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THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

VOL. VI.

NOVEMBER, 1906.

No. 3.

THE FAKIR.

By EDGAR FRANKLIN.

A story of mysticism, great yearnings, oriental complexities,
and queer things.

CHAPTER I.

A MILLIONAIRE DISTRESSED.

IN the corner of the library, over by the fireplace, the thick-set, iron-gray man dropped the end of his cigar, blinked at the newspaper, laid it aside, and yawned, long and wearily. He was more than ever conscious of a sense of bored restlessness which had been growing steadily these last six or seven months.

In the corner, diagonally opposite, a clock—not altogether unlike the Eiffel Tower in height and original cost—began a solemn chime. Four times the bell struck—and the iron-gray man yawned again.

He was thinking that something would have to turn up to divert him, ere he exploded, for the boredom of retirement was assuming a vague sensation not unlike internal fermentation. He wished even, just now, that somebody would turn up to talk to him and—the particularly solemn person which the establishment seemed to demand appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Addleford is here, sir."

"Hey?" The iron-gray man brightened. Addleford wasn't much, perhaps, but he offered more company than the towering clock.

"Mr. Addleford, sir."

"All right, Thomas; send him in."

"Very well, Mr. Bennett."

Solemnity personified bowed and

faded from view. Bennett yawned for the third time.

As he did so, the figure in black glided in once more, assumed the pose of attention and, with that peculiarly unnecessary and irritating way of his, announced:

"Mr. Wilmot Addleford!"

Whereupon he faded away in funereal silence and there entered a man perhaps a year on the sunny side of thirty. This was Addleford.

There was nothing particularly distinctive about him.

He wore clothes which were made in London and looked it—a fact which the hard-headed and practical John Bennett had striven valiantly to ignore. He displayed a small mustache; his hair was adjusted with mathematically beautiful precision; he wore pearl gloves and pearl spats.

All told, he was not exactly the sort of being one would have supposed likely to prove congenial company to a retired hide-and-tallow merchant, but Bennett's own friends were still doing active business at that time of day—and Addleford was better than nothing.

He held forth a hand from which the glove had been partially removed, and the elder man wrung it with unwonted cordiality, and waved him to a chair.

"Glad to see you, Will."

"Marcia's not at home, the man said," Addleford commented.

"There's no reason to suspect that he

lied," Bennett chuckled. "The employment agency guaranteed him strictly honest and reliable."

"Is she coming home soon?" Addleford inquired further, with some anxiety in his eyes.

"Give it up—gone shopping with her ma, I guess. They'll be home some time between now and midnight. Have a cigar?"

"Thanks."

Addleford folded his gloves tidily and accepted the cigar. He turned, at a faint sound, and a smile broadened his not too intelligent features. Entering again, the silent Thomas deposited beside him a siphon, a glass, and a tall bottle.

He departed, and Addleford concocted lingeringly a beverage that clinked with ice and bubbled with gas.

"Will!"

"Yes." The glass paused half-way.

"How many o' those highballs do you drink in a day?"

"One."

"Hey? That the first?"

"Not at all—it's the fourth instalment of it. It's only, strictly speaking, one highball, but I absorb it in sections, as it were. Do you see?"

"I see." Bennett stroked his gray, short beard and watched the liquid disappear. He observed the lighting of the cigar and the first cloud of pleasant smoke, and he spoke again:

"Will!"

"Eh?"

"Do you suppose," said Bennett slowly, "that it would do me any good to take to drink?"

"What?"

"Thunder! I mean it!" The elder man rose and glared into the fireplace with eyes that were somber and melancholy. "I do mean it, Will!"

"But I thought that you——"

"That or something else," Bennett continued inconsequently. "I've got to have something to occupy my mind or—bust!"

"You mean you don't like complete idleness?"

"Exactly!"

The word came from Bennett with explosive force. Addleford raised his eyebrows and toyed gently with his mus-

tache as he, too, stared into the blaze at his feet.

"Queer!" he observed, with the air of one who has approached the unknowable. "Deucedly queer, I should say! I never felt that way!"

"Honest?" Bennett glanced at him with the flickering contempt which, even now, insisted on rising occasionally.

"Honest!" replied Addleford sincerely.

"Well, maybe I can tell you why."

Bennett resumed his chair with a grunt.

"You, young friend, were born to money. You've got it now in bunches. You were brought up on that basis, sent to expensive schools, and all that sort of thing. When you'd gathered what they thought was education enough, you stopped even that sort of effort. Any wonder you don't mind sitting around and going to pink teas and so on?"

"No, I suppose not." Addleford spoke slowly. The thought came as a mild and harmless and slightly interesting revelation.

"Whereas—look at me!" Bennett pursued, warming up.

"At your age I was down in a Front Street cellar, wondering whether I'd make enough out of it next month to pay the rent. Then things got better, and I got to making more money—and more and more—and every darned cent I made meant that much more work in looking after it and spreading out the business. Why, I've been at it, many a time, from seven in the morning till near midnight. Then I get together a few millions—and ma and the doctors say I've got to retire and spend the balance of my life resting!"

He popped out of the chair again and walked scowling to the window.

"Hang it!" he cried. "I don't *want* to rest! If I was going to be a mummy, why didn't they get some cheesecloth and spices and paint and a *sar*—you know what I mean—from the Metropolitan, and do the job right?"

Addleford laughed his gentle and well-bred laugh.

"Well, I wouldn't worry about it, Mr. Bennett."

"I know you wouldn't," the elder man snapped. "It ain't in you to! But

I do! I want something—I've got to have something to keep me busy—some sort of blamed purpose or occupation or—bah!"

Addleford smiled as Bennett returned to his chair.

"Why not found libraries, or hospitals, or something?" he suggested.

"No good!" Bennett shook his head. "Hospitals cost like the dickens, and, anyway, how would I get any fun out of it? I don't want to go round gawking at smallpox cases or getting chills watching appendicitis operations!"

"Well—I suppose that's so," Addleford assented, with a sage nod. "You don't want to go back to business?"

"You bet I do—but that's out of the question. The whole family circle, M.D.'s included, would have an epileptic fit at the notion."

"Ever try golf?"

"Golf be—blasted!" said Bennett.

"When I need that kind of occupation I'll get a job in the street-cleaning department and make something out of it!"

"But golf——"

"Cut it out!" remarked the elder elegantly. "Nothing on that order will fill the bill!"

"How about travel?"

"I'd thought of that." Bennett scratched his head and scowled a little.

"I—I dunno, Will."

"You know there are lots of places to go to," Addleford advanced, with unusual brilliancy.

"Yes, I guess there are, if geography hasn't changed," said Bennett, rather dubiously. "I—dunno."

"You know I run over to London every spring. Why not think it over and all of you come along this year?"

"Well——"

Bennett pursed his lips and stared at the floor.

As a matter of fact, he secretly preferred a somewhat smaller house than this recent acquisition of wealth, and a pair of carpet slippers, and that particularly rank old brier pipe which had so mysteriously disappeared. But home was home, after all, and the idea of knocking about hotels and so on—well. Faintly, from the street, came the sub-

dued puffing of an automobile. Addleford pricked up his ears; Bennett yawned slightly.

The almost inaudible shuffle of Thomas was heard in the hall, and the opening of a door and the swish of skirts. Addleford rose slowly.

There was an indistinct word or two without, and the swishings seemed to divide into two sections, one of which ascended the stairway, while the other approached the library.

Then, as Addleford stared expectantly, the hangings swung apart and there appeared a radiantly pretty girl of twenty or so. She was befurred to her very eyes, which sparkled mischievously above the glowingly healthy little patches of red upon her cheeks.

Marcia blew a kiss across the room to her father, who smiled back with a fondness no other mortal was capable of rousing in him. She advanced to Addleford, who gazed at her adoringly.

"Good afternoon, Family Friend!"

Addleford snapped his fingers behind his back. If there was one thing he detested more than another it was this "family friend" business. He was, of course, the friend of the family, but for one particular member he cherished something far more than mere friendship.

"Well, Willy?" The furs were tossed unceremoniously to a prim maid who had suddenly appeared.

"I dropped in to have a look at you, Marcia," Addleford hazarded.

"Look to your heart's content, then!"

The girl laughed in a fashion which maddened the young man, and dropped into a chair with a sigh.

Bennett arose stiffly.

"I'm going to look up ma," he said slowly.

Hands in his pockets, he walked out, humming under his breath.

Addleford drew himself up and approached the girl slowly. A little hesitation and he took the low chair at her side.

"Marcia!"

"Umum?"

"I came to-day——"

"So I see."

"Let me talk!" Addleford protested, with fitting humility. "Marcia, I

dropped in here to-day with a—a very definite purpose."

"*Really?* What is it? Could I guess?"

"Don't make fun of me! Marcia——"

"Wait!" The girl held up a warning hand. "Wait, Willy! Things tire you most awfully, anyway, and I know it all so well that I can say it just as well as you!"

"Marcia——"

"Hush! In the first place, you have decided, once again, that you cannot live without me. That's right, isn't it?"

"If you'd only——"

"A moment. Without me, your life will be a desert drear, hope will depart from everything; you'll get desperate presently and hurl yourself headlong into the wildest dissipation—any old thing to drown your sorrow and make you forget me! Right?"

"Please——" Addleford pleaded.

"Therefore, you have come again to fall at my feet and beg me to marry you! *This* will be the last time! If I refuse you now—oh, goodness knows what's going to happen!"

"Let me tell you, Marcia! Let me make you understand!"

"But I do understand!" she laughed. "I understand every word thoroughly."

Addleford moistened his lips and groaned.

"Then why don't you marry me?" he cried.

"Because, sir," replied Marcia, with mock gravity, "it is utterly impossible."

"And why?" Addleford's passive spirit was quickening into a semblance of life. "Why? Because I'm not the sort of hustler that your father was? I've never gone out and done anything big. What of it, Marcia? I'm a decent sort, anyway! It's your same old set of reasons, I suppose. I've never gone out and conquered men and piled up money and all that sort of thing, but——"

"But you've left out the most important reason!" Marcia suggested, with a malicious grimace.

"What's that?"

"Simply that you're not the man I want to marry, Willy!"

"But—oh, pshaw!"

Addleford's head sank to his hands,

with an emotion which was really as sincere as anything he was capable of feeling. "Why on earth is it, Marcia?"

The girl's mocking humor lessened somewhat.

"My dear boy," she said gently, "how on earth do you suppose I can tell you *why*? I'm quite certain that that part is all beyond me. I think very likely"—and her head was poised thoughtfully to one side—"I think, Willy, that you're not my—my affinity!"

"Rubbish!"

"Well, you know I'm a great believer in affinities. When the right two people come into contact, matters just settle themselves. When it's the wrong two, they usually settle each other."

"Then tell me what you have to do to be an affinity!" Addleford pleaded. "I mean your affinity, Marcia."

The girl threw back her head and laughed.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, either. Perhaps if you went out and killed a dragon or two, it might work a total change in me. Or, if you were to bunch all the trusts and vanquish them, or even——"

"Please don't make fun of me!"

"How can I help it?" she asked, with charming frankness. "You're awfully funny, Willy. You always have been, in the five or six years we've known you."

Addleford rose and threw up his hands.

"All right—admit that part. Wouldn't it be something to have somebody to laugh at all your life? You're fond of laughing, you know."

"I know I am, but—oh, dear! Let's not go over the whole thing again to-day."

"But some day——"

"Why, I don't know, I'm sure," she laughed. "Let's just drop this marrying talk for to-day. I've got something *really important* to talk about!"

"Eh?"

"Yes, indeed."

"What is it?" Addleford inquired.

The girl shook her head mysteriously. From some five or six packages in her lap she selected a rectangular one, neatly wrapped in white paper. Humming a brisk little operatic air, she untied the

knot and disclosed a box of white paste-board.

With one hand on the cover, she paused.

"It's a real, ancient oriental casket!" she announced impressively.

Addleford groaned in despair.

The curtains parted once more and Bennett sauntered in, his cigar cocked at a rakish angle.

CHAPTER II.

A BREATH FROM ANCIENT INDIA.

"Is *that* the important thing?" Addleford inquired.

"Is what what?" asked Bennett.

"Marcia has acquired a real oriental casket," the visitor informed him, having conquered his tendency to sarcasm.

"What's that?"

"Look and see!" came from the girl's corner of the room.

The two men came to her side. The lid was raised and disclosed something wrapped in tissue paper.

She turned it out and deftly unwound the several layers of fine paper. At last she held up to their more or less appreciative gaze a little box, some six inches long.

It was wonderfully carved. It was black, and appeared to be of ebony or some similar wood. It had, at the front, a tiny keyhole in the shape of an odd kind of cross. Beyond that the men were not able to see, just then.

"Hairpin box?" Bennett asked.

"Jewel case," Addleford said confidently.

"It's neither one nor the other," murmured Marcia. "It is a real, genuine oriental antique."

"I know," Addleford pulled his mustache and smiled slightly. "I used to be acquainted with a chap who had a factory for turning out that sort of thing. It was over in Hoboken, I think, and he sold 'em by the truck-load—or was it the car-load? He made a pile out of 'em!"

"This isn't anything of the sort!" said Marcia, with much emphasis.

"This happens to be the real article." She shook her head positively. "I know it!"

"How?"

"Because the man I bought it from said so!" There seemed, to the speaker at least, to be absolute finality about that.

The two men chuckled. Bennett took the curious little casket and turned it over slowly. He was not an expert in that variety of antique—on in any other. It impressed him as rather pretty and distinctly odd, but—

"What's it for, Marcia?" he asked.

"No one knows!"

"They don't, eh?" Bennett looked at her. "How much was it?"

"Twenty-five dollars!" the girl said serenely.

"Eh?"

"Certainly." She smiled at him; and that smile, which had smoothed over many other twenty-five dollars and multiples of twenty-five dollars was as effective as ever. Bennett chuckled.

"Where, under the sun, did you get it?"

"Why, at Marrash's. There isn't another place in town where you could pick up such a thing."

"Mar—huh?" Bennett grinned at her again over his glasses.

"A fellow on the avenue," Addleford supplied. "He calls himself—what does he call himself, anyway?"

"Abdullah Marrash," said Miss Bennett. "It's his name."

"All right," laughed the visitor.

"That's the chap. He opened a shop, about a year ago, with—er—oriental wares of various sorts. He's made a big hit, I understand—particularly with the women who have money."

"If that is intended as a slur upon the intelligence of women in general—" began Marcia.

"It's not, I assure you," said Addleford, "only it does seem a confounded shame, somehow, that people who'll give a twenty to charity and feel warm and comfortable over it for a week will go to that sort of a place and deal out two or three hundred without turning a hair." He glanced at the casket in Bennett's hands. "It's a pretty thing, though," he added, with some effort at conciliation.

"How perfectly sweet of you to appreciate it so much!" observed the young woman.

Addleford looked at her humbly. Marcia looked away and at her father with studied unconcern. The as yet unsuccessful suitor sighed.

As for Bennett, he seemed interested—as, in his peculiar state, he would have been interested in a stray dog.

He stepped across the room and turned on the electric table-lamp and sat down beside it. He laid the casket before him.

"Locked!" was his first observation.

"Yes."

"Where's the key?"

"There isn't any," said Marcia.

"You bought that thing, and without a key?"

"The key was lost, hundreds and hundreds of years ago, dad!" said the girl softly.

"Oh!"

Bennett turned it over again and looked at the back.

"Hinges all out of sight, too."

"They are concealed, Mr. Marrash said, as only the workmen of that time knew how to conceal them."

"And there isn't any more than the faintest line to show where she opens, either," the father pursued. "Say! That's a bang-up piece of cabinet work, isn't it! Hardly a line!"

He considered it further; finally he appeared to reach a decision. He dived into a pocket and produced a robust jack-knife. He snapped open the blade with a stubby thumb-nail and, picking up the box, remarked:

"Well, here's where we see what's inside of her!"

"Father!" in a scream from across the room.

The girl darted to his side. Bennett, intent for the instant upon his task of inserting the blade between the halves of the casket, looked up suddenly in astonishment.

"Eh? What? What's the matter?"

"You—you—why, you might injure it, dad!"

"Well, don't get so stirred up, anyway," laughed Bennett. "I won't do it any harm. Still, I'm mighty curious to know what's inside the thing, Marcia. I believe I can open it without leaving a mark."

"Please don't try, dad!"

Bennett laid aside the knife and looked at her.

"Girl, can't your poor old father have that much innocent diversion? If I break it, I'll import a dozen."

"It—it isn't that, dad. It's what—Mr. Marrash said."

"And that was?"

"Well——" Marcia shifted a little and ended by perching on a stool at his feet.

Addleford sighed yearningly. She made a pretty picture there. The round blue eyes, from the frame of light hair and delicate rose-color, looked up at them with a new quality, an odd little shade of expression that seemed to bespeak an awakening of some sort.

"Well, you see——" she began.

"Oh, you won't laugh at me, will you?"

"Not me!" her father promised.

"I swear it!" proclaimed Addleford.

"Well, Mr. Marrash said—I can't quite remember the words, he talks so quaintly—he said that, for occidental eyes, the beauties of the casket must be wholly external."

"Mighty definite, ain't it?" muttered Bennett.

"Well, what he meant was that whatever it contains may not be viewed without disaster by people of our time and country. He said that, looked upon by any eyes save those that watched the little thing grow into being, and which have been closed for many centuries, great disaster might follow."

"Hum!" Her father scratched his head again. "Poor old Dan Butler used to talk like that, after he broke down and took to morphine."

He turned again to the casket.

"Still, it is a queer sort of a little thing! Any more of that kind of yarn go with it?"

Marcia pouted.

"Mr. Marrash could—or would—tell me very little about it; and what he *did* tell me I'm not going to repeat."

"Why?"

"Because you both sit there and make fun of me—and it's all very interesting, too," she ended, rather incoherently.

"My dear little girl!" laughed Bennett. "I'm not making fun. Go on with the yarn. It's all poppycock, but it's something *new*, anyway."

"Well——" Marcia tilted her head and considered for a minute. "Of course I was fearfully interested when he had told me a little and I tried to learn all about it. Mr. Marrash smiled, in that oddly grave way he has, and said that little indeed was known."

"So far as he was aware, the casket was at one time of vast importance—away back in the interior of India, centuries ago. It is supposed to have been taken from the great temple at Benares and to have been owned—or perhaps made—by some very high priest."

"What for?" asked Addleford.

"That is what we cannot even guess!" Marcia exclaimed enthusiastically. "However, that is where it originated. Afterward, Mr. Marrash said, it is all conjecture. It came into his hands through a native priest, and when he came to this country he brought it with him, and finally decided to put it into stock and sell it!"

"But why—if it's so blamed valuable?" Bennett asked suspiciously.

"He said that he has always had a peculiar feeling about the casket," the girl replied softly. "He said that it may contain a good or an evil influence, and that under certain conditions it may manifest its power to sway one's fortunes—or something like that. He warned me not to take it, if I was at all afraid. I wasn't—and I took it!" she ended with a laugh.

"I—see!" agreed her father vaguely.

"Marcia!" interrupted Addleford, with some impatience. "You don't mean to say you're taking that seriously? Why, the whole thing's a simple fake—a tissue of nonsensical business—oriental business—lies, from one end to the other."

"Well, it isn't a tale I'd be dead stuck on telling the folks in the hide trade myself!" Bennett observed. "However——"

He took the casket and held it closer to the light. The carving was undeniably perfect, but it was not that which riveted his attention. He squinted carefully at the little smooth space on the cover.

"Some kind of writing here," he observed.

Marcia looked at it.

"It's—Hindoo or Arabic, I suppose."

Addleford looked at it, too.

"It's shorthand!" he announced. "Prehistoric or antediluvian shorthand—something like that!"

"No, I guess it's Hindoo," Bennett muttered. "Wonder what the dickens it means?"

"Ask Marrash." Addleford sniffed. "He'll tell you it's a solemn warning to walk three times around the block every time you see a tortoise-shell cat."

Bennett tilted back and gnawed his cigar.

His brow wrinkled considerably. With a wholesome hatred of automobiles, detesting salt water and yachting, abhorring the "society" into which his ambitious better half was moving, he had at last found something, however small, besides the newspaper, to interest him.

"Say, I do wonder!" he announced again.

"What?"

"What that scribbling means, anyway. That's got me interested, Will."

"Well—you wanted something to interest you," Addleford murmured.

"Yes, sir! That's got me interested!" Bennett reiterated. "Looks like—Chinese. Why didn't you ask him about that, Marcia?"

"I did, but he led me off the subject," she confessed.

"Didn't want to tell, eh?" said her father curiously.

"Or didn't know," Addleford suggested.

Bennett turned slowly and leaned back, the casket still before his eyes.

"Now, that blamed little thing," he said, "may hold something we'd give thousands to know—or thousands not to know. I don't say it does, for I don't know anything about it, but—I would like to get the sense of that inscription on the cover."

"Take it around and ask Marrash," Addleford said.

"Say, I believe I will!" chuckled the elder man. "Or—hold on! I've got a better scheme than that—and it'll furnish something interesting, too! I'll ask him around here to tell me about it."

"Yes, and as soon as he hears who you are, he'll be here with a dozen baskets of truck, too!" commented the visit-

or. "You'll never get rid of him, Mr. Bennett."

"Bosh!"

"When are you going to ask him, dad?"

Bennett looked quizzically from one to the other.

"Either of you two object to sitting down to dinner with him?"

"I don't," said Marcia. "And you'll enjoy hearing him talk."

"I'm agreeable," sighed Addleford.

"Good!" Bennett picked up the telephone book.

"Has he a telephone? What's his name again—Marrash? Yep, here she is. One-three-o-four. All right!"

He reached for the 'phone and briskly notified "central" of his desires. He waited impatiently for a minute or two. Then:

"Hello! Hello! Marrash? Oriental store? Yes? All right. This is Bennett—John P. Bennett—West Seventy-Second—that's right, yes."

Holding the instrument, he settled back again and framed his invitation. Now, most people would have considered an invitation to that household rather flattering. Marrash, apparently, was not like most people, for Bennett's summons seemed to meet with little success.

The millionaire's face clouded somewhat and he gnawed his mustache as he listened attentively to a rather prolonged discourse. In the end, however, his expression cleared again to something not far from a pleased smile, and he rang off and replaced the instrument with a sigh.

"He's not coming," he notified them. "Said something about castors or plaster casts or——"

"Why, his caste, of course!" Marcia exclaimed. "Mr. Marrash is a high-caste Hindoo, dad. He couldn't possibly eat with us. I never thought of that."

"He's a remarkable talker, girl," her father murmured, "over the telephone at any rate. Got a voice like—I dunno what."

"And he isn't coming?" Addleford inquired.

"You bet he is!" chuckled Bennett. "He's coming to give us a short talk on caskets in general and this one in par-

ticular. Right after dinner, too, I guess—going to stay for the show?"

Addleford sighed wearily. He glanced at Marcia and decided to stay.

CHAPTER III.

THE ORIENT INCARNATE.

ADDLEFORD, as a rule, enjoyed a Bennett dinner.

The elder two-thirds of the family were good, whole-souled people, if lacking, in a slight degree, the niceties to which breeding had partially accustomed him. But Addleford, despite his more or less meritorious and patrician ancestry, was far from a snob; and any little details which grated upon him in the parents were immeasurably overbalanced by the charm of Marcia's company.

This evening, however, seemed different.

For one thing, Addleford hated anything that savored of the complex—occultism, orientalism, or otherwise. He preferred thoughts capable of monosyllabic arrangement; or, if he must hear deeper things discussed, he preferred to hear it done by persons of indubitable authority.

Bennett's sudden enthusiasm upon matters oriental slightly wearied Addleford.

He wondered what would be coming next.

Addleford listened to Mrs. Bennett and her hopes of soon finding something "lionizable."

Mrs. Van Der Blank had captured the last swami and Mrs. Somebody Else had succeeded in snaring Zilitzki, the 'cellist. Marrash had a promising sound; perhaps she could learn from him of some undiscovered Hindoo celebrity and ascend to social prominence upon a stairway of mysticism.

So ran the dinner-talk, interesting enough to the others, boresome to Addleford. He sought to involve Miss Bennett in a discussion of the latest books—but in vain. He attempted to discuss the dinner of night before last, and the people who had attended it—again in vain. He thought that he had found a vulnerable spot in the opening

of the skating-rink for the season—and he found that he was wrong.

In the end, he gave over the endeavor and resigned himself to an evening of orientalism.

This infernal Hindoo would come and size up the situation; he'd give Bennett a string of the Eastern equivalent for what Addleford termed hot air; he'd prod around and devise some particularly interesting line of relics—and if he hadn't turned Bennett, poor old man, into a collector of some fool stuff before the evening was over, Addleford missed his guess altogether.

The meal came to an end.

They repaired to the smaller drawing-room, toward the front of the big house, and, in the cozy glow of little shaded lamps, they waited.

Marrash seemed a long time getting there. One stroke announced half past eight, and Addleford sighed pleasantly. Very likely the fellow had given over his visit. If he didn't turn up by nine, the last two acts of that new comic opera were simply splendid and Marcia hadn't seen them.

The tireless quarter-hour mechanism of the library clock told that it lacked but fifteen minutes of the hour. Addleford crossed his legs the other way and smiled almost sweetly. Marcia looked annoyed. Bennett grunted impatiently. He had no great conception of his social station, but when he condescended to ask a mere retail dealer—and a foreigner at that—to visit him, he did not care to have the invitation wholly ignored. If this chap—

A bell rang faintly.

Marcia brightened and her father cleared his throat. Addleford groaned, and the matron looked toward the door with polite interest. Whereupon Thomas entered again:

"Mr.—Abdullah Marrash!"

"Send him in!" commanded Bennett.

A tall, erect figure glided in. The quartet arose.

Their eyes were riveted upon the newcomer, Marcia's less intently than the rest, for she had viewed him previously before.

Marrash was plainly a type with which none of them were familiar.

He stood well above six feet. His

frame was perfectly proportioned, lithe and sinuous; his hands, long and slim. His skin was very brown and his features fine and clearly cut; his eyes, jet black and wonderfully keen and intelligent, were the eyes of the profound thinker. He was clothed in the simplest of black frock coats and wore a black skull-cap upon his short, black hair.

Marcia had stepped forward.

"My mother, Mr. Marrash, and my father, and Mr. Addleford."

The Hindoo smiled and bowed in grave silence. Mrs. Bennett smiled with condescending sweetness, Addleford nodded easily, and Bennett jerked his head forward uneasily.

The man was altogether beyond him. He had expected something on the order of the World's Fair Turks and Syrians; this seemed an altogether superior type.

With no intention of undue scrutiny he ran from the slim, dull shoes of the visitor to his head. He tried to grasp the intangible quality which pervaded the Hindoo.

He dwelt curiously, for a few seconds, on the odd red mark in the center of Marrash's forehead. He wondered whether it was some kind of skin eruption, but concluded that it must be a scar of recent making. Later, he learned that it was the stamp of the highest Hindoo caste.

And at about that point he regained breath and said cordially:

"Sit right down, Marrash!"

Silently, the oriental complied. He leaned back with an easy grace and looked from one to the other with interrogative eyes.

"Mr.—Marrash!" Bennett moistened his lips and groped for an opening. "My daughter was around at your place this afternoon."

"Yes."

Perhaps they all started a little at that voice. It was low and slow and musical and modulated to a point of exquisite sweetness. It seemed to hint of mystery and mysticism.

"Well, sir, she was! Around there she bought a little box."

"I recall it, Mr. Bennett," said the remarkable voice, and the grave smile appeared again.

"Well——" Bennett found himself

wishing, with some irritability, that he would speak like an ordinary citizen. "I thought I'd like to know more of that box."

The oriental raised his eyes slowly and faced the merchant.

"Sahib," he murmured, "many may have wished that."

"What?"

"Many have wished to know more of the little casket."

"Well—y' don't say!" Bennett quickened again. His wife and daughter leaned forward a trifle and watched the visitor eagerly. "Nobody ever found out anything, eh?"

"But a very little."

"And you know that?"

"What little it may be given one to know, perhaps."

Bennett crossed his legs and removed the eternal cigar with a sigh of pleasurable relief.

"Spin the yarn, mister!" he said enthusiastically.

"I—er——" The Hindoo raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"Please do tell us all you know about the casket, Mr. Marrash?" said Marcia.

"Well——" the thin finger-tips touched and Marrash stared thoughtfully aloft. "It is ancient, this casket, even as the stars above us, as the Mother Ganges herself."

"How old's that?" Bennett inquired.

"Very ancient, indeed, sahib. One may not know with precision. It may have been made centuries in the past—it may have been made many thousand years ago."

"And whereabouts?"

"In India, we believe. Indeed, there seems little doubt of that."

"And it came from a temple?" asked Marcia.

"It has been told that the casket was stolen from the great temple of our religion at Benares, sahiba—even from the shadow of the trinity of Siva, Vishnu, and Brahma."

He looked again toward the ceiling and relapsed into a silence which continued for some minutes.

Mr. Marrash plainly was not a voluble personage. Mr. Bennett was extremely curious. He wished now to know every particular of his daughter's

acquisition, and when he had waited what he considered an interminable time, he reopened conversation.

"See here, Mr. Marrash, why not tell us the whole yarn?"

"It were not well to speak too freely of these things, sahib."

"Well, I guess we're none of us afraid of consequences. Go ahead and let's hear the story."

"Yes, *please* do, Mr. Marrash!" Marcia exclaimed.

For another short space the oriental considered. He smiled faintly and sighed. He seemed to have come to a decision, for he straightened slightly and his lips parted.

"Perhaps you are right," he said softly. "We are far from the home of the little casket and of my people. The great forces that obtain there may well be spent before they attain your western civilization. I shall say but what I have heard—of true knowledge I have little or none.

"It came, then, from Benares in a time long past. It was the work, I think, of some devotee high among the Brahamana. How he may have labored, for what reason, it is not given us to understand. It was stolen, they say, by a minor priest—again for reasons we may not define. It wandered long, through unknown hands. It came to me through an impoverished priest, who cherished it as a great and wonderful thing."

"And what's inside?" Bennett asked.

The Hindoo smiled inscrutably.

"Again we have but rumors, sahib; and yet I have heard, again and again, but one tale. It holds, they say——" he paused and frowned. "Ah, I cannot put it into words."

"Come as near as you can," the hide man suggested amiably.

"Well—the—the great secret of the world, I think."

"And what's the great secret of the world?" Bennett asked excitedly.

"Ah, sahib," the oriental smiled, "there again you do not comprehend. It is not given us to know. Were it to be our part, Brahma would have disseminated the knowledge."

"And you—you honestly think that that thing holds something nobody knows—something important?"

"As important to humanity, sahib, as your own life to yourself!"

Marcia's eyes were sparkling and her mother's as well. Bennett stared long at the little box on his knee, and one hand slipped furtively into his trousers pocket.

"By gosh!" he said suddenly. "*That thing's coming open!*"

"Sahib!" The word came with much emotion. He started from his chair and his eyes dilated with inexpressible horror. One slim hand stretched protestingly toward Bennett.

"Never, sahib, never!" he gasped. "The time is not yet appointed! Ah, I should not have—sahib, may I not acquire again the little thing? I shall most gladly——"

Bennett dropped back, rather limp and distinctly startled. But he recovered himself quickly, and gathered the casket to him with a new sensation.

"No, sir!" he said. "It isn't every day a man gets hold of a universal secret, even if it is done up in a box. This stays in the Bennett family, Mr. Marrash."

"But what is—what is this great secret of the world, Mr. Marrash?" his wife asked with much animation.

"Sahiba!" The Hindoo turned to her, his palms upward, and smiled helplessly. "Knowing that the unknown is vast and mighty and powerful, can one measure its vastness, its might, its power?"

Addleford drew a long breath and scowled. The whole thing was far beyond him. It didn't interest him in the slightest, and he began to wish that he had cut it out, even to the extent of Marcia's society, and spent the evening at his club.

"There is no key?" Bennett asked abruptly.

"The legends tell of one, yet one must have existed—may yet exist—for there is a keyhole, strangely fashioned. But that knife, sahib——"

Bennett snapped the blade into place and pocketed the article with a puzzled sigh.

"I'm not going to dig any holes in the thing," he said. "I—I'm hanged if I understand what the danger is, but I'm not going to take any risks."

"And you will promise it, sahib? You will promise that no effort at opening the casket shall be made?"

"I——" Bennett stared. "Yes!"

"Ah!"

The remarkable tension of Marrash seemed to relax. His finger-tips met again and he smiled with a kind of wan relief.

"It is well, sahib. I have been unwise in parting with this, for wrath may be visited upon me for another's indiscretion."

"You—you think—you honestly believe"—Bennett was grappling with a strange, new condition of affairs, earthly or unearthly—"you really believe that if—if this thing were to be opened before—well, before the proper time, whatever that may be, that trouble would come to the man who did it?"

"If one believe—and one can scarce think otherwise—that the casket contains the Great Secret, can other than harm befall?" said the Hindoo, with hushed solemnity.

Silence fell once more. The ladies were visibly impressed. Addleford stifled a yawn. Bennett turned the mysterious little casket over and over.

Then he looked at Marrash again.

"What's the inscription on top?"

"I am very sorry," said the Hindoo. "Once again I must prove a worthless informant. It is, like the rest, unknown."

"Isn't it Hindoo?"

"Of a form long passed away, sahib. It disappeared, we believe, centuries before our grandsires were born. It is the most ancient sort of Sanskrit. In all the world there is but one man who may, by the barest possibility, be capable of reading it."

"And who's he?"

"Far, far away, sahib"—the Hindoo waved a hand that indicated great space—"in the uttermost recesses of the mountains of Darjeeling, even beyond Rhamarpur, there dwells a man of marvelous learning—Jehanizeb."

"India?"

"Even so."

"And do you mean to say that *no-body* else could wrestle with this thing?"

"I know of no other, sahib."

"And do you suppose that if that thing *was* translated, it'd give us a line on what's inside this thing?"

"It is well within reason, sahib, so to believe."

Bennett's eyes dropped again to the casket and another spell of silence ensued. The Hindoo stared absorbedly into space, regarding nothing in particular; the ladies watched the Hindoo intently. Addleford's eyes were peacefully closed.

Thomas, approaching to attend the smoldering fire in the grate, took in the scene unnoticed and started; he was impressed with the notion that some sort of heathen prayer-meeting was in progress and he promptly made for other regions.

Bennett fingered the casket. A train of confusing thoughts was racing through his head, a collection of wild possibilities unsuspected throughout all his workaday existence. The whole thing had taken deeper root within him than he would have believed possible. He watched the queer characters and thought—and thought—and thought.

And suddenly, so suddenly that all four started violently and stared at him, his heavy hand came down resoundingly on his leg, and his thoughts crystallized into words:

"*I've got it!*"

"You—you——" Addleford mouthed.

"This thing's a mystery—a big, world-important mystery!" The extalloy man was on his feet and talking rapidly. "If it was solved, if we understood it all and could give it to the world, it'd mean—pshaw!"

He paused and licked his lips. His wife regarded his undue emotion with disapprobation, through her lorgnette.

"And I feel it in my bones that I'm the man to solve the riddle!"

"*What?*" came from at least three tongues.

"Yes, sir! I'm going to India!"

CHAPTER IV.

A MISSION AND A BARGAIN.

Now be it remembered that John Bennett had lived a life of hard work and money-making; of hard-headedness and

economy, without ever a suspicion of insanity, hereditary or acquired. He had avoided the mythical and the intangible and clutched the material with strong hands. Imagination and fascinating speculation he had left to the fools.

Perhaps certain occult tendencies had been existing latently within him; perhaps for that very reason, coupled with his recent idling, they swept into being with greater force. In any event, Bennett appeared a man transformed.

His square jaw protruded determinedly; a small, excited smile played about the corners of his mouth. He looked from one to the other with something like a challenge in his eyes.

"John!" remarked his wife.

"I mean it, Martha! By crickey, I mean it!"

"That you—you're going to India?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"If necessary!"

"Well, how about me, dad?" Marcia queried.

"You'll come if you want to."

"I do, but——"

"Oh, I say!" Addleford interrupted.

"I'm going to India!" Bennett repeated. "I'm going to take this here casket to Dar—whatever it is, and find the chap that can translate this puzzle on the cover!"

"The sahib speaks in words of seriousness?" Marrash asked, curiously.

"I never meant a thing more thoroughly in all my life!"

"But, my dear John!" his wife protested. "Have you thought how *quite* absurd——"

"There is nothing absurd about it!" Bennett replied, forcefully. "Here's a thing of real importance. It's been lying, around neglected for ages, perhaps. If I can fathom the meaning of the thing and give it to the world, I'll be doing more good, maybe, than by founding a dozen of the hospitals Addleford mentioned this afternoon!"

"Or perchance more harm, sahib," the oriental murmured gravely.

"I don't believe it!"

The retired merchant turned to him very earnestly. "Marrash, I've got a feeling in my bones that this casket came to me for a purpose! I've nothing

whatever to occupy my time—I've got plenty of money to travel ten or a hundred years if necessary. I believe——"

"Oh—fudge!" Addleford breathed.

"It is nothing of the sort!" Bennett glared at him for an instant, and the younger man quickly smoothed the cynical grin from his features. "I can't explain it, but—by thunder! it's something very like a mission to me!"

"And the sahib proposes to start immediately?" Marrash went on.

"As soon as possible. Are you going along, Martha?"

The elder lady caught her breath once or twice.

"To—to London, possibly. John. Farther than that, emphatically not! Nor is Marcia!"

"Oh, yes, I am," that person stated. "If dad's going to India——"

"Well, he is!" Bennett resumed his seat and frowned. "Well, how d'ye get there, Marrash?"

"To India, sahib, and Darjeeling?"

"Yes, sir."

"From here, one journeys to England. At Southampton, the steamer takes one to Calcutta. From there it is a long journey northward."

"Good railroads—Pullmans and diners in good shape, and all that sort of thing?" Bennett queried briskly.

"Hardly, sahib. For a space there is the railroad. Afterward travel is by camel to the hills; ascending, one uses donkeys."

"Mother, wouldn't you go to India for the sake of seeing dad ride a camel?" Marcia gurgled gleefully.

"I——" began her mother; but Bennett was talking once more.

"And I suppose you could give me some pretty clear directions how to get there, Marrash?"

"My knowledge is at the sahib's service."

"Good for you!" The tallow man wagged his head enthusiastically. The prospect was broadening every minute. "Can you come around here to-morrow morning to talk it over, or shall I go to your place?"

"Either, sahib. But is it wise?"

"It's not!" said Addleford, energetically. "You hit the nail on the head that time, Marrash!"

"I have expressed no opinion, sahib." The oriental's black eyes rested coolly upon him for a moment. "I offered but a suggestion."

"Why isn't it wise?" Bennett asked.

"There is much hardship to be encountered on the journey, and great risk of failure."

"I guess that won't stop me," said the enthusiast.

"Marrash, I'm as curious about this thing as—as a man could be. If there's something in it to benefit mankind, so much the better. But I may as well own up frankly, once for all, that it's the confounded mystery of it that is dragging me along. I'm going to find out what those letters mean, and if possible what's inside this casket. To-morrow morning—— Hold on!"

He had been smitten with another inspiration. He raised one hard fist and brought it down on the other palm.

"Marrash!" he cried. "You're coming along as guide and courier and general manager of the trip!"

His sparkling eyes were fastened upon the Hindoo. That individual, as usual, remained totally unaffected. His faint smile reappeared for an instant, and his finely poised head shook a trifle.

"It is not to be, sahib."

"Why not?"

"I shall never return to India."

"Well, I'm not asking you to do it for nothing, man. I intend to make it worth your while."

"It is not a consideration of money, sahib. Of that I think little." He ignored Addleford's audible sniff very gracefully. "I cannot return to my country, forevermore."

Bennett scowled. This calm opposition roused him a little; obstacles, so far as his memory ran, had been but things to be removed from his path.

"Why?" he asked.

The oriental sighed and rested his chin upon his startlingly symmetrical hand as he fastened his eyes upon Bennett.

"It must be pardoned if I speak of myself, sahib," he said, in a strange, low voice. "First, I am a full yogi."

"What's that?" Bennett asked bluntly.

"A—*yogi*!" ejaculated Marcia.

"I know," Addleford supplied, with a tinge of contempt. "It's one of those Hindoo chaps that cut up kids and put 'em together again, and stick a twig into the ground and make a full-sized orange-tree grow up in ten seconds—and all that sort of rot."

The oriental glanced at him curiously, and Bennett, having noted the tone of his younger visitor, wondered whether it was possible to make the man angry.

"The sahib speaks of minor performances," Marrash commented, turning again to Bennett. "However, such am I. Never had I intended to leave the country, sahib. It was in the mountains of Darjeeling that I lived and grew wise, and there I hoped to pass all my days."

He sighed again and they waited.

"It is all a matter which may not be spoken of," he continued softly. "Enough that I journeyed, some little time ago, to Benares, and there remained for a space. Between the highest of the priesthood and myself trouble arose. I was forced to leave India, and forever. To return would mean danger and strife."

"Umum." Bennett nodded sagely.

"And there is another reason, and one nearer yourselves," Marrash went on. "I came to this country and, as you know, established a shop for the sale of oriental wares. It has prospered well, sahib. I cannot forsake it."

"So you don't think you'll go?" Bennett rubbed his bearded chin.

"It may not be, sahib."

"Well, your hermit, or whatever he is, is where I can find him, isn't he, Marrash?"

"If it is to be, you will find him, sahib," the oriental responded very gravely.

Bennett looked at the floor and pondered. He had taken a distinct liking to this subdued Hindoo, more than ever did he like him now, for the man refused to leave a money-making business—and that made him seem, to Bennett, much more of a human being than before.

Still, the notion of solving the riddle of the casket had taken root within Bennett and in an amazingly firm fashion. When he came to a decision it was likely

to be carried out; and, with the fund of pent-up energy which had been accumulating for months, this specific project stood a pretty good chance of fruition.

"Look here!" he said. "As I understand the matter, you're pretty much afraid to go back?"

Marrash faced him proudly.

"It is not fear, sahib."

"Well, there's a pretty good chance of getting a knife stuck in you, according to your idea, isn't there?"

The slight smile appeared again.

"The chance is 'excellent, sahib."

"Well, sir, I wouldn't be afraid," said Bennett positively. "I know India isn't New York, but all the same there are police and English soldiers enough to take care of a man."

"But, sahib——"

"And what's more, I had a friend—Randall, his name was, and he was down there on Ann Street till he died—who lived for ten years in Bombay. Nothing ever happened to him, and there wasn't a scrapper individual on earth than Randall."

"From Bombay to Darjeeling is a far journey, sahib."

"All very true, I suppose, but I'll guarantee nothing would happen to you if we kept our eyes open. Let's consider that idea of danger as disposed of—shall we?"

"If it pleases the sahib."

"All right. Now for the other. Now about the store. What's it worth to you to turn the key and keep her closed for six or eight months, till we get back?"

"I cannot say, sahib."

"Why?"

"It is not to be."

"Well, it is to be, if I have anything to say about it," Bennett pursued, determinedly. "Let's see now. Summer'll be here in four or five months, and you don't do much business then, do you?"

"The trade is not so great as in the colder season, sahib, but——"

At this point Mrs. Bennett stepped into the discussion, and she spoke with the soothing tone one might use to an excited child.

"Really, John, you should not urge

Mr. Marrash. He does not wish to leave his business."

"He will before we're done."

"And it is altogether absurd, you know—the whole idea, and——"

"It's nothing of the sort, Martha!" Opposition, as usual, seemed to be confirming all of Bennett's first faith in his proposition.

He turned abruptly from his wife. He squinted a moment at Marrash.

"Come! Are you going to put a price on it?"

"I can put no price upon a service I may not perform."

"You'll have a good time—I'll warrant that. You'll travel in the best way and you'll have the best of everything. Whatever you accept for running the outfit's going to be plain velvet for you—clear profit, I mean. Then you can come back freshened up and go on selling oriental stuffs with a clear conscience—and I'll be mightily obliged to you, you know, and send lots of trade around."

"I thank you, sahib," Marrash said, impassively. "It may not be."

"Bosh!"

Bennett snapped out the word—and swallowed one or two sharp ones that were about to follow. He looked around under lowered brows, and found that his wife was preparing to speak once more. He turned away quickly, and, something after the manner of a rapid-fire gun, and with hardly less startling effect upon the hearers, he hurled at Marrash:

"Will you pilot me to the mountains of Darjeeling, help me find that fellow and generally keep matters on the track, for ten thousand dollars, payable in cash before we leave?"

His hands were thrust into his trousers pockets; he stared aggressively and waited.

The oriental seemed to rise a full inch from his chair; then he settled back again, imperturbable as before.

From three spots in the little drawing-room came three separate exclamations:

"Mr. Bennett!"

"John! Have you gone stark, staring mad?"

"Oh, dad!"

"Ladies and gentlemen!" said Mr. Bennett "That cash is my own. I worked for it, and the Lord knows I've never spent much for diversion. Well—how about it, Marrash?"

Marrash closed his eyes for a moment and appeared to consider.

"You offer me great temptation, sahib."

"That's what I meant to do," Bennett chuckled.

"Should I succumb, it may mean much evil."

"Also much good."

"Perhaps. Yet, in a matter of such dimensions, one must hesitate."

"I'm not hesitating. I've made up my mind, and I'm going ahead, whether you go with me or not?"

"John! I protest against this insanity! What an utterly outrageous idea, spending ten thousand dollars upon a——"

"Going to take me up, Marrash?"

The oriental's head came up suddenly. He looked for a moment at the ladies, and then faced Bennett.

"So shall it be, sahib."

"That's the talk. Wait here."

Bennett walked off briskly. Through the hangings his daughter, watching, saw him draw a chair up to the big library table, saw him produce his check-book and pen and write rapidly a few lines. She saw him waving the slip to dry the ink—and he returned, whistling cheerily between his teeth.

"There you are, Marrash." He held it out—ten thousand dollars' worth of paper, and as good, with that signature, as gold.

The oriental received it placidly, folded it and tucked it away with a slight bow.

"I thank you. Does the sahib require an acknowledgment?"

"We'll leave that out. There are witnesses enough," Bennett smiled. "Now! Will you come around here to-morrow and——" he paused. Out of the corner of his eye he caught his better half's expression. "Or, better still, I'll run around to your place some time in the forenoon. Is that all right?"

"Quite."

Marrash glanced about for a moment, then inclined his head.

"I must bid you all good evening," he said, in a queer, half-purring tone.

At least three of the party replied in a half-dazed fashion. Bennett, however, bade the guest the heartiest of adieus. He walked with him to the door even, chatting in a low voice. The outer doors closed, and the master of the

(To be continued.)

house returned, smiling happily upon the little group.

He surveyed them benignly. They returned the gaze coldly. Then, before they could speak, he addressed them:

"I've been kicking because I had nothing to do. *Now*, by thunder! I've got it, and got it strong!"

LADY LISPING AND OTHERS.

By E. J. Rath.

NOTHING more nor less than
a transient record of three
extremely fascinating little kids.

"**A**LL 'board for Europe, Asia'n Africa! All 'bo-o-ard!"

The voice of Kenneth was shrill with excitement. One foot was on the seat of the Morris chair, so that he could swing aboard the minute the train started. The hurrying feet of the belated passenger—the only passenger—sounded in the hall, and, a second later, Irene, in one of her mother's skirts, entered the room breathlessly.

"Wait! Wait!" she cried. "I mutht catch thith train."

"Step lively, madam," admonished the conductor. "Not that car; that's the smoker."

"I'm huthtling ath lively 'th I can," said the passenger, picking up a train that trailed a yard behind her. "Which ith the Pullman?"

"This one, ma'am," said the conductor. "The third car."

Irene settled herself luxuriously in a rocker, patted her skirt out smoothly, and, from somewhere in the folds of it, extracted a small gray kitten, which she placed upon her lap and began to cuddle fondly.

"Let 'er go," shouted the conductor, holding up two fingers and then waving his arm. The signal produced no sign of animation in the locomotive, where the

engineer sat like a statue in his rocking-chair cab. The conductor swung down on the platform again and walked forward.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"You don't do it right," said Robert, from his seat in the cab. "You got to pull a string and it goes 'ps-s-st' in the engine."

"There ain't any string," said the conductor simply.

"Well, holler 'ps-s-st,' anyhow," said the engineer.

"When we get to Europe I'm going to be engineer," remarked the conductor as a parting shot, as he walked back to the rear of the train.

"Ps-s-st!" he shouted.

"Now, what's the matter?" he demanded, half a minute later, as the locomotive still remained inert.

"Holler it good and loud," said the engineer. "I didn't hear it."

The conductor swallowed his mortification and hissed it out vindictively. Like magic was its effect, for the locomotive became a thing of life, and, although the train was heavy and hard to start, by dint of bell-ringing and whistle-blowing and a prodigious amount of puffing on the part of the engineer, it finally got under way. As it gained momentum the locomotive rocked violently back and forward, rearing and bucking like a bronco, so that the engineer finally had to lay aside the dinner-bell and use one hand to hold on with. The other he employed in keeping the whistle continually at his lips.

"You don't need to whistle so much," said the conductor at length.

"You c'lect the tickets," retorted the engineer. "I got to keep cows and people off the track."

Kenneth climbed dexterously over the backs of two chairs that intervened between him and the Pullman, where the lady sat.

"Tickets," he called sharply.

"You should thay 'ticketh, pleathe,'" said the lady, with dignity, handing over one of her mother's visiting cards.

"Where you going to?" asked the conductor.

"Athia'n Africa."

"They're diff'rent stations," explained the conductor. "Anyhow, you can only go to Europe on one ticket."

"Here'th another," said the passenger. "Now how far can I go?"

"I'll have to take that one for the cat, ma'am," said the conductor remorselessly.

"That'th not a cat," exclaimed the lady. "That'th my little daughter, and she'th only a year old and she rid'th free."

"You'll have to get off at Europe." The conductor was inexorable.

The passenger's lower lip trembled, while the kitten purred peacefully.

"I—I want to go to Africa," said the lady. "Pleathe let me go to Africa, Kenny."

"It's no place for ladies, ma'am," said the conductor, ignoring the familiarity. "Or babies, either. Do you want to be eat up by a g'rilla?"

"No-o," said the passenger hesitatingly. "Not by a g'rilla."

"Well, maybe something worse'll eat you up if you don't get off at Europe. Anyhow, I can only take you as far as Europe, 'cause then I'm going to be engineer."

"Tunnel!" interrupted a voice from the locomotive.

"Merthy!" exclaimed the passenger. "Their goenth through the old tunnelth again. Daughter, shut your eyeth tight up." But the kitten's eyes were already shut, so the passenger had nothing to do but shut her own.

"You tell me when we get out of the tunnel," she added, "cauthe I don't want to mith the thenery."

The tunnel was not long, but it was followed by so many others that the passenger complained bitterly about missing the view.

"When I'm engineer I don't have so many tunnels," said the conductor.

"Tunnel!" called the engineer.

The passenger's eyes closed quickly and she exclaimed "merthy" again. At that moment the engineer glanced back and caught the conductor with his eyes wide open. "Shut your eyes," he commanded.

"Yours ain't shut," retorted the conductor.

"I'm the engineer," said that person loftily. "I can't shut 'em."

"Well, I'm the conductor. Only passengers shuts their eyes."

It followed that the rebellion of the conductor was the martyrdom of the passenger; now there were twice as many tunnels. But the worm turned at last. In the middle of a brief stretch of open the passenger gathered up her skirts, signaled the conductor, tucked the kitten under her arm, and announced:

"I'm going to get off."

"Can't," said the conductor. "There ain't any station here; it's the middle of the ocean."

"I forgot that," faltered the passenger disconsolately, settling back in her seat. "Aren't we motht to Europe now?"

"Half way," called the engineer, carefully surveying the ocean. "Tunnel!"

As they emerged into daylight again, Irene opened her eyes and surveyed the scenery. The most prominent object in the foreground was Aunt Emma, surveying the train with silent but eloquent disapproval.

"Oh!" exclaimed the passenger involuntarily, whereupon the engineer also beheld Aunt Emma and the train came to a violent stop.

"You children will wake the dead," said the lady in the doorway.

"My papa sayth you can't wake dead folkth," returned Irene.

"Glad I ain't dead," remarked the engineer.

"I suppose this is playing?" said Aunt Emma, with rising inflection.

Aunt Emma was known by the young Hewletts to be shockingly ignorant of games, so Kenneth reassured her.

"Yes'm, Aunt Emma," he said. "It's playing. It's a train of cars going to Europe, Asia'n Africa."

Mr. Hewlett's sister sighed. It was one of those resigned, hopeless sighs that the little Hewletts had been listening to for five days. When Aunt Emma sighed they knew what to do—sit quietly and wait for the lecture. Since Mr. and Mrs. Hewlett had gone away for a brief vacation Aunt Emma had been in charge of the household. She had made many discoveries about the little Hewletts; or, rather, she had confirmed suspicions concerning them. For a long time she had suspected that their upbringing was being conducted in a manner widely at variance with her own ideas—now she knew it. And with this full knowledge also went an authority which she had never before possessed. That it was her duty to exercise this authority, even though it might be brief, Aunt Emma never for a moment doubted.

The little Hewletts lived in a riotous world of imagination, through which they made weird and exciting journeys, even to the uttermost frontier of that fanciful realm. Worst of all, they actually believed in the reality of it all. Of course, this was very bad for their little minds, Aunt Emma firmly believed, for the fantastic and the unreal had no place in her scheme of the child life. She was a contender for the sane and the simple. "Making believe," except as applied to the simplest of things, she regarded as a form of falsehood.

"Actually," she had protested to Mrs. Hewlett, "these children seem to believe these things. Their minds are becoming distorted."

Mrs. Hewlett always smiled sweetly and never argued.

"You won't mind if I give them a few little talks while you are away, I hope," remarked Aunt Emma, as the Hewletts said good-by.

"Oh, not a bit," said Mrs. Hewlett cheerfully.

"Talk as much as you like, Emma," said Mr. Hewlett, winking at his wife.

And Aunt Emma had talked. Patiently and conscientiously, for five days she had been trying to make the little Hewletts see the unreality and wild absurdity of what they called play. Equally pa-

tiently did the little Hewletts listen and then go forth again to shatter the idol of simplicity. The signs that betokened a talk from Aunt Emma were not hard to read. So it came that when she interrupted the journey to Europe, Asia, and Africa they understood perfectly that a talk was at hand.

"Children," she began—that was always the beginning—"perhaps it is all right for you to play that you are on a railroad, though I had hoped you would find something more simple and more quiet. But playing railroad, I find, leads you to imagine impossible things. Always remember to keep within the bounds of the possible, preferably of the probable. Although you seem to believe it, this is not a real railroad upon which you are riding. Neither do railroads run to Europe. In crossing the ocean ships are employed. And in playing tunnels, remember that they are but imaginary tunnels. I have been watching you, Irene, and I think you really believe you are in darkness when you close your eyes. Such is not the case; you are merely simulating darkness. Play engineer, if you must, Robert, but remember that you are only sitting in a rocking-chair, after all. And you, Kenneth"—Aunt Emma never left anybody out—"should not try to make your sister believe that you are in the middle of an ocean. Trains do not run on the water."

"Well, we had a ship once," said Kenneth, "but the boiler busted and we all fell overboard and got drowned and eat up by sharks. When you get drowned you have to crawl under a rug, and it's too stuffy, so now we don't get drowned any more."

"And the water wath awful thalt," said Irene, "and I got thoaking wet."

"Anyhow," added Kenneth, "there's only one captain on a ship, and on a train there's two."

"Well," sighed Aunt Emma, "try to make your play as much like the realities of life as possible. It will be just as pleasant as riding upon your purely imaginary railroad."

When she had gone beyond hearing, Robert spoke.

"It was a real railroad," he declared stoutly. "It had a whistle and passengers and an engine and everything."

"And there wath real tunnelth, 'cauthe it wath dark," said Irene, "wathn't it, putthy, dear?" But the gray kitten had escaped from the room in disgust.

"And we were going to Europe," said Kenneth, with finality, "but now I ain't going to play train any more. Let's be robbers."

"I'm head robber," shouted Robert, leaping from the locomotive.

"No, me," cried Kenneth. "I thought of it first. Anyhow, you're always head robber."

"Well, I'll be second robber," said Robert. "Irene, you're the traveler."

"I'm alwayth the traveler," said Irene sadly. "You don't ever let me be even a little bit of a robber."

"Girls can't be robbers," said Robert, which settled it. "And besides, if you ain't the lady traveler you won't get a chance to cry."

The last observation settled any doubt that may have remained in his sister's mind, and the trio ran noisily through the hall and out upon the lawn, where a commotion arose that brought Aunt Emma to the porch in haste. Her niece was on her knees, getting beautiful grass stains on her stockings and weeping copiously, while her nephews, each holding a pigtail of the child's hair, stood over her, waving clubs and shouting terrifically.

"Children!" screamed Aunt Emma, running down the steps.

The clubs fell to the ground, the pig-tails were released and Irene arose reluctantly from her knees.

"What in the world does this mean?" said Aunt Emma.

"Robberth," said Irene, wiping away her tears.

"Are you injured, child?" asked Aunt Emma anxiously.

"No," replied Kenneth, "she ain't hurt a bit. She's a rich lady being robbed and she always cries like that. That's part of being robbers. You ain't hurt, are you, Irene?"

"No," said the late rich lady. "You thee, Aunt Emma, I couldn't get robbed if I didn't cry. I alwayth cry; it's fun."

"What are those sticks for?" demanded Aunt Emma, pointing.

"They're guns; they ain't sticks," said Kenneth. "Robbers carry guns. We're Spanish robbers and we catch Irene in the mountains and tell her we're going to shoot her dead, and then she cries and gives us millions of dollars to let her go. And then we go off to the cave. Sometimes, when she don't give us enough, we take her to the cave, too, and tie her up with chains and starve her and hold her for a rasmon. We were taking her there to-day," he concluded. Irene glanced reproachfully at her aunt, the interrupter of that delectable event.

"Children, listen," said Aunt Emma.

The trio ranged themselves in a row.

"Robert and Kenneth, you are not robbers at all; you are just little boys. If you wish to play, play something quiet and reasonable; something that does not pretend to be what it is not."

The trio listened in silence and nodded at the conclusion, and Aunt Emma retired to the house.

"She's spoiled that, too," said Robert sullenly.

"We were real robbers," said Kenneth, always champion of the world of delightful adventure. "What'll we play now?"

"Let's go down to the barn," said Robert, "and be kings and queens and emp'rors."

It was almost supper time when Aunt Emma again beheld her niece and nephews. They came straggling to the house, hot and dirty and evidently happy.

"Go and get some clean things and wash your hands and faces," said Aunt Emma. "Supper will be ready as soon as you are."

The little Hewletts were quite presentable at the table, so far as their hands and faces went, and their appetites were beyond reproach.

"What were you doing all the afternoon?" inquired Aunt Emma pleasantly.

The trio exchanged glances grimly.

"We were down in the barn," said Robert finally.

"Playing?" asked Aunt Emma.

"Yes'm," said Robert.

"Playing what?"

Robert hesitated, but decided to face it. "Kings and queens," he said.

Aunt Emma bit her lip in annoyance. "Tell me about it," she said.

"I'll tell, Aunt Emma," said Irene. "Rob and Kenny were kingth. Kenny wath Henry the Eighth and Rob wath William the Conqueror and I wath Mary Queen of Scot'th. It'th a play. They both wanted to marry me, but I wath going to marry the King of Rutthia, tho Henry the Eighth cut off my head."

"How?" asked Aunt Emma.

"I took her by the hair," explained Robert, "and held her head on a box and Henry the Eighth tied her hands behind her back and then he cut off her head with an ax and she cried." Irene corroborated the recital by several emphatic nods, murmuring ecstatically: "I wath Mary Queen of Scot'th."

"An ax!" exclaimed Aunt Emma. "Did you play with an ax?"

"It was really a stick," said Kenneth, "but we played it was an ax, and I just sawed it along the back of Irene's neck. She cried good, too; didn't you, Irene?"

"Yeth," said Irene happily. "It ithn't nithe to have your head cut off, Aunt Emma. But it'th exthiting."

"She's a fine crier," added Robert generously.

"After that we were other kings and queens," continued Kenneth. "Rob and me were emp'rors, fighting for a throne, and Irene was the damager empress. And when she couldn't decide between us, she poisoned us."

"Poisoned you?" repeated Aunt Emma, mystified. "With what?"

"Pillth," said Irene.

"What sort of pills? Where did you get them?"

"Oh, jutht little pillth," said Irene evasively.

"Where did you get those pills, Irene?" Aunt Emma was in earnest.

"In the medithin chethth," said Irene.

"Merciful heavens!" shrieked Aunt Emma, sitting back helplessly in her chair.

"It's all right, Aunt Emma," said Kenneth soothingly. "They're just plain white pills. Here's the bottle."

Aunt Emma grabbed at a small phial which Kenneth fished out of his pocket and read the label. "How many have you taken?" she asked.

"We each took two," said Robert, "'cause the first ones didn't poison us enough."

"We've taken 'em lot'th of time'th," added Irene.

Aunt Emma rushed from the room, ran up-stairs and the little Hewletts heard the telephone ringing violently.

"Doctor Williams says the pills will not injure you," said Aunt Emma, when she returned. She seemed to acknowledge it with regret. "But never dare do such a thing again. You might have killed yourselves."

"Why, they're jutht teeny pillth, Aunt Emma," protested Irene. "Kitty eat'th 'em too, and they don't hurt her a speck."

"Now, observe what I say," said Aunt Emma, waving the pill-bottle for emphasis. "I will not have this sort of play. It is dangerous. I insist that you shall play reasonable and suitable games," she said. "Hide and seek; puss in the corner; even tag, if you do not run too violently. There are lots of children's games that I used to play. Why don't you play games like that?"

"They ain't any fun," said Kenneth. "Nobody gets killed in 'em."

"Is it necessary that anybody should be killed?" demanded Aunt Emma.

"It's better," said Robert judicially. "Anyway, Irene always peeks before she counts five hundred."

"I only peek thometime'th," declared Irene indignantly.

"Tragedies are more fun," said Kenneth. "We hung Rob once."

Robert confirmed the statement with a nod.

"He hangth fine," said Irene. "We put the rope under hith armth and he can hang awful long."

Aunt Emma, who was losing authority and dignity in the discussion, ended it by sending the little Hewletts to bed. They displayed singular willingness to go; in fact, they submitted to the banishment with an alacrity that was suspicious.

Half an hour after their retirement, Aunt Emma, who was reading in quiet enjoyment, dropped her book and exclaimed, "Oh, what now!"

The exclamation was caused by a pattering of feet up-stairs, accompanied by little squeals of alarm. She ran up two flights of stairs softly. At the head of the second flight, at the very edge of the top step, stood an oil lamp, flaring high

and smoking odorously. Aunt Emma thrust it aside and dashed into the nursery, which she found brilliantly illuminated. Irene, dressed in her nightgown, was disappearing out of the window, uttering terrified shrieks. Robert and Kenneth, in pajamas and bed-slippers, were leaning out after her at an alarming angle. They drew in hastily as their aunt screamed and let go of a rope that was composed of knotted sheets. Immediately followed a soft thump and another squeal from outside.

Aunt Emma rushed to the window, and, by a supreme effort of will, forced herself to look out, knowing full well that she was about to view the crumpled and inanimate form of her small niece, two stories below. What she did see was a small figure on the roof of the porch, one story below, in the act of crawling in at a window, and dragged the knotted rope after her like the tail of a great kite. As the end of the tail disappeared there was a sound of bare feet on the stairs and Irene burst into the room, shouting:

"There, now! I told you tho. You dropped me again, and you promised not to." Then she observed Aunt Emma, standing stern and rigid, and subsided, with an awed "Oh!"

"Are you injured, Irene?" said Aunt Emma. Her voice was tragic.

"No, ma'am," said Irene meekly.

"Then explain, please."

"I wath being thaved from fire, tho I wouldn't get burned to pietheth," said Irene.

"It's a hotel fire, Aunt Emma," put in Robert. "Irene's a lady in a hotel that is burning up and she can't get down the stairs. So she hollers like anything for help and Kenny and I save her. We make a rope of sheets and let her down, and then she crawls off the shed and runs up-stairs again and we rescue her all over. We wouldn't have dropped her, only you hollered and it scared us so that we let go the rope."

For once Aunt Emma had wisdom enough to realize that words were inadequate. The ethics of play were not to be discussed at such moments as these.

"Give me those sheets," she said shortly. The life-line was cast loose from Irene's waist and handed over.

"Mercy on us; they're wringing wet," said Aunt Emma.

"They thoaked the knotth tho they wouldn't untie," explained Irene. "It'th thafer."

Aunt Emma threw the dripping tangle into a corner, went to the linen-closet and returned with an armful of fresh sheets. She remade three tousled little beds in ominous silence and then pointed to them.

"Get in," she commanded.

The little Hewletts got in silently.

"Now, don't you dare get out of your beds again until morning. Do you understand?"

"Yes'm," said the trio.

"Who lighted all these lights, and what for?" asked Aunt Emma, surveying the scene of brilliance. Every gas-jet was going at a full head and three oil lamps were giving their best assistance.

"We lit 'em," said Kenneth. "They're the fire. The one at the head of the stairs is so she can't escape."

One by one Aunt Emma extinguished them. With her hand at the last gas-jet, she took a final survey of the three beds, then plunged the room into darkness and went down-stairs, without a good night.

"If you hadn't hollered so much," said the voice of Robert, melancholy in the gloom, "you could have got rescued again."

"I had to holler," said Irene tearfully. "They alwayth holler."

"Well, you didn't need to holler so loud."

"I wath thcared," remarked Irene, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Irene," said the voice of Kenneth sternly, "there's a great big elephant in the room and he's going to eat you up."

"Ooo-o-eee!" shrieked Irene softly, putting her head under the covers.

"Bang! Bang!" chorused the two heroes, from the safety of their couches. "There; he's dead," said Robert. "You go to sleep, Irene, and we will remain on guard."

"With it had been hittopotamuth night," sighed Irene gratefully, settling herself contentedly on the pillow. As the last delicious peril of the day, the little Hewletts always slew a wild beast before going to sleep. It was never any-

thing smaller than a buffalo, and the larger the better, because the more heroic the dead.

Now there was peace in the nursery and the treacherous guard fell asleep almost as quickly as the imperiled lady. Apparently they were in slumber when Aunt Emma appeared at the door in the morning, although the suspicion that eternally lurked in her mind was at once aroused by the fact that the pillows were not on the beds, but were scattered in various rumbled attitudes on the floor.

"Children," said Aunt Emma.

The little Hewletts awoke with suddenness.

"Time to get up," said Aunt Emma. She made no comment on the state of the pillows, though she was convinced that the day had already begun.

Her niece and nephews blinked at her inquiringly and said "Good morning" politely. Aunt Emma was almost ominously gracious. If she harbored any postponed views on hotel fires and hairbreadth escapes she refrained from expressing them, and the little Hewletts were astonished and somewhat apprehensive at this omission.

"I am going to ask you to play my games to-day," said Aunt Emma, at the breakfast table. "Will you?"

The trio looked doubtful and exchanged glances.

"Can't we play ours?" asked Robert. "We don't know yours."

"Unfortunately, I do not like your games," said Aunt Emma. "They are really not play at all; they are melodrama. Whoever invented them? Was it you, Robert?"

"We all invent 'em," said Robert. "I invented the robbers and wild animals and Irene invented most of the king and queen games, but that's 'cause she's studied more history than us. Kenny invented the hotel fire, although I thought of the going out the window part of it. He wanted to carry her down-stairs."

"I invented hothpital, too," said Irene.

"Hospital?" inquired Aunt Emma.

"Yeth'm," said Irene. "It'th where we cut off Kenny'th armth and legth, and I'm the nurthe and Rob'th the doctor. It'th lotth of fun, Aunt Emma, and—and it don't make any noithe."

"Shocking," said Aunt Emma, with a shudder. "It is not the way I played when I was a child. My amusements were the simple games of childhood."

This was the second time Aunt Emma had adverted to the days of her youth and the little Hewletts exchanged glances again, for only the day before they had unanimously agreed that their aunt had probably never played anything in all her life.

"Do you think you could play my games to-day?" pursued Aunt Emma.

"H-mm," said Robert. "Are they nice?"

"Exhitting?" broke in Irene.

"Nice, but not exciting," said Aunt Emma. "They are interesting, quiet, and some of them are very instructive."

Whereupon Aunt Emma ran over her list, which included twenty questions, button-button, playing house, playing school, a variety of ring games and several other pastimes of which the little Hewletts had not even heard.

"I don't think w'd like any of those," said Robert bluntly when the list was concluded.

"We might play thchool," suggested Irene timidly.

"A very excellent idea, Irene," said Aunt Emma, beaming upon her niece. "You will find it easy, quiet, and instructive. You may take turns being teacher. The pupils will get their books and the teacher will ask questions from them, going over those parts that you have studied. It will be just like having an examination."

"We don't like examinations," said Kenneth sourly. "Irene only said school because she knows her lessons better than us."

"You should follow her example," said Aunt Emma, with another glance of approval upon her niece.

"I'm going to be teacher firtht," said Irene. "Ladieth are alwayth teacherth."

"There; I told you so, Aunt Emma," said Kenneth.

"Well, we'll try it, anyhow," said Robert graciously. "If you want to be teacher, Irene, you've got to get the books. You know where they are."

Irene made haste to obey and school was organized on the side porch, under the supervision of Aunt Emma. When

she left it and went inside to look after the morning work it was spelling earnestly and conscientiously.

But spelling became tiresome. None of the children cared for arithmetic; it was too hard. Reading, on the other hand, was too easy, although Robert found some enjoyment in its opportunities for rhetorical effect. Finally it was Kenneth who suggested:

"Please, teacher, may we have history now?"

Could they have history! They certainly could, for in the matter of history Irene needed no books. To her it was the most delightful branch of learning.

"Name thome of the kingth of England," she commanded.

"William the Conqueror," responded Robert promptly.

"Name another," continued the teacher.

"Henry the Eighth," cried Kenneth. The class stirred uneasily.

"Hum," said the teacher thoughtfully. "Tell what he did."

"Chopped off Mary Queen of Scots' head," chorused the class.

It is barely possible that it was a sleeping imp, just arousing, who asked the next question, although the word came from the lips of the teacher herself. It came softly, almost reluctantly: "How?"

The class looked at each other, then at the teacher, upon whose face sat charming innocence as she awaited the reply. "Like this," cried Robert, jumping from his chair and making a lunge at his sister, who sniffed, slipped to her knees and laid her head on the seat of her chair. A ruthless hand grasped her pigtails and another one drew from her limp fingers the ruler of authority. Kenneth bared his arm, Robert drew the pigtails taut, and Irene shivered and sobbed. Three times the ruler descended on the back of the chair.

"There; that's done," said Robert, releasing the hair. "Only it wasn't a very good chop."

"It was the best I could do with this," said Kenneth, regarding the ruler with some contempt. "Anyhow, Irene didn't cry hard enough."

"I can cry loth better in the thtable," said Irene suggestively.

"We promised to play here," said Kenneth, with a sudden return of virtue. "Now I'm going to be teacher and we'll have geography."

"Hithtory 'th nitheth," said Irene, with a sigh, as she got her geography and seated herself with the class.

"We're on Europe," said Kenneth. "Where's Europe?"

"In the Eastern Hemisphere," said Robert promptly.

"What are the countries of Europe?"

"England, Paris, Germany, and Russia," suggested Robert.

"Parith ithn't a country; it'th a thity," said Irene loftily.

"Well, you name some of 'em, then," retorted Robert.

"Thpain," said Irene, looking at the teacher.

The teacher returned the look with a fixed stare, but hesitated. "What do they have in Spain?" he asked, after a pause.

"Spaniards," volunteered Robert.

"What else?"

"Population, wheat, coal, and iron," added Robert.

The teacher sighed and turned an inquiring eye upon his sister. "What else?" he repeated. Clearly, the question was a pointed one and required an answer. So Irene, transfixed by the pedagogical eye, said:

"Robberth."

The teacher was on his feet in a bound. So was Robert, chagrined at his own dulness. Kenneth brandished his ruler aloft, while his brother picked up a handy hammock-stick. Irene, who waited dutifully while these preparations were made, now shrieked and started to run, but was rudely grasped by the hair and detained. The robbery of the lady traveler was but half completed when Aunt Emma appeared upon the porch, summoned by the uproar.

"Children!" she cried. "How dare you?"

The robbers, balked of their booty, looked sheepish, while the lady traveler hastily dried her tears and scrambled off her knees.

"Do you call this school?" demanded Aunt Emma.

"Well, it *was* school," explained Kenneth, "but we were having geography, about Spain, and I asked what they had

in Spain and Irene said 'robbers,' and then—well, we just couldn't help it, Aunt Emma. But now we'll have grammar."

"No, you will not have grammar," said Aunt Emma, dropping into a chair, limp from vexation. "You will turn grammar into a hotel fire, by some diabolical ingenuity, and I believe you would turn arithmetic into a railroad disaster and then offer the most plausible explanation for it. Oh, you are hopeless; utterly hopeless."

The little Hewletts regarded Aunt Emma respectfully.

"We're thorry," said Irene ingratiatingly.

"I do not believe it," said Aunt Emma sharply. "You are perfectly delighted. Please do not add hypocrisy to your misbehavior."

During a period of embarrassed silence the little Hewletts noticed, for the first time, that she held a letter in her hand.

"It is humiliating," said Aunt Emma, at length, "and I am not sure that it is not demoralizing, but I am going to offer you a bribe to be good. I see no other way. You are so impossibly perverse that I can think of no other method of securing good conduct except to purchase it. Now," waving the letter, "if I tell you the nicest thing in the world, will you be quiet and good all the rest of this day, and not play another one of your awful games?"

The little Hewletts hesitated. Bartering away independence was a serious matter, not to be lightly decided.

"It's just for to-day, is it?" asked Robert.

"I only ask it for to-day," said Aunt Emma, "but it ought to be forever."

"And is it pretty nice?" asked Kenneth.

"Yes," said Aunt Emma, guardedly, and beginning to reflect upon the ethics of such shameful bargaining.

"Ith it ath nithe ath playing hoth-pital?" asked Irene.

"Irene," said Aunt Emma sharply, "you dicker like a little Shylock. I believe you are the most mercenary of the lot."

Still the trio hesitated. So significant were the looks they exchanged that Aunt Emma would not have been astonished

if they had asked permission to retire for consultation.

"Shall we promise?" asked Robert finally.

"Go ahead," said Kenneth hopelessly. Irene nodded her head.

"We promise, Aunt Emma," said Robert, "only we expect it to be very nice, of course."

"Well, then," said Aunt Emma, "I have here a letter from your father and mother. They are coming home a day ahead of time. They will be here to-night."

"Whee-e-e-e!" shouted the little Hewletts, straightway falling to a three-cornered wrestling match that threatened to overturn the porch chairs, including the one occupied by their outraged aunt.

"Remember your promise!" called that lady warningly. "You are to be quiet and good."

In their ecstasy of joy the little Hewletts had forgotten, and they abandoned the celebration with reluctance.

"We just had to holler at that," said Kenneth. "I should think you'd holler, too, Aunt Emma."

"I think I shall when they are really here," said Aunt Emma. "Now, was it nice enough?"

"Yeth, indeedy," said Irene, her eyes shining. "It'th the nithetht of all."

"Wish they were here now," said Robert. "To-night's an awful long time."

It was a painful and uncanny goodness, that of the little Hewletts during the remainder of the forenoon and all the long summer afternoon. They kept the faith stoically, so that the heart of Aunt Emma was melted almost to the point of relenting; but she did not relent, for that would be weakness. Irene sat by herself, mending dolls whose various parts had been severed by the surgeon's knife, before the use of Kenneth as a patient had come into practice. Kenneth pored through his adventure books, looking for some story he did not already know by heart, and finding none. Robert wandered about the place disconsolately, not daring to approach either brother or sister, for he realized the weakness of flesh and the possibilities of kindred spirits in propinquity. The bitterness of being quiet was in the hearts of all.

"I hope it will do them good," said Aunt Emma to herself, almost reconciled to bribery by the success of it. "And they will be nice and clean when their parents arrive."

As evening approached, the restlessness of the little Hewletts was apparent to the most casual observer. Irene made several journeys to look at the clock. Kenneth dropped his books and relapsed into a meditation so evidently unpleasant that he scowled at Robert every time the latter crossed his vision. As for Robert, he did not dare trust himself to play anything at all. But the treaty with Aunt Emma was kept with honor. It was absolutely intact when the proposer of it appeared on the porch, dressed to go to the station.

"Oh, can we go?" cried Irene plaintively.

"There won't be room," said Aunt Emma. "Besides, children, I want you clean and tidy when you meet your father and mother. We will be back very soon," she added, as Patrick drove a two-seated rig up from the barn.

The little Hewletts swallowed their disappointment gamely and watched Aunt Emma and Patrick disappear down the road in the direction of the station.

"She might have taken uth," said Irene, pouting.

"Maybe we could walk a little way down the road and meet 'em," suggested Kenneth.

"We will," said Robert, going inside for his hat.

* * * *

Half an hour later a carriage, containing four persons, approached the Hewlett residence, the horse moving at a comfortably brisk trot. Three of the occupants were in animated conversation; the fourth was flicking flies with the end of the whip. The afternoon, now grown late, was as quiet as Sunday; there was a play of yellow sunshine through the trees that shaded the road and a flower-scented breeze stirred the leaves very gently. The carriage turned into a narrow way, bordered by high and closely wooded embankments, and now headed directly toward the house.

A high-pitched yell broke the stillness. It came from the shrubbery at the left of

the road and was immediately followed by a small figure that plunged abruptly into view, endeavored to descend the embankment in two strides and fell headlong in the gully by the roadside, as a result. A second yell was followed immediately by a second figure, whose momentum carried it sprawling into the dust, almost under the forelegs of the horse, which was pulled up with a jerk and a smothered exclamation from Patrick. Almost instantly there came a third arrival, tripping at the top of the embankment and making spectacular revolutions, like a pin-wheel, which landed it on top of the prostrate one in the gully.

The dust-begrimed figure in the road scrambled to its feet, brandished a stick to which it had clung desperately in its descent, and shouted:

"Hands up! Money or y'r life!"

"Hands up!" echoed a voice from the gully, as its owner scrambled out into the road.

"Handth up! Ma-ma! Pa-pa!"

Mr. Hewlett leaped from the carriage and stood rigid, his hands high above his head. Three robbers, dirty, tattered, and bruised, fell upon him at once, seized him by the waist and endeavored to climb him, as though he were a tree. One by one he overcame them, kissed them and tossed them into the carriage, where they attacked with fresh energy a lady who occupied the rear seat.

Aunt Emma, viewing the hold-up from the front seat, was dumb with horror. The cowardice of Patrick, who made no effort to save his passengers from the bandits, was abominable. He merely grinned. For a full minute the attack raged and then Aunt Emma recovered speech.

"Oh, Louise," she cried. "I am so sorry; so ashamed: I left them nice and clean and expected to see them waving to you from the porch."

Mrs. Hewlett poked her head through a tangle of arms and small bodies and smiled happily. Her hat was tilted ruthlessly over one ear and her cheeks, flushed and rosy, bore grimy evidence of the dastardly work of her assailants.

"Why," she said contentedly, "if they hadn't done something like this I'd have been worried almost to death."

THE LADY OF THE COBWEBS.*

By J. Aubrey Tyson.

A love-story among the New York artists; with a glimpse of Bohemia.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

CECIL DELAFIELD, out of Princeton on account of a broken leg, is living with his guardian, Horace Runyon, at his studio, next Morin's little French restaurant. To break the monotony, Cecil widens a chink in the common partition near his bed so that he can look through into the restaurant. Thus he learns to know Esther Warwick, an artist, and her friend, Rose Heaton; Lauchenheimer, who handles Runyon's copies of the old masters; Herstrom, the husband of an old friend of Esther's, and Archie Drayton, a newspaper man.

Runyon and Cecil have both reached the end of their money. Cecil has been irritable, and nagging his guardian about the property which will not be his for five years, at last confessing that he has opened a forbidden closet and found, covered with dust and cobwebs, the portrait of a beautiful woman.

Runyon leaves the studio and somewhat later enters Morin's, where he orders a dinner for Cecil, paying the waiter with a hundred-dollar bill. As he is leaving, his shabbiness and haggard face attract the attention of Dick Luyster, another journalist, who has come to drag Drayton out of the restaurant, when he proceeds to tell him that, through a telephone misconnection, he has overheard a murder committed in a certain house in Washington Square, and a reference to a 6:15 train from Washington.

They go to the house, and the butler informs them that Mr. Muirness, its owner, is not at home. Tracing the footsteps plainly visible in the light snowfall, they arrive again at Morin's. The only person who has been out of the building is Runyon. Luyster takes the number of the hundred-dollar bill and then starts to meet the 6:15 train from Washington.

CHAPTER V.

THE BETTER LIGHT.

WHEN Cecil finished his breakfast on the morning following the incidents that have been described, Runyon gave to him a paper that he had been reading. The painter then drew his easel to one of the windows and began his work.

On the third page of the paper was a story which Cecil read idly. Over it were the headlines:

ART COLLECTOR DEAD.

Alexander Muirness Killed Almost Instantly
by Fall of Plaster and Heavy Mold-
ings in his Library—Had Long
Been a Recluse.

The story was as follows:

The lifeless body of Alexander Muirness, well-known in art circles as the

possessor of one of the most extraordinary collections of paintings in the United States, was found, shortly before midnight, on the floor of his library in North Washington Square.

Death, which doubtless was instantaneous, had been caused by the fall of the plaster and heavy moldings of the library ceiling. The skull was fractured in two places.

The body of the former millionaire was found by Enoch Cassidy, Mr. Muirness's butler.

According to Cassidy's account of the tragedy, he had been busy in the basement most of the evening, and about 11:30 o'clock he went up-stairs to the library to learn whether Mr. Muirness would require his services before he retired for the night.

Cassidy found the library door ajar, and as he pushed it open it grated against numerous pieces of fallen plaster. The gas was burning and the butler saw the body of his master lying on

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

the floor beside an overturned chair near the desk.

The desk and the floor around it were covered with plaster and fragments of the heavy molding with which the ceiling was ornamented.

Cassidy at once telephoned to St. Vincent's Hospital, and an ambulance responded promptly to the call. The surgeon said that Mr. Muirness had been dead for more than an hour before the body was found.

Mr. Muirness was a native of Scotland, being born in Glasgow seventy-three years ago. He went to California in 1849 and attained a marked degree of success as a prospector.

During the Civil War his interests in Western mines aggregated from three to five million dollars. It is believed that much of this was lost in subsequent speculation.

Mr. Muirness retired from business about ten years ago, and then removed from San Francisco to New York. While living the life of a recluse in his house in Washington Square, he still contrived to make a collection of famous paintings, most of which were the works of the old English, Dutch, and Italian masters.

Five years ago Mr. Muirness came into conflict with the Federal authorities, who chanced to discover that he had in his possession a celebrated painting by Murillo, which had been smuggled into this country in order to avoid the payment of duty. At that time it was rumored that in a similar manner Mr. Muirness had filled his house with some of the most famous paintings in Europe.

Mr. Muirness never married, and little is known concerning his relatives. A search for the will is to be made to-day.

"Did you see this story of the art collector who has come to grief?" asked Cecil of Runyon as, laying the paper aside, he prepared to light his pipe.

"Old Muirness? Yes, I saw it."

"Did you know him?"

"Only by reputation. I've heard some queer stories told of his collection. There seem to be excellent reasons for the belief that it is very valuable."

Cecil picked up the paper again, and for several minutes the stillness of the apartment was unbroken.

At length, raising his eyes from his work, Runyon saw that the paper again had slipped from the young man's hands and that his face was turned toward the wall. At the same moment Cecil spoke.

"Did you ever see her, Horace?" he asked absently.

"See whom?" demanded Runyon sharply.

"The young woman we were speaking of last night—Miss Warwick?"

"Never. But it struck me, while you were talking with those two chaps last night, that you were manifesting a singular degree of interest in a woman you had never seen."

Cecil chuckled quietly.

"But I have seen her."

"Since you've been here?"

"Last night."

The painter, lowering his brush and stick, looked at his young friend with puzzled eyes.

"You don't mean to tell me that she came in here last night while I was out?"

"No, no, no!" laughed Cecil. "She has neither seen me nor spoken to me, but for nearly an hour last night I watched her as she sat at the table in the restaurant. She——"

The color fled from Runyon's face.

"Then you left your couch, despite——"

"I did nothing of the kind, but your guesses are so wild that it is better, perhaps, that I make a clean breast of it."

"I wish you would," retorted the painter grumpily.

Cecil hesitated for a few moments, laughed a little uneasily, then said:

"Just before you went out last night, you dropped your canvas-knife near the couch, and with a little effort I got possession of it."

"Well?"

"Well, it proved to be a key to a side-gate of paradise. Do you remember the lines in Moore's 'Lalla Rookh'?"

"One morn a peri at the gate
Of Eden stood disconsolate."

"I was thinking that possibly I was the son of that peri and had inherited some of her disconsolate spirit, when——"

"The peri who was your mother has passed within the gate, Cecil," interrupted Runyon, as he gazed thoughtfully toward the window.

"——when from the other side of this partition there rose the voices and laughter of the throng of diners," Cecil went on.

"They are scarcely the sort one

would expect to meet in Paradise," said Runyon grimly.

"Not most of them, perhaps, but there was one—I say, Horace, when they were singing 'Auld Lang Syne,' just before you went out, you surely must have heard the voice that rose above the others—a voice like that of an angel."

The hands that laid aside the brush, palette, and maulstick were trembling now.

"Yes," said Runyon quietly, "I heard it. It was like the voice of one of those sirens who lured mariners to death on the shoals."

Cecil laughed lightly.

"This one lured me from morbid meditations in a cheerless room to a contemplation of smiling faces and a scene of light and glowing colors."

"But you did not leave the room?"

"No. As I have said, I saw it all through the gate of Paradise, or, rather, through the keyhole of the gate. With the knife you threw away, I made a hole in the partition that separates your studio from the restaurant."

"Ah!"

"I saw her then."

"The singer?"

"Yes."

Runyon rose and stepped to the window. As he looked out on the gloomy back yard, he asked:

"What sort of looking woman was she?"

"She was more beautiful than any woman I ever saw before. Her hair was black, and, great Heaven, what a wealth of it she had! Her complexion——"

Runyon laughed uneasily and made a gesture of expostulation.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Lead me not into temptation. I cannot afford the luxury of employing models now."

"Ah, why do you not paint a woman like that, Horace? Such a face and figure in a picture could not fail to——"

"Beware lest you find them in your heart."

Again Cecil laughed with boyish lightness.

"If I had such a picture as that in my heart, I would close my gallery to visitors."

"And turn me out with the others," retorted Runyon as he again seated himself before his easel.

"No. I couldn't do that if I would. In the gallery of my heart you are set in the wall as a sort of bas-relief of an avenging angel decapitating friendship with a two-edged sword. I shouldn't like to spoil the wall."

"It's a pretty subject," said Runyon gravely.

"Perhaps, but somehow, Horace, it never quite appealed to me. Of all the friends that I have made there is not one among them of whom you have approved."

"You haven't been altogether fortunate in their selection, perhaps!"

"Certainly not, if you are to be believed. But, tell me, why it is that whenever I express admiration for a woman, you always get in a bad humor."

Runyon, continuing to paint, did not answer.

"Why is it?" Cecil persisted.

"Because I fear you are too impressionable; because you do not know women as well as I do."

"Sometimes I think you do not know them at all—that you have obtained your false ideas concerning them from morbid novels, and that you regard those ideas as knowledge."

"That is as you see it now. Some day, perhaps, you will recognize your error."

"Well, all knowledge is the fruit of errors."

"True, and that is why I may claim the distinction of being an authority on female character."

"But you have not seen the woman I saw last night."

"I heard her voice. It was a voice like that of a woman I knew when I was just about your age. Had I never met her I should be doing something rather more creditable to-day than earning a precarious livelihood by making copies of the works of men who did not suffer women to wreck their lives."

Cecil looked at his mentor with an expression of new interest. Was this self-avowed woman-hater the victim of an unfortunate love-affair?

Then the subject of the quarrel of

the night before came to his mind. Perhaps—ah, yes, that was it! He had fathomed the mystery now. At some time Horace Runyon had known and loved the Lady of the Cobwebs!

But who had this young woman been? He had known Runyon ever since he could remember, but until he had come upon that mysterious portrait in the closet he had never seen or heard anything of the original.

So Horace at one time had been in love! But that must have been a very long while ago.

And then Cecil, with his face buried in the pillows, summoned before his mind's eye the image of the woman he had seen through the hole he had made in the wall.

Each changing aspect of her expressive features had been photographed by his memory and again he surveyed them one by one. While thus employed the beautiful image to which his fancy clung drifted with him into dreamland, and he slept.

He awoke suddenly to find that Dr. Rollin, his physician, was shaking him by the shoulder. The physician greeted him cheerfully and then proceeded to examine the plaster cast that encased the injured limb.

"How soon shall I be able to have it off?" the young man asked wearily.

Dr. Rollin smiled encouragingly as he answered:

"If all goes well, I think we can free you from it in three or four days."

Cecil's eyes brightened, and he was about to speak when the physician bent over one end of the couch, while Runyon gripped the other.

"What are you doing?" the injured man asked anxiously.

"You've been doing too much reading in a bad light," explained Dr. Rollin. "If we put you over against the other wall, the light from the window and the chandelier will get at you better."

"But, hang it all, I don't want——"

The creaking of the couch drowned his words as it was wheeled across the room by the physician and the painter.

"Come, Horace, this is another specimen of that peculiar diplomacy of yours that you'll have to cut out when I get around again," protested Cecil angrily

when the width of the studio separated his couch from its former place beside the partition.

Runyon made no reply, and after giving utterance to a few pleasantries, Dr. Rollin withdrew. When he was gone, Cecil rose to a sitting posture and turned a pair of blazing eyes on the painter.

"You had my couch moved because—because I saw her through the wall!" he exclaimed.

"The doctor agrees with me that over here you can see things in a better light," replied the painter, smiling gravely.

"The better light may enable me to see more clearly that the period of your guardianship has come to an end, and that it is time that I had from you an accounting of the estate left to me by my mother."

"Perhaps it may," said Runyon.

CHAPTER VI.

CECIL TAKES HIS OWN ROAD.

THE five days that followed the opening of Morin's new restaurant and the death of Alexander Muirness were comparatively uneventful.

Luyster, who for several months had been only an infrequent visitor at Morin's, was to be seen there now every night.

He explained that this was possible because of a change that he had made from a morning newspaper, which had kept him employed evenings, to an afternoon newspaper that enabled him to have his evenings to himself.

Despite the enthusiastic message Luyster had sent to Drayton by telephone, he apparently had found it impossible to run out successfully the clues that had seemed so promising.

When Drayton had sought further information on this subject, Luyster had replied that, having failed to obtain from the baggage-master of the six-fifteen train from Washington the envelope which, he had inferred, had been addressed to Muirness, he had decided to place the matter in the hands of the New York police and to have no further connection with it.

This, he said, he had done.

But if Morin's had regained a regular patron in Luyster it appeared to have lost two others.

Neither Herstrom nor Esther had visited the place since the opening night. Occasionally, however, Runyon dropped in, but it was only for a few moments, and on these occasions he usually directed the head waiter to serve a dinner to Cecil in the studio.

Since the removal of Cecil's couch from the partition that separated the studio from the restaurant, the relations of the painter and his protégé had been strained.

Runyon appeared to be deaf to all Cecil's requests to wheel the couch to its former position, and at last the requests ceased. The young man surrendered with a bad grace, however, and consistently discouraged all attempts made by Runyon to effect a reconciliation.

For the first time since Cecil had been injured, Runyon now began to spend his days away from the studio. Cecil's breakfast and luncheon were brought in by a waiter from a cheap restaurant in the neighborhood, and his dinners, as has been said, came from Morin's.

On the fifth day following the removal of the couch the plaster cast was taken from Cecil's injured leg, and a careful examination of the limb satisfied Dr. Rollin that the bone had set satisfactorily.

On the sixth day Cecil was up and was able to walk about the studio with the aid of crutches. From that time his life became more bearable.

While he had been obliged to keep to his couch, Cecil suspected that Runyon, taking advantage of his periods of sleep, had made some effort to close the hole that had been made in the partition.

Accordingly, as soon as the younger man was able to get about the apartment he lifted the silken hanging, and saw that the hole was still there.

On the sixth night, when Runyon, who had been absent from the studio since nine o'clock in the morning, pushed open the door, he found the studio dark.

He lighted the gas and glanced around the apartment. Cecil had gone.

Through the partition came the voices and laughter of the diners in Morin's.

With a muttered oath on his lips, Runyon quickly left the room, and hurried to the door of the adjoining apartment. There he saw Cecil seated at a table with Luyster and Drayton, who appeared to be greatly amused at some story he was telling them.

Runyon felt a sinking of the heart. Was it possible that Cecil really had taken the bit between his teeth at last?

"Well, thank God, the woman is not there!" he muttered as he turned away.

But, even as he was congratulating himself, there came to his ears the sound of laughing voices on the stair.

A few moments later two young women, tastefully gowned and wearing furs, approached. As Runyon stepped aside, one of the women—a blond—moved by him. But his eyes rested on her only a moment.

Something in the voice of the young woman behind attracted his attention and, as he turned, something in her features and her aspect held his gaze.

"How strangely that man in the hall looked at me, Rose!" exclaimed Esther Warwick when she and Rose Heaton were inside the door of the dining-room.

"Who was he, do you know?" Rose asked carelessly.

"No. But he seemed to shrink from me as if he had something to fear. Look, Rose, there are Archie Drayton and Dick Luyster making places for us at the table. Who is that young man who is with them?"

"One of Archie's friends, I suppose. Oh, see the crutches by the wall! It's that Princeton boy Archie spoke of."

The two women had arrived at the table now, and after they had been greeted by Drayton and Luyster, Cecil was introduced to them by Drayton. In a few moments Esther was sitting beside Cecil; Luyster and Rose sat facing them, while Drayton occupied a chair at one end of the table.

"How is it that you are here to-night, Mr. Luyster?" Esther asked as Cecil, without rising, helped her to remove her wraps.

"Archie has deserted the field of morning journalism in order that he may have the pleasure of meeting us here every night," Drayton explained.

Luyster flushed deeply, as he said shortly:

"I'm doing day-work now."

Esther turned to Cecil.

"Mr. Drayton has told us of your accident, Mr. Delafield," she said. "I was sorry to hear that you had been so unfortunate, but I'm very glad that you are able to be around again."

All unconsciously, she glanced at the crutches that were leaning against the wall.

Cecil colored and laughed uneasily, as he said quickly:

"Please do not look at those sticks, Miss Warwick. I shall be able to throw them away in a week or two."

There was something in the earnestness with which the young man spoke that caused Esther to look at him with an expression in which surprise and amusement were blended.

"Broken bones are neither unusual nor serious in a young man of your age," Esther replied.

"Though they are scarcely as common as broken hearts," said Drayton, who was wrestling with the obdurate joint of a lobster, "unfortunately they are not so easily mended as the hearts."

"Has yours ever been in need of repairs?" Esther asked, as she turned laughingly to Drayton.

"Oh, yes," sighed Drayton. "Mine is a good deal like this lobster. The members of your sex crack it, nibble at the meat inside, then leave me to crawl off to the hospital with my broken shell in my claw."

Esther did not join in the laughter that followed Drayton's remark. Her eyes were upon a newcomer who had seated himself at the next table.

Cecil glancing toward her saw an expression of annoyance on her features, then, following the direction of her gaze, his eyes encountered those of Runyon.

Cecil grew pale with anger. That the painter had entered the dining-room for the purpose of seeing the young woman and watching his conduct while with her, Cecil did not for a moment doubt. His eyes kindled and flashed with a defiant light as he continued to watch his guardian.

"Hello, Runyon!" called Drayton, as he too marked the presence of the

painter. "Come over here with us. Luyster and I have bagged your patient, you see."

"Not to-night, thank you," the painter answered. "Your table will seat only five. I'm just having a cup of coffee and a smoke."

He nodded to Luyster, then unfolded a newspaper and began to read. As he sat thus, he appeared to be indifferent to his surroundings.

Cecil, however, knew that not a gesture made or a syllable spoken by himself or his friends would be permitted to escape this apparently uninterested neighbor.

The conversation at the table at which Cecil was sitting was light, and consisted, for the most part, of lively passages at arms between Drayton, Luyster, and Esther.

Occasionally the name of Herstrom was mentioned, and Drayton gave a humorous description of the manner in which Lauchenheimer, a week before, had entered the place, condemned the quality of the dinner, ordered Chianti, announced his intention of paying all costs and then decamped, leaving Herstrom to settle the bill.

Only once had Cecil seen Runyon raise his eyes from the newspaper that he held before him. This was when the name of Lauchenheimer was first mentioned.

Just before the coffee was served at Cecil's table Runyon rose and, without speaking, left the room. Cecil observed that Luyster looked after the painter curiously.

"How long have you known that chap, Delafield?" he asked.

"Nearly all my life. He is my guardian."

"Oh."

For the next five minutes Luyster appeared to be abstracted, and did not join in the conversation.

Now and then he stole a glance at the smiling, earnest face of Cecil and each time he saw that the student was looking at Esther with an expression of admiration which he made no attempt to disguise.

"Have you ever seen young Sothern in 'Hamlet,' Miss Warwick?" Luyster asked abruptly.

"No," the young woman replied. "I am ashamed to confess that I have never seen 'Hamlet' played at all."

"I have a couple of tickets for to-morrow night," Luyster said. "If you have nothing more entertaining on your schedule, I should be glad to take you."

"I should be very glad to go," Esther answered, and as she spoke her dark eyes lighted with anticipated pleasure.

"We will consider it settled then—dinner up-town and theater afterward, to-morrow evening," said Luyster.

Drayton, chancing to look up as Esther expressed her appreciation of Luyster's proposition, saw the color fade from Cecil's cheeks and a stricken look come into his eyes.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "It is as I suspected. The youngster is in love with Miss Warwick, and, what is more, he is jealous!"

A few minutes later Esther and Miss Heaton rose from the table, and Drayton and Luyster assisted them to put on their wraps. Esther held out her hands to Cecil, who grasped it eagerly.

"No, no, don't get up," Esther said. "I would be glad to have you come with us to my studio, where we have a little music and more chatter for an hour or two every evening, but I'm afraid that icy sidewalks are not just the thing for a man who is recovering from an accident. However, I shall expect to see you there some other night."

Cecil half rose and bowed.

"In the meantime, I dare say I shall see you here," he hazarded.

"Oh, yes. To-morrow night, as you know, I am going to the theater. The next, perhaps——"

"You will be here then?"

Esther colored slightly as she met the student's earnest eyes.

"Yes," she answered, smiling. "The next night I will be here."

She moved away and her three companions cordially bade Cecil good night.

CHAPTER VII.

A PERSISTENT GUARDIAN.

As Cecil opened the studio door, he saw that Runyon, with his hands in his pockets, was standing with his back to a

fire that roared and crackled in the grate.

There was an unwonted expression of grimness on his tense, white face and a strange gleam in his eyes.

"Well, you've had your way—you've met her," Runyon said.

"Yes, and you've had yours."

"My way? How is that?"

"You've gratified, for the time being, that curiosity which is insatiate when it has to do with my affairs."

"Yes. So far as this particular young woman is concerned, my curiosity is quite satisfied."

The face of Cecil brightened.

"You like her then?" he asked impulsively.

"As a model for a picture of Circe or Cleopatra she cannot be surpassed. But may God pity the misguided wretch who learns to love her!"

"And why?"

Cecil's voice was quiet and low, but his face was as white as Runyon's own.

"Why?" repeated Runyon with an accent that was vibrant with emotion.

"Why? Because all the blackness of night is in her hair."

"Why? Because the lights of Hell's own lamps are shining in her eyes—because, like Eve, she is beautiful and has fellowship with the serpent—because, like the genius of opium, she speaks in soothing language and points out magnificent mirages the while she picks the will out of the pocket of the soul!"

As Runyon spoke, Cecil's face took on a grayish hue.

Never before had the young man seen the painter lose his self-possession as he had lost it now.

The student felt a strange faintness stealing over him as the eyes of Runyon, gleaming with the phosphorescence of anger, launched their beams into his wondering soul.

"But—but you do not know her!" Cecil stammered. "She——"

"I have seen her. The Creator has not made angels and beautiful devils so like that a man who has been to Hades will mistake one for the other."

"Stop!" cried Cecil hoarsely. "This woman is scarcely more than a stranger to either of us yet, but you shall not traduce her as you have traduced nearly

all the men and women who have honored me with their friendship.

"As the guardian of my inheritance you still have certain functions to perform, but as guardian of my person your duties and privileges are ended.

"In the future you will do well to make no comments on the character of my friends—especially on that of the young woman of whom we have spoken. I shall be with you here only a few days more, and then——"

He stopped and, supported by his crutches, he crossed the floor and sank down on the couch.

"And then?" queried Runyon.

"Why, then I'll begin life on my own account."

"You mean you will not return to the university to take your degree?"

"I mean exactly that."

Runyon, who appeared to be suddenly stricken with fear and astonishment, silently gazed at the younger man for several moments before he spoke.

"You are a bit fatigued to-night, my boy," he said. "Go to bed now, sleep quietly, then think it over again to-morrow."

Rejecting with an angry gesture Runyon's offer to aid him in removing his garments for the night, the crippled student kicked off the slippers he had worn during his visit to Morin's, and got himself to bed.

Nearly all that night Runyon walked the floor of the studio, a prey to disquieting meditation. When Cecil awoke the next morning the painter was gone.

It was nearly noon when Runyon reappeared. His manner was cheerful, but this new warmth failed to thaw the coldness of Cecil's demeanor.

At two o'clock Runyon left again, after giving directions at Morin's to have a dinner served to the student in the evening.

Cecil did not see him at all on the following day. In the afternoon Drayton dropped in to see him, and later they went into Morin's together. They had been there only a few minutes when Esther and Rose Heaton entered.

It was with his heart a-flutter that Cecil rose to greet her. He had placed his crutches on the floor in order that she might not see them.

The significance of his flushed cheeks and brightening eyes was not to be mistaken. Drayton smiled as, turning toward Rose, he saw that she had difficulty in restraining her amusement.

For a moment Esther seemed to hesitate, then, with her right hand extended, she advanced toward Cecil. As their fingers met, she knew that his hand was trembling.

Esther's greeting to Drayton was rather more perfunctory, for she did not offer him her hand as Rose had done. She had seen the smile on his lips and knew its meaning.

A faint blush mantled her cheek and her eyes kindled with vexation as she realized that Drayton and Rose, having marked Cecil's infatuation, were secretly enjoying its manifestation.

"The silly boy! Why does he not learn to conceal——" was her thought. But her greeting was conventional enough:

"Good evening, Mr. Delafield. I'm glad to see that your first expedition from your room night before last had no unfortunate results."

Cecil suggestively drew back the chair next to his own, and aided her to remove her wraps.

"Oh, I'm doing very well now," he answered laughingly. "I thought of going out for a little airing this afternoon, but decided to wait until after dinner."

The look of expectation in his eyes was unmistakable. Esther saw and recognized it, but did not speak. The light of suddenly inspired mischief played on Rose's face, and before her embarrassed friend had an opportunity to change the conversation, she said:

"Why, then, Mr. Delafield, what is to prevent you from walking with us to Miss Warwick's studio when we leave here?"

"It is only a little distance from here and I'm sure Miss Warwick and her friends would be glad to have you there. You told me, didn't you, Esther, that you would be at home to-night?"

Rose laughed behind her handkerchief as Esther flashed upon her a look of reproach that vanished almost immediately.

"Why, yes, I should be delighted to have Mr. Delafield join us," she said.

"My studio is scarcely more than two blocks from here. The pavements are rather slippery, though, and I should be very sorry if——"

"I'll not come a cropper, I promise you," interrupted Cecil reassuringly. "It will be a relief to get away from this building, which, when Morin's friends are not in session, is about as gloomy as the City Prison."

And so Esther bowed to the inevitable. Her latest admirer had passed the Rubicon by virtue of sheer clumsiness. He had been vouchsafed the entrée to the studio of the woman whom he was satisfied was more charming than any other member of her sex on the island of Manhattan.

Elated by the auspicious beginning of his second evening with Miss Warwick, Cecil became the liveliest member of the little party.

Drayton, however, looked alternately from Cecil to Esther, suddenly seemed to have found food for serious reflection, and was rather more silent than usual.

Rose, on the other hand, threw off her wonted reserve and Cecil gradually revised his former opinion of her.

The four remained at the table for nearly an hour and a half, then all left the dining-room together. Cecil was the last to descend the stair and step into the street. Rose had taken Drayton's arm, so Esther prepared to walk beside Cecil. They had taken only a few steps, however, when a dark figure approached, and halted in front of the student and his companion.

"My boy, I fear that if these good friends of yours can't persuade you to return to your room at once, you will not be able to dispense with those crutches for another month at least."

The words were spoken in a cheery voice, but in one pair of ears, at least, the cheery note did not ring true. The speaker was Runyon.

Cecil stopped abruptly, but did not speak.

"I was afraid to have him attempt it," said Esther apologetically, addressing Runyon. "We are on our way to my studio, which really is not far from here, but——"

She paused and looked with an expression of embarrassment toward the strap-

ping cripple at her side. She marveled at his sudden pallor, and ascribed it to physical pain.

"You know how glad I would be to have you come," she went on, "but your guardian doubtless is a better counselor than I am. You will come to see me some other night, will you not? I will see you at Morin's to-morrow evening. Believe me, my studio has few attractions. It isn't half so lively as Morin's."

Cecil took and slightly pressed the hand that she held out to him impulsively.

"To-morrow evening, then—at Morin's," he said.

"Yes, yes—I shall be there," she answered smilingly.

Again his fingers tightened their hold on her hand, then, with a little sigh, he dropped it and bowed as she turned away.

For several moments he stood watching his retreating friends, then, without glancing toward Runyon, he returned to the building he had left only two or three minutes before.

It was with considerable difficulty that he ascended the stairs, for it was his first experience in making such an ascent with crutches.

Runyon, pale and haggard, waited at the foot of the stairs until the student was at the top, then he followed slowly.

It was not until the painter entered the studio that he and Cecil again found themselves face to face. Cecil, standing in the room, was only a few paces from the threshold, and was directly facing the door.

"Well, my boy," Runyon began, "I'm sorry that——"

But he said no more. There was the sound of a falling crutch, then Cecil's right hand shot out and landed on Runyon's face with such force that the painter reeled backward through the still open door.

Runyon quickly steadied himself, and turned upon Cecil a pair of eyes that looked like two glowing coals set in a death mask.

For nearly a full minute each man confronted the other without speaking. Then Runyon advanced and, stooping, raised the crutch that Cecil had suffered

to fall to the floor. As the painter held it out to him, Cecil took it with nerveless fingers.

Runyon turned on his heel, and as he went out into the hall he closed the door quietly behind him.

Cecil stared for several seconds at the door through which his guardian had left the room, then, with lowered head, and leaning heavily on his crutches, he swayed across the floor and sank, with a hoarse groan, upon the couch.

(To be continued.)

HIS CONTRIBUTORY COURTSHIP.

By Leo Crane.

HOW sympathetic interest played an important role in a Western wooer's love-affairs.

OF course you remember Spooner—Duff Spooner, that fellow who used to ride over to Carson's once every two months and try to forget that there was a world and all that? Every one knowing Carson's has heard more or less of him. The crippled man used to describe him as "a very energetic man o' parts." A good fellow? Well, medium—just medium was Duff Spooner.

One night when things were mighty quiet at Carson's he took it into his head to frisk up a row with a stranger who had off-saddled there for a day or two—intimated that the country was kinder without the stranger's presence. The fellow wanted no trouble of him, but Duff Spooner wouldn't take "No" for an answer; and so, as it happens when a chap is insistent, they accommodated him nicely—three or four of them who were idle, including Dutch, who was a wonder all by himself.

I found Dutch Spooner outside afterward. He was some bruised. He asked me to get his horse out for him, thinking that they had a plan to ambush him from the house, and he had a hazy idea that it was dangerous for him to be abroad.

"Which way are you riding?" he asked me, when I helped him up.

I don't believe he knew just where he

wanted to go, but he followed me blind. When we came to the ford, he rolled off his horse to bathe his wounds, after which he felt much better, so he said. At least, he brightened up enough to commence singing.

"What did you want to mix it up there for?" I asked him. "That fellow hadn't a thing against you."

"Nor me ag'in' him," said Duff Spooner gravely.

"Then why the free-handed row?"

Duff considered things a moment or two, and, spitting to get the burr off his tongue, he said:

"He looked just like a man I knew once over to Lovell's place. D'ye remember that tall, slim chap who tried the job there a while, and who left sudden because he wouldn't mind his number? No—it wasn't the same, but, somehow, I just couldn't keep from touchin' him up a bit on account of old times. Which the same was not without results, but I ain't growlin'."

"Tall, slim chap over at Lovell's? I don't recollect."

"No, you weren't around in them days. Maybe you recall Tad Martin's little girl, Sue? Eh? Little charmer, she was. Don't remember Sue? Well, you've missed seeing one of the prettiest frocks that ever held down a bunch of admirin' men on these adjacent ranches. No, I wasn't stuck on Sue myself—not enough to hurt; but I liked her, ye know. An' Sue liked me. I'll tell ye about it.

"Sue had her eye on George Brown. George was a right good sort—steady, and he had folks back East who would look out for him some day. George

wanted Sue, all right, but he was kinder slow in his gait. Don't know why he was goin' such a slow clip for a chap that ye could see wanted a given lady. It was noticeable.

"Anything that happened concernin' Sue—slipped off a horse once, for instance—would stir up George Brown like a burr under the saddle, but he sure was slow. Maybe 'cause o' them folks back East.

"George needed a little hurryin'. I knew Tad Martin had nothin' ag'in' the boy. Tad Martin would have been proud to give his consent. All that was lacking was a little ginger in the game. Says I to meself one night, riding out, 'It's me to do it.'

"But the how to do it. To do it without givin' a false premises, as the lawyer folk say when they're talkin' to impress the local vote with the wisdom of Kansas. Then along comes this tall, slim chap, and the bright light begins to dawn in the East."

"He took the job off your hands, eh?" I suggested.

"Not much—he increased the order," was Duff's grim retort. "This tall, slim chap thought that all the world and the little brooks had been created for him alone. Wimmen to him were just the flowers he plucked to trim the band of his hat, an' he sure was proud. After he saw Sue, he just came to the conclusion that things were all right around Lovell's, an' that he'd stop a little.

"This didn't please any one in particular but himself, but some folks is easy pleased, an' he felt that he had winnin' cards. He just sorter laid down his hand, an' concluded that he'd stay in the game without a draw. Confidence was appalled by him.

"Of course, Sue was a woman. You must always figger that they're goin' to be wimmen first, last, an' the middle. An' if they wasn't, why, blame it, this old world would be like a theater without a fiddle.

"Sue felt that George Brown was drawing out the game, an' she had ideas that things ought to be briskin'. She let this tall, slim chap suppose that she admired the way he wore his hair. Anybody with eyes set properly straight

could see the play. George would get mad soon, have things understood, an' this tall, slim chap would start toward the river country. Sue had it all doped out.

"But wimmen only look at them things from the emotion standpoint, which ain't by no means practical. The theory worked out good, I could see, but the practise, I feared wouldn't stand the gaff. When this flashed on me brilliant, I resumed my accustomed place in the game, not because I wanted to, but just to see George Brown get all his cards without Sue havin' to weep over the result.

"Ye see, I found out that this tall, slim chap was some handy with his guns, an' havin' been around George Brown a goodish bit, I somehow knew that George couldn't call him with any degree o' certainty. Certainty is the stuff when makin' a swift call. I held my peace for a little, though. Then, one day, I ketches up with Sue herself. She was ridin' out a little, and good luck brought her over into my territory.

"'Look here, Sue, girl,' says I to her, gentle, 'you're makin' a mistake in these little dramatics. S'pose this tall, slim chap kills George Brown when the cloud breaks?'

"An' Sue gets white as a piece of linen. Her lips begin to tremble, an' for the first time she sees that the game has two ends, which was a surprise.

"'You don't think he would?' she says to me.

"'It ain't what I think he would—but could he? Sure, he could. George is a nice fellow—just about the primest chap I know.'

"An' her eyes begin to shine pretty.

"'But,' says I, 'sooner or later George'll have to request that chap to make tracks, or give you up himself, which ain't none human to s'pose. Sue, d'ye want George Brown to make his bundle an' go off? Plain question, square answer—now, d'ye?'

"Then Sue gets red an' white by shifts, an' she makes ready to lie to me, which is the way of wimmen. But I puts the kybosh on the lie with a strong word, which same word is 'Dammit!' uttered swift.

"'Dammit, Sue!' says I to her.

'Don't lie to me—I'm old enough to be your father.' Which was so true that I wished it wasn't.

"Then Sue owns up graceful. She didn't want George Brown to ever go away, an' she wasn't afraid to say so, though she wouldn't have him know it for the whole world, maybe, an' some more stuff like that.

"Then," says I, 'the matter resolves itself that George'll have to suggest that this tall, slim chap do the movin'. An' this other chap might get nasty. See—that's the complication you've brought about with your eyes an' your taking ways. All to please your woman's fancy. It's fair enough to tease a man into kissin' ye, or into marryin' ye, if he's young an' foolish; but, by Gawd, it ain't right to get a fellow killed just because ye wanted some excitement!'

"I don't want him killed,' she blubbers out.

"Well, George couldn't hit a hat at thirty paces, an' this tall, slim chap can cut a dime into a ring at that.'

"Oh, Duff!' she says tearful, 'd'ye think there'll be any trouble?'

"If I know myself, I do,' says I to her, confident. 'George'll pick a fight with this man, or have one nagged on him. The fight may come about carryin' a bucket, or squintin' at table, or the difference between Kansas an' the State o' Maryland, but the real simon-pure essence of it will be you, Miss. Then, in a fight, some one always gets hurt. Sometimes it's the man standin' by looking on, but most always it's one o' the principals to the affray, an' most generally it's both of them. Even in school-boy days that result had to be figgered. This trip, little woman, it's goin' to be your Georgie.'

"Then Sue goes all up in a heap with fear for him. She begins to whimper an' to shudder an' to blame herself, an' it ends in her getting so shivery an' weeping that I must put one arm around her to keep her from droppin' right down. I gets her off the horse an' tries to quiet her.

"Oh, Duff!' she says to me, 'help me get him out o' this!'

"I'll try, little girl,' I says.

"You will, Duff!' she cries on my shoulder, an' with that she flings her

arms around my neck, an', well—it was nice and decent of the little girl, seein' as how I was an oldster with spike whiskers.

"Sure!' says I, feelin' that there was work for me to do.

"Hello!' joins in a mighty sharp, tricky voice. And as I swings about, one arm still holdin' the little girl mighty nice, there stands the tall, slim chap lookin' on.

"Don't let me interrupt ye,' he says, cool.

"Of course not,' I says to him. 'Stand right where ye are.' And with that I bends down an' kisses the little woman fair on the mouth. She didn't understand it, an' course she didn't like it, but it had to be done, 'cause that chap was lookin', an' 'cause I wanted him to get all the benefit of it, d'ye see?

"What do you mean, Duff?' she says, fightin' herself away, an' she was sure angry.

"Hush! Hush! Be quiet, Sue, I'm fixing things all right for ye,' I whispered to her; an' then I helped her onto the horse, an' she rode away, her face scarlet, leaving me an' the tall, slim chap looking at each other.

"Maybe you've got somethin' to say to me,' I salutes him.

"He eyes me up and down contemptuous.

"I'll see to you later,' he says, also makin' off.

"An' when I rode in that night there was some considerable black glances travelin' about. George Brown had his thunder-clouds workin', and then Tad Martin draws me aside. I knew the tall one had been making things travel.

"Tad wanted to know what in all the blue-lined Danubes I meant by makin' love to a girl young enough to call me daddy, an' he observed that while he had nothin' against me personally, yet he didn't think I had acted just right.

"I fixed Tad all right. It was George Brown I was afraid wasn't goin' to be fixed. But I thought that was Sue's ante, an' so I went looking for her.

"Sue,' says I, nice and gentle, 'you've got me into this row—or rather, to speak plainly, I've willingly allowed myself to be worked into it so's to help you and George. Now, don't you think

you might have a talk with that green young boy, an' let him know that I'm not a ringer?'

"'Duff, if you'll only tell me just why you did it——'

"'Pshaw, little girl, I love ye, but not that way; an' don't ye see this lets me talk to the tall, slim rooster? There won't be no one to weep for me if he gets my number. I'm a sorter old no account, an'——'

"'No, you ain't, Duff,' says she, clouding up; 'you're just the dearest I know, an' right next to George I'd weep just as much for you,' she says, which was right solid comfort.

"'Then you stand by George, an' keep him from harm,' I says; 'an' if he wants to make a get-away with you to the nearest parson, why, you dig out with him if ye have to take one o' my horses to do it. Oh, I'll handle this end all right.'

"An' Sue looks at me with tears in her eyes.

"'You're just the dearest, Duff,' she says, sudden, an' then, like a little fool, she goes an' does it again. But it was some different this time—George was the one lookin' on."

Duff Spooner rode along silent for some minutes while I had the laugh out.

"Oh, yes," he observed dryly, "it was a nice, pleasant sort of position. George Brown appreciated it. He comes at us like a wild man. There was some fury in his eyes, an', to tell the truth, I didn't blame him much.

"'What d'ye mean, Sue!' he rages. 'You love this man—an' to think o' what you have told me. By God, Sue, don't try to make up a yarn, 'cause I see it with my own eyes!'

"'Slow, George, slow!' says I, gentle.

"An' then he turns on me.

"'I'll have your blood for this!' he screams.

"'Please, George,' says Sue, putting her hand on his shoulder.

"'Keep your hands off'n me,' says he, wrathful an' wicked. 'You're a snake.'

"Then there was more tears—real big, sorrowful tears. An' if there's anything that can get into my thick skin like the spur end of a can-opener, why, it's tears when a woman is tearing. I

felt just like bawling myself. There she was, poor little woman, breakin' her heart at what this clump had said, when all she did was to kiss me for savin' his bloomin' life. An' I gets mad then, too, an' whenever I gets mad there is some-thing said.

"'George Brown,' says I, stern-like, 'you're worse'n any damned fool that has walked into my range of inspection as yet. You've gone an' insulted the best little woman this side o' the river, you've gone an' made your own sweet-heart cry like the weepin' wimmen of Israel, an' you've further gone an' mistaken me for a child-stealer, which is a bad thing to do. Now you apologize to Sue right off, or I'll make you feel like a bu'sted balloon.'

"After which there was some talk an' explanation, and George Brown turns the names on himself, which he got 'em placed right.

"'What you want to do to square this thing, young man,' I says to him, quite sarcastic, 'is to ask Sue to have you right off the reel, an' then go get the performance over. Do you expect a fine girl like Sue to wait for ye until the cows come home? Do ye think the rest o' the world is goin' to let a fine girl pass along without notice, jest because you're too slow to say boo?'

"An' George Brown felt like a man who has got in the wrong pew.

"'Now, Duff,' Sue speaks up for him, 'he did ask me, an' I've been waiting for him.'

"'Well, don't wait any longer. He makes a livin' for himself, an' he ought to cut it in half, if it's big enough, or make it twice as big if it ain't, so you can have a share in it. But this mooning around, waiting for morning,' I says to 'em both, 'ain't addin' to the population.'

"An' with that parting shot I leaves 'em.

"What happened? Why, I went off to look for the other Romeo, who, maybe, was waitin' for me with a double-shotted gun. He was sitt'n' talkin' to some o' the boys around in front o' the house. I walks up before this group an' declares that I must speak. They listened to me quite anxious.

"'Boys, there's a fine small game o'

hearts working out in this shop. Which the same is between George Brown an' Miss Sue Martin. They've kinder straightened things out, with me refer-een' on the side, an' so it's proper that I announce the banns in a sort o' way, also the danger signal to the rest of you. Sue Martin's not for any of us fêllows, an' with these few remarks I remain yours very truly.

"But as a sorter postscript, if any o' you thinks that ye haven't had a square deal in this little affair, please remember that I have assisted once, an' that I am always ready to assist again. Is there anything bein' said?"

"I looked 'em over.

"Then this tall, slim fellow gets to his feet.

"I've got something to say, but I ain't saying it to you," he says. "What have you to do with Sue Martin? You! Who are you? I caught you out there kissin' her yourself, an' I guess may-be—"

"But at this point o' the game there was a sudden skurry, an' the tall, slim chap went to see how long he was on the grass. One o' the boys went for a bucket of water with which to recollect him.

"When he comes 'round to sensibleness, boys," I said to them, "whisper in his ear that I did it, an' that I go about whistling when times is dull."

"Yes," said Duff Spooner, an air of secret disconsolation in his big voice, "in them days a fellow could live in this country without gettin' lonesome. My, my! but when I think of the times I've had hereabouts, I get fair sorry with myself, an' I just have to start something like that little argument back at Carson's to see if I'm really gettin' old."

He seemed inclined to ride the rest of the way, to wherever he had a mind to go, without enlightening me as to the aftermath of the tall, slim chap's feelings. I insisted that I had redeemed him from the barbarians, and that he should fulfil contracts.

But Duff Spooner insisted that the rest of it really didn't count, since it only recorded the escape of the lovers, and that would be, as he put it, a mushy conclusion for an old hand like himself to relate serious.

"But the tall, slim chap?" I asked.

"Oh! next day he was concerned of an eye, which stuck out remarkable. Then George Brown an' Sue, bein' among the absent, having gone off to a marryin' gentleman with my blessing, kinder makes the tall, slim chap feel that some one had treated him nasty, an' he promises himself as to what he will do to me. One o' the boys says to him:

"Don't you worry Duff."

"I'll have his scalp before I'm through with this," he says.

"An' maybe you'll feel the earth tilt," cautions the boy.

"But that tall, slim chap wouldn't hear to no argument. An' he went about like a sick shepherd, nursin' his eye. I kept wary, an' trusted in the Lord. I certainly hoped the Lord would look down on me with some comfort up His sleeve, 'cause if these things had happened in my young days, when I went lookin' for kisses, I'd have stood my trick getting shot for 'em, but much as I liked Sue, it didn't run that far.

"A kiss is a mighty fine thing. Ever notice how fine it is? Just like a flower—only better. There ain't no flowers with the taste of a woman's mouth. But then consider it this way: if ye wanted a flower ever so much, an' yet ye knew there was a right keen shot of a man campin' out behind the hollyhocks in the rear garden, d'ye think you'd go over the fence for the roses? Not any in mine, thank you! I can be Queen o' the May without roses."

"But what happened?"

"George Brown an' Sue got married; ain't that enough for ye? The tall, slim chap vamoosed sudden; ain't that plenty? To me? There was a crime committed on me. He shot me just aft the upper right hand lung, an' he laid me on the shelf for three months as if a landslide had hit me. Oh, yes, I got in a shot or two, but the aim was shy, an' I only cut up his legs a trifle.

"He got away. An' the worst is, he never came back. That's why I started that affair back at Carson's. It troubles me when I see a tall, slim chap like that fellow. No, no, he wasn't the one, or I'd be there yet; but he had the luck to look like him. He'll know better next time.

"Sue? She came back lookin' like a red rose. An' she cried a lot over me an' my busted lung. But she didn't ever kiss me again. Ohoo! but that's long gone now, an' Sue's raisin' two little girl chicks to make trouble for some chap when I'm growing cacti. Well, well—it's all we can expect: life, kisses, and wimmen, with hell waitin' for us all! Here's where I get off."

Without further warning he rolled

from his horse. There was nothing but a level stretch of ground like a grassy sea under a low-hanging silver moon. A lone bush stuck up its head as a buoy in this otherwise markless place.

"Good night," he said, with a yawn; "I sleep here."

So he rode on, wishing him much comfort in the memory of his two kisses, which were like flowers in his life—"only better."

THE SHORE-LINE OF HOPE.*

By Albert Payson Terhune.

How a dullard schooled himself to have courage in the face of great opposition.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

THE Erie Lady, canal-boat, draws up at her Hudson River dock, carrying one passenger, a country boy, Calvin Clay. He has come to New York with the idea of developing an invention, an improved canal lock-gate, but, arriving, finds that the very sight of the city terrifies him. This affords Captain Blair and his associates, Red and Steve Mack, an unending source of ridicule.

Kitty Blair alone gives him sympathy, and in return Clay gives her his heart's devotion. In her behalf he quarrels with Red Mack on the dock and beats him. The police interfere, and Clay runs on shore, closely pursued until he finds a hiding-place in Grant's tomb.

CHAPTER V.

A NIGHT WITH THE GREAT.

PROSTRATE, panting, his lungs and overwrought muscles throbbing with pain, the fugitive lay where he had fallen, his burning face against the chilly stone. The cold of the marble floor struck through his thin clothing.

It was this sensation of cold, following as it did upon the feverish heat of his long flight, that brought Cal Clay back to his senses.

Still, for some time he lay where he had fallen. The great rotunda was in utter darkness. As a slight movement let the heel of one of Cal's thick boots drop heavily down upon the stone floor, the tomb echoed and reechoed with the sound.

But for the words of the policemen, so dimly heard through the thick doors, Cal would have been in ignorance as to his whereabouts.

As it was, his first thought was not one of dread or even of wonder, but of drowsy security.

"Grant's Tomb!" he repeated dully to himself.

From the depths of memory he dragged forth certain information gleaned from a "Guide to New York" which he had, months earlier, come across and eagerly devoured, at Windsor. He knew he must be lying somewhere between the doorway of the tomb and the huge central crypt which contained the stone catafalque of the republic's war-hero.

He remembered, in the "Guide," a diagram of the Tomb's interior. The al-

coves containing the battle-flags must, he knew, be to the front and to either side of where he lay; and, directly opposite him, the wide stairway leading down into the crypt itself. Bit by bit he recalled the various data of the guide-book.

From the distance, on the deck of the Erie Lady, he had often looked up the river at the gray top of the edifice and had mentally planned to visit it some day.

He now remembered the awe with which he had viewed this last resting place of the man who, to him, had filled all boyhood's boundless area of hero-worship.

At the memory, the old awe returned—returned, mingled with reverence, but wholly untinged by fear. Vaguely he felt himself somehow under the protection of that great Soul whose monument had so miraculously opened to shelter him when all earthly succor seemed hopeless.

Cal raised himself to a sitting posture, then rose to his feet. His legs shook under him.

He threw out a hand and his fingers touched the rail surrounding the crypt. He sat down on the side of the rail, there in the dense blackness, above the body of the dead general.

At last he had set foot in New York, the city of his dreams, but in such fashion as even in his wildest imaginings he had never planned.

He was penniless, friendless, alone; a fugitive; without plans, without prospects. His worldly wealth consisted of the torn, ill-fitting clothes he wore.

Of all strangers who have been sucked into the maelstrom of the City of Cities, none has come worse equipped; none in more pitiable plight.

Though he understood keenly the hopelessness of his condition, the lad, somewhat to his own surprise, felt no despondency or anxiety for the future. A strange medley of sensations had taken hold on him.

The vastness, the symbolism of the place, gripped him. The world seemed very distant, very vague. He and the spirit of the hero whose body slept just beneath him seemed to be alone together in illimitable space. For the luckless

lad there was strength, solace, courage, in the fancied companionship.

He rose at length and began to move about the rotunda, his footfalls resounding. He passed through the semicircle of alcoves, his fingers brushing the tall cases of shot-rent battle-flags. Every succeeding moment intensified that strange sensation of nearness and familiarity with the great dead.

His nerves were overstrained, as was his brain, by the events of the evening. But what would have induced hysteria in a less stolid nature, served to brace and calm this lonely rustic and to fill him with a quiet, slow resolution—a courage that was calm because it would consider no possibility of defeat.

In his gropings he came to the chain stretched across the stairway leading down to the crypt.

Lifting this swinging barrier he stooped and passed under, descending the dark stairs with caution until he had passed the turn and come to the foot. Then, still groping his way step by step, he came out into the wide central space surrounding the catafalque.

There, leaning lightly on the polished slab of stone, he stood for a long time, deriving dumb comfort from the increased nearness to his hero. At last he spoke; unconscious of the weird echoes roused by his halting, muttered words.

"General Grant," he said, "you were a poor boy; without friends or money. You had a rougher road than I have; for I've got your example to help me.

"You fought your way to the top, and when the fight was fought you said, 'Let us have Peace.' That's good enough for me, I guess. I've got to fight *my* way, too; but if you could do it, I can. And I'm going to.

"I want peace, but I see I've got to fight to get it. If it isn't a gang of toughs I must fight next time, it's a much bigger enemy—the world itself. But I'll do it. And I'm going to win."

He paused, and was aware for the first time that he had spoken.

His was no hysterical exaltation, but a quiet, granite resolve. And he had voiced that resolve. He had voiced it into the still ears of another quiet, "granite" man who would have under-

stood and approved. His train of thought continued, no longer in spoken words, but none the less coherently.

"I've wasted three weeks, because I was a fool. Grant wasted years because of a mistake. But he won out at last. So will I.

"I'm stupid. I'll make the world teach me sense. I'm not used to other people's ways. I'll learn them.

"I've been afraid of this big city. I'll fight my way in it. I'm laughed at by every one. I'll make every one respect me.

"Kitty was ashamed of me. I'll make her look up to me. I've been bullied. I'll learn to hold my own.

"The trouble with me is that I've been expecting peace without having sense enough to know I must fight to win it. Nobody bullies or slights or makes fun of the man who proves that he can defend himself. Well, I'll show them that. Not only that canal-boat crowd, but the whole city as well.

"I'll have peace. But I'll fight to win my right to it. I don't know how I'm going to do all this, but I *am* going to do it. And then—Kitty!"

CHAPTER VI.

A MAN AND HIS CHANCE.

THE early spring sun had scarcely risen when the attendant charged with opening and cleaning out Grant's Tomb arrived at his post of duty.

His key released the spring-lock. The metal door swung open, letting a shaft of gold sunlight into the gloomy rotunda. The attendant stepped back and stared open-mouthed.

There, in the bar of light, stood a man. Tall, stalwart, but haggard from privation and effort; dried bloodstains on his face; his ill-fitting clothes rent and muddy; a shock of uncombed red hair tumbling forward into his eyes.

"Whatcher doin' here, you bum?" growled the attendant.

Cal stepped nearer. In the quiet gray eyes that looked into his interlocutor's was none of the vacant bashfulness which had characterized them the day before.

"What did you call me?" he asked;

and the voice was as quiet and level as the gaze.

"I—I asked you what you was doin' here," repeated the attendant with less assurance.

"Waiting for you to open the door you forgot to shut last night."

"Look here!" blustered the attendant, reassured now that Cal made no overt sign of aggression, "d'ye s'pose the city pays fer keepin' up this place just so's to give you a night's lodgin'? I'll call a copper an'——"

"And tell him you forgot to lock up? I don't think so. Good-by."

He placed his palm gently against the attendant's chest. And the man, taken off guard, flew backward through no volition of his own and caromed off the door-jamb, leaving the way clear.

Cal Clay walked out into the glory of the spring sunrise. With a firm tread, oddly at variance with his old-time shuffle, he descended the marble steps and gained the broad plaza.

There, without a pause, he turned eastward and hurried down the steep, half-built crosstown street with its shantystrewn borders and ugly vacant lots.

Cal, who had imagined New York a city of palaces, felt keen disappointment at his more immediate surroundings, though he was somewhat consoled by a bird's-eye view of the distant skyscrapers and residence blocks.

He had no clear idea whither he was going, nor how first to set about his self-appointed mission of winning a livelihood from a hostile world.

His knowledge of Manhattan topography was worse than limited; but he knew that the city lay to the east of the river, so, with his back to the Hudson—and incidentally, to all he knew and cared for on earth—he advanced to the attack.

Passing down the hill, he came into the maze of criss-cross thoroughfares below. Here was life and plenty of it, despite the earliness of the hour.

Although there was not one person abroad where, later, there would be forty, the highways seemed a dizzying hive of industry to the countryman. Never before had he seen so many people together at a time.

For a while he walked aimlessly, con-

tent to drink in impressions, his steps unconsciously treading south, even while he pursued his general eastward course. In his keen interest he forgot that he had eaten but once in the past thirty-six hours; that he had passed two practically sleepless nights, and that his clothes were thin for so chilly a morning.

Many were the curious glances his odd appearance caused.

Yesterday, had he walked abroad in such a garb, he would have exposed himself to the gibes of passers-by. To-day his steady eye, the purpose in his face and tread, added to his air of conscious strength, turned ridicule into a sort of amused respect.

After what seemed a mere stroll, Cal arrived at what looked to him like the end of the city. For beyond were grass and trees. He was surprised to find New York so small.

He was a little tired, and the unwonted hardness of the pavements jarred his feet. The sight of Central Park gave him a faint twinge of homesickness. It would be pleasant to rest there a few minutes before beginning his search for work. He crossed Eighth Avenue and entered the big enclosure at the One Hundredth Street gate.

The soft wet grass was pleasant to his bruised feet. He walked on a little distance, looking for a rock whereon he might sit for a while. At length, just across a path, he saw a bench and started toward it.

Two men, running at a dog-trot, their thin-soled shoes making almost no noise on the gravel, came up the path. Cal, intent on reaching the bench, and dazed with fatigue and the noises of the adjacent city, did not hear. A clump of bushes and a sharp turn cut off the runners from his view.

As Cal was midway on the path, the foremost runner rounded the curve and ran flush into him. The impact sent Clay reeling. With difficulty he kept from falling headlong among the bushes.

The man who had run into him was less fortunate. The shock had pitched him in a heap alongside the path.

He scrambled up, his little black eyes ablaze, and launched at Cal an

avalanche of profanity, advancing menacingly as he talked.

Cal, after a vain effort to explain that the fault had not been wholly his, listened in silence to the tirade, but did not retreat before the threatened onset.

The stranger, who was but little shorter and considerably broader than Clay, took a step nearer, his hands clenched, at the same time turning his hitherto general salvo of profanity into channels of personal threat and invective.

As the step was taken, Cal jumped forward, anticipating the attack he believed imminent, and sent his unscientific right fist with all its clumsy force into the stranger's face.

The other, who had expected no such move on the part of the stupid-looking country youth, was caught totally unprepared. Yet, instinctively he braced himself, recovering his imperiled balance, and at the same instant Cal saw a succession of varicolored light flashes and felt the earth rise and smite him.

When he came to himself he was sprawling on the walk while the second of the two runners was holding the aggressor by the arm and talking to him in the provokingly soothing manner a nurse might adopt toward an invalid.

All this Cal dimly noted in the space it took him to scramble to his feet and throw himself bodily upon his late assailant.

But this time it was no "rough-house" waterside tough to whom he found himself opposed.

The wild Berserk rage, the fearless aggressive tactics, the giant strength which had put to rout "Red" Mack and his fellow dock-rats—all were unavailing against the science and trained strength of his adversary.

Cal's flail-like arms swung wide; his fists encountered empty air. The other man stepped in, struck one, two, and was out of reach before Clay was fairly aware that both blows had landed.

After his elusive adversary Cal rushed again, head down, arms wide, ready to strike or to grapple. Once more the other stepped in, but this time he did not try to get back out of reach; for there was no need.

His fist had reached the point of Cal's jaw and the country giant was for the second time rolling in the gravel.

Half-stunned, weak, and shaky, he rose slowly, gathering his scattered senses and prepared for a third onslaught. But the former peacemaker had by this time pacified his antagonist, and interposed his own somewhat portly person between the two combatants.

"Look here, youngster!" he expostulated, catching Cal by both shoulders and forcibly holding him back. "You must be achin' for your own funeral. What's a novice like you mean by tryin' to mix it up with 'Spike' Farley?"

"He swore at me and tried to hit me," answered Cal, to whom the magic name of the pugilist conveyed no meaning whatsoever.

"Well, what if he did?" expostulated the trainer. "You know how they are the first week they're workin'. All cross and quick-tempered and turnin' ugly if you crook your finger at 'em.

"He'll get over all that crankiness in a day or two. Why, there ain't a squarer, sweeter-tempered man in the business than Spike; excep' durin' his first week of trainin', or maybe when he's carryin' a load. See, he's all over it by now. Chase, an' next time be more careful who you try to lick."

Much of the trainer's talk was as Sanskrit to Cal; but he caught a few phrases that interested and puzzled him.

He looked with new eyes at his recent foe. The man's face was of the better-class laborer type, portraying no especial intelligence, stupidity, nobility, or degradation. He wore a sweater, a pair of loose trousers, running-shoes, and a golf-cap. The trainer was similarly attired.

"What's he training for?" asked Cal.

"What's he trainin' for? What *would* he be trainin' for? His go with Kid Rutan, of course. Don't you read the papers? You must be from Sque-dunk!"

"No," corrected Cal, with perfect seriousness, "From Windsor. This is my first day in New York. What's a 'go'?"

"Come on, Keller!" interrupted Farley, "I'm catchin' cold hangin' around here. Shake the Rube and come on."

"Wait a minute," said Cal. "You swore at me and called me a lot of names. You'll apologize for that before you go."

"Shut up!" implored Keller. "Don't rile him again! It ain't good fer a man in trainin'. Clear out and be glad of the chance."

"I won't," retorted Cal, stolidly, as he placed himself in front of the pugilist. "I'll stay here till he apologizes, and he'll stay here, too."

"You're crazy!" wailed the trainer. "He'll kill you! Don't mind him, Spike! He's daffy. Come on!"

"Didn't you get beat up enough?" queried Farley, eying the bleeding, battered rustic. "I shouldn't think you'd be comin' back for more."

"Chase!" urged the trainer. "What show would you have against the Big Feller?"

"I don't know," calmly admitted Clay, "but he doesn't go from here till he says he's sorry for the way he spoke."

"And if I don't feel just like sayin' it?" grinned Farley.

"Then we'll fight it out, right here and now," replied Cal, awkwardly putting up his hands, and striding toward the prize-fighter.

"You don't understand, Rube," cried Keller. "Spike Farley's a fighter. He——"

"You mean a prize-fighter?"

"Sure. He'll eat you alive. Don't worry him! Get out while your feet are still in workin' order."

Clay was gazing wide-eyed at the pugilist. He had never before seen a member of this class; and had heard them described, by his waterside friends, as something more than human in power and ferocity.

"Well," he muttered at last, "I suppose you'll kill me; but as long as I can stand up, you don't leave here without apologizing. Say you're sorry or fight."

Keller precipitated himself upon the pugilist, entreating him not to run the risk of "going off his feed" by losing his temper a second time that morning. To his astonishment, Farley broke into a rough laugh, brushed him aside and walked up to Cal.

"Rube," he growled, "you're daffy,

but you're all right. You haven't a streak of yellow in your body. Shake!"

"Does that mean you're apologizing?" asked Cal.

"Sure. It means anything you like. Shake!"

He caught the country boy's big hand in a grip that left it numb to the wrist.

"I'm glad," said Cal simply, "I didn't want to go to a hospital, for I've got to find work."

"Work? What sort of work?"

"Anything."

"What can you do?"

"Nothing especial. But I can learn."

Farley turned his back on the lad and conferred in a gruff whisper with Keller. In a moment or two the latter crossed to where Cal stood waiting.

"The Big Feller's took a fancy to you," he reported. "He says you're the first amachure he ever met that wasn't afraid of him. He likes your looks and he thinks maybe we can make something of you. We're shy a 'rubber.' We found Kearney carryin' secrets to the other camp, and fired him this morning. Want the job?"

"Yes."

"Hard work and small pay. Of course, if you do all right, Spike may give you a bit after the fight. He wants me to break you in so you can spar with him sometimes, too. He says you're the sort that'll keep comin' all the time and that you've got lots of strength. That means he'll knock you around like a punchin' bag. Still want the job?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then. He's been standin' still too long as it is. We're on the way home to my place from his mornin' run. Get into the stride."

Pugilist and trainer resumed their swift dog-trot, and Cal stumbled along in their wake, weak, sore in every limb, dizzy and half-starved, but happy.

and similar mental and physical processes in older folk are doubtless beneficial, but they cause little enjoyment either at the time or in retrospect.

So it was with Cal. The "improving" process he went through was of a sort that would have crushed a less hardy man.

That he came out of it not only alive, but physically transformed into another man, spoke volumes for his natural strength and for the force of the regeneration that had come over him during his night in the crypt.

"Spike" Farley's training quarters were at Keller's gymnasium and road-house near the Harlem River, much frequented by up-town sporting men as well as by Harlemites who sought knowledge of boxing.

It was by no means a "tough" resort, nor the haunt of rowdies; but it was scarcely the place a bashful country boy would have sought for preserving peace of mind or ease of body.

And Cal found neither. Nor did he seek them. His resolve to win his way in New York was ever before him, and the present surroundings appeared to form the only immediate opening for such a course.

He found himself installed as "handy man," with a multiplicity of duties, which ranged from sweeping the gymnasium to "rubbing down" and boxing with Farley.

Of the science of boxing he knew nothing. But his great strength, his bulldog pluck, and his dauntless fashion of coming back to the attack in face of the heaviest hitting, made him more or less useful for Spike to practise on.

Keller, moreover, took the trouble, at Spike's order, to teach the boy the rudiments of sparring, and was pleasantly surprised to find the gawky youth showed unexpected deftness in acquiring the art.

Throwing himself heart and soul into the work, as he did into everything that his somewhat heavy mind really decided was worth while, Cal soon outgrew his first awkwardness and slowness and began to "take on form."

Apart from the lessons administered by Keller, he had daily practise not only with Farley, but with Ormond, the lat-

CHAPTER VII.

REINCARNATION.

THE three months that followed formed a period upon which Cal Clay never cared to look back.

No evolution is painless. The "growing pains" that wrack children

ter's sparring partner, and with several of Keller's more advanced pupils who had reached the stage of fistic development where they yearned for some one to pummel.

A few days after his lessons began, Cal was secretly horrified at the altogether new sensation of helplessness that crept over him.

He had arrived at the point, familiar to every one who has taken boxing lessons, where the natural instinct of self-defense ends and scientific knowledge has not yet begun. But the hiatus was quickly bridged and progress thereafter was rapid.

A daily plunge in the dirty Harlem soon taught him to swim, and swimming thereafter became a regular part of his training.

The strict diet, the long, muscle-wearing runs, the many hours a day passed in manual labor and gymnastic exercise were at first infinitely fatiguing, but before long began to act on the lad's gigantic, untrained physique like a charm.

Many a night he threw himself on his hard mattress in one corner of the gymnasium, aching in every joint, sore, bruised, weary to the point of nausea. But each morning he emerged from his shower-bath a little stronger and more energetic than on the preceding day.

Certain "born humorists" among the pugilist's hangers-on had at first picked out the raw country boy as the butt of their wit; but few tried it a second time. For this was not the Cal Clay who had borne the brunt of waterside horseplay so short a time before.

The time for Farley's fight with Kid Rutan drew near. But, owing to a squabble over the exact interpretation of some of the "articles," it was postponed for six weeks.

In view of Cal's great improvement and in order to save expenses, Farley, who was still to continue light training, dispensed with Ormond, and took the lad on in his place as regular sparring partner.

For, by this time, Cal was no longer panting and purple in the face by the end of the first mile of the morning run; nor could the pugilist toy playfully with him any more during their daily

bouts with the gloves or catch-as-catch-can wrestling practise.

And so the spring lengthened into summer, and August drew near.

Now that he was no longer sick with weariness at the day's end, Cal had resumed work on his canal-lock idea during the summer evenings; he was fast making up for the damage caused by Red Mack's trick. Spike came upon him one evening while he was thus engaged.

"What's that thing?" queried the fighter.

Cal explained briefly. Always a man of few words, he had grown still less talkative since his sojourn at Keller's.

"What do you fool away your time at that for?" asked Farley, after trying vainly to make head or tail of the explanation.

"Money in it."

"H'm! Not half so much as there is in the fightin' game."

"There is for me."

"You're foolish. Let me put you on to something. You're raw yet and a sort of a dub with your hands, but you've got the makin' of a fighter."

"You've got pluck and you're strong, and you've got a reach from here to Yorkville. A year's experience will put you up alongside a whole lot of the heavyweights that think they are stars. Think it over."

"I don't want to."

"D'you mean you've got a yellin' streak?"

"You know best. You've worked with me."

"That's so. I was only kiddin' you. But why don't you make a try for the ring? Look here: I'll get you put on at one of the preliminaries up at the Lenox some night an'——"

"I'm not going to be a fighter."

"But why not? Haven't I just told you you can——"

"I don't like the game."

"What's the matter with it? Look at me. I ain't in the 'champ' class quite yet, but I'll be in line for a try at it when I've licked Rutan. An', even now, look at me. I wear the best an' I eat an' drink the best, an' I can flash a roll that's made a lot of Wall Street geesers look sick. How'd I get it all? By fightin'! An' so can you. If——"

"Sam Croly was in here to-day. Wanted to borrow a quarter."

"What's old Sam got to do with it?"

"Ten years ago, Keller says, Sam was where you are to-day."

"Well?"

"Well, he's a broken-down bum; a cheap drunkard, a panhandler, an old man at forty."

"What's that got to——"

"Only this, I don't want a few years of flushness from smashing other men and then wind up like Croly, or John L. Sullivan, or Heenan, or nine out of ten ex-fighters."

"Maybe you don't think the ring's good enough for a fine talker like you?" sneered Farley.

"Maybe not," assented Cal, relapsing into his usual laconic diction.

"Then what makes you stay on here?"

"Got to live. This feeds me and gets me decent clothes and a few dollars over. My canal-lock scheme here will do the rest some day."

"If it goes through."

"It will."

Spike told of his sparring partner's hopes in the gymnasium, for the amusement of a half-dozen amateur athletes.

The story spread; and soon in Harlem sporting circles the young athlete's "invention" was a by-word. One of the daily papers even ran a semi-humorous paragraph on the subject in its "Ringside Gossip" column.

Ex-Assemblyman Heintz, a local lawyer of athletic tastes, heard the story and attempted to pump Cal concerning it. The boy was reticent.

"How would you like me to advance you the money to get this model of yours perfected and then patented?" queried Heintz at length.

A light awoke in Cal's quiet eyes; but died almost at once.

"Go on," he said.

"Go on with what? you heard——"

"The rest of the offer."

"I don't understand," blustered the lawyer, "I made you a proposition and——"

"But you didn't make all of it. What am I to do to earn this money you want to advance?"

They were resting after a bout with

the gloves. The lawyer looked cautiously around, then replied:

"If you can keep me posted on any change in Spike's condition or put me next—on the quiet, you understand—if there's to be any fake in this Rutan fight—or—you see I'm backing him pretty heavy and——"

With maternal gentleness Cal stretched forth one hand and lifted the amazed Heintz from the floor by the collar of his sweater.

Then carrying the wriggling, swearing lawyer tenderly to the door at arm's length, he dropped him on the stairway outside, closed the door and, returning to the gymnasium, washed his hands.

He did not mention the incident. Nor, which was perhaps less unnatural, did Heintz.

Once, a week after his arrival at Keller's, he had stolen off by night, for a glimpse of the old Erie Lady and the possibility of seeing Kitty.

True to his earlier resolve, he did not intend to go aboard, nor even to make known his presence; but merely to look down from the steep bank of Riverside Park upon the boat at her dock below. Kitty might be on deck, or perhaps walking on the pier.

He had gained the point of vantage and looked down toward the scene of his first sojourn in New York. To his disappointment, the anchorage was empty. The Erie Lady was not there.

Twice later, on succeeding weeks, he revisited the spot to find the boat still absent. There was no one of whom he cared to make inquiries.

He knew that in all probability the scow was again in commission and was off for the summer cruise among the canals. Whether or not she would ever again come to dock at that particular spot he could not tell.

But that doubt made little difference to him. His mission accomplished, he would find Kitty, even were the Erie Lady plying the canals of Venice. So he went back to his round of daily toil, content to wait.

It was now three months since he had fled from the river police, along the freight tracks; and, for the first time in eight weeks, he turned his steps westward toward the Erie Lady's former

dock. It was a hot evening in early August; too hot for indoor work. Memory of the cool river breezes drew him toward the Hudson.

He reached Riverside Park at One Hundred and Twelfth Street and crossed to the brow of the steep embankment. As he had feared, the Erie Lady was not at her dock. He turned away and strolled along one of the winding hill-paths that run down toward the water.

A man and a woman passed him.

"I feel nervous in the west side of the park after dark," he heard the latter say. "There have been three hold-ups along here in the past ten days. I wonder what the police are about."

"Oh, those dock-rats have no end of a pull," answered her escort wisely. "Once in a while the cops make a bluff at arresting one or two of them when complaints get too thick. But they always manage to take them next morning before some judge who lets them off. So there's no hard feeling either way."

They moved out of earshot. Their words recalled to Cal's mind recent accounts in the papers of daring robberies and hold-ups in the Riverside district.

As he knew Kitty was no longer there, the matter had made comparatively little impression on him.

He walked on, mentally contrasting his present condition with his plight of three months earlier; and planning, as youth will, for the future.

So immersed was he in his thoughts that he came to himself with an actual start as, not ten rods away, a woman's voice rang out in a cry for aid.

But it was not the cry alone that startled his whole body and mind to galvanic action. It was the voice of the woman who had uttered it.

• For the voice was Kitty Blair's!

CHAPTER VIII.

A RESCUE AND A PREDICAMENT.

CAL, at first sound of the call, sprang forward in the darkness.

Rounding a breast of rocks he came upon two persons struggling. The faint light showed him they were a man and a woman; that the man was trying to wrench some object from the girl's hand.

As Cal neared them the man, with a final wrench, snatched the object from the girl's convulsive grip, and, eluding her outthrown hands, darted away—straight into Cal Clay's arms.

The thief, caught at the very outset of his dash, wriggled madly to escape. But he might as well have tried to break an iron chain as the hold that pinned him by both shoulders. Cal bent lower to see the fellow's face, meantime blocking, by a wrench of one wrist, the other's sudden gesture toward his hip-pocket.

Though the brief struggle had brought the two out from the denser shadow of the little precipice, Clay could not make out his captive's features. A second glance showed him the reason for this. A coarse handkerchief mask was strapped across the thug's face.

To Cal there was something vaguely familiar about the fellow's figure and furtive, rat-like movements, and he resolved the more to discover his identity.

The encounter scarcely deserved the name of struggle; for the struggling was all on one side—that of the thief. He was vainly trying to tear himself free from that steady, unyielding grip.

As a last resort, he flung from him the thing he had snatched from Kitty.

Then he whispered gruffly:

"The goods ain't on me. Let me go. It's all right. You must be a new man on the beat."

"I'm not a cop," replied Cal. At the same moment, releasing his grasp on the man's right shoulder, he tore the handkerchief from his face.

Quick as was his motion the thief was quicker. With an eel-like twist he was out of his coat and bounding down the hill, leaving the garment in Cal's hand.

Riverside Park at that point rises from the water so abruptly that even by daylight rapid progress down the steep slope is a matter of peril. But the fugitive leaped like a mountain goat down the dangerous incline, taking no apparent heed of the risk to life and limb. It would have been an act of madness to follow merely for the sake of abstract justice; and Cal was far from mad.

The man had dropped the object he

had wrenched from Kitty; and Clay, beyond a passing whim for seeing his face, had no especial object in turning him over to the police and going to the inconvenience of appearing against him in court next day. So he let him go, unpursued.

The entire affair had lasted a bare ten seconds from the first to last; Kitty, a dumfounded spectator, having viewed it to an end before she clearly grasped its full purport.

Indeed, she had hardly recovered from the first shock when Cal, after stooping to the ground, offered her a much-dilapidated handbag.

"This is what he took," said he. "He's gone; don't be scared."

The voice of the big man, whose face was a vague blur in the darkness, so amazed the girl that, for an instant, she stood petrified, peering up at him, forgetting to take the precious bag he was holding out toward her, forgetting everything save that voice she had so often dreamed of, but whose present timbre she had never before heard.

"It—it isn't Cal Clay, is it?" she asked doubtfully, ready to laugh embarrassedly when the stranger should disavow the name.

"Yes."

"Cal—Mr. Clay, I mean—what's happened to you? You're so—so different."

She spoke haltingly. He made no reply, but stood looking down with equal intentness at her dimly defined face and figure.

"Come up the path to the light," he said presently, as she still groped for words, "I want to see your face."

Silently she obeyed and they walked side by side until they had rounded the low cliff and came into the clear white glare of the electric-lamp. Then, with one accord, they turned and faced each other.

For a full minute they stood thus, wordless, eager, scrutinizing. Cal saw with a pang of uneasiness that there were dark rings under her big blue eyes. There was, too, a new look of pensiveness, almost of sadness, and there were lines of worry or care in the white forehead under the cloudy mass of light hair.

Kitty's gaze, if less pitying, was full of wonder. She remembered a shambling, bashful, country boy whose ill-made clothes ended abruptly at ankle and wrist, leaving a huge expanse of gawky feet and red hands.

She saw to-night a big man of powerful build, with the self-assured bearing of the true athlete, quietly but neatly dressed, and with the general manner of one who had completely "found himself."

Many a time Kitty had called up before her every detail of his personality. In her extremest imaginings she had not dreamed of finding him thus transformed.

A vague shyness, as though she were in the presence of a total stranger, crept over her. The memory of the simple boy who had loved her, and whose ardor had once for a moment almost set fire to her own heart, faded forever. Only as that memory vanished did she realize how dearly and how unconsciously she had cherished it.

"You've come back?" she asked at last, stupidly enough.

"No," he answered. "But I shall, some day. Did that man hurt your hands?"

With a start she recalled the attempted robbery.

"No," she replied, holding up her hands to the light. "He only wrenched my wrist. But if you hadn't come just when you did, he would have got away with the bag."

She gave a little shudder and clutched the battered reticule tighter. "If he had, I don't know what I should have done."

"Valuables?"

"It holds the three months' rent for the Erie Lady. It's due to-morrow, and I went this afternoon to borrow it from Mr. Gorst. He's father's cousin, you know. He keeps a pawnbroker place on Tenth Avenue. I was on my way back to the Blauvelts', where I'm staying, when——"

"Why aren't you with the boat?"

"I was sick and couldn't go. Mrs. Blauvelt took care of me. Oh, it's been a horrid summer! Everything's gone wrong. The coal strike held up the boat till after the first of May, and the sea-

son's been so bad that father's run behind with the boat rent.

"He wrote me that he'd be back tomorrow, and that we must have the money by then or the owner would turn us out. Think of that! And winter coming on in a few months, and——"

"Who is the owner?"

"Steve Mack."

"But he'll *barely* wait."

"He won't wait a day. Father begged him to, but——"

"Not if *you* asked him?"

She hesitated, and her pale cheek flushed under the light.

"That's just it," she replied in a lower voice. "I *can't* ask him."

"But he was such a friend——"

"He isn't any more. I—I couldn't marry him, and so——"

"And so he's taking it out on both of you."

"Oh, he has a right to, I suppose. I tried everywhere to raise the money; and at last I thought of father's cousin. He has plenty of money but he isn't very generous. He wouldn't let me have it till I'd signed away my share of the next two cruises' profits. I have a half-interest with father in the freight, you know."

"But Steve Mack?"

"Do you remember once when you and I talked about it being wicked for people to marry if one of them didn't love the other? Well, at that time I had about made up my mind to accept Steve the next time he asked me. But——somehow——"

She paused. Then went on with a mirthless smile:

"Well, the next week he asked me again, and I *didn't* accept. That's all. And I made him see I never could accept. It was then he began making it hard for us."

"You say you've been sick?"

"Yes. I caught cold and—I was worrying a good deal—about father's affairs, you know," she added hastily—"and all at once I came down sick. It was the day before father started up the canals. Mrs. Blauvelt offered to take care of me, and——"

"And all the time I thought you were away with the boat you were right here, near me."

"You've been over here before, then?"

"Once or twice—just for a walk," he admitted.

"Cal Clay!" she broke out. "What in the world has come over you? You are another man! What have you done?"

"I've been licked into shape."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. But don't let's talk about me. I want to hear more of you and of——"

"But I want to talk about *you*!" she insisted with pretty imperiousness. "Won't you tell me about yourself?"

"What is there to tell?"

"When you left us you said you were going out to make your way in the world. Have you made it?"

"Not yet. But I'm making it slowly. It takes longer than I thought. And it is harder—much harder. And I've made no great progress so far. Still——"

"Made no progress? Why, you're not the same man you were three months ago. You *must* be making your way. What are you doing?"

"Nothing dishonest. I'd rather not talk any more about it. When I get to the point where I can see success or even a decent living ahead of me, I'm coming back to you, Kitty. Then I'll tell you."

"I'll always be interested in hearing of your good luck."

"It won't be to tell you of my good luck that I'll come to you, but to beg you to make my luck good."

"I don't understand," she said quickly. "It's late. I must go back to the Blauvelts——"

"You *do* understand," he contradicted, keeping pace at her side as they descended the walk toward the freight tracks.

"And you won't tell me what you're doing?"

"No. But some day I can tell you anything you want to know. And when that day comes——"

"It hasn't come yet," she retorted. "And when it does, I may have other things to do than sit meekly and listen to the tale of your adventures. Better tell me now. *Please* tell me," she pleaded.

They had reached the door of the boat-club cottage where the Blauvelts lived. She stood with her hand on the latch, looking up alluringly into his face.

A wild, irresistible longing to bend over and kiss the pretty upturned face almost overmastered him. His past three months' experience had taught him much of men, but had left him as ignorant as ever on the subject of women.

"You are *very* pretty, Kitty!" he blurted out. "Did any one ever tell you that before?"

Had he possessed even a rudimentary knowledge of women he must have seen from her eyes how utterly the effect of the first half of his speech was wrecked by the latter part.

"I don't like compliments," she said demurely. "And—just by chance—it happens a few people *have* told me so before. But you haven't told me yet what you're doing. Please, *please*, tell me."

She laid a light hand on his coat-sleeve, and the touch sent a thrill through all his big, muscular body.

"Please tell me, Cal," she repeated softly.

Samson and Delilah! Perhaps the really strong man who can refuse the pleadings of the right woman is yet to be born.

"I'm a helper at Keller's gymnasium," he admitted, "and——"

He got no further. Nor was knowledge of women needed to enable him to read the look of frank chagrin and disappointment in the girl's uplifted eyes.

Kitty Blair herself could scarcely have analyzed her own emotions when she heard the very commonplace answer to her eager queries.

She did not know just what reply she had expected him to make; nor what might be the position he had wrung from the world. He had left her, a Don Quixote. He had returned, seemingly a Launcelot or even a Galahad.

He had gone forth, a half-baked boy. He had returned, a strong man. Her lively imagination had filled in the interim with daring deeds, great exploits, brilliant achievements.

And then—just as she felt that her faith in his prowess was justified and that she was about to hear the glittering

narrative of achievement—to learn that he was a mere gymnasium helper!

To discover that the man whom she had just crowned with mystery's halo was apparently a mere roustabout like the negro lad who, for board wages, helped Dan Blauvelt swab the boat-house floor and keep the club's fishing tackle in order!

The keen disillusionment in his sweetheart's face struck Cal momentarily dumb. He had been about to go on with the recital of his "invention's" progress; his envied post as Spike Farley's sparring partner; the various prospects that were opening out before him. But her look sealed for the moment the never-exuberant fountain of his speech.

It was the girl who broke the silence.

"I wish you all success, whatever you do," she said, with a brave attempt at cheerfulness. "Thank you for telling me. I must go in now. Good night."

She held out her hand. Dumbly he took it, feeling that a breach had all at once widened between them, but at a loss to discover its cause.

"Good night!" he said, turning away.

He heard the door close behind the girl, and walked, crestfallen and sullen, before the house.

So often had he pictured their next meeting and in such glowing colors! Now that meeting had been brought about by a seemingly kind Fate, and for a time its pleasure had exceeded all his expectations.

Then—almost at the very last minute—he had realized that he and the girl he loved were once more a world away from each other. He could not understand why; and with a sigh of sulky resignation he gave up the attempt to solve the vexing problem.

He turned his face eastward, unhappily ignorant that a girl in an upper room of the boat-club cottage was sobbing to herself in the darkness, and was confusedly and illogically resolving to give Blauvelt's helper an ill-spiced dollar the very next morning.

Cal Clay had covered more than half the long mile that lay between the North River and Keller's place before he emerged sufficiently from his fit of ab-

straction to realize that he was still carrying, slung over one shoulder, the coat out of which Kitty's fleeing assailant had wriggled.

He had thrown it across his shoulder, mechanically, when he had stooped to pick up Kitty's reticule from the ground where the thief had flung it. The garment had remained there ever since, unnoted in the succession of more absorbing thoughts.

It now called attention to its presence by slipping down his arm to his elbow. He glanced at it in dull surprise; then, remembering how it had come into his possession, threw it again across his shoulder and resumed his journey.

When he reached his own sleeping quarters Cal dropped the coat on the trapeze mattress that served him as a bed, and began to undress. When ready for bed he picked the coat up to lay it on a chair.

He lifted it by one sleeve. From a pocket a soiled sheet of paper fell out and fluttered to the floor. He glanced casually at it by the single electric globe above his bed. There were scrawled words on the grimy surface of the page.

He read them. Then, with an exclamation of amazement, re-read it.

His usually stolid face took on a look of genuine fear. He sank down on the side of the mattress and with dazed eyes and parted lips sat staring in dull horror at the written words.

CHAPTER IX.

IN DEEP WATERS.

THE words scrawled across the crumpled slip continued to hold Cal Clay's eyes and mind.

Nor did the look of fear leave his face. Rather it deepened into a hopeless bewilderment that for the time paralyzed his senses and left him sitting there silent, confused, inert.

Yet, to an unversed outsider, the writing on the paper would have seemed to hold nothing to warrant such excitement in the athlete's usually phlegmatic nature.

In fact, to the average onlooker the writing's meaning would have been unintelligible. The paper contained mere-

ly a list of names, one under another, and opposite each a word or ill-spelt phrase.

As read from beginning to end the scrawl ran:

Akron	Rush
Cleveland	Keep away
Bronx	Play for head
Hartford	Play for body
Sullivan	He's tired. Go in
Richmond	Don't let up
McCoy	You've got him going
Jeff.	Hold off till further orders
Frisco	Fifteen seconds left

Cryptic as the words, at first glance, seemed, their meaning was clear as day to Cal.

The list was made up of the secret signals agreed upon between Spike Farley and Keller, who was to coach him throughout the Rutan fight. They were the words which the trainer was to shout to his principal during the battle; and they were in cipher in order that Rutan might not understand and profit by their meaning.

The trainer thus hoped to coach his man freely from the ringside without the opponent taking advantage of the signals.

In order that Farley might perfect himself in the understanding of the various terms, the code had been taught to Cal; and in Spike's bouts with Clay the trainer had employed the jargon in hopes of familiarizing Farley with all its terms.

The code had been imparted to Cal under the solemnest pledges of secrecy, and the sharing of the secret with him was the highest proof of the trust reposed in the boy by his employers.

And yet, here was this list, copied out and found in the coat of a thief who operated on the other side of the city.

How had the list been secured? And, above all, how did a man, more than a mile away and in no wise associated with Farley, happen to have it in his possession?

"The fight's three days off!" mused Cal. "Every cent Spike has in the world is up. If he loses he'll go broke; and then who'll take care of that poor old father of his?"

"And what'll become of Farley's championship hopes? He's trained down to the minute, and with any sort

of luck he ought to win. The betting's five to two on him. But if his signals have been stolen and if men like Lawyer Heintz are rubbering around to find out if it's true he's not in form, there must be something crooked somewhere.

"The man this coat belonged to is a thief, a hold-up. Then it stands to reason he didn't have this paper in his possession for any good end. Is there a game up to queer this fight?"

He studied the screed again—not so much the writing, which was in a coarse, scrawled hand, unfamiliar to him, as the texture of the paper itself.

He looked at it on both sides; holding it up to the light and with difficulty deciphering the water-mark. The sheet was a torn half-page, apparently from a pad. This was the lower half of the sheet. The water-mark read "—er Mills."

Cal rose, crossed the gymnasium slowly, his heavy mind awakening to some dim and evidently unwelcome idea. He passed into Keller's private office, opening out from the exercise room.

Crossing to the trainer's desk he opened it and began to rummage amid piled-up memoranda, notes, calendars, ring records, and newspaper clippings. At length he came on something over which he bent with puzzled eagerness.

So intent was he that the first intimation he had of Keller's approach was when the trainer, entering the office by an opposite door, came upon him at his work of rummaging the desk.

"Hello, son," exclaimed the stout man, visibly annoyed, "wouldn't it be better to say 'by your leave' before you butt into your boss's private desk? Eh?"

Cal looked up with a start and eyed the trainer in a troubled, uneasy fashion. Then he dropped back into the desk a bill-head pad he had been scrutinizing.

"What did you want in here?" blustered Keller, the more loudly in order to drown a certain uneasiness that had crept into his voice.

"I got what I wanted," replied Cal, himself again, now that the momentary surprise had worn off.

"And what was that? Some of my love-letters?" Keller laughed mirthlessly.

"I guess you know what I found," was the answer.

"See here! You put back whatever you got out of there and you put it back in a hurry, or I'll have you juggled! See? Nice sort of grateful mucker you are to sneak in here and——"

"Be quiet. I'm thinking."

"Well, add up your thoughts and give me the total, pretty quick then, 'cause——"

The thought-wrinkles had cleared from the boy's face.

"Keller," he interrupted calmly, "why did you sell out Spike Farley?"

The trainer's purple face went white. For a second he stood loose-jawed and shaking. Then, with a bovine roar, he swaggered menacingly up to Clay.

"You dirty Rube that I picked up out of the gutter!" he bellowed. "What d'ye mean by raggin' me in my own place? Eh? What d'ye mean by it? Me, that was known to be on the square before you was born. Why, fer two plugged dimes I'd——"

"You'd betray the man that trusts you," finished Cal, with the same heavy, imperturbable calm. "There's no use blustering, Keller. You're caught with the goods. You've sold Spike Farley, even while you pretend to be putting him into shape for the fight of his life. You know what this fight means to him and to his old father who is dependent on him. Yet you double on him and——"

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" snorted Keller, with an exaggerated fervor that could have deceived no one. "What's your proof? Show me your proof! Your proof, I tell ye! I——"

"Your face is proof enough for me. But that isn't all. Do you remember when that Massachusetts paper-man who trained here went home again he sent you five dozen pads from his mill, with your bill-head on them? 'Clearwater Mill' was the water-mark. I——"

"What's that got to do with it? He ain't in on the deal—that is, if there is any deal. I ain't heard of none. But then, I ain't clever an' a fine talker like you.

"You say I've given Spike the double cross. Well, prove it! Go ahead an' prove it. You ain't got any proof

more'n your own fool guess. I guess my word'll win out over yours, if it comes to a showdown. You ain't got the first atom of proof. Why, you'd only just started at my desk when I come in. I—that is——"

He caught himself up, but too late.

"There's proof of some sort in his desk that I overlooked or didn't get to," thought Cal. Aloud he said: "You're mistaken. I was just finishing putting the things back—*some* of the things—when you came."

"You've got it on you then? By—you don't leave this room alive with it!"

"Hold on a minute. Your gun's in the desk. Without it, what show have you got against me?"

For an instant it was a duel of eyes, of wills; the trainer, apoplectic, desperate; the country boy quiet, phlegmatic, utterly at ease.

Then, as though a chord had snapped in his brain, Keller collapsed into a chair, helpless and trembling.

"For God's sake!" he mumbled incoherently, "for God's sake! I—I had to have the cash—I had to—I was broke—I——"

Cal scarcely heeded him. His rarely awakened faculties of deduction were doing some quick work.

"It isn't the signal-code he's thinking of!" he said to himself.

"That's not in his hand-writing and, besides, he couldn't know I have the copy. There's some sort of document in this desk that implicates him. If I give him five minutes to recover his nerve, Spike is a goner."

He picked up the desk-top bodily, carried it across to the big empty fireplace and dumped the contents upon the hearth. Then striking a match he set fire to the heap. It blazed up like tinder, rendering the close room's heat almost unbearable.

"There!" he thought, "the proof's in there somewhere and he'll never know I haven't got it."

Turning to Keller he said:

"There were other things in your desk that were better out of the way. Now tell me why you double-crossed Farley."

"I had to. Heintz holds the mortgage on this place. It's been a bad

year. He'd a turned me out, dead broke."

"Oh!"

"Yes, him and them West Side heelers of his put it up to me. They'd bought up a lot of my notes. They've got a pot of money on Rutan an'——"

"And they're going to lose it."

"Don't give me away! Don't show them papers, Cal! *Don't!* Spike'll kill me. It'll wreck me as a trainer for always."

"I'm not going to show the papers. If——"

"If what? If what? I'll divvy with you an' gladly, an' Heintz'll give you your bit, too. If *what*, man?"

"If Spike wins the fight."

"But he *can't*. He——"

"He can win it if it's on the square. You know that as well as I do."

"But——"

"You're up against it, either way. But you still have time to put something on Spike, and besides, if he wins, you'll have a bigger reputation and it'll mean better business for you, even if Heintz forecloses."

"But if Spike loses, I'll brand you a cur and a crook from one end of America to the other. There isn't a newspaper in town that sha'n't know how you've sold your man. What'll happen to you then? It's the almshouse for yours—or the pen."

The trainer was utterly incapable of clear thought. He gurgled in his speech and his fishy eyes appealed to Cal in grotesque pathos.

"You've got to stand by Spike and make him win," went on Cal, as if repeating instructions to a very stupid child. "You've got to make *him win!* Understand? Because if he loses, you lose far more. Think it over."

There was a short silence. Then Keller muttered:

"I'll do whatever you say. Anything goes you tell me. I'll tell Heintz and his crowd it's all off—but—say, they'll be wild. They'll pay me out fer this all right! It's hard for a man to build up a place like this an' then get the key to the street at once——"

"Better than getting the key to Sing Sing. There's been too many fake fights lately to make it safe for a man to be

caught promoting another one. You'll run this on the square?"

"Honest to goodness, yes! Only give me them papers."

"The day after the fight—if Spike wins it. I'm going out now. And when I come back, the papers won't be on me. So there's no use going through my trunk or having me held up. But if Spike loses either I or some one else will see they get to the right authorities. Good night."

"You—you won't tell Spike?"

"No. Not for your sake; for his. I want his nerve to stay good till Thursday night. But if he loses, he'll call on you next day."

When Cal returned to the gymnasium it was long past his usual early hour for going to bed. But, late as it was, there was one member of the household abroad still later.

Not until Cal had been asleep for nearly an hour did Keller return home. He had spent the interim in visiting his friend and patron, Chris Heintz, lawyer and sporting man, and two of Heintz's friends.

After Keller had taken his departure, shaken and cowed, yet visibly relieved, Heintz looked from one to another of his two cronies.

The others—roughly dressed men who treated the lawyer with a certain loutish servility—returned the look with a sort of puled wonder.

"Well," observed Heintz, "there goes our plan, sky-high! All our work for nothing! There's no doing anything with him. He's scared stiff."

"Why didn't youse give us the office, an' we'd a beat him up good for you," growled the younger of the two visitors, a coatless youth with a tear in his right shirt shoulder.

"Yes," chimed in the elder, a better attired man, "you treated him pretty gentle, I thought."

"My dear friends," purred the little lawyer, "there are more ways of catching a sparrow than by shooting a ten-inch shell at it."

"I don't get the point of that," timidly suggested the elder guest.

"I lose on it, too," admitted the younger.

"You're in a losing streak to-night, Red," retorted the lawyer. "First you lose your swag, then your coat—and now my meaning. But I'm surprised your brother Steve hasn't more sense."

"I mean, if I'd browbeaten Keller or set you boys on him, he'd have been useless to me in future. By being friendly, I've put him off his guard. He's fool enough to expect nothing more from us. That country chap will think it's all right, too. For the only man he'll watch is Keller."

"But, take my word for it, if the fight comes off—I say *if* it comes off—Spike Farley won't win it."

(To be continued.)

THE SCANDAL-SOWERS.

By Elizabeth York Miller.

HUSH! Here she comes now.
—I don't believe half that I
hear, but I must tell you this.

THE "Scandal" strolled unconcernedly down the long pier, followed by little Nannette Beresford, the Beresford collie and twenty pairs of baleful, accusing eyes.

The "Scandal" was happily—yes, blissfully—unconscious of the social havoc she was creating. It lumped the crocheting and embroidering row of femininity under the red and white striped awnings into one distasteful mass—and let it alone.

The "Scandal's" attitude was inquisitorial, detached. There were things of much more importance to be discussed, and besides—which was more to the point—Mrs. Beresford could not crochet

and had never so much as outlined a tray-cloth in the whole of her lazy life. So she, for one, was hopelessly outclassed.

It was February—Washington's Birthday, to be exact.

The warm, green waters of the Gulf spread away toward Texas in a gentle monotone; a warm, sun-gilded haze hid the line where sky and water met, and one seemed to melt into the other. Beyond the strip of sand, on the shore, the tops of the tall cocoanut palms waved gently back and forth in the breeze, and beyond them the still taller pines loomed black against the evening sky.

Some of the men were fishing from the end of the pier, in their comfortable, soiled, khaki suits. One fisherman watched patiently by a pile where he had tied a stout rope, baited in a manner he hoped would prove most alluring to the hungry shark.

Down on the beach a belated group of bathers emerged from the bath-houses and skipped gaily across the hot, shell-strewn sand, into the water.

Mrs. Beresford and Morrison stopped to watch them.

There was scarcely any surf. The water lapped softly against the beach, and, on the stillness of the evening, the voices of the bathers rang shrill and insistent.

Mrs. Beresford turned idly, letting her gaze wander across the horizon, taking in the group under the awnings, as it passed. Mrs. Napper's white face, black-eyed and vigilant, caught and held her attention for the fraction of a moment. She was on the point of speaking of it to young Morrison, but let it pass.

Something telepathic seemed to pass between the two women—Mrs. Beresford and the woman under the awning, with the white face and hard black eyes. It was as though one had said, "I hate you!" and the other had responded indifferently, "I know it, but I don't care."

Mrs. Napper felt herself grow hot under the calm gaze she encountered and, turning away hastily, resumed her conversation and her embroidering.

"It's outrageous and disgusting!" she said forcefully; "above all—disgusting! I simply won't stand it any longer. Either she leaves the hotel or I do. It's

a horrible example for the children—I haven't any of my own here, thank the Lord, but I *can* feel for those who have."

"If you mean me," said Lily Caruthers, "I'm not a child—I'm seventeen, and I almost came out this winter. I think Mrs. Beresford is a dear!"

"I do mean you, Lily—and Willis and Kathryn and Sadie—it's shocking how wise you have grown about this—affair. Positively shocking! You don't know what you're talking about when you say you like that creature."

One of the stouter matrons coughed suggestively, and Mrs. Napper set her lips in a fine, hard line.

Lily leaned her strong, slender young figure back against the bench, dug her heels into the floor, threw up her arms and yawned with youthful candor, to show how very little the matter interested her.

"Lily!" said her mother gently, in a soft, helpless voice that was meant to convey reproof, but somehow failed in its mission.

"Oh, I know," continued Lily, "they're all jealous and—afraid of her. I don't blame them. Joe Morrison is the only good-looking man in the place, husbands included, and it's hard to have to sit by and see a married woman run off with him. You'd better begin to look out—I saw Mr. Napper talking with her this morning; she was showing him how to bait his hook for trout——"

"Lily!" said her mother again, a shade more distinctly.

Lily shrugged her shoulders and relapsed into silence; Mrs. Napper sat up very straight and looked her ugliest; several of the other ladies exchanged sly smiles while they compared stitches, and Mrs. Caruthers got up hastily and started toward the hotel.

She met the "Scandal" half-way. She was now strolling back toward the end of the pier.

Mrs. Beresford nodded gaily.

"We ah goin' out to watch the sunset," she said, in her pleasant Southern drawl. "Don't you-all want to come, too?"

A frozen silence enveloped the crocheting group and they watched Mrs. Caruthers warily, for she was the

social center of this winter colony. She hesitated for the fraction of a second, then slipped by with an apologetic smile.

"I must dress for dinner," she said, "Later, perhaps."

The group under the awnings gave a sigh of relief, and Mrs. Napper's eyes flashed ominously and met those of Lily Caruthers with a triumphant glare. Mrs. Beresford looked from one to another of the group with a puzzled, questioning gaze.

Lily returned Mrs. Napper's glare with interest and sprang from her seat impulsively.

"Ask me; I'll go!" she said.

Her mother turned anxiously in time to see her throw one of her arms about Mrs. Beresford's shoulders, and turn her back on the other women. It was a critical moment, and Mrs. Caruthers felt herself unable to cope with the situation—or with Lily.

"Lily!" rang out a sharp feminine voice, which she recognized as belonging to her aunt, "Don't go, child! It'll be cold directly and your dress is thin."

Mrs. Beresford turned, smiling blandly. "She c'n have mah shawl," she drawled good-naturedly.

They walked on toward the end of the pier, Nannette and the dog still following complacently, happily ignorant of the disturbing whirlpool about them.

Nannette was six and a perfect miniature of her mother. She stepped along daintily, her chin held high, her white lace frock spread wide under its sash of pink satin, and her baby face framed in a mass of pale golden curls.

"Look at the poor, innocent child," hissed Mrs. Napper, as Nannette trailed by. "What do you suppose will happen to her with such a mother?"

A tall, lanky damsel, somewhat too old for the jaunty Peter Thompson suit she wore, opined wisely that women of Mrs. Beresford's ilk were apt to be reasonably strict in the bringing up of their offspring, and there might still be hope for Nannette, despite her mother.

A horrible thought struck one of the matrons, and she suspended her embroidery for a second.

"Has she a husband?" she threw out suggestively. "Does anybody know, for certain? Perhaps——"

"My dear," said Mrs. Napper impressively, "I acknowledge that it might be worse, but she certainly has. I met him last autumn at the races, at Belmont."

"They're Lexington people, I understand—excellent family, and some money—but there's bad blood somewhere on her side. He's a charming fellow—'Ogden Beresford'—I couldn't forget the name, possibly, he made such an impression on all of us. Mr. Napper is in the automobile business in New York, you know, and he sold Mr. Beresford a machine."

"Does she know that you know about her?" asked the young lady in the Peter Thompson.

"Certainly. Do you notice how she avoids me? The minute I saw her name on the register, 'Mrs. O. Beresford,' I went right up to her and told her that I had met her husband. Her manner was very queer—she seemed startled, and changed the subject. Since then, of course, her conduct has compelled me to ignore her."

"She's pretty," ventured one of the younger women, glancing timidly in the direction where Mrs. Beresford's dainty figure made a slender silhouette against the sky.

"Oh, yes, in a vulgar way," conceded Mrs. Napper. "There's something about her, though, that annoys me. I can't explain it. She's too sure of herself. She ought to be ashamed, but she isn't. I don't think there's any shame in her!"

Meanwhile, the lady under discussion was chatting brightly with Lily Caruthers and Joe Morrison, as they watched the fishermen from the end of the pier.

Lily regarded her with frank and youthful admiration that was beautifully tinged with innocence. She looked upon Mrs. Beresford, whether rightly or wrongly, as a martyr, and she thought she detected in the latter's bravado a spirit of unconventionality that she loved.

Lily was not yet out of the school-room, but she had absorbed many vital

truths in her short life, her knowledge of which shocked and bewildered her relatives.

She accepted Joe Morrison's devotion to the charming young Southern woman as a delightful bit of romantic drama enacted for her especial benefit.

She dismissed the crocheting brigade with a wave of her hand—they were tabbies; while as for Mrs. Napper, she was a cat pure and simple.

Naturally, they couldn't be expected to accept Molly Beresford pleasantly, nor offer her the homage that her youth and beauty and good spirits deserved.

And, naturally, they didn't.

Lily was curious, too—frankly curious. Indeed, frankness was her predominating and most alarming trait. She had always been in the habit of calling a spade a spade, with the perfect tactlessness of honest, unspoiled youth, and when it came to the Morrison-Beresford affair, she did not hesitate nor falter.

"Do you know," she suddenly advanced, with a threatening sweetness, "that all those old women out there are jealous of you, Mrs. Beresford?"

"Jealous?" Mrs. Beresford's reddish-brown eyebrows went up a trifle and she feigned a surprise she did not feel. "What do you mean, child? Surely, you 'ah mistaken."

"No, indeed, I'm not mistaken. They're jealous—just that. Joe's the only good-looking man here, and naturally——"

She hesitated, at a loss for a word, and Mrs. Beresford's light laugh rang out startlingly clear. "Do you heah that, Joey?" she exclaimed. "They don't like for me to have yo'! Well, yo' ah surely handsome, Joe—I don't know's I blame 'em. And ain't yo' jealous, too; Lily?"

Lily dug the toe of her boot into the weather-beaten boarding of the pier, smiling a little ruefully.

"Oh, I'm jealous, too, but what's the use? I'd rather see you have him than any of the others, even if you are——"

A swift expression of pain crossed Mrs. Beresford's face, so fleeting that Joe Morrison thought he must have been mistaken, but she rose suddenly

and extended her hand to Nannette. "Come, honey," she said quickly, "it's nearly dinner-time. We'd best be goin' in."

Lily and Joe Morrison followed her slowly.

II.

AFTER dinner the great, golden Southern moon rose high in the heavens and spread its glittering track across the waters, luring everybody to the wonderful out-of-doors.

A faint breeze from the land brought with it the smell of orange and lemon blossoms from the grove beyond the hotel; on the Gulf, far to the north, was a single light, just visible above the horizon, which gave warning that the mail-boat would make port in half an hour.

By a magic which they neither knew nor understood, Joe Morrison and Mrs. Beresford again found themselves together on the pier.

It was very natural that he should come up to her, and she made a place for him on the bench beside her, drawing away, ever so little, from the contact of his shoulder.

Since the afternoon an imperceptible something had come between them, just the shadow of a constraint.

A misty white scarf enveloped her head and shoulders and her delicate face gleamed strangely under the light of the moon.

After their first greeting something of her constraint communicated itself to him and he rose abruptly, and commenced pacing back and forth across the platform. He was a tall, well-set-up man, with a mop of wavy black hair, and rather full, handsome features. As he walked back and forth, her eyes followed him admiringly.

"Joe," she said, "don't yo' tell me what yo' ah thinkin' about. Jus' have a care—this is a good time to spoil things—I c'n feel the moon-madness mahse'f."

He turned toward her abruptly, and she rose, a little frightened, and put out a warning hand.

"I know, I know!" she said pleadingly. "But don't, Joe—don't—*spoil it!*"

"How can I spoil it, Molly?" he said tenderly, taking her unresisting fingers in his.

"Somehow, I feel that you love me as I love you. Don't tell me it hasn't meant anything to you—our being together, our hunting and fishing, our friendship—don't tell me it hasn't meant anything *more*! I couldn't bear that, Molly."

He paused for a moment, as though waiting for some response, but she stood like a statue, frozen into silence, and he went on, half hopefully.

"I've only known you a little while—but we've been so happy—these delicious days. I—why, what's the matter, darling?"

Under the moonlight she seemed to grow whiter than before and he felt her soft arm tremble as it lay against his sleeve.

"Don't," she whispered agonizingly; "I was afraid it was too good to last—but please don't spoil it now, Joe. I may not love you—in that way! It is impossible!" she faltered.

"Why? You must tell me why; you owe me that much, Molly."

"Oh, I know I do, I know I do! I owe you everything—every moment of happiness my poor life has held I owe to you."

"Then, why? It can't be your husband. The other day when we spoke of it you said, 'I have no husband.' It was true, wasn't it? I felt a certain delicacy—that it was none of my business, in short—and so I didn't ask anything more. I trusted you, Molly."

"You shouldn't have trusted me, dear—it was silly of you to trust me—I was so greedy for happiness. Yes, it is my husband!"

He turned on her fiercely.

"Why didn't you tell me the truth?" he demanded. "Between you and me there is no special need of splitting hairs. You saw me loving you—every day must have made it plainer to you, and you let me go on and on, until I am mad with love for you. Your eyes, your lips, Molly; I love them so——"

He drew her passionately to him, but she pushed her hands against his chest, to free herself.

"No, no!" she sobbed.

"Please wait. I'll tell you—everything! Perhaps you'll forgive me, Joe. Don't you think I have a heart, too—that I suffer?"

"I'm willing to take the consequences. I'll tell you, and then, and then—I'll leave you, Joe. It's true—there is a man living who is my husband."

"I haven't seen him for five years. He—he placed himself beyond the pale of my forgiveness, and then he left me."

"Later, his wild life caused him to go insane, and he has been in an asylum ever since. No one sees him but his brother, and he killed all the love I had for him long ago. It's almost as though he were dead. Sometimes I forget that he is in existence, but you have made me remember. I am being punished, dear; please don't make it harder!"

Joe Morrison's arms fell helplessly; his shoulders drooped; a look of pain spread over his youthful face.

"There must be a way out of it," he muttered hoarsely. "Surely you can get a divorce, or something like that."

"No—I can't do that, wretched as my life is. I promised his brother Ogden that I wouldn't—he has been so good to me; I couldn't bear to hurt him. Oliver's conduct was a great cross to him."

"My husband has drifted so completely out of sight that most of our friends think he is dead. It would only revive old memories—and for little Nannette's sake——"

"But for our sake," he pleaded.

"Oh, Joe, please, please don't tempt me. If you only knew how I longed to be happy with you."

"Then——"

"No, no! *I must not!*"

"Yes!"

"No!"

"But you belong to me, dear."

"Oh, Joe, you make it so hard——"

"Mrs. Beresford, Mrs. Beresford!" rang out Lily Caruthers' high-pitched young voice, "Aren't you comin' down to see the mail-boat—she's almost here!"

"Yes, indeed!"

Mrs. Beresford fairly flew down the pier to the opening where the steps led

down to the float; Joe Morrison followed slowly, his face drawn into stern lines, his shoulders drooping heavily.

The wash made by the mail-boat splashed heavily against the piles and sprayed over the skirts of the venturesome ones who had descended to the float. The coming of the mail was an important event in this out-of-the-way little resort, and the whole community turned out to greet it.

Lily was the first to climb back over the rickety stairway, her white dress drenched with salt water, her arms filled with papers. "Here are your papers, Joe," she called out. "Take them, please; I'm going to wait at the post-office until the mail is sorted."

"Bring mine up, please, Lily—that's a good child," said Mrs. Beresford. "I'm tired; I reckon I'll go in."

She turned back toward the hotel, Morrison at her side, neither of them speaking a word.

On the porch, Mrs. Beresford sank wearily into a chair; he hesitated a moment, as though undecided what course to pursue, but she helped him out, speaking quite naturally, as though nothing had happened.

"Those are the Nashville papahs, ain't they, honey? Yes, I thought so. Go read 'em, Joey, and tell me the news. I'm too lazy to try to read to-night."

He went inside obediently. The shining lamps and long writing-tables made a cozy interior. In the stone fireplace a log was burning; some of the tabbies were still embroidering, and a group of young people were having an exciting game of "I Doubt It."

They beckoned Morrison to join them, but he refused and settled himself with his papers in a corner under a lamp. He was in no mood for companionship.

He tried to read, but the words seemed to swing and tremble before his eyes, and he pressed his hand wearily to his head. Somehow, it all seemed harder than he could bear.

There had been lots of girls in Joe Morrison's life, nice girls—and some of them he had thought he loved—but this was different.

While he made a futile attempt to

read the printed page, Molly Beresford's clear-cut face, with its slanting brown eyes and crown of golden hair, came before him and prevented him. He could hear her mellow, happy laugh, and her soft intonation, and he hurled a mental curse at the fate that separated them.

Some one stopped and looked at the paper over his shoulder. It was Nelson—a man that he instinctively disliked, and his shoulder burned under the familiar touch of the older man.

"What's the matter, Morrison?" the intruder jocularly observed. "Better come and have a drink; it'll cheer you up. Something gone wrong between you and the pretty grass widow?"

Joe turned on him wrathfully.

"Look here," he said tartly, "as a rule, I don't mind, but you know, she's—she's——"

His voice wavered, as, by chance his eye fell on the paper in front of him, and a tiny paragraph seemed fairly to burn itself into his brain.

A lump caught in his throat, he swallowed hard and then turned on Nelson still more wrathfully. "You'd better be careful with your talk."

He jumped from his chair and started for the porch, the paper clutched in one hand, his face tense with excitement. Nelson's eyes followed him curiously.

"Gad, but he's hot about it," he mused. "I wonder what he means?"

A thought struck him and he started to join his wife.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Beresford sat alone on the porch. She was too tired and dispirited to notice the quiet withdrawal of the chairs in her vicinity, and too listless to care.

Her own little world of suffering and sorrow encompassed her to the exclusion of all else. She felt that she must be growing old, for every muscle ached; but worst of all was the ache in her heart. She scarcely noticed Morrison when he stepped out into the shadow and took the empty chair at her side. He sat for a moment in silence, then he said softly:

"Molly, what you said on the pier to-night—you remember—it's all true, isn't it? You do love me?"

She looked up at him, clear-eyed and unafraid.

"It's all true," she said slowly. "Why should I deny it? Yes, indeed, I do love yo', Joe. It can't be wrong to say that."

Her hand lay on the arm of her chair and his fingers closed over it.

"Molly," he said quietly, "you are free to give me your love, your heart, your very self, and I now claim them all!"

She drew her hand away quickly and looked anxiously into his face.

"Joe, you ain't mad, are you, honey? You frighten me, Joe dear. What do yo' mean?"

He brushed the paper lightly.

"It's here," he said briefly. "Your—husband—is dead."

She rose from her chair. "You're mistaken. I—must see it," she faltered. "They would have written, or telegraphed——"

"It can't be a mistake," he said. "This paper is four days old. He has been dead almost a week."

They went back into the room. The group from the post-office had returned and the room was filled with a merry, laughing crowd.

Lily Caruthers, still in her water-soaked frock, thrust a bundle of letters into Mrs. Beresford's hand.

"Here's your mail," she said.

The tables had been pushed to one side and the children from New Orleans were dancing a quadrille, dressed in bizarre costumes. Molly realized, for an instant, the fact that they were celebrating Mardi Gras.

Then she turned and read through the little paragraph that gave the bare facts of her husband's death, and, above all the chatter, the music of the piano and Lily's shrill voice directing the children, she could hear her own heart pounding.

For an instant she stood quietly facing Morrison, then she dropped into a chair and rested her elbows wearily on the table before her. The room swam about her like a dream-picture; she saw dimly the sour, accusing countenance of Mrs. Napper and her friends; she saw them whispering and nodding to each other and she knew they were talking

about her, but all this failed to touch her at all.

All that she saw or felt was the look in Joe Morrison's eyes, as he bent over her.

"It can't—be—true!" she whispered.

Then her glance fell on the letters in her hand and she hastily broke open one that bore a Lexington postmark. She read it through quickly, then handed it to Morrison.

"Joe, dear, it is true," she panted. "This letter—it's from my brother-in-law. He wants me to accept it as a happy release—'a happy release.'"

"Joe, do yo' know what that means to me? It's been a living death these past five years, and then you came into my life—it seemed so hard to shut out all the happiness——"

"Yes, I know," he whispered.

* * * * *

Some weeks later it was Lily who broke the interesting news to the row of tabbies under the gaily striped awnings. She waved a letter defiantly at them.

"It's from Mrs. Beresford," she announced triumphantly; "only she isn't Mrs. Beresford any longer. She and Joe Morrison were married last week!"

The tabbies jumped, and then looked, with one accord, at Mrs. Napper.

"You said she was married," they chimed in one breath—"you said you had met her husband."

Mrs. Napper drew herself up with great dignity. "I certainly did meet him," she said, "and I'm sure I don't see what you can mean, Lily. He was a most delightful man, Mr. Ogden Beresford; I'm not likely to forget. My husband's in the automobile business in New York and he——"

"Huh," interrupted Lily rudely. "A whole lot you know! That's her brother-in-law."

"Lily!" remonstrated Mrs. Caruthers gently.

The tabbies turned on Mrs. Caruthers fiercely. "Did *you* know she was a widow?" they said.

"No—I didn't know, exactly. I knew that her husband—well, we never heard of him. Some people said he

was dead—but nobody seemed to know. He must have been dead, or she wouldn't have married again."

"Well, I for one always distrusted her, married or single," said Mrs. Nap-
per. "She isn't my style of woman."

"I should say not!" exclaimed the irrepressible Lily.

"Lily!" exclaimed the long-suffering Mrs. Caruthers, in her pained, sweet voice, "I must insist that you be more careful!"

IN THE GRIP OF THE GALE.*

By Marcus D. Richter.

An ocean-going serial swept by the wildest winds of the restless sea.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

A QUEER old schooner, *Eagle Bird*, is becalmed in the vicinity of a party on the Van Lorros' yacht, *Skylark*. Nan Van Lorro suggests that they visit the old schooner, and a boat puts off with Nan, her brother Harry, Caleb Lonsden, and a Canadian, Netherly, a recent acquaintance of Nan's.

They find the schooner's crew rough men, but, with the exception of a Swede, Oleson, good-natured. A sudden storm ends their visit, and when they return to the yacht they find that Lonsden is not with them. The storm proves to be a heavy one and the yacht puts in to shore.

Netherly wires to Boston and finds that at the bank in which both he and Lonsden are employed there is a shortage in Lonsden's books. Nan is convinced of his honesty and that some harm has befallen him, for, having unintentionally thrown herself into a hypnotic state, she has dreamed that Lonsden is lying gagged and bound in the hold of the *Eagle Bird*. She persuades her brother to start in pursuit of the schooner. Meanwhile, the old vessel, unable to weather the gale, has lost most of her rigging and is half filled with water.

Eight of her crew of eleven are rescued by a British trader that later puts into Fayal for repairs, where the *Skylark* runs across her. Nan recognizes Oleson on the vessel and, from her captain, Bronson, they learn that the three left on the hulk of the *Eagle Bird* are probably still alive. Share, one of the rescuing party, declares, however, that as they pulled away from the schooner he saw four figures left on the wreck.

The Van Lorros set forth again on the trailless hunt.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE HULK.

AND, strange though it may seem, one man of those fifteen in the Gilbert and Arthur's boat, and one man only, had counted correctly the figures on the floating hulk of the wrecked schooner.

When Guinness seized Horlick and dropped him into the departing boat, Bob Bundy was following the dumb cook below. The little seaman did not know what harm the half-crazy Hank might do.

He found Hank tearing away the litter from before the mouth of the passage that led aft to the cabin. This passage was fortunately on the windward side, and most of the galley furniture had piled up on the other side.

"Wot ye doin'?" demanded Bundy, shaking Hank by the shoulder.

The dumb man looked around and held up his hand for silence. Bundy strained his ears.

There was a voice from the heart of the waterlogged schooner! Hollow and faint it was, but he could distinguish English words.

"In the name of God, *help!*"

Hank flung out the last broken plank, darted into the passage, seized the trap ring, and raised it.

A rush of foul air came forth. Hank fell back with a guttural cry, for there appeared instantly at the opening a bloodstreaked and awful face.

"A stowaway, by thunder!" yelled Bundy.

But he was not scared as was the dumb man by the apparition. He stooped and seized the unfortunate by the collar.

In a minute he had Caleb Lonsden out of the hold. The latter was wet to his waist where he had stood in the rising water.

He was in a pitiful state, yet the awful experiences of his last few hours in the hold had roused him from the apathy which had first followed his injury.

Hank ran wildly on deck, the appearance of the stranger being too much for his weakened intellect. Although his intuition had saved Lonsden, he evidently did not believe the stowaway flesh and blood.

Bundy dragged the latter out upon deck, where Guinness had seized Hank and was holding him from leaping overboard.

"For the mercy of God! who is it?" gasped the red-headed mate.

"Huh! Ask me an easier one," grunted Bundy, easing Lonsden to the deck with his back braced against the low galley-house. "I only know that he was below there and Hank seemed to know about him."

"Glory!" exclaimed Guinness. "It's what's been troubling the cook ever since this gale broke out. He must have heard the poor critter."

Meanwhile the mate had been lashing the cook to the stump of the mainmast. Now he came over to Lonsden and peered into his face.

"This ain't no stowaway—leastwise he's no dock-rat," declared Guinness. "See his clo'es, Bundy! Gosh! he's a gent."

"It's one of them that come aboard from that yacht the other day!" declared the little seaman succinctly.

"Water!" gasped the apparition.

Guinness darted into the galley. The water butt which had been lashed to the deck for general use, of course, had been carried away.

And when the mate held the tin dipper under the spigot of the keg in the cook's quarters, only a little water trickled out. The keg was well-nigh empty, and the thought smote him that unless they could get into the hold, and find the water stores, they would all four soon suffer from lack of the precious liquid.

But he gave what there was to the stowaway. He scooped up a bucket of salt water and washed the wound in Lonsden's head, too.

This was rather vigorous treatment; but the sting cleared Lonsden's brain and he began to speak coherently. In a few minutes Guinness and Bundy were cognizant of all the facts connected with Cale's presence in the hold of the Eagle Bird.

From the hour the cargo shifted on Monday night until this time, the unfortunate bank clerk had suffered terribly. The water coming in below compressed the air in the hold, which grew fouler as the hours dragged by.

The constant danger arising from the shifting of the cargo and the fear that it might plunge him completely under water, worked upon Cale's mind until he had well-nigh gone mad. And his shoutings and knockings, as we have seen, had brought him no release.

The dumb cook's intuitive belief in the presence of somebody besides the crew aboard the hulk, strengthened by Cale Lonsden's groans before the schooner was wrecked, were the causes leading to his rescue.

Guinness had something to think about besides the strange story which the passenger, whose presence was so unsuspected, had told him. He looked now and then, from the higher side of the slanting deck, toward the life-boat laboring across the wave-tops to the brigantine.

The gale did not seem to decrease much. The waves went hissing by, washing far up on the sunken side of the schooner's hulk, and slapping against the port broadside now and then with a report like thunder.

At such times—when the waves broke—all hands were drenched with spray, and wet to the skin. And only Guinness and Bundy were able to get about the deck between the blows which shook the waterlogged hull so terribly.

Guinness hung to the starboard rail and watched the small boat with its fifteen occupants fight its way to the bigger vessel. But, although the rescue had been made not far from noon, it was near night before the boat reached the brigantine.

And a black night it promised to be. The wind shrieked above them; the sea moaned in the distance like some monster in travail; the wreck staggered on, blown now and again almost broadside to the waves.

When this occurred, Guinness feared that she would capsize entirely. It seemed that only the mercy of God saved her from it.

He could rig no sail to keep her head up. When the masts and top-hammer went by the board, the bowsprit had been jerked out of her, too. Nor was there a spar to be rigged as a jury mast.

The rudder was still slamming as the waves beat upon it. It was a strong piece of furniture, bolted to the rudder-post with wrought-iron pins that passed clean through the big timber and were clinched on the inner side.

The steering apparatus—the wheel and chains—were broken; but Guinness began to study the problem of getting control of that rudder again, and so, in a small way at least, governing the drift of the hulk.

He called Bundy, told him his plan, and together they set to work. There was plenty of strong cable, and after risking their lives a dozen times, they wove two rope-ends through the great wrought-iron staples in the rudder-post, bringing the ropes inboard over the rudder pendant and the broken rail.

In this way they endeavored to lash the rudder at an angle which Guinness judged would bring the nose of the schooner more before the wind and save her from rolling so terribly.

It was pitch dark before they had accomplished this. It was a foregone conclusion that the people from the

brigantine could not reach them again before morning—providing she was able to remain that long within sight of the wreck, or the latter was not wrenched to pieces before the day dawned.

And the gale kept at the wreck “hammer and tongs,” as Bundy said. The waves beat upon the old schooner wickedly.

The men upon her saw now and then the lights burned for their encouragement upon the deck of the brigantine. But they had no more oil with which to make a flare, and they saw the brigantine’s signals drifting farther and farther away, without being able to retard the separation.

Besides, about midnight a cross sea swooped down upon them, and hove the Eagle Bird over so far that her starboard rail was completely under water, and remained there. Then, while the unfortunate quartet were expecting to be carried completely under the surface, another wave smashed into the stern of the wreck and tore away the rudder.

This accident showed the force of the sea. Heavy as the rudder-post was, and well bolted as the rudder was to the timber, the bolts, heads and all, were drawn completely through the wood. The hulk, even had it not been thrown too far over upon its beam-ends, would have now been completely unmanageable.

“The next time she swings broadside to the waves, and a big one fetches her, she’ll roll over,” Guinness screamed to Bundy. “We’re goners.”

“I reckon,” was the taciturn seaman’s only comment.

But Cale Lonsden had begun to take an interest in their affairs, and in the conditions which surrounded them. He was within hearing, being bound to the capstan with the mate and the sailor.

“Can’t we make a drag and so keep her headed right?” he gasped.

“Ain’t got nothing for the drag. And, besides, the cargo’s shifted too far now. I believe we’re sinking a good bit, too, mister.”

“The cargo will help keep us afloat just the same?” Lonsden asked quickly.

“Oh, she won’t really sink. I’m pretty sure of that.”

“Then if the starboard rail stays

under, it will reduce the chance of the wind getting beneath the hulk from the port and rolling us over," Cale said quickly. "Isn't that so?"

"Damn poor comfort," said Bundy.

"It's true, though," admitted Guinness.

"What have you got to eat?" asked the passenger.

"Well, there's mebbe half a dozen biscuit left. There is a little coffee—a handful only. But we've no water."

"Is it as bad as that, mate?" demanded Bundy.

"I'm giving it to you straight," declared Guinness. "You're a man, Bundy, and this gent here seems to have the right stuff in him."

"We have little chance of being picked up by that brigantine to-morrow. She's a long way from us now."

"We're up against what the boys call 'the real thing.' This is a first-class, A1 wreck!"

"The galley itself is half full of water now. We couldn't get to that hatch out of which we helped *you*, sir—not now. It's under water."

"I tried the companionway doors some time ago. They're jammed."

"We haven't a blessed thing to smash 'em with. And the cabin's under water like the galley an' forecastle, too."

"We've got this hulk to lie on. But that's about all. There's practically no food, and not a drop of fresh water. Hank's as mad as a hatter now, and we'll all be like him before we're many days older."

"You're despairing, Mr. Guinness," said Cale.

"Who wouldn't be?"

"That's the worst thing that can happen to us," declared the passenger. "If we despair, our minds will become melancholy, our brains inactive."

"And if either of us have inventive faculty, it is now that we must awake it. Injured as I was, there was something in my head that kept me believing that I should escape from that hold; otherwise I would have plunged into the rising bilge and drowned myself."

"Well, by thunder! Unless that brigantine helps us, I don't see a chance," growled Guinness.

"Wait till daylight. Then we'll see."

"Oh, I'll wait all right—we'll all wait," said the mate, with a harsh laugh.

They were silent after that, and, exhausted by their struggles, all three dozed more or less until sunrise.

Not that they saw the sun come up above the horizon. But they knew he was somewhere behind the thick clouds that still overcast the sky.

As the reader knows, the wreck and the brigantine Gilbert and Arthur had drifted so far apart during the night that even the topmasts of the vessel that had rescued their companions were out of sight of the unfortunates upon the waterlogged schooner.

The gale still blew savagely. Almost every wave broke over the wreck.

Saturated so long by these seas, their flesh had become swollen and raw. The ropes which lashed them had drawn so taut that they could scarcely move.

The strands cut into their swollen flesh. The knots were strained so tightly that they could not be loosened, and the trio fastened to the capstan had to cut themselves free.

Guinness, so bold and cheerful at first, seemed to have lost heart when he saw the brigantine's boat depart with his companions. He was convinced that they would not be rescued, and the coming day brought him no measure of cheerfulness.

But Lonsden's spirits rose hourly. And why should they not? He was far better off than he had been while held a prisoner in the hold of the wreck.

He took the lead and tried to cheer his companions. It was he, too, who crept along the deck after releasing himself, and reached the dumb cook just in time to save Hank's life.

Speechless, the unfortunate fellow had been unable to call the attention of the trio to his desperate state.

His bonds, too, held him like a vice, and he had no knife with which to cut them. The ropes across his stomach were actually buried in his swollen flesh. He was merely gasping for breath, and must have been unconscious for some time when Cale set him free.

Hank's condition served to rouse

Guinness a little, and Cale left the dumb cook to the ministrations of the mate while he went with Bundy to see what they might rescue from the open galley.

The sea water swashing back and forth in it floated a few boxes and other odds and ends.

Guinness had put the crackers and coffee on a high shelf when he first got into the place. But in some plunge of the hulk these had been jarred off, and now Cale found only a mess of saturated pulp in the bottom of the cracker-box, and the coffee-beans were distributed in about four tons of sea water.

"Never mind," declared he cheerily, to Bundy. "Once let the sun come out and we'll dry this cracker pulp and it will be quite palatable. Is there anything else here?"

There was nothing else—nothing edible, that is.

"If we had had our wits about us when you fellows pulled me out of the hold, we might have recovered a lot of the stores. Now it is too late," grumbled Cale.

"It isn't the eatin' that's botherin' me," said Bundy. "It's the thirst."

"True. The thirst will soon make us forget our hunger."

He did not tell the seaman that the fever of his own mouth was well-nigh setting him crazy.

He was in a much worse condition than Guinness or Bundy. Indeed, the dumb cook, who was unconscious, seemed to have much the best of it.

But Cale Lonsden would not be overcome by these untoward conditions. He drove the thought of thirst from his mind.

He sat down, clinging to a loop of cable, and set his brain to the task of evolving some means of help for them all.

CHAPTER X.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST.

THINK of a college-bred man, poor it was true, but with all the instincts and tastes of a gentleman (in that sense in which "gentleman" means "wealthy"), a man who for two years and more had been chained to a desk in

a bank, being suddenly thrust into such conditions as these that faced the quartet of survivors aboard the Eagle Bird!

About as well fitted for such a situation as a babe in swaddling clothes. Such would appear at first blush to be the case.

But there was another side to Cale Lonsden's character. He came of seafaring people, and was by nature fearless when at sea. Besides, he was a great reader.

A man's brain, I hold, is like a desk fitted with a multitude of pigeonholes. In these pigeonholes the knowledge one picks up from reading, or from experience, is filed away for future reference.

Some people seem to utilize very few pigeonholes for the knowledge they collect. And some people's information is badly tabulated.

But the methodical man, when he sets his mind to it, can glance over the notes he has taken and stored away in times past in any given pigeonhole.

Cale Lonsden turned to the pigeonhole in his brain marked "shipwrecks." He found, after some deep thinking, that he had stored away there a deal of information which might, to a bank clerk, be termed truthfully "useless lumber."

A bank clerk, if he sticks to his stool, will never be wrecked in mid-ocean. But in his reading Cale had fortunately a habit of storing away much odd information that did not enter primarily into his daily work and life.

He knew that although hunger was likely to trouble shipwrecked people first, that as compared to the final need of something to quench the thirst the comparison is as 100 to 1.

There are many substitutes for nutritious food.

Chewed leather he knew would alleviate the irritation of the stomach to some extent; the act of chewing would impel the formation of saliva, and "fool" the stomach into believing that something was coming its way.

But the desire for drink would soon overcome hunger and every other requirement. To find water was his first task, therefore.

Water! He could see nothing but

water, and clouds holding water, wherever he looked.

"Why is man so helpless?" he thought bitterly. "We call ourselves lords of creation—and we cannot turn salt water to fresh without a paraphernalia as complicated as a Swiss chronometer."

"Here are miles upon miles of water about us—stretching away to eternity, perhaps. If we drink it we are worse than poisoned!"

"Yet the removal of one particular element from this water will make it palatable and of saving power to us! To change salt water to fresh—that is the problem."

Had it rained he would have sought to catch some of the falling drops. Yet even then the dashing spray would have doubtless mixed with the rainwater and spoiled what little he could catch for drinking purposes.

He knew that as soon as the gale ceased and the sun came out, their sufferings from thirst would be vastly increased. Yet, when the sun shone its hottest he remembered of reading that to saturate the garments aided greatly in alleviating thirst.

Bundy was the most uncomplaining of mortals. He lay against the mast and sucked at an empty pipe and said nothing.

Guinness did not leave the dumb cook. Hank was in a bad state. Although he had recovered consciousness, he was as helpless as a baby.

And in the eyes of his companions Cale did nothing but lie at ease, too. But as I have said, his mind was exceedingly active.

By and by he rose and crawled into the flooded galley again. He was looking for a particular object—and he found it.

It was an empty quart bottle, and had once held ammonia. He washed it for an hour, and finally swabbed it out dry with his handkerchief and tightly corked it again.

He put the bottle in the cracker-box which they had lashed with wire to the zinc platform Guinness had made, and flung the broken oil stove away.

About this time the trio of comparatively sane castaways realized that the

gale had begun to decrease. The wind remained steady in one quarter, and although its velocity was still great, there was a promise in the westward of a break in the clouds.

The wreck floundered about less. It was possible to stand up, despite the slanting deck, and view the surroundings without running the risk of being pitched headforemost down the incline at every plunge of the hulk.

Cale became active at once. Guinness would not be roused; and, indeed, they feared to leave Hank alone.

The dumb man had suffered so greatly during the night that his life seemed ebbing from him despite all that they could do. Guinness lashed himself to the mast and held the cook in his arms, for every time they tried to tie Hank he plainly evinced the fact that the ropes tortured him.

Bundy came to Cale's assistance, however.

"Didn't the cook have an ax or a hatchet in the galley?" Cale asked the seaman. "He must have chopped wood with something."

"It was a hatchet."

"Then we want to find it. I want that hatchet to chop a way into the cabin."

"I dunno as that will do us much good," grunted Bundy.

"Guinness says the captain had some private stores. We know he had spirits, and a little brandy would help that poor cook immensely."

"Besides," said Cale reflectively, "there is something else I want there more than either spirits or food."

And Cale had a very clear mental picture of the thing he wanted. He had looked into the cabin while he was showing Nan Van Lorro over the schooner, and what he now wanted he had seen hanging on the bulkhead near the companionway stairs.

This article was a lifebuoy—a rubber ring big enough to go over a man's head and shoulders, and which was to be blown up through a brass tube when in use.

He told Bundy what he wanted so particularly in the cabin; but he did not tell him why he wanted the life ring, nor did Bundy ask.

That was the best thing about the Bangor man. He was used to obeying orders, and he went straight ahead to do as he was told without asking too many questions.

He and Cale took turns in plunging into the galley until Bundy was successful in finding the hatchet. Then they moved on the cabin aft.

Now the cabin skylight was under water—all but a corner. There was no use in bursting that in.

As for the doors of the companionway, it had already been proven that they could not be forced. They were half under water, too.

Cale began, therefore, to cut through the deckhouse on the port side. There were two small deadlights here, and he began by bursting one of those in with a tremendous blow of the hatchet head.

A puff of bad air rushed out. But that soon cleared, and between him and Bundy, a hole sufficiently large for a man's body to pass was soon made.

They could see into the cabin. Indeed, just at this time the clouds broke and a ray of sunshine lit up the floundering old Eagle Bird.

Guinness weakly cheered. Cale, delighted that the red-headed mate should be coming to his senses, caught up the "hurrah."

"Give it three of 'em!" he cried, and he and Bundy solemnly stood up and gave the blessed sunlight "three and a tiger."

Then Cale brought a coil of rope and fastened one end around his waist. He knew his own weakness, however, and he dared not descend into the cabin without having both Guinness and Bundy at hand to pull him out.

Guinness managed to fix Hank so that he could not easily roll off the wreck, and came to help Bundy at the rope. At once Cale slipped his legs through the hole in the side of the deckhouse and dropped into the water.

Many articles floated about in the cabin; but there was nothing in sight, or in reach, which Cale thought they wanted. He swam to the companionway, found a footing on the steps, and began groping about for that patent air buoy which he remembered so vividly of seeing there.

He found the hook, but the ring had fallen from it, or been taken down. Although it had not been inflated when he saw it, surely the ring should have floated!

About this time Guinness and Bundy became frightened for his safety and pulled him back to the hole. They could not see his operations very clearly and his struggles made them fear that he was drowning.

So he had a smaller line tied to his waist the next time, having arranged a series of simple signals by which he was to be pulled in, or let out, as he should need.

He went down once more and from the companionway steps began to dive into the deeper water, groping about the overturned furniture and other litter for the object of which he was in search.

At last, held down by the table itself, which was too heavy to float in such shallow water, he found the rubber ring. He brought it up in his arms and was pulled out, breathless and exhausted, on the deck.

"Not that I can see any use in your getting of it, sir," Guinness declared, but showing that his curiosity was at last aroused.

"I am going to get drinking-water by its aid."

"What, sir?"

"Do you know what sea-water becomes by evaporation, Mr. Guinness?"

"How's that?"

"It becomes fresh. If we can turn sea water to steam, the drops of steam that congeal are fresh."

"But how in heaven's name will you do it? The sun won't be hot enough to heat up water in this climate."

"We must have a fire. If it continues to grow fair, some of this wood-work will dry to-morrow. That will give us fuel."

"It is true we shall have some difficulty in managing a fire for my purpose on the open deck——"

But Guinness' eyes began to sparkle. He had become interested.

"The cook's stove!" he exclaimed.

"But that was flung away."

"Not the oil-stove. The cook-stove. We can get it out of the galley and set it up on deck."

"I'll have to level that platform again," and he pointed to the zinc-covered table top, which was now sadly aslant.

"If you really think there is some way of obtaining water, sir, Bundy and I will get up that stove for you," the mate declared.

"I believe it can be done. And a fire in the stove will be of great assistance," Cale assured him.

He was particularly glad that the mate was showing interest in their affairs. Guinness hourly threw off his despair after that. Activity was what he needed.

Even the coming of night (a night which canopied them with a clear sky picked out by a multitude of stars) did not quench the new enthusiasm of the mate of the Eagle Bird.

Guinness and Bundy found sufficient timber to brace the zinc-covered table in a horizontal position. This done, they took turns diving into the galley until they had loosed the stove, which had fallen into a corner.

A length of stove-pipe came out first; then between them they wrenched off the base and brought that up.

It was an ordinary small cook-stove, and Guinness knocked off the legs and lashed the base to the platform with wire, that its position might be more secure than it would be if they stood it on its legs.

It was a tug to get the body of the stove up; but they did it, and by midnight even the covers were saved and the stove was complete and in position. Not a part of it had been broken.

They were exhausted then and Cale made them lie down, lashed to the mast, and sleep if they could. He, meanwhile, watched poor Hank and finished the nicer job which he had been at work upon.

This began with his twisting the brass nozzle off the life ring, saving the wire which bound the rubber and brass together against future need.

He blew into the rubber tube and found that the ring was perfectly airtight. So he secured the bottle he had cleaned and dried earlier in the day, filled it two-thirds full of water, thrust the mouth of the bottle into the rubber

tube, and wired tube and bottle together securely.

He was patient and made the joint carefully, for much depended upon the tightness of it. Having accomplished this, however, there was nothing more he could do until morning.

The experiment of evaporating sea water had to be postponed until the sun had dried the woodwork of the wreck sufficiently to make it inflammable.

And so Cale Lonsden lay through the remainder of the night with hope in his heart, waiting impatiently for the sun to rise, and watching the sky as it grew gradually clearer and clearer.

CHAPTER XI.

MAN WROUGHT MIRACLES.

THE sun came up with a bound. Cale had fallen into a doze just before dawn, and the appearance of the red-faced luminary above the sea-line, sending his level beams directly into the eyes of the castaways, aroused him with all the shock of a gunshot.

It was going to be a hot day, although the wind was still fresh. They told each other this before the sun was an hour high.

Aside from the discomfort this would cause them on the unprotected deck, and aside from the fact that the heat would increase their thirst, Cale was delighted that the sun was torrid. He wished that part of the wreck above the water to dry up as soon as possible.

Guinness looked at the life-ring and bottle which he had arranged and expressed his delight in Cale's invention. As slightly as he was grounded in science, the mate saw what the inventor intended.

But Cale was not content to lie idle while the upperworks of the wreck dried in the sunshine. He was in such agony for water himself that he could not keep still.

Suffering made Hank and Bundy apathetic. To Cale it lent a nervous energy that he knew would finally end in complete madness if he did not keep his hands and head busy.

Besides, he was as worried as Guinness himself over the cook's condition.

Hank was just alive, and that seemed all.

If ever a man needed a stimulant, that man was the dumb cook of the Eagle Bird.

"If I could only get to the captain's store of elderberry wine with which he treated the crowd that day," thought Cale. "Guinness must know where Horlick kept it."

And he propounded the question to the mate. Guinness knew very well where the wine had been kept, and some medicinal liquors, too.

"The old man had a chest in the stern-cabin," he said. "There he kept the stuff and some few canned things that his wife bought and brought aboard before we sailed."

"Guinness, we must get into that cabin," cried Cale.

First he set Bundy to work whittling off bits of the rail with his knife, and drying the chips in the sun for kindling. He and the mate went to the hole they had smashed in the afterhouse.

Every movement they made was painful, but they ignored this fact and Cale went about the attempt with cheerfulness. He was confident of reaching the stern-cabin door; whether he could open it, however, was another matter.

With the rope tied about his waist and the signal cord to his wrist, Cale dropped into the water-washed main cabin of the Eagle Bird.

He ploughed his way through the floating furniture and mattresses from the upper berths, and finally reached the end of the room where the door of the captain's stateroom was located.

Not much light entered the place by the break in the deck-house, and he floundered about a good bit before he found the door. Then the knob proved to be so far under water that he could not reach it without diving.

So down he went beneath the surface, fumbling at the knob, trying to push the door open against the accumulated tons of water inside.

Remember that Lonsden was a theoretical scientist, not a practical one. He had forgotten that Goliath of Gath could not have pushed that door open against the pressure of the water behind it.

Indeed, he forgot that the inner cabin of the Eagle Bird was probably just as full of water as the outer compartment.

He could not stay beneath the surface longer than a minute, and had then made no impression on the door, of course. He thought the wood had swelled so that it stuck, and finally signalled Guinness to help him out.

Indeed, so exhausted was he that had it not been for the mate he would have drowned there in the cabin. Guinness dragged him out through the hole by main strength, and so weak were both when this was accomplished that they lay gasping on the inclined deck for some time, like expiring fishes.

But Cale was possessed of indomitable courage. He would not give up. And his determination was infectious.

As soon as he could crawl about again he went to see what Bundy had accomplished. With the ax and his knife the seaman had prepared a heap of small wood, which he had spread upon the platform and the dry top of the stove.

The sea had gone down so much now that the waves no longer splashed over the wreck, but lapped against it instead with a purring sound—the purr of the gorged tiger.

Cale did not trust to the element's seeming calm. The weather might change again at any time.

The sun was drying the wood famously. Bundy kept turning the chips and he had such a heap of them that Cale decided to risk lighting the fire.

The fire-box of the cook-stove was not large. It was a coal-stove, but of course that fuel was below and could not be come at.

It might take longer to dry than the wood, too, even could they find the small amount of coal the cook had had in the galley.

Guinness and Bundy both had dry matches. The patent match-box which Cale carried was of course saturated. Patent things never do what they are warranted to do.

Cale laid the wood in a small and well ventilated heap in the fire-box, closed the covers, and tried to light it through the slide below. But the wood was not yet sufficiently dried to catch like tinder.

Bundy offered a piece of his cotton shirt, and with this the thing was accomplished. A blaze soon sputtered in the stove and a faint wreath of smoke rose through the pipe.

The shavings, although not thoroughly dry, began to glow nicely and Cale fed the fire with judgment. Soon it roared up the pipe and they put on larger bits of wood which Bundy had hacked out of the rail with the hatchet.

Then Cale held the rubber ring above the fire and allowed the bottle of water to dangle in the flames. It was tedious work, and the buoy grew very heavy.

Guinness took his turn, and then Bundy. Cale dared not allow the bottle to get hot too quickly, or it might explode and their work would go for naught.

By and by, when the water grew milky, and then began to boil in the flask, and they saw the steam rising through the neck into the tube of the life-buoy, they were cheered mightily.

Guinness and Bundy trusted to Cale's superior knowledge and implicitly believed him when he declared that every drop of steam congealing in the interior of the rubber ring was fresh water. And it was true.

But Cale's scientific knowledge did not go far enough. Or, rather, he ignored a very simple fact that any housewife could have told him.

They held the bottle over the fire too long, allowing the water to evaporate so much that finally, with a pop like the explosion of a pistol, the glass flew into bits!

Bundy yelled with pain, for a flying bit of glass had cut him deeply in the cheek. Guinness cursed despairingly.

But Cale grabbed the rubber ring and turned it over quickly so that not a drop of the precious water already distilled should escape through the dangling tube to which the neck of the bottle was still fastened.

"Don't lose hope," Cale said to the mate. "If we can find another bottle we can easily make another evaporator. And the next time I won't let the water get so low in it before adding to the salt-water supply.

"Listen!" and he shook the rubber ring close to the mate's ear. "Hear it?"

There was actually almost a cup of warm water inside the buoy. Guinness and Bundy croaked a hoarse cheer.

"Let's have it, mate!" cried the seaman, still mopping the blood from his cheek.

"Easy," warned Cale. "Let us wait for it to cool a little. It will then quench our thirst much better.

"And we should be very sparing of it, too. A teaspoonful at a time until we can rig another evaporator and get a sufficient store to last us some time."

"That's wisely said, sir," declared Guinness. "And Hank should have a bigger share than either of us. He's the worst off."

"He needs something more than water," declared Cale thoughtfully. "I wish I could get at that liquor."

"Smash another hole in the deck, sir," suggested Bundy.

Cale leaped up with renewed vigor. "Of course!" he cried. "What an ass I am!"

He grabbed the hatchet and staggered along the deck to a spot over the stern-cabin. There he began to hack at the deck-boards.

It was a painful and tedious job. Guinness and Bundy came to help him, and some time after noon they had made a hole sufficiently large for a man to drop through into the after-cabin and be drawn up again.

Cale saw the water and realized then why he had been unable to get through the door between the two compartments. Before venturing down for the captain's private stores, he drained all the water out of the rubber ring into a tin cup.

He had found a pewter spoon in the galley, too. With this Cale portioned out the water to each.

After all these hours of parching thirst the few drops trickling over their swollen tongues were scarcely better than a tantalization; yet nobody complained.

One spoonful to each of the stronger ones; then two were forced between the dumb cook's teeth.

Hank responded instantly to this treatment. He opened his eyes and his lips worked pitifully.

"The poor devil wants more," groaned Guinness.

"Let us try to get those things from the captain's chest, and we'll give him something better even than this water," declared Cale.

Guinness had a suggestion here. He thought Bundy, being the lightest of the three, should be lowered into the after-cabin.

"Let him, if he likes," Cale said. "But I never ask a man to do what I'm not willing to do myself."

"No, I see you don't," returned the mate dryly. "But let me tell you, Mr. Lonsden, I plainly see you are the most valuable member of this party."

"If it wasn't for you we'd all be lying about the deck at our last gasp, hopeless and helpless. Bundy will go down."

And the Bangor man made no objection. They dropped him through the hole in the deck and, after half an hour of rummaging, he brought up from the depths a long-necked quart bottle, sealed with brown wax, and a pound can of chicken.

The cover of the captain's chest had been smashed and the chest itself overturned. He had found several broken bottles and a jug with the neck knocked off.

What had become of the other canned goods it was hard to guess. They must be somewhere at the bottom of the water which flooded the room; but there was so much litter in the way, and floating articles of furniture, that Bundy had found only this one bottle and can.

"That's some of the old woman's home-made stuff," declared Guinness, referring to the sealed bottle. "Mrs. Horlick is famous all around Bangor for her wine."

Bundy fished out a huge pocket-knife which contained a corkscrew and the bottle was opened. Bundy's eyes glistened and even Guinness sniffed the stuff appreciatively.

"Look here, men," Cale said decidedly. "I'll put a few drops of this into every spoonful of water we take; but I advise that none of us touch this stuff raw."

"Our stomachs are empty. To drink this heavy wine in our present condition is to make us all drunk in short order."

"Well, that wouldn't be so bad," de-

clared Guinness, with a cracked laugh. "We'd forget our troubles for a while."

"You are a blamed fool!" declared Cale vigorously. "About two good swallows of this would make you tipsy."

"If you have experienced heretofore the after-effects of intoxication, you will remember that an unbearable thirst is one of the marked results of a spree."

"Imagine the fever of awakening to find no water—not a drop—to quench that awful thirst."

"Thunder! Mr. Lonsden's right, matey," declared Bundy.

"Well, I s'pose he is," grunted Guinness. "But I feel as though a dern good drunk would do me good."

It was quite plain why the red-headed mate had risen no higher than his position on the old hooker. Intemperate seamen do not retain positions of command in the merchant service to-day.

While Bundy was opening the tin of chicken, Cale mixed a couple of spoonfuls of the water with a few drops of wine, and let the liquid trickle down Hank's throat.

The three stronger men had agreed to wait as long as possible, however, before taking another ration of water themselves. But when the tin was open each man took an inch cube of chicken, and twice as much was given to the dumb man.

Cale might have advised being more sparing of the chicken had he not known that, once exposed to the air, the meat would soon spoil in so warm a climate. Indeed, the sun was very hot and they suffered greatly from exposure to it here on the open deck.

An old crockery pitcher was found among the stuff in the galley, and into this Cale poured the wine, and then prepared to make another evaporator out of the wine bottle.

The wine would not keep long in the pitcher; but he feared that either Guinness or Bundy would get at it finally, and knew that it would be more of a curse than a blessing to them.

He had already dried the cracker pulp in the sun, and they mixed this rather salty material with the chicken when they ate their rations. The "meal" enlivened the trio immensely.

As the afternoon slipped by, the gale

died away, and the sea fell very rapidly. Before sunset the water was like glass and the orb of day slipped below the horizon, a great, sullen, red eye.

They watched it moodily from the higher side of the wreck. No sail or blot of smoke upon the horizon had betrayed to them the presence of any other living creature on the sea but themselves.

Suddenly, however, Guinness caught Cale's arm, pointing directly off in the red path of the sun's rays. His finger shook a little and his voice was husky as he said:

"Looker that!"

"What is it?" returned Cale, astonished by the mate's emotion.

He strained his eyes in the dancing light. Suddenly he saw a glistening, tricorned object, like a tiny leg-o'-mutton sail, cutting through the calm sea. He started.

"Know what it is?" grunted Guinness.

Cale nodded. He had never seen such an object before, but his reading stood him in good stead again.

"We'll have company for the rest of the voyage," muttered Guinness, staring at the thing with fascinated eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

BY GRACE OF A GOOD HEART.

IT was all right to scoff at the superstitions of old sailors; nevertheless, the first thing Cale did when it came daylight the next morning was to scan the surroundings of the wreck for that shark fin.

It was there. Round and round the hulk of the *Eagle Bird* the fish of ill omen swam, showing every intention of remaining with the survivors of the wreck to the last.

"He smells death," whispered Guinness, behind the sharp of his hand, into Cale's ear.

"Don't talk like a Molly, Mr. Guinness!" snapped Cale.

He was shaken, just the same. There certainly was something terribly sinister in the attitude of the huge fish.

But Hank was much better this morning, and that was certainly encouraging. Cale set to work with the assistance of

the two other active castaways to evaporate some more sea water.

Bundy hauled out of the wreckage in the galley a covered saucepan and by noontime that was nearly full of fresh water. It was a tedious labor, however, and it took a lot of fuel.

The day was more torrid than the preceding one. At noon they all lay about the half-submerged deck, gasping for a breath of air. A taste of the gale that had passed would have been welcome.

Submerging themselves in the water in the galley or cabin was not pleasant, for it had the foul bilge-water smell.

Finally Cale took a turn of a small rope around his wrist and slid down the sloping deck into the sea. The other end of the coil was securely fastened to a cleat at the base of the mainmast.

He splashed into the calm water, which felt delightfully cool on the instant. Down he went, head and all under, and came up a few yards from the wreck, shaking the water from his eyes, and feeling its invigorating power throughout all his poor, parched body.

But suddenly Bundy and Guinness began shrieking to him from their position on the wreck. They danced about, waving their arms, and yelling for him to return.

Without looking about Cale knew what was the matter. For the moment he had forgotten the shark, and he knew as well as he wanted to that the dorsal fin was cutting through the sea in his direction with the speed of an express train!

He forgot everything else then but escape. Throwing himself forward he struck out madly for the wreck.

Once he cast a frightened glance over his shoulder and saw the glistening fin, like a streak of silver in the sunlight, flashing after him. The huge fish seemed almost upon his bare heels as he reached the wreck.

How he scrambled up that inclined deck, through the shallow water, he never knew. But the fear of death was on him—a death so awful that visions of it would bring him out of his sound sleep with a scream for months afterward!

And as he flung himself up the deck

he heard a mighty splashing behind him. Coming with such terrific speed the shark did not stop at the submerged rail of the Eagle Bird.

It shot up the deck after its escaping prey—sliding through the shallow water half-turned upon its back, its mouth wide agape.

Snap went the horrid teeth, the force of the powerful tail driving the shark's long body half-way across the deck. The jaws closed within a foot of Cale's leg!

There the disappointed monster was, floundering in the shallow water awash on the sloping deck, its wicked eyes cast hungrily at the men just out of reach.

But Cale had recovered instantly from his fright. The shark's momentary helpless condition was an advantage not to be lost.

In a minute it would have flopped back into the deeper water and swum away; but Cale had the strong, small line tied to his wrist and now he put it to excellent use.

He swiftly flung a loop of the rope over the shark's fin, and, as the creature thrashed about, he caught the tail in another loop.

Singing out for help, Cale ran up the deck to the mast and took a turn around it. The huge fish, held in a sharp curve, could not flop about so easily and was unable to cast itself free.

Guinness and Bundy shouted with joy and rushed forward to Cale's assistance. Bundy, risking the loss of his hand, thrust a stick upright in the open jaws of the fish, practically gagging it with the mouth wide open!

Guinness brought a heavier rope, and although he was knocked half the length of the deck by the muscular energy of the shark's tail, succeeded, on a second attempt, in getting the rope about the body. Then the fish was fast beyond all question.

How delighted the castaways were at this one can scarcely imagine. Here was plenty of meat for them; starvation was no longer a menace.

Having placed the shark *hors de combat* with the stick in its jaws, Bundy despatched it with repeated blows of his clasp knife. Guinness hurried to make a fire in the stove. All hands forgot

the dreadful heat of the sun in their desire to obtain a square meal.

The last of the chicken had disappeared early that morning, and although shark steak is not recommended as a dainty dish, the four castaways on the hulk ate to repletion.

The only serious effect following this meal was an increase of thirst, and in the evening they returned to the task of evaporating more water.

And while preparing for this Cale was smitten with another idea.

"See here, Mr. Guinness," he said suddenly. "What's the matter with killing two birds with one stone?"

"Don't see any birds," growled the mate.

"Figurative birds, I mean. You tell me that what attracted the brigantine to the wreck was a flare you made with the old oil-stove. Let's make another flare."

"No oil."

"We've plenty of wood. Hi, Bundy! get to work and chop up a lot of this deck stuff. We'll stuff the stove with it till the flames come out of the smoke-pipe. The light ought to be seen for miles in this calm sea."

"I don't believe there are any vessels about here," muttered Guinness. "We'd have seen some sign of 'em by day."

"Don't lose heart again, Mr. Guinness," advised Cale. "It's half our battle to keep in good spirits, you know."

"Well, you *do* make me ashamed of myself, Mr. Lonsden," admitted the Irishman. "But we've been blown into a lonesome part of the sea, or I'm no judge."

Cale refused to listen to any croakings, and talked the man down whenever he undertook to harp upon the doubt of rescue. In Lonsden's own mind hope bubbled cheerfully.

It is well to be a fool at times. His lack of practical experience in shipwrecks aided Cale to remain cheerful.

He did not know, as his companions did, that their chance of rescue in this part of the Atlantic was of the smallest.

The gale had blown the Eagle Bird far off her course before her masts went.

Since then, as near as they could tell by the sun, she had been carried by that African current which finally circles to

the westward, passing the Sargasso Sea, and entering the Carib straits to form the great Gulf Stream which flows northward and eastward along the coast of the United States.

The wreck was farther south than the Azores of course, and how near the Canaries they had no means of telling. To attract the attention of a passing ship by a flare from the cook-stove was all but beyond the possible.

Nevertheless, Cale stirred Bundy up to cutting a great heap of firewood, and while he held the bottle and rubber buoy over the open stove he had the satisfaction of knowing that the glow from the fire was flung abroad into the night.

"We never can tell what good it may do. It is our duty to seize every chance of helping ourselves. And we need the water, anyway," he finished.

He finally talked the others into seeing it his way, and they agreed to keep watch, turn and turn about, all night, one remaining always awake to stoke the stove and force the flames through one of the cover-holes, since in that way they found they could make the largest flare.

Cale remained awake until he had evaporated all the water that the saucepan would hold. That amount must last them through the following day.

Hank was given a sip of the precious liquid; with a few drops of the wine in it, whenever he motioned that he was thirsty. They tended him, indeed, like a baby.

But Cale and Guinness and Bundy restrained their lust for water, and when one drank, all drank, and the fluid was measured carefully.

Cale was awakened once during the night by hearing Guinness chopping away more of the galley-house for firewood. But he dropped asleep again in the midst of figuring on the problem of how long the wreck would float them if they continued at this rate to cut it up for firewood.

Cale rose early in the morning with a new thought. It was scarcely light, and Bundy was sleepily feeding the stove.

"Keep the fire going for a while longer, Bundy," the passenger said. "I want to cook some of this fish. We can keep the flesh better if it is cooked."

And this was proven true before that day was over. There was no place where they could keep the bulk of the shark-flesh out of the sun. It grew soft, and the blood began to threaten swift decay.

The strips Cale had scorched, however, remained in better condition. It was painful, however, to consider that this great store of meat would soon be unfit to eat at all, and the castaways would be quite as badly off as before.

Cale was careful about overeating, and he fed Hank himself; but Guinness and Bundy went to extremes, and both were made very ill.

Nausea and sharp pains kept them rolling in agony half the night. Cale believed that the meat of the shark must already have become tainted. And so he got up, cut the monster free, and slid it down the deck and heard it plump into the sea.

In the morning Guinness and Bundy were still too ill to object to Cale's action; afterward they were inclined to complain, for in throwing away the shark meat he had left them without a scrap of food again.

The wine in the pitcher had turned to vinegar, and Cale threw that away, too, for he feared one of the others might drink it. They evaporated some more water, but he left Guinness to hold the machine, and the mate unfortunately rapped the hot bottle against the stove and broke it.

This was a catastrophe which worried them all exceedingly. Guinness could not forgive himself the awkwardness.

"I'd better be under the say, an' done wid it!" he groaned, sitting with his head in his hands. "It's only going to the fishes a bit before the rest of you."

At that Cale sprang up and shook his fist in his face.

"You red-headed, flannel-mouthed mick!" he exclaimed. "Let anything like that out of you again and I'll punch your head for you!"

"What's that?" yelled Guinness, leaping up, his face red, and as ready for a scrap as an Irishman of his size ever was.

"Hah!" said Cale. "You are not so near dead as you thought. I'm a better man than you are, Mr. Guinness;

but just the same we'll wait to settle the question till we're off this thundering old wreck."

As for the dumb cook, he lived in a world by himself. He smiled and nodded, cried when he wanted water or food, and otherwise acted like a child.

Cale often wondered what would become of the poor fellow if their condition grew so bad that all humanity should be buried under that first law of the universe—self-preservation.

He could not help doubting Guinness and Bundy a little, for they were ignorant men and the ignorant are very apt to abandon themselves to selfish impulses.

That day was passed in increasing discomfort. At night Cale could not get either the mate or Bundy to help him with the flare light. But he cut up a lot of the rail and kept the fire going until long after midnight.

Then he was so exhausted that he actually fell down upon the deck and lay there until dawn. Had the sea risen he would have been rolled off the wreck without being able to help himself.

Every drop of water was gone by the following noon. The last few swallows they gave by common consent to Hank.

Hourly misfortunes were added to their already accumulated troubles—not least among them the awful stench which rose from the hold and cabins.

The water washing about below threw off a smell so nauseating that they were all forced to keep to windward of the holes cut in the deck.

This amazed Cale at first. As the sea water had leaked into the interior of the old schooner through her planking, he saw no reason why there should not be a continual in-flow and out-flow, thus keeping the bilge sweet.

But Guinness explained to him that although the hull was greatly strained in the gale, there was evidently no break in the planking, and now the seams had been swollen tight once more and the bilge had become stagnant.

On this evening Bundy produced his tobacco-pouch, from which he had long since taken every scrap of tobacco, and with his knife cut the cloth into strips, which he divided among them all.

Cale chewed a piece and found that it

really relieved to some extent the craving of his stomach for nourishment. But he warned his companions against swallowing the pulp of the cloth after it was chewed.

Guinness and Bundy would not be warned, however, and in the night they became ill again. Their stomachs were in much worse condition than his own, anyway, from the poison of the shark's flesh.

Lonsden hadn't the strength necessary to cut up sufficient wood for a flare this night. Besides, the hatchet had become dull, and they had no means of sharpening it.

He lay sleeplessly between his groaning companions all night, striving to again invent something for their betterment.

It seemed a terrible, and a foolish thing, for them to be floating here in an element which gave life to so many creatures of service as food to man, and yet to be starving to death!

But already Guinness and Bundy had tried fishing, and to absolutely no purpose whatever. The fish that would bite at hooks, even baited with shark-flesh, lived much too deep to be caught from the wreck.

Besides, they had no proper lines or hooks. There might as well have been no fish in the sea as far as they were concerned.

The sun rose again with a promise of as hot a day as those that had preceded it. The deck boards of the wreck that were out of water were beginning to curl and warp. The four castaways were painfully blistered, and running sores broke out upon their bodies.

Cale continued to duck himself frequently, and so quenched his thirst to an appreciable extent through the pores of the skin. But Guinness and Bundy would not, or could not, put forth the necessary exertion to do this, and Hank had sunk into a trance-like condition once more.

The wound in Cale's scalp troubled him a great deal, although he had made light of it. The washings in salt water had perhaps kept out proud flesh; but the cut was still raw, gave no sign of healing, and his head for several inches around was very sore to the touch.

It was indeed strange how this bank clerk, this man unused to roughing it, endured the experiences on the wreck so much better than the sailors who had lived hard, and were used to arduous work.

And it would appear an insoluble mystery if we did not know the power of a strong will. It was by the power of his will that Cale Lonsden met with a good heart the fearful hardships he experienced on the wreck of the Eagle Bird.

(To be Continued.)

A QUESTION OF TIME.

By Bertram Lebbhar.

A STORY of now, when, before, afterward, it is and it isn't, it did and it didn't and so on.

AS old Josiah Jenkins, a smile of confidence on his wrinkled face, arose to open for the defense, he glanced absent-mindedly out of the window of the crowded court-room.

His sharp eyes rested on the distant outlines of the Hastings drawbridge and the clock of the town hall, and, at sight of these objects, the confident smile upon his lips deepened, so that he almost grinned.

The crowd, gathered in the court-room to see Jack Dunne tried for the murder of old Silas Pegg, marveled at the old lawyer's unruffled demeanor; for Sam Slater, the public prosecutor, had just finished as strong a case against the accused as had ever sent a man to the gallows, and the doom of Jack Dunne seemed to be sealed.

And yet, quite unperturbed, Josiah Jenkins began his case by calling the accused man to the witness-stand.

He had promised the people of Hastings a surprise and they awaited it with breathless interest.

After a few preliminary questions, which the prisoner answered calmly, the lawyer for the defense again glanced out of the window at the distant drawbridge and the distant clock on the town hall.

Then, wheeling toward the prisoner, he asked sharply:

"Jack Dunne, where were you at 9.30

on the morning of July 6th—the day of the murder?"

"On the drawbridge. I was crossing the bridge on my way to the dentist's. I had a violent toothache and was hurrying to have the tooth removed," was the unhesitating reply.

"It was 9.30 A.M. when you reached the bridge, eh?" repeated the lawyer emphatically.

"I desire to call the attention of the jury to the fact that it takes at least three-quarters of an hour to walk from the scene of the murder to the bridge. There is no way of getting to the bridge from the scene of the murder except by walking, as there are no roads.

"According to the prosecution, the murder occurred between 9.15 and 9.30. I need scarcely point out that it would have been a physical impossibility for my client to have committed that murder and to have reached the bridge by 9.30. That is all, your honor. The defense is finished with the witness."

"One minute!" cried Slater, the public prosecutor, as the defendant was about to leave the stand. "We desire to ask the witness a few questions."

He turned to Dunne.

"You say that it was 9.30 A.M. when you reached the bridge on that morning. How do you know?"

"Because I looked at the town-hall clock, which can be plainly seen from the bridge. The clock said 9.30."

"That's all," said Slater.

"I'll call our next witness," said Josiah Jenkins. "Mr. Herbert Smith, take the stand."

An old man hobbled to the witness-

chair. "What is your occupation, Mr. Smith?" asked the lawyer.

"I'm a newsdealer," said the witness.

"Did you meet the defendant at the bar, on the morning of July 6th?"

"Yes, sir. I did. I was delivering my newspapers and I met him on the bridge. He asked me the way to the dentist's."

"What time was that?"

"It was 9.30. I remember the time because I glanced at the big town-hall clock and remarked to the defendant that I doubted whether he would find the dentist, as it was only 9.30 and the dentist was a lazy man and hardly ever began work before ten."

The public prosecutor arose.

"You are sure it was 9.30 by the town-hall clock, Mr. Smith?"

"Yes, sir. I am positive."

"And you were standing on the bridge?"

"Yes, sir. In the center of the bridge about half-way across."

"That's all."

Again a murmur of surprise went through the court-room. Everybody looked at Slater. Apparently his case had collapsed. The alibi was conclusive.

But the public prosecutor was smiling strangely.

"Before the defense goes any further I would ask permission of the court to interpose a witness," he said.

"I wish to explain to your honor that this attempt of the defense to prove that the accused man was on the drawbridge at the time of the murder is no surprise to me. I had been warned that that would be their game, and I took steps accordingly. I would like to call a witness in rebuttal. Will Hiram Hanks take the stand?"

A tall, red-faced man walked to the witness-chair.

"Mr. Hanks, what is your occupation?"

"I am engineer of the Hastings bridge."

"What kind of a bridge is it?"

"A revolving bridge."

"And is it your duty to open and close this bridge to allow shipping to pass up the creek?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you at your post on the morning of July 6th?"

"Yes, sir. I haven't missed a day in ten years."

"Well, was the bridge open or closed at 9.30 of that day?"

"It was open. The schooner Betsie Lee, with a cargo of lumber, was passing up the creek and I opened the bridge to let her go through."

"What was the exact time you opened the bridge?" asked the public prosecutor.

"At 9.25," replied the bridge-keeper. "The Betsie Lee was slow in moving and the bridge was kept open an unusually long time—to be precise, from 9.25 until ten o'clock."

"How do you know that it was 9.25 when you opened the bridge?"

"Because I keep a record every time the bridge is opened and closed. Here are my records for that day. I brought them with me."

He handed a small ledger to the public prosecutor, who offered it in evidence.

"The two preceding witnesses have said that they crossed the bridge at 9.30 of that morning," said the prosecutor, smiling.

"They lied," said the bridge-keeper emphatically.

"One minute," said Josiah Jenkins excitedly. "Perhaps Mr. Hanks's clock was wrong. By what clock did you see it was 9.25 when you opened the bridge?"

"By the town-hall clock. My own watch had stopped and I glanced out of my window in the tower at the town-hall clock, and set my watch by the clock. It was 9.25 exactly."

"When I closed the bridge, I looked at my watch and it said ten o'clock."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jenkins eagerly, "you marked the time of closing by your watch, and not by the town-hall clock, eh?"

"Yes; but I'm telling you that I had set my watch by the town-hall clock only half an hour before, so what's the difference?" snapped the engineer irritably.

"A great difference," said Jenkins. "You may have made a mistake in setting your watch, you see. Perhaps the bridge was in reality opened at 9.25 and closed again by 9.30, by the town-hall clock."

"Bah!" snorted the witness. "That would be impossible. In the first place it would be a physical impossibility to get that bridge open and closed in five min-

utes. The mechanism moves much too slowly. Besides, I know that that bridge was open for at least half an hour, leaving watches and clocks out of consideration altogether. The schooner Betsie Lee took so long in going through that I made a kick to the skipper, and he apologized. There's no doubt whatever that the bridge was opened wide at 9.30, and for thirty minutes after."

"But the two preceding witnesses have sworn that it was 9.30 o'clock by the town-hall clock when they crossed the bridge," said the public prosecutor sarcastically.

"They are lying," said the bridge-keeper.

"They couldn't have crossed the bridge, then. The bridge had been open five minutes at that time."

"It is very evident that somebody is committing perjury," said Prosecutor Slater, turning to the jury. "It can't be Mr. Hanks; for his records, made at the time, speak for themselves."

"If anybody is committing perjury in this court they shall be punished to the full extent of the law," said the judge sternly.

"But wait a minute," he added hastily, a smile of enlightenment stealing across his face. "I believe I see the solution of this little problem. It really is very simple, gentlemen. The town-hall clock must have stopped at 9.30. Doubtless the clock was going at 9.25 when the engineer set his watch by it; but it may have stopped five minutes afterward."

"Good!" exclaimed the prosecutor eagerly.

"I'm perfectly willing to accept your honor's theory. Of course the town-hall clock may have stopped at 9.30, but there is not the slightest doubt that the bridge was open at 9.25 and remained open for thirty-five minutes afterward. We will not deny that the hands of the clock may have pointed to 9.30 when the prisoner at the bar and the witness, Mr. Smith, were on the bridge; but the real time was after ten o'clock, consequently the alibi of the defense falls to the ground."

"I object, your honor," cried Josiah Jenkins, turning pale. "There is no evidence to show that the clock did stop at 9.30 on that morning."

Everybody in the court-room was talk-

ing at once. The judge had to rap three times for order.

Suddenly an old man jumped up from his seat in the front row of the spectators' benches and cried shrilly:

"Your honor, they're all lying. The town-hall clock stopped at eight o'clock on that day."

"What's that?" cried the surprised judge. "Who was that who spoke just then?"

"I did," cried the old man. "I'm Wallace Ham, the official clock repairer, your honor. I've just happened to remember that on the afternoon of July 6th I was called to the town hall to repair the big clock, which had stopped at eight o'clock that morning. I, too, have records to prove what I say. All these witnesses are telling lies. The clock could not have been 9.30 or 9.25, for it stopped at eight o'clock that day and never moved an inch. I'm ready to take an oath as to that."

Again the hubbub broke out in the court-room. The judge rapped repeatedly for order.

"If what Mr. Ham says is true," he said sternly, "I'll have all these men indicted for perjury. There's some crooked work being done here. I shall hold every man who has testified falsely strictly to account."

Josiah Jenkins and Prosecutor Slater looked puzzled. The mystery of the clock was apparently beyond them. If the clock had possessed more than one face, the solution would have been simple; but it was a single-dial clock.

"One minute!" cried the judge suddenly. "What you say, Mr. Ham, cannot be true. You must be mistaken. The clock didn't stop at eight that day."

"Here's my records," said the old man, waving a note-book. "I've got my writing here to prove that I'm telling the truth. I always keep a memorandum when I fix the clocks on public buildings so that I can make my official report to the town council. I know what I'm talking about. That clock stopped at eight o'clock on the morning of July 6th."

"Impossible," said the judge. "I say again that you're mistaken, Mr. Ham. I don't think that you are wilfully committing perjury, but you're mistaken."

"Now, when I come to recall it, I re-

member the morning of July 6th distinctly. It was the day of my silver wedding. I crossed the bridge at 11.10 that morning and I glanced at the town-hall clock, which said 11.30. I knew that the clock was always right, so I changed my watch and found, when I got to court, that my watch was then twenty minutes fast, so I changed it back again, and remember remarking to myself that for once the town-hall clock was out of order and was twenty minutes fast. If I saw it going at 11.10, it could not have stopped at eight or at 9.30 either."

"Well, I'm sure it stopped at eight o'clock that morning," persisted the old man.

"Silence, sir, or I shall commit you for contempt of court," cried the judge indignantly. "How dare you contradict me?"

"I know that I'm right," cried the little old man, almost tearfully.

"Silence, sir," thundered the judge. "I know that that clock was going at ten minutes after eleven."

"I'm positive that the clock said 9.30 when I met the defendant on the bridge," cried Herbert Smith, the newsdealer, in defiance of all court decorum.

"And I'm positive that the town-hall clock said 9.25 when I opened that bridge, and it stayed open until ten," yelled Hiram Hanks.

"Dear me, this is very extraordinary. Why not call the dentist?" suggested the judge. "You're forgetting all about him, gentlemen. If the defendant really did cross the bridge at 9.30, he must have got to the dentist's soon afterward. Is the dentist in court?"

"Unfortunately, your honor," said old Jenkins, "we cannot produce the dentist. He's out of town. We've tried to reach him, but in vain."

"That's too bad," said the judge.

"There's a very remarkable discrepancy here. If the bridge was open at 9.25, and remained open until ten, as the bridge-engineer says, then it is obvious that the two witnesses who say they crossed the bridge at 9.30 are either sadly mistaken or else they are perjuring themselves. This other man's statement that the clock stopped at eight is preposterous, for, luckily, I have the evidence of my own eyes to guide me.

"This case seems to have resolved itself into a question of time," said the judge. "Obviously we cannot proceed further until we have settled this dispute. I will therefore declare this court adjourned until to-morrow morning, to give both sides an opportunity to present further evidence."

As the people poured out of the courtroom, everybody was talking at once.

By nightfall all Hastings had taken sides.

Some said that Herbert Smith, the newsdealer, who was noted for his veracity and his good memory, could not have made a mistake. Others backed the veracity of the engineer. Others, again, were willing to believe the old clock-repairer who had been mending the clocks of the town for the past twenty years.

Prosecutor Slater and Josiah Jenkins were both virtuously indignant. They glared scornfully at each other as they passed out of court. Each believed that the other side was manufacturing evidence out of whole cloth. Each threatened to have the other disbarred for unprofessional conduct.

The next day, when court reopened, everybody was bursting with suppressed excitement.

"Well," said the judge. "Has the learned counsel on either side managed to produce corroborative evidence to support the testimony of yesterday?"

"No, your honor," said Prosecutor Slater, frowning.

"The State can offer no more evidence on the vexed point. I tried last night to locate the skipper of the schooner Betsie Lee, who might be able to confirm the statement of our witness, the engineer, but we cannot learn where the skipper is. He's probably in some distant port."

"And we, your honor," said Josiah Jenkins, "have been unable to obtain any additional evidence to prove our alibi."

"Then we are no further advanced than we were yesterday. I shall have to adjourn court again. We must settle this question of the clock before I can let the case go to the jury. I am convinced now that somebody is wilfully committing perjury. They shall suffer for it, I warn them, unless they immediately confess."

"I can explain this mystery, your

honor," came a piping voice from the spectators' gallery.

"Who are you?" asked the judge.

"Wallace Ham, the clock repairer," cried the old man, jumping to his feet.

"You, again," said the judge contemptuously. "What ridiculous statement are you going to make now?"

"I can explain the whole puzzle," said the clock repairer eagerly. "Everybody is telling the truth. Nobody is lying. Everybody is right."

"The man is crazy," said the judge.

"No. I'm not crazy. I've been investigating and I've discovered the solution of the problem. I've found witnesses, several of them, who are here in court to bear out my story. We're all right—every one of us. The clock pointed to 9.30 when the defendant at the bar met Smith on the bridge. The clock was at 9.25 when the engineer opened the bridge, and it was at eight o'clock when it stopped."

"Did it go backward?" sneered the judge.

"No, your honor, not backward, for you also were right when you said that you saw it pointing to half past eleven when the real time was eleven ten."

"Then, what's the explanation?" said the judge irritably. "Were we all bewitched that day, or was the clock bewitched?"

"Well, I don't know whether or not that clock was bewitched," said the old clock repairer, "but it is certain, your honor, that its works were badly out of order. You see, your honor, it was like this. The clock was fast—faster than any clock I ever heard of in my life. There was something wrong with the works. The clock was going at the rate of twelve hours an hour—an hour every five minutes.

"Consequently, an hour after the hands were at 9.30 the hands pointed to 9.30 again. When the defendant and Mr. Smith looked at the clock and saw the hands pointing to 9.30 the real time may have been 9.30, and when the bridge-keeper saw the clock at 9.25 it may have been nearly an hour afterward, and the hands had, in the meantime, gone almost around the clock again.

"When you, your honor, saw the hands pointing at 11.30 the real time just

happened to be 11.10, which made the clock seem just twenty minutes fast; but, as a matter of fact, it was then many hours fast and it would have been pointing to the same time one hour, two hours, or three hours later.

"When I saw the clock, in the afternoon, it had stopped altogether at eight o'clock; but goodness knows how many times that small hand had traveled around the clock before it finally stopped at the figure eight. The clock was running away with itself; racing against time. That's the solution of the whole problem."

"And why is it that this solution of the whole problem did not occur to you yesterday?" asked the judge incredulously.

"I never imagined that a clock could get that much headway—twelve hours an hour," said the old man.

"It's something new in my experience. I happened to meet three men last night who told me about it. They said that they had noticed the clock that morning, and that the minute-hand was traveling around so quickly that they could see it moving. Then I guessed in a minute what must have happened."

"Well," said the public prosecutor, "I, for one, am ready to believe that Mr. Ham's solution is the correct one. If his witnesses are in court, we'll hear them, with your honor's permission."

The witnesses were called and they testified that they had seen the big hand of the clock moving rapidly around the dial. They watched the phenomenon for five minutes, they said, and in that time the big hand had encircled the dial once, while the small hand had moved from one hour to another."

"That settles it," said Prosecutor Slater triumphantly. "That disposes of the alibi of the defense. The accused may have been on the bridge when the clock pointed to 9.30, but nobody knows what the real time actually was. It may have been eight, nine, or ten o'clock, by the real time—any hour of the day in fact. Nobody knows at what hour that clock started on its mad race against time. I sympathize with my learned brother, Josiah Jenkins, but his alibi has vanished into thin air."

The unfortunate counsel for the de-

fense had no retort to make. He was completely dazed.

But it was a day of surprises.

At that moment a messenger burst into the court-room and handed a telegram to the judge. He opened it and uttered an exclamation of surprise as he perused its contents.

The telegram was from the police at

Halifax, a town fifteen miles away. It read:

Have just captured negro who confesses to the murder of old Silas Pegg of your town on July 6 last. Says motive was robbery. Am investigating.

And so old Josiah Jenkins won his case, after all, but not by the town-hall clock.

HIS PRICE.*

By Helen Tompkins.

A tale of an artful physician, an insurance policy and various queer accessories.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

DR. LEONARD is called to attend a dying negress, old Hagar, who tells him that his brother-in-law, Jock Ellison, will die in six months. She has seen the traces of death, she says, and describes them to the doctor, who also sees them. The doctor has been told that his own death from tuberculosis is a matter of months. His sister is frail, and his brother-in-law has little money to leave his wife and children. Leonard induces him to be insured. He is examined by Dr. Reyburn, who pronounces him an excellent risk, and he takes out a policy for a large sum. At the end of the six months, although still in perfect health, Ellison disappears.

With the help of bloodhounds he is tracked to old Hagar's cabin, which earlier in the evening has been reduced to ashes. There a body is found, half charred, which Dr. Reyburn identifies as Ellison's.

A pistol wound is found on the body, made apparently after death. The coroner's verdict, however, is, "Death from a pistol-shot."

Dr. Leonard, almost prostrated with the shock, proves to be the last person to have seen Ellison alone. A lying witness throws suspicion upon him and later he overhears Sevier further coerce the girl into positively incriminating him. A warrant is issued for his arrest.

At this point Leonard's friend, Dayton Summers, appears with a detective called Dan. Reyburn, urging that confinement would undoubtedly kill Leonard, offers to arrange the details of a flight and a hiding-place. The start is accomplished but intercepted by Summers and Dan, and, in the midst of a drenching storm, they set forth on a strange midnight ride.

CHAPTER XI.

A MATTER OF IDENTIFICATION.

PERSONALLY, I thought all the time that we were going to Rosston, so I was not surprised when upon leaving the grounds we took the road leading in that direction. Summers and Dan talked together in low tones on the front seat.

Somewhat to my surprise we drove in at the gates of the cemetery on the out-

skirts of Rosston. The rain was still pouring down steadily and there was a low muttering of thunder on the horizon.

We drove, still without a word, to a secluded corner of the graveyard, screened from the high-road by a hedge of evergreens.

Here the light from the single lantern which Dan carried showed a fresh, red mound with several storm-beaten, rain-drenched wreaths of flowers dying upon it. I shivered a little as I saw it,

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

for I knew then that I was looking upon poor Jock's grave.

"Stay where you are, Allen," commanded Summers. "You need not take any more of the rain than is necessary."

He took a spade from the cart and began to open the grave while Dan stood idly by and watched him. In the shadows beyond the grave I saw the outlines of a man standing stolidly against the dark fringe of evergreens.

He did not speak nor did he show the least interest in his surroundings. As for me I had already promised to hold my tongue.

Summers grew tired after a little and handed the shovel to Dan, who took it without a word. It was slow work, and the rain splashed sullenly in the wide hole in the red clay. And then, long before I had expected it, I heard the spade strike against the coffin.

I turned my head away. When I looked around again the stranger was gone, the grave filled up, and I heard the sodden rumble of wheels dying away upon the Rosston road. • Summers climbed in the cart beside me, and Dan wiped the clay from his grimy hands with a bit of cotton waste and clucked to the horses.

"What is the meaning of this, Dan?" I asked. Dan only shook his head and extinguished the lantern.

"Wait only a little longer, Leonard," begged Summers; so I said no more.

I leaned back in my seat after that and paid but little attention to my surroundings as I heard the rattle of the closing gates of the cemetery.

I know that we made more than one abrupt turn, that we drove very rapidly, and that twice I heard the horse splashing almost belly-deep in running water. We were stopped once by two men who talked to Dan in whispers, and once Summers got out of the cart and walked ahead with the lantern, directing Dan in low, tired tones where to drive.

We stopped by and by in front of a large building. I caught sight of a wagon with a white cover standing a little in front of our cart and several men lifting something from it.

"We get out here, Allen," said a voice in my ear. "One minute, old man. Can I depend upon you to speak *only* when

you are spoken to—to volunteer no information whatever, and to answer the questions which we may ask you?"

"I am tired of mystery," I said shortly. "I think that I have had quite enough of it lately to last me as long as I live. Yes, you can depend upon me."

We went into the building. It seemed to be a long warehouse of some kind, but it was quite empty and the windows were boarded up. There was a musty smell inside and the rain, pouring in through several jagged holes in the roof, made wet patches on the floor.

A long, clay-stained pine box was in the center of the room, with several men grouped about it. Light flared from two or three kerosene lamps. I remember noticing that the glass chimney on one was quite black and that the flame, wavering in the drafty room, was rising high above the lamp-chimney in a plume of greasy smoke.

I heard the rasping of screws as one of the men bent above the box. The shadow of the man bending above the box started suddenly, and the lid fell to the floor.

Some one was speaking. It was Summers, but his voice was so changed that I for one would never have recognized it.

"You men can swear that this is the body which we have just taken from the cemetery," he said, and there was an odd little catch in his voice. "There has been no opportunity for an exchange of bodies."

No one spoke. Every man waited for his neighbor.

Suddenly Summers leaned forward a little hurriedly.

"Come," he said hurriedly. "Some of you know just how hard this is for me."

"I can swear to it, sir," said a jerky voice behind us, "and so can Adams."

"All right. Now, Leonard, listen to me. You knew Ellison as a boy. Do you remember the time when you and he were wrestling and he fell on a bit of icy rubble and broke his finger?"

"Yes," I said. "I remember. He lost that finger later."

Summers leaned across the rough pine box and looked me squarely in the face.

"Suppose that mark is lacking in the body before us?" he asked.

"It cannot be," I said slowly. "Remember, Summers, I identified the body found among the ruins. I cannot be mistaken."

"Did you look to see whether or not that finger was missing?"

"I forgot it," I said honestly. "I was so sure, and Reyburn said——"

The rising wind shook the crazy building and the door rattled as if some impatient hand was shaking the latch. Summers thrust the lamp which he held close to the body in the box between us.

"Look, Leonard," he cried roughly. "Is *that* the body of Jock Ellison?"

I leaned forward and stared fascinated at the ghastly, blood-stained corpse before me—at the rigid shape—the folded hands——

"No!" I said positively. "I don't know what legerdemain has been practised here, but this is not Jock's body."

"You are positive?"

"Entirely so."

"That is all, then. What did I tell you, boys?" There was exultation in his voice. "Isn't this case a *daisy*?"

"If that isn't Jock's body——" I began.

"Ah, so you are waking up." He turned to a man standing near me. "Take Leonard home with you, Gardiner, will you?"

"I don't understand," I began. "You see, if——"

"And you are not going to understand any more than you do, Allen," said Summers firmly; "so it is up to you, you see, to make a virtue of necessity and be content until to-morrow. What is the hour for the trial, Dan? Ten?"

And that was the last—the very last—that I was able to get out of him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OPENING OF THE TRIAL.

THE court-room was crowded. No trial in years had created half the interest.

When I walked in with the sheriff there was a little buzz of excitement among the spectators. I paid little heed

for a time to the routine procedure of the court. I was aware that people were looking at me accusingly, but beyond that I saw little.

"Let the first witness for the State be called," some one said presently, and I saw Reyburn pushing his way to the front.

He looked ghastly, and there were little purple splotches about his lips. He gave his testimony clearly, without either hesitation or embarrassment.

He told about the application for life insurance and Stanley's suspicions—on account of which, he declared, he had made a more rigid examination of the applicant than usual. He went on to tell of the strain under which for two months I had seemed to be laboring—of Ellison's disappearance—of the finding and positive identification of the body.

Richard Evans followed him, and after that Annette Gregson was called to the stand. To my surprise, Summers sat quietly and allowed these three witnesses to be removed without cross-examination. I saw the look of doubt on Reyburn's face deepen, and knew that he was quite as much perplexed over the situation as I was.

One or two minor witnesses were called. A man, I remember, testified that Jock had told him (laughingly, I knew, although he did not make it appear so) that I was really the head of the family and that he did whatever I told him to do.

Then a woman who had nursed my sister during her illness testified that her mind seemed filled with conspiracy and murder.

I became aware that the testimony for the State was all in, and that the court-room was listening anxiously to hear what the defense would offer in rebuttal.

Summers rose slowly to his feet and stood listening for an appreciable instant. I heard behind me in the little room that opened out of the court-room the restless tramping of feet and the low murmur of voices. Then Summers began to speak.

"Your honor," he said slowly. "I am about to make a strange request. In the course of this trial the defendant may have to offer testimony that will—"

that must—appear singularly irrelevant. I ask the indulgence of the court if I offer any violence to legal traditions and I beg your honor to see that no one, on any pretext whatever, is allowed to leave the court-room.”

The judge nodded, and the sheriff and one or two deputies moved toward the doors. Reyburn’s face was ghastly.

“I will ask Stainton Murrell to come forward,” said Summers.

With a shuffling of feet, a man whom I had never seen before came out of the crowd. Perplexed as to what possible connection he could have with the case, I saw my perplexity repeated a little later in Reyburn’s features. The room had grown as still as death.

“Your name, please,” said Summers shortly.

“Stainton Murrell.”

“Place of residence?”

“Little Rock.”

“What is your business or occupation?”

“Until very lately I have been a member of the firm of Dandridge & Murrell, builders and contractors.”

“What connection have you with this case?”

For the first time the witness hesitated. “It will be a story of some length,” he said diffidently, “but I think that the things I have to tell have an important—*very* important—bearing on the matter in question.”

“Go on.”

“I retired from the active practise of my profession some time ago—ten months to be exact—and came to Rosston.”

“For what purpose?”

“I was not very well and I fancied that the change might be beneficial. I have a brother living in Rosston.”

“Well?”

“My brother had written to me more than once that he believed he had made a discovery which would make our fortunes. I did not believe him, for my brother is—has always been—of an exceedingly sanguine disposition.”

“Well, and in what did this discovery consist?”

“He had, he fancied, discovered the presence of oil in large quantities on a little plot of ground—a part of a large

plantation at a mile’s distance from town.”

“Who owned this plantation?”

“I don’t know who owned it then—either some loan company or a man named Coleman, I think. It was bought soon after that by a Mr. Ellison, who moved in only a few days before I reached Rosston.

“My brother had kept his discovery a secret and the knowledge that the place, long on the market and as you might say going a-begging, had been sold was a great blow and a great disappointment to him.

“I reached Rosston on Thursday, late in the evening.” He looked over the crowded court-room and his eyes were anxious. “There was only one man in the town whom we both knew.”

“I will not ask you to give any names at present,” said Summers. “I will ask you, however, to look over the court-room and tell the jury whether the man of whom you speak is present or not.”

Murrell’s eyes swept the court-room again.

“He is present,” he said in a low voice.

“You may go on, then.”

“We went to see him on Thursday night and the three of us talked together in his office until nearly midnight. We—my brother was spokesman—made a clean breast of the whole matter. He knew this man to be a very shrewd business man. He did not suspect him of being—anything worse.

“I took but very little interest or part in the conversation after its beginning. My brother, as I have said, did most of the talking. The upshot of the conversation was that we took this man into the thing—share and share alike. I was to put up the money and he was to do the work, furnish the brains. And we were not to make a single move without his consent.”

“Well?”

“There was nothing doing after that for several days. I saw this man once and he told me that things were ‘progressing.’ I did not half like the tone he used, and told my brother at the time that I wouldn’t stand for anything that would put either of us within reach of the law.

"In the meantime I was introduced to Ellison, who struck me as being—well, rather an easy mark, in case we desired to try any skin game. Then, toward the last of the week (I think that it was on Friday), I received a note from the man of whom I have been speaking, asking me to be at his office at midnight with five hundred dollars.

"I went, but I did not take the money. To tell the truth, I was growing very suspicious. I met a stranger in the office——"

"You will give his name, please."

"I was told that his name was James—Henry James, I think. I have reason to believe that this name was assumed."

"I will ask you to look over the court-room again. Is the man introduced to you as Henry James present?"

Murrell again glanced over the court-room. "I met the man only once," he declared, "and that was at night. But I am quite sure that I should know him again. I do not see him in the court-room."

"Did the man tell you what part James was supposed to play in the affair?"

"He did not. I told him that the whole thing was beginning to have rather a suspicious look to me—that I did not care to run counter to the law—and that, so far as I was personally concerned, since I had seen and talked with Ellison I was quite positive that any overtures on our part—any *legitimate* overtures—would be rejected. Consequently I drew out."

"What did he say?"

"He began to bluster, but I soon let him know that I would not stand for it. I left Rosston the next day, and, as my brother moved away within a week, I heard nothing further of the matter until I read an account of the tragedy in the *Gazette* to-day."

This ended his testimony. He was turned over to the prosecution, but evidently they were utterly at sea as to what the defense was trying to prove. Consequently the questions asked were entirely irrelevant and brought out nothing of importance. The witness was dismissed.

"Arthur Simmons," called Summers, and to my surprise I saw a man accom-

panied by two deputies take the witness-stand. He was a dark-browed, sullen fellow. A look of surprise appeared on more than one face as he took his place.

At this juncture a slight diversion was caused by an effort on the part of Dr. Reyburn to leave the court-room. The sheriff laid one hand upon his shoulder.

"I must ask you to wait a few minutes, doctor," he said respectfully. "We have orders, you know, to allow no one to leave the court-room at present."

Reyburn shook the detaining hand aside. "I am ill," he said impatiently.

"You could not leave the court-room now even if you were dying," I heard the sheriff say, still in a low voice.

Summers leaned over and whispered to the judge.

"Mr. Sheriff, put that man under arrest if he doesn't sit down!" called out the judge nervously. "You have your orders, sir. Why don't you see that they are carried out?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE.

REYBURN sat down hurriedly. I could not keep my eyes from his face. It occurred to me that the court must be arrogating powers to himself to which he had no right. Really, Reyburn did look frightfully ill.

"Your name is Simmons?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you a resident of Rosston?"

"No, sir. I live in Cohassee, eight or ten miles below Little Rock."

"You are connected with this case?"

"Yes, sir. And I have been promised immunity if I tell what I know about it."

"You may go on," said Summers.

"I left Cohassee for Rosston a week ago——"

"Why did you come to Rosston?"

"I had been in correspondence for some time with a gentleman here. And I came in response to a telegram."

Summers looked at him curiously. "What name was signed to this telegram?" he asked.

Simmons hesitated and his eyes swept the crowded court-room.

"The name signed to the telegram was Francis Reyburn," he said in a low voice.

"So Dr. Reyburn sent the message; and you responded to it in person?"

"I came up on the next train—yes, sir."

"Well, what next?"

"I went round to his office. He was very busy and told me to come back after nightfall when I could see him alone. He seemed troubled and unlike himself. He gave me some money for necessary expenses and sent me to Gregson's."

"What next?"

"I went back to the office after dark. I found him waiting for me. He said he had got hold of a scheme that would make us both rich, if I would go into it with him. I told him that I was willing to go into anything to make a little money, provided that I didn't run too much risk."

"What did he say to that?"

"He hesitated a little and then said that he had made one mistake—that he had let one man into the plot who was a darned fool and stood to ruin the whole thing if we didn't watch out. I asked him who this man was and he said his name was James."

"Did you see James?"

"No, sir—at least not then. I told him that I would have to know what I was going into before I got too deep, and I repeated the remark I had just made about not wanting to take too much risk."

"Did he explain just what he meant when he spoke of the 'plot'?"

"After some persuasion he did, sir. He said that he had found oil in paying quantities on an old plantation called The Syringas, and that the place had been recently bought by a man named Ellison from somewhere in Sevier County. He said that he had tried to buy the place, but that Ellison had proved 'difficult,' and that he soon found that there was nothing doing in that direction."

"I told him that in that case I failed to see what we could do. He answered that he had been puzzled for a time himself, but that fate or the devil had opened the way—"

Reyburn rose to his feet, but again the sheriff laid a heavy hand upon him.

"I told Reyburn plainly that unless he was perfectly free with me I would have nothing to do with the matter; that if I was to put my neck in a halter, I would at least do it knowingly."

"What then?"

"I found that the plot had already made considerable progress. It seemed that Reyburn had planned the whole thing with an old negro woman who had originally been a servant in his grandfather's family. (His mother was a Coleman.)"

"Under the plea of illness she had sent for Dr. Leonard, Ellison's brother-in-law and a practising physician. Leonard, so Reyburn said, was in very poor health, and old Hagar had found no difficulty in making him believe the story which she and Reyburn had made up between them."

"Reyburn said that the woman at first refused to have anything to do with the deception and that he only persuaded her by convincing her that he had a remedy which he would give her to prolong her life indefinitely."

"She was very old and believed everything that he told her. Reyburn would not tell me at first just what this story was, and I did not get it out of him until some time afterward. He simply said that Leonard's greatly exaggerated fears about his own condition (fears which a word or two in the proper direction had helped to intensify) and his superstition had made things more than possible."

"As a result of his faith in what the old woman had told him, however, Leonard persuaded Ellison to have his life insured for an amount that placed him immediately under suspicion."

"All this, you must remember, happened some time before Reyburn sent for me. Time went on and neither Reyburn nor James could quite agree as to what the next move should be. And all this time Leonard, who had been told that his brother-in-law, between whom and himself a strong attachment existed, had only a short time to live, was growing more and more disturbed and his actions more and more suspicious."

"At the last, however, it took us only a very short time to perfect the plans which Reyburn had already designed be-

fore I reached Rosston. The only thing we had to worry about was James, whose temper made him at all times a most uncertain quantity. He grew every day more and more unmanageable until at last Reyburn swore that he would bring us to the gallows after all, if we didn't look sharp.

"The day we set for the winding up of the affair was dark and rainy. We had got a skeleton from Little Rock and had it hidden in old Hagar's cabin. It answered in a general way to a vague description of Ellison, and we believed that it would fill all the requirements. There was never any intention to harm Ellison himself. The idea was to get him out of the way for a time, throw suspicion upon his brother-in-law, and thus rob Mrs. Ellison at one blow of both of her masculine advisers.

"In this emergency it was supposed, of course, that she would naturally turn to Reyburn, who had been her husband's friend. He hoped to win her confidence by aiding Leonard in his flight from justice. After this was done, as her closest friend, he was to collect the life insurance, sell The Syringas (he had already had an offer of seventy-five thousand dollars for it from some people in the North), and then we were to skip the country and allow Mr. Ellison to return home.

"Reyburn tried his best to persuade James to draw out of the thing and allow me to take his place, but James had been drinking, and he turned ugly toward the last. So we had to make the best of a bad matter and allow him to go on.

"We—Reyburn and I—went out to old Hagar's cabin just before dark, while James, following a plan already agreed upon, went out to The Syringas. He loitered about the house a little while, and then chance proved his friend.

"Ellison (the windows were uncurtained and the lights burning) went into the sitting-room and James, from the veranda outside, heard him tell Leonard, who was at the table reading, that supper was ready. He then walked out upon the veranda.

"Without raising his voice enough to be heard inside, James called Ellison outside. 'I want to speak to you with

reference to something important,' he said, and the two walked down the path together.

"James told Ellison a pack of lies strong enough to take him to old Hagar's cabin, where we—Reyburn and I—were waiting for him. I think he told Ellison that Leonard had become involved in a conspiracy to put him out of the way for the sake of the insurance money.

"Evans came up while they stood there and hindered their departure until James grew so very impatient that he took the chances of being recognized rather than wait longer. James said that Ellison expressed an utter disbelief in what he was saying, but at the same time offered no objections to accompanying him.

"Reyburn and I were waiting at the old cabin. James was so long in coming that we fancied that he had made a failure, as we more than half expected that he would, and we set fire to the cabin as a last resort, hoping that the flames would draw Ellison within our reach. Just as the light flared up, however, the two men appeared.

"We saw in a moment that the thing which we had so dreaded with regard to James had actually happened. He had had a great deal too much whisky and was past reasoning with.

"Reyburn had sworn most solemnly to me that he meant no harm to Ellison. I had a boat hidden, and James and I were to go down the Terre Rouge a dozen miles to an isolated cabin where we were to keep Ellison safe until things blew over a little and the insurance company was ready to pay over the money.

"James's temper, however, caused a hitch. About the first thing, Ellison commenced on Reyburn about the lie which James had told him. He seemed dazed, and although he talked brave enough, I could see that he was cut to the heart and that he more than half believed that it was the truth and that his wife was in league with his brother-in-law to put him out of the way.

"All this time I stood back and had nothing to say, and Reyburn was trying to get Ellison inside the house. He was trying his best to pacify him and having trouble enough out of the job. And James was getting in the very devil of

a rage and wanting to put Ellison out of the way without any more fooling. It was the only way out of a bad box, he said.

"Well, all this time Ellison was getting more restless. Finally he said that he was going home and have it out with his wife and Leonard, and Reyburn, who was half beside himself, motioned me to follow him out of the house, which I did.

"We had barely closed the door when I heard a cry and the sound of a heavy fall. I asked Ellison to wait, and ran inside again. I found James lying on the floor and Reyburn standing over him with a pistol in one hand and a heavy iron wrench, which I had noticed lying on the cabin floor, in the other.

"I bent over him a minute. 'It's no use striking him again, Reyburn,' I said. 'You have already played hell. The man is dead.'

"Reyburn did not appear to hear me. 'His head is crushed like an egg-shell,' I said. 'What in the devil possessed you, Reyburn, to strike him such a blow?'

"'It was in self-defense,' said Reyburn sullenly. 'He came at me with a knife, and it was either his life or mine. I didn't choose to be murdered.'

"I looked at him helplessly. 'Well, what are we to do now?' I asked. 'I went into this, Reyburn, on the expressed condition, you know, that there was to be no bloodshed.'

"'Go out and stop Ellison,' he said hoarsely. 'You will have to get him down the river alone now, Simmons; that is all there is to it. You can drug him, if necessary. And James will serve our other purpose now instead of the stiff. That will dispose of his body. Are you sure that he is dead?'

"I bent over the body again. 'Dead as a door-nail,' I said. 'The whole skull is crushed, Reyburn. The chances are that the man never knew what struck him.'

"He thrust his pistol forward. 'I will send a ball through his head, then,' he said, and I noticed that he was shaking like a leaf. 'In case the body is only partially burned it may help us a little. Go look after Ellison, Simmons. You are in this now as deep as I am.'

"I went back outside and found Ellison still waiting where I had left him. 'I believe that the whole thing is a lie, Ellison,' I said to him. 'And if you will go down the river a bit with me I think I can prove it.'

"He neither refused nor consented, but he followed me. We had not gone ten steps when I heard a pistol-shot. 'What was that?' he said, turning about sharply.

"'Never mind about that, Ellison,' I said, still trying to urge him forward. 'The fact is, old man, you are up against a pretty hard proposition. I can see you out of it all right, however, if you will come with me now.'

"What was your reason for going on with the matter?" interrupted Summers.

"I knew that I was already too deep in to get out," said Simmons. "Besides, to tell the plain truth, I did not think that Reyburn was so much to blame—for the killing of James, I mean. I believed just what he told me—and that with him it was a plain case of self-defense."

"So it was, as a matter of fact, the body of James, and not that of Ellison, that was found in the half-burned cabin?"

"Yes, sir. Reyburn hurried out and joined the men whom Mrs. Ellison had summoned from town, reaching The Syringas soon after they did. I carried Mr. Ellison down the river and kept him there, partly by persuasion and later by the use of drugs."

"Where is he now?"

"Under the care of the sheriff, I suppose. We reached Rosston early this morning."

With this the witness was dismissed.

"Your honor," said Summers impressively, "I learn that Mr. Ellison is too much prostrated to appear in court personally, but I have a dozen witnesses who will establish his identity beyond the shadow of a doubt. I ask that the case against my client be dismissed and that a warrant be issued at once charging Dr. Reyburn with the crimes of murder and of an attempt to defraud the insurance company."

"Court is adjourned," said the judge.

"Mr. Sheriff, you will see that the warrant is issued and served at once.

The case," he added, "has been one unprecedented in the history of the State."

I went out of the court-room half dazed by the turn affairs had taken. "Where is Jock?" I asked Summers.

"They have already taken him home. Go there yourself, old man, and go to bed. We will take care of Reyburn."

I pulled at his sleeve.

"It is a new lease of life for me, Summers," I said softly. "With Jock alive and plenty of money from the sale of The Syringas I can hope to ask your sister the question——"

He laid his arm across my shoulder.

"I will not forestall her answer, old chap," he said smilingly. "And you were never so bad as you thought, Leonard. I talked to the specialist about you and he thinks a change of a few years—say to the south of France——"

"What will they do with Reyburn?" I asked.

"With Reyburn? It is the penitentiary for him, I dare say, for a good long time, or would be if he was ever tried for the James affair. But I rather think——"

There was a little commotion behind us. Some one called for a doctor. Some one else said that he was out of town. "Here is Dr. Leonard," I heard a voice behind me say.

I turned sharply.

"Who wants me?"

"You are wanted at the jail, sir. Dr. Reyburn has taken poison, they think. They would have called in some one else, but it seems that all the other doctors are out of town."

I quickened my pace in the direction of the jail.

"I doubt very much whether we would be doing the man a kindness to prolong his life," I said dubiously. "I will do my best, however."

But my help was not needed. He was lying on the floor of his cell, dead, when I reached the prison.

"He was the brains of the whole plot," said the sheriff. "Now that he is out of the way the others will get off with very light sentences."

When I crossed the river again the sun was shining. A touch of radiance lighted the cypress branches with palest gold. A squirrel in a hickory tree overhanging the water scolded me nervously, but my heart was very light.

Straight before me I saw the sunlight fall upon the green-girdled Syringas, and I knew that a reunited family waited there impatiently for my coming.

And across the ocean, smiling health, the divine goddess of my dreams, waited for me by the sunny sea and smiled at me with the tender eyes of Agnes Summers. I was well content.

(The End.)

FRANCES ELEANOR.

By Jeannette Cooper.

HOW would you like to be a mother by proxy and take the consequences narrated herein?

WOULD you mind holding the baby a minute?"

Before Constance could answer, the hundle of white lace and embroidery was lowered gently but swiftly into her lap. Her magazine

went down before it; her astonished eyes went up.

"Thank you," murmured the baby's mother to the astonished girl. Then she went back to her own section and began a leisurely rearrangement of her bags and boxes, interrupting her occupation to gaze out of the window.

"Well!" said Constance Ashburton. She looked down at the blinking blue eyes and downy head in her lap, and instinctively cuddled the tiny mite into a more comfortable position.

Then, with a strong access of disapproval, her glance went back to the mother. She was a very pretty young woman: Constance remembered having noticed her the evening before as she passed her on the way to her own section. She had not noticed the baby.

A matronly woman came in from the dining-car and dropped unceremoniously into the seat beside Constance.

"I took care of it last night," she whispered, her eyes brimming over with laughter, "and a woman who got off at Ogden told me she had it all the way from the coast. It looks as if you were elected to take charge from here to Chicago." She picked up the little white shoe that the baby had kicked off and smiled with sympathetic enjoyment at the girl.

"But I don't know anything about babies," protested Constance, not at all amused.

"You can't know as little as she does."

"But it is her own baby and she will have to learn some time."

"Oh, no, she won't. She will always find some one to do it for her."

"She won't find me," said Constance firmly. "The instant she closes that bag I shall return this child."

The woman deftly tied the little white shoe on the baby's small foot, then, as the train began to slow up, she arose, looking down at Constance with her nice eyes still twinkling; "I am sorry I am getting off here," she said.

An hour later, Constance still had the baby. The mother was looking prettier than ever, having just emerged from the dressing-room with her hair freshly curled. She came down the aisle with a box of candy in her hand, and looked at Constance.

"Isn't she dear?" whispered the mother. "It is so good of you to let her lie there. My section is so crowded. I have brought her all the way from the coast and I am completely worn out. I know Will will be perfectly shocked when he sees me in Chicago. He felt terribly at having me come through alone, but he just couldn't come back after me, and, at the last moment, the nurse refused to come.

"I wired Will that I could not come

alone and he wired back that I must, but I know he'll be sorry for it when he realizes what a dreadful time I've had with all the care of the baby, to say nothing of the anxiety.

"Did I tell you the baby's name? Frances Eleanor. Isn't it a big name for such a little thing? Frances Eleanor Van Inwegen—the Frances is for Will's mother, and the Eleanor is for me. Will said it might be Eleanor Frances if I preferred, but I said no, that we would put his mother's name first. I am going to have her called Eleanor, any way, when she gets older. I believe I had better run back to my seat now and get a little rest while the baby sleeps." She offered Constance some candy with an inquiring lift of her pretty brows and tiptoed softly away.

Constance promised herself that she would take that baby back the instant it woke up. And she did.

Then she barricaded herself as effectually as she could and read. She responded to the first call for luncheon, avoiding a glance at section eight, and she ordered with reckless extravagance. She paid for the lunch with the largest bill in her purse and counted her change with lingering care. She finally retraced her steps to her own car with stately deliberation and some slight return of self-respect. Mrs. Van Inwegen met her in the aisle.

"I put the dear little thing in your section," she said. "I fixed your suitcase so she can't fall off and she has her bottle. I hope they have something I like on the menu."

Mrs. Van Inwegen's success in spending time in the dining-car made Constance blush for shame. Frances Eleanor had long since finished her bottle and was being entertained in Miss Ashburton's arms when her mother returned. She was certainly a good child. Constance had ready a little speech that she intended to deliver, with the baby. In this speech, the virtues of the child should set forth (by tactful implication) the shortcomings of the mother. But she had no opportunity to deliver it.

"The train waits here a few minutes," said Mrs. Van Inwegen, bending to kiss her daughter's little hand.

"I'm going to get off and get a breath

of fresh air. If the baby wants another bottle you ask the porter to bring you a glass of milk and just put a teaspoonful of lime-water in it. The lime-water is in the top of my black bag. But I don't believe—Oh! everybody is getting off! I had better hurry!"

Everybody was getting off. It had been a tiresome ride and the stretch of gravel with two round beds of geraniums beside it, looked very refreshing in contrast to the dusty, upholstered car. One passenger besides Constance remained—an old gentleman at the farther end of the car. He looked over his newspaper at the helpless indignation on Miss Ashburton's countenance.

"I wonder if I couldn't watch that baby?" he said. "You'd like to get out, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, thank you," said Constance gratefully, but she hesitated.

He was a nice old gentleman, but he looked like the kind that would get to reading and forget the baby. "*I think* I had better stay with it," she concluded, "since it was left in my charge. If it were *my* baby——"

"If it were *your* baby, I don't believe you would be expecting somebody else to take care of it," said the old gentleman. He returned to his newspaper, and Constance, much cheered by his sympathy, looked out of the window and watched the passengers strolling up and down in the shade of the station. The air came in a little cooler through the open window. Constance tucked the baby's skirts around her little feet and wondered if she ought to be covered up.

"When your mother returns, Frances Eleanor," she said, "you are going straight back to section eight and you are going to stay there."

Frances Eleanor looked at her with preoccupied blue eyes.

The passengers began to return in twos and threes, then a last group with a little laughing rush.

Where was the baby's mother! Constance appealed in a panic to the latest comers.

Why, yes, they had seen her. She must be here somewhere. And then everybody on the car began looking about and speculating and explaining where they had noticed her last, and agreeing

that the signals for starting had been given all right. The old gentleman put his head out of the window and looked back.

"She's coming down the hill," he said. "Seems to have waked up to the fact that the train's moving."

The other passengers were very kind to Constance. They did everything except relieve her of the responsibility of the baby. They tried to persuade the conductor to go back, and when that failed they united in the preparation of a telegram which should inform Mrs. Van Inwegen that the baby would be delivered to its father at the Chicago station, and advising her what train to take. They divided their pity between the mother and Constance, and each one had a different idea as to how often the baby should be fed.

"Give it a bottle every time it cries," said the old gentleman. "I'll bet that's the way it has been brought up," and Constance followed his advice.

Whatever time Frances Eleanor left unoccupied in that six hour ride, Constance spent in picturing herself wandering endlessly through the Chicago station watching for a paternal Van Inwegen who might never come. By the time the train was really in, hope had all but forsaken her. How was she to identify him if he did come? All she had to depend upon was the probability that when he did not find his wife he would scan every woman carrying a baby. A glimpse of herself in the mirror at the end of the car did not add to her comfort. Her hat was on one side, her hair was loosened, her cheeks were scarlet, and her eyes were feverishly bright. The other passengers left her with sympathetic and reassuring farewells, and she started slowly down the long platform, followed by a porter with her bags and another with Mrs. Van Inwegen's.

Out of the indifferent crowd one hurrying man gave her a glance of eager inquiry. Hope sprang to Constance's eyes. She seized his arm.

"Are you Mr. Van Inwegen?" she said faintly.

"I am," he returned promptly, and Constance could have wept with joy. In her relief, a sudden pity for his anx-

iety seized her. She sought for words in which to explain. But he took the words from her.

"You are Eleanor, aren't you?" he said, smiling down at her with kindly eyes. And then he stooped and kissed her.

Constance did not drop the baby. She wondered, afterward, why she hadn't.

"I am not Eleanor," she cried. "Eleanor got off the train at Treves and got left behind."

"Got off the train?" he repeated feebly.

"Yes," cried Constance, "and the train started."

"But you——"

"I brought the baby!" Constance's wrath at being plunged into more complications was rising to a climax. "Don't you know your own wife?" she demanded.

"She isn't my wife," said the young man. "She is my sister-in-law and I have never seen her."

"Oh!" said Constance. She moved a little away and stared at the young man as one who has had the cup of happiness dashed from her lips. Then she started forward.

"Why, it's all right, anyway," she said. "You can take the baby." She straightened Frances Eleanor's wraps and held her out.

"Oh, good heavens!" said the young man. "What am I going to do with her?"

"Can't you carry her to a cab?" said Constance icily. She was still holding the baby, at arms length, and the passers-by were taking time to gaze at the embarrassed pair.

"But my brother expects us to wait for him. He was delayed. He 'phoned me to meet Eleanor and the baby and take them to the waiting-room and he would find us there."

"Then you had better take the baby to the waiting-room," said Constance.

"I suppose so," he answered helplessly. He held out his arms and she put the baby into them. Whereupon Frances Eleanor began to weep loudly and wrathfully.

"Give her to me," said Constance.

She took her from him and soothed

her into quiet while the young man looked on unhappily. "I will carry her to the waiting-room," she said tragically. As in a vision she saw herself tied for life to this strange child.

"Oh, if you would!" he said fervently. And Constance started on, her hat more askew than ever, Frances Eleanor still in her arms, the wrong Van Inwegen by her side, and the two porters rolling their eyes at each other as they followed.

"Bob! Where's Eleanor?" said a voice, sharp with anxiety.

The young man whirled.

"It's all right, Will," he said joyously.

"Don't be alarmed. This isn't Eleanor, but the baby is all right and——"

"What do you mean?" demanded the other. "Where's Eleanor?"

Ah! this was the right one at last! Constance unceremoniously interrupted the young man's further efforts toward explanation, and briefly and lucidly set the facts before Frances Eleanor's father.

He listened with a troubled brow. Then he thanked her abstractedly. Again Constance smoothed Frances Eleanor's wraps, preparatory to handing her over.

Mr. William Van Inwegen was looking at his watch.

"That train will be in in an hour," he said. "I won't have time to go out to the house and get back," he hesitated, looking from his brother to Constance. Then he addressed the latter: "Which side of the city do you live?" he asked.

"The South Side," returned Constance faintly. She hoped against hope that the answer might free her from the tightening coils.

"That's all right, then," he said in a relieved voice. "We live on the South Side also. You will, I hope, add to your great kindness by taking the child home. There is a nurse there to receive it. And then the carriage will take you to your own home." He gave her the address.

"Is it much out of your way?" he asked.

"It is on the way," said Constance resignedly. She had given up the strug-

gle. The only thing left to decide was where she should educate Frances Eleanor.

"We shall be under the greatest obligations," he said. "I suppose Mrs. Van Inwegen was very much exhausted by her journey?" he added in anxious inquiry.

"She did not appear to be," said Miss Ashburton with a sudden mental picture of the contrast between her own disheveled self and the faultlessly neat young woman who had sauntered out of her sight on the platform at Treves.

"Didn't she, really?" he cried. "Come, we will go to the carriage. You will go out, Robert, with Miss——"

"Ashburton," said Constance.

"Thank you! You feel sure your telegram reached Eleanor, Miss Ashburton?"

"I am sure of it," said Constance.

"I shall never forgive myself for letting her come through alone," he murmured.

He took the baby while Robert opened the carriage-door and helped Constance in.

"You will give her to the nurse yourself, won't you, Miss Ashburton?" he said.

"Certainly," said Constance.

Mr. Robert Van Inwegen leaned back in his seat and looked at Miss Ashburton. Then he leaned suddenly forward.

"You are simply worn out," he said. "Give her to me. I'll hold her, even if she does cry. It won't hurt her. Give her to me, I say! He reached out and took Frances Eleanor with scant ceremony; but Frances Eleanor was evidently minded to make the best of it. She lay in his arms and stared up at him philosophically. Meanwhile he stared at Constance.

The color had gone out of her face; her eyes looked big and dark and tired, and there was a weary droop to her mouth.

"This is by all odds the worst imposition I ever heard of," he said with emphasis.

"What on earth was I thinking of to allow it! Couldn't anybody see that you were simply dropping with fatigue? Why, we even let you carry that child to the carriage! I suppose your arms

ached all the time we kept you standing there, didn't they?" he demanded.

"No!" said Constance shortly. She was afraid of crying if she were sympathized with. She took off her hat and pinned up her hair as well as she could, bending to look at herself in the little mirror in the side of the carriage.

"Don't put on your hat again," said the young man. "Lean your head back and try to rest. You look very tired."

"I know it," said Constance, on the verge of hysterical laughter, "but it isn't polite of you to tell me so."

"You know what I mean. You are as white as a ghost. If Eleanor looks as fagged as you do——"

"She doesn't," said Constance, and then she gave a little sob.

"Lean back there and rest," he said peremptorily. "Frances Eleanor and I are going to look out of this window."

"I don't believe she ought," began Constance.

He held up his hand. "You do as I say," he said. "Frances Eleanor isn't the only one that needs taking care of."

There was silence in the carriage after that. Frances Eleanor went to sleep, and Frances Eleanor's uncle, instead of looking out of the window, looked at the long black lashes on the delicate face opposite him. After a while a faint little color crept into the cheeks and the eyes opened reproachfully.

"You said——" began Constance.

"I know it," he interrupted, "but you looked so sort of ethereal that I was afraid you might fade into nothing if I didn't keep an eye on you. I won't do it again."

He stared conscientiously out of the window after that until the carriage drew up to the curb.

"Here we are," he said.

"But the house isn't there, is it?" said Constance incredulously.

"It is," he answered.

"Then something will have happened to the nurse."

"The nurse is coming down the steps. Don't move." Opening the door of the carriage he handed the sleeping child to the woman in white gown and cap. Then he gave Constance's address to the coachman, closed the door and leaned back with a relieved air.

"It seems as if I ought to have taken a more ceremonious leave of Frances Eleanor," said Constance.

"It wasn't necessary," he said, "you will see her again. Don't imagine that the Van Inwegens will lose sight of you, having learned what a useful person you are."

Constance smiled contentedly. Frances Eleanor was safe in the home of her fathers. Let the future take care of itself!

"And, Miss Ashburton," said Mr. Van Inwegen, after a silence spent in thinking how unusual her smile was, "I have not yet apologized for the way I greeted you at the station."

The color dyed Constance's cheeks again but she laughed with frank eyes. "It isn't necessary," she said. "I entirely forgot it in the ensuing complications."

"But I didn't want you to forget it," he said. "Only to forgive it."

He felt suddenly that he had known her for a long time. He waited for her answer to his last remark. "Don't you think that would be a better way?" he suggested.

The carriage was stopping. Constance looked across at him with mock serious eyes.

"I shall never forget—Frances Eleanor!" she said.

And then the carriage stopped. She gave him her hand in farewell, and another smile. Soon she was being pulled, tumultuously, into the house by two very unceremonious sisters.

And the coachman after twice inquiring where Mr. Van Inwegen desired to go, took matters into his own hands and drove him home.

* * * * *

"Of course I was awfully anxious to see you again," said Eleanor, "to tell

you how terribly I felt when that train went out of sight at Treves. Will has kept fussing, too, because you hadn't been properly thanked. But Robert simply gave me no peace until I called and got you to promise to come to dinner. Meeting you at other places has only served to make him more determined.

"How pretty you are in that pink dress! I didn't notice that you were so pretty that day on the train. But then I was too taken up with the care of the baby to notice anything. She looks cunning in her cradle, doesn't she? Oh! I guess I've waked her. See her open her big eyes! Isn't she just the dearest, cutest thing? Don't you want to hold her?"

"She certainly does not!" said a decided voice at the door. Mr. Robert Van Inwegen came forward and held out his hand to his sister's guest. There was a very satisfied look in his eyes. "She wants to come down to the drawing-room and indulge in rational conversation," he said.

Eleanor pouted.

"Robert always has his own way," she complained. "Well, go on. I'll follow as soon as I have called Maria to take the baby. Isn't she the dearest thing, Robert?"

"I think so," said Robert, but he wasn't looking at his niece. He held the door open for Constance and shut it after her with relief.

"If they ever try to make you hold that baby again," he said, "come to me. I will take care of you"—and then he added softly under his breath—"always!"

But Constance, gathering up her silken ruffles to descend the stairs, remembered that this was but their fourth meeting, and very properly pretended not to hear.

A NATION'S STRENGTH.

By Goldsmith.

ALL fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade—
A breath can make them, as a breath has made—
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroy'd can never be supplied.

FOR GOD AND THE KING.*

By Ethel Louise Cox.

A romantic love story of the time of Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution.

(Copyright, 1906, by Ethel Louise Cox.)

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

ALMOST at the hour of his betrothal to Anne Wentworth, Valentin Saint-Leu leaves his newly adopted country, the young American republic, and answering the call of his queen, Marie Antoinette, returns with his friend, Montauran, to the defense of the royal family imprisoned in the Tuilleries.

During their attempted escape, he is wounded, but Théot, a Breton peasant and his foster brother, at that time a popular idol, recognizes him and hides him in the vaults of an old church, the headquarters of the Revolutionists.

Here Saint-Leu comes upon Diane de Vernage, whose guardian, the Chevalier de Maubray, has placed her there to be rid of her and gain control of her fortune. He is a kinsman of Saint-Leu, who immediately espouses Diane's cause and flees with her to his aunt's house in a neighboring town. They find the house deserted, but take up quarters there for the night, and are joined by De Marsan, Diane's lover. All goes well until the next day. As Diane is sitting alone in the garden the Chevalier de Maubray appears.

Saint-Leu arrives as he is about to force her to accompany him. The chevalier withdraws, only to meet De Marsan, whom he wounds with his pistol.

Saint-Leu and Diane flee to the home of some peasants belonging to the De Casteran estate and thence to the woods, closely pursued by the chevalier and a company of Republicans. Saint-Leu manages to rescue De Marsan and proceeds with him toward their latest hiding place. He lingers in the forest to overhear a conversation which he thinks will benefit him, and reaches the hut to find no sign of his companions.

Diane, however, has contrived to drop the beads of her amber necklace along the way, and at last they discover her. De Marsan has also reached her and, although he is able to flee with her to safety, Saint-Leu is captured and condemned to immediate death by the same tribunal which ends the notorious double career of his kinsman, the chevalier.

Saint-Leu kills his jailer, and escape is almost his when he is set upon by the hounds of the prison, to be rescued by his enemies.

CHAPTER XIII.

ADIEU!

THE jailers carried Saint-Leu to his cell. With the morning came the roll-call, the summons away from earth.

The doomed prisoners took gallant farewell of those who had still some days to live. The adieux were said with gentle grace, often with merriment. It would be so short a time before they would be reunited.

They kissed each other's hands; and the departing friend was wished a good voyage out on that unknown sea whose

returning wave would bear those waiting to the distant shore beyond.

The dream of life was drawing to a close, and Saint-Leu walked as if among shadows to its end. The melancholy chamber in the Conciergerie where the prisoners doomed to the guillotine were assembled, the varied assembly, the brutal faces of the jailers, spies, and huissiers made a vague, meaningless picture before his eyes, and words of parting fell unheeded on his ear.

He was brought back to the present by seeing the chevalier step forward in answer to a summons for "The ci-devant Biron."

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

The chevalier paused in front of him. "My cell adjoins that of Monsieur de Biron," he said carelessly, in a lowered tone, "and the chalk-mark was placed on my door by mistake. I will let it stand. He is young. He loves. Another day of life may mean much to him.

"Besides," added the chevalier, shrugging, "it is a mixed assembly. One sees tradesmen, ballad-singers, and Jacobins among the prisoners. I would leave life decently. I will go with my kinsman."

He sank into a reverie. After a time he spoke again, as if dreaming aloud:

"It is time to put out the candles," he said. "The king has gone to his rest, which will be sound and untroubled by the bitter cries that have vexed his gentle soul, and the ladies and nobles of his splendid court may follow the king.

"We have come, hand in hand, down the great, shining staircase, through the mellow lights and blushing, scattered flowers and great, golden candlesticks which pages carry to show us the way.

"Madame, your light feet, white and swift, trip bravely beside me, and your cheek retains its bloom where I have placed our last kiss. Permit me to assure you that you are as fair, as dewy fresh and bright, as that unforgotten May morning when we went a-gipsying together.

"Let us keep that memory in our tombs. Rameau is fiddling us down with his airy, tinkling minuet of sylphs and wood fays, of Loves and Graces. The rosy groups of Boucher's nymphs cast their dewy garlands after us, and lean out from their golden mists.

"We go bravely, with dancing and piping, with love and laughter, to meet our fate.

"Here stands the executioner. And he is Jacques Bonhomme—shambling, gaping, narrow-browed Jacques, the tiller of fields and hewer of wood.

"He has turned his ax now to other uses. It gleams against the white neck of the dame, from which the pearls have been torn, and over the proud shoulders of the lord.

"Jacques Bonhomme has become woodsman and fiend. It is time for us to go. The age we loved, with its folly and its chivalry, its splendor and its woe, is rushing down to ruin.

"The life we loved, the brilliant, laughing, careless life, has vanished. Ah, it has flashed by like a radiant, falling star.

"We cannot live on memories. They promise us wonders in their new age, in their age of mediocrity and humanity and of the commonplace, but the earth will never be again the rosy place we found it. So much the worse for our children.

"Jacques has conquered us, but at least he leaves us the dignity of dying. Let us go, for our world knows us no longer, and death is easier to face than change."

He was silent, seeming to ponder. But again he spoke—gravely, solemnly:

"What remains? They refuse us a priest. Do but look at them preparing their hideous paraphernalia in the devout hope of slaying us body and soul. I am about to depart. I will give them my last thought. Death is an impossibility."

He became plunged in thought, indifferent to his surroundings.

Saint-Leu's eyes fell on a mother and daughter clinging together, weakness supporting weakness and fears consoling fears, and not parted on the dread steps of the scaffold; and then on a sister and young brother, hand in hand; and the restless pangs of his sorrow assailed him anew, sharper than those prepared for him by death.

Heart and mind cried out under the torture. To die without one brief word of farewell to her whom he loved! without one message of his constancy!

The memory of happier days stole upon him. He recalled every incident of that brief, sweet life of the heart, now past, which he was not to exchange for greater happiness; every tone, every glance, every word that had passed between them.

Walks together in blissful solitude or with some laughing friend; lingering farewells in the soft twilight returned to him in thought. All past and gone with the dead year!

He breathed again the perfume of the knot of pale, early flowers he had found clustered under dewy moss and tiny leaves, and had carried to her.

Simple, touching words of hers assumed a new meaning for him. Thus

she spoke, sweeter and more beguiling than any music, her words mingled with laughter, for his love was but a child—thus moved in her youth and grace—thus looked when he passed beside her, or when his hand touched hers—thus hushed under his look of deeper passion, as shy and fluttering as a nest of young thrushes at an intruding glance, the music of her mischief stilled.

The lover's thought—"Thus she turns her curled, golden head, and others see her and hear her speak, while I am absent from her side," pierced him with its poignant anguish.

They had spoken together for the last time. They would never see each other again. She was waiting for him.

Then from the deeps of memory his own words rang in his ears.

"I swear that neither the dungeons of France nor dangers of the sea, wounds, or years shall keep me from you.

"You know that I would come back to you, Anne, even from another world."

He groaned aloud, and began restlessly pacing to and fro. A young man near him fixed a glance of sympathy on him, and Saint-Leu was impelled to draw near to and speak to the stranger.

"Are you leaving any one whom you regret," he asked, "and who will regret you?"

"Only France," answered the young man seriously.

"You do not regret life?"

"No. My name is André Chénier, and I am a poet. France condemns me, and the future flies out of my reach."

"Yes, but her—the woman you are leaving?" said Saint-Leu out of his own despair.

"She has passed before me to the grave," the young man answered, sighing, "and on her bosom lie the songs she inspired, and which were doomed like her to live one beautiful day and then to die."

He laid a hand on Saint-Leu's shoulder and drew his story from him.

"Put by these withering, earthly fears," he said, "for heaven opens over us, and we must see by its light. Do not think that she will doubt or forget.

"Life is naught, and love is all. That is the great reality. We pass, but love is deathless."

Saint-Leu heard himself summoned by name. The last hour had come. It had come with such pangs as mortal life cannot resist. The young poet clasped him in his arms, and they parted.

Saint-Leu hastened to the grate, where the chevalier was awaiting him. The executioner's men approached them. Their arms were bound and they were hurried into the rough cart that was to carry them to the guillotine.

Then there was a delay. Finally a groaning wretch was lifted in after them. He lay prone in his helpless terror on the floor of the cart. He was a peasant, with a vacant, frightened face and glancing, hare-like eyes. The chevalier received him with equanimity.

"His political opinions are probably misunderstood," he said, "and his lamentations are deplorable, but he is our companion for the long voyage ahead. One prefers to see a man on his feet. Let us find out whether there is heart in the creature."

He set himself, whimsically, to administering consolation. The prostrate form showed signs of life, and evinced susceptibility to the silvery accents that greeted it. It rose, but fell prone again after one terrified glance at the somber reality.

"There are human beings who should not be called upon to die," said the chevalier to Saint-Leu.

With this jest, he returned to his self-imposed task with undiminished zeal.

"Friend Jean."

"Matthieu, monsieur."

"From what province are you?"

"Of Gascony, monsieur."

"Friend Matthieu, did you not have a king, a glorious Henry of France? Get up. Do not shame him. Look the Jacquerie in the eye. Again, friend Matthieu, courage!"

He helped the dazed peasant to his feet.

"Now, do you know a Royalist ballad?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then, in the name of heaven and Henry of France, sing!"

The man submissively quavered a stave, but was speedily frightened into silence by a roar of rage from the watching patriots.

The chevalier's eyes flashed and lightened.

"Sing!" he thundered. "By Saint Anne of Auray, if you go to death with me you shall go as a man should. Sing, or I hurl you to them!"

The hoarse voice resumed the ancient ballad. The peasant's terror had vanished in the convulsive gaiety of despair. The chevalier's eyes lit with defiant laughter.

The cart was ready to leave the grated door of the Conciergerie for the fury of the waiting streets, the roll of drums, and blare of trumpets.

The prisoners gazed, with eyes unaccustomed to the blaze of sunlight, out through the solemn gateway. Groups of vague faces in the distance threatened them. Death and terror awaited them.

Saint-Leu experienced a feeling of shame in his fate. The bonds confining his arms humiliated him.

After so many battles faced bravely, to die this melancholy, helpless death!

The last of his race, he had kept their name fragrant, and remembered their virtues. They had walked in glittering courts; he had lain on battle-fields. They had had great possessions; he had become a wanderer and an exile. They had lived to haughty age; he was perishing in his flower of youth. The Republic had seized on the noblest of a long line for sacrifice.

The cart began to move slowly.

"You know that I would come back to you, Anne, even from another world."

They had started on the fatal way. In a moment they would face that waiting storm of rage and hate.

Some one cried aloud.

There was a sudden disturbance among their guards. Gendarmes moved to the horses' heads, and Saint-Leu, bewildered and dazzled, heard a voice that seemed to come from a great distance.

"You are relieved. Descend from the cart," it said.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RED TERROR.

DAZZLED by this sudden and late relief, Saint-Leu followed his guard back through the gateway. He who had just

grazed death breathed more freely even in that dismal atmosphere of sighs and tears.

The mystery of his escape from the knife of the guillotine was not explained to him. He was not reconducted to his cell. He was abruptly led out to the streets without a word as to his destination.

The first breath of fresh air and the sight of every-day life sent a thrill through the prisoner. He glanced about him. His guard closed up, keeping him in their midst.

"Whither are you taking me?" he demanded.

The only reply he received was a grim "Forward, citizen!"

He passed through the busy crowd, and no one had a glance or a thought for him. This man, young, ardent, was numbered with the dead.

At the corners of streets hawkers were shouting the hair of aristocrats and bits of silk coats for sale. A woman's long, golden locks, redolent with youth and beauty, were thrust almost into Saint-Leu's face. He drew back, shuddering, and sick at heart.

In the distance he heard a lugubrious sound. It was the rolling of the tumbril's wheels. That muffled, funereal sound was audible in every part of the city. Above it was heard the hoarse clangor of the tocsin.

Once he fancied that he saw a face in the crowd grow distinct with the unmistakable look of recognition. He even thought that the lips moved as if sending him some unspoken message.

When he looked again the face had vanished, and he thought that he had been deceived by a chance resemblance.

The soldiers conducted him through the streets to a small house in an obscure quarter. Here they ascended a flight of creaking steps and entered a little room where a man was seated at a desk. Saint-Leu was thrust forward. The man, without looking up from his writing, spoke to the guards.

"Wait outside, my children; I may need you."

The soldiers silently withdrew, leaving Saint-Leu alone with the occupant of the room. Saint-Leu remained standing, waiting for the other to speak.

The little room seemed very peaceful and still. A window let in a ray of sunlight, in whose warmth a cat was basking, its emerald eyes half-closed in sonorous happiness. Before him, among the papers that heaped the desk, was a woman's miniature—a fresh-cheeked, commonplace beauty.

The man did not raise his head at first, and Saint-Leu surveyed him at leisure. As he looked a chill shudder stole over him.

He had seen that keen, thin face before, with its furrowed forehead and the firm line of the mouth.

His eyes scanned the silent figure in reluctant fascination. A red cap was drawn down to the hidden eyes, but the rest of the neat and well-ordered attire was that of a bourgeois.

There were shining buckles in the shoes, and ripples of cobweb lace at the wrists of the puce-colored coat. A tricolor sash, in which pistols were stuck, bound his waist.

On the white silk stockings and on the shoes were ominous stains, as if the man had walked in blood that had splashed above his red heels. Yet this was not the executioner.

Laying down his pen, he suddenly fixed upon Saint-Leu that piercing, sinister gaze before which the untamed monster of Paris had trembled.

Saint-Leu sustained that look without fear and without haughtiness. There was no need to ask himself who his judge was. It was written in the cold, immovable features before him, in the background of the quiet room, in the miniature of a woman lying among scattered seals and papers.

"You are the Citizen Saint-Leu?" said the man at the desk.

"Yes, citizen."

"Let us talk," said Robespierre.

He leaned forward and fixed Saint-Leu with his coldly imperious glance.

"You arrived in Paris some months ago. You came from America?"

"Yes, citizen."

"It would have been better for you if you had never set sail. You came in behalf of the Royalists."

"Of the queen, citizen."

"Understood. You then lay hidden in the underground palace."

Saint-Leu assented in surprise.

"From there you went to Brittany, where you were captured by the Republican soldiers."

"By the Chevalier de Maubray, citizen," said Saint-Leu.

The sound of a bell vibrated through the room with a melancholy echo.

Robespierre raised his head to listen. A gleam of triumph passed over the inscrutable face. The gloomy eyes lightened. If it were possible for the heart of this frog-like organism to accelerate its action, it beat quicker now.

"He is dead," he said coldly.

"The arrest was not in order," he resumed. "I am acquainted with the circumstances. You were brought to Paris and lodged in the Conciergerie."

"Yes, citizen."

"You made a desperate attempt at escape; so wild an effort, in fact, that it was reported to me. You regret the loss of life?"

"I am at an age to regret it, citizen," Saint-Leu replied, with eyes suddenly aglow.

"Men have no age in the present, citizen," said Robespierre in a somber tone. "But of all those lying in my prisons you are the sole one of these aristocrats who has battled and struggled for life. I should say that you are not afraid to die, but that they are afraid to live."

Saint-Leu looked into the eyes opposite him that seemed to read the weakness of the human heart, to tempt and coldly calculate upon its sufferings.

"You wish to live, citizen?"

"I wish to live with honor," answered Saint-Leu slowly.

"Honor—what is that?" Robespierre said, with a grim smile. "Ah, I understand that look and tone. You disdain us even when we offer you friendship—you aristocrats."

His voice held a hidden menace.

"I am of mean extraction," he went on, "and the humble cannot advise the noble."

Saint-Leu's face, severe and pure in all its lines, had regained a pale calm and quiet resignation, and his eyes did not waver from those of his questioner. Ah, to die with so much desire for life!

"Citizen Saint-Leu, you do not stand or fall with the kingdom of France. You

have a career before you in the New World."

"I had that hope, citizen," replied Saint-Leu.

"I approve it, although France needs men of merit. Citizen, when I singled you out from the *fournée* of prisoners an hour ago and placed you before me I had my own reasons for the act."

"Citizen, if it should be possible for me to serve you——" Saint-Leu paused abruptly.

"I am also inspired with sentiments of esteem toward you," said Robespierre. His harsh voice softened to a silky purr. "I love virtue, even when it is aristocratic. Duty to the state permitting, I am compassionate at heart."

The cat by the window, weary of watching swallow flights, made a spring and vaulted upon the laden desk, where it sat regarding Saint-Leu.

Some curious resemblance between the eyes of the man and the feline eyes gazing at him oppressed Saint-Leu like a nightmare. He addressed them both. For a moment he was uncertain which had spoken to him.

"I repeat, if it is in my power to serve you, I am ready," said Saint-Leu, with a secret feeling of distrust and repulsion.

"It is possible. You were an intimate and friend of Marie-Antoinette?"

"Yes, citizen."

"Then, citizen, I shall request you to answer a few questions concerning the Austrian; also some questions concerning the affair of the diamond necklace."

Saint-Leu was silent.

"You could give me the information I desire?"

"Yes, citizen."

"You will do so?"

"No, citizen."

A livid light flashed from Robespierre's eyes. It passed like a gleam of summer lightning, and his hand dropped from the butt of a pistol that he had grasped unconsciously in his convulsion of rage.

"You are wrong," he said composedly. "You would gain life and liberty by acceding to my request."

"I should betray the queen."

"The woman is doomed. You cannot save or injure her," said Robespierre.

"Then of what use would this information be to the Republic, citizen?"

Robespierre leaned his chin on his hand and looked at Saint-Leu before answering him.

"I will answer you, citizen," he said. "Because we will have no more queens or mistresses in France. May the name of the last be accursed that there may be an end of her children and of thrones forever."

He looked steadfastly at the young man.

"I am speaking to one who has passed from among the living. Take that message with you to the dead."

Saint-Leu felt the solemn chill of that last scene of partings strike through him once more.

The man before him inspired him with horror. What streams of blood had flowed from under those pale fingers! He seemed to gaze at the figure before him through a red haze.

Robespierre lifted his pen, and wrote a few words on the paper before him. The scroll he traced appeared to flame, and the letters were written in blood.

"You refuse to answer, citizen?" said Robespierre.

Saint-Leu passed his hand over his forehead as if to drive away the thoughts that bewildered him.

"It would be a crime," he murmured.

"There are no crimes among the acts that serve your country. You prefer to die?"

His tone was mocking, and his piercing, ironic eyes were on Saint-Leu's.

"Will you come to see me die, citizen?" Saint-Leu replied, with flashing eyes.

"Your death will be unknown out of France. Your grave will be nameless."

Saint-Leu bowed his head.

"Lieutenant," said Robespierre, raising his voice.

The door opened and the guard appeared.

"Remove the prisoner."

Saint-Leu slowly and sadly followed his guard to the street. For the first time his icy fortitude gave way, and a sigh burst from his lips.

The mad desire to fling himself, pinioned as he was, upon the soldiers and make an end then and there rose in his

breast. The plaything of fate and tossed on a sea of circumstance, he could still shun a passive death.

Wrath and defiance stifled him. He would die young, and he had not lived. He cast a glance about him, with dilating eye, and strained his arms in their bonds, that cracked with the effort but held him fast in their ligaments.

As he looked about him, a sound struck upon his ear. Some one in the Paris crowd was softly whistling a Breton ballad.

Saint-Leu shuddered. Was it help at the last hour? Friends to one who had thought himself abandoned? Life to one who could feel the grass growing above him, and the moss on his name?

The face, ghostly in its beauty, flashed before him that only came in dreams, with the murmur of tender words soft as wooing notes of birds. He returned to the land of the heart. He breathed again the fresh, pure air of the forest, and felt the keen wind blowing on his cheek, and heard the rustle of dead leaves under his horse's hoofs. He climbed once more the familiar flight of stone steps. A sylvan stillness replaced the murmur of the somber streets. There she was waiting for him. There they might live in peace, hidden from the world. This fearful life of horror and fear and battle, this blood-stained Paris, would fade away gradually to a dream—Anne!

Saint-Leu, suddenly calmed, yet strung with tense excitement, did not turn his head, but held himself in readiness for the next signal. He set himself desperately to the task of loosing his pinioned and benumbed arms from their bonds.

A sudden ringing of steel on steel fired the drooping spirit of the soldier weighed down by the gloom and damps of prison, and sent the blood coursing through his veins, and his heart beating a wild music of joy and hope. A band of men, clad as Incroyables, flung themselves with drawn swords upon his guard. Over the uproar of Paris rang out the wild, exultant shout.

"For God and the King!"

His guards drew together, and presented a firm front to the attacking party. At the same moment Saint-Leu,

struggling with the bonds that held his arms, caught a glimpse of a well-known face that drew from him a sudden, imperious cry of passion and the desire of life.

"Help here! De Marsan!"

* * * *

Two weeks later the bark Polly, of Bath, Maine, sailed from Havre. In the high stern, propped among soft wraps, lay Saint-Leu, pale and drawn, but with the sparkle of hope in his eye.

His glance wandered back to the receding French coast.

"Ah," he murmured. "What I could do I have done. Yet I have failed. The queen——"

There was a voice at his elbow, and he looked up to catch the sympathetic gaze of De Marsan, who said:

"Can you think you have failed, Saint-Leu? Ten thousand of us could not have saved the queen. But my wife and I do not call your work failure. Do we, Diane?"

Diane de Marsan smiled happily.

Then Théot broke in:

"Monsieur and madame will pardon me, but he must not talk. His wounds—and he is very weak."

The faithful Breton rearranged his master's cushions.

"Do not send them away, Théot," said Saint-Leu. "Nothing can harm me now. I leave my wounds behind with the old life. For us the future and the New World.

"Turn me around, good Théot. My eyes would look forward. Your hands, my friends. There! It is better. I am stronger with every foot of lessened distance from my hope.

"She is waiting. And I come."

CHAPTER XV.

"HOW SHOULD I, YOUR TRUE-LOVE, KNOW?"

IN the old house by the sea, in the little colonial town of Newport, a girl was waiting for her lover, and bravely stifling her fears.

Anne passed the long, sheltered hours in dreams, while the sails fled over the sea, fluttering and returning, with snowy sweep, going and coming into other lives.

Her wistful eyes searched the empty wave. Its murmur held her ear by day, and mingled with her dreams at night; for it had played a great part in her life, had borne love to her on a balmy summer sea, and with receding tide had carried away her happiness.

Parted lovers were never glad at heart, but her days were not all unhappy. To-morrow he would surely come to her. Like an amulet, their faithful love would preserve him from harm. Dreams, meanwhile, sufficed the longing heart.

With the first rays of sunlight over a sparkling world she stole to the window by the sea, hoping to see the sails that would have flitted up, under cover of darkness, from that distant land of France.

At night she lay down to rest with quiet thoughts and pity for her love on his dreary travels, and was consoled for his absence by dreams of him so vivid and so sweet as to make him almost an actual presence to her fond, innocent heart.

At first no shadow fell across her sunny dream. She was contented with her memories. Her days were divided between the tender wants of those dear to her and the secret life of the heart.

To think of him at certain times of whom she dreamed at all times—never to rise or drift into sleep without the whispered greeting, a tremulous "Dearest!"—to mingle the thought of him with her songs, her little joys and maiden tasks, were graceful acts of memory and tenderness. Such days were sweet and undisturbed.

But as the months passed and he did not return, that piteous need of the heart awoke called longing. Quiet and uncomplaining, she turned a cheerful face to meet the love about her; not to sadden three lives or to see her own sorrow reflected on the household faces. Only at night her sleep was broken with tears and indistinct, tender murmurs of love; and she awoke to rise in the moonshine and to stand by the lattice and gaze out on the sea.

Waking fears and nightly visions, coming with the drip of rain against her window, paled her cheek and dimmed the blue eyes. A mysterious intelligence would cause the words to die away on

her lips, and a shudder pass over her slender form in the midst of an assembly or on quiet evenings by the hearth.

Fearful tidings crossed the sea to the peaceful home, and restless fears glided like shadows by Anne's side. Imperceptibly, her laughter fled from her lips and her eyes grew bright and large.

The sudden sound of a footstep on the stair would blanch her cheek; or the sight of some tall, youthful figure, seen at a distance in her lonely walks, would shake her with expectation and longing.

Then calming her own fast-beating heart, she would murmur to herself his last words, "You know that I would come back to you, Anne, even from another world."

One night in her dreams a great picture unrolled before her eyes.

She thought that she stood in a great square, amid a seething, yelling crowd of red-capped men and haggard women—a sea of moving heads. Soldiers were beating drums. Some lifted trumpets to their lips.

It was in a gray twilight, murky and dim, but sparkling with torches. She thought that a bell tolled with ominous note.

Immediately the men and women joined hands and danced a wild carmagnole toward something coming slowly up the street. She could see distinctly their open mouths and mocking gestures.

A gloomy sound smote on her ear, a rolling of wheels, and a cart came into sight. As it passed, the spectral crowd surged about it and hid the figures in it from her eyes.

She awoke with a cry, a cold dew standing on her forehead. She leaned her flushed cheek on one hand. Her eyes, wide and sad, pierced the darkness. A sudden, vague sound sent a childish shudder of fear through her frame. The dream had been so vivid. Love quailed before that dark breath from a shadowy land.

The wind in the pear-tree outside the window had ceased its broken harping on the branches. A faint color tinged the cold, gray sky, and the world was growing clear.

The sea was calm. The red vision faded away into the darkness from which it had emerged, startling and

grim. She must not fear. He would come back to her. It was only a dream.

A secret sympathy surrounded her. Other eyes watched with hers, in that kindred tenderness that understands all without a spoken word.

The old house that had stood so long in gray peace and quiet beauty looked out over the waters as if it, too, were awaiting the end of the story that had had so sweet a beginning within its walls—as if it sympathized with the fair child it had cradled.

Now the home lights of the old mansion shone out, and the strains of a minuet echoed once more through the ballroom where the fair daughters of Major Wentworth had danced with the brilliant French officers.

The rooms and stately corridors were gay with dancing youthful life. The fire of bright eyes flashed from under softly powdered locks, as hands met in the courtly posturings of the dance.

The sea, full of voices, murmured through the delicate music with its monotonous story, and trembled, like her own sighs, through the heart of Anne, reviving tender memories.

The candles had been blown out, the ballroom was deserted, and the sisters were standing together.

Anne was silent. Her eyes were eloquent. Perhaps she was going over her wistful life, day by day. Her dream was vanishing in fleeing mists, and fear, unrest and passion were shaking her gentle breast.

Her sister watched her with pity and keen sympathy, with a mute desire to console her. A vague doubt was creeping into the hearts of those who loved Anne, though as yet they did not say among themselves, "There is no hope."

She looked sorrowfully at the sweetness and loveliness of the face turned toward the sea. Alas! Anne might never be the happy child again whom they had loved. Time could not give her back her placid thoughts and joys.

Suddenly Anne raised her head, as if in response to some mysterious call. She watched and listened intently, breathlessly noting every sound and sight. Was love summoning love through the darkness and void?

Her sister was startled by the radiance

that shone from the wistful eyes fixed on the distant line of the sea.

"Anne," she whispered tenderly.

Anne did not turn, but held up one hand, pleading for silence.

"Hush!" she said.

Her face was transfigured. A tender smile hovered on her lips, and her great eyes dreamed.

"Anne," said her sister, trembling.

Anne smiled divinely, and the happy color flooded her fair face.

"He is coming," she murmured.

She softly opened the casement, letting in a breath of salt air. She had stood there many times, waiting for him. She had never waited in vain.

"Hush, Phœbe. He will know that I am here," Anne said.

"Anne darling," implored her sister, shuddering. She flung her trembling arms about the girlish form.

The soft voice spoke again. Anne clasped her hands over her beating heart, as if to still its tumultuous throbbing at the sound of his footsteps. Her parted lips trembled, yet smiled.

"He is coming," Anne said. "He is standing at the gate. How the sea is calling to-night! He is thinking how fair it all is, and wondering how he could stay so long away.

"He is glad of the night breeze and starry sky. He is remembering and longing. He is coming. I can hear his footsteps. No one comes to me so hastily and so eagerly. He has been long gone. Oh, hasten, dearest, hasten, before my heart breaks at last!"

The soft words of love broke and trembled on her lips, words that the shy maiden had cherished, unspoken, in her heart.

"Come, my own, my darling," she murmured, flinging her arms wide on the empty air.

She listened. What mysterious messenger told her that he was near?

A shower of moonlight fell through the diamond-paned window. Soft breezes, sweet with the breath of the sea, stirred the ghostly draperies. A great, white moth, the incarnate soul of a flower, fluttered in from the dusky night and hovered. The sisters drew together.

"He has crossed the threshold. He is coming," Anne said.

She stood in her attitude of expectancy, flushing softly with delight, the tears sparkling on her lashes and filling her happy eyes. Her pale, outstretched hands trembled piteously.

They were silent. Phœbe, gazing into the passion of her eyes, heard the sound of footsteps, firm and light and long-remembered, on the stair, and knew that a hand was laid on the latch of the door. They clung together, with fast-beating hearts.

(The End.)

The door swung wide to admit a well-known figure to their gaze.

A thrilling cry burst from Anne's lips, an eloquent note of joy and love that drew the tears to watching eyes.

"Valentin! Oh, at last, at last!"

She fled from her sister's arms to meet the love that had burned like a flame through the world to her.

Her white embrace went about him; her heart beat on his. The lovers would be parted no longer.

THE FIRE - HORSE.

By William R. Stewart.

**OF the rehabilitation of Jim,
and how he won peace and
comfort in his declining years.**

JIM was at odds with the driver from the first day he was hitched at center.

"That horse ain't no good," complained Billy to the captain when the latter had ordered the change, substituting, in Jim's old place, a green horse from the training-stable.

"I don't say he can't run and pull his share o' the engine, and behave like a horse ought to behave at a fire, but he's too full o' mischief in the stable. Hear him now, poundin' away with his hoof on the floor for pure devilment. Think you c'd catch him doin' it when some one's around to give him the whip? Not on your life.

"Why, I've let on to go up-stairs, and then sneaked around behind the trucks ready to lay the lash on good an' heavy, so's he'd know what 'twas for. But you couldn't fool that horse. He knowed the poundin' bothered us—used to get on the men's nerves so, especially after a fire, that they'd shout at him and throw their boots, bang, on the floor—and that's what gave him the idea. 'Taint good for discipline to promote a horse like that."

But the captain only smiled.

"You're prejudiced, Bill," he said. "Haven't got over Ginger yet—I know it—and wouldn't take to any horse that'd be in his place. Jim's all right. A bit lazy and mischievous, as you say, but no shirker—always keeps up his end of the whiffletree."

Billy walked off, mumbling.

"Say," the captain called after him, "there's some—what d' you call it?—romance about Jim, too. Maybe it'll interest you."

He reached up to a pigeonhole in his desk, mused clumsily through some odds and ends of papers, and brought forth an envelope with a broken seal and a piece of twisted broom-handle wire.

"Here it is! This was fastened under the mane when the horse reached us. Read it."

The driver took the letter, which was as follows:

MEADVILLE, MO., March 28, 1904.

TO THE MAN WHO BUYS THIS HORSE:

His name is "Jim." He is a kind and splendid work-horse, and I trust will come into good hands, as he was a great pet of mine. He has been sold because I have had financial trouble. A note which will tell me where he is will be gratefully received.

MRS. J. D. MILLIGAN.

"There you are," said the captain. "Write the Widow Milligan that you've got Jim and are taking good care of him."

Who knows but the financial trouble mayn't last long, and maybe she'll write you to come to Missouri and bring Jim and settle down and run the ranch for her."

"Thanks, but I ain't lookin' for no matrimonial agency business," said the driver, as he handed back the letter and started down-stairs. Before his knees showed below the first step Jim had stopped pounding, and when he reached the floor the horse was looking vacantly over his chain in the stall.

"Hm! 'Kind, splendid work-horse,' ain't you?" sniffed Billy. "Wish the Widow Milligan, or whatever she is, had you back again on the farm. Maybe her nerves haven't been spoiled by sleeping with one ear next to a gong. Guess she could stand you better."

Then he turned to the new horse and proceeded to give him another lesson in station tactics, letting him feel the cut of the whip the moment the gong sounded. That was to show that the gong and the whip talked the same language, and, interpreted, meant to run to the engine. In due time the command of the gong would be enough.

Somehow, Jim did not take things with sufficient seriousness. Horse nature is like human nature in its variations. A humorist does not play the heavy rôles, and the serious-minded do not go in for light opera. That is, as a rule. But there are exceptions.

Jim was an exception. No one ever said that he did not do his duty. But that was all—duty and no more. You did not have to drive him into a wall to stop him when you had gone far enough—but he always took you far enough. The captain said Jim was a bit lazy and full of pranks, but his record was creditable in a department where serious work, and plenty of it, had to be done.

He was a good horse to look at, too. He had blood and breeding, with a good Clydesdale pedigree on the sire's side, and his carrot-red coat covered a shapely framework. There was something about him which, after you got to know him, stuck in your mind. Something not very tangible, but haunting. This may have been, in a measure, because of certain human-like propensities which he had.

Among these was a moral laxity with regard to the proprietary rights inhering in such things as he might happen to desire for himself. For instance, if you stood beside him he would thrust his nose into your coat-pocket and flch from it whatever might give promise of being eatable.

This habit he had acquired from seeing pockets produce such things. Being allowed occasionally the run of the engine-house he would, if thirsty, walk over and turn on the water-tap, as he had seen the firemen do. In such ordinary acts as raising his foot at an invitation to shake hands, or opening his mouth to catch a thrown sweet, he was very proficient.

But Billy had not taken a liking to him. Perhaps it was, as the captain said, because he was in Ginger's place. Perhaps the horse's laziness grated on a man who did not know the feeling. Perhaps, too, the stamping of the foot at such provoking times as when a fireman is trying to sleep, added to the antipathy. And, as Jim was willing to reciprocate the sentiment, the relations between them became more strained.

An accident made matters worse. Since Jim joined Station 44, everything seemed to go wrong. One day, during a run, the fore-wheel of the engine-truck had come off, and, although the strap which held him to his seat kept the driver from falling, it was none the less provoking to be beaten out by every other engine and hook-and-ladder in the district. It was easy enough to say that the engineer who had greased the wheel had forgotten to insert the pin; the fact remained that no such thing had happened before.

At another time the three horses with the five-ton engine were loping along Tenth Avenue to a fire on Fifty-Third Street. Billy was anxious to be first that day, for another company had been gaining stations on him lately.

With the clear sweep of the wide avenue ahead he had straightened out the horses as they rounded in from the narrow side street. Gathering in the reins, sweeping the whip evenly across the flanks, shooting out his driving arm as the horses jumped forward, pulling back the horses again with the tightening bit, loosening the bit again, he succeeded

in getting the horses jumping as one animal. In the above manner Billy had given them the rhythmical measure by which the great load could best be pulled at a four-minute gait.

Swaying on the lines, guiding his team evenly over the asphalt, Billy felt the excitement of the race. No such chance for speed lay in the crowded, vehicle-filled streets which were usually the scenes of his runs. The horses, too, shared the fierce joy of the course. There were no scurrying children to avoid, no surface cars to watch for, no elevated-railroad pillars to be dashed into. The slap of the traces, the leap of the poles, the pull of the whiffletrees attested the terrible speed of the engine.

Then came the accident. As the engine reached Fifty-First Street a man-hole blew up and flew into the air just as the engine was passing over it. It struck the right horse's slender leg and broke it in three places. But the team plunged on.

Leaning over from his seat, the driver saw what had happened. He saw the injured horse swinging along on three legs, the fourth dangling. There had been no lessening of speed, but the man's heart smote him as he thought of the animal's suffering.

"Easy, boy, easy!" he called, pulling in gently on the reins to check the pace. "Easy there."

Again Company 44 was late at a fire. The horse with a broken leg was shot by an agent of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. This was another of the things which had gone wrong since Jim joined the force.

But Jim himself was the victim of the next misfortune at Number 44. Lying on his back and kicking ceilingward he had been found one morning in the grip of the colic. The usual remedies were applied and he was removed to a box-stall at the rear of the engine-room.

A few days before a large mongrel dog, half starved, had wandered into the station. The firemen had fed him, and, there being a vacancy in the ranks of the station mascots, they had adopted him. The dog took a liking to Jim, and Jim, for his part, tolerated the dog, in the patronizing way that fire-horses have. Often the two would occupy the same

stall at night, and in the daytime, if alarms were few, Jim would amuse himself in bullying his companion, as a large boy might a small.

When Jim was sent to the box-stall to get over his colic the dog followed and curled himself up in a corner of it to sleep. He had been acting queerly in the afternoon, and had snapped at Billy.

"Get out!" called Billy as he kicked at him. It was then that the dog took refuge with Jim.

A few minutes after midnight one of the men was awakened by unusual sounds. Snarls, and the frightened squeals of a horse came from below, and then the sharp, angry pawing of a hoof on the floor.

The commotion increased. Sliding down the pole the firemen ran back to the stall where Jim and the dog were battling. Crouching in the corner, eyes blood-red and glaring, froth flecking his lips, the dog was preparing to jump. The horse, ears laid back and snorting defiantly, faced his maddened enemy.

With a tiger's spring the dog sank his long teeth in the horse's neck. Jim shook him off, then, catching the spaggy coat in his teeth, threw him across the stall against the wooden partition. Back and forth they fought in the narrow space, the dog leaping and snapping, the horse striking with his front feet to kill him.

Then the horse turned. Viciously he threw out his hind feet, once, twice, three times, splintering the sides of the stall with the force of the blows. The fight was over and the dog rolled over, dead.

But Jim had worse than the colic now. His neck and shoulders were bleeding from half a dozen wounds, and a long strip of torn flesh hung from a front leg.

"Hydrophobia," said a fireman to Billy. "Horse may catch it, too. Safest to shoot him, I guess."

But a new sympathy had welled up in the driver for the wounded animal. The victorious fight of the horse had stirred his own fighting blood. Not the mischievous brute which pounded the floor to annoy him did he see in the torn, trembling beast before him, but one that, whatever his faults, had been a good fire-fighter. Billy's was an impulsive nature.

"Shoot him be hanged!" he exclaimed. "He'll be all right in a day or two. Veterinary can cauterize the cuts. No danger of hydrophobia."

But Jim was not all right in a day or two. Some of the wounds had gone deep and healed slowly. From the hospital stables, where he had been taken, came the report that, as a fire-horse, his days were over. The report worried the driver. Was it not his own kicking of the dog which had sent it to Jim's stall? He hated to think of the usual fate of horses sold out of the department to become animal derelicts in the great city.

At any rate he would write to the Widow Milligan and tell her Jim's condition. It was a sort of reparation which he owed the horse. Perhaps, if she knew, she would buy him back for twenty dollars, as he would do for her farm.

And the Widow Milligan replied. She thanked him gratefully. Would he see that the horse had the best of care? She could not buy him and pay his transportation to Missouri now. Would he look after the horse for her—just a little—until she could spare the money?

Billy set himself to comfort the Widow Milligan. As often as his duties would allow him he visited the hospital where Jim was. There the two old enemies made up their long score of misunderstandings, and Billy patted Jim's head affectionately, and Jim nosed him understandingly.

So Billy wrote to the widow. Was she really a widow, he wondered? He had never given much thought to women before.

It made the captain smile to see how the driver and the horse got along together when Jim, as good as new, got back to the station. But Billy didn't mind the smiles.

However, Station 44 still seemed to be hoodooed. The week of Jim's return had already seen one accident, when, late one afternoon, the gong rang for a fire which gave two of the men the most exciting drive of their lives.

The engine had just wheeled into Fifty-Ninth Street, from Seventh Avenue, with a down grade ahead. Jamming his foot on the brake to check the weight of the load, the driver's boot slipped and he plunged from his seat to the heels

of the horses. Throwing himself sideways he barely escaped the wheels, and, bruised and cut, staggered over against the curb, half dazed, in the wake of the engine.

On down the street ran the three horses, the two outside ones, green members in the department, plunging recklessly ahead. The grade aided their flight, and they gathered speed with every leap. For a few yards Jim leaped with them. The free bit might have been Billy giving them their head to make up time.

But Billy never would have loosened the reins so long. The thrill of the rhythmical pull and slack was missing. Jim felt that something had gone wrong. From the windows of a twelve-story building ahead there rolled great clouds of smoke, through which, at intervals, there shot thin forks of flame, only to be swallowed by the choke of the smoke. The fire-horse knew that his duty lay there.

For the first time in his life Jim's end of the whiffletree lagged. The wild lurchings of the engine behind, the frenzied bolt of the horses at either side, the unrestrained slapping of the reins told him it was time to think. On the step behind the engineer still held his post, jangling the alarm-bell desperately to warn the excited people in the crowded street.

Approaching Fifth Avenue the high horse swerved to the left. The green stretch of the park lured his runaway fancy. But Jim kept straight, holding back in the traces, guiding the others by the press of the poles. The smoke and the flames still called from ahead.

As the engine lumbered across Fifth Avenue, with the fire only two blocks off, Jim's whiffletree came up even with the whiffletrees of the bolters. Baffled by the trained horse at center the two green animals had slacked their pace. At a hydrant on the corner a fire-engine was purring busily. A policeman ran out and caught the horses' heads. He did not need to, for Jim had brought them to a stop.

When Billy, after a month in the hospital, recovered from his injuries—his recovery in a large measure due to the visits of a young woman from Mead-

ville, Missouri—he obtained a two weeks' leave of absence for a honeymoon. Then he came back to his engine.

"How I ever come to misjudge Jim so, I can never tell," he said. "Must 'ave

been somethin' wrong with me. But I got over it."

And the captain smiled. "What did it," he said, with a poke at Billy's ribs, "the horse or the widow?"

"I'LL TAKE THAT BET."

By Sheppard Stevens.

In which it is shown that the winner frequently gets more than his wager calls for.

A NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

STARTING THE BALL A-ROLLING.

It is more than probable that if Tony Van Amringe and Evan Austin had not dined so well—that evening, the events which I am about to chronicle would never have taken place.

When the question of their evening's amusement arose they decided without hesitation on seeing Bellew in "*Raffles*," both having an openly expressed preference for a play where something happened, as against one of those "Shaw or Ibsen things that are all talk." It was on their way home from the old Grand Opera House, where Bellew was playing a week's return engagement, that they fell into a discussion as to the actual cleverness of *Raffles*.

"I don't agree with you, Tony. It is easy enough to create a set of circumstances in a book or on the stage which give your hero the appearance of tremendous cleverness, yet if he were to do the same things in real life, where he did not have the center of the stage, so to speak, nobody would credit him with more than ordinary common sense. Any man with average coolness of brain can get out of the situations in which *Raffles* finds himself, if he only keeps his head."

"If he only keeps his head," objected his friend warmly, "but the whole ques-

tion lies in that insignificant '*if*.' In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a man no sooner commits a crime than his sense of guilt upsets his judgment and he acts with about the brain capacity of a bug. He gives himself away by his own foolishness."

"Well, I don't make any pretensions to more than average brain, but I'll bet *Raffles* never faced a situation that I couldn't have got out of as readily as he did." Austin flung away his cigarette and reached for a fresh one from his friend's proffered case with the air of having definitely settled the matter under discussion.

"Oh, peek-a-boo, Evan! You may feel sure that you are the real article, the surest thing that ever ran over the course, but I'd be willing to put money on it you would lose your head completely and be chasing yourself in circles ten minutes after you knew that an officer was on your track. And it would take him just about another ten to nab you, you having kindly blazed a trail for him with hands pointing, and 'this way to the thief' painted beneath so that even a blind bobby need not miss you," Van Amringe spoke derisively.

"And I am equally willing to bet that I could get away as clean as you please," boastfully declared the other.

"Well, since we have no way of testing the matter, there isn't any use in dis-

cussing it, but I stick to my opinion," retorted Tony obstinately.

"Yes, we can prove it after a fashion. For instance, I'll bet you I can snatch some valuable of yours, here, on the open streets, with people passing, and you can set an officer directly on my heels and I'll escape him. I'll go further; if I lose the bet, I'll not only put up the hundred gracefully, but I'll agree to stay in quod twenty-four hours before you need feel called upon to explain and let me out."

"I take the bet," cried Tony promptly. "When is the trial to be? Here and now?"

"Oh, no, that wouldn't be fair to me, for you would be on guard and ready. We'll say any time within a week, and if I fail to carry out any part of the agreement before twelve o'clock next Thursday night, I forfeit the hundred. There is one stipulation which I make, however: you are not to try to catch me yourself, but must put an officer on my track."

"All right, my misguided friend, and I hope you are fully prepared for the twenty-four hours' jail experience, for I assure you you will get all that is coming to you. Don't count on my being soft-hearted and letting you off that part of the bargain," warned Tony.

"Don't waste your sympathy. You recall the directions for cooking a hare? First catch it."

The tone was overconfident.

"Never mind, Austin, think of the use to which you can put your experience," rejoined his friend comfortingly. "After that twenty-four hours you will be qualified, according to modern methods, to write a book entitled, 'Some Terrible Abuses of Our Modern Jail System,' which will be one of the six best sellers and yield you fame and fortune."

"No, Tony, my son, my trouble is to decide which particular worthy charity shall have the hundred I take from you. I could not keep it myself; it will be too easy—like taking a rattle from a baby."

Some time longer they continued to chaff each other on the foolishness of hoping to win this wager, before the talk drifted into other channels. They had continued up Broadway and were nearing Twenty-Sixth Street, when, with a

sudden dexterous movement, Austin snatched the scarf-pin from his friend's neck, and with somewhat hurried pace crossed the street, springing forward at the warning clang of an automobile-bell, but assuming as unhurried a step as his overpowering inclination to run would permit him, when he reached the pavement on the other side.

Tony Van Amringe sent an uncomprehending gaze after his friend's retreating figure. His hand involuntarily flew to his denuded scarf, but it was an appreciable moment before he realized what had taken place.

He had so fully assured himself that Austin's attempt was to be made at some future time, that he was completely off guard. It was with a distinct effort that he rallied himself, recalling at the same time his friend's stipulation—that he, Tony, was not to attempt the capture, but was to set an officer on the trail.

Turning hurriedly to summon a policeman, he discovered a blue-uniformed figure coming directly toward him.

"Officer——" he began, but before he could state his case the other interrupted breathlessly:

"Didn't that fellow grab something from you, sir? I thought I saw him make a pass at you?"

"He did, officer; he snatched my scarf-pin. Catch him for me and I will give you fifty dollars. Here is my card. Did you get a good look at him? Would you recognize him again?"

"I took notice of him as you passed me, sir. I keeps my eye out for his kind, and unless I mistake it was Slick Jimmy Winston, one of the flash gang that works among your sort. I'll get him this time, you bet. He give me the slip not long ago, but he won't do it again," and the big officer started in pursuit of a certain high hat and overcoat which was not yet out of sight and which he thought he could distinguish among the many of like appearance that frequent Broadway at that hour of the night.

There being no reason why he should not hurry or even run, he was gaining rapidly on the figure walking briskly ahead of him, when the doors of the Princess Theater and Weber's Music Hall began almost simultaneously to

send forth their nightly crowd of amusement-seekers. Austin was just passing as a scattered few started to trickle out, but when the officer reached the spot it was to be caught in the full rush of the jostling mass then pouring into the street.

Fearing to lose his man he made an attempt to leave the sidewalk, but the pack of carriages and fretting horses made this impossible, and the worst of it was that the other side of the street seemed little better than the one he was on, for it was the hour of crowds. He pushed and fought his way through the press in a manner which called forth many protests, and would have elicited something more decided had it not been for the blue uniform.

When he had at length disentangled himself from the crowd, the object of his pursuit was almost out of sight; indeed he could no longer feel that the particular back that he was following was that of the man he wanted. Having lost sight of him during those minutes of struggle, he realized, in trying to spot him again, how inconspicuous the fellow was by reason of the perfect conventionality of his dress.

Trusting to the fact that he would be able to recognize him if he were indeed Slick Jimmy Winston, as he believed, he broke into a quick run and gained rapidly on his man.

Evan, who had been resisting at every step a desire to look back and see if Tony had succeeded in setting a sleuth on his heels, was just congratulating himself on his success in escaping and feeling that the game had been too easy to be worth while, when he heard hurrying feet in his rear and, utterly unable to control the involuntary movement of his head, turned back to catch a fleeting glimpse of the blue-coated Nemesis gaining on him at every step.

For the first time, a realization of his position came to him, and the gay bragadocio of his earlier mood dropped from him in an instant. He faced the humiliation and discomfort of that twenty-four hours in jail which he had been rash enough to add to his penalty for losing the wager, and a chill of disgust ran up his spine.

Tony's jeers were already ringing in

his ears, while his imagination, always vivid, was giving him a series of experiences not unlike those which would have been his if he were indeed guilty of a real crime.

Tony's words, "A man no sooner commits a crime than his sense of guilt upsets his judgment and he acts with about the brain capacity of a bug, giving himself away by his own foolishness," came back to him with a quick realization of their truthfulness.

He found himself forced to shut his teeth hard and hold every nerve in him tense, to keep his rebellious feet from breaking into a run.

He had turned into a side street and was going toward Fifth Avenue when he first became aware of the pursuing officer. When he reached the corner it was to see before him the familiar exterior of a popular club in which he had maintained his out-of-town membership during all the years of his absence from New York, and which he had much frequented since his return to the city.

This offered him a sure refuge, and he was thankfully making his way toward it when a horrible possibility struck him—the officer might follow him in and arrest him there, before all his fellow members. He dared not risk such a contretemps, yet which way was he to turn?

Fortunately for him, at this instant he was lost to his pursuer's view by the passing of a number of people, and when the policeman again caught sight of him he was just disappearing into a carriage standing before the door of the club. No sooner had the door slammed after him than the vehicle moved off rapidly, leaving the panting "bobby" on the curb, shouting after the coachman, who, utterly oblivious, drove on the faster and, turning a corner, was lost to view.

CHAPTER II.

A CLOSE CALL.

WHEN Evan Austin, in a moment of complete demoralization and loss of nerve, opened the door of a carriage standing before his club and stepped into it, it was with the intention of letting himself out on the other side, crossing the street and turning into the first spot

which might offer momentary hiding from the officer whom he felt to be close at his heels.

The possibility of its containing an occupant never occurred to him until the door slammed behind him, and in his effort to reach the other side of the vehicle he stumbled over a pair of feet.

"I beg your pardon," the conventional expression of politeness leaped to his lips involuntarily.

At this instant the sudden starting of the horses threw him on the front seat, where he remained, too astonished at the turn affairs had taken to make any movement of escape even if he had desired to do so.

He could not understand the silence of the other occupant. The situation began to develop an element of mystery, which deepened as the flash of the street-lamp revealed that his companion was a woman, and a beautiful one.

Momentarily expecting her to cry out or otherwise protest against his intrusion, he kept his eyes glued fearfully upon her figure, waiting for each revealing flash of light with inheld breath, the while his mind, made fertile by his predicament, was building up some excuse to be offered when she did realize his presence.

He had just decided that a muttered apology as to having mistaken his carriage would relieve him of his unpleasant position, and, thanks to the swift gait of the horses, set him down far out of reach of his blue-coated pursuer, when a flash of light showed him more clearly than he had yet been able to see it, the clear-cut, cameo-like profile. Her head was resting wearily against the dark covering of the carriage cushions and he saw for the first time the reason of her silence—her eyes were closed.

She looked so pale that a sudden fright seized Austin. Could she have fainted? Utterly at a loss what to do, he waited for another flash from the street corner by which to verify his fears.

It came, and this time he saw on her cheek the gleam of a tiny wet streak which announced itself unmistakably as the mark of a tear. He leaned forward involuntarily, forgetful of self, of his awkward situation, of everything except that his companion was a woman in distress; perhaps ill or fainting.

Before he could be guilty of the mistake of speaking, he saw her raise her handkerchief and with a slightly furtive movement wipe away the tell-tale mark on her cheek. Informed from this slight action that she had not fainted, and that she did not desire her grief to be noticed, he waited until she should see fit to open her eyes, in the meanwhile congratulating himself that every second was taking him farther from pursuit.

It seemed to Austin, keyed up as he was by waiting, fully five minutes before his fellow passenger stirred, sat up, and, in a perfectly natural tone, said:

"What makes you so quiet, John; did the wedding put you in a serious mood?"

Before he had time to think of something to say to this most unexpected remark, the carriage turned a corner and a lamp flashed a bright light for an instant across his face. He heard a gasp, a breathless, half-frightened "Oh," and the next instant the other occupant of the carriage had touched a button and Austin found himself blinking in a flood of electric brilliance.

Even in the miserably embarrassing turn affairs were taking he could not but notice how much more beautiful she appeared in the full light than in those dim glimpses which he had obtained of her before, and this in spite of a look of startled fright which wholly changed the habitual sweetness of her expression.

But he had no time in which to consider her perfections, great as they were, for he was quick to realize that her up-raised hand was seeking the check which would bring the coachman to a sudden halt.

He sprang forward and caught her wrist, saying as he did so:

"One moment, madam, I beg. Allow me to explain my unwarranted intrusion——" At this instant his eyes, coming on a level with the small window in the rear of the carriage, saw, framed as a picture, a portion of a hansom cab, and leaning forward against its closed doors, with eyes intently fixed on the carriage ahead, was the very blue-coated minion of the law whom Austin fancied had been left far behind in the vicinity of the club.

A look of consternation flashed over his face. He sank back in his seat with

a thorough realization of the folly of his absurd wager and the train of most disagreeable consequences likely to follow in its wake.

He still held the hand of his companion in a tight grasp, and its soft warmth aroused him to his position before her angry tone challenged him:

"How dare you? What is the meaning of this? Why do you presume to keep me from stopping the carriage?"

Even her anger did not conceal entirely her fright, and Evan, realizing that his grasp was increasing it, released her hand with a word of apology.

"One moment, I beg, before you give your signal to the coachman. I have no excuse for having taking refuge in your carriage except the flimsiest. In fact, I was hard pressed; I thought the vehicle empty, and I but intended to go in one door and out of the other in the faint hope of eluding the man who was directly on my track. As I closed the carriage-door behind me, you may remember I stumbled, and at the same instant your coachman started. Since then I have been your very willing prisoner."

"Then you shall have immediate release," she returned, her tone more natural, her hand reaching again toward the check.

"One moment again, I beg. I have just discovered that at the moment I cease to be your willing prisoner I shall become the unwilling captive of the man in the hansom just behind us. Turn around and you will see that he is close on my heels."

She turned quickly, saw the threatening figure of the policeman, and with a gasp of dismay faced Austin again.

"A policeman! Oh, what have you been doing? You have committed some crime?"

At this the absurdity of the situation and her fear-stricken face aroused his sense of humor. Throwing back his head he gave vent to a hearty peal of such honest, boyish laughter that the woman's fears evaporated under it as frost under a warm sun.

"Well, what have you been doing, then; why does he want you?" And Evan noticed that this time her tone was merely puzzled.

"I have been behaving like a fool, but

I haven't done anything that I am ashamed of," he replied with perfect frankness, meeting a gaze which seemed to lay him on a set of mental balances and weigh his honesty.

"You look like a gentleman; indeed you look honest," she said at length, as if she were thinking aloud.

Again he gave vent to his full, hearty, and disarming laugh—the kind of laughter that one finds it well-nigh impossible to associate with anything save honest goodness.

"Then help me," he appealed boyishly. "Forget for a few minutes that you are what you are" (he swept her with a comprehensive glance which was an unspoken compliment), "that I am an utter stranger, with no representative of Mrs. Grundy near to vouch for me, and remember that we are both merely human creatures, the one needing aid, the other able to give it."

He was scarcely aware himself how persuasive he was as he leaned eagerly toward her, his deep-blue eyes compelling her by their controlling power to give heed to his unusual plea.

"What do you want me to do?" she demanded cautiously.

"Instead of making your coachman stop and putting me out in the road to be devoured by my pursuing friend, let me stay in your carriage until you reach your destination. I will then assist you out as if I belonged with you, accompany you to the door, and I may be even obliged to ask you to allow me to step inside for a few minutes, until my too attentive friend shall have passed, then I shall go my way, your eternal debtor, and we will probably never see each other again. Is this too much for a fellow creature to ask?"

"But suppose he tries to arrest you, there——" She hesitated and did not finish her sentence.

"Never fear; with your assistance I shall be able to bluff him easily. In any case I shall take care that you suffer no annoyance."

Whether she would have consented to his proposition or no, it is hard to say. While she balanced the question the coachman neared the curb, brought his horses to a slower pace, and finally stopped before an old-fashioned brown-

stone front whose exterior was ample guarantee for the respectable affluence of its dwellers.

Austin turned the handle of the carriage-door, sprang out, and waited to assist his companion, all with the accustomed ease of good breeding. Even in her trepidation at what might be about to happen, she found herself taking note of this.

She gave him her hand, stepped out, crossed the pavement, and was beginning to ascend the steps when the hansom, which had followed closely, stopped with a jerk which seemed to tumble the hurrying officer on the curb. In an instant he was beside Evan and had laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"You'll have to come with me, young man. You've give me a good chase, but I've got you at last."

Evan made an indignant movement as if to shake off his hand, but the officer held him firmly.

"None of that now, Jimmy. I've got you for fair this time, and you needn't put up any fight. Just come along peaceable."

"What do you mean by this insult, officer? Take your hand off my arm or I'll make you?" threatened Austin, angered by the man's insolent manner.

"Now, none of that. You know well enough what you done. You've led me a pretty chase and I guess you was thinking that I had been left behind when you popped into that carriage in front of the club, didn't you, Jimmy?"

"I don't know why you presume to call me, 'Jimmy.' For whom do you take me, my man?" inquired Austin coolly.

"Aw, what are you givin' me? Don't you guess I know Slick Jimmy Winston by now? You've give me enough trouble for me to know you anywhere," returned the man with conviction.

"Nevertheless you are mistaken," returned the other, gaining assurance by the officer's words. "Does this look like your friend Slick Jimmy?" turning so that the light fell full on his face, and lifting his hat at the same time.

The officer loosened his grip and fell back with an exclamation of surprise.

"I beg pardon, sir; I thought you were another man. You do look a

bit like him, but I see I'm mistaken;" then, after a hesitating pause, during which Austin turned to continue up the steps, the man stepped forward again and caught Evan's arm anew.

"But I've got to run you in just the same, sir. You're the man I have been following from Twenty-Sixth Street."

"What nonsense is this? What have I done? Show me your warrant and let us have done with this foolish business. Don't you see that you are annoying and frightening my wife, officer?"

The policeman turned toward the woman, who during their colloquy had remained in one position, her white face and tightly clenched hands evidencing her extreme nervousness.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; is this your husband?" he asked respectfully.

It was on her lips to deny him, to cry out in repudiation, but she caught his compelling gaze, which seemed to plead boyishly and command with some strange force which she could not define, and before which she was powerless. Scarcely knowing what she did, she bowed her head in assent and uttered an almost inaudible "yes."

"Well, I thought sure you was the man I had been tracking from Twenty-Sixth Street, but in one of them times that I lost sight of him I must have picked you up by mistake. He stole a valuable scarf-pin from a man he was walkin' with, in the coolest fashion you ever see. He's a sharp gazabo, all right, all right. I beg you and your lady's pardon, sir, for holdin' you up like this, but a man will make mistakes sometimes."

The officer ended in a crestfallen tone, in strong contrast with that in which he had begun his attempt at arrest.

"That's all right, officer; say no more about it," returned Evan in an offhand manner not at all in keeping with the wild sense of relief that was sending the blood dancing through his veins.

Following his companion up the steps as the crestfallen policeman departed, he asked in a low tone for her latch-key, which she produced after some fumbling and handed to him.

When the door swung open he followed her into the lighted hall, and from it into a long, old-fashioned drawing-

room whose sober elegance and beautiful antique furniture bespoke people of taste, refinement, and ancestry.

Beyond the most casual glance the surroundings were completely lost on Austin, who had his eyes fixed on the patrician, white-faced woman before him.

"Thank you for your goodness to me," he said. "You hardly realize from what you have saved me. In a moment, when the policeman has gone, I shall relieve you of my presence, which I have so unpardonably thrust upon you for the last half-hour."

She refused to notice the hand frankly outstretched toward her. "How dared you say what you did? Claim me for your wife and make me admit the claim?" she questioned indignantly.

Austin looked at her a moment as if he were groping for an answer, then gave utterance to a sentence which was as great a surprise to him as to her.

"I think it was a prophecy," he said, holding her under the spell of his eyes.

She made a little gesture as if to ward away something abhorrent.

"Was it—was it true—what the officer said?"

For answer he opened his hand, and there sparkling on its palm lay the scarf-pin which he had gripped tightly in his closed fist ever since the moment when he had snatched it from Van Amringe's cravat.

The look of horror on her face as she retreated before the sight cut him sharply.

"Oh," she gasped, "how you have abused my confidence! You said that you had done nothing to be ashamed of. Are you so hardened that you feel no shame for that?"

"Listen to me, let me explain," he cried, trying to catch her hand, but she buried her face against both of them, begging: "No, no, *go*; it is the only thing you can do. *Go!*"

And he went, in spite of his desire to stay, his wish to clear himself in her eyes. Her disgust and fear were so real that they daunted him for a moment, and it was not until he had yielded and was outside that he recognized how foolish he had been not to stick it out and insist upon her hearing him.

He had scarcely gone half a square from the house before he heard the rattle of a hansom and saw the vehicle pull up before the very door which he had just closed after his ignominious retreat. He saw a man alight, run swiftly up the steps and let himself in with a latch-key.

Struck by an appalling thought, he paused in the middle of the sidewalk and stood staring back at the house whence he had come. She was married, and this must be "John," her husband, the man for whom she had waited before the club.

CHAPTER III.

THE AFTERMATH OF A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

FOR some time after the front door closed behind Austin, Constance Cadwallader stood in the center of the drawing-room, gazing straight in front of her, possessed by the humiliating sense of having come directly in contact with a low crime; nay more, of having been a party to it, since she had aided the criminal to escape.

Now that the incident was closed she rehearsed it again and again, trying to understand the motive which had caused her to act in a fashion so utterly foreign both to her nature and training. It was not until she heard the stopping of a cab before the door, followed by familiar footfalls on the stone steps without, that she roused herself sufficiently to run swiftly up-stairs, enter her room and close the door softly.

Then she heard the rattle of the latch-key in the front door and the sound of her cousin's step in the hall below. How was she to meet him? What explanation could she offer for having allowed the coachman to drive off and leave him in that uncereemonious fashion?

She could not tell him the truth—own that she had driven home with a strange man, whom she had actually admitted to the house to save from the police.

She covered her face again as the humiliating circumstances marshaled themselves once more. What demon could have possessed her to act as she had?

She was still groping for an excuse,

her heart thudding with consternation, when she heard her cousin ascend the stairs and pause before her door.

"Constance," he called in a low tone.

"Yes," she answered, trying to steady her voice.

"Oh, you are safe at home; I am so relieved. I couldn't understand what had happened when I saw the carriage gone. Were you ill, dear? Is anything wrong?" he questioned anxiously.

"I'm feeling better than I was." She grasped at his suggestion, not actually lying, yet leaving him to infer what was untrue. "I hope you will forgive my unceremonious manner of leaving you, John."

"Yes, yes, of course; but don't you want a doctor? Can't I do anything for you?" He was still solicitous.

"No, indeed. I am quite all right now and am going to bed at once. Good night."

"Good night; but I feel as if something ought to be done." He accepted her assurance with reluctance.

"Nonsense, don't worry, John; I'm quite myself now and there is nothing to be done. Good night."

The last words were uttered in so firm a tone that they left John Penniman nothing to do except turn toward his own room. He did so, feeling that he would have been better satisfied if Constance had opened the door and given him the assurance of sight as well as her word.

He was glad that she was not offended with him, for he was guiltily aware that he had allowed himself to be detained longer at the club than the glib five minutes which he had begged of her, and knowing her hatred of waiting, his first fear had been that she was annoyed with him.

As soon as Constance heard her cousin's door close she began hastily to prepare for the night. In a very few minutes she was safely in bed with the light out, but she found that sleep, ready enough to come to her usually, refused to be wooed to-night.

Her brain was in a whirl. The events of the evening ground themselves over and over through her mind like a series of biographic pictures, and Austin's face kept rising before her, distinct,

clear, his compelling gaze fixed upon her.

Each time that she met in fancy his steadfast blue eyes, a thrill shot through her, followed by a shiver of disgust, as she whispered to herself: "A thief, a common sneak-thief."

Yet everything about him, his look, his manner, seemed to deny such a conclusion, and she realized that had it not been for his own admission she would have found such a belief impossible.

Her cheeks burned like flame when she remembered that this man had claimed her, Constance Cadwallader, as his wife, and that she had acknowledged his claim. Even in the darkness she hid her face.

Toward morning she fell at last into a deep sleep, comforting herself with the thought that New York was a very large city, and that she was never likely to lay eyes on him again.

Probably at no period of her life would she have been so open to the impulse which had swept her into such a series of unconventional acts as on this particular evening.

For months past she had been increasingly conscious that she was a very discontented, unsatisfied woman. Not that she gave way to this either in speech or action—she would have considered this ill-bred—but deep in her heart the feeling grew and waxed strong until life was fast becoming an unendurable bore.

There was nothing in it except the same unimpeachable set of people, the same conventional pleasures, the same well-bred emotions. She felt at times as if she were ceasing to be an individual, and becoming a mere replica of one of those marvelously self-contained wax ladies on which dressmakers display their wares.

She could not truthfully say that her pulse had ever stirred a beat quicker for any man. She had had plenty of offers of the well-bred, self-controlled order, from which all emotion seemed to have been carefully eliminated, and not one of them had excited a ray of interest in her.

She scarcely realized that there was a certain high dignity and coldness in herself which caused even impetuous men to woo her with distant dignity, as if she

were some far-away goddess, too fine for earth. She was in fact warm-hearted and impulsive under all her conventions, and she longed to have some one breezily take possession of her, force her to fling aside her cool calculations and be willing for love's sake to risk all that love demanded.

Of all the lovers who had ventured into her life her cousin, John Penniman, was the most doggedly persistent. There were times, in spite of her determined and reiterated refusals, that the calm perseverance of the man, and the quiet assumption on the part of her aunt that it was to be, filled her with panic.

She feared that this constant pressure would conquer in time, and she would meekly end her days as Mrs. John Watts Penniman.

On this particular evening she had been with her cousin to the wedding of Mary Harriman, a friend, who had fallen wildly—and her relatives said foolishly—in love with a young army officer who had nothing beyond his pay and the near prospect of being ordered to the Philippines. Despite her father's disapproval, and the assurance that if she disappointed him she must expect nothing from him, Mary had persisted in her choice.

Constance had caught a look which passed between the young bride and groom that night, and it had opened up to her a world of which she was heretofore but dimly aware. It was this that had set her heart aching with a great new loneliness as she leaned back in the corner of the carriage while it waited before the club door; it was this that had caused a few foolish tears to escape and trickle down her cheek. It was the longing not merely to be loved, but the fear that she was never to know this ennobling sentiment; in fact, a doubt as to her capacity either to inspire or feel it.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEARSOME DISCOVERY.

WHEN Constance Cadwallader woke from the troubled sleep the next morning it was to face the events of the night before with an added sense of humiliation and discomfort. During her short

period of unconsciousness she had dreamed so vividly that it was only by a distinct mental effort that she was able to separate dreams from realities.

During sleep she had seen herself arrayed as a bride, the filmy veil already fastened to her hair. She was strangely happy as she waited. Then out of the vague surroundings of her dreams the man of the night before approached her, holding in his extended hand a scarf-pin—the scarf-pin. He was smiling at her with a look of tender assurance.

She took the pin from him and fastened it in his scarf, then he had caught her in his arms and kissed her, and she had given him kiss for kiss.

But when morning broke, and she passed from vision to reality, she left behind that sweet content which had possessed her in her sleep.

She recalled the events of the night before with disgusted shudders which the vividness of her dream only augmented. Those kisses—they were so real—so real—that the recollection of them made her cheeks burn.

Realizing the futility of lying there thinking over mistakes that were beyond recall, Constance threw aside the covers and stepped out of bed.

When she descended to breakfast nearly an hour later she found her aunt already seated at the table, her large, placid personality seeming to fill the room with that atmosphere of self-satisfaction which stifled Constance at times, making her long to throw up a mental window somewhere and let in a breath of the stinging cold air of reality.

Since the death of her father, being at the time a girl of fifteen, Constance had lived with her aunt, Mrs. John James Penniman, and there had scarcely been a day during that period in which she had not felt toward that good lady an undefined antagonism, for which she took herself to task, but which she was unable to conquer. Her aunt always reminded her of a large, well-fed pussy cat that purred loudly on being stroked, and, since Mrs. Penniman was rich, negative, and too stupid to hold many opinions, the world invariably stroked her.

Her loudly optimistic purr was admired and counted to her for righteous-

ness, yet it was nothing more than a selfish satisfaction in her own well-being and a determined ignoring that there were others not so well circumstanced as she was. For years she had felt no keener emotion than irritation at the failure of her dressmaker, or annoyance at the stupidity of her cook, and had any stronger feeling forced itself upon her she would have resented it vigorously, regarding it as a vulgar intrusion on her privacy.

Into this atmosphere Constance had come, a vivid, impulsive, affectionate creature. Little by little she had felt herself being crushed into her aunt's small molds, pared, and trimmed, and fitted, until she grew to doubt if there was anything left alive of the bright, generous girl that she once had been.

There were times when, in a fit of rebellion, she would vow to rise against this unconscious tyranny and assert herself, but when she tried to put finger on some specific cause of complaint, there was none. She was only being wrapped about, fold on fold, by an impalpable gossamer something, until the wholesome life was being choked from her.

How she longed to break away from it all, to go out into freer conditions even if they meant poverty and hardship!

As Constance slipped into her seat at the breakfast-table, Mrs. Penniman laid down the morning paper and her lorgnette.

"I have just been reading the account of Mary Harriman's wedding, Constance. It was evidently a very pretty affair—very pretty. But what a pity for a clever, attractive girl like that to so throw herself away!" commented Mrs. Penniman in her fat, satisfied voice.

Constance assented absently and began eating the grapefruit which the butler had just placed before her.

"Didn't I hear John come in last night after you did, dear? I thought I heard the front door close twice; no, three times."

Constance was caught in a sudden panic at the simple query. She did not wish to lie, and to her aunt of all people it was impossible to tell the truth in regard to last night's adventure.

For an instant she pictured herself giving way to a foolish impulse to pour out the whole tale, and the look of horror and consternation which her imagination painted on those fat, complacent features almost brought a smile to her lips. Fortunately she was saved the necessity of an answer to her aunt's question by the arrival of her cousin, who entered the breakfast-room with an expression of concern on his commonplace face.

After a perfunctory greeting to his mother, he turned to his cousin with a relieved air.

"I'm glad to see that you are all right this morning, Con. I have been worried about you ever since you ran off and left me last night."

"Was Constance ill last evening?" inquired Mrs. Penniman with curiosity, but no concern.

"Yes," drawled her son, who affected the deliberate both in motion and speech. "I left her in the carriage before the club—I was obliged to stop a few minutes to see Saylow, who is going out of town this morning. While I was there she was taken a bit ill and made Henry bring her home."

Constance kept her eyes on her plate, thankful enough to have her cousin do the explaining and lying for her, but she was obliged to assure both of her relatives that she was quite well this morning, that there had really been nothing worth considering the matter, before the subject could be disposed of.

It was scarcely put out of the way before another as disturbing to the girl took its place.

"By the way"—John Penniman laid down the spoon with which he was about to attack his grapefruit—"I met Maggie in the hall as I came down and she tells me that this morning she found one of the front drawing-room windows open. She says nothing seems to have been disturbed, nor does she miss anything, yet it looks as if some one had entered the house, for she is sure that she examined that window after Horton locked up for the night, and that it was securely fastened. Have you missed anything—any silver or valuables—from this part of the house, Horton?" addressing the butler.

At this instant Constance's nerveless fingers let fall her spoon, which dropped to the floor beside the table. A sudden recollection startled her.

When she left her room that morning she had discovered that her door was not latched. She generally locked it, but fancied that in her worry of the night before she had overlooked the usual precautions, yet she was positive that she must have closed it tightly.

Horton stooped deliberately to pick up her spoon, and as deliberately brought her another before answering the question addressed to him.

"Nothing was disturbed here, sir. You know the silver and valuables are placed in the safe in Mrs. Penniman's room at night." His voice had its usual subdued, respectful sound.

"Yes, and it is a most foolish arrangement," protested Mrs. Penniman. "Some day I shall wake up to find myself murdered and the silver gone."

Constance laughed foolishly.

"If you don't discover it before then it won't be very painful, Aunt Mary."

"Constance, you are so unfeeling. Now, I can never hear of a possible calamity to another without——" but here her son, who seldom gave much heed to her aimless talk, interrupted her.

"Was anything disturbed in your room, Constance?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, everything was as usual as far as I could see," she replied, on tenter-hooks in her desire to be up-stairs and examine her jewel-box.

As soon as breakfast was over she flew to her room, closing the door carefully behind her as she entered. She seemed to know what she was to see before she lifted the lid of her jewel-casket, which she was in the habit of leaving very carelessly on her dressing-table, its frail lock being the only protection for the valuables within.

As she gazed into its satin-lined depths, empty save for a few valueless trinkets, her heart stood still. A diamond pin, several very handsome rings, and her mother's diamond and pearl collar, which she seldom wore, and generally kept in the safe in her aunt's room, all were gone.

The slight lock of the box had been easily broken by a penknife.

She walked to her desk and pulled out one of the drawers, where yesterday she had placed two hundred dollars in cash which she had just drawn from the bank, intending to give one hundred anonymously to the children's home in which she was interested, and use the other for some trifles for herself. The drawer was empty.

Before her vision rose the face of her companion of the night before. This was his work then; a sneak-thief, a burglar, a pickpocket probably.

If she gave the alarm; set the police on his track, they might find and arrest him. He would be recognized as the man whom she had helped to evade the law—had acknowledged as her husband.

The whole miserable story would be flaunted forth in the sensational papers; she could see the flaring head-lines that they would give it. She would be forever disgraced.

She dropped into the chair before her desk, let her head fall on her bent arm, and burst into a storm of helpless tears.

CHAPTER V.

FACE TO FACE AGAIN.

"WELL, I suppose I must acknowledge myself beaten; you won fairly, Evan. But don't be so mysterious about the matter; tell me how you accomplished it."

There was nothing that suggested triumph in Austin's bearing. Any one looking at him as he stood aimlessly beside the table, turning over the books and papers that littered it, would have said that there was something of an unpleasant nature on his mind.

It was the morning after their foolish bet, and the two men were lounging in the comfortable Van Amringe library, after having dawdled over a late breakfast. Austin seemed little inclined to boast of his success, and Anthony, scenting adventure of an interesting nature, was determined to hear the story.

Austin sank into an easy-chair with the air of one who resigns himself to the inevitable. "I might as well confess, Tony," he replied, "that in spite of my success I really demonstrated your theory far better than my own. I did

indeed, to a great extent, act as you predicted that I would. When I realized that a policeman was on my track I lost my head completely, and it was entirely due to a set of fortuitous circumstances that I did not spend that twenty-four hours in jail."

Then, omitting no detail, he gave his friend a full account of his adventure.

"By Jove, Evan, you *were* clever. In spite of what you say, I think you have proved your own theory, not mine. But you certainly had your nerve with you, to open your hand and show that woman the pin which she thought you had stolen. Why didn't you bow yourself out with thanks and leave her to guess a bit about the dark secrets of your past life. That is what I should have done."

Evan had risen and was wandering restlessly from place to place, picking up and putting down objects in an aimless fashion.

"That is what I should have done, Tony, but I thought she would let me explain. Instead, she was so horrified that she would not hear me. I wish to heaven now that I had kept my own counsel," he concluded soberly.

"Well, I can't see any reason for taking it so seriously; you'll probably never see the lady again," comfortingly said Tony.

Austin wheeled with disconcerting suddenness.

"Yes I shall," he announced determinedly.

"What do you mean?" asked the other, moved to the question more by the look in his friend's face than by his words.

"Some day I am going to marry that woman, Tony. I feel perfectly sure of it. As we faced each other and I looked into her eyes I seemed to have known her forever, to have waited all my life for that moment. It wasn't that she was different or so much more beautiful than other women—though she is—it was that she was mine, my very own. Everything in me rose up to claim her."

"Well, if you don't put *Romeo* to blush for a slow thing, I'm a fool. He at least knew the lady by sight and reputation, I think, before he tossed his heart into her lap on a first meeting; but you—why, you don't even know whether

she is married or single. For my part, I think she is married, and that man who drove up later and used a latch-key is her husband. That seems as plain as can be.

"And don't you remember that she didn't take the trouble to open her eyes when you stumbled into the carriage? That's the way a woman treats her husband, and he is the only man she does treat so," concluded Van Amringe cynically.

Austin put down the frail trifle which he held in his hand with such force that only a miracle saved it from being shattered to fragments.

"Look here, Evan, in your agitation you needn't smash the mantel ornaments. Mother has a weakness for keeping them whole," gibed his friend.

"I don't believe she is married." Austin's voice had a dogged sound as if he strove to convince himself.

"I take it the pronoun refers to the lady of last night and not to mother," suggested Tony, but as Austin refused to notice his remark he took another tack. "I say, old boy, if this little affair had happened a few years ago you'd have found yourself married now, provided, of course, the lady hasn't a husband already, as she probably has. As it is, it doesn't take much to make this contract a binding one, I believe—some registration or something of that sort."

"Do you know what you are talking about, Tony? Because I don't. If you allow yourself to fall unchecked into these frequent maunderings you will end in an asylum for the feeble-minded."

"Upon my soul, Evan, I'm not maundering, though I admit that it sounds like it. What I say is true. Don't you know that until within a few years the Scotch marriage held in this State? That two people had merely to acknowledge themselves man and wife before witnesses to constitute a perfectly legal union."

Evan uttered an exclamation of surprise. There was a pause in which he seemed to be thinking deeply, then his lips curved in a whimsical smile and his eyes filled with a look of quiet satisfaction.

"So I am a married man, am I?"

He questioned space rather than his friend.

"Well, you would be pretty near that if she were not, fortunately, already married," returned Tony as one who offers consolation.

Evan administered a vicious kick to a small hassock at his feet, sending it bounding across the room.

"Why in the devil do you keep harping on that string, Tony? I tell you she isn't married—she couldn't be," he exclaimed irritably. "You—why are you trying to make my wife a bigamist. It's monstrous."

"Well, if you aren't the limit, my boy, I'll give it up. I half believe you are in earnest, that you are in love with this unknown." Tony's manner was genuinely puzzled.

Austin greeted his remark with a boyish laugh, then with an effort to make his answer light, he agreed.

"I believe I am," he said.

After a moment's pause, in which Tony eyed him wonderingly with a slightly contemptuous expression, such as the unromantic frequently permit themselves toward the sentimental follies of others, Austin lifted his head suddenly and gave utterance to the question which he had been turning over in his mind during that silence.

"Tony, I wonder if a woman could love a man enough to take him, believing him to be what that girl thinks me?"

"The Lord knows. She might if she thought she could reform him. Women are so dead keen on reforming men that I sometimes think they had rather catch them bad and make them over to suit their own ideas than have them good to begin with. Feel the creator's joy in the work of his own hands, I guess," he concluded cynically.

"That's very true, so far as wine, women, and horses are concerned, but this is a very different matter. A thief!"

"Well, I should say so! No, I don't see how she could forgive it, unless she happened to be one of the same stamp."

Austin made a gesture as if the mere association of such a thought with the person in mind hurt him.

"And yet, do you know, I wish she could. If a woman could overcome such a bar as that I'd feel pretty sure that

she loved me, and not any of the externals that surround me," he said soberly.

"I never knew before that you were such a romantic chap, Evan."

"I don't believe I knew it myself," returned the other slowly.

Tony took out his watch, looked at the time and closed the case with a businesslike snap.

"Well, I've given all the time I can to this lover's confessional. I have an appointment at twelve. Now, Austin, if you won't go with me, for the love of heaven don't go hunting up that fair unknown, and getting yourself mixed up in trouble. Remember the husband and have a care."

But this time Austin refused to charge at the red flag so obviously flaunted for his angering.

"I say, Tony, do you value that scarf-pin of yours particularly? If not, I'll keep it and you can drop in at Tiffany's and select one twice its value and beauty, for which I'll gladly put up. I have a fancy to wear this one of yours at my wedding. Is it a go?"

"Yes, keep it by all means. I can't remember where it came from—birthday or Christmas, or some anniversary from one of my large collection of doting maiden aunts. Can't remember which or when."

"Thanks awfully, old man, for I really want it," exclaimed Austin gratefully, as his friend with another laughing admonition, and the expressed fear that from the present outlook he would soon need a guardian, departed, leaving him to settle in a deep armchair with a cigar and a book.

He had been sitting quietly for ten minutes with the book open, yet making no attempt to read, when he heard a feminine voice in the hallway—a familiar voice at that.

"Tell Mrs. Van Amringe not to hurry; that I'll wait for her in the library."

Springing to his feet, he turned to face the lady of his thoughts, who no sooner saw him than, with a gasp of dismay—grasping the back of a near-by chair for support—she stammered: "You—you——"

Austin's face lighted with a sudden

brightness which gave it additional charm. He was about to go toward her, to beg her to listen to his explanation cut short the night before, when he noticed her backing toward the bell, her hand outstretched to touch it.

"Wait, wait, what are you going to do? Oh, please listen to me first," he cried, and his perturbation might easily have been that of a guilty man about to be apprehended and begging for a last chance.

Before his words were fairly uttered her hand dropped nervelessly.

"Oh," she exclaimed piteously, burying her face in her hands as if to shut away the sight of him and the humiliation which he represented, "I was going to ring—to warn them—Mrs. Van Amringe—to have you arrested, but how can I without explaining—telling about last night, and I *cannot* do that."

Evan advanced toward her.

"What need is there for that? Tony Van Amringe is my friend; he—they do not know of my——" he hesitated.

"Crimes," she supplied the word with the righteously indignant tone of one who will not gloss over an ugly fact.

"As you wish," he acquiesced with a bow; "but why drag them into this unhappy business?"

"Why, why? I should think that even *you* could see that. These people are my friends. Am I to leave them in ignorance of your true character—leave them to be victimized as I was?" she questioned indignantly.

"You are a bit hard, don't you think?" he objected ruefully. "I know things look black for me, but if you would listen to my explanation."

"What explanation could there be for such acts as yours?" Her tone seemed to place him beyond the very pale of hope.

"Well, at least, whether you think it or not, there is such a thing as honor among thieves. Tony was my college chum, is my friend, and when I leave here I assure you the plate and valuables will remain intact."

Austin spoke warmly, stung in spite of himself by her measureless contempt.

"So you were born a gentleman, then?"

"I was."

"Possibly even well-to-do?"

"My father was counted a rich man."

"I see, and when he failed, perhaps died, you took to this, became a sort of social highwayman, because it was easier than honest work?"

Austin felt her tone like so many lashes on his bare flesh.

"It isn't so simple for a man brought up as I was to earn a decent living," he protested, beginning to feel his part and throw himself into it warmly.

"And because you couldn't earn a decent living, which means, I suppose, enough to enable you to hold the outward position which had always been yours, you took to this—this dastardly occupation? How much better to have been a common day-laborer, working with pick and shovel; to have had a pittance, but honestly earned."

"I did try that—I assure you I did." If his eyes had not been fixed on the pattern of the carpet she must have seen the gleam of amusement which he could not keep out of them.

"And because it was hard, and dirty, and disagreeable, you gave it up, I suppose?" This with cutting contempt.

"No, not exactly, only it didn't seem necessary, so I—so I dropped it," he ended lamely.

"I understand." Again her tone seemed to put him far off beyond the reach of the decent and the good.

He plucked up spirit to attempt a defense of himself.

"They say even the devil isn't as black as he is painted, so please at least believe that my friends are safe from my depredations, and don't, I beg you, expose me to them."

"Expose you!" she cried, almost wringing her hands. "Don't you realize that that is my bitter humiliation, that I cannot expose you, after having connived at your crime, acknowledged you as—as——" She blushed and paled, unable to proceed.

"Your husband!" He supplied the word, a triumphant ring in his voice, which she recognized and resented in a hot burst of silent anger.

She flashed her eyes over him as if she could do murder, yet as she let them fall again she thrilled with a feeling which was not indignation.

She had met full his tender and triumphant gaze, the very expression which his dream eyes had held the night before, as her dream self had fastened the scarf-pin in his tie. The feeling was but momentary, then her anger reasserted itself.

"I cannot even make a move to recover the property which you have stolen from me without laying myself open to—without the fear of last night's—without the fear of its being known." It was almost a wail with which she finished.

"The property which I have stolen from you?" His amazement seemed perfectly genuine, even to her, but she regarded him as past master in the arts of deception and gave no weight to such seeming.

"Yes, it is useless to deny that you entered our house last night and stole a number of valuable rings, a pearl and diamond collar, and two hundred dollars in money."

Austin dropped into a chair in a sort of limp collapse. He was so taken aback that for a moment he hadn't a word to say.

"Did that really happen?" he demanded incredulously.

"You know that it did."

"Well, if you say that it is useless for me to deny having done it, I suppose I might as well not try to do so, but all the same, when the police get to the bottom of the affair, you will see that I am not the guilty party."

"The police will have nothing to do with the matter," she objected coldly. "Do you think that I would risk having the theft traced back to you, have you arrested and the events of last night made public? I'd sacrifice every valuable that I possess first." The pride of her as she said this! Austin thought he had never seen her look more beautiful.

"But, now that I have met you, listen to me—grant me this: I have money. I will sell some of my securities and give you the cash for these articles. You would rather have that than the pearl collar—it was my dead mother's," her voice faltered.

"My God!" cried Austin going toward her; "you can't believe this thing of me. It is all a foolish, hideous mistake. A man may be a bad lot, yet not bad enough for this. It is a far cry

from the scarf-pin to the thing you accuse me of. I never in my life entered a house with felonious intent, believe this of me at least."

He was pleading now in real earnest, and as she looked at him she could not withhold a wish that he was as good and honest as he appeared.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you look honest. I wish I could believe you. But last night—in the carriage you assured me that you had done nothing criminal, only foolish, and afterward—" she broke off helplessly.

"I know, I know; I was a fool and worse. But you must believe me this time. You say that the police will have nothing to do with the case. Do you mean that they have not been notified?"

"Of course not; I have not told any one of my loss, and I shall not. You are safe enough, never fear."

"But you must, you must. You must go at once to the police station. I will go with you, and we will put a good detective at work on the case as well. If I were guilty, would I insist upon this? Be reasonable, believe me. Come, we will go at once."

He urged his plea in breathless eagerness.

She shrank back.

"No, no, I cannot. If what you say is true, if I may really believe you, I will speak to my cousin; he will take me. I could not go now under any circumstance, for I have an appointment with Mrs. Van Amringe."

"I understand, I beg your pardon," he said slowly. "You don't wish to be seen with me."

She flushed guiltily at his quick interpretation of her thought.

"So be it, I cannot blame you, but promise me this much, that you will put the matter in the hands of the police at once."

"I promise," she said, and again she seemed to be weighing him on her mental scales.

"One thing more." He came close to her now, his eyes searching her face eagerly. "Are you married? Was it your husband that I saw returning to the house shortly after I left last night?"

"No; it was my cousin."

"Thank God!" he cried fervently,

and catching her hand, before she was aware of his intent, he placed three or four quick kisses on her white wrist.

"I shall see you again before long," he cried, and dropping her hand he was at the lower library door as Constance heard Mrs. Van Amringe's step in the hallway.

CHAPTER VI.

ON SHIFTING SANDS.

ON entering the library, Mrs. Van Amringe gave a startled look of inquiry at her guest, who stood in the middle of the room, her usually placid brow ruffled by a frown, her cheeks blazing with angry color.

Her sleeve was pushed back and she was rubbing her wrist with her handkerchief. Indeed, scrubbing would be the term that more nearly described her action.

"Constance, my dear, has anything happened? You look annoyed, ill. Can I do anything for you?" With fussy kindness Mrs. Van Amringe took possession of her caller.

Constance laughed awkwardly, touching her hot cheeks with her gloved hand.

"No, no, dear Mrs. Van Amringe, nothing is wrong with me, only the day is so warm."

"Warm! My dear, you must be ill, feverish. Hawkins told me at breakfast that the thermometer registered zero this morning at half past seven. It can't have come up very much by now."

"How stupid of me, I didn't mean to say the day was warm; I meant the room."

But even here Mrs. Van Amringe was determined to be exact. Setting her gold-rimmed glasses carefully on her nose, she consulted the thermometer.

"Sixty-five degrees, dear, that is not warm. I fear you must be feverish; do let me get you something. I have some little pills——" she was beginning, when Constance, who had dropped into a chair with a helpless sigh of exasperation as the elder woman turned to the thermometer, now cut short her offers.

"No, no, indeed. I am quite well, I assure you. Possibly I am a little excited and hurried this morning because I have so many things to attend to."

"Dear, dear, and I have kept you waiting so long. You must pardon me, my child. You see, this is the morning the woman comes to manicure my nails, and another to massage my scalp and attend to my hair, and I really never seem to get through dressing until luncheon. In my young days we never had to take all this time to be massaged and hair-dressed and manicured, and upon my soul I think we had much better hair than girls have now, and we never thought that there was anything wanting as to our nails. I always used to cut mine and no one considered me *outré*; but, I declare, these manicure women make one feel that such an act is mildly criminal. I feel that it becomes more and more necessary to blush for my past self, and hide my unforgotten misdeeds of the toilet."

Mrs. Van Amringe finished her plaint with such a serious face that Constance threw back her head and laughed heartily, and in so doing forgot her anger and annoyance for a minute.

"There, you laugh, but it is no laughing matter; the infinite number of things that a modern woman is expected to do, and all in the same short twenty-four hours that served her great-grandmother for a day. And here I am wasting your precious time when you have just told me that you are in a hurry. By the way," here a new thought caught her and her guest's haste was as completely forgotten as if it had never been mentioned. "I thought Tony was down here. Didn't I hear you talking to some one as I came down the stairs?"

"I found a young man here, a friend of Tony's, I think. He left as you came in." Constance's color deepened in spite of her effort to seem perfectly indifferent.

"Yes, that was Evan Austin, Tony's old college friend. Fine fellow, handsome eyes, charming manners. Such a fine character, too, so upright and all that," the good lady concluded with vague enthusiasm.

Constance gave a little unnoticed shudder.

"Who is this young man, Mrs. Van Amringe? I don't recollect to have heard Tony speak of him," she asked, for she found herself most curious to know something of the man's past.

"No, possibly not, for they haven't seen each other for about eight years. Evan's father was a Western man, lived in Omaha or Denver, or some of those Western places, I can never remember which. Just about the time the boy finished college his father, who was enormously wealthy, lost everything he had on a bad speculation or something, I don't know just what; I never can remember details. So Evan has had rather a hard time until lately. Now he seems very comfortable again and has plenty of money."

"From what does he derive his income? What business is he in?" Constance asked, wondering how he accounted for his newly returned prosperity to these unsuspecting friends.

"Oh, mines, or something of the sort—out West."

Yes, he had been clever enough to take some vague thing like that which would pass without question.

"Do you know, Constance, I have thought several times lately of this young man in connection with you; he would be just the husband for you—" the good lady was maundering on when the girl, with flushing cheek and angry eyes, interrupted:

"Mrs. Van Amringe, I beg of you—I marry a man of that sort? Impossible!"

"My dear, why do you speak of him in that tone? Actually one of disgust. I have never known a more charming fellow," protested the older woman, warmly indignant.

"Yes, I have no doubt—I had no right to speak so—I do not know him—but his appearance annoyed me." Poor Constance floundered hopelessly in her attempt to explain her vehemence.

"Well, well, that is so like a girl. To take a foolish, unreasoning dislike to the very man made for her by heaven," exclaimed Mrs. Van Amringe sadly.

Such a sense of exasperation flooded Constance's being for a second that she was obliged to make a mighty effort at self-control. Was this man to persecute her at every turn? To be thrust upon her at every instant?

It was horrible, monstrous, humiliating, and she would not bear it.

"Pardon me, dear Mrs. Van Am-

ringe, if I can't discuss matrimonial possibilities with you this morning, but I really am in such haste—" She made but a poor effort at the attempted smile, but fortunately her hostess was not hypocritical.

She patted the girl's hand repeatedly, blaming herself for her thoughtlessness, and murmuring apologies until Constance's impatience became almost unendurable.

"Let me see, I was to give you the money for poor Mrs. Mulcahey's husband this morning, wasn't I? Yes, yes, such a worthy case, dear, and you do so much good among these poor people. There aren't many girls like you, Constance. Now, where did I put my pocketbook? I am continually leaving it about somewhere. I sometimes believe the thing actually hides from me.

"Now I was perfectly certain I left it here on top of my desk not an hour ago. Very careless of me, too, for I had quite a large sum of money in it, and one ought not to put temptation in the way of servants. Dear, dear, where can it have gone?"

During all this time the old lady fussed from place to place, peering with her short-sighted eyes, stopping every few seconds to adjust her glasses, which had a habit of dropping off her nose, while Constance sat cold with fear, a horrid suspicion tugging at her heart.

He had been alone in the room when she entered. In spite of his appearance to her that there was honor even among thieves, and that he would leave the plate and valuables of the Van Amringe household untouched, had he taken the pocketbook?

It must have been a keen temptation. If he had, what was she to do?

• Could she leave them in ignorance of the true character of their guest? Was it honorable of her? Did not her knowledge and her silence make her a party to his wrong-doing?

Yes, how could she tell, how confess the humiliating truth of the evening before?

"Ah, here it is at last, and just where I put it. How stupid and forgetful I am growing. Age—age, my child. It is very hard to bear," murmured the good lady sorrowfully.

The revulsion of feeling which Constance experienced almost sickened her. She felt like a reprieved criminal, and under her selfish relief was a tiny throb of satisfaction that she need believe no worse of this man than she already did.

This last, however, was such a subconscious thought that she did not recognize it as playing any part in her feeling.

As soon as she could free herself from the garrulity of her hostess she left the Van Amringe house and went directly to her cousin's office.

"Constance, is anything wrong? It is very unusual to see you here," exclaimed John, stirred for an instant out of his stolidity at sight of his cousin's perturbed face.

"Yes, there is very much wrong, John. You remember speaking of the open window this morning and asking Aunt Mary and me if we had missed anything? When I reached my room I found that all my rings, some ornaments, and my pearl and diamond collar which I wore last night had been taken from my jewel-box, besides two hundred dollars, which I drew from the bank yesterday."

"Impossible, Constance! Why didn't you tell me at once, before I left the house?"

"I didn't discover it until after you had gone." Fortunately this was true.

"But since that time, where have you been? It is twelve o'clock now. You should have telephoned me at once; there shouldn't have been a minute wasted. Every instant counts in a case like this," he protested vehemently.

"If that is so, don't waste any more time scolding me, John, but get the matter in the hands of the police at once," retorted Constance severely, and so used was her long-suffering cousin to being bullied by her that he turned to the business in hand, feeling, in some vague way, as if he were to blame for the delay.

After Constance had given him a description of the lost articles and all the information which she had to offer, which was little enough beyond the mere fact of the loss, her cousin put her in a carriage and she drove home to a late luncheon, feeling tired and very cross.

She had scarcely settled herself before

a bright, open fire in her sitting-room when the parlor-maid entered, bringing a box. A glance proclaimed it from a florist-shop, and Constance guessed its sender before it was placed in her hands.

She waited until the maid left the room before untying the string, then she lifted out a great bunch of roses. Underneath, damp with the contact of the moist flowers, lay an envelope.

Constance eyed it as if it were a coiled serpent. It bore her name, written in a bold and rather fine hand. For an instant she thought to toss the flowers and note into the flames and try to forget both, but curiosity whispered that they might have come from some other source—and she laid the roses in her lap, and tore open the envelope.

The enclosure had no address and no signature.

"You are good to the poor and the miserable; cannot your gentle charity extend even to such a sinner as I? At least, until it is proved, believe that I am not quite as bad as you thought me."

CHAPTER VII.

THE EXPLOSION OF A BOMB.

THE two weeks which followed the burglary of the house in Fifty-Sixth Street were anything but agreeable for its inmates. As soon as the police were made aware of the theft they began to appear about the place at all hours, asking endless questions both of the up-stairs and under-stairs dwellers.

They insisted, moreover, on searching the belongings of every servant in the house, which caused much sniffing and injured innocence among them, to say nothing of martyred bearing and declarations that never before had they been called on to endure such indignity.

"My dear Constance," declared Mrs. Penniman, toward the end of the first uncomfortable week, "if this state of things keeps on I shall be down with nervous prostration. If the thief is not apprehended soon I propose to have my trunks packed and start for Florida. I simply cannot endure any longer the apologetic attitude which I have held toward my servants since this thing happened."

"Now, there is Jane, she has been a perfectly invaluable maid until now, but I believe she will put me out of my mind before she gets through. She sniffs as she lays out my things, she sniffs as she prepares my bath, and she sniffs still more loudly as she does my hair. Dear, dear, I don't know what I shall do if I am forced to dismiss Jane."

Constance sighed heavily, but made no answer. She had felt the disagreeable atmosphere of the house far more keenly than her aunt, for she had enough real sympathy with the servants' position to understand their feelings.

More than once she had tried to make it clear to them that none of the household suspected them, and that it was but a usual form which the police insisted upon at such times.

Of all the servants the butler was the only one who took a cheerful and reasonable view of the situation. He willingly permitted his belongings to be searched, jested with the officers, and showed them places which they seemed likely to overlook, and in every way conducted himself with an understanding of the situation most grateful to his employers.

"I tries to make these foolish maids understand, miss, that there ain't nothin' personal in all this searchin' and questionin' and that we ought to be thankful for it, for it lets us go free of suspicion; but it ain't much good talkin' to women folks—askin' your pardon, miss, but the females of my class ain't got but mighty little sense." This to Constance as she sat alone over a late breakfast one morning, and Mason moved dexterously about, serving her and soothing her feelings at the same time.

Yet it is possible that in spite of the man's sensible manner of viewing annoying circumstances, they had really worked on him more than he realized himself; at least, so the family regretfully concluded, when about ten days after the robbery Mason, always the quintessence of respectful servility, suddenly burst forth to Mrs. Penniman in a speech of such unpardonable impertinence that he was instantly dismissed, leaving the house within a few hours.

During this ten days Constance had

been out constantly in the evening, for the winter was at its gayest. It seemed to her that she rarely failed to catch a glimpse of the man who had become for her a sort of specter.

She saw him at several receptions and dances, and on three occasions at the opera. At no time did he make an attempt to seek her out or speak to her, and for this she was so thankful that her gratitude almost caused her to hold toward him a little glow of kindness.

On one of the evenings at the opera, for a short time she believed that he was coming to her, and she sat with thumping heart for fully ten minutes fearfully watching the door of their box.

She had seen him across the house with Tony Van Amringe. They had wandered into the Knellet-Brown's box for a few minutes, and Tony, catching her eye, had sent her a beaming smile and bow—for they were the best of friends at all times, and she had felt of late that he was strangely neglecting her.

She saw Austin speak to Tony and look toward the box in which she sat. A moment later they left the Knellet-Browns', and she found herself shrinking and palpitating at the thought that they were coming to her.

Yet, strange as it may appear, when ten minutes passed and they did not turn up, she felt vaguely disconcerted and caught herself wondering where they were. When the curtain rose on the last act of "Romeo and Juliet" she gave but scant attention to the dying woes of the two young lovers.

Every time that Constance saw Austin at a reception, or the opera, or read in the society column of the paper of his being one of some gay party, she caught herself searching for accounts of mysterious robberies among the people whose society he frequented. It was somewhat of a puzzle to her that nothing of the sort occurred, and she began to wonder if the social highwayman had ceased his operations because he was visiting in the house of his friend.

She regarded him a little more leniently for this supposed bit of decent feeling.

Then came the startling but welcome intelligence from police headquarters

that the thief had been taken and her jewelry recovered. The startling part of the intelligence lay in the fact that the thief was no other than their much regretted amiable butler, Mason. The police had suspected him from the first and had had him shadowed.

After his sudden departure Mason went directly to a pal who had taken the plunder on the night of the robbery. Both men were arrested, and after a long search the articles were discovered in a secret hiding-place in their room.

At last it seemed that life could once more settle to its old quiet routine and that night of humiliation, so burned into Conscience's proud spirit, be forgotten.

She heard through Mrs. Van Amringe that Austin expected to leave New York shortly, and she looked forward eagerly to this time as a final closing of a very disagreeable episode. She hoped that when he had passed from her sight she would cease to think about him as she so constantly found herself doing.

Possibly it was her inability to reconcile the thing he seemed with the thing he was that kept him so continually in her mind. Whatever it was, she resented his presence in town and longed to be free from him in thought as well as in bodily nearness.

But before this happy state was ever brought about, something in the nature of a bomb exploded at poor Constance's very feet, scattering all hope of the oblivion to which she intended to consign this most annoying young man.

As once before, it came in the shape of a florist box, but this time there was no suspicion of its donor, and without hesitation, indeed with the pleasurable sensation every woman feels under such circumstances, she opened the box. Even when she gazed down at the delicate loveliness of a huge bunch of lilies of the valley she did not suspect the source of the gift; not until she lifted the flowers and saw beneath a sealed note, directed in a hand too characteristic to be forgotten, did she realize that again Austin had dared to write to her.

In her flurry the flowers fell, scattering loosely over the carpet. While the maid was busy gathering them up, Constance tore open the note, frowning slightly as she did so.

As she read, her frown changed to a look of dismay, of actual fright. As before, the communication was without address or signature. It ran:

"At last the mystery of the burglary is cleared up and I feel free to approach you. I have something very strange to tell you, something of which at the time of its occurrence I was entirely unaware myself. Do you know that on the night when you saved me from my folly"—Constance smiled at the euphemism of the expression—"by allowing the claim which I put forward that you were my wife, we actually became man and wife? and that after some very slight formality of registration has been attended to, our union will be as legal by the law of this State as if we had been united by a bishop?"

"I want to talk to you concerning it. Is it asking too much to hope that you will meet me to-morrow morning, say at half past ten at the Museum of Fine Arts? I will wait for you in the gallery at the head of the main stairway. Do not refuse me, I beg; you will regret it if you do."

Constance stood staring fixedly at the paper in her hands, a sudden horror of her position turning her cold with apprehension.

"You will regret it if you do." *That was a threat.* She understood; it was a scheme to blackmail her, and she was at his mercy.

In spite of his claim that there was honor among thieves, he was showing himself in a light that even a thief might repudiate. In the midst of her anger, disgust, and consternation, she realized that all unconsciously she had been rubbing out the deeper black lines in which his character had first appeared, and substituting lighter ones.

It was through her feeling of disappointment that this knowledge was pushed home on her.

"Shall I put the flowers in water, Miss Constance?"

The maid's voice startled her from her painful train of thought, and she noticed for the first time that the girl had finished gathering up the scattered lilies and stood waiting her mistress's direction.

"No." Constance's voice had the ring

of a tragedy queen, as with outstretched hand she pointed to the bed of glowing coals in the grate. "Throw them there."

"Oh, Miss Constance, if you don't care for them we would like to have them down-stairs."

But the maid knew that her request was refused before she heard her mistress's commanding tone a second time.

"Do as I bid—throw them in the fire, and go."

This time there was no demur, for the servants of the house were little used to being commanded in such haughty fashion by the girl who was generally both gentle and considerate with them. The heap of green and white loveliness was hastily tossed on the burning coals, where it spluttered and crackled, and after sending out a dull, thick smoke for a while, caught fire and blazed up for a brief instant until reduced to a few white ashes.

Constance stood watching the tender things writhe in the fierce heat as if the sight gave her pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CLEVERNESS OF MAN.

WHEN Constance entered the door of the Museum of Fine Arts the next day at the appointed hour her face looked as if it had been carved out of granite. Underneath this hard exterior there was a surging fear and disgust of the man she was hurrying to meet.

As Austin, watching the main stairway from the gallery above, saw her coming toward him, he went to meet her with an expression of buoyant gladness on his frank, boyish face. Constance was moved for the hundredth time in their brief acquaintanceship to wonder how he could be the thing he was and look the thing he did.

As she neared him, forgetting for an instant in his joy at seeing her what she believed him to be, he half-extended his hand in greeting, but let it fall quickly before she had time to refuse it.

Constance accorded him but the coldest of acknowledgments and led the way to one of the smaller and less frequented galleries before she allowed him to speak.

When she paused in one that for the time being was entirely deserted, though somewhat dashed by her manner he could not keep a note of exultation from his tone when he said:

"You are very good to come. I hardly dared hope that you would."

"How did you think I would dare do otherwise after your threat?" she answered in frozen tones.

"My threat! I don't understand. What threat did I make?" He was smiling still, for he had no suspicion of her thought.

"Did you not write me that I would regret it if I did not come? Did you not tell me of the trap into which I had innocently walked? What could that mean but a threat?"

"How stupid of me to express it so. I should have been nearer the truth if I had said that I would regret it, yet I hoped that in time it might mean something to you too. But, pray tell me with what you thought yourself threatened, for I still do not understand?"

Constance had seated herself on a bench in the middle of the gallery and drawn from her muff a check-book and fountain-pen.

"I fail to understand why you deem it necessary to assume this air of innocence, when your plans are what they are. My actions in the past may have led you to think me an unsophisticated fool, but believe me, I have divined your intention in this matter."

She opened her check-book and unscrewed her fountain-pen.

"How much do you demand for keeping the whole miserable affair secret?" The frigid scorn with which she asked this was beyond words to convey.

Austin's face underwent a dozen different expressions in as many seconds. It flashed from amazement and incredulity to indignation and scorn, and ended in a look of deep reproach.

"Blackmail!" he breathed. "So that is what you thought I intended?"

"Yes; how much do you want for your silence?"

"Constance! How could you think it. Have I seemed so bad as that?" he exclaimed reproachfully.

"You must not, you shall not call me so," she cried, helplessly indignant.

"My wife, then?" His words were hardly more than a whisper.

Constance writhed.

"How dare you—remind me——" She lifted flashing eyes to his face, to be met by a look that made her own quickly seek the floor, and left her thrilling as if she had suddenly touched an electric battery.

He could not restrain a quiet laugh which held a hint of triumph in it. Constance flung her check-book and pen on the seat beside her and, getting up, walked angrily away.

When she returned some minutes later she had regained her usual calm.

"If what you wrote me is true," she said, "you must be aware that being what you are only adds to the horror of my position. Kindly tell me why you sent for me if there was no intention of blackmail. I confess I can conceive of no other reason."

"I begged you to come because I wanted to see you, to speak to you, to tell you how I thanked the kind fates that they have given me for wife the only woman in the world whom I could love. Don't mistake me——" She was about to speak when he stayed her. "You have nothing to fear from me. Unless that acknowledgment of ours were registered, the words spoken the other night are as if they had never been uttered. If I stated the matter a little more strongly than facts warranted in writing to you, it was to make you come to me here, for I wanted you so. But believe me, you have nothing to fear from me; I shall put forward no claim."

"There is one thing, though, that I wish you to know. Though you are in no wise bound by this marriage, I feel that I am. I am your husband, I belong to you absolutely from this day forward, and no other woman shall ever have an iota of claim on me, Constance."

The girl found herself blushing under his eyes in a way which angered her, but which she was unable to control.

"This is nonsense." She tried to speak disdainfully and made but a poor success of it. "You have seen me but twice; such a feeling does not grow up in two brief and very unpleasant meetings," she protested.

"I know a great deal more about you

than I have discovered in two meetings. I have seen you much oftener, and you may believe that I have made excellent use of my eyes; then I have questioned Mrs. Van Amringe about you until I know all that that good lady does, back to the days when you wore very short skirts and had two tails down your back. Everything that I have heard has made me love you the more."

"But—but you have no right to do this; you have no right to feel so toward me," protested the girl, riven between anger and embarrassment.

"Yes, I have," he claimed sturdily. "I may be the poorest outcast on the face of the earth, but one can't take from me my man's right to love where I will—where I must."

There was a moment's pause, which Constance broke with a hesitating question.

"Then you do not mean to make any claims, and I am free—free to marry as I choose?"

She was looking at him when she spoke, and she could not fail to see the change which came over his face.

"Yes—you are free. It is only I who am bound. But there is no one—you do not wish to marry any one else?"

"You have no right to ask that question."

"I know that. I am not standing on my rights as a husband," he smiled whimsically. "But as a human creature who has some right to know what he must face in loss and disappointment, may I not ask it?"

"Why do you exaggerate in this foolish fashion? I do not like it," she rebuked him.

"I do not exaggerate. I am speaking sober fact. Answer me, is there any one else?"

"Not now, but there may be some time, and I wish to know myself free," she returned at last, after considering his question until he feared the worst.

He gave a sigh of relief which was like an uttered word of thanksgiving.

"I cannot comprehend you," she said, looking at him directly and speaking very frankly. "You seem one thing, and confess to another so different. For instance, a few minutes ago you appeared as shocked as any man could be at the

"thought of blackmail, and at Mrs. Van Amringe's the other morning you seemed horrified at my accusations, and then—then you *look* so honest. How can you, and yet be guilty of the things that I know? Why do you come so near to it, yet lack the virtue of honesty?"

"I sometimes think that a man's soul is asleep until the one woman comes who can wake it to life. There is much in my past which until now I dismissed with but slight excuse. It comes back to me now in a different aspect, and I wish I could wipe it all out. Your eyes are like search-lights; they show me every black spot in my being. I am ashamed before you."

He spoke earnestly. She thought that he referred to past dishonesty, while he was thinking of certain other things which until now had given him but moments of light regret.

"Oh, if you feel like this, why—why don't you stop it all and lead a decent life?" she cried impulsively.

"Would you care—would it make any difference to you if I did?"

"That is a foolish question to ask." She blushed, and being angry because she blushed, blushed more deeply still. "How could I fail to be glad, knowing that a human creature who has been outraging his manhood by such acts as yours had given them up and turned to honest citizenship? I should indeed be glad."

"If you wish it, it shall be. You can make me do anything you desire."

She held out a hand of protest, of denial.

"No, no, I do not believe in reformation for the sake of another. It must be for its own sake, or it is useless."

In spite of her protest, however, she was caught with this most alluring bait as a woman will be every time, even when she thinks she is refusing it. Set a woman to reforming a man and there is no length of folly to which she may not go. The devil knows this well—and makes good use of the knowledge.

"You are doubtless right, but I had rather do it for your sake. I will promise you that from this day forward, no matter what the temptation, I will never do a dishonest action. I will live as uprightly as a man can."

"You mean that you will never—never——" She could not bring herself to utter the ugly term.

"I will never steal again." He supplied the word sturdily.

"But remember, you will be poor; you must face the same temptations which conquered you before. Can you resist them?" she questioned anxiously.

"This time I will starve before I yield. Don't you, won't you believe me?" he begged.

She stretched her hand impulsively toward him, her eyes shining with gladness. He caught it and held it between his own.

Even in his joy at having conquered so far, he could not resist a tug of shame at his deception, but he dismissed it as lovers will with: "All's fair in love and war," nor would he allow himself to face the thought of her anger when she should really come to know the truth.

She gave a happy little laugh.

"I know I am behaving foolishly," she cried; "my common sense laughs at my faith, but I *do* believe you, somehow I cannot help it—and I am glad."

It was soon after this that Constance, feeling that their conversation had gone as far as it ought, made a move to depart.

"One thing before you go," he begged quite humbly, when he realized that no artifice on his part would detain her longer. "I expect to go away very soon; possibly I may never see you again. Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"That before I go you will meet me here once more. Let me talk to you for a little time—possibly the last time."

Constance looked distressed. She hated anything of this sort. Such a meeting would be in the nature of a clandestine act, and she revolted from it.

"No, no, I cannot; do not ask that of me, I beg."

"Not just once more to strengthen my resolution for the struggle?" he insinuated with the craft of a Machiavelli.

She gave him a long, questioning look as she weighed the point, and his eyes did yeoman service for him.

"Oh, why do you make me do things that I do not wish to do?" she protested feebly; then: "Yes, I will come."

As she hurried away from him through the galleries toward the main stairway, she seemed suddenly to become very self-conscious; she felt as if the eyes of every pictured face on the walls followed her accusingly, demanding of her what she had been doing.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATES UNBEND A BIT.

IT is useless to deny that after leaving Evan and returning home, Constance did not suffer a revulsion of feeling. When the warm glow of her generous impulse had subsided, that part of her which she characterized as "common sense" asserted itself and began to point out coldly that a second time she had allowed this persuasive young man to sweep away reason and make her do and think as he dictated.

She pondered disapprovingly on the ease with which he seemed to turn her as he wished, half resenting, yet half liking the new experience.

However much cold reason derided her growing faith and tried to divert her from it, she found herself clinging tenaciously to the thing—though she deceived herself in so far as she called it "hope"—and with it came that joy, of all the most subtle, the most flattering to our vanity, the feeling that she was helping a fellow creature from his lower to his higher self.

She found herself thinking of Austin constantly, and she also discovered—and the discovery was a slight shock—that she watched for his appearance at the different social functions which she attended, and was as disappointed in not seeing him now as she had at one time been annoyed by his presence.

Nearly a week passed in which she did not meet him anywhere. She was beginning to wonder if he had gone away as he had spoken of doing at their last meeting.

To be sure, he had exacted from her the promise to see him once more before he left—a promise which had given her social conscience not a few qualms since its making, but which she was minded to keep nevertheless. Perhaps in thinking things over he had decided that another

meeting was not for the best, and had gone without a word.

Whenever this possibility presented itself she felt a distinct sense of disappointment, and she invariably rejected it, though she was far from understanding that she did so because she did not want him to go without seeing her again.

It would have been strange indeed if, during this period in which he occupied so much of her thoughts, the recollection of how nearly she had come to binding herself to a stranger had not returned to her again and again. At first she recalled it with a thrill of fear and relief combined, but by and by she came to have a feeling as if there was still between them a gossamer link which she could not quite brush aside.

It is safe to say that, since she bade him good-by at the museum, Constance had scarcely been out of Austin's thoughts five minutes of his waking hours. He had dreamed of her, and watched for her until her face haunted him, so that he seemed to see it elusively everywhere, yet find it nowhere.

He had no doubt as to his condition; he was openly, confessedly in love, and he was as deep in as he had always hoped he would be when his hour came. More than once he was obliged to fight down a desire to go to her and confess all of his foolish mystification and put himself in a position where he could have opportunities now denied him, but on each occasion that this temptation assailed him he had resisted.

In the first place, he was afraid that she would not forgive him; then there was the desire to win her in spite of the handicap which he was carrying. If he could make her love him, believing him to be poor, thinking him to have been dishonest, her love would be for him a triumph for which all the after service of his life could scarcely pay.

Like Constance, he, too, had been disappointed as day followed day, bringing none of those chance encounters between them, of which he intended to avail himself now as he had not dared to do in the past. He had reached the conclusion that he must make an attempt to play the part of the Fates himself, when one of those grim sisters relented a little and lent him her aid.

It was Saturday morning and he was strolling down Broadway, nearing the Empire Theater, where Maude Adams had revived "The Little Minister" for a long and successful run.

Just before him walked a man whose back presented a slightly familiar appearance. Austin was trying to place him and it was just at the moment of recognition that he saw him turn into the entrance to the theater.

It was John Penniman. Austin had met him at the club, and a chance remark of Tony's, that Penniman was much in love with his Cousin Constance and, report said, would marry her, had sufficed to surround him, in Evan's eyes, with a jealous interest which his vague personality would never have elicited otherwise.

Before Austin was aware of what he intended doing, he had followed Penniman into the lobby of the theater and was standing directly in his rear at the box-office. The impulse that had moved him was the hope that Constance and her cousin might be going to the play together, in which case he could at least buy a ticket for the some performance and so enjoy the pleasure of seeing her, even if he could not speak to her.

His heart gave a bound of satisfaction when he discovered that Penniman was only buying one ticket and that for the *matinée*. The destination of this ticket was quickly settled, for the young man thrust it hurriedly in an envelope which he took from his pocket, and, having sealed and directed it in pencil, pushed it back to the ticket-seller, saying:

"Could I trouble you to ring up a messenger and send this for me, collect? I am in a tremendous hurry."

"Certainly, sir," the man agreed, politely, and Penniman bolted for the door before the words were fairly spoken, not having noticed, much less recognized, Austin standing patiently behind him.

Over Penniman's shoulder Austin had read the name of Constance Cadwallader as it was hastily scratched on the envelope, and he had previously taken care to notice the position of the seat purchased, about which there had been some discussion.

It did not take him long to become the possessor of the next chair and to regain

the street, feeling that at last things had begun to come his way.

He was in his seat at an absurdly early hour that afternoon and looked about the empty spaces with here and there a silent figure wearing a very forlorn expression, which he was conscious that his own face was reflecting. He had stopped at a florist's before coming in, and bought an enormous bunch of violets, and with these clutched in his hand he waited, flushing like a girl whenever a passing woman cast a pitying or comprehending look on his burden.

He began to feel like a bashful school-boy, and his hopes, which had been so high, lowered steadily as the usher trotted up and down the aisle, snapping down seats and uttering his curt directions. Woman after woman rustled in and took her place and began the endless task of adjusting hat and wraps and settling herself for the two hours of enjoyment.

Austin wondered how so many women could come without bringing the one for whom he watched. When the row on which he sat was entirely filled except for the seat beside him, he turned down the chair and laid his bunch of violets on it, sure that a few minutes more must end his patient vigil.

The orchestra was in place and the plaintive strains of the *Lady Babbie* music echoing through the house before he was aware that, at last, some one had stopped beside the chair next his own. His head was turned away and he purposely kept it so, but it did not need eyesight to tell him who it was: every quivering nerve in his body seemed to cry out her identity.

It was not until he heard her voice saying, "I beg your pardon, are these your flowers?" that he turned and saw her looking down at the violets which she was waiting for him to remove.

"They are not mine; I think they must have been placed there for you." As she recognized his voice she looked up with a start of surprise, which quickly deepened to embarrassment as she met his gaze, so openly telling her of his gladness at sight of her.

He lifted the violets and held them toward her and after a second of hesitation she took them.

When she had thrown back her wrap and taken off her hat, she very deliberately fastened the flowers on the front of her gown, then leaned over to bury her nose luxuriously in their cool fragrance. He, watching and waiting, saw that her self-possession was not yet entirely regained, and that she was trying to win time before speaking to him.

But his impatience could brook no longer delay.

"You were surprised to see me just now?" His inflection made this something between a question and an assertion.

"Yes, very much; also puzzled," she returned.

"Coincidences are sometimes strange," he suggested.

She shook her head smilingly.

"These make the theory of coincidence untenable"—she touched the violets.

As he made no attempt to explain, but sat smiling enigmatically at her, she questioned impulsively:

"How did you know that I should be here this afternoon?"

"The Fates are sometimes kind."

"Yes, but what I desire to know is, when they wish to be kind, how do they communicate with you?"

He laughed softly.

"You must not press me too hard. They are very capricious ladies, and if I should boast of being connected with their abode by a private wire, they might immediately wreck the instrument. No, I must be circumspect."

Perhaps curiosity would have made Constance press the matter further, but just here the curtain slid up and the play began.

It was during the first act, where *Babbie*, looking very demure in *Nannie's* borrowed cloak and bonnet, sticks her arm impudently through that of the *Little Minister* and remarks to the soldiers in broad Scotch, "And where should a woman be on sic a night, if not at her husband's side?" that Austin suddenly recalled the story of the play which he had heard, but which until now had slipped his mind.

From that moment he waited with impatient eagerness for the dénouement, glancing at Constance from time to time,

and wondering if she knew what was coming. A small suspicion even suggested itself to him, that it was because she knew that she had settled upon this play.

If such was the case he had to admit that she showed no sign of self-consciousness as they talked in the intermissions, and he was not slow to see his mistake when the next to the last act was reached, and *Babbie's* father, in a burst of triumphant laughter, goes off, accompanied by the artful *Babbie*, to confront the *Little Minister*, who, according to Scotch law, is a married man, but does not know it.

During the unfolding of this scene, Constance's cheeks not only grew redder and redder, but even her neck and ears burned crimson, nor could all Maude Adams's pretty fooling, as she cajoles both father and lover, hold her attention to the exclusion of her own feelings.

Finally she burst out, in low but indignant tones:

"Did you know this? Was this why you came?"

"No, upon my soul, I did not; *this* is really a coincidence. Don't make me suffer where I don't deserve it. I have enough disabilities as it is," he begged in the same low tone.

After this, though the color died slowly from her cheeks, Constance was unable to meet his eye, and the curtain fell without her constraint having entirely disappeared.

As they were making their way from the theater Austin remembered vividly her look on the day he had proposed going to police headquarters with her, did not risk another rebuff by staying beside her, but purposely fell behind, allowing her to go on alone. It was not until she looked back, evidently thinking him just in the rear and intending to address some remark to him, that he moved up and held his place as they issued into the lobby.

After he had put her in the carriage and watched her drive away, he realized that this little act, this permitting him to walk beside her and serve her as another gentleman might, marked a change in her attitude toward him more certainly than anything which had yet occurred, and he went on his way rejoicing in

spite of the fact that the afternoon had been so short and opportunities of speech so limited.

The Fates having made up their minds to treat Austin kindly on one occasion continued to do so, and it was only three nights later that he found himself seated at dinner on Constance's left.

At first he was for thinking that this was to be but a tantalizing pleasure, for beyond the merest word of recognition she had nothing to say to him until the third course appeared.

When she did turn in his direction she met a pair of deeply reproachful eyes, which caused her a disconcerting blush as his eyes had a trick of doing whatever their expression.

"I consider the man on your right one of the most selfish and disagreeable persons that I have met since coming to New York," he said in a low tone, looking significantly at her.

She pretended to open wide eyes of surprise.

"Why, he seems to me entirely charming," she protested.

"Don't make me dislike him more than I already do," he begged in a subdued voice which was lost in the chatter of the dinner-table. "No, don't look in his direction, I forbid it. I am sure he is waiting to seize upon you the instant he can, and I have waited forever to get this moment."

In spite of his effort to keep her, however, she was claimed almost immediately, for her right-hand neighbor was not only a man of charm, but he was well aware of his charm, and did not for an instant imagine that Constance might perhaps prefer a word with some one else.

So it was that Austin scarcely had another moment of attention until the ladies were leaving the table, then in desperation he detained her as she passed him.

"May I come to you in the drawing-room later?" he questioned eagerly.

She looked at him for an uncomprehending second.

"Yes; why not?"

He flushed happily.

"I should not have presumed without your expressed permission," he returned significantly.

It was her turn to blush, but she repeated her permission and passed him, following her hostess, who had already gained the door.

When he joined her in the drawing-room he was thankful to note that she was sitting a little apart, so that it was possible to speak to her less conventionally than under ordinary circumstances.

"How good, how good you are to me!" he exclaimed earnestly as he sank into the seat beside her.

She did not answer, but seemed to be searching his face for something that she desired to know.

"And your eyes," he continued, "are just two blue question marks asking me if I deserve that goodness. No, Constance, I do not, I never could, but I have done nothing to make you regret your trust. I think that is what you wish to know."

She put her hand to her cheek as if to stay the flood of rising color which came so guiltily at his quick intuition of her thought.

"You must not call me that," she protested, looking down, then as he made no effort to apologize for his liberty, she continued honestly: "You have a most disconcerting way of reading my thoughts. I wish you would kindly refrain in the future."

"Then you must not allow them to be so crystal clear," he returned amusedly.

"I have never before been considered so childishly open. Other people have not understood my innermost thoughts as if they were written on my forehead," she exclaimed, distinctly nettled, for what woman likes to be considered anything save complex?

"I am very glad to hear it," was his disconcerting answer, and Constance tingled with resentment at the revelation which her own foolish words had vouchsafed him. She hurriedly changed the subject.

"Mrs. Van Amringe was talking to me of you yesterday, Mr. Austin. She let me into the secret that you are quite a hero."

It was Austin's turn to look upset now.

"I am afraid that Mrs. Van Amringe has been romancing to you, dear lady.

You ought to know her well enough to understand how dearly she loves an adventure, and how highly she decorates those of her friends."

"Yes, but not to the point of manufacturing them," protested Constance warmly. "Do tell me the story; it would be so much more interesting from the very person to whom it all happened," coaxed the girl.

"I don't know what you can mean except that affair in the Philippines, and I assure you there was nothing heroic in that."

"Yes, that was it. Ah, do tell me the story."

"There really isn't anything to tell. I went out to the Philippines with the volunteers just for the excitement and fun, and on one occasion I and a handful of men who had been sent out on scouting duty were caught on a bridge which was under fire from a number of Filipino sharpshooters. One of the men was wounded and fell when we were about half-way over in our rush for cover, and it was not noticed until we reached the other side. Then, since he could not be left there, I went back and brought him in. That was all."

"Oh, you don't begin to tell it as well as she did," objected Constance. "She says that you were all under a terrible rain of bullets and had just gained shelter and safety when you discovered that one of the men had fallen. He was only a common soldier, and not your friend, and you didn't even know whether he was dead or only wounded, and all the men begged you not to go, but you would not listen."

"She says you crawled out, lying as flat as possible, trying to shelter yourself from the patter of the bullets that rained about you, and when you reached the soldier and found him alive you got him on your back and made a dash to safety without being so much as touched. It was glorious!"

The girl's eyes were shining.

"Well, that is the story practically as I told it."

"Never; yours was but the bald statement of a few facts."

"You could hardly expect of me the dramatic details that Mrs. Van Amringe delights in. I am not romantic."

"Mrs. Van Amringe says that if it had been an Englishman under the same circumstances he would have received the Victoria Cross."

Poor Austin was becoming more and more embarrassed. He had always behaved over this much-lauded episode as if it were the most disgraceful moment of his life. His tone was almost irritable when he said:

"I fail to see where the heroism comes in. According to your own story, I crawled out to the man on my stomach, like a worm, carefully shielding my precious person behind every bit of available timber, and I dashed in with my comrade on my back, his body making a splendid shield against bullets. Any man there would have done as much and thought nothing more of it."

"But you would not let any of the others risk it. You insisted on going yourself."

"That was merely because I was the largest and strongest of the crowd, and therefore more physically able to carry the weight of the wounded man. My strength was my sole qualification and my sole merit."

"Why do you wish to belittle your action?" she asked, but before he could frame an answer she continued; "but, no, I understand, and I am glad that you do."

Evan looked at her with eyes full of whimsical misery.

"Do let's change the subject," he begged pitifully.

CHAPTER X.

THE CONFESSION.

IN the days following the dinner at the Wares's Constance was very far from realizing how completely her thoughts were absorbed by Evan Austin.

She admitted to herself that he possessed for her a charm which other men lacked. More and more she found herself thinking of his stained past and regretting it.

Still she had faith in his future, and she built upon this slight foundation quite an imposing structure. She saw him settled to honest work, making a clean, successful career for himself, the

past buried and unknown to all save herself.

She saw herself standing his stanch friend, encouraging and helping him in his moments of depression, until in the end, regenerate and free from the old taint, he had no need of help. Whenever her thoughts reached this happy consummation she felt a glow of quiet satisfaction in the realization that she had accomplished some real good in the world.

Poor Constance. At last the thing which she had longed for had come to pass—she was in love; foolishly, romantically in love, and with a man whom she knew to be unworthy of her.

As yet she was not aware of the real nature of her malady, still thinking that the glow of feeling which warmed her being and made the whole world seem brighter, was merely her joy over the one sinner repented.

This pretty dream was rudely disturbed by the arrival of more flowers and a note from Austin. This time the flowers were not consigned to the grate, but were carefully arranged in water by Constance's own hands.

It was the announcement of his departure contained in the note that startled her into a dim understanding of her state.

"Will you keep your promise and meet me to-morrow at ten at the same place? I leave town on a late train to-morrow night. I may never see you again."

He had justified this last sentence by thinking that it was possible that he might never see her again, the world being so uncertain a place, but if Constance had seen the assured smile on his lips when his pen formed the words, they would not have held for her the appeal which they did.

So she was not to have the joy of helping him along the stony road of righteousness; he would go away, where she would not know of his success, his temptations. She seemed to look down the vista of her own life, and suddenly it had become blank—drear—

* * * * *

Early as the hour appointed for their meeting next day, Austin had been wait-

ing some time before he heard Constance's step echoing through the deserted galleries. He turned from a canvas by Corot, in which he had been trying to interest himself, but he did not go to meet her as on the last occasion.

Since writing to her the day before he had seriously considered his position, and decided that, in keeping up the misapprehension in which their acquaintance began, he was taking foolish risks of losing her, and he determined that if she came to him as he had asked he would explain the whole matter to her and put himself straight in her eyes—then he felt that he might approach her in a new attitude and demand of her the assurance for which his whole being cried out.

As she came toward him he was instantly conscious of a change in her. He had never seen her look so radiantly lovely, and it was a new and softer loveliness, which had in it a hint of melancholy. He greeted her as before.

"It was good of you to come."

This time she let him take her hand and hold it as he led her toward the bench which they had occupied together two weeks earlier.

As she seated herself she said in a constrained voice: "Your note was a surprise to me. I thought—I hoped you were going to remain in New York."

"I wish that I might, but a question of money makes my departure a necessity."

She sighed.

"Yes, I suppose so. With life beginning all over for you I can understand the necessity."

"Life is indeed beginning all over for me," he agreed significantly, but they hardly meant the same thing.

"Shall you be sorry when I am gone?" he questioned, after a moment of silence.

"Yes."

It was the restrained earnestness of her monosyllable which offered him his first enlightenment.

"Do you mean that?" he insisted almost fiercely.

She made a brave attempt to meet his eye and to speak playfully.

"Shouldn't a wife regret her husband's departure?" she asked softly.

"Constance, Constance, Constance!"

All the varying emotions that were surging through him found expression in the repetition of her name. She continued to face him.

"Constance, it is not—it cannot be possible—I dare not believe what your eyes are telling me. Remember what you think I have been," he reminded her earnestly.

"I had rather remember what you are going to be," she objected loyally.

"Think of the poverty and denial which may be yours until I learn the way of honest success," he persisted.

"I have something of my own, not a fortune, but we can be comfortable, and it will keep from you the goad of necessity," she answered bravely.

"And you will accept my stained, disgraced name? You love me enough for that?" His amazement and joy were beyond expression.

"No one else knows of the stain, and nothing shall smirch it in future," she cried fiercely, as one who defends a precious possession.

Before she was aware of his intention he had slipped to his knees beside her and dropped his head in her lap. Too conventional not to be alarmed by the thought of some one appearing suddenly and surprising them, Constance looked fearfully about, begging him to get up.

"Don't, don't, Evan dear. Some one will see you—oh, please——"

But when he did not move, her hand touched his bowed head, caressing it gently and, bending, she kissed his hair. ~~He~~ He stirred then and raised to hers a pair of eyes swimming in tears.

With his arm on her shoulder, his adoring gaze compelling her, he tried to draw her toward him.

"No—no—not here—not now," she protested.

"There is not a person in sight or sound," he begged.

She put her hands to her face with a shy, almost childish laugh. "All the pictures are staring, Evan."

"Constance!"

She would have been more or less than woman if she had resisted the appeal in his voice.

When she had coaxed him to the seat beside her they talked as lovers will of when it had begun, of every shade of

feeling, of all their fears, now recalled but to heighten present happiness.

After some time had passed, Austin felt that he could no longer postpone his confession, which was momentarily growing to seem more appalling.

"Constance," he began at last, "I have something very serious to tell you of myself, and I do not know whether you can forgive me or not."

She fastened a pair of startled eyes on him for a moment, then smiled as if reassured by what she saw.

"Tell me what it is. I promise to be merciful; I am so happy I could not do otherwise," she confessed girlishly.

Then he poured out the whole story of his foolish deception, and his great desire to win her love while she believed him to have been dishonest. Before he had finished his tale she burst into tears and dropped her face in her hands.

"Darling, darling, what is it?" he cried, in distress.

"Nothing—nothing," she sobbed softly, "only I am so happy. Now there is no stain on your dear self, and I can be so proud—so proud of you."

"And you forgive me, dear, for the trick I played upon you?" he questioned uncertainly.

"Yes, oh, yes, nothing matters now that I know you have never been the thing I thought you," she assured him, smiling through her tears.

"If you have felt it like this, how magnificent the love, dear heart, which made you overlook my wrong and give me yourself in spite of it," he exclaimed wonderingly.

"I could not help it. I had to come to you," she explained simply.

Some time after she said playfully:

"I shall never know when to believe you, Evan. You are far too good an actor to suit my taste."

"I didn't tell as many lies as you think, Constance," he assented stoutly. "Very frequently you helped me out yourself. All that I told you about trying to earn my living first as an honest wielder of pick and shovel was really true. When my father died and I realized that everything was gone, I tried a bank clerkship. I thought the confinement of the life would kill me, and I was no good at it besides."

"About the only thing that was left to me out of the wreck was a mining claim which father had regarded as promising, but which was entirely undeveloped. I took the few hundreds that I had, threw up my position in the bank, and hunted up that mine. I worked it alone for a time until I got enough of a show to make it 'worth while for some one to invest capital. Three months later we struck a vein that meant fortune.

"It has turned out even better than we anticipated, and there won't be any need for us to struggle on until I get

(The End.)

established, dearest. Anything in reason that the heart of woman desires I can give you, thank God."

Constance looked very sober.

"Aren't you glad?" he questioned, puzzled by her expression.

"Yes-s," she drew out the word doubtfully; "only before I was glad because I felt that I had so much to give; now I have nothing, and you give all."

"You royal creature," he cried; "is it not enough to give yourself? Can all I have or am be adequate return for that?"

A BLESSED LIE.

By Vingie E. Roe.

HOW could she do it? Well, read the story and answer this perplexing question yourself.

MY dear husband, Jeremiah, has allus said I am a genius—for getting into other folks' affairs.

But it seems to me that the good Lord must need, here and there among his children, one with the faculty—and it is a rare one—for seein' the ragged edges of human lives an' the willingness to draw them together.

Which latter is rarer still.

And me, havin' this faculty set plain before me in airy life, I have allus tried to make the most of it, for the makin' the best of one's lowly talent is as great a thing as the highest attainment of the greatest artist or singer.

But Jeremiah is set on shakin' his head and prophesyin' evil, for there have been one or two times in the years that are past a bit embarrassin' to remember.

And one of them had to do with the two houses on the farm just across the big road from us, when I tried my art—and failed.

I have grieved more, I reckon, over them two houses, which can both be seen

plain from our front stoop, than most anything that has come to pass in the neighborhood of Light's Point in the last twenty years, an' there has a heap happened, what with marriages and deaths and the pitiful bringin' home, an' buryin', of Ellis Tram, months after he'd been killed in the Philippines.

It's sixteen year ago come airy spring that Abner and Lucindy Green parted in such bitter anger that the warm love of their young married life was crushed to death in its fury.

It was one of them ideal marriages, everybody thought, for there wasn't a finer young man in Sepoy County than Abner, an' Lucindy was as pretty as a June morning, all rose and brown and blue, of cheeks an' hair an' eyes, and they started life on the old farm which had been Abner's father's.

I know they were as happy as ever they could be, for I was just a bride myself with Jeremiah here on our new place, and Lucindy an' I were the closest of friends, runnin' back an' forth across their clover field an' the big road a dozen times a day.

Land sakes! I stop to remember now, and it seems that them boys must hev put up with a lot in the way of meals not bein' on time and such like when we girls was young.

But it never made any difference to Jeremiah, an' Abner Green would 'a' eat underdone dried apples and never known it so long as he could look across the table at Lucindy, all blushin' an' dimplin' and with her hair blowing loose in little curls.

To this day Lucindy hain't lost her sweetness of face, an' her hair does just that way still. They was both overflowin' with young life and happiness and as contented as two doves for the first year, Abner a-makin' great improvements around the place an' Lucindy coining money with her cows and chickens.

I remember how we girls raced each other with our account of butter an' eggs. Land sakes! but we was happy, we four young things, with the blue skies and the tall, green trees and the gold of the harvest fields. Though a woman may be happy in after years, there is nothin' like the first years of her marriage when all the world is new and life lies all ahead.

And then one morning, as sudden as a summer storm, the shadow fell which was to hang over their lives for so many years.

I remember I went over as usual an' met Lucindy on the back step. I know I jumped back from her an' screamed. It was a changed Lucindy, white an' silent and hard of face, an' she staggered a bit when she walked.

I clutched her arm an' made her speak to me, and she told it all in a dozen breaths.

You see, for a long while she had been a hankerin' for a new house on the place, down in the clover field facin' the road, but had never dared to mention it to Abner, him bein' so fond of the old house where he was born an' where both his mother an' father had died.

That night she had got up her courage and told him about her longing, and Abner had looked at her as if he didn't understand, and when she made it plain he had told her gently but firmly that it couldn't be.

Abner was one of them boys who had been a good son, an' his love for his mother and father was about as strong as his love for his wife, though not quite, and this I must say in justice, for

he nigh about worshiped Lucindy. But to abandon the old home, where they had lived, was something he jest couldn't do, an' Lucindy ought to know it.

But she, bein' high tempered, his first refusal of her wish, an' it bein' her biggest one, set her aflame with anger in a minute, and before either knew what they were doing things had been said which left each of 'em agasp with horror at the other.

An' when, after they had quarreled pitifully, Lucindy, white and crazy with rage, flung out a hateful, jealous word about his dead parents, Abner Green rose up an', telling her she should have the house, went out-a-doors.

That was all, but in a week workmen came from Valley Center an' commenced work down in the clover field by the big road.

A big, beautiful house went up, finer an' grander than the old one an' just like Lucindy wanted, and when it was finished an' furnished Abner Green moved Lucindy over—and then went back to the home of his father! He had told her he would not give her a divorce, that he was still her lord an' master, but that their lives was divided from then on, an' Lucindy, with her head held high, commenced her strange new life.

I tried frantically to talk to Lucindy an' fix it up, an' even went to Abner, but I came away humiliated, for Abner laid his hand on my shoulder, smiled at me in a way that made my heart ache, an' said:

"Don't meddle, Almeda."

And so the years went by, me a-hopin' they would have a reconciliation, but they never did.

Lucindy cared for the big house, tended her cows and chickens, an' the outside world went by, lookin' with awe at the two houses which held the tragedy of Light's Point neighborhood, an' no one but Jeremiah an' me saw how the girl an' then the woman ate her heart out from year to year. It was all such a sorry mistake.

Jeremiah an' Abner remained warm friends and the feelin' between Lucindy an' I grew stronger as time went by, me a-pityin' her from my soul an' a-tryin'

all I could, with neighborly kindness, to make up a little mite of it.

And then, one day in the warm spring-time, Lucindy fell ill. She had been sort of ailing for some while, jest a kind of dropping of her restless energy an' a-settin' round a good deal more than common.

I had made her drink some catnip tea, I remember, an' given her some of Grandmother Pomroy's famous herb-tonic, but jest the same she pindled, an' then, one spring day she took to bed.

I was plumb scared to find Lucindy in bed, her bein' allus so full of vital energy, and stayed the hull day with her, a-rubbin' back her hair an' askin' where she hurt.

"'Tain't nothin', Almeda," sez she, "jest a ailment of the spring, I guess."

An allus that was her one answer, "jest a spring fever," though the days rolled by an' slipped into weeks, an' still she lay in the big fine bed as bright an' new lookin' as when Abner Green had bought it years ago, a-standing by the west winder, where the sunsets washed over our south fields.

She grew white a little with the bein' indoors an' it went to my heart. After two weeks were gone I sent Jeremiah over to Valley Center after a doctor. He came out in a shiny buggy, an' it stood tied at Lucindy's gate for an hour, but when it sizzed back in a cloud of dust I knew no more what ailed the friend of my girlhood than I did before it came.

"Just a slight ailment of the spring, Mis' Pomroy," sez the doctor, and left some pills and powders.

I gave them all an' he made another trip. Jeremiah was a saint them days, a-takin' care of the cows and chickens, and the house, and himself, with scarce a bit of help from me, for I couldn't leave her there alone with them big eyes of hers quietly lookin' out the winder not caring particular to see anything, as if there wasn't anything on earth much worth lookin' at, or that wanted to be looked at.

Abner Green knew that Lucindy was ill, though in all the years we never talked of one to the other, not but that Jeremiah an' I would gladly hev done so, but there was no breaking through

the grim barriers of reserve that wrapped them both.

One evening I saw Abner stand a long time under the great elms that shaded his mother's door a-lookin' at Lucindy's house, an' my heart ached for the man and the woman, so deeply lovin' and yet so strongly held by pride and anger an' ill will. He had changed a deal, had Abner, his thick dark hair bein' streaked with gray, though the eyes was still as blue and sharp as ever and his form as upright. I allus did admire Abner.

But whatever it was of relenting, or softness, or memory, that was in his heart, it was weaker than his iron will, an' he turned, as the night fell, an' went to his lonesome meal. It does seem a pity that the Lord's best handiwork is so often marred by evil passions.

Spring came on apace, the early flowers bloomed, the green grass crept in a soft carpet all over the pastures an' the meadows; the birds sang in the sunlight; it seemed as if all the world must look up and smile, an' still Lucindy lay by the west winders.

We had them open all day now, the winders and doors, a-takin' all of the glorious days we could, for I allus thought the light of spring a harbinger of the Eternal Day an' like to bask in it.

"Lucindy honey," sez I one day when I had set for an hour a-watchin' her eyes dreaming off over the south meadow; "Lucindy, hain't there somethin' you want?"

She never moved her eyes nor stopped her thin hand from its soft, slow smoothing of the quilt I had laid over her.

"No, Almeda," sez she.

She was getting thinner and thinner and her sweet face was sort of pinched with a look I didn't like, as if she had been a-hungerin' all the years for somethin', but had hidden the pain, an' now in her weakness it had betrayed her. It was about this time that the doctor told me what made me desperate.

"Mis' Pomroy," sez he, "there is a strange lethargy here that it seems beyond my power to combat, and unless we can get her awakened by some sudden emotion, I am afraid our efforts will be useless."

He looked at me sharply as he said it, an' drove away.

My land! Lucindy was a-lyin' there jest a-driftin' away with the days.

I ran down to the clump of willers by the creek and put my apron up to my eyes an' cried. I had loved her as girl and woman for fifteen years an' my heart ached with a weight of sorrow that darkened everything.

I wanted, so bad, to do something to save her, an' then, all of a sudden, it come to me.

I dropped my apron, an' let the tears dry in my eyes while I stared hard at the bank across the little ranch and thought. Land sakes! how I did think. I knew the material I had to handle, but I knew, too, that Lucindy was dying, an' I made up my mind.

Jeremiah sez when I have made up my mind the thing is done.

The very next morning I made my first move. I told the doctor.

He nodded his head.

"Good idea, Mis' Pomroy," he sez, "good idea."

I remember all that day Lucindy seemed paler and smaller under the quilt and her eyes was farther away than ever, an' I reproached myself bitterly for not havin' seen an' decided sooner.

For all them lonely years her sorrow and her pride had sapped her strength, an' now, when the body had lain down in the shadow of sickness, there was no reserve of spirit to fall back on, jest that silent givin' up as if there was no use.

I own I felt a little mite hard at Abner and then I knew that one was as much to blame as the other. That night I took my first step.

At the back of Abner's house there was an old garden, planted full of all the sweet flowers that air old-fashioned now, hollyhocks and z'nnias and hearts-ease and bulbs of dahlias and hyacinths, all comin' up in their season from the old beds, planted years ago by Abner's mother, an' kept carefully, jest as she had loved them.

Along the north fence ran a long row of jonquils, an' I have never seen any with such great golden cups. They come originally from some island in the seas an' there was none like them in Light's Point.

And them jonquils was in full bloom. It was no trouble slipping into Abner's

garden and findin' the bed. Their sweet breath led me to them easy.

Lucindy slept late next mornin', a-seemin' as if she had nothin' to waken for, an' I set by the bed a-wonderin'.

It was cool and sweet by the west winder, an' when she opened her eyes the first thing they fell on was them flowers where I had put them on a little stand where the breeze nodded their yellow heads an' carried their perfume straight to Lucindy.

She lay lookin' for a minute with that listless expression, an' then the queerest look came into her face an' she looked quick at me. She had recognized them in a second.

"Almeda," sez she, faintlike, an' I knew what she wanted.

"Lucindy," I answered, bravin' her look, "they was on the front stoop this mornin'." I quaked inside for a minute but braced up.

They was on the front stoop, for I put 'em there.

I hurried to the kitchen, but all day them jonquils nodded in the breeze and Lucindy watched them with a weak, troubled look in her eyes.

She quit watchin' the sunwash on the south meadow. It was mighty little change, but it was better than that care-for-nothin' blankness. Next mornin' she woke up airlier an' I see her look quick at me when she heard me comin' an', when I held out another bunch, her lips quivered and, turnin' over on her pillow, she began to cry weakly like a sick child.

I set down and patted her shoulder, an' held the flowers where the scent came strong, and let her cry, an' my heart was full of thanksgiving.

When I told the doctor he said: "Capital, Mis' Pomroy!"

Land sakes! how I did steal from Abner Green's garden, and how I did study for ways to make Lucindy think he was puttin' them flowers on the front stoop he had never crossed.

But she never doubted, an' began to get more eager each mornin', a-flushin' a little in her thin cheeks and, by an' by, she took to listenin' all the time intently for somethin'.

At first I was worried, for I've seen that listenin' look on a face when the other world draws nigh, but at last I

saw it was a footstep she was waitin' for, and then I knew she was waiting for Abner. And then I was in a flurry, for though I had snatched her from the fatal stupor I had plunged her into somethin' as bad, for as the days went by and he didn't come she began to go into a fever of excitement, tremblin' at every sound and clutchin' nervously at the bed-quilt.

The doctor wrinkled his brows and shook his head.

"I'm afraid, Mis' Pomroy," he sez, one day, "that we have done no good."

I was sick at heart, for I had worked hard an' almost lied to Lucindy, and had failed pitifully. But Jeremiah sez I am a major-general and possessed of unlimited reserve force, and, as the doctor and I both saw the nervousness and excitement was makin' her weaker every day, I knew somethin' must be done.

Jeremiah had told Abner anxiously how bad Lucindy was, an' though his eyes looked mighty sad the iron will he had inherited from old Elihu Green had made him stern and unforgiving. But just the same he was my last resort to save Lucindy an' I decided I'd force him to help.

So, in the dusk I went up to the old house where they had been so happy that first year. I had never been inside it sence the times we girls ran back and forth and my eyes filled as I crossed the smooth stone step.

The scent of Grandmother Green's jonquils came in at the winder as Abner gave me a chair and I felt suddenly tired and bitter.

Abner stood by the table a-workin' his hands together, for I knew afterward that he thought I had come to say Lucindy was gone, but his mouth was hard.

"Abner Green," I sez, a-goin' straight to the mark, "down there in the house where you put her away so long ago, Lucindy lies a-dying. For all these years you've let her abide alone as no woman should, and now she's enterin' the Valley of the Shadow. Are you goin' to let her go without peace between you?" sez I, for I felt bitter that moment, and I had no heart for subtleties.

The darkness an' the flower smell comin' in at the winder, an' the pity of

the whole thing filled my heart with dreariness. I had grieved for them two so long and now it was to end in such a pitiful way, with only the width of the clover field between these two who had been all the world to each other.

I wanted to hurt Abner all I could. And I had, for when he spoke out of the dusk his voice was hoarse an' I heard his knuckles workin' in the dark.

"Almeda," he sez, and even under his emotion I heard his father's stern spirit speakin', "Almeda, there is jest one way—if Lucindy has asked for me to come to her, I'll go. Almeda Pomroy, has she asked?"

I gripped my hands on the chair-handles an' I have allus hoped the Lord understood the stress of my soul that moment.

I have been a testifyin' Methodist for thirty year; have been faithful in season and out; have led the prayer-meetings; and am quoted as a pillar; but I know that I almost backslid right there.

I have allus held a lie as the unforgivable sin, but I thought of Lucindy, a-lyin' down there by the west winder and all the years of her lonely life, an' of Abner, too, a-lovin' her I knew, but so hampered by the blood-hardness that he'd burn to the last ash the sacrifice of himself and her without he thought himself justified in breakin' his stern judgment, an' I made up my mind.

If the Master exacted payment for the sin, I would willingly make it for the satisfaction of takin' Abner Green to Lucindy's bedside, an' I rose to my feet in the darkness and lied.

It was my first, an' I hope my last, but I sha'n't say, for no mortal knows what he will do for friendship, or love, or pity.

"Lucindy has asked for you, Abner," I sez, though the words stuck in my throat, "has asked for you and watched for you along the meadow path, has listened for your step," sez I, a-growin' bolder and—so long as I was lying, lying right with convincing detail—"has kept her hold on life hopin' that you'd come to her, a-waitin' for you with all the eagerness of that first year, Abner——" But there I hushed, for out of the shadows by the table I heard him whisper hoarsely:

"Stop!"

And when he came across the floor an' took my hand, an' went out with me beneath the stars, he was tremblin' like the ague.

We walked in silence, for I was humblin' myself in spirit for the thing I'd done, but next minute I lifted my head, for I'd be willin' to suffer for those I loved as He had, to pay the price of that lie whenever He asked for it.

There was no light in Lucindy's room an' Jeremiah sat in the doorway. I reached in the winder as we went by an' softly took a handful of them jonquils an' put 'em in Abner's hand.

He took 'em unconsciously and then we went in. She was lyin' quietly in the dark an' it seemed she was asleep, but Abner trod heavily and the moment he struck the door an' saw the gleam of the white counterpane he went toward it with a rush of hurryin' steps, an' when he sez "Lucindy!" sharplike an' with the break and catch of tears in his voice, she gave a scream that quivered all over me, it was so full of the unsatisfied longing of those empty years, an' so full of heart-breaking joy.

Abner fell on his knees beside the bed, an' I knew he had her in his arms

and that she was a-holdin' him as if she would never let him go.

I touched Jeremiah an' we slipped away down to the patch of willows, an' Jeremiah used his bandanna freely an' he shook my hand like I was a political brother at election, an' he sez:

"Almeda," sez he, "you're the finest general in America! You're a major-general!" sez he.

All this is some few years ago, an' now I run back and forth to Lucindy's across the clover field as I used to do, for Abner and Lucindy live in the old house where they began, an' the fruits of my labor is a delight to my eyes, for they air as happy as they were that first year.

And I helped them to decide about the houses—each a-wantin' to live where the other wished—an' so we cast lots an' it fell to the old place; so Abner rented out the other to a helper so's he could have more time with Lucindy, a-makin' up for the years they had lost. They both know about that lie of mine, but Lucindy kissed me an' said tenderly:

"Almeda, that was a blessed lie!"

And there isn't a bed in the old garden that blooms with the glory of Grandmother Green's row of jonquils.

JOSÉ MARIA'S LAW.

By Charles Francis Bourke.

OUR hero pays an obligation along with an old score, all for the sake of adventure.

JOSÉ MARIA leaned against the blackened door-frame of the little stucco inn.

The bandit's eye wandered meditatively from the slow, up-curling smoke-rings of his cigarette to the slim, straight traveler, scarcely more than a lad, who sat idly thrumming upon a table just within the inn.

"Faith of El Tempranito," muttered

the bandit, "here is one to defy the tyrant Justitia—that cursed law—if it unwisely crossed him. Assuredly 'tis a bandit gone amiss in the making!"

The stranger lifted his head, his eyes squarely meeting José Maria's glance.

"Greeting, señor!" smiled the bandit. "It seems the siesta hour holds us prisoners!"

The young man sprang up at the words.

Coming to the doorway he shaded his eyes with his hand and eagerly scanned the blinding glare without.

"I find impatience shields well against cold or heat."

"Soon you will not need it," observed

José Maria, pointing to the west, where the sun was already declining.

"My journey ill brooks delay, señor," replied the young man, staring moodily.

The bandit studied his companion intently. He wore the rich attire of a Spanish caballero of rank, and the traveler's mule, browsing beside the big bay mare in the shade of the near-by trees, was of the finest Andalusian breed.

"We are perhaps fellow travelers?" José Maria suggested suddenly.

The young man shook his head.

"There are few, señor," he said, "whose business leads them through the heart of the Sierras."

The bandit's eyes gleamed and his white teeth showed in a swift smile.

"That is as it should be, perhaps," he muttered to himself.

Swiftly the sun sank behind the rugged Andalusian peaks, invading the parched plain with a sense of coolness.

When the great ball of fire fell behind the mountain the young man uttered an impatient exclamation and sprang hurriedly toward his mule, the bandit's dark eyes following him with a look of curiosity.

"Doubtless, there is a purse," thought José Maria, puffing quietly at his cigarette. "And yet——"

Suddenly he exclaimed aloud, tossed his cigarette away and hastened to the roadside.

The stranger had paused admiringly beside the big bay mare, and Chiquita, raising her beautiful head, nuzzled her soft nose confidingly in the young man's outstretched hand.

"Señor!" exclaimed the bandit, moved by his favorite's action; "the Sierras are unsafe for travelers. Can you not as well follow another route to your destination?"

The stranger looked at him wonderingly, surprised at his sudden warmth.

"Impossible, señor," he replied. "I have business there—and alone," he added significantly.

The bandit's ready hand dropped on his stiletto at the rebuff. But Chiquita still nuzzled the stranger's open palm caressingly, and José Maria thrust his stiletto back in sash with a slight laugh.

"Have you, then, no fear of the bandits?" he questioned.

A curious expression crossed the young man's face; he smiled bitterly.

"There are worse bandits to be found in palaces than in the mountains. And from the great one—the Robber of the Morning," he added with a peculiar emphasis that roused the bandit's curiosity, "I should not flee. As for the others, the petty gentry of the mountains, with their miles of gaudy ribbons with which they deck out their shapely legs and sugar-loaf hats, I could easily outrun them."

José Maria laughed loud at the lad's disdain.

"Plainly, my friend," he cried, "you have not met these gentlemen. Well, I have, and they do not jest, let me tell you. Come, decide to take another road."

The young man stubbornly shook his head.

"Señor, I have not sought to show you the error of *your* ways," he retorted pointedly.

Then patting the mare's glossy neck, he added: "Farewell, you beauty! The sight of you has gladdened a weary road."

With a final caress he went toward his mule and began to tighten and readjust the girth of the saddle.

For an instant José Maria stood, undecided. Then Chiquita pressed her intelligent head against his shoulder. The bandit strode to the traveler, the big mare following like a pet dog at his heels.

"Señor," said El Tempranito, impulsively offering the young man a small round object; "travelers should assist one another in these troubled times. Since you will take the road of the mountains, take with you also this. It was given by one of authority in the Sierras. Wherever you show that, doubtless you will pass unmolested."

"Señor!" exclaimed the caballero, "how can I thank you? I fear I was impatient——"

"Hola! Thank Chiquita here," the bandit laughed as he vaulted into the mare's saddle. "The coquette begged it for her new admirer. And faith," he muttered to himself, "the lad has taken my fancy, too."

With a gay wave of his hand he tight-

ened the reins and galloped swiftly away, soon to be lost beyond a turning of the road.

Left alone, the young caballero curiously examined the small object which José Maria had dropped in his hand. It was a little silver button of finely wrought filigree work with a curious device in the center which baffled his keenest scrutiny to decipher.

"Some brigand's passport, I warrant," he exclaimed at last, thrusting the little button into his pocket. "Well, none needs help worse than I, of any kind," he muttered sadly.

With a final adjustment of the bridle, he sprang on the mule's back and urged the animal forward at top speed along the mail-road ascending the hills.

He rode without slackening speed until the road turned abruptly and, winding through a narrow gorge, which boulders and trees rendered black and gloomy in the gathering dusk, emerged before a small, isolated venta or inn, of none too inviting appearance.

"Herrara's Inn!" cried the traveler; "he who receives the bandits so hospitably, as well. We shall now see what a few gold pieces may do."

Riding up to the door, he thundered upon it with the butt of his riding-whip. "Landlord—hola, landlord!"

A stout man came running from the stables, with a welcoming smirk on his broad features. It was the innkeeper, Herrara.

"Does it please your grace to dismount?" he inquired, with a low bow.

The young traveler laughed and beckoned the innkeeper to come closer.

"It pleases my grace to have a few words with you here in the open," he whispered, slipping a gold piece into the landlord's ready palm. "Tell me the road to the stronghold of El Tempranito—he of the——"

The innkeeper started back with a cry of fear and flung the gold from him as if it burned his hand.

"Señor, I know naught of the bandit," he replied, scowling sourly. "I am an honest man——"

"To be sure!" the traveler interrupted with a reassuring gesture. "So is El Tempranito, I stake my life—honester by far than the governor, Don Miguel,

to my mind. Come!" he pressed closer to the shrinking innkeeper. "I mean you no harm. I swear it by the Virgin del Pilar."

"Señor," stubbornly retorted the other, "I have had the honor to tell you I am an honest man. Him you seek you must seek by yourself—and look closely to yourself when you find him!" he muttered, turning aside.

The traveler heard the muttered words.

Suddenly he bethought him of the little talisman in his pocket. It was an opportunity to put the merits of the recently acquired passport to the test. Spurring his mule close to the lantern which hung before the venta, he held the button out to the landlord.

Herrara's face changed swiftly, his eyes bulging with surprise. He thrust his nose close to the button and stared long at it. Then he handed it back to the traveler with a low bow.

"I have no one to send who could guide you, señor," he said, scratching his head. "But wait—I have a kitchen lad who will show you the mountain road, to a certain point. Then you must shift for yourself. There is an old mule in the stable who knows the way. If you will change for the night——"

The traveler sprang from his saddle. "Willingly," he cried, "I will ride a she-goat if it will but show me the way through the mountains. Haste, landlord, haste, the matter is pressing!"

Herrara needed no urging after sight of the bandit's button. Before the last gray of the twilight had faded into the night the young caballero was headed through the steep defiles, impatiently urging on his mule.

Above, in the very heart of the Andalusian heights, where rugged peaks and crags, barren and forbidding, massed against the black sky, El Tempranito sat alone, staring into the pine-knot fire.

"Mother of heaven!" he exclaimed, thinking of the afternoon's acquaintance; "the lad's purse did not tempt me, but the man! A bandit he is, if I can read faces; a born defier of governments, for all his fine clothes and the blue blood in his veins. Chiquita recognized him as a friend. But who comes?"

Through the stillness of the night a sound of clattering hoofs and the noise of dislodged stones, rolling down the steep defile, came insistently to him.

"Caramba!" the bandit exclaimed. "The comrades are all here and asleep. Who visits me so late at night?"

He sprang to his feet and, seizing a pine torch, ran to the head of the winding defile. The flickering flame lighted up the narrow pathway, falling upon a weary mule and its rider.

"The caballero of the posada!" exclaimed José Maria.

"Señor!" cried the rider, holding up the silver button. Then he cried: "Is it not El Tempranito?"

"At your service," returned José Maria, "Señor——"

"Don Iago de Guttiere," supplied the other. "Ah, Señor Capitan, let us waste no time—for it presses. I come to ask a favor."

José Maria held out an inviting hand, beckoning his guest to the fire. The young man obeyed, springing from the jaded mule and speaking eagerly.

"Señor Capitan, you know of the Guttiere vineyards and orange-groves?"

José Maria nodded. "I thought there was something familiar," he murmured softly to himself. "Ah, Don Guttiere was good to me when I was a little lad!" The bandit sighed. "Ah, señor!" he cried aloud, "throughout all Andalusia Don Guttiere's lands are known. In Spain there are none so rich."

"And Don Miguel is poor. He finds it hard to maintain his rank as governor," the young man continued bitterly. "His excellency the governor wants money and he will stand at nothing to procure it."

The bandit's black brows met sternly. "I have had some acquaintance with the ways of Don Miguel," he said grimly. "You come to lodge a complaint against his excellency?"

"Señor Capitan!" the young man cried, "my father, Don Guttiere, goes to the galleys that the governor may confiscate his lands. And, be assured, some of the gold will stick to Don Miguel's fingers in passing to the crown."

"So Don Guttiere is your next victim, thief of a governor!" the bandit

muttered, glowering into the night. "We shall have something to say about that, if I do not mistake. Speak, my friend."

"Ah, señor," cried the youth, bending toward him supplicatingly, "where the law refuses justice—you will compel them. It is for that I came!"

José Maria sprang to his feet and drew himself up proudly.

"Have no fear that I shall fail to compel Don Miguel," he hissed, his voice lingering with sinister emphasis on the word. "But to do that I must fully understand."

Don Iago bowed. His excitement had spent itself and he went on wearily.

"My father accepted the constitution before the French returned to make us a present of this famous royalist government. During the conflict between the two parties, my father, like the others, killed his enemies. Of that Don Miguel has made a pretext. My father has been accused of murder and condemned for life to the galleys."

"Serpent governor!" the bandit cried. "But, be patient; before Don Guttiere goes to the galleys I will converse with Don Miguel—with these." He tapped the pistols in his sash.

The boy shook his head despairingly.

"The trial and sentence were rushed through this very morning. To-morrow, at dawn, my father sets out with the convoy of presidarios for Torre Blanca—the convict prison."

"Faith of my soul; Chiquita will not sleep to-night," scowled the bandit. "You give me little time, señor. Plainly, instead of conversing with Don Miguel, we must deliver the good Don Guttiere."

With a motion to remain quiet, the bandit disappeared into the darkness and presently returned, leading the bay mare.

"Patience, friend Iago," he said, as the lad rose to his feet and was preparing to follow the bandit on the mule. "You will wait here."

"But you will need help—there will be soldiers," the young man said.

José Maria laughed softly.

"Redcoats I have met before," he returned grimly. "Besides, how will one follow Chiquita? No, you shall stay here," he said kindly. "I have no mind

to restore that excellent Don Guttiere to a son unable to greet him. Doubtless there will be bullets—as there are red-coated ones.”

“Dead or outlawed—what is the difference?” the lad cried. For a moment José Maria looked at him sternly and the boy flushed scarlet. The bandit smiled.

“Come,” he cried gaily, “rest in peace till my return.” He sprang into the saddle and, with a wave of farewell, swung the big mare into the darkness.

“On, best beloved of my soul!”

“Madre mia!” the bandit murmured, as the mare cautiously picked her way down the treacherous defile. “I foresee that Don Miguel will have some writing to do after dawn!”

The bandit laughed softly, turning his head downward toward the plain below and the distant city hidden in the blackness of the night.

El Tempranito urged the willing mare across the last stretch of plain with rising hopes. The sky was still black in the east with the heavy massing of clouds peculiar to the hour before dawn. The bandit and the big mare were both as fresh and willing for the work before them as when they had started on the long night ride.

“Good Chiquita!” José Maria cried joyfully, patting the bay’s neck, “the coming morning bears a good omen. If the saints are with us we will beat this governor, who would play pranks with our friends, as we beat the dawn.”

The mare tossed her head and whinnied, treading softly upon the turf at the roadside as they skirted the sleeping city.

“Softly now, beloved, but swiftly,” the bandit whispered, flattening himself down on the mare’s neck. The big bay shot forward to the broad bridge that spanned the silently flowing river and on to the Torre Blanca road beyond.

Above them, lights flared in the windows of the old prison tower by the city gates; harsh voices, shouting orders, drowned the muffled rhythm of the mare’s hoof-beats on the wooden bridge.

“They are marshaling the convoy of presidarios,” hissed El Tempranito. “Ah, friend Guttiere, but for Chiquita you, whom they would make a galley-

slave, would surely lodge at Torre Blanca.”

He ran his hand over the double-barreled pistols in his sash and patted the brace which reposed in the saddle holsters.

“Caramba!” he exclaimed, “I am an arsenal to-day. In a year I have not fired so many pistol-shots as I now carry pistols. However, the good padre bids us give alms freely.” El Tempranito laughed softly. “It may be that the occasion is coming.”

The mare’s swift and silent pace brought them to a place where the road narrowed at a turning, with the trees growing thickly on either side. A dense underbrush of Spanish thorn formed an almost impassable barrier at the foot of the trees.

“Well, we know the opening, eh, Chiquita?” the bandit cried, as the bay swerved from the road and darted through an almost imperceptible aperture in the forbidding hedge. “My faith! ’twas on this very spot the diligence from Valencia once brought us a fine present!”

“If only they come before the dawn they are at my mercy,” the bandit meditated. “There will be four redcoats and the lieutenant; hardly more. The presidarios do not count against me. Ah!”

El Tempranito’s quick ear caught the reverberation of many tramping feet, steadily advancing along the road he had just traversed.

Overhead a faint gray began to show in the sky and the air was sweet with the first breath of the morning breeze.

Nearer and nearer came the convoy, tramping toward the narrow stretch of road where the bandit waited. Suddenly the big mare quivered and gathered herself for a spring.

“Now, Chiquita!” whispered El Tempranito.

The mare darted through the opening; a spectral body of men had appeared in the gray light.

El Tempranito’s pistol flashed, before the mare had fairly landed in the road, and a second bullet ploughed up the dirt at the head of the convoy.

The lieutenant was riding in front of the marching men. His horse plunged

against the impassable hedge and lashed out in pain at the sting of the thorns. Struggling vainly to control and free the animal, the lieutenant was powerless against the unexpected enemy who had attacked him.

The presidarios, at the two shots, broke from the ranks—shouting to each other that the soldiers were firing upon them.

The red flame of the bandit's pistol spurted again and again, and the clamor of the now thoroughly disorganized convoy increased to madness. Disregarding the orders of the officers, the presidarios fought with the soldiers and sought to escape through the hedges.

The soldiers, obeying the shouts of the lieutenant, ran back along the road, trying to check the flight of the presidarios, clubbing right and left at the chain of prisoners with their muskets, and driving them forward toward that spectral shadow that loomed up so ominously against the black and frowning hedge.

Suddenly, as the struggling group closed together near the big mare, the bandit rose in his stirrups.

"Guttiere! Guttiere!" he shouted; "a friend!"

His cry was followed by a shout of anger from the lieutenant, who still struggled in the hedge. A tall man broke from the group in the road and ran toward the bandit.

When José Maria saw his white hair and his features, faintly outlined in the dawning light, he urged Chiquita forward.

"This way, Don Guttiere!" he cried. "Up now, and off with me!"

But the lieutenant had freed his horse and swung it into the road.

"Fire on the prisoners!" he cried, "I will attend to Don Guttiere!"

The officer's pistol exploded and the tall man staggered as he ran.

"I am shot!" he cried. "The rascal has shot me!"

"Then he shall pay for it," José Maria responded, swiftly raising his own weapon. The bullet whistled through the air and the officer toppled from his saddle, falling upon the road.

"On your own head you brought it!" José Maria cried. "Courage, friend Guttiere!"

El Tempranito swung out in his saddle and gathered up the swaying form with a single sweep of his sinewy arm, lifting Don Guttiere from the ground.

"To cover, Chiquita, for our lives!" the bandit cried.

Clasping Don Guttiere's form against the saddle, he swung the mare back to the opening. Quickly as she had come, the bay darted through with her double burden and sped, for some paces, along the concealed hedge. Then she paused motionless, her very breathing stilled.

El Tempranito placed a warning hand on Don Guttiere's lips.

"Silence now!" he whispered.

From beyond the hedge of thorn a babel of voices rose from the superstitious presidarios and soldiers.

"It was the devil, the foul fiend!" they shouted. "He sprang out of the ground; now he's back to the black pit again!"

"Foul fiend or not!" one voice rang out above the others; "He's opened our way to freedom. Let us fly, my friends!"

"Sancta Maria, it is true!" the presidarios cried. "Off, lads!"

In an instant the prisoners had scattered again and fled along the road, the soldiers, with shouts and cries, pursuing them.

In the gray light, the lieutenant lay, face downward, in the road, his horse sniffing wonderingly at the still form.

As the noise of the convoy died away José Maria sprang from Chiquita and faced Don Guttiere anxiously as the old man wiped the blood from his cheek.

"It is but a scratch," he said. "The ball just grazed me. What Providence sent you to my aid, señor?" he cried.

José Maria smiled.

"Señor," he said softly. "Have you forgotten the little José Maria who so loved your grapes?"

Don Guttiere scanned the handsome face before him. Then, in the reaction from sorrow and despair, he flung his head back and laughed long and loud.

"Then praise the Virgin," he said, "that you did not follow my wise counsels. Else you would now be saying prayers in the theological seminary."

"And you, señor, would be pulling an oar in the king's galley." El Tempera-

nito's eyes sparkled; then he held up his hand warningly.

"Careful, señor," he said. "The soldiers may come back. There is quick work to be done."

The bandit stole to the opening of the hedge and darted into the road. In a moment he had divested the dead lieutenant of his uniform.

"Quick, señor," he said to Don Guttiere, "we must make an officer of you, with these."

He held out the uniform as he spoke. From a pocket of the lieutenant's coat a portfolio of red morocco fell to the ground.

"It seems we escort presidarios and carry despatches at the same time," the bandit said, pouncing upon it. "Hola! What is this? It bears the arms of our Governor of Andalusia. Let us see what message this devil of a Don Miguel sends."

With a rapid movement he wrenched the lock open and drew out a slip of white paper from within.

"To Don Pourtales, Governor of Valencia," he read, "Greeting! To-day Guttiere goes to the presidio at Torre Blanca. Next week his estates go to the crown, but before then you and I will have richly profited. It is safe, for they must depend upon our accounting at Madrid. MIGUEL."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the bandit, "now we shall see, Don Miguel, if I have you! I think you will reinstate Don Guttiere in his rank and lands, with much honor."

He sprang upon the bay, motioning to Don Guttiere to follow on the fallen officer's horse.

"We must be across the river before the sun gets higher, señor," El Tempranito urged, as they galloped along.

At the city gate the bandit drew rein.

"Follow the mail-road with all speed to Herrera's venta," he said to his companion. "Later I will join you, but now I have business—" he paused an instant and then added, in an undertone, "with Don Miguel, Governor of Andalusia!"

* * * * *

The silence of early morning lay upon the sleeping palace. In the vast ante-

room of the governor's bedchamber José Maria paused for a moment, listening.

"My faith!" he muttered, laughing softly; "'tis simple for the early bird to enter, but now to catch the worm!"

He frowningly considered the great oaken door with its heavy lock.

"That brave governor turns the key from within; there are other means."

The bandit stole noiselessly to the long French window, swung it silently open, and stepped upon the balcony without.

Below a drowsy guard stood yawning in his sentry-box, but the high stone coping sheltered El Tempranito from view.

Panther-like, he glided along the palace wall to the next window, thrust aside the Venetian blinds and entered the room. With a swift glance he assured himself that the key was in the lock, as he passed to the bed where the governor lay snoring.

"And now, Don Miguel!" the bandit said sharply, "we will converse, you and I."

Don Miguel started suddenly from his sleep, half-rising in his bed, his dark, saturnine face, with its sleep-laden eyes, showing ludicrously amazed against the white linen.

"El Tempranito—at your service," the bandit pursued suavely, before the astounded governor could recover himself.

The hated name effectually roused the governor.

"Damnation!" he cried. Still staring at the bandit, he raised his hand to the bell-cord hanging above the bed.

"Reflect, excellency," urged José Maria deprecatingly. "To summon aid means your destruction, certain and swift."

"Shoot, shoot if you dare, you cursed thief!" roared the governor, roused to fury. "Do you think I fear your bullets?"

José Maria shook his head gently. He suddenly thrust the red morocco case, bearing the tell-tale arms, before the governor's eyes.

"But this, excellency?"

At sight of the incriminating packet Don Miguel's face grew terribly white. Tremblingly he lowered his hand from the bell-cord and fell back among the pillows.

"Ah, it seems we do fear something," José Maria said mockingly. "Doubtless you know from whom I secured it?"

Don Miguel nodded helplessly. He knew too well the measure of the bandit's daring exploits to mistake the means by which he had obtained the despatches.

"What do you want of me?" he asked, with pallid lips.

"I?" José Maria smiled deprecatingly. "Your excellency honors me above my merits. On the contrary, I am here to do your excellency a service."

Don Miguel rose upon his elbow and stretched out an eager hand.

"Oh!" he exclaimed in a relieved tone. "You would barter that. You shall have immunity—gold——"

José Maria frowned ominously.

"I have a sense of honor, excellency," he interrupted scathingly. "The paper belongs to Don Guttiere, who sends it—to—Madrid—unless——"

"Unless?" repeated Don Miguel hoarsely.

José Maria shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not skilled in the law," he said, "yet, Don Guttiere could not prove a conspiracy if the judgment was based on error—his estates restored to him——"

The governor nodded. His breath came in choking gasps that stifled his utterance.

"A messenger will wait at Herrera's venta—until twelve of the clock, excellency."

José Maria bowed courteously and drew away from the bedside.

Don Miguel scowled, with a sidelong glance at the bell-cord.

"Be assured, Don Miguel," the bandit hissed, quickly noting the glance, "to harm me will destroy you. For that you have the word of El Tempranito!"

"Shall I give you a safe-conduct?" shouted the tortured governor, flinging prudence to the wind.

José Maria turned the key in the lock and flung the door open. On the threshold he paused smiling.

"El Tempranito, excellency, is his own safe-conduct," he said with dignity. "Remember—twelve of the clock to-day!"

* * * * *

"Ah, Chiquita mia!" José Maria murmured, as the mare bore him swiftly across the plain, "did I not say it? The morn was of good omen. There will be glad hearts in the hills when we arrive."

PICKING POOLE'S PHANTASMS.

By Raymond S. Spears.

THE story of a wandering musician who was, rather unfairly, regarded as a worthless one.

WEARLY footed, with his head bowed to a cold, stinging storm, "Picking" Poole plodded through the mud on the long trail from Marked Tree to Parkins, the banjo on his back representing his sole capital after forty years of life.

To the horsemen whom he met at rare intervals he turned a smiling face, and

when night came he did not lack for a place to rest his tired body.

His board and keep he paid for with a song or two to the accompaniment of the banjo. On each man he met he levied a smoke, and at night, when he sat playing before an open fireplace in a wind-swept board shack, he paused to borrow a wipe of snuff from the lady of the house. His banjo was his capital, but his smile was his collector of interest.

Day after day he pressed southward. Day after day the showers of rain came down on his thinly clad shoulders, making him hurry onward to keep his blood circulating.

As he tramped along he called himself alternately "fool," and "shif'less, mud-poking string-picker!" Well he might. He had loitered the fall away in the Ozarks among the Taney and Christian County people, whose love of music and good nature had carried him through the months when he should have been hurrying to the sunnier climate of Louisiana.

The frosts found him in the cold mountains, so he hurried away along the south-bound trail. Once started he did not tarry, but, regardless of sun or rain, resisted tempting invitations to linger. The swamp trails were frightful. The water softened them, and wagon wheels and horses' hoofs cut them to a mush. The mud was always ankle-deep, and sometimes up to his knees.

"Lawse! Lawse!" he groaned. "This is travelin' proper. I wouldn't live in this dod-dratted swale foh ten million dollahs an' two wives. Chills an' ager! neighbors seven miles apaht!"

Without knowing it, he passed a "last house," and entered a wild and uninhabited tupelo gum-brake, where the land was low and swampy.

Night came, blank and gray, leaving Poole staggering along between two vast tangles of elbow tree and knotted grapevines, in the loneliest forest in the district.

Mere loneliness did not appal him, but, after hours of fruitless walking, the steady drip of unseen raindrops against his face and the shivering of the forest trees bore heavily on his spirits. He tried to hurry, only to trip and fall headlong into the muck. Hungry, chilled, and growing faint Poole sham-bled along till he could go no farther.

"I gotter sleep aout!" he muttered. "Well, 'tain't the fustest time!"

From a tightly corked bottle he took a match, and by the light he discovered a hollow tree in which to pass the night. At break of day he started on again, and long after noon he came to a little cabin where he found dinner smoking on the table and a warm blaze in the fireplace. He tarried a while with the lonely home-makers for company's sake, but remembering suddenly, he started to his feet.

"I cayn't stay no moh!" he said. "Peah's like I'm allus shiftin' . . .

Well, down yonway theh's sunshine—I don' like the dark corners in these year bottoms; nosseh!"

Whistling cheerfully, he left the little home, but it had touched an undeveloped spot in his heart which ached as the increasing downpour once more forced him to turn up his collar.

"This ain' no good foh a man!" he muttered. "I'd orter have a roof oveh my head—huh! I mout of had one onct—on'y—on'y—shucks! Thah's a long time ago now. Well, if this heah keeps up, I 'low I'd betteh stop somers; I shore had."

For two days the storm beat down upon him, and then a log-camp boss offered him a lost cook's job.

"'Tain't hard!" the boss said, sizing up his man, "Jes' reg'lar putterin' raound the fiah to keep wahn!"

It was a crucial moment. Poole glanced down the trail, and saw a breeze coming, marked by drops from the forest branches.

"I'll take hit!" he exclaimed with a shiver. That night he heaped a great pile of fluffy biscuits before a lot of grinning darkies. The coffee he steeped was delicious, and there was a flavor to the pork he fried.

For two days Poole cooked and tended the camp. Then one of the crew told him that there was to be a dance in the quarters of a new plantation a mile away. Music was wanted, and would Poole go? He would and did. It was long after daybreak when he returned, and the boss met him with a dark and wrathful face.

"Heah's you' time!" the boss said. "Clar aout! We've had fiddling cooks, an' pickin' cooks, an' singin' cooks! What we wants is a reg'lar two-meals-in-the-dark-and-one-in-the-day cook, an' we'll paht with the musicals, drat 'em!"

"I hope ye find 'im!" Poole answered respectfully, pocketing the three silver dollars. Without another word he turned down the trail, leaving the boss stamping in the mud.

Around the first bend Poole made his only comment on the incident.

"Shif'less mudpoke! When you git life easy, you drap hit foh dancin' an' fiddlin'! Well, I'll go to the magno-lia now!"

He passed clearing after clearing, following a road which grew imperceptibly fainter. As night came on he found himself in a lumber forest, and somehow he had missed the trail. A little wind stirred the branches, and a falling mist thickened the air. While he searched for the path, darkness came.

"Lawse!" he exclaimed, "rainin' an' I gotter sleep aout!"

He was searching for a hollow tree when he heard a distant cry.

"Mammy! Mammy!"

"Sho! Mus' be a house thataway!" he said, starting on.

The rain was falling noisily among the branches and on the ground, and stinging when it struck the man's skin, but as he called aloud, and was answered by a boy's voice, he did not notice the weather.

At last he came to the little boy. He was on the edge of a cane-brake, and no house was anywhere near.

"Poh chile! He's lost!" exclaimed the man. "Come, heah, little chap—I'm yo' friend!"

In spite of the darkness he reached the lad and took hold of his arm. The sleeve crackled and the man felt scales of ice breaking under his hand.

"Lawse!" Poole cried out. "Hit's sleet!"

The winter terror of the swamp country was upon him. Taking off his coat, Poole wrapped the lost boy in it, and then lifted him to his shoulders.

"A man cayn't sleep aout a night like this!" Poole said to himself. "The chap cayn't live fur from heah—I'll holler!"

"Whoe-e-e!"

No answer came; but the swish of the sleet driving through the branches filled the air with a roar. The man hurried on aimlessly and then he caught sight of a gleam of water ahead of him.

He cried out joyfully, "This chap's house is shore on the bank, an' we'll find hit! Hue! 'Tain't fur now!"

Turning toward the stream, the man hurried on hopefully. The way was level before him, but he tripped over fallen limbs and strands of green brier, while the child seemed to grow heavier.

A new sound came into the air—the creaking of branches, overburdened by

the ever-increasing coating of ice. The twigs rattled as they hit one another, and the weaker ones broke off and came crashing to the ground.

"Law! Law!" Poole exclaimed as he stumbled along, hurting his shins against the sticks and stones. Then he came to a "dry bayou," an old branch of the St. Francis River.

He almost ran down the declivity; in the bottom he broke through the crust.

The next moment he was wallowing, with the mire up to his hips. With a terrible effort he flung himself forward, found a branch of elbow brush and, with one hand, dragged himself out of the mire. On the far bank he found that one shoe had been sucked from his foot.

"Law! Law!" Poole exclaimed. "Hit'll tear my foot all up!" He turned back thinking to fish out the shoe, but in a moment he saw that the attempt would be futile, so he picked up his burden and started on.

To his left was the pale gleam of the river; to his right was the opaque gloom of the forest.

Above the trees he could discern the dark sky.

Bareheaded, and holding his shoulders up to protect the skin of his neck from the sting of the sleet, the man pressed on. Time and again he stopped to rub his bare foot, or to catch his breath.

The film of ice on the ground was so thick that he slipped every time his shoe landed on a stick. The coat crackled every time he changed the position of his arms. But the boy was warm and slept until the pelting sleet finally woke him up.

"Law! Law!" Poole muttered. "Ain' this travelin' proper?"

The strain increased; his arms were cramped, and he began to see purple rings, black suns, and red shooting-stars.

The time came when he had to stop to rest, and he tried to find the lee of a tree, but the sleet found him, and drove him on, cold and staggering. Time and again a limb crashed down near him. Once something hit his head and knocked him to his knees, stunned and crying.

"I wish I was down yonder where theh ain' no sleet!" he sobbed. "This ain' no place foh a man!"

The timber through which he was passing was nearly all small, the large trees having been cut away for the Helena sawmills. There was no hope of a hollow tree, and only the thought that the boy's home must be near kept him going. He had no idea of time. The hurt of the foot, the pound of the banjo on his back and the ache in his arms were all that he noticed.

"'Tain't no use!" he exclaimed at last. "I cayn't go no farther—I'm plump tired aout!"

He sat down under the merciless pelt-ing for a little while, but the sleet fairly drove him from his seat. He came to a cane-brake that grew to the edge of the river-bank. He forced his way into it, his bare foot thrilling with agony as it pressed down between the close growing stalks. Between his hurts he noticed a tinkling as of ringing bells. He paused to listen, and, as the wind swept across the icy cane-tops, he heard above the rattle of the sleet a set of chimes, sweeter and more delicate than any music he had ever heard. For a full minute he listened, charmed by the sound, and then cried out:

"Gracious! Dyin' folks hears them!"

Thrusting the thought from him and refusing to listen to the music, he pressed onward. Somehow he got through the cane-brake, and the music died slowly away.

Sometimes he paused to listen, fearing that he could hear the bells in his ringing ears. Sometimes he was sure he could not, and again he feared that he heard them. The fear of hearing "angel music—shore death!" was greater than his bruises.

After a time he began to distinguish things. Overhead the sky became so plainly visible that he could see the network of the branches against it. He blinked, fearing the black suns had affected his vision. At each blink he saw his surroundings more distinctly, and it worried him until suddenly the truth dawned on him.

"Shucks!" he said. "Hit's comin' day!"

Day came, but with it no cessation of the storm. Wonderful was the scene which the people of the swamps saw that

morning. Every twig and branch was encased in a transparent covering of ice.

Poole rejoiced in the light and it seemed to give him new strength.

Unfortunately he could not see very clearly. His eyes blurred unaccountably.

The burden in his arms had fairly frozen to his waistcoat. Turning his head he saw the handle of his banjo cased in ice. One of the strings, with little globes of ice on it, was swaying back and forth. It tinkled and made a sweet sound. Thereafter the music did not leave his ears, but grew louder and louder as he staggered on. He began to smell the odor of peach-blossoms, and gradually there came to him the promise of spring. The trees in bloom were only a little ahead of him, so he wrenched his feet from the ground and went toward them.

"We'll go yonder an' res' a while!" he said to his burden. "Then we'll go fin' yoh mammy. Yoh mammy who has yellow hair an' who I ust to call Tennessee—Law! She was a pretty 'oman, that gal was. I 'lowed she loved me—but shucks! I reckon she got tired of waitin'. Now we're comin' to them peach orchards—we'll res' thar. When we's rested we'll go fin' yer mammy!"

Unable to see plainly, he was obliged to go cautiously. To his left he could see the water, and ahead of him lay a shimmering trail, at the end of which was a little opening with a trace of pink in it, and from which was wafted the odor of peach-blossoms. He was so tired that he could hardly move. He felt that he ought to have known better than to go barefooted at such a time, in such a place.

Then he heard music again, and forcing his way along he hurried toward it. A thousand hurts and restraints troubled him, but he kept on in spite of them. He knew that when he reached that little open where the pink trees were, he could sit down and rest. There would be comfort there.

On the far side of that cane-brake there was a little cabin at the edge of a considerable clearing. The man of the house was on the roof prying off blocks of ice to keep the shack from breaking in. Inside, by the fireplace, sat a wom-

an holding a baby in her arms and sobbing. Somewhere in that wilderness of ice around them was her other child. Her husband had tried to find it and failed.

Into this clearing staggered Poole, and blindly kept on, past the cabin. He fell to his hands and knees under a little tree and began to fumble with the wrappings of the child. As its face was pelted with the sleet, the young one began to cry, upon which the mother in the cabin uttered a scream and rushed to the door.

At sight of the ragged, ice-covered man, fumbling over the boy, the mother sprang at him, pushed him away and then carried her son into the house. Her husband soon followed with Poole in his arms.

"Gawd! What a foot!" the man exclaimed: "He's plumb done for. Tennessee—is that boy all right?"

"He shore is, Luther. That man saved 'im!"

The husband did what he could for Poole. He stripped him down, rubbed him, and gave him a copious draft of whisky.

"I 'low he'll die!" the man told his wife.

"Me die!" Poole exclaimed, "I ain' goin' to die. Why, man, I'm jes' goin' down South. I heard the music, I seen the blooms. I'm goin' on ag'in—lawse!"

He had caught sight of the woman tending her child by the fireplace.

"Um—m," he said, rubbing his eyes. "You-all—you-all—who mout you be, strange?"

"I'm Luther Cope—who are——"

"Cope? I ain't no love fer—— Hit's Tennessee, eh, man? She's Tennes-

see—— Sh-h! Heah that music—heah it?" Poole turned his head on the pillow. The man turned to the woman, who had come closer and gazed at the pale and drawn face.

"Good Lord!" she whispered, "hit's Pickin' Poole. He's—he's come back like he said—an' to die! Jes' like he said, up in ole Kaintuck!"

"Sh-h!" Poole said warningly. "Heah them chimes? Ain' they purty—sweet? Law, chile, don' drag down on my arms so—hist up a little! Wonder what kin' of music that is? Hue! Thehs the peach-blooms, an' a little garden—we'll be theh d'rectly, chile! Law! Law! I mus' ketch that tune! My banjo, man, my banjo, please!"

The man handed down his own banjo from the wall, and Poole seized it. He picked the strings a little.

"'Tain't in tune!" he muttered, "but hit'll do! I'll have to play jes' chords! Lawse! Lawse! Ain' hit sweet—sweet music?"

With an effort he caught up all five strings, and let them fall with a crash. Then trying feebly to follow the music he heard he began to call, with rhythmic swing:

"All change—turn yer honeys onct again,
Then all walk around the hall-l!
And that's all!"

His old-time smile wreathed the whitening face, and the banjo slid to the floor.

A moment later the woman exclaimed, half crying:

"Wa'n't that just like Picking Poole? Wa'n't it just like him to die thataway, after playing and dancing all his life? Poor, shiftless wanderer—and him so brave!"

ON HOPE.

By Oliver Goldsmith.

THE wretch condemn'd with life to part,
Still, still on Hope relies;
And every pang that rends the heart
Bids expectation rise.

Hope, like the glimmering taper's light,
Adorns and cheers the way;
And still, as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray.

THE AGITATED EMERALD.

By George Folsom.

THE story of a mobile gem that cut up all sorts of capers and created no little excitement.

MR. JOHN TRUESDELL, a retired merchant, had forsworn fast horses, and had not yet acquired the automobile habit. Being free from these "manias," as he termed them, he devoted his leisure to collecting unset precious stones.

So zealous was he in his new occupation that he soon attracted the attention of those independent dealers who make a business of "private house" trade with customers who never haggle at a jeweler's counter, and insist on examining gems on their own library tables.

Mr. Truesdell was excited as well as pleased when he had read for the second time the following letter from one of these dealers:

NEW YORK, Nov. 1, 1905.

JOHN TRUESDELL, ESQ.,

DEAR SIR:

I have just succeeded in securing one of the largest and finest rough emeralds that has ever come to this country. It was found in India and is said to have some strange characteristics. One of these is its changing to a lighter color under conditions I cannot very well explain in a letter. It is also said that it has been known to move without being touched.

I would like you to see it before I show it to others. The price is four thousand, which no more than covers its actual value in karats. The other things may be all humbug, and I wouldn't care to have you buy it expecting to find it something queer. Trusting you will make an early appointment, I remain,

Yours respectfully,
THOMAS TRIPP.

"I've had good things from Tripp," said Mr. Truesdell to his secretary, "and I think I will look this emerald over.

Please write him, Mr. Wilder, that I will see him here to-morrow night. If that stone really does change in tint—for I suppose that is what he means—I will have it cut and set. But are there such stones?"

Tracy Wilder, a tall, slender young Englishman with a closely trimmed, pointed beard, hesitated for a moment.

"There was the Nadhir diamond," he said slowly, "which flashed defiant rays when an enemy of the king, its owner, came near it. Then there was an East Indian ruby which turned white every new moon. There were others, but I cannot recall just what they did."

"Authentic?" said Mr. Truesdell.

Wilder put out his hands with a distinctly French gesture as he answered, "Not exactly vouched for, but mentioned in chronicles of the early occupation of India by the English. All such stories are more or less exaggerated."

"Well," said Mr. Truesdell, settling down to an examination of the more prosaic stones of his own collection, "make the appointment, anyway. I will consider the emerald on its merits."

At eight o'clock the next evening Mr. Thomas Tripp bustled into the library, a thick-set, smooth-faced, well-dressed man, with just enough bluntness to prevent his displaying any trace of servility. For servility, Tripp considered, was a very useless thing in his particular business.

"I've brought it, Mr. Truesdell," he cried briskly, "and really, sir, the more I look at it the finer it shows up. It's a grand stone, but—" and here his voice sank, "I'm afraid of it. There does seem to be something about it—" and then he looked at his customer and from him inquiringly to the secretary, now busy at his desk in a far corner.

"You can say anything you wish before Mr. Wilder," said Truesdell, "he is something of an expert, too, and will examine the stone with me. Mr. Wild-

er, this is Mr. Tripp to whom you wrote, and he has brought the emerald. Come over to the table and join us."

Wilder quietly seated himself at the end of the long, leather-covered table at which Truesdell and Tripp were already seated, and the dealer went on:

"Now," he said, taking from an inner pocket a small box, "I want to say something before I open this. It's hard to believe, but you can judge for yourselves."

He held up the box and shook it. There was no sound that the others could hear, and Mr. Truesdell smiled.

"This morning," said Tripp, impressively, "I looked at the stone and wrapped it in tissue paper afterward. Then I put it in the box and placed the box before me on the table. I heard a slight rattle and looked at the box and, would you believe me, gentlemen, that box actually moved!"

Mr. Truesdell stared, but Wilder laughed. "Put it on the table now," he said.

Mr. Tripp placed the box in the center of the long table, and the three men looked at it intently for more than a minute. It did not move, and again Wilder laughed.

"The move was an illusion," he said. Mr. Truesdell thought differently. As the prospective owner of a stone with a history he was prepared for any exhibition. In fact, the price being settled, he was very willing to have the box move or even to have the emerald unwrap itself and come out of the box of its own volition.

"Open it, open the box!" he cried eagerly, "and let me see this wonderful stone. I cannot wait."

Mr. Tripp opened the box with provoking slowness. Taking off the tissue-paper he finally revealed to Mr. Truesdell a magnificent uncut stone, half an inch wide on its flatter side and somewhat longer from its flat to its pointed end.

"Odd shape, too," said Tripp, fingering it gingerly, "almost the oddest I ever saw; and I have seen a good many in my time."

He passed it over to Mr. Truesdell, who examined it with glistening eyes and moving lips.

"Magnificent!" he gasped, "wonderful! Whether it moved or not, it moves me. Magnificent!" he repeated, for no other adjective seemed to fit the case.

Wilder, being at least four feet from the others, actually sprawled along his end of the table to get a nearer view.

Then, his curiosity apparently satisfied, he settled back into his chair and waited for his turn to examine the stone. When it came he looked the gem over with the patient, careful manner of an expert.

"It is magnificent," he said, handing it back to his employer, "no other word describes it."

"Mr. Truesdell," said Tripp, rubbing his hands together, "you know a stone when you see one. Mr. Wilder seems to know one, too. Do you fancy this one at the price?"

"The best answer I can give you to that," said Truesdell, "is my check. Now," he added, after passing the check over to Tripp, "there can be no question in the matter. The stone is mine, and if it moves it moves for me."

"That is understood," said Tripp laughing, "and I don't mind saying that I had a sort of a fit when the box tipped this morning. It might have rolled over when I wasn't there, you know, and gone clean away. You'd better keep it locked up when your eye isn't on it."

"Nonsense!" cried Wilder nervously, "there's nothing in that moving business. See here," he went on, rising, "suppose we work that out now. If it can move, it can do so just as readily unwrapped as wrapped and boxed. May I test that, Mr. Truesdell?"

"Certainly, if you wish," said his employer.

"We will place it between us," said Wilder, rubbing the flattest end of the stone and laying that side on the table at a point about two feet from where he had been seated. Each of the other men were sitting at the same distance from the sparkling green object, now directly under an electric light.

Wilder sat down again and the three men gazed intently at the emerald. For perhaps a half minute they neither moved nor spoke. Then Tripp began to move his fingers nervously, and Trues-

dell for a moment allowed his eyes to wander from the stone to the moving fingers.

Suddenly Tripp gasped, and straightened himself in his chair. Truesdell turned his eyes to the emerald and sprang to his feet. The stone was moving down the table toward Wilder, slowly indeed, but unmistakably.

Wilder did not rise. Instead, he shrank slowly away from the table back into his chair. His right hand hung over the arm of the chair, the other, drawn from the table when he fell back into his chair, was nervously closing and unclosing. In his face there was more fear than surprise, and Truesdell, leaning forward, allowed his gaze to leave the moving gem for a moment. He saw the secretary's face and wondered. Wilder had been the skeptic, and now he was perturbed.

Tripp was now on his feet, apparently striving to speak. The stone was barely six inches from the end of the table and Truesdell had made one step toward it.

"It will go over!" he cried, in a choking voice. "It is going over!"

"Wait!" cried Tripp, reaching over a detaining arm, "I—I will——"

At that instant the stone slid over the edge and disappeared. A sharp but slight explosion followed, and Wilder, springing from his chair, bent over the carpet, his hands moving convulsively.

"Look! Look!" he cried, pointing to the floor under the projecting end of the table. On the red carpet were scattered a number of small, glittering green fragments.

"The emerald has exploded!" cried Truesdell. Then he ran to the door and opened it.

"Ames," he called, "come up here, will you? Something has happened."

II.

SIDNEY AMES had arrived at the Truesdell house fifteen minutes after Mr. Tripp had been ushered into the library. In a few moments Miss Alice Truesdell had put him in possession of the contents of Tripp's letter.

"Funny idea that," he said, "especially the moving. Stones that change in color, or tint, are not unknown. Who

is Tripp? I seem to know the name. A thick-set man, with a smooth face and an oily manner. Does that describe him?"

"I don't really know, Sidney," she laughed, "but father often buys from him. And Sidney, I don't half like our new secretary. He is furtive, don't you think?"

"Not really," said Ames, "he's just nervous, diffident. I noticed that when I met him coming over from England. But he is all right and of good family. Of course he is poor and I guess he was glad to get this berth. I am his sponsor, you know, so you must not abuse him before me."

"I am not abusing him, Sidney, but I think he is rather queer."

"Maybe he is," answered Sidney carelessly, "and this emerald your father says he will have mounted for you, if it turns out to be all that it should. Do you really want it?"

At this moment Mr. Truesdell's loud call was heard, and Sidney jumped up.

"Wait here, Alice," he cried, as he ran up the stairs, "if it is anything serious I will come back at once. Perhaps the stone has changed color."

In the library the first face he saw was that of Tripp. He cast one searching look at the dealer and turned to Mr. Truesdell, who stood at the end of the table looking down on the green fragments.

"The emerald has exploded, Sidney!" cried Truesdell, in a quavering voice.

"No!" said Ames blankly. "Has it? How?"

"How?" cried Truesdell, throwing up his hands. "Why, how would it explode? See here," motioning toward the floor, "there are the remains."

Sidney stooped and began picking up the pieces of emerald. "Not much good now, are they?" he said.

"There's sympathy for you," groaned Truesdell, turning to the others.

In a few moments Ames had all the larger fragments in a little heap on the table. Then he separated them.

"So this is the emerald that changes color?" he said. "It has changed color since it exploded—in places. What was it doing when it went off?"

Truesdell, with another groan at Ames's impassiveness, told the story of the emerald's trip across the table and over the edge.

"That reminds me of something," said Ames. "Do you remember that London clipping I gave you to put in your scrap-book of queer tales about diamonds and other stones? Wilder," turning toward the secretary, "would you mind getting the book from the big desk beyond yours?"

Then he sat down in Wilder's chair. "You sat here, did you?" he said, taking the book from the other's hand. Wilder nodded and went back to Tripp's side of the table.

"Here it is!" cried Ames. "Excuse me, please, while I go over it." He read the item to himself with frowning face.

"I thought it was a similar case," he said, as he closed the book, "and I will now demonstrate." He reached both arms along the table and then drew them back again.

"This dress coat," he said, "doesn't give me much liberty of action. The sleeves are tight."

He rose from his chair and walked toward Wilder.

"You might let me wear your coat for a few minutes, if you don't mind," he said, "this is a very pretty illustration of something that happened in London, and I want to do it properly."

Wilder hesitated for an instant, then took off his coat and handed it to Ames.

"I don't see——" began Truesdell, querulously.

"You will!" interrupted Ames, as he seated himself, in the new coat, at the end of the table.

"Now," he went on, "imagine that this ten-cent piece is a diamond, for it was a diamond that performed in England. I lay it here," placing it where the emerald had been placed.

"Now, you all watch it carefully—and nothing happens at first. You are too anxious, you know, as they were in London. I will tell you about that after I get through my demonstration."

"This is foolishness," began Mr. Truesdell, looking from Ames to Tripp, now frowning in his chair. Wilder, still in shirt-sleeves, stood beside him.

"Foolishness?" queried Ames, "I don't—— Ah! It moves!"

The coin had started down the table toward him and he drew back into his chair with an affectation of alarm. Truesdell was the only man of the other three who stirred, and he moved toward the coin as he had started before to catch the emerald.

Again he was too late. The coin increased its speed and fell over the edge of the table. This time there was a sharp, metallic click, and Ames reached down to the carpet with his right hand.

"Ah!" he said, "the coin is broken and here is the result!" And he held up two nickels before the indignant Mr. Truesdell.

The latter would have spoken, but Ames checked him.

"Now," he said, "I will read the clipping," and he pulled the book toward him and read aloud:

"A happening at the Carlton Club has created some excitement among members. A dealer in diamonds was showing a supposed 'live' diamond to three club members when the stone, without any warning, began to jump up and down. In the slight disturbance which ensued the diamond disappeared and the clubman who had already paid for it was disconsolate, but suspicious.

"The stone was afterward found, an unpleasant feature of the case being the fact that one club member seemed to be involved. The matter was hushed up, but the buyer recovered his check."

"Now, Mr. Tripler," cried Ames, "give me Mr. Truesdell's check. I wish to explode that."

"My name is Tripp——" began the dealer.

"Not in London," returned Ames, coolly.

"You are going too far, Sidney!" cried Mr. Truesdell. "The risk was mine after I paid for the stone. You are certainly going too far."

"Don't you see it yet?" cried Ames. "No? Then I will have to tell you what was not printed in that clipping. The diamond was brought to the club by a gentleman named Tripler. When it jumped, it jumped toward a club member who was known to be in financial difficulties. It failed to explode,

though the exploding business was not then unheard of.

"The third, or disinterested, club member had good eyes and saw things. So the stone was recovered and given back to Tripler. He returned the check, and, as the clipping says, the matter was hushed up."

"But this stone is gone—the fragments are there!" cried Mr. Truesdell helplessly.

"This stone," said Ames, "is not gone. See here," he went on, holding up a long horse hair. "I found this under the table. On the end is a bit of wax. The stone is pressed down upon it. The gentleman in the chair holds the other end of the hair, and as he moves back in evident alarm the stone comes toward him. When it falls over the edge he catches it in his left hand; with his right hand he explodes against the chair a toy-pistol cap attached to a small iron weight. Then the fragments of the stone are found on the floor."

"That, sirs, is a combination of the London happening and an 'explosion' story told me by the third clubman. Now, Mr. Tripp in New York and Mr. Tripler in London, give me the check."

"When you show me the emerald," said Tripp, sulkily, while the secretary stood pale but quiet, looking from Truesdell to Ames and back again.

"The third clubman," went on Ames, "said that when the 'live' stone went

over the edge of the table it was conveyed to a small pocket on the inside of the confederate's coat-sleeve. Here"—putting his thumb and forefinger inside the right sleeve of Wilder's coat—"is the emerald!"

And Ames held it up where Mr. Truesdell could see it.

"That is it," cried the collector.

"The game is up," whispered Wilder to the discomfited dealer. "Give him the check and say nothing. The old man is proud and we will get away all right. Ames knows that."

Tripp threw the check across the table to the collector, and Ames went on talking, for he had seen the shamed look in Truesdell's face.

"You can take the stone with you when you go, Mr. Tripp," Ames said, looking again at Truesdell, who nodded, "and take Mr. Wilder with you at the same time. Confederates seem to be as easily procured here as in London. Mr. Truesdell could hold you on this, but I guess we will hush it up right here. But it will be just as well if you both leave town. Mr. Wilder can send for his things."

Thinking that Mr. Truesdell would prefer to be left alone, Ames followed the swindlers down-stairs.

"Girlie," he said to Alice Truesdell, "you won't get your rough emerald. It proved altogether too rough, and your father sent it away."

"OBJECTION WITHDRAWN."

By Arthur Hendrick Vandenburg.

SHOWING that wealth possessed by one's beloved should be no bar to persistent courtship.

TEMPESTUOUS Tompkins beat a nervous tattoo with his fingernail upon the ledge of the desk. His right hand, meanwhile, nervously twitched off his glasses, beat

them back upon his determined nose, and snatched them off again.

"I tell you that Theresa loves me," persevered young Comstock, standing at respectful but determined attention before the fuming capitalist.

"I tell you she doesn't," snapped the portly host to his unwelcome guest. "She wouldn't dare to without my consent."

Shadows of war seemed to settle upon the magnificent private sanctum.

"She does, nevertheless," softly announced the beardless youth. "As a matter of form, I have come here to ask you to put aside your prejudices and——"

"As a matter of form!" interrupted Tompkins with a withering sneer. "I suppose my refusal would not hamper you in the slightest?"

"It would prove inconvenient," admitted Comstock, thoughtfully brushing the nape of his black derby across the sleeve of his coat.

"Well, she doesn't love you," the well-groomed elder repeated with a tone which brooked no argument. "Even if she says so," he added.

He pitched his glasses across the desk. They fell, clattering, between the inkstand and the paper-weight.

"Why, say, Comstock! I spent ten thousand dollars on that girl's education. I put her through private school; then shipped her to a seminary off down East. Then she took two years in Germany learning to fiddle. I've bought her all the polish there is to buy. Now do you suppose for a single minute I'll consider throwing her away on a man who runs a candy-store? Not yet. She's got to marry a duke, she has. Or something else with a title. I'm in the habit of getting returns on my investments. You're only a candy-maker."

Comstock straightened stiffly to his full six feet.

"I believe you made your money in hair-oil," he replied grimly. "'Timothy Tompkins's Tonic,' is the way the yellow labels used to read, if I remember correctly."

"Yes," roared Theresa's father, bringing his burly fist down upon the arm of his chair with a heavy thud. He had been prodded in his vulnerable spot. For ten years he had figured as a director of banks and a broker in bonds, endeavoring to live down the memory of the fluid that had made him rich.

"And a vast deal of difference there is between hair-oil and peppermint-drops," Tompkins cried. "A deal of difference, sir. I paid a chemist thousands of dollars to perfect Tompkins's Tonic. Any fool who knows enough to boil water and stir with a spoon can make candy."

"Not Comstock's candy," corrected the visitor, leaning against the door-jamb in debonair unconcern. He was drawing on his immaculate gray gloves.

"There's where your education has been neglected. Candy-making is one of the modern arts. Comstock confectionery has as wide a reputation as Tompkins's Tonic. Our candies are fit for a king—or for your duke or a son-in-law. Take our Mary Anns for instance——" he was standing, arms akimbo, feet planted far apart, derby pushed back from his brow, as though soliciting an order for a bill of goods.

"Mary Ann is a delicious little chocolate drop, flavored with just a suggestion of rose, coated with a nut-brown paste of fascinating taste, generously stuffed with cocoanut of finest grain, all molded into the dearest bit of candy you can imagine and wrapped in scented tin-foil. We get three dollars a pound——"

"To thunder with Mary Ann!" cried Tompkins irreverently, again reaching for his glasses.

"Of course you named this stuff after a woman! I tell you you're in a woman's job! Mary Ann! A delicious little chocolate drop—bah!"

He started his finger thumping again upon the desk-ledge.

"Every barber on the street makes hair-tonic," replied Comstock, "puts it in a gilded bottle, pastes a yellow label on it, and hawks it to the bald-headed"—looking accusingly at the shining summit of Tompkins's bulldog brow.

"But even a barber is a man," snapped the banker, unwillingly drawn into an argument, yet eager to protect his position. "You don't find toddling school-girls going into the kitchen after school to make hair restorer. I tell you you're running a woman's shop; and I want my daughter to marry a man!"

"You said a duke before," gently suggested Comstock, casting to the winds all vestige of a son-in-law's proper respect. "Aren't you getting the species mixed?"

"Certainly not a candy-maker," cried Tompkins. Then he suddenly thought of a final point in support of his position.

"The man who discovered hair-tonic was a benefactor to his race," he said,

without turning. "Now think what Samson would have given for——"

"Tompkins's Tonic," interrupted Comstock.

The glasses again popped off the bridge of the nose and clattered against the inkstand.

"We've said enough," the old man announced pompously, throwing a glance of cold austerity toward the rejected suitor.

"Theresa—will—not marry a—cook—or—anybody who has anything to do with cooking."

He bit off each word with a determination which invited no dispute. "You're not a bad fellow, Comstock"—mellowing just enough to soften the blow—"but I can't stand for your business."

"I want a son-in-law who meets and deals with business men. Now business men no more frequent your store than I do. There is nothing to call them there. What do I care about the price of Mary Anns!"

Unconsciously he lapsed into a scathing jeer. "Nothing!" answering his own query. "What has chocolate to do with the bank clearances of the day? What has a stick of lemon to do with the operation of my bond offices? There you are. You have my answer. I tell you Theresa does not love you. I tell you she wouldn't dare—against my will—with fall bonnets only a matter of days."

Comstock studied the pearl buttons upon his gloves. His eye followed the pattern of blooming roses in the Brussels rug. At the foot of the stem he found Tompkins's patent-leathered foot planted in final determination. He followed up the well-creased trouser's leg to the white waistcoat. Tompkins's face was the natural terminal of his journey.

"Nevertheless, I shall marry her—wait a minute!"

Tompkins had half-risen from his chair, his face white with anger. He dropped back when Comstock held up a silencing hand.

"And with your consent," the suitor added.

Tompkins relaxed with a forced chuckle of relief.

"I'll consent when I come into your

store and buy some Mary Anns," he said sarcastically.

"Exactly!" replied Comstock.

Tompkins straightened—and frowned.

"You must have anticipated my idea," the visitor went on, now with one hand upon the door-knob.

"You will, of course consent if, within three weeks, you come into my store and buy some Mary Anns?"

"Yes," laughed the hair-oil king.

He rose and proffered Comstock his hand. "You really interest me, young man," he said patronizingly, "in spite of your business. And if I don't happen to crave some of your delicious chocolate drops within the time limit——"

"You will," replied Comstock, smiling grimly. "Not only you but all your fellow bank directors. Good day, sir."

"Good day," murmured Tompkins, with a troubled frown.

Tompkins was president and managing director of the only bank in town. He was president of the gas-works and the rattan furniture factory. He was chairman of the Republican county committee and at the head of the business committee of the Home for Civil War Veterans' Widows. He had twice been mayor, and had held any number of other odd public jobs from year to year. He owned a palatial residence at the head of the Boulevard, and entertained lavishly.

For six months he had openly discountenanced Theresa's friendship with the dealer in bonbons.

Comstock was a clean young fellow, to be sure, handsome, popular, and prosperous in his more than ordinarily pretentious candy-store next to the bank. But he had shown the unpardonable bad judgment of choosing a shoemaker for a father and the molding of sweetmeats for a profession. He merited and could only expect the coldest sympathy from the head of the town's aristocracy.

The banker turned once more to his desk, after Comstock's retirement. He mopped his perspiring brow with a generous handkerchief and granted himself the luxury of a long sigh of relief. But his brain was in a turmoil. He had been sadly disturbed by the attack from the enemy. It had been many long

months since any one had dared mention hair-oil to the respectable old capitalist. It was generally known to be a forbidden subject.

Never was it even hinted within the family circle. Among outsiders a new generation had sprung into existence since the days of hair-oil. Slowly Tompkins had felt that he was living down the disgrace of his early notoriety. Suddenly and unexpectedly the skeleton had been dragged from the closet. An added indignity was the offer of a candy-maker to marry the patriarch's only daughter, she who was intended for a peer. And worst of all, Tompkins really liked the young fellow.

Unable to deal with the letters and papers upon the broad desk before him, he slammed down the heavy mahogany lid and drew his swivel-chair to the generous plate-glass window.

He excavated a fat cigar from the deep pocket of his waistcoat, and thoughtfully slit the little brown band with his paper-knife. A match was soon teasing the end of the weed into flame.

He lay back, with feet cocked upon the window-sill, seeking comfort and oblivion in the aromatic clouds of smoke.

He was beginning to wonder what sort of a tearful reception he might receive from Theresa and just thinking that he would go home at once and complete the ordeal with neatness and despatch, when his telephone bell rang.

With a grunt he answered the call.

"Father," came the gentle word from a soft voice.

"Yes, my dear." Tompkins edged forward on his chair in expectancy.

"Are you coming home to lunch?"

"Yes—I was just about to start. I want to tell you about a yachting party I am preparing for the Orient. I wondered if you and your mother would care to go?"

"Will you do an errand for me on the way, daddy?" gently urged the siren, disregarding the yachting party.

"Of course, my dear," said Tompkins, suavely eager to please the girl whom he would soon have to meet in mortal combat.

"And you won't forget?"

"No, daughter. Do I ever forget anything you want?"

"And you'll come right away?"

"On the next car—or you can send the carriage down."

"Well, daddy! Please stop at Comstock's and get me a pound of Mary Anns. That's a new candy, and the girls say it's delicious. You won't forget? And——"

"Wait a minute!" Tompkins interrupted. He clapped his hands over the transmitter and cursed roundly beneath his breath. In despair he frowned at the ground-glass in his office-door. Appealingly he glanced at the picture molding.

"Girly!" he finally said, speaking directly into the black mouthpiece with all the softness and diplomacy at his command: "A messenger has just brought in a note from the bank. There's to be a directors' meeting and I can't get home to lunch. I'm awfully sorry. What? Of course I will. I'll try and remember the candy this evening. I may not be near Comstock's, but I'll see that you're remembered."

With an irritated air he slammed the receiver into place.

"He put her up to that," he muttered grimly, between set teeth. "She'd never have worked me along into that trap alone."

Taking his hat from the heavily carved tree, he made for the door, fleeing from the telephone as from a thing unclean. He paused again at the window, long enough to wonder what purpose painters had in adjusting their swinging scaffolds to the sheer brick wall at the side of Comstock's store. He studied the busy artists fearfully; then passed to the elevator.

"A young gentleman that was in your office, sir, this morning, left a word with me for you, sir," reverently announced the scraping servitor, swinging the iron gates together.

"He said I was to say to you, sir, when you came down, that the price was three dollars a pound. That's all, sir."

Tompkins jerked to one side as though some one had struck him in the ribs. He vouchsafed no response.

"Any answer, sir?" timorously inquired the old man, bowing his employer out.

"Not for him, William," Tompkins

responded gruffly. "If he ever calls, remember that I am always out. Do you hear? Always out!"

He buttoned his coat about his expansive form and stalked through the marble corridor to the thoroughfare beyond.

As he stepped upon the sidewalk, he involuntarily caught his breath and shuddered; then passed on with renewed vigor.

Across the flagstones at the entrance was painted in fresh black letters a strange device; strange to the throngs who had watched inquisitively while a tall young man applied the brush, but uncomfortably plain to the man who owned the block, "Meet Mary Ann at Comstock's," was all it said.

Tompkins hailed a hansom.

"The City Club," he grumbled to the driver; then jumping in he slammed to the doors.

"I'll never buy his chocolates though," he said to himself, closing his eyes against the possibility of meeting Mary Ann in some new form.

The club was nearly deserted. Only a small group of loungers lolled before the open hearth and blazing logs. The town was comparatively small, and the select few who were eligible for membership were numbered. The king-bee dropped into an empty chair without a word of salutation.

This silence—unexplained and far from characteristic—roused Grout, manufacturer of nails.

"What's the trouble, Tompkins?" he said jocularly. "I think you need one of Comstock's Mary Anns——"

Tompkins sat bolt upright.

"What do you know about Mary Anns?" he snapped angrily.

Grout's eyes opened wide in surprise.

"Nothing personal," he hastened to amend. "Is Mary Ann *persona non grata* with you? I had in mind Comstock's new candy. The fellow's got the town talking. Must be a pretty clever sort of a chap. He's placarded the town with his suggestive advice—'Meet Mary Ann at Comstock's.' He'll make a strike with that stuff. See if he doesn't. Ought to boom it over the country. I must stop and get some for my daughter to-night."

Tompkins rose and sought the window at the opposite end of the room. Grout's face contracted with a puzzled frown.

"They're voting on young Comstock for membership," he called across the library. "Better drop in a slip while you're waiting for lunch."

"I'll not vote," Tompkins mumbled. "If I did, I might do him an injustice!"

Grout dropped his paper and advanced toward the irate parent.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded, grasping the banker by the arm. "Are you mad, worried, or only dyspeptic? Come, now; relieve yourself!"

Tompkins smiled. He was naturally jovial and pleasant. Trouble sat but lightly on his shoulders. He suddenly seemed to comprehend the ridiculous figure which he had cut. His smile broadened into a laugh.

"No," he said, clapping Grout cordially upon the back and steering him, in retreat, toward the shining andirons.

"Not even dyspeptic. Just my old trouble—always thinking about business, while you other fellows lock your desks and business with them. I was worrying about the phenomenon which our little local money market seems to be experiencing."

"You mean the scarcity of copper cents?" suggested Grout.

"Yes," said Tompkins, in surprise. "Has it become so general as to attract public notice? Queer, isn't it? Of course our town is queerly situated. It's devoted exclusively to manufacturing. Its passenger railroad facilities are poor—and we get little transient trade or transient money. We have but one bank, and that bank does not carry a heavy cash surplus."

"But what gold and silver and copper there is in town ought to keep on circulating unless it piles up in the bank. The gold and silver is in evidence, but the copper isn't in the bank; and, strange to say, it doesn't seem to be very generally in circulation. I confess the situation puzzles me."

He beat the knuckles of his right hand into the open palm of his left, and studied the snapping logs meditatively.

"That suggests to me," ventured

Grout—more skilled in the making of nails than the intricacies of finance—"that a dearth of pennies in a city like ours might prove just as serious in handicapping the transaction of daily business as though the dearth were of gold or silver coins."

"No question about it," admitted Tompkins. "Never occurred to me before; but I believe our bank would be forced to suspend operations, at least temporarily, if we ran out of pennies. But, of course it's just a passing freak."

The stringency in the penny market, however, became more and more serious.

The day following the momentous interview in Tompkins's private office, the stringency became a topic of general public discussion. Pennies were hoarded by the department stores and groceries as precious necessities. Never one escaped save under actual necessity. The bank drew liberally upon its supply at the call of business depositors.

There was no thought of economy. Comstock was given three thousand in a single afternoon. But suddenly the reserve was exhausted. The disbursement had not been counterbalanced by an offsetting income.

The story soon found its way into the newspapers. Because the phenomenon was inexplicable, it aroused the more intense interest. The copper market had been quietly cornered.

A week later Tompkins was revolving the enigma in his mind. To his utter and unfathomable surprise, there had been no outburst from Theresa following the interview with young Comstock. She had been as sweet and diffident as ever.

What more forcibly appealed to Tompkins was the fact that she had never renewed her request for Mary Anns, though the papers were full of Comstock's clever advertising.

He had forced his chocolate drops upon nearly everybody in the little city. Tompkins grinned grimly at his own immunity.

As he stumped along the avenue, however, poking a path through fallen autumn leaves with his cane, he could not but admit the vigor of the youth. Everywhere were compelling evidences of

Mary Ann. The most brazen display was upon a spacious signboard upon a vacant corner directly opposite the Tompkins homestead. Here was a bold, black suggestion, anonymous in its nature, yet strikingly effective in results. In the midst of a great field of white, stood out this jingle:

WANTED—A MAN
FOR MARY ANN.

"Theresa might do worse," he admitted to himself. "Even if he is a chocolate-maker, he seems to have some traits in common with men."

More amiable than usual, he turned a friendly glance toward Comstock's building as he swung into his own corridor.

One look froze his blood and the marrow of his bones. His face contracted until the pointed jaws stood white against the skin. He clenched together the fingers of his left hand until the knuckles shone and his arm shivered in rage. His right hand grasped the heavy cane as though it were a bludgeon. Like a statue of Anger, he studied the wall at the side of the candy-maker's store. His worst fears were realized. The blow had fallen. His reputation was blasted.

The sign-painters, whom Tompkins had casually noticed before, had just finished their appointed task. They had wrought well and forcefully. There was no gainsaying the effect. Their *chef d'œuvre* stood out strongly and was visible for blocks.

Yet the wording was simple and direct. It suggested that within the candy-store might be found an old friend. "We have secured a limited supply," it read, "of Timothy Tompkins's World-Famous Hair Restorer—discovered thirty years ago by our distinguished fellow townsman."

There was more. But Tompkins waited not to read. He fumed up the stairs to his office—utterly forgetting the presence of the elevator—jerked the telephone bell into action, and got Comstock on the wire.

"Look here!" he stormed, breathing angrily through distended nostrils like some animal of the wilds.

"You miserable scoundrel! You fiend incarnate! You——"

"Hello! Hello!" interrupted Comstock suavely. "Speak a little louder, Tompkins—and look this way when you talk. I can't hear you."

"You——" Tompkins's tirade ran off into a senseless and wholly inaudible mumble. "What do you mean," he said, coming to the point of the interview, "by putting that sign on the side of your building? You know you haven't a drop of my old hair-oil! I'll prosecute you, sir, unless——"

"The label on the bottle says it's your restorer," interrupted Comstock. "I wasn't on earth when your hair-oil first put in its appearance, and I can't say whether this is genuine; but it looks the part. Suppose you come down and——"

"I'll not come down!" snapped the banker.

"Then suppose I send you up a bottle——"

"I don't want to see it or you. I don't care what you've got to sell. I want that sign down. I want it down—painted over—smudged—anything—before the business men get out of their stores this noon. Now name your price. I suppose money'll buy you."

"You're not ashamed of your business, are you?" intoned Comstock. "Compared with the candy business, it——"

"I want that sign down," interrupted Tompkins, nearly crying in his helplessness. "I'll give you \$500."

"You do me an injustice," replied the candy-maker. "If I am harming you, I'll remove the sign without a bribe. Suppose you come down and talk it over. Of course I've been to some expense. But I'll be amply reimbursed if you will buy a couple of pounds of Mary Anns——"

Tompkins clapped the receiver back in its socket. He sank into his chair, limp as a rag. But the door opened and the bank cashier popped into the room. His face was troubled.

"I suppose you've heard, sir," he cried.

"Heard!" echoed the banker. "Heard what?"

He was bolt upright now, in wild-eyed terror.

"We'll have to close our doors unless——"

"Close our doors!" screamed Tompkins, interrupting the most momentous part of the speaker's message. He leaped to his feet and grasped the cashier by the shoulders. "Why! Why!" he cried. "Is somebody short?"

"It's about the pennies," said the cashier.

Tompkins dropped back into his chair in relief.

"There isn't a copper in the bank, sir," went on the visitor. "And what's more none of the stores seem to have any. There's not a cent of change to be had in town. Our business depositors are clamoring for pennies and we can't do business without a supply."

"Griggs's department store is without any, and so are the grocers and butchers."

"I've wired to Dexter for a supply—but there's no train in until after closing hours this afternoon. We can't open the doors, sir, without a cent of change."

"Where have all the pennies gone?" queried the capitalist, with a sigh.

"We had a couple of hundred last night," whimpered the cashier. "But Comstock, the candy-maker, begged them from us this morning. That was before I got down, sir," he hastened to explain, seeing the signs of a rising storm.

Tompkins's lower jaw dropped to his ascot. His eyes closed. His hands gripped the arms of his chair. He nodded once or twice and muttered something to himself. After a moment's silent meditation he reached again for the telephone without a vestige of his former spirit.

"Hello! Comstock!" He was speaking softly and humbly. "Have you cornered all the pennies in town?"

"I don't know, sir," replied the candy-maker, swallowing the laughter which rattled in his throat. "I have about forty thousand of the little coppers here. I didn't know whether I had corralled them all or not. I assure you I intended to, in the end. Why? Is the bank out?"

"We haven't got a cent, Comstock," admitted Tompkins dejectedly.

"Perhaps I can help you out," suggested the candy-maker.

"Name your price," replied Tompkins, conquering his pride.

"Well—come down and buy a box of Mary Anns," said Comstock, unable to repress a tone of triumph. "That's what everybody else in town must do."

Tompkins hesitated. He ground his teeth in helpless despair.

"I'll do it," he said finally. "And the sign?"

"Oh, I've decided to take the sign down," answered Comstock. "It's served its purpose. And Theresa?"

"I've decided to withdraw my objections," replied the one-time king of hair-oil.

BIRDS OF PASSAGE.

By George Allan England.

BEING some further incidents
in the career of Messrs. Pod
Slattery and Pittsburgh Bender.

CHAPTER I.

DOTS AND DASHES.

OUR ingenious friend, Pod Slattery, and his clerical companion, "Bender," had served only about a fortnight of their twelve-year sentence at the penitentiary when certain rather curious doings began to manifest themselves in that most conservative of retreats.

In the first place Bender (whose cell, be it said in passing, was two galleries underneath Pod's) bit into some tough substance in his bun at supper.

He stopped chewing and was just going to investigate, by means of a daintily hooked forefinger, when he got a red-hot glare from Pod, some tables beyond—a glare and just the *souffron* of a gesture.

Bender's hand paused, half-way to his mouth, and the substance, whatever it was, nestled itself coily down under his tongue until his cell-door had once more safely clanged behind him.

Only when the bolt had been shot home did he unanimously resolve himself into an investigating committee of one and dredge out the mystery.

"Paper, eh?" he queried to himself, in sudden wonderment. "Paper, all rolled up in a wad? If that hasn't got the limit outstripped a block, I'll pass!"

It really was a quid of tough oiled paper, traced with faint yet quite distinguishable writing; and when Bender had carefully unrolled it, he read this characteristic message from Slats:

These for yours, P. D. Q. 11 P.M.
When ready, fire!

There followed twenty-six cryptographic signs made of dots, dashes, and combinations of the same.

Bender stared at them a brief instant in semi-stupefaction; then the light dawned.

"The Morse!" thought he. "Wants me to learn my A B C all over, eh? Pod is an ex-ticker, now I think of it. Learn these, will I? Crimp my gear, if I don't!"

Bender's wide-awake brain soaked up the symbols as greedily as a dry Park Row pilgrim climbs outside of cold schooners, and before two days had dragged on leaden wings over the big gray prison he knew the Morse backward, frontward, and sideways; knew it awake and asleep; would have known it drunk or crazy.

There is no dallying over tasks when they may involve "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Just as soon as the symbols were safely inside his skull he chewed up and swallowed the dangerous paper; and after that he began teaching himself how to "send," by using the forefinger of his right hand as a sounder and the first two fingers of his left as an "anvil." Try it, and note the noiseless little noise you make.

His time was unavoidably occupied by business engagements in the paint-shop, where he primed bedsteads from half past six in the morning until half past five at night; and the rest of his daylight was taken up with meals and that cheerful lock-step circumambulation which passed for recreation; but at the end of forty-eight hours he felt, as he expressed it, "all to the wheat" on Morse and ready to take his conversation on tick.

So it was that toward eleven o'clock, when all through the house not a creature was stirring, not even a warder, and when from the five tiers of cells in the west wing bass snores were blent with treble gurgles and baritone "pr-r-oufs" in a syncopated minstrelsy of slumber, with here and there a soporific yodel for good measure, suddenly there came a tapping as of some one gently rapping, rapping with a nail on the two steam-pipes that led up through Bender's cell.

It was a faint, cautious little tapping, so it was, and might easily have been made by steam condensing in the pipes, had it not been so curiously methodical—just loud enough to be heard at all; yet not sufficiently strenuous to attract the ear of Turnkey Knowles, who was keeping watch in the rotunda, whence the four wings radiated spokeswise.

The tapping seemed to be made of dots and dashes. First there came dot-dash; then dash-three-dots; then two-dots-space-dot; and so on, all very quiet and innocent.

If you had been there (which I'm glad you weren't), you might have heard the whole Morse alphabet repeated twice over, once from the cell of Bender, once from the cell where Pod Slattery lay wrapped in sleep and snores, to all appearances, though with one arm sprawling suspiciously near the steam-pipes.

After the code had been ticked twice over, there came a little silence; then Bender heard this message:

..... .. — .. —
P r a c t i s e
—
m o r e

Then it became a case of nothing doing on the pipe-line. Several times Bender tried to draw further remarks,

but failed. When at last he grew wise to the fact that he couldn't reopen the conversation he desisted, and throughout the west wing silence, sleep, and the symphonic snore-fest reigned undisturbed.

CHAPTER II.

A MODERN PROTEUS.

Now, on the fourth night after these occurrences, when our cleric had "practised more," and when several lengthy messages had come to him (whereby his eyes bulged with surprised wonder), it happened that he was seized with very acute and painful cramps, so that he writhed on his iron bed in uncontrollable anguish.

Bravely did he try to bear his pain, to stifle his groans and not to cause the good turnkey any apprehension, as this worthy made his 2 A.M. inspection; yet such was the agony that a few doleful moans escaped despite all resolutions of fortitude.

The turnkey heard these groans; he paused at Bender's cell, peered through the door-bars, and listened. Sympathy was born in him, for he was a kind-hearted man, albeit somewhat rough-shelled.

Having harkened for a minute he did a very imprudent thing—no less than to take his keys, open the cell-door, and step inside for the purpose of investigation.

Had he known the Reverend Bender thoroughly he never would have risked any sympathy on him in any circumstances; but he didn't know him, so he stepped to the sufferer's cot, bent over it, and asked kindly:

"What's wrong here, eh?"

For an answer the suffering man groaned and distorted his face. Knowles noticed in the dim light which came from the corridor how ghastly pale the stricken one was; he did not know that the pallor was manufactured out of chalk swiped from the paint-shop; and, therefore, the cockles of his heart still further were melted with compassion.

"Come, come," he said, laying a large hand on Bender's shoulder, "snap out of it! What's the row? Why don't you speak?"

"Cramps—something terrific—lead-

poisoning, must be—didn't want to wake anybody——" Bender managed to gasp. "Water, water, for heaven's sake!"

Knowles, all commiseration, reached for the jug, thus half-turning his back to the cot.

As he did so he was conscious of something swift, terrible; he threw up his arm, but too late to fend off the blow which Bender's strong right hand, armed with his heavy prison boot, dealt like lightning.

"Thud!" went the hobnailed heel on Knowles's cranium, just back of the left ear; little birdies began to sing for Knowles, beautiful wavy circles of light wheeled and blended and widened to his view; then he doubled up, slid to the floor, quivered a bit, and went sound asleep.

All this happened very quickly and made no great noise, so that nobody was awakened in the adjoining cells; still, Bender kept up his realistic groans, semi-occasionally, as he rose expeditiously from his bed of suffering, lifted Knowles on to it, and confiscated the bunch of keys.

This done, he hastily peeled off Knowles's uniform, donned it, set the official cap over his close-cropped poll, and wiped the chalk from his face.

By dint of some labor he managed to get his own striped coat on the unconscious man; then he covered him with the blanket, leaving the shoulders visible, and the transformation scene was complete.

In spite of the uniform being rather a far-away fit—especially the cap—Bender in that dim light was a sure-enough turnkey; and the striped figure gasping, gurgling on the cot, was he not a bona-fide prisoner? Bender figuratively patted himself on the back as he surveyed his handiwork and prepared for further tactics.

First of all he listened. Nothing—nothing but sleep, oblivion, symphonic snores. Nobody had heard, nobody knew; and even if any one of the prisoners *had* known there was little danger of "snitching."

"Got this spiel beaten to a syllable!" he murmured, taking a final account of the situation.

Then he foraged under his pillow,

paying as little heed to Knowles as though he had been a bran-bag, and produced a small piece of putty, which the paint-shop had also kindly furnished him on the Q. T.

A hasty rummage in the pockets of his new uniform dredged up a match-box. Bender emptied the matches into his pocket, loose, then dropped the putty into the box. After this he hastily put on his shoes, and then found himself ready for a sortie into the enemy's country.

He moved boldly to the door, with a word or two of comfort for the invalid, who was apparently beginning to get over his cramps; he tried one key silently, then another, and a third, which opened the lock. Swinging open the door, he stepped into the corridor.

"There, now," said he in tones like Knowles's (and Bender was no slouch of a mimic), "I guess you'll be all right. If you ain't, knock on de bars an' I'll come, see?"

Bender was taking no chances; everything had to be done "decently and in order" when the penalty for failure might be eleven years and forty-nine weeks.

He closed and locked the door; then, humming a light air, continued the watchman's rounds.

Carefully, not a trifle too fast, he inspected the cells on his own gallery; his footsteps seemed to ring even a trifle more loudly than usual. It was just as well to apprise every possible listener, official or otherwise, that the set routine of the prison was going on quite as it should. "Steady does it!" murmured Bender as he descended the circular iron stairs to the next gallery.

This he inspected also, found everything correct, and so went down one more round to the bottom floor, where lay Pod's cell. At this, jingling his keys, he finally paused.

The inmate was waiting for him. Silently they greeted each other with a look; silently Bender tried the keys, one by one, until he found the right key. This he withdrew from the lock; then he took his lump of putty from the match-box and made a quick, careful impression of the wards, both side and end. —

It was familiar work with him, wax-work of this sort. The impression he carefully replaced in the box, which he slid into his pocket again.

"You're in the 'greatest' class, all right!" whispered Pod. "Got it, sure?"

"Ump-ah."

"Ain't this playin' on velvet, though? It's a case of takin' the tricks as they're led up to us, and that's no pill-prattle, neither. But ain't there no way I can fade, too, this evenin'? Tell the truth, I'm en-weed here."

"I know—but you just hold on—don't spoil things by any snap-shots. Stay right, where you are and wait for me to furnish proper ammunition."

"The plan's a lay-over-all. You do nothing but keep the sand out of your bearings and we'll both be on the Bowery inside of a month, punishing cold foamy ones. Patience for yours!"

"You're right," whispered Pod. "Well, patience is one of my four long suits. Ta-ta, now; you'd better cut loose and evap. By the way, how d'you reckon on givin' me the combination to whatever you write? We want to fix things some way so you can change it every time, in case the bulls tumble to it."

"Look under the postage-stamp, that's all!"

"And you'll pull me out o' this sure?"

"Never fear—you can bet your hands to the plastering on me. But you promise not to bat an eyelash, whatever mother I send you?"

Slatts nodded.

"All right then, au revwar. You're the real four-X, and no false start on *that*—you've got more details inside than an alarm-clock. Too bad your averdu-pois prevented you from playing first fiddle in this game!"

"Prance along now! Here!" and Slatts poked his fat hand through the bars. Bender solemnly shook with him. Then Slatts went back quietly to his cot and Bender continued his inspection.

When it was done he hung the bunch of keys, intact and in good order, on its accustomed hook, then sat down coolly for a few minutes at the warder's desk, and finally, with sovereign casualness,

strolled out through the office to the small door whereby the employees left the building.

The drowsing night-watchman hardly glanced at him; under the visor of Knowles's cap Bender's face was well shadowed. Nobody had seen him, except this watchman and the warder of the north wing—this latter only from a distance; so Bender breathed deeply with relief as he opened the door and stood idly on the sill, looking up at the calm, beautiful stars, taking in great lungfuls of cool September night-air.

Then there came a gust of wind—a sudden draft was it not?—that slammed the door, with our warder on the outside. Five minutes later the night-watchman, wondering at his non-appearance, went and opened the door.

"Gosh!" said the watchman, "where in Halifax is Knowles?" He stood and scratched a puzzled cranium; then he hailed:

"Knowles! Knowles! Where *are* you?" But all the answer he got was a derisive little "*you!*" reechoed from the great granite walls of the hollow exit passageway.

CHAPTER III.

FILIAL LOVE.

TEN days later, or some such a matter, when the to-do attending the escape of the Rev. Bender (characterized by the press as "bold, brazen, unparalleled, masterful") had pretty well died down and when Turnkey Knowles was just about beginning to feel like himself again, Pod Slattery got a letter.

It was a poor, miserable-looking letter, written on cheap, lined paper with a pencil; the handwriting was wobbly, and the spelling would have done credit to the most advanced reformer on earth. There were several tear-stains, too—warped places on the paper that showed where the scalding brine had fallen.

The envelope was rather more pitiful than the letter itself, for it was a mourning envelope and did not even match the paper. The writer's hand had trembled with emotion over the word "Penitentiary." One could almost feel what poignant grief that word had inspired.

Even Knowles (now hardened by sad

experience) murmured a few words of apology as he handed the envelope in through the bars.

"Sorry we had to open it," said he, "but you know de rules—all letters has to be inspected. If we'd known, though, about it bein' from your—your——"

"Mudder," said Slats, wiping his eye surreptitiously on his striped sleeve.

"From your mother," continued Knowles, "why——"

"Ferget it!" exclaimed Pod, extending an eager hand for the epistle. "Rules is rules!"

He took the envelope and looked at it with tear-misted eyes; his face twitched painfully; then he said with husky accents:

"Sticks to me through thick an' thin, *she* does! Everybody else has gave me the merry ricaddo long since, but——" His voice broke and he turned away to hide the very complicated combination of wink and grimace which his fat face kinked itself into with joyous abandon.

Knowles uttered a mothy platitude and went on down the line with a few letters for others; Slats pulled the mis-sive out of the envelope and looked it over leisurely while the stamp was soaking off in his mouth.

As quick as the stamp was well loosened he removed it carefully from the envelope and looked minutely at the place where it had been. His keen little eye made out these words written faintly in that small area:

Read all mistakes carefully.

"Ain't that a blues-banisher of a scheme, though?" he asked himself with ecstasy. "Changes the comb'nation every time, see? Well, now, this is goin' some, or I'm a livin' skeleton! Let's pipe off what the Rev. is tryin' to tout me. High art, I call it—salt-water splashes an' all. Oh, he's the real people, Bender is! Let's see."

With filial affection he read the letter over scrupulously. This is what it contained:

PITTSBURGH, Oct. 20th.

MY POOR, DEAR BOY:

At last I have found out where you are and I am coming there quick to see you. How could they ever put you in there? Somebody must have told a wicked ly.

I know you are a good boy and would not do such a loe thing as rob that bank they say you tried to rob. But I will stick by you til death, my dear boy. I shall be there Octoaber twenty-foarth or sooner. I hope they ewes you well there.

I sor Lawyer Carlyle about you this morning, my dear boy, and told him whare you were and he duredted me to petition Governor Kingman. I wil do everything possible.

When we mete I will tell the home news. I am taking boarders ever since you left home. I have thre now and it is hard work and I Am getting discouraged. Your brother Francis is working in the moterboat works here and gets only three dollars and a haf a week. We are having a mile sea-son here, no frost yet.

I will be down and see you the first boat I can get on the rivver. We all know you never robbed that bank. My heart is broak, butt I am still hoapful to see you very soon, my dear boy. Good-by and be good and Heaven bless you.

Your loving
MOTHER.

"Wouldn't that make you snap your eyelashes?" asked Slats enthusiastically of himself when he had finished.

"The dominie *may* be short on the decalogue, but he's loaded clear to the muzzle with brains, ya! He's a swift mover, with a full supply of non-slip, and that's no dope, neither. .

"Well, now, me for the careful scanning. Mistakes, eh? I may not be Andy Carnegie, but here's some spelling that has got me hypnotized all right. Let's see—let's see."

His unseemly forefinger traced the pitiful letter with eager zeal.

"Ah, *here's* one—and here—and here! 'Ly . . . loe . . . til . . . Octoaber 24, use sor'—*what?* Sor, sor? *Saw*, eh? Oh, sure, use saw!—'whare duredted . . . mete . . . thre . . . Am . . . moterboat . . . haf mile . . . down rivver . . . broak butt hoapful.' That's all! But I guess it'll hold me for a while.

"'Lie low till October 24; use saw where directed.' That means that me poor, dear mudder what takes boarders is goin' to *bring* the saw, eh?

"'Meet you 3 A.M. with motor-boat half a mile down the river,' to interpret freely. 'Broke but hopeful'—*that's* the spiel! Broke, but goin' to get a motor-boat; oh, yes, that's pie for the

dominie. He's a board-sweeper from cocktails to cordials, *he* is; I bet he'd go out with a broken-bladed jack-knife and come in with a whole hardware store—that's him."

And Slats methodically tore both envelope and letter into fine bits, which he laid in a small pile in the corner, to be swept out at the next morning's clean-up.

That night he slept the long, sweet sleep of one who dreams of freedom and beer unlimited, after the dull routine of prison life.

If Pod Slattery had been moved even unto tears by the mere receipt of a letter from his affectionate parent, how shall we describe the Niobe-like melting into lachrymosics which took place when a shabby, bent, lame little woman in rusty mourning was shown to his cell the following Sunday afternoon?

Even Knowles, used to touching demonstrations, turned away from witnessing the pathetic scene.

Far be it from us to detail the meeting; the poor, homely sentiment; the heart-to-heart interchange of questions, of hopes and fears; the grieving and the sorrow.

Knowles, true to his duty, stood at the door to see that no suspicious present should be given the felon; but on this score he found nothing to fear, since the old lady came quite empty-handed.

How was Knowles to know that, when the parting-time came and the poor old creature threw her arms about her wayward boy, she dropped down his back a cleverly palmed key and a short steel saw for metal-cutting, the key being one made by subterranean methods from a certain putty impression, and the saw bearing the words "basement window" scratched on its smooth side in microscopic letters?

CHAPTER IV.

A DEAL IN MOTOR-BOATS.

THE Reverend Bender, what of him? Whence had come the saw and the key which Pod kept artfully concealed in his boot-toes (the same being large and square)? Whence had come the tearful, loving letter? How about the motor-boat which the dominie, though "broak,"

had promised for the night of October 24?

Bender's first move when the employees' door was slammed behind him by that very opportune *draft* was to peer about with cautious expedition.

The outlook was decidedly good. He found himself in the tunnel-like passageway which communicated with the street and was used, as we have said, only by employees.

This fact, in addition to his uniform, was quite sufficient to reassure him thoroughly. He fronted with boldness, though noiselessly, down the steps, opened the iron grille (which was fastened only by a spring-lock), and stepped forth a free man.

High above him loomed the penitentiary walls, dark, chill, ominous; the night was cool and cloudy—unusually so for early October—and the street was deserted save for a solitary "cop" near the electric light at the corner.

Bender's predestined course led him past that light; he did not hesitate, but with businesslike step launched forth upon his travels. He even ventured a silent nod to the minion, who returned it unsuspectingly.

Once past the corner, darkness shrouded him again, in the lee of the prison-yard wall. Ahead of him was a closely woven nexus of obscure streets and alleys which offered safety.

Thither he bent his steps; therein he plunged, and the night swallowed him. Twenty minutes later he had found refuge with a former pal of his, one McNamara, barkeeper in a "blind pig."

With this worthy he lay perdue for three days, till the hue and cry of pursuit had abated a little. When he issued forth it was as a tramp, with a stubbly beard shading his jaws, an old felt hat hiding his close-cut hair.

McNamara had given him aid and comfort, and had even advanced two dollars in cash, on the security of the uniform, which contained much good cloth and was hardly at all worn.

Armed then with this money, with a passable disguise, and with his omnipresent gall in first-rate working order, he jumped the town at night via a side-door Pullman, and in due course traveled the several hundred miles to New York,

landing at the freight-yards over on the West Side, near a favorite resort of his, the "Eagle Pleasure Club," kept by an ex-gun blessed with the name of Magnus McCarthy Duff.

Once or twice he came near being pulled, but his good genius watched over him and he reached this safe haven after some lively dodging.

Within forty-eight hours a rather well-planned "touch" on Eighth Avenue had put him temporarily on his feet again and he was able to emerge from seclusion with the garb and bearing of a gentlemanly salesman.

This make-up, next to his clerical one, had brought him his best hauls; he felt that success was drawing near. As for his suspiciously short hair—well, a recent run of typhoid accounted for that admirably, as well as for the slight pallor which prison days had bequeathed to him.

And now Bender, traveling elegantly in the drawing-room car of a fast express, gave himself the pleasure of being whirled westward to a thriving river city about thirty miles down-stream from the public hotel in which his running-mate was incarcerated.

Thus far advanced, I invite you to behold him one evening seated at a little iron table in the back-room of a not too gaudy saloon, conferring intimately with a rowdy-looking friend of his, over certain beverages stronger than bock.

"It's dead open-and-shut—simply a scream, I tell you!" Bender was saying, tapping with a well-manicured nail the newspaper-clipping which lay before him on the table.

"Here this duck, this Van Duzer fellow, advertises his choo-choo boat for sale; says 'Will sacrifice for cash'—oh, yes, he'll sacrifice it all right, or I'm a Sunday-school superintendent! Calls it a 'four-cylinder, air-cooled Croteau motor.' I bet Van D. will need some cool air himself after the Sahara brand I unbottle for him!

"Sixteen miles per hour guaranteed—accommodating four to six persons,' and so forth.

"Accommodating!' Yes, that's the very identical word—*accommodating!* First rate! But three persons at the outside is all I'm counting on.

"Now, then, Flynn, if you've followed my line of jollyisms, here's a proposition we can make a book on and take all the money that's offered. All you've got to do is play up to my lead; get under the tree while I shake it—then this plum simply does one grand ker-chug down your epiglottis, see?"

"Maybe; but what's to hinder his pinchin' us both by telegraft?"

"What's—to—hinder? Why, my prattling babe, d'you expect I'm going to leave the honorable gent in any situation where the proximity of telegraphs will give him insomnia?"

"Just wait till I get the whole dope ladled out to you, and see if you don't agree we'll make a span that nobody can give any dust to—see if you don't weep with joy.

"You're trotting after money, same as all the rest of us, yes? Well, then, here's a chance for you to gallop, to acquire the coupon-cutting habit; and yet you get an attack of frosted pedals, you want to fold up and steal away to the high woods. Say, you ought to be ashamed—you must be a dead one from your heels up! Did I ever steer you wrong, say now?"

"No; but dis here frenzied frolic looks like it was pretty risky, and *that's* no bubbles!"

"Risky rot! All you do is dress and look the real thing for half a day, at the end of which time you find yourself owning said property as billed above. You make quick sale at point of landing, same's I've explained already, then do a fade—nothing easier. I don't want the goods, nor the mazoom, either, not a sou marquee of it—all I want is the afore-said accommodation for about twelve hours. You know how to run a motor, and I don't. 'I'm from Missouri'—see? Well, for the service of 'showing me,' you get the boat; fall to it?"

"You'll give it to me, sure t'ing?"

"I will."

"Yes, but——"

"Oh, feathers! You're a phoney, a never-happened, a narrow-gauger!"

"Cut that! I ain't said no to the deal yet!"

"You'll romp into it, then?"

"Sure—if you do the palaver."

"Palaver's where I live. Agreed?"

"All right, we'll christen! Here, waiter, another bot of joy, and hump it lively, too!"

* * * * *

If you, dear reader, had been cursed with the X-ray vision which we poor devils who write for you have to have (or starve gracefully), you might on the next morning have easily seen with the naked eye our Protean friend entering the office of one Benton Van Duzer for the purpose of talking motor-boat. A little scanning of advertisements in the back of a magazine had made him quickly familiar with the jargon of petrol.

Our friend looked fair and prosperous; he was smoking a twenty-five-cent Imperial; his clothes fitted well; his card bore engraved in refined Gothic capitals the name "Paul Willard," and the explanatory words: "Chase Electrical Supply Co., Philadelphia." He waited with confident ease while the bumptious office-boy took in the card, which evidently produced a good impression, for from the inner office issued a thin, nervous voice saying:

"Show him in!"

Mr. Willard graciously let the boy usher him into the presence of Van Duzer, who was even thinner and more nervous than his voice—a regular picked chicken of a man, with large ears, tremulous Adam's apple, a little anemic mustache and veiny hands.

If you can imagine the spider-and-the-fly fable inverted, with the fly having a parlor into which he might invite the spider, you get the situation to a T.

Mr. Van Duzer wheeled in his revolving-chair.

"Well?" said he briskly.

Mr. Willard produced the clipping about the boat and handed it over; then he drew a chair close to the desk, sat down, carefully crossed his legs (disdaining to ease the stretch of his trousers at the knee), and waited.

"Oh, yes, yes," chirped Van D., "that boat, eh? Hang that boat, she's made me more trouble than she's worth—three men been here this morning to see me 'bout her—taking up my time!"

Willard made as though to rise.

"Oh, in that case, if you're too busy,

why—I might call on another man I have in mind."

"No, no—sit still now you're here, though I don't think we can trade—that is, I want a pretty stiff figure for her, you know—cost me three thousand and I've put in new engines since—Harry Packard model, racer, seaworthy, and all that, air-cooled, double ex——"

"About what price do you set?"

"Two thousand—couldn't go a mite lower—been offered eighteen hundred already. Hate to sell, but must—going abroad—can't afford to keep, that's the truth of the matter. Splendid boat, splendid."

"Came in first at the races last fall—has beaten everything on the river so far this season—but I can't winter her again, can't do it. Hate to lose her, though—can't bear to think of it——"

"Of course; I quite understand," murmured Mr. Willard, laying his cigar carefully on the edge of the desk where the beautiful aroma would waft like incense toward the excitable Van D. "Won't you smoke?" And he produced another Imperial.

"No, no—thank you just the same—can't do it—nerves won't stand it, simply will not. Don't tempt me!"

"Neurasthenia?" Willard queried sympathetically.

Van Duzer nodded.

"Yes," said he, "bad case, too—been under treatment two years past—can't stand strain, excitement, stimulants—liable to go to pieces any time, doctor says. However, that's not germane. Are you inclined to follow up my boat—at two thousand?"

Willard picked up a pencil from Van Duzer's desk and made a brief calculation on the edge of the newspaper which was lying there.

He contemplated the result a moment, while Van D. fidgeted with his watch-chain.

"I'll tell you how it is," Willard answered frankly, "that comes to a bit more than I—that is, than we were calculating on, but still we might arrange it. I'm not here on my own account, but for a friend of mine named Maynard—Alexander Maynard."

"Curious fellow—good man, but of obscure origin—not a bit grammatical,

you know, or—or anything of that sort, but a mighty good sportsman.

"Self-made, lots of money, and all that kind of thing. Relies on my judgment, you see.

"If I say the boat's all right, he takes it, at whatever figure you and I agree on. Of course, you understand, Mr. Van Duzer, this is strictly *entre nous*? Certainly; I see you get the situation precisely.

"Well, then, to continue: Maynard saw your advertisement last night and 'phoned me to see you at once. He's something of a crank on motoring of all kinds—owns a boat already, but she's not fast enough, only twelve miles. He's developing ambitious ideas, Maynard is; wants a winner and——"

"I can suit him *there*!"

"Exactly—must have something that will show a clean stern to everything in sight. Fifteen hundred was the figure he named (the boat being second-hand); but if you insist, why, I shouldn't wonder if it could be arranged. Speed's the main thing. By the way, what does she make an hour?"

"Eighteen to twenty, according to wind and tide."

"Good! Well, now, Mr. Van Duzer, how would this sort of a proposition strike you: One hundred dollars for every mile she shows? My friend's a dead game sport, right up to the handle—er—I mean, Maynard is an all-round sportsman, and I'm sure a proposition of that sort would tickle his fancy. Would it suit you?"

Van Duzer thought a moment, then said with a short laugh:

"Hang me if it wouldn't! Good idea, blasted clever! I stand to make a hundred or two over my two thousand, with luck; and at the least it comes to two; if it doesn't—but there, I'll *give* the boat to you if it doesn't."

Mr. Willard nodded in perfect agreement with this last statement.

"Exactly," said he. "Now, for the matter of an appointment, a try-out; when could we see you and the boat?"

"Mmmm—let's see—I'm head-over-ears to-morrow and next day; how would Friday suit? Friday morning?"

Mr. W. thought a minute, running over all his many, many pressing busi-

ness engagements. Finally he shook his head.

"No," said he, "I'm not at liberty till Saturday—the electrical business is pretty exacting, I find, especially on us poor promoters. But if Saturday afternoon would suit you, why, it's all right for me, and as for Maynard, I can answer for *him*; he's a gentleman of leisure, calls no man master. Shall it be Saturday, the 23d?"

"Why, yes, I guess so—if nothing comes up."

"All right, Saturday it is. Where's she lying?"

"Near the C. A. A. club-house."

"You don't say? Why, Maynard's a member of the C. A. A., and I go there often with him. Curious coincidence! Probably I've seen your boat a score of times. She's the—the——"

"Javelin—oak frame, cypress plank-ing, carvel built."

"What? Are *you* the owner of the Javelin? Well, now, here's luck for Maynard! Hardly a week has passed all summer that he hasn't spoken about her.

"There isn't a craft afloat he'd rather own, I'll wager. 'Cleanest lines and slickest clip of anything on salt water,' I've heard him say of her time and again. Your boat's as good as ours already, believe me. Saturday she changes hands, or I'm very much at fault. Two o'clock suits you? Very well; and where shall we meet? Here, you say? All right."

And Willard made another memorandum, this time on one of his business cards. He picked up his hat and the expiring Imperial.

"Good day," said he, "and thank you immensely. I'm sure we *never* shall repay you for the service you're doing us both, *never*!"

"Pray don't mention it," said Van Duzer, rising.

Mr. Willard bowed himself out with Chesterfieldian grace. When the door had closed after him, Van D. sat down again at his desk with a much-relieved expression.

"One sucker a minute," he soliloquized. "If there wasn't, what would become of men with worn-out boats? But I'll get twenty-one out of her *once* more, if I have to melt her cylinders!"

He took up his paper-knife and went at his letters again. "Jove!" said he as he ripped up the last of them, "isn't this pure bull luck, though, what with those notes falling due the 30th?"

"This lets me out just in the absolute nick of time! That little fib about going to Europe, though—well, this is high finance, I guess, so I'm clear all round." And a look of semi-beatitude wreathed itself over his lean features.

Two hours later a curiously misspelled letter had been written by our friend Proteus. This letter had been enclosed in a cheap mourning envelope, sprinkled dexterously with salt water, and enclosed in a box to one "Scotty," a clever "fence" in Watertown. In the box were full instructions, together with a very fine and small steel saw and a newly filed key. A sum of money completed the contents of this prize-package, for contingent expenses, which money left the Reverend Bender (as the letter said) "broak butt hoapful."

CHAPTER V.

THE DEAL CONTINUES.

"WELL, which shall it be, gentlemen, up the river or down?"

Van Duzer straightened up after starting the engines of the Javelin, and laid his hand on the port steering-wheel. He blinked nervously as the raw October wind smote him in the face. The boat, just gathering speed, ruffled the green waters in a wide circle.

"I don't know as it makes very much difference, either way," answered Mr. Willard from his seat, wrapping his large loose overcoat about him; but Maynard interrupted with:

"Up river fer me, if it's all th' same to you."

"Very well," answered the owner. "Up the river it is!"

Van Duzer shoved the spokes down; the boat swung gracefully around and straightened away with accelerated speed. The owner adjusted the vaporizing valve and touched the spark-plug; the engines leaped into a double-quick tune, with now and then a hop-skip-and-jump, and foam began to whirl astern.

"She must be doin' fifteen already,"

remarked Maynard with satisfaction, peering over the rail at the swiftly cloven waters.

"Very nearly, and I haven't begun to let her out yet—she's just playing—wait and see! Will one of you gentlemen tend the motor? Or would you rather steer, or how?"

Our two friends cast quick, meaning glances at each other. Mr. Willard knew precisely as much about petrol as bottle-babies do about synthetic chemistry. Therefore it was with a note of anxiety, though well-concealed, that Maynard answered:

"You better steer, Mr. Van Duzer, I guess, goin' up, anyway. P'raps I'll take a hand comin' back. I'd like t' watch de motor woik, so I'll tend it."

"Good!" said Willard, playing up to his pal; "I must confess I'm no sailor, and the smell of oil just about does for me in a seaway. So I hope you'll excuse me if I move a trifle forward here, away from the engine?"

"Make yourself perfectly at home," answered Van D. "Act as though the boat was yours."

"Tanks!" said Maynard. "We hope she *will* be 'fore long!" and he winked elaborately at his companion, as Van Duzer got up and went forward to the main steering-wheel. In a whisper he added:

"Lucky I woiked in de Union Garidge dat time, eh? If nothin' happens I can tout up a passable jolly on de engine, see? I guess she won't run away from me!" Then, aloud: "She intermits some, don't she?"

"Well, yes, a trifle at first," answered Van D., without turning, "but when she gets into her stride she'll be all right—wait and see. There isn't another boat like her anywhere in these waters."

"Thank Heaven for *that!*" he thought, "Though she's not doing so badly to-day. But on one of her cranky spells I don't believe the Old Boy himself could get anything out of her!"

A long silence ensued. They drew rapidly along. Mr. Maynard, at Van Duzer's hints, operated the engine, handling the current and the speed control like an experienced hand. His time at the Union Garage and along the

river front, among motor-boats, had not been wasted, as he had already taken occasion to remark.

Van D. finally swung his boat around a curve into a long, straight stretch, took the time and bade his passengers do the same.

"Quarter of three, we'll call it. If we aren't in Marshport by 3.15 I'll eat the lubricators, oil and all!"

As he spoke he drew goggles from his ulster pocket, slipped them on and pulled his cap well down over his eyes.

Willard and his friend nodded again at each other.

"Ain't this enough to make all de odder novelty-woikers drool wit' envy?" murmured the extempore engineer. "Say, Bender, you sure knows how to display an' deliver de goods! I'd take me hat off to youse if I wasn't scared o' losin' it. Just look at de come-on burnin' his cylinders to a frizzle, all fer a give-away! Oh, say!"

"The E. Z. Mark," Van Duzer was thinking at precisely the same moment. "If they only knew how she's racked and pitted and ready for the scrap-heap any old time now, they'd certainly throw spasms.

"But it's not *my* place to tell 'em, if they can't see it for themselves. If they want to fool themselves, there's no reason in high finance why I shouldn't be *particeps criminis*, even if I have to melt the motor!"

Then he said aloud, turning his head: "Let her out now as much as you like, and we'll see some fun!"

Maynard threw the controller over, a notch at a time, and the Javelin answered like a roweled mustang; she leaped ahead and began to whirl the water from her smooth shoulders in long, smooth surges, cutting through the waves rather than riding over them.

The exhaust of her four-cycle engine swelled into a roaring quick-fire; on either bow long swirls of creamy froth spurted out, and from the stern whirled a long, undulating wake. The C. A. A. pennant at her stem snapped and crackled; now and then spray came aboard, dashing its spindrift in the men's faces.

Van Duzer faced this unmoved; the tension was like wine to him; he

thrilled with the nervous energy which had worn him out, even as the mad pace at which he loved best to drive the Javelin had all but ruined her.

Mr. Willard, 'midships, and his friend at the engine, crouched down in their upturned collars, held their hats on, and kept silent, save for a quiet word now and then. There was little need for talk so long as Fate was playing their hand, taking all the tricks for them.

Once Maynard remarked: • "She hammers some—ain't workin' none too steady," and pointed to the engine. Willard nodded; in such a wind, with that whirring, loud exhaust droning angrily, conversation was not easy.

One or two scenes, however, drew remarks—they passed curious comments on certain places which came into view as they sped on up the river.

At Portersville, it seems, Maynard had been involved in certain difficulties, and recalled the fact discreetly to his companion. Earlington, they agreed, was a good ripe town for a shake-down; while Dartmouth was excellent to steer clear of.

Occasionally they shouted some remark to Van Duzer about the pace, the miles covered, the engines—but only a word or two. Once or twice when the owner looked round they smiled cheerfully at him; nodded encouragement. Van Duzer grew cheerful, too, thinking of the graft he was going to obtain from his two poor innocents.

The majestic hills dropped steadily away from them toward the south; the craft they overhauled seemed almost standing still, while shipping, bound down-stream, whirled past at an astonishing rate.

Almost every boat they passed saluted them, and they waved back friendly greetings. It was, on the whole, quite like an ovation, that little trip of theirs.

"Marshport ahead!" shouted Van Duzer at last; the wind whirled his voice back to them like a feather in a typhoon. "Nearly ten miles, so far! Look!" and he held up his watch for them to see. It pointed to 3.12.

"*Bully!*" yelled Maynard; and then a very curious thing happened. Maynard looked significantly at his com-

panion, who nodded and whispered: "Sure you got the 'peter'?"

For answer Maynard reached down into his voluminous pocket and brought up a four-ounce bottle with a dash of some colorless liquid in the bottom.

"All right," said Willard. He got up and staggered forward to Van Duzer, buffeting against the wind, holding on by the brass side-rail. Van Duzer edged aside from the wheel to make room for him.

"Doing twenty, eh?" Willard shouted, looking all up and down the river to assure himself that no boats were near enough to see what might happen on board the Javelin.

"Twenty or better!" answered Van Duzer. "You'll make the mistake—of your life if you don't buy her! Here, try—your hand at steering—see how slick she runs, true as—a watch!"

The wind whipped the words out of his mouth as he loosened his grasp on the spokes. No sooner had he done so than Willard's right arm flashed round Van Duzer's neck, and Willard fell to the bottom of the boat, dragging the unfortunate victim with him.

"Hold on! What—what the dev—" protested Van Duzer, sprawling grotesquely; but before he had time for another syllable Willard had whipped a handkerchief into his mouth, had wrenched both the man's hands behind him and had lashed them together with a short rope which Maynard tossed him.

The unfortunate Van Duzer, so suddenly, so unexpectedly put *hors de combat*, was bundled under the starboard seat, and thereafter, in spite of his glares and savage struggles, received very little more attention than the seat itself.

Willard, calmly rising, flicked some dust from his coat and then assumed control of the wheel, heading the Javelin out into midstream.

The river, over a mile wide at that point, offered the best of privacy for any little deal of this kind, and as the two men looked at each other, then around at the few indifferent boats which here and there dotted the water, they nodded and smiled with the satisfaction which a good conscience inspires when seconded by a sense of duty well performed.

"Ease her 'up a bit," directed Willard. "We've got all the time there now—there's no use racking the motor. Next to honesty, *economy!*"

Maynard answered by bringing the speed-lever up nearly to the vertical, and the burr-r-r-rr of the exhaust dropped suddenly to an intermittent tremolo.

Noise and wind both diminished at once; their progress slackened to a conservative nine or ten miles an hour.

Leaving the engine, now working smoothly and economically, to run itself, Maynard came forward and joined his companion.

"How much juice we got, I'd like t' know?" he asked, bending over the tank. "Half full, accordin' to de gauge—well, dat's enough fer to git me to some quick purchaser."

"Shut up!" he added, turning on the helpless Van Duzer, who at these words had set up a great commotion under the seat.

"You keep still under dere, see? Dis boat b'longs to *me*, now, an' if you go makin' any holler, somet'ing's goin' to drop on you—dat's a hunch straight out from de lip—tumble?"

Then, turning to Willard: "Wot's de lay now?"

"Well, we've got time to burn, and the best combustion I know is to dodge in by the other bank somewhere in a quiet place above. Lie there till midnight, then get rid of *that*"—with a glance at the now apoplectic Van Duzer—"and then pick up our friend as per agreement. Anything better in your bubble-box?"

"Naw, dat's all to de good, just so long's I get de boat after youse is t'rough wit' it."

"Don't worry about *that*! There won't be any frosty phiz in this game—you know *me*!"

"Sure—well, head her fer Rockland; we'll feed an' have a few, when we git in a good place. Put de wheel over!"

It was a little before midnight when our two friends took the still groaning Van Duzer, loosened his gag, and held his nose until he gasped horribly for breath. Then Maynard filled the chloral hydrate bottle with water, and

poured the mixture down Van Duzer's throat.

The unfortunate man, choking, had perforce to swallow; five minutes later he had gone to by-by. Then, freely untied, he was laid out on the bank, to wake up only after the denouement of the little game.

Shortly afterward, the measured "put—put—putt" of a gasoline engine, moving slowly across the dark reaches of the river through the night, was the only sign that the complex human chess-match was still being played.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLITTING OF SLATS.

SLATS, wise as a serpent, though not harmless as a dove, had not been idle while all these doings were being put forward in his behalf.

On the contrary, he had taken counsel day by day, and had formed, in his astute brain, every last detail of his intended coup.

First of all he had taken the pains casually to inform himself concerning the habits of Turnkey Knowles. This had proved no very serious task to one of his versatility. Very soon after Bender's escape he felt perfectly cognizant with the main factors of his own. And of these he realized that Knowles was the chief:

This functionary, he knew, came on duty at 6:30 P. M. for one week, when he was on night duty, and at 7 A. M. the next.

The 23d of October came during a period of night duty. After having locked up, for the night, the men under his care (and these included all the wings on the ground floor), Knowles habitually went back to his desk in the rotunda, where he stayed till the midnight inspection.

Both before and after this he kept scrupulous watch down the four corridors; Bender's escape had hurt his reputation and he knew well that, should another case occur, his official head would have to fall. That, to a man with wife and five children, was no laughing matter.

Slats knew, of course, that so long as

Knowles stayed at his desk the chance of evasion was just nil. The question therefore arose how to get Knowles away from it for the brief minute necessary for his well-expedited flitting.

With this point in mind, Slats managed to get a few mumbled words with his left-hand neighbor in the paint-shop, a man named Connors, "in for shoving the queer."

This Connors occupied a cell near the middle of the north wing, on the same floor with our hero; he was an accommodating person, and in consideration of certain quantities of tobacco to be sent him in case of a successful get-away, he promised to play his little part in the tournament of wits.

These, to sum up, were the main features in Slats's case:

First, his arrangements with Connors; second, a thorough knowledge of the prison-yard and the basement windows which opened thereinto (the same having been gained by observation and deduction while at "exercise"); third, the key and the steel saw, which, as we have said, he wore safely in the toes of his boots.

Add a little bit of bright tin-plate which he had picked up in the shop, and you have his total lay-out. Brains, ingenuity, and "nerve" unlimited rounded these material assets into a beautiful, well-balanced whole.

Thus provided, it was with a good conscience and the happy presage of impending beer that Pod lay down as though to sleep on the evening of the 23d. He lay inert, resting, thinking; he was polishing up the details of his plan, accumulating reserve strength to carry it out.

One by one the hours and half-hours struck from the tower, at infinite intervals; the night, it seemed to him, was longer than most years.

About eleven o'clock he sat up quietly in bed, reached for his clothes, fished out a lump of graphite from under his mattress, and deftly went to work on the gray stripes of his jacket, toning them down. This was tough work, but he hung to it and by a quarter to twelve had largely obliterated the stripes on both jacket and trousers.

"They'll do," thought he. "They'll

pass in de night, like Conners's lead half-plunks!"

The clothes, in fact, might fairly be counted on to escape public observation (if such had to be faced) until better could be had.

"They *got* to do till 3 A. M., anyway," said Pod, hanging them up carefully again, inside out, so that Knowles should not notice them at inspection.

Inspection passed quietly, perfectly, without suspicion. Knowles reached Pod's cell about 12:15, flashed his lantern in, perfunctorily, and passed on.

When Pod heard him get back to the rotunda, heard his chair scrape on the iron floor, he got up noiselessly and slipped into his renovated clothes, leaving his shoes off.

Then, creeping to the door, he took his piece of tin and poked it, at a certain already-determined angle, through the bars. Squinting into the reflection, he was just able to discern a vague blue spot which he knew was Knowles.

"Science wins again, by a hair!" he murmured to himself.

Then he stood still, the tin in one hand, his boots in the other, the key between his teeth. In the toe of the left boot lay the little steel saw on which everything depended.

Standing thus, watching the blurred bit of color which represented Knowles, he once more reviewed the situation. At the end of the west wing he knew there was a short concrete stair leading down into the basement; a door closed this stairway.

This door was supposed to be kept locked, but as Pod had discovered, through innocent remarks of his, it was often left unlocked for greater convenience of the janitors.

Beyond the door lay a passage, flanked on the right by a sterilizing-plant and on the left by coal-bins. From midnight until 5:30 A. M. nobody was likely to be in that particular section of the basement, though farther along there were sleeping-quarters for some of the inferior employees.

The coal-bins were filled through windows which communicated with the yard; these windows had hinged gratings with vertical bars four inches

apart; they were strongly padlocked with two steel padlocks apiece.

The bins at this season were almost full, which was a circumstance in his favor, as he could thus easily get at the bars.

These and other things, as we have said, he had discovered by keen observation and sound reasoning while at "recreation." As he passed over the various data in his mind, he realized, to the full, how very dangerous and difficult the obstacles were; how disastrous any failure would be, involving a longer term and much greater severity; yet, weighing the good and the evil in the balances of his judgment, he felt no serious discouragement, but only keen anxiety to be up and at the task.

"I'd take on a few more troubles," quoth he, "and yet carry the money home. I'd play 'em to win, for a place and to show, an' cop the coin all three ways. Why don't that Conners get a wiggle on? Think I want to pose here like a livin' picture of Venus emergin' from the mas-sidge all night, eh? Well, I guess——"

"Tap! Tap! Tap!" came a sharp metallic rapping from the north wing, the signal that some prisoner required attention. Slats, squinting at the blue blur, saw it move, rise, travel; then to his infinite joy it disappeared. Knowles had gone into the north wing!

"Here's where I cut loose!" thought Slats. "I've got just two minutes. Quick exit for mine!"

With the assurance of an absolutely colossal nerve, coupled with a perfectly thought-out and oft-rehearsed plan, he slipped the key into the lock, turned it without noise, swung the door open and peered out as a turtle peers.

Nobody in sight!

Relocking the door he dropped the key down his neck; then, holding the shoes in his hand, he stepped out in silent stocking-feet and hiked down the dim corridor, soundlessly as a shadow, swiftly as an exorcised wraith.

Not one snorer serenaded less vociferously on his account; nobody knew, nobody even guessed what kind of fly-by-night was winging its way thence.

Pod's celerity was astonishing; unlike most men of Gargantuan girth, he was

quick and active under stimulus, quick in body as well as in wits, which is still a rarer blessing.

His three hundred and twenty pounds of gelatinous avoirdupois seemed no longer to exist; he was agile as the proverbial gazelle.

In a jiffy he had reached the end of the corridor, had turned the end of the cell-row—now, at least, he was out of sight of the rotunda. Silently he padded down the concrete steps and tried the door.

Was it locked? Ah, wo, it resisted! Locked? No—it gave—it yielded—it was merely stuck—it opened wide!

When it closed gently, Pod was on the other side, in the basement passageway.

"Huh, this is goin' some!" thought he. "As a swift mover they don't need to give *me* no handicap! And say, when they find the bird gone and the cage locked, well, won't there be some altitudinous rhetoric, eh?"

Down the passage he skittered; in a minute he was on the coal, crawling toward the window. Now this coal, you see, was lump-size, very large, for the furnaces; therefore it did not roll and rattle like the finer sorts.

"Ain't this luck enough to make you radiate gladness?" soliloquized Slats. "There's a dash of everything in it except heliotrope!"

Another minute and he had crawled up close to the window and was feeling of the bars.

"Half-inch, wrought-iron, I make it. If my equator was civilized, two bars out would turn the trick and put me in the fly-fly-birdie class; but as it *ain't* I'll have to gouge three. Well, here goes—fair heart never won a faintin' lady."

The quick rasp of steel on iron, very quiet, but very energetic, went zee-zee-zee-zee through the silence of the coal-bin.

Pod, subtly wise, attacked the bars not at the middle, as a novice might have done, but at the top, so that a single bend, with long leverage, would drag them down horizontally.

He worked with a quick, forceful stroke, pulling the little three-inch saw back and forth fifty or sixty times, then

pausing to listen and to let the steel cool off so that it should not lose its fine temper.

In twenty-five minutes the first bar was divided and he had attacked the second. This bothered him considerably, both because he was getting terribly tired and because the saw was beginning to lose some of its "set."

Still he kept on with good courage, changing hands once in a while, and at the end of about forty minutes more had divided the second bar. When this was done he took a long rest, listening attentively. Here and there above him he heard stray footsteps or an especially raucous snore; but that his absence had been discovered there was no indication.

"Here goes the fi-nally—luck in odd numbers!" quoth he as he tackled number three.

Blisters had begun to form on his thumbs and forefingers; his arms and shoulders ached with the horribly monotonous saw-saw-sawing, so cramped, so exasperatingly slow.

"Glaciers is chain-lightnin' side o' *this!*" he commented.

The third bar became, as it were, a horrible, interminable nightmare, but Slats kept at it, with gritted teeth, sweating face, and veins that started out on his temples.

His hands seemed numb; his neck was beginning to swell—that heat-apoplexy of his, four years previously, had by no means improved his health.

On and on he hacked, however, for just beyond that third bar lay the prison yard; across the yard was the tool-shed built against the inside of the wall; outside of that wall ran the street.

"It's this time or bust!" groaned Slats wearily, throwing every ounce of energy into that endless, harrowing rasp; every nerve and fiber of him seemed striving against the sullen metal. Exhaustion rose about him like a tide, trying to drag him down, away from his work, but he fought it off savagely.

The prison bell struck two, and he realized that his time was growing short. On and on he wrestled.

At last, when it seemed that flesh and blood could endure no more, when the blunted saw was worn almost smooth and his hands were raw, the blade

slipped suddenly through. The bar was severed!

"I hope the fiend that made this here iron gets a snug little corner down below—red-hot, too!" groaned Pod, slumping down limply on the coal to pant a minute.

The task was really but half done; the road he had to travel was but started. Summoning his energy, he seized the bars, one by one, and pulled them toward him with all his strength; they yielded and came down, leaving a space about two feet high by sixteen inches wide, through which he now had to squeeze his elephantine carcass.

"There ain't a sardine livin' but would blush to think of how I've got him outclassed!" thought he, exploring the opening with his torn hands. "But it's this or else a merry canter back to bed. Better try it sideways, I guess. Here's where leaf lard's so far below par you'd need a Lick telescope to sight it!"

He poked his head through, twisted himself, and thrust his shoulders out. Then he stuck.

"*Eughhh!*" he grunted, tugging and writhing, all to no avail. His globular diameter flattened masterfully, but stuck fast about at the Tropic of Cancer region. Struggle as he might, he could not get through.

"Them damn buttons an' clothes!" he muttered, and retreated, with difficulty, back on to the coal. He rapidly divested himself of his outer garments and had another try at the window.

This time with pain, prayer, patience, and profanity in equal doses, he made a go of it; lamely he dragged himself into the yard. Then he reached in and pulled his clothes after him.

"I ain't enamored of these here vestments," said he, "but I'll take 'em."

Rapidly he dressed again, then, with his shoes in hand, stood listening. He could hear nothing suspicious, nothing but the usual night-sounds of that great, terrible hive of sorry human bees with their torn, soiled wings; no sound there was to alarm him, yet he panted like a man in great fear, and the sweat did not dry from his forehead, in spite of the searching wind which chilled him and made him shiver.

"Next!" said he to himself, getting a grip on his nerve.

The night was cold and clear, with a suspicion of frost in the air. He drew a deep breath, passed a hand over his eyes, and looked up at the stars.

"Gawd!" said he. "To think that any men should have the say-so over any other men—could take *this* away from 'em!"

One look around, and he was creeping along the wall, in its shadow; now he had turned the corner and was opposite the tool-shed. This shed, as we have indicated, was built against the yard-wall, and was separated from the rear of the west wing by a vacant space of about sixty feet.

Slats looked at the space and hesitated; along in the shadow he felt comparatively safe, but out there—who could tell what eye might find him, what tongue raise the alarm?

As he eyed the yard, faintly lighted by the stars and by a dim aura from the prison itself, he felt what doctors know as *agoraphobia*, the fear of open places.

He trembled as with a chill; his teeth (such as remained of them) began to clatter. Behind him the "pen," years of servile, unpaid toil, bestial confinement; before him life, liberty, hope, everything.

"How *can* I buck such a proposition?" he groaned, shrinking even closer to the prison's shelter.

Then, suddenly pushing his resolution as an unskilled diver has to do when plunging from a height, he took a long breath, set his jaw, and made a quick, crouching run.

Before you could have said boo to a bear, he was across—nothing easier in this world! Nobody had seen him, nobody knew he was there, and the run itself was only a trifle, even for his rotund corporosity; yet he was panting like a coursed jack-rabbit.

There was no time to rest, however; another and far harder task remained—none other than climbing to the shed roof, escalading the wall, and then dropping to the street outside. To any man of normal build, this would have been no slouch of a job; but to Pod, with his huge bulk, it approached the impossible.

There is in human beings (as doubtless you all know) a mysterious secondary mind called the subjective consciousness, which, in times of great stress, asserts itself and endues us with powers quite beyond our normal capabilities.

This and nothing else it must have been which hoisted that Brobdignagian bulk of Pod's to the shed roof.

Just how it was done he never could recall. He had a vague notion, afterward, that he had first tossed his shoes up, had then swarmed up a stack of joists that leaned in the corner nearest the wall (which joists kept turning and slipping and would not be still); that he had then got a hand-grip on the edge of the roof, and had eventually pulled himself up.

How he had accomplished this last feat was not to be explained in any ordinary way. However it may have been, Pod realized very soon that after some frantic and excessive struggles he was on the shed, some twelve feet from the ground, with the yard-wall projecting six feet still above him.

Here it was dark and safe; here he sat and rested a moment, crouching close to the wall, on the tar-and-gravel roofing. The idea came to him that now was the time to put on his shoes. He crawled to them, slipped them on and laced them tightly.

Then he stood up, took a firm hold on the top of the wall with his swollen, painful hands, and, with a tremendous effort, wormed himself to the top.

There he hung, suspended like Mohammed's tomb, between heaven and earth; cautiously he peered over. The prospect was hopeful; only fifteen feet separated him from the street-level. There was an electric-light glaring at the next corner, true, but not a soul was visible.

"Here's where I stack into a bunch of get-away!" quoth Pod, wiping his forehead with the rough sleeve which on a former occasion had served to dry his tearful eyes at mention of his "mudder."

Then, with all the airy grace and debonair sprightliness of a ten-ton mas-todon he swung himself over the coping, dangled a minute like a pork-barrel, and dropped.

He hit the sidewalk like a runaway planet. The jar loosened up two flag-stones, made Pod's Cyclopean blubber undulate grotesquely, and shot a complete galaxy of constellations through his brain; it also wrenched his left ankle severely and hurt his back. Nevertheless, he scrabbled to his feet in a hurry.

"Me to the conifers!" he said, and beat it at an amazing pace toward the river-front.

A minute, and he, too, was swallowed by that same tangle of alleys which but a few weeks before had sheltered his astute friend the dominie.

CHAPTER VII.

A SHORT CHAPTER, BUT A LIVELY ONE.

THERE is an old Spanish proverb: *Salen a cortar lana y vuelven trasquilados*—"Some go out for wool and come home shorn."

With this brief introduction, let me invite your attention to a certain motor-boat which, in the thick gloom of the third hour after midnight on the 24th of October, was cruising tentatively along the east bank of the river.

This boat carried no lights and contained only two men, one of whom tended the engine, while the other, at the wheel, steered close inshore past a sleeping town.

The steersman's object seemed to be this: to keep within hailing distance of the various sheds and wharves along the river, yet not to approach close enough to be in any way conspicuous from the shore, should any listener be so indiscreet as to find himself in those deserted places at such an undue hour.

After passing down-stream a certain distance, he swung his boat in a wide arc and ascended the stream. He seemed to be looking, listening for some signal.

Twice the boat performed this maneuver. Save for a trivial remark, now and then, the two men kept silent. As the one at the wheel turned his boat southward for the third time, he struck a match and, by the dancing light, scrutinized his watch.

"Past three already," said he, "and

not a sign of him yet. What if he slipped up? That *would* be hilarious, wouldn't it? What the *devil*——"

Over the dark water came booming and rolling a deep-toned bell in regular rhythmic cadence: "Dong! Dong! Dong!"

"They're on!" ejaculated the man at the engine.

"*That's* no smoke!"

"Hike fer ours!"

"*What?*"

"I said, we better make a push away from here. Flit, fade!"

"Not—on—your—life!"

"But they're dead onter 'im!"

"What of it? If we can't outplay the tads, I'll turn farmer."

"But, Bender——"

"Chaw that right off; there's no 'but' to it! D'you s'pose this trip was arranged for your convenience? This boat b'longs to me till I get through with it, now you fall to *that*! Ease her off a bit!"

"S'pose I won't?"

"Won't? Did I understand you to say '*won't*'? Well now, Flynn, my sweet cherub, you must be suffering from relapsed memory. Don't let it slip you that you still owe the State nine years and eight months; if the bulls get a hook at you there'll be iron between you and the sky P. D. Q., and that's on the level.

"Me? Yes, I owe time, too; but this deal goes through or we both show down. I've never been bluffed yet and you can't do it as long as I hold this wheel in one hand and a gun in the other—cocked."

As he spoke there came a little "click," which corroborated his words.

"Ease off!" commanded the steersman again, and this time the other obeyed, grumbling profanely. The boat's speed slackened till she hardly made steerage-way.

From afar the bell still tolled ominously, presaging misfortune.

"Look!" exclaimed the steersman suddenly.

Away to the left, at an indefinite distance, lights were gleaming, moving slowly.

"Look! They're hitting his trail! Shut that engine way off!"

The "putt-putt-putt" ceased; the boat drifted silently, invisibly with the current, a shadow floating on shadows.

Still the bell tolled from afar; the flickering lights seemed coming nearer, nearer.

"Hark, what's *that* now?"

"Sounds like somebody's got a cough, over dere," answered Flynn.

From down-stream a short distance there drifted to them a sudden coughing, persistent, asthmatic, painfully choking; it seemed to proceed from a long wharf that projected beside a dis-used warehouse, dimly visible through the gloom. It was toward this spot that the lights seemed hurrying.

"Start her along a bit! Look lively!" commanded Bender.

The engine coughed as though in answer to the unseen sufferer; the boat drew in toward the wharf. Bender brought it close, then said, in a matter-of-fact voice:

"Hello, there!"

No answer.

"Is this the P. S. wharf?" he asked.

"Hustle in!" answered a thick voice.

Flynn shut off the current again; the boat slid up to the wharf. Bender leaned over the coaming, seized the string-piece and brought the Javelin to a standstill.

A dim figure of rotund proportions emerged from the shelter of some mooring-bitts at the corner of the wharf, and started for the boat. As it did so there came from beyond the warehouse a faint clatter-clatter as of heavy boots running over cobble-stones; and still the vibrant bell gave the alarm. Suddenly distant lanterns flashed; there came cries of:

"This way! Here! Halt!"

"Jump!" commanded Bender.

Slats ran heavily (exhausted as he was), fell rather than jumped from the wharf, and landed in the boat like a ton of pig-iron; the Javelin quivered protestingly from stem to stern and rocked like mad. "*Ooof!*" ejaculated Slats.

At the same instant Bender leaped for Flynn, clinched, and threw him with a fancy half-Nelson. The two men rolled struggling in the bottom of the boat.

"Get off me! Lemme up! Watcher doin'?" protested the amazed Flynn.

"Grab hold here, Pod, and help me

chuck this carrion out!" grunted Bender, straining furiously to subdue his lively fisted engineer. "Quick! Quick!"

Pod, still sorely shaken and aching tremendously, rushed to do his pal's bidding.

"Obey first, find out later," is a good rule to follow in such crises. Under Pod's weight the activities of Flynn very promptly subsided; in a few seconds, kicking, cursing, biting, choking with violent protestations, he had been brought to submission. The Javelin had drifted with the current and was already some rods from shore. The lights now gleamed at the warehouse.

"Over with him!" commanded Bender.

"My boat—promised me—I'll be pinched——"

"Bite that off! This boat's *ours* now, and out you go!"

"But you promised——"

"*Out!*" The two pals forced him to the rail, beating off his frenzied hand-grips.

"They'll gimme ten years!"

"Good! You deserve twenty! *Let* go there, will you!"

"*Can't swim!*"

"Fine chance to learn! Ta-ta!"

With a wrench that loosened a yard of the rail they jerked Flynn's clutch free and bundled him, blaspheming, over the side. He fell into the ice-cold river with a gigantic splash.

"Help! *Help!*" he screamed in an agony of terror, then choked as the water found his mouth.

Bender sprang to the engine, threw on the current, wrenched the starting-crank madly round and round; the spark caught, the engine woke to furious activity, and at the stern there burst forth a seething blossom of foam as the Javelin surged forward. Bender threw the controller full-over, then ran to the wheel and jammed down the spokes.

A sudden castanet-clatter of footsteps along the wharf, then:

"Crack! *Crack!*" barked a revolver. Another joined it, and lead whipped the water; one bullet spudded into the stern of the fleeing Javelin.

"Down! Get down!" cautioned Bender. The fugitives crouched low, out of range.

"What made you—chuck Flynn?" Pod questioned breathlessly. "Grudge or—somethin'?"

"*Him?* Oh, nothing except the same reason they say the jovial Russians toss out kids for wolves. Besides, we get his share in the boat. See?"

"Kind of rough on him, eh?"

"For-get it! That ain't a fly-bite on some o' the other features of this get-away—a New York sport used to own this boat, see? He got 'peter' and is sleepin' out on the cold, cold ground, minus two thousand. Respectable old washwoman was persuaded to be your mama; *she's* pinched for conspiracy; may get three years; and besides that——"

"Who *was* she, anyway, Bender? I always was sort of inquisitive about whatever parents fate puts in me path. D'you know her?"

"Naw! Drop your sentiment, Pod! You'll be sympathizing with the come-ons, next! I'm ashamed o' you, fer a fact, I am! Hear that!"

Confused cries rose from the shore, mingled with faint splashings of the unfortunate Flynn.

"We got one of 'em, anyway!" they heard a voice cry faintly; then somebody shouted:

"Here! Here's a launch! Gimme a knife quick while I cut de rope!"

Profanity followed; then a weak "Teuff-teuff-teuff" announced pursuit.

"The yaps!" exulted Bender. "Chasin' an eighteen-mile racer in a dinky little launch! It is to stretch a smile! Here," he continued, "take the wheel a minute, and steer due south. I want to peel off some o' my superfluous raiment—I've got two suits on, an' it's rawther stuffy, when one of 'em is mastodon size."

"Two suits?"

"Sure—one's for you. In five minutes you'll be dressed like a sure-enough plutocrat and your late garments will be wafting on the boozum of the deep. How's that for poetical? Poetry—Ah! me for it; but sentiment, never!

"Makes me cachinnate yet to think how Flynn put his head into the trap; why, he actually expected we were going to give this boat to him, after we

got through with it. And good cold spons waiting for us in old Uncle Feinberg's pocket—eight hundred of 'em—when we deliver the goods to him, which same we'll do long before sun-up."

"Eight hundred?" interrogated Slats, beginning to change his clothes.

"Eight. *He* don't know the cylinders are about gone; no, he'll find that out later, when he's repainted, re-everythinged her. Never mind, sheep there be, and we must shear 'em, 'specially all such as try to shear us first, same as the man that owned this craft to begin with, and Flynn, and Feinberg. Eight hundred, ya, to speed us on our merry way back to Chatham Square, where things are 'fixed,' eh?"

"You bet."

"Back to the Land of Honest Graft, of bocks and peter, touches, guns, dips, come-ons, and everything that makes life worth living—the land of crooks."

"And sheep."

"Sheep! Here's to the shears!"

Bender dredged up a flat flask from his pocket, ceremoniously handed it over to Pod, then took a long one himself.

"Flynn ought to have a nip," he remarked, catching his breath. "I'll stake my last sou marquee he's got cold shivers enough to last him a lifetime. *Hear 'em* entertaining him back there!"

Far through the gloom a faint discord came wafting over the dark surface of the river. Once or twice impotent little shots popped; there seemed to be an ant-like running to and fro with the lanterns.

Then the Javelin straightened out like a bird of passage for her southward flight to a safe haven with that most versatile of "fences," old Uncle Feinberg, and all sights, all sounds of pursuit were blotted out.

ART FOR ART'S SAKE.

By Marie Brueckman MacDonald.

EVEN the female worm will turn if too often trod upon by the unfeeling foot of man.

THE worst of the theatrical profession," said Herr von Drueben, as he graciously accepted the proffered cigar, "is that it has but two paths, with no breathing places where people may stop and rest. Both are steep. Up one of them people are forced to climb painfully. It is slow work and the suffering is great. The other path tends downward. The descent is swift. People put their feet on it—swis-s-sh—"

He made a dramatic gesture indicating a crashing fall, and then added:

"Then they come to this."

"This" was the "Wild Stag Imperial Concert-Hall and Ladies' and Gents' Dining-Room." The hall had

been made by knocking down the partitions of several stores and turning them into one room. As you entered from the street it was necessary to pass through the barroom. In the hall itself was the concert stage, and, arranged closely together, were a multitude of small tables surrounded by chairs. It was only nine o'clock now, so the crowd was small and scattered.

Herr von Drueben had recently been imported as manager for the most popular German dramatic organization in the United States, and as there were grave doubts about his continuance in his present position he looked upon the artistic condition of this country as hopeless.

He naturally felt a supreme contempt for the Wild Stag, though he spent most of his spare time either there or in some similar place, as he contemplated opening such a music-hall in the event of his parting company with the higher forms of amusement.

The manager of the Wild Stag re-

sented the slight his companion's words implied, and his carefully trimmed beard seemed to stand out in aggressive denial as he leaned across the table and said impressively:

"This? Come to this? What then? Is not this something? Our people are good. We do not claim high art—but *we* pay salaries. Our performers make an honest living. They sing a few songs, drink with their customers, and then go home. Many have a name. Many are beginners and they make a name here. To illustrate: look at the woman who is on now."

Herr von Drueben gave an order to the waiter, for he knew that, being at the table with the manager, he would not be expected to pay, and then looked in a critical way at the woman who was singing.

"She is good. She has the manner," he said decisively.

"She is great. She has the grand manner," corrected Manager Dinger. "That woman was once the best emotional with the Hamburg City Theater. She was for five years in leads with the very company you direct. That is Kaethe Hilde."

"Kaethe Hilde!" echoed the other. "She had all Germany at her feet. And Kaethe Hilde has come to this!"

"To this!" said Manager Dinger, still more nettled. "What was she to do? She gets her twenty dollars each week. She sings in the halls in winter and the parks in summer. She has a few wine customers, and each quart she sells means half a dollar to her. I tell you, Von Drueben, we have been the salvation of the profession."

On the stage a worn woman was smiling bravely through her lavish make-up, singing a German love-ballad. She had had good dramatic training, and there were still traces of an excellent voice. But, like the smile, the voice was weary and her actions were mechanical and listless. She threw out her arms in a gesture of appeal as she sang Karl Boehm's "Hast du mich lieb——" A child sitting at a table with its nurse, and intently and joyously watching Kaethe's actions, mistaking the gesture from one it knew and loved so well, cried rapturously:

"Take me, mutter, take me!" at the same time struggling wildly to get to the stage.

Kaethe wavered for a moment and choked a little, but the nurse subdued the child and the ballad was finished. The small audience applauded noisily and demanded more, but Kaethe bowed and smiled and shook her head. Then she made her way to where the child was sitting, kissed it vehemently and, despite its protests, ordered the nurse to bear it away.

Out of the glare of the footlights, Kaethe gained in appearance. She was still young and her face was an intelligent one, fine, sensitive, and of good features. But it was worn and lined by work and sorrow, and the dimmed eyes betrayed the weariness which the unvarying smile sought to deny.

She sat down at a table, and refused to drink with a customer who had come over to her, bent on sharing at least a bottle of Hochheimer before it was her time to go on again. She sat with her forehead resting on her hand, for the little incident in which her child had been concerned had pained her; pained her unduly, she sought to convince herself.

"But he will soon get to know," she thought sorrowfully, "that his mother is a singer in a cheap music-hall."

As the two managers watched her, a man entered the place and took a seat at a side table. He gave his order to a waiter and then turned his attention to the stage, where a couple of English knockabouts were gaily kicking and beating each other. They had little attraction to the newcomer, and he turned to look the audience over. His glance rested on Kaethe and he half rose, hesitated, and then sat down. But his hesitation was only momentary. He paid the waiter hurriedly and went over to her.

"Kaethe——"

"I saw you when you came in," she said without looking up.

He seated himself with assurance, and gazed at her, half pityingly, half resentfully. It was the first time he, Paul Haudermann, her husband, had seen her since their child was born over three years before.

He, too, had won fame as an actor.

Increasing years had brought to him an increasing tendency to quarrel, and finally he had broken down and was forced to accept such work as came to him.

He had been enormously proud of his wife at first, and then insanely jealous of the fame that came to her. First he worried her, and then he involved her in his quarrels. When she could no longer contribute to his support and there was little likelihood that she would recover her place again, he deserted her.

Memory of all this came to him, dimmed and subdued by his egotism, and he looked upon himself as her protector, opportunely arrived. He felt that he generously forgave her for some enormity.

"You have not dared use your own name?" he asked.

"No," she said.

He became tender.

"Does it seem so long since we parted?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders, and resting her elbows on the table, looked intently across at him.

"I never think of it," she said, "except when I consider how much easier my life is, how much happier, alone with my little boy."

"Oh, yes," he said. "Does he bear my name?"

Her eyes flashed, and her lips curled scornfully.

"Why should he?" she asked curtly.

He looked at her in astonishment. The woman was incomprehensible. It was the first full view of his face she had obtained, and she noted swiftly how the beauty which had once so attracted her had coarsened. The color of his skin was higher; from drink, she concluded. His clothes were showy but shabby. The eyes were watery; the hair was becoming thinner and whiter at the temples.

"Kaethe," he said, "you saw whom they brought over for the juveniles? You saw who is billed to play *Uriel Acosta*? No? You care nothing where I am concerned. Oh, for a chance to show them what acting——"

"You surely did not come here to tell me all this again," she said pleadingly, "you will spare me that story?"

"Kaethe, I am serious. I want to

make a protest. It ruins my reputation to have you here. You must, for my sake, if not for your own, forsake this work."

"What are you doing now?" she asked sharply.

"Well," he answered reluctantly, "I have a few pupils, and I recite at clubs. Then I shall have a benefit if I can get a hall free."

"Still getting up benefits for yourself—at the earnest solicitation of your many influential friends, who are deeply concerned that this brilliant light of the stage should be temporarily unable to appear in public."

She laughed mirthlessly as she quoted from the notices she knew he would send out.

"Does any one attend them now?"

"Not many," he answered gloomily. "But what have my affairs to do with you?"

"Much," she answered. "I have just finished paying the debts you contracted in my name while I was ill. Now my reputation will be clean, my boy's name unsullied, no matter what you do."

She was startled but unable to move as he suddenly leaped from his seat, placed one hand on the table and bent threateningly over her.

"Kaethe Hilde," he began, in a low, menacing tone that caught and held the startled attention of all in the room, and caused even the orchestra to stop rasping "Gluewuermschen."

"Kaethe Hilde, now is the time to speak! You are my wife! Before all the world you are my wife, and before all the world I would and will rescue and protect you. I find you here—playing in a cheap music-hall—you, who once swayed thousands! Now, I, your husband, speak; nay, I command. Come with me!"

He had risen to a climax, and his sonorous voice had rung out loud and clear. Kaethe sat quiet. When he had finished and was still standing in an attitude of command, she raised her hands and applauded vigorously, and laughed joyously and infectiously.

"Capital, capital! Well acted! Bravo!" she cried, adding in a lower voice that he alone could catch: "Now sit down."

His stage picture crumbled and faded away, and he reddened slightly, for he had not expected such a tame reception for a scene he had worked up so carefully. Kaethe saved the situation by turning to the gaping crowd and saying:

"It is all right. It is just a little rehearsal. I am glad you appreciate it."

They were puzzled, but they applauded, and a famous singer from Vienna came on to distract them. The orchestra started in again, and once more the waiters slid rapidly and noiselessly in and out among the tables.

"Do you know," said Kaethe, "at one time your theatrical move would have frightened me. Now—it does not even amuse me. You have lost your grip."

He ignored her words.

"Kaethe," he said, "poor Kaethe! I must take you from here."

She shook her head. "It is all work and no glory," she said sadly, "but it means bread for myself and my boy."

"But your artistic sense?" he persisted.

"Dead and gone," she answered briefly. "A living is all that I can hope for, and it is all I want."

"Poor Kaethe!" His words sounded the depths of pity.

Then he leaned over the table and his voice was low.

"Kaethe," he whispered, "I have not got a cent. I gave the last to the waiter. Could you lend me twenty-five dollars? It is such a miserable little amount, but I need it."

She had evidently expected this, for her hand slid along the side of the tray on the table so none would notice the action, and under her fingers was a little roll of bills. He took it eagerly, and tried to seize her hand, but she whipped it away from him.

"It is my call to go on," she said.

He arose, and there was hauteur in his glance and a new dignity in his bearing, for he was to be, for the coming week at least, a man of independent means. He fingered his tie to assure himself that it was properly arranged, pulled down his coat so that it would hang rightly, and nonchalantly twirled his cane as he said:

"I shall not stay to see you. It would be painful. But, Kaethe, you can rely on my protection—poor Kaethe!"

He turned to go, but there was something in her laugh that made him pause.

"You need not return," she said, "I have made my last contribution to art."

His face was full of amazement, for it came to him suddenly that she did not want to see him. Her deviation from art was worse than he had at first supposed. He would return, however.

She watched him as he stepped jauntily out, and she sighed.

"I must leave the city," she thought sorrowfully, "else will I have to earn for three."

She made her way to the dressing-room. In a few minutes she was singing again, while Herr von Drueben and Mr. Dinger watched her critically.

A NOVEMBER SONG.

By CLIFFORD SCOLLARD.

THE winds of autumn wail and sigh
About the fenced fold;
The far, free reaches of the sky
Have lost their blue and gold;
And thou, my heavy heart, and thou,
Dost sorrow with the leafless bough.

How tender sweet and vanished days,
And yet how winged fleet!
Alas! but gray and sodden ways
Now ope before my feet;
And love, that gave the summer grace,
Conceals the sunlight of his face.

CHEF OF GREAT SMITH STREET.

By Gerald Brennan.

A TALE of a duke, a New Yorker, an actress, a cook, and a sauce. * * * *

"**A**H, m'sieu'! Does not m'sieu' remember me? I am Gouvin."

Wandesford stared at the speaker in mute astonishment. Could this seedy, starved-looking specimen of humanity be indeed Gouvin?—Gouvin the famous chef whose cookery had been the talk of Paris?

"M'sieu doubts my identity. But I can prove it. Does not m'sieu' remember the last night we met? It was at the house of his grace. The dinner was a success. I was called in to receive my lord's congratulations. M'sieu' was good enough to compliment——"

"Yes—yes," interrupted Wandesford, at last finding his voice; "you are Gouvin, sure enough. I remember your face. But how in the name of all that is wonderful are you here in New York, and in such a—such a——"

"M'sieu' would say 'such a shabby costume.' Alas, it is true. I am indeed shabby."

"But the Duke of Montmirail? You were his prize chef."

Gouvin lifted both hands in eloquent protest. "Ah, m'sieu'," he cried, "it is a sad story. Will m'sieu' care to hear?"

Wandesford seized the cook's arm. "Come along," he said. "This is a democratic country, and I owe you a good turn for those dinners at the duke's. You look half-starved, so we'll lunch together and you can tell me your history."

Installed at a table in a modest restaurant, Gouvin opened his heart.

"It was at the Hôtel de Montmirail," he explained. "I was at the zenith of my glory. All Paris spoke of my din-

ners. His grace loaded me with honors. I lost my head, to such dizzy heights did I seem to soar.

"The duke worshiped at the shrine of Mlle. Mimi Martigues, of the Varieties. In an evil moment I allowed myself to fall in love with that fairest of mortals. She invited me to call and wheedled out of me the recipe for the famous Sauce de Montmirail—the joint invention of the duke and myself.

"As we sat together the duke himself entered unexpectedly. Then the false Mimi denounced me as an upstart menial who had dared to pose as his master's rival. Even then the duke might have pardoned me, had he not discovered my foolishness regarding the sauce. To contend with him for Mimi Martigues' affections was bad enough; but to reveal the secret of the sauce—it was unforgivable!

"I was kicked out of Mimi's house and the next day dismissed from the Hôtel de Montmirail.

"But, m'sieu', my woes did not end there. The duke proved malignant. Not wishing to employ me himself, he was determined that no one else in Paris should possess me. As you know, he is a great power in society. His word is law, and when he organized a boycott against me, I could find employment nowhere.

"For a month I despaired, then the idea of emigration occurred to me. 'There are Luculli in the New World,' I cried. 'I shall fly to New York.' Accordingly I took ship and landed here many weeks ago.

"But, alas, my cup of grief was not empty even yet. I brought no recommendations with me and in New York my name was unknown. Moreover, I knew not the language, and so few Americans speak French as does m'sieu'.

"Wherever I sought a place, I was asked for my discharges. Alas, thanks

to the malignity of monseigneur, I had none. My scanty stock of money—I had always lived well and had never saved much—was soon exhausted. A few days ago it ended and yesterday I was turned out of my lodgings. Last night I slept in your park."

"But it rained last night——"

Gouvin grinned grimly, as he held out a soaked coat-sleeve.

"Of that I was made aware," he answered. "It was not a pleasant bedroom, your park in the rain."

Just then sundry eatables arrived and Gouvin fell to with a vigor that spoke loudly for the truth of his story. Wandesford watched him eat and, as he watched, turned the poor chef's case over in his mind.

Finally there came to him an inspiration.

"By Jove, Gouvin," he exclaimed, "I have it. You shall start a restaurant of your own."

"But, m'sieu', I have no money."

"Neither have I, for that matter; but I have property. Last month an uncle left me real estate, consisting of one house in Great Smith Street. It is a mean district, let out in tenements, and very dirty. My whole house has been let, save for the basement. A front and rear cellar remain. In those two cellars you shall make your new start."

"In a cellar, m'sieu'!"

"Yes, Gouvin, in a cellar. Over here, my friend, a man must begin at the foot of the ladder."

Gouvin elevated his shoulders and spread out his elegant hands.

"So be it," he murmured. "It is better than starvation and open-air sleeping apartments."

II.

REGGIE VAN HOOPEN rushed into the smoking-room of the Tepee Club, simmering with excitement.

"Hullo, Reggie!" sang out one of the youthful loungers, "you have got a secret—I can tell by your manner."

"Yes, and Reggie is never happy until he gives his secrets away. Come, tell us all about it. Has Mrs. Sylvester's dachshund died or is Jack Smallton in supplementary proceedings?"

Reggie Van Hoopen sank into a chair

and gazed around him with a smile of triumph.

"I say," he exclaimed, "does any one here know where Great Smith Street is?"

There was a general head-shaking.

"Then let me tell you," continued Reggie. "I was there last night. I had dinner there. And such a dinner! It was the best, the very best, I have ever indulged in. Now, don't stare and ask me what I've been drinking. It is all perfectly true. Some of you may know a fellow named Wandesford."

"Well, this chap Wandesford," continued Van Hoopen, "asked me to dinner last night. I was simply pining for a little excitement and when he suggested a voyage into the unknown regions of the lower East Side I jumped at the proposition. Of course I did not intend to eat anything there. I merely wanted to see a little low life and have a little adventure."

"Bold man!"

"Well, I thought I was at first. And when Wandesford led me through unexplored and grimy byways, and down a flight of reeking stone steps into a noisome cellar, I half wished to back out. But, y'know, we Van Hoopens are proud of our spirit and I decided to see the adventure out."

"I assure you that I was well repaid. Out of the back cellar came an old chap in genuine cook's rig and Wandesford and he had a talk. I pride myself on my French; but I really couldn't keep pace with those two."

"Presently Mr. Cook lit a couple of lanterns; and, behold, the place, cellar as it was, had been neatly decorated and looked clean as a new pin. By and by dinner began to come in. The first sight of the soup set me thinking. Just to please Wandesford, I took a spoonful. It was simply a triumph! Never in all New York can you beat that 'potage à la Central Park.' Thereafter I capitulated; and from soup to dessert, I did not miss a course. There were some 'cotellettes aux Monseigneur le Duc'—I suppose the chef took me for a duke—that haunt my palate still."

For some minutes there was silence in the smoking-room. Then the dean of the loungers said solemnly:

"Reggie, is this a practical joke? If it is——"

"Good heavens, no!" cried Mr. Van Hoopen. "Everything happened just as I told you. The dinner was superb. The chef is a treasure. Tell you what, let us go over there in a body to-night. It is Thanksgiving and things will be dull here. I'll notify Wandesford, and he can act as guide. If the Great Smith Street cellar is not just as I say, I promise to pay the entire reckoning."

III.

WANDESFORD strolled down the cellar-steps in Great Smith Street, a telegram in his hands. At the kitchen-table sat Gouvin, concocting a visionary menu.

"Hullo, Gouvin, victory is ours! To-night you must prepare dinner for twenty-five persons."

A smile of joy overspread the chef's features.

"It will be hard, m'sieu'," he exclaimed, "but then I am a general. I am equal to emergencies. Give me the aid of one assistant and lend me your glassware and crockery."

Wandesford laughed joyously.

"You shall have the glassware and crockery," he said, "but as for the assistant—stop! I will help you myself. I would ask my man, Jenkins, but he is too 'aughty.' In three hours we'll have the tables set, and you and I'll roll up our sleeves and go to work. I'm going to make you the greatest chef in New York, if I have to play scullion myself to do it!"

* * * * *

It was Thanksgiving evening, a murky, misty Thanksgiving, when the delegation from the Tepee Club stole stealthily along Great Smith Street and disappeared into the Gouvin cellar. The

policeman on the corner confided to Schmidt, the saloon-keeper, that some "Dago furriner had moved into the basement of sixty-one an' was holdin' an annerkist meetin'." Indeed, the mysterious movements of the Tepee youths quite justified this illusion.

But in the cellar, where the Tepeeans had come to scoff, they remained to marvel. The dinner at the "Restaurant Gouvin" was all that Reggie Van Hoopen had painted it. Wandesford had sagely brought over a few bottles of excellent wine, left him by the same benevolent uncle who had bequeathed him the cellar, and these lent an extra charm to Gouvin's wondrous preparations. At the close of the feast Gouvin was sent for.

He came from his back cellar with the same triumphant stride with which, in bygone days, he had been wont to march into the presence of the Duke of Montmirail.

Wandesford, in the name of the guests, complimented him heartily on the dinner and Gouvin was induced to give an account of the events which had led to his downfall and exile. The love-affair with the now famous Mimi Martigues completed his conquest of the Tepeeans.

"Come with us," said the chairman of the Tepee House Committee.

"A paragon of chefs, who has cooked for a duke and been loved by a queen of comic opera, cannot remain hidden in Great Smith Street."

To-day Gouvin is chef of the Tepee Club, with a salary equal to that of a United States Senator. Over his own luxurious apartments presides his wife, a somewhat faded, almost forgotten, stage celebrity, once famous as the beautiful Mimi Martigues. The Duke of Montmirail, it is said, still talks of the unrivaled chef he was so unfortunate as to lose.

LINES ON THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

By Dryden.

A MAN so various that he seemed to be,
Not one, but all mankind's epitome;
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;
Was everything by starts, and nothing long;
But, in the course of one revolving moon,
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon.