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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

The Rajah's Prize

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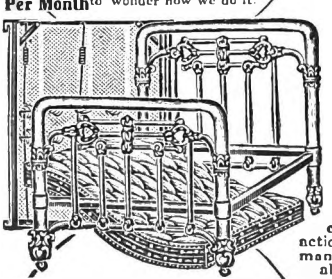

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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXVI CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 12, 1914 No. 2

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FIVE SHORT STORIES

VERSE

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $8.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXVI SEPTEMBER 12, 1914 No. 2

The Rajah's Prize

by Marguerite & Armiger Barclay

CHAPTER I.

Daughter of a Dohbee.

MR. GHOSE stood under the archway that gives entrance to the law courts. The black clock on its gallows-frame above him marked the quarter after one. The courts were emptying for the luncheon interval.

Mr. Ghose, watching the outward-going stream of humanity, was reminded that he, too, was ready for lunch, though where he usually put it you might have had a difficulty in deciding.

The most undersized of the many solicitors' clerks that sped past him looked robust in comparison with Mr. Ghose He was spare to tenuity; his shoulders were narrow, his hands fragile; even his waist, hidden beneath a fancy vest, proclaimed itself phenominally small.

For all that, his mind was very much occupied with thoughts of food.

He was tired of milk and scones and such-like provender of the tea shops; his gorge rose at the mere consideration of chops and steaks; English curries made him homesick.

He hungered for the spicy messes of the East, for *moorghi* and rice, especially rice—rice in fat, rice curried in fifteen different ways, each accompanied by a different condiment of powerful aromatic flavor.

In short, he craved for a good square meal that should not upset either his digestion or his conscience.

In spite of his English clothes, Narain Khuma Ghose was Eastern in heart and spirit and looks.

Fate had sent him westward to learn the language and the laws of his rulers. The former he spoke passably; the latter he was acquiring from books and the procedure of the courts. One day he hoped to practise in Bombay, and there extract many fees from litigious members of his own race.

A push from behind sent him down the steps. Without resenting it he moved on, crossed the street, and strolled undecidedly down the Strand,

walking with pantherlike tread for all that his feet were shod in American patent leather shoes.

It was a girl's voice, speaking to some one, that decided him and brought him within measurable distance of the food he was in search of.

It said:

"Let's go in here. It's vegetariany, but it's nice."

Then Mr. Ghose noticed that he was standing outside a restaurant. Almost at his elbow was the girl who had spoken and her companion, rather a determined-looking young man.

The moment he looked at her Mr. Ghose temporarily forgot all about his lunch.

She was of slight build, over the middle height, dark and graceful. There was something allusive about her, Creole perhaps—a suggestion of the Spaniard, a hint of the Orient.

It was the last that arrested Mr. Ghose's attention.

Her eyes, like still, dark pools, were full of depths. She was golden-colored like a Maori, and her black hair had aureate tints in it.

Her features were finely formed. You could not definitely decide to what nationality she belonged. Her appearance was vaguely foreign. She was in very deep mourning.

There stood Narain devouring her with his eyes. She did not see him. She was looking at the man beside her.

"In here," she repeated, and preceded him into the restaurant.

Narain, like an automaton newly wound up, followed them. He sat down at the next table to theirs, was vaguely aware of an attendant handing him a menu, and dreamily ordering a meal.

Until it came he hardly took his eyes off the girl. Only once did she look carelessly in his direction.

Now, from where he sat, an ordinary person would not have caught the low-toned conversation of the couple. But Narain was all ears, whose Indian keenness was as highly developed as that of a savage.

So he heard almost if not quite all that the man and the girl had to say to each other. It was evident to him that they had only just met.

"Where were you off to?" she asked.

"City," he answered. "Business."

"I never knew you did any."

"That's because you think I'm as lazy as I look. If it comes to that, why are you in this part of the world?"

"I have to see poor mother's solicitors. About her will, you know."

"That reminds me, Jacynth!"

"Yes?" She looked up.

"You mustn't stop in that boarding-house all by yourself. Come down and stay with my mother. It wouldn't be like an ordinary conventional visit, you know."

Narain noticed that the girl called Jacynth was nervously twisting a ring round and round her finger. He heard the white man tell her it was too large, and that he would have another ready for her soon.

Narain wondered whether they were betrothed, and looked intently at the speaker to see what manner of man he was.

A vegetarian steak with a fringe of imitation fat around it was placed before Narain. It engrossed his attention for a moment, but not to the exclusion of the affairs of his neighbors at the next table.

It did not occur to him that he was eavesdropping.

"I'd like to come," said Jacynth. "I may, later on, when I've wound things up. I don't know anything about mother's affairs yet."

The man leaned forward. He spoke so very low that Narain did not catch what he said; but the girl's reply told him.

"Not yet," she said with a shake of her head. "I can't be more defi-

nite just now. All these things—mother's death and funeral—have made me feel too miserable and unsettled to think about marriage. I should like to go away, out of England for a little while—away from my friends, even from you."

"We could travel together—before we settle down. Girls can't conveniently go globe-trotting alone. Where would you like to go—Algiers, Egypt or Italy?"

They dropped their voices after this, and Narain heard little of what they said.

He finished his lunch and strolled back toward the law courts. But his thoughts were not of the law.

Much to his surprise he came upon the girl again just as she was about to enter the courts. She was alone now, looking about her as though not sure of her way.

She stopped indecisively, and Narain gained on her. He noted her grace, the easy swing of her walk.

He approved of both, and was reminded of the women of the East, who, though virtually prisoners, yet walk with a freedom of carriage which their emancipated Western sisters cannot emulate.

"My word! She is of a most noble indication," he said to himself.

As he drew level with her he raised his hat.

"May I be of a politeness sufficient to direct you?" he asked diffidently.

She smiled at the idiom. Her eyes swept him carelessly, as they had done in the restaurant. She recognized him.

"I am looking for Portugal Inn—No. 62."

"Misters Vannam and Hield, that is? Solicitors?"

She nodded affirmatively.

"Then permit me to escort. I am one perfectly honest Indian gent. In these vicinities it is simplicity to confuse oneself. Allow me. I show you. It is up this passage."

He piloted her up a narrow byway, and indicated a brass plate bearing the name of the firm she wanted.

"Thank you very much. I should have missed it."

Jacynth smiled at him and mounted the staircase. Narain stood in the doorway and watched her until she disappeared round a bend.

There he remained patiently, tranquilly, with the immobility of his race, waiting.

On the second floor Jacynth handed her card to an office-boy. It was engraved "Miss Jacynth Elphinstone, 153 Gordon Square."

"Mr. Vannam is expecting me," she said.

The boy took it away with him, returned almost at once, and conducted her into Mr. Vannam's private room.

The solicitor rose and shook her cordially by the hand. He was a young-old man who prided himself on his tact, not always with reason.

Just now he had a task before him which he did not relish. He showed it by the way in which he placed a chair for his visitor, and the fidgety way in which he took up a position with his back to the mantelpiece.

His face expressed nothing because he had trained it to be inexpressive, but he was looking at her and wondering very much.

"I have some grave news to tell you," he said. "But first, have you found any other papers among the late Mrs. Elphinstone's effects?"

"No, nothing of importance. If you have bad news to tell me, Mr. Vannam, let me hear it quickly. I'm not the sort of girl who faints in an office."

"I'm sure you're not. You're too plucky," agreed the lawyer. "Well, I won't waste time. Before she died did Mrs. Elphinstone make any—statement to you?"

Jacynth wrinkled her brows.

"Why should she? We knew everything about each other. Mother and I were more like sisters or friends than mother and daughter."

Unconsciously she had given Mr. Vannam his cue.

"Would it surprise you very much to hear that there was no stronger tie between you than that of friendship?"

Jacynth paled a little. She knew that lawyers do not usually ask motiveless questions.

"Naturally. It would — stagger me," she answered.

Mr. Vannam could not meet the question in her eyes.

"I have to tell you that our late client, Mrs. Elphinstone, was not your mother," he said in a low voice, and looked out of the window.

It often falls to solicitors to impart many unguessed, sometimes brutal truths to helpless women, and they do not always find it a pleasant sensation. Mr. Vannam heard the girl catch her breath and the jerk of her bracelets as her fingers worked.

For a little while she remained silent. When she spoke her voice was strangely calm. "I suppose you have proofs of this?"

"The proof, doubtless, is here." He unlocked a drawer and took from it a long envelope. "This is a letter directed to you and sealed. It was to be given to you at her death. But Mrs. Elphinstone asked me to explain it to you by word of mouth."

Jacynth moistened her lips.

"I was adopted, then?"

"Yes. When you were a baby. Mrs. Elphinstone was childless."

"Where was I adopted?"

"In India."

"Ah!"

"And my real name?"

"Elphinstone is your name by deed poll."

"Yes, yes. But the name of my own mother?" she asked impatiently, imperatively.

Again Mr. Vannam looked away, looked at the ceiling preparatory to imparting the unpalatable truth.

"Do you insist on knowing?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Her name was Mootima Husain."

Jacynth's voice rang authoritatively. "You need not be afraid of coming to the point, Mr. Vannam. Who was she?"

But, for all her forced calmness, when he answered the question the room spun round her, so that for support she had to grip the arms of her chair.

"She was Mrs. Elphinstone's *ayah*."

"And my father?"

Mr. Vannam was having a bad quarter of an hour. It was provoking to have to tell an aristocratic-looking girl and a beautiful girl that she was of plebeian, indeed of tar-brush origin.

He answered, hoping that she would not ask him to translate.

"A *dohbee*."

"What is that? A man who washes clothes?"

She hid her mortification and looked sympathetically at her lawyer.

"Poor Mr. Vannam! It must be very unpleasant for you to have to tell me these things. I—I shall get used to them in time, myself. It's rather awful. I've always been" — she relapsed into schoolboy phraseology — "so beastly proud. Is there anything else?"

Mr. Vannam cleared his throat. "Unfortunately, yes. I have to tell you about your financial position. I am very sorry to say that with the exception of her bank balance—some two hundred pounds—Mrs. Elphinstone has been unable to leave you anything. She had her pension as an officer's widow, which ceased at her death, and a small annuity, likewise terminable and reverting to a relative. I deeply sympathize with you, my dear young lady. I have daughters of my own. Anything I can do—"

Jacynth managed to smile.

"You're kind," she said. "But that is the least part that troubles me. I shall manage somehow. So many girls earn their living nowadays. And

there is always the stage for the incompetent," she added satirically.

"You should marry," suggested Mr. Vannam diffidently.

Jacynth shook her head.

"Not now," she said decisively. "There is — my origin, you see. I could not."

She got up.

"One moment," said Mr. Vannam. "Perhaps I ought to tell you that some inquiries are being made concerning you—from India. I am completely in the dark as to their object, but I gather that they emanate from an important personage. It's possible I may hear nothing more, but if I do, I will, of course, let you know."

"Thank you. It sounds rather mysterious. An Indian lunched at the table next to me. The same Indian directed me here." She glanced out of the window. "There he is. Is he —the person who made inquiries?"

Mr. Vannam knew Mr. Khuma Ghose by sight.

"No, indeed," he assured her; "that is a Mr. Ghose, a law student. A very earnest person, and a highly commendable young man."

Jacynth held out her hand. It was very cold.

"Good-by," she said. "I'll let you know if I change my address. It will be the same for a week or so."

She passed out, still with her head held high, though she felt as if she could have bowed herself to the very dust.

She felt rather than saw her way down the narrow passage. She had the uncomfortable sensation that she was walking on the edge of a precipice, and that the ground might give way at any minute, and precipitate her down—down—

Narain Khuma Ghose had been walking up and down the pavement. Now he stood in the entrance. His ears had caught the sound of her footsteps long before an ordinary person would have heard them. They halted once or twice, were uncertain.

"She is faint," he said to himself.

When he saw her face, pallid for all the gold of her skin, and her eyes widened by fear or some other strong emotion, he knew that she suffered.

He came to meet her.

"I apologize if I occur to you impertinent," he said. "Can I be of use to you?"

Jacynth looked at him this time with a tinge of aversion. This black man was of higher birth than she; for she, according to the lines of social demarcation of the East, would be accounted a low-caste woman.

What would this "honorable Indian gent's" feelings be if he knew that he was addressing the daughter of a *dohbee* and an *ayah?* Would he be polluted by her shadow?

"I should be very much obliged to you if you would fetch me a taxicab," she said.

"I bring it here so directly as to be immediate."

He vanished, and was back in less than three minutes, riding on the step of the cab.

He opened the door for her and helped her in with a palpitating deference.

"Where to shall I tell him?"

"No. 153 Gordon Square."

Narain directed the cabman, but did not pay him. He had good feeling enough to know she might resent that.

"No. 153 Gordon Square," he repeated. "Drive most carefully," and stood with his hat in his hand till the cab was out of sight.

"No. 153 Gordon Square," he reiterated, and wrote it on his shirt-cuff.

CHAPTER II.

A Business Proposition.

WITH her latch-key Jacynth let herself into her boarding-house, and slowly crossed its ugly hall with dragging steps. She was glad that it was empty.

Her bedroom and sitting-room were

on the first floor. She gained them without meeting anybody on the stairs and was glad of that, too.

She wanted to face things out by herself, to make up her mind how to meet the future. She took off her hat and sat down limply before her writing-table.

It was her own table, for Mrs. Elphinstone had furnished the two rooms herself. They were light and graceful in effect, showing that their owner had been a woman of taste.

An impulsive woman, too, for she had had a sudden craving to live in London, and she had sold up most of the contents of their country cottage and migrated to town. As Mrs. Elphinstone said, they could not afford a fashionable part, but in Bloomsbury they would at least be central, and within a shilling cab fare of many places of entertainment and the more select quarter of the town that she preferred.

But within five months of their arrival in London death had claimed her.

On the table before Jacynth, in a plain silver frame, was the photograph of a fair-haired, sweet-looking woman, the woman Jacynth had believed to be her mother. She drew it toward her now with a passionate gesture and pressed her lips to the cold glass.

"I shall always think of you as my mummy, darling," she said softly, "because you must have wanted me to. And I'm going to try and look at things calmly and sensibly because you hated scenes and tears. Now I'm going to read your letter, dear."

In spite of her brave words she cried a little before she opened the envelope.

She was only nineteen. She had lost the woman she had looked to as a mother.

In one single day she had been brought to realize that she was nothing, a nobody; that she ought not even to contemplate marriage with a European.

And there was Tom. She was tremendously fond of him, and he would never be her husband. Pride forbade her to tell him the truth and put his love to the test.

She turned her attention to the letter. The writing on the envelope was firm, clear, and characteristic. It might have been written yesterday, but when she opened it she saw that it was dated two years back.

It was a long letter, and she read it slowly.

MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL:

(For you are that in everything but actual relationship, which fact you will have learned by the time you open this.)

Mr. Vannam will have told you; or, if you should marry before I die, I shall have told you myself. I am writing in the event of my death occurring before that happens.

First of all, darling, you must forgive me, and think of me gently, even if I have done you a great wrong in letting you grow up believing you are my child. I had no baby of my own, and when I got you it was so precious and so real to *pretend*, that I hardly realized you were not actually my daughter. If you are ever married and childless you will know the heart-hunger I endured until you were given into my keeping.

Darling, when I am gone, don't be lonely, or despondent, or ashamed. Keep your dear, proud little head high as you have always held it. I love that autocratic lift of your chin.

Jacynth, I will tell you all I know, which is little enough. *I do not, I cannot believe that your father was a native.* You must have had a white parent.

You look foreign, but not Indian. When you were tiny, your hair was the mixiest color you ever saw, a sort of piebald gold and black—black at the roots, turning into gold; and you were not a brown baby any more than you are a brown girl now.

You were as you are, the color of gold, the color of fair children's legs when browned by the sun and the sea. I used to call you my little Maori *baba*. Your ten toes were like gold beads, and your eyes like dark-blue sapphires. They have changed color since.

Now Mootima, my *ayah*, had been married seven years, she told me, when you were born, and you were her first child, and she never thought she would have another. She had consulted a native soothsayer, and he told her so, too.

She came to me from some big native establishment or other, where she had been foster-mother to a native baby, but the *chit* she brought me was from her previous place with the wife of an officer. So I took her without further inquiry.

You were quite a little mite, a few months old, and she seemed to love you fiercely until she knew that the prophet had erred, and when her last baby was born, a boy, she almost seemed to resent you.

She willingly gave you up to me for my own.

I always had a conviction that she kept certain facts back from me. She was a good-looking woman, and would not be without attractions even to European eyes.

Once I asked her to tell me frankly whether she had been an unfaithful wife, and if your father was a white man. She flamed up and poured out such a torrent of Hindustani that I could not follow her. The vehemence of her denial seemed unwarranted, but I never found out anything else. You can never make natives tell the truth when they have made up their minds to lie.

And then there is that mark upon your foot. It faded as you grew, and now it is so indistinct that you yourself would not notice it.

Mootima made me promise never to speak of it. She said it was a secret sign, and would bring down trouble upon her. In the East there are so many meanings and marks and symbols that it may mean anything or nothing.

A man reading this letter would say it was full of a woman's illogical reasoning.

I dare say it is. Most intuitive feelings are illogical. And I have intuitions about you.

Perhaps it is because I am fanciful; more likely because I have watched over you and know you so well. I should not even be surprised if Mootima were not your real mother.

All this is very vague, I know. I wish I could be more definite.

Try and imagine I am with you as you read this, and forgive me for what I was, not for the sake of all I have been. And —I must write the dear word once more— it is the last time I shall play at make-believe—your loving mother,

CARA ELPHINSTONE.

Jacynth read the letter again before she locked it up.

Once she glanced at herself critically in the glass, almost with distaste. The idea that she might be, that universally scorned thing, a half-caste, was more repellent to her than the thought of being a true-born native.

And there was Tom to be told.

To that task she nerved herself at once. She could not link her life with Tom's. He was well off, of good birth, a kinsman of a noble family. He must choose a wife from his own class.

She faced the stigma of her own birth very bravely. It was the best way to get herself used to it. Her course was quite clear to her, and so she wrote:

My answer might have been different, but it is impossible for me to marry you now, irrespective of my inclinations. My reasons are very strong ones, though I did not know them myself until I returned from seeing Mr. Vannam this morning.

If you insist as a right upon hearing them, you shall; but I should much prefer you did not insist.

Don't come and see me for a little. I want time to make some plans. I have to earn my living now. Oh, Tom, I—

Her pen was running away with her. She scratched out the last three words, and ended conventionally, remembering that he might want to show the letter to his mother.

That Tom Lucas was not the sort of man to take his dismissal without protest did not occur to her.

But she did not know Tom really. Very few people did. He seldom spoke of himself or of his ambitions, if he had any.

Jacynth's mind was in a chaos. Her world for the time being had been turned upside down, and she had to accustom herself to the new angle of vision.

The most important problem to be solved, because it affected the present, was where to go and how to earn a living. She had a certain facility with her pen, and had published a few little stories in mushroom magazines, but these had never been paid for, so she assumed there was no money in writing.

The stage did not attract her. She

was not particularly domesticated, she could not teach children.

A rap at her door interrupted her train of thought.

"Come in," she called. "Oh, it's you, Miss Ayres. Sit down, won't you?"

Her landlady took a chair. She was a good-natured mountain of flesh. A dry-goods clerk would have described her as an "out-size in women."

She had a baby face and a business head. She admired and liked Jacynth, and knew she had just been to see her lawyer. A kind, if commercial, heart beat beneath her cheap lace blouse.

"Do you want to be alone?" she asked.

Jacynth shook her head. "I've done my thinking for the present."

"Good news?" asked Miss Ayres.

"Hardly. I have no money. I shall have to do something for myself. And I may as well tell you now, Miss Ayres, I don't think I shall be able to afford to stay on here very much longer. So if you have a good opportunity of letting these rooms you mustn't consider me. I'm very comfortable, but the longer I stay, the shorter my small capital will get."

"I don't want to be inquisitive," said Miss Ayres, "but what do you propose to do?"

"Well, I must learn to do something. There are such a lot of professions for women nowadays."

Miss Ayres's mild blue eyes opened wider. So did her mouth.

"Let me see," she murmured reflectively. "You pay two pounds ten a week inclusive. I make all that out of you, and more."

Jacynth wheeled round.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"What I mean is that you can stop where you are."

"But I shouldn't be able to pay after a little while."

"Don't pay, my dear. Only stop. Darn a table-cloth or do something like that if it makes you feel more independent."

Jacynth flushed.

"What a generous soul you are!" she exclaimed. "But I couldn't possibly think of living on you like that."

Miss Ayres adjusted the brooch on her capacious breast. It took her quite a long time.

"You're the draw," she said at length. "Living in a boarding-house as you do, and running a boarding-house as I do, are two different things; though, if you ask me, they're both equally unpleasant.

"There's the business side of it. Now, ordinarily speaking, the profits don't amount to much. I do stick it on where I can, but I draw the line at charging a shilling for a bath, for instance, because that would be putting a premium on uncleanliness. And there are lots of other ways. But they're too mean for a large-sized woman.

"Now, I'll be frank with you. When you and your mother came here five months ago I'd been at this sort of thing a year, and there was no money in it. How many boarders did I have? Two old ladies at twenty-five shillings a week, running the servants off their feet all day long. Now I'm full up and boarding people out—turning them away, so to speak."

She nodded sagaciously.

"Of my twelve boarders, nine are gentlemen. Moreover, they're none of them Bloomsbury gentlemen, if you know what I mean. They could afford to live in more fashionable parts, most of 'em.

"It's no good beating about the bush. They all like living in a house where there's a pretty, amiable girl. Why, I like it myself, and I'm a woman! From their point of view it's next best to coming home to a wife in the evening.

"You and Mrs. Elphinstone made things sociable—societyfied. If you go my business will dwindle again. So, on a purely commercial basis, I ask you to stay. Keep your rooms; don't let anybody know you're not a

regular paying guest, and believe me that I'm not speaking out of charity."

She paused for a very much-needed breath.

"But—I never thought of—of myself in that light before!" faltered Jacynth. "I'm not sure that I like it. It's rather sordid, isn't it?"

"Not half as sordid as if you went away to earn a living in a city office or something like that. You're treated with respect here. You mightn't be there. There you'd be paid, and when a girl's in a man's employment he seems to think he's purchased her soul as well as her time for thirty shillings a week. I know, because I've been there.

"There's a mixture of people in the world. Gentlemen and bounders, and ladies and what-you-may-call-'ems, and it's heads or tails which ones you run up against when you're out on your own. I can promise you you'll have no unpleasantness here."

"But I don't quite gather what you're asking me to do."

"Nothing at all, except to be as nice as usual. And if any of them ask you to go to a theater or for a walk, or anything harmless like that, go with them and keep them happy."

Jacynth smiled. "I think you overrate my powers of fascination," she said. "No, I couldn't stop under the conditions you make, because I'm fairly sure that it's only a little out of business and a great deal through philanthropy that you are speaking as you do.

"But I've a suggestion to make. I've got two hundred pounds. I'll put a hundred and fifty of it into this business and become a junior partner if you'll have me. I could even interview people and make terms."

Miss Ayres did not jump at the offer. But she was sorely tempted.

"I'm not a shark," she said at length. "And I don't like your idea. You're not my class, you see. You're a lady born and bred. It wouldn't do. And in any case," she reverted to her original expression—"it wouldn't be the draw."

"Why not?"

"Puts you in a different position at once. Takes the gilt off the gingerbread, so to speak. Really, I think you might consider what I've said. It's not binding. You could back out of it any time you liked."

Jacynth shook her head.

"I can't see things as you do," she said, "but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll stop on, and, even if I find something to do, I'll still stay if I can; and I'll be nice to your guests, so it will work out just the same, won't it?"

"For me," said Miss Ayres.

There was a noise at the door. The German waiter opened it.

"A shentleman who vas vant rooms," he said. "I put him in der hall."

"I'll come," said Miss Ayres briskly. "The top-floor back has been vacant two days."

CHAPTER III.

Narain's Call.

MR. GHOSE could not work. The face of Jacynth rose before his mental vision and blotted out all else. Law-books failed to rivet his attention or legal procedure to interest him.

His thoughts were fugitive. They all centered upon the girl called Jacynth.

Why, he could not tell. He had not fallen in love with her in the headlong fashion of British youth. Love, indeed, did not at all describe the strange emotion that Jacynth had inspired in him. It was something higher even than love, for in it was no thought of self—only of service.

He had seen her once. From that time henceforward she was to him as a being set apart, high above him, and therefore to be worshiped.

Indescribable feelings surged within him. By creed and rule and nature he was something of an ascetic.

It must be remembered that he had an Oriental imagination, which is the most vivid in the world. The Oriental is prone to be a visionary, to be swayed by signs, to be the victim of ecstasies. Moreover, Narain's frugal habits, amounting as they did to an abstinence not far removed from starvation, were greatly conducive to the mediumistic trance state.

His eyes rolled, his fingers worked, he became very still; his inner sight was fixed upon the vision that imagination and suggestion had conjured up.

In it the god Siva appeared to him in the semblance of an ancient and withered *Yogi*, most dreadful to look upon. Round his neck was twisted a deadly cobra and a necklace whose jewels were human skulls.

In one hand he held the noose of the thugs, in another a bleeding head, in the third the Gada, mace of war, and in the fourth the trisula, the pitchfork with which he rakes and mars or mends the petty affairs of the human race.

He spoke:

"Behold, student of the law, thou shalt attend upon the footsteps of a maiden, and sit in the shadow of her whose life it is ordained thou shalt serve. Watch while she sleeps, pray while she wakes, guard her always. That thou mayest know of whom I speak hear now, O youth, that her beauty is unveiled. Like the beauty of the moon it is visible for all men to look upon, until the passng clouds hide it from their sight. Her cheeks are like damask; night is enthroned in her eyes. The glory of her beauty doth bridge heaven and earth. Set apart is she by Siva's seal and the anointing of man. Danger compasseth her feet, yea, unto the mouth of the pit that hath no name, and with thee shall she pass through the Great Swamp that lies around it, there to render means of escape to one who hath long sought it. To thee at the end will it be given to guide the maiden's footsteps along the path of safety; if needs be over thine own body. And through thy precepts and thy sacrifices shall she see the vanity of human endeavor, and know that the greatest thing that can befall a woman is that she shall pass through the Workshop of the world.

"Go forth. The hour has come!"

Narain's bodily rigidity relaxed. He came back to himself—came back to the actuality of the tiny room he sat in, full of the odor of law-books, which are as musty as some of the jurisprudence between their covers.

He heard the faint hum of traffic from a distance, realized that he was in materialistic England, where those who see visions usually reside in Bond Street, charging for them in guineas at the hazard of the law.

But the study of English laws and customs cannot alter the mind of the Oriental. It is pliable, but unadaptable.

The East comes to the West, and the West annexes the East, and the gulf will never be bridged though perfervid socialists rant forever of the brotherhood of man, for the gulf is wider than the difference between black and white; perhaps it differs in the very pigmentation of the brain.

Narain had had his call. He viewed it calmly and fatalistically, not in the hysterical light of a so-called "convert"; and he acted deliberately now that his path was set.

He warmed himself before the dying fire, for it was getting chilly now, and, like most of his race who emigrate to a temperate climate, he hardly ever felt warm in the region of the stomach.

Then he reached for his great-coat, and once more mingled with the hurrying, busy crowds of the streets. They reminded him of the white ants of his native land.

To restore his circulation he walked fast all the way to No. 153 Gordon Square. He had not the least doubt in his mind that she whom he was called upon to protect was Jacynth. Her beauty was unveiled, and of a surety it bridged heaven and earth.

For the time being, until his course became clearer, he must be near her, watching over her, winning her respect.

He did not ask himself what Jacynth might think of all this. He

quite ignored the fact that she, not having had a call herself, might view it strangely and regard it as an intrusion.

From the man called Tom he had gathered that she lived in a boarding-house. In that boarding-house he also might find an abiding place.

Perhaps it was one where the fare would not consist entirely of chops and steaks and joints of the sacred calf, or portions of the unclean pig. Perhaps there they might provide him with vegetable substitutes, such as he had partaken of in the restaurant that noon.

Once in a way perhaps they might give him rice—only in England they cooked rice so that it stuck together in a glutinous and unpalatable mass.

He reached his destination at last, and asked to see the proprietor.

Miss Ayres came down. She had not had an Indian in her establishment before, and when she saw that the applicant was one she decided to inform him that she had no vacancy. Indians, she had heard, were not good-paying boarders, and her present ones might object to a colored person.

"Have you one little room?" asked Narain humbly.

"I'm afraid not. It's a very busy season just now. Everybody who hasn't got a house of their own is finding quarters for the winter. In the summer we're not so full. People go out of town. I can recommend you to a nice boarding-house."

"I have been recommended here," said Narain stolidly.

That put a slightly different complexion on matters.

"I might *make* room," conceded Miss Ayres. "Who told you to come here?"

Narain hesitated—and stooped to craft. He felt it was his only chance.

"Miss Jacynth—" It was all he knew of her name.

While the miracle was working he fervently wished the earth would open and swallow him up. He had committed himself so terribly. It was an awful lie.

"Oh, so you know Miss Elphinstone?" said Miss Ayres. "Would you like to see her? She's in."

Narain put out a thin hand. "Not now. Later." There was a note of fear in his voice.

"I have a room on the top floor. Large and airy," said Miss Ayres. "Of course it's high up. But then the price is proportionately low."

"I am indifferent entirely concerning the elevation," put in Narain politely. "If you will have the goodness to show me I will decide at once."

"Yes, you can see it," said Miss Ayres.

She led the way up three flights of stairs and threw open the door of a large and desolate-looking room.

There was a diminutive fireplace in it, quite inadequate for heating purposes; a small iron bedstead, a warped wooden wardrobe, a tottery washstand, and a dressing-table with three coats of different colored paint which showed traces of them all.

The floor was covered with linoleum. Two cane chairs and a three-legged table completed the furniture. There was nothing for comfort.

"With a deck-chair or two about it's quite a homelike room," said Miss Ayres cheerfully.

Narain would have preferred a coolie's hut with a floor of baked mud and the smells appropriate to it. But he tried to be appreciative of this astounding Western parody of a home.

"It is what you say in Ingleesh 'a home from home,' is it not?" he said, showing his white teeth. "But"—he glanced apprehensively at the linoleum, "my feet will be cold on the floor-cloth."

Miss Ayres looked surprised. "And you an Indian!" she observed. "Why, I thought they went about barefooted in India."

"The climate is different," explained Narain patiently. "The earth is of the temperature of your pavements in summer."

"Yes, but you have cold weather, too, don't you?"

"There is the rainy season. My home is in the plains. It is never much cold there."

"But you go up to the hills in the hot weather?"

"We go not to the hills. That is the white people you think of," said Narain. He returned to the needs of the moment. "A *furush*—I mean a rug, by the bed, and another by the fire-hole, perhaps you could arrange?"

"It would mean a few shillings extra. The room is a pound a week. For thirty shillings I will give you a carpet all over."

"But I bring my own mattress. You will take something off for that, a little trifle?"

Narain rather liked this bargaining; it made him feel he was in the East again.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly. The mattress fits the bed. It wouldn't do for any other. But we'll say twenty-five, and the carpet all the same; that is if you come for some months, of course. How will that do? Now about food. What do you eat?"

"I am of the vegetable persuasion."

"A vegetarian?" she interpreted. "That means special cooking. You like lentil soup, and baked beans, and rice stewed in nut-oil—"

"And Indian corn and pulse," augmented Narain eagerly. "I have not had such prog in England." His eyes glistened.

"Well, you can have it here—if you pay for it," said Miss Ayres. "I'll make you really comfortable for fifty shillings a week, everything included."

It was a big price and she knew it. She divined also that Narain wanted to come badly. Jacynth was "the draw" again.

"You said you would decide at once," she said insidiously.

Now, Narain's father was a cultivator, but not a rich one, and two succeeding years of drought had hit him hard. The exchequer had nevertheless been strained to the utmost to send the hope and the light of the family across the seas to acquire learning in the white man's land.

Narain had a keen sense of duty.

"I cannot pay more than two guineas a week. Give me vegetables and I go without the carpet," he said.

"Very well," said Miss Ayres. She added more kindly: "I'll work you a pair of carpet slippers instead. When would you like to come?"

"I come this eventide," said Narain.

"The room shall be ready."

"Then I go to pack where I am at once."

They discussed a few more details, and then Miss Ayres opened the front door. Narain went down the steps, lifting his hat.

At that moment something pathetic in the expression of his thin face—something about him that she could not define—moved Miss Ayres to call him back. He reascended the steps.

"I don't want to drive a hard bargain with you," she said. "Suppose we say thirty-five shillings a week inclusive—and a carpet?"

Narain thanked her with gleam of teeth and eyes.

"Now, what made me do that?" marveled the landlady. She went upstairs again and put her head in at Jacynth's door.

"Good business," she said brightly. "Top floor back let to a friend of yours—a Mr. Ghose."

CHAPTER IV.

A Humble Knight.

SOME tinge of consideration — perhaps it was a sister feeling to that which inspired Miss Ayres when she

called Narain back—moved Jacynth not to convict Mr. Ghose of a lie. She did not tell Miss Ayres that she had not recommended her establishment to the new lodger.

"I suppose he's quite sound financially?" asked the landlady.

She had occasionally been "bilked" by her boarders, as she frankly and slangily put it.

One German gentleman had gradually removed his belongings in brown paper parcels, and when he departed without notice, leaving his trunks behind, they were found empty. Another individual had posed as an ailing millionaire, ordered costly aliment, much brandy, and a doctor, and after a week of high living and no paying, departed like a thief in the night.

And there had been defaulting ladies who had left imitation jewelry behind as surety for unpaid bills.

It is not to be wondered at that boarding-house keepers are versed in sharp practise, so much sharp practise is practised on them. It behooved Miss Ayres to be circumspect.

"I don't know much about him," admitted Jacynth. "He's a law student, I believe. I met him—out," she added indefinitely. "Mr. Vannam, my solicitor, knows him."

"Well, I must bustle about and get his room ready, and his blessed carpet down for his poor cold feet," said Miss Ayres, who was one of those active and conscientious spirits that does not leave everything to servants.

Narain arrived late that afternoon. Miss Ayres had a message for him.

"Miss Elphinstone would like to see you," she said. "She's in her sitting-room now. You can speak to her while your luggage is being carried up. That's the door."

With beating heart, Narain knocked and was bidden to enter.

"Shut the door, please, Mr. Ghose," said Jacynth. "Will you sit down?"

Narain nervously took the edge of a chair. His agitation dimmed his spectacles. Through them he saw Jacynth's face in a blur; and her eyes seemed to him accusing.

He found voice.

"I am most perfectly aware of what manner of speech you wish to make with me," he said. "I make no special pleadings for my conduct. It is rotten-bad.

"I see you first outside in the street where I search for food. I hear you say to one other: 'In here.' You indicate a restaurant and go in.

"I follow. I sit at the table adjacent, and I have even inclined my ears unto your conversation, so great is the feeling with which I become animated.

"You take leave. I say: 'Narain, finish thy food. It is good that thou hast found a shop wherein to satisfy thy stomach-ache.'

"Nevertheless, I finish hastily, and behold! again I see you in the street, graceful like a young fawn considerably astray.

"I accordingly direct you. I arrest a cab. You go home. I memorize the address and — I am here — come to live."

"But that," said Jacynth, "is what I object to. I'm not used to being followed in the street. And you told an untruth when you said that I had recommended you here. I didn't tell Miss Ayres, but I want an explanation from you. I'm living alone. I've lost my mother, and I want protection, not persecution."

"But why should I persecute?" cried Narain. "I, who have come to protect you through all the multiple fluctuations of life!"

Jacynth began to wonder whether much law study had not turned the young man's brain.

"But that's a dreadfully tall order," she said in a softer voice. "That's a husband's duty, not a stranger's."

"I could not seek to be your husband," answered Narain. "A flea may not mate with an antelope. More-

over, as is the custom of my country, I am already wed to a wife which I have not seen since it was twelve years old. At the same time, my bride is but as the star-dust to the moon whose face is unveiled."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you," said Jacynth.

"I have seen a vision," explained Narain. And he recounted it.

As he spoke he gained courage, and the flowery imagery of the East transfigured his speech, so that Jacynth, listening, felt curiously stirred.

The fervor he showed was unmistakably real. There was no note of disrespect in his regard for her.

She was touched. He offered her homage. Is there in the world a woman who will not accept homage from any man? It makes of a peasant a queen; it gives a queen her due.

"It was a strange dream," she admitted. "But you mustn't regard it as a heaven-sent vision, or if it is I am not the person it concerns. In it you are told to attend upon the footsteps of the great. I have nothing in common with the great, nor have you with me except"—she hesitated—"that we were both born in India."

He expressed no surprise at hearing that. Surprise is one of the emotions which the Oriental seldom exhibits. To him it was but a link in the chain—the chain which, under Shiva's protection, he was to help forge.

"I ask only to serve you," he said at last. "I am your dog."

"Oh, please don't put it like that! It sounds like slavery, and we don't understand that in England. I know what you mean—devotion and faithfulness—and, of course, I'm grateful to you for thinking like that toward me."

She was rather shocked by his abjectness, and felt sorry for him. The only thing she could think of to put him and herself at ease again was to laugh it off.

So she went on rather jocularly:

"In olden times when people wanted to show their faith they did great deeds. Ladies had knights who fought for them—dragons and giants, you know."

"There are still many things to fight," answered Narain valiantly if vaguely. "Men and the power of men."

Jacynth was thinking. The day's happenings had been strange enough, and this one was a climax to it. She had intended being angry with the insistent law student. But she was very lonely, and circumstances and the moment, and perhaps a presage of what was to come, made her inclined to be kind.

"Even now," said Narain, "if you command, I will return whence I came."

He waited anxiously for her answer, his eyes full of worship.

Jacynth spoke half playfully, half in earnest, beneath her breath. Her spirits were always volatile. She was recovering them somewhat.

"Kneel down," she directed.

The request did not strike him as a strange one. If it had, he would still have complied with it.

So, in his carefully creased trousers, he knelt at her feet very humbly indeed, while the spiritual fire of the zealot and devotee burned within him.

Jacynth had in her hand a little silver paper-knife. She touched his shoulder lightly with it.

"Rise, Sir Knight," she said.

"From henceforth am I consecrated thy servant," he said in a voice of great reverence.

CHAPTER V.

The Soothsayer.

JACYNTH had a letter from Tom Lucas the next day. It was characteristic of the man to view things calmly and in a rational spirit. Jacynth's decision had puzzled him. After the manner of most women, when it comes to the handling of

words, her phraseology was vague. He did not therefore accept her words as final, and wrote to that effect.

There appears to be no good reason why you should not marry me if you love me. I will come and see you directly I return to town. By that time you will probably have made up your mind how to earn a living, and I shall be able to dissuade you from it.

Jacynth liked the masterful tone, the absence of loverlike expression. A man's love seldom rings true when he makes protestation of it on paper, and she preferred Tom's straightforward, dogged sentiments.

But she dreaded seeing him. In his presence she became weak, plainly showing that he was her master. She might be weak enough to marry him, weak enough to tell him the truth if she came within fingers' touch, or lips' touch, of his crisp, fair hair.

It curled a little at the temples, and his mouth curled at the corners. She always had a temptation to kiss them both.

Jacynth bid fair to be a passionate woman when she was older, if her emotions were not diverted into some other channel than love.

Just now she was going through the transition stage. She wanted, like so many of us, all the presents on the world's great Christmas-tree done up in one parcel; an ambition that cannot be gratified. The luckiest of us can only expect one boon at a time, and that so seldom is the one we have set our hearts upon.

As a compensation, however, it generally wears longer than the other toys, and is therefore most appreciated.

At nine she had wanted the fairy doll at the top of the tree; at nineteen she knew its charm to be meretricious, and appreciated the fact that distance and height had lent enchantment to its value. But she had not yet reached the age of philosophy.

Time hung heavily on her hands. A good many of Mrs. Elphinstone's friends came round to see her and to ask her to their houses.

But there were the hours in between, the dull evenings. No one appreciates how dull an evening can be unless he has had an experience of a boarding house.

Mrs. Elphinstone's death had cast a gloom over this one. None of the boarders liked to show himself cheery in the face of Jacynth's mourning, though she herself would have much preferred it.

Voices which had dropped to a subdued key out of sympathy for her had not yet been raised to their normal pitch. In the evening the men who stayed in did not clamor for Jacynth to sing, as had been their custom. Old Colonel Blow did not like to ask her to play her customary nightly game of cribbage with him. The youngest of the party refrained from whistling in his bath.

Miss Ayres was the only one who had remained unchanged. A hundred deaths could not divert her from her normal cheerfulness.

Narain could not help seeing that Jacynth was affected by this air of gloom. He had effaced himself during the first few days, not intruding upon her, content to see her at meal-times, worried to notice how little she ate.

For himself, he began to thrive upon a vegetable, if unvaried, diet.

One evening after dinner he found himself practically alone with her.

It was the end of September. The day had been remarkably warm and nearly everybody had gone out. In the drawing room two old ladies played patience; Miss Ayres was taking a nap. It was the only time of the day when she could snatch a moment's rest.

Jacynth occupied the sofa. She had been reading the Situations-Vacant Column in the *Daily Telegraph*.

A "skirt-hand" was wanted. All

Jacynth knew of skirts was how to put one on. There was a vacancy for a young lady who could "vamp and live in"—evidently a public-house appointment. Several amateurs were wanted for the stage, also premiums.

It was a totally unsuitable list, or else she was totally unsuitable. She badly wanted to find some employment before Tom made his promised appearance. She felt it would give her some moral stamina to have a business engagement behind her.

Narain stood at the window. He had been trying to pluck up courage to speak to her for the last five minutes. He could think of nothing but platitudes.

Jacynth, becoming aware of his intent and timorous gaze, spoke first.

"Why don't you go out, Mr. Ghose?" she said. "It's quite summery again to-night. It's dull indoors."

"You find it so into the bargain?" He took a chair at a respectful distance from her. "You have been out to-day?"

"No."

Mr. Ghose swallowed hard, opened his mouth and plunged.

"Would you take a perambulation with me?"

Jacynth was about to refuse, but she saw the eagerness in his face, the desire to do her a service, if ever so small, and disliked to disappoint him.

"I haven't been out with anybody since—" she began.

Narain understood. "I am not anybody," he said. "I am nobody. Therefore why not? I accompany you only as a protector, not as a hilarious friend. You need not jaw without the inclination."

By this time his combination of English and unconscious slang had ceased to bewilder her.

"I'm not as unsociable as all that," she said. "I'd like to come out. I'll go and put on my hat."

They left the room together, Narain in a seventh heaven of delight.

There was an Indian exhibition at Earl's Court, and they decided to go there. On the way Narain discoursed to her of the magical beauty of the East, using Indian phrases here and there instead of pausing for halting English ones.

He was no longer ridiculous in her eyes, rather something of a poet. He spoke like one freely translating beautiful Oriental verse without depriving it of its exquisite melancholy.

"I should like to go to India," she said. "I can scarcely remember it. I was so little when I was brought home. I wonder if this is anything like the real thing?"

They had reached the exhibition now, and were strolling through the Indian bazaar, real enough except for the absence of those smells peculiar to the East, full-flavored smells of the spicy cook-pot, the waft of incense, the cloying odor of native sweetmeats, of burning wood and crowded humanity—a mingling of smells that once sensed gives even the white man a nostalgia for India.

Jacynth stopped at a quaint little booth where a native soothsayer was installed, who gave audience to one person at a time. A flickering oil-lamp threw a spat of light on his sunken face. A native woman, his interpreter — for the seer had no English—sat cross-legged on the floor.

Narain remained outside. A *chic* of matting hid Jacynth, the soothsayer and the woman, from his sight.

Jacynth, invited to sit on a mat, began peeling off her glove.

"Which hand?" she asked.

"The holy one reads by the lines of the sole of the foot," said the woman, and proceeded to remove the visitor's shoe.

Jacynth took off one stocking, a little nervously. Then she extended her foot toward the light.

It was a small foot, arched and narrow. It bespoke breeding, or suggested the pliant tread of those who walk barefoot in a hot land.

The soothsayer took it in his lean, brown hand. He glanced at the sole once, gave a strangled cry, and prostrated himself before her, his head bowed to the ground.

The strangeness of the action dismayed her. The man kept on raising himself and bowing.

"Please get up," she said, and turned to the woman. "Ask him what he means."

The woman did so, but got no answer.

Jacynth called to Narain.

"Please come here, Mr. Ghose. This man is behaving so weirdly. Do make him explain."

Narain came in. The soothsayer continued his abject obeisance. At last, very slowly, he straightened himself. Narain addressed him in the vernacular.

The man replied—a long speech. When he had finished he prostrated himself again. Narian looked startled, too, but not amazed.

"I go once more outside," he said to Jacynth. "I wait for you."

In a few minutes Jacynth rejoined him. She thought the visit to the soothsayer had fallen rather flat.

"I could tell fortunes as well as that," she said lightly. "I know no more now than when I paid my shilling. Why, how grave you look, Mr. Ghose! You're trembling!"

CHAPTER VI.

"Shahzadi!"

"IT is utterly preposterous," said Mr. Vannam. "I am not in the habit of examining the soles of ladies' feet. You've come on a fool's errand, Mr.—Mr. Rajanath, and I'm afraid I can't help you."

He spoke indignantly. He felt indignant. Here was the stranger who had been making inquiries about Jacynth, importuning him for a sight of her foot, and giving no explanation for such an odd request.

It was preposterous, far-fetched, and altogether outside the business of a solicitor.

"Moreover," he added in a tone of finality, "I refuse to give you the lady's address."

"I see that I must be more explicit," said Mr. Rajanath pompously. "I am emissary of His Highness the Maharajah of Rohpore."

"Then I should advise you to return to him without delay. He's a madman. I've heard it said so. Gives the government a lot of trouble."

The native gentleman smiled benignantly. "You are in England," he said. "You would not speak so in the royal vicinity. To make myself short, however, I am furnished with a deposition signed by witnesses. It is the death-bed confession of a woman called Mootima Husain."

"Ah!" said Mr. Vannam.

"I interest you more now?"

"Go on."

Mr. Rajanath produced a document. It was covered with Arabic characters. He placed it before Mr. Vannam, who snorted.

"I'm not a Sanskrit scholar. I read English and French and German—that's all."

"Then I translate." Mr. Rajanath cleared his throat, and in a singsong voice did so.

"'I, Mootima Husain, do here make confession of the sin and crime of which I am guilty, and I swear by all my Gods that it is the truth and the truth only which I speak. In the year of the prophet, 1310, and on the eighth day of the month Saphar—'

"That is, in your reckoning, February, 1892," explained Mr. Rajanath—

"'there was born to me a girl-child, and in the third week of the month I entered the Palace of Rohpore to become foster-mother to a girl-child of the Ranee, English wife of the Maharajah of Rohpore, the Ranee having died a few days after the birth.

"'Now upon this child were all hopes fastened, for the maharajah had

no other offspring. Therefore was there great rejoicing.

"'Behold, in the midst of it my own child sickened in the space of two short hours and died, and I was filled with an exceeding grief. Wherefore I was tempted and fell into deceit.

"'Both children were dark, though mine was the darker. But few had looked upon the face of the royal child, and none would know the difference. Even the maharajah had gazed upon his daughter but twice.

"'It was the night-time when my child died, and in the hunger of my heart and the madness of my grief I did a grievous thing. I put my dead child in the royal child's place, and took the royal child to my bosom. And I ran out crying 'Wo! Wo! The royal child is dead!'

"'And at the coming of the royal physician I drew aside the coverlet from her face, and he, bending down to make examination, agreed that it was so, and that the child had been seized by a virulent fever. Then was there mourning in the palace, and, as was fit, I, and I alone, prepared the babe, which was my babe, for burial, so that none detected the deceit.

"'And after a while I journeyed to another place with the babe that was not my babe, and I entered the service of one Mem-sahib Elphinstone, wife of Elphinstone Sahib of an English regiment.

"'Now, after a season, I, who had no hope to have another child, became aware that I was again to become a mother, and, therefore, I had no further need for the stolen babe. So, later, I gave her to the *mem-sahib,* the *mem-sahib* knowing nothing. And the *mem-sahib* journeyed with her to England, where, if the child still lives, she assuredly is to be found.

"'By this means shall it be known and also shall it be made clear that I speak truly: In Rohpore always, since man can remember, has the sole of the left foot of all the royal line been branded at birth with the sign of the five-hooded cobra as a protection against the fatal snake-bite unto which, many hundreds of years ago, the good and gracious Ranee Ayanana succumbed, and under the foot of the babe that I stole there was placed that brand. Of a surety it is now faint, but to him who knows will it be discernible and beyond uncertainty.

"'Great is my contrition for this my grievous sin, and with my Gods and with those whom I have offended I make my peace before I die. (Signed) *Mootima Husain.*'"

"Very plausible," allowed Mr. Vannam, as Mr. Rajanath folded up the precious document and placed it carefully in an inner pocket.

He was not going to show himself taken aback, or make concessions on a point which might be very good romance but very poor law. But the confession naturally had its effect upon him. It was far more credible to his mind that Jacynth should be of high descent than of the low birth that had been imputed to her.

But he had first to ascertain her attitude. The identification mark must be investigated. He was not a lady's man. It might be a delicate matter to ask to see a lady client's foot, and rather a ridiculous one at that.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at length. "I'll take you with me to where Miss Elphinstone lives, and if she will see you after I've spun your extraordinary yarn to her, perhaps she may be induced to show you her foot. But I tell you frankly, I'd rather have nothing to do with the whole affair. However, she's my client, and I suppose I must look after her interests. Come along, Mr. Rajanath."

Jacynth was in. She listened to Mr. Vannam's narration in amazed silence.

Was this a fairy tale? Everything had taken place so quickly, one strange incident had followed on the

heels of another—her mother's letter, Narain, the soothsayer, now—this!

Her voice trembled.

"These are funny things to be happening in Bloomsbury," she said. Then she became quite serious. "My mother — Mrs. Elphinstone — in the letter you handed to me also speaks of a mark on my foot. You had better read what she says."

She unlocked a drawer and handed him the letter, indicating the paragraph. Mr. Vannam read it with drawn brows and pursed lips.

"I've looked, but I can't see anything on my foot at all except a few lines. But last night, curiously enough I was at Earl's Court, and an old Indian read my foot. They often tell fortunes from the soles of the feet, Mr. Ghose says—"

"Mr. Ghose? Mr. Ghose?" repeated the lawyer. "What has he got to do with it?"

"He came here the day after I saw you."

"Why? I mean—please do not think me rude—I thought you did not know him. You asked me who he was."

"I know. But he says he has a call—to look after me and protect me."

Mr. Vannam grunted.

"You'll need some one like that," he remarked. "For you're getting mixed up with a lot of funny people!"

"I know. They've mixed themselves up with me. But about the Indian fortune-teller. He evidently saw something in my foot, and he went on in a most extraordinary way."

She recounted the incident at length, not omitting to refer to its remarkable effect on Narain.

Mr. Vannam was now more than ever impressed by the strange coincidence. He stood thinking.

"Perhaps I'd better show my foot to the gentleman waiting in the cab," suggested Jacynth. "If you'll call him in I won't keep him long."

Mr. Rajanath was in the room when Jacynth reentered it from her bedroom. She wore only velvet slippers, and looked uncomfortable.

Mr. Rajanath bowed. It was an awkward moment.

Without a word she sat down, and slipping her foot out of her shoe, extended it.

Mr. Rajanath bent down and examined it.

"I cannot see with my naked eye," he said. "I will take an impression of the sole with some charcoal I have brought with me for the purpose."

"No, none of your Indian hanky-panky tricks," forbade the solicitor. "If you can make people vanish up a length of string, and grow mango trees out of orange pips, you can make a cobra pattern out of charcoal."

"But I am not a low-class magician!" protested Mr. Rajanath angrily.

"I have one of those indiarubber stamps, and the ink for the pad," suggested Jacynth. "Shall we try that?"

She was becoming interested in the experiment. If there was no cobra mark upon her foot, she was still nobody. If—if—

"Yes, try the ink if you don't mind," said Mr. Vannam.

The ink was applied to the sole of her foot with a wad of cotton wool; a sheet of white paper was placed on the floor to take the impression.

"Press the foot down hard," said Mr. Rajanath. "So; that will do. Step off with great care."

He lifted the paper with both hands, looked at it closely and rushed toward Mr. Vannam in triumph.

"Bear witness that it is no trick!" he cried. "Here is the impression clear and strong."

Mr. Vannam put on his glasses.

The paper showed a fine-lined print of Jacynth's left foot, and on it with startling clearness was depicted the fear-inspiring design of a cobra head with five hoods.

Mr. Vannam shuddered. Jacynth saw it and wondered.

"What does it mean?", she asked. "Who am I?"

Mr. Rajanath spoke. "You are one of the great ones of the earth. Your foot is on a throne. You are the daughter of a ruler, of the great and excellent Maharajah of Rohpore, *shahzadi*—princess!"

CHAPTER VII.

The Girl in the Saree.

THERE ensued a profound silence. Jacynth sat very still. She looked stunned, lost to her surroundings.

Even Mr. Rajanath was affected. With the information in his possession, he had not doubted the result of his experiment. But its success—the tangible proof of his contentions—overpowered him.

He stood, with abstracted eyes, deep in preoccupation.

The only one of the three who remained unmoved was Mr. Vannam. Professionally schooled to withstand emotion and surprises, he kept control of himself.

"Now all this play-acting is over, I suppose we can leave this young lady in peace," he said. "Since you are quite sure who she is—and I suppose her identity is fully established, though, thank the Lord, we don't confirm things in this odd way in a civilized country—we can return to my office. We shall have to talk over settlements."

"Settlements?" echoed Mr. Rajanath.

"Quite so. Money. The exact sum His Highness of Rohpore is prepared to settle on his daughter, so that she may be enabled to live in the luxury and comfort suitable to her rank."

Mr. Rajanath shook his head. "I know nothing of this. Her highness"—he bowed to Jacynth—"and I return to India this week. It is written."

"Where?"

"In my instructions. Her highness will take up residence in Rohpore, in the palace. In the mean time I make arrangements for sojourn in sumptuous hotel. It is all established. Words avail not."

"This is all high-handed rubbish. You cannot ship Miss Elphinstone off as if she were—er—an Indian rug! She's a British subject!"

Jacynth broke into the argument.

"I am perfectly ready to go to India," she said. "Even if I did not want to, I think I should go. My duty lies there."

"I don't think you understand," argued Mr. Vannam. "In India you are neither seen nor heard. You are put behind a curtain. You see only women, probably uncultured and jealous ones at that. Ten to one people will be trying to poison your food. You die in agonies and nobody knows.

"Once there I can't help you. Technically, you have the British government behind you; but the only thing they do quickly in the East is their killing, and the one thing that goes slowly is the course of justice. What use is justice to you when you're a corpse?"

It was a highly colored statement, somewhat involved. But Mr. Vannam, in his capacity as an officer of the law as well as legal adviser to an unprotected feminine client, thought it as well to exaggerate.

"Oh, but they want me to live! There's no heir," debated Jacynth. "I'm sure your fears are groundless, Mr. Vannam. As to living behind the *purdah*, I don't suppose they will be so very strict about that. I am not in the least afraid. I can be ready to sail next week. But I shall want some money to buy clothes, and to pay for a few things besides."

"I have brought clothes and many jewels with me," said Mr. Rajanath with a bow. "If you permit me, highness, I send them to the hotel you appoint. Also money."

"I shall stay here," said Jacynth.

"But it is not fit—"

"I am the best judge of what is fit," she interrupted imperiously; and Mr. Rajanath stood rebuked.

"Thank you very much for being so kind and solicitous about me," she said to Mr. Vannam. "I know you don't approve, though, after all, I'm not doing anything out of the way. I'm simply going where I belong."

"I wish you were under sixteen, so that we could keep you here," he grumbled. "You'll regret it when it's too late. Don't thank me. I don't approve of these proceedings or your decision."

And he went, preceding Mr. Rajanath out of the room.

Then Jacynth sent for Narain. He was sitting in his bedroom when the summons came, thinking of her, wondering when and how he could serve her. He had a presentiment that the opportunity would not be long delayed.

With a beating heart he entered her presence, and as he stood there, a great reverence in his mien, he saw that the hour had come. There was something in Jacynth's appearance, her bearing, that convinced him of it.

The sweetness of her smile permeated his soul. It fed his spirit.

"Mr. Ghose," she said, "some days ago you told me of a very strange vision that had come to you. At the time I thought there was nothing in it. Practical English people put down the things they cannot understand, all that seems unreasonable and too imaginative, to hysteria or indigestion. But your vision seems to have been prophetic. First, I must tell you I am not an English girl. I am the daughter of a maharajah."

Narain was trembling. He trembled to his finger-tips with excitement. But in no other way did he show surprise at Jacynth's news.

The Indian who had inspected her foot at Earl's Court had recognized the five-headed cobra upon it, and divined its significance. Something of this he had faltered out to Narain, and Narain was therefore, in a sense, prepared.

All he did was to prostrate himself at her feet.

"I am the daughter of the Maharajah of Rohpore," proceeded Jacynth, when Narain had risen; "and I am going to India at once." She paused and regarded him steadily. "Would you like to come with me? I want some one faithful, some one I can trust, and who speaks English."

"Faithful unto death," breathed Narain. He was still trembling. "And my English is beyond words without reproach," he added with pride.

"You are prepared to come, then?"

Narain did not think of his incompleted studies, of the money that had been so arduously saved to pay for them, of his future career as "a legal gent." He thought only of the royal personage in whose presence he stood, whose servant he was, appointed by the gods themselves.

"I am ready in ten minutes when I pack my little things," he answered.

"Oh, there's a whole week! In the mean time tell me what sort of a salary you want, and I'll see that Mr. Rajanath, the maharajah's secretary, attends to it."

"I require no salary. My service is labor of love—cost-price."

"That's nonsense. Of course you must have a salary. I'll speak to Mr. Rajanath. Mr. Ghose, only the other day I was telling you how much I would like to return to India, and now I'm actually going there, not as an ordinary person, but a princess. Isn't it wonderful—and exciting?"

Narain was doubtful whether her pleasurable anticipations were warranted. She was young and dazzled by the prospect of life in an Indian palace. She might find it wonderful and probably exciting, but would not the change from European conditions disappoint her? He considered it his duty to warn her of what she would be giving up and of what she would gain in exchange.

In his halting English he tried to tell her.

"You make a great sacrifice," he said. "I, of most flealike insignificance, have no right to offer counsel but for this reason: I come from the East, you purpose go to it.

"There you will have many possessions, jewels and toys, motor-cars, and peradventure a piano to make music without hands. But the days will be long, and after a space one like the other, all the same. Moreover, there may be enmities; for where there are women there is always enmity.

"You have a saying that no omelet is concocted without the breaking of eggs. I say unto you that no quarrel is made without a woman. Where women are gathered together there is trouble, and of a surety behind the *purdah* they are always gathered.

"Moreover, your royal face, too, will be veiled. There will be no man to gaze upon its beauty. Excuse me, that will be very boring.

"You will have no communication with the world. You will be cut off in the heyday of your youth. I speak though I should not speak, for it is my land."

"It is my land, too," said Jacynth. Her decision was in her voice.

Narain backed out of the room. At the door he salaamed deeply, and noiselessly effaced himself. With the impassivity of the East, he had shown no inordinate delight at the thing that meant so much to him, but mentally he was caught up into heaven itself.

Left alone, Jacynth sat thinking, chin on hand, staring before her, her eyes seeing right through and beyond the little English sitting-room into the future, which spelled the East and splendor.

After all, it *was* dazzling! No wonder she was eager to grasp and make this Eastern dream of life within a palace her own.

She thought of Tom Lucas with a shade of remorse and a touch of deeper feeling. But the fact that she was of blood royal did not remove the race-barrier between them.

He was English; she was not. There was no getting behind that.

Although happily not the daughter of a *dohbee* and an *ayah*, she was of their race. There was no difference when it came to a question of marriage with a European.

Still, it would be hard on Tom, harder perhaps because he could not share the compensations that would be hers.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. Miss Ayres opened it.

"There are two black men in funny uniforms down-stairs and the one who came with your solicitor not long ago," she said in a puzzled tone. "They've brought two boxes which they say are for you. I don't know whether you expect them, so I—"

Heavy steps on the landing made her turn.

"Well, you might have waited for permission to come up-stairs," she called to the men who had dragged the boxes to the open door of Jacynth's room. "You had better put them down and go. That's right."

The bearers presented Jacynth with the keys, prostrated themselves, kissed her feet and, to Miss Ayres's horror, hers as well before they departed.

Mr. Rajanath remained in the hall. He had only come to see that the things were safely delivered.

"What on earth does it mean?" she asked. "I've had a feeling all day that something funny's going on, and it makes me creepy and uncomfortable. And Mr. Ghose is behaving most oddly, too. I know you sent for him a little while ago. Well, now he's packing his things, and he says he's going to India with you.

"I'm bewildered. If you've suddenly been making arrangements to go off all that way you might have thought of telling me something, considering the interest I've taken in you."

"I'll tell you everything I can," said Jacynth. "But sit down and lis-

ten calmly. I am quite calm, and yet I am the person most concerned."

She told her astonished landlady the whole story from beginning to end, and when she had finished Miss Ayres sat opening and shutting her mouth in astonishment.

"It can't be true!" she ejaculated feebly. "You're hoaxing me!"

"Indeed I'm not. It's all true." Jacynth had been looking at the boxes with curiosity. "Now I'm going to open these and see what's inside."

The first box was an ordinary trunk of English make. The second seemed to promise most interest. It was of brass, beautifully chased, and crudely set here and there with uncut green stones, a massive contrivance not to be carried in the hand, but which, nevertheless, constitutes the typical jewel-case of an Eastern lady of high rank.

Jacynth fitted the key in the lock and threw back the lid. Miss Ayres, deeply interested, leaned over her shoulder.

A kaleidoscopic gleam of splendor came from wondrous things reposing in the box. On a tray, evidently the uppermost of several, there reposed a necklace of emeralds, strings of pearls, heavy gold bracelets, chains and rings without number.

Single stones of various colors and some value occupied the third tray.

It looked to the two women like the accumulated wealth of ages. As a matter of fact, the maharajah had sent over everything he valued least. He was not going to trust any of his most precious jewels out of India. These were quite blinding enough for a young girl's eyes.

Jacynth went a little white at the sight of so much treasure. She had all a woman's fondness for precious stones. Often she had dreamed that she actually possessed some, and suffered the usual aftermath of disappointment that such dreams bring.

She touched them now as if she expected them to melt under her fingers. By sense of touch she wanted to assure herself that this time she was not dreaming.

Miss Ayres pressed her pudgy hand to her heart.

"Oh my!" she gasped. "Oh my! Are they really yours?"

"I suppose so," said Jacynth in a dazed voice.

"But whatever will you do with them here? It's hardly safe. To begin with, there's that heathen upstairs—"

"Mr. Ghose? Why, he's quite a friend of mine! I'm going to take him to India with me."

Miss Ayres's agitation increased.

"I hope you don't think of taking *all* my boarders with you? Already I've lost two at one blow; though to be sure the fact of your turning out a princess, even an Indian one, will be a first-rate ad for me. I suppose you won't mind writing a testimonial in my visitors' book so that I can quote it in my advertisements in the daily papers?"

"Of *course* I will. That's the very least I can do after all your goodness to me."

A dreamy expression came into Miss Ayres's face.

"Fancy!" she murmured. "A genuine reference to a real princess! Signed in full! The only Bloomsbury boarding-house that ever had one! I shall have the house photographed—" She came to herself abruptly. "That reminds me. Directly the papers hear of all this they'll be coming round for an interview and your portrait. The *Mail's* sure to send—or perhaps the *Mirror*. My dear, you'll be *famous!*"

She was going on, wrought up by the phenomenal circumstances, but Jacynth stopped her.

"Not a word to the papers—to anybody," she enjoined. "Please, Miss Ayres. Newspaper notoriety is the last thing I want. You promise?"

"I suppose I must," sighed Miss Ayres. With her crude but business-like ideas about advertising she thought her boarder's refusal of pub-

licity a terrible waste of a good opportunity. She swallowed her disappointment as best she could.

"Won't you see what is in the other box?" she said. "Clothes, I expect. And if they're meant to go with the jewels they must be dreams!"

Jacynth unlocked the box. Miss Ayres clasped her hands.

"What brocades! What embroideries! What colors!" she exclaimed. "I never did! Why, Liberty's haven't got anything like them!" She jumped up excitedly. "I'm going to dress you up. With your coloring you'll look pretty near the real thing!"

"I *am* the real thing," laughed Jacynth.

Miss Ayres lifted out a length of cloth of gold. It was a wonderful piece of fabric, beautifully embroidered.

Jacynth knew how to wear a *saree*. She slipped out of her frock, donned one of the numerous embroidered bodices and wound the *saree* round and round her figure, draping it over her head and shoulders and bringing it across her breast on the left side. Miss Ayres clasped a necklace of emeralds about her neck, piled bracelets on her arms, and rings on her hands.

"There!" she said. "You're a treat!"

Turning to the glass, Jacynth stood and contemplated her reflection. She was not vain, but the colorful picture gave her pleasure.

"What do I look like?" she asked.

"Like! Like a bit of musical comedy, only more splendid! My dear, you're *blinding!*" She stopped to listen to the ring of a bell. "That's the front door. I must go down in case it's a new boarder, though I shouldn't be surprised if it turned out to be more niggers for you and a string of elephants in the street."

It was Tom Lucas.

"Miss Elphinstone in?" he asked.

The casual inquiry, the customary name, had a depressing sound in Miss Ayres's ears. She almost resented them. They seemed to her to belittle Jacynth's new status. She was bursting to impart the whole of her startling news to the world at large.

"Oh, yes. She's in. But she's not Miss Elphinstone now. She's the Princess of— I forget the name. Do go up, Mr. Lucas. She's in her sitting-room, all in gold and jewels."

Tom stared. Had the woman gone mad?

"Thanks," he said shortly, and went up-stairs, wondering whether he had heard aright.

In answer to his knock Jacynth's voice bade him enter. He opened the door and stood transfixed by the dazzling figure which came toward him, with jewels and bracelets tinkling in a way that was already strangely Eastern.

"What does it mean? Why are you got up like this?" he faltered.

His eyes went to the open brass box and the trunk with its bales of colored finery, and a chill crept over his heart. Jacynth wasn't play-acting or dressing up for fun. Whatever it was, it was real.

"Jacynth, what is it? Something's happened—"

"Yes," she answered, and quite suddenly felt afraid of him, of his strength, of the will which she knew he would pit against hers. "I—I'm an Indian princess."

He laughed incredulously. His laugh irritated her.

"What next?" he asked.

"I'm going to India—to my father."

"Oh, to India? To your father? Perhaps you wouldn't mind explaining. May I sit, or must one stand in the presence of—royalty?"

The irony in his voice, put on to hide indefinite fears and real anxiety, hurt her, made her conscious of her new dignity.

"You may sit," she said seriously.

"Thanks awfully. And smoke? I'm burning with curiosity."

As calmly as she could, and for the third time that day, she related everything that had befallen her.

At first he listened with tolerant amusement. Then his interest deepened. He grew as serious as she—more serious.

And when she had finished he said very gravely:

"Then I count for nothing now?"

"Why should you say that? I like you more than any one I know. Only you must see how impossible it is that we could ever marry."

"So you mean to renounce everything English?"

"I must."

"Good Lord!"

He got up and paced the room several times. Presently he stopped in front of her.

"You poor blind darling," he said in a voice that shook. "You don't realize what you're doing. You're going to live in a palace? But what sort of a palace? Barbaric! You are walking bang out of the twentieth century into medieval times. That's where the East stands now. And you're going to put the ocean between us, build walls around my love for you, make it impossible for me to get to you. And God knows what you've got to go through.

"And what's more, Jacynth—look at me"—she raised her eyes obediently to his—"I don't believe for a single moment that you've got a drop of native blood, high-caste or low-caste, in your veins. Somewhere there's a flaw in this story, dashed plausible though it sounds.

"Look here, aren't you safer with me, with people who love you, than thousands of miles away without a single friend? You've *got* to marry me, Jacynth."

She turned her face away.

"I'm going. Nothing can alter that."

And he knew that she meant it. Her newly discovered parentage, her belief that she was more Oriental than English, the race-call (if it really existed, which he doubted) had hold of her.

She was being impelled by them, martyrized by them. She was in the throes of an excitation that just now was proof against reason. Argument he felt would be useless. He was out of touch with her.

In silence he sat and looked at her, this *saree*-clad and bejeweled girl in whom the real Jacynth had disappeared.

To the real Jacynth he might have appealed. But this one was new and incomprehensible to him. The real Jacynth was beyond his influence, as far removed as if the sea and the *purdah* already divided them. The fact staggered him.

"Very well," he said, trying hard to keep his voice steady. "It's good-by, then. There's no use in prolonging the agony. And it is agony to me."

Unemotional until now, it was Jacynth's turn to be moved.

The words "good-by" were like a blow. She had never attached any real meaning to it until this moment. It had practically escaped her that her determination implied good-by to Tom. And Tom meant a great deal to her, however much she might deny it to herself.

Perhaps she would not even be able to forget him as quickly as she ought. She glanced at him now, at his strong, set face, so good-looking, so English, and her heart softened.

"You may kiss me—just once," she said, and there were tears in her voice.

Tom took a step toward her. His arms made a convulsive movement, then dropped to his side.

"I daren't kiss you. If you ever want me send for me. Good-by!"

Hardening his heart against the sob that broke from her, he made his way out of the room. At the hall door

he cannoned into Narian Khuma Ghose.

"Sorry," he apologized.

But Narain had seen his face. He followed him swiftly down the street and touched him on the arm.

Tom turned, stared and then recognized him.

"Yes?" he asked. "What is it?"

"I follow to impart to you some joyful news," said Narain humbly. "I go with her. I look after her with devotion unsurpassed. I am by the gods appointed."

In the state of bitterness that held Tom he failed to appreciate the other's meaning. The small Indian was a stranger to him.

"Whom are you speaking of?"

"Of the lady we both worship in most totally singular way," said Narain glibly.

Tom's first impulse was to knock him down. But he was so slight and small a creature, and so tremendously in earnest.

"I," pursued Narain, "with the worship of a dog—ay, even a *pi*-dog, you, as a man. I go with her as most fluent English-speaking secretary. I watch over her with vigilance unceasing. Brighten up your countenance, if you please."

Tom could not help feeling amused.

"I suppose you mean well," he said.

"I mean most atrociously well," asseverated Narain. "If you will permit me have your address I will now and then write you concerning her. It it nothing. Do not thank me. To love a woman is most uncommonly bad feeling. I am a bloke who understands."

Tom handed him his card.

CHAPTER VIII.

India at Last.

THE Arabian Sea. Not a breath of air. It was stifling on deck; hotter, if possible, below.

On deck Jacynth was constrained to walk veiled. Therefore in this heat she found it preferable to keep to her stateroom, where at least she could lie still and be fanned by her women. They spoke no English worth talking about, and were Mahrattas, strangers to Rohpore.

Mr. Rajanath had obtained them in London through an English agency. They had come home as *ayahs* with their mistresses, and were eager to return to their own country as soon as possible.

Jacynth found them merely irritating. One of them was in constant attendance on her, and her presence did not make the heat more bearable. At night she lay on the floor, breathing stertorously, making sleep impossible. She could not rouse her. *Ayahs* sleep like the dead.

Between them, the women dressed her hair and kept a watch over her. That was what they were there for. She was never for a single moment left alone.

Whenever she could not stand the confinement of the stateroom and sought freedom on deck, the officious Mr. Rajanath popped out from somewhere or other, summoned Narain, and the two of them would walk behind her till walking became an absolute penance.

She scarcely ever had Narain to herself. Mr. Rajanath was not quite sure of the young man. He kept a watch on him as well.

The maharajah's envoy was pompous and entirely uninteresting. He had not even the gift of description, so that Jacynth could elicit from him nothing but bald and unimaginative statements concerning her future home and the people she would meet there.

She gathered that her father's motives in desiring that she should take her rightful place as his daughter were political rather than private ones. Apparently there was no likelihood of an heir to the throne, although the maha-

rajah had married again for the third time.

There was only one wife in the palace at the moment—the favorite one. Neither history nor Mr. Rajanath had anything to impart as to the manner of the disappearance of the other two —whether they had died, or been helped to die, or whether they still lived.

"Can't you tell me something about my mother?" she asked him one day. "What was she like?"

"She was white," he mumbled, with much the same enthusiasm as he would have employed in describing a piece of chalk.

Jacynth made an impatient movement.

"Of course I know that. But what else?"

Mr. Rajanath frowned. Clearly he did not want to discuss the subject any further.

"She was gentle," he said at length.

And that was all she could ever get out of him. She was white—and she was gentle!

Jacynth gathered that the favorite and existing wife was a low-caste women of powerful beauty and still more powerful will. The effect of her voice and presence upon Mr. Rajanath, as described in his own words, caused his stomach to churn. Presumably he held her in some awe.

Who she was, what she had been, he hinted at discreetly, if contemptuously. In speaking of her he frequently used the word *Kasbi*. Jacynth took that to be her name.

As regards herself, he told her that had she refused to return with him to India, his instructions had been to carry her off by force. This, he was quite sure, would have been easy of accomplishment.

Her presence in Rohpore would brook no delay. Failing Jacynth, the throne in due course would have passed to one Bakshu Tanan, a cousin, for whom the maharajah nourished an exceeding hatred.

The admission set Jacynth thinking. It suggested political intrigue, and that she was the instrument needed to carry it out. The possibility that sentiment, which had impelled her to expatriate herself, might be a negligible quantity in her new life was something of a disappointment.

But she was not frightened at the prospect, and the thought did not oppress her for long.

There were so many other things to think of. According to Mr. Rajanath, she would have to undergo a great deal of preparation and initiation before she could publicly have her caste restored to her, and her official and religious status acknowledged.

At first time hung heavily on her hands. She wrote a long letter to Tom, chiefly describing the view as seen from a port-hole, and detailing the affairs of a native state as recounted to her by Mr. Rajanath.

That letter never reached him. Mr. Rajanath, after opening and reading it, posted it in the depths of the Indian Ocean. He had been given certain instructions as to his charge's communication with the outer world, and he carried them out explicitly, taking no risks.

Then it occurred to Jacynth that she would learn Hindustani. She remembered it a little, and felt that the rest would come back to her soon, especially as she had spoken it fluently as a child.

She conveyed her decision to Mr. Rajanath, and desired that Narain should teach her.

"I will instruct you myself," he replied. "I speak English better than Mr. Ghose. I more lucidly explain."

Jacynth wanted Narain to teach her. She liked his gentle manner. In these lonely days his whole-hearted devotion was her only compensation.

But she was learning quickly. She was learning tact. She knew it would be unwise flatly to refuse Mr. Rajanath's offer of instruction. That might make a declared enemy of him.

And she needed friends. Already, intuitively, she was guessing that.

She used diplomacy. She suffered Mr. Rajanath to teach her, and assumed a degree of denseness that baffled and irritated him.

Her memory stubbornly refused to retain anything he imparted. She asked incessant questions, and his mouth grew dry with answering them.

At last he was fain to admit that she needed one of smaller intelligence as a preceptor. In the end she obtained what she was seeking, Narain's services, and Mr. Rajanath rested from his labors.

Mentally he compared the thickness of his late pupil's head to several inches of wood, and execrated her for being that most foolish and troublesome thing, a woman.

With Narain, Jacynth learned quickly and well. They could not converse confidentially. The *ayahs* were always in the way.

But Narain had the Oriental's gift of story-telling. He was *Rizzio* to her *Mary*.

He had no lute, but he had voice and imagination, and when he spoke in his own language, and she was proficient enough to follow him without much difficulty, his phrasing no longer sounded ridiculous in her ears.

"Narain," she said one afternoon, shutting up her Hindustani grammar, "tell me a story. See if you can make me forget that I am shut up, a prisoner."

She smiled as she spoke, but the words smote at Narain's heart.

Was she realizing that already? And if so, what unhappiness might not lie in store for her in the future?

"All those of royal rank are virtual prisoners, highness," he answered. "And since you ask it, I will tell you a tale—" He relapsed into halting English. "It is one little story I made up in my head and write in English for the four-penny-ha'penny mags, but the editors all said it was fetched too far, and sent it back with compliments and crumples. Shall I tell it in English, as it was wrote, or in Hindi, as it flowed through my confoundedly miserable brain?"

"Tell it in Hindi."

The *ayahs*, squatting on the floor chewing betel-nut, drew closer, with eyes fixed expectantly on Narain. Narain gazed over their heads, supremely indifferent to all but his audience of one.

"*Sunna!* Harken!" he began, and wove a fantastic warp and woof of Oriental imagery and philosophy that held them entranced. When he ended his tale Jacynth thanked him, and the *ayahs* made guttural noises of appreciation.

As he finished his flowery deprecation of their praise, Mr. Rajanath came into the room with the first touch of excitement that she had seen ruffle his serenity.

"What is it?" she exclaimed, rising.

"We now approach India," he said, his voice shaken a little. "Would you like to see?"

Would she! As she stood at the railing of the boat, Rajanath, Narain, and even the *ayahs* beside her gazing with hungry eyes, and looked at the blue-green of the distant shore-line and the white city they were slowly nearing, she felt a crisping of her heart-strings and her eyes burned.

India, the land of her birth, land of beauty and terror and mystery! India, cradle of the Aryan race, mother of half the languages of the globe and of all its civilization! India, where the East is supreme and most impenetrable to the West—what fate did India hold for her, in whom East and West truly met?

What was before her? She shivered, despite the sultry air, and lowered her veil again. Well, she would soon know!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Way of the Strong

by Ridgwell Cullum

Author of "The Trail of the Ax," "The Watchers of the Plains," "The Night-Riders," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THE Yukon. Leo, who has just made his pile prospecting, is induced by his sweetheart, Audie, to start south in the middle of winter, so that they can reach civilization and be married. On the journey Leo's gold is lost. Desperate, he hurries to the camp of his former associates, Tug and Charlie. Tug is away and Charlie has died. Leo takes their gold, escaping with the sled and dogs, intending to overtake Audie, whom he had sent ahead with the Indian guide, her destination being her sister's home in California. Arriving there after a delay, Leo advertises for Audie, who has died in the meantime, leaving a child. Monica, Audie's sister, has promised the dying girl never to let the baby know the story of his mother's misfortune. Both Leo and Tug come following the advertisement, but Monica keeps her secret and puts them off the track.

CHAPTER VIII.

After Eighteen Years.

MONICA HANSON stood in front of the full-length mirror in her bedroom. For a long time she stood viewing her fair reflection with a smile at once half humorous, half tearful. Thirty-five!

It sounded terrible as she muttered the age she knew herself to be. Thirty-five! Yet the perfect blue eyes were not a day older as they looked back at her out of the glass. There was no hardening in their depths; there were no gathering lines about their fringed lids. Perhaps there was a deeper, wiser look in them. The rich, ripe mouth, too—so wonderfully firm yet gentle—the broad, intelligent forehead, with its fair, even brows; there was not one single unsightly line to disfigure these features. Her wealth of fair, wavy hair was faultlessly dressed; nor had she ever yet found in its midst a silver thread.

No; she beheld nothing in her reflection to cause her a single pang, a single heartache. Yet her heart was aching; and the pain of it was in the smile which came back to her from her reflection.

But such ponderings before her glass were useless, perhaps harmful. It was all so impossible. So she turned away with a little impatient gesture and, picking up the letter lying on her bed, she passed through the folding doors into her sitting-room beyond.

The winter sun was shining in through frosty windows—that wonderful winter sun which brightens and makes joyous the Canadian dead season, without shedding sufficient warmth to disturb the thermometer from its despairing depths of cold.

She crossed to the window and stood beside the heat radiator while

This story began in The All-Story Cavalier Weekly for September 5.

she read her letter for perhaps the twentieth time. It was, quite short and intensely characteristic of the writer. Monica understood this. The lack of effusion in no way blinded her to the stormy passion which had inspired it.

DEAR MONICA:

I am going to call on you at four o'clock this afternoon, if you have no objection. If you have, phone me. I simply cannot rest until the subject of our talk the other night is settled.

Yours,
ALEXANDER HENDRIE.

There was a wistful longing in her eyes as the woman looked up from the brief note. The subject of their talk? He could not rest. Had she rested or known peace of mind since that evening?

She knew she had not. No one knew better than she the happiness that might have been hers in her newly found regard for this great wheat-grower of Alberta, had things only been different. She had admired him ever since she came into his employ; but now she loved him with all the long-pent passion of a woman who has for years deliberately shut the gates of her soul to all such feelings.

She knew her love must be denied. There was no hope for it. The trials she had gone through for the sake of her pledge to her dying sister were far too vividly in her mind to leave her with any hope for this love of hers. She must crush it out. She must once more steel herself, that her faith with the dead might be kept.

She dropped upon the ottoman beside the window and, gazing out on Winnipeg's busy main street, gave herself up to profound thought. Her incisive brain swiftly became busy reviewing the career which had been hers since—since young Frank, her beloved boy, the child who had cost her a sister's life, had become her one object and care.

Her deep eyes grew introspective and her pretty lips closed firmly. She had not traveled an easy road during those years. She was caught among the first shoals that presented themselves in the ebb tide of her fortunes six months before the completion of her contract on the *Daily Citizen*. Would she ever forget the tragedy of that moment?

Everything had gone along so smoothly. In the warmth of her girl's heart, her rapidly growing love for the little life in her charge, she found herself spending every moment of her spare time with the child she intended to teach to call her "mother."

They were happy days. The joy of them still remained. But her indiscretion grew, and so the blow fell. It was on a Sunday afternoon in early summer. She was pushing the baby-coach along the sidewalk of the broad country road toward the city. She had paused to readjust the sunshade over the child's head. When she looked up it was to discover a light buggy drawn by a fast trotter rapidly approaching. Mr. Meakin was driving it, and beside him sat his wife.

They saw her and promptly pulled up; and instantly Monica knew that trouble was knocking at her door. Mrs. Meakin did not like her.

"Why, it's Miss Hanson," she promptly exclaimed. "And—oh, the lovely baby! Why—" She looked at Monica's scarlet face and broke off.

Mr. Meakin took up the greeting in the cordial fashion of a man who is well disposed.

"Say, Miss Hanson, it's a hot day for you to be pushing that coach. You surely ought to be around an ice-cream parlor with one of your beaus; not out airing some friend's kid."

But Monica's confusion only increased under the sharp eyes of Mrs. Meakin, which never left her face.

"A baby can't have too much of this beautiful air," she said helplessly.

"Why doesn't its mother look after it?" demanded Mrs. Meakin.

"She's—she's busy."

Monica's attempts at evasion were

so feeble, she had so little love for subterfuge, that, to a mind as prone to suspicion as Mrs. Meakin's, the word "mystery" quickly presented itself.

"Whose is it?"

The inevitable question seemed to thunder into the wretched girl's ears. Whose is it? Whose is it? It was useless to lie to this woman, whom she knew had no love for her. So on the spur of the moment she did the only thing that seemed possible, seeing that Mr. Meakin was her employer. But she did it so badly that, even while she spoke, she knew her doom was sealed.

"She belongs back there." Monica pointed at the distant farmhouse.

"That house?" cried Mrs. Meakin sharply. "Why, that's Mrs. Gadly's. I—" She turned abruptly to her husband. "We'd better drive on or we'll be late back for supper, and that will make us late for chapel."

With a flourish of his whip and a cheery good-by, Mr. Meakin set his "three-minute" trotter going again, and Monica was left to her dismay.

She knew. She needed no instinct to tell her. It had all been written in Mrs. Meakin's icy face. The woman would find out all about the baby she had seen her husband's secretary with. She would smell out the whole trail with that nose which was ever sharp for an evil scent.

She continued her walk, thinking hard all the while, and finally took the child back to its nurse at the usual time.

Mrs. Gadly met her at the front door, and Monica put a sharp question.

"Has Mrs. Meakin been here?"

"She surely has, ma'am," replied the woman, smiling. "And a God-fearin' woman she is. I've known her years an' years. I didn't jest know you were her good man's secretary. She's a lady, she is; a real, elegant lady. An' she was all took up with the baby, an' the way I'd look after him. She said as it was a great thing for a woman who's lost her baby to have the care of another woman's child; kind o' softens the pain. An' when I told her as you paid me so liberal for it— Why, ma'am, you ain't faint? Ah, it's the sun; you best come right inside and set down."

It had been a terrible moment for Monica. She knew that her career in San Sabatano had suddenly terminated.

She returned to her apartments that evening with her mind made up to a definite course; and, on the Monday morning following, before she went to her office, she looked up her contract with the *Daily Citizen*. She took it with her. Mr. Meakin was amiability itself. But there was evident relief in the sigh with which he accepted the return of the girl's contract.

"I'm real sorry, Miss Hanson, real sorry," he said sincerely. "But I guess you're right, seeing things are as they are."

Mr. Meakin stood her good friend, for, on her departure, the cashier handed her a check for three months' salary—which she had not earned!

After she left San Sabatano her fortunes for a while became checkered. Her trials were many. Not the least of them was when, as Miss Hanson, it was discovered she was always accompanied by a boy with blue eyes and fair hair, practically the color of her own. And the child always called her "mother."

She realized that, for his own sake, she must temporarily part with the boy. Later, when he grew up, she would tell him the false story which she had hardened her heart to, and trust to Providence that it might satisfy and have no evil consequences.

It was a terrible blow to part from him. She loved the boy, whom she had had christened Frank Burton, with all the profound affection of her ardent nature.

It almost seemed as if Frank's going

were in some way responsible for the change of fortune which so quickly followed. Within a month, Monica secured an excellent position in a Chicago wheat broker's office at the biggest salary she had ever earned. Furthermore, she remained in this place for a year, with unqualified success. Thence she went to another wheat operator's office. Then on, from post to post, always advancing her interests, and always in the wheat world.

So Frank's education was completed in the manner Monica most desired. Her experience in the world of wheat inspired her with definite ideas as to his future; ideas in which, fortunately, he readily concurred.

Therefore, at the age of fifteen, Frank repaired to an agricultural institution to learn in theory that which, later, he was to test in practise.

It was during his career at the agricultural college that Monica first became the secretary of Alexander Hendrie, the greatest wheat-grower and operator in the west of Canada. He was a man she had known by reputation for several years, ever since she first stepped within the portals of the wheat world. She had never come into actual contact with him before, but his name was a household word wherever wheat was dealt in. Besides being a big operator on the Winnipeg and Chicago markets, he owned something like thirty square miles of prairie land in Alberta under wheat cultivation, and was notorious for his scrupulous honesty and hard dealing.

The manner of her meeting with him was curious, and almost like the work of fate. But the manner of her engagement as his secretary was still more curious, yet characteristic of the man.

It happened on the railroad. She was returning from the west coast with her then employer, Henry Louth, one of the most daring of the Chicago wheat men.

Like many another speculator in the past, this man had become disastrously involved in a wild endeavor to corner wheat. But he found, as others had found before him, that he had only created a Frankenstein which threatened him with destruction. His thoughts turned at once to Alexander Hendrie, who was then in Vancouver. He was the only man who could afford him adequate help. There was nothing for it but a desperate rush across the continent on his forlorn hope, and he undertook the journey at once, accompanied by Monica.

When Louth put his proposition to the millionaire he learned to his horror that this man was actually the head of the syndicate who had been his undoing. It was an absurd blending of comedy and tragedy, yet the situation was wholly characteristic of the methods of Alexander Hendrie. The work had been carried out with all the subtlety of the astute mind which had lifted the man to his present position. Louth set out on his return journey a broken and beaten man.

Monica would never forget that journey, and all it meant to her. While the train was held up by a heavy snowfall at a place called Glacier, in the Rocky Mountains, Henry Louth, in his private car, took the opportunity of shooting himself. Monica attended him during his dying moments, afterward watching at his bedside until his body was removed by the authorities. When the excitement had died down and all was quiet again a large man entered the car from another part of the train. He came straight to the bed, and looked gravely at the dead man. Then he turned to the beautiful woman beside the bed and looked at her with unsmiling eyes.

She knew him at once, and returned his look unflinchingly. It was Alexander Hendrie. She recognised the strong, rugged face of the man, and his abundant fair hair.

In a moment a cold resentment at the intrusion rose up in her.

"Well?" she inquired. "Are you satisfied?"

The man displayed no emotion.

"You are responsible for this."

Monica's challenge came with biting coldness. But Hendrie only shook his head.

"Wrong. Guess you don't understand. Maybe most folks—who don't understand—will say that. But I'm not responsible for—that." He indicated the dead man with a contemptuous nod. "I was on a legitimate proposition to prevent the consumers of wheat being plundered. I'm losing money by what I've done. Guess he hadn't the grit to stand the racket of his dirty game. Men like him are well out of it."

Monica dropped her eyes from the steady gaze of the iron man before her. Somehow she felt ashamed of her impulsive accusation. In his concise fashion he had given her a new understanding of what had happened.

"I hadn't seen it that way before," she said, almost humbly.

Hendrie nodded.

"You were his secretary," he said, with a subtle emphasis.

"Yes."

Again the man nodded.

"I've heard of you. I need another secretary. You can have the job."

Two weeks later she found herself in her new position, established in the millionaire's offices in Winnipeg at what was for her a princely salary.

At the end of nearly two years she was still with him, a confidential secretary; and at last the woman in her was crying out against the head which had for so long governed her affairs.

Alexander Hendrie had offered her marriage. He had done more. This apparently cold commercial machine had shown her a side of his nature which the eye of his world was never permitted to witness. He had thrown open the furnace doors of his masterful soul, and she had witnessed such a fire of passionate love that left her dazed and powerless before its fierce intensity.

And she—she had needed little urging. The wonderful attraction of this personality had ripened during her two years of service. She no longer worked with every faculty straining for the handsome salary he gave her; she worked for the man.

Yes, she knew that he stood before even her love for the boy whom she had taught to call her "mother." That was her trouble now. That was the one all-pervading drop of gall in her cup of happiness.

She rose and crossed the room to her bureau. She picked a letter up that was lying on the top of it. It was the last letter she had received from young Frank, from the farm he was on, not far from Calford, just outside the little township of Gleber. She read it through again. One paragraph particularly held her attention.

"I've met such a bully girl. Her name's Phyllis Raysun. She's just about my own age. It was at a dance, at a farm twenty miles away. We danced ten dances together. Oh, mother, you will like her. She's fine. Pretty as anything, with dark eyes and dark hair—"

Monica went back to her seat at the window. There was a smile in her eyes, but there was trouble in them, too. She understood that Frank was grown up.

Frank was still in ignorance of the facts of his birth. She, Monica, was his "mother," so far as he knew, and he understood that his father was dead. This was the belief she had brought him up to. This was the belief she hoped to keep him in. But now, all too late, she was realizing through such letters as these that a time must soon come when he would want to know more.

Her determination to shield her sister was still her principal thought. At all costs her promise to the dying woman must be kept. There should be no weakening. She would carefully prepare her story. Lies—it would all be lies.

But now had come this fresh complication in the person of Alexander Hendrie. Here was something she had never even dreamed of. He became something more than a complication. He was a threat. She could not marry him. She must definitely refuse him. And then—

She turned to the window with a deep sigh and stared hopelessly out of it at the keen winter sunshine.

To contemplate marriage with a man as passionately in love as Alexander Hendrie, a man as strong, as masterful as he, with the existence of her boy to be explained away, would be rank madness. It was hopeless, impossible. It could not be.

Her course lay clear before her. She knew now how she had sacrificed herself on the altar of affection when she pledged herself to the care of her sister's child. That sacrifice must go on to the end, come what might.

CHAPTER IX.

Alexander Hendrie.

IT was a troubled woman who started at the clang of the bell at her outer door. She turned with terrified eyes at the silver clock which stood on her bureau. It was four o'clock, and instinctively her hands went up to her hair, and nimble fingers lightly patted it.

For a moment she stood irresolute staring before her. The next moment she hurriedly passed out to her front door.

Alexander Hendrie followed her into the sitting-room, and promptly its femininity gave way to the atmosphere which his personality seemed to shed upon all that encountered it.

It was not an essentially refined personality; it was too rugged, too grimly natural, too suggestive of nature in her harsher moments to possess any of the softer refinements of life. He was over six feet in height. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his muscular, erect form, which was clad in the simple fashion of a well-tailored man who takes little interest in his clothes. But these things were almost lost sight of in the absorbing interest of his rather plain face. An artist painting the picture of a viking of old would have reveled in such a face, and such a wealth of wavy fair hair. It was a face full of faults, yet it was such a combination of strength and mentality that no eye trained to the study of physiognomy could have resisted it. The lines in it were pronounced. Yet every line was a definite indication of the power behind it. There was a contemplative light shining in the keen gray eyes which told of perfect control of all emotions. The nose was broad and pronounced, with curiously sensitive nostrils. The mouth was broad, too, but firmly closed. It was a hard face; hard in its relentless purpose.

Monica realized something of all this as she brought a large rocker forward for his use; and her heart failed her as she remembered the mission that had brought him to her apartment.

The man leaned forward in his chair. His hands were clasped together, and his forearms pressed heavily on his knees.

"Tell me," he cried, a deep note in his voice, "have you anything to say to me? Anything about our talk the other night?"

Monica kept her eyes averted. She was summoning all her courage, that she might the more successfully bruise and beat down her own love for this man.

She shook her head without daring to face him. She knew, she felt the heat of passion shining in his gray eyes.

"It — it — it can't be," she said, stumbling fatally.

She waited, hardly knowing what to expect. He smiled, and his smile was strangely tender.

"Is that all?" he asked at last. "Is that your—final word?"

"Yes," she almost gasped, and desperately faced him.

Then she abruptly rose from her seat and moved toward the window. She had seen more in his eyes than she could face.

"But—it's insufficient, Mon."

The man rose from his chair and followed her. He came near, and stood close behind her. She could feel his warm breath on the soft flesh on her neck. She trembled, and stood helplessly dreading lest he should recognize the trembling. Then she heard his voice speaking, and her soul responded to the fire in his words.

"I love you, Mon. I love you so that I cannot, will not give you up. I love you so that all else in my life goes for nothing. All my life I've reveled in the constant joy of anticipation of the success I have achieved. All my life I have centered my whole soul on these things, and trained brain and body for a titanic struggle to the top of the financial ladder. And now, what is it, if—if I can't win you, too? Mon, it is simply nothing. Can you understand what I feel when I say that? More than all the wealth and position I've dreamed of all my life I want you—you. What is it? Why? Tell me why it—can't be."

Suddenly, in desperation, she turned and faced him.

"I tried to make it plain to you the other night," she cried, with a complaint that made her voice almost harsh. "I tried to tell you then that I could not marry you. But you wouldn't listen to me. You laughed my refusal aside. You told me you would not give me up. I can only reiterate what I tried to tell you then. Why—why urge me when I say I—I cannot marry you?"

"Cannot? There can be only one reason for 'cannot,'" said Hendrie, with an abrupt return to calmness. "Are you married? Have you a husband living?"

The woman's denial flashed out without thought.

"I am not married. I never have been married."

In a moment she realized the danger of so precipitate a denial. The man's face lit more ardently than ever, and he drew closer.

"Then you must take that word back, and say you—'will not.' But you can't say that," he smiled gently.

He was very near her now. He was so near that Monica dared not move. She could only stand helplessly gazing out of the window. As she remained silent he urged her again, placing one powerful hand gently upon her shoulder.

"Tell me, do you dislike the hard, unscrupulous financier that men are only too ready to vilify?" he asked, with a gentle smile of confidence. "Do you?" His hand moved till it dropped to the woman's soft, rounded upper arm.

"Mon," he continued, "I want you so much. Tell me you don't—dislike me."

Monica's courage was swiftly ebbing. The task she had set herself was too hard for her. The touch of the man's hand, so gentle, so almost reverent, had sent the blood coursing through her veins in a hot, passionate tide.

"No," she cried, in a low voice. "How could I dislike you? What does it matter to me what men say of you?"

In a moment she lay crushed in the man's powerful arms; his tall figure towered over her, and his plain face looked ardently down into hers while he poured out a passionate torrent of words into her willing ears.

"Then I'll take no refusal," he cried, a ring of triumph in his deep voice. "Look up, Mon, look up, dear, and tell me that you don't love me! Look up, and tell me with your eyes looking right into mine, and I'll believe you, and let you go. You can't—you can't. Quit it, Mon, quit

it. You love me, I know. I feel it in my heart, here, Mon, here," he cried triumphantly. "Right where your beautiful head is resting."

He moved one hand from about her, and deliberately lifted her face so that he could gaze down upon the eyes hidden beneath the deeply fringed lids.

"Come, Mon," he cried tenderly. "Speak up. Say, I can't just hear you. I want to hear you say you don't love me, you hate me for this. No? Then you must kiss me."

He bent his head and drew her face up to his. And an exquisite joy flooded Monica's heart as he rained burning kisses upon her lips, her eyes, her hair.

So they remained for many minutes. But at last she stirred in his arms, and finally released himself. Then, with flushed face and bowed head, she flung herself upon the ottoman beside her with something almost like a sob.

Hendrie waited for a moment. Then he drew up a chair and sat down, and deliberately removed the hands in which her face was buried.

"What is it, Mon?" he inquired anxiously, but in his decided way.

"I—I don't know," she cried with the desperate helplessness of a child. "You—you've made me love you, and—and it's all wrong—all wrong."

Hendrie's smile was good to see.

"Now listen, Mon. We are going to be married without unnecessary delay. How soon can you be ready?"

It was impossible to withstand him, and, in desperation, Monica realized that it was worse than useless to pit her reason against a love she desired more than all the world. She felt utterly helpless, like one swept off her feet by an irresistible tide. There was a recklessness, too, in her blood now—a recklessness flowing hotly through veins which for so long had been left unstirred in their perfect calm, and somehow the joy of it had intoxicated her reason and left her unable to adequately control it. So, while she knew that every fraction of the penalty would be demanded of her later, she thanked her God for this love that had come to her, and abandoned herself to its delight.

It was a changed woman who restlessly paced the narrow limits of her sitting-room four days later. Monica was awaiting another visitor; again she was awaiting the ominous clang of the bell at the front door.

The sober moments she had anticipated had come; oh, yes, they had come as she knew they inevitably must come. She had faced the consequences of the weakness she believed herself to have displayed in all their nakedness, and she saw before her such a tangle the contemplation of which had set her head whirling, and filled her heart with despair.

She had sent for her boy, the man—yes, he was a man now—whom she had been at such pains to bring up with lofty aspirations, and a fine sense of love, and honor, and duty. She told herself she was going to lie to him, lie to him with all the heartless selfishness of an utterly weak and worthless woman. She tried to smother her conscience by reminding herself that she had always seen the necessity of ultimately lying to him, and now only the motive of the lies was changed.

So she was desperate. All that was best in her was warring with her baser human side of a really fine nature. She suffered agonies of torture while she waited for the coming of the man who would gaze at her with wide, frank, trusting eyes, while she lied something of his simple faith and youthful happiness away.

She could see no other course than the one she had decided upon. Frank must be persuaded into the background. He must remain hidden, lest the breath of scandal reach Hendrie, and she be robbed of the happiness she so yearned for.

In the midst of her desperate thought, the signal rang out through

the apartment. She passed swiftly to the door and opened it, and, in a moment, was engulfed in a bearlike embrace by a great, fair-haired young giant who, tall as Monica was, quite towered over her.

"Why, mother," he cried.

Monica's eyes shone with admiration and love.

"Frank, dear," she cried, "come right in and sit down."

Frank flung himself into the same rocking chair in which Alexander Hendrie had sat, and gazed up at the beautiful woman he called mother with a radiant smile on his handsome, ingenuous face.

"Gee, I'm tired," he exclaimed. "Two nights and a day in a train."

Monica abandoned herself to the delights of the moment. The boy could not have been more to her if he had really been her son. Her eyes were full of a maternal adoration. He was so tall, she thought; and his bright, shrewd, good-natured blue eyes full of half-smiling seriousness. How handsome he was with his finely cut, regular features, his abundant fair hair. And then his hugely muscular body. Eighteen! Only eighteen! Little wonder, she thought, this Phyllis Raysun was ready to dance so often with him.

"Got any lunch, mother," he cried. "Oh, I forgot. Your wire was 'rushed.' You wanted to see me at once. There's—there's nothing wrong, is there?"

Now it was Monica's turn to urge. All the joy had gone out of her eyes. He had reminded her of the tissue of falsehood she had prepared for him.

"I'll—I'll tell you about it when you've eaten," she said hastily. "We've—we've got to have a serious talk. But not—now. Afterward."

Frank gave her a quick, sidelong glance.

"Right-o!" he said simply. But a shadow had crept into his eyes.

Frank was seated on the lounge beside the window. His attitude was one of intense, hard feeling. His blue eyes were full of bitterness as they stared out at the coppery sheen of the telegraph wires, which caught the winter sunlight just outside the sitting-room window.

Monica had just finished speaking. For some minutes the low pleading of her voice had reached him across the room. She was as far from him as the limits of the room would permit.

Her story was told. She had branded herself with her sister's shame. The curious twist of her mind held her to her promise even to this extent. Now she waited with bowed head for the judgment of this youth of eighteen who had been taught to call her "mother."

As the moments passed and no word came in answer, Monica's apprehension grew, and she urged him. She could face his utmost scorn better than this suspense.

"That is all, Frank," she said with a dignity she was wholly unaware of.

The man stirred. He stretched out his great limbs upon the couch and drew them up again. Then he turned his eyes upon the waiting woman. They were unsmiling, but they had no condemnation in them. He had fought out his little battle with himself.

"I have always known—at least suspected it," he said slowly.

Monica suddenly buried her face in her hands. He had known. He had suspected. And all these years she had endeavored to keep the secret from him. The thought of it all hurt her as much as if the shame of it were really hers.

Presently he left his seat and came to her side.

"Don't worry, mother dear," he said, with one hand tenderly laid upon her shoulder. "You see, we never talked much of my father. You were never easy when you spoke of him. I guessed there was something wrong, and I found the truth without much guessing. Still I didn't ask questions.

I knew I should hear some day, and quite made up my mind how to act."

He paused, and Monica looked up at him with wondering admiration.

"I want to tell you, mother," he hurried on, "that only a great and brave woman could have told her son —what you have told me. I want to tell you it's not going to make any difference between us unless it is to increase my—my love. As for me—I don't see that it's going to give me sleepless nights, so—so just let's forget it."

Frank started to return to the lounge. Half-way across the room he came to a sudden stop, and a look of perplexity drew his brows together. In his anxiety for his mother he had forgotten. Now he remembered. Suddenly he turned back.

"You didn't send for me so urgently to tell me this?" he demanded. "This would have kept."

Monica shook her head decidedly. She caught a sharp breath.

"It would not have kept. It—it had to be told—now."

"Why?"

"Because I am going to be—married."

"Mother!"

There was no doubt about the man's dismay. He stood there hardly daring to believe his senses. His mother was going to be married after—after—

"But you can't!" he cried with sudden vehemence. "You daren't! Oh, mother, you must be mad to think of marriage now—I mean with—with my existence to be accounted for."

"That's just why I have sent for you."

Monica sprang from her seat and ran to him. She reached up and placed both hands upon his shoulders and gazed pleadingly into his face.

"Don't fail me, Frank. Don't fail me!" she cried, all her woman's heart stirred to a dreadful fear lest, after all, she should lose the happiness she was striving for, had lied for, was ready to do almost anything for.

"You don't know what it means to me. It means everything. Yes, it means my life! Oh, Frank—Frank, I have given up everything in the world for you, and now—now I love this man—I love him with my whole soul!"

Her head was bowed, and the agitated boy led her back to her seat. He was beginning to understand things.

"I think I am beginning to understand, mother," he said simply. "Tell me what you want of me. Who is the man?"

"Alexander Hendrie."

"Hendrie? The man you work for? The man who owns all those miles of wheat up our way? The millionaire?"

Frank's eyes shone with a sudden enthusiasm as he detailed the achievements of the wheat king. For the moment he had forgotten the reason of the mention of his name.

"Yes, yes!" Something of his enthusiasm found an echo in Monica. "Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it wonderful? Can you wonder that I love him? Such a king among men. He will not hear of my refusing him. I intended to because of you, but—but he is too strong for me. He has bent my will to his, and I—I have yielded."

"Does—he know of my existence?" Frank demanded.

Monica's eyes widened.

"Of course not! That is the terrible part. That is why—why I have had to tell you everything."

"I see."

The man flung himself on the couch and clasped his hands behind his head. He was thinking hard. Bit by bit all that was in his mother's mind was coming to him. He suddenly looked up as though he had come to a final decision.

"Look here, mother. I suppose I haven't had experience enough to grasp the moral side of this thing. I—I suppose there is a moral side to it," he said with something almost like helplessness. "But it seems to me

that—that Hendrie's eyes must never light on me, as—as any relation of yours. Is that it?"

Monica sighed.

"I'm afraid that's what it comes to, Frank, though it sounds dreadful put that way. It sounds as if we were conspirators scheming to get the better of Alexander."

"Does it matter what it sounds like? I don't think so," he said sharply. "You love this man, mother, and you want to marry him. Very well, marry him. I will never jeopardize your happiness. It is small enough return for all the sacrifices you have made for me. I promise you Hendrie shall never know you are my mother. I promise you never to come near—"

"Oh, no, Frank! I don't want that!" Monica cried desperately. "I could not bear that. I must see you sometimes, and later, when — when things have settled down—"

Frank shook his head.

"You are taking a grave risk, mother," he said earnestly. "Far better let me pass out of your life — altogether."

"No, no! I would rather never marry than that. Promise me that you will come and see me, and I will see you whenever opportunity offers. Promise me, or—"

"All right, mother," replied the man with his gentle, affectionate smile. "You go ahead. You can always rely on me for anything, and I give you my word of honor your husband shall never know that I am your son."

CHAPTER IX.

The Blinding Fires.

HENDRIE stood with one foot on the burnished rail of the anthracite stove which augmented the heating apparatus of Monica's sitting-room. He was smoking a cigarette in the pensive manner of a contented man. His eyes idly wandered over the simple but dainty furnishing of the room, while his mind—that wonderful mechanism with which he had carved his way to a mighty fortune—was busy dreaming dreams of the future.

He was thinking of the palatial residence which he had just purchased here in Winnipeg and of the wonderful decorations that he had already arranged should be executed by the finest decorators in New York.

He intended that nothing should lack for the delight and luxury of his bride. He loved more madly than any youthful lover; he loved for the first time in his strenuous life, and the exquisite joy of being able to give out of his overflowing storehouses intoxicated him.

He was a fine-looking figure as he stood there in his perfectly fitting evening clothes. He was awaiting Monica while she arrayed herself in the adjoining room. Nor did he display the least impatience. He was rather enjoying the delay than otherwise. It afforded him those moments of delightful anticipation which rarely enough find their equal in realization.

He threw his cigarette end into the stove. He was about to light a fresh one when a sound caught his ear. He dashed the unlighted cigarette after the other and stood erect, waiting. Yes, the soft rustle of skirts moving toward the dividing doors was unmistakable. Monica had completed her toilet, and was coming to him.

A frank delight shone in his steady eyes as they turned to the folding doors. Such was the ecstasy of his feelings that it seemed as if the whole earth, the whole universe, were acclaiming his happiness.

Monica was in evening dress, an exquisite picture of perfect womanhood. In Hendrie's eyes there was nothing on earth comparable with her. He stepped forward.

"Mon!"

In a moment she lay panting in his arms, and his kisses melted the pallor of her cheek.

"Mine! Mine!" he cried with a deep note of emotion in his voice. "Mine forever!"

After a few delirious moments his embrace relaxed. Quite abruptly his hands unclasped about her. He raised them to her shoulders and held her at arms' length from him.

"Mon, my Mon!" he cried in a low voice. "Look up! Look up into my eyes and tell me! Look up and tell me you—love me with all your soul! Look up and tell me that you'll give up all the world—everything—for me! I can't do with less!" he went on hotly. "There's nothing and no one in the world for me but you! D'you understand, Mon? I want no less, and you must tell me now—now—that this is your love for me, as it is mine for you!"

He paused, waiting for his answer, but remained gazing with devouring eyes upon her beauty.

"I love you, dear," she murmured. "I love you—best in all the world."

Then a shy smile lit her fair face, and she clung to him.

"Best in all the world," he repeated ardently. "Mon, it's good to hear; and you're *my* best in all the world."

Then came long silent moments, moments in which heart beat to heart and no spoken word but must have robbed them of something of their rapture.

The spell was finally broken by the ticking clock. The man became aware of its hands. The irresistible march of time would not be denied. He nodded at the accusing face without any enthusiasm.

"It's nearly seven," he said with a smile.

"We'd better go," she said decidedly.

"Yes," he said, promptly acquiescing. "You run along and get your wraps, while I go and see if the car is ready down-stairs."

With a final embrace Monica hurried into her bedroom.

Hendrie prepared to depart down-stairs. But a final glance at the clock arrested him, and he stood staring at the desk.

Slowly a flush crept into his lean cheeks, and the softness of his steady eyes gave place to the usual cold light with which the man was accustomed to face his world. The coldness changed again to a curious sparkle.

He took a step toward the desk and picked up an embossed silver photograph-frame and stared down at the picture it contained.

It was the picture of a man, a handsome, powerfully built young man, dressed in flannels.

The glitter in his eyes hardened, and slowly a deep fire grew in their depths. His brows drew together and he glowered with deadly hatred upon the offending picture.

At that moment Monica reentered from the bedroom.

A sudden terror leaped into her eyes as she recognized the silver frame in his hand. One swift glance of his hot eyes left her terror apparent to him. He needed no more. A furious rage mounted to his brain.

With one jerk of his muscular fingers the back of the frame was torn out and the photograph removed. Then the frame fell to the floor and its glass was shattered.

"Who's picture is this?" he demanded.

Monica strove to steady her shaking limbs. She cleared her throat.

"Why—that's—that's the son of an old friend of mine," she cried desperately. "I've known him all his life."

The man deliberately tore the picture across. He tore it across again. Then he walked over to the stove. He opened it. One by one he dropped the fragments of Frank Burton's picture into the heart of the glowing coal. Then he reclosed the door.

The next moment Monica was in his arms, and his eyes were devouring her frightened face.

"Guess you'll know him no more,"

he cried with a laugh, which only seemed to accentuate the fury of his jealousy. "No more. There's just one man in this world for you now, and that man is—"

CHAPTER XI.

In the Spring-Time.

A GRAY twilight stealing across the sky heralded the coming of day. It was spring upon the flooded prairie-lands of Canada; a season which is little more than a mere break between an almost sub-tropical summer and the harshest winter the world knows.

In the shadows of dawn the country looked like one vast marshland. Wide stretches of water filled the shallow hollows. These wide expanses of water were all that was left of snow to the depth of several feet; and in their turn would soon enough be licked up by a thirsty summer sun.

Just now this region was the feeding-ground of migratory visitors from the feathered world. Also it had consequently become the happy hunting-ground of every man and boy in the neighborhood capable of carrying a gun. They were all there, waiting in perfect silence, waiting with a patience which nothing else could inspire, for the golden light of day, and the winging of the unsuspecting birds.

The dim, yellow streak on the eastern horizon widened, and the clacking of perhaps a hundred thousand tongues screamed out their joy of life.

Old Sam Bernard and his pupil, Frank Burton, were among the waiting guns. The light was not yet sufficient, and the geese had not yet begun to rise. Both men were lying full-length upon the sodden highlands which lined the slough, thrilling with the inspiring tension of keen sportsmen. Their half-breed spaniels crouched between them, their silky bodies quivering with joyous excitement. It was a moment worth living for, both for men and dogs.

At last there came a heavy whirring sound down at the water. In a moment a great gray bird sailed up, winging in a wide circle toward Frank's deadly gun. It was the signal waited for. The dogs beat a tattoo with their feathered front feet. A thrill shot down the two men's spines. Both raised their guns, but it was the sharp crack of the younger man's which sent the bird somersaulting to the ground.

Now the whole length of the slough became alive with whirring wings and guns. The panic of the birds was complete. In less than half an hour five hundred brace and more had fallen to the forty-odd guns waiting for them.

But the shoot did not finish there. That was the pot-hunting. The real sport of the morning came with the scattering and high flying of the terrified birds, shooting which required the greatest keenness and skill.

By ten o'clock Sam Bernard and his pupil were returning home to the old man's farm in a buckboard laden down with nearly a hundred birds. It had been a great shoot, and Frank's enthusiasm was almost feverish.

"It's the greatest game," he declared. "Forty-seven brace! Say, Sam, shall we get any more of 'em to-morrow?"

Sam flicked the mare with the whip as he shook his gray head.

"Guess not," he said, slowly rolling a chew of tobacco into the other cheek. "They've smelled powder."

Then he pointed out ahead with his whip. His wife was standing waiting for them at the door of the farm-house.

"There's the gentlest soul living," he observed with a smile. "Guess she couldn't wring a chicken's neck to save her life. But she'll sure handle these birds, and reckon 'em up, with as much delight as a cannibal nigger smacks his lips over a steak off his pa's quarters."

This man who was teaching him the business of farming was always a

source of amusement to young Frank, and he laughed cordially at the absurdity of his comparison. Nor could he help watching the old farm-wife as they drove up.

"Guess I don't need to ask no fool questions about your sport," she cried. "Say, ain't they great? Look at 'em, all bustin' with fat. They'll make real elegant eatin'. They surely will."

Then Mrs. Bernard remembered what was, perhaps, the most interesting thing in the life of the Canadian farmer. A neighbor had brought out their mail from Gleber that morning. She dived into a capacious pocket in her ample print skirt, and her russet face smiled up into Frank's blue eyes.

"My, but them birds has surely set me daft an' forgettin'," she cried. "Here's your mail, boy Frank," she added, pulling out a bulky envelope. "Jest one letter. An' it's a female writin' on it. Always a female writin'. You surely are some with the gals."

Frank took his letter with a smile at the old woman's genial chaff.

Up in the attic, in the pitch of the roof, which served Frank as a bedroom, he sat down on the side of his bed to read his letter.

For some moments the letter remained unopened in Frank's hand, and it was, perhaps, the first time in his life that he had reluctantly contemplated his mother's handwriting. He certainly was reluctant now. It was not that he was not at all times delighted to receive word from her, but he knew and was apprehensive of the contents of this bulky package. It was the first letter he had received from Monica since her marriage to Hendrie, which he knew had taken place nearly a month previously.

He had not had an easy time since his flying visit to Winnipeg. Far from it. His devotion to his mother had fought and conquered the natural resentment and bitterness her story of his birth had inspired. But the effect of that battle remained. He knew that he was not as other men, he knew that he was not entitled to the same privileges as they.

In a measure he was an outcast among his kind.

At last he tore open the envelope, and in a moment became absorbed in its contents. Here were the same warm words of affection he was accustomed to. The same ardent desire for his welfare; and, through it all, and through the sober accounts of her marriage, and the progress of her new life, which was all she could desire, ran that thrilling note of joy which told him of the completeness of her happiness.

And yet he was not satisfied. The shadow was there lurking about him. It was in the corners of his sunny room, it floated about his head like an invisible pall, the presence of which depressed him.

He turned again to that ominous last page, so full of kindly thought for him.

"I believe I am on the track of the very farm for you. It is a fine place, my agent tells me, dear boy. It consists of a whole section of land, with more to be acquired adjoining. Furthermore, it has three hundred and twenty acres already fenced, and some excellent buildings. It also has a waterfront of half a mile on Fish Creek, with plenty of excellent timber. This is going for seven thousand dollars. Now, I shall be at Deep Willows, our great farm, on May 15, *by myself*. Alexander has to be in Chicago then. He wanted me to go with him, but I persuaded him to let me go to Deep Willows by myself that I might enjoy exploring its magnificence. You must run over as soon after that date as possible. It's less than thirty miles from Gleber, so you can easily manage it."

There was more of it, much more, but Frank did not read further. He looked up with troubled eyes. Here, here was the threat overshadowing them both. He saw it in the subterfuge by which his mother was seeking

to meet him. He saw it in the fearless manner in which she deliberately refused to shut him out of her life.

Phyllis Raysun was a remarkable girl when her parentage and simple yet strenuous upbringing were considered. Her beauty was admitted even by those female souls who were really fond of her. She was dark, with large, dark eyes, deeply fringed with black lashes. And with it all she wore an expression of keenness and decision at all times. She was tall, of a height which always goes so well with a purposeful face such as hers. But wherein lay the unusual side of her personality was the unconventional views of life she already possessed at the age of eighteen years. The breadth of them and her self-confidence often made her the despair of her plump and doting and very ordinarily helpless mother.

Perhaps her mother's helplessness may have accounted in some measure for Phyllis's unusual mental development. Years ago, when she was an infant, her father had died, leaving her mother in straitened circumstances. From her earliest years Phyllis had had to think for herself and help in the struggle against poverty. Then, as she grew older, she realized that they possessed a wholly neglected property which should yield them a living. Now the farm was nearing prosperity and, with the aid of a hired man, Phyllis worked it with all the skill of an expert and widely experienced farmer.

Phyllis had spent her morning out seeding, as every other farmer in the district was doing, while her hired man was busy with plow and team breaking the last year's fallows. The work was arduous and monotonous, but the girl felt neither of these things. She loved her little homestead, with its hundred and sixty acres, and she asked nothing better than to tend it and watch and reap the results. She was robust in mind and body, and none of the claims of this agricultural life came amiss to her.

But during the past six months a new interest had come into her life in the shape of a blue-eyed male giant of her own age; and from the moment she first set eyes upon him an added glow lit the heavens of her consciousness. She did not recognize its meaning at first; only she realized that somehow the winter days were less dark and irksome.

Phyllis was returning at midday with the old mare that hauled her seeder. As she came she was reckoning up the time which the rest of the seeding would take. She had completed her figures by the time she drew near the house, when, looking up, she beheld the figure of the man whose presence never failed to raise a smile of delight in her eyes, standing at the door talking to her mother.

"Ho, Frank!" she cried out joyously.

The man turned at once and answered her greeting, but the smile on his handsome face had little of the girl's unqualified joy in it.

"I just felt I had to come over, Phyl," he said impulsively. "I couldn't pass another night until I had seen you and told you all. I'm—I'm utterly miserable. I—"

They had reached the barn and Phyllis halted.

"You put the mare in and feed her hay," she interrupted him quickly. Her manner was studiously matter of fact. She had realized at once that Frank's condition must not be encouraged; so she remained outside the barn and waited for him. The boy found her sitting on the tongue of the wagon which stood close by.

"Come and sit here, Frank," indicating a seat beside her; "then you can tell me about it."

The man obeyed and, for the first time since he had left Sam Bernard's farm that morning, a smile of contentment lit his face.

"Phyl," he cried suddenly, "you—

you make me feel better already." He broke off and, seizing her two hands in his, bent over and kissed her on the lips.

"That's better," the girl exclaimed happily when he had released her.

The man smiled in spite of himself. "But—but it's serious. It's simply awful."

The girl's eyes were just a shade anxious, but her manner was lightly tender.

"Of course it is. It surely is. Now, just tell me all about it."

The man sat with his great body drooping forward and his hands clasped and hanging between his parted knees.

"I—I came to tell you that—that you can have your promise back—if you want it."

Phyllis drew a sharp breath. She looked straight ahead of her for one brief moment while her sunny cheeks paled; then the soft color came back to them and presently a very tender, very wise pair of eyes studied his dejected profile.

"And if I don't want it—back?" she said gently.

Frank raised his miserable eyes and looked straight into hers.

"But you will when you know all," he cried passionately. "I know it. I know that a good, honest girl like you could not bear disgrace. When I asked for your promise I did not know all I know now. If I had I would rather have cut off my right hand than attempt to win your love. And now —now I know that I had no right to it. I—I have no right to anything; not even to my name."

"Frank!"

Another sharp intake of breath came with the girl's exclamation.

"Yes, I mean it," the boy went on with passionate misery. "I have known it for six weeks, and I should have told you before; but—but I hadn't the courage, the honesty."

He made his final statement with his eyes upon the ground. To see this great, honest boy bowed with misery was too much for Phyllis.

"You didn't *win* my love, Frank," she said, with eyes that were tenderly smiling. "I gave it to you—quite unasked. I gave it to you such a long —long time ago. I think I must surely have given it you before ever I saw you. I don't think I could take my promise back if I felt that way. But I don't—not if you'd like to keep it."

"Phyl, Phyl!" The boy's eyes were shining, but his sense of right made him protest. "You don't know what you're doing. You surely don't. Think of it."

"You love me, Frank, don't you?"

The girl's question came so simply that Frank turned toward her in astonishment. The next moment she was in his arms.

"Love you? Love you?" he cried. "You're all the world to me!"

"And—and you don't want me to take my promise back?" she asked him.

"I love you more than ever." He sighed in great contentment. "And we'll get married as soon—as soon as mother buys me the farm she's going to. She's written me about it to-day."

"Ah, yes, that farm." Phyllis rested her chin upon her hand and gazed out at the old house abstractedly.

"It's to be a great place," the boy went on.

"I'm so glad, Frank," she replied absently. Then she recalled her dreaming faculties. "And—your momma's giving it to you? She must be very rich."

Frank flushed and turned his eyes away.

"She has a good deal of money," he said awkwardly.

The girl seemed to understand. She questioned him no further.

"She must be a good and kind woman," she said gently. "I hope some day I may get—to know her."

"I—"

Frank broke off. The promise he was rashly about to make remained

unspoken. He knew he could not promise anything in his mother's name —now.

CHAPTER XII.

Happy Days.

ANGUS MORAINE was a dour, hard-headed business man such as Alexander Hendrie liked to have about him. He was also an agriculturalist from his finger-tips to his backbone, and the millionaire's great farm at Deep Willows owed most of its prosperity to this hard, raw-boned descendant from the Crofters of Scotland.

When he heard of his friend and employer's forthcoming marriage he shook his head and his lean face took on an expression of added sourness. He saw visions of his own sphere of administration at Deep Willows becoming narrowed. He felt that the confidence of his employer was likely to be diverted into another channel.

Quite apart from his own interests he felt that Hendrie was making a grave mistake, and when he learned that he had married his secretary his conviction became permanent. This time his disapproval was directed at the map of Alberta, which hung upon his office wall. He shook his bony forefinger at the silent witness, his narrow eyes snapping with angry scorn.

"Female secretaries are pernicious," he cried angrily. "They're worse'n a colony of gophers in a wheat patch. You want a temperature of forty below to keep your office cool with a woman working in it. Hendrie always hated the cold."

Later he learned that Deep Willows was to be Monica's future home, and the place was to be immediately prepared for her reception.

"I'll need to chase a new job, or the old one'll chase me," he muttered.

But there was far too much of the old Crofter's blood in Angus's veins to let him relinquish the gold-mine which Hendrie's affairs were to him. With all the caution of his forefathers he awaited developments and refrained from any precipitate action.

The preparations were duly put in hand, and Angus supervised everything himself. Every detail was carried out with that exactness for which Hendrie's manager was noted. He spared no pains, and that was his way. His native shrewdness had long ago taught him how best he could serve his employer's interests, and consequently his own. So he gave Monica and her husband a royal welcome to Deep Willows.

After all Monica was not permitted to explore Deep Willows by herself. Hendrie contrived to get his business in Chicago temporarily adjusted, and, as a surprise, explained at the last moment to his bride that he could not bring himself to permit her going to Deep Willows for the first time without him.

The news at once pleased and terrified Monica. Her thoughts flew to Frank and her appointment with him, and it became necessary at once to despatch a "rushed" wire to put him off.

Then came her arrival at Deep Willows; and at once she learned to her delight the chief reason of her husband's accompanying her.

She had expected a fine farm. She had expected the rush and busy life of a great commercial undertaking, wonderful organization, wonderful machinery, wonderful, crude buildings for the surer storing of crops.

But a miniature palace was awaiting her. A palace standing in its own wide grounds of park-like trees and delicious, shaded gardens. She found a home in which a king might have dwelt—one that had been designed by one of the most famous architects of the day.

It was set on the banks of a river, high up on rising ground, whence, from its windows, a wide view of the almost illimitable wheat-fields spread out before the eyes, and, directly be-

low, lay the roaring falls where the water of the river dropped churning into a wide gorge.

The farm buildings were nowhere visible from the house or grounds. They were hidden behind a great stretch of woodland bluff. All that was visible was the wheat, stretching away in every direction over the undulating plains as far as the eye could see, a distance of something like five miles.

Such was the home which Monica's love for Hendrie had brought her. There was a light of happiness in his gray eyes as he stood in what he called the office, but which was, in reality, a library furnished with every luxury unlimited wealth could command. He held out a long blue envelope on which her name was inscribed.

"Now, Mon," he said, in a sober way which his eyes belied, "I guess you've seen most all, and — and I've been real happy showing it you. Make me happier still by taking this. It's— it's a present for a good girl."

Monica drew out the papers and gasped out her delight when she discovered that they were a deed of gift to her of Deep Willows. The house, furniture, and the grounds as separate from the farm.

"It's—it's too much, Alec!" she cried. "Oh, I can scarcely believe it —scarcely believe it."

The man's face was a study in perfect happiness as he feasted his eyes upon her beautiful flushed face.

That night Monica realized that the culminating day of her love and ambitions had drawn to a close. Such a day could never come again, such moments could never be experienced twice in a lifetime.

Then, strangely enough, in the midst of her content, her thoughts drifted back to the now dim and distant struggles that lay behind her, and at once centered round a blue-eyed, fair-haired boy.

A week later the call of business took Hendrie away. Such were his interests that he could never hope to remain for long in any one place. He went away after a brief, characteristic interview with Angus Moraine.

It occurred in the library.

"Angus," he said, "I want you to get a grip on this. Henceforth my wife represents me in all matters to do with this place. She's a business woman. So I leave her to your care. But remember, she's—me."

At that moment Angus Moraine's cup of bitterness was filled to overflowing.

Some days later a stranger registered at the Russell Hotel, in Everton, a small hamlet on the eastern boundary of Hendrie's farm. He was tall and young, blue-eyed and fair-haired, and he registered in the name of Frank Smith.

On the same day Angus Moraine received word from Monica she intended to explore the country round about; she wanted to see something of its people.

With the coming of this order Angus understood that he was no longer master at Deep Willows, and his resentment was silent but deadly.

After a long day of arduous work he finally threw off the yoke of his labors, and prepared for his usual evening recreation. He had a fresh horse saddled, and rode off down the river toward Everton.

Here it was his nightly custom to foregather, and, in his choice, he proved something of his Scottish ancestry. He rarely missed his evening whisky in the office of the little hotel. It was his custom to sit there for two hours or so, reading papers and sipping his drink, listening to, but rarely taking part in the gossip of the villagers assembled. Here he was looked upon as a little king, and he was as vain as he was churlish.

He drew near his destination. In the dusk the few odd lights of Everton shone through the bluff of trees, in the midst of which the village was set.

He pulled up his horse and struck a match, and, instantly, in the stillness of the evening, became aware of approaching wheels. He heard horses take the water at the ford. He heard voices, and so still was the evening that their tones came to him distinctly. Two people were evidently in the vehicle; a man and a woman.

The horses had ceased to splash. He heard them coming up the slope, and, almost unconsciously, he drew back into the shadow of the trees. He waited. The horses were abreast of him, beyond the trees. Suddenly the sound of their hoofs died out. They had halted, and he heard voices again.

"Oh, Mon, it's been a glorious day. You are good to me. Was there ever such a woman in the world?"

It was a man's voice speaking. Angus had caught the name "Mon," and his ears strained doubly hard to hear all that passed between them. Now the woman was speaking.

"Don't talk like that, you silly Frank," she cried. "But it has been a day, hasn't it? We've had it all to ourselves. You'll be all right now. You can get back to the hotel and no one will be the wiser for our meeting. I'll write you when it is safe to come over again. I want you with me so much, and it is perfectly safe when Alec is away. Good night, dear boy."

Angus heard a sound and recognized it. She had kissed the man.

The blood mounted to his head. Then it receded, leaving him cold. He sat quite still.

Presently he beheld a tall, burly figure in tweeds emerge from the other trail. He was a powerfully built man, and, even in that light he could see the thick, fair hair under the brim of the stranger's prairie hat.

"So that's your game, mam, is it?" he muttered. "I guessed Hendrie had made a mess of things marrying his secretary. I—wonder."

Moraine's whole attitude toward Monica underwent a sudden change. That his feelings changed is doubtful. His feelings rarely changed about anything. However, where before an evident but tacit antagonism underlay all his service to the new mistress of Deep Willows, now he only too readily acquiesced to her lightest wish.

The unsuspicious Monica appreciated his efforts. He was her husband's trusted employee, he was a big factor in her husband's affairs, and it seemed good that she should be taken thus readily to the bosom of those who served the man she loved.

Her days were hours of delight that were all too short.

The affairs of the farm she intended purchasing were well in hand. She and Frank had inspected it together, and both had approved. Now it was only for the lawyers to complete the arrangements, and for the money she must provide to be forthcoming. Monica did not hesitate to see Frank as often, perhaps more often than was necessary. Her husband always kept her posted as to his movements.

Had she only known that Angus had recognized her and witnessed her parting from Frank after inspecting the new farm, her peace of mind would have known none of the ease it now enjoyed. But she remained in ignorance of the fact, and the astute Scot was determined to give her no cause for suspicion.

The change in his manner extended in other directions. It did not affect those who worked under him, but, to those whom he met during his evening recreations, it came well-nigh as a staggering surprise. The first mention of it came from Abe Hopkinson, who dealt in dry-goods and canned "truck." He was sitting with his feet thrust upon a table in the office of the Russell Hotel early one evening.

"Say," he cried, thumping one heavily shod foot upon the well-worn blotter, and setting the inkstand rattling, "wot's hit old leather-belly?"

Pete Farline, famed for his bad drugs and antiquated "notion" de-

partment, breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"I'm glad you ast that, Abe," he said. "I've been troubled some. Guessed I'd have to hit the water-wagon a piece."

Sid Ellerton looked up from the pages of a cheap magazine.

"Meaning the whisky souse from Scotland, via Deep Willows?" he asked vaguely, and returned to his reading.

A titter went round the room. They had just seen the reflection of Angus Moraine in the broken mirror which adorned the opposite wall. He was standing in the doorway.

Pete jerked his feet onto the top of the cold stove, assuming a nonchalant air.

"Feelin' good, Mr. Moraine?" he exclaimed. "Why, I'd say. Say, this tarnation country's settling that rapid I had a new customer to-day. Guess I'm figgerin' to start a drug trust."

Angus smiled with the rest as he moved across to his usual seat, a rigid armchair under the lamp bracket on the wall.

"Who was your customer?" he asked indifferently.

"Why, a guy that's been gettin' around a heap lately. He stops in this house when he comes. Dresses in fancy store clothes, and wears fair hair and blue eyes. Guess he's maybe twenty or more. Calls himself Frank Smith. He was buyin' fancy perfume for a lady."

Sid looked up.

"First got around soon after Mrs. Hendrie come to the farm," he said, and lost himself promptly in the pages of his magazine.

"I've seen him," Angus said quietly, without lifting his eyes from the absorbing colored illustrations. "A flash-looking feller."

"That's him," cried Pete quickly. "He ain't unlike Mr. Hendrie, only bigger. Guess he's a deal better to look at, too. Maybe he's a relation of the lady's."

"Maybe," muttered Angus indifferently.

"Smith stopping here now?" inquired Angus, setting his glass down a moment later.

Abe turned to the tattered register. "Booked in yesterday," he said, thumbing down the page which contained the list of a whole year's guests. "Ah—paid," he added, running his eye across to the "remarks" column. "Guess he's gone. I'd say that perfume was a parting gift to his lady friend, Pete."

"And who may she be?" inquired Angus, innocently turning the page of his paper.

"Can't say," observed Sid. "I see him once with a gal. They wer' a long piece off. She was tall an'—an' upstandin'. Didn't just recognize her."

"Guess I see him with her, too," put in Pete almost eagerly. "Seen him several time with her. They were way out riding. I was too far off to see them right."

"Maybe," muttered Angus dryly. "Anyway—"

He broke off and looked across at the doorway as another townsman came in. It was Charlie Maybee, the postmaster.

"'Evening, boys. 'Evening, Mr. Moraine," he cried, beaming on everybody. "Say, Mr. Moraine, I guessed maybe I'd find you. I got some mail here for Mrs. Hendrie. It's local, and addressed to the post-office. We don't get mail much that way, so I thought I'd hand it to you. It'll save the lady comin' in for it."

"Mailed locally?" the manager inquired casually.

"Yes; this morning."

"Ah!"

The keen-eyed Scot intercepted an exchange of meaning glances and looked from one to the other with some severity.

"Say," he cried with a sudden and studied return to his usual dour manner, "some of you boys seem to be saying one thing and — thinking an-

other. Maybe you know something about this letter."

An instant denial leaped to everybody's lips, but Angus was playing his part too well for these country townfolk. He maintained his atmosphere of displeasure and suspicion, and finally the impulsive butcher burst out:

"We don't know a thing about that letter, Mr. Moraine, but it just fits in with things we do know — all of us. We know that just as soon as Mr. Hendrie disappears from the farm some other feller appears, and his name's Frank Smith, and he mostly gets around riding and driving with Mrs. Hendrie. That's what we know."

Angus fixed him with a stern eye.

"You surely do know a lot!" he exclaimed with angry sarcasm. "And I want to tell you that I know a lot, too. This is what I know. What you're saying is a damned scandal. Do you get me? A damned scandal!" he reiterated. "And if I told Mr. Hendrie he'd have you all for criminal libel—or worse."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Wheat Trust.

MONICA leaned forward in her saddle as her well-trained bronco came to a stand. She set her elbow on her knee, and the oval of her pensive face found a resting-place in the palm of her hand. Thus she sat gazing out over the golden world, which rustled and rippled in the lightest of summer zephyrs, chanting its whispered song of prosperity to the delight of her listening ears.

Summer was nearing its height and a perfect day shone down upon the world. Everywhere about her spread out a rippling sea of golden wheat. Far as the eye could see, in the vague heat haze which hovered over the distant line of nodding grain, it washed the shores of an indefinite horizon, a monument to one man's genius.

A great pride stirred within her. It was a worthy labor; it was magnificent. Was there another man in the world comparable with this great husband of hers? His was the brain which had conceived the stupendous scheme. What other schemes yet lay behind his steady eyes awaiting the moment of decision for their operation? She wondered; and wondering smiled, confident in the knowledge that he had yet worlds to conquer, and that she would share in his victories.

Her delight culminated as she reached the house. As the man servant stepped forward to assist her to dismount he gave her the only information that could have added to her happiness at such a moment.

"Mr. Hendrie is home, ma'am," he said. "He's in the office, awaiting your return."

Monica sprang to the ground and ran into the house. In a moment she was in her husband's arms.

"I made home sooner than I hoped, Mon," he said, the moment of their greeting over.

The woman's smiling eyes looked up into his face.

"Yes. And I'm so glad. You said not until Thursday next, and this is only Saturday. You were full of a tremendous business in your letter last Tuesday. Something you couldn't trust to paper."

The man smiled.

"That's it," he said. "Trust."

"Trust?" Monica echoed the word, her eyes widening with inquiry.

Hendrie nodded.

"This has been a secret I've kept—even from you," he said. "From the moment you promised to be my wife I determined to turn all my wheat interests into one huge trust. I determined to organize it and become its president for a while. After it's good and going, maybe I'll retire from active service and—just hand over the rest of my life to you."

The woman's face was a study in emotion.

"Oh, Alec!" she cried. "You—you are doing this for—me?"

"I'm doing this, Mon, because I guess you've taught me something my eyes have been mostly blind to. I seem to be groping around for something else — something better. Guess I'm not just clear about things yet. But—well, maybe, seeing you've made things look different, you'll help me—sort it out."

While he was speaking Monica had turned away to the window which looked out upon the beautiful stream far below them. Now she turned, and all her love was shining in her eyes.

"Oh, Alec!" she cried earnestly. "I thank God that this is so. With all my heart I thank Him that this wonderful new feeling has come through—me."

After that the man's attitude changed again to the cool method which had made him the financial prince he was. She listened to him with all her business faculties alert. Once more he was the employer and she the willing secretary.

"I have practically finished the preliminaries of this trust," he said. "When it's fixed there'll be a bit of a shout. Bound to be. But I don't guess that matters any. What really does matter is the result, and how it's going to affect the public. My principles are sound and—wholesome. We're not looking for big lumps of profit. We're not out to rob the world of one cent. We are out to protect—the public as well as ourselves. And the protection we both need is against those manipulators of the market like Henry Louth. In time I'm hoping to make the trust world-wide. Meanwhile eighty per cent of the grain-growers of this country, and the north-western States across the border, are ready to come in. Such will be the supplies of grain from our control in a few years that we can practically collar the market. Then, when the organization is complete, and the wheat-growers are universally bonded together, there's going to be no middle man, and the public will pay less for its bread and the growers will reap greater profits. That's my scheme."

Monica clasped her hands in the enthusiasm with which Hendrie always inspired her. She knew he was no dreamer.

"Now I'm going to ask for your contribution," Hendrie smiled. "Ah, Mon, I can't do without you. I am going to set you a task that'll tax all your capacity and devotion to me. You've got to run this great farm of ours. I'll need Angus in Winnipeg. I know I can trust him in things that I could trust to no other man."

Hendrie rose from his seat at the writing table and pressed a bell.

"I'll send for him now," he explained.

Monica came to his side and laid a shaking hand upon his shoulder.

"Could not I do the work in Winnipeg?" she asked timidly. "Would it not be wiser to leave Angus—"

Hendrie's keen eyes looked straight down into hers.

"We are battling with hard fighting men who demand cent per cent for their money and can only get a fair interest," he said. "They must be dealt with by men as hard as themselves. No, it's not woman's work. Angus is the hardest man of business I know."

Monica accepted his verdict.

"Yes," she said simply. "I think I understand." Then she went on in a thrilling voice: "But I am glad there is work for me to do. So glad."

Her husband stopped to kiss her.

"Good, Mon," he said in the calm tone of approval Monica knew so well.

At that moment Angus Moraine appeared in the doorway. His coming was swift and silent, and for the first time since she had known him his cold face and colder eyes struck unpleasantly upon the woman who was to supersede him.

Hendrie looked up and, in one swift glance, noted all that Monica had seen in the manager's face without being in the least affected by it.

"I'm going to take this place out of your hands, Angus, my boy," he said easily. "I want you in Winnipeg. You must be ready in a month. The appointment will be to your advantage. Get me?" Then he smiled coolly.

Angus displayed no emotion of any sort. It was not easy to take this man off his guard.

"Yes," he said simply.

Hendrie turned again to his desk as though about to write.

"That's all," he said shortly.

Angus shot a swift glance in Monica's direction.

"Who supersedes me here?" he demanded.

Hendrie raised his massive head.

"Eh? Oh—my wife." And he turned to his writing again.

Angus thrust a hand into his breast pocket and turned deliberately to Monica.

"I met Maybee last night—the postmaster," he said, drawing a letter from his pocket. "He handed me this mail, addressed to the post-office, for you, Mrs. Hendrie. He asked me to hand it to you. I forgot it this morning. P'r'aps it's not important—seeing it was addressed to the post-office."

For the life of her, Monica could not control the color of her cheeks, and Angus was quick to note their sudden pallor as he stood with the letter held out toward her.

She took it from him with a hand that was unsteady. Neither did this escape the cold eyes of the man.

Monica knew from whom the letter came. She knew without even glancing at the handwriting. Why had Frank written? She was terrified lest her husband should question her.

"Did he do right—sending it up?" There was a subtle irony in the Scot's cold words that did not escape the ears of the millionaire. He looked round.

Without looking in her husband's direction, Monica became aware of his interest.

"Quite right, Mr. Moraine," she said steadily, now smiling in her most gracious manner. "And thank you very much for taking such trouble. It has saved me a journey."

Angus abruptly withdrew. The moment the door closed behind Angus, Hendrie swung round in his chair.

"Letters addressed to the post-office? Why?" His steady eyes looked up into his wife's face with an intentness that suddenly reminded her of the dreadful display of jealousy she had witnessed once before.

It was a desperate moment. It was one of those moments when it would have been far better to forgot all else and remember only her love for her husband, and trust to that alone. She smiled back into his face. She held up the letter and waved it at him. She was acting. She bitterly knew she was acting.

"Ah," she cried with a forced gaiety, "you must have your big secrets from me; I must have my little ones from you!"

Hendrie smiled, but without warmth.

"Why, it's fair enough, but—I told you my secret."

"So you did. I'd forgotten that. Then I s'pose I must tell you mine. And I did so want to surprise you with it. You have always told me that I am a—clever business woman, haven't you?"

Hendrie nodded.

"You settled one hundred thousand dollars on me when we were married—all to myself, 'to squander as quickly as you like.' Those were your words. Well, I just wanted to show you that I am not one to squander money. I am investing some of it in a concern that is to show a handsome profit. The letter is from the man who is to handle the matter for me. Oh, dear, you've robbed me of all my fun! It is a shame! I—I'm disappointed."

Hendrie rose, smiling. The reaction from his moment of suspicion was intensely marked. He came over to her.

"May I see it?" he asked.

Monica risked all on her one final card.

"Oh, don't rob me of the last little bit of my secret!" she cried. Then she promptly held the letter out. "Why, of course you can read it—if you want to."

She waited almost breathlessly for the verdict. The verdict came to her ears as though from afar off.

"Keep your little secret, Mon," she heard her husband say. "It's good to give surprises—when they're pleasant. Forgive me worrying you, but—but I think my love for you is a sort of madness—I—"

She felt his great arms suddenly thrust about her and was thankful for their support.

CHAPTER XIV.

Monica's False Step.

ALEXANDER HENDRIE spent only two short days at the farm before he was called away on a flying visit to the seat of his operations at Winnipeg. But during those two days there was no rest for him; his business pursued him through mail and over wire, and the jarring note of the telephone became anathema to the entire household at Deep Willows.

The announcement of his going came as no surprise to Monica. She was prepared for anything in that way. From the moment she learned that she was to take charge of the farm at Deep Willows she began to prepare herself; and with her husband's going she was left even freer still to pursue the knowledge she had yet to acquire for her new responsibility. Her time was spent almost wholly out of doors; and such was her enthusiasm that daylight was none too early to find her in the saddle, riding round the remoter limits of the farm, watching and studying every detail of the work which was so soon to become her charge.

She had quite shaken off the effects of that moment of panic when the preservation of her innocent secret had hovered in the balance. But it had served her as a lesson, and she was determined to take no further risks. It was absolutely necessary to see Frank once more to hand him the purchase money for the farm, and his starting capital. She dared not risk the mail, and to pay him by check would be to court prompt disaster.

So her mind was made up swiftly, calmly, after a careful study of the position. She arrived at her decision through no selfishness. She was sacrificing herself to her husband and her boy. To do otherwise was to risk wrecking her husband's happiness as well as her own.

Now, as she rode round the western limits of the grainlands she was watching a number of teams and their drivers moving out to a distant hay-slough. Forty teams of finely bred Shire horses moving out from the farm with stately gait, each driver sitting astride of his nearside horse's comfortable back. She knew the mowers were already in the slough, where haying had been going on for days.

The horses passed her by and vanished into a dip in the rolling plains. Monica felt the chill of early morning, and as soon as the horses had passed she continued her round.

At that moment she became aware of a horseman riding at a gallop from the direction of the farm, and, furthermore, she recognized him at once as Angus Moraine, evidently about to visit the scene of the haying.

She waited for him to come up and greeted him pleasantly, in spite of the fact that, since the incident of the letter, her feelings toward him had undergone serious revision.

"Good morning, Mr. Moraine," she cried, as the man reined his horse in.

"They're out promptly," she added, following the trail of the haying gang with her eyes.

Angus looked after them, too, and his thin lips twisted wryly.

"They need to be," he declared coldly. "There's one time for farm work to start, Mrs. Hendrie—that's daylight."

"Yes. I suppose there's no deviation from that rule."

"None. And we pay off instantly any one who thinks differently."

Monica surveyed the Scot with interest. Her husband's opinion of him carried good weight.

"You run this place with a somewhat steely rule," she said. "These men are so many machines; the horses, too. Each has to produce so much work. The work you set for them."

Angus's eyes were turned reflectively upon the horizon.

"You're thinking I'm a hard man to work for," he said. "Maybe I am. There's just one way to run a big farm, Mrs. Hendrie. It's the hardest work I know, and the boss has got to work just as hard as the least paid 'choreman.'"

"I think—I feel that," Monica agreed cordially. "The work must be done in season. And it's man's work."

Angus calmed his restive horse.

"You're right, ma'am," he said.

"You mean I am not the fit person to step into your shoes," she said with a smile.

"P'r'aps I was thinking that; p'r'aps I was thinking of something else. I'll not say you can't run this show. But I'll say a woman oughtn't to."

"And why not?"

Monica's demand came sharply.

"Do you need to ask, ma'am?" Angus retorted, with just a suspicion of contempt. "Could you handle these guys when they get on the buck? Could you talk to 'em? Could you talk to 'em the way they understand?"

Monica's eyes flashed.

"I think so."

"Then you're thinking ten times wrong, ma'am," came the manager's prompt and emphatic retort. "You'll have hell all around you in a day."

"You seem to feel leaving your control here," she said sharply.

The man's expression underwent a prompt change. He was her husband's employee once more.

"I do, ma'am," he said earnestly. "I feel it a heap—and it makes me feel bad. That's—that's why I've told you—all this."

Monica's resentment died out before the man's earnestness.

"I don't think I understand you," she said more gently.

"I didn't guess you would." The Scot leaned forward in his saddle and his face lit with something like appeal. "You see, ma'am, you haven't taken a patch of prairie land and turned it into the greatest single-handed grain-growing proposition in the world. You haven't worked years and years fighting men and elements, and beaten 'em, until you can sit back and reckon your yearly crop to almost the fraction of a bushel.

"I've thought a whole lot since your husband told me he was going to take me off this farm; and I made up my mind to talk to you. I saw you go out this morning, so I came along to have this yarn with you."

"But to what end?" inquired Monica.

"To what end?" he echoed. "Why, to ask you to persuade your husband to leave me here."

Monica shook her head decidedly.

"No," she said with decision. "I can do nothing in the matter."

In a moment cold anger lit Moraine's eyes.

"You won't—you mean."

Instantly Monica was stirred to a resentment as cold as his own. But she held herself well in hand.

"How dare you say that to me? I tell you I can do nothing. But, since you put it that way, I certainly will do nothing."

Angus displayed nothing of the penitent under Monica's rebuke. His angry eyes looked straight into hers, and his reply rapped out smartly:

"If you always serve Alexander Hendrie as loyally as I have served him, and shall continue to serve him, you'll have little enough on your conscience."

He lifted his reins and, crushing both heels into the flanks of his raw-boned bronco, galloped off without waiting for a reply.

Monica looked after him, and somehow as her thoughtful eyes followed him out of sight, his challenge still rang in her ears.

"If you always serve Alexander Hendrie as loyally as I have served him, and shall continue to serve him, you'll have little enough on your conscience."

Monica set her horse at a gallop across country, regardless of whither her course might take her. Nor did she pause to consider her whereabouts until the wheat-lands were left several miles behind her, and she found herself entering the woods which lined the deep cutting of a remote prairie creek. Here she drew rein and glanced about her for guidance.

She looked back the way she had come, but the wheat-fields were lost behind a gently undulating horizon of grass. Ahead of her, far as the eye could see, the wide-mouthed cutting of the creek stretched away toward a ridge of purple hills. To the right of her was miles and miles of waving grass, without the tiniest object on it to break the green monotony.

The sound of wheels coming up from the creek below drew her attention. The next moment a single-horse buckboard appeared over the shoulder of the cutting.

She smiled as she gazed upon the girlish occupant of the vehicle. The stranger's face was shadowed under a linen sunbonnet, and her trim figure was clad in the simplest of dark skirts and white shirt-waist.

"Good morning," Monica cried cordially, as the vehicle drew near. She sat smilingly waiting for the lifting of the sunbonnet.

The girl looked up with a start.

"My!" she cried. Then she remembered. "Good morning—ma'am!"

The final suggestion of respect came as the speaker realized the perfect-fitting riding-habit Monica was wearing. Her eyes were round with wonder, but there was no shyness in them. Equally there was no rudeness.

"I'm afraid I startled you," Monica said kindly, as the girl drew up her horse.

The stranger smiled in response. She was a striking-looking creature. Her dark hair and brows threw up into strong relief the beautiful eyes which looked fearlessly up into her face as she made her reply.

"Say, where you from?" she asked suddenly in a quick, decided manner. "Guess you belong to Deep Willows. Maybe you're Mrs. Hendrie?"

"Quite right—how did you know?"

The girl reddened slightly as she smiled.

"Why—your clothes. You see, we've all heard you're at Deep Willows."

Monica laughed and the girl joined in.

"Now, I may ask who you are. I didn't like to before, but—"

The girl smiled frankly.

"I'm Phyllis Raysun, ma'am. We're farmers—mama an' me. Just a bit of a farm, if you can call it 'farm'—not like Deep Willows."

Monica now scrutinized her with serious interest. So this was the Phyllis who had caught her boy's fancy. This was the girl he described as "bully"—and she was frankly in agreement with him. She longed there and then to speak of Frank and learn something of Phyllis's feelings toward him, but she knew she must deny herself.

"I dare say it's a very happy little place for all that, Phyllis," she said, deliberately using the girl's first name.

She meant to begin the intimacy she had suddenly determined to establish at once. "Who works it for you? Your father—brother?"

"Neither, ma'am." There was a slight hesitation over the use of the respectful "ma'am." Monica's use of her own name had slightly embarrassed her. "There's just mama and me, and we work it together. We've got a choreman, but that's all. It's—it's only a quarter section."

Suddenly she leaned forward in her saddle and spoke very gently.

"Would you like to oblige me—very much?" She smiled into the girl's earnest face.

Phyllis flushed with pleasure.

"Why, surely—ma'am."

"Then don't call me 'ma'am,'" Monica said. Then she laughed in the way Phyllis liked to hear. "You see, I am just the same as you, Phyllis—if I do wear a tailored riding habit. We're both farmers—in our way."

Phyllis blushed, but shook her head with a simple yet definite decision.

"I won't call you 'ma'am' if you don't like it," she said readily. "But I can't help thinking there's a big—big difference, if you don't mind me speaking so plainly."

Monica's interest was sincere.

"Go on, child," she said. "I like to hear you talk."

The girl's luminous eyes brightened.

"I wasn't going to say much—only"—she hesitated doubtfully—"only I hear so many folk say there's no difference. Most of them say it sort of spitefully. They sort of want to make out they're as good as anybody else, and all the time most of 'em can't even think right. It's just conceit and spite and envy. And, oh, there's such a big difference all the time! Take our choreman. Then look at Mr. Hendrie. Was there ever such a great man? He doesn't sit down and shout he's better than other folk. Maybe he don't think he is. But he gets right up and does things that come near making the world stare. I wouldn't be rude to you—indeed I wouldn't, but—but there's a heap of difference between folk; it shows in the result of their lives."

Monica was startled. She was filled with an intense wonder at this youthful prairie flower. Where did she get such thoughts, such ideas from at her age?

"Whom do you talk to about—these things?" she asked after a brief pause.

Phyllis flushed. Monica's tone had been almost cold.

"I don't generally talk so much," she said hastily. "I like to think most—when I'm plowing or working on the farm. I talk to my beau sometimes," she added with a blush.

"You have a beau?" said Monica with a ready smile. "But of course you must have—with your pretty face."

"Oh, yes, and we're going to get married soon," Phyllis hurried on, basking once more in the other's smile. "His mama's going to buy him a farm and start him right, and we're going to get married. Frank's awfully kind. He's—he—"

"Frank? Frank—who?" Monica had no need of the information, but she was anxious to encourage the girl.

"Frank Burton. He's much bigger than me, and he thinks a heap. I just love him. I just love him so I don't know what I'd do if I hadn't got him."

"And when is he going to get this farm?"

"Soon—quite soon. Then we'll be married. It's—it's good to love some one and feel they love you," Phyllis went on, almost abstractedly. "It makes you feel that you can work ever so. The days get short. Yes, it sets everything moving quick about you, and all the time it's just you, because you're full of happiness and looking forward. The only thing that's slow is the time between seeing him."

Monica smiled.

"I think you'll be very happy with your beau, Phyllis," she said gently.

"You would make any man happy. If Frank Burton is all you say he is, and I'm sure he is, I fancy you'll live to see the day when you have quite lost your desire to say 'ma'am'—when you speak to me. Meanwhile, may I come and see you, and will you come and see me?" Her eyes grew almost pathetically appealing. "Will you?" she urged.

A flush of embarrassment swept over the girl's happy face.

"Oh—yes—if—if—"

"There must be no 'ifs'!" Monica cried. Then she urged her horse nearer the buckboard and held out her hand.

"Good-by, Phyllis!" she said, lingering over the girl's name caressingly. "I shall keep you to your word, and I shall come to see you. Good-by, my dear!" she cried again. "A pleasant journey."

CHAPTER XV.

The Clean Slate.

MONICA'S chance meeting with Phyllis Raysun was not without its effect on both their lives. The girl drove on home in a state of considerable elation and told her story to her sympathetic mother, Pleasant Raysun.

"Mama," she said, "she's a lovely, lovely woman, and somehow I kind of feel I'm all mixed up with her already. I don't think folks *make* friends. Friends are just friends. That's how I feel about Mrs. Hendrie. I — I'm sure we're friends, and always have been."

Pleasant Raysun was a plump body, whose dark eyes and soft mouth were strangely opposed in their efforts to display the character behind.

"Maybe you're right, my dear," she said amiably; "you generally are. How you know things beats me all to death!"

With Monica the effect of that meeting on the trail was marked in a wholly different manner. She had at last seen this girl whom her boy had told her of in such glowing terms. She had seen, and she knew that she approved his choice.

Thus she spent the rest of her day with an added light shining in upon Frank's future, and with it came a swift decision to act promptly and carry out her carefully considered plans without any further delay.

So she sent word to Angus that she required the best team of drivers and a buggy, since Hendrie's automobile was away, to take her in to Calford the next day.

Her order was received with considerable suspicion by her husband's manager, so much so that the company at the Russell Hotel that night were treated to a more than usual severity on the part of this local magnate. He wrapped himself in an impenetrable and sour silence.

Monica spent her last hours before retiring to bed in writing a long letter to Frank. She chose the library—or office, as her husband preferred to call it—for her correspondence. She preferred this room to any other in the house.

It was a luxurious place, and the great desk in the center of it was always a subtle invitation to her. The subdued light focusing down upon the clean white blotting-pad, with its delicately chased silver corners, never failed to please her whenever she entered the room at night.

Her maid had insisted on changing her from her habit, which Monica warmly regarded as her business dress, to a semievening toilet of costly simplicity. This was a feature of her new life which Monica found it difficult to appreciate.

Now she took her seat at the desk. She drew a sheet of note-paper from the stationery cabinet, and for some moments sat gazing at it, lost in pleasant thoughts of the young girl she had met that morning.

It was curious what a sudden and powerful hold this child of eighteen

had taken upon her affections. She thought she had never encountered any one of her own sex who so pleased her, and she sat there idly dreaming of the days to come, when this boy and girl would marry and she could subtly, almost unnoticed, draw them into her life.

Yes, it could be done; it could be done through Phyllis. Everything was simplifying itself remarkably. Fortune was certainly with her. She smiled as she thought how they would come to her—a local farmer and his wife, in whom she was interested. Her husband would be rather pleased. He would undoubtedly encourage her in her whim. Then, if he should recognize Frank as the original of the photograph he had once torn up, that would be easily explained and would be an added reason for befriending the couple—seeing that Frank would then be married.

Then she would eventually get Alexander interested in the boy, and when that was achieved she would begin to develop her plans. Frank might be taken into some of her husband's schemes.

But she was suddenly awakened to her waste of time by the chiming of the little clock in front of her, which was accusingly pointing the hour of ten. So she snatched at a pen to begin her letter.

Habit was strong with Monica. An ivory penholder and gilt nib had no charms for her, so the humble vulcanite of the stylograph of her stenography days was selected, and she prepared to write.

But for once her humble friend refused adequate service. It labored thickly through the heading, "My dearest Frank," and in attempting to punctuate a sudden flow of ink left a huge blot in place of the customary comma. With a regretful expostulation Monica turned the paper over and plotted it on the pad, and after readjusting the pen went on with her writing, detailing her instructions swiftly but clearly, so that no mistake could be possible.

In less than half an hour the letter was finished and ready for despatch. So she hurried away to bed, deciding to mail it in Calford when she arrived there next day.

That night Angus returned to the farm about half past eleven o'clock. He let himself into his quarters, which were situated in an extreme wing of the building, lit the lamp in his office, and flung himself into a chair. He sat there staring moodily before him, chewing the cud of grievance which was momentarily getting a stronger and stronger hold upon him.

His grievance now was not against Hendrie; there was a peculiar quality of loyalty in him which always left Hendrie far above any blame that he might feel toward others. It was the woman he was thinking of.

Just now he was speculating as to her reason for suddenly taking the long journey into Calford. He was considering that, and in conjunction with it he was thinking of a telegram which Maybee had handed him. It was addressed to Monica, and the postmaster had assured him that it was from Hendrie, announcing his unexpected ability to return home tomorrow. At first Angus had felt spitefully pleased that Hendrie would meet his wife on the trail; but this hope had been dashed by Maybee's subsequent information that the telegram had been despatched from a place called Gleber, which he knew lay thirty-odd miles to the northwest of Everton, and in an almost opposite direction to Calford. Now he was considering, while apparently doing his best to deliver the message, how best he could arrange that Monica should not see it before she went away.

His reason was not quite clear. Only he felt, in the light of what he knew of Monica's clandestine meetings with Mr. Frank Smith, that she was not taking this journey with her husband's knowledge. More than that, he felt

that when Hendrie discovered his wife's absence explanations would have to be forthcoming.

After some minutes of deep thought he rose from his chair with a wry smile, twisting the corners of his hard mouth. A thought had come to him which might serve.

He made his way to the library and lit the lamp over the desk, and as he did so he detected perfume and glanced quickly around him. Then his eyes fell on the blotting-pad, where he was about to place the telegram.

In a moment he saw that the pad had been recently used, and the perfume told him by whom. He had no scruples. Monica had been writing letters, and he wondered. He picked up the pad and carefully removed the uppermost sheet of blotting-paper. Reversing it, he held it before the light and studied it carefully. Then he replaced it, but in doing so deliberately left the reverse side uppermost.

"Guess you ought to know better, my lady," he muttered, his face genuinely smiling. "Thick pens are cursed things for telling tales on a blotting-sheet."

He carefully placed the telegram exactly over the blotted words, "My dearest Frank." Then he hurried back to his quarters, feeling in a better frame of mind than he had felt all day.

Angus Moraine's little plan worked out exactly as he had anticipated. Monica did not visit the library before her somewhat rushed departure the following morning. Her departure took place shortly after daylight, at which hour even the chance visit of a servant to the library was not likely to occur. Thus it happened that the envelope and its contents remained in their place until two o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour Alexander Hendrie returned

The millionaire's return was the result of an impulse, inspired by finding himself with something in the nature of a "loose end." His business of the great trust had unexpectedly taken him to meet a deputation of local grain-growers at Gleber, just as he was about to leave Calford for Winnipeg. Thence a flying visit to Deep Willows was only a deviation of route whereby he might fill in spare hours which otherwise he would have had to spend waiting for the east-bound mail in Calford.

The idea of surprising Monica had pleased him. He knew the delight it would give her, and for himself every moment spent away from her was begrudged.

Consequently, on his arrival at Deep Willows his disappointment was keen when he learned that Monica had departed suddenly for Calford. His decision was prompt. He would go straight on and join her in Calford. With this resolve he passed on to the library, while a man was despatched to notify Angus of his return.

Angus was on hand. He had arranged that this should be so. He had no intention of missing his cues in the little drama his own mischief had inspired.

He responded to the millionaire's summons without undue display of alacrity. He left him ample time in the library before presenting himself. His purpose was obvious and well calculated.

When he finally entered the room he came almost without any sound, turning the handle of the door with what seemed unnecessary caution.

His first sight of Alexander Hendrie was of a great man standing before a window examining with painful intensity a large sheet of white blotting-paper.

The fair, rather sunburned complexion was deadly pale, the bushy brows were drawn harshly together; the lips, contrary to their usual custom in repose, were slightly parted. But it was the steel-gray eyes of the man that most held and perhaps pleased Angus. They were cold, dreadfully cold and cruel, like the steely gray of a puma's. There was pain in them,

too. But it was a pain that did not suggest helpless yielding. There was an atmosphere about his whole expression that was merciless.

Angus moved across the soft carpet without any sound. So engrossed was Hendrie that he did not appear to observe his manager's approach, yet he gave no start or sign when the latter's harsh voice broke the silence:

"You sent for me? I'd heard you'd got back."

Then a very strange thing happened. Hendrie laughed without looking up.

"Why, yes," he said. "I sent for you. You can tell the man I sha'n't need the automobile."

Presently Hendrie looked up, and Angus mentally rubbed his eyes. The man was smiling—smiling pleasantly. But he did not put the paper aside.

"Sort of curious," he said with a half-humorous dryness. "You never think of the blotting-pad you're writing on."

Angus gazed meaningly at the paper.

"Guess Mrs. Hendrie being away, the maids just fancy they can do as they please."

In a moment the change Angus had been awaiting came.

"That's my wife's writing!" cried Hendrie, while one great hand gripped the manager's shoulder with crushing force.

Angus stared into the man's livid face, and as eye sought eye he knew that at last he was gazing into the torn soul of his employer.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. **Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.**

ASPIRATION

By Ethel M. Coleman

I DO not covet vast estates untilled,
With lake and mountain, forests, moors, and bogs,
But I *should* like some land, if Fate so willed,
To try the strange things of the catalogues.

My tiny garden harbors beets and beans,
And frills of lettuce trim the tiny yard;
But e'en to artichokes my fancy leans—
And how resist the pleading looks of chard?

These lips have never feasted on cardoon,
Nor tasted scorzonera, rich and black.
Shall okra soup not reach our table soon,
Or savory salad of celeriac?

We sigh for jelly of the fair rozelle.
One hardly dares to try finocchio
In rug-size gardens. Will you kindly tell
Where we can find a place for these to grow?

The Sealed Valley

by Hulbert Footner

Author of "Jack Chanty."

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

NAHNYA, a beautiful half-breed Indian girl, asks Ralph Cowdray, an impressionable young doctor in a frontier town of the Canadian Northwest, to make a journey of three hundred miles to break and reset her mother's crudely set arm. Aroused by his interest in the girl, Ralph consents. They travel first on a primitive steamboat. Nahnya's charms attract attentions from the rough men on the boat, especially Joe Mixer, with whom Ralph almost comes to blows in consequence. The last stage of their journey is made by canoe with Nahnya's brother, Charley. Ralph's growing love for Nahnya causes him to show toward her an ungoverned passion. She proves her ability to take care of herself. Ralph is remorseful and Nahnya forgives him. At the beginning of a rapids Nahnya insists that Ralph go the rest of the way blindfolded. He is angered at the mystery and refuses. They camp for the night. Suddenly Ralph is rudely awakened by the descent of two heavy knees between his shoulders. Nahnya and her brother succeed in bandaging Ralph's eyes and the next morning they proceed to their destination. Ralph performs the operation. Following Charley, he penetrates through a hole in a mountain into a sealed valley—green, beautiful, and rich with gold. Here dwell Nahnya and the Indians she hopes to mold into a new tribe away from white-man influence. She tells Ralph her life's story and ends with a search for her white father.

CHAPTER X.

Moonlight.

RALPH looked at Nahnya a full half minute before he ventured a question.

"And then what happened?" he inquired.

"His eyes go bad like other men," Nahnya said. "I no like the way he look at me. I run out of the house. I never see him again."

Her story ended, Nahnya rose and said good night. Long after she disappeared into her mother's teepee, Ralph lay under his blanket staring at the fire.

Sleep was banished to the other side of the world from his eyelids. His body was still, and his brain with in-

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for August 29.

conceivable rapidity and completeness was flashing pictures before his inner eye.

So vivid, so involuntary was this process that he felt as if it were taking place independently of him. There he lay, the quiet self that he knew, with a mad, foreign sprite turning the wheels inside his skull, and he helpless to think or to act in his own person.

The pictures were all of Nahnya: Nahnya as he had first regarded her, a common Indian girl, blind fool that he was!

Nahnya sleeping with a smile on the deck under the lantern; Nahnya glorious at the helm in the rapids; Nahnya, flashing-eyed, defending herself from him—the beast that he had been! Nahnya weeping in the grass at midnight; Nahnya reproachful and despairing when she found the white man in her sanctuary; and finally Nahnya as she had unconsciously revealed herself in all the phases of her own story; modest, true, and brave as Ruth, and intolerably persecuted.

"Oh, Heaven, what a shame!" he cried with a heart wrung with rage and compassion. "And I can do nothing to square it! Oh, God, how noble she is! And how beautiful!"

Beauty seemed of lesser moment to him now.

His soul prostrated itself before the shining gold of the character she had revealed. Simple and strong and self-forgetful as a saint of the Middle Ages, he saw her.

"If this is to be an Indian," he thought wildly, "I will be one! God knows, she makes me ashamed of my own race!"

He was tormented by the necessity of unburdening his breast to Nahnya. At the conclusion of her story with too much emotion he had been dumb.

By and by his little fire died down, and across the lake, above the superb peak in the center of the eastern wall, he became aware of a delicate radiance in the sky. His heart rose, thinking it was dawn.

But this was a tenderer and more unearthly light than day.

The great peak was silhouetted against it, the outline faintly luminous. Ralph was struck by its likeness to a titanic thumb; the thumb of the Earth-Maker, as the red men say. It was the same peak that he had seen from the other side.

Presently there appeared above it the blade of a silver simitar. The wasted moon slowly mounted the ramp of heaven, like a lady wan with a sorrow bravely borne—like Nahnya.

Her light descended into the valley with ineffable tenderness.

The trees on the nearer shore were painted with a brush of silver dust, and the light of dreams was spread on the grass. The lake was no longer a lake of water, but of a fairy vapor that slowly crept across to the opposite shore as the shadow of the mountain retreated.

The whole valley was like a bowl slowly filling with moonlight poured from the tilted silver chalice held aloft.

Only to those whose hearts have become prescient through suffering does the moon fully reveal herself. Ralph, struck with awe, beheld her for the first.

The soft potency of her beauty drew him out from under his blanket to stand upright in the purifying rays. His pain was at the same time soothed and deepened, like a tearing rapid received into still water below.

The ugly nagging thoughts that throng upon the agitation of wakefulness were exorcised, and the great matter stood out clear.

"I love her!" Ralph silently vowed to the moon. "Please God I'll make myself worthy of it! I'll make up to her if I can something of what she has suffered!"

He sat down at the edge of the bank where Nahnya had sat that day.

A great wave of emotion made a clean sweep through him, drowning selfishness, and lifting his better self high on its crest. Everything in him was changed, he felt.

All his life up to this moment had been a sordid affair; it should be different hereafter. For the first time Ralph was caught up to the heights of emotion, and the poor youth thought he could remain there.

On the deepest note of his heart he breathed: "Thank God for something noble to love!"

Across the lake the mountain under the moon was still black down to the water's edge, but about its summit certain planes of snow had caught the moonlight, making an effect of weird, pale loveliness up there.

Behind him the mountains to the west were fully revealed. Withdrawn and misty in the moonlight, they suggested not hard facts of rock and ice and snow, but lovely, suspended fantasies of the imagination.

The strip of beach with the canoes lying upon it was at Ralph's feet.

Very slowly through the haze of his dreams he became aware that there were only two canoes below, instead of the three that belonged there. When the fact fully penetrated his understanding, his heart bounded in his breast.

Was it possible that Nahnya— He knew that, like himself, she had no love for a sleepless bed. If he could only find her somewhere in the moonlight and pour out the weight of emotion that overcharged his breast! Leaping down the bank, he lifted one of the remaining canoes into the water and embarked.

He found her.

Half a mile up the lake, out in the middle, she was resting on her paddle, woman and canoe making a graceful shadow picture in the path of moonlight. Hearing him coming, she made no effort to escape, nor when their canoes gently collided expressed any surprise at his coming.

He could not see into her face, but from her still air he guessed that the moonlight had softened her, too.

Seeing her so still and lovely, his heart swelled in his breast, throttling speech again. Clinging to the gunwale of her canoe, he could only look at her. They faced each other in the attitude of prayer.

Nahnya spoke first. "It is beautiful to-night," she said softly. The pain had gone out of her voice.

"Sunlight or moonlight," Ralph said simply, "this is the most beautiful place I have ever seen."

There was a light breeze from the direction of camp. It swung the two canoes gradually around and propelled them slowly up the lake. The moon now shone in Nahnya's face.

Like the brush of a master-painter, it blotted out unessential detail in order to reveal in dim, suggestive lights and shadows the very spirit of beauty dwelling there. Ralph thought he had already encompassed her beauty, and he was amazed.

He leaned toward her, gazing like a despairing sinner at a vision of heaven. There was a long silence.

It terrified Nahnya. Obliged to say something, anything to break it, in her agitation she said the wrong thing. "It is late. We must go back."

"Late!" cried Ralph, suddenly feeling speech. "What does it matter? What does anything matter? I must speak to you. There will never be another night, another time like this!"

Again the sweet and terrible silence that discharged lightnings from heart to heart. Nahnya, half swooning, still resisted the current desperately.

"I must go," she murmured, and picked up her paddle.

Ralph clung to her canoe. She could not escape him.

"That was a wonderful story you told me," he murmured at last.

This provided her a loophole of escape from the tender influences that betrayed her.

"Wonderful!" she said in a stronger voice, and bitterly. "It is an ugly story."

"Ugly for the beasts of white men you were thrown among!" he cried with rising indignation that half suf-

located him. "I always hated the life of cities. Now I am ashamed of my race into the bargain. Nahnya, if I could make it up to you in some way!"

"It is nothing to me now," she said quickly.

"Nahnya, I've got to tell you how it made me feel," he went on in a low, moved voice. "I couldn't sleep without telling you. It made me mad with rage that things like that could happen to a woman like you.

"You ought to be the happiest woman in the world! And — and there's something else. I wish I could say it right. You don't know how fine you are, Nahnya.

"It is you whc are wonderful! I never knew anybody like you. When I think of myself, what I have been, I feel as if I should go down on my knees to you.

"I suppose every man is born with a dream in his heart of a woman like you, brave and good and true like you, but few men meet her!"

This was infinitely worse to her than the silence. "Don't talk! Don't talk!" she murmured in a voice sharp with apprehension. "It hurts me."

Ralph's bursting heart, having found an outlet, was not to be stopped. "I love you," he said.

A queer little cry escaped her. She instinctively drove her paddle into the water, but Ralph clung to her canoe. She dropped the paddle and covered her face with her hands.

Ralph, misinterpreting the cry, was wounded to the quick.

"It's not the same!" he cried. "I am different from those others. I love you truly with the best there is in me. This is for life, Nahnya!"

"Me, a red girl?" she murmured. "You are crazy!"

"I don't care about that," he said quickly. "You're the woman I have dreamed of all my life!"

Her hands came down from her face and gripped the sides of the canoe. Ralph covered one of them with his own. She snatched it away.

"Stop! Stop!" she murmured. "This is madness! You and I! What good could come of it?"

"Come of it?" said Ralph. "I'm asking you to marry me."

"Marry!" she whispered with a piteous catch in her breath. Her hands were twisted together in a way that he knew. "Let me go," she said imploringly. "Please, *please* let me go!"

"No!" he said grimly. "There's no use running away from it. You and I have got to have it out here and now."

His voice deepened into tenderness again. "I love you," he said. "I ask you to marry me. Why does that distress you so?"

"Wait!" she whispered shakily. "We must quiet down. We must think. There is much to be said. I must say it. Let me be quiet."

"All right," he said on his deepest note. "I'll wait. When it's the real thing a man can be patient."

He suddenly leaned toward her again.

"Ah, if you knew how I loved you! With every bit of good there is in me! I want to do the best thing for you. I want to take care of you! I can't tell you how I feel. It will take years to show it!"

"Oh, don't!" she whispered painfully and low. "This hurt me more than—those things I told you. Nothing can come of it. I have a curse on me!"

"That's nonsense!" cried Ralph quickly. "I'll take care of the curse."

"There is no place in all the world where we could go," she breathed.

"We will stay here," said Ralph. "Don't you understand I am willing to give up everything I have known. It's no sacrifice, because I never set any store by it, anyway. There's a good work to be done here. I'll help you."

"You are white," she murmured. "You cannot help here."

"Nahnya!" he cried reproachfully.

"Wait!" she said. "Let me say it all! It must be said!" Her voice was gaining in strength and assurance. "I much wish I could say it just right. They are happy here now. I have sworn to St. Jean to keep them from the whites!"

"St. Jean Bateese likes me," put in Ralph.

"Why not?" she said. "We think you are a good man. But you are white. You have the white man's strong eye. Oh, if I could say it right!

"If you come here you do not want it, but you are soon the master. You have many thoughts they cannot understand—white men's thoughts—and your eye is more strong than theirs. They try to be like you and they lose themselves. They cannot be the same as you, and so they are nothing."

"But you," said Ralph, "you and I understand each other, and you get along here."

"Because I have the same blood in me," she answered. "I know them without speaking. You do not know them."

"I will make myself one of them!" cried Ralph.

"I have seen white men do that," Nahnya said relentlessly. "When they come live in a teepee Indian way the red people scorn them. The white men hang their heads and look out sidewise like beaten dogs. They never forget they white once. That is worse."

Ralph in his eagerness to persuade her scarcely listened to what she said. "If you don't want me here let us go and live outside the valley," he cried. "You have started them right; you could come and see them sometimes. I would not come."

She shook her head.

"It is madness!" she murmured. "Always I am thinking that. If you marry me other white men laugh and call you fool. If all white men think little of you, you never be big man among them.

"By and by, soon now, white women will be come in this country. White women hate me, and hate you for taking me. We always alone. You sicken of me then—oh, I have seen it! If I have children they cursed like me."

She paused. Passion shook the quiet voice.

"I would kill my children before that come to them!" Her voice rose, impatient at last with too much pain. "I can't say it right. What's the use? Somehow it is wrong. White must mate with white and red with red. Me, I am nothing; I will go alone."

Her last words stabbed at his breast like a knife. He leaned toward her.

"I won't have it!" he cried passionately. "You make me mad when you talk that way. You're crazy on the subject. Oh, I don't blame you! The finest woman God ever made to be wasted!

"It's not possible! I love you with all my heart and soul! I think you love me back again—you hesitate. What do all these things matter? If you love me you've got to marry me."

"I hesitate—why not?" she said quickly. She had full command of herself now. "I am a poor red girl. A white man, a doctor, ask me to marry him. It is a great thing for me. I hesitate. But I know now. I will not do it."

"Give me a straight answer!" cried Ralph. "Do you love me?"

There was silence for the space of time between the opening and the closing of a door. Ralph hung upon her answer with all his faculties suspended. He heard her draw a steadying breath.

"*No!*" she said.

The soft clearness with which she produced it was horribly convincing. So strong a spell had her honesty cast upon him that he never questioned her denial.

He fell back into his own canoe, and the two drifted a little apart.

He remained motionless on his knees, his hands grasping the gun-

wales mechanically. His world was tumbling around his ears. The moonlight was flat and garish.

As yet he felt no pain; only an immeasurable disgust of living.

Nahnya became alarmed by his silence. "What are you thinking?" she asked sharply.

With an immense effort Ralph pulled himself together. "It's all right," his lips said. The voice that issued from them was strange in his ears.

"I have been a fool, that's all. You have not been to blame in any way." He picked up his paddle like an automaton. "Let us go back," he said in the same quiet, stiff voice.

Later he said: "I will go away just as soon as I can leave your mother."

"I can dress her arm," Nahnya said, "or Ahahweh can. I have teach her."

"All right," Ralph said. "I'll start back to-morrow."

CHAPTER XI.

The Departure from the Valley.

RALPH wished to leave the valley alone. After what had happened, to be with Nahnya night and day without ever meeting her eyes, or exchanging a word beyond what the business of camp made necessary, seemed like the very refinement of torture.

But there was no help for it. It was too hard to go back up-stream, Nahnya said; they must go out a different way, and she must show him.

She took Charley, which made it easier. They set off next morning. In his instinct to conceal pain, Ralph was as much an Indian as any of them.

No one could have guessed from his composed face what had happened.

Such natures consume themselves inwardly. He was scarcely conscious of what was taking place outside him.

Charley was nothing loath at the prospect of another journey. Little by little the Indian boy had come to be at his ease with Ralph. His stolidity, it appeared, was largely an affectation for the purpose of impressing white strangers.

He now talked freely to Ralph in a queer jargon of English and Cree of what interested him, hunting and animals and making trips. St. Jean Bateese, too, who accompanied them to the mouth of the cave, stuck close to Ralph's side, and betrayed an unaffected regret at his going away.

"I can win them all but her," thought Ralph bitterly.

Before the cave swallowed him, Ralph looked for the last time at the lake with its sheen like a peacock's breast; at the kingly mountains drenched with sunshine and at the mad, green meadows with their white-stemmed birches.

"I leave myself here," he thought. He grimly clenched the stem of his pipe between his teeth.

During the long traverse under the mountain, Ralph spoke but once. Passing the scarecrow, he asked why it had been set up there. Charley explained that it was to keep the animals out. The man-smell which clung to his clothes was sufficient.

On the site of their last camp in the great forest they spelled for a meal. Afterward Nahnya brought the handkerchief to Ralph with a depreciating air.

"That's ridiculous now," cried Ralph, turning red. "I won't be carried down like a cripple!"

Nahnya, not looking at him asked quietly: "You promise never to come this way again?"

"No!" said Ralph instantly.

He could not have told why the word sprang from his lips. Perhaps it was that hope cannot be killed dead in a lover's heart while it beats.

The bandage was put on. Upon Ralph's promise not to disturb it, they refrained from binding his arms. And so after all he was carried down.

An instinct of caution kept him from telling them how it chafed his spirit; he knew he could find his way back anyway, if he chose.

Carrying him down hill was comparatively easy. When they halted at last and the bandage was removed, Ralph found they were still immured in the forest, but from a murmur of the rapids that reached his ears, he knew they had come almost to the river.

"We will travel all night," Nahnya said, "so you not have your eyes blinded. Better sleep now."

He did sleep. He had had none the night before.

They awoke him to eat. Once more the bandage was put on, and he was carried, but only for a little way. They came out beside the river, and he was laid on the flat rock.

He heard them launch the boat, and stow their baggage. Then he was laid on the blankets, and they pushed off.

Ralph had supposed they would go back at least part of the way they had come. His surprise was therefore great when he heard the roar of the rapids growing closer, and realized they were going on down.

His hand instinctively shot to the bandage over his eyes. Remembering in time that he had given his word, he clenched it instead, and clenched his teeth.

Nahnya understanding something of what was passing through his mind said: "This is an easy rapid. I know all the rocks in it."

There was the same breathless pause while the whole firmament was filled with the roaring of the waters; the startling plunge and mad leaping below; the same sudden subsidence into an unnatural calm.

It was like dreaming of falling over a precipice.

From the quickness with which the roar dulled to a murmur behind them Ralph realized they were carried down at an astonishing speed. He wondered grimly if ever before a blind man had been taken down great rapids in a crazy dug-out.

Some time later Nahnya leaned over and took the bandage from around his head.

It was dark, or nearly so. At first he saw only towering mountain masses on either hand, and overhead the stars beginning to come out. Sitting up he was amazed at the metamorphosis of the river.

It was the ragged, violent Rice river when he had seen it last.

Here was a volume and majesty that stream had never suggested. In mere size it was trebled, and its banks were flung up to the stars. The overwhelming shadow mountains seemed to be drawing back courteously to allow the mighty stream to pass.

To see such a place for the first at night added to its majesty. Ralph was dimly conscious that he was beholding one of the great sights of earth.

His subconscious mind never ceased to register every detail by the way that might help him to learn where he was, and to find his way back if need be.

Looking over his shoulder he could see a faint glow in the sky up-river. So it was true, as he had supposed, they were traveling east. What river this was, or what mountains, he did not know; though he guessed that in North America there was but one such mountain chain.

He tried to calculate the speed at which they were traveling by current and paddle.

The river made no sound except here and there where it snarled over an obstruction alongshore, but he knew from the way the points on shore marched past that their speed was considerable. Finally passing close beside an exposed bar he had something to measure by, and he was astonished.

Ten miles an hour he would have said, did it not seem incredible.

By and by Charley, with a word to Nahnya, put his paddle aboard, and stretched himself in the bottom of the dugout. Soon his deepened breathing gave notice that he slept.

Nahnya, too, took in her paddle and sat still, letting the current carry them. The eddies waltzed them slowly around and back, and the stars circled around their heads.

This was the hardest part of Ralph's ordeal.

To be alone with her under the stars and not to be able to touch her nor to speak of what was cracking his heart seemed more than a man ought to be called upon to bear. His streak of stubborn manliness would not allow him to reopen the discussion of the night before.

"I have my answer," he said to himself. "It is enough! I will not whine!"

And so he sat in silence thinking his painful thoughts, and she in silence thinking hers—but whether they were painful he could not guess. The question tormented him, and finally sprang from his lips:

"What are you thinking of, Nahnya?"

"Nothing," she said quickly, with a suggestion of sullenness in her voice.

It hurt him shrewdly. "Can't we be friends?" he burst out. "Can't I speak to you?"

She made no answer, and he sat fuming and nourishing his grievance. After a long time, when he had given up hope, she said softly:

"I sorry, Ralph. You take me by surprise. I not know what to say. I want to be friends. I cannot tell my thoughts."

At the unexpected touch of gentleness, remorse, and renewed tenderness melted him like wax. "Oh, Nahnya," he said brokenly, "I'm sorry! Why can't you tell me?"

"I not know how to give them words," she said simply. "Maybe they are not thoughts, but feelings."

"What are the feelings?" he asked.

"*Please!*" she said imploringly. "I cannot talk. I have say everything before."

"There's something I want to tell you," Ralph said haltingly, grateful for the darkness that covered him. "Words don't come any too easy to me, either. I want you to know that I'm not sore like a spoiled child that can't have what he wants.

"I don't seem to matter to myself as much as I did.

"It goes deeper. I want to tell you I'll never change, Nahnya, not in fifty years if I live so long. No matter what may happen in between, if I could ever help you— Oh!

"I talk like a fool! but I've got to say it! If I could ever help you I'd come from across the world. Expecting nothing, you know, but just to help you! Oh, damn! If I could feel that you would let me help you it—it wouldn't hurt so much!"

"I would let you help me if you could," she murmured.

"Your hand on that!" he said.

She gave him her hand over his shoulder. Gripping it, he pressed it hard to his cheek, and a single cry was wrung from him:

"Oh, Nahnya, my dear love!"

Gritting his teeth, he forced the rest back. "I will not whine!" he muttered to himself.

Nahnya sat behind him like a ghost woman, giving no sign.

Dawn broke over the river ahead of them, and the sun rose and shone straight through the noble pass. Charley awoke, and the three of them took paddles.

They left the principal mountain chain behind them, and thereafter the river pursued a circuitous course through wide flats, and around the bases of lesser heights. They breakfasted on an exposed stony bar, obtaining fuel from a fantastic jam of drift-logs left at high water.

As the sun approached the meridian

Nahnya produced the bandage again. Her face expressed the old, wistful, inscrutable blank. Never was there such a woman for ignoring all that had passed.

"We going to land soon," she said. "I take it off then."

Ralph submitted.

They landed within sound of another rapid, a hollow, throaty roar. After a wait to unload the canoe, and pack their slender baggage on their backs, Ralph was led up the bank and, as his moccasined feet told him, put upon a well-beaten trail.

"Put your hand on Charley's shoulder and follow," Nahnya said. "It is a good trail. You will not fall."

After a few minutes Nahnya took off the bandage, and Ralph found that they were swallowed in the bush once more. But this was only a forest of thickly springing aspen saplings, with straight white stems, and twinkling, trembling bright leaves.

The trail wound ahead of them and behind like an endless brown ribbon. Centuries of moccasined travel, not to speak of the hoofs and paws that used it surreptitiously, had packed the earth too hard for anything to grow.

Always looking out for any evidences of his whereabouts, Ralph thought: "This must be a main route of travel."

Once climbing a hill, he had a glimpse of the river behind them. Thence up hill and down the trail led them over a rough and characterless country. The aspen trees were springing from the ashes of the original forest.

There were raw open spaces filled with the charred remains of the monarchs, mantled with the purple-red bloom of the fire-weed.

Through the openings Ralph saw lesser mountain heights, green to the summit. He called it an unbeautiful land. As far as he could judge the general trend of the trail was northeastward, but the trail twisted continually, and he often lost the sun.

They had covered, he guessed, between twelve and fifteen miles, when Nahnya called a halt. They were in a little stretch of grass fringing a still streamlet.

"We stop here till midnight," she said. "All will sleep."

Ralph awoke about sunset to find that he and Charley were alone in camp. His heart winced, remembering the other times she had stolen away from camp and he had followed her.

This time he did not go.

Soon he saw her coming back in the trail with an ax upon her shoulder. He thought that her footsteps dragged and that her face betrayed an unutterable, sad weariness. Rising quickly, he found he was mistaken. It was the old, walled face that she showed him.

"We start in five hours," she said quietly. "Sleep some more." She lay down at a little distance.

It was very dark when they arose and made up their packs. Continuing on the trail they were obliged to keep close together. Presently they commenced to zigzag down a long hill where the trail was much broken and washed by rain.

Ralph putting his feet into holes, and catching his toes on exposed roots, made but rough going of it. They reached the bottom at last, and the trail became good again, but Nahnya, who was leading, presently struck off from it, and they crossed a wide meadow, their moccasins swishing through the grass.

The sky was heavily overclouded.

Ralph could barely make out Nahnya close ahead; everything else was swallowed up in the thick darkness. Nevertheless Nahnya seemed to know exactly where they were. At a certain point in the grass, without any distinguishing features that Ralph could see, she stopped, saying:

"We wait here till it is light. You can sleep if you want."

Dawn brought another dramatic surprise. They were resting almost

at the edge of a steep declivity of earth, and two hundred feet below moved another great, smooth, swift stream, its eddying surface gleaming in the gathering light like creased satin; or as if the water were flowing shallowly over a mirror.

It stretched away far to the left, confined deep between its dim bare heights, like a luminous ribbon. Down stream were several fairy-like islands half-revealed through the mist with their unreal foliage.

It was a kind of gigantic trough that confined the river. From the edge of the bank the land stretched back in gentle undulations. Behind them and off to the left as far as they could see rolled an unbroken sea of grass showing a strange, dark green in the half light.

To the right, about half a mile away, the wooded hills began, rising tier behind tier.

The river first appeared foaming from behind a spur of these hills. Behind him in the grass Ralph was astonished to discover two ancient log shacks with boarded windows and padlocked doors. They reminded him with a faint shock of the existence of fellow white men.

Nahnya was busy wrapping a pack within blankets.

After cording the bundle and tying it, she gave it to Charley, and with a laconic command, led the way down the precipitous slope. They scrambled and slid down to the water's edge, accompanied by miniature avalanches of gravel.

At the bottom, drawn up on the stones, there was a little raft made of four lengths of dead timber lashed together with a strong, light cord. A little paddle was stuck between the logs.

The cord was the same that had been used to bind him; a length of it was now around the pack that Charley carried.

Ralph recognized Nahnya's handiwork. This was what she had been doing with the ax during the previous afternoon, while he and Charley slept.

Nahnya and Charley pushed the raft into the water until only its forefoot remained resting on the stones.

Charley held it from floating away, while Nahnya, kneeling on the logs, tied the pack firmly to a cross-piece. Having done this she came ashore, and an awkward silence descended on the trio.

Ralph waited apathetically for her next order, but none was issued. The resourceful Nahnya for once was at a loss. Her back was turned to Ralph, Charley continued to kneel, holding the raft.

Ralph's mind dulled with pain and from insufficient sleep did not grasp the significance of these preparations. From the first he had been used to leaving all details of the journey to Nahnya, and he took little notice of what they carried. It was he who broke the silence.

"This little thing is never big enough to carry the three of us," he said listlessly.

"Sure!" said Charley with a grin.

Nahnya said nothing. She kept her head averted from Ralph. She twisted her hands until the knuckles were white. Ralph remembered this later.

He stepped on board the raft to test its buoyancy. As he did so, Charley with a heave of his back launched it out on the current. Then Ralph understood. He spun around, a dreadful pain transfixing his breast.

"Nahnya!" he cried in a voice wild with reproach.

Her back was stubbornly turned to him, her head sunk between her shoulders, her hands pressed over her ears. Charley still knelt on the stones, his dark face working oddly.

"Good-by, Hooralph!" he cried.

In the confusion of surprise, dismay, anger, and pain that shattered him, Ralph's eyes conveyed only one idea to his brain—Nahnya's hands pressed to her ears.

His essential stubbornness respond-

ed. "She'll hear no more cries!" he said to himself, clenching his teeth.

To shut out the agonizing sight of her, receding on the shore, he flung himself down full length to bury his head in his arms. He took no thought of the instability of his craft. Rolling off the center, the logs sank under him, tipping him into the icy water.

Quickly as it happened he heard Nahnya's cry before he went under. It was no ordinary sound of terror, but a cry of agony exactly attuned to the pain in his own breast. Even as the water closed over his head he heard and understood and everything was changed.

He immediately rose to the surface again.

The raft relieved of its burden had righted, and still floated beside him. Man and raft were being carried down together in the current. Grasping the logs he turned his head.

An unforgettable picture was etched on his brain; Nahnya, waist-deep in the water, straining toward him, and Charley desperately dragging her back. There could be no mistaking that act, nor the cry preceding it. Everything was changed.

Life blossomed again.

He did not feel the paralyzing chill of the water. Pain winged out of his breast, giving place to a joy so keen it was still like pain. But he could gladly have died of this pain.

He knew for sure that she loved him!

CHAPTER XII.

The Object Lesson.

RALPH wriggled his body back upon the unstable raft and snatched up the paddle.

The clumsy float responded but sluggishly to his desperate strokes. The current was running five miles an hour, and its tendency is to draw all floating objects into the center of the stream.

Even as he worked, he was carried around a point out of sight of Nahnya and Charley.

The water flew from his blade in a cascade, and still he appeared to be gaining nothing on the shore. The resisting logs and the unresisting water combined to defeat him.

It was like fighting feathers. He could have wept with rage at the insensate indifference of matter to his desire.

He was carried down a third of a mile before he could land. Drawing up the raft he ran back over the stones like a man distracted. Rounding the point he saw that Nahnya and Charley had disappeared.

Without giving himself a pause for breath he commenced to claw his way up the towering height of gravel, which continually gave way under him, dropping him back. He felt as if all nature was in league against him.

When he finally rose over the top, in all the wide expanse of grass there was no sign of the two he sought.

He flung himself down then, abandoned to despair. It was as if he had been given a glimpse of heaven, only to be thrust deeper than ever into the pit.

Perspiration was streaming from him, and his heart was staggering. A heart has its limitations; he had forgotten them, making that fearful climb.

When the pain subsided, and his brain was able to work again, he thought it all out. It was useless for him to pursue the two if they did not wish to be caught. He had not the woodcraft to find their tracks in the grass.

True, he was pretty sure they had gone back into the hills over the way they had come, but before he could find the beaten trail they would have several miles start. Long before he could overtake them they would recover their boat.

He had no food, nor firearms by

which to obtain any. Despondency seized upon him. He lay inert and indifferent.

By and by hope began to stir, as it has to do in a healthy young breast.

After all matters were not as bad as before. She loved him. That being so, what a poor thing he was to give up. He sat up again. What was to prevent him from getting a proper outfit at the nearest trading-post and returning?

How thankful he was that an instinct had kept him from promising not to return. The summer was young; June had not completed her course. If Nahnya loved him, she would not stop loving him in a week or a month.

He stood up ashamed of his weakness. He made his way back to the raft.

By this time the sun was giving a grateful warmth. Taking off his outer clothes, he spread them to dry on the stones. His pack had likewise been partly wetted, and he opened that to dry.

He was curious to see what Nahnya had included in it.

It was unlike her to set him adrift on an unknown river, without preparing him for what was in store below. As he had half expected, the first thing he saw upon opening the bundle was a note in Nahnya's nunlike hand.

It was without salutation. It read:

> There are no rapids in this river before you get to Fort Cheever. Always keep in the middle of the river. You will come to Fort Cheever before the sun goes down. You will see the houses a long way. Then you must keep close to the shore so you are not carried past. The steamboat come to Fort Cheever. Good-by.
>
> ANNIE CROSSFOX.

Ralph read and reread this prosaic communication, searching wistfully between the lines for some intimation to reassure him of her love. There was nothing of the kind.

"Under the circumstances what else could she write?" he asked himself with fine reasonableness. But his heart sunk unreasonably. He carefully stowed the letter away.

Within the bundle was a small store of rice-cakes, and cold roasted moose-meat, also a little copper pot with tea and sugar. The sight of the last items encouraged Ralph of her thoughtfulness for his comfort. Tea was worth more than gold to them; sugar they denied themselves altogether.

Besides the food he saw his medicine-case, and everything else that belonged to him; his eye passed over it carelessly. A fat little moose-hide bag sharply arrested his attention.

Lifting it, he had no need to look inside. It was gold, a respectable weight to lift, two thousand dollars he guessed.

An angry pain contracted his breast. "She pays me, and turns me off," he thought bitterly. "Does she think I did it for this!"

His first impulse was to drop it in the river. A better thought restrained him. He tried to put himself in Nahnya's place.

"She's conscientious," he thought. "Even though she might guess it would hurt my feelings, she would feel obliged to pay me. But she shouldn't have given me so much."

As he continued his reflections with a hand upon the little, swollen bag, his eyes began to shine.

"I know how to get square with her," he was thinking. "I will buy her a magnificent present with it. She's a woman after all. She can't be indifferent to beautiful things!"

Throughout the day Ralph had all the time there was to reflect upon what had happened.

Hour after hour he sat on the little raft nursing his knees, his eyes, generally observant enough, turned within. He never could have told of that part of the journey, except to describe in general terms the unchanging flow of the jade-colored river, with its endless procession of steep, grassy hills on either hand.

The burden of his thoughts was: "You fool! To let her send you away! You should have seized her and held her and forced her to confess!"

When Ralph climbed the bank at Fort Cheever about eight o'clock that evening he came face to face with a white man.

Years seemed to have rolled between him and his own race. In time it was eleven days. This man was a fine specimen; upstanding, broad and lean, with a bearded, grim, whimsical countenance.

"Make you welcome!" he cried, extending an enormous hand. "Saw you coming from up-stream."

There was something instantly likable in his strength and directness. Ralph returned his greeting with a good will.

"Sit down," the man said, pointing to a bench at the foot of the flagstaff. "Soon as I saw you coming I told the old woman to put on a bit of supper. She'll send one of the little lads down with it when 'tis ready."

He looked at Ralph with a strong and friendly interest.

"You are young!" he said. "Thought I knew everybody up and down the river. You must have come from across the mountains."

Ralph nodded. This was safe.

"Risky traveling alone," the man said with a shake of the head. "It isn't done much." He offered Ralph his tobacco pouch.

Sitting side by side they filled their pipes. After the obvious commonplaces had been exchanged, a somewhat constrained silence fell between them.

Ralph had instantly perceived that this man had the instincts of a gentleman, and would not stoop to catechize him. For that very reason Ralph felt obliged to give an account of himself. Here he was in a pretty quandary. He did not even know the name of the river that flowed before them.

"I'm David Cranston, the trader here," volunteered his host.

Ralph gave his name, adding: "I'm a doctor, if it's any use to you, or any of your people here."

"Sure!" said Cranston heartily. "You shall sound us all! It will be a treat to them. You must stop here a while. I don't get many white men to talk to."

Ralph beat his brains for an expedient whereby he might find out what he had to know, without making himself out a madman or an imbecile. Finally he said: "I suppose I can get an outfit from you?"

"Going back?" said Cranston in surprise. "Sure, you can get an outfit. I'm out of nearly everything at this moment, but I'm looking for the steamboat every day. She will bring me my year's stock."

Here was a clue. "How far down the river does the steamboat run?" asked Ralph carelessly.

"Fort Ocher," said Cranston. "She was built there."

Ralph was no wiser than before.

"How do you figure on going back?" asked Cranston.

"That's what I've got to find out," said Ralph.

"Well, I can give you horses to carry all you want to the other side of the portage, with a couple of natives to drive them back. The trail is good. Have you got a boat at the portage?"

Ralph felt himself floundering. He did not know where the portage was. "No," he said.

Cranston turned astonished eyes on him. "Then how in Sam Hill do you expect to go back up the river?" he demanded to know.

Ralph felt himself turning red. "Thought I could make a boat," he said at a venture.

Cranston shook his head strongly. "There isn't a grown cottonwood tree to make a dugout within twenty

miles of the portage. It was all burned over eighteen years ago."

Ralph tried another line. "Have you got a map?" he asked.

Cranston shook his head. "Only in my head," he said. "I've been in this country thirty years.

"Do you mean to say you rafted it down the upper river?" Cranston asked presently. "How did you make the Grumbler Rapids?"

Ralph turned red again.

He did not know how to answer. At the same time he began to understand that the two rivers he had traveled upon were one and the same, and that the well-beaten trail must be the portage Cranston had referred to.

Cranston, observing his confusion, said quickly:

"There, it's none of my business. I don't want to pry into your affairs. An old-timer like me can't help but feel concerned seeing a youngster trying to make his way without knowing what he is up against."

Ralph was naturally of a candid disposition, and his inability to respond to the other man's generous advances made him very uncomfortable.

"Look here," he said impulsively, "you naturally wonder where I've come from and what I'm doing up here. I can't tell you. It's not on my own account, you understand. There are others in it. Will you take me as you find me?"

"Fairly spoke!" cried Cranston in his great voice. He insisted on shaking hands again. "I never want a man's story, so he speaks from his chest and looks me in the eye!"

"That's decent of you," murmured Ralph, much relieved.

"Belike you and your pals have struck something rich up there," Cranston went on. "I know the stuff's there somewhere, but it doesn't keep me awake nights. I've seen too many disappointments. I'd liever raise horses."

Two dark-skinned little boys, whom their father addressed as Gavin and Hob, brought Ralph's supper from the house, and having bashfully delivered it, stood off regarding the stranger with a mighty curiosity. Cranston sat by smoking and watching Ralph satisfy his appetite.

He radiated a hospitable pleasure.

"If you're wanting to go back from here," said Cranston, "I'll tell you straight, it can't be done. Of course it was a regular company route in the old days, but they thought nothing of taking a crew of thirty Iroquois to track them up-stream. A man couldn't do it alone. Why, the current runs seven miles an hour."

"I've got to go back," said Ralph with a sinking heart. "What can I do?"

"Make the big swing around, and go in from the other side," said Cranston. "It's a long trip, but shortest in the end. Take the steamboat from here down to the Crossing, then by freighter's wagon ninety miles to Cariboo Lake; then by boat down the lake and down the little river and the big river to the Landing; then another hundred miles overland to town."

"What town?" asked Ralph desperately.

"Prince George, of course," cried Cranston.

At last Ralph began to have a glimmering of his whereabouts. "Then this is the Spirit River!" he cried, off his guard.

Cranston glanced at him with a twinkle under his bushy brows. "What did you think it was?" he asked dryly. "The Rhine?"

Ralph blushed.

"I didn't know there was any river that flowed right through the Rockies," he muttered.

"You don't want a guide," said Cranston with grim good nature. "You want a nurse. Take my advice as soon as you get to town and buy a geography primer!"

Ralph, in his relief upon obtaining

a bit of definite information, could afford to take Cranston's gibes in good part.

"From Prince George you take the branch railway down to Blackfoot," Cranston continued, "then by the main line westward over the mountains to Yewcroft, and north up the Campbell valley to Fort Edward. From Fort Edward—"

"I'm at home there," Ralph interrupted.

"I'm glad of that," said Cranston ironically. "Else I might think you were a visitor from the skies!"

Cranston sent the little boys back to the house with the dishes. It was growing dark, and he built a fire on the edge of the bank—"for sociability," he said.

"Sorry I cannot ask you into my house," Cranston said with a kind of honest diffidence. "There are nine of us, and we are overcrowded."

Ralph suspected from his manner that he had other reasons. He hastened to reassure him.

The two men sat until late smoking and talking by the fire. The progress of intimacy beside a camp-fire cannot be gaged by civilized usages. Cranston was a lonely man, and for his part Ralph, after the overwhelming emotional experiences of the past few days, needed a sane friend to lean upon.

Ralph could not talk of his affairs, of course, but it was good to him to have Cranston beside him.

The trader's talk was all of the country. "There's only one thing bad about it," he said. "That's the mixed marriages."

Ralph pricked up his ears.

"If you're coming back," Cranston went on, "if you're going to settle here, be on your guard against the pretty native girls. Take the word of an old-timer; it is always fatal!"

A hot color crept into Ralph's cheeks, but the flickering firelight did not betray him.

He was on fire to refute Cranston's cynical dictum, to crush him with arguments, but he fought it down, fearful of betraying his secret.

Cranston went on all unconscious: "You can't blame either party. The young fellow is lonely, of course, and he thinks he is cut off from the women of his own race. As for the girl, she thinks she is made if she gets a white husband.

"He forgets the long procession of the generations ending in him, and she doesn't know anything about it. You cannot reconcile the two strains. Generally the man gives in. He forgets his past and sinks to her level; becomes 'smoked,' as we say."

"Once in a way the man turns out to be of harder fiber, and then it is worse. For she cannot rise to him. She is made conscious of her own deficiencies, and all the hateful stubborn qualities of the red race come to the fore.

"When you look to a woman for more than she can give, and she knows it, it turns her into a devil. Suppose this couple has children, and the man tries to teach them their white heritage.

"The children become strangers to their mother, and who can blame her for going mad with rage? What is this father going to do with his children who are neither red nor white when they begin to grow up; what with the girls? What with the boys? That question is unanswerable."

Ralph remembered the two engaging little dark-skinned boys with the Scotch names, and his heart warmed toward their father.

"Poor devil!" he thought. "He's been unlucky!" The story came no nearer to Ralph himself, for to him Nahnya was an exception and of different clay from every other woman in the world.

While the two men were talking a woman suddenly appeared within the firelight.

They had not heard her come. She was a half-breed, still handsome in a

savage way, though verging upon middle-age. Her features were distorted with rage, and she opened a torrent of withering invective in her own tongue upon Cranston, with maligning side-shafts in Ralph's direction.

Cranston coolly knocked the ashes out of his pipe and arose. "Go back to the house, my girl!" he said with a compound of firmness and patience.

The woman clutched at her hair in hysterical fury. Her voice rose to a scream.

"Go to the house!" repeated Cranston with a commanding gesture.

Their eyes struggled for the mastery. Hers fell, and her voice died away. She turned, and the darkness swallowed her again.

Cranston looked deprecatingly at Ralph. "I didn't want you to learn my story here," he said. "You'd hear it soon enough down the river. I suspect my case is notorious. Very like the good Lord intended me for an object-lesson," he went on with characteristic grim irony. "Take warning from me! Good night to you, my lad!"

As an object-lesson it was a failure, for Ralph fell asleep gloating upon how different Nahnya was.

CHAPTER XIII.

Outside.

FOURTEEN days later found Ralph in the metropolis of the Pacific.

During the interim he had made the fifteen hundred miles swing around the country as laid out by David Cranston, except that instead of leaving the transcontinental train at Yewcroft and heading north for Fort Edward, he had come through to the coast. Here he meant to indulge himself in buying the gift for Nahnya.

He had likewise supplies to lay in for the journey back to her.

All the days and nights of the way out he had little to do but plan the details of the return trip. By this time all the meager details of the published maps of that country were transferred to his brain.

Ralph's first act in town was to visit the government assay office.

His dust amounted to close on two thousand dollars. Thereafter in all his peregrinations through the streets a pair of sharp eyes followed his every movement.

When Ralph made purchases in a store the eyes affected to be examining goods at a near-by counter; when he ate a meal in a restaurant the eyes watched him over the top of a menu card from the table behind; when he returned to the railway station and bought a ticket for Yewcroft and a berth on next day's train the eyes next in line bought the same kind of ticket and booked a berth in the same car.

Not until they had satisfied themselves that Ralph was safe in his hotel room for the night did the eyes relax their watch on him.

They looked for a taxicab. These eyes were what is known as mouse-color, which is not the color of any breed of mouse, but a kind of yellowish gray. They were fixed in the head of a little, nervous man with a sickly complexion of a lighter yellowish gray, and mouse-colored hair that stuck out in different directions, and a mustache to match with drooping ends ragged from being gnawed.

He had himself carried in the taxicab to an imposing residence in the west end of town.

The name that he sent in was John Stack.

After a certain wait the owner of the residence received him in his library. This was a captain of industry, rosy with fat living and nonchalant with money.

"Well, Stack, what do you want at this time o' night?" he said with good-natured insolence.

Stack's obsequiousness supplied the complement to his insolence. His smile was painfully ingratiating. "I flushed a good lead to-day," he said, with a queer imitation of the other's offhand air.

"Heard that before," said the financier, attending to his nails.

"But I never started anything like this."

"What is it?"

"I've been watching the assay office," Stack said eagerly. "It was my own idea. We all know there's plenty of gold waiting to be found up North. Well, I haven't got the money to spend staking prospectors, and in bribing and wheedling the miners. So I watch the assay office. Everything that comes out is bound to go there."

"Well, what then?" asked the financier.

"No one knows the game better than me!" Stack continued, with a little red spot in either sickly cheek. "I'm acquainted with all the known mines and diggings. I know all the old-timers in the field, and all the agents here in town.

"To-day a new man came in with a sweet little bag of dust.

"A youngster of twenty-five with the tan of high latitudes still on his skin. He was green; didn't know where to go with his dust. It was in a moose-skin bag, Indian made—nearly two thousand. He hasn't a friend here. I haven't let him out of my sight!"

"Suppose he has something good up there. How do you expect to get in on it? What do you want me to do?"

"Stake me to five hundred so I can follow him back to his claim," said Stack breathlessly.

To his relief the other man did not flout him. "How do you know he's going back?" he asked.

"He bought a folding canvas boat," said Stack eagerly; "a rifle, a revolver, and a shelter-tent. He took ticket and berth to Yewcroft on to-morrow's train."

"H-m! What did he do with the two thousand?"

"Spent the whole of it on a necklace, an emerald pendant, the finest stone in town."

"A woman in the case, eh? Ain't you afraid to risk your skin among these rough guys?"

"He's a nice, decent young fellow," said Stack. "I'll make up to him. We'll be good friends before we get to Fort Edward."

"What did you come to me for?" demanded the man of money, with a steely look.

The little man cringed and fawned. "You and me has turned more than one trick together," he said in a scared and silky voice. "I been useful to you in the past. Now I got a chance to help myself I thought maybe—"

"What do you offer me?"

"Half. I take all the risk."

It never occurred to the guileless Ralph that any one in town had any interest in his affairs.

It is doubtful if, during the whole of the two days he spent there, he ever looked behind him. Not until he took his place in the stage at Yewcroft and sized up his fellow-passengers did he observe the small, mouse-colored man with the insinuating smile.

Ralph was not particularly impressed in his favor, but he had to have some one to talk to on the four-days' trip to Lecky's Creek. Of the other passengers—a promoter and his flamboyant lady, another splendidly attired lady traveling alone, a boastful tenderfoot, and an alcoholic miner—none was at all to his taste.

At the first stopping-house the two gravitated naturally together.

Stack made it easy to make friends. Ralph, overjoyed to be clear of the city and to have his face at last turned north where his heart was, was suf-

fering for the lack of some one to unburden himself to. When the stage went on Stack secured the place next to him.

"Fine country!" he said.

It opened the flood-gates.

"Fine!" cried Ralph. "It's God's own country! And the farther you get from the cities the finer it becomes! The air is purer and the people are honester! Up in the woods a man faces facts. How any young fellow with blood in his veins can be content to mess around in cities beats me!"

Stack encouraged him to talk himself out. Ralph's enthusiasm was merely general. Stack, reflecting that he had plenty of time, made no attempt to draw him. During the first day he avoided all reference to what he wanted to know.

On the second day Ralph began to squirm and fidget on his seat. "Lord! what a tedious trip!" he complained. "You sit here till you lose the use of your limbs! Give me a canoe!"

"You've made this trip before," said Stack carelessly.

"I came in for the first at the beginning of May," Ralph said.

Stack thought: "Two thousand dollars in two months! What a strike!" Aloud he said: "I suppose you're going to Fort Edward like the rest of us."

"That's my headquarters," said Ralph.

Stack talked wisely about the real estate business in Fort Edward in which he designed to interest himself.

"Better leave it alone," said Ralph indifferently. "It's rotten!"

Stack insisted on the advantages of the city that was to be.

Ralph listened with growing impatience. "What do you want to make another city for?" he demanded. "Aren't there enough cities fouling the streams?"

Stack shrugged deprecatingly and murmured something about "progress."

"Progress be damned!" said Ralph rudely. "We're progressing in the wrong direction!"

"I should like to see a bit of the real thing myself," said Stack by and by, "but I don't suppose an inexperienced man like me could get about. If I could get a good guide!"

Ralph did not rise to the cast. "Plenty of guides," he said carelessly.

"What is the best way to go beyond Fort Edward?" asked Stack.

"There are three main routes," said Ralph; "up the Boardman to the Stukely valley; straight north over the hills to the Campbell Lake country; or east up the Campbell River."

"What's the lake country like?" asked Stack.

"Only know it by hearsay," said Ralph. "Principally fur."

"One hears in town about the diggings in the Stukely valley. I suppose it's pretty well worked out by now."

"I don't know," said Ralph carelessly.

"How does a man get up the Campbell River?" asked Stack.

In spite of himself a thrilled tone crept into Ralph's voice.

"There's a little steamboat runs up to Gisborne portage now and then," he said. "And beyond that if any one is willing to pay."

Slight as the change was in Ralph's voice it did not escape Stack's attentive ear. "Gisborne portage?" he said carelessly. "What is it a portage to?"

"Over to Hat Lake," said Ralph with shining eyes.

"Aha!" thought Stack. "I'm getting warm!" He immediately changed the subject, and avoided it during the rest of the day.

On the next day he led the subject by imperceptible degrees around to the subject of maps of the country. Ralph, who had procured every map he could lay his hands on, had plenty to say on this.

"I have a map of North Cariboo that Father Ambrose, the missionary made," said Stack. "Do you know it?"

"I have a copy," Ralph said.

"I was looking at it last night," Stack went on. "I found Gisborne Portage and Hat Lake. That little lake seems to be one of the sources of the great Spirit River. I wonder if it's possible to follow all those little lakes and rivers down to the main stream?"

"You'll have to ask somebody more experienced than I," said Ralph.

He was an indifferent dissembler. The note of evasion was not lost on the little man. He passed to something else.

Later they were talking about rapids. "A fellow in town told me that the worst rapids in the North were in the Rice River," said Stack. "He said it was white water all the way from the mouth of the Pony to the forks of the Spirit."

Ralph was caught off his guard. "A lot he knew about it!" he said. "It's smooth going all the way."

He had no sooner said it than he regretted the slip. Looking sideways at the little man he was reassured by the innocence of his expression. Stack started to talk about other things.

Thus during the four days of the stage trip, and the day and a half on the steamboat, Stack collected his tiny scraps of information and stored them away without arousing Ralph's suspicions.

Thrown upon each other as they were during the whole time, Stack managed to create and maintain a certain fiction of intimacy between them. But as they drew close to Fort Edward he was disappointed with the net results.

Of real intimacy there was none.

It was clear to any one who watched him that Ralph had a secret. When he was off his guard he could not keep his eyes from turning north, nor keep the shine of his hidden fire from showing in them.

Stack naturally thought it was gold that induced the shine.

In his own way the little man was clever, but hardly clever enough to distinguish between the dazzle of gold and the dazzle of love in a young man's eyes. He laid himself out to win Ralph's confidence seeking to tempt him with more or less apocryphal confidences of his own.

Ralph was never moved to open his heart in return. A resentful look began to show in the mouse-colored eyes when Ralph's head was turned away.

Ralph was a little surprised to find Fort Edward unchanged. The raw packing-case still rose from among the little soap-boxes; the mud was still undried; the stumps undrawn; and the little Tewkesbury lay with her nose tucked in the bank. True, he had been gone only a month, but such changes had taken place in him that it seemed unreasonable to find everything going on as before.

The "boys" were all waiting on the bank, of course.

Ralph a little dreaded the ordeal that awaited him. It is difficult to guard a secret in the wide and empty North where men have little to talk about. When he was seen from the shore shouts of surprise and welcome were raised.

The mere fact that he was returning from the south when he had gone north betrayed the length of the journey he had taken.

Stack, hearing the welcome, brightened somewhat. It would not be difficult to learn something about one who was so well known, he thought.

Ralph was carried off to Maroney's, little Stack clinging to him like a burr. There, all lined up before the pine shelf, the questions began.

"Well, Doc, give an account of yourself!"

"Gentlemen!" began Ralph with an air of portentous gravity. "An

astonishing adventure happened to me! I woke up in Joe Mixer's shack that morning with a dark brown taste in my mouth along of Maroney's whisky, and I went for a walk up the river to cool my head.

"As I was standing there admiring the view I heard a buzzing like a sixty-horse-power bumble-bee over my head, and I'm darned if one of those aeroplanes that you've all heard about didn't come down and light in the grass beside me like a crane. Surprised!

"You could have laid me out with a rabbit's foot! The fellow aboard it, he was nervous too. Seems he had only a quart of gasoline left, and him far from home. He asked me where he could get some more. I told him there wasn't a drop in the country. 'Maroney buys it all up,' said I, 'to put in his whisky.'"

Ralph paused to let the laughter spend itself.

"The fellow was in a great taking then," he went on. "Didn't know what to do. Suddenly I remembered about Tar Island up the river. I said, 'There's a place ten miles from here where they say that petroleum oozes right out on the ground.

"'Couldn't we gather it up and refine some gasoline?' 'You're on, fellow,' said he; 'climb aboard.' Say, we made Tar Island in five minutes, but I was deaf the rest of the day with the wind in my ears.

"It was a slow job, you understand, because we hadn't anything but a tin pail and a whisky-bottle and a strip of birch-bark to make a distillery out of. We were there three weeks, and then we had him tanked up, and he flew South and dropped me off at Kimowin. That's all."

This tale, which was in the style of humor most admired at Maroney's, made a decided hit.

Maroney himself conceded that the next round was on him. In every gathering of men it is tacitly understood that a man has a right to keep his affairs to himself—provided he can also keep his temper. When they saw that Ralph did not mean to tell where he had been they let him alone.

Little Stack bit his lip in his disappointment.

Stack had not been in the bar five minutes before the batteries of wit were turned on him. The stiff tangle of his mouse-colored hair procured him the names of "Haystack" and "Jack-Straw."

Later Dan Keach carried Ralph away to his office.

This was more difficult for Ralph because Dan as his friend had a claim on his confidence. Ralph had a story ready to tell him, but first he had to find out how far it would coincide with the Fort gossip.

Joe Mixer knew where he had gone; Joe had probably told the steamboat men, who would bring it back with them. Still, to his surprise and relief, no one in the bar had offered to chaff him about any half-breed girl.

"What do they say about me?" he asked Dan.

"Nothing," said Dan. "You simply disappeared from Gisborne portage. They say Joe Mixer knows where you went, but he won't tell."

Ralph's conscience reproached him for the story he was about to tell, but there was no help for it.

"There's no secret about it," he said carelessly. "I met some Indians going up the Campbell, and they took me along with them. I staked out a point on the river, a beautiful place, and just off the proposed line of the railway. I went on up the river to Cheval Noir Pass, and went over the new line. While I was outside I filed my claim, and now I have to go back and clear a part of the land and build a shack to fulfill the conditions."

"Is that the story you want to have circulated?" Dan asked, with the suspicion of a whimsical twinkle.

"Just as you like," said Ralph stiffly.

They returned to Maroney's for supper. Entering the dining-room they saw that there were only two vacant places remaining at the general table.

As Ralph put his hand on his chair to draw it out the fat back on his left was turned, and he found himself looking into the leering, swollen face of Joe Mixer. He waited, stiffening.

Joe sprang up. "Hello, doc!" he cried jovially. "Welcome home! Just dropped down on a raft myself. They tell me you been having grand adventures. Sit down and tell us!"

Ralph was obliged to shake the detestable hand or precipitate a conflict on the spot.

The meal proceeded without further incident. It was not an observant crowd, and only one pair of sharp eyes across the table marked Ralph's stiffness, and perceived the painful glitter in Joe's little eyes when he thought himself unobserved.

Stack patiently bided his time. Later in the evening Ralph and Dan went away together to Ralph's shack. Stack maneuvered until he succeeded in getting Joe a little way from the others.

"I got a bottle of outside whisky up in my room," Stack whispered. "Come on up and have a touch."

"Outside whisky" was worth five dollars a bottle at Fort Edward. "Sure!" said Joe brightening, and wiping his mouth on the back of his hand in anticipation. "Keep it quiet," he said. "There ain't enough in one bottle for the crowd."

They sat with the bottle between them. Stack played the rôle of the humble seeker after information about the country until he thought Joe had had enough to render him incautious.

Finally he said carelessly: "Seems to be something more in this trip of the doctor's than he wants to let on."

It had an electrical effect on Joe. His breath hissed through his teeth. His face purpled.

"You're right, there's something more!" he cried savagely, with an oath. "There's a woman behind it!"

"So," said Stack, remembering the emerald pendant.

"He took her from me by a low trick!" Joe went on. "By playing the sniveling preacher, blast him! They went away together a month ago. By gad! I'll pay him out if it takes the rest of my life!"

"He's got a boat in his baggage," said Stack softly, filling both glasses again. "Maybe he's on his way back to her now."

"Sure he's going back to her!" said Joe—adding with drunken mysteriousness: "I'm just waiting for him to start!"

Stack bethought himself how he could learn more.

"He makes me sick!" he said suddenly, genuine hatred making his pale eyes snap. "He thinks himself such a wonder! Treats me like dirt, he does. I wish I could bring him down a peg!"

Joe leaned over the table and extended his hand.

"Put it there, pardner," he said thickly. "It does my heart good to hear you say it. Gad! I hate him till it's like an indigestion in my stomach that won't give me no rest. To think of a smooth-face kid like him getting the best of Joe Mixer drives me wild. I won't never rest easy till I do for him!"

One more drink and they were sworn allies.

"What are you going to do?" asked Stack.

"I got a couple of fellows hanging round my place," said Joe, "fellows as 'll stop at nothing — a white man and a breed. I'm going to take them and follow him back to the girl. I don't know where's he's left her. Then"—Joe rubbed his greasy hands together—"the three of us 'll manage to give young medico a shivaree, I guess!"

Stack, pursing up his lips, thought quickly.

The situation was becoming complicated. It was clear Joe knew nothing about any gold. Perhaps he, Stack, could keep that knowledge to himself, and still play off Joe against Ralph. The size of Joe's party did not please Stack; still it offered him the only chance he was likely to get of following Ralph into the country. That was all important.

"Take me along with you," said Stack breathlessly.

"Eh?" said Joe, partly sobered. He looked the little man up and down and laughed brutally. "What good would you be?"

"I ain't much on fighting," said Stack. "But I can advise you good. I got a head on me. I got legal training."

"To hell with legal training!" said Joe. He looked at Stack cunningly. "You'll have to pay your way," he said. "I don't carry no passengers gratis."

"How much?" asked Stack anxiously.

Joe fixed him with eyes like pinheads. "Oh, well, make it a round sum for the trip," he said. "Make it two hundred and fifty."

Stack swallowed hard. "All right," he said.

Joe looked disconcerted. "Maybe it'll be more," he growled.

"A bargain's a bargain!" began Stack excitedly.

"Oh, all right! Done!" said Joe. They shook hands on it.

"Do we have to take so many men with us?" suggested Stack cautiously.

"We got to have the half-breed to steer," said Joe. "The other fellow'll cook. I don't travel without my cook!"

"A large party makes so much talk," murmured Stack.

"I want a lot of talk!" said Joe. "Just so's the fellow ain't warned beforehand. I want folks should be talk. I want everybody to know that no man can put one over on Joe Mixer and get away with it!"

CHAPTER XIV.

The Journey In.

NEXT afternoon the Tewkesbury left for Gisborne portage again, with Ralph, Joe Mixer, and Stack for passengers. Stack had said to Ralph:

"I'll just make the trip up and back on her. It's a chance for a tenderfoot like me to see the country." This seemed natural enough. Perfect amity prevailed during the trip.

Stack affected a great admiration for Ralph; Joe Mixer was friendly.

Ralph himself held to the rôle of reticent good nature that he had assumed. Privately he was a good deal bothered, in the light of the story he had told at the fort as to how he was going to make a getaway at the portage.

They arrived at the same time as on the previous trip, and Ralph as before was invited to spend the night in the bunkhouse.

"Thanks," he said easily, "I think I'll put up a tent. I've got the craze for sleeping out of doors."

"I'll sleep out with you," said Stack.

"The mosquitoes will eat you up," said Ralph coolly. "I've got only a one-man shelter.

He pitched his tent on the edge of the river bank, across a little muskeg from Mixer and Staley's buildings. He ostentatiously went to bed at an early hour.

As soon as everything was quiet he crept out, and hoisting the bundle which contained his boat to his back, started to climb the portage trail.

At two o'clock he returned. Making all the rest of his baggage into a pack, he got away again before the dawn began to break. At five he was on the shore of the lake with all his belongings. At six he had his boat

set up and packed, and was setting off.

All these movements were reported to Joe Mixer later.

Ralph, thrusting his paddle into the water which would eventually bear him back to Nahnya, felt like an exile coming into his own country again. The world and its business which obtruded irritatingly on his dreams, was all behind him, and when he stepped into his boat, he had likewise left his matter-of-fact self on the shore.

Here, alone on the opalescent lake under the all-embracing sky he was at home with his dreams.

This was Nahnya's land. With the keenest satisfaction he gazed around him, letting the scene photograph itself on his brain. Ralph never forgot anything that he had once looked at squarely.

Seeing the quaint islands, he smiled. "Nature's shop-window," he thought, "setting out her spring line."

Entering the little river the reeds and the lily-pads presented familiar faces, and every bend recalled the previous journey, evoking the presence of Nahnya so strongly that he had an actual physical consciousness of her sitting behind him, seeing all that he saw.

He played with the idea, forbearing to turn his head that he might not dispel the comforting illusion.

He had intended stopping at each place where they had spelled on the first journey, but this he found was impracticable no matter how hard he worked. His tubby craft could never make the headway of the slender dugout, and his paddle lacked the skill of Nahnya's.

In the rapids he was soon in trouble, but here the elastic sides of his coracle proved an advantage.

She bounced off the rounded boulders without taking any harm. When she ran high and dry it was no great matter to step out into the shallow stream and guide her to the channel.

Though he paddled until near dark he had to go ashore several miles short of their first camping-place.

It was on a grassy point in the middle of a quiet reach of the river that he chose to spend his first night alone in the silence. Solitude, silence, and darkness older than all created things are terrific to us newest creatures with nervous systems.

Very few of us know them really.

In an inhabited land at any hour of any season there is no such thing as silence. Ralph sat beside his fire thrilling in the presence of the ancient sisters.

He was weighed down, overwhelmed, intimidated. He felt as if he and his little fire existed like an island in an infinite void.

All this was changed by the cheery sun. He continued his journey downstream joyfully. These two days that he spent entirely cut off from his kind ever afterwards lingered in Ralph's mind with a flavor distinct from all the other days of his life.

Cut off from the distracting business of life, nor tugged opposing ways by human associations, it was as if he came face to face with his own self for the first time. It seemed as if the fetters of the flesh were a little loosened, enabling him to feel more keenly and to think with a greater lucidity.

This increased sensibility was for evil as well as good.

While the river seemed even lovelier if possible than upon the previous journey, side by side with the pleasure he had in it, a premonition of evil entered Ralph's breast.

"Something is going to happen," a voice whispered to him. He sought to laugh it away, but it stuck. He could not but remember the stories that are told in the north of how men living alone in the woods become gifted with a prescience of what is to come.

With a vague feeling that escape from the danger lay ahead, he paddled until ten o'clock that night.

Darkness was then falling, and his weary arms could scarcely lift the paddle. He camped on the river in the spot where they had dined on the second day of the other journey.

He fell asleep with the premonition like a cold hand on his breast.

In the morning it awakened him all of a piece. He abruptly sat up to listen. There was no sound. "What is the matter with me?" he thought wonderingly.

"Something is upon you," that still voice seemed to whisper. He looked to his gun. His heart failed him a little, he was so terribly alone. Inside him he offered up an unspoken prayer that whatever was coming might come quickly, before fear of the unknown should unman him.

Hastily cooking his breakfast he never ceased to listen.

Therefore, he was scarcely surprised when he finally heard that most startling sound in the wilderness, human voices. An instant later a long dug-out swept into view up-stream with four men in it. Courage warmed Ralph's breast again; to be sure it was bad enough but it was real.

At sight of Ralph the men in the dug-out set up a shout. Arriving abreast of his camp they swung around and beached their craft below. In the bow was a white man strange to Ralph, Joe Mixer and Stack sat amidships, while the stern paddle was wielded by a handsome, muscular young half-breed.

They all got out. Ralph awaited them on the top of the bank. Burly Joe approached with an anticipatory, cynical grin; little Stack kept partly behind him.

"Hello, pardner!" cried Joe.

Ralph seeing that he actually expected to keep up the fiction of friendliness, smiled grimly. "What do you want?" he asked.

Ralph's warning of danger had served him well. Joe seeing him cool and prepared was completely disconcerted.

"What do I want?" he repeated, falling back with a scowl. "That's a hell of a nice good morning to hand out to a man!"

"What were you looking for," asked Ralph, "an address of welcome?"

Joe turned purple and shook his fist. "I'll show you!" he cried.

Little Stack stepped from behind Joe. Physical terror gave his face a greenish cast, but his chagrin at seeing his careful plans about to be destroyed was stronger still.

It emboldened him to put himself in front of Joe. "Wait!" he implored. "You mustn't quarrel! Let me explain!"

Joe turned aside with a muttered oath.

A fawning note crept into Stack's voice. "We've taken the doctor by surprise," he said. "He thinks we're spying on him. You can't hardly blame him."

"You're a good guesser, Stack," said Ralph grimly.

"It's nothing of the kind!" cried Stack virtuously. "You must remember I told you long ago I wanted to take a trip through the wilds if I could get the chance. Mr. Mixer was willing to go, so I engaged him and these men to guide me."

"Why explain?" said Ralph. "It's nothing to me. The river is free to all."

"I didn't expect this from you," said Stack with an aggrieved air. "I thought we were friends. What have you got against me?"

"Nothing," said Ralph; "but you're in bad company."

Joe could no longer hold himself in. His face was purple.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" he cried thickly. "You stinking dude! You smooth-face poisoner! You rah-rah college boy. It makes my stomach turn to hear you lisping! What are you doing in a man's country? Go home to your pink teas and your toe-dancing!"

Ralph could not help but smile at the style of Joe's invective.

The smile maddened Joe. The foulest dregs of English speech were fished up to express his feelings. The other white man laughed obsequiously. He was in Joe's pay.

The half-breed pitched pebbles into the stream, handsome and unconcerned. Ralph took it all steely eyed and smiling still.

"You stand there like a little Gorramighty!" cried Joe with a string of oaths. "What can you do against the four of us? We've got you where we want you now, and you know it! You'll be singing another tune before we're done with you!"

"Now you're talking!" cried Ralph, bright eyed. "The truth is coming out at last!"

Stack all but wrung his hands at the turn things were taking. "Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" he implored.

"Ah shut your head!" snarled Joe. "You hate him as much as me!"

Stack turned paler still, and darted a furtive look at Ralph, and cringed and tried to smile indulgently.

"Don't listen to him," he said to Ralph. "You've made him mad. He don't mean what he says. It wasn't half an hour ago he said to me, 'Won't it be sport to surprise the doctor!'

"There's no need for you to quarrel like this. We don't want to intrude upon your privacy. Come to our camp to supper to-night and talk things over quiet and shake hands on it!"

Ralph preferred Joe's honest obscenity to this. He made no answer.

"Ah come on!" said Joe. "I'm sick of your palaver!"

He pulled the smaller man back to the dugout. Stack got in, nodding and smiling over his shoulder in a comic and pitiable attempt to propitiate the grim Ralph.

They pushed off. As the dugout disappeared around the first bend below, Stack had the effrontery to wave his hand to Ralph.

Ralph sat down to do some hard thinking.

His charming dreams were rudely shattered, and like every man suddenly roused to action, he felt a little ashamed at having been caught dreaming. He remembered precautions he might have taken had he been wide awake.

When his anger cooled—in spite of the smile he had been no less angry than Joe Mixer—he was a little appalled by his situation. Four against one is heavy odds.

If he had had even so much as a dog to keep watch while he slept!

How could he venture to sleep and leave himself open to a night attack? He resolutely put that unnerving thought out of his head. "I shall travel exactly as if they had not come!" he decided.

The more he thought the greater loomed his difficulties.

In a manner of speaking he was trapped in the river just the same as if they had him on a road between high and unscalable walls. He could not go back against the current, and he could not leave the river.

With his clumsy boat and one paddle, against their dugout and four, there was not the slightest possibility of his escaping them down-stream. They were free to follow him at their leisure and play with him like cat and mouse.

Ralph was amazed, as any open-hearted man might be, at the suddenness of the discovery that he had active and malignant enemies.

Joe Mixer's hatred he instinctively understood, and returned. Those two had been formed to hate each other. He likewise understood now that the evil fire Nahnya had lighted in Joe's breast was no mere ephemeral flame.

It was clear that Joe hoped to reach Nahnya through him.

"I'll lead him a chase," Ralph thought grimly. This brought up the thought that Joe might be the means of keeping him from returning to

Nahnya. Ralph ground his teeth at that, and understood the desire to murder that is born in men's breasts.

In Stack, Ralph realized he had a more dangerous enemy than Joe.

In vain he thrashed his brain to discover a reason for Stack's being in Joe's galley. He had never laid eyes on the little man until they took their places in the stage together.

It was true he had never thought much of the little Jack-Straw, but there had never been anything but friendly exchanges between them. There was a mystery here that tantalized him.

The upshot of his cogitations was, Ralph decided to accept Stack's invitation to visit their camp that night —not to eat with them, his gorge rose at the idea, but to go after supper.

"It'll surprise 'em," he thought grimly. "Nothing like bearding them in their own den. I'm bound to find out something. One man's strength isn't enough against four. I've got to use all the wits I have, too. I've got to meet them on their own ground, lie for lie. Beastly crooks! I'll go further than lying if necessary to keep them out!"

All day they remained ahead of him in the river.

About nine o'clock, while it was still fully light, he came upon their camp in the accustomed camping-place where Nahnya had stopped on the second night of the previous journey; the spot where Nahnya and Ralph had effected their midnight reconciliation.

There was the little grassy shelf in the bank where she had lain—the coarse voices of the men above profaned the scene horribly.

Ralph's face as he climbed the bank was serene. His greeting was as bland and offhand as a schoolboy's. The four men were sitting on the ground playing "jack-pot."

As Ralph had pleasurably anticipated, their jaws dropped upon his appearance.

Only Stack answered his greeting. Cards in hand, the little man jumped up obsequiously, but Joe Mixer barked at him, and he sat down abruptly. Joe scowled at his cards like a hangman.

The game proceeded as if Ralph were not there.

Ralph's cheeks began to burn at the implied insult, but he clapped his anger under hatches. He saw clearly enough that Joe was waiting for him to make an opening for a quarrel.

Drawing closer, he coolly overlooked the game.

They had a folded blanket between them to play the cards upon. In lieu of chips they used matches. The half-breed was winning. He was a fine specimen of physical manhood a year or two younger than Ralph, with a bold, conceited face.

He scarcely took pains to hide his contempt for the three white men of his party, and Ralph observed that even Joe was inclined to truckle to him, like a bully to one whose strength he has not measured.

Stack was obsequious all around. In the third white man Ralph recognized Crusoe Campbell, a disreputable character well known up and down the river of that name. He had the reputation of being not quite right in his head, which he traded upon to his advantage.

His wits were good enough to play a crafty game of poker.

So much for Ralph's observations. "A rum outfit!" he thought grimly.

When the cards were collected for a fresh deal Ralph asked coolly; "What are the stakes?"

"Nickel a match," answered Crusoe Campbell.

"Give me the worth of that," he said, throwing a five dollar bill on the blanket. "You," he said, indicating the half-breed; "what's your name?"

"Philippe Boisvert," the breed announced swaggeringly.

Crusoe Campbell and Philippe made room between them, and Ralph sat

down. All looked covertly at Joe to see how he would take it. Joe, still scowling, kept his eyes down and said nothing. The game went on.

Ralph's bluff was as yet uncalled.

Outwardly as cool as the ideal poker-player, Ralph was on the alert for an explosion. Under stress of excitement, his spirits soared like a bird taking wing. The corners of his lips twitched provokingly, and the shine of unhidden fire glowed in his dark eyes.

He bet recklessly; winning and losing with equal good humor.

His good humor communicated itself to three of the other players. All men love a good gambler. The ill-assorted game became almost jolly. Only Joe grew more and more morose.

His face turned an ugly brownish red, and a vein stood out ominously on his forehead.

When the explosion took place it was not directed at Ralph. Stack carried away by the appearance of general good feeling, during a pause while the cards were being shuffled had the misfortune to say, addressing Joe and Ralph:

"You two ought to shake hands and let bygones be bygones."

Joe Mixer broke out on him so violently as to be almost comic. "You sneaking little two-faced informer!" he shouted with a whole string of oaths.

"Keep your lip out of my affairs, will you? I'll learn you to talk to your betters! You make me sick with your lying palaver! Get the hell out of this game anyway! You ain't man enough to play poker!"

Stack hastily retreated from the circle. The breed laughed. Crusoe Campbell quietly confiscated Stack's matches.

"Give me another box of cigarettes out of your bag," the breed said curtly.

"A half-breed issuing orders to a white man and being obeyed!" thought Ralph.

"Bring up a pail of water from the river," commanded Crusoe.

The little man had already become the camp drudge it appeared.

Stack sat down at a little distance from the game with a childish assumption of injured dignity. During the deals Joe alternately chaffed and reviled him coarsely.

Ralph could not find it in his heart to feel very sorry for the little man. "He *is* a sneak," he thought. He kept his ears open for any word that might throw light on this obscure and curious situation.

After a while Stack said humbly: "Dr. Cowdray, if you please, I'd like to have a word with you before you go."

"I'm damned if you do!" cried Joe. "You'd like to play him off against me, wouldn't you, and me against him, and get your private pickings off the both of us! Me and Cowdray we ain't got no use for each other. We don't make no pretences. But you! You snide! You want to square yourself with him, don't you? After telling me you trailed him all the way from the coast!"

"I have nothing to say to you!" cried Stack with a display of childish fury that caused all three of his mates to shout with laughter.

A light broke on Ralph. Trailed all the way from the coast! To learn this was worth having come for! But why anybody should want to trail him was more of a mystery than ever.

He determined to find out.

Meanwhile the game went on with four players. The fortune of the cards changed, and Joe Mixer began to win, principally from Ralph. His good humor was restored.

This was as good a way to get square as any. As Ralph's pile of matches melted away, Joe triumphed insolently. He doubled and trebled the ante whenever it came to him. Finally he said:

"A dollar to draw and two to play. Does that scare you off, Doc?"

"Not at all," said Ralph coolly. "This is mild beside the play in New York clubs."

"Well, it ain't hard to win all you've got," snarled Joe.

"Three cards," said Ralph to the dealer. "This is my last hand."

He had been dealt a pair of aces. He drew another ace with a pair of sixes, and a comfortable little satisfaction warmed his breast. His face was like the sphinx's.

Joe Mixer drew two cards. Ralph, watching him narrowly saw a tiny spark of satisfaction light his eye when he looked at them, and guessed that he held three and had drawn a pair. Revenge was as sweet to Ralph as anybody.

Joe bet in a small way, and Ralph raised him modestly. The others had dropped out.

Joe raised again, and Ralph followed suit. Joe seeing that he was not to be shaken off began to plunge. Ralph's matches were exhausted long ago, and he threw the money on the blanket, raising Joe a dollar each time. Joe began to breathe hard and his face became as pale as a butcher's face may, except his ears which remained a furious crimson.

He raised Ralph five, and finally ten dollars at a time, hoping to bluff him out. Ralph covered his bets with a smile, and each time raised him one. A respectable little hill of greenbacks grew on the blanket.

Crusoe and the breed eyed it hungrily. Finally when it came to Joe's turn he stopped. Beads of perspiration had sprung out on his forehead.

"What's the matter?" asked Ralph innocently. "Are you scared off?"

"No!" cried Joe with an oath. "Ain't got no more money," he added sheepishly. "Don't carry it on the trail. Will you take my I. O. U."

Ralph shook his head. "A cash game you said. I'll take back my last raise and call you instead."

Joe with a great air of bravado laid down three kings and five queens.

Ralph made believe to be dumfounded. Joe grinned and reached for the money with a trembling hand; whereupon Ralph counted out his three aces, and his pair of little ones.

"It's a shame to take all you've got," he said softly.

CHAPTER XV.

The Stanley Rapids.

JOE ardently desired to continue the poker game on borrowed capital, but Ralph pointed out that he had announced in advance his intention of retiring from the game. "I've got to sleep," he said.

"Camp here if you like," growled Joe.

Ralph shook his head. "I'll drop down the river a little piece," he said. "I want to get an early start."

"You'll have to get up early to keep ahead of us in that contraption," said Crusoe with a laugh. "It's no more than a dunnage bag stretched on a couple of half hoops!"

"You can't go down the Stanley rapids in her," said the breed. "She all bus' up."

"Don't expect to go down the Stanley Rapids," said Ralph with a great air of carelessness. "I'm going up the Stanley." He observed that Stack and Joe were listening attentively.

"You can't track her," the breed said scornfully.

"My partner is waiting for me at the Forks," lied Ralph. "He's got a dugout."

"Where the hell did you pick up a partner?" Joe burst out, forgetting himself.

Ralph opened his eyes wide in affected surprise. "Well, say, give me time," he drawled, "and I'll tell you all my private business!"

The laugh was fairly on Joe. He flung away with a muttered curse.

Ralph, embarking, paddled no farther than around the first bend.

Here he made his camp on the same side of the river as the others. He thought it likely Stack would try to communicate with him during the night.

Ralph was highly satisfied with the results of the evening's entertainment.

Besides winning about fifty dollars, he had shown them he was not afraid, and he had put them, he hoped, on a false scent as to his destination.

He made a little fire, and retired under his shelter, but not to sleep. He had plenty to occupy his mind. After an hour or so he heard a rustle in the underbrush, and presently a scared voice whispering:

"Dr. Cowdray! Dr. Cowdray!"

Ralph sprang up.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" cried the voice in terror. "It's only me, Stack."

Ralph laughed.

The little man drew near, cringing. "Won't you put out the fire?" he whined. "In case any of them should come."

Ralph scattered the embers.

Stack needed no encouragement to make him speak. It came tumbling out; truth and lies, complaints and excuses, all mixed.

"My God, doctor! What a terrible position I'm in!" he wailed. "I don't know which way to turn. I gave Mixer two hundred and fifty dollars to guide me through the country, and look at the way they treat me! You saw it!

"I have to wash the dishes, and wait on the half-breed! Me! with a college education! I'm in momentary terror of my life. I hired Mixer thinking no wrong, and now I find him pursuing some murderous vengeance against you!

"If you could hear how he talks about you! Look what a position that puts me in—traveling with a gang of murderers! What must you think!"

Ralph listened to all this, smoking impassively. "What are you making this trip for?" he asked.

"Just to see the country," whined Stack. "Didn't I tell you that. I wish to Heaven I was well out of it!"

"That's a lie," said Ralph coolly.

"Oh, Dr. Cowdray, I wouldn't lie to you! I wouldn't do such a thing!" he protested volubly.

"Did you hire Joe Mixer to bring you after me?" Ralph demanded imperatively.

"Yes," faltered Stack. "But for a purely legitimate purpose. I swear it!"

"Have you, as Joe said, been trailing me all the way from the coast?"

"Yes," he confessed. "But meaning no harm at all—purely legitimate doctor, purely legitimate—" His voice trailed away.

"Well I'm damned!" said Ralph. There was a silence while he smoked. "What was your purpose?" he finally demanded to know.

"It's such an improbable story I didn't dare tell you," said Stack. "And I haven't any proof of it."

"You tell me and I'll decide as to the proof," said Ralph.

Stack took a breath and began with renewed glibness: "I'm a newspaper reporter, *Pacific Herald*. The city editor was told you had made a big new strike up here, and he sent me to follow you in, and get the first story of it for the *Herald*. I had to do what I was told," he whined; "or lose my job. You can't blame me—"

"Who told him about me?" asked Ralph astonished.

"Don't ask me," said Stack. "I've heard they have the assay office watched. I don't know."

It was obvious to Ralph from the man's silky, fawning voice that he was lying still. His gorge rose. Evidently the truth had to be terrified out of such a creature.

They were sitting beside the last faint embers of the fire. Ralph shot out his hand, and gripped Stack by the collar. A faint, gasping cry escaped the little man, and he went limp in Ralph's grasp.

"I have my revolver in the other hand," Ralph said in a rasping voice. "The truth now, or I'll crack your skull with it! It was you who watched the assay office."

"Yes," murmured Stack in accents of honest terror.

"You followed me up here on your own responsibility, hoping to get in on my strike?"

"Yes."

Ralph dropped him. "Now we know where we stand!" he said.

Stack, like all born liars, had an infinite capacity for swallowing his lies. Ralph had no sooner dropped him than he unblushingly appropriated the credit for his confession.

"I had to come and square myself with you," he whined. "I couldn't rest until I had come and told you the truth!"

"Well, I'm damned!" said Ralph again. "Go on!"

"You're the only friend I've got!"

"Friend!" said Ralph with a snort of scornful amusement. "This is good! Give it to me straight," he went on curiously. "What did you come here for to-night?"

Stack's voice rose to a piteous wail. "Any night I may be murdered in my blankets!"

"Sure," said Ralph coolly. "But what can *I* do for you?"

"Take me with you in your boat," Stack blurted out.

"Well upon my word!" cried Ralph.

"Don't refuse! Don't refuse!" said Stack breathlessly. "They wouldn't dare touch me if I was with you. They're afraid of you. That was magnificent of you to come to their camp and sit in the game as if nothing had happened.

"It had its effect I can tell you! Oh! take me with you!" he went on, stuttering in his eagerness. "I can help you escape from them. Two heads are better than one. I have a good head for planning when I'm not in mortal fear of my life."

"Fine!" said Ralph. "And you get right in on my strike!"

"I wouldn't ask much," said Stack. "I'd be content with whatever you wanted to let me have. Why can't we work together? You need a representative outside. You've got to file a lot of dummy claims to cover the whole field. You've got to form a company. I can attend to all that for you. It's just my line!"

"Thought you said newspaper reporter," remarked Ralph.

"That was just making out," said Stack hastily. "I know the mining business from A to Z. I've got legal training. You need me!"

"Thanks," said Ralph coolly. "I prefer to pick my own company."

"If anything happens to me it'll be on your head," whimpered Stack. "Aren't you going to take me with you?"

"No!" said Ralph in a tone there was no mistaking.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" moaned Stack. "If you won't let me travel with you, tell me where you're going, and if I can escape from them, I'll try to reach you. In common humanity you can't refuse that!"

Ralph smiled into the darkness.

"Is it possible he still thinks I am fool enough to give away my secret!" he thought. "If he does, all right!" Aloud, he said carelessly: "I've no objection to telling you that. But I won't guarantee you a welcome."

"Anyway, you're not a murderer!" whined Stack.

"It's about twenty-five miles up the Stanley river from the Grand Forks—"

"Then you were telling the truth!" said Stack with naive surprise.

"Why not?" said Ralph coolly. "I'm not afraid of them." He bethought himself of adding a few convincing touches to his lie.

"You enter a tributary that comes in on the right hand side of the Stanley, and ascend it as far as you can go into the foothills. There is our camp."

"How will I know the mouth of the right tributary?" asked Stack.

"By two pine trees that lean across, one at each side until their tops almost meet," said Ralph readily. My partner and I call it the A river."

"Take me with you!" Stack began all over again. "You need me—"

"Cut it out!" said Ralph impatiently.

"You ought to take me with you," Stack persisted. An indescribable, sly, cringing, threat crept into his whine. "Now that I know where you're going, if they torture me, I might let it out in spite of myself!"

Disgust overmastered Ralph. He sprang up. "You little cur!" he cried. "Get out of here before I hurt you!"

Stack waited to hear no more.

During the next three days the two boats see-sawed on the lakes and rivers, Ralph now ahead, and now Joe Mixer's party.

Ralph kept much longer working hours, but the others made it up in speed. Whenever they passed each other it became the occasion for an exchange of half-serious abuse, which was only prevented from developing into a fight by Ralph's unshakable, steely smile.

Ralph insisted on making out that it was all a joke.

Joe was itching for a fight, but the smile cut the ground from under him. Meanwhile, Ralph gave as good as he got. Stack never took part in these contests of wit. He sat in the dugout haggard and abstracted, gripping the gunwales under his skinny knuckles.

When he thought Ralph's gaze rested on him he did his best to look meek and imploring, but succeeded very ill in disguising his hatred. Joe Mixer carried a deal of liquor in his baggage as evinced by their frequent thickness of speech.

At the end of the third day they had traveled far down the Rice River.

By paddling until near dark Ralph succeeded in pitching his camp three miles in advance of the other party. It was his intention to sleep for four hours only, and then go on. According to his calculations he was within a few hours' journey of the Grand Forks, and it was essential to his plan that he get there first.

He meant to watch from some place of concealment on the shore, to make sure that they turned up the Stanley River instead of continuing downstream. In case they were not deceived by his false lead, and did not leave the main stream, he had one more desperate card to play.

The moon was now nearly full again, and he could be sure of a certain light until dawn.

Ralph pitched his little shelter in an opening among the willows that thickly lined this part of the bank. His boat was drawn high up on the stones below, and tied to the willow trunks. He ate a hasty supper and turned in.

As he lay waiting for sleep, once again he was warned by a vague disquiet in his breast of impending danger.

He remembered this afterward. At the time he was dog-tired, and the still voice was not insistent enough to cleave the gathering mists of sleep. He soon became unconscious.

He was awakened immediately, or so it seemed to him, by a sudden outburst of drunken shouting. At the same moment his shelter collapsed on top of him.

When he succeeded in freeing himself of the entangling blankets, netting and canvas, in the dim light he saw four figures reeling about where his fire had been, kicking his belongings into the bush, and wreaking what senseless damage they could. A terrible rage nerved him in every fiber.

"You damned cowards!" he cried.

Hearing his voice they made for him simultaneously, but Ralph retreated silently under the willows, and

bided his time, peering through the branches. They searched for him, stumbling over the roots and shouting inanely.

During the next two or three minutes the scene was as confused and incredible as a nightmare.

Ralph made out a swollen body swaying on the edge of the bank, outlined against the moonlight. Rushing him, he hauled off and struck him on the jaw with a savage satisfaction in the crack of it. He made to follow up the blow, but Joe was not there.

He lay in a heap at the bottom of the bank.

Hearing a sound behind him, in the act of whirling around, a bludgeon aimed at Ralph's head descended on his shoulder. Seizing him who had wielded it around the body, Ralph lifted him clear of the ground and flung him after Joe. This one was Crusoe Campbell.

A third figure scuttled down to the water's edge without waiting to be assisted. Ralph stood in the ashes of his fire, breathing hard and glaring around like a lion for another adversary.

The half-breed stepped from out the shadows. "Look out, white man!" he cried boastfully. "I got it in for you! I'll fix you good!"

"Come on!" cried Ralph gladly. At the same time the curious thought shot through his brain: what could the half-breed have against him? It was not Joe Mixer's quarrel; there could be no mistaking the note of personal enmity.

The moon shone down serenely indifferent.

A little prize-ring was illuminated within the encircling willows. In it the two men advanced toward each other, fists up. They crashed together.

This was an adversary worthy of Ralph; he fought like a white man, and he fought fair. Shrewd blows were exchanged on either side. Each quickly learned to respect the other, and thereafter fought more warily.

Failing to reach Ralph's head, the breed punished him about the body. Every one of Ralph's blows was aimed in the center of the pale ellipse that denoted the other man's face.

Ralph had the advantage in that the breed's head was somewhat fuddled.

His blows began to go wild. Ralph beat him to his knees, and stood back to let him rise. As they rushed each other again, Ralph's ankles were grasped from behind, and he was flung violently to the ground, striking his head.

As from an immense distance he heard the half-breed say: "Damn little sneak! W'at for you do that? I want lick 'im myself!"

Then the voices receded.

Ralph heard them from the beach; heard a hoarse guffaw, and afterward the splashing of paddles. He understood that they had gone.

By this time he had got to his feet. He stood, reeling from the effects of his fall, and half suffocated with a cold and deadly rage. He made his way down to the water's edge.

His boat was turned upside down on the stones, and the moonlight revealed several clean slashes in her canvas bottom.

"Oh! the scum!" muttered Ralph in his rage. "Unnatural beasts without decency or manliness! Malignant and cowardly and sneaking as rats!"

In cutting his boat they had not done as serious damage as they doubtless expected, for Ralph carried spare pieces of canvas in his baggage, and a can of waterproof gum against emergencies.

He instantly set about repairing the boat, working away in the partial darkness with the pertinacity inspired by a cold rage. He had no doubt now of what he meant to do.

"They'll be sleeping sound after the booze," he thought grimly. "They think they've fixed me for a while. They won't be looking for a visit to-night."

When he had his patches affixed,

he built a small fire on the stones, and held the boat over it to dry the gum.

In less than two hours she was fit to float again. He carried his fire up on the bank then, and making a blaze, hastily collected his scattered belongings. This refreshed his rage.

In his impatience he flung everything into his boat higgledy-piggledy, and pushed off. He did not paddle, for fear of being carried past, but allowed the current to take him, while he searched both shores with straining eyes. No shadow was allowed to pass unexplained.

He had not gone much above a mile when he saw what he so ardently desired; their dugout drawn up on the stones.

A great satisfaction diffused itself throughout his breast. Softly paddling ashore, he beached his own boat alongside, and bent his head to listen. A faint snoring from the bank overhead reassured him.

He smiled scornfully. In their drunken carelessness they had actually left most of their baggage in the dugout. Ralph had no desire to starve them to death, or to deprive them of the means of ultimate escape.

With suitable precautions of silence he unloaded everything on the stones. Then untying the rope by which the dugout was fastened to a tree, he heaved her adrift on the current. He didn't care much whether they heard that or not. But no alarm was raised.

Embarking in his own boat, Ralph towed the larger craft into midstream.

Picturing the scene that awaited their awakening next morning, he chuckled grimly, and found his breast eased of its weight of rage. He felt not the slightest regret for what he had done; indeed he was blaming himself for the foolish compunctions that had prevented him from doing it earlier.

His enemies were in no pressing danger; they possessed a store of food, also guns and ammunition.

They would eventually build a raft. In the mean time he would get a start that would put him out of their reach for good. He was free of them. A great serenity descended on his spirit.

Before he cast off the dugout it occurred to him that it was better fitted to descend the rapids ahead than his own clumsy coracle. He debated the matter.

An odd quirk of conscience finally prevented him from making the change.

"If I use the thing," he thought, "it's the same as stealing it." On this fine distinction depended the whole subsequent course of his story. He cast the dugout adrift. There was no wind to blow it ashore and it was good for a long journey.

During the rest of the night Ralph paddled and floated with the current without seeking any further rest. Dawn found him among the islands that marked the approach of the end of the Rice River.

This was where he had first been blindfolded on the previous journey, and he awaited the subsequent sight of the river with a stimulated curiosity.

At sunup, rounding a bend, he beheld the wide expanse of the meeting of the waters, the Grand Forks of the Spirit River. There could be no mistaking the place.

The two rivers occupied the same valley; one came down from the north, one from the south; meeting head on, they swung away to the eastward. The green current and the brownish struggled ceaselessly for possession of the channel.

At present the Stanley was in flood, backing up the waters of the Rice River for several miles.

The division between sweeping brown water and motionless green water was as sharply defined as between water and land. Poking the nose of his boat into the current, she swung around and almost rolled awash under the impact.

Ralph instantly remembered the sensation which had so puzzled him while he lay blindfolded.

Soon after he began to move down on the majestic flood of the augmented river, the murmur of the great rapids crept on his ears, and his heart began to beat. This would be the first real test of his paddle.

The murmur increased to a rumble, then to a roar. Finally he could make out the white-caps leaping below, like the naked arms of a multitude ceaselessly tossed to the sky in wild excitement. He appreciated the vast difference between a pretty stream brawling over a stony bed, and a mighty watercourse plunging over a reef.

He landed a little way above the rapids and fortified himself with an excellent breakfast. Afterward he made his way along shore to the beginning of the turmoil to try to spy out the best place to enter it.

A close view of its mightiness made him feel very small.

The immeasurable flood of water swept smoothly over the hidden ledge with an oily streaked surface, moving faster and faster until it suddenly boiled up madly at the bottom. From shore to shore nearly half a mile, the wild, white welter prevailed.

Ralph received a stunning impression of the tearing, resistless might of the down-rushing water. Its roar was deafening. At the thought of tempting it with his flimsy coracle, his heart shrunk away to nothing in his breast.

But it had to be done.

At first, as far as he could tell, one place was as bad as another to descend. Gradually he made out that by great good fortune he had chosen the right side of the river. Toward the other bank the white surface was everywhere pointed with ugly black rocks.

He saw that the greatest volume of water rushed down close to the shore on which he stood.

If he could keep his boat in the middle of it there was no danger of rocks. There remained the danger of those strange, great billows which curled and rolled and roared without ever advancing an inch in their paths.

He returned to his boat, fighting his terror of the place.

Refusing to think of it, he worked desperately to make all snug. He got in and clung to a branch that trailed in the water, while the increasing current sucked at his little craft. He had fallen out of the habit of articulate prayer; maybe he prayed in his own way.

He let go of the branch, and began to drift toward the place. He moistened his lips, and drew a long breath, and drove his paddle into the water. No turning back then.

Then he took the plunge, and was filled with an amazing exhilaration.

The struggle was brief. His boat buried her nose right under the first curling white billow, and half a ton of water fell aboard. She staggered drunkenly, and in spite of his desperate paddling swung broadside in the current.

The next billow raked him from stem to stern, rolled his boat completely under and washed him clear of it.

The opposed currents of the water clutched at him and racked him like whirling machinery. He came to the surface gasping, only to be flung violently against a rock, striking on his shoulder. Stunned by the buffeting and the roar, he was carried on down like a rotten log, now underneath, now on top, the plaything of ever wild eddy.

Struggling instinctively, in the end he found himself somehow in still water. He crawled out on the beach and lay inert, struggling for breath and for consciousness. Very slowly the realization of his plight was forced on him.

He felt no great concern.

It was like something that might have happened to somebody else.

There lay a poor devil cast ashore in the wilderness hundreds of miles from any fellow creature. Everything he possessed, boat, food, matches, axe, blankets, gun and ammunition were at the bottom of the river.

Out of the wreck he had saved only Nahnya's necklace, which was sewed to his shirt, and his pocketbook with money, neither article being of the slightest service to keep life in his body.

He sat up, roused by an imperious pain. Looking sideways and down at himself he was mildly impressed by the extraordinary conformation of his right shoulder — like somebody else's shoulder.

It was dislocated. He could not lift his right arm. It was a mercy if a small one that his faculties began to work so slowly. His first articulate thought was:

"Well, thank God! I got a skinful of breakfast before I lost it!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

THE PLAINT OF THE WORKING GIRL

By W. J. Lampton

I AM so weary, so worn out,
That I can scarcely move about,
And still all day I work—must rise
With sleep so heavy on my eyes
I cannot see—must eat and run
To meet a task that's never done.
I feel a lightness in my head,
My hands are slow, my feet like lead;
I drag around as though I were
Some lazy, listless messenger;
I ache and pain—my senses seem
The dead-weight of a nightmare dream;
My wits are dull and make of me
The limit of stupidity;
I hear what people say, and yet
Before I grasp it I forget;
I try to work—I want to do
My duty all the long day through,
But it is hard, so hard that I
Have more than one time wished to die.
Still, it is not the work all day
That saps my energies away;
The work is not so bad—I might
Do most of that and be all right
If I could only sleep at night.
But, oh, I cannot—I must go
To parties, or a picture show,
Or dances, or to things like those,
That keep me up till, goodness knows,
I don't get any sleep at all
Before I hear the rising call,
And quite forget the fun I had
The night before, I feel so bad.

I am so tired, so worn out,
That I can scarcely move about;
I am so weary—can there be
No rest for working girls like me?
What? What's that? Of course I might
Stay home and get some sleep at night,
But what's the good of life if you
Have nothing else but work to do?
What? Go home early? Quit and leave
The fun we're having? Can that, Steve.

A Missing Key

by Robert Ames Bennet

Author of "Into the Primitive."

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

TOM DENTON, an employee of the State National Bank, comes home bruised, bleeding, and dazed at 1.15 in the morning, muttering incoherently of robbers and a key. His sister Grace is terrified and phones for their uncle, Dr. Leonard Vidnor, who thinks the young man has been sandbagged. She then phones to Alvin Rance, an effeminate reporter of the *Record*. He, the doctor, and detectives investigate at the bank and find it robbed of nearly a quarter of a million, and Paulding, Denton's fellow clerk, murdered. Although Tom is in bed, he is seen about the city. Unable to remember what had happened, Tom swoons. When he comes to he is furtive and crafty. "I've got it!" he exults.

Plainly unbalanced, Tom says the money is safe—he has the key. He is taken to a sanatorium by his uncle. At the station Grace thinks she sees his face, but a changed face. A week later the doctor returns to find a burglar in the house, ransacking Tom's room. He gets the police, but the burglar shoots one of them dead and gets away. Nothing has been stolen. The doctor tells Grace that her brother is coming home, but is suffering from hallucination—he imagines himself to be Bruce Cameron, a psychologist. He comes; Grace is demonstrative, to his embarrassment; then he disclaims brotherhood and says he loves her.

Cameron, who really looks like Tom, has come with the doctor to help solve the mystery. He finds the key that Tom had secreted in his room. Rance tries to mesmerize him, then in a boxing bout knocks him out with brass knuckles and secures the key. But Cameron has the real key hidden in his watch, and makes other false ones. Rance throws suspicion on Cameron in a talk with the bank president and buys a racing car and a coupe. He then tells Grace his suspicions, and the latter, frightened, tells her uncle. But Cameron forestalls a denunciation, gives the doctor the key, and announces his own speedy arrest.

CHAPTER XIX.

Cat and Mouse.

DR. VIDNOR'S fat jowl dropped.

"Arrested! On what charge?"

"Probably only on investigation. That will afford an opportunity to search me for the key."

"You foresee that! It is a serious matter. Why not be frank with me? Why not tell me what you're driving at?"

The young man's jaw thrust out almost obstinately.

"There will be developments in a day or two. All I ask is that you come to see me at the jail a few hours after I am arrested."

He drew out his watch and looked at its open face. Perplexed and somewhat offended, Dr. Vidnor took the hint and withdrew in dignified silence.

Cameron shot the door-bolt, hung his handkerchief over the keyhole, and

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for August 22.

produced a pocket knife. In the center of the largest space of blank wall in the room he cut a slit under the overlapping edge of the thick wall paper with the thin, sharp blade of the knife.

A slice across enabled him to lift a pointed flap of the paper. Under it he scooped out a small shallow trough in the plaster, carefully catching the dust and fragments on a piece of note-paper.

From his hollow watch case he took a key and placed it in the hole under the paper. A careful application of mucilage from the portfolio of writing materials on the dresser gummed the flap of paper smoothly to the wall.

Cameron looked critically at the place from all angles. There was no bulge, no depression, no crease, not even a line to indicate that the paper had been cut and raised.

He drew out still another key. After starting to put it in the empty watch case, he changed his mind and thrust it into the inner pocket of his waistcoat.

Beside the portfolio on the dresser was a plain jeweler's box. Cameron took from it his uncased watch and replaced it in the gold case with deft skill.

To dispose of the plaster he turned off the lights, opened a side window at top and bottom, and flung the dust and bits of lime through the space above the upper sash. They were carried away in the outflowing draft of warm air.

Half an hour later he was in bed, locked in the deep slumber of one who is assured of his position and satisfied with himself.

In the morning at breakfast Tillie showed in the quiet, sharp-eyed detective who had led Rance and Dr. Vidnor in the discovery of the murder and robbery at the bank.

He bowed to the physician.

"Excuse me coming round so early, doctor," he apologized. "But the chief wants to have a little talk with this gentleman—Denton or Cameron, whichever his name is. You'll come, I suppose?"

"I believe I may as well," essented Cameron. "I have nothing else on hand."

A second detective was waiting in the street with a small two-seat car. When they reached police headquarters, the first detective suavely suggested that Mr. Denton would find a bath refreshing.

After soberly correcting him as to his name, Cameron thanked him for the courteous offer and accepted it with pleased readiness that drew stares of blank surprise from both detectives. This did not prevent them from showing him at once to a tiny dressing-room off the bath-room.

Though they remained outside, a peep-tube with deflecting lenses enabled them to watch his every movement. As soon as he had stripped and gone into the bath-room, one of them opened the locked door with a pair of key nippers, and they proceeded to search Cameron's clothes with the thoroughness of experts.

When, after a leisurely bath, the young man came out to dress, the outer door was locked and his clothes were lying exactly as he had left them.

"Chief would like to see you soon's you're ready," one of the detectives called through the door.

He came out to the waiting pair, refreshed and smiling. They took him into the private office of the police chief.

For more than an hour no one else was admitted to see the chief. When the grand master is conferring the third degree he does not wish to be interrupted.

At last the second detective came out with a sheaf of telegrams, half of which were in code. The first detective presently followed with Cameron, who appeared cool and unruffled, though his square jaw was set and his eyes were hard.

He was left to entertain himself in a comfortable room with barred windows.

On the police blotter an entry was made that Thomas Denton, alias Bruce Cameron, was held for investigation.

Soon after noon the first detective brought in a tray of food and lunched with the prisoner. Again the latter was left alone, this time until four o'clock, when he was taken in for a second interview with the chief.

Shortly afterward Dr. Vidnor came to police headquarters and was permitted to see the prisoner in private.

Meantime a report by the chief had been sent to the president of the State National Bank. Within a few moments after it was delivered Rance strolled into the bank and was promptly requested to enter the sanctum of finance.

Without comment the cold-eyed banker handed him the report of the police chief. Rance skimmed through the typewritten paragraphs with avid haste.

"Ah—claims to be graduate of Harvard—postgraduate course in psychology and sociology—old Cameron family—Boston—intimately acquainted with Prince, Sidis, and other leading psychologists. . . . Indeed! Very clever and probably more than half true! Not the first black sheep in those good old New England families, nor the only brilliant college graduate to go wrong! I told you we were matched against a criminal of the first water—a crook of extraordinary intellect. But the main object of the arrest—Ah, yes, the key was found on him and sent as requested."

The banker shook a key out of the envelope from which he had taken the report. Rance snatched it up for a close scrutiny.

At the very first glance his face darkened with a disappointment too extreme to be hidden. But he rallied in an instant and faced the banker with a smile of grim determination.

"All marks of identification have been filed off," he observed. "We've discovered that he must have taken his box under a false name. But we'll get him yet. I will make the rounds of the safe deposit companies with a note from you asking, as a personal favor, that I be given confidential information with regard to depositors. It will take time, but I feel sure that I can locate the box."

"The man is in jail and we have the key. The stolen money is now safe," remarked the banker. He added in a hard, relentless tone: "Delay will do no harm. First recover the money. We will then send the thief to the gallows."

Rance looked down at the key in his hand and scrutinized its filed handle until the banker had written the desired note to the officials of the safe deposit companies. Armed with both note and key, the young man briskly went out to begin his round of calls on the companies.

After banking hours he took an uptown car and hastened from it to the Denton residence with eager anticipation glowing in his violet eyes.

When he rang, old Tillie, with cautious timidity, opened the door on the chain. Through the four-inch space she informed him that her mistress had gone out for a motor ride.

He started to say that he would come in and wait, but the housemaid was rather deaf. She took his card and promptly closed the door.

He reached out to push the bell button, paused, and ended by sauntering away to take the car to his elegant bachelor quarters.

An hour later Dr. Vidnor came whirring uptown from his visit to police headquarters. Grace met him at the door and accompanied him upstairs. Tillie, at work in the library, heard rather loud and excited talking above her in the physician's bedroom.

Some time later Dr. Vidnor descended and went out to his coupé. He drove directly back to the city hall and was received by the chief of police.

Cameron was brought in and questioned for the third time.

The outcome of the conference was that the chief agreed to release the prisoner for a few hours, on the personal recognizance of the physician.

The pair drove up-town, and Dr. Vidnor crowded the speed limit so close that he was halted and warned by a traffic officer. When they reached the Denton residence the physician hastened through the kitchen to sterilize a hypodermic needle and fill it with a stimulating drug.

Cameron flung aside his hat and coat and bounded up the stairway. At the same moment Grace came darting down from the upper hall.

As she made the turn at the landing she perceived Cameron and stopped short, the color ebbing from her face.

She half turned as if to flee. But the young man was already close enough to reach out and seize her if he wished. He paused only one step below her.

"Where is—I thought I heard Uncle Len come in," she faltered.

"Yes, he is downstairs," replied Cameron. He smiled at the shrinking girl with rather an odd look, and asked: "Do you wish to see him?"

"Why, I—yes, of course—at once," she replied.

"But, first, I know you will be kind enough to permit me a word or two," said Cameron, without moving aside for her to pass. "I gather that our society friend, Mr. Rance, has been gossiping to you about me. What was no less naughty of him, he carried his tales to the chief of police. As a result, I have been detained at the city hall all day."

Grace's paleness increased to deadly pallor.

"Oh! Then—what Alvin—thought really is—true!"

"That does not necessarily follow," replied Cameron with quiet assurance. "You see the police have taken Mr. Rance's gossip for what it is worth. I have been released."

"Yet if you—"

"Are you sorry?" he broke in.

"No, oh, no! It—it is pleasing to know that Alvin was mistaken. Now, I wish—if you'll kindly allow me to pass—I wish to see Uncle Len."

"Certainly," agreed the blockader. "I'll be glad to have you ask him about me. But first—" His gray eyes suddenly met the beautiful, frightened eyes of the girl, bright with ardent boldness. "You've doubted me! You shall make recompense! You can pass, but you must pay toll!"

The audacity of the demand flooded the girl's white face with a wave of angry crimson. Her eyes flashed scornfully.

"How dare you?" she cried. "You are insufferable!"

"How can I help myself?" he rejoined. "Don't blame me! Your loveliness is irresistible!"

Before she could shrink back out of reach his arms were about her. His lips pressed upon her averted cheek. She was swung around in his powerful grasp and gently lowered to the step below him. She stared up into his audacious, ardent eyes, too astonished and breathless to cry out.

He sprang about and bounded to the head of the stairs. She started down almost as swiftly. But near the foot her flight became less rapid. Crossing the hall her pace slackened still more. Just inside the parlor she came to a halt and stood panting, her hands clasped on her bosom.

When, a few moments later, her uncle hastened back from the kitchen, she beckoned him into the parlor and inquired, with apparent tranquillity:

"So you succeeded in bringing Mr. Cameron home with you?"

"Yes. The chief received another telegram that tended to confirm Bruce's assertions and to discredit Rance's wild charges. Can't stop to give you particulars now, my dear. I'm supposed to return Bruce to police headquarters as soon as possible. Remember, I have your promise to say

nothing about Tom being in the house. If that flighty dude calls, tell him I have returned to the city hall. Suggest that he call up police headquarters if he wishes to know why.

"By the way, Tillie is putting in the roast. Wish you'd look to it yourself. You know I detest overdone meat— And her way of preparing the vegetables. Good-by. I'll be back in an hour or so."

He labored up the stairs in panting, wheezing haste. His niece went out to direct Tillie, as he had requested.

When, presently, she returned, his hat and overcoat and Cameron's hat and overcoat were gone.

CHAPTER XX.

The Hold-Up.

DUSK found Rance mounting the Denton steps. He was correctly attired in a tuxedo for an after-six-o'clock call, but his look was rather less composed than seemed compatible with the strict requirements of good form.

As Tillie showed him into the parlor her mistress rose from the table in the library and came forward with a smile and a look that displayed her sincere pleasure.

"I've been expecting you, Alvin," she said. "You'll be able to dine with us, I hope."

"Wish I could tell," he replied. "It's most kind of you. Fact is, though, I really can't until— Is your uncle home?"

"No; he said he was to take Cameron back at once. They went some time ago."

Rance stared incredulously.

"You don't mean to say that Cameron permitted himself to be taken back to jail?"

"Perhaps he—Oh dear! What if he has struggled with Uncle Len on the way?" exclaimed Grace. "He is so strong!" A vivid blush flamed in her white cheeks. "Can't we telephone? Yes, Uncle Len said to phone to the police."

In a moment he was at the telephone.

Promptly a terse answer came back:

"Sure. Been here. Just left. He returned to custody Thomas Denton, alias Cameron, held for investigation."

"Good!" exclaimed Rance. "But Cameron has had access to his baggage and room here. There should be another search."

"He likes baths. We'll give him a second one at once," chuckled the detective.

Rance rang off and came back to Grace, puzzled yet plainly satisfied.

"It's all right," he said. "Must be he expects to brazen it out by playing martyr. He is welcome to try. It permits me to accept your invitation, dearest lady!"

They chatted pleasantly for a few minutes, then Tillie called upon her mistress for instructions regarding the dinner.

Rance took advantage of the girl's brief absence to call up police headquarters. He learned that the clothes and suitcase of Denton, alias Cameron, had been searched without the discovery of another key or of any incriminating evidence whatever.

He returned to the parlor with his jaw set and a vertical crease showing between his delicately arched eyebrows.

But he was chatting with Grace as lightly as before when, a few minutes later, Dr. Vidnor returned from the city hall. He rounded out an anecdote and turned to cast a bantering shot at the big physician:

"So you've come home alone this time, doctor? I hear you brought company last trip, but changed your mind and returned the party."

"Had to come for a suitcase of clothes, for one thing," rejoined the physician. "How about dinner, Grace?"

Soon after they withdrew from the table there was a telephone call for Dr.

Vidnor. Rance looked at the clock and sprang to his feet.

"My dear Miss Grace, if you will pardon me!" he exclaimed. "An appointment, you know—late already! Business—important business! Simply must tear myself away."

"Certainly, if you *must* go, Alvin," she accepted the excuse.

He was already across the room. He bowed and made a dash for his overcoat and hat. The outer door closed behind him as Dr. Vidnor reached the telephone.

The call for the physician was from one of his most exacting patients. Somewhat reluctantly he put on his fur coat and went out in his coupé. When he applied the self-starter there was no response from the engine. He climped out and laboriously turned the crank. It likewise failed to start the engine.

His knowledge of motors was limited. An inspection in the light of a small electric torch failed to locate the cause of the trouble. Yet he must reach his patient without delay.

Hastening up to the house, he asked Grace to telephone for a man from the garage to repair the coupé. He then set off for the car line. The sky was overcast and the night dark. But there was no snow on the ground, and he knew the sidewalks.

He walked rapidly.

A few seconds after he had started the vaguely outlined figure of a man appeared on the low roof of the kitchen porch and slipped noiselessly down the rainspout.

As Dr. Vidnor came swinging his corpulent figure up the sidewalk a dark form stole out to the alley entrance and crouched behind the corner of the brick wall.

The physician passed the wall. The lurking form leaped out at him from behind, flung a black garment over his head, and with a sudden tug, hauled him sidewise, reeling and staggering, into the dark shadow of the barn.

The cloth about his face smothered his startled outcry until the menacing pressure of a pistol muzzle against the back of his thick neck forced him to sudden silence.

From back in the alley a second form stole swiftly out toward the holdup and his victim, but stopped behind a telephone pole a dozen feet away.

The holdup mumbled a fierce threat through the folds of cloth that bound the physician's head:

"No blattin', yuh big fathead, or me popper scrambles yer brains! Savvy? Wiggle a finger an' I blow yuh t' hell. Stick up yer flippers—quick!"

Obediently Dr. Vidnor thrust his fat arms up above his muffled head. The cold muzzle of the pistol on the back of his neck was an even stronger argument than the robber's words.

The suffocating tightness of the garment about his head relaxed as the holdup let go. The hand that had gripped it reached around under the big fur overcoat and began to investigate the physicians pockets with the deft skill and swiftness of a pickpocket or a detective.

The search was completed while the victim still wheezed and panted from the effects of his choking.

"Now, damn yuh!" swore the robber, even more fiercely than before, "stan' here an' don't move ner cheep till ye're told, if yuh don't want a pill t'rough yer blubber!"

A moment later the loosened wrap was whisked off the physician's head and the pistol muzzle withdrawn from the back of his neck. The dark form up the alley sank down in a shapeless huddle in the blackest shadow between the telephone pole, the rear wall of the barn and an alley box.

The holdup came tiptoeing backward, watching the victim so closely through the narrow eyeholes of his queer baglike hood-mask that he did not notice the heap behind the pole.

As he turned to dart up the alley an expanse of white showed on his chest, but was at once covered with the gar-

ment that had been used to capture the physician.

Within fifty yards he vanished in the darkness.

The watcher behind the pole half rose and glided after him. Dr. Vidnor continued to stand motionless for several seconds. Then, with desperate suddenness, he lunged sidewise and swung his corpulent body around the corner of the barn.

No bullet came whirring after him; no shot broke the peaceful stillness of the night.

He hastened up the brightly illuminated street intersection, feeling in his pockets. They had been emptied of everything. Even his prescription pad was gone.

He hurried to the patrol box where he had secured the aid of two policemen on the night of the burglary. This time the patrolmen were elsewhere on their beats.

He telephoned to police headquarters from the nearest house, borrowed a dime, and caught the first street car bound in the direction of his patient's residence.

CHAPTER XXI.

After Midnight.

WHEN the physician returned home he was compelled to ring for admission. The robber had taken his keys, with everything else.

He found waiting for him one of the detectives who, in response to his telephoned report, had been sent out to look for the holdup. No clue or trace of the man had been found, and no suspicious character had been seen in the neighborhood. The detective departed and Dr. Vidnor joined Grace in the library.

"Great to-do," he grumbled. "It's getting so a man can't step out of doors without danger of death or robbery. There's my coupé, too!"

"But it's all right now, you growly old bear! The man came and found only a wire crossed or loose or something—nothing at all serious. He fixed it and drove to the garage."

"Only a wire? Enough, though, to set me afoot and give that rascally holdup the chance at me. It shook me up. Must turn in and sleep it off."

He escorted her to her door with fond pride, and waited until he heard the key turn and the bolt slide into the socket. These were precautions that she had taken ever since the burglary.

He found the door of his own room bolted. When he rapped, there was an answering rap within. He spoke his name. The door opened. He slipped inside. The bolt shot back into its socket.

For a few minutes his deep voice and another voice not so deep murmured and muttered. They died away in silence, and the house sank into the hush of slumber.

One after another, the old French clock on the parlor mantel struck off the hours on its mellow chime. The count of twelve rang clear through the cooled air of the house.

As if in response, the knob of the front door rattled faintly. A key rasped still more faintly in the keyhole. The door began to swing inward.

But at four inches it stopped, held fast by the chain.

A gloved hand reached in and felt at the chain. After a pause it was withdrawn and the door was pulled shut as softly as it had been opened. The night latch snapped.

A minute later a dark form swung up over the rain gutter of the back porch. The prowler kept to the top of the low-pitched roof where it covered the bedroom of the housemaid. He stopped under the rear window of Denton's room and tested it with a stealthy hand.

The lower sash was unfastened. It slid up as if greased. The prowler stepped in over the sill.

After listening a full minute, he flashed a tiny electric torch on the bed.

It was empty and had not been occupied since old Tillie had last made it up with neat and painstaking care.

The door of the room was closed. The burglar slid the bolt, pushed a wad of paper into the keyhole, and laid a rug along the crevice at the bottom. He then closed the window, drew down all the window blinds, and turned on the electric lights.

The bright illumination showed him to be an athletic young man, close buttoned in a dark overcoat and with a head enveloped in a black bag. This peculiar mask had a small cross slit for air and a pair of eyeholes strangely near together.

With unhesitating certainty of purpose, the burglar darted to the closet. He came out with a vividly colored hat and garish Mackinaw blanket overcoat that Denton had bought and worn just once before the murder and robbery at the bank.

Flinging these down before the window at which he had entered, the burglar began a swift yet systematic and extremely careful search of the room. At the end of an hour the room was in even greater disorder than after the first burglary.

The baffled searcher rose from beside the upset dresser, looked at a cheap old watch and, with an angry curse, darted to turn off the lights. Out of the sudden blackness came the sound of a bump, a second curse, and the soft rumbling of an opening and closing window.

A dark form crept down the roof of the rear porch to the gutter, swung over and disappeared.

Whether engaged in another calling or intent upon winning the one girl in all the world, a reporter must turn in his daily or nightly grist of news if he expects to hold his position.

There were two pre-Lenten balls that night, and Rance covered both, turned in his copy just in time, and hastened out to catch the uptown car for his apartments.

The furnishings of his rooms displayed a simple elegance in color, design and material that bore out his claim to innate good taste. Nothing was cheap or inharmonious or ostentatiously costly. He looked about with a satisfied glance, smiled, sighed, and went in to prepare for bed.

Before retiring he mixed himself a small whisky and soda from the bottles that stood ready on a tray in his smoking room. In the bottom of the one upturned glass there was a thin gelatinous film, but it was so transparent and Rance was so weary that he did not notice it.

He sipped the drink and returned to his bedroom.

His eyelids drooped and his fingers fumbled clumsily as he turned off all the lights except the tiny rose-colored night bulb. The whisky, instead of stimulating, seemed to have at once stupified him. He was already so drowsy that he hardly managed to get into bed. His head sunk on the pillow.

After ten or fifteen minutes there was a soft sound in the room. A masked man, young and vigorous, slid from under the bed and rose on his knees to peer at Rance. The reporter-detective lay like one who had been drugged.

The masked man drew an automatic pistol out of the inside pocket of the sleeper's dress waistcoat and dexterously emptied the cartridges from its magazine. He then reloaded it with cartridges from his own pocket.

Rance had laid out a suit to wear in the morning. The masked man thrust the reloaded pistol into the inner waistcoat pocket of this suit, and glided from the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Shammer.

IN the morning Grace and old Tillie and the physician surveyed the disordered scene of the midnight search

with startled faces. Grace made a quick inventory of the jumbled articles.

"There doesn't seem to be anything injured except the pillows and mattress," she said, "and I can't see that a single thing has been taken unless—oh, that awful hat and overcoat of Tom's! Where — no—I do believe they're gone!"

"Good riddance!" commented her uncle. "They were just the style to catch the fancy of a degenerate criminal. Tom must have been quite off his head that day when he bought them."

"Shall you telephone for the detectives?" asked Grace.

Her uncle considered and shook his head.

"There's no hurry. They're already looking for the man who held me up and will arrest every suspicious character they can find. I shall notify them when I go down to my office."

The vicinity of the Denton home was favored with a mail delivery rather early for a residence district. The postman rang while Grace and her uncle still lingered at table. Tillie brought in the mail and with it a message that the postman wished to speak to Dr. Vidnor.

When the physician went to the door the mail-carrier held out a prescription pad.

"That yours?" he inquired.

"H-m—yes, to be sure—my name on it. Where did you find it?"

"Noticed in the morning paper that you were stuck up last night" (the man disregarded the question). "What else did you lose?"

Dr. Vidnor named the articles as near as he could recall them. One after the other the postman drew them out of his pocket—watch, card-case, penknife, handkerchief, keys, and purse. But the purse was empty.

"The collector found them in the mail-box back yonder," explained the man. "It's not an unusual way for dips and footpads to ditch the stuff that isn't worth the risk of keeping. Your card-case and pad told us who these things belonged to. Good morning."

The physician withdrew to the parlor and examined his key-ring.

"Um-ah!" he observed. "Not so bad—not so bad. All back except the key Bruce gave me and the latch-key. And here's the coupé—in very good time. Reliable garage, that."

He mounted the stairs, remained a few minutes, and came down with a breakfast-tray. In the dining-room Grace took it from him and looked at the dishes with pleased interest.

"Every one empty!" she exclaimed. "He *is* improving wonderfully!"

"Appetite could not be better," replied her uncle. He laid his hand on her shoulder and looked down into her trustful eyes with a gaze as grave as it was shrewd.

"My dear, there is one thing more I must ask of you. Then I hope this matter will be cleared up."

"Yes, Uncle Len. Whatever I can do."

"It is only that I wish you to leave off the chain of the door and keep Tillie down-stairs this morning. If you go up yourself, do not enter my room or Tom's."

Grace's eyes widened wonderingly, but she gave a willing assent: "I shall do just as you say, dear."

"That's a good girl!"

He gave her a pat and a kiss as if she were a child and at once left to drive down-town.

Soon after he reached the lower part of the city, a short time before banking-hours, the president of the Security Trust and Safe Deposit Company received a call on the telephone:

"Hello! Is this Mr. Simmons? Mr. Simmons, with regard to that matter of the State National. Yes, I am acting in behalf of the bank. About five weeks ago you rented a box to a party giving the name of Flaubert Loti. He probably will come to visit his box this morning. Show no dis-

trust of him, but immediately notify police headquarters and make some excuse to delay him. He is the murderer of Teller Paulding, of the State National."

With this the informant rang off. The president had a clerk verify the fact that the name of Flaubert Loti was on the books. He then called up the chief of police and repeated the message that he had received.

The chief heard him, but without comment, and replied with curt brevity: "All right. Will be ready."

A few minutes after this Rance drove rather slowly down the avenue to the old Denton place. He swung out of his coupé and walked up to the porch with smooth swiftness. Instead of ringing the bell he stepped up close to the knob.

There was a moment's pause; then the door opened. He slipped silently into the vestibule, closed the outer door, and noiselessly opened the inner one. He could hear no sound in the front part of the house.

Leaving the inner door open, he glided into the hall and up the stairs.

The doors of all the upper rooms were closed. Rance went straight to Denton's room, listened a moment, shifted an automatic pistol from his waistcoat-pocket to the side pocket of his thin overcoat, and tried the door. It opened at the turn of the knob. He stepped inside, his hand gripped on the hilt of the concealed pistol.

Cameron stood before the center of the largest space of blank wall in the room. He was carefully slicing under the overlapping edge of the thick wall-paper with his penknife.

The light tread of Rance's shoes on the waxed floor caused him to glance around. He whirled about and stood frowning, with his back against the wall.

Rance advanced upon him. His eyes glinted with the cold, hard light of blue steel.

"The game is up, Denton alias Cameron!" he said in a voice as grimly exultant as it was low. "You're cornered at last."

He exposed a detective's star on his waistcoat, and, plucking a document from his breast-pocket with his left hand, held it out menacingly.

"Here's a warrant for your arrest. You are wanted for two murders, three burglaries, and a hold-up."

"Rot!" jeered Cameron. "Think you can railroad me, do you?"

"You haven't a ghost of a show to escape the noose—unless you hand over that key," rejoined Rance.

With a swift twist of arms and body Cameron gouged the key from under the wall-paper with his knife.

"Come and take it!" he challenged, and he burst into a taunting laugh.

Rance jerked out his pistol. As if infuriated by the sight of the weapon, Cameron started to rush across the room at him, the key in his left hand, the penknife clutched threateningly in his right.

Rance took quick aim with his pistol. Cameron ducked his head forward. The pistol flared and roared in the closed room with the loudness of a rifle.

Cameron pitched sideways on the heap of bedclothes and lay motionless, face down.

Rance swiftly stepped toward the fallen man, his lean jaw outthrust, his pistol raised for a second shot. From the hall came the sound of a violently opened door and a stifled scream. He glanced around and back again.

A metallic object on the bare floor before him caught his eye. It was the key.

He snatched it up and shot a piercing glance at the prostrate figure on the heap of bedding. It lay as it had fallen, limp and motionless.

From the door came a gasping cry of horror and anguish: "Alvin! Oh! O-oh-h! Brother! You've killed —brother!"

He wheeled about and ran to her, thrusting the pistol into his pocket.

"No!" he denied; "not Tom—not Tom! It's Cameron—understand?—Cameron! He broke jail! I've tracked him here—just in time. It was to save Tom—I had to shoot—he attacked me! If he'd escaped, Tom'd have no chance. Can't stop to explain now—not a second to lose. Tom's in jail! They will—"

"In jail? Tom in jail?" cried the frantic girl.

"Yes—Cameron's devilish cleverness! He has fixed it to railroad Tom—send him to the pen—hang him! Must hurry—save him!"

"You can?"

"If not delayed. Every second counts! Listen! You wish to help?"

"Of course! Of course!" panted Grace.

"Then go to Forty-Ninth and Theron Streets—West End street-car. You'll find a big tourist auto—gray racer. Get in and wait. I'll come soon—half-hour—three-quarters."

He thrust the girl out of the doorway and sprang past her. As he leaped down the stairs he called back with desperate emphasis:

"Be sure! For Tom—to save Tom! Don't fail!"

For a moment the girl stood too dazed to move. Then the vision of that prone figure in her brother's room flashed back into her consciousness with frightful vividness.

"Alvin! He—Bruce—dead!" she gasped.

Rance had pushed her past the edge of the doorway. She took a tottering step and peeped in with fearful, dilated eyes.

The fallen man had moved. He had raised himself on his elbow, his muscles tense, his head bent to listen. The house shook with the thud of the heavy front door crashing shut.

Cameron bounded to his feet and dashed forward. He leaped out past the astounded girl, twisted, and rushed down the stairs.

A wave of scarlet swept down Grace's cheek as he came toward her. But when he shot past without pausing or speaking the wave receded as swiftly as it had come. It left her deathly white. She swayed and clutched vaguely at the wall.

"Running away!" she moaned. "He's running! Then — it's—true! Tom—brother—bro—"

The words died away in an inarticulate murmur. Her limbs sank under her. She fell in a swoon.

When consciousness returned to her she was first aware of a voice, seemingly very faint and far away. Gradually it became louder and nearer.

Then she recognized it as the voice of Cameron. It came from the lower hall, clear, authoritative, and a trifle impatient:

"Forty-Ninth and Theron Streets, yes! But Mr. Rance wishes Miss Denton to meet him there for a drive. So if you'll have the chauffeur call here for her on the way. Miss Denton is waiting. Very good. Thank you."

A spot of vivid color appeared in each of the girl's cheeks. She grasped at the door-jamb and tottered to her feet, to stand dizzy and uncertain, her head in a whirl of wild thoughts.

He had not run away—he was telephoning. He had telephoned for Alvin's car to call for her. What could it mean? Was it possible that he was innocent—that, like Alvin, he really was working to save Tom?

Yet, why had he shammed death in that cowardly manner? Or was it that the bullet had stunned him? Perhaps he was hurt—seriously wounded! She uttered an involuntary cry.

Cameron was already near the top of the stairs. He took the remaining steps in three bounds. She sought to shrink back and avoid his impetuous rush, but he disregarded the outflung hands with which she attempted to repulse him.

With masterful boldness he swept her up in his arms and kissed her.

"Darling!" he cried. "You love me! I see it in your eyes!"

"You—you are hurt!" she faltered.

He chuckled derisively. "The dupe! Thought he had killed me. Not even a powder burn."

"Not hurt!" panted Grace. The sudden revulsion of feeling gave her strength to thrust herself free from him. "You shammed! You coward—you contemptible coward!"

He stared at the angrily indignant girl, surprised and disconcerted.

"So you take it that way!" he muttered. "Wait and see. You do not understand."

"I do understand!" she retorted. "No brave man, no honest man, would sham! Stand aside. I'm not afraid of you. I'm going down to telephone the police."

It was her turn to be disconcerted. He smiled as if yielding to the whim of a wilful child, and drew aside for her to pass.

Instead of going down-stairs, she turned aside into her room. He stepped into her brother's room and proceeded to glean through the scattered mess on the floor. The articles he picked out included a new hat and tie and an unlabeled pint flask.

As he came into the hall with his collection and started for the bath-room, Grace darted from her room to the head of the stairs. She was dressed for a winter motor-ride, and looked charming in her modest furs. Cameron did not stop to watch her flight.

He ran to the bath-room to dampen his hair with liquid from the pint flask and rinse it in warm water. Almost immediately the dyed locks changed from black to a light brown tinged with gold.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Trapped.

GRACE did not telephone. Cameron's smile had changed her determination. She stood hesitating in the open front doorway when he came down-stairs as correctly and tastefully costumed as Rance at his best.

He smiled as he caught her startled glance at his hair.

"The real color—no sham this time," he bantered.

She frowned at his flippancy.

He asked in a casual tone: "Have you told Tillie where you are going?"

"No. I sent her on an errand half an hour ago. Uncle Len asked me to keep her away from up-stairs. He did not know that you had escaped from jail."

Cameron ignored the thrust. "Have you any objection to my going with you to meet Mr. Rance?"

The girl's ruddy, brown eyes flashed with disdain. "Aren't you afraid? He may still have his pistol."

"I'm willing to die again if necessary," replied Cameron, with mock gravity. "Ah! here comes our gray racer."

At the words Grace stepped out onto the porch. He caught up his overcoat, closed the door, and followed her to the curb.

The chauffeur brought Rance's big touring-car to a throbbing stop in front of them. Cameron jerked open the door of the tonneau and handed Grace up into the seat. He sprang in beside her, closed the door, and leaned forward over the back of the front seat.

"To the Security Trust and Safe Deposit Company as fast as you can make it," he ordered.

"No, no!" contradicted Grace. "Forty-Ninth and Theron Streets. Mr. Rance said to meet him there."

"Sure, miss," responded the chauffeur. He squinted hard at Cameron. "This is Mr. Rance's car, sir. I've got to obey his orders."

With a quick jerk Cameron drew open his overcoat and coat and exposed a detective's star.

"You obey *my* orders!" he rejoined. "You know the penalty for resisting an officer. Security Trust Company—and drive the limit!"

The chauffeur scowled, but he knew the law.

The car shot forward under his ex-

pert control. At the first corner it turned down-town instead of keeping straight ahead toward the West End.

Cameron had seated himself beside Grace. She moved over as far away from him as possible. She sat very quiet, but her eyes blazed with scorn.

"Coward!" she scoffed. "Running away! Afraid!"

"Be careful," he warned. "You may have to pay for that!"

The girl disdained to reply other than with a scornful glance. But as the chauffeur whirled them down toward the business section of the city her bitter disappointment and angry contempt for his deceitfulness gave way to the realization that she was being taken in the opposite direction from the place where she was to meet Rance.

He had said that it was to save her brother. The remembrance filled her with a dread that crushed her high spirit. She leaned toward Cameron, her lovely eyes dark with terrified entreaty.

"Please — please!" she begged. "Let him take me where I was to go! It is to save Tom! Oh, please!"

Cameron avoided her imploring gaze and set his square jaw.

"We are first going to the trust company," he replied with grim determination. "You will meet Mr. Rance quite soon enough."

Grace shrank back, hot with shame at the failure of her appeal to his generosity. He sat motionless, staring ahead with the look of one who is calculating the effects of a move in chess.

Before many minutes the sullen but extremely efficient chauffeur brought them to the entrance of the Security Trust. It was the third of the four safe-deposit companies visited by Rance on the day that Cameron had shadowed him from the Athletic Club. A coupé with lowered side blinds stood a few feet beyond the entrance.

Another coupé drew up to the curb just before the arrival of the big gray touring-car. From this second coupé there stepped out a large, corpulent man and a small, quiet man with sharp eyes. They helped out a third man who was closely bundled up.

"Uncle Len—Tom!" gasped Grace as the three men walked in a close group across from the curb to the door of the trust company.

They were entering when Cameron sprang out of the car with a stern order for the chauffeur to await his return. Grace sprang down after him. He shot a sidelong, frowning glance at her over his shoulder.

"Better stay here," he advised. "Go to your uncle's coupé."

"I'm going in to tell them about you!" she rejoined.

He dashed across to the entrance. She followed so quickly that she slipped past the door before it could swing shut.

Her uncle and brother and the sharp-eyed man had paused to speak with two of the trust company employees. As they started to enter at the gate Cameron came darting to join them, with Grace only a step or two behind.

Denton and Dr. Vidnor went ahead without looking back. The other man, who was none other than the detective that had charge of the State National Bank case, perceived the newcomers and nodded to Cameron. The latter showed his star as he approached, and the gatekeeper admitted both Grace and him as members of the party.

Before the girl could push past the others to reach her uncle and brother the party came to a clerk who had entered with a customer to open the company's lock on one of the doubly locked boxes. He had then withdrawn as usual to await the depositor's pleasure.

His face was flushed and he looked vastly relieved at sight of the party.

They advanced quickly around the turn of the passage just beyond the clerk—and came to an abrupt halt. A few feet before them a man in a vividly colored hat and a garish Mackinaw blanket overcoat was downbent over

an open safe-deposit box, hurriedly transferring flat packets from it to the inner pockets of his coat.

He had been so feverishly engrossed in what he was doing that he had failed to heed the soft footsteps on the rubber matting. But the sudden hush drew his attention.

He glanced about, saw the party, and sprang up with the lithe swiftness of a startled leopard.

His black Vandyke and sallow cheeks seemed oddly familiar to Grace and Dr. Vidnor, though his eyes were hidden behind large, blue goggles and the brim of the vividly colored hat covered his forehead.

They had no time to puzzle over the impression. Denton was jerking away the wraps that muffled his face. He took a step forward.

The man at the box reeled back, his hands clutching at his throat.

"*You!*" he gasped as if choking. "*You*—dead! *Tricked again! May you*—" The sentence ended in an atrocious blasphemy.

Instead of flinching before the frightful curse Denton flung out his fist and shrilled in fierce exultance:

"That voice! I remember—I remember! *Murderer!* I know you now —*murderer! murderer!*"

Yelling a curse even more furious and blasphemous than the first, the accused man whipped out an automatic pistol. He took swift aim at Denton and fired. At the same instant the sharp-eyed detective and the trust company detective and Cameron all sprang forward, thrusting aside Dr. Vidnor.

The enraged man sought to check their advance with his pistol, shooting as fast as he could pull the trigger.

The building rang with the rapid succession of reports. Yet all the shots seemed to go wild. None of the three assailants staggered or fell before the fusillade. Nor did they attempt to shoot back.

They kept on, quickly and steadily, their heads lowered to avoid powder burns.

Astounded and dismayed at his failure to kill or wound them, the man sprang back, his pistol still menacing them, but no longer spouting flame.

"Seize him!" shouted Cameron. "He'll shoot himself!"

All three flung themselves at the desperate man. His back was to the wall at the end of the passage. In another moment the three would be upon him. He turned the pistol against his own breast.

There was a muffled report. He staggered but did not fall.

Quick as a flash, he thrust the muzzle into his mouth and again pulled the trigger. His head jerked back with convulsive force against the ornamental steel rim that separated the lower tiers of deposit boxes from those above.

He sagged heavily and crumpled forward into the outstretched hands of Cameron and the trust company detective.

The fall knocked off his hat and the blue goggles. As the detective turned him over to loosen his collar, the black Vandyke beard and mustache pulled loose from the sallow face.

"*Rance!*" cried the shap-eyed detective.

The other detective stared close into the glazing eyes.

"Croaked!" he stated.

"What?" exclaimed Cameron. "It can't be! They were blanks—every cartridge. I called out what I did in order to make him prove his guilt. But they were all blanks—all! He's only stunned—he can't be dead! Dr. Vidnor, come here."

At the first shot the physician had grasped Denton and interposed his bulky form before Grace. In response to Cameron's call he left the terrified girl clinging to her brother and hastened to examine the insensate body at the end of the passage.

"Concussion," he observed. "Mouth torn and burned, but no bullet wound. Contusion—rear of head, at base of brain."

"The shot drove his head back against the rim of that steel ledge," explained Cameron.

"Hah!" ejaculated the physician. "Double concussion—the explosion inside his mouth, or the blow on the skull—either one may have killed, or both together."

"Is he dead?" queried Cameron.

"Quite."

"I thought I had blocked him from any more killing," mused Cameron. "Perhaps, though, it is just as well. At least, if hitting the back of his head is what killed him, he has died from the same blow as the one with which he murdered Paulding."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Unlocked.

BY this time half a dozen police officers and plain clothes men were guarding the entrance of the building and scattering the crowd that had gathered at sound of the shots, while the startled employees of the company were obeying a peremptory order to return to their desks.

The highest officials alone came down the passage to the scene of the tragedy. They reached the little group at the end as Dr. Vidnor straightened out Rance's body. The bright colored Mackinaw overcoat fell open and revealed a packet of yellow treasury notes protruding from the breast pocket of the coat.

The two detectives pounced upon them.

"Thousands!" cried the trust company man.

The other flashed an approving glance up at Cameron.

"This cinches it! You sure had the right dope, Mr. Cameron. He took a box under this disguise. No one would have known him. Notice the yellow stain on his cheeks above where the whiskers were."

"There should be two hundred and thirty-one thousand in these thousand-dollar bills, unless some are left in the box," stated Cameron. "Also you probably will find four or five thousand in smaller bills—all that are left from his second haul. He drew them out of bank preparatory to his flight."

While he spoke, eager hands were plucking bills and treasury notes from the pockets of the suicide. The trust company officials took charge of the count.

Tallied by packets, there were found to be the full amount of thousand-dollar notes named by Cameron, and between five and six thousand in smaller bills. But to be certain, the examiners moved back along the passage to the open safe deposit box. It was empty.

Denton, tense with excitement, yet as clear-headed and sane as any teller in the country, identified as his own the figures on several of the treasury note packets.

Grace was leaning upon her uncle's shoulder, pale and tremulous in the reaction from the shock of the pistol firing and the discovery of the murderer's identity. When Rance killed himself both she and her brother had heard the sharp exclamations that disclosed his name and the fact that he was dead.

At sight of the girl's white face the president of the trust company suggested that all should come to his private office, where the young lady could rest while they were waiting for the coroner and the president and cashier of the State National Bank.

When Cameron promptly stepped forward to support her, Grace blushed and looked down, but she did not attempt to repulse him. She walked around into the office between the young man and her uncle. All followed except the trust company detective, who remained to guard the body of the suicide.

As soon as the president had seen the money deposited on his desk he looked curiously from Denton to Cameron.

Seated together, their points of difference were easy to perceive, especially now that Cameron's hair had been restored to its natural gold-tinged brown. He was broader across the shoulder, slightly taller, and much more robust. Denton had the look of an older brother or cousin. His face was thin, his nose smaller, his newly shaven chin less square, and there was no trace of blue in his dark gray eyes.

"I understand that—er—you are Mr. Thomas Denton, a teller of the State National," observed the trust company's head.

"Yes, this is he—my cousin," replied Cameron.

"Cousin?" exclaimed Grace. "You—our cousin?"

Cameron looked at her banteringly and answered with an outflashing of his audacity: "Tom is my cousin on his mother's side, Miss Denton. But the only relationship between you and myself is now—and will be—by marriage."

"Oh, yes, of course. I—I see," murmured the girl, seeking to cover her confusion. "My father's first wife was related to your family."

Cameron turned to Denton to divert attention from the girl's blushes.

"Your mother, Tom, and my mother were sisters. Owing to your mother's death before I was born and to a family quarrel with your father, I never knew that I had a cousin and step-cousin until Dr. Vidnor's curiosity over my resemblance to you led to explanations."

"That accounts for your looking alike," remarked the sharp-eyed detective. "But what I want to know is how you got the dope on Rance. He sure was the slickest ever—the top-liner of the top bunch! Remember, doc, you and me and him were the ones that found Paulding. I've got to own up he put the blinkers on me. Until just now when his whiskers pulled off and I saw his face, I never had one single solitary glimmer of a suspicion that he was the man we wanted. Even when we got next to his sleuthing for the bank, he bunked the chief and me into thinking he was just a swell amychure dilleytanty, trying to pull off the smart reporter stunt."

"Most criminals of his ability keep within the law and are accepted as respectable pillars of society," remarked Cameron. He turned to Denton. "Tom, you knew his voice when he cursed you. What more do you now remember of that night at the bank?"

Denton put a thin hand to his forehead.

"It seems as if I do recall more—Yes, that's it—a tremor—the floor and desk shaking—a dull boom—yes! I see it now! Paulding drew his pistol and ran out through the board-room. I dropped the pen and went around by the other door and through the passage. Paulding lay on the floor. Over him stood a man with a green mask that had queer eyeholes near together. I ran at him. He cursed. We closed and fought. I knocked him down—no, he knocked me down. Then—let me see—what then?"

For several moments Denton sat pondering. At last he shook his head.

"That's all. I can't remember anything after that, until I found myself home."

"H'm," commented Dr. Vidnor. "This shock has restored your memory only up to the moment you were struck. Amnesia of what followed may be permanent."

"Looks like we've still got to guess over that key," remarked the detective.

"The loud hat and Mackinaw overcoat on Rance were taken by him in the burglary of Mr. Denton's room last night," stated Cameron. "They and the false whiskers and the sallow stain evidently were intended to make him resemble Mr. Denton as he appeared before he went East. On the day that Mr. Denton bought the hat and coat—a day or two before the tragedy at the bank—he was taken

sick. Suppose Rance drugged him, went into the bank disguised as he was just now, took the two hundred and thirty-one thousand from the vault, and deposited the money here in the same disguise?"

"But how did I get the box-key, and what made Rance blow the safe?" queried Denton.

Cameron's eyebrows drew together in a thoughtful frown.

"Well, the last you remember seems to be confused. You first said that you knocked Rance down, then that he knocked you down. May not both have occurred? It is easy to surmise that his purpose in blowing the safe was to make the stealing of the thousand-dollar notes seem to be a yegg job. Also he may have wished to make another haul of bills—smaller ones, which he could handle without suspicion. Now suppose, when he knocked you down, he thought both you and Paulding merely stunned. He was not nerved up to outright murder, else he would have struck again to make certain, just as he shot Policeman Ahern the second time, on the night he was surprised when searching your room for the key."

"That key!" grunted the detective. "It bobs up everywhere through this case."

"No wonder," said Cameron. "In trying to recover it Rance was playing for stakes only a little short of a quarter of a million dollars.

"To return to that night at the bank. Suppose, after felling the two tellers, he thought one or both might suspect his identity. How could he better prove an alibi than by manufacturing evidence that the vault combination had been used to open the door before the explosion? This of itself would be enough to clear him, for it would not be thought possible that he could have known the combination.

"After felling Mr. Denton and blowing the inside vault, is it not probable that he wedged the withdrawn bolts of the vault door with a sliver of steel from the shattered lock, to give the impression that they had been jammed by the explosion? While he was doing this, suppose Mr. Denton revived and came at him, half crazed by the blow on his head. It is not unlikely that Mr. Denton cut his hand on the piece of the lock with which Rance had been pounding the steel splinter. Is it not probable that Mr. Denton, in his maniacal rage, knocked the robber senseless, searched his pockets, found the key, and ran off with the mad idea that he was saving the bank? Suppose Rance revived a few moments later, discovered the loss of the key, and rushed out in pursuit of Denton."

"Pretty good theory," agreed the detective. "But how about Mr. Denton's hat and overcoat and the phone message to Bayport?"

"Now we begin to replace surmise and conjecture with fact," answered Cameron. "I was making a night sociological study of your city. As I was strolling along in the vicinity of the State National a man came running around the corner. He was without hat or overcoat. His eyes were glaring and his face was ghastly white. His bleeding right fist was clutched fast on something. I thought I saw a metallic glint. Doubtless it was the key.

"He dashed past without appearing to see me. A fleeing criminal would either have attacked or swerved aside. I realized that he was delirious or insane, and turned to run after him. Then another man came darting around the corner. At sight of me he stopped short, slunk back around the corner, and fled. I gave chase, but lost him in an alley."

"Rance—after Tom!" exclaimed Dr. Vidnor.

"Yes. I had only a momentary and partial view of his face, but the brown hat and striped overcoat were easy to remember. In due time I saw

them again and remembered them. They were the ones left at the house from which the message was phoned to Bayport. Tom had fled from the bank without them. So Rance put them on, with the idea of misleading any one who might see him.

"The overcoat went on over his own thin dress overcoat and he carried his theater hat crushed flat under his arm. He pursued Tom to recover the key and perhaps to kill him. My chance encounter prevented.

"He fled in a panic; he sent the message to Bayport and left the hat and overcoat with a wild idea of diverting suspicion. He then hastened to the Charity Ball and from there to the *Record* office.

"He was terrified when Miss Denton phoned to him that something was wrong with Tom. But he went to the house, determined to know the worst. He found that Tom did not recognize him as the murderer or even suspect him. After that he quickly recovered his nerve."

"At the bank with doc and me he was pretty shaky, but I laid it to his being a society sissy," grunted the detective.

Cameron nodded. "That was his hardest test. Afterward all was plain sailing for him."

"Until you took a hand in the game," admiringly complimented the detective. "But just how did you get onto him?"

Grace clasped her hands.

"To think that he did those awful things! It does not seem possible! Alvin Rance—of all men! Oh, I'm sure he could not have meant to kill Tom."

"Probably not," agreed Cameron. "I believe he struck Tom and Paulding with the intention of only stunning them. With the policeman it was different. The unfortunate man recognized him. To escape capture Rance had to kill. He fired the second shot to make it a certainty. Dead men tell no tales."

"But how did you get onto him in the first place?" the detective repeated his question.

"You forget I had a glimpse of his face the night when he was pursuing Mr. Denton from the bank," replied Cameron. "At the time I thought little of the odd occurrence, and until I left the city I was so engrossed in writing up the results of my sociological study that I paid little heed to the newspaper accounts of the murder and bank robbery. But going east I met Dr. Vidnor and Mr. Denton and became interested in the case. When the doctor returned he wrote me a detailed account of the burglary.

"The significant facts were the evident intent to take the Mackinaw overcoat and bright-colored hat, the failure to pocket the gold cuff-links and watch-chain, and the cry of astonished recognition uttered by the policeman just before the shot that killed him. My deductions were that the coat and hat had a probable bearing on the purpose of the burglary; that the object of the search was not money or jewelry, else the cuff-links and chain would have been taken and the rest of the house searched; and, most important of all, that the murderer, though well known to the policeman, was not a rough-looking man or one with a criminal record, else the patrolman would not have been astonished."

"That's all plain as mud—now!" grumbled the detective.

"As soon as Mr. Denton's condition justified," continued Cameron, "I came back with him. He went first to a sanatorium. I came to his home after Dr. Vidnor had given out the impression that his nephew had developed a double personality—which was true for a few days—and that I was the double. This was to confuse and mystify the criminal.

"Rance was present when I reached Mr. Denton's home. I at once knew him to be the murderer, but I had no legal proof other than my uncertain

glimpse of his face the night of the bank robbery. On his part, I believe he felt certain from the first that I was not my cousin. He saw that the doctor and I were working together."

"Your first need was to get the key," remarked Dr. Vidnor. "I see that now."

"Yes. Rance had been unable to find it in his burglary of Tom's room. No doubt he conjectured that my cousin had taken it East and that I had brought it back. Under pretense of doing me a service, he got from me the baggage checks of my suit-case and Tom's trunk. The baggage was taken to his apartments and searched by him. The same night I found a key concealed in my cousin's room. To test Rance, I hid it in my watch-case and put a similar key in the inner pocket of my waistcoat. Going down to the bank in the doctor's coupé next morning Rance fell against me and felt the key."

"So that was it? I remember his awkward stumble."

"Most adroitly awkward! He was exceedingly clever and resourceful. From the bank he lured me to the Athletic Club and sought to hypnotize me. I feigned to yield to him, but we were interrupted. He then induced me to spar with him. I soon felt the brass knuckles he had on inside his boxing-gloves. Pretending to slip, he struck to knock me out. I received the blow pulling back, but fell as if unconscious. He took the substitute key from my waistcoat. When we left the club we parted, but I shadowed him and saw him go to four safe-deposit companies. No doubt he suspected me.

"However, I now had confirmation of my theory that the key was the solution of the mystery; that he knew its value, and that it was what he was after when he pursued Tom from the bank and burglarized his room."

The detective broke in with belated shrewdness of deduction:

"He got employed on the *Record* and as secret-service agent for the bank months before, so's to side-track suspicion. As either a reporter or a detective, he'd have a good excuse if caught sneaking round and doing queer things. He could even have explained away that first burglary if he hadn't lost his head and shot poor Pete Ahern. His job with the bank came in handy when he had the chief jug and search you."

"Only for him to get another substitute key out of it," said Cameron. "But it was fortunate I was able to clear myself and enlist the aid of yourself and the chief. By returning to the house and sending Mr. Denton to take my place in jail we threw Rance off his guard. I suspected that, having failed elsewhere, he would see if Dr. Vidnor had the real key.

"When he disabled the doctor's coupé I stole up the alley and saw him commit the holdup. Later, after midnight, I watched him through a pinhole in the door while he again burglarized my cousin's room."

"Oh!" exclaimed Grace. "You knew—you saw him rob Uncle Len, yet did not try to catch him? You let him rob the house again?"

Cameron smiled banteringly.

"What if I was afraid? No; seriously, the point was that it was necessary to find the money and at the same time force him into betraying himself as the criminal. I saw that he failed to find the key, which I had hidden under the paper in the middle of the wall opposite the door. But he took the Mackinaw overcoat and the hat. From this I surmised that he was getting ready for a desperate effort to get the money.

"I went to his apartments, entered with the aid of a master key loaned to me by the chief of police, and put a transparent opiate in the bottom of his whisky glass. He took a drink and was in a drugged sleep within a few minutes. I unloaded his pistol and substituted blank cartridges."

"Lucky thing for us!" exclaimed the detective. "He tried to shoot us clean out of the passage."

"He was cornered, and knew it. Already he had realized the necessity of flight. He had ordered his big touring-car left for him out in the West End. When he learned that Mr. Denton was at the jail instead of me he came to kill me and take the key.

"Leaving me for dead, he drove down here in his coupé, changing to the Mackinaw overcoat and other disguise on the way. His purpose was to get the money, drive to the West End, shift to the touring-car in another disguise, and race away, probably with a false license-number on his car.

Fortunately I had telephoned for him to be detained here until the arrival of the police. You know the rest. He escaped the law; but in view of the way he killed Paulding, one might say it is a remarkable exemplification of poetic justice that his self-inflicted blow at the base of the brain probably was the cause of his death."

CHAPTER XXV.

The Real Key.

THE president of the trust company bowed gravely to Cameron.

"You appear to have handled this remarkable affair with even more remarkable cleverness. Of what agency are you an operative?"

"Of none," answered Cameron. "I am an amateur in this line. It is my first case as a detective, and I trust that it will be my last. My vocation is psychological and sociological research."

"Ah—pardon me! But with regard to your work in this case, there is one point not quite clear. We blurred part of the item under which the deposit box was entered on our books. This enabled us to delay the criminal without alarming him. But our business with all clients is strictly confidential. May I ask how you learned that he had rented the box under the name Flaubert Loti?"

"I should be pleased to enlighten you, sir, but—" Cameron rose and looked out through the glass door of the office. "There come the bank officials. You can now explain the case to them. Miss Denton is fatigued from so much excitement. As I am not needed here, I shall ask Dr. Vidnor's permission to take Miss Denton home in his coupé."

"H-m—ah! By all means—by all means! I prescribe it!" replied the physician, his corpulent body quivering with an internal chuckle of approval. "I'll stay with Tom to see this matter out."

"You have the promise that his position as teller is waiting for him. I assign to him my right to the ten-thousand-dollar reward for the recovery of the money. My right to the reward of the Bankers' Association for the apprehension of the criminal I shall be pleased to waive in favor of my detective friend here," said Cameron.

The detective sprang up to take his hand with much enthusiasm.

"Say, Mr. Cameron, take it from me," he asserted, "you're *the* top-liner—you're a prince!"

Cameron broke away to grip the outstretched hand of Denton. The cousins exchanged a look of profound sympathy and understanding. Then Denton drew Cameron around to his sister. Grace had risen and stood demurely waiting. Cameron opened the door of the office. They passed out and entered Dr. Vidnor's coupé.

For some time the young man was too busy guiding the coupé through the thick of the down-town traffic to look at his companion. She sat very still, her eyes on her muff.

They were near the edge of the business section when she drew in a tremulous breath and murmured almost plaintively:

"But—but why did you lead me to think you were afraid of him?"

"It was necessary for me to sham death. It was to make him desperate and force him into committing himself," answered Cameron. "Tom had to be saved, whatever the risk. Do you think it was cowardly to let Rance use his pistol when there was the chance that he had discovered the change of cartridges? He might well have noticed that the pistol was lighter. Ten blank cartridges weigh much less than ten with bullets."

"Oh! I would not have thought of that! You were brave—very brave! And to save Tom, you say? But how?"

"Listen," replied Cameron. "This is between you and me. Not even Tom nor your uncle is ever to know. The man who took the two hundred and thirty-one thousand dollars and put them in the safe-deposit box under the name of Flaubert Loti was—*your brother.*"

Grace stared up at the clean-cut profile of her companion in utter amazement. Had he gone mad, as her brother had gone mad that fearful night?

He glanced down and read the look in her bewildered face and dilating eyes.

"No, I am quite sane," he said. "Tom did it, but he did it while he was not responsible."

"You—you mean— Oh! that is —better! But—back there—you did not tell them!"

"Because his innocence would be extremely hard to prove, and the accusation might again shatter his mind. The plea of hypnotism is a weak defense in a court of law. Yet that is the true explanation of what happened. You will remember your uncle said that Tom was in a state peculiarly susceptible to hypnosis. He put him to sleep that night with a hypodermic injection of water under the suggestion that it was an opiate."

"But what has that to do with taking the money?"

"You shall see. Under hypnosis the subconscious mind remembers everything that has happened to the subject. After your uncle left Tom with me at the sanatorium I hypnotized and questioned your brother. He told me what his conscious mind does not know and never will know unless informed.

"Rance had hypnotic power. I knew it for certain when he tried to hypnotize me that day at the Athletic Club, and I had to put out all my own power to resist him. Before the robbery he had learned Tom's condition, probably from your uncle. The day that Tom was taken sick Rance hypnotized him. He then suggested that a gang of yeggmen were planning to rob the bank, and that the only way to prevent a great loss was to secretly take the thousand-dollar notes and put them in a safe-deposit box.

"Tom was able to get the money because he had been entrusted with the combination of the inner vault, though not of the outer door. Rance also suggested that Tom buy that garish hat and overcoat and blue goggles and use the name of Flaubert Loti. This was to convict Tom in case the theft was discovered."

Grace shuddered. "What a—a horrid, creepy snake! He pretended all the time to be so fond of Tom!"

"He meant him no harm unless it became necessary to save himself. In that case his plan was to prove Tom guilty and collect the ten-thousand-dollar reward.

"It was the same at the bank. He knew that Paulding and Tom were there, but intended only to stun them and get the deposit-box key away from Tom. But while still under hypnosis Tom had hidden the key in one of the cuffs of his trousers.

"Half frantic over his failure to find it, Rance sought to direct suspicion away from himself by jamming the bolts of the vault door. He

was robbing the inner vault when Tom revived. The blow had rendered your brother temporarily insane, and in that condition he had a confused recollection of what he had done while hypnotized. The sight of the shattered vault door and of Paulding lying dead recalled to him Rance's suggestion of a yeggman scheme, and wrought him into a delirious paroxysm of fury.

"He ran into the vault and knocked Rance down. He then took out the key and taunted the half dazed murderer. Suddenly his mad rage changed to equally mad fear. He sprang out of the vault and fled from the bank before Rance could leap up and overtake him. Rance gave chase, but the lucky meeting with me forced him to turn back."

Grace drew in a deep sigh.

"Then the key was Tom's? He really took the money?"

"Not Tom," corrected Cameron. "It was Rance who stole it, using Tom's unconscious body as a tool. He was the only guilty person, and he has been convicted of the crime by himself and punished for it by his own hand. Tom is innocent. He does not know what he did, and he never shall know. That is to remain forever a secret between myself and my relation—by marriage!"

The girl uttered a startled little cry and averted her head to hide the scarlet blush that swept down her lovely face. Cameron reached out his arm to draw the side-blinds of the coupé. The little conveyance was rolling smoothly along a deserted residence street.

"Oh, B-Bruce!" faltered the girl.

"Remember, coming down-town?" he reminded her. "I warned you that you might be called upon to pay for what you called me."

"But—but is that—fair—when you know that I—that I—"

"Pay!" he demanded. "I'm as relentless as *Shylock*. Pay!"

She quivered and shrank and sought to spur herself to defiant rebellion. But her heart was traitor to her pride.

Of a sudden, rosy with enravishing blushes, she turned to clasp her arm about his neck and offer him her adorable lips.

On a quiet residence street a skilled chauffeur need have little difficulty in driving a coupé with one hand. No harm is done even if the course of the vehicle is rather wavering.

After several minutes Cameron patted the disheveled rufous brown tresses of the hatless head that pressed against his bosom.

"By the way, Miss Denton," he observed, "there is one important detail. I have yet to mention my financial standing."

"The idea!" came back a tiny voice that quavered with blissful tenderness. "You dear, silly, old goose—"

"Gander," he corrected.

"—Gander! As if anything in all the world mattered except only *you!*"

"You forget there soon will be the important question of an Easter hat," he replied. "As I pay income tax on ten or twelve thousand a year, I think you may look forward to picking out the hat you prefer—provided it suits me. The only other condition is that hat and day and wedding-bells be synchronized."

"Be w-what?"

"Made to occur at the same time."

"But—Easter? Why, this is the beginning of Lent already!"

"I'll be starved entirely, starving for all those forty days," he rejoined. "How about an earlier date?—next week, or this afternoon?"

His impetuosity alarmed her. She hastened to compromise.

"Indeed, no! It can't possibly be sooner than Easter! The flowers will be blooming then. Besides, it will take me all Lent to prepare my—my trousseau."

"Hang the trousseau!" he irrev-

erently denounced. "As if anything in all the world mattered except only *you,* darling!"

Again a silence.

He mused reminiscently:

"It began when I saw you on the train platform at the station. Then I found your picture in Tom's trunk and knew who you were. Then I came to call, and you received me as—"

"As my brother!" she interposed.

"Then you required me to brush your hair and—"

"Oh, please, *please,* dear, don't! It makes me so ashamed!"

"And then," he went on, "you began to find that you loved me—*not* as a brother."

"I—I thought I hated you, but now I understand that it was— Oh, Bruce, dearest! Isn't it wonderful?"

The coupé rolled slowly on along its wavering course.

(The end.)

ANYHOW

By Howard C. Kegley

VERBENA SMAY and Buddie Snooks
Became betrothed one summer day,
They both had read in recent books
About the new eugenic way
Of marrying, and so they thought
That ere they became groom and bride,
In justice to the world they ought
To stand tests and be certified.

Bud Snooks was broad across the back;
His lungs were strong, his breath was sweet;
But when the doctor watched his track
He turned him down on flattened feet.
Verbena went before the board
Of health and, 'tis the gospel truth,
Too low to be a bride, she scored,
For she had but one wisdom tooth.

Verbena squalled at home all day;
Bud's chin hung down upon his chest;
The neighbors all came in to say
That what transpired was for the best.
It didn't turn out as we hoped,
But then all hands are happy now,
Because that night the pair eloped
And had their wedding, anyhow!

Plain Betty Deane

by Robert Adger Bowen

Author of "Fortune's Favorite," "Red Roses," "Twisted Oaks," "Mandy of the Twin Bar," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Experiment.

FOR a week the X-Y outfit had been without a cook and housekeeper, and things had reached a sorry pass in the mess and in the entire ranch-house. Weird efforts at cooking made by those members of the outfit having a speaking acquaintance with pots and pans and an utter neglect of beds were at last getting on the nerves of even such healthy animals as the cowboys of the X-Y range.

And Larson, the foreman, whose own wife was too ill just then to be of any use in the *impasse* which had arisen, had again gone up to Geoffrey Farrell's house to tell him that something had to be done if the ranch was to escape impending mutiny.

"'Tain't in human nature—or cowboy nature—tuh stan' it much longer, Mr. Farrell," Larson had declared. "I saw the omelet Bud Standish made this mawnin', an' if it warn't fur the eggshells he held as proof, yuh'd er thought that omelet was the toughest steak ever er lean long'orn give up. The bacon was like an ole shoe, an' the coffee's pure blasphemy, sir. The boys is kickin' powerful."

Upon which, in sheer desperation, Farrell had driven the twelve or more miles into town, swearing he's bring back a cook if it had to be the mayor's wife.

It was not the mayor's wife he was bringing, but doubts had already begun to assail him as to whether that somewhat acidulous lady would not have been a far safer proposition than the young woman who sat beside him on the seat of his buckboard, her small trunk strapped on behind.

When he had first heard of her through no one less than the minister of the church he sometimes attended, and to whom he had applied for help in his need, Farrell's relief at finding any female willing to assume the duties in question was so great that his judgment had waited upon his necessity.

"Remember," admonished the minister, "I know nothing about this young woman beyond what a brother clergyman wrote me in the letter she presented yesterday upon her arrival in Sheraton. He wrote that she was worthy and capable, and asked me to place her if I could. I am not sure she is the person you need. Indeed, I very much question it."

"If she can cook and make beds, I

need her the worst in the world," Farrell had answered.

But that first moment of satisfaction had passed.

Farrell realized now that the girl appeared absurdly young. It was even more evident that she was alarmingly pretty. Even in those sections where servants are servants no one would have thought of her as a domestic, and in the cattle country there are few servants.

In spite of a certain calm decision of manner, he saw that she seemed pleasurably excited. This fact disturbed him further.

"I hope," he said, with that kindness characteristic of him, blended, however, now with sensations of uncertainty, "that you do not in any way misunderstand the nature of the duties you are to do for me, Miss—"

"My name is Betty Deane," supplied the girl, as he hesitated somewhat awkwardly over the manner of his address. "Jus' plain Betty, Mr. Farrell. No. I think I understand perfectly what I am tuh do. Cook, wash dishes, make beds. I sha'n't find that hard."

"There is something you'll find harder, I've no doubt, Betty," he ventured guardedly.

Then, at her slight puzzlement of look: "Your predecessor was a person of the name of Scraggs. In her the love of whisky turned to vinegar—or the use of it did. I was thinking of the sudden strain upon the boys in accustoming themselves to her successor."

"I'll help 'em tuh that," she said enigmatically, and he was not sure that she had understood his vague warning, nor sure that he understood her reply.

Nor, as he fell silent, thinking about it, did he understand her. Her voice, low and with an accent of refinement that carried for all of her rather slipshod English, roused him from the abstraction that claimed him.

"I know jus' what yuh're thinkin', Mr. Farrell. Because I ain't what yuh might call scraggy, yuh are feared the boys is goin' tuh stop their eatin's tuh look at me. But I'm some cook, an' I'll watch out fur that.

"I ain't ever seen the man yet, Mr. Farrell, an' I've knowd er good many of 'em, that wouldn't pay 'tention tuh er good dinner 'fore he would tuh er pretty woman—'specially," she added, smiling, "if the pretty woman cooked it."

"I see," he said, and, indeed, he began to.

The young owner of the X-Y range glanced keenly at his companion. Her eyes still searching the level plains, she seemed unaware of his scrutiny. But that she was not wholly at her ease, he thought her next question proved.

"Any other women, Mr. Farrell?"

"Oh, yes!" he answered, welcoming the opportunity thus afforded him. "There is Mrs. Larson, and up at the house there is my mother. You will, of course, live with Mrs. Larson, but my mother will be glad to give you any aid she can."

The girl nodded.

She liked this new employer of hers, handsome in his ranch dress, well knit and stalwart, his manner toward her filled with an instinctive courtesy and kindliness. Glancing down, she noted the firm hands that held the lines so skilfully and with such ease. She was very glad to have found a place.

She was glad to have found a place with such a man. She had not boasted in vain of her knowledge of men, and she knew when one could be trusted and when another was not to be. She could trust Geoffrey Farrell.

He drove her straight to Larson's cabin, the foreman meeting them by its door. Farrell was aware of the look of incredulity upon the man's honest face. He assumed a matter-of-fact air he by no means really felt.

"Larson," he called, bringing the buckboard to a halt, "this is Miss Betty Deane, and she comes to save the lives of the X-Y boys. Do what you can to put her on to the ropes. It's an experiment, I know," he added in an

undertone to the abstracted foreman, "but we must make the best of it."

"Lawd, ma'am," exclaimed Larson, staring at the girl and not hearing Farrell, "does yuh mean tuh say *you're* the new cook?"

CHAPTER II.

The First Supper.

WHEN the boys tramped into the mess-room that night for their supper, the besom of a capable reform had already achieved miraculous results in the ugly, two-story ranch-house which was the home as well as the eating place of those members of the X-Y outfit who had not their individual cabins along the "street" outside.

The long table was set in orderly fashion—for a week past it had resembled nothing so much as an ensanguined battle-field—there was a tall vase of heavy golden-rod in the center; the fresh red-check tablecloth was immaculate; from the adjoining kitchen odors of a deliciously appetizing quality assailed the hungry men.

They had received their cue from Larson, who had, in turn, received his from Farrell.

"I don't want to hear of any nonsense, Larson, with regard to that young woman," Farrell had said, much, indeed, as he might have remarked in the face of a coming thunder-storm: "I don't want the ground to be moistened by that cloudburst.

"If the experiment doesn't work, so much the worse for us. Good cooks don't grow on blackberry bushes."

"No, sir," said Larson, with the same admirable blinking of the inevitable. "I'll tell 'em yuh said so, Mr. Farrell."

He had, and though in so doing he had served to whet their curiosity, they were in no wise prepared for the vision that confronted them when, with a certain awe induced by the appearance of their table, they had found their places at it, and turned expectant faces toward the kitchen door at the sound of a fresh voice greeting them one and all indiscriminately.

"Hello, boys!" said Betty Deane as she entered, in both hands the steaming cornmeal pudding, her eyes sweeping the long table, and seeing, as over the footlights, her audience as a whole, but resting on no one individually.

None of them answered, except with their eyes. The girl's face, a little flushed by excitement and the warmth of the kitchen fire, glowed beneath her dark hair and above the simple blue calico dress she wore.

"I hope yuh're good an' hungry," she remarked, still with the same air of generalization. "Things was in an awful mess, an' I didn't have much time. I'll do better to-morrow."

"Wow!" exclaimed Bud Standish. "Is any one hungry?"

The girl set the big dish down before the young fellow at the end of the table nearer to her, whose face, turned so that he might see the object of their concerted interest, looked up into hers.

It was as well that no one was watching him at that precise instant. At sight of the girl intent upon depositing the hot and heavy dish he started, the curiosity in his eyes changing into an expression little short of consternation, it might almost have seemed of fear, the smile dying on his lips, his good-looking face, whitening under its wholesome tan.

Then, as Betty Deane turned, she saw him.

For an instant the girl stood still, her breath failing her. Her back was toward the room and the light. Only Bud Standish, sitting in the first seat to the right, could have seen her face, and his eyes, true to Betty's prophecy to Farrell, had centered on the pudding, so that he not see the quick paling of the flush in her cheeks, the instinctive quiver of her open lips.

A second more, and she had gone silently into the kitchen.

They broke into a sudden life then, passing plates down to Dan Tavish in

an endless chain, while he helped them, and they circulated the other way around the long table. His tongue was the only quiet one there.

The girl came in with the other dishes and placed them. Then she went the rounds with the coffee-pot.

"Sing out if yuh want me, boys," she said. "I'll be on tap, an' my name is Betty."

"Aouw, yuh Betty!"

It was "Mooly" Watkins who spoke, and the fact that his mouth was full of hot cornmeal pudding did not disguise the flavor of his impertinence.

The girl faced him quickly, though the words, ready on her lips, halted an instant in a puzzled stare.

"Not on yo' tintype," she then said slowly. "I don't answer tuh the ring er *that* bell."

They laughed amid sundry guying of the facetious cow-puncher, and the girl, her glance lingering for a moment upon the grave face of Dan Tavish, went on out into her kitchen, the incident slipping easily from her mind.

It was the custom of the X-Y men, supper being over, to use the mess-room as a common lounging room. Farrell kept it well supplied with magazines and papers.

The custom had rather fallen in disuse during the Scragg régime, but tonight they drifted into it quite naturally again. From beyond the closed door of the kitchen they could hear the occasional clatter of dishes as Betty Deane, having cleared the mess-table, busied herself over her washing up. Betty herself could hear their voices, and she had little doubt that they talked of her.

She was very sober over her dish-washing.

There was a stern set to her mouth, and her dark eyes were somber. That her whole nature had received some shock the slight trembling of her hands would have made obvious to any one who might have seen her. Her untasted supper lay on a side table near.

But she had passed the first moment of her alarm and indecision. Goeffrey Farrell never knew how near he had come in that moment to losing the services he had just acquired and seeing the end of his experiment.

"I'll stay," she kept murmuring to herself. "I'll stay. I won't run away. After all, life owes me er livin', too, an' I didn't know he was here!"

She finished her work, shut up the kitchen, and stole softly out into the night. Some one in the mess-room was strumming idly on a banjo. Down the little lane lights twinkled from the windows of the cabins, that of Larson, the foreman, being just across the way.

She stepped out into the darkness, her first sense of loneliness among strange surroundings assailing her rather sharply.

Slowly she walked down the path, let herself through the low gate, and started across the road. From out of the shadow of one of the pecan-trees bordering the lane a man's figure took shape, coming toward her.

The girl stood still.

She had no doubt who it was, even before she could make out in the pale light that fell across the road from the open mess-room door the slender, agile figure of Dan Tavish. But just before he reached her she moved quickly forward toward the gate of Larson's yard. Even with her hand upon the latch as she drew the gate open, Tavish was beside her.

She faced him then, speechless, pallid, very quiet, her eyes even seeking his.

His lips broke over her name, and at the sound the girl shook her head mutely.

He glanced behind him. Standing in the doorway of the mess-room, his body blurring the light, one of the boys was whistling softly to himself.

"Tell me one thing," asked Tavish in low tones. "Shall I go away from here?"

"As yuh please."

"As *you* please," he insisted, and

there was that in the firm voice that was not to be denied.

"Go or stay," she murmured. "This post here ain't mo' dead tuh me than you are, Dan Tavish. Yuh're only one mo' mouth tuh feed. Go or stay at yo' pleasure."

He drew himself erect. She could hear his shortened breath.

"Then it's tuh be silence between us?"

"The silence er the grave, Dan Tavish, 'tween you an' me furever."

CHAPTER III.

Rumblings.

DAN TAVISH lingered a moment after the girl had left him upon her words. He had made her no answer beyond the steady regard of his eyes. Then he turned slowly and crossed over to the door of the ranch-house. It suited him to see who it was that stood in that doorway whistling so persistently.

He had an enemy among the members of the X-Y outfit, and he knew it, but at that instant he was not thinking of any harm that might befall him. He was, indeed, not apt to give much thought to that. He realized, however, that it might have been more expedient had he chosen a less inopportune moment for his conversation with the girl.

He was not to know definitely at that time who it had been in the doorway, for seeing that he was observed, the watcher stepped back into the room out of range of vision, and Tavish, checked in his desire, turned away to his own cabin which he shared with Bud Standish.

It was from Standish, between whom and himself there existed more than the ordinary friendship of man to man, that he was later to learn what had transpired that evening in the mess-room.

"Tavish ain't losin' no time in gettin' in with the new cook," remarked Mooly Watkins when some minutes had lapsed after his reentry into the room, and it was evident that the man he had seen advancing toward him had decided not to come further.

The observation induced a silence.

Several of those more or less interested in their magazines and papers glanced up at the speaker. Others paused in their game of pinocle, resuming their play as at an unwelcome interruption.

Bud Standish, lying on a couch in the corner of the room, sat up suddenly. He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, his eyes focussed steadily upon the face of the big cow-puncher.

"What if he is?" he asked with an ominous quietness.

"The Possum" paused in the act of dealing his stack of cards the horizontal smile which closed his eyes and gave him his endearing nickname coming on his face.

All of those present ceased their occupations to pay more or less close attention to the speakers, aware of a tension that had arisen beyond the ordinary. Few of them liked Watkins, though many preferred not to offend him.

But Watkins had colored angrily. He took a step toward his questioner, arm extended, with pipe held in emphatic hand.

"What's it any business er yo'n, Bud Standish?" he demanded. "Ain't I the right tuh say what I please but you must cut in? What's this gal tuh you?"

"She ain't nothin'," said Standish, and he rose to his full, slim height; "an' she's less tuh you, by her own calkilations. It's Dan Tavish yuh're stingin' as usual when he ain't aroun' tuh give yuh the lie, an' we're all gittin' plum sick an' tired of it, Mooly. Yuh're sp'ilin' our happy family, an' yuh got tuh quit it."

"Yuh don't say so! An' who's er goin' tuh make me have tuh quit it? You, Bud Standish, or yo' pal, Tavish —or mebbe it's this new gal cook?"

"It may be *I* will, Watkins," said a

voice they all recognized at once as Geoffrey Farrell's, and wheeling about the angry cow-puncher faced the young ranch owner as he stood blocking the doorway with his body.

"What is all this about, anyway?" he asked, advancing into the room.

The man turned aside, muttering incoherently, his threatening glance lingering upon Standish.

"Watkins!" came Farrell's imperious command, and the cowboy once more turned.

"I've been watching you, Watkins, this long time, and I've not been blind to your dissatisfaction on the X-Y. If things don't suit you here, there's no time like the present for pulling out from them. I want no mischief-makers here."

"There's worse'n mischief-makers yuh've got here," growled Watkins under the sting of the rebuke. "'Cause I'm honest an' say my say I git er hot iron slapped onto me. 'Cause I don't go 'roun' makin' folks think snow would lie black upon my repytation I git called down an' jumped on. 'Cause I ain't wanted in another State fur mo' things than one, I'm tole I can clar out while others is welcome tuh stay!"

Farrell went nearer to the main actor in it. They could see, too, that he was in no mood for further trifling.

"What do you mean by your insinuations?" he asked sternly. "Are you speaking of Bud Standish here or of whom?"

"I ain't speakin' er Bud Standish," muttered Watkins; "but Bud Standish knows who I am speakin' of, an' if I've got any eyes in my head this new gal knows, too. Ask her what she knows er Dan Tavish, out thar in Eagle Tail."

CHAPTER IV.

Betty Sounds a Warning.

AS the days passed into weeks the anxiety in Geoffrey Farrell's mind as to the practical working out of the experiment he had essayed subsided under the adaptability of Betty Deane to her surroundings and her duties.

Not only had she made good her claim to being an excellent cook, she showed that she was also amply able to hold her own among the boys. She had it become very clear to them that their presence in her kitchen would not be tolerated.

She served them with just the right blending of business precision and friendly interest.

The keenest among them could detect no discrimination in her favors, although it had been noticed that she never joked with Dan Tavish; that the smile left her eyes and lips whenever he spoke—which he never did to her of his own initiative—that she seldom found occasion to address him.

They would probably never have noticed this at all had not the memory of Mooly Watkins's words stuck by them.

Dan Tavish was not a man of whom one easily believed evil. Unfortunately Watkins was.

Whatever their records may have been before their days on the X-Y, the outfit had the evidence of their own senses as to what they had been there, and the scales tipped heavily in Tavish's favor. They were the sort that judged a man by what they knew him to be and not by what he might have been in the past.

They knew Dan Tavish to be brave and gentle, a loyal friend and a forbearing enemy.

They accorded him a tacit leadership among them which even Larson himself willingly acknowledged. It did not shake their faith in him the least to be told, as Watkins had told them, that he had run counter to the law before they had known him. The law did not always represent to them the highest right.

Only to one of them, indeed, had the insinuations of the big cow-puncher gained a deeper significance through a knowledge personal to himself.

Bud Standish, sharing as he did Tavish's cabin, realized that to his

companion the advent of Betty Deane upon the X-Y range had been fraught with a disturbing quality that made him, in the privacy of their rooms, a changed man.

He had listened in an unanswering silence to Standish's account of the scene in the mess-room — a silence, however, which checked all questioning upon Standish's part. But when evening after evening came, and, the supper hour passing, had left Tavish invariably restless and perturbed, a certain resolve began to crystallize in Bud Standish's mind.

If Betty ruled the ranch-house while she was in it, she did not rule the ranch, and she managed to be not a little abroad on the ranch, so deft and rapid was she with the work she had to do. She had made one request to Farrell when he had asked her in his friendly way if she was finding all to her liking on the range.

"Anything you want, Betty?" he had asked.

She had been quick to avail herself of the opportunity.

"I want er horse," she had answered.

She had gotten it, and every day she rode, sometimes alone, but not always.

Farrell himself had met her out on the range more than once. Standish also had upon more than one occasion discovered an important reason for riding toward the stables when she had been returning in that direction. Today was the third time, and he was not going to let it slip by as had the other two.

"Yuh must be awful busy, Bud," said the girl when his intention became evident to continue along with her beyond the creek from the prairie where she had met him.

"Yes, ma'am!"

She flashed him a glance in which suspicion was mingled with a real annoyance.

"Don't speak tuh me like I was yo' gran'mother," she told him after she had satisfied herself that he was not going to smile, her tones somewhat impatient withal.

"No, ma'am," he answered demurely.

After a time he became aware that she did not mean to break the enveloping silence. He glanced at her, boylike in her cleverly adapted cowpuncher costume, the banded sombrero on her head shielding from his sight all but the tip of her nose and the curve of her healthily flushed cheek.

"I have somethin' tuh say to yuh," and he waited.

"Yes?" inquired Betty, and now he could watch her up-tilted face, eyes quizzical seeking his, the mocking smile upon her lips dangerously provocative.

"Yes," he repeated. "Yuh see this thing's 'bout Dan Tavish, an'—"

"Dan Tavish!"

The interruption brought him up suddenly. There was warning in it sharp as its surprise, and the surprise had changed her instantly from the bantering girl to a woman, alert, defiant, almost threatening. With a quick, upward sweep of her hand she pushed back the drooping brim of her hat so that her eyes, unimpeded, might look into his face.

"What have yuh tuh say tuh me er Dan Tavish?" she demanded, passionately.

The young fellow hesitated. In that moment it seemed to him that he had pitifully little to say, but he had gone too far to draw back.

"Yuh know him an' me bunks together," he began. "When I told him what that mooly cow of er Watkins said 'bout him an' you in the mess-room the night yuh come—"

She was listening now with a curious intentness, and he saw too late the blunder he had made. It shut him up as though he had suddenly been stricken dumb.

She made no comment, however, until they reached the big gate that let in to the home pastures. There she stopped him.

"So they was talkin' 'bout me that

night, was they, the puddin' heads! They'll be cookin' their own victuals if they do that again, Bud, an' yuh can give 'em that frum headquarters, see? As fur Dan Tavish—his appetite seems middlin' good, an' yuh needn't worry yo' head 'bout him. I'll take care er Mooly Watkins myself. I thought I'd seen his angel face before, an' now I knows where. You go back tuh yo' cows, now, an' let me get tuh my pots an' pans. An' Bud—"

She put her pony through the gateway as he held back for her the long gate, speaking over her shoulder as she went on.

"Yuh're er nice boy, but don't yuh go an' be gettin' any notions intuh yo' head 'bout me an' Dan Tavish. But if yuh plum' has tuh get 'em, keep 'em under yo' bonnet an' tuh yo'self, d'yuh understan'?"

CHAPTER V.

Straws in the Wind.

"GEOFFREY," said Mrs. Farrell one morning at the breakfast-table, as she looked over the tray before her at her idolized son, "I have asked Zora Vinson to make us a visit."

She was a slight little woman, who gave the impression of being hung on hair-springs.

Her eyes were as bright as a bird's. There was something birdlike in the movements of her head. There could sometimes, too, be a peck in the expression even of her affections.

"That will be pleasant for you, mother," responded Farrell, and if there were any emphasis upon the pronoun it would have taken ears as sharp and keen as Mrs. Farrell's to detect it.

"I meant it to be pleasant for you," she chirped, and her hands fluttered.

"Why, yes. Only I am very busy just now, mother. It will be nice for Betty Deane, though, to have Zora here."

He rose as he spoke, crossed over to the mantelpiece, and took up his pipe, proceeding slowly to fill it.

"Betty Deane!" exclaimed his mother, also rising. "Betty seems a very good girl in her place, Geoffrey; but you can't mix milk and cream."

She came closer to him and struck the match she knew he would need.

"Take care that you don't turn Betty's head," she cautioned as she held the lighted match to his pipe.

It was not exactly the way she would rather have put her admonition. It was Betty she feared rather than feared for, but she was also a little afraid of her son. She watched the effect of her ambiguity.

"Betty's head is as level as a prairie," he affirmed, puffing the first sweet breaths of tobacco. "As for mixing milk and cream—it won't hurt Zora to be mixed a little with Betty. Betty is cream!"

Mrs. Farrell hesitated.

"You have become very intimate with Betty, Geoffrey. Is it wise?"

"I don't know," he returned frankly, hiding a momentary impatience. "Hardly that, mother, anyway."

But he knew it was that, and as he left the house a little later, going down to the corrals and the stables, he was aware that he was looking forward to his almost daily ride across the ranges with the girl with a degree of eagerness that would have justified fully his mother's uneasiness.

For that day, at least, it looked as though he were not going to meet the girl.

A glance about the stable showed Farrell that her pony and saddle were not there. Keen scrutiny of the plains even to the horizon gave him no sign of her.

He rode on over the range, conscious of a sense of annoyance with his mother for having delayed his setting out.

He had gone some distance, striking off to the south along a one-time Indian trail when, as he neared a spur of chaparral, he caught the sound of

voices from the hollow in which they grew—a woman's voice and a man's.

Unable to distinguish words, Farrell was yet aware of the vehemence with which the woman spoke, and a curious emotion kindled in his own veins, knowing that it was Betty whose voice fell upon his ear charged with such intense passion.

Instinctively he hesitated, drawing his horse to a slower pace, feeling subtly that his approach would be an intrusion, yet determined to approach. As he lingered, shielded by a straggling fringe of the thicket, a horseman rode out of the thicker clump of bushes and, without seeing Farrell, went on along the trail to the south.

It was Tavish, and even an eye less alert and interested than Geoffrey Farrell's could have seen that he rode as a man might ride whose mind was gravely troubled, with reins hanging loose in hands that were crossed on the pommel before him, slim body bent forward in blind indifference to his surroundings.

It was on the point of Farrell's tongue to hail Tavish, but he forbore. Swift remembrance of those words of Watkins came to him, and his brows knit in a puzzled and vague disquiet. He would not willingly have believed anything to Dan Tavish's discredit.

He put his horse into motion, turning him into the chaparral grove, and brought him to a sudden halt at the sight that met his eyes.

Standing in a small, cleared space, her face resting upon her arms as they clasped her saddle, Betty was sobbing aloud, moaning inarticulate words, her body shaken by the storm of emotion that had claimed her. She did not hear the approach of Farrell's horse, and for a surprised instant he sat watching her.

Then he sprang to the ground.

"Betty," he cried in dismay, "what is it?"

The girl did not move, but her sobbing ceased almost as by magic.

Farrell drew closer.

"Have you and Dan been quarreling?" he asked, solicitude more tender than he knew in his tones. "Look at me, Betty."

She turned at that, face tremulous and tear-stained, something of indignation, too, in her gleaming eyes.

"Why do you ask that, Mr. Farrell?"

"Because I saw Dan Tavish ride away. Dan is a favorite of mine, Betty; but if he hurts you—"

Her body stiffened.

"How can Dan Tavish hurt me?" she demanded proudly.

She held his eyes fearlessly, but something in them of pain and resentment was obvious.

"Perhaps it is you, Betty, who have hurt him," said Farrell. "I should be almost as sorry."

"I wisht yuh wouldn't talk tuh me er Dan Tavish," the girl burst out. "He ain't nothin' tuh me, an' I'm less'n nothin' tuh him. So long's he's got no kick comin' with my cookin' he's no need tuh complain. They's folks in this world as is never willin' tuh pay fur their dance music."

"That, I am sure," said Farrell gravely, "would never be Dan."

He waited a moment, his eyes upon her glowing face, seeing the quivering of her scornful lips over the unspoken words.

"What is the trouble between you and Dan, Betty?" he asked suddenly. "I have never asked even Dan."

Once more Betty's anger flared.

"Who said there was any trouble 'tween me an' Dan Tavish, Mr. Farrell?" Then her voice broke. "I'm sick er hearin' 'bout Dan Tavish! I'm sick er seein' him! I wisht tuh Gawd I'd knowd he was here 'fore I came! I wisht tuh Gawd I'd knowed it!"

She wheeled abruptly to her pony, caught up the reins, and swung herself into the saddle, uttering a cry of startled surprise as she turned the pony's head about to see Tavish himself upon his horse standing in the outlet to the little clearing.

"Betty," he said, and something stern was in the tones, "I came back tuh say—"

He checked the words, catching sight of Farrell, and for a strained moment the three remained looking from one to the other, an expression of mingled pain and accusation crossing Tavish's face.

Betty was the one who lifted the tension, ignoring Farrell as he stood somewhat self-consciously by his horse. Putting her pony in motion, she passed between the two men.

"Somethin' 'bout dinner?" she suggested evenly. "I'm goin' back tuh get it now."

Tavish did not avail himself of the hint, and the girl, with an imperceptible shrug, rode on. It left the two men face to face.

For an instant each hesitated about to speak. Then Tavish in silence turned his horse, and Farrell mounted his; but it was in contrary directions that they rode, and they had said no word.

That afternoon Watkins appeared at the door of Betty's kitchen.

"Well!" she cried at sight of him. "What is it, Mooly? I've no time tuh wait fur eclipses, an' yuh're blockin' my daylight."

"That's easy helped," answered Watkins as he stepped inside the doorway. "I've somethin' tuh say tuh yuh, Betty Deane!"

CHAPTER VI.

A Blundering Play.

A QUICK color mantled Betty's cheeks at the man's impertiness. She said nothing for the moment, washing her pared potatoes and dropping them in the pot before she faced the intruder, drying her hands the while.

"Take that pipe out yo' mouth," she said curtly. "An' get what words yuh may have behind it out also double quick, Mooly Watkins; an' then get out yo'self. Some folks has hides tougher 'n shoe-leather. The gall er yuh!"

"Go easy, Betty." Watkins pocketed his pipe. "I seen fur er long time past that yuh remember seein' me before. I knowd you the moment my eyes sot on yuh the night yuh come yere. I come tuh yuh now as yo' friend. Yuh ain't none better on the X-Y."

"Then the Lawd help me!" cried the girl, standing arms akimbo.

"Yuh ain't lovin' Dan Tavish still, is yuh, Betty Deane?" asked Watkins abruptly.

The girl recoiled, her breath coming sharply in the surprise of the man's question.

"Yuh sneakin' buzzard!" she breathed. She turned from him then, taking down from a shelf pots and pans and resuming her work.

"Sho'," he ventured suddenly, "I don't love Dan Tavish. I ain't no cause tuh. An' I know you ain't, neither, Betty. I hate er man what thinks he's Gawd A'mighty an' every one else only er tumble-bug! I s'pose yuh wouldn't mind havin' him in the way—tuh squash," he went on, covertly eager. "'Tween you an' me, Betty, we could spread Dan Tavish out flat—flatter 'n blazes!" he added, his caution lapsing.

The girl lifted her eyes from the big bowl of corn-meal she was stirring for the pone. The flash of contempt in them was quickly veiled by a subtle wariness.

"How?" she asked, bending her head as though to test the mixture in the bowl.

"With what you knows an' with what I knows," said Watkins, "we've got him dead tuh rights, Betty."

"Yes," murmured the girl, and in his obtuseness Watkins thought she assented in fact as well as in word. He lifted his shoulders as though relieved of a burden.

"There ain't no use in tryin' tuh queer him with Geoffrey Farrell," he

went on. "He's got Farrell sort er spellbound with his soft speech; but there's the law, an' if that don't work—"

He paused, stirred by a belated qualm hardly a doubt. Had he not seen her undisguised unfriendliness to Tavish? Betty was lifting her batter on a wooden spoon and letting it fall back into the bowl as she carefully gaged its consistency.

"Yuh're in with me on this on the square, Betty?"

She met his gaze evenly.

"I'm quite willin' tuh see him get his deserts," she said. "Why not?"

"Sho'," assented Watkins. "He done yuh dirt, Betty, the double-faced cayuse!"

She flashed him a penetrating glance beneath her lowered lids as she slipped down off the dresser's edge where she had perched herself.

"He's threatened me," he muttered, "an' I took it quiet; but there's ways er doin' things 'thout braggin' of 'em 'forehand. There's bigoty men an' there's them as ain't."

"Sho'," Betty acquiesced calmly. "Yuh've said it, Mooly. There's them that does an' them that talks. What are yuh talkin' 'bout doin'?"

In spite of her care, some scorn winged the girl's words. She was afraid he would detect it, so she added, hating herself for the sop she threw him.

"Tell me, Mooly."

"Kill him—one way or another!" he burst out. "He's said he would draw my fangs. I ain't said nothin'. But I needs yo' help, Betty."

"My help tuh kill Dan Tavish!" She knelt before the oven door, her back toward him as she basted the roasting joint. "Well, Mooly?"

"'Course," said the man, leaning forward in his chair and speaking with an odious frankness, now that he thought he had the girl enlisted in his design, "I couldn't do it open."

"They're all his friends here, an' he's made 'em ag'inst me. But they knows him an' me is enemies. He's tole 'em so himself; though if somethin' comes of it, Betty, I'd need yo' backin' up 'bout things back thar at Eagle Tail.

"They won't b'lieve nothin' I say ag'inst him; but you an' me together, Betty, could pull it off all right, an' yuh know I thinks er heap er yuh, Betty."

"Sho'," said Betty once more, still with her face turned away. "Go on, Mooly."

He leaned closer, a feverish intensity burning in his eyes.

"'Bout that night Jim Granson caught his wife in Tavish's shack an' got shot dead as he come tuh the door 'fore he could draw his gun. Robbed er his wife fust an' then his life! Went there smilin', he did, tuh take Nell home, fur Jim was an onsuspectin' creetur', an' he loved that huzzy, Nell Granson.

"'Come on, Nell,' he says. 'I'm hungry as er bear. Bring Dan 'long with yuh fur supper,' an' with that Tavish ups an' shoots him dead. 'Eat yo' supper in hell,' he says. 'You an' me'll have ourn here—eh, Nell?' But Nell Granson ain't never heard him, fur she's drapped in er dead faint."

The girl at the oven, crouching, paused still as death itself, her hand resting on the open door as she had been about to close it. The man behind her, unaware of the strained poise of her every faculty—both mental and physical—leaned back in his chair, moistening lips that seemed curiously dry.

Betty Deane turned her head without rising from her crouching attitude until her eyes, keen and searching, rested upon Watkins's face.

"How'd yuh come to know all that so slick, Jed Watkins?" she asked. "With Nell Granson in er faint, an' Jim dead, how'd *you* know? Did Dan Tavish tell yuh?"

Open-mouthed, his face blanching, horribly silent, Watkins stared before him at the girl. Mechanically Betty

slammed the oven door and rose to her feet. She was almost as white as the man, her eyes burned brightly, the small hands clenched until the knuckles gleamed.

"Yuh mis'rable liar!" she panted. "Yuh worse than that—there ain't er name mean enough tuh fit yuh, though fool covers yuh frum top tuh bottom. Where was yuh tuh hear all that if yuh heard it? Why ain't yuh said it afore? Dan Tavish ain't never spoke. Why'd *you* skip out frum Eagle Tail overnight? Dan Tavish stayed. Why'd *you* run away?"

She paused, regarding him intently, her words having come thick and fast.

Suddenly she sprang toward him.

"I b'lieve you done it!" she cried, conviction stirring her voice to a ringing passion. "I b'lieve it was you an' not him that killed Jim Granson! That much, at least, Dan Tavish ain't guilty of, Gawd furgive me fur all my thoughts er him an' never guessin' this before.

"An' yuh come here askin' me tuh help yuh kill him! Oh, I'll help yuh, Jed Watkins! I'll help yuh, all right; but it'll be tuh help yuh on yo' way tuh the rope! Yuh polecat! Yuh crawlin' snake!"

She bounded toward the door, tore it open, and, halting only long enough to shake her doubled fist at the dazed Watkins, ran down the narrow walk toward her room.

CHAPTER VII.

An Added Complication.

SUBSEQUENT events might have been very different from what they were destined to be had Dan Tavish been on hand at that moment of Betty's first impulsive emotion.

Her sharp sense of having unjustly judged him did not linger in its acuteness, dulled with the recurring recollection of his wrong toward her. Whatever part Watkins had played in that sordid tragedy, which had robbed her of her faith in Tavish, whatever had brought him to the little settlement and carried him away again just at that time, the damning fact of Tavish's own complicity was not to be blinked.

Only that morning in the mesquit grove she had whipped him anew with the scorn, and he had been silent. Had he returned with some intent to justify himself at that moment when he had found Geoffrey Farrell with her? Betty lifted her shoulders in some disdain.

That he was in danger from Mooly Watkins, however, the girl could not doubt; how serious the danger was, the man's unguarded disclosure just now had given her a significant clue.

With that clue in her possession, Betty thought she could handle Watkins. If not, there was Farrell to appeal to. More and more, her disinclination grew to approach Tavish himself.

Moreover, if she was right in accrediting Watkins with some part in the crime that had wrecked Jim Granson's home, Tavish would himself already know it, and be forearmed.

Having seen from the window of her room Watkins leave the mess-house kitchen across the way, Betty returned to her labors there.

The dinner hour had passed without incident, save that Betty rightly interpreted certain covert glances she received from Watkins as the fellow's plea for her silence. She awarded them an inscrutable stare which left the man obviously ill at ease.

In the morning of the following day she first met Zora Vinson.

Miss Vinson was a young woman possessed of a paramount desire, which was to marry Geoffrey Farrell. She was wise enough to be aware that Farrell did not acquiesce in this desire, but she lacked the shrewdness to conceal the knowledge.

There was always in her bearing toward him a tacit reproach which sometimes became explicit. It made the girl

a nettle in the skin of the young ranch owner.

She pointed now over her pony's ears with the gold-handled riding-whip she carried to the figure of a rider some little distance ahead of them.

"Is that the new cook? Your mother was telling me about her."

"That is Miss Betty Deane," replied Farrell.

"Miss Betty Deane!" repeated Miss Vinson, ironic emphasis on the title Farrell had used of a purpose. "How funny, Geoffrey!"

"Oh, doubtless she could have made it 'Mrs.' many a time had she cared to," Farrell said, laughing. "Betty's some woman."

"She looks more like some man," observed Zora Vinson, disapproval in voice and eye. "Need we overtake her, Geoffrey? I think I shall not care for your Miss Betty Deane."

"I am sure," said Farrell, for he was a man, "that you will like her, Zora. I want her to know you."

Betty Deane turned in her saddle at the sound of galloping hoofs upon the plain behind her. At sight of Farrell and his companion she pulled in her pony.

The girls acknowledged Farrell's introduction with instinctive restraint.

"I've been hearing your praises sung," said Zora, looking at Betty with critical eyes and speaking with a deliberate manner of formal condescension.

"Cooks are important people on ranches," answered Betty. "Like stokers on an injin," and she smiled under the drooping brim of her sombrero.

"Yes," assented the other. "I guess that is so."

"Where are you riding, Betty?"

The girl glanced at the sun. She was perfectly at her ease.

"Tuh pots an' pans in er few minutes," she answered, and she turned her eyes upon Zora Vinson's city-made habit. "We're havin' cabbage an' bacon fur dinner," she added, "an' cabbage takes long."

"Horrible!" cried Zora, and shuddered nicely.

"Do yuh think so? I like it myself," said Betty demurely. "An' it's so fillin'."

Farrell led the way on. He was conscious of an atmosphere rather subtly charged between his companions. On a plateau beyond a slight rolling of the land he could see some of the men busied in rounding up the beeves he had just sold for the slaughter-house.

As though the brutes had a foreknowledge of their destination, they were proving refractory, and the shouts of the cow-punchers with their loud cracking of their whips came clearly across the intervening space.

"Isn't it dangerous, Geoffrey, to go too near?" asked Zora Vinson. "What awful looking horns!"

Farrell reassured her. It was Betty who said with some malice:

"There's always danger where there's good, healthy fun, Miss Vinson. 'Course 'tain't like croquet or cyards, though there's danger in cyards, too, when they's played lively. Didn't Bud Standish do that clever?" she asked, turning to Farrell.

The girl's eyes were sparkling. Her color glowed. Neck and neck, bellies to the ground, Dan Tavish's horse chased along with a bolting steer, ugly with fight and perversity.

Farrell checked the advance of his little party lest the creatures swerve in its direct dash across their path. Leaning forward over his pony's neck, Tavish rained blows of his blacksnake across the steer's shoulders and chest, but the animal would not wheel. Straight on he headed for the distant wooded lands about the creek.

In his interest in the race before him, Farrell forgot his companions, until, like a shot from a cannon, Betty's pony leaped forward under his horse's nose, and tore across the plain at an angle to the racing steer.

"God!" cried Farrell. "What made her do that?" and he stood in his stirrups, frightened by her daring.

For Betty's flying path led straight across the line of flight of the maddened steer, and Tavish had not seen her coming. But the steer had, and, veering suddenly at the approach of this new enemy, he swung so close that his lifted horns grazed the girl's skirt as she, too, wheeled her pony with the fraction of an inch to spare.

Then, putting him full after the headed steer, she carried the animal back into the herd, her shrill cry and the sharp crack of her quirt very businesslike, Tavish riding hard at her pony's flank.

Drawing rein, she faced him, smiling somewhat at the whiteness of his lips. And, like Farrell, Tavish asked:

"What made yuh do that foolish thing, Betty?"

"Ain't it enough that I done it well?" she demanded, panting, and with color pulsing. "You ain't the only one what can drive cows, Dan Tavish, an' cookin' cabbage ain't all I can do—if it is horrible!"

"Cookin' cabbage!" he echoed, at a loss. His eyes followed her gaze behind him where Farrell was riding up with Zora Vinson.

Something in what she had done had strangely elated Tavish. Beyond the shock of his fear at her narrow escape had hammered the joy that she had done this thing to aid him. At least, she had done it with him.

But now, seeing the girl riding beside Farrell, and with Betty's remark in his ears, Tavish believed he understood. Not thought of him but thought of Farrell had impelled her! Jealous thought that meant—

Before Farrell's nearer approach Tavish rode away.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Other Woman.

IT was after Farrell had scolded Betty, and the girl, making light of the risk she had run as of the scolding, too, had ridden away alone in spite of Farrell's assurance that he and Zora Vinson would be going back almost immediately, that the latter, awaiting Farrell's return from his men, decided in her own mind that Betty Deane was an impertinent and underbred person, but dangerous nevertheless to her own plans.

She had not forgotten the sight of Farrell's emotions of dread and gratitude, and his reprimand of Betty had smacked uncomfortably to Zora of sentimental solicitude.

She was thinking of these things in some impatience at being kept waiting by Farrell, for Zora Vinson did not readily tolerate interference with her pleasures, when a man's voice at her elbow caused her to look around.

"That was er close call Betty had, ma'am."

"Was it?" asked Zora, looking down into the face of Bud Standish. "I do not know anything about such things, though it struck me as very improper."

"Of the steer, ma'am?"

"I haven't the honor of your acquaintance," said Zora after a moment's pause, during which she had tried in vain to stare Standish out of his easy confidence.

"Lawd, ma'am," he laughed, "that's dead simple. My name's Bud Standish, an' I knows yo's."

She hesitated, seeking the best way to chide him for his presumption, but a more wholesome impulse of naturalness came over her, and she found herself smiling.

"And what was the name of the man chasing the cow?" she asked.

"Lawd, ma'am!" exclaimed Standish, "that warn't no cow. That was the cussedest ole long'orn steer that ever cropped bufferler grass, an' the man what was tannin' his tough hide was Dan Tavish, an ole friend er Betty Deane's."

"Ah! I thought he seemed very much disturbed."

"Yes, ma'am, yuh see we all think er powerful lot of Betty Deane."

"And Betty Deane," she asked, "does she think a lot of any one in particular?"

"If she does, ma'am, she's particular careful tuh hide it."

The answer was not particularly satisfactory to the questioner. Indeed, she found something in it that piqued her, so that upon Farrell's riding up at that moment and asking: "What is Bud entertaining you with, Zora?" she replied with more sharpness than good taste:

"Oh! the topic of universal interest—the X-Y cook," and she noted the shade of annoyance that brushed his face. It quite convinced her that Geoffrey Farrell had fallen a victim to Betty Deane's seductions.

As a matter of fact, Betty was giving Farrell very little of her thought just then. Tavish's scolding of her, impetuous and sharp as it had been, rang sweet in her memory, do what she might to summon harsh arraignment of him to mind.

She scorned herself for the leaping joy within her heart at the recollection of his momentary abandon of the reserve she had herself imposed upon him, for it was a joy that brought stinging tears of pain and humiliation.

She could not glory in this love of him which persisted in her heart. It was a shame to her, a temptation even, for Betty was honest with herself; but the man Tavish stood a thing forever attained in her sight.

After that she ceased to ride where she might meet any of the X-Y outfit or its young owner, so that for some days Farrell saw nothing of her. She had not forgotten Mooly Watkins, and watched him closely when he was about, moody, more reticent than his wont, as though his mind brooded.

More than once he had failed to put in an appearance at supper time, and one of the men had told her that Watkins had ridden into town, preferring the allurements of The Golden Calf and the society to be had there.

Had she been aware of the recent advent at The Golden Calf of a certain new waitress and bar-maid these absences of the big cow-puncher would have assumed an added significance to the girl, but since her arrival at the X-Y range Betty had never so much as set foot in the town, and knew nothing of the reputation of certain of its dives, of which The Golden Calf was the most famous.

She noticed, however, that upon his return from these evenings within its walls, Watkins was always more than usually taciturn and morose. She had her doubts about it pointing alone to an excess of conviviality upon the preceding night. This doubt a forthcoming event was to render conviction.

Several things that day had already gone to ruffle the usual tranquillity of Betty's nature.

To begin with, there had been an interview with Farrell in the mess-house which had troubled the girl. He had appeared suddenly before her as she was tidying the dining-room, going direct to the point of his perturbation.

"Why are you avoiding me, Betty?" he had asked.

Her answer was not quite frank and she resented the necessity for evasion put upon her.

"We rode in opposite directions," she said, "an' neither of us circled the globe."

"Did I vex you the other morning, Betty? Why did you ride in an opposite direction?"

"'Cause I don't always twirl my thumbs the same way, I 'spose," she laughed, but the laughter was not free from a thread of impatience.

He went further then than he had meant to.

"You don't like Miss Vinson. I don't either, Betty."

"Lawd, then, I'm sho' sorry fur her," said Betty, carefully dusting the clock on the mantel-shelf, and turning her back upon him.

"You are vexed," he complained regretfully. "Look at me, Betty."

"I'm lookin' fur dust, Mr. Farrell. I'm awful busy. An' you're bustin' rules," she added. "I'd er dusted any one but you out," she concluded.

He had gone at that plainly disappointed, even somewhat out of humor, and the incident had left Betty rather serious.

"'Twon't do fur him tuh be gittin' doped," she murmured, and, sure that Farrell was well out of the way, she had made ready for her ride and saddled her own pony.

Betty turned her pony's head toward the plains that stretched almost unbroken to the northward of Farrell's house, following the road that ran like a ribbon drawn across them to the far-off bounding highway of the X-Y range upon that side of its vast extent.

It was generally a deserted portion of the ranch, though as the girl rode on this day she saw in the distance a score or more head of the home cattle browsing on the flower-sprinkled prairie, and she knew that one of the men would be somewhere about herding them from too wide a straying.

Indeed, a moment later she saw two figures in the shadow of a spur of chaparral which even as she caught sight of them separated, that one coming in her own direction taking on the outlines of a woman's body, while the other galloping off she recognized as Mooly Watkins.

"I didn't know yuh rode alone, Miss Vinson," said Betty as the horses drew abreast.

"Mr. Farrell was very busy this morning," answered Zora, "and I excused him from his attendance upon me."

Betty caught the note of appropriation in the words. She had not in any way meant to provoke it, but it provoked her.

"Sho'," she affirmed. "I reminded him of it jes' now. Men has tuh be reminded er their duty often."

There was more subtlety in Betty's smile and words than there had been in her companion's, but she missed nothing of her point for that. Though she was unused to drawing-rooms, Betty understood the nature of the men and women that made drawing-rooms, and she understood the little frown on Zora Vinson's face.

"I'm ridin' on," she said. "Must yuh go back, Miss Vinson?"

"Yes, but I shall run down to see you some day."

"Sho'. Come an' see how I take care er the boys."

"I've been hearing something about that from Watkins," replied Zora. "I ran across him back there."

Something made Betty look up with keen glance. She could not have told why, but the impression leaped to her mind that the girl before her had been questioning Watkins about her—Watkins of all others. A moment later and each had ridden on her separate way.

Having no desire to encounter Watkins herself, Betty turned aside at the point where she had seen the man and Zora separate, and, riding into the chaparral made for a spring, she knew of where she might water her pony and loiter for a few minutes before returning homeward.

Just below the spot the land broke into a ravine, thick with jackvines and the dwarfed growth of scrub-oaks, with here and there a cottonwood towering skyward.

Watering her pony, Betty stood drinking slowly from the big calabash that was kept hanging above the spring. There was an unusual listlessness upon her, almost a despondency. Life, for the time, had lost its zest. It seemed a hardship to have to return to her duties at the ranch-house.

She drained the gourd, hanging it again upon its broken twig. With her arm still uplifted she paused, her head turned, listening.

Below her in the gulch she heard the sound of voices — a man's voice and a woman's—Watkins's voice and another's.

"I couldn't come no sooner," he was saying, "an' yuh ain't no business followin' me round' so, anyway. What yuh mean by it, Nell? Don't yuh see enough er me in town?"

The girl above them started. Listlessness fled from her. Attention alert and strained seized upon her every nerve. She leaned forward tensely expectant to catch the answering voice.

"'Cause I love yuh," it moaned; "Gawd help me! I've followed yuh far. I'll follow yuh here. Yuh swore yuh loved me. Yuh ruined me an' left me, an' I love yuh still. Let me be yo' wife, Jed, if yuh love me any mo'!"

Betty heard the growled protest of the man.

"What I done I done fur love er you, Jed. Yuh knows it. Gawd knows it. 'Tain't wipin' out the sin, I know; but ain't yuh no mercy—ain't yuh no love fur me any mo'?"

"Hush!" he muttered. "Yuh fool! 'Course I love yuh, Nell; but why'd yuh come here tuh this place with *him* here? Yuh ran tuh him frum me that night. Why do yuh come tuh me now?"

"I ran tuh him tuh save you," sobbed the woman. "Yuh know it. I meant tuh throw Jim off yo' trail, fur I 'lowed he'd trust Dan Tavish. They was friends, an' you was er stranger in Eagle Tail. An' ain't he stood by us? Ain't he kept er close mouth tuh his own cost?"

"An' he'll keep er closer 'fore long —him!"

An ominous silence fell.

"What yuh mean?" gasped the woman. "What yuh mean by that, Jed?"

"Oh, ——!" he growled savagely. "Stand back! Keep yo' hands tuh yo'self!"

Betty's own hands clenched at the sharp cry of the woman. She heard Watkins stride away through the bushes, the woman following, her hoarse voice sobbing a passionate but futile appeal.

Then it became very still in the spur of woods.

CHAPTER IX.

The Other Man.

GETTING upon her pony, Betty rode out upon the plain. There was no one in view. Evidently Watkins and his companion were making their way through the woods which ran on toward the road the woman must go to return to the town. With no one to observe her, Betty took the homeward trail across the prairie.

One thought was paramount — the strengthening belief that she had seriously wronged her lover.

She could not still that leaping faith. Not reason so much as intuition guided her. Though she understood as little as before of the exact circumstances of Jim Granson's death, she knew now that it had been Watkins throughout, and not Tavish, who had been the evil spirit.

It had been Watkins and not Tavish whom the woman had loved.

How she had wronged him! Betty's heart sank at the recurring thought. Could she ever hope for his forgiveness?

She who had scorned him so for his supposed disloyalty—how might she seek pardon from him for her own? And then the remembrance of the danger that menaced him struck the crimson of her humiliation from her face and flashed the light of a grim resolve in her eyes.

Shielding Watkins as she had reason to believe he was—for what else could the woman's words have meant? —Tavish himself stood in peril. But first, and Betty rode hard upon the thought, his enemy should have to deal with her!

Like a pent-up tide her long-denied love swept through every fiber of the girl's being. The man she had loved behind all her scorn and fierce contempt of him stood forth to her at last

a hero. She quivered with emotion, her lips murmuring his name, her eyes filling with delicious tears.

The wine of joy within her, she stabled her pony and, going to her room, threw off her riding clothes and dressed for her work in the kitchen.

It was for him she would labor now, the lowliest duty that fell to her hand, gilding itself into a service of love. She almost forgot the shadow that lurked behind her new and abounding happiness.

Larson's wife joined her as she went across the lane to the mess-house, and sat watching the girl's deft movements.

"Yuh sho' runs by clockwork, Betty," the woman said admiringly.

Betty laughed. She felt very lighthearted just then.

"Meals get themselves," she declared, "if yuh fix fur 'em ahead er time. But I want some fresh eggs, an' hear er hen cacklin' over tuh the barn. I'll be back in er minute if yuh'll jes' sit still."

She ran out bareheaded, her blue dress a quickly moving spot of color as she crossed the corral, disappearing through the rear doorway of the barn.

Among the loose hay in the loft she gathered her spoils, and, making a pocket for the eggs by the caught-up skirt of her dress, climbed somewhat carefully down the ladderlike stairs at the instant that Farrell rode his horse into the stable.

His face brightened at the sight of her, and Betty, aware of her exposed ankles, brightened also to a bewitching crimson as she sprang to the ground.

"I wonder why hens will lay in haylofts!" she said, and took the eggs from her skirt. She placed them on a wheelbarrow near and smoothed down her slightly rumpled dress. Her eyes lifted to Farrell's in quizzical humor.

"Perhaps it's just feminine perversity," he ventured. "Like riding in contrary directions."

Betty sobered.

"P'r'aps," she replied. "Leasterways I rode tuh some advantage this mawnin', Mr. Farrell."

She checked herself suddenly. He could not understand the swift glance of her dark eyes. He took a step nearer to her.

"If you mean in avoiding me, Betty, I am not so sure of that. I've been thinking since I left you this morning, and if I'd been with you I'd have been only enjoying. Do you know what I've been thinking, Betty, and what my thoughts have led me to?"

Intuition told her plainly enough what stage he had reached, and something of fear clutched at the girl's heart. By an effort she met his ardent gaze calmly, laughing with simulated unconcern.

"I know," she said, "that I must find er bag or basket fur my eggs an' get back tuh my dinner. Won't yuh help me, Mr. Farrell?"

Appeal quivered in the voice — warning, too — but Farrell heeded neither at the moment.

"Betty!" he murmured brokenly. "Can't you see—won't you see that I love you?"

In genuine distress she answered him:

"No, I can't an' I won't; but I'll furget yuh ever said this tuh me, Mr. Farrell, if yuh'll remember never tuh speak tuh me so again."

"But you like me, Betty, do you not?"

"I have liked yuh very much, Mr. Farrell—an' respected yuh."

"Good God!" he cried at that. "Do you mean that my love for you costs me your respect?"

She turned from him with a little wail of mingled distress and vexation.

"Don't yuh see if yuh say these things tuh me I'll have tuh go away from the range?" she cried.

Moodily he watched her cross the open space toward the door of the harness-room and stoop to take up an empty feed-bag. Holding its four corners, she looked back at him, smiling bravely.

"Put the eggs in fur me, Mr. Farrell."

He did her bidding silently, the girl holding the cloth in both hands, her eyes upon his face, her own face delicately flushed.

"Hurry," she commanded as he lingered over relinquishing the last egg. "I'm the cook, yuh know, an' I've lots tuh do."

She was more than pretty right then, and very helpless. Something wistful about her lips tempted Farrell wildly. Quickly he leaned toward her, and over her outstretched hands, still waiting to close the bag about the eggs, kissed her with swift, impetuous passion.

Then, in a rush of remorse, instantaneous and affrighted, Farrell stepped back.

With her face blanched and quivering Betty stood motionless, her unwinking eyes set toward the open doorway in which, sitting upon his horse, Dan Tavish looked back at her, a curious smile twisting his mouth mirthlessly.

CHAPTER X.

Impassable Barriers.

MARTHA LARSON turned at the sound of Betty's steps outside the kitchen door, and dropped the knife from her hand as her eyes fell upon the girl's face.

"Land above, child!" she cried. "Has yuh seen er corpse?"

Betty set down the eggs. She tried to laugh, but it was more of a sob.

"Yes. I've seen er corpse—the hideousest of all corpses—an' I'll see it tuh my dyin' day!"

"Oh! come now," exclaimed the foreman's wife, resuming her paring of the potatoes. She glanced at the girl keenly. "Yuh want me tuh stay an' help yuh, Betty, or yuh want me tuh go?"

"Go, Martha—if yuh don't mind."

Left alone, her happiness of an hour ago dashed, Betty went dully about her work.

She scarcely thought of Farrell, so stupendous seemed to her the irony of her fate that Tavish should have this cause to misjudge her. She had sent Farrell from her with a few passionately bitter words, despairing rather than resentful.

The memory of that smile upon the lips of Dan Tavish seared her soul.

That night she heard his voice in the mess-room after supper, and she lingered in the kitchen after her dishes had been washed, determined to intercept him should he leave the ranch-house alone.

His manner toward her at both of the meal times had shown no hint of his feeling — unless in that very fact there lay the hint of his contempt. For in her pain Betty forgot that Tavish had no reason to blame her for what he had chanced to oversee.

She had been frank in her renunciation of him, judging him however harshly, and she was free to love whom she willed. He did not know that Betty had only that day herself come to know, and did not wish to be free.

After a time Betty closed her kitchen door, and standing just outside, waited.

It was not Tavish's usual custom to spend his evenings in the mess-room, and it was not long this night either that Betty had to wait. When she saw Tavish stroll down the near-by path to the lane, the girl darted, soft-footed and shadowlike, behind him.

Just beyond the house as he was turning toward his own cabin, Tavish heard her fluttering skirts and faced about abruptly.

"Dan," she murmured, "I want tuh say somethin' tuh yuh!"

Tavish had been wounded. He was sore and hurt. He knew that he was hotly jealous.

Yet over and over again he had told himself that afternoon that he could not be angry. So far as he was concerned, Betty was free—as free as Farrell.

If they loved, what right had he to resent it? But now instinctive anger that heeded no reason leaped within him toward Betty. Why should she come seeking him this night when all these weeks she had scorned him so?

He stood in unresponsive silence, and the girl felt the sickening chill of his demeanor, of the formless but stirring doubt of her in Tavish's mind, and the words she would have uttered fell back leaden upon her heart.

Did he think that as yet uncertain of Farrell she had come seeking him now to crave the regard she had spurned? That idea stung Betty into a feminine caution, alert and sensitive.

"Well, Betty," Tavish asked politely, when she did not speak. "What is it yuh have tuh say?"

The sound of laughter broke upon them from the mess-house doorway. Betty shrank back.

"It's about you, Dan," she said, quickly making her resolve. "Will yuh take er turn with me out there?"

"'Bout me?" he asked, with pardonable incredulity.

The girl colored under the darkness of the night, leading the way beyond the row of cabins out upon the starlit plain.

"Yes, it's 'bout you," she reiterated. "Yuh're in danger, Dan, frum Jed Watkins."

Conflicting emotions swept through him. He noticed her use of the man's rightful name. He could not restrain the thrill that came that she should be concerned about his well-being, but he remembered Farrell, and the foolish joy died within him.

"Watkins is er coward," he replied, after he had taken stock of these things. "I ain't feared er him."

"It is because he is er coward," she said, and her voice trembled, for his apparent indifference hurt. She had meant to tell him of what she had overheard in the woods that day, but the words stuck with which she would have spoken to him of Nell Granson.

They moved on slowly, aimlessly, the night pulsing about them in wide, unbroken silences. Now and then an owl quavered its eery cry, a coyote barked on its distant hunting range. nearer at hand the little street of cabins lay still, a few lights glimmering from open door or window.

In her pain Betty's sense of values became clouded.

"Yuh're very unkind tuh me, Dan," she murmured.

Tavish started. He had all but forgotten her actual presence in his closer, more poignant thought of her.

"Unkind!" he echoed. "That ain't so, Betty. Why should I be unkind? I thank yuh, but Watkins cain't hurt me."

"He can kill yuh!" she cried tensely. "He swears he will. He come tuh me the other day, thinkin' I'd stan' by him if trouble come er it."

"Ah!" he muttered, in bitter retrospect, "Watkins knows the value of er woman's skirts tuh hide behind!"

Betty could weigh now the full meaning of the low words, scarcely intended albeit for her ears.

"Dan," she asked, "do yuh know that she is here—that woman yuh speak of? She was on this place today with Watkins over there by the Bonham road."

He stopped, turning to her in the gloom, his eyes searching her face.

"Who?" he asked with stern abruptness.

"Nell Granson."

He fell back from her, his short laughter bringing the leaping blood into Betty's face.

"So that explains—" he began, when Betty's whole being seemed to flame within her, and her words, hot and torrential, cut across his slow speech:

"Yuh dare tuh think that er me, Dan Tavish! That I come tuh yuh tonight because I'm jealous er that mis'rable creetur! I thought yuh was er man, Dan Tavish! It was you I was thinkin' of, not myself. I come tuh warn yuh er what I heard.

"Did I ever try tuh hold yuh tuh me? Have I ever gone down on my knees tuh yuh beggin' fur yo' love? An' I never will, not if er hundred Watkinses is after yuh. I'm goin' tuh leave this place. I wisht tuh Gawd I'd never come here. I hate it. An' I hate you, Dan Tavish, fur that laugh!"

Tavish listened in shocked amazement.

"Betty!" he cried. "What do yuh mean? I never laughed at you!"

The girl struggled to steady her breath, reason far from her now.

"I know all yuh've been thinkin' this night," she panted. "Yuh thought I came tuh yuh tuh tell yuh how Geoffrey Farrell stole his kiss. Yuh thought I was er gal who drove tandem in her love, didn't yuh?

"An' now yuh think it's Nell Granson I'm jealous of! Yuh can think as yuh please, Dan Tavish. Yuh can love as yuh please, an' who yuh please—if er man knows what love means at all!"

She broke away on the words, breath catching in a dry sob, and before Tavish could stop her she had plunged into the surrounding gloom and vanished.

CHAPTER XI.

Thwarted.

TAVISH stood immovable.

Had a hurricane just brushed by him out of the calm night he would have been no more dazed. Yet even with his amazement at its greatest he was conscious of an underlying current that ran as with electric thrills of delight through his veins.

She loved him still! That fact lifted itself above the fury of Betty's anger. She could not have showed her heart more plainly had she held it out to him upon open palm.

The sacrifice he had made by his silence in order to shield another woman had not been made in vain, and Nell Granson had followed clear-eyed the man of her evil destiny. It absolved him, Tavish felt. Back there in Eagle Tail he had borne Betty's blazing condemnation without a word, for to have spoken would have been to have purchased her faith at the cost of another woman's honor.

But that other woman had lied to him, had duped him, used him as a catspaw in her own disloyalty.

He had more than once suspected it. Now he knew. It was the sudden explanation of Watkins's frequent absences of late that had prompted the thoughtless words which had so enraged Betty.

He recalled that disrupting night in Eagle Tail when, as he had sat reading by his fire, the door had been burst suddenly open, and Nell Granson, her face blanched with terror, had dashed into his cabin, crying to him to save her from her husband's wrath.

She was clinging to him when her husband came, and the rest had happened so quickly that Tavish had never known which of the two shots that had been fired had killed Jim Granson—that one fired by his wife or the one which as the man had wheeled suddenly came from the night outside through the open door.

Only one had struck him, but that one had been deadly, and neighbors rushing in had found his own pistol yet smoking in the woman's hand.

Rough justice had acquitted him, despite the mystery of his persistent silence, perhaps, partly, because of it; but Betty never had.

It had been a wretched business, misunderstanding breeding misunderstanding—Betty yearning for the word of self-exculpation which Tavish would not utter.

In despair Tavish had shaken the dust of the little frontier town from him, and come into the cattle country where Watkins, lured by the fame of Farrell's ranch, had already preceded him.

Something was stirring on the prairie. Tavish half turned to listen. He thought that it might be Betty coming back to him. Betty impulsive and de-

termined; Betty generous and tender, yet so harsh in her judgment of him.

His heart gathered a beat.

He had nothing to forgive her, for he loved. Then Tavish smiled to himself in the darkness. He would not find the path of his desire so easy as all that. Instead of Betty it was doubtless a mule-eared rabbit browsing among the low running bluegrass, or a heavy flighted owl on its hunt for harvest mice.

He walked on a little way, checking his pace suddenly. About him the treeless plain lay an invisible space, not black so much as objectless. Nothing caught the eye because nothing was there above the gray patches of broom-sedge close to the earth. A low wind whispered through its drying branches, barely audible. Yet Tavish was sure he had heard a heavier sound.

There grew within him the sense that he was being followed, but as yet he did not think it might be by a human being. A colt, perhaps, separated from its dam for the night, was inquisitively hovering about him, or a calf. He knew, too, that sometimes even the wild things of the open would curiously stalk a man.

Perhaps it was the subconscious influence of Betty's recent warning that woke the first vague suspicion in Tavish's mind that there was something sinister in that indefinable sound that always ceased as he listened and made itself stealthily audible again when he moved on.

It might have been but the stirring of the primitive instinct of the creature that is intently watched that made him suddenly wary and alert, trying to pierce the darkness about him with sharply inquiring eyes, listening keenly even as he walked onward with steps that now fell noiselessly upon the tufted grass.

There ran a slight depression in the surface of the land, and once more Tavish turned, looking back upward over the way he had just come. Dimly discernible against the luminous darkness of the sky he saw a figure advancing cautiously, a figure that lifted large and threatening in the gloom—Watkins's figure, Tavish was sure.

He had no love for this man.

He had for long suspected him of being the actual as he had surely been the contributory influence in the murder of Jim Granson. He knew of the man's enmity toward him, for which Tavish could find an adequate enough reason. He had long despised Watkins. He had never hated him.

But now a quick and dangerous anger burned in him at this evidence of the cowpuncher's perfidy.

His hand stole back to his hip-pocket and drew out his revolver. He crouched down, a straggling fringe of broom-sedge absorbing in its even grayness the outlines of his slim body. He could see that the man who had been following him paused uncertain on the slightly higher level above.

Tavish waited, but he had not waited motionless, and he realized that he had been discovered.

Nor did he linger motionless now, but as he sprang erect, his gun-arm raised, a lighter shadow bounded into view before his eyes and threw itself upon that of the unsuspecting Watkins, while there was a flash of light and a report that set the plains echoing, and a woman's scream rang out and died.

Tavish leaped forward to the sound.

CHAPTER XII.

The Imp of the Perverse.

AT the sight that met his eyes Tavish groaned aloud.

"Betty," he cried hoarsely, "are you hurt?"

He stooped over the huddled form upon the ground, fell down beside it on his knees, and before she was aware seized the girl in his arms.

She struggled to her feet, drawing away from him, albeit cautious still.

"No, I ain't hurt," she whispered, "but I knew he'd run faster if he thought I was. But you'd ha' been dead in another second. He had yuh covered."

"An' you saved me, Betty. He might ha' missed me in the dark, but he might ha' hit me. An' he might ha' killed you!"

"Didn't I warn you, Dan Tavish?" she asked, standing away further from him, for she had reason to fear the emotion that shook his voice and held his whole body aquiver.

"Was yuh courtin' death that yuh kept walkin' out here in the night with that wolf aroun', knowin' what yuh know about him? Soon's I saw him prowlin' 'roun' after I left yuh I knowd he was up tuh murder."

"An' yuh trailed him, Betty! Yuh did that tuh save me!"

"Tuh save you! Tuh save er human life, Dan Tavish, frum one as murders men an' breaks women's hearts. Make no mistake about that!"

"No," he answered with an odd alacrity, "I won't."

"An' now," Betty went on, "I reckon yuh is safe fur to-night, at least. I guess yuh'll not see any mo' er Mooly Watkins on the X-Y in the daytime, but look out fur him at night, an' in the bushes. I mayn't always cut in so handy, Dan Tavish."

In spite of herself a note crept into her voice that thrilled Tavish like a clarion call. Wisely, however, he held silence, intuition telling him that was not his moment. But as he walked on beside her his blood was singing in his veins, for he knew also that Betty had been badly frightened, and frightened about him.

She was right in her surmise about Watkins. In the morning he did not appear, and though Tavish did not disclose the reason for his non-appearance, Larson, knowing of the enmity between the two men, had his own surmises.

"He's jes' saved me the trouble er orderin' him off," remarked the foreman. "He's been powerful thick of late with that Bludsoe bunch, an' that ain't no recommendation fur any place north er Hades. I was jes' sayin' tuh the boss he ought tuh wipe 'em off the map er this county—they's no mo' than murderin' thieves!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Tavish Scores.

THEY were branding one day over by the Crooked Horn, and Betty rode direct across the intervening prairie for the spot.

The devil was in Betty just then, though it was the devil of contrariness rather than that of evil. It seemed to her that she had stood for a moment on the mountain-top only to be pushed back into the tangled undergrowth of circumstance, and this morning she had been scratched more deeply than usual.

She was vexed with Tavish, too, blaming him, womanlike, for the very actions which her own conduct toward him forced upon him.

If he misjudged her she would give him cause for his judgment. Sometimes she wondered with a sickened heart if the rainbow of her love for Tavish which had been broken so harshly could ever be remade into the perfect arch.

She rode recklessly, her pony obedient, however, to her lightest touch of hand upon rein or the blunt rowel of the silver Mexican spur Farrell had given her as a tacit token of atonement for that momentary act of his audacity.

Once the horse shied, snorting loudly as a white-tailed rabbit, crouched among the thick leaves of a mullein plant, bounded suddenly with frightened leaps across its path and sped away over the plain. Once it swerved abruptly when the sharp shadow of a low-flying buzzard cut

the ground scythelike under its hoofs. Coveys of quail rose before the galloping feet, whirling away in drumming flight. And once Betty leaned forward in her saddle, cracking her quirt at the threateningly lifted head of a rattlesnake disturbed in his repose beneath a blooming cactus.

The girl welcomed the spice of danger.

The wind, blowing against her rapid motion, whipped the color to her cheeks. Her eyes were alight with a dangerous sparkle of their own. She called aloud to her horse as one of the Walküre of old, the clear notes of her voice fluting upon the air.

An answering shout caused her to bring her pony about and to a sudden halt. Tavish was galloping toward her over the soft sward, the branding iron he had ridden back to get lying before him against the horn of his saddle.

She had expected it to be Farrell, and the slight shock of surprise was not welcome to Betty.

She feared that an undue acquiescence might seem to lie in the instantaneous checking of her speed. She was very careful that nothing of the kindling admiration she felt for Tavish's buoyant horsemanship should be discernible by him.

"I thought yuh was Geoffrey Farrell," she said, as he drew up beside her.

"I'm sorry I'm only myself," he returned, and his spirits fell.

"'Tain't tuh be helped, of course," answered Betty, the words, though nothing in themselves, gaining an edge by her manner of utterance.

Tavish glanced at her shaded face, a swift divination of her mood almost within his grasp.

"Betty," he said on an imperative impulse, "I thought the other night we was goin' tuh pull together once mo'."

"I know yuh did," flashed Betty, surprised herself at the anger that seized her, "but you've another guess comin', Dan Tavish. I ain't tuh be picked up an' throwd down that er way."

"Good Gawd!" he cried, and ceased when he saw the passion in the face she turned upon him.

"Yuh is all the same," she told him breathlessly, "all men is an' some women's as bad! All yuh think about is matin', matin', matin'—jes' like that Molly Cottontail out there yonder. It's plum sick'nin'! Yuh think er gal's nothin' better tuh do but be settlin' down an' marryin' every man who beckons tuh her."

"I never thought er matin' with any one but you, Betty, an' I never will. I thought yuh'd come tuh know that frum what yuh said that night. I thought yuh'd come tuh b'lieve it at last."

She fell silent. They were in sight of the others, and the lowing of the herd, the shriller bleating of the branded calves served apparently to distract Betty's attention. Sitting his horse near the group of men about the fire was Farrell, and he was watching their slow approach.

Betty knew that she had been unjust to Tavish, and the knowledge hurt madly. Gentleness trembled on the tip of her tongue. And then Tavish spoke, unwisely.

"Do yuh treat him so, too?" he asked, nodding his head toward Farrell. "Or is he different frum that po' Molly Cottontail back there an' the rest er us mere men?"

She dealt him an unkind cut at that, bruising her own heart the more.

"Yes, he's different. He takes his punishment noble an' don't cry."

"P'r'aps," said Tavish sharply, for the words stung, "that's made easy fur him by the one he's offended."

Betty deigned no reply to this. Indeed, Farrell was riding up to them, the telltale delight upon his handsome face only too evident both to Betty's indignant eyes and to Tavish's jealous pain.

"Hurry, Dan," said Farrell. "The work goes badly with that old iron. It doesn't make a clean job." He turned to the girl as Tavish rode on. "So you favor us this morning, Betty."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Betty crossly. "I ain't Miss Zora Vinson that yuh's got tuh perfume her!"

"No, thank God!" he murmured.

The girl brushed back the drooping brim of her sombrero, and looked at him clearly, something akin to real anger stirring in her breast.

"It's mo' than she's doin' jes' now, I reckon," she said. "She's saw fit more'n once tuh put me in my place, Mr. Farrell, an' I'm goin' tuh put you in yo's. An' it ain't sittin' here 'fore all yo' men talkin' drawin'-room tuh yo' cook as though she was er town lady!"

He turned his back upon his men, leaning closer toward her, swept by a realization of her loveliness into unpremeditated speech. That intimation of Zora Vinson's impertinent interference also rankled.

"Then be my wife, Betty," he pleaded. "I love you, and we'll get them another cook."

A moment she was silent — for all her preparedness, taken aback.

"Yuh'll find it easier," she then said, "tuh get another wife, Mr. Farrell; an' if yuh ain't careful yuh'll have tuh look elsewhere fur another cook, too."

"Tell me," demanded Farrell, and she could not doubt the seriousness of his eyes, "why you say this to me, Betty. Is it because of Dan Tavish?"

She did not answer, and, following her gaze toward the group of men beyond them, Farrell drew his horse quickly about, his interest centered upon what he saw. Beside him the girl, sitting like a statue in her saddle, held bated breath as she watched.

When Tavish at Farrell's urgency had ridden on with the iron, which he threw down before the men at the branding fire, he had carried his pony farther toward the clump of sassafras bushes about which the other horses were grouped.

From there he had seen, standing apart from the rest of the cattle, an interested and somewhat irate beholder of the branding, one of the toughest old characters on the X-Y range, a long-horn bull, glorying in and justifying his name of Beelzebub, oftener called Bub, for short.

The animal had never received a brand, though in his nose he wore as a symbol of a long past period of captivity a big copper ring. He was easily the monarch of the X-Y herds.

Tavish was in no gentle mood himself just then, vexed with Betty, more vexed with himself, resentful of Farrell's cool assumption of the girl's presence there as a license for himself. As he stood for a moment beside his horse he could see Betty and Farrell as they talked together some distance to the right, and he saw that they talked with an uncommon earnestness.

Then his eye caught sight of the old bull in whose belligerent attitude Tavish chose to read a challenge to the whole race of mankind of which he was just then a resentful member.

An idea flashed into the young cowpuncher's head. Turning to his horse, he took from the horn of the saddle the long snake lariat coiled there, throwing it lightly over his arm as he loosened with one hand the loop at the end. Then he coolly walked out upon the plain toward Beelzebub.

The bull at once noticed his approach, took a few steps backward, paused, and bellowed sullenly. The men at work branding were unaware of Tavish's maneuvers.

"I'm goin' tuh slap the sign er the cross on yo' hide to-day, yuh ole devil, or write my name on my own tombstone," murmured Tavish as he circled nearer the shifting bull, whose head, always to the foe, as his worst enemy could not but admit, forgot his interest in the work going on in Tavish's more personal designs upon him.

He knew the meaning of that gently swinging bit of rope as well as any man of them all. And he knew quite well what he meant to do himself to thwart its purpose.

Tavish drew closer. The gentle swaying of the lasso had now gained a more sinister movement, though not yet had Tavish begun to circle his head. Beelzebub met that more sinister intent and nearer approach with steadily erect head and switching tail and a rumbling in his deep chest, ominous and threatening.

Tavish's arm jerked upward, circling the pliant noose in spirals above his head, measuring with calm eye his distance, wary in his aim. And Beelzebub—wary, too—watched his man.

Like a living thing the lariat flew out upon the air. A living thing, indeed, the big bull leaped forward; but Tavish knew his enemy's cunning, and as he had cast, had himself sprung back, and the noose which would else have overreached, settled beautifully over the branching, polished horns, and jerked taut, even in the instant of Beelzebub's crafty but too tardy halt.

And so the game was on!

Beelzebub was furious now, tricked as he had been for all his wisdom, and Beelzebub's fury was no tempest in a lady's teapot. Tavish knew that well.

And others besides knew it—the men, pausing now in their branding to watch the outcome of Tavish's daring—Farrell on his distant horse, and Betty, still and suddenly very pale, feeling that in some way she lay at the bottom of this dangerous play.

Cautiously Tavish drew in the slack of the lariat. Angrily Beelzebub rumbled, sending with pawing hoof clouds of gray dust over his brindled shoulder and back, his long, tufted tail lashing his sleek sides. Tavish approached nearer, when swiftly Beelzebub wheeled and charged.

Once the looping rope as Tavish played it all but caught about a leg, but missed, and Tavish stood firm, like a matador awaiting his moment.

With the bull almost upon him, Tavish leaped aside, seized the copper ring in the dilated nostrils, his whole weight thrown sidewise against it, twisting the massive neck by nose and horn, and so toughened had the cartilage become around the ring that the nostril did not tear, and Beelzebub stumbled to his knees, with a grunt toppling over upon his side.

Then, with a deftness that seemed to those looking on marvelously easy, Tavish coiled the trailing lariat about the animal's legs and drew the rope tight, the noose about the bull's horns giving him his purchase. Running back a few paces, he stood still, holding the taut rope in his hands.

Beelzebub the unconquerable was vanquished at last!

"But it's jes' because Bub was dazed at yuh bein' such er plumb everlastin' fool, Dan!" declared Bud Standish, who with others had come running up. "If that ring hadn't er held he'd ha' tossed yuh tuh Jerusalem the golden!"

Tavish laughed.

"In the mean time I've swore tuh put the sign er the X-Y on him. Get the iron quick, Bud. Don't stan' there scoldin' like er ole woman."

And Farrell, looking at Betty, knew by the girl's pallor and the dry sobs that shook her, what the answer to his question really was!

CHAPTER XIV.

Tavish Loses.

NOW it might be thought that, having been frightened badly, Betty would have made Tavish's way smooth, but the reaction from her fright gave her exactly the opposite impetus. Her love told her that Tavish had been spurred on to his daring act through something of the spirit of old that led knights to tilt for their ladies' favor.

Betty knew nothing of tilt and tourney, but she resented the strategy by which Tavish had sought at one and

the same time to please and punish her. Since he was safe from the possible consequences of his deed she determined to punish him for the cost of it to herself.

In fact, she was vastly proud of him. Betty herself liked daring. She did not much enjoy being dared.

Yet, in spite of her carefully nurtured design to allow nothing of her real sentiment to become apparent to Tavish, the girl was experiencing a sense of elation as she rode homeward alone, having seen Farrell leave her to congratulate Tavish upon his achievement. She was not very sorry for Geoffrey Farrell, except when she thought of the probability of his becoming the husband of Zora Vinson, though Farrell just then felt sorry enough for himself.

"You are a lucky man, Dan," he had said to Tavish, riding up to the group standing at a respectful distance from the crestfallen and freshly branded Beelzebub, who remained eying his enemies in sullen dejection; and as Farrell held out a hand to Tavish something in the glance accompanying the action spoke more eloquently to the young cow-puncher than the mere words.

"The spell took me," responded Tavish, "an' it worked. 'Twas three parts luck, as yuh say."

"Only I didn't put it that way," answered Farrell as he turned aside.

That evening Betty sat by her window, the light in her room only that drifting in from the half moon outside. There had been that in Tavish's eyes as he had repeatedly looked into hers during the supper-hour that had set her heart glowing.

After all, she asked herself, why should she struggle against her love? It had already had its full meed of sorrow. Why punish it any further?

They were strumming banjos in the mess-room. A figure came and stood in the open doorway, and Betty saw that it was Tavish. She caught his glance up and down the lane, then shrank a little into the shadow as his head lifted, and she knew he looked up to her window.

For some moments he remained there alone, then Bud Standish joined him, and the low sound of their voices as they talked came to the girl's listening ears. After a little Standish drew back into the room, and she heard his rich voice lifted in a rollicking song which had something to do with a "looloo gal" and carving a rival's heart with a razor.

She saw Tavish turn and make some laughing comment, and a moment later step down from the doorway and walk toward the lane.

Again he glanced up to her window as he passed before it, going in the contrary direction to his cabin. Was he hoping to see her there to call her down to him? She knew she would have obeyed the call, although as he passed by she crouched lower lest he should see her watching him.

In that moment Betty knew she was but as wax in this man's hands. The knowledge, curiously, brought her no sense of shame now, rather an exaltation that sang along her veins, making her pulses leap.

She had tried to tear him from her heart, but he was one with every fiber of her body. She owed him reparation for the wrong she had done him. Gladly she knew she would repay him.

She dropped to her knees, her arms crossed upon the window-ledge, thought of the possible danger he might invite if he walked far into the night recurring to her, stilling her joy. All that day she had forgotten it; but now, reason as she would, the fear for him grew.

No word had come of Watkins lately, but in that very fact might lie the hint of danger. Betty remembered how that other night the man had stalked Tavish, patient and determined.

She rose to her feet, standing hesitant, her alarm waxing keener. An instant more and she had turned, steal-

ing noiselessly down the stairs and out of the house.

The plains were not dark this night. Under the sinking moon they lay in a spectral light, their distances magnified, shadowy and gray. At the end of the lane Betty paused, uncertain. She thought she saw a moving blot far out upon the plain's vastness, and she turned toward it, walking with free, quick steps. But as she drew near it the object she had seen proved to be merely a solitary cactus.

Beside it Betty paused again, scanning the spaces about her, made one glad, relieved step, and then stood still, the rigidness of death seizing upon her pliant young body.

A little way beyond the cactus where the prairie rolled gently into a wide valley stood Tavish with another, one who clung to him with low, running words of passionate entreaty. His own arms were outstretched to the woman, his own voice soothing and, to Betty, tenderly caressing, answered her.

For a moment Betty could not move. So violent was the shock, coming, too, just in that hour of her complete surrender to her love, that she was stunned. Life ceased in her veins. In her ears a booming silence seemed to be crushing her down.

She could feel the lack of all sensation, as though dead she yet lived.

Then fury—swift, passionate, overpowering—rushed through her. Every nerve swelled to bursting with the leaping blood, and she sprang forward, running across the intervening ground, and stopped in front of Tavish, who, with upraised face, looked into her own in a speechless understanding.

The woman whose hands yet clung to Tavish's shoulders had not moved. Either she was unaware of Betty's swift approach, or aware of it, stood overwhelmed. Upon her shoulder Betty's hand fell with the strength of a man's.

"Let me see yo' face," she panted, "both yo' faces that I may be sho' this time!" She jerked the woman around, peering into the frightened eyes.

"You!" she cried. "I knew it!" and she laughed, falling back a pace. Her voice sank to a deadly bitterness as she turned to Tavish. "Yuh've fine taste, Dan Tavish," she said, cruel in her scorn. "Er false wife an' every man's pick-me-up! Good luck tuh yuh both!"

Across the plain Tavish's call followed the maddened flight of the girl.

"Betty—Betty—fur the love er Gawd—fur yo' own sake—listen tuh me!"

CHAPTER XV.

The Two Women.

ALTHOUGH nothing had been heard on the X-Y from Watkins, the man was neither dead nor sleeping. It suited his purpose very well that he might be temporarily forgotten, for he was not forgetting.

In a brooding sullenness not unmixed with uneasiness he was waiting his time, holding his life an uncertain thing so long as Tavish held the knowledge of his secret, shared now, he knew, through his own folly, by the woman Tavish loved.

Moreover, he hated Tavish far more than he feared him. There were many debts of scorn and open contempt and insult which he sought the opportunity of settling, and, until the woman Nell Granson had appeared, Watkins had had a fatuous hope that with Tavish out of the way he might make progress in what he called his love for Betty Deane.

Nell Granson was very much in the way. She haunted Watkins with her unhappy importunities.

She left the town, and secured work on Bludsoe's ranch that she might be near the man she loved, and she killed the last vestige of Watkins's tenderer sentiment for her by her unwelcome devotion to him.

He had sterner things to think of just then than a played-out infatuation which had cost him dear and might yet cost him all.

He had told her so the day before, purposely exaggerating to her the risk he was in from Tavish's revenge, striking a cold terror to her soul by his own braggart threats of harm to Tavish.

"One er us has got tuh die," he had told her, "an' whichever one it may be, it's you that's brought it about with yo' runnin' tuh him that night back there in Eagle Tail an' puttin' him wise tuh our love. 'Course he knows you ain't shot Jim—yuh couldn't hit er house! 'Course he knows he ain't done it! 'Course he knows I did!"

"Yuh wouldn't kill him, Jed, an' after he's kep' silence 'bout us!"

"P'r'aps yuh'd rather see him kill me," he sneered. "He's swore he will. It's all yo' doin's, anyhow, whichever one er us gets potted! Yuh kin smoke that in yo' pipe!"

He had left the woman utterly terrified; and that night she had gone to the X-Y, meaning to see Tavish if she might, and plead with him, or failing that, to go to Betty herself. Tavish's habit of strolling before he turned in at his cabin played into Nell's hands this night with disastrous result.

Tavish had little enough cause to feel kindly toward the woman.

Through her he had suffered the eclipsing of the dearest hopes of his life, and her open devotion to the man whose just penalty had in so large measure fallen upon Tavish's own shoulders killed sympathy in disgust.

Yet Tavish could never turn a deaf ear to a woman's cry for help; and as Nell Granson had pleaded with him this night, illogical enough in her terror and pain, he had soothed her until she had clung to him weeping. And so Betty had found them.

Tavish turned now to the awed woman standing miserable beside him. In his own pain he spoke sternly.

"Twice yuh have been er curse in my life, Nell Granson. Are yuh willin' tuh do what yuh can tuh save it?"

"Yes, Dan, yes!" she cried and wrung her hands.

"Then go after her," he said, "an' tell her all. Tell her all I've ever been tuh yuh at Eagle Tail an' here. Tell her why yuh come tuh me to-night. Tell her there's never been er thought er love 'tween you an' me."

She shrank at the words.

"She hates me!" she moaned.

"She loves me. Twice, hadn't it been fur you, she would ha' been my wife."

The woman struggled with herself.

"Very well, then. Yuh've been good tuh me, Dan, an' I'll go; but 'twon't do no good. She ain't goin' tuh b'lieve me."

And Betty would not. Checking the slower steps into which she had fallen after her first leaving Tavish and his companion, she turned about at the sound of her name, waiting for Nell Granson to come up. Creature as she was of varied impulses, the worst side of Betty was in evidence now.

"Well!" she cried, scorn flaming in her voice. "This is as near tuh where I live as I want such as you tuh come."

"He ain't tuh blame, Betty," panted Nell. "I come tuh him to-night tuh beg him not tuh harm Jed Watkins."

"So yuh wants 'em both," sneered Betty. "Well, I ain't stoppin' yuh."

The other woman drew her shawl about her shoulders tighter. She was shivering, though the night was not cold.

"Yuh'll be sorry some day yuh said that, Betty Deane," she cried. "Dan Tavish was never nothin' in my life but er friend, an' any one that says he was lies."

Betty's laughter cut cruelly.

"Have it yo' own way, Nell Granson. 'Tain't nothin' tuh me. I notice he ain't never denied it."

"An' yuh'll be sorrier yuh said that! Listen tuh me, Betty Deane, though it ain't easy fur me tuh say it tuh yuh

this night. There ain't no whiter man on Gawd's earth than Dan Tavish, an' yuh knows it. I don't blame yuh fur hatin' me, but yuh're er fool tuh turn frum him."

"Yuh ought to know," laughed Betty shortly, shivering now herself.

"Yes, I ought tuh know, an' I does know. I never thought that night when I run tuh his house frum my husband of all that would come er it; but he ain't never gone back on me tuh this day—though yuh went back on him!

"I never thought er you when my husband come back that night an' I run tuh Dan Tavish, knowin' what friends they was, but he never put even his love fur you before his honor, though you put yo' 'spicion, Betty Deane, before yo' love, an' yuh're doin' it again to-night."

"An' good cause I has," cried Betty in blazing anger. "You tuh talk er honor, when I've two eyes in my head tuh see what I saw this night! Go back tuh yo' friend an' yo' husband's friend an' ask him tuh take yuh back tuh yo' other friend, fur the plains ain't safe tuh be roamin' aroun' on at night even fur such as you."

Nell Granson's breath caught in a cry of pain and she covered her eyes with her hands. When she looked up a moment later she was not alone, although Betty had gone.

"I knowed it would be no use," she moaned to Tavish. "I knowed it!"

It was then that Tavish made his determination. Running after the sound of Betty's hurrying footsteps, he overtook and stopped her.

She faced him, panting in anger and indignation.

"Betty," Tavish pleaded, and his low voice quivered, "listen tuh me before it is too late. Yuh're wrong, Betty; yuh've been wrong an' unjust tuh me frum the first. I love yuh, Betty, with every breath in my body, an' I've never loved any one else; but not even my love can make me silent any longer under yo' scorn.

"It ain't fair; it ain't true. I don't deserve it of yuh, Betty. Once before I left yuh 'cause I couldn't stand it. Think, Betty, 'fore it's too late an' yuh drive me away frum yuh furever!"

Had he known the cold fear that gripped her heart Tavish would have silenced the passionate words that her lips flung at him.

"Am I askin' yuh fur yo' love, Dan Tavish?" she cried. "Am I holdin' yuh that yuh talk er me drivin' yuh away? I don't b'lieve in yo love an' I don't want it."

In all her pain and blind anger Betty could see his face. White and very stern it looked into her own, while his breath came hard and heavily.

"So be it, then," he murmured hoarsely, "an' Gawd furgive yuh, Betty, fur what yuh've said this night!"

She saw him turn away; she heard his steps leaving her, leaving her forever. She held her breath, listening. In the utter silence of the plains she stood there swaying weakly, took a step or so forward, sank to her knees upon the ground, moaning, sobbing.

CHAPTER XVI.

Camp-Fires.

IT became gradually but increasingly evident to all on the X-Y range that something had happened in its social atmosphere. Between Betty and Dan Tavish a cold wall of silence and constraint had arisen that cast its shadow over the entire mess.

To Tavish's surprise and to Betty's own passionate self-reproach, the girl had not resigned her duties as cook on the ranch; and Tavish himself, though he had not been without thought of leaving, stayed on, telling himself, with bitterness he only half succeeded in making himself believe, that he had already sacrificed too dearly to an unworthy love.

His one attempted explanation to the girl had been received with derisive scorn, and Tavish, like Betty, hardened his heart against his love.

Geoffrey Farrell, also, was aware that something had gone wrong. His own more intimate association with Betty had ceased from that day upon which he had read her secret.

In fairness to Betty and to Tavish himself, he stood aside, for while all might be fair in love and war, Farrell knew that he held an advantage over Tavish by which he refused to profit.

About this time rumors of certain lawlessness reached Farrell from that plague-spot in the county's orderliness, the Bludsoe outfit, beyond the easterly ranges of the X-Y—rumors to which Farrell, in his capacity as a county magistrate, felt bound to give attention.

As yet the X-Y had not suffered in the alleged depredations on neighboring ranches, the last and most flagrant of which, the firing and burning of a well-stocked barn on the Bar-O range, Farrell had learned of only that morning; but he was determined not to wait for anything like that.

In fact, he rather welcomed the opportunity of spending a few nights in the saddle with the chance of excitement of an encounter with his unruly neighbors whose periodic outbursts had long made them a menace to the community.

He chose his men with some thought —Tavish first, with Bud Standish, and the Possum, and a few others, leaving Larson in charge of the X-Y. Farrell counseled secrecy as to their object.

There were some new men on the outfit, and it was well to observe caution; but to Betty, who prepared for each man of the little expedition rations sufficient for several meals, their destination was clear enough. A stubborn tightening about her heart echoed her realization of its possible dangers to all, likely danger to Tavish if opportunity should beckon Mooly Watkins's way.

She watched them ride off in the early dusk of the September evening, ponchos strapped over the saddle skirts, lariats over pommels, about the waist of each man holsters in full evidence above his booted legs, supple thighs gripping horse in easy mastery.

She noted that Farrell and Tavish rode ahead, side by side, and a curious sense of being outcast by both of them made itself felt. The loneliness of the woman was upon her.

Perhaps something of this flashed through Bud Standish's mind as he saw her, standing out more boldly now from the shelter of the corral fence since Farrell and Tavish had ridden by. At any rate, he dropped back from his fellows, spurring his pony up to the girl.

"What's it, Betty? Yuh look mournful."

"I wish I was er man 'stead of er pot slinger! What's doin', Bud?"

"Nothin' mos' likely. Never is when yuh goes huntin' it."

"Bludsoe's gang?"

He nodded.

He also divined the cause of her look of silent anxiety. He had his own reason for believing that Betty's treatment of Tavish spelled not indifference, but the reverse. Yet he was mindful of her rebuke when once before he had essayed to do her and Tavish a service.

"Anythin' yuh want me to do, Betty?" he asked, busying himself with the loose end of his girth strap.

For an instant the girl's eyes flashed anger. Had he looked at her he would have had his temerity for his pains, but Bud was sagacious.

After a moment Betty spoke.

"Look out fur snakes!"

"Sho'," acquiesced Bud, tightening his reins. "I'll tell him yuh said so," and, still without glancing at Betty, he galloped after his companions.

He did so that night in the camp they had pitched in a natural pocket along the dry bed of the Raccoon Creek not far from the road that any of the Bludsoe band would be most apt to take in leaving the home range. Farrell had posted sentries on the pla-

teau above, and the others with their horses hitched to exposed and protruding roots of trees in the creek's bank, were gathered about the smoldering fire, their supper finished. A little apart, Tavish and Bud Standish smoked their pipes and talked.

"I wonder, Dan," said Bud, after they had started at the cry of a whippoorwill above them, so near, however, that they could detect the soft whirring undertones and so knew the call to be real, and had settled down again—"I wonder if we're goin' tuh run up against that scaly-backed Mooly Watkins in this."

Tavish was silent, remembering his assurance to the woman, Nell Granson, and Bud went on:

"An' that remind me, Dan. I've er message fur yuh."

"Frum Mooly?"

Tavish's voice was guarded.

"'Bout him," replied Bud, smoking calmly. "Look out fur snakes, is the message, Dan, an' she sent it."

"Did she?"

What he thought a righteous anger stirred in Bud Standish against this man he loved for his conduct toward the woman he dared not let himself love.

"Do yuh know, Dan Tavish," he said in a low, strained tones, "there are times when I could think you the orneriest fool that ever wore boots an' spurs?"

Tavish said nothing.

"If Betty Deane—if er woman like Betty Deane—loved me," went on Bud, "I'd go through hell afire tuh make her happy."

"An' if yuh come through hell afire," asked Tavish slowly, "an' found out yuh hadn't made her happy after all—that she still made yuh feel yuh couldn't ever make her happy—what then? S'pose she wanted tuh keep yuh thar—an' yuh loved her?"

"I'd take her 'long with me," declared Bud, vehemently, "an', by the Lord, she'd go!"

They sprang erect at the low, insistent cry of a whippoorwill repeated at a little distance by another. Farrell was kicking the glowing embers of the fire into ashes. Other dim figures were noiselessly unhitching the horses from the banks.

Tavish and Bud leaped forward toward their own.

CHAPTER XVII.

A Successful Sortie.

FROM the edge of the sheltering woods above the creek over the plateau that broke to form the valley through which ran the high road and beyond which lay the land of Bludsoe's ranch, the house and barns invisible in their grove of elms, the watchers of Farrell's little band had seen a dark and moving mass come out of the gloom and take its way across the dim plain toward the road.

It moved silently and quickly as though destination and plan were well defined, and, striking the highway, turned northward, the muffled fall of the unshod hoofs of horses echoing dully on the silence of the night.

As those echoes died away, another band defiled from the shadow, and, crossing the strip of prairie, followed just above the road where the steps of the horses on the drying turf made no sound, and spurs of chaparral darkened their way.

"The mean-blooded cayutes," murmured Bud Standish to Tavish as they rode. "I wonder where they're headed fur."

"Fur ole man Mason's corrals," grinned the Possum, who overheard. "He's jes' bought er score er head er yearlin's, an' is sleepin' with 'em under his pillow."

Some distance ahead the band they followed had paused, and Farrell, to the fore, waved his men back behind a low clump of mesquit. A dark blur on the night's grayness the woods of Mason's ranch lay to the eastward.

They saw the band separate, three or

four horsemen turning more abruptly aside, the others leaving the highway for a more direct approach to the dwelling and barns of Mason.

"Now what in jumpin' thunder does that mean?" murmured Standish.

"It means they're going to fire the grain stacks," replied Farrell, "while those others raid the corrals. It's for you, Dan, with Bud and Sandy, to get there by the time they do, and fire them. I can't spare any more of you."

"That's enough," said Tavish, "an' we'll get there before they do. It must be that mooly head of-er Watkins tuh be takin' that direction, or they're that sho' er themselves they're makin' er picnic of it."

Striking the road, Tavish reversed their course, riding at first slowly and softly, but with an increasing speed, in the very direction they had just come. His companions understood, and made no comment.

At a point some half mile back the thin line of an intersecting trail led off to their left to the northeast, and they swung their galloping horses upon it.

When the bulky outlines of Mason's grain stacks rose dim and uncertain in the gloom, Tavish drew in his horse.

"Sandy," he said, "you've got tuh stay here with the hawses an' keep an eye on that stack while Bud an' me attends tuh the other two. Don't do nothin' till yuh see 'em about tuh act, then let her speak.

"Remember, yuh've got tuh shoot quicker'n they can strike er match, or we might as well be in our beds so fur as ole Mason's oats is concerned. But give 'em er chance or they might say we was here first — which we are — though I reckon Mason would excuse us fur that."

They were off their horses now, and Sandy was tying the animals to the straggling remnants of an old *bois d'arc* hedge which offered him ambuscade as well as shelter. Tavish and Standish lost no time in taking their posts on the tops of the two big stacks they had elected. Lying there in the yielding straw, they waited.

Nor was it for long.

Cautious in their final approach, at least, three figures came stealing forward afoot straight toward the expectant men of the X-Y. Yet that they had no thought of any immediate danger was clearly evident, for their low words were distinctly heard by Tavish and Standish.

It was Mooly Watkins who seemed to be their leader, and it was near to the stack upon which Tavish lay listening that they paused a moment in further consultation.

"Reckon they's there by this," said Watkins, "an' it's time tuh wake the ole man an' his gang. They'll burn fine, these ricks. Light 'em up, boys, an' then give 'em er few minutes 'fore we shoot an' make tracks. If Bludsoe ain't cut out his yearlin's by then he's er plum tairypin."

They separated, moving blindly into the traps set for them. Over the forward end of his stack, Tavish, drawing his body noiselessly, looked down on the unsuspecting Watkins, who waited an instant for his companions to gain their stations.

Then the big cow-puncher called out softly:

"Ready?"

"Let her go!" answered one.

But they didn't, for in that instant, as a match flared up from the further stack, there was a more deadly flash from beyond, and the man, howling, shot through the hand by Sandy Whitson, dropped his box of matches, and, after the manner of his kind, fled headlong.

"Hold on er minute, pal!" cried Standish to his man, who looked above him, cowering, to see Bud, legs outstretched before him on the sloping side of the stack, with revolver leveled in his hand full in the upturned face. "Move er inch," counselled Bud, slipping gradually downward, "an' yuh'll never move again! Hands up till my legs is down!"

Tavish had waited until just beneath him he had seen Watkins squat low to the base of the stack, then had flung his legs over the straight side and dropped sheer to the ground, barely missing Watkins's head with his feet.

The man staggered erect, startled, and stood helpless at the sight of Tavish, scarce aware at first of the pressure of the latter's pistol against his breast.

"Funny how things work out in this world. Funny how er scoundrel always hangs himself sooner or later, ain't it, Watkins? It 'd be er fairer death fur you than the shot yuh put in Jim Granson's back if I shot yo' coward heart out now!"

Though not without his own quality of courage, Watkins was abjectly frightened.

The shock of his surprise, followed by the keener realization of all he had justly to dread at Tavish's hands, held him dumb and inert. The last time he had seen this man it had been his own hand that held a murderous pistol which had all but done its deadly work. He recalled this now, and his expectation of mercy was faint, indeed.

Tavish, however, had not forgotten his pledge to Nell Granson.

"Hand me yo' gun," he demanded sternly, "butt first an' no foolin'," and his finger moved ominously on the cocked trigger of his own revolver. Without turning his eyes from Watkins's white face he took the proffered revolver and pocketed it. Then he called to Sandy Whitson to bring his lariat.

"Tie his hands behind him, Sandy," he ordered, "an' loop his feet," and in a minute Watkins was trussed and harmless.

"What yuh want done with this pigeon, Dan?" asked Bud Standish, who had held his man likewise at the point of his revolver. "He ain't worth shootin', but I didn't make him!"

They bound him, too.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Bud, spitting in disdain as he put up his pistol. "I've knowd gals as would put up er better fight!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

In the Dark.

IT had not fared so well with Farrell. Bludsoe's men, waiting in vain for the signal of the firing of the stacks, and the consequent drawing off in that direction of Mason's force, which would have left them free to enter the corrals and drive away the cattle herded there, had finally determined to go ahead without the planned for strategy, which they assumed had for some reason miscarried.

They were thus in ugly mood, and their previous assurance had become tinged with some suspicion.

It was Farrell's object to surprise them in the very act of their lawlessness. Intangible evidence had often enough pointed to their depredations in the neighborhood, but fortune had always staved off a direct retribution.

It was known that Bludsoe had traffic with the marauding bands of cattle thieves that now and again swept down from the uplands, rounded up an unprotected bunch of grazing cattle, and carried them off to the inaccessible hill country, oftentimes days elapsing before the loss was discovered.

Only recently, however, had the crime of arson been added to those which it had long been suspected were shared in by Bludsoe and his men, and this more serious outrage Farrell swore he would stop.

So he drew his little body of men aside from the road the thieves must follow to reach the highway and awaited their coming. He could judge by the occasional lowing of some half-frightened yearling that the robbers must even then be driving them from the corrals, tired of waiting for their incendiary scouts to get in their share of the work.

Farrell thought with satisfaction

that he could account for that failure. It was seldom that Tavish and Bud Standish had ever disappointed him.

It was not long before the silence of the night echoed softly to the dull sound of cloven hoofs trotting along the road, and every man of Farrell's band stiffened in his saddle to instant readiness. Almost immediately a nervous yearling, trotting ahead of the rest, espied them around the point of jutting woods that shielded them from sight from the road behind, and paused, stupid head erect, to eye them with a renewed fear and suspicion.

If the animal should bolt there it might create a general wild rush of the following drove, and Farrell did not want this. He rode forward cautiously, brandishing his blacksnake, and the animal trotted on, hoofs clicking on the hard road.

A moment later the rest of the drove, in jumbled and jostling disorder, pushed their way past, Bludsoe and his men riding carelessly a few horses' lengths behind.

Farrell's horse sprang forward, the little band behind him separating in an opening V, raking with the fire of their pistols as they ran the front and van of Bludsoe's surprised drovers, while the herd of yearlings, frightened and left to themselves, fled in ever-gathering panic down the road in the direction of the X-Y land, to scatter there.

So far, Farrell's plans had worked; but while he had sent the best of his men to thwart the firing of the stacks, Bludsoe had sent his worst to fire them, and the men he had with him were of a different temper from Watkins and his aids.

Moreover, their strait was more serious, for the manner of Farrell's surrounding of them left no doubt as to his grim purpose. They wheeled and fought.

In the first volley of their fire the Possum reeled in his saddle and went down, his genial smile stilled forever; and Farrell, by whose side it happened, saw and swore between his teeth.

Yet it began to look as though things were to go hard for him, overmatched as he was in numbers by the enemy, who fought recklessly and with daring, regardless of friend or foe.

It was blind fighting, too, for the waning night grew overcast; but just at the moment when Bludsoe had collected his men with some semblance of order, the ringing echo of hoofs behind him as Tavish bore down to the rescue threatened again to hem him in between foes, so that he wheeled his horse and fled, followed by his fellows and a round of shots from the newcomers, which showed him the value of his discretion.

But Farrell's anger ran high. He had saved Mason's property, though at a cost which the capture of Watkins and his companion in no wise discounted, and Bludsoe himself had gone free.

"We'll get him before we sleep under cover again," he swore, and they knew that he meant it.

Bludsoe was angry, too. He cursed the man with the shot hand when he told of the easy walk-over Tavish had had with Watkins's expedition. He had always distrusted Watkins, but the indignity of the capture of two of his men rankled. He, too, swore that Farrell should repent of his rashness.

The X-Y men finished that night where they were, wrapped in their ponchos under the open sky, and in the early morning Farrell despatched some of them after the yearlings, leaving in old Mason's grateful care the body of the dead cow-puncher, and to his less tender consideration the safe-keeping of the two captives until they might be delivered to the justice they had defied.

And therein Farrell blundered again, and that, too, in spite of the urgent pleading of Bud Standish that he be allowed to ride to the county jail with the two men.

For while Farrell made his men rest in their improvised camp during the hours of daylight, that they might be fresh for the work he had on hand when night should come, Nell Granson

had made her way to old Mason, whose crusty bachelor heart held a notoriously soft spot for all women, whether in distress or not.

She had little difficulty in winning her way to an interview with Watkins where he and his companion lay immured upon the shucks in an empty corncrib, and leaving with them implements with which, when Mason and his outfit were at their dinner, the captives forced the hasps of their lock and walked out to their liberty and revenge.

Nell had done Bludsoe another service. From the ridge above the creek-bed, as she had made her somewhat devious path homeward, she had seen below her in the dry creek Farrell's encampment; and when she had reported the fact, Bludsoe came to a sudden resolution to carry the war into the heart of the enemy's country.

He lay several miles nearer to the home acres of the X-Y at the moment than Farrell and his band; and before that little band came to a renewed yet still cautious life at the close of the day, Bludsoe and his men lay even closer. Hunted, he had determined to hunt, and a better chance, with the X-Y forces broken as they were, might not again offer itself.

"An' what's mo'," he said grimly, "we'll have time left tuh git back an' finish up that old fool Mason, after all, with Farrell makin' tracks fur what 'll be left er his barns. An' I reckon he'll stay at home er while after that."

Thus, while Farrell waited for the night to come that he might draw his men closer about Bludsoe's house, that cunning desperado had halted with the better portion of his men in the woods just below Farrell's barns, waiting, also, for the night to come.

CHAPTER XIX.

Forebodings.

ALL that day Betty had gone about oppressed by the sense of some impending disaster, her heart sore within her because of her own waywardness, heavy with hopeless longing. There were times when Betty found it hard to believe that she could be what she was at other times.

So now the remembrance of her passionate anger toward Tavish and Nell Granson filled her with a self-disgust and keen remorse, and fear was upon her, merciless in its imaginings—fear that proved her a fool in her miserable self-torturing pride and stubbornness.

She even spoke to Larson of her dread that day, but the foreman laughed at her.

"The worst that 'll happen, Betty," he reassured her, "is that Farrell 'll have his ride out fur his reward."

She was thinking about them still that night after she had gone to her room, and about other things whose goading memory turned in her heart like the sharp edge of a knife — Tavish's stern face in its pain and misery —the echo of her own bitter words.

The persistent thoughts made her unendurably restless and remorseful.

She sat by her window, her heart aching with longing, sick with the dread upon her of the danger that might be encompassing Tavish. Then, nervous with her brooding, she lighted her lamp and tried to shake care off in the pages of a magazine she had brought over from the mess-room, but its depicting of a life in towns which she did not know failed to interest her, and its one attempt to portray that life she did not know made her laugh impatiently.

Finally she tossed it aside and returned to her window.

The desire to be at large possessed her. For a little she hesitated, then made up her mind. Quickly she dressed herself in her riding clothes, placing in her belt an object she was not wont to ride with generally, blew out her lamp, and, listening a moment in the little passageway to make sure that Larson and his wife were out of the way, she slipped down the stairs and let herself out of the house.

Ten minutes later she had her pony saddled and was riding through the lot toward the gate opening toward the plains. It was the click of the latch of that gate that Larson, drinking by the water-bucket on his rear porch, heard, and stepped down upon the ground and around the corner of his house.

He saw nothing, however; for Betty, at once turning off the road, had struck the plain where sight and sound alike were muffled. Yet Larson was vaguely uneasy over a thing which at any other time would have meant nothing to him. He went indoors, got his hat, and stepped out upon the lane.

His unrest grew upon him. He began to hear things which he was sure he did not hear; soft fannings, and now and then a crackle like frost among the trees in winter—only this was not winter. Then a pungent but as yet indefinable odor came to him.

He moved down the lane, going across it barely to the fence of the corrals, looking about him at the row of silent cabins. Here the pungent odor was more discernible, and something soft-footed seemed to be stirring somewhere beyond the corrals; perhaps a cow had loosed her restraining noose and gotten out of the cow-shed to the millet stacks. It sounded like a cow tearing down mouthfuls of the stacked grain.

A lifting wind brought the odor stronger, and as at the rising of the sun, the night before Larson's gaze became visible, brightened, leaped into a certain glow, became lurid. And at the instant, farther off, the sound of galloping hoofs, as though men mounted horses suddenly and rode fast.

The foreman's voice rang out in loud summons as he cleared the high fence against which he had been leaning, dashing across the empty corrals to the barn lots beyond, and when those of the outfit left behind came running, half dressed, they found him tearing at a blazing millet stack, while around him a dozen other ricks were leaping into devouring flames.

They fought with worse than useless effort, as it had been thought they would, for the dry straw, ready for the thrashing, burned like fire itself in the wind that seemed to start with a diabolical sympathy.

And while they battled uselessly a sterner enemy behind them gained way, until they suddenly ceased at the screams of Martha Larson, who stood at a distance pointing to the barns themselves, belching black smoke in the lurid light of the flaming stacks.

With her back turned to the tragedy of fire Betty rode on, galloping in the teeth of the wind that blew the soft hair into her eyes or, lifting it in streaming pennants, left her face free.

She was riding aimlessly, avid of the wild motion, glorying in the poise and curve of her supple body to the slightest action of the horse beneath her, glad to be out where the largeness and the darkness of the night-shrouded prairie enfolded her. Now she bent low to her pony's neck, now she sat erect, neither urging or restraining his willing mood.

She scarcely noticed that he had of his own accord turned his head northward, skirting the wooded lands to her left and making for the wider ranges which ran on for miles broken only by the stretch of timber that held the creek to the east, that creek in whose sheltered bed Farrell had camped that day. But Betty, kinder to her pony than he was inclined to be to himself, drew rein at last, and stooped, stroking the pony's neck. Then she paused, looking about her.

Over her shoulder to the west a strange glow was in the sky, brighter where the tops of the timber lands shut out the horizon. The girl wheeled her pony and gazed at that light uncertainly. It is hard to place a fire in the night. On the prairies it is doubly hard. Yet an ominous fear grew at Betty's heart.

Just in that direction lay the X-Y barns.

She lingered, hesitating. Perhaps it was better that she should return anyway. The solitude of the plains hitherto a joy had now become unaccountably a sinister terror. And then Betty heard a sound that drove all thought of terror from her in an alert attention.

The dull thud of galloping hoofs drummed upon the night air. Horsemen were riding fast from the west straight toward her, and from that brightening glow behind them. And Betty needed not to be told what it meant. Her somber forebodings had come true!

As the sound came nearer and louder she drew her pony out of its direct approach, and as she did so she drew something else from the leather belt about her waist. Sitting with it resting on her knee Betty almost forgot to breathe.

Suddenly for all the warning of their approach a band of riders plunged out of the darkness into the circle of Betty's vision, wheeling diagonally northward. One called out in command, and another answered, and that answering voice Betty knew.

She raised her pistol as though the voice had been a target, but in the very act desisted, a more cautious resolve inspiring her.

She had not been seen! Intent upon reaching his own range, knowing that he had left the men of the X-Y at home that which would hold them there, Bludsoe led his gang without thinking of interception ahead.

And Betty, with no thought now of anything but peril to Tavish—not even of horror for what must have been done behind—put her pony to his gait, and followed.

CHAPTER XX.

Atonement.

BETTY judged rightly in thinking that it was Bludsoe's intention to make his dash for home before Farrell, attracted by the illumination of the fire and suspecting its whereabouts and its perpetrators, should intercept him on the X-Y land.

And in this he would no doubt have been successful had Farrell remained but a little longer in his camp. Instead of this, however, at the first coming of the twilight, anxious lest his quarry escape him, Farrell had ridden forward to the point where the night before he had seen Bludsoe ride forth on his raid of Mason's corrals. Thus he was many miles nearer home, and, moreover, right in the path of Bludsoe's flight.

It was Tavish who first noticed that unusual glow in the sky, spreading even to the woods in which they waited. Suspicious at once, and uneasy, he motioned silently to Bud Standish, and they slipped away to reconnoiter.

With every step their horses took nearer, Tavish's fear strengthened to the point of certainty. By the time they had reached the furthermost fringe of the woods beyond the creek, they knew.

"The devils!" he groaned. "It's the barns, Bud, sho' as sho'. Nothin' but wood, an' lots er it, would make er light like that!"

Bud nodded. It was plain to him, too.

"Yuh're right, Dan," he said, and there was no trace in him now of his wonted whimsical humor. "An' if them devils has done it, we'll shoot tuh kill this night."

Tavish set grim jaws. He was thinking of Betty.

"Come," he said, quickly. "We must tell Farrell."

Farrell heard them in unquestioning silence, and believed.

"Then, boys," he said, quietly, placing a hand on the shoulder of each, "we stay right here until—"

Simultaneously they swung about. The clatter of hoofs on the dry, rocky bed of the creek below them reverberated through the woods. Voices, too, reached them, the shout-

ed voices of men who cursed jaded and stumbling horses as they urged them over the uneven footing.

Then the scrambling hoofs climbed the winding road that led through the nearer woods. So unsuspecting were the riders of an ambuscade that they laughed and joked as they came onward.

Sitting side by side upon their horses in the center of the defile, Farrell and Tavish, with their men posted on each side behind them, waited the approach. The temper of all was deadly.

The men had been hurriedly told the meaning of that pale glow overhead which limned the tree tops against an uncertain sky, and they remembered the night before, and the comrade they had left behind them.

Then, at a signal from Farrell and Tavish, whose keen eyes had caught the vague, dim outline of the advancing group, the X-Y men clapped spurs to their horses, and sprang forward.

Half way through the woods behind the men she had been following, Betty Deane drew up her pony sharply at the rattling echo of shots and the yells of men attacked and attacking, the frenzied snorting of the terror-stricken horses, the occasional shrill whistle from one of the X-Y outfit as he fought his foe to the death.

For a moment Betty sat dazed with a terror of her own. The next, bending flat to her pony's neck, she sent him bounding forward by loosened rein and touch of her spurred heel, by low-breathed sobbing words, words incoherent now in the abandon of her agonized love, words that sounded the name of her lover upon whom she called even as she rode wildly to his rescue, all her long denied and punished love surging at her heart in a torture of passionate yearning and ghastly fear and utter self-relinquishment.

It was a mad scene she rode upon a moment later.

In the dim and spectral woods men fought with the desperation that neither sought nor gave quarter. As instance of that, a well directed shot from Farrell had sent Bludsoe toppling dead from his horse even as the man himself had fired the shot that grazed Farrell's gun arm.

Standish, too, singling out the tall form of the man whom he had good reason to believe had laid the Possum low hounded him backward with a relentless fury that seemed proof against bullets, and sent the man on his destined course with a shot through his heart.

But it was Betty after all who turned the tide decisively in favor of the X-Y.

Firing her revolver wildly lest she wound friend as well as foe, she uttered her sharp cries, and already deprived of their leader, their number otherwise depleted, and the avenging fury of the X-Y men in no whit abated, half of the marauding gang broke in a mad panic at the fresh assault, and fled breakneck through the woods, pursued by those whose hands were not otherwise full.

Of these Betty's quick eyes caught the form of the man she loved. Backed up between the trunks of two trees against which Tavish had crowded him, Watkins sat his horse, chest to chest with the horse of Tavish, face to face himself with the man he hated, but behind whose manhood he had shielded his own guilt nor been above seeking to accomplish worse.

Tavish spoke in low muttered words of contemptuous scorn.

"Last night I spared yo' scoundrelly life, Jed Watkins, an' I must spare it now because of er woman's love fur yuh fur all yo' blackguard soul. Gawd knows why yuh fall intuh my hands again when they are tied, an' another could send yuh tuh a place that's too good fur yuh.

"But there's er justice 'bove even er woman's love, an' that justice I'm

goin' tuh give yuh up tuh, Watkins, if my own life goes in the doin' er it. Drop that hand, blast yuh!"

For as he had spoken, Watkins's pistol hand had moved, and half lifted, the desperate eyes of the man going beyond Tavish's face to that of a slight figure behind, drawing nearer as Tavish had talked. Their evil light was hid from Tavish.

Likewise the quick action of the man's hand as it hung arm's length beside him.

Tavish's horse huddled and swerved at the quick flash of a pistol under his nose. The snap of another on the instant from behind Tavish made Watkins reel in his saddle.

But it was not the sound of pistols that involuntarily drew Tavish's gaze from the man before him.

It was the low, stifled cry of a woman broken over the quick sob of his name.

He found himself on the ground beside her, Watkins, the world itself forgot in the dumb agony of that moment. Her arms were about his neck. Her face was against his. In his ear she was moaning through the smile upon her lips:

"Thank Gawd it was me an' not you, Dan! I done it fur you, Dan! Fur the love er you, Dan, I followed 'em here—fur the love er you!"

Tavish, holding her closer in his arms, was sobbing the man's cry that tears the heart out!

CHAPTER XXI.

The Valley of the Shadow.

BUD STANDISH, gentle as a woman, knew no compassion for the man who, tied hands and feet, wounded by the avenging shot from Betty's pistol, haggard and doomed, rode before him as they crossed the gray, dawn-lit stretches of the prairie toward the X-Y home lands.

Even the others who rode along, after Farrell and Tavish had gone on ahead, carrying Betty between them, fell back amazed and possibly a little shocked at the unabating bitterness of their companion.

"How I'd ha' loved tuh have blowed yo' p'isonous head off, Watkins!" he muttered, savagely. "Yuh big, lumberin' coward of er she-man —yuh snake of er devil! But yu'll hang fur it—hang till yo' ugly face is blacker'n yer heart—yuh lyin', thievin', burnin', murderin', polecat of er carrion crow!"

"Shut up, Bud," remonstrated one from behind. "Leave him be tuh his own thoughts."

"Thoughts!" sneered Bud, his scorn flaring afresh. "Him have thoughts! That bale er murderin' wenom! Ain't he er nice figger of er man! He ain't worth er decent lynchin'! He ain't worth er bobbycue! He ain't worth hell!"

And so Bud raved, for his heart was broken.

In the mean time Farrell and Tavish, almost silent in their grief, had reached home with Betty. Past the smoldering ruins of the big barns they carried her, their faces grimly set as Larson met them, but scarce pausing to look about them at the devastation done, and on to Farrell's house.

There Mrs. Farrell, to whom Martha Larson had run ahead on flying feet, met them, awed and strangely gentle, and took charge of their burden, while Farrell sprang into the wagon behind his bays, brought up by Larson, and raced for the doctor twelve miles away.

For Betty was alive, though for days she was scarcely anything more, the scales of her young life tipping heavily toward death.

And during those days of almost hopeless uncertainty the friendship that had always been between Farrell and Tavish took on a quality of sympathy that never cooled, though they all wondered at the sobering of Bud Standish.

"Put him in jail?" he cried, as he had seen Farrell one morning start for the distant town with his prisoner. "Give him er chaince tuh save his life? Why, boilin' tar 's too white tuh pickle him in!"

They laughed at his vehemence, but Bud did not laugh. And only Tavish, talking with him through the night hours in their cabin, came to know the reason why, and held him dearer for it.

"I b'lieve," murmured Betty one morning, smiling wanly into the face of the doctor, "I'm goin' tuh live tuh cook cabbage fur the boys yet."

"You surely are, and nothing would please them better," responded the doctor.

"It depends on the cabbage," smiled Betty, closing her eyes. "Sentiment's all right, but er hungry man can't eat it."

CHAPTER XXII.

On the Heights.

"AN' now," said Martha Larson, throwing a last look about the festal decorations of the long supper table in the mess-room, and noting that all was well, "if yuh think yuh are able tuh do without me, Betty, an' really want tuh be left alone, I'll go, but I'll be ready tuh come over any minute if yuh jes' call. Yuh ain't lost none er yo' contrairiness, Betty Deane, if yuh has gained in good looks."

"Oh, Martha," cried Betty from beside her kitchen oven, "don't say that! I never mean tuh be contrairy again, but don't yuh see I want tuh meet 'em all again jes' as if nothin' had happened? I couldn't bear tuh have 'em all come up tuh me, makin' much er my bein' among 'em once mo'. I'd rather do the makin' much of myself—bless 'em!"

But she had to bear it after all, and she bore it well. From the instant Bud Standish halted in the doorway at sight of the table, crying somewhat queerly to those behind him: "Betty's come!" they knew she was in the kitchen beyond—all but Tavish, who was late.

He had just come when the door behind his back opened, and Betty, hands full of their piping supper, face pulsing above the dainty freshness of her gown, eyes glad and shy glancing at their expectant faces, greeted them.

"Hello, boys! I'm with yuh again. Yuh've all been awful good sendin' messages an' things tuh me, an' here's yo' supper. I hope I'll cook many mo' fur yuh!"

A babel of voices answered her, glad, exultant voices. And if in the general acclamation Tavish and Bud Standish scarcely joined, the rest did not notice it, nor did Betty.

Neither did they notice, nor did Betty, when all was over and she was placing the flowers back upon the tidied table, that Tavish had quietly slipped from the room, but as the girl closed the door upon them, and turned to the dishes upon the kitchen table, she saw him coming to her.

Her breath caught.

Perhaps she was not so strong yet as she had fancied herself, for the color fled from her face, leaving it very white, and her eyes, lovely, filled with a tremulous yearning that leaped to them unbidden, met his own.

Even then Betty tried to play her little comedy.

"It's against rules. Yuh'r trespassin'— O, Dan, Dan, Dan! I've been so wicked, so foolish, but in my heart I loved yuh always!"

She was in his arms, the last feeble barrier of her resistance down forever.

"Yuh love me still!" she cried. "After all, yuh love me still!"

He silenced the glad cry upon her lips, quieting the wild beating of her heart against his. Minutes fled, and yet they stood so, taking no thought beyond, needing no words besides.

(The end.)

One Rosy Day for Rosie

by E. K. Means

"DIS here water tank is shore a good place to rest," Homer Brown sighed as he mopped the sweat from his shiny, black face on the torn sleeve of his blue hickory shirt. "I's got 'bout fo' reg'lar jobs hunting fer me, an' dey keeps me dodgin'."

Fumbling in his pocket, he brought forth a twenty-five cent piece, tossed it on the sand at his feet and chuckled.

"Dat white woman ain't got no sense," he tittered. "She paid me in egsvance. I learnt her somepin 'bout niggers she wusn't on to. I knowed she wus from de Nawf soon as I sot eyes on her. I ain't got no time to wash no buggy."

He polished the money in the sand until it shone like new. Then he continued his soliloquy:

"Ef I could take dis here two bits an' git married wid it, it would shore put me in a corntented mind."

He made a hasty mental survey of all his women friends and reached the saddening conclusion that only one colored lady would seriously consider a proposal of marriage to him in his present state of financial embarrassment.

"Rosie shore ain't no good-looker," he meditated miserably. "She's black as I is, an' real black nigger mans always likes de high yallers. Excusin' dat, she's got a mustache as big as de one I's tryin' to grow. An' it 'pears powerful likely dat she kin fight wid her fistes and sling a skillet."

He rubbed his hands through his thick mat of hair and sighed. Then he scraped the bottom of all his pockets for a few crumbs of chewing tobacco. His jaws worked ruminatively.

"I could buy her a tub and washboard on credick an' give her half de money she makes. I could persuade her to pay for de board an' de tub outen her half of de money. Dat would sot me up financial agin."

At that moment a portly son of Ham crept cautiously out of the high weeds growing beside the railroad track, looked fearfully up and down the track, and seated himself beside Homer Brown. His shirt collar was a wilted rag, his clothes torn on the vines and briers and stained with perspiration, his shoes caked with the "black-waxy" mud of the Little Mocassin Swamp.

"I's come a right fur piece, pardner," he explained, as he tossed his dilapidated hat to the ground and wiped his bald perspiring head by the simple expedient of rubbing his arm backward over it. "An' I done come in a hurry. A fat man hadn't oughter be shoved along. Is you waitin' fer de log-train?"

"Naw, suh," Homer answered. "I's jes' restin' my mind."

"Is you got troubles, too?" the stranger asked sympathetically.

"Shore is," Homer answered. "'Bout fo' white men in dis town is tryin' to colleck up whut I owes 'em, an' dey shore is pesticatin'. Excusin' dat, six niggers is tryin' to borrer back de money dat dey done loant me. An' besides all dese folks besettin' me—"

Thereupon Homer began a long, sad, purely fictitious tale, and told it well.

In the midst of this narrative of financial distress, the stranger reached into his pocket and brought out a roll of five-dollar bills. While Homer talked, the stranger counted the bills, laying them one by one on his fat knee.

Homer ended his tale with an earnest exhortation and an appeal. A man with so much money ought to help a friend in need. A trifling loan would help him pay his debts and restore him to high favor among the white folks and the negroes.

"Dem sentiments appeals to me," the strange negro smiled, "because dat is whut I preaches in my sermonts. Let him whut's got gib to him whut ain't got nothin'."

"Does you b'long to de 'postles?" Homer asked in a pleased tone.

For an answer, the stranger chanted in a monotonous tone:

"Rescure de perishin', lif' up de fallen down, weep o'er the errin' one, de Lawd will pervide." Then, after a pause, he added: "I's de Revun Wash'tun Jones."

"Yes, suh. Dat's right. Corntents my mind to know you, suh," Homer declared with amen-corner unction.

"I knowed you wus a religion man as soon as I sot eyes on you," Washington Jones remarked gazing at Homer, his shrewd, piglike eyes gleaming through the rolls of facial fat.

"Dat's so, suh," Homer assured him. "I b'longs."

"Dat means you is plum' honest," Jones declared. Then after a moment of deep thought he picked up the roll of bills on his knee and asked: "How much does you say you owes?"

Instantly, with hope blazing in his heart, Homer began an itemized account of his liabilities.

"I owes Mr. Alex Harrett six bits—"

Rev. Washington Jones peeled off a five-dollar bill and laid it on Homer's knee.

"I owes old man Chadder a dollar—"

Jones laid another five dollar bill on Homer's knee.

When the list of names was concluded, there were ten five-dollar bills stacked up on Homer's knee, and Washington Jones was holding two more in his fingers.

"Shore you don't owe nobody else?" he asked.

"Naw, suh, dat's all," Homer said; but he eyed the two bills covetously.

"Now, son," Rev. Wash Jones began, "you listen at me: I's done got tired totin' dis big money aroun', an' I needs some loose change. I's a stranger is dis here communerty, an' it ain't right fer a nigger to flash too much money at de white folks. Dey gits skeptical. Now, you wait till it gits dark, den you go up town an' pay eve'y nigger an' white man you owe wid one of dese five-dollar bills. Den you bring me back de change. How's dat?"

"Dat suits me," Homer declared with smiling eagerness. Then noticing that Jones was idly twisting the two other bills around his pudgy fingers, Homer added: "Dat's fine, but it won't leave me nothin' over. Ef I had jes' a little change to git married wid—"

"Fotch me de change fer each five dollar bill widout makin' no miscue," Washington Jones interrupted, "an' I'll give you dese fer yo' weddin'. Dar's a woman in dis town I been married to onct, but I ain't hankerin' to meet her. Dat's de onliest reason I don't go up town wid you."

"I onderstands," Homer grinned.

"Dese here has-beens sometimes totes razors."

"You has a wise onderstandin', son," Jones agreed.

They discussed the holy estate of matrimony until total darkness had settled over the town. Then Homer felt the roll of bills in his pocket and stood up to go.

"You git back wid dat change befo' de log-train comes." Washington Jones commanded. "I's got a call to proclaim de word to de dark peoples whut sets in de darkness of Arkansas, an' I gotter travel."

At nine o'clock that night Homer entered the Hen Scratch saloon and ordered a drink of whisky.

"You ain't got no credick," Skeeter Butts informed him in a sharp tone.

"Don't need none," Homer assured him, and brought forth from his pocket a handful of currency and silver. "I's done turned honest, Skeeter, an' I's payin' my owe-bills."

"Gimme one of dem fives right now an' we'll settle up an' be friends agin," Skeeter declared.

Homer laid the money on the bar and sipped his raw, vicious whisky as he waited for his change.

"I reckin you's gwine up to de church festerbul wid all dat money, ain't you?" Skeeter asked as he pushed the change toward Homer.

"Yep," Homer grinned; "but I ain't gwine in. I ain't got no slit skirt. I ain't got nothin' but a split shirt. But I owes a nigger up dar an' I's gwine up to de Shoo-fly bizaar to pay him. I done paid fo' white folks an' five niggers an' I owes jes' one mo'."

"Whar you git dat money, Homer?" Skeeter asked.

"My paw wus a ole soldier an' I done drawed his back pension," Homer grinned.

The Shoo-fly church was ablaze with light and the beams from the windows extended far out across the churchyard. But Homer kept in the shadow and called to a little negro boy who was playing beside the door:

"Tell Elder Vinegar Atts to come out here!"

When Atts appeared he was handed a bill.

"Take out whut I owes you an' gimme de change fer dis five," Homer said importantly.

"My lawd, nigger," Atts exclaimed, "whut you mean by givin' me a shock like dis? I got a weak hip an' my legs is all trembly."

"Git de change!" Homer ordered. "Gimme back fo' dollars an' six bits."

"Bless gracious, Homer," Atts boomed. "You got mo' money dan a bank. Whar you git it?"

"My brudder died down in de Tensas an' dey sont me his death ben'fit," Homer explained easily.

"Come in to de festerbul, Homer," Vinegar Atts urged, hating to see so much money stay outside of his church.

"Ain't got on no weddin' gyarment," Homer declined.

"Lemme send you out some 'freshments," Vinegar insisted.

"Dat's all O. K.," Homer agreed. "Ef a nigger woman called Rosie Jones is in dar, tell her to fotch 'em out, an' bring de change fer five dollars."

In a moment Rosie Jones appeared, bearing in each hand a plate of ice cream, and on the side of each plate a deadly-looking hunk of cake. She greeted Homer cordially.

"Come along wid me, honey," Homer said, fumbling his little mustache and comparing its size with that on Rosie's face. "We'll eat dese here 'freshments togedder."

When they sat down on the root of an oak-tree, Homer placed his plate of ice cream on the ground, laid his hat upside down beside it, and emptied into his hat all the money his pockets contained, amounting to nearly forty dollars.

Rosie took one look at the money, then drew herself close to Homer's side and put her arms around his neck.

"Dat's a holy hatful of money, Homer," she said sweetly. "Whut woman is gwine he'p you spend it?"

"Any nigger woman dat is willin' to go in biziness on a good onvestmint kin he'p me spen' it," Homer answered. "I'll use some of dis loose change to buy her a wash-tub, a scrub-board an' a clothes-line, an' atter dat she kin have half she makes."

Rosie set her plate of cream beside that of Homer, raised herself upon her knees and took a diamond hitch with her arms around Homer's neck.

"Honey," she proclaimed, "dis is whar you gits a nigger woman right brief. I's yo' honey-love on dem same terms."

Releasing her strangle-hold, she sat back to admire her splendid acquisition, but sprang up with all possible haste.

"Good lawd!" she exclaimed. "I done sot down in dem two plates of ice cream!"

"Let 'em go, Rosie," Homer giggled. "I'll buy you some mo' to-morrer. We'll git elder Vinegar Atts to marry us to-morrer night. I's got a frien' down at de railroad water tank, an' I's gotter see him now. Good-by!"

Homer stood by the tank a long time before Washington Jones emerged from the high weeds and cautiously approached him.

"Here's de change, parson," Homer greeted him. "Now gimme de two fives you promised me an' I'll git goin' agin."

Far down the track a screechy whistle screamed.

"Dar comes de log-train," parson Jones remarked. "Pour de change in dis here hat, quick!"

Homer emptied his pockets, then Jones commanded:

"Walk down de track wid me and hide in de weeds so de head-light won't shine on us. I's gwine ketch dat train when she stops fer water."

"Gimme dem two fives you promised me," Homer repeated.

"Here dey is, son," Wash Jones said, passing them over.

The train, loaded with immense pine logs bound for the big sawmills of Arkansas, came to a stop. Washington Jones whispered a command to Homer to remain hidden in the weeds until the train had passed, then crept swiftly through the darkness and climbed up upon the logs.

At that moment the fireman threw open the door of the engine and a shaft of light illuminated the track on the side opposite where Homer lay in the weeds. By that shaft of light, Homer distinctly saw the Rev. Washington Jones climb over the logs and drop off on the ground on the other side of the flat car.

"Huh," Homer snorted, glaring under the car with popping eyeballs, "dat parson ain't went. I bet de revun is gwine stick me fer dese two bills. I's gwine fade."

The fireman slammed the engine door shut, and in the intense darkness, Homer departed.

He spent the night in a cotton-shed, sleeping upon a pile of cotton-seed, a happy man. He had plenty of money. To-morrow he would have a negro woman to work for him. There was no further need to dodge the four regular jobs which were hunting him.

As he crept out of the cotton-shed the next morning, a little negro boy hailed him:

"Better run, Homer! 'Bout fawty-'leben billion niggers an' white folks is huntin' fer you!"—by which he meant that possibly the constable and a nigger woman had inquired as to Homer's whereabouts.

"How come?" Homer asked.

"Dunno. But dey sho' is rambunctious—all of 'em." The boy went on toward the bayou.

Homer discreetly retired within the recesses of the cotton-shed. He sat down to think.

"White folks don't know nothin' on me onlessen dat damyank woman is told 'bout dat two bits paid in egsvance.

I don't owe de niggers no money. How come dey's huntin' me?"

He recalled all his crimes and misdemeanors for the past twelve months and decided there was no danger for him there.

"I don't know whut dis is all about," he sighed miserably. "But I's plum' sure de white folks ain't huntin' me to gimme no b'iled eggs. I'll rack over to Rosie's an' ax her."

He slipped out of the shed, scurried along the ground like a raccoon, and dropped into a gulley. Following this until he came to the edge of a cornfield, he climbed the fence and walked through the corn.

Then slipping along a hedge and down a back alley and across a cottonfield, he arrived at Rosie's back door, opened it and entered, then knocked softly to announce his presence.

Rosie came from the front room.

"Bless gracious, Homer," Rosie greeted him; "ain't the white folks cotch you an' hung you yit?"

"Whut dey atter me fer?" Homer asked in frightened tones.

"All dat money you slung aroun' las' night wus counterfeit!" Rosie informed him.

"My gawsh!" Homer moaned, sinking down upon a broken-backed chair, and fumbling at the two five-dollar bills in his pocket. "I wouldn't thought de revun would a did me dat way!"

"You'd better run, Homer," Rosie advised. "De white folks is shore huntin' trouble wid you."

"Can't you hide me in dis cabin, Rosie?" Homer asked pleadingly.

"Naw," Rosie answered positively. "But I'll tell you whut you kin do: put on my caliker dress and apron, wrop up yo' head in a red rag and w'ar my sunbonnet, an' de white folks 'll think you is me. I's got a mustache 'bout de size of yourn."

Homer lost no time in assuming the disguise suggested, and a few minutes later left the cabin in a woman's garb carrying a fish-pole. He walked boldly through the streets of Tickfall, unchallenged by white or black, and started for the Dorfoche Bayou.

Arriving safely within the dim woods of the Little Mocassin Swamp, Homer sped across the country like a fox, arriving in the middle of the afternoon at a lonely retreat, far from Tickfall, known to the negroes as the "Coon's Nest," and equally well known to the whites as a hiding-place of negro criminals.

And there, under a tree, flat on his back and sound asleep, lay the Rev. Washington Jones.

As became a lady who had intruded into the sleeping apartment of a gentleman, Homer promptly retired with a little gasp of surprise.

Then he arranged Rosie's dress with the utmost care, tightened the red rag around his head, adjusted his dirty apron and his bonnet, and walked over and gave the Rev. Washington Jones a mighty kick.

Jones sprang to his feet, wide awake in a second, and greatly frightened. He stared at Homer with eyes that seemed about to pop from his head.

Then the features of his face seemed to run together in a crumpled mass, presenting a panorama of emotions conflicting and inexpressible.

"My lawd, Rosie!" he howled, "how come you out here in dese woods?"

This astounding question left Homer dumb. He merely stood and stared at the frightened negro.

"Don't look at me dataway, Rosie," the startled parson pleaded. "I knowed you as soon as I seed dat little mustache! When I runned away an' lef' you, I aimed to come back some time. Yes'm, dat's de hones' trouth!"

"Why didn't you come den?" Homer demanded. "Did de white folks at Tickfall head you off?"

At the mention of the white folks Washington Jones turned nearly white.

"No'm, not dat," he stammered, with a thick tongue.

"You know de white folks is atter you, don't you?" Homer asked.

Wash Jones's legs suddenly gave way and he sank down on the ground, lying there like a broken weed.

Homer stepped close and said in a low voice:

"Wash, is you ever got 'quainted wid a shot-gun, an' a suit of striped clothes, an' a pack of loose-mouthed nigger dogs wid long, flappy years an' a keen, smelly nose?"

"Hush, Rosie!" Wash pleaded pitifully. "A white man sold me twelve of dem five dollar bills for twelve silber dollars—one dollar fer one bill per each."

"Dar wus a nigger in Tickfall lookin' fer you, too," Homer said sadly. "But he ain't lookin' no mo'."

"Is—is—he cotch?" Wash Jones stammered.

"He's dead!" Homer proclaimed tragically. "His name wus Homer Brown. De white folks hung him on a tree-limb close by de railroad water tank. He had two of dem bills wid him when dey fotch him in. He said dat you give 'em to him."

Wash Jones groaned. A hundred tiny wrinkles formed about his mouth and eyes, the skin on the top of his bald head formed in ridges, and his whole body shook with fear.

"You's gwine he'p me out, ain't you, Rosie?" he begged. "You an' me lived mighty lovin' togedder one time, till I acted like a fool an' got a deevo'ce."

"I's willin' to he'p a little, Wash," Homer said; "jes' fer ole times. Dat's why I come out to tell you."

Washington Jones took courage, stood up and put his hands in his pockets.

"Rosie," he said pleadingly, "ef you's done dat much fer me jes' fer ole times, will you, please ma'am, keep dis money fer me? Ef de white folks cotch me, I don't want 'em to find no money on me at all."

"I don't want no counterfeit money!" Homer snorted.

"'Tain't. I mean, ef you keeps it, dey won't soupspicion dat you's got it."

"All right," Homer agreed, catching his apron by the corners and holding it out.

Wash emptied his pockets into the apron, and Homer untied the apron strings from around his waist, made a bundle of the money, and tucked it under his arm.

"Good-by, Wash," Homer said.

"Good-by, Rosie," Wash answered in trembling tones. "Don't try to spen' dat money. It's all counterfeit."

"I know how to keep dis loose change," Homer grinned.

Several miles away from the Coon's Nest, Homer heard a sound in the woods ahead of him and crouched down in the weeds and underbrush.

Two determined looking white men, strangers to Homer, rode by on horses, following the Little Mocassin ridge.

"Dem white gen'lemens knows perzackly whar dey's gwine," Homer murmured. "Good-by, Revun Wash'tun Jones!"

And then Homer Brown made the wisest decision of his life:

"I's gwine right back to Tickfall an' tell Marse Tom Gaitskill all 'bout dis!"

At noon the next day Washington Jones stumbled out of the Little Mocassin Swamp followed by two determined men mounted upon mud-caked horses and carrying guns. Jones hastened through the town of Tickfall and stopped at the door of the jail with a sigh of positive relief, for every step of the journey from the Coon's Nest had been taken with the dreadful fear that he was ultimately to be shot down in his tracks or hanged to the limb of a tree.

When the jail doors clanged behind Jones, a feeling akin to happiness broke through his gloom and fear.

A few minutes later Homer Brown under the capable chaperonage of Mr. Tom Gaitskill, president of the Tickfall

National Bank, entered the jail and stopped at a cell, peering through the bars at Wash Jones.

"Dat's him, Marse Tom. Yes, suh, dat's de very nigger dat gimme dat counterfiit money to pay my owe-bills wid, an' den he gimme dese here two bills fer fotchin' him back de right change."

The two United States deputy marshals advanced, seized the two bills which Homer held out, and inspected them intently.

"This Homer Brown is one of our ignorant village niggers, gentlemen," Mr. Gaitskill remarked to the two deputy marshals. "He's actually guilty of no offense. I can produce him as a witness at any time."

The older marshal looked Homer over and smiled. "Ole Alabam' is full of such coons," he said.

An hour later Homer sat on the porch in front of Rosie's cabin, holding a dirty apron in his lap. The apron was tied into a bundle and gave forth the pleasant sound of jingling coin as Homer fondled it.

"I tole Marse Tom eve'thing but whar de loose change was at," he chuckled. "Dey searched dat Wash Jones and couldn't find nothin'!"

"Is any of it counterfeit?" Rosie asked.

"No'm. It's all hones', white-folks' money. We's gwine buy de wash-tub wid some of it, an' den we's gwine spend de rest in high livin'."

Homer smiled.

"When dat nigger wus foolin' me down at de water tank, he said somepin 'bout 'Rescure de perishin', lif' up de fallen down, weep o'er de errin', de Lawd 'll pervide.'"

He unwrapped the bundle and ran his fingers through the poisonously dirty currency and the silver coins, and broke out with a loud chuckle:

"I agrees wid dem sentiments, Rosie," he said.

The Half Moon

By Frank Condon

ANY other man than John Redmond would have been agreeably excited under the circumstances.

Any other actor than John Redmond would have paced the rooms of the apartment in a state of pleasurable ecstasy.

But the tall, gray-haired veteran of a thousand notable successes sipped his coffee without a tremor, and there was almost a grim turn to the corners

of his lips as he read steadily, tossing the newspapers from him as he concluded each criticism.

It was the morning after a remarkable personal success for Redmond, as well as a healthy triumph for the producers and the author of "The Duster."

On the previous evening, the new drama had been offered to that world-weary little group of pessimists known as first-night New Yorkers, and from the first curtain rise to the final speech the audience applauded and whispered its appreciation and delight.

At the conclusion of the second act Redmond had been industriously cheered and had responded with a thirty-word speech of thanks.

The author had bowed before the footlights in a state of pallid imbecility and all went merry as a wedding bell.

And now, at ten on the following morning, Redmond was reading the printed adulation of the professional newspaper critics.

It has been said of theatrical critics that they bear the same relation to the theater as the flea does to the dog's back.

They are there and possessed of a certain form of activity, but whether they figure largely in the dog's general affairs is one of the most mooted questions in Mootsburg.

Redmond had been a star for so many years that he disliked looking back.

Success had come to him and with generous hands, poured fame, money and position into his lap. Great authorities had compared him with the names that shine lustrously in the annals of American drama.

In spite of his renown Redmond's private life was almost a closed book to all but a few intimates, and the hungry press agent passed it by respectfully.

Never in the papers did there appear articles telling of the Redmond motor-cars, his country home, or the actor's remarkable fondness for broiled mushrooms.

It was known that he preferred seclusion, so far as his private life was concerned, and his wishes were regarded.

A hundred times in the past the star had read the morning papers, and very few were the times his play had been written down a failure.

Even on such occasions Redmond's acting had been praised, if his vehicle had been weak, and now that "The Duster" was hailed as a success he was satisfied, but neither excited nor overjoyed. The hot, buoyant pleasure over good work and its appreciation was a sensation denied the actor.

There was one small note running through the various critical comments that disturbed Redmond. In reality it referred to such an unimportant phase of the previous evening's work, that the actor's slight displeasure was without good cause.

In the second act of "The Duster," Redmond, clad in a red sweater, appeared in the gymnasium and for several moments disported himself with a pair of brightly colored Indian clubs.

"Mr. Redmond," said one critic, "no longer has the physique of an athlete. His age and obvious lack of muscularity almost make this one scene ridiculous."

After he had read this comment, Redmond put down his coffee cup and frowned.

"The fool," he remarked somberly. "What does he know of athletes?"

But whether the particular critic knew of athletes or did not know, other criticisms pointed to the gymnasium scene in disapproval.

The scene was important in its bearing upon that part of the plot immediately following, and therefore it could not be eliminated.

For some time after he had finished with the papers Redmond lounged in his easy chair, thinking of the one fault in "The Duster."

Something about the tiny jab of complaint irritated him. If they had accused him of slovenly acting or remarked that he was not convincing in the character, he would have laughed at them, but the covert sneer at his physical state hurt him.

He had always lived a clean life and had been fond of athletics. He had boxed in his younger days, played tennis and had manipulated the dumbbells every morning for thirty years.

His shoulders were broad and his arms as well developed as those of any normal man, and in his practise hours with the clubs, in preparation for this very scene he had secretly congratulated himself upon his skill.

The bell in a far-off door rang gently, and presently one of the hotel attendants stood before him with a card in his hand.

Visitors were not casually announced to John Redmond. He disliked them on general principles.

"The young man insisted," explained the servant.

"I don't know him," replied the actor, fingering the card incuriously.

He paused for a moment, and then:

"Send him up," he said. "I feel like talking to somebody this morning."

The man disappeared and a few moments later a young man, twenty or twenty-one years old, apparently, came into the apartment, his hat in hand and a friendly smile upon his face.

"I am George Halsey, Mr. Redmond," he began. "I know that you don't approve of visitors, and I'm not going to bother you long. I've been reading what the newspapers say about you this morning and I want to add my personal congratulations. It must be a wonderful thing to have your gift."

Redmond smiled.

"I have worked hard, young man," he said. "Sit down."

"You have been successful, too," Mr. Halsey answered.

When he smiled there was a good-natured geniality about his face that reached out to his host.

"I suppose you have read so many complimentary things about your acting that it's an old story," the young man ventured.

Redmond nodded.

"That's the funny part," Halsey said, a trifle whimsically. "I suppose I've worked as hard as you have, for a shorter time, and I suppose, when the years roll around I'll be more weary of my work than you, but the newspapers will never tell me what a great man I am—not if I live to be a million. It's the difference between being a genius and a dub."

"What do you do?" Redmond asked, with some interest.

"I'm in vaudeville, but vaudeville isn't excited over me," the younger man laughed. "I'm usually on the bill after the overture, while the people are coming down the aisle, and if I'm not paid the smallest salary it has to be a mighty poor act that beats me out."

"We're in the same business, then," Redmond said. "You entertain the public, and I, also, try to."

"Which is one way of putting it, Mr. Redmond. Maybe it's impossible for you to understand the craving in a young fellow for just what you are getting and for which you don't care a whoop.

"I'd give my right leg for just one bit of regular newspaper praise from a regular dramatic critic. I'd give the other leg to have my name known and have people think of me as a big man, who has arrived at the top of his profession.

"I suppose it was that feeling, as much as any other, that led me to break your rules and come prancing up here this morning. I wanted to see what a man looked like who has such a grip upon the public and the press as you have."

"You make me blush," Redmond answered with a laugh. Nevertheless

he was pleased with the young man's evident sincerity.

Halsey rose and walked toward a window at the opposite end of the room. The elder man watched him and noted the grace of his movements, the breadth of his shoulders and the general air of fitness about him that marks the well-bred animal.

"He's well put together," Redmond said to himself; then aloud he said:

"I forgot to inquire the nature of your act in vaudeville. What do you do?"

Halsey laughed and pointed to one corner of the room.

"There are the implements of my trade," he replied.

Redmond looked over to the corner where stood several sets of ordinary Indian clubs.

One pair Redmond had owned for years and had swung in a desultory sort of way, but the other and heavier pair he had bought after "The Duster" went into rehearsal and had worked diligently with them, with the results sarcastically noted in the morning newspapers.

"I'm just a plain, dub club-swinger," Halsey continued. "I can also juggle rubber balls, roll hoops and perform simple sleight-of-hand tricks. One summer I clowned with a circus. I presume I'm a better club swinger than anything else."

While he spoke, Halsey had picked up a pair of the clubs and for a moment or two flipped them lightly about his head.

"Go ahead," said Redmond. "Let's see what you can do."

Halsey grinned with genuine pleasure and for a few moments exhibited the qualities of his art.

As he manipulated the clubs, Redmond reflected.

"You're good, young man," the actor commended. "If it isn't impertinent how much do you receive weekly for the act?"

"Forty dollars in and around New York; thirty-five on the outside. Sometimes I work three a day and sometimes four. It's a gay life."

"Would you take a job at seventy-five a week?" Redmond continued.

"I certainly would," Halsey answered in some wonderment. "Where and for how long?"

"Indefinitely. 'The Duster' seems to have tickled the popular fancy, so I presume it will run a year, here and on the road.

"If you noticed, the critics united in calling attention to the badness of my club-swinging in the gymnasium scene. It is a blow to my pride, I will admit, because I have hitherto held a very good opinion of my ability.

"The idea I have in mind is for you to take my place on the stage for the several minutes of that scene and improve it. You can swing clubs and I can't. You look enough like me, in a general way, to make up so that the audience will be none the wiser, and the pay is generous, considering the brevity of the work and the fact that we play but one matinée a week."

"Do you mean it!" Halsey exclaimed.

"Naturally I mean it."

"Of course I accept," the club-swinger said delightedly. "It's almost too good to be true. But can I make up so—"

"My valet is a wizard," the actor responded. "He will make you look so exactly like me that you won't know yourself. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll write some pressing letters. Call at the theater at two this afternoon and we will go over the details."

Thereafter "The Duster" was a thing of utter perfection, and the most hide-bound critic could find no fault with the club-swinging scene.

One of the critics who had called attention to Redmond's muscular inefficiency on the opening night dropped in casually for half an act and again beheld the flying clubs.

He rubbed his eyes in amazement. It seemed to him a miracle that a man could so vastly improve in such a brief time, but it did not occur to him that the club swinger was George Halsey and not John Redmond.

As the actor had said, his valet was a wonderful artist with a make-up box.

The audiences found especial joy in the club-swinging young man and applauded him with unstinted vigor at the end of his brief nightly appearance.

Halsey was not called upon for a solitary word of speech during his short stunt, but he managed to throw a heap of enthusiasm into the work, and again the spirit of unrest and discontent seized John Redmond.

The actor often stood in the wings and watched his double at work. He listened to the applause that greeted the young man, and slowly there grew within him a distinct feeling of jealously.

There was no doubt about it. Here he was, a modern, successful actor, intelligent and capable far beyond other actors and proclaimed so by the authorities of the stage, and yet the sight of a mere boy, swinging a gaudy set of Indian clubs and dressed to imitate him, filled Redmond with a ridiculous anger.

He realized that his irritation was foolish, but it was none the less real on that account.

The abounding health and plain virility of the younger man irked him, and as he stared moodily at his understudy, the irony that lay in the startling similarity of their appearance was distasteful.

It was as though Redmond were glaring into a mirror at himself and that the mirror had the power to change his reflection to make him young again.

And worst of all—the thing that hurt Redmond was that George Halsey made him think, in spite of himself, of the woman he had driven from his side when things were very different and the world was much younger.

That had been a sealed book for many years. He never spoke of it, and he never thought of it.

Few people knew of it and that this strange young man, coming suddenly into his life, should drag forth memories of the past, angered the actor and drove away his usual good humor.

A month passed.

"I'm going to get rid of him," he finally decided. "If I spoil the part myself, let it be spoiled. I won't have him around, and I'll pay him enough so that he can't complain. Let him go back to his circus stunts, but he will irritate me no longer."

After reaching that definite conclusion, Redmond delayed the act itself.

Night after night he came to the theater fully determined to discharge his club-swinger, and night after night he hesitated.

In the quiet of his dressing-room his thoughts continually jumped back through the years, and he saw himself again as a youthful enthusiast on the stage, with everything to learn and a fair future before him.

He, too, had been in vaudeville in those early, happy days, and with him had been his wife and the man who made up the trio.

What had happened to Redmond has happened before and will happen again.

Jealousy fastened its fangs upon him and he began to watch Mary Redmond's every action. That she was growing fond of the Third Man there seemed to Redmond no doubt at all, and he bore his torture in secret until he thought he would go mad.

Their act—a melodramatic little sketch—had been going very well. Redmond and Mary had been married less than three years and until the time when jealously first seized him he and Mary had lived more than happily.

Suspicions and doubts gave way to certainty in Redmond's mind that his wife no longer cared for him and that the Third Man was to blame.

He never found a definite cause for his anger, for the very good reason that there never had been a cause. Redmond had been a jealous husband, which is something that requires no evidence.

In a fit of rage one night he accused his wife of wrong-doing and drove her from him, dumb with fear, grief and astonishment. It had come to her like a lightning flash.

The sketch was destroyed on the spot, and Redmond disappeared.

When he came again before the public it was with a second rate traveling company in England, and Mary Redmond went out of his life completely. She never returned to the stage.

That, briefly, was the story the actor had tried to bury beyond the reach of memory. As he had grown older in years and experience he regretted at times the haste of his action, but what was done was done.

"The Duster" played a matinée every Thursday, and it was during the afternoon performance that the star decided he would wait until the evening performance ended and with it would end the activities of George Halsey.

Unconscious of his impending doom and wholly unsuspecting the irritation he was causing in the mind and heart of his employer, the young club-swinger went cheerfully at his task and received his usual amount of applause.

He returned as usual to his dressing-room and started slowly to change to street clothes.

A few moments afterward, Redmond, facing his task grimly, pushed open the door and entered. Halsey looked up in some astonishment.

He was standing before his mirror and had just pulled the red sweater over his head.

The white skin of his shoulders and chest gleamed in the flickering light, and the muscles stood out cleanly in little round pads.

A well-trained prize-fighter would have envied his physique and perfect condition.

"I've come in to say," Redmond began as bruskly as possible, "to say that—that—"

He stopped as though his powers of speech had abruptly failed him.

Halsey was leaning slightly against the edge of his table, half-smiling and wondering at the same time at the unexpected visit.

"Yes," he said, questioningly.

Redmond continued to stare without speaking.

His eyes were fastened upon the younger man's naked chest as though he were hypnotized.

He saw there a blood-red half-moon, no larger than the rim of a silver dollar. It was in the exact center of Halsey's breast and it showed with startling distinctness against the white skin.

For a full minute the older man gazed fixedly. Then he spoke again.

"I've come in," he went on huskily, "to say that you are doing unusually —unusually well with your little part in 'The Duster.' I want to thank you."

Then Redmond turned quickly, and the door shut behind him with a sharp bang.

Halsey remained motionless, staring after the actor.

The star went through the remainder of the performance like a man who is only partly conscious. The audience and the cast noticed his queer actions, and the stage manager inquired solicitously.

"I'm a trifle dizzy," Redmond explained. "It is only temporary, I am sure."

He drank the brandy they gave him, and the play came to an end without any untoward mishap.

Again in his own dressing-room Redmond looked at his face. It was

white as chalk, and his hands trembled as he unfastened his garments.

"It can't be possible," he said in a voice that sounded unlike his own.

But he knew, in spite of his words, that it was possible and that the white-skined youngster was his son.

He had recognized it as suddenly as the electric flash over an inky sea, and once recognizing it he could see his own features reproduced in the boy called Halsey.

The youngster had the Redmond nose and the Redmond eyes and—

The veteran actor slowly unfastened his shirt and glanced into the mirror, his eyes upon a blood-red half-moon that stood out sharply upon his skin.

It was no larger than the rim of a silver dollar.

A Jesting Guest

by Simeon Russ

A WELL-DRESSED young man walked into the main reading-room of the big library on Fifth Avenue and let his eye wander appraisingly over the throng of readers seated at the tables there. All kinds were on hand, as usual on a Sunday afternoon—men and women, old and young, sleek and seedy. The young man's eyes scanned the assemblage at the first long table listlessly; those at the next table also failed to arrest his gaze.

But as his eyes started to take in the readers at the third table they fell on another young man—a tousle-haired, carelessly dressed young man, the kind known at college as a "grind"—whereupon the newcomer grunted to himself as with satisfaction, walked over to the seat next the other youth, and sat down.

"Pardon me," he remarked, and, motioning to a small pile of books on the table before the other: "I see that you have there the 'K' volume of the encyclopedia. It is the very one to which I wish to refer. Do you mind letting me consult it just for a moment?"

"Why, delighted," said the carelessly dressed young man, hastening to push the volume toward his neighbor. Its recipient turned the pages busily for a minute or so. But a careful observer would certainly have noticed that he was not really interested in the contents. Now and then he glanced at the other young man, who was immersed—genuinely immersed, he was—in a fat and formidable tome.

Finally he of the encyclopedia spoke:

"Deuced long words in these books, aren't there?"

The studious one looked up, showing a pair of good-humored gray eyes.

"They're the limit," he agreed. "I'm reading an article on philosophy, and the words I've run across have almost made me loony."

And he looked vindictively at the open page before him.

"Two minutes of this thing has been enough for me," said his neighbor. Then he added impulsively:

"Let's quit and go out for a walk. I never saw you and you never saw me, but it's a hot summer day, and I'm all sole alone in this blighted burg, and I'm just hungry for some one to talk to. Now, don't say, 'This is so sudden.' Here's my card. I'm perfectly respectable, as you will see."

He handed over a visiting-card.

The student of philosophy gazed at the name upon it apparently with deep interest.

"Vansittart Waterston, eh?" he drawled. "Are you *the* Vansittart Waterston?"

"That's me," said the youth who had handed over the card, not without a touch of satisfaction. "Then you've heard of me?"

"I have. I don't make much of a practise of reading the society columns in the papers, but even then your name often jumps out and hits me in the face. I don't mind confessing that I've come to take quite an interest in your movements."

"Indeed," said the other with a good-humored laugh. "I feel quite flattered."

"For instance—from what I have been reading of late—I thought you were at Lenox for a couple of weeks more."

"Had to come back all of a sudden for a few days. Confounded bore. I'm living all alone up at our house. Wow, but it's lonely! My mother, you know, is away."

"Yes. In Europe."

Again the other chuckled in a satisfied way.

"You certainly do know about me, don't you?"

By this time some of the readers in the vicinity of the two young men were beginning to grow restive and cast a few sharp glances in their direction.

Both realized that their conversation was becoming distinctly unwelcome, and the carelessly dressed youth, slightly embarrassed, turned his eyes again upon his book. But the other, acting again as if on a sudden impulse, half rose from his chair and said:

"Oh, come! I'm tickled to death to have found a human being to talk to. Let's walk up to the house and get some dinner. I can offer only cold stuff, but I guess it won't be so bad. And there's some fine Burgundy."

His companion hesitated for a bit while his good-humored gray eyes scanned the other's face. Then he stood up.

"Thanks awfully," he said. "I'm with you."

As the two young men swung along up the avenue with the good, strong stride of youth, the sun was slowly sinking in the west. and the city seemed to be getting back its breath after a long day of gasping in the summer heat.

They swung past Delmonico's, past St. Patrick's Cathedral, up toward Central Park.

For a while their remarks were perfunctory—about the weather and the traffic and the dog-goned-ness of New York in midsummer. But presently the young man who had been thus summarily snatched from his library studies, after eying his companion sidewise and taking in all the details of his dapper raiment and clean-cut features, suddenly burst out:

"Say, to think of me walking up Fifth Avenue with Vansittart Waterston!"

"Oh, rats, what of it?" muttered his companion, seemingly embarrassed.

"You're just one young chap and I'm another."

"But to think of me digging into philosophy there at the library and suddenly being snaked away to dinner by Vansittart Waterston, son of Mrs. H. Rodman Waterston, of New York and Lenox. Me, a long-haired, beetle-browed, spectacled 'grind'! You'll have to admit it's funny."

"We're almost there," interrupted his companion, turning into a side street leading eastward.

Half-way along the block he dived abruptly into a narrow passage and brought up against a side door. Taking a key from his pocket, he opened it and, standing aside, motioned his companion to enter.

The other again hesitated for a moment. Then, his eyes twinkling with amusement, he stepped into the mansion of Mrs. H. Rodman Waterston, the name dear to all who love the much-sung chronicles of the Four Hundred.

"Pardon me for bringing you in through this side entrance," said the host; "but, you see, it's altogether too much work to push open that big front door of ours. It tires me out for the rest of the day. Come in—don't be bashful."

The student of philosophy, who had paused as if deterred by the darkness enveloping him, moved forward at the words.

His companion lit a match. Together they ascended a flight of stairs and and came out into a splendid hall, all dark wood and tapestries and grand paintings.

From the way that the host stopped and turned back to his companion it was perfectly obvious that he expected an outburst of admiration; nor was he disappointed. The grind stopped abruptly. For a moment he seemed struck dumb with astonishment.

"Whew!" he said. "This is simply magnificent."

"We're rather proud of it," observed his guide. "But you haven't seen all our treasures yet. Please pardon me if I appear a bit bumptious, but honestly, I can't help it. I was born in this house and I've lived here all my life, and it certainly tickles me to death to show it off to a perfect stranger."

While he was speaking a fleeting look of amusement passed over his companion's face, to be replaced, however, almost immediately, by one of open-mouthed ecstasy.

"Say, it's mighty kind of you to bring me in here!" he stammered. "I've never seen anything like this. I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Waterston."

"Oh, bosh—don't mention it," said said the other graciously; and again the fleeting look of amusement crossed the grind's face. The next moment he was lost in rapture before a piece of tapestry.

Together they went through the stately drawing-rooms of the mansion, through the bedrooms and other apartments of the upper stories, pausing before splendid paintings hanging on the walls, before masterly statuettes tucked away in niches or standing out proudly on pedestals in the middle of corridors and rooms, before the intricate candelabra and gorgeous mirrors with which the Waterstons, folk of unimpeachable taste and many millions, loved to surround themselves.

"My rooms," said the guide, throwing open a door into apartments calculated to turn the humble guest green with envy—apartments in dark colors, rich in easy chairs and handsome prints, in everything that does a young man's heart good.

From them it seemed that the visitor somehow could not tear himself away.

When his host, already on the road to show him something else, was calling to him from another room, the studious one was still standing before young Vansittart Waterston's dresser

as if enthralled by its splendor of mahogany and glass.

After a furtive glance about him he flung open the top drawer, snatched up something in it, and stuck it into his pocket. Then, with something like a guilty start, he answered his host's cheery call and hurried off in his wake.

"Food and drink!" said the latter when rejoined by his guest. "I dare say if we rummage round we'll find plenty of good things."

So they descended the great stairway and, from ice-chest and cellar, amid laughter and good-humored badinage, produced a cut of cold roast beef and some things in cans, and bread and jam and pickles and olives and a cobwebby bottle of Pontet Canet, which the grind, with much grunting and protestation of innocence in such matters, uncorked while his host set two places at the Waterston board.

The host filled two glasses with the wine.

"Your health, sir," he said genially.

They drank deep and smacked their lips. Then both went to work on the viands, while all about them stretched the long, dark vistas of the mansion's rooms, wrapped in a silence broken only by occasional cheery words and laughs from the two young intruders on its solitude.

"Push over your glass," called out the host. As his guest complied with the request he said suddenly:

"Say, I've already told you that I'm Vansittart Waterston, and I've clean forgotten to ask you your name. What is it?"

The other drew toward him his glass, again filled with wine, and said slowly and quietly:

"There is a mistake somewhere. You are not Vansittart Waterston."

As the words fell from his lips he drew from his pocket a revolver and covered his host with it. Then, taking up his glass in his left hand, he sipped from it, smiling up at the other with his good-humored gray eyes.

"*I* am Vansittart Waterston," he said.

The other's fingers clutched his glass convulsively for an instant, and his eyes fixed themselves on his visitor in a look of frozen bewilderment. Then they switched to the revolver.

Then, with a gay toss of the head, he raised his glass to his lips and swallowed.

"Your *telling* me that you are Vansittart Waterston isn't proof that you *are*," he said.

For answer the young man with the revolver took from a pocket of his coat and handed over to his *vis-à-vis* a photograph clipped evidently from a newspaper.

It showed a youth carelessly dressed, of easy-going, good-humored features—unquestionably himself. Under it was the caption: "Among this week's arrivals at Lenox. Mr. Vansittart Waterston, son of Mrs. J. Rodman Waterston. Young Mr. Waterston, though heir to many millions, prefers philosophy and other learned lore to athletics and social frivolity."

The other young man threw up his hands in mock despair.

"I guess you have me," he vouchsafed.

"As a rule, I manage to avoid photographers," continued Mr. Vansittart Waterston, "but one of them landed me that time."

"I wish he'd landed you twenty other times," groaned the man across the table. "That would have saved me the trouble of inviting you to your own house and getting myself into this mess. Incidentally, how does it happen that a man of your peaceful and studious proclivities runs round with a revolver?"

"I didn't till a few minutes ago when I picked the thing out of the dresser drawer in my room up-stairs—which you so kindly showed me. I always keep it there. Don't you remember how long I stood in ecstasy

before that dresser? That's when I snaked the revolver."

His companion, lifting his glass, made him a little bow.

"Let me congratulate you," he said.

With a smile young Mr. Waterston acknowledged the compliment. Then, still keeping the other man covered with the revolver, he moved a few paces to a telephone and sat down in a chair beside it.

"Before I call up the police to come and arrest you," he said, "you may wish to give me some explanation of how you broke into this house and how you disposed of Regan, the caretaker, who was left here when I went to Lenox two weeks ago."

"Certainly. What's more, you'll never telephone to the police after I've told you."

"That remains to be seen."

Resting his revolver hand on the arm of his chair, Mr. Waterston eyed his erstwhile host with a smile. The other, meeting him with a smile equally calm, began:

"So Regan was that caretaker's name, was it? Well, he was one grand little caretaker, believe me! But that's hurrying matters.

"Three weeks ago I came to New York from my home town up-State to try my fortune. I had nothing but an ambition to become a writer and a few hundred dollars. I took a hall-room.

"Mr. Waterston, you probably don't know what a hall-room is. It's a poison that needs a strong antidote if it is not to become fatal. My antidote for it was to walk along Fifth Avenue and the gilded cross-streets diverging from it and imagine to myself that I owned the palaces there.

"Combined with reading the society columns of the newspapers — I had plenty of time for reading—this made quite a serviceable antidote.

Sunday before last—just two weeks ago—I was passing your house very late in the night. I had been writing all day and needed a walk before going to bed. I knew your house, all right, from pictures I had seen in magazines and papers, and it was one I particularly fancied as a background for my dreams of opulencee.

"So far as I know there wasn't a soul on the whole block but myself, and I must have been snooping along as silently as a ghost, because, just as I got to the narrow side passage through which I escorted you in here to-night, I ran smack into a man who was coming out of the passage.

"He was carrying a bundle. The collision with me knocked it from his hand and it fell to the sidewalk. Out of it rolled a lot of silver spoons and knives and things.

"Well, if ever I saw guilt in a face I saw it in that man's. In the light of the street-lamp he turned white as paper and his knees gave so under him that he almost crumpled up at my feet.

"I grasped the situation in a jiffy, and I'm really proud of my next few moves."

"Before you tell me about them, how about a little more wine?" suggested Mr. Vansittart Waterston from his seat beside the telephone.

"Thanks!" The other filled his glass and Waterston's, and, bowing politely, handed the latter over. Both took a few sips in silence.

"Go on," said Mr. Waterston, putting his glass on the table. The other set his down, and continued:

"I caught hold of the man's shoulder.

"'You thief!' I shouted. 'So you're robbing Mrs. Waterston's house, are you? I'll call a policeman.'

"'I—I'm Regan, the caretaker here,' he stammered. 'I—' But no lie came to his lips. He just stood there, trembling. Then my great idea came to me.

"'Oh, I know who you are, Regan,' said I, 'though you may not recognize me. I'm an old friend of Mr. Waterston's. I came down from Lenox to-day with him, and we're going to spend the night in this house—he'll be along in a few minutes, and then you'll catch it for fair. Been

stealing right along since he left you in charge here?'

"'No, sir,' quavered Regan. 'This is the first stuff I ever took.' Then he fairly fell on his knees before me on the sidewalk, and, with his voice all broken up by sobs and the chattering of his teeth, implored me to let him go and not hand him over to the police.

"'All right, beat it!' said I. 'Give me the bundle.'

"He fumbled round on the sidewalk, picking up the spoons and things that had fallen out, put them back, and handed me the swag.

"'God bless you for a kind-hearted gentleman!' he muttered. 'You'll find the side door unlocked.' Then, with a terrified glance about him for a possible policeman, he staggered away into the darkness, while I, with the Waterston silverware tucked under my arm, walked down the passageway and through the side door into the Waterston mansion.

"Now, as I have told you, I follow the movements of your clan closely—many hall-roomers do—so I was perfectly well aware that you had definitely decided to be a fixture at Lenox for a month.

"So I decided to take a chance and play a fine little comedy. First I unanimously appointed myself caretaker of the Waterston mansion, lest Regan or some of his stripe should wish to take further liberties with it and its contents. Then came the matter of remuneration.

"I resolved, in addition to mulcting your larder for food and drink, to cater to my interest in the four hundred by not only living in the Waterston mansion, but by passing myself off as Vansittart Waterston himself—not only to myself, but to others, as my fancy dictated.

"So, during the past two weeks, whenever I have felt particularly lonesome, I have been in the habit of singling out some youth who looked lonesome and friendly, approaching him as I did you to-day in the library, getting him into conversation, and then vouchsafing the fact that I was Vansittart Waterston and inviting him up to your house.

"I made a point of picking out some one who looked—well, shall I say seedy and guileless?"—here the real Mr. Waterson bowed in mock acknowledgment—"and for that purpose there was no better place than the public library. There persons congregate who don't know Vansittart mansions and are particularly generous in their epithets of admiration at the luxury therein.

"It may interest you to know, Mr. Waterston, that during the two weeks of my tenancy here you are the tenth man who has crossed your threshold and enjoyed my hospitality. Had it been some one else I flatter myself that I should have lived the full month here in utter contentment."

He reached for his glass and took a sip of wine.

"That is my story," he continued. "But before I finish I'll add a few questions. You seem to be a young man of sense. I feel very certain how you will answer them beforehand.

"Do I look like a crook? Is there anything missing from this house? Why, if what I have just told you isn't true, do I go out and ask a total stranger in to eat with me? Why hasn't Regan denounced me to you at Lenox?"

Silence fell in the room.

The young man with the revolver looked earnestly at his companion. Neither moved nor spoke for a short space. It was the self-constituted dweller in the Waterston house who broke the silence.

"Aren't you going to telephone for the police?" he asked.

Mr. Vansittart Waterston rose from his chair. Tossing his revolver on the table, he pushed the bottle of Pontet Canet toward the other young man.

"*You* are *my* guest now," he said. "Fill up your glass."

Crossing the Signals

by Octavus Roy Cohen

"NEVERTHELESS, I think Christy Mathewson is the greatest pitcher the world has ever known," insisted Al Parker of the world champion Warriors. "Just because Walter Johnson has—"

The door opened, and Rube Lamboll, huge, ungainly, confident, stepped inside, picked out the most comfortable of the vacant chairs, and flopped into its welcoming arms.

"—plenty of speed," continued Parker, ignoring the newcomer, "that don't make him the best in the business. Why, Christy—"

"Gettin' into the ancient history class," broke in Billy Ward—"what about Pop Anson?"

The discussion waxed warmer. The advocate of Mathewson's ability turned to Lamboll, the greenest of green recruits, for help.

"Who do *you* think is the best pitcher in the world, Rube?" he asked eagerly.

Lamboll uncrossed his lanky limbs, stared slowly about the room, and then:

"Any o' you guys ever seen *me* pitch?" he queried languidly.

Silence.

Charley Milham, the diminutive short-stop, walked sedately across the room and felt the pulse of the big twirler. His face was grave as he announced "Pulse normal." Not a Warrior cracked a smile. Lamboll was puzzled.

"Are you sure," questioned Milham, "that you're the best pitcher in the world?"

"Well," modestly, "I'm not 'serting that as a fact; but I b'lieve if they'd give me a real chanst to show, why, I might do a few things they don't prezactly look for."

"How retiring you are!" The sarcasm went over Lamboll's head.

"Did you guys hear how I got with the Warriors?" He chuckled.

"I got McGuire, of the Vultures, and Quinn, of the Wolverines, biddin' against each other for me, and then I offered to sign with the Warriors, and Collins snapped me up—just as he orter done.

"There's more t' baseball than just bein' clever on the di'mond, you know. It takes this—" The recruit tapped his forehead. In the corner some one gently murmured: "Solid ivory."

"If you're so good," snapped Dunk Riley peevishly, "why don't Zimmer give you a try-out?"

"Didn't wanna waste me yet," replied the Rube airily—the Rube had been with the team three days. "We've been playin' St. Looey, an' there wasn't no use puttin' me in."

The team members were floored.

No words of theirs could adequately express their feelings, and they kept silent. Then, one by one, they drifted from the room; and, because he always sought company, Lamboll left, too.

Lamboll could pitch—there was no gainsaying that fact—and each member of the team had extended the glad hand of welcome after the first day's practise. They saw, as the manager and scout had seen, that Lamboll had the makings of a wonderful twirler; but they realized his greenness, his absolute ignorance of the finer points of baseball.

Twice in as many years the Warriors had wrested the world's championship after bitter struggles; but the close of the following year had found one of their star pitchers ready to retire, or to commence the inevitable slide into bush league oblivion. And the discovery of Lamboll was like manna from heaven.

Lamboll's baseball career had consisted of three years of pitching on the Cartersville team, a team which was literally a "nine," and which carried no substitutes. And Lamboll had been a wonderful pitcher, and he had gained a tremendous intra-State reputation.

In his home town he ranked just ahead of the mayor and the owner of the pool-room in importance. Young men and old, and girls who were young or tried to be, had for two years hung on his every word, and he had come to believe himself an oracle.

His attitude, therefore, toward his new teammates was not unnatural.

He seriously considered himself the best pitcher in the world, and only dimly sensed that the quiet, confident men with whom he traveled knew more baseball than he.

At the close of a short series with Boston, the team jumped to Chicago for the first series of a long and arduous Western trip. In the interest of the team, many of the men tried to strike up a real friendship with the new man, and they found it impossible.

His toploftical manner was impossible; his ego disgusting. And only Manager Zimmer realized that the apparent ego was ignorance.

The Warriors broke even in Chicago, and took a majority in St. Louis. At Detroit the team struck a real snag and lost the first two games. Rube Lamboll sought Zimmer at the hotel that night.

"I'd like to pitch to-morrow," he announced quietly.

"Would you?" The manager did not appear enthusiastic.

"Yes. I suppose it's all right—"

"No!" Zimmer's voice was sharp. "It's not all right, and the sooner you get that swelling out of your head the better it's going to be for you. You're a rube—one of the kind you spell with a small *r;* and you don't know beans about baseball. I'm keeping you on the bench so that you can watch and learn something—"

"Listen here," broke in Lamboll patiently, in the manner of one who is bearing the pettishness of a child; "you don't understand. Of course, I've been learnin' quite a bit from the bench; but, shucks! you have no idea what a good pitcher I am.

"Why, I'm gettin' more'n any unknown pitcher ever got before. Why? Because I've got a bean with something in it. Lemme go out there and pitch against the Tigers this afternoon and we'll win."

"You—you—" Zimmer choked.

"You don't understand, Mr. Zimmer. I'm a great pitcher, an' I'm tellin' you so. If I wasn't I wouldn't say it. I ain't stuck on myself — special. And if I am a good pitcher, w'at's the harm of my tellin' you?"

The manager whirled on his heel and strode away in disgust. The man was impossible. He almost bumped into Gil Collins, the scout who had sent Lamboll to him.

"Hello, Gene?" greeted the scout breezily. "How's my find getting along? Used him yet?"

"Shut up!" growled the manager. "Don't talk to me about him."

Collins chuckled.

"Thought he'd pull some of that highfalutin stuff. But listen to me; if you can once get that boob to take his job seriously—to use that head of his to study baseball, and to stop thinking he's got Christy shaded — you've got the greatest pitcher in the world."

"And you'd advise—"

"—Lettin' him get slammed out of the box once or twice."

Zimmer thought seriously over the scout's proposal. It was logical, certainly. If Lamboll was knocked out of the box his swelled head would have to come down, and he'd realize that he was of the earth earthy, as were his companions.

Every follower of baseball knows that on certain occasions teams get what is called a "batting bee." Everybody hits—and they hit anything.

Detroit started the fireworks next day in the fifth inning and knocked Severance out of the box. Riley went in, and he, too, was sent back to the bench. Con Harvey's offerings were easier than those of the other two.

At the end of the sixth the Tigers had the game sewed up by an 11-1 score. And the entire team was batting.

Zimmer looked at the batting order for the following inning. He saw Cobb, Crawford—

"Go in next inning, Lamboll," he ordered curtly. The men grinned covertly, but Lamboll rose very seriously and started warming up with Craig.

The Warriors went out in 1-2-3 order, and Lamboll walked slowly to the box. The Warrior infield smiled broadly; a nervous, well-built young Georgian approached the plate springily—and walked back less springily after three strikes had whistled across.

The next man fanned. The following batter grounded to Milham, who booted the ball, allowing the runner to reach first. Then the fourth man struck out.

Three men faced Lamboll in the eighth inning, and two of them fanned. The third put up an easy one to third—and, of course, Detroit did not take its half of the ninth.

"I told you," proclaimed Lamboll to Zimmer when they met in the clubhouse, "that I could deliver the goods. Do I take my regular turn?"

"No, you do not!" snapped the other irritably. "You're no good."

As a matter of fact, the manager had been profoundly impressed by the easy, confident manner of the huge recruit during the two innings of work. But he had been in the game long enough to know that no man just up from the bushes could possibly know enough of baseball to take his regular turn in the box.

But there was wonderful material in Lamboll, and he longed to develop it.

That was plainly impossible so long as the lanky pitcher thought himself the best twirler in the world. It was evident that his first move was to take down the swelling in Lamboll's head, and he lost many night's sleep over the problem.

With the final game in Cleveland tightly sewed up, Zimmer let Lamboll go in the box for the final three innings. He fanned five men and did not give a hit or a base on balls. And he was insufferable on the trip back East.

But during the opening series with Boston while at home Manager Zimmer had an inspiration. He called most of the team members into consultation.

"Over in Bayonne, New Jersey," he explained excitedly, "is a very fast semi-pro team called the Baysides which plays Sunday ball. They've challenged us for a game and offered a good guarantee.

"Here's my plan. We'll go there, and Billy Ward 'll catch. As each batter comes up and Ward gives the signal for the kind of ball he wants, he'll tell the batter what's comin'. Our friend Rube Lamboll will be knocked to every consecutive corner of the lot, and he won't be quite so stuck on himself after the fireworks display—"

The men lay back and howled. They told Zimmer he was a wonder.

And in the meanwhile Hector Lamboll, pitcher, was worried. It was clear to him that something was radically wrong with Zimmer; he could not be a fit man to manage a world's champion team—else why wasn't he, Lamboll, worked regularly.

Then, too, Lamboll, for all his egotism, knew that he needed actual practice on the mound to keep himself in proper trim. Ever since joining the team he had been a close student of play, and had watched every move and sought carefully for the motive which inspired it.

He could not understand why his teammates did not like him; it was not for him to understand that they didn't regard him as a phenom—as his fellow townsmen had looked up to him.

There was something pathetic in the position of the big man—misunderstood and misunderstanding; anxious to make friends, eager to learn—yet too full of confidence, and exuding an ego which seemed natural to him and disgusting to others.

He really longed for a chance to start a game, to make good with the team. If they'd only start him once—he'd show 'em. He went with the team to Bayonne Sunday morning and climbed into his uniform. Outside the rickety clubhouse Manager Zimmer called him aside.

"Take care of your arm in warming up," he ordered; "you're going to pitch to-day!" Then he turned away quickly lest Lamboll should see the twinkle in his eyes. And in turning away so quickly he missed the look of ineffable happiness which overspread the face of the big man.

At last his chance had come; at last he was to pitch a full game. What did it matter that the team opposite was composed of semi-professionals?

A huge crowd overflowed the grand stand and bleachers and ganged along the foul lines. The Warriors went to the bat and banged out two runs before being retired. Then they trotted nimbly into the field, and Rube Lamboll, the untried phenom, gangled to the mound.

Stahl, who headed the Baysides' batting order, stepped to the plate. Ward signaled for a high fast one, and rose from his toes.

"He's putting over a high fast one—straight goods!" he said sibilantly.

Over it came; like a bullet. Stahl's bat cracked against it, and it sailed over Zimmer's head for a clean single. Two or three of the men grinned maliciously.

Lamboll looked dazed when he received the ball. He rubbed it in the dirt and shambled around the pitcher's box.

Meanwhile Stahl had murmured something frantically to the coacher, and that dignitary had informed his teammates that for some inscrutable reason Billy Ward had given away his pitcher's intentions.

Gibbons stepped up amateurishly, holding his bat short for a bunt. Again Ward signaled and rose from his toes.

"Spitter—probably wide of the plate," he said quietly.

Over it came, as he had foretold.

"Slow one—over the outside corner," he said again.

Gibbons met it just above the outside corner of the plate and dumped a beautiful bunt down the third base line. Frankel swooped down on it like a hawk and caught Gibbons at first, but Stahl was safe on second.

But it is needless to give the details of the slaughter. Seven times the Bayside batters clouted safely; five times their runners crossed the pan. Finally the third man was retired and the team trotted in.

They had studied their parts carefully, and very ostentatiously they grouped at the opposite end of the bench from Lamboll. As for Rube, he sat alone, dejected, staring unbelievingly at the semi-pros—the despised semi-pros—who were batting him with an unheard-of ease.

The next inning they slammed him

—and again in the next inning; but he walked in with his head up and his shoulders back. Maybe he wasn't a pitcher, after all; but he'd show 'em he could take his medicine like a man.

If Zimmer wanted to take him out, all right. For the first time the idea occurred to him that he wasn't so much, after all—that maybe some of the other members of the world's champion team could play baseball.

He felt like apologizing to every one of them for his aloofness; for now, in his disgrace, he realized how asininely he had acted.

And there was not a man on the team who did not feel a sudden pity for the awkward Rube, who took his medicine in such a manful way. They wondered how it would end—

Not by a sign did Rube show what he suffered. He faced the fusillade of hits unflinchingly and won the admiration of every one of his teammates.

Once, in the sixth inning, he poled out a clean single, and promptly stole second and third just as though he was playing a championship game. Zimmer was enthusiastic.

"That man's a real ball-player," he told Milham. "And thank goodness he's getting some of the ego knocked out of him. He'll come down to earth now—and we'll have one of the best twirlers in the world."

The game ended finally—as all games do.

The Baysides had made fifteen runs; the Warriors seven. The small-town fans hooted at the score, at the team, and at the gangling twirler who had been so mercilessly slaughtered.

As the final "out" was called by the loud-voiced umpire, the Warriors made a dash for the shower-room of the club-house. Lamboll followed slowly. Right ahead of him walked two of the members of the Bayside team.

"What I don't understand," Bouton, the catcher, was saying, "is why Ward told us exactly what Lamboll was going to pitch. We couldn't have touched him without that—"

In a flash Lamboll understood. He strode springily toward the club-house.

The Warriors disported themselves gaily under the showers.

"Thank goodness it worked," chortled Zimmer delightedly. "I never saw a man so thoroughly squelched—"

The door swung open and Lamboll stepped into the room. Instantly the babble ceased and the men turned toward the lanky twirler—the man whose ego they had routed.

"Well?" It was Ward who spoke—Billy Ward who had given away the signals. And Billy's eyes were twinkling.

Lamboll's expression did not change, but the shadow of a smile crinkled the corners of his straight-lipped mouth. He spread his legs far apart, rested his hands on his hips, teetered easily back and forth on the balls of his feet—and stared.

"Well!" he remarked, and there was a note of challenge in his tone.

He was answered by a chorus of denunciation.

"Thought you said you could pitch!"

"Mathewson would have been jealous—not!"

"Some twirler you are!"

"And by a semi-pro bunch!"

"Back to the bushes f'r yours!"

Lamboll smiled indulgently. It wasn't at all as they had expected him to do. Something in his manner commanded silence.

"You boobs give me a pain," he remarked slowly and distinctly. "Why, I wasn't even *trying* to pitch against *that* team! If y'd think I'd throw my wing out against them—y'r fools! Why, I'm the best pitcher—"

As a man they groaned, and Zimmer murmured an expressive:

"Good *night!*"

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR

VERILY, the times have changed! That is, the bad times for the woman of long ago are changing into good times for the modern woman.

What a snap the old Hindu had, anyway!

In those days woman was at his entire mercy. Her slightest indiscretion was punished by death, while the man might do what he liked without let or hindrance. Just listen to a Hindu husband's creed:

> If a man goes on a journey, his wife shall not divert herself by play, nor see any public show, nor laugh, nor dress herself with jewels or fine clothes, nor see dancing, nor hear music, nor sit at the window, nor ride out, nor behold anything rare or choice, but shall fasten well the house door and remain private; and shall not eat any dainty victuals, and shall not view herself in a mirror; she shall not exercise herself in any agreeable employment during the absence of her husband.

When *Ignatius,* the Roman, surprised his wife in the act of sipping wine, he beat her to death—and he was praised for it. These old Romans dismissed their wives upon the slightest pretext. And yet, modern woman thinks she is not emancipated!

Why, woman to-day is absolutely free—it is only poor man who is not free. Now, instead of the man pursuing the woman of his choice and marrying her, very often the woman pursues the man, although I will admit the man doesn't always *know* this! Especially is this true in the story entitled

A CURIOUS COURTSHIP

BY W. T. NICHOLS

a novelette scheduled to appear in our September 19 number. It is unlike any love story you ever read.

Herbert Tenney is a young Irish-American. That fact alone is not extraordinary. It only indicates that there is going to be lots of action in the story. For wherever the Irish are there is action.

Tenney has just returned from an extended tour through Europe. As he steps from the ocean liner that has carried him across the Atlantic a hysterical young lady throws her arms around his neck and begs him to pretend he is her *fiancée.* And then, before *Tenney* can recover from his surprise and amazement, up comes a middle-aged female of extensive embonpoint, with a "God bless you, my children" air, and *Tenney* hears the girl introduce him as "Dear Herbert!"

That is what I call a real start for a story. The most curious thing about "A CURIOUS COURTSHIP" is the way it begins. For you don't think that a young man who has genuine red blood in his veins is going to let a girl play a trick like that on him and get away with it, do you? Of course not! *Tenney* wants an explanation—demands it. The girl tries to evade it by evad-

ing *Tenney,* and she almost succeeds in doing it, too! Then follows the rest of a most curious courtship.

If Mr. Nichols does not succeed in giving you an hour of real entertainment I shall be much disappointed.

Remember "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" in the "Arabian Nights"—probably the first detective story on record? Well, next week you're to have the privilege of reading

FORTY ALI BABAS AND A THIEF

BY ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

It's a long novelette, complete in the September 19 issue of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER.

This isn't the tale of the desperate efforts of twoscore plain-clothes men to capture one lone, defenseless miscreant. The Ali Babas in this case are—rugs!

Very costly rugs, too; worth a thousand dollars each, as *Ulrich Laing* told *Galvin Brenner* after *Ulrich* had partly recovered from the shock. You see, *Brenner* thought the Persian characters on the price tags were code marks, and he sold a dozen of 'em—

Wait a minute, we're getting all tangled up. *Galvin Brenner* walked into *Laing's* office one morning, announced himself to be a thief tired of crookedness, proved his capability and landed a job with the "rug king." He was just making good, and mightily pleased with himself, when the Ali Babas arrived.

Within an hour he'd sold a dozen for fifteen dollars apiece!

So, to go back, when *Laing* recovered from the shock, he put it up to *Brenner* to get busy, steal all those rugs and bring them back.

But take it from us, neither the story nor *Brenner's* troubles come to an end with this herculean task. It's only the beginning.

"ABOARD THE AMOS R.," by Forrest Halsey, is a story with a new setting and characters that are new to ALL-STORY CAVALIER readers.

Captain Bill was master of the trim, rakish canal craft, "Amos R." The efficient crew of the vessel consisted of one small, tow-headed boy, aged anywhere from ten to fifteen. *Captain Bill* had signed his crew somewhere along the line a long time before, taking the homeless, motherless chap to his broad chest with a combined paternal and maternal yearning. The youngster became a tyrant in his way, and when the story opens he has just discovered *Captain Bill* shining his shoes! To the discerning kid this unexpected polish can mean but one thing—the captain has a lady love! He questions the captain, and the captain, between sundry blushes, admits the scornful accusation.

Right then and there the deck is cleared for action. Listen to the noise.

"SOME SURPRISE FINISH," by Rutherford Davies, is the story of an unusual man and has a most unusual ending.

The hero, *Jimmy Dumphy,* was frantically afraid of water. Some said this was because his father was lost in the awful Johnstown flood, and nature thereby handed him an ineradicable heritage. Consequently, *Jimmy* grew up with half the pleasures in life denied him. He never waded a brook, and for him the old swimmin' hole held no allurement.

He started in to learn the plumber's trade. When a broken water-pipe cut loose, *Jimmy* quit his job and went to work in a theater as property-man. From this he advanced to a sketch in vaudeville, and then—can you beat this for luck?—he joined "The Seven Mermaids," the same being a bunch of useful water-nymphs in fancy diving and aquatic feats.

Here's a combination for you—a performer playing in a tank act who is afraid of his life almost every moment.

Without telling you anything more about this story I will observe in passing that you will keep your gaze glued on every word of this tale until it ends.

"THE DRIVER OF THE DELIA," by Bradford Burnham, comes at a time when ALL-STORY CAVALIER readers ought to be ready for a slashing sea story, for that is just what it is.

Along the east coast they called the driver of the Delia a crazy man. This reputation started when he set all sail in front of a hurricane and beat the worst of the hurricane around the capes. Long before he began this mad run the skipper of the tug had discarded his tow and scud-

ded for safety. It was then the captain went forth in a wild fury to keep ahead of the storm center. With this reputation in hand the driver made love to a girl on shore, only to find out that he had a rival. Both men were sports. The rival drove a locomotive and the Delia was only a ship; but they made a wager, with the girl as the stake, to race a certain distance, the one in his engine and the other in his boat!

There's a bet for you! How did it come out?

Why, an engine can beat a ship any time, can't it? Of course it can—on land!

"COMBINATION A DECIDED IMPROVEMENT"

To the Editor:

Both my husband and myself have been readers of *The Cavalier* for two years. Have also enjoyed many of your *All-Story* stories. We think the combination a decided improvement.

To our way of thinking, Zane Grey, Terhune, Titus, and Gregory are your best contributors. "The Lone Star Rangers," by Zane Grey, is one of the most interesting stories I have ever read, holding the reader's undivided attention from the first to the last word. "The Outlaw," by Jackson Gregory, and "To the Victor," by Harold Titus, were splendid. Just finished "The Quitter," by Jacob Fisher, and liked it very much.

I do not care for Fred Jackson's stories, but as there are many that do I'm not complaining.

Wishing you the best of success,

Mrs. Vern. Hinkle.

Niles, Michigan.

"THE QUITTER" BEST YET

To the Editor:

I am not very much addicted to the habit of telling people how good something is, but I cannot refrain from telling you that "The Quitter," by Jacob Fisher, is the best story I have ever read in any magazine. It is, indeed, a relief to escape from the poor stories which one is accustomed to seeing in the magazines, but from which the All-Story Cavalier is remarkably free.

I am a new reader of your magazine, but as long as it continues to please my whims as well as it does at present, I will not be denied of my All-Story Cavalier.

C. C. R.

Ybor City, Florida.

AN APPEAL FOR A SEQUEL

To the Editor:

Cannot you persuade Mr. Burroughs to go back to that cairn in the African desert and attach a telegraph instrument to the wire left there by *David* when he started for his trip to Pellucidar?

Really, the story of "At the Earth's Core" leaves its readers in a worse state of mind than Stockton's "Lady or the Tiger."

We simply must know how the Twentieth Century A. D. subdues One Million B. C.

The versatile Mr. Burroughs can tell us, and we look to you to persuade him to give us the sequel to "At the Earth's Core."

Corinne E. Lillibridge.

Lillibridge, Florida.

FROM A SOLDIER AND A GENTLEMAN

To the Editor:

I was just looking over some magazines we have here and came across your All-Story Cavalier. I read it through, and I must say it is one of the best I ever read.

It is pretty hard to get any reading-matter out here.

Wish some of your subscribers would drop me a line once in a while so that I will know what goes on at home.

Just finished "The Double Dealer." Think it is great.

We have been stationed over here since 1911 and don't know when we will get back to "home, sweet home."

Herbert B. Clark.

Co. B., Second Inf., U. S. A.,
Honolulu, H. I.

TO THE DEFENSE OF THE ALL-STORY

To the Editor:

Have just finished "The Quitter," which I think is the most interesting story I've read in a long time. But why, oh why, did Jacob Fisher cut it so short? Was so disappointed because we didn't hear how *Hallam's* friends received *Norma*.

Have read several kicks against combining *The All-Story* with *The Cavalier*. I read *The All-Story* six years, and it simply can't be beaten, in my estimation. It makes me fairly boil to hear it run down.

E. F.

East Moline, Illinois.

VARICK VANARDY WON'T ESCAPE

To the Editor:

May a young girl congratulate you on your magazine? I have been a reader of it for two years and think it is one of the best printed. All of your stories are very good. But what has become of Jackson Gregory and Zane Grey? Also give us more stories like "A Year After" and "The Quitter." Do not let Varick Vanardy escape from you.

Wishing the All-Story Cavalier Weekly much success,

(Miss) Cecelia Brown.

Waterbury, Connecticut.

WANTS MORE NAPOLEON

To the Editor:

Enclosed please find check for two dollars for which please send me the All-Story Cavalier for six months. I have been reading it for about three months and I think it contains some of the best stories I ever read.

Wish you could get Mr. Brady to write another story like "The Eagle of the Empire," for I think that is the best that has appeared.

W. F. Epperson.

Kibler, Patrick County, Virginia.

PRAISE FOR "SKIPPER COHEN"

To the Editor:

Your weekly magazine is steadily improving in the character of stories published. "Skipper Cohen," by Charles W. Wood, published in the August 8 number, is simply corking, as fine a bit of humor as I ever read. I was greatly interested in "The Absent-Minded Skipper," by the same author, published a few months ago; but this latest yarn is even better. I sincerely hope your readers may have the pleasure of many more stories by this clever humorist.

Lillian Williams.

New York, N. Y.

MISSES FRED JACKSON

To the Editor:

Since you joined *The All-Story* with *The Cavalier* you seem to have forgotten Fred Jackson. Give us more of his stories. Besides these, I liked "A Knight of the Lariat" and all the other yarns by Robert Adger Bowen.

(Miss) Grace Honsinger.

Collinsville, Oklahoma.

THE BEST OF SEVEN

To the Editor:

To begin with, let me state that I am now taking seven magazines, but no one of the other six arouses my enthusiasm as does the All-Story Cavalier Weekly, a delightful combination of two first-class magazines. My wife likes Fred Jackson best, and I rather favor Albert Payson Terhune. Both are top-rung writers.

Give us more stories like "The Mad King," "Tarzan of the Apes," and "The Smoldering Past."

Here's to the success of the All-Story Cavalier!

Cleo. Plymale (and wife).

Stanberry, Missouri.

"A FINE FICTION MAGAZINE"

To the Editor:

As a constant reader of the All-Story Cavalier I can safely recommend it as a fine fiction magazine. I am a lover of fiction, and out of the numerous books I read that are in the field of magazines, I find that the All-Story Cavalier is the very best. It has the choicest stories one can wish for.

My friends also are interested in this magazine. I therefore wish success to it.

Anna Braunstein.

157 East Eighty-Fourth Street,
New York City.

"WE ARE FRENCH" PLEASES

To the Editor:

Can't you give us more stories by Perley P. Sheehan? "We are French" is, in the humble opinion of this household of your readers, the best you have had so far, and at the right moment, too.

Admiringly yours (and his),

C. K. Smith.

523 West 137th Street,
New York City.

"GETTING BETTER AND BETTER"

To the Editor:

I read *The All-Story* for months and enjoyed it immensely. I believe it has been getting better and better every issue since it combined with *The Cavalier*.

I would certainly like to read a sequel to "At the Earth's Core," as would several others of my acquaintance.

"The Frozen Beauty" was fine. Why not give us more of that kind of stories?

L. K. Story.

Amory, Mississippi.

Osculation Astray

by Allen Phillips

HAROLD WAKEFIELD was not a promiscuous kisser.

He had always been judicious in distributing his osculatory caresses; in fact, he could not remember ever having placed one outside the immediate family circle—except once.

That particular "once" was just three nights ago, and that is why he was in a particularly perturbed state of mind as he left the elevated at Kedzie station this eventful summer's evening.

Harold Wakefield was shamefully bashful, and that was one reason he had always been chary with his kisses. But he was desperately in love, and that was why this one slip had occurred three nights before.

It happened in the darkened hall just as Rosie was bidding him good night, and Harold never knew exactly how it happened.

When he came to himself enough to gather his scattered faculties he was standing outside the closed door of Rosie's home and without the least idea of whether his demonstration of affection had been received with favor or whether he were banished forever from the little flat where he had been calling regularly two evenings a week for the last year.

Through three nerve-racking, sleepless nights he had told himself over and over that he never would go near that flat again, yet here he was on the way to make his regular semiweekly call in a sort of desperation, determined to learn his fate at once and have it over with.

In this particular block on Walnut Street there is a row of flats, all exactly alike, and it had always been Wakefield's custom to count six doors from the corner before turning in so as to be sure and locate the right place.

Perhaps it was because of his disturbing thoughts that night, or it may have been that he had grown careless; at any rate he neglected to count as usual.

He walked haltingly up the front steps with his courage at a very low ebb. On reaching the door he was half inclined to retrace his steps and postpone the ordeal until the next night, but managed to overcome the impulse and resolutely turned and gave the door-bell two short rings, the signal which he knew Rosie would recognize.

He half expected to hear the heavy footsteps of Rosie's father in the hallway, and breathed a sigh of relief when he heard some one with a light, quick tread coming to open the door.

It was Rosie after all, and his heart gave a great bound.

He noticed through the curtained window at the side of the door that the gas-light in the hallway was turned low—so low that the room was in almost total darkness, and his spirits rose.

As the young man outside heard the knob turn, a bold plan took shape in his mind.

With Harold Wakefield to think was to act, and as soon as the door was opened he stepped quickly inside, pushed it shut, and clasped the girl in his arms.

To his surprise she made no resistance when he pressed a lingering kiss upon the warm, soft lips.

Harold's heart bounded with delight. So he was forgiven after all!

As if in a dream he released the girl, who stepped to the gaslight and turned it up. Wakefield blinked in the strong light, then rubbed his eyes, took one look and started back in amazement.

It was the wrong girl!

Wakefield backed slowly until stopped by the wall of the room. He half extended his arms and his fingers were spread as he pressed himself tightly against the wall as if hoping that an unseen door would open and let him back into another room, out of reach of the flashing black eyes of the angry young woman who stood before him.

With head thrown back, nostrils distended, and the red blood mounting to her temples and forming a contrast with her shining black hair, she surveyed him haughtily, and no slave ever cringed more abjectly before the cruel *Cleopatra* than Harold Wakefield did that night.

He felt somewhat as he had years before when a certain school-teacher had caught him in some mischief of which he was heartily ashamed.

Wakefield noticed that the girl was handsome, and that she was about the size of Rosie; but she certainly was not Rosie. She was a total stranger to him. He couldn't remember ever having seen her before.

"How *dare* you?" she exclaimed.

"I—I—it's—" began the discomfited young man.

"What do you mean?" she interrupted.

Wakefield again started to explain.

"Who are you?" she broke in once more.

"It's all a mistake—" he gasped out, and hesitated for words to explain his action.

"I should hope it was," said the girl sarcastically, but apparently somewhat softened by the intruder's look of consternation and his evident discomfiture.

"I—I came to see Rosie Alderman," continued Wakefield, encouraged by the girl's slight change in manner; but he got no further, for she broke in again with an explanation which threw a great light into his bewildered mind.

"Rosie Alderman doesn't live here," she said. "She lives next door at No. 829. This is No. 827."

"What an idiot I am," said Wakefield, and he confessed it with such feeling and expression that the girl smiled in spite of herself.

"There is no use in apologizing for such a piece of stupidity," he resumed after an embarrassing pause, "so I may as well bid you good evening."

He partly opened the door to leave, but hesitated and turned back to his companion after one look outside.

"Say," he said in a nervous, imploring voice, "I can't go out there."

The girl stepped to his side to see what the trouble was.

The door of No. 829 was not more than ten feet from the one where they stood. Between the two doors was a window, which was dark when Wakefield entered the flat.

Now the shade had been raised and a flood of light poured from it, making the walk in front as light as day.

Stretching across the blaze of light was the shadow of a woman, who was sitting in the lighted window, her head resting on her hand.

"See," whispered Wakefield, "that's Rosie, and I never could get out of here without being seen, and that wouldn't do! I never could explain it. Please let me stay here for a few minutes; perhaps she will put the shade down soon. I'll promise not to stay any longer than I have to."

The girl with the black eyes consented, partly because she was sorry for the young man and partly because she wished to avoid any possibility of gossip, which might reflect upon her.

So she sat down on the stairs and propped her chin in her hand, while Wakefield stood where he could watch the light from the window next door.

They had hardly settled down to their vigil when quick footsteps sounded on the sidewalk coming from the corner.

The girl jumped to her feet.

"That's Jack!" she exclaimed excitedly; "I know his step. I didn't expect him so early!"

"Jack!" repeated Wakefield in alarm. "Who is Jack?"

"Jack," said she with a blush, "why—er—Jack and I are to be married next week. That's who I thought you were when you came."

"Good Lord!" groaned Harold in despair. "What on earth am I to do?" and he looked about him helplessly.

"Can't I hide behind that curtain until he goes?" asked the reckless young man with a gleam of hope.

"You couldn't stay there four or five hours, could you?" retorted his companion, who did not particularly relish the idea of having a third person concealed behind a curtain witnessing an evening call made by her fiancé.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, "Jack doesn't stay that long, does he? I never stayed that late at Rosie's home in my life."

The footsteps were coming up the walk in front.

"I know!" exclaimed the girl. "You will have to make your way through the flat and go out the back door. There is no one else here; but it is dark and you will have to be careful and not make any noise. The key is on the inside of the door at the rear. Turn it and go out through the back yard."

She talked rapidly and breathlessly as she pushed him toward the back of the hall and between some curtains into a strange, dark room beyond.

"Don't knock over the reading-table in the middle of the living-room and don't bump your head on the mantel," she cautioned as the door-bell rang.

The bewildered man took one step, banged his ankle against a rocker and cursed under his breath. Then he stood stock still, afraid to move.

He heard the front door open and immediately afterward a resounding smack.

"You aren't the first man who got one of those to-night," reflected Wakefield, and he found considerable satisfaction in the thought, despite the fact that he was far from being out of his predicament.

He heard the girl and Jack go into the front room and settle down for an evening in each other's company.

Then slowly and with the utmost caution he began to make his way through the rooms to the rear of the flat, feeling every inch of the way with his hands before each step.

Slowly he moved through the room, waving his hands gently up and down and sidewise, like a disciple of Delsarte, to avoid coming in violent contact with the furniture.

All at once his left hand touched something. He gripped it, found it was hard, cold, and unfriendly, and let go again with a shudder.

It was a marble mantelpiece.

"That's the kind of stuff they'll plant me under if Jack catches me in

here," he reflected grimly, and became more cautious than ever. Somehow the touch of that marble seemed to bring home to him the gravity of the situation and reminded him of headstones, coffins, funerals, and other cheerless things until the cold sweat started all over his body.

Calling himself a fool for his nervousness, he resolutely reached out and grasped the mantel, felt his way carefully along to the end, and then along a wall until he reached an open door.

Then he resumed his Delsarte movements and advanced until he thrust one hand into a pitcher of cold water, which gave him another start. He now concluded he was in the dining-room.

Wakefield ascertained by judicious use of his sense of touch that the pitcher of water was on a table directly in front of him, so he felt his way part way around the obstacle before he left its friendly guidance to embark on another trackless voyage, which soon landed him against a wall.

Locating another open door, he waved his hands before him and stealthily "fanned" himself into the next room.

It seemed an age before he put his hand on a gas-stove and knew he was in the kitchen.

Then he found the back door, softly turned the key, and an instant later the cool night air was blowing on his face and he breathed a sigh of relief.

But a rapid survey of the back yards of the flats showed him that there still was a problem to solve. It was about twenty-five feet from the row of flats to the alley, and all the back yards were enclosed with a tight board fence about six feet high.

The narrow porch on which he was standing was just even with the top of the fence which divided the flat from which he had just emerged from the one occupied by the Aldermans, so Wakefield could pass through either yard to the back gate.

But it suddenly occurred to him that the people who lived in the flat above the Aldermans kept a bulldog in the back yard, with whom he was not even on speaking terms. He also recalled some random talk a few days before with Rosie, and decided that she had said something about her next-door neighbors also owning a dog.

After pondering the matter carefully, he decided that he did not care to risk stumbling over a sleeping dog in a strange yard, and that the safest way would be to walk the line fence to the alley.

So he started on the perilous journey with his right foot on top of the fence and his left carefully following a narrow strip which ran parallel to and about ten inches below the top. By placing both hands on the fence before him he made fairly satisfactory progress to within about ten feet of the alley.

First he would place his hands on the fence and test each board to see that it was perfectly solid and would bear his weight. Then he would carefully shove his right foot along until his knee was just underneath his chin and then "hitch" his left foot along until it was even with his right.

He repeated this series of movements until he came out of the shadow of the buildings behind him into bright moonlight.

As he emerged from the shadow his delivery seemed so near that he began to think of his adventure in the light of a joke. Up to this time it had been a remarkably serious matter with him, and events had followed so closely upon one another that he had not had time to think of anything except how he was to extricate himself from the dilemma.

"What a pretty figure I must cut —up here creeping along a back fence in the moonlight with my back humped like an excited tom-cat," he reflected.

His nerves were so overwrought that the picture he painted of himself

in his own mind tickled him so he was forced to bend double to keep from laughing aloud.

As he writhed with suppressed mirth there on the back fence in the moonlight his hat dropped off, he clutched at it desperately with both hands, lost his balance, and fell from his perch squarely on a pile of tin cans on the opposite side of the fence from the Alderman yard.

The crash of his fall seemed to arouse every living thing for a block around.

He heard the bulldog next door bark savagely, but was more concerned with the excited yelping of a canine in the yard where he had fallen. He scrambled to his feet, kicking tin cans in every direction, to find — greatly to his relief — that the dog he most feared was securely chained in the opposite corner of the enclosure.

The noisy animal was straining at its leash and nearly barking itself into convulsions.

Wakefield had hardly gained his feet before lights began to appear in the back windows of the row of flats behind him.

"There he is! I see him!" shouted an excited woman.

Wakefield realized that his only hope for safety was in flight. With a bound he reached the rear fence, mounted it, and dropped into the alley.

Just as he did so some one fired a revolver shot at random from an up-stairs window.

Wakefield dashed down the alley at top speed, but he could not outdistance his ill luck that night, for just as he reached the street he ran, breathless and excited, plump into the arms of a burly policeman, who promptly collared him and demanded an explanation.

Poor Harold was too much out of breath to speak, and even if he had been able to talk it is not likely that what he said would have made sense.

It seemed to him as if his reasoning powers were paralyzed. He felt as though he had been using his brains all the evening to get himself out of scrapes, and he felt all fagged out and about ready to give up and go to the police station as the only alternative.

Here he was, breathless, dishevelled and covered with dust and dirt where he had fallen on the pile of tin cans, in the position of having to explain a very delicate and altogether improbable state of affairs to a coarse, unfeeling Chicago policeman.

No wonder he felt he was about at the end of his resources.

"Please let me go," pleaded Wakefield as soon as he could catch his breath. "I can explain everything in a satisfactory manner if you will only give me time."

"What do you mean by running up a dark alley like a scared pup this time of night?" demanded the officer of the law as he shifted his grip from the prisoner's collar to his arm, which he seized by the fleshy part at the back just below the shoulder with a grip which made the young man wince.

"I don't like the looks of this business a bit and I think I'll find out where you came from," continued the big patrolman, and he marched sternly into the alley dragging his captive with him, despite the latter's protests and lagging feet, which now were as reluctant as if loaded with lead, while a moment before they had brought their owner out of the alley as though they had been gifted with wings.

The alley was well lighted now from the rear windows of the flats that lined both sides, which were all aglow.

Harold and his captor had advanced but a short distance when they met a group of men, followed by a curious, half-frightened throng of women and children, all talking excitedly about the burglar. Most of the men were in their short-sleeves

and some of the women wore kimonos.

Emboldened at the sight of the policeman and his brass buttons, they gathered around the officer and his prisoner and began to ask all sorts of questions.

As Wakefield was being led a captive through the alley all sorts of wild plans of escape flashed through his whirling brain.

Rather than face the crowd, some one of whom would be sure to recognize him, he was ready to confess to being a burglar or anything else and trust to luck to get himself out of the scrape in police court the next morning.

However, he reflected that the policeman was bent on making an investigation and probably would do it no matter what happened. So he stumbled along with a sinking heart, hoping that he might not be recognized after all.

The first familiar face he saw in the curious crowd was that of the black-eyed girl whom he had kissed by mistake a few minutes before. With her was a young man of about his own size and build, whom he rightly guessed was Jack.

The girl recognized the prisoner at once, and the latter felt hurt and chagrined when he saw—or thought he saw—a look of mingled amusement and triumph in her eyes, but she made no outward sign of recognition.

"Who is he?"

"What did he do?"

"Whose house did you catch him in?"

"Is he a burglar?"

These and a dozen other questions were hurled at the big policeman, who quickly lost his temper and ordered the crowd to "shut up."

"How do I know who he is or what he is?" he demanded, showing his irritability. "That's what I came up here to find out."

A pause followed. No one seemed willing or able to volunteer any information, and the patrolman became more and more out of patience every minute.

"It looks like Rosie Alderman's beau," came in a hoarse whisper from a woman standing directly behind Wakefield.

The latter did not turn to see who made the remark, but he felt that he was blushing.

All at once Wakefield saw the familiar figure of Rosie making her way hurriedly through the crowd.

Reaching the inner edge of the circle, of which Wakefield and the policeman were the center, she exclaimed breathlessly:

"Oh, Harold, what a shame! I ought to have known better than to have sent you out on the back porch after the ice-cream alone. I never thought of the dog!"

Right then and there Harold Wakefield resolved that he never would marry any other girl than Rosie Alderman.

"Any girl," he thought, "who is resourceful enough to think up a plausible falsehood like that on the spur of the moment certainly is worth having."

"Do you know this fellow?" demanded the officer of Rosie.

"Why, of course," she replied. "He was calling on me to-night and I sent him out on the back porch to get some ice-cream from a freezer out there—and—"

Here Wakefield took his cue and completed the explanation.

"And when I got out there," he said, "the dog got after me and I jumped over the fence into the next yard, and there was another dog in there, and he began to bark also. Then when I tried to get out some one shot at me and I ran down the alley—and—and that's all there is to it."

A look of disgust crept into the policeman's face as Wakefield finished his recital. The crowd now began to

treat the affair as a huge joke and to rally the officer upon his astuteness in making a capture.

"Why didn't you pick out somebody of your size?" came from one joker.

"I saw a man running up the street about half an hour ago," remarked another. "He may have been running to catch a car, but perhaps he was a burglar. You'd better investigate."

Anxious to get himself out of an embarrassing position as quickly as possible, the policeman released his prisoner and, after threatening to "pinch" him on general principles if he ever caught him running headlong out of a dark alley again, strode hurriedly away to resume his beat.

Harold and Rosie stood facing each other for a moment and then turned and walked side by side in silence past a row of grinning faces toward the Alderman flat, and the crowd slowly melted away.

"Where's the burglar?" came in a frightened voice from a woman in a third-story window.

"Oh, he's gone to get some ice-cream," shouted back some one in the crowd.

The retort was followed by a general laugh, and Harold quickened his steps.

"Come, let's hurry and get out of this," he said to his companion.

All the way back he was planning some excuse to offer his sweetheart for the strange predicament in which she had found him, without telling her the real truth.

Rapidly he ran over several wild stories in his mind and finally decided upon one which he thought might pass muster.

Neither spoke until they were seated opposite each other in Rosie's parlor. Then Wakefield looked straight into the eyes of the girl he loved and saw there a look of pity and concern.

The honest and straightforward impulses that always had been his came to his aid at that moment, and he stifled all thoughts of deceit and falsehood and made a clean breast of the whole humiliating affair.

He detailed everything that had occurred to him since the third night before, dwelling particularly upon his agony of mind as to how he would be received. Of course, the hardest part was to tell how he had entered the wrong house and kissed the wrong girl.

"But I knew there was something wrong the instant I did it," he declared.

He pleaded his cause well, and when he looked into Rosie's eyes as he ended his story he knew that he was forgiven.

His spirits rose and he went one step further.

"I haven't been drinking a bit," he continued; "honest, I haven't."

A look of reproach crept into Rosie's eyes that he should suggest such a thing and she started to remonstrate.

"Smell of my breath," he commanded, bending toward her.

She leaned forward in her chair to obey and—well, any one could guess what happened.

Mr. and Mrs. Harold Wakefield and Jack and his black-eyed wife now are living just a few blocks from Nos. 827 and 829 Walnut Street. They have become acquainted and are the best of friends, but by common consent the night on which they first all met is never referred to.

It had been planned by the parents of both brides that they and their husbands should begin housekeeping in some of the flats in that same block on Walnut Street.

But the fathers and mothers encountered such strong opposition on the part of the two young couples that they are now living on avenues where each flat has a distinctive architecture of its own.