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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Mollie of the Movies

Fred Jackson's One-Reel Masterpiece

COMPLETE

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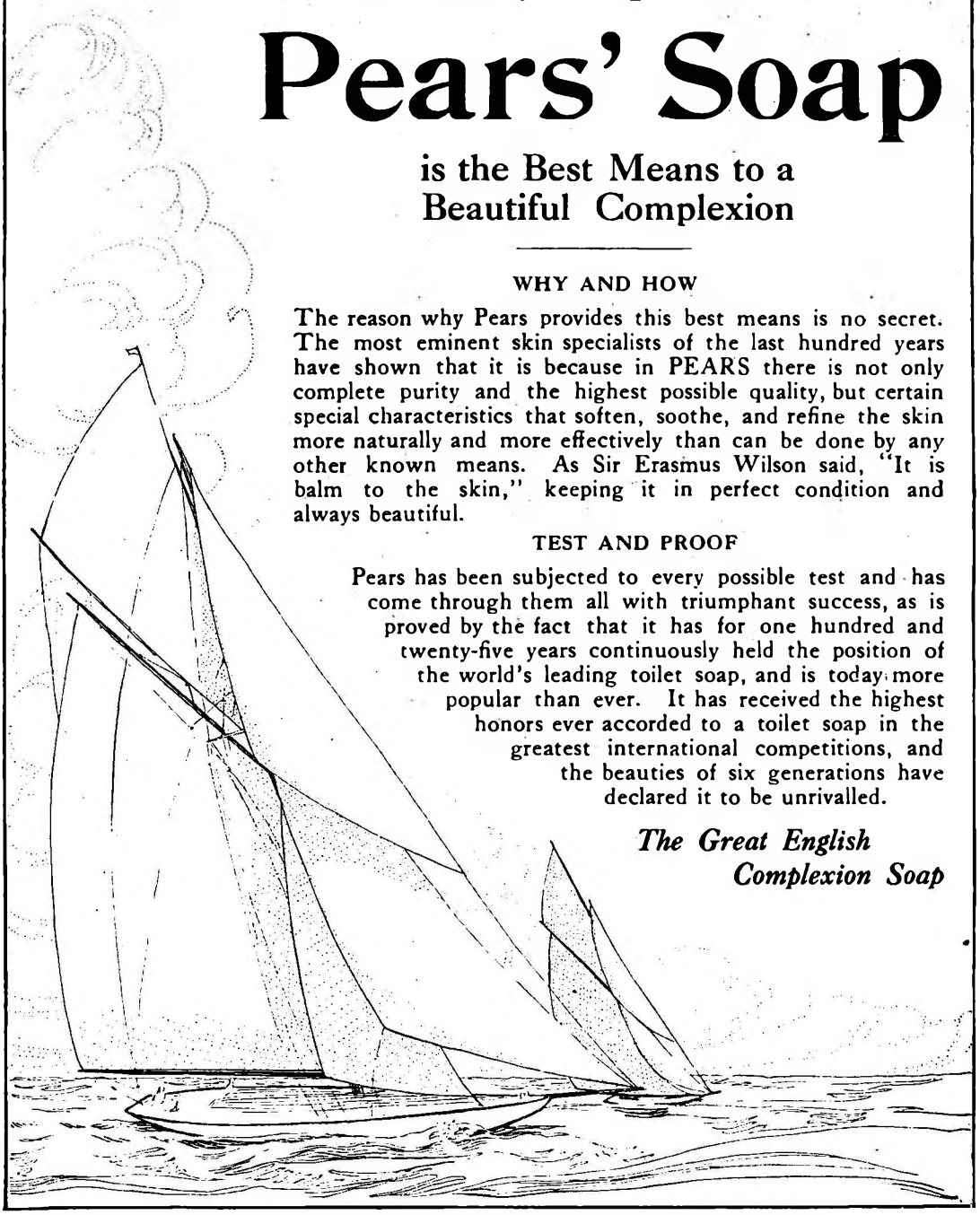
to Everything—and
Pears' Soap
is the Best Means to a Beautiful Complexion



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The Great English Complexion Soap

OF ALL SCENTED SOAPS PEARS' OTTO OF ROSE IS THE BEST

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXVI CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 5, 1914 No. 1

ONE NOVELETTE

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

SIX 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
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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXVI SEPTEMBER 5, 1914 No. 1

Mollie of the Movies

By Fred Jackson

Author of "The Masked Bride," "The Bride Unmasked," "The Blood Tie," "Business Is Business," "The Biggest Diamond," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Girl on the Screen.

JIMMY BERKLEY always succeeded in having a good time no matter where he found himself. That was his reputation.

Now and then, when some one remarked this fact, a disgruntled grouch in the same vicinity might say:

"With all that money—who wouldn't?"

But it was not a matter of money with Jimmy Berkley. It was a matter of temperament and disposition.

He enjoyed things. He managed to extract some entertainment out of anything that turned up—and he was always looking for fun.

Whether there is any truth in the old adage, I cannot say, but in this case at least it worked out—for Jimmy usually found what he was looking for. He was one of those people to whom things always happened.

Hence, the adventure that began upon the 17th of September at half past eight.

Berkley had been asked to the Appletons' dance. He had also been dining an out-of-town man at his club. Accordingly, he had arrayed himself in formal things early, and had reported for dinner in that state at seven o'clock. It had seemed to him quite probable that his dinner date would last until it was time for him to go on to the Appletons.

But when he met his dinner-guest he was informed regretfully that that gentleman was leaving town on the eight o'clock express for the West.

Mr. Berkley, of course, was sorry to hear this, but he made the best of it. He gave his friend a rousing good dinner that filled in the hour that they

had together, and then he drove down to the Pennsylvania to see the other man off.

Half past eight found him headed up-town again, with nothing to do until eleven or so.

Your average man would probably have been bored, finding himself with so much time on his hands; but Jimmy Berkley was never bored. He looked eagerly out of the car windows to see what sort of world he was in and what the chances were for passing the time.

As he looked out it chanced that he was passing one of the little neighborhood theaters that are sprinkled so lavishly over the city nowadays. Some of them, up-town, are quite as elaborate as first-class theaters, and appeal to audiences just as select.

However, Jimmy was down-town, in the district devoted to business instead of to dwelling.

The theater which he passed was decorated in front with placards and lithographs advertising the moving-picture plays on view inside, and their garishness and color caught Mr. Berkley's eye.

In the days when melodrama thrived he had often made up parties to see them. Now that moving pictures had come to take their place—in a large measure—he had transferred his interest.

Accordingly, the lithographs displayed before the Concordia Theater attracted him.

One was "The Gipsy's Ruse." It revealed a gipsy man with blazing eyes, holding aloft a dagger as he confronted a shrinking, very blond girl.

Another picture showed the gipsy camp. Another showed the blond girl having her fortune told by a very dark woman who was arrayed in huge earrings and a shawl.

As he gazed, first absently, then with growing interest, Mr. Berkley was aware of the call of the films.

This is the newest craze to which the flesh of man is heir. It is lustier than the craving for drink or drugs. It is practically irresistible and incurable.

From arctic to antarctic, it is sweeping the globe—the lure of the films.

Society gives film-shows after dinner in the drawing-room. Mag Rafferty on the Bowery steals out at night to go to the "movies" with Joe. Children of six, and old women of sixty are smitten alike. The fever, like death, is no respecter of persons.

So it is not in the least unusual that Mr. Berkley heeded the call that came to him as his eyes rested on the flaming posters of "The Gipsy's Ruse."

He leaned forward suddenly and tapped with his stick on the glass that separated him from his chauffeur. The chauffeur turned and was directed, by a series of signals, to turn at the corner and halt before the Concordia Theater.

A few minutes later and Mr. Berkley had purchased a ticket at the window for fifteen cents and had passed within the enchanted portals.

His appearance created no sensation. It is true that the regular habitués of the Concordia had not the custom of donning evening things, but they had seen such togs before and had learned not to shy at them. Indeed, on the screen itself evening things were a common enough occurrence, and in the audience they were not entirely unique.

Nor was Mr. Berkley's car the first that had ever distinguished the curb outside. Even the elaborately coifed lady at the ticket window had vouchsafed Mr. Berkley no more than a casual glance.

He found himself in a dim interior, silent but for the appropriate musical accompaniment rendered by the pianist down front.

He looked about for a seat, first; found one in the third row from the back — by unusual good luck — and turned his attention to the screen.

"The Gipsy's Ruse" had already

begun. He suspected it from the local color of the picture and the garb of the actors.

He knew it, however, when the next lead appeared:

MARITA INFORMS CAPTAIN HARTLEY OF NIKO'S SCHEME.

THE GIPSY'S RUSE—PART TWO.

And then the printed explanation vanished and Mr. Berkley saw *Marita!*

CHAPTER II.

"So Near and Yet—"

THE lithographs outside had lied.

She was not at all like the girl they pictured. She wasn't black and scowling, arrayed principally in earrings and a shawl.

She was, so far as he could judge from the photographs, brown—soft, beautiful brown. Her eyes looked dark brown. Her skin looked a sort of creamy tan.

But it wasn't her brownness that appealed to him. It was her bewitching, fascinating, bewildering animation.

To watch her was to realize the crudeness of speech. She could express more with a droop of her eyelids than the average person can say in five minutes. You knew exactly what she was saying and what she was thinking just by watching her. Every expression, every movement meant something.

From the moment *Marita* flashed upon the screen, Mr. Berkley was absorbed in the story. It mattered nothing that he had missed the first part. Any one with one eye could see that the girl was in love with this dashing officer and that he did not suspect.

And later any one could see why he did not suspect. Because he was enamored of the blond ward of his father's. And it did not take you long to see that *Marita* loved her, too, and for that reason forbore to try her enchantments on *Hartley*.

But how a man could hesitate for an instant between *Marita* and the blonde was more than Berkley could imagine. His disgust for *Hartley* was beyond words.

But later, when *Niko* succeeded in abducting the blonde, meaning to hold her for a ransom, and when *Marita* betrayed her own people and led *Captain Hartley* to the rescue, and when he suddenly realized her true worth and drew her to his bosom, then Berkley felt more jealous than pleased.

Even the last bit, showing the blonde happy with somebody else and *Marita* queening it like a real aristocrat in *Captain Hartley's* gorgeous home—even this did not quite make him happy.

It piqued him a little. It stirred strange longings within him — longings not entirely unconnected with *Marita*. He thought of his own gorgeous home, in which no *Marita* queened it.

Blinking in the sudden light, while the sign on the screen read:

ONE MINUTE, PLEASE!

he recalled *Marita*, and wished like anything that a fellow could meet a girl like that once in a while.

It seemed to him little less than a tragedy, that he should see her at such close range — should have the privilege of studying her sweet face, her lithe, slim form—that he should come to know her in all her moods as well as he knew himself—and that she should yet remain a stranger to him.

It was uncanny. It was a calamity. Why, he even knew her little mannerisms—that trick she had of shaking back her curls, sort of sidewise—and that way of tilting her head up high and then looking down at you.

He knew her intimately—and did not know her at all.

He did not even know her name! It was not *Marita*, of course.

Darkness came, and with it, "Sammy Sleeper at the Zoo."

Mr. Berkley was not interested in *Sammy,* but he kept his seat, for he suddenly remembered that these shows keep on from morning to night, repeating the same pictures again and again. By merely enduring the intervening ones, he could see *Marita* again.

"Sammy Sleeper at the Zoo" was a comedy that made the audience howl. In it *Sammy* dreamed that all the animals were his own particular pets, and he liberated them in the park, delighting at their consequent meetings with policemen, nurse-maids, babies, boys, and girls, old ladies, poets, carriage-horses, and coachmen, *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.*

So terrified did everybody become that the park became deserted and *Sammy* had it all to himself. He took one of the public buildings for his own and lived in it, served faithfully by his wild pets.

The lion served him for a riding-horse. The orang-utan was waiter. The elephant was valet. The giraffe was guardian of the gate.

But nobody ever came. The foliage, untended, grew thicker and thicker. The grass grew high as a man. The park became a jungle right in the midst of New York.

Then one day a little girl wandered into the jungle. She had golden curls and a starched white dress, and she was lost.

Sammy had his pets serve up a fine banquet for her. Then he conducted her to a beautiful apartment in his palace, but she cried to go home. So he abandoned arguments and conducted her to the entrance, after several days hard traveling.

There he himself was seized by soldiers who had sent the little girl in as a decoy. He was thrown into prison and put in a cell with a hobo.

The hobo offered him a drink from a flask. *Sammy* refused. The hobo was insulted and attacked him.

And *Sammy* awoke to find his governess shaking him.

After "Sammy" there was "Over the Fence," a picture about an old bachelor whose cat goes after the parrot owned by an old maid next door. They married in the end.

After that came a news review of topics of interest, and then an American flag with a line underneath it, reading:

THIS IS ONE COMPLETE PERFORMANCE.
PLEASE USE EXITS AT SIDE.

The lights went up. The pianist availed herself of a much-needed respite, and some of the audience went forth into the night.

But Mr. Berkley was not one of them. He rose, it is true, but only to find a seat further front, where no slightest phase of *Marita's* beauty could be lost upon him.

He waited impatiently for the beginning of the next show, and settled back in his seat with a sigh of relief when it finally began.

"The Gipsy's Ruse" was the first picture. And this time, seeing it from the beginning, he discovered *Marita's* real name. The cast at the opening of the picture gave him that.

Marita.....	Mollie Edwardes
Niko.....	Hamilton Gaines
Captain Hartley.....	Lorrimer Lovatt

The names of the others meant nothing to him. But her name meant a great deal. It was like making a little more of her his own.

He watched the picture breathlessly. When she was on the screen he lived. When she was not, life was dull and stale and unprofitable. He abandoned himself to this sudden interest in her and everything else went out of his head.

"The Gipsy's Ruse" was in two parts, each part occupying a reel. The Concordia management thought it quite a long picture. So did the Concordia clientele. But to Berkley it was tragically short.

He relaxed in his chair when it was over and sat through the rest of the show a second time, enduring it simply to see her again; and as he looked on, facing the screen though he did not actually see it, he wondered how on earth he could manage to meet Mollie.

For with Mr. Berkley nothing was impossible. When he thought of something he wanted to do it remained to decide the ways and means —that was all. No matter how impossible the thing looked, he usually succeeded in doing it.

So now to meet Mollie Edwardes had become the most important object of his life. At dinner-time, it is true, he had not even known she existed. But now she was the only woman in the world for him, and he vowed he would run her down if it took ten years of his life and all of his money. And when Jimmy Berkley felt that way over anything it usually happened.

The third and last time that "The Gipsy's Ruse" was run that night Mr. Berkley noted something of importance—the name of the concern responsible for it.

"Velvograph."

It was photographed on the film at the beginning and at the end. Obviously, then, the Velvograph Company controlled the services of Miss Mollie Edwardes, and through the Velvograph Company she was to be reached.

He left the theater, his mind busy with schemes for making her acquaintance. And so interested was he in the business that he drove back to his rooms instead of on to the Appletons'; and the débutantes looked for him in vain that night.

He dismissed his car and went up in the lift. He gave his coat and waistcoat to his man and called for a lounge-robe instead. He lighted his pipe and threw himself into a big chair to think.

To write her a note telling her he'd fallen in love with her wouldn't do at all.

He realized that at once. He supposed she got several hundreds of such notes a day. And to her the one from Jimmy Berkley would mean no more than the one from Hermann Blaatz, of Iota, Ioway. For there was nothing that Berkley could say that Hermann couldn't say.

It seemed quite possible to him that three-fourths of the men who saw her on the films wanted to make love to her—and that at least half of that number wrote her mash notes.

No, that wouldn't do at all! It would be useless to class himself with her other innumerable admirers. He must advance more warily; he must make her acquaintance without arousing her suspicions as to his intentions.

The next idea that occurred to him was to pretend to be an interviewer. He could have cards engraved with the name of some big magazine in the lower corner. On receipt of such a card she would probably receive him, talk to him—even might present him with some of her photographs!

But what excuse would he have for calling a second time? What excuse for continuing the acquaintance?

Even he, with his quick-fire methods, might not be able to accomplish much in the way of captivating her in one meeting. For she might see him in her moments of leisure at the studio, where they might be interrupted at any moment.

Or she might not see him at all—the press-agent might see him.

Besides, it would take three or four days to have cards made—and even then they might know the *real* interviewer for the magazine he chose; and his hóax might be discovered.

No, there was nothing in the interviewer stunt.

What, then? How else could he get in touch with her? How could he manage to meet her constantly without letting her suspect that he was the sort of imbecile that falls in love with popular celebrities from

the audience? In what way could his path cross hers naturally and at frequent intervals?

The answer came to him in a flash, like an inspiration. It brought him up in his chair, wide-eyed.

He would act on the films! He would apply for a position with the same company that controlled her. He would get into the same pictures that she was in.

Maybe he would even be able to play parts opposite her!

He would be her lover before the camera!

He would hug her and kiss her and do heroics for her sake!

The solution delighted him. He leaped to his feet and strode back and forth excitedly. He glanced at the clock wistfully.

It was only twelve o'clock. At least eight hours must elapse before he could put his plans into execution.

CHAPTER III.

"Where There's a Will—"

I SHOULD like to say that he slept poorly, waking every half hour to glance fretfully at the clock; but such was not the case. He slept soundly, as usual. It was a trick he had inherited from his father.

He always slept soundly; and this night he did not vary. He would have slept until noon if his man had not awakened him at eight, per instructions. And even then it took a second calling to really rouse him.

But once he was awake, his enthusiasm awakened with him. Sleep had not caused his interest in Miss Edwardes to fade. Indeed not. He was as keen for meeting her and knowing her and making love to her as he had been the night before.

So, when he had tubbed, he arrayed himself carefully for the part he was planning to play.

He chose a Norfolk suit that he had formerly worn only in the country. It was lightish gray. He selected a lavender silk shirt and a violet cravat. He wore a soft black hat, lemon-colored gloves, and carried a cane.

En route to the Velvograph studios, which were in Staten Island, he bought a silk handkerchief with a violet border for his outer coat-pocket, and a pair of lemon-colored spats to match his gloves.

In this costume he caught a taxi and drove to the ferry.

He felt that he was most appropriately gotten up. Time and time again he had seen leading men and matinée idols promenading Broadway and had noted their sartorial display. He felt that, at the moment, none of them had anything on him.

In appearance Mr. Berkley was distinctly pleasing. He had dark hair and blue eyes and features that were neither chiseled nor chopped, but downright attractive. His figure was very good, as figures go nowadays.

He was, in short, an ordinary man—neither an Adonis nor a Caliban. You can see his sort any day in the week in the Wall Street district. They are there by the hundreds.

Mr. Berkley had no intention of trading upon his personal appearance, however. He meant to bluff his way. Consequently he did not dismiss his taxi at the ferry and take the car that passed the Velvograph studios. He remained in the taxi all the way, dismounting only when he arrived at his destination. And he told the cabby to wait as he descended and mounted the white stone steps.

The Velvograph plant was a tall, red-brick building trimmed with white stone.

There being nobody to say him nay, or to ask questions, he proceeded to enter boldly.

There was a broad vestibule beyond the outer doors. Then there were more doors.

Passing through this second set, Mr. Berkley found himself in strange surroundings.

The large hall was used as a sort of green-room and waiting-room combined. It was crowded to overflowing with people in every conceivable costume.

There was a nun reading a magazine in one corner; there were soldiers; there was a girl in a Quaker costume, poke-bonnet, and shawl; there were two bums with grotesquely painted faces.

All the people, in fact, had heavily painted faces. They looked ghastly.

In the rear a railing protected a row of doors on which various names were painted. To the right a red-haired girl presided over a telephone switchboard and a handsome devil in khaki smoked cigarettes and talked to her. He had a huge shock of silky hair which seemed to be his chief care.

Berkley drew near, undisturbed by the curious stares of the assembled luminaries, and leaned upon the rail beside the god in khaki. And the red-haired girl, becoming aware of him, interrupted her tête-à-tête to inquire politely:

"You lookin' for anybody?"

"Yes," said Berkley, smiling pleasantly. "I'm looking for whoever engages people for this company. Perhaps you can direct me?"

The gentleman in khaki glanced anxiously at Berkley's hair, and was reassured to find it merely of normal growth. Whereupon his interest in Berkley ended. He flicked the ash from his cigarette and yawned.

"Mr. Murphey engages," said the red-haired girl, "but we've got all we need. You can leave your name and address if you wish."

Berkley shook his head.

"No. That won't do. I want to see Mr. Murphey anyway. It's rather important."

"I'll send in your name," said the red-haired girl, sticking a small connection plug into a socket and pressing a button.

"Mr. James Berkley—on important business," said that gentleman.

"Mr. James Berkley on important business," repeated the switchboard-operator mechanically.

Then she turned, drawing the connection plug out of the socket. "You can go in," she said. "Third door to your left."

Mr. Berkley thanked her and glanced along the row of doors. On the third, beyond the gate, he found:

J. G. MURPHEY
Private

And he turned the knob.

Mr. Murphey was short and fat. He had a red face that might have deceived you into thinking that he was a heavy drinker. He wasn't. He never touched a drop. His favorite beverage was "pop," which he drank from the bottle.

Mr. Murphey swung round in his swivel chair and fixed upon Berkley a pair of sharp, shrewd, green eyes.

"Well, sir," he said, "what can I do for you?"

Berkley advanced with a pleasant smile.

"You can give me a job," he said.

"Wha-at?" roared Murphey, leaning back, his arms gripping his chair. "I thought you said you came on important business?"

"I did," said Berkley. "It's vastly important that you give me a job."

"Important to you, perhaps," said Murphey grimly.

"Important to you, too," responded Mr. Berkley. "If you miss this chance to engage me, you'll miss one of the biggest opportunities that will ever come to you in life. I'm not an ordinary movie actor.

"I should think you could see that. I'm the greatest all-around man in the business. I can ride, shoot, swim, run an aeroplane, fall off buildings, dance, dive—do anything, in short, that any man has ever done before. I can play any sort of part.

"And to convince you of my worth I'll accept merely a nominal salary. Give me a chance. That is all that I ask. Let me prove to you what I can do and what I am worth."

This avalanche of conversation stupefied Mr. J. G. Murphey. He sat for an instant gazing up at Mr. Berkley as though he thought he must be dreaming. When he got his breath he said:

"By gad, you've got nerve at least! I'll try you."

And, leaning forward, he pushed his fat thumb down upon a pearl button. A buzzer sounded in another office back of his, and a red-cheeked young man sauntered in. He had been whistling, but he stopped politely when he crossed the threshold.

"Dan," said Murphey, "take Mr. Berkley to La Norman and ask him if he can use him."

"This way," said Dan, looking critically at Berkley, who followed his guide eagerly.

At the door he glanced back to thank Murphey, but that gentleman was deep in a letter. His heavy brows were knotted. As far as he was concerned, the incident was closed.

Berkley found himself traversing a narrow corridor lined on both sides with closed doors. Each door bore some inscription in black lettering.

There was a "Scenario Department"; there was a "Directors' Room"; there was a door marked "Stenographers." There were others marked with proper names.

Between the doors the whitewashed walls were lined with scenes from various pictures or with "trials."

At the end of the corridor a spiral staircase led upward. Mounting in Dan's wake, Mr. Berkley passed along the third floor, emerging into a huge room that was ablaze with sunlight. It was walled in by glass on all sides and roofed with glass, too—and white curtains on sliding rings and rods were so arranged that they could be made to shut off the light wherever desired. In this respect the place resembled an ordinary photographic studio.

There were three studios in one here, however. That is, there were three separate and distinct scenes set up in three different sections of the room.

The scenes were not complete ones, either, such as you see at the theater. Only as much of a setting was made as would be required in the picture to be taken.

One represented part of an office. There was a desk in it, a bookcase in the rear, a picture on the wall, and two chairs stood near the desk. In the foreground the desk and chairs were raised upon plugs of wood, which would not show in the picture.

All the furniture was real. But the wall was of painted canvas. Mr. Berkley had been of the opinion that moving pictures are taken in real homes and offices—in real interiors.

But that is not the case. Interiors are always built to be photographed.

The second setting was a music-room, with a baby-grand piano drawn up near a window. The window looked out upon a garden which was painted and made to look real by means of linen rose-bushes and wooden and linen trees.

The glass in the window was real, and a real curtain was made to blow in the breeze from the garden by means of a bellows. A vase of big linen roses stood on the piano.

The third set consisted of part of a hall and a stairway. The stairway was of wood—solidly built, with balustrade and carpet complete. It rose almost to the glass roof and descended to the floor. A wide settee stood near the foot of it, and a pedestal with a marble figure on it stood near by.

The marble figure, however, was painted yellow.

A brace hidden behind the painted wall and extending over the top held a beautiful chandelier.

As Berkley and Dan entered this last set was being photographed. A

man in evening clothes, with a yellow collar and shirt-front, had an altercation with a liveried servant at the foot of the stairs. The liveried servant was evidently arguing with the dress-suited gent.

The latter wanted to mount the stairs. The servant barred the way.

A girl appeared suddenly in the picture. She, too, protested, barring the dress-suited gent from the stairs. He put her aside roughly and began to mount.

At that instant another man who had been waiting at the top all this while, out of the picture, began to descend.

He was elderly, wearing a white wig and heavy, flowing mustache. And he had a revolver in his hand. He was also very weak, which was indicated by his clutch upon the balustrade. But he was not too weak to level the revolver at the dress-suited gentleman and cry:

"Stop!"

"Put down that gun!" ordered the dress-suited gent. "You can't stop me now! Nothing can stop me now!"

He sprang forward, knocking the revolver out of the old man's hand and sending the old man himself spinning down the stairs. Then he mounted.

The camera man stopped grinding in obedience to a tall man in his shirt-sleeves, who shouted:

"All right, Frank!"

The dress-suited gent came down the stairs again. The old man got up ruefully, rubbing one shin.

"Take the number," ordered the tall man, "and we'll try that again."

A husky chap who looked like a scene-shifter advanced to the foot of the stairs and held up a big card, on which was marked "579."

Afterward Berkley learned that the scenes are not taken in the order in which they are finally shown, and that each one is identified in this way. But at the moment the business was a mystery to him.

"All right now — lively, please," called the tall man. "Take that again, please—Mr. Hale?"

Mr. Hale, who was evidently the servant in livery, extricated himself from a conversation with a Chinaman at one side, and the whole scene was done over again, even to the flinging of the old man down the steps.

"Right!" called the director at the end. "Now the other scene, please. Just run it through once without the camera."

Dan approached the tall man as the actors scattered.

"Mr. Murphey wants to know if you can use Mr. Berkley?" said Dan.

La Norman, the tall director, looked Berkley over critically and apparently without enthusiasm.

"Leads," he asked, "or juvenile?"

"Anything," answered Berkley easily.

La Norman stared.

"Did Murphey take you on?"

"Yes," answered Berkley.

"I'll try you. You look about the type I want for an English officer. Mr. Grant!" he called, turning away toward the dress-suit gent, who was chatting with a colonial belle.

"Yes?" said Grant promptly.

"Show Mr. Berkley where to get his costume—and find him a dressing-room, please."

Mr. Grant offered his hand with a smile, evidently considering this an introduction.

"This way," he said pleasantly.

Dan went whistling back to his desk. Berkley followed his new guide in the opposite direction, where a second spiral staircase led downward.

They passed through a carpenter's shop first, where much hammering and sawing and planing accompanied the building of a paneled court-room scene. Adjoining it was a paint-shop where a brick wall was being painted.

Then came a sort of storeroom where every conceivable sort of object was placed. It was called the property-room, and could produce almost

any object demanded in a scenario. Beyond this again was the outfitting-room, where two old negresses handed out any costume required over a broad wooden counter.

"Your first part with us?" asked Grant as he led the way.

"Yes," answered Berkley. "My first here. But not my first by any means."

"What company were you with?" asked Grant.

"I have never been in the movies before," admitted Berkley. (This sounded safer, considering that he was very green.)

"Oh, I see. Legit? Well, the movies are getting the best of us these days."

They reached the window by this time, and Grant added:

"Tell Kitty what you want and she'll fix you up."

Kitty, the negress attendant, beamed upon him.

"I'm going to be an English officer," said Berkley.

"Dat's colonial period, Ah reckon," she said. "Size?"

"I don't know," smiled Berkley. "I've no idea."

The negress lifted the wooden counter and came out with a tape-measure.

"You-all is new, Ah reckon," she said. "Bettah take de measuahments."

In a few minutes she delivered to him the uniform he needed, some black boots, a cloak, and a hat.

"You-all bettah git a sword from Tony," she added in parting advice.

Tony proved to be in charge of the property-room, and he handed out a sword without comment, even without waiting to be asked. He had already outfitted the "extras" for the picture that Berkley was to be in.

"You are going to take Lovatt's place in the new picture they're doing for Mollie Edwardes, I guess," said Grant pleasantly as they headed for the dressing-room. "He went home sick yesterday, and hasn't shown up to-day. I thought I'd have to do it."

Berkley's heart jumped at this speedy realization of his dreams.

"Did Lovatt play her lover?" he asked.

"No, the heavies," answered Grant. "Villains."

He threw open the door of a dressing-room and looked in.

"Well?" called a man's voice inquiringly.

"Looking for an empty," explained Grant.

"No. 37 is empty," answered the man's voice.

They found No. 37, and Berkley took possession.

"Thanks awfully," he said to Grant, nodding.

"Know anything about the make-up?" asked Grant. "It's different from the legit, you know."

"No-o, I don't," admitted Berkley.

"Stop in at No. 19 when you are ready and I'll show you."

The door slammed.

Berkley began to throw off his clothes wildly and to don the English uniform. It seemed to him incredible luck that he should have met with such swift success. Here he was actually dressing to play in the same picture with Mollie.

He looked at himself in the glass and chuckled.

CHAPTER IV.

"If at First—"

MR. GRANT was waiting in dressing-room No. 19 to plaster his face with paint and powder. It was exceedingly uncomfortable stuff to wear, but Berkley bore it as though he had used it for years.

Black lines were drawn around his eyes and brows, and his lips were emphasized.

At the end, when he was finished, he observed his reflection in the mirror without any noticeable delight.

"I thought you didn't have to fix up for pictures," he said. "I thought it was just like having a photograph taken."

"You have to put on a heavier make-up than for the stage," explained Grant.

"I look like an Indian," complained Berkley.

How could he make a hit with Mollie like this?

"You'll photograph great, though," Grant consoled him. "That's exactly the same kind of make-up I use, and I register great."

"You ought to know," agreed Berkley. "I suppose I'd better go up, eh?"

"I suppose so," said Grant.

"Much obliged to you," said Berkley from the doorway.

"It's all in the day's work," said Grant.

Berkley mounted the spiral stairs again, his sword clanking against the railing, and made his way back into the studio.

The stairway set was going. They were building the cabin of a boat in its place. The actors who had been working in the stairway picture, too, had disappeared, and a new set sat about. There were colonial gentlemen in powdered wigs and satin small-clothes. There were some Indians. There were some colonial ladies and some black slaves.

But Berkley's eyes passed rapidly over them all to linger upon the girl who stood talking to La Norman apart. It was Mollie Edwardes in the bewitching costume of a Quakeress.

The night before she had been ravishing as a gipsy maid in gay raiment and gold earrings. To-day, however, she was bewildering in the more sedate garments of gray and white.

Her brown hair was almost entirely hidden beneath her bonnet. But her eyes seemed enormous, and the curve of her lips was simply indescribable.

She was Mollie Edwardes, that's all; Mollie of the Movies.

Berkley's heart thumped beneath his English uniform as he slowly advanced toward her.

If you are not accustomed to wearing a sword it is rather uncomfortable. It clanks along at your side, either dragging you back at every step or swinging the wrong way. Mr. Berkley found himself compelled to keep his hand upon his as he walked.

And even then his long, dark cloak annoyed him; it felt so ridiculous and womanish, especially when Mollie's eyes rested upon him.

It was their first meeting, and he would have liked to look rakish and devil-may-care like the handsome devil he had seen below in khaki. Instead, he looked like a dandy in red and blue and brass.

"Where's your wig?" roared La Norman, catching sight of him.

Berkley felt his head anxiously.

"Wig!" he cried. "Do I need a wig?"

"Powdered wig with cue — eighteenth century! See Carboni on the floor below."

La Norman turned back to Miss Edwardes, dismissing Berkley from his mind. He had not presented him to his divinity. It was not an auspicious beginning.

Berkley wheeled and went back to the spiral stairs and down. He blamed Grant for this error. Grant should have told him about the wig.

Storming inwardly, he inquired of a passing mechanic where wigs were to be got, and so was directed to Carboni, who spent his days dressing wigs and hair arrangements of all times and all styles.

Carboni, a little Italian, fitted him out nicely, and sent him back to the studio complete in every detail. But La Norman was watching for him this time from under scowling brows.

"Keep your hand off your sword," he cried. "Haven't you ever worn one before?"

Mr. Berkley was not accustomed to being addressed in such a tone, but he swallowed his annoyance and saw the funny side of his situation. He beamed.

"Sure," he said. "I never budge a step without one."

"And stop mincing along as if your boots hurt you. Do they?"

"No."

"Then swagger a little. You are supposed to be an English officer visiting the colonies—before the war. You are something of a divil with the ladies. Feel your own importance. Strut a little. Carry yourself with an air. Do you understand what I want?"

"Exactly," said Berkley, observing that Mollie was looking on.

"Good. Let me see you cross, then, and enter the music-room, there. You are coming to present a letter of introduction to your second cousin, a wealthy colonist. Beggs, here, is ushering you in. Beggs?"

Beggs drew near. He was made up as a darky servant in livery. Assuming a shuffling step, he turned and beckoned for Berkley to follow.

"Dis way, sah," he said. "Jes' dis way, if yo' please."

Berkley followed him, one hand upon his hip, the other swinging. He followed with an exaggerated swagger, dragging one foot at each step. And as he moved, he swung his shoulders so that his long, dark cloak whipped out behind him.

The other actors and actresses looking on, made no attempt to smother their laughter.

They shook. They howled. They guffawed. Only Mollie Edwardes looked a little puzzled. La Norman turned red and looked apoplectic.

"Very good," he said grimly, as Berkley reached the piano, "except that you are not playing a low comedy part and it is customary to face the camera."

Berkley turned abruptly and faced the other way, with a fixed expression of boredom stamped upon his face. It was a bored young English officer he conceived.

"Come back and do it over," said La Norman, "and follow Beggs. Don't make a short cut before the camera. And stop that idiotic strutting!"

Berkley stopped dead in his tracks and faced La Norman, waiting.

"I don't mean halt there. I mean cut out the burlesque. This is serious. It's costing money. We're wasting time. Have you ever posed for pictures before?"

"Photographs," answered Berkley pleasantly.

The onlookers snickered. Even Mollie Edwardes hid a smile.

But La Norman did not see the joke. He writhed in his wrath and turned scarlet.

"You are very humorous, Mr. Berkley. Quite a comic, in fact, but we haven't time for such things here. We are here to work. We're earning our salaries. And I'd advise you to begin to earn yours if you hope to hold down a job here. Take that bit again with Beggs. And mind you walk. Don't swagger, don't strut, don't swing yourself or drag your feet. For God's sake walk like a British officer would walk, if you can imagine it."

Berkley held himself erect. He marched in soldierly fashion after Beggs, entered the music-room with his face turned unfalteringly toward the camera, and clicking his heels together near the piano, saluted La Norman.

La Norman stamped his foot.

"Don't salute!" he roared. "Don't you see you are alone in the room except for the servant!"

"I didn't mean to salute when you were taking the picture," explained Berkley. "I just did that to you to signify that my instructions went no further."

"Don't do anything except what I tell you, and when you've done that,

stop and stand still. This is a rehearsal. You are supposed to do now exactly what you do when the camera is working. Do you get me?"

"Right-o," said Berkley. "When I enter the music-room I am to stand here until further orders come. Is that it?"

"It is."

"But I don't see how I can make a careful character study of my part if I don't know what it is all about."

"Perhaps you can improve upon the way we run our business, Mr. Berkley?" said La Norman.

"I think I could, in that instance," answered Berkley pleasantly.

La Norman looked as if he was considering a physical attack upon his tormentor. Then he evidently changed his mind, mastered his impulse, and turned to the others, shouting:

"Miss Talmadge!"

"Yes?" drawled Miss Rosalind Talmadge, advancing.

She was a tall, regal-looking woman, gowned in the draped satins and laces of the colonial days. A white-powdered wig rose high upon her head. She waved a fan gently to and fro before her face, and a train swept out behind her.

"You are the captain's second-cousin, Miss Talmadge. You have been informed he is in the music-room. You come to him, give him your hand to kiss, and ask him to be seated. He kisses your hand, first having swept you a low bow upon your entrance."

These directions he fired at Berkley emphatically.

"Then," went on La Norman, "you both sit and talk for a few moments *ad lib.* until you are interrupted by Miss Edwardes. She is presented to the captain, and both are immediately attracted. That means that you, Berkley, and Miss Edwardes greet each other with signs of pleasure and interest. She smiles and sweeps a low curtsy. You bow over her hand and kiss it.

"Then Miss Talmadge excuses herself, indicating the doorway, vaguely, and goes out. Have you got all that?"

"Yes," said Miss Talmadge, nodding.

"Yes," said Miss Edwardes, who was regarding herself in a dressing-table mirror to one side.

"Certainly," said Berkley.

"Ready, then," said La Norman. "Let's have it."

Miss Talmadge appeared in the doorway, hesitated, looking inquiringly at Berkley.

"*Captain Anstruthers?*" she asked.

"Madam, your servant," said Berkley, sweeping her a low bow.

She advanced and offered her hand with a smile. "Welcome to the colonies, captain," she said.

He kissed her hand, bowing again, released it, and sank into the seat she indicated. It was placed so that he would be turned with his profile to the camera, while she faced it directly. But Berkley shifted it as he seated himself, so that his face was toward the camera, too. In this position, however, he had to strain his neck in order to look at her.

"No, no, no, no!" roared La Norman. "Don't move the furniture, Berkley, unless I tell you to. Put that chair the way it was before."

"But you said to face the camera," objected Berkley.

"Do as I tell you!" shouted La Norman. "No one told you to keep your eyes glued on the lens. Have you no common sense at all?"

He advanced and reset the chair.

"Now, sit down there and go on with it. Go on with it! We haven't all day for this one rehearsal!"

Berkley reseated himself and turned smilingly to Miss Talmadge.

"You'll pardon this slight interruption, cousin, I trust," he said. "I am here on business, you know, and in business one is so often compelled to associate with one's inferiors. But tell me about yourself?"

His words, which were audible to every one and plainly meant for La Norman, stupefied them all—even Miss Talmadge, who sat with eyes and mouth agape. La Norman looked as if he had been paralyzed.

"You did not know I was in the colonies on business?" asked Berkley innocently. "You thought perchance my visit were one of mere pleasure? Ah, nay. 'Tis not so. His majesty hath sent me upon a mission."

"Indeed?" said Miss Talmadge, recovering self-possession after a side look at the director. He had decided to ignore Berkley's attack.

"Oh, aye," said Berkley. "Some day when we know each other a great deal better and have played in the same pictures for a long time, I will e'en confess to you its nature. You look a motherly soul, though somewhat sunburnt."

"Miss Edwardes!" called La Norman.

Mollie entered demurely, hesitated with that little startled gesture so well known to her admirers, and advanced timidly, encouraged by Miss Talmadge's manner toward her.

"*Captain Anstruthers*—my daughter," she said.

Berkley advanced with real delight shining in his eyes, and pressed his lips to Mollie's hand, not once, in formal salutation, but several times, in quick succession, hungrily.

Mollie put her hands behind her, instinctively, with the born actress's attempt to save the scene.

"Please," she said protestingly.

"I am attracted to you," explained Berkley. "You must not draw away from me thus. Smile."

"If you will permit me," said La Norman sarcastically. "One kiss on the hand will be plenty. Indicate by your facial expression your interest in her. Again, please—from your entrance, Miss Edwardes."

Mollie entered again. This time Berkley clutched his heart at sight of her, and rolled his eyes. The audience of actors laughed. La Norman lost his patience.

"Mr. Berkley," he roared, "I'll give you one more chance. If you try any more nonsense—out you go. We don't need any clowns around here. You may be the life of the party elsewhere, but here we've no room for you. From your entrance again, please, Miss Edwardes."

Mollie went back and reentered.

This time Berkley behaved. The threat of La Norman's had been effective. To be cast out, now, when he was actually in touch with his divinity would be unendurable. He attacked this business of acting seriously.

"*Captain Anstruthers*—my daughter," said Miss Talmadge again. Mollie advanced. He kissed her hand, and rising, released it slowly, effectively, gazing up into her eyes the while. She dropped her lashes, becomingly, and seemed confused. And neither so much as gazed at Miss Talmadge as she made her excuses and vanished.

"All right," said La Norman. "Just run through that again from the beginning, please."

They did. This time Berkley put even more energy into his work. He put too much energy in, in fact. But La Norman said nothing until the end. Then:

"Now the camera, Frank. And remember, Berkley, not to exaggerate your movements. Be natural. Ready! Picture!"

Beggs entered with Berkley behind him. And Berkley, becoming aware of the fact that every move he made was being perpetuated on film, suddenly became self-conscious.

He was attacked by stage-fright. He stiffened. His gestures became awkward and ungainly. He tripped over his sword as he advanced to meet Miss Talmadge, and he was struck dumb as they faced each other. He stood smiling at her with a sickly smile as she talked—

"Stop! Stop!" roared La Norman.

He strode forward into the picture and faced Berkley.

"I've been in the business since it started," he said, "but I have never seen anything to equal you. You are vile, rotten, impossible. Tell Murphey I said so—and get out!

"Grant!" he yelled, turning away and raising his voice.

Grant was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is Grant?" yelled La Norman.

Berkley drew near him.

"Do you mean I'm fired?" he asked.

"Fired?" roared La Norman, beside himself. "Somebody take him away before I kill him!"

"You terrify me," said Berkley. "You really terrify me. I'm trembling!"

"Boys!" shouted La Norman wildly, nervously, "help Mr. Berkley down-stairs!"

Three big, husky grips started toward Berkley. He saw that he was outnumbered.

"All right, boys!" he said, drawing his sword. "I'm on my way. I see I'm not appreciated here."

Melodramatically he backed toward the door, his sword covering his retreat.

"Thank you," he said, then, addressing La Norman, "for a very pleasant morning. *Au revoir.*"

He passed out of the swinging-doors, first saluting with his sword hilt.

And he descended the stairs to the dressing-rooms.

His first attempt to woo the lady had failed. But he was not discouraged. He hummed lightly to himself as he went.

CHAPTER V.

The High Sign.

THE business of getting off his make-up and reentering his own clothes kept him busy for the next half-hour or more—so busy that he had no time to think about what he should do next.

But once he was back in his taxi, which was waiting all this time, he leaned back upon the cushions thoughtfully. A scowl darkened his brow—a reflective scowl.

He had not been disillusioned by a nearer view of Mollie. Rather, if possible, more fascinated than before; for, bewitching as she had been on the screen, she was a hundred times more so in person.

There was her coloring, for one thing, so fresh and lovely! And there was her musical voice! And there was the warmth and firmness of her little hand trembling beneath his ardent kisses.

Oh, decidedly, she was more attractive than he had imagined her—and he was in no mood to give up the pursuit of her.

But how to proceed now? That was the question.

The interviewer stunt was no longer possible, since she knew him by sight. The mash-note system was equally "dead." And he no longer had any desire to be a film-actor.

How, then, to come in daily contact with her? Could he find out where she lived and live in the same place? No; she probably was at home very little, and then, if she had an apartment somewhere, only brief glimpses of her would be vouchsafed him.

But who saw her besides her fellow players?

Her maid, probably; her family; the directors and scene-setters. But he had no desire to become one of them.

Her employers! Again came the solution. An inspiration!

He sat up in the taxi, radiant. His eyes flashed. He smiled; and he vented his delight audibly in a prolonged whistle.

The chauffeur turned, expecting new directions, but Berkley shook his head and motioned for the man to go on.

Her employers! They were the lucky dogs, no doubt! They saw her as often as they pleased—probably discussed scenarios with her, and so on. What was to prevent his becoming one of them? What was to prevent his buying stock in Velvograph? Then he would have the run of the studios. Then he would be free to see as much of her as he pleased.

He could hardly restrain his enthusiasm. The time that elapsed between the birth of the idea and his entrance into his lawyer's office was an eternity to Berkley.

Fortunately for his peace of mind, his lawyer was in and was not busy.

"Kaine," cried Berkley excitedly, eliminating greetings and all preliminaries, "I want to buy some stock in the Velvograph Moving Picture Company. I don't mind acquiring control, if possible; or I'd buy it outright, if necessary. But I want a foothold there; I want to rank as one of the owners; I want to have the run of the place."

Kaine, who had served his biggest client in many unique capacities, shoved his best box of cigars across the desk.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Never mind. I've a big idea in the back of my head, but I don't mean to divulge it yet. How soon can you let me know what you can do for me?"

"Oh, in an hour or two, I dare say—if I can locate my men. Suppose you go out and have some lunch and then come back?"

"Right," agreed Berkley. "Where can one get a decently broiled chop in this neighborhood?"

"At Tavarin's, two blocks over. You remember we lunched there once before."

"I believe I do. All right. I'll find it. Now hustle like a good boy and have some news for me when I come back."

"I'll do the best I can," said Kaine, nodding.

Berkley went off to lunch in a cheerful mood. He met by chance a number of his friends who were also lunching at Tavarin's, and joined them at their big table. And for an hour and a half he amused himself quite nicely.

Then he sauntered back to Kaine's office and entered. Kaine was waiting for him.

"The Velvograph is a limited corporation," said Kaine at once, "and the stock is not for sale. It is impossible to get in control."

Berkley strode the floor a moment thoughtfully.

"Then," said he suddenly, coming to a standstill before the lawyer, "it is up to me to start a rival company. I'll go into the business myself, and, what's more, I'll go into it now, at once. How do I begin?"

He seated himself opposite Kaine and waited expectantly.

Kaine stared.

"Are you serious?" he gasped.

"Entirely. I'm going to open up some studios at once. I'll call them the—the High Sign Films. There you are—the first step is taken. We've got a name. You incorporate me at once for, oh, let's say a quarter of a million. I leave it to you to get a reputable man to get things going. Meanwhile, I'll begin engaging actors."

"What?" shouted Kaine.

"Let me have your stenographer for half an hour," went on Berkley imperturbably. "I want to dictate a letter."

Mr. Kaine's eyes suddenly lighted. He leaned back, regarding his biggest client with sudden understanding.

"O-ho!" he cried. "It's a girl."

Mr. Berkley smiled pityingly.

"What else do you suppose it would be?" he asked. "Of course it's a girl—*the girl!* Now stop asking questions and making guesses. My time is valuable, and we are wasting it. If I get this letter off at once she may be able to see me to-night. Where in thunder is your buzzer?"

Mr. Kaine put his finger upon it.

As the stenographer came in Kaine went out—to get a bite to eat and to discuss with certain persons "in the know" the best way to start a moving-picture business.

He had a wide acquaintance in all circles of society and a good brain for emergencies. That is what held Mr. Berkley's business for him.

Berkley, meanwhile, lit a cigarette, invited the stenographer to be seated, and began to pace the floor nervously in the throes of composition.

It was his desire to get a letter that would give her no hint of his personal interest in her, but that would convince her that she had been under his managerial eye for years. In other words, he wanted to make her believe that she was valuable to him and desirable—in a business way only.

To this end he finally evolved the following epistle—with the stenographer's aid:

MISS MOLLIE EDWARDES,
Care The Velvograph Company,
Union Street, Staten Island.

Personal.

DEAR MISS EDWARDES:

We are about to open a large studio for the purpose of manufacturing and releasing moving-picture films, and it is our intention to gather about us the biggest stars in the business to aid us. Your excellent work has been attracting our attention for some time, and it occurs to us that our roster would not be complete without your name.

Could you call at my office to-morrow evening (Thursday) at half-past eight o'clock?

I make the appointment for evening because I realize that you will probably be busy during the day. However, if any other time on Thursday will suit your convenience better, notify me by note or phone, and I will gladly make my own arrangements accordingly.

Trusting to hear from you at your convenience,

Believe me, very sincerely yours,
GEORGE GORDON KAINE,
For High Sign Film Company.

Dic. J. B.—M. S.

M. S., the stenographer, looked up at the end from her book of shorthand notes.

"Is that all, Mr. Berkley?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered pleasantly, "that's all. Please type it at once and get it off. If Mr. Kaine isn't here to sign his name to it, you sign it or get one of the office-boys to do it."

"Yes, sir," said the stenographer, passing out.

Berkley departed then, taking occasion later in the day to telephone to Kaine, so that the office would be open Thursday night unless Miss Edwardes phoned before.

Miss Edwardes did phone. It was not her custom to go to the offices of strange men at night. However, she expressed a willingness to come at twelve o'clock noon on Thursday.

The hour suited Mr. Berkley to perfection. It meant that he would not have to wait as long as he had feared before seeing her again.

Wednesday afternoon and night he had spent at various theaters on a still hut for other films with Miss Edwardes in them; but he had been unfortunate in his choice of theaters, for he had not succeeded in his search.

On Thursday morning, instead of continuing the rounds, he slept late, rising just in time to dress and drive down-town by noon.

He arrived at Kaine's office before Miss Edwardes, however, and in time to send Kaine forth to luncheon. So that Berkley had the private office all to himself when the stenographer brought in Miss Mollie Edwardes's card—and it was Berkley who rose behind the big mahogany desk and bowed to her as she was ushered in.

She cast one surprised glance at him, another surprised glance around the beautiful office, and dimpled.

"You?" she said. "Mr. Berkley?"

He beamed at her joyfully and his heart thumped at the realization that she remembered him.

"You've guessed it," he cried, smiling and offering her a seat. "Won't you sit down, please?"

"But—I expected a Mr.—Mr. Kaine," said Mollie, rumaging in her hand-bag for the letter. He thrilled as he watched her. It was exactly like a moving picture the way she did it. A little frown gathered on her white brow.

"Mr. Kaine is my lawyer," said Berkley, seating himself behind the desk. "He signs all of our letters, as a general thing, but I wanted to interview you myself."

Mollie looked up at him, mystified.

"Are you engaged by the High Sign Company?" she asked dubiously.

"Not exactly," said he, determined upon bold methods. "I *am* the High Sign Company, Miss Edwardes. No doubt you assumed from my behavior of yesterday that I was a moving-picture actor?"

"No," said Mollie, smiling, "I didn't."

"But you must have assumed that I was trying to be one—that I thought I was one?" he added, pleased to find in her a sense of humor.

"Ye-es," said Mollie, "that was my impression."

"Of course!" cried Berkley excitedly. "I meant you to think that; I meant everybody there to think that. But I was merely playing a part. I was spying upon the Velvograph's methods. I was gaining pointers that might be of value to me in starting my own plant."

Mollie gazed at him curiously.

"Really?" she gasped.

"Really and truly," said Mr. Berkley. "But I did not send for you to discuss *that*." He dismissed yesterday with a lordly wave of his hand. "I sent for you, Miss Edwardes, to offer you a position with the High Sign Company."

Miss Edwardes nodded. A look of grave doubt and anxiety was on her sweet face. There was a wistful expression in her much-admired eyes.

"I gleaned that from your letter," said she slowly, "or, rather, from Mr. Kaine's letter. But I am afraid I can hardly see my way clear to considering another offer, Mr. Berkley. You see, Velvograph gave me my first opportunities. Velvograph discovered me. I was utterly unknown until then. I owe Velvograph a tremendous debt of gratitude. Heaven knows where I might be to-day, but for the Velvograph Company."

Berkley leaped up and began to stride the floor.

"All that is all right. Such feelings do you credit, Miss Edwardes," he said; "but one cannot live on gratitude. Is Velvograph paying you what you are worth?"

"*No*," said Miss Edwardes positively.

"Well, that is the thing to consider, then, it seems to me. Velvograph has profited by discovering you. You must remember that. You are not the only one who has gained by the arrangement. Where would Velvograph be to-day but for discovering you?"

Miss Edwardes cast down her long lashes.

"Oh, you flatter me," she said, "if you insinuate *I* have made Velvograph."

"Indeed not," said Berkley. "I only speak what is true and what every one knows. Why, you are Velvograph's one and only attraction, Miss Edwardes. I, for one, would never witness a Velvograph picture if it were no for the chance of seeing you in it. And there are hundreds—*thousands*—through the country who are of the same opinion."

Miss Edwardes felt at last that she was being appreciated. She raised her eyes slowly and regarded Mr. Berkley.

"What were you meaning to offer me in the way of salary?" she asked.

Mr. Berkley had no idea. He had not considered that end of it. He had no idea what salaries were paid moving picture actresses; but, after all, he would not have been guided by that, as he was willing to pay her anything to get her.

"What were you receiving from Velvograph?" he asked.

Miss Edwardes was receiving one hundred and fifty dollars a week in real money, but she judged from Mr. Berkley's manner that he rated her higher than that. She drew a long breath and doubled her salary, on the impulse of the moment and without a thought.

"Three hundred," said she, gazing across at him with wide, innocent eyes, the eyes that she used so effectively in the "Nancy in New York" series.

"I'll give you four hundred," said Mr. Berkley promptly. Plainly, the figure did not feeze him.

Miss Edwardes could hardly restrain a gasp. She was on the verge of collapse; but, mastering herself firmly, she said, in a voice that was a *little* uncertain:

"I couldn't think of deserting Velvograph for that. I should want five hundred at the very *least*."

And then her heart began to beat wildly for fear he would refuse. She wondered if she had not made a dreadful mistake in demanding such a large salary at first.

Four hundred dollars a week in cash. Four hundred dollars! The more she thought of it, the more gigantic it seemed.

She was shaking. Her mouth was dry. But with the art of which she was past mistress, she kept her face marvelously calm and unconcerned, using the expression of *Lady Isabel* when the *Count* proposes in "Love and a Crown."

"Very well," said Berkley carelessly, "I'll give you five hundred—but not alone for acting."

She drew herself up with an air of proud hauteur.

"I am new at this moving-picture game," he went on placidly, "and awfully green. If I give you five hundred a week, you'll have to act as my adviser, too. You'll have to let me come to you with all sorts of questions. You'll have to give me pointers on almost every phase of the business."

Miss Edwardes drew a long breath and smiled.

"I shall be glad to help you in any way I can," she answered frankly. "I know the business from A to Z. I've been in it for eight years."

"Really?" cried Berkley. "You must have been a child when you started."

"I was," said Miss Edwardes.

She looked at a watch that she wore round her neck on a silk ribbon and, discovering the time, rose hastily.

"I must be going," she said. "We are finishing a picture this afternoon, and I must be there on time. When do you want me to leave Velvograph and join your company?"

"At once," answered Berkley. "I shall want to consult you about all the details of getting started. When is your week up at the Velvograph Company?"

"We get paid off on Saturdays."

"Very well, then. Better give notice to-day and quit on Saturday. In the mean time I'll give you your contract. May I bring it to your home or will you come here to sign it?"

"I'll come here," said Mollie. "To-morrow at noon."

"I shall expect you then," said he.

"Five hundred dollars a week," said Mollie.

"Right!" said he.

"The first week's salary in advance upon the signing of the contract," said Mollie.

"Very well. As you like, of course."

Mollie shook hands with him cordially and smiled to herself all the way down in the elevator, and in the surface-car and in the subway and in the ferry, and in the surface-car again, and even in the picture that she was finishing at the Velvograph studios that afternoon.

Mr. Berkley smiled to himself, too

—and spent the evening in various moving-picture theaters.

CHAPTER VI.

Mollie Takes Charge.

MOLLIE spent the evening more profitably, looking up this James Berkley who offered her five hundred a week so carelessly. What she discovered evidently satisfied her, for she reported at the office the next day at noon and signed her contract with a flourish.

Berkley was on hand with five crisp one-hundred-dollar bills, which she accepted with a thrill.

"Now," she said, as she slipped them into her hand-bag and looked up with the businesslike air she had used so effectively in "Alone in the World" (six reels), "I am duly appointed and recognized as a member of the High Sign Film Company, so I have a few suggestions to make."

There were present at the moment Mr. Berkley, Mr. Kaine, and Mollie. Mr. Berkley took it upon himself to encourage her.

"We shall be delighted to listen to suggestions," he assured her pleasantly.

"I judged so—from our conversation of yesterday," said Mollie. "So—well—to begin with—have you engaged a manager, some one thoroughly acquainted with every detail of the business and capable of carrying it on successfully? Of course you realize that you'll need some one of this sort. You yourself couldn't do it at the start."

"Yes," said Berkley, "we do realize it—and we've been looking for some one."

"So far in vain," added Kaine.

"Then," said Mollie, "I know the very man for you. He invented movies. Years ago he was an actor, but he went into the moving-picture business when it first started—and he's grown up with it. He not only manages everything, but he puts on the pictures, too. You know," she added to Berkley, "like La Norman over at Velvograph, only much better."

"He sounds good to me," said Berkley. "Who is he?"

"John Morgan. Just at present he isn't working, either, so I imagine you could get him for a hundred and fifty a week. I've even got his address if you want to communicate with him."

She fished in her hand-bag and produced a memorandum-book, which she held aloft expectantly.

"We might send for him and have a little talk," said Kaine, pressing the buzzer.

"Assuredly," agreed Berkley.

The stenographer reported.

"Take down this address, Miss Sellers," said Kaine.

"'John Morgan,'" read Mollie, "'8888 West Forty-Sixth Street, New York.'"

Miss Sellers repeated it as she wrote it down.

"That's right," said Mollie. "Thank you."

Miss Sellers departed.

"Morgan," said Mollie, "has ideas and the brains to develop them. He's not content to put on anything with a persecuted heroine and a wild chase in it. He wants new situations. That's why I recommend him. There's too much competition nowadays to get away with any old story. You've got to give them distinctive pictures if you don't want to go under. You've got to give them better pictures than any one else is giving them. And I'll show you how to clean up on this if you've enough money back of you to follow directions."

"We've plenty of money back of us," said Berkley.

"What's the idea?" asked Kaine.

Mollie leaned forward confidentially. If the camera had been working she could not have made her expressive face more effective.

"Don't be satisfied with the scenarios that come through the mail or that fifty-dollar-a-week men write. Don't put on the stuff you can buy for ten or twenty or fifty dollars. So far only hack writers have been in the game, turning out poor stories and using the same old tricks over and over. And when the public began to get tired of those things every one began to offer them thrills — wrecked trains, houses caving in, steamboats blowing up, and so on.

"But that isn't what they want. They want stories! The public is made up of a lot of children grown up. They want stories. The thing to do is to pay the big fellows in literature today to write you corking scenarios full of character and plot.

"Look how 'Quo Vadis' and 'Les Miserables' and 'The Last Days of Pompeii' are coining money! Look what 'Brewster's Millions' and 'The Spoilers' and 'Samson' are doing.

"That's what they want! Stories! Not only in big four- and six-reel films, but in one-reel ones, too. You take my advice and try it out—and see what happens. You can pay authors as much as magazines can pay 'em, I guess. You'll have a bigger circulation."

She leaned back and drew a long breath. Berkley's eyes were beginning to shine.

"By gad, it sounds all right to me," he said.

"But do movies appeal to people who could appreciate better scenarios?" asked Kaine.

"The movies appeal to all classes to-day," said Mollie, "from the bottom to the top. Sarah Bernhardt in 'Queen Elizabeth' packed the houses on Third Avenue."

"It's worth a trial, at least," said Berkley.

"I suppose you can afford to gamble this way if you enjoy it," answered Kaine.

Mollie produced a list from her hand-bag.

"Here are some names," she said, "of men who write good stories. You might approach them. And tell them you are going to run signed films. Tell them they are going to get credit for their authorship, and that they are going to reach a bigger audience than ever before."

Kaine took the list, regarding Mollie curiously. For the moment her winsome sweetness was gone. She was a business woman, intent on the project under discussion.

"I'd like to stay right here and go on with all this," she added then, consulting her watch, "but I'm due back at Velvograph to-day and to-morrow. I'll report regularly beginning Monday, though."

"In the mean time," put in Berkley, "I'll have some offices. We can't go on using Kaine's and interfering with his practise."

"Drop me a line, then, to the studios," said Mollie. "And don't forget to get desk-room for me."

Mr. Berkley was in the seventh heaven of delight over her attitude. Plainly she had taken the new concern into her own hands and meant to see it safely through.

She was going to earn her five hundred a week. That was obvious. She was not going to be content with posing before the camera. She was going to dictate policies.

Her reason for this was a good one. She had looked on for years at the game, and had had plenty of opportunities for developing theories. She saw the mistakes that her employers made without being able to warn them.

But she stored up a lot of valuable pointers, meanwhile.

Now she felt that five hundred a week regularly was too good to miss. Why, it was as much as Mary Pickford got. Almost as much as John Bunny found in his weekly envelope.

Should she be content to draw it for a month or two while the High Sign Company managed to hold its head

above water? Or should she pitch in and help make the High Sign a big and lasting success?

Obviously that was the more sensible plan — for as long as the High Sign lasted her five hundred a week was good. Moreover, the bigger the success it made the more she would be worth.

She returned to the Velvograph studios with her head in the clouds, but she did not slight the picture she was doing. She was too thoroughly imbued with the spirit of her art for that.

She was a moving-picture actress first of all; she was a moving-picture actress before she was a wage-earner—even before she was a woman.

So "The Baby's Birthday" progressed to a brilliant conclusion, to La Norman's delight. It finished late Friday night, the last scenes being photographed in the studios under the mercury light.

On Saturday Mollie did not work. But she reported at the studio as usual, said "good-by" to all of her old associates, received her pay-envelope (the hundred and fifty in it looking very small now), and got her mail.

There was a letter from Berkley. It ran:

DEAR MISS EDWARDES:

The High Sign Film Company has rented a suite of offices in the Jamaica Building temporarily, where the executive work will be done. Desk room is reserved in my private office for you. I have taken possession this afternoon (Friday), and will be here every day.

I expect to see you Monday. However, if you find yourself free any part of Saturday, I am sure your presence here would prove most helpful.

Very sincerely yours,
JAMES BERKLEY.

Mollie thrust the letter into her bag and went back to the dressing-room floor where she found Miss Talmadge. A short, very earnest confab ensued, at the end of which Miss Talmadge went and made excuses to La Norman, and got the rest of the day off.

Meanwhile Mollie approached Gerald Waine. Another mysterious conversation—and Waine had himself excused.

Accordingly, when Mollie entered the new offices of the High Sign Film Company, it was to introduce two fellow members of her profession.

Berkley had been leaning back in his swivel-chair, smoking, dreaming, and hoping against hope that she would show up. He leaped to his feet delightedly when the new stenographer brought in her name.

But he was a little disappointed, upon going to the door to welcome her, to find her accompanied by her two associates.

"This Berkley," she had explained to them on the way over, "is the fellow who nearly played *Captain Anstruthers* in 'Mistress Quaker.' You remember the one?"

"Really?" gasped Miss Talmadge. "The one that was so funny?"

"Yes. As it turns out, he was not an actor at all, but a millionaire. He was looking for pointers and meaning to go into the business himself. Now, the thing for you both to do is to ask for double the money you are getting."

"I'm getting seventy-five," said Miss Talmadge.

"Ask for a hundred and fifty," said Mollie.

"I'm getting a hundred," said Waine.

"Ask for two hundred."

"If he can get two hundred, surely I can," said Miss Talmadge.

"No. You can only play mothers or aunts or chaperons," said Mollie. "Gerald can play heroes. He's really worth more to the High Sign Company. Now you be satisfied with a hundred and fifty. You never got that much before in your life, did you?"

"No-o," admitted Miss Talmadge.

"And Gerald got more than you, even with Velvograph."

"That's right," pointed out Gerald. "Let's not bust the bank before the game gets started, you know."

So into the office they came, all primed.

"Mr. Berkley," said Mollie, "let me present you to Miss Talmadge. And *this* is Mr. Gerald Waine. They are very good people from the Velvograph, and I think we'll need them with us. Popular players, you know, are half the battle to begin with.

"Why, Mary Pickford and Crane Wilbur and Alice Joyce and this fellow Anderson have actually drawing power. They pack the houses out West when they bill those names.

"But those players are under contract. What you've got to do is to get the most popular players you can and make them stars. Here are two we can get, and they are already strong with the public. Gerald here had the leading part in 'Storm and Stress.' You remember how that went?"

"Yes, indeed," said Berkley enthusiastically.

"And Miss Talmadge always gets applause, even though she only plays matrons."

"I was a well-known legitimate actress before I went into the movies," said Miss Talmadge, hearing her cue. "At first, when Mr. Murphey approached me, I hesitated—being so comfortably fixed, you know, where I was, and with no difficulty to find employment. Why, before I ended one engagement I always had two or three offers for another.

"But Murphey would not take 'no' for an answer. 'We don't want inferior people, Miss Talmadge,' he said. 'We want the best. And I'll raise whatever you are getting by fifty dollars, and guarantee that you'll always be in New York.'

"Of course, that was an inducement, for I am fond of home life. So, after a lot of shilly-shallying, I signed for a hundred and fifty a week."

"Your salary with Velvograph was a hundred and fifty?" asked Berkley.

"I think we can afford to pay that," said Mollie hastily, lest he offer to raise the sum.

Miss Talmadge cast a disappointed glance at her.

"Very well," said Berkley, "I'll have a contract drawn."

He pressed the buzzer under his desk.

Miss Talmadge sat gloomily assuring herself that she could have got two hundred just as easily if it had not been for that interfering little cat.

The stenographer appeared.

"What is Mr.—eh—"

"Waine," said Gerald.

"What is Mr. Waine's salary?"

"Two hundred," said Gerald, as though it were a mere nothing at all.

He almost yawned as he said it. In fact, he thought of yawning as a bit of good business to accompany the line, but remembered at the last moment that yawning was not exactly good form. So he refrained.

"I was engaged for less originally, but I worked myself up," he added. "I don't come from a theatrical family, but my dad disinherited me for a youthful indiscretion, and I had to earn money somehow.

"Well, I could ride and all that, and Velvo took me on at fifty to begin with. I took to the work so naturally and did so well that—that I got up to two hundred in time. It just goes to show that hard work wins out in the end.

"Why, I had only a quarter in my pocket when I signed up, and I didn't know a soul in the East. Now I cannot walk down Broadway of an afternoon without being pointed out and named by nine out of every ten people that pass me."

Berkley turned to the waiting stenographer.

"Draw contracts, please, for Miss Talmadge—Miss—"

"Rosalind Talmadge," said that lady, giving the stenographer a melting smile.

"And Mr. Gerald Waine," added Berkley. "Miss Talmadge gets one hundred and fifty dollars a week. Mr. Waine gets two hundred."

"Perhaps I had better help her with the details," said Mollie, rising.

"Thank you," said Berkley, "you are very good. Have you your book, Miss Taylor?"

Miss Taylor had, and Mollie forthwith began dictating. Waine and Miss Talmadge sat listening intently. Berkley walked the floor.

In the course of half an hour the contracts were drawn and properly signed, and Miss Talmadge and Waine took their leave.

As the door closed behind them Mollie turned to Berkley.

"Those are the highest salaries you'll have to pay," she said. "We had to have some well-known names. But for the rest of the company, we'll try people who haven't had a chance. There are thousands to be had at nominal figures, and experience isn't essential in the movies.

"Gerald's popular with the girls. I'm popular with the men. And Miss Talmadge is adored by older people because she looks so motherly. Her face does register beautifully.

"For the rest, we'll get beginners. But we must have the best directors obtainable. I've sent notes to two. One is with Biograph and one is with Pathé Frères. They'll be here on Monday."

"That's fine," said Berkley. "But before getting together a company and all that, hadn't we better begin finding a studio and all that?"

"I thought," said Mollie, "that we might get an open motor-car this afternoon and scout about the outskirts of the city a little. Any big room building anywhere can be turned into a studio in short order. You just have to let skylights into the roof and throw up partitions for dressing-rooms. We could visit real-estate offices, too, and get lists."

"That's a bully idea," said he. "Let's start now. I'll phone for a car."

"I'd like some lunch first," said Mollie, smiling.

She was recognized and stared at as they entered the restaurant, and a wave of whispering followed her progress through the crowded rooms; but Mollie bore herself simply and sweetly and unconsciously, as though quite unaware of the stir she caused.

Berkley, following, felt, however, as if he captured a prize, and was in excellent humor.

Men stared at him enviously. Women observed him curiously. Even the waiters were more than usually obsequious. They were patrons of the movies, too.

The head waiter conducted them to one of his choicest spots, off in a palm-sheltered corner, and there they lunched, leaning eagerly toward each other over the little white-draped table.

The onlookers scented a love-affair. But the conversation looked much more intimate than it was. Mollie did most of the talking, and her subject was "Better Scenarios."

But so long as she talked and looked at him with her great, serious dark eyes, so long as she gave him her full and undivided attention and let him admire her to his heart's content, Berkley was satisfied. No, perhaps not satisfied, but content.

He felt that he was in a fair way to make progress, now that they were actually lunching together on terms of friendliness.

True, her attitude was still that of employee toward employer. But their acquaintance was young.

"How very businesslike you are," he said absently, as she paused to put some chicken hash into her amazing mouth.

She looked at him sadly.

"I've had to be," she said. "I'm the chief wage-earner in my family. My father died when I was a youngster, and my mother wasn't businesslike at all. She tried taking lodgers, but couldn't make a go of it. I've been forced to be businesslike in order to live."

His eyes kindled with sympathy.

"And I've had more money than I needed or could possibly use—always," he said sympathetically. "How beastly unfair!"

"Oh, it has been fun working," said Mollie. "It is like a splendid game with big stakes. And the money one earns means so much more. Before I finish I'm going to have a little country place of my own, with pigs and cows and chickens and dogs about. Then I shall stop acting before the camera and devote my time to farming."

"Really?" he cried, delighted with this domestic twist in her.

"I've begun to save already," said Mollie, nodding. "But I haven't nearly enough yet. It takes a good deal. That's why I want your company to make a big success. I want to make money fast while the movies are so popular and while they like me. There's no telling how soon another favorite will step into my place."

"Nonsense," said Berkley; "your position with the High Sign is going to be yours as long as you want it. You can be sure of it until you find something better."

There was a sly significance in his last words which Mollie altogether missed.

"Thank you," she said. "The only way I can show my gratitude for that is to work hard, and here we sit discussing nothing at all and wasting time. Have you finished? Have you paid the check?"

"Yes," said Berkley reluctantly.

"Well, then, let's go," said Mollie rising.

And their conversation was confined strictly to business topics for the rest of that day.

But he did accomplish something. He found out where she lived, for he had the privilege of dropping her at her own door. It was an apartment-house on the upper West Side convenient to the subway.

She did not ask him to come in because it was near dinner-time, but she made an agreement to continue the studio-seeking on the next day, which was Sunday.

He found some consolation in that.

CHAPTER VII.

"The Path of True Love—"

THEY found exactly the place they sought on Sunday. It had been a public garage, but on account of its size and its out-of-the-way location it had failed.

The building was of concrete or cement, two stories high, and very large. To cut skylights in the roof would be a simple matter; that was plain at a glance, for the roof was of shingles. And to divide the lower floor into dressing-rooms and offices was no more difficult.

To begin with, Mollie assured him, they would not need to have such an array of properties, costumes, and scenery as they had had at Velvograph. They would buy costumes as they required them, and paint only such scenery as they needed.

For outdoor pictures they would use the woods directly in back of the ex-garage. And the scene-painter and carpenters could work in the cellar.

Having decided upon the place definitely, they spent the rest of the afternoon planning the interior arrangements of it, and only tore themselves away at five o'clock, when the darkness made it impossible for them to see inside the building, and when they were both nearly famished.

However, they stopped at an inn for tea on their way back to town—Mollie selecting it because she had been in a picture once in which the inn figured—and she told him, as they sat comfortably before the big, open fireplace, how Walter Halloway had nearly been killed that time by slipping as he was climbing out of the attic window to make his escape.

"It was a wonderful fall," said Mollie enthusiastically. "You can imagine. Out of the third-story win-

dow. First he struck the roof, rolled off, and hit the ground. Fortunately the camera man had presence of mind enough to go on taking the picture, and it was a wonderful one when it was finished, although it was delayed several weeks until Walter's arm healed. He broke it in his fall and sprained one ankle, but that's actually all.

"Everybody wondered how he had dared attempt such a feat, and he never told that it was an accident. In the scenario, you know, he was supposed to slide down the vines. But it was ever so much better as it turned out.

"They 'cut,' of course, as soon as Walter struck the ground, and then continued the picture two weeks later with him picking himself up. I came from the inn, helped him dust himself off, bandaged his arm, helped him on his horse—and the old scenario went on from there."

The waiter served their tea. Berkley had small appetite for it, however, now. A terrible thought had come to him.

"Have you ever been in such accidents?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Mollie. "All of us have some exciting experiences. In 'For Her Country' I was a female spy—a Southern girl, you know, spying on the Yankees in Virginia. And in the scenario I was ordered to steal some papers and ride off with them, pursued by the Yankees.

"Well, somehow, as I was making my escape — riding hard, you know, and looking back over my shoulder at the pursuing troops—a white hen flew across the road, flapping its wings right under my horse's nose—and my horse shied.

"I was looking back and didn't realize what was happening until I was thrown right over his head into the bushes.

"I was rendered unconscious by the fall, but I was not otherwise injured. I might have been killed, though, if I had been thrown a foot more to the right, for I should have struck a huge tree then."

"Good God!" gasped Berkley.

"And another time," went on Mollie, "in 'The Moonshiner's Daughter,' I was being let down over a precipice on a long rope. It had been tried out, of course, before I risked my weight on it, and it seemed safe enough, but as I swung back and forth in mid air the rope came against a sharp bit of rock, and it cut half-way through.

"The drop below me was at least twenty-five feet. I saw the rope give, and closed my eyes, expecting to be dashed to death. The camera man saw it, also, and shouted, though he did not stop grinding.

"You can imagine the tension as they let out the rope as swiftly as they could and lowered me to the ground.

"The rope held?" he breathed.

"Yes. Heaven knows how. It was cut half through."

"I'll see that no such parts are assigned to you in my company," said Berkley, mopping his brow.

"It's all in a day's work," said Mollie. "One gets used to taking chances. Why, the actresses doing outdoor pictures in the West take their lives in their hands every day. They are always riding wild horses, or swimming some rapids, or tempting a waterfall in a rowboat, or something. It is only occasionally that we have to run risks here."

She took a long sip of tea and smiled up at him as she had smiled at the *Little Minister* in Barrie's story.

"You have to give the public something different," she said. "The idea at present is to give them thrills. But I think we'll get them by giving them better *stories*. Did you approach the writers I mentioned?"

"Not yet," said he. "They are all coming to the office to-morrow."

"At what time?" asked Mollie.

"Each has an appointment. I think the earliest is eleven."

"Oh, I'll be there long before that," said Mollie. "I'll be there at nine."

"So shall I," said Berkley.

"We might sign a lease for the studio and get the carpenters at work there before noon then," said she. "It takes a long while before you realize on your investment, even after you get your actors and your directors working. I'll spend the evening looking up more players, scene-painters, camera-men, and so on."

"Perhaps I can help you," said he.

"No, I hardly think so."

"But I've nothing to do, anyway," he protested.

She smiled wistfully.

"I wish I had nothing to do. I never have any leisure."

"Take to-night off, then, and we'll see a vaudeville show together."

She shook her head.

"Business comes first. I'm a wage-earner, and my farm is not yet earned. No, thank you. You go to see the vaudeville show—or make it moving pictures and pick out the names of the players you think good. I'll get in touch with the people we shall need to-morrow."

"Can't you forget business and wage-earning for one night and play? After all, your contract doesn't go into effect until to-morrow. It begins Monday."

She shook her head again.

"Couldn't think of it," she said firmly. "A friend of mine who can put me in touch with a lot of people we'll need is free to-night; but he'll be working again to-morrow, and I won't be able to reach him. I've got to see him to-night."

"Suppose, as your employer, I *order* you to go with me to the movies?"

"I don't begin to work for you until to-morrow," said Mollie, smiling demurely.

He sighed.

"But I loathe being alone."

"You can get some friend to go with you."

"No, I can't. Not on such short notice."

She looked impatient.

"Very well, then," she said; "take my mother. She is something of an invalid and doesn't get about much by herself. She'd love to keep you company, I know."

Berkley gazed at her searchingly. She did not smile. She was not jesting. She meant it.

He did not relish the thought of taking her invalid mother when he wanted *her*.

But still, he might make progress that way. He would be gallant and devoted to mama. He would get mama on his side.

"Right-o," he responded almost cheerfully. "I shall be glad to take her."

They returned to the car and set off on their homeward way. And when he left her at her door, he arranged to stop again at eight o'clock for mama.

He dined at his club and refused innumerable invitations for the evening.

There were card games on; there were dances; there was a garden-party out of town, to which he had promised to go weeks before; there was a studio tea in the apartments of an artist whom he knew.

There were hundreds of things he could have done to pass the evening pleasantly, but he forswore all of them and reported on the upper west side for mama, in the closed car, lest the night air be too sharp for her.

Arriving, he sent up his name via the telephone, and was informed that Mrs. Edwardes would be right down.

He waited in the marble hallway, outstaring the negro who was in charge, and fifteen minutes later mama appeared.

She did not look at all like Mollie. She was immensely stout, and her cheeks were like apples, so ruddy and round. She wore a white linen coat suit, fashioned, perhaps, year before last, and a black hat heaped with forget-me-nots. Beneath it, her hair

was brushed back smoothly so that not a single strand escaped. And as she advanced she drew on white silk mitts, and beamed upon Berkley.

"Mr. Berkley?" she asked, with great cordiality.

Berkley mastered his first involuntary start, whipped off his hat, and smiled back.

"At your service," he said.

"Mollie told me you were coming for me," said she, "and it's more than glad I am to get out. I don't get about much of late. My feet trouble me."

"I understood so from your daughter," he answered. "My car is just outside."

He gave her his arm, but she seemed to get on well enough.

"It's gout," she explained confidentially, "inherited. My father had it before me, and manny's the time I nursed him through it, never thinkin' I would be servin' my time one day. 'Tis the penalty we pay for old blood, Mr. Berkley."

The footman stood at the door, holding it open. The chauffeur sat on his box, facing rigidly forward. The negro hall-boy stared after them, his black face pressed against the glass door.

Berkley helped her in, and hesitated at the step, looking in at her. She looked, seated, as if she were too tightly corseted for comfort.

"Where shall it be?" he asked.

"Nowhere near," said she, "if you've no objection. I get to the places in the neighborhood occasionally. And I would be thankful for a breath of air."

"Go on up Broadway," said Berkley.

There was not much of the snob in him, but he was glad to be able to keep to such neighborhoods where his friends were not likely to meet him.

It would be difficult to explain mama. If she were anything to him, if he were *married* to Mollie, he would cram mama down his friends' throats and make them smile over the operation; but as he was *not* married to any one, mama's company was likely to be difficult to explain.

For mama's appearance was unusual.

She was not shabby Her clothes were in good condition, but several seasons old, and very much out of vogue. Ladies of his own set would probably have mistaken her for a cook or housekeeper; and yet she was a most estimable person, as he presently learned, and a woman of some education, too.

She was English by birth, had come to America only after her marriage. But she was one of those women who utterly lack surface polish.

No gorgeous raiment could have made her seem any different than she was. Jewels would have looked odd in her ears and on her fingers.

She was in no way decorative. She was useful. It had been her mission in life to be a good, hard-working, God-fearing wife and mother; and she had accomplished her allotted tasks splendidly.

But Berkley's limousine was not the proper setting for her, nor was Berkley, in his evening things, her natural escort.

However, he bore himself toward her as though she were the Queen of Spain.

There was no awkwardness between them at all. Mrs. Edwardes kept a conversation of some sort going. Her neighbors considered her a right cheery talker, and she demonstrated her claim to that reputation to-night.

She told him how glad she was that Mollie was to get more money. She told him how very eager they all were to get a farm. She told him how she longed to see Mollie leave the pictures. She told him how impatient little Lettie was to get out of school and into the studios. She told him Mollie's father had been a seaman and that they all had come from the same place as Lily Langtry.

And then, by way of variety, she asked him a question. She asked him if he liked the pictures. And when he said he did, she told him the kinds she liked best and why.

All this lasted until they reached the huge amphitheater out near the Two-hundreds, and there Berkley called to the chauffeur and helped Mrs. Edwardes down.

They saw the whole show, with desultory comments in between reels, and his reward came when Mollie appeared in the feature film of the evening.

In spite of her acknowledged wish to get Mollie out of the business, Mrs. Edwardes watched with pride and gratification as the audience murmured its recognition of her daughter and its pleasure in seeing her.

And Berkley was conscious of a certain superiority over the other spectators, inasmuch as he knew the original Mollie herself.

She photographed wonderfully, her beauty being set off to perfection by the gowns and background that were chosen for her, and Berkley, gazing from the girl to the mother, marveled.

For there was little resemblance between them. Mollie was playing the part of an aristocrat, by chance, the daughter of an English earl, and through the lofty, paneled rooms of the old castle, through its shady, sheltered park, she moved as though she had never known any other existence.

She, at least, looked to be of his world; and he would not be marrying her family.

He thought of her moving through his place, as she moved through the earl's in the picture. He adored the tilt of her head, her charm of manner.

In this proud daughter of England's nobility there was no hint of business-like Mollie. This was the *real* girl, as she would be always if she were freed from the necessity of considering dollars and cents. This is the girl who would be his wife and reign over his household.

So she would sit at *his* table, surrounded by his guests. So she would smile at *him,* when she had learned to love him. So she would go into his arms to find a safe harbor there.

The little perforated dots that marked the end of the picture flashed before their eyes; Mollie's figure and the figure of the royal prince faded out, and the lights flashed up.

On the way back, Mrs. Edwardes wondered where Mollie got her talent from, since none of the family had ever been actors before. And she told how the little Mollie of years ago loved to dress up and strut before the mirror.

"I thought it sinful vanity then," said she, "and licked her for it this many a time, never knowing 'twould some day earn us our bread, the very same posing and acting. But the good God put it in her for a purpose. How wonderful-like things work out."

"If she hadn't got into the pictures, I might never have seen her," said he.

"And we'd never be getting five hundred a week this day," she added.

Berkley said nothing, but he had not had quite that climax in mind.

He left her at her own door and drove back to his rooms in a state of tranquillity.

Even Mrs. Edwardes had not terminated his infatuation for Mollie. He figured that he could buy Mollie's mother a little place somewhere out of town, where he and Mollie could go quietly now and then to visit her.

After all, it was Mollie who counted.

CHAPTER VIII.

Concerning Wedding Bells.

MR. BERKLEY'S friends knew him no more—that is, his idling, wealthy friends. He devoted his time to business.

When the studio opened, he transferred his desk thither and was thereafter among the first to report each day and the last to leave.

But with the beginning of actual work, he saw little of Mollie, except at a distance. She worked harder than any one else in the place.

She read scenarios and passed upon them. She discussed plots with authors. She talked over things with the directors. She acted the leading rôles.

When Berkley protested, she shook her head at him and smiled.

"If this venture is a failure," she said, "I shall feel responsible, for I dictated its policies from the first. Therefore I feel *obliged* to see that it succeeds. Moreover, if it is a failure, we all cease drawing salaries, and none of us can afford that."

"But surely some of the things you do can be relegated to assistants," he objected.

"No," said Mollie. "What you want well done, you had best do yourself."

"But you work all the time," he pointed out. "You'll kill yourself. Take dinner with me this evening and let me take you to the theater. I never get a chance to talk to you any more. You are always rushing somewhere or other."

"You are talking to me now," smiled Mollie.

"And you are thinking of something else," he asserted.

"I *was* wondering if I hadn't better go down to the projection room and see that first picture run off."

"There, you see," he cried. "Very well, go down to the projection room, if you like; but first promise to dine with me."

"I can't. I'm dining with Howard Talbot to discuss that new scenario he is writing."

"Then come to a show with me later."

"I can't. I've a lot of scenarios to read and some letters to write."

"When am I to see you, then?"

"You see me all the time. You are seeing me now."

"But away from business hours and out of this business atmosphere."

She looked thoughtful.

"Come to my apartment to-morrow evening," she said. "Say, at eight o'clock."

His eyes lighted.

"Right!" he cried.

Mollie hurried away.

Mr. Berkley watched her go, meditatively. What would happen to the High Sign plant when he married her and took her out of the place, he hadn't an idea.

She seemed to be the one who kept things running smoothly. Although the great building swarmed with busy people—carpenters, scene-setters, painters, actors, directors, stenographers, authors—all of them seemed to wait upon Mollie's commands.

And no wonder. Mollie had selected them and engaged them. Mollie had named their salaries.

Mr. Berkley himself had done nothing but yield to her suggestions and sign contracts and checks.

So far, he had buried a number of thousands in the thing, but he did not regret the expenditure.

Mollie assured him that he was going to double his fortune before he knew it, and he had faith in her business head. But even if he lost the money, he felt that it was worth while for simply bringing him into daily contact with the girl.

For the weeks had not dissipated his interest in her. As she flitted this way and that, always before him but always just out of reach, like a leading lady in a living moving picture, he had grown to find her more and more desirable.

And her work before the camera fascinated him. It showed her to him in such a variety of phases.

To-day she might be princess, to-morrow, peasant. She was now a gipsy and now an Indian maid; now a shop-girl or a manicurist, again a young society matron or the débutante daughter of a millionaire.

He saw her sad and melancholy,

sorely persecuted by unscrupulous villains. He saw her gay with everything that money can buy; he saw her brilliant and moody, thoughtful, vengeful, tender, sympathetic, wifely, daughterly—even motherly. And always, no matter what the part she assigned herself to play, he found her utterly adorable.

So he awaited the falling due of his appointment with eagerness hard to restrain. And when it neared eight upon the following evening, he presented himself promptly at her door, having dined early in order to be on time.

Mama Edwardes opened it for him. It was one of her non-gout days, and she was swathed in a voluminous kitchen apron, busy with the dishes.

However, she took occasion to admit him and usher him into the front, and there Mollie was waiting for him —with two other gentlemen.

One was tall and lank. One was short and stout. Both looked rather the worse for wear.

Mollie gave Berkley her hand with a smile, and, turning, presented:

"Mr. Paul Treyne and Mr. Horace Spivel."

Berkley smothered his disappointment, though it was almost all-engulfing, and tried to comfort himself with the assurance that they had dropped in unexpectedly and would presently be going. He had his important speech so carefully framed, it was impossible to conceive keeping it until next time.

But her first words told him the worst at once.

"These gentlemen," she was explaining softly, "have an idea for a big feature film—a six or seven reel affair, and I must say it sounds very good to me. But I couldn't decide such an important matter alone and unaided. That's why I asked you to come to-night, where we can talk undisturbed."

Mr. Berkley seated himself almost resignedly. She observed that his face fell.

"Had you anything more important to do?" she asked.

"Never mind," said he. "I'm here in your trap now. Turn on the idea."

Mollie looked dubious.

"Do you really want to go on with this? Are you in the mood to listen and weigh the matter carefully? I want to do this thing if you see it as I do."

"I'm listening—intently," said he. "Prepared to be absorbed. Fire away."

"You explain, Mr. Spivel," said Mollie, leaning back and clasping her hands in her lap.

Berkley's eyes rested upon her, marveling. She was in a new rôle here.

It was the first time he had ever seen her in her home. The surroundings were hideous, of course—the sort of surroundings they could afford and Mama Edwardes selected — everything bright and cheery.

But she was wearing a simple little house dress, of gray stuff, with a white frill at her throat and sleeves. And she looked like a demure little mouse of a woman sitting there.

There was about her an air of placid content. She was relaxed. She had thrown off her workaday manner. She was simple, youthful, eager, enthusiastic—she was *herself*.

Mr. Spivel interrupted his reflections by beginning the outline of their idea. Mr. Treyne looked on, listened, approved, and added a word now and then.

It was a mammoth thing, calling for big scenic investiture, but it sounded good to Berkley. The idea was to use the travel-pictures idea, but to invest it with a story interest. That is, a story begins in New York, whence the action of the plot carries you to England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Portugal, Australia, India, Japan, China, and back through California and our other Western States to New York again.

But all the way through the countries visited and their customs were to

be so woven into the story as to form a background merely.

In this way, the entertainment could be made to appeal to two classes—the class that likes to know about other countries and their customs, and the class that cares only for story interest.

"What do you think of it?" asked Mollie eagerly, when the two authors had finished outlining their idea.

"It sounds good, offhand," said Berkley. "But wouldn't it cost a good deal?"

"Yes," answered Spivel, "it would. "It would be necessary to send your company to all the countries pictured. But it would be a valuable film when you had done it. It would form one complete show by itself, and it would be worth dollar prices if the pictures were at all carefully taken."

"What do you think of it?" asked Berkley of Mollie.

"I think well of it," she responded. "There are so many people who'll never travel themselves, who'll never read about foreign countries, and who shun travel-talks, fearing that they 'll be dull and uninstructive. This thing, given some such title as 'Around the World with Winnie,' or 'A Race for Millions,' would get to that multitude and fascinate them. I think it is decidedly a good idea."

"Have you the story part of it written?" asked Berkley of the two gentlemen opposite.

"Yes," said Spivel.

"Miss Edwardes thought—" began Treyne, but Mollie interrupted him.

"I thought it best just to put the idea to you first. Then, if you liked that, it would be time enough to read the story. Are you quite sure you can conveniently listen now?"

Mr. Berkley was a martyr.

"Quite sure," he said. "Even anxious to hear it."

So they began the story.

It was interesting enough—funny in parts, exciting in parts, the interest and suspense very well sustained; but it did not quite succeed in driving out of Berkley's head the wish that it would end, and the two needy authors would go and leave him alone with Mollie.

But this was not to be. When the story was read there were business details to be arranged, and then Mama Edwardes came in and seated herself near Berkley with the air of a homing pigeon finding its nest.

He took his departure at the first opportunity and cursed all the way home in the car.

However, he had accomplished something. He had decided to act in regard to his infatuation for Mollie.

Until that night he had recognized that he was in love with her, but he had taken no steps toward winning her save that all-important one that brought him into daily contact with her. Now he was resolved to propose. True, he realized she had not had an opportunity to know him well outside of business hours, but he reflected that by proposing he would compel her to think of him in the light of a husband, anyway, and to study him as a man.

So the following day he set off for the studio, determined to make his avowal.

Mollie was very busy, however, consulting with the scenic artists about the sets for the picture she was going to do next; and when a note came for her from Berkley, requesting her to stop in his private office at her earliest convenience, she scribbled on the back of it:

Am much rushed, but will stop in for a minute when I can.

Some of the business details of the High Sign Company fell upon his shoulders. He had arranged things in this way so that he might have an excuse for hovering about, so he had plenty to do while he waited for Mollie.

This was fortunate, for Mollie did not put in an appearance all morning.

He looked for her at noon, meaning to take her to lunch; but she opened her dressing-room door to him when he knocked and revealed herself in the costume and make-up of a Japanese girl.

"Luncheon?" she cried. "Thank you, no; not in this disguise. But you can send me in a bite, if you will."

"I'll bring something in," said he, "and eat with you. May I?"

"If you like," she said. "But include Miss Le Mare in your ordering. She is here, too. We were just going to look for some one to send out."

He scowled.

"I want to talk to you on a most important matter," he urged.

"I'm coming to your office later," she promised.

So Mr. Berkley brought something in and ate with them both in the dressing-room, and did his best to be as gay and interesting as they were. But his proposal weighed on his mind. He did not succeed in being very gay.

Most of the other actors and actresses thought nothing of going across to the Luncheon Club in their costumes and make-up. The neighborhood had long ago gotten used to seeing them about, and they attracted no attention. But Mollie never followed this custom.

Berkley went back to his office after luncheon and set about answering some letters; but he could not keep his mind on them, and the stenographer's waiting air irritated him.

He dismissed her for that day, lighted a big cigar, and paced the floor nervously.

Mollie had promised to come as soon as she finished in the studio. He determined to attempt nothing more until she came. So he was pacing nervously, half an hour later, when Dick, his little office-boy, opened the door.

"Mr. Berkley!" he gasped. "There was a man here asking for Miss Edwardes, and I asked him his name, and he wouldn't give it, and I said Miss Edwardes never saw any one unless I took in their names first, and he said she'd see him, and he pushed right by me and went into the studio. I couldn't stop him. He's a six-footer."

"He went right by you into the studio?" gasped Berkley.

"Yes, sir. I couldn't stop him, sir!"

Berkley strode toward the door.

"Just go back to your desk, Dickie," he said, "and you'll see him come out of the studio again."

He threw open the door, crossed the passage to the studio door, and entered violently and in haste. Anger was written upon his brow, where any man might read.

But anger turned to astonishment and incredulity as he found himself face to face with Mollie and the six-footer—in each other's arms.

He looked for the camera. It was not working.

This was no moving picture. It was true!

"What's—this?" he gasped hoarsely, advancing.

Mollie drew back from the six-footer hastily, her cheeks mantled with blushes. She smiled. And she turned the six-footer around by a clutch on his sleeve.

"Oh," she cried, "Mr. Berkley, I didn't hear you come in! Let me introduce you to my husband."

He staggered back under the blow.

"Who?" he gasped. "Your wha-at?"

"My husband," repeated Mollie, nodding. Her eyes were softly shining. She had never looked more stunning. "Jed," she prompted, "I want to introduce you to Mr. Berkley."

Jed turned. He was tall and broad and handsome. His features were chiseled. He had dark eyes that registered magnificently in the pictures, and a winning smile. He was tanned. He was astoundingly arrayed in the latest fads of fashion.

"How are you, Berkley?" said Jed condescendingly, offering his hand as

one might offer some rare gift. Berkley shook it.

"Married," he repeated. "You never told me anything about it. When did it happen?"

"Eight years ago," said Jed promptly. "Didn't you know?"

Berkley felt a strange, sinking sensation within him.

"No," he said. And to Mollie he added: "You never told me."

"You never asked me," said Mollie, wide-eyed. "And what difference would it have made to you?"

"None, of course," said Berkley. "None at all!"

He was glad he hadn't actually proposed. He wondered how much older she was than she looked. He had supposed she was about nineteen. But if she had been married eight years—

"Why, I put her in the business," said Jed proudly. "Didn't I, kid? I copped her out in Milton, Pennsylvania, and married her while we were doing a picture there. I saw right away she was too good a looker to be cooped up in a flat, and I got Myers to take her. Why, it'd be throwing money away to keep her out of the movies! Her face is her fortune—eh, kid?"

"Worth five hundred a week right now, Jed," said Mollie.

"So," said Jed, "I kind of share up with the public. On the screens she's for anybody that has the price of admission. But after working hours she's mine." His laugh rang out musically.

"The worst of it is," said Mollie, "he does outdoor pictures and I do studio work. But I was thinking we might use him in that 'Round the World' film. He's a leading man, you know, and his salary's—"

"Five hundred, too," put in Jed.

Berkley shrugged.

"I guess that will be all right," he said. "But he'll have to do more than act for that money. He'll have to help you run this shop. I'm getting tired of it. I'm thinking of going abroad for a while. Do you think you could manage this between you?"

"I'm sure we could!" cried Mollie.

"That's settled, then," said Berkley. "Meet me at Kaine's office in the morning and we'll arrange the details."

The High Sign Film Company ranks among the biggest moneymakers in the moving-picture field to-day, and Berkley, who is back in town, is drawing heavy dividends from it. But he never goes near the studios any more. And he has come to hate moving-picture shows.

However, occasionally he visits a little country-place in Jersey where he has a little namesake. It is called James Berkley Evers, and its mother is Mollie of the Movies.

(The end.)

TO AN APPLE

By Hamilton Pope Galt

A BABE thou art, crop full and like to burst
Thy tightened skin! All season thou hast nursed
The sweetness from the summer's ample breast,
And in her gentle breathing been caressed
Until thou art, indeed, grown round and sleek!
The autumn wind has rubbed thy rounded cheek
With her rough hand into a ruddy glow,
And though the death wind of the winter blow
Among thy kindred leaves, to age and kill,
Thou dost remain a sweet-breathed infant still!

The Way of the Strong

by Ridgwell Cullum

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

CHAPTER I.

On Sixty-Mile Creek.

IT was a grim, gray day — a day which plainly told of the passing of late fall across the border-line of the fierce Northern winter. Six inches of snow had fallen during the night, and the leaden overcast of the sky threatened many more inches yet to fall.

Five great sled dogs crouched in their harness, with quarters tucked under them and forelegs outspread. They were waiting the long familiar command to "mush"—an order they had not heard since the previous winter.

Their brief summer leisure had passed, lost beneath the white pall which told of weary toil awaiting them in the immediate future. Unlike the humans with whom they were associated, however, the coming winter held no terrors for them. It was the normal condition under which the sled dog performed its life-work.

The load on the sled was nearing completion. The tough-looking, keen-eyed man bestowed his chattels with a care and skill which told of long experience and a profound knowledge of the country through which he had to travel. Silently he passed back and forth between the sled and the weather-battered shelter which had been his home for more than three years. His moccasined feet gave out no sound; his voice was silent under the purpose which occupied all his thought. He was leaving the desert heart of the Yukon to face the perils of the winter trail. He was about to embark for the storm-riven shores of the Alaskan coast.

A young woman stood silently by, watching his labors with the voiceless interest of those who live the drear life of silent places. Her interest was consuming, as her handsome brown eyes told.

Her heart ached and her despair grew as she watched. But she knew only too well that her limitless prison was of her own seeking, as was her sharing of the sordid lot of the man she had elected to follow. More than that, she knew that the sentence she had passed upon herself carried with it the terror of coming motherhood in the midst of this desolate world, far from the companionship of her sex.

"Heavens, how I wish I were going with you, Tug!" she cried.

The man lifted his sharp eyes questioningly.

"Do you, Audie?" he said in a metallic voice, in which there was no softening. Then he shook his head. "It'll be a hell of a trip! Guess I'd change places with you readily enough."

"You would?" the girl laughed mirthlessly. "You're going down

with a big 'wad' of gold to — to a land of—plenty. Oh, God, how I hate this wilderness!"

The man called Tug surveyed her for a moment with eyes long since hardened by the merciless struggle of the cruel Yukon world. Then he shook his head.

"It sounds good when you put it that way. But there's miles to go before I reach the 'land of plenty.'" He laughed shortly. "I've got to face the winter trail, and all we know that means. I've got more than that. I'm packing a sick man with me, and I've got to keep him *warm* the whole way. It's a guess, and a poor one, if he don't die by the way. That's why I'm going. Say, he's my partner, and I've got to get him through." He laughed again. "Oh, it's not sentiment! He's useful to me, and so I want to save him if I can."

"You can't save Charlie," she said decidedly. "They tell you you can't get consumption in this country—but, well, I'd say you can get everything that makes life hell. He's got it; and a chill on the way will add pneumonia to his trouble, and then—"

"Maybe you're right," Tug admitted.

The girl sighed. She was thinking of herself.

"When do you start?"

"When your Leo comes up to help me pack Charlie into the sled. Say, isn't that him coming along up now?" he added, shading his eyes. "This snow's got me dazzled for a bit."

The girl peered out over the white world. Far as the eye could see a great ring of gray-crested hills spread out, their slopes massed with patches of forest, and the gleaming beds of ancient glaciers. The girl shuddered and, for relief, was glad to return to speech.

"Yes; he's coming along up."

Tug watched the distant figure for some thoughtful moments.

"He's a great feller," he said at last. But there was no real appreciation in his tone. Then he laughed. "I should say he'd need to be a great feller to get a good-looker girl to come right along up to this devil's playground with him."

Audie's troubled eyes softened.

"He's a great fellow," she said simply.

Tug laughed again.

"I s'pose that's why they call him 'Leo.' He's a fighter. I'd say he's a born 'kicker.' He doesn't fancy the things that come easy. He's after a big piece of money, but"—he laughed—"he don't want it easy. That's where we're different. Say," he quizzically surveyed the girl's flushed face, "guess you'd follow him to hell—if he asked you?"

Audie shrugged her handsome shoulders, but her eyes were soft.

"I've followed him here, which is the cold edition of it. I don't guess I'd need persuading to get up against the warmer side."

"No. But it's taking life hard."

"Guess we have to take life hard sometimes. It's mostly the way of things. Life comes by degrees. And you can't help any of it. Three years ago I was acting in a New York theater. I lived on the best, and never knew what it was to cook a meal, or do a chore. Two years ago I was 'barnstorming' at Dawson. Now—now I am here."

"With a man called 'Leo.'" Tug studied the girl's beautiful face, her superb figure, that would not be denied even under the coarse clothing she was wearing.

"And why not?" demanded Audie, with a quick flash of her big eyes.

Tug smiled coldly.

"Just so. Why not?"

"Maybe I haven't given up as much as you might think." Audie's eyes were intently fixed upon the approaching figure. They were a light with the fires of passion. "Leo is bound to make good. He can't fail. That's the man. He would win out under any circumstances."

Tug nodded.

"Sure. By fair means or—"

"He'll win out," cried Audie sharply.

Tug's broad shoulders lifted indifferently.

"Sure. He'll win out."

It was not the man's tone; it was not the man's words; it was his manner that made Audie long to strike him. His cynical expression was infuriating as he moved off to meet the approaching Leo.

Audie saw the two meet, and, in a moment, the sun broke through the clouds of her anger. How could it be otherwise when she beheld the contrast between the men, which so much favored Leo? In face and form, as well as character, her man was something of a god to her.

They came toward her, Leo moving with an active, swinging stride, while the other moved with the almost catlike stealth which the use of moccasins ever gives their wearer.

Leo was a large man in the early stages of manhood. He was twenty-five years of age, but, from the unusual cast of his rugged features and the steady light in his keen gray eyes set beneath shaggy, tawny brows, he might well have borne the burden of another ten. It was a wonderful face. Such a face as rarely fails to appeal to a woman of Audie's type. He was large and extremely powerful. He wore a close, curling fair beard which accentuated the thrust of his square chin, and from beneath his slouch hat flowed the mane of waving hair which had originally inspired his nickname.

The woman watched Leo pass a critical eye over the sled. Then his deep voice expressed his approval.

"You've fixed things neat," he said, without great interest. Then his eyes settled upon the stout canvas bag lashed securely on the fore-part of the sled, and his whole expression instantly changed. His eyes shone with a deep fire. He pointed at the bag. Nor was his hand quite steady.

"That's a great 'wad,'" he said. Then, half to himself, "a dandy 'wad.'"

"Yes." Tug gazed thoughtfully at the parcel of gold, which represented the result of his and his partner's years of isolation in the white wilderness of the north.

The bigger man was lost in a profound contemplation of the gold that was his quest also. For a moment or two neither spoke. Then Leo withdrew his gaze with a sigh, and turned to the waiting woman.

"Here, catch!" he cried. He pitched a seven-pound trout, which he had just taken from the creek, across to her. "It 'll make dinner," he added. "Guess we'll not get many more. The creek 'll be solid ice in a week."

Then he abruptly moved up toward Tug's hut.

"You best get things fixed, and I'll bring Charlie out."

Tug left the sled and followed him. Tug was the first to reappear from the hut. He was clad for the long trail, and bore in his arms the pile of furs with which to shut out the deadly breath of winter from the body of his sick partner. Behind him came Leo carrying the attenuated body of the sufferer easily.

He deposited the burden in the sled, and looked on while the other buried the sick man beneath the warmth-giving furs. At last all was in readiness and Tug stood up. His whip was in one hand, and his gee-pole in the other. He was ready to "mush" his waiting team on.

Leo bent over the sick man to wish him good-by. "So long," came the weak response from amid the furs. Tug swung out his whip and the dogs stood up alert.

"So long, folks," he cried. Then he turned and shouted at his dogs.

"Ho, you, Husky! Demon! You, too, Pinto! Mush, you devils! Mush!"

The dogs strained at their harness, and leaped into a swift run, bearing

the laden sled away in a dense flurry of soft snow.

Leo and Audie looked after the departing outfit, until the speeding sled reached the foot of the long slope and disappeared behind a snow-laden scrub of undergrowth. Then the man stirred.

"It's getting near food," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

But Audie gave no sign of hearing him. Her face was turned away. She was still turned in the direction of the vanished sled. Her eyes were crowded with tears.

"Audie!"

The summons came without any softening. The woman's only answer was a deep, choking sob. Leo turned at once; neither was there any sign of impatience in her voice as he questioned her.

"What are you crying for?"

She choked down her sobs and her tearful eyes smiled upon him, although her cheeks were still wet.

"I—I was thinking of—of the places he was going to. I was thinking of the—the good time he'll have. I was—oh, I was thinking of the winter that's coming to us here and—and of what I've got to—"

The man drew a deep breath, and something like a shadow crossed his strong features. His gaze wandered away toward the creek, where for so long he had been laboring to lay the foundations of that wonderful structure of success he purposed to achieve.

"You're scared," he said deliberately, at last. "You're scared to have your baby up here—alone. What do you want me to do?" he asked at last.

She shuddered. "Yes, I'm scared. I'm terrified. I don't want our baby to be born in this awful country. Think of its little eyes opening on—on this wilderness. Besides—"

She broke off, her tearful eyes filled with doubt.

"Besides—what?"

There was no denying the directness of this man's mind.

"It—it doesn't matter. I—"

"But it does."

Andie had stopped to pick up the fish; but she left it where it was. She understood the uselessness of further denial.

She knew now that a crisis in their lives had arrived. She knew that she had gone too far to retreat. Therefore she took her courage in both her hands.

"It's—it's the baby," she cried haltingly. "He—oh, yes, he, I am sure it will be a boy—will—will have no father, if—if he is born up here."

It was out. She could get no further; and she stood clasping her hands to steady the trembling she had no power to check.

The verdict of this man, whom she looked to as the arbiter of her fate, was slow in coming. With each passing moment her apprehension grew till she longed to cry out at the torture of her suspense. He was thinking earnestly, swiftly. At last his keen eyes turned upon her upturned face.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "And," he went on, after a moment, "maybe he'd have no mother either."

For a moment puzzlement was added to the woman's trouble.

"You mean—?"

Again Audie broke off. A sudden understanding had come. His point of view was wholly in another direction from hers. He was not thinking of their moral obligations toward the little, unborn life. He was thinking of her.

She was startled. Then a rush of feeling swept over her that would not be denied.

"I—I wasn't thinking so much of—of myself," she cried eagerly. "I meant—"

"I know," he interrupted her. "You meant we are not married."

"Yes, yes. That's it." She came to him and seized one of his strong hands in both of hers, and her eyes were pleading up into his. "Oh, Leo, don't you understand what it means to

him? I never thought of it before. All I wanted in the world was to be with you. That's why I—I made you bring me up here. Yes. I know. I made you bring me. You didn't want to. Think of it. The terrible shame for the boy—for his mother. Don't you see? Give our little one a father, and never as long as I live will I cross your path, or make any claim on you. All I want, all I hope for is that you may go on to the success which you desire more than all things in life, and may God ever prosper you."

The man released his hand deliberately, but without roughness. The calculating brain was still undisturbed by the self-sacrifice of the girl. He had solved the problem to his own satisfaction, through the only method he understood.

"You don't need to worry yourself, Audie," he said, in his blunt way. "The boy—if he's a boy—shall have a father. We'll start down this day week. We'll get Si-wash's dogs. He's a good scout, and knows the trail well. He'll take us down."

The woman's face had suddenly flooded with a radiant happiness, the sight of which caused the man to turn away. In a moment her thankfulness broke out, spasmodic, disjointed.

"You mean that?" she cried. "You mean—oh, may God bless every moment of your life, Leo! Oh, thank God—thank God!"

She suddenly buried her face in her hands, and tears of joy and happiness streamed down her cheeks.

Leo waited for her emotion to pass. He stood gazing out down at the creek. His eyes shone with that peculiar fire which, in unguarded moments, would not be denied.

"Listen to me, Audie," he cried, in a voice grown suddenly thick with an emotion she had never before witnessed in him. "It's true I never calculated to marry you. But I liked you, because—you are a woman. Just a woman full of all the extraordinary follies of which some of your sex are capable, but—a woman. I have no real love to give to any woman. My whole mind and body are absorbed in another direction. What shall I call it? It's a passion." His eyes shone with deep feeling. "A passion that's greater than any love man ever gave to woman.

"Yes, all my life I've fostered it," he went on abstractedly. "God knows where I got it from. My father and mother were dozy, middle-class folks in New England, without a thought beyond the doings of their little town. They had no ambition. Their life drove me frantic. I must get out and do. I must take my place in the battle of life, and win my way to the forefront among the ranks of our country's millionaires. That is the passionate dream of my life. Do you understand me? Do you understand when I say I have no love to give to any woman? I am eaten up with this passion, which leaves no room for any other.

"Maybe you think me a heartless brute," he continued after a moment's pause. "Perhaps you're right. I don't know. All I know is, nothing I can remove will ever stand in the way of my achievement. This problem is not as difficult as you seem to think. There is no particular reason why I should not marry you. On the contrary, there is every reason why I should. I have had a good year, so good that it might astonish you if you knew the amount of gold I have taken out of the creek. We shall go down to the coast with twice the amount Tug possesses. Tug never knew how well I was doing."

He smiled faintly.

"However," he hastened on, "what does it matter if we make the journey six months earlier? So—don't worry, but just make your preparations for departure this day week."

The man's usual calm had returned by the time he finished speaking. He had settled the matter in his own way, and his manner left nothing more to be said.

"Thank you, Leo," Audie said simply. Then she added, with an emotion that would not be denied, "I pray God to bless you."

Leo nodded.

"Right ho!" he said coldly. Then he picked up the trout. "Guess we'll get food."

CHAPTER II.

The Roof of the Northern World.

SI-WASH was a great scout; he was also an Indian of independence and decision. When consulted he protested against Leo's contemplated journey over the winter trail to the coast, especially with the added burden of a white woman. He drew a picture of every difficulty and danger his fertile brain could imagine, and laid it before the cold eyes of the big man.

Then Leo rose from his seat on the floor of Si-wash's hut, and invited him to visit his workings on the creek bank. Si-wash went, glad that he had been able to dissuade this man who possessed such cold eyes, and so unsmiling a face. At the creek Leo spoke quite seriously.

"Si-wash," he said, as they stood beside the frozen, snow-laden stream, "I have brought you here to show you your grave. There it is—under the ice. If you don't accompany us to the coast, I'll drown you in the water under that ice, where it's so cold that all the fires of hell, where your spirit will surely go, will never be able to thaw you out."

Si-wash both liked and feared Leo. But he hated cold water, and feared talk of hell still more; so there was no further discussion. Si-wash accepted his money in advance; and, nearly a month later, the travelers were scaling the perilous heights of the watershed which is really the roof of the northern world.

Once foot is set on the long winter trail, all rest of mind and body is left behind. Days and nights, alike, become one long nightmare of unease. Every hour of the day carries its threat of danger.

It is called the Shawnee Trail; vain enough appellation. There is no trail. It is just a trackless wilderness, claiming thoroughfare by reason of the impassability of the rest of the country in that region.

For the most it is a silent land; nor is there movement to break the awesome stillness, unless it be the frequent presence of storm. It is the stillness of outer darkness, lit only by a wintry sheen, like the death-cold stare of wide, unseeing eyes.

Such thoughts and feelings stirred the woman who was walking easily over the smoothly pressed snow-track left by the laden sled. She moved with the curious swing of the snow-shoer, leisurely, comfortably. The gee-pole in her hand was an unnecessary equipment, for her path was fully tested by those who understood the dangers of the road before them.

Audie's eyes were looking out ahead at the men and the dogs. She knew she had no other responsibility than to keep pace. Si-wash headed the dogs. A great incline of smooth, soft snow mounted up to the crotch of a great hill, where twin peaks rose sharply, towering above, and a wide pathway was left between them. It was a beacon of the trail, marking one of the roughest stretches yet to be traveled. Beyond this, five miles further on, the scout had marked a camping ground.

Just now he was a little anxious in his silent Indian way, and the sign of it was in his furtive watchfulness, as he peered from the road to the burnished light of the desponding sun. Leo, swinging along beside the sled, was quite unaware of his guide's unease. His fortune, or that which stood for the foundations of it, lay strapped at the tail of the sled, and the knowledge of its presence, the sight of its canvas wrapping stirred him to a gladness which no monotony of the long trail could diminish.

The harsh voice of Si-wash struck unpleasantly on his ears.

"Look!" he cried, pointing at the drooping sun with a mitted hand. "It the be-damn sun-dogs. Him look, an' look lak hell. Him much be-damn sun-dogs."

"Storm," said Leo as he came up beside the Indian.

"We camp. Five miles," said Si-wash presently. "Five mile, long piece. Yes. Storm, him come quick."

They were nearing the summit of the hill. The laboring dogs moved with heads low, and lean quarters tucked well beneath them. With each moment the gap came down toward them, and, at last, they trod the shoulder. Then Si-wash's sharp command rang out, and the five great burden bearers of the North dropped in their traces.

For long moments no word was spoken. Then the Indian held up a warning hand.

"See, hark!"

A curious sigh, almost as if the great hill were shivering under the biting cold of the atmosphere, seemed to drift out upon the sparkling air. It died away.

Then Si-wash spoke again.

"We camp quick." He pointed away out at the far side of the valley confronting them. "We mak dat valley. See dat hill? We come so. We mak round it. It bad. So. Long, deep fall. Dogs haul 'em long side hill. Very bad. So we mak 'em before storm. Good. After hill mush wood. Tall, big. It is we camp."

Without waiting for reply he turned to the dogs.

"Ho, you damn huskies. Mush!"

In a moment the dogs leaped at their traces, and the journey went on.

The dogs raced down the long hillside under the urgent commands of the Indian. A mile was devoured by scurrying feet. Then came the first real challenge of the storm. It was a swift, fierce blast which swept after them, as though enraged at the attempt to escape. In wanton riot it sent a dense flurry of snow like a fog whistling about them, and, for the moment, blotted out all view of the goal Si-wash had set for himself. Audie closed up on the sled, and her action spoke for itself.

Another blast rushed at the speeding travelers. It came across them. It swung round in a fierce whirl, round and round in growing fierceness, picking up the snow and bearing it aloft in a gray fog, like fine white sand. Harshly above the howl of the storm Si-wash's voice shouted into Leo's ear.

"The gar-damn blizzard. It hell!"

But Leo made no response. He had no answer for anybody. All his mind was centered upon the goal he longed for. Just now the woodland bluff, Si-wash had spoken of, seemed the most desirable thing in the world. He was not thinking of life or death. He was thinking of what the wrecking of their transport might mean to him. Si-wash, being simply human, thought of the woman, the burden of whose presence he had deplored.

He turned and shouted at her to come up abreast of them, and in the same breath, the same tone, he hurled a string of blasphemous commands at his dogs.

Almost blinded by the whipping snow, Audie staggered to the side of the Indian. So cruel was the buffeting of the storm she would have fallen, but for the timely succor of the man's outstretched hands.

The steady pull upward began and went on for an hour; a grinding, weary labor in which every inch of the way was only accomplished under the cruel lashing of a merciless wind, and with eyes more than half blinded by the powdered snow. The wind seemed to attack them from every side. The heavy wrappings of furs about their mouths were a mass of ice from the frozen moisture of their hard breathing.

At last the ascent was accomplished, and with the relaxing of effort came

the first warning of the dangers with which they were surrounded.

It was the horror-stricken cry of the woman. In the blinding snow she had approached the edge of the path too nearly. Her feet shot from under her, and, for a moment, destruction threatened. Again the Indian clutched her, and held her. Then he gathered his strength for an effort, and the next moment she was sprawling in safety at the feet of her lover.

"Ho, you damn-fool woman!" Si-wash cried, in a manner that merely expressed his own fears, and had no insult in it.

Leo helped Audie to her feet. A moment later his deep voice shouted above the howling of the wind.

"If she can fall, what about the sled?"

The Indian's reply was full of the philosophy of his race.

"Sure," he cried. "It easy."

The white man dropped back to the tail of the sled to guard his precious possessions. His first, his only consideration was his gold.

Each passing moment brought added perils. The path up here was shorn of its loose covering of snow, swept away to the depths below by the all-mastering gale. The surface left was little better than a sheet of glare ice, hummocky and studded with roughness caused by broken ice frozen upon its surface.

The track sloped perilously toward the edge of the precipice on the left. It narrowed, too, so that there was no room for more than two people abreast. Leo understood these things.

"Stop! Curse you, stop the dogs!" he cried wildly.

The shout brought the dogs to a stand, and the Indian dropped back.

"What is?" he demanded. But he needed no answer.

The tail of the sled was at the very brink of the precipice, supported only by the thrust of Leo's gee-pole, to which he clung with all the strength of his great body.

The Indian and the woman flung themselves to the rescue, and, in a few moments, the sled was resting safely at the inner side of the path. Then the Indian, as though imparting pleasant intelligence, assured his comrade.

"It more skid, bimeby," he observed confidently. "It worse—bimeby," he added, turning again to the dogs. "Mush on, you devils!" he cried. "Maybe we freeze."

Time and again the sled skidded, and each time Leo saved it from destruction only by inches. That stretch of level became a nightmare to him, and his labor only made his nervous tension bearable. His pole was at work every foot of the way, guiding, staying, holding that incessant skid.

So they struggled on, floundering their way yard by yard. The dogs tore at the unyielding surface of ice with claws broken and bleeding.

The drop to the woodland valley below was nearing. Si-wash called a warning to the man behind.

"We near come by end," he shouted. "Then him go down lak hell."

Presently the sled jolted. It tilted forward as the leading dogs of the team vanished down the slope. Then, in a moment, the run began.

The sled gained a furious impetus. Leo dashed forward to thrust a brake at its head.

Then something happened. Leo's pole bent, cracked and broke off short. In a moment he was left behind sprawling in the snow. Before Si-wash could readjust his pole to the center the sled swung out stern first. It swept on at a great speed, and the dogs raced to keep out of its way. In another moment its impetus carried it to the brink of the precipice. It swept on, half poised in mid air. Then, with a clatter and crunch, it fell over the side, almost sweeping the heavy dogs from their feet.

It was a desperate situation. The straining dogs held for the moment by reason of their great weight, and in that moment the Indian and the wom-

an were able to reach them and throw their own weight into the balance. Could they hold it? Could they recover the fallen sled carrying such an enormous weight? Just as the great figure of Leo loomed up on the scene of the disaster, the strain on the traces slackened, and the dogs were left standing still. There was no longer need to struggle. The treasure was lost in the abyss.

Leo leaned over the edge of the precipice, gazing down with eyes that strained to behold the safety of that which he most prized in all the world. Then he turned away and looked out into the gray fog. Presently he glanced at the man beside him. His eyes rested on the dogs. Audie saw a strained, dreadful expression growing in his eyes.

Then he began to speak. And as he spoke a wild, untamed, impotent fury swept through his head. He cursed the Indian; he cursed the woman, the dogs, the sled. He cursed the storm and the country. He cursed furiously, impotently every form of life that came within the range of his distorted vision.

CHAPTER III.

The Driving Force.

THROUGH the tattered pinewood branches the northern sun's cold rays sought to light the gloomy aisles below. Two men and a woman sat huddled over a crackling fire, at a spot where dozens of fires had burned before. It was cold, bitterly cold.

Beyond the rays of the firelight the meager paraphernalia of a camp loomed up in the twilight. A low tent of rough-tanned hides had been carefully pitched. Near by was an up-turned sled in the course of repair, and the stout crudeness of workmanship bespoke the Indian hand. The weary dogs squatted about between their human masters, staring and blinking at the fire.

The men were silent, and the woman watched one of them with anxious troubled eyes. She was longing to speak, to say something that might salve the wounded heart of her lover. But there was nothing, nothing, she knew, that would ease his pain, and restore to his burning, despairing eyes their wonted look of masterful confidence. She saw the fixed stare of his bloodshot eyes boring unseeingly into the pitiful embers of fire. She saw the thick veins standing out upon his temples, and understood the passionate regret and resentment driving him.

While she watched the brooding figure her mind went back to the moment of disaster when the sled had fallen. For just as long as she lived those moments would remain vividly in her memory. When Leo had discovered that half the load had torn itself from its fastenings, and had been swallowed up by yawning depths below he went suddenly demented.

Si-wash was silent, too. But that was his way, the way of his race. His impassive face yielded no indication of what was passing behind it. If he feared his companion's mood he gave no sign. Possibly he did not. Possibly he realized that here, on the wild, chaotic trail, he was master; certainly that his chances were equal with the other.

Audie broke the silence.

"When'll the sled be ready for the road again?" she demanded.

"I finish him two days," said Si-wash, holding up two fingers.

"Most of the food was saved," Audie went on. "It was the other things that were lost."

The Indian nodded.

"Sure. Him cook-pots go. Only one him saved. Blanket him go. So him go the—"

"Go and get wood, you red son-of-a-moose," cried Leo with sudden vehemence. "Don't stand there yapping like a yellow cur."

The man's bloodshot eyes blazed up furiously into the Indian's face. The

Indian moved silently off to obey. He had a dread of people who were possessed of a devil.

Leo watched him disappear in the gloom of the woods. Then he turned back impatiently to the fire. He hunched himself up, resting his chin upon his hands, and his elbows on his knees. The mention of their losses had again driven him hard, but, curiously enough, now the eyes of the watching woman saw that his mood had changed for the better. His were less straining, and the veins of his temples no longer stood out like twisted cords. She began to hope. She felt, dangerous as it might seem, that it would be far better that he should talk, whatever pain such talk might cost her. Far better than that he should sit silently nursing his despair.

It was Leo who at last broke the silence. He stirred, and swiftly aimed a vicious kick at a log protruding from the embers of the fire. The response was a shower of sparks flying upward. Then he turned to her and began talking rapidly.

"I—I sometimes feel as if I could blame you for all—this," he began, in a low, harsh tone. "But I don't. I've still got sense enough for that. And it's lucky—lucky for you."

"How could I be responsible?" she asked, while her heart chilled within her.

"How?" Leo laughed without mirth. "I tell you I don't blame you—and yet I might. I did not intend to make this journey in winter."

Audie understood. She knew he was making this journey for her sake. Therefore she remained silent.

"Say, I wonder if you know what this means to us—to me," he went on, in a tone of suppressed passion. "No, you don't—you can't. Guess it's not likely. You just remember we've still enough food for the journey. You know we have no money. But that don't mean a thing to you, because you guess there's a man's hand ready to get busy in your service. You've no thought for anything else, because—because I guess you're a woman."

He caught his breath sharply as though laboring under a stab of intense pain. Then he laughed harshly.

"If you could only look into my brain—my heart—my feelings, maybe you'd realize something of the destruction that's been done there by the loss of my gold. Oh, I'm no miser. It's not that." He paused and looked steadily at her. "I s'pose you can't realize what it means to have the concentrated hopes of years suddenly dashed to a thousand atoms. No, of course you can't. But I'm not down and out—yet. Not quite. No. I want to get right up and hurt some one. I want to hit out."

Audie nodded. The fear of him was dying out of her.

"I think I understand—all," she said, in a low voice. "Yes, look ahead, it will be best for you. Don't let thought of our—our boy concern you now; forget everything—but that goal you spoke of."

Just for a moment the man's eyes softened. He was not insensible to the utter self-effacement in the woman's desire to help and comfort. But they hardened again almost at once.

"I'm not going to let—anything—interfere," he said almost brutally. "My plans are fixed. Now listen. To-morrow I get right back to Sixty-mile Creek. Anyway I start out for it. I'll have to go on foot. Maybe I sha'n't ever reach it. Anyway that don't matter. If I do I'll remain there until I have washed up as much gold as I have lost. It may take a year—two—three. It don't matter how long."

"But—" Audie broke in with wide, horrified eyes.

Leo stopped her with a swift gesture.

"It's no use shouting," he said harshly. "I tell you my mind's made up. You'll go on down to the coast with Si-wash. You'll be able to get the help you need there."

"Yes, yes, I can manage. I can get to my sister in San Sabatano."

"Good. You'll go on then. I can trust Si-wash. He's been paid. You'll have food enough, and you'll travel light. If he fails you, and I survive, if I hunt the world over I'll kill him."

Audie's eyes lit. It was the one expression of feeling Leo had displayed which she could take to herself.

"Then afterward — God knows when—I'll come and marry you. It's the best we can do. It's all I can promise. We're plumb up against it. Whatever happens, I'm going to marry you. That goes."

Audie breathed a deep sigh of heartfelt gratitude. The ice had been broken. She knew that Leo's mental balance was restored. The future had no longer any terrors for her. Her lover was once more the powerful creature she had followed into the wilderness, was ready to follow into the wilderness again if he would only permit her.

"Must I—must I go on to the coast? Is there need?" she said, in a low, pleading voice, after a moment's silence. "If you are going back, cannot I go back, too? There's the sled. Why go on foot? Let me return with you, Leo."

The man shook his head, and his negative was as irrevocable as any spoken words. If he understood the devotion prompting her he gave no sign.

"Your life sha'n't be risked that way," he said. "The child must be born where you can get help. That's —our duty. It's my duty that you reach the coast in safety as far as the matter is humanly possible. Si-wash 'll have to fix that. After that I'm helpless—I haven't a cent in the world or I would give it you. You'll have to go on to the coast, and I—I return alone."

Si-wash returned, scrunching upon the pine-cones with a great load of firewood upon his broad back. Leo watched him deposit it and replenish the fire. Then Audie set about preparing a meal, and the dogs were fed from the store of frozen fish, which, by the trick of Fate, had been saved in preference to their precious store of gold. After that, as the twilit woods were swallowed up in the darkness of night, Audie vanished into the tent, and was seen no more.

For long hours after the woman's eyes had closed in troubled sleep the two men hugged the warmth of the fire. They had neither blanket nor bed. All that had been saved had been given to the woman. They smoked in silence, each man busy with his own thoughts; and it was nearly midnight when Si-wash gave his friend the benefit of his profound cogitations.

"I mak' 'em long piece way. No plenty wood. I mak' 'em mile—two mile." Si-wash held up two fingers.

Leo looked up quickly at this breaking of the silence.

"Sure," he said. "Wood scarce."

Si-wash nodded.

"Plenty scarce." Then after a long pause: "Other man find him. Burn 'em all up."

Leo eyed his companion. Then he grinned unpleasantly.

"Guess there's only one damn-fool outfit on this trail—hereabouts—" he said.

The Indian went on smoking, and nearly a minute passed before he shot a quick, sidelong glance at his white friend.

"No. Two," he said; and the inevitable two fingers were thrust up again before Leo's eyes.

It was the white man's turn to pause before replying now.

"Two?" he said, half incredulously.

The Indian nodded, and again held up two fingers.

"How do you know?" Leo's question came sharply.

"Smoke," returned the Indian; and his one hand described a series of circles upward.

"You mean a camp fire? Where?" Leo was more than interested.

"So. Back there. Big piece. One

—two—three mile." Si-wash held up three fingers in deliberate succession.

Daylight had come. Leo yawned and stretched his cramped limbs. Si-wash was still beside the fire. He had melted a pot of snow, the only pot that had been saved from the wreck on the hill-side. He was making tea, boiling it, as is the fashion of all Indians. The smell of it pervaded the camp and reminded Leo that he was hungry.

In half an hour breakfast was over, and Si-wash proceeded with his work on the sled. Audie waited for the commands of her lover. But none were forthcoming. For a long time Leo sat lost in thought. At last he rose and picked up the rawhide rope which was lying beside the diminished wood pile. He stood for a moment contemplating it. Then he absently stretched it out on his powerful hands, and finally coiled it up.

"Guess I'll climb around and gather wood. So long, Audie," he said briefly.

The next moment the girl's longing eyes were watching his retreating figure as the gray distance swallowed it up.

For a long time she stood thus. Then she started and looked around. It was Indian's voice that had startled her.

"Him heap good feller. He no come back bimeby."

The girl's eyes widened with sudden fear.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, with a clutching at her heart.

The Indian's face relaxed into something approaching a smile.

"Him crazy, sure!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Shadow of Death.

AT the crest of a snow-covered ridge, sloping down into a thick wood, Leo stopped with a start as he heard the sounds for which he had been straining his ears. He crouched down and peered over the edge of the snow. What he saw there made him crouch still lower, and as he directed his intense gaze furtively forward some hidden fire smoldered within him; for there amid the stillness, he saw a man in profound contemplation of a figure beneath a covering of furs. The silent woods suggested the calm of a shadowed sepulcher. The shrouded figure lying at the feet of the standing man completed the suggestion.

Having seen that, Leo withdrew as swiftly and as furtively as a wolverine, to wait, and wait.

Tug's eyes, if unsympathetic, were, at least, anxious. The sunken features of his companion filled him with a curious feeling of superstitious awe at the stealing, subtle approach of death. Death, in the abstract, had no terrors for him. The sight of a life suddenly jolted out of earthly existence would have disturbed him not at all; but this steady march, this almost imperceptible progress, stirred those feelings of superstition which underlie all human life.

He noted the hungry shadows of an unearthly blue which surrounded the sunken eyes, and filled the hollow sockets. The greenish tinge in the pallid flesh revolted him; the lips, so drawn, with all their ruddy ripeness gone, left him with a feeling of positive nausea; while the utter helplessness in the way the trunk collapsed beyond the rough pillow supporting the lolling head, left him shrinking at the thought of the speeding life whose ebb he was powerless to check.

Well enough he knew that death was hovering well within sight. Poor Charlie, the companion of his fortunes, was rapidly passing away. There was no help he could bestow, no real help. All he could do was to minister to each whim expressed in the thin, struggling voice; for the rest, the march of death must go on. For many days the end had been steadily

approaching, and now the icy breath in the shadow of death's hovering wings seemed to add a chill to the wintry air and freeze up the heart in his own robust body.

Tug's expression was one of hopeless incompetence. He wondered, as he had wondered for days, what he could do to help the sufferer. He knew that pneumonia had laid its clutch upon the poor wretch's lungs, and all treatment for it was a riddle to which he found no answer.

His eyes lifted from the dying man and he stared about him vaguely. They took in the squatting dogs reveling in the comfort of the flickering firelight, well sheltered from the breath of winter by the canvas screen he had erected to shelter his sick companion. The sight of these luxuriating beasts annoyed him, and with a vicious kick at the nearest he sent them scuttling into the background.

Then he glanced at his diminished store of wood. Here lay the only service his helplessness permitted his thought to rise to. Yes, he could still strive to keep the cold—that stealing cold which Charlie had cried out against so bitterly, that cold which he had declared had eaten into his very bones—from his dying friend.

So he moved over to the pile and replenished the fire with liberal hand till the last stick in his store had found its way to the hungry flames. Then, with a curious patience, almost gentleness, he once more tried to administer the fragrant but less savory soup which was always kept simmering in the boiler on the fire.

At last Tug put the pannikin aside and dropped the spoon with a clatter. He could do no more. Again he rose to his feet and stood helplessly by.

"Poor devil," he muttered; "his number's plumb up."

At the sound of his voice there came a slight movement of the lolling head. Then the great eyes opened slowly and stared up at the muttering man in an uncanny, unseeing fashion.

"Sure."

The one word, spoken in the faintest of whispers, told Tug that the dying man's intellect remained unimpaired; and the knowledge left him annoyed with himself that he had spoken aloud.

"I'm kind of sorry, Charlie," he blundered. "I didn't just guess you could hear."

"It—don't—matter. I was thinking of my—folks."

"Sure. I know." Tug sighed in a relief he could not have explained.

"It's my share—my—share—of the gold." He gave a short, quick gasp. "I want them—to—have—it. It—was—for them."

Tug nodded. "I know. I'll—see they get it. Is—there anything else?"

"No. Say—"

Tug waited. As the silence remained he urged the dying man. "Yes?"

"It's no good. They—they—won't—get—it."

"What d'you mean—they won't get it?" Tug's face flushed. He felt that his promise was doubted. "I've given my word."

"Sure. But—" The man broke off, gasping.

After a while the struggle eased and his whispering voice became querulous.

"It's—it's—cold. The—the fire's going—out."

Tug glanced quickly at the fire. It was burning brightly. Then he remembered he had used up the last of the fuel.

From the fire he turned to the dying man again. He understood. It was the march of death, that cold he complained of.

"Yes," he said. "I'll go and collect more wood. I—I didn't notice the fire going down. We must keep the cold out of you."

The lolling head made a negative movement.

A shuddering sigh, half shiver, half gasping for breath, passed through the man's body. Then the thin eyelids

closed, and no effort on Tug's part could produce any further sign of life. For a long time he endeavored, striving by words of encouragement to persuade the weary eyes to open; but they remained obstinately shut. The man's breathing was of the faintest.

He moved away. No, he could do nothing else, so he might just as well go and gather wood. For some unaccountable reason it was attacking his nerves. The woods seemed to be haunted with strange shadows. He must certainly get to work.

From the far side of the fire he glanced back at the ominous pile of blankets and furs. He saw the man's head move. It lolled over to the other side. The movement, the vision of that deathly figure, suddenly set the strong man's skin creeping. He hurried away almost precipitately.

After Tug had gone not a movement disturbed the tomblike peace of the aged woods; no sound broke the profound silence. It was as if even nature herself were held in supreme awe of the presence of death.

Tug's dogs crept toward the fire and crouched within the radius of its pleasant warmth, their great muzzles resting between outstretched paws.

Then again, in the briefest of seconds, the whole scene was changed. It came as one of the dogs lifted its head, gazing intently at the pile of furs under which the sick man lay.

It was a tense moment. Every muscle in the creature's powerful body was set quivering and a half-savage whimper escaped its twitching nostrils. Every head about the fire was abruptly lifted, every ear was pricked alertly, and each pair of fierce eyes stared hard in a similar direction.

For nearly a minute the tenseness remained; then the spell was broken. One dog, the oldest in the craft of the trail, squatted upon its haunches and licked its lips. One by one the rest followed its example, and finally, with sighs as of relief, returned to their luxurious basking in the firelight.

But the leader did not attempt to return to the charmed circle of the fire. It seemed as if he realized a sense of responsibility. Presently he rose and, with gingerly tiptoeing, moved away from his companions. He edged warily toward the sick man's bed. He drew near, snuffing at the air, ready to draw back instantly should his wisdom so prompt him.

Nearer and nearer he drew, and with lowered muzzle he snuffed at the edge of the bed. With stealthy, creeping gait he made his way toward the pillow, snuffing as he went. Then, as his greenish eyes rested upon the man's lolling head, he again squatted upon his haunches and licked his lips. The next moment a low whimper broke the silence; it grew louder. Finally the dog's great head was lifted, its muzzle was thrown high into the air, and the whimper was changed into a long-drawn-out howl of amazing piteousness. It was doling the death warning of its race.

A chorus of whimpered acknowledgment came from the fire. The other dogs stirred restlessly, but that was all. Within five minutes every dog was on its feet again. There was no mistaking their mood. There was no craven slinking, there were no currish snarls. Every dog was on his toes, ready to battle with a tangible foe.

At last the sound of muffled footsteps awoke dimly the echoes of the woods. A man was approaching. He was walking swiftly, with the soft crunch of hurrying, moccasined feet. His shadowy figure loomed up out of the gray twilight of the woods, and just beyond the camp he halted and hurled a string of deep-voiced curses at the growling dogs. Instantly the chorus of canine displeasure ceased and the creatures backed away from the forbidden pleasures of the fire. These animals obeyed man; for such was their teaching upon the trail.

Now the man came on fearlessly. Without hesitation he began a closer examination; and the first thing to

interest him was the sled, with its rough harness spread out just where the dogs had been freed from their traces.

His quick-moving eyes passed on to the bed, with its pile of furs. Just for a moment he hesitated; then, with a movement almost of defiance, he stepped toward it and dropped on one knee beside the pillow. Again there came a pause, but his turned ear explained it. He was listening; but no sound came to him, and at last he turned back the cover.

"Dead!" he muttered.

He rose to his feet and moved swiftly across to the tent, and as he went the memory of all he had lost upon the trail swept over him. He told himself he had been robbed—robbed just as surely as if human hands had wrested from him the prize he had toiled so desperately to win. This came in answer to the voice of conscience; but conscience had no power against the driving force which was the whole substance of his life.

Some strange fate had driven him toward an opportunity that he was not the man to miss. Charlie—that mild, harmless partner of Tug—was dead; and Tug—well, Tug was probably living, but he had never been a friend of his. He had always felt subtly antagonistic toward him. What mattered if—if he robbed him? Yes, that was what he intended. He would rob him, and—

He raised the flap of the tent and passed within, letting the curtain fall behind him.

Not a sound broke the stillness outside. The dogs stirred without sound. Their ease was passing. It was almost as if they knew that the law of club and trace was soon to claim them again.

In a few moments Leo reappeared. A fresh change had come over him. His work was in full progress, and now the light in his eyes was less straining, less passionate. Now he was once more the man of purpose—keen, swift-thinking, ready. The passionate obsession that was his was once more under control, its desire having been satisfied in the acquisition of the bag of gold he now hugged in his arms, The keenest essence of his thought was at work.

Though powerless to resist the temptation held out to him, he knew full well its meaning. He knew what possible consequences hovered on the horizon of his future. The morality of his act concerned him not at all, but those other considerations demanded his closest attention. All his plans must be reorganized. Now there was no need to return for laborious years on Sixty-Mile Creek; and a great joy flooded his heart at the thought. He thought of Audie, and at once his keen mind began to make swift plans.

Audie and the Indian could still go on, he thought as his eyes surveyed the five great, husky dogs with satisfaction. All that had been arranged for her could remain—for the present. She was still to remain a part of his life. He had given his promise. Then there was Tug. Tug must be provided for; and as the thought came to him a grim half smile twisted the corners of his compressed lips. Yes, he would leave him written instructions, which, if he knew the man, would not be ignored.

These thoughts passed swiftly through his mind in the midst of action. Reluctantly enough he bestowed Tug's store of gold upon the sled, lashing it doubly secure after his disastrous experiences. Then he stored bedding and food upon the vehicle.

Within half an hour the pack on the sled was complete, and the great dogs stood in their harness ready to do the behests of their new master. But the last item of his program still remained to be attended to. Leo searched his pockets and found the stub of a pencil, but no paper rewarded his efforts.

Then he bethought him of the tent and passed beneath the flap. In a few moments he returned with a sheet of

water-proof paper such as is used to line biscuit-boxes, and he sat down on his pack and began to write. And all the time he was writing the grim twist of his lips remained.

His writing finished, he secured the paper on the front of the tent where it must be easily seen. Then he stood off to read it.

MY DEAR TUG:

I find it necessary to commandeer your gold. Mine is at the bottom of a precipice ten miles back, if you care to make the exchange. Si-wash will tell you where. I suggest you either wait here till they come along, or go back to my camp in the woods, beyond the broken hill, and join Si-wash there. Anyway you can travel down with him. They have dogs and camp outfit, and I have left here sufficient food, *et cetera,* for your needs. I have found you a better friend than I ever hoped to. So-long. Good luck.

LEO.

Leo read his note over with evident satisfaction. He had no scruples whatever. He saw in one direction only. Straight ahead of him, his eyes turning neither to the right nor to the left of the path of life he had marked out for himself.

He picked up Tug's gee-pole, and gave one swift, final glance over the camp. Then, stooping, he covered the staring face of the dead man with a blanket and turned to the dogs. A sharp command and the traces were drawn taut. Another, and the journey had begun.

CHAPTER V.

Dead Fires.

WHEN Tug reached his camping-ground he found himself in a land of dead fires. The cold, gray ashes were everywhere about him. Life had gone; hope had fled. And the charred embers of the camp-fire in the center of it were the symbol of the ruin.

His quick eyes took in the picture, while his cold heart read something of the meaning of what he beheld. The absence of his dogs first drew his attention, and this was swiftly followed by the realization that his sled was nowhere to be seen. Then his eyes caught the notice which was written on biscuit paper and secured to the front of his tent. He threw down his burden of dead wood, which had still remained upon his back, and stood in front of the message Leo had left him.

For long minutes he stood while the words sank deep into his selfish heart. Here he was treated to the very attitude he loved to assume himself, and it lashed him to a cold, deadly fury. Again and again he read the message, and each time he read it he found fresh fuel with which to build the icy fire of his rage. The theft itself was maddening; but, strangely enough, the tone of impudent triumph in which Leo addressed him drove him hardest.

Suddenly he made a movement with his moccasined heel. It was his only expression. The pine-cones crushed under it; and to him it was the life of the man, Leo, he was crushing out.

With a steady hand he reached out and removed the paper from its fastenings. He folded it deliberately, carefully, and bestowed it in an inner pocket. Somehow its possession had suddenly become precious to him, and a certain contentment was his as he turned away and seated himself on an upturned box.

For long he sat there before the dead fire. His comrade remained unheeded. He was thinking, thinking desperately in his cold fashion. And, curiously enough, the possession of that paper helped to inspire him. Already he contemplated it as a sort of token that, in the end, he would return a hundredfold the injury done him. Yes, it should be his mascot through life; it should be a guiding star to his whole career. It should be his inspiration when the moment came. He would make his own law—when the time came. There would be no

mercy. Mercy? He smiled. And it was a smile so cruel and cold that it might well have damped the courage of the great Leo himself.

Night closed down before Tug stirred from his seat; and when the movement came it was inspired by the bitter cold which had eaten into his stiffening joints, and the gnawings of hunger to which he had been so long oblivious. He rekindled the fire and boiled the water for his tea. He prepared the dried fish and cooked it. Then he sat down and devoured his meal with all the relish of a hungry man without a care in the world.

Hours passed, and the long, sleepless night dragged on toward a gray, hopeless dawn; and by the time the black woods began to change their hue and the gray to creep almost imperceptibly down the aged aisles, his last plans were complete.

Then he arose and stretched himself. He put his pipe away and replenished the fire with the last of the wood, finally setting water thereon to boil. Then, picking up his ax, he moved off into the deeps of the wood.

In half an hour he returned with a burden of rough-hewn stakes, which he flung down beside the fire, while he prepared his breakfast. He devoured his meal hurriedly, and within another half-hour was at work upon his final tasks.

He stored all his property inside the tent, removing the furs and blankets from his dead comrade. It almost seemed like desecration. Yet Tug would not leave the body encased in warm furs. The man would have to be buried—later. In the mean time the cold would freeze the body.

Now the purpose of his stakes became evident. Even Tug, selfish and callous as he was, acknowledged his duties to the dead. He knew the prowling scavengers of the forests too well to leave his comrade without sufficient protection. So he proceeded to secure the body under a cage of timber.

With Charlie left secure, his work was complete. Broad daylight was shining among the rugged crowns of towering pines. The moment had come for his departure. He would obey the letter of Leo's instructions. He would follow the path he had marked out for him. Afterward he would choose his own path; a path which he knew, somewhere in the future, near or far, would eventually bring him within striking distance of the quarry he intended to hunt down.

It was Si-wash who first witnessed the approach of the newcomer; and he at once realized that it was not the return of his friend, Leo, the man whom he still liked, in spite of the madness which he believed now possessed him.

So he watched thoughtfully from the shadow of the fringe of the forest. He peered out over the white plain upon which an ineffective sun poured its steely rays, while he studied the details of figure and gait, which, in a country where contact with his fellows was limited, were not likely to leave him in doubt for long.

Presently he vanished within the woods. He went to convey his news to the waiting woman, the woman whose heart was full of a dread she could not shake off, whose love was silently calling, calling for the return of the man who was her whole world.

But his news must be told in his own way, a way which, perhaps, only an Indian, and those whose lives are spent among Indians, can understand.

He came to the fire and sat down, squatting upon his haunches, and remained silent for some minutes. Then he picked up a red-hot cinder and lit his black clay pipe, which he produced from somewhere amid the furs which encased his squat body.

"We go bimeby," he said, after a long pause. "No storm — no snow. Him very fine. Good."

Audie's brooding eyes lifted from the fire to the Indian's broad face. All her fear, all her trouble was shining

in their depths. The man saw and understood. But he did not comment.

"We can't go—yet," she said. "We must wait. Leo will come back. Oh, I'm sure he'll come back."

The Indian puffed at his pipe and finally spat a hissing stream into the fire.

"Maybe," he said.

The woman's face flushed.

"Maybe? Of course he'll come back!" she cried with heat. "He—he has gone to collect wood."

The Indian nodded and went on smoking.

"Him fetch wood. Sure," he said presently. "Him go day—night—morning. Si-wash fetch wood. One hour — two — three. Then Si-wash come back. Si-wash not crazy."

Suddenly Audie sprang to her feet. Her eyes flashed, and a fierce anger swept through her whole body.

"Leo is not crazy. Don't dare to say he is!" she cried vehemently. "I—I could kill you for saying it."

The Indian smoked on, and when she had once more dropped to her seat, and the hopeless light in her eyes had once more returned, he removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Si-wash—you kill 'em. It no matter. Leo, him crazy still. You stop here—an' freeze. So. It much no good."

"But he will come back, Si-wash!" Audie cried haltingly. "Say he will! You know him! You understand him! He must come back! Say he must! He can never travel this country on foot, without food or shelter! Oh, say he must come back!"

But Si-wash was not to be cajoled from his conviction. He shook his head and spoke between the puffs of his reeking pipe.

"Leo no come. But the other, him come. Tug, him come quick. Maybe him speak of Leo."

In a flash the girl's beautiful eyes shot a gleaming inquiry into the man's coppery face.

"Tug? Tug coming here? Tug is miles away. He must be getting near the coast by now. He must be safe by now—safe with his precious gold."

"Maybe him not safe. Maybe him lose him gold, too."

"You mean—"

Audie caught her breath as she left her inquiry unfinished.

"Nothing? All same Tug him come here. I see him. Hark? Sho! That him—he mak noise."

The Indian turned slowly round and stared out into the twilit woods. Audie followed the direction of his gaze and sat spellbound, listening to the sound of hurrying feet as they crushed the brittle underlay of the woods.

"Tug!"

Audie was on her feet, staring at the apparition of the man she had believed was even now nearing the coast.

Nor did the man's usual ironical smile fail him.

"Sure. Didn't you guess I'd get around after — what has happened?"

Audie eyed him blankly as he waited for her to speak. The Indian, with his eyes fixed upon the fire, had not stirred from his seat. For the moment he was forgotten by these white people. He moved now. It was a slight movement. Very slight. He merely thrust one of his lean hands inside his fur coat.

His movement was quite unnoticed by the others; and as Audie stared, quite at a loss for words, the man went on:

"Well? He's got away with it. Maybe you're—satisfied."

Tug's smile was unequal to the task. The cold rage under it made its way into his eyes. And as she listened a curious change crept into Audie's eyes, too. Si-wash, with his attention apparently on the fire, was yet quite aware of the change in both, and his hand remained buried in the bosom of his fur coat.

Audie had suddenly become very cool. She pointed at the box which had been Leo's seat.

"You'd better sit down," she said coldly. "You seem to have something to tell me."

"Tell you?" Tug laughed. Do you need telling?" he asked, as he dropped upon the seat.

Audie resumed her place at the opposite side of the fire.

The Indian smoked on.

"You'd best tell us all you've got to tell," Audie said, with cold severity.

"What the hell!" he cried suddenly. "Do you want to tell me that you don't know what Leo's done? Do you want to tell me the whole game isn't a plant, put up by the three of you? Do you want to tell me—?"

"I want to tell you, you're talking like a skunk. If you've got anything to tell us tell it in as few words as possible, or—get out back to your camp."

It was a different woman talking now; a very different woman to the forlorn creature who had appealed to Si-wash a few minutes ago. Just for a second the Indian's eyes flashed a look in her direction, and it was one of cordial approval.

Suddenly Tug thrust his hand into the bosom of his clothing and withdrew it swiftly.

"Read that," he cried furiously, If you are as ignorant of his doings as you make out. Read it."

He flung out his arm across the fire, his hand grasping the biscuit paper on which the fateful message was written. Quite undisturbed by his brutality Audie took the paper and unfolded it.

"It was left fastened on the front of my tent while I was away fetching wood," Tug went on bitterly. "I came back to find my dogs gone, my sled, half my stores, Charlie dead—he had been dying for a week—and—and that paper. Read it—curse it, read for yourself!"

Tug waited impatiently while the woman devoured the contents of the message. She read it once—twice—even a third time through; and while she read, though her expression remained the same, all her emotions were stirred to fever heat. She was thinking swiftly, eagerly, her brain quickened to a pitch it had never realized before. Her love for Leo was urging her the more fully to grasp the position in which his latest act had placed him.

This outrage against the man, Tug, in no way lessened her concern for her lover, for his welfare. The primitive woman was always uppermost in her. She cared not a jot that Tug had been despoiled. Leo was well, Leo was alive and safe. But was he safe—now?

She read the message for the fourth time—read it aloud slowly.

As she proceeded the impassive face of the Indian remained unchanged.

Audie's voice ceased, and for a moment no one spoke. Then with a muttered imprecation Tug held out his hand.

"Give me the—paper!" he cried roughly.

Audie did not appear to hear him.

"Pass it over!" he demanded still more roughly.

The woman looked up at him. Then she held the paper out, as though to pass it across to his outstretched hand. The next moment it dropped from her fingers and fluttered into the heart of the fire.

With a wild ejaculation Tug sprang to rescue it, but even as he rose to his feet he stood transfixed. The muzzle of a revolver was covering him, and behind the muzzle was the copper-hued visage of the forgotten Si-wash.

"Let 'em burn," he said in his low, guttural tones. "Him writing heap bad med'cine."

The paper curled up and burst into flame. Tug, furious but helpless, watched the hungry flames devour it. Then, as it crumbled away into the red heart of the fire, Si-wash returned to his seat.

"Si-wash is right," said Audie coldly. She had not risen from her seat.

"Leo was foolish to write that. Still, I am glad now that he did. It has told me what to do. You see, he said nothing when he went from here, and I thought I should never see him again. Now I know that I shall. Now I know that he is well and safe—yes, safe, since that paper is destroyed. Well"—she looked her visitor squarely in the eyes—"what are you going to do? You are welcome to avail yourself of our transport, as Leo suggests, under conditions."

Tug's fury held him silent. Audie went on with the tacit approval of her faithful comrade.

"You can travel with us, but you will carry no firearms. You can go home to your camp now. To-morrow morning, if the weather holds, you can join us. We'll meet you in the open somewhere near your camp. Mind, in the open, and you'll come to us with your hands up. We shall then search you for weapons. After that, if things are satisfactory, we'll take your outfit on our sled, and you can travel with us. Remember, Leo's welfare is my one care. Well?"

Tug rose. In a moment the Indian's gun was covering him.

"Look 'im over for gun—now," Si-wash said, addressing Audie in his brief, guttural fashion.

Audie nodded.

"You'd best put up your hands, Tug," she said with a smile as she rose from her seat. "Si-wash is a dead shot."

Tug obeyed. His hands went slowly up, and Audie passed round the fire and undid his fur coat. As she did so her eyes sparkled.

"You've got them both on," she said, unstrapping the ammunition-belt supporting two revolvers about his waist. "That'll simplify matters. You see, I know them. One is Charlie's and the other yours. They are the only guns you possess. Good! Now you best go."

But the compelling gun of the Indian could no longer keep Tug silent, and his pent anger broke out in harsh abuse.

"You—" he shouted. "You think I can't get back on you, but I can! I will. I'll get your man, Leo, if I wait years. I'll break him—I'll break the life out of him! I'll—"

"Maybe." There was a hard glitter in Audie's eyes as she interrupted him. "One thing, you've got no evidence against him. Charlie is dead and—that paper is burned. It is your word against his. When you meet it will be man to man, and I don't guess there's a doubt who's the best man. You best go home now."

Tug made no attempt to obey. In a second the threatening gun was raised again.

"Go 'm quick! Damn quick!" Si-wash cried savagely.

Tug's eyes caught the threatening ring of metal. For a moment he hesitated. Then he turned and strode off.

The steady eyes of the Indian watched him until the woods had swallowed him up.

CHAPTER VI.

In San Sabatano.

SAN SABATANO was not a big city as California cities go, but it was a very busy one. At least its citizens thought so, and their four-sheeted, two-cent local news-sheet fostered their belief.

The editor was a shrewd journalist of very wide experience. No, he had not been "raised" in San Sabatano. He had served his apprenticeship on the live journals of the East. He understood men and the times in which he lived. More than all, he understood making money, and the factor which his women readers were in that process.

So it came about that this individual had for months darkly hinted that the San Sabatano *Daily Citizen* had something up its editorial sleeve with which it intended to stagger human-

ity. San Sabatano stood agog with breathless expectancy for weeks.

Then came the humanity staggerer. It occupied a whole page of the *Daily Citizen*. It was a competition. Yes, a mere competition. That was the first disappointing thought of everybody.

Then digestion set in and hope dawned. Yes, it was not so bad. As a competition it was rather good. Good? Why, it was splendid! A competition for women clerks. Speed and accuracy in stenography and typing. Twelve prizes of equal value. Five hundred dollars each or a month's trip to Europe, including Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Rome, London. And the final plum of all. The winning twelve to compete among themselves for a special prize in addition. A clerkship in the office of the *Daily Citizen* at two hundred dollars a month, an office to herself, and a year's contract!

At the closing of the entries it was found there were just two thousand competitors. Success for the scheme was assured, and quarts of ink told the gaping multitude that this was so.

Then came the day of the competition. It was held in the town hall. The competition lasted all day, and it was late at night when the last weary, palpitating competitors finally reached homes, which were still in a state of anxious turmoil.

A week passed, and then a special edition brought the long-awaited announcement which dashed the hopes of one thousand nine hundred and eighty-eight bursting feminine hearts. It gave the list of the twelve winners of the competition and invited them to meet at the editor's office at noon next day to compete for the special prize.

Among the names of the winners was that of Monica Hanson.

The following day Monica attended the final competition. She did her utmost, spurred on by the driving necessity which had just been thrust upon her brave young shoulders. Now she was sitting in the San Sabatano Horticultural Gardens, waiting for the evening issue of the paper which was to tell her the news which was either to crush her eager young soul in despair or uplift her to realms of ecstatic hope and delight.

Oh, the teeming thought of those straining moments! It flew through her brain with lightninglike velocity, spasmodic, broken. One moment she had visions of pleasures hitherto denied her in a solitary career, eked out on a wholly inadequate pittance doled out to her monthly by her dead mother's executors in far-off New York. At another she was obsessed by the haunting conviction that such good fortune was impossible. Yet she felt she had done well in the examination, and, anyway, she would certainly take that five hundred dollars she had already won in preference to the European tour. It would mean so much to her, especially now — now that this fresh call on her resources had come.

She made a pretty picture there amid a setting of fantastic tropical vegetation. The cacti, great and small, with their wonder-hued blooms and strange vegetation, were a fitting background to the girl's golden beauty. Her waving, fair hair shone with a rich, ruddy burnish, crowning a face of perfect oval, lit with eyes of the deepest blue.

She heard the cry of a newsboy, and rose with a start. With heart hammering violently against her young bosom, she darted off to catch him.

She reached the gates and slackened her pace to a decorous walk. The boy had just handed an elderly man his paper, and looked admiringly up into Monica's pale face.

His shrewd eyes grinned impishly.

"Say, ain't you Miss Hanson, miss?" he inquired with the effrontery of his kind.

Monica's heart beat harder. But she replied with an icy calmness:

"Yes. That's my name. But—"

The boy's eyes sparkled.

"Then I guess the paper is sho' worth 'two bits' to you!" he cried, thrusting the folded sheet at her. Then, his feelings and covetousness getting the better of him, he added: "Gee, five hundred dollars, an' two hundred a month! Say, how do it feel gettin' all that piled suddenly onto yer, miss?"

In a flash Monica's dignity had vanished.

"What—what do you mean?" she cried, almost hysterically. "I—" Her fingers trembled so violently that she tore the paper nearly to ribbons struggling to open it in the breeze.

The boy grinned.

"Gar'n! You ain't smart any. Guess you best hand me that 'quarter' an' I'll show you wher' to look."

He was as good as his word, and handed her another paper folded at the right spot, nor, to his credit, did he wait for the money in advance.

"You won it sho'," he said, and waited while in a daze Monica read the wonderful news—

"'We have much pleasure in announcing that the winner of our special prize of a position on our staff at two hundred dollars per month is Miss Monica Hanson, whose wonderful speed, *et cetera, et cetera.*'"

Monica hurried on at nearly a run. Never, never in her life had she felt as she felt now. It almost seemed as if the whole world were before her with loving, outstretched arms and smiling face, waiting to yield her all that her young heart most desired. In a vision every face that passed her by in her rush home seemed to be wearing a happy smile.

There was her sister, the dearly loved, erring, actress sister, who had come back to her out of those terrible wilds in the far north of Canada.

Thank God this good fortune had come in time to help her. Poor, poor Elsie, or Audrey, as she called herself on the stage. What terrible troubles had been hers!

Deserted by the man she loved, left alone with an Indian, and another unfortunate white man, to make her way back to civilization. The thought of her sister's sufferings smote her tender young heart even in the midst of her own rejoicings.

Poor Elsie. She seemed to have made such a mess of her life. She had been doing so well, too, in New York. Why had she thrown it all up to marry this man, Leo, and wander off to the Yukon? What a funny name, Leo! It seemed to be his surname, too. Leo; it was all right for a first name, but—Elsie had insisted that it was his name, and the one she liked to call him by.

And now, here she was fretting her poor heart out for him. And to leave her under such conditions, and at such a time! But even her anxiety for her sister was lessened by the knowledge of her own good fortune. She remembered the nurse, who was even now up in the small apartments she occupied, and the doctor she had engaged. A week ago she had trembled at the thought of how she was to pay these people, and provide her sister with even the bare necessities.

Now, her sister should have every care. Everything she could do to make her happy and comfortable should be done. And then, when the baby came she would be its fairy godmother. She hoped he would be a boy. Fancy Elsie with a son. Wasn't it wonderful?

So her thoughts ran on, and long before she was aware of the distance she had covered she found herself at the door of the cheap little apartment-house where she lived on the top floor.

There was no elevator, and she ran up the stairs two at a time.

On the sixth landing she stood breathlessly fumbling in her satchel for her key, when the door opened and the nurse appeared holding up a warning finger.

"Come quietly," she whispered. "The doctor is with her now. It came on quite suddenly. I hope things

will be all right, but—she's in a bad way."

An infantile cry from the other bed startled Monica. She rose and passed across the room. The child seemed to be asleep, for its breathing was regular, and the cry was not repeated. She gazed down upon its tiny, crumpled face, and her young heart melted with a curious yearning and love for the little life that was robbing her of a sister. It was so small. It was so tender—and—and it had cost so much.

"Monica!"

The girl started and looked round. The dying woman's eyes were open.

"Come here." The voice was low, but the words were quite distinct. It was the first time she had spoken for more than twelve hours.

Monica passed swiftly back to her place at the bedside.

"Oh, Elsie, Elsie," she cried, "I'm so glad you have spoken. So, so glad."

A faint smile flickered gently over the sick woman's emaciated features.

"It's no use, Mon. But I'm perfectly easy—now. That's why I called you. I want to talk about—him. You—you—love my little son, don't you?" There was pleading in the voice as the woman asked the question. "I saw you bending over him just now, and—and I thought—hoped you did."

"Oh, Elsie, he is yours. How could I help but love him?"

The words came impulsively, and Monica dropped a warm hand upon her sister's. Her action was rewarded by a feeble pressure.

"I—I knew you would."

After that neither spoke for some moments. Tears were softly falling down Monica's pretty cheeks. But her sister's eyes were closed again. It was almost as if she were gathering her strength and thoughts for a final effort.

Presently Monica grew alarmed. She dashed the tears from her eyes, and bent over the bed.

"Shall I fetch nurse? Is there anything I can do?" she asked eagerly.

"I don't want any one but you, dear—now." The voice was tired, but a sense of peace was conveyed in the gentle pressure of her thin fingers upon her sister's hand. "I—I want to tell you of—things. And—and I want you to promise me something. Oh, Mon, as you love me, as you love my boy, I want you to give me your promise."

Monica seated herself on the edge of the bed and tearfully gave her promise with all the impulsiveness which her love inspired.

"You only have to tell me what it is. I could promise you anything, Elsie."

"I want to tell you about Leo; and I want to talk about my—my boy. Leo and I were not married."

A little gasp of horrified dismay escaped the young girl.

"Ah, that—that hurts you," the other went on. "I knew it would. I—I—that's why I lied to you before. I lied when I said Leo was my husband. Oh, Mon, don't let it make any difference to us now. The time is getting so short."

"Nothing could ever make any difference between us," Monica said. "I was startled. You see—"

"I know. Ah, my dear, my dear, you don't know what it is to love as I love. I met Leo a long time ago, when I was an actress. He knew me as Audrey Thorne, an actress, and I—I wanted to marry him. But—you see he had nothing on which to keep a wife—an extravagant woman as I was then. So he went away, and—and I followed him."

"Poor, poor Elsie." Monica's dismay had passed, and she gently squeezed the hand she was still holding. The pressure seemed to give the other courage to proceed.

"You mustn't pity me too much. I—I was very happy. I was very happy until I knew about—my little son. I—I think I was nearly dis-

tracted when it all came upon me." Her voice had risen. It was almost strident with emotion. "For weeks I thought and thought what I could do to remedy my wrong, and at last I took my courage in both hands. I told Leo, and—and asked him to marry me—for the child's sake."

"For the child's sake?"

The admission which the words implied filled the simple Monica with something like panic.

"You see, Leo never loved me as I loved him."

"Oh, Elsie, Elsie!"

After a while Elsie roused herself again. There was a lot yet to be said, and she knew her time was short.

"I am all to blame. You mustn't blame Leo," she said earnestly. "He was a good man to me. I know you think he has deserted me. But he hasn't. He promised to marry me, and, had I lived, he would have kept that promise. We were coming down country for that purpose." She paused. "Then something happened which made it necessary for him to go on ahead. That's how I came to make the journey with the Indian. It—it couldn't be helped. You—you mustn't blame Leo. He will be looking for me. Is very likely looking for me now. But it is too late. That is why I want you to promise me something." Monica waited. She could find nothing to say. She was learning another of the bitter lessons of life. Presently the other went on:

"You see, neither of us can now remedy the wrong I have done my little son. I shall be gone before Leo can marry me."

The big eyes became eager. They looked up with piteous straining into the gentle face before them.

"Do you see? Oh, Mon, do you understand? My boy—our boy has no father; and very, very soon will have no mother. Oh, Mon, what can I do, what can I say? Can—can you help me?"

"How? Oh, Elsie, tell me how."

With a sudden effort the mother propped herself up with her elbows behind her. Her dying eyes were burning bright with feverish light. All the hope of her poor, dying soul looked up into her sister's face in appeal.

"How? Why, why, by taking him as your own son. How? Oh, Mon, his own mother is taken from him. Then give him another. Make him your own child—whose father is dead. It would be easy for you. You married young, and your—your husband died—died at sea. He will never know differently. No one will question it. Oh, my dear, don't you see? Bring him up as your own child and never let him know his mother's shame. Promise me, your sacred promise to a dying woman, that he shall never know through you his mother's shame and his own disgrace. Promise it to me, Mon. Promise!"

Her fingers tightened almost painfully upon Monica's hand.

The impulse of the moment was upon Monica, and she leaned forward. Her other hand was tenderly raised to the woman's moist brow.

"I promise, dear. Henceforth he shall be my son. I promise you, Elsie dear. And all my life I will strive to keep the real truth of his birth from him."

"Thank God!"

CHAPTER VII.

Two Strangers in San Sabatano.

MONICA'S life suddenly became filled to overflowing. She was no longer a child, but a woman of a maturity that was almost absurd in one so young. Whatever the future might hold of happiness for her, certainly freedom from the more serious cares of life would never again be hers.

Perhaps the first real warning of the change in her came at the moment she considered her sister's funeral. Here a shock was awaiting her, and in a moment there leaped into focus

a teeming picture of almost endless complications. Just for an instant all her nerves were set jangling, and an utter helplessness left her painfully distressed. Then the feeling as abruptly passed, her mind cleared, and one by one she found herself reviewing each detail of the situation, and marking out the course she must adopt.

First and foremost her sacred promise to the dying woman stood out, entirely robbed of its cloak of impulse and affection, in which it had been clad at the time of its making. And from that promise, radiating in every direction, she saw boundless possibilities for more than unpleasant consequences.

She knew she must make up her mind swiftly. A sleepless night found her in the morning ready with her plans all clear in her mind. She still had three weeks before taking up her new position in the office of the *Daily Citizen*. This would be ample time to put everything in order. It was necessary to take the doctor into her confidence. He had been their doctor for as long as she could remember. He had attended her mother in her last illness.

Dr. Bernard Strong was a man of wide sympathy and understanding, and in giving his promise of help pointed out the gravity of the position which her quixotic promise had placed her in.

"My dear," he said, "this is a terrible business for you. Here you are, bound to this town for at least a year, with a newly born infant in your care, which you cannot explain without breaking your promise to poor Elsie. You are known. You have many friends. What in the world are you going to do?"

It was then that Monica displayed the quick, incisive working of her suddenly aroused mental faculties. She told him in brief, pointed words the plans she had made during the long, wakeful night.

"It does not seem so—so very difficult," she said.

Then she plunged into the details of her schemes. She pointed out that her tenement was a weekly one, which she could get rid of as soon as Elsie was buried. This she would do. Then she would take rooms far out on the outskirts of the town. She would first find a house for the baby in the country, a few miles out, where he was not likely to be brought into contact with the townsfolk.

That would be a start. After that she would meet any emergency as it arose. The help she wanted from him was to arrange the funeral with all the secrecy possible, and see that the law was complied with in regard to the baby. His registration, *et cetera*.

The quick, practical manner in which she detailed all the minor details to this man of experience filled him with a profound admiration.

"It is astounding to me, Monica," he said kindly, "that you, a girl of seventeen, can handle such a matter in the calm manner you are doing. You certainly ought to do well in this business career you are about to begin. Really you have made things seem less — er — formidable. But, my dear child, I feel I must warn you. Your tale of an early marriage and all that, if the boy becomes associated with you in the minds of people in the town, will never do. At once they will think the worst, and then—what of your position on the *Daily Citizen?* Then when the time comes for you to marry? What then?"

"I shall never marry—now," was Monica's prompt and decided reply.

The doctor shook his head.

"It is so easy to say that. Believe me, my dear, you have tied a millstone about your neck."

Monica realized the gravity of her position to the full now, and knew that, without breaking her sacred word to a dying woman, there was no means of remedying it. But she was quite determined, and walked away with her

lips tightly compressed, her blue eyes gazing out unflinchingly before her.

How well the editor of the *Daily Citizen* had judged the competitors for the special prize was quickly demonstrated. Monica's zeal was backed by the suddenly aroused acuteness of an unusually clever brain, and, before a month had passed, the complacent individual in the editorial chair had excellent reason for again congratulating himself. He had intended from the outset that the winner of the prize and salary should earn every cent of it, but he found in his new clerk an insatiable hunger for work, and a capacity for simple organization quite astounding.

In this beginner he quickly detected a highly developed germ of commercial instinct; that germ so coveted, so rare. He tried her in many ways, seeking in a more or less fumbling way for the direction in which her abilities most surely pointed. Stenography and typing, he quickly saw, were mere incidents to her. She had other and larger abilities. Frequently in dictating letters he found himself discussing matters pertaining to them with her, and she never failed to center her mental eye upon the point at issue, driving straight to the heart of the matter in hand. The man was frankly delighted with her, and, in the shortest possible time, she became a sort of confidential secretary.

It was about this time that the editor's sanctum was invaded by a stranger; a big stranger of quite uncommon appearance. The man was simply dressed in good store clothes, which covered a powerful, burly figure. But the chief interest lay in the man's face and head. It was a strong face. To use Mr. Meakin's own description of him to his young clerk some time later, he possessed a "tow head and a face like emery cloth."

He refused his name. He came to insert an advertisement in the paper, and to consult the editor about it.

His objects were so definite that, in spite of the refusal to give his name, Mr. Meakin decided to see him. Monica was away at dinner, or he would probably have turned him over to her. However, when the man finally appeared the editorial mind was pleased at the study his unusual personality offered him.

The stranger nearly filled up the doorway as he entered the inner office.

"Guess you're the editor?" he began at once, dropping into the chair Mr. Meakin pushed toward him.

"Sure," Mr. Meakin was always sparing of words to strangers. "What can I do for you?"

"Don't guess you can do much. Maybe you can tell me a deal. I'm looking for some one who has lately come to this city. A lady. Maybe you get a list of visitors to this city in your paper."

"At the hotels—yes."

"Ah, I don't guess she's stopping at a hotel. Came to visit her sister. Her name's Audrey Thorne."

"Audrey Thorne?" Mr. Meakin searched the back cells of memory. He seemed to have heard the name at some time or other, but for the life of him he could not recall where.

"Guess I'm not wise," he said at last, with a thoughtful shake of his head, while he eyed his visitor shrewdly. "Anyway, if I knew of the lady, 'tain't up to me to hand information to a stranger—without a name."

The stranger promptly rose from his seat.

"Just so," he said, with a sharp clip of his powerful jaws. "I'll ask you to read this over," he went on, producing a sheet of paper from his pocket, "and say what it'll cost to have it in your news-sheet for a week."

He handed the paper across the desk.

Will Audie send her address to Box 4926 P. O. Winnipeg? Sign letter in full name. —LEO.

Mr. Meakin read it over twice. Then he looked up keenly.

"Guess it'll cost you ten dollars," he said. "Sunday edition two dollars extra. In advance."

The stranger paid out the money without comment and pocketed the receipt for the money with some care.

The door closed behind the man who signed himself as "Leo," and Mr. Meakin turned to the stack of local copy at his elbow.

When Monica returned from her dinner he looked up quickly.

"Miss Hanson," he said, holding out a pile of proofed copy. "This needs classifying. It goes in to-morrow's issue. Get it through before four. And you might hand this in to the advertisement department. A guy with a tow-head and a face like emery cloth handed me twelve dollars for a week—and Sunday. Reckon he's chasin' up his lady friend, and she's guessin' to lie low."

He passed her Leo's advertisement, and went on with his work.

Monica glanced down at the sheet of paper containing the advertisement. In a moment her attention was riveted upon it, and a sickening feeling stole through her whole body. Then her pulses were set hammering with a nervousness she could not control, and she felt faint.

At that moment Mr. Meakin happened to look up.

"Well?" he inquired.

Then he became aware of the pallor of the pretty face he was accustomed to admire when Mrs. Meakin was safely within the walls of their home on the outskirts of the city.

"Say, you're not well," he exclaimed kindly.

Monica promptly pulled herself together.

"It's—it's just the heat," she stammered. "I'll go and see to these. Anything else?"

"Nothing else just now. Say, don't worry too much if the heat—"

But Monica had fled before his well-intentioned admonition. Once in her own office she flung herself into the chair at her desk, and sat staring at the ominous sheet of paper.

"Leo!" she muttered. "What am I to do? What am I to do?"

For a long time the pile of copy remained untouched while she struggled with the problem confronting her. What was her duty? What was the right course to pursue? This man was Leo. Elsie's Leo. She had no doubt of it. Leo, the father of Elsie's boy. If Elsie had lived she would have welcomed him. But Elsie was dead. Elsie was dead and carried with her her promise never to let the child know his mother's shame. Ought she to tell the father of this child? Ought she to give him up? It would be an easy way out of all her difficulties. Yet she had promised to bring him up as her own.

No, she would not give the boy up. It was plainly her duty to keep him, and—yes, she knew it—her desire. But equally she had a duty of some sort to fulfil by this man. He must not be left in ignorance of Elsie's death. And with this conclusion came an inspiration. She would write to him on her typewriter, and leave the letter unsigned.

So she passed the advertisement on to its department, and on a plain sheet of paper sent the briefest possible message to the post-office, Winnipeg:

"Audie died in child-birth."

There was neither heading nor signature, and she decided to have it mailed from another town. The more she considered it the more her message pleased her. She was keeping her promise to her sister, and fulfilling what she believed to be her duty to the man.

Her work was duly completed by four o'clock, and she awaited a call from Mr. Meakin. There would be several letters to take, she knew, when his editorial work was finished for the day. Meanwhile she had leisure to reflect upon the visit of the man, Leo.

It was curious. Almost a coincidence that he should call when she was

out. Had she been in it would have fallen to her duty to have interviewed him first. As it was she had missed seeing him. It was a pity.

A bell rang; but it was not Mr. Meakin's bell. It was from the outer office. She took up the phone at once. Could it be—

"Hello! Oh! Some one to see Mr. Meakin? Who is it? Austin Leyburn? He's dressed funny? All right, send him to me."

There was a knock at the door, and it was thrown open by the small boy who piloted visitors.

"Mr. Austin Leyburn, Miss!"

Monica indicated a chair as the door closed behind her visitor. He took it without hesitation, and she found herself gazing upon a most extraordinary object. He was obviously a powerfully built man with a keen, alert face and narrow eyes. He was smiling at her with a curiously ironical smile which rather annoyed her. But his general appearance was deplorable. His clothes were so unclean and ragged that, even among tramps, she never remembered seeing anything quite like them.

"If you'll state your business, I'll inquire if Mr. Meakin will see you," she said in her most businesslike way. "He's very busy. You see the paper will be going to press soon."

"I don't guess I need to worry the boss if you happen to know about things."

Monica started. The man's quick, smiling eyes saw the start and drew his conclusions.

"I see you know him. I knew he'd been here. Came this morning. You see he's after a woman belonging to this city. I guessed he'd get around. Maybe you can put me wise where he's stopping?"

Monica shook her head with a calmness she was by no means feeling.

"I shouldn't tell you if I knew. You're quite right, I know the man—by name, but that's all. You see, we know many people by name—but there our information to strangers ends."

"So." Mr. Leyburn eyed her coldly.

Monica pressed the bell under her foot. The man laughed harshly.

"Well, it don't matter. Guess I'll come up with him sooner or later. Maybe he'll look into this office again another day." He rose, and his hard eyes shone with a metallic gleam. "If he does—you can just tell him that Tug is on his heels."

The stranger's visit left an unsavory flavor behind him. Monica was disturbed, and sat thinking hard. She was striving hard to raise the curtain which shut out her view of the life lying behind all these people. She was striving to visualize something of that life with which poor Elsie had so long been associated. She tried to see with her sister's eyes. What would Elsie have done, with Leo—threatened? Her sister's responsibility had devolved upon her. Elsie would have taken some action to help—Leo. What would she have done?

She thought and puzzled for a long time. Then she pressed the bell once more. An inspiration had come.

When the boy appeared she demanded the proofs of the day's advertisements.

She waited impatiently until the boy returned, and then kept him waiting while she hastily extracted the one she required from the pile. She read it over carefully. Leo had worded it to suit her purpose well. Suddenly she took up her blue pencil. She dashed out the word "Winnipeg" and substituted "Toronto" in its place. And without another glance at it handed the papers back to the boy.

As the boy slouched off she leaned back in her chair with a sigh of relief. She had done her best to put the man calling himself Tug off the track of his quarry.

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 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 must 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.

CHAPTER VI.

Blind Man's Buff.

WHILE Ralph still struggled with the mists of sleep, his wrists were secured behind him. He put up the best fight he could, but his ankles were soon tied, too.

Then it was easy to bandage his eyes.

Harder to bear than the indignity of bondage was the pain of betrayal that stabbed him.

"Is this your friendship?" he cried.

There was no answer out of the dark.

His struggling only exhausted him, and bruised his wrists and ankles. He soon gave it up, and lay outwardly quiet, seething with resentment within.

Deprived of his sight, his hearing became preternaturally acute, and he had no difficulty in following the various steps of their preparations for departure. Before the bandage was clapped on his eyes, he had had a glimpse of daylight. He guessed from the freshness of the air in his nostrils that the dawn had just broken.

After the tent had been taken down over his head, and carried away, Nahnya and Charley came back to him together.

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for August 29.

Charley lifted him under the arms, and Nahnya took his feet. Charley's manner of carrying him suggested an insulting indifference that caused Ralph to grind his teeth.

They climbed cautiously down the steep bank, finishing with a sudden slide to the bottom, and almost dropping Ralph between them. Charley laughed, and Ralph swore savagely.

They laid him in the dug-out, and he heard Charley's steps retreating. Nahnya was arranging the blankets under him.

"Ralph, I sorry," she said in a soft voice, sharp with emotion. "I not know anything else to do."

It did not help matters any. He was too full of resentment to give a thought to her side of the case.

"This is what I get for trying to do the square thing by you!" he cried. "For holding myself in night and day to keep from distressing you! You worked on my sympathies. You made me think you were on the square. You talked about friendship, and then you attacked me while I was asleep! Oh! I have been nicely taken in!"

He heard no more from her.

They slid the boat off the stones; Nahnya climbed over Ralph to take her place in the stern, and they set off in the current. For hours after that Ralph had nothing to go on but the quiet dip of the paddles, the answering leap of the boat to the thrust of their strong arms, and the drip of the water as the blades were withdrawn.

Both brother and sister had a great capacity for silence.

Ralph's frame of mind was anything but an enviable one. It is not pleasant to a man to be confronted with a mystery in the woman he loves. As long as they had been in accord it had troubled him very little. He had looked in her clear eyes thinking, "Whatever may be in store, she's on the square."

But when she turned against him all this was changed.

Every look, word, act that he had not understood at the time, recurred to him charged with a sinister significance. Wounded pride hatefully suggested to him that she was using his love for her to further her own ends.

Nevertheless he could not but admit that for such a hardy villainess some of her acts were strange.

He had plenty of time to think things out. He remembered how she had boxed Charley's ears when the boy had first suggested tying him up; he remembered how her eyes had filled, and how sadly she whispered: "I think you are going to hate me by and by."

This suggested that she might be the victim of circumstances no less than himself. "Why can't she trust me a little!" he thought. "She knows I'd do anything for her!"

Behind all this was the mystery of what lay before him, hanging like a heavy black curtain close ahead.

When a man has his eyes to see, and his arms to fight with, a mystery is pleasantly provocative and stimulating. When he lies blindfolded, bound and helpless, the darkest apprehensions seize upon him. Thus the weary round continued in Ralph's mind.

The long silence was broken by Nahnya.

She uttered in Cree what sounded like a quiet warning. Immediately afterward the dug-out lurched violently once as under a side blow, spun around and went on as smoothly as before.

For a long time Ralph lay vainly threshing his brain for an explanation of this odd shock.

A new sound slowly stole on his ears, a dull, heavy growl from down the river. He did not need to be told what this was; rapids—but no such rapids as they had shot in the Pony river, or hitherto in the Rice.

Those compared with this sound were as the laughter of children to the voice of a giant.

The growl became a roar which grew louder with every moment.

Ralph's heart began to beat painfully. It is probable that it never occurred to Nahnya, certainly not to Charley, what a refined species of torture they were inflicting on their prisoner.

There is no terror like terror of the unseen. "If anything happens I'll drown like a cat in a bag," thought Ralph. He would not stoop to make any complaint aloud.

Charley and Nahnya stopped paddling, and talked low-voiced; Nahnya gave unmistakable orders. The slight, sharp note of excitement in their voices shook Ralph's breast.

From the sounds ahead he pictured a very cataclysm of the waters awaiting them, wilder indeed than any earthly rapids.

Little beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. Oh! for his sight! the use of his arms—but he would not ask it. They started paddling again. The roaring seemed to be on every side of them now.

Ralph clenched his teeth and his hands. "Now we're going to take the plunge!" he thought. "Now! *Now!*" And still it held off until he could have screamed with the suspense.

And then the dug-out seemed to drop from under him, and immediately afterward precipitated itself with a crash against a wall of water.

A wave leaped aboard drenching Ralph to the waist. He thought it was all over, and suddenly ceased to trouble. Charley yelled with pure excitement; the dug-out gave a series of mad leaps and plunges, flinging Ralph from side to side like a sack of meal—and suddenly they floated in smooth water again.

An uncanny stillness descended on them. A long breath escaped between Ralph's teeth.

There followed what seemed like the greater part of a day to Ralph, with scarcely anything to register the passing of the heavy time. It was perhaps four hours.

The sunshine grew warm in his face, and he smelled the pines on shore.

High overhead he heard the eagles screaming. Charley complained—of hunger, Ralph guessed—and Nahnya laconically silenced him. At intervals a new sound gave Ralph food for thought. This was the loud, brawling voice of a stream, now on one side, now the other.

"The whole character of the country must have changed," he thought. "We must be passing between steep hills or mountains for the streams to come down like that."

The long wait for something to happen was ended by the voice of another great rapid ahead. Ralph's heart began to beat. "Must I go through with that again," he thought.

But while he was steeling himself for the ordeal, the nose of the dug-out grounded, and Charley springing out, pulled her up on shore.

Ralph was lifted out and laid on a flat rock. There was a long wait. A very real hunger began to assail him. one of the brawling streams came down near-by.

From the sounds that reached his ears, Ralph pictured the dug-out being dragged across the rock on rollers, and hidden under bushes.

Evidently their journey by water was at an end. Nahnya and Charley sat down near him, seemingly to make something. Finally Ralph was lifted up and laid down again, and then, much to his surprise, hoisted on a litter and borne away.

A long journey over rough ground followed, and all up-hill, Ralph judged.

They never passed out of hearing of the voice of the small stream. They stopped often to rest. Even so it was wonderful to Ralph how easily they went.

He was no light-weight. Once or twice Charley grumbled at taking up the load, and Nahnya angrily silenced him.

There was no faltering in her. In spite of his resentment against her Ralph felt a kind of compunction at being carried by a woman. Anyway

his resentment had cooled somewhat; cooled enough to allow him to glance at the oddity of his situation.

"Lord! here's a queer go!" he thought. "What next?"

He was not under any apprehensions of danger to himself.

They went on for an hour or more, the question of food becoming of more vital moment to Ralph, than of what was before him. The air had the lack of motion and the cool smell of vegetable decay that suggested a deep forest.

Finally he was put down for a long period, and he heard the welcome sound of Charley's ax, and shortly afterward the crackle of the growing fire.

In a little while the delicious emanation from baking bannock reached his nostrils, and at last he heard the hissing of the bacon in the pan which signified the completion of the preparations. A certain anxiety attacked him.

"How the deuce are they going to manage about feeding me," he thought. "By Gad! if they think they're going to make me go without my dinner—"

However, Charley presently untied his ankles and his wrists. Ralph tore the bandage from his eyes, stretched himself luxuriously, and looked about him.

They were in the magnificent gloom of a primeval forest. Gigantic trunks of fir and spruce rose on every hand with lofty branches that darkened the heavens. The little patches of sky that showed between seemed immeasurably far off.

The fallen monarchs of ages past lay here and there in confusion, rotting by infinitesimally slow degrees. The ground was stony, but stones and fallen trunks alike were largely covered with moss, incredibly soft and thick and green. The moss masked treacherous holes, as Ralph discovered when he attempted to move about.

There was no undergrowth except a few spindling berry-bushes, and a low plant with huge leaves called "the Devil's club," both pale from lack of sunlight.

The forest grew on a steepish slope.

Ralph affirmed to himself that the way home lay straight down hill. He could still hear the voice of the little stream off to one side. He discovered a faintly-marked trail that climbed straight from below, and continued on up-hill.

This explained how Nahnya and Charley had been able to avoid the fallen trunks and the holes. A trail once made never becomes totally effaced. The wildest, most deserted forest wilderness has such forgotten paths.

So far Ralph's deductions carried him.

Later he made a fresh discovery. Facing down hill and looking straight away through the tree trunks, he distinguished the outline of a noble, snow-capped peak a mile or two away.

From the direction of the shadows upon it he saw that the sun was slightly to the left of it.

As it was now half-past ten or eleven, that peak must therefore be directly south of where he stood. Walking up and down, he searched through the trees and gathered from the suggestions of the outlines of other mountains that the peak was part of a chain running right and left.

Little by little he pieced it all together in his mind.

"We shot a big rapid, and paddled for three or four hours, or until we came within hearing of the next big rapid. The big river must flow parallel with that range yonder, that is to say east and west.

"We are upon the mountain on the other side of the river. We landed on a big flat rock at the mouth of a stream and struck straight up-hill which is due north.

"Blindfolded or not," he said to himself triumphantly, "I guess I won't have much trouble finding my way back if I want."

Nahnya watched Ralph making his observations with a sullen, troubled face, but offered no comment.

Breakfast or dinner, whichever it was, was eaten in silence. Nahnya and Ralph each wore a mask, and avoided each the other's eye. Charley was solely concerned with his long-delayed food.

Ralph secretly elated by his own perspicacity, later made no objections to being bound and blindfolded again. It seemed to him rather a ridiculous precaution, because if he ever got as far as this, he would naturally continue by the trail—however, if they wished to give themselves the trouble of carrying him, so be it!

The journey of the morning was repeated, but for a longer period.

Ralph marveled at his bearers' endurance. For at least two hours they toiled with frequent pauses, always uphill. Finally upon laying him down they left him, and he guessed they had come to the next halting-place.

A long time passed without his hearing them talk, or hearing any preparations to camp. The possibility of their abandoning him there in the woods occurred to him, causing a disagreeable prickling up and down his spine.

At last he heard Charley's footsteps, and the bandage was removed from his eyes. Still the virgin forest. No sign of Nahnya. More mystifications!

"Where's Nahnya?" demanded Ralph.

"Him come back *tepiskow*," Charley answered stolidly.

The boy held up a piece of paper with writing upon it for Ralph to read, but held it upside down. Since it did no good to yell at Charley, and Ralph's hands were tied, it was a little while before they came to an understanding.

When the paper was finally righted Ralph saw that it was a letter, from Nahnya, and once more he was astonished by her. It was written in a hand as fine and precise as a nun's. This strange girl could write as well as steer a canoe!

"To the doctor," it began. (She had made an attempt to spell Ralph, and had given it up.) "If you promise not to go away from here till I get back Charley will untie the ropes and make you free. If you promise make a holy cross on this paper for him to see. Annie Crossfox."

Ralph had not by any means forgiven Nahnya her high-handed proceedings, but an extraordinary curiosity modified his anger.

He was determined to discover what lay behind all these mysteries. He instantly decided to submit to the promise, and signed to Charley to put the pencil between his teeth.

Charley holding up the paper, he made the sign as decreed. First pocketing the paper as a warrant for the proceedings, Charley liberated him.

Ralph walked to and fro to stretch his legs and to see what he could see. Here there was nothing but endless vistas of the forest whichever way he looked.

Because of the higher altitude to which they had climbed the trees were not of such a staggering magnitude, and there was more undergrowth. He saw gigantic raspberry bushes with pale flowers as big as mallows.

The silence was unearthly; not a bird cheeped nor a leaf fluttered.

Ralph was finally reduced to studying the impassive Charley. There was not much reward here. Charley sat with his back against a tree, smoking a pipe and staring into vacancy.

Charley had the faculty of being able to suspend animation when he chose.

Ralph wondered why he did not fall asleep. By and by it came to him that the Indian boy was actually uneasy, not the uneasiness of alarm, but of impatience. His head would turn slightly in a given direction, and a desirous look appear in his hard, bright eyes. His head was cocked to listen.

"Nahnya has kept him out of something that he is keen for," Ralph deduced.

Charley prepared a meal, and they ate. Afterward, since there was nothing better to do, Ralph rolled himself in the blanket he had lain on and slept. When he awoke the indefatigable Charley was cooking another meal.

They had eaten it and were smoking; darkness was already creeping through the forest aisles, though far overhead the sky was bright, when without warning the Indian boy sprang up with a whoop and, seizing his hat and gun, darted away. Ralph, gazing after him, wondered if he had gone mad.

Presently from the same direction he saw Nahnya coming through the trees, followed by an old woman in a black cotton dress. At the sight of her the recollection of the indignities she had put upon him flamed up in his breast, and his eyes hardened. He forgot about Charley.

Nahnya, after a quick glance in his face, lowered her eyes. "This my mot'er," she said in a low voice.

The old woman made a bob to the doctor. She was frankly terrified by the sight of him. She did not in any way suggest the mother of Nahnya, being without grace. She was the middle-aged mother of many, with jetty hair neatly parted and braided, eyes as stoical as Charley's, and a skin like wrinkled, waxed brown paper. She had the strong, patient look of the aging worker.

Ralph, looking from one to the other, could not find any point of resemblance between mother and daughter. The fact caused him a certain grim satisfaction. His professional eye fixed on the old woman's pitiful, crooked arm.

So it was true, after all, that Nahnya had fetched him to cure her mother?

He felt relieved—but only the more mystified. For why, if everything was plain and aboveboard, had she taken such desperate precautions to ensure secrecy? Nahnya was no fool.

He angrily gave it up, and turned his back on the old woman, who, as soon as his eye fell upon it, began to soothe the injured arm with deprecating glances toward him. Ralph had already observed with a hard smile that they had brought up his little satchel of instruments and medicaments on the litter.

He had made up his mind that nothing should induce him to open it.

The two women had brought packs containing everything needful for a comfortable camp, and they set about making ready for the night. Nahyna said no more to Ralph, nor did she look at him again, but her actions were eloquent.

Watching her with sidelong glances, a great uneasiness grew in him.

She cut a heap of spruce boughs to make him a soft bed. She roasted a ptarmigan she had brought with her, and when it was done, took it to him to tempt his appetite before he turned in. She offered it silently, with an extraordinary upward look—soft, penitent and imploring.

The look raised a storm in Ralph's breast.

It confused and touched and angered him together. His heart leaped to answer it, and his indignant pride held it back.

"Why can't she be open with me?" he thought. "Does she think she can treat me like a piece of baggage and then bring me to my knees again with a soft look?"

He accepted the offering as his right, without relenting, and Nahnya went sadly back to her own bed beside her mother.

With a great air of unconcern, Ralph crawled between his blankets and resolutely closed his eyes.

But the struggle within him went blithely forward. He would, and he would not. She had used him intolerably, and he hated her.

She was sorry, and he loved her. The mystery she chose to wrap herself in exasperated him; her quiet resistance to his will maddened the male in him.

There were times when he felt as if the only thing that would give him any peace would be to crush her utterly. Then he would remember the look in her eyes which promised a secret heaven for him to whom she chose to open it. Daylight was coming again before Ralph fell asleep.

When he woke the struggle was over.

Such a struggle in him could have but one outcome. His pride caved in. After all, he told himself, he was a doctor, and he could not turn his back on a grievous injury.

He did not mean to forgive Nahnya, at least, not in a hurry; but he knew he could not forgive himself if he went away leaving a doctor's work undone.

Perhaps he was not quite frank with himself in this; perhaps it was only pride trying to save something from the ruins; perhaps he never would have left Nahnya could he have helped it.

Every imaginative heart that loves, loves the sentimental satisfaction of heaping coals of fire upon the head of the beloved. She would feel sorry she had used him so, but he would be relentless.

When she had suffered a great deal —perhaps—

So, after breakfast, still scowling like a pirate, he opened his doctor's kit, and issued gruff orders to Nahnya. The sun came out in her face; she said not a word, but flew to do his bidding.

Admirable was her capability and her deftness. In no time at all the frightened old woman was made comfortable on a deep bed of spruce boughs, with splints, bandages and hot water waiting.

When it was all over and the old woman began to come safely out of the ether, weeping copiously, but vastly relieved in mind, Ralph repacked his satchel viciously.

When his purely professional absorption was no longer called for, he ran up the flag of resentment again.

Nahnya had said nothing. Once, when the danger point was passed, she had leaned across the patient and squeezed his hand, but he had quickly pulled it away. Her eyes followed him expressing a passion of humble gratitude.

It infuriated him; why, he could scarcely have told; perhaps because it was so clear that it was only gratitude, and not the other kind of passion that he was hungry to see there. At any rate, he could not support the look.

Snapping the valise shut and tossing it to one side, he strode away leaving the patient to Nahnya.

"It's done," he thought bitterly. "And she's done with me. A lot she cares what I'm suffering. She sacrificed me without a qualm to the old woman.

"Now she's cured, I can go back, and be hanged to me, I suppose. Well, I don't mean to be fobbed off so easily. I've done my part, and I'm a free agent. I won't leave here till I've unwound every thread of the silly mystery she entangles herself in."

By and by the old woman fell into a natural sleep, and Ralph was free to leave her. He lit his pipe and wandered off the faintly marked trail.

In the perpetual twilight of their camp one got the feeling that this forest rolled on forever, but Ralph had not gone above three hundred yards before he unexpectedly came to one of its boundaries.

To the left of the trail it ended at the base of a mighty precipice of naked gray rock. Standing at the edge of the trees and looking right and left, the height of rock extended as far as he could see. Looking up, it was too beetling for him to see its summit.

Continuing upon the trail a little way farther, he came to the edge of

a gulch, where he could obtain a wider prospect. Looking up now, he had dizzying, foreshortened glimpses of peaks and domes of rock, with a distant view over all of the supreme summit shaped like a gigantic thumb of rock sticking up out of fields of snow, gilded and dazzling in the sunshine and incredibly far-flung.

It was a stirring experience thus to be brought without warning into the immediate presence of such a god. Ralph gazed, forgetting his private despite against Fortune.

At his feet the gulch came down from the left along the base of the unscalable heights.

A trickle of water ran musically in the bottom of it and was borne off to the right to join the larger stream, beside which they had ascended from the river. The trail crossed the gulch and disappeared within the forest on the other side.

The forest skirted the edge of the gulch and swept on up, concealing all on that side.

Ralph's only view was therefore up the gulch. The floor of it was heaped with broken masses of rock and fallen trees. As he looked, thinking of nothing but the wild beauty of the scene, suddenly his jaw dropped and he dashed a hand across his eyes to make sure they were not tricking him.

For out of a little tangle of living and dead trees at the base of the cliff, about a furlong from him, issued the figure of a man.

It was Charley. One would have said the boy had issued out of the cliff itself.

CHAPTER VII.

Bowl of the Mountains.

RALPH instinctively fell back among the trees. He had not been seen. Charley was unconcernedly picking his way down over the stones.

Drawing back from the trail, Ralph concealed himself until he heard Charley pass on his way to camp. He then clambered down into the gulch and made his way as fast as he could over the obstructions to the spot where the boy had so surprisingly come into view. Ralph suspected that an alarm would be raised for him as soon as Charley got back to camp.

The place he was making for was in a slight angle of the gulch, and the driftwood was piled in a wild tangle there.

Climbing over the fallen trees as he had seen Charley climb down, Ralph came to a little niche of earth that provided a precarious living to three stunted pines and a few berry-bushes, the whole making a natural screen against the cliffs. Pushing through it, he found himself looking into a hole in the rock at his feet.

Starting back, he gaped at it a little stupidly. He did not know what he had expected to find—not a hole in the rock! For a moment he doubted the evidence of his senses; it seemed too preposterous.

Weird ideas took half shape in his brain and floated away while he stared in the hole.

Was it possible they were of another race? Creatures existing in the bowels of the earth without sunlight or the stir of air?

Why, after traveling hundreds of miles from the world of men, was there any need of burying oneself any deeper?

Was it the possession of some ghastly secret that made Nahnya's face always wistful? What did it conceal, that hole—a hideous crime, disgrace unimagined, or a treasure?

The opening was about two feet across. Buttressed by the fallen trees below and screened by the living ones, it was shrewdly hidden. Ralph wondered by what chance it had been first discovered. He lighted a match and dropped it in.

It burned until it struck the bottom. It was about fifteen feet deep.

There was the trunk of a young pine standing upright within it, reaching to within a foot of the top.

Obviously this was used to climb in and out by.

It was like an invitation to enter, but Ralph hesitated. Notwithstanding the reassuring light of day and the solid earth of rocks and trees, the feeling of something uncanny, something more than natural, would not quiet down.

When he laughed this away there remained very human fears.

"Who knows what may be down there?" he thought. "And what kind of a reception will I receive?" Finally there were compunctions of delicacy.

"It's hardly fair to break in on their secrets behind their backs," he thought. Recollection of his own injuries wiped this out. "They weren't so careful of my feelings," he told himself.

In the end, perhaps because he was afraid, Ralph was obliged to descend. As he would have put it, he could not take a dare from himself. Swinging his legs over the edge, he felt for the top branch of the pine tree.

At the bottom of the hole he struck another match. There were several pine-knot torches lying at his feet. Picking up the longest, he lighted it.

He was in a narrow cleft in the rock extending obliquely and downward into the mountain. It was necessary to recline partly on his back and inch himself along, holding the sputtering torch at arm's length before him. It was an awkward posture in which to meet danger. But if Charley could come through he could, he thought.

After only a few yards of this he issued suddenly into a much larger chamber, where he was able to stand firmly on his feet.

It was a kind of spacious corridor running off to the right and left and floored with pebbles and sand. Manifestly a stream had once flowed over it, but at present the floor was dry.

The thrilling impressions of a cave brought Ralph's boyhood winging back to him.

Thinking of grizzly bears and mountain lions none too comfortably, he was unarmed, he sniffed the air delicately. There was no suggestion of animal effluvium. Anyway, Charley had just passed through.

The torch made an extraordinary dancing light on the walls of the rock, reminding him of a certain flaring gaslight in the cellar at home. The cave was not like a tunnel with arching roof, as he had always imagined caves, but was still a fissure in the rock, both sides leaning obliquely in the same direction.

Overhead the split gradually narrowed; the light of his torch did not penetrate to the top of it.

Ralph was faced by the choice of turning right or left in the corridor. He lowered the torch to look for footsteps. In the patches of sand they were plainly discernible, many of them almost a beaten path leading off to the right.

Besides Charley's, Ralph readily distinguished the prints of Nahnya's small, straight feet, and another foot, evidently her mother's.

The sight of all these footsteps had the effect of allaying Ralph's fears and of strongly stimulating his excitement. Up to this moment he had kept in view the possibility that this cave might be a private affair of Charley's.

Now he could no longer doubt that Nahnya's secret, whatever it was, lay at the end of this path.

He followed it, feeling himself on the brink of an amazing discovery. Nothing could have turned him back now. "With all her pains to keep me in the dark, I have been a little too clever for her!" he thought vainGloriously.

Sometimes the corridor was ten feet wide, sometimes it narrowed down to four. The air had that extraordinary dead quality only to be found in deep caves; but it was quite pure, because

the torch burned clearly. The stillness pressed on his ear-drums.

The quietest room; the quietest night out of doors was vibrant and musical by comparison. His own breathing sounded hoarse and labored in his ears.

Holding the torch high over his head, he made his way swiftly over the smooth floor, wrought up to the highest possible pitch.

Rounding a corner of the rock, the flickering light fell on a human figure standing motionless before him. He stopped short with a horrid shock of fright.

The torch dropped from his nerveless hand and was extinguished.

He slowly screwed down the clamps of self-control and, schooling his voice, hailed the creature. The sound shattered the dark stillness with an incredible, unnatural ring. The sound of his own voice in that place terrified him. The silence that followed upon it was terrible.

There was no answer.

Very slowly he forced himself to pick up the torch, to light a match, and to ignite it again. He held it aloft. The figure was still there, motionless. Ralph went forward very gingerly, and saw that it was not human, after all, but merely a kind of scarecrow; a stick planted in the sand with a crosspiece on which was hung a coat and hat.

Evidently some of Charley's work, placed there for what purpose Ralph could not conceive. He sat down, wiped his face, and allowed his shaking nerves to quiet down.

Proceeding, he heard a murmur which later resolved itself into the sound of running water. Ralph wondered uneasily if there were times when a torrent swept between these rocky walls; he pictured himself swept helplessly upon it, and his skin prickled.

In such a place he would not have been surprised by anything. The scarecrow reassured him partly.

Plainly it had been set up to stand more than an hour or two. Keeping on, he satisfied himself that the water was not coming toward him. The sound increased only in the ratio of his progress toward it.

Soon it was close ahead, not a loud sound; but the musical voice of a rapid, smooth stream. Holding the torch high, its light was reflected in pale gleams up the corridor. The water was coming straight toward him, to be suddenly and mysteriously diverted.

A few steps farther and he had the explanation.

A yawning hole in the floor of the cave received the stream entire without a sound. It simply slipped over the lip of rock and ceased to be.

The absence of any sound of a fall below was uncanny.

Ralph tossed a little stone in the hole—and heard nothing. Not until he lay at full length and stuck his head over the edge of the chasm could he hear above the soft hiss of the descending water the distant, muffled crash of its fall.

The height suggested by the sound staggered the senses. Ralph received a new and awful conception of the goodly old phrase—the bowels of the earth.

At one side two logs made a rough bridge over the gap.

Ralph continued his way beside the stream, crossing from side to side, and, upon occasions when it filled the whole floor, he was forced to wade. Here there was a faint stir to the air, a hint of freshness, and he instinctively began to look for daylight ahead.

Finally he saw it far off, a crooked exclamation-point of white.

He hastened toward it, feeling an unbounded relief. He had been prepared to face—he did not know what—some shape of mystery or terror in the darkness. And here was honest daylight.

An insupportable curiosity filled him, forcing him to run and to leap as

if but a minute or two of daylight remained.

Arrived in the opening, he flung the remains of his torch in the water. The blessed bright sky was over his head once more. Until he saw it he did not realize how heavily he had been oppressed by underground terrors.

At first nothing else was visible to him but the sky and terraces of rock on either side between which the little stream came tumbling down into the hole.

Ralph went up over the rocks like an ape. At the top there was lush-green grass starred with flowers. Trees below still obstructed his view.

He ran on up the slope of grass until the whole prospect opened to his eye. There he flung himself down to gaze his fill.

He was not disappointed. It surpassed his brightest imaginings. The first glimpse amply repaid him for the trip underground.

It was lovelier than any sight he had ever beheld—lovelier than any scene he had visited in his dreams. It was itself, and it was new. The artist in him experienced the rich, rare satisfaction of beholding a perfect thing.

He had to enlarge his conception of beauty to take it in.

It was a valley hemmed all round by craggy mountains, running up to towering, sharp peaks. The mountains held his eye for a while; it was his first unobstructed view of earth's mountains in their majesty.

They rose, fantastic, overpowering shapes of gray rock with mantles of snow upon their shoulders and bared heads, each as distinct in individuality as an old king. The grandeur of the company set off in poignant contrast the tender loveliness they guarded below.

It was well guarded; there was no break in the armed ranks to let in discord from the world.

Below the scene was drunk with strong color. The middle of the valley was filled for half its length with an exquisite sheet of water, curving away as gracefully as a girl's waist.

Its water was of an unreasonable richness of hue that held Ralph's eyes like a charm; neither sapphire nor emerald, but partaking of both.

That part of the valley nearest him was like a park—like a dream-park.

The trees, aspens, and white-stemmed birches were set out in clumps in the riotous grass. Farther up the valley rolled a thick forest. Everywhere there were flowers. The blue-bells growing under his hands were as big as thimbles and blue as lazulite. Everything growing—birch-trees, flowers, and grass—flaunted itself with a particular vigor and richness, as if the valley were nature's own nursery where she perfected her specimens.

The scene was not all nature's.

Off to the left, about half a mile from where Ralph lay, he saw three teepees topping a little rise of grass beside the lake. A column of thin smoke rose above them. Three canoes lay on the shore below.

It did not make a discordant note in the scene; the teepees rose from the grass as naturally as trees. Ralph gazed at them with strong curiosity. He saw, or imagined he saw, figures moving in front of them.

The whole scene touched a chord in Ralph's memory; where had he heard of such a secret valley—such a blue-green lake?

So this was Nahnya's secret! He was compelled to readjust his ideas of her again. His dark thoughts at the mouth of the cave seemed foolish to him now.

This, her place, was characteristic of the best in her. Nahnya was worthy of her lovely valley. But why was she so passionately bent on keeping him out of her paradise?

This thought raised all his torturing doubts again. He determined to find out what the teepees concealed.

Descending the slope and crossing the stream, he made his way around through the flowery grass. Never had he seen such wild flowers—blue-bells, wild roses, painter's-brush — besides the thickly blossoming berry-bushes, and many a flower he could not name.

The trees, growing singly or in small groups, reached the perfection of their kind.

It was too beautiful to seem quite real; Ralph, passing among the snowy trunks in his sober habit, felt a little out of place, like a mortal who had strayed into a fairy tale.

He crossed another little stream, bringing its quota from the mountains to the lake. Where it emptied into the lake at his right it spread out into a miniature delta.

Ralph, attracted by the sight of some implements lying in the grass beside the water, went to investigate. He found a shovel, a large, shallow bowl, and a smaller bowl all roughly fashioned out of cottonwood.

As he looked into the last-named article, Ralph caught his breath in astonishment.

It was half full of gold. No mistaking those clean, yellow grains! Ralph had not fallen a victim to the gold mania of the north; he held the bright metal as lightly as any man, nevertheless his breath quickened and his eyes grew big at the sight of so much in so little.

He dug his hands into it and let the stuff run through his fingers. There was enough here to buy the Tewkesbury outright, or to buy a whole string of the best ponies in the country, or to carry a man around the whole world spending royally.

Ralph wondered if ever before gold had been left like this unguarded under the sky. He moved the bowl a little, and saw that the grass was white beneath.

Evidently it had lain there many days. Gold must indeed be plentiful in this valley, or lightly regarded. Dimly in his mind rose the vision of a happier world where gold was despised like this.

Leaving it where it lay, he went on.

Descending into a wooded hollow the teepees were hidden from him for a while.

Climbing a little rise finally, he found himself unexpectedly almost on top of the camp.

Nearest him a ripe and comely Indian girl was stirring a pot over the fire.

Beside her on a blanket in the sun sprawled a flourishing naked infant. At sight of Ralph a piteous gasp hissed between the mother's teeth. Her eyes protruded with terror; she caught the baby tragically to her breast and cowered over it.

It uttered a piercing cry.

Beyond the woman an old man squatted on the ground mending a bow. He looked up, and his face, too, froze into a mask of terror. Two half-grown boys came running from the beach and stood transfixed. The frightened faces of two girls stuck out of a teepee opening.

Ralph was much embarrassed by the suddenness of the effect he created. Never having looked upon himself as an object to inspire terror, their attitudes could not but seem far-fetched and ridiculous to him.

He stood as much at a loss as they.

Finally the old man, after a visible struggle with himself, arose and approached Ralph. His features were stiff with anxiety, and his old eyes fixed in a kind of glare.

It was evident from his manner that he considered himself bound to show an example to the boys. Not without dignity he held out a trembling hand to Ralph.

"How?" he said.

"You speak English?" said Ralph eagerly.

"Little bit," the old man said, shaping the words with difficulty. "I no see white man, two, three winter. I forget, me."

Having said it he waited with a

courteous air for Ralph to speak again. Only deep in his eyes could be seen the working of his harrowing anxiety.

"I am friendly," Ralph said quickly. "I won't hurt anybody."

The old man shrugged deprecatingly. "Not afraid of hurt," he said. He paused, searching for English words to convey what he wished.

"We alone here long time," he said. "Forget strangers. Stranger comes—wah! It is lak sun fall down from the sky!"

Ralph began to understand the effect of his sudden appearance.

"For what you come here?" the old man asked.

Ralph was nonplused. "Why—why just to see the place," he said lamely.

The old man bowed. His manners were beautiful; the kind of manners, Ralph dimly apprehended, that come only from real goodness of heart. He had never been a big man, and now he was bent and shaky, yet he had dignity.

The manifold fine wrinkles of kindliness were about his eyes. He was clad in an old capote made out of a blanket. Around his forehead he wore a black band to keep the straggling gray locks out of his face.

"How you come here?" he asked.

"Through the cave under the mountains," Ralph answered.

"You are the white doctor!" the old man suddenly exclaimed with a look of extraordinary anxiety.

"I am," said Ralph.

The old man's head dropped on his breast, and a little sound of distress escaped him. He murmured in his own tongue.

"What's the matter?" cried Ralph irritated. "Why shouldn't I come here if I want to take a walk? Do you think I'll bring a plague with me?"

The old man raised an inscrutable, sad face. He shrugged. "I not talk," he said. "Got no good words, me. Nahnya will talk. Nahnya is the chief here. She come soon I think."

"What does it all mean, anyway?" cried Ralph.

"Will you eat?" inquired the old man with his courteous, reticent air. "I sorry I forget before. We have moose-meat."

Ralph was conscious of receiving a rebuke.

"I'm not hungry," he muttered, turning away.

His imperious curiosity soon brought him back. The old man stood as he had left him. "Has this place got a name?" asked Ralph.

"Call Mountain Bowl," was the answer.

A great light broke on Ralph. He stared at the Indian with widening eyes. Wes' Trickett's story came rushing back to him. The cave under the mountain, the blue-green lake, the gold beside the little stream!

Bowl of the Mountains, of course!

So it was true after all, and he had found it! He looked over the lake with shining eyes.

"Nahnya come," the old man said quietly.

Ralph whirled about in time to see her come flying up the slope, panting, disheveled, wildly agitated, a flaming color in her cheeks. At the sight of Ralph she stopped dead, and her hands fell to her sides.

She paled.

She did not speak, but only bent an unfathomable look on him. Indignation, reproach, and pain were all a part of it, and a kind of hopeless, sad fatalism. It accused him more eloquently than a torrent of invective could have done. He became exquisitely uncomfortable.

"Well, here I am!" he said, trying to carry it off with a touch of bravado.

Still she did not speak. With her mournful, accusing eyes fixed on him, she flung up her arms, palms to the skies, and let them fall.

"So be it!" the action said. Turn-

ing abruptly, she walked to the edge of the bank and sat down in the grass.

CHAPTER VIII.

In the Valley.

RALPH, without knowing exactly how it had been brought about, was sensible that he had produced a calamity. Penitence and shame overwhelmed him.

He felt like one who has inadvertently killed something beautiful and defenseless. With too much feeling he was dumb. He could only stand off and watch her wretchedly and reproach himself.

But the spectacle of Nahnya's still despair became more than he could bear, at last, and he went to her where she sat on the bank.

"Nahnya, what is the matter?" he begged to know. "What have I done?"

"Nothing," she said dully. "You not mean bad."

"Then why are you sitting like this? Why did you look at me so when you came?"

"I feel bad," she said simply. "You are here. I not know what will happen now."

"What can happen?" he cried, mystified. "Why shouldn't I come here? Why can't you trust me?"

"Trust!" she said with an inexplicable look. "What is trust? You mean good, I think. You are a white man. You can't change that. How can you stop what will happen anyway?"

"You talk in riddles!" cried the exasperated Ralph. "If you'd been plain and open with me from the first wouldn't it have saved all this trouble? Why can't you tell me what it is?"

Nahnya twisted her hands painfully together. The quiet voice began to break. "I can't talk," she murmured. "I feel much bad. I have got no right words to tell you."

"Do you want me to go back?" he asked.

She shook her head. "You have found the place," she said. "What does it matter when you go? Stay here. By and by I try to tell you what is in my heart."

"But your mother," said Ralph. "I must go back and see to her."

"Charley and I carry her through the mountain," Nahnya answered. "They are waiting back there. I will send the boys to help Charley carry her here." She raised her voice. "Jean Bateese!"

The old man hastened to them. Nahnya gave him an order in Cree. Continuing in English, she said:

"The doctor will stay with us tonight. He is our friend. Make everything for his comfort."

Her unaffected magnanimity, after he had so grievously injured her, touched Ralph to the quick, and covered him afresh with shame.

"Nahnya, I'm so sorry!" he burst out impulsively.

She got up without answering and walked down to the lake shore. Lifting one of the birch-bark canoes into the water, she got in and headed her craft up the lake, paddling with her own grace and assurance.

"Where is she going?" asked Ralph jealously.

The old man spread out his palms deprecatingly.

"I do not ask," he said. "She moch lak to go alone. She is not the same as us." Whenever Jean Bateese referred to Nahnya it was with the unquestioning air that an ancient Egyptian might have said: "Cleopatra wills it."

He led Ralph back to the fire.

The three teepees stood in a row parallel with the lake shore. Between them were summer shelters of leaves, so that the women could do their household tasks out of doors. Their winter gear, sledges, furs, and snowshoes were slung up on poles out of harm's way.

There were racks for smoking meat and fish, and frames for tanning hides, all carefully disposed to be out of the way. The view from the little esplanade of grass in front was superb.

The two boys were standing near, rigid with astonishment and curiosity. They were a comely pair, sixteen or seventeen years old, with bold, handsome faces that became sullen with shyness at Ralph's approach.

Each was naked to the waist and lean as a panther, with a coppery skin that shone in the sun and muscles that crawled subtly beneath as if endowed with separate life.

They wore buckskin trousers and moccasins embroidered with dyed porcupine quills; their inky hair grew to their shoulders, and each wore a thong about his forehead to confine it.

Here the resemblance ended.

He who stood a foot in advance was the taller. He had thin features and an aquiline glance. In the band around his head, unconsciously true to his type, he had stuck an eagle's feather.

"This Ahmek, Marya's son, the brother of Nahnya," said St. Jean Bateese.

The other boy, while an inch or two shorter, was broader in the shoulders. His face was flat, with high cheekbones and narrow eyes.

"This Myengeen, my son." The old man spoke a word in Cree, and each boy put forth a bashful hand.

Ralph could not remember their uncouth names. The taller boy he thought of afterward as Cæsar; the other as Ching.

St. Jean transmitted Nahnya's order to them, and the two departed in the direction of the cave.

Ralph, notwithstanding his distress on Nahnya's account, could not but be keenly interested in the life of the strange little community that she ruled.

Since she withheld the explanation of her unhappiness, he listened eagerly to St. Jean's gossip, and questioned him, hoping to discover a clue there. Though St. Jean had shared in Nahnya's dismay at the white man's coming, he had pride and pleasure in exhibiting their work.

Moreover, Nahnya had commanded him to do the honors. Courtesy was this old savage gentleman's ruling force.

"Him good boys," St. Jean said, looking after them proudly. The old man's English gradually came back to him at his need. "I teach him all my fat'er teach me, long tam ago. I teach him to be pain and 'onger and cold, and say not'ing. I teach him mak' canoe. I teach him shoot with the bow."

"Have you no guns?" asked Ralph.

"Our fat'ers got no guns long ago," answered the old man. "Nahnya say bang-bang drive every beast out of our valley. Him not any scare of arrows. We kill sheep and goat on the mountains with arrows. We kill caribou with arrows. My boys good hunters."

"Are there caribou in this little valley?" Ralph asked, surprised.

"N'moya," said St. Jean, shaking his head. "Over the pass up there"—he pointed to the north—"there is another valley. When the first snow come we travel there to kill for winter. Nahnya say we kill only bulls, and him never get scarce."

The simple old man worshiped at two shrines. "Our fat'ers do that," was continually on his lips; or, "Nahnya say so."

If Ralph had been a long-desired guest instead of what he was, an intruder, St. Jean could scarcely have done more. He made Ralph sit on a blanket, and brought him a new pair of moccasins. He commanded the young woman to bring food.

This was Charley's woman, he explained; her name, Ahahweh. The baby was the first native of the valley; the first of the strong race they meant to establish.

"Don't the boys ever want to get out of the valley?" Ralph asked curiously.

St. Jean shook his head.

"N'moya. Him not white men. Him not want what him not see. Him happy enough for good hunting and plenty meat. Pretty soon him take a woman and build lodge."

"Wives?" said Ralph. "Where will you get them?"

"They are here," said St. Jean. "Marya's son will take my girl. My son take Marya's girl. Marya teach the girls all woman's work, lak our people long tam ago. They are good workers."

Ralph remembered the two scared young faces he had seen looking from the tepee. "Suppose the boys are not pleased with the girls you have chosen for them?" he asked.

St. Jean looked at him surprised as by a foolish question. "There are no more girls," he said.

"How long have you been here?" Ralph asked.

"Two summers."

"How about you? Wouldn't you like to see the world again?"

Jean Bateese shook his head.

"I am old," he said. "I have seen everything. I have traveled as far as the Landing. I have seen too moch white man." Here feeling that he had been impolite, he hastened to add deprecatingly:

"White man good for white man. White man moch bad for red man. Nahnya say so. She is not lak other women. She is more wise than a man."

Ralph had the feeling that he was listening to wisdom from its source.

Jean Bateese waved his hand over the lovely scene before them, and his old eyes grew soft. "This our good hunting-ground," he said. "My boys good hunters. Him get good wife. Him have many good fat babies. Him live same lak red man live long tam ago. Him forget white man. It is best."

As Ralph listened the white man's world of artifice and oppression, the world of teeming, disease-ridden cities, the world of place-seeking and money-grubbing, seemed like a nightmare to him.

He felt as if he were being shown a glimpse of the essential truths of our being. As St. Jean had said in his own way, Nature was best.

Charley's wife, the blooming young Ahahweh, served him his dinner in an agony of bashfulness. The meal consisted of a stew of goat's flesh and rice. Ralph found it good.

"Rice?" he said questioningly.

"Wild rice," said Jean Bateese. "Him grow around the lake more than we can eat. We eat nothing from the white man's store only tea. The tea is near gone. I will miss it," he said with a sigh. "But our fat'ers not drink tea," he added stoutly.

Before Ralph was through eating the two boys came into camp bearing his patient on the litter. Examining her, he found that she did not appear to have taken any hurt from her journey.

Charley, St. Jean Bateese explained, had gone back through the cave to fetch the rest of their belongings from the camp in the woods.

An hour passed, and there was still no sign of Nahnya's return. Ralph became more and more uneasy. St. Jean assured him that it was frequently Nahnya's custom to paddle away by herself, and that they never sought to question her or to follow.

Meanwhile the old man relaxed none of his efforts to entertain Ralph.

He put his pupils through their paces. There was a foot-race in the grass, which Ching won to everybody's surprise, and the chagrined Cæsar was forced to yield up a brass clock-wheel that he wore around his neck.

A race between the two canoes across the lake and back followed.

This time Cæsar redeemed himself. The lithe young creatures were wholly beautiful in action. Afterward they

were sent into the woods with their bows and arrows.

By and by Cæsar returned with a brace of rabbits, and Ching brought in a fat porcupine. Ching was held to have won.

"Rabbit him no good meat," St. Jean said. "Man eat rabbit till him can't swallow no more and stay poor."

St. Jean was like a fountain of humble philosophy. Like all philosophers, he frankly rejoiced in a good listener. Ralph was strongly drawn to the gentle, garrulous old man. St. Jean was a real individual.

He had lived a real life, and stored a real wisdom from it. This natural life as Ralph saw it lived before him, and as St. Jean interpreted it to him, satisfied a deep desire in him.

This was what he had always been looking for. Nevertheless, as he listened his heaviness increased. He could not deny the sad conviction that it was not for him. He was like an old man envying youth.

He could not go back. He was an interloper here. He began to understand why Nahnya had been so distressed by his coming. He waited for her return anxiously, but without much hope.

She returned in time for the evening meal. He experienced an immense relief to see her safe. Her face was now composed and inscrutable. She made no overtures toward Ralph.

Ralph's meal was served in state apart—baked porcupine and rice-cakes. He would have much preferred to join the others, but this was their politeness. None would start eating until he had begun.

Afterward they all gathered in a circle about the camp-fire.

Even old Marya was carried out of the teepee to take a place. Nahnya sat between her mother and Jean Bateese, and kept her eyes in cover. Ralph sat on the other side of St. Jean Bateese. From across the fire five pairs of beady black eyes stared at the white man with a savage, unwinking fixity.

The baby was asleep, and Charley's curiosity was satisfied.

St. Jean Bateese told a story. The words were lost on Ralph, but the quaint and speaking gestures were illuminative. Afterward, in his politeness, St. Jean insisted on repeating the whole tale in English.

"It is said once ver' long tam ago," he began, "when it was winter; when it was snow for the first tam; when the snow still lie on the ground, three men go out hunting early in the morning.

"Come to a place on the side of a hill where there is moch thick, low scrub. And a bear is gone in there. Them see his tracks, wah! One man go in after him and start bear running.

"Man call out: 'Him gone to the place where snow comes from!'—what you say north.

"Other man him already gone round to place where cold comes from. Him call: 'Bear gone back fast where comes the noon shadow!'—what you say south. Other man him already gone by side where noon shadow comes from, him call: 'Bear going quick to the place where the sun fall down!' him call.

"So this way and that way long tam they keep the bear running from one to other. Bam-by the story says one man that come behind, him look down and see the world far, far down, wah!

"Wah! and it was green! It is the truth that bear him bring them right up into the sky, all tam in that place of thick scrub they think they chase him.

"The man that come behind him call to other man next before him: 'O Joining-of-Rivers, we must turn back. Truly into the sky he lead us!' he say to Joining-of-Rivers. Him say not'ing back again.

"Joining-of-Rivers him run between the front man and the back man, and him have his little dog call 'Hold-Tight' run along behind him.

"Bam-by in the time of leaves falling they catch him bear. They kill him. After they kill him they cut many boughs of poplar and much sumac. They throw the bear on the boughs, and skin him and cut up meat.

"Always when the summer goes the poplars and the sumac redden in the leaf. Why is that? Because they put the bear on top the boughs, and all the leaves are stained with blood. That is why the poplar and the sumac turn red after summer.

"After those three men skin that bear and cut up meat they throw what is left all around. To place where light first comes in the morning they throw the head. In the winter when the light is near coming there are stars there.

"They say it is the bear's head. His backbone they throw to the east also. In the winter ver' often you see stars there close together. It is that backbone!"

St. Jean paused and cast a look around the circle to gather all eyes for the climax of his tale. Though they could not understand these words, they knew what was coming and hung upon the event attentively.

Suddenly the old man pointed dramatically to the east.

"See!" he cried. "They are coming now, the stars of that hunt! There are four stars in front. They say that is the bear! And the three that come behind is the three men that chase him. Now look hard with your young eyes. Between the middle star and the behind star you see a tiny little star hanging there?"

All the boys and girls looked hard at Ralph.

"I see it," he said, perceiving that it was expected of him.

"That is little Hold-Tight, the pet of Joining-of-Rivers," said Jean Bateese triumphantly. "That is the end of the story."

Exclamations of high satisfaction were heard around the fire. Clearly these tales never palled.

To work and to hunt all day and to tell poetic tales around the fire—what a complete life! Ralph thought. He glanced at Nahmya, seeking to let her know that he was not alien to her life. Her expression dismayed him. Never had he seen such sadness in a woman's face.

Cæsar spoke up from his side of the fire. "Him say him tell story now," said St. Jean Bateese. And the boy went on with fire in his eye and shrewd gesticulation imitated from his master, St. Jean translated *sotto voce* for Ralph.

"Little Spider happened to be traveling along alone in a certain place, they say. He go alone through the forest eating. Him come to a river and stand on the edge. Him want to go across very bad, but there is no way.

"They say Spider say: 'Here I stand all tam thinking, Oh! how I want sit on the other side!' Then something big come swimming up against the current. But only his long horns are showing. Spider say again: 'Here I sit all tam thinking, Oh! how I want to sit on the other side!'

"Then the beast with long horns, him stop there and say to him: 'Ho! friend! I will take you across this water, but you mus' do something for me.'

"Spider say: 'Come, my young brother, I all tam do what you tell me.'

"So he say to him: 'I all tam swim in the water with my head not out. So you mus' sit and watch for me.' Then he say: 'Yes.' So he say: 'When one small cloud comes tell me. Then I will double up and go back to deep water.'

"Then Spider say: 'Wah! my young brother, what will I do when you double up and go back to deep water?'

"Long-Horn say: 'When you tell me and I double up and run away, you will fall beside the shore. When you say to me your grandfather is coming, that means the thunders roar.'

"So Spider was going along in the water, sitting on the horn. When he was going along in the water near the other shore black clouds came. So Spider say: 'Wah, my young brother, your grandfather is coming!'

"*Wah! Wah!* Towasasuak! All around the water is jump and roar and go white! And where Spider goes he not remember at all. Long tam he not remember nothing. By and by when him get his sense back he is lying half on the land and half in the water. Him look and all the water is muddy, and him not see this thing with long horns any more, and he hear thunders roaring.

"After that they say Spider travel like anybody else. Ahmek remembers only this far."

The group around the fire broke up without Ralph's having had a chance to get into communication with Nahnya. She baffled every attempt he made. When he saw her leading her mother into the teepee his heart went down like a stone, thinking he would not see her again until morning.

"Nahnya!" he cried. "Aren't you going to speak to me? You promised!"

She turned with her inscrutable face. "I am coming back," she said. "Wait for me." She paused for an instant and added: "St. Jean, you stay up, too. We three will talk."

Ralph angrily bit his lip. So it appeared she was still bent on keeping him at arm's length.

He wanted no third at their talk.

CHAPTER IX.

Nahnya's Story.

ST. JEAN BATEESE, Nahnya, and Ralph sat by the fire. The flames threw strong, changeable lights up into the three unlike faces; the first ashy brown, the second ruddy brown, and the third ruddy white. The fire held each pair of eyes steadily; it was too disconcerting to look at each other.

Nahnya, in the middle, sat on her heels, with her head a little lowered and her hands clasped loosely in her lap. Ralph was reminded, with a little pain at his heart, of a picture of Mary Magdalen that he had seen.

Throughout the telling of her long story she scarcely ever changed her position.

There was a long silence before anybody spoke. When it became oppressive St. Jean started to tell the story of the making of the world, but Nahnya silenced him.

"St. Jean," she said, "I have been thinking much what to do. Now I know. Often the doctor was angry against me because I did not tell him all about us. Now I will tell him. I think he is a good man. I think he is not so greedy for gold as other white men. I think when I tell him all he will go away and forget what he has seen."

It sounded like a death-warrant to Ralph.

"Nahnya—" he began.

"Wait till I have told you," she said.

She was silent for a space, looking down at her hands and searching, it would seem, for the right words to begin. She told her story in a low-pitched, toneless voice that, concealing all, suggested all.

When in certain parts of the story her voice threatened to shake; she paused until she could control it. Nahnya had no fine English phrases; therein lay the power of her talk; its bare crudeness went deeper than pathos.

"When I was a little girl," she began, "I go to the mission school at Cariboo Lake. The nun's school. I am there four winters.

"They teach me to speak English and French; to read and write and number; to sew and cook and keep house like white people. I am the smartest girl in the school, they say. I like to learn in books; the other children hate books.

"When visitors come the nuns send me to say my lessons in the parlor. I not like the other girls. They stupid and foolish, I think. They not like me, either. I different from them.

"At Gariboo Lake are plenty white people. I like them. I like how white people live with nice things and nice ways. I like to sit in a chair to my meals and have a white cloth on the table and china dishes. All the time I think of the white people, their own country outside. I am crazy to go there and see all that is to be seen.

"There was a boy at that school two years more older than me. He is half white like me. He does not like books, but I look at him and I know he feels the same like me inside. I would like to be friends with him. But the nuns do not let the boys and the girls speak together.

"But I look at him and he look at me, and at night when all are asleep I go out of the dormitory as soft as a lynx, and he is wait for me in the vegetable garden. We talk together. He is like my brother. He tell me he is going to run away from that school and go outside. I feel bad. I want to go, too.

"When I come back in the house a nun wake up and catch me. They make awful trouble. They say I bad girl. They lock me up and give me only bread and water.

"I am mad because they call me bad and look sour at me. Because I think before that they did love me. I know I am not bad, but I will not say anything. They say I am hardened. I am not hard. I am soft. All the time when I am alone I cry. But I will not let them see me cry.

"Long time I am locked up. It is near spring when I am let out. The boy is gone from the school. I am changed. I hate that school now. I want to run away.

"I act very good now, so I get a chance to run away. The nuns say I am reformed, and they smile again. They not know what is inside me. By and by they begin to let me go out by myself. Because I am one of the biggest girls they send me to the store for tea and sugar.

"There is a white man in the French outfit store, and he is kind to me. He give me things for myself out of the store, and I think he is a good man. I tell him I want to go outside so bad, and he say he will take me when he goes in the summer.

"I am so glad I near crazy. I not think any bad, because he is an old man with gray hair, and he say he will take me to see his daughters that he got outside. Me, I am not yet sixteen years old.

"So when the ice go out of the lake and they say the first York boat will leave Grier's Point soon as it is light next morning, he tell me, and in the night I get out of my bed. There is a nun sleeping beside the door, but I crawl under all the beds like a weasel and I get out.

"All the way I run to Grier's Point. It is five miles. Soon it is day, and they push off the boat. I am so excite, I am *weh-ti-go,* crazy. But I am still.

"Soon I find I make a mistake. That white man is no good. He begin to act bad to me, and I am scare. There are many people going on the York boat, and with so many I am safe.

"I stay close by the English schoolmaster's wife and mind her baby, and he cannot get me. He is mad. We are on the York boat five days. When we get to the landing, when he is drinking in the hotel, I run away and hide in the woods.

"I walk to Prince George by myself. It is a hundred miles, they say. I beg a little food from the stopping-houses. I sleep in the deep woods because I am afraid of men. When I come to the town I am wood with all I see.

"So much noise and moving; so many people I don't know what to do. I feel bad because there is not any

place for me. And all the men look at me the same as that old white man on the York boat.

"Always I am hiding from them. I think there is something the matter with me. Maybe I am bad like the nuns say, and I not know it.

"I walk and walk in the streets. I am much hungry. By and by I get a job in a laundry. There are other red girls working there, and I think I am safe. They will tell me what to do. But they act bad to me because the boss talk and laugh with me and only curse them. The boss is like the other men, and soon I have to go without my pay.

"I get another job soon because I am strong. I get many jobs. I cannot count them. Always some white man he will not let me be, and I have to go. It is near three years that I am working in Prince George.

"There is no use telling it because it is always the same. By and by I am really hard inside like the nuns say. I do not care any more. I say to myself, What is the use of a life like this? It makes me no friends. I am only a hunted beast.

"And I say I will not run any more, but take what comes. It cannot be worse. But always I have to run when the time comes. It is something inside me that makes me run.

"At last there was a man who was worse than any of the others. He followed me from place to place and spoke bad against me, so that always I lost my job. He thought if he could starve me out I would go to him. I would sooner have jumped in the river. By and by I couldn't get any jobs in Prince George, and I go away.

"I am much sick of white men and white man's country. I think there is a curse on me that turns them into devils when they look at me. I often see they do not act so bad to their own women as to me. So I think I go back to my mot'er's people. Maybe there is a place for me there. Maybe I am most red myself.

"So I make a long, long journey. I come to my mot'er's people at last. It is no good. There is nobody glad to see me. They are poor and sick and bad. They not like me because I am scold them because they are so dirty and lazy and foolish.

"They live beside a company post on the big river. When I was a little girl it was far off, and we never see a white man but the trader; but now the steamboat run on the river and many white men are coming. They are surveyors measuring the land and farmers plowing it and growing wheat.

"It is much bad for the red people. The young white men come around the teepees and flirt with the girls and give whisky to the boys. Our girls and boys want to go with white men and dress fine and not work at all.

"The boys learn to steal and the girls are bad. The people live in houses with stoves to be warm, and they get the lung sickness. They try to be like white men and are nothing.

"My mot'er's husband is a bad man. He beat my mot'er and take a new wife. He hate me moch because he cannot look in my face. He speak bad of me to all the people. He is a chief man among those people and all believe him and hate me. So they do not want me there.

"I feel bad. I think I doubly cursed because I cannot stay in any place nowhere. Only St. Jean Bateese, he is my friend. He remember the good time when the red men were free hunters.

"He feel bad like me to see the people dirty and lazy and sick. He feel much bad to see his children growing up and only badness waiting for them. When all are sleeping in the teepees we talk much together.

"By and by we make a plan. We say we take his children and my mot'er and my mot'er's children, and we travel far from the white men, and we teach the children how to make live like our fathers lived without the white man and the white man's goods.

"My mot'er's husband, he not care if we go. He got a young wife now.

"All winter we are making ready, and when the ice go out in the spring we start up the river in three canoes. We travel many days on the big river. The weather is fine, and the children are happy to be traveling."

"One day Charley and I are hunting a bear on shore.

"He is wounded, and we follow him a long, long way up a mountain. He goes into a cave. We are much afraid to go after him, but we have followed far and there is no fresh meat, so we go in.

"We follow him under the mountain, and that is how we find this place. I am much glad when I see it. It is what we want. No white man will ever find us here, I say.

"Here is everything we need to live. We will live here and die here, and forget the white man. And me, I think then I have found happiness."

Nahnya came to a conclusion, and there was a silence by the fire.

"So that is why you wanted to keep me out," said Ralph very low.

"You are a white man," murmured Nahnya. "St. Jean and I have sworn to keep the children from the white men."

Ralph was moved to the bottom of his soul.

"Nahnya," he said in a low, shaken voice, "in all my life before I never made an oath. Hear me now. I swear to you by all I hold dear, by my honor, by my hope of heaven, that I will never do anything to bring unhappiness into this valley!"

"You mean good," she said. "I do not doubt you. But who can tell what will follow? I have a feeling of evil to come. Once I heard a wise man say: 'The white men are like a prairie fire and the red men are the grass. Who shall stop the fire from consuming the grass!"

At a certain point in the telling of this tale Ralph's intuition had warned him that something was left out; this feeling pursued him to the end. "Nahnya," he said presently, "you told me you had been in Winnipeg."

Her eyes darted a startled, pained glance on him, and her head fell a little lower.

"Never mind if it's too painful," Ralph said quickly.

"Yes," she said in the same dead, quiet voice, "I will tell you that too. That part I have never told. Not to St. Jean Bateese."

After a while she went on:

"When I couldn't get a job in Prince George any more it is not true that I come back to my mot'er's people right away. First I go to see my father.

"When things get so bad I think maybe my father will help me. My mother have tell me his name. I ask one and another, and by and by I find out he lives in Winnipeg. I have save a little money, and I go to Winnipeg on the railway. It is a big city.

"I have not been there at all before I learn my father is now a rich, great man, and the king has put a sir before his name. Then I am scare to see him.

"I do nothing to see him. I get a job. I get many jobs. I can take care of myself better in such a big city.

"One day in the street I hear a man say my father's name. 'That is he,' he said, and I look and I see my father. He is riding in a fine motor-car with his white wife and his white children. My heart beat fast to see him.

"He is a handsome, proud man, not very old yet. He was just a boy when he was in our country; my mot'er tell me so. A boy with yellow hair, who laugh all the time and play jokes, she say. Still he likes to laugh I see by the lines in his face.

"After I see him in his fine motor-car I am more scare. What does he want with a poor girl like me, I think, and I do nothing to see him. But all the time I read the newspapers to find out about him.

"Then I see there is going to be a big, what you call, political meeting, and my father is going to speak. So I go to the skating-rink on that night, and all the people look at me because there is no other red girl go to that political meeting.

"But I do not care. I am crazy to hear my father's voice. When he stand up to speak my heart knock in my breast like the stick-kettle when they dance.

"He speaks. It is beautiful. I do not understand it all, but I am happy because my father is a good, kind man who wishes good to all the poor people. Always he is working for the people, he says. His voice was as sweet and strong as an organ in church. When I hear him speak I know for sure he is my father, because I feel the same inside as him, but I cannot speak it.

"After that I think much I go to see him. I am afraid and I am not afraid. I think why should I be afraid; he is kind, he feels for poor people. I think maybe I go as a poor girl, and not tell him I am his daughter. At last I go.

"When I see his house I am scare again. It is as big as a hill. It has a hundred windows. Long time I walk outside the yard. 'You are a fool,' I say to me, 'you have done nothing against him; he will not be angry.'

"At last I go to the door. A man comes. He says my father is out and closes the door to me. As I am going down the steps my father comes in his motor-car. He ask me what I want. I say I want see him. He laugh and take me inside with him, into a room. It is like a dream. My legs are shaking.

"It is a beautiful room with high windows. All around the walls there are books with different-colored covers. There is a big desk, and he sit behind it, and lean back and pull off his gloves.

"He smile, showing his beautiful, white teeth, like my mot'er tell me, and he ask me again what I want. I am so scare I say the first thing I think. I ask him for a job.

"He is very kind. He say: 'Certainly we will find you work. What can you do?'

"I say I am a good laundress, or a cook, or a nurse. We talk some more. He is still kind. He ask me how long I been in Winnipeg, and where I work and all. But always I am too scare to say in that fine room: 'I am your daughter.'

"At last he say: 'Well, come back to-morrow, and I'll see what I can do.' Then I start to go, and he say: 'Wait a minute.' He get up and come around the desk, and then—"

She paused. Ralph's heart beat thickly with a horrible premonition of what was coming.

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.

FASHIONS FOR THE BEACH

By M. V. Caruthers

"MOTHER, may I go out to swim?"
"Of course not, foolish daughter!
That bathing-suit was never made
To wear *into* the water!"

Two kinds of bathing-suits there be
(So modern mothers teach),
One for the surf, while t'other's just
To show upon the beach!

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.

CHAPTER XIII.

Tactful Tactics.

THE girl stared with dilating eyes at the ardent, pleading, glowing face of the young man. She was dazed—bewildered.

Could it be possible that he was not her brother? Had her uncle indeed blinded her and Alvin Rance with his undoubted power of hypnotic suggestion?

Cameron did not wait for her to speak. Already intoxicated with his love for her, the sight of her beauty and distress and indecision was more than he could withstand.

"Grace—darling!" he cried, swept away by the sweet madness of his ardor. "I love you—I love you, darling! Say that you will marry me—that you'll be my wife!"

"Oh-h!" she murmured, and she reached out an uncertain hand, overcome with amazement and the wild conflict of her emotions.

He caught the outflung hand. The touch of it thrilled him to irresistible, blissful madness. A quick step forward and he had her in his arms. With resistless strength he crushed her to him and showered kisses upon her hair and eyes and half-parted lips.

She did not resist him. She seemed stunned. The suddenness and wild ardor of his wooing had overwhelmed

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for August 22.

her. She was disconcerted, confused, utterly dazed. Her wide eyes gazed up at his closely down-bent face as if fascinated by the passionate love and adoration that streamed from his eyes.

"Darling! my darling!" he murmured, his voice deep and sonorous with the masterful joy of possession. "You are mine! mine!"

Again he bent to kiss her. At the touch of his lips she quivered. The spell of her bewilderment was beginning to dissipate. She thrust up her hands, which she had instinctively clasped on her bosom when he caught her to him. The delicate finger-tips felt vaguely at the sides and back of her head, and the touch of the loose tresses quickened the reaction from her dazed fascination.

"My—my hair!" she gasped.

A blush of outraged maidenly modesty flamed across her face. With frantic strength she thrust herself from Cameron's arms and fled in headlong haste, her bright hair streaming, her lacy gown fluttering.

He sprang to overtake her.

"Wait! wait!" he implored. "I was mad! Forgive me!"

But she darted from the room like a terrified nymph. He followed, only to see her flash aslant the hall and into her own room. Her door crashed shut. There was a rattle as of tremulous fingers on a sliding bolt; then silence.

The young man stopped short in the middle of the hall, his face suddenly gone white. With a powerful exertion of will force he controlled the tumult of wild emotions that would have driven him to a fresh outburst.

After several moments he turned and walked quietly back into his room.

The first object he noticed was the girl's hair-brush lying on the floor where he had dropped it. He caught it up and pressed it eagerly to his lips. It was hers; it gave out the subtle indescribably delicious perfume of her hair.

He drew in a deep, ecstatic breath—

But he had no right to keep the precious prize. There must be nothing to embarrass her with the reminder that she had been in the room. He went out and back along the oblique hall, past the head of the rear stairway, to the open door of the bath-room. There he left the brush.

Whether or not owing to inability to sleep, Grace was the first astir in the morning. When, half an hour later, her door-knob noiselessly turned and a narrow crack appeared along the jamb, there followed a decided pause as if she were listening.

No sound came from the hall or the other rooms.

The girl slipped out and gently closed the door. She had on a neat, plain dress. Her hair was dressed as severely flat and tight as its abundance would permit, and was covered with a plain Dutch housewife's cap.

She stole back to the bath-room, intending to secure her tooth-brush and retreat down the rear stairs.

On the shelf beside it lay her hair-brush. She uttered a muffled little cry and reached out to grasp the brush as if half doubtful of its reality. Her fingers closed on the handle and instantly let go. She could not have drawn her hand away more suddenly had the handle been red-hot.

A deep blush confused her cheeks and her eyes burned with angry mortification.

Yet, as she stood panting with shame and indignation, the fact that he had brought the brush out of his room forced itself upon her consideration.

Of course he had done wrong! But he had begged to be forgiven, and he had been thoughtful enough not to leave the brush in his room. And it was true that from the very first he had disclaimed that he was her brother.

The look in the girl's eyes began to soften. Half unconsciously she took up the brush and fluffed the locks of

hair that were drawn so severely close over her pretty ears below the hem of her cap.

When, some time later, Cameron stepped from his room, Dr. Vidnor was just disappearing down the front stairs. The young man went to the bath-room to wash his face and hands.

His first glance showed him that Grace's brush was gone. His eyes glowed even as he flushed and bit his lip.

He hastened to complete his toilet and go down-stairs. Dr. Vidnor sat alone in the library, skimming the head-lines of a morning paper. Before Cameron had time to more than utter a rather stiff and formal good morning, Tillie, the elderly housemaid, came in to announce that breakfast was waiting.

As Cameron followed the physician his manner showed an odd mixture of diffidence and eagerness.

In the doorway he stopped for a moment to look at Grace. She was seated at the head of the table behind the bulwark of the coffee percolator.

She raised her eyes, with a fair show of composure, and calmly greeted her uncle. But as her gaze met Cameron's a rosy blush mantled her cheeks and forehead. Her eyelids fluttered and drooped; only to lift again in an effort to dart a disdainful glance.

He had flushed far redder than the girl. His look of shame and contrition instantly restored her composure.

"Good morning, Mr. Cameron," she said affably, favoring him with a gracious smile. "The seat on the left, please. I hope you slept well."

"Can't say I did," he replied with gratifying penitence in his tone. "Made a miserable night of it. Dropped off at dawn, but until then I lay worrying—"

"You did?" murmured Grace, her eyes on her plate.

"Gave way to worry, eh, yet call yourself a psychologist?" rallied Dr. Vidnor.

Cameron looked appealingly at Grace.

"Even a psychologist is human, doctor," he sought to defend himself. "The most scientific training cannot save one from the outburst of a profound and overwhelming emotion. I seldom feel deeply, but when I do it is as powerful and lasting as it is impulsive. My psychological knowledge makes me certain that when I break through the inhibitions of convention it is because of a hate or a love"—his deep voice thrilled and lingered on the word—"a love far more intense than most men are capable of feeling."

Grace glanced up coyly, met the young man's look of passionate adoration, and blushed into her coffee-cup. Her uncle was too intent upon his crisp bacon to observe the couple, but not to pass unheeded the seeming irrelevancy of Cameron's remarks.

"Still off your head a bit, Tom, my boy!" he chuckled. "Hello! there's the phone."

"No, the door-bell," hastily interposed Grace, as her uncle started to rise from the table. "Wait. Tillie will go."

The housemaid passed through the hall. Cameron turned to Dr. Vidnor.

"Doctor, I wish you to explain at once to Miss Denton our reasons for my trying to impersonate her brother. Miss Denton has—"

"What?" interrupted the physician, staring at his niece. "You've discovered him?"

"On the contrary," replied Cameron with a flash of audacity, "I had to prove to her that I could not be her brother."

Dr. Vidnor turned to peer inquisitorily at the young man, and so failed to observe the violent blushes of the girl.

"You told her?"

"Yes."

"H-m. It's as well. But it should go no further for a time."

"If you so advise," agreed Cam-

eron. "Perhaps, though, the fact that I have found—"

He paused and looked doubtfully at Grace's down-bent head. The housemaid reappeared in the hall doorway.

"Mr. Rance has called, miss," she announced.

Grace had almost regained her composure. She looked up and spoke with ready decision:

"Ask Mr. Rance to join us — at least for a cup of coffee."

Rance came in smiling and debonair. He placed a chair for himself opposite Cameron with all the smoothness of manner and movement of one whose sole purpose in life is the attainment of perfect good form.

"'Morning, Miss Grace! Tom, old man—er—beg pardon—Mr. Cameron! Lay you odds, doctor, you're astonished to see me. I'm astonished myself. First time in over a month that I've seen the sun before midmorning. No trifle—this going to all society affairs and reporting them in a way to keep the peace of select circles."

"Nothing serious last night, eh?" rallied Dr. Vidnor.

"Wasn't there! Yes, without sugar or cream, Miss Grace. Dinner and two balls, and only my usual column in which to jam my write-ups! Talk about exhausting labor! Could have slept till tea time. Had to come to apologize, though. When I went to turn in last night I found that the chuckle-headed expressman had delivered Tom's — Mr. Cameron's — baggage at my rooms. Hope the delay hasn't inconvenienced you, old man."

"None at all," politely disclaimed Cameron. "The only cause for regret is that you have been put to this bother."

Dr. Vidnor looked at his watch and regretfully pushed his bulky person clear of the table.

"Must make a call," he remarked. "Out near your apartment house, Rance. Can take you home if you wish."

"Very good of you," drawled the young exquisite. "No chance to sleep now, though. I'll linger here a while, unless Miss Grace wishes to push me out into the cold."

"How can you think that, Alvin?" the girl reproached him. "Mr. Cameron and I shall be delighted to have you to entertain us."

Cameron's dark eyes hardened. Rance smiled at him and proceeded to engage Grace in gay repartee. Dr. Vidnor left the house heavy-footed.

An hour later he returned, to find the three young people in the parlor, laughing and chatting as if not one of them had a care or a thought for anything more serious than mirth.

Even Cameron had thrown off his stiff reserve and was proving himself as much superior to Rance in real humor as the society reporter excelled in the brilliant, cynical wit of the clubs and the editorial rooms.

"Back again already, Uncle Len?" called Grace. "Come in and enjoy the manifestations of Tom's double—I should say, of Mr. Cameron's so different personality."

"No time, my dear. Must be at my office by eleven. I stopped at the bank. Arranged for—h-m—Mr. Cameron to go in back of the screen. May result in beneficial developments."

"Ah—can I be of service, doctor?" volunteered Rance. "Perhaps as I was there with you that night—Don't hesitate to call on me."

"Pretty tight squeeze, the two of you in the coupé with me," replied the physician. "Glad to have you, though, if you can stand it. We should start at once."

The young men rose together. Cameron received Grace's gay nod of dismissal and turned away. Rance lingered a moment. The girl gave him a grateful smile.

"It's like you to be so ready to help, Alvin," she murmured.

"Of course. He is your brother! Remember" — the reporter's voice dropped to a half whisper and he bent

close—"we must work together to save him. Look for the key and be sure to give it to me. You understand?"

"Yes, yes, I will," promised the girl. She paused and then started to explain: "I did not—think you—wished it kept—a secret."

But he had turned swiftly to follow Cameron and did not hear her hesitating murmur.

As Dr. Vidnor had forewarned them, his corpulency left scant room on the seat of the coupé for the two young men. Rance insisted upon Cameron stepping in first. He followed with a hurriedness that resulted in an awkward stumble over Cameron's legs. He fell upon Cameron, his outflung hands plunging down inside the latter's half-buttoned overcoat.

"Deuce take it!" he ejaculated in a mortified tone. "Rotten luck! Didn't hurt you, did I, old man?"

"Not at all," good-humoredly replied Cameron. "It was my fault, not getting my clumsy feet out of the way."

CHAPTER XIV.

Brass Knuckles.

AFTER some squeezing the three men managed to settle themselves in the coupé with a fair degree of comfort, though the passengers were compelled to sit askew and pressed together with the closeness of lovers.

Rance smilingly made the comparison and imitated the coyness of a "sweet young thing." Cameron stiffened. Levity of the kind was not to his taste.

Their arrival at the bank brought a look of hardness and gloom into his moody eyes. He followed his companions in through the side entrance, stopped short, and peered around as if uncertain what to do.

"This way, old man," said Rance, and with nonchalant assurance he opened the gate into the bookkeepers' department.

The few among the busy accountants who noticed the visitors stared at Cameron with odd glances, in which surprise and curiosity were mingled with friendliness. But Dr. Vidnor had forewarned them not to speak to Cameron unless he first recognized them.

The physician laid a confiding hand on Rance's arm. "You understand. We are to picture to him the conditions exactly as we found them that night."

Rance smiled, and his violet eyes shone bright and clear with purposeful determination. Closely watchful of Cameron's expression, he described with minute care the close-set-eyed mask of the criminal, told how it had been cut from the window-blind, and pointed out the exact spot where it had been found. Cameron listened with profound attention, his eyes narrowed and his face impassive.

The three passed along behind the screen to the room where had been found Paulding's book open on the desk and the pen sticking upright in the floor. Cameron listened with unrelaxed attentiveness to what was told him, but both he and Rance eyed one another rather than their surroundings.

When they started through the board-room Dr. Vidnor led the way around the upper end of the table. Rance cut across and stopped to scrutinize Cameron's expression as the physician told with dramatic terseness how he had come up behind the detective and seen the foot of the murdered man out on the floor of the open space.

Though Cameron's face remained impassive, he shot at Rance a glance that was as swift and piercing as a rapier thrust.

It struck, but did not penetrate. The reporter's eyes were cold and hard and bright. All their feminine softness was gone. They might have been disks of burnished blue steel.

Dr. Vidnor led the way out into the space before the vault and continued his terse account. Throughout his vivid description of how Paulding had been murdered with the improvised slungshot and the expert manner in which the vault had been blown, neither Cameron nor Rance betrayed a trace of emotion, though each watched the other with alert scrutiny.

At last the physician paused. Rance immediately relaxed and spoke to Cameron with friendly concern:

"I've been watching you, old man. It's certain you do not recall your part in what happened. I take it Dr. Vidnor hoped that bringing you here would revive your memory. However, I have added information, and it may jolt your recollection. Must tell it in private, though. Suppose we go up to the athletic club."

"I must be in my office," remarked Dr. Vidnor. "But if he wishes to go with you it would do no harm."

Cameron roused from his gloomy contemplation of the spot where the murdered Paulding had been found outstretched. He drew out a watch that was as thin as Rance's, but much larger.

"Stopped again," he grumbled. "Will have to send it on for repairs."

"It's only ten-thirty," said Rance. "You'll run up to the club with me for an hour. That will leave you ample time to get home for lunch."

"Well, if you insist," Cameron rather ungraciously accepted the invitation.

Rance took him out through the front of the bank and called a taxicab. The chauffeur drove them along the traffic-crowded business streets with a leisureliness that gave Rance ample time to relate to his companion a detailed account of the proofs that the criminal had stolen the vault combination and opened the door before blowing the lock.

His companion listened with the same impassive expression and hardening of the eyes that he had shown at the bank. But Rance seemingly paid no heed to the other's lack of response.

The only things he omitted to mention were the missing key and his theory that the teller had committed the double crime while temporarily insane. He finished as the taxicab drew up before the entrance of the athletic club.

Owing to the time of day, the clubhouse was almost deserted. Rance ordered cocktails and led the way into the library. When the colored steward who served their drinks withdrew they were left alone in the silent, secluded room.

Rance had seated himself at the small, highly polished table in such a position that a ray of reflected sunlight slanted down over Cameron's shoulder and struck the mirrorlike surface of the mahogany before him. While they sipped their drinks he began to talk to the silent guest about the affairs of the club in a smooth, quiet monotone.

The cocktails failed to enliven his talk or to stimulate Cameron out of his moody reserve. The guest sagged down in his chair with an air of boredom as Rance continued with his monotonous recital of uninteresting club business and routine.

But, though the reporter's talk was dull, his eyes were far otherwise. They shone with a cold, mesmeric light that told of intensely concentrated will-power.

Presently he placed his hand on the table with just enough obtrusiveness to attract Cameron's gaze to the big blue diamond of his solitaire ring. It flashed and sparkled dazzlingly in the ray of reflected sunlight.

Cameron's glance became fixed. He sat staring at the beautiful scintillating stone as if fascinated by its wonderful play of light. Rance's eyes shone brighter than before—they sent out a stream of mesmeric light upon the down-bent face of the silent man across the table.

With no change in his monotonous tone, the reporter began to suggest to his companion: "It is very quiet and restful in here, is it not? I think it is the most restful place I know of. One could sleep here — restful sleep. No one to disturb you—quiet—restful. You look tired. A nap would do you good."

Cameron did not reply. He continued to sit motionless, his chin on his breast, his gaze fixed on the sparkling, glinting, scintillating diamond.

Rance continued without a break:

"Sleep — best thing when one is tired. Eases your nerves—rests you. No one to disturb you here—quiet—peaceful. You are tired. You need rest—sleep and rest. Go to sleep—go to sleep."

The eyelids of the guest were drooping. His body sagged lower in the chair. Rance's eyes flamed with mesmeric fire.

"Sleep!" he murmured in a tone of inflexible command. "You are going to sleep — you are asleep! You shall—"

"'Scuse me, sah"—it was the voice of the colored servant; he bowed obsequiously and did not see the angry glance shot at him by Rance—"'Scuse me, but Ah reckoned yuh'd be wanting anotah serving of cocktails, Mistah Rance."

"Get—out—of—here!" ordered Rance. He spoke in a low tone, but every word was projected like a bullet.

The steward's mouth gaped open. This was not the genial Mr. Rance from whom he was accustomed to receive tips for attentive service. He slunk away, too bewildered to excuse himself.

Rance turned quickly to his guest. Cameron was in the act of rising from his seat. Rance sprang up, alert and suave.

"Must have bored you no end with all this club talk, old man," he apologized. "Suppose we go into the gym and liven up a bit?"

His guest looked at him moodily, but acquiesced by following him into the gymnasium. It proved to be as deserted as the library. Not even an instructor was to be seen.

"We seem to be alone in our glory," Rance remarked. "Let's put on the gloves to warm up a bit, and follow with a plunge in the pool."

Cameron hesitated, but ended by giving a reluctant assent:

"I'm rather rusty on my boxing, but if you wish to go a few rounds I'll do what I can."

"That's the sport! There's nothing like sparring to keep one in trim. If you had kept up your practise you'd never have run down and suffered that deuced mental smash. Here's the quietest room. We won't need to put on suits—just shed our coats and go to it."

When Cameron followed into the room the reporter shut the door with a careless shove and stripped off his coat and waistcoat, and his shirt as well. Cameron slowly did the same. He completed his preparations by rolling up the sleeves of his undershirt.

"I say, old man," observed Rance, "you should be in tiptop shape. You've taken on muscle. The size of your— Hello! What's become of that strawberry-mark—the one below your left elbow?"

"Mark?" replied Cameron after a moment's pause. "I never had a mark below my elbow."

"Ah—er—yes?" murmured Rance. "Pardon me. I keep forgetting you are not Tom Denton. Queer, though, about that mark. Not a sign of it left. Remarkable what these dermatologists can do."

"There has been no deception on my part, Mr. Rance," declared the visitor. "When we first met I stated distinctly that I am Bruce Cameron."

"Of course, of course," agreed Rance, as if humoring a whimsical child. "Here are the gloves. They're pretty light weight; but, as we are to spar for points and not slug, they will do, I take it."

Cameron silently drew on the pair of gloves handed to him and stepped out near the middle of the padded floor. Rance followed him. As they fell into position he opened the bout with a playful feint. Cameron met it and scored with a neat tap over the reporter's heart.

The latter smiled and attempted to even the score, but failed.

The two were fairly well matched in height and reach. The more slender Rance was very quick, but he seemed unable to gage distance as perfectly as his opponent.

As Cameron warmed to the exercise he displayed a skill and coolness that put the reporter almost entirely on the defensive. He scored two, and even three points to his opponent's one.

Twice Rance made blunders that laid him open to the ready attack of Cameron. After that he repeatedly dropped his glance, as if too chagrined to meet the cool, steady gaze of the man who was outboxing him.

Cameron lost interest in the one-sided contest. He stood on the defensive, plainly bored. Rance started to spring in and out in amateurish attempts to catch him off his guard.

Suddenly, in one of his forward springs, Rance tripped and stumbled. Cameron flung out both hands to save him from a fall. At the same instant Rance's right hand shot forward in a blow that had all his weight and lithe strength behind it. Struck on the point of the jaw, Cameron fell prone on the mat and lay motionless.

Rance jerked off his gloves, slipped a set of brass knuckles from his hands into his trouser-pockets, and flashed across to the hook on which Cameron had hung his coat and waistcoat.

He lost no time over a random search of the pockets. His very first movement was to draw open the waistcoat and thrust his supple fingers into the inside posket. They came out with a corrugated key. A glance at its smooth-filed handle and it found lodgment in his fob-pocket.

Back he leaped, to drop on his knees beside Cameron and bend down over him. The stricken man seemed just beginning to regain consciousness, though his ruddy cheeks told of a full supply of blood in his head.

"Sorry, Tom—deuced sorry!" apologized Rance, and he reiterated the statement: "Deuced sorry—deuced sorry! Slipped, you know—accident—hand swung round—accident! You understand—accident."

Cameron opened his eyes in a vague stare. "What—is—it? What—happened?"

"My fault, old man!" Rance again apologized. "As I was coming in at you I slipped—couldn't stop myself—happened to catch you on the jaw. Fact is, you've been knocked out for at least half a second. But you're all right now. A shower bath and a plunge in the pool, and you'll never know the difference."

He helped Cameron to his feet and took him in for a refreshing bath and swim.

CHAPTER XV.

Double Play.

AFTER their swim Rance showed his guest to the street and insisted upon prepaying his taxicab fare to the Denton home. Cameron allowed himself to be persuaded, and, after a cordial shake of Rance's small white hand, stepped into the vehicle.

Rance started hastily off downstreet.

There was a jam of cars in front of the club entrance, and other cars were bringing members to lunch.

Before the taxicab could back clear Cameron stepped unobtrusively out of the door opposite the curb. He had exchanged his stylish soft hat for a shabby cap, the peak of which was drawn askew low down on his forehead. Large green goggles covered his eyes. His shoulders were stooped; his chin was buried in his upturned

collar; his hair had an unkempt appearance, and he walked off with a shambling gait.

Within a few moments Rance turned to watch the taxicab roll around the corner. He saw, but seemed to pay no heed to the slouching man who had stopped to peer in at the display window of a store. He wheeled about and swung away still faster than before.

Cameron shuffled after him, crossing over at the first corner, to walk along the opposite side of the street. Though he covered ground as rapidly as Rance, he contrived, with his long, slouching stride and leisurely manner, to give out the impression that he was moving at a moderate speed.

They soon came to the upper edge of the banking district. Rance passed the entrance of the most up-town trust and safe deposit company, stopped, and glanced around with a casual air. Cameron was drifting along the inner edge of the opposite sidewalk. If Rance observed the peculiar figure across the street, he gave no sign of the fact.

After a short pause he turned back and entered the building.

Ten minutes passed before he sauntered out again. He stopped before the entrance, drew a key-ring from his pocket, rather ostentatiously added a key to the ones already on the ring, and started off at a brisk walk.

Cameron stepped from a stationer's stall and followed as before. Within three blocks Rance swung past the entrance of another trust and safe deposit company building, stopped, looked around, and entered, all exactly as at the first trust company. He remained inside the same length of time, sauntered out, and placed a key on his key-ring.

He hastened on to the next trust company, where he went through the same performance.

That he had noticed the "shadow" and was playing a counter game was now almost certain. Yet Cameron followed him to still another trust company. Rance then boarded an up-town car.

Cameron dived into the dark hallway of a quiet old office building. In a few seconds he came out without his disguise.

A taxicab similar to the one that Rance had engaged for him took him up-town. As it left him on the curb before the old Denton residence, Rance came hastening around the corner of the avenue on his way from the car.

Cameron strolled up the house walk and lingered on the porch for the reporter to overtake him.

"So you decided to come back, too," he remarked as he rang the bell. "You almost arrived first."

"Curious how a taxi can make speed slowly," replied Rance. "Where's your latch-key?"

"I'm not yet that much at home," countered Cameron.

The elderly housemaid opened the door. As they entered the parlor, Grace came in from the library and favored each with a charming smile. The blush that heightened her exquisite color might have been owing to the presence of either young man or to both.

"You'll stop for lunch, Alvin?" she invited.

"Sorry," he complained. "Just my deuced luck! Must hurry on. Really had no time to stop at all, but I wished to make sure that Tom—Mr. Cameron—reached home all right. We had a little accident down at the Athletic Club, you know."

"An accident?" asked the girl, glancing at Cameron with a startled look in her ruddy brown eyes.

"Yes. We were boxing, and I happened to knock him out—struck him, you know, so that he fell unconscious."

"O-o-h!"

Cameron flushed and frowned savagely at the sweetly smiling reporter. From the way the affair had been stated, Grace could not but infer that Rance had proved himself by far the better boxer.

"It was nothing serious," Cameron muttered. "Mr. Rance slipped and accidentally struck me on the chin. He said I was unconscious only half a second."

"After I had started him home in a taxi, I thought I had better follow and make sure that the shock had not upset his present personality," explained Rance with a seriousness that masked from Grace his mockery of Cameron.

But the girl had her own score to settle with the intruder in her home. She might forgive his impetuous wooing, but she never could forget that she had forced herself into his room and insisted upon his brushing her hair. Her smile of unconcealed amusement bordered on disdain.

"That was thoughtful of you, Alvin. I can understand how being knocked down by you might jar his personality to the very foundation."

Cameron blushed brick red.

"Miss Denton," he said, "you have the right to think and say the worst about me. I have laid myself open to it. I realize how unbearable my presence must be to you. The best I can do is to offer my sincere apologies and relieve you of my presence in your home without delay."

He bowed and strode stiffly out into the hall. Grace's smile faded.

"I've angered him!" she exclaimed. "He is going away!"

She wavered and started toward the hall. Rance stepped close to her.

"Miss Grace," he murmured, "we must lose no time. He's quite off his head. Arrest and imprisonment would shock him into complete insanity. We must prevent that by getting the affair settled—by returning the money before the police issue a warrant for his arrest. Have you looked for that missing key?"

"All morning, ever since you and he left with Uncle Len," answered Grace. "I searched all over Tom's room. His trunk came with the suitcase. I would have looked through the trunk, but it was locked."

"No use," said Rance. "The key must be in that room—unless— But that's not probable. There are just two possible places — a crack of the skirting board, or else the hollows of the bedposts, if the castor shanks can be pulled from their sockets."

"I'll look carefully, the first chance I have, Alvin."

"Good! Here's your uncle's coupé. You understand it's as well to keep mum about the key until we can surprise them with the good news that the matter is settled."

"I'm so sorry! I told Uncle Len and—and Mr. Cameron last evening," confessed Grace.

Rance's face darkened but cleared as quickly. "That's all right. It will discount our happy surprise—no harm done, though. Only you need not let him know when you find the key."

"I promise. We'll work together."

The girl's eyes beamed with trust and friendly affection. Rance bent to clasp her hand and press it to his lips. A moment later he was darting into the hall. He went out at the front door as Dr. Vidnor entered.

Grace signed to her uncle to join her in the parlor. Though her manner was very quiet, the brightness of her eyes and the spot of intense red in each of her cheeks warned him that she was greatly irritated.

"Precisely, who is this Mr. Cameron?" she queried.

"His standing is said to be excellent," replied the physician. "Good education; good old New England family. The sanatorium psychologists know of him favorably and were pleased to have his advice in Tom's case."

Grace's usually gentle eyes flashed with angry indignation.

"So you took advantage of his resemblance to Tom to introduce him into my home!"

"Against his wish, my dear. The fault, if any, was mine," blandly replied her uncle. "You forget he announced his identity at once."

But you had prepared me to disbelieve that. Either by suggestion or outright hypnotism, you caused both Alvin and me to think he was Tom, only with a second personality."

"You're sure that Rance was as fully deceived as yourself?"

"Of course! He still believes it."

"Ah—then my control of hypnotic suggestion is rather stronger than I thought. My impression was that Rance has too much hypnotic power himself to yield readily to suggestion. I will ask you not to enlighten him at present. Bruce Cameron and I are working together to discover information to aid Tom's treatment. The night of the crime at the bank Bruce was in the city and he happened to see —a clue that may lead to the solving of the mystery."

"He is the man who was twice mistaken for Tom that night!" exclaimed Grace.

"Not twice, but three times. I also saw and mistook him. It seems he has a habit of getting into queer places at queer hours. He saw something which—recurred to him when he read the newspaper accounts of the crime. Then he met Tom on the train and became interested in the case. He remained with him at the sanatorium until coming back here. All this has been purely voluntary and disinterested on his part. It seems he has an independent fortune and goes in for sociological research. There were reasons why we thought it advantageous that he should impersonate Tom. But he stipulated that you should not be deceived."

"He did?" murmured the girl. Her eyes had softened and the spots of intense red in her cheeks had diffused into a delectable pinkness. "Perhaps —perhaps you had better go up to him, Uncle Len, and let him know that lunch will soon be served."

"Here he comes now," replied the physician.

The quick steps descending the stairway were firm and rather heavy. Cameron appeared opposite the parlor door carrying a bulging suitcase.

"Hello, Bruce," hailed Dr. Vidnor. "What does that mean? Come in and explain."

The young man entered and bowed with stiff formality.

"Miss Denton will, I am sure, accept my heartfelt thanks for her hospitality. I have separated my baggage from Mr. Denton's, and am on my way to the lodgings I occupied on my previous visit."

Dr. Vidnor stared from the departing guest to his niece. She stood with her hand resting lightly on the back of a chair and her eyes gazing back into the library as if calmly noting that the writing table was disorderly.

"I presume Mr. Cameron wishes to take leave of me before he goes," she remarked.

"If you will be so kind as to permit me," he said.

"And if I will not?" she inquired.

He looked at her in blank surprise and began to flush. The girl walked serenely out into the library without turning her gaze. As she passed from the parlor her voice floated back over her shoulder in a tranquil murmur:

"Tillie has set three plates, and it would be a pity to have her work wasted."

Cameron's perplexity deepened. He looked questioningly at Dr. Vidnor and asked:

"May I ask just what—"

"You're to stay, of course," cut in the physician, his shrewd eyes twinkling. "I've explained to my niece that the deception was entirely my fault. Your suitcase goes back upstairs."

The young man again flushed, but in a manner very different from the first time.

"You're sure, doctor, that Miss Denton is willing I should stay?"

"She did not give you leave to go," rallied the physician. "You can't escape us."

"I am not trying very hard," re-

plied Cameron. He drew in a deep breath, and smiled. His eyes glowed with golden ardor. Then, suddenly, his lips tightened and his eyes grew hard and cold.

"The misunderstanding has hastened one discovery," he said. "In separating my clothes from your nephew's I found that the trunk had been searched."

"What?" queried Dr. Vidnor.

"Both the trunk and my suitcase had been unpacked and repacked."

"Not here?"

"No. You remember that your friend Mr. Rance very kindly insisted upon seeing to my baggage last evening. Also you remember that it was delivered at his apartments—by mistake—and kept there over night."

"Aha!" puffed the physician. "I see. The trunk and suitcase were searched by some one who has the entry to his apartments."

Cameron smiled grimly.

"Yes. The party was looking for the key and for letters or anything else that might tell him who I am. He found only the clothes and other articles that your nephew took east with him and some articles that he might well have acquired on the trip."

"The key?" questioned Dr. Vidnor. You still think there was something more than mere delirious fancy in Tom's ravings?"

"Decidedly. There was a key, and it is the key to the mystery," answered Cameron.

He paused, considered, and added:

"The burglar who killed the policeman was not searching your nephew's room for gold. You wrote me that he threw aside a gold watch chain and a pair of gold cuff links."

"Hah!" ejaculated the physician. "You think he was looking for the key? You think he believed that Tom had hidden it in the room?"

"He was right, but he failed to find it. I think he is the same man who overhauled the trunk and suitcase last night."

"That's a serious charge. The burglar must be a particularly hardened criminal. The murder of the policeman was due to an almost automatic reflex action of a brain as crafty as it was brutal."

Cameron's eyes narrowed.

"The same can be said of the brain of the bank criminal, unless we accept Rance's theory that your nephew did the deed while temporarily insane."

"That's preposterous!" spluttered Dr. Vidnor.

"On the contrary, it is a very plausible theory," differed the young man. He put his hand to his breast, felt inside his waist-coat, and frowned. "However, the case is more complicated than I thought. I will not allow the insanity theory to prevent my consideration of others."

Tillie came in to announce luncheon. Immediately the frown cleared from the young man's face and his narrowed eyes widened with a look of joyous anticipation. When he and the physician entered the dining-room Grace was beside the table arranging an extravagant bouquet of roses sent to her by Rance.

The name of the giver and the tone in which the girl spoke it brought a heavy frown to Cameron's forehead, and his gray eyes flared with anger. Almost instantly he repressed the look and complimented the reporter's excellent taste.

This won a smile and a half blush from Grace. The young man followed up his advantage with remarks which, though seemingly impersonal, hinted at an ardor and an audacious assurance that put the girl on the defensive.

With subtle comprehension of feminine psychology, he kept her aquiver with emotions that pleased and vexed and confused her. His every look and tone told of his love and of his determination to win her. She smiled and frowned and blushed—and made no serious effort to block his masked attack.

But when the telephone summoned

her uncle to the sanatorium where he usually treated his neurasthenic cases Grace avoided a *tête-à-tête* with her guest by beating a rather hurried retreat to the kitchen, on the plea of household duties.

His assurance far from dashed by this desertion, Cameron went upstairs to Denton's bedroom, light of foot and eyes aglow with ardor and exultance. When he entered the room he shot the door-bolt, sat down with his back to the keyhole, and drew out his big flat watch. He opened the back.

The works had been removed from the case. Within the space back of the dial was only a key of the Yale pattern.

From his pocket the young man took a small file and another key, which he compared with the one in the watch case. They were of the same type and size. He proceeded to increase their resemblance by filing smooth the handle of the second key.

CHAPTER XVI.

An Unexpected Disclosure.

UPON leaving the Denton residence Rance walked to the car line at a rapid, though unhurried, pace. A car approached running in the direction of his apartment house. He crossed over and took another car that was bound for the business section of the city.

It brought him to the corner of the State National Bank.

He entered at the side door with elegant leisureliness and handed his card to a clerk, with a request for an interview with the president on the horse show. The banker was a member of the board of directors.

After a short wait the visitor was shown into the inner sanctum of the temple of finance. The banker coldly signed him to a chair and tapped an official envelope that lay on the front of the desk.

"The chief of police reports no progress," he stated in his most abrupt manner.

Rance gracefully seated himself and smiled into the unresponsive face of the banker with the easy assurance of a social equal who is not under financial obligations to his companion.

"The police are excellent sleuths when trailing criminals of their own limited mentality," he drawled. "In this case they are out of their depth."

"Yourself?" queried the banker. "Be brief. My time is valuable."

"I can at least report progress," replied Rance, unruffled and unhurried. "You are aware that Thomas Denton returned home from the Eastern sanatorium yesterday and that he came to the bank this morning."

"Yes."

"That is a mistake. The man is an impostor. He is not Thomas Denton."

The banker's eyes widened almost imperceptibly.

"Well?"

"The resemblance is marked, but not extraordinary," went on Rance. "Every one would see the many points of difference if the impostor and Denton were brought face to face. On the other hand, the resemblance is strong enough to deceive any one, at least for a time, in Denton's absence —particularly when statements are made beforehand that Denton has developed a double personality and has also changed physically."

"Well?"

"This man—he calls himself Cameron—is more than clever. He has managed to ingratiate himself with Dr. Vidnor. He succeeded so well that the doctor went so far as to mislead his niece—Miss Denton, you know—and myself as to the man's identity. The lady actually received the fellow as her brother. I am convinced that her uncle must have influenced her with hypnotic suggestion, which, as is well known, he uses freely in his treatment of neurasthenic cases."

"The connection? Be brief," snapped the banker with a hint of irritability.

Rance raised one shoulder in an insouciant shrug.

"Ah—my dear sir, one prefers to work up to an artistic climax. But if you are urgent— The connection is that this Cameron has wormed himself into the good graces of Dr. Vidnor, has established himself as an inmate of Denton's home—in fact, occupies Denton's bedroom—and has successfully carried off his impersonation with every one of Denton's acquaintances except myself.

"At first even I was deceived, though I had my doubts. This morning the connection flashed upon me. You may remember that the night of the robbery Denton was reported to have been seen, first when there was every reason to believe he was at the bank with Paulding, and again when he was supposed to be home in bed and—"

"It was this impostor," cut in the banker, quick to perceive the point.

"There you have it!" agreed Rance, once more smiling complacently. "He came to the bank this morning to cover his impersonation by the boldness of the act. The very audacity of it turned away suspicion. I thought that he had also come to look for the key. But I was mistaken."

"Your theory of a key is childish," criticised the man of finance.

Rance exultantly drew from his pocket a key of the Yale type, the handle of which had been filed smooth.

"Here is proof that the theory is correct," he said. "This morning, coming down to the bank in Dr. Vidnor's coupé, I fell against the impostor and felt what was in his waistcoat pockets. From the bank I decoyed him to the Athletic Club and persuaded him to spar with me. He bared his arms before putting on the gloves. The absence of a certain mark below the elbow of his left arm gave me positive proof that he is not Denton.

"We started to spar. Feigning to trip, I knocked him out with what appeared to be an accidental blow. I searched his pockets and found this key."

"Ordinary Yale key," commented the banker, with no word of praise for the young man's cleverness.

"It was concealed in a special inside pocket of his waistcoat," replied Rance. "Consider the probabilities. The fact that the vault door—as proved by the jammed bolts—was opened before the lock was blown, forced me to consider my first theory that Denton had committed the deed while temporarily insane. Every one else who could have known the combination seemed to be accounted for. But here is this mysterious impostor who is easily mistaken for Denton.

"The day before the robbery Denton was taken ill. Without speaking to any one about his condition he closed his window and left his cage to go out to a drug store. It was a bitter cold day, and people were moving in and out of the bank muffled to their eyes. Cameron could have seized his chance to slip in at the side door before Denton's return. Audacity is his strongest trait. He may have intended to smuggle out the gold and bills in Denton's cage. But you and the cashier were present at a board meeting.

"Suppose Cameron slips in here and overhauls your desk. He finds the memorandum of the new inner and outer vault combinations prepared that morning. He makes a copy; goes on to Denton's cage; slips into the vault, and loads up with the thousand dollar bills."

The bank president's lips tightened. "Your theory appears slightly more plausible."

Rance nodded with smiling assurance.

"Our crafty friend soon realizes that thousand-dollar bills are hard to pass. He puts them in a safe deposit box. The next night he comes to the

bank prepared to open the combination, help himself to some tens and hundreds, and then blow the doors to make it appear like an ordinary yegg job. He has to blackjack Paulding and Denton.

The latter revives and in some manner gets away with the key of the safe deposit box in which the two hundred and thirty-one thousand dollars are hidden. Cameron is desperate to recover the key. He goes East on the same train as Denton and Dr. Vidnor, and passes himself off as a psychologist in order to get in personal touch with Denton and his baggage. Not finding the key, he comes back to the city a train ahead of the doctor, and is surprised while searching Denton's room for the key.

"The policeman at the rear door calls out in surprise, mistaking him for Denton. He escapes, returns East, comes back as soon as he has recovered his nerve, is put in Denton's bedroom, and finds the key?"

"You say this is the key?"

"No."

"What?" queried the banker, indignant at having been misled into an erroneous inference.

Rance smiled nonchalantly.

"I told you we had to deal with a criminal of the first water, so to speak," he reminded. "This key is a substitute for the real one. The file marks on it are still fresh. I noticed the fact at once, but when I found it, Cameron revived quicker than I expected, and so I lacked time to look farther. Though he shammed unconsciousness, I perceived that he had seen me take the key; so I pretended to believe it the real key. I then went to four safe deposit companies. He or a confederate shadowed me.

"To account for my visits, I engaged a box at each place. I did not wish to declare myself. The usefulness of a secret service man is decreased fifty per cent the moment his profession becomes known."

"Anything more to report?"

"Yes. By a deucedly clever ruse I got his baggage sent from the station to my apartments last night. But as I found neither the key nor anything to identify him, my cleverness was wasted. However, the fact that he misled me with this substitute key proves that he has found the real one. I shall continue in my efforts to get it from him.

"Meantime I shall ask you to warn the officials of all the safe deposit companies not to permit him access to his box. No doubt he used an assumed name when he engaged the box, but I will investigate and find out the company where it is located. As a last resort, I shall have him arrested, but it will be better to wait and catch him in the act of visiting his box. Otherwise he may hide or destroy the key, and so as to put the money beyond recovery."

The bank president's eyes grew colder.

"First make certain of the money," he directed. The bank will then spend as much of the amount to hang the man as may be needed."

"Ah!" murmured Rance, rising in response to the other's gesture of dismissal, "I fancy I am not far out of reach of that ten thousand dollar reward. Even more satisfying will be the consciousness that I have matched brains with one of the greatest criminals in the world and won the contest for the side of law and the good of the community."

The banker unbent the slight fraction that indicated his utmost endeavor at affability and friendliness.

"Mr. Rance," he stated, "nothing can be more honorable than the protection of the security of financial institutions. In this respect, your profession is worthy of high esteem. With regard to yourself personally, you have proved that a gentleman can engage in secret service and remain a gentleman."

Rance bowed himself out with a cer-

tain dignified gravity under his usual air of insouciance and elegance.

CHAPTER XVII.

Man Proposes.

AFTER what he termed his breakfast-luncheon at the city's most fashionable hotel, Rance spent the afternoon at three or four garages, inspecting automobiles.

Regardless of price, he selected the tourist car most noted for speed, arranged to pay for it in instalments, and drew his check for the first payment. He left the car in the garage, with directions for it to be thoroughly overhauled and tested on the road, and then held ready for his use.

He returned to another dealer and bought a coupé, also on time. In it he drove to the Athletic Club, where he took his usual afternoon work-out and plunge, and dined with a fellow bachelor member.

On his way out he told the clerk that Mr. Thomas Denton had dropped a valuable key in the gymnasium, and wished to be notified at his home if the key was found and turned in at the desk.

Three-quarters of an hour after he drove off in his new coupé a postal special delivery messenger brought a letter to the clerk of the club. It contained a Yale key and a scribbled note to the effect that the finder had picked up the key in the dressing-room and had forgotten to turn it in when leaving the club. The signature was illegible.

Upon reaching the outer edge of the down-town section of the city, Rance had taken advantage of the darker streets to drive to the old Denton residence at more than the legal speed. When he arrived, the absence of Dr. Vidnor's coupé indicated that the physician had gone to see a patient.

The young man stepped out of his elegant little vehicle and went up to the door with an eagerness not entirely covered by his nonchalant manner.

In answer to his seemingly casual inquiry, old Tillie told him that Dr. Vidnor had received a call to the sanatorium immediately after dinner. She understood that Mr. Cameron had suddenly been taken very ill and had gone with the doctor. Yes, his hat and coat were not on the halltree.

Miss Denton had told her to show Mr. Rance into the parlor, if he called.

Rance's half-effeminate violet eyes glinted with steely light and as quickly softened to golden glow. He could not conceal his eagerness and exultance.

"Kindly tell Miss Denton I wish to see her at once—that I have important news," he said, and he handed over a half-dollar by way of emphasis.

Tillie labored up the stairway much faster than her usual aged pace. She returned with word that her mistress would be down presently.

Five minutes passed. Rance began to pace the parlor with swift-mounting impatience. Still Grace delayed.

The lights of a motor-car appeared up the avenue. Rance peered out of the window. When the approaching car came near enough for him to make out that it was a coupé he frowned and moved to one side of the window.

The coupé turned in at the curb beside his own coupé. Dr. Vidnor stepped out into the half-light.

After a brief pause he was followed by a man who was muffled to the eyes, as if fearful of being chilled by the damp coldness of the night air. He walked up to the house beside the physician with a trace of unsteadiness in his gait and his shoulders slightly stooped.

The watcher drew back into the unlighted library. There, unseen himself, he had an angling view through into the front end of the hall.

When the pair entered the house, he saw clearly the second man's figure, though not his face, which was still

muffled. The hat and overcoat undoubtedly were Cameron's. The watcher bit his lip and frowned, but after a moment's reflection he smiled.

He heard the tread of the physician and his companion on the stairs, and quietly walked across the parlor to a seat beside the entrance into the hall.

A door was opened upstairs. Grace's sweet voice called out in a half-stifled cry. There was a murmuring of two or three voices, followed by the opening of a door, another murmuring, and the closing of a door.

Dr. Vidnor came down into the parlor and greeted Rance with his usual bruskness: "Good evening. My niece will be down soon."

"I trust that Tom's—beg pardon—Mr. Cameron's illness is not serious," gravely condoled the young man.

"He's all right. Quite himself now," replied the physician, and as he lowered his bulky form into an easy chair he began a pointed discourse on the frivolity of society devotees.

Rance listened with an air of polite boredom. He did not attempt to conceal his relief when the ring of the telephone gave promise of an interruption. The physician kept on without a break until Tillie appeared at the hall doorway.

"Excuse me," she said. "The clerk at the Athletic Club says a key has been found, and maybe it's the one Mr. Denton lost."

"Key—lost?" queried Dr. Vidnor.

"That's just what he said, sir."

"Perhaps Tom dropped a key when we were at the club this forenoon," observed Rance. "Might ask him."

"I will," agreed Dr. Vidnor.

He went upstairs and tapped on the door of his nephew's room. A voice called to him to enter. Cameron stood at the dresser, filling a hollow tooth comb with black hair dye.

"What's this about losing a key at the Athletic Club?" asked the physician.

Cameron completed the filling of the comb, passed the teeth carefully through the hair above his forehead, looked at the result in the dresser mirror, and turned to reply:

"Who says I lost a key?"

"The clerk at the Athletic Club just telephoned that a key has been found, and that it may be the one you lost."

The young man reflected on this and answered in a matter-of-fact tone: "I lost a key when I was there with Mr. Rance. I believe it was taken from my pocket. I shall at once go down and see about it."

"You'll go with me in the coupé," stated the physician decisively.

He went to his own room, shutting the door with a swift turn the moment he was inside. There was a murmuring within. He came out, followed by Grace. At sight of Cameron, who stood waiting at the head of the stairway ready to start, the girl blushed and held back.

"All right, my dear; we'll return in an hour or so," said her uncle.

As Cameron led the way down the stairs he turned up the high collar of his overcoat, so that all the lower part of his face was lost to view. At the foot of the stairs he drew the brim of his hat low down on his forehead.

Grace stood at the top and watched him until he and her uncle had gone out through the vestibule. Her face was clouded with perplexity and doubt.

After a mental struggle she recovered her composure and descended to the parlor with an apology ready on her smiling lips. The blinds of the front windows had been drawn, and Rance stood peering out between the edge of one and the window frame at the lights of the departing coupé. He failed to hear the light step of the girl on the stairs.

"Good evening, Alvin," she said. "I am so sorry to have kept you waiting."

He sprang about and came to her impetuously.

"If necessary, I could wait years for you; but every moment would be an age."

"That is what books on rhetoric call hyperbole," parried Grace. "Pray be seated and rational."

The steel glinted through the golden ardor in Rance's eyes.

"Have you looked for that key where I said?" he asked almost sharply.

"Yes. The casters are loose, but there was nothing inside the posts. I scraped all around under the skirting board with a hairpin ever so carefully —and in every other crack, too. The only things I found were two needles, eleven pins, a gold dollar, the missing face from my mother's cameo comb—I'm ever so glad of that!—and a lot of lint. It's impossible to attend to those thin cracks, no matter how carefully the housekeeping is done."

"Very true," agreed Rance somewhat absently. He studied the backs of his white hands. "Yes—that leaves only the one possibility. He has found it."

"How mysterious!" rallied Grace. "Pray enlighten me!"

Rance met her banter with a profound gravity that sobered her.

"Dear Miss Grace, it is most unfortunate!" he exclaimed. "The key must have been either in one of the bedposts or under the skirting board. There was no other place left. Yet you have not found it. He has been in the room. Therefore he must have found it. We must get it from him at once, else there'll be the devil to pay."

"I—don't—understand," faltered Grace.

"Not understand, when it's so plain? Haven't you suspected? Don't you realize the truth? This Cameron is a sham—an impostor. He is no more your brother than I am!"

The girl took this vehement statement with a coolness that he had not expected.

"You remember what Uncle Len told us," she replied. "We were to hold in mind that as Bruce Cameron he would be quite a distinct personality—a stranger."

"Distinct, indeed!" exclaimed Rance. "Are you still so blinded by your uncle's hypnotic suggestions? This man—"

"I do not believe people can be hypnotized into thinking what is not true," interrupted Grace.

"They can!" asserted the young man. "Why, I myself have made people believe— But that's not the point! You must be made to realize that this man Cameron is a rank impostor. He is not a double personality of your brother. I suspected it from the first. I know it now. We sparred at the Athletic Club, and he rolled up his sleeves. He hasn't that mark of Tom's below the left elbow."

"Indeed?" murmured Grace. "That would seem to prove he cannot be Tom."

"It's absolute proof!"

"Well, then—I promised Uncle Len not to tell, but since you have already found out—it is quite true that Mr. Cameron isn't Tom. Uncle Len knew it all along, and I"—the girl blushed vividly, hesitated, and concluded with a vain attempt at a tranquil tone—"I found it out last evening."

Rance's usually soft eyes flared with furious light; a wave of angry red flooded his face.

"The sneak! The sneaking coward!" he denounced. "What—how was it? The beast! He took advantage of your belief— You thought him Tom! Insulted you! I'll kill him —kill him! The damned—"

The girl's outflung hand pressed across the mouth of her enraged champion.

"Hush!" she cried. "It wasn't! No, no, he didn't! No, no, *no!* You have no right— He didn't do anything. It was only—only the thought. Besides, right there at the first—you heard him—he told us he was not Tom. He insisted. It was all my fault."

The young man's rage-quivering muscles had stilled to iron rigidity.

Seeing that he had controlled his outburst, the girl took her hand from his lips. He stared at her, his eyes bloodshot but strangely cool.

"You say the man took no advantage of the situation?" he asked.

"You forget yourself!" reproved Grace. Though her cheeks blushed scarlet, she looked her questioner in the eye with a level, unwavering gaze as she added quietly: "Mr. Cameron has done nothing for which I blame him."

"Forgive me!" begged Rance. "I lost my head. It made me wild to think that he might have— It's not as if I hadn't some excuse. There was reason for me to believe him capable of anything. A man who could seek to deceive you—who could sneak into your home as your brother—"

"But he did not," denied Grace. "That was Uncle Len's fault. Mr. Cameron was opposed to doing it. He came here as a friend, at Uncle Len's invitation. You remember when Tom went East and I thought I saw his face at the car window? That was Mr. Cameron. He helped Uncle Len with Tom. He came out here to try to learn something about what happened at the bank that dreadful night. They think it will help to—to put Tom where he was before."

Rance received the explanation with a somberness that perplexed the girl.

"What is it? Why do you look like that?" she questioned.

"The cleverness of the man!" ejaculated Rance. "The consummate cleverness and audacity! Not only has he deceived a shrewd man like your uncle—he has deceived you, as well, in spite of your womanly intuition!"

"But I tell you he has not sought to deceive me. It was Uncle Len who—"

"Yes, yes, so that the impostor could get the benefit of impersonating Tom, yet be able to say he had not been a party to the deception. He worked your uncle beautifully! Oh, he is crafty and deep—damnably deep! Listen what has been found out about him—"

In simple, concise, forceful language the young man repeated what he had told the bank president as to the evidence and deductions that connected Cameron with the murders of Paulding and the policeman Ahern, and the quarter million robbery of the bank vault.

The only fact he suppressed was that he had been working on the case as a secret agent in the employ of the bank.

Gradually the damnatory proofs and the clear logic of Rance's deductions overcame the girl's favorable preconceptions of Cameron's good faith and character. She began by seeking to defend him, then lapsed into doubtful silence, and at last yielded to conviction.

"Oh, Alvin!" she murmured, overcome with horror. "To think that he is the man who did those awful things —that he is the murderer! Yet he is a guest in the house—he has been here all this time! Oh, he'll come back with Uncle Len! I'm afraid! You must keep him away! Call the police!"

The terrified girl would have darted out to the telephone had not Rance sprang before her. He caught her small hands in a tenderly reassuring clasp.

"Wait—please wait! There's no reason to be alarmed," he soothed. "I'm sorry I frightened you, dear! You must be brave. Remember, it's to save Tom."

"But to think of his coming back here—of his being here to-night!" cried Grace, shuddering with dread and repulsion.

"He will do nothing to-night," asserted Rance. "There is absolutely no danger. He has the key, and he will be extremely well behaved until he has the chance to use the key and get the money. For Tom's sake, you must hide your feelings. You must not let him suspect that we know, else he may hide the key and balk our plans to recover the money."

"To help Tom—for his sake!" murmured Grace. "I'll—I'll try."

"Of course you will—you must! It will be only for to-night. To-morrow you shall be relieved of his presence. I'll see to that."

"You will? Oh, Alvin, it's so good to think we have you to depend upon! How can we ever repay you?"

"Need you ask that?" replied the young man.

He drew her hands to his lips and gazed at her, his violet eyes purpling with an immeasurable devotion and tender passion before which her own gaze wavered and sank in utter confusion.

An entrancing blush suffused her cheeks with rosy color. She stood, waiting for him to speak—perhaps expecting him to act.

But he had more self-control than Cameron. He either respected or feared her more, or else he lacked his rival's impetuous audacity.

Yet the rich and vibrant softness of his voice told her that his love was no less passionately intense.

"Dearest!" he murmured. "Dearest Grace! You know now! Whatever I have done has been for you, beloved! Say you love me—that you'll marry me!"

The girl sought to draw her hands from his clasp.

"Oh, I—I can't tell you now! Let me go!" she implored. "This—I did not expect that you—so soon, and—and with him still here, and Tom—I must—must wait till Tom—"

He again drew her hands to his lips. Then with tender reluctance he released them.

"You are right, dearest," he acknowledged. "This is not the time for me to insist on an answer. But soon I will win out against him. I'll put him behind the bars and get the money. Then, dearest, I'll come to you for my answer!"

Abruptly he turned and left her. She stood motionless until she heard the closing of the front door.

As if startled by the sound, she shuddered and fled up-stairs in wild panic.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A New Custodian.

CANCE had been gone less than half an hour when Cameron and Dr. Vidnor returned from the Athletic Club. The physician was irritated, and did not hesitate to show the fact.

"See here, Bruce," he admonished, "this has gone far enough. It's all well enough for you to be reserved with my niece. Though she is usually discreet for one of her sex, she still is a woman. But this misleading of myself! All the way down there and back, and now, after putting me to the trouble of the long drive, you tell me you knew beforehand it would be a wild-goose chase!"

"Pardon me, doctor," blandly differed the young man. "I merely say there can be no doubt the message was a ruse to draw me off and leave him alone with Miss Denton. Incidentally we have learned that he knew about the loss of my key, and, therefore, probably was the one who took it."

"Practical joke of a brainless fop," grumbled Dr. Vidnor. "That is all it amounts to. You have your key back."

"But it is not my key."

"What's that? You took it as yours!"

"That's my part of the joke, doctor," replied Cameron with aggravating mysteriousness. His jaw thrust out and his eyes narrowed. "Now I'll ask you to talk with Miss Denton, and see what it was that our butterfly friend had to confide in her."

The physician frowned. "I admit the probability of your theory that he is in touch with a leak in the police department. But if he has information that will clear Tom, why should he tell Grace and not me?"

"Will it not help his standing with

the lady if he makes himself out a hero?" suggested Cameron. "On the other hand, if we let him play it out along his own lines, there's apt to be a mess—with your nephew in the midst of it. I can see that far into the muddle. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going up to do some thinking."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned his back and started up the stairs. Dr. Vidnor pursed his lips and peered from under his bushy eyebrows at the young man's aggressively squared shoulders. There was considerable irritability and a trace of doubt in his twinkling blue eyes. He frowned, shook his head dubiously, and went in to look for his niece.

She was not down-stairs. He ascended to the upper hall, looked into his bedroom, closed the door, and rapped at the door of the girl's room.

After a pause, Grace's voice tremulously inquired who had knocked. At his gruff response the door-bolt slipped out of its socket.

He opened the door to enter, but halted on the threshold to stare at the frightened face of his niece.

"Shut the door—quick!" she whispered. "Come in and shut it!"

She drew him into the room, thrust the door shut, and shot the bolt.

"What ails you? Hysterics?" demanded her uncle. "Stop—at once!"

"Oh, Uncle Len! I've been so frightened!" whispered the girl. "Alvin told me that he—he is—"

"Yes? Well, out with it!"

"That—that he—is the man who—who did those awful things at the bank!"

"What—Rance? He said he did it? He confessed? Impossible!"

"No! Oh, no, no! It was—was Cameron! He said that Cameron—"

"Hah!" ejaculated the physician. "He charges Bruce Cameron with—But that's absurd—preposterous!"

"But he explained. They know! They have the proofs!" rejoined the agitated girl, and half incoherently she poured out what Rance had told her.

Her uncle listened with all the gravity and concentration of attention that he would have shown in diagnosing a complicated medical case. The account was jumbled and somewhat distorted by the excited girl, but the physician was accustomed to the wild talk of neurasthenic patients.

He caught the facts and pieced out enough of Rance's shrewdly logical deductions to feel his skepticism shaken by a black doubt. Yet he was careful not to betray the doubt to his niece.

"Pooh-pooh!" he ridiculed. "All vapid fancy of a shallow sensation-monger! Bruce Cameron is not that kind of a man. Rance is afflicted with hallucinations, or else he is deliberately lying to cook up a newspaper story."

"But he believes it—I'm sure he believes it!" insisted Grace.

"Hallucinations, my dear. If anything more, it's his misconception of some stupid blundering theory of the police."

"Oh, do you think so? Just the same, the very thought of the possibility is dreadful! I'm afraid! Until I know for sure, I'll be afraid even to look at him. But we have Alvin's promise. We'll be relieved of his presence. Of course that means he will go away, or they will force him away."

"Um-m," considered the physician. "That may be taken as an intimation that the police intend to— But it's no proof of guilt, my dear; none whatever.

"Now go to bed and get a good sleep, like a sensible girl. It's coming out all right. With Tom making such splendid progress, we should smile at trifles. Cameron will easily clear himself of these trumpery charges."

Grace clasped her hands together. "You really think so, Uncle Len?"

"Yes. Go to bed—and to sleep."

"I—I hope Alvin is mistaken. I know he means well. He is trying his best to help Tom. But it is dreadful to—to think of any one doing—what was done that night!"

"It's a habit of giddy-headed cub

reporters to mean well when they spring their melodramatic sensations," growled the physician. "It has jangled your nerves quite enough. Go to sleep."

The girl mustered a half smile and held up her lovely face for his good-night kiss. He gave it to her, patted her shoulder with his pudgy hand, and left the room. As the bolt of the door slipped gently into its socket he walked directly aslant the hall to the door of Cameron's room.

He had to tap twice before he gained admittance. Cameron met his keen glance with the half unseeing, lack-luster gaze of one who has been absorbed in profound calculation.

"Ah, yes— Did I keep you waiting?" he asked in an abstracted tone. "I have been thinking. So you have seen Miss Denton? She gave you unpleasant information from our elegant society writer—something that troubles you."

Dr. Vidnor's frown deepened at this proof of the young man's remarkable acuteness. Cameron's mouth set in a hard smile, and his gray eyes raked the physician with a mocking glance.

"So our fashionable butterfly has been flitting about with pollen from nightshade blossoms," he jeered. "Your niece has been poisoned against me. You, also, have tasted, and are ready to swallow the concoction."

"H-m. You have not been as frank with me as I could wish," countered Dr. Vidnor. "There can be no doubt that Rance is in touch with the police."

"No doubt, whatever," dryly agreed Cameron.

"And they seem to believe you have found this mysterious key which—"

"Which is the key to the mystery," cut in the young man.

"Have you found it?" demanded the physician, pointblank.

Cameron's eyes narrowed. He stood for several moments, his gaze on the upper corner of the door-jamb and his strong, tanned fingers twiddling his watch-fob.

At last he looked down and faced the other's keen gaze with steady coolness.

"Yes," he answered. "I believe I have. That is, I found a key under the skirting board here in the closet. The chances are that it was put there by your nephew the night he came home from the bank."

"What kind of a key is it?"

The finder gravely thrust his hand inside his waistcoat and drew out a Yale key whose handle had been filed smooth.

"Put it on your own key-ring, doctor," he said. "They'll never think of looking for it there."

"But what is it the key to?" queried the physician, staring at the filed head. "Is it not my duty—our duty—to deliver it over to the police immediately?"

"And have them make a mess of everything!" scoffed Cameron. "If you have lost faith in me, take it to them, by all means—or give it back to me, so they will get it direct. I expect to be arrested any minute now!"

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

HER FIGURE

By John E. Dolsen

PERHAPS her face is not so sweet
As is a poet's dream of love,
And other women say her feet,
Though "out of sight," are much above
The number of the shoe she wears;
Yet for her little faults who cares?
Her figure is the loveliest one;
It sets my pulses all aflame,
And warms my heart as does the sun;
Two million, and all in her own name!

1-8-8-1

by W. T. Eldridge

Author of "The Forest Reaper," "Cowards All," "The Tormentor," "An Ancient Grudge," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

ONE morning Steven Grayson, a Wall Street financier, is found dead in his library, an empty laudanum vial at his feet and a slip of paper marked "1-8-8-1" on his desk. His son Charley believes that he was murdered, and suspects a stoop-shouldered man who demanded to see him and was admitted to the Grayson home the night before. Tom Medfield, his confidential man, is kidnaped. Charley receives a phone message from a woman to the effect that Medfield is confined in a house on the Baintree Road, Westchester. He motors to Westchester, locates the house, and is searching the place when he is plunged through a trap in the stairs.

Charley finds himself imprisoned in a little room under the stairway. He is released by a heavily veiled girl who says that Medfield is not in the house. She becomes agitated when they hear voices outside, hurries Charley to the barn, where he has an encounter in the dark with a stranger who has pursued them; then consents to return to town in his car. On the trip she is pleasant, but refuses to disclose her name or remove the veil. Returning from his father's funeral, Charley meets Helen Penbrook, the daughter of one of Steven Grayson's business associates. Helen invites him to Greyledge, her summer home. In the Penbrook limousine, her face shadowed, is a girl whose voice identifies her as the girl of the Baintree Road house. Frank Brodwitch, Helen's cousin, threatens to publish a scandalous article about Charley's father, and Charley has a violent quarrel with him.

After trying in vain to clear up the mystery of his father's death, Charley goes to Grayledge. Helen meets him at the station. She seems worried, talks of going away to rest, and then suddenly asks him to marry her. At this moment a Titian-haired beauty appears on horseback, calling merrily to Helen as she canters by. Charley recognizes her voice—she is the girl of the Baintree Road! After dinner Helen again proposes to Charley, then entreats him not to harm her father. She seems relieved when he assures her that he has no intention of doing so. She leaves him abruptly. A minute later Charley sees the Titian-haired beauty meet Brodwitch on the terrace below—and kiss him! That night he sees Brodwitch join the man who visited his father the night he died.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Eavesdroppers.

OF course it is conceded that a perfectly "nice" person or, if preferred, a perfectly honest and upright person, would never attempt to eavesdrop.

Charley Grayson was just plain human. He followed after Brodwitch and the little Irishman, and secured an advantageous position with his ear to the wall of a summer-house where the two men sat down.

"Well?" demanded Brodwitch, and his tone was about as disagreeable as a man's could be under the circumstances.

"Come across," suggested the small man.

This story began in The All-Story Cavalier Weekly for August 15.

There was the rustle of bills and: "That's all until I know what you've got this time."

Then:

"Van Cling came home drunk last night, and he and his wife had a run in. She accused him of going to dinner with some actress from the Gaiety Theater, and it ended in a row.

"He tried to choke her, and she let out a yell. Her maid came in and got fired out by Van Cling. Then there was a bunch of talk which the maid didn't get, being afraid Van Cling would catch her at the door. About two o'clock in the morning the car was ordered out, and Mrs. Van Cling went to her mother's."

"Huh," grunted Brodwitch.

There was the rustle of paper and then: "I've got three notes here to Mr. Werrington from Mrs. Vanderlin."

"What?" snapped the fat man.

"They're worth a hundred each."

"Let me see them."

"Not much," with a dry laugh. "Come across, you know I'm no faker."

More rustle of money, and then Charley put his eye to a small opening in the wall.

He could catch a hazy outline of Brodwitch when suddenly the man struck a match. In the light of the flickering flame he thumbed over the notes, got the gist of their contents and uttered one satisfied grunt as he thrust them into his pocket.

"What else?" he demanded.

"Ain't that enough for one night? You ain't easily satisfied."

"What about Grayson's servants, what have you done there?"

"What have I done there," growled the Irishman. "Say I tackled one of his men just as soon as Grayson left for here. Been trying to get him before and couldn't make it."

"Well, well, what did he say, did you fix him?"

McCarthy thrust forward his face. "Can you see that?" he demanded, leering at Brodwitch through a half closed eye. "That's what I got. The fellow gave me a clip in the jaw and swung on me eye, laying me stiff. You can get some one else to tackle that job."

"Say look here," snapped Brodwitch, "you can't hand that stuff to me. You aren't playing square, and I'll fix you for it."

"What you getting at?"

"I'll tell you. You were at Grayson's house the morning of the day he died. Don't lie to me, I saw you myself. What were you doing there?

"Young Grayson took you in, and you beat it away not long afterward. You weren't working for me then, on that, for I never asked you to tackle that fool until two days ago.

"Are you double crossing me on him? By God, if you are," and murderous anger crept into the tone, "I'll fix you sweet. I'm going to get that cad, and any one that plays to him stands to get it from me. Take that for a sure bet, McCarthy, and come across with the truth."

The Irishman tried to carry it off with a laugh.

"You think you're some smart, Mr. Brodwitch, but you can't bluff me, and I ain't afraid of ye. I ain't been near Grayson's joint until I got this bum lamp from his footman."

Charley had found a larger opening in the wall and he took a good look at the Irishman.

The moonlight fell straight through the door and directly upon McCarthy. One look and he knew that Brodwitch was being lied to.

Brodwitch eyed his companion in sullen silence for a moment. Then:

"All right," he snarled, "I'll find out what you are up to, and I'll make you dance. If you are playing me cr—" and the fat man's head came up with a jerk.

There had come a sound, heard by Charley as well as Brodwitch.

With an oath the fat man towered over McCarthy.

"You dirty cur," he hissed, "you've got some one listening," and with a wilder oath he was out the door of the summer-house and around the corner.

There was no time for Charley to do more than throw himself against the vines.

Brodwitch saw him, however, and with a yell pounced upon him. Before Charley could move to save himself he was yanked into the open and snapped upright.

"You low-down sneak," shrieked Brodwitch, and then he struck.

With a quick duck Charley avoided the blow, broke free and stepped back. In a paroxysm of rage Brodwitch rushed him, striking out.

Charley avoided, gave back and when pressed let drive with all his strength. His fist caught Brodwitch full on the point of the chin, and like a log the fat man went to earth.

As he fell a cry at Charley's side caused him to wheel. Almost at his elbow stood the girl he knew but as Marjory.

"I hate you," she cried, her face aflame with anger. She came straight to him.

Something in the situation impressed Charley as amusing. He felt her hot breath upon his cheek and he smiled as he nodded.

"Did you fancy that I thought you might feel differently toward me?" he questioned.

She was startled at the question.

"Why should I think you could do anything else but hate me?" he persisted. "You tricked me at the Baintree Road house. As enticing as you are, you have not played fair with me. And it should be otherwise; you know that it should."

Her big eyes, wonderful in the moonlight, parted wide. Her lips, red as fire, disclosed white teeth, and her full bosom lifted with one deep breath.

"Why?" She barely breathed the word.

"Why?" he smiled. "Does Fate ever allow two to meet as we met and have them hate each other? It would not be the order of things if the world was to run in proper circles.

"You," and his voice lowered as his bantering mood left him, "awoke fancy. You stirred strange hopes and made wonderful a mystery. All that I had was the lingering sweetness of your voice to guide me.

"Did you think I would fail to know you when we met again, having heard your voice once? Surely, if you did, it was a poor compliment to me.

"But now," and here anger came into his tone, "I find illusions smashed to bits. If you are bound to do something unkind, why choose that man," indicating Brodwitch, struggling to his elbow, dazed and bleeding at the mouth. "What company!" and he turned on his heels and walked away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Balcony to Balcony.

SLEEP was the last thing Charley thought of when he got back to his room.

Sinking down into the chair he had vacated when McCarthy's pebbles disturbed him he tried to readjust his theories in the light of the new information he had secured.

He felt that all the fine explanations he had been weaving had gone for naught.

Brodwitch had been the king-pin in the entire situation, as he had viewed affairs, and he had expected to find, when he got the truth, that Penbrook's nephew was the man who had sent the slip of paper by the Irishman, the receipt of which had caused his father to take his life.

Now, while he had heard enough to aid him in his resolve to down Brodwitch, he had also—and this was the most important part of all—learned that McCarthy had not called with that fatal slip at Brodwitch's directions.

Such information made it necessary for him to reconsider many points.

It looked as if Munroe, in receiving the same set of numbers, was not in the fat man's power as the banker had supposed. It was even possible that Penbrook's case must be viewed in the same light.

If he eliminated Brodwitch, he wondered where his hunt might lead. Of course he could still try to land McCarthy; thus the man who had sent the Irishman to his father, also the man who had attacked McGuire.

Suddenly a new idea came to him.

Was it possible that the numbers—1-8-8-1—had nothing to do with his father's death? He had been so certain that they had—and that the slip of paper bearing them had been brought by McCarthy—that he had been unable to conceive of any other explanation.

Now he pictured this situation:

McCarthy had come with just an ordinary message. After his departure some one, the same man who had attacked his footman, had appeared through the secret passage, killed his father and fled.

In considering this new view point a good many questions and conflicting theories developed. Why had McCarthy fled when he heard Brewster call out that his master was dead?

Was there a chance that both Munroe and Penbrook had been playing with him?

Were they working together, both telling him the same story, for a purpose he could not fathom, while one or both of them knew more than they pretended? How had it happened that Munroe had looked for the bottle of laudanum?

Had he put it there himself as a blind? Had Penbrook and Munroe visited his father that night, using the underground route?

He fell to pacing the room, answering his self-put questions and finding a dozen answers to each and a dozen and more new questions.

Then he turned his thoughts to the girl for, with all these demanding questions, her face seemed ever before him.

It was the sound of an automobile going down the drive that started his mind actively upon her. He wondered if she was leaving and if Brodwitch might be with her.

He knew he had had strange thoughts concerning her. Romance is bred in the bone of all men, and Charley was no exception.

One could never have charged him with being sentimental, yet he had thought that some day out of space one would come and he would know that she was the one.

Some such idea had been germinating since that night at the Baintree Road house. Perhaps the mystery of who she was had helped. Possibly, where she was concerned, no help was needed.

At least he knew that he had received a shock which had left him sick of heart when he had watched her meeting with Brodwitch.

Her telling him that she hated him was less terrible. He had no doubt but what she did just as surely as he knew that what he had given back in reply was not all true.

He tried to think who she could be. Then with a start he attempted to find some solution for Helen Penbrook's statement.

Helen had as good as told him that she understood that he could not care for her, caring for some one else; this girl of mystery undoubtedly being the one to whom she referred.

He stopped short as this question leaped into mind. Then he heard a sound and raised his head with sharp alertness.

When he located it, as coming from the next room, he lost interest. Again he sat down and some twenty minutes later heard footsteps go past his door, along the hall. They went just a little ways and stopped.

He was listening for them to move on or back when he caught another sound outside his window.

Like a shot he was on his feet and across the room.

There was no one on the balcony, and he had been prepared for almost anything when he arose.

He was standing just inside the French window able to command a full view of the balcony, but still not be seen.

In this position he caught, from outside, a quick drawn breath, which he fancied almost a smothered sob.

In two strides he was outside the window and there, on the next balcony, he saw her. She was peering downward, and for one wild second he had the idea she was going to throw herself to the stone flags below.

"Don't," he whispered.

She turned with a start.

"Oh," she whispered back, and a smile struggled with the tenseness of her expression, "it is just you."

She was gowned in a long, black wrapper which intensified her height. There in the night, with the dark trees as a background, she looked wonderful.

There was less color in her cheeks, her eyes seemed bigger, but she was marvelously beautiful.

And such a small space, ten feet about, separated them. He wanted to hold out his hands to her and beg her to come to him.

With a rush of hot blood he felt that he must tell her that he did not think she should hate him, that she could not, must not, when he cared so much.

But he found no speech; only he studied her, breath checked and longing grew ten thousand times greater than ever before.

Suddenly she moved and broke the spell. As if she floated upon air she came to the rail of the balcony, threw out one long white arm, and her lips, scarlet red in her pale face, parted.

"Is that your room, in there?" she begged.

He nodded and with his nod laughter, mystifying, mischievous, touched her lips.

There was something truly wonderful about her that he could not quite analyze.

It was as if the air about was charged with quivering currents, radiating from her, whispering of her beauty, of her vivacity—just of her and setting his heart and blood afire with madness.

"Then quick," she whispered to him, holding out her hand the further.

He comprehended instantly and, with no thought of why she might make the request, he was over the rail, setting one foot upon the balcony's edge outside the rail which he gripped with his hand.

Thus he swung himself out into space and threw his free hand upward.

"Come," he begged.

With no hesitancy she lifted her silken wrapper and had one knee upon the rail. He waited for her as she climbed and worked to a sitting position.

"One foot there," he whispered, nodding toward the narrow coping of stone which projected from the house line and ran even with the floor of the balconies.

Slowly she let herself slip down between him and the wall, and inch by inch her slippered foot and silken ankle crept nearer to the narrow footing.

His free hand was upon her arm steadying her, and when the toe of her slipper found its resting place he whispered for her to stand upright.

As if she had no thought for the yawning gap beneath, she did as he bade.

For one brief second she hung, his hand and weight alone steadying her. He called for her to jump, and, as lightly as a bird of the air, she flung herself across the opening.

He swung with her. Her two hands clasped the rail, and his arm went about her. There she was held, their bodies pressed close together for one delicious moment.

"All right," she nodded.

He swung toward the front of the balcony, steadied her again and with

marvelous cleverness she climbed the rail and was over.

He swung after her.

She was facing him as he dropped to the balcony floor. Her lips were parted, her bosom rose and fell a little rapidly and there was greater color in her cheeks, nothing more.

Then suddenly she gave back, cheeks ashen, a look of horror flashed in her eyes.

"Pretty!" came the sneer.

He swung. On the balcony she had quit stood Brodwitch leering at them.

CHAPTER XXV.

Blind Rage.

HARDLY an audible cry, escaping the girl's lips, swung Charley from the leering, mad, angry features of Brodwitch.

She was gone, into his sitting-room, and when he glanced back at the further balcony it was to see the fat man disappearing through the French window.

For one second he felt without the power to move, so stamped upon his brain was the look which had rested upon Brodwitch's face.

Ordinarily repulsive—over fat and bloated with dissipation—this night the man was more than disgusting. He bore a heavy bruise on his chin where Charley's fist had fallen and his under lip was cut and swollen where his teeth had dug into the flesh.

Added to this his face had borne a look of hatred, almost of murder, which awoke a great fear in Charley's heart.

With alarm he interpreted Brodwitch's move, following so closely upon the girl's disappearance. A warning cry broke from his lips, and he leaped for his room.

Brodwitch might hate him, but somehow, he fancied he hated Marjory the more.

To his relief he found that she had not moved toward the hall.

A smile, as if she read his apprehensions and wished to reassure him, touched her lips.

"You had better wait, just a little while," he suggested, moving a chair toward her. When she did not accept: "Or I will have him leave your room, and you can go there then."

"It is his room," she said.

"Your room?"

"His. I thought he had gone to town. Did you hear a car leave?"

"Yes," he agreed.

"And I thought he had gone," she frowned.

She lapsed into silence, though twice while he waited watching her, mindful of her beauty and charm above all else, she seemed about to speak, and each time hesitated.

"If there is anything I can do to help you," he suggested finally, and he thought of how he had made the same offer to Helen Penbrook.

"I was wondering if—if I could help you," she answered, and her eyes and her lips smiled upon him with faint plaintiveness.

"I do not think so," he shook his head, for he was certain that Brodwitch had had nothing to do with McCarthy's visit to his father.

"If I could," she frowned. "I owe it to you, I would be glad to do anything that I might."

He stepped closer to her, studying her pale face, surrounded by its encircling mass of Titian hair, somewhat awry.

"Tell me who you are," he urged.

Her eyes opened wider. For a second there was a glint of mischief in the brown depths.

"Don't you know?" she countered.

"I do not and I have wondered. If you could tell me how you came to be at that house on the Baintree Road and knew that little beast of a man. It isn't right for you to know such men, who spring traps under one."

"Traps?" she frowned.

He told her of the stairs which had opened under his feet and sent him

crashing into darkness, and her eyes grew troubled, her lips trembled.

"Oh, it is terrible," she whispered. "I—I should be silent, but—well, you are due some explanations. That old house on the Baintree Road has been in the Brodwitch family for years. It is the old farm, and the man there is just the caretaker."

"A queer caretaker," he mused, "who has trap stairs at hand for his callers."

"You do not believe me," she cried. "Those stairs; I know nothing of them."

"Of course. As for believing you," and his eyes met hers—and perhaps his look said more than his tongue: "I would believe anything you told me."

For one moment her glance searched his face and then she drew a deep breath, turning from him.

"I sent you there," she admitted. "But, of course, you have guessed as much. My voice betrayed me."

"I recognized your voice the next time I heard it, when you were with Helen in the car at the Grand Central. It was from you that I received that note asking me to say nothing of the Baintree house."

She nodded.

"I didn't want you to speak of it, for it could do no good. At the Grand Central I was afraid Helen might take you in, and I didn't want to meet you then. It never occurred to me that you would know my voice."

"Do you think after that very delightful barn escapade I could have made a mistake?" and he tried to make his tone light.

A faint smile of recollection touched her lips.

"I sent you because I thought, from something I chanced to hear, that your man Medfield was there."

"You thought that Brodwitch might have had something to do with Medfield's disappearance?"

"But he didn't, you cannot think that he did."

"I imagine not," he admitted.

"No matter what else he has done you can not think that," she persisted.

"You mean what I heard to-night, what you and I heard?"

With a shade of defiance in her look she answered him "I listened because I wanted to find out certain things."

"And because I wanted to know who that Irishman was. Do you happen to know him?"

She shook her head. "I suppose," wearily, "he is just one of those—" and she stopped.

"Those men whom he uses as his go-betweens. Men who bring him the dirty facts he buys from servants and uses for blackmail."

"You do not realize what you are saying," she cried, her cheeks pale.

He was startled at the look upon her face. It came to him that he did not know who this girl was or what her connections with Brodwitch might be.

Before he could frame an answer there was a sound in the hall. The door, which Charley had not thought of as being unlocked, swung open and Brodwitch stepped through, closing it behind him.

He had been drinking heavily and he backed against the door for support.

Marjory had turned.

Her hand flew to her mouth as she choked back a cry of fear. Brodwitch leered at them, a cunning smile distorting his repulsive face. Slowly he lifted his arm and pointed at her.

"You get out of here," he ordered. "I've got something to say to this cur," and he swung on Charley.

Swiftly the girl crossed to Brodwitch. "Please," she begged, "let everything go until morning. It is late now."

"Late," sneered Brodwitch. "So late you two want me to get out and leave you here alone. Grayson, you've got to answer to me for this, my sister in your rooms."

The girl uttered a smothered cry, shrinking back as if struck. Charley

was in front of Brodwitch in two strides.

"You get out," he snapped. "I'll see you in the morning and give you the chance to say what you want to. As for—your sister I will see that she goes to her room at once. You go now."

Brodwitch stiffened, lurched forward and half raised his fist.

"You dirty cur," he snarled. "You think you can order me about, do you? Well, you tried that once, telling me what I should and should not do, and you know what you got in the *Tattler*. You'll get worse, you low down—"

"Stop," roared Charley, his face white with passion. "You go. Miss Brodwitch, will you please leave us?"

"Lord," roared the fat man, "he doesn't even know who you are," and for just a second his anger was gone before coarse mirth.

Charley turned in bewilderment from one to the other.

"My name is Marjory Wenting," she said.

"Wenting!"

With the name Charley gave back. The room went black before him, everything seemed forgotten but that his father was responsible for her father's death. It was the irony of Fate.

"Come, get out," growled Brodwitch suddenly.

The tone stirred Charley. "You—you are just her half brother," he frowned.

"Well, what the hell of it," snapped from the thick lips. "I'll see to her just the same. I won't have her getting in with curs like you. Been through my papers have you," he shouted, his anger mounting high, "been in my room after what you could steal. I thought I'd land you and your smart tricks. You had an idea I'd beaten it in the car. Well, I did, down the road and hoofed it back, and I caught you, miss, going after my stuff to give to him."

"Frank," she cried, suddenly calm, "you do not realize what you are saying! They were my papers; you should have given them back to me as you agreed."

"You stole them," he roared on, "and you are going to give—"

"I shall not give them to Mr. Grayson."

"You lie!" he bellowed. "You and your silly twaddle about how much you thought of him and what his father had—"

Charley shut the tirade off by seizing Brodwitch by the shoulder and backing him up against the wall.

"That is all from you," he ordered, his voice husky. "You leave this room at once or I'll call Mr. Penbrook."

"To hell with Penbrook!" roared Brodwitch, wrenching himself free. "I'll make him dance yet, and you too, you— Take your hand off my shoulder!" as Charley tried to push him toward the door.

Marjory sprang forward, begging for silence lest the house be awakened.

At her urging, and to quiet Brodwitch, Charley let go his hold, and the fat man went reeling back. His feet slipped on the rug and he fell heavily.

With an oath he dragged himself to a sitting position and shook his fist at Charley.

"I'll teach you," he snarled. "You've told my uncle a lot of stuff; he's been at me, trying to tell me I'm the one who sent him those letters. You'll butt in on my game, will you—prying on me, listening to what I say to my friends? You'll try to butt in on Munroe next, and then—"

"Frank," begged Marjory, "you do not realize what you are saying."

"Don't I? Well, I realize that this cuss has spied on me, trying to get me as he threatened, and what I say won't put him any the wiser. He's a—" and the torrent of oaths and wild words sent Charley forward.

He took one step when up came Brodwitch's right hand and he fired.

As the pistol belched flame a wild shriek of alarm broke from Marjory's

lips. She flung herself forward, but Brodwitch was on his feet and had fired again.

The first bullet went wild; the second sent Charley reeling back with the feeling that he had been dealt a terrific blow.

As he went down he saw Brodwitch avoid Marjory and dash for the window. There had come the sound of footsteps in the hall.

With an effort he drew himself upright and gripped the table. Brodwitch had halted at the window threshold.

There he turned, slowly raised his pistol, and took deliberate aim at the white-faced girl too stunned to move.

With one wild cry of warning Charley sprang forward. He saw things as in a mist, the leering face of the man threatening death, the terror-stricken features of the girl.

Brodwitch fired, but as the shot rang out the heavy inkstand Charley had hurled struck the man full in the chest and the bullet plowed into the ceiling.

Brodwitch clutched at the window casing, caught his balance, and turned as Charley rushed him.

Before he could reach the opening Brodwitch was outside upon the balcony. With a spring, clumsy because of his overweight, he got to the top of the rail.

As Charley halted, fascinated, he balanced himself, got ready to make the leap, and swayed as he would have cleared the space.

For just one second he hung, his arms swaying to balance him, and then down, straight to the stone flags below, he pitched, a shriek of wild agony ringing out upon the night.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Out of the Passage.

JUST before Charley prepared to go back to town, the day following Brodwitch's attack upon him, he had a long talk with Penbrook.

The broker had seen him earlier in the day, and explained how he had satisfied the physician called in to administer to Charley's wound and give a death certificate in Brodwitch's case. It had not been hard for Penbrook to satisfy his family physician, for that gentleman asked few questions.

That Brodwitch had fallen by accident and, striking the stone flags, broken his neck was the way it had been put.

In Charley's case, Penbrook had explained that his guest was examining a revolver he was showing him which wasn't supposed to have been loaded.

All this Charley had been told before. Now Penbrook came to speak of his nephew, and also to mention that Marjory Wenting was bearing her loss bravely.

In truth, Penbrook made it plain that little real sorrow could be felt by Marjory or himself or any of his family over the catastrophe. The one thing that really troubled Penbrook was that Charley had suffered.

"It's nothing but a flesh wound," Charley replied, glancing down on his arm carried in a sling. "Darned uncomfortable, and I feel weak from the loss of blood.

"Beyond that — well, I fancy I should be willing to stand this much if it brought about his end. That sounds a bit inhuman, but I feel that the world is a good deal better off without his kind, and I might as well say it."

Penbrook nodded, and then, lowering his voice, he confessed to the same feelings.

"It's a relief, Charley—nothing else. Marjory feels the same way. I've had a long talk with her this morning, and we all feel differently toward her."

Charley turned an inquiring look upon Penbrook, and the broker went on.

"There are a good many sides to this thing. For instance, I supposed you were ready to push me to the wall until I had my talk with you. Then I

was convinced I must look elsewhere for the agent of those letters, and I thought of my nephew.

"Well, there is one thing certain; if he sent them, he helped you. Yes" —with a slow nod—"I would undoubtedly have sold heavily on certain stocks, following the news of your father's death, had I not received those letters.

"If I had you would have lost a good deal of money, for you held the biggest bulk on margin, and the price would have tumbled. Frank Brodwitch must have saved you many a dollar."

"I see," agreed Charley, thinking that it was a strange world where no feelings of friendship entered, but where fear of exposure or the holding of the whip-hand shaped the course. But he said nothing, waiting for Penbrook to go on.

"As for Brodwitch, I might as well tell you that I have for a long time suspected what he was about. One thing that brought this idea was when I learned what he was doing at the old Brodwitch farm.

"There, he went even to the extent of robbery. I was at the house this morning, for Marjory told me a little of your experience there.

"I guess that you know how my nephew bled men and women by buying information concerning them. When he had a man in his toils he would arrange, through a third party, to fix matters for them, and appoint the Baintree Road house as the rendezvous.

"The poor fools would go there to buy relief, be shot through a trap in the stairs, and robbed. It was a pretty raw game," added Penbrook with a shake of his head, "and it makes my blood boil to think a relative of mine could do such things."

"I see," nodded Charley.

"I've suspected some of this before. To-day I have found out enough to make me heartsick, and not anxious to talk about it. I'm telling you this much because of what you have suffered, and I want to add that my fear that these things were being done led us all to be less cordial to Marjory when she came from Europe, a few months ago.

"I was so bothered and worried over what I feared Frank was doing that I—all of us—treated Marjory with scant courtesy. We were in a state where we almost thought she might be a party to his acts."

Charley's face took on a dull red, but he held his peace. It was useless to speak his thoughts, and certainly he did not care to let Penbrook know how he felt.

Of one thing he did want to talk, however; and before he started back for town he urged his host to give him the full facts regarding the West Side Trust matter, more particularly the full details of the final deals and conferences which, failing to bring help to Wenting, ended with the banker's death.

He got little satisfaction, and rode into town heavy of heart.

He could not put out of mind the thought that his father had been in a position to save Wenting, and that through his failure to lend a helping hand her father had been driven to suicide.

He had not seen Marjory before leaving; in fact, not that day; but he was resolved to do so at the first opportunity, and offer to make what restitution lay in his hand. He had no real idea what he could do—money seemed a mockery under such circumstances—but that he must do something to atone in a slight degree he was convinced.

He got home, went to the library, and after a little, into the bath and locked the heavy padlock he had had placed upon the sliding panel.

Then he went and sat down to await Jack Hanson's coming, for it had been a telephone message from Brewster—relaying a message from Hanson—which had brought him to town that day.

What Hanson might have discovered he did not try to guess, but he believed news was upon him, and he waited with marked anxiety.

As he waited, still thinking of the one who had done what she could for him, offering all the help she might, he came to recall some of the slurs thrown at him by Brodwitch in his rage.

It came to him then that Marjory Wenting had given him her aid because she felt under some certain obligation for something his father had done for hers.

Brodwitch had as good as said as much; he recalled that now.

The recollection brought relief. He wanted her charity; he wanted her love; but he wanted to find, if it might be possible, that his father was not responsible for her loss.

A sound awoke him from his thoughts. Instantly he was upon his feet and down the room. When the door at the far end opened, the door leading into the little hall which ran from library to sitting-room and on to the private bath, he stepped behind the screen beyond the great mahogany desk.

Two men came into the room. For one second he was of the mind that it was Medfield, and then he saw his mistake.

The fellow resembled his father's confidential agent; but he was taller, heavier of build, more powerful in face and figure.

But beside this man came Jack Hanson, and Hanson had told him that he knew nothing of the secret passage.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Wall Safe.

CHARLEY'S first inclination was to step forth and confront the two men. Then it came to him that he had returned from Greyledge at Hanson's urging. He began to think that these past days had put him into a state of mind where he suspected every one.

From between the panels of the screen he commanded an excellent view of the library. Hanson had stopped and turned on his companion.

The man, who certainly bore a striking resemblance to Medfield, shot a glance about.

"That door there, better lock it," and he nodded toward the hall.

Hanson shrugged.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded with a smile. "You've got nothing to fear. I'm cover for your safety, and you can get busy with no fear of being disturbed."

"But none of the servants saw us come in."

"Well, you picked the way. I offered to bring you in through the front door, but you preferred the back passage. Go ahead; if any of the servants butt in, I'll guarantee to satisfy them.

"They all know I'm in and out, more or less, and your being with me wouldn't make them bat an eyelash. Get busy, though.

"Young Grayson is at Penbrook's place, but he might take it into his head to come home any old time, and we want to be sure to be out of here before he does. I could fix Brewster or any of the other servants, but it would take some tall explaining to satisfy Grayson. Get going."

Apparently satisfied, the man crossed to the fireplace.

"Let's see," he muttered; "it was to the left, and I'll take another go, though I couldn't find it the other night."

Hanson settled himself in an easy chair, and lighted a cigarette.

"The night you did for McGuire?" he asked indifferently.

The man swung. "What are you getting at?"

"You say you didn't find the place the other night. You mean the night you got Grayson's footman and made your search. Oh, I've kept track of you," with a low laugh.

"Don't you think I was wise enough

to appreciate there were pickings here with Mr. Grayson dead? I've told you that. What's more, I've been told all that was going on, and I put one and two together.

"That's how I came to run you down; I wasn't going to be left out. Of course, it was you who fixed McGuire. Lucky for me you didn't find the safe that trip, or I never would have got in on the thing."

The man turned with an ugly scowl on his face.

"Yes," he admitted, "I made that hunt. That was the only time I was here outside of the night he died. If I'd found the safe then, I'd be a good many miles from here by now."

As he talked he worked along the wall, sounding the high wainscot which surrounded the room.

"I see," agreed Hanson. "With the stuff you'd have made tracks and lived happily ever after—doing people."

"Hell," growled the man, "you needn't think there is such good picking as all that. At any rate, I've agreed to hand you the amount you wanted, and what in hell more do you want?"

"Oh, I'm satisfied," laughed Hanson, blowing rings; "but you want to remember you'd have had a hard job getting in here if I hadn't come to your aid."

"Did you unlock that bath-room door? I tried it last night, and couldn't get any further than the end of the passage."

"Sure," nodded Hanson. "I fixed it so you couldn't, and then watched and landed you. I guessed you'd make another try, and I didn't see any other way to get my pickings. Good thing for you that I was ready to come in with you and not darned anxious to play with Grayson. Found anything?"

The man shook his head and continued at his work. For half an hour he went up and down the side wall, tapping and sounding, but to no avail.

At last Hanson got up and stretched himself.

"Guess there isn't any safe, after all," he mocked.

"Well, there is. It's right here somewhere, for I've seen old man Grayson open it. If I'd paid more attention to the spot it would be easier. The damned thing is hidden fine.

"I've got to locate it and then the spring. I'd have done it the other night if I hadn't thought some one was at the hall-door and beat it. If we are left alone, we'll get the stuff this trip."

"Say," exclaimed Hanson, coming to a sudden stop, "I'll make sure of that. I'll phone Penbrook's place and see that Grayson doesn't leave."

"Good idea," agreed the fellow, and he went on with his work, tapping away with his knuckles and a light piece of steel held in his hand.

Hanson crossed to the desk, drew the telephone to him and gave a number. Charley, not three feet from the instrument, caught the low spoken words, and he knew Jack Hanson was not calling Greyledge.

"Hello!" exclaimed Hanson. "I'd like to speak with Mr. Grayson. This is Hanson, his secretary. Say to him that it is quite important."

He settled back in his chair watching the man at work on the wall.

"Yes, yes," he agreed suddenly. "Mr. Grayson, this is Hanson. Didn't know but you'd have some instructions, so called you up. No, nothing of importance to-night at this end.

"I've got an idea we'll land Medfield before morning. Can't be sure, of course, but I think we have a good clue. Just thought I'd let you know that there wasn't any need to come in to-night. What? Good, you'll be in to-morrow. I'll meet you, about noon. Then you won't be in until to-morrow. Good."

He hung up the receiver and swung in his chair.

"Go to it, old man," he smiled; "you've got the night before you."

The fellow gave a satisfied nod and went on with his work. In an hour he was still at it, but a little later he gave a satisfied grunt.

"There," he exclaimed, studying the woodwork through his magnifying glass, "I've got it!"

Then began a hunt for the hidden spring, and at last Charley, watching intently, saw a section of the wainscot swing outward.

"A safe, as I live!" exclaimed Hanson.

"Yes, and you back up," snapped the man, his voice alive with satisfaction. "You'll get your price, but I get full go at what's here."

Hanson turned away, went down the room, and halted for a moment by the door leading from the library to the little hall which connected with the sitting-room.

When he turned to pace the rug the fellow had the safe open, employing tools brought in his bag, and was busy with the contents of the pigeonholes and drawers.

A rapid search of the papers and documents was soon made. A large number the man transferred to his own pockets, the balance he returned to the safe. Snapping the door closed, he straightened.

"Right. Come on now and I'll hand over your price."

Hanson let him go down the room, waiting, his cigarette between his lips and one eye closed.

The fellow tried the door to the little hall and wheeled like a shot.

"It's locked," he whispered, all the elation gone from his voice on the instant.

"Sure," smiled Hanson, "I locked it."

"You!" And the fellow straightened and took a step forward.

"Exactly. Did you ever read the story of the cat and the monkey and the chestnuts? Who pulled the nuts out of the fire and got burnt?"

"What in hell are you trying to get at?"

"I was just afraid you'd think you'd burnt me, and I wanted to set you right," smiled Hanson calmly. "You've pulled out the chestnuts, now hand them over."

"Do what?" And there was a note in the voice that was dangerous.

"Hand over those papers. None of us knew about that safe. It has been kind of you to locate it, for no doubt Mr. Grayson will be glad to examine his father's property.

"Come," with a sharp ring in his tone, "cut out the dangerous. Don't reach for that pistol of yours. When I telephoned, it wasn't to Mr. Grayson, but to a private detective agency. Your brother is landed, and this house is nicely surrounded.

"You can't walk out without my passing you by the police. Hand over what you've got and I'll see that you have the chance to escape. Get funny and I'll have you sent up as sure as death."

As Hanson spoke the man's shoulders lowered.

His face grew black with anger as he realized how he had been trapped. For just one second he hung, swaying backward and forward upon his toes.

Then with a wild yell he flung himself forward, murder in his heart.

As quickly as he sprang, Jack Hanson was the quicker. He simply sidestepped and, while the fellow brushed by him, he missed and went on crashing into the great desk.

With a yell he caught his balance and whipped out his revolver.

"You dirty cur," he snarled, "open that door and see me through or you'll never live to yap of your smartness. Come, be quick."

The revolver came up slowly and covered Hanson.

Then Charley, fascinated by this sudden change in the picture he had watched so intently, swept the screen aside.

With one spring he was upon the man's back, his good arm going about the fellow's neck.

As he made the leap the man half turned upon him and the roar of his revolver was followed by the dropping of the ceiling plaster where the bullet tore a great hole.

Hanson was forward with a cry, but before he could clear the space the two went down, Charley underneath.

The great desk, with its carved legs, was at the back of the two men.

Charley fell first, his head struck the claw foot, and blackness enveloped him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Understanding.

RECOLLECTION, and a realization of his surroundings came slowly to Charley Grayson.

For some time, at lucid, semi-conscious moments, during the past days, he had been aware of an attentive, white-capped nurse and once or twice of the doctor's presence, the same physician who had dressed the bullet wound inflicted by Brodwitch.

There had also been a moment when he had opened his eyes and looked into Jack Hanson's face. That there was trouble in Hanson's features Charley thought quite to be expected.

"Say," he muttered, moving uneasily under the smooth bed clothes, "did—did you get him; Medfield, wasn't it?"

"It's all right, Mr. Grayson," assured Hanson.

"You're damned formal. After what we've been through, what you've done you might—" A vision in white moved to the side of the bed and Charley lost interest in what he was about to say in noting the way in which his wrist was lifted for the pulse.

"I'll see you later, Charley," smiled Hanson, catching the nurse's sign, and he went away.

Charley merely nodded.

He was busy studying the nurse, who, while decidedly pretty, did not, somehow, coincide with ideas he had of one who had been a constant attendant.

That he was in bed he knew, that he had suffered and had wild moments he seemed to recall; but he could not make this nurse agree with another whom he was certain he had seen a good many times.

Trying to think hurt, and so he stopped.

Then there came a time when he got the gist of the matter.

Hanson and he had a talk, the doctor allowing, and it was a good deal of a shock to Charley to hear that he had been in bed a number of weeks.

"Well," he agreed, "I do remember getting a thump on the head—against the desk, I believe—but I never for a moment supposed it was enough to crack my skull. Contusion, eh?"

"Nothing less," admitted Hanson. "You've had a close call, Charley, no harm in telling you that now, and we all have worried a good deal.

"We all?" suggestively, still thinking of the nurse he seemed to remember but didn't see now.

"The Penbrooks. Munroe has been bothered, too. You're at Greyledge, you know. I didn't know what to do and then, when I telephoned Mr. Penbrook—after I had nailed Medfield—why he and his daughter and her friend came to town. I guess they broke all speed records in getting in."

"At Greyledge?"

"Penbrook insisted upon bringing you here and he had a dozen surgeons out. Too many doctors often spoil the broth, but I guess good nursing brought you through."

"Say," frowned Charley, "I have an idea I've done a lot of talking. Just can remember jabbering away like a wild one. What have I been saying?"

Hanson smiled. "Too much to tell you now," he laughed.

A few days later Hanson and Charley got together again and, they went into many things. The contents of Steven Grayson's safe was spread be-

fore Charley, and he went over the papers.

There were bonds and negotiable securities, which Hanson had wrested from Medfield after one blow had laid the man out, and a letter, the most important of all to Charley, for it had been written by his father the night of his death.

He read it carefully and put it away. Then he and Hanson talked long into the afternoon.

Two weeks later Charley came down to dinner. Helen was there, her sister, Mrs. Penbrook and the broker.

Also Marjory Wenting.

A few days slipped by and Charley began to talk of going back to town. The Penbrooks didn't want him to think of doing so. Marjory Wenting said nothing and Charley decided he must go.

So it was planned that he would stay over the following Sunday and leave Monday morning.

Sunday afternoon Helen found him in the sitting-room on the second floor. There was a big snapping wood fire on the hearth and Charley was trying to read the papers, but actually attempting to piece together certain hazy recollections he had not been able to get straightened out, nor find any one who would elucidate.

"We're going for a run out to the Meadowline Club, Charley," explained the girl. "You won't mind being left alone?"

"Lord," he smiled, "I'm not such an ingrate. Say, Helen, you've done a heap for me. They tell me it was nursing that brought me around. I want to thank you."

"Me," she laughed softly, "I didn't do much."

"No?" he frowned.

She shook her head.

"Say," he suddenly demanded, sitting straight, "are you going to rob me of one I like better than any fellow I know?"

Her look of surprise was not quite genuine, and Charley laughed at her.

"Go on," he advised, "the car's waiting. But, Helen, Jack Hanson is a brick."

Miss Penbrook attempted bewilderment and fled precipitously when Charley's mirth became contagious.

"Oh Lord," he groaned, "but—well, darn it, I'm glad for them. They deserve it."

He heard the car go down the drive and got up to watch it. The tonneau was quite full and he couldn't make out the occupants.

When he turned to go back to the hearth fire he heard steps coming up the stairs. Presently the door opened.

"Helen said you wanted to see me," suggested Marjory.

He moved a chair in front of the fire, thinking Helen's charity was of a kind hard to equal.

"I have," he admitted, "a great many things that I want to say to you. I've got a lot of things straightened out in my mind, yet some things not at all clear. I hope you can help me on certain points."

"For instance?" she spoke very softly.

"I know who McCarthy came from; that Irishman."

She nodded.

"You recall I asked you once if you knew him. Well, it's good at least to know Medfield didn't go crooked. I haven't seen him, but he's attending to my affairs right up to the mark now, and no one could do it better, Jack Hanson says.

"Hanson's a trump," he rambled on, finding it easier to talk of this side of affairs than the one he really wanted to speak about. "Do you mind if I explain?"

"I shall be very glad to hear about it all."

"I hope that means that you are a bit interested," he ventured with his old-time smile.

"I came near being in on so much of it that I am, naturally."

"Well, it involves you and me," he explained. "And I want you to know

just how I feel about a certain phase of this affair, so I might as well go at it and have it all out. Strange how you and I are concerned in all this."

"How?"

"McCarthy came from Medfield. Tom Medfield was my father's confidential man. His brother, Jack Medfield, had done a lot of things for my father; just what, I don't know, but different matters had been given to him to look after. Do you know about that secret passage?"

"Mr. Hanson has told me some things," she nodded.

"Jack Medfield knew of that passage and used it. He came up through it that night, after McCarthy had been there, and brought from Tom Medfield a note warning my father against his brother.

"Tom Medfield had learned that night that his brother was not doing the straight thing by my father. Tom had to go to Jersey on business and couldn't come himself.

"He tried to get my father on the phone, this he has told Hanson, and, failing, sent a note by McCarthy. It was just a note of warning against his brother. And his brother came that night, up through the passage, with the intentions of robbery. He thought my father would be away or in bed. He found him—dead."

Charley took a turn across the room. Marjory sat with chin in hand, her big eyes on the snapping logs.

Then, when he found what had happened, he had an idea, he confesses to this. He kidnaped his own brother the next morning to get him out of the way, thinking that if Medfield was not around to advise me he might profit by the way the market would kick up when the news of my father's death became public.

"After that he decided on robbery and tried it, to be landed by Hanson, who had traced the fellow, located Tom and got him free by sending the private detectives to the place he was held a prisoner by his brother."

"Then, though this man McCarthy knew Frank Brodwitch, his coming that night did not have any connection with him?" she whispered.

Charley came across and stood with his back to the fire and looked down upon her.

"I'm going to go into everything, because I think it best," he said slowly.

She looked up. Their eyes met and she nodded.

"Well, my father left a note, put it into the safe that Jack Medfield unearthed for me. That note my father wrote before Jack Medfield came up through the passage, for after writing it he took the laudanum."

"And he—" But she did not finish.

"He took the laudanum," went on Charley grimly, because he had received a slip of paper with 1-8-8-1 written on it. The same combination of numbers received by Mr. Munroe, which kept that gentleman from raiding my stocks and losing me a million odd.

"The same thing that kept Mr. Penbrook from raiding on his account; only with Mr. Penbrook the warning was sent in a different manner."

"Oh," she whispered, "you mean—" and her eyes, lifted to his, were filled with appeal.

"Frank Brodwitch sent them," he admitted, as if he was bound to go on with the task he had selected, no matter what came of it. "He found out about the Westside Trust matter in some way, just found out then I fancy, and began to use his power."

Marjory was on her feet. Swiftly she came to him and bent forward. Her face was touched with pain, lines formed suddenly.

"Do you know who made it possible for Frank Brodwitch to kill your father?" she cried, her voice choked with emotion.

"What do you mean?" he frowned, startled by her vehemence.

"I did. Oh, can't you see, can't you understand what I have suffered?

For I have guessed a little of all this that you are telling me. I had that power and I gave it to Frank Brodwitch to use.

"Listen" — almost breathlessly — "I had a lot of my father's papers. When I came from Europe I did so because of what I had heard concerning Frank. I wanted to find out if he was doing as rumor said, and I was bent on stopping him, although—well, I wanted to stop him, though we were nothing to each other."

"Yes?" he agreed.

"I believed him when he assured me they were a pack of lies, these stories. I let him go over my father's papers and among them he found a letter or statement written by my father just before he died.

"In that statement he told how he had sent to Mr. Munroe, Mr. Penbrook, and to your father a warning saying that he had given to the others a statement of the Westside Trust affair distorted to make each appear guilty of nearly wrecking the bank and causing his death.

"Mr. Munroe felt that your father had the whip-hand over him; so did Mr. Penbrook. Your father thought that Mr. Penbrook had the statement, and actually — no — such—statement was ever sent to any one of the three."

She stepped back, the color deep in her cheeks and her breath coming quickly.

"What?" frowned Charley, getting this startling truth in hand. "How, then, could Brodwitch use the information? There wasn't any statement. What Munroe, what Penbrook, what my father feared was just a myth?"

"Yes," she agreed.

"Just something sent to make them remember always what they had done. I see"—more to himself, almost unconscious of Marjory—"he wrote to them as he did and then ended it all, knowing that after he was gone they would still remember—every day—they would always fear him and think how different it might have been had they given aid."

"And I—I allowed that power to be used—as it was," she moaned.

He looked up sharply, watched her sink slowly into the big chair, and stepped forward.

"Retribution," he said slowly. "It may seem a strange thing to say, but it was that."

"But I—I did it," she whispered. "I was trying to get those papers back the night you helped me on the balcony."

He nodded. "My father's letter told me how he got the warning."

"Did it tell you," with sharp eagerness, "that he was not to blame for my father's death? Do you know that after their last conference your father wrote to mine, telling him that he was ready to take care of all the notes at the bank; that his fortune was at my father's disposal. That letter came after my father was dead, but I have it."

Charley drew a great breath and his eyes were bright with a new light.

"I guessed as much from what my father said in his letter to me. He spoke of how little he deserved to be persecuted—as he put it—for something he had striven to avert and had offered to prevent."

"He did everything, more than even his brother-in-law or Mr. Munroe thought of doing."

"Yet his offer came too late."

"That was not his fault. How could he have known what would happen. It was a great, big, generous offer. The cruel part is that, knowing all this, only intent upon playing upon their fears, Frank Brodwitch should have done as he did."

Charley did not answer for a long moment. Slowly Marjory's eyes lowered under his steady regard and a deep flush stole into her cheeks.

When he did speak it was in a different tone of voice, low, appealing.

"We have the facts in this now," he said, his resolve made, "and you

and I are going to forget it all. There is no gain in our harrowing our feelings further. We will put it all behind us, this unpleasant part, and turn to a future.

"Marjory, you can understand. You must know, for I am sure in my moments of raving I said enough for you to comprehend that I love you. There was just a fear that my father had robbed you, and that would have held me silent. Now there is no need. I want you to know that I care for you, dearest, as for no other woman. I want you to say you will marry me."

She did not raise her head nor look at him.

"Marjory?" he questioned finally.

Then she looked up, and he saw that her eyes were swimming pools of tears. For just a moment he fancied they might be tears of gladness, and then he noted the wistful shake of her head, the tired, aching touch that pouted her lips.

"It is kind of you; it makes me feel that all I have suffered is much easier to bear, to think that you forgive so readily."

"Forgive? What is there for me to forgive, dear one?"

"What we have done to you—I and my brother."

"It is not so," he cried. "You have done nothing. What he did—well, you had no part in it, and he has paid."

She got up slowly then and walked across the room, though he threw out a hand to her which she would not see. So he let her go, watching her, for he seemed to understand that there was a question which she must settle for herself.

Looking out upon the lawn, Marjory saw the bare trees, the dead leaves, and the brown turf, and it seemed to her as if her heart was dead too. Yet, somehow—and the feeling had just come and would not down—it was as if way deep down there was a spark, as there was in the soul of the turf and the heart of the trees.

And the spark within the gray, silent things would come to warm life in the spring.

Was the spark, which his words had put into her soul, like that?

He waited for her until he found that he must speak. Crossing slowly, he stood at her side.

"Marjory, my love, you know how I care. I cannot seem to find the words to tell you just how much you are to me, how little there is in life without you. Perhaps you know"—he smiled whimsically—"for I fancy while I was ill, and you nursed me back to life, I spoke of all my heart holds for you."

"Then you did not know what I had done," she whispered, and her voice caught.

"What have you done?" he challenged.

"I brought those papers to him, and through them he obtained the power to rob you of your father. Can you not understand how I have suffered? I suspected all that you have told me just now, and to hear you speak of your love for me, to see how readily I could comfort you when you were ill, tore my heart as—as even unkind words from you could not have done."

"My love, this is perversity on your part. You twist the situation and take blame where no blame rests. My dear, are you going to love me or are you going to let this stand in the way?"

"I love you," she admitted, turning then and meeting his eyes.

Then the trouble fled from his face and laughter came; but he did not move.

"With that confession do you think I will allow you to be barred from me by imaginary things?"

"You cannot understand how I feel," she protested.

Deliberately, smiling down into her eyes, he took her hands in his and drew her to him.

"Listen," he whispered as his arms went about her, "will you blame yourself for the acts of one too low to be thought of again? Will you charge

yourself with what he did when you would not have done such a thing or—will—you—just—love—me?"

His lips found hers; she could not answer him if she would have. And with that kiss the spark, deep down in her heart, awoke; spring had come.

It grew, set her very body afire, made more wonderful the golden glint of her hair, the fire in her eyes, the red of her lips that were like blood roses.

And he felt it, too, in her throbbing pulse, the suppleness of her body, in the fragrance of her being.

"Charley dear," she whispered.

"My love," he answered her.

(The end.)

Desiree's Destiny

By Brevard Mays Connor

DESIREE'S dark brows arched into a frown that was meant to be intensely thoughtful and businesslike.

But the lips that were a red stain on the translucent pallor of her face pouted in a way that was neither; only womanly weak and appealing.

"New plows are so expensive, Davis," she complained in her slow Southern drawl that was softer than thick velvet. "We really can't affohd them. Won't the old one last anothah season?"

"Them plows shake like they had the ague, Miss Des'ree," replied her overseer, who sat with easy familiarity on the step below her. "This here climate's so damp it cuts into iron like it was butter. Yo' paw always bought new every three years."

He looked up with helpless apology in his pale, weak eyes and combed the thin beard that veiled his sallow cheeks like sun-bleached seaweed littering a sallow beach.

Her frown resented this helplessness of his, yet shared it. Her shoulders drooped; her hands lay limply in her lap.

"Then I suppose we-all will have to buy new," she admitted with a sigh that held less sorrow than relief that the perplexing question should be off her mind.

Davis agreed joylessly and took his departure.

The frown marred Desiree's forehead again as she summed up his leisurely gait, the slovenliness of his dress, the incompetent sag of his shoulders. Something was wrong with the man as something was wrong with her immediate world.

But she shrank from facing the unpleasant truth that awoke in her only dismay and a nerveless helplessness.

"Oh dear!" she sighed. "Oh dear!"

Aunt Georgette, who sat in the shadow of the honeysuckle vines, stopped the slow weaving of her turkey-wing fan, and with palpable effort raised her heavy lids until she could survey her niece.

"I wouldn't worry, honey-sweet," she purred, and her voice was softer than Desiree's, soft and clinging in the mouth like thick cream. "I wouldn't worry. We-all will get along. The Delacroixs have always gotten along."

The heavy lids drooped; the fan began its gentle weaving; a tree-toad droned its philosophy of restful monotony.

The words lulled Desiree into contentment, and she relaxed, frown and fretfulness gone.

There was no good in worry. They would get along.

The yellow sunlight stabbed through the smoky green roof of pines, stenciling fantastic arabesques of light and shade on the flooring of brown needles. Green water glinted behind the swaying curtain of Spanish moss that draped the live-oaks along the bayou.

It was so restful, so soothing to the senses. And it was pleasanter not to worry!

She lifted her hands and let the sunlight drip through her fingers, enjoying the sensuous warmth.

"Honey," objected her aunt, "you'll freckle!"

"What difference does it make," pouted the girl, dropping her hands into her lap, nevertheless, and sighing. "I might as well be old and wrinkled and hideous here on the Bogue Falaya. There's no one to see or care.

"And we can't affohd to live in town, and I can't affohd to dress like Lila Lejeune, and we can't affohd anything. Oh dear! I hope I get a horrid yellow freckle right on the end of my nose!"

"Des'ree! Remember Lila's housepahty!"

"It's fo' months off. Things are always fo' months off for me."

"But Louis is coming ovah next month."

"Louis!" She shrugged her delicate shoulders. "I wondah what actress he'll be raving about."

"Honey!" protested her aunt.

The modern girl was very perplexing. In her day the preservation of one's complexion was on a par in importance with the preservation of one's soul; in her day a girl would have died of shame before confessing a knowledge of the frailty of a man who was otherwise eligible.

The topic languished, was blown from the minds of both by the warm caress of the breeze.

"Somebody's coming," Desiree announced languidly. "Why, he's getting down to open the gate!"

It was a patent gate that opened by means of ropes hung conveniently to buggy-seat and saddle, and no one they knew would have gone to the trouble of dismounting.

She heard the cane chair creak beneath her aunt's heavy weight, and stiffened with interest herself.

The simple action out of the ordinary broke the spell of the languorous mid-morning and stirred her drowsy contentment as a vagrant wind ridges a sleeping pond.

The stranger rode straight up to her, swung down, and lifted his hat.

He addressed her with a frank, sexless directness that refreshed if it did not flatter.

"Miss Delacroix?" And at her nod: "My name is Gary — Wister Gary. I have a letter from Nona Munger."

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "I met her at Mardi Gras. Then you're from New Yo'k?"

He was searching through one pocket after another of his Norfolk jacket, chagrin deepening in his face.

"I do believe—now, wasn't that

stupid? I've left the letter at the hotel."

"But that's all right. I'm glad to meet you, Mistah Gary. Come in and sit down."

He obeyed hesitatingly.

"This is very kind," he began, "not to suspect me of being an impostor."

"Why should I suspect you of that? Surely you're not so suspicious in New Yo'k?"

"We have to be," he replied.

She laughed, low and musically.

"We generally take a person's word down here, and even an impostah would be a pleasant diversion on the Bogue Falaya."

She turned to introduce her aunt, but found that good lady had fled in the noiseless way that was so surprising in one of her bulk.

Aunt Georgette was averse to having the household, even, surprise her in breakfast negligee.

"I guess you're taking the rest cure," the girl suggested. "That's the only reason people come here. There isn't anything else to do."

Though her tone was casual, her eyes were scanning him with the deepest interest. He was a new and puzzling type to her.

For one thing, she had caught no admiration of herself in his voice or face, and she was accustomed to having men's eyes flatter her at first glance. This piqued as well as puzzled.

Even his exterior was puzzling. His limbs showed straight and youthful in the puttees, but there were many little lines raying out from his eyes that matched the occasional glint of silver in his hair.

"Resting is the hardest work I've ever done," he replied.

He spoke crisply, almost harshly, she thought, who had been used to mild tones in men at all times, and milder when they talked to a woman.

"I've never taken a vacation beyond week-ends in my life and never wanted one. This was forced on me. The doctors threatened me with an eternal rest unless I came South and forgot there were such things as stocks and bonds."

He smiled apology for his weakness.

"In me you see the tired business man. Only I refuse to admit I am tired. It is a conspiracy in restraint of trade hatched up by Nature and my business rivals. I appealed for an injunction; but the courts of medicine found against me. And here I am, asking you what there is to do."

"Do?" she scolded prettily. "You are not to do anything but rest and drink in our sun and ozone and natural beauties. You must be a lotos eater and fohget."

He frowned heavily at the scenery.

"Too much beauty is unhealthy. It makes us content with the present and saps our ambition. As for lotos-eating that is downright immoral."

He looked from the landscape to her and back again.

"But the land of the lotus is a good name for this place. I have quite a crow to pick with it if it will only wake up enough to argue with me."

"That isn't gallant," she pouted, "and it isn't grateful. If it wasn't for the land of the lotos what would become of you tired business men?"

He smiled with her, but unconvinced.

"I almost believe the doctor's alternative is preferable. But with the tramps and the fishing and the riding —you ride, I suppose?"

"Ye-es, sometimes, when it isn't too wahm and I have the energy."

She was startled, he looked so displeased, and she flushed angrily as he looked her carefully up and down, taking in the flaccid droop of her shoulders, the transparency of her slender hands, the querulous ennui mirrored in her velvety eyes.

"You walk or swim, perhaps?"

"No," she replied coldly. "You will be disappointed if you look for athletic girls like you have in the nohth. We have neithah the climate nor the constitutions for it."

"That's true," he agreed, and he seemed actually to pity her. "But I think you'd be terribly bored with nothing to do."

"But I have lots to do," she cried. "I manage the plantation."

"You do?" he echoed with surprise that was almost ludicrous. "Why, I think that's bully!"

"Aunty doesn't like it at all. She says it isn't womanly."

"I can't agree with her. It's much better for a woman to do something than sit all day with her hands in her lap."

Desiree's hands parted hastily. She could not let him know that her participation in the management of the plantation rarely interrupted the folding of her hands.

The praise was too sweet. It roused the self-respect and enthusiasm which were too dormant in her to accomplish more than make her vaguely unhappy.

"It must be interesting work for you," he went on, squaring around in his chair to get a better view of the fields stretching back from the house. "Farming is so open to improvement along scientific—" his voice trailed away and a hot wave of mortification almost smothered her heart-beat.

She followed his eyes from the shaggy unkempt fields to the yard before them, where a riotous jungle of flowers, emboldened by man's neglect, had sprawled over the bricks lining the paths, and lapped over the fences until they sagged beneath the weight; from there to the rotting planks in the floor of the porch, and finally to the walls where the paint had flaked away and left ugly drab scars.

He stood up abruptly.

"I must be getting back. Won't you ride with me to-morrow morning?"

"I really don't believe I care to," she replied, for in her shame she never wanted to see him again.

But he was strangely persistent.

"The exercise would do you good. You look pale."

"Wh-what?" she gasped.

"Perhaps you have been ill?"

"I was never bettah in my life," she retorted hotly, pale no longer.

Beauty is always sensitive, and she had been reared in a land of flattery.

"Have I offended you?" he asked, but without the least abjectness.

"Oh, no. You didn't tell me my nose was red."

"But it isn't."

Desiree laughed almost hysterically.

"I see I have offended you," he exclaimed, eying her closely. "You must forgive me. It is ignorance and not conscious rudeness. I have dealt always with men, and I fear I speak to a woman as I would speak to a man. It frightens me sometimes when I think how little I know about you."

His confession quenched her anger in a fresh surprise. The men of her acquaintance knew nothing but women.

"But Nona Munger?" she inquired.

"Nona," he smiled, "is the daughter of my partner. I danced her on my knee when she was a baby."

Desiree suddenly felt very young and trivial. "I will be glad to go riding with you to-morrow," she said.

"Then you do forgive me?"

"Surely an honest opinion does not demand forgiveness."

"Even a tactless opinion?"

"What is tactful is rarely honest."

"Quite right," he exclaimed, and for the first time looked at her with frank admiration. "Shall we start early — say, six o'clock? I dare say the mistress of a plantation is up by that time."

"Oh, yes!" she assured him faintly, fearful that her aunt might be listening.

She watched him ride down to the big gate, dismount, and open it, and her emotions were whirling and battling like a tide-race.

What a puzzling man he was! He was like a bur, and burs are painful, especially to the sensitive; but there was something in him, too, that interested even as it antagonized.

She did not know whether she hated him for his criticism, feared him because he had not succumbed to her as all men succumbed, or pitied him because he did not know woman.

She was unable to reason about him, but she was left with the impression that the troubles overshadowing her were the thicker for his going as the darkness is thicker for the passing of a light.

She was glad she had accepted his invitation to ride. It would be pleasant to enlighten him about her sex, perhaps interest him — perhaps make him suffer as he had made her suffer from hurt pride.

But there was an alloy of dubiety in the prospect as she wondered at her presumption in thinking she could humble a man whose hair was graying and who had trotted Nona Munger on his knee!

Aunt Georgette had been listening, and admitted it with a placid smile.

Strangers were such rare birds along the Bogue Falaya that the fault was easily forgivable.

"He seems a very nice young man," she remarked, for to Aunt Georgette every man properly indorsed was a nice young man.

She had married at sixteen, and grieved that Desiree should have passed twenty heart-whole and fancy-free.

"He thought it splendid that I was managing the plantation," said Desiree, thinking of other things.

Aunt Georgette shrugged her expressive shoulders. In her day and experience women had not worked—that is, the Delacroix women.

"He seems a very nice young man," she repeated, nevertheless.

"Ye-es," Desiree pondered. "I guess he *is* nice, but I wouldn't call him young. He must be yeahs and yeahs oldah than I am."

"I'm not so very late, am I?" Desiree demanded at ten minutes after seven.

She wore a dark-green habit that clung tightly to her slender figure, and under the shadow of the broad hat pressed low on her dark hair her eyes had the haunting intangibility of a Rossetti girl's, with something Oriental, and even Semitic, in the languorous droop of the lids over their liquid depths.

She was fresh from her mirror and very assured.

"Just one hour, ten minutes, and thirty-two seconds," he replied, shutting his watch with a grim click.

It was horrid of him. She knew she was looking her best, and he hadn't noticed it at all. Her meekness under the circumstances surprised herself even.

"I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"I didn't mind that—the morning was worth it. It was the principle of the thing."

"Goodness!" she cried. "You haven't a New England conscience?"

"Of course not," and then he frowned thoughtfully. "That is, I don't think so—hope not, surely. I despise narrowness, but, as a business rule, punctuality—"

"Oh, of co'se," she agreed lugubriously, for she had not dressed with such care to hear a sermon.

He glanced at her, and fell silent, frowning again.

"Where shall we go?" she asked listlessly.

He shook off his moodiness and became alert.

"Take me over your place. Farming is the greatest business in the world, and as a professed business man it is time I knew something about it.

"Then I wouldn't be asking you to neglect your work. There are probably some things you have to attend to."

The last was in the nature of a question, but she did not answer. Things to attend to at seven in the morning!

She merely nodded and led the way back through the servant's quarters.

Familiar as the scene was it depressed her, for the life had gone out of the morning.

The little, weather-beaten cabins, so many silent and tenantless, with sagging doors and empty window-frames and weeds hemming in the warped porches, pricked her conscience. Frowzy negroes, fresh from sleep, eyed them from the doorways, and the first blue smoke from starting fires coiled from the mud-daubed chimneys.

She could not tell if his tone were joking or accusing.

"The employees don't seem to follow their mistress's habit of early rising."

"We call them hands," she replied coldly. "Since you've never fahmed you probably don't realize that this is the slack season."

"I see. I was under the impression you worked all the year around in the South. With these mild winters you could get such an early start in your plowing."

He dispelled the suggestion of giving advice by smiling.

"Have I offended you again? I've decided that punctuality is not a virtue if it prevents a lady wearing dark green and a hat that suits as yours does."

"I doubt if dahk green and wide hats make for efficiency," she replied, still unappeased, though her sarcasm could not drown a thrill of pleasure.

"I suppose not," he pondered doubtfully. "Do you know you are older than I thought you yesterday."

"I am twenty-one."

"Is that all?"

"That's quite old. I'm considered an old maid here."

"Rubbish," he scoffed with such conviction that an irresistible laugh foamed up in her throat, and her good temper returned.

The fresh, virginal charm of the morning was new to her, and her spirits rose to heights they had not touched since she could remember. And all because he had at last admired!

She sucked in the breeze redolent of pine, cried after the rabbit floating ahead of them like a tuft of thistledown, and pointed out the dew clinging everywhere that the alchemist sun was transforming into glittering jewels.

In her sensuous satisfaction she did not notice the frown gathering on his brow again as he took in the weed-strewn fields and rotting fences.

Soon they left the fields behind and followed a mere path through girth-high weeds, a path raised above the general level, which was low and swampy with frequent pools haloed by mists that reeked of miasma.

He halted and wrinkled his nose.

"This is unhealthy."

"This is Louisiana," she replied.

"But why should it be?" he demanded heatedly. "Surely we are enlightened enough to know the possibilities of drainage. This could be reclaimed and planted. As it stands it is a hot-bed of malaria infecting you people for generations. No wonder there is no get-up and get to the people here."

"Why!" she gasped. "I think you are positively insulting."

He hesitated and then his jaw hardened.

"You said yesterday that an honest opinion could not give offense. I'm going to take advantage of that, for I know we agree in the folly of false pride.

"Surely you see this country has gone to seed, that it is asleep, land and people. I don't mean to be insulting, but you have to insult some people to wake them up.

"I saw a wizened, undersized football coach slap a young giant and call him a coward once, and the boy went in and played a game that will be talked of when the rest of us are gone and forgotten."

"How brutal!" she cried. "If I had been the boy I wouldn't have played at all."

"You don't understand," he said soberly. "It's the game. We all must play the game."

"But we can play it like gentlemen and not like toughs and ruffians. Shall we turn back?"

He shook his head.

"It isn't good to part on a misunderstanding. A good gallop will blow it away."

It was an exhausted, angry, and thoroughly miserable Desiree who sank on her bed regardless of the green habit, and raged wearily at the man who disturbed her so unaccountably.

She had never been so insulted in her life! She would never speak to him again as long as she lived!

But she met him at six-thirty the next morning with a smile. And many mornings after that.

It was hard to reconcile the resentment she generally harbored when she parted from Gary with the smile she always wore on meeting him again, and Desiree made little effort to do so.

Although her pride and her sensitiveness, fostered by a lifetime of indulgence and incense, were constantly quivering from contact with his burry personality, she found him a refreshing, interesting contrast to the other men of her acquaintance who respected her judgments merely—it was easy for her to see—because they respected her personal charm.

Grasping a bur is painful, but it is also stimulating, and with the newcomer Desiree felt a new quickening within her that struggled against the barriers of pride and all the relaxing and dulling influences that climate and care-free living had bred in her.

She had long been the victim of physical and moral inertia, and her softness made her easy to wound, but that which was most hurt most roused her now.

It was pride that made her meet him with a smile. She could not let him know he could make her suffer, and she would force him to see in herself things that were not faults to be disparaged and failings to be pitied.

And so she smiled when she was most mortified; spent hours before her mirror erasing all signs of the angry tears that followed some criticism of his, and brought into play all her well-trained powers of charm and of natural attractiveness.

They loitered along the placid green bayou beneath the damp caress of the moss-fringes. They rode through the pines to Moundville, and sat on the sanded, brick floor of the Dutchman's, sipping a cool drink.

They looked out across the broad, yellow bosom of the Mississippi, that octoroon of rivers, sinuous, suave, a blend of competent utility and wasteful sloth, smiling generally and humming to itself as it sucks along between its green levees, but leaping into sudden frenzies of rage at times, when its tossing foam is like the bared teeth of Anger and its unreckoning strength that of the wild beast touched by the blood madness.

At such times the hard mobility of his face would relax, and their talk would be light and companionable, or he would fall into a silence and stare at her with puzzled intentness.

Then how her blood would run warm with pleasure and gratification!

The pleasure she derived was remarkable, seeing he was years and years older than she, and her only reasons for interesting him being those of revenge.

She had never thought revenge would be so sweet. It made her almost dizzy at times as she took in the pagan beauty of square shoulders and a straight back outlined against the brown boles of the pines.

And sometimes the consequences made her actually afraid, as that day he stared so long and murmured finally: "Desiree? What a beautiful name! To be desired!"

He was soon a familiar part of their life on the plantation, coming every day and staying longer and later when the moon turned full and it would have been a sin to do anything but sit on the porch behind the honeysuckle vines and listen to the love-warblings of the first pair of mocking-birds.

Such nights! The air was like warm milk so saturated was it with the milky moonlight, and the *tum-tum* of Desiree's guitar and her low contralto, fitted so well to the plaintive folk-songs of the blacks, wove a veritable lotus-spell into the scene.

It was a balm that soothed all the girl's resentment, and in her own satisfaction she could not realize that discontent might lurk in others.

And so his words one night came like an icy douche of water.

"I want to ask a favor," he said abruptly, and she let her fingers relax on the keys, startled but glad that this self-sufficient person had need of her at last. "I am going to ask you to appoint me assistant manager of the Delacroix plantation."

"But—I don't understand," she murmured, chilled as she recognized his old, harsh tone—as she termed it, his business tone.

"I want something to do. I can't be idle or I'll go off my head as sure as I live. It is the way the Lord made me and even the doctors can't change His handiwork. It would be much the same as resting for I'd be out in the air all day. I'd like it, too. You don't know how I'd appreciate being allowed to help."

"How can you talk of business on such a night?" she asked regretfully.

He raised clenched fists into the moonlight.

"I talk of business because I'm afraid of nights like this. I can feel it overpowering me and I never could bear to let anything best me. I'm afraid it will make me contented, and I fear that more than anything else in the world."

"Afraid of being contented?" she murmured, shocked. "I don't believe I understand you, as I don't understand a successful broker wanting to work on a 'gone-to-seed' farm."

The phrase was his, and she used it maliciously, but he was deaf to the rebuke.

"I have a passion for efficiency," he told her in a burst of confidence. "I can't bear to see anything 'gone to seed' without having an overwhelming desire to raise it to perfection. There is so much here that could be done."

"Meaning there is a lot left undone?"

He hesitated only briefly.

"Yes. We agreed on frankness at the start, you know. There is a lot left undone, not only here, but in this whole country. It is dreaming so much of past grandeur it is blind to present poverty. I want to open its eyes."

She laughed, spiteful with mortification.

"And you flatter yo'self you could do it?"

"Yes," he retorted, squaring his jaw. "I'm positive I could if you let me try."

What she considered his blatant egotism brought the anger boiling from her.

"I can't prevent you talking down to a helpless country that is older than you are, Mistah Gary, but I do object to yo' talking down to me—yes, you do, all the time! You treat me as if I were a baby."

"I am old enough to be your—uncle," he smiled. "Please don't take offense if I have been tactless again. I am going to admit that I am not moved entirely by ideals, if at all. I can't think of anything that I would enjoy more than working here with you—working and planning together! Don't you think that would be fun—a little?"

Working and planning together! Just what it would mean rather overpowered her and made her afraid.

Many vivid pictures of this intimate companionship flashed to mind, and they were very clear, very appealing.

"What would Aunt Georgette say?" she faltered.

"I already know. She's quite willing. She doesn't like the idea of your working, you know. Won't you consent? You don't know how much I'd appreciate it and enjoy it. And then I might do some good."

The last made her cold even in the face of his eagerness, for she assured herself it was nothing but his love of business that impelled him.

Still, the future presented was too pleasant to avoid.

"Since I doubt if my refusal would stop you, I might as well consent," she agreed.

He sighed, and then with a descent to roguishness made a final effort to win from her a better complaisance.

"Aunt Georgette says it will be perfectly proper. I am so much older than you no one can say anything."

"You must be years and years," retorted Desiree with savage pleasure.

Desiree sat on the front porch holding tight to the arms of her chair and staring moodily at the gray shadows stealing through the dripping pines and the gray mists hanging above the bayou.

The afternoon was no more depressed than her mood, for it was filled with the mists of anger and the shadows of shame.

Under her feet the planking of the floor shone raw and new; behind her the walls that time had stained to a pleasant ivory color were crude and clean in their dress of fresh paint; one and all every evidence of decay was being advertised by being remedied.

Gary had carried out his threat. In two short months he had awakened the place.

Plows threaded through the fields at a pace she had not thought possible; the weeds were gone from the fence corners; sagging doors and empty window frames were straightened and filled.

It was as if he had released a flood of dammed-up energy that she sat and watched boil past.

She sat and watched, herself in an eddy, and wilfully. It was shameful enough to know that all this had been done and not through her own initiative; it was not to be considered that she who had not led should weakly follow now.

It was hard not to follow.

She had to steel her pride and encourage ill-temper, for performance was a thrilling thing, and it took all her strength to quell her enthusiasm roused by his certain, competent methods.

She reminded herself of his impudence in taking charge of her affairs, but when he brought plans to her she feigned indifference, a proceeding quite paradoxical and feminine. And he did not understand and was hurt, and she was hurt because he could not understand.

Desiree asked herself how she could bear to have him around when she hated him so. He was years and years older than she.

A negro sauntered into the front yard, a hoe over his shoulder. He glanced lugubriously at the riot of flowers before him, and then with a sigh of resignation set to work among them.

Desiree jumped to her feet.

"What are you doing?"

He shrank back from her vehemence.

"I'se jes' cleanin' up a li'l', Miss Des'ree. Dis hyar mess sho' needs it, don' it?"

"I'm the best judge of that," she flashed. "You mahch out of this yard."

He fumbled awkwardly with his hat.

"But Miss Des'ree, de boss—"

"The boss? I am the boss here. You do as I tell you, you hear?"

She turned to face Gary as he came

from the door behind her, and all the white-heat of her anger was turned on him.

"You might ask permission befo' you give ohdahs on my place, Mistah Gary."

"I'm sorry," he apologized, and waved the negro away. "I never thought you would object. The yard does need cleaning up."

"And the pohch needed mending and the house painting and—haven't you humiliated me enough?"

"Why, Miss Desiree?" he protested gently. "I thought I was helping you. I wanted to help you."

"And are you so confident I needed yo' help? I thought I was doing you a favor by giving you something to do, but it seems you are the philanthropist and I the needy one."

He reddened slowly, and aware of the injustice of her attack, she hastened to soften her tone.

"I don't want these flowahs touched because I like them this way. Please don't smile. I mean it. Haven't you ever realized there is a beauty in natural things, in things as they are and not as they ought to be?"

"But they would bloom more beautifully if they were pruned and cultivated."

"Yes, a beauty that was fo'ced and unnatural. God made his flowahs this way; why do you wish to improve on His handiwork? There are some things that are too tendah for the rough hands of business efficiency, and you should let them be, for they serve no business ends. Flowahs are not utilitarian; they are a sentiment. But you don't undahstand sentiment."

"Perhaps not," he replied thoughtfully. "I have always considered sentiment a bar to progress and improvement."

He sank down on the steps and pillowed his chin in his palm.

"Sentiment? I wonder—I have been thinking a great deal lately and I've learned a great deal—that iron breaks, for one thing; that mules sulk; that the African nature is unchangeable; also, that Nature has a will of her own.

"I am worried about the river. It is still rising. They predict another crest at Moundville to-morrow. If the levee should break—".

He waved his hand sorrowfully at the evidence of his labor.

"Where would be the results of efficiency? I have come to learn to doubt my gods, and it isn't a comfortable feeling at all."

He smiled apologetically, and instead of the triumph she had promised herself upon such an admission, she felt only an unaccountable pity for this man, so confident in his strength, admitting weakness.

Abruptly she sat down beside him.

"I'm sorry. It is too bad that things are going wrong."

He shook his head.

"No it isn't. It is the best thing that could have happened. My conceit is punctured. What I didn't know I always considered trivial before. Now I know how trivial and narrow such an attitude was.

"Since I have been here I feel like hollow places in me have been filled out—places that I didn't know existed. There was a tremendous abyss between my point of view and that of you people down here. I thought a man had to be all aggressive, all confident, to win; but now I see that it doesn't win the only thing worth winning — happiness. I thought that abyss couldn't be bridged, but it can."

"How?" she asked quickly.

"By a humble willingness to understand it. It isn't easy always to understand. Sometimes we are so blind we can't, but more often we are so prejudiced we won't.

"Understanding implies we had something still to learn, and that hurts like the dickens when a fellow is 'sot in his ways,' as Davis says. He and I had a talk the other night. We bridged the abyss very successfully. I believe Davis is going to be a very useful man

and I a much more lenient critic. We both are learning."

"What are some of the things that you have learned?" she asked softly.

His steady gray eyes rested on hers with a look so candid and comprehensible to her, a woman, that her heart seemed to stop in mid beat.

"I have learned many things," he said slowly, "but there are only two that really matter now. One is that God's greatest work is woman, and the other, that—I am not so very old."

Davis, the overseer, came rushing around the corner of the house.

In the wave of change that had swept over Desiree's world she had not noticed especially the changes in Davis until now.

He was a straighter, a brisker, a firm-lipped Davis.

"Mistah Gary," he called. "The evenin' train's gone into the ditch the other side of Abita. Our sacks are on it and the levee is weakening."

Gary did not hesitate a moment.

"Get out every team on the place. We'll cart them to Moundville."

"The roads," began the overseer weakly, and then: "To hell with the roads; we'll cart 'em through!"

Desiree sat there limp, open-mouthed.

She had been deserted without explanation or apology. She had never felt so insignificant, and yet she was not resentful.

Instead, she went to her room and spent a long time before her mirror, coiling and uncoiling her hair and singing to herself.

A haggard dawn came slinking over the world's edge like a shame-faced roué returning from an all-night revel as Desiree slipped quietly down-stairs dressed in the green habit and the wide hat.

Gary was seated on the porch as if waiting for her, his face drawn and weary in the wan light.

"You look wohn-out," she chided gently. "Didn't you sleep well?"

"Not well," he smiled, the rigid lines of his face relaxing before her gentle interest. "I didn't sleep at all. It took us the whole night to cart the sacks here. They are on their way to Moundville now."

"To think that I've been sleeping while you stayed up all night!" she exclaimed ruefully as he helped her into the saddle.

"This was worth staying up all night for," he replied, and she didn't know whether he meant the hand he held over long or the business that had engaged him.

"Moundville?" he asked.

"Yes; we must do what we can."

Mist hung in layers like awnings stretched from pine to pine, and every bush and twig was incrusted with dew.

The steady patter of the big, glistening drops sounded like stealthy, hunting footsteps following them through the ghostly silence of the woods.

A damp festoon of moss swept Desiree's cheek and she shivered. In the face of this chill, gray morning all her warm confidence and content of the night before cooled into doubt and uneasiness.

She examined the future and found it sterile of joy, but pregnant with foreboding. The unearthly gloom was charged with the imminence of climax that did not leave her tense, but flaccid and nerveless and prey to her old helplessness.

Out there behind the mists was the octoroon river, ruled by the savage corpuscles in its blended blood. To Desiree it seemed such a torrent raced between her and all the things that were desirable, and she had not the courage to attempt the crossing.

What was it Gary had said? He had named a way of bridging the gap.

"Do you know," he said suddenly, his voice low as if the stillness inspired a reverence, "when I'm with you I feel so different, and so wonderfully different! I suppose it is the things you stand for and which your family

have stood for before you—the fine, noble things. I come from a different strain and a different environment, where, if we didn't worship the material calls, we obeyed them, at least. We are rude where you are fine.

"What I have learned makes me feel such a failure that I would be wholly discouraged if I did not feel that through this knowledge you have given me I can yet fight my way to the light."

"What can you learn from me?" she laughed in bitter disbelief.

"That money is *not* king," he replied. "Don't be angry. I know it is a sordid thing to come from such a fine source; indeed, it only came from you negatively. Since I met you I know money is not king because I have found that love is."

Impossible as it had seemed, she knew she had been waiting for this, and waiting eagerly despite her pride that hardened her against yielding to that which had hurt her.

"I have read that women see they are loved before the men are sure themselves," he went on. "Perhaps you have seen that I would rather remain here and eat the lotos with you than do anything else in the world."

She cried out a quick objection.

"No, no! Not the lotos! You have taught us the folly of that. You have taught us much, and if you stay you can teach us much more."

"Then shall I stay?"

"You do not have to ask me that," she faltered, for they had turned into the streets of Moundville, and the white cottages peering beneath the level branches of the live-oaks seemed like eager, listening gossips.

She was glad he did not press her, and yet she was contrite because she had evaded where he had been open open and honest.

He had bridged the gap and she had refused him foothold, although she knew now, cleanly and honestly, that she wanted him above everything else in the world.

A sudden fear struck her that this opportunity she had wasted would be the last.

North and south, as far as they could see through the lowering mists, the levee embankment was an ant-hill of activity. Men, women, and children swarmed over it with the seemingly inane restlessness of ants and a staccato clatter of high-pitched voices floated above the hoarse, uneasy murmer of the swollen river.

They tied their horses on a bit of rising ground and pressed through the throngs of negroes that clustered about them like flies about a sugar-bowl.

Among them were Desiree's own servants, white eyeballs rolling in dusky faces, their excited jabbering blending into a perfect hysteria of sound.

She saw with a pang that she went unnoticed as they hung to the man who was really a stranger to them; and with a deeper pang she noticed that he had forgotten her.

She was a nonentity, if not actually in the way!

She moved aside and climbed the levee only to shrink back with a gasp.

The river lapped at her very feet! It swirled by with the dizzy swiftness of a fly-wheel belt, as tawny-pale as weak, boarding-house coffee, and speckled with grounds that were gigantic trees, outhouses, and the swollen carcasses of animals.

She felt a little sick and dizzy, she seemed such a helpless mote of life before the onrush of that elemental force.

She turned to Gary, not for protection, for how could man protect her in the face of Nature's rage? but to share, and by sharing, assuage the helplessness he must feel.

But she found no echo of her weakness there. Hatless, his hair silvered with mist, he stood, straight and tall, hurling orders like arrows into the groups about him.

She saw earth being shoveled into

sacks, sacks being piled upon the low places. Her eyes went back to the man in awe of his little reverence of the elements.

He was advancing down the levee and she turned to follow, and then paused.

No, she would not follow. He had no need of her. He had forgotten her.

The old bitterness marred her smooth brow.

A huge, glistening log came booming down the current. Some perverse current caught it—swerved it—it struck the levee head-on and the rampart crumpled as easily as if it had been paper!

The yellow water spurted through with a chuckle of delight that was drowned in a low-pitched groan of agony that went up from hundreds of throats.

A shrill command brought Desiree back to her senses, and she saw that the ever-widening crevasse stretched between her and Gary.

She felt no physical fear, but in that widening gap she saw more than water. It visualized the flood that divided them, born of their differences in birth and temperament and swelled with misunderstandings and her foolish pride.

Would it ever be bridged—that flood? Would it always lie between them, ever widening?

She asked herself the direct question: "Will I lose him?" and it brought her true, latent self forth as the sun draws flowers from the sod.

She held out her arms.

"Wister! Wister!"

He waved his hand; he smiled reassuringly.

"Don't be afraid! We'll stop it!"

She clenched her hands and closed her eyes. She had not been afraid except that he would not come.

And he had not come in the hero fashion she had pictured. He had not come at all. It was much more important that the gap be closed.

"You are a fool, Desiree Delacroix," she whispered to herself; "you're a silly little fool. Of course it is more important to close the gap."

She opened her eyes upon a scene that obliviated her thoughts.

The most stalwart of the negro men, arms about one another's waists, were wading out into the breach.

More and more followed until the gap was filled with close-packed men, swaying in the force of the current, but resisting grimly.

One started one of the slow, wailing "corn-field" hymns, and the sound swelled clear and sweet and charged with peace above the mad raging of the river.

Slowly, tenderly, Desiree smiled.

Other negroes came with sacks of earth that were stacked before the living rampart, and soon the gap was entirely filled and the last trickle of water stopped.

Desiree looked again at Gary, but his back was turned as he directed operations beyond.

The last flicker of pride burned her, but there was a sweetness in the very pain. Humble understanding, he had said, would bridge the gap. She would understand and be humble.

She moved forward and climbed along the rampart of sacks, her trim boots sinking deep into the moist earth, her green habit dipping into the water, but she did not notice it.

She halted beside him and took his hand. He pressed it as if it were a greeting and then released it.

"We've won, little pal!" he cried jubilantly.

He turned from her again, but her smile wavered only the slightest bit in the world.

What more could she ask than to be his pal?

She took his hand again, and at the touch he whirled, his cry half disbelief and half a question.

"Desiree!"

She relaxed against him and her eyes filled. That was all she wanted—to be desired!

His Little Magnificence

By Helen Frances Huntington

"YOU are my prisoner, beyond all hope of escape," said the raja vindictively. "Consider that fact and act accordingly."

Lieutenant Clancy knew that his captor spoke the truth. He had not the thousandth chance of escape.

His little following of military scouts believed him dead, for they had seen his suddenly lamed horse fling him headlong over a thousand-foot precipice into the jaws of annihilation, and even should any of them risk life and limb by descending into the gloomy gorge where Clancy should by all rights have fallen, the rushing little river that tore its way toward the plains would account for the absence of his mangled body.

A miracle—a stark jest of Fate—had pitched Clancy's bruised body sidewise in its rebound from a ledge of rock and tossed it across a network of vines that hung between the stunted trees a hundred feet or so below the wall from which his mount had plunged, and before consciousness returned hidden enemies had found and carried him away.

"Yes, you've got me," Clancy admitted ironically. "But I really don't think my capture will do you much good, raja, as I am not what you'd call a tractable person; and I haven't the slightest intention of serving your interests in any conceivable way. You might as well have allowed me to finish my plunge into the gorge."

"We shall see," said the raja grimly.

He was a medieval figure, that black-bearded, strutting Maratha prince who so tremendously overrated his own power and importance that he actually dreamed of giving his son empire over all India.

Decked out like an opera bouffe hero, in soiled, gem-incrusted velvet, diamonded turban and ropes of emeralds so clouded with dust and grime that they might as well have been bits of green glass, he stood looking down from his dais at his khaki-clad prisoner as one would regard an unfamiliar kind of worm.

Like many of the petty Indian princes, he called himself a Rajput, for to be born a pure-blooded Rajput is, to inferior Asiatic races, glorious beyond the grandest of kingly honors.

It has always been so, and the lordly Rajputs are still supreme over all other Asiatics.

"I offer you your choice between life and death," said the raja with pompous disdain.

Clancy accepted the offer without the faintest thrill of hope.

He knew that Raja Valaji was a rebel chief, a continual menace to British law and authority.

None of the secret service agents who had shadowed his comings and goings had ever surprised him in any of his seditious juggleries, for he was even craftier than the shrewdest of all the human ferrets employed by the government to trace the concealed currents of its destiny in India.

"I have a fancy," continued the raja, yet more pompously, "to give my only son, who will succeed to the regency, a military training of the European order. Not that I admire your fighting tactics any more than I admire the rest of your claptrap innovations, but one never knows when trifling accomplishments may become useful.

"His Little Magnificence is a soldier born, like all the princes of his illustrious race, and he is now of an age to absorb new ideas readily. Train him thoroughly in your so-called expert war tactics and military diplomacy and you shall not only escape death, but shall fare like a baron for the rest of your days."

Clancy, full of reckless despair, laughed in his captor's swarthy face.

"Do you suppose anything in this God-forsaken wilderness would tempt a civilized man to accept an offer of that sort? I'd rather be a sweeper of English slums than rule here in your place."

"Be careful, or you'll spoil your chance before your choice is made," the raja broke out threateningly.

Clancy smiled again, in a way that caused the observer's dark skin to warm ominously.

"The situation is perfectly clear to me," said he calmly. "I can either train your son to fight like an Englishman and to conduct himself as nearly like an English gentleman as possible, in exchange for barbaric luxuries and lifelong captivity, or—I can die."

"Exactly. I have no other uses for a man of your race, *sahib.*"

"It seems to me that we possess one feeling in common," observed Clancy with indescribable insolence, "for I quite thoroughly despise your vulpine, braggart, favor-currying, lying race."

The raja's night black eyes took fire.

"You are courting a violent death with such words," he warned truculently.

"Well, then, let it come! Do you imagine I value the mere breath of life so highly that I'll consent to pay your price for it? Not that the training of your son for expert warfare would result in any great harm to my country, for he stands a mighty poor chance of ever getting the start of the British war dogs, but the task is obnoxious to me.

"I am certain that your motive is a treacherous one. Although we haven't actually caught you in seditious schemes, we know you're a black rebel at heart, and that you would welcome any safe opportunity to violate your solemn treaty vows."

The raja smiled gloatingly.

"Yes, it is true that I hate your country and race with every breath, with every drop of my heart's blood," he vowed with fierce relish. "Some day my son, who was bred to the same implacable hatred, will repay his race-debt by drenching British India with English blood. So the stars foretold at his illustrious birth, and so it shall be."

"Reverse your prophecy and your son may live to see its fulfilment," said Clancy insolently.

Whereupon the raja's hand closed over the gem-incrusted scabbard of his ancient sword—loot of the Mogul wars in which his grandsire had risen from the dust to a military chieftainship.

But the weapon was not withdrawn for he was still secretly hopeful of attaining his end in spite of his captive's outrageous defiance. It was the weightiest need in his towering scheme of empire that his son should

obtain European military training unknown to the British powers, for all other cogs of his machinations were running smoothly.

He had secured an enormous quantity of arms and ammunition from the daring Persian gun-runners who for years have been supplying India's rebel princes and chiefs with forbidden firearms of the deadliest and most modern type in spite of government vigilance.

"Think my offer over carefully this night, *sahib*," the raja advised with significant emphasis," for it will not be repeated. Consider your fate reasonably. Your captivity can be made more desirable than the liberty of many a better man.

"Practically, your fortune will be in your own hands, for by dignified and reasonable behavior you can secure ease and even riches. You will be at complete leisure during the long periods that His Little Magnificence will reside in our state capital to satisfy the government. After he attains his majority you will be generously pensioned and relieved of all further duties."

"And meanwhile I'd rot out my soul in odious lethargy, hearing nothing from the civilized world, lost to friends and kindred, a poor, despicable manikin in golden chains. Truly a fate worthy of joyous acceptance," scoffed Clancy.

"Oh, as to news of your world, I could arrange to have newspapers sent to you occasionally, but of course it would be quite out of the question for you to communicate with friends. We want no secret service ferrets nosing about this secluded domain.

"Nor would you ever be given the slightest chance of escape, for I should make your get-away a capital offense to at least twenty guards. Think the matter over reasonably. Your final answer will be required to-morrow, remember."

With a golden tinkle and a flash of diamonds the raja withdrew, and a warden slammed the door of Clancy's tower prison with a rusty clash which was like a death-knell to the prisoner who shuddered and shrugged his shoulders at the same time.

By that time Clancy knew that he was many, many miles from the scene of his fall, in a natural stronghold somewhere between the Himalayas and the monstrous backbone of earth that separates the plains of India from the snowy mountain peaks, in a virgin world full of tumultuous cataracts, roaring rivers, and impetuous, unbridled natural forces that had kept out European invasion.

He dimly remembered some mention of the raja's "remote hunting camp" by the harassed political agents of the government who always rejoiced when the prince's hunting whims drove him away from his court activities; but neither Clancy nor the rest or the Anglo-Indian world knew the exact location of that camp except that it was somewhere within the straggling confines of the raja's mountainous domains.

"What an ignoble end!" exclaimed Clancy as he rose and went to the slit in his prison walls that looked out at the Lost Land which was to afford him his last glimpse of the pleasant old world that had treated him with rare generosity for twenty-eight years.

An uplifting scene met his gloomy gaze. From the verge of the towering cliff, against which the ancient palace reared its walls, a dense forest dropped abruptly, overpowering in its suggestion of unconquerable, primeval force.

Finally the green cataract ended in a five-mile-wide amphitheater whose depths were overlaid with luminous purple shadows that seemed to palpitate with the breath of a stupenduous vegetable existence.

"And such a magnificent world to turn one's back upon at my age!" Clancy muttered as he became conscious of a strange thrill, defiant yet

fervid, which woke the will to conquer against all the obstacles that fate had piled up against him.

He drew himself into the embrasure between the stone walls and looked out again on a different view.

A narrow river of dark gold glinted in and out of the open spaces of a deodar grove set with dainty little marble shrines whose frostlike purity was flushed with the tender rose reflections of the evening sky.

High up among the sparkling summer clouds the tremendous majesty of the snow-covered Gosia Than dominated all the bright spaces of the world.

"Why, a man *can't* fling his life away in the flush of his strength!" Clancy cried to the hoary old mountain peak. "I am going to fight so long as a fighting chance remains."

He let himself down and fell to pacing the floor, with hands clenched savagely at his side.

"What harm can possibly come through training a barbaric princeling whose power will never attain anything but puppet proportions," he asked himself. "The concession will hurt my Saxon pride, but it holds out my only chance of escape.

"And soon or late a chance will come to get back to the land of my heart's desires. Once I get clear of the raja's clutches I can undo all that a military play can possibly effect."

Love of life was very strong within Clancy's breast, for life had been steadily kind to him. Success in warfare, loyal friendships, the love of a good woman, boundless zeal, and a fair amount of worldly goods had given him an ardent wish to round out the measure of his allotted threescore and ten years.

So in the end he accepted the raja's offer.

At once he was conducted from his prison to a spacious palace apartment under guard of two Pathan attendants of enormous stature and strength, armed, not with rusty flintlocks, but with strictly up-to-date high-power rifles.

One of these guards was a mute, but he, as well as his companion, knew that his life depended upon the safe custody of his prisoner, and he was as watchful of Clancy's movements as a cat is of the actions of a mouse.

These men rode with Clancy, walked with him, and idled with him, but he could not outride, outwalk, or outloaf them.

At night they took turns sleeping on the mat outside of Clancy's door. Both kept an eye open for trouble, like sleeping tigers.

His Little Magnificence kept Clancy waiting for a week before he summoned him to the imperial presence chamber.

He was a frail-appearing boy of thirteen or fourteen, with the most beautiful face Clancy had ever seen, and the manners of a tyrant.

He was the son of a Rajput noblewoman who had fallen upon such evil fortunes that her abduction by Raja Valaji had never been avenged save by her own death a year after her boy's birth, and he had inherited part of the lofty characteristics of his mother's race as well as the despotic traits of his father.

"You are always to kneel in my presence when not engaged in my training," was the boy's first command, spoken with indescribable haughtiness.

And, after a fearful struggle with his pride, Clancy knelt.

In his heart he vowed to make his captors smart for that insult.

"You are to train me exactly as you were trained," the princeling continued arrogantly. "I shall know if you try to shirk your duty and shall have you punished in the most humiliating manner imaginable. You may now outline your working plans."

With that he turned his gleaming velvet back to his new slave: for so had his father accustomed him to give audience to vassals.

Clancy, who considered himself well disciplined, realized that he was far from master of his worst passions as he knelt there in the neglected glory of a king's audience chamber, speaking to an arrogantly erect little back that remained as motionless as a statue until all had been said that was necessary; his Saxon spirit rebelled to the verge of madness, but the kindly, temperate voices of his own world held him back from destruction.

"Wait in heroic silence, for your hour of escape will surely come," they assured him one by one, the good spirits of his soldier comrades, and of the woman whom he knew would never yield his place in her heart to any one, living or dead.

So he endured his torture in writhing silence, hating his little tormentor with the fiercest passion of his life.

But Clancy's military labors proved to be his salvation, for they were arduous and honorable.

The little despot was, as his father had proudly affirmed, a warrior born, and his military conduct was superb.

He obeyed orders without question, and punctiliously rendered his chief all the homage due a superior officer, and although he was far from robust, he never yielded to fatigue or heat or hardships, nor would he admit that his exertions tired him until he literally dropped with exhaustion.

He would have faced a soldier's death with a smile. Above all, he burned with ambition to fulfil the prophecy foretold by the stars at his birth.

Clancy organized two opposing forces of soldiers out of the raw Himalayan natives, and after drilling them with equal care and zeal, put the princeling in charge of one while he assumed weaponless command of the other.

For weeks he labored tremendously, breaking in his crude material, and the prodigious labor gave him back his health of soul.

The first engagement between the opposing brigades was fought with might and main, for His Little Magnificence had ordered that he should never be favored, on pain of Clancy's death.

He was no mock soldier and wanted no unwon advantages. He lost in that skirmish, but his maneuvers were so gallantly executed that his defeat was all but a brilliant victory.

His young warrior spirit was so uplifted by the ardor of that cleanly waged conflict of brain and skill that he sent his military master a splendid gift of appreciation.

Clancy felt very queerly indeed as he examined the big pigeon-blood ruby. In spite of his fierce hatred toward the little despot his heart warmed unaccountably.

"It must be true, what they say of the Rajputs," he muttered with reluctant admiration. "Given a decent up-bringing and good surroundings that unspeakable young tyrant might have achieved something worth while. He possesses a single saving grace as it is, besides the soldiering instinct, for he neither lies nor allows any one else to do so in his presence.

"It appears to me that I have come into the possession of the price of my escape," he continued with a gloating look at the costly gem. "Now I must find a safe person to bribe. Can I trust either of the Pathans, I wonder?"

Even as he asked himself the question one of his giant guards brushed his elbow accidentally with his rifle, perhaps to remind him of the futility of his hopes.

Always those two mighty fellows were on the *qui vive,* with their rifles trained his way, even when they dashed after him in his military flights, as watchful as hungry tigers.

They were faithful, friendly fellows, drilled from the cradle to unquestioning obedience to a despotic will, and they repaid Clancy well for his good treatment of them; but he knew unerringly that their doglike re-

gard for him would not stand in the way of his death should he endanger their lives by trying to escape.

"His Magnificence sends you word, *sahib,* that an Afghan chief will bring in a large herd of hill horses to-morrow morning, and your advice will be asked in the matter of selecting mounts best suited to soldiering service," the guard announced with due obsequiousness. "You are to be on hand at sunrise."

"Very well," murmured Clancy with assumed indifference.

His chance had come! He knew enough about Afghan horse-breeders in general to be sure his bribe would be accepted at almost any risk.

After a night of feverish planning he wrote two brief notes, one for his soldier brother in Lahore, and another for the horse-breeder, explaining that his brother would richly reward him for the safe delivery of the former.

He wrapped both slips of paper in a thick, richly cured tobacco leaf which he pressed deeply into his full tobacco pouch. This he was never without except when engaged in military duties. Its presence would, therefore, excite no suspicion on the following day.

The splendid jewel that was to buy his freedom he put in his pocket, trusting to luck that he would have a brief opportunity to give the Afghan horse-dealer a glimpse of it.

The little prince was interviewing the Afghan horse-dealer and his two companions when Clancy appeared on the scene, outwardly calm but inwardly aquiver with excitement.

"We need fresh mounts for the officers of the militia, Captain Sahib," said he crisply, "and I have a fancy for a younger, fleeter charger than any our stables now contain. Help me pick out three score of mounts most suitable for military service."

Clancy examined horse after horse critically, with His Little Magnificence watching him intently and listening to his remarks.

There came a propitious moment, however, when Clancy stood shoulder high beside a horse that hid his hands from view of the prince as well as from his Pathan guards, and instantly he took the jewel from his pocket and held it under the Afghan's greedy eyes for a silent second.

The Afghan's eyes fairly blazed the question at Clancy.

"How much?"

Clancy deliberately filled his pipe and drew in and exhaled a few whiffs of superlatively fragrant smoke.

"Very fine tobacco, that of yours, *sahib,*" observed the quick-witted Afghan, noting the nervous play of Clancy's fingers as he fumbled with the pouch.

Clancy handed him the bag with a careless nod.

"Pray accept this for your enjoyment on your homeward way," he murmured.

Then he slipped the jewel under the band of his trousers and let it glide along his limb to the ground where he deftly set foot on it and pressed it into the yielding sod, meanwhile stroking the glossy mane of the horse beside him.

He well knew that the Afghan would mark the exact spot where the gem was embedded so that he would have no difficulty in finding it later.

A wave of dizzying exultation swept through Clancy's being as the Afghan tucked the tobacco pouch among the folds of his cloak with an elaborate carelessness that bespoke understanding, but he immediately mastered his emotions and began his enthusiastic selection of the sixty-odd mounts that the little prince wanted.

It took till late in the afternoon to conclude the transaction, and after that Clancy was called upon to give orders to the palace carpenters concerning the erection of stable sheds.

When he reached his own quarters there was barely enough light left to enable him to distinguish the small, dark object that lay on his bed.

It was his tobacco pouch with its two notes securely wrapped in the big, pliant leaf where he had hidden them.

Clancy's disappointment was absolutely overwhelming. He dropped into a seat and sat there with his head bowed in his hands until a light touch fell upon his shoulder—long after the shadows of night had shrouded his room in soft, fragrant darkness.

"*Sahib*, it is best to resign oneself quietly to what must be," said a familiar native voice very gently. "Do not try to escape, for you will never succeed. We should have to kill you rather than let you go from our sight for an instant, for not only our own lives depend on keeping you here, but those of our families and friends."

"You saw?" Clancy asked in a toneless whisper.

"We see everything, *sahib*. It is our life-and-death business to see all that concerns your custody."

"The prince?"

"He knows nothing. The Afghan yielded up what you gave him without question, for he knows the Great Magnificence" (the raja), "and fears his power exceedingly. He had no time to examine your messages, so he can do nothing for you even if he would."

"There remains, then, only a single avenue of escape from this loathsome servitude!" said Clancy wildly. "For Heaven's sake get out of my sight, Levan," he added savagely as the second guard struck a match and lighted the swinging lamp. "Get out of here, both of you. Lock me in. Bar the windows and nail them up if you want to, but get out of my sight."

But when his turbulence quieted Clancy realized shudderingly that even the ghastly one avenue of escape was closed to him, for by that time he knew that his duty concerned a far more important matter than his own personal welfare.

Already he had added to the rebel prince's dangerous equipments against British peace by training him to the expert use of the hoarded accumulation of weapons and ammunition that was constantly being enlarged through secret dealing with the gun-runners who contrived to smuggle their deadly wares across barriers insurmountable to white men.

The little warrior prince had learned to drill the raw hillmen as Clancy had drilled their brothers, and he was fast gathering into his stronghold hundreds of potential fighters whom he would some day lead out against some unwarned English garrison, perhaps to its utter destruction.

Somehow Clancy would have to check the peril that he had increased, and to that end he would have to endure his captivity as best he might.

He conceived a wild notion of building a tiny airship for the conveyance of a message of warning to his countrymen, and sending it out from his window some stormy, moonless night when the wind roared out of the north toward the Indian plains.

He was taking secret stock of his available material for an aeroplane, the morning after his devastating disappointment, when His Little Magnificence sent him an order to report in the courtyard at once.

"I have detected a strain of weakness in the mount I selected for my own use," the young despot told Clancy worriedly when they met a few moments later, "and I wish to put him to an endurance test that will prove his fitness for my purposes. We will ride to the farthest end of the valley, down through the Serpents' Pass, for that trip will show what the horse can do on a hard, rough stretch.

"You may ride the second horse of my selection, and your guards can take those two sturdy mounts, yonder," nodding toward a pair of stanchly built Peshawur ponies in the hands of waiting grooms.

The prince led off a glossy coal-black stallion which he rode like a centuar, a brave, beautiful little figure

in his flashing uniform and spic-and-span arms.

Clancy rode between his gigantic guards on the prince's second choice of war chargers, unarmed as usual, and because it was to be a military endurance test for himself as well as his mount, the young warrior would permit himself no luxuries in the way of body guards, though his father implored him to let his regiment ride down after him at least.

The raja, though never afraid for himself, was always full of vivid anxieties about his son against whose safety the wealth of the world was as dross.

He greatly feared, also, that a chance encounter with some venturesome English hunter would lead to the prince being secretly followed to his stronghold and its hidden ammunition discovered, for the boy, though brave as a lion, was not yet as wary as a serpent.

It was hard riding for even the muscle-hardened Englishman, let alone for the delicate princeling who led the perilous dash down the rocky trail that overlooked sickening depths, through almost trailless woods, across foaming streams and raw gashes in the raw hillsides.

The hardy little horses, bred to hill climbing, picked their way with marvelous precision and deftness, and the prince never allowed them to pause or slacken their pace until they reached the far limit of the test which was a plateau beyond the utmost rim of the foliage-smothered amphitheater.

Finally he emerged from a thorn-studded thicket, spent in body, but triumphant in spirit.

"Now I am satisfied with my choice of mounts," he panted, as he leaned forward to pat the foam-flecked neck of his heaving horse.

"One could not wish for a better steed to ride to victory on," he added when he got back his breath.

Then he turned and gave Clancy one swift childishly sweet smile. "He is as good and gallant as my military leader," said the despot.

And that was the first and last revelation of what was in his proud, young heart toward the only white man that had ever won a mild thought or word from him.

Clancy's sunburnt face flamed for a moved instant.

"It is the soldier in him that makes him feel that way," he said in his heart, "for aside from that he's a despicable little tyrant. It is utterly unthinkable to care a rap about him personally. Of course, I *don't* give a damn; only there's something heroic about the little heathen that makes a chap take notice against his will."

Out on the rim of the plateau the world was still radiant with sunshine, but the day was nevertheless far spent. "Do you notice how near the hill-tops the sun is, Magnificence?" asked Clancy, forgetting his usual icy formality of address. "It will be quite dark within two hours at the latest."

"You are right, Captain Sahib."

His Magnificence swung his stanch mount about and began the homeward canter gently along an open stretch of pampas-choked valley walled in on both sides by a dense jungle growth from which his horse seemed to scent peril, for he betrayed every evidence of alarm as he started up the sun-drenched yellow lane.

Clancy's horse gave him quite a little trouble, also, but he reined the animal in so closely that he could not get a good grip on the bit.

"Elephants," muttered the Pathan who rode at Clancy's back, and slid his steady hand along his rifle barrel.

That valley was a favorite haunt of wild elephant herds at certain seasons of the year, but the big beasts invariably shunned the approach of mankind.

On a sudden the green jungle wall ripped apart and a huge yellow striped body hurtled itself toward the nearest horseman, the Pathan mute who rode between Clancy and the prince.

The prince's mount flung back his head with a snort of panic, throwing his rider headlong in the grass, and then dashed frenziedly away.

But none of the other men saw the prince's fall just then, for each of them faced the fearful peril of a ferocious death.

The tiger's charge had been a trifle too violent, for it had carried him clear across the horse at whose rider he had aimed, but his second charge tore the Pathan mute from his saddle just as the other Pathan fired.

In another instant the slightly wounded tiger was upon the man who had shot him, clinging to the bleeding flanks of his mount with claws that ripped deeper and deeper into the quivering flesh, and tearing at the rider's right arm with slavering, snarling jaws.

Clancy had no time to snatch the rifle from the listless hand of the prostrate mute when the agonized horse crashed through the jungle wall with a scream, carrying both man and tiger with him.

A human cry came back from the crackling foliage followed by a shot and a roar of fury that woke sinister echoes far away in the jungle's dim depths.

Then all sounds ceased.

Clancy, cold and shaken to the marrow of him, turned to the spot where His Little Magnificence lay stark and still among the crushed pampas tassels, his deathlike face upturned and his eyes half closed in a fixed and sightless stare.

Ten feet away from him lay the gigantic body of his Pathan mute, with his broken neck doubled back between his shoulders and the blood streaming from a terrible gash in his throat.

"Gracious God, I am free!" cried Clancy with a burst of passionate gratitude to his Creator and Deliverer.

He was perhaps two hundred miles from the outposts of civilization, yet with his sturdy mount and a high-power rifle and plenty of ammunition his chances of reaching safety were more than good.

He could be pretty certain of stumbling across an inhostile native settlement where he could obtain food and shelter before either he or his horse would suffer seriously.

Within a week he would be back in the old sweet home world again!

With his eager hand grasping the prince's rifle, his heart contracted with pain at the sight of the still, beautiful little face among the sunlit grasses.

Involuntarily he dropped to his knees and laid his head against the silent breast, and the faint, unsteady flutter that came to his listening senses beat in upon his own heart like hammer blows, for he had not expected to find any signs of life.

He reasoned swiftly that as soon as the prince's long absence alarmed the raja a search party of soldiers would be sent out for him, and they could not fail to find the unconscious boy in that open space at the trail's very edge.

No, they could not fail to find the prince—if the wounded tiger's mate did not find him first!

Could he, a man of merciful and honorable instincts, leave a living child to the ferocious onslaught of a tiger? *Could* he pay that coward's price for freedom?

"But, God in heaven, this is my one chance of escape from hideous, lifelong bondage!" he cried out in poignant protest against the commands of honor's monitor.

And kneeling there in the hot silence of the jungle wilderness, with life and love and liberty on one side, and a living death on the other, he argued and bargained and pleaded with his own soul to be released from the inexorable dictates of honor.

But the prayer was denied. Something weightier than temporal happiness—something grander than personal liberty—something better than anything that can come to a man from without, forbade him to accept freedom at such a cruel cost.

He well knew that no act of his, however heroic, would ever win his liberation, because even had the raja been capable of gratitude, which he was not, he would not dare set Clancy at large.

He had learned enough of his captor's seditious schemes to cause the everlasting forfeiture of his regency and his lifelong exile as well.

For Clancy, then, there was no choice but the stark path of duty.

With the little alien form leaning against his breast he rode back toward captivity through the still shadowy forests, keeping close watch, so long as the light remained, for the wounded tiger's mate.

By and by the deepening dusk yielded a glare of torch lights from the soldiers that had ridden down to the Serpents' Pass at the day's close, to meet the prince. The raja led the riders, all his odious, bumptious dominance submerged in racking paternal dread.

Clancy told the story briefly while he yielded the unconscious, limp form to the raja's unsteady arms, and the raja held his torch for an instant before the Englishman's face and looked him deeply in the eyes.

"My eyes have been bound this long while," he muttered in a voice devoid of everything but suffering.

"Why couldn't I have seen that part of him before," Clancy asked himself as he rode heavily onward through the palpitating dark. "I hope to the Lord the little chap will be spared."

But the prince's hurt was mortal.

He lingered for three tortured days, bearing his agony with all the inherited fortitude of his mother's race, making light, cheerful prophecies that almost deceived his distracted father, suffering increasingly, as Clancy alone perceived.

Meanwhile the smoke of a thousand sacrificial fires went up toward heaven, and the priests prayed incessantly, day and night, for their hero's recovery.

On the third day, when the raja seemed about to break under the fearful strain of helpless suspense, His Little Magnificence devised a way to lighten his father's grief-stricken spirits.

He ordered a military engagement, and, arrayed more gloriously than Solomon of old, he lay on a glittering gold-and-pearl embroidered couch in the open space where he was accustomed to review his troops, and directed the maneuvers of his own force against the opposing brigade.

To humor the indomitable young soldier Clancy drove his troops harder than he had ever driven them before, almost persuaded, against his sounder judgment, that the lad's miraculous energy bespoke recovery instead of approaching death.

The prince played his part with fervor despite the ghastly grayness of his face and the cold sweat that gathered like dew on his forehead, but his eyes, always appealingly beautiful, never lost their sparkling light, and his clear, sweet boyish voice did not falter once till the mimic battle was over.

"See, sire, see!" he cried with martial exultation, when the last shot had been fired. "My troops have been perfectly trained. Even without me they could do our great work. But I shall live to lead them to many a glorious victory, never fear, Great Magnificence.

"Captain Sahib, again we won against you!" The cry was faint but triumphant, and it was plainly very difficult for the speaker to turn his tired head toward his trainer.

Clancy bared his head to the burning noontide sun.

"Yes, Little Magnificence, you won again. And it was the finest victory ever won by any soldier," he said from the depths of his thrilled heart.

The soldiers saluted in a body, and their little general cheered them agonizingly, waved his hand to the victorious force, crumpled back in his father's arms, and was forever still.

Raja Valaji and Clancy met after the burning, returning by different

trails from the funeral ghats in the deodar grove where the brave little body had been given back to the dust of the earth.

The raja, stripped of all his arrogance and pride and lust of power, with the thirst of death in his dry eyes, read what was in the other man's heart, of which he showed more than he knew.

"For me everything is over," said the stricken man in a voice of utter desolation. "Pride, ambition, hope, and love of life—all those things the gods have stripped from my life."

"Prince, I am sorry."

There was no mistaking the truth of that simple statement.

They looked each other in the eyes, and in a single revealing instant the race difference of a thousand years fell away from each.

In a moment the abyss between their antipodean races was bridged, and for a space the soul of each was bared to the other's inhostile gaze. They saw the things that contempt and misunderstanding and strangeness had cloaked in age-long enmity.

"Only a man could have done as you did, *sahib,*" said the raja. "A wastrel would have chosen his liberty. I was mistaken in your worth. Perhaps in other things, also, I have erred, for there are doubtless others like you among your countrymen. Always there has been strife between my race and yours, and it has hidden our hearts from each other. Yes, I have erred in judgment concerning you."

"I, too, have erred. I am sorry," said Clancy earnestly.

Then for the first time in his belligerent, arrogant, hate-obsessed life the raja's hand touched the hand of a white man in friendship.

"You are a free man, *sahib,* as you have been since you brought my son back to me at such a great cost to yourself. Go back to your own people and live after your heart's desire. When the time comes to speak of what you have learned here give me the blame, but spare the dead, I beg of you."

"God forbid that I should blacken the memory of your little hero by so much as a word!" cried Clancy, moved to the soul of him.

"What he did was right in his own sight. As for you, Raja Valaji, for your son's sake I could wish that—that in the future there will be nothing for me to condemn in your actions."

"*Sahib,* for me there is no future. Still, I thank you."

So Clancy rode forth in the radiant glow of dawn, a free man, ably escorted. At the last turn of the mountain trail he looked back across the shoulder of a beetling cliff at the hushed palace, the rose tinged deodar grove, the mighty forests and the silvered splendor of majestic Gosia Than, and the whole glorious scene that was never to fade from his crowded memory.

But he hardly gave a thought to nature grandeur then, or even to the joy of his own liberation. His whole heart was with the valliant young soldier who had won his affection and respect in spite of a thousand drawbacks.

With a last military salute he lifted his helmet and bowed to the gallant memory of His Little Magnificence.

A MEMORY

By Mabel J. Bourquin

MY fingers swept your cheeks with tenderness;
You scarcely felt them, deep in thoughts apart;
How could you know that in my light caress
I touched you with the worship of my heart?

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR

DO you know what it means to be a rajah?

A certain district commissioner in India was instructed by the British government to go and reason gently with a neighboring rajah who had been misbehaving. The D. C. was accompanied by a sergeant who was somewhat the worse for the wear of many campaigns.

The D. C. got down to business and the rajah got angry.

"And who are you that you give me such orders?" he demanded furiously. "Know you not that I hold my people in the hollow of my hand to do with as I please?

"Hither, soldier," said he to one of the guards. "Chop off thy left hand."

The guard bowed submissively, drew a short-handled ax from his belt, laid his wrist on a step of the dais and raised the weapon.

"Stop!" the D. C. ordered peremptorily. The guard lowered his ax. "I don't doubt your power, rajah," he conceded, "but I also have power, you know. Sergeant! Draw out all thy teeth," commanded the D. C. in the vernacular with the ghost of a wink.

The sergeant, after a desperate struggle, laid a double set of shining ivories on his outstretched palm—gums and all, as the startled rajah noted!

"Now pluck forth thy right eye," continued the commissioner imperturbably. The sergeant complied.

"You see, old top," said the D. C., "that the government's servants are quite as loyal as your own. But more than that. If your guard *had* chopped his hand off, could he have put it back on again?"

"That is against nature." The rajah was plainly uneasy.

"Sergeant," said the commissioner, "replace thine eye and thy teeth!" And amid groans of wonder from the whole court, it was done.

"So you see," said the commissioner as he prepared to depart, "that it would be wise to do as the government orders." And the rajah agreed with him.

You're to meet another rajah next week, and quite an interesting one.

It is rather a far cry from London to India, from the primarily respectable and shabbily plain precincts of a third-rate boarding-house to the *purdah* of a maharajah. Yet in

THE RAJAH'S PRIZE

BY MARGUERITE AND ARMIGER BARCLAY

the first instalment of which will appear next week in the ALL-STORY CAVALIER, that step is taken in most convincing fashion. It is a very unusual story about an India that has changed to no small extent since the days of Rudyard Kipling's "Plain Tales from the Hills."

You are introduced, to begin with, to *Narain Ghose,* Hindu law student in England's capital. *Narain* discovers a pronounced and mysterious attrac-

tion for a decidedly pretty, olive-skinned girl, whom he sees by chance in a vegetarian restaurant.

Next you are introduced to the girl herself, *Jacynth Elphinstone,* and to the mystery that surrounds her birth. Her supposed mother has just died, and *Jacynth* is horrified to learn from a posthumous letter that—

Meanwhile *Narain,* who has not had enough to eat of late, has gone to his room and is visited in a sort of trance by the god Shiva. This god tells him of a great service that he shall perform on behalf of a beautiful girl, who—

Now, don't get mad at these sudden breaks! Positively, another word about either of these two people would spoil the story for you. Just get next week's ALL-STORY CAVALIER and see for yourself if this isn't so!

By way of variety we are offering

PLAIN BETTY DEANE

BY ROBERT ADGER BOWEN

as the complete novel for September 12. Bowen is the author of "Mandy of the Twin Bar," "Twisted Oaks," and other rousing stories of the West.

Betty belongs to the class facetious young men are used to calling pippins. Therefore, imagine the astonishment of *Geoffrey Farrell,* the sole owner of the X-Y Ranch, when *Betty* applies for the job of ranch cook. Besides being a slovenly exponent of the culinary art, the last cook was addicted to alcoholic beverages, and so she was fired.

Farrell is opposed to hiring *Betty.* Her good looks, her evident refinement, her probable inability to cope with the rough cowboys, all seem to point to the foolishness of such a course.

But the girl pleads "I'm just plain *Betty Deane,*" and *Farrell* takes her on. She turns out to be a splendid cook. But when she first enters the room where the ravenous cowboys are seated about the dinner table, she is received in surprised silence. One of the outfit is especially amazed when he sees *Betty.* And *Betty,* when she catches sight of him, almost faints.

I daren't tell you what these two people know about each other. Take my word for it, strange things begin to happen on the X-Y soon after they meet. *Betty* finds herself the center of a fiendish conspiracy against *Farrell* and another man. The latter comes to her rescue when she needs him most.

"PLAIN BETTY DEANE" is sure to grip you.

"ONE ROSY DAY FOR ROSIE," by E. K. Means, marks the return of one of our best writers. Be it understood that Mr. Means is an original product of the old *Cavalier,* and we are proud of it. Furthermore, we say without reservation that no writer of negro stories in recent years has attained as sudden or as deserved popularity as he. We are constantly importuned by our friends to "please print another story by Mr. Means—they are great," *et cetera;* and Mr. Means is not the only ALL-STORY CAVALIER writer whose work is in great demand from all parts of the country. *Homer Brown* is the particular negro hero in this story, and just now he is ducking work. Listen to him:

"I's got 'bout fo' reg'lar jobs huntin' fer me, an' dey keeps me dodgin'." All of *Homer's* worldly wealth consists of a twenty-five-cent piece. "Ef I could take this here two bits," he soliloquizes, "an' git married wid it, it would sure put me in a corntented mind." Aren't you anxious to read more about *Homer* and his home-making efforts?

"THE HALF MOON," by Frank Condon, is not as funny as his stories usually are, but this fact does not denote any weakness in it. On the contrary, it is a straight, out and out good story, and this kind of a story by Condon means a mighty good story. It's all about an actor, one *John Redmond,* who has been a matinée idol and read mash notes until the very sight of a letter-carrier gives him a bilious attack. He is now to make the finest effort of his life in a new play; and just to show that he is not a ladies' afternon tea actor, but a real man, he has a vigorous club-swinging scene written in the new piece. He is going to show 'em that he is full of pep, and that he has the arms of a longshoreman. So he hires a young club-swinger from the vaudeville stage to put him through a training stunt. And now that I have started the story so well, I'll leave the rest for your own perusal.

"CROSSING THE SIGNALS," by Octavus Roy Cohen, is another baseball story about *Rube Lamboll.* In this week's issue we introduce *Rube* to our readers, and next week we'll tell you something about this phenomenon in action. The *Rube* hates himself—yes, he does! When they talk in the club house about Christy Mathewson's wonderful pitching, and his amazing record, the *Rube* stands up with a yawn and remarks:

"Say, any o' you guys ever seen *me* pitch?".

This was enough. One and all—right then and there the rest of the club made up their minds to get the *Rube*—get him good and hard, and take the abnormal bump of conceit out of his bean. So they jobbed him, and I'll warrant no such job was ever put up before on a star baseball pitcher in a big league club. How did it come out? Ha, much different than you expect and not in a way you could guess until you read the last line of the story. Now, mind you, don't you go and read the last line first!

"THE LOST HEARTHSTONE" FINDS A FRIEND

To the Editor:

Will you accept a few lines of appreciation from an enthusiastic reader of the new Munsey combination? It certainly suits me in every respect, and to me is on a par with my old stand-by, *The Argosy,* as it has many of the works of old familiar and favorite authors between its covers. Have just finished "Dad," and it sure was a dandy. Fred Jackson is always good, and I would like to hear from H. Bedford Jones with a long story of Eastern life.

Mr. Sheehan, who is an old schoolmate of mine, had a very pleasing story in "The Lost Hearthstone," and I could easily recognize his landmarks and even some characters; but the old covered bridge at "Milldale" has not been replaced with steel, and the creamery only ran a few weeks.

George Webb.

346 S. B. Street,
Hamilton, Ohio.

SPEAKS FOR "A SILENT WITNESS"

To the Editor:

I have been reading your magazine steadily for quite a while, and think it is the best story magazine on the market. I like Mr. Burroughs's stories very much, but his endings are usually poor. For instance, "At the Earth's Core." You get all excited when the hero goes up to the crust of the earth and can't get back. Say, for the sake of the magazine, get him to give a sequel in which the hero goes back to Pellucidar and brings back his bride.

Some of the stories in your magazine have made such an impression on me that I have remembered them for years, such as "The Brain Blight," "The Cave Girl," and "The Gods of Mars."

"A Silent Witness" is the best and most scientifically constructed detective story I ever read. Mr. Freeman must have a wonderful mind to draw up such a plot. Give us some more stories in which *Dr. Thorndyke* plays detective.

"The Frozen Beauty" was another remarkable story, and "Dad" was one that ought to cause anybody to open their heart to dear old *James Brinton.*

Ed Gettins.

Los Angeles, California.

THE WRITER WANTS YOUR OPINION

To the Editor:

Have been a reader of the old *All-Story Magazine* for some time, as well as other magazines. *The All-Story* was far and away the choice of the lot. There never had been and never will be as good, I firmly believe.

William Patterson White, Edgar Rice Burroughs, J. Earl Clauson, Rex Stout, and Perley Poore Sheehan; names to conjure with—all of them.

I was very glad when you announced the plan of a weekly instead of a monthly, not because the price was reduced, but because that meant fifty-two issues per year in place of twelve.

When you joined *The All-Story* with *The Cavalier,* I said to my wife, "I am afraid that means curtain for the good old magazine," and I was right. You have been steadily dropping ever since.

Where is the old guard of *All-Story* writers? The only part of this magazine that is *All-Story* is the title. I am going to request that you publish this letter and raise the question of old *All-Story* readers as to whether or not they are satisfied the way it is now published. Here is one emphatic vote for the old régime.

A. W. Thompson.

East Haven, Connecticut.

HARD TO PICK FAVORITES

To the Editor:

I have been reading your Heart to Heart Talks in the All-Story Cavalier magazine, and have decided to write and give you my own opinion of your publication.

I have been a constant reader of the

All-Story Magazine for six or seven years and have yet to find a periodical to compare with it at any price.

I have noticed, in several letters from different readers, kicks in regard to certain stories they did not like. Now I do not think this is fair to yourself or to the several authors involved, as you know that it is an utter impossibility to "Satisfy all the people all the time," and to such persons I would give my advice to read the stories by their favorite authors and pass the others by; but do stop kicking, as I think any one who buys the ALL-STORY CAVALIER magazine certainly gets value received for his investment, and I do not think any one has a kick coming.

It would be quite a hard matter for me to pick out any two or three authors as my favorites, as I enjoy them all; but if it comes down to a scratch, I think that Burroughs has a shade over the rest of your excellent staff, and I am patiently waiting for a sequel to his "At the Earth's Core," which I think is one of the most interesting stories it has been my good fortune to read by any author; but it did not end right to suit me, as I think that E. R. B. left off at the wrong time, and it appears to me he must have it in mind to give us a rousing sequel to this story.

If I am right I wish you would kindly jog his memory and let us have it without any more delay.

C. W. PARRY.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

EVERYBODY LIKES "DAD"

TO THE EDITOR:

We have just finished reading the serial "Dad," by Mr. Albert P. Terhune; that is, my father and myself. We have read this story aloud for the benefit of my mother, whose eyesight will not permit the reading of type.

We all wish to congratulate you on your selection of this capital war story, as it is instructive as well as intensely interesting, covering well the many small details so familiar to one of the G. A. R., to which my father belongs. During the reading of this story he had the pleasure of living over many of the incidents as experienced in the great War of the Rebellion.

I also wish to thank you for the well-nigh perfect serial, "The Quitter," by Mr. Jacob Fisher. This also cannot help but please your readers, making a man feel better toward the weaker sex (so called). The heroine in this case is by far the contrary to the above statement.

The ALL-STORY is becoming more interesting every week, but allow me to express my distaste for the products of the pen of Mr. E. R. Burroughs; they are too crude in plot and suffer in contrast with the works of Mr. Rider Haggard and Jules Verne. When Mr. Burroughs produces works on a par, or nearly so, to the above writers, then, and not till then, will I consider them worth reading.

CLEMENT W. LOWE.

Vineland, New Jersey.

AN ANSWER TO "OLD GUARD"

TO THE EDITOR:

It was just impossible for me to read what "An Old Guard" said of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER and not write and contradict him. Why did he waste (?) his time reading *The Cavalier* for three months if he found only one story to his liking? I can safely say that any one who fails to enjoy Fred Jackson's "stuff" ought to write stories for himself.

I am now reading "The Biggest Diamond." It is excellent! Some of my favorite stories are: "The Quitter," "Dad," "A Silent Witness," and "The Beasts of Tarzan." I also enjoy the Nutting series.

Do give us another Crewe story, as "The Double Dealer" was just splendid.

Wish your magazine the very best success.

FLORENCE HOURTLY.

New York City.

LETTERETTES

We have been readers of *The Cavalier* for about three years. Can say we like it fine. Fred Jackson is a favorite of ours.

Give us a sequel to "The Lone Star Rangers." It was a great story.

L. F. T.

Lonipoc, Santa Barbara County, California.

You may be surprised at my choice, but my favorite *Cavalier* writer is one of the poets—Stokely S. Fisher. I like his love poems best.

MARY SMITH.

Cambridge, Ohio.

TO THE EDITOR:

Have just finished reading "The Quitter," by Jacob Fisher, and must say that I believe it is one of the best stories I have ever read (and I do some reading). Can't you get Mr. Fisher to give us a sequel to this? as I think there are others that would like to know how *Norma* got along in the "Big Town," and also how *Sophia Burton* enjoyed her musk-ox skin coat and the loss of her man.

W. P. GRAYE.

16 Oliver Street,
Boston, Massachusetts.

Some Rube!

By Octavus Roy Cohen

DAN McGUIRE, scout for the Vultures, snipped the end from a black perfecto, sighed contentedly and waddled back to the smoker of the lone Pullman. He paused in the doorway to light the cigar, and then, as his eyes met those of the only other occupant of the compartment, he let the match burn his fingers

"Well, what are *you* doin' down this way?" he queried in frank surprise. "Thought you were working the Northwest for the Wolverines."

Jimmy Quinn, former team-mate of McGuire's and present chief scout of the Wolverines, squirmed uneasily and flushed.

"Ain't doin' nothin' special," he answered evasively.

"Traveling on this road for your health, eh?"

"N-o-o, not exactly *that;* but I'm bound for a little rest in the country."

McGuire saw instantly that Quinn had some reason for concealing his motive in visiting the forsaken country through which the train rattled and clattered, and he pretended, wisely, to be indifferent. But he determined to watch closely.

Despite a friendship of years, McGuire and Quinn were, in a way, business enemies. They scouted for rival teams; that is, they traveled about the country looking for promising ball players with whom their clubs could be strengthened; and Dan McGuire knew that when Quinn evaded answers to innocent questions, he must be on the track of a good thing.

Less than half an hour later he had ingratiated himself with the Pullman conductor, and, in turn, with the train conductor. Finally he ventured the question which had prompted his sudden convivial propensities.

"See that big fellow in the smoker?" he questioned absently.

They nodded.

"Well, I want to find out something from you on the q. t.—where's he bound for?"

"Cartersville," answered the train conductor promptly. "He gets off this train at Delman Junction and takes a sort of a shoo-fly to Cartersville."

"What sort of a town is Cartersville?"

"Dead—and then some."

"Got a baseball team?"

"You bet. They've been cleaning up everything in these parts for two seasons."

"Aha!" exclaimed McGuire interestedly, "I begin to smell a mice."

"Huh?"

"I said smell a mice. Which is, of course, cryptic. But, seriously, who's the star player on the Cartersville team—that is, if there is some bright, scintillating meteor—"

The conductor, evidently a product of the section, gazed at him in astonishment.

"Haven't you ever heard of Hector

Lamboll—Heck Lamboll they call him?"

"No. What is he, a politician or a pitcher?"

"Haven't heard of him?"

"No."

"He's a pitcher," confided the conductor impressively. "The man who shut out the Kansas City Federals this spring with one hit. He's a phenom."

"And he pitches on the Cartersville team?"

"Uh-huh. And he's got a head a mile long. Old Solomon hasn't a thing on him in being wise."

"So I judge," returned the big league scout mildly, "by his bein' a product of Cartersville. Now listen," he grew suddenly confidential, "I reckon you'd like to see this here what's-'is-name—"

"Heck—Heck Lamboll."

"—This Heck Lamboll get a try-out with the Vultures, wouldn't you?"

"The Vultures? Not Connie Casey's club?"

"The same."

"Would I?" The conductor whistled expressively.

"All right, I'm going to confide in you, and keep what I say under your shirt, hear. I'm Dan McGuire."

"*The* Dan McGuire—the man who played second on the world champion Bluejays?"

"The same. I'm scouting for the Vultures. That man in there is Jimmy Quinn, scout for the Wolverines. I suspect that he's after Lamboll. I wanter get there first, see? But I don't want Quinn to know I'm goin'."

"Cinch," said the conductor heartily. "And I'm with you, only don't forget to mention to Heck that I was the man who put you wise.

"We've already missed connections at Delman Junction, and Quinn will have to wait there until ten o'clock to-morrow morning. He'll get to Cartersville at two in the afternoon if his train is on time, which it never is, being usually about two or three hours late. That'll land him there after the game between Cartersville and Bingen."

"Game there to-morrow, eh?"

"Yeh. First game of a seven-game series for the county championship.

"As I was saying," he went on, "Quinn ain't likely to get there until after the game is over. Now, if you're willing to ride all night you can go with us to Salters and catch the C. and R. train back from there to Cartersville. You'll reach Cartersville not later than eight in the morning."

"Sleeper?"

"No. Day-coach. You'll have to make up your mind to spend an uncomfortable night."

McGuire pondered. He hated a day-coach as fervently as a drinker hates prohibition; but maybe—

"This chap Lamboll is really a phenom?"

"The most wonderful pitcher I ever saw. Head like a judge; speed of Walter Johnson; perfect control; a spitter that breaks at an angle—and he bats like a fiend."

"I'm on," sighed the scout resignedly. "It'll be almost worth it to put one over on Jimmy."

At Delman Junction McGuire grinningly watched Quinn drop from the rear platform of the train and scurry to the shelter of a shack near the right-of-way, where he concealed himself until the train pulled protestingly out.

"And he'll be waiting there until to-morrow morning," chortled the emissary of the Vultures. "And when he gets to Cartersville I'll have had a chance to look over the phenom, and, if he's any good, I'll have him all signed up safe and sound."

Pleased with himself and with the world in general he sauntered back to the smoker.

The conductor, his face the picture of melancholy, joined him. McGuire proffered one of his fat cigars. The conductor took it.

"Hard luck," he volunteered sadly, as he lighted it.

McGuire straightened in his chair.

"Huh—what's that?"

"Tough luck."

"What's tough luck?"

"Don't you know?"

The calmness of the man exasperated the baseball scout.

"No!" he shouted, "I don't know. *What's* hard luck?"

"The Cartersville train was late too," wailed the train official, "and Quinn made connection at Delman Junction."

Then he rose and shambled from the smoker.

In black rage Dan McGuire stared with unseeing eyes at the flying landscape. In blacker rage he transferred and spent a tortuous night in a sleeper.

But he was calm when he reached Cartersville.

He knew that Quinn did not suspect his presence in the town, and he knew that Quinn would attend the game in the afternoon to look over young Lamboll before speaking.

Therefore it behove McGuire to lie low; to see the game, and then to beat Quinn to it in signing Lamboll, if Lamboll proved worth signing.

The semblance of a grin returned to McGuire's face. He felt that he held the whip-hand again.

During the morning he remained in the seclusion of his hotel room, and cursed the lack of comfort. In the afternoon he took his place in the crowd near the home plate, and gazed with keen interest at the man whom he had come to inspect.

He saw a young giant; red-headed, freckled-faced, gawky; evidently devoid of brain.

"Rube!" he muttered to himself.

"Ball t'ree!"

Lamboll calmly took the return from the catcher and grinned at the three runners who populated the bases. Then, smilingly, he pitched.

"Strike 'un!"

Again the ball sped over the pan.

"Strike tuh!"

As calmly as before he slammed the sphere to the catcher.

"Strike t'ree an' out! Side out!"

"Well, Jimmy, what do you think of him?"

Quinn whirled to stare in surprise and consternation at the grinning Dan McGuire.

"Well, I'll be—"

"Don't," admonished Dan. "Ladies present."

"How'd you get here?"

"Flew. I'm an angel. Honest, Jimmy, you sure pulled a laugh outa me the way you skeedaddled from the train at Delman Junction. I was wise all the time that you were headed to Cartersville. But now that you're here, what do you think of him?"

Quinn's course of action was plain; it was up to him to pretend that Lamboll was no good, and then, when McGuire had his guard down, to sign the youngster.

"Rotten," he answered cheerfully. "Hasn't got a thing on the ball."

"Speed," insisted McGuire. "Just barrels of it."

"Poor break on the ball."

"You're getting blind in your old age, Jimmy. That ball breaks like something hit it. And he's cool and heady. I don't blame you for chasing him. The Wolverines could use a man like him, couldn't they?"

"Oh, no," wearily; "he's not good enough."

McGuire poked him playfully in the ribs.

"Quit kiddin' yourself and tryin' to kid me," he advised cheerfully. "He's some pitcher."

"Look who he's pitching against," retorted Quinn disgustedly. "A real batter would slam that ball all over the lot."

One of the Cartersville batters swatted a sizzler between the second baseman and the shortstop. Each dived for it, and both missed.

They rose to their feet, exchanged a

few heated and pointed words and started a pretty mixup. The town constable carried them off to the lockup.

And Bingen was left two players shy.

"Is there any one in the crowd," asked the Bingen manager, "who will fill these places for us? We ain't got no substitutes."

Quinn looked at McGuire and McGuire looked at Quinn. Here was a chance to bat against the phenom and see what he had in his twirling repertoire.

They grinned as they stepped forward together.

"Neither of us have played for a couple of years," volunteered Quinn, "and we're both a bit rusty; but we used to be pretty good, and we'll try if you want us."

"Great," enthused the Bingen manager. Then, as the scorer stepped forward—"names?"

"Quinn."

"McGuire."

Lamboll turned suddenly and eyed them. Then he smiled gently. But the others did not notice.

"Let's have a ball and a couple of gloves, will you?" requested McGuire, as, coats off, the two men trotted onto the field, the objects of a hundred pair of eyes.

Gloves and a ball were tossed them, and they tossed it lightly to and fro. Then a bit of their old major league ginger came back and they sped the ball to each other, alternating with skipping grounders and lightning liners.

The spectators stared in open-mouthed amazement, and the Bingen manager mentally patted himself on the back.

"Play ball!" ordered the umpire.

Quinn went to second and McGuire pranced happily to the short field.

In the sixth inning a Bingen runner reached first on an error. The next man up hit a high fly to deep left, and the outfielder muffed it prettily, the batter going to second and the runner taking third on the play.

Then McGuire came to the bat.

Lamboll sized him up nicely and wound up.

There was an unwinding of arms and legs, a sizzling streak, and the ball spanked into the big mitt of the catcher.

"Strike one."

"Lemme see you do it again," invited Dan eagerly. Never before had he dreamed any man could throw a ball with such speed.

"A' right."

Lamboll wound up with a peculiar twisting motion all his own. Then his arm shot high over his head, whirled in a great arc.

McGuire saw the ball coming and swung viciously. And after he had swung the ball floated lazily by the plate, and spanked into the catcher's hands.

"Strike tuh!"

The batter rubbed dirt on his hands, clutched his bat and watched. Lamboll received the ball, stepped into the box, and then suddenly whirled and sent it hurtling over the heart of the plate.

"Strike t'ree—an' out!"

The crowd howled and Quinn stepped forward, his jaw grim.

"You weren't sojering?" he asked excitedly.

"Sojering—nothing. That's a marvel."

The first one went wide, but the next three came over the plate, and Quinn was fanned. Nor did either of them make a hit on their final trips to the plate, each putting up a pop fly to the infield.

Cartersville was returned victor by a score of 6—0; and both Quinn and McGuire waylaid Lamboll on his way from the field.

"My name is McGuire," Dan said breezily. "I'm scout for the Vultures. I offer you two hundred a month."

"I'm Quinn, Jimmy Quinn, of the

Wolverines. I'll make it two-twenty-five."

Heck Lamboll looked them over carefully.

"Come an' see me some time," he invited calmly, "an' we'll talk it over. Sounds pretty good; but I've always hankered to play with the Warriors, they bein' the world's champeens."

The two scouts looked at each other and gasped.

"Where will we find you—and when?"

"To-night, after eight o'clock, at my house on Main Street."

"Will you promise," asked the wily Quinn, "not to sign with the Vultures without letting me know?"

"And," interjected Maguire, "not to sign with the Wolverines without giving me a chance to outbid 'em?"

"All right," replied Lamboll wearily, and rambled toward the dilapidated structure which did service as a clubhouse for the Cartersville team.

The two major leaguers stared after him in silence.

"Well, Dan," said Quinn finally, "it's simply a case of which one goes highest. That guy is the best natural pitcher I've ever seen."

"Me too," agreed McGuire; "but what a Rube he is!"

"Ain't got the sense of a common jackass," seconded Jimmy. And they walked off the field arm-in-arm.

For a week first Quinn and then McGuire talked and pleaded and begged and browbeat Lamboll to sign with him, and for a week he turned down all offers grinningly.

He was much obliged, but there was nothing doing.

And then, at the end of the seventh day, McGuire and Quinn, loafing together by the principal corner of the town, grabbed each other in mutual fear as a man swung up the street, suit-case in hand.

"Well, I'll be switched!" gasped Dan. "It's Gil Collins, of the Warriors!"

Together they stepped out and faced him.

If they expected him to show surprise they were disappointed. He merely smiled, deposited his suit-case on the ground, extended his hand.

"Well," he said, "has either of you signed the phenom yet?"

"Huh!" McGuire looked at Quinn and Quinn looked at McGuire. "What you know about — about him?"

"Why don't you call him by his name?" persisted Collins. "I think Lamboll is a cute name. It'll look so nice on the batting list of the Warriors, don't you think?"

"Listen here." Quinn stepped forward belligerently. "Don't you think you can come down here at the eleventh hour and grab our game. I don't know where or when or how you heard about this guy; but I came down here on direct, confidential information. He's my find. I could stand biddin' against Dan here, but two of you—"

He paused, at loss for words. Collins merely laughed.

"Cheese it, Jimmy," he advised. "Sour grapes. I know he must be a world-beater or you two guys wouldn't have been hanging around in any such dump as this for a week. I know he's good enough for me to sign without looking him over."

An unholy light came into the snappy eyes of Jimmy Quinn.

"Yeh!" he snapped. "And you'll pay him a fortune. I could have signed him long ago, but he thinks he's a Christy Mathewson. What do you think that guy wants?"

"What?"

"Not lessen four hundred a month."

"What?"

"Straight."

When Collins had gone on down the street McGuire turned to Quinn, his forehead wrinkled.

"What's the steer? Why did you lie about that four hundred a month business?"

"Because," retorted Quinn grimly, "somehow or other, Mister Gil Collins is wise to the fact that this here Heck boob is dead anxious to put his John Hancock on a Warrior contract, and he thinks he's got a cinch. Well, 'tween you and me, Dan, he's goin' to find the sleddin' rough, and we'll get the laugh on him any way you look at it."

"You mean—?" Dan grinned.

"Exactly. Right now you and me's goin' down to warn Heck, friendlylike, that he's to hold out for four centuries per month. We're each going to duplicate the offer. Maybe Gil will be scared off. If he ain't, then it'll be worth it all to see him have to pony over."

"And if he takes us up?"

"Since we ain't goin' to get him," said Quinn, "I don't mind telling you frankly that I'd pay almost anything for him. He's the greatest natural pitcher, bar none, I've ever seen."

They found Lamboll whittling happily.

"Ain't he a Rube," muttered McGuire. And then:

"Mr. Lamboll."

The phenom unfolded himself lazily and strolled to the fence, his manner languid, indifferent.

"'Mornin'."

"Good morning. Mr. Lamboll, I offer you four hundred a month to play with the Vultures."

The eyes of the countryman narrowed; but he shook his head.

"Sign with the Wolverines," said Quinn evenly, "and I'll give you four-twenty-five a month."

"See me to-morrer," retorted Lamboll, and they got no more satisfaction.

That night Quinn and McGuire sat in the lobby discussing the various phases of their chase after this eccentric wonder—the only man they'd ever known who scorned offers from a major league. Gil Collins, dejected, unhappy of appearance, shambled into the lobby of the hotel and dropped wearily into a chair.

The two scouts looked at each other and sidled closer sympathetically.

"He wouldn't sign with you, either?"

Collins looked up viciously.

"Tell me the truth. Did one of you boobs offer that bonehead Rube four hundred and twenty-five a month?"

"Yes," answered Quinn seriously. I did."

Collins, sitting straighter in his chair, smiled.

"Then I ain't as bad off as I thought."

"You—"

"I've got his signed contract."

McGuire and Quinn stared dejectedly at each other.

"Come and have a drink," invited Quinn gamely. "I'm the supreme goat in this little game."

"He really is a wonder, eh?" questioned Collins.

Together they dilated on his playing.

"Then I don't mind confessing," went on Collins, "how the bonehead roped me in. In the first place, when he agreed to sign for four twenty-five a month, he demanded a bonus."

"What?"

"Yep. Had to pay him a bonus of a hundred and fifty."

"Ah, g'wan."

"Straight goods. But that ain't the worst. He then told me that the Cartersville team had a right to his services, and then they'd sell him for one hundred dollars."

"That's reasonable."

"Is it?" Collins's voice was fraught with sarcasm. "I thought so too until I found out that our friend Heck owns the Cartersville club, and that the purchase money will go into his own pocket."

Silently they took another drink.

"And we thought he was green," said Quinn solemnly.

The limited shot northward over the rocky roadbed. In the smoker sat Quinn of the Wolverines, McGuire of

the Vultures, Collins of the Warriors, and Hector Lamboll, recruit phenom.

"The way I got wise to it," explained Quinn, "was by a regular flood of letters which came to me, some handwritten, some typewritten—all of 'em telling me what a wonder our friend Lamboll was. So when the time came and I had nothing to do I drifted down to look him over. I must 've received a hundred and fifty letters."

He turned to Lamboll.

"You have a bunch of admirers."

"No," explained Lamboll calmly. "I wrote all them letters myself."

Silence.

"Say." McGuire leaned forward. "Tell us the story, won't you, Heck?"

"Wasn't nothin' much," said Lamboll languidly. "I jes' wanted to sign with the Warriors. So I started playin' on Mr. Quinn by a bunch of letters, knowin' that he needed a pitcher and might pay some attention to 'em because of that. Then he came down, and Mr. McGuire was with him, and I managed to get them bidding against each other."

The listeners were breathless.

"Go on."

"So then I wrote to Mr. Collins an' told him that you two was down here tryin' to sign me and that I'd rather play with him. Then *he* came down."

"For the love of Mike!" said Collins awe-struck; "isn't your first name 'Solomon'?"

"No," replied Lamboll, his eyes twinkling. "An' it ain't 'Rube,' either."

His Last Plea

By Tom S. Elrod

THERE is a possibility that it never would have happened had it not been for the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Albert Montgomery Fletcher were so violently in love with each other.

If marriage proves happy, husband and wife generally turn match-makers because they have decided that all their unmarried friends are missing the greatest thing in life by remaining single.

So after they had invited Mrs. Fletcher's particular friend, Miss Cornelia Pennfield, to visit them at their summer home in the wilds of the newest summer resort, Brown County, Indiana, they began scheming to find her a mate. While Miss Pennfield was becoming becomingly tanned her host and hostess were planning, discussing, and eliminating in an effort to decide upon a suitable man who might also be invited to their home.

The choice finally fell upon Arthur Thompson.

Match-makers move in a mysterious way their miracles to perform, so the scheming Fletchers gave never the slightest hint to Miss Pennfield that they were inviting Thompson down for a week. And in their letter of invitation to him they said nothing whatever of the presence of the girl.

"It will be such a delicious surprise for both of them," declared Alcia Fletcher.

"Capital, capital," agreed her husband.

Thompson, who was just back from a big contract, hailed with delight the chance to run down from Chicago and spend a few days in Brown County. He thought a great deal of the Albert Montgomery Fletchers.

His note of acceptance named the time of his arrival, and there was a flutter of suppressed excitement about the Fletchers when they brought out their car and started to Gnawbone to meet the train.

To Cornelia, Alcia said: "Bert and I have to go to Needmore on an errand, and we are coming home by way of Gnawbone because Bert is looking for an express package when this afternoon's train gets in. We are leaving you and Roderick here because the roads are so dusty, and you will be just as safe as if you were in your own room at home."

Then blowing a kiss to her guest while Fletcher cranked the engine, she took a seat in the car and they were off.

Roderick was a very valuable and very ugly bulldog that belonged to the Fletchers. Contrary to his usual disposition he had made friends with Cornelia and appeared even to desire her society to the exclusion of his master and mistress.

It was just about this time that Fate stepped in and began to arrange the stage for action.

Perhaps a quarter of a mile from the Fletcher bungalow ran Emerald Creek. At this time of the year Emerald Creek was warm and inviting, and if there was anything Miss Cornelia Pennfield loved to do better than anything else it was to go in bathing.

She had bathed in the surf in wild as well as tame oceans; she had taken her dip in lagoons, lakes, rivers, and seas, but she had been forced to forego the pleasure of a swim in the placid waters of Greasy Creek because in her hurry of packing she had forgotten her bathing-suit.

So she sat and looked at Roderick and thought about how delightful it would be to slip through the cool, green woods to the stream, dive into the pool where the minnows sported and where an occasional turtle dropped with a "plunk" from neighboring drift when some intruder came too near, and there to idle away an hour of the afternoon that was beginning to pale upon her.

She was growing just a little tired of the same old view of Weed Patch Hill, humped up there against the sky, of the same squirrel that scolded her when she walked through the timber, and of the same old spooning of the Fletchers.

She loved them both, of a certainty she did, but just now she was plainly bored and exasperated.

"I never before went anywhere, not even on trip across Death Valley, without having at least one bathing-suit along," she told Roderick, who smiled at her and snapped at a fly, "and to think here I am with a whole afternoon to kill, nobody within five miles of this place, a near-by stream inviting, and I haven't a thing to wear for a swim."

Then she blushed and Roderick regarded her critically.

"But no one would know," she told the dog, as her idea began to take form; "no one ever comes past here because it is private property! Bert and Alcia will be away all afternoon, and it will be the greatest sort of a lark. And absolutely safe, isn't it?"

Roderick nodded.

It was one of Cornelia's characteristics that when she made up her mind there was never a thought of the consequences. She was wearing a short walking-skirt and one of those middy blouses, and she realized that both garments could be discarded and donned in a twinkling. And as for what was underneath, why that is a matter of no concern here at all.

Down the path that linked the bungalow with the stream Cornelia's rubber-soled shoes padded, and Roderick hurried to keep up, his bulk and his diet conspiring to make it a thing difficult for him to do.

At the stream all was quiet save for the rustle of the birds in the bushes, the cry of a crow overhead, and the barking of the scolding squirrels.

In a moment Cornelia had divested herself of shoes and stockings. A minute more and her clothes were in a neat bundle on the turf, and she stood ready for the dive.

A squirrel poked his head around a branch, and then, scandalized, hurried back to his home.

There was a flash of a white body in the filtered sunlight, a splash, and Cornelia Pennfield, clad only in the bathing-suit old Mrs. Nature had provided for her, was swimming there in the pleasant water of Emerald Creek.

Her breath came quickly as a result of the water's shock to her body, but she shook the drops from her eyes, laughed aloud for pure joy, and thought of the only thing that would mar her pleasure.

"I will have to dry my hair when I get home," she observed. "That is another penalty for forgetting a bathing-cap as well as a suit, but it is worth it. All my life I have been consumed with a desire to go swimming once without being encumbered with a silly old bathing-suit, and now my wish has come true. I am just as isolated as if this were the middle of the ocean, and Roderick there is all the body-guard any girl needs."

Cornelia's hair was wet and consequently a little more water would not hurt it, so she dived repeatedly, swam, floated, tried new strokes, and played in the water, for all the world like a fabled mermaid come to life.

On the bank Roderick sat with a puzzled expression on his ugly face.

He never had seen anything like this before. He had grown used to the ways of the country since his residence had been taken up in Brown County, but this was an experience entirely new and startling.

Somehow or other he did not feel just right, sitting there and watching this girl swimming around the pool. He felt that he, too, should do something out of the ordinary.

He noticed a bundle of white things close to him on the bank. When he sniffed them they gave off a pleasant perfume. As he pawed the bundle slightly it turned over and out rolled a black silk stocking, then another.

He sniffed the rubber shoe-soles, but that was not what he wanted. Where was that elusive odor of violets that reminded him of something in a tall bottle on Alcia's dressing table? Once she had shaken a few drops on his nose, and he liked it very much.

Nosing into the bundle again, he picked out a frilly-white garment and shook it.

He sniffed.

Ah, that was better, also stronger. He must have some more of that.

Roderick pulled forth the various things he found in the bundle and shook them. The faint odor of crushed violets was very pleasant indeed.

Then, doglike, he began to think of some place where he could hide them until, some other time, he could return and enjoy those subtle hints of perfume all by himself.

Why not do as he would with a bone?

Clever idea that. He would hasten to carry it into action.

Roderick bustled away with a skirt

in his mouth, and covered it over with leaves and soft, rich dirt. Next came a stocking and a waist. Then came something else.

Meanwhile Miss Cornelia Pennfield continued to enjoy the pleasures of Emerald Creek, with never a thought of her rapidly disappearing wardrobe. Also, she failed to realize how rapidly the minutes were passing.

And back there on the hot and dusty road between Needmore and Gnawbone she could not possibly know that a tire had blown out on Fletcher's car, or that he was sitting by the roadside making a vain attempt to repair the trouble while his pretty wife continually glanced at the dial clock and urged him to greater speed.

Neither could she know that Arthur Thompson had arrived on time, had found no one to meet him, and had inquired the way.

Even then Thompson, who had been told at the railroad station how to cut across the country and reach Honeymoon Hall, was swinging through the woods, whistling a gay tune and thoroughly glad to be alive.

Experience in the open had made it easy for him to follow the station agent's directions. He realized that before long he would be reaching Fletcher's property.

Yes, there was a rural mail-box and a sign on the rail fence that read: "Private Property of Albert M. Fletcher. Trespassers Will Positively Be Prosecuted."

"Regular Garden of Eden!" laughed Thompson, as he disregarded the warning and swung into the path that he judged would lead past the fringe of willows and beeches along Emerald Creek, and then on the scant half mile to the bungalow.

His feet made but little sound as he hastened along the path, and the quiet of the woods caused him to break off his whistling abruptly.

"Funny thing Fletcher didn't come to meet me," thought Thompson. "However, if he had I would have been cheated out of this glorious walk. Hello! There's a bulldog waving a flag of truce. I suppose that means 'Welcome to our city.'"

The bulldog was intent on burying practically the last of the pleasant-smelling, frilly, white things that Cornelia Pennfield had left lying on the bank. Later he meant to dig them up and nose them at his leisure.

Thompson was almost upon him before he realized that his work was being interrupted.

Roderick had never made friends with the natives; and as Miss Pennfield had been the only visitor at Honeymoon Hall, he viewed Thompson with suspicion, and suspicion with him was the incentive to action.

So he bared his teeth, uttered a growl that could not have been mistaken for a welcome and made a rush for the intruder.

Thompson cast about for a club when he saw the dog coming, realized that flight and fight were both useless, and did the next best thing.

Above him was the low-hanging branch of a beech. He swung himself above ground just as Roderick made a dive for his leg.

Scrambling through the dense growth of branches, he finally found himself astride a stout limb, where he paused a moment to get his breath.

Underneath, Roderick sat and growled, biding his time.

"You dirty, contemptible, bow-legged, misshapen, poison-faced brute!" shouted Thompson, his temper rising. "Just wait until I think out a plan, and I'll beat out the few brains left in your ugly head, you low-bred pot hound, you mangy—"

"Oh!" screamed Miss Pennfield involuntarily, then clapped both hands over her mouth.

Thompson looked in the direction of the scream.

His high perch gave him a direct view of the pool, and there he saw a young woman, her beautiful white shoulders rising from the water.

It is nothing to his discredit, perhaps, to relate that he came very near falling into the waiting jaws of Roderick.

For just the fraction of a second the man and the girl gazed into each other's eyes. Cornelia was frantically digging her toes into the sandy bottom of Emerald Creek, because the water was very clear.

Like the flashing impressions that come to a drowning man, it occurred to Thompson that here was a living September Morn, only the water was deeper.

"Turn your head instantly!" she commanded.

Thompson's head went around with a jerk.

A full minute passed without any sound other than that of Roderick's anticipative panting.

"Will you please get out of that tree and go away from here at once?" demanded Cornelia. "This is private property."

"I shall be only too glad to go away from here if you will call off your infernal dog," he replied, unable to keep the anger out of his voice. "I assure you I never climbed this tree to spy upon you or any one else."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, whose position in the water made it impossible for her to see where Roderick sat on guard.

"I mean that I was walking through this woods when a bulldog, which, I presume, is your property, rushed at me, and I swung into the branches of this tree to escape being torn to pieces. If I had a weapon I would come down and fight the brute, but I am not going to drop into his arms just for the sake of giving him a full meal. Call off your dog and I'll get away quick enough."

As Thompson sat staring straight at the trunk of the big beech that was his refuge, taking great care neither to turn his head to the left nor the right, Cornelia began calling Roderick.

She called him softly and said he was a good dog; then her tone was one of command.

Finally she pleaded with him, but to no avail.

Roderick realized that she was simply a guest. She really had no authority over him.

He loved her a great deal, but his duty plainly was to remain right there.

"Has he moved?" she asked.

"He has not," replied Thompson, stealing a glance at the dog.

"Ouch! Help!" suddenly cried Cornelia, and instinctively Thompson whirled around.

"What in Heaven's name is the matter now?" he demanded.

"Turn your head this instant!" was the reply, and as Thompson jerked into position, with his back to the stream, he caught a fleeting glimpse of her face as she stood with only her chin above water.

"I—think a crawfish was biting at my foot," she added by way of answer to his question.

Below sat Roderick with a "This rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I" sort of expression, and occasionally he uttered a growl to demonstrate that he still was on the job.

At length Thompson thought of a plan.

"Why in the world don't you come out of there and take the dog away?" he inquired.

"B-b-because I haven't any clothes on," she sobbed, her tears mingling with the waters of Emerald Creek, "and I'm g-g-getting c-c-cold, and I'm f-f-frightened and I don't know what to do."

"Now, let me suggest something," said Thompson, after a moment's reflection. "If your clothes are on the bank I assure you on my honor as a gentleman that I will sit right here with my eyes closed while you come out of the stream and put them on. Then you can call off your dog; I will come down and go on my way, and this incident will be forever closed."

"I am going to trust you," she agreed at length; and as Thompson sat with closed eyes he heard her leave the water, heard her scramble to the top of the bank, heard her give another scream, and then the sound of some one diving into the creek came to his ears.

"M-m-my clothes are gone! M-m-my clothes are gone!" Cornelia cried, sobbing through her chattering teeth.

"I think, perhaps, your dog has carried them away," Thompson offered. "He had something white in his mouth as I came up. Now, I don't propose to stay up here and allow a girl to suffer any longer. I'm coming down, dog or no dog, and go for help."

"D-d-don't you d-d-dare come out of that t-t-tree!" she cried to him. "Roderick would f-f-fairly t-t-tear you to p-p-pieces!"

They were silent a little time, then he spoke again. He had another plan.

"Now, listen," he said. "I will climb higher, where the leaves are thickest; then I will remove my coat and my—er—er—trousers and toss them down to you. You put them on and take that infernal dog away. Get some clothes of your own and bring mine back.

"Meanwhile I'll play I'm one of my own ancestors, and will caper about in the top of this tree, trusting to luck that no one sees me and shoots me for a crazy man."

"I could never think of such a thing," Cornelia firmly insisted. "Such action would be scandalous!"

"Woof!" said Roderick, as if in support of her statement.

"Well, anything's better than me sitting here like a helpless infant while you freeze to death there in the water," he declared. "Come on and accept my way out. Nobody will ever know about it, and we probably will never see each other again."

"Oh, I c-c-can't do th-th-that, Arthur!" she began, and he whirled at the sound of his own name, only to jerk his head back in place as he caught a glimpse of her ducking to her chin again.

"How did you know my name?"

"I-I-I knew it from the v-v-very f-f-first," she admitted. "*Please* think of some way to help me!"

The light was beginning to dawn.

"You're Cornelia Pennfield!" he shouted excitedly. "I knew all the time there was something familiar about your voice!"

Back and forth flew questions and answers.

She explained that she was visiting at the Fletcher bungalow, and he told her he was bound for the same place when unfortunately Roderick had treed him.

They had separated about a year before, after perhaps his tenth proposal of marriage.

She had steadfastly refused him because she was never sure of herself, and, strange to say, this was one of her affairs about which she had told Alcia Fletcher absolutely nothing. Neither had Thompson ever mentioned the matter to the owners of Honeymoon Hall.

But Old Man Fate knew all about it and chuckled to himself.

"Will you marry me?" asked the man up a tree in a matter-of-fact tone. "That's the eleventh time, and you remember I told you I intended to keep on proposing just as often as I saw you."

"How c-c-can you think of anything so f-f-f-foolish at a time like this? And besides, you d-d-don't see me now."

"I'm not thinking of anything foolish; I'm thinking of something that has occupied my thoughts for a very long time. Will you marry me? That makes an even dozen. Say 'yes,' and I'll come down from my perch and tear that dog limb from limb."

"Oh, p-p-please do something to help me, Arthur; I'm f-fairly f-f-freezing!"

"For the thirteenth time, will you marry me, Cornelia? Please take pity

on me; surely you love me a little by this time."

Just then Old Man Fate poked a stick into a bush and out jumped a rabbit.

It scurried across the path of Roderick, the watchful.

Only an instant did he hesitate; then the dog in him came to the surface and he was off through the trees, bent on catching the cottontail.

The man in the tree might go hang, for all he cared.

"Did you answer me?" demanded Thompson.

"No."

"Is that your answer?"

"No."

"Well, what is it?"

"Yes," she said, barely loud enough for him to hear as the sound of Roderick crashing through the brush grew dimmer.

By a great demonstration of self-control, Thompson maintained his position on the beech branch. He fumbled in his pocket a moment, then knotted a handkerchief over his eyes.

After adjusting his hoodwink, he announced: "Now, Cornelia, I am thoroughly blindfolded, and I am looking exactly opposite from where you are. I think that bulldog hid your clothes somewhere near. Come out and hunt for them, and I will stay right where I am, or else I can drop down and run to the house for some of your clothes, whichever you choose."

She told him to remain right where he was, and he heard her leave the water and begin her search.

A bit of white under a pile of leaves and loam caught her eye, and in a twinkling she had pulled from their hiding-place the various things that had been lost.

Faster than she had ever dressed before, she donned them. Then she called to him.

"I am going back now. The bungalow is down this path a little way. You stay as you are until you can't hear my footsteps any longer; then come on. I couldn't bear to face you after all I've been through."

And she was gone.

Thompson watched her until she disappeared through the avenue of trees. He dropped from the branch and stretched his cramped muscles.

Next he drew his knife and cut a club, which he carefully tested.

"Now, if that cussed dog shows up again I'm ready for him," he said and struck out for Honeymoon Hall.

Cornelia was safely in her room and contemplating her blushes in the mirror when she heard the sound of Fletcher's motor. A moment more and she recognized Thompson's step and overheard the shouts of greeting the Fletchers gave him.

She listened to Fletcher's explanations of how a blow-out had prevented their meeting the visitor at the station.

"We've a great surprise for you," purred Alcia. "Cornelia Pennfield is visiting us, and we are certain you will fall in love with her the minute you see her. You've never met her, have you?"

"I never had that pleasure," lied Thompson with a perfectly straight face.

Cornelia did not come down until dinner was announced, and then she acknowledged with a bow and a handclasp the formal introduction to the handsome visitor.

After dinner they sat on the mosquito-proof porch for a while, but Alcia was restless. She wanted her magic to begin its work.

"Cornelia," she suggested, "suppose you take Mr. Thompson for a walk under the beeches. This moonlight is perfectly heavenly."

Fletcher and his wife sat in silence a while until they heard the crunch of a step on the gravel. At last he yawned.

"Hoo-hum," he said, stretching his arms. "I believe I'll just step out and see how the sky looks. I wouldn't be surprised if we had rain to-morrow."

Like all Brown County residents, he

had learned to use the weather as a topic of deep interest.

Alcia followed him around the corner of the bungalow, where a view of the sky was unobstructed. Their feet on the turf made no sound.

Suddenly Alcia grasped his arm and pointed.

A cloud had just sailed away from the moon, and there, before them in the glade, clasped in each other's arms, were Cornelia Pennfield and Arthur Thompson.

The whole world might have been howling about their ears for all they cared. They were in love, and this was one of their first kisses.

"Humph!" exclaimed Fletcher, turning to his wife. "I always knew you were a match-maker, but I never knew your love-charms worked as fast as all that!"

A Blue Trail

By George Henry Shelton

FIRMAN left the Academy strong in languages and weak in anatomy. The first was due to his ability in Spanish and the second to Miss Tarlington's facility in hearts.

Later the lady repudiated any obligations in the matter, and the youngster joined his regiment sworn to devastation of every female breast thereafter to come under his influence, and ready in the mean time for deeds likely to distract attention from the void in his own.

Otherwise, Firman mentally was normal—and was only twenty-three.

For the rest, so far as matters here, he stood six feet one, weighed in condition one hundred and eighty-odd, and had held untouched the shot and hammer records and center of the eleven for successive years. Stripped, he was good to look at; yet was also a surprise. His legs were so slender that despite his bulk you might suspect he could clear his hundred yards within two points of record time.

His weight lay in his shoulders and breast and arms. Most of his strength was there, too, though this was less evident. There were no visible bunches of muscle; the plentiful flesh concealed them under an appearance almost of corpulence. These things all matter in what follows.

The regiment was holding the water-edge of one of the middle islands—the interior was still debatable ground. When you ventured into the hills you kept your eyes open and your piece cocked and hoped to get back unmutilated.

Firman's company was divided. Its headquarters was at Tulag, while thirty men under a non-commissioned officer were at Polaso, twenty miles down the coast, with practicable communication only by sea.

Once a month, with good luck, a government launch, on its way around the island, touched successively at these stations and put off rations and mail from home and orders to do impossible things.

This was the tail of the insurrec-

tion. Open conflicts had ceased. Most of the insurgent leaders had surrendered to accept civil offices under the new government as likely to yield better returns with more comfort and less danger.

Only those were still out who could hope for no preferment, or were afraid for their crimes to come in. It was not war, but still-hunting. There was no glory in it; only work.

But Firman was ripe for work. Cabildo, the local chief, was still in the hills, still wherever the Americans were not, frequently even where they were, pillaging, killing—and worse.

Nobody expected him to give up until run to earth; there was too much charged to his account, and in his ignorance he could not know how much the United States could forgive —of her enemies.

So for three months Firman sought Cabildo, never finding him, never expecting to find him in open search, but learning something of his ways and means and much of the hill country.

And he learned other things; not the people, and thereby again betrayed wisdom, but something of their language and customs.

His captain was on detached service, and in his present mood he did not find Blakesley, the senior subaltern, congenial. He formed his associations with the natives: with the priest, and learned grammar and monte; with the *principalia,* and learned the dialect and something of their power; with the common *tauos,* and picked up the jargon and other common things; with the women, and learned their vernacular of love and to endure coconut oil.

It was altogether a fairly busy period, sufficient to keep his mind off his troubles and to prevent his visiting Polaso or the detachment there; not without some purpose in this last, half-fledged and wholly foolish, but still a purpose waiting opportunity of execution.

Three months gone, four things happened.

First, Blakesley broke his leg and was sent to Cebu for repairs, which left Firman supreme for fifty miles up and down the coast. The fracture was not serious and Firman was satisfied. Second, Private Henderson deserted to the enemy from Polaso. The report from Sergeant Hagan divided responsibility between the fermented juice of the nipa palm and Belita de la Cruz, native, father unhinted at except through her name, who resided with her mother at Polaso, and who was known to be friendly, and believed to be in love, with Cabildo.

Third, the same mail from Polaso brought in a letter found on a native, killed while attempting to avoid a detachment seeking the deserter. It was addressed to *El Señor Comandante Juan Cabildo, donde esté* — wherever he may be—and its enclosure in the local dialect was still unread when it reached Tulag.

Out of his knowledge Firman thereupon deciphered its contents. They confirmed the report of Henderson's desertion, fixed the responsibility as already placed, and told the girl's love for the insurgent chieftain. The note was signed "Belita."

Fourth, Firman disappeared.

The detachment at Polaso was at breakfast. Few spoke, and, speaking, were answered surlily or not at all.

They had spent three days in a hill chase after Private Henderson without other results than blistered feet, exhausted frames, and embittered hearts. They were rough men, these soldiers, playing a rough game alone, without the restraint of commissioned guidance.

Had they found their erstwhile comrade doubtless they would have treated him roughly. But they hadn't, and so vented their feelings on one another.

Sergeant Hagan was particularly ugly. He felt responsible for what had happened and suspicious of what might come. Henderson was not the

only one who had sought to drown loneliness in native liquor and the depths of Belita de la Cruz's eyes.

Moreover, nobody knew better than Hagan what six months alone in a coast town seven thousand miles from home, and apparently just as far from everything else, can do toward destroying manhood. Hagan was beginning to doubt himself.

He gulped down his coffee, and rose to his feet and glowered at his scowling companions.

"There's just one thing I want to say to you fellows," he said, "and you'll be wise to take some notice. I know just how near hell this is, but it ain't no worse for us than for several thousand others just like us. We're in for it and we ain't goin' to cry-baby *yet*.

"More'n that, this detachment is goin' to take a brace from this date. For one thing, there's goin' to be less liquor. It's goin' to be uncomfortable for the next man that goes on a *bino* drunk here.

"And another thing is, I'm going to be mighty suspicious of any man who goes pretty reg'lar to see that girl over there in the white house. If you are pinin' for society just look for it elsewhere. It won't be as pretty and it won't be as white, but it'll be healthier."

"Look here, Hagan," said Corporal Donaldson, "what you say is all right if it hits any one here; but you don't think we're all goin' to desert, do you? I guess you know most of us better than that. What's the use of rubbin' it in?"

"You heard what I said," answered Hagan, "and what I know don't matter. I knew Henderson. He was all right once, but you see what liquor an' women's done to him. I used to like him, but he'd never gone before a court if we'd got him. And it wasn't my fault we didn't. My feet didn't give out. And it's some of you fellows that got sore feet yesterday that 'll get cold feet next. But the man who does won't go before a court either; he won't have time. Just remember that."

"Who's that?" said a man, pointing to the beach. "I've been watchin' him come in. It ain't no gugu."

At the water's edge a man in uniform was pulling a *barota* out of reach of the tide. This accomplished he picked up a rifle and kit from the boat and made his way toward the group.

"Gee, he ain't no infant anyway," said Donaldson.

"Is Sergeant Hagan here?" asked the newcomer.

"I'm him," said Hagan. "Who are you?"

The man threw his blanket-roll on the ground and shouldered his rifle. Then he saluted awkwardly; but the detachment was in no humor to be amused by a recruit.

"Who you saluting?" asked Hagan roughly. "I ain't no officer."

The man was confused.

"Excuse me, sergeant," he said, "I forgot; I haven't been a soldier long. I'm Freeman—Private Freeman. Lieutenant Firman sent me. Here's a letter for you."

Hagan read the order. It assigned Freeman for duty with the detachment. "Where's Lieutenant Blakesley?" he asked.

"He's gone to Cebu. He broke his leg."

"How'd you get here?"

"I came in that boat."

The sergeant snorted. "Like a damned shave-tail lieutenant," he said, "to send a man twenty miles alone in this country, and like a damned rooky to get through alive. How long you been in?"

"Three months."

"I thought so. What 'd the lieutenant send a recruit here for? Doesn't he think I've got troubles enough?"

"I speak the language a little," said Private Freeman; "the lieutenant thought you might make me useful."

"I'll make you useful, all right,"

growled Hagan; "you'll be for guard to-morrow."

Two months later Firman was still missing from Tulag. Only the first-sergeant knew that every fortnight or so he appeared and signed the papers that avoided irritating questions from above. Then he vanished again.

At Polaso Private Freeman was daily accounted for at retreat and reveille. There were only twelve hours between these calls.

To paddle forty miles in the open sea between dark and light was likely to keep any man attempting it, say once a fortnight, in condition.

But not counting this, the two months had not been spent in idleness either by the Polaso detachment in general or by Private Freeman in particular.

Henderson was still unfound, and still by all reports with Cabildo. Cabildo's band, moreover, had throughout manifested unusual and flealike activity, raiding towns here and there, wherever there was reason to believe American sympathizers with money or supplies could be found and where there was certainty that American protection was lacking.

For this activity Hagan held Henderson responsible; and he kept his detachment correspondingly busy, chasing rumors of Cabildo and the deserter until the men, physically worn out from the strain and mentally tired of Hagan's vigilance and brutality, which never ceased after Henderson's desertion, were well-nigh mutinous.

Only Freeman seemed at once tireless and temperless. His agility and, had the detachment but known it, his well-concealed strength surprised them constantly.

Both his knowledge of the dialect and his facility in following trails made him invaluable in the field. And Hagan, growing to depend upon him, used him pitilessly, yet nothing to the discomfiture of Freeman himself.

A principal difficulty of Hagan's, indeed, was to keep the young recruit from wandering off by himself in the field when the detachment, exhausted or disgusted, had gone into bivouac to wait for another day.

All this made the boy not only a likable comrade but a sorely needed tonic for the heartsick detachment. Hagan himself might have softened to him had it not been for other qualities of Freeman's which manifested themselves whenever the men were in quarters at Polaso.

The first of these was an apparent if irregular appetite for native liquor, which imbibed too freely makes maniacs of the gentlest natures, and the second, an irresistible fondness for society, native in general and feminine in particular, which, commencing with the populace at large settled firmly down to Belita de la Cruz alone.

Twice Freeman had come in late, his ordinarily controlled vocal chords volubly loosened, and created such disorder that only through the roughly applied strength of four men was he suppressed and confined in the little six-by-eight cell in the corner of the old warehouse used for quarters.

The odor of *bino* was so apparent that the mere fact that less than half a dozen grown men were required for the ceremony aroused no suspicions.

When released the morning after these indiscretions, Freeman was contrite enough, but in the matter of female society, general and particular, he was incorrigible. Hagan fell from reasoning with him to cursing him.

Finally the worm turned.

"What difference does it make," Freeman remonstrated, "whether I go there or somewhere else? I'm just learning the language."

"You know the language well enough," answered Hagan, "and you'll learn a heap more'n that from her."

"That's what I hope," answered Freeman calmly — "perhaps where Cabildo is."

Hagan sneered. "You're likely to,"

he said. "D'ye think that slut was born yesterday? She's has had pupils like you before—she had Henderson."

The others present watched Freeman expectantly, but they were disappointed. There was no resentment in his tone when he spoke.

"Well, I'm not Henderson," he said, "and besides, you're all wrong; she is a nice girl. Come over with me tonight and see for yourself. Perhaps you'll learn something, too."

Hagan rose in his wrath. He was over six feet himself. Also he was of the old army, and unused to taking back-talk from recruits.

"Shut up," he said, with an oath, "or I'll learn you something right now. More'n that, you ain't goin' over there to-night, d'ye hear? That's an order. An' if you do go, I'll settle the matter without waitin' for that shave-tail at Tulag to try you, remember that. Now clear out!"

Freeman moved away, and the group broke up, grinning unhappily.

They knew Hagan and they suspected that Freeman was not without fighting capacity. In their present mood, a first class mix-up, even among themselves, would have been a cheering thing.

But, though disappointed, they could still forgive Freeman. He was a recruit—and their own opportunities to enjoy Belita's society having been measurably decreased by his intrusion, they could endure his deprivation of privileges with grinning fortitude.

But Freeman was not to be denied. He visibly disobeyed Hagan's order that night, and those of the others who hopefully sneaked around to the big white house found him, as usual, in possession of the wide sala, the easiest chair, and Belita's presence, together with the company of her mother and various female relatives with whom Belita lived, but who count no more in this narrative than they did with Belita's admirers—possibly, not so much.

So, with them, disappointment and hope changed places, and they returned to barracks to wait expectantly for an opportunity to goad Sergeant Hagan into action.

But Hagan needed no more than the knowledge of Freeman's disobedience. This came, of course, at breakfast the next morning, which Hagan scowlingly finished before he walked across to Freeman, while the detachment looked on with eager nonchalence.

Freeman was cleaning his mess pan, but he stood up as Hagan approached.

"So you went, did you?" said Hagan.

"Yes," said Freeman.

"After I told you not to?"

"Yes."

"After I told you I'd settle with you to-day if you did?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll settle right now, an' I ain't takin' you without warnin', remember that."

And Hagan drew his arm back without haste and lunged at the other, while the detachement, happily flinging their nonchalance to the winds, ringed their way about them.

But Freeman did not even put up his hands. Instead he moved his head and shoulders quickly—and fortunately—keeping his feet squarely in their place, and Hagan's huge fist glanced along the youngster's jaw, leaving a dull red mark, but inflicting no damage.

Hagan, almost overthrown, recovered and turned to repel the expected onslaught. Freeman simply faced him, still holding his mess pan. Those closest could see his cheek flush and his eyes narrow, but that was all.

There was a quick silence, while Hagan hesitated a moment, on the point of rushing the youngster, and then let his hands drop.

"Ain't you goin' to fight?" he demanded.

"No," said Freeman.

"Ain't you goin' to defend yourself?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I can't fight with you," said Freeman. "A soldier can't hit an officer."

"Forget it; I ain't no officer."

"You're a non-commissioned officer," answered Freeman; "you're responsible for the discipline here. I've learned that. You're within your rights if you think I've disobeyed you, but I'm within mine if I believe you haven't any right to order what you did. And I don't believe you have."

Hagan stood speechless for a moment, divided between intent to thrash a fresh recruit and the knowledge that he would make himself ridiculous if he attempted it. He had let negotiations go too far to resume hostilities.

But there was not the slightest notion in his mind that the task was impossible for him. Had there been he would have entered upon it regardless of consequences. He was still Hagan.

"We'll drop this for the present," he said finally, and there was almost rough kindness in his tone. "The army's gone to the devil anyway. It's all talk now from headquarters to rooky."

He looked at Freeman with returning fierceness.

"But don't think you're through with it yet. Some day this company will get an officer who'll stay with it, and who can't talk and can cuss, and then you'll learn something. And in the mean time, take my advice and do what I tell you."

He turned to the others. "What you all standin' here for? Those of you due for the next hike get ready. We're goin' to the hills in half an hour."

He strode off. Freeman picked up the rest of his mess-kit and went into the quarters. The others looked at each other in silent gloom until Private Norton expressed the prevailing sentiment.

"Oh, hell," he said.

"Well," observed Private Wigham, "if I had that kid's size and reach I'll be hanged if I'd be afraid even of Hagan."

"I don't think he was afraid," said Corporal Whitaker; "you noticed that he went, didn't you?"

"Went where?"

"To see the girl."

"Yes, I noticed it," answered Wigham, with a sheepish grin. "You saw him there, too, didn't you?" he added, with quick soldier repartee. "Why didn't you run him off? Ain't you got no pride in your rank?"

Three days later the detachment was back—empty handed.

Thereafter the action moved swiftly. The same night Freeman went to the big white house—as usual. If anybody told Hagan he chose not to notice it.

There followed a day of rest. In the evening Freeman disappeared again, obviously in the same direction.

A few hours afterward he came back raving, the odor of *bino* strong upon him. Hagan cursed fervently. Four men grabbed Freeman and threw him into the corner cell, shut the door, and pushed the wooden bar into place. A half-hour later he quieted down in a drunken stupor.

One by one the others went to bed. Every quarter-hour one of the men on the double-sentry post in front of the barracks made the round of the building. Every two hours one of them went up-stairs and roused the men succeeding them on the next relief.

None of them noticed anything unusual during the night. But when, after reveille the next morning, Donaldson went to the cell to haul Freeman out for breakfast, and whatever else was coming to him, Freeman was not there.

"Who let Freeman out?" he demanded.

Those still in the room came trooping to the corner. Donaldson dropped to his knee and examined the door. Then he pulled the bar out of its guides and answered his own question.

"He let himself out," he said, and pointed to the evidence.

Neither the door nor its fastening had been constructed with a view of restraining anything except men too drunk for ingenuity. Freeman had opened it by pushing the blade of a pocket knife through the cracks into the bar and working it back until released from the catch.

Once outside he had pushed it again into place and left it apparently undisturbed from the time he had been thrown into the cell.

"Freeman was fakin'," said Donaldson; "he wasn't drunk."

"But what was he fakin' for?" demanded some one. "And where is he now?"

A sudden hush fell upon these rough, tired men, while the spirit of Henderson stalked among them. Donaldson, looking grave, called Hagan, who came and heard and looked graver.

"God," he said, "another—and Freeman!"

They turned to the deserter's bunk. The tale there was soon told. His haversack and mess-outfit were gone. So were his blankets.

Beyond this, apparently, there was nothing missing save perhaps some little clothing. They could be certain of an extra blue flannel shirt. The man who occupied the adjoining bunk knew that Freeman had at least two. Neither was there.

"He's traveling light," said Donaldson. "He means to go fast."

Smith, the trumpeter, from his own bunk uttered an ejaculation. "My pistol and belt's gone," he said.

The others turned to their beds hastily. Hagan was the next to report. "He's got my belt—the gun's here. He wanted more ammunition. He'll need it, too."

Nothing else had disappeared. Hagan waited until all were satisfied. Then he spoke, quite softly.

"Donaldson," he said, "take your squad through the town and see if you can get trace of his direction. You'll stay here in charge. The rest of you get your breakfast—and eat a lot. Then get ready. Don't carry a thing you don't need. We're goin' to travel light, too, 'cause we ain't comin' back till we got him."

An hour later Donaldson returned, out of breath, with a mud-spattered and perturbed Chinese in tow.

"We've got his trail," he exclaimed, between gasps. "He's gone toward Dalongan. Sam met him two hours ago. And—the girl is with him!"

"The girl?" said Hagan.

"Yes—Belita," answered Donaldson, "What d'ye think of that?"

"Never mind; it ain't worth repeatin'." Hagan turned to Sam and spoke in his best Chinese. "You tella, Sam, all 'blout it," he said.

And Sam, frightened but pleasant, told. Everybody helped to translate the several languages used. Annotated and expurgated, the facts were as follows:

Sam was a merchant-prince of Polaso, engaged ordinarily in the hemp trade with Cebu, but not above employing his talents in lesser things and increasing his revenues during this extraordinary time of insurrection, while hemp shipments were tabooed, through a little *tienda* under his dwelling, where he sold small cans of food-stuffs at large prices to the soldiers and natives.

So the detachment knew Sam well, and Sam knew the detachment better. He had, indeed, to know them because not infrequently he sold canned sweets to selected men "on jawbone" against the time of pay-day.

Therefore in what Sam said confidence was to be reposed.

The afternoon before Sam had gone to Dalongan, six miles back in the hills, to look into the possibility of buying some few piculs of hemp, which, obtained at fair discount from the market price, might be stored until the embargo was lifted and then sold at a reasonable profit of seventy or eighty per centum. Not completing his investigation until late, he remained there

for the night, but was up and off before daybreak in order to reach Polaso in time for the morning trade.

After leaving Dalongan a mile behind him, rounding a sudden turn just as it grew light, he observed not a hundred yards ahead a woman on a pony toiling up the trail and beside her a man walking.

The times being uncertain and Sam being discreet, he halted to watch the approaching travelers, keeping meanwhile one eye upon his line of retreat. Both of them were engaged in looking for something at the right of the trail.

Presently, fifty yards from him, they stopped, examined the growth at the side and then turned and plunged into the brush.

Though they had not seemed to notice him at first, before they disappeared, Sam was certain that his presence was known to them, because the man stopped for a moment after the pony had vanished and looked carefully up the trail. Unless he were blind he could not have avoided seeing the hesitating Oriental above him.

Moreover, while not wholly assured, Sam thought that the man had smiled in cheerful recognition upon him.

Also he was satisfied that it was Freeman who smiled and sure that it was Belita de la Cruz who was with him.

"That's enough," said Hagan, "we'll do the rest. Fall in, you men!"

Donaldson planted himself squarely in his front. "I'd like to go with you Hagan," he said.

Hagan looked the other way. "You can't do it," he answered roughly—"some one's got to stay here, and it's your turn. Besides"—he turned now, and the men's eyes met—"it ain't necessary."

"I know it ain't," said Donaldson, "but I've always sort of befriended Freeman, stood up for him, you know. I feel kind of responsible for this. I'd like to be at hand when it's settled."

"'Twon't make any difference; you ain't any more to blame than the rest of us. I liked him, too. An' I'll be there."

"Of course," said the other. He hesitated. "I don't want to hurt your feelin's, Hagan," he added, "but you're so soft-hearted. This ain't no case for a court."

"I know," said Hagan shortly, "an' there ain't goin' to be no court. It ain't at all likely we'll get him alive anyway. Even Freeman 'll fight now."

"Make him fight," said the other earnestly, "that's it. Make him. Then there can't be any question. But I wish I could go."

"It ain't possible," said Hagan, and he went to his bunk and picked up his equipment.

Outside the others were in ranks. Hagan came down and inspected them. A group of natives, already apprised of what had happened, was looking on silently.

Hagan took no notice of them. He well knew that not only the few there but the whole town knew of it, and that even then the news was traveling with almost telegraphic rapidity back into the hills and up and down the coast.

What he did not know was that this was as Freeman had planned, that all the elaborate circumstances of his desertion had been designed for this end. When you intend to venture alone into debatable territory where cold steel and ignorance of the laws of war are the common possession of the patriotic and fanatic alike, it is well to have every one you may chance to meet fully acquainted with your status.

Hagan finished his inspection and took his place. "There's just eighteen of us," he said, "countin' me. We're goin' to travel fast and we may travel far. But I'd rather have fewer men than weak men, so that if any of you are goin' to get sore feet or cold feet, now's the time to get 'em. 'Twon't be no picnic, an' I warn you now that if

any man falls out I'll leave him on the trail to rot. That's all."

He waited a moment. No one stirred.

"All right," he added; "you know what's comin'." He nodded good-by to Donaldson. "Right, face! Forward, march!"

The detachment moved off through the town in double rank, breaking into column of files when it struck the Dalongan trail at the last straggling row of shacks. Hagan was in the lead; Corporal Whitaker close behind him.

The trail followed the river for a mile or two, and then abruptly turned into the hills. Occasionally along the clearer ground two could walk abreast; for the most part only single file was possible.

The formation did not encourage conversation, nor were the men in a mood for talk.

The column wound its way along, therefore, in earnest silence or, at best, in monosyllabic and profane expression of feeling. The way was rough; the trail difficult. There was small wonder that, following it by night, Freeman had got no farther than Dalongan at daybreak.

Up and down it went, hard and jagged on the hillsides, soft and muddy from recent rains along the bottoms.

In one of these the fresh hoof-marks of a pony and the impression of a man's heavily-shod foot were plainly visible. Whitaker pointed them out to Hagan.

"I know," said Hagan; "I saw 'em back a ways. They ain't important now. We know where he left this trail. After that we'll have to look for 'em."

"How much start do you figure he's got?"

"Not so much. He was only five miles from us at daylight, accordin' to the Chink. He had about three hours after that, a matter of five or six miles more. It depends on the trail he's follerin'. "More'n that, the girl 'll get tired. They won't go much farther to-day. He'll find he ain't travelin' as light as he thought, if I know anything o' women an' hosses."

Whitaker was an efficient soldier; but he was still young. Therefore he was properly impressed. Hagan, years before, had served one enlistment in the cavalry.

His education in both women and horses was accordingly complete.

About eleven o'clock they struck the long rise to Dalongan. Half-way up Hagan halted them and pointed ahead.

"There's the turn in the trail," he said to Whitaker; "that's where the Chink stood. It must be along here that he turned off."

He moved on slowly; then stopped again and bent over to examine the ground.

The trail, sunk a little by the wash of the water and the tread of many feet, left the jagged banks exposed a foot or two above the bank itself. The surface was too hard to take impression, but two or three fresh scars that might have been made by a pony scrambling up the bank were, on close inspection, visible.

Here also the tropical growth at the side seemed not so thick as elsewhere; while just above the scarred bank it was bent inward as though recently sime heavy body had forced its way through. Two or three twigs were broken, their ends still hanging in place and unwilted.

"Here it is," said Hagan; "come on."

He plunged through, followed by the others. The undergrowth thinned rapidly, and before he had gone a dozen yards he came into a clearing across which led a fairly marked trail disappearing in the brush at the other side.

"Look at this," exclaimed Whitaker, close behind him. He held out a little piece of blue flannel. "I found it on a thorn as we came through. Freeman's sleeve caught and tore."

"Keep it," said Hagan; "but we don't need it. Look there." On the softer earth of the clearing the pony's hoof-marks were plain again, and by their side the same man's footprints.

They rested a few minutes and pushed on. The trail, difficult enough, was still easier than the one they had left; but a little after noon, at the foot of a precipitous hill, it seemed to run out in a triangle of bamboo.

The spirit of the detachment ran out with it; the men sank down in sudden realization of their exhaustion.

Hagan and Whitaker wormed their way through the thickets, discovering finally that the trail had not ended, of course, but merely branched, running both ways along the foot of the hill and following the harder ground, where its occasional use left little wear.

Again Whitaker found the trace. He called Hagan. Clinging to a bamboo thorn, and plainly visible, was a torn shred of blue flannel shirt.

The spirit of the men came back.

"Come on," said Hagan briefly. "We'll play the devil at his own game. He went through here in an awful hurry, or else he's turned plain damn fool."

After a little the trail reappeared. It followed the base of the hill for a few hundred yards, then turned and zigzagged up and over it into the valley beyond.

There, where a slender mountain stream tumbled along, Hagan halted his command again.

"Here's where they stopped for breakfast," he said, pointing to the traces. He kicked the ashes where a small fire had burned out. A faint haze arose from them. He picked up a handful of them, and then for the first time in weeks—grinned.

They were still warm.

At the edge of a pool they found the footprints of the pony and a man, and now, for the first time, the lighter impression of a native woman's sandal.

The whole story was complete when Hagan himself picked up an ordnance fork, plainly stamped with the national trade mark, and, apparently left unnoticed where Freeman had sat to eat his breakfast.

"We'll stop here for an hour," said Hagan, "and have coffee. We won't eat till later."

Hagan was nursing his rations as well as his men. He counted it a good sign when some of the latter grumbled at halting so long. But he was immovable.

"You'll get enough before night," he said. "We'll stop an hour."

And he made his word good in both cases. They moved on the minute, and pursued their way steadily until five o'clock.

They had few troubles except the physical difficulties of conquering the trail. There was no question of missing it.

When they halted for the night Whitaker had five little triangles of blue flannel, besides Freeman's fork.

The sixth piece hung on a twig across the clearing where they had bivouacked. But they left it there to double assurance of their direction when morning should come.

They cooked and ate their only meal since breakfast and prepared for the night. Afterwards Whitaker got his haversack and lounged over and sat down by Hagan.

He drew out the five pieces of blue flannel and Freeman's ordnance fork and spread them on the ground. Hagan watched him unmoved.

"We've got almost a whole sleeve, ain't we?" said Whitaker.

"Almost," said Hagan.

"Curious he should be so careless, ain't it?" Whitaker observed, moving the blue pieces before him like a picture-puzzle.

Hagan nodded.

"Freeman ain't a fool," went on the corporal.

"No, he ain't a fool," agreed the sergeant.

"Well, what do you make of it then? Do you think he's doin' it on purpose?"

"I don't know; I thought of that when you found the first piece."

"Did you?" said Whitaker. "I didn't till we found the fork. I've been thinkin' of it pretty steadily since."

It was characteristic of Whitaker's youth in the service to accept the other's statement without question. It is more important, however, as a revelation of Hagan's character that Hagan himself believed what he said.

This simple vanity has a larger place in military life than is ordinarily recognized. In its higher forms it is the basis of loyalty and *esprit de corps*. It is never to be despised.

"Do you believe Freeman wants us to follow him?" persisted the corporal.

"I don't know," said Hagan, and there was almost a sob in the old man's voice. "But God knows I hope so."

By the first touch of day they were ready to move again. Hagan led them across the clearing toward where the blue remnant still hung on the twig.

Something with it glimmered now in the dawn-light, and Hagan rushed forward and pulled it down. It was a scrap of soiled paper, and he read the message scribbled upon it before he passed it to Whitaker.

"It was a hell of a guard we had here last night," he said savagely. "Read it out an' see if will make this outfit mad enough to do their duty."

And Whitaker read:

"If your sore-headed bunch hasn't got sore feet as well, why don't you come on? If it's got cold feet, why don't you go home? You can't get me, and you know it, damn you all. FREEMAN."

There followed silence; then unprintable things from the detachment.

"Shut up!" roared Hagan. "Ain't it true? Didn't some of you let the skunk come and pin this under your nose last night? It ain't no time to cuss," he added an oath to prove his case—"it's time to act—if you've got it in you."

Whitaker picked up the blue triangle from the ground. He was loath to give up his theory, evolved out of much travail.

"He's playin' with us, you think?" he said almost pitifully.

"Playin'! Of course, he's playin' with us. Don't that show it?" He tapped the soiled paper. "And those things," looking contemptuously at the blue cloth, "why, he's just tantalizing us. Besides," he turned to Whitaker, and to the corporal's surprise, winked solemnly, "besides," he repeated, lowering his tone so the others could not hear, "if he ain't, don't he need us just as bad?"

He turned back to the men. "Anyway, the gait's increased from now on. We're goin' to show that—that polecat whether we're in earnest or not. Come on."

And the gait was increased. The march made by those men during the next two hours probably established a record for white men in the Philippines.

Nobody attempted to estimate the distance. Possibly Freeman, who had traveled the same course once the day before and twice while they slept, could have judged with greater accuracy.

The detachment measured it simply by two more blue patches, which was sufficient for the purpose in hand.

It was a little after eight when Hagan halted for the first time. Throughout the men's feet were hurting cruelly; they were panting visibly for breath; but not a man had lagged.

He promised them five minutes, and they sank in their places. They were still within the shade of the tropic growth through which they had marched since the start; but, just beyond, the trail could be seen winding to the top of a gentle slope, which, except for the tufts of rank grass, was free from growth, and glistened hotly in the morning sun.

Five bare minutes gone, they fell in promptly at command. It is possible that they had needed neither Freeman's nor Hagan's goading. But all except very desperate men have a limit to physical endurance, and it may be that only through the means adopted was the end achieved.

For the end came swiftly now. Hagan was about to give the command to move when from beyond the slope came the cracking reports of a small fusillade of shots.

Hagan turned swiftly to the front, holding up his hand to stay his men. An instant later, at the top of the hill, there appeared a blue and khaki figure bearing some heavy burden across its shoulders and plunging madly toward them.

The men instinctively raised their pieces.

"Steady!" roared Hagan, terribly is earnest; "I'll shoot the man dead that fires before I give the word. Get into the brush there and get ready. Quick! There's something behind him."

This seemed obvious. Certainly it was not left long in doubt. For close behind them there burst into view a score of Filipino pursuers, bolos in hand, charging down the slope.

"Ready!" shouted Hagan. "But listen to me. Over his head at the gugus. I'll hang the bunch of you if Freeman's touched. Aim, fire!"

Hagan's estimate of the situation at Polaso after Freeman's escape had been correct in general, but wrong in some particulars.

As a matter of fact, though Freeman had indeed dropped from one of the back windows of the quarters shortly after midnight, it was not until nearly four o'clock that he had aroused Belita and had her pony saddled and waiting when, a few moments later, she stole out of the house.

The coming day was bound to be a hard one for the girl, and he had no notion of tiring her unnecessarily by a long night journey. He knew the Dalongan trail well enough; Belita knew it even better, while the pony knew it best of all.

The failing moon lighted the way dimly and, swinging along by the girl's side with his hand on her saddle-pommel whenever it was possible for the two to be abreast, Freeman found no difficulty in making the long rise to the Dalongan plateau by daybreak.

Sam, too, had been wrong in believing that he had been observed when he first appeared around the curve. The girl may not have seen him. Certainly, Freeman did his best to keep her attention otherwise occupied.

It was she, of course, who pointed out the entrance to the concealed trail, and Freeman turned the pony promptly and urged it up the bank into the brush.

It was then that he paused and, looking full at the waiting Chinese, smiled cheerfully at him. And with reason. He viewed Sam as another card to play in a difficult game, where he was certain to need all the cards he could get.

But he did not neglect on this account to play the hand he held. Just under cover of the brush he paused again to reach back and break two or three small branches, leaving their ends dangling at the edge. Then he reached into his haversack, drew out a little triangle of blue flannel, and hung it on a projecting thorn.

Thereafter he followed the pony into the hidden trail.

They pushed on rapidly until the halt for breakfast was made. They talked little; it was not easy on the trail, and perhaps both were thinking.

But every now and then Freeman glanced up and smiled encouragingly at the girl, and should have found sufficient reward in merely looking at her. But he got her look, her smile, in return, which was more than he deserved.

Belita would have been good to look at anywhere. She was much more in

the Philippines—in the hills. Her forehead was high, her nose was straight, her lip was long, her mouth large, but chin square.

To one who knows women (and horses) most of these are points that count.

Lustrous hair framed the perfect olive of her face. Let it be noted to her credit, moreover, that rouge formed no part of her make-up, and that, generally, her hair was free from coconut oil.

To men who love women alone these are also counting points.

But it was her eyes that told the story. Black, they glowed softly or flashed brilliantly at will or temper. They were large and with the faintest slant that added piquancy to what was God-intended to be sensible.

They revealed the strain of Chinese blood, which her mother showed indubitably, and for the possession of which any Filipino may praise Heaven. From it, properly reduced in the process of generations, come the qualities that make for progress—energy, initiative, independence—altogether lacking in the Filipino pure of blood.

Moreover, Belita had escaped the overfulness of form frequent among Filipinos, common in the women of her father's Spanish race.

She was slender, and she was five feet five. She stood straight, and she rode straight now, with head erect, sitting comfortably, with her wide skirt tucked up and light cape drawn about her, across the native saddle.

So she was good to look at, and Freeman looked—frequently.

Freeman insisted on the halt for breakfast, though the girl was for pushing on, fearing pursuit. He helped her dismount, lifting her bodily from the saddle to the ground, and then he drew her to him for a moment and kissed her.

It was not the first time, but the blood flamed suddenly in her face and her eyes fell.

Then, let it be said to his credit, Freeman flushed, too, and he released her.

He unsaddled the pony and turned it loose to browse. Then he unfastened the pack strapped to the saddle and spread his blankets for Belita to sit upon. He started a fire and made coffee, and of this and bread and guava they made their meal. They tried to talk afterward, with indifferent success; and Freeman's sense of humor coming to his rescue, he presently caught the pony again, saddled and packed it, and helped the girl to mount.

He did not attempt to kiss her. Instead he dropped his fork where they had eaten.

After that they went on all day, with only occasional rests.

Belita guided. Freeman kept at her side, his hand on the saddle whenever possible, and otherwise close behind, pausing only at confusing turns to mark the way from his stock of blue patches.

About five o'clock they struck the bottom of the slope that Hagan reached fifteen hours later. Freeman halted to rest a moment before beginning the ascent.

"How much farther?" he asked gently. The girl looked tired.

"Only a little way," she answered; "only a few minutes more."

They went on up the slope. At the top the undergrowth began again.

They followed the trail through it for fifty yards, then Belita turned her pony off sharply, worked her way through a thicket and, followed by Freeman, came out into a clearing some forty or more paces across.

At the far side, close to the undergrowth, stood a little palm hut. There was no other sign of life.

Belita rode up to the doorway. Then she turned to Freeman and held out her arms.

"Take me down," she said; "this is our house."

Freeman looked at her steadily.

Her color came, but her eyes met his unashamed. "Our house?" he said.

"Yes, for to-night."

"And Cabildo, where is he?"

She waved her hand back toward the trail. "On, on farther," she said.

"And he is coming here?"

"Yes, of course."

"To-night?"

"No, to-morrow."

"What time?"

"I don't know—early."

He paused a moment, unprepared.

"Shall we not go on then?" he asked finally. "Will it not be better to find him to-night?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I'm tired," she answered; "and it's too far. We could not find him. Besides he would not want me to bring you to him until he has seen you."

"Why?"

"Because he would not want you to learn his hiding-place until he is sure that he can trust you?"

"He would prefer, you think, to trust me here alone with you?"

She flushed again, and her eyes wavered.

"What has Cabildo to do with it?" she asked angrily. But almost at once her mood changed, and she looked demurely at him.

"Am I not safe with you?" she said softly.

He was fairly caught. He flushed in his turn, and did not answer.

She held her arms out again. Silently he lifted her from the saddle. She did not offer to move; and he dropped his arms and did not offer to kiss her.

She waited an instant, and then pushed him petulantly away and ran into the house. He heard her laugh softly, and he swore aloud.

He unsaddled and picketed the pony and carried the saddle and pack in and dropped them on the bamboo floor. The girl sat there watching him, and smiling. He avoided watching her, and inspected the house.

It was the ordinary shack of the hills. Four posts rose through the floor near the corners to the roof. To these the bamboo framework was lashed. The roof and sides were palm.

There were window openings on each side, and another door at the rear looked directly into the underbrush, to afford, no doubt, a convenient way of retreat in the event of attack from the front.

The single room was divided by matting stretched half-way across the middle line, serving to screen, in part, the back from the front. The few pieces of furniture were all of bamboo, roughly constructed.

A couch was behind the matting; there were a few chairs and a table—nothing more. A stone slab in front of a window served as a range. Two or three clay cooking pots, a water bottle, and an enameled-ware plate comprised the kitchen utensils.

There were evidences of occasional occupancy. The whole probably was but one of many similar retreats for Filipino gentlemen wanted by the government.

His inspection finished, Freeman prepared for supper. The meal was simple and soon over, and the two cleared the remnants away.

But in the mean time Freeman's equanimity returned, and he tried to talk of inconsequential things while planning for graver ones. The girl met him more than half-way.

But it was all subterfuge, and both knew it. Their inconsequentials failed them when they could find no more work to do.

It was almost dusk, and Freeman got candles out of his kit and put them on the table. He did not light them yet; instead, he sat down in the doorway and lighted his last cigar.

After a moment the girl sat down beside him. A long silence followed.

"Belita," he said at last, very gently, "aren't you running risks unnecessarily?"

"In what way?"

"In coming here. In staying here. If Cabildo loves you, is he likely to be pleased at finding you here, alone, with me at night? If he isn't pleased, is he likely to be gentle?"

"He won't find me here—alone—with you—at night," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because he won't be here until the morning, and he will find me here—alone—with you—by day."

Freeman refused to smile. "But he will know that we were here to-night."

"Why should he? Can we not say that we have just come?"

"Yes," said Freeman, "of course." He had no qualms at lying in so good a cause. It was war. "But will he believe us? If he doesn't know now when we started he will soon."

"Perhaps."

"Did he expect us to reach here to-night?"

"No."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Did you tell him we would start last night?"

"No."

"When?"

"To-night."

"Then why did you tell me differently, Belita? Why didn't we wait until to-night?"

The girl turned to him in sudden passion.

"Why?" she repeated. "Can't you tell? It was because I love you, because I wanted one day — all of it—that should be just ours. It didn't seem to matter what came after that. It doesn't matter—to me—now. That's why I did it, *chiquito,* just because I love you—and because I thought that you loved me. You said you did. Do you?"

"Yes," said Freeman steadily; but he had qualms now. His cause was just as good, but this was love. The philosophy of the proverb was insufficient to meet the case.

But he lied bravely. Many men, it may be suspected, would have done the same—with Belita, and without so good a cause.

The girl waited then.

"You show it," she said finally with sudden scorn.

Hagan's prophesy was coming rapidly true. Freeman was learning many things from Belita de la Cruz. He was to learn still more.

But he understood for the present that there was nothing subtle in the girl's last comment, and he dropped his arm about her waist and drew her to him. She resisted for a moment before she nestled in his arms.

Had he kissed her then her satisfaction, no doubt, would have been complete. But he did not; though for this he deserves no credit. It was not through his strength; it was through doubt of his strength.

"I love you, Belita," he said. "I've told you so. I do. But we must talk a little now of other things—and plan. We may not be able to talk to-morrow—when Cabildo comes. We may not have time to plan."

"Why should we wait for him to come?" asked Belita then softly. "Why should we not go away — together—now?"

"Go away?"

"Yes—far."

"Where?"

"We can reach Biang," she answered, "before any one knows. We can get a boat there for Mindanao, and then to Borneo. After that we can go where we choose."

Freeman's wonder increased, but his reason held fast.

"And the money," he asked—"where will it come from?"

"I have some," she answered promptly; "enough to go with. I can get more afterward. And you can work."

Freeman hesitated. It was possible that the girl was testing him—that this had all been planned with Cabildo to determine his loyalty to the new cause he was professing.

"And desert Cabildo?" he asked after a moment.

"Haven't you deserted your own people?" she flashed back. "And why?"

"You know," he answered. "Because I love you; because you asked me to."

"Then why not Cabildo because you love me—because I ask you?"

The girl's logic was unassailable. Freeman evaded the issue.

"I am thinking of your desertion," he said.

"Of mine."

"Yes. You love Cabildo—you have loved him?"

She broke from his hold. "No—never!" she said.

"But Cabildo loves you?"

"Yes."

Then Freeman lost his control.

"What is Cabildo to you?" was the question with which he proved himself a man.

The girl raised her chin and looked straight at him. "He is nothing to me," she said simply. "He never will be—now."

"Not even if anything happens to me?"

"No—no matter what happens."

"Yet if I hadn't come, you would have married him?"

"I think so."

"Without loving him?"

"What difference would it have made? I didn't know what love was. I know now. I was a Filipino; I should have remained one—that's all. It wouldn't have mattered."

"And aren't you a Filipino now? Don't you still love the Filipino cause—Cabildo's cause?"

"Cabildo's!" Her tone was filled with contempt. "Cabildo has no cause but himself. I thought he had; I thought the Filipinos had; but I know better now. Cabildo is a thief and a murderer; nothing more. And he is a beast."

"And how did you discover these things?"

"By knowing you," she answered, "and by loving you."

Freeman tacked promptly. "But if you wanted us to go away together, why didn't you suggest it in Polaso?"

"Because I knew you wouldn't go."

"You knew it?"

"Yes," bitterly.

"And knowing this," he persisted gently, "why did you come all the way here to suggest it now?"

"I've told you that. Because I wanted to be alone with you, to love you as I pleased, to have you—all to myself."

She looked him clearly in the eyes. It was almost dark, but he could see that there was no shame, no color even, in the beautiful face turned bravely up to him.

Moments such as this come rarely to men—and men seldom deserve them when they come. But, coming, they make men better, and so may be reasonably encouraged.

Perhaps they helped Freeman. He needed help.

"But am I worth it, dear?" he said, and self-contempt filled him as he spoke. But he went on: "Is a man twice a deserter of men worth the love of a woman?"

She reached up and kissed him then, and he could still see that her eyes were shining.

"Does a man twice a deserter leave these to mark his trail?" she asked softly, and put a blue flannel triangle in his hand.

Freeman rose and lighted the candles. Belita followed him in—and she was smiling very prettily.

"You knew?" he said, when the flames lighted them.

"Yes," she said; "I've known all the time."

"How?"

"By just knowing you. You were different—different from your own people, much different from mine. I knew you couldn't desert; I knew you couldn't live as the Filipinos live—in the hills. Even Henderson can't. I

knew why you wanted to come; I know now why you are here."

"And will you help me, Belita?"

It was almost a coward's question, but he got a brave woman's answer. "Yes," she said—"to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow—to-day is ours." But she was pleading—not affirming, and her voice betrayed her.

There followed silence while Freeman fought. Then, victorious, he drew her to him again and kissed her, and put her gently from him.

But the manner of his kiss told her all, though he did know it. She was very quiet after that.

The impossibility of conversation became evident. After a little Freeman picked up the blankets and a candle and went behind the screen. He spread the blankets on the couch carefully, glanced around as one looks for the final touches in one's guest-room, and, leaving the candle, came back.

Belita was standing in the doorway, looking out into the dark, yet she turned as he came, and she smiled at him. But her face was pale.

Once again he took her in his arms. "It will be a hard day to-morrow," he said. "You must sleep. Your bed is ready."

"And you?" she asked.

"I shall watch for a little, and then lie down here."

She nodded. Freeman led her to the edge of the matting screen, and kissed her.

"Good night," he said—"and pleasant dreams. Let us dream of the future."

She stopped him. "Don't," she said. "I know. Good night, *chiquito*."

She released herself and disappeared. He saw the light go out, and he heard her lie down on the couch. He did not hear her cry. He did not know the torment in her heart.

Freeman went outside and walked up and down in front of the door. He walked a long time. And he thought of many things—of a foolish girl for whose slight he had vowed boyish revenge on a whole sex, of Belita, of his home, of his dead mother.

It is not given to us to know all that his youthful soul went through then, but the boy went out of him and the man came.

Finally, he went into the house softly. The candles were almost burned out, but he took one and crept to the screen and looked at the couch.

Belita lay there with her face turned partly toward him, her eyes closed, and breathing deeply.

He tiptoed back and put out the candles and lay down on the bamboo floor with his head at the open door. Then, looking far beyond the stars, he came as near to prayer as it was given to him to come.

"I have been foolish and selfish," he cried in his soul. "Perhaps I am foolish and selfish now. But I'm clean."

And almost shamefacedly, he went to sleep.

Perhaps he dreamed. Perhaps the old-age moon, which some time after midnight sent shaky gleams through the trees into the doorway, roused him. He sat up suddenly, wide awake.

"Why not?" he thought. "I may need them."

He rose quietly, lighted a candle, and looked at his watch. "I can do it—if I know Hagan."

He found a scrap of paper in his haversack, and scribbled a brief message, which he read over with a grin, and then reached for his revolver and hat. From the other side of the screen came faintly Belita's regular breathing.

He listened a moment, then put out the light, paused again, and went silently out and worked his way down the dimly lighted trail.

It was early dawn when he returned. He crept in and back to the couch. Belita still slept. In the coming light now he could see the tear-traces on her face, and he knew that she had cried herself to sleep.

He stole back and busied himself

preparing breakfast. Before it was ready the girl came out. She had removed the traces of her tears, but her eyes were swollen and she looked deadly tired. But she smiled at him.

"I'm glad you're back," she said.

"It was only a little while," he answered, concealing wonder; "I couldn't sleep."

"I know," said the girl; "neither could I."

They breakfasted hastily, and then, at Belita's suggestion, they cleared away all traces of their stay, and Freeman packed the pony and tied it near the door.

Then they sat down to wait. It was not long. The girl's quick ear caught first the sound of cracking twigs.

"They're coming," she said. "Will you kiss me, *chiquito,* once before they come?"

The man caught her in his arms, almost roughly, and kissed her again and again. There was no reason for self-control now; circumstances were in command.

She lay in his arms motionless for an instant, and then pushed him away.

"Quick!" she said.

They stood at the entrance waiting. Almost immediately three men broke into the clearing and stopped in sudden suspicion at sight of the pony and then of the pair in the doorway.

Two of them wore revolvers and bolos. They were plainly Filipinos. The other had a bolo only. He might once have been American.

The girl waved her hand and called to them, and after looking cautiously around they came on.

"The first one is Cabildo," said Belita, in an undertone; "the other is Vamor—his lieutenant. The man with the beard is Henderson."

"Are they all?" whispered Freeman, relieved.

"No; the others will follow—soon. Go inside."

There was time for nothing more. The girl stepped outside to meet the approaching men, and Freeman withdrew slightly within the doorway—and loosened his revolver in its holster.

Belita greeted the newcomers. She shook hands with Cabildo. He was slight and dark, and unpleasant looking. His eyes were cruel. They looked cruelly at the girl now.

Vamor was little more than a boy. Henderson was indescribable. Three months in the hills had destroyed whatever manhood liquor and vice had left in him at the time of his desertion.

The girl ushered them into the house.

"This is Freeman," she said to Cabildo.

Freeman bowed, and Cabildo returned his salutation, with perfect politeness and without warmth.

"I did not expect you until afternoon?" he said. He spoke in Spanish.

"We had to leave earlier," said Belita. "They suspected Freeman. We traveled all night. We have just come."

"You traveled all night?"

"Yes; we had to. We were afraid they were following us."

Cabildo looked at Freeman. The mud on his shoes and leggings was still wet. It bore out Belita's statement. Cabildo's eyes wandered from Freeman to the pony outside. The mud on its legs was dry.

Freeman noted all, and cursed inwardly his carelessness. Cabildo made no sign.

"You have come to join me?" he said to Freeman.

"Yes, *señor.*"

"Why?"

"I haven't been treated right," lied Freeman. "And I thought you would be glad to have another American to help fight for your country."

Henderson, eying Freeman shiftily, came as near to contempt as it was possible for his degenerated and wasted face to show. He knew, of course, that Freeman was either lying to Cabildo or deceiving himself.

Also he knew something of Belita's part. And he knew much of the re-

sult of putting the reasons Freeman had advanced into practical operation.

"Yes," said Cabildo, "I shall be glad to have you. But you will understand," he added, with an apologetic bow, "that men in my present position have to be careful whom they trust. We must test those who join us a little at first. It is not because I doubt you, you understand, but because I must be"—he shrugged his shoulders—"cautious.

"For the present, then, until we know each other better, I suggest that you let me keep your arms." He indicated Freeman's revolver. "I will, of course, return them to you later."

"Certainly," said Freeman. "You are quite right." He raised his hands to unclasp his belt.

Vamor stepped forward to take it for his chief. A second later Vamor crashed into the corner of the room, dazed beyond immediate recovery, and Freeman's revolver covered a white-faced and startled Cabildo.

"Don't move," commanded Freeman sternly. "That means you, too, Henderson," he added in English. "Take your hands off that bolo and put 'em up!"

Henderson haltingly obeyed. Freeman went back to his Spanish.

"Now raise yours, too, Cabildo," he said, "in the same way." And Cabildo acted promptly.

Belita stood by the window, watching. The climax was reached so rapidly that she could not stir. Freeman's back was toward the door.

Cabildo was a few feet in front of him, facing it; Henderson, a little farther off and to the side also, could look out under Freeman's pistol arm.

Then suddenly Cabildo threw a flash of triumph at Freeman and shouted loudly. Almost at the same instant an exclamation of dismay came from Belita at the window. Henderson grinned fiendishly.

Freeman, not daring to turn around, still understood. Cabildo's band had broken into the clearing.

There followed the confused sounds of many voices, then of rushing feet.

Henderson saved Freeman from decision. The deserter could not wait. He dropped his arms and made a sudden rush at Freeman, tugging at his bolo as he came. Freeman instantly turned his pistol from Cabildo and pressed the trigger.

Henderson stopped, put his hand to his throat, and fell in a heap at Freeman's feet.

At the same instant Cabildo dropped his hands and tried to draw his own weapon, but time failed him. Freeman jumped across the body of the deserter and grabbed the Filipino around the body, pinning his arms uselessly to his sides. Then he swung the struggling form like a sack of meal across his shoulder.

"Quick, Belita," he said, "the other door! Hide in the brush till I come back. My men are coming."

He saw her nod understanding and start to follow, and he was satisfied. With his burden unchanged he leaped from the doorway into the brush and tore his way through the undergrowth around the clearing toward the trail.

Belita stopped at the door when he had disappeared, and then turned to face the raging band of outlaws that crowded through the house.

"He went that way," she said to the leaders, pointing quite the other way. "Cabildo is following him. Don't shoot."

They were deceived for only a minute, but perhaps the time counted for Freeman. Certainly, the girl had made her promise good.

The youngster heard them breaking through the brush, and their imprecations, though he did not understand them, when they discovered that the girl had duped them; he heard the excited commands that followed and then the song of the flying bullets, but he never hesitated.

How far he intended to carry the race with his heavy handicap, he did not himself know, but fortunately the

sight of Hagan at the foot of the slope, when he cleared the brush, made calculation unnecessary.

Hagan's volley checked the rush of Cabildo's men, who swung back with undiminished speed under cover. It had no other effect. The sergeant's forcible warning to fire over Freeman's head was sufficient to carry the flight of steel above every head in sight.

The detachment was taking no chances of irritating its leader.

Freeman threw his lacerated and breathless burden on the ground in the midst of Hagan's men.

"There he is, Hagan," he said, breathing himself like a one-cylinder motor. "Better tie him up. That's your friend Cabildo."

"I'm glad you got him, sir," answered the sergeant. And he meant it honestly, notwithstanding that he had clung to some ambitions of his own during the ten months he had been hunting the human flea on the ground before him.

Achievement would have been a desirable thing on his record.

The detachment waited then for Freeman to recover his breath. After a little he rose to his feet. Then Hagan, planting himself immediately in front, spoke the thought of all.

"If you please, sir, now," he said, "will you tell us who you are?"

The other looked at him with a grin. "I'm that damned shave-tail at Tulag," he said.

"I thought so," said Hagan—"nobody else would of tried it."

The old soldier's face was gravely respectful, and Lieutenant Firman did his best to regard the comment as a compliment. He was not very successful.

"Fall the men in, Hagan," he directed. "We have something else to do. The girl's up there, hiding in the brush, and we must find her. Henderson's up there, too—but he's easy to find. He's dead, I think." He turned suddenly to Hagan. "She *is* a nice girl, sergeant," he said.

"I always thought she was, sir," responded Hagan imperturbably, "that's why I wanted to keep you away from her."

When they entered the clearing there was no visible sign of the events of the last half hour. Even the pony had vanished, and silence reigned.

Fear smote Firman suddenly. He darted forward to the palm hut, the others following. Hagan, in the lead, saw him stop in the doorway and then reel forward again.

They all heard what came from his throat. It was not a cry; it was hardly human.

Before they reached the hut Firman was back, barring the doorway and holding up his hand. His face alone would have held them. They stopped in their tracks.

"Bring me some blankets, Hagan," he said hoarsely.

Eager hands unrolled packs hastily, and Hagan snatched up two or three of the blue blankets nearest him and went on. Firman took them from him, his big frame still shutting from view all that was within.

"Hold the men where they are till I call you," he said. "I don't need you now. The girl is dead."

Outside the men stood speechless for a moment; then they muttered evilly among themselves, and looked evilly at their trussed-up prisoner.

God was good to Cabildo at that moment in forbidding them to look upon the sight He had reserved for Freeman's punishment.

Inside, the body of Henderson lay in a heap where it had fallen. It was not this, but what was beyond.

For there with her hands tied above her head to one of the posts in the corner was the girl. Her dress had been half torn from her. She was mutilated.

Through her breast, far into the post had been driven a huge bolo. Stuck on its handle was a piece of paper on which was scrawled in the local dia-

lect unpleasant things of her loyalty and virtue.

Only her luxuriant hair, tumbling down, served mercifully to hide in part what no man so young as Firman should have beenocalled upon to witness.

Firman took the body down, drew the stained fabric of the girl's dress tenderly over the wounded breast, and wrapped the blankets around the slender form that a half hour before had stood so straight and beautiful by the window. Then he carried it behind the screen and laid it on the couch.

He returned to the doorway and called Hagan.

"Get rid of that," he said, pointing to the dead heap on the floor, "and then let the men make themselves comfortable. We'll rest to-day. I shall want a burial party this afternoon. That's all."

The sergeant saluted and went out. Firman went back to the couch.

IN LOVE

By Blanche Elizabeth Wade

ONE charming day we went to stroll
Along the ocean shore.
We went to watch the blue waves dance,
And count the gulls that soar.
But waves and gulls we did not see,
For I saw him, and he saw me!

And then, another time, we sought
A cool and quiet wood,
To gaze at noble, stately trees—
A monarch brotherhood.
I can't recall a single tree,
But I saw him, and he saw me!

We climbed beyond the purple mists,
When dawn first tinged the skies,
Until we reached the mountain crest—
To see the great sun rise.
It rose; but we forgot to see,
For I saw him, and he saw me!

At evening, when the sun was gone,
And stars above were lit,
We wandered near a babbling brook,
Where fireflies love to flit.
And though 'twas dark as it could be,
Well—I saw him, and he saw me!

Get Thee Behind Me

By Redfield Ingalls

THE baby cried out in his sleep, and Mrs. Hibben opened her eyes with a start.

The cry was not repeated, and after listening a moment she yawned wholeheartedly, picked up her tumbled mending and glanced at the clock.

Nearly two, and Frank not home yet!

"He didn't say he'd be *early*," she argued drowsily, leaning back in the Morris chair and taking a stitch or two at the knee of a little stocking. "Oh, well, he's been an angel—holiday do him good—wonder who phoned—"

She dozed off again, to be roused a few minutes later by the rattling of a latch key and the sound of her husband's voice.

"Hello, sleepy-head!" he said guardedly, for the baby was all too easily aroused. "What'd you sit up for?" and he kissed her in spite of the face she made at him.

"You didn't say 'early,'" she scolded. "Aren't you shamed?" But she hugged him none the less.

"Ouch! Look out for that back!"

"Why, what's the matter?" She was wide awake now and alarmed. "Did you go joy-riding?" Then, "Oh! Was it as bad as *that*, you poor boy?"

"It wasn't exactly pleasant," he admitted grimly, taking off his shoes.

"*Well!*" she said in fine scorn. "You men make me tired. You're always poking fun at us, and then you turn around and spend fifty perfectly good dollars to get man-handled! What'd they do to you, anyway?"

His face suddenly went grave and rather white.

"Little girl," he said quietly, "you must never ask me that. I've never kept anything from you before, but now I must. You know what I told you."

"All right for you, Mr. Francis Joseph Hibben! You just wait till you see the secrets I'll keep. I'll join a lodge, too; see if I don't, and then I'll be just as mean about it as you are."

She moved about indignantly, setting the room to rights.

Hibben caressed his shin-bone tenderly, then looked up with a queer little smile.

"Lottie," he said, "I'll tell you something. I went away from here this evening a boy, and I've come back a man."

"Nonsense!" she snapped, impressed none the less. "What's initiation got to do with it?"

"I'll tell you as much as I knew before—to-night," and again his face paled a bit. "As far back as history goes initiation has existed in every country and among every people. It weeds out the weaklings from among the fighting men, it tests and proves a man's courage, his physical vigor, his self-control, his powers of endurance, and above all, his moral stamina. And those things count just as much to-day with us as with the cave man warrior. You ought to be thankful I wasn't born a Red Indian. And you may be proud that I've been admitted to full membership in the lodge, because it means a whole lot."

"I *am* proud, boy," and she fluttered up to be forgiven. "Oh—Frank! The notice came this afternoon that your insurance is due."

"For the love of Mike! And I thought I had that half-century clear!" he groaned contritely. "That means an awful hole in the bank-roll. I shouldn't have joined after all."

"Pooh-pooh! Likewise tut-tut! Now you go right straight to bed, or you'll be late at the office in the morning. Oh, Frank! Wait a minute."

She hunted in her work-basket and found a slip of paper.

"Somebody called up just after you went out."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know, he didn't leave any name. But he said you were to call this number as soon as you got in. I told him you'd be late, but he said it didn't matter, to call anyway."

Hibben took the paper and whistled.

"Why, that's Peter Ratsell's home. What on earth—"

He padded over to the telephone. His wife yawned again and fished under the sofa for a Teddy-bear.

"Hello—Mr. Ratsell's home? I say is this Mr. Rat—Yes? Well, this is Frank Hibben—Frank Hibben, his private secretary. Francis J. Hib—what's that? He's *what?*"

"Sh! Not so loud, Frank, you'll wake the baby! What's the matter?"

"Good Lord! When did it happen? Yes? Yes, Mr. Rogers, first thing in the morning. G'by." He turned from the telephone with a very pale face. "Mr. Ratsell is dead, Lottie."

"Oh, Frank! Why, he's just a young man."

"Automobile accident," he muttered with dry lips. "Don't talk about it now, honey; I'll have to be up by six."

Hibben slept hardly at all.

The events at the lodge had not been such as to make the candidates successful wooers of the arms of Morpheus for a night or two, but wholly aside from that he was more than a little worried over the morrow.

Mr. Ratsell was head of the Ratsell Dye Works, and although his private secretary knew the business pretty well he very much doubted if a position would be made for him, now his secretaryship was gone.

Things had not been going well with the Ratsell works of late, thanks to the encroachments of the big Strandring Dyeing Company, and Hibben knew that orders had gone out for the reduction of expenses to a minimum.

And to be out of work just now was a serious problem. Times were bad and the cost of living never higher. They had been living almost from hand to mouth ever since the baby's arrival. It had put an astonishingly big hole in the already hard-pressed weekly pay envelope.

He dozed off at last in a jumble of wild dreams, to be wakened seemingly within five minutes by the alarm clock and Francis Junior's uproarious demands for his breakfast.

Hibben heated the milk with sundry groans and interjections, for he made it a point to help as much as he could with his offspring.

It didn't seem fair that Lottie should have all that work to do. And anyhow there was a heap of satisfaction in seeing to it personally that the youngster was comfortable and happy.

In his secret heart of hearts he felt that *he* could handle that baby very much better than any mere woman, which is the way of a man.

He snatched a hasty bite himself and hurried down to the office.

Conditions there bordered on a state of chaos. Clerks hurried about with anxious faces, the foreman of the padding department was in conference with Rogers, Mr. Ratsell's general manager, and the chief chemist was waiting for his turn.

Hibben attacked the correspondence and was busy most of the forenoon. As soon as he got an opportunity he went to the manager and asked him frankly what the situation was.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Hibben, that we'll have to let you go," was the reply. "Not at once, of course; there are all Mr. Ratsell's papers to be gone through and put in order. I understand that he has a number of private formulæ among them of no small value, and you are the man to sort them out. But after that—well, you know how things are with us."

"But good Lord, Mr. Rogers, I have a wife and child to think about. It puts me rather up against it."

Rogers looked at him not unkindly, but shook his head.

"Perhaps later on after we've got things straightened out— Look here, Hibben, I'll give you a quiet tip. I happen to know that Strandring is looking for a private secretary."

"Not Alexander?"

Rogers nodded.

"For goodness' sake don't say where you heard this, though. If I were you I'd try for it."

Hibben thanked him and went back to his desk.

Alexander Strandring, head of the big company that had stolen so much of this firm's business! Why not?

He thought of the proverbial sinking ship, and the view-point of the deserting rats suddenly occurred to him with force. Perhaps the rats had wives and children to think about.

It was odd and rather saddening to sit there in his accustomed place, knowing that Peter Ratsell's voice would never again boom out over the partition in altercation with a visitor, or to summon him. He was glad to get away when the lunch hour came.

"Alexander Strandring," he thought again as he walked. The name was one to conjure with in the dyeing business. He had the reputation of being a hard man and ruthless, one who kept his week-day business code separate and distinct from that of Sunday.

Tales were told of the methods he had used to build up his huge business, and they contrasted oddly with other tales of extensive charitable works.

It occurred to Hibben that there is no time like the present; that he had time to see Mr. Strandring and put in his application before he was due back at the office.

It would only be necessary to hurry his lunch, for the rival dye works were just a few blocks away.

He acted on the impulse at once, and was soon shown into Mr. Strandring's private office.

Hibben knew him by sight. He was a big man, with heavy, aggressive features and pale eyes that told nothing of the thoughts behind them, but that were set off by tiny lines which hinted at humor.

"Ratsell's private secretary, eh? Sit down. What can I do for you?"

"Mr. Ratsell's death has left me without a position," said the young man succinctly, "and I have heard a rumor that you have such a position to fill."

"You have, eh? Hum. Know anything about dyeing?"

For ten minutes Hibben answered questions by the dozen, and they were of the most searching kind. He outlined with some diffidence his home conditions in response to the demands for information.

"Wife and kid, eh? Doctor's bills and all that? I see. How much are you getting now?"

Hibben told him, and the big man showed a trace of animation.

"Look here, if you are worth anything to me you are worth half as much again. Either you aren't or Ratsell skinned you. I suspect the latter."

"He was going to give me a raise as soon as business conditions permitted it," said Hibben, flushing.

"Huh, same old stall they used when I was a boy. Now I like you, Mr. Hibben, but my business methods are different from Ratsell's." He smiled a little.

"So they say," said the young man, non-committally.

"They do, eh? Call me a pirate and robber?" He chuckled. "The under dog always finds a lot to squeal about. Yes, Perkins."

"Smith & Co. have sent that wool, sir. They want mordant colors used."

"All right. Tell the foreman to stuff it and sadden it first. See that they don't get it back till they pay for it. And Perkins."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm not to be disturbed for a few minutes. Have a cigar, Mr. Hibben."

Hibben took the weed with misgivings, wondering what was coming next.

"Now, here's your situation as I understand it. Out of a job, wife and kid to support, nothing put by, best fitted for this business, and I'm the only other man in it in the city."

The young man nodded.

"I want good service, Mr. Hibben." Strandring picked up a paper-cutter and stabbed at the blotter on his desk. "All's fair in love and business. I understand that you are to put Ratsell's papers in order before you leave there. Well, it's generally known that he has the formula for making artificial cochineal. It's worth nothing to them now, but it's worth a heap to me." He dropped the knife and faced the young man. "Bring me a copy of that formula and we'll see about a job."

Hibben went white and rose from his chair. "I'm afraid I—" he began, but Strandring cut him short.

"Don't decide too hastily, Mr. Hibben. You may be sorry for it. Think it over and come in again in a few days. Good afternoon."

Hibben thought it over. In fact he found it hard to think of anything else.

"What you worrying about so, Frank?" his wife demanded that evening after he had complained twice about Francis junior's objections to going to bed. It was unprecedented.

He had an impulse to lay the whole case before her and see what her judgment would be, but repressed it.

In the first place it would mean more trouble for her, and in the second she was herself an important factor in the problem.

"Ratsell's death has left things in pretty tangled shape," he explained.

He was ringing the changes among fits of cold rage at the big dyer's cool assumption of his dishonesty and the way he had taken advantage of his need, of blank despondency at the alternative of walking the streets in search of work perhaps for weeks, and of half-hearted impulses to take the easier way and do this thing.

"If I were alone," he thought over and over again, chewing on his pipestem, "I'd tell Strandring where to go and take my chances of finding something to do in this city or another. As it is there's Lottie and the baby—"

He tried to plumb the old, old sophistry that the end justifies the means.

"All's fair in love and business," Strandring had said.

Was it so? The survival of the fittest? Was there a higher law than honor where self-preservation, the protection of his mate and offspring, were concerned?

And, after all, it was Lottie who in all innocence tipped the balance.

"I suppose, now Mr. Ratsell's gone,

that you won't get that raise for a long time," she mused aloud. "Oh dear, and I'm just in rags! And we've *got* to get babykins out in the country somewhere for the summer. You know what the doctor said. Think we can manage it, Frank?"

"I think we can," he said grimly, and started, drawing a long breath.

The die was cast. She was rather startled at his sudden outburst of gaiety that lasted the rest of the evening, but responded to it, nothing loath.

A couple of days later Hibben was shown into Strandring's private office again.

"There it is," he said with a touch of sullenness, dropping an envelope on the desk.

The dyer looked up at him with an inscrutable face. "Uh-huh, so you brought it, eh?" he remarked, reaching for the paper-knife.

Hibben was in that black mood when little things come to one with startling vividness. Strandring's gesture as he stretched out his hand reminded him of one that had been taught him at the lodge the other evening. The lodge—his initiation! The high, beautiful moral code they had held up to him—and here he was violating it at the first temptation that was offered.

He came back to the present with a sudden, deep breath and sparkling eyes.

"No, I'm damned if I do!" he cried, and before the big man could move he had snatched the envelope and torn it to pieces, stuffing the fragments in his pocket. "Much obliged for your offer, Mr. Strandring; but I think I can get a job digging ditches," and he turned to the door with a light step and heart.

He was startled by a chuckle behind him and turned.

"Don't go, Mr. Hibben. Glad to see you passed that test so well. You're the kind of man we want."

Almost the very words of his brothers at the lodge the other night!

"I don't quite understand—" he gasped.

"Think I'd trust a man who couldn't be true to his former employer? If he'd do him, he'd do me. When do you want to report for work?"

W A R !

By John Brown Jewett

WE think our Mother Nature is the awfulest old dame
When she is in a fury, when she gets into the game
With earthquake, flood, tornado, and lays about her so
That thousands of us perish at every mighty blow.

But when she's been so gracious that our fear of her is gone,
We imitate her terrors, then we rage and carry on;
With our engines of destruction, like her whirlwind, 'quake, and flood,
We beat our Mother Nature in the game of death and blood.

There seems to be a moral in our inconsistent view,
But not with morals usually have children much to do.
We can't be hypocritical—no, that would be a shame;
We just love to beat our Mother at her own ferocious game.