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THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

VOL. V. MAY, 1906. No. 1.

A GIFT FROM MARS.

By WILLIAM WALLACE COOK.

An astronomical wonder story that does not get all its plot from the stars.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIERY MESSENGER.

THERE were fatalists who declared that the trouble had been on the cards from the Beginning, and that Fate simply played her hand according to program.

Others averred that the machinery of the universe had slipped a cog somewhere and that Coon Hollow was bearing the brunt of it; and there were a select few, with ears to the ground and eyes alert for the signs of the times, who boldly asserted that although the visitation was a bitter draft it yet carried tonic properties from which the entire country would ultimately benefit.

Homer, dead, was claimed by nine cities which washed their hands of him when living. And even so did Coon Hollow vie with Shelbyville, Hank's Corners, and other towns in coddling the memory of one whom all had denied in the period of his budding powers.

Concerning the catastrophe, as a matter of fact it arrived in two detachments, harmlessly halved by the operation of Chance. Finite ingenuity brought the two halves together.

Part Number One literally dropped out of a clear sky on the night of June 13. In his memoirs, to which the present chronicler has full access, Jethro gives the time of the momentous event as "somewhere between eight and ten." However, the exact hour is immaterial.

Part Number Two reached Coon Hollow arm in arm with Professor Spriggs; or, if not arm in arm with him, at least it dangled from his right hand, part and parcel of the contents of his commodious carpetbag.

Far be it from the faithful chronicler who pens these lines to shy stones at the amiable professor; yet in studying the ramifications of that stupendous disaster which dammed the monetary system of the country and laid ax to the root of commerce, we must hark back to that little New England town, and to Professor Spriggs and the carpetbag. A character of so much importance deserves especial note.

The professor was of meager frame and cadaverous of face, and the broad sweep of his brow began at his eyebrows and ended at the back of his head. It was preeminently the brow of a thinker.

A silk hat, a frock coat, attenuated trousers, buff spatts and patent leathers comprised the professor's ensemble—all ancient, the style of three decades back, looking as though they had seen continuous service from the very hour they were fashioned.

It is remembered now that he entered Coon Hollow afoot, and that Jud Givins, who sat in front of Tobe Easley's general store and made sport of him, was afflicted the day following with a rheumatism that confined him to the house for a month.

A small thing this, but it proved to

many that Spriggs was to be taken seriously if at all.

At the village tavern the newcomer registered as "Socrates Spriggs, S. P. S., Everywhere, W. A. L." He blandly explained to Than Loftis, proprietor of the tavern, that the final initials meant "World at Large."

Thereupon Than wished to be enlightened as to the "S. P. S.," but his inquiry was met with so fierce a look and such chilling silence that he mumbled apologies and shook in his boots.

Adjoining the tavern office was a vacant room in which traveling men sometimes displayed the contents of their sample trunks. On the day following his arrival Spriggs took possession of this room, his carpetbag yielding up certain articles in the shape of professional furniture.

First, there was a noseless plaster head, the pate like a billiard ball and marked with black into numbered squares; then there was a phrenological chart containing a key to the numbers on the plaster head. There was also a telescope, and a map of the heavens, and a white oilcloth sign bearing this legend in crimson letters:

> Professor Spriggs, S. P. S., and Phrenological Expert. Also Astrologer and Past-Master in the Sciences of Chirognomy and Chiromancy, Character delineated and Events, Past, Present, and To-Come foretold by the Lines of the Hand, the Bumps of the Head and the Stars of Heaven. One reading, One Dollar. Family Reading at a discount from Regular Prices.

This sign he hung from the street door on the morning of June 12.

By noon he had delineated six characters and had discovered in Coon Hollow one future president of the United States, two millionaires, one member of Congress, one horse thief, and one Napoleon of Finance—all prospective except the horse thief, who quitted town within an hour after he had been told what he was.

In the afternoon the professor discovered enough governors and members of the legislature to flood the executive machinery of the State.

It was in the forenoon, however, that he discovered the subject of this chronicle. Jethro, in those fledgling days, was clearing his "forty" and had whipped into town with a load of four-foot wood.

He sold his wood for four dollars—humble indeed were the transactions of this man of destiny in that early stage of his career!—and immediately called on the professor, whose fame was thrilling the main street from end to end.

The professor was delineating, and Jethro was obliged to wait for some ten minutes in the tavern office. Deacon Cotter came in after he got there, and Squire Bingham was not long in following the deacon.

Presently Tobe Easley fared forth from the conference chamber, flushed, haughty, and stepping high.

"What are you ter be, Tobe?" asked Than Loftis, leaning breathlessly over the office counter.

"I'm to count my wealth in seven figgers," answered Tobe grandly.

"When?" gasped Than.

"He didn't say," and Tobe nodded condescendingly to the deacon and the squire, but passed the impecunious Jethro without word or look.

"I'm next," said Jethro, heading off the impatient deacon and entering the mysterious precincts beyond the closed door.

There was little about Jethro to command attention. He stood six feet in his cowhides, had carroty hair and a face of tan and freckles, and wore the traditional blue wammus and overalls in vogue in that community.

Yet when he entered the professor gasped, surveying him keenly and comprehensively for a full minute. The brightest star in the galaxy of Coon Hollow had swept into range of the professor's eyes.

"You—*you,* of all men!" murmured the delighted savant.

"Ah, it is a happy day that enables me to pass upon such merit. Be seated, young man. Is it a dollar reading?"

Jethro said that it was, and took a chair. For five minutes the professor pushed his long, deft fingers through Jethro's carroty hair, smoothing this bump and pressing that, all the while crooning delightedly like some child who has found a lost toy.

He told Jethro that there was not

another such head in the whole country; which was a pretty broad statement and might have been a compliment, or the reverse.

"Constructiveness, normal; Ideality, so-so; Imitation—ah! Your Imitation is so large it is a wonder you are not troubled with headache.

"Taken in connection with Calculation, Cautiousness, and Comparison, which are all good, I have the honor to inform you that you would make an A1 counterfeiter, a most excellent forger.

"Destructiveness—gracious! Young man, if you ever turned yourself loose, I shudder to think of the devastation you could cause! I have felt destructive bumps in my time, thousands of them, but never one like this.

"Your Combativeness is also most extensive. You will fight at the drop of a hat.

"And Acquisitiveness! Oh, it is phenomenal, phenomenal! Did you ever receive a blow here, just above and forward of the ear?

"No? Then this protuberance must be perfectly natural. Sir, you can acquire anything you set your mind on, from the girl of your choice to a mortgage on the gold reserve."

The professor said more, much more, but no tribute rang in Jethro's memory like that which fell under the head of Acquisitiveness.

When the professor dismissed him it was with a fervent hand-clasp and an oral offering in the way of "*the* Napoleon of Finance—a coming whale, my dear sir, among the minnows of industry and speculation; I shall keep you under my eye."

Jethro N. Mydus was discovered. The very prospect of his coming greatness so stunned and bewildered him that he passed from the tavern into the street, not heeding the questions launched at him by those in the office.

When he drifted out of his dreams and back into the prosy realities of everyday life he found himself in the vicinity of Tobe Easley's store. The rooms above the store were made use of for dwelling purposes by the proprietor and his family.

A pair of bright eyes looked down at Jethro, and perhaps a mysterious electric thrill shot through him and was responsible for his quick awakening. At any rate, he smiled as he looked upward, and just as he lifted his old straw hat a bit of paper fluttered down to him.

Barely had he possessed himself of the note when Pa Easley appeared in front of his establishment. The bit of paper was deftly thrust into the opening of the blue wammus and Jethro drew nearer the gentleman who was haughtily surveying him.

A prospect of wealth which could only be counted in seven figures was playing havoc with Easley's humility.

Since he had visited the tavern and paid for a dollar reading he had donned his "Sunday best" and resigned the business of waiting on customers to his clerk.

"Mr. Easley," said Jethro, "I've got something to say to you, and I guess that now's my time to speak out if I'm ever going to."

"You and I haven't anythin' in common, Jethro Mydus," answered the storekeeper loftily.

"It's—it's about Luella," faltered Jethro.

"My daughter!" Pa Easley stiffened and thrust one hand into the breast of his old frock coat.

"Whenever you have occasion to refer to Miss Easley, sir, I'll thank ye to do so in that way and not go takin' liberties with her given name.

"And don't presume, don't *presume*" —he withdrew the hand to shake an admonitory forefinger under Jethro's nose —"to pester her with your attentions. They're not wanted by her—or me, either."

Jethro took a deep breath, shook back his shoulders, and squared away for another try.

"You're to come into money, the professor says——"

"It'll take seven figgers to count it," interrupted Pa Easley. "Such bein' the case, it's the height of folly for my little girl to fix her young affections outside the halls of our national Congress. Bud Brackett is to be an M. C., and we've settled on *him*."

Jethro fell back with a gasp. Brackett! Bud Brackett! In his callow schoolboy days his first fight had been

with Bud; later he had plowed against him at the county fair; still later he had run against him for highway commissioner; and still later he had laid siege to the heart of the fair Luella with Bud for a rival.

A moment only was Jethro taken at a loss. Straightening his lithe form he met Pa Easley's ominous look with a decent pride born of his own exalted destiny.

"Member of Congress!" he derided. "Is that all? What is an M. C., compared to a Napoleon of Finance, a fellow with a mortgage on the gold reserve?"

Pa Easily laughed. This young whipper-snapper, with nothing in the world but a tax title to forty acres of raw land and a team of horses, posing as a Napoleon of Finance!

Spriggs had perpetrated a joke. The humor of it was infectious and Pa Easley's merriment grew into a roar.

"Clear out!" he exclaimed, sobering a little. "You'll never be nothin' more'n a hired man. Don't you never speak to me about my daughter again, and don't you never let me catch you speakin' to her. If you do, there'll be trouble. Napoleon of Finance!" and Pa Easley bellowed his way into the general store.

Under his tan and freckles Jethro reddened painfully; then he jerked the brim of his straw hat down over his eyes and started up the street to where he had hitched his team.

The sigh of a breaking heart followed him from the second-story window of the store building. But Jethro, profoundly steeped in his own gloom, heard it not.

He could not work the rest of that day. After driving home, he put out the team, retired to the house, and battled with despair.

In that dreary hour he doubted Spriggs. The professor had cajoled him into making an attempt to acquire the girl of his choice, and the attempt had failed.

Dark thoughts took shape in Jethro's mind, leveled mainly against Bud Brackett. Bud had whipped him when they went to school, and Luella had witnessed the battle; Jethro had won the plowing contest, and Luella had clasped his hand and congratulated him; Bud had won out as highway commissioner; and now, at this fourth trial of strength, was the highway commissioner and prospective M. C. to carry off the victory?

Jethro's haziness as to the precise moment when the other half of the catastrophe arrived may be easily accounted for. The afternoon waned, evening came on, and still he was lost in thought and oblivious of the flight of time.

He was aroused abruptly. Excited voices came from without.

"You got to go, and go peaceable. I never saw a man take on like you do!"

"I will not return to that whited sepulcher! It is haunted by the ghosts of injustice, genius disprized and paralyzed endeavor. Their groans would set a sane man's brain to rocking and I need all my mental powers."

Both voices were familiar to Jethro. He sprang to the open door and peered out into the moonlight.

A group of dark figures slowly evolved from the shadows. One man, backed against a tree, was laying about him with a club and fending the approach of two others.

The individual at bay was Socrates Spriggs. Of the remaining pair one was Neb Hanchett, the Coon Hollow constable; his companion Jethro believed to be a stranger.

"Hey, professor!" called Jethro, stepping from the house, "what's wrong?"

"Ha!" cried the professor, still plying his club and glimpsing Jethro out of the tails of his eyes, "the bright particular star in these rural heavens! Observe how science is made to suffer at the hands of ignorance.

"These minions of an unwise psychological system, which pronounces that man mad who does not think and act in accordance with the views of the majority, would lay hands upon me, incarcerate me in a padded cell and forcibly suspend my career of usefulness."

Jethro edged forward with the intention of ranging himself at the professor's side.

"Not so, friend Mydus!" cried the professor. "I am under the protection of the Red Star which not only ruled my nativity but your own, as well. This hour is ripe for awesome events. They will come, they will come!"

"We don't want to hurt you, Mr. Clawson," spoke up the stranger, advancing warily from Hanchett's side, "so don't make it necessary for us to use force. I'm here to take you back where you belong, and there ain't goin' to be any ifs nor ands about it."

The professor left his tree and cautiously retreated in the direction of the house.

"Rush him!" yelled Hanchett.

The constable and the other man executed a swift forward movement. In his haste Spriggs fell backward over a block that fringed the edge of Jethro's wood-pile.

Exultant cries leaped from Hanchett and the stranger. Jethro's heart sank. Nothing on earth could save Spriggs—and nothing on earth did. Yet saved he was, for the time being.

A screaming hiss, as of a thousand shells in full flight, fell over the evening quiet. The weird sound increased to deafening proportions in the space of one labored breath.

The moonlight paled under a crimson glare that flashed into the brightness of day, and between the prostrate professor and his foes came hurtling downward a glimmering, blinding thing that struck the earth, spluttered and vanished.

The great noise died away, and the intense light was blotted out, as if by magic. And from a distance sounds were heard as of men running.

Jethro was on his knees, all but terrified out of his five senses. Spriggs arose and stood with folded arms before the gaping wound in the earth.

"I knew it would come, I knew it," he murmured. "Friend Mydus," he added, turning to Jethro, "a pick and shovel, if you please. There is work ahead, and we must be expeditious."

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE THE KEEPERS CAME.

THE awed Jethro was in no mood for inquiry. He made haste to secure the implements requested, also a lighted lantern; and he and the professor fell to manfully.

In an hour they had uncovered a huge black cinder, as big as a barrel and still hot from the friction of its rush through space. Several bucketfuls of water quenched the heat and made it possible for them to manipulate the cinder with ropes and haul it to the surface.

A stone the size of a barrel would have tried the strength of many men, but this porous, burned-out derelict of the skies was very low in specific gravity. Once on the ground at the base of Jethro's wood-pile, the professor sat down on it and wept in the tails of his coat.

Jethro's awe had been sweated out of him. Curiosity had asserted itself, but sympathy for Spriggs in this emotional crisis restrained the questions he had at his tongue's end.

"Noble youth," said Spriggs, lifting his head with a final snuffle, "not grief but joy has caused these tears. I knew this meteor was scheduled to fall in the vicinity of Coon Hollow, hence my visit to the place. How wonderful that it should drop almost at your very door! There is an omen in this."

"It's a meteor, is it?" queried Jethro.

"Aye," responded Spriggs, his bubbling delight simmering into quiet complacency, "my fellow scientists would call it that. Yet it is more.

"It is a donation fresh from the master-minds of another world; in short, it is a gift from Mars. The people of the Red Star," he added, looking aloft and stretching his hands upward, "have remembered Spriggs!"

A dramatic silence intervened.

"And why?" went on the professor passionately, dropping his hands and staring through the gloom at Jethro.

"Because," he murmured hoarsely, "it was Spriggs who read the message flashed by the Martian lights!

"It was Spriggs who grappled the great truth and migrated to Coon Hollow in advance of the fiery messenger!

"It is Spriggs who knows how to make best use of the gift and lay a pernicious piratical system of high finance gasping at the feet of an outraged people!"

A wave of admiration rolled over Jethro. Throwing himself at the knees of the wonderful man he looked timidly up at him through the semi-gloom.

"One of those men called you Clawson," Jethro observed, half apologetic-

ally, for he did not want to convey the impression that he was suspicious.

"Indeed, yes," sighed the professor. "The padded cell and the strait-jacket know me as Thomas Clawson, but when I stand as the people's beacon on the treacherous coast of finance, I am Professor Spriggs, S. P. S.

"The dear people!" Spriggs clasped his hands soulfully and pressed them against his heart. "Gladly would I brave the harrying storm of martyrdom, if thereby I might win to safe harbors all those little craft that are struggling in the sea of darkness and speculation!"

Jethro thrilled with the humility and sweetness of the declaration. If he had had an aureole handy he would have presented it to the professor with his compliments.

"My lad," pursued this paragon of unselfish devotion, "I was one of this tribe of plutocrats, but when our practises became a stench in the nostrils of honesty and respectability, I underwent a most violent relapse.

"I flung policy to the four winds; I shook the red rag of defiance in the very teeth of the bovine crew; I advertised their methods; I whisked the screen from in front of the car of Juggernaut—then I bided my time until the hour was ripe. Look! The supreme moment is upon us and I shall not be found wanting."

Jethro went hot and cold, and little shivers raced back and forth along his nerves. The professor was weaving a rhetorical spell, and Jethro fell completely under its influence.

"These high priests in the temple of commercialism," purred Spriggs, "demand their toll of blood from the deluded middle class; they whet their Shylockian knives and go on a still hunt for their pound of flesh.

"Presently, mark ye, they will turn and rend each other until only ten will be left; and these ten will hold the country in the hollows of their hands.

"What if Spriggs anticipates the dire dilemma? What if Spriggs, who knows so well the methods of the financial thimble-rigger, takes a hand in the game? What, my dear sir, if Spriggs forces these Ruling Ten into a corner and wrests out of their hands this unlimited power?

"That is the bee that is just now buzzing in my financial bonnet. If you will make mental note of my remarks and have them published in the Coon Hollow *Clarion,* with a footnote requesting city papers please to copy, I shall be obliged."

Silence fell. Like all good rhetoricians, Spriggs was vague; if there was meat in his sounding phrases, Jethro was nourished little by it. But the young man's ear was pleased and his fancy enraptured.

Abruptly the mooning philosopher arose from his cinder. "Bring me an ax, or a sledge-hammer," said he briskly. "We must crack this Martian nut and get at the kernel."

Jethro made haste to fetch a maul. While the professor held the lantern and directed the blow, Jethro smote the cinder until it fell apart.

From the very heart of it, the professor plucked forth a black stone the size and shape of an egg.

Leaning on the maul, Jethro watched while his companion, in a perfect transport, kissed the meteor's kernel, and hugged it to his breast, and executed a fantastic *pas seul* around the wood-pile.

"Let us go into the house," said Spriggs, on recovering from his temporary lapse. "From this moment, the 'S. P. S.' no longer cleaves to my name. The magic of high finance, which makes you a millionaire in a night, pales to the vanishing point before my own unlimited power."

The professor darted into the house and Jethro followed with the lantern. As the youth crossed the threshold, approaching footsteps reached his ear. Another moment and he had hurled the door shut and shot the bolt.

"What now?" demanded Spriggs.

"Hanchett and the other man are comin' back," replied Jethro.

The professor clasped himself in his thin arms and swayed weakly. A hand tried the latch, and immediately afterward the door shook under repeated blows.

"Open!" shouted an authoritative voice. "That frenzied man in there is liable to become violent, and he must be taken to where he belongs."

"How long will the door hold?" whispered Spriggs.

"Not many minutes," answered Jethro, "if they keep at it like they're doing now."

"Is there no way of escape?"

"You might try the window and take to the woods."

"A forlorn hope," murmured the professor. "I cannot run the risk of allowing that stone to get into their hands. What shall I do?"

He ran back and forth across the room, frantic with doubt. Those outside redoubled their cries and their attack on the door.

Abruptly Spriggs ran to Jethro and clasped his arm. "I must leave the stone with you," said he, "together with instructions for its use.

"If I succeed in effecting my escape, I will return for it; if I do not escape, you must work out the stone's destiny, with now and then a word of advice from me in case I am able to smuggle the word to you. Listen!"

The professor dragged Jethro into a far corner and poured rapid and surprising words into his intent ear. Jethro's eyes widened, his face went pale and he hardly breathed as he listened.

Barely had the professor finished and entrusted the black stone to Jethro when the lower half of the door gave inward so that the barrier hung by only one hinge and the latch.

"You haven't another minute!" cried Jethro, dashing at a window and throwing upward the sash.

With a hurried farewell the professor climbed through, starting at a run for the timber.

"There he goes!" cried a voice; "he's makin' for the woods!"

Hanchett was standing in the forced doorway, the alarm coming to him from the corner of the house. He turned from the door and Jethro, at the open window, gazed through the gloom at the chase and pursuit.

The next moment a groan escaped the youth. Spriggs had collided with the well-sweep, and before he could rise his pursuers were upon him.

Hanchett, with a rapidity born of long experience, succeeded in effectively binding the struggling professor's arms—that individual protesting volubly all the while.

Leaning limply across the window sill, Jethro watched while the professor was half carried and half dragged out of sight, in the direction of town.

CHAPTER III.

AN INTERCEPTED ELOPEMENT.

WHEN Jethro, worn with the exciting events of that busy day, removed his blue wammus preparatory to retiring, a scrap of paper fluttered to the floor at his feet.

For a moment he was puzzled; and then a glad cry escaped him and he caught up the scrap and pressed it to his lips.

Unfolding the bit of paper, he drew closer to the lamp and read the following:

DEAR JETHRO:

Pa is addamant. Bud Brackett is to be a Member of Congris and besides he holds a morgig of Three Hundred Dolars on Pa's store. The serious part is, Bud may foreclose before Pa counts his money in 7 figures. If Pa bestows my hand upon Bud, Bud will sign a Release; but, oh, Jethro! my heart is yours, and being the bride of an M. C. hasn't no allurements. Nothing remains but flight, and if you can make a raise we will elope. But it must be soon. Lovingly and impatiently,

LUELLA.

P. S. what is a Nappoleon of Finnance? They say you are to be one.

It was pleasant to know that Luella's heart was his, and that she only awaited the word to fly with him to the minister at Hank's Corners.

For the remainder of the night the particular bumps of that phenomenal head concerned in the evolving of ways and means were more than busy.

Jethro debated the problem awake, and when he slept the debate went on in his dreams. On arising in the morning he had the solution.

After a hurried breakfast he hitched his horses to the wagon and drove into town. At the village smithy he dickered with Hiram Noggs for a piece of iron about the size of a brick.

Immediately following dinner, his face flushed, his manner nervous and a parcel wrapped in newspaper under his arm, he waited upon Deacon Cotter.

The deacon was one of the two mil-

lionaires now hiding their radiance under the Coon Hollow bushel. He greeted Jethro patronizingly and inquired humorously as to his financial prospects.

Spriggs had been carried away that morning by the keeper who had traced him to Coon Hollow, yet the dear delusions he had fostered were clung to tenaciously.

The fact that Spriggs was unbalanced and had effected an escape from an asylum was not allowed to eclipse that other fact that sundry gentlemen had paid one dollar each to be read into wealth and the halls of Congress.

"Deacon," said Jethro in a shaking voice, "you know I've got an uncle out West——"

"A gold miner," interpolated the deacon dryly. "But if you think he is goin' to help you become a Napoleon of Finance, Jethro, I fear your future hangs by a rope of sand."

Jethro's uncle and the hopes the youth had founded upon his success in the Montana mines had become a jest among the good people of the town.

Like the man in the ballad, Uncle Ez Mydus had left Coon Hollow at one end of a halter, the other end being attached to a horse not his own.

Sooner or later, the Coon Hollow folk averred, the neck of Uncle Ez was sure to become entangled in a halter of another sort.

"Uncle Ez," asserted Jethro, "has made a strike in the gold fields."

"How?" rallied the deacon. "With a sandbag an' a dark lantern?"

"With a pick and shovel, sir. And he has remembered me. Look here!"

Jethro unwrapped the parcel, and lo, a yellow bar lay glimmering before the deacon's eyes.

"What is it?" gasped the deacon.

"Gold!" declared Jethro. "If you want to buy it, deacon, you can have it for one hundred dollars. I don't know much about the value of the thing, but it ought to be worth that."

The deacon was shrewd, and he knew the bar was worth fifteen times Jethro's price if it was worth a cent. But it was his nature to haggle, and while he hefted the bar in his hands, and fondled it with his eyes, he offered fifty dollars, then seventy-five, then eighty.

Jethro, however, was firm. The squire might want it if the deacon didn't.

That fetched the deacon. He vanished into the house and came back with a hundred in small bills.

"If your uncle sends you any more gold," said he, "you bring it to me, Jethro, and I'll do the right thing by you."

Jethro was non-committal on this point. He had made his "raise" and his heart was light; the deacon's heart was also light, for by that day's work he had made a comfortable start on the road to his million.

Approaching Tobe Easley's store from the rear, Jethro whistled a few bars of "The Maiden's Prayer." The signal had been used before, and Luella immediately appeared at a window.

Jethro threw her a kiss, receiving another in return; then he waved aloft a note which he had written.

Luella cautiously lowered a string, the note was tied to it and drawn aloft, Jethro retiring to the smoke-house and waiting with wildly beating heart.

"Have made the raise, Luella," read the girl. "Will you meet me at 9 P. M. at the old mill? Will have horses ready for a ride to Hank's Corners."

Luella returned to the window and nodded joyously. Ah, there be kings in this world, and princes of the blood royal, but never prince or potentate with whom Jethro would have exchanged his prospects at that moment.

Jethro purchased a suit of decent black; and it seemed fitting, indeed, that he should purchase it of his future father-in-law, flashing the roll of bills before that gentleman's astonished eyes.

A visit to the village barber still further aided in the young man's transformation; and when this budding Napoleon, touched with the graces of Lothario, perambulated the main street he was followed by gasps of astonishment and comments, envious and otherwise.

With a cigar between his lips, Jethro posed a space in front of the creamery. Bud Brackett owned fifty-two shares of creamery stock; there were only one hundred shares, so Bud's was the guiding hand.

The future M. C. was in the weighing-room. He stared at the vision

propped against the hitching post, noted the nonchalance and the insouciant manipulation of the cigar, and drew from sight with clenched hands and labored breath.

What meant all this? Where had Mydus obtained the means for such a lavish display? On what did he base his impudent pretensions?

Evil thoughts surged through the brain of the highway commissioner. Seizing his hat, he fled from the odious spectacle in front of the creamery—fled toward the home of Neb Hanchett, intent on airing his suspicions.

What was to be expected of Jethro, nephew of a man who had left town with a horse not his own? And did not every one know that Jethro had entertained Clawson, alias Spriggs, an escaped lunatic, the evening before?

There was material here for a countercheck to an aspiring and dangerous rival. Bud Brackett was the one to make the most of it.

Jethro, after complacently viewing the flight of the highway commissioner, lighted another cigar and betook himself to the livery establishment that formed a part of the Than Loftis hostelry.

The hired man who had charge of the stable was a friend of Jethro's. Of him, under a strict pledge of secrecy, Jethro borrowed two bridles and two saddles—one a side saddle.

At eight P. M. Jethro's horses were equipped with their riding gear; and at eight-thirty Jethro fared cautiously from the barn, riding one horse and leading the other.

True to her promise, Luella met him at the old mill. She had many bundles, and when Jethro had taken tribute from her red lips, and had stowed the bundles at the front and rear of their saddles, they mounted and set their faces resolutely toward Hank's Corners.

Hank's Corners was five miles away on the Rocky Run road. The elopers' horses were draft animals, and necessarily slow, but they were goaded to their best pace.

The start was most propitious; and as they traveled side by side through the starlight their young hearts communed as only young hearts may.

But the evil activities of Bud Brackett were on the point of bearing fruit. Jethro was just enlightening the fair Luella on the subject of a Napoleon of Finance when the rapid fall of hoofs struck on their ears from behind.

"Pa!" gasped Luella, and was on the verge of tears in a moment.

Jethro cheered her as well as he could in that exciting crisis, and the horses were lashed to their utmost speed.

Those behind, however, continued to gain, and Hank's Corners and the minister faded from the lovers' perspective.

"Halt!" cried a determined voice; "halt or I'll fire!"

Fate had them in an iron grip. They halted their panting horses and Jethro posted himself as a bulwark between danger and the weeping Luella.

Three men galloped up to them—Pa Easley, Bud Brackett and Neb Hanchett.

"My child!" cried Pa Easley, his voice hoarse and near to breaking with emotion. "Oh, that I should have lived to see this day! Villain! Scoundrel!" And he rode past Jethro and clasped Luella in his arms.

Jethro would have fought until unhorsed and laid low, but for the fear that indiscriminate use of firearms might injure Luella. As it was, he remained sullenly defiant.

"Seize him, Hanchett!" fumed Bud Brackett; "seize him!"

"Lay the weight of your finger on me if you dare!" flung back Jethro pugnaciously.

Hanchett rode close, and something rattled in his hands.

"I don't want to be rough with ye, Mydus," said he, "but you got to go to the lockup."

"Lockup?" echoed Jethro. "You can't put me in jail for running away with Luella."

"Spare him, spare him!" sobbed Luella. "It was all my fault."

"Silence, child!" interposed Pa Easley tenderly. "You have fallen victim to the wiles of a villain! Ma is about wild. Do your duty, Neb Hanchett!"

"We ain't juggin' ye for runnin' off with Luella, Jethro," explained Hanchett, "but for swindlin' the deacon at the time-honored gold-brick game."

"Swindling the deacon?" faltered Jethro. "Gold-brick game?" he repeated vacantly.

"That's it!" went on Hanchett. "Ye got a hundred out o' him for a piece o' lead washed with gold, conservatively estimated as bein' worth about fifty cents. Ma Easley ain't the only one that's wild! You jest ought to see the deacon!"

A metallic snap followed, and Jethro's wrists were in manacles.

There are times when, out of consideration for the human emotions, it is advisable to draw the curtain. The present chronicler exercises his prerogative and draws it here.

CHAPTER IV.

JETHRO VINDICATED.

A MAN'S philosophy is largely influenced by his outlook upon the world.

There's the broad, plate-glass outlook, with its roseate fancies and an optimism tagged with the dollar-mark; and the prim, old-fashioned outlook through sixteen small squares, suggesting blue laws and Puritanical rectitude; and the outlook through three panes (two cracked and a fourth pane gone but replaced with cast-off wearing apparel) furnishing a perspective of back yards, squalor, and hopelessness.

But to survey the world through a stone casing and crossed iron bars is the most depressing. It was such an outlook that presently tinctured the philosophy of Jethro N. Mydus.

Bitterness fell upon his soul, even as poison drops from the deadly upas tree. In those evil days his only solace was an occasional chat with Neb Hanchett.

Neb made it his personal duty to supply the prisoners with their food. These prandial occasions afforded Jethro his opportunities for talk.

The youth was informed that his team was being cared for in the constable's barn at the expense of the village; that Luella was bearing up bravely; that Bud Brackett was the hero of the hour, his fortunes waxing as Jethro's seemed to wane, and so on; but apart from news of Luella, Jethro was most interested in the light Hanchett shed upon the career of Thomas Clawson.

"That feller, I guess," remarked Hanchett, "has more money 'n ye could put into this here jail."

A telling trope this, and Jethro was properly awed.

"How'd he get it?" he inquired.

"Buyin' air," was the oracular response.

"Air?"

"That's it," chuckled the constable. "Clawson bought air from a lot o' fellers at one dollar a cubic foot, an' he kept buyin' till he got all there was of it; then the price went up an' he sold it back to the same fellers for ten dollars a cubic foot and got independent well-off."

"Just air?" returned the incredulous Jethro.

"That's all."

"He's a pretty smart man, and what business have they got sending him to an insane asylum?"

"Well, he took to standin' up in second-story windows an' throwin' money into the street jest to have the fun o' seein' people scramble for it."

"Come easy, go easy," said Jethro. "Didn't he have a right to do what he wanted to with his own money?"

"He thought so, but his relatives didn't. He kept on doin' that for quite a spell; then a bartender invented an improved gin-rickey an' Clawson give him forty thousand dollars if he'd call it the 'Clawson rickey.' That settled it. Relatives got out papers an' he was put into a padded cell.

"That's the kind o' feller that's delineated all the best characters in Coon Hollow, 'cept'n *mine*. He didn't get no dollar out o' *me*."

Two days later, about the middle of the afternoon, Jethro heard a church bell and saw many townspeople passing in their best clothes. Waiting impatiently until Neb came with his supper, he asked:

"Who's dead?"

"No one that I know of," replied the constable. "Why do you ask?"

"Heard a church bell to-day and thought it was a funeral. What was it?"

Neb Hanchett was embarrassed.

"I brought ye chicken to-night, Jethro," said he. "An' there's some apple dumplin', an'——"

"Look here, Neb Hanchett," broke in Jethro, "I want to know what that bell was ringing for."

"Weddin'," said the constable, looking away.

"Whose wedding?"

"Bud Brackett has married Luella. Didn't want to tell yē, but you was so set there wasn't no gettin' out of it."

Jethro got up and walked over to the grated window. People were going home from work the same as usual, the six o'clock whistles were blowing, and not a ripple seemed to disturb the vast and varied operations of the universe. And yet, Bud Brackett had married Luella!

"Now don't take it so hard," said Neb Hanchett consolingly. "There's plenty good fish in the sea, Jethro."

"Take it away," said Jethro, facing about and waving his hand toward the food. "I'm not hungry."

He threw himself down on the cot, gave no heed to the persuasive voice of the constable, and finally was left alone.

Bud Brackett had married Luella! One moment Jethro wanted the walls to collapse and bury his lifeless remains under the ruins; the next moment he wanted to live—live to become a Napoleon of Finance, drive his successful rival out of the creamery and ruin him.

His bump of destruction labored with the details of his vengeance. Up from his embittered heart rose such comprehensive schemes of reprisal that even he was astounded.

A policy of revenge gradually took hold of him; a revenge so sweeping that not only Bud Brackett but Coon Hollow and the entire country should cringe before it.

This chronicler is no apologist. On such affairs as that ceremony in the Coon Hollow church human destiny has been known to hinge. So long as men are what they are, conditions cannot well be otherwise.

Next morning, Neb Hanchett had among his prisoners an iconoclast. The iconoclast ate his food in chilling silence; and when the constable bore away the empty breakfast dishes he carried with him a demand for Philo Jenkins.

Philo Jenkins was the legal luminary of the village. Had he not belonged to the wrong party he would have been Justice of the Peace any number of times.

Philo wore a long black coat, and parted his hair at the back and brushed it forward over his ears. Why he clung to Coon Hollow when a larger sphere of usefulness beckoned him elsewhere was a mystery.

He waited upon Jethro. When he left the jail his manner was portentous of mighty things to come.

Jethro's case was set for that morning at ten. Philo had it continued until next day in order that a jeweler might be summoned from Shelbyville.

As the hour for the trial approached, the justice shop filled to overflowing. Among the townspeople present were two strangers.

One was a prosperous looking man, pointed out as an important witness for the defense; none other, in fact, than the Shelbyville jeweler.

The other stranger had not the same prosperous appearance. He was a large man with a tanned complexion and a drooping eye.

His hat was broad-brimmed and of black felt; his shirt was of soiled blue flannel; his trousers were corduroy and were tucked into the tops of high boots.

All in all he was shabby, and but little attention was paid him. He seemed entirely satisfied, however, to sit in an obscure corner, escape observation and watch the progress of the trial.

Deacon Cotter was first sworn by Judge Grimes. The deacon told his story, repeating verbatim his conversation with Jethro and dwelling at length upon the vocal arts by which he had been victimized.

Uncle Ez was exploited, and a snicker cantered around the court-room. The transfer of the brick was set forth and the brick itself produced in evidence and placed upon the judge's table.

Cross-examined by Philo Jenkins, Deacon Cotter admitted that Bud Brackett had first inspired his doubts

as to the genuineness of the brick. These doubts had alone led to the arrest and imprisonment of Jethro.

On rebuttal it was brought out that Bud had no sinister purpose to serve. He simply did not like to see so estimable a gentleman as the deacon buncoed.

Then Philo: "May I inquire, Mr. Brackett, if you and Jethro Mydus were rivals for the hand of Miss Luella Easley?"

Answer: "Well, I'd like to say a few words about——"

Philo, in thunderous tones: "Yes or no!"

Answer: "Yes."

Philo, triumphantly: "That's all, your honor."

Move by prosecuting attorney that his evidence be stricken out. Motion overruled. Objection by prosecutor.

Jethro was then called to the witness chair. On being sworn, refused to answer any questions concerning Uncle Ezra, or as to how the brick had come into his hands. Did not deny, however, having told Deacon Cotter that the brick had been sent from Montana; but the story was not told with any desire to deceive the deacon.

Prospects darkened for Jethro. Although the deacon, Bud Brackett and the prosecuting attorney were jubilant, it could not be seen that consternation had entered the opposing camp.

Jethro was calm, and Philo Jenkins particularly so—even melodramatic. Philo called William Barkins to the stand.

William Barkins was the Shelbyville jeweler; and when he arose to the witness chair he took with him a small satchel.

Led on by Philo Jenkins, Mr. Barkins stated his name, age, and occupation. He had been a jeweler for twenty years.

The brick was offered him for inspection. Was it gold? It seemed so. Had he any way of settling the fact beyond dispute? He had. Thereupon he was told to go ahead and do it.

At this point the importance of the satchel became manifest. From it Mr. Barkins took a newspaper and a hand-drill.

Spreading the newspaper carefully over his lap, he rested the glittering brick on his knee and bored directly through it. Yellow particles filled the brick from surface to surface.

Laying aside the brick and drill, Mr. Barkins took from the satchel a small porcelain dish and a bottle of acid. The yellow dust was shaken into the dish and the acid applied.

"Well?" said Mr. Philo Jenkins tentatively.

"If Deacon Cotter," said Mr. Barkins, with a quiet smile, "will take one thousand dollars for his brick, I will gladly purchase it."

A palpitating silence hovered over the court-room. Men, women, and children leaned forward in their chairs; even Judge Grimes hung over the table in front of him, jaws agape.

Deacon Cotter glared at Bud Brackett, who squirmed uneasily. The prosecuting attorney looked like a man in a daze.

"Is—is it gold?" he demanded.

"It is," averred Mr. Barkins.

The deacon arose and hurried across to the jeweler. Catching up the brick from the floor beside the witness chair, he clung to it greedily while he asked:

"Will you make it twelve hundred, Mr. Barkins?"

"Yes," answered the jeweler, "providing you can give me a clear title to the property. It is rather unusual to find such an article in the hands of a young man like Mr. Mydus. Did, or did not, his uncle send it to him?"

Jethro was non-committal. At this point, the disreputable looking stranger got up from his chair and strode to the front.

"Just a moment, your honor," said he. "No one seems to know me. Have I so soon passed out of the memories of Coon Hollow people? Perhaps I have been seen at a disadvantage heretofore, so I will ask you all to look at me again."

Up to now, contrary to the etiquette of the place, he had kept on his hat. As he spoke, he removed it and faced the people.

"Uncle Ez!" cried Jethro.

"Ezra Mydus!" cried the startled crowd.

Neb Hanchett drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and started toward the man.

"Ezra Mydus," said he sternly, "you left here, several years ago, with a stolen horse. I deem it my duty to——"

"Go back to your chair and sit down!" ordered Ezra Mydus.

The next moment a very large revolver had found its way into his hands. Neb Hanchett paled and dropped into his chair, Judge Grimes crawled under the table, Deacon Cotter got behind Jethro, and the crowd started for the doors.

Ezra Mydus had always borne the reputation of being a most determined man and he had never seemed so bent on having his own way as at that moment.

CHAPTER V.

UNCLE EZ ELUCIDATES.

UNCLE EZ laughed. It was a laugh replete with all the dare-devil recklessness of a man who was wont to rub elbows with Death and make a boon companion of Peril.

Mr. Barkins stood up and grabbed at the back of his chair. Little shivers of dread raced through the constable's body and the dangling handcuffs rattled from his grasp.

"Come back!" cried Uncle Ez to the vanishing crowd. "Play fair with me and I'm as harmless as the cooing dove. Just now I am charitably disposed, and have something to say that will interest all of you.

"Come out, judge," and he stooped to give his hand to the gentleman under the table.

"Chirk up, Hanchett," he added affably to the constable.

"Philo, how's tricks? When I left you were reading law with old Barmeister. Deacon, you're looking well. Have you any more horses as good as the one I borrowed?"

And so he went on, addressing by name each person whom he knew and fostering at least a temporary sense of security. The more courageous of the crowd returned to the court-room; the more timid clustered about the doors.

"Ezra," said the judge rather weakly, "this is no place for firearms."

"Beg your pardon, judge," smiled Uncle Ez, "but there hasn't been a load in this gun since I left Montana. I have returned from the West—returned with money enough to buy up Vandefeller and put Rockybilt out of the running."

"Made it honestly, too; dug it out of old Mother Earth. At first I thought I'd buy a train of Pullman cars, hire a brass band and swoop down on Shelbyville like a circus procession.

"Then I had another thought. 'No,' said I to myself, 'I'll take the other way round. I'll go to Shelbyville just as I am; I'll tramp from Shelbyville to Coon Hollow in my old clothes, and I'll find out when I reach the old place just who are my friends.

"'If I can find one man in Coon Hollow,' thinks I, 'who'll give me a friendly hand, as a token of my regard I'll buy the place and give it to him!'"

The deacon edged out from behind Jethro.

"Ezra," said he, half extending his hand, "I always thought you'd amount to something! I always said——"

"No, deacon," said Uncle Ez decidedly, "you can't gold-brick me. I return to my native place, and what do I find? Why, that the youngest scion of the house of Mydus has been haled into court to answer to the charge of swindling! Although he stands before you cleared of this heinous charge, yet the odium of arrest and imprisonment will cling to him for the rest of his natural life.

"However, I intend to start him in life with a million in cold cash. When his money jingles in the public's ear the public will forget his incarceration; but Jethro will never forget."

Uncle Ez sat himself on one corner of the judge's table and swung one of his booted feet pensively.

"I had intended," said he, "to buy up the Shelbyville, Hank's Corners & Portland Railroad, run it into Coon Hollow and so on to Boston. I had intended to erect a marble palace on the hill back of Cy Lepper's and ransack the Old World for costly nicknacks with which to fill it.

"I had intended to pave Main Street from end to end and erect an opera house, a paper-mill, and two or three other factories. I had intended to do all this, and more, but this rank injustice visited upon Jethro has given me pause."

An awful silence fell upon the court-room. Looks like dagger-thrusts were shot at the deacon and the highway commissioner, through whom all this splendor and prosperity had been lost.

"I sent the brick to Jethro," Uncle Ez continued.

"I had always intended to do something for the boy and this was but a starter, an opening wedge, as it were. You could take a thousand such bricks from my hoard of gold and never know the pile had been touched.

"And I return to find that the deacon swindled him out of the bar—buying it for a tenth part of its value; and then, oh, the irony of fate! turning on him with a countercharge of swindling and holding him up to reproach and contumely."

He faced the jeweler.

"Sir, will you give one thousand five hundred dollars for that bar of bullion?"

"I will," said Mr. Barkins promptly.

"Have you the cash about you?"

"I can give you three hundred dollars in cash and a check for the balance."

"Pray do so."

Mr. Barkins drew out his pocket-book and his check-book. The deacon reached for the three hundred dollars.

"What!" thundered Uncle Ez. "You repudiated that transaction when you brought suit against Jethro. Make any trouble, sir, about my adjustment of this difficulty and Jethro sues you for ten thousand dollars damages. Has Jethro a case, Philo Jenkins?"

"He has," declared Jenkins; "he could get judgment against Deacon Cotter. But I would suggest that the suit be brought against Brackett and Cotter, jointly."

"Keep the brick," fluttered the deacon.

Uncle Ez took the three hundred dollars and handed the deacon one hundred dollars of it.

"Very fair, Ezra, I must say," struck in Judge Grimes.

"Make out the check in my name, Mr. Barkins," continued Uncle Ez; "I shudder at the thought of letting Jethro have anything more to do with this transaction."

Presently Uncle Ez took the check and thrust it carelessly into his trousers' pocket.

"I warn you," said Mr. Barkins, "that I have made five hundred dollars at least by this deal."

"I said a few minutes ago that I was charitably disposed this morning," returned Uncle Ez, dryly.

Apart from Jethro, not one of all the many assembled in the court-room but would have given Ezra Mydus the cut direct had he been met and recognized a short half-hour before; now that it was known he had returned a latter-day Monte Cristo, a modern Crœsus, all pressed forward to grasp his hand and hail him as neighbor—all except the deacon and Bud Brackett.

The deacon had lost one thousand four hundred dollars and would be made sleepless for many nights on account of it; as for the highway commissioner, already had discontent appeared in his father-in-law's eye and there were thoughts of infelicity in his home-circle.

Together they elbowed through the press of an impromptu reception extended to Uncle Ez, glared angrily at each other when they reached the sidewalk, and departed their different ways without speaking.

Presently came Jethro and Uncle Ez, arm in arm. They had dinner with Than Loftis; a most remarkable dinner, the menu embracing the choicest of everything then in the house.

Following dinner, the plutocrat and his nephew started democratically from the town in Jethro's lumber wagon. When the last of the gaping citizens was out of sight and the town lay far behind, Uncle Ez dropped a hand on Jethro's knee.

"I never sent you that gold brick, my lad," said he.

"I know it," answered Jethro. "But you could have sent it if you'd wanted to."

"Jethro, I couldn't have sent you a plugged dollar!" declared Uncle Ez.

"But you said——"

"I have longed to return to Coon Hollow with just such a story as I recited in the court-room," interrupted Uncle Ez.

"I was coming here to see if I could borrow a few dollars of you, and was attracted to the court-room by the crowds making in that direction. When I heard that I was supposed to have sent you that gold brick——"

"I didn't say that under oath," hastily interpolated Jethro.

"Perhaps not," answered Uncle Ez, "but when I heard that, I knew my opportunity had come to tell a good one, so I took temporary possession of one of my air-castles. The effect was magnificent!" and Uncle Ezra glowed as he thought of it.

"Then you can't give me a million in cold cash?" asked Jethro.

"I can give you half of this money Barkins paid for the brick."

"Keep it, Uncle Ez; there's more where that came from."

Uncle Ezra's eyes grew wide.

"Where did you get that brick?"

Jethro was silent.

"Why did you tell the deacon I sent it to you?"

"As the easiest way to account for my having such a thing. It was a mild deception and not calculated to injure the deacon in any way."

"Business, that's all. If you have a private graft somewhere, Jethro," went on Uncle Ez confidentially, "and will let me in on the ground floor——"

"I haven't!" answered Jethro sharply.

"And you can get more of the bullion?"

"A hundred, yes, a thousand, times more than you led the Coon Hollow folks to believe that you had!"

Uncle Ez did not fall from the wagon-seat. He merely sat there and wondered if this scion of the house of Mydus had gone crazy.

"Won't you tell me where you get the yellow metal?" he coaxed.

"No," said Jethro resolutely, "but you're just the man I want to help me dispose of the stuff after it is made."

"Made?" came the startled query.

"You can still occupy your air-castle, Uncle Ez," said Jethro. "Although I furnish the gold, we will continue to foster the impression that you bring it from Montana. Then you can help me."

"Help you what?"

"Become a Napoleon of Finance."

(To be continued.)

THE BUGLER OF SEDAN.

By Sam Davis.

A STORY of war, of a man misunderstood, and of an army that came to a dead halt.

THE twilight was falling over the landscape which marked the frontier of France, the dividing line between Napoleon III and the Emperor William. A sturdy young German stood motionless by the roadside, taking a last look at the Fatherland. There was a pack on his shoulder, a staff in his hand, and his dusty shoes told of a long tramp. His clothes indicated poverty, and in his face was the mournful look that is worn by men who carry burdens of misery in their hearts.

He felt himself an outcast, as if misfortune had been the first hand that caressed him in his cradle. From his earliest memory his father's home had been a place of turmoil and bickering. As he grew up he discovered that his features, which were of a pronounced French cast, were the cause of all his troubles.

The tongue of village gossip connected his birth with the presence of a French officer, the commander of a squad near the frontier.

His mother, as pure a soul as ever lived, was innocent of the charges made by the gossiping busybodies of the village, but some fatality placed that Gallic stamp on his features, and thus it came to pass that his own father, a man of a jealous, suspicious nature, hated him because he did not have the heavy German features of his other sons.

When there was a family quarrel afoot he had heard his mother taunted; so one day he packed his effects, took a small purse his mother pressed into his hand, felt her warm tears upon his cheek, received her kiss and benediction, and was away. He made up his mind that if his face was so unmistakably French, he would go where it would be better appreciated.

Before reaching the frontier he had stopped a day or so at an old farm where a young girl who was very dear to him lived with her aged grandmother.

So it was, as the young fellow gazed upon his country, perhaps for the last time, that the scenes of his boyhood spread before him for a few moments, and then faded into the gloom that settled down on everything.

In a few days, which were barren of adventure or incident, he reached a little farm and engaged himself to work there for a year. His new master could speak French and German, and they got on very well together. When his time was up he received his pay and pushed on to Paris. In another year, Herman began to feel that he had become quite a Parisian.

With a little shop, opened up on his year's earnings and his mother's bounty, he was making a small living. He was planning to increase his business and was building a good many hopes for the future when the rumbling of war began to be heard in France.

At first the coming conflict was considered quite a joke in Paris, and the comedians in the theaters raised many a laugh over the impending clash of arms; but presently soldiers began to drill, war was declared in earnest, and then came the preparations which precede the real work of the field.

Herman was pressed into the French service. He protested that he was German, but when he saw that the protest brought him into contempt with the others in his company, he abandoned all efforts to escape, resolving to go to the front and watch for an opportunity to desert.

In the rush of preparation the contagious enthusiasm of his comrades so affected him that his willingness to serve was no longer questioned. At times he almost persuaded himself that he was a Frenchman.

From the city they moved into the barracks and from the barracks drifted into the field. Herman irresistibly caught the war feeling and longed to reach fighting ground. But now and again his heart went back to his birthplace and he began to wonder what he would do when he saw the uniforms of his countrymen.

Every day brought his battalion nearer to the center of operations. The French had a series of engagements, with much hard fighting, along the road to Gravelotte, but the regiment of cavalry to which Herman belonged singularly escaped for the time any contact with the enemy.

Herman saw a long line of ambulances, taking sick and wounded men to the rear, and now and then he listened to the distant boom of artillery. Everywhere the soldiers commented on the slowness and indecision of the French generals. They lost a day here and another there. Before they reached a stream the enemy had cut the bridge, and the fords were sure to be occupied in advance of the French.

The men were full of enthusiasm and chafing to leap into the fray, but the generals were continually consulting and deliberating. They fought their way over a country from which they seemed unable to gather any natural advantages. The troops felt that Napoleon I would have swept like an eagle where these generals crawled.

After disaster at Gravelotte, nothing gained at Borny, and bad news from other quarters, the army moved toward Sedan, where it was expected that France

would retrieve her losses and win a last great victory.

Late one afternoon the regiment halted on the crest of a low hill, and as Herman observed the landscape he noted a stretch of the country which he knew so well. In plain view of the old farmhouse where he had spent many a never-to-be-forgotten summer afternoon.

He studied the familiar features of the landscape until the darkness came on and he could recognize the old house only by the gleam of light from the window.

Herman passed a restless night, for there was running through his brain an idea, vague and shadowy, that he might in the heat of battle be of some service to the Fatherland.

Everything was astir on that gray September morning, the morning of the day set aside by Fate for a terrible blow to France.

Herman's regiment expected an early move, but got no orders. For hours the columns of infantry surged past and now and then a battery of field guns.

The men whose good fortune it was to move toward the front of battle were elated with anticipation. The new recruits moved on with their caps on their bayonets, the regulars silently and with a sullen precision, looking neither to the right nor to the left. The march became like the rising tide of a swollen stream drawing in everything along its sides.

Herman heard the measured boom of German artillery and the answering bark of the French field pieces. Later came the sharp crackling of musketry and the rhythmic file firing, where battalions, like great machines, were handled by one man. Yet all this time Herman saw little besides clouds of smoke, through which detachments of soldiers hastened to the front.

Presently his regiment was on the move, and it was passed up and down the line that the French cavalry, nearly twenty thousand strong, was to fall upon the German lines. The maneuver had been well planned. The tremendous bombardment of the French artillery in front was to create an impenetrable curtain of smoke, behind which the cavalry was to form, and from out of this cloud the charge was to come like a flash of lightning.

For nearly half an hour the French artillery smoked and thundered and created the battle mask behind which the French massed their battalions of restless horses. In front was a pall of smoke that seemed to hang from the zenith to the earth, as if God had lowered a curtain from the sky to separate the armies.

Then the artillery vanished as the plunging horses bore the guns to the right and left, leaving a clear highway for the cavalry. The French horse moved forward at a trot which presently merged into a gallop, and as Herman reached a slight rise in the ground he saw the German infantry for the first time, and it seemed about a quarter of a mile away.

Then he heard the bugle signals for the charge float up from the right, to be repeated like an echo as the signal passed up the swaying lines. These calls sent a thrill of ecstasy through the great squadron. Herman's horse was plunging forward with the rest. The bugle calls, the commands of the officers and the wild shouts of the men were all merged in the thunder of hoof-beats and the stormy rush of the charge.

The space between them and the foe must be crossed in the shortest possible time, so that with the desire to engage the enemy was mingled the feeling of self-preservation which never quite forsakes the soldier. This is what makes a cavalry charge so terrible and irresistible. The brave are eager to engage, the timid are urged forward by the knowledge that they will be safer at close quarters.

The trick of the French did not surprise the Germans. They were prepared, and the lines of infantry, drawn up to repel cavalry, were blossoming with smoke and fire.

But there was more; the Germans and not the French had set the trap. While Bazaine was plotting the blow for the French, Von Moltke conceived the counter.

At the charge of the French cavalry the lines of German infantry parted like the lips of a savage hound, and like a hound's row of teeth the German field guns, battery upon battery, came into view, as the infantry with their rifles still crackling stepped back to give them play.

The Germans had sprung their trap upon the French, and now the bristling

line of field pieces sent their welcome of canister into the advancing line of horses. The slight eminence reached by the French cavalry was swept by this frightful death storm. The only course now was to make the hottest possible pace to the foe.

A shot killed a bugler at Herman's shoulder. He fell forward with his hands on each side of his horse's neck, and like a flash the ideas that were clouding Herman's brain focused themselves.

He tore the bugle from its fastenings.

He lifted the bugle to his lips and sounded loud the command to halt.

He sent all his desperate strength into the blast and the call, a sound more appalling to the French than the roar of the field pieces, cut like a simitar through the sullen thunder of the battle. It was taken up and repeated down the line and at once the avalanche of men and horses seemed struck with a terrible paralysis.

The trained soldiers of France knew that an order was meant to be obeyed, and so the line writhed like an immense serpent stunned with a blow on the head. What could this halt mean right under the withering fire of the German guns?

No one knew.

The signal, coming from the chief bugler, had been carried down the line.

In the confusion and horror of the halt, while the tangled masses of men and animals were melting away before the storm of German canister, there was no time to inquire. A few minutes are eternity at such a time. The field pieces were in continual eruption and the infantry advancing alongside the guns added a treble accompaniment to the diapason of battle.

Some officer, recovering his senses, ordered a charge and the decimated cavalry of the French lurched forward toward the death wall beyond the open, but the momentum and the enthusiasm of the charge was past; the fire had gone out of the nostrils of the horses and the mettle of fight had gone out of the hearts of the men. They threw themselves upon the foe with a sort of mechanical obedience.

When the horses felt the hot breath of the cannon and the smoke in their faces they slowed their stumbling pace and the line rolled back like a receding wave.

Again Herman set the bugle to his lips, and sounded the retreat. It was unnecessary, for the retreat had already begun. The notes of his bugle went in mournful and dying echoes down the line, and the retreat flowed back like the underflow of the sea, sweeping everything. What was left of that splendid squadron was only a few handfuls of men who regretted that the sickle of battle had not cut them down.

Squads of fleeing steeds passed over the field like animals lost in a bog, stumbling over their fallen riders. Herman looked on his work, at first with satisfaction, then with horror. He had seen the line halt at his breath, had seen it melt away at the breath of the German guns, and now he watched the remnant of French cavalry in full retreat leaving the victory to Germany.

As he was sounding the retreat an officer spurred his horse toward him with foam and curses flying from his lips, and sword uplifted.

"Traitor!" he shouted, and then, as a ball pierced his chest, fell at Herman's feet, the blood streaming from his mouth.

Herman's horse was shot under him and, falling, pinned him to the ground. Soon the retreating remnants of the French became mere silhouettes against the fading sky. The smoke of the battle had settled down over the field as if decency would cover the picture which the field presented. Slowly the twilight crept down over the litter of carnage, softening and shrouding that which had appeared so terrible in the garish sunlight.

The moon coming up in the east touched the gleaming cuirasses, the broken sabers the metal-tipped accouterments and pallid faces of the dead with a soft radiance. It seemed very still to Herman after the storm of conflicting sounds that had stunned his ears during the day.

There came to him at intervals the boom of distant guns and at times he fancied he heard the murmuring of chimes, as if some far-off cathedral were signaling back to the Fatherland the glad tidings of victory.

Contemplating his more immediate

surroundings, he saw many signs of life in his immediate vicinity. A body would half turn to find an easier position, an arm would rise in air and fall back heavily, a leg would be drawn up, as moaning, restless men tried to rise and fell back groaning. Herman heard strange whisperings that arrested his attention.

His action in sounding the false bugle calls was being discussed. Those who had fallen close beside him were revolving the matter in their minds. Men who had fallen with their faces close together had exchanged ideas, and were sifting the evidence against Herman.

The word "traitor," passing in whispers from one to another, was radiating in a constantly widening circle from the spot where Herman lay. Men with ghastly, bloody faces rose on their elbows to gaze at him. Fingers were pointed, and curses were hissed from the mouths of soldiers who spent their expiring breath in imprecations.

He became aware that the tribunal of dying men had reached a verdict in his case and had condemned him to die. He heard the jibberings and whisperings of those nearest him, and then became aware of strange movements. They rolled over slowly, they crawled along, and every movement, accompanied with groans and imprecations, brought their hideous, powder-stained faces nearer.

The splendor of the moon shone upon them only to accentuate the redness of their wounds and the ghastly pallor of exposed flesh, wherever it could shine on a patch of skin not stamped with the blood and powder stencilings of battle. Herman watched them with beating heart. It seemed as if the entire regiment was crowding upon him.

He recognized men with whom he had slept and eaten, men from whose canteens he had drunk. Some whom he had counted as corpses lifted their heads painfully above the rest to watch his execution. One, a man of immense build and countenance distorted by frightful wounds, was shuffling toward him on his elbows and dragging his wounded legs.

He advanced inch by inch and, when he came within reach, clutched with his long arm the collar of Herman's coat, and dragging himself nearer, seized with both of his powerful hands the young German's throat. But the effort exhausted the poor fellow's strength and he sank down on his face and died.

The heads that had been lifted up in the vicinity fell back simultaneously, with curses and groans of disappointment. The execution had failed, the nervous tension and the labor of lifting their heads to watch the vengeance of the man who had just died was fatiguing to the living, and for some minutes they lay motionless.

Then, as with one accord, the circle of human remnants about him began to narrow as by almost imperceptible movements they resumed their journey. At times they were so nearly stationary that the horrible stare from the glazing eyes of dying men could not be distinguished from those already with the shades.

Herman felt the calmness of despair. He began to watch some particular person and calculate his chances of covering the ten or twelve intervening feet. One, a petty officer, was the most active. He was slowly drawing ahead of the rest.

Presently his sword touched Herman, and he had but another foot before the lunge, when his face sickened and sank into the ground, from which it never stirred. As the circle of glassy eyes drew nearer Herman was glad to see some become fixed in the moonlight.

The sword that had touched him lay within reach. He seized the blade but could not wrench it from the dead man's hand. Necks were craned forward to see the outcome of the struggle. The dead man maintained stubborn possession of the blade. Herman gave up the conquest, and a face not six feet away grinned with malicious satisfaction.

Herman wondered what time it was. A still wind from the east swept over the field. It bore with the mingled scents of death the odor of burnt powder. The cold chilled and stiffened the limbs of the creeping men, and many of his avengers ceased their journey altogether.

Herman's attention was now attracted by a stir to his right. A man with a pistol was working his way through and over a mass of cavalrymen. He reached his long weapon ahead and tapped impatiently on those in front as a signal

to make way for him. They did so whenever they could.

He seemed bent on getting as close as possible to his victim. Where it was possible for those in front to clear obstructions and give him range they did so by pulling caps and knapsacks out of the way and squeezing their bodies to the right or left. Every one seemed bent on assisting the man with the weapon. There was a freemasonry of thought, an interchanging of ideas, a concert of action that appalled and horrified Herman.

Suddenly a shadow swept past him. He looked toward the sky and saw betwixt him and the moon a great bird hovering over the field. Others soon followed, and out of the dark pocket of the night came a flock led by instinct to that banquet which only a battle can afford.

They came down from the sky in narrowing spirals and with their heavy wings skimmed over the field undecided where to alight. There was more horror in the coming of those birds than in any event of the day.

The men who had fearlessly faced the fire of the German guns shrank closer to the ground when the scavengers of the air swept past them. As the men saw the down-thrust heads and gleaming beaks, swaying to the right and left, they trembled and shuddered with a terror seldom known to the soldier. Soon the birds began to settle in numbers and those who were able beat them back with their swords.

Meanwhile the man who was crawling toward Herman advanced with great difficulty to within twelve or fifteen feet, and reached the line which separated the wilderness of corpses from the open. He deliberately cocked his pistol, but at the click of the weapon one of the carrion birds settled on his shoulders.

With a yell of anguish he rolled over on his side. Then he discharged into the bird's breast the load which he had intended for Herman. The man and the vulture expired together.

Herman thought it strange that the man, knowing how near he was to death, should have allowed his determination to be balked when its consummation was but the touch of the finger on the trigger, a touch that would have given him the revenge that had tormented him and the hearts of all his comrades. With only a moment to live, he gave Herman his life that he might live that moment out.

Turn where he would Herman saw nothing but a circle of corpses, which formed an impassable barrier to others in the rear who were seeking to come on but could not scale the ramparts. Death had cast a wall of bodies about him and made the interior of the circle a sanctuary of refuge.

He presently became aware of a glow in the faces of those around him. It danced, flickered, died out, and glowed again. He heard voices and footsteps, and as if in answer to his shouts for help two men hastened toward him. One held a lantern over him, and, recognizing his own brother, his heart gave a great bound of joy.

He called out his name: "Johann! Brother! 'Tis Herman!" His brother held the lantern so the rays fell on the French uniform.

"Traitor," he said between his teeth.

A moment later he pushed his sword into the chest of the prostrate man.

"I have wiped out the stain," he said to his companion. "He will never more fight against the Fatherland."

Herman made no resistance, made no sound. His eyes, raised to his brother's, wore a look of ineffable tenderness through a dim mist of tears.

After he had drawn his sword from his brother's body, the German trooper caught the look of those eyes and shrank back. The features wore a calm he had never noticed on his brother's face in life, and the eyes now fixed and glazing were so sweet and forgiving that the German's soul was filled with a horror of a nameless remorse.

Had those eyes but gleamed savagely at him, had a parting malediction left a scowl upon the features and the froth of dying hate upon the lips, he would have found it easier to have faced it. Then he lifted a lantern and saw a score of dead men's faces all scowling upon the brother he had just slain. Why those menacing attitudes? Why were hands and weapons all pointed to the common center where the dead cavalryman lay?

He made a careful examination of the surroundings and noticed the trails in the soft ground where dying men had

dragged themselves toward a common goal. Their feet had dug little hollows in the turf to push themselves along; their nails had clutched and torn the earth in front.

He saw a bugle close to his brother's hand, from which it had evidently fallen. Yet his brother wore no bugler's uniform. A vague mist was rising in his brain and by slow degrees he recalled the enigma of the day's battle. Had he not seen a squadron of cavalry moving with a cyclonic force upon the German lines suddenly halt at the most disadvantageous position possible? Had he not witnessed, with an amazement shared by every one, a magnificent troop of horse stand rooted like standing corn, while but a few hundred yards away a living line of flame streamed from a hundred smoking batteries?

He was now standing where that fire had been the hottest, standing within that circle of corpses in whose attitude he read vengeance. His eye fell on the bugle once more, and the full meaning of it lying there under his brother's hand seemed to suffocate him.

What but a bugle call to halt had laid the hand of military authority upon that impetuous line? And who but his brother could have blown the death blast that gave the victory to the Iron Chancellor?

But he must make a certainty of these surmises. A dozen yards away he found a wounded man whom he addressed in French as he held a flask of liquor to his lips.

"You lost the battle?"

"Yes, a traitor in our ranks sounded false bugle calls. I saw him sound the bugle that halted the whole line. The man over there by the horse. They tried to kill him. I wish I had the chance."

The man who spoke was lying close beside a prostrate horse. The butt of a pistol protruded from the saddle.

"Can I have your pistol, friend?"

"Yes, and welcome. I suppose you Germans are taking everything you can get your hands on."

In the morning a squad of German soldiers found a German officer who had evidently shattered his skull with a pistol. He had no other wound.

Strange, said they, that a German officer should kill himself after the battle in the midst of so many dead Frenchmen.

THE MAN IN HIS SHIRT SLEEVES.

By Charles Edward Barns.

A serial of the sea and the strange adventures that befell a coatless hero.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE TAKES A HAND.

"WELL, gentlemen, are we all here?"

"I believe so, chief."

"Very well. Sergeant, close the door after you, and let no one in till I ring. Do you understand?"

"Certainly, sir."

The tall, lank orderly of the Chief of the New York Detective Bureau backed from the presence of his superior, glided through the door, and stood guard on the other side.

The chief sat back in his chair and swept the little chamber with a keen eye. It was a bare room, monastic in severity, yet more like a criminal's cell than an anchorite's. There were just enough chairs for the three in waiting, each one occupying a corner, as if there were a three-cornered fight about to proceed; and the thick-set, stocky man in the center, seated behind his bastion of documents in orderly array, was the referee.

The chief noted that the two well-dressed men who had entered the chamber at the appointed hour, almost simultaneously, did not recognize each other—did not even seem to realize each other's presence; and their frigidity gave the chief no little concern.

It influenced his first, cautionary utterance as he eyed the grizzled figure at his right hand, and then the other at his left, who was somewhat calmer, but whose face showed the strain of sleepless nights and days given to a problem which to this hour had baffled him. The third figure was a stout, beefy man in coachman's uniform, and, save as an important witness, he did not count.

"Gentlemen," began the chief in a low voice, "I trust that it will not be necessary to remind you that in this important conference you are to preserve the strictest consideration for each other and for the law.

"I realize the situation thoroughly—understand perfectly how each is at variance with the other in theory, with regard to the calamity which has befallen you both. But let me counsel you to approach this subject, as much as is in your individual power, from a neutral standpoint—to go right to the bottom of the case, telling the truth and the whole truth, and in every way assisting me to do my duty. I must be impartial.

"Colonel Van Blunt, have I your pledge to that effect?"

The elderly financier, who had meanwhile been wriggling forward to the very edge of the chair, trembling with suppressed excitement, raised his hand in sign of solemn declaration.

"You have my pledge, chief. But you must remember that I have left the bedside of a daughter whom I love—a daughter deserted at the altar, sir, and by one who——"

"There, there! You are violating your pledge with your first utterance. No good can come of rashness in argument—only harm, grave harm. Dr. Mountjoy, have I your word, too, that you will preserve absolute reserve in this discussion of affairs so vital to you both, and that you will suppress all personal animosity——"

"Chief," cried a broken voice out of the shadows as a tall form half rose from the creaking chair, "I am not a man given to losing my nerve in great crises—my profession has taught me the science of self-elimination in great emergencies. But remember, chief, the honor of my house is attacked, and without knowing whether he is dead or alive, my only son——"

"One moment, doctor, I beg of you," broke in the chief, in his very heart pitying the elder man, who stood shaking like an oak-leaf in a gale.

"Once more, I ask you gentlemen to forget your personal griefs and approach this mysterious matter in a manner becoming the detective seeking a clue rather than the father who mourns the loss, or supposed loss, of a son; or of the father who sees his beloved daughter deserted at the very altar by one who has shown every evidence of pride and affection.

"Let us begin at the point where legitimate investigation dictates. Let us review the events of the night of the thirteenth of January, two weeks ago to-day, when Miss Marcia Van Blunt, the colonel's daughter, was led to the altar by her father, and there given in marriage to a gentleman supposed to be Lieutenant Daniel Mountjoy——"

"Supposed to be, sir? Why, did I not see and hear?"

"Excuse me, colonel. I will show you that there is still a doubt——"

"And you mean to infer that my daughter married some person in the disguise of the missing bridegroom?"

"I infer nothing; take nothing for granted; accept nothing—till proven.

"Now to proceed. The wedding, I understand—let me refer to my notes here—yes, the wedding was set for five P. M., at St. Hubert's Episcopal Church, near Gramercy Park. The bridegroom was late."

"Nearly forty minutes, sir," broke in the colonel hotly. "The guests were already beginning to consult their watches and cast sidelong glances toward one another and back into the chancel where my daughter, sir, supported on my arm, awaited the word. You know that when a bridegroom is a minute late, it causes comment; what, then, of forty minutes! Well, as I was about to state——"

"Pray be calm, my dear sir. You wander from the point. It was, then,

about five-forty when the bridegroom appeared."

"Yes. I saw the best man at the little door beside the altar wave his handkerchief to the organist, and then the organist——"

"Precisely. The bride marched up the aisle upon her father's arm, and there took the arm of the groom, turning about to face the officiating clergyman."

"Yes. Then I stepped back——"

"How far?"

"Not so far but that I could see everybody and everything quite plainly."

"You use glasses, I believe—very strong ones. Did you wear them on this occasion?"

"I did not, sir."

"And although it was an afternoon wedding, so-called, the lateness of the hour made it practically an evening wedding without the usual accessories—sufficient lighting, for instance."

"I confess that it was very gloomy and dark. Indeed, I twice endeavored to catch the sexton's eye and motion him to light the big chandelier nearest the altar. I should have done it myself even, had not, just then, that amazing episode occurred which turned my thoughts into a new channel."

"What episode?"

"The bride had said her 'I will' and the question had been put to the groom. He muttered something incoherent which every one accepted as the expected affirmation. Then, suddenly, I heard him say distinctly, in that awful silence, 'My God! No. I may be desperate through poverty and suffering, but I am no criminal.'

"With that he turned, dropped his head so that his chin rested upon his bosom, covered his face with his hands as if in great mental distress, and went through that little door by the altar like a shot. The bride, seeing herself deserted, turned and looked about her in a bewildered sort of way; then she gave me a glance of unutterable agony and with a heart-broken cry sank fainting into my arms."

"And the groom?"

"Sir?"

"Lieutenant Mountjoy. Was that the last you saw of him?"

"The last, I hope, forever," said Colonel Van Blunt sharply. "It is not to regain him for my daughter's sake that I am here, mark you that. It is to discover whether he is dead or alive—in other words, to know whether he can ever trouble her again. My daughter has today consented to marry the man of my choice, an English gentleman of rank who still idolizes her in spite of the fact that she discouraged him in favor of this—this deserter, and loves her in spite of this scandalous occurrence—in spite of the scoundrel——"

"Excuse me, sor! But Oi'll tell y' now thot Danny Mountjoy, as I knew him fer twinty years or more, was no scoondrel, an' I'll break the head av anny man who blasts the reputation av me departed frind——"

"There, that will do, Michael," cautioned the chief, raising a finger before the broad-chested, scarlet-faced coachman, who had risen and advanced a step and was shaking his fist in the face of the veteran soldier. "Did you say 'departed friend,' Michael?" added the chief.

"Thot I did, sor. And what is more, I'll tell y' now thot on the day of that weddin' Lieutenant Mountjoy niver wint near St. Hubert's Church at all, at all. I mane to say thot on his way there from the Mountjoy mansion on Brooklyn Heights, the poor man niver got farther than the big bridge. Why, mon, have I too not eyes to see and ears to hear as well as anny mon? I tell you now, Danny Mountjoy, the mon I knew and loved so well, is gone an' will nivver be found, and for a very good reason."

"And what is that reason, Michael?"

"Listen now, an' I'll tell y', for I can't slape o' nights wid the memory of that awful scene on my chist, and I walkin' the strates wid the secret on me brain. Listen now——"

"Go on, Michael. And remember, there is a stenographer back of that screen yonder taking down every word."

CHAPTER II.

THE COACHMAN'S STORY.

"LET me say furst av all, gintlemen, thot although Oi am a coachman, my people are the decindents av the

O'Bradys, County Monahan, Oireland, which boasts av two mimbers av Parliament, a bishop, and siveral magistrates to their credit in toimes past, an' nivver was one known to tell a lie, nor to do a mane trick to anny livin' sowl on earth——"

"Never mind that, Michael. Get down to the facts of this case."

"Excuse me, chief. I'm just sayin' this so as you'll know thot, although Oi was the black shape av the family, and ran away to come to America whin I should have stayed at home an' got an eddycation loike me Dublin University brothers, nivertheless, the blood av the O'Bradys is in me veins an' Oi could niver forget so far as to lose me manners and me morals, in church or on the coach-box, now or no time, for Oi'm a rale O'Brady in foight or in peace-makin', and thot is the r'ason why Oi have kept me jobs with the Denlow family on the Heights—the very flower of Brooklyn society—for more'n twinty long years, God save us——"

"We know all about that, Michael. Come to the point!"

"Thot's what Oi'm arrivin' at, sor. Will y' listen? Well, on the fatal day—mark y' I said fatal day——"

"Very well, Michael, 'fatal day,' if you must have it so——"

"On that fatal day my missus she says to me, 'Michael, there's a weddin' goin' on at the Church av Saint Hubert, near Gramercy Park, New York, at five o'clock. Have the carriage ready at four, and then watch out for the Mountjoy carriage next door.

"'You know,' sez she, 'Lieutenant Mountjoy is to marry the beautiful Miss Van Blunt, who was the queen av the May ball here last May Day, and whom you drove home afterward. Do you remember?' sez she. 'Roight well Oi do,' sez Oi, proud-like. 'And it's a happy choice has me frind Danny Mountjoy made—I say "me frind" wid all respect,' sez Oi. 'And in honor av the occasion,' sez Oi, 'would y' moind my pickin' an orchid from the plant he loikes so much in our granehouse, for there's just one bloom, and thot's the pink av perfection,' sez Oi. 'Certainly, Michael,' sez she. An' so, with me heart more than glad for Danny (whom I had known for the twinty years av me sarvice there), I plucked that orchid, an' when his coachman drove up to the curb of the Mountjoy mansion, I sneaks over, lays that orchid on the cushions unbeknown, thin goes back to me own carriage, mounts the box an' waits the procession."

"Did you see anybody or anything in the carriage, Michael?" It was the chief who spoke.

"Nothin' at all, at all."

"How long did you wait on the box of the coach?"

"Till I began to get worried, sor, terr'bly worried. I thought Lieutenant Danny was all the toime in the mansion, but bless me sowl! if at a late hour he didn't come drivin' up to the front in a hansom, the pony all white wid foam. Then he plunges into the house, and widin two minutes dashes out again, wid a lot o' black clothes over his arm, discharges the hansom, jumps into the coach in waitin', calls out, 'Benson, we're frightfully late! Put on speed all the way, only look out for the bridge cops. I don't want to be caught again, above all on me weddin' day! And off they goes.

"Well, at this same moment, my people, the Denlows, who had been meanwhile watchin' at the window, comes down pell-mell and piles into my coach; an' it was my missus who sez to her daughter, 'Maisie, there must be somethin' sharp doin' in Wall Street to-day that would make a man forget his own weddin'.'

"'Yes,' said Miss Maisie, 'an' what's more,' sez she, 'did you notice, mama, the lieutenant had on his business jacket with his top hat jerked on at the last moment, with his frock coat, an' other duds over his arm as he slammed himself in the coach? Think av makin' your t'ilet in a thunderin' carriage whoile goin' to your own weddin'!' she sez, laughin'. 'That's what I call "the strenyus life" fer true, eh?' Then the coach door slammed an' I heard no more. I whips up, drivin' pell-mell after the Mountjoy carriage, far ahead."

"Where did you overtake it?"

"Just at the entrance of the bridge, sor. There was a blockade, just as luck wud have it, an' it looked sorry fer the weddin' bein' on toime, sure it did. I

whipped up roight in line just behind the Mountjoy carriage, an' we started snailin' over that long bridge. The jam was somethin' awful—just as you see on fog days durin' a January thaw."

"There was a fog, then?"

"Fog? Say, by the toime we were a quarter across the river, sor, the fog were so thick Oi couldn't see three carriages ahead. An' as we went on over the span, it grew thick as puddin'; on me loife, sor.

"The jam o' cars was makin' a great racket, an' as I leaned over and looked down toward the water below, though I couldn't see ten feet, sor, for the darkness and the fog, the whistlin' and pandemonium of wessels showed the trouble on.

"It were a very Londonish day, sor, only worse; and me heart sank for Danny in the for'ard coach, for Oi knew how he must be chafin' and worryin' there in his loneliness. Well, God save us! gintlemen, it was at this very crisis, wid the line of traffic goin' slower an' slower till it actually stopped for a moment dead still, that that awful thing happened."

The long-drawn and hollow words, "awful thing," brought a shudder to the listeners, for the homely eloquence of the Irishman and his deep sincerity carried tragic conviction.

"What 'awful thing,' Michael?" said the chief calmly, leaning forward and listening with great intent. "Remember, you are not under oath, Michael, but what you say now you will have to substantiate and stand by to the last."

"God stroike me dead, chief, if what I tell you now is not the truth an' nothin' but the truth, by all the saints av the church, sor!"

"Calmly now. You were in the center of the bridge. The long train of carriages and wagons had stopped for the moment in the blockade. You were surrounded by a dense gloom of darkness and fog. Could you see the coach ahead very plainly?"

"Perfectly, sor, but precious little farther. Through the rear window in the for'ard coach I could see a white arm shoot up every second or two as of some one dressin' himself in a hurry inside the vehicle, but the side blinds were still up. Well, I turned to look back to see who was behoind me. Whin I looks for'ard again, Lord bless me! what did Oi see? The coach door was wide open, I hears a weird cry—a sort o' call and yet a shriek of alarm—and then out av that coach dashes the figure of me frind, Lieutenant Mountjoy, makes a strange leap as if pursuin' somethin' or somebody loike a crazy man, and then and there, in shirt sleeves and trousers, without hat or shoes, gintlemen, he makes an awful plunge into space out from the great strand of that big bridge, and disappears forever from soight!"

The speaker fairly shrieked out the closing words, as he stood in the center of the little chamber, drenched with perspiration and quaking with horror at the recollection. The effect upon the listeners was electric. There was a long pause.

"And then what, Michael? Did you not even cry out?" asked the solemn man at the desk.

"Cry out? Why, mon, do y' know that there are some momints in a man's loife when he is so stunned that he can no more cry out than he can fly unrepintint to heaven on the wings av the marnin'?

"Cry out? Why, chief and gintlemen, I was thot paralyzed wid terror that I felt me soul ooze out av me shoe-tops. Cry out? No; I sat there limp as a herrin' in a fish-market, wipin' my eyes an' blinkin' wid wonder whether or not Oi was dreamin'; for nivver a soul seemed to see it but mesilf, and nivver a cry from a human throat. Then, on lookin' up again, Heaven witness, Oi tell y' the truth! Oi saw the lower half av a man's shape reentering the coach, the door closed, and we went on."

There was another silence. At last the chief spoke.

"Michael," said he, "how much had you had to drink that day?"

"Nivver a drop, sor. What's more, Oi'm not a drinkin' man, now or no toime."

"What were your thoughts when you saw the lieutenant reenter the carriage——"

"But he didn't, sor—'pon me sowl, and thot av me sainted mother, sor, he didn't! The lieutenant jumped off thot bridge before me eyes—I swear to it!"

"And who entered the carriage, then?"

"It must have been the very divvil himself, sor. Sure, an' Oi will nivver tell fer Oi nivver will know. Oi thought Oi must have been mistaken—thot the fog an' the loight an' the darkness an' the hullabaloo had put a bug into me brain an' that I saw things that nivver were.

"An' so I sat tremblin' and jabberin' prayers all the way over to Gramercy Park, in the manetoime havin' lost soight av the Mountjoy coach entoirely. Thin, whin I got to the church, and my people were already gone in, I leaves the box o' me coach and sneaks me way up to the Mountjoy carriage standin' a little way around the corner. Slyly openin' the door, I peeps into thot abode of divvils, an' stood starin'."

"Well, what did you see, Michael?"

"I saw two coats, two short jackets, sor, one neat and new, such as Oi had seen on the back o' me frind, Lieutenant Mountjoy; the other worn and threadbare—the coat av a stranger, and one thot I had nivver seen before."

The chief went to a closet door, opened it and produced two short coats.

"Do you recognize either of these?"

The coachman rushed forward, took them up, and regarded them with care.

"I recognize both av thim, sor. That one particular. I recall the first day the lieutenant wore it, God rist his sowl! The other I do not recall so well, but to the best av me knowledge and belief, it is the same one thot Oi saw on the cushion av the Mountjoy coach whoile the ceremonies in the church were goin' on. I recall the linin' as Oi saw it in the dim loight."

"Why did you not go into the church and satisfy your curiosity, then?"

"Curiosity, is it? Well, Oi'll tell you the truth, Oi had no more curiosity than a man has who has been up forninst a third rail and lived to tell the tale, sor. I stood tremblin' and speechless at the curbstone; an' then all av a suddin, out came the crowd, awful for silence, an' thin I sort o' woke up as I heard my missus say to her daughter, 'Maisie, what a frightful thing! Will the poor girl ever live through it? Deserted at the altar—great hivins! deserted at the altar!' And then I knew that what I had seen on the big bridge, 'spite of all else, was true: thot Lieutenant Mountjoy, in a fit of timporary insanity, had leaped to his death——"

"That will do, Michael. We quite understand your point of view, as you believe it. But it fails to convince me."

It was Dr. Mountjoy, the father of the missing groom, who spoke, and his words fell with great precision.

"Gentlemen, so far, so good; but neither of these testimonies, given in good faith, I believe, has approached the true facts in the case. Let me speak, for I am convinced of two things in my very heart of hearts: first, that my son, Daniel Mountjoy, is alive, and right here in the city of New York, too; and second, that he never went anywhere near the Church of St. Hubert on the day of the wedding, and, consequently, did not desert his bride at the altar as scandal would lead you to believe."

"It is not scandal, sir, but the facts—the bitter, condemnatory facts, sir——"

"Colonel Van Blunt, allow me to remind you of your pledge," broke in the chief.

"Resume your seat, I beg of you, else all the good attained thus far will go for nothing. Dr. Mountjoy, you have the floor. Will you proceed?"

"I will, chief. And when I am done at least one cloud will have been swept away, although another may appear."

"One cloud at a time, doctor, is a fair record," said the chief, with commiseration and encouragement in his voice. "Speak on!"

CHAPTER III.

A FATHER'S AMAZING DISCOVERIES.

"I WISH it distinctly understood," said Dr. Mountjoy, "that my son, Lieutenant Mountjoy, has always been a most methodical and painstaking young man. From his earliest years he has ever proceeded with caution till he got his bearings, as it were, then has plunged in with his whole reserve of force and ability, careless of consequences so long as he knew that he was in the right.

"This is one of the reasons why he was graduated with such distinction from Harvard, has since been honored at Leipsic and Padua, has been made a member

of the learned royal societies of England—and this is why, since directing all his talents to achieving a fortune in the stock market of late years, such flattering success has crowned his efforts. He has always been conservative; but when he saw opportunity, he knew neither fear nor favor in pursuing the object of his search to the limit of human skill and endurance.

"The result has been that up to the time of his disappearance, no man in or out of Wall Street had a greater promise or was more respected for right dealing and right thinking under any stress and in any emergency. Is it possible that any one could gainsay these truths, I ask?"

The colonel sat silent, neither affirming nor denying, and it was the chief who broke the silence.

"I fancy, doctor, that there are no disputes on that score," he said kindly. "But proceed. You say that you believe—nay, that you have proof that he lives?"

"Proof that may not commend itself to you gentlemen, but to me, who knew him so perfectly, it is so satisfying that I would stake my fortune upon it. Listen."

The doctor resumed his seat, for in the heat of his harangue he had whipped himself fairly to his feet. The company was respectfully silent.

"That my son was dearly and devoutly in love with his fiancée, Miss Marcia Van Blunt, I have seen hundreds of conclusive proofs. He was loyal, affectionate, and hopeful, believing implicity in her love, and planning all things happily, even extravagantly, for her future. That he was loved in turn there is no denying, for women instinctively admire and trust such manly, self-reliant, and promising men.

"It is, therefore, out of the question to believe for one moment that a man whose talents were so great, whose prosperity was ever on the increase, whose future was so full of the assurances of happiness in prosperity and marital affection could deliberately, of his own free will, forseeing the awful consequences of such a deed, desert at the altar one whom he loved so fondly, knowing full well the shocking consequences of such a deed, both to himself, and, above all, to one whom he held dearer than his own life."

"But, if you will allow me, sir," broke in the colonel coldly, "these generalities offer no enlightenment. We can appreciate a father's sentiments toward an only son and admire the courage with which he takes up arms in his behalf. But we are met here to solve problems by the rules of evidence, not by sentiment. Facts, sir—what we want is facts!"

"Facts you shall have," returned the doctor hotly.

"Now, gentlemen, more forbearance, please," said the chief.

"First of all, my son's affairs, as you may infer, having been investigated by competent accountants, have all been found in excellent condition. Every deed, every document, with one possible exception, as recorded in his memoranda, was found intact in the vaults to which, fortunately, I had been entrusted with duplicate keys."

"All documents save one," said the chief.

"Yes. That was a certificate of stock in the Amalgamated Silver Combine to the amount of forty-four thousand dollars."

"What! The stock that has been so mercilessly hammered by the Philadelphia syndicates of late?"

"Yes, and which for the past few days has been steadily rallying till it is now almost normal again."

"Well, what about this stock as bearing upon your son's disappearance?" asked the colonel.

"Just this. On the day of the wedding, almost at the last minute of the last hour, my son bought this stock. He placed it in his pocket, not wishing to return to his Broad Street office, or possibly seeing that he was already late and that any further delay would make him tardy to the wedding.

"I know that besides this stock, the lieutenant had in his possession a few hundred dollars in bills and a letter of credit for a thousand dollars. This was to be his reserve fund while on his wedding trip to the Bermudas, the passage tickets for which voyage, as you know, had already been purchased, and were also in his possession.

"Well, gentlemen, here is the strange

thing about that stock of the Amalgamated Silver Combine. Two days after the lieutenant's disappearance, *the value of that stock rose so that it stood at forty-eight thousand dollars,* and, wonderful to relate, *that self-same certificate of stock was thrown upon the market at that date at that profit.*"

"Are you sure?" broke in the chief.

"Positively. But that is not all. The hammering of the Philadelphia syndicates, as you mention, chief, brought that stock down literally on its haunches, so that the former holdings of my son had dropped in value to less than twenty-two thousand dollars. At this point the stock was bought back by the same party who sold it previously, whereupon it began to rise. The holder of that stock then, has won in this interval the neat sum of twenty-six thousand dollars clear profit, and still has the stock."

"And that person was your son?"

"I do not say so—I do not know. I do know, however, that he was the only man in New York who knew the inside workings of the Amalgamated Silver deal—the only man outside of Nevada. I know that there was not another operator in Wall Street who received any advantage out of this sudden fluctuation, and this assures me that at least the brain if not the hand of Lieutenant Mountjoy was behind this one manipulation. He was the only man in New York who knew what was going to happen, and who improved the opportunity."

"But this seems the slightest foundation upon which to base so vital a point of evidence," burst in Colonel Van Blunt.

"I admit it does not seem altogether conclusive," vouchsafed the chief.

"That proves conclusively," cried out the doctor in a shrill falsetto, "that neither of you gentlemen understand Wall Street. I tell you, to me it is unmistakable proof, and there will be others——"

He paused, for there came an unexpected rap on the door. To the chief's consternation, directly against his orders, the sergeant appeared. He bore a package in his right hand.

"Excuse me, chief," he said hurriedly, "but Dr. Mountjoy's coachman is outside. He begs me to hand the doctor this package which, so he says, he just found on the floor of the coach. He thinks that some one must have tossed it in at the carriage window, and escaped unseen.

"He examined it, and, as he saw that it was important to the Mountjoy case, he hurried in and asked me to deliver it. With your permission, chief, I will hand it over to the doctor."

The company sat silent. The elderly practitioner took the package with a trembling hand. The orderly turned and disappeared, closing the door softly behind him. There was a dead calm, broken at last by the recipient of the strange parcel.

The doctor had risen and stood with hands outstretched and eyes blazing. In either hand he held part of the contents of the mysterious package.

"Look, gentlemen!" said he in a voice that shook with excitement. "Look! the very certificate of stock of which I just spoke, my son's pocketbook with the money intact, his letter of credit, the passage tickets to Bermuda—all, all!"

"And—and not one single message of explanation?" cries the chief, springing up.

"None—absolutely none!"

"Ah, that proves it!" shrieked Colonel Van Blunt, rising to his tiptoes and gesticulating wildly. "The scoundrel lives, and my daughter *was* deserted at the altar——"

"Nothin' av the koind!" yelled the flaming Hibernian. "It only proves what Oi said: that poor Lieutenant Mountoy, in a fit av insanity, wint to his death——"

"Silence, silence!" broke in the doctor, suddenly. "It means nothing of either. It means that you are both wrong and that I am right——"

"Mystery of mysteries!" murmured the chief. "Gentlemen, I declare this conference adjourned till to-morrow at this hour."

CHAPTER IV.

A MAIDEN MIND UNDECEIVED.

At about the same hour of that eventful day, Marcia Van Blunt, in the solace of her boudoir, was reclining upon a divan covered with an oriental robe

which might have been a queen's canopy of medieval days. She was a picture, indeed, though perhaps a little paler than was her usual wont.

Suffering and suspense had left their traces upon the beautiful face, and though nothing could eradicate her expression of resigned sweetness, the fine arch of brow was still clouded with anxiety, and tears glistened in her eyes.

"He has come again, mademoiselle," said the maid. "This time he says he simply must see you."

"Who? Not that strange man again, Fifi?"

"Yes. That nervous fellow with the sloping shoulders and the twitching fingers. I do not think he means any harm, mademoiselle, but only your good. He does plead so hard."

"But I am not seeing strangers, Fifi," cried the dreamer thus interrupted in her reveries. "Oh, I wish papa had not left me. Do you know where he went, Fifi?"

"No; he received a summons by a man in uniform who announced himself as from 'Police Headquarters,' mademoiselle. That is all I know."

"Police Headquarters!" echoed the listener. "Dear, dear! what will happen next?"

"Shall I tell him that you will see him, mademoiselle?"

"The strange man? Certainly not. I do not know his business, and I want nothing of him. Tell him please to go away. He may return when papa is at home, if he insists."

"Very well, mademoiselle."

The maid glided away, leaving her mistress alone, but more strangely troubled than ever. Soon Fifi returned, this time bearing a fluttering bit of paper upon which had been hastily scrawled a message. Marcia held the paper to her swollen eyes. It read:

> The recipient of this will not only be doing herself the greatest good by conferring for a few moments with the man in waiting, but also will see cleared up one phase of the mysterious disappearance of Lieutenant Mountjoy.

"Fifi, Fifi, quick!" cried Marcia.

"Mademoiselle?"

"My slippers—my Venetian shawl—anything! Oh, Fifi, you are so slow!"

"I am doing my best, mademoiselle. Please have patience with me."

The French girl was trembling, for she saw a sudden transformation in her mistress and her responsive heart fluttered with dread of its meaning.

"What does the strange man say to unnerve you so, mademoiselle?"

"Unnerve me!" exclaimed Marcia. "On the contrary, Fifi. There, that will do. You need not follow. If I want you, I shall ring."

"Very well, mademoiselle."

But Marcia Van Blunt was already beyond hearing, gliding swiftly down the velvet-carpeted stairs. She was still clenching the little slip of paper in her colorless hands when she burst into the drawing-room. The stranger who sat by the window in an attitude of dejection, did not heed her till she was almost upon him. Then he arose stiffly, bowing very low.

"I beg a thousand pardons," he began, lame of speech.

Marcia stood still in the center of the room, her hands clasped across her bosom, her whole form the picture of tense inquiry, eyes blazing with an unnatural brightness which mingled terror with their supplications, lips parted but colorless and expressive of inner tumult. At last she found one choking phrase:

"You wish to see me, sir? You have tidings?"

"Tidings," he answered in a voice of much solemnity measured with pity and commiseration. "Grave tidings indeed, but for your ears alone, madam."

That word "madam" seemed to bear some profound significance, particularly at this moment of strained suspense.

"Are we alone—safe from eavesdroppers?" the visitor continued, peering about him.

Marcia recoiled. She did not want to confess that she was quite without protectors, yet she dared not stay him in the rush of events, particularly in his mood of confession. For, whatever might be the impression he made, it was certainly not lacking in evidence of deep earnestness.

"Yes," she faltered at last, "we are alone. Proceed, sir."

"Will you be seated? I beg of you——"

"No; I prefer to stand."

"As you please, madam."

Again that word! The listener felt a tug at her heart-strings.

"You will oblige me——" she urged. "You must realize how painful this is to me——"

"And to me, be assured," broke in the visitor, straightening like one accused. "Indeed, madam, could you only know the courage, the moral fortitude, the inner spiritual strength required to force myself into your presence at this hour, you would temper your severity with at least a little pity. For, alas, madam——"

"Why do you persist in calling me 'madam?'" choked the unwilling hostess in gathering rage, taking a forward step that was almost threatening.

"A most excellent reason, indeed," said the other, smiling without mirth, yet without irony. "Shall I tell you truly? Shall I out with it at once? Are you strong enough to bear it?"

Marcia felt a strange misgiving, but she rallied, facing the visitor with challenge in every feature.

"I am strong enough to bear anything now," she murmured. "Speak out at once, sir!"

"Very well, then," resumed the man. "I called you 'madam' because—because you are a wife."

"A wife!"

The frail figure swayed. The whole earth seemed to rock and heave beneath her. Without a further sound she turned and clutched the portière at her side with one hand while with her wasting strength she endeavored to snatch at the pear-shaped electric button hanging behind it.

The man saw the movement and knew its meaning.

"Wait!" he cried softly, with uplifted hand. "Pause and reflect. I come not to tell you falsehoods, but the truth; not to harm you, but rather to save; not to bring alone bad tidings, but also the good—better than you dare dream. No; do not ring; for if you do, and we are interrupted, I shall leave at once, taking my secret with me. Ah, and I thought you so strong to bear——"

Marcia, swaying for a moment longer, finally renewed her courage.

"Wife, did you say—I—a wife?" she demanded in accents scarcely audible. "Whose, may I ask?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"You shall—you must. Whose wife am I—whose?"

"Mine!"

For the moment the listener did not seem to comprehend; then she uttered a strange cry.

"I *your* wife! Impossible—madness! Why, I never saw you before in my life—never knew of your existence."

Then with another struggle she added: "Won't you please go now? I cannot bear this any longer. I feel something giving way here—here——" And she swept her hands across her forehead.

The stranger seemed touched to pity and his eyes shone with tears of unutterable sadness.

"Poor little woman!" he murmured. "At least you are a real heroine—thank God for that!"

He turned and groped among the shadows for his hat and gloves.

"Yes," he added softly, "I will go, as you suggest. But first," and he advanced as he drew forth a package from his bosom, "first I must give to you these letters, which are the property of my distinguished friend of years, Lieutenant Mountjoy——"

At sound of that name and at sight of her own portrait and her own letters in the stranger's hands, Marcia gave vent to a long, low moan that seemed to well out of her inmost being.

"Lieutenant——" she started to speak, but the voice died in a whisper.

"And thereby hangs a tale," pursued the giver with regained composure. "Ah, yes, such a tale as seldom man is called upon to play heroic or unheroic part in. But"—and here he turned as if to leave her there in her new suspense—"it is your wish that I should leave; so, with this duty performed, I bid you——"

"No, no, no! Stay! Tell me everything."

"But it was your wish——"

"It is not my wish now. I fear you no longer. There—sit there! You shall not stir till you have told me the truth—all the truth; for I perceive that, after all, you know—know per-

haps what no one else on earth yet knows——"

"Alas! if only——" The visitor paused. He sank into an armchair.

"If only—what?" Marcia demanded, seating herself opposite him, but half the room's length away.

"Do you know his fate—do you know it truly? In the name of all that you hold dear——"

"His fate I do not know, madam, but I assure you I shall soon know it. I have sworn——"

"But, living or dead? At least—at least, sir, you have some personal conviction—some proof. For God's sake, I beg of you——"

"He lives!"

"Lives! Thank God! Thank God!" cried the girl, sinking back and covering her face with her hands. "Then he will come back and explain all. He will tell me why he deserted me so cruelly at the altar——"

"But he did not—I swear to you he did not. Lieutenant Mountjoy was nowhere near the Church of St. Hubert on your wedding day. I know whereof I speak, for *I* was."

Marcia widened her eyes upon the speaker of enigmas.

"Tell all—explain all, and so save me," she murmured. "Can you not see my sufferings——"

"I see and understand, and you are indeed a brave woman," he said fervently as he straightened in his seat. "And yet, I cannot tell you the last without the first—you would never, never understand. There are incidents leading up to this mystery which explain it, and, in a measure, mitigate what offense there may have been in the part I have played. Will you listen?"

"Yes."

"And you will be patient?"

"Try me."

"Thank you."

CHAPTER V.

A DIVORCE ON THE TRAIL.

THE stranger shifted in his chair, wiped his brow with his handkerchief, and ran his eyes along the arabesques of the ceiling.

"There is a blank chapter in every man's life," he began, "one with which his most dearly beloved intimate is but vaguely acquainted. Such are the pages in our daily history which we remember to forget."

He regarded Marcia's flushed face as he added:

"I even believe that Lieutenant Mountjoy never so much as hinted at his experiences in the Yukon Valley in the winter of 'ninety-eight, and of his desperate and well-nigh disastrous search for gold after his journey thence from Fort Donaldson, Idaho."

His listener gave no sign of acquaintance with the story.

"Do you even know where he was given the title of 'lieutenant'?"

"Somewhere in the far West, I am informed, and I trust with honor."

"Of that you may be assured," came the narrator's confirmation. "It was at Fort Donaldson, after many, many months of hard service following his migration thither with a Harvard fellow classman, one Haydon Barr. By the way, did the lieutenant ever speak of this Mr. Barr?"

"Never to my recollection," said Marcia, feigning lack of interest.

"I thought not. And I do not wonder. It was another case of remembering to forget. Well," he added after a mysterious pause, "I am Haydon Barr."

Marcia's eyes smarted with the strain of watching every movement of the stranger's lips.

"You perceive that this is approaching the nature of a confession," pursued the visitor. "Well, so be it. Daniel Mountjoy and Haydon Barr, fellow classmen for two years, inseparable in work and play, occupants of the same dormitory chambers, mutual borrowers and lenders of small personal necessities, resolved to stand by each other after matriculating in that greater university, the world.

"Dan was an independent lad. Near the close of his senior year he made a trip to New York, remaining a week. When he returned he was in a very bitter mood. 'Haydon,' said he, 'I have had an awful row with my governor. I thought I would take a flier in the 'Street' to make up for some extrav-

agances and to show that a college man is no green one at that. Well, I got it good and plenty, and was at last compelled to appeal to the old gentleman and tell him that I was just twenty-one thousand dollars to the bad.

"'He was furious, of course, and I promised all sorts of things to get him to cover my shortage—mainly, that I would keep out of Wall Street for a period of—I don't know how long. The pledge was unnecessary, for I am going to keep as far away from the lambkin-fold as I can. As a starter, after our graduation I am going to make a trip westward and get back a little of the nerve lost in acquiring a *maximum cum laude*. We have planned to stand together, so I want you to go with me. Will you?'

"'Surely,' said I, only too readily.

"And so it was. In less than five months, having been graduated with honors, Dan and I were riding side by side over the wilds of Montana, finally drifting into army life in Idaho.

"There is no use in dilating upon the humdrum though manly and health-giving career of a frontier soldier; but after two years of it—Dan meanwhile having become a first lieutenant in the Nineteenth Cavalry—we grew restless. 'Haydon,' said he one day, 'everybody is going to the Klondyke. Let's urge the powers that be to grant us discharges and make for the Yukon.' 'On to the Yukon it is!' said I, yielding to my superior officer; and a few months later we were sledding over the awful wilderness of Alaska in the killing search for the yellow metal.

"I need not dwell upon the ensuing experiences, which are better forgotten—months of hard labor under well-nigh perishing conditions. Our plan was to share grub and fortunes alike, as we had always done, Dan to assure me passage-money home in case of a parting in the wilds. Then came that awful winter of 'ninety-eight.

"Under the severest strain, in a climate of dreadful rigor, eating improper food and seeing only the bleak face of Nature and the harder aspect of greed upon every miner's countenance, men revert into a sort of emotional insanity. Jealousy, baseless suspicion, and envious rage crop out with every slight provocation, or even with none at all.

"Our camp lay between lakes Linderman and Bennett. Near by there was a large camp where were gathered together from the world's wastes some of the hardest outcasts that ever butchered wood, salted a mine, or teamed dogs over a trail.

"Luck was not with us. Poor Dan began to be possessed of delusions. One of these was to the effect that I, his friend and partner, had struck a vein—the real mother-lode of the Klondyke—and while taking out thousands every day, was secreting it from him, thus violating our compact to share and share alike our findings as we had our food.

"In vain I denied his charges. One day he hired men from the renegade camp to shadow me over the hills and locate my supposed secret claim. I forgave that. But one night, thinking me asleep, my insane comrade arose and began searching my clothes for evidences of my 'lucky strike' and my perfidy.

"That was too much for my overwrought nerves. I stood up in my sleeping-bag and—well, I used words that no man should use to another—certainly not to one whom he loved as a brother—words spoken in the frenzy of despair during terrible hours of suffering.

"'Haydon,' said he bitterly, 'this is the end. To-morrow we part. I shall go home, and you can remain here with your accursed treasure of which you are robbing me of my just half. It is my dearest wish that I may never, never set eyes on you again!'

"The following morning, violating his former pledge by not providing me with passage-money home, Danny kept his vow. He never did set eyes on me again until—until your wedding day, on Brooklyn Bridge forty minutes before the fateful ceremony."

The face of the fair listener was of the hue of marble. The narrator looked up in a sort of appeal for further indulgence.

"Well," he resumed with a sigh, "matters went very bad with me after that. I lost ambition, courage, hope—all. I scarcely moved out of my bivouac day or night, yielding up to melancholy till I saw that I must either seek companion-

ship or go insane. Of two evils I chose the lesser. I joined that renegade camp.

"Naturally, the rascals were not long in relieving me of all my worldly goods. I was then compelled to throw myself upon the mercy of nine of the miserable gang who were resolved to quit ground and strike for Cape Nome. I became no more than their abject slave for the grub bought with my own possessions of which they had robbed me.

"But reaching Nome after many hardships, I broke away from them. Being early on the ground, I started in again for myself, cleaning up sixteen thousand dollars in dust in a few months. 'Now,' I cried exultantly, 'back to civilization! I will hunt up Danny Mountjoy again and we can bury the knife, for by this time he must have come to his senses.' I set sail for down coast.

"The voyage in that day was more perilous than now. The treacherous channels, the icebergs and shoals were not so well known. Off the Alaska peninsula the Alice, the most unseaworthy craft that ever bribed herself with a marine policy, went down in seven fathoms of water, together with all the gold dust that thirty-one of us poor sick and exhausted miners had hoarded, ourselves barely escaping with our lives.

"Months later I arrived, wounded and utterly ruined, in God's country again, spent some weeks in a hospital, and took to the high seas once more in the direction of the Hawaiian Islands.

"There I was restored to health and spirits, as well as fortune. By hard labor I acquired considerable money, bought an option on a plantation whose owner had just died, formed a syndicate, and turned over the property at a profit of nineteen thousand dollars in cash. The plantation needed skilled hands, and knowing that there were more laborers than work for them in our other possession, Porto Rico, I resolved to go thither and bring back a ship-load of immigrant natives. I embarked.

"It was on this voyage that I again met my evil genius in the person of one Roderiguez, a native of Santo Morro, one of the West Indian group of islands. He was a son of a former president, and had been driven from the island by its present ruler.

"The people had tired of their tyrant, and, so he claimed, the exile was called back by a grateful people to seize the reins of power, unchair the chief executive, restore a depleted treasury, and otherwise bless the island with a prosperous rule.

"General Roderiguez spoke English as well as his native tongue, and I fell easy victim to the wiles of this impetuous, brilliant, and specious demagogue, who offered me the portfolio of minister of state of the new republic if I would join him, assuring me that with my opportunities I could be a millionaire within a few years.

"I was carried away by his argument, and consented to join the forces of this Napoleon returning from his Elba. For seven long months after our arrival on the island, I lived a life of sufficient riot and ravage to satisfy a medieval swashbuckler.

"One night, in escaping with my very life (the 'general' in the meantime having laid hold of my entire fortune), I swam three miles to sea under fire from the fort, begging protection from a vessel flying the Stars and Stripes. Weeks later I arrived penniless, sick and wasted with jungle-fever, utterly disheartened, on American soil. Little by little I beat my way to New York, intent upon throwing myself upon the mercy of my former fellow classman.

"Again I was doomed to disappointment. Either the underlings who took my name to my old friend lied to me, seeing my shocking condition and believing me a madman or a common beggar, or else Danny refused to see me—which I do not now believe—but this defeat struck deep to my heart. Hunger, fever, and mental bitterness filled me now with hallucinations, just as, years before, the hardships of the Klondyke winter had acted upon Danny.

"I was convinced that fate was against me, life was a lie, the world a purgatory, and all effort vain. I resolved to make one last appeal to my lost college mate at his own home in Brooklyn. At least, should I find him there I should have the satisfaction of knowing the truth from his own lips.

"Alas, the butler at the door repulsed me with the news that Lieutenant Mount-

joy had 'engaged passage to some foreign country,' and, for all he knew, was already aboard ship and far out to sea. I turned away in a state of mental and physical collapse. Now, madam, I approach the crisis.

"There are no words in the combined languages of the world to express the depth of my wretchedness and despair at this pass. I was hungry, homeless, and without friend or helper. The dense fog clutched me with its chill hand.

"I wandered down toward the big bridge. The very faces of the passers-by seemed to mock me. The poor whipped beasts of burden appeared more fortunate than I. They had no demon of ill-fortune dogging them at every step? I looked into the face of heaven! It was piteously blank, void, forbidding. Then I looked into my own heart; it was breaking.

"As I dragged myself on the fog grew even denser. I found myself wandering over the bridge roadway instead of the promenade. I was nearly half-way over before realizing my mistake. I passed a policeman, but as he did not concern himself to set me right, I plodded on.

"The line of congested traffic was immense. It snailed along funereally to the roar of passing trains, the cursings of drivers and the shrieking of whistles below. I paused. The great river looked like the awful stretch of eternity. I could not see far down, so dense was the mist, but the screechings and bellowings below sounded like the callings of ten million lost souls in hell, as if indeed it were the River Lethe—the river of Nothingness and Oblivion, and beyond it lay the vast Nowhere, rest, peace, and forgetfulness.

"Nearer and nearer I approached the awful verge, fascinated, subdued, yearning. I felt a strange giddiness, a sensation of sinking, drowning, wasting away, and found it ineffably sweet.

"It did not occur to me that suffering had robbed me of all sense of self-preservation, all moral courage, mental reserve and poise—indeed, that it was robbing me of life itself. Something within was urging me on, on to the verge, while something beyond it was calling, calling! I grasped the dripping cable, swaying for a frightful instant; then I heard a clear voice through the mist behind me.

"'Haydon Barr! For the love of God! Haydon——'

"I turned. A coach stood on the roadway. A face was peering through the door ajar. Instantly a man in his shirt sleeves burst from within, hatless, even in his stocking feet, making a rush toward me.

"I sprang aside. His clutch missed me by a hairbreadth. I felt his fingernails scrape my sleeve as he slipped on the fog-drenched cables, tottered, turned about half-way, then fell—oh, God, I can see him now—floundering headlong over that awful brink—down, down, down——"

A wild moan broke from the listener's bosom. Marcia had leaped up, clasping her two hands over her heart, her face the picture of agony conjured by the vivid portrayal of the tragedy, then she fell back almost insensible.

After a time she rallied. "And yet, sir," she voiced almost in a whisper, "you tell me—you say that he still lives—that Lieutenant Mountjoy still lives?"

"Yes."

"How can it be—how, how?" she demanded wildly.

"Listen! I will tell you all. Listen!"

CHAPTER VI.

A PROBLEM FOR A PSYCHOLOGIST.

"WHAT I have to relate now," faltered Barr, "is rather a problem for the physician and the alienist than for one given to deciding questions of right and wrong. I do not pretend to explain, much less to excuse my acts; and yet I cannot wholly accuse myself, since, before God, the criminal intent was entirely absent.

"Had I been hypnotized and coerced by a superior power to move and act under other volition than my own, I could not have followed out more innocently yet effectively the part assigned me. However, so far as my memory serves me, let me unburden.

"Having witnessed a tragedy, that vague spirit of self-preservation which seizes every man at such a crisis laid hold of me. Although the man in his shirt sleeves desired perhaps to save me from suicide—he whom at the moment I did

not know from any other son of Adam—I was instantly possessed of a desire to run to cover.

"It seemed as if, apprehended there, I might be called to account for this stranger's mad act—perhaps be accused of having thrown him with my own hands over the awful verge.

"For the instant I stood quivering, breathless; then I turned. The thick fog enveloped me. It was a cloak, but by no means a refuge. I slunk back to the roadway. To my amazement and joy, there was one door open to me—the carriage door from which had emerged the stranger the moment before.

"Slyly I peered within. There was no one there. The coachman on the box was nodding, unconscious of the strange drama passing under his very nose. Into the coach I crept, closing the door softly, sinking down upon the soft cushions, silent, and shocked at my own audacity.

"The carriage moved on slowly. I watched and listened for a long time, then, reassured in my heart, I gave vent to uncontrollable laughter — laughter deep and racking, as the poet says:

> Like man's laughter heard in hell,
> Far down——

Spasm after spasm it came, leaving me weak and exhausted, my voice drowned by the roar of whirling cars and the shriek of steam-whistles below.

"With eyes closed and my body palpitating, I lay back, wondering what new sensations were in store for me; for, of a truth, had I not run the gamut of human experience? Soon a soothing sense of rest came over me, the sounds seemed afar off, and at last interposed that first series of utterly unconscious lapses wherein I was rocked as it were into hypnotic slumber in the swaying carriage, dashing over the pavements at a terrific rate of speed.

"A little later I came to. I began to take note of the things about me.

"At my side lay a broadcloth coat of finest texture, an orchid in the buttonhole. Likewise a white silk waistcoat, a fresh collar, and a cravat stuck with a precious stone.

"On the floor of the coach glistened a pair of low shoes, and others of tan, apparently just cast off. On the seat opposite lay a short business jacket and waistcoat. Beside it, crown up, were a conventional derby, and a silk hat of tempting brilliance.

"A weird idea laid hold of me. I was like a child who discovers in a grandparent's garret some of the gowns and fineries of the older days, relics of a departed glory. Like a child, too, I was now possessed of a passion to masquerade in these new-found garments, discarding my miserable toggery, arraying myself like a true hidalgo before going to my doom, as the penniless tramp who steals into the grand restaurant, orders a twenty-dollar dinner and enjoys it to the utmost, knowing well but caring nothing that the prank will cost him three hard months in solemn penance behind bars.

"The transformation was as speedy as it was complete; and, though I had no mirror at hand, I knew that my best friend, of which solace I had none, and my meanest enemy, which was all the world, would never know me. I recalled that with my last dime I had accomplished an indifferent barbering down in Chatham Square before making that foot-journey to Brooklyn Heights.

"My heart leaped with a sort of Satanic joy as I said to myself, 'Old man, the world has bluffed you to this pass: turn tables on it and pursue it to the end, come what may!' With that there returned again that insane desire to laugh—bitterly, sardonically, till shaken and exhausted I lay back upon the cushions in temporary collapse, and for the time being fell once more into completest oblivion.

"Soon after that I was rudely awakened. The carriage had stopped. The door was snatched open, and I felt the cool air strike my fevered brow. A hand shot through the rift and clutched me by the shoulder. 'Oh, God! it is the hand of the law!' I murmured in terror. 'Here is the end of your wild, sweet dream, the beginning of a stern reality.' But just then a voice, in tones of pleading familiarity, welled out of the enshrouding gloom.

"'Here he is, boys, at last! My God! man, where have you been all this time? Come, quick, quick! Everything

is prepared. Oh, the suspense is awful. What, what's the matter, old chap——"

"'What's up with him?' cried some one out of the misty murk beyond.

"'Don't know. He can't seem to get his bearings. He's——'

"'Not loaded—good Lord!'

"'Don't know. Something strange. No time to find out. Come, man, for Heaven's sake, brace up, will you?"

"A pair of gloves were thrust into my hand. The silk hat was jammed halfway down over my ears. Thereupon I was literally hauled out of that carriage to the curbstone. Another strong arm grappled me on my left. I felt myself rushed along through a gate, on down a narrow path, then up a few steps into a little chamber.

"'All right?' a voice called from beyond. 'Shall I signal?'

"'Y-y-yes, signal!' There was the sound of music. 'Brace up, old chap! You're a winner. It will be over in a moment. Walk straight, for God's sake!' said my custodian.

"Had I been moving blindfolded along a plank of a pirate ship to my doom, or dragged straight to the electric chair in the death-house at Sing Sing, I could not have had less will to resist. I simply resigned myself to the Fates.

"I was advancing with head bent and knees knocking together, supported by two men. The strains of the familiar wedding-march resounded from afar. Into the great gloomy oratory I was urged, then suddenly whirled about as I felt a slender arm thrust through my own, and my kidnapper's voice whispered in my ear, 'Clutch the railing, old man. Hold on tight—tight, for God's sake!'

"So I seized the railing and stood there like a statue. With the dying of the sweet strains from the organ-loft, I heard the low, solemn voice of the clergyman before me, and slowly I realized that I was standing before an altar, a woman in fragrant mauve and white at my side—a bride, merciful Heaven! and she was swearing before the altar of her faith to 'love, cherish and obey' a man whom she had never seen before.

"Realization of the falseness of my position drove me back to my senses. I clutched the rail. Echoing your words I muttered, 'I will.' I said the words also automatically. Then in the stillness I cried aloud, 'My God! No; I may be desperate through poverty and suffering, but Heaven witness, I am no criminal!'

"With that I turned. Seeing the little door ajar by the altar's side, I dashed for it. In the chancel I seized the only hat in sight, plunged to the outer air, and started down a winding path at full speed—on, and on, through the fog, knowing not whither and caring nothing, till at last I sank exhausted in an obscure nook of a tavern. There I lapsed into my third and longest period of unconsciousness.

"When at last I came to my senses I found myself in sumptuous quarters. I was lying upon a luxurious bed, surrounded with such material comforts as I had not enjoyed for many a year.

"Who could have been my benefactor in my extremity? What miraculous episode had changed the course of my career?

"Instead of being a prisoner behind bars, I was housed in a regal apartment. The remains of a feast lay upon the table in the center of the room. My hunger was gone, and a strange feeling of personal security enveloped me. I raised myself on my pillow and peered through the window upon familiar Fifth Avenue. Then I knew that I was a guest at one of New York's famous hostelries. But by whose invitation? By what manner of windfall, or through what fortuitous circumstances?

"Suddenly there sounded a rap at the door. A horrible dread of awakening into the clutch of the law seized me. However, it was a man-servant in livery.

"'Here are the morning papers, as you requested, Mr. Barr. There are no letters as yet, sir.'

"'Mr. Barr,' I echoed.

"Then I was at least known by my right name. And I had ordered the morning papers—and there were 'no letters.' I merely waved my hand to the servant, for I could not have spoken a single unsuspicious syllable. I was alone again, to my intense relief; and lying back, I strained my memory to piece together the recent past.

"Slowly, to my awakening sense of

horror, I recalled incident after incident, with the exception of short lapses, from that moment when I stood on the big bridge and saw the man in his shirt sleeves go to his doom, up to the moment of my mad flight out of the chancel of the church into which I had been fairly dragged to take part in such a wedding drama of errors as never man before had encountered.

"Realizing how I had compromised myself, and how, perhaps, I had done a deep and irremediable injury, I suffered agonies on the rack of conscience. And yet, was it indeed I who had done all this? I began to doubt. The situation baffled me completely.

"I turned on my pillow. In so doing, my hand pressed under it, and my finger-tips encountered something cold. I drew forth a gold chronometer of rare and beautiful design.

"Thus rewarded, and eager to know at once the extent of my perfidies, back went my hand again. This time I found what proved to be certificates of stock in a certain Amalgamated Silver Combine, to the value of forty-four thousand dollars. A blue sheet fell out, and on opening it, I found it to be the first page of a letter, which said:

> DEAR SIR:
> Your favor at hand. You are right. The Philadelphia people have united to hammer our stock to the limit. But let them do so. The minute it touches twenty-two, our Nevada holders will come to the rescue, so do not fear. We are——

"The names of both sender and recipient being on the missing sheet, I abandoned this clue.

"Again my hand went back under the pillow. This time I drew forth a large wallet. I opened it with trembling fingers. There were several hundred-dollar bills and some of smaller denomination; some memoranda; a letter of credit for one thousand dollars; and last of all, two passage tickets to the West Indies and return—and to my amazement and horror, made out in the name of 'Lieut. Daniel Mountjoy and wife!' I sank back, utterly prostrated.

"So it was Danny—the man in his shirt sleeves—who had leaped from the carriage intent upon saving me from suicide. It was he who missed me by a hair, and slipping, made that awful plunge. It was my old comrade for whom I had been mistaken at the church door and hurried on to a most amazing deception. It was Dan whose clothes I had worn, whose money I had spent.

"Thus after my long and despairing search for poor Lieutenant Mountjoy, I had found him only after he had first found me and had gone to God knows what shocking fate to save me.

"Ah, what a helpless, hopeless wretch did I realize myself then and there in the solitude of my awakening! How and by what means was I ever to atone for this deed? What explanation could I make to those near and dear to my comrade of years, aye, to all the world?

"The victim of unconquerable dread and melancholy, I clambered from the bed and stood in the luxurious chamber as one braces himself on a sinking ship in a mid-ocean storm.

"Suddenly my eyes fell upon the head-lines of one of the newspapers which the valet had laid upon the broad green table-top. I clutched the sheet, gasping incoherently the words which commanded me there like a voice of judgment. They were as follows:

BRIDE DESERTED AT THE ALTAR.

Society Shocked by the Conduct of Lieutenant Daniel Mountjoy.

WALL STREET LOSSES ACCOUNTABLE.

No Trace of Groom Whom Prostrated Bride Believes to be Temporarily Insane.

"Then followed, as you know, a most sensational and at the same time cruelly erroneous version of the mad affair.

"Locking the doors, I staggered back to the bed and threw myself upon it. All the breath seemed crushed from my very breast. For a time all was chaos, but out of the depths came one or two glimmers of light. As I had gone so far without being apprehended, I had accomplished one fortuitous end. I was free. The free man can work out his own salvation where one who is behind the bars must leave his rescue in the hands of others.

"I realized that, perhaps, after all, I

held the whip-hand on the situation, and that by renewing my courage and proceeding with caution, I might do two things which I felt it my duty to do speedily; first, to right the great wrong done to Danny Mountjoy, dead or alive; and, second, to set free by proper legal means, if husband I was, the innocent woman I had married.

"Well, madam, let me assure you that if I had not accomplished this, at least in part, and through a series of self-sacrifices, I should not be here. My presence should assure you on that score.

"I have succeeded in a measure quite satisfying for the present; and as I am at once to make an important trip to Washington—indeed, I may make a tour of some thousands of miles in your behalf before I have done my whole duty to you—let me narrate the events of these overcrowded and marvelous fourteen days of my career."

"Go on, please," murmured Marcia.

CHAPTER VII.

A TROUBLOUS FORTNIGHT—AND A DENOUEMENT.

"AMONG the many things I regarded as dire misfortune, I had, nevertheless, two things to be thankful for," resumed the stranger.

"First, I was a comparative stranger in New York; for Father Knickerbocker has a short memory for transient sojourners. Second, I was possessed of money enough to carry out my scheme of reprisal and justice to all. I knew that the little money that would be required to this end would not be begrudged by my old comrade, were he still living, nor by his heirs were he no more of this earth, and I resolved to make a strict account to whomsoever I was beholden.

"Besides, had not Danny promised me long before that he would not desert me penniless on the trail? How had he kept that compact? What little handful of money could requite me for my awful struggle back to civilization?

"I had forgiven him long ago, and now I forgave him doubly. Resolved that a strict account should be made, I had no compunction in making use of the trust fund in my possession for the interests of all concerned.

"My first task was to search the records and the newspapers for tidings of any bodies that might have been found in the East River or the Bay. Failing to discover a single clue, I visited the morgues of the different boroughs, then the docks, and, finally, chartering a tug at fifty dollars a day, I pursued my search to the river itself, from the big bridge half-way down the Narrows, in the vague hope of catching the glimpse of an upturned face in the dark waters. But defeat ended my efforts in this direction.

"I had changed my residence to an obscure hotel on the lower West Side. One day, on returning to the Waldorf-Astoria just to prove to myself that I was not suspected or watched, I passed two men whom I took to be brokers and possible associates of my departed friend, just as one remarked casually to the other, 'Better get out from under, Tom. The Philadelphia syndicate is going to get after it within a day or two, so I understand, and they'll hammer the daylights out of it when they do.'

"Then and there I realized that they were discussing the very stock of which I held certificates to the value of forty-four thousand dollars in my possession. 'What would Danny do under the circumstances?' I asked myself.

"Suppose I held on to that stock and the bottom fell out of it, as predicted? Would I not be accountable for the disaster? The longer I pondered, the deeper became my conviction—that the stock would drop, then, having touched rock-bottom, the Nevada contingency would come to the rescue.

"The next morning I hurried to Wall Street, pleased to find that the stock in my keeping was worth forty-eight thousand dollars, leaving a profit of four thousand; I sold it, and with this treasure strapped about my person, I pursued my business and awaited developments.

"Within five days rock-bottom was indeed reached in Amalgamated Silver, and acting upon the advice of the Nevada holders, I jumped in and bought back for twenty-two thousand dollars the original stock which I had sold at forty-eight.

"Within five days more that stock again resumed its normal state, and only this very day, lest some fluctuation take place that should make me further responsible, with twenty-six thousand dollars profit in my possession with which to carry on my work, I wrapped up the certificates, together with other personal property, and started out to return them to Danny's father.

"On telephoning to the Brooklyn mansion, I was informed that the old gentleman had just been driven toward the bridge in the family coach. At the Manhattan end I awaited him, to discover his destination and then devise a plan by which I could dispose of my burden unknown to him. To my surprise when the carriage came in sight, instead of turning toward Wall Street, it started at a fast clip uptown, myself following closely in a hansom, till we turned into Mulberry Street. There the coach stopped before Police Headquarters.

"Leaving my conveyance at the corner, I sauntered toward the Mountjoy coach. Unseen, I flipped the package through the window, retreating and watching from a distance. The coachman was first to discover it, and making a hasty examination, rushed forthwith into Headquarters. I knew then that the property was safe in the hands of its logical protector.

"But some days before, I made a discovery of vital importance to you, madam, and let me proceed with these details without further delay."

Marcia turned uneasily in her chair, her eyes troubled with a strange misgiving.

"The only man to whom I have confessed everything, let me say right now, and, besides yourself, my only confessor, is General James Gower, the most respected and irreproachable authority in matters relating to the legal technicalities of marriage and divorce in America to-day.

"He spent four days consulting authorities, and up to the last moment could not seem to decide whether you were maid, wife, or widow. At last he concluded that, in order to avert any suspicion of doubt, it was better for you to acknowledge the marriage technically for legal purposes only, and myself as well, and then to apply to the court for an instant annulment of the tie.

"Here is the document for your perusal, and yours alone, for the time being. To-morrow, at this hour, General Gower will call upon you and witness the signature to the paper which will set you forever free.

"To-day, in the eyes of the law, you are a wife; to-morrow, with your signature to that document, without further ado and without further trial to you, you will be to all the world as you were before this chain of strange events interposed to embitter your happiness.

"Now I have to offer the last detail of my narrative. You will find it one of increasing hope as the truth dawns. It relates to Lieutenant Mountjoy.

"I have shown you that Lieutenant Mountjoy did not, as society chose to believe, desert his bride at the altar. I will now offer you indisputable proof of another fact—so far as we may credit any circumstantial evidence, coupled with a personal knowledge of the man, Lieutenant Mountjoy lives!"

"Speak, I implore you!" Marcia whispered.

"Did you see the afternoon papers? Read this. Does it look like an enigma to you? Very well. It does likewise to thousands of others, but to me it brings for the first time a glad conviction. Look!" And he laid in her white hands a paper whose scare-heads offered the following paradox:

GOVERNMENT MYSTIFIED BY CIPHER DESPATCH.

Wireless Station at Roanoke Receives Message from Somebody Somewhere in Distress.

MARCONI SYSTEM FROM VESSEL AT SEA.

Cables and Land Telegraph Try to Solve Problem, but Without Success, and All the World Guessing.

FAME TO THE MAN WHO DECIPHERS IT.

All Government Vessels and Ocean Liners Fitted with the Wireless System are Accounted for.

WASHINGTON, Thursday.—Wireless station at Roanoke reports receipt of a broken and imperfect wireless message from some ship at sea, no one knows how far, but probably at a great

distance, or else instruments are improperly attuned.

As the message seems to hint of some conspiracy, or that some vessel is sailing the high seas under false colors, the Navy Department has been stirred to the foundations in an effort to solve it, and cables and telegraph have been set on the trail, all to no effect.

Almost every man in the Department is poring over a copy of the message, and the fortunate one to decipher it will be certain of promotion. No amount of appeals by the Roanoke station brings any reply, which seems to argue that the vessel's instruments are available for transmission only.

The message was received three consecutive times yesterday. Each communication was imperfect in part; but, pieced together, the three make the following incomprehensible jargon:

U. S. Gov..nm... Wa.hi.g...
Se.. hel. at c..e br.g..ti.. ari.l
cle....ed f.r b.th mai.e h..ded f..
s.nto mor.o wit. fiv. fie.d g.ns 3000
st..de. arm. 4000000 r..nd. ammu..t
..n an. .th.r im..em.n.. .f .w.r un..er
lead..s..p o. r.be. ch..f rod.r.g..z
to .apt..e. gar.i..n mo.t. cr.st. an.
mar.. o. to ..apit.. kil. pr.s...n. an.
ov..th..w go...nm..t 160 .ns.rg.nt.om
b..rd an. 3000 aw..t.ng e.p.di..on
.n ju..l.. n..th i .m a pr..o.er .n b.
a.d. fe.l.ro. b.ook..n b.id.. int. .h.
ps sa.l. as s.e p. ss.d un..r i. den.. f.g
m.st.ke.fo. sp. wil. b.rn.d .t th. st.k
o. ar.iv.. a. s m unl.s. r.sc.. c.me.
se.d gu.bo.t .t o.c. t. s.ve .lc.dshe
t..l m.re.. v.n.b.un. if i .ie i di. l.ke a
ma. .oo.b.e al. l..ut .an..l m..ntjo.

Marcia glanced at the sheet. Not a line, nay, not even a syllable of the tidings which had worked so upon the bearer of the wonderful message, did she comprehend.

"What does it mean?" she whispered.

"It means," he answered, speaking with great conviction—"it means that beyond a doubt Lieutenant Mountjoy lives!"

"Lives!" she echoed, leaping up as in a dream. "Oh, God! that I might believe it——"

"But you must believe—you shall," he broke in. "Danny Mountjoy lives, but he is in jeopardy. Indeed, he is in hourly peril of his life. He is a prisoner, accused of a crime whose penalty is death."

"Death?"

"But I will save him. Believe me, I shall restore him to you. This very hour I leave for Washington to lay my project before the Secretary of the Navy.

"Without his assistance I can do nothing now; but with the government's power behind me—and I swear to you that it is a matter vital to our country and our flag—I can accomplish all things. I can thwart one of the most gigantic plots to steal a country from its lawful possessors, after murdering them, that ever was attempted by a rebel chief. Moreover, best of all, I shall bring Lieutenant Mountjoy safely back to you. I swear it!"

He saw Marcia sink back in her chair, pallid and limp. He sprang forward and tried in vain to rouse her. An electric button near the door caught his eye, and he pressed it quickly. Instantly the maid appeared.

"Take care of your mistress," he cried.

Half an hour later Haydon Barr was aboard the Washington flier.

(To be continued.)

THE QUIET STREAM.

Anonymous.

SEVEN miles I drove to find a stream
That leaped its rocks among;
But I found only one that made
A little lulling song.

O'er pebbly shallows soft it ran,
And in its quiet breast
The fresh born beechen leaves of May
Were mirrored and at rest.

Among its little island stones
The water birds were gray,
And all the trees along the banks
Bent down to see it play.

BUGLES AND BUTTERFLIES.*

By J. Aubrey Tyson.

A story of army life wherein Love and War march to the music of battles.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

LIEUTENANT FORBES, of the 23d U. S. Cavalry, in Manila, and his friend Captain Longaker, are leading an expedition to bring in Pacheco, a Filipino leader, who is hiding farther down the coast.

Longaker has previously received an appointment to General Purdy's staff, which has been withdrawn to give him this hazardous command. He feels that some inimical personal motive is behind it, as his colonel, Secor, disapproves of his friendship with Miss Secor, and an old enemy of his, Florence Endicott, has lately made her appearance.

On board the transport bearing them down the coast, Forbes and the captain are talking the matter over when the commander reports a vessel to starboard, acting in an unfriendly manner.

CHAPTER V.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CLOUDS.

WHEN morning dawned no trace of the mysterious vessel was visible to the persons aboard the Bojeador.

In response to queries put by Longaker and Forbes, Lieutenant Tappan explained that, while the appearance of the strange craft had caused him no uneasiness, it was apparent that it either had aboard material for the insurgents or recruits for their forces in the north.

"The west coast is pretty well patrolled by our cruisers," he said, "and vessels carrying contraband goods from Japan, China, and European ports naturally would take that route otherwise. But for some reason or other the east coast is practically unwatched."

This intelligence caused the brow of Longaker to darken.

"It is probable, then, that Pacheco will be informed that our expedition has started," he said.

"It is possible, but not probable," Tappan replied. "The plans for this expedition appear to have been guarded so carefully that it is most unlikely that any person other than General Purdy, Colonel Secor, and those now aboard this vessel are cognizant of it.

"The rifles, ammunition and supplies that we are carrying for you were taken aboard by the Bojeador from a supply ship two weeks ago at Hongkong. This morning I received orders to coal to the full capacity of our bunkers. I knew, therefore, that we were in for a long run somewhere, but it was not until your men began assembling at the Tondo landing that I knew what sort of a task was cut out for us."

"Have you ever been up this coast before?"

Tappan hesitated.

"Why, yes," he answered slowly. "Under the circumstances, I think that I am not only warranted in admitting that I have, but it seems to me that it would be a mistake if I did not reveal to you what hitherto has been guarded as a secret. I have been twice to the place at which your expedition is to disembark."

Forbes and Longaker exchanged significant glances.

"You have taken up another expedition then?"

"Yes. Six weeks ago I took up Major Forrester and thirty men of the Seventy-Ninth Cavalry."

"Forrester!" exclaimed the two friends in a breath.

Tappan nodded.

*Began April All-Story Magazine. Single copies, 10 cents.

"You didn't bring them back?" asked Forbes.

"No. According to information received from Devoges, they were exterminated."

"The devil!" Forbes muttered as, stroking his mustache, he looked toward the horizon.

"There has been no public report either of the expedition or of the fate of its members," Longaker said.

"No. We lay off the coast for a week, but were unable to get any message from the party. Then we ran short of coal and had to go south. We were relieved by the Yba which returned five days ago.

"Day before yesterday I saw Lieutenant Colson, the commander of the Yba, and asked him what he had learned concerning the fate of Forrester. He replied that Devoges was authority for the statement that Forrester and his entire command had been slain. He would give no further particulars, for he said he had been ordered to keep the affair secret."

"Humph!" growled Forbes. "If the Military Department of the Philippines is going to play hide-and-seek with itself, we will have about as much chance of winning out as a bunch of blindfolded sprinters facing a brick wall!"

"You have seen Devoges?" Longaker asked.

"Yes."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

Tappan shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, he's a good deal like most of the mestizos—as suave and conceited as a Spaniard and as vacillating and tricky as the average Tagalog. He seems to have the confidence of the Department, however."

"Was it understood that he was to work in conjunction with Forrester?" Longaker asked.

"No. He was in Manila then. How he got up to Bongabon, only Heaven knows. He asserts that had he been with Forrester the expedition would have returned to Manila with Pacheco. For the last two weeks Devoges has been secretly organizing the amigos in and around Bongabon—with some success, I am informed."

"You think, then, that he is not to be relied upon?" queried Longaker.

"I think that he should not be the subject of blind confidence—that's all."

Though Tappan had described the Bojeador as a ten-knot vessel, it soon became apparent that while she might attain that rate of progress under extraordinary favorable conditions, eight or nine knots were about all she was capable of logging in fairly moderate weather.

The result was that it was not until noon of the third day out that Lieutenant Tappan, having taken his bearings, laid his sextant in its case and announced that a three hours' run would suffice to take the Bojeador to the place that had been designated as the point of debarkation.

In view of the fact that the orders specified that the landing should be made only under cover of darkness, the bow of the Bojeador was turned to the northeast in order that the vessel might be kept out of sight of the coast.

Having satisfied himself concerning the position of the vessel and set a course that would not bring the Bojeador to the point of debarkation until midnight, Tappan went below.

The members of the detail were then quickly mustered on deck for inspection. Assisted by Forbes, Captain Longaker subjected to a rigid examination all the accouterments of his men, who were now informed for the first time of the object of the expedition, and the nature of the plan of operation.

Scarcely had the men been dismissed when Forbes gripped one of the arms of Longaker and led him to the starboard rail.

"Look there!" Forbes said quietly, as he nodded toward some fleecy clouds in the northeast.

Longaker glanced in the direction indicated, but failed to see anything remarkable. As he turned with an inquiring look toward Forbes, he saw that his companion's eyes were flashing with suddenly inspired excitement.

"What's up, old man?" Longaker asked impatiently.

"What's up, lad! Look—look up there among those clouds! There—there it goes again! Do you see it now?"

Longaker gave a sudden start as he

saw a long, faint glint of light moving up and down with short, jerky motions.

"By heaven, it's a heliograph at work!" he exclaimed.

"It's a heliograph as sure as it's daylight in Luzon," said Forbes. "We've got to have a code, lad—a code! Hey there, Tappan! Where the devil's Tappan?"

He ran to a companionway and down it he bawled the name of the Bojeador's commander. The excitement under which the cavalryman was laboring soon spread to all parts of the little warship, and in a few moments Tappan, grim-faced and alert, came rushing to the deck.

Longaker and Forbes were at him at once. Before his lips had time to frame a query the words "a helio code" had sent him flying to his cabin. There Forbes snatched from his hands the little black-covered book which he took from a locker. The three men quickly mounted to the deck.

"They are still flashing it, sir," said a seaman reassuringly.

Longaker drew out a memorandum book and as Forbes called off the dots, dashes, and pauses, the captain jotted them down. Tappan, who had regained possession of the book, looked over Longaker's shoulder. Near the trio, bluejackets and khaki-clad cavalrymen formed a silent, eager group that listened with bated breath to the unintelligible utterances that fell from the lips of the skyward-gazing Forbes.

Suddenly Forbes stopped. A series of murmurs rose from the little group of watchers.

The wavering streak of light had disappeared.

Tappan, without speaking, snatched from Longaker's hands the memorandum book in which he had been recording the dots and dashes.

"Come—to the cabin," commanded the naval officer.

Longaker turned to Corporal Yost.

"Corporal, if those signals are resumed, report to me in the lieutenant's cabin," he said.

Then he hurried after Tappan and Forbes, who were disappearing down the companionway.

Seated at a table in his cabin, Tappan, with the cipher before him, quickly thumbed the pages of the code book and wrote out on a sheet of paper the words and sentences as he translated them. Forbes and Longaker, looking over his shoulder, followed the movements of his pencil with breathless eagerness. When he was done the message on the paper read as follows:

> Cor, brought on the Freda yesterday, are Pacheco's prisoners. Both women are being treated well. Beware of Devoges, but trust Sanchez if you find him. The attack has begun. This is the thirty-fifth. God help us, if——

There was no more.

As he finished transcribing the message Tappan glanced it over; then he passed it to Longaker, who had read it while it was being written.

"Have you got a heliograph instrument?" Forbes asked.

"No," Tappan answered gloomily. "It is only by the merest accident that I have the code aboard."

There was an ashen pallor on Longaker's face as he reread the message, and the fingers that held it were trembling violently.

"What do you make of it, Forbes?" he asked, as he handed the paper to his friend.

Forbes, pulling violently at one of the ends of his mustache, took the message and glanced over it thoughtfully, but he did not answer.

"It's from Forrester or one of his men, I dare say," said Tappan gloomily.

"Did Forrester have a heliograph?" Forbes asked, looking up quickly.

"I think not. It is more than probable that if he had he would have mentioned the fact and made some attempt to communicate with me while I was lying off the coast six weeks ago."

"Do you know anything of the Freda?" Longaker asked abruptly.

"Yes. She was lying about a thousand yards from the Bojeador while we were in Manila Bay. She's a steam vessel of about two or three thousand tons and flies the Dutch flag. She weighed anchor about an hour before you came aboard."

"She is probably the vessel you sighted on the first night out."

Tappan nodded.

"I think it was the Freda," he replied.

Longaker took from Forbes the paper on which the message was written.

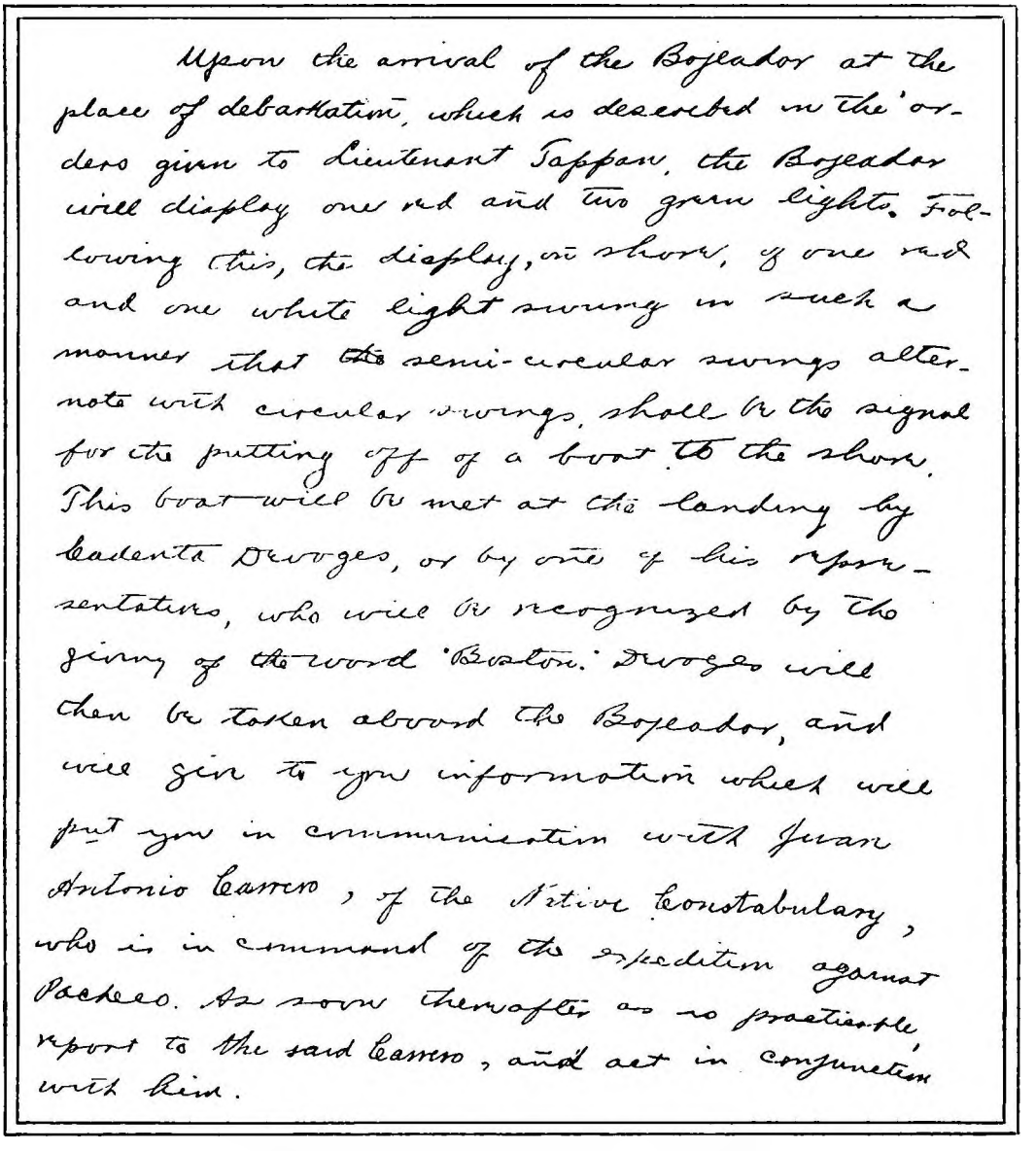
"Who are the two women who were brought up by the Freda?" he asked.

"It is apparent that the final syllable of the name of one of them constitutes the imperfect word at the beginning of the message," Tappan said. "What is it? Ah, yes—'cor.' A rather uncommon suffix, I should say."

As he spoke, he glanced at his companions. Something in their faces caused him to ask hurriedly:

"Do you know of any woman whose name ends with such a syllable, and who is likely to have been taken from Manila by order of Pacheco?"

"No," Forbes answered sharply. Then he added: "That is to say, none who is likely to have been carried off in this manner."



Upon the arrival of the Bojador at the place of debarkation, which is described in the orders given to Lieutenant Tappan, the Bojador will display one red and two green lights. Following this, the display, as shown, of one red and one white light swung in such a manner that the semi-circular swings alternate with circular swings, shall be the signal for the putting off of a boat to the shore. This boat will be met at the landing by Eudenta Deroges, or by one of his representatives, who will be recognized by the giving of the word 'Boston.' Deroges will then be taken aboard the Bojador, and will give to you information which will put you in communication with Juan Antonio Carero, of the Native Constabulary, who is in command of the expedition against Pacheco. As soon thereafter as no practicable, report to the said Carero, and act in conjunction with him.

Facsimile of Captain Longaker's orders. (See page 45.)

"Probably it was the departure of the Freda with these women that was responsible for the alarm," Tappan suggested.

Forbes, apparently satisfied with this explanation, glancing at the white face of Longaker, answered:

"Yes. This probably explains the nature of the alarm."

CHAPTER VI.

THE HAND OF THE ENEMY.

As the Bojeador continued on its course toward the northeast, scores of eyes glanced curiously toward the west in attempts to see once more the faint shafts of light that had told such an incomplete and disquieting story to the cavalrymen. They were not seen again, however, in the course of the afternoon.

Shortly before twilight fell the head of the Bojeador was brought around to the westward, and once more the course was set for the little bay in which the expedition was to land. Not until then did Longaker and Forbes, assured that no more heliograph messages were to be obtained, go below.

Seated in Lieutenant Tappan's cabin, Longaker took from the pocket of his coat the written instructions that had been given to him by Colonel Secor. Several times in the course of the voyage he had glanced over the paper.

The directions given were plainly expressed, but, in view of his conversation with Tappan relative to Devoges, he now examined them more carefully.

They read as follows:

> Upon the arrival of the Bojeador at the place of debarkation, which is described in the orders given to Lieutenant Tappan, the Bojeador will display one red and two green lights. Following this, the display of one red and one white light swung in such a manner that semicircular swings alternate with circular swings, shall be the signal for the putting off of a boat to the shore. This boat will be met at the landing by Cadenta Devoges, or by one of his representatives, who will be recognized by the giving of the word "Boston." Devoges will then be taken aboard the Bojeador, and will give to you information which will put you in communication with Juan Antonio Carrero, of the Native Constabulary, who is in command of the expedition against Pacheco. As soon thereafter as is practicable, report to the said Carrero, and act in conjunction with him.

"Forbes," Longaker said, as he pushed the paper away from him, "who the devil is Carrero?"

Forbes, who had read the instructions soon after the Bojeador left Manila Bay, now reached for the paper and looked it over in the manner that Longaker had just done.

"Have you asked Tappan?"

"Yes. Tappan does not know him. I was not aware that a company of constabulary was operating this far north."

Suddenly Forbes' brow darkened, and he began to stroke his mustache.

"Humph!" he grunted. Then, looking sharply at Longaker, he asked: "Did you read these instructions at the time the colonel handed them to you?"

"No. The envelope was sealed. I did not open it until I got aboard the Bojeador."

"Where did you carry the envelope prior to the time you opened it?"

"In the inside pocket of my coat."

"No one could have got at it, then?"

A gray pallor overspread Longaker's face and he leaped to his feet.

"No, no—no one!" he cried excitedly. "By Heaven, Forbes, do you think that game could have been played on me twice?"

Forbes shrugged his shoulders.

"This order is signed by Colonel Secor. But—well, there appears to be every reason to believe that it was written, placed in an envelope and sealed in the office of General Purdy—the office from which you went with the envelope that got you into trouble before."

"In God's name, Forbes, do you mean to tell me that you, too, believe that Purdy is——"

"Not at all, lad—not at all. I think the general is one of the most honorable men in the service, but—well, there is something just as queer about this paper as there was in the substitution of the blank paper for the photographs and charts that were stolen from you while you slept."

"But it is impossible that the instructions I received from Colonel Secor could have been tampered with before I opened the envelope. These are the same that I read then. What is there about them that is queer?"

Forbes, stroking his mustache, resumed his study of the language of the order. Then he tapped the paper with one of his fingers.

"I know the handwriting of the colonel as well as I know my own," he said. "This signature is his and so are most of the sentences, but the references to Carrero, lad, have been written by some one else."

Forbes placed the paper on a table in front of him and smoothed it carefully. Longaker rushed to his side and looked over his shoulder.

"Look here," said Forbes, as he placed one of his long, brown fingers on the paper and ran it below the words: "Juan Antonio Carrero, of the Native Constabulary," in the sixth and fifth lines from the end of the order.

For several moments both were silent, then Forbes spoke.

"I'm not a handwriting expert, lad," he went on. "But one does not need to be to size up such a bungling piece of work as this. It is so palpable that to call it a forgery would be to give to it a dignity to which it has no claim.

"For instance, compare the 'A' of 'Antonio' with the 'A' of 'As' on the second line below. See the difference in the character of the loops? Then, too, compare the 'st' in 'Constabulary' with the 'st' in 'against,' immediately under it. In the first instance the writer raised his pen on completing the 's,' and in the second instance he ran the last stroke into the 't.' Do you think a real forger would have made a break like that?"

A muttered oath fell from the lips of Longaker.

"But perhaps the most apparent proof of the fact that the unknown writer bungled his work is to be found in the positions of the commas after 'Carrero' and 'Constabulary,' in the fifth line from the last and after 'Carrero' on the third line below. These, you see, are midway between words, whereas you will observe that in all other sentences in the order the commas lie close to the words they follow."

"Then the original words have been erased?"

"Unquestionably—since they are not there. Some eradicating fluid has been used, and these words substituted."

"Then it is probable that——"

"It is altogether probable that the original words would have explained to you that Major Forrester is the man from whom you should expect some communication. That is clear, I think, when we consider the concluding sentence in the order: 'As soon thereafter as is practicable, report to the said Carrero, and act in conjunction with him.'

"Do you think that Colonel Frobey Secor intended to command a captain in the Twenty-Third Cavalry to report to a little brown-skinned native? Is it not rather more probable that our colonel would have put it up to that mysterious official of the native constabulary to report to you?"

Longaker's face had grown almost purple.

"Well, Forbes, by the time you get through with me, I'll be a long-eared, mouse-colored ass," he murmured bitterly.

Forbes, looking again at the paper, was muttering something quietly and counting on his fingers.

"Just fits!" he exclaimed complacently. Then, observing the stricken look in Longaker's eyes, he hastened to add:

"The number of letters in the words 'Major Morton Forrester,' as the colonel would write them, would fit the space taken by the name, 'Juan Antonio Carrero.'

"Then, too, 'Seventy-Ninth Cavalry' would fill to better effect the hole occupied by 'Native Constabulary,' which, though it is spread out pretty well, can't quite connect with the comma that follows.

"Colonel Secor was never much given to the use of the words 'said' and 'aforesaid,' so I think the expression, 'the said Carrero' might easily be retired in favor of plain 'Major Forrester.' Still, these are only theories."

And as he spoke, Forbes with considerable deliberation, folded the order and handed it to Longaker, who took it gingerly.

"Well, if Forrester is the man I'm to meet, how the deuce can I communicate with him if Devoges is playing double?"

Forbes shook his head gravely.

"We'll have to size up Devoges first, then get the lay of the land. It is probable that the heliograph may give up the information we seek."

"Tappan says there was no heliograph with Forrester's expedition."

"It is apparent, however, that the one from which we got that message this afternoon was operated by a chap who understood the United States Army Code."

Longaker sank in a chair by the table and covered his face with his hands.

"And all this time Miss Secor——" he began with an accent of desperation in his voice.

"Fudge!" exclaimed Forbes, rising abruptly. "We do not know that Miss Secor was one of the women mentioned in the message. It is more to the point to try to find some solution of the mystery that hides the person who substituted the blank paper for those photographs in Manila, and who has made the alterations in Colonel Secor's order."

"I can't make head or tail of it, Forbes," the captain sighed.

"You say that at the time General Purdy gave you that envelope for Colson, of the Yba, Crawford and a Filipino were the only persons present."

"They were all."

"Well, it couldn't have been Crawford, so it must have been the Filipino."

"Exactly. But if he was an unknown quantity, so far as General Purdy was concerned, why should he have been there at all?"

Forbes tugged impatiently at his mustache.

"That's what beats me, lad," he answered moodily. "Old Purdy is no man's fool, but—well, Flora Endicott is not a man."

He sighed heavily; then he murmured:

"And that's the devil of it!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

WHEN the moon rose, shortly after eight o'clock, the Bojeador was in sight of the coast. There was scarcely a cloud in the sky, and as Longaker and Forbes sat smoking near the bow of the little warship, Forbes, breaking a long silence, said, moodily:

"If this sort of thing keeps up, lad, it will be too light for any one on shore to make out the color of our signals. A man might almost read a newspaper by moonlight without straining his eyes under one of these tropical skies. If we are going to carry out the terms of the order and land under cover of darkness, we'll have to wait a week or so, I guess."

"We'll land to-night—as soon as Tappan can make it," said Longaker shortly.

Forbes chuckled.

"You seem as anxious to meet this Devoges as the average democratic American girl is to meet a real live prince," he said.

"While I can't help envying you your good humor, Forbes, it's difficult for me to understand how you retain it at a time when we are confronted by so many serious responsibilities," retorted Longaker irritably.

"Some day you will learn that it is the good-humored man—the man who keeps his wits in training by exercising them in the sun for a few hours every day—who wins battles," Forbes explained.

"What's the use of worrying about things that may never happen at all? You are planning what you are going to say to Devoges when he comes aboard and then what you will do with him when you find that he's a scoundrel.

"Well, the game isn't worth the candle you're burning. You won't be able to size up Devoges until you see him and hear what he's got to say. You won't be able to punish him until you find the proper time and place. So when you do see him you will find that all these fool plans you are making now won't work. Take it easy, lad—take it easy."

"Hang it all, do you think I'm a fool?" Longaker demanded. "How can I take it easy when——"

"How does a pugilist take it on the eve of a fight? Does he let his anxiety get the better of him to such an extent that he goes to a gymnasium and uses up on a fool punching-bag all the strength and vitality that he should hoard for use in the ring? Well, that's what you're doing now.

"When you meet Devoges give him smile for smile. Keep on smiling until you fathom his little game, then keep smiling while you twist his neck. After all, the principal object in life is to con-

tinue smiling after the other fellow has quit."

"I had never observed that smiling was your forte, Forbes," said Longaker.

"A big mustache, like mine, sometimes has its advantages," Forbes answered calmly. "But you are bad company to-night, lad, so I'm going back to watch the boys play poker. All gambling is bad, but poker is a more sensible form of gambling than counting chickens before they are hatched."

And, suiting the action to the word, Lieutenant Crosby Forbes strolled aft, blowing fragrant smoke-wreaths as he went.

For the next two hours Longaker sat almost motionless in the bow and watched with eager eyes the increase in the size of the coast-line's silhouette.

At ten o'clock a hand fell on his shoulder, and the voice of Tappan said:

"Well, captain, my contribution to your undertaking is about in now. It begins to look as if the rest of the thing was up to you."

"I'm ready," Longaker answered. "How soon will you cast anchor?"

"In about a quarter of an hour, unless—— Well, it's going to be a pretty bright night for a landing."

"We'll do it. Give 'em the signals as soon as the anchor's down."

"Everything is ready. We will send in a boat as soon as our signals are answered."

As Tappan went aft, Longaker rose and began to pace the deck nervously. He was thus engaged when Forbes approached.

"Well, lad, we're in the bay," he said. "When Devoges comes aboard you'll run him into Tappan's cabin, I suppose."

"Yes. You'd better come with me. Two heads are better than one when we are in for a game like this. It's possible that we will have to split the detail."

Forbes nodded.

"So I was thinking," he replied gravely.

"You haven't been spending all your time watching the poker game, then?" said Longaker, with a smile.

"Pretty nearly. That's why ideas came to me. Good ideas are like women—the more you seek them, the more inclined they are to turn you down."

Longaker laughed nervously.

"It seems to me, Forbes, as if nearly everything suggests some phase of woman's character to you," he said.

"Naturally, for in these days woman is more or less mixed up with everything. That's why no latter-day men are canonized as saints."

"You were speaking of ideas," Longaker suggested.

"It has occurred to me that, as you have said, it may be necessary to divide the detail," said Forbes. "In view of the fact that our enemies are trying their hands at the forgery of official communications, I'm going to suggest that each of us keep a copy of this list that I am giving to you. It consists of words so arranged as to correspond with the numbers of the days of the month.

"In order that I may be assured that communications sent by you to me have been written by your hand or by your order, it is best that you write on each page the word that corresponds with the day of the month. Thus, if you are writing to me on the fifth, you will place the word 'indigo' somewhere on each page. I will do the same with all the communications I send to you."

Longaker nodded.

"Very good," he said. "I will do so."

"You are going to give to Devoges the rifles and ammunition that were intended for his use?"

"Under the circumstances? No."

"He is looking for them and will suspect that we distrust him if you do not."

"The suspicion will have a salutary effect, perhaps."

"I don't agree with you, lad. It will put him on his guard."

"It's better to do that than to have him put our own rifle balls into us."

"He'll not do that, I promise you—with the rifles that we have on board now."

"You mean you will tamper with them in such a way as to make them useless?"

"Not at all, for we may have a use for them ourselves a little later."

Longaker surveyed Forbes with an expression of astonishment.

"You will give fifty rifles to this man who, as we are agreed, is our enemy?" he asked.

"In order that he may think that he

has completely duped us—yes. There is no more certain way to compel a man to make a fool of himself than to allow him to think that he has succeeded in making a fool of you."

Longaker thrust his hands into his pockets and walked away. Presently he returned to where Forbes stood beside a rail.

"We'll let Devoges have the rifles, Forbes," he said. "I don't quite see what wisdom there is in such a proceeding, but that's because I'm only a ranker, perhaps. Heretofore it has been my privilege to fight and let others do the thinking."

Forbes laid a hand on the young captain's shoulder.

"It takes more than a courageous fighter to win such a fight as this we have ahead of us, lad, but you will see the game clearly enough, with little help from me, after we get to work.

"And as for being a ranker—well, sometimes it has seemed to me that the best generals are those that are evolved from the men behind the guns. There's Chaffee, Funston, and a score of other rankers who never saw the inside of West Point before they got their commissions, and who—— Hello, the anchor's down!"

One of his sinewy hands closed round Longaker's right.

"Now, lad, we have the hour and the man," Forbes said, earnestly. "A month hence the man must wear a major's uniform and be betrothed to Harriet Secor. So let's get our noses to the trail of this little brown devil, Pacheco."

Longaker, returning the grip of his lieutenant, was about to speak when he saw a green light moving quickly to the masthead.

Forbes chuckled softly as he dropped Longaker's hand, then, stroking his mustache, he glanced aloft.

"The game is on, my boy—the game is on," he murmured.

Both men now turned their faces toward the shore, about five hundred yards distant. They had not long to wait, for scarcely two minutes had elapsed when Longaker exclaimed:

"There they go—a red and a white, in circles and semicircles!"

"They've been watching us for half an hour, I'll warrant," Forbes grumbled. "Well, lad, I'll go aft and get out the boys."

He gave Longaker a military salute, and as he hurried aft he heard the voice of Tappan, addressing his men.

"Are you ready?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Lower away."

There was a creaking of blocks and one of the ship's boats, manned by a boatswain and four men, descended from its davits and disappeared over the side of the Bojeador.

The lights that had been sent aloft were quickly lowered and the white boat was seen to be moving swiftly through the calm waters of the bay, in the direction of the shore. At length, while Longaker stood watching it, it was swallowed up in the shadow of a lofty hill.

Walking toward the stern, Longaker saw Corporal Yost and ten members of the detail sitting or standing among their camp kits. He turned an inquiring glance toward Forbes, who, saluting, said:

"The others are below, captain. They are ready to come up if they are wanted."

Longaker smiled.

"Good," he said quietly. "You have anticipated my orders. It is altogether probable that I will leave the others here with you."

Forbes scowled slightly, fingered his mustache meditatively, but said nothing.

"They're coming, captain," said Tappan, with a drawl which he was wont to affect on occasion when highly strung men might be warranted in manifesting some degree of excitement.

Looking again in the direction of the shore, Longaker saw a black spot on the moonlighted waters.

"Come on, Forbes," he said, with a cheeriness that caused the bronzed face of his friend to beam with satisfaction.

Nearer and nearer drew the boat, until at length those on the Bojeador were able to see the features of its occupants. Two of these were Filipinos.

"Is Devoges there?" asked Longaker, addressing Tappan in an undertone.

"Yes—the little mestizo in the stern. The fellow in the bow is Perigo—a full-blooded Tagalog, who appears to be a sort of understudy to Devoges."

"Do they speak English?"

"Better than they pretend to. You can talk to them in Spanish, I suppose?"

"Yes."

In three or four minutes Devoges and Perigo were on board. Tappan saluted them respectfully, then led them to Longaker, to whom he introduced them.

Longaker's face brightened, then after a low bow, he held out his right hand.

"I am delighted, señor, to meet one who enjoys so much of the confidence of General Purdy and Colonel Secor," he said. "But let us go to the cabin where we may drink to better acquaintance."

When each had bowed two or three times with wonderful impressiveness, Longaker took the arm of Devoges and started toward the companionway, closely followed by the smiling Perigo.

Forbes brought up the rear, and as he stroked his mustache he muttered:

"Egad! We may be only rankers, but the way that lad has come out of his trance makes me think that in this game with Devoges there's one of us that will do!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

It was not until the four men entered Tappan's cabin that Longaker took occasion to introduce Forbes to the two visitors. He, as well as Forbes, was quick to observe that their greeting of the lieutenant lacked much of the cordiality that had characterized their greeting of him.

From a locker Longaker took a decanter and four glasses and placed them on the table. This was scarcely done when the hand of Forbes placed a fifth glass beside them.

"We are forgetting the commander of the Bojeador," he said.

Longaker hesitated, but as he glanced inquiringly toward Forbes he saw something in the veteran's eyes that caused him to arrive at a prompt decision. Tappan must hear all.

"Of course," the captain replied with a smile. "Why is he not here?"

Forbes bowed and left the room. Longaker observed that the smile on the face of Devoges had lost something of its brightness, while the features of Perigo had suddenly assumed an expression of profound gravity.

"Brandy and soda, señors," Longaker said pleasantly. "Fill your glasses, I beg of you. Our friends will not keep us waiting long."

Devoges hesitated, then, bowing slightly, he said:

"It will give us great pleasure to drink a toast with the friends of Captain Longaker, but——"

He stopped. The eyes of Longaker were looking at him quizzically.

"Captain Longaker will understand that while discussing the plans for the proposed expedition against Pacheco, it is better that no subordinate should be present."

"But Señor Devoges forgets that Lieutenant Tappan is the commander of this vessel, and that, as such, he is to act in conjunction with this expedition."

"The Bojeador will wait here then?"

"Oh, yes. She will not return without us."

And, as he spoke, Longaker began to fill the glasses.

"Is that wise, captain? Her presence here——"

"Oh, she will cruise round a bit, just out of sight of land, but will drop into the bay from time to time, at night, to take messages for Manila."

"She will be in communication with other vessels then?"

"Most assuredly."

Devoges directed a swift, furtive glance toward Perigo, who was about to speak when the door opened and Forbes and Tappan entered the cabin.

Longaker smiled as he took Tappan by the arm.

"Lieutenant, I have just been explaining to Señor Devoges and his friend that the Bojeador is going to wait to take us back with Pacheco," he said. "I have also told him that you will be cruising around just out of sight of land, and will drop in here from time to time to take reports from me for transmission to Manila."

Tappan nodded.

"Those are my orders, señor," he replied.

"I wonder if the fools thought we came up here to be marooned!" mused Forbes.

"And so you see, señors, that it is advisable that our plans should be discussed in council," Longaker went on. "Lieutenant Tappan's place in this council is thus explained, I think.

"And as for that of Lieutenant Forbes, you will easily see that, as second in command, he must familiarize himself with all our plans so that he may be qualified to replace me should I be so unfortunate as to stop one of Señor Pacheco's rifle balls.

"Gentlemen, let us drink to the health of the President of the United States, and to the confusion of all enemies of our government in the Island of Luzon."

The five glasses clinked. The two visitors were content merely to touch their lips to the beverage, Longaker took a couple of swallows, while Forbes drank the entire contents of his glass before he removed it from his lips.

"It's a good toast," he said; then he heaved a heavy sigh of approval and, drawing out a handkerchief, he forthwith proceeded to wipe the drops from his mustache.

"Let us be seated, señors," Longaker said, and the three Americans placed five chairs around the table. Longaker sat at the head of the board, with Devoges and Perigo on his right and Forbes and Tappan on his left.

When all were seated, Longaker took from his pocket the written instructions that had been given to him by Colonel Secor. These he proceeded to read aloud. When this was done, he turned to Devoges.

"These instructions correspond with those that you have received, I presume," he said.

"Yes, señor. Mine, however, were verbal. They were given to me by Colonel Secor two weeks ago."

"Very good. Now will you be kind enough, señor, to tell me something of the Juan Antonio Carrero who is named in this order?"

The faces of the Filipinos expressed the most profound astonishment.

"You do not know Carrero, señor!" Devoges exclaimed. "Surely you——"

"I understand that I am to expect you to put me in communication with him, that he is in command of an expedition that has been operating against Pacheco, and that I am to report to him. That is all."

"Ah!" exclaimed Perigo thoughtfully.

Devoges glanced uneasily toward Tappan, then he said:

"Señor Carrero is the most powerful leader of men in Central Luzon. He is a native of Spain, and for several years he served in the army of that country, but several years before the glorious victory of the great Dewey at Manila, Señor Carrero left the Spanish army and became the friend of the Filipino people, who now regard him as one of themselves."

"He is leading an expedition against Pacheco?" Longaker asked.

"Yes. Though for a time ostensibly in arms against your government, he was secretly working as its agent. Five weeks ago he threw aside the mask, señor, and is now an open partizan of the United States."

Longaker nodded gravely; then, glancing at Forbes, he saw that though his features were as imperturbable as ever there was a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"He is a military man, then—this Carrero?" said Forbes.

"Yes, señor."

Longaker looked earnestly at his friend, thinking that perhaps he had another question to ask, but Forbes said no more.

"Well, señor," Longaker went on, "having learned something of the personality of our good friend Carrero, we come to that part of the order which informs me that you are prepared to put me in communication with him."

"Yes, señor. He awaits you at a point about four hours' journey from the coast. I am to conduct you to him."

"You are prepared to supply us with the necessary mounts, I believe."

"They await you on the shore."

"How many horses are available?"

"Thirty. We have also six buffaloes and four carts for the transportation of impedimenta."

The three Americans smiled.

"There is no need for secrecy, then?" Longaker asked.

"No, señor. With your twenty men and my fifty, all armed with American

rifles, our force will be irresistible," replied Devoges with cheerful confidence.

"Under these circumstances there seems to be no reason why the Bojeador should not remain at her present anchorage," Forbes suggested.

Devoges hesitated. The Americans saw that he was thinking quickly.

"It would be better, perhaps, that she should remain in the bay," Devoges answered.

Perigo smiled faintly.

"But my force consists of only ten enlisted men," said Longaker.

"Ah!" Devoges exclaimed quickly, and Forbes could have sworn that he saw a transient gleam of satisfaction in the eyes of the mestizo. In two or three seconds it had disappeared. "They will suffice," Devoges added.

"Very good," said Longaker. "Now let us see to getting the men ashore."

"The Bojeador's boats are very light," put in Forbes suggestively.

"We have two sampans which we will send out to you," Perigo explained.

Longaker rose. Devoges shifted uneasily in his chair. The brows of the two visitors suddenly had become clouded.

"A moment, captain," said Devoges, with an effort.

"I await your pleasure, señor," Longaker answered as he reseated himself.

Devoges was plainly embarrassed.

"I had understood that General Purdy would send to me, by the Bojeador, fifty rifles and thirty thousand rounds of ammunition," he said.

Longaker's face grew grave, and he looked thoughtfully at the table. Forbes, stroking his mustache, gazed at the Filipinos benevolently.

"True," Longaker answered, very soberly, "true, we have to speak of the rifles."

There was something in the speaker's accent and attitude that caused Forbes to start, and in his eyes and attitude there was an expression of suddenly intensified alertness.

"I have an admirably selected company of auxiliaries," Devoges went on, "but only half of them are armed."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Longaker absently.

Forbes, tugging nervously at his long mustache, saw that the captain's face had grown tense and white.

"We will require the rifles and ammunition, señor," said Perigo.

Longaker settled himself back in his chair and rocked it gently as he said:

"Señor Devoges, as I take it, you have General Purdy's confidence because of the fact that he believes you to be honest and also because of your ability to keep yourself informed concerning the movements of the enemy in this territory. Am I right?"

"Yes, señor," replied Devoges, who was unable to keep from his countenance an expression of apprehension.

"You have been on this coast for several days, awaiting the arrival of the Bojeador?"

"For three days, señor."

"Anything of importance that happened in this vicinity in the course of that time would be reported to you?"

"Certainly, señor."

"The arrival of a strange vessel would be regarded as important under the circumstances, would it not?"

Devoges started and his face seemed to grow longer. Glancing from him to Forbes, Longaker saw that the features of his friend had changed from the color of bronze to a deep purple. The captain quickly turned again to Devoges.

"Well?" he asked.

"It would be regarded as important—yes, señor," the mestizo replied.

The forelegs of the captain's tilted chair again touched the floor, and he leaned forward on the table.

"I am sure, señor, that it is quite unnecessary to subject to a test either your good faith or your ability to acquire, in your own territory, knowledge of the movements of an enemy. Still, it is essential that I ask you to tell me what you know of the arrival of the Freda yesterday."

For several moments the silence that followed Longaker's words was unbroken. Devoges smiled and leaned forward in such a manner that his folded arms rested on the table. Perigo stared stolidly at one of the walls.

"The visit of the Freda already has been made the subject of a report to General Purdy," he said.

"By land?"

"Yes, señor."

"How long will it take to reach him?"

"Three days, señor—perhaps four or five. In these days the time required for the delivery of a message sent from here to Manila is uncertain."

"What is the nature of the report?"

Devoges shrugged his shoulders.

"It is an official communication. It would be improper for me to reveal its nature."

"As commander of this expedition, I represent General Purdy here. You will send to him, of course, such reports as you may think proper, but in order that I may act intelligently it is necessary that I should know the movements of the enemy in the territory that I am to cover."

Devoges nodded thoughtfully.

"Therefore we must speak of the Freda," Longaker asked.

"Am I to understand, señor, that the delivery of the arms is conditional upon my giving you information concerning the Freda?"

One of the feet of Forbes fell heavily on the toes of Longaker under the table.

"Yes," said Longaker shortly.

There was a clatter on the table. The teeth of Forbes had bitten through the rubber mouthpiece of his pipe and the bowl and part of the stem had fallen.

CHAPTER IX.

A LESSON IN STRATEGY.

For several moments the silence that followed was broken only by the drumming of Tappan's fingers on the table. The features of Forbes were expressionless; and those of Longaker were calm and grave. The visitors were gazing thoughtfully at the top of the table. Devoges was the first to speak.

"I am sorry to learn that you distrust me, señor," he answered sadly. "Though I had reminded you that the matter had been reported to General Purdy, it was my intention to tell you all."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Longaker coldly.

"I will proceed," continued Devoges. "The Freda, a Dutch vessel, dropped anchor in this bay yesterday, during the absence of my force. I was with Carrero, and in a few hours the matter was reported to me. I hastened here, but the Freda was gone. She had remained little more than an hour."

"You know the object of her visit?"

"Yes. She landed supplies for Pacheco."

"Nothing more?"

Devoges hesitated.

"You appear to be already informed, señor," he said uneasily.

"That is not an answer to my question."

"She also sent ashore a little party of sympathizers from Manila."

"Only sympathizers?"

"There were two women."

Longaker's eyes gleamed like burning coals.

"You have learned who they were?"

"One was the daughter of your colonel."

"Miss Harriet Secor?"

"Yes."

"And the other?"

"It is a very English name and has escaped me. I have forgotten it."

"You have seen these ladies?"

"No, señor."

"Where are they now?"

"With Carrero, who overtook the party that Pacheco had sent to conduct the prisoners and supplies from the Freda."

"Was there a fight?"

"No. Upon the approach of Carrero's force, Pacheco's men fled, deserting their prisoners and supplies."

"How did the two women happen to be brought here?"

"They were kidnapped in Manila, and were to be held by Pacheco for ransom. He is badly in need of funds."

"Miss Secor and her friend are safe, then?"

"Ah, yes, señor. They are with Carrero."

"And Carrero——"

Devoges made a deprecatory shrug, then answered:

"I am waiting to take you to him, señor."

"Then we will go at once," said Longaker, extending a hand to Devoges, who grasped it warmly.

"Señor Devoges and I will then return to the shore and send out the

sampans," Perigo said, as he held out a hand to Forbes.

But Forbes did not take it.

"I infer, señor, that when the sampans come the arms will be put aboard," said Devoges, addressing Longaker.

"No."

The quietly spoken word came from the lips of Forbes, who, of the five men present, was the only one who remained sitting at the table. The other four glanced at him with expressions of surprise.

Forbes drew toward him the bottle of brandy and the siphon of soda, filled his glass deliberately; then he said:

"I think Señor Devoges has misunderstood Captain Longaker. Did you not say, captain, that the delivery of the arms was conditional upon satisfactory answers to the questions you put to the señors?"

"I am of the opinion that Señor Devoges has answered them satisfactorily," Longaker replied coldly.

Forbes shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, then as your subordinate, captain, I have nothing more to say."

Having thus spoken, Forbes raised his glass to his lips and sipped its contents.

"Do not the answers appear satisfactory to you?" Longaker asked, as, releasing the hand of Devoges, he continued to gaze wonderingly at his friend.

"The words might do, perhaps, but the spirit is lacking," Forbes replied. "The information that you have obtained should not have been extracted with a corkscrew. If we had not learned of the arrival of the Freda from other sources, we would never have heard a word of it from Señor Devoges."

The two visitors clapped their hands on the hilts of the short swords they wore. Forbes finished his brandy, then he rose.

"Under the circumstances," he said, "I should make the delivery of the arms conditional upon the release of the women."

Perigo was about to answer hotly, when Devoges, laying a hand on the arm of his companion, restrained him.

"It shall be so, señor," Devoges said.

"And also the giving of information that will enable us to effect a junction with Major Forrester's command."

"Alas, señor, the brave major and his men were ambushed by Pacheco five weeks ago!" explained Devoges. "All were slain."

Forbes laughed mirthlessly.

"We will require evidence of that," he said.

"You shall have it, señor," replied Devoges firmly.

Forbes bowed gravely to Longaker, as he said quietly:

"These are only suggestions, captain."

Longaker's face was white with anger as he turned to Devoges.

"You will send out the sampans?" he asked shortly.

"Yes, yes, señor. We will see you on the shore?"

"I will go with my men," Longaker replied.

The two visitors bowed low to each of the three Americans, then withdrew. Tappan walked out slowly after them.

When the two cavalrymen were alone, Longaker turned upon Forbes a pair of eyes that were ablaze with anger and indignation.

"Your theories and your practise seem to be in a strange conflict to-night," he said. "What the devil do you mean by——"

Forbes laid a hand on the captain's shoulder, as he answered—

"I mean, lad, that you have been a fool—that an American officer was about to pay the piper for a Filipino dance."

"If I am a fool it is because you have made me so," Longaker retorted bitterly. "It was in accordance with a suggestion made by you that I decided to let Devoges have the rifles. What do you mean, then, by telling me in his presence that it would be better to keep them?"

"Because your regard for Miss Secor got the better of your judgment and caused you to reveal your hand. My suggestion was that you give him the arms for the purpose of leading him to believe that you did not suspect him of playing double. You have taken another course, for after plainly telling him that you suspect him, you offer him the arms."

"Was it not better to compel him to reveal the fact that Miss Secor is with Carrero? We would not have had that knowledge if he had not received such a jolt as I gave him. At the time you

spoke, he had every reason to believe that our confidence in him was restored."

"Devoges is no fool, my lad. When you told him that you were aware of the fact that the Freda had put in here, you gave him to understand that you had some source of information that he knew nothing of. He will reason now that, if we have this, we are aware of his duplicity. This has put him on his guard. To give him the rifles now would be an act of madness."

"How should it alter your original plan of making the rifles useless in his hands?"

"I had planned to take advantage of his over-confidence. It is scarcely likely that under those circumstances he would have sent on the arms with the men who were accompanying us. With the ten men we were holding in reserve I purposed making an assault on the second party in such a manner as to make them believe that a force independent of you and Forrester, was operating in this district."

"Damnation!" Longaker muttered. "Why did you not explain all this before?"

"There appeared to be plenty of time. Naturally no plan could be definitely decided upon until you had talked with Devoges. The idea that you would use our discovery of the Freda's visit as a lever with which to lift the stone that covers his knowledge of Miss Secor's whereabouts did not occur to me.

"As a result of your indiscretion we have learned from Devoges nothing that we did not know before. He is the only person who is wiser as a result of the interview, for he has learned that we have come up here to snuff out his candle. We had surmised that Miss Secor was one of the prisoners. We know it now, and Devoges knows that we know it. He will be doubly on the alert to prevent us from getting into communication with her."

Longaker paced the floor nervously for several minutes.

"Well, we'll keep the guns, and I will take ten men ashore as soon as the sampans come," he said moodily. "You'd better come with me, I suppose, and then return to the ship. What then?"

"Later in the night I'll land with Yost and the boys. If you and Devoges start at once, we can follow you. It is better that we should remain under cover during the day. Yost is an old scout and will keep us to your trail. If Carrero, as Devoges says, is only four hours distant you should come up with him before sunrise. The sound of shots will bring us to your relief."

"Suppose I want to communicate with you?" Longaker asked.

Forbes stroked his mustache meditatively for several moments.

"Some bluejackets have a custom of saving empty cartridge shells and selling them on shore," he said. "Perhaps we can find some among the crowd."

He opened the door and summoned one of the sailors, who promised to return with a handful of shells.

"Just tear a leaf from your memorandum book, write me a few lines, slip the paper into one of the shells, and drop it on the right side of your trail," Forbes explained. "The chances are I'll have it inside the hour."

"That will do, I guess," Longaker answered thoughtfully.

"There's one other thing," said Forbes. "Let me see that copy Tappan made of the heliograph message we got to-day. I'll keep the code, if you don't mind, and watch for something more to-morrow."

Longaker placed the message in the hands of his friend. Forbes read it carefully.

"This was sent at noon to-day," he murmured. "It tells us that the prisoners are in the hands of Pacheco. That doesn't correspond with what our friend, the señor, has just told us, does it? Then, too, it says 'Trust Sanchez if you find him.' Who the deuce is Sanchez?"

The door opened and Tappan entered the cabin.

"Two sampans have put out from the shore, captain," he said carelessly.

Longaker, turning to Forbes, smiled gravely as he asked:

"You think, then, that the Bojeador's boats are too light to take twelve of our men ashore?"

"I dare say they would make the shore all right, but it is questionable whether they would have sufficient staying powers to get back to the Bojeador again," Forbes answered grimly. "In carrying eggs to market it is sometimes better to

use a neighbor's basket than to risk the loss of our own. And so we'd better take the sampans."

CHAPTER X.

HOW A ROSE BLOOMED IN THE SEA.

As the three men, after mounting the companionway, stepped out on the deck they saw the shadow-like sampans moving toward them.

Forbes went aft to take another look at his men. When he returned to where he had left Longaker he gave to him a handful of empty cartridge shells. These Longaker slipped into one of his pockets.

"How'll you get back?" Longaker asked.

"They'll have to bring me out in a sampan," Forbes replied.

A few minutes later the first of the sampans was alongside the Bojeador and was boarded by Corporal Yost and six of the ten men. When this put off, Longaker, Forbes and the four other men embarked in the second. Then the start was made for the shore. On the Bojeador there still remained four tents, a camp stove and packages containing two weeks' rations, which, owing to the small size of the sampans, awaited the return of these little vessels from the shore.

The expanse of waters that lay between the Bojeador and the shore was quickly covered. The two sampans arrived at the landing place about the same time. There the cavalrymen, disembarking on a small raft that served as a float, found themselves confronted by a semicircle of white-clad figures, about forty in number.

All the natives were armed, and as the glance of Forbes and Longaker swept the company both Americans saw that the faces of the silent men were expressive of sullen curiosity. Devoges and Perigo were not there to greet them.

"Have your men keep their eyes open, Yost," said Forbes in an undertone to the corporal. "These brown fellows may be friends, but somehow I don't quite like the look of them just now."

"Do you look for trouble?" asked Yost, who was an old campaigner.

"No, but the troubles that bother us most are those that come without our looking for them. Just tell our boys to act toward these brownies as friendly as they know how, but to keep on their guard."

Yost nodded. This rough-mannered corporal was a man of Forbes' own kidney, and for Crosby Forbes he had more really sincere respect and admiration than for any man who wore shoulder straps in the American army.

The Americans had been on the beach for nearly five minutes when Devoges appeared.

"Welcome, señors," the mestizo said, as, smiling faintly, he gave a military salute.

"How soon shall we start to find Carrero?" Longaker asked, abruptly.

"In an hour, señor. We will send out to the ship now for your impedimenta and pack it on the buffalo carts. We will be ready in an hour."

Longaker glanced around him.

"And our mounts—are they ready?" he asked.

"Yes, señor. They are here."

Longaker turned to Yost.

"Better look them over, corporal," he said, in English. "Be back as quickly as you can, for you and Forbes will return to the Bojeador on the boats that go out for the luggage."

Forbes, who was watching Devoges closely, saw the mestizo give a little start. He seemed to be on the point of speaking, then suddenly checked himself.

"He understands that English, and doesn't want our company on the sampans," the lieutenant mused. "I wonder why?"

He stroked his mustache reflectively, and turned to the sampans that had brought the Americans from the Bojeador. He saw that these two little vessels were being drawn up on the shore, but that five or six more were floating near them.

"They are sending out two others," he muttered.

At this moment he observed the lithe figure of a Tagalog running down the beach to the waterside. The native put his hands to his mouth and called out some words that Forbes was unable to understand. Then the lieutenant, looking through the corners of his eyes, saw several dark figures moving in two sam-

pans that were lying off shore. A few minutes later one of them was under way, heading for the float at which the Americans had been landed.

Forbes turned toward where he had last seen Yost, who had been walking away with two Filipinos. The corporal had disappeared.

The place at which the little company had landed was on the shore of a small cove to the right of a ship entering the bay. The beach was of white sand, and back of it arose a cliff about two hundred feet in height. The face of the cliff was perpendicular, but, as Forbes observed, on his right it sloped easily to the bottom of a valley which extended inland.

On his left the cliff extended about three hundred yards, then, with the expanse of beach at its foot, merged into a promontory which, running about a thousand feet into the bay, formed one of the sides of the cove.

The promontory, which was scarcely more than half the height of the cliff, sloped gradually to the rock-strewn margin of the cove, and appeared to be densely wooded. The Bojeador lay about seven hundred yards off the middle of the beach and five hundred yards from the point of the promontory. The landing float was about the middle of the beach, and the sampans which Forbes had seen were about two hundred feet distant, in the direction of the promontory.

As Forbes and his companions now stood with their backs to the float, the Filipinos, lounging in the shadow of the cliff, were directly in front of them. When Yost was last seen by Forbes, he was walking in the direction of the little valley on the right, which apparently constituted the only means of egress for mounted men from the beach surrounding the cove.

The trained eye of Lieutenant Forbes quickly absorbed these details; then he turned again to the sampan that was lazily making its way to the float. As he watched the little craft a scowl came to his face, for he saw its gunwale was scarcely more than a foot and a half above the water.

"By Heaven, our bundle of tents alone would send her to the bottom," he muttered. "She's taking out a heavier cargo than she intends to bring in."

He paused, then he added:

"And my old bunkie, Corporal Yost, is too good a man to lose."

From the group of Tagalogs opposite there rang out a sharp command. The natives shouldered their rifles, formed in ranks of four, and, preceded by an officer who was neither Devoges nor Perigo, they marched in the direction that had been taken by Yost and his two Tagalog companions. At the opening of the valley they halted.

"I wonder what their game is now!" Longaker muttered.

As he spoke, three white-clad figures moved toward them from the shadow of the cliff. One of these was Perigo. At the same moment Devoges approached them from the little group of sampans.

Drawing nearer Longaker, Forbes, speaking quickly and in an undertone said:

"Better let Yost and me cut out our return to the Bojeador to-night, lad. I'm going to take a stroll down the beach. Tell Yost I'll meet him at the point of that promontory in an hour."

"But——"

"It's all right, lad. Don't appear to miss me until they tell you I'm not in the sampan. Then send Yost to look for me, and tell him to work his way down to the promontory. Delay the departure of the sampans as long as you can."

As Devoges and Perigo came up to Longaker, Forbes strolled carelessly toward the cliff and was soon lost to view in its shadows.

"Are your lieutenant and corporal ready to return to the Bojeador?" Devoges asked.

"Why, yes, as soon as Corporal Yost finishes looking over the horses."

Devoges stepped back and drew out his watch, which he held in such a manner that the moonlight fell on the dial.

"It is after eleven, señor," he said, with a little shrug of impatience.

"I dare say he will be here in a few moments," Longaker answered coldly.

Devoges spoke a few quiet words to Perigo, who forthwith started toward the valley. He had traversed scarcely more than half the distance, however,

when Yost appeared. Perigo halted, and Yost approached alone.

"Well, Yost, how do they look?" Longaker asked him cheerily.

"Fit as fiddles, sir," the corporal answered, in the same tone. Then, as he stepped to Longaker's side, he added, in English; "The horses are from the Seventy-Ninth Cavalry."

Longaker started, then hesitated.

"All right, Yost," he said calmly.

Devoges again came forward.

"We'd better get the sampans off," he suggested.

"All right, señor," Longaker replied. "Good-by, Yost. I'm sorry we're not taking you with us."

And, as he spoke, he slapped the corporal on the shoulder.

"Where is the other—the lieutenant?" Devoges asked, with some appearance of irritation.

"He was here a moment ago," said Longaker, looking round. Then he called: "Forbes—Oh, Forbes!"

There was no answer.

"Where the devil is the man?" he exclaimed, now apparently as irritated as Devoges.

Devoges, Perigo, and their two attendants looked searchingly up and down the beach. One of Longaker's men advanced, saluted, and seemed about to speak. His captain silenced him with a gesture. Then, turning to the corporal, Longaker said:

"Yost, look for him on that promontory yonder. Lose yourself, but be careful to keep out of sight of these chaps in the white uniforms. At the end of an hour be at the point of the promontory. Forbes expects to meet you there."

A moment later Yost was gone.

For the next ten minutes cries of "Forbes," issuing from American and Spanish throats, resounded along the beach. Devoges and Perigo, standing together, watched Longaker attentively. It soon became apparent to them that the nervousness that characterized his attitude while he was pacing to and fro on the beach was not feigned.

Convinced that Forbes had made some sensational discovery, or that, at least, he had suspected that some new and important development in the situation was imminent, Longaker, finding himself groping in the dark, now was as irascible as Devoges and Perigo appeared to be.

Why had Forbes not been more explicit? True, there was something in the lieutenant's manner that had indicated that he was acting on the spur of the moment, and that he believed there was no time to be lost. But what danger threatened from the promontory? Why was the departure of the expedition—the expedition that, ostensibly at least, had for its object the release of Miss Secor—thus delayed?

Once more Devoges approached.

"If we are to make the journey while it is dark, we must be off in an hour, señor," he said. "Much depends on our junction with Carrero without being observed by the spies of Pacheco."

"Do not wait longer then," Longaker answered. "Send out the sampan to the Bojeador, without the lieutenant and corporal. If we find them before the expedition gets under way, we will take them with us. If not they will have to get out to the gunboat in their own way."

Devoges bowed and hurried off to where one of the sampans lay beside the float. He addressed a few words to the men on board, then Longaker heard some one in the first boat call out to the crew of the second.

In another minute both sampans had drawn away from the shore and were headed for the Bojeador.

As soon as the Filipinos on the beach saw that the sampans were off at last, they promptly abandoned the search for the missing lieutenant. Glancing at Devoges and Perigo, Longaker saw that they appeared to have recovered much of the composure they had lost.

Meeting the gaze of the American officer, Devoges walked over to him, and said, with a smile:

"I think we shall make it now, señor."

Longaker nodded, but did not reply. His gaze was directed now toward the sampans. His thoughts were of Forbes.

Standing well together, the ten American cavalrymen who had landed with Longaker talked in low voices, the while they glanced now toward the Bojeador and now toward the entrance to the little valley where the white forms of

Devoges' riflemen were dimly outlined as they stood at rest.

Among the Americans was a black-haired, dark-skinned man of medium height, with a broad, high brow and jutting chin. This was Joe Vibbert who, only a few months before, had lost the chevrons of a corporal and had been transferred from the Twenty-Seventh Cavalry because he had soundly trounced a sergeant who had offended him.

Vibbert, who was about thirty years of age, had spent a little more than three years in the ranks. Of his life prior to his enlistment nothing was known. He was a heavy drinker and a reckless gambler, but, despite his vices, there were certain traces of refinement about him that led his comrades to believe that this cheerful, devil-may-care roisterer, this champion boxer of his regiment, had at one time been familiar with college halls and stately drawing-rooms.

It was to Vibbert that Tom Twining, the latest recruit of Longaker's troop, now turned and asked:

"What do you make of it, Joe?"

Vibbert thrust out his lower jaw in such a manner that the bowl of his pipe moved upward, and he continued to gaze meditatively for several moments after the distant sampans.

"I haven't made anything of it yet, Tommy," he answered, with that cheerfulness which rarely forsook him. "The captain looks to me like a man who knows he's up against it. These brownies have got him guessing—that's plain enough. But I've an idea that Forbes is either on to their game or off the earth."

"Surely, you don't think, Joe, that——"

"Think, Tommy! What's the use of us fellows in the ranks trying to think when our officers, who are supposed to know it all, are playing hide-and-seek with one another in the enemy's country? Just keep one eye on the captain, the other on the brownies, and your gun where you can grab it quick—that's all that's up to us to do."

"Where are the sampans now?"

"They must be alongside the Bojeador."

"I see the Bojeador, but——"

"Keep your eyes on the brownies yonder, Tommy. The Bojeador can take care of the sampans."

For eight or ten minutes longer, the little group of cavalrymen, taciturn and ever vigilant, remained standing a few paces distant from Longaker and Devoges, both of whom had lapsed into silence. Near them Perigo, smoking a cigar, walked to and fro with his hands behind him.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a loud exclamation from Vibbert.

"By Heaven, Captain——"

But the words that followed never reached the ears of the watchers on the beach.

From the Bojeador there suddenly had risen a flash of red and yellow light, which changed into a great uprushing spiral thing that looked like a rosebud bursting into full and colossal flower. Almost as quickly as it appeared, it died away. Then the watchers on the beach saw flames breaking out in different parts of the gunboat.

From the white-clad Tagalogs at the valley's entrance there rose such a babel of cries that it was difficult to tell whether they were inspired by horror, triumph, or alarm.

But from the little company of American cavalrymen there came no sound.

"Captain, captain, what has happened?" cried Devoges, as, wringing his hands excitedly, he rushed toward Longaker.

The American turned slowly toward the speaker.

"Why, it looks as if we had lost the Bojeador, señor," he answered calmly. "But, hang it all, my cigar is out. May I trouble you for a light?"

Devoges, taken off his guard, stared in amazement as he saw the unruffled demeanor of the man before him. Then he remembered that once upon a time he had heard a Spanish veteran say that in warfare the man most to be dreaded by an enemy is he who trembles with anxiety on the eve of battle, but becomes a steel-nerved, insidious thing of action when the hail of lead begins to fall.

And so the hand of Devoges shook visibly as it held out a lighted cigar to the Yankee captain.

(To be continued.)

A TROLLEY CAR MUTINY.

By Mary Roberts Rinehart.

HOW the passengers, the conductor, the company and Dan Cupid got tangled up.

THE reason for the quarrel has nothing to do with the story; it was the usual affair, in which the Girl declares with every appearance of sincerity that she hopes she will never see him again, and the Man gnaws his lip—fashion having abolished the mustache—and declares savagely that she need not worry, she won't.

The only unusual feature was that the Man was handsome, and did not know it, and the Girl, who was charming, and knew it, was quite unspoiled. Perhaps it was the rain that had ruffled the current of true love; it is hard to say. Tight shoes or a disappointing gown have been known to do it. But whatever it was, the quarrel was a fact.

As he held his umbrella over the Girl, they were as far apart as the poles; the drip was falling on the rim of his hat, and his head being thrown well back—he was *very* much injured—a little stream of water ran down between the shoulders of his gray raincoat. From one pocket protruded the corner of a gilt tied package, and the little widow who stood just back of them smiled and sighed. Once he put his hand down as if to take the box out, but he changed his mind suddenly and reached for his handkerchief instead. The little widow let go of her black skirt in the excitement, and it got quite wet and draggled.

When the Wilkinsville car came along he assisted the Girl in ceremoniously. On the platform she turned and spoke to him.

"You have my purse," she said, icily polite. "May I trouble you for it?" Which meant that she wished to pay her own fare; he was not to dare to do it.

The Man looked uncomfortable, and fished out of one of his big pockets a dainty little patent leather affair with a monogram on it. The little widow thought it beautiful, probably it was one of his gifts to her.

The Girl went to the extreme end of the car and sat down; the Man made his umbrella an excuse to stay on the platform. The car filled up with people. Being bound for a suburb, these people mostly knew each other and bowed.

Half-way to the door sat the Burgess; being a public man, he bowed down one side of the car and up the other. Then he got out the five o'clock edition and began to read.

The car was comfortably full, but not crowded. In fact, as they discovered later, there were precisely twenty-six passengers. Down near the door a baker's boy held a large basket with a white cover, and two or three Wilkinsville matrons had their market baskets piled on the rear platform.

The Girl sat rigidly erect, gazing out of the rain-blurred window across. She was perfectly aware that two eyes, from which the hostility was fast fading, were looking at her from the rear platform, and she straightened her hat with a careless coquetry that was meant to be maddening. She examined the hem of her pretty plaited skirt for mud, and smoothed the wrinkles from her gloves. Then she resumed her expressionless stare out of the window.

The conductor was collecting the fares. He declined her proffered nickel with a jerk of his head toward the door.

"Fare's paid," he said; but the Girl insistently held out the money.

"There is a mistake," she said, flushing uncomfortably. "I intend to pay my own fare."

The conductor took it resignedly.

"Well," he said, "the gentleman back there with the gray raincoat paid your fare, but if you want to pay twice, all right."

He rang up the fare with an air of

great probity, and went on. The Girl flashed a glance of withering scorn at the back of the car, but the solitary passenger there was whistling cheerfully under his breath, and with a little frown the Girl looked out of the window again.

The widow was palpitating with excitement; there was a little excrescence under the glove on the third finger on the Girl's left hand. Perhaps they were engaged!

The rain was beating down mercilessly now—the penetrating, all-pervading rain of February, when to the downpour from overhead is added the melting snow from the housetops, and the ground exudes moisture like a wet sponge. The windows were steamed and opaque and the tracks were twin canals of sluggish yellow water. The car stopped with a jerk, and the conductor thrust his head in.

"Car ahead, please," he said sonorously.

With a sigh the women began to pick up their bundles and gather their skirts. This was an imposition under which the Wilkinsvilleites had long groaned. The car, designated plainly for Wilkinsville, would, toward the rush hours of the evening, take its passengers only a certain distance. Then, relying on the toleration and lack of spirit of the average suburbanite, the passengers were transferred to another car, which might or might not be waiting ahead, and the original car was hurried back to town.

The Burgess got up heavily and folded his paper.

"This is an outrage," he said to the conductor. "This car is marked Wilkinsville, and to refuse to take us there is a clear violation of the company's charter."

Two or three other men upheld him in his protest.

"It's an infernal shame," they said hotly. "These women ought not to have to get out in that downpour. We've paid to go to Wilkinsville; now you take us."

The Man took a hand. When one has just quarreled with the only girl, and she has just told him, quite frankly, that she does not care for him any more, he is in the best possible condition to take up a public grievance.

"Look here," he said, stepping into the doorway, "don't get out, you people. It says Wilkinsville on the front of this car, and we ought to stay on it until it takes us to Wilkinsville."

The conductor reached his hand to the bell-rope. The motorman had taken his place at the reverse end of the car, which was now ready to start toward the city again.

"All out for Wilkinsville," said the conductor. "Take the next car ahead."

An Irish laborer got up and picked up his dinner bucket.

"Come on," he said. "Yez'll do it, anyhow, afther the other car's gone. The gr-r-reat American people is mighty indepindint—on the Four-r-th of July."

He went out then, but the shaft had told. The Burgess stopped massively in the aisle.

"I demand," he said, "that this car take us to Wilkinsville. If it doesn't, there will be trouble."

"I guess there will," said the conductor, "if missin' your dinner will be trouble."

Then the Man spoke again.

"Any one who wishes to should get out now and take the car ahead—if there is one. Those who would like to make this a test case will remain on the car and insist that it go to Wilkinsville."

He glanced at the Girl, but she did not move. A woman with a baby got up irresolutely, looked out at the pouring rain, and sat down again. No one got out; it was mutiny, unanimously agreed upon. The conductor jerked the bell-rope and the car started back to town.

The mutineers were a trifle startled at their own temerity. The Burgess, puffing with indignation, proceeded at once to take the names and addresses of the occupants of the car. The conductor and motorman held a conference on the front platform, with an occasional chuckle and backward grin, and the car went bumping back to town.

Occasional transients got in, hung to a strap for a time and got out. When it reached the down-town district the car became crowded, but the original twenty-six retained their seats, and gradually the car was depleted of all save the Wilkinsvilleites. Conversation became general and animated again; at the car barn a company inspector boarded the car, and

to him an appeal was made. He sustained the conductor, however, and then discreetly departed.

Two drummers getting on soon afterward gazed electrified at the interior of the car.

"Just run over somebody?" one of them asked the conductor, as a burst of general conversation came through the partly open door.

"No," he said surlily.

"Well, what is that in there—Sunday-school convention, or trade union?" the other man asked facetiously.

The conductor ran a scornful eye over the indignant suburbanites within.

"There's twenty-six of them," he said disgustedly, "and they're as crazy as a sky-rocket in a snow-storm." He refused to explain further and went in to collect the fares in moody silence.

There had been some demur about the second fare, but after consultation it was decided to pay it.

"It merely adds to the outrage," the Burgess explained, "and it will make good material when the suits are entered against the company."

The passengers were becoming better acquainted. When a messenger boy took a flying leap and managed to scramble to the platform, he beheld the amazing spectacle of a car full of people in animated conversation with one another. The business men, who were ordinarily retired behind evening papers, were sitting well forward, talking to men across, or with raised voices exchanging suggestions from one end of the car to the other. When a young man in a gray raincoat took from his pocket a box of chocolates and started it on its way around the car, the messenger almost fell off. He applied to the conductor for an explanation.

"Say," he said, pointing through the glass of the door, "what's the trolley party?"

"Lot of damn lunatics," snarled the conductor, and lapsed into morose silence.

At the end of the line the conductor opened the door with a jerk.

"All out," he said. "This car is going back to town."

Some of the mutineers looked hesitatingly from the door to the Burgess; then, encouraged by that gentleman's magnificent indifference to home and supper, settled into their seats again.

"We'll get off at Wilkinsville, and no place else," said the Burgess firmly, and amid a silence broken only by the snapping of watch cases as the mutineers consulted the time, the car started back to town. The Man came in and sat down not far from the Girl, but she only chatted pleasantly with the little widow across from her.

The conductor and motorman were not so mirthful now; there was an air of grim determination about the twenty-six that made the cold night air warm and comfortable by comparison.

In the meantime a common trouble was bringing the people inside closer together. It developed that the woman with the baby had a cloth bag inside of her coat containing three hundred and fifty-five pennies—"one for every day of his life," she explained amiably; "I brought them along, it isn't safe to leave them."

So the pennies were brought out and suitably exchanged, and the next time the fares were paid in copper, leaving the conductor white with rage and visibly bulging.

It was eight o'clock when the car began its next trip from town. The passengers were growing hungry, and when the last transient had gone, leaving only the steady occupants, the Man conversed secretly with the baker's boy. As a result the white covered basket was passed around, with a bag of apples from one of the market baskets; so the Burgess of Wilkinsville and two or three of his councilmen dined frugally that night with the borough street-sweeper, the janitor of the town hall, and other less well-known boroughites.

Two passengers weakened at the end of that trip and got off, leaving only a space of empty seat between the Man and the Girl. The little widow eyed the gap disapprovingly, but the Man stonily read the advertisement for somebody's pork and beans, and the car, after another request from the conductor, a little less courteous this time—that they move into the car ahead—started back to town.

The Girl was feeling very lonely and

unhappy. Once or twice she looked at the relentless profile near her, but it was unresponsively classic. Not for worlds would she have shown less spirit than the other women in the car, and got out. But she was stiff from sitting, her head was aching from excitement and hunger—and just a little from the quarrel.

As for the Man, it is very possible to gaze stonily straight ahead, and yet see clearly every movement of a girl some distance to your left. He had an ache too, but it was a lonely sort of heartache.

As for the little widow, she pulled her black veil over the rim of her hat, feeling very sad and alone, and wondering if she had ever been so foolish when she had some one to love her.

At the barn the car switched off and rolled slowly, echoingly into the dimness of the building. There it was stopped with a jerk, the conductor switched off the light and heat, and with the motorman made his way to the office.

When the Burgess realized what was happening he groped his way to the platform and shouted furiously through the darkness: "Here, you," he called, his voice choked with unutterable adjectives, "you come back here. What do you mean by leaving a car full of passengers in this manner?"

But the only answer was a momentary flash of light as the door into the office opened, and a slam as it closed. There was a buzz of indignation in the car, and the Girl took advantage of the darknes to wipe away a tear.

From the platform the Burgess addressed the mutineers. "And now," he finished, "if two or three gentlemen will come with me to the office over there, I think I can assure a speedy end to this outrageous treatment."

The little widow shivered. What if the Man should go? It would be so like a man to leave at this psychological moment, when the Girl was hungry, and lonely, and forlorn; for the tired eyes and the quiver of a proud chin had not been lost on the woman behind the veil.

The committee shuffled out and struggled through the darkness toward the faint beacon of the office light. After a time they reappeared, led by an apologetic man with a lantern.

Across the aisle some one sighed—she could have sworn it was the Girl. And then in a great burst the lights came on again. The little widow gasped and smiled. For across the way the Man and the Girl sat, side by side, their faces radiant.

The little widow smiled through a mist of tears, then she slipped her hand to the throat of her black gown and lovingly touched a locket with a photograph, which hung there.

ONE OF THE NINE.

By Helen Tompkins.

HOW would you like to be the lawyer in this particular complicated legal situation?

CHAPTER I.

ASSAULT AND BATTERY.

JUDGE ALSTYNE looked rather glumly about him over the crowded court-room.

"We are anxious to get through to-day if possible," he said. "Court has been hanging on a week longer now than it ought to have done. Mr. Clerk, what is the next case?"

"One of simple assault, your honor. The State of Arkansas against John Devine."

John Devine on being called took his place quite calmly. The lawyers began folding their papers and casting relieved glances about them. The last case on the docket had been reached, and when it was closed (a matter of moments, since it was an insignificant one) the spring session of the Circuit Court of the Seventh Judicial District would be at an end.

"Have you a lawyer, Mr. Devine?"

Devine shook his head mildly. "No sir," he said.

The judge looked over the court-room again, this time uncertainly.

"You have been in court some few hours," he said, "and we have despatched quite a lot of business in that time. It is the court's duty to appoint a lawyer to defend you. Have you any choice in the matter?"

Devine's slightly protruding, light-blue eyes swept the array of legal talent critically, then he looked back guilelessly at the judge. "Not the slightest, judge," he said cheerfully and impartially. "A man had as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, I guess."

Judge Alstyne repressed an inclination to smile, and the jury, who had earned a rest, relaxed somewhat from their stiff, rather bored attitudes and grinned boyishly. His honor looked across at Elderberry significantly, but Elderberry made an almost imperceptible gesture of refusal.

"Mr. Dusen," he said then, hesitatingly, "will you act as Mr. Devine's attorney in this case?"

There was a perceptible smile as Dusen, slightly bowing, crossed the court-room to Devine's side. Dusen was a young lawyer only that term admitted to the bar.

Elderberry, between whom and Dusen some slight animosity seemed to exist, could not resist the opportunity to make a caustic remark.

"Go in and win, Dusen," he said offensively. "Remember that the eyes of the world are upon you."

Dusen looked up rather doubtfully. The words were plainly audible, but Elderberry was clearly in favor with the judge. No attention was paid to the remark, save by the jury, who laughed again—a little louder this time.

"I have served my turn in the same way," continued Elderberry. "Defended ten at the last term of court at the appointment of his honor. And only one ever paid me anything. 'There were ten—where are the nine?'"

"In the State penitentiary, the most of them," said Dusen promptly. His words were quite as audible as the other's had been, and Elderberry was just thin-skinned enough to resent the sly dig at his own ill-luck. He gasped like a stranded fish.

"Order in the court-room!" said the judge sharply. "Mr. Sheriff, see that order is enforced. I will fine the next man who speaks unless it is to address the court."

Dusen flushed a little, and the jury became all of a sudden preternaturally grave. Devine looked up at the young man with an expression of something like sympathy.

"Guess you don't stand well with the administration and old whiskers does," he said in a low voice with a slight glance at Elderberry. Dusen picked up some papers without a word.

The case did not last many minutes. As the clerk had said, it was one of simple assault. Devine had been traveling across country from Missouri to Texas with a cart and two horses, and had stopped for several days in Prescott.

He was quiet and inoffensive, but had evidently incurred the ill-will of a class of people possessing more leisure than brains, and they had annoyed him more than once by prowling about the cart in which he slept at night. He tired of this after a time, and one night when the parties were making themselves peculiarly obnoxious he sallied forth and gave two of them a sound drubbing while the rest took to flight. As nobody appeared against him the case was almost immediately dismissed.

He and Dusen were the last to leave the court-room. "How much do I owe you, Mr. Dusen?" he asked as he looked at the young fellow with approving eyes.

"Nothing at all, Mr. Devine," said Dusen with a laugh. "I did nothing, you know. If I had——"

Devine's hand went back into his pocket slowly.

"Somehow I feel like I would like to be the one to pay you your first fee, sir," he said quietly. "I believe that I dropped a letter back there in the court-room. Will you wait for me a minute?"

Dusen nodded and stopped. He noticed that Devine's face had a shadow on it. The man hurried back inside the building again while Dusen waited outside a little impatiently.

"Hello, Dusen!" said a voice at his elbow. "Going down town?"

Dusen shook his head.

"I am waiting for a man," he said briefly. "I am going on to my office then, Clark. I have some work to do."

Clark lowered his voice a little. Perhaps he had caught a fleeting glimpse of the man to whom Dusen had been talking when he came up.

"Rather a queer fish that new client of yours, Dusen," he said. "I don't mind telling you that I would cut loose from him as soon as I decently could."

"He seemed rather a decent sort of fellow to me," said Dusen distantly. He was anxious to get rid of Clark.

Devine came out suddenly just behind the two men. His face was flushed, and he appeared slightly agitated. Clark, with a look at him, walked away.

"Did you find your letter, Mr. Devine?" Perhaps it was the suspicion in Clark's words, slightly resented, which tended to make Dusen's own tones more cordial.

The color faded slowly out of Devine's face. "My letter, eh," he said stupidly. "Oh, yes—I found it all right!" But Dusen noticed that he did not produce it.

"I asked you about your fee, Mr. Dusen," he said, and you were kind enough to say that you did not mean to charge me anything. I had meant to pay it anyway, but I find—if you will be good enough to take my note for the amount, sir, and allow me to pay it when I get back to my old home in Missouri I would appreciate it."

"Why certainly, Mr. Devine, I told you, you know, that you owed me nothing."

Devine looked at the shabby clothing of the man before him a little sharply. "Thank you, sir," he said simply, and the two separated.

CHAPTER II.

AN ARREST.

Dusen went to see a girl whom he liked that evening. And on the strength of his admission to the ranks of the legal luminaries and his first case, which he assured her gravely he had won as easily as possible, he stayed a little later than usual. So it was quite midnight when he reached his boarding-house, and later still, almost one o'clock, when he fell asleep.

He was aroused by a furious knocking on his bedroom door.

"Wake up, Dusen! Let me in!"

Still dazed with sleep, Dusen threw up the window.

"What do you want, Clark?" he said to the man in the hall outside.

"It's your client, Dusen. He is under arrest again—for murder this time!"

Dusen was dressing himself hurriedly. By this time the whole house was aroused.

"What did I tell you about Devine, Dusen?" Clark spluttered. "Didn't I tell you that you had better leave him alone—that the man was a desperate character?"

Dusen was finding his clothing slightly refractory. He was excited himself, and was putting his coat on wrong side out when he noticed his mistake.

"What's the matter, Clark? Or is this all a tempest in a teapot? Who has been killed, and how do you know that Devine did it; and how did he come to send for me?"

"Why, the boys have been suspicious for a long time; Devine acted queer—has acted queer ever since he came to town. Had plenty of money apparently, but would give no account of himself. And he kept the cart closed and locked, and resented it like the devil when anybody went near it."

"He was traveling alone, wasn't he?"

"He was *supposed* to be traveling alone, yes. Nobody has been seen but himself, but children, who prowled about the cart occasionally, say that they heard voices and quarreling more than once. Lately there has been nothing heard. And to-night the sheriff got this letter."

He handed the lawyer the envelope, and watched him narrowly while he opened it and read the inclosure.

OZARK, MISSOURI,

October 8th, 1892.

SHERIFF NEVADA COUNTY.

DEAR SIR: My stepson, John Burks, disappeared about six weeks ago, and has not since been heard from.

He had frequently been seen in company with John Devine, a man half tramp and half pedler, who left here about that time for Texas. Have heard that Burks has been seen in the vicinity of Prescott.

He was well-to-do—had ten thousand dollars in bank, and the day before his disappearance he sold his farm and stock for ten thousand more, and withdrew the whole from the bank. He was a widower without near relatives, and about fifty years of age.

He was slightly bald and wore false teeth. The middle tooth on the right-hand side was gone and he had replaced it with a bit of bone which he had fastened in place with a brass rivet. This may help to identify the body if you find that he has met with foul play.

Be kind enough to let us hear as soon as possible if the men—either of them—have been seen in your part of the country. I cannot give an accurate description of Devine, as I only saw him once or twice.

He is of medium height, has light hair and rather prominent blue eyes; and he walks with a slight limp, probably affected. He is supposed here to be wanted on grave charges somewhere in the East. Yours truly,

SARAH BURKS.

Dusen handed Clark the letter quietly enough.

"What next?" he said.

"Why, the sheriff caught on at once, of course. He spoke to me and to Abe Henley, and we went out to Devine's camp about ten o'clock, or maybe a little later. Everything was as dark as Egypt—not a spark of light to be seen. By that time the news had spread a little, and Elderberry, the constable, Hammett, and several of the boys were following us, keeping well out of the way.

"For all the cart was so dark, I don't believe that Devine was asleep. The sheriff stepped up to it, and called: 'Here, you Devine! Come out of there and let us have a look at you. I have a warrant for your arrest.'

"He was speaking pretty rough, I guess, and not overly respectful. Anyway, all at once we heard the snap of a trigger, and Devine said as cool as a cucumber.

"'If you are really the sheriff and have men enough to enforce your demands you might lower your voice a little, drop your gun, and speak as a gentleman to a gentleman. I am not deaf. But if you are spokesman for a crowd of drunken hoodlums—well, I am not alone and I am armed. You had better get out.'

"'I am the sheriff all right,' said Graham in a lower voice, 'and I guess that you are about right, Devine. You see I thought that you were asleep.'

"'What's the charge against me?' said Devine. He opened the door of the cart and showed himself then. He was fully dressed, too—didn't look much to me like he had been asleep.

"'Ugly enough, Mr. Devine. Murder—that is what it is,' said the sheriff.

"'All right. Will one of you fellows take a message to Dusen for me? I guess that he will serve my turn as well as the next. You are on the wrong trail, boys, but I guess that *that* is about what I would say if I was guilty, so it won't count for anything. Here's my popgun, Graham.'

"The sheriff picked up the gun. As he did so Elderberry whispered something to him. I didn't catch what it was, but they mostly run together, you know. Then Devine loosened a belt from around his waist.

"'There's twenty thousand dollars in gold in this, Graham,' he said. 'I'll ask you to take charge of it, please.'

"There was as many as a dozen torches burning then, and everything was as light as day. I saw Elderberry's eyes bulge out when he saw the heavy belt in Graham's hands and heard what Devine said about the gold, and he whispered to Graham again.

"'See here, Devine,' said the sheriff in a whisper, but not so low that I didn't hear it. 'I don't know what kind of a hole this is you are in, but I would like to see you get a square deal.

"'You had better get Elderberry, here to represent you instead of Dusen. Dusen is well enough, I dare say, but he is a green hand, and, between you and me, he don't stand any too well with Alstyne. Elderberry is your man.'

"'Oh, I guess not!' said Devine coolly. 'You see, I am sorter acquainted with Dusen and like his ways. Better give the young fellows a show, Elderberry!' he called out, and then—right then—I knew that when the trial come on Elderberry would be the man you would have to fight. I got a look at his face.

"Then Devine turned to me.

"'Was you the fellow that said you would take that message to Dusen for me?' he said, and I hiked off like a flash."

They had almost reached the cart now, both of the men walking hurriedly. There they found the situation unchanged. Devine looked at Dusen quizzically, but his eyes were anxious.

"I am not guilty, Mr. Dusen," he said quietly, "but I am free to confess that the whole thing is going to have a nasty look—very. Will you take charge of my interests?"

Dusen nodded.

"You don't look to me like an understudy for Cain, you know, Devine," he said flatly. "Yes, I will look after you. And you are not talking for publication, you know. Let the other fellows do that."

Devine nodded. "All right!" he said indifferently.

"We will have to search the cart, you know, Mr. Devine," said the sheriff.

"Just as you say," said the former, as he climbed down from the apron stiffly. For the first time Dusen saw that there was a slight embarrassment in his manner.

"I thought you said, when I called on you to surrender, that you were not alone," said Graham suspiciously.

"I did. Come on, Grantley, old boy! I guess that Arkansas will have to take care of us for a while."

There was a faint rustling inside the cart and a huge dog, the largest the men had ever seen, followed Devine to the ground. He looked at the ring of unfriendly faces surrounding his master menacingly from his heavy-lidded, bloodshot eyes, but not a growl escaped him. Devine spoke to him quietly, and the beast lay down at his feet.

The cart was speedily emptied. There was a heap of provisions—mostly tinned goods—a mattress and bedding, a dozen books—treatises, or some kind of scientific works—a valise containing well-worn clothing, and a long, narrow box, rather heavy, and fastened with a padlock.

"Burst the lock in with an ax, boys," said the sheriff roughly.

This was easier said than done. However, it was accomplished at last and the lid of the chest was forced open. The chest itself was found to be packed also with old clothing.

"We are too late to find the body, boys," said Graham briefly. "He must have recently buried it, however, for I'll swear the smell of this chest is enough to sicken anybody."

"What did you do with Burks' body?" asked Elderberry suddenly.

Dusen took a step forward, but he need not have gone to the trouble to do so.

"Wants me not only to confess to a murder that I never even dreamed of, but to produce a body as well!" said Devine plaintively. "Look here, Graham, I am willing to help you fellows all I can, but this is really asking too much."

"It's getting daylight," said Dusen suddenly. "Bring your prisoner up to the hotel, will you, Graham? We can hold the inquest (if the body is found) and the examining trial there."

"All right," said the sheriff morosely. "I wish I could find the body, though."

A cry from one of the men startled him.

"What is it, Abe?" he called out sharply.

"There is a hole here, sir, just under the cart, and it has only recently been filled up. I should not wonder——"

A shovel was produced, and he began digging. Almost the first shovelful of earth thrown out contained a part of the cremated bones of a human arm. Dusen looked at Devine a little startled.

"I should like to be quite sure that you have told me the truth, Devine," he said simply.

"I have, sir. Good Lord, I told you that the thing was going to look black enough, didn't I? I am not guilty, Mr. Dusen."

"All right!" said the young man briefly, but his face did not clear. He walked over to where the men were standing about that ugly hole in the ground and the little pile of bones half burned and charred with fire.

"Rather plain case, sir," said Elderberry triumphantly, as he pointed to two rows of what had evidently been false teeth, and holding up a torch he read

an extract from the letter which had been in Dusen's hand not long before.

"He wore artificial teeth—both upper and lower plates. The middle tooth on the right hand side was gone, and he had replaced it with a bit of bone held in place by a brass rivet."

He held up the plates triumphantly. Sure enough, the middle incisor was missing, and there was a bit of substance in its place that looked like bone and was held in place by a little brass rivet.

Elderberry looked at Graham, and Clark nudged Dusen interestedly. "Don't that beat the devil, though?" he said emphatically.

CHAPTER III.

THE CORONER TAKES A HAND.

THE sun was pretty well up when they had reached the hotel, and the men had fortified themselves with breakfast. Devine, whose paleness and constraint had passed away, ate his own meal with enjoyment. Dusen was more anxious.

"You will have to be open with me about this matter, Devine," he said in a low voice. "I believe in you somehow, but the thing has a bad look. One thing is certain; it is up to me to make the fight of my life right here in the beginning. I wish that I was a better lawyer."

"Oh, you are good enough, I guess," said Devine cheerfully. "I have been in tighter places than this." His face grew grave. "I want to say something to you, though, Dusen, and I don't know of a better way or a better time to say it.

"I can't be thoroughly open with you, and there is no use saying that I will. The understanding between us had better be that you will do your best for me, and that I will be as straightforward as possible. Is it a bargain?"

"It will have to be," said Dusen after a pause. "In the first place, is it true what the letter says?"

"In the main, yes. Burks was a queer sort of fish that I fell in with while I was in Ozark. He *did* convert everything he had into money (he thought a lot of me, you see, God knows why), and we did leave Ozark together."

"With the money?"

Devine looked at him whimsically.

"With the money, yes, sir."

"It was not his bones that were dug up—I judge they were not his—Devine?"

"No sir, they were not."

"When, where, and under what circumstances did he leave you?"

There was a long pause.

"I guess those are some of the questions I can't answer, sir," he said.

Dusen sighed.

"Have you forgotten the money which you turned over to Graham?" he said, taking another tack. "Have you forgotten that the amount tallies exactly with that withdrawn from the Ozark Bank by Burks?"

"I have not forgotten, sir."

"What about the money, Devine?"

"It is honestly mine, sir, every cent of it."

Graham approached with a sheaf of telegrams.

"We have opened communication with Ozark, Devine," he said, "and it seems that you are wanted there sure enough—badly. You see Burks left there very hurriedly, and there are some little claims——"

"I guess not," said Devine hastily. A new look which Dusen found it impossible to interpret crossed his face.

"Some little claims which people owe him, and they are anxious to have them settled."

"Oh!" said Devine, with symptoms of relief. "Burks was a square man, I guess. I always found him so."

"His mother has had a stroke of paralysis, they say. We wanted her to come on for the purpose of identifying Burks' things," said Graham.

"Stepmother, I guess," said Devine. "Burks' mother has been dead years and years, I guess! And the second Mrs. Burks was a regular Tartar according to all accounts.

"I heard a lot about her when I was in Ozark, and Burks told me a lot more. Hope to the Lord her paralysis will hold out"—he grinned impudently—"until after they *hang* me.

"Dusen, I am a whole lot more afraid of her than I am of the law. All she wants is poor Burks' money." He looked

at Dusen, and for the first time a shadow of fear crossed his face. "You don't think that there is any danger of her getting *that,* do you?"

Dusen looked at him suspiciously.

"You don't know anything about *that,* you know," he said significantly.

"That's so!" said Devine; but the troubled look did not leave his face. "So far as identifying the things are concerned, I'll do that quick enough.

"Most of them are mine, although a few of the old clothes belong to Burks. He wasn't much of a dude, Burks wasn't. The horses and cart are mine." He became slightly confused. "And the books——."

Elderberry had strolled up and was listening curiously.

"You are not on the witness stand, you know, Devine," said Dusen, and Elderberry and Graham walked out of earshot.

"I am not going to be a very good client, I am afraid, Mr. Dusen," said Devine apologetically. "I guess I talk too much. That's how Burks and me come to disagree."

"Then you did quarrel?" asked Dusen sharply.

"No—I can't say that it amounted to that exactly. We got tired of each other, and I told him so."

"But you parted on good terms, you two? You see, Devine, I believe in you somehow, and I must advertise for Burks."

"He'll never see it if you do," said Devine quickly. "Burks is not a reading man, Mr. Dusen."

"I wish that you would tell me about those bones," said Dusen. "I wish that you would tell me when Burks left you, and why. I wish that you would tell me how John Devine, 'half tramp and half pedler,' according to Ozark reports, comes to be in possession of twenty thousand dollars, the exact sum which Burks left home with."

"I wish that I could tell you, Mr. Dusen," said Devine regretfully. "It makes it mighty hard for you, I know. I'll swear, though, that Burks is alive and well; that the money is mine; and that no other living man or dead ghost has the slightest claim upon it. I'll swear that I have no more idea of who that skeleton belonged to in the flesh than I have of the identity of the man who 'struck Billy Patterson,' and that when Devine and Burks parted they parted on the friendliest possible terms. You may believe all this or not, Mr. Dusen. It is the truth."

"I do believe it," said Dusen simply.

"Very well, then. Have another hot biscuit, sir. They can't hang me for killing a man who is alive and well, can they?"

But Dusen only shook his head, and declined to discuss the matter any further.

The coroner's inquest was postponed until the next day, and several people came down from Ozark to attend that and the examining trial which followed hard upon it.

Devine's identity was not clearly established except upon his own admission, as he had been but little known in Ozark save by the deceased and the deceased's stepmother, who was lying at the point of death. But the Ozark people swore positively that the bones belonged to Burks, and when the inquest was over they were carried back to Ozark and buried in the family burial-ground under his name.

They also swore that the horses and cart, the books, and every scrap of clothing found in Devine's possession belonged to the man from Ozark. The money turned over by Devine to the sheriff—not all of it, but a part—was positively identified by the cashier of the Ozark Bank as money which he had paid out to the dead man. Elderberry was retained at a handsome fee to aid the prosecution.

As a consequence of the examining trial—of course Dusen had hardly hoped for anything else—Devine was held on the charge of murder and was denied bail.

"I hope this case won't cost you anything, Dusen," he said one day, and to the lawyer's surprise there were tears in Devine's eyes. "You have been mighty straight with me, sir, and I want you to know that I appreciate it. You have never said anything about a fee."

"You are a poor man so far as I know, Devine," said Dusen coolly. "I don't mind telling you, though, that you are

not in my debt. I am a young lawyer, you know; and a case like this, where the interest is so widespread, is worth a lot to me as a cold-blooded proposition. But if the money identified as belonging to Burks is all you have——"

"Every cent that I have in the world!" said Devine, showing his first signs of agitation. "But it's no matter, Mr. Dusen. I have made out a note for five thousand dollars payable to you the day of the trial. I have friends, sir, if I am——"

Dusen frowned.

"Can your friends help you any?" he asked pointedly.

"No, sir, except in a financial way, and in the matter of identification—a thing which is not disputed. They would testify to my good character, too. It's all a lie—that business about my being wanted back East—and just shows what imagination can do when a fellow gets a bad name and is down on his luck. I don't owe a cent in the world, and was never in jail a day in my life." He waited a minute. "Is the note all right, Mr. Dusen?" he asked then.

"Yes, it's all right," said Dusen soothingly. He was not thinking of the note.

Devine stared at him wistfully.

"We have got to liking each other pretty well, sir," he said. "I hope that you will not consider it a bit of impertinence in me to say so? You see, your appearance struck me somehow that first day in the court-room. I had a family once, you know—ages and ages ago, it seems to me now; a wife and two children. The girl died when my wife did, but the boy lived to be ten years old. Well, sir, I never see you that you don't remind me of him some way."

He choked a little and turned and walked to the window.

"I like you, too, Devine," said Dusen simply. "I wish that I could do more for you. I wish that you would let me take another lawyer into the case. Five thousand dollars would be enough to secure a dozen, any one of them better than I am."

"No, sir—I won't have it!" protested Devine hotly. "I have my reasons, sir, and they are good ones to my mind."

"All right," said Dusen patiently. "Your feelings do your friendship credit, Mr. Devine, but they speak more for your heart than your head. They are more flattering thatwise."

"I saw you pass the jail with a young girl yesterday, Mr. Dusen," said the prisoner, as if anxious to change the subject. "I wonder if you would mind telling me about her."

"It was Marian Langley," said Dusen, uneasily conscious that he was blushing like a girl. "We have been sweethearts all of our lives, and expect to be married some day—when I am able to take care of her," he added with a sigh.

Devine's mind was off at a tangent again, and he was thinking of something else. "Thank you, sir," he said absently. "Will you write a letter for me, please, sir?" he added a little later.

The lawyer took his note-book from his pocket.

"To somebody at Ozark?" he asked idly.

"No, sir. To Rafael Ortello, Albuquerque, New Mexico. He is a sheep-herder, and I—I have interests down there. Have you got the address, sir? Oh, yes—Box 231, R. F. D. He is working for a man named Denny down there."

"Shall I put his employer's name down also?"

"No, sir; I guess not. I dare say Rafael is pretty well known down there." He hesitated a little. "I guess that you will have to give me a little time," he said then. "It's not a very easy letter to write."

The lawyer felt but little curiosity on the subject. He looked beyond Devine to the square of sunlight that came through the narrow grating of the window of the cell, and he wondered how it would seem to be shut out from the world and all that made life sweet, and perhaps a prospect of a tragic end at the last.

When he turned Devine was staring at him. "Write this," he said.

DEAR RAFAEL:

In the matter of the dispute between us I am obliged to say that as usual I suppose you were in the right. I will not be able to come to Albuquerque as I

had meant to do, for I am in trouble here over the disappearance of one John Burks, about whom I may have written you. I am sure my interests there are safe in your hands. My trial comes off in three weeks.

Your old friend,
DEVINE.

"There, now, that is over," he said cheerfully. "Get it off to-day, Mr. Dusen, please. Ortello may not be about Albuquerque in God knows how long. I would like for him to have that letter as soon as possible."

It was the next day that Elderberry and Dusen had trouble. The older lawyer chose a peculiarly unfortunate time to twit the younger on the slender chances of his client, and Dusen promptly knocked him down. The older lawyer went off muttering.

Devine, who heard about the incident later in the day, turned to Dusen, after thinking a moment, and said:

"Please let me have my note again, Mr. Dusen. I want to change the figures a little. That blow was worth a thousand more of any man's money."

The young lawyer, who hadn't the faintest idea of ever getting a cent of the money, surrendered the note with a laugh.

CHAPTER IV.

AN AMAZING CONCLUSION.

DAYS drifted by. Newspaper men came, stared, and interviewed. Devine was a most promising subject, and the reporters wrote the most astonishing things imaginable about his case—things that shocked Dusen, and filled Devine, who assured his lawyer that "stringing" the boys was "dead easy," with unholy glee. He told the most incredible stories of hairbreadth escapes by land and sea, by flood and fire, from the pistol and the knife.

He was by turns a pirate, a highway robber, and always a murderer. The whole demeanor of the man under this stimulus seemed to change.

The day of the trial came at last.

"Well, sir," said Devine gravely, "the day has come, sir, and likewise—the man. I believe that you are more nervous than I am."

Dusen *was* nervous. His face was pale, and he had some difficulty in controlling his agitation.

"I am nervous," he said. "I am afraid that you never have realized the gravity of the situation, Devine."

Devine stared.

"I had a lot of newspapers brought in last night," he said. "I guess that you are a made man, sir, any way the cat jumps. The *Gazette,* the *Globe,* and the *Republic* all agree that you are the coming man. The *Globe* must have got their pictures slightly mixed. If you had the face on you that they had in that picture, I would be afraid to meet you on a dark night. You look like a cross between Brigham Young and a boodler, sir."

Dusen was thinking of something else.

"Yes, the case has been the making of me," he said in a low voice. "I have all the business I can look after now, Devine, and Marian and I are to be married in the spring."

"I'll give you a set of artificial teeth for a wedding present, if they don't hang me first," said Devine coolly. "Many folk in town, Mr. Dusen?"

"Yes, quite a number. By the way, an old friend of yours from Ozark is here, Devine. Mrs. Burks registered at the hotel last night. I think that she has asked to be allowed to see you this morning."

"No, no, no! Mr. Dusen, don't say that, sir. She was lying at the point of death, you know, sir, and paralysis is a tenacious disease. That is what the doctors said when I asked them about it. She *can't* have got well!"

Dusen turned sharply.

Devine, a picture of the most abject terror, was huddled in the corner of the cell, shaking like a leaf.

"I refuse to see her, sir," he stuttered. "The law will have to protect me. *You* sha'n't leave me, Mr. Dusen, sir. I swear I won't be left alone. I never counted on this, sir."

Dusen looked at him wonderingly.

"She will not be allowed to see you without your consent, Devine," he said slowly.

Devine was recovering from his fright—but slowly.

A drift of color came back to his face

—he wiped the heavy drops of moisture from his brow, and coughed apologetically.

"By George, sir, you certainly did give me a turn," he said in a lower voice, grinning sheepishly. "When they turn me loose, sir, to-day——"

"*If* they turn you loose, Devine."

"Certainly. If they turn me loose, will the law protect me, Mr. Dusen? Honest? A man can't be put in jeopardy twice for the same offense I have heard——"

Dusen frowned at his levity.

"I don't understand you," he said.

"No, sir, I don't suppose you do. You see, you didn't know the old lady like—her son did. And he certainly did talk to me about her a sight."

True to his promise, Dusen, on some pretext, prevented Mrs. Burks from entering the jail.

When the case was opened, the court-room was packed. The fact that the young lawyer had no one associated with him in the case had turned general public sentiment slightly in Devine's favor. Elderberry, although a successful lawyer, was not popular with the masses.

It was ten o'clock when the case was called. There had been some difficulty in impaneling a jury. The case had excited such widespread interest that but few people could be found who were not subject to challenge.

"I have not been honest with you, Dusen," said the prisoner. "I am going to tax your good nature and friendship very heavily, I am afraid. I am just simply an eccentric old man, Mr. Dusen. You must remember that." He arose and walked forward to the witness-stand.

Just as the oath was about to be administered a cry rang through the court-room, and a thin, wiry female, clad in rusty black and brandishing a peculiarly aggressive-looking umbrella, rose agitatedly from her seat.

"You—*John!*" she called.

"There, sir," said Devine, turning his back on the judge and facing Dusen. "It's all off, I guess."

"Silence in the court-room!" thundered Alstyne, who was furious. But the woman evidently had views of her own.

"I knew that you were born to be hung, John Burks!" she quavered.

"John Burks!" exclaimed the astounded judge.

"Yes, your honor. Plain John Burks."

"It is a trick of the defense, your honor," said Elderberry faintly. "Aware of the weakness of their case, they have resorted——"

"If your honor will allow me, I will make a clean breast of the whole thing," said Devine calmly. "To begin with, Mr. Dusen is absolutely ignorant of the facts in the case. My name *is* John Burks, and I left Ozark in company with Devine some time ago.

"It was our intention to go to South America together, but we soon began, not to quarrel, but to disagree. He was a gloomy-tempered sort of man, and while he was as straight and honest as the day is long, he couldn't see much good in the rest of the world. He had been a sort of doctor or something, and I believe that he told me that he had sold some kind of patent medicine. Anyway, he had a skeleton, and said that he had used it in his business. He carried it in a long box. Said he had got sorter attached to it some way, and felt like it was people. When we decided to part company, which was several days before I reached Prescott, he left the skeleton with me, and I promised to bury it, which I did."

"Why did you conceal your identity?" asked the judge.

"It was a wager, sir, partly. Devine always complained that the poor were downtrodden, and that, if I was peculiar, and *not* John Burks, a man who was known to have money, I would be in trouble in less than a week. And I suggested that we change names. He demurred to this at first, but afterward agreed to it. He was to drop out of sight, and, as Rafael Ortello, wait until he heard from me.

"I, on my part, was to take the name of John Devine, under no circumstances to use any part of the money which he claimed constituted the whole difference between us, and to take anything that was coming to me without kicking.

"On no account was I to avail my-

self of any aid that would come to me from a discarding of the name of Devine or the resumption of that of Burks.

"After all, your honor"—here he faced the judge with a sudden wistfulness—"what would it have availed me if I had broken my promise? A dozen men positively identified the bones as those of Burks. It was a mistake to bury my artificial teeth with the skeleton, I admit.

"It was only a whim of mine. The only thing I could do I did—wrote to Devine at Albuquerque and told him of my plight. I see him here in the court-room now, your honor."

Alstyne's brow was black.

"Dismiss the case!" he said sharply.

A few formalities followed.

"Here is your money, Mr. Dusen," said Devine—or Burks—in a whisper. "I heard Elderberry say, 'I defended ten, and only one ever paid me anything. Where are the nine?' Well, Mr. Dusen, here is one of the nine."

Dusen shook his head.

"You don't owe me so much, De—Burks," he said. "I am willing to take a reasonable fee."

"Looked like you, my boy did," said Dusen's client, reminiscently, and the old catch came into his voice. "I dare say he would have followed the law if he had lived. He looked like it. And I haven't got chick or child in the world."

Here Burks, alias Devine, looked across the court-room to where a young girl was standing. She was looking at the young lawyer, and there was a knot of violets on her white frock.

"Nice-looking girl," he said. "She seems to be looking for you, sir. I am glad to help start you two children to housekeeping, sir. Here is your money."

Dusen hesitated.

"Your mother is asking for you," he said. "I think that she is waiting for you at the door."

"For me? Gracious Heavens!" A look of terror took the place of the placid content in Burks' face. "Please tell her that I have gone to South America, Dusen, that's a good fellow," he begged. "Tell her that you saw me start!"

He turned and swung himself out of the low window like a boy. Dusen smiled, and joined the throng of people now leaving the court-room. On the steps outside, Marian Langley smiled and nodded to him, and the two walked away together.

A TINY SHOE.

Anonymous.

THEY found him by the roadside dead,
A ragged tramp unknown;
His face upturned in mute despair,
His helpless arms outthrown.
The lark above him sang a song
Of greeting to the day,
The breeze blew fresh and sweet, and stirred
His hair in wanton play.

They found no clue to home or name,
But tied with ribbon blue
They found a package, and it held
A baby's tiny shoe.
Half worn and old, a button off,
It seemed a sacred thing;
With reverence they wrapped it close
And tied the faded string.

And laid it on the peaceful breast
That kept the secret well;
And God will know and understand
The story it will tell
Of happy times and peaceful home
That dead tramp sometime knew,
Whose only relic left him was
The baby's tiny shoe.

LITTLE DUNNY WEAVER.*

By Philip Verrill Mighels,

Author of "The Inevitable," "Bruvver Jim's Baby," "The Ultimate Passion," Etc.

A romantic love story of the Western mountains and lumber-camps.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

SYLVIA WEAVER and her six-year-old brother, Dunny, are on their way from Connecticut to Tamarack, in the mountains of the West, where she is to marry Jerry Kirk, a middle-aged friend of her father's whom she has never seen. On the train is Allan Kennedy, a young man who falls in love with her, and she with him, though loyalty seals her lips.

The train is stalled in the snow. Jerry comes over the mountains on skis, carrying provisions. Not knowing him, Sylvia questions him about himself, expressing her belief that Jerry is a young man. Though hurt, he quiets her compunctions when she discovers his indentity. Jerry sees the growing affection between Sylvia and Allan. After reaching Tamarack he tells her to take time to think the situation over. Delay does not help her to a solution. Jerry finally writes that he is coming to "have a talk," at the same time a letter from Allan says that he will stop at Tamarack to see her. Sylvia talks with Allan. Later she meets Jerry, but does not tell him that she has seen Allan. Jerry afterward hears the truth from a busybody.

Dunny, meantime, finds a sick burro which has been abandoned by Chinese drivers. He leads the beast home and with the assistance of Tid Flack, a philosophic shoemaker, restores it to health.

Jerry is biding his time with Sylvia, and she, as the weeks pass, feels more and more kindly toward him, though she knows that now her heart is with Allan. There are other suitors for her hand—virtually all the unmarried men in the town. She has almost made up her mind to try to forget Allan and marry Jerry, when one day he is called to a neighboring town, funds belonging to him and his partner having been stolen by stage-robbers.

In the absence of Jerry, Dunny goes by himself for a ride on the burro. The call of a passing Chinese driver brings back to the burro memories which cause him to run away with his small rider All through the afternoon the burro keeps on up into the mountains at a rapid walk, and Dunny cannot make him turn. At dark they stumble into the camp of the stage-robbers, one of whom fires, blinding the burro, which throws Dunny to the ground. The boy is stunned. When he comes to, he finds himself in a cabin, surrounded by rough men, the leader of whom treats him kindly, though some of the more suspicious ones think that he should be put out of the way.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BREWING MUTINY.

TWO long days had passed in the crushed-in cabin occupied by the five highway robbers in hiding, and the little chap who had come among them so strangely was neither well nor happy. His head was sore, a touch of fever had followed his hurt and the dread and excitement of his ride, and he was worried.

The men about him were apparently growing rougher all the time. Bill was openly hostile to his presence and sullenly revolting against the leader's attitude. The others were divided in opinion as to what should be done, for Zack supported all or any schemes to be rid of the child, while Smoky faithfully backed the decisions of his chief.

The half-breed, Chenook, said little or nothing. To which of the factions he would lend his weight, should conflict presently arise in the company, could not be known.

Little Dunny made no complaint. He clung to his strong friend Larry in affection quite unquestioning, asking only for Sylvia, wishing only that the outlaw chief would take him home to Tamarack whensoever he could get the time.

*Began March All-Story Magazine. Single copies, 10 cents.

The food was poor and meager; the nights were cold. He was weak and sick and spiritless.

"Don't you like it here?" inquired the leader, this morning of the third dread day. "Don't you like it a little?"

And Dunny answered, "Pretty well."

"Poor little customer," the leader muttered to himself. "He's got a heap of sand."

Zack and Smoky sat beside the table, while the breakfast simmered on the fire. Chenook was out by the trail, on guard. Bill was sitting on a log of wood, his rifle in his hands. He fondled it idly.

"How long you goin' to keep this racket up?" he asked, with no attempt at concealment of his hate for little Dunny. "S'pose you'll be wantin' us to see him home pretty soon."

"That's where he belongs," replied the leader, in his big, gruff voice. "I might do worse than take him back."

Bill delivered a string of oaths that he found no longer containable.

"You're headin' the whole fool gang to the pen and fifteen years of labor, you are!" he concluded, in his wrath. "For just about two cents I'd shoot——"

"Stow it, Bill!" interrupted the chief, in a warning command. "Don't make no cracks at me or the kid, 'bout what you'll do. Your doctor wouldn't advise you no such way."

"Well—what'll you do?" demanded Bill, in defiance.

The leader placed little Dunny in a bunk, for the little man was again asleep. Walking deliberately over to the angered Bill, the master outlaw regarded him calmly, while a cold, hard glitter came in his eyes.

"Don't ask me to begin inventin' ways; I'd break every bone in your carcass, Bill," he said. "I might git to feelin' 'thusiastic and sweatin' to tackle the job."

"You've worked your bulldozin' racket to the bed-rock, Bart, and don't you fergit it," Bill replied, relapsing into sullen fury. "We ain't a-goin' to stand this right along."

"We?" repeated Bart. "We? And who is we? You two, you, Zack and Smoky?"

"Not me," said Smoky, with alacrity.

"We've got some rights," protested Zack, in weak support of Bill.

"Well, any time you want to break with me, you pack and git," responded the leader, addressing the malcontents comprehensively.

"You know where you'll come to anchor. The mountains is fuller of deputy sheriffs than a clam's full of meat."

"Then what you keepin' the kid fer, drawin' every cuss in Tamarack 'round the shack?" inquired Bill.

"How many have we drawed by this?" replied Bart. "There ain't bin a man within a mile or more of the place."

"You don't know when they'll git here, though."

"When they do they ain't a comin' with weapons, not if they're hunting fer the kid," argued the chief, with logic unerring. "They don't know what's waitin' here to stand off law and a posse."

Zack said: "That's kerrect." He wished to reinstate himself in the leader's favor.

Bill glared in Zack's direction, fully aware he was losing support.

"How long you goin' to keep this up, is what I want to know?" he repeated. "If the kid could ride up here alone, he kin go back home same way. Start him off on his burro, headed fer Tamarack, and let his folks maybe find him on the trail."

"He'd tell 'em all about us here," objected Smoky.

"It can't be done to-day," decided the chief. "He's sick. Give him a show to git a little better."

Bill began to swear again. His anger rose in proportion as he felt the leader knew of the danger to them all attending the presence of the helpless child in the cabin.

"When the time comes, Larry Bart," he said, "and we're ketched like a lot of crawlin' rats, and all on account of you bein' soft as a rotten pear over this here brat—why, you look out fer trouble, here in camp."

Bart was keenly aware of the risk he was hourly incurring with his sick little guest beneath the roof, but he meant to stand his ground.

He had almost been in a mood to beg

for time—to appeal to the something decent remaining in his lawless following. Now, however, he became the hard, unflinching master once again.

"Bill, don't you give yourself away fer a treacherous sneak," he said. "I'd just as soon kill you as a rattler. You know that. And again, you wouldn't dare to shoot at me unless I was dead as a salted cod. What's the matter with breakfast, anyhow? No wonder we're all on the fight."

The breakfast was presently served. It consisted of half-cooked beans and some stuff that passed for coffee.

Bart awakened the pale little fellow in the berth, and brought him to the table. He sat on the great, rough knee, his little cheek laid wearily on the outlaw's coat, his dulled eyes listlessly turning from one of the men to another.

"Dunny, can't you eat a little breakfast?" queried Bart, in attempted tenderness. "Not a little bite?"

Dunny slowly shook his head.

"How you feelin' to-day?" inquired the man.

"Not—very—well," faltered the little guest, and his lip was quivering, despite himself.

Bart arose without attempting to eat. He walked up and down with the childish form in his arms, trying to hum at a song and gently patting the little fellow's back with his comforting hand.

"Game little shaver," commented Smoky. "Sort of a nice little tike."

Bill and Zack made no observations, though Zack, to do him justice, felt a little sympathetic himself.

And so that Saturday, beautiful beyond expression, as to sunshine, warmth, and summer glory, passed as the days before had passed, and the outlaws bided time, in their mountain concealment.

In the afternoon the big, brown-bearded leader carried Dunny out to see his blinded burro and the horses, hopeful that the sight of these would do the little fellow good. It only served, however, to reveal to the man the weak and fading grasp on existence his childish guest retained.

"Is there anything you want, my little boy?" he said. "Ain't there anything you want?"

Dunny nodded feebly. "I want—Sylvia—awful—bad," he said, and he closed his eyes and his two little fists, to keep from crying.

Bart took him back to the cabin, where he laid him in the blankets of a bed.

"The little feller's got to be took to his folks," he said, "or—I reckon he ain't a goin' to live."

Then at dusk Chenook came in to make a report. He had seen an Indian on the hilltop, half a mile away, slowly working through the rocks, around the "flat" where the one-time lumber-camp was situated.

"Takes an Injun to ketch an Injun," dryly vouchsafed the outlaw chief, as he listened to the meager particulars. "Keep a watchin'. If he gets to smellin' 'round too close—shoot him first, Chenook, and ask him his business afterward."

"I knowed we'd soon be comin' to it," Bill remarked with satisfaction that was grim and ominous. "I wonder how much longer you'll be stayin' now and foolin' around with the kid."

"Well, we won't run straight to the posse, scared so bad we can't pipe a crew to work our brains," said Bart. "We'll navigate accordin' to reason."

With an Indian sleuth already thus upon them, the outlaw knew their stay in the camp was at an end. That night, at the latest, must see them far away, and fleeing from the long, uncompromising arm of the law, for very life itself.

Yet he drew out his pocket-knife and whittled at a stick, as he sat in the door of the shack to think.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO MEN'S DECISIONS.

In Tamarack, despair had come like a vulture, circling, soaring, waiting in the air till hope should cease to live.

Utterly distracted, Sylvia knew not what to do, or which way to turn. That first black night of Dunny's disappearance had gone like a terrible dream. With Jerry away, with not a single soul to whom she could turn for that deep and intimate friendship that would furnish the aid she suddenly required, she had undergone anguish after anguish for which there could be no relief.

She had quite expected Dunny to return at any hour of the afternoon, till the day had gone, the sun had set and the darkness of night begun to fall. Then her worry had quickly ripened into fear.

John Hank had spread the alarm throughout the town, at last, and roused his neighbors, yet a man to take the parties all in hand and organize a search, as Jerry Kirk would certainly have done, was not to be found among them all.

Such as they were, however, they had scoured the region thoroughly in every direction, within a mile of town.

Searching with lanterns, calling sharply from one to another, they had swept in a long, eager line across the flat whereon the lumber-yard and town were placed, and then athwart the shoulder of the mountain, up through the bed of the great ravine, and down toward the valley and the farms, but all to no avail.

How the night had gone poor Sylvia did not know. She had spent the greater part of those hours out on the hills herself. Then had followed a day of summer beauty, suddenly terrible in all the dread it contained.

The search had continued. Not more than two miles upward in the mountains had the parties penetrated. No one had thought of trailing the burro till his tracks were quite obliterated and such a hope was wasted energy.

Then dark and fearful theories had come from their caves of doubt and despair. The Chinese woodmen could have done some deed of violence, in snatching back the mended donkey; the flume could have caught a form so small and carried it down with a drive of wood, to be buried in the dark-red pyramid of four-foot billets, to be seen no more for months.

Sylvia, wringing her hands and trying to hope, trying to guide the men to newer fields, had become so pale they hardly knew her face. By the third day she was quite at the end of her wits.

She was frantic to run away herself—anywhere—in search of the little brother to whom she clung with all the love of a sister and mother combined.

She had written to Jerry Kirk to come and help her in her need, but the letter waited at Millsite, while Jerry was miles beyond, delayed by intricate cares of business and unaware of what had occurred.

Then two things happened. She thought of Allan Kennedy; and Tid Flack had come to her aid unexpectedly.

"I've sent an Injun friend of mine to look for Weaver, miss," he said. "I got him as soon as I could."

Kennedy arrived in Tamarack on Saturday afternoon. He lost no time in securing a horse and riding hotly to the mountains. He searched as all the others had searched before, blindly, but with worry and love to spur him on.

He rode his horse half to death that first afternoon, and found himself baffled at the fall of darkness. He then spent the hours till midnight scouring the Chinese quarters, with Flack, to see if Dunny's burro might be there.

At daylight, Sunday, he was after Tid again, for the cobbler alone supplied him with a hope. The sun was barely up when the Indian trailer came to town, and proceeding at once to Flack's reported that Dunny's burro, and doubtless also the little man himself, could be found in the camp across the summit, where once the lumber gangs had worked.

"Five mens up there," he added quietly. "Maybe Big Bart—you savvy?"

"Bart, the stage-robber? Bart and his gang, up there?" demanded Kennedy. "Oh, little Dunny isn't with them, I hope."

"No see um boy," reported the Indian. "Heap see um donkey."

"He's there! Of course he's there!" said Allan, with sudden conviction. "And Bart!"

"I hope he's alive," said Flack, in a tension of feeling he could not conceal. "I hope Weaver's alive."

"I'm going," decided Kennedy, without delay. "Mr. Flack, don't tell of this to any one in town. If you do they might attempt to send a posse after Bart, to get the reward. Then we'll never see Dunny alive. If I go alone the robbers will never suspect I've come to give them trouble. I only want the little boy. Don't say a word to Miss Weaver, either, please. I'd hate to raise a hope that may go all to pieces. Understand?"

"Ain't I a cobbler?" answered Tid. "Jim and I ain't the kind to spoil it now."

Jim was the Indian. Kennedy gave him a five dollar gold piece.

"That's for a starter," he said. "Now tell me how to find the place."

The Indian gave very brief but lucid directions. Flack was listening intently.

"Of course you know you may git shot," he said. "Want a gun?"

"No—not a thing," said Allan. "I've got no row with highway robbers to-day. I only want little Dunny."

"May git shot, however," cautioned Flack again.

"I'm going—that's all!" said Kennedy, and he hastened away to get his horse, on which he was presently riding up the cool ravine.

In the mountains various matters had come to a head in the hidden retreat of the desperadoes. With the falling of night activities had quickly developed, and with them complications.

Nervously apprehensive that the Indian, seen but once by Chenook, had come to the place as a spy, or a scout for the sheriff, four of the robbers had thrown indecision aside immediately, in a species of panic to be gone.

Larry Bart, finding Bill assuming a leadership over the men, whose one mad thought was flight, nevertheless continued his calm and masterful indifference to gathering dangers.

"We'll make no mistake by puttin' in two good hours of thinkin' fer every hour of scooting," he said. "We've got to think how we're goin' to feed, as well as give the law the slip. Starvation ketches more men like us than all the sheriffs."

"Come out with your meanin' good and plain," responded Bill in his angry impatience. "You're countin' on foolin' around here with the kid. If it hadn't a bin fer him, we wouldn't a bin in no such fix!"

"We'd have been stayin' here, kid or no kid," answered Bart, unwilling at such an hour to confess the softness increasing upon him for his little guest. "You all know that."

"But we wouldn't a had the kid-hunters, on top of posses, snoopin' around and seein' our smoke," answered Bill. "Don't you fergit it, Bart, we ain't a-goin' to hang out here no longer, not fer you and a dozen kids to boot. You kin make up your mind right now—it's us or the brat you're goin' to stick to, after this."

"What do you want me to do with the child?" inquired Bart. "You know he's sick."

"Don't make no diff to us what you do," said Bill. "You kin leave him here fer his friends to find, I reckon."

"Yes—they might come along and find him—after he was dead," agreed the leader grimly. "I'd feel awful pretty after that."

"Mebbe you'd rather feel like a corpse, hangin' on a tree," suggested Bill. "We ain't in this fer sentiment—not the rest of the gang."

Zack interposed, "That's kerrect."

"If the little feller wasn't sick——" began Bart, and there he stopped.

Bill said, "Well?"

"Well—I've took a likin' to the boy," answered the chief, in calm defiance. "He's sick and needin' a mother. He's sicker than I thought. I ain't a-goin' to go away and leave him here to die."

"Then you can go to hell!" retorted Bill. "We're done with you, right now, and we're goin' out to saddle up and git."

"Where to?" inquired Bart, without the slightest emotion.

Bill was unable to answer for a moment.

"Anywhere away from here," he presently replied.

"And maybe run into a posse, first crack," supplemented the chief. "It wasn't you, Bill, that kept us from bein' nabbed the night of the hold-up; don't let that git dry in your memory."

"That's kerrect," said Zack.

Smoky added: "Larry, you kin git us out of this. Don't fool around with no durn kid, but git us out!"

Chenook said nothing.

"If the kid was out of the way, we'd git along all right and save our necks," said Bill. He suddenly conceived a sinister purpose.

Quietly drawing his hunting knife he moved toward Dunny's berth, as if in a careless mood of no particular purport.

Instantly Bart leaped upon him and struck him a blow that sent him reeling.

"Don't try it, Bill!" he growled, in a voice more terrible for the very sup-

pression of rage behind it. "Don't lay a finger on that little kid or I'll kill you deader than oakum!"

In a towering rage Bill staggered to his balance and drew a huge revolver. He cocked the weapon hurriedly and raised it to the level of the leader's head. But he dared not touch the trigger.

Bart walked up to the muzzle of the gun in absolute fearlessness. A hard, indomitable light was in his eyes.

"Put it down!" he commanded.

Bill could see nothing but that glittering gaze, and down the weapon came.

"Put it up!" ordered Bart, and it went to its holster shakingly.

"You're an idiot, Bill," said the leader. "You ain't got the sense of a fish."

Zack muttered, "That's kerrect."

Bill commenced to swear.

"That's enough of that. Your cussin' ain't good enough to stand fer planning," instructed the chief. "I'm running this show, and I'm running it my own way. You lot of fools would land in the sheriff's paws before the morning.

"Now listen to me. You go and saddle up and take my horse in lead and put for Lady's Cove, by way of Cedar Valley. Go to Moody's ranch fer grub—some beans and bacon. Then ride your horses up the creek, and don't leave the water till you reach the cove; and there you camp in the little lost meader, and wait fer me to come."

"Wait fer you, Larry?" echoed Smoky. "Ain't you goin' along? Don't you want your hoss?"

"He's goin' to stay with the kid," sneered Bill, in his impotent wrath. "He thinks he's come to be a mother."

"I'm goin' to take him home," corrected the chief, a flush of color burning for a moment in his swarthy cheek. "I'm lookin' out fer all you boys; I'm goin' to see you through the game, but I said I've took a fancy to the boy—and I'm going to land him back among his folks."

CHAPTER XV.

HOW TWO MEN MET.

FOUR of the desperate outlaws were gone, with all the horses. Only the blind little burro was left, of all the animals. Bart and Dunny were alone in the cabin.

By the light of a single candle the man sat gazing at the berth where his ailing little guest was wrapped in a blanket. He knew his task of taking Dunny down to Tamarack could be much more safely accomplished in the dark, yet he waited here, determined that the child should have the benefit of all the night of sleep and rest.

Taking the candle in hand, at midnight, the man went quickly across the floor to the bunk and gazed long and silently at the pale little face that lay on the grain-sack pillow. A mighty yearning came in the outlaw's breast as he gently laid his hand on the tangled hair. His eyes took on a look of concern.

"God Almighty, I can't pray," he presently muttered, "but don't hold what I've done ag'in my little boy. Give him a show till I can git him home."

Watching, listening, momentarily expecting the arrival of the Law, in the form of a posse of men, he sat beside the table or hovered near the bunk till day was come and the sun was resuming the alchemies that wrought a summer. Then he saddled the burro and wakened his little guest.

Dunny opened his eyes, but he appeared not to see. He could not touch the bean-and-coffee breakfast, thoughtfully prepared, and, therefore, Bart was obliged to eat alone.

Wrapped in the blanket to shield him from the chill of the morning air, the silent little pilgrim was taken up in the big, strong arms.

"We're goin' home," said the man.

But as Dunny was far too ill to ride, the burro was led. In its blindness it followed patiently, banishing forever that mad, ecstatic dream of returning to the pastures it had known a year before. So they issued forth in the trail, where hiding was no longer possible, and headed for the haunts of men. They crossed the region of rocks and trees, came to the chasm of cliffs, and wound on downward on the farther side, the man with two revolvers strapped upon him, a vigorous, muscular, sinister figure, with the small, light burden on his arm, and the blinded donkey trailing in his wake.

By this time Allan Kennedy was well

up into the great ravine, where the day engoldened trees and slopes and structures of rock were heaped crudely up as if in the play of Titans, prodigious only in their strength. The horse that Allan was riding, having seen too much of service recently, was beginning to limp. In half an hour he was hobbling painfully.

Despite his impatience, Allan knew the animal could not be further employed. He therefore dismounted, and hastily securing the horse to a tree, continued on his way afoot, striding forward with all the haste that the steepness of the trail would permit.

Ahead of him at last the canyon seemed to end. It was merely where an angular turn of the mighty wrinkle in the mountain mass was formed, however, as Allan presently observed. The trail took a "corner" here, about a growth of trees. Kennedy came around it rapidly. Then he suddenly halted.

He was face to face with Bart, whose hand had dropped instantaneously to the butt of a long revolver.

For a moment the two men stood there, motionless and dumb, staring each other in the eye. Then Allan saw the donkey and the burden the outlaw held upon his arm.

"Bart!" he cried, "have you brought little Dunny? Have you got him, safe and sound?"

He started forward eagerly. The outlaw's pistol was out, cocked and leveled like a flash, but Allan seemed not to see it, as he hastened forward, his two arms held out before him, in a gesture of yearning.

He fairly collided with the pistol's yawning muzzle before he reeled back, aware of the peril. The sweat broke out on his brow at once. His face was fearfully white.

"Don't shoot," he said hoarsely. "Dunny—little Dunny!—he's all I want!"

Beads of moisture had likewise oozed abruptly from the outlaw's face. How it could be that he had actually permitted a man to run against his weapon with impunity he could not imagine.

"Who are you? Where did you come from?" he demanded gruffly, still with the pistol pointed blankly at Kennedy's head.

Allan answered his question honestly and promptly.

"I didn't come to look for you," he added in frankness that sprang unbidden from his lips. "I came to find the little boy. Isn't he awake? What's the matter? Tell me, Bart—he isn't sick—or something worse?"

"I guess you're on the square," replied the outlaw, dropping his weapon to its place. "He's sick; he's awful sick. He's got to be took to his folks." He held forth the limp little form reluctantly, as if it cost him pain to let him go.

Allan took the precious burden, in affection, impatient and eager. He turned about to flee to Tamarack as if not to lose another minute.

"Say, hold on, just a second," said the outlaw, catching him roughly by the shoulder. "How'd you hear he was up in the hills?"

Allan told him candidly of the Indian's work and report.

"All the town dead on?" inquired Bart.

"No, not a soul was told but old man Flack and me," said Allan. "All I wanted was Dunny."

"Guess I can turn around and go, then," said the outlaw resignedly. A light of yearning burned in his eyes, and Allan understood, not only that the man had dared the utmost dangers to his life, in coming thus toward Tamarack, but also that Dunny had taken a wonderful hold on the man's affections.

"Bart, let's shake," he said, thrusting forth his hand. "You must have liked him yourself."

"I—liked him all the way through," admitted Bart, as he took the proffered hand. "He's an awful nice little kid. You'd better lead his burro, Kennedy. He's blind—got a dose of shot, but I reckon he's Dunny's pet."

Allan accepted the bridle reins mechanically.

"I want to hurry all I can," he said.

"I know," said Bart. "I hope he'll soon git well—I hope he will! If he ever asks fer Larry—but of course he won't—and maybe better not. So-long."

"So-long," said Allan, and again he turned to go.

"Say," said the outlaw huskily—"say, I'd kind of like to kiss the boy good-by."

Gently he bent above the white little face and kissed the pallid cheek.

"By, my little boy," he said. "Good-by. Best I kin wish you is—you'll never see Larry again."

The sick little man on Allan's arm could make no response. The outlaw smiled at Kennedy peculiarly, and started up the side of the mountain, in his active, vigorous way.

After a moment of watching him, Allan faced again toward Tamarack, and led the burro onward, down the trail.

Where the great ravine made the turn that would hide those particular slopes entirely from view, Kennedy halted and looked for Bart.

Far up the slope, among the rocks, the outlaw, too, had paused. He waved a rough farewell, and once more faced the Titan steeps that lay across his path.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOVE WILL FIND THE WAY.

On Monday morning news was brought to Tamarack that Larry Bart had been killed in a battle with a posse, while attempting to escape toward the mountain retreat where he had baffled the law from time to time before. The man had been found alone on Sunday afternoon, according to the story, and having fought like a tiger driven to bay, had died with a smile upon his lips. His pilgrimage toward Tamarack had cost him all he could give.

Jerry Kirk returned to town on Tuesday, glad to find little Dunny slowly improving under the fostering care of Sylvia and Allan Kennedy.

Every one had rendered aid, and faithful Timonides Flack more than any other soul, but Dunny clung to Allan with all the strength and purpose in his weary little body. He seemed to derive an infinite comfort from Allan's ministrations.

With a natural understanding and sympathy between them, Allan and Sylvia worked beside the bed together, hourly becoming more and more indispensable to each other's happiness.

It was this that Jerry discovered first. He had come there worried; he remained to be harassed. Only the one little letter, informing him of Dunny's disappearance, had greeted his return to Millsite, on the summit; for after the sick little fellow's restoration to her arms Sylvia had not had the time to write again.

The great relief that Jerry felt to find little Dunny at home again was partially nullified by the bitterness of jealousy swiftly engendered in his bosom thus to see Allan Kennedy occupying all the field that by right belonged to himself.

The galling part of it was that he knew it was to Allan that they owed nearly all their gratitude. Allan had been here in Sylvia's hour of need; Allan it was who had brought the little patient home in his arms. Despite himself, Jerry could not withhold his admiration, not only for Allan's manliness and courage, but also for his modesty and the unaffected frankness of his confession that Bart was the one deserving praise.

The sheer force of bravery that Kennedy had shown in riding straight for the stage-robbers' camp appealed to Jerry perforce. He gave his rival credit, in his honest way, yet he could not drive the rancor from his heart.

That love had come to its blossoming here at Dunny's side, between Sylvia and Allan, was inevitable. It was patent to all who saw the two together. The touch of their hands in the worry they shared, the look in their eyes, where common affection begot a trust and understanding—these, and a score of little signs that appeared almost parental between them, could not have been concealed.

Their love not only had flowered here, it had also come to sublimation. The touch of divinity had been thus early vouchsafed it, through the strain and rack of anguish, before the tide had been turned in Dunny's favor.

Mrs. Hank had early become aware of the feeling existing between Allan Kennedy and Sylvia, but even she could not discern all that was soon revealed to Jerry Kirk. He could feel in the air the facts at which another might possibly conjecture.

But with Dunny still so helpless, so weak and white and well-nigh smileless,

the time was hardly one for sullen brooding. Moreover, Jerry's nature was anything but sullen. His present concern was the little patient's recovery.

With all his big and generous heart he joined with Allan and Sylvia to restore the health and strength to the mite of a man whose hold upon his heart was stouter than before.

For two more days the three continued their labors here together. By then little Dunny was well out of danger and Allan had finally received a note from Asa Craig requesting his presence again where his work was being neglected.

The letter came in the late afternoon. Jerry had purposely refrained from alluding to Kennedy's work or the need they had for his services up at the summit, and he did not know that Craig had written. Allan was going, but not before the night. As the twilight fell he sat with little Dunny on his knee, the quaint bit of a man holding to his hand and wanly smiling in content.

Jerry came in from his office. He stood looking down at little Dunny, after greeting them all, an expression of infinite tenderness upon his face.

"How's the little man by now?" he asked.

"Pretty well," said Dunny. "I came back—home, all—the same."

"You bet!" agreed the mountaineer. "Want to have a ride?"

"What on?" inquired the little chap. "On Jack?"

"No, on me—just packin' you up and down," said Jerry.

Dunny held out his arms and nodded his answer. Such rides as these had been of untold comfort to his tired little body, since Jerry's arrival. So up and down the two proceeded, Allan and Sylvia watching quietly. The hour was one of peace for them all, as if a truce had been declared between unseen but warring forces.

Allan remained there for dinner. He had told them all he was going, and Mrs. Hank had particularly desired him to remain and dine with "the family" before he went.

Those were moonlit nights, and the moon is warmer than the sun on the hearts of youth in the plight of love. Sylvia, vaguely unhappy and also vaguely joyous, in all her being, over thoughts of Allan and Jerry, and of partings and longings, and facing things to follow, slipped out in the garden, where the silver light gave a newer and chaster beauty to the flowers, come from the seeds and shoots in answer to her summons.

Fragrance of mountain air was coming and going in balmy currents. Peace and calm and beauty such as night alone may foster enfolded all the world. The first shy harpings of crickets had begun. A million unseen sprites were filling space with essences that stirred the heart to ecstasies too fine for definition.

With lips apart and eyes uplifted and wide with the wonder of it all, Sylvia gazed into the sky. Unconsciously her hands were pressed upon her bosom. Her face seemed particularly beautiful and sweet, in her quiet mood.

She had come without a hat. Her hair, so gloriously black, was slightly loosened, crowning her head with a mass of color in wonderful contrast with her snowy neck and forehead.

Slowly she walked to the gate, where she stood for a time enthralled by the subtle passions of the hour. Then she knew that Allan was coming. It was not so much that she heard his step as that she felt his spirit, seeking hers in the open air.

She did not turn, and he leaned against the gate beside her, saying not a word. Her hand was on one of the palings. Allan clutched the paling next to hers, where their fingers could have met. Thus they stood in silence, each convinced the other must hear how loud a heart may beat.

Allan gazed upon her face, revealed in profile by the softened light. The wonderful luster of her eye, thus partially seen, was beyond his finest conceptions of loveliness. Her cheek and chin and her exquisite neck beset him with their beauty.

Such increasing, silent, tumultuous delight as both of them felt was perilous. She felt its danger and its ecstasy. Her nature was answering, not only to Allan, but also to the moon—that foster-mother of the tides of love.

She knew they ought to talk. She tried to think of something commonplace to

say, but when she opened her lips to speak she murmured.

"And—you're going away to-night?"

"Yes," he said, "to-night. Will it be a relief?"

She was trembling. It was almost as if he had said: "Is it Jerry—or me?" for it made her think of everything in one quick flash of mental agitation.

"Relief?" she said. "You have been very kind to Dunny—and all of us, I'm sure."

"But—even then," he insisted, "we can't pretend——" and there he halted.

"Pretend—that it isn't a—great relief?" she supplied, in a stammer as she tried to smile all seriousness away.

"I didn't start to say precisely that," he confessed, but he failed to proceed with an explanation.

He feared to speak the all that was clamoring within him for a voice. He preferred not to know it, if she felt she must hold to her promise made to Jerry Kirk. Even this present uncertainty of his fate was sweeter than anything he had ever known in all his life. They were silent again for a moment.

"You will have a lovely night," said Sylvia, faintly. Every dread and every hunger in possession of Allan's heart was likewise dominant in hers.

"It is lovely now—but it won't be, after I'm gone from here—I mean for me," he said.

Her nature, not her reason, prompted and she asked him:

"Why?"

"Oh, Sylvia—don't you know?" he answered.

She closed her eyes. She dared not look on a world made so suddenly beautiful, merely by the sound of her name on Allan's lips, in such a question. She could not reply.

"It won't be lovely for me because I've got to leave—little Dunny—and you," added Allan in a moment.

His mention of Dunny in such a way as this did more than a thousand protestations to possess her heart with a love grown instantly all powerful. The splendid things he had done back there even in the snow-blockaded train, and now right here, for the precious little brother, endeared him anew to herself in a manner overwhelming.

And yet her self-control was not entirely swept away. She trembled, but her sense of loyalty to Jerry could not be completely stifled. It was battling—sheer battling with her own yearning nature when she made herself reply in apparent calm:

"We shall miss you—both of us, I'm sure."

He was breathing with difficulty. He clutched the paling with all his might to restrain his hand from flying to hers.

"Much?" he asked. "Sylvia—shall you miss me very much?"

Her nature was winning against her logic and her judgment, swiftly. In a sort of despair she said:

"O Allan, don't ask me, please."

The joy that came when she called him Allan was swiftly modified by what he knew she meant. Yet love is a conquering force; it knows no defeat. It swayed him now, despite himself.

"I can't keep it back," he said. "Sylvia how could I keep it back? I didn't know anything about—anything, at first; I only knew I loved you—and loved you—and loved you—and it can't be helped!"

His spoken words of love leaped to her heart as if for sanctuary; and as if to shield them in a safe retreat, her bosom gave them rapturous welcome.

All her being surged, however, with excitement. The feeling that love is in the air is sweet, the knowledge of its hovering thrills the soul to ecstasy, but to hear it declared by a voice as dear as life—this is the deepest joy of all. Surprise that is almost fear, that yet is pure delight, comes with the murmur of the word itself, the word that may never thereafter be repeated once too often.

Sylvia swayed, with the flood of happiness sweeping torrentially through her being. She knew not what she should do. But nature was there to prompt. Therefore it was that she looked upon him for a moment with eyes in which the beacons were illumined—the beacons that are never lighted save to guide a man to his home.

"Allan," she said in a faint, sweet voice—"Allan, what are you saying?"

"You knew it, dear," he answered. "It had to be. I love you so much I can't seem to care for anything else. I

know it's folly. I know it isn't even fair —but God and you are stronger than I, and love has got the best of me. I'll go away—I've got to go, but Sylvia, tell me —do you think there is just a little hope?"

She knew he was thinking of her promise to Jerry Kirk. He made no attempt to blur the facts or even to confuse her sense of the right. She loved him the more for his honest facing of the truth.

"How can I tell you, Allan?" she replied. "How can I know?"

Throughout it all he had held at least his hand in check, but now it went quickly to hers, still grasping the paling, and covered it in a fond caress that gave her yet another infinite thrill of emotion.

She made no effort to disturb the clasp in which he held her fingers.

"You can tell me one little thing," he said excitedly. "Do you care for me, Sylvia—just a little?"

She dared not trust herself to speak, but she laid her other hand on his—and that was answer sufficient.

The door of the house was suddenly shut, with unnecessary noise. The pair at the gate were warned and startled by the sound.

"Hullo," called Jerry from the porch. "Has Kennedy gone without good-by to Dunny, and Mrs. Hank—and me?"

"No. Just getting—ready to start." stammered Allan, as calmly as he could. "I hope little Dunny hasn't gone to sleep."

He and Sylvia came up the path at once. They could not see the glint in Jerry's eyes; they did not know that he had seen enough to kindle the passion in his heart to a fierce, consuming flame.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BATTLE ON THE HILL.

JERRY remained in the house only long enough to see Allan Kennedy fairly off, with only a formal good-by to Sylvia, then he said good night himself and went away.

He had held himself in a grip of apparent unconcern, he had even tried to smile, while still in Sylvia's presence, but her keen perceptions had pierced his mask, and fear had come in her heart. Outside in the open air, he seemed to release all the hounds of anger in his nature. His eyes were ablaze, his jaws were set, as he strode away from the house—he knew not whither.

Presently pausing, he took off his broad-brimmed hat and crushed it savagely in his hands.

A big, strong man in every way was Kirk, with all of a natural man's emotions. His love of Sylvia was the greatest emotion he had ever conceived. He loved her savagely and tenderly, selfishly and yet with infinite generosity; passionately also, but again with the fostering affection of a parent.

To-night had brought the culmination of bitterness that all the recent happenings had called into being. He knew that Sylvia's heart was gone irrevocably to Allan Kennedy. It was Allan who had been vouchsafed every opportunity to do some splendid thing—and he had been sufficient of a man to meet the moment. Moreover, fate had given him youth, in addition to it all!

For a moment as he stood there in the moonlit road alone the mountaineer was tempted to hasten after Kennedy and choke the life out of his body. If it had not been for him the whole affair must have come, before this, to a happy conclusion. If only now he were banished from the scene, it might not be too late.

Anger, jealousy, the outraged feelings of one who finds himself being robbed of every precious thing, surged upward to Jerry's brain. He started as if to seek for Kennedy, but halted, once more to crush the hat in his powerful hands, and swayed in his tracks with the force of his agitation.

He presently strode off blindly toward the mountains. Squat upon the earth like a Buddha, prodigious in dimensions and infinite in calm, the massive sculpturing of immensity rose before the tortured man and gave him welcome.

Up to the mighty knees of rock and sand he climbed, in the lust of his strength and rage. The moonlight modeled him out against the gray of gravel and granite, a splendid figure, hewn out rough and large and magnified at present by his own up-moving shadow, black as ink.

He hoped to wear down his muscle and with it the anger possessing all his being. He made no confessions to himself, and yet he knew he was waging war against the ego of his own unreasonable nature. When he panted his strength was increasing. Scorning the gentler slopes and clearer way, he smashed through underbrush that grew on the steepest rise, and felt at least he was getting the better of the huge acclivity.

Not till he startled a gaunt coyote from the manzanita and saw its fear of himself as it looked at him once and fled away did he think of pausing. Then he stood there watching where it had gone. He wondered if Kennedy also would have sped away at his near approach. No, the man was a man.

But Sylvia? Yes, she would fear him, could she know him in a mood like this. He felt ashamed to think he could give her a fright. He suddenly felt a revulsion come upon him—a something akin to abhorrence of himself. But the night was working its spell upon his nature. Love was in him, and here—how lonely was his climb!

He thought of Kennedy, doubtless somewhere out in the open himself, as he traveled back to Millsite on the summit. But with what a different feeling in his breast did the younger man go dreaming through the mountain silences!

Bitterness was come again, increased by the thought of Allan's very youth. The mountaineer was ready to fling all youth to the yawning abyss where the canyon held its fathoms on fathoms of shadow. His eyes were resting idly on a sapling pine. Presently noting the symmetry and youth of the growing tree, the man laid hold upon it and wrenched it from the ground. Its roots came up like fingers, clutching a fistful of rocks. Jerry flung it down the slope, and descending on another little pine tore it likewise from its hold.

A larger tree was growing near. Like a fury the man laid hold of its trunk and gave a tug in all the lust of his anger and passion. It held to its place. He caught it lower down and lifted like a giant, but to no avail. In wrath, he took it as a wrestler closes with a rival and straining, panting, wrenching with tremendous force, expended his utmost strength to tear it up. The tree resisted stubbornly, shaking though it was from tip to root.

Twice and thrice the angered mountaineer engaged the pine and gave it battle. His muscles swelled, his lungs expanded, his big stout legs were rigid as steel and his face was purple with engorging blood, but he presently slipped on a rock and fell to the sand defeated.

"I can't—pull him out—of her heart!" he panted aloud, in a sudden perception of his impotence. "I can't pull him out!"

He sat there catching explosive lungfuls of breath, and staring at one of the smaller trees, prone upon the earth where he had thrown it in his passion. A shame came creeping upon him. He covered his face from the moon, in his arms, and leaned his elbow on his knee.

"The trees had a right to live," he said aloud, as if in confession to the mountain. "They've got a right to be young!"

And his fight with himself was over, and won, although he remained on the hill throughout the night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TID FLACK'S DISCOVERY.

In the morning Jerry went again to Millsite, where attention to business made his presence somewhat essential. He was glad and he was sorry to go. Purposely refraining from any speech that might be disturbing to Sylvia, he left her doubting and worried, when his only intention had been to assure her peace of mind.

She felt she had done this friend a grievous wrong, and yet she could see no way in which the march of events could have been perceived or prevented. All her self-accusations, moreover, could not suffice to extinguish or even diminish the happiness welling in her bosom.

The days, the beauties of the earth and sky, the songs of birds, and fragrance of blossoming grass and flowers, served to increase her ecstasies and to fling out banners of beatitude in every blush that mounted to her cheeks. Joy the dominant, joy the irresponsible, joy the madcap of emotions, made her its bower by

day and its shelter through the watches of the night.

That morning particularly, sweet delight was upon her, for Dunny was mending so bravely as to walk about, and sit on the porch in the sun. She placed him there herself, and plucked him flowers, to put in a vase of water. She even led his blind little burro from the shed to where he was sitting, and watched the two in their friendly demonstrations of companionship.

"You runned away—nasty Jack," scolded the little fellow fondly.

But a moment later, looking at Jack's poor sightless eyes, little Dunny was loving his velvety nose in childishly sweet remorse.

"We have awful bad times," he said. "We're just like the babes in the wood—only pretty soon we'll be all well again and going barefoot, and everything."

Jack was taken again to his quarters. When Sylvia came once more to the porch, she found Tid Flack arrived and beaming mightily, a pair of high-topped leather boots in his hand.

"Weaver," she heard him saying, "you're important. I knowed it the minute I seen you first, and you gittin' lost by a donkey! Didn't I always say that animals is different? Some is critters and some is brutes."

Then he noted Sylvia's approach. "Good mornin', miss," he said, with a wave of the boots. "I came to tell you Weaver is important."

"Why—good morning, Mr. Flack," said Sylvia cordially. "It's very kind of you, I'm sure."

"His name is Tid, for short," said Dunny.

"Weaver knows," said Tid. "Weaver knows. But he don't know what I've got."

"Boots!" said the small convalescent.

"Well, yes—and no," said Tid, with solemn gravity. "I always did say it, Weaver, that procrastination is the noblest work of God; and what am I good for if it ain't to know my business?"

"You're good to fix donkeys," promptly responded little Dunny.

"And to find little boys," added Sylvia. "Are the boots to be mended, Mr. Flack?"

"Now, there's the point. What did I say?" replied the cobbler. "Procrastination—you can't tell me—— Them boots, Weaver, belonged one time to your father."

Sylvia looked at him, startled.

"Those boots belonged to our father?" she repeated. "Oh, I shall be very, very glad indeed to have them just as they are!"

"That's what I says to myself," said Tid, still retaining the boots. "He brought 'em in to be patched up, miss, and I set 'em aside, and then—well, you know, the ways of Providence is curious—not a bit like cobblin'—and there they've been ever since."

"His very boots!" said Sylvia, more to herself than to Tid.

Dunny ventured, "You couldn't cut them down for me. Boots ain't the same as pants."

"And that's why I say that Weaver is important—and you, too, miss," added Tid. "For your father left a paper inside of one of the boots and procrastination keeps it safe and sound till I found it there this mornin'."

"A paper?" echoed Sylvia, putting forth her hand to take the boots. "What sort of a paper?"

"It ain't in them no longer, miss," said the cobbler, dropping the foot-gear on the porch and thrusting his hand in his pocket. "Never trust a pair of boots too long, or first you know they'll go walkin' off. There you are, and I must say Weaver is important."

The paper that Sylvia took from his hand trembled in her grasp. She was stirred by all the forces of mystery, as if she were face to face with a message from the dark, inscrutable beyond. No sooner had she bended back the folded sheets and glanced at the writing than she knew the document for what it was—a will.

In unabated agitation she read it through, discovering first that her father had left a certain section or parcel of land, across the border of the State, to Dunny and herself, and second that provision had been made for the safety of the property through means she failed at first to comprehend.

She presently understood, however, that her father by this testament ap-

pointed Asa Craig as guardian over Dunny and also as executor and trustee of the property in question—unless she herself should marry some man "of reputed business sagacity and over the age of thirty-five years," in which event the husband so espoused should thereupon assume the duties of said guardian, trustee, and executor.

As she read, the cobbler watched her with the greatest satisfaction.

"This is very important indeed," she told him presently.

"Is it a letter from papa?" said Dunny, who knew of his father only through the letters that had come, those many years. "Did he send any love to me?"

Sylvia went to him and kissed him.

"Yes, deary, yes," she said. "It's all his love for you and me."

"Important? Didn't I say so, all the time?" inquired Tid, as proud as Punch of the document. "Procrastination never fools around with things that ain't important."

"I must send for Mr. Kirk at once," said Sylvia. "I don't know Mr. Craig."

"The hawks all know him," said the cobbler, with one of his awe-inspiring winks. "He's lord high chief hawk of 'em all for business."

"Is any one going to Millsite pretty soon?" inquired Sylvia. "Could any one ask Mr. Kirk to come right down?"

"Young Morris has to take up a stage-horse just about now," replied Mr. Flack. "I'll go and tell him right away."

He went and caught the messenger, and late that afternoon big Jerry appeared at Mrs. Hank's, a worry visible in his eyes, for he had not been informed of the nature of the "trouble," and had feared little Dunny must have suffered a sudden relapse.

His relief, when Sylvia stated the need she had for counsel, was a thing she felt. It made him nearer and dearer, even as the will, which required that she should seek his aid, had taught her how very much indeed he was to them both.

He read the paper through without apparent emotion, although it held so much affecting him that his heart was fairly pounding in his breast.

"I'm glad he left you some property," he said, stifling a jealous pang at the thought that Weaver might have made himself, instead of Craig, the guardian. "We'll get it into court and have it proved at once."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HAND OF ASA CRAIG.

No one had known that Henry Weaver died in possession of a tract of land, for the reason that the land in question was situated just across the border of the State, and, therefore, nothing could possibly appear on the records in the section where he had lived and met his end. Now, however, there was no opposition to the early probation of the will, and all who knew of its terms were glad for little Dunny and Sylvia.

Asa Craig, made all important by the document, had not appeared at Tamarack, nor did he seem disposed to come and meet his little ward. The will, to him, meant very much more than any mere feeling of foster-parenthood—it meant something very near to ownership in a timbered acreage of very great value indeed.

No sooner had the man become aware of the metes and bounds of the land entrusted to his keeping than he realized what a force it lent to his own heretofore somewhat helpless position. In connection with the properties owned and operated by himself and Jerry Kirk, this new acquisition was exceedingly important.

The man had always been shrewd, scheming, and dangerous in his business association with Jerry. He had taken powers unto himself insidiously, building up his strength at every turn, to make himself the master of the enterprise they had brought into being together. He had previously reached too soon for the lever of control, and Jerry had seen and blocked his game, but only by the weight of greater possessions in the company's lands and assets. Now the tide had suddenly turned, and Craig, as sole trustee over all the Weaver holdings, let his new-found force lie unsuspected while he cautiously fostered his plans.

Craig was a busy, dominant figure at the Millsite plant. A sawmill here was running day and night; a pair of small

locomotives ran back and forth from the timber lands trundling cars with monster logs, to be reduced to lumber; and a force of men and teams worked ceaselessly to fetch in fuel-wood from many a mountain fastness, while always a gang was toiling to feed both wood and lumber to the flume, in which it scudded swiftly down to Tamarack, below.

There were two men only of all the busy horde at Millsite camp who had no fear of Asa Craig. One was Jerry—the second, Allan Kennedy.

The others—foremen, teamsters, engineers, and common laborers—dreaded the man of iron purpose, and knew him only for a fierce, sharp-spoken, masterful device of energy and keenness, who was everywhere at once, alert as a panther and quick as a hawk to see and pounce upon a failing.

Therefore, when he disappeared one day after all the court proceedings regarding the will had been completed, there was no rejoicing, but only vague unrest concerning what his mission might imply.

He was gone three days, and when he came again to his place a certain glitter had developed in his eyes that boded no good for any man about. During his absence Allan Kennedy had been exceptionally busy. Indeed, since that short "vacation" time, spent at Tamarack on account of little Dunny's escapade and resulting illness, Allan's days had been so closely occupied that he could not visit Sylvia, not even for a Sunday.

A clever man at business himself, and enjoying an intimate knowledge of the lumber industry in all its various aspects, Allan filled an important place in the company's affairs, overseeing a hundred details branching out too widely for Craig himself to follow. He was Craig's own man, and even Jerry Kirk had nothing to say concerning his employment.

To-day, when Craig appeared unexpectedly at his post, Kennedy was summoned to his presence. He entered the office briskly, noting at once a subtle change, suggestive of increasing force and confidence, come upon his chief.

Craig was a man of medium height. He was slender, and neatly dressed in black. His hair was white as snow, his face clean-shaven and firm. Thus far he might have been commonplace enough. His eyes, however, were the coldest gray, deeply set in his head under overhanging brows as bushy as mustaches and white as his hair, while his nose suggested an eagle's beak. The width of his jaws, the strength of his chin and the thinness of his lips served to emphasize a countenance as stern as one is likely to imagine.

"Kennedy—how's everything?" he demanded, turning aggressively about as Allan closed the door.

"Running smoothly, as usual," said Allan. "The water supply is better than we thought. I found a leak at one of the feeders and had it repaired."

"Gone on just as well without me as with me, I suppose?" said Craig in his way of brusk demand.

Allan smiled. "I think so," he replied.

"Huh! You think so, do you? And about how long could you keep it up if I were to die?"

"As long as the timber remains to be cut on company land," said Allan, without the slightest boastfulness or hesitation.

Craig was secretly pleased. He admired the younger man exceedingly, not only for his fine ability, but also because he was not afraid.

"You'd run me out, if you got the chance," he said, however, in his blunt, uncompromising way. "I'll see how things are looking later on. I got you here to talk of something else. Have you got any money?"

"I don't depend entirely on my salary," answered Allan. "I've got a few odd dollars laid away."

"Five thousand, say?"

"Five thousand? Yes."

"I thought so!" Craig was glaring at him savagely, as if he felt the money had made the young man independent. "Huh! Well, Kennedy, what do you say to taking up a mortgage with your money and some I can let you have, and coming into the company with me."

Allan said: "Who is the mortgagor?"

Craig looked him over sharply; the glitter increased in his eyes.

"Jerry Kirk," he said.

Allan faced him unflinchingly and

thought it out. He felt, but he could not be certain, that this was a bit of business with which Jerry Kirk was entirely unacquainted.

"Isn't Mr. Kirk quite satisfied with his present mortgagee?" he inquired.

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Craig. "I want that mortgage here—I want it in my own hands."

"A great deal more in your hands than in mine, perhaps?" said Allan.

His boldness astonished himself no less than it did his chief. Craig was instantly affronted, but he knew the younger man was tempered steel himself.

"No!" he said. "The mortgage will be yours. Kirk has been too big in this house, and now I'm going to take a hand."

"I like and admire Jerry Kirk very much indeed," Allan told him honestly. "I'd rather not disturb the mortgage, if you please."

"Well, I don't please!" cried Craig, striking the table with his fist till the ink-well and paper danced. "I thought you and Kirk were rivals. What do I hear of you being after that girl that Jerry wants to marry?"

Allan colored. "You haven't heard anything from me," he said, "and probably nothing from Mr. Kirk."

"Can't anybody talk but you or Kirk?" demanded the chief, with his eyes sharply focused on Kennedy's face. "You don't deny the story?"

"I don't propose to drag it in," said Allan.

Craig was piqued. He could neither frighten, excite, nor allure his man into indiscretions of speech. The present bait was evidently no temptation whatsoever, yet he gave up unwillingly.

"Do you mean to say you haven't got the sense to take a legitimate advantage of a rival?" he asked. "Don't be a fool."

Allan burned with shame at the mere suggestion of taking advantage of a man for whom he felt a respect that was kindling to affection, and whom he had almost if not quite wronged already.

"I can't understand your thinking this even possible," he said. "I know I haven't understood you correctly." He added with pointed significance, "I know I couldn't understand. But about the new sugar-pine logs coming in——"

"Logs! You're a log!" interrupted his employer. "Git out of the office!"

Allan was instantly angered by this order.

"I'm out of my office now," he said a little hotly.

Craig looked once in his set, young face, and knew he had made a number of mistakes.

"Then go back," he said in a reasonable voice. "And watch that sugar-pine to see that Croson hasn't worked in any yellow."

Allan went, and Asa Craig began to walk up and down in a singular mixture of emotions. He was certain of one thing through it all that set his mind at rest. It was simply that Allan Kennedy would no more tell of the interview than he would take advantage of Kirk.

But certain premonitions that had come to Jerry at the reading of Weaver's will were being swiftly justified by all the scheming thoughts in his partner's mind. Craig had the power, long sought and denied him, and he meant to force Jerry Kirk entirely out of the business, practically ruined.

The will had given him more than the balance of power. The lands conveyed to his guardianship were not only adjacent to all of the company roads, but the timber there was the finest and most desirable to be had in miles. Moreover, the water supply was abundant and convenient to be turned at once into the company flume and feeders, so that Jerry's lease of water rights from other sources would presently cease to be an asset available to support his weight in the partnership association.

Craig had set a score of schemes afoot the moment he learned of the stroke of fortune which had brought things his way from an unexpected quarter. Already Jerry Kirk was being undermined in countless directions.

With money now available to right and left, Asa Craig had bought up three of Jerry's mortgages already. Everything, moreover, had been managed with absolute honesty, so far as the rights of the two Weaver heirs were concerned.

The man had simply determined to cut the timber on the Weaver land and pay

the stumpage according to the ordinary custom, even as Weaver would have wished it done, and so release himself from exorbitant contracts made with timber-owners elsewhere, who were keeping his nose to the grindstone relentlessly.

In addition to other advantages, the money for stumpage would remain in his hands by virtue of his offices, and thus, without doing the slightest injury to Sylvia Weaver and Dunny, he could swing a power overwhelmingly greater than Jerry's.

The bitterness that was deep enough to actuate this subtle and deadly hostility against his partner had been of slow and morbid growth in Asa Craig.

It had started with a jealousy of Jerry's popularity; it had fed on pique that his partner held the ultimate control of all the developing industry; it had fattened at last on a sheer greed of might.

The man had evolved a mania for power. His one consuming idea had become the determination to czar it absolutely in the mountains. Friendships, affections, loyalties—all had gone down before that one mad appetite. The man had filtered steel through all his veins, and his heart was alleged to be the toughest fiber of his being.

He had hoped to employ the business perspicacity of Allan Kennedy to bring about his ends a little indirectly. It was he who had sent Allan down to Sylvia's side and told him to remain, when Dunny's troubles had been at their height, but he had done it solely in the hope of fostering, if not creating, a rivalry between the younger man and Jerry Kirk, for plenty of talk had come concerning the two, through Thomas King and Mrs. Hank. He had thought to entangle the younger man as an element on whom to count on a day that soon must come, but he realized this morning that he must do his work alone.

CHAPTER XX.

ALLAN BRAVES AN ORDEAL.

A CALM, unerring conception of what it might forebode had been vouchsafed to Jerry Kirk when he read the Weaver will. He had been amazed that Weaver could have held a property so valuable with never a word to any one, but more than this had been the hurt he felt to think his friend could have left it all in charge of Asa Craig, giving him almost a parent's place regarding little Dunny and Sylvia.

That Weaver and Craig had been together in the Civil War, and that Weaver had always and forever felt an inordinate admiration for Craig's capabilities in business, could hardly soften the all that Jerry felt, and yet he had done his very best to help the will business through without delay.

He was doubly sore, for, after all, the status of affairs with Sylvia affected him far more deeply than anything financial ever had done or ever could.

He loved her, yet he knew she was slipping from his life. He had fought his fight with himself, and his larger, nobler nature had conquered; nevertheless he was a man, with all of a man's primeval yearnings, stirrings, and wants.

If possible, Sylvia's very remoteness from his possession made his love the greater. He felt like brother and father in one to little Dunny, but only like a lover, mate and protector when his thought returned to Sylvia.

He kept away from the house, however, except as business, or play with little Dunny, called him there from time to time. In his manner there was never a hint of his anguish of heart, nor did accusation greet the questioning gaze that Sylvia so often bent upon him.

His patience, the largeness of his heart, the steadfast loyalty and truth of his nature—these made him dearer to her day by day. She understood a little of his deeper feeling, also, for heart despair has a way of showing through the brightest, merriest twinkle of the eyes, and Jerry had over much to bring him despair, these summer days.

Had Jerry spoken, even now while Sylvia's bosom heaved at every memory of Allan's confession, her sense of gratitude and affection would have warmed her heart so softly she would certainly have given him her hand to keep forever. But he could not dream that such a thing could be, and he would not ask, in his pride, and have her beg to be released.

Thus, though the summer days were coming and going in beauty ineffable, her heart was filled with many doubts. Neither birds that sang so blithesomely, nor crickets chirping of their mating, nor dainty wild blossoms, like chalices filled with love that bees were fetching constantly, could make her wholly content.

Yet ecstasy, in fine independence of content, would still come sweeping upon her with the stirring of the trees or in the stillness of the night, for a thousand things had voice enough to whisper of Allan Kennedy.

Day after day had passed without a sign or a word from Allan now, and Sylvia was anxious.

She wondered if anything had happened to keep him away. Till Jerry should speak, till something should be definitely settled, she knew it was better and safer for Allan to remain at Millsite, yet she found it hard indeed to endure his absence during days like these.

She and Dunny were very much together all the time, the little barefooted chap again bringing Jack into requisition and riding the blind and patient little animal about, in Sylvia's care.

Concerning the legacy bequeathed to herself and Dunny, she felt a great satisfaction, inasmuch as she knew she could some day repay Jerry Kirk for all he had done and was doing. Beyond this point she had no knowledge whatsoever of the splendid value of the property or the power it gave to Asa Craig.

On a Sunday morning she was early astir, and traipsing up through the great ravine, gathering ferns and flowers to bedeck the little porch of the house, for she somehow felt that Allan Kennedy would come.

Such a charm of summer filled the world, and the canyon in particular, that she could not resist the wish that Allan could find her here among the trees. It almost seemed as if the morning sighed with a sense of its own perfected loveliness.

Leaves and birds and frisking squirrels all appeared alike rejoicing in the ardor of the sun. The brook by now was an instrument of music, furnishing the laughter, and the tinkling in the woodland orchestration. Down through the fretwork of the trees the light was thrown till it dappled all the earth and grass with its gold.

But Allan failed to come till nine o'clock, and then he found the radiant Miss Sylvia seated on the porch replacing shoes and stockings on her small brother's feet and legs to make him more presentable and in keeping with the day.

He was glad and excited at Allan's appearance, and so was his sister. They all remained on the porch in the sunlight for a time, and then little Dunny wandered off to look for Timonides Flack.

"I thought perhaps you—or Jerry—might be down to-day," said Sylvia, and she rose to walk toward her bed of flowers.

"Well, Jerry isn't coming," answered Allan as he followed where she led. "I think there is trouble brewing at the camp."

"Trouble for Jerry?" she inquired in genuine concern. "Oh, I hope not anything real! What sort of trouble?"

"Trouble with his partner, Mr. Craig," said Allan, worried, and glad to share his burden of knowledge with another as fond of Jerry as he was himself. "It is very serious indeed. I fear that Craig will get the better of the battle in spite of anything that Jerry can do."

"They haven't quarreled?" asked Sylvia. "Why, they are friends and partners."

"Yes—of a kind," agreed Kennedy. "But you see, your father's will——" he checked himself abruptly.

"My father's will?" she repeated. "Yes—go on. What about it?"

"You know it made Mr. Craig trustee over all that property," said Allan. "He saw what he could do, and he's doing it now, and nothing—so far as I can see—will be strong enough to stop him till he crushes Jerry out and leaves him ruined."

Sylvia looked at him in doubt and perplexity, the light of worry swiftly deepening in her eyes.

"Perhaps I don't quite understand," she said. "The will, as you say, made Mr. Craig trustee and executor and so forth, but how could that affect Mr. Kirk?"

"I'll explain it as I understand it," said Allan, himself a champion for Jerry, for reasons he hardly comprehended, save that Jerry's hold upon his affections was daily increasing.

"I believe Mr. Craig has been trying for years to get control of the company. Jerry has been too strong for him up to now, because he owned more than half of the assets in the business in his personal right, and could swing more money. Now, then, this will comes along—all quite right and proper and wise on the part of your father—but it gives Mr. Craig a tremendous advantage."

"What has he done?" she asked breathlessly.

"He has utterly ruined Jerry's leases on water rights, heretofore good, by taking water from springs now as good as his own, on the Weaver land.

"He has canceled contracts with other men for logs, and will cut the trees on your property instead—as he has a perfect right to do, and ought to do, as the trees are of no account to you until they are sold in your behalf.

"He has freed his own money and can now employ not only that, but also all that accrues to Dunny's credit, and he has bought up Jerry's mortgages to foreclose them if possible, and is simply pushing him bodily against the wall!"

"He's a monster—a hideous monster!" said Sylvia, white with anger and with fear for Jerry.

"A monster perhaps," agreed Kennedy, "but not a rogue. He is doing it all honestly—so far as you and Dunny and all purely business transactions are concerned. He is shrewd, far-seeing, and unrelenting. He has found he can do it, and he means to own the business completely."

Sylvia gazed at Allan's face in horror.

"Jerry will be—ruined!" she said.

Allan was clenching his fists.

"He will," he agreed. "And the worst of it is, I don't believe there is any way in the world to prevent it. Oh, I could almost strangle Craig for this! A better, truer, finer man than Jerry never lived! I've been finding it out. I've come to like him immensely. It seems to me I'd do 'most anything to help him out. It's deviltry—cunning, scheming deviltry—on the part of Craig! It's downright meanness! I don't see what Jerry can do."

"And my father's will—did it all," said Sylvia, pale as she thought it out. "I wish it had never been found! We've brought Jerry nothing but trouble. And he has never said a word! He endures it all, in his generous, big-hearted way! But he'll hate us both. My father's will——"

"Oh, no, he won't," interrupted Allan. "He wants you to have the property. He's glad of that. He's glad the will was found."

"He can't be glad," she answered, thinking of all of Jerry's blighted hopes. "We shouldn't have needed the property if only I had kept——"

She caught herself and did not add, "my word." Nevertheless she was swiftly reviewing the situation. She saw how different everything would have been had she married this man according to her own agreement. She shamed herself in the face of his impending ruin and shattered hopes.

"But the will would have come to light at last some day," argued Allan. "There is no use regretting it was found."

A sudden remembrance of the will and its oddness of provision flashed through her mind.

"I might have made it different," she said. "I could make it different now! I could save it all for Jerry—take it all away from Mr. Craig!"

"What?" interrogated Allan, puzzled for a moment by her words. "How could you save——"

"The will appointed Mr. Craig—unless I should marry a man over thirty-five years old," she interrupted swiftly. "Allan—Allan—go tell Jerry Kirk to come right down here to-day!"

Kennedy stared at her, stunned and bewildered.

"Sylvia, how—how can you ask—— You mean—you'll marry Jerry Kirk—at once?"

"Of course I will—I must!" she answered. "I want you to go up and tell him to come without a moment's delay!"

"Go up—and tell him!" he faltered, in a mental fight for time. "But, Sylvia, I love you myself. I told you so before. I came to-day to ask——"

"No! No!" she interrupted. "Stop, Allan—don't say that again. It can't be right. It isn't right. I want you to go. It's all there is to do."

"Sylvia!" said he. "Sylvia! You don't know what you are saying. We love each other. We belong—but perhaps you don't really love me, after all."

"I do!" she said, in a sudden outburst of confession. "I do! I can't help it. I didn't want to let myself, but it came—I couldn't help it. I love you dearly, but I beg you, Allan, to go and send Jerry here without another word."

Her voice had broken. The tears had come to her eyes abruptly—with firm resolution and softened lights of love for company.

Allan took her hand.

"But how can I go, when we love each other so?" he said. "I can't. Our happiness—our rights——"

"We haven't any rights," she interrupted; "not with Jerry about to be ruined! I can't do anything else than this. I promised. I should have married him before. It hasn't been fair—it hasn't been right. Please, please go up and tell him—now!"

"I can't give you up!" he said in sudden passion. "I can't—I won't give you up!"

"You can—you will—if you love me," she answered in her strength. "It's the only right thing to do."

"It's sacrifice," he said. "It's sacrifice of us both—of love and happiness—to save a mere piece of property."

"It's sacrifice of Jerry if I don't!" she cried. "He brought us here when we were poor and needy and hopeless. I came here to be his wife. I could never have met you or loved you, if it hadn't been for him.

"He has given us everything, and we have given him nothing! He is being ruined, all on account of us—and he makes no complaint—doesn't even ask me to keep my promise! How he must have suffered, all these weeks! Do you think he doesn't see—doesn't know about you and me? I have seen it in his eyes! I've hurt him, brought him to ruin—taken his money, his care, his love—and given him—what?

"No, no, no, no! I would feel so mean, so selfish and sordid—taking all, all, all—happiness, property—money, sacrifice and—you! I won't I couldn't be so cowardly and mean! I love you enough to give you up! And if you don't go and send him here I shall hate you."

She had spoken swiftly, hotly, with a passion he had never expected to find in her nature. She had clutched his wrist, as if to satisfy to some extent the hunger of her arms to hold him fast, but she gently pushed him away at the end.

"I don't see—how—I can," Allan faltered in reply. "I love you so. You don't understand how much, Sylvia."

"Understand?" she said, with a smile it hurt to see. "As if my heart doesn't understand it all. But I should so despise myself—and you—and love, if we couldn't be as brave and generous as Jerry. Prove that you love me, Allan—prove it. Don't let him be the only noble man—dear heart—don't do that. Go, go—and let me love you the better for your courage!"

"I've got to go. I knew all along I'd have to go," he said, as he took her hand again in his. "Only—I had to wait—just a minute. I love you so. . . . Good-by."

"Good-by," she answered faintly, her color swiftly departing. "I knew you would. I knew it, dear. Good-by."

He looked upon her in his yearning, and her gaze met his without a falter. Love, heroic, enduring and beautiful, was shining in her eyes.

As if across a wide abyss their glances met in a sweet, long look of sadness. She hungered to be taken to his arms, for she was weak already, now that her arguments had won and lost him together. He was aching just to clasp her once to his heart and kiss her on the lips. But he knew he had no rights of love, and so he dropped her listless hands and went away.

She watched him pass through the gate and down the road. At length at a corner he turned and waved his hand. She answered with a gesture that was simple enough, except in the pang it cost her heart. Then weakly she knelt upon the earth, above her flowers, clasping her hands upon her breast in poignant loneliness.

(To be continued.)

THE FISSURE OF ROLANDO.

By James Spratt.

IN which it is proven that a parrot does not always talk too much nor yet say too little.

WHAT most delighted Waring about that wretched little estate—inherited through the death of a distant relation of whose existence he had scarcely been aware—was the fact that a murder had been done there a half century ago.

The victim was not one of Waring's family, to be sure, but a Mexican, Herrara by name, a crazy old hermit who lived there with no other companion than a woman—a captive woman. A beautiful señorita, Waring would have us believe. What she really may have looked like or who she was, no man ever knew, for she was never seen.

Waring told the tale with a good deal of gusto. His information was acquired from the journal of his deceased relation, which he inherited along with the estate—a very unreliable and unauthentic source, to say the least.

This much, however, was doubtless true: Herrara was found outside his door one morning dead, bound hand and foot to a huge boulder, a dagger sticking in his breast. People said that the woman's brother had killed him and set her free. But, as I say, all this took place a lifetime ago under the Mexican rule, and it is difficult to separate fact from fiction.

"At any rate," said Waring airily, as he stood, portfolio under arm ready for the start, his mop of bristling red hair surmounted by a corduroy cap, "there's a barrelful of Spanish legends down there, and a million dollars' worth of the most seductive climate in the State; besides——"

"Besides an abomination of fleas," snorted Trollett from the depths of an easy chair, where he sat smoking.

"Besides, I was about to add," continued Waring, without observing the interruption, "there's a piece of seacoast and some rugged peaks that are worth a fortnight of any painter's time. Trollett, I'll look for you and Tom to come down toward the end of the week. You can fight to see which one shall occupy the bed of the murdered Herrara."

"What do you say, Trollett?" I asked when the clatter of Waring's feet on the stair had died out. "Shall we go?"

"Go! Of course we'll go. You need the vacation." (Trollett's sarcasm is endurable at times.) "Besides, I think I can carry on a little investigation to good advantage down there. These confounded newsies can't bring in anything but cats and dogs, and they're always sick."

Trollett, you understand, is a sort of scientist, I should call him a dabbler had he less genius and more money. He is forever cutting open frogs and birds and dogs; prodding them on the nerves with little sharp steel points; jotting down notes of what they do; and all the while he is grinning most diabolically, his white teeth bared and clamped about the stem of his stubby pipe. Otherwise Trollett is splendid company and might pass for a gentleman anywhere but for the disreputable clothing he wears.

The week's end found Trollett and myself landed with all our traps (most of them were Trollett's, for he carried a lot of his abominable instruments and pestiferous bottles and boxes) on the platform of the station at which Waring had directed us to alight.

After storing our luggage in the station agent's office, we inquired the directions and set off at a brisk walk down the dusty road which, according to the agent, passed within a half mile of our destination. A beautiful piece of country it was, too, with the sea on one side and the rugged mountains on the other, their ridges spiked with giant sequoias, with the lambent, unflecked blue overhead.

We found Waring sitting in the shade of a huge boulder (the very one, I afterward learned, the dead Herrara had been found bound to), industriously sketching in the outlines of a tumble-down half-frame, half-'dobe house.

Beside the open door sat a disreputable old greaser, his chair propped back against the mud-wall, boots hooked in rungs of chair, broad brimmed hat shading his face from the glare of the sunlight, for all the world like a lizard sunning himself before his hole. And at his side was a decrepit old parrot alternately hanging by beak and talons from the bar of a wooden perch.

"An accommodating lay figure," said Trollett, after the first greeting, nodding his head toward the somnolent figure. "How long has he been sleeping there?"

"Sleeping!" Waring chuckled. "He's not sleeping. He's watching me like a hawk. I can feel it. It's a sort of game we play with one another every morning."

"Does he belong to the realty?"

"Scarcely, though he has been here for the past ten years; in fact, since the death of my lamented relation. The parrot is 'Miss Henriette.' She's a thousand years old, I judge, from the looks of her."

"That's not old age," said Trollett, gazing critically at the bird as she climbed awkwardly about on the perch. "She's paralyzed on the right side. Notice how that right wing droops. It's useless the same as her leg. I'll take a look at her to-morrow."

"Don't you do it! A more snarling, soured spinster I never saw. Look here." Waring held up one finger, showing the badly lacerated flesh. "That's the way she greeted me."

"Does she talk?" I asked.

"Talk! No. One would think from the looks of her that she could swear like a trooper, but she hasn't uttered a syllable since I've been here. Perhaps it's because of her association with that sphinx of a Pedro. Here, Pedro, Pedro."

This last was addressed in a loud voice to the greaser, who finally stirred, pushed back his hat, yawned, and stared at us out of his narrow, shifty eyes.

"Pedro, these gentlemen have left their baggage at the station. Go down and have some one haul it up."

Pedro continued to stare at us for a moment, then lifting the parrot to his wrist he muttered, "No sabe," in a barely audible tone, and slunk around the corner of the house.

Trollett and I burst into uproarious laughter at Waring's discomfiture.

"Confound the insolent dog," he grumbled. "He understands right enough when he wants to. I've got a mind to kick his carcass off the place."

Waring's house, whatever may have been the mystery of its early existence, was not, in its present state, a habitation to arouse more than the passing interest of a visitor.

Dirt, filth, and disorder were everywhere, save in the one room which Waring had had the forethought to renovate before our arrival, supplying it with a pine table for Trollett to work over, three or four camp chairs, an oil lamp, and a hammock swung in one corner.

"This is the room in which Herrara is said to have kept his captive," said Waring, with a grandiloquent sweep of the arm. "Though, I dare say, he had it fitted up more sumptuously than this."

"She must have been a delicate creature not to have broken jail," put in Trollett, surveying the four corners of the room scornfully.

"She may have been chained," added Waring, who was very enthusiastic over the theme. "She must have been chained. Naturally, you know, a crazy old galoot would chain up his captive. Smile if you want, you soured old skeptic. I tell you, I believe it, every word of it. And as for Herrara——"

"Drat Herrara!" interrupted Trollett. "I'm hungry as a bear. Besides, we didn't come down here to get a feature story for the Sunday newspapers. Trot out your grub; that's what we want, not your legends."

During the succeeding days, the legend of Herrara and his captive (for legend Trollett and I insisted upon calling it) was almost forgotten.

Waring kept as diligently to his sketching as if he were still in his old quarters in the city; while Trollett, who is a madman to work, had no sooner got settled than he rigged up a laboratory in the house and began to scour the country for birds and reptiles to experiment with.

He had some sort of theory in regard to the pneumogastric nerve and the carotid artery, and the voluntary control of the heart action in certain animals.

Pedro and I were the only ones to spend the hours in slothful idleness; he in dozing before the sunny side of the 'dobe, a part of the house which he and the parrot occupied unmolested by us; and I in long tramps through the hills and surrounding country.

At first I had tried to make friends with Pedro and the parrot; but the lethargic, cur-like indifference of the one and the fiery, bellicose disposition of the other soon repulsed me. That Pedro hated us was more than apparent; and as Waring had stated on that first day, he watched us like a hawk.

"That greaser, I tell you," stormed Trollett, "is festering up with some sort of mischief. We won't wake up one of these fine mornings on account of a knife thrust between the ribs, and all because Waring won't let me kick him into the Pacific Ocean."

"Pedro is afraid we're going to steal something," I said. "It will be a great relief to him when we leave."

"He's so confounded touchy about that parrot," grumbled Trollett. "You can't look at her but what he shows his teeth like a cur and hustles her out of sight."

"He's seen you cutting up enough rabbits and snakes in here to make him suspicious," put in Waring. "And I confess, Trollett, if I saw you looking at me with that cold, calculating stare of yours, as I've seen you gazing at Henriette, I shouldn't stop running until I'd placed the Sierras between us."

That Trollett secretly harbored a desire to experiment upon Henriette had been apparent from the day of our arrival. And that Pedro more than half suspected his intention was not to be doubted.

Henriette, indeed, was never out of Pedro's sight night or day. And did we but show a casual interest in the bird, by look or gesture, his resentment was displayed in the most marked actions of displeasure.

That Trollett would by some subterfuge sooner or later compass his design, I was convinced. In this I was not mistaken; for late one afternoon, returning from a long tramp in the hills, I found him, pipe in mouth, sleeves rolled back over his sinewy arms, bending over the table, a tiny sharp-pointed instrument in his hand. And lying before him was Henriette, peacefully sleeping under an anesthetic.

"Where's Pedro?" I asked in some surprise, wondering how in the world Trollett had ever gained possession of the bird.

"Gone to town," snapped Trollett, who does not like to be interrupted in his work. "Now, clear out of here. It cost me three dollars to get rid of Pedro, and I've got to finish this job before he returns or there'll be the deuce to pay."

"Trollett," I said with some warmth, "did you promise Pedro to take care of his bird while he was gone?"

"Yes, I did," he snapped. "And I'm going to take better care of her than I promised. Now, get."

It was with a feeling akin to disgust that I left the house and joined Waring, who was sketching at his usual post beside the boulder. Pedro's affection for the bird had never before touched me in a sentimental spot; but now, in the light of Trollett's broken trust, it appealed strongly to my emotions.

That the bird was as good as dead, I had little doubt. Trollett's operations were never calculated to save the life of the victim. I shuddered at the thought of a human being going under his knife. He was a perfect ghoul, was Trollett.

Imagine my surprise an hour or two later, on entering the house, to see Henriette not dead, but sitting on her perch, her head ludicrously bandaged with white muslin. She was more sour looking than a dyspeptic old maid.

"As neat a little surgical operation as you would care to see," said Trollett proudly, wiping his instruments. "And she'll have as nasty a temper as ever when the effect of the anesthetic wears off."

"But what have you been doing to her head?" exclaimed Waring from the doorway.

"Fixing it, my dear Waring, fixing it as I might fix yours or Tom's, if you came to me with a palsied arm and said that your head had ached for thirty years." Trollett paused long enough to

bestow a patronizing smile upon each of us.

"You may have heard me remark that Henriette's lameness was due to paralysis of the right wing and leg. Now, sometimes paralysis is due to one thing, sometimes to another. In this case I found that Henriette's skull had at one time been injured by a rap over the left side of the head—nerves cross, you know.

"I merely open the skull; look for blood clot on the brain, and, finding none, bandage up the head, being very careful that the former pressure is removed. Simplest thing in the world!

"To-morrow, or next day at latest, if I'm not mistaken, Henriette's useless leg will show remarkable improvement. Now let's get supper. Pedro will be back soon, and he'll be hopping mad, too."

As Trollett had predicted, an hour or two of rest and Henriette was as surly and cross as ever. That she would survive the operation was not to be doubted. And there were indications, too, of returning life to the paralyzed leg.

Trollett was as pleased as a baby with a new rattle over the rapid recovery of his patient. I had never seen him in such high spirits. Long after dark we sat in the open smoking our pipes, while Trollett entertained us with the most extravagant ideas of the remarkable things scientific investigation would bring forth during the next decade.

At length, our discussion beginning to flag, he arose from his chair, remarking as he did so that he must have a final look at Henriette for the night, to make certain the bandages had not worked loose. A moment later he had entered the house; there was the snap of a match; a stream of light shot through the window.

Immediately there burst out on the air the most outlandish shrieking in a treble key I have ever heard—an angry, outraged voice repeating over and over again some unintelligible words; and mingled with it uproarious peals of laughter from Trollett.

As we burst into the house the first thing that met my gaze was Trollett, convulsed with merriment, rolling on his back in the hammock.

"Look, look!" he gasped, pointing toward the table.

And there in the circle of light from the dingy lamp, like some specter from a tale of the Middle Ages, we beheld Henriette, head bandaged, feathers ruffled, eyes glaring, shrieking over and over again words which I failed to understand.

Scarcely, however, had my eyes taken in the situation when a man rushed headlong through the open doorway and struck the bird a heavy blow with a cudgel, killing it instantly; then, darting out of doors, disappeared in the gloom of the trees. It was Pedro.

For a moment Waring and I stood transfixed, then the full humor of the situation dawned upon us. We fairly rolled on the floor in a paroxysm of mirth.

"In the name of Heaven, Trollett," gasped Waring at length, "what was the matter with that bird?"

"Aphasia," howled Trollett between fits of laughter. "Aphasia!"

It was a full quarter hour before Trollett's mirth had simmered down so that he could give us a detailed account of what had happened, and then he used so many technical terms that we must needs ask him to repeat it once more.

"You see," he concluded, "the Fissure of Rolando, which is located on the left side of the brain, is in man, and I may add in parrots also, the speech center; and an injury to the brain in that region (in this case the pressure of the skull due to a blow) has been known frequently to deprive men of the power to speak, and at the same time to paralyze the motor nerves that control the right side of the body.

"You will readily see that an operation removing this pressure would be likely to enliven the speech center at the same time that it restored control of the paralyzed right side of the body. Exactly that has happened in this case.

"Had I known that Henriette, before she was injured, had been able to talk I might have predicted what has taken place. And to tell you the truth, I am quite ashamed of my own stupidity. Just such oversights have often been known to result disastrously to the patient."

"But what was it she was saying?" I asked. "And why do you suppose Pedro might have wished to kill her?"

Trollett spread his palms outward and

raised his brows, an expression which in his own phraseology meant, "Search me."

"One of the words she spoke," said Waring, "sounded to me deucedly like 'Herrara!'"

Trollett sprang from his chair.

"Herrara, Herrara, that was it!" he exclaimed. "But the rest of it?"

"Spanish," I suggested.

"Likely as not," said Waring. "But what I'd like to know is why, in the name of thunderation, Pedro wanted to kill her? Pedro, mind you——"

"Waring," Trollett was looking straight at the other, his lips twisted into a quizzical smile, "haven't I heard you say that Herrara is supposed to have kept a woman captive?"

"Y-e-s."

"Well, in my opinion, Herrara's lady prisoner was nothing more nor less than a parrot. Very likely Henriette."

"But how came she here!" I exclaimed. "How and why is Pedro here? Herrara was killed fifty years ago. Pedro and the parrot have been here less than ten."

"We might speculate on that till the crack of doom," said Trollett. "But if I'm not mistaken, Pedro has been hanging around here a good many years to hear Henriette speak those mysterious words."

How much sleep my companions may have got that night I cannot say. But as for myself, I know that my own slumber was disturbed by the wildest of dreams; and mixed with it all was that hideous shrieking of Henriette—shrieks, which on awakening, proved to be nothing more terrifying than the snoring of Trollett. It was long past sunup when I was finally roused from a peaceful slumber by a kick in the ribs and the voice of Trollett, demanding if I would sleep all day.

The episode of the night before was still too fresh in our minds to permit of discussing any other topic. Neither Waring nor myself could advance a plausible explanation; and as for Trollett, the thoughtful silence which he kept as we ate breakfast convinced me that he, likewise, was completely at sea.

The meal ended, Trollett proposed that he and Waring lay aside their work for the morning and the three of us take a long tramp in the hills.

That he had some object in view, I was sure; and that the object, whatever it might be, in some way bore on the question that perplexed our minds was more than likely.

During our progress into the hills he vouchsafed never a word to satisfy our curiosity. He seemed scarcely to listen to the prattle of Waring and myself as we trailed along at his heels.

It was not until we reached the summit of a high hill, which overlooked the surrounding country, that we finally came to a halt.

"If this is one of your pleasure jaunts," gasped Waring, dropping down on the ground, "I prefer that hereafter you do not ask us to join you. What's up?"

Without making reply, Trollett drew from his pocket a small pair of field-glasses, and, adjusting them to his eyes, began to sweep the valley below.

"Trollett," said Waring finally, "will you be so kind as to tell me what in the name of Gehenna you are up to?"

Trollett leveled the glasses on some particular object in the valley (our own house, I judged), carefully scrutinized it for a moment, then he said:

"Pedro has scarcely had time to get back there yet."

"Get back where?" growled Waring. "I don't make head nor tail of what you are driving at."

"If you had looked behind you on the way up here, you might have seen him dogging our footsteps. It's exactly as I thought. Pedro is anxious to have us leave that house for a short time."

"But what for?" burst forth Waring.

"That, I think, we shall find out presently; for there he is now skulking about the place."

It was impossible with the naked eye to distinguish more than the outlines of the house quivering in the heat waves, and a tiny speck moving about the yard. This latter, I doubted not, was Pedro, though what might be the real purpose of his maneuvers we were compelled to await the pleasure of Trollett to inform us. And this he was in no great hurry to do.

"He's puttering around that boulder," came the response to our impatient inquiries after an age of waiting. "He's

trying to hide something. We'll make a note of that when we get back. Suffering Saint——"

Scarcely had the exclamation burst from Trollett's lips when Waring and I, who were straining our eyes to distinguish what was going on, saw a cloud of débris fly high in the air; and then there floated up from the valley below the boom of a heavy explosion.

"What is it, Trollett. What *is* it?" I gasped, looking into his face as he stood, with blanched cheek, the glasses still to his eyes.

Waring was already half-way down the slope.

"The fool, the fool," muttered Trollett. "The charge went off prematurely. Wait a minute, Waring. There is no great hurry. He's very much dead, or I'm mistaken."

When we got there we found Pedro's body lying stretched out on the ground scarcely ten yards from the blasted boulder, an ugly gash in his head.

"Dead," said Trollett, stooping over and placing his ear to Pedro's breast. "Dead!" And then, picking up a rock from beside the corpse, he added:

"This is what did the work—Cæsar's ghost! It's—it's gold—solid gold!"

It is odd what children men are at times. There over Pedro's body, with wildly beating pulse, we passed the nugget from trembling hand to trembling hand. It was gold, without mistake.

Nor was that all. For scattered about, here and there, some of the lumps half embedded in fragments of the shattered boulder, we found gold in plenty.

"Like raisins in a fruit cake," said Waring, as he split open the last fragment with a hammer and extracted a nugget the size of his fist.

At last we turned our attention to Pedro's body.

"A beautiful piece of poetic justice," said Trollett, when we had stretched the corpse in a peaceful pose, and had closed the eyes. "And not a small pinch of the irony of fate mixed up with it all."

"But how came the gold in that rock?" exclaimed Waring.

"If you will examine the fragments carefully," said Trollett, "you will see that it is composed of sand and cement, a very durable 'artificial rock,' indeed. Herrara showed a clever ingenuity in melting his gold into nuggets and hiding them in such a place."

"But Henriette's words," I exclaimed. "What bearing should they have on the case! How should Pedro know?"

"That we can only guess at," said Trollett. "Herrara was a melancholiac; and there is no accounting for the fantastic notions that prompt such men to certain acts.

"It may have been his fancy to teach the parrot the key to the treasure. Perhaps it was for this reason that he guarded her so closely—so closely, indeed, that passers-by, hearing her jabberings, may have mistaken them for the cries of a woman. And the discovery that Herrara possessed gold, together with a suspicion that the parrot knew the secret, doubtless led some one to the crime.

"And lastly, the murderers, impatient to make the bird speak the charmed words which should enrich them, might have struck her a sharp blow over the head with the knuckles, thus, as we have seen, depriving her of speech."

"But who could have been the murderer!" I exclaimed. "Surely not Pedro, for he was scarcely born at that time."

"Who knows!" said Trollett. "Perhaps it was Pedro's father, his grandfather, or an uncle. At any rate, he knew that the parrot held the clue to the treasure, and he understood at once what the parrot said last evening. The secret of the murder was in Pedro's keeping, and will remain with him till the end of time."

AN EASTER SONG.

By Clinton Scollard.

GONE are the icy hours;
Song and the sun are rife;
Flowers break bud in the bowers;
Life has won in the strife.

Blessing after the blight;
Glory after the gloom;
Light from out of the night;
Bloom from out of the tomb!

A WHITE STREAK OF DISASTER.*

By Edgar Franklin.

How the swinging pendulum of fortune came almost to a dead stop.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

JOHN GRAFTON has mortgaged his entire fortune to back a traction company promoted by George Colson. At midnight before the day of settlement it is discovered that the papers showing the company's indebtedness to Grafton have disappeared from his office. Detective Burleigh is immediately summoned, and from various clues, concludes that the package, sealed and addressed in one of the firm's envelopes, has been dropped down the mail-chute by the thief, and is lying in the general box on the lower floor.

Grafton persuades Brady, a politician, to secure the pass-key from the postmaster and open the box. His hand is almost on the letter when Brady reads the address, and, pretending to be overcome with moral scruples, replaces the letter in the box.

Both leave the building, Grafton returning later with Burleigh. Hiding in the shadow of the vestibule, they hear some one attempting to open the door. An unfortunate movement puts the person to flight, Grafton and Burleigh in close pursuit. After a long chase the man escapes, and Grafton finds in his path the mail-box key. They rush back to the building and open the mail-box, but there is no letter. An early collection has been made.

He resolves to trust himself to Colson's honor, only to find, when he seeks an appointment with him, that Colson has utterly disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

BURLEIGH UNEARTHS A COINCIDENCE.

BURLEIGH'S eyes opened widely. "You don't mean to tell me, sir, that Mr. Colson isn't about town as usual?" he cried.

"Not only that, but they can seem to get no trace of him."

"But he was one of the most prominent figures in town—he's everywhere in this business district, every day in the week."

"I know it, but he's nowhere in it on this particular day."

The detective scratched his head, then wagged that member thoughtfully for a few seconds.

"Well, we certainly do seem to be up against it in this business!" he commented, with a wry smile. "When was the gentleman last seen, Mr. Grafton?"

"In the café of the Grande last evening."

"Alone?"

"No, with a party of friends, I believe."

"You don't know who they were?"

"No, but Bennett, his secretary, does, and he has communicated. They can tell nothing of him."

"Um." Burleigh drummed on the arm of his chair for a time; when he looked up, his gaze was questioning.

"I wonder what connection that has with this robbery?"

"Give it up," sighed Grafton. "None, I fancy."

"Why?"

"Colson isn't the sort of a man to steal, Burleigh."

"Very true, sir; but in this unhappy affair we seem to have no one besides honest men to suspect. If we can't fasten some sort of suspicion on some one, we're going to be hard pushed."

"But on the face of it, he couldn't have been the man—it's a physical impossibility."

"Why?"

"He was in the café until one. We know that the robbery was committed at about twelve o'clock."

"True—I'd forgotten that." Bur-

*Began February All-Story Magazine. Single copies, 10 cents.

leigh snapped his fingers. "And yet if he had nothing to do with it, it's remarkable that he should have disappeared at this precise time. We know that Colson wasn't here, and to the best of our knowledge and belief he's a perfectly honest man, but—well, it *is* queer, sir."

"It's queer, but it is altogether too circumstantial without the corroborating evidence of some other crooked work on Colson's part."

"Yes, it's rather an unjustified slur on Colson, I admit," sighed Burleigh, hopelessly. "Well, we'll have to look in new directions."

Grafton nodded.

"We'll have to look pretty quickly, too, Burleigh. Time's getting short for me now, you know."

"The day after to-morrow, was it not?"

"At noon—yes. Been doing any theorizing on your own account, Burleigh, since early morning?"

"A little—not much."

"In what direction?"

"Well, I returned to the office when you went home, sir, just to start things moving for the day. To be perfectly honest, I hardly knew in what way this thing could be best handled, but on the off chance I took the risk of sending a man to Dobbs."

"The postmaster, eh? What was that for?" asked Grafton.

"Well, I gave him the key we found —the one which opened the box." Burleigh smiled slightly at the recollection. "The man I sent was Slawson, an entirely new addition to my force. He came on from the East only last week and he's not known about town at all. It occurred to me that the key was of no particular value to us, now that the papers were gone, and that something might be learned when it was returned."

".I see—on the assumption that it was the same Brady lost. We don't know that."

"We didn't know it a few hours ago, Mr. Grafton. I instructed Slawson to get a private interview with Dobbs and to say that he came from Brady. He obeyed quite accurately. He was downstairs when I came in, something over half an hour ago."

"And what did he have to report?"

"That Dobbs was intensely relieved at seeing the thing again. That was natural, but he put in a queer remark quite unconsciously. He said: 'Why the devil didn't he send it back as he promised, without scaring my wits out by that note this morning?' Slawson asked what note was meant. 'Why, the one stating that he had lost the key, of course,' replied our friend Dobbs."

Grafton whistled in astonishment.

"That was an unexpected bit of confirmation, wasn't it?" he cried. "It seems pretty well to establish the fact that we found Brady's key and no other."

"As well as it could be done without direct evidence. That seems to open up a new train of thought, does it not?"

"Several of them," confessed the other. "But what do you make of it exactly, Burleigh?"

"Nothing very positive, except that it establishes Brady's odd connection with the affair pretty firmly. I believe that he was the man we chased just at dawn this morning, the man who tried to break in here twice within the hour."

"Very little question of that seems to remain," mused Grafton. "Yet, why did he do it?"

"Because he wanted to open that box alone and get the letter! And did he know what was in it or did he mistake it for something else of importance to himself, or what? Don't ask, sir—that's brought me to a standstill every time I tried to reason it out. You didn't tell Brady the nature of the papers?"

"Of course I did not!"

"You did not even hint at it?"

"I did not. All he knew was that they were of the utmost importance to me. I tried to tell him that it was something that I had addressed by mistake and you remember how cheerfully and truthfully he called me a liar!"

"I do, sir. And since he knew that you were not telling the truth, all I can conceive is that he was acquainted with the thief's handwriting or your own, or both. What that leads to, I can't say."

"Well, you'll have to say soon, Burleigh," said Grafton, somewhat sharply.

"I shall hope to, sir—I'm taking steps in that direction at this moment and I'm going to try a few longer ones in a little while."

"What sort of steps?"

"In regard to Brady. Whatever he knows, I want to know. To hope for the information from him personally is absurd, but I have another little plan. I sent another man to watch his office and learn when he goes out. Should Brady leave during the afternoon, I'll know of it at once. Then I mean to go there and —well, see what there is to be seen."

Grafton's mouth had opened to speak, when a knock came upon the door. Burleigh opened it upon his own office boy, standing there with a folded note.

The detective read the line and smiled.

"Speak of the devil, sir!" he chuckled, turning to Grafton. "My man has just 'phoned in that—the coast is clear, if I can hurry."

"And you're going to try——"

"To do what may be done," said Burleigh softly, holding up a warning finger as he stood in the open door of the outer office. "Will you stay here until I get back, sir? It won't be later than four o'clock, perhaps not so late as that. Good-by, sir."

He hurried out and Grafton turned back to his desk with a sigh. He felt that he was doing an abnormal amount of sighing nowadays, and the notion impressed him most unpleasantly. Why under the sun was he mooning around in such fashion even with the desperate situation to face?

He had a rush of other business, regular business, to manage. He set his teeth resolutely. The whole infernal series of weird complications should be banished together; Grafton would return to his accustomed duty of managing a large part of Kenyonville.

He rang for his stenographer and his mail and set about the task of answering the most pressing letters. In twenty minutes, strong effort had mastered the harassed mind: he was giving full attention to other affairs.

His letters disposed of, he ran over some law business, called up Collins and gave a number of directions. He sent for Jennison, and readjusted certain matters of rent and taxes in connection with the apartment houses and astonished the chief clerk by not mentioning or even hinting at the great mystery.

When the last personal detail had been disposed of, Grafton found himself watching the clock. It was four now. He had shifted the burden for a good two hours, but now it was piling up again on his shoulders and Burleigh should have returned perhaps to lighten it.

Where was Burleigh, anyway? Grafton meditated a trip down-stairs to the agency; he had risen to carry out the design when the boy entered with word that the detective wished to see him.

Grafton, his eyes glowing with expectancy, returned to his chair.

Burleigh was in a state rather peculiar for one of his usual stolid bearing. His face shone and there was a spring in his walk that bespoke nervous animation. He closed the door quickly and sat down.

"Well?" Grafton inquired.

"I'm back, sir!"

"And you have brought news—what kind?"

"Several kinds, Mr. Grafton. I'm blest if I know precisely what good has been done, but at least I've hit upon another remarkable coincidence."

"Let's hear it."

"First of all, sir, and you may think it foolish, I sent out the four men who were waiting in my office when I left, to try and get some track of Colson. I hustled them off and told them to be back at four sharp."

"And did they find him?"

"They located no trace whatever of the man! Between them, they visited every place where he was likely to be—or even where he was known by sight—and asked particularly after him. Since he walked out of that café last evening not a soul has seen hide nor hair of him. I couldn't even learn in which direction he walked, for that matter. He left the café alone and he appears to have made one jump and gone clean into the sky."

"That's disappointing."

"That part is—yes. But I wasn't working on that part myself. My job was Brady's office."

"You found him out?"

"I did indeed. He'd gone out Melvale way to see about some of his contract work and there was nobody in the office but his kid. This one happened to be a somewhat stupid little chap who's

only been in his employ for a day or two, and he couldn't have been a better one for my purposes."

Burleigh chuckled.

"Well, sir, being sure that Jim was gone, I marched in and asked for him. The boy announced that he had left and wouldn't return until five o'clock. I said I'd wait, anyway, and he didn't object. I sat down in the outer office for a while, and then I began to fuss about the draft from the door. The kid was sorry, but he couldn't do anything to remedy it, so I suggested that I could wait in the private office, and, suiting the action to the word, I stalked in and sat down in Jim's own chair!"

"Good!"

"Next, I gave the door a gentle kick, and it almost closed. Then I went at his desk. It happened to be locked and one of my skeleton keys happened to fit it. In about three minutes I slid the top up without a sound and went about the job of investigating Jim's business affairs."

"Risky!" commented Grafton.

"Also necessary," added Burleigh. "I went on turning things over carefully for about five minutes, I suppose. There wasn't a hint of anything in the way of a clue. Then I gave a little attention to the waste basket. Wasn't much on top, but I was patient and kept on. Down at the bottom—" Burleigh leaned forward and spoke very softly—"way down at the bottom, I found an envelope!"

"What!"

"Yes, sir, a long, legal-size envelope."

"But——"

"Wait, Mr. Grafton. On the upper left hand corner was printed your regular business address—in short, it was one of the envelopes from this office!"

"The odd one from that package?" cried Grafton, eagerly.

"I won't swear to that," concluded Burleigh, with more than a little triumph in his voice, "but there's another detail that would make it look very much like that same."

"Yes, yes! What's that?"

"The postmark, sir. That envelope was stamped from Station A, our downtown station here, and the date was May 19, 7 A. M. How's that?"

Grafton leaped from his chair.

"Fine, Burleigh! By George, it's more than fine! Where is the thing? You never left it behind?"

"With a sample of the thief's handwriting on it?" chuckled Burleigh. "Well, I guess not! Here she is, sir, and it's the best clue of all that we could have asked!"

He glanced at the door and put a hand in his inner pocket. A moment later it appeared again bearing a crushed and bruised legal envelope.

He held it aloft.

"There she is, sir! Your own envelope, one of the same size that the thief used, mailed so that it was collected and postmarked at seven this morning—*and* bearing a sample of the crook's hand. Just examine it for yourself, Mr. Grafton."

Grafton's eager fingers clutched the thing. He carried it over to his desk and sat down quickly. He held up the envelope and gazed hard at it. Burleigh watched him complacently from across the office.

But soon the detective took to staring, for Grafton's face had paled and his hands were trembling.

"Well, sir?" asked Burleigh. "It is addressed——"

"To James J. Brady—yes."

"And the writing? Do you know that?"

"Do I?" Grafton laughed bitterly. "Yes, I know it, Burleigh. The man who addressed that envelope was my chief clerk, Jennison!"

CHAPTER XV.

AN INTERVIEW AND A TELEGRAM.

THE nature of this new revelation and the suddenness with which it had come, brought to Grafton such a shock as he was not often called upon to bear.

Of all people in the world about him, Jennison was the one he would last have suspected. Why, he had lifted the fellow from almost abject poverty and kneaded him into a successful, capable man of affairs. And now it appeared that even he, even Jennison, was involved in this plot to rob him!

Unfortunately the suspicion which

must attach to Jennison was very definite. His handwriting was unmistakable, more particularly so because Grafton knew well the peculiar slant of the young man's chirography when writing hurriedly. The envelope, they knew, must have been addressed in great haste; the letters bore out that assumption too perfectly.

When after a pause Grafton looked up, Burleigh was at his side studying the fatal lines.

"You are positive, sir?"

"Absolutely, Burleigh."

"And your confidential man, too! He knew about the papers, did he?"

"He knew that they were here, certainly."

"And there was nothing yesterday which he had occasion to mail Brady in this kind of an envelope?"

"Not to my knowledge. He would hardly have mailed it at so late an hour, at all events."

"You're right, sir. I was only trying to find a loophole for him. We are forced to assume everybody as innocent, you know, in spite of all we may suspect or try to prove against them."

"But this looks pretty black for Jennison."

"It does indeed. Bah! It's the devil, isn't it, sir, what some men will do for money?"

"It's more than the devil in this case," said Grafton sadly. "For had any one else accused Jennison, I should almost have been willing to spend every cent I have on earth in his defense."

"That's usually the kind, sir. Well—shall we get at him?"

"In what way?'

"By talking to him at first. We'll sort of feel our way and draw him out, without accusing him of anything. If he lets on information of an incriminating nature, I'll have a man keep track of him until we can get out a warrant for his arrest."

Grafton shook his head wearily.

"I suppose that it is the only course, Burleigh, although I'd rather be whipped than adopt it. I'll ring for him."

"First put the letter out of sight, sir."

Grafton thrust the accusing envelope under some papers and pressed the button. When the boy appeared, he sent word for Jennison.

Then he sat with bowed head, waiting. Jennison! To think that it was Jennison! But as footsteps approached he straightened up, and when the young man entered he was sitting back, calm and imperturbable as ever, and even wearing a slight smile.

The door closed, and Jennison faced him questioningly.

"You wanted me, sir?"

"Yes, for a moment." He glanced covertly at Burleigh, and the detective nodded for him to proceed. "Jennison, where were you last night?"

"At what time, sir?" smiled the clerk.

"Midnight."

Jennison's eyes opened.

"In bed, Mr. Grafton."

"You retired early, did you?"

"A little after eleven, if I remember correctly—yes, it was about five minutes past the hour."

"You left home at the usual time this morning, of course?"

"Yes."

"And you're not subject to sleep-walking fits, are you?" Burleigh put in suddenly.

"Indeed I am not," laughed Jennison. "Why do you ask?"

Burleigh shrugged his shoulders in silence and smiled at Grafton with a mysterious significance. That person took breath and continued:

"You knew that those Colson papers were here in my desk, did you not, Jennison?"

"I knew that they were in the office."

"And you saw them?"

Jennison frowned slightly.

"Not that I recall, sir. Why?"

"We're only trying to get at a few facts, Jennison," sighed Grafton.

"But——" the confidential man's color was rising.

"Oh, we are not accusing you of any improper knowledge," said his employer quickly.

"I hope not, sir."

"But we are trying to gather all possible data in regard to the confounded things and you may be able to give us some assistance."

Jennison bowed rather stiffly. Bur-

leigh hitched about in his chair and regarded Jennison quizzically.

"You know me, don't you, Mr. Jennison?"

"I know who you are, of course." The chief clerk smiled.

"And you don't mind my asking a question or two?"

"Not in the least."

"Then let me ask how much you know of Mr. James Brady?"

"Of Brady?" Jennison stared rather curiously at the other. "Well, I presume, Mr. Burleigh, that my knowledge of Brady is neither more nor less than that of dozens of other people in Kenyonville. Why?"

"This office does more or less business with him, does it not?"

"Yes." Jennison glanced at Grafton, who remained silent.

"You saw him yesterday?"

"No!" The word came with rather astonishing energy and Burleigh indulged in the very smallest of chuckles.

"Then you are prepared to say positively that you did *not* see him yesterday, are you, Mr. Jennison?"

"Of course—but is this a cross-examination?" the clerk asked with a good deal of asperity.

"You will aid us very much by answering promptly and readily whatever Mr. Burleigh chooses to ask," put in Grafton quietly. "He is conducting an investigation of the robbery."

Jennison nodded and drew a deep breath. Innocent or guilty, it behooved him to proceed or excite direct and well justified suspicion.

The detective bowed slightly to Grafton and turned back to the young man by the door.

"Now sir, inasmuch as you did not see Brady yesterday, may I go a little further and ask whether you telephoned to him?"

"I did not."

"Did you write him?"

"I did not. But——" Jennison smiled perplexedly. "Surely I have some right to know the bearing of all this questioning, Mr. Grafton?"

"That will appear within a few moments, I think."

"You didn't see him, you didn't telephone to him, you didn't write him?" Burleigh pursued thoughfully. "You are particularly positive that you did not write him, are you?"

"Quite positive."

"Nor even enclosed anything in an envelope and mailed it to him, eh?"

Jennison's eyes grew rounder than before.

"What under the sun should I send him, if it were not a letter?"

"I don t know. I don't know that this is going to lead anywhere at all, Mr. Jennison, but—it may. Well, well, then we've established the fact that you did not direct any sort of envelope to Brady yesterday, haven't we?"

"I believe we have," said the confidential man.

Burleigh leaned forward, in Grafton's direction.

"May I trouble you for that envelope, sir?"

With a hand that was none too steady, the troubled man reached under the mass of odds and ends and drew forth the accusing strip of white. Burleigh took it and studied it pensively, meanwhile watching Jennison with the merest corner of his sharp eye.

Grafton, too, was paying much attention to the expression of his confidential man and he saw several things. Jennison's high color was fading fast, his breath was coming ever more and more rapidly and his hands worked in a nervous fashion. His eyes were glued to the thing in Burleigh's hand, and when suddenly the latter looked up and faced him, the chief clerk started back instinctively—and as quickly recovered his poise.

"Here's an envelope, Mr. Jennison." Burleigh scrutinized him disconcertingly, but Jennison returned his gaze calmly enough now.

"I see it, Mr. Burleigh."

"Do you, by any odd and impossible chance, know what it is?"

"Perfectly."

"Eh?" It was Burleigh's turn to start. "You do?"

"Perfectly," repeated Jennison.

"Then suppose you tell us?"

"It is the envelope in which I mailed Mr. Brady some papers yesterday."

"Brady, eh? But I thought that you mailed nothing at all to him yesterday?"

"I had absolutely forgotten it," confessed Jennison, looking squarely at him.

Burleigh seemed a little nonplused. Grafton spoke up sharply:

"What were the papers?"

"The documents in connection with that Hartwell mortgage, sir, which Brady gave us in connection with one of his contracts."

"And you sent them from this office?"

"No, sir. I had prepared them for mailing, but some one came in and I put them in an inner pocket. Later in the day I forgot them completely, and it was only when undressing last night that the envelope caught my eye."

"At what time?" asked Burleigh.

"Just about eleven, sir. I stepped out at once and dropped the envelope in the mail-box at the corner."

Burleigh scratched his head thoughtfully and looked at Grafton, whose face showed a mixture of relief and perplexity. Jennison's gaze traveled quietly from one to the other.

"Isn't it—er—a little odd that you should have forgotten this episode a few minutes ago?" asked the detective.

Jennison shrugged his shoulders.

"You may regard it so—or not. When you spoke of mailing things, my mind went naturally to the letters which had left this office during the day, and I could recall nothing sent to Brady."

"But the sight of the envelope reminded you at once?"

"It did."

"Well——" Burleigh stared at the ceiling for all of thirty seconds. "I believe that that is all, Mr. Jennison. Thank you."

The chief clerk looked inquiringly at Grafton, who nodded. Jennison turned and left, and the two men faced each other.

"Well?" Grafton almost whispered.

"What do you make of him, sir?"

"I am forced, by his words and his past work, to believe that he has told the truth."

"He—well, he seemed straightforward enough, certainly," mused the detective. "His story came straight enough, but—he seemed a little flustered, didn't he?"

"Jennison understands the gravity of the matter, Burleigh. The idea that he was suspected, even indefinitely, very likely worried him."

"It may possibly have been that, sir, and still it seemed odd, somehow, the way in which he recalled the circumstance of the envelope."

"Odd, undoubtedly, but natural, too, in a way," said Grafton. "The letter being mailed at eleven, after the last collection, would explain the early postmark perfectly."

"He lives down-town here, does he—in the district covered by the mail collectors of Station A, I mean?"

"Jennison lives not more than three blocks away from the building. He shifted down here from the Melvale section to be nearer his work."

"Recently?"

"No, a year or more back."

Burleigh shook his head, half despairingly.

"By ginger, sir! I give it up! No sooner do we seem to happen on what looks like a clue than something or other turns up to smash it or at least to throw a serious doubt upon its value. Now whether that fellow was lying or not, I can't say; his story came plausibly enough to be the absolute truth, but the other circumstances point so strongly to other things!

"He was the only one who knew positively about the papers, he was one who could gain access here, he directed the envelope which I am still morally certain held the documents—and yet here he goes to work and faces us and explains it all away as calmly as you please!"

"And I'm downright glad he did!" confessed Grafton.

"Well, I'm glad that you're pleased, sir," said Burleigh, dryly. "But I haven't finished with Mr. Jennison yet, I can tell you!"

"No? What is your idea?"

"I'm going to have a man on his heels from now until this confounded mystery is settled, one way or the other. I'm going to keep a second man on Brady's heels, and if they meet and talk and my men don't find out what they're talking about—well, I'll fire the pair of them!"

Grafton smiled slightly.

"And how about Colson?"

"I'll do all I can toward finding him,

too, for I have a vague notion that he could clear some points, Mr. Grafton."

"Well—perhaps he could, Burleigh. At all events I'd like to have a little interview with him myself, I can tell you. If he at least doesn't show some sign of life in the very near future, things are going to take on a serious aspect."

Burleigh nodded comprehendingly and whistled a thoughtful tune through his teeth. Grafton, almost unconsciously, followed the melody as his pencil drummed on the desk; and thus they sat in silence.

Another sharp knock caused both men to start. Grafton called out, and the door opened. A boy in the blue Western Union uniform stepped in and laid a yellow envelope upon his desk. The millionaire nodded, signed for it and opened the envelope as the boy left.

"What's that, sir, if I may ask?" said Burleigh.

"Eh? Oh, I don't know—something that has no connection with this affair, probably."

He glanced over the sheet and caught his breath. The paper crackled under the tense grip of his fingers as he drew it nearer to his eyes.

"Well, by jingo!" gasped Mr. Grafton.

"News, sir?"

"Listen! Listen, Burleigh! Here's the wire: 'Am in Chicago—must see you immediately without fail. Take train reaching here at eleven. Meet you at depot.'"

"Chicago?"

"Yes, Chicago!"

"But who the devil's it from, sir?" cried the mystified detective.

Grafton laid down the telegram with a queer smile. He rose from the chair and faced Burleigh rather excitedly.

"Who is it from?" he repeated. "Well, Burleigh, the wire is signed 'George Colson!'"

CHAPTER XVI.

COLSON UNFOLDS A TALE.

BURLEIGH'S eyes became positively saucer-like.

"From George Colson, you say, sir?" he cried.

Grafton held out the telegram.

"There is the signature, Burleigh—it's plain enough."

"Indeed it is, sir," muttered the detective, scanning the yellow slip.

"Now what—what the devil could have taken Colson to Chicago?"

"I pass on that."

"It's the most remarkable thing! To have him just drop out like that and then reappear in Chicago."

Burleigh laughed softly.

"If you're not getting used to remarkable things now, Mr. Grafton, you never will," he observed. "What with the happenings of the last twenty-four hours, it would take a good deal to surprise me just now."

"And yet, if we could know Colson's true reason for disappearing, even you might be surprised, Burleigh."

"I don't doubt that, sir."

Grafton walked to the window and regarded the world below with a very thoughtful frown.

"That wire must be genuine."

"We are certainly not justified in regarding it as anything else, Mr. Grafton. When a man simply vanishes from the face of the earth, and is then obliging enough to send a telegram announcing his whereabouts, we should accept it without a great deal of question."

"Of course, but—the thing seems so infernally odd, somehow."

"Things have been seeming that way lately, sir."

Grafton shrugged his shoulders and continued his study for a few minutes. Then he turned sharply.

"You don't believe that it is some kind of a game, do you?"

"What kind, sir?"

"Well—I give that up."

"And so do I."

"Then we may dismiss it, I think," said Burleigh, thoughtfully. "To base such an idea, we should first have to find a motive, and I'm blest if I can put a motive to that wire, other than the fact that Colson has gone to Chicago for some very good reason, and that for some other very good reason he wants to see you, sir."

"I can certainly see no other explanation," rejoined Grafton, nodding slowly.

"Well—you'll go, then?"

"To Chicago?"

"Yes."

"There's no time to wire, and he gives no address. Yes, sir, I believe that I should go."

"And you wouldn't advise my sending you or one of your men?"

"Certainly not, sir. Whatever Colson has to say, he will probably say to you alone."

"I know it," sighed Grafton. "The only thing is that I dislike leaving here while things are in so unsettled a state. However—this may mean the settling of it. I'll depute you to call at my house and explain matters to Mrs. Grafton," he ended, with a slight smile.

Burleigh nodded assent. His employer glanced at his watch.

To catch that five o'clock train meant some hurrying. He called Jennison and without stating the latest development told the chief clerk that he should be out of town for a few hours, and that several minor matters were to be arranged thus and so. Then, picking up his hat and overcoat, he turned back to the detective.

They walked to the depot almost in silence. Matters had gone almost beyond the point where discussion was profitable. Why Colson had disappeared, what he had to say now, how the interview would affect the remarkable situation were matters which could be settled only at the meeting, and the sooner the meeting was over the better.

The train from the south rolled in and Grafton stood by the steps.

"Well, good-by, Burleigh."

"Good-by, sir. When shall I expect you back?"

"I don't know. To-morrow afternoon, if all goes well—possibly sooner. Should things straighten out, by any chance, I will try to catch the train that leaves Chicago at three to-morrow morning, but I don't know, of course."

"And I am to keep on here?"

"To the best of your ability. I'll leave matters absolutely in your hands, to do whatever seems advisable."

"And your address in Chicago?"

"If I find I have to stop over, I'll wire you in the morning. Good-by, Burleigh."

He stepped aboard and into the parlor car and the detective watched him out of sight with what was meant for an encouraging smile.

When the train had rolled out and the detective turned, his solemnly shaking head and his muttered remark might hardly have been supposed to hold much encouragement:

"Has he gone to clear it up or to tangle it more? And is it going to give me a black eye as a detective or is it going to be the biggest victory ever? Oh, damn!"

Grafton sat back in his chair, as the green country appeared in the late afternoon sunshine, and went once more to the pondering of his trouble. And then, at the end of ten minutes, he scowled and came to a most sane conclusion. Six hours of quick travel were ahead of him, but they were destined to be long hours if he spent them in trying to unravel what at present seemed very nearly inexplicable. More than that, he needed a clear head for the coming interview and this train of thought did not make for clearness.

Happily, he espied a friend, the president of a St. Louis bank, making for the smoker. Grafton followed and within the quarter hour had lost his troubles in an intensely interesting game of whist.

Some few minutes past eleven, the journey came to an end; the train and Grafton had arrived in Chicago.

He stepped from his car and looked about eagerly. The lateness of the hour had kept the platforms fairly clear and the features of the few in sight were easily discernible, but there was no sign of Colson.

Where was he? Why, more particularly with the train overdue, did he not appear? Was he playing some incredible game on Grafton? Kenyonville's magnate scowled as the fact of Colson's absence became indisputable, and walked quickly toward the waiting-rooms.

Reaching the gates, he looked swiftly around once more and from behind a pile of trunks stepped Colson! Grafton breathed a sigh of relief and turned to him.

"Colson!"

"Hello, Grafton!"

The other approached and shook his hand, and Grafton looked him over

rather curiously. Colson's mien was not quite the usual one.

His eyes seemed to have developed a queer trick of wandering. They did not rest steadily upon the new arrival, but drifted slowly about the depot, with a seeming preference for the iron-girdered roof above. His hand, too, was cold and clammy and with a suggestion of a tremor. Grafton's curiosity increased: had his debtor been drinking, or was there another cause for his evident nervousness?

"Good gracious, man! You frightened me!" he said.

"Did I?" Colson smiled slightly. "I suppose you wondered what had become of me for a while?"

"Wonder isn't the word!" cried Grafton. "Whatever took you off so suddenly, night before last?"

Colson's eyes flitted from side to side.

"Nothing that we can go into here," he replied softly. "Come along, Grafton, I haven't had dinner yet."

"You haven't? We'll go over to the——"

"No, we won't. I'm not frequenting first-class hotels this evening. Come to the little place where I have a room. I can talk to you there."

"But——"

"Oh, come along," said Colson, impatiently. "I have no end of things to explain, you know."

He turned away abruptly and Grafton followed, speculating actively. Here was an entirely new and unexpected mystery—what had Colson been doing, that he did not care for the better class hostelries?

They left by a side entrance and Colson set a rapid gait down the street. At the corner they turned and passed into a not too elegant thoroughfare, running away from the more pretentious neighborhood and parallel with the railroad tracks.

In the course of a few blocks it impressed Grafton that the environment was becoming almost sinister. Tenements of a sort were on either hand and the few occupants visible at that hour betokened anything but fashion. And yet questions elicited from Colson only the request to hurry along and meanwhile to be patient.

When they stopped before a door, Grafton's eyes opened widely. It was a hotel of the cheaper class which Colson patronized. On the street level, a dirty groggery occupied the corner; behind, a dingy restaurant sign appeared beneath a gas-lamp. Colson entered unhesitatingly, however, and Grafton came close behind. The former selected a table and dropped to his chair with a tired sigh.

"Well—there's nothing conspicuously fashionable about this," Grafton observed.

"Not exactly." Colson smiled dryly. "But there is a reason for it, Grafton, and a pretty good one."

He glanced up as a square-jawed waiter approached and muttered an order for himself, Grafton briefly declining to join. As the man left, Grafton leaned over.

"Colson, for heaven's sake, what's the reason?"

"That I don't want my whereabouts known—that's all."

"But why? Has it any connection with the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"And what is the connection?"

The unlovely waiter was returning. Colson regarded the table thoughtfully until he had gone again.

Then he looked up suddenly.

"Grafton, I'm going to ask you something that will strike you as very remarkable!"

It had been upon the tip of Grafton's tongue to tell of the stealing of the papers; this last odd remark restrained him. His revelation could wait.

"What is it, Colson?"

"I'm going to ask you to stay here in Chicago until after the twenty-second of this month!"

"The twenty-second! Why, on the twenty-first we're going to settle up that Traction matter, aren't we?"

"Not if you'll stay over here until the next day."

"But——" Grafton gasped. "What the devil ails you, Colson? Don't you suppose that I want the matter settled?"

"If you do, stay here," said the other quietly.

"But why? Why?" There was an angry flash in the other's eye now.

"For a number of reasons which I

cannot divulge," Colson replied coolly. "The same that brought me here."

"That sounds very well—I, however, have a right to know them."

"You have the right, fast enough, but it is impossible for me to go into the matter. Oh, I know that it sounds fishy," smiled Colson. "But it isn't in reality, you know. It is simply here: if you'll take me on faith and remain here with me until the day after the notes are due, I'll go back with you and pay every last cent, Grafton. If you don't—if you insist on pressing matters, there's going to be a muss, and you'll come out at the small end of the horn!"

"What!" Grafton stared hard, as much with amazement as with anger. Had his power as a leader and manipulator of men and affairs departed altogether, that Colson could sit and talk in this calm fashion?

"My dear fellow, taking you on faith is all well enough, of course, but I can't do it in this. Be sane and reasonable and tell me precisely what's wrong, anyway. If you want an extension of time—a week or even a month—I'll give it to you. You know that. But to talk in the mysterious way that you are talking——"

"It's the only way in which I can talk to-night! Grafton, there are more people involved with me than even you know about. One or two of them I can't handle just as I wish; and on their account I can't explain why. But if you'll do as I ask and stay here and——"

"And deliberately absent myself, without cause or explanation, when those notes become due! Colson, you're talking like an idiot!"

"Very likely it sounds so to you, Grafton." The other shrugged his shoulders. "But that, flatly, is the situation and I can't change it to save my life. It's a long way to bring you for an interview that may be so short; nevertheless, it comes down to just this—will you do as I ask, or will you not?"

Grafton literally glared at him.

"You're either intoxicated or insane, Colson!" he rasped. "Being neither a fool nor a child nor a lunatic myself, I will not!"

"You're going back to Kenyonville, then?"

"At three o'clock to-morrow morning, Colson."

The other sighed and smiled a little.

"You'll be sorry when you understand, Grafton."

"I'm willing to understand here and now, if you will let me."

"And I'm willing to let you, but—I cannot. There is the whole business in a nutshell!"

He dropped knife and fork with a disgusted grunt, and turned toward the waiter.

"I can't eat that stuff," he said, sourly. "However, their bottled goods are honest, at least. Have a bottle of ale with me, Grafton? But of course you will—and then you can trot along to your own destruction, if you insist."

The order was given; the bottles came; the glasses foamed up and the waiter retired once more. The air was close and hot, the malted stuff cold and sparkling; both men drank deeply and with satisfaction and over his empty glass Colson smiled at the other.

"Hang it, Grafton! I know just how absurd it must sound," he said. "I understand perfectly how you feel, and I was morally certain you would not agree blindly; but as things stood, I resolved to make the attempt at least."

"But, my dear man, why don't you give a reason for it? This is a business matter of serious importance—you can't expect me to trust you blindly with seven million dollars, you know. Tell me what is up—tell me who is involved and what makes such a request necessary."

"And if I do explain," said Colson, slowly, "will you stay, then?"

"If you can give a valid reason for so absurd a thing," said Grafton, "I'll stay with you, yes."

"Um." Colson scowled at the opposite wall. "It means breaking my word to other parties."

"Use your own judgment as to that."

"But—well, perhaps I will, after all." The scowl grew more thoughtful. "Oh—let me think it over for a few minutes, Grafton."

The other nodded and lighted a cigar. Colson, declining the weed, twisted his chair about and tilted it, drumming lightly with one shoe, as he revolved the matter.

Grafton watched him curiously, as the minutes hurried by—Colson seemed to be having a hard time of it. His brow was wrinkled and his head sunk low. Now he grunted faintly; now he pursed his lips impatiently; now his shoulders were elevated a trifle; now he glanced over at Grafton and smiled faintly.

Five minutes passed, ten, fifteen and still Colson seemed to have reached no decision. But Grafton felt little impatience. He was tired and the chair seemed very comfortable. Indeed, he experienced a deliciously sleepy sensation creeping over him. He felt beautifully complacent, serenely thankful that no such problem as Colson's existed to torture him.

Then his cigar dropped to the floor. He would have risen to regain it, but Colson pushed him back into his chair. He felt no resentment at Colson—indeed, he smiled approvingly at him.

And nevertheless, Colson was acting curiously. Chair, table, Colson and all were sliding slowly across the room! Whither were they bound? Grafton had not sufficient interest to rise and investigate; he merely smiled. Yet they went on and on and on! Grafton yawned.

And at that point Colson and the furniture vanished through the wall and Grafton—dropped out of the realm of conscious things!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GUEST IN ROOM FIFTEEN.

A STUFFY, musty odor, as of an unclean place, badly ventilated; a sensation of coarse bedding; a sound of creaking and groaning and the straining of loose, old joints. These things Grafton seemed to experience through a haze that veiled every sense.

Of course he was at home and in bed, but conditions must have changed overnight, for he had believed himself the owner of one of the best dwelling-houses in the State. Also his eyes refused to open and past events to piece themselves together coherently. That, doubtless, was ascribable to his recent worry and the consequent abnormally sound sleep. Grafton wished that he could wake up and see things as he knew they were—sweet and clean and plainly luxurious.

Then a new element entered, to arouse him and set doubt at rest. From somewhere a warm breeze stirred and with it came the wretched odor of stale, sour beer! That at least was foreign to the Grafton home, even in dreams! His eyes came open with an effort; a stronger effort brought him to a sitting position.

What under the sun had happened?

Emphatically, the premises were none of his. The room was small and dingy, the paper old and very soiled, the floor covered by the most forlorn bit of ingrain that had ever met Grafton's eye. Across the miserable apartment, two small-paned windows gave out upon a brick court; upon a chair, his clothes were piled, and not too neatly. And again came that dreadful odor of beer-kegs.

Grafton shook himself. Every bone seemed to ache, his head ached, his skin was hot, his mouth dry and parched, his hands trembled. Only after a strong gathering of his forces did he succeed in throwing off the clothes.

"Drugged, by thunder!" said John Grafton.

Yes, that was what had happened to him—no doubt could exist. Colson had managed to poison his ale and—now he was here!

His head reeling, he managed to stand erect and steady himself against the rickety bedstead. He looked about dully and his eye caught sight of a plain iron sink in the corner. He made for it eagerly and turned the faucet. A grateful flow of cold water rewarded him.

No cup or glass was in sight; he put his lips to the pipe, drinking deeply, and it refreshed him wonderfully. He thrust his burning head under the cool stream and held it there; he bathed his stiffened joints.

Stronger and steadier, he stifled any qualms, reached for the grimy towel in the rack, and looked around him.

Well, the environment was bad enough in all conscience! A dirtier, more squalid semblance of a human habitation could hardly have been conceived. Was he in Colson's "hotel"? That seemed the only explanation. He searched again, and found painted on the small glass transom the number 15. It seemed to

confirm his surmise. He was a guest of room fifteen.

How long had he been there? That phase came over Grafton with a staggering rush? Was it—no, it couldn't be the twenty-first. His dosing must have occurred at about midnight on the nineteenth of May, and no drug of which he had any knowledge would give one two days of unconsciousness without fatal results.

He was most certainly alive again, and therefore it must be the twentieth of the month. The sun in the narrow court seemed to indicate afternoon. Grafton looked for his watch, with small expectation of finding it.

Yet the timepiece was in his pocket and his roll of bills as well. Evidently the game was far too profitable for even the keepers of the house to make petty robbery an object; they had left him his clothes and his watch and his money. The hands pointed to three o'clock. So he had been out of the world for fifteen hours, at the very least!

Grafton imbibed more of the water and slowly drew on his clothes. Then he sat down heavily on the edge of the groaning bed, to consider matters in their latest aspect.

Beyond question, Colson had lured him to this den for the sole purpose of holding him. Also beyond question, Colson's motive had been to have him out of Kenyonville during the twenty-first. Logically, therefore, Colson was a criminal and one of a puzzling sort.

Had he fallen into trouble and devised some such desperate scheme as this to free himself? Or was he a professional criminal, who had worked for years toward this big game?

To save himself, Grafton couldn't determine the question to his satisfaction. If a professional, Colson had been a consummate artist; if not, a consummate fool, in that he had not dared lay matters before Grafton in straightforward fashion.

But whatever his intent or his past record. Colson had accomplished one very serious thing in the drugging of Grafton—and now, just what use did he intend to make of it?

Perhaps even now he was back in Kenyonville, rearranging matters to his own liking. Perhaps he was explaining why Grafton had not returned, and a few more things. Perhaps he was planning for to-morrow and—what? That was it!

Even granting that the man had matters all his own way when the appointed time came to settle the notes, just what would he *do?* The possibilities were so wide, and many of them appeared so extremely far-fetched that Grafton hesitated at fixing a definite plan of action for the lately trusted debtor.

One certainty remained, however. Colson meant to do something, and it was reasonably sure to be something desperate; more than that, it would be something highly detrimental to Grafton's interests. It might mean his ruin. Very surely, it would mean a great deal of trouble.

With Grafton to see trouble was to forestall it by every means possible. He would get back to Kenyonville with all possible speed, and when he found Colson, matters would become merry in the last degree for one of them.

Grafton rose and went back to the sink; and with pocket comb and the fragment of a mirror, he contrived an apology for a toilet. After which, he gathered up his overcoat and walked to the door.

Curiously, in the confusion of many strange ideas and in the strange afterhaze of his drugging, the notion of imprisonment had not occurred to him. Thinking of Colson as the only direct enemy to be handled, he laid a hand on the knob and turned it.

The door was firmly locked.

He tried it again, and bent and looked over the crack between door and jamb. The bars of brass convinced him and he stepped backward with a scowl. They had imprisoned him!

It was a most unpleasant shock, to find that the keepers of the low place were evidently in league with his arch-enemy. Perhaps they had been well paid for it—and perhaps they had not. As matters stood it was imaginable that Colson, having engineered him to the room, might have locked the door himself and departed quietly.

If that were the case and the proprietor's intentions were good, he should have early opportunity to prove it. Graf-

ton cast about for the button of a call-bell, and then smiled at his own absurdity in expecting such a thing in such a place.

Of course it was not there. But the guests, it might have been supposed, had some means of communicating with the powers of the place. He searched further, but without avail.

"Well, how on earth do you ring 'em up?" he demanded irritably.

The answer was not forthcoming. Grafton searched the place again, and ended by knocking loudly on the door.

He waited. Unless the place was larger than he had fancied, some one must have heard that.

But no one had, or if the signal had been noted, there was no response. He fumed for a few minutes and pounded more heavily. Again he listened for the sound of approaching steps. Again he was sorely disappointed.

"Confound it! I'm not alone in the old barn, am I?" He put his ear against the panels. "Not a sound, though. By jove! I'll make one, then!"

He pried at the small panel—finally succeeded in forcing it open. He stood back a pace and filled his lungs for a shout that would shake the very rafters.

"Hey! Hello! Hello! Hey!"

He shook an approving head at his own effort. That must surely raise any one who happened to be in the den. And when they came, he would have a few words to say on the subject of service.

But they did not come!

Listen hard as he would, Grafton could no more detect signs of life without his apartment than he could leave it.

"Now, that's peculiar!" he meditated. "It's beginning to look very much as if the crowd here were in with Colson. Well——"

Once more, he stood back from the door and expanded his chest.

"Help! Help! Help! Police! Police!" he roared. "There! If the house has a reputation they're bound to heed that call!"

With an angry smile, he bent forward to await them. A minute dragged by, and another, and another. For all the aid his hail had brought it might have been shouted into the mouth of a tomb.

When finally he gave over the hopeless task of listening, Grafton's mouth was set.

"They've got me! They've got me!" he muttered. "I suppose this is one of the places the police never visit—or visit only in regiments. And they've got me caged up here!"

His hands in his pockets, he glowered at the wretched carpet, at the cracked mirror and the dirty windows.

"Well, damn them! They sha'n't have me long!"

He strode across the place and looked out into the court with snapping eyes. Could he jump? No, the window was a good three stories above the ground level.

But a new opportunity caught his eye and he snarled his delight. There was a fire escape, opposite the other window—a single, frail, rusty ladder, but a path to earth!

Quickly he threw up the sash and thrust his head out into the close air of the court. The ladder led to the bottom. And at the bottom sat a man, brawny and blue-shirted—and looking upward at him!

"Say! You!" cried Grafton.

The other's ugly features broadened into a smile—a smile neither pleasant nor promising. He offered no reply.

"Look here, my man!"

The sinister one smiled on in silence.

"I want this door unlocked!"

The smile turned to a laugh.

"Ye do, hey?"

"Yes, and I want it done quickly, too!"

The man below watched him for a few seconds, but vouchsafed neither answer nor move. Indeed, he picked up a pipe from the pavement beside him and lighted it slowly and carefully. Grafton seemed to have passed from his ken.

"Is that door going to be opened?"

"Some day, mebbe."

The man smiled on, and the smile set Grafton's blood to boiling. If they were not going to release him, he would descend and try conclusions with the person in the court and any other persons who might choose to enter the game; and in his mood, he felt capable of handling all the court could hold.

The sash went higher. One of Grafton's legs was thrust out and found a rung of the ladder. He gripped the cas-

ing of the window and prepared to descend to the bottom.

And then a voice reached him.

"Hey! Git back there!"

"I'll get back when I'm ready!"

"Then you're ready now—see?"

Something so assured lurked in the tone that Grafton paused and glanced downward.

The man of the blue shirt was beneath him, and a revolver in his hand pointed straight upward!

"I've been sitting here to wait for you, mister," his guard announced. "You git back, or you may come down quicker'n you think."

"But——"

"You git back!"

The man did not look like the sort of person who would hesitate long at murder, more particularly in the closed court. Grafton, gritting his teeth, obeyed the injunction.

His guard pocketed the pistol and reseated himself upon the empty keg.

So that means of escape was cut off! The plot was very plain now. He had been securely trapped—foully, but very efficiently. Whether by his own volition or not, Grafton seemed in a fair way to complying with Colson's request that he remain in Chicago for a day or two.

Almost bewildered, he perched on the edge of a broken chair to reconsider. They had him fast; that was certain. If a guard had been stationed even at the foot of the fire escape, there were other guards, in all probability, awaiting him in the corridor. Should he succeed in opening the door, a disastrous prospect would very likely confront him—a blow or a shot that would relieve him from active business for more than a day or two.

But Grafton's seven millions which now hung in the balance had not been amassed by shrinking from disastrous prospects; indeed, his habit had been to approach whatever seemed most threatening and to vanquish it. He was not going to reform his habits now.

If they had locked him in, if they had guarded the ladder, at least it was possible to make a din such as would be heard beyond the flimsy walls. What good that would do was somewhat problematic, but certainly he would hardly harm himself more than by accepting the situation complacently.

First, the door! If he got that down without a fight, he would sally forth and create such a turmoil as even this disreputable hole had not heard in a decade. He walked quickly over and rapped on the panels. They were too solid to go down even before his hard fists.

He turned to the aged bedstead, with its heavy foot-posts. A wrench or two, and he had hurled mattress and bedding to the floor, and twisted the post loose from the frame. He weighted it and swung it about his head in tentative fashion, and he smiled. Short of firearms, it was as good a weapon as the heart of man could desire.

Standing a yard or so away, he swung his club and brought it down against the door. A splintering crash ensued, but the wood held. He stepped back and whirled it about his head once more; once more brought it down upon the old woodwork.

This time, he made a distinct impression. A long, jagged crack appeared in the upper half of the barrier.

"Good!" Grafton rested the club against his knees and drew back his sleeves for a better grip. "Next time, by thunder! the door comes down or the old club smashes!"

He drew breath and raised his battering ram again. Stepping away once more, he gripped it firmly and swung it about—once, twice, thrice. Then he hurled it forward, with every ounce of his own weight behind the stroke.

With a thud that brought plaster from the ceiling above, the bed-post went squarely through the upper panel! That one was settled. Grafton drew back his club and smiled slightly. Two or three more like the last, and he would have the thing down, hinges and all—and then!

He raised his weapon again—but he lowered it before the blow could fall. Outside on the rickety stairs of the dark hallway, steps were approaching rapidly. He caught the sound of angry grunting; the steps reached the stairway to the third floor and hurried up still.

Grafton grasped his weapon and stood back with a sigh, almost of relief. At last he was to have a tangible enemy!

(To be continued.)

IN SELF-DEFENSE.

By Charles Francis Bourke.

HOW a very tired worm finally turned, and what effect it had upon His Honor the Court.

"THE State against Thomas Harmon. The charge is wilful murder."

Following the clerk's announcement came the shuffling of many feet and the murmuring of many voices.

The court-room was packed with men, conspicuous among the throng being a score or more of rough-looking mountaineers, "moonshiners" from the hills, friends of the accused, men who had flocked to the little court in the isolated village—the "county seat" in the mountains—to assure themselves that the circuit judge dealt out square justice to "Tom" Harmon.

Furthermore they brought with them their long-barrelled rifles, which they carried into the court-room and retained in spite of the scathing denunciations of the little red-faced judge.

It was scorching hot in the court-room. Judge, jury, lawyers, and spectators sweltered in the stifling heat, but the drama about to be enacted served to pack the spectators' benches and crowd the aisles to the door.

Court had held a week now; it was Saturday morning, and the prosecuting attorney groaned in spirit when the young village lawyer assigned to defend the prisoner announced that his client was ready for trial. The prosecutor even essayed a remonstrance.

"Hold it over till next week, Frazer," he suggested. "You've hardly had time to look into the case and the judge wants to get back to the city——"

The judge was leaning forward the better to secure a view of the prisoner. The latter, a gaunt, hollow-eyed man with grizzling hair and beard, had his eyes fixed in return upon the little red-faced man on the bench. He met the judge's gaze frankly and smiled as though he detected some friendly indication in the sharp, black eyes that peered down upon him.

"It's all right, so far's I'm concerned, jedge," he said simply. "The young lawyer done said I could maybe get delay, but I don't want to, honest. I'm shore obliged to you-alls, but the pore little woman's sick up there in the hills, an——"

"So you'd like to get it over with, eh?" the prosecuting attorney interposed with a grim smile. "All right, then, we'll have to try and accommodate you, Tom."

Upon the heels of the prosecutor's remark a deep voice conveyed the information to the curious ones crowding the hallway:

"Tom's on trial now, for shootin' the sheriff, boys!"

"I'm obliged to you, Mr. Bender," the prisoner was saying gratefully. "I'd like shorely to git back up in the hills. Course I done the shootin', but——"

"Go on with the case, Mr. Prosecutor!"

The judge had finished his scrutiny of the mountaineer, and rapped with his gavel for order. The little man was irritated by the presence of armed men in *his* court-room; the only excuse for permitting such an outrage—which he was powerless to remedy in this backwoods village—was the fact that carrying arms seemed to be the custom in the mountains, when men were on trial for murder, and this particular case, to a psychologist, seemed to promise interesting developments. It did not appear to be complicated, however, to the prosecutor, this case of The State against Thomas Harmon.

"It's just the result of a lifelong quarrel between Jim Martin and Tom Harmon," he assured the jury.

"Tom was mixed up in stills and things, and Jim just devilled him into doin' it, and so the shootin' occurred. There ain't no defense that I know of—is there, Tom?"

He turned to the prisoner, who sat listening.

"Just as you say, Mr. Bender. I done told you all about it."

The prosecuting attorney nodded and went on:

"Jim just hounded Tom till Tom couldn't stand it any longer. Then he laid for Jim and shot him. That's the whole story, isn't it, Tom?"

"That's it, Mr. Bender," Harmon acquiesced. "It's just two weeks ago that Jim Martin came up in the hills. I left him just where you found him—up near my place. I done thought the jedge knowed all about it."

"When we found Jim's body, we asked Tom about it," the prosecutor went on. "He was up in his cabin, looking after his wife. She was sick and Tom made a clean breast of it. You was doin' some moonshinin', too, wasn't you, Tom?"

"I just had some old stills," the prisoner said eagerly. "They wasn't any other way of making a living. You-alls know what I told you."

"He shot Martin, and he makes no denial of the fact," the prosecuting attorney continued. "His wife was sick, so he promised to come down here when the jedge came to hold court. There ain't no defense offered, 'cept that Tom says he killed him in self-defense. That's all there is to the case, outside the facts of the shooting."

Back in the court-room a tall mountaineer sprang up, holding his long-barrelled rifle by the muzzle.

"Never you mind, Tom," he cried. "Me an' the other boys is projectin' hereabout. We know what you done, an' I reckon we-alls will see fair play——"

The little judge banged his gavel upon the desk. This continued irregularity of court procedure in the mountains affected his temper, inclined to be fiery even under the most commonplace circumstances.

"If there is another interruption, I shall clear the court-room!" he cried, glaring at the offender. "It is the most outrageous thing I ever heard of—armed men invading a court of law for the purpose of interfering with the course of justice. In any other State—— Proceed with the case."

The little judge checked himself. He glanced at the prosecuting attorney and that officer shook his head mournfully. There was nothing to be gained by assumption of authority. The nearest railroad was thirty miles away, and mountaineers always carried their guns, even when they came to attend court at the county seat.

The judge studied the jury with the uneasy thought that the presence of the armed men was more than likely to make a farce of the trial. But the gentlemen of the jury seemed plunged in meditation and avoided the court's scrutiny.

"There is only this left to tell, gentlemen of the jury," the prosecutor concluded: "When we had secured sufficient evidence to warrant our apprehending Thomas Harmon he volunteered to tell what he knew of the matter on condition that he be permitted to remain with his wife until court opened here. Whereupon he confessed that he himself had shot Martin from ambush, and set up a plea of self-defense."

A titter ran through the circuit riders inside the rail and one young lawyer laughed outright. The judge, having annihilated him with gavel and glance, addressed the prosecuting attorney:

"Do I understand, Mr. Prosecutor, that this man, the prisoner at the bar, having been permitted to run at large in the mountains pending the opening of the present term of court, voluntarily gave himself up to this tribunal?"

"That is the fact, Your Honor."

"Are there any witnesses?"

"Only Dr. Brown, of this village, who will testify that the deceased received a fatal shot wound."

"Do I understand that the prisoner sets up the plea of self-defense, but at the same time admits having shot his victim from ambush?"

"That is the fact also. He claims that he had sufficient cause and provocation to take Martin's life."

"Then there is no question about it being an act of cold-blooded murder?"

The little judge was getting more and more bewildered. It began to look very

much like a case of charging the jury to bring in a verdict of murder in the first degree, and that was the one judicial act he ordinarily shrank from. He could not divine the nature of these hill people, men who shot an enemy from behind a tree one day and gave themselves up to almost certain death the next. His confused thoughts were disturbed by the voice of the prisoner.

"Jedge! Ef I kin jes' tell how the trouble came about, you-alls will know why I done it—that Jim Martin shorely tortured the heart outen me, an' he shore deserved it."

He gently pushed back the young lawyer who tried to stop him.

"Never mind, suh; it ain't no use, 'less the jedge lets me tell all about how it all came around. He's jes' natchelly got to believe it."

"Let him tell his own story in his own way," the judge said testily. "If there is any further disturbance I shall clear the court at once. Harmon, what have you to say for yourself?"

The prisoner threw one arm over the corner of the judge's bench. He raised his other hand to silence his friends in the court-room.

"Yo'-alls keep quiet, I'm jest goin' to talk to the jedge here, an' I reckon he's goin' to understand the whole trouble.

"Jedge, I'm way back, me an' the sheriff was little tads together. Jes' o'nery little towheads runnin' round the meadows, larkin' like kids will be, 'cause the sun was shinin' an' the berries was plentiful in summer, and we didn't need to go hungry then, like we did in winter.

"It all jest grew out of our natures. Jim was bound to be a gentleman, like the squire in the big white house. Then he thought he'd rather be sheriff, 'cause he'd have more his own way then. He said when he was a law officer he would have his own way.

"Even in those days there was a mean streak in Jim, something like a strain o' coon-dawg mixed up in his hide. Anybody done him a mean trick, Jim'd hold on to like death. Even the dawgs hated him. He was main bent on gettin' learnin', too, 'cause that was the way out o' the pore white trash; after that, Jim said, he'd get more money an' grease the ropes an' have things his own way."

The prisoner looked around the court-room, collecting his thoughts. The judge, engrossed with the man's earnest face, neglected to use his gavel when two or three gruff voices rang out, encouraging Harmon: "That's right, Tom."

"Tell him the whole story."

"We'll back you up."

"Jedge, I ain't sayin' Jim's ideas weren't right. I saw it—when—when Luella came. Then it was too late to git ahead like him. I tried for it, but he jest kept me down an' drove me to moonshinin' w'en I was figurin' how to get a home for Luella.

"She was worth work, I do asshore you. The sun was allers shinin' in Luella's hair, when it wasn't shinin' anywhere else. The squire's lady was good to her and the squire was good to me, 'cause I liked dawgs, I reckon. Squire had some powerful good ones. There was a collie worth a thousand dollars, an' he'd follow me anywhere. But I was always thinking of Luella and whistling back o' my teeth, all day long.

"One night Jim got after the collie and tried to steal him. Collie fought him an' he knocked him over in the road and I had to tell the squire, and Jim skipped.

"The squire he set me up in a little village store and Luella came to me, but Jim he found me out after squire's death. He made the place a hell. That's the way it went, jedge. Jim broke me up in business and drove me out o' town.

"It was then I took to sellin' a little corn whisky. There weren't no harm in it, but Jim he found out what I was doin' and he came down on me. He was deputy sheriff then, an' he drove me into the mountains. Everything went wrong, and Luella got sick an' things looked powerful black.

"Jim hinted around that I'd turned informer—an' then—there wasn't left but the hills. I couldn't let the pore little wife starve, and I jes' tried a little moonshinin'. I didn't make much. Just a few dollars. Enough to keep body and soul together.

"One day it got so bad I took my old horse and buckboard to the village to trade for food. It was just when that big shootin' scrape was on, when Billy Haines killed the gov'ment officer. When I was usin' round in the village I heard

Lawyer Brooks say it weren't no murder to kill in self-defense. Lawyer Brooks was tellin' how it didn't permit the law to take a man's life for shootin' in self-defense.

"I was listenin' and I heard him say the law gives every man a chance to live, an' when another man interferes in that, an' strikes first and keeps on strikin', then it's his duty to shoot that man, or use anything that's handy to save his life. An' Lawyer Brooks said there was a law that protects men special that kill in that way.

"Then it came to me, jedge, that, bein' ignorant of the law, I'd let Sheriff Jim kill me an' Luella by inches for years, an' that it was my duty to obey the law. I remember, too, somethin' squire told me long ago. So I climbed into my old buckboard and drove straight back to Luella.

"But, jedge, I ain't never hurt anybody, and I made up my mind if Sheriff Jim came to me I would put up a good fight, and mebby take to the woods. But if I thought he was aimin' at my life, an' Luella's I would kill him as the law said I should, in self-defense.

"So that day I just took my gun and went out on the edge of the woods, looking down the mountain road. I laid my gun down behind the rocks and waited and after a while I saw Sheriff Jim come along and stop at Cronin's still just below me and have a drink. Then he came on and I *knowed* then he was after me. When he took his drink he came on to'd my place.

"I stopped him at the bend of the road 'cause I knowed what he was after, and Lawyer Brooks said it was right."

Harmon stopped. Something he saw in the judge's face made him throw up his hand with a quick gesture of remonstrance.

"'Twan't *that* way—no, no, 'twan't that way, jedge! I wouldn't do *that*, 'cause I had to go back to Luella. Jim had his chance, jes' like I would ask fer, like old squire told me once.

"I figured it all out up there on the rocks. It's right to shoot quick and shoot first when you git after a man in the mountains, jedge, but I jest couldn't do *that*, 'cause——

"Well, old squire he said, times 'way back in hist'ry, wars and battles and terrible troubles was of'en settled by jest two head men goin' out an' havin' it out with battleaxes an' swords an' things, and squire said gentlemen settled private troubles that way, swappin' name-cards an' stickin' each other with swords, an' you could force a man to do it and it was brave and no murder, 'cept in law.

"That's what I thought, jedge, when I see Sheriff Jim comin'—that an' what Lawyer Brooks said about self-defense. Jim he allers toted his quick-shootin' rifle an' when I showed myself he throwed it 'cross his arm. 'T'wan't needful to say nothin'. He seed it in my face, I reckon, an' he went white as paper, fumblin' with the trigger.

"'I ain't got no name-card,' I says, 'but I don't guess you mind that.'

"'What do you want o' me?' he says. breathing quick like a houn'-dawg panting. Thar weren't no way out away from *there* and he knowed it—jest rocks down one side the road an' mountain brush up t'other.

"'Go up thar 'round the bend,' I says, 'an' come back thar through the wood; I'll be usin' up that a-way.' Then I says slow, so he'd know: 'It's self-defense, an' it's no murder; so squire said an' so Lawyer Brooks says, so's if ye get *me*——'

"He wet his lips with his tongue, jedge, and went backin' off.

"'I ain't goin' to fight you,' he says. He was watchin' my gun—my ole single-bar'l, an' he had his Winchester gun. It was twelve times to one, you might say, but I jest trusted to God, 'cause I knowed I was right.

"I turned to the wood, watchin' him over my shoulder; he was up that road a piece w'en I saw him sling up his gun an' my ole hat jumped. I rolled behine a big rock by the road an' he went to pourin' lead over the top an' 'round the sides at me. Then he went down behine another rock an' we went to ambushin'.

"It was noon-time, jedge, when I went to ambushin' Sheriff Jim, an' it war nigh sundown when I fetched him. I fished in my ole hat with a stick an' shoved it up an' Jim plugged it. He must 'a thought he'd got me.

"I lay still an' heard a stun rattle under Jim's boot. He was beatin' it

down the hill, takin' no chances to look, but he stopped an' turned 'round when I jumped up, an' he put up his gun.

"I never didn't even sight, jedge. I knowed that bullet would go straight, an' it did—plumb betwixt his eyes. Ef you-alls want to see the holes in my ole hat——" I went back home then, an' next day the officers came an' tole me anything I said would be used ag'in me, an' I just told them I shot Jim from behine the big rock at the bend, an' they said I could tell that to you-alls at court time.

"So that's the whole story, jedge, an' ef you don't mind I'd like to get back to Luella; I bin away three days now an' she's sick, an' I'll be obliged to you-alls."

It was evident that the matter was finished, in the mind of the mountaineer. He stood waiting with a confident smile on his lips, fumbling his dilapidated, broad-brimmed hat, flattening out the rents in the crown.

For a full minute after Harmon had finished the court was perfectly silent, except for the tap, tap, tap of a lead pencil the prosecuting attorney was nervously rapping against his teeth.

From the bench the judge angrily watched a gaunt moonshiner softly rubbing his hands up and down the barrel of his rifle—one of those guns which had become an abomination in the eyes of the little circuit rider.

Harmon had not removed his eyes from the judge, and waited patiently, a faint gleam of hope illuminating his anxious face.

Then the spell was broken by one of the jurymen drawing forth a red bandanna and blowing his nose with a sound like the report of a pistol.

A deep sound like a groan ran through the audience and the tall, gaunt mountaineer who had been fondling his rifle sprang to his feet with an oath.

"They ain't no reason why Tom should be kept here," he growled. "He's done explained how it happened, an' now, jedge, I perpose that you let him go back home. His wife's sick an'——"

The judge's gavel came down upon the desk like a mallet. The prosecuting attorney had sprung to his feet with an objection on his lips, but the judge held up his hand and stopped him. He had listened to Harmon's story with a sense of wonder; something out of reason and logic was happening and he had struggled to reconcile the proceedings—irregular as they were—with some vague possibilities of legal jurisprudence.

But the words and action of the mountaineer decided him. He was antagonistic by nature to violence and intimidation, and here was something tangible to oppose—to fight against—a score of armed hill men!

Throughout the entire week that he had held court in this wild region, his sense of propriety had been outraged by these armed men camping out in his court-room. He would teach them a lesson, and the lesson came in sharp, incisive words that cut like knives.

He swung his chair around toward the jury. In his heart he knew that these men would release the prisoner, and that they would release him through their fear—fear, pure and simple. His soul revolted against the injustice—to Law. But when he spoke his words came softly and without a tremor.

"The case at bar, gentlemen of the jury, is a perfectly simple one. There is no question about the act, the deed, or the intent. The accused, by his own testimony, killed a man, and the law does not justify a murder committed in a duel. Even if the accused tells the truth, there is but one punishment to be legally administered.

"Before pointing out your duty in this case, I wish to say one thing. I take you to be brave men, honest men, God-fearing men. For four days armed men have sat in this court-room—friends of the prisoner——friends of the *murderer*.

"These men came here for the purpose of intimidating you. They came in force, because they are cowards, afraid to meet their fellow men on equal terms. Ah! ye may growl and threaten!"

He spun around and faced the mountaineers, many of whom had risen to their feet in anger.

"You are cowards—bullies—creatures below contempt. You defy law, you make justice a mockery! You have come here to intimidate this court, and secure the release of this man who shot another man from ambush in intent if not in fact.

"Now I tell you, gentlemen of the

jury! If this self-confessed murderer is released by your act and verdict, I will herald the outrage to the four corners of the State."

The little judge stopped, glaring. His whole soul was in the problem of the moment. He was the Horatius Cocles of the backwoods bridge, and he meant to see the business through even to the extent of supplying backbone to the twelve supine villagers who occupied the jury box, and who divided apprehensive glances between judge and spectators.

Mountaineers are people of uncertain temper. The judge had fully expected the acquittal of the prisoner. But without leaving the box, the jury brought in a verdict of murder, with a tempering recommendation of mercy.

The judge jerked open the drawer of his desk, and thrust in his hand, looking for the black cap. He withdrew his hand empty and slammed the drawer shut. He turned to the prisoner.

"I am about to pronounce sentence upon you, Thomas Harmon," he said. "What have you to say?"

The mountaineer smiled up at him.

"Nothin', jedge, on'y I shore have got to go back this afternoon. There's Luella——"

"If he don't go back, we'll take him back!" a mountaineer growled from the audience.

The little judge jerked open the drawer again. When he withdrew his hand it contained the black silk cap. He deliberately placed it upon his head and addressed the condemned.

"Stand up, Thomas Harmon," he commanded. "The sentence of this court is that you be taken to the place of your crime and there hanged by the neck until you are dead—and may God have mercy on your soul. Mr. Sheriff, clear the court-room!"

"And *that*," a circuit rider whispered to a brother lawyer, "is judicial ill-temper. A verdict against a popular sentiment—because he wouldn't let those fellows bully him. Lucky Harmon!"

* * * * *

Five miles down the mountain road from the county seat the judge overtook the sheriff who was conveying the prisoner to the county jail, ten miles away.

When the judge's buckboard overtook the officer he told the driver to pull up. It was a bright sunny morning and the birds sang merrily in the trees.

"You are taking Harmon to the county jail, I understand," he said to the sheriff, casually.

The officer nodded.

"There ain't no cells over at Blount, jedge. We got to take them over to Cullman. That's where we keep all the condemned prisoners."

"How does he take it?" the judge asked again. "It was a flagrant case, but I confess to some interest in the man."

"Comin' quiet as a lamb, but mournful," the sheriff replied. "There he is under the tree over yonder. I just strapped his arms and let him rest a bit while I scouted along the road. The excitement was too much for him, I reckon. Has he got to hang really, jedge?"

The little judge suddenly slapped his hand upon the skirt of his coat and searched through his pockets with evident excitement. Then he ran to the buckboard and searched under the seat, and finally started back over the road, looking from side to side. The sheriff spurred after him.

"Anything lost?" he asked.

"I've dropped some valuable court papers," the judge replied. "I had them half a mile back, I'm sure. Would you mind taking a look along the road?"

"Sure not!" the sheriff said heartily. "Just keep your eye on Harmon, though, will you? I'll be back in a minute."

"Drive down the road, Tom," the judge said to the grinning darky on the buckboard. "I'll overtake you in a moment."

He walked over to where Harmon sat, bound upon his horse.

"You're going with the sheriff because I ordered you?" he asked.

The mountaineer nodded mournfully.

The judge stepped behind him and made two quick slashes at the straps that bound his arms.

"Go home to Luella," he said, stuffing the cut strings into the skirt of his coat.

The mountaineer turned in his saddle and stared at him.

"You said I was to be hanged. Must I go home?" he asked.

"Go!" said the judge imperatively.

When the sheriff galloped back the judge was picking himself up from the road and brushing his clothes. The sheriff cast a quick look around.

"Where's Harmon?" he cried.

The judge pointed to the direction opposite that in which the mountaineer had fled.

"He rode over me," he explained. "I tried to stop him, but——"

"I'll overtake him," the sheriff said cheerily. "I know Tom Harmon. He's just gone on."

The little judge smiled. The sheriff looking down at him smiled back.

"Reckon we're goin' the same way, ain't we, judge?" he drawled.

BLUNDELL'S LAST GUEST.*

By Albert Payson Terhune.

A story in which the reader is escorted where all others are forbidden.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

JUSTIN BLUNDELL and his daughter Ruth are entertaining a house party. Several houses in the neighborhood have been plundered by daring thieves, who make use of a motor car. It is the chief topic among the guests, and especially with Beckwith, a vapid youth of much curiosity.

In hunting through the attic Ruth comes upon a white trunk containing a large amount of plate which she recognizes as belonging to the Hendricks, the latest victims of the robbers.

She half determines to tell Alan Lorimer, a young friend of her father's, who went with her to the attic, but whom she does not think knew the contents of the trunk. He has made a half-confession of love to her, but says his life is utterly blighted and seems so distressed that she resolves to say nothing about it.

That night, awakened by the flash of a lantern from outside, she goes to the attic to investigate. In the drive below, she sees Alan Lorimer and Gavroche, the chauffeur, lashing the white trunk to the back of an automobile.

The next morning she confronts Lorimer with her discovery. He admits his guilt, and later she receives a note, saying that he is going away to try to become the man that she would have him.

Blundell is called away also. The guests retire early, overcome with sleepiness, and Ruth, by mere chance, discovers that the entire household has been drugged. From her dazed condition she is aroused by the sound of an auto on the drive. After a little hesitation she decides to turn on the electricity. As she reaches for the switch she is conscious that some one is following her. A touch of her fingers and the house is flooded with light. Hurrying feet sound on the veranda. She turns to face the man behind her. It is Beckwith—alert, vigorous. She bars his way, and he resumes his usual vapid manner.

Blundell returns the next morning, bringing Lorimer back with him, and gives Ruth an old birthday book in which she has some of the guests write their names. A private conversation between Blundell and Lorimer develops the fact that Blundell is the leader of a gang of thieves and forgers. Lorimer, having been an accomplice, announces now that he is through with criminal life. Blundell shows that the birthday book he has given to Ruth is a device to secure signatures to blank checks. Lorimer leaves, Blundell knowing that love for Ruth will prevent the younger man from disclosing the truth.

In a talk with Ruth, Blundell agrees to retire from business. He goes to New York for the day. A freshet comes on. At dusk Lorimer arrives mud-stained, at the house, evidently under great stress, seeking for Blundell.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALAN LORIMER BRINGS NEWS.

"WHERE is your father?" repeated Lorimer.

"He is in town. But what——"

"In town?" He strode to the farther end of the hall where the telephone hung, the water crunching in his soaked boots as he walked.

"In town? Did he say where he was going to stay? I must call him up at once."

"He's—he's left New York by this time. He——"

"Left? Where has he gone? Did he tell you?"

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"He's on his way home. Why, what's the matter?" For Lorimer was staring at her in dismay.

"On his way home?" echoed Alan stupidly.

"Yes, Gavroche went for him nearly half an hour ago. Why? Oh, is anything the matter? He isn't ill, is he? Do you know anything about him?"

"No," answered Lorimer, regaining his self-control with an effort. "I came here to speak to him on an important matter, that is all."

She was eying the excited man from head to foot.

"You merely called to see him on a business matter?" she asked.

"Yes, but——"

"And does that account for your rushing in without ringing, and for the mud on your clothes and for your looking like a ghost? You transact 'business' in an odd manner, Mr. Lorimer. No, you are keeping something back from me. I demand to know what it is. Are you——"

She stopped; for Alan did not appear to be listening. He had crossed to the window overlooking the drive and was shading his eyes with his hand in an effort to pierce the dense darkness of early night.

His attitude and the direction in which he was staring gave her a clue. She recalled the running figures she had so dimly seen stealthily crossing the drive to the shrubbery.

"Those men!" she cried, coming close to his side. "Do they belong to your band? Are they your accomplices? What does all this mean? You *shall* speak!"

"What men?" asked Lorimer, spinning about and facing her with bloodshot, questioning eyes. "What men?"

"The three men I saw run across the drive not fifteen minutes ago and hide among the bushes. Do they——"

"You saw them? You are sure? They are here already, then!"

Questions and exclamations left his lips in a groan and he stood inert, panic-stricken. At sight of his terror a new conjecture assailed her.

"Are you a fugitive?" she asked, her voice vibrant. "Are those men seeking you and have you come to my father for refuge? Answer me!"

"I—I cannot tell you!" he muttered. "I cannot tell you who or what they are."

"I am right!" she continued. "They *are* seeking you. What do you want? A hiding-place? Aid in escaping? Tell me; for all that one woman can do to save you, I'll do. Only tell me what you want."

He paused in his nervous pacing of the room and halted before her. Across his haggard face shone a light that for the moment transfigured it.

"You would do this for *me?*" he murmured. "For me whom you despise! You would help me?"

"Help you?" exclaimed the girl, carried far out of herself by the stress of the crisis. "You know I would. You *know* it. You know there is nothing I would not do for you! I have told myself that I detest you, that I look on you with abhorrence. I have told myself so over and over again. And I lied when I said it. I will help you—will save you—if it is in mortal power to do it."

She scarcely realized what she said. The words rushed from her lips by no volition of her own. The flood-gates were down. The love that for days she had been striving to slay now burst its bonds and sprang to freedom, stronger tenfold for its imprisonment.

She had seen Alan Lorimer in what she believed to be the commission of crime. She had lashed him with the whip of her scorn. She had listened, outwardly unmoved, while he had told her of his love and his repentance.

She had steeled her heart against him and had buried his memory beneath an avalanche of fierce resolution and contumely.

And now—now that he came to her, apparently an outcast, a hunted thing—all the tenderness and the semi-maternal instinct of protectiveness that dwells in a good woman's nature had risen unbidden and had battered down the gates of her stern reserve.

"Tell me!" she urged hysterically, "tell me what I can do to save you!"

He was staring at her, transfixed with rapture that shone upon his face like a great light. He was trembling in every limb. The deep red surged back to his white cheeks as he sprang forward.

"Ruth!" he cried. "*Ruth!*"

A current of cold air swept across them. The spell was broken. Alan turned on his heel to confront Justin Blundell, who was crossing the threshold.

At sight of the older man the light died in Lorimer's eyes, the flush ebbed from his cheek. Again that look of strained excitement settled on his face. Justin glanced at him carelessly—the apparently indifferent glance wherewith he was wont to read men's acts and motives.

"Ah, Lorimer!" he observed coldly as he closed the door behind him and stepped into the room. "What brings you here? Business, I suppose; and pretty pressing business, to judge from your condition. Good evening, little girl! How has the day gone?"

He stooped and kissed his daughter; then continued, still addressing her:

"I've a rather important matter to discuss with Mr. Lorimer, dear. Would you mind running away for a little while?"

Ruth looked, undecided, from one to the other. Lorimer nodded. Without clearly understanding why she did so, she obeyed his nod rather than her father's expressed wish, and left the room.

"Now then!" cried Blundell as the door closed behind her. "What is it? Out with it, man!"

"They're after you!" answered Lorimer curtly.

"After *me?* Nonsense! I'm no such fool as to leave myself open to a chance like that. There's nothing they can hold me on. You're dreaming, man!"

"That check—Sinclair's check. The one in the birthday book. You got it cashed yesterday."

"Well, what then?" snarled Justin. "Do you suppose I was fool enough to get it cashed in person? They'll never trace it back to me. Besides, the signature was genuine."

"It's that they want you for. And I tell you they're after you! They are on the place here. The house is surrounded. And you ran right into the trap.

"The grounds are full of men. You can't escape. I tried to get here ahead of them. I didn't dare telegraph, and I knew they'd have an agent at Central, so I didn't telephone. That's why I came myself. I took the auto you keep in town. It broke down two miles from here on the back Paterson road and I ran the rest of the way."

For the instant Justin Blundell's lightning powers of thought and action appeared to have deserted him. He stared, only half-believing, at his informant.

"How you got past them on the drive I can't understand," went on Alan, "unless they didn't know you had been away from home and didn't recognize you in the darkness. They were afraid if they came to the house openly to arrest you that you'd get away by some secret passage. It was arranged to wait till nightfall, then surround the house and make sure of you."

"You're sure this isn't a mare's nest you've stirred up?" asked Blundell, still dazed and inactive. "How did you find it out?"

"What does that matter? Brace up, can't you, and try to form some sort of plan. They may smash the door in any minute!"

"But how did you learn of this?" babbled Justin. "How——"

"I was looking for work. I'd heard of the famous Barkley Detective Agency of course. It struck me that the one thing I might be fit for was tracking the class of men whose ways I knew best. I went there to-day to apply for a position. The office boy told me to wait in the reception room till the chief had time to see me.

"He ushered me into the wrong room, or I mistook my way, for I strayed on until I got into the anteroom of the chief's private office. There was only a ten-foot partition between it and the private office, and as I sat there I heard Barkley himself giving instructions to the men who were to help him on to-night's job.

"I didn't stay to hear more than a dozen sentences and then I posted off here. There wasn't a train for three hours, except a 'special' that Barkley had chartered. So I took the auto. It broke down four times. Besides, the waters are out all along the road. This freshet—but what are you going to do? Isn't there still a card you can play?"

"Yes! Come to my study!"

The apathy was gone. Justin was again the alert, resourceful man who had engineered a hundred successful raids

against society; who had for twenty years successfully eluded the police of two hemispheres.

He led the way up the stairs into his study. There he went hastily to the telephone connecting with the various buildings on the estate.

He called up Gavroche at the garage, and spoke a dozen incisive words of command:

"Bring the racing car to the back veranda at once! No lights."

"If you're making for the station it's useless. They'll catch you by telegraph before you can reach New York," suggested Lorimer, as his host darted about the study, now tossing a handful of papers into the grate, now throwing articles of various sorts into a suit case.

"I'm no fool. I've kept that racing car stored and ready for just such a trick as this. I'm not making for any railroad. At least, none in this State. The highway is good enough for me. By daylight I'll be a good two hundred miles from here, if the car holds together and keeps up to its record speed. Then let my friends the police look for me if they will."

"But the house is surrounded."

"Gavroche understands. He and I planned out long ago what to do in a corner like this. He'll signal me when he leaves the garage. The car ought to be ready in five minutes anyway. As he rolls up to the back veranda I'll be in the seat beside him before he comes to a halt. And then a thirty-mile-an-hour dash through the dark; and let's see the dirty spies stop us!"

"And Ruth—Miss Blundell?"

Justin stopped short in his hasty preparations.

"Ruth!" he muttered, his voice choked and hoarse.

He gathered himself together with an effort.

"You must explain to her as best you can," said he. "I can trust you to do it, not for my sake but for hers. Just as I know you came to-night to me not for my sake but for hers, because you wouldn't see her heart broken by learning what her father was.

"I can rely on you to make things as easy as possible for her until I can send for her. When I'm with her again I can make her forgive me, I know. I'll have some story ready by that time to prove me an innocent and persecuted man. Until then, I trust you. You see I size men up pretty fairly; and, while I admit I'm inclined to despise you for a renegade and coward, I know you will be worthy my trust. By the way, I wonder what sort of man this Barkley is?

"I've heard of him a dozen times of course as a crack-a-jack detective—the cleverest in New York, they say. And I've heard, too, the story of his being a man of family and wealth who got so bored by society that he started a detective agency in order to have something to do. I've heard so much of him that it's a pity I can't see him this trip."

"You have already seen him," returned Lorimer. "You've seen him and classified him as a fool. You knew him as Charles Beckwith."

"Beckwith! That—Good Lord! I was right when I told Ruth this morning that I'm getting too old for this sort of work. Beckwith! And it was he who found out about the check and—— Oh, what a driveling ass I am!"

"You've no time to worry about that now. If you're packed, you'd better say good-by to your daughter. Gavroche must be almost ready. I suppose you realize that your reaching the racing car uncaught is a ten to one shot against you?"

"This may reduce the odds," coldly observed Blundell, picking a pistol from his desk drawer and pocketing it.

They descended to the central hall. At a call from her father Ruth appeared. Her first look was at Alan. From him her eye strayed to Justin and widened in surprise as she noticed his traveling outfit.

"Why, where are you going?" she asked. "Is it to help——"

She glanced at Alan and left the sentence unfinished.

"It's to help no one," replied Justin. "The fact is, Lorimer brings me news of a plan to smash a deal I've been trying to float and I must get back to town at once if I want to save the transaction. I may be gone some days; so I'm taking this big suit case. Gavroche is to meet me at the back veranda entrance. Come."

He moved toward the rear door; Ruth following him, dumb with mingled emotions.

Only that morning he had promised her to drop business; yet here he was apparently going into the thick of it once more. She was bitterly grieved at his lack of good faith.

A second and keener emotion, however, swiftly drove out this minor grief. So it was merely to notify her father of a business transaction that Alan Lorimer had made so melodramatic an entrance half an hour earlier! By false pretenses he had surprised from her that wild confession of love!

As she dwelt on this latest of his many deceptions her face flamed hot with anger. She seemed fated to be this criminal's dupe; to believe in him again and again, only to find how foolish that belief was.

"But this time was the last!" she vowed to herself between set, white lips.

As they reached the rear entrance a loud knock sounded on the front door. At the same moment three sharp whistles were heard from the direction of the garage.

Justin Blundell snatched Ruth convulsively to his breast, covering her wondering face with swift kisses.

"Good-by!" he muttered hoarsely. "Good-by, my own darling little girl! God bless you! God——"

The knocking was repeated at the front door. Steps sounded on the gravel walk outside. From the drive leading to the garage came the muffled whirr of the mighty racing car.

Setting Ruth down, Justin closed the door on her. He and Alan Lorimer stood alone in the dark entry.

"Too late, I'm afraid!" whispered Lorimer. "They're all around the house."

"It's touch and go," replied Blundell excitedly as he threw open the outer door. "Stand by me, lad. Now then for the rush!"

CHAPTER XIV.

PURSUER AND PURSUED.

THE night was pitch-dark. As Blundell and Alan emerged upon the rear veranda they were swallowed up in a pall of blackness.

Justin knew his way and prepared to run silently across the veranda just as the racing car should swing around the curve of the drive at the south corner of the house.

"Stay here till I draw them off!" whispered Lorimer. "Then make for the car. It will be alongside in a second."

He sprang across the veranda at a run, his feet resounding on the wet boards. In an instant two men had sprang from the darkness and grappled him.

Alan threw them off; but they closed with him at once, and turning to the left he fought his way down the veranda, with one of them clinging to either side. Trusting to the roar of the rain to prevent his voice from reaching Ruth, he called hoarsely:

"Help! Thieves! Thieves!" and added in the same tone:

"I'll have the law on you as sure as my name is Justin Blundell!"

At the words one of his assailants clapped a whistle to his lips and blew two piercing blasts on it. Alan redoubled his struggles; stamping for a foothold on the slippery floor. He freed one arm and struck out blindly with all his strength.

His fist encountered warm flesh and one of his opponents crashed heavily to the ground, plunging through the network of vines that walled in the veranda.

The other, who had seized Alan by throat and shoulder, released the latter grip. The next instant Lorimer felt a cold circle of steel jammed against his face.

"Stand still," commanded his captor, "or—I'll blow your head in."

Other running footsteps sounded from in front and behind. At the same moment something whizzed past the veranda, within six feet of Alan.

Lorimer knew it for the racing car; and divined, too, that his ruse had successfully drawn off attention from Justin and had allowed him to cross the darkness of the veranda unobserved and to gain the refuge of the car.

Alan at once ceased to struggle, and stood there in silence while his captor summoned assistance.

Through the sweep of the storm he

could hear the great car thundering up the drive toward the main road. Once, too, he heard a distant shot.

"One of the men stationed at the gate must have tried to stop him," he thought. "Small chance of a bullet going true in such darkness as this!"

Meantime through the gloom a group of men had gathered about him. He spoke no word; wishing to give Justin as long a start as possible before the ruse should be discovered.

"Caught him just in the nick of time!" muttered one of the men. "He must have had wind of us. Clymer and I nabbed him just as he was getting into his auto. He got rattled and started to run. The chauffeur's skipped without him."

"Got him, sir!" reported a second voice as a newcomer joined the group. "Nabbed him as he left the house by the back door! Shall we take him inside?"

"No," replied the man addressed; and Alan recognized Beckwith's voice. "Bring him to the stables first. Put the bracelets on him and bring him along."

The irons were slipped on Alan's wrists. A hand on either shoulder propelled him down the steps and along the drive leading to the stables. One man in front flashed a bull's-eye lantern to show his fellows the way; but captors and captive plodded behind in darkness. Beckwith ranged himself alongside Lorimer as they walked and spoke to him in a low tone inaudible to his companions.

"I am having you taken to the stables instead of to the house, Mr. Blundell," he said, "in order to save your daughter from needless shock. I regret that I was unable to capture you away from home. As it is, you may be assured we shall do nothing to alarm Miss Blundell."

"Here we are, sir!" spoke up the lantern-bearer. "Here's the carriage house. Will that do?"

"Yes," replied Beckwith. "Bring him in and turn on the electric light."

The switch-key was found, and a cluster of three incandescent globes hanging from the center of the carriage house shone forth, making the place light as day.

Beckwith turned, directly beneath the light, and faced his prisoner. As he did so, Alan could scarcely believe this was the vacant-faced, insensate bore who had for two weeks been the butt of the house party.

The detective's face had wholly lost the foolish mask it had so long worn. His loose figure was now compact and muscular. His light blue eyes were as keen and alert as a bull-terrier's.

But as his gaze fell full on his prisoner, Beckwith's jaw dropped and his quick eyes widened into a stare of stupid amazement that was not in the least assumed.

"Where is Blundell?" he shouted, addressing his men. They looked from each other to the prisoner in perplexity.

"Why, here, sir! We——" began one of them.

"This man is not Justin Blundell!" stormed the detective. "You idiots! You've caught the wrong man. Where is Blundell?"

"Perhaps I can answer that question better than these subordinates of yours," suggested Lorimer easily. "I can't give you Mr. Blundell's exact location; but at the rate of speed he was making I should say he is about five miles away by now."

"You've let him slip!" cried Beckwith, glowering at his followers. "You miserable bunglers! After all my work you've let him slip."

"It must have been Blundell that lit out in the auto," volunteered one of the men. "But how he did it is more than I can——"

"It was very simple," put in Alan, again addressing Beckwith. "I left the house an instant ahead of him. It was dark. Your men seized me. In the struggle he came out, got into his racing car, and made off."

"You said you were Blundell!" snorted a man who was busily mopping blood from a cut lip. "You said you were! That's what we——"

"How delightfully credulous those good fellows of yours are, Mr. Beckwith," observed Alan, bent on making the most of this final and supreme opportunity to humiliate the man whose plans must forever wreck Ruth's faith in the father she adored. "Singularly cred-

ulous! They seem to believe everything they hear. I wonder you dare trust them abroad in this wicked world."

"Shut up, you!" ordered the man on Alan's right. "We've got *you* even if we've lost your master. You'll pay for this before you're through! If——"

"Clymer!" ordered Beckwith, addressing the man Alan had knocked down on the veranda. "Take one of the horses and ride to the station for all you're worth. Send telegrams up and down the line and then telephone to headquarters to issue a generel description and offer a reward. We'll nail him yet! Drake, ride over to the Erie station and send the same message. Telephone Paterson and Suffern, too."

"In the meantime, Mr. Beckwith?" queried Lorimer as the two envoys departed on their respective errands.

"In the meantime, Mr. Lorimer," answered Beckwith, who had in some measure recovered from his first chagrin —"in the meantime I think I am justified in detaining you. You are a clever man—a resourceful man—and you have served your master well to-night. But I'm afraid you're pretty firmly caught in his trap."

"It does look like it," admitted Lorimer, but without a trace of anxiety. "By the way, there's nothing you can do, I suppose, for the moment? Perhaps it may interest you to hear how your proposed raid happened to be discovered in time. There are also a few other interesting details I can give you. Do you care to hear them?"

"If you care to give them, knowing that anything you may say is liable to be used against you at your trial."

"My trial? On what charge?"

The detective hesitated. Alan, quick to press his advantage, continued:

"I will confess to something, if you are so anxious to find a valid charge against me. I will do so, knowing full well the consequences of what I shall say. So you need not repeat the cut-and-dried warning concerning my trial. I'll do this; but I will do it at a price."

"I cannot bargain with you."

"Perhaps not. On the other hand, perhaps you can. My terms are these: first, that Miss Blundell shall not be told by you or your men of the business that brought you here, nor anything that shall shake her faith in her father."

"I agree to that—willingly."

"The second condition is that you tell me the specific charge or charges on which you secured your warrant against Blundell."

"There can be no objection to my telling you. I——"

"Third—that you gratify my idle curiosity to the extent of telling me why you came to Blundell's house as a guest, and why you played the fool, and how you secured evidence against him. I gather, in a general way, of course, that you came here to spy on him. But what put you on his track?"

The detective considered for a moment. Professional vanity was strong within him. He by no means shrank from exploiting his own achievement, of which, despite Justin's temporary escape, he still felt more or less proud.

Nor (so ingenuously careless was Alan's manner) did he suspect the ulterior motive that urged the prisoner to seek this varied information. For Alan had long since formed a definite plan of action, and was carrying it out with a coolness and circumstantiality well worthy the example and teachings of Justin Blundell himself.

Beckwith's men had scattered to different parts of the wide carriage house; all save the two who guarded Alan. At a word from the detective these also drew back out of earshot.

Alan seated himself on the step of a surrey, his manacled hands lying inert in his lap. The glaring electric light fell full on his face. It was flushed from the violent exertion he had undergone.

Strangely enough, considering his present predicament and all he had been through, his features had for the time lost their harsh outlines and wore an almost boyish look.

They formed a strange contrast, these two young men facing each other in the pitiless electric light—Alan, disheveled, wet, muddy, bare of head and shackled at the wrist; the detective, tall, spare, sinewy, with sharp, incisive face and spruce, even dandified, costume. Lorimer was the first to speak.

"Well," said he, "to begin with, what is the charge against Blundell? Is there

anything beyond that business of Sinclair's signature?"

"Who told you about Sinclair's signature?" asked Beckwith in surprise.

"My dear fellow, we'll come to that later. Just now, if you don't object, *I'm* doing the questioning. Is there any other charge than that?"

"No," confessed Beckwith grudgingly. "None that justified me in getting out a warrant. But I know as well as you do that he is mixed up in a dozen other forgeries, and that he was the moving spirit in the robberies that have terrorized this part of New Jersey for the past month or two.

"And he was in the same sort of work over in England. It got too hot for him there and he came here. My English correspondent gave me the clue. He told me that for two years Scotland Yard had been practically certain of Blundell's complicity in certain forgeries and robberies, but that the man had positive genius for eluding actual evidence.

"They never could quite lay their hands on him with a clear enough case to insure his conviction. My professional interest was aroused by what my correspondent told me. I thought it would be a feather in my cap if I could succeed where all Scotland Yard had failed. And it will be."

"It would have been," replied Alan in a tone that might imply either assent or correction.

"It *will* be," pursued Beckwith. "I watched him or had him watched from the moment he landed. In less than a month cases came up in which I was sure I could detect his hand; but, as for convicting proof, there was none.

"He *was* a genius, just as Scotland Yard had said. All this made me the more determined to win. Then came the Bernardsville and Tuxedo robberies. They were performed in practically the identical fashion of a big robbery in Yorkshire that had been undoubtedly the work of Blundell's gang.

"At last I saw a chance. My agency does work occasionally for the banking firm of Sinclair & Heath. Sinclair is an old friend and a clubmate of mine. I was dining with him one evening when he told me of having received an invitation to this house party.

"Without going into details I prevailed on him to bring me here. I told him I had an important case in this part of the country that I couldn't trust to any of my subordinates.

"I got him to bring me here, to connive at my rôle of 'cheerful idiot,' and to keep his mouth shut. I promised him in return to tell him the whole mystery when we got back to town. He jumped at the proposal; for he's an eccentric, mystery-loving chap, just as many of those seemingly matter-of-fact Wall Streeters are."

"Good idea!" commented Alan in approval. "And you played the part fairly well. A trifle overdone in spots, perhaps, but——"

"My dear sir, you *can't* overdo a fool. That's why it's the safest part to play. All one has to do is, be consistent. Moreover, it will help you out of a tight place as no other assumed character could. It helped *me* that way twice while I was up here."

He paused. Alan glanced up inquiringly.

"I kept in touch with my agents," resumed Beckwith, "all the time I was here. But little good they did me, or I them!

"At last, Hendricks' house was robbed. It was robbed in the early morning, little before sunrise. I was certain from various ear-marks of the job that it was the work of Blundell and his crew. I was equally convinced that the thieves hadn't had time to carry the plunder very far, for fear of daylight surprising them.

"I figured out that it had probably been brought directly here for temporary keeping; and that the next night, or some time soon, it would be taken away to a safer place. I was right, as you know."

"Quite right. Go on."

"That next day I hunted everywhere, as well as I could without exciting suspicion; but I couldn't find the stuff. Naturally there were a lot of places where, under the circumstances, I couldn't look.

"But I was on watch that night. And about 2 A. M. I heard an auto go past the house. I couldn't see it from my window, so I crossed the hall to a va-

cant room whose window commanded a view of the drive.

"I'd barely crossed the threshold when some one else entered—almost at my heels. I hid behind a pile of boxes. The 'some one'—it was Miss Blundell, by the way—went to the window, looked out, and then rushed from the room, slamming the door behind her.

"When I went to look out the auto had gone. And I found the door had a spring latch; so there I had to stay all night. I thought at first the girl was in league with her father and had trapped me there while the booty was being removed. But later I saw that I had wronged her by such an idea."

"You assuredly had," observed Alan coldly.

"Next afternoon," went on Beckwith, "Blundell said he was going to town. It seemed odd to me that he should leave his guests like that. I happened to be hanging around the garage and I heard two or three words of direction he gave to that sour-faced chauffeur of his. They put me on the track.

"I sized up the situation in a minute: Blundell's own house was to be entered that night and his own guests plundered. A delightful little conceit on his part, wasn't it? I pretended to start for town with him; purposely missed my train; telephoned full instructions to my office manager; and in consequence, at 1 A. M., a half dozen of my men were surrounding the house, waiting for a signal from me to enter and catch the whole gang red-handed.

"I was resolved to bag the entire lot. So I waited till they got fairly inside and at work. Then I crept down-stairs to give the signal. My fellows had had orders not to stir hand or foot till they got that signal from me.

"Miss Blundell balked me again. She scared the scoundrels off by turning up every light and she blocked my way when I was hurrying out to give the signal.

"The thieves escaped; and I had to go afterward, feeling like a whipped cur, and send my men about their business. Twice she stood in the way of my success, you see."

"Hard luck!" consoled Alan. "Decidedly hard luck. But how about this check of Sinclair's?"

"The simplest thing imaginable. That birthday book idea was sublime; but when I saw Sinclair signing his name I was suspicious. I took the book over to a table and sat there with my back to the others while I pretended to be thinking up a verse for the second page.

"It didn't take me long to examine the book and notice that the double sheets of cardboard on each page could come apart. I parted two of them and out tumbled a check. That told me the whole story. I marked Sinclair's check in three places with invisible ink. The kind that won't show unless it's exposed to heat. Then I gave back the book."

"And when you went to town next day you told Sinclair all about it and had the banks notified and put your agents on the watch?"

"Precisely. You're a veritable mind-reader. The check was cashed yesterday and the chain of evidence was complete."

"And that is *all* your evidence?"

"All? Yes! Isn't it enough? I tell you the chain is complete!"

"Complete against whom?"

"Whom? Blundell, of course! Who else?"

"Myself."

"*You!* What are you talking about? We——"

"I mean just this: That scheme was mine, not Blundell's. I went to town the same afternoon he did. I concocted that little book that evening.

"Next morning he and I came out to Pompton together. I told him it was a birthday book I had picked up in a curio shop, and asked him to present it to his daughter as I felt a hesitancy about offering it to her in person. My idea was to have her ask the guests to sign their names in it.

"Then I intended to steal the checks from the book, fill them out and get them cashed. In fact, I did so in Sinclair's case. I got that check cashed yesterday. *I* got it cashed. Justin Blundell knew absolutely nothing about it."

Beckwith was staring at the speaker in dumb incredulity.

"And you expect me to believe that yarn?" he exclaimed at last.

Lorimer glanced hastily about to make sure the others were not within hearing. Then he lowered his voice and replied:

"To be perfectly frank, I don't expect you to believe it at all. But I *do* expect the court to believe it. And, if need be, a dozen of Blundell's pals will swear to any of the minor points of my testimony. The story is good. It can't be disproved. There are no witnesses to our conversation. Beckwith, I've *got* you! What are you going to do about Blundell now?"

For at least a minute Beckwith eyed the shackled man in crass, expressionless wonder. But it was a saying in his agency that when the chief's face was blankest, the chief's brain was busiest. So it was now.

Mentally, he inspected the trap into which Alan Lorimer had led him. He saw that if the fellow chose to stick to his preposterous story it was plausible enough (especially if strengthened by false outside testimony) to send him to State's Prison and leave Beckwith without a shadow of evidence against Justin Blundell.

All the labor, the time, the planning, the scheming of weeks would have been in vain and Beckwith's name would be a laughing stock in police circles throughout two continents.

"Yes," he assented at length, with the air of a man checkmated at chess. "You've got me."

"You see," said Lorimer, "I keep my share of our bargain. I told you that if you'd explain a few intricate mysteries to my feeble mind I would repay you by making full confession. And I've done it."

He leaned back wearily. The haggard lines had again settled about his face and the light of high purpose had died from his eyes, leaving them heavy and hopeless. And, in his heart, he defended his action and buoyed his resolution by saying over and over to himself:

"It's for her! For *her!* Now she need never bend her head to the dust in shame for her father. It would have broken her heart—it would have wrecked her whole life—if the father she loved and trusted had gone to a felon's cell."

He looked up to find Beckwith staring moodily down upon him.

"I suppose you know," said the detective, "that, apart from this ridiculous story you tell, there is not one shred of evidence against *you?*"

"Yes."

"And that, if you abandon that story, you are a free man—free to move among other men—to breathe God's free air and to look the world in the face?"

"I know it," responded Alan uninterestedly.

"And that this story of yours, if stuck to, means a long term of years in prison? That it means you lose your liberty, your right of franchise as an American citizen, your hopes of a future—all that makes life worth living?"

"I understand."

"Moreover, while we might have held you on the charge of aiding and abetting the escape of a criminal and of assaulting an officer of the law while in pursuit of his duty—I say, I suppose you know those are minor charges and they would, even if pressed, entail only a comparatively trifling penalty?"

Lorimer nodded.

"In other words, you know that by standing by and letting the law take its course you would be a free man. For I shall not press either of the charges against you. Whereas, if you insist on taking Blundell's guilt on your shoulders, you are a lost man for all time. And, knowing all that, you still adhere to the suicidal course you have chosen? Think, man! Reflect before it is too late!"

"Surely," interposed Lorimer, a world of weary apathy in his voice, "we have discussed this long enough. You have my last word."

"Do you know what I think of you?" queried Beckwith after a pause. "I think you're a fool, of course. But you're the bravest, most honorable, magnificent type of fool I ever met. And there you have *my* last word, Alan Steele."

The prisoner sprang to his feet, regardless of his manacled hands. His face went dead white.

"My name is Lorimer, not Steele," he retorted.

"Your name may be anything you choose," answered Beckwith. "I happened to be thinking, for the moment, of a poor young chap, who some eight years ago was charged with forgery. He was second vice-president of a Wall Street house. He had a brilliant future before

him. His name was Steele. And, now I come to think of it, his full name was Alan Lorimer Steele. Odd coincidence, isn't it?"

Lorimer had dropped back to his former seat. His head was sunk on his breast.

"I had just started my agency in those days," continued the detective. "I was put on the case. It interested me, because I knew many of Steele's friends and had heard much that was good of him. I saw him only once; but I never forget a face. The matter was hushed up and Steele disappeared. The rumor got about that he had committed suicide.

"Years later, comparing the methods of that forgery with those of a famous English gang, and remembering that Justin Blundell had at that time been connected with that Wall Street firm, I formed a rather shrewd guess as to who had really been guilty.

"I was sorry for poor Steele and his unjustly wrecked career and his death. In fact, I happened to be thinking of it one night at Blundell's dinner table only a few weeks ago when in walked Steele himself. It startled me more than anything had done before in years. I believe I even dropped my wine-glass on sight of you."

Lorimer made no reply; but still sat with bent head and motionless body.

"Your secret is safe with me," said Beckwith gently. "And so is another secret. I chanced to overhear a conversation between you and Miss Blundell, out by the trellis, the morning after I had been locked in the storeroom. I listened purposely, fancying you were still mixed up in Blundell's plans. That talk undeceived me. It told me much. For instance, it now tells me why you are willing to make this Quixotic sacrifice for the sake of the man who ruined you."

He waited for a reply. At mention of the overheard conversation Alan had looked up quickly and with fiery indignation in his eyes. But he did not speak.

"And," resumed Beckwith curiously, "you are actually going to throw away your life for her. You are going to perjure your immortal soul in court by swearing to your own guilt in order that she may not learn what her father is. In order that she may live happy, while you are enduring a living death."

Alan raised his eyes—bloodshot, despairing, miserable.

"In order that she may live happy," he repeated. "Surely this smashed life and world-battered soul of mine are a pitifully cheap price to pay for all that."

Beckwith was about to speak when a man appeared in the doorway.

It was Clymer. His face was alive with excitement, and he beckoned mysteriously to his chief.

Leaving Lorimer, Beckwith followed the man out into the rainy night.

CHAPTER XV.

BECKWITH CUTS A GORDIAN KNOT.

FIVE minutes later the detective returned. His alert face bore a look Lorimer could not read.

"You'll have to come out of here," he said; and something in his voice made Alan eye him with a dull curiosity. "We shall need this place in a few minutes. Will you go to the house?"

Lorimer glanced down at his handcuffs, then appealingly at Beckwith.

"Is it absolutely necessary?" he pleaded. "Miss Blundell is there. Must she see me—like this?"

For reply, Beckwith unlocked the irons and removed them.

"I am going to trust you," said he. "Will you give me your parole?"

"You know that I will," retorted Alan. "I shall see this thing through. Even if you should refuse to take me back to town as your prisoner I should give myself up the moment I heard that Justin Blundell was captured or that his daughter had the slightest inkling that there was a criminal charge against him."

"I believe you," said Beckwith curtly. "It will not be necessary to hold you strictly as a prisoner. If Blundell is captured, you can use your own judgment as to whether or not to get yourself imprisoned by telling that insane story of yours.

"If he is not captured, you would only be throwing your freedom away for nothing by charging yourself with his crime.

"The matter will not get into the papers unless he is captured. I shall see to that, for the sake of my own reputation. So his daughter is not likely to get wind of it. Now go to the house, please. I shall see you before I leave. I shall have decided before that time whether or not to take you back with me."

Through the sheets of driving rain Alan Lorimer groped blindly toward the house, guided by the level ray of light from the wide south window of the hall.

As he drew near he was aware of a slender figure silhouetted against the pane. His heart bounded at the sight and he quickened his pace. And so he fought his way onward through darkness toward the distant light and—Ruth.

The wide front door stood ajar and he entered without knocking. Ruth had not heard his approach. For a half-hour she had stood there at the south window, looking out into the blackness and the storm, fighting again that old battle between her heart and her judgment.

She told herself, in bitterness, that Alan had taken an unfair advantage of her weakness, in letting her believe him a fugitive and in tacitly pleading for her protection and her pity.

She saw now with amazing clearness, that the wild unaccountable emotion his supposed plight had aroused within her had been due solely to the shock of his sudden advent and his disheveled aspect, and to a natural desire to shield from harm any one who chanced to be in dire misfortune.

She was surprised and relieved to find how lucidly she could now think out the whole subject. The feeling she had once entertained toward Lorimer had evidently been but a passing infatuation.

She had seen him in his true colors and the infatuation had fled. Her most unmaidenly behavior toward him that evening had been largely prompted by the hysterical and overwrought state of her nerves.

She must rest, and get back some of her old-time poise and calm. The events of the past month had been too much for her. Henceforth, she would settle down to a bovine rural existence; caring for her father and her father's house; and forgetting that brief, mad episode that had once threatened to change the whole world for her.

Lorimer had apparently gone—gone as suddenly as he had come; gone with her father to town. He would never come back. Of that she was quite certain. And she was glad. Yes, honestly *glad*. And——

"Ruth!"

She wheeled about and saw him. And then—somehow—she never knew how—she was in his arms, sobbing against his drenched shoulder, and rejoicing unspeakably at the strong, tender clasp of his arms about her.

In a moment he had released her and they stood, startled and uncomprehending. Neither could explain what had just occurred. It was certainly quite unlike what either had anticipated. Alan was the first to regain his voice.

"Forgive me!" he begged. "I—I had no right to. I——"

Her hands were over her burning face and she was trembling from the sharp reaction of her emotion. She could not reply, but instinctively she moved nearer to him.

"I had no right to," he repeated, in shame at his unforeseen action. "I am not worthy to touch the hem of your garment. Can you ever forgive me?"

She raised her head and looked him full in the eyes, crimson from throat to brow, but with fearless, unashamed gaze.

"What is done is done," she said at last. "I have nothing to forgive. I thought I had forced myself to forget you—that I had driven you wholly from my heart. I was wrong. 'Deep waters cannot quench love!' In my foolish pride I heaped up barriers to keep out that which God Himself has implanted in our hearts. I was blind and wilful. I see it all now."

"Wait!" he urged miserably. "You do not know what you say. You are speaking of the love between woman and an honorable man. I am not such a man. You know what I am—what I have been. What right have I to chain the love of such a heart as yours?"

She laid her white hand across his lips in pretty imperiousness.

"What is done is done!" she repeated.

"I have heard you say you are a criminal. I have seen you when I tried to force myself to believe you were in the actual commission of crime. But a woman has higher, more trustworthy guides than mere sight and hearing.

"Something in my heart tells me you are worthy of any woman's love, or her reverence, her esteem. It has told me so from the first. For a time I tried to silence it with the words of reason.

"But reason is such a poor, fallacious thing at best! Whatever circumstances may have led you to do or to be in the past, I *know* you are honorable—all that a man should long to be."

"If anything on earth could make me what you believe me to be, it is your divine faith," he faltered, his voice shaken and hoarse.

"And if in past years I had known you, I might now be more worthy of that faith. My road was through the dark. There seemed no light ahead. So I had not the courage, the manhood to struggle on until I should come out into the day.

"Instead, I chose to believe that, because I had been thrust into the darkness through no sin of my own I could never rise out of it. If I sinned less deeply than those whom fate made my companions, it was more through virtue of circumstance than by any merit of mine. Then, when the light at last appeared, it seemed too late to turn to its rays. It *is* too late."

"It is never too late," she insisted. "I do not know your past. I do not want to know it. It is enough for me that you have come to me out of the Darkness and that never again shall I let you sink back into it.

"How can *I*—a girl who has lived a sheltered, protected life—judge of the temptations that may have beset you? And, for the future—well, the future is *ours,* dear heart. Yours and mine, through all eternity."

Her arms stole about his neck and again their lips met. Then, as Lorimer raised his head he saw, outside the window behind her, a man's face pressed to the pane. He recognized the intruder as Clymer.

The latter beckoned him in dumb show. He evidently came with a summons from Beckwith and took this more or less tactful fashion of delivering it, sooner than to break in on the lover's privacy.

At sight of the man Alan Lorimer's golden dreams vanished, and the present, in all its repulsive reality, rushed back upon him.

He remembered the path of sacrifice he himself had elected to tread; and he felt that never again could that path cross Ruth Blundell's. Yet the blissful moment he had just known made him somehow infinitely stronger for the ordeal ahead of him.

"I must go, sweetheart," he muttered incoherently.

Not trusting himself to say more, he hastened from the room, leaving the puzzled, happy girl staring after him in bewilderment.

Clymer met him at the foot of the veranda steps.

"Chief wants to see you right away," he reported, "down at the carriage house. Hurry up!"

In silence they splashed through the rainy road, Alan steadfastly forbearing to look back toward the shaft of golden light from the south window that spread along the path.

At the door of the carriage house Beckwith met him. The room beyond seemed full of people, all clustering toward its farther end.

Beckwith laid a restraining hand on his arm as Lorimer would have entered.

"Wait an instant," he requested. "I must speak to you first."

Lorimer paused on the threshold.

"The bridge at the north end of the lake was swept away in the freshet an hour ago," said Beckwith. "Blundell and his chauffeur crashed into the fallen parapet that stretched across the road. They were going at top speed.

"The machine was smashed to atoms, Gavroche was killed outright, and Blundell was pinned under the débris. Clymer found the wreck on his way to the station to send those telegrams.

"Blundell was still alive, but Clymer, single-handed, could not extricate him. He returned at once and reported to me. I sent three of my men with a wagon to rescue Blundell and carry him home here. I sent another man for Dr. Colfax.

"I didn't tell you what was the matter; for I wished to wait until I saw how serious Blundell's injuries were, and how far his return would affect the plan you had formed for shielding his daughter. He has just been brought in. The doctor has not come yet. But"—he paused, then went on—"there will be no need for him."

"He is dead?" asked Alan in an awed whisper.

"He died as the wagon reached the lodge gates, Clymer tells me. Come in now, if you wish. He and Gavroche are both there"—pointing toward the farther end of the apartment.

"I had Justin brought down here before taking him to the house so that you might break the news to his daughter. Will you do it? It will come less as a shock from you."

In a daze, scarce understanding what was said, Alan assented.

"You can tell her," went on the detective, "that an accident occurred as her father was on the way to the train to keep a business appointment. She need never know the rest. It would blast her life.

"The case against Justin Blundell dies with him. So does your need for sacrificing yourself in his behalf. You are released from your parole. Begin life afresh with that gentle girl as your guide."

"By the grace of God," murmured Alan Lorimer reverently, bending his uncovered head, "*I will!*"

(The End.)

A CLOAK OF KINDNESS.

By Alice Garland Steele.

HOW the wrong man on the right wire did the correct thing at the proper moment.

DALTON, about to leave his office, heard the jangle of the telephone. He looked toward it impatiently, hurriedly locking away some securities in a private safe. All the clerks had gone, and the senior partner, leaving him quite alone; the typewriter, tipping her hat to a proper angle in the next room, leaned through the doorway.

"Shall I answer, Mr. Dalton?"

"Never mind," he said carelessly. "I'll attend to it, thank you. Good night."

"Good night," she nodded, and went out into the hall with a little swish of skirts; a moment later he heard the elevator descending.

The bell sounded again, and this time the call was more imperative. He went over hastily and took up the receiver.

"Hello! Who is it? Yes, this is George Dalton."

He waited, listening to the soft burr of the wire, trying to place the voice. It was the long distance, from Chicago, and the tones were indistinct. He caught a name, then it was repeated.

"Tell your uncle . . . Ruth has started . . . meet the Chicago Special . . . arrive to-night, 6:37."

"Look here," he called back. "Ruth? You're making a mistake. I'm George Dalton, but——"

"All right," called the voice faintly. "Old lady has grippe—take Ruth to Seventy-Ninth Street. . . . I've wired them . . . 6:37 . . . good-by!"

"But——" he cried blankly, and then he called desperately: "You have the wrong place! Hello, Central! Central! Connect me with——" But Central had shut him off.

He stood for a moment, staring helplessly at the ebony disk in his hand; then he grimly hung it up and drew a long breath. He was stupid, asinine—if those securities hadn't been in his head he would have seen at once that it was the wrong connection.

Suddenly a gleam of light came to him. He knew people in Chicago—the

Dents. They had five or six daughters, perhaps one was Ruth, perhaps—he broke off, wiping his forehead with a feeling of faintness—he had no *uncle!* This person at the other end of nowhere had called for an uncle of some sort!

He wavered in indecision, taking out his watch mechanically. It wanted a few minutes to six, and at 6:37—— His ideas, disjointed, perplexing, began to take shape.

Of course, this Ruth must be met—he couldn't let a girl arrive alone at that hour in a great, perhaps unknown, city! And if, after all, she happened to be a Miss Dent—to the hope his suggestion offered he clung desperately—of course she was—and he knew her father well, in a business way, and no doubt she would be very glad to know him.

Two things were clear—she was to go to Seventy-Ninth Street, and if he wanted to be in at train-time, he must start at once.

With feverish hurry he caught up his hat and gloves and took down his coat from the rack; a few minutes later he was in a crowded Broadway car, bound up-town.

Waiting for the overdue Special, his worry took a new form. How in the world was he to know Miss Ruth Dent from anybody else? As he heard the distant snort of an engine he paced up and down the platform, his lips dry. Slowly it rumbled in, and the exodus began—a kaleidoscope of figures, descending, shifting hither and thither, and then darting off in the same direction—toward the gates.

His usually fair face wore a grim shadow of something between remorse and anger; his eyes, wearied in their effort to find the expectant one, turned helplessly up and down in a vainly eager search. In desperation he approached a guard.

"Can you tell me," he stammered—"do you know if a young lady—I mean any kind of a lady—came alone on this train from Chicago?"

"Couldn't say," the man snapped. He was tired of answering imbecile questions.

Dalton feverishly pressed a bill into the unresisting fingers.

"I'm in a desperate strait," he began—"I'm to meet a lady I don't know, and who doesn't know me—and I thought if——"

The guard grinned sympathetically. "Best way is to wear a red flower in your button'ole—but I'll do my best, sir."

He walked off briskly to interview another guard, while Dalton, breathing vengeance on his own stupidity, waited.

And then, suddenly, among the sparse few who still lingered he caught sight of a girl—a very helpless-looking girl, in a gray traveling coat, gazing uncertainly into the gloom. Behind her a porter waited with a suit-case, shifting from one leg to the other.

"Put it down," Dalton heard her say. "Thank you. I may be some time yet; you can come back later."

The voice was weary, and she drew down her veil nervously and turned quickly the other way. With a flickering hope, Dalton strode forward.

"I beg your pardon," he began eagerly, "is this——" he stopped and bit his lip.

She turned at sound of his voice. "Oh!" she said. "Are you Mr. Dalton, Mr. George Dalton?"

He bowed gravely.

With a little hysterical laugh, she held out a gloved hand. "I'm so glad," she said. "Aunt Margaret was taken ill at the last moment, and I had to come on alone—and I've just—I was so afraid nobody had come—it was a terrible moment!"

"Quite terrible," agreed Dalton fervently. "But I must explain—I am afraid—that is, there is some mistake, I fear——"

The girl looked at him quickly, and the light fading from her face showed it tired, vaguely troubled, but altogether the sweetest face Dalton had ever seen.

"Aren't you——" she stammered. "But I thought you said—aren't you Mr. George Dalton?"

She was staring at him piteously, the fear of being alone again in her eyes.

Dalton met the need of the moment without regard for the future. "I certainly am," he said cheerfully. He fished in his breast-pocket for a card.

As she read it she drew a breath of relief. "Do you know," she said faintly,

" for one dreadful second I was afraid—I was afraid you were *not!*"

He murmured something to reassure her. He felt almost a criminal in keeping up the illusion! He would see her safe to Seventy-Ninth Street, and then—well, explain and apologize.

Meanwhile they had passed through the gates, followed by the porter, meekly carrying the suit-case. It gave Dalton a strange sense of pleasure to be protecting her. Once outside in the cheerful evening bustle of the city he grew strong.

He lifted her into a hansom and stood a moment; she had sunk back in utter weariness, but he felt her eyes on him as he looked away from her.

He gave the order in a low voice:

" Drive us to Seventy-Ninth Street."

The man obediently took up the reins. " Yes, sir. East or West, sir?"

There was a bare little pause, then the girl filled it in.

" It's 116 West, isn't it?" she half whispered. " You know I've never been there before——"

" One hundred and sixteen West," he echoed vaguely. " Of course," and he got in beside her.

" If Aunt Margaret had been with me," she said, " we shouldn't have troubled them—the Sevilles, I mean—being away in Europe—but the housekeeper is there, and Mrs. Seville's cousin. They were so nice about it. I didn't want to come—I mean——" She stopped, suddenly crimson.

" Have you dined?" he asked hurriedly to cover her confusion. At her faint negative he called to the man behind. " Drive first to the Manhattan."

They whirled about and pursued a backward course. " You must forgive me," he said. " I am acting the part of escort very carelessly."

As the cab drew up with a jerk he stepped out. " Afterward," he said smilingly, " we will go on to—the Sevilles!"

He was feeling quite at ease. He began to think this meeting with Miss Ruth Somebody or Other a very pleasant accident. That he had always thought himself a confirmed bachelor seemed to him just then surprising.

As they sat a few moments later in a sheltered corner of the dining-room he noticed how pretty she was—and how sad. She drooped in a way which suggested that this might not be entirely a pleasure trip.

As she drew off her gloves he was startled to see a solitaire gleaming on the third finger of her left hand; it gave him a distinct sense of shock; somehow he resented it—he could hardly have told why. At his quick glance the color rushed to his cheeks again, and he was surprised to see sudden tears in her eyes.

She smiled faintly. " Oh, I wear it yet," she said. " I shall until——" she broke off abruptly.

He was relieved that a waiter just then approached with their order. They ate silently, she in a half-hearted way that seemed to connect itself in his mind with her broken sentence. As she played with the salad she leaned suddenly over.

" Do you think," she said, " your uncle *will?*" In the question there was anxiety, almost alarm.

He felt his hand tremble as he put down his fork.

" I should think," he said slowly, " that my—uncle—would do anything for you!"

At the conscious lie his soul recoiled, yet he only saw the girl's face before him, pleading for an answer. She sighed, and then tried to cover it.

" Is he so very terrible?" she asked. " They say—Richard——" She spoke the name faintly and then went on in a firmer voice: " Dick says he is—that he is harsh and unjust, and yet I should think—if he is at all like you, he might be—kind about it all."

He took refuge in silence.

" Do you think," she said after a moment, " do you think he believes it—of Dick?"

He parried. " Of course," he said painfully, " one can never be sure of what another man thinks—but don't—don't tell me any more." He grew reckless. " I—it is better not—I have no right to listen—or know!"

She sat up a trifle stiffly. " I should not have mentioned it," she said, " only I knew how long you and Dick have known each other, and how good you have always been to him. It is right of you to shield him now, but—but I am very unhappy!"

She had turned her head away with a proud little gesture, but he still saw the traces of tears in her eyes. It began to be intolerable. He sat silent. His pulses were leaping in a sympathy he dared not express. He was glad that after a moment she rose.

"Let us go now," she breathed, "to the Sevilles'."

As he followed her out into the lighted corridor he was accusing himself cruelly. He felt desperate. To face that drive with her, to have to tell her at the end that he was a sham, an impostor, never to be able to see her again, never to know whether she was happy or sad! It was the strangest moment of his life!

As he got into the cab and took his place at her side he was glad of the darkness; he shrank back as far as possible, his eyes fixed moodily on the whirling lights outside. His silence seemed to distress her vaguely.

"I feel," she said timidly, "as if you were being sorry for me all the time. I can't bear that!"

"You are mistaken," he said gravely. "I am only sorry for myself."

Something in his voice thrilled her. He felt her eyes on his face, caught the sound of her quickened breathing. He cleared his throat.

"When a man has been a cad," he said hoarsely, "when a man has lied, has deceived a girl, and is afraid to show himself a liar for fear—for fear he will lose her—respect—wouldn't you call that man"—he spoke with infinite contempt—"a coward?"

She recoiled as from a blow. "Oh!" she said, "I knew it!"

Into the painful darkness crept a sharper edge; he was urging himself to go on, now, while he had entered the first wedge. Suddenly he heard her sobbing, and then, before he quite realized it she was speaking, telling him in broken utterance:

"I knew it. I have known it always, I think; but I could not believe it was true. And then, when they were all against him, and tried to make me cast him off, I felt it was the time to be true—to give him a chance to right himself! But what is so terrible about it is that I am living a lie—because I am pretending to them all that I—love him!"

"Pretending?" he asked breathlessly. "Pretending?" In his tone there was a savage note of joy; he had forgotten everything, except her nearness—her lovableness!

"Yes," she cried bravely, "pretending. You know it, Mr. Dalton, because I have been too cowardly to act it out with you. I have come here, on this journey, to plead with your uncle for Dick—that it was a mistake, that they lost the money some other way, and yet in my heart I know—it is true!" she ended miserably.

He could only stretch his hand out to her, unseen, in the darkness. "And if—if it *is* true?" he whispered.

"I shall be free," she murmured, "free—and glad of—my freedom! You are Dick's friend, and yet I dare to tell you that."

As the cab stopped he came harshly back to the present; he had been living in a dream, with her! His face was rather white as he assisted her up the steps of the dimly lighted house, but he sounded the bell, realizing that in a moment more she would be out of his life. As they stepped into the hall he kept his eyes away from her.

"Oh, yes," the maid said, "Miss Ruth is expected; Mrs. Mathews is waiting up-stairs to receive her."

She turned to him. "I won't thank you," she said, "for all you have done. I will only remember it." She was flushing in strange embarrassment.

He stood awkwardly; an overpowering reluctant to bid her good-by, to tell his deceit and close the episode, sent a trembling request to his lips:

"May I come," he said, "for just an hour—to-morrow afternoon?"

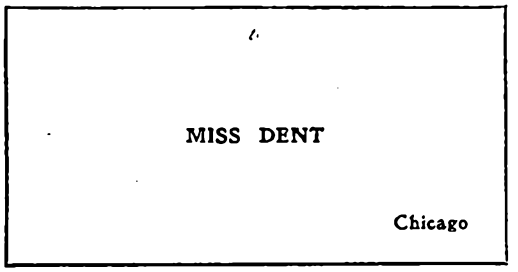
She avoided his eyes. "I see your uncle then. I want to know soon."

"But in the evening?" he hazarded. "There is something I must tell you—"

"I know," she said sadly; "about Dick. Yes, come then," and as he turned and left her he saw her still standing in the doorway, her eyes half filled with tears.

He stepped blindly out into the night. As he entered the cab again and gave his own address he saw something white at his feet. He leaned down, picking up a card. It was hers; it held the mystery

of her name! With nervous haste he struck a match, reading by its flickering light the small lines:



He sat back, holding it still in his hand, but into his troubled face there crept no smile!

In the morning, after a restless night, he went back to the office, leaving an order at a florist's on the way down-town; into the box of orchids he slipped his card and sent it to Miss Dent. He hardly knew why. She would despise him when she knew, and he would not, dared not, put off any further the telling.

The hours of the day seemed leaden; business jarred; the vapid chatter of the clerks; the monotonous record of the "ticker," the click of the typewriter in the next room—it wore his patience threadbare. Whenever he heard the ring of the telephone he fell into nervous dread. He hated himself for a liar and a coward.

And then somehow the day ended and he took his way up-town. As the maid answered his ring he took off his hat nervously and handed his card. "Miss Dent," he said faintly, and then at her questioning look: "The young lady who arrived last night. I believe I am expected."

He was in the strange, dimly lighted parlor, his eyes on a grinning Chinese mandarin in a cabinet opposite, when he heard her step on the stairs. She came in, holding out her hand gravely. Her face was pale, and the dark circles beneath her eyes gave them a softened brilliance.

He suffered her to motion him to a chair, and then he stared helplessly ahead of him, his voice powerless. Suddenly he turned his eyes to her hands as they lay in her lap. The ring was gone.

"Mr. Dalton," she said, "I saw your uncle this morning."

His face flushed painfully.

"He was very surprised. It seems you had not told him that I was coming."

"No," he said, "no, I didn't."

"Why, Mr. Dalton?"

Somehow he got to his feet, facing her. "Miss Dent, when I spoke last night of cowardice—of falsehood—I meant myself!"

She had risen, too; her hands, clasping and unclasping, were nervous interpreters of her thoughts.

"Miss Dent, my name is George Dalton; but nevertheless I met you as an entire and absolute stranger!

"It was a mistake," he went on forcedly, "just at first—a wrong connection on the telephone. I did not understand till it was shut off.

"There was nothing to do, it seemed, but meet you. I went as a gentleman, to do an insignificant but imperative service for a lady. I should have explained then."

She was not looking at him. "Why didn't you?" she asked.

"Because"—he vainly tried to put his reason into words—"because I thought at first you would be frightened. Afterward, I—I—the pleasure of being with you proved too great a temptation to my honor; and then—then when I found—when you unwittingly conveyed to me a hint of your unhappiness—and its cause, I was reckless enough, selfish enough, to wish to know the end—to desire to see you again—because, even in that time, I had grown to know—the truth!"

"The truth?" she asked faintly. "No, don't tell me—I should not ask!"

"You have every right," he said gently; "when a man meets a woman—the woman he could love—he is not long in ignorance. I was selfish, that is all."

There was silence; he was looking at her unflinchingly, his eyes ashamed, but truthful; her own, wandering in wavering circles, came back to him and then swept downward. "I have known it," she said, "all day."

He paled slightly.

"My name," she smiled faintly, "is not Miss Dent; it is Mannering."

"I found a card," he murmured. "I knew some Dents in Chicago. I believed, I hoped——"

"Janet Dent is my friend," she said quietly. "I dropped her card from my case last night. When your flowers came, and afterward, when I met Dick's friend at his uncle's office, I began to understand a part. You have told me the rest."

"It was wrong," he murmured, "it was cowardly—to act such a falsehood. I dare not ask you to forgive me!"

"Falsehood," she said in a low tone, "sometimes wears a cloak of kindness—but it is a falsehood just the same."

"I know," he said bitterly, "I know it. You do not need to tell me!"

"I was thinking," she said gently, "of myself when I said that, Mr. Dalton—your flowers were very—sweet!"

Her hands went out to him.

And then, of a sudden, he knew.

THE MAXWELL MYSTERY.

By Carolyn Wells.

The story of a score of clues and several vague rumors.

A NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE PARTY

"PETER KING—Peter King—Peter King!"

With a telegram on his tray, the bell-boy traversed the crowded hotel dining-room, chanting his monotonous refrain, until I managed to make him realize that I owned the above name, and persuaded him to hand over the message. It was short, and extremely characteristic of the sender.

House party. Take afternoon train Saturday. Stay Tuesday. I. G.
PHILIP MAXWELL.

I was more than willing to take the designated train, and looked forward with satisfaction to a few days of pleasure at Maxwell Hall. Philip had a decided genius for arranging parties of congenial people, and, moreover, the telegram assured me that at least one of my fellow guests would prove attractive. For the letters "I. G." meant nothing more nor less than that Irene Gardiner would be there. Though I had met this young woman only twice, she already exerted a fascination over me such as I had never before experienced. As I had hoped, she too, went down to Hamilton on the afternoon train, and the four hours' journey gave me an opportunity to cultivate her acquaintance more informally than at our previous meetings.

This pleased me, and yet when we were comfortably settled in our chairs, and rushing swiftly through the monotonous and uninteresting landscapes of central and southern New Jersey, I was conscious of a distinct feeling of disappointment regarding my fair companion. In the daylight, and on a railroad train, she lost the subtle charm which perhaps had been imparted by the glamour and artificial light of a ballroom; and she looked older and less ingenuous than I had thought her.

Still, she was undoubtedly a beautiful woman, and with a ready, graceful tact she adapted herself to all the exigencies of the situation.

Perhaps it would be more nearly true of Irene Gardiner to say that she adapted situations to herself. Without seeming to dictate, she anticipated my wishes, and made just such suggestions as I wished to carry out.

Within an hour of our leaving New York, I found myself enjoying a cigar in the smoker, and wondered how I had managed it.

When I realized that I had come there at her advice and even insistence, I gave her immediate credit for tactful cleverness—woman's most admirable trait.

After a time I began to feel a strong inclination to return to Miss Gardiner's society, and with a sudden intuition I felt sure that this was just the result she had intended to bring about, and that she had dismissed me in order that we might not both become bored by a long and uninterrupted tête-à-tête.

I returned to my chair in the parlor-car, and was greeted by a bright smile of welcome.

"I've been reading a detective story," she said, as she turned down a leaf and closed the paper-covered book she held. "I don't often affect that style of literature, but the train-boy seemed of the opinion that this book was the brightest gem of modern fiction, and that no self-respecting citizen could afford to let it go unread."

"Don't scorn detective fiction as a class," I begged. "It's one of my favorite lines of light reading. I have read that book, and though its literary style is open to criticism, it advances a strong and tenable theory of crime."

"I haven't finished the story," said Miss Gardiner, "but I suppose you mean the idea that innocence is only the absence of temptation."

"That is perhaps putting it a little too strongly, but I certainly think that often opportunity creates a sinner."

"It is not a new idea," said Miss Gardiner thoughtfully; "I believe Goethe said 'We are all capable of crime—even the best of us.' And while he would doubtless have admitted exceptions to his rule, he must have thought it applicable to the great majority."

"It's impossible to tell," I observed, "for though we often know when a man succumbs to temptation we cannot know how often he resists it."

"But we can know about ourselves," exclaimed Miss Gardiner with a sudden energy. "Honestly, now, if the motive were sufficient and a perfect opportunity presented itself unsought, could you imagine yourself committing a great crime?"

"Oh, I have a vivid imagination," I replied gaily, "and it isn't the least trouble to imagine myself cracking a safe or kidnaping a king. But when it came to the point, I doubt if I'd do it after all. I'd be afraid of the consequences."

"Now you're flippant. But I'm very much in earnest. I really believe if the motive were strong enough, I mean if it were one of the elemental motives, like love, jealousy, or revenge, I could kill a human being without hesitation. Of course it would be in a moment of frenzy, and I would doubtless regret it afterward, and even wonder at my own deed. But the point I'm trying to make is only that, in proportion to the passions of which we are capable we possess an equivalent capability of executing the natural consequences of those passions."

I looked at Miss Gardiner curiously. She certainly was in earnest, yet she gave me the impression of a theorist rather than one speaking from personal conviction.

"Let us leave ourselves out of the question," I said, "and merely admit that crimes have been committed by persons innocent up to the moment when strong temptation and opportunity were present at the same time."

"You will not be serious," she retorted, "so we'll drop the subject. And now, unless you make yourself very entertaining, I'll return to my story-book and leave you to your own devices."

"That would be a crime, and you would commit it because you see your opportunity," I replied, whereupon Miss Gardiner laughed gaily, and abandoned her discussion of serious theories.

I must have proved sufficiently entertaining, for she did not reopen her novel, and we chatted pleasantly during the rest of the journey.

Philip met me at the train with his automobile.

"I say, but you're late!" he shouted. "We've been waiting twenty minutes. He led the way to his big touring car, as shinily spick-and-span as a steam yacht, and bundled us into it. "You sit back, Peter," he directed, "with Mrs. Whiting and Miss Leslie, and I'll take Miss Gardiner with me. We'll run around the country a bit before we go home."

I hadn't seen Mildred Leslie for several years and I was all unprepared for the change which had transformed the shy schoolgirl into one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen.

She was of the apple-blossom type, and

her frivolous, dimpled face was adorably pink and white, with big pansy-blue eyes, and a saucy, curved mouth. A riotous fluff of golden hair escaped from her automobile-hood, and the first glance proved the girl to be a coquette to her finger-tips.

Her sister, Mrs. Whiting, was totally unlike her. She was a solid, sensible little woman whose sole occupation in life seemed to be a protracted, futile attempt to keep Mildred in order.

I took my seat between these two ladies, feeling that, for the next few days at least, my lines had fallen in pleasant places.

"I do love a house party at the Maxwells'," said Mildred, "because the party never stays in the house. There are so many lovely, outdoorsy things to do that if it weren't for meals we'd never see the inside of the beautiful old mansion."

"It is a beautiful house," said Mrs. Whiting. "I almost wish it would rain to-morrow so that we might stay in and enjoy it."

"Oh, Edith, not to-morrow!" cried Mildred; "we've too many things planned. Why, Mr. King, there's a different picnic arranged for every hour in the day, and you can pick out whichever ones you like best to go to."

"I've such faith in your taste," I replied, "that I'll just follow you, and go to the ones you attend."

"I'm going to send regrets to several of the picnics," announced Irene Gardiner, "and ramble around the house. I've never seen it, but I've often heard of its glories."

"We must stay indoors long enough to have some music," said Mrs. Whiting; "I want to hear Irene sing some of her old songs again."

"I cannot sing the old songs," Irene said amiably, "but I know a new coon song that's just great."

"I'll stay home from one picnic and hear that," announced Mildred promptly.

"We'll get the Davenports and Turners to come over," said Philip, "and bring their banjos and mandolins; and we'll have a musicale to beat the band."

"Oh, how stunning!" cried Irene Gardiner, for just then we whizzed up the driveway to the Maxwell house, and though perhaps not the word a purist would have chosen, "stunning" did seem to express the effect. The white pillars and porticoes of the old colonial mansion gleamed through the evergreen trees that dotted the broad lawn; the sunset in progress was of the spectacular variety, and a near-by lake reflected its gorgeous colorings.

As we neared the veranda, a cheery voice shouted "Hello," and Tom Whiting ran down the steps to meet us. The big, good-natured chap was a general favorite, and I cordially returned his hearty greeting. Then the wide front door swung open, and the old doorway made a fitting frame for the gentle lady of the house who stood within it.

Miss Miranda Maxwell was Philip's aunt and, incidentally, was his devoted slave.

She and her brother Dudley had lived in the old house for many years, beloved and respected by the townspeople of Hamilton, though deemed perhaps a shade too quiet and old-fogy for the rising generation.

But this was all changed when their nephew Philip came to live with them, and filled the house with young life and new interests. He had been there about three years now, and though the village gossips had concluded that he would never make the gentleman of the old school that his Uncle Dudley was, yet he had won his own place in their regard, and his gay, sunny nature had gained many friends for him.

Phil was a good-looking chap of twenty-four, and had been an orphan since childhood.

After his school and college days, he had drifted around the world rather aimlessly, until, on his coming of age, his Uncle Dudley had invited him to make his permanent home at Maxwell Hall, and Philip had accepted the invitation.

It was generally understood that he would eventually inherit the place, together with Dudley Maxwell's large fortune, and though not avaricious, Philip looked forward complacently to a life of ease and luxury.

So far as social life went, he was practically master of Maxwell Hall; he invited guests whenever he chose, and entertained them elaborately.

Though Mr. Maxwell joined but seldom in the young people's festivities, he paid the bills without a murmur, and smiled indulgently at his merry-hearted nephew.

I had known Philip all through our college days, and I had made long and frequent visits at Maxwell Hall, where the hours of quiet enjoyment were varied by delightful impromptu entertainments, the product of Philip's ingenuity.

I was a favorite with both the old people, and I fully returned their regard.

Mr. Maxwell was a collector in a modest way, and I was always gratified when I could assist him in his quest or researches.

Miss Maxwell had such a kind, motherly heart that I think she was a friend to everybody, but she, too, seemed specially to like me, and so my visits to Hamilton were always pleasant occasions.

CHAPTER II.

DEATH DANCES TO MUSIC.

As Mildred had foretold, there were many planned-for pleasures to be crowded into the next two days, and it was Monday evening before time could be found for the proposed musicale.

"Now," said Philip, as after a late dinner a few of us strolled into the music-room. "Now I'll show you how to produce an instantaneous concert."

In less than half an hour Philip had issued orders, by telephone, to several musical neighbors to report at once for duty; had arranged chairs and music-stands; and was rapidly selecting piece after piece of music from a cabinet when the guests arrived. They were soon made acquainted with the young people staying at Maxwell Hall, and a merry musical evening was the immediate result.

Not a formal concert, but desultory snatches of song, violin obligatos or improvisations, and now and then a rousing chorus or banjo quartet.

The guests from the village were all well known to me, and one of them, Dr. Sheldon, was a good friend of mine. He was a young man, but one who had made his mark.

Indeed, he had often discussed with me his cherished project of going to New York and becoming a specialist in certain branches of surgery.

For some unaccountable reason people always confided in me. Philip said it was because of the ridiculous habit I had of pretending to be interested in their foolish troubles or plans.

On this particular evening I was destined to receive two confidences from separate sources, but about the same person, which caused me no little surprise and anxiety.

Miss Maxwell was the first one to unburden her mind to me.

Before the guests arrived I chanced to see her sitting alone in the drawing-room and I went and sat by her for a few moments' chat.

She seemed preoccupied, and after some perfunctory answers to my trivial remarks, she said:

"Peter"—she always called me by my first name, and somehow her soft, sweet voice gave the ugly word a pleasant sound—"there is something wrong with Philip. I can't imagine what it is, but for a week or more he has been so different. It began all at once.

"One day last week he came to luncheon looking so harassed and worried that my heart ached for him. I said nothing about it—we are not confidential as a family, you know—I only tried to be especially gentle and tender toward him. But he didn't get over it. He spoke sharply to his uncle, he failed to show his usual deferential courtesy to me, and he behaved altogether like a man stunned and bewildered by some sudden misfortune.

"I talked to his uncle about it when we were alone, and he, too, had noticed it, but could not account for it in any way. He thought perhaps it might be money difficulties of some sort, and he offered to increase Philip's allowance. But Philip refused to accept an increase, and said he had no debts and plenty of spending money. So we are at our wits' end to understand it."

"Could it have anything to do with Miss Leslie?" I asked.

"I think so," replied Miss Miranda, looking about to make sure we were not overheard. "He is very much in love with her, and I think she cares for him, but she is such a coquettish little rogue,

that one cannot be sure of her. Besides, this trouble of Philip's began before he planned this house party, and before he thought of inviting Miss Leslie and her sister down here."

"Does he talk frankly to you about Mildred?"

"Oh, yes, he hopes to win her—indeed, he says he feels confident of succeeding. But I think he tries to persuade himself that he will succeed, while really she is breaking his heart over her flirtation with Gilbert Crane."

"Gilbert Crane!" I exclaimed, greatly surprised.

"Yes, our fellow townsman, and one of Philip's best friends."

"But he can't hold a candle to Philip."

"I know it. Philip is rich, or will be, and Philip is handsome and talented, while Gilbert is none of these. But somehow he has a queer sort of fascination over Mildred, and she is certainly very gracious to him."

"Philip and Gilbert are as good friends as ever, aren't they?"

"Yes, I think so. At least they were until yesterday. But Mildred's evident preference for Gilbert's society has wounded Philip, and though he treats Gilbert as kindly as ever, I've seen him look at him as if he wondered how he could play such an unfriendly part."

"You think, then, to put it plainly, that Gilbert is trying to win Mildred away from Philip."

"I do, and I think Philip is as much hurt by Gilbert's treachery as by Mildred's fickleness. But I cannot think that it is this affair that worried Philip so last week. For then, Mildred hadn't come, and Gilbert was right here all the time, and he and Philip were inseparable. No, it's something else, and I can't imagine what."

"Phil seems about as usual to me," I said.

"Yes, he is much brighter since you young people came. More like his old self. But when he's alone, even now, he drops into an attitude of absolute despair. I've seen him, and it is something very dreadful that has come to my boy. Oh, Peter, can't you find out what it is, and then I'm sure we can help him."

I assured the dear old lady that I would try in every possible way to do what she wished, and then the violins began to tune and we went across the hall to the music-room.

Mr. Maxwell came in to listen to the impromptu concert.

Though slightly deaf, he had a fine ear for music, and greatly enjoyed a good performance. I saw him glance at Philip several times, and, if the boy were smiling, the old gentleman's anxiety seemed relieved, but if Phil were over-quiet or sober-looking, Mr. Maxwell sighed and glanced away again.

The music-room was the front room on the right as one entered the great hall that ran through the center of the house. Back of it was the dining-room, and back of that, a cross-hall, a butler's pantry and, in an ell, the kitchens and servants' sitting-room.

On the left of the wide hall, the front room was the drawing-room. Then the billiard-room; back of that Mr. Maxwell's study, and back of that the conservatory.

The large library was on the second floor, and was in many ways the most attractive room in the house. There were bedrooms on both the second and third floors, so that Maxwell Hall was well adapted for generous hospitality.

A broad veranda ran all around three sides of the house both on the ground floor and second story, and on it, from most of the rooms, opened long French windows.

Later in the evening, I walked with Irene Gardiner on the upper balcony, and we reveled in the beauty of the scene spread out before us.

Irene Gardiner puzzled while she attracted me. I never could feel quite sure whether she was as frank as she seemed, or not.

Perhaps it was only the natural effect of her dark, almost Oriental beauty, but she somehow seemed capable of diplomacy or intrigue.

To-night, however, she was simply charming, and whether assumed or not, her attitude was sincere and confidential.

We traversed the three long sides of the house on the upper balcony and then, turning, retraced our steps. Frequently we met or passed other couples or groups of young people, and exchanged merry, bantering words.

At last Irene paused at the southeast end of the balcony, and we sat down on a wicker settee.

"Mr. King," she said, almost abruptly, "don't you think it's a shame, the way Mildred treats Mr. Maxwell?"

I was surprised at the question, but had no intention of committing myself to this mystifying young woman.

"Who can criticize the ways of such an enchanting fairy as Miss Leslie?" I replied lightly.

"Do you think her so fascinating?"

The question was wistful and very earnestly asked.

"She is both beautiful and charming, and she has completely bewitched Philip," I said.

"Yet she does not really care for him," cried Irene, passionately. "She adores Gilbert Crane, but she leads Philip on, and is breaking his noble, splendid heart, merely for her own amusement."

My eyes were opened.

"Oho, my lady," I thought to myself. "So you are in love with the handsome Philip. Sits the wind in that quarter?" But I only said, "I think she cares for Phil. Who could help preferring that splendid fellow to young Crane?"

"I know it seems so," went on Irene, "but she does like Mr. Crane better. She told me so herself, only to-day. She said Philip is egotistical and purse-proud, and that Mr. Crane has a true poet-soul."

"Perhaps she didn't mean her confidences for me, Miss Gardiner," I said a little stiffly, for I was of no mind to discuss these things with her.

"I don't care," cried Irene, her eyes blazing, "I'm telling you because I want you to know how matters really stand, and then I want you to warn Mr. Maxwell against such a fickle, shallow little thing as Mildred is."

"I can't consent to do that," I answered. "Philip is old enough to know what he is about. If Miss Leslie prefers Gilbert Crane, Phil will certainly find it out for himself, and soon. But I think he will convince her that she has only a passing fancy for Crane, and that he himself is really her destined fate."

I tried to speak gaily, for I did not wish to take the subject seriously. But in a low, tense voice Irene exclaimed:

"It shall never be! Philip Maxwell shall not throw himself away on a heartless little coquette who doesn't know how to value him! Since you refuse to help me, I will take matters into my own hands!"

I was amazed at her intensity of speech, but still trying to treat it all lightly, I said:

"That is your privilege, fair lady. Come, let us return to the music-room. I want to hear you sing again."

"You go down, please, Mr. King," she said, and her voice was quieter. "Leave me here for a little, and I will rejoin you soon." As she seemed to be very much in earnest, I did her bidding, and sauntering around, I entered the house by the long French window into the front hall. As I passed through the hall, I met Miss Miranda just going to her own room.

"Leaving us?" I inquired, smiling at her.

"Yes," she said. "I am very weary to-night, and I have excused myself. Mrs. Whiting will look after you young folks, and I am sure she will ably represent me."

She looked not only tired, but worried, and I felt sure Miss Leslie's behavior was grieving her dear old heart.

"Good night, then," I said gently, "and I trust you will rise to-morrow morning refreshed and happy."

"I hope so," she said. "Good night, Peter."

As I turned to go down-stairs, I heard voices in the library, which I realized were those of Philip and Miss Leslie. With no intention of eavesdropping, I couldn't help hearing him say:

"Don't trifle with me to-night, Mildred; I am desperate." The tone more than the words, struck a chill to my heart, and I hastened down-stairs lest I should hear more of a conversation not meant for me.

A crowd of people were in the music-room, but somehow I didn't feel like joining them, and I wandered back through the long hall, and looked in at the open door of Mr. Maxwell's study.

This attractively furnished room could have been called a "den" by a younger man, but my host was conservative in his language, and adhered to old-fashioned customs.

I well knew it was his habit to devote

an hour or two after dinner to his evening paper, which, naturally, never reached Maxwell Hall until late.

The household always refrained from intrusion on him at this time, and so, when I saw him intently studying the market reports, I turned away. But he had seen me, and laying down his paper, he said cordially:

"Come in, my boy, come in and smoke a pipe with me, if you are tired of your young and somewhat noisy contemporaries."

"No," said I, going into the room, "not now, Mr. Maxwell. You finish your paper, and later, I'll drop in for a smoke. I'd very much like to have a talk with you."

"About Philip?" he asked, looking at me with a concerned air.

"Yes," I said, "but don't be apprehensive. Indeed, I think we may have cause to congratulate the boy before the evening is over. He and Miss Leslie are even now in the library, and I hope that they will arrive at a happy understanding."

"Good, Mr. King, good," said the old man in his kindly, pleasant way. "Let us hope for the best, and I trust it will all come out right."

I went on through the study, and, lifting the portière, passed into the billiard-room.

Here I found Gilbert Crane, alone, and sitting with his face buried in his hands in an attitude of deepest dejection.

I suddenly realized that, as I was obliged to speak to Mr. Maxwell in a loud, clear voice, on account of his deafness, Mr. Crane must necessarily have heard what I said. He looked up as I entered, and his face showed bitter despair.

He said nothing, however, and as I had nothing in particular to say to him, I went on to the music-room.

The singers were now in full voice and I joined in the chorus. We drifted into rag-time music, and what with the various stringed instruments, and the hilarious young voices, I fear we waxed almost boisterous.

Suddenly Gilbert Crane appeared in the doorway. His face was white with terror and wild with fright, and he cried:

"Dr. Sheldon, Philip and Mildred have shot each other! Come up to the library. Quick!"

CHAPTER III.

A LIFE IN THE BALANCE.

ALTHOUGH Dr. Sheldon was quick in his response to Gilbert Crane's summons, I was quicker, and, dashing up-stairs, I reached the library door first. For I must admit, that beneath the horror and shock of the fearful thing that had occurred, I felt the promptings of the detective instinct, and I eagerly looked around to grasp the true facts of the case.

Of course Gilbert's statement that they had shot each other was manifestly improbable, and was doubtless the irresponsible speech of frenzy.

My first glance at the tragedy showed me Philip stretched on the floor, apparently dead, and Mildred fallen in a heap, a few feet away.

I did not touch them, but I saw she had a pistol grasped in her right hand.

In a moment Dr. Sheldon and several others came hastening in. I had expected to see the whole crowd, but, as I learned afterward, one of the men with rare good judgment and presence of mind, had insisted on most of the guests remaining down-stairs until more particulars of the accident were learned.

Dr. Sheldon gave a quick look at Philip, flung open his clothing, placed his hand on his heart, and after a moment, said gently:

"He is dead."

Then he turned to Mildred, and stooping, took her unconscious form in his arms.

"She is not," he said eagerly. "Telephone for my assistant, Dr. Burton, to come at once and bring my instruments. I think we can yet save her life. Tell him to fly. Tell him what has happened, but don't delay him."

Dr. Sheldon, who was acting as rapidly as he talked, took the weapon from Mildred's hand and laid it on the table.

"Let no one touch that," he ordered, "and let no one touch Philip Maxwell's body. Send for the coroner at once.

"Mr. Crane, will you keep guard in this room? And, Mr. King, will you dis-

miss the guests, and inform Mr. Maxwell and his sister what has happened? Mr. and Mrs. Whiting will assist me with Miss Leslie."

Tom Whiting and the doctor bore Mildred to her room, and I, not at all liking the part assigned to me, went toward Miss Maxwell's door. But I suddenly thought of Irene Gardiner, and resolved to tell her first, thinking she could break the news to the dear old lady with a better grace than I could.

I stepped out on the front balcony, wondering if I would find her around the corner where I had left her, but to my surprise she was seated near the front window, and was weeping violently.

"Irene," I said, as I touched her shoulder, "Miss Gardiner, do you know what has happened?"

"What?" she said, still shaking with convulsive sobs.

I told her, and her piercing shriek brought Miss Maxwell to her door.

"What is it?" she cried, as she flung open the door. "What is the matter?"

Suddenly Miss Gardiner grew calm, and with a return of her own tactful manner, she took the old lady in her arms, and told her the sad news.

Miss Maxwell's face turned white with grief and shock; she tottered, but she did not faint. Then her loyal heart prompted her to cry out:

"My brother! Does he know? Has he been told?"

"No," I said, "but I will tell him."

"Do," she said, "you know and love him." Then, supported by Irene, she returned to her room.

I hurried down-stairs, and found Mr. Maxwell still alone and undisturbed in his study. It was the hardest task I had ever had to do in my life.

The old man laid down his paper, stretched his arms, and said:

"Well, have you come for our smoke?"

"No, Mr. Maxwell," I said, "I am the bearer of sad news. Philip has been hurt."

"Eh?" he said, not quite hearing my words.

"Philip has been hurt," I repeated, "shot."

"Shot!" and the old man's face grew ashy pale, as he leaned back in his chair.

I had heard hints of heart disease, and I was thoroughly frightened. But just then Dr. Burton came in, and I begged him to take a look at Mr. Maxwell, even before he went up-stairs to Mildred Leslie.

Dr. Burton gave the old gentleman a stimulant of some sort, and I resumed my awful errand.

He was very quiet, seemingly stunned by the news, and after a few moments, his sister came into the room. I believe I never was so glad to see any one in my life, and feeling now that they were better alone, I left them.

I went next to the music-room, where Tom Whiting was dismissing the guests who, less than a half-hour before, had been so hilarious.

Tom Whiting was a splendid fellow, and his cool head and capable management proved to be just what was needed for the sorry situation.

Except those of us who were staying at the house, the doctors, and Gilbert Crane, all the guests went away, and immediately afterward the coroner and his men arrived.

A trained nurse also came, who had been sent for by Dr. Sheldon, and she was taken at once to Mildred's apartment.

"Mysterious case," said the coroner, after a long look at the room and its contents. "Might be an attempt at double suicide, or suicide and murder."

"Or double murder," said I.

The coroner gave me a quick glance.

"We must work on evidence," he said, "not imagination."

"What evidences do you see?" asked Gilbert Crane.

"Very little, I confess," replied the coroner, who was a frank, straightforward sort of a man, and whose name, as I afterward learned, was Billings.

"But," he went on, "when a gentleman is found dead, and a wounded lady near-by, with a pistol in her hand, it doesn't require an unusual intellect to deduce that she probably shot him. Unless, as I said, it is a double suicide, and he shot himself first, and then she shot herself."

"Is Philip's wound one that could have been self-inflicted?" I asked.

"Without a doubt," replied Mr. Bil-

lings. "He is shot directly through the heart, and that could have been done by himself or another.

"But of course we shall have medical evidence as to that."

"How about the powder marks?" asked a quiet voice.

It came from Mr. Hunt, the detective, who had come in with the coroner, and had since been examining the room and taking notes.

"It is difficult to judge," answered Mr. Billings. "The shot went through both coat and waistcoat, and while the powder marks would seem to prove that the shot was fired from a distance of three or four feet, yet I cannot say so positively."

I felt a certain relief at this, for while it was bad enough to think of poor Philip shooting himself, somehow it was worse to imagine Mildred shooting him.

Soon Dr. Burton came into the library. He talked with Mr. Hunt and Mr. Billings, and then said:

"As soon as you have completed all necessary investigations, Dr. Sheldon requests that the body shall be removed to Mr. Philip Maxwell's room and laid upon the bed, in order that it may seem less shocking to his aunt and uncle."

I liked this young doctor. He had Dr. Sheldon's clean-cut, assured ways, but he spoke and moved with rather more grace and gentleness.

The coroner agreed to his suggestions, and later, I saw Mr. Maxwell and Miss Miranda go together to the room where lay all that was mortal of their beloved nephew.

As I look back upon that night now, it seems to me like a horrible dream—so many people coming and going, the servants beside themselves with grief and fright, and the dreadful facts themselves so mysterious and so difficult to realize.

It seemed impossible that Philip could be dead—merry, light-hearted Phil, who, except for the last week or so, had always been so gay and joyous.

And Mildred Leslie's life hung in the balance.

Dr. Burton's news of her had been this: she had been shot in the right shoulder, and the wound was dangerous but not necessarily fatal.

Partially paralyzed by the shot, or perhaps only fainting from fright, she had fallen to the floor, and struck her temple as she fell, presumably against the corner of the table near which she stood.

It was this blow which had made her unconscious, and which had left its mark in a huge, swollen discoloration on her fair brow.

She had as yet uttered no word, for she had been placed as soon as possible under the influence of ether, while the doctors probed for the bullet.

It had been successfully extracted, and was now in Dr. Sheldon's possession.

Dr. Burton thought that Miss Leslie would soon regain consciousness, but deemed it exceedingly unwise to question her, or excite her in any way for some time to come. Indeed, he said he was sure Dr. Sheldon would allow no one to see her for several days except the nurse, and possibly her sister.

At last Mr. Maxwell and Miss Miranda were persuaded to retire, and the rest of us were advised to do so.

But Gilbert Crane announced his intention of staying at the house all night. He said some one should be in general charge, and as Philip's best friend he considered he had the right to assume such a position. He established himself in Mr. Maxwell's study, and told the servants and the doctors to call on him in any emergency.

Seeing that Mr. Hunt sat down there too, with the evident intention of discussing the affair, I delayed my retiring and joined them.

Soon Mrs. Whiting and Irene came in, and we went over and over the mysterious details.

"What were Mr. Philip Maxwell's sentiments toward Miss Leslie?" inquired the detective.

No one seemed inclined to reply, and as I thought it my duty to shed all the light possible on the case, I said:

"I have good reason to believe that, at or about the time of his death, Mr. Maxwell was asking Miss Leslie to marry him."

"Did she favor his suit?" pursued Mr. Hunt.

"No," broke in Irene, "she did not. She told me so only this morning."

"But that would be no reason for her

shooting him and then shooting herself," wailed Edith Whiting. "Oh, I am sure Mildred never did it. Or, at least, not intentionally.

"I've reasoned it all out, and I think he must have been showing her his pistol, or explaining it to her, and it went off accidentally, and then, in her grief and fright, she turned the weapon on herself."

"Was it Philip's pistol?" asked Irene.

"Yes," said the detective, "that is, it had P. M. engraved on the handle."

"Oh, it was Phil's pistol," said Gilbert Crane. "I know it well. And he always keeps it in the top drawer of that big table-desk they were standing by."

"How do you know they were standing by it?" spoke up the detective sharply.

"Because," said Gilbert quietly, "there were no chairs near the desk. They both fell near the desk. Philip could not have walked a step after that shot through his heart, and Mildred must have been standing near the desk to fall and hit her head on it. Am I clear?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Hunt.

"Mildred never shot Philip intentionally," reiterated Mrs. Whiting. "She is a rattle-pated girl—a coquette, I admit—and she was not in love with Philip Maxwell; but truly she was no more capable of a murderous thought or instinct than I am. You know that, don't you, Irene?"

Irene Gardiner gave me one quick glance, and like a flash I remembered our conversation in the train about opportunity creating a criminal.

Could it be that pretty Mildred, holding a pistol in her hand, and alone with an unwelcome suitor could—no, I could no more believe it than Edith, and I flashed a look of amazed disapproval at Irene. But she was already speaking.

"I'm sure Mildred didn't shoot Philip at all, Edith," she said. "I think he shot himself and she tried to wrest the pistol from him, and in doing so wounded herself."

This explanation struck us all as so plausible that we gladly accepted it—all of us except Gilbert Crane—and wondered we hadn't thought of it before.

Gilbert said slowly:

"There could have been no struggle after that shot entered Philip's heart. If he shot himself, and Miss Leslie then took the pistol from him, it was after he had ceased to breathe."

"Was death, then, absolutely instantaneous?" I asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Hunt, "both doctors are sure of that."

Just here Tom Whiting came downstairs and joined us in the study. His face wore a peculiar expression. One of awe and perplexity, yet tinged with a certain relief.

"I think you ought to know," he said, "that Mildred is coming out of the ether's influence, and has spoken several times, but only to repeat the same thing over and over. She continually cries:

"'He shot me. Oh, to think he should shoot me!' I tell you this in justice to my wife's sister."

"I knew Mildred didn't do it!" cried Edith, almost fainting in her husband's arms. "I don't care how black the evidence looked against her, I knew she never did it."

CHAPTER IV.

WHO FIRED THE SHOTS?

THE next morning it was a sad party that gathered around the Maxwell breakfast table.

The news of Mildred was not encouraging.

Dr. Sheldon greatly feared brain fever, and kept the girl under the influence of narcotics. He said she had uttered no words, save to repeat, "Oh, to think that he should shoot me!" in pathetic, despairing tones.

We endeavored to keep away from the subject of the tragedy as much as possible during breakfast, and tried to talk of cheerful, or pleasant things, but it was difficult.

Mr. Maxwell said almost nothing. The poor old man was crushed, and unless some one spoke directly to him, he paid little heed to anything that was said.

Miss Miranda, on the other hand, tried to forget herself and her troubles in caring for her guests. It was pathetic to see her efforts to be cheerful and unselfish, and she seemed to me like a lovely saint ministering to unworthy mortals.

After we had finished breakfast Mr. Hunt came. This seemed to arouse Mr. Maxwell's indignation.

"It is no case for a detective," he said, with a severity of manner I had never noticed in him before. "If, as Miss Leslie asserts, my poor boy shot her, that is all that is necessary for us to know about the affair. As to motive, my nephew has been seriously troubled of late, and doubtless his worry so disturbed his mind that he was irresponsible for his act. At any rate, I choose to consider him so."

Mr. Hunt bowed and departed. I accompanied him to the gate.

"That is a possibility," I said, "though it's a new theory to me. But Philip was very much upset, indeed, deeply troubled for some unknown cause; and I, for one, do not think that cause was connected with Miss Leslie."

"Then why did he shoot her?" demanded Hunt.

"He didn't, intentionally. But if his mind was unbalanced, who can hold him responsible for his deed?"

"That's true," said Hunt. "Well, I suppose it will be all cleared up at the inquest."

"The inquest," I cried. "Must there be one?"

"Of course. But since the perpetrator of this murder is not alive, it will doubtless be a mere matter of form."

"Where will it be held?"

"Right here in the house, probably. To-day or to-morrow, I should think; as the funeral will be on Thursday, and they can't bury him without a permit."

I shuddered at the dreadfulness of it all. Hitherto I had thought an ordinary death and burial sad enough, but how much worse with these attendant circumstances.

"Queer, nobody heard the shots," went on Mr. Hunt.

"Did nobody hear them?" I exclaimed. "I hadn't thought of that at all.

"Why, I thought you showed some signs of 'detective fever,'" said he glancing at me a bit quizzically.

"I do take a great interest in detective work," I replied, "but I feel like Mr. Maxwell in this case. I see no occasion to detect anything beyond what we already know. It seems mysterious, I admit, but we know that one or both of the two victims did the shooting, and truly, to me, it doesn't much matter which."

"It does to me," said Gilbert Crane, who had joined us as we stood by the gate, and had heard my last remark.

"Well," said Mr. Hunt, with what seemed to me like a brutal cheerfulness, "if Miss Leslie gets well, we'll know all about it; and if she doesn't, we'll never know any more than we do now."

"If she fired either ball, she did it accidentally," declared Crane.

"Didn't you hear the shots either?" asked Mr. Hunt, turning on him suddenly.

"No," said Gilbert, "and I can't find any one who did hear them."

"But you were first on the scene?"

"Yes, so far as I know."

"How did you happen to go up to the library just then?"

"I didn't start for the library," said Gilbert slowly. "I was feeling pretty blue and forlorn, and the gay music jarred on me, so I thought I'd go home. I went up-stairs for my banjo, which I had left on the upper front balcony earlier in the evening.

"As I reached the top of the stairs, I couldn't help looking toward the library, and as I heard no sounds, though I had been told Philip and Mildred were in there, I glanced in, I suppose from sheer curiosity."

"Who told you they were in there?"

"I did," said I, "or rather, I told Mr. Maxwell, in Mr. Crane's hearing. I saw them there when I went down-stairs. That was, I should think, about half an hour before Mr. Crane gave the alarm."

"Can either of you fix the time of these occurrences," said Mr. Hunt. He was very polite, even deferential in his manner, and I saw no harm in accommodating him.

"I can tell you only this," I said. "After I passed the library, where I both heard and saw Philip and Miss Leslie, I went on down-stairs and looked into Mr. Maxwell's study.

"He asked me to sit down. I did not do so; but after a word or two, I went on through to the billiard-room. I

looked at the clock in the study as I passed, and it was exactly ten. I can't say, though, at just what time the general alarm was given; I should think less than a half hour later."

"I can tell you," said Gilbert. "When I concluded to go home, I looked between the portières into Mr. Maxwell's study, and it was twenty minutes past ten. Mr. Maxwell was nodding over his paper; he is a little deaf, so he probably didn't hear me.

"At any rate, he didn't look up. Then I went immediately up-stairs, and it could not have been more than two minutes before I called Dr. Sheldon."

"All this is of interest, and I thank you," said Detective Hunt. "Though, as you say, since there is no criminal to discover, there is small use of collecting evidence."

"Queer chap, isn't he?" I said to Gilbert, as the detective went away.

"Yes, but I think he's clever."

"I don't; if there were any occasion for detective work on this case, I believe I could give him cards and spades, and then beat him at his own game."

"Perhaps you could," said Gilbert, but he spoke without interest. There was plenty for all to do that day. I had expected to return to New York, but both Mr. Maxwell and Miss Miranda begged me to stay with them till after the funeral. As there was no reason for my immediate presence in the city, I was glad to be of service to my good friends.

I assisted Mr. Maxwell to write letters to the various relatives, and together we looked over poor Philip's effects.

The boy had no business papers to speak of, for he had no money except what was given him by his uncle, and apparently he kept no account of its expenditures.

"I paid all his bills," said Mr. Maxwell, in explanation of this, "and kept the receipts. I allowed Philip such ready cash as he wanted, and, I may say, I never stinted him. Whatever his recent trouble may have been, it could not have arisen from lack of funds."

"Unless he had been speculating privately," I suggested.

"I can't think so," replied his uncle. "Philip wasn't that sort, and, too, had that been the case, we would surely find papers of some sort to show it."

This was true enough, and as Philip's papers consisted entirely of such documents as scented notes addressed in feminine hands, letters from college chums, circulars of outing goods and cigars, and old dance-orders, I agreed that there was no indication of financial trouble.

Later in the morning, I went for a stroll with Irene Gardiner. The girl looked so pale and wan, that I hoped a brisk walk would do her good.

"Do you believe in the 'accidental' theory?" she asked, as soon as we were started.

"No," I replied. "Philip was too well used to fire-arms to shoot anybody accidentally, or allow any one to shoot him. But I now fully believe in Mr. Maxwell's theory that the boy's brain was temporarily affected, and that he shot himself in a moment of insanity."

"But if he shot himself first, how did he then shoot Mildred?"

"I've puzzled over that, I confess, and I think he shot her first—as I said—not being responsible for his actions. And then, overcome by grief at what he had done, he killed himself in his sudden despair."

"Yes," said Irene, "I suppose that must have been the way of it. But, granting all that, I don't see how Mildred came to have the pistol in her hand."

"Nor I. It is almost mysterious. Let us hope that Mildred will soon recover, and then we will know all."

"Mr. King, I suppose you will think very hardly of me, but I have looked at this matter in all lights, and I want to ask you if this isn't a possible case. Mightn't Philip have shot Mildred, and, since she is not very severely wounded, might she not have then snatched the pistol from him and shot at him in return."

I looked at Miss Gardiner in amazement. I felt horrified that she should imagine this, and yet there was a shadow of plausibility in it.

"It seems almost impossible," I said slowly, "that a wounded girl could have energy enough to secure a pistol and shoot her assailant. And yet, I admit, I can think of no other way to explain Miss Leslie's repeated expressions of

grieved amazement that Philip should have shot her."

"You don't think it possible, then, that Mildred may not be as unconscious as she seems, and that she is making this repeated statement for reasons of her own."

"Miss Gardiner!" I exclaimed, now thoroughly aroused, "I am surprised at you. Even if you suspect Miss Leslie of absolute crime, pray give the poor girl the benefit of the doubt until she can defend herself, or—is beyond all need of defense."

"You do me injustice," said Irene, raising her head haughtily. "My logical mind necessitates the consideration of every possible solution of this puzzle. I look upon Mildred impersonally, merely as one of the actors in a tragic drama."

"You have indeed a logical mind," I said coldly, "if you can entirely eliminate the personal element from your estimate of Miss Leslie."

"I see no reason why I should not. I judge her fairly, and without prejudice. But I fail to see why the ravings of a mind affected by the consequences of an anesthetic should be accepted as unquestioned truth."

"On the contrary, the revelations made by a brain just reviving from the unconsciousness produced by ether, are conceded by all medical authorities invariably to be true statements. Many secrets have been revealed in this way."

"That fact is new to me," said Irene thoughtfully, "and it is very interesting. I am always willing to accept authoritative facts, but I decline to accept unproved theories."

"At any rate," I ventured, "you have no word of blame for Philip." She turned flashing eyes toward me, and in a moment I realized the situation. She was in the grip of two strong emotions. Grief for the man she had loved, and jealousy of her rival.

"Never speak of him to me!" she exclaimed. "I claim that much consideration from you."

"And you shall certainly receive it," I said gently. "But, on the other hand, let me beg of you not to do an innocent girl an injustice, which your better nature will surely regret later."

Irene looked at me. She had never seemed more beautiful, and her wonderful eyes expressed contrition, gratitude, and a deep and hopeless sadness.

She held out her hand.

"I thank you," she said, "you have save me from a grave mistake."

Still I didn't understand her, but I realized she was beginning to fascinate me in her mysterious way, and I abruptly turned our steps toward home.

When we reached Maxwell Hall, we found Dr. Sheldon, and the Whitings, with Mr. Maxwell and Miss Miranda in the study. Evidently something had happened.

Each one looked excited; Mr. Maxwell was writing rapidly, and Tom Whiting was hastily turning the leaves of the telephone book.

"What is it?" I inquired. "Is Mildred——"

"No," said Dr. Sheldon, "Miss Leslie is no worse. On the contrary, she is much better. Her mind is entirely cleared, and she talks rationally, though I am not willing she should be questioned much as yet.

"I am very glad you have come, for there is a new and startling development in the case, and there is much to be done."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Simply this. Miss Leslie, being perfectly rational, you understand, says that neither she nor Philip fired any shots at all. They were both shot by an intruder who came in at the library window."

"But," I exclaimed, "then what did she mean by saying 'He shot me!' in such a grieved tone?"

"She tells us," said Dr. Sheldon, "that those were the last words uttered by Philip as he fell, and that they rang in her brain to the exclusion of all else. That is why she repeated them, parrot-like, during her unconsciousness."

"This changes the whole situation," said I, thinking rapidly.

"It does," said Mr. Maxwell. "It is now a case for a detective." Then he added, in a manly way, "I am sorry I spoke so shortly to Mr. Hunt this morning, and I have written to tell him so, and to ask him to return and help us."

"But what——" I began.

"You know all that we do," interrupted the doctor. "If Miss Leslie is questioned further, or in any way excited at present, I will not answer for the consequences. My first duty is to my patient.

"This afternoon, and in my presence, she may be interviewed by some one who can do it gently and discreetly. Tomorrow, in all probability, she will be quite herself, and may be questioned by a detective or any one empowered by Mr. Maxwell."

And with this, we were obliged to be content.

CHAPTER V.

THE CORONER'S INQUEST.

THE situation was indeed changed. My latent detective instinct was now fully roused, and I determined to do all I could toward solving the mystery.

I said as much to Mr. Maxwell, and he thanked me earnestly for my sympathy and interest.

He also asked whether I thought Mr. Hunt a skilled detective, or whether I advised sending to New York for a more expert man. This annoyed me, for it proved that he considered my services as well-meant, but not especially valuable. However, I showed no irritation, and answered simply that I thought Mr. Hunt quite capable of discovering all that could be discovered.

"You see," I went on, "we are at a disadvantage in having lost so many hours already. Had we known last night there was an intruder from outside, we could easily have caught him. As it is, he has probably made good his escape."

"That is true," said Mr. Maxwell with a sigh. "But we must do our best, and leave no stone unturned in our endeavor to find Philip's assailant."

I determined to go at once to the library, the scene of the crime, and make a thorough search for clues before Mr. Hunt should arrive. All the detective literature I had ever read, had taught me that it is next to impossible for a human being to enter a room and go out again, without leaving a trace of some sort, though visible only to a trained detective.

So to the library I went, and subjected the room and all its contents to a minute and systematic scrutiny. Contrary to all precedent, literary and reportorial, I found nothing.

Again I went over the room, even more diligently, remembering Sherlock Holmes' wise advice to discriminate carefully between vital and incidental clues.

But, alas, I could find neither, except the very doubtful one of a fluffy bit of yellow marabout feather, which might have fallen from a lady's fan, or the trimmings of her costume. I remembered no one who had worn yellow the night before, but then, I take little note of ladies' dress.

In lieu of anything more interesting, I put the bit of down carefully away in my note-book, and proceeded with my examinations. All to no purpose. The room had been put in order by the servants that morning—dusted, and possibly swept—so it was absurd to look for anything on the floor or furniture.

Sighing to think of the opportunities we had lost, I turned my attention to the window by which the intruder must have entered. It was a long French window reaching from floor to ceiling. It was in three divisions, each of which was really a door, and opened out on the balcony, which as I have said, ran around both sides and the front of the house without barrier.

The panes were of ground glass, in a diamond pattern; and I knew that at night, with lights inside the room, an outsider might look in through the glass unseen by those within.

I opened the middle door, stepped out on the balcony, and endeavored to scrutinize in a scientific way.

Signs of a scuffle there certainly were. Just outside the library window, in the dust of the balcony, I observed many long, sweeping marks, that had every appearance of being the tracks of men who scraped their feet around in a wrestle, or struggle of some sort. From the shape of these streaks in the dust, I could not gather the size of the shoes that made them, nor the style of their toes; but as even the paint of the balcony floor was scratched by the marks, I felt sure that a tussle of some sort had taken place there.

I looked for a continuation of these tracks, but found none, save the scratches that were to be seen everywhere over the balcony floor. As many people had walked there the night before, this was of no importance, but unless some one had danced a clog dance outside the library window, I saw no reason for changing my first conclusion.

I found nothing else of note, save two more bits of the yellow down. One piece in the outside library blind, and another bit farther front on the balcony. These I put away with my first morsel, determined to find out who wore such decoration the evening before.

By this time Mr. Hunt had arrived. The coroner had come, too, bringing his jury, for it had been decided to begin the inquest that very afternoon.

How strange it seemed, to be holding an inquest in Miss Miranda's stately drawing-room! But that was not more strange than realizing that Philip's dead body lay up-stairs, and that we had not the faintest idea whose hand wrought this evil.

I paused in the library to talk to Mr. Hunt. He was not mysterious and uncommunicative like the regulation detective, but was frankly at his wits' end.

When I saw this, and knew that I was similarly unenlightened, I wondered if I had done wisely in advising Mr. Maxwell against getting a man from the city.

"Very little to work on, eh, Hunt?" I said.

"Nothing at all," he said, moodily staring at the carpet.

"But the inquest may bring out some important facts."

"I doubt it. If any one knew anything, he would have told it at once. Why shouldn't he?

"We are all of one interest. The deed was doubtless done by a burglar who was trying to effect an entrance, and who was frightened away by his own shots."

"Well," I responded, "I'm willing to suspend judgment until I have something more definite to base my opinions on. Come, let us go down-stairs."

A crowd had assembled in the lower rooms, for the inquest was, in a way, a public function.

I was sure the Maxwells were terribly annoyed at this invasion of their beautiful home, but I was also sure that such thoughts were swallowed up in their eagerness to discover and punish the murderer of Philip.

Mr. Billings was calm and businesslike.

He had impaneled his jury, and was already examining the first witness.

Mr. Maxwell's own lawyer was present, also the district attorney and several other gentlemen of legal aspect who were strangers to me.

The first witness was Gilbert Crane.

To my surprise he appeared agitated and ill at ease. In one way, this was not astonishing, for, as the first one to discover the tragedy, his testimony would be of great importance. But he had been so cool and self-possessed all day that I couldn't understand his present demeanor.

"Will you tell us," said the coroner, not unkindly, "the circumstances which led to your going to the library last evening?"

"I was alone in the billiard-room," said Gilbert. "I had been there alone for some time, as I was troubled and did not care to join the merry crowd in the music-room. I heard Mr. King come down-stairs, go into Mr. Maxwell's study and talk to him for a few moments. After this I heard Mr. King tell Mr. Maxwell that Philip Maxwell and Miss Leslie were in the library.

"After this Mr. King walked through the room I was in, but we said nothing to each other, and he went on to the music-room. I stayed exactly where I was for some time longer, and then I concluded I would go home.

"Not wishing to make my adieux to the guests, I thought I would merely say good night to Mr. Maxwell. I lifted the portière and looked into his study, but as he seemed to be asleep, I thought I wouldn't disturb him, but would just run up-stairs for my banjo, and then slip away unnoticed.

"I went up-stairs and I admit it was curiosity concerning the two people inside that led me to pause and look toward the library door. I heard no sound of voices, so I took another step or two in that direction, and, looking, saw Philip's figure stretched on the floor.

"Then, of course, I went into the room. It has no door, and the portières were but partly drawn. Seeing what was evidently a serious accident of some sort, I immediately ran down-stairs and called Dr. Sheldon to the scene."

"You saw no one else in the room?"

"N—no," said Gilbert, but he seemed to hesitate.

"You are quite sure?" asked the coroner.

"I am positive I saw no one else in the room," said Gilbert, decidedly this time.

"Can you fix the time of your going up-stairs?"

"I can. When I looked into Mr. Maxwell's study, I noticed by his large clock that it was twenty minutes after ten. In less than a minute after that I was up-stairs."

"That will do," said Mr. Billings, and Gilbert was dismissed.

Dr. Sheldon was called next, and testified that he had responded immediately to Mr. Crane's call, and on reaching the library found Philip Maxwell's dead body on the floor, and Miss Leslie, wounded and unconscious, a few feet away.

"She was shot?" asked the coroner.

"Yes, shot in the shoulder. She had fallen, and in so doing had hit her temple. This rendered her unconscious. I extracted the ball, and found it to be a thirty-eight caliber. The revolver found in Miss Leslie's hand is also thirty-eight caliber.

"And has the ball been extracted from Mr. Philip Maxwell's body?"

"Yes; that is also a thirty-eight caliber. He was shot through the heart, and must have died instantly."

"In your opinion, how long had he been dead, when you examined the body?"

"Not long, as the body was still warm. Not more than half an hour at the most."

"The pistol found in Miss Leslie's hand, and which is now in my possession," said Mr. Billings, "has two empty chambers. In view of Miss Leslie's statement that the shooting was done by a person who came in by the window, it would seem that the intruder might have placed the weapon in Miss Leslie's hand after she was wounded. In your opinion, Dr. Sheldon, would this be possible?"

"Possible, yes, but highly improbable, as I myself took the pistol from her hand, and she was holding it in a tight grasp. This would scarcely have been the case, had it been thrust into her hand while she lay unconscious."

"We will not pursue this line of investigation further, until we can hear Miss Leslie's story," said Mr. Billings. "Dr. Sheldon, you are excused."

Mr. Maxwell's testimony was merely to the effect that he had spent the evening in the music-room until about half past nine, at which time he went to his study, and remained there, reading and occasionally dozing, until he had been told the dreadful news.

He corroborated my statement about my looking in on him at ten o'clock, though he didn't notice the time, and he said that he neither saw nor heard Gilbert Crane look in later.

Asked if he heard any shots, he said he did not, owing, doubtless, to his deafness, and the fact that he was asleep part of the time.

He was excused, and Mr. Billings then inquired if any one had heard any shots.

We who were in the music-room during the half-hour between ten and ten-thirty (when the murder was judged to have taken place) declared we heard no shots; and this was but natural, as the library was up-stairs and some distance away, and our music was, at that time, of a noisy variety.

Gilbert Crane said he heard no shots, but said that he was so deeply immersed in his own thoughts, that he doubted if he would have heard a cannon fired.

Then Miss Maxwell's gentle voice was heard, saying:

"I heard two shots, and they were fired at exactly ten o'clock."

"This is most important, madam," said the coroner. "Will you kindly take the witness-chair?"

Then Miss Miranda testified that she was in her own room preparing for bed. Her doors were closed, and the water was running for her bath, so that she could not hear distinctly, but at ten o'clock she heard two sounds that seemed to her like pistol shots.

At the time, however, she hardly thought they were shots, but she opened her hall door and looked out. Seeing nothing unusual, and hearing the gay music down-stairs, she assumed it was the slamming of doors or some other unimportant noise, and so thought no more of it, until informed of what had happened.

"This, then," said Mr. Billings, "fixes the firing of the two shots at ten o'clock. That coincides with your diagnosis, Dr. Sheldon?"

"Yes, sir," said the doctor. "I went up-stairs at about half past ten, and found the body still warm."

"It is fortunate that we are able thus to fix the time so accurately," said the coroner, "as it may be helpful in discovering the criminal."

CHAPTER VI.

SUSPECTED TESTIMONY.

THE next witness called was Irene Gardiner.

For some unaccountable reason, I trembled as I saw her take the stand.

There was no knowing what sort of an impression this strange girl might create, and there were certain bits of evidence which I would feel sorry to have brought out in reference to her.

"Where were you between ten and ten-thirty last evening?" asked Mr. Billings.

Although the tone was courteous, the question had somewhat the sound of a challenge.

"On the upper balcony," replied Irene, her head held high, and her red lips curled in a haughty expression.

"Which part of the balcony?" The coroner's voice was a little more gentle.

"The south end of the east side."

That was where I had left her when I came down-stairs at ten o'clock. The library opened on the southern end of the west balcony.

"Were you there alone?"

"Mr. King was with me part of the time. Also there were others in different parts of the balcony. After Mr. King left me I was alone."

"Were not the others you mentioned there?"

"I don't know; I could see no one from where I sat."

"How long did you remain there?"

"I cannot tell by exact time. When I came into the house again, I was met by Mr. King, who told me what had happened, and asked me to break the news to Miss Maxwell."

"While sitting on the balcony alone did you see any strangers, or any one, around the grounds, or on the driveway?"

"None."

"Did you stay in the same place all the time you were on the balcony, after Mr. King left you?"

"No—that is, yes."

"What do you mean by that answer?"

"I walked a few steps back and forth."

"Not around the corner into the north side?"

"N—no. Not so far as that."

As Irene made this statement, her face grew ashen pale, and I thought I saw her glance in the direction of Gilbert Crane.

But I was not sure of this, and I was most anxious to make all allowance for the girl, who was certainly pitiably nervous and disturbed.

"You are quite sure, Miss Gardiner, that you did not walk round on the north or west sides of the balcony until the time you came into the house?"

"Quite certain," said Irene, but her voice was so low as scarcely to be heard, and her eyes were cast down.

I didn't know what to make of her strange manner, and just then I chanced to look at Gilbert Crane. To my surprise, he was equally pale and agitated in appearance. No one else seemed to notice this, so I kept my own counsel concerning it.

Miss Gardiner was dismissed, and other witnesses followed. None was important, in the sense of throwing any further light on the incidents of the evening before.

The Whitings and other guests who had been in the music-room, simply repeated what was already known.

The servants had heard no shots, but as they were at that time in the outer kitchen, busily engaged in preparation for supper, that was not surprising.

The coachman and gardener had rooms in the barn buildings, and said they heard nothing unusual until notified of the catastrophe.

There were now no more witnesses to be heard from, save the most important one of all, Mildred Leslie.

Dr. Sheldon consented that she should be interviewed, providing it was done in her room, in the presence of the smallest possible number of people.

The coroner was to ask the questions, and a stenographer was to report Miss Leslie's statements.

The nurse, the doctor, and Mrs. Whiting were to be the only others in the room.

This was agreed to, and we who were left below stairs impatiently awaited the result.

As we had all given our testimony, we were not required to remain in the drawing-room with the jury and the officials.

But as we were all more than anxious to be on hand when the coroner returned with Mildred's statement, we did not drift far away.

Gilbert Crane and I strolled on the front lawn, smoking and discussing the events of the morning. I was most curious to know the reason of his extraordinary hesitation at some points of his testimony, but not caring to inquire directly, I resolved to find out in a roundabout way.

"What did you think of Miss Gardiner's testimony?" I asked.

"I think the poor girl was so agitated she did not know what she was saying," he replied somewhat shortly, and as if he did not wish to dwell on the subject.

But I was not to be turned from it.

"It is not like Miss Gardiner," I went on, "to lose her poise in an emergency. She is usually so calm and self-possessed."

"I do not consider Miss Gardiner's a calm temperament," said Crane; "I think she is decidedly emotional."

"Emotional, yes; but she has a wonderful control over her emotions. And aside from that, she positively contradicted herself this morning. I wonder if she did walk around to the west side of the balcony and look in at the library window."

This was mere idle speculation on my part, but it had a strange effect on Gilbert Crane.

"What do you mean?" he cried angrily. "Are you insinuating anything against Miss Gardiner's veracity, or do you perhaps consider her implicated in the affair?"

"I have no thought of Miss Gardiner, save such as are most honorable and loyal," I said; "but, by the way, Crane, what sort of a gown did she wear last night?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I'm no authority on ladies' dress. I never notice their furbelows."

Somehow, the emphasis with which he said this made me think he was overdoing it, and that perhaps he was not so ignorant as he wished me to suppose. But I had no desire to antagonize him, so I dropped the discussion of Irene altogether.

He was amiable enough then, and we returned to the house, chatting affably.

Determined to settle a certain point, I went in search of Miss Maxwell, and found that good lady in the study with her brother.

"Miss Miranda," I said, without subterfuge, "what sort of a gown did Miss Gardiner wear last evening?"

"Irene? Why, she had on a lovely yellow silk-gauze—a sort of pineapple material."

"Was it trimmed with feathers?"

"No," and Miss Maxwell smiled a little. "We don't trim dresses with feathers. But Irene wore a sort of fancy boa, or stole, of white and yellow marabout."

She didn't inquire why I wished to know; indeed, I think she scarcely realized what she was talking about, for she spoke almost automatically.

I understood this, for all day she had seemed dazed and bewildered, and unable to concentrate her mind.

"What is it, Peter?" asked Mr. Maxwell, "have you learned anything new?"

They were very pathetic, these two old people, who had lost their only link to the world of youth and happiness, but the brother seemed to me especially to be pitied. Owing to his deafness, he heard nothing except what was directly addressed to him, and was naturally anxious for any side-lights on the affair.

"No, sir," I replied, "nothing new. But I think we will soon hear Miss Leslie's statement, and then we will know where to begin our work."

"Leave no stone unturned, my boy; call on me for any money you may need, and spare no trouble or expense in your efforts. You're something of a detective yourself, aren't you, Peter? Can't you ferret this thing out?"

"I mean to try, sir," I replied. "But we have lost so much time, and there is so little evidence, I have small hope of success."

"Have you any theory or suspicion?" asked Mr. Maxwell.

I couldn't tell him of my finding the bits of yellow feather, for I hadn't a thought of Irene that could deserve the name suspicion, but he seemed to notice my hesitation.

"You needn't answer that," he said in a kind way, "only remember this, my boy. Be careful how you proceed on suspicion, unless your proof is pretty positive. Trace your clues carefully, and don't let them mislead you."

It seemed as if he must have read my thought—or had he too found a bit of yellow feather?

Well, at any rate, I would follow his advice, and be very careful before I let even my own thoughts doubt Irene.

And now we heard the people coming down from up-stairs, and all hastened back to the drawing-room.

Since Mildred's assertion that Philip was killed by an intruder, the district attorney had been called in, and had of course attended the whole inquest. He was a Mr. Edwards, and seemed to be an alert and intelligent man.

Like the rest of us, he eagerly awaited the expected statement, and when the coroner rose to read the paper he held, the general excitement, though subdued, was intense.

"I will read," said Mr. Billings, "the sworn testimony of Miss Mildred Leslie, given by her to me, and reported *verbatim*, by my official stenographer. It is in dialogue form, and I will read it as written.

MR. BILLINGS.—Miss Leslie, will you relate, in your own words, the story of the tragedy that occurred last evening in the library?

MISS LESLIE.—Mr. Philip Maxwell and I were in the library, and had been there some time when a man appeared.

MR. BILLINGS.—Wait a moment, Miss Leslie. I must ask for more details. Excuse me, but on what subjects were you and Mr. Maxwell conversing?

MISS LESLIE.—Must I tell that?

MR. BILLINGS.—I am sorry to annoy you, but you must.

MISS LESLIE.—Well, then, he was asking me to marry him.

MR. BILLINGS.—And you?

MISS LESLIE.—Oh, I refused him. I had refused him many times before. He knew I didn't care for him.

MR. BILLINGS.—He knew, then, that his was a hopeless suit?

MISS LESLIE.—Yes. But he said he had something to tell me that he was sure would make me change my mind.

MR. BILLINGS.—Did you learn what this something was?

MISS LESLIE.—I did not. Before he had time to tell me, that awful man came.

MR. BILLINGS.—We will come to that part presently. Did Mr. Maxwell say nothing that could suggest to you the nature of the important argument he meant to make?

MISS LESLIE.—No, except that he said something had occurred, a week or so ago, which had entirely changed his future, and which, he believed, would make me consent to marry him.

MR. BILLINGS.—How did you receive this suggestion?

MISS LESLIE.—I only laughed at him, and made some foolish remark. And then he said, "Don't trifle with me to-night, Mildred, I am desperate."

I started at this, for it was the very speech I had everheard Philip make as I passed through the hall. I glanced at Irene. She was calm, but her clenched hands, and set lips proved how deeply this story moved her. To her jealous temperament it was nothing short of torture. The reading went on:

MR. BILLINGS.—Did you then become more serious?

MISS LESLIE.—Not I. I never was serious with Philip. The only way to manage him at all was to chaff him. Well, then he kept on begging me to listen to him, and I kept on fooling, when suddenly I saw him look toward the window——

MR. BILLINGS.—One moment. Where were you both?

MISS LESLIE.—We were both standing by the big table-desk. We were on the side toward the hall—that is, the desk was between us and the window. As Philip stood, he faced the window, but I was turned sideways, leaning against the desk, and looking

at Philip. So when he looked toward the window, and such a strange look of terror came into his eyes, of course I turned to look, too.

I saw a man in a full automobile suit. He had apparently just stepped in at the open window, and in his hand he held a pistol which he aimed at Philip.

I didn't scream, I was so paralyzed with fright, I couldn't even move. It seemed like minutes, but I don't suppose it was, that we three stood there.

Then Philip pulled open the top drawer of the table-desk, and grabbed his own pistol. He raised it to aim at the man, and at the same time he said in a low, moaning voice, "Oh, to think *he* would shoot me!"

MR. BILLINGS.—Then you think Mr. Maxwell knew who shot him?

MISS LESLIE.—I'm sure of it. But he was a stranger to me. He had——

MR. BILLINGS.—You may describe him later. Go on with your connected story.

MISS LESLIE.—When I saw Philip take his pistol, I had a wild desire to prevent either of the men from shooting. I suppose I was almost crazed by fright, and scarcely knew what I was doing, but my only thought was to attack the man, and so I snatched up a heavy cut-glass inkstand full of ink from the desk and threw it at him. I don't know whether I hit him or not, but the next second I picked up a bronze horse that was on the desk and threw that at him, too.

This didn't take as long to do as it does to tell it, for my hands fairly flew. I couldn't speak, or make a sound, but I felt impelled to act.

Philip and the man paid no attention to me, but stood with their pistols pointed at each other. Philip said again, "To think *he* would shoot me!" and just then the man fired.

Philip fell backward, and as he fell, the pistol dropped from his hand onto the desk. I don't know what gave me courage, for I had never touched a revolver before, but, as I say, I was maddened by fright, and I picked up that pistol and aimed at the man myself.

With that, he turned his own pistol toward me—I heard the report—and I remember falling forward. I remember nothing more.

MR. BILLINGS.—Miss Leslie, you have given a very clear and coherent statement. Now, if you will describe the intruder, we will not disturb you further to-day.

MISS LESLIE.—I can't describe him very much except to say that he wore automobile clothes—a big coat, a cap with a visor, and goggles which covered most of his face.

MR. BILLINGS.—Not the lower part of his face?

MISS LESLIE.—No, but his large collar was turned up and buttoned in a way to hide his mouth and chin.

MR. BILLINGS.—Would you recognize him if you saw him again?

MISS LESLIE.—I think not; the clothes were not peculiar in any way. Just such as all men wear when automobiling.

MR. BILLINGS.—Was it a fur coat?

MISS LESLIE.—No, not that kind. A sort of thick cloth, I think, of medium color, but rather light than dark.

"That is all, gentlemen," said Mr. Billings, addressing the jury at the close of his reading.

All! I should think it was enough!

I felt as if I must get away to think things over by myself.

I rushed from the room and out on the veranda, where I found a secluded corner.

What sort of a story had Mildred told, and why?

For the doctor had sworn she was perfectly sane and rational, and quite capable of describing the affair.

Why, then, did she say she threw an inkstand full of ink and a bronze horse at the intruder, when I, who had so carefully searched the room for clues, found no traces of ink? And, moreover, I especially remembered seeing that bronze horse on the desk when I first entered the library after Gilbert Crane had given the alarm!

CHAPTER VII.

RED INK AND A HORSE OF BRONZE.

NOT for a moment did I doubt Mildred's good faith in the matter. It would be too absurd to think of her making such statements if they were not true.

And yet how could they be true? How could any one throw an inkstand full of ink, and not leave black spots somewhere? How could any one throw a heavy bronze paper-weight, and, being shot a moment later, restore the bronze to its place on the table?

Clearly she must be laboring under an hallucination regarding these things. Probably she so strongly desired to throw the inkstand or the horse that she really believed she did throw them. Yes, that must be it. There was no other plausible explanation of her words.

But after all, though this point was interesting, it was incidental evidence, not vital. The main thing was to find the man in the automobile clothes. He must be some one whom Philip knew and recognized in spite of the goggles.

He must have come in an automobile, for men do not walk around the country in such attire. But Miss Gardiner on the balcony commanded a view of the entrance and driveway, and she had seen no one enter the grounds.

Possibly then he had come from a distance, had left his machine at some point near-by, and had approached the house secretly and on foot.

But how had he gained an entrace?

The servants had not let him in. He couldn't have come in by the front door without being seen. The conservatory door was always locked at night.

Oh, well, while all these things were true, still there were many windows by which he might have entered, and slipped up-stairs unseen. Then he could have gone out on the balcony through the little cross-hall and so reached the library window.

Or, he might have climbed to the balcony by means of a veranda pillar. An agile man could easily do this—still, not so easily if dressed in a bulky automobile coat.

It was mysterious enough, but of course the first thing to do was to look for traces. If I had only known sooner that there was an intruder to be looked for, how much better a chance we should have had of finding him.

But there was no use crying over spilled milk, so I started at once to look cheerfully at the veranda pillars. There I found myself forestalled.

Mr. Hunt and Gilbert Crane were already examining them.

"Any scratches?" said I.

"Plenty of old ones," said Mr. Hunt, "but none that seem to have been made as recently as last night."

"How about automobile tracks?"

"There are any number of those, all over the drive; but as several people came in automobiles last night, they mean nothing definite.

"What do you make of those marks on the balcony floor that look as if made by scuffling feet?"

"They may be the marks of a scuffle," said Mr. Hunt, "or it may be that some one stood for some time looking in at the library window. A nervous person standing there might move about in a manner to leave just such traces."

For some unaccountable reason these remarks of Mr. Hunt's seemed to disturb Gilbert Crane. He turned pale and was about to speak, then set his lips firmly, and turned silently away.

"There is one circumstance that ought to be explained," I said, speaking to Mr. Hunt, and hoping that Crane would leave us.

But Gilbert turned back and seemed anxious to know what I was about to say. I watched him closely as I went on, though addressing my remarks directly to Mr. Hunt.

"I found these bits of evidence this morning," I said, taking my note-book from my pocket. "They may not be vital clues, but anything found in the library is of interest."

Even before I opened my note-book Crane showed signs of agitation which he tried vainly to suppress. His white, frightened face and his clenched hands showed that he feared the disclosure.

Still watching him covertly, I produced the three bits of yellow feather.

"Do you recognize these?"

"No," said Mr. Hunt, "what are they, and where did they come from?"

"Do *you* recognize them?" I said, turning suddenly to Crane.

"Y-yes," he stammered, "they seem to be bits of down from a-light wrap which Miss Gardiner wore last evening."

"They are," I said, "and I picked them up in the library, and on the balcony, and one piece I disengaged from the catch of the library window-shutter."

"Well," said Gilbert Crane, trying to speak naturally, "and what does that prove to you?"

"It doesn't prove anything," I said slowly, "but it is a peculiar coincidence that Miss Gardiner declares she was not in the library last evening or on the west balcony at all."

"She says that?" said Hunt, looking up sharply, while Gilbert Crane looked more distressed than ever.

"Yes," I answered. "Did you speak, Mr. Crane?"

"No," said Gilbert, "I have nothing to say on the subject." And turning abruptly he left us and walked rapidly across the lawn and out of the front gate.

"I don't understand Miss Gardiner's attitude," said Mr. Hunt. "I cannot think she had anything to do with the crime, but I do think she is withholding information of some sort. But I must go now, and I will return this evening. Then, if you please, Mr. King, I would like to discuss matters more at length with you."

When Mr. Hunt came back that evening he found me with Mr. Maxwell in the study. Although I did not wish to pain the old gentleman with more details than were necessary, yet I wanted him to know as nearly as possible how matters stood; and, too, I wanted the benefit of his sound judgment and good advice.

"Come in, Mr. Hunt, come in," I said to the detective. "Let us three sum up the real evidence we have and see what may be best to do next."

I closed the doors in order that we might feel more free to speak in tones which Mr. Maxwell could hear easily, and then I left it to Mr. Hunt to open the conversation.

"First," said the detective, "I would like to know Mr. Maxwell's opinion of Miss Leslie's testimony."

"I have just been reading it," said Mr. Maxwell. "I did not hear it clearly when Mr. Billings read it, so I asked permission to read the paper myself. I do not know Miss Leslie very well, but she impresses me as nothing more nor less than a merry, light-hearted, innocent girl. Coquettish, perhaps, but I think the depths of her nature are honest and sincere.

"Now, we have all agreed that her testimony regarding the ink-stand and the bronze paper-weight cannot, in the very nature of things, be true testimony. For ink spilled on a carpet will remain there, and bronze horses cannot get up on a table by themselves.

"Personally, then, I am forced to the opinion that Miss Leslie's mind is affected—temporarily only, I trust.

"But surely there is no other explanation for her strange statements. And, granting this, may it not be possible that her whole story of the man in the automobile coat is but a figment of her diseased brain?"

"It is possible," said Mr. Hunt, "but they tell me that Miss Leslie is so clear-headed and rational in her conversation that I find it difficult to disbelieve her story of the intruder."

"Nor do I ask you to," said Mr. Maxwell. "I only want to call your attention to the logical point that such grave discrepancies in one part of her recital might argue doubt in other directions.

"I have a logical mind, but I have none of what is often called the 'detective instinct.' That is why I wish to put this whole affair entirely in the hands of an able detective.

"And again of a detective's ability I do not consider myself a judge. If you think, Mr. Hunt, that you can take care of it successfully, I have sufficient confidence in you to give you the entire responsibility. Or, should you prefer to call in an assistant or an expert from the city, I am quite willing you should do so."

"I don't want to seem egotistical, Mr. Maxwell," said Mr. Hunt, "but I can't help feeling that Mr. King and I can take care of this thing. Mr. King, though not a professional, has what you have called the 'detective instinct' to a marked degree. And if he will help me, I would prefer his assistance to that of a stranger."

"Then we will leave it that way," said Mr. Maxwell. "I shall be glad to have Mr. King for my guest as long as he will stay, and you may consider yourselves authorized to make such investigations as you see fit.

"I do not presume to advise you, but I want to ask you to take an old man's warning, and be sure of your proofs before you act upon them. Clues are often misleading; evidence may be false. But there are certain kinds of facts that point unmistakably to the truth. Those facts you must discover, and then follow where they lead, irrespective of whom they may implicate, and oblivious to any personal prejudice."

I couldn't help wondering if Mr. Maxwell shared my faint but growing suspicion that either Mr. Crane or Miss Gardiner, or both, knew more about the

tragedy than they had yet told. I was sure the old gentleman's conservative habits of speech would not allow him to put this into words, but that his sense of justice demanded an intimation of the idea.

After a little further conversation with Mr. Maxwell, we left the study and Hunt and I went for a walk.

"It's clear to my mind," said Hunt, "that this shooting was done by an intruder from outside, not a common burglar but some past acquaintance of Philip's who had some strong motive for ending the boy's existence.

"It was some one whom Philip knew and recognized. The motive he did not know, for he was both surprised and grieved that this individual should intend to kill him."

"Then you believe Mildred's story, as a whole?"

"Yes. It seems to me that we have as yet no real reason to doubt her main statement, even though the details are mystifying."

"Mystifying! They are impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible in detective work," said Mr. Hunt, "at least nothing that is mysterious."

With that we parted. Mr. Hunt went home, and I went back to Maxwell Hall to toss all night on a bed of wakefulness. I felt flattered that Mr. Hunt had asked me to work with him and I resolved to do something that would prove my worth as his assistant.

I mulled over the ink-stand question until I felt as if my own brains were addled, and I finally fell asleep resolving to make the solution of that puzzle my definite work for the next day.

As a beginning, I begged Dr. Sheldon to allow me a short interview with Mildred the next morning. He readily granted this, as his patient was rapidly recovering from the shock sustained by her nervous system, and was now suffering mainly from the flesh wound in her shoulder.

In my talk with Mildred she repeated the statements she had made the day before, and she seemed so entirely herself and so sure of her memory, that I had no reasonable ground to doubt her assertions.

"Are you sure, Miss Leslie," I asked, "that you really threw that inkstand? Might you not have intended to throw it without doing so?"

She looked at me in amazement.

"Certainly I'm sure I threw it," she said. "I distinctly remember picking it up and throwing it at the man. It did not hit him; it fell short of him, for it was heavier than I thought.

"So then I threw the bronze horse at him. That was heavy, too, and it struck the thick rug with a soft thud. That didn't hit him, either; I never could throw things very well. But I scarcely knew what I was doing, and my acts were impulsive, almost unconscious."

"That is just the point, Miss Leslie; since they were almost unconscious, might it not be that they were not acts at all, merely intention and imagination?"

"I am perfectly sure that I threw those things. Will you tell me why you doubt it?"

"Because," I said, watching her carefully, "when I entered the room where you lay unconscious, the inkstand was undisturbed on the desk, and the bronze horse also."

Mildred looked utterly blank.

"I think," she said, "I have as much reason to doubt your statements as you have to doubt mine. For I *know* I threw those things. The whole affair is like a dream, a vivid dream, in one way; yet in another way every instant of it is more acutely real to me than any other moment of my life.

"I positively threw those things just as I have described to you, and if, which seems impossible, they were returned to the desk, it was done by other hands than mine, either human or supernatural."

This interview made me more than ever determined to solve this mystery before going any further.

I went in search of some of the servants and learned from them two important facts: first, that the library had not been swept since Monday night, although it had been dusted; second, that the maid who dusted it distinctly remembered seeing the bronze paper-weight in its usual place, and also asserted that the large inkstand was undisturbed, and that it did not need refilling.

With this new knowledge, or, rather,

with this corroboration of previously attested statements, I went to the library, determined to discover something, if I had to remain there all day.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN QUEST OF CLUES.

FIRST I looked at the bronze horse as it stood in its place on the library table. This table, which was really a flat-topped desk, was covered with books, writing implements and bric-à-brac of various kinds.

The bronze horse was one of a half dozen different paper-weights, and was a beautiful specimen of its kind. I picked it up and gazed at it intently, wishing it could speak for itself and solve the mystery. As I stared at it I suddenly noticed that one ear was broken off.

It was a very small bit that was missing; indeed, scarcely enough to impair the beauty or value of the ornament; but if that missing ear could be found on the library floor, it would be a pretty fair proof that Mildred had thrown the horse in the way she had described.

Eagerly I went in search of the maid whose duty it was to dust the library. In response to my questions she told me that the horse had belonged to Mr. Philip; that it was one of his favorite possessions; and that it was comparatively new.

She had noticed the day before that the horse's ear was broken. She could not say positively, but she thought that if it had been broken before that, she would have known it.

Excited at the prospect of something like a real clue at last, I returned to the library and began a systematic search for the missing ear. Getting down on my hands and knees in the space between the desk and the window, I searched, inch by inch, the thick Persian rug and was finally rewarded by discovering the tiny piece of bronze that I was hunting for.

Comparing it with the other ear—indeed, fitting it to the very place from which it was broken—I saw there was no doubt that I had succeeded; and though I could not imagine how the horse had been replaced on the table, I could no longer doubt the truth of Mildred's assertion regarding it.

Carefully wrapping the broken ear in a bit of tissue paper, I put it away and devoted my attention to the inkstand.

The large and elaborate affair stood in the center of the table. The ink-well itself was of heavy cut glass, and was mounted on an ornate silver standard which was also a pen-rack.

The longer I looked at it the more I felt convinced that nobody could disturb the ponderous ornament and restore it again to its place in the way Mildred told of. For it held as much as a small cupful of jet black ink, and even though the Persian rug was of an intricate design in small figures, yet it was light enough in its general coloring to make ink spots perceptible.

Helpless in the face of this assurance, my eye wandered aimlessly over the articles on the desk, when toward the right-hand end and not far from the bronze horse I spied a second inkstand.

It was heavy, but not so large as the other, and had no silver standard. I opened it and looked in, and found it to be nearly half full of red ink.

I looked again at the rug. The predominating color was red in varying shades. Instantly the thought struck me that if Mildred had thrown that inkstand and if there had not been much ink in it, the drops on the carpet would be unobservable because of the similarity of color.

Without stopping to inquire how it could be restored intact to its place, I dropped again to my knees, and again searched for traces. The pattern of the rug being so complicated and mosaic-like, it was almost impossible to discover red spots other than those which belonged there; but at last, I thought I did find on a small white figure red blotches that were not of the Persian dye.

Almost trembling with excitement, I procured from a drawer in the desk a fresh white blotter. Moistening this, I placed it on the doubtful red spots and gently pressed it. Then lifting it, I found that it showed dull red blurs which had every appearance of being red ink.

Reserving further experiments of this nature to be done in the presence of witnesses, I went in search of Mr. Hunt.

He had not yet arrived, so I telephoned him to come as soon as he could. Meanwhile, I returned to the library to think over my discoveries.

I admitted to myself that they gave us no enlightenment whatever, but they had proved the truth of the only doubtful parts of Mildred's story, and left us therefore no excuse for not believing her entire statement.

Hunt soon arrived, and was more than pleased at what I had done.

"I knew you had ingenuity," he said, in his honest, generous way. "Now, I don't believe I should ever have thought of that blotting-paper scheme."

"But what good does it do?" said I. "Granting that she did throw them, how did they get back to the table?"

"That is another part of the problem," said Hunt, "and one which we need not consider at this moment. First, I think, if you have any more of those clean white blotters, we'll find out the route traveled by that inkstand."

I found plenty of blotters in the drawer, and, proceeding with great care, we succeeded in getting a blotting-paper impression of many more red-ink spots.

We proved to Mr. Hunt's satisfaction, and to mine, that the inkstand had reached the floor about midway between the desk and the window, and that it had then rolled toward the couch, and had stopped just under the long upholstery fringe which decorated the edge of the couch, and which reached to the floor.

"That gives a ray of light!" exclaimed Hunt, triumphantly.

"What do you mean by that?" said I wondering, for I could see no indication of light.

"I can't tell you now," said Hunt, "for some one is coming. I think, Mr. King, it will be wiser to keep these discoveries quiet for the present. Indeed, it is imperative that we should do so."

It was Tom Whiting and his wife who came to the door.

"We want you, Mr. King, if Mr. Hunt will excuse you," said Edith Whiting, in her pleasant way.

"Certainly," said Mr. Hunt. "I am just going home anyway."

"Have you discovered anything?" asked Tom Whiting.

"We hope to do so," said Mr. Hunt. "I think we are on the right track, though we have not progressed very far, as yet."

"We're going for an automobile ride," said Tom, "and if you authorize it, I think it would be well for us to inquire concerning any strangers in automobiles who may have been seen in town day before yesterday."

"I think it could do no harm," said Mr. Hunt, "though it's taking a very slim chance."

"I fear that we have nothing but slim chances to take," said Tom sadly.

We started away, but Hunt called me back to whisper a parting message.

"If you find any strangers in automobile togs," he said, "observe carefully whether there are any signs of their having tried to erase red-ink spots from the lower fronts of their coats."

"That's the slimmest kind of a slim chance yet," I said, almost smiling at the idea, "but I promise you if I find an automobilist spattered with red ink, I will arrest him at once."

I found the others ready and waiting for me. It seemed pathetic to ride away in Philip's automobile, but, as Tom Whiting had said, the ladies really needed some fresh air, and he thought the trip would do us all good.

Mr. Maxwell, and Miss Miranda insisted on our going, and so we started off. Mr. and Mrs. Whiting sat in front, for Tom was quite as good a chauffeur as Philip had been; and Miss Gardiner and I sat behind.

As there was ample room for another, Irene proposed that we stop for Gilbert Crane. This we did, and he seemed glad to accept the invitation.

It scarcely seemed like the same party who a few days before, accompanied by Philip, had traveled so merrily over these same roads.

In pursuance of Tom Whiting's idea, we endeavored to find out if any strangers in automobiles had been seen in town lately.

We inquired at the small but picturesque inn, at the larger, but less pretentious, hotel, at the golf club house, at the railway station and post-office; but no hint could we glean of any motor cars other than those belonging in the village, all of which were well known.

On our return, Mrs. Whiting asked Mr. Crane to come in to luncheon with us, and he accepted.

He alighted before I did, and as he stood waiting to help Miss Gardiner out, the midday sunlight shone full upon him.

I looked at him curiously, thinking what a large, fine-looking fellow he was physically, and how becoming his fashionable automobile coat was to him. Its color was a light brownish gray, and as my eye rested idly upon it, I suddenly noticed something that made my heart stand still.

On the front of this same coat, on the lower edge, were several small spots, visible only in the brightest sunlight, which, whatever they might be, had every appearance of being red ink.

To say I was stunned would pretty well express my feelings, but I was learning not to show surprise at unexpected developments.

I went into the house with the rest, and finding that Mr. Hunt had gone, I sent a note to him, by one of the servants, asking him to return at two o'clock.

He came just as we finished luncheon, and bidding him go in the library and await me there, I went into Mr. Maxwell's study. Finding my host there as I had hoped, and not wishing to elevate my voice, I scribbled on a bit of paper a request that Mr. Maxwell would ask Mr. Crane to come into his study, and would keep him there, securely, for twenty minutes at least.

Mr. Maxwell read the paper quietly, handed it back to me, gave me a quick nod of comprehension, and immediately went in search of Gilbert Crane.

A moment later, I saw him return with Gilbert Crane. They entered the study and closed the door, so I knew that the coast was clear, and that for twenty minutes I need fear no interruption from them.

Eagerly seizing his coat from the hat-stand where he had flung it, I hastened to the library.

I found Hunt there, and after closing the door I held up the coat for his inspection.

"You don't mean to say you have found the man!" he cried.

"I don't know about that," I said, very soberly," but I have certainly found a coat that ought to be looked after. What do you make of this?"

I held the front of the coat toward the window to catch the bright sunlight, and drew Hunt's attention to the almost invisible spots on it.

He looked at them in silence a moment, and then said abruptly: "Get some more blotters."

We dampened the blotters and applied them very carefully, for the spots were faint, and the surface of the cloth dusty.

But the results showed strong evidence that the stains were similar to those on the carpet.

"Whose coat is it?" said Hunt, though I think he knew.

"Gilbert Crane's," I answered, looking straight at the detective.

"But that does not prove that Gilbert Crane committed the murder," he responded, looking at me with equal directness.

"It does not," I said, emphatically, "but it is certainly a clue that must lead somewhere."

"And we must follow it wherever it leads."

"Yes," I assented, "now that we have something to work on, let us get to work. Shall I call Gilbert up here, and ask him if he can explain these spots on his coat. Somehow, I can't help thinking that he could do so."

"Not yet," said Mr. Hunt. "I think it wiser to straighten out a few points before we speak to Mr. Crane on the subject. He is a peculiar man, and I don't want to antagonize him.

"I would much rather, if you please, that you would replace the coat where you found it, let Mr. Maxwell know that he need not detain Mr. Crane any longer, and then bring Miss Gardiner back here with you for a short consultation."

I followed Mr. Hunt's suggestions to the letter, but it was with a rapidly sinking heart. Not for a moment did I think Gilbert Crane a villain, and yet there were many circumstances that looked dark against him.

I was also disturbed at Mr. Hunt's request for Irene. A strange foreboding made me fear that some dreadful revelation was about to take place.

The jury had rendered its verdict of

"wilful murder by a person unknown," and I fervently hoped the criminal might remain forever unknown rather than that the shadow of guilt might fall on any one who had been hospitably received at Maxwell Hall.

Still, in the cause of justice, every possibility must be considered, and I knew that Mr. Hunt would shirk no duty, but would doggedly follow any clue that presented itself.

I looked in at the study door, and the merest lifting of my eye-brows was sufficient to inform Mr. Maxwell that a detention of Gilbert was no longer necessary. I looked at young Crane's inscrutable face, and was obliged to admit to myself that it was not a frank countenance in its general effect. But I resolved that this fact should not be allowed to prejudice me against him.

Finding Mrs. Whiting in the hall, and learning from her that Miss Gardiner had gone to her own room, I asked her to say to Miss Gardiner that Mr. Hunt desired to see her in the library. Mrs. Whiting promised to send Irene there at once, and, greatly dreading the interview, I returned to the library myself.

I found Hunt making a tabulated statement of certain facts.

"You see, Mr. King," he said, with a very grave face, "while these things are not positively incriminating, they are serious questions which need clearing up."

"Granting that the bronze horse was thrown at the intruder and replaced on the desk before you entered the room that night, we must allow that it was picked up and replaced by somebody. Miss Leslie was incapable of this act, the murderer was not likely to do it.

"Gilbert Crane was the first to find out that the tragedy had occurred. There is no witness to say what he might or might not have done in this room. It is possible therefore that he restored the horse to its place."

"And the inkstand?"

"You remember that Gilbert Crane insisted on spending the night in this house. Is it not, therefore, conceivable that he should have waited until every one else had gone home, or retired to their rooms, and that he should then have come to the library, found the empty stand, refilled it, and replaced it?"

"But," said I, in utter amazement, "if he did not commit the crime why should he be so careful about these details?"

"I am not sure," said Mr. Hunt in a low voice, "that he did not commit the crime."

CHAPTER IX.

A SUSPECT.

ALTHOUGH horrified and even indignant at Mr. Hunt's assertion, I could not fail to be impressed by his arguments. I was still bewildered at the possibilities he suggested, when a tap was heard at the library door. Mr. Hunt rose quietly and admitted Miss Gardiner.

The girl looked haggard and worn. Her brilliant coloring seemed faded, and her whole attitude betrayed deep distress not unmixed with fear.

But all of this she tried to hide beneath a mask of impassivity. I think she impressed Hunt with her appearance of calmness, though I felt sure that her turbulent spirit was far from placid.

"Sit down, Miss Gardiner," said Hunt kindly. "I wish to ask you a few questions."

Irene sat down, and with an air both haughty and dignified awaited the detective's next words. Had it not been for her restless, troubled eyes, she would have deceived me into thinking her assumed indifference real.

"In your testimony, Miss Gardiner," began Mr. Hunt, "you declared that you did not leave the spot where you were sitting, on the east end of the balcony, the night of the murder, until you came into the house at about half past ten. Are you still prepared to swear to this statement?"

"Why should I not be, Mr. Hunt?" said Irene, but her lips grew white, and her voice trembled.

"You might have since recollected that you *did* go around to the west side, if only for a moment."

"I have no recollections that cause me to change my sworn statement in any way," declared Irene.

Her voice had sunk almost to a whisper and her eyes refused to meet mine.

Mr. Hunt continued:

"Were you around on the west side, near the library window, at any time

during the evening—earlier, perhaps, than the time you spent sitting alone on the east side?"

"No," said Irene, and this time her voice was stronger and her whole air more decided, as she looked the detective straight in the eye. "I was not on the west balcony earlier in the evening. I was not there at all!"

The last sentence came with a desperate burst of emphasis, that somehow did not carry conviction. For some reason the girl was under a severe tension, and I couldn't help thinking there was danger of her physical collapse.

"Then," said Mr. Hunt, suddenly producing the bits of yellow down from his pocketbook—"then may I ask, Miss Gardiner, how these feathers chanced to be found in the library, and on the library window-shutter?"

Irene Gardiner gave a low cry, and hiding her face in her hands, seemed in immediate danger of the collapse I had feared.

"Miss Gardiner," I said, for though her actions were inexplicable, I was still deeply under the spell of her fascination, and greatly desired to help her—"Miss Gardiner, let me advise you, as a friend, to tell your story frankly and truthfully. I am sure it will be better for all concerned."

Raising her head, Irene Gardiner flashed a look at me so full of faith and gratitude, that, assured of her complete innocence, I determined to become her strong ally.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I would be so glad to tell the truth! I swore to a falsehood from a sense of duty to another."

"It is always a mistaken sense of duty that leads to false swearing," said Mr. Hunt.

"I believe that is so," said Irene earnestly, "but I had no one to advise me and I thought I was doing right. The truth is, then, that I *did* go around to the west end of the balcony, and that I did look in at the library window."

"At what time was this?" asked Mr. Hunt.

"I don't know," said Irene, "but it was perhaps ten minutes later that Mr. King came to me on the front balcony, and told me what had happened."

"What did you see in the library?" asked Mr. Hunt.

"Must I tell that?"

"You must."

"Then I saw Philip lying on the floor, and Mildred fallen to the floor also. But she was partly hidden by the desk."

"Is that all you saw?" asked Mr. Hunt, looking at her intently. "Was there no one else in the room?"

"Must I tell that?" asked Irene again, with an appealing glance at me.

"Yes," said Mr. Hunt sternly, "much may depend on your telling the absolute truth."

"Then," said Irene, "I saw Mr. Crane placing a pistol in Mildred's hand."

"Wait," said I, "was this occurring just as you arrived at the window?"

"Yes."

"Then," I went on, "you cannot swear that he was placing the pistol in her hand. He might have been taking it away from her, or attempting to do so."

"I never thought of that," said Irene, an expression of relief lighting up her face.

"Even so," said Mr. Hunt, "he should have told of the incident in his own testimony. What did you do next, Miss Gardiner?"

"I went away at once. I went to the front veranda, and I could go no farther. I was so mystified and horrified by what I had just seen that I flung myself into a chair and cried. I was still crying when, soon after, Mr. King came in search of me."

"She was," I declared, "and crying so violently that I was alarmed. But as Miss Maxwell appeared almost immediately, I left the two ladies to look after each other."

"And had it not been for the incriminating yellow feathers, did you not intend to correct your misstatement?" said Mr. Hunt, looking at her severely.

"No," said Irene, and her manner now was frank and self-assured, "for I felt sure Mr. Crane had done nothing wrong, and I did not wish to attract any unfounded suspicions toward him."

"A suspicion that is really unfounded can do no one any harm," said Mr. Hunt, who seemed to be in a mood for oracular utterances.

"I am glad," said Irene simply, "for I would not wish any harm to come to Mr. Crane through my testimony."

"That is as it may be," said Mr. Hunt, and the interview was at an end.

Although Irene's evidence had placed Gilbert in a doubtful position, I was not yet willing to believe the man guilty, or even that he was implicated in the crime.

Indeed, I was for going straight to him, and asking him for the explanation which I felt sure he could give.

But Mr. Hunt did not agree with me. He was in the grasp of a new theory, and therefore subject to the temptation which too often assails a detective, to make the facts coincide with it.

"No," he said, "don't let us go ahead too rapidly. Let us formulate a definite porposition, and then see if we are warranted in assuming it to be a true one. In the first place, whoever killed Philip Maxwell must have had a strong personal motive for the deed.

"There is no reason to suspect an ordinary burglar, for there is nothing whatever to indicate burglary in the whole affair. If Philip Maxwell had any personal enemies, the fact is not known to us. Even his uncle is unaware of the existence of any such.

"The only man we know of who might have had an ill-feeling toward Philip Maxwell—mind, I say, *might* have had—is Gilbert Crane. We know that an antagonism existed between the two men on account of Miss Leslie. While it would not seem to us that this antagonism was sufficient to develop a crime, yet parallel cases are not unknown. Gilbert Crane is a man of deep passions, fiery temper, and uncontrollable impulses.

"He is erratic, eccentric, and, while I do not wish to judge him too harshly, I must admit he seems to be of the stuff of which villains are made."

"But none of this is definitely incriminating," I said, appalled at the sudden directness of Hunt's attack.

"No," he replied, "and that is why I'm not willing to proceed as if it were, or as if I so considered it."

"It is absurd anyway," I said almost angrily, "for you know that he was in the billiard-room at exactly ten o'clock. I saw him there myself. And according to Miss Maxwell, the shots were fired at ten o'clock."

"Yes, according to Miss Maxwell. But it has occurred to me that hers is the only evidence that the shots were fired at ten o'clock, and we are by no means certain that her clock or watch was exactly right."

"The clock in the study was right," I said doggedly, "it always is. Mr. Maxwell is very particular about that."

"Yes, but ladies are not apt to be so exact with their timepieces. At any rate, I shall make it my business to find out."

"Let us find out now," I said eagerly. "If there is anything in this horrible theory I want to know it at once."

"Go yourself," said Hunt. "Go at once, and ask Miss Maxwell as to the accuracy of her clock."

I found Miss Maxwell alone, and I asked her in a casual manner how she knew it was ten o'clock when she heard, or thought she heard, the two pistol shots.

"It was ten by the little clock on my dressing-table," she replied. "I am sure of that, for it was striking at the time I heard the reports."

"And is that clock always right?" I asked.

"No," she said; "in fact, it is almost never right. For some time I have been intending to have it regulated."

"Is it slow or fast?" I asked, trying to preserve my casual manner.

"It runs slow," she said, "and that night it must have been as much as ten minutes slow, because I remember I was late for dinner, though I thought I was in ample time."

"You should have stated this discrepancy sooner, Miss Maxwell," I said, unable to keep a note of grave concern out of my voice.

"Why," she returned, in astonishment. "I had no idea that would make any difference. In fact, I didn't think anything about it. How can it make any difference?"

"Never mind, Miss Maxwell," I said soothingly, "perhaps it won't make any difference. Don't give it any further thought. You have quite enough trouble as it is."

"Oh, I have indeed!" said the dear

old lady. "I don't know what I shall do, Mr. King. Philip's death has affected my brother terribly. Dudley was always a quiet man, but now he is so crushed and heart-broken that he is more silent than ever.

"And I can't seem to comfort him. I think we will have to go away from Maxwell Hall. We have a sister out West, and I think we will go out there. I am sure that entire and permanent change of scene is the only thing that will help Dudley at all."

I looked admiringly at the dear lady whose unselfish spirit thought of her brother's comfort, ignoring her own sorrow, and assuring her of my sincere sympathy and my assistance in every possible way, I returned to Hunt.

"I am not surprised," he said, when I told him that Miss Maxwell's clock had undoubtedly been ten minutes slow on Monday evening. "It is alarming, the way the links fit into the chain of evidence, but it must be more than mere coincidence.

"Look at it in this way for a moment —supposing, for the sake of argument, that events proceeded like this:

"You saw Gilbert Crane in the billiard-room at ten o'clock. This you are sure of. Now according to Crane's own statement he looked into Mr. Maxwell's study some twenty minutes later. But we have no other witness for this.

"Mr. Maxwell says he neither heard nor saw him, and Crane himself admits that he did not. With the exception of Miss Gardiner on the balcony, the guests were all in the music-room, not only absorbed in their music, but making a great deal of noise.

"Miss Maxwell was in her own bedroom, and the servants were busy in the kitchens, of which the doors were closed. As nearly as I can find out, Gilbert Crane came running down-stairs for Dr. Sheldon a few moments before half past ten. If you have followed my reasoning, you will see that his whereabouts between ten o'clock and, say, ten-twenty-five, are unaccounted for except by himself.

"His coat—the automobile coat on which we have discovered the red spots—hung on the hat-stand in the back part of the hall. He therefore had ample opportunity to leave the billiard-room, put on his coat and the cap and goggles which he always carries in that coat pocket, go up the back staircase, and through the hall window at the head of that staircase out on to the west balcony.

"The library window is directly next to the hall window. He had therefore, I say, both time and opportunity to fire the shots at about ten minutes after ten, which would accord with Miss Maxwell's inaccurate testimony. He had also time and opportunity to return downstairs the way he came, restore his coat to its place on the hat-stand, and go back to the billiard-room.

"This yet left sufficient time for him to go up-stairs again—the front stairs this time—in full view of the people in the music-room if they chanced to look, and return to make his startling announcement to Dr. Sheldon."

I had followed Hunt's words with such intense interest that I seemed to be living through the successive scenes myself. As he paused, I remarked thoughtfully:

"And that would explain why Philip cried out 'Oh, to think that *he* should shoot me!'"

"Yes," said Hunt gravely, "it explains a great many things. It explains of course the spots on his coat——"

"Wait," I cried eagerly, "when the ink spattered on his coat it must also have fallen on his shoes and the bottoms of his trousers."

"Not necessarily on his trousers," said Hunt, "for the coat is long and large, and would probably entirely protect them. As to his shoes, they have doubtless been blackened since, and so all trace would be lost."

"As a chain of circumstantial evidence it is certainly complete," I said, with a sigh. "But all my intuitions cry out against its being the truth."

"Have you any other theory to offer?"

"Not the shadow of one. I only wish I had. But stay. What do you make of Miss Gardiner's assertion that she saw Gilbert placing a pistol in Miss Leslie's hand?"

"I think she is mistaken as to what he was doing. I think Miss Leslie's story is true in every detail. Possibly Mr.

Crane endeavored to take the pistol out of her hand, then, changing his mind for some reason, concluded not to do so."

I sat staring at Mr. Hunt, almost stunned by his convincing arguments.

"What will be your next move?" I asked.

"I shall submit this report to Inspector Davis, and he must do whatever he thinks best. I shall ask him, though, not to arrest Mr. Crane until after the funeral, and this more for the sake of the Maxwells and their guests than for any consideration I have for Mr. Crane. He will, of course, be kept under constant surveillance."

CHAPTER X.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

FURTHER investigation only served to strengthen the case against Gilbert Crane. It was discovered that he owned a thirty-eight caliber pistol. When found, this pistol was properly cleaned and loaded. It was not rusty, and had every appearance of having been used recently, but how recently who could say?

To my mind the fact that Gilbert possessed a thirty-eight caliber pistol was not a vital bit of evidence. Anybody might possess one.

But as Hunt said, it was not contradictory evidence, and, taken in conjunction with the other clues, it was of importance.

It seemed, also, to the authorities, that the motive imputed to Gilbert Crane was a strong one, and among those which most often lead to crime.

And so, on the day after Philip's funeral, Gilbert was arrested and held for trial.

Though everybody at Maxwell Hall was shocked and astounded at the news of his arrest, it affected them in different ways.

Mildred Leslie was frantic with grief and indignation. She declared that although the intruder might have worn Gilbert's coat, it was positively *not* Gilbert Crane himself. She vowed she would know Gilbert in any circumstances and in any disguise, and she was sure the man who shot her was a man with whom she was unacquainted, though he was apparently well known to Philip Maxwell.

She grew so excited as to become hysterical, and the doctor ordered that she should again be remanded to absolute seclusion, and allowed to see no one save the nurse and her sister.

Irene Gardiner seemed uncertain as to the justice of the arrest. She viewed the whole matter from a stern, judicial standpoint, and seemed unable to take a personal view of it. I felt sure that she had never liked Mr. Crane, and, feeling equally sure that Mildred was very much in love with him, I could easily understand the different attitudes of the two girls.

I was conscious myself of a growing regard for Irene, and while I could wish her a little softer and more sympathetic toward the prisoner, yet I couldn't help admiring her splendid appreciation of law and justice.

As for the Maxwells, Miss Miranda was so completely crushed already, that another unexpected blow could make but little difference in her demeanor. She said she could not believe Gilbert guilty, but that it was not for her to judge.

Dudley Maxwell showed a like philosophical spirit. After the first shock of surprise, he admitted that justice must have its way, wherever that way might lead; but he again begged us not to be misled by false or incomplete clues, and to prove beyond all doubt whatever we accepted as a fact.

I fully shared the old gentleman's spirit of caution, and kept a vigilant watch on Mr. Hunt's proceedings. But I was forced to admit the evidence all pointed one way, and my only hope lay in the fact that it was purely circumstantial evidence.

Resolved, if possible, to find some weak spot in Hunt's diagnosis of the case, I obtained permission to visit Gilbert Crane in his cell.

I felt a certain embarrassment as I entered, for I expected to see a despairing, broken-down man.

But I found I did not yet know Gilbert Crane. Instead of appearing dejected, he rose to greet me with an expectant look, and held out his hand.

"Will you take it?" he said impul-

sively, and eagerly. "You need not hesitate. It is the hand of an honest man. I am no more guilty of Philip's death than is Philip himself."

Quite aside from his words, there was honor and truth in the sound of his voice, and the look of his eye. I am very sensitive to deceit, and in every fiber of my being I felt at that moment that an honest man stood before me.

Acting in accordance with this conviction I grasped his hand heartily, and said:

"I am sure of it! I admit, and you must admit yourself, that the circumstantial evidence against you is pretty bad. But even before your denial I could not think you guilty, and now you have removed any lurking doubt I may have had."

"Thank you," said Crane simply. "And now I wonder if you can help me."

"It is what I want to do," I said, "but I fear I can do little. I have tried to get at some counter-evidence, or refutation of Hunt's theories, but so far I have been unable to do so."

"That's just the point," said Gilbert, in a practical way that seemed to show me a new side of this man. "I don't know myself what to tell you to do. The whole situation is so absurd. To me it is like lightning out of a clear sky.

"Here am I, arrested for the murder of a man who was one of my best friends. I didn't murder him, and yet circumstances are such that I cannot prove I did not."

"Since we are speaking frankly," I said, "will you tell me if you touched the pistol that Miss Leslie held?"

Gilbert looked at me gravely. "I will," he said. "I ought to have been more straightforward about that, but I didn't mention it, because I thought it of absolutely no importance.

"When I saw the bodies, I thought that Philip was dead, but that Miss Leslie was still living. I went nearer to look, and on an impulse I started to take the pistol from her hand. But I at once realized that it would be better to call Dr. Sheldon before I touched anything, and I did so."

"You didn't pause to pick up the bronze horse?" I asked.

"Certainly not," was the surprised reply.

"That horse and inkstand play a most mysterious part in the matter. But there must be some explanation for them, and we must find it."

"It will be made clear," said Gilbert, "if you do what I ask."

"I am more than willing to do your bidding," I said.

"Then send for Stone. He is a New York detective, and though I do not know him personally, I know enough about him to feel sure he can unravel this tangle as no one else can."

"How shall I find him?"

"I don't know his address. You will have to go or write to Jack Hemingway; he can tell you. Stone will be expensive, but this is no time for economy. Will you get him?"

"I certainly will," I replied, "and do all in my power to help him."

"Fleming Stone won't need much help," said Gilbert, not ungratefully, but decidedly, "he is a wizard. He can see right through anybody or anything."

"Then he is the man for us, and I'll go for him myself."

"Perhaps," said Crane, after a moment's thought, "it would be wiser not to let it be generally known that he is a celebrated detective."

"All right," I replied; "but the Maxwells will have to know it, because I want to put him up at the Hall. They'll be willing I know. Indeed, Mr. Maxwell has himself suggested that we should get a city detective down."

"I know it," said Gilbert," but I wish you'd act as if he were just a friend of yours who has a taste for detective work."

"Very well, I'll fix it that way then. But I hate to have you staying here, even for a few days."

"That can't be helped," said Gilbert, "and mustn't be considered. If you can only get Fleming Stone to come down here, I am as good as released."

Glad that he could view the situation in this cheerful manner, I went away, prepared to go at once on Gilbert's errand.

Miss Maxwell hospitably agreed to my proposal to burden her home with another visitor, but Mr. Maxwell did not seem quite pleased.

I couldn't help wondering if he thought that a more astute detective would only succeed in proving Gilbert's guilt more conclusively. He expressed himself as thinking it wise to let well enough alone, but as he made no definite protest against my going, I went to New York that very day in search of Fleming Stone.

I found him, and after some persuasion, I induced him to return to Hamilton with me in the interests of Gilbert Crane.

Never shall I forget the delight of my first long conversation with Fleming Stone.

As to personal appearance, he was a fine-looking man without being in any way remarkably handsome. He was large and well-formed, between forty and fifty years old, with iron-gray hair and a clear, healthy complexion.

His eyes were his chief charm and their attraction lay largely in their expression, and in their surrounding dark lashes and brows. Mr. Stone had a kindly smile, and his face in repose seemed to denote an even temper and a gracious disposition. He was possessed of great personal magnetism, and the liking which I felt for him the first moment I saw him, grew rapidly into admiration.

On the way down, at his request, I told him everything I knew about the Maxwell mystery. He was intensely interested; and I was secretly filled with joy when he expressed a decided approval of the methods I had used in discovering the red ink.

After I had told him every detail of the story, he changed the subject courteously, but very decidedly, and talked of other matters.

He was a brilliant conversationalist, which surprised me, for my mental picture of a great detective had always represented a most taciturn gentleman of sinister aspect.

When we reached Maxwell Hall it was nearly dinner time.

At the dinner table, Mr. Stone gave no hint of his profession either in manner or appearance. He was simply a well-bred, well-dressed gentleman, with irreproachable manners and a talent for interesting conversation.

I noticed that Mr. Maxwell looked at him with occasional furtive glances, and seemed to be mentally weighing the man's professional ability. Either he was satisfied with the result of his scrutiny, or the charm of Mr. Stone appealed to him, for he distinctly showed a liking for his new guest before the close of the meal.

As Mildred Leslie was not yet allowed to leave her room, the Whitings and Miss Gardiner made up the rest of the dinner guests. Edith Whiting and her husband were always to be depended on for a correct demeanor of any sort that the situation might require, but I was anxious to see what attitude Irene would assume toward the newcomer.

To my surprise she showed an intense interest in him. She seemed fairly eager lest she lose one word of his conversation, and her brilliant cheeks and shining eyes proved her vivid enjoyment of the occasion.

After dinner there was music. In addition to his other talents, Mr. Stone was a musician, and though he declined to play for us that night, he seemed thoroughly to enjoy the music we made for him.

Though quite content to leave matters in his hands, I couldn't help wondering when he intended to begin his detective work. But almost as if in answer to my thought, Mr. Stone remarked that if it met with the approval of them all, he would ask for a short but absolutely private interview with each one.

"I assume there are no secrets among us," he said, in his winning way, "and as I understand the situation, from what Mr. King has told me, I think we are all earnestly anxious to discover the person who took the life of Philip Maxwell."

This was said gravely, almost solemnly, and for a moment no one spoke.

Then Miss Maxwell said, in her gentle voice, "I trust I am not too revengeful in spirit, but I own I would be glad to see the slayer of my boy brought to justice."

Fleming Stone seemed to consider this an authority to proceed in his own way. Asking Miss Maxwell to go with him to the study, he escorted her from the room with an air of courtly grace that sat well upon him.

After not more than ten minutes, Mr.

Stone brought her back, and asked that he might next have a few words with Mr. Maxwell. When the two men had gone, Miss Maxwell gave voice to her admiration of her new guest and declared that she had never seen any one who gave her such favorable first impressions. We all agreed with her, and were enthusiastic in our praise of Fleming Stone as a man, whatever he might prove to be as a detective.

When Mr. Maxwell's short interview was finished, the others were taken in turn, and I was somewhat surprised to notice that Mr. Stone detained Tom Whiting far longer than any of the rest.

When he finally rejoined the group in the music-room, Fleming Stone said:

"These preliminary and perhaps not entirely necessary formalities are now over; and I think I have learned all that I need to know from you who are here. I can, of course, do nothing more to-night. To-morrow I must ask for a short talk with Miss Leslie, and after that I will see Mr. Crane."

But later that evening, Fleming Stone and I had a short conference in the library. I showed him the horse and the inkstand; described the exact position of Philip and Mildred when they were found; showed him where the bits of yellow down were discovered; and pointed out how the balcony floor had been marked by signs of an apparent scuffle.

Mr. Stone showed an unexpected interest in this last-named clue, though I confess it had seemed to me the least important of any. The balcony had since been swept, but there were still visible slight scratches in the long, sweeping marks I have described.

"I do not deduce from these scratches that there was a scuffle," said Mr. Stone. "That is, not in the sense of there having been a struggle between two persons. I see no reason for thinking that these marks were made by more than one pair of feet."

"Mr. Stone," I said, almost timidly, "perhaps I have no right to ask, but have your suspicions fallen in any direction as yet?"

Fleming Stone looked at me with an expression of sorrow in his deep gray eyes.

"I will tell you," he said, "for I know you will not betray my confidence, that I am positively certain who the criminal is; that it is not Gilbert Crane; and that it is a person upon whom I can lay my hand at any moment."

CHAPTER XI.

AT LAST.

THE next morning, although Fleming Stone was the same affable, courteous gentleman that he had been the night before, yet there was a shade more of seriousness in his manner. He spoke cheerfully, but it seemed to be with an effort, and I felt a vague sense of an impending disaster which might be worse than anything that had gone before.

After breakfast, Mr. Hunt came over and in the fateful library he was introduced to Fleming Stone.

I was present at their interview, and I was glad to see that the two men at once assumed cordial attitudes, and seemed prepared to work together harmoniously.

I think Hunt may have felt a natural professional jealousy of the city detective, but if so he showed no trace of it. Besides, Mr. Hunt was quite at the end of his resources—completely baffled by the case. If Gilbert Crane were not the guilty man, neither our local detective nor I myself knew where to look for the criminal.

Our discussion in the library did not last long, but it was exceedingly business-like and to the point. Without losing a shade of his graceful politeness, Fleming Stone showed also the quick working of his direct, forceful mind. He approved of all that Hunt and I had done. In a few words he commended our methods and accepted our results.

Then in silence he scrutinized the library. I think nothing in the room escaped the swift, thorough glances of those dark eyes. He rose to examine the rug, and the window casing, and then stepped out on the balcony to look at the footmarks of which I had told him. These latter were very faint, but with a large magnifying glass which he took from his pocket he examined them care-

fully and seemed satisfied with what he found.

Returning to the library, he took the waste-paper basket from under the desk and examined its contents. It was empty save for a few scraps of torn paper which I had thrown there myself the day before, but I saw his action with a sudden shock of dismay.

Neither Hunt nor I had thought of looking in the waste-basket, and though I had no definite hope of anything to be found there, it was a chance we ought not to have lost.

"Did Mr. Philip Maxwell ever write letters in this room?" asked Mr. Stone.

"Sometimes he did," I replied, "but more often he wrote down in his uncle's study."

"But he might have opened letters and read them here?"

"Yes; he used this desk a great deal."

"Where are the papers from the waste-baskets thrown?"

"I don't know, Mr. Stone; but the servants can tell you. Shall I call the maid who attends to the cleaning of this room?"

"I wish you would do so; then we will consider this consultation at an end. I have no wish to be unduly secret about my plans, but I must work uninterruptedly to-day, for I think developments will come thick and fast."

Mr. Hunt and I left the library, and I at once sent the maid to Mr. Stone as he had requested.

Less than fifteen minutes later, I saw him coming up from the cellar.

Seeing that I was alone, he said:

"I found a paper that is a most important link in our chain. Will you look at it a moment?"

He drew from his pocket a paper which had evidently been smoothed out after being much crumpled, and turned down the top of the sheet so that I did not see the address. "That is Mr. Philip Maxwell's handwriting, is it not?" he said.

"Yes," I replied, and in Phil's well-known characters I read:

> At last I have discovered the truth, and it has broken my heart. Even now I could not believe it, but your——

The writing stopped abruptly, and the letter had evidently been thrown aside unfinished. I restrained my intense curiosity, and did not ask to see the name at the head of the letter, but apparently Fleming Stone divined my thoughts.

"You will know only too soon," he said with that sad note in his voice that always thrilled me. "Now I am going to see Miss Leslie."

The doctor had permitted a short interview, and I learned afterward from Edith Whiting, that though Mildred had dreaded it, she was at once put at her ease by Mr. Stone's gentleness, and gave a brief but coherent account of the affair.

It was shortly before noon that I went for a walk with Irene Gardiner. As we went away, I saw Mr. Stone and Miss Miranda Maxwell in the music-room. Miss Maxwell was knitting some fleecy white-wool thing, and though she looked sad she was calm and unexcited. They seemed to be chatting cosily, and yet I felt sure that Fleming Stone was learning some details about Philip's life or character which he considered important.

I sighed to think that the net was certainly closing in around somebody, and the amazing part was that I had not the remotest idea toward whom Fleming Stone's suspicions were directed.

Miss Gardiner and I walked down the path to the river. As was inevitable, we talked only of the all-absorbing topic, and especially of Fleming Stone.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she exclaimed. "He is certainly the ideal detective."

"He is in his methods and his intellect," I said, "but his personal appearance is far from my preconceived notions of the regulation detective. I had always imagined them grim and sinister. This man is not only affable but positively sunny."

"He is fascinating!" declared Irene. "I have never met any one who seemed so attractive at first sight."

I quite agreed with her, but I was suddenly conscious of an absurd pang of jealousy. I was beginning to think that Irene Gardiner was pretty nearly necessary to the happiness of my life, and this avowed interest of hers in another man spurred me to a sudden conclusion that I cared for her very much indeed.

But this was no time or place to tell her so. At the Maxwells' invitation she

had decided to remain at the Hall with the Whitings until Mildred was able to travel to New York. Dr. Sheldon had said that the journey might safely be taken about the middle of the following week. I had made my plans to go at the same time, but in view of the rapid developments of the past two days I had unmade those plans and had made no others.

"Doesn't it seem strange," said Irene, "that you and I were talking about crime and criminals on the way down here last week? How little we thought that we were coming straight to a tragedy."

"It is a tragedy," I said, "and it may prove even more of a one than we yet know. Irene, if Gilbert didn't shoot Philip, have you any idea who did?"

"No," she said, looking at me with a candor in her eyes which left no room for doubt. "No, I have not the faintest idea. And yet I cannot believe Gilbert did it. I never liked him, but he does not seem to me capable of crime."

"And yet you hold the theory that, given an opportunity, we are all capable of crime."

"I know I said that," said Irene thoughtfully. "And it does seem true in theory, but it is hard to believe it in an individual case."

"I am sure Gilbert was not the criminal," I said, "but my certainty is based on something quite apart from the question of his capability in the way of committing crime.

"First, I was convinced of his innocence by his own attitude. A simple assertion might be false, but Gilbert's look and voice and manner told far more than his words. No criminal could have acted as he did.

"Even his scornful indifference to the fact of his arrest carried conviction of his innocence. But aside from all that, Fleming Stone says he knows that Gilbert is not guilty, and moreover he knows who is."

"He knows who is!" exclaimed Irene. "Who can it be?"

"I don't know; but I am sure from what Mr. Stone says it is some one whom we all know, and whose conviction will not only surprise but sadden us."

"Do you suppose," said Irene slowly, her great eyes wide with horror, "that it could have been Mildred after all?"

So this strange girl had dared to put into words a thought which I had tried hard to keep out of my mind.

"Don't!" said I, "I cannot think of it!"

"But her whole story about the intruder may have been a fabrication."

"Don't," I said again, "such remarks are unworthy of you—are unworthy of any woman."

"You always misunderstand me," said Irene impatiently. "I don't mean it the way you think I do. If I could see Mildred myself, I would talk to her in the same way. There is no harm in asking a frank question."

"Then," I said abruptly. "I will ask you one. What did you mean last Monday night when you told me that if I wouldn't interfere between Philip and Mildred you would take matters into your own hands?"

"I am not at all offended by your question," said Irene, looking me straight in the eyes, "neither do I assume that, because you ask it, you think that I meant anything desperate. I meant only what I said—that if you wouldn't advise Philip Maxwell not to be infatuated by such a foolish, artful little coquette as Mildred Leslie, then I would warn him myself."

"Since we are speaking frankly, I must admit that it would seem to me unwarranted interference on your part."

"I suppose I am peculiar," said Irene with a sigh, "but it doesn't seem that way to me. However, this is a question capable of much discussion. Suppose we leave its consideration for some other time, and return to the house now."

We walked back, chatting in a lighter vein, and somehow my heart sank when I saw Fleming Stone sitting alone on the veranda. It may have been imagination, or perhaps intuition, but as soon as I saw him, I felt a conviction that he had accomplished his work, and that we would soon know the result.

"I've been waiting for you," he said, as I went toward him. Irene went into the house, and Mr. Stone continued. "I have discovered everything, and I want you to be prepared for a sad revelation."

"Did you learn anything from your

interview with Miss Leslie?" I asked impulsively.

"Nothing more than I knew before I saw her," he replied, and his inscrutable face gave me no glimmer of information.

"It is almost one o'clock," he went on, "and after luncheon I will tell you all. I have asked Mr. Hunt to be present, and you will both please meet me in the library at two o'clock."

Somehow the sad foreboding that had taken possession of me made me glad of even an hour's further respite. I went to the luncheon table and made my bravest endeavor to seem my natural self. But a depressing cloud seemed to hang over us all.

Although each one tried to be cheerful, the efforts were far from being entirely successful. Even Mr. Maxwell seemed disturbed. Indeed, Miss Miranda was most placid of all, and I felt sure that was due to the calming effect of Mr. Stone's kindly consideration for her.

At last the meal was over, and, unable to keep up the strain any longer I went at once to the library, and awaited the others.

Mr. Hunt came first.

"Have you any idea of the disclosure Mr. Stone is about to make?" he said to me.

"No" said I, "I think I can truthfully say I haven't."

"He has asked Dr. Sheldon to be here by half past two," said Hunt.

Again my thoughts flew to Mildred Leslie, but I said nothing.

Then Fleming Stone came into the room. There was sadness still in his eyes, but he had again assumed that alert, official air which characterized his professional moments.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I came down here, as you know, an absolute stranger and entirely unprejudiced. I have listened to various accounts of the crime; I have weighed the evidence offered to me; I have made investigations on my own account and drawn my own deductions.

"I have considered the character and dispositions of all persons known to be in the vicinity of Philip Maxwell at the time of his death; have pondered over the possible motive for the crime; and, from the facts learned as a result of my investigation and consideration, I have discovered the murderer.

"Gentlemen, Philip Maxwell was shot by his uncle, Mr. Dudley Maxwell!"

CHAPTER XII.

FROM THE LIPS OF THE DYING.

THERE was nothing to be said. I was silent, because I felt as if the earth had suddenly given way beneath me, and all was chaos. Not for a moment did I doubt Fleming Stone's statement, for his words compelled conviction.

But in the confused mass of sudden thoughts that surged through my brain, I seemed to see clearly nothing but Miss Miranda's placid face, and I cried out involuntarily:

"Don't let his sister know!"

Hunt sat like a man stunned. His expression was positively vacant, and I think he was trying to realize what Mr. Stone's announcement meant.

"It is terrible, I know," said Fleming Stone, "and I quite appreciate the shock it must be to you. But inexorable justice demands that we proceed without faltering.

"I think that, without telling you of the various steps which led me to this conclusion, I can best prove to you that it is the true one by asking you to go with me while I lay the facts before Mr. Maxwell. I think his reception of what I have to say, and the visible effect of my accusations upon him, will prove to you beyond any possible doubt his connection with the crime. Indeed, from what I know of the man I am disposed to think he will make full confession of his guilt."

Fleming Stone's words sounded to me like a voice heard in a dream; and even my own voice sounded strange and unreal, as I murmured: "It will kill him. He has heart disease."

"I know it," said Fleming Stone, "and I, too, fear the effect upon him. For that reason I have asked Dr. Sheldon to be present."

When Dr. Sheldon arrived, he came directly to us in the library, and Fleming Stone told him in a few words of the ordeal we had to undergo.

The four of us then went down to Mr. Maxwell's study. We found him there

alone. We all went in, and Fleming Stone closed the door. He stood for a moment looking directly at Mr. Maxwell, and his deep eyes were filled with a great compassion.

"Mr. Maxwell," he said—and his voice though quiet was most impressive—"we have come to tell you that we have discovered that Philip Maxwell died by your hand."

If any of us had doubted Dudley Maxwell's guilt—and I think some of us had—all possibility of doubt was at once removed.

If ever I saw a face on which confession was stamped as plainly as on a printed page, it was Dudley Maxwell's face at that moment. Instinctively, I turned away, but almost immediately I heard Mr. Maxwell gasp, and I knew that Fleming Stone's expectations had been verified, and that Mr. Maxwell's heart had not been able to stand the shock.

Dr. Sheldon sprang to his side, and with the assistance of the others laid the unconscious man on the couch.

"He is not dead," said Dr. Sheldon, after a few moments. "And he will soon rally from this; but I feel sure it is a fatal attack. I think he cannot live more than a few hours."

As the doctor had surmised, Mr. Maxwell soon rallied and spoke:

"Don't let Miranda know," he said, "don't *ever* let Miranda know."

Fleming Stone stepped forward.

"Mr. Maxwell," he said, "if you will make a full confession in the presence of these gentlemen, I will promise you on my honor that I will use every endeavor to keep the knowledge of your guilt from your sister."

"I will not only assist Mr. Stone in his endeavor," said Dr. Sheldon, "but I think I can safely promise that Miss Miranda shall never learn the secret. You are very ill, Mr. Maxwell, and whatever you wish to say must be said at once."

"I am ready," said Dudley Maxwell, and though his voice was faint, and though he seemed to realize his own fearful position, yet his manner expressed a certain sense of relief which I believed to be due to the relaxation of the tension of fear he had been under so long.

"I am ready," he said again, "and, to make clear to you the motive for my deed, I must begin my story many years back."

"But you must make it brief," said Dr. Sheldon. "I cannot allow you to talk long at this time."

"There will not be any other time," said Mr. Maxwell quietly.

I could not help marveling at this strange man, whose wonderful power of self-control did not desert him in this moment of mental and physical extremity.

Mr. Maxwell proceeded, and Fleming Stone took stenographic notes of his statement.

"Twenty-five years ago I lived in California and so did my brother John. Though not partners, our business interests were closely united in many ways. My brother married, and, about a year after Philip's birth, his wife died.

"Five years later, John Maxwell died, and left the whole of his large fortune with me in trust for Philip. Although it was supposed at that time that my own fortune was as large or larger than John's, the reverse was true. I had lost much money in unfortunate speculation, and it was to my surprise that I discovered the large amount of money my brother had left behind him.

"I used this money to make good my losses, trusting to replace it with further gains of my own before Philip should come of age. I was always a close-mouthed man, and neither Miranda nor my other sister, Hannah, knew anything about John's money.

"I came East to live, and after some years the lawyer who was the only one besides myself who knew the circumstances died. Having by this time become a well-known and respected citizen of Hamilton, being president of the bank, and holding, or having held, various public offices, my pride and ambition rebelled at giving up my entire fortune to Philip.

"But it would have taken all my available assets to make up the sum entrusted to me by the boy's father. For many years I struggled with this temptation, and at last, when Philip was twenty-one, I succumbed.

"On his twenty-first birthday, instead of telling him the truth, I offered him

a permanent home at Maxwell Hall and agreed to support him indulgently and even extravagantly."

Here, at the very climax of the recital, Mr. Maxwell sank back upon the couch, breathless and exhausted. But after a moment's rest he continued:

"We lived happily enough for about three years—in fact, until one day about a fortnight ago.

"That morning I was here in my study and had spread out before me the principal papers relating to the trust I had held for Philip.

"Suddenly I was called to the telephone and, thinking to return in a minute, left the papers on my desk. But I was detained at the telephone much longer than I anticipated, and, when I returned, although there was nobody in sight, it seemed to me the papers had been disturbed.

"They were tossed about, and I felt a presentiment that Philip had been in there, and had read them. It would have been no breach of honor on his part, for he had always been allowed free access to my study and to my business papers.

"From that time on Philip was a changed man. His manner toward me confirmed my suspicion that he had discovered my guilt. No mention was made of the subject between us, but for more than a week Philip continued to act like a man crushed by a sudden disaster.

"Last Monday he wrote a letter to me in which he told me that he had discovered the truth, and that he felt he was entitled to an explanation. This explanation I knew I could not give, nor was I willing to face my nephew's well-deserved condemnation and the exposure of my treachery to the public.

"On Monday then, after reading Philip's letter, I determined that I would take my own life, as being a cowardly but final solution of my difficulties.

"Monday evening I sat in my study and decided that the time had come. I had placed my pistol in my pocket, and had intended to go up to my own room and there expiate my guilt toward my brother and his son.

"At this moment, Mr. King chanced to come into my study, and mentioned that Philip and Mildred were in the library. This strengthened my purpose, for I felt sure that Philip was even then telling Miss Leslie that he was in reality a rich man.

"Mr. King went on through the billiard-room and across the hall to the music-room. I left the study at once, and saw Mr. King enter the music-room door.

"As I crossed the back part of the hall, I felt an impulse to look once more on Philip's face. I knew I could step out on the balcony from the hall window and look in at the library window unobserved.

"It has always been my habit when going out for a moment into the night air to catch up any coat from the hat-stand and throw it around me. I did this mechanically, and it chanced to be Gilbert Crane's automobile coat.

"I went up the back stairs, putting the coat on as I went. Instinctively putting my hands into the pockets, I felt there the cap and goggles.

"It was then that the evil impulse seized me. I saw my beautiful home with its rich appointments, its lights, and its flowers; I heard the gay music and laughter; and like a flash it came to me that Philip should be the one to give up all that, and not I.

"I realized, as by an inspiration, that the goggles and a turned-up coat-collar would be ample disguise, and I thought the crime would be attributed to an outside marauder.

"The rest you know. Philip recognized me. But Miss Leslie did not. That is all."

Mr. Maxwell fell back, and Dr. Sheldon, thinking the end had come, went toward him.

But Fleming Stone, the inexorable, leaned forward, and said distinctly to Mr. Maxwell: "Wait—did you refill the inkstand?"

"Yes," said Mr. Maxwell, with a sudden revival of strength, "yes. I returned to the room late that night, picked up the inkstand, washed it, refilled it, and replaced it. The bronze horse I picked up and replaced before leaving the room the first time."

I gazed at Dudley Maxwell wonderingly. And yet, for a man who could live the life he had lived, who could conduct himself as he had during the past

week, it was not strange that he was able thus, in the face of death, calmly to relate these details of his own crime.

"One more thing," said Mr. Stone. "Did you scrape your foot around on the balcony to efface a possible footprint?"

"Yes; I knew the dust was thick there, and I wished to eliminate all traces."

Here Mr. Maxwell's strength seemed to leave him all at once. On the verge of total collapse, he said again, "Don't let Miranda know"—and then sank into unconsciousness.

"He will probably not rally again," said Dr. Sheldon. "I think his sister should be notified at once of his illness. But we shall all agree that she must not know of his crime."

"Shall I call her?" I volunteered, as no one else moved to do so.

"Yes," said Dr. Sheldon. "She will be startled, but it will not be entirely unexpected. I have warned her for years that the end would come like this."

In justice to the innocent, Fleming Stone and I went at once to Inspector Davis to ask that Gilbert Crane be released. The order for release was sent immediately, and at last we were free to ask Fleming Stone a few questions.

"How did you do it?" cried Hunt, in his abrupt way.

"How did you do it so soon?" cried I, no less curious.

"It was not difficult," said Fleming Stone, in that direct way of his, which was not over-modest, but simply truthful. "Mr. King's statement, which was the first one I heard, showed me that, although Mr. Crane's alibi from ten o'clock till half past ten depended entirely upon his own uncorroborated word, yet Mr. Maxwell's alibi was equally without verification.

"Mr. King saw Mr. Maxwell in his study at ten o'clock. He was found there again some time after ten-thirty. This proved nothing but the opportunity. Then all the evidence regarding the coat, the clues found in the library, and elsewhere, would apply to him as well as to Crane. It remained, however, to find what motive, if any, could have impelled Dudley Maxwell to the deed.

"I had not talked with him ten minutes before I concluded that he was a man with a secret. Miss Maxwell supplied a clue when she told me what she knew of Philip's early history.

"Another clue was the crumpled letter found among the waste paper. This was addressed to Dudley Maxwell, and was probably begun and discarded for the one which Philip wrote and sent to his uncle.

"The fact that the inkstand had been refilled and replaced argued some one familiar with the library; even Gilbert Crane would not be apt to know where the supply of red ink was kept. Everything pointed in one direction.

"But perhaps the most convincing clue was given to me last evening by Mr. Maxwell himself. You remember, Mr. King, that I took each member of the household to the study separately. When I interviewed Mr. Maxwell there, I took care not to alarm him, but rather to put him at his ease as much as possible.

"Noticing a well-worn foot-rest, I felt sure that it was his habit to sit with his feet up on it. In hopes of his taking this position, I asked him to show me just how he was sitting when the news of the crime was brought to him.

"As I surmised, he sat dwon in his big armchair and put his feet upon the foot-rest. This gave me an opportunity to examine the soles of his shoes, and I discovered on one of them a large stain of a dull, purplish red. The stain made by red ink is indelible and of a peculiar tinge, so that I felt sure this was the man at whom the inkstand had been thrown, and who had unknowingly stepped upon a wet spot of red ink.

"Owing to the awkward goggles which he wore, and, too, the excitement of the moment, he probably did not notice the ink at all. When he returned later, the spots had sunk into the crimson rug, and partly dried. The shoes were light house-shoes, and probably he did not wear them out of doors, for dampness or hard wear would have tended to obliterate the stain.

"As it was, the color could plainly be seen. I am sure that a chemical test would prove it to be a stain of red ink."

Now my story is all told—all but a little.

Mr. Maxwell died that night, and Dr. Sheldon at once took Miss Miranda to his own home, and kept her there, safe-

ly out of the reach of gossip, until she went out to Colorado to live with her sister. Her nerves were shattered, and she begged so piteously that she might not be obliged to enter the door of Maxwell Hall again, that her wishes were willingly respected. The rest of us remained at Maxwell Hall until the sister, Hannah, came to take charge of affairs, and to take Miss Miranda home with her.

"It is a case," I said to Irene Gardiner, "which proves your theory—the murder of Philip Maxwell was brought about solely by opportunity.

"My chance remark to Mr. Maxwell that the young people were in the library; the inadvertent snatching up of Gilbert's coat; the fact that the goggles and cap were in the pocket; the fact that Philip's uncle had a weapon with him—all these things form tiny links in a strong chain of opportunity."

"But the evil impulse must have been in his heart, or he would never have taken advantage of this opportunity," said Irene, unconsciously refuting a theory she had herself advanced.

"I would rather not think," said Fleming Stone, in his sweet, serious voice, "that opportunity creates a sinner, or even that it creates an evil impulse. I would rather believe—and I do believe—that opportunity only warms into action an evil impulse that is lying dormant; and I do not believe that dormant evil impulse is in everybody."

(The End.)

LIKE A WOMAN.

By John G. Neihardt.

OF a heroine who did the unexpected thing for reasons that no man dare try to explain.

WITH chin resting in her hands and her elbows upon the massive sill, Pelagie sat, gazing blankly out of an upper window of old Fort Union.

Framed in the log embrasures of the window, this picture would have seemed paradoxical to a thoughful observer looking up to it from beyond the encircling stockades, through which a half dozen light cannon frowned upon possible invasion.

For upon this girl's face was written in that mystic but unmistakable characteery, the pride of race and the superiority of culture; and all about her was the rugged savagery of the Upper Missouri River country in the forties.

Pelagie gazed out across the fort enclosure and over the stockades into the far reaches of the prairie, growing hourly dimmer with the increasing scurry of snow.

It was February, and for days a soft wind of premature spring had blown up from the south; a "Judas wind," it was called, for its soft voice was the voice of treachery.

To-day the wind had veered slowly into the northwest; and now, long, sinuous streamers of powdery snow crawled in and out among the bunches of brown grass, making a soft, purring sound.

At intervals the face of the girl frowned spasmodically, the black eyes flashed under their long lashes, and the trembling of an anxious mind sent wrinkles rippling over the white serenity of her low, broad forehead.

Snatches of a conversation she had overheard that afternoon were running through her brain: "Ten miles below—Dick Gray—horse thief—going to blow frozen hell to-night—can't get away—take him in the morning, if the storm dies in the night—hanging too good for him—take three men along—apt to make a fight."

Dick Gray!

The girl's strong, shapely jaw drooped nervelessly and trembled; her lips quivered; a tear ran down her cheek.

She buried her face in her arms upon

the window ledge, and conjured up in the gloom of her thoughts the image of a man with blue eyes and the engaging smile of a boy; a man of feminine exterior, with the manners of a prince, the bearing of a hero, the dress of a fop; a man about whom seemed to go the halo of many adventures, and yet over whom rumor had thrown a thin fog of cowardice and treachery.

When Pelagie had made the long river voyage to Union from New Orleans, a heartache had traveled with her; for her mother had just died, and her future was cast in desolate places at the side of her father, the burgess of Fort Union.

And he of the blue eyes that looked into hers frankly and with such sympathy—he had somehow driven away the heartache. And now—Pelagie sobbed at the thought—Dick Gray, the free-trader, he whom the whole American Fur Company could not daunt, would hang to-morrow—a thief!

Had not her father, Jules Dauphin, the burgess, said it? Had she not overheard it by chance? And Jules Dauphin was king of the Upper Missouri; he was the proconsul of the Fur-Emperor. It would be done.

In all that country, "Dauphin" meant "inexorable." He was as real and as little to be thwarted as the elements. Therefore, Pelagie would not throw herself before him and implore. No man checks the coming of the winter or the blizzard or the tempest with a prayer.

A wilder gust of wind boomed about the house. Its boisterous shout shook Pelagie from her bitter musings. She sprang to her feet and peered again into the ever-contracting circle of day.

The sight thrilled her. A strange warmth ran through her limbs as she watched the magnificent charging of the spindrifts of snow into the southeast. There was a something heroic and martial in it all—this insane rush of phantom cavalry!

Into the soft dark eyes, in which the girl and the woman still struggled, leaped the glare of the wounded tigress. She sobbed no more.

The epic cry of the increasing storm and the sharp edge of anguish had swept away the veneer of culture; and now it was the woman of the Franks who stared into the storm—the mate-woman of the men of Clovis!

It was only ten miles! She could follow the river and easily reach the log cabin on the bluff where Gray kept his independent trading post. She would go! Was she not strong? Could she not pierce the blizzard?

Pelagie was eighteen.

The creeping of a shadow through the white tempest heralded the approach of night. It was already dusky. Pelagie slipped out cautiously into the long hall where the garments of the engagés hung.

She selected mittens, a coat of fur, a pair of trousers, and took from a rack a loaded revolver. Then she returned to her room and dressed in the fur garments. Pelagie was tall.

Going again to the window, she opened it and peered down. A drop of ten or twelve feet would put her in the fort enclosure, and at the bottom was a snow drift. She waited until the dusk had deepened; then, balancing herself upon the ledge, she closed the window behind her, and dropped.

Struggling out of the drift, she cautiously approached the stockade, and with a great effort clambered up the big supporting logs. She was lithe and strong; in a moment more she had dropped from the stockade, and stood in the open prairie.

She listened a moment, but heard nothing save the bawling of the wind and the hissing flight of snow. The storm-prisoned inmates of the fort had not seen.

When she reached the river she felt the great joy of triumph. The ice was swept clear of snow. A three hours' struggle at most, and her battle would be ended.

She set her face down river to the southeast and proceeded at a nervous, halting trot.

Snatches of the conversation she had overheard ran through her brain in a jumbled drone. Distorted images of a man's face flashed through her thoughts; now it smiled, and the blue eyes were soft and full of love; now on a sudden it writhed with pain; it grew purple; it twitched; it became a hideous thing transfigured with the death leer. Then again it changed, and smiled.

Faster and faster Pelagie fled. The strong wind pushed her from behind. She became dimly conscious of a tightening at her throat, sharp shoots of pain in her chest. But she ran on.

Slipping on a sheet of wind-swept ice, she fell, and struggling to her knees, for a moment she wondered dazedly where she was. Then, in a flood, she saw it all in its terrible meaning. She had been proceeding at a breathless run.

Exhausted for the moment, she sobbed. It was rapidly growing darker; she was even now at a considerable distance from the fort. What would become of her amid the terrors of storm and darkness?

Intangible horrors peered in through the sibilant snow-maze upon her.

"—take him in the morning——"

The horrors fled howling down the mad wind!

With the passing of her subconscious state, the sullen booming of the blizzard in the bluffs came as an unexpected cry out of a stillness.

It was the challenge—the ultimatum of the elements to the enemy, a girl with the heartache! Pelagie heard and understood. She would battle with giants that night; white, pitiless giants; huge, volatile, writhing, hissing, stinging, biting giants!

Out of the depths of the woman's soul arose the reserve of ancient strength. The warmth came back. She feared no more. She arose, tottered, floundered for a moment in the terrific gale, then, turning her back to the wind, set her teeth and pushed on. The contemplation of the possible odds thrilled her now..

A strange, uneven battle had begun. Titan blows fell upon the pigmy. Against dumb force was pitted the tense nerve of the human thoroughbred. Yet there was no eye to look into the narrow zone of battle, hemmed with the writhing fabric of the storm.

"Have to keep to the river—keep to the river," muttered Pelagie; "to the river—the river."

The words went droning in her brain. She struggled on for some time—hours? —days? She did not know. In a blizzard even the sense of time is lost.

Suddenly she was conscious of a stinging sensation on the left cheek. She had been walking with her left side to the wind, whereas the wind blew down the river.

Thereat she turned and walked with her right cheek to the wind until, with a thrill of joy, her feet felt the ice.

"Keep my back to the wind—back to the wind—the wind."

She trudged on, stepping in time to the insistent drone. "Back to the wind —the wind—*Oh!*"

She had run against a tree!

In a hopeless daze she leaned against it, trying to solve the riddle of her whereabouts. It came in a flash.

Trees! They were only on the right bank; she had strayed from the river to the right. But where was she? The question terrified her.

"I'm lost—I'm lost—lost," she muttered. "Lost—lost—lost." She went on, keeping step to the death march that the hideous words sang.

Suddenly the writhing darkness ahead of her was illumined, and in the midst of the illumination was a smiling face.

"Dick! Dick!" cried Pelagie.

The light and the vision were swirled away into the dizzy darkness. Reality came upon Pelagie as a shout to one who is asleep. She was going to Dick—to save him!

Now for the first time, the buffeting of the storm maddened her. A great anger shook her. With teeth set, she strode more rapidly into the storm. The rage of a fighter against odds was in her heart.

She struck out savagely at the storm with her little clenched fists. She wished the wind would materialize into a living beast that she might set her teeth in its neck!

But a blizzard is a bodiless anger—an enemy without nerves. A blizzard is the madness of the air. God wished to demonstrate to mankind the awful tragedy of unbridled passions, and His precept was the blizzard.

Pelagie began to stumble and fall frequently. Once she fell upon her face and was half persuaded to lie still. But the wind's shout would not let her sleep.

"Dick Gray!—Dick Gray!—Gray—Gr-a-a-ay!" it shouted and roared and shrieked, until she arose and pushed on, with every step a fight against stupor. She struck no more trees, and was dimly

conscious of a constant struggle to keep her back to the wind.

But she wanted to lie down and sleep; and the wind was so noisy. Why would it not be quiet? All about her were beds of down, soft, warm beds made for her.

But the wind went on shouting about Dick; and she floundered on.

Despair began to creep icily through her veins. There is a terrible strength for endurance in despair. Hope avails to goad the limbs only until the limbs rebel; then it vanishes, and despair fights defeat. It is the difference between the stimulant and the narcotic.

A time came when even the sense of despair left Pelagie. She felt nothing. She was merely a thought blown down the darkness on a pitiless wind—and that thought was about Dick Gray.

At last she was aroused from her apathy. With characteristic caprice the storm had lulled, and a wild moon broke in upon the warring night. She saw the huge spectral shoulders of the bluffs, reared aloft in mystic silhouette against the dusk.

Her feet had kept the river.

II

At midnight Gray, the independent trader, asleep in his cabin on the bluff, was suddenly aroused.

He listened, yawned, and prepared to return to sleep, when the cry came again. Some one was at the door.

"Who's there?" he called.

An incoherent moaning answered him. Leaping out of bed and slipping on his trousers, he lighted a candle, grasped a gun from a chair at his bedside, and approached the door.

"Who is it?"

"I."

The answer was faint and too thin for the voice of a man. Gray cocked his gun, unfastened the door and threw it open. A fur-clad form fell full length upon the floor before him.

"Pelagie!" cried Gray.

The girl raised her face, about which her storm-tossed hair tumbled in black masses.

"O—Dick—they're—coming!"

With a sigh her head fell nervelessly upon the floor. The man closed the door and carried her nearer the box-stove, where a log fire smoldered. After a time Pelagie revived and struggling to her knees, laid her head upon the man's shoulder. She began to cry.

"O Dick, why did you do it? They're going to hang you. You must fly—now! Take your horse and fly! O, why did you do it?"

"Why, my pretty creature," said the man, attempting to put the caress into his trembling voice, "I have done nothing. Did you come all the way from Union to-night? You're a brave girl, but I've—done—nothing."

Across his face an ashen pallor crept. He bent his head and kissed her on the cheek.

She sprang to her feet and leaped back, her haggard eyes glaring, her hands clenched.

"You *horse thief!*" she shrieked. "I could have forgiven you that; but you're a *liar, too!* A liar to *me!*"

"Pelagie, Pelagie," said the man wheedlingly; "the trip has done you up." He stepped toward her with arms outstretched.

"Stop there, Mr. Gray!" hissed Pelagie, taking the revolver from the pocket of her fur coat. "*I'm a Dauphin!* My cheek burns where a liar has kissed it! Get your horse and go! You have stolen; my father said it, and he is a Dauphin. Get your horse!"

Erect and trembling in the grip of her rage, she was once again the woman who had fought the storm.

"I will stay and fight!"

"*You?*" A haughty sneer lifted the thin upper lip of the girl.

Her exhausted body, sustained with her passion, swayed. And yet in the haggard face, the sunken eyes, there was that which made the man cower.

"If you stay, you won't live to fight," said the girl. She cocked the revolver.

Slowly the man put on his fur robes, went to the door falteringly; then said with a quavering voice: "*Are* they coming to hang me, Pelagie?"

The girl's face softened, and tears ran down her cheeks. The mother that is in all women for all men pitied this big boy whose lips quivered as he spoke.

"O Dick! Yes! It's because I love you, Dick, that I want you to go."

She had lowered her weapon, and ap-

proaching the man, she reached up and kissed his trembling lips.

"Leave me the rifles and ammunition, Dick; but go. Oh, ride fast and far!"

With a sob the man went out into the night. She closed the door and fell upon her face, crying softly. After a time the sound of a horse's hoofs aroused her. She threw open the door. A voice came in out of the night:

"I'm—I'm sorry I did it. You're a brave girl; and I—did—do it, Pelagie. Good-by."

She stood at the door until the chug of galloping hoofs died away in the night, and the dull moaning of the abating storm was the only sound.

When she closed and barred the door, her exhaustion came upon her like a sickness. She reeled to a chair by the box-stove.

"I can't give up yet!" she moaned, rocking herself to and fro; "I mustn't give up! I mustn't!"

III.

THE storm had died in the night.

In the light of the bitter dawn four horsemen appeared upon the bluffs to the north, looming clear-cut and huge against the sky.

When they came in sight of Gray's post, perched upon the bluffs with steep declivities upon three sides and on the other the great, white waste, they drew rein and parleyed awhile, their breath making a glinting cloud about them.

A thin streamer of smoke arose from the cabin's chimney, mounting a lazy spiral into the storm-cleared air. It seemed that the inhabitant must still be asleep. The four men spurred their horses and approached the unprotected side of the cabin at a gallop.

Suddenly a puff of smoke issued from between the logs of the cabin; there was the sharp crack of a rifle and a spray of snow near the horsemen, together with the spiteful *spink* and snarl of a bullet.

The four dismounted.

"Oh, he's up and doin', is he?" said the leader.

One man led the horses to a safe distance and tied them to a scrub oak. The others sought cover behind a frozen hillock and returned the fire.

A long silence followed.

"Seems like we must've got in through the chinks that time," remarked one of the besiegers. "Let's make a rush in."

They began creeping forward on hands and knees, when another spurt of smoke issued from the cabin, and a spray of snow sprinkled over the advancing line. They crept back to cover.

The steep declivities of the bluff on three sides made all attack impossible except from in front. Gray had taken advantage of the best of fortifications—those of Nature.

So the posse settled down for a siege.

It was late in the afternoon when the firing was no longer returned from the cabin. Volley after volley was let loose into the heavy logs without answer.

But the posse thought best to wait until the fall of night. The silence might be merely a ruse.

When the night came at last, the four made a rush for the cabin. There was no resistance. With a small log for a battering ram they burst in the door.

The interior was dark and soundless. A light was struck, and in the sudden flare they saw, lying upon her back, with a rifle clutched in her hands, a woman.

Her cheeks and eyes were sunken and her face was begrimed with powder smoke.

"The devil!" gasped the leader. "If it ain't Ma'm'selle Pelagie!"

One rummaged about for a candle and lit it. The leader, breathless, and with a sickening of the heart, felt the hands of the girl; they were warm. He sought for bullet wounds; there were none. She breathed with the deep, regular breathing of the utterly exhausted.

Disturbed by the touch of the man, Pelagie tossed her head about and moaned.

"Ride fast, Dick," she mumbled; "I'm holding them off for you; ride fast."

Her words became an incoherent muttering. The four stood staring.

"Damn me, if that ain't jest like a woman!" said the leader. "Jim, give me a lift with ma'm'selle; and you, Bill, open the winder a wee mite; this cussed powder smoke smarts my eyes."

And to clinch the statement he rubbed a horny hand across the affected members.

THE VENGEANCE OF HONORAT.

By Mary K. Ford.

A TYPICAL French tragedy translated from the works of Stanislaus Meunier.

IT was easy to see that he was mad, although the more charitable of his neighbors called him "original." He occupied two small rooms in the sixth story of an obscure lodging-house, but spent little time there, being apparently dominated by an unconquerable desire for motion.

He passed all his days out of doors, regardless of rain or heat. In the morning he would join the stream of workers hastening to their places of business; during the day he would visit the Bourse or wander through the most crowded of the city streets; and at night he formed one of the throng of tired workmen returning to their homes.

But his demeanor was most eccentric when he visited the Jardin des Plantes, a spot which seemed to draw him as by a cord. Once inside the gates he hurried along until he reached the marvelous collection of animals for which the place is noted.

The great hall where the reptiles are kept seemed to be his goal, but once there he hurried through it with averted eyes, not stopping until he was once more outside, when he would draw from his pocket a map of Africa, look up some place upon it, and then furtively fold it up, with a look of alarm, as if he had allowed his secret to escape.

Just over the Hall of the Reptiles were some rooms occupied by an old professor named Honorat Meuris, who, in spite of his important books on "The Pterosaurus, the New Lizard of Malacca," "The Structure of the Teeth of the Great Crocodile of the Nile," and other works, had never been taken quite seriously.

His critics considered that he occupied himself too much with what was then called animal magnetism; that he made too many experiments on hysterical people and somnambulists; and that he rather vulgarized by his lectures certain discoveries whose value was still uncertain.

He had, however, achieved some astonishing results from his experiments, and was one of the first to recognize the phenomenon of suggestion and the marvelous power of one mind over another.

Honorat Meuris was a man who had been rendered gloomy and morbid by the death of his best friend. Born in a hospital and brought up at the public expense, Honorat had been a servant.

His master, Raymond Sylvestre, a man of large mind and excellent heart, was struck by his intelligence and undertook his education, in which he was so successful that later the two made extended investigations, published the result of their researches, and lived together in perfect community of thought and feeling.

Unfortunately it occurred to Sylvestre to look beyond his dead specimens to the great world of living animals, and from that day his laboratory seemed narrow as a grave.

"Our world is so small," he said, "that it is scandalous not to know it thoroughly. Come with me, Honorat. We will visit those rivers where the alligators live, where dangerous serpents are found, and we will study their habits from life. Have you not lately felt, as I have, a restless desire to see the world?"

It was true, but Meuris would not acknowledge it, for he knew that they could not both be absent from their posts at the same time.

Raymond Sylvestre began by making the tour of the world, and at the end of six months returned with a strong desire for further travel. Although he had brought back immense collections, he cared no more for natural history. He now resolved to tread where none

of his race had ever trod before, and Honorat encouraged him, divining in him the spirit of the explorer.

After his departure Raymond wrote from Naples, from Cairo, and from Khartoum. In this last letter he said he had met a Frenchman called Adrien Bruneau, with whom he intended exploring the great African lakes.

Then complete silence ensued. Honorat wrote, made inquiries in Egypt and, obtaining no information, started himself for the banks of the Nile.

Displaying all the sagacity of a trained mind, using methods as scientific as if it were a question of restoring an extinct animal, he at last came upon traces of his friend, and reached the dwelling-place of one of the black tribes near the source of the river, where he obtained only too many proofs of his death. The chief was dressed in Sylvestre's overcoat and wore about his neck one of the explorer's socks, the mark on which was still visible.

These savages did not hesitate to confess that, acting upon the advice of another white man, his companion, they had thrown the traveler into the river, where he had been devoured by crocodiles.

Honorat at once thought of Adrien Bruneau, but the savages could give no description of the assassin. In vain he sought for him in Egypt and in Europe, but for the past ten years not a day had passed without Honorat's thinking of the punishment to be meted out to Bruneau when he should be found.

This was the secret of his studies in hypnotism. Through it he hoped to discover hidden things, and to this idea he clung, in spite of the unsatisfactory replies given by the different mediums whom he had consulted.

Meuris went often to La Salpetrière, where he followed Charcot's experiments and became interested in all forms of mental eccentricity. When he saw the pale and haggard person wandering about the menagerie, he began to speculate as to his reason for coming so often.

"Had Raymond Sylvestre's assassin lost his mind?" he wondered—"a thing which often happens after a crime has been committed; and the criminal would be sure to visit the former haunts of his victim. This man consults a map. Perhaps he thinks himself still traveling, and he probably keeps near the reptiles because they recall the country of his thoughts."

Once having formulated this theory, Honorat was haunted by it. The terrible suspicion reacted upon himself and he passed the afternoon at the window, waiting until the stranger should reappear. When he saw him coming, he grew pale, made a great mental effort, and, fixing his eyes upon him, said aloud as if he could have been heard:

"Stop before those animals at which you really desire to look!"

The lunatic stopped hesitatingly.

"Now come here!" continued Honorat.

The man approached the door.

The perspiration broke out on Honorat's forehead. Then he stamped his foot with an oath, and the lunatic, hurrying off, disappeared down one of the alleys.

"He will come back," said Honorat, and gave orders that the man should be admitted whenever he came and allowed to wander about without perceiving that he was watched.

A week later the stranger returned and went straight to the reptile-house.

It was a sultry day, and the low-hanging clouds made a curious light. Outside, the birds uttered shrill cries, while even inside the menagerie the air felt the electric disturbances. A deep silence pervaded the hall, for the visitor made no more noise than a shadow, and the great reptiles disported themselves as though alone.

In a large stone basin surrounded by a curved iron railing were the crocodiles, enormous ones from the Nile, and a smaller species from the Mississippi, their jaws bristling with ferocious teeth.

The hour for closing was at hand when, warned by the sound of keys turning, the man stealthily opened a door leading into the lecture-room and hid himself in a closet there. The attendant did not enter this room, but left by another door which he carefully closed.

The sky became more clouded and the setting sun sent level rays of glory from behind the clouds. The crocodiles were motionless.

Slowly the brilliant hues of the sunset paled and the shadows lengthened. A storm was impending and faint flashes of heat lightning were visible. The crocodiles began to move and there were blue lights to be seen in their yellow eyeballs.

Very soon flashes of lightning were tearing the heavens. There were moments of darkness, during which one heard torrents of rain falling, and then seconds of blinding light, followed by crashes of thunder which drowned the uproar made by the cries of the frightened animals.

At this moment the lunatic entered the hall, approached the railing, and, leaning over it, contemplated the crocodiles.

Suddenly a steady light gleamed through the leaves of the palm-tree upon the troubled water in the basin. The lunatic, perceiving near him a little man with a lantern, uttered a cry which seemed to exasperate the crocodiles, for they dashed their heads against the railing, and one of them caught the skin of its neck on one of the points, so that its muzzle was above the guard.

The little man placed his light upon the ground, took from the corner a stick with which he pushed the animal back into the water, and bestowed a few blows upon the others.

The lunatic noticed that he had a hard look. Gold spectacles added a glitter to his small but piercing eyes. The crocodiles were frightened and grew quiet.

"Ah!" he said: "How came you to be shut in? You don't want to steal one of these creatures surely!"

The lunatic put his hands to his head as if in pain.

"You do not seem well, my poor fellow," said Honorat, with apparent benevolence. "Come up into my rooms and rest."

With an instinctive movement of resistance the lunatic clung to the railing. The crocodiles watched him as if expecting a victim, and one snapped in his direction, but Honorat struck the audacious reptile with the stick and the animal fell back into the water with a cry.

"Come, I insist," said Honorat, looking fixedly into the eyes of the lunatic, who obeyed with averted glance.

Passing through the lecture-room they mounted a short staircase, and entered a large room which the lunatic surveyed with restless eyes.

Accustomed to living in a sort of hovel, he was somewhat disturbed by the perfect order of this room. The bed was in an alcove, concealed by red damask curtains.

There were two mantelpieces, one of marble ornamented by a bust of Raymond Sylvestre. The other, with its iron hood, was that of the kitchen, but suggested a laboratory, as it contained crucibles and retorts as well as pots and pans.

All about were scattered those things that betray the man of science. Bones of animals, a microscope, drawings, sponges, bottles of spirits of wine. On the desk was a manuscript.

The lunatic having looked at everything, surveyed the bust intently.

"Did you ever know my friend Raymond Sylvestre?" asked Honorat.

"Raymond Sylvestre? How could I have known him?" answered the lunatic, moving toward the door.

"What is your name?" demanded Honorat, seizing the man by the wrist and approaching him so closely that their faces almost touched

The lunatic was dazzled by the spectacles of the older man, which glittered like little mirrors. He blinked his eyes and tried to turn them away.

It was in vain. He found the spectacles always at the same distance with the same eyes glittering behind them. Soon he ceased to struggle and gave one or two faint moans. Then he became motionless. He had passed into the cataleptic state and Honorat Meuris had him at his mercy.

"What is your name?" asked Honorat.

"Adrien Bruneau."

Although he had been prepared for this answer, so ardently desired for the past ten years, Honorat trembled.

"Raymond Sylvestre's companion," he said at last in an uncertain voice. "You cannot deny it. You betrayed yourself by the way in which you looked at his bust and by your distress when his name was mentioned. Why were you distressed?"

"I will not tell you."

"What a foolish reply. You belong to me, miserable wretch. For ten years I have hypnotized sick people and heard strange secrets from them, and you will submit to my power even more completely than any other, for you will answer me like a man in possession of his senses. Demented while waking, you are sane in the cataleptic state. How long have you been ill?"

"For twelve years."

"Since Raymond's disappearance?"

"Yes."

"How did you become insane?"

"I suffered so."

"Why?"

The unfortunate man writhed until his bones fairly cracked, but he did not answer.

Honorat extended his arm over him and repeated his question.

In a voice so low that it was like a breath passing over the agitated face of his judge, the lunatic answered:

"Because I killed Raymond Sylvestre."

At this the rage and grief of the old instructor knew no bounds. Up to this time there had been room for doubt. The savages might have stolen Raymond's clothes and lied about his fate. He might, in spite of the absurdity of the idea, be even now living in the wilds of Africa somewhere, chief of a tribe. The lunatic's answer brought despair.

After his first grief had spent itself Honorat continued:

"You killed him! But why? How?"

"Mercy!" begged Adrien Bruneau. "I suffer so when I think of it, how can I bear the torture of telling it?"

"Suffer, you demon! Suffer all the tortures of hell if it be possible!" And Honorat, suffocating with rage, went to the window to take breath.

The storm had ceased, and a cool air, heavy with the perfume of flowers and wet leaves, revived the animals, who had been fainting under the heat of the dog-days. Silence reigned in the menagerie, countless stars twinkled in the heavens.

Honorat tore off his cravat and uttered a sigh of relief. Then he returned to Adrien Bruneau, and, with an expression which showed that he had taken a ferocious resolution, he said:

"Now tell me all the details of your crime."

Trembling, like a child taken in a fault, the lunatic began his story in a low voice.

"In my youth I was an officer in the navy and in that capacity traveled extensively. The wildest, most remote localities were those that attracted me most, and I resolved to resign my commission and explore parts of Africa.

"I was strong and courageous, but I lacked the genius necessary for the discoverer. I could only confirm the accounts of what others had seen, and the difficulty of finding a fresh field ended in preying severely on my spirits.

"I ought to have been satisfied with the marvels which I had seen and contented with the energy I had displayed. I could have written, on my return to Europe, a fine book describing people and places whose very existence is hardly suspected.

"I had materials for a history of Mohammedanism in the region of the Nile, and I could have predicted Mahdism, which would have been something of a surprise to the world. But I despised any such way of making myself famous: for me there was but one way to glory—the discovery of new rivers and mountains.

"During two years I lived in the lake country, a region as large as Hindustan, and at an altitude higher than the highest valley in the Alps. I made the ascent of mountains higher than Mt. Blanc.

"I met Livingstone, who received me very kindly and invited me to join him, but I conceived a sudden hatred for that great man and left him, lest I should be tempted to commit some crime. I returned by the valley of the Nile and at Khartoum had the misfortune to make the acquaintance of Raymond Sylvestre.

"From the first we were sympathetic. He told me of Livingstone's death and said he meant to visit the great lakes. I tried to dissuade him, depicting the frauds and jealousies attendant upon exploration.

"He rallied me upon what he called my pessimism, asked to see my notes and drawings, which he praised highly, and reinstated me in my own esteem so completely that I decided to go with him.

Together we explored the Louapoula River, which flows through a region of great beauty and which Livingstone had taken for the Nile. Raymond Sylvestre, on the contrary, recognized it as the upper Congo."

"But it was Cameron who discovered that!"

"He came there later than we, and he really did discover it, for he had never seen the map which Sylvestre drew."

"So you have deprived my friend not only of life but of fame. Go on, you wretch!"

"I would have given twenty years of my life to have done what he did. Unfortunately my share in the discovery was nothing; it was Sylvestre who had seen everything and understood everything. In fact, I had often raised objections in which I persisted the more I saw that he was right.

"But he called me his collaborator and this generosity made me hate him as I had hated Livingstone. Alas! I could not fly from him. Together we owned a canoe and half a dozen negroes who served as guides and escorts.

"I had to remain with him, living in the most complete intimacy, feigning to share his enthusiasm. When I think of all I endured at that time I do not regret having killed him."

"Ferocious wretch!" cried Honorat.

"If you oblige me to tell the truth, I must say all that I have in my mind. It is the only way that I can explain my crime and show that I was even then mad."

"Mad with envy and hate. I know that theory—that all assassins are lunatics," said Honorat, with a bitter laugh. "Go on, and tell me how you murdered that great man whose achievements are buried in obscurity, owing to your crime."

Adrien Bruneau's face assumed a sort of greenish hue, his features became pinched and his eyes, which had hitherto retained their beauty in spite of their wandering expression, looked glassy. He gasped for breath, interlarding his phrases with sighs.

"The negroes we had with us were thieves—always ready with murderous thoughts. One of them died. I told the others that my companion—was a sorcerer—that he had caused his servant to die in order to have his spirit to guide him across the lakes and rivers. I persuaded them that I was good and full of pity for them.

"They believed me and killed Sylvestre. It was one evening—on the banks of the Louapoula. Your friend was lying in the canoe, looking at the stars. The night was beautiful, like to-night. We had heard the crocodiles bellowing—as to-night.

"One negro jumped into the canoe—and struck him with an oar. The others followed—and finished him. I was on the bank—with my gun in my hand. He saw me—stretched out his arms. I did not move.

"The negroes only ceased their blows when his head was crushed. Then they threw him into the river and the crocodiles gathered like a pack of wolves. They tore him limb from limb—I heard the cracking of his bones—the tearing of his muscles."

"Horrible!" murmured Honorat. The lunatic continued his story.

"The negroes escaped with the canoe, the papers, clothes, and provisions. I was alone in the desert, or what was worse, among savage tribes. I was afraid—I had a fever.

"Always before my eyes was that man, his head crushed, being eaten by crocodiles. I wanted to kill myself, but lacked the courage. I walked all day and almost all night; for two or three hours I would sleep and even then dreamed I was walking.

"And since my return to Paris I walk day and night, pursuing my course in a dream. Only in Paris I prefer to walk among crowds, for then I do not see the murdered man being eaten by crocodiles.

"I love those animals. On the Nile, after the crime, I felt no horror of them, and here I regret not seeing them. Several times I have felt myself drawn by an almost invincible power to enter the menagerie, but I resist, for I feel convinced that they would devour me."

At these words, in which the madness of the man showed itself in spite of his trance, Honorat, by an effort of will, collected himself and became once more the hypnotizer, Honorat the hermit,

whose savage soul arrogated to itself the right to punish the murderer of his friend by subjecting him to a frightful experience.

"Crocodiles," said he. "You are indeed foolish to be fond of them, and wise to believe that they and I together are your fate. This is to be your punishment.

"You shall be eaten as was Raymond Sylvestre, but you shall be eaten alive. You shall hear your own bones crack—feel your own muscles torn asunder."

The face of the maniac expressed the greatest terror and his hands were clasped convulsively.

"Mercy! have mercy!"

"Did you have mercy on Raymond Sylvestre? He was in the prime of life, on the eve of attaining fame. You are but a vile madman for whom death will be a deliverance—will there be any equality in your fates? I am the instrument of your destiny—you will do whatever my will dictates. Descend the stairs!"

The lunatic took a few steps in the room, apparently feeling steps beneath his feet, his hand on an imaginary balustrade. Then the hypnotist stopped him, saying:

"You are now in the menagerie. The crocodiles are aware of your arrival. They awake and roar with excitement and desire. Do you hear them?"

The silence was profound. In the eastern sky the dawn was faintly visible. The lunatic stopped his ears.

"The noise is deafening," he cried. "Oh, you will not drag me to them—I will cling to the serpents' cage—to the doors!" And, suiting the action to the word, he threw himself upon the ground and made as if clutching at some resisting body.

"What is your will beside mine, assassin? See, I lift you like a feather. Here you are before the crocodiles. Do you see their menacing jaws? Come, get up! Be a man and look them in the face."

The lunatic rose with a piteous expression and eyes filled with tears.

"They are hideous. Why did I ever love such monsters? I hate them now. Let me go! You won't thrust me into their jaws, I suppose! You are not a murderer!"

"No, but an executioneer, since there is no law that can be invoked against you. Instead of being punished you would be placed in a comfortable asylum and that would be a terrible injustice. Do not expect pity from me."

"Oh, my dear sir," began Adrien, kneeling before Honorat.

"Back! Do not touch me! Throw yourself into the basin!"

The hypnotized man uttered a shriek.

"Be quiet! Now you are in the water. The crocodiles surround you, drag you down. The reason you are not drowning is that your head is resting upon the back of one of them.

"Do you feel their leathery skin, the nails in their claws? Do you see their yellow eyes glaring upon you? Do you feel their bite? They have bitten off your hands—one leg is gone!"

The lunatic fought with all his force against the horrible delusion. He extended his arms, struggled like a drowning man, and finally fell his entire length. When Honorat said "Do you feel their bite?" his face expressed the greatest pain, and he almost fainted with agony when his tormentor added, "One leg is gone."

"You also are a murderer," he gasped. "I did not deserve this torture. I was mad when I met Livingstone, mad when I let Raymond Sylvestre be killed." He shut his eyes and his head struck the floor.

Honorat muttered:

"Mad—since the crime. Adrien Bruneau, awake!"

He blew upon his eyes; but even the power of the hypnotist is unable to awaken the dead.

* * * *

The next day the attendants of the menagerie had to break down the door of Honorat Meuris' room.

They found him occupied in contriving a sort of guillotine with a scalpel for the knife. He said to them:

"You have come to get the body of the man who has just been executed? Very well—take it. I don't know how it happens that his head is still on his shoulders—I took it off so neatly!"

Crime and madness are both contagious.

A CALL TO BATTLE.

By Mary Roberts Rinehart.

HOW an old war horse heard the clarion call of conscience and stood up to face the enemy.

THE Honorable James Stoddard scarcely knew himself what impulse had taken him back to the old church. It was fifteen years since he had left the city—it was twenty since he had been inside the Second Presbyterian Church. If in the interval he had thought of the low, flat, gray building it had been somewhat vaguely as the place where he had been married, and therefore, as the beginning of his material prosperity. For the Honorable James had married a wealthy wife, and money begets money.

It was almost an accident that he found himself stranded in the little home city over Sunday. It was the fault of an unavoidable break in his itinerary, not any desire to return to the scenes of his boyhood. And when Judge Bennington, the local Democratic leader, had discovered him at his hotel and invited him to Sunday evening dinner, the Senator was exasperated.

"Why can't they let me alone?" he said savagely to his wife. "Afraid I'd be lonely! There's nothing I would like better than to be lonely, if I had the chance."

It was a surprise when Angela suggested the old church that morning. They were Episcopalians now; the children had been baptized in that church. Stoddard himself rather liked the pomp and ostentation of the service, the perfection of the music, the decorous luxury of the congregation; the softened lights soothed his nerves.

He remembered the old church as something very different, as a place where things spiritual were unembellished, where there was only the austere beauty of long straight lines, of dull woodwork blending into the faded frescoes on the walls, as a place of battered hymn books and lop-sided foot cushions. Here had been no organ in his day—there was one now, he remembered. Angela had sent them a check one year toward the fund.

They drove to the church, and for fear of being ostentatiously late were as much too early. There was no usher, and after standing uncertainly in the aisle Stoddard led the way to the old pew, half-way down the church under the long side gallery, one of whose pillars divided it into unequal halves. Angela dropped her head for a moment on the pew in front; Stoddard frowned—one or two people had looked around—it seemed out of place here, where people came in, sat down, and remained rigidly upright, looking neither to right nor left. Then he adjusted his back to the old angle formed by the pillar, and watched the arrival of the congregation.

As the pews filled, he began to realize that through all the movement and life of his last twenty years, little was changed here. No doubt he was recognized—there was sibilant whispering somewhere behind. He saw and remembered people whose very names he thought he had forgotten; he could mark breaks in the families—here a tall old man whom Stoddard remembered in his vigorous prime, his collar now too large for his shrunken neck.

Beside him a row of daughters in black—the mother was missing. Here a little woman in a heavy veil, and towering beside her a tall young fellow in a gray suit. Stoddard had to look twice to remember the Darlings, to miss John Darling, and to realize that the baby he had seen baptized was now a man. He began to have a queer choking feeling; there seemed to be a break in every pew, and there were fewer young men. No doubt, like himself, they had graduated from the old church into life somewhere else.

He looked at Angela; she was staring intently into her lap, where lay a little old hymn book. As she passed it to him she smiled, a little tremulously. Written in the front, with little flourishes and reenforced shading, was the inscription, "Louie Stoddard, from his mother." Stoddard slipped the book into his pocket and wondered suddenly if the relatives here at home ever went up to the cemetery and looked after her grave. He couldn't be expected to look after those things, living so far away, and yet—he used to sleep in this very pew on the summer mornings, his moist head against her arm.

The singing was very bad; he knew that at once. Perhaps he was glad of it. It took his mind from unpleasant things—at least it was not paid worship at so much a note.

It was only a part of this going back into the past to find the old minister still there. He was very old; he went up the pulpit steps slowly, and his worn body looked pathetically small and frail in the straight, high-backed pulpit-chair. His hair was quite thin now; Stoddard could remember when that hair and beard, white even then but plentiful, had shone in the pulpit lights at the evening service, making a silvery halo that grew more and more misty until it faded altogether into the deep sleep of boyhood.

It was a dark day; the lights came soberly through the long, opaque glass windows, with their narrow bordering of purple flowers and green leaves, as unlike as possible the stained glass martyrs of Saint Stephen's. The minister's eyes were dim, and the church dark. Stoddard saw with relief that they were not observed—he wanted to be an onlooker at that day's service.

Across from them, in the Breed pew, Catherine Breed was sitting. He could see her past Angela's clear profile, her head haughtily erect, her regular features arrogant and unsmiling. The lines looked hard, he thought, almost insolent. He was glad now that he had not married her, and yet, perhaps she would have been different had she married; she looked as if all the impulses of her nature had been frozen, as though she had missed her heritage, that dower of womanhood which should have been her right.

Through the sermon he relaxed somewhat; every inflection was familiar—it was as if each gesture, each word, had been impressed on his mind years ago. But toward the end the minister's voice strengthened; Angela shifted her position, there was a perceptible movement through the building.

"The church of Jesus Christ is nonsectarian," the minister was saying, a new note of strength in his voice, "it is non-partisan, non-political. But there comes a time when the church of peace becomes the church militant, when the order comes 'To your tents, O Israel!' When the powers of evil are gaining the ascendancy is such a time; when the white man held his black brother in slavery was such a time; when the freedom of religious liberty was threatened was such a time. When Abraham Lincoln issued his calls for volunteers the churches gave their best, their men, their money, their labor. And now another crisis is threatening our country. Again the powers of evil are breaking loose, doing their devil's work around us. The love of country is dying; for patriotism we have pecuniary gain; for love of country we have the love of position and material honor. The city government, the state political parties, are rotten, corrupt, crawling with the worms of iniquity."

Stoddard could see his wife's head go up; her gloved fingers clasp each other tensely.

"Men of the Second Church;" the minister's voice was full and strong, "forty years ago to-day I stood in this pulpit and looked in the faces of my people. Some of them are still here, worn and old like myself—thank God, the army of Jesus Christ has no age limit—you who were here will remember the day, a warm June day like this. The city was quiet—quiet with the stillness of desolation. Regiment after regiment had gone out and had not come back. Another call had come for volunteers; the danger was great. At Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville the Army of the Potomac had been defeated with sickening loss; General Grant was before Vicksburg; Lee under cover of strategy, was moving his army north through the Shenandoah Valley.

"The President called for a hundred and twenty thousand more men—those who could be spared had gone before; there were left the fathers of families, the sons of widows. That morning the people had been awakened with the blast of bugles and the clanging of the church bells. Some of the men who sat in these pews were stained with clay from the earthworks where they had labored all night. And standing here"—the old man's voice shook—"with the eyes of women and children on me, I read the President's call for more men, and asked for volunteers to follow me to the field. Sixty men stood up at the call, every man of enlisting age in the congregation. Not a man who did not leave a mother, or a wife and children. Of the sixty, eighteen came back again. Three of them are still living, but the time is not far when there will be none to answer 'present' to the roll call.

"But although these men are gone, their children and even their children's children are still with us. To-day we are threatened, not with civic conflict, but with civic degeneracy. This great country, which was saved at such a cost, is in danger, danger from its public men, who would sell its soul for gain; danger from its people, who are becoming place seekers and money getters. Men of the Second Church, your country needs you as much to-day as it did forty years ago—volunteers for the army of pure government and just legislation. I am an old man, but once again I would like to see my people respond to the call of duty. Up, then, all of us, who volunteer to preserve the purity of this great country we love."

Before the call was finished men were on their feet; in the pew ahead of Stoddard an old man in faded army blue stood up with the erectness of youth. Boys got to their feet sheepishly, urged by their mothers' eyes. The heads of families, solid men all, rose with a quiet determination that was almost grim—many of them remembered vividly the historic scene of forty years ago.

Stoddard had felt his pulses leap at the minister's words; his father had been one of those to go, and had not come back. Then he looked at Angela; probably she would be scornful if he posed as an advocate of pure government. She gave no indication of emotion, sitting erect and tense, but she was very pale. "Louie Stoddard, from his mother." Perhaps he would better get up. He drew a deep breath, then he rose slowly, gripping the back of the next pew with straining fingers.

"The spirit of your fathers lives in you," said the minister softly. "Thank you."

Through the benediction Stoddard did not look at his wife. They slipped away quietly when service was over, and once in the carriage, he relaxed again.

"Well," he said with an attempt at lightness, "how do you like me as an advocate of purity in politics?"

"If you had not stood up," she said, looking away from him, "I should have hated you." And with a new tenderness he reached over and took his wife's hand.

* * * * *

By the following Wednesday the Stoddards were back in Washington and by Thursday the senator was immersed in business again. On that day there came to him a gentleman named Flynn, a well-groomed, smooth-voiced individual, with a silk hat, who spoke for some minutes concerning a certain iniquitous measure in which he was much interested. At the end of that time Stoddard leaned back in his office-chair and thrust his hands deep in his pockets.

"The fact is, Flynn," he said smoothly, "I am already committed against that thing."

"The devil you are," said Flynn, forgetting his urbanity. "Why, the thing's barely been broached. The other side hasn't got hold of it yet. The party——"

"Well, I'm committed," said the senator finally, and he looked at a small photograph on the top of his desk, a daguerreotype of a soldier, with eyes like his own. "As for the party—well, this is a party you never heard of."

"When did it happen?" asked the enraged Flynn.

"Some time ago," said the senator, with a grim smile. "In fact, it was forty years ago." Then, as Flynn stormed out of the office, he took down the little picture and gazed at it thoughtfully.