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BY THE 5400th YEAR

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

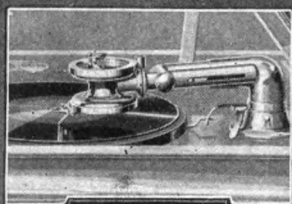
*A Story of a
Golden Girl
in the Golden
West*

The Red Glory

by Ethel and James Dorrance

Authors of "The Law's Outlaw," "Who Knows?" etc.

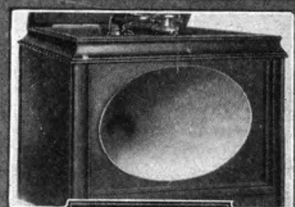
The BRUNSWICK Method of Reproduction



The Ultona



The Brunswick



The Amplifier

Two New Ideas Which Won Millions of Friends

WHEN the now famous Brunswick was announced, most people believed that the utmost had already been attained in the phonographic art.

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And this great expectation was realized. The Brunswick created a memorable sensation. It commanded instant respect and admiration.

The Pioneer

Of the major instruments, The Brunswick was the first to play *all* records with faithful regard for different requirements. This feature alone created thousands of admirers. For it meant that a Brunswick owner could buy and play *any* record, whatever make.

Since different makes offer different artists, and no one make offers them all, music lovers saw in The Brunswick the

opportunity to select their own library of records, without restriction.

The other outstanding Brunswick betterment was in tone production. By a more scientific amplification of tone waves, The Brunswick overcame many old time crudities and brought out lovely tones hitherto lost. Today the Brunswick Method of Reproduction is a recognized triumph. It means perfected reproduction to all who know it. And the news is spreading fast.

Two Famous Ideas

The Brunswick Method of Reproduction includes the Ultona, an all-record player. This master invention can be obtained on no other phonograph. The Ultona presents to each make of record, the proper needle and diaphragm. All at a turn of the hand. It is a unique reproducer, not an attachment nor makeshift.

The Brunswick Method also includes The Brunswick Amplifier, an all-wood sound chamber built with scientific regard for acoustic laws. No metal is used because it muffles sound vibrations.

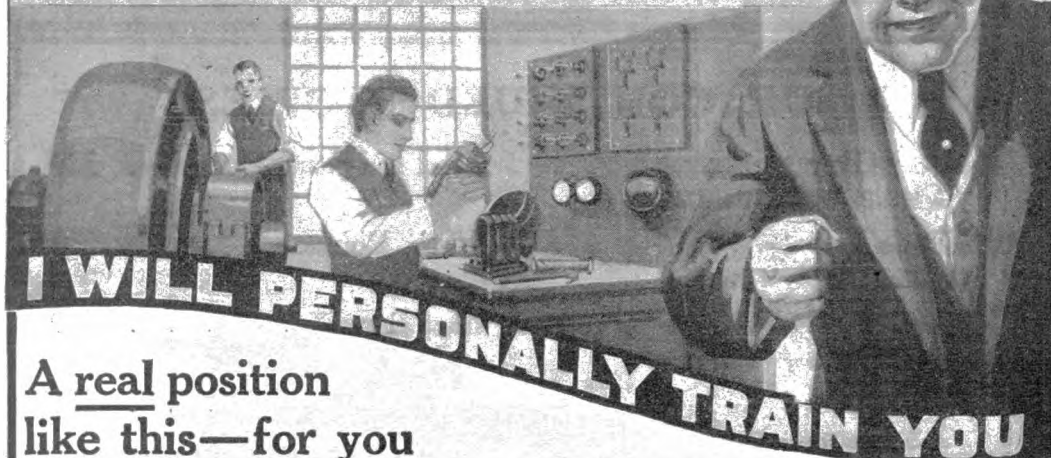
Before you decide which phonograph for your home, hear The Brunswick. Compare its tone. Note the Ultona. A Brunswick Dealer will gladly assist you in making a tone test.

Branch Houses in
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and Canada

The Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co.
General Offices: CHICAGO and NEW YORK

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Chief Engineer

Chicago Engineering Works

Dept. 174

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCV

NUMBER 4



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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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Entered as second class matter May 17, 1915, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

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Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	\$3.25
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The Argosy	1.75	
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April 26th Argosy Combination Forms Close April 3rd

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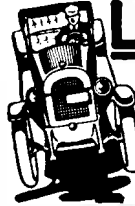
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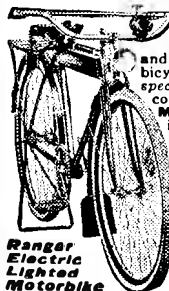
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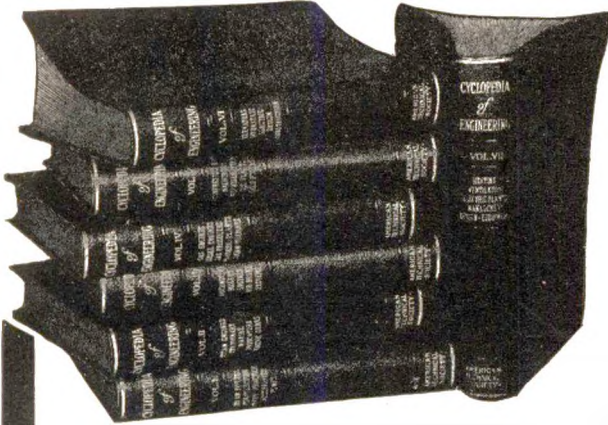
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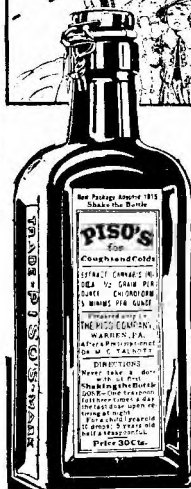
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They both decided that an income of at least \$3,000 a year was necessary and was not too much to ask for their services—if they could GET IT.

There was the rub. Each of them had a different idea as to how he was going to "put it over." On this one point they were at wide disagreement. Each was so convinced that his way was right, a wager was entered into between them as to who would be first to land a job at \$3,000 a year or better.

Mr. Bookkeeper's plan was to put up a bold front, to "blud" his way into an important job. He was going to get there on his "nerve." He positively knew "men who were less capable than he, and they got into good jobs, he claimed, by pure nerve backed up by a little luck." He was going to watch the "want ads" and apply for every attractive position so long as he thought there was the slightest chance of landing one of them. He scanned the newspapers day after day. After some several hundred attempts, and aided by the fact that the war had made men scarce, he finally secured a position at \$2,400 a year; but was fired and kicked out for incompetency after a week's trial.

He had actually put in an average of two hours a day over a period of a year and a half, reading the "help wanted" columns of the daily papers, writing letters of application, telephoning, scheming, dreaming and hoping. In not one case in twenty did he even get an interview. All his efforts were for NOTHING; nothing but another twenty-five dollar salary. He finished exactly where he started after wasting a good part of a year and a half hunting jobs he was unqualified to fill.

Now, Mr. Stenographer had a different scheme—one that was practical and thoroughly tested. It worked out even better than he had planned. He "put it over" in a big way in exactly 300 hours' spare time, too. They were "thirt hours," he said, which can be saved out of the time men ordinarily waste in any 60 days of the year.

Mr. Stenographer, too, went over the "help wanted" columns of the newspapers. He was attracted by the large number of really big positions open to competent men. He noted particularly the unusual salaries—any number of them at \$2,500 to \$6,000 a year offered to Expert Accountants, Auditors, Cost Accountants, Comptrollers, Senior and Junior Accountants.

"Why this big demand for trained Accountants?" he asked himself.

That night he read a book, "The Awakening of Business" by Mr. Edward N. Hurley. When Mr. Hurley wrote this book, he was Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission. He claims that not one in ten American business men keep accurate accounting systems. They don't know their costs. They are losing money when they think they are making a profit. He said in effect that American business men have got to WAKE UP if they are going to be factors in the competition for world trade.

And American business IS waking up.

That is one reason why Expert Accountants are in such great and growing demand. Mr. Stenographer at once pictured that bigger income for himself as a trained Accountant. That night, in another section of the evening paper, he read an advertisement of an institution offering to train ambitious men in the principles of Higher Accountancy under the direction of a Certified Public Accountant assisted by a big staff of accounting and business experts. That institution was the LaSalle Extension University—the largest institution of the kind in the world, whose graduates are in demand in every organization where efficient, well trained men are needed.

Before Mr. Stenographer went to bed that night, he dropped into the mails an inquiry to the University asking for full particulars regarding their home study course and service in Higher Accountancy.

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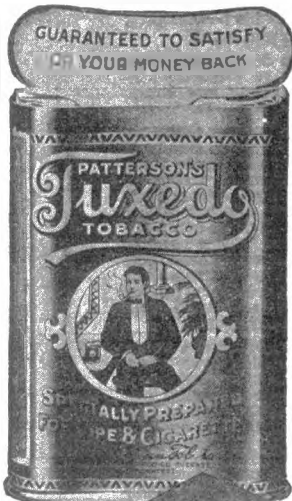
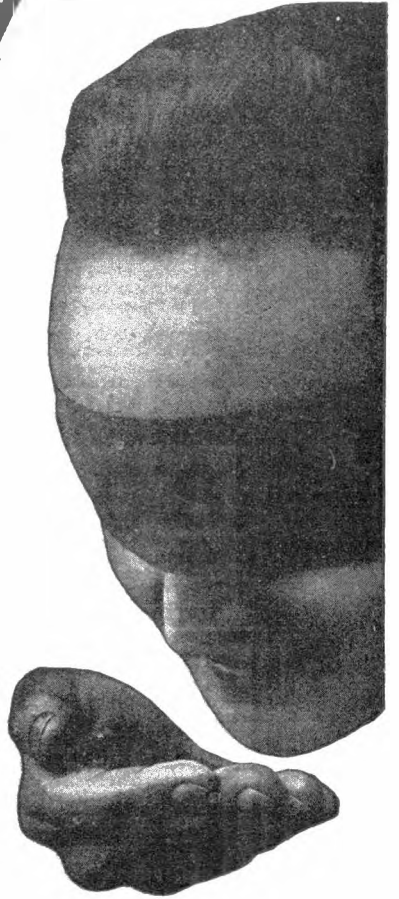
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. XCV

NUMBER 4



SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 1919



The Red Glory by Ethel and James Dorrance

Authors of "The Law's Outlaw," "Who Knows?" "The Whitewashed Wall," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SANS ADMISSION OR TAX.

A GIRL and a horse—you'd never have thought they could bear so many points of resemblance! Yet if you could have seen Gloriana Frazer and her bay mount streaking the trail this hot Arizona afternoon, you'd have begun to see.

Both were rangy in build, yet taut of muscle; both young, as youth compares in horse and human; both trained to the limit of capability and endurance. Even stronger in tone than the mane backward-flung by the wind was the copper braid, thick as a puncher's wrist, which coroneted the head beneath the wide-brimmed felt hat.

Alike were the two pairs of eyes, tawny as topaz, with darker stripes around the irides. Long, brown lashes, the flash of ivory teeth—yes, even certain freckles upon both noses carried out the similitude.

And in spirit—

Well, it was only when you knew them that you could appreciate how the two were

one. Although in the beginning they had been assigned to each other on account of their coloring, it was a singleness of enjoyment that now coupled them. With chests expanded to the vital air, nostrils dilated sensitively, heads thrown back and mouths laughing from the sheer well-being of power to spare, they bent to the going in perfect rhythm.

In the shade of a piñon clump the girl halted her mount, removed her hat, and pushed back her hair to the breeze. There was none to appreciate that the forehead was white as milk, for the green lizard slithering in the dust just below was unable to focus his jetty eyes so high and the screech-owl, perched upon the limb of a scrub above, was quite too sound asleep.

Atop an enslanking ridge, ample excuse for a few minutes' lag, was being unreeled—sans admission or tax—a marvelous, natural-history motion-picture. The rhythmic accompaniment of many thudding hoofs had attracted her attention to the "show" of a hundred-odd wild horses in purposeful mi-

gration. A single-tinted film of bright color they looked at this distance, unwinding toward the desert.

Screwing her binoculars into focus, Gloriana looked, then exclaimed in an excited way as she recognized the band. There was no mistaking the "Streak," if one ever had seen or even heard of that regal stallion before. A "spook" horse, the Apaches had dubbed him when, season in and season out, he had evaded their most wily snares. "Outlaw," "land pirate," "thief-by-night"—these were other of the appellations applied by the ranchmen whose mares and colts he had nosed away. To the list they later had added "Satan's Son," when his bright hide had proved impervious to the aim of the best marksmen among them.

"Yonder goes your Daddy-Blazes, Connie," she said, leaning forward in the saddle and, with the lift of one rein, urging her horse's head in the direction she desired him to look. "There runs your whole family, in fact. Shall I loosen the latigo and slip the throat-latch for a prodigal's return?"

Con snorted what Gloriana chose to consider a negative answer and stamped a petulant forefoot for emphasis.

"No? Is it that you don't love them, or love me more? Reckon you know too well where your oats are threshed!"

His willingness on the trail toward the inspection of her mule band, on which she was bound, recalled the day when he had become her personal property, an acquisition due to the fact that they both were "red-heads."

The Blaze outfit had been off on a six-day "walk-down" after the very outlaw who had just disappeared through a cleft in the ridges. Six months would not have sufficed, the ranch hands had self-respectingly declared, to put a string on the Streak. From the chuck-wagon they had produced their only capture, a spindle-legged colt, made "doggie" by the persistence of their unsuccessful drive.

At once the girl's mother-instinct had gone out to the wabby orphan.

Then had ensued a year in which he had followed her. Always at her heels, he even trespassed into the ranch-house when his way was not barred.

There had come the day just as Mary Ellen, the lady-cook of the home ranch, was beating the triangle for "grub-pile" and all the outfit was gathering upon the porch, she had raced into the yard to offer proof of her latest feat of "busting," her glorious red hair flowing behind her in the wind.

"Bless me if they don't look like—They sure are some conflagration!" exclaimed her father pridefully. "It needed Glory's brand of grit to bust a critter foaled like that Streak colt, and you can bet your *alce* on that!"

"Conflagration? You've hit it at last, boss!"

The horse had then and there been formally christened by the sousing of a bottle of beer over his foretop, while Mary Ellen O'Grady fumed over the supper growing cold in the mess-shack. Later, "Conflagration" had been familiarized into "Connie."

A glance ahead, as they topped a rise and dipped toward the ford of "Lost-and-Found," quickened again their speed. Some auto-tourist party appeared to have come to grief in the quicksands of the stream which here came up for air and ran like a regular water-course, only to return to subterranean flow a few miles further south.

The nearer view showed the vehicle in distress to be a motor-truck which had left the hardpan crossing and come to a period in midstream. When one of the two men aboard left the driver's seat, climbed over the load and seemed about to attempt wading ashore, Gloriana felt impelled to warn him.

"Hold up, stranger!" she shouted, cupping her hands trumpetwise. "Wait till your hurry's over. You've got all the time there is."

CHAPTER II.

THE SIGN-POST MAN.

AT the bank, before dismounting, she surveyed the situation.

The foreground included the squatted figure of "Always Busy," an old Apache, whose chief characteristic was con-

tradicted by his name. At ease, he sat upon his haunches, his lackadaisical gaze upon the bogged machine a misnamed mystery, this buck, since, while he never worked, he usually had money.

As the stranger seemed minded to heed her shouted warning, Gloriana spared a word for the Indian.

"Hello, Busy! Living up to your rep as per usual, I see!"

"Ugh!" His grunt was doubtless intended for "Certainly." Busy was always most dignified in his idleness.

"Left your helping hand back in the teepee with your squaw, eh?"

"Ugh!" This time he embellished the guttural with an expressive shrug and the comment: "White man damn fool, Missey Gloryfrazee!" His unsleeved arm flung a gesture of scorn toward the truck.

The girl's glance of appraisal studied the stranger so characterized. He stood on the tail of the machine—erect, lean, intent. Even at the distance she could see that his features were massed for other effect than beauty. There was a straightness to the line of his mouth and an obstinate set to his shaved jaw which she noted as if from recognition, although certain she never had seen him before.

Whom was it he resembled?

Across the rippling yards between them, her frown put the question. It was at once forgotten, however, in her displeasure at sight of his clothes.

"So?" ran her mental comment. "The gent I'm delegated by circumstance to help is *that* sort—the puttee-knicker, belt-coated, Panama-hatted sort! Beyond doubt a raw Easterner, of the breed that never measures up."

As if the fact that he drove one of her pet abominations were not enough! Motor-cars might be excused in cow-persons such as—well, they are all right as playthings for young Philip Strong, of the neighboring Emerald Ranch. But for horse people—

With a shake Gloriana doffed her inclination to tell the stranger just what she thought of him while he was in her power.

Just there the Lost-and-Found was a monster, limpid though it looked. Men, horses, unnumbered cattle had been gulped

in its greed. The floor area of the truck kept that from being drawn under, but a wading human wouldn't have a chance.

"Then you advise me to stay here?" His tone and expression were rueful. "Tedious prospect, that. Couldn't you throw out a pontoon bridge?"

At his somewhat frivolous question Gloriana sniffed.

"I'm not up to bridge-throwing, but I'll fling you my string and tow you ashore."

Forthwith she unfastened the horse-hair riata from her saddle-horn and limbered its supple stands. With a free-arm movement that bespoke the control of hard muscles underneath, she circled the noose several times about her head. Suddenly, before you would have imagined it could have gained such force it shot forward to a sure-aim fall about the stranger's shoulders.

"Bravo!" applauded the older person, who still sat behind the steering-wheel.

"Guess I'm not the first man you've roped," was the comment of him she had caught.

Gloriana ignored the general admiration, even that of Always Busy, who hugged himself, swayed and grunted as delightedly as if he had performed the feat himself. She made his participation more active by ordering him on his feet to act as anchor at the slack end of the rope. Instructing the cheerful blunderer to fasten the loop under his armpits, then lengthen himself into the stream, she laid hold of the lariat. Her salvage proved a more considerable weight than she had judged, but not too much, either for the "string" or her own strength. Soon she had dragged him over the dangerous sink.

As he climbed the bank, his tenderfoot garb dripping, his fingers at work loosening the noose, she saw that his eyes were a rather lightish blue, with what looked like a veil over them. They were well-set beneath a high forehead, their paleness probably accented by their very dark lashes and brows. When he removed his misshapen Panama to speak to her, his hair showed to be brown, thick and of ungraceful stiffness above his right temple, probably from a cowlick.

"Miss or madam, I thank you," he said

elaborately, but with a quaver in his voice that sounded more like amusement than the deeper emotion of gratitude. "As a saver of human life, as a fisher of a decidedly appreciative fish, you are a success. If you could only have done it with one quick jerk, though, as I've seen trout landed, I needn't have wet my clothes."

A surge of indignation caught her as she watched him squeeze the tails of his Norfolk and pull out to the sun-rays the unspeakable outlines of his knickers.

But Gloriana had learned to discipline herself. With polite calm, she remarked:

"If you'd had presence of mind enough, you might have left your pretty jacket on the truck. And if you'd been driving cayuses, their instinct of protecting themselves, if not you, would have kept them from entering a swallow-all like that, no matter how hard you insisted. But you can't expect gasoline to have horse-sense any which way."

"I've met a horse or two myself in my day, but—"

The laugh with which he had started ended abruptly. The more familiar part of his face—his jaw—set in stern lines.

"Young lady, it is unpatriotic for you to criticise me or my conveyance," he concluded.

"Unpatriotic?"

"Yes. You see, the government has approved both me and the motor-truck."

"The—*the government!*"

"Allow me to introduce ourselves. I have the honor of being Seth Gilson, of the United States Geological Survey, in your midst on desert duty. While yonder"—with quite a flash he waved toward his companion—"the gentleman on the truck may look to you like a mere reproduction of Patience on a monument. As a matter of fact, he is no less a person than Alonzo Funk, my assistant, said to be more intimately acquainted with Forty-Mile Desert and Death Valley than any other man extant."

Making a megaphone of his hands, he shouted:

"Off with your hat, Alonzo; look pleasant; bow! Even though marooned, show that you have some effete manners."

All the severity of Gloriana's face rippled away as she watched these instructions obeyed; saw a head of beautiful, moon-silvery hair, uncovered to the sunlight by the older man; tried, but in vain, to distinguish the words of acknowledgment, he called across. She bowed pleasantly in return. For the sake of her father she was always her pleasantest with older men.

"Well, for geologists," she observed to Seth Gilson, "you two haven't shown yourselves keen to quicksand. A hundred-foot gee to the right would have given you a hard-pan ford all the way across."

For just a second a gleam showed through the opacity of his eyes, and one corner of his mouth twitched as he replied:

"But I have a good excuse—always make a point of having one or two handy in case of mistakes. A flock of horses or a covey or whatever you say—"

"A band," she corrected.

"Thanks so much. A band of what looked to be wild horses went tearing southward and diverted my caution. Since you, too, like horses—"

"Any excuse is better than none," she commented, with returning acerbity, in the pause of his tentative appeal.

"That's the idea!" He nodded cheerfully. "But the burning question of the moment is how to get that superwagon of mine on this side."

Already Gloriana had been giving the problem serious thought. Seth Gilson, even though so imposingly announced as of the U. S. Service, seemed more or less helpless—considerably more, in fact, than less.

"I can't, you know, go back and push it, after all the trouble you've had getting me out."

"Your load—heavy or light?"

"Compared to lighter things—heavy," he sighed. "Since you show an interest, we carry galvanized steel pipes to be used as water sign-posts on the desert."

She turned quickly, looked him over again, from Panama to puttees.

"So you—you are the sign-post man?"

Again he bared his head and more ceremoniously than before he bowed, the Panama pressed against the sopping chest of his Norfolk.

"At last you really get me!"

Gloriana flushed. She was sure now he was making sport of her. The stripes in her tawny eyes darkened as she lifted them to his and remarked, with a smile that somehow warned against smiles in response:

"Would I need to be so bright 'to get' a sign-post man? Besides, we heard that you were coming. It's to be hoped that you carry a 'Stop, Look, Listen!' against quicksand, if other mushers are as slow to recognize it as you."

But her small barb shunted off his amiable exterior. He answered with the concern of sincerity:

"Unfortunately, Alonzo and I are equipped only to mark the desert water. However, I can have a special sign for quicksand executed on my return if you think it advisable."

"Oh, it's not likely that regular travelers will be dense enough to need it!" She aimed at him again. "I was only thinking that if any more geological experts were to follow you--"

Instinctively artistic, she always left something to the imagination of those she met in verbal combat. Her consideration veered now from the cause of the dilemma to the dilemma itself. She set her mind upon the problem of how best and quickest to help him.

The difficulties to be overcome likely would make her "best" essential. Her "quickest" was urged by the pawing impatience of Con to be off on their errand. It did seem unfair that their day's work and their supper must needs be postponed while she pulled out of the voracious creek-bed one Seth Gilson, one elderly assistant and one motor-truck. The remembrance that the truck was loaded with government supplies was an urge quite timely, in view of the fact that her gaze had returned to the puttees.

"Any block and tackle on your go-wagon?" she asked.

"Enough to catch all the fish that aren't in your Arizona deserts."

"Then I reckon I can yank you out. Oh, don't begin thanking me! I'll help myself to what thanks I want in the joy of revenge."

"Revenge, Miss Young Lady—and against an admiring, helpless man, whose only crime toward you is asking your advice?"

Her gaze lifted from the puttees to his face. "If it's for my entertainment that you keep frothing up that soft-soap, stranger, pray desist!"

After a further moment of consideration, she gave her orders.

"Keep your assistant where he is. You mind my horse or—better let him mind you. Me? Oh, the trail I'm going to take is entirely too geological for the company of anybody but Always Busy here."

She crossed to the squatting Indian. Despite his guttural protests, she shook him to his feet. "You come along with missy. Always Never!" she commanded him.

With no further word of explanation, either to white man or red, she dug into a rough trail that led up the side of a bisecting ridge—a short-cut to her original destination.

Seth Gilson stood in a negligent position, staring after her, literally allowing her horse to "mind" him. His eyes remained vague as the hazes that obscured the secrets of the sky overhead. But the words he muttered, after he had gazed a while, although not loud enough possibly to have been intended for his assistant or even the horse, had some force.

"Roped—and at first throw!"

CHAPTER III.

TWENTY-MULE POWER.

MORE than that help-the-stranger spirit, which had vitalized so many lonely hearts in the West, speeded Gloriana Frazer up the cut-off trail and across the ridge to the acres of the ranch her father called "Blaze," after his own nickname. Nor could her resentment of Seth Gilson, of his sanguinity, his clothes, or his bogged conveyance detract from her satisfaction on first sight of her grazing mule herd. The fact that he was the sign-post man, entrusted with the duty of making the deserts safe to thirsty travelers, warranted any possible effort to aid him.

Within the week, on an evening when they had sat together in the cool of the porch, her father had told her what the United States Survey was doing in their direction.

"Heard to-day that they're going to scatter dig-down posts over the Solemncholy Desert," he said, with feeling in his voice that did not match the topic. "Just to think what fifteen feet of light digging would have saved! The signs come four years too late to help us, Glory, but we sure can rejoice for those they're calculated to save to-morrow and the next day!"

To Gloriana, as to many another woman of the desert fringes, the Solemncholy Desert was the darkest spot on the map of Arizona. Its seeming drought had claimed her mother to a terrible death from thirst four years previous—and merely because none of the party with which she had been traveling homeward from a visit to an ailing relative on the other side had been desert-wise to the fact that springs of pure water lay hidden just a few feet beneath their blistered soles.

That truck in the sink of the Lost-and-Found was laden with sign-posts which, when properly placed, might prevent other such tragedies. Unworthy the memory of her mother she would have felt had she left anything undone to speed the mission of the putteed strangers.

She did not explain to the misnamed Indian. No more could Always Busy explain to himself why he followed the pace she set over the rocky spur and down into the bottom where the wild red-top waved. He was afraid of her father, who had a way of "blazing" away at peaceful folks, but he did not obey him. He was not afraid of this girl, yet he performed the most effortful tasks she set. *Quien sabe?*

Locating the bell mare, a flea-bitten white that had outlived other usefulness, Gloriana soon had the hybrids—browns and blacks that wore her personal brand upon their short-haired hips—within the training corral. Twenty of the most colorful, picked *mula de carga* every one, which had enjoyed her particular schooling, lined up at her whistled signal. The Apache she commanded to help adjust the trail harness

which would give them to understand that work was expected of them.

Five minutes saw the animals equipped. In response to her sharp "*Anda! Anda!*" they trotted over the trail after the Indian. The girl herself brought up in the rear to guard against possible truancy.

Over a course which would have been dangerous for horses, the thin-legged, dainty-hoofed creatures proceeded with a carelessness that only seemed to be such. Their big ears beat time to the march in a sort of goose-step. Their only load was such lengths of rope as the girl had been able to gather at the corral.

A welcoming shout from Seth Gilson greeted their appearance over the ridge. Alonzo Funk, still marooned midstream, arose from the front seat of the truck and stared his amazement.

"A twenty mule-power wonder you're about to work before our very eyes, Miss—Miss Miracle," commented the surveyor, when they were near enough to each other for speech.

"Not Miss Miracle," corrected Gloriana, wondering how he could have mistaken her for her friend, Philomena, who was a decided brunette and buxom to a degree. "She's retired from the range to preside over the bar of Eddie Bristo's 'Oasis' up in Rabbit Ear. Gloriana Frazer is the name I answer to and I'm not aiming to be any wonder-worker, either. We'll leave that to the mules."

"You can scarcely blame me for thinking you a promising member of the Miracle family when—presto, chango—you disappear among the rocks and return with a fully equipped pack-train. What next?"

"Next" proved to be the recovery of the block and tackle from the truck. Without further dignifying his persiflage, Gloriana flung her rope to Funk with equally well-aimed instructions.

Soon she drew to the bank the pulley-aid, through which she meant to apply her mule power. With Gilson's help this was fastened to a convenient cottonwood, the beasts formed tandem and drawing lines strung to the truck.

There ensued a tense moment after she had started the elongated pressure by a

sharp word of Spanish command. Would the ropes stand the strain? Would the suction of the sand or hybrid power prove the stronger? All faces asked the questions except that of the Apache. His constitutional indifference to "pale" troubles had returned him to his favorite seat.

The mules pressed forward in their grass collars, dug their hoofs into the soil, pulled as one. The ropes turned in twisting protest, but were too well made to fray. Sucking sounds came from the sands. The truck, with its cargo of desert life preservers, began to move, although at first so reluctantly as to leave the issue still in doubt. Under the soft encouragement of their trainer, which was contrary to all prescribed rules for hectoring hybrids, the twenty dug deeper into the earth, straining harder upon their breast-bands. The movement of the truck became more definite; the suction lessened; in the end they drew their load out upon the bank.

His slouch hat in hand, Alonzo Funk came forward to be presented at closer range and to express his gratitude. A sort of quiet that blanketed his features caught the girl's attention. Was it the tranquillity of long study of rocks, she wondered, or the reflex from those deserts he was reputed to know so well—deserts listless and cruel as a sleeping sea?

"I am both ashamed and glad of our late predicament," he began in a voice almost lazy in its deliberation. "The shame is for our carelessness in driving into such an evident trap; the joy is over making your acquaintance, Miss Frazer, even though your efficiency rather shatters my preconceived ideas of the supremacy of the male. Allow me to thank you."

His bow was courtly; quite out of keeping with his rough garb, his carelessly trimmed beard, his unkempt hair.

"Don't thank me," deprecated Gloriana. "Thank the mules. I'm going to live on hereabout and may some day benefit from the water-signs you mean to spread around Solemncholy Desert, so, you see, I have a selfish motive in helping. My mules haven't. Lacking ulterior motive in the service they gave, they're entitled to such credit as is."

The old man bowed toward the band.

"Consider yourselves thanked for once being stubborn in a worthy cause," he saluted them, then returned his quiet gaze to Gloriana. "Permit me, at least, to express my appreciation of the sight of you in action. With the ultimate fate of us all so assuredly near, one's pleasure in the beautiful grows."

The girl was spared any embarrassment at the direct compliment by the look of unutterable gloom that now settled upon the geologist's weathered face.

"Ultimate fate?" she pondered.

"Possibly you don't know that the earth is drying up," was the morose return. "Yes, ma'am, there's no disputing the fact. This planet on which we dwell is destined to become like the moon. Its surface waters absorbed within, its very oceans dried up, it will become a dead orb, traveling through future ages, tenantless, about the sun."

"But not in your time or Miss Frazer's," put in Gilson, with characteristic cheer.

"If you ask for proof"—Funk continued his hobby riding—"look out over your own Solemncholy yonder. The deserts are rapidly, steadily spreading over the earth. Already we Americans have lost one-fifth of our territory. Ultimate fate assured? I should say it was!"

Gilson's laugh—which Gloriana privately decided she liked best of anything she had noticed about him—rang out. "Your ultimate, Alonzo, will become decidedly more assured if you don't get busy drying out that motor and making Hercules again mobile."

He waved toward the truck.

With another profound bow for the girl, the old man turned to his task. Gloriana deserted her English in some instructions to Always Busy regarding the return of the mules to their range.

"Friend Funk is a bit pessimistic in the ultimate," said the surveyor when she rejoined him. "But on the desert he's never out of tone with the landscape. That, you see, makes him the best sort of a companion."

"But of course he's all wrong about the earth drying up and turning into a second-rate moon?"

"Centuries hence his forebodings will doubtless come true—yes, Miss Young Lady. Meantime we have started upon a campaign to check desert encroachment, to make the wastes safe and habitable for man and his woman. The planning of this is part of my work out here and the Solemn-choly of your own front yard is my latest assignment."

They approached the truck, where he lifted the canvas that she might examine the load she had helped to salvage. The posts were galvanized steel pipes, two inches in diameter and twelve feet long. The water-signs that they would eventually carry were also of steel, enameled in white lettering upon a dark-blue background.

Bitterly Gloriana thought of what an earlier marking of the desert might have meant to her. But of this she did not speak. Instead, true to her West, she offered an invitation that Gilson and his wet-blanket companion accept the hospitality of her father at Blaze Ranch on their return.

"You're from the East, aren't you?"

This was the one gibe she allowed herself—and only after her proffer had been provisionally accepted and she was again astride Conflagration.

Washington, District of Columbia, is headquarters, but—"

"Don't apologize. *Somebody's* got to live back East," she interrupted. "Come to see us when you're through tagging the desert. You haven't horses to feed, but Hercules may be thirsty for gasoline, and we keep some always on hand—to run the pump."

Gilson checked her departure with a reminder.

"You spoke of revenge; might I have a diagram showing just where that enters in?"

"Through the mules." This time she laughed—and evidently at him. But still he looked puzzled.

"Here's the diagram," she added. "When the motor craze honked over the country it looked as though we horse folks were doomed to become also-rans. It took a world war to reestablish our importance in the big scheme of things. But still it's sweet revenge to find an auto in trouble and yank it out with mule-power. Much obliged for to-day's contribution."

"Don't mention it," he returned as she started her horse.

He was left wondering whether or not she had heard his addendum: "Sweet revenge—I'll come back, Miss Young Lady, for some of my own."

But he did not care. The promise was made really to himself. His mind was made up to that one thing—he was coming back.

CHAPTER IV.

TOKENS FROM BEYOND.

GLORIANA FRAZER'S homeward pace, one mid-afternoon nearly a week subsequent to her tussle with the sands of the Lost-and-Found, was easy. Her horse dictated that it should be a cow-trot, seeming to realize from the lax pressure of his loved rider's knees that, although the afternoon was but half spent, she must be tired. And, indeed, she was.

Before daybreak she had been in the saddle, as on so many days since the last labor raid of their neighbor and enemy, Philip Strong, Sr. The one remaining wrangler of their outfit fallen to the bribe of wages which her father could not pay and privileges which he would not grant, her own ranch duties had multiplied.

No longer were the mules, her own particular property, the chief responsibility of her rides afield. The several Frazer horse bands, all sorrel or bay and segregated as to ages, had to be visited as often as possible, which meant the daily covering of many miles in the saddle. Although her father undertook as much of the inspection and care as one man well could, there remained a constant strain upon the daughter brought up much as a son would have been. Fortunately, the past activity of the rangers and the distance which lay between the ranch and the international line to the south made close herding against rustlers unnecessary. Otherwise the two could not have put through the work which, under ordinary conditions, would have been apportioned to four or five punchers.

The care of the colts and their dams had been apportioned to Mary Ellen O'Grady. That the bounteous-built spinster need not

neglect the cook-shack which was her especial domain, the mares had been pastured as near the ranch-house as possible and a buckboard provided for her to-and-fro trips to the colts.

As the season advanced, outside help would become absolutely necessary. That was the text of Gloriana's fear to-day—fear because, if they were forced to employ vaqueros, the chief of Blaze Ranch traditions would be shattered. Her father still hoped to recruit several old wranglers of past friendship, who might be counted upon to withstand Strong's efforts to cripple them and to these had written most persuasively. Only one of the letters had been answered, and that was unsatisfactorily. That the other's would ever reach the veteran rovers seemed to the girl highly problematical.

From a vantage-point on the home trail she had a view into Emerald Basin, the ranch-hold of her father's enemy, known as the "Silver Fox." Down there fully a dozen punchers were drifting a bunch of bald-faced Herefords toward one of the big corals which three easily might have handled. The ache that had settled between her shoulders gave acuteness to her envy of such an overplus of man-power.

Momentarily her eyes rested upon the low concrete house whose yellow-tinted walls and red-tile roof showed effectively against the green background of the further slope. A veritable palace of dreams with which the youthful imagination might conjure, it had added importance as the home of the younger Strong—splendid-looking "Phil," who had personified to Gloriana since her childhood the idea of romance. Because of the long-standing feud between her father and his, she had never been inside the house—never, in fact, met the son except by chance, either on the trail or at the homes of friends in town. Despite his protests against such a quixotic restriction to the growth of the strong attraction between them, she remained too loyal to her father to appoint secret rendezvous with him.

From general report, after the barbecue and ballé which had warmed this "show" house of the range, she knew the luxury of its high-ceilinged rooms, the combined art

and comfort of its tiled patio with splashing fountain. The elder Strong was as successful as shrewd—that she had to admit, loyally as she tried to share in the Frazer antipathy, to the original cause of which she never had been able to penetrate.

Disillusionment was inevitable as she turned her eyes ahead toward her own home, certainly rough in comparison. No changes had been made there since the arid soul of the desert had called the wife and mother unto itself. The house with which Blaze Frazer had planned to replace his cabin did not seem worth the building, since there were only two of them left, and they spent most of their time in the open. Besides, the money therefor never seemed to be in hand.

A certain parental plunge into politics by way of distraction—when the old fire-eater had been temporarily quenched by the fact of the naturalized Mexican vote going solidly for his opponent—that had been costly. Moreover, there was his "bad habit," the affixing of his John Hancock to the promissory notes of impecunious friends. These notes the elder Strong often shaved to profit, while Frazer usually suffered the loss of having to pay them on the default of the makers.

At the barn, a welcoming whinny from Flame, foretold her father's return from Rabbit Ear, their railroad town, earlier than she could have hoped. Providing for the comfort of Con, Gloriana started for the ranch-house.

Into the main chamber of her house, the girl who had ruled there since her sixteenth year stepped softly, in case her parent might be snatching a nap after his long ride. Instead, he stood with his back toward the door, facing a portrait of the lost "Marge," whose memory remained the burning flame of his life. A fair likeness it was, suggesting the little lady as she had looked in her prime, dainty and sweet, vividly brunette, with one of the red roses which she was said to have resembled clasped against her breast.

Although Gloriana had stopped just within the door and waited, Blaze seemed to feel her presence. At once he turned about and faced her, a blond giant, unbent

by the years which had turned to a tawny shade the still-plentiful thatch whence had come his sobriquet. One glance at his clean-shaved, weathered face told her that he was suppressing some excitement.

With quick steps she crossed to him.

"Aren't you home earlier than you expected?" she asked.

As he did not reply, just stood there looking at her, with that strained, unusual expression, she put another question with what case she might: "Well, what's on your mind besides your mane?"

Taking one of her hands with a strong pressure, he led her toward the single seat. "Do you remember the color of that veil Margie wore the day when she—she left us?"

The girl cast a sidewise look at him.

"As if you didn't remember, too!" she exclaimed. "Was there anything about her, what she wore, how she smiled, every word she said, that we haven't discussed many times?"

"Yes, yes, Glory-girl; but my memory don't seem as good as it was. Was there anything particular about the veil she wore that day?"

More surprised than before, Gloriana detailed: "It was the color of roses, and extra thick, as her skin always suffered so from the desert dust. And on one hem of it I had perpetrated my most ambitious bit of embroidery as a going-away surprise—her initials, with some forget-me-nots, that likely wouldn't have wanted anybody to remember them, entwined."

"Did it look anything—*like this*?"

Still holding her one hand, Blaze withdrew the other from his pocket and stretched toward her a folded piece of veiling—thick chiffon and the color of roses, embellished with faded blue flowers twined through a lattice-work formed of the initials M. B. F.

The girl seized it, examined it closely, smothered a hard-suppressed sob into its softness.

"Dad!" she exclaimed, scarce above her breath. "Where? How?"

As her hands lowered there sounded a faint metallic click upon the hearth. Gloriana did not notice it in the upsurge of her

mother-longing, but Blaze swooped after what had fallen from the veil. As he straightened he looked into his daughter's face with an expression she had never seen in his eyes before.

"Glory," he said, in a voice that further agitated her because so suppressed, "all may not be over with the littlest pardner. There is a chance that she still lives, that we may find her. Look at this!"

He held out for her inspection that which had clicked upon the hearth—a bracelet so small that it looked to belong to some child, wrought of hammered silver.

As the girl examined it she remembered well the day Blaze had had it fastened about her mother's tiny wrist by a Navaho silversmith, with the idea that it would never be removed. At sight of it, hope died within her.

"But, but—" She faltered over the cruel suggestion. "If some one found this on the desert and gave it to you, it would mean that— Oh, don't you remember, Daddy-Blaze, that she never could slip it over her hand?"

"I had the Indian put it there with a prayer for luck, and I've got a hunch that prayer's going to be answered yet. Marge must 'a' been mighty sick, mighty thin before this could have been slipped from her wrist. But that don't mean that she—that she— Get a grip on yourself, my girl, while I tell you how I came by these things. Here, read the letter that was with them for yourself."

"You mean that you got them—"

"In the mail, yes. Handed to me by Em Walton at the Rabbit Ear post-office first thing when I 'lighted there to-day."

His eyes agleam, voice exultant, hand shaking, he passed her a soiled sheet of paper, written over with irregular, pencil-printed letters. Now as stirred as he, Gloriana lifted it to the light. It was dated ten days before from Nogales, Mexico, and read in full:

SEÑOR:

Woman here with us now four years, may be relation with you. We find her desert loco. Long time she knew not much. Some time she cry for Blaze and Glory. We not understand. Now she say her name is Frazer. We make inquiries and

hear about you. If you have lost your woman, better come look at this one found. No reward is asked but the expenses she have cost us—five thousand gold.

Bring it yourself to San Ignacio, Señora Estate, Mex. Rep. There you visit all pulque shops. Ask in each one for José el Toro. Nobody can tell you about him it seem. But be not discouraged. Somebody will learn by your askings who you are, and direction to rancheria will be furnish to you. No word of this to Americano counsel or to rurales is our warning.

As evidence of our respected esteem, señor, we send you amulet from wrist of woman and garment token of recognition.

There was no signature.

When Gloriana glanced up, her resemblance to her father was more than usually striking. No need for her to ask what his response would be; no need for him to ask whether she approved. Despite the anonymous authorship of the message, the money-hold-up, the covert threat of its warning against appeal to the authorities—all this counted for nothing by common consent in view of the possibility of ultimate, priceless reward.

The virile look upon both faces—the wind-burned, time-creased old one, and fair, flushed younger—the fire-gleam in the two pairs of topaz eyes, foretold that there need be no occasion for argument as to their response.

"I'll catch that early train south in the morning," said he. "I've raised the five thousand by cleaning out our bank and borrowing back some I had lent to my many friends."

Gloriana stood with hands pressed upon her thighs and fingers gripping the seams of her riding trousers.

"God help you split the scenery!" she breathed.

It was characteristic of the man-to-man attitude of the two so much alike that neither missed the embrace or possible kiss which in another father and daughter would have been a natural expression. The girl did, however, offer her hand for a "shake," nor winced under the physical twinge of his return.

"Someway," she promised, "I'll keep the horses grazing! I'll do my bit to help matters along!"

For the first time a noticeable uneasiness

entered the eyes of Blaze. Emphatically he shook his leonine head.

CHAPTER V.

THE REBEL SPARK.

ALWAYS had Gloriana Frazer been a dutiful daughter — unless she thought she had good and sufficient reasons for being otherwise. Her father's postponement of the naming of his objection was in honor of this recognized characteristic.

Taking down the wall map, he began to trace his route. He would take the rattler east to Tucson, and change there for a south-bound local to the international boundary at Nogales, he declared. If Mexican trains were running, which was always doubtful, he could continue by rail to the San Ignacio appointed in the letter, where he was to put his mysterious inquiry among the pulque shops.

But from San Ignacio—where? Not a hint was disclosed as to which way those "directions to rancheria" would lead him. That the little hostage had been sequestered in some remote place unfrequented by Americans for the assurance of the ransom named for her restoration was a logical surmise. Otherwise rumors might have been started which, considering the wide regional knowledge of their loss, would likely have reached them. But they had not even a compass point of speculation. The human caché might be back in the Sierra de Pinitos to the eastward or in the opposite direction over the Rio de Altar way. Indeed, San Ignacio might prove to be only a teasing stop-over along an extended journey into the republic of trouble.

The strange, hand-printed missive made plain that the "samaritans"—neither of the Frazers could think of their informants in harsher terms, any more than they could prefix the "good" that usually accompanies the allusion—had reasons of their own for conducting negotiations with the greatest caution. Beyond that, father and daughter soon agreed that they could not and need not go.

Together they folded the veil of faded

rose chiffon; wrapped in it the silver circlet, whose small circumference enclosed so much that was significant. Then Blaze wrapped around them and the letter the paper covering in which they had been mailed to him.

"I'll leave these with you, my girl, just to remind you, in case you miss your dad, why he went away. But it's best to keep it our secret—until we know."

With the words he crossed the room and tucked the packet into a pigeonhole of her desk.

Gloriana made a creditable attempt at a laugh of cheer. "I'll miss you—if I find time," she said. "But I won't be any lady of leisure if I keep the gearing of this horse ranch oiled. What with that five thousand and your expenses to pay, we'll need a record clean-up on the market band. Not that you're to think of money in taking care of—of her, after you've redeemed her. Doctors, if she needs them, nurses, food, clothes—everything of the best that is! Then we'll want to build the real house as soon as we can make the raffle—a kind of temple consecrated to our gratitude."

Absorbed in the premature plans which will come at such epochs, she did not notice how the veteran's shoulder had lifted as he turned to her, how his face had stiffened as if in preparation for some blow.

"Glory-girl," he began gravely, "I sloped along all those by-trails before I left town. There wasn't time to come home and consult with you first, so I—well, I just arranged for everything."

His hesitant, almost apologetic tone caught her attention. She gazed up at him, waiting for answer to the questions which raced, unput, through her mind.

What arrangements had he thought it necessary to make in town that were not already down in black and white? Their horses of marketable age—those beautiful, sleek-coated sorrels and bays bred for cavalry service—weren't they good as sold? The day had been appointed, a month hence, for the arrival of the army remount officers to make the inspection that would precede government branding, so why suggest a change of program? Even the mules, upon whose training she had lavished all

the skill that had come to her as a birth-right—had not they, as well, been bargained for?

The lapsing silence alarmed her.

"Elucidate," she suggested crisply.

Blaze gulped hard, then obeyed in a voice rapid and unctuous for him.

"I've decided to lease the ranch for three years—feel plumb sure you'll see that it's best all round, once you get used to the idea. We'll sell the horses and mules outright, except for Con and Flame. I had an offer that's mighty fair, considering the rush we're in, a half-hour after I let out that I had to go to Mexico. This will give us cash-in-hand for those expenses you were mentioning. After the three years are up—well, don't you reckon we kind of owe it to Marge to let her decide what she wants to do and where she wants to live? It's likely, ain't it, after all the horror she's been through, that she might hanker to get far away from the desert-edge? She's the one that ought to decide about the real house. Don't you think we owe that much to her?"

Gloriana had got to her feet during this unwontedly lengthy speech. Because every fiber of her mind and body strained for an expression of vehement denial, she took herself in hand.

"And what becomes of me?" she asked quietly. "Am I chucked in with the deal?"

"I worked that out, too. You'd best go up to Phoenix and hole-in with your Aunt Sarah until—until *we* get back. I'll bring Marge straight there. Meantime, you see, I won't be nagged to death worrying about you. And on your part, you won't find life dull among all your old schoolmates."

Privately Gloriana compared certain half-formed, ambitious plans she had meant to work out on her native range with the parent-made one staged in that vine-covered cottage in the capitol city. Her conclusions were not expressed except, perhaps, in the squaring of her jaw.

"You speak of an offer—a deal? Who made it?"

"Timothy Rudd, of the Eureka Feed and Sale Stables, came to the bat the moment I said I'd sell out the stock." Blaze

made the announcement with the reluctance of a pedro player leading a doubtful card.

To the girl the name was a culminative blow.

"You've arranged to sell our stock to *Timothy Rudd*?"

The indignation of her protest was no surprise to Blaze. Even to himself it had seemed a desecration that an outsider like the dapper feed-stable man, so recently from Missouri, that the reason for leaving his native State had not yet caught up with him, should settle on their home ranch, even as a tenant. The place would never seem the same again when they took it back, if ever they should. As for the stock—

But Gloriana was voicing their common thought: "I don't burr to his way with horses any more than our reds will. Oh, if it was anybody but Rudd!"

The sandy brows of the veteran drew down. "His system is fuller of deuces than aces, for sure. But who else was there for me to dicker with? He was right on the job and nobody else was. He's got the mazuma, and he ain't been here long enough to mind hiring greasers, so the labor shortage won't bother him none. We'll have to let her go as she lies."

For a moment Gloriana gave up to urgent calculation. For long her father had called her "pardner," and in the past generally had consulted her. In view of a decision she had reached before hearing of this catastrophe, to which she knew she would never become reconciled, she felt the right to speak her mind.

"Have you signed up with Rudd?" she began. "Has the money passed hands?"

"Not yet, child; but—"

"Then give up the deal and let me run the ranch while you're gone. I'm not afraid of the work, and I can surely get some one to help out with the riding, in view of my emergency. Mary Ellen will stick—we can count on her. And you needn't worry about my handling the inspection. I simply know there isn't a spot in the wide world that mother would rather be brought back to than old Blaze Ranch. Why, dad, it was her home—and home to

a woman of her sort means more than a man ever could understand. She'll become her real self quicker and surer here than—"

"I thought of that, too," Frazer interrupted, the troubled look of his face deepening. "Your offer is just what I expected—brave and unselfish. But it's too brave and unselfish for me to accept. And I know Marge wouldn't want me to. No telling how long it will take to deal with these manana Mexicans. The five thousand may be only a starter, and, no matter what the price, I'm not coming back without her. If you did succeed in hiring a puncher or two up at the Ear, you couldn't keep 'em. That hell-fiend over in the basin would run 'em off on you. And even if they stuck, he'd find some other way of making trouble for you, for there ain't a decent corpuscle in his veins. Fighting a girl would just suit him."

"You've often said I was as good as two men. Were you flattering me, dad, or have I lost your confidence?"

"*You* lose my confidence? Say, you'll take that back after you've glimmed through this document!"

Blaze produced from his pocket a paper of legal look and tendered it to her for his justification.

As she hastily glanced it through, he interjected soothing comment: "I reckon that lawyer paper shows how much my confidence has been lost in the one and only Glory-girl, eh? You needn't be afraid to trust your eyes—it's a power-of-attorney, as absolute as the judge knew how to draw. Tim Rudd will ride out with you to-morrow afternoon after you've seen me off and make a stock tally which will determine the exact amount he's to pay over to you. He's to pay it straight to you, understand, and you're to sign all the necessary papers. That's how much confidence I've lost!"

But if he hoped the document would distract her from the issue, he was doomed to disappointment. Rather, it seemed to point her complaint.

"Since you trust me enough to deal me one card, why not the whole hand?" she demanded. "If I'm up to holding my own against a natural-born shark like Rudd,

why say I'm not up to playing the straight game of running the ranch?"

"Glory"—the old fellow faced her squarely, now as flushed as she—"there ain't no use your trying to razoo me!"

"Razoo—me razoo you, dad?"

"Don't you reckon I know why you're so set on sticking to the ranch? Do you think I'm blind to what every one else has seen—the truth about you and that yellow dog's whelp?"

The girl turned on the parent she had aroused by her insistence with equally flagrant signs of resentment.

"You can't call Phil Strong insulting names before me, dad, even if you do hate his father. And if you're not blind, as you say, you know there's nothing below the surface between Phil and me. I've put your wishes before my own—you know that!"

"I do know it, and I'm not denying it. You've always played the game above the table—I'll say that for you. But why try to bluff me now?"

"Dad, you—"

He silenced her angry retort.

"It's because I wouldn't trust P. H. Strong, Sr., in the first place, or anybody with a drop of his sneaking blood in the second, that I won't consent to your staying here at their mercy. And I won't—that's plumb settled!"

"You'd acknowledge yourself licked to everybody that knows us and P. H.?"

"And Phil, Jr.—don't you leave him out of it," Blaze added. "I'd take a bet that if it was nosed around I'd left you here alone, he'd slope right over the line and be pestering you."

"That's enough, dad! You're sloping right over my feelings when you talk that way about somebody I've told you frankly is my friend!"

"One hound of a friend!" the veteran blazed anew. "And as for acknowledging I'm licked, I didn't expect you to be the first to throw that up to me. I'm not licked—never was. But I reckon I can quit fighting when it's to save my girl-child from—well, from them that ain't fit to clean her riding boots, if you insist on complimentary language."

Gloriana started as if to voice the fury that showed in her face; then turned, her lips set tight, her hands clinched, and walked across to the window. But when she realized that her father had followed; when she felt his great, heavy hand upon her shoulder and looked up to see that his love for her had dimmed all the yellow flames of his hate for another—

Her hand met his in a strong grip and she listened to his feeling plea:

"We mustn't have hard words, pardner, especially just at this time. I've never given you a command, and I ain't going to now. It's only for your own good that I'm willing to quit the fight—to sacrifice the ranch. Don't you reckon if you'd take a little hike out into the fresh air you'd come to see it my way? Leastwise, won't you try to, Glory-girl?"

"Of course I will, my Daddy-Blaze," she promised fervently.

"I'll be loading up for to-morrow's trip while you're gone. You'll be back in good time for Mary Ellen's best-ever biscuits?"

"Don't you think you'll get to eat them all!"

With a fond laugh that falsely declared their difference forgot, she started out, but not to "hike." On Con's back she could best "think things out." There only could she "try" to change her mind.

CHAPTER VI.

A LADY'S WHIM.

IF Conflagration was surprised at the day's second call upon his services, he did not show it; indeed, he might have realized, from the pace set, that motion aided the human mental process. Too late in the day to seek her chief adviser, one known as "Danny" Dunn, Gloriana turned toward that monster desert which could gulp so voraciously man's first treasure of life. Perhaps through the purple hazes which at this closing hour of the day were draped before its cruel mysteries, just beyond where spread its yellow-green border of greasewood, she might see answer to another cruel mystery.

After a few moments' hard riding, she left

the trail and blazed one of her own up the slope, finally to draw rein in the shade of a palo verde which stood like a lookout on the last bluff before the rim of arid waste. How long she sat there, feeling, rather than thinking her problem, she did not calculate. She was startled when an alien rasp cut through the velvet nature noises of the hour. Then the triumphant honking of a siren not altogether unfamiliar told her that she had been espied upon her height and followed.

Philip Strong was reducing the speed of his racing car, his expression most contrite.

"I beg a thousand pardons," he exclaimed on pulling up. With goggle-eyed cap in hand he leaned over the steering-wheel toward the girl. "Had I remembered Connie's pet prejudice, I wouldn't have allowed my rubber-tired steed to whinny."

She avoided the intense look which accompanied his flippant words, and her response seemed somehow to reiterate her mount's resentment.

"Nothing wasted except a breath or two. But don't think I blame Con for acting loco—your daffy buggy is about as quieting to him as a 'phobia skunk."

There ensued a moment's pause in which like frowns from unlike reasons appeared on the faces of the young couple regarding each other—his from disappointment at her ungracious reception, hers from realization of the very pleasure she felt in the meeting.

Certainly, she told herself, with a smile close behind the frown, any girl might be pleased to have so gallant a knight pursue her. Philip Strong, Jr., was undeniably handsome, as well as likable—dark of eyes, luxuriant and black of hair, regular of features, of a good height, and muscular. So cogent was the appeal of his form and fitness to the girl born to appreciation of animal perfection that she had taken of late to warning herself against it.

Equally hard to resist was his frank subjection to the fair neighbor's influence over him. That weakness—or strength—he made no effort to conceal, excuse or boast, either before her or their little world. Always had he simply recognized it, as he did other established conditions in his life.

In view of the feud that smoldered between their respective parents, a bareheaded controversy of parts over ranch-hands, barbed-fences, water-holes—anything that could add fuel to the fires of that unfathomable, long-ago cause of their mutual dislike—Gloriana had encouraged this predilection in the beginning as an aid toward the prevention of actual hostilities. Later had come moments when she forgot just why it was so in the true girl's enjoyment of the fact that it *was* so.

That he should obtrude the influence of his presence, however, just when she had sought solitude to make a decision which concerned him, seemed an unfair, if unintentional advantage in his favor.

"I wish you wouldn't take your drives so near our place," she said, with the equivocal petulance she felt. "A blind gopher would get wise to what you're looking for."

"Have I ever said that fooling blind gophers was one of my ambitions? I've never broken my promise to keep outside your boundaries, have I? Further than that, I'm entitled to look for what I please."

"And I'm entitled to refuse to be looked at," she snapped, "so will you please toot-toot along?"

"You don't mean that, Glory?"

His laugh had been short-lived.

"I sure do."

"Why?"

"Because if my dad would see me talking to you so near home, or hear of it, he'd think I had broken my word to him and met you by appointment."

"But when can I ever see you—to talk to you? Are you going to let your father's rancor against mine spoil all my happiness and—I hope—just a little of your own?"

"That's just what I came here to think out, Phil; but I want to think it out alone."

He shook his head and sighed deeply.

"You're the most different sort of girl in Arizona, Glory Frazer," he said slowly. "Sometimes I wonder if you can be made of regular feminine material. I suppose a decent fellow has got to obey the whims of the lady he—"

"Then why don't you?" she cut in.

"Why don't I what?"

"Why don't you slope, since I've made it plain that that's my latest whim?"

She threw back her head, her tiger-striped eyes mocking his dark ones. Con, too, seemed moved by exasperation, pawed the earth impatiently.

But even then Strong did not obey. He sat staring up at her, his face slowly reddening, his mouth moving as if in an effort to hold back indignant words.

"I guess you—you don't quite mean—"

But startling interruption came to their difference. A man's voice, keyed to a stressful bellow, waved up from somewhere below.

"Help! Mr. Strong—help—help!"

Both the young folks turned, listened to the reiterated cry, leaned closer to the rim ahead. They saw trundling out of the desert, dust-gray as an alkali ghost, a large auto truck.

With her first long glance, Gloriana recognized it as the one her mules had dragged from the sink of the Lost-and-Found several days before. The driver was the sign-post man. Two other men were stretched upon the deck of the truck, but neither looked to be the old geologist.

Evidently it was recognition of these passengers which started Philip's response to the appeal in his name.

"Under the circumstances, you won't mind excusing me a moment?" he asked with frank irony. "Somebody who knows me is in trouble down there."

He started the racer and circled back to the road.

After a moment's deliberation, Gloriana yielded to her natural curiosity. The combination of those desperate cries with the government surveyor's return seemed peculiar. Holding Con to a more or less casual pace, she followed to see what she might see.

When she got down to them, both drivers had left their steering-wheels and were in the main trail, facing each other, Seth Gilson in the negligent attitude which had irritated her before, Philip taut with excitement. Her appearance upon the scene would have seemed to be quite unnoticed,

except that Gilson shifted one glance in her direction, pulled the Panama off his head, shook the dust off it, then, after a moment, replaced it.

Strong was speaking in an aroused voice, his gesture recalling her attention to the truck's passengers. She could now plainly see that they were bound with ropes; that one was a roughly bearded white, the other a swarthy Mexican.

A few steps through the mesquite brought her near enough to make out the words of the colloquy.

"Do let me save you the responsibility, stranger," Seth Gilson was urging, but without stress. "The sheriff will be glad enough to see my catch where they belong."

"That's at Emerald Ranch!" Philip advanced a threatening step or two. "My name is Strong—son of my father the owner. I can vouch for both your so-called prisoners, I tell you. You admit that you're not an officer, and that you have no warrant, so hand them over."

The geologist's smile expanded. "Not this happy afternoon," he objected.

"Now—immediately!"

The ring of command in Strong's voice thrilled the audience of one, even as his suddenly drawn automatic frightened her.

But neither thrill nor fright showed in the face of Gilson.

Gloriana started forward, then hesitated. Interference from her would probably relieve a situation tense with possibilities; but just in time a primitive desire to see the two weigh out in combat clutched her.

Of the merits of the controversy, she knew nothing—at the moment cared as little. But she did want to know the quality of Phil's fighting spirit. So long and bitterly had she heard him maligned by her parent, on account of a vicarious hate, that it would be a satisfaction, indeed, to see him prove himself. Also a satisfaction, although of a less personal nature, would it be to see the cock-sure sign-post man crumple to obedience. She gripped the horn of her saddle, her lips tight shut.

The next few moments would have to take care of themselves.

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.

Shall--or Shall Not



by
George Allan England

AS Eric Winton entered the law office of Solomon Merrick, on Cornhill, Boston, old Merrick looked up from his desk, and nodded curtly.

"Good morning, Eric!" said he. "I sent for you, to show you your Cousin Jethro's will. My letter told you that. But it didn't tell you something more important—something most unfortunate."

"Unfortunate?" asked the young architect. "Why, what's wrong now?" He laid his hat on the desk and sat down. "Has anything slipped, Mr. Merrick?"

"Yes," the lawyer answered. "Very much so. Things have all gone wrong for you."

"H-m! You don't say so!" ejaculated the architect, looking blank. His eyes clouded; he passed a hand over his smooth, chestnut hair. "Why, what can have gone wrong? You mean Cousin Jethro didn't leave any money, after all?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that! The money's in the bank in Portland, all right enough. But—you've been disinherited, that's all."

"Disinherited!" gulped Eric, half-starting up. "No!"

"Fact, sir," the lawyer answered. "Your cousin—really only your second cousin—was a most peculiar man. Even the way he kept his money was peculiar; kept it in that bank, in cash, instead of investing it as most men do. The manner of his life was odd, and he died in a singular way out

there in his cottage on Peaks Island in Portland Harbor. A strange man! A hard man, though just. He had his good points, but among them we can't count his keeping of his promise to you. That's turned out to be all mere wind."

"I tell you there's a mistake!" cried Eric. "It was all settled that Hester and I were to have—"

"No matter, you're cut off entirely. It's in black and white!"

Eric had turned a bit pale. He still persisted:

"But for six or seven years he's been planning to leave me well off! I'm the only one of the family he hasn't quarreled with. And then my marrying Hester clinched things. He thought her—as she is—the finest little woman in the world. Told me if I married her he'd leave practically everything to me—more than a hundred thousand. There's a mistake somewhere!"

"None whatever!" answered the lawyer. "It's an excellent rule not to calculate poultry in the shell. Thus you avoid shell-shock when the hatching fails. I know your cousin's agreement. Still, the unexpected has really happened. The copy of the will, sent me by Norris and Rosbaum, from Portland, proves it. It leaves you—"

"How much?"

"Not a cent in any specific bequest."

"Good night! And after all the obligations I've assumed!"

"Unwise to build castles in Spain with unhatched eggs for a foundation!" Merrick philosophized. "Still, everything was so well understood that I can't blame you for having bought that house out at the Reservoir, or the car, or anything else. But now it's all over!"

"Lord!" groaned Eric. "I don't care about myself. But Hester? What 'll she do now? Go back to work as a stenographer, or—"

"That's for you to settle, not me. I'm only concerned with the legal aspects of the matter. And those are absolutely as stated."

The architect leaned forward in his chair, and for a moment remained silent. Then, getting a grip on his nerve, he asked:

"How is the property left, then?"

"There's no specific disposal of anything very important. Your cousin left a remarkable will, disposing of no end of trinkets and *minutiae*; but as for the money, he seems to have left that for distribution according to the laws of inheritance of the State of Maine. It will all be divided among the various relatives."

"Then I'll get a little something, after all?"

"Yes, about enough to buy gas for one ride in the new twin-six you're planning on. Your claim is practically *nil*. Remember, you're only a second-cousin, after all; and there's a swarm of hungry and rapacious relations much nearer."

"What the devil did they ever do for him?" demanded Eric. "Did they ever have him come and live with them, or—"

"They did nothing for him, Eric, I admit," said the attorney. "But that's quite beside the point. The law takes no cognizance of personal kindness. It deals only with hard, cold facts."

"I understand. If the will cuts me off I'm done. But *does* it cut me off? Surely you say I'm mentioned!"

"You are," answered Merrick. "And that's the odd part of it. Your name is the only one occurring in the will at all as a legatee in connection with the money; and it seems to have been put in just for the purpose of disinheriting you. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*—speak nothing but

good of a dead man, you know. Still, I've never seen a more flagrant case of ingratitude and breach of faith.

"Let that pass, however," he added. "Recriminations do no good. They cannot reach beyond the grave. You've been disinherited, and that's all there is to it. Sorry, Eric, my boy; but facts, like mules, are stubborn things."

For a little while the young man sat there, looking out rather vacantly at the old brick building across Cornhill. Eric was well set up, competent and urban in all details. He seemed a strong-shouldered, efficient sort of man. His blue eyes appeared to be appraising the brickwork opposite; but in reality they were looking very much farther—looking in imagination at the new house he had just built out in Chestnut Hill, the house with the rose-hedge, the big piazza, the garage, and all the pleasant, modern comforts that his forthcoming legacy had dictated.

Eric seemed to behold Hester there, the young wife happy and courageous—the girl he had so loved, the girl that Cousin Jethro had so very strongly favored that, in the event of Eric's marrying her, he had positively promised to give them nearly his entire fortune.

Cousin Jethro, more than seventy years old, had long known his heart was bound at almost any time to fail. Like a stoic he had faced death, quite calm in the knowledge that, after he should be gone, his money would remain in the keeping of the only two human beings with whom he had never quarreled.

And now—what could have happened to have upset all plans? Eric was still too dazed for analysis. The blow that had been dealt to Hester and to the new home, lightning from a clear sky, had left him weak and shaken.

"Lord!" he exclaimed again, smiting his knee. "This means giving up all our plans. Giving up the whole thing! It means—what doesn't it mean? We're ruined!"

The lawyer proffered no answer. He had opened the flat-top drawer of his desk and had taken out a paper. This he spread before him. He glanced it over, passed it to Eric, and said:

"Here's the copy of the will. You see for yourself I'm telling you the truth."

Winton mechanically took the paper and looked at it.

"I don't know that this really interests me very much," said he in a dull voice. "You've already given me the facts. Nothing else matters. I've been ousted from what's mine by every right and justice. Why bother me with details?"

"Read it, read it!" bade the old lawyer. "I want you to see for yourself how very explicit it is, and how impossible it would be for you to break it. Go on, Eric; read it, I say!"

The young man focusing his attention read:

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

That I, Jethro F. Bates, of Boston, County of Suffolk, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, do make this my last will and testament, hereby revoking any and all wills by me heretofore made.

After the payment of my just debts and funeral expenses, I give, devise, and bequeath as follows:

To James B. Goddard my collection of Japanese prints, kakemonos, netsukes, and—

"Why," said Eric, glancing up, "this is all a mass of minor bequests. Dozens of 'em disposing of the personal property to various friends." His eye ran quickly down the pages. "I don't see where I'm even in it at all."

"Look on the last page," directed the lawyer. Eric obeyed. The very final paragraph told the story:

I particularly and specifically direct that, after the above provisos have been fulfilled, the cash in my name in the First National Bank of Portland, Maine, in the event of Eric Winton marrying Hester Barton, shall not be paid to said Eric Winton.

In testimony whereof—

"Well, I'll be damned!" cried Eric, looking up angrily from the signatures. "So that's all the gratitude he felt for years of kindness!"

"Sh!" interrupted the lawyer, raising his hand. "As I said before, let us speak no ill of the dead. Protests are useless. If you make a contest the other relatives will beat you badly, and you'll have big legal expenses. Be wise and drop the matter now before it costs you a lot of money."

"Which I haven't got, to begin with!" ejaculated Eric. He stood up, flushing. "This is the limit, all right! Will you please give me a copy of this extraordinary document?"

"Take that one—and welcome!" said the lawyer. "Norris and Rossbaum sent it down from Portland for you." Merrick, too, arose. He stretched out his hand. "I hope," said he soothingly, "you aren't going to take this too hard. It's a cruel blow, of course, but—"

"I'm not thinking of myself," put in Eric. "It's Hester."

"I understand. It's very hard to bear. You'd hate to see her back in an office doing stenography and all that. But if it comes to a pinch she'll help you. You can retrench, work, fight. I'd give all my money to possess what you have, boy—to have youth, and health, and love. Good fortune go with you, Eric, in spite of all this. Good luck and good-by!"

The architect silently pressed Merrick's hand, then released it. He took his departure. As the office door closed the old man looked after him with a singular expression.

"Poor Eric!" said he, shaking his head. "Poor little girl!"

He remained musing a while, then once more plunged into the work before him. But his thoughts were not upon that work. They still dwelt insistently upon the architect, whose castles in Spain had all so suddenly and so disastrously crumbled to dust.

II.

WITH diplomatic gentleness Eric tried to break the evil news to Hester. But she, meeting him in the hallway of the new house they had built on the strength of dreams now shattered, was not to be deceived regarding the seriousness of the situation. She knew at once, even as he kissed her, that some calamity had befallen, and—looking into his face with steady eyes—asked him:

"What's the matter, dear? Has something bad happened?"

"I'm afraid so," he answered, vainly trying to smile. "You're bound to know

it sooner or later. I might as well tell you now."

"You're not sick, are you?" she queried anxiously.

"No. Not my body. It's my heart that's sick—my heart and soul!"

For a moment she stood there in the hallway, her hands upon his shoulders, her sweet and wistful face upturned to his. He thought her eyes had never looked so deep, her thick masses of hair so bewitching. The little blue linen dress she wore molded itself charmingly to her lithe, girlish young body. From her whole person rose a delicate, intangible perfume that fascinated him. Eric realized how very dear and beautiful she was; he felt he never yet had loved her so much as now.

And at thought of what this loss must mean to her, the luxuries she must lose, perhaps the hardships she must bear, his heart sank.

"You look quite pale, dear," said she. "What is it? Tell me!"

"It's something entirely different from sickness. I'm all right."

"Then nothing else matters!" she cried joyfully. Again she kissed him. "Forget everything else, dear. Let's go for a ride and forget it. Such a wonderful August day! You were going to get the new car to-morrow. Make it to-day, Eric, and let's go somewhere!"

"I'm sorry, dear, but it's impossible!" he stammered. "That car—you know, perhaps, after all, we can't have it. Would you be terribly disappointed, Hester, if we had to give up that car?"

"What do you mean, Eric? Can't Fletcher fill the order?"

"Yes; but maybe we aren't going to be able to afford it."

"Not afford it? Why not?" Her eyes widened with astonishment. "That's absurd! Ever since Cousin Jethro promised you—"

"Listen, darling!"

"And now he's gone the money will be paid you any time!"

"Please, dear, please!" he exclaimed, passing a hand over his forehead where sweat was beading. "You've got to listen to me now, and not interrupt. We've been

living in a fool's paradise for months. Getting credit for all kinds of things we've had no right to—counting all sorts of chickens before they'd even begun to hatch!"

"But, dear, Cousin Jethro—"

"He's double-crossed us!"

"What?"

"Fact! We've been building air-castles like a couple of precious idiots. This house here is one of them. We've been going into debt on the credit of a 'sure thing'—mortgaging the future! And on the strength of what?"

"Why, on the most solemn promises!"

"On nothing but an old man's whim. And we've lost!" Greatly he pitied her as she stood looking up at him with eyes of fear. He felt her beginning to tremble. She cried:

"Eric! It can't be true!"

"Yes, but it *is*, though! There's nothing coming to us but a few odds and ends. The hundred thousand and more that we were going to have—"

"We've lost it?"

"Yes! Here's the will!"

He drew it from his pocket and thrust it into her hand. She sank down in the hall-seat, under the window of little leaded panes, and by the mellow light of that glass spread out the paper on her knee.

"It's over on the last page," said Eric. "At the end. There! See it for yourself?"

In silence she read the ending of the will. Then she spoke the words that had so suddenly shattered everything:

"Shall not be paid—shall *not* be paid!"

"Well, there it is, isn't it?" he demanded, his nerves unstrung.

"I can't believe it, even now! There must be some mistake here. They've made a wrong copy of the original will. This is only a copy. It says so right here. But I think—"

"Lawyers aren't apt to make mistakes in matters of this importance," said Eric, pale and shaken. "Old Merrick called me to his office about an hour ago and sprang this knock-out. I thought, of course, he was going to hand me the money—about one hundred and eight thousand dollars, cash. Instead, this is what I got!"

"You poor boy!" she murmured with

commiseration, not yet fully understanding how heavily her husband's loss was going to react on her—not even thinking of that at all. "You poor, poor dear! I guess it's so, all right. But, Eric, I positively don't understand!"

"Cousin Jethro simply changed his mind, that's all. When he went to Maine everything was all right. He had a bad spell there—his heart, you know—and got those local attorneys to draw up his will. Then he just died. Nothing more to it."

"People don't do things like that!" she persisted.

"Cousin Jethro did!"

She looked at him a moment, noting his pale and anxious face, his eyes where fear and suffering were mirrored. Then suddenly she stood up. The paper fell unheeded to the rug. She threw her arms round Eric's neck and kissed him and cried:

"How little it matters, after all, boy! As long as I've got you—as long as we've got each other—how little it matters, after all!"

III.

It did matter, none the less. It mattered a very great deal. In spite of all heroics of youth and boasts of love, money does always matter. For money is so very vital a thing that not even love and youth can throw it away and laugh it to scorn—undamaged.

During the two or three days that followed, in spite of all their efforts to be quite cheerful and happy and to lay plans for the immediate retrenchments now necessary, the cold hand of anxiety came to oppress them with its inexorable clutch. Their loss dwelt constantly with them. Such is the human heart that it grieves greatly over the might-have-been. And not only had this turn of events totally shattered their plans, but it had also rendered imperative some very radical and immediate readjustments.

Life had suddenly assumed wholly other and poorer aspects. Eric had to humiliate himself by canceling the order for the car, as well as other prospective purchases. His credit went to pieces, and the story of his loss magnified itself into bankruptcy. Many

demands for payment of obligations came pouring in. The *débâcle*, once launched, might spell Ruin with a big, big R.

The new house, naturally, would have to be sacrificed. The prospect confronted them of moving into a cheap apartment and of having to assign land and building to creditors now ravenous. Eric knew he would have to give up the Wildwood Country Club. On every hand discomfiture awaited him.

For himself he cared not, but for Hester he cared a very great deal. The thought of her social downfall, of her possibly having to sharpen up the stenographer's pencil and go back to the red-ruled note-book galled him to the quick. He swore that before he would permit this he would work night and day till he dropped. And bitterly he cursed his folly in having gone ahead on the strength of an old man's promise and of having builded his prospects on shifting sand.

Though Hester never by word or look reproached him, but in every way stood with him, shoulder to shoulder, so that he loved her and admired her grit as never before, none the less he tasted every bitterness that defeat and loss can inflict.

On the fifth evening after the blow had fallen they were sitting together in their little library, eternally discussing the disaster, when the wife picked up the copy of the will from the table, and once more fell to studying it under the light of the reading-lamp.

"This is certainly a curious document, Eric," said she. "It strikes me as being very curious, indeed."

"Curious? Is that all? It's infernal—damnable!"

"I know. But abusive adjectives do no good. What I mean now is that this will is a most unusual one. Its wording is very peculiar. The specific way in which our marriage is mentioned as a bar to the fortune strikes me as highly singular. If Cousin Jethro was really lying about favoring our marriage, and if he wanted to disappoint us, why couldn't he have just omitted any mention of us at all? That would have disinherited you just as effectively as this way."

"Oh, I don't know what he might have done, or mightn't have done!" exclaimed Eric. "All I know is we're in the soup up to our necks!"

"What I'm pointing out is that the phraseology is very odd," analyzed Hester. "The will reads just exactly opposite to the way it was to have read. It disinherits you for doing the very thing that was to have assured you the money. It's the complete reversal of Cousin Jethro's original intention. Eric, I want to see that original will. I'm not satisfied with this copy!"

"Nonsense, child! D'you mean you'd go 'way to Portland to see it?"

"I certainly would!" And she nodded vigorously. "It may be nonsense, but that is what I'm going to do. If you want to go, come along. If not, I'll go alone." Fresh color had risen to her cheeks; her eyes were lighted with fighting determination. Eric thought he had never seen her half so pretty. He realized, too, that from this mood no argument would budge her. So, being wise, he yielded.

"All right, dear!" said he, coming round the table to her. He bent above her; she drew his face down and kissed him very tenderly. "If you want to go, that settles it!"

"You're a darling, and I love you!" she whispered.

"If you really set your heart on going to the north pole"—he laughed—"I know I'd better begin packing the sledges."

That made her laugh; and so in a few moments of happiness they almost forgot the heavy Damocletian sword suspended over them. Whatever might befall they still had each other. Through Eric's mind drifted a few half-forgotten lines:

She is mine own, and I as rich in having her
As twenty seas, if all the sands were pearls,
The waters crystal, and the rocks pure gold!

IV.

NEXT day they took the ten o'clock to Portland. Without difficulty they found the office of Norris and Rossbaum on Exchange Street. Rossbaum was out. Norris received them with courtesy in the inner

office. The establishment was not impressive. Only one stenographer was at work, close beside a little railing in the outer office. The firm was about such a one as Cousin Jethro, with his peculiarly niggard ideas, would naturally have chosen to draw up the most important document of his life.

Eric introduced himself and Hester, and explained that he had been mentioned in the will and had been disinherited out of more than one hundred thousand dollars. He requested the privilege of examining the original will.

Mr. Norris nodded assent and rang for the stenographer.

"Miss Kincaid," he directed, "please bring the Bates will." The girl looked competent, though a little slack. Her clothes were a trifle untidy, and the pencil thrust through a coil of her hair needed sharpening. "The Bates will. It's in the safe, you know."

She fetched it presently and handed it to Mr. Norris. He gave it to Eric, and the stenographer withdrew to her clattering machine.

Eric read the last paragraph with Hester and found no mistake. The wording was identical with the copy. He had surely lost a fortune.

"Anything else I can do for you, sir?" asked Norris. He seemed rather nervous and uneasy. Perhaps he feared being drawn into a discussion of the old man's motives or of the rights and wrongs of the case. "If I can be of any further service to you, I shall be pleased to."

"No, I don't think there's anything else," answered Eric, mentally regretting the time and money spent on this fool's errand. Hester, however, spoke up. Eric was already reaching for his hat, but she gave him a swift glance and asked:

"How was this will written, Mr. Norris? Did Mr. Bates come in here and tell you how he wanted to dispose of his property?"

"No," said the lawyer. "He was at his cottage on Peaks Island, felt himself failing, telephoned up; and I went down on the first available boat with Miss Kincaid."

"And what then?" persisted Hester. "Just *how* was the will produced?"

"I'm sorry," answered the senior part-

ner. "but it's not ethical for an attorney to divulge any details of his dealings with a client."

Eric wanted to pluck Hester by the sleeve and bid her come away, but her mood was determined. She fired a shot pointblank:

"Oh, in case there's anything to conceal," said she, "of course I understand you couldn't make any statement."

Norris flushed a little. He seemed an obdurate, honest fellow; shrewd, yes, but still he gave the impression of being honest.

"Your inference is quite unwarranted," retorted he. "This will was dictated to Miss Kincaid, in my presence, at Mr. Bates's bedside."

"That's better," smiled Hester. "Thank you for remembering. Do you recall hearing Mr. Bates's exact wording of the clause disinheriting my husband?"

The lawyer shook his head, while Eric sat there feeling uncomfortably like a schoolboy. What man does not suffer in his self-esteem when his wife takes the initiative?

"No, madam, I do not remember that clause," said Norris. "The exact wording escapes me at present. The will was a long one, and I have so very many papers to handle that you can hardly expect me to recall words uttered a week or ten days ago."

"I see. Well, after Mr. Bates dictated the will, what then?"

"We returned to the office," answered Norris, obviously ill at ease. He shot a peculiar look at this very inquisitive young woman and began drumming on the desk. "After we reached the office Miss Kincaid transcribed her notes. I expected to take the will down to the island next day for him to approve. But his condition must have got rapidly worse, for he phoned me at about half past four that same afternoon, and told me to bring the written will at once."

For a man of untenacious memory Mr. Norris now seemed to remember with surprising clarity. Hester's proddings had possibly awakened him.

"Thank you for telling me — us, I mean," said Hester sweetly. "What then?"

"When I reached the cottage Mr. Bates was in a collapse. He signed the will, however, and the signature was witnessed by his housekeeper and by the physician, Dr. Randall. It's a legal instrument, all right," the lawyer added, seeming relieved by that fact, "and when probated will stand as such. Any further information I can give you?"

"Nothing more; thank you!" spoke up Eric. Surely he must have *some* say in this interview. Hester, however, promptly squelched him with:

"Yes, one more thing. Did Mr. Bates read the will over himself? Read it personally before signing it?"

"He did not, madam. His condition was such that he was unable to read anything. But I read it to him, and he offered no objection."

"At what time did you read it to him?"

"Really, madam, I must protest against being cross-questioned thus in my own office by a person who isn't even a client of mine!"

"Oh, very well!" smiled Hester. "I'll ask Dr. Randall—a very good friend of mine."

Eric started at the naked lie. What could have got into Hester to make her utter a deliberate untruth such as that? Eric was helpless to protest. He could not put his wife palpably in the wrong.

"You know Dr. Randall, don't you, dear?" Hester asked him.

"Oh—h-m!—certainly! Known him for years," fibbed Eric with entire boldness. "He'll tell us anything we need to know."

Hester smiled and nodded at Mr. Norris, as if admonishing him to reveal all the facts. What it was about and whither leading, Eric could not even guess. He merely had to sit tight and play to her lead.

The elderly lawyer, confused and disgruntled, answered with reluctance:

"Since you ask, Mrs. Winton, I don't mind telling you the will was read to him about six-forty-five on the evening of August 3."

"And Cousin Jethro died at seven, did he not?"

"Seven-fifteen, madam!" corrected the lawyer, obviously unnerved.

"Thank you again ever so much!" said Hester. "It's all so very interesting."

"I'm glad you find it so. Anything else?" Norris's voice gritted.

"Nothing; thank you!" Hester answered. Then to Eric she said:

"Hadn't we better be going now? I really think you've taken enough of Mr. Norris's time. He's been so extremely kind in volunteering so much information that we oughtn't to trespass any further. Come, Eric!"

She arose, nodded at the lawyer, and departed from the inner office, followed by Eric, as much mystified as Norris himself seemed to be. As the door closed Norris sank back, passed a hand over his forehead and muttered: "Well, by God!" Something seemed disturbing him very profoundly—though it may have been nothing more than the unusual experience of having been given the third degree.

As Hester and Eric came into the outer office, a rather stout, ruddy man entered from the street. He was a bit puffy, with protuberant brown eyes and an air of self-satisfaction; say, thirty-five years old, and as careful in his dress as Norris was indifferent. This man was trimly efficient-looking, even to his shave, his shine, his fresh handkerchief and the sharp pencil in his waistcoat-pocket.

Hester covered him with a quick glance as he passed—a glance, however, no more comprehensive than his own. As he entered the inner office, Hester walked over to the little wash-place in the corner by the rail, and began taking off her hat before the mirror there.

"I'm all to pieces, Eric," said she. "Wait just a minute, please."

The girl at the clattering typewriter glanced up from her desk near the rail and cast an envious look at the well-tailored figure. In the inner office, the newcomer was already questioning Norris.

"Who are those people out there?" asked he.

"Oh, hello, Rossbaum!" Norris greeted him. "Say, I wish you'd been here a minute sooner!"

"What's the idea?" demanded Rossbaum, sitting down.

"I've just been grilled by a most extraordinary woman. She ought to be a lawyer. She's just gone out; you must have seen her."

"I did. Who is she?"

"Mrs. Eric Winton, of Boston. That's her husband with her."

"Winton? Winton?" asked Rossbaum. "Don't know 'em. Never heard of 'em. What did they want?"

"They wanted to know about the Bates will."

"Which Bates? Lemuel, out at Falmouth?"

"No. Jethro. The old man that died on Peaks Island last week."

"Oh, that one? Well, I don't know anything about that. You handled that, Norris. What have these people got to do with it?"

"The old man disinherited Mr. Winton, and they seem to think there's something crooked about it, somewhere. But you know as well as I do that the will was legally witnessed and will stand every test. You'd back me up in that, wouldn't you, if it came to a contest?"

"Oh, I suppose so," answered Rossbaum with indifference. "I'd have to. But I really don't know a thing about it." He shot a keenly analytic glance at his partner. "You did the whole thing, Norris. If there's a row about it, that's not *my* funeral!"

Norris looked perturbed. But as Rossbaum opened his desk and fell to work, the elder man realized no more conversation would be welcome. He pressed the button to summon Miss Kincaid.

At the moment Miss Kincaid's buzzer sounded, Hester had just put on her hat again, and with a tiny puff taken from her vanity-case was doing a little mural work on her nose. Miss Kincaid arose, took a note-book from the top drawer of her desk where several more books remained, and walked into the inner office.

"Come along, Hester," said Eric. "Twenty minutes to catch that Boston train. We've wasted time enough as it is—time and expense, all for nothing. Come along!"

She silenced him with a look more elo-

quent than words. Then, while he stood staring, she did a thing most inexplicable—something that filled her husband with astonishment, mixed with fear.

Not a moment had Hester and Eric been left alone in the outer office, when she suddenly turned to the rail, leaned over it and pulled out the top drawer of Miss Kincaid's desk.

Swiftly, yet with great care, she began looking over the note-books crammed with hieroglyphics, hopeless scrawls to the average person, but to her eye quite legible because of her long training as a stenographer in the days before she had met Eric.

"For Heaven's sake, Hester! What are you doing?" half whispered her husband, staring. "You—you mustn't—"

"Sh!" she commanded. Then all at once she took up one of the note-books and began ruffling the leaves over at a great rate. Her eyes fairly leaped at the pages of soft, red-ruled paper. In her cheeks burned the blood of excitement. Her breath, Eric could see, was coming fast.

Muted by stupefaction, he stared at her. Then he stammered:

"If they come out—if they find you doing that—"

"Oh, *do* keep still!" she whispered. "You don't understand. Let me alone!"

Suddenly she paused in her search, looked more carefully at two or three of the pages, ran them back and forth. She closed the book and shoved it into Eric's hand.

"Put that in your inside pocket, quick!" she commanded.

"But—"

From his hand she seized it, and herself jammed it into his inside breast pocket, just as they heard a hand on the knob of the inner office door.

Instantly she turned to the mirror. Miss Kincaid, coming back, saw her still engaged in putting a few final pats to hair and complexion.

"It's that dolly kind that's got no brains that always gets the best men," pondered Miss K., spitefully. "Look at that one now! Just an empty-headed plaything, and see what she's landed!"

Hester had, indeed, landed something more than Miss Kincaid knew. And what

that something was, shall now right soon be made apparent.

V.

"For the love of Pete! What's all the larceny about, anyhow?" demanded Eric, *sotto voce*, as they came out into Exchange Street.

"Will you please be quiet till we can get to a room, somewhere?" she threw at him. But Eric would not be quiet. Uneasiness possessed him. It was bad enough to have lost the money without going to jail for larceny. He spoke again, in guarded tones, as they walked along:

"You've done a mighty risky thing—gone into the office of two lawyers and stolen some correspondence. People have gone to prison for less. What do you mean by all this?"

"Eric, you're only a man. How can I expect you to understand?"

"I demand an explanation!" he retorted, warm under the collar.

"If you'll get a hotel room, somewhere, I'll tell you all about it. Don't argue, but do as I tell you!"

"A room? You're a wild woman! We're going back to Boston!"

They had reached the corner just below the Walmouth Hotel. Toward the hotel she set out. He had to follow. Right into the entrance she walked, with Eric making the best of necessity. Nothing remained for him to do but walk up to the desk and register. As they were without baggage, the clerk gave them the sharp eye. Still, he assigned them a room, and Eric paid three good dollars.

When he was alone with Hester, he demanded with irritation:

"Have you gone stark raving crazy, or what?"

She answered by flinging her arms round his neck, kissing him enthusiastically and demanding:

"Fifty-fifty on what I make?"

"On what—you make? Well now, you *are* crazy, for fair!"

"Dear old stupid!" she exclaimed. Then from his pocket she drew the note-book and waved it before his wondering eyes.

"Here it is, Eric!" she exulted. "I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"The shorthand notes disinheriting you."

"Great souvenir!" he giped. "We'll have 'em framed and hung in the hall-bedroom we'll soon have to occupy. Clever of you to have found the will, but what a frost! How did you ever locate it?"

"Oh, partly by luck, and partly by knowing just how to look for it and how to read shorthand. Miss Kincaid uses the Munson system, same as I used to. Also, she dates everything carefully. So it didn't take me long to locate the right book, then the date, then the will. Look at it, will you?"

She opened the book, found the right page and showed him. He squinted at it with a wry face.

"Laundry-checks are a cinch, beside that," he commented. "Give me the Chinese, the good old Babylonian cuneiforms or the Egyptian cartouches, but take that stuff away!"

"Don't you see something very important here?" she teased.

"Yes, I do not! It looks like a hookworms' convention with the D. T.'s!"

She laughed, and carried the note-book over to the window. For a moment she studied one leaf very carefully, then turned to Eric with a smile.

"This is certainly interesting," said she.

"What is?"

"I'm not going to tell you anything, Eric. You only laugh at me. I'm going to work this all out myself. But, remember, fifty-fifty!"

He went to her, and caught her in his arms.

"Why does my ladybird talk about fifty-fifty?" he chided. "Don't you remember in 'Caliban,' where it says:

"Love knows no *mine* or *thine*, but only *ours*?"

"Everything I've got in the world is yours, anyhow—and God knows, now, it's little enough!"

His face grew very sad. She caressed his hair, smiling up at him.

"Listen, dear," said she. "You must help me. Do you know anybody in Port-

land who could give you a little inside information?"

"Well, yes."

"Who is it?"

"Mert Hargison, manager of the New Popular Theater."

"Does he know this town thoroughly?"

"What he doesn't know, you could run through the eye of a cambric needle, with sixteen miles to spare on both sides."

"All right. Go right up to the theater and interview him."

"What about? I suppose you don't mind telling me that?"

"Ask him all about Norris and Rossbaum. Find out about their careers, what they did before they became lawyers—if anything; and what their connections are. That is, get 'the dope' on them. Now, go!"

"And leave the ladybird all alone, here?"

"Oh, the ladybird won't be lonesome. She'll have plenty of thinking to do. Be as quick as you can. Get back by three thirty, surely."

"That's an hour—a mighty long time to be away from you!"

"Flatterer!" she laughed. "One thing more. Get me a good, powerful reading-glass. No, a microscope. One of those little three-legged ones. The quicker you send it in to me, the better."

"What next?" demanded Eric, staring. "You rob lawyers' offices, demand dope on lawyers, and ask for microscopes! What's it all about? Has the ladybird become a *Sherlock Holmes*?"

"It does look like that," she laughed. "Now, run along!"

Amazed, he departed. When he was gone she sat down in a big chair by the window and fell to studying one certain page of the note-book. Her eyes narrowed, her lips went tight, as she scrutinized the Munson characters.

"It's a long shot to take," she murmured. "A mighty long shot. But if I can only hit the target—if I only can!"

VI.

MERT HARGISON, leaning back in the white-painted and immaculate little office

of the New Popular, was with a satisfied eye surveying the photographic gallery of stage beauties tacked to the wall in front of him. Cigar in mouth, hands deep in pockets, he looked the picture of content. A packed house, a good bill and a clear conscience combined to make his state of mind even more beatific than the usual good-humor possessed by this Ar white man.

"Hello, Mert!" exclaimed Eric, in the doorway. "How's everything?"

"For the Lord's sake, *you!*" exclaimed the genial manager, jumping up with the extended hand of greeting. When did you blow in? Haven't seen you in a dog's age—not since you did those plans for the theater annex. What good luck brings you to Portland?"

"No good luck at all. Bad luck. Just came this morning, with Mrs. Winton. Going back this P.M. It's business."

"New building or something like that?"

"No. Wild-goose chase after some dough we almost had our hands on, but not quite. Mrs. W. is at the Walmouth, working up what she thinks is a clue, or something. She sent me here, like an errand boy, to get some dope on a couple of men."

"Sit down," said Mert. Eric did. The manager sat down, too, and handed him a cigar. "What's on your chest? Shoot!"

"Well, it's this way," answered Winton, lighting up. "You see—"

Briefly he explained. When he had done, Hargison said:

"I'll spill all I know. Norris is an old-fogy type of lawyer. Never has been anything else. A smart man, but never has been a money-maker. He's had troubles and losses—a fire, to begin with, and then some bad investments. He's always hard up and in need of cash. Shabby, you noticed. But he knows the law, and all its crooks and turns. No doubt about that."

"And how about the other fellow, Rossbaum?" asked Eric.

"Well, he's a different proposition, altogether. Norris took him in, five years ago, to put new blood into the business. He's keen, too, though not a regular law-school man. His law education began as a court-reporter, and finished in Norris's office. He's got money, outside his practise.

He's in all kinds of paying deals. A great ladies' man, too—he sure does like the skirts, in spite of the fact that he's got a wife. He's brilliant. One of our coming men, while Norris is going. Anything else I can tell you?"

Winton shook his head.

"No, I guess not," he answered. "That seems to cover everything. Well, I must be going. Friend wife is waiting, you know."

Mert tried in vain to make him stay. Great as was the temptation, for Hargison had a wealth of odd theatrical reminiscence and was a master of narration, the visitor took his leave.

In almost the exact words of Hargison, Eric gave Hester the facts he had learned. She listened eagerly, sitting there at the window with the note-book in her lap. The little microscope he had sent in, stood beside her on the window-sill.

After the story was ended, she walked to the phone and called Norris and Rossbaum. She demanded speech of Mr. Rossbaum, himself.

"My name?" said she. "Never mind—tell him there's a lady on the wire for him. That's enough."

"For Heaven's sake, Hester!" protested Eric. "What's the idea, now? Haven't we bothered those people enough already?"

"Hello? Mr. Rossbaum?" interrupted Hester. She shot an annihilating glance at Eric to silence him. "This is some one you know. Who am I? Oh, I can't tell you that on the phone. But you know me, all right. Where? At the Walmouth. Yes. Room 187. Yes—1—8—7."

"Are you awfully busy, just now?" she continued with a wink at the scandalized Eric. "Could you get away for an hour or so? No, no, I will *not* tell my name. What's that? You can? That's lovely! Yes, I'll wait right here. *Au revoir*—and don't be long!"

She hung up, and with a smile turned toward her astounded husband. Crimson with indignation, he burst out at her:

"Have you lost your mind? Making dates with a stranger—"

"You big, foolish boy!" she interrupted, laughing. "*Will* you be quiet a little longer, or have I got to get cross with you?"

"Yes, but what the devil—"

"You sit right down and light your pipe, and keep still! Ladybird is running this show, and you're only the audience. Understand?"

Eric subsided. In silence he smoked, and watched her as once more she fell to studying some of the shorthand notes under the microscope. The silence extended to ten minutes, to fifteen. Eric set his jaw. Come what might, he would draw down no more rebukes by protesting.

A tap at the door startled them.

"Come!" cried Hester, slipping the notebook into a bureau drawer close by the window. Eric arose, as she did also. The door opened. Rossbaum appeared, sleek, groomed, smiling.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Rossbaum?" asked Hester, advancing. "I'm awfully glad to see you!"

The lawyer stood there, peering in with wonder and confusion. At sight of Eric, he hesitated. What kind of a "plant" might this be? For a second, he seemed half-minded to retreat; but already Hester was close. Rossbaum had to stand his ground. He had perforce to enter the room. Hester carefully closed the door. With suspicion on his full-blooded features, he nodded at Eric. The silence grew taut. Rossbaum snapped it:

"To what am I indebted for this pleasure?" His *sang-froid* was returning; his eyes had grown penetrant. He remained on the defensive, realizing that a woman, for purposes unknown, had enticed him into coming to a hotel. "To what," he repeated, "am I indebted?"

"To my wish to consult you, professionally," she answered.

"But you said I knew you."

"So you do, don't you? I'm Mrs. Eric Winton. This is my husband. Surely you must know us, through your legal work."

Rossbaum inclined his head, and murmured something trite. He laid his hat on the table, and awaited the next move. But the glance he shot at Eric seemed to say: "If I had a wife like that I'd discipline her if I had to break all the furniture to do it!"

"Sit down, please," invited Hester. Rossbaum could not refuse.

They all sat down, Eric still quite dumb with amazement.

"It's about Mr. Bates's will," she began. "You know, of course, that Mr. Winton has been disinherited. For years Mr. Bates has promised to make him the principal heir. Of late, he made that more specific by saying that if Mr. Winton and I were married before his death, he would leave him nearly all his money, more than one hundred thousand dollars."

The lawyer listened with attention. He nodded, commiseratingly.

"I know the facts in a general way," said he, "though this will has been entirely in the hands of Mr. Norris. I am very sorry, madam, that the affair has turned out thus. But accidents will happen. Legal annals are crammed with them."

"No doubt," answered Hester. "Still, this particular case strikes home to us, and if any error has been committed, of course we want it rectified. Don't we, Eric?"

"Naturally!" Eric put in, glad of a chance to speak. The rôle so far forced on him seemed like that of a "supe" in a big show.

"I wish there were some error I might correct," said Rossbaum. "Did not Mr. Norris explain everything to you?" His eyes were keen. They fell upon the microscope, rested there a moment, then turned again to the young woman's face. "Will you pardon my asking why you chose this rather irregular manner of consulting me? Had you called at the office, I should have been only too happy to talk with you and your husband. I am wondering why you summoned me here, in a way perhaps just a little suggestive of deception?"

"Deception?" she smiled innocently. "I'm sorry you misunderstood me. Is it my fault if a gentleman misinterprets a lady when she phones him? I thought you wouldn't mind coming here where it's nice and quiet, in a matter involving so much money."

The lawyer murmured something non-committal. His face masked itself in calm, but his eyes began to look evil. He was by no means the man to let any one make game of him, least of all a woman. His voice, however, was courteous as he asked:

"Well, madam, what can I do for you? I'm quite at your disposal."

"Thank you, that's very kind, indeed," she answered, while Eric in silence watched the tension develop in this play of forces, as if he had been present at a drama. "Now, let's begin right at the beginning. A will, let us say, is dictated to a stenographer who uses the Munson system. The same system that I used, myself, before I married Eric."

"You used—" began Rossbaum, but did not finish. "Well, what next?"

"Suppose," she continued, "that this will is a mass of unimportant details, and that it is very long; that it contains, at the extreme end, only one paragraph vital to two persons—a very brief paragraph. Suppose that on account of one single little word, the word *not*, the entire purpose of the testator, as stated on many occasions, should have been overthrown."

"Well, what then?" asked Rossbaum. "I don't see that all these suppositions can interest me or benefit you."

"Wait a minute, please," she smiled, most amicably. "Suppose that before the shorthand notes were transcribed, some one might have had access to them—some one who could read them."

"All right, madam, I'm supposing," said the lawyer, looking a bit bored. "If you've summoned me here to do a lot of supposing, instead of asking my legal advice, I'm satisfied. My fee is the same, in either case."

"Thank you, that's very liberal," murmured Hester. "We'll do a little more supposing then." Her voice strengthened. "Suppose it were to the interest of some person to alter the terms of that will so as to divert the money from the rightful legatee and allow it to be divided according to the laws governing such matters."

"Yes? What then?" inquired the attorney, while Eric peered at his wife, astonished by her unsuspected logical faculty. "What else?"

"The important part is coming now. This will interest you very much. Suppose the same person who wanted to change the will also had access to the notes and could alter one word so as to upset everything?"

"Well, and what then? You are building

up, madam, a most extraordinary series of suppositions."

"Am I not, indeed? And yet, all this supposing rests on a very solid basis of fact."

"Wonderful!" commented Rossbaum, mockingly.

"It rests on the unimpeachable basis of Miss Kincaid's note-book containing Mr. Bates's will!"

VII.

"WHAT?" ejaculated the lawyer, jarred out of his complacency. "How do you know that?"

"Because I've got the note-book!" she came back at him, her eyes closely fixed on his face. Rossbaum's gaze wandered out the window, fell to the carpet and then met hers. His calm returned. But he had gone a little pale. His pallor deepened when Hester pulled the note-book out of the bureau drawer and spread it on her lap.

"How did you get that, madam?" he demanded. "By what trickery, what—"

"Easy, there!" menaced Eric. "Watch what you say, Mr. Rossbaum!"

"No trickery at all," laughed Hester. "I stole it."

"*Stole* it?" cried the lawyer, fists clenched. "You admit larceny?"

"Yes. It was all very simple. I just opened the top drawer of Miss Kincaid's desk, found the book with the right dates, and put it in my hubby's pocket. Wasn't that easy?"

"Do you know, madam," asked the lawyer in his most impressive manner, "that a severe penalty might attach to any such act?"

"Oh, indeed?" She opened the book, found the page she wanted, and beckoned him. "Just look here, please."

Rossbaum got up and went to her, while Eric watched him closely, lest he try to grab the book.

"Well, what do you want me to look at?" the lawyer demanded.

"These characters here. See the characters that read: 'Shall be paid'?"

"How should I know what those hen-tracks mean?"

"See, here, how the whole will has been absolutely reversed by the addition of one tiny stroke, a mere bit of a curve, here, making the words read: 'Shall not be paid'?"

She picked up a pencil from the window-sill, and on the margin of the paper wrote the characters:

Then, adding the tiny curve, she reversed their meaning, thus:

"It's all Greek to me, madam," persisted Rossbaum, though sweat had begun to prick out on his forehead.

"Your memory is pretty bad, isn't it?" asked Hester. "Court-reporters don't usually forget their shorthand in five years."

Rossbaum stared, turning quite pale. Then he laughed, and waved a mocking hand.

"That's a weird piece of detective work you've got going, there," gibed he. "But don't forget it's a serious matter to go into a lawyer's office and steal one of his note-books."

"And it's far more serious to alter notes so as to commit grand larceny!" retorted Hester. "I don't think, Mr. Rossbaum, if I were in your shoes, I'd make any threats about my stealing this book!"

"What d'you mean by that?" ejaculated the lawyer angrily. His assurance and self-control seemed oozing away, much as Mr. Norris's resistance to questions had disappeared before the tactics of this very forceful little woman. "What are you insinuating, madam?"

"Hester! Be careful not to make any charges you can't back up!" put in Eric. "But whatever you do, I'm with you to the finish!"

With clenched fists, he eyed Rossbaum as if calculating the best place to land a knock-out.

"Back up!" exclaimed Hester, flushed. "Listen, and look! The original notes were written by Miss Kincaid. Her pencil

was a little dull. This word *not* was written with a sharper pencil—like the one you see sticking out of Mr. Rossbaum's pocket!"

The lawyer's face grew white. He shook a hand of wrath at the Wintons, and choked:

"This is blackmail—some infernal shake-down! It's—"

"Go slow there!" warned the architect. He had got up and come close. "If you don't want to get hurt, go very slow!"

"Furthermore," smiled Hester, "Miss Kincaid's notes, all the way through, show that she writes that *not* curve connected to the preceding character. This *not* is slightly detached. It almost touches, but it certainly does not run out of the preceding character, like all other cases in this book where *not* occurs. The microscope shows all that. If you don't believe it, look for yourself!"

"It's—it's a—"

"And the best part of it all," Hester continued, "is that my line of deduction has been borne out by a direct witness. Some one actually saw that change made in the will. And that some one will testify as to who did it, when the case comes into court!"

"*Court!*" gulped Rossbaum hoarsely. His face underwent a swift, painful change. His skin became gray, his eyes widened, and a scared, hunted look came into his eyes as he glanced toward the door.

"Lock that door, Eric, love," bade Hester. Eric obeyed.

"Really, Mrs. Winton," stammered Rossbaum, "if you—if you'll listen to reason—"

"Certainly I will," she agreed. "We're perfectly reasonable people, Eric and I. Give Eric the money, and we'll give you this note-book. I don't know just how it would have benefited you to divert the legacy to the other heirs—"

"My wife—Mr. Bates's niece—would have inherited fifty or sixty thousand, if this had gone through," whispered the lawyer. Staring and ashen-pale, he looked a wretched object. "And the will has got to stand, or else it incriminates me. If I pay you, I—I'll have to take it out of my own pocket!"

"That's a very neat piece of poetic justice, I think," judged Hester. "Like the dog in the fable, you grabbed for more meat than belonged to you, and lost even what you had. Fine! You will reimburse us to the extent of one hundred thousand dollars. We'll let the few odd thousand of problematical money go. Make it an even one hundred thousand."

"How can I raise that amount, off-hand?" cried the lawyer, while Eric remained there, struck dumb with amazement and exultation. "It's impossible!"

"Really," answered Hester, "your financial condition doesn't interest me. But a man of your wide connections and deep ingenuity won't have much trouble in paying. It's that, now, or jail."

Rossbaum stared at her in silence. Then he said, huskily:

"You hold all the trumps. You win. I—I'll pay."

"I thought you would," said Hester. "We'll give you a week. That's liberal. We'll spend the week at Cape Elizabeth. Eric needs a rest, anyhow. One week you have, Mr. Rossbaum. Remember!"

The lawyer nodded, and moved toward the door.

"All right," he answered. "Let me—let me go, now!"

"Delighted, I'm sure!" smiled Hester.

When he was gone, Eric took Hester's

hands, drew her up out of the chair, and caught her in his arms.

"You're just wonderful!" he cried. "How in the world did you know all that?"

"I *didn't* know the really vital part, that Rossbaum himself did the trick. At first I was sure it was Norris—Norris, always hard up and in need of money. I owe him a silent apology for the suspicion."

"Yes, but the witness that saw Rossbaum make the change? How about that?"

"Oh," she answered, laughing, "that was all what you slangy men call 'Durham dust'—that is, 'bull.' But it all fitted in, perfectly, didn't it? Everything's all right, dear! I got away with it, didn't I?"

"Some! Why, Hester, you're a marvel. Talk about your *Sherlock Holmes*!"

"It was just putting two and two together, and making four of them, and then—taking a long, long shot."

"You're the most wonderful woman in the world!" he cried enthusiastically.

"*Camoufleur*!" she said. "Come on, dear, let's be on our way to Cape Elizabeth. I want to sit on the rocks by the sea, with you, and build some more castles in Spain—real ones, this time. Isn't this an ideal day for a dear old architect and his naughty, forward little wife to build castles? See how blue the sky is? See how the sun is shining? Come, Eric, let's make it a holiday to celebrate the happiness that 'shall be paid'!"

U U U U
RAINBOW MISTS

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

GRAY mists fall drearily,
 Chill the air—wearily
 Crowds roam the street.
 But in my heart to-day
 Glows the warm sunlight gay—
 Thrillingly sweet.
 Gray day, be slow to go;
 Gray day, I love you so—
 Mists tenderly
 Cooling my burning cheek.
 List! Magic words I speak:
 My Love—loves me.

The Lion's Jaws

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "The Diamond Demons," "Draft of Eternity," "The Sea Demons," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

LEUTENANT ALLAN FORTESCUE, of Morgan's Riflemen, while marching toward Quebec with the American expedition in the first year of the American Revolution, was asked by his commanding officer, General Benedict Arnold, to undertake the task of entering Quebec in disguise and getting into communication with some persons known to be disaffected with British rule—chief among them the Seigneur de Quesnoy. Unwillingly he undertook this mission, and, disguised as a traveling merchant, started through the forest for the St. Lawrence.

Just before he reached the banks of the river, Allan rescued a beautiful girl from attack of three ruffians. Later, attacked by the peasants, he entered a manor house, and overheard some British officers demanding of Captain Armand St. Cyr that he obtain some papers held by his half-sister, Hermione. When discovered by the officers, Allan was saved by Hermione, the girl whom he had rescued, and learned that it was in her home that he had taken refuge. At the suggestion of Major Blair, who was in love with Hermione, Allan was placed in her custody—for as seignior of the manor she was an officer of the crown—and she was ordered to deliver him to the provost marshal in Quebec.

That night Allan was attacked while in bed by a masked man whom he recognized as St. Cyr, and rescued Hermione from three men who were attempting to carry her off. She told him that the papers she had contained the plan of a secret entrance to Quebec, and that they had been given her by her father as he lay dying on the battle-field when Wolfe captured the city for the British.

Upon arriving in Quebec Allan learned that Hermione was the Seigneur de Quesnoy. She directed him to lodgings, and told him to trust Gaubert, a cooper. He was called upon by Duggan, a barber, and taken to a secret meeting of conspirators. Not trusting them, he was in danger when there came the sound of sharp orders, and the door flew open. Into the room stepped Hermione, dressed in the uniform of a sailor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CITADEL.

THE scene reminded me of one of those plays brought lately from France, called *tableaux vivants*, or living pictures, for I am sure not a man changed his posture for three or four seconds. Then Hermione's voice came to us.

"A trap, *messieurs*, the picket is about the house! Save yourselves!"

At once, in wild confusion, the conspirators plunged through the doorway, jostling each other aside, and Duggan leading the flight. Hermione came running to me.

"Come, *monsieur!*" she panted. "There is just time before the patrol rounds Sous-

le-Fort. Those others know where to save themselves. Never mind them! Come!"

She drew me with her, and we ran through the network of alleys extending from the rear of Gaubert's shop. But ere I left the outhouse my eyes happened to light upon a heavy bar of iron, such as is used for making a door fast from within, and I picked it up and brought it with me. It was fortunate I did so.

I heard shouts behind me, and, glancing back over my shoulder as we stumbled on, panting, saw the guard running into the main alley, an officer at their heads. We turned the corner into Champlain, hearing as we did so the slamming of shutters everywhere upon the windows above by frightened householders. Then two men who had been posted to intercept us leaped

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for March 29.

forward out of the darkness, and I had a vision of a pistol leveled at my head and another at Hermione's.

I brought my weapon down on the skull of the nearest man with a force that must have cracked it, for he dropped a sprawling heap at my feet, and with my other arm I succeeded somehow in knocking up the pistol that threatened my companion. The weapon was discharged, and the report stunningly close, but I struck the pistol from the fellow's hand with a second blow and sent it flying.

I think I broke his wrist, for, with a howl of pain, he darted from me and ran down the alley shouting, his hand dangling limply.

Hermione tugged at my cloak.

"This way!" she panted.

We turned along Champlain. I followed Hermione blindly, with no idea whither she was leading me.

There was shouting all about us—from the picket, emerging out of the valley, from guards posted in Champlain Street itself, and from others, whom I could see dimly, descending the flight of steep stairs known as Breakneck that connects Sous-le-Fort with the lower part of Mountain Hill.

Flintlocks were snapping everywhere, and only the darkness saved us from the random flight of balls. The trap had been set skilfully; we seemed as helpless as escaped beasts in a city's streets. Suddenly I perceived an officer and some guards running diagonally from the alley to intercept us in our flight; and I recognized Major Blair.

He sighted us, and leaped out from among his men, coming at me with surprising swiftness and uttering a loud tally-ho whose jeering notes were full of scorn and hate. He sprang in front of us, barring the way with his drawn sword.

Hermione shrank back behind me. It was impossible for him to recognize her in the dimly seen figure of the sailor; nor, indeed, did he seem to have thoughts for any one but me.

"Yield, Master Spy!" he shouted. "You are trapped this time fairly, and with no woman to protect you! Hands up, you dog! Have this; then!"

He made a violent lunge at me. But he was dealing with no merchant now. I brought my bar to the parry, and the blade clashed against it and twisted in his hand. He shouted with rage and made at me again, thrusting and slashing so furiously that it was the length and thickness of the bar rather than any strength of mine which saved me.

At length a savage lunge ripped into my cloak. The strong fur held the blade. As he tried to withdraw it I brought my heavy bar sweeping sidewise, and, with a clatter, the two pieces of the broken steel fell to the ground.

I heard him catch his breath with a sob of fury and shame. He snatched at his pistol, but I thrust at him with the bar as if it had been a sword, and, catching him in the stomach, bore him to the ground, where he lay writhing.

There was no time to stoop for his pistol, and mine was unprimed. Two of his fellows leaped at me; I felled one with a blow across the shoulder, and the other dodged me in time to save his life. We were running again, immediately toward the patrol that was swarming down the steps to capture us.

All the time my encounter with Blair lasted must have been measurable in seconds. It struck me as singular, as I ran, how little the positions of the moving figures had changed during that eternity of the fighting.

But it was hopeless now. A ball whizzed past my ear.

"Let us yield!" I cried to Hermione, seeing her in danger.

It was unnerving me. But, without answering, she pulled me into the yard of an empty house, cutting us from the sight of our pursuers.

Behind this house rose the precipice steeply, with a little runway ascending to a ledge of rock, above which towered the gaunt, scarred flanks of the mountain. About the base was tough undergrowth of spruce.

Hermione caught me by the hand and drew me into the briers. We ran on, covering a dozen yards into the flanks of the precipice. Behind us I heard the guards

streaming into the yard. But thus far they had not seen us.

Hopeless, though, seemed our plight. They would beat the bushes in a moment. And the face of the rock rose sheer before us. Then in an instant Hermione had disappeared from my sight!

For one moment she had been with me, and the next she was gone. But I felt her catch my hand and pull me from my feet. I struggled in a funnel-shaped hole, no larger than my body, fell a foot or two, and found myself at her side again, with a tiny passage in the rock before us.

It was hardly more than a fissure, just wide enough to allow the passage of a single person. Overhead were the branches of a small spruce-tree, and between them I saw the sky.

Then, as I followed her, a roof of rock intervened. She stopped and placed her hand upon my lips.

In the distance we could hear the picket banging with their muskets on the doors of the empty house, their cries of bewilderment, their answering shouts from the street.

Hermione drew me by the hand into a passage which began to widen in the rock wall, and placed my fingers on an iron bar. With great difficulty I depressed it, and heard the end drive an iron latch out of a groove. A slab of rusted ironwork grated open before me.

I set my foot on a stair, wet with the trickle of water, which I heard lapping down from above. A breeze blew on my face.

"Come!" whispered Hermione, and led me through the gateway.

I followed her, turned, and pushed the rusted latch back into position. Then we stood there together, half-stooping in the rising tunnel, listening to the faint sounds of the pursuit dying away along Champlain, and the ensuing silence, broken by little more than the melancholy lapping of the waves in the Cul-de-Sac beneath us.

"This is the secret of the papers," said Hermione. "And I will be frank with you. I meant not to tell you, as I have told no one in all my life. I broke a life's resolution because you had come to me;

not because you saved me, but because you were sent to me."

"But you—how came you here, *mademoiselle*?" I asked.

"Because Major Blair has no reins on his tongue," she answered. "In some way you betrayed yourself at the manor, for none of those officers believed you other than one of Mr. Arnold's emissaries. But Major Caldwell saw his opportunity to discredit me in the eyes of our people by accepting Major Blair's challenge, and so convert ten thousand possible enemies into neutrals.

"They thought that you might be used to disclose the conspiracies within our walls. They planned to entrap you to-night, as they came within an ace of doing. They planned well, having learned of the meeting-place through spies.

"Major Blair turned back from his intended journey to Montreal to execute it; but he could not keep from coming to me this night and boasting of some intended *coup*. That is how I learned of it, and came to save you."

"And this tunnel?" I asked.

"It is a secret passage, or, rather, two or three, between the lower and upper towns, made by the French in the days when Admiral Phips besieged the city, and long ago forgotten. My father rediscovered it when he had charge of the construction of the defenses.

"He would not disclose it to De Vaudreuil, nor to the Intendant Bigot, not trusting them, nor had he the opportunity of revealing it in those last days to Montcalm, whom he loved. He was carrying the papers when he met his mortal wound.

"Once, long ago, when I was a child, I verified the truth of the plan. It is a flight of steps, hewn roughly in a subterranean passage formed by springs, and leads from above down toward the Cul-de-Sac, whose waters once flowed to the base of these cliffs.

"Now, M. Fortescue, if you are rested, listen to my plan. We can make our way to the upper town; with a little care we can avoid the sentries. I shall take you to my house. My servant is faithful, and can be trusted.

"To-morrow we shall make plans. Now we must go quickly, before the alarm of your escape is given on the heights and the house is watched."

The thought of her courage, the very flaming qualities that made her as of spirit and fire, her presence by me within the little tunnel, made it all I could do to avoid taking her in my arms there and then and telling her what was in my heart. But I had wit enough to restrain myself and restraint enough to keep silence.

So, taking her hands in mine for a brief moment, I followed her, picking my way upward behind her from step to step, often a mere slab of rock, seeing naught, but hearing her calling back as I struggled up clumsily behind her.

And suddenly—'twas unbelievable to me, but a débris of pebbles and loose shale was about my neck, my head and shoulders were in the open—and, with a roar, a little landslide of rocks and stones fell about me, obliterating the hole through which I had emerged.

I found myself at the summit of a great pile of rocks midway between the château and Mountain Hill and forming one of the twin eminences overlooking the road, the other, opposite, being occupied by batteries, so near that I could see the guns distinctly and the sentries walking behind them.

And Hermione was gone!

That it was some accident was clear to me; she could never have planned that singular ending to our journey. And the thought that some accident had befallen her set me to digging furiously, and yet vainly. For the fall of the loose, disintegrated rock had completely filled the tunnel entrance, so that I could not even tell, more than approximately, where I had emerged.

I was forced to desist at last. I knew the fall had not been heavy enough to injure her; it had been pebbly masses, sliding down into the cavity. If she had been behind me she could undoubtedly have made her way back to Champlain Street, and so have reached safety after the pursuit had died away. But she had been in front of me.

And that should have brought her, too, into the open.

Utterly baffled, it seemed to me that the only thing to do was to follow her instructions and make my way to her house. I knew it was on Louis Street, and that, I knew in turn, was the main avenue extending upward from the Château St. Louis beyond the Ring, or open space between the governor's residence and the building of the Recollets, which I could see dimly before me.

But I realized that this task was no light one, for Mountain Road was almost immediately beneath me, with the guns opposite, and the guards' tents behind them, while on my left hand was the château, a stone's throw away, with a small railed gallery before it, on the edge of the cliff, and two officers walking up and down there.

Straight before me, beyond the tumbled masses of rock, was the open Ring. Once there, I should be safe enough; I could see pedestrians crossing it; but to reach it meant to expose myself to scrutiny from the sentries on both sides of me, and my presence among the rocks would at once incite a challenge.

Yet I must make the venture quickly, for, as I crouched there, I heard the alarm spreading up Mountain Hill from Champlain Street below. I heard the beat of a horse's hoofs galloping up the steep road. And, before I had made up my mind to stir, the rider came galloping past the Ring and into the château courtway, hardly slackening speed to fling the countersign to the sentry.

Then another officer came from the château out upon the railed gallery, and, approaching the two who had been pacing there, engaged them in earnest converse.

I began to crawl quickly among the rocks, bending low enough for the intervening ridge to hide me from view. My plan was to keep as far as possible from the batteries on my right, trusting to concealment from the three officers to a position under the projecting edge of the gallery.

I reached this safely, but, as I was about to resume my journey, heard the voices of the three immediately above my head as they approached the end of the promenade.

I waited till the voices ceased, and, calculating that their backs would now be turned, straightened myself to sprint across the intervening space to the shelter of the château wall.

As I looked up I saw the three beside the rail, looking toward me. And I knew that I had been seen, for one held a pistol in his hand, aimed at my head.

There were a score of yards of jagged rock before me, and certain death. So I stood still, looking into the pistol's muzzle, and waited.

The officer who held it was Armand St. Cyr!

He laughed in a cynical way and turned to the older of his two companions.

"Colonel Voyer, permit me to present to you M. Fortescue," he said. "Thus, in my sister's name, I fulfil the trust imposed on her."

The provost marshal smiled sourly at me.

"An unexpected but welcome meeting," he said. "Come, sir, this is a sorry business. You came to Quebec upon a peaceful errand, and, it seems, have associated yourself with the disaffected; grievously assaulted an officer of his majesty; stunned, if not killed, an enlisted man; and made your way within the military precinct, though how the devil you passed up Mountain Hill I know not."

He looked his bewilderment, but it was clear he had no notion of the truth on this score.

"Be so kind as to step up here, sir," he said. "But, first, your pistol, for you go armed, I believe, and am told you have a fashion of concealing your weapon."

I drew it from my belt and handed it to him. He took it ungraciously and handed it to the third officer, who placed a whistle to his lips and blew.

Immediately three soldiers came at a double from some post behind an angle in the wall. Then, without waiting for the order, I climbed upon a pinnacle of rock, and, placing my hands on the gallery rail, made my undignified vault over it and upon the platform, from which I could now see the line of the ramparts extending along the top of the cliff as far as the Citadel.

I looked at my captors. The young officer who had taken my pistol wore a captain's uniform beneath his cloak. He was a trim, handsome, well-built gentleman of some thirty years, with a bobbed wig that fitted closely about his head, and dandyish airs.

A second was a middle-aged sergeant of the Royal Artillery. The two others were artillerymen, but carrying flintlocks and bayonets.

"Captain Chabot, permit me to present Mr. Fortescue," said the provost marshal formally. "You have already had your orders, captain, and I am sure that Mr. Fortescue understands his situation."

He turned to Armand St. Cyr, who had been regarding me with a mocking smile.

"Your sister, my dear captain?" he asked.

"Is in our home, colonel, I thank you."

"You will acquaint her with the fulfilment of her commission," said Voyer, and swung from me without the grace of nod or bow.

The lion's jaws had closed on me!

"Hark, sir!" began St. Cyr, scowling. "I shall be frank with you. Where knew you my sister? Was it in Boston? You have much to gain by—"

"You will pardon me, captain," lisped Captain Chabot, "but my orders do not permit this gentleman to parley with any one."

St. Cyr tossed his head contemptuously.

"Later will do," he said shortly, and strode toward the door of the building.

"M. Fortescue, I must require your belt of you," said Chabot, turning to me again.

I drew it from me, and he inspected the pouches and removed my jack-knife before returning it. Then he gave my pistol to the sergeant, who at once opened the pan to see if it was primed, and, finding it was not, slipped it into his belt.

The man's expression was grim and uncompromising enough to make me see a harsh jailer in him, if he was to be mine.

"And now, M. Fortescue," lisped Captain Chabot, "I shall be your guide to the Citadel."

Though I had known this must be my destination, the sudden disclosure came to

me with stunning force. Of a sudden the end of my adventure seemed imminent, and I realized what my fate must be. The sergeant and the two soldiers fell into file behind me, and Chabot, leading the way, proceeded past the farther end of the railed gallery and thence along the ramparts. We passed the black thirty-two-pounders lining the cliff, until there appeared a gateway, set into the flank of the mighty bastion. It opened, and we traversed a winding road deep under the crest of the glacis, and so came into the interior of the fortress, an immense place, filled with carts full of construction material and the tents and barracks of the soldiers and laborers.

I looked at the mighty strength of those unbreached walls, the guns, the great piles of cannon-balls, heaped up in pyramids, the towers and salients, and realized what a task we had undertaken. We crossed the Citadel grounds, directing our way toward a massive tower at the extreme northeastern angle of the walls, and, entering, ascended two flights of winding stairs, illumined by two lamps projecting from opposite faces of the walls of stone. Above I saw the stone roof. There was a door before me, of age-blackened oak, heavily barred with iron.

Captain Chabot took a key from the sergeant, and, unlocking it, pushed it back with some effort, and invited me to enter. I passed into a round cell. The walls were of rough stone, a small window in front, about the height of my head from the floor, guarded by three bars riveted into its stone frame, though there was a sheer drop of several hundred feet into the river beneath us.

A gloomy place, yet open to air and sky, unlike some of the cells within the fortress underground.

There was a small bed, with blankets, a little table, and a gaudy, ill-woven *habitant* rug spread upon the stones of the floor.

"Come, my dear M. Fortescue, take courage!" said Captain Chabot, patting me on the shoulder. "This is not the worst room in our lodging-house, by any means, though perhaps 'tis not so warm and cozy as Mrs. Prentice's. In fact, 'tis reserved

for our distinguished guests of state, and my orders are that you be treated considerably. Sergeant McQuarters here will see to it that you be supplied with any small commodities that you desire to purchase. Only, unfortunately, 'tis not permitted to change your hostelry."

Although he veiled his encouragement with mockery, I fancied that he felt for me in my position, and this small ray of sunshine seemed partly to lift the fog of despondency that had settled down upon me.

"And I am of the opinion that you will not be kept long in suspense," he added. "And so, for the present, my dear lieutenant," he concluded, with an exaggeration of his dandyish lisp, "I must bid you *au revoir*."

So I was known! This was the last shock in the series of revelations. I was aroused from my musings by the harsh voice of Sergeant McQuarters.

"Now, Mr. Fortescue," he said in his rough Scots burr, "I've got to search ye. So, to make things easy and save trouble to come, off with your clothes, and we'll make a good job of it!"

He did so, examining my garments, prying into my wig, feeling along seams for Heaven knows what implements of preservation or destruction; finally grunting sourly as he handed me back my clothes and remaining nineteen guineas.

A little later one of the soldiers brought me a supper of bread and meat, late as it was, and a pitcher of water. But I could eat nothing, and I spent the greater part of the night pacing my cell, or staring through the bars and dreaming, like every prisoner, of escape.

From my window I could see the flowing river and the dark heights opposite. A pot of flaming tar upon the salient underneath sent up its smoky wreaths into the air. Through the stillness I could hear the cry of a watchman far below.

"All's well! A fair night!" he called out.

And then, as if to mock my misery, there floated to my ears the distant song of lumbermen, sailing their craft down the mighty current of the St. Lawrence; and, though

I could not discern the words, my memory seemed to fit them to the tune:

*Il y a longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEATH SENTENCE.

A LENGTHY investigation of my surroundings as soon as it grew light convinced me that escape was an impossibility. My cell was at the top of the tower, in the extreme angle of a salient. From my window, which was just large enough to permit me to squeeze through, could I contrive to file away the bars, I could see the river beneath, with the heights of the south shore opposite, as well as a considerable extent of land along the river-front, and for some distance along the walls.

But to drop from my window would be to fall upon one of the pinnacles of rock that jutted up from the base of the great cape abutting on it, fully two hundred feet below. For there was no moat beneath me, the Citadel being here protected by the inaccessible cliff.

And the days dragged themselves on feet of lead. Cooped up in my cell, deprived of exercise, with only the monotony of my thoughts for company, and with the thought of my uncompleted mission and folly to gall me, I was quickly falling into a hypochondria.

Despite my blankets and the short mink cloak, I suffered bitterly from the cold. It was soon after sunrise one morning when, seated on my bed, I was startled by the discharge of two cannon-shot.

Running to the window, I saw that the walls and ramparts were packed with soldiers, while the streets of lower town were filled with an immense crowd. In the river itself three merchantmen, which had laid up in the St. Charles, to winter in the ice there, were putting slowly up-stream. Behind them, with sails half set, came the Lizard and the Hunter, men-of-war, the sun gleaming on their port guns.

And suddenly I heard loud cries within the Citadel and drums beating. Bells

rang; all Quebec seemed to buzz like a great hive; and now, glancing landward, I saw a sight that brought my heart into my throat.

For there were General Arnold's men, advancing toward the walls, and among them—it was impossible to mistake them—Colonel Dan Morgan's riflemen, my own half-company that I had been so proud to lead all the way out of Virginia.

They had emerged from the forests, and, emulating Wolfe's feat, crossed the river in boats on the night before, from the falls of the Chaudiere, whose thunder drowned the sounds of oar and paddle, and, as I learned afterward, had already occupied an extent of territory about the city, including Major Caldwell's own mansion, Sans Bruit, near the St. Charles.

They advanced in steady columns toward the walls, which were lined with soldiers, then spread out in skirmishing order, and stopped within a thousand paces.

How I longed to be among them! How barbarous seemed my fate, so near them and unsuspected!

The roll of the drums had ceased, and the intense silence was broken suddenly by the single command of an artillery officer. A puff of smoke appeared at the muzzle of each of a dozen guns. There followed the rolling echo of the discharge.

When the cloud cleared away I saw our men standing unharmed by the balls, which, falling short at that range, or moving with decreased momentum, had passed harmlessly among them.

Then a soldier stooped, tore off his coat, and, wrapping his hands in it, raised one of the hot balls and hurled it into the air toward the walls.

At this defiance there broke forth such a storm of cheering from our ranks as made my pulses leap, and taunting shouts from the walls for answer.

Then our red flag with the black border was raised, and two soldiers stepped forward, waving it as they went. Gradually the troops behind them advanced also, until the entire force was within hearing, the British on the walls and our men below looking on each other with similar surprise and appraisal.

Upon the ramparts leaped an officer. I fancied it was Major Blair.

He shouted angrily and waved his arms, pointing toward the cannon. And, taking out his watch, he began to count. He leaped back, and the roar of a cannonade broke forth again. When the smoke cleared I saw our men in some disorder, but not through fear.

They were chasing the round shot that bounded harmlessly across the plains! A most intolerable sight to me, this clowning, as if they were playing at ball, while the ramparts rocked with laughter.

Yet I was to learn that, like the first courtesies of practised boxers, such a play is not incommensurate with high courage and resolution. Our troops, having effected this reconnaissance, withdrew behind the crest, leaving me in a fever of apprehension. I imagined rightly that there would be a sequence for me out of this affair; and so it proved.

After a night spent lying awake, shivering, and torn by tortures of suspense, and fear for our troops, I was dressed and seated by my bed, very miserable, when the cell door opened and Captain Chabot appeared. He seemed to be almost startled at my appearance, and I could see the jest die on his lips.

"Courage now, my dear lieutenant," he said. "Your troubles shall be ended quickly, one way or another. Sir Guy is back from Montreal, and, busy as he is, will see you this very morning."

"Thanks to the arrival of our forces," I said ironically.

"Why, yes," he returned. "Never was such a change effected by one man. For I am free to tell you that the appearance of your ragged invaders, who fell upon us suddenly out of the forests, like savages, and are now ravaging the surrounding country for food, produced almost a panic, and there were those who counseled surrender. And what with Mr. Allsop at odds with Mr. Cramahe in the council, and disaffection rife everywhere, 'tis odds but your General Arnold could have made quick work of us, had he known how we warred."

I prudently refrained from comment, but

could not help asking him if Montreal had fallen to General Montgomery, as I inferred from Sir Guy Carleton's arrival. He would not admit this, but I could see it in his manner.

It was true; Montreal had capitulated, with all the ships in her port, and Sir Guy Carleton had run the gambit of the besiegers at the last moment on board a barge and made his escape to Quebec.

Had he not done so, how different would have been Canada's story!

For I cannot but pay my tribute to that great man, ill as England has served me.

"You have breakfasted?" Chabot pursued. "Then I am commissioned to bring you to the château immediately."

He glanced at my plate, with the untasted food on it, and seemed to feel the mockery of his question, for he produced a flask of wine, which he had very considerably brought with him.

"Drink some of this, my dear lieutenant!" he said. "'Tis no Dutch courage, as the English have it, but very necessary for a gentleman with such an ordeal to face. Between ourselves, I should grieve much if your confinement dispirited you before the court. We gentlemen, divided by the accidents of war, must stand together. *Diable!*" he added, as I drank gratefully and handed back the flask. "Your quarters are cold! The winter sets in early."

He was kindness itself, and yet I was sure he knew that it had been planned to break my spirit with the cold of the cell and loneliness.

How strangely we are all made! Pretense and spontaneity, shallowness and kindness—such was Chabot, one of the most human types I have known.

"And now, *monsieur*," he said, offering me his arm, "the guard waits below, and if you will be so good as to accompany me we will start on our journey."

In spite of the coming ordeal, I breathed more freely when we descended into the Citadel enclosure. Chabot's consideration in coming to my cell alone had been extraordinary; now his manner changed immediately. I found myself surrounded by a squad of men with bayonets fixed, who came to attention smartly at his command.

He seemed curt and contemptuous; the dandyish lisp, the airs were gone in a moment, and, at his ringing command, we set off smartly across the enclosure, through the gate, and along the ramparts, past the artillerymen drawn up behind their guns, past a detachment of the Seamen's Corps, and so through Fort St. Louis into the château courtyard.

For half an hour we waited there. Through the open gates I could look into the heart of the upper town; I saw the Ring and the Recollets' building, with pedestrians crossing, ladies in their fine gowns, and civilians.

Meanwhile the soldiers about me discussed me freely, not knowing that I understood their tongue—for they were of the French militia.

"He's to go before the court martial as soon as the governor comes from the council," one said.

"Is it true he had laid plans to blow us all to heaven with the powder-magazine?" asked another.

"I heard 'twas to seize La Glaciere Fort he came, and was taken in the nick of time, the lit fuse in his time. That was why the Congress men feared not our cannon, for they expected to see the Citadel go sky-high."

"Whichever be true, one thing's sure—he'll hang this day week over the ramparts."

"Better than shooting. 'Twas I put the ball in M. Webster's brain at twelve paces. 'Twas his eye I aimed at, for he would not have his face bound, but he rolled it so my aim miscarried, and my ball went through his eyebrow."

Captain Chabot, who had gone into the château, leaving the squad in the charge of a sergeant, now reappeared, accompanied by the lieutenant-governor, Mr. Cramahe, a tall, sour-faced Swiss, who eyed me gloomily, gave some command, and went into the rotunda of the fort, leaving behind him a little secretary dressed in the uniform of a captain.

This personage eyed us with an air of great consequence, snapping his gold watch repeatedly, as if waiting for the arrival of an exact moment. At last he snapped it

for the last time, and, replacing it in his pocket, spoke to Chabot, who rasped out a command.

The fusees clanked on the stones and were shifted shoulder-high. We marched across the court and into old Fort St. Louis.

Here, in the big stone rotunda, a hollow square was formed. In the center had been placed a table, with ink-pots, paper, and quills.

The soldiers stood guarding me until I saw Mr. Cramahe coming through a doorway, accompanied by a notary, in an old-fashioned full periwig.

The notary came up to me, and, at the lieutenant-governor's instructions, I was left free. The notary bowed stiffly toward me.

"Lieutenant," he said ceremoniously, "I have been asked by the crown to represent you. The charge you know; what defense have you to offer?"

I hardly knew; indeed, I had hardly thought. For, though the reservation I had made to Mr. Arnold had been to save me from the stain of vulgar spying, I knew that I had placed myself nevertheless under the inexorable laws of war.

"I have been shown the evidence against you," continued the notary. "It is conclusive enough to hang an army, sir. I speak bluntly, because your only hope lies in the recognition of this. Courts martial are composed of soldiers, who, being men of untrained minds, judge by the facts alone."

He paused, studying my face.

"I understand," he said in a lower voice, "that there are influences at work to save you, provided you prove amenable in a certain matter. I advise you to plead guilty and throw yourself upon the mercy of the court. What say you?"

I knew not what he meant, and I think the impression I made on him was wholly unfavorable. We were talking at cross-purposes, without much chance of an understanding, when three officers entered the rotunda, followed by several others, whereupon he stepped back to the table, my guards ranged themselves alongside me again, and the soldiers brought their muskets ringing down on the stones.

The central figure of the three officers was a gentleman wearing a general's uniform. He looked a little less than fifty years of age; he would have attracted instant notice anywhere, and his whole manner was one of such simplicity and ease, and yet blended so admirably with unbending and austere authority, as I have never seen in any other man, save one, and he of my own colony of Virginia.

This was Sir Guy Carleton, the famous governor of Quebec, a veteran soldier who had bled for England at Havana and in the first battle of the Plains; he had been quartermaster-general in Wolfe's expedition and Wolfe's executor; he had fought in the second battle against Levis, and had but latterly returned after being four years on leave in England.

The two officers with him were a colonel and a captain of his staff. Behind them I recognized the faces of Major Caldwell, of Colonel Voyer, of Captain Malcolm Frazer, and of the Comte Dupre—but not, I was glad, of Major Blair or of St. Cyr.

I was weak enough to feel that Blair's presence, at least, would have unnerved me. For our rivalry would have made my humiliation too keen for mortal endurance.

With very brief formalities I was placed on trial upon the two charges of espionage and of the unlawful wounding of a soldier in his majesty's army.

During the two hours or so that the trial lasted I lived over again all the events of that evening at the manor. Everything was recounted, everything piled up with damning cumulation against me.

The chain of events was linked, from my discovery in the anteroom of the manor to my appearance upon the summit of the cliff beside the château.

Then Colonel Voyer, who was acting as the prosecutor, read out the written statement of the maid Marie, to the effect that, hearing voices in the anteroom, on the night of the assemblage, she had listened at the door and had heard me state to Hermione that I was a lieutenant in General Arnold's forces.

I saw the notary, who had really defended me with some skill, sink back in his chair with a hopeless gesture and begin to

play with one of the pounce-boxes upon the table. I heard the governor asking me if I had anything to say; and, while I was wondering why St. Cyr had not been called, the guards closed about me, and I was removed to the far end of the rotunda.

There followed a brief deliberation; then I was recalled, and Sir Guy Carleton quietly announced the verdict of guilty.

Then happened an unfortunate incident.

There was an intense silence in the rotunda as the verdict was pronounced; not an officer or a man shifted or stirred, and Sir Guy, standing at the head of the table, was already pronouncing the first words of the sentence when there came a stir at the rotunda entrance, and I saw Hermione de Quesnoy push the sentry aside and pass within.

Sir Guy ceased speaking at the interruption and glanced sternly toward her, and Colonel Voyer rose quickly from his place and went toward her.

But she evaded him and came straight toward the table.

"I have been deceived!" she cried. "I should have been called in evidence. Mr. Fortescue is no spy, American though he may be. He had good reason for coming here!"

"Be silent and withdraw, Mlle. de Quesnoy!" said the governor sternly.

But she confronted him as unflinching as he.

"I have been played with and deceived!" she cried. "I have the right to speak, since I was used as the bait for this trap. I shall speak, and I shall tell the truth!"

Her breast heaved violently, and she stood before Carleton as lithe and supple as a panther ready to leap. Looking at the governor, I was sure that he had known nothing of the trap; and I think his consciousness of that tragic moment moved him enough to hold him silent.

"He is no spy!" she cried. "He is my lover, whom I knew in Boston, two years since, when my uncle took me there. It was to visit me that he came in disguise ahead of Mr. Arnold's army. 'Twas I admitted him to the manor. Ask the witness if 'twas not so. I hid him in my room.

They found him there. Now you have the truth, the whole truth, gentlemen!"

The silence following her words was broken by a wild oath at the entrance. I turned, to see Major Blair standing there, his eyes fixed furiously on mine, his face convulsed almost to the point of madness.

Out of the ensuing silence I heard the voice of Colonel Voyer:

"You are too late, *mademoiselle*. The verdict has been rendered."

The notary leaped up.

"The case can be reopened!" he cried. "I appeal to his excellency!"

"Your statement is not true, *mademoiselle*," said Carleton quietly and seemingly unmoved.

"'Tis false!" I cried. "Mlle. de Quesnoy would save me, a stranger, at that price, and out of pity. I never saw her till that evening."

I heard Blair gasp, and now, looking involuntarily at him, saw that his whole frame, so tense, had relaxed suddenly; he turned away and stood with hanging head, like a great, sullen schoolboy.

Carleton, who had continued to look gravely at Hermione, asked her again to withdraw, and, when she would not, went on reading the death sentence. I had one week in which to prepare for its execution. In view of the conviction, the second charge against me would be dropped, he said.

"Your excellency," the notary cried, "I speak without my client's present leave, knowing he will accord it to me. Our only hope now lies in the clemency of the executive. He will reveal all that he knows, and throw himself upon your mercy, hoping, but not bargaining, for commutation."

"I will not parley with a traitor," answered Carleton, and went out of the rotunda.

CHAPTER VIII.

HERMIONE'S GLOVE.

I WAS dimly conscious of being led back through a lane of shouting, menacing people, who had broken into the precincts of the fortress, and at first yelled

execrations at me and then became silent. And there was a woman who cried "God save you!" and others who wept. I remember it all as one sees a scene reflected in a mirror, with the cloudiness of unreality and yet a keen sense of the details.

But anon I was back in my cell, with a week's grace of life, and, I am not ashamed to say, save for my joy at Hermione's safety, utterly humiliated and cast down.

I knew that I should face death calmly enough in the end; yet the thought of my home in Virginia, which I was never to see again, of my part in the war unplayed, and, above all, of Hermione, shook me with horror.

To save my reason and keep a brave face toward the future, I made it my business to inveigle one of the soldiers into conversation. He was a *censitaire* of the French militia, and, finding that I spoke his language, he became quite communicative.

From him I learned that General Arnold had withdrawn his troops up the river, to meet General Montgomery's, marching east, flushed with the capture of Montreal. It was strange how much I interested myself in the man's talk.

His name was Petitclerc, his father a small land-owner not far from Beauport. I listened to all the humble details of his life, of his sweetheart, Jeanne Roy, who was a maid in the governor's household, his brothers and sisters; all the while drawing him out and studying him, finding him a simple countryman, of no great mind, and incorruptible.

Yet he pocketed the gold piece I gave him gratefully, saying, with an apologetic air, that he supposed I was not likely to have much use for it later.

On the day following my sentence old McQuarters came into my cell and, in his rough snarl, announced that an officer wished to see me.

To my astonishment it was Armand St. Cyr who stood before me.

"You may leave us, sergeant," he said. And, when we were alone:

"You seem to bear imprisonment hardly, Mr. Fortescue."

"It is no great matter, sir," I replied.

"Harken!" he said, laying his hand on my shoulder. "You understand your position, sir. Your shrift will be a short one, and you can hope for no respite."

I tried to hide the emotion I could hardly master. For the dog's death of the rope, the felon's cart, the jeering crowds—I have seen it all; I saw it in Boston, and the soldier's calling does not steel a man against its horror.

"These are stern times, Mr. Fortescue," he said, seating himself on the bed beside me. "It is a big stake now played for. The first rubber, between the French and the English, the English won. But that enmity, now partly assuaged, was as nothing to this, between two brothers who fight for the mastery in their own household. Our foes to-day are of our own household."

"You speak like an Englishman," I answered bitterly.

"English or French matters little," he answered. "The wise man chooses the winning side, and you have no man a match for Carleton, in valor, in character, in power. What are your Arnold and Montgomery? A chemist and an Irish renegade! You think me a traitor?"

"My position does not permit me to express myself," I answered.

"Take your Washington," he went on thoughtfully, as if he hardly heard me. "What is he? A gentleman of honor, a patriot, doubtless; and yet the turn of fortune shall decide whether he reign a king or die on the scaffold. What is a traitor, and what a patriot?"

I listened warily, conscious of bigger things to come.

"You, Mr. Fortescue," he said, "will be a sorry sacrifice for those knaves who plot against us. All the best in your country are heart and soul with his majesty's cause. This freak that led you to take up arms with the rebels is inexplicable in a gentleman of your standing."

"Here, too, many of the best among our French are obsessed with the same mad ideas of liberty," he went on. "In their case, with more justice. I will come to the point, sir."

"My sister is possessed of important

papers which, for a mere whim, she hides from his excellency, knowing that the possession of them is of incalculable value to us. Should she be persuaded to surrender them, he who persuaded her could demand and receive almost anything, and not least—liberty."

He paused and stared at my face, to watch how his words affected me.

"I will be frank with you, Mr. Fortescue," he went on. "You are acquainted with her; you knew her in Boston. You, unfortunately, are the cause of her refusal to listen to an alliance which will restore our fortunes to their former prosperity. If she yield the papers I say, on my honor, that you shall go free."

"The honor of the man who would compromise his sister's honor?" I asked bitterly. "The honor of one who steals back into her home at dead of night, in company with armed robbers?"

He started violently, but controlled himself with the ease of one well used to double play; only his heightened flush now betrayed him.

"I do not bandy words with you, sir," he retorted. "This distasteful task that I am set upon is one where the personal element must be laid aside."

"Place those papers in our hands, and you shall be set free. 'Tis no base offer. And it can never be renewed."

"For it comes not from Sir Guy, who would have naught of it; he will not bargain; 'tis his one weakness."

"Then I shall have learned to honor him from your lips, sir," I retorted.

"I speak by Mr. Cramahe's authority, before he lays down his office to Sir Guy," he persisted. "To-morrow will be too late. You must decide immediately."

"My decision needs no telling," I rejoined. "You may leave me, Captain St. Cyr."

With a shrug of his shoulders he went out of the cell, leaving me a prey to more dejection than I would have let him know, lest he renew that hideous offer, unthinkable, and yet atrocious in its appeal to one whose days were ending.

However, I had no time to brood over the matter, for, hardly a half-hour later, as

it was beginning to grow dark, I had my second visitor.

I was seated on my bed. I heard McQuarters unlock my cell door, but was so used to the constant coming and going of my guards that I did not notice he was not alone, nor look up, until I realized that an officer had entered with him. Then I sprang to my feet, to discover Major Blair.

I saluted him, and he returned my salute.

"I have been posted here for the present time, sir," he said, when we were alone. "I have you in my charge, but you may infer that I have not been overeager to visit you.

"However, circumstances change resolutions, mine having been not to see you until I lead you to your gallows."

The sneering tone, the brutal words, aroused my hot resentment. I could not help asking him whether an officer, even if convicted of espionage, did not deserve, by cause of his misfortune, the same courtesy as one in honorable captivity. He looked a little ashamed.

"I offer my regrets, sir," he answered reluctantly. "As you know, I have no cause to love you. Your friends remain active in your behalf. It has been thought they even risk their reputations as patriots, if not their safety, they so outrun discretion in their championship—and, in particular, when they humble themselves to take shame for love of you."

"Pray say what you have come to say, sir, and end this interview," I said.

"By gad, sir," he burst out, "I will know whether there be one word of truth in the statements made before the governor by Mlle. de Quesnoy."

And, as he hurled these words at me, his fingers drummed a wild tattoo upon the hilt of his sword; he glared at me like a man famished for truth, or groping for light in the black fog of his own doubts.

"There is no word of truth, sir, as I have said," I answered. "Publish this widely. Mlle. de Quesnoy sought to save a stranger's life; it was the warm impulse of a brave woman—no more."

His eyes were like sword-points upon

mine; he sighed, and seemed to relax from the same tension as in the rotunda. Then he smiled coldly, and all at once I saw the gallant soldier of the manor again, brave, reckless, handsome, fascinating.

"I thank you, Mr. Fortescue," he answered simply. "Otherwise it would have gone hard with me—for Mlle. de Quesnoy is without."

Before I had recovered from my surprise he had stepped out of the cell. He came back with Hermione.

"*Mademoiselle*, here is Mr. Fortescue," he said. "I charge you not to delay, for his excellency has granted you a quarter-hour and no more, and that only because he misconceives your sentiments toward Mr. Fortescue."

"It may be he misconceives me, my dear major," she answered. "Yet Sir Guy is a shrewd old soldier, and doubtless has read much of many women's hearts before Lady Maria carried his away."

He started—how easily she played with him! He peered into her face, and then drew back toward the cell door, eying her uncertainly and morosely.

Hermione came to me and put out her hands. For all her seeming coldness, they were burning.

I held them in mine for a long moment as I looked into her face. It was nearly dark now, but the gloom of the cell seemed only to increase her beauty and heighten the living charm that spread from her.

She was dressed all in black, she carried a pair of soft gloves in her hand, and her dark hair was faintly powdered. I loved her; and the thought of death, which had depressed my spirits, now kindled me to a raging resolution which made death seem impossible, as if there were some magnetism in her that drew my soul upward.

She bent toward me.

"Keep hope!" she whispered. "We shall save you. Plans are being contrived. This night six days hence watch at your window a half-hour before midnight. Help will come. Be sure of it."

"And you?" I asked. "You will not endanger yourself?"

"I?" she asked. "I shall be at the château, dancing there, as is required of

me; for Sir Guy gives a state ball to celebrate the departure of the Americans, and I dare not let suspicion of me arise. But my thoughts will be of you, my hopes with you, my heart with you—"

Her words threw me into an uncontrollable agitation. We two stood there, face to face beneath the window; Blair had drawn a little toward us from his post by the door, but I forgot him as if I had never seen him. I only knew that we, who loved each other, were together in a new world, a solitude.

"Take my glove!" she said in a low voice, drawing it from between her fingers.

I thought it was a keepsake, such as lovers exchange. I never doubted her love for me. I placed it in the bosom of my coat.

And I know not what I was about to say; anyway, it was not said, for she suddenly bent to me, and her lips touched mine lightly; then, as my arms would have detained and held her, she was gone from me, leaving me all uplifted and solemn, too, for all my joy, at this most wonderful thing—grander than any dream I had ever cherished.

She was at Blair's side by the door; I heard his voice rattle in his throat and die inarticulate; they were beyond the door, and then I heard her laughter, so light and soft you would have thought she was amused at some small drollery.

"Why, my dear major, you take too tragical a view. A dying man, whom I have befriended? What else had I to give him? You make a great deal of naught."

I did not hear his answer, for they were already passing down the stone stairs. Already my enkindled spirits were beginning to die down.

The clang of the heavy door enclosed me in my living tomb again. And I paced it, wondering what scheme had been devised, who would help me, and how, by any possibility, help could come.

I was startled to find McQuarters at my side. He had come in so softly, and I had been so absorbed in my thoughts, that I had not heard him.

"Mr. Fortescue, there's something on my mind," he said. "Your span is but a

short one—as the grass that springs up and is cut down and perisheth. It troubles me—it troubles me sore."

"You are very good, sergeant," I said, surprised at his change of manner.

"Aye, Mr. Fortescue, but it's not your end that troubles me," he replied grimly. "It's the fear that you've misused your opportunities and havena the consolations of relection. But every tub must stand on its own bottom. It's not for me to con-vairrt ye!"

He lingered on the word so lovingly that I was sure he would have delighted in the opportunity, had I been willing to furnish it. Indeed, the thought came to me that I might use him; but his next words brought that hope to the ground.

"When I've watched ye, so quiet for hours together, I thocht ye had interior hopes," he went on. "But now I know that I was wrong, sir, and there's only one thing besides relection that could have given you your strength. Ye're planning to escape, and there will be need of watching ye more closely, I'm thinking."

With which he walked to the window, and, reaching up, began to pull at the bars, examining them in the light of the pine torch in my cell. Satisfied at last that they were solid in the masonry, he shook his head dubiously and withdrew.

When I was alone I walked toward the torch and drew Hermione's glove from my breast. There was a faint fragrance about it that brought her back to my eyes almost as vividly as when she stood in the same place before me.

But the little glove was, as I thought, fastened; and, looking at it, I saw that it was stitched along the wrist, and it was not limp, but filled with something like soft sand.

Wondering, I bit one of the stitches apart and unripped the rest. The little glove was nearly filled with black blasting-powder!

And, hidden in the midst of this, I found a little, sharp pick, such as is used for removing stones from the hoofs of horses. For a moment I did not understand.

Of what use this heap of powder, which I could almost hold in the hollow of one hand?

Then I looked up toward the window, and saw the bars, set in the masonry, and understood. With the pick I could drill a little hole at one end of each bar, a little deep hole invisible to others.

In such a confined space the force of the explosion, greatly intensified, would suffice to loosen the stones and let the bars be plucked out or swung free from the window.

And so it became clear to me that my rescue would come, in some manner, from without.

But how, I could not understand; it seemed an impossibility, as I stood looking out and down the slope of the gaunt cliff; and yet I felt like a man brought back to life out of his tomb.

Then I remembered that the night of my rescue and of the ball was the night before my execution.

CHAPTER IX.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE.

A CAREFUL survey showed me that, with the middle and lower bars out of the way, I could just manage to force my body through the window opening. This would require the drilling of two holes, a task which, I calculated, would take me two or three nights only.

And here I thanked my luck in having had the training of an engineer during our frontier expeditions. For, in truth, the task was an engineer's in little.

The edge of the stone frame was my bastion, my holes the mines, the wall the sap; to follow the metaphor less carefully, the counter-mine was the watch outside my door.

Though my guards' frequent visits were meant to be untimely, the men had, in fact, unconsciously fallen into some sort of routine.

McQuarters paid his last visit at nine, and there followed hourly visits until midnight, varying never by more than a few minutes; from midnight until morning these visits were irregular, but never less than a full hour apart.

The knowledge of this would enable me

to pursue my task with reasonable safety, and the slight sounds of the pick on the stones would not be heard behind the solid door.

I began my labors that very night, after McQuarter's last visit: I found that the steel pick made hardly any impression on the stones, while its smallness, and the constraint of the position—for I had to reach upward—cramped my wrist and set my fingers aching.

At the end of an hour I had made only a tiny hole, hardly deeper than the point.

I had collected the stone scrapings on one of my gold pieces, and, before retiring, carefully replaced them in the hole on the point of the little pick, and moistened them into the masonry.

Throughout that night I labored at safe intervals, and by morning I saw that my estimate had not been too sanguine.

But one thing began to trouble me. I had been searched two or three times since my imprisonment began, and it was essential to find some safe concealment for the pick, and the little hoard of powder, each grain of which was so precious.

After much thought I saw no alternative but to strew the powder thinly between the edges of the stones in the corner of my cell farthest from the window.

The grains looked black as jet against the gray of the stone; however, I was satisfied that they were not likely to be detected.

Then, as to the pick, for a long time this problem appeared insoluble, for McQuarters searched the cell so thoroughly that hardly a needle could have escaped his eye. I thought of my hair, under my wig, which had not been cut for some two weeks, and was uncomfortably long.

But I discarded that fantasy, and also, successively, my belt lining and the hem of a blanket. And finally I had an inspiration.

I had noticed that, owing to the age of the tower, it had sunk slightly toward the interior of the Citadel, so that the momentum of the heavy, oaken door, after it had been swung open, carried it back again and closed it.

To avoid this petty nuisance, which de-

manded the constant use of the key, my guards were in the habit of pushing back the door to its full extent, where it could be kept open, owing to some slight alteration in the level of the cell.

I therefore placed the little pick between two stones, in my full sight when the door was closed, but hidden by the lower edge when it was opened.

There was, of course, the danger that McQuarters would close the door when searching my cell, but he had never done so, and it was fortunate I hit on this solution, for, the next morning, following out his plan, he came in and made the most thorough of investigations that he had yet made.

He examined the floor, and my heart beat fast when he came to the powder; but it escaped his notice, and he went next to the window, rubbing his fingers all along the bars, and peering into the grooves in which they were clamped.

However, he did not think to look at the face of the wall, a few inches away, and I had done my work deftly enough to fear no casual inspection.

Then he stripped me to the skin, felt my clothes, probed my wig, finally pried apart the two planks that formed my bed, and so at last confessed, by his manner, that he was at a loss.

"I canna understand ye," he said, shaking his grizzled head and looking at me thoughtfully.

And then he had his inspiration.

"Man, I know how 'tis," he said. "Ye haven't the imagination!"

This seemed to satisfy him, but I could not sleep until I had completed my task, and twice the next night all but outran my margin of safety.

At length, however, the work was done. I scraped the powder from the stones, covering it with a layer of stone dust, and tamping it into place until the hole was entirely invisible.

All I needed now was a strand of thread, steeped in resin from the pine torch, to form a fuse, which latter—since the torch would be extinct before the time for my rescue—I believed I might obtain from Petitclerc, my guard.

He smoked tobacco nightly in order to protect himself against the smallpox, then prevalent in Quebec, and believed to be carried on the noxious night air.

In all my doings Providence must have been with me, for the morning before my execution brought something which would otherwise have frustrated my hopes. I had just breakfasted when in came McQuarters, accompanied by Major Blair.

He was insulting enough not to return my salutation, but stood in the middle of the floor, looking at me insolently, a sneer upon his handsome face, which was deadly pale.

"How long since you searched this prisoner?" he asked McQuarters.

"Yesterday, sir."

"He should be searched thrice daily!" cried Blair, in a sudden, furious passion. "You will see to it! With these rumors of rescue plots going the rounds, and every fool agape to know what manner of spy we hold here, no precautions may be neglected.

"And, should you find aught on him portending an attempt, place him in irons. Strip him and search him now!"

My blood boiled, less at the humiliating treatment in his presence than at the insult on the last day of my life. But I had my revenge when McQuarters produced Hermione's little glove.

I saw Blair's features grow livid. He seemed to choke, took the glove as if he would have torn it to pieces. Then, with an envenomed glance, he returned it to me.

When the search was at an end, and I had resumed my clothes, he dismissed McQuarters and swung upon me with a gesture of intense contempt.

"Hark, Mr. Merchant," he said, "had we met under other circumstances there had not been room enough for both of us in the whole world!"

"You honor me too highly," I returned.

"Know you not ~~that~~, because of you, Mlle. de Quesnoy's name is bandied lightly from lip to lip in this city of babblers?" he cried.

"Perhaps you smile at that and take pleasure in such a reputation. Who are you, in the devil's name, that you should be the cause of it? Have you known her

in Boston? What is there between you that you should bring her to this shame?

"Answer me! By Heaven," he shouted, whipping out his sword and drawing back his arm as if to thrust at me, "I will know all before I leave you!"

I could not but feel pity for him: he was like a madman in his grief and fury. But I faced him quietly.

"I have answered your questions, sir," I answered.

"Aye, but you lied to me," he retorted, plunging back the weapon into its scabbard. "You lied, and will go lying to your death. Sergeant!"

McQuarters, who must have heard his outcry, came quickly in.

"You will keep a guard in this prisoner's cell until his sentence has been carried out!" he commanded.

McQuarters saluted, and he stalked out of my cell, muttering like one demented. I heard his scabbard clank on the stone steps as he went down.

One of the guards was immediately posted in my room; it was the soldier Petitcherc, and he brought his kit and blankets and strewed them under the window.

And every hour of my last day passed, as leaden as the wintry sky and the ice-choked river without. They had left me my watch, and, as it drew toward ten, and Petitcherc spread out his blankets to sleep, I felt choking, my heart beat wildly, and a fierce desire for life gripped me.

Hermione's face was before me, and Major Blair's, a sweet and a sardonic shadow in the darkness.

I swore my corpse should never hang over Quebec's walls; and it was my intent, if no rescue came, rather to plunge through the window upon the rocks beneath.

No guard had ever entered my cell between a few minutes past eleven and midnight, and I built all my hopes on that. I had contrived, during a momentary absence of Petitcherc, to twist some threads of linen from my shirt, so that they formed a passable fuse, and I had steeped them in resin from the pine torch.

At ten o'clock I begged Petitcherc for a pipeful of his tobacco to remedy a stomach ache, and at the same time gave him two

more guineas, bidding him purchase a gift for Jeanne Roy with it in my remembrance.

It hurt me to see the tears come into the honest fellow's eyes. He wrung my hand, as McQuarters had done, and, taking the pipe which he was then filling, wiped the stem and handed it to me.

I puffed the herb slowly, so as not to be overcome by the noxious fumes. Most of us planters had acquired the habit of smoking the tobacco we grew; but my father, who was old-fashioned, and detested the trick, had kept me to the more elegant snuff-box; however, it was a mild tobacco of *habitant* curing, and I suffered little from it.

Soon, having a glowing ember in the bottom of the bowl, I laid the pipe aside. Then Petitcherc, who had been watching me closely and uneasily, came to my bedside.

"*Monsieur*," he stammered, "I have something for you—from somebody."

He held out a letter. I did not know the writing, but the faint fragrance of the sealed paper told me from whom it came. My hand shook so that I could hardly take it from him.

"Jeanne Roy gave this to me at noon," he said in a low voice. "'Twould go ill with me were this known, *monsieur*; but she made its delivery the condition of our engagement, and—and I, too, wished to deliver it."

He put it in my hand and withdrew, and, puffing at the pipe until the embers were aglow, I opened the letter and spelled it out word by word by their faint light. I read:

I write in haste to say that all the plans go well, and if you play your part undetected, your freedom is sure. I dare not write the means, lest this fall into other hands than yours. I shall dance at the château to-night, and smile upon my partners in the minuet, and bend my head to hear the flatteries they offer—and all the while my heart and mind are far away, in that cold cell, with you.

Much has happened in this short time since I saw you. For one thing, Sir Guy sent for me the next morning, and asked me whether I was prepared to swear to the truth of what I had said at the court martial. When I replied I was, he questioned me upon our meetings in Boston, so gently and so little, but in a minute he had me silent and confounded.

Mr. Cramahe's secretary, who was with him, laughed loudly, but Sir Guy, turning on him, sternly bade him be silent. Then, with the air of one who cuts short a tiresome business, he asked me whether I was loyal. To which I answered—loyal to France and her memories, yes; but not to England. Then would I pay my homage, as the other seigniors had done, which bound me merely to commit no questionable act, nor to use anything against England.

He referred, of course, to the papers. I said I would, provided he would commute your sentence, but not otherwise. And he did not smile, as a lesser man might have done; he is a great man, and one cannot but admire him. He knew immediately the fire in my heart, for he forbore to press me; and so I came away.

And yet, though I had yielded naught, I left him with the feeling of one who had been insolent and ungrateful. Indeed, I would he were other than governor, for when I am in his presence naught but the truth will serve, and his very glance seems to shrivel away all that is false. I have heard men say the same of him. And it is only this that makes me fear for your cause.

Are your Messrs. Arnold and Montgomery men of such mold? In truth, I think you have but one your General Washington who is such a man as he.

Now I must be brief trusting to the good will of a former maid of mine to see this reaches you. There is a plan afoot to imprison me in the manor until I consent to deliver my father's papers. I believe 'tis my brother's; Sir Guy would not stoop to that though he would not interfere with his subordinates.

I learned of it through Major Blair; I fancy he was commissioned to discover whether I would yield. I appeared hesitant, I seemed to ponder, I encouraged even his own approaches, and by that I think I have postponed the moment of my arrest. To-night, 'tis my purpose to fly, and you shall know more. You shall be saved. God speed your hopes—and mine.

It was unsigned. I read it to the end with mingling hopes and fears; and when I knew she loved me, telling me so unsought, with all the candor of her nature, I resolved that the night should not pass till I had seen her, told her all, and taken her with me.

I laid the letter down. 'Twas already past eleven. I rose up and walked to the window, trying to appear unconcerned, and looked out.

Naught was in sight but the ice-choked river, the slope of the precipice beneath, and the snowy heights of the south shore opposite.

Upon the floor beneath the window Pet-

itlerc lay, rolled in his blankets. The sight of him, trustful of me, and never dreaming of my plans, brought a lump into my throat, and yet I could not do other than I had planned.

Holding the pipe in my hand, I leaned over him and made as if to restore it; instead of which, I let it drop to the rug, and clutched his throat suddenly with the other hand, grasping his windpipe in such a way as the Indians use, to render him incapable of the least outcry, yet causing him no pain.

Fear and astonishment would in any case, I think, have left him dumb. But I took no risks, and, before releasing him, I had gagged him by thrusting my handkerchief far down his throat.

He struggled bravely enough, but he had taken off his boots, and his heels made little sound upon the stones. I had previously observed that the rug could be torn into strips along the edges of the rug patterns without much effort, and, having mastered him, I quickly tore off a strip and made a bond for his hands, next fastened his legs together; finally I tied him to the wall by the lower bar of the window, arranging the rag rope about his neck with a slipknot in such a way that any attempt to free himself would quickly warn him to desist by its tightening.

'Twas no pleasant task—'twas an abominable one; but I could not give my life to pay him my gratitude, and, when it was ended, he lay there without a struggle, his eyes fixed on mine in what I thought was hurt bewilderment.

But, as I stooped over him to pay some sort of apology, to my surprise he winked his eye at me in the most expressive manner, as if to say he wished me well.

That cheered me wonderfully. I left him, all aroused to my task, and mad to finish it. I put Hermione's letter in my pocket, then raised the bed on my back and carried it across the cell to the door to form a barricade.

With much precaution against making any sound, I succeeded in wedging it diagonally, so that the foot rested against the door, while the head was jammed firmly in the rough interstices between two lines

of stones of the wall; this latter, being circular, made the task not difficult, and dislodgment extremely so.

It was now half past eleven. There was not the least sign of rescue, but I would not think of this till I had fulfilled my part.

I crossed to the window, inserted the fuse ends quickly into the holes, and applied the ember from the tobacco pipe to the center. In a moment or two the twisted strand of threads broke into two parts, one in each hole, and two little sparks of fire began to creep upward.

That was the hardest moment of all, for if either fuse went out, I was lost. And a renewed struggle on the part of Petitclerc attracted my attention.

I saw his eyes turn in his head from fear. He thought he was to be blown sky-high, with the tower and powder magazine and myself, in tumbling ruin.

"Have courage," I said. "'Tis naught to dread. It will not harm you."

He looked at me piteously, and suddenly the explosion came. I had underestimated its force, or done my work better than I had thought, for, with a dull roar, the whole edge of the window frame broke from the wall, and a terrific shower of splinters and mortar came pattering down upon the floor.

I seized the loose ends of the bars and twisted them, and, finding the iron soft, by using the fixed leverage upon the other side, I managed with no difficulty to wrench them upward, leaving sufficient egress for my body.

Hardly had the explosion sounded when I heard a shout outside, a rattling at the door. I heard the key turn in the lock, and the door's edge grate against the planks of the bed.

I heard McQuarters cry to me, and he and the night guard flung the weight of their bodies against my barricade.

The stout oak did not yield. There was an instant of silence. They heard me twist the bars. Then McQuarters shouted:

"Yield, or we fire!"

I did not answer them. I looked from the window. There was naught in sight save precipice and river.

They were straining at the door and shouting loudly. I heard other soldiers of the night watch racing up the stairs. Then musket butts began to crash violently against the upright oak timbers of the bed.

I grasped the topmost bar of the window with both hands, and, swinging myself up, crouched on the tiny sill. Perched on that narrow ledge, I hesitated.

All my senses recoiled from making that awful plunge into oblivion. I looked to the right and saw the guards pacing the walls. Within the room Petitclerc was moving.

He was dragging the knot of his rag rope along the bar, whose lower end bent downward behind me under the weight of his half-suspended body. In another moment he would be free.

I leaped back into the room, caught the bar, and twisted it upward, striving for a little delay, still hoping against hope. Petitclerc, finding the rope tighten about his neck, ceased his struggle, and remained partly suspended, and on the verge of choking.

Outside the door of my cell the crashing musket butts had ceased. A volley, fired through the chink, followed. Balls struck the walls all about me, ricocheting round the cell.

There came another rush. And now the creaking bed began to go to pieces. I heard the timbers cracking.

Another rush, and the door was six inches open. There came another rattle of musketry, and the balls, as if inspired by devilish malice, leaped past me, bouncing from point to point in the rough masonry.

Again I scrambled to the ledge. And now, prepared to leap, I mustered all my resolution, whispered the few words of my earliest prayer—it was strange how in that instant it came into my mind—I poised myself, and something struck me violently in the chest, so that I staggered backward, and only saved myself by catching at the unbroken bar.

Within the room, just visible upon the strips of the rug, I saw an Indian arrow, with a blunted tip.

And I saw, attached to the feathered

shaft, the thinnest thread of flax, hanging from the ledge beside me.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE NIGHT OF THE GOVERNOR'S BALL.

I PULLED at it, at first without understanding, as I suppose it is the nature of a man to pull at a thread, and, self-numbed for death, I acted as mechanically as one of the new-fashioned spinning-machines.

But soon the thread thickened and became a cord, and the cord a rope; and, as I hauled it into the room, with a new discharge of balls ricocheting about me, and the planks cracking and the door widening, I looked out and saw the figure of an Indian standing upon a projecting crag half-way down the face of the precipice below.

The rope end was in my hands. I leaped back into the room. I saw the face of McQuarters in the gap between the cell door and the wall, and slammed the door fast in his astonished face.

I heard the guards shuffling outside, and McQuarters cursing like one of less sanctimonious mind. I heard the keys jangling.

But, before the door could be opened again, I had tied a quick, strong knot about the bed and brought the rope back to the window.

And I was through the window as the door opened, and descending the rope with a speed that left my hands skinned—though I knew naught of it then.

Hardly had my descent begun when I heard the bed smash. Yells sounded overhead. The guard rushed to the window toward me.

The rope quivered. I fell toward the precipice, thinking that I was lost, but pulling up with a jerk that almost wrenched my arms from their sockets.

That was the giving of the bed; but the knot held, and apparently my pursuers were temporarily unaware of the point to which the rope was fastened.

I heard them cursing in the dark. I scrambled downward. The figure of the Indian under me grew more distinct.

Then fusees were discharged above, and

the balls whistled about me—I found a hole in my cloak afterward. I heard the snapping of the priming pans.

I saw the guard running upon the walls. And I heard McQuarters's voice above me:

"Cut the rope, damn ye!"

It was only later I realized how this command had saved me. In their excitement they forgot that, where one man could flee, others could follow.

The rope parted. I dropped a dozen feet into a sapling, broke it, and twelve feet more, landing, bruised but otherwise unharmed, at the feet of the Indian.

I saw an aged crone of repulsive aspect, her face almost hidden under long locks of lank gray hair that trailed about her shoulders. And we two crouched beneath the shelter of the crag as the muskets in the window roared out together.

As soon as the sounds ceased we rose and began to scramble down the slippery precipice. The crag now protected us from direct aim.

But, looking upward at the walls, I saw that the alarm had been given generally, for the guards were running toward the tower, and the gunners standing to their pieces, as if expecting an assault.

A bell began to clang, a drum within the Citadel to beat to quarters. Drums answered it along the wall, and their reverberating echoes were taken up throughout the town.

We slid down the cliff together in a shower of stones. On my left lay the ramparts, with the château looming up, every window bright with candles. It was the night of the ball; Hermione was there.

I stopped. I would have her and take her with me, else my own freedom was meaningless. By now we were a little more than half-way down the cliff, and on a level with the ramparts, toward which a tongue-like ledge projected.

We could descend no further, save by making a *détour* among the almost vertical rocks. The hag pointed downward. I concluded from her gestures that help was there—perhaps a boat to carry us to the south shore through the ice floes.

But I was mad with the thought of Hermione, with elation at my escape, and

hatred of my persecutors. I could go no further without Hermione—for the life of me I could go no further.

The hag pointed toward the river with the bow she carried, but I shook my head and looked along the ramparts toward the château.

She came to me across the rocks and laid her hand on my arm. She was about to speak when a volley passed overhead, and suddenly, with extraordinary swiftness, three men, who must have been moving upon me quite unobserved from the ramparts, came running along the tongue of rock.

It was only the width of a table, extending from the end of the ramparts to a deep and impassable fissure upon my other side. There was no escape possible. So I stood still and awaited them.

The foremost, in his ardor, lost his footing, and, without any touch from me, went tumbling over and over down the steep slope toward the bottom. I laughed afterward when I recalled the sight, but I did not laugh then. The two others were jostling each other for footing, and both threatened me with their pistols.

"Yield, sir! You have no refuge!" shouted the nearer of the pair.

I recognized Captain Chabot. The second was a petty officer of the French militia. I flung myself upon the two, heard one weapon discharged and the trigger of the second snap without ignition.

I felt my hat spin on my head, and then we were all in a medley, rolling among the rocks, till we lost our footing together, and went downward, with the stones that accompanied us bruising us as much as each other's fists.

I thought there would be no staying that descent of ours till the St. Lawrence closed on us, for we were on the edge of the sheer lower vertical half of the cliff; but we were brought up by a small thicket of birch growth, and I found myself pommeling Chabot, and he me, to our heart's content, with no sign of his companion or of the hag anywhere.

So we fought each other for what seemed several minutes, with the din about us constantly increasing, and the drums rolling

overhead, shouts above us, and the crackle of musketry.

At length I managed to wrest Chabot's pistol from him, as he tried to stun me with it, and dealt him a blow above the ear that sent him to sleep as peacefully as a young infant.

With fingers half numbed by the bitter cold, I quickly stripped him of his uniform, fur cap, and sword, took off my merchant's dress and wig, and exchanged attire, delaying my flight, for humanity's sake, in order to dress him as best I could, that the breath of life might not be frozen out of him.

I spread my cloak of mink about him, since I now had his coat, and I did not forget to put on his hands the gloves that had been in my pocket, nor yet to leave him his papers and take Hermione's letter.

This done, I made my way along the rock and leaped to the ramparts, where I waited a moment. I knew that there had been hardly time for the Citadel gate, which alone communicated with the ramparts, to open.

Consequently, the three who attacked me must have constituted the ramparts picket; they alone had seen me, and, in their excitement, had failed to summon aid.

This reasoning was correct. There was no picket at this end of the ramparts. I passed along them, and found that the gate which communicated with the Citadel was still closed, though a shouting came from behind the turn of the fosse.

And, as I was passing, the gate swung back, and out came the guard at the double, headed by a young officer, capless, and waving his sword.

I shouted to him—it was too dark for him to distinguish me; and he must have taken me for Chabot, for he called back something, and, when I indicated the rocks, led his way thither.

And now, from the landward gate beyond the cliff, I saw a second party emerging, bayonets fixed. But they were too far away to imperil me.

I made my way along the ramparts, running, and adding my own voice to the general din, until I reached the second picket outside Fort St. Louis. The alarm had been given here, and the men were hastily

fixing bayonets and buckling their belts about their coats.

I shouted loudly as I ran, and pointed backward. In the confusion none asked me for the countersign. I broke into a run, crying out as I went that a plot had been sprung to seize the château.

And so, in this way adding fuel to the flame, and mistaken by all for an officer of the garrison, I passed the precincts of the fort, and at length found myself within the courtyard of the Château St. Louis.

Here all was as peaceful as it had been confused without. Bells were still ringing in the city, the alarm was rolling round the walls, and, as I stopped to breathe, three officers on horseback came at a gallop beneath the arch and took the road toward the Citadel.

One of them made as if to rein in and question me, but thought better of it, and, after a quick glance at me, went on. A company was marching toward St. Louis gate from the Jesuits' College, near the building of the Recollects, now used as a barracks, and the headquarters of the troops. Their boots rang musically on the frozen snow.

But in the Château St. Louis the lights blazed. I heard the hum of voices, and suddenly the band blared out.

I crossed the courtyard and made my way to the entrance.

Two periwigged footmen in the governor's livery stood at the door, before which were drawn up dozens of sleighs, the horses' breath steaming into the frosty air.

I passed in unquestioned, and found myself in a long passage leading toward the stairs, which ran upward to the reception-rooms, with the ballroom below, on the east side, giving upon the gallery and the precipice.

The scene was splendid. Outside the danger and darkness—here warmth, light, and such magnificence as reminded me of my own Jamestown in other days. The wide hall was packed with ladies and officers, and a few civilians in court dress.

Great hoops swung like balloons along the passage, making my progress hazardous, great plumes nodded from huge top-knots of powdered hair, of the kind then called "Macaroni."

I made my way slowly toward the stairs, trying to seem unconcerned, and searching for Hermione among that multitude.

Yet, for all my seeming calm, I became aware that instantly every eye was turned on me in astonishment—more than that, in derision. I saw the ladies look at me, smile, and whisper to one another, the officers stare; yet I could not imagine why.

For this was not suspicion, but contempt, and I had not cut so poor a figure in other days that I had grown used to it.

"La, 'tis some captain of impressed *coureurs de bois* from the back country!" I heard a plump dame with nodding plumes remark to her daughter, a still plumper Quebecoise, in an enormous hooped skirt, who giggled and eyed me mischievously.

And I examined my dress furtively as I went past them, feeling their eyes burn into the small of my back, but found naught wrong with it.

I had grown thin in prison, and Chabot's uniform might have been made for me. My gloves were clean, my jackboots stained a little, but passable.

Yet the mockery rippled along the hall behind me, and I was glad to pass on toward the ballroom, past the stairs, with their balusters curved outward to permit passage to the great hoops that filled their width, out of the range of supercilious malice to where a few men lounged by the door watching the dance.

These were mostly the older citizens, in court dress, looking at the couples who swayed in the minuet. The Citadel band was playing a lively air, and some dozen of gentlemen led their partners through the volutions of the dance, while the logs in each of the two great fireplaces sent up a stream of sparks. Among the watchers I saw two elderly men in converse.

One was the notary who had defended me at my trial; the other a dignitary of the church, in a purple cassock, with a gold chain about his neck. I heard a fragment of their speech as I went by.

"Your grandeur will see Sir Guy to-night, then, without fail?" asked the first.

"My dear M. Tardieu—yes, I pledge myself," answered the other. "Yes, if I

have to confront him in his nightrobe. Here I remain till he returns, and not all the footmen in his and Mr. Cramahe's suites together shall move me.

"To tell you the truth, *monsieur*," he went on, in a lower voice, "I am of your opinion that there is more to this affair than meets the eye. If Sir Guy knew—"

I believed they spoke of me, and that influences were at work to save me at the eleventh hour. I looked back from the ballroom door, wondering why the alarm occasioned by my flight had not already reached the château.

But in that very moment I saw it winging its way along the hall, mixed, doubtless, with terrifying rumors of an assault or a surprise.

It came with a tall officer with a cloak covered with snow, who passed from guest to guest, addressing a few hurried words to each. At once the officers began to make their way toward the entrance, tightening their belts and straightening their scabbards.

The hall became abuzz with excited voices. The ladies squeaked and fluttered, the mothers sought their broods.

I sought Hermione, but I could not find her. I made my way up-stairs. A few guests were gathered in the large reception-room, chatting together, probably on weightier matters than those below, and one officer in a colonel's uniform came quickly toward me, stared into my face, and, with a muttered apology, turned away.

And then, standing in a doorway, I saw Mr. Cramahe.

The lieutenant-governor looked at me keenly in his sour way, and seemed about to speak, but turned and made his way back into his room. I went slowly down the stairs again, my heart sinking.

Hermione was not at the reception. There seemed no possibility that I had overlooked her.

And then I saw her, in the thinning hall, standing not far from the door, as if she had just entered. Her face was flushed, and she was searching the passage in evident agitation. I went toward her, and she saw me.

Her face went white, and she put out

one arm and grasped the back of a seat before her. Even then, as always when I looked at her, she seemed the sole figure within the range of my vision.

Gone were the fluttering ladies with their hoops and toupees: I saw only her graceful figure, her superb and steady poise, her eyes fixed on my face, and wide with consternation.

I offered her my arm.

"*Mademoiselle*, a place with you in the minuet," I said.

I felt her fingers tighten upon my arm, but she said never a word. So we went into the great ballroom, bright with its glittering sconces and candelabra.

The tittering rose about me again, but I looked at those nearest me, and there must have been command in my glance, for it ceased instantly.

Inside the ballroom the wild rumors which filled the passage and the stairway seemed not to have spread, for the graceful minuet went on. We passed before one of the fireplaces and went toward the recess that gives upon the railed gallery on the east, overlooking the river.

A storm had broken, a rush of snow drove hard against the leaded panes, heavy with rime; the keen night air blew through the double windows.

Hermione stood facing me.

"Why have you come here, M. Fortescue?" she asked, in low, vehement tones. "You are mad! Think you I risked my liberty, if not my life, to save you, and for this trick of yours?"

She broke down in a storm of sobbing, and yet her eyes were dry, so that none of those in the room might have discerned her emotion. I was astonished at this self-control of hers, but more at her reproaches.

She turned her face from me, looking through the windows toward the ice-filled river.

"*Mademoiselle*," I stammered, "I do not understand you. I came to save you, because of what you wrote me—for that, and to show the Englishman that neither his gallows nor his cold cells can break men's hearts."

"You have ruined us all," she answered in a low voice, not looking at me. "Saw

you not the whole company staring at you? It is hopeless, now—hopeless!”

I was disconcerted beyond measure. If folly had brought me there, at least it had been for her sake.

“Had I not received your letter, *mademoiselle*,” I answered, “I had not come. I hoped to conduct you on your journey—”

“Aye, and Gaubert waits for you beneath the cliff,” she answered; “and how will you escape? Go, if you can, the way you came here—go!”

I bowed and turned to leave her. I was bewildered by her reproaches and utterly heartbroken at what I thought her ingratitude.

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.

Snow Hunters

by Raymond S. Spears



IN the beginning a snow-storm does one thing well; it covers over, it hides, and it conceals. But in the end, snow reveals, with relentless and unmistakable clearness. Therefore it is easy to make a serious mistake about snow-storms and snow.

There are four thousand square miles of the big woods and the forest canopy covers mountains, ridges, knolls and flats; it covers valleys, swamps, bottoms and lowlands. In the autumn, winter makes tentative advances upon the wilderness by scouting snow-clouds, which lay miles-wide swaths of snow, like white ribbons across the woods and mountains.

The snow sometimes covers the land and trees from the mountain tops down to the twenty-three-hundred-foot level, say, and while all the land above that level is white with snow, very sharply, the parts below that level are dark, black even, with autumnal purples and wetness.

Of humans, hunters are most concerned with the autumn snows. They want tracking snow, so that they can tell where the

deer have been, where they came from, and especially, whither they are bound.

Up to, and including the 15th of November, the woods are greatly occupied by men who wish to let go of their instinct to kill their own meat, but on the 16th, the great majority of hunters put on their packs, tuck their guns into the crooks of their elbows and amble down out of the woods and climb stiffly into their conveyances, to take their courses to less exposed, more comfortable, less attractive abodes and places of occupation.

Men commonly desert the wilderness, just when it become most wild; just when the woods are most solemn, quiet, given over to the perfect coordination of Nature's forces, humans turn their back on the fastnesses, because, perforce, the law no longer permits them to kill deer—of all large wild creatures, the easiest and the most pitiful to kill.

Take bears, for example: bears are legal game, and there are only four or five real bear hunters among the two or three hundred thousand hunters who go in the

big woods. By bear hunters one does not mean men who set traps, baited with odorous and attractive temptations to suit a bear's appetite, but men who shoulder their rifles and slip into the wilderness, to hunt down the bear, and shoot him in the spot where it will do the most damage—wherever that may be, as hunters continually dispute whether a heart, neck or head shot is worst for bears.

Bears are self-sufficient animals. They take advantage of those first autumnal snows. They use them in visualizing the presence of their natural born enemies, the riflemen of the woods.

A bear, following a beech flat, from nut tree to nut tree, will inspect a hunter's mocasin track with nose, and even with tentative picking with a long forepaw claw. Of all noses in the woods, a bear's is the keenest and the most accurate; it registers the odor of a man from a mile, or even miles, up wind; and a bear's ears put a deer's or fox's to shame for acuteness and identification.

A bear knows the step of a deer, the jump of a rabbit, the whir of a partridge's wings, and the faint, practised, villainous craunch of a still-hunter, armed with a rifle, with a pointblank of two hundred yards.

A human, with keen ears, will hear the distant scared cry of a cub suddenly deserted—for lesson's sake—by a mother bear, in full flight at the least taint in the woods' pure air.

The fact is, the woods are full of odors, and a fish caught dead upon a lake beach, a deer dead of slow wounds, the muck of dead-wood, the slip of wet leaves—all these things are pure and of the woods; but not the odor of men, modern men, with their tobacco, their cooked food, their natural smell, for not even the smoke of an open dead-wood fire—the abomination of the woods in these days of burning dead and down timber, instead of slim beech, birch, and maple—not even the dank smudge of half-rotten spruce or balsam, can purify a man and make him sweet to the green timber creatures.

Snow blankets the earth, and covers all that was; but immediately everything that is is revealed, forthwith. And on this ac-

count, Jerry Tilcum rejoiced when he entered the timber, between days, on bare ground, which was immediately covered, flake by flake, with snow. Jerry had reason for desiring to be absent, without trace.

He was a pot-hunter; he was determined to kill venison for his winter meat; he needed snow to hide his trail, to reveal the deer, and to cover the fact of his violations. He went into the woods on the 17th of November, which was the day after the last of the law-abiding deer hunters shouldered their packs for the regretful pull-down out of the woods into the highways where they sought home comforts, including home cooking.

Jerry lived in Boulder, and he knew that Game Protector Vincuss had his eye on him. Jerry had violated all the game laws, fish laws and forest laws that he felt inclined to break.

Otherwise, he was a very law-abiding, circumspect citizen. He didn't have to violate the law, as a matter of livelihood; it was merely a sport with him, like playing poker with a member of the police board, or buying a glass of good liquor on Sunday from the alderman of the ward.

The trouble was, Game Protector Vincuss was without humor, and he had a sense of duty. Not for the world would Vincuss sit down and eat a venison steak with a boon companion for an early December dinner.

Having sat down to such a dinner, he would immediately arise and take his host to the justice of peace, and force a confession of judgment, with costs, amounting, all told, to \$111.14, including war tax on railroad fares.

Before going into the woods Jerry ascertained that Vincuss was trying to catch boys who were shooting muskrats, when muskrat shooting was illegal, because it spoils the hide.

He knew, too, that Vincuss was looking around trying to find automobiles with parts of the meat of does in them, killing female deer being among the innumerable possible violations of the law.

Between days, Jerry slipped his flivver out of his garage; he ran it twenty miles up the Creek Road; he turned it into an

old log camp tote road (throwing down some dead brush where he left the main-highway, to cover his tire tracks), and hid the little car in some hemlock second growth.

Then he shouldered his pack and slipped back four miles to a hunting country in which he had great confidence.

Deer were there in plenty; hunters had missed that locality, having gone too far into the woods, or not gone far enough in, to locate this game pocket.

There was a big, overhanging boulder there, and under this Jerry had often slept, on a bed of hemlock and balsam boughs. In front of it was a built-up stone fireplace, which reflected heat back under the big boulder, where it was dry and cozy. A passer-by, glancing at the camp, would have thought it was occupied only by porcupines, for all the human conveniences were cunningly hidden and obscured by dead-wood, a fallen tree top, and other camouflage.

Jerry reached the camp before midnight. He rolled up in his woolen-waterproof canvas sleeping bag, till just before dawn, he awakened and ate a hot breakfast. At the first streak of dawn, he warmed the grip of his rifle barrel over his little fire, and ten minutes later he slipped forth in the falling snow, his moccasins making no noise on the slushy, wet ground.

"I guess I've given old Vincuss the slip, this time!" he grinned to himself.

He hunted slowly, and with the minimum of motion commensurate with covering the ground at the rate of a little less than two miles an hour. Knowing the habits of deer like a successful violator, he sought them where they were most likely to be in such a mild storm, either in rather thick evergreen timber, or working along the beech ridges pawing among the wet leaves for beechnuts.

The deer were very wild; they had been driven into that small area by the activities of legal hunters of three days previous on all sides, some driving the ridges with wild ballyhoos, and some sneaking with more or less craftiness, according to more or less crude ideas about the art of still-hunting.

Deer tracks were plenty in the dead

leaves, showing through the thin white of the snow. The woods, black at the beginning of the storm, seemed to grow whiter and brighter apparently under the inspiration of the snow, rather than because of the coming of day.

The illusion, one of Nature's prettiest, was perfect. The snow was making daylight!

Jerry crossed an area of spruce knolls; ascended an open beech ridge; descended into another evergreen patch—a balsam swamp, this time—and worked his way diagonally up the side of a great, master ridge where deer found a succulent moss along the north side. He struck a deer runway which led into a deep gap in the ridge, and following it, he sat down to breathe at the crossing of many wild animal trails.

Deer runways, cut by sharp hoofs in the soil, were most conspicuous; but the practised eyes of the veteran poacher discovered the claw prints of a fisher, the fresh pads of a fox, and various other sights revealed to him the fact that bears had been using that gap a good deal lately.

Having arrived at a certain monarch hemlock, at the foot of which he could sit down and watch the converging runways, he put his back to the friendly trunk, and with his rifle across his lap, he began a vigil which does very well in place of active hunting, when game is uneasy and when wild life is wandering about very much a foot.

He sat there quite a long time. It was, to his wicked mind, perfectly beautiful. He could not hear a shot of any fellow violator in any direction.

He knew that, except for one trapper, whose line was three miles west, up Sand Creek, it was unlikely another man would be in that part of the woods again before the following hunting season, in October.

The sense of possessing the great wilderness for his own private purposes pleased him very much, and a feeling of snugness, a glow of warmth, combined to soothe his eagerness.

Inspired by the loveliness of the scene, soothed by the certainty of his aloneness, he unconsciously yielded to the demand that he make up for some of the weariness,

excitement and effort incident upon his loss of sleep and scurrying like a hunted man away from his happy home into the realms of game law breaking and sense of fugitive necessity.

No deer in a snug bed, no bear under a dense evergreen, no rabbit in its found ever slept with the soundness that closed the eyes of Jerry Tilcum. He was as much a part of the wilderness as any man could possibly be—smoked by his camp fire, a fugitive in fact, a raider in instinct, and wearied by his exertions.

So the snow sifted softly down, whitening him; and the faint breeze sifting through the trees, pulled loose a number of late hanging beech leaves, two or three of which drifted down on him, one on his hat, one on his mitts, and one on the toe of a moccasin.

He might have been a wart on the roots of the hemlock, for all he looked, after half an hour.

From the other side of the ridge, something began to approach the gap. It ambled up, worked back a snuffle or two, ambled up a little further; it stopped to scratch into an old stump.

Then it sat on its haunches, and scratched under its shortest rib. When it came up a little higher, and out into a little more open a space, it was revealed that this was a bear, a cub bear which would weigh about forty pounds.

Cub bears are not old, keen-nosed specifiers of the wilderness. They have much to learn. They are eager to learn it.

This cub's mother was about three hundred yards down the side of the mountain, lying under a clump of hemlock second growth, trying to get to sleep. Her cub was a very great care on her mind, and every once in a while she had to go hunting all over some valley, or mountain, trying to find the little brute, only to discover that the cub had laid down to sleep somewhere, without the least regard to being found by a hunter, or getting sick from eating too much, without drinking enough water, or some other ailment known to mother bears.

She was going to lie down, now, and sleep, no matter what happened to the little wretch, looking after whom was enough

to keep four mother bears and two or three yearlings busy. So she was asleep, but with one ear cocked for sake of her cub.

The cub rambled up to the gap, at last, and seeing a great, beautiful hemlock tree, with elegant rough bark, to climb, and a chirring red squirrel sitting anxiously upon a knot, the cub reached up the grade to the foot of the hemlock, and walked half-way around it, still looking up, planted one long forepaw upon a protuberance, reached with the opposite hind claw to take a good hold of a pliable, yielding, grippable substance, sank all its claws in, to take a most firm grasp, and then fell over backward with a wild cub call for help, which blended admirably with the nightmare yell of a man.

Jerry Tilcum, sleeping absolutely peacefully, caught first with his nostrils the odor of bear, and it started subconscious trains of thought which rapidly developed and expanded and became vivid as something cold and clammy settled upon his warm neck, and then something short, powerful, and full of energy, gripping power and action, seized upon the mittened fist on his rifle, across his lap.

Jerry Tilcum's nightmare lasted several seconds. While it lasted, it was the liveliest thing ever seen or experienced in the big gap of the long ridge where he had drifted into sleep.

He grabbed it, he fought it, he spurned it, and he tumbled up and down and around in its embrace. It filled him with irresistible distraction and dismay.

He sprang up, at last, gave three jumps, fell into the space over a steep slope, and pitching and plunging, half awake, he rolled and fell and scrambled a hundred yards down the mountainside. When he finally recovered his consciousness, he looked around in bewilderment.

Stunned by the utterly incomprehensible attack, he did not at first remember that he was in the woods. His dream had been that he was in perfect serenity in the quiet of his own bedroom. The bearskin rug, in the adjoining room, rose up and began to snuffle around.

It had shambling sidewise through the doorway, while he lay there, perfectly help-

less. It had reached up with a hind leg and clawed his neck; it had lathered upon his face with its gutta-percha tongue.

Then it had fondly clutched at his throat with all four legs, and three sets of claws, not including the ones the bear had lost in the trap that had been its doom; all the claws had then rivaled one another in seizing his throat.

Struggling against the horrors of being destroyed by a heretofore perfectly innocent bearskin rug, trophy of much skill and effort, Jerry Tilcum tumbled and pitched and clawed, and he had actually rolled and fallen a hundred yards before he awakened to the fact that it was—well, what was it?

The swath he had made coming down the ridge was perfectly plain. The snow was wiped up in spots, and the brush was bent, broken, pulled up by the roots, so that there were white places, covered with snow, and black places, where the ground had been torn up.

There was plain evidence that he had slid twenty feet down an old glacial polish on a ledge of rock.

Fifty feet up the mountain Jerry found his rifle, with the muzzle jammed ten inches in a soft spot. He examined the barrel to see if it was bent—it was not; and he, with great care, fished about five inches of humus and sand plug out of the thirty caliber barrel, and then carefully wiped it out with a string cleaner. By this time not less than an hour had passed.

Jerry had reconciled himself to the fact that he had suffered a nightmare, and after glancing up the steep, brushy hillside where he had rolled and torn up the shrubs by the roots, he neglected one of the cardinal virtues of the wilderness. He did not climb back up the tiresome grade to see what signs he had made in his wrestling match with the nightmare. He did not feel like it!

Jerry Tilcum's neck was sore, but he ascribed it to the fact that he had scrambled head first through green ash and witch-hopples, not to mention the top of a wind-fall spruce and past a few edged stones and rounded boulders.

Lust of sport, lust of game law breaking,

hunger for venison, had largely been appeased in the heart of Jerry Tilcum. He regarded himself as a fool for going to sleep up there in the gap.

There was no excuse for him, an old-time hunter, defiant of game laws, going to sleep in the cozy arms of a hemlock's roots soothed by the whisperings of faint winds, and charmed by the soft falling of a beautiful tracking snow.

At the same time, with the departure of his lust and appetite, he found his pride coming to him. He had come into the woods for the deliberate purpose of killing a big venison and taking it out home, to put down for the winter.

Pride would not permit him to return home, especially now, after dreaming like a tenderfoot, without making the most valiant effort to kill big game.

"Dreams don't mean anything!" he assured himself, thinking of the clutches of that awful fur rug.

He had made enough noise, with his scramble down the mountain and his yells—he knew that he had yelled, that no one in the wide world but would have yelled, even a stoic—to scare all the deer anywhere around there.

Accordingly, he walked along the hillside rather rapidly for half a mile, and then worked up onto the back of the ridge, to approach the point at the end. Nervous, noisy, clumsy, still thinking of the nightmare, he could not hunt thoroughly well.

It was after eleven o'clock, and deer were certainly lying down over the noon of the day. Even if it was snowing, perhaps some big buck would be up there on the point, hardening—no, a buck's horns were already hard. Anyhow, big bucks like to sleep on points.

He was sore, and he ached, here and there. But at last he hunted with care, and like an old woodsman, without relaxing his vigilance in the least.

A tenderfoot will be even skilful and careful in the first few hours of a hunt, but as he grows tired, hungry, and begins to question his prowess and wish he was home, he relaxes and begins to stumble, and thus loses perhaps the only opportunity he would have of killing big game.

Jerry hunted on, and found where a big buck had been routed out, and had fled down a mountain. He went hunting for another big buck, and true to form, late in the afternoon, when the big circle course he had taken through the timber began to close in on his big rock camp, there stepped out in front of him, a buck with antlers as wide as a window.

Jerry dropped his rifle sights in line with the foreshoulder of the noble brute, took aim for the fraction of a second, and pressed the trigger.

One shot—one jump—and a splendid head of live game was reduced to good venison.

Tilcum had never killed a finer deer. He had never seen a better shot. He had never felt a greater satisfaction in his own prowess than at that moment.

The butchery was rapidly and expertly performed; the head, cut off close to the ears—the hair around the horns was pretty long to have mounted that year! He cut off the quarters, and carried them only a little more than a quarter of a mile to his camp; he returned and brought in all the rest of the meat; the horns he hung in a hardwood tree, thinking that he would some time return there and get it, and that squirrels would be less likely to gnaw it in the open hardwood than in an evergreen's branches.

Then Jerry Tilcum took out of his pack-basket a contrivance of the most villainous kind, regarded from the standpoint of the game laws. It was a sausage grinder, and when he had finished with that instrument, beside which a burglar's jimmy is as the contribution basket passed at a suffrage meeting, he had exactly one hundred pounds of—sausage.

He had added to the meat two spoonfuls of sage, three spoonfuls of black pepper, one half spoonful of Cayenne pepper, and four spoonfuls of fine salt, at the rate of ten pounds of meat per each dose of spice.

He put each ten pound batch of meat on a great sheet of oiled paper, and set it out on the rocks where it would freeze, and cool and "blow" or steam—a hundred pounds of pure sausage.

The hide was taken out and buried under a log, very carefully. The bones were buried with the hide.

Jerry also threw some waste stuff away. He viewed, with delight, the steadily falling snow. Every sign and trace of his villainy were covered over, without question.

It happened that he had in his pockets a newspaper, one printed the evening before, and he read it by firelight, for a little while.

Then he chucked it away, turned in and went to sleep. He slept peacefully, and without dreams.

In the morning the sun was shining, and Jerry hid his outfit under the rock, shouldered his pack, almost full of sausage, and started out in the new-fallen snow. His hundred-pound load felt heavy, and he stopped frequently to rest it on a log or stone, and at last hoisted it into the automobile with a sigh of relief.

He brushed eight inches of snow off the top of his car with a hemlock bough, filled his radiator from a near-by brook, gave the crank a lift or two, and then pulled it over hard. The flivver began to shiver, shake, puff, blow, and expound like twenty horses.

Jerry, however, had a second thought. He reflected that as he had a contraband load, he ought not to take a chance of meeting his neighbor Vincuss, the game protector, anywhere down the road.

He decided that he had better let the car remain where it was till nightfall, when he would surely escape an unwelcome search by the game protector. Accordingly, having let the radiator warm up good, he stopped the motor and went out around to look at the woods.

A woodsman can never sit at his ease in the woods; he must go out and around and look at the timber, at the tracks in the snow, so wherever a woodsman is, there is activity and wandering and observation.

Jerry Tilcum wandered off three or four miles, and circled around in a rabbit swamp, and shot two snow-shoe hares. He felt proud of them, and slung them from his shoulder by a stout cord.

He sat on a log and watched a yearling deer feeding and nuzzling around in the

snow—he didn't dream of killing it, for he had all the meat he wanted.

By and by, he returned to the automobile, and, all wrapped up, to keep off the chill, he went to sleep, deliberately.

The pride of Jerry Tilcum was unspeakable! He thought, he believed, that he could go to sleep any time he wanted to, anywhere he wanted to. And he might have done any one of a hundred things, as for example, he might have run his little flivver out into the old tote road, and down the old woods road to the Wilderness Highway, six miles away, and gone to sleep in sight of it.

Then—well, other things happen in the woods besides what a man does. A man, even an old woodsman, is at best an extraneous creature, in the green timber.

Game Protector Vincuss had been so successful cleaning up his district of violators that it was difficult for him to discover and apprehend violators. For two months he had nursed a case against a man who had killed a woodpecker, accumulating corroborative evidence. He had his eye on a certain hotel, where he reckoned a game dinner might be served with illegal viands, to the proper, paying kind of sports.

He was even thinking of making a foray on some small boys, who were suspected of the villainy of shooting muskrats.

Being a game protector of experience and resourcefulness and success, he was without pride. He was more humble than any man of his acquaintance.

On his head fell the curses of more deliberate violators than on any other law enforcer north of the moonshine belt. His humility was real and earnest, for he knew that the more he knew about game law breakers, the more he had to learn.

Nothing, positively nothing, could be permitted to escape his vigil, or escape his attention. So he discovered that Jerry Tilcum had gone away in his flivver.

The fact is, one of the victims of the law had cursed Vincuss because Jerry could go out any time and violate the law, and "nothin' is done to him! Why, he went out with his 30-30 just to-night, an' I seen 'im—course, he's gone huntin' red skurrels, er chipmunks!"

"The United States Constitution gives any man the right to bear arms," Vincuss replied gently, and with a kind of piety.

"Yeh—yeh!" the man who had paid a fine fairly yelled. "Yeh—"

Vincuss saw the Tilcum garage door was open, and the garage empty. He slipped into it, by way of exploration, and found that a big fur robe had been thrown over the work bench, which proved it wasn't a social or pleasure ride. An extra overcoat, of the kind commonly carried for chance or visiting passengers, was dumped out, too.

"Yeh!" Vincuss muttered. "Now, where's the cuss gone?"

He sneaked out of the garage, and homeward, unseen. He slept a little, but he was awake a good deal more of the time, trying to think, trying to imagine or divine where Jerry Tilcum would be likely to go, and finally, his wife began to scold him for waking her up all the time, with his pitching and tossings around.

"I got to get an early start in the morning," he apologized to her, though that was the first time he knew he had to get an early start that particular next morning.

"Shucks! I'll wake you up!" she retorted, and so Vincuss went to sleep, knowing that his wife surely would rout him out, which she did, one hour before daybreak.

Half an hour later, having eaten his buckwheats, he kicked the starter of his five passenger, six cylinder and went out into the cold dawn. It had been raining some down in the valleys, but the hills around were white with snow, and accordingly, when he reached the end of the State Road, he put chains on all four of his wheels, and began to buck the mud and snow into the big woods.

He was on a blind chase. He knew, in his heart, that Jerry Tilcum had gone into the big woods, almost surely to kill a deer.

The best he could do was trust to the luck that makes things right. He picked a little trapper's camp over on Sand Creek, and leaving his car at a farmhouse, he went across to the creek.

The camp was cold, deserted, and had not been occupied in several days. Then he went out "for a walk." When a game protector goes for a walk it is a fearful

thing, meaning perhaps ten miles, perhaps twenty; they have sauntered away for a "little walk," and spent a week and traveled a hundred and fifty miles.

Vincuss had no idea that he would go far or see much. He just ambled along, listening for distant shots; looking for fresh tracks in the snow that was falling, alert for any least indication.

He was walking along, about half past ten, when he bethought himself of some molasses cake which his wife had put into a game bag for his lunch. There were other things besides molasses cake in the lunch, but the cake—um-m.

Vincuss brushed the snow off a log; sat down and he drew out one slab of the cake, which had been baked in a tin nine inches wide. The slab was nine inches long and three inches wide.

He broke it in two, and carefully put one half back into the piece of oiled paper, with another slab of the same kind, and began to eat; not because he was hungry, but because in all the world there was nothing exactly like a piece of the molasses cake which Mrs. Vincuss made to remind him of her during his absences from his home hearth.

He had eaten almost all of the half-slab, when, suddenly, there raced tearing through the woods, not fifty feet from him, an old bear, with a cub galloping at her heels. She was going for further information, and the cub was uttering an alarmed whine at every jump.

They were the most scared bears that Game Protector Vincuss, had ever heard of. He watched them come, pass, and go with ever so little vindictiveness in his heart.

He had been a good sportsman before he became game protector. Now he had no wish to kill game, not even legal bears. He had in his pocket a .45-caliber automatic pistol, but he did not think to use it on the bears. He was a hunter for bigger game!

The racing, frightened, whining bears were a wilderness sign. Vincuss, marshaling his ideas, recalled the keenness of the bear's nose, its acuteness of hearing, its certainty of vision. One thing, and perhaps only one thing, will make a black bear in the big woods take to its heels and go to a

new country—and that is having been scared by a man; sight, sound, and hearing of a man.

These bears had been scared by something, terribly scared. So Vincuss, having digested his thoughts, and eaten his molasses cake, started on the back track of the two bears.

He knew that bears sometimes ran for twenty miles from the source of their alarm. These bears had crossed Sand Creek half a mile east of him; he crossed on a fallen tree, and took up the back track in the snow.

It was still storming; the snow was several inches deep. Every jump the claws of the bears had dug down to the ground. They had thrown black humus and wet leaves upon the snow behind them.

They left one of those revealing trails. Vincuss followed it back and he ran it into a thick clump of hemlocks, and there he found the bed which the old bear had occupied. The cub had come right straight into that bed, and the mother bear had jumped ten feet from her dreams into full flight.

Vincuss followed the cub tracks up the mountain, and he did so with comparative ease, for the cub had every time jumped ten feet, and slid five feet clear down the steep southside of the great ridge.

Up on top of the mountain, in the big gap there, he found an extraordinary thing. He found a place where a man had been sitting, and the cub's tracks started from that point. The bear had gone south, the man had gone north, and Game Protector Vincuss studied the signs in the snow, quite unable to determine what had happened.

Apparently, the man had rolled end over end down the ridge!

But there were a man's tracks. They were partly obscured by the snow, but the snow had not begun to fall till the previous night; ergo, the man tracks, from the viewpoint of a game protector, were very satisfactorily, fresh.

Vincuss did not know what man it was, but he took to the trail, for luck—always for luck!

It was a long trail; it was hard to follow in some places; but it was, unmistakably,

the trail of a deer hunter, seeking game in the points, where bucks lie, on hardwoods, where deer feed, and in the evergreen clumps where they find shelter and moss to eat. It was sometimes impossible to follow the moccasin tracks in the evergreens, because there the snow was thin, and more snow had fallen on the tracks than had been on the ground before they had been made.

All day long, sometimes step by step, Vincuss followed the trail. That night he sat in a thicket, all huddled up, to wait for day.

Again he ate his wife's molasses cake and it was solace, comfort, food and encouragement. In the dawn he went on again.

The sun was shining; it had stopped snowing; the hunter's tracks were so faint in the obscuring snow that Vincuss almost despaired of following it to his quarry. As yet, he had not found any proof that a deer had been killed, but he knew the signs; deer were being hunted.

He spent hours, trying to follow the trail, and, finally, he lost it. It was in a big hardwood, and though he circled, he could not pick it up.

So he started with the feeling of defeat for the main road, miles distant, and as he came down over a ridge, a kind of big hardwood flat, he saw something in a tree ahead of him.

It was draped with snow, but he ran up to it, and uttered an exclamation—a great pair of buck antlers, with the head cut off close to the ears, hide and all.

That was confession of illegality! Further proof was the red drip of fresh blood. Also, no one who had killed a pair of horns like that legally would ever have left them in the woods.

From the horns it was only a little ways to the kill—forty feet or so. Already foxes had come to the place, and the three trips which the hunter had made coming and going in the snow had left a plain trail.

In ten minutes Vincuss was at the great rock, with its hidden boughs, its covered fireplace, and another trail which led to the hide and bones of the deer under the log.

Evidence? Plenty of it! There was a newspaper, partly covered by the snow. Its

date line read November 16, and it was an evening paper.

There was a little yellow shred of paper on the first page, and that paper had some printing on it.

The hands of Game Protector Vincuss trembled as he breathed upon the paper to melt the ice with which it was covered. When he shook the water away, there was the plain reading:

Jerry Tilcum,

November 22, '16.

"Lucky thing for Jerry if his subscription had expired seven days sooner," Vincuss mused. "Now to nail the cuss to his job!"

Vincuss looked around the camp, and found an empty cardboard can which had held sage, and tucked back under the rock was a cache of salt, red pepper, black pepper, a sausage grinder and a simple cooking outfit.

When the pepper was delivered from the grocery, a piece of gummed paper had been stuck on the can, to hold the written address of J. Tilcum.

Then Vincuss took the fresh morning trail out of the woods; it was a trail that went deep into the snow at every footstep, and where it crossed logs, and passed stones, the violator had sat down to rest with a basket heavy laden. But not a drop of blood had dripped from the meat within.

Vincuss grinned.

"A scientist," he mused, "would have the hardest kind of job proving that venison made into sausage, and flavored, is venison."

It was late in the day when Game Protector Vincuss discovered the flivver by its black top ahead of him in a hemlock thicket. He studied it carefully.

He did not know how desperate the violator would be. He recognized that Jerry Tilcum might be "bad," at this moment, when he was caught, red handed.

Accordingly, Vincuss, the man-hunter, slipped up to the flivver with utmost caution. As he drew near it, he heard a little snuffle.

He knew a snore by its sound. Grinning, he crept closer.

Yes, Jerry Tilcum had gone to sleep again. In his pride, he had been sure that he was perfectly safe. There he slept in the back seat, with his mittened hands crossed in front of him, a red line of wrist above the mitts.

The 30-30 carbine was in the front seat. Vincuss, all nerve and alert, slipped up to the side of the car, not daring to breathe. He opened both jaws of his handcuffs, and with a jaw in each hand, he aimed them at the narrow, bare lines of the wrists, and with a swift, sure drive, snapped them both in place, and then, seizing the 30-30, dropped the lever far enough to see that there was a loaded shell in the barrel, in front of the hammer plunger.

"Hi-i—I—I—Gee—Holy—Moses! Save me!"

Jerry Tilcum screamed, springing to his feet and then lunged headfirst out onto the ground, half burying himself in the snow. He jumped up, struggling and blowing and pulling at the handcuffs.

Game Protector Vincuss stood by, smiling. He, too, had got his game. He was not exactly proud, for he knew better, from hard experience in the big woods, than to be proud. He saw his prisoner come up out of deep, unhappy slumberland into a more unhappy consciousness.

Tilcum, suddenly realizing what had happened, and identifying the handcuffs on his wrists, wiped the snow off his face and the sweat out of his eyes. He turned a shamed, trapped-bear look at his captor. He blinked, and gave a trapped-bear look out into the wide, open wilderness, in which a man could be free.

He looked back again, and meeting the level gaze of the game protector, accusing him, he dropped his glance in shame to the torn up snow where he had fallen in his nightmare.

"You got me," Tilcum confessed.

"You'll confess judgment?" Vincuss suggested.

"Why—you mean—"

"If you will, you can sign the paper right here, and then—"

Vincuss drew out the wallet in which he carried his papers, and Tilcum read the judgment blank.

"I might's well," Tilcum said, and when Vincuss had filled it in, he signed.

"Now I'll take them off," Vincuss said, and he unlocked the slim steel rings.

They rode out of the thicket together, down the old tote road into the State Highway. When they reached the farmhouse where Vincuss had put up his car, the game protector took the sausage, in the pack-basket which he borrowed from Tilcum, and started to carry it to his car. He stopped, however, and turned back.

"Jerry," he said, doubtfully, "it's none of my business, but—er—I'd like to know what happened over on that big ridge, in the gap there—"

"Eh—you—you were there?" Tilcum demanded.

"Yes—I tracked you from there. I saw two bears running like the devil over beyond Sand Creek. I knew—well, I thought something had scared them. So I followed their back tracks.

"The old one had a bed down at the foot of the mountain. The cub came from up in the gap, and things were tore up—I couldn't tell very well—it'd snowed quite a lot, you know."

Tilcum felt of his neck, and Vincuss saw under the collar a big, raw scratch.

"Why—I thought I had a devil of a dream!" Tilcum gasped. "I thought my old bear hide rug had grabbed me—I could smell it—feel it—"

"Say! Is that right? You know—I couldn't tell, but it looked to me just as though that cub had stepped on you—"

Tilcum blinked. He pulled at his thick shirt collar, and picked up something to look at it.

"Ain't that bear hair?" he asked.

"Why—it is!"

"Yes, sir! I wrestled with that fool cub!" Tilcum blinked. "If I'd knowed that—um-m. Say, Vincuss, I'm paying right up—no fuss nohow—only I got a favor to ask?"

"Yes?"

"Sure. Mum's the word, you know. Not the ketching me—that's all right—but you know, me getting caught twice, asleep!"

"Well, all right," Vincuss hesitated, adding: "Gee!"

The Living Portrait

by Tod Robbins

Author of "Who Wants a Green Bottle?" "Safe and Sane," "The Terrible Three," etc.

A "DIFFERENT" NOVELETTE

I AM not insane! You doctors who wag your pointed beards over me, you specialists who attempt to analyze my brain in all its separate cells, you nurses and keepers who buzz about me continually like summer flies, have you no pity for a man robbed of everything which can make life dear—a man unjustly accused of homicidal mania—a man forcibly deprived of the sovereign rights which accompany intelligence?

You have incarcerated me in this beehive of insanity because the scope of human imagination cannot embrace an unusual chain of events. Like Christ, I find myself abused because I am neither understood nor believed. Very well—but I shall snarl a bit.

May I ask, learned doctors, in what way your combined intelligences overshadow my single mind? You who follow in dead men's footsteps; you, the apprentices of a profession which it has been my lot to advance into a yet unexplored wilderness; you, pitiful practitioners of a knowledge handed down to you between the covers of countless books, dare to put your hands upon me and lead me to this dungeon!

Like *Gulliver*, I am at the mercy of Lilliputian minds!

But if I could once escape from here, if I could once break down the barrier which

you have so carefully erected, what then, learned doctors?

There are elements in the sea and air as yet unknown to science. I have the key which unlocks the arsenal of the heavens. Did you think, when the Purple Veil lies ready to my hand, that I would strike with a poniard?

If so, you little guessed your man—if so, you did rightly by confining me in this place. It is written that one's acts cannot exceed one's intelligence.

And yet it is not with your stupidity that I quarrel—it is rather with the teaspoonful of knowledge which you have absorbed and which has made you incapable of understanding the slightest truth not written on a printed page. You smile—wagging your beards at me, you smile.

But will you smile at my translucent child, the Purple Veil? I doubt it very much, my genial friends.

But I must not wander. Even though the moon has pressed her soft, leprous face against my barred window, I must not wander.

And yet what a strange power rests behind those haggard, sightless eyes! With them she beckons from us our calm, collected thoughts. Like a mother she bends over us—a sad, shy mother who dares visit her children only at night.

She has stolen into the nursery to see us play. Now she is shaking her black, tangled locks over the world. They trail out behind her; and, afar off, through their moving blackness, tiny trembling disks of light appear.

She, our mother, has plundered the infinite. Like a mad queen she steals to my window, her diadem of precious stones caught and dangling from the intertangled meshes of her hair.

"Play!" she commands with a wide, toothless smile. "Play!"

But I will not play—not to-night. Even *she* shall not dominate my mind. It is necessary that I first give to the world a clear, collected account of the strange chain of events which has drawn me hither—a narrative which shall prove to unborn generations that Gustave Ericson was a victim to the stupidity of his age rather than to the slow inroads of egomania.

After that, if she is still there and still smiling—well, perhaps—

CHAPTER I.

TWO DISCOVERIES.

I WAS not born to battle for existence. My father had amassed a considerable fortune before I came into the world. He was a large, obese man with round, protruding eyes which gave his florid face a look of perpetual astonishment.

He never understood me; and it tickled the ribs of my humor to set his slow mind revolving on the axis of a new idea. At these times he would regard me with an air of amazement and pique—the air, in fact, of a hen that has inadvertently mothered a duck's egg with brain-numbing results. Undoubtedly I was the cause of much mental worry to the poor old man.

It is not my purpose to bore you with a long dissertation on my boyhood. Suffice it to say that even at that time I had an instinctive love for chemistry. Soon I fitted up a room in the house as a miniature laboratory, and with a school friend, Paul Grey, experienced the various vicissitudes common to most youthful exponents of science.

What soul-stirring odors permeated the atmosphere of that house! What ear-jarring explosions rattled the window-panes!

Daily the expression of rapt astonishment on my father's face deepened. I was at last breaking through the barrier of his mercantile calm; I was proving the fact that life is precious only because it is precarious.

Paul Grey, even in his teens, gave promise of some day making his mark in the world. He was my direct opposite in every physical and mental attribute.

Excessively blond, with pale-blue eyes and the girlish trick of turning fiery-red at any emotional crisis, he fluttered about our laboratory like a pigeon swooping after each stray crumb of knowledge, while I, with my swarthy skin and unmanageable tangle of blue-black hair, followed as sedately as a crow.

And yet, although he was far quicker, he lacked the depth of insight which makes toward originality of thought. It was *I* who unearthed hidden knowledge in later years; it was *he* who put it to an immediate practical use.

I was very attached to Paul—I am still attached to his memory despite his colossal theft of my discovery. You smile incredulously, but it is a fact, I assure you.

One could not cherish a lasting hatred for such a sunny personality. Even a thief is forgiven, if he can amuse.

We grew up together like two brothers, united by the chain of a common interest. At school and college we were inseparable.

I shared the burden of his wild escapades; he dispelled the gloom of my rather melancholy temperament. He was sunshine; I, shadow.

We were as united as day and night, as moonshine and madness, as sorrow and joy. Then one day the old, old story—a woman came between us.

Only a month ago Evelyn testified at my trial. As she stood in the witness-box I looked at her quite calmly. There was no feverish throbbing of the senses, no wild beating of the heart, no feeling of sadness or of joy.

On the contrary, this slender figure in black conjured up nothing but a kind of

dull resentment. "What a tiny speck of dust," I thought, "to slow down the wheel of Progress!"

And suddenly this inconsequential doll in her widow's weeds, this female straw whom I had loved, lost all semblance to humanity and became a meaningless automaton—an automaton created by my attorney to squeak out on the silent air one mechanical phrase:

"He is insane—he is insane—he is insane!"

Ah, no, waxen puppet, Gustave Ericson is not insane! Squeak on till the end of time that lying phrase and still it will find no echo of the truth.

Many years ago, perhaps, there were chords of moonlight in my brain which you could play upon, intertangled threads of wild desire which throbbed at your slightest touch—but now I am reason itself enthroned, silent and smiling, as impervious to that small, petty passion as is the mountain-peak to the fretful, flickering lightning.

I do not attempt to justify my youthful infatuation. Evelyn Lawrence, as I saw her in the court-room—her eyes red from weeping, her dark hair prematurely streaked with gray—makes that impossible.

But there was a time, not so many years ago, when she possessed a certain languid charm which one associates with a warm summer afternoon spent in the country. She was the kind of woman toward whom an overworked man naturally turns with thoughts of rest.

I remember distinctly how I chanced to meet her. It was two years after my graduation from college. Paul and I had been working steadily in the laboratory for upward of a month.

I was at that time on the point of discovering Zodium, the life-giving chemical which was afterward to revolutionize medicine. We were both worn out and plunged into a fit of depression. We had gone far, but still success trembled in the balance.

Suddenly Paul, with a muttered imprecation, flung himself on the leather couch in one corner. Spots of color flamed up in his cheeks, and he began to pluck at his lower lip—a sure sign that he was out of sorts with the world.

"What's the matter?" I asked, looking up from the test-tube which I was heating over an electric burner.

Paul's blue eyes wandered to the window.

"It's hell to be cooped up in here day after day!" he murmured. "I've grown to feel like a run-down machine. Let's chuck it and get out into the air."

"But there's our experiment," I expostulated. "We may find the secret any day now."

"That's what you've been saying for the last week!" he cried impatiently. "Let Zodium wait a while. My aunt's having some sort of an affair over the week-end. Let's go!"

"Who'll be there?"

"Oh, there'll be the Turners and a cousin of theirs—Evelyn Lawrence I believe her name is. She's quite a beauty, Aunt Grace tells me."

I snorted contemptuously. Here we were on the brink of one of the most noteworthy discoveries of the age, and Paul was yapping about house-parties and pretty girls!

As fond as I was of him, I was never quite reconciled to this frivolous strain in his nature—a strain that kept popping up at the most inopportune moments, interfering with hard, conscientious work toward the furthering of science. And yet it was necessary to humor him on these occasions—otherwise he would sulk for days and be of no use in the laboratory.

"Well, if *you* go on a strike, I suppose the shop must close up!" I said regretfully. "But it seems a shame when—"

He cut me short with the gleeful shout of a released schoolboy:

"Now you're talking!" he cried. "Get your things together and we'll be off in two shakes! And, remember, not a word about chemistry until after Sunday."

The upshot of the affair was that I spent the week-end out of town and met Evelyn Lawrence. I can only explain the emotional crisis I passed through by the fact that I was in an exhausted mental condition, and that the girl's languid atmosphere soothed my tingling nerves like a sleeping draft.

Certainly love at first-sight is a ridiculous hypothesis to be entertained for an instant

by the scientific mind. And yet on the evening of the second day—as we drifted lazily along on the smooth, moonlit waters of Lake Deerfoot in one of Miss Grey's canoes, seemingly as far distant from the noisy, frivolous world as the small, remote stars—I had all I could do to refrain from voicing an ardent protestation of an enduring passion.

What a fool! Even then the moon exerted an undue influence over me.

On the following day I regained a measure of common sense. Here I was wasting the precious moments when I might be at work in my laboratory.

If I happened to be in love—well, even love must wait its turn on science. After I had completed my discovery, why, then, it would be time enough to analyze my emotions toward the girl.

I pointed out to Paul that our holiday was over. He seemed very loath to leave the country.

Finally he said that he would follow me into town later in the day, but that no consideration could move him to travel on such a warm morning. I had to content myself with his promise, and, after saying my farewells to Evelyn and Miss Grey, caught the ten-thirty for town.

I have always prided myself on an ability to banish everything from my mind but the work at hand. Perfect concentration is the ladder by which man may ascend to unknown heights.

And yet, on returning home, I had great difficulty in fixing my attention on Zodium. For the first hour or so in the laboratory Evelyn Lawrence's face hung like a brilliant, languid moon over my mental horizon, drawing my thoughts away from the hunt for unknown knowledge. I broke fully three test-tubes and scalded my hand severely before I regained my usual mental equilibrium.

Paul, in spite of his promise, failed to put in an appearance during the afternoon. I did not see him for the entire week—in fact not until after I had made the final, triumphant experiment which gave Zodium to the world.

By an acute chain of reasoning I had succeeded in discovering the essential with-

out him, and was actually holding a vial of the precious amber-colored liquid in my hand when he made a rather shamefaced appearance in the doorway of the laboratory.

At the moment I was so flushed with success that I greeted him with no shade of reproach in my tone.

"Let me introduce you to Zodium, Paul!" I cried, leaping to my feet and advancing toward him. "At last the secret is ours!"

His face, which had worn a ruefully penitent expression, flushed on a sudden to a deep red. He advanced a step and examined the contents of the vial which I held out for his inspection.

"You don't say!" he muttered. "So you got it, after all!" His eyes avoided mine and wandered to the window. "Well, now you've discovered it," he said almost belligerently, "of what practical use is it?"

"Of what practical use?" I cried. "Why, you talk like a grocer, Paul! How should I know as yet? But undoubtedly it will be invaluable for medical purposes."

"Perhaps," he muttered. "That remains to be seen. But tell me how you happened to hit upon it."

When one has worked unremittingly to the successful conclusion of a problem—worked both day and night, as I had done—one often finds recompense for one's labor by explaining the solution to an enthusiastic, comprehending listener.

So it was in my case. It was a pleasure to unburden my mind to Paul. I even went so far as to repeat with equally good results my triumphant experiment.

"You see how near we were to the solution last week," I finished. "If you hadn't insisted on taking a holiday it might have been *you* who discovered Zodium."

He laughed a trifle bitterly.

"You deserve all the credit, Gustave. It was your idea, in the first place. But I made a discovery this week which puts Zodium in the shade."

"You did? Why, I didn't know you were working this week. What is it?"

I had an uncomfortable feeling that Paul had stolen a march on me.

"You wouldn't call it work, exactly," he

answered with one of his vivid flushes. "My discovery is simply this: I am in love!"

In spite of myself a feeling of relief permeated me. So it was just another one of his silly sentimental affairs and no startling chemical discovery which might overshadow Zodium.

Paul, in spite of his brilliancy, was as susceptible to Cupid's darts as any school-girl. A lack of constancy alone had pulled him up short on the very brink of matrimony at least a score of times.

"Who's the lucky girl now?" I asked indulgently.

"Mrs. Paul Grey."

"Mrs. Paul Grey?" I repeated, aghast. "You don't mean to tell me that you're married?"

"Just that," he said simply.

"But after that affair with Laura Le Rue, I thought—"

He cut me short impatiently.

"That was just moonshine and nonsense. This is an entirely different thing. Evelyn Lawrence is a girl any man would be proud of winning.

"We loved each other from the first day. What was the use of waiting? We were married this morning before a magistrate."

"Evelyn Lawrence!" I muttered. "You married *her*, Paul?"

Suddenly all the air seemed to have been pumped out of the room. It became difficult to breathe. He had been right—this discovery of his had completely overshadowed Zodium.

"To be sure, Evelyn Lawrence," he continued joyously. "You remember her, don't you?"

And then I could not refrain from smiling. Remember her? Good God, I should always do that—always! And this red-faced fool had dared to ask me, Gustave Ericson, if I—

But I must be quite calm, smiling, cheerful. He must never know that he had blundered unpardonably into the web of my attachment. While I had been working like a slave for science, he, the shirker, the woman-seeker, had slipped out and stolen my life's happiness!

Very well—but some day he should an-

swer for that! Now it was necessary that no shadow of the truth should fall between us.

Rising I grasped his hand.

"My heartiest congratulations, Paul!" I cried. "She is indeed a prize well worth winning!"

How much longer we talked I do not know. I was like a man coming out of an opiate to the presence of feverish pain. And everything I said did not seem to come from myself but rather from a talking-machine which had suddenly been placed in my breast, wound, and started; and everything he said fell on my ear-drums like the relentless beating of tiny steel hammers. *Tip! tap! tip tap!* his words sounded, driving in painful thoughts which were like red-hot nails.

And all the time the vial of Zodium grinned at me from the table like a tiny, misshapen Judas.

CHAPTER II.

THE PORTRAIT.

THERE is no medicine in all nature's apothecary shop so potent, so soothing as the slow-falling sands of time. They cover up in due course the painful bleeding wounds of yesterday; and when we attempt to retrace our steps into that bygone era, when we attempt to portray the agonies which once seemed so real to us, we stumble over the mounds of buried feeling like strangers in an unknown graveyard.

My infatuation for Evelyn was real enough at the time—so real indeed that it caused me unparalleled agony to think of her as another man's wife.

Even my sincere affection for Paul failed to lessen the weight of the blow. Realizing that I could no longer put my mind on science, I closed up the laboratory and left the city.

For several months I traveled aimlessly from place to place, driven on by a restless energy to be moving. Gradually peace began to settle over my tormented mind.

And then, a year after Paul's marriage—just as I had begun to take a brighter view of life—I met the man who was uncon-

sciously to play such an important part in future events.

At the time I was living at a small hotel in one of those picturesque little towns to be found in Virginia. I was in the third week of my stay when a young man stepped up to where I was sitting on the veranda and accosted me.

"You have a most interesting face," he said without any preamble. "I would like to paint your portrait."

Naturally I was rather taken aback by his bluntness. However, I had already learned never to take offense at an artist. One might as well grow angry at a humming-bird. It is a waste of energy.

Besides, there was a pleasing frankness in this young man's manner which was very attractive. He stood with his legs wide apart, cocking his head at me as though I were some strange specimen under a microscope.

"You flatter me!" I said with a half-smile. "But may I ask why you find my face of interest?"

Before he answered he scrutinized me with a pair of very keen gray eyes. In spite of his immaculate flannels, pink cheeks, and youthfully egotistical mustache, there was something of the wolf about this young man. He had the air of one sniffing at the heels of vanishing Truth.

"Before I tell you that," said he, "I wish you would visit my studio. I'm sure I could explain everything more easily there."

"An artist can only be natural when he is surrounded by the works of his art. Can I presume upon your good nature to the extent of enticing you up three flights of stairs?"

I rose to my feet willingly enough. The boredom which so often accompanies loneliness had weighed down my spirits of late. Perhaps the company of this ingenious young man would prove amusing.

"I must warn you beforehand that I know nothing about art!" I told him as we entered the hotel together.

"No matter," he rejoined lightly. "You yourself—if you will pardon my frankness—are a work of art, a walking portrait of an advanced passion."

"There is a look in your eyes at times—

a certain twist to your lips that— But, no matter, I will explain later."

As we mounted to his room he told me that he was the famous portrait painter, Anthony Worthington, of New York, and that his doctor had ordered him to take a protracted rest in the country. He had already been away from town for nearly two months, and during that time had not done a single stroke of work.

"I'm fairly itching to get back at it," he continued. "And when I saw your face at breakfast this morning I knew that the moment had come."

Anthony Worthington had secured the largest and brightest room in the hotel. It had two long French windows, through which the sunlight streamed, lighting every corner and illumining several dark portraits on the wall.

The whole place had absorbed the personality of its occupant. It was indisputably the abode of a painter.

"Is this some of your work?" I asked, stepping up to the wall and examining the portrait of a bull-necked individual with a jaw which jutted out like the prow of a battle-ship.

"Yes," he answered, offering me a cigarette and lighting one himself. "That's Bill Sands. I painted him a week before he was arrested for murder."

"You may remember the case. He killed his father and robbed him of a cheap watch. The most primitive type. But still we must have a beginning."

"Am I to understand that you are interested in painting criminal types?"

"Murderers!" he replied simply. "It's my life's work! We all have our hobbies, we artists. Some of us paint cows, sheep, geese—even pigs."

"But give me murderers every time. I've painted dozens of them in the last five years."

"But isn't it rather difficult to find sitters?" I asked.

"Not at all," he told me. "Any city is loaded with murderers. Walk a block and you'll meet ten."

"Most of them are of the primitive type like Bill here; and of course nearly all of them are in the embryonic state. These

remain out of jail merely because the peculiar twist in their characters has never been properly developed."

"This poor young man is mentally deranged," I thought to myself. "What a shame it is that so many artists live on the borderland of reason!" Aloud I said:

"But I suppose in time they all succumb to their natural tendencies?"

"Not necessarily," he answered lightly. "On the contrary, very few attain a full mental growth. Perhaps the natural fear of the consequences holds them in check, or perhaps the psychological moment never enters their lives."

I began to feel a strange interest in this crack-brained artist's theory. He stated his opinion with such evident sincerity that I knew well enough that he was not joking.

Could there be any truth in such a bizarre belief? If so, it would cause timid folk like my father no end of worry—timid folk who had amassed large fortunes and whose progeny would be benefited by an early demise.

"And some of these embryonic murderers go through life never guessing the truth about themselves?" I suggested.

"Just so," said he. "It often takes war to wake them up. A great international conflict serves as a mammoth incubator for all the vices. It hatches out some strange chicks, my friend—some very strange chicks."

He paused for a moment, and I caught the glint of his sharp, gray eyes as he turned toward the window.

"A fair light," he murmured. "If you would oblige—"

"You want me to sit for you?" I asked. "I am then one of these embryonic murderers?"

I had spoken facetiously and was scarcely prepared for his answer. When he said:

"Out of your own mouth you have spoken it," I started involuntarily. "But not at all like Bill," he went on encouragingly. "You're of a very uncommon type. Just glance at that other portrait near the window."

To humor him I did as he told me. I saw a strikingly handsome face, lean, dark, esthetic—a face with haunting eyes and

drooping, crimson lips—a face which one felt instinctively to be quite soulless, quite malign.

Like an assassin's mask, time had carefully carved it out of ivory to conceal the grimaces of the soul. And yet, through the slanting eyelids, death looked out at the world; and behind those languid, crimson lips, one sensed the cruel white fangs.

"That," Anthony Worthington continued, "is Burgess Corell. He murdered his wife by mental suggestion. He forced her to commit suicide.

"The law could never touch him. That is the face of an advanced type of murderer, just as Bill's is the primitive type. Together they represent crime's ultimates."

I turned from the portrait with an involuntary shudder. The atmosphere of this mad artist had got on my nerves. Of course, what he had said about me was ridiculous.

And yet there had been a time, a year ago now, when Paul had stood in my laboratory and told me that—

What nonsense! Of course I had been hurt and angry. What man would not? But I had long since reconciled myself to my loss. I could now view the affair with a philosophic calm. All my affection for Paul had returned.

"Do these murderers whom you paint confess their crimes to you?" I asked.

"Very often," my host answered genially. "It's embarrassing. Murderers are inclined to be too communicative, if anything.

"They're all great egotists at heart. Many a confession has been made because the guilty man thought the story too good to keep all to himself."

"To be the confidant of a murderer I should think would be a trifle dangerous. They might repent of their loquacity at leisure."

Anthony Worthington smiled pleasantly.

"You're right," he said. "It is dangerous. After a few unpleasant experiences, I always put wads of cotton in my ears and made sure that my models saw me do it. Now, if you'll be kind enough to sit in that chair by the window, I'll get to work."

"You think that my face really deserves your attention?" I asked as I seated myself,

"It stirs me!" he cried enthusiastically. "You have a remarkable expression. Turn your head a trifle to the right, please. The chin a little higher. Ah, that's it! Splendid! Splendid!"

He began to take aim at me with a piece of charcoal.

And I, in spite of my great sanity, once more experienced an involuntary tremor. At first this young man's silly pretense had amused me. I had looked on him as a crack-brained child and had humored him accordingly.

But the portrait of Burgess Corell had unaccountably affected me. For an instant it had seemed that I was looking into a distorted mirror at my own face.

There was something about the tilt of the chin, something in the curve of the lips and the lifted eyebrows, which resembled the Gustave Ericson I met each morning in the shaving-mirror. It was just coincidence, of course, but then—

Anthony Worthington's voice broke in on my thoughts. He stood before his easel, making quick, definite strokes; and while he worked, he talked coherently.

"We all have two faces," he was saying. "Men go about in masks. It is the art of the portrait-painter to unmask humanity. He must see more than the surface values; he must get a glimpse of the soul, or he is merely a photographer.

"It is difficult in some cases; and especially difficult with you. Now, if you would kindly think of some especial enemy of yours—some person whom you hate with all your soul."

"I have no enemies," I answered coldly. "I hate no one."

"Have you seen the morning paper?" he asked hopefully. "No? Well, there's a most interesting murder on the first page, and a rather vivid description of the details. Allow me."

He rose, and, picking up a copy of the *Sentinel*, presented it to me.

"Read it carefully," he pleaded. "It's the first column to the right. All about the murder of an old woman in Roanoke."

I smiled in spite of myself.

"I have no interest in such things," I assured him. "Well, if you insist." I took

the paper and glanced at it. The next moment I had all I could do to stifle a cry of astonishment.

My eyes had become riveted upon an article to the left where he had pointed—an article which bore the heading:

YOUNG SCIENTIST GIVES ZODIUM TO THE WORLD

I had great difficulty in holding the paper steady while I read the short paragraph.

One of the most interesting discoveries of modern times was recently made by the young chemist and scientist, Paul Grey. And he has put his discovery to an eminently practical use. Zodium, we have been told, is likely to revolutionize medicine. Dr. Madden, an eminent physician and specialist, prophesies that this drug will add at least ten years to the longevity of the race. It acts as a powerful stimulant on diseased and worn-out organs, and is said to be a sure cure for hardening of the arteries.

For a moment the room seemed to be revolving slowly about me. Allowing the newspaper to slip to the floor, I seized the arms of the chair. And then a great wave of blood swam up into my head, blurring my vision with a curtain of dancing purple.

So Paul had betrayed me! Not contented with robbing me of a wife, he had now robbed me of my discovery. Like a sneaking hound, he had waited till my back was turned before stretching out his plundering hands to my treasure.

And I had trusted him always! What a fool I had been! But now—Why, he would smart a bit. I would see to that. I would—

"Hold it, hold it!" Anthony Worthington cried out. He was working like a madman.

"The very expression I wanted! Hold it, man—for God's sake, hold it! Hold it; and I will paint a portrait of you which shall be life itself—as true as your own soul!"

CHAPTER III.

"I HAVE PAINTED YOUR SOUL."

TWO weeks after I learned of Paul's treachery, Anthony Worthington wrote his name on the canvas and stepped back with a sigh of content. My portrait was finished.

"Come and look at yourself," he called to me. "This is a sample of my very best work."

With no small amount of curiosity I took my stand beside him and examined the painting. Up to this I had purposely refrained from looking at it.

It is unfair to judge a man's work until it is the finished product of its creator. The satisfying results often rest in the very last touch of the master's hand.

For some time I looked at this painted likeness of myself with amazement. This could not be I! This face, distorted by passion, with pinched nostrils and glaring eyes, was not the face of Gustave Ericson—that calm, thoughtful face which had so often looked reassuringly at me from the mirror.

Like Medusa's head, this horrible apparition froze me into dumb immobility. The painted figure seemed to be crouched there waiting but for the signal to spring forward to all its murderous length; and while thus waiting, the stored-up venom of the world was welling into cruel lines about the lips, glowing dully behind the starting eyeballs, writing its message to the world on the furrowed parchment of the forehead.

Shuddering, I turned away.

"This is a portrait painted by a madman," I said aloud.

Anthony Worthington smiled.

"It is you," he answered. "I have painted your soul."

For an instant hot anger overmastered me. It took all my self-command to hold in check a wild desire to pick up one of the pallet-knives and cut into shreds the painted lie.

What right had this crack-brained artist to so parody my emotions? I had been a fool to sit for him!

"It is a very fine piece of work," he continued, rubbing his hands together gleefully. "If you don't want it, I'll hang it in my studio at home."

I was silent for several moments. It would never do to let him have this portrait. He might show it to his friends; he might even put it on exhibition or sell it.

In my mind's eye I could see a crowd of the curious surrounding this abomination

and commenting on the model who was so very different. Such a portrait could well-nigh brand a man a felon. I had a shrinking shame that other eyes might see it.

No, that would never do. I would buy it and destroy it at my leisure.

Once more I looked long at the painting. It was necessary to humor the artist until I rescued it from his clutches.

After that? Well, after that I could destroy it in a thousand different ways.

"It improves on a second glance," I told him. "In fact, it isn't at all bad. You seem to have got the—er—"

"The hidden expression," he broke in impatiently. "This is your real face, my friend."

"To be sure," I said mildly, "to be sure. The hidden expression, that's what I meant. Now I want this portrait, Mr. Worthington. The price?"

"In your case, nothing. It was a positive joy to paint you. I would like to do another one of you."

"I am leaving for home to-morrow," I told him hastily. "Perhaps some other time."

"That's a shame," said he. "However, as you say, perhaps some other time. When I return to the city, I intend painting my conception of the Spanish Inquisition.

"You will be invaluable as a model. May I call on you?"

"Certainly," I lied. "And my portrait?"

"I'll have it crated up and sent to your address."

We parted with this understanding; and on the following afternoon I boarded the train for home. Strange to say, I had a feeling of unbounded relief as the wheels began to revolve.

It was as though I were escaping some imminent peril. Try as I would, I could not then account for this uncalled-for sensation.

On arriving home, I found my father greatly altered. During my absence, he had aged considerably.

His face, once as round and red as a harvest moon, had dwindled. Now it was as shriveled as a winter apple; and his large, protruding, brown eyes looked out of it with the hopeless expression of a sick animal.

Also his disposition had altered for the worse. He now evinced an impatience toward the petty little annoyances of everyday life which he would have blushed for at an earlier period.

He greeted me with an unpleasant allusion to my long absence which was galling in the extreme. It was all I could do to refrain from voicing my opinion of his churlishness.

"Well, now that you're home," he continued, "I hope you'll go into the office and be of some credit to me."

The mere thought of Gustave Ericson in an office made me smile. An eagle in a hencoop could not be more incongruous.

"My dear father," I said patiently enough, "do you not realize that I am a scientist? My time is invaluable to the progress of the world. No business is important enough to absorb my mentality."

Now this truthful answer should have silenced him. But it did not silence him. On the contrary, it seemed to infuriate him.

The poor old man was such a mental dullard that he could not appreciate the gifts of his son. No doubt my words sounded to him like hollow boasting.

"A scientist!" he sneered. "What have you ever discovered? All *you* do is to make vile stinks in your laboratory."

"Now, if you were like Paul Grey, and really did something, I'd put up with it. If you had discovered Zodium, which is of practical use, why, then—"

Suddenly he paused, and his eyes seemed to fairly pop out at me. He had the look of one who beholds an unaccountable transformation.

"Why, what's the matter, Gustave? Aren't you well?"

"Certainly, father. Do I look ill?"

"No, not now. A moment ago your face seemed to change. It must be my eyes."

He put his hand to his forehead with a weary gesture.

"I haven't been myself lately. What was I saying? Oh, yes! You must go into the office, Gustave. I'll not support you in idleness."

"Idleness!" I cried angrily. "Have you no conception of my life? I have worked very hard."

"Where are the results?" he asked in an aggravating tone.

I had opened my lips for a bitter reply when the tall figure of the butler appeared in the doorway, interrupting for a time the family quarrel.

"The express company just left a large box for you, Mr. Gustave," he said. "Where shall I put it, sir?"

Instantly the feeling of exhilaration which I had experienced since leaving Virginia vanished. It was as though an invisible weight had descended upon me.

I had a sensation of guilt—a sensation as though I were in immediate danger of being detected in some crime. If the butler had been a relentless policeman, and I a cowering felon, his words could not have caused me a greater shock.

Ridiculous as it now seems, beads of perspiration gathered on my forehead, and my knees began to tremble.

"You may put it in my laboratory, Tom," I said at length.

"Shall I take the crate off, sir?"

"No!" burst from me with such vehemence that my father and the butler both started involuntarily. "I'll open it myself!"

"Very well, sir," said Tom in a grieved tone. "I'll leave a hammer on the table."

"Why did you shout at Tom like that?" my father asked when the butler had gone. "That's no way to speak to servants, Gustave. I won't tolerate that kind of thing in my house."

"It won't happen again, father."

I turned on my heel and strode into the laboratory, leaving the old man pacing up and down the room with the pompous air of one who has come off best in a battle of words.

Tom had obeyed me with rather more than his customary alacrity. I found a tall, crated package leaning up against one of the walls. Undoubtedly it was the portrait.

Picking up a hammer, I began to tear the laths free. They gave readily enough, coming out with the sharp, rasping sound of nails torn from wood; and, in a moment more, I lowered the paper-swathed portrait to the floor and began to unwrap it. Soon the painted apparition of myself glared up at me with all its blood-curling ferocity.

While I had been at work, my nerves had been steady enough; but now, as I met the fixed regard of the portrait, I noted something which at the time I thought a foolish fancy. The figure in the gold frame seemed to writhe from side to side, as if in a death agony, its thin, red lips drew back from long, white fangs; its breast rose and fell spasmodically; and its malignant, narrow-lidded eyes rolled wildly, as though seeking some loophole of escape.

And then a strange hallucination possessed me. For an instant it seemed that we had struggled together, this painted creature and I; that we had had a fierce combat in this very room; that at last I had thrown it on its back and was holding it there.

Sweat poured down my face and my knees were trembling from fatigue; yet an overmastering hatred burned my veins like molten lava. I would destroy it forever. That was my only hope, my only salvation.

I would bring the hammer down on its leering face again and again till nothing was left but an unrecognizable pulp. Now for a straight blow and a strong blow. I raised the hammer aloft.

Suddenly a human hand grasped my arm and a loud voice called out: "What are you doing, Gustave?"

Instantly the strange hallucination passed. I found myself on my feet, the hammer still gripped tightly in my hand.

My father stood near me, his face unnaturally white, and his eyes staring. He had raised one arm on a level with his head, as though to protect himself from a blow.

"What do you say?" I muttered hoarsely. The hammer slipped from my hand to the floor.

He lowered his arm, and his face became suffused with blood. He seemed to be in a towering rage.

"You must be insane!" he shouted. "I'll have no madman in my house! Whether you like it or not, I tell you that that painting does resemble you.

"Just a moment ago, when you lifted the hammer to strike me, your face was exactly like that."

"I lifted the hammer to strike you, father?" I cried, dumfounded. "Why, I didn't know you were in the room!"

"You're lying or you're mad," he said. "I know you had an abominable temper, but I didn't think—" He paused and shot a suspicious glance at the portrait.

"If I hadn't seen you in time, you'd have killed me, Gustave! I know it. I could see it in your face—it's in the face of your portrait now. Good God, what a son!"

He began sidling toward the door, his frightened eyes still fixed upon me.

"But I don't know what you're talking about!" I cried in desperation. "I was unpacking the portrait and didn't even know—"

He cut me short.

"It's no use lying," he sneered. "I came in here and found you on your knees staring at that painting. Looking over your shoulder I said that I thought it was a very good likeness.

"At that you shouted out, 'You lie!' and, springing to your feet, attacked me with a hammer. I avoided your first blow, and then you came to your senses."

"A ridiculous story!" I shouted after him.

"Perhaps so," said he. "But if the facts were known, you'd get a term in prison. From now on we'll not live under the same roof. I think you'd better be off on your travels again to-morrow."

Once more he gave me a fearful look over his shoulder, and then, without another word, slammed the door in my face. Soon the sound of his shuffling footsteps died away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MURDER.

SOME one has said: "Truth is stranger than fiction." Bear this well in mind as you peruse the chronicle of the startling events which befell me and do not deafen your ears to these unparalleled experiences because they seem unbelievable.

Once more I repeat: "I am sane, quite sane!" And as a proof of my sanity, I refer you triumphantly to Zodium and the Purple Veil. Which one of you, my readers, has given to the world such proofs of sound mentality as these?

On the night of our altercation, my father was stricken with a severe attack of paralysis. Perhaps the abnormal excitement under which he had been laboring brought it on prematurely; but, as I look back on the scene, as I weigh again on the scales of time his uncalled-for accusation, I exonerate myself from any shadow of blame. Thus all my life I have been more sinned against than sinning.

It is terrifying to see a robust man stricken down in an instant—at one moment to see him strong, upright, master of his powers; at the next, a fallen tree-trunk, twisted, motionless, dumb.

An unseen ax has been at work for days, months, years—but we have noticed nothing till the fall. Who wields this ax so silently, so mysteriously?

Even now the shadowy woodsman may have signaled us out in the waiting forest, even now he may be chopping through the essence of our lives. Who then is safe?

My father, once a virile, boisterous man, had become an inanimate, voiceless lump of humanity—an odd, waxen dummy which lay motionless in its large four-posted bed.

Only his eyes moved. In them had centered the spark of life. They followed the nurse, the doctor and myself about with feverish anxiety; and often, when my back was turned, I knew that they were still staring at me.

Although he had lost both the power of speech and the power of motion, in fact was as completely shut off from human intercourse as if he were already dead and buried, I knew by the expression in his eyes that he feared me and would continue to fear me up to the very end. If nothing else, fear dwelt behind those eyes.

How ridiculous, how laughably absurd! He should have been as immune from fear as a fallen tree is immune from the rising storm.

Suppose his ridiculous surmise *had* been correct, suppose I had once threatened him with physical violence, what then? Surely he was now quite safe from me. I could offer him nothing but a blessed relief.

A man of limited intelligence, he remained one to the very end.

I had a consultation with the family

doctor shortly after my father's stroke. He offered no hopes of recovery, but seemed to think that his patient might retain this feeble spark of life for years. It was at that time I made the statement which was later to count so heavily against me at my trial. It was simply this: "It would be a work of kindness to put my father out of his misery."

Surely it was a very innocent and truthful remark. And yet how sinister it has been made to appear when repeated triumphantly by the prosecuting attorney!

For a time my father's illness caused me to forget the portrait. I had a thousand and one things to attend to. It was necessary that his business interests should be looked after. I was plunged into a whirlpool of commercial affairs.

Exactly two weeks after my home-coming, I entered the laboratory for the second time. It was evening and the room was bathed in blackness. Lighting the electric-lamp, I glanced about me.

Unconsciously my eyes sought the corner where my portrait had rested against the wall. It was no longer there.

An unaccountable tremor passed through me. I circled the room with my eyes apprehensively and at the next moment uttered an ejaculation of relief. Some one had hung the portrait above the fireplace.

Now it looked down at me with sneering, sardonic contempt—the look of a lifelong enemy who has suddenly obtained the upper hand. "I am here for all time," it seemed to be saying.

Instantly all my old hatred and repugnance for this painted abomination returned in full force. Seating myself opposite it, I repaid its baleful stare with all my mental strength, attempting to break its almost hypnotic influence.

And sitting thus, apparently in repose, but in reality tingling all over from an overmastering sensation of loathing and fear, I soon beheld a clarified vision of the truth. It was simply this:

Suddenly my painted likeness moved, its breast rose and fell, and its lips lengthened in a mocking smile. Then, nodding its head at me solemnly, reprovingly, it spoke.

Like dry, wind-swept leaves, its words

came to me—leaves that halt for an instant only to rustle on again about our feet.

"Gustave Ericson, why do you deny me?"

And then it seemed to me that hot, angry speech tore my lips apart, that challenging words leaped forth like an army going out in battle array.

"I know what you want," I cried aloud.

"But I will not obey you! How dare you claim to be my soul?—you with your murderous eyes and loathsome lips! I will do more than deny you—I will destroy you!"

"No man can destroy his own thoughts," the portrait murmured.

"You are not my thoughts," I answered.

"You are but another's painted fancy of my thoughts."

Again the portrait smiled.

"Your father found me true. Do you not remember when you denied me first?"

An involuntary shudder passed through my frame.

"It was *you* then," I gasped, "who threatened him with a hammer?"

The portrait bowed and smiled. Placing one of its long, thin hands over its heart, it bowed and smiled.

"You or me, what can it matter?" it murmured politely. "In the eyes of the world, it will not matter."

"In the eyes of the world it will not matter," I repeated dully. The portent of its words sounded a brazen alarm somewhere in my breast. God! how true that was. In the eyes of the world, it would not matter.

What it did, I must answer for. And if it could once escape from its golden prison, what might it not do?

I feared the look in its eyes, the crimson cruelty of its lips, the long, thin hands which seemed to vibrate with evil energy. I must destroy it now or never!

"You wish me to kill my father?" I said at length, glancing about furtively for some weapon to use against it.

"I *demand* that you kill your father," the portrait answered calmly. "We need his fortune to advance science. How can you hesitate?"

At that moment my wandering eyes encountered what they had been in search of

—a bottle containing a powerful chemical which had gone into the making of *Zodium*. A few drops of this sprinkled on the canvas and I would be rid of my loathsome visitor for all time.

Rising, I took the bottle from the shelf and approached the portrait.

"You're right," I said in a reassuring tone; "it is evidently my duty. But there are the means to be considered."

"Now, this chemical is deadly and leaves no telltale traces. If I gave him a drop in his sleeping-draught, he would never wake again."

The portrait's lips were once more contorted in an evil smile, and for an instant its eyes were covered with a gray film.

"Poison?" it muttered. "To be sure, *poison*. Let me see!"

By now I had reached the wall and stood directly beneath the portrait.

"Perhaps you are unfamiliar with this chemical," I murmured, uncorking the bottle deftly. "It is guaranteed to be efficacious—to remove all the stains from our lives. Here, take it in the face, you dog!"

The portrait made a protective movement with its thin, white hands. But it was too late. With the speed of lightning I had thrown the contents of the bottle straight into its leering eyes.

Now the fiery liquid was running down the canvas, burning and destroying everything in its path. I heard a choking cry, and then all was silence.

Picking up a large sponge from the laboratory-table, I began to pass it up and down the canvas till every square inch of paint was saturated with the liquid. Then I seated myself with a feeling of relief and watched the grizzled apparition decompose and fade away before my eyes.

Soon the canvas offered nothing but a bare expanse of withered white. My portrait was no more.

And now a great drowsiness descended on me like a soft, languorous sea of mist. The mental struggle through which I had passed left me weary in both body and mind.

Closing my eyes, I was soon wafted away to the land of dreams—dreams, gigantic and ponderous, under which the subcon-

scious mind toiled wearily along up mountain-peaks and down deep declivities, on and on till the break of dawn.

And through these dreams, like the motif in music, as persistent and relentless as the voice of eternal alarm, rang these words in strange cadence: "What it does, I must answer for; what it does, I must answer for," till all the weird valleys of sleep took up the refrain and whispered it softly.

When I awoke, a sickly morning peered in at me through the trembling curtains. The room was still a ghostly battle-field for day and night.

In the corners, an army of shadows lurked, dark-browed and sinister, crawling ever back before the spear-points of dawn. Suddenly the picture above my head was illumined, and I uttered a cry of horror.

Surely I could not have dreamed that I had destroyed the portrait! There was the empty bottle to prove that I had not dreamed. And yet the canvas no longer offered a bare, seamed expanse.

No, there was my abominable painted likeness glaring down at me with an added venom in its eyes! And, while before the crouching figure had seemed several paces in the background, now it appeared closer, as if it had made a long stride forward while I slept.

Rubbing my eyes, I stared at it. But no stare of mine could wipe it out. If the acid had failed, was there anything in the world which *could* wipe it out?

And the portrait seemed to answer silently with its eyes: "No man can destroy his own thoughts."

How long I sat confronting this incomprehensible apparition, I do not know. I was suddenly brought to myself by the sound of the door opening behind my back.

Starting, I turned and saw the butler's long, lugubrious face peering in at me.

"Well?" I asked sharply.

The man's watery eyes avoided mine. He licked his lips as though they were dry.

"I went for the doctor as you told me, sir," he said at last.

"You went for the doctor?" I cried at a loss. "When did I tell you to go for the doctor?"

Again Tom moistened his lips.

"Why, only two hours ago, sir! You must remember, sir, it was when I ran against you in the dark just as you were coming out of the sick-room."

"Nonsense! I haven't been near my father all night long."

"If you'll pardon me, sir," Tom continued more firmly, "I advise you to take a little rest. You're not yourself, sir. Your father's sudden death has—"

"My father's death!" I cried, aghast. "You don't mean to tell me that he's dead?"

"Yes, sir. It was as you thought—he was dead when I met you in the hall. Dr. Parkinson said it must have been his heart which failed him at the last.

"Now brace up, sir! Don't give way! Just lean on my arm, sir. That's right; that's right."

My overstrung nerves had suddenly snapped at the butler's news. Trembling from head to foot, I burst out into uncontrolled sobs. So this was where my portrait had vanished to while I—slept.

I had thought the acid had destroyed it, while in reality it had only liberated it for a time to do a ghastly business. There had been a few drops of the chemical left in the bottle—enough to kill an old man; and when I had dozed off, *it* had used them.

See, the bottle was now bone-dry. God help me! What was I to do?

"Come into your own room and lie down, Mr. Gustave," Tom pleaded. "You need rest, sir."

I could no longer resist him. Indeed, I was so weak both in body and mind that I could not have found the strength to disobey a child.

What I needed was sleep—an ocean of tranquil, dreamless sleep. In the future lay a silent struggle between this painted demon and me, an heroic struggle for which I could expect no help from the world.

Before I quitted the room, I glanced over my shoulder at the painting. And as I did so, I saw its crimson lips curl up like a cat's, I saw it place its hand on its breast and bow ever so gracefully, like a famous actor responding to an encore. Bowing and smiling, it followed me with its eyes.

"Can I destroy it?" I murmured. "Will I ever be able to destroy it?"

CHAPTER V.

THE PURPLE VEIL.

FORTUNATELY my father's death called for no unpleasant investigations.

It was natural enough that a man well past the prime of life, suffering from paralysis and a weak heart, should flicker out without a moment's warning.

After the funeral I was plunged into a whirlwind of financial affairs which kept me thoroughly occupied. My father's estate proved to be a complex affair and one which took the family lawyer and myself many weeks to straighten out.

And yet I was not able to forget my painted evil genius at this time. It would obtrude itself before my mental vision at the most inopportune moments, parting the calm, collected chain of thought with its ghostly hand, bowing and smiling at me in mockery from the picture-frames which hung in the lawyer's office, and even interrupting me as I spoke solemnly of my affliction with some ribald jest at the expense of my poor dead father—jests which my companions evidently considered as proceeding from my own lips, and which soon won for me an unenviable reputation.

And I was powerless to clear myself! Even then I realized that any accusation launched against the portrait would rebound and destroy me. The incredulity of a world given over to safety and sanity—a world marked out into squares of possibility like a chess-board—offers no mercy to a man such as I, a man lost in the labyrinth of unparalleled experience.

But do not think that I suffered meekly and in silence. No, on returning home from some scene in which I had been made to appear odious, I would steal into the laboratory, close the door softly, and take my stand before the portrait. Then, with a heart heavy with horror, I would upbraid it.

"You are a murderer!" I would say.

And my portrait would smirk at me with vivid lips, smirk and bow with its hand on its heart.

"I am a thought," it would murmur—"I am your crimson thought!"

"But why do you persecute me?"

"Do you not deny me?"

"And if I did not deny you?"

"Why, then we would be as one, united and peaceful—quite happy with one another. Do you not long for rest?"

And then somewhere in my breast the strident voice of eternal alarm would cry out, "Not yet—not yet!" And fear would ripple over me like an ice-crowned wave; and it would become difficult to face the portrait.

Shivering and drawing my dressing-gown about me for warmth, I would steal out of the laboratory and up the creaking stairs to my room. God! how cold it was!

A month after I came into my inheritance, I once more took up my scientific studies. Under the eyes of the portrait, grimly and in silence, I experimented with various chemicals.

And such was my concentration that even its gorgonlike regard failed to shatter a theory which was springing up in my brain. Already I had visualized my translucent child, the Purple Veil.

You, who have experienced the poisonous gases on foreign battle-fields, can have but a minimized conception of the Purple Veil. Imagine, if you can, a thick, purplish smoke, shot here and there with tiny iridescent specks of flame like spangles in an eastern shawl—a thick, purplish smoke which coils about its victim fold on fold, smothering and burning till all life is transformed into blackened ashes.

Imagine this, and you may have some slight conception of the Purple Veil.

Hate is one of the great motive forces in the world. Often, like love, it inspires its devotees to unprecedented achievement.

It is a matter for speculation as to how many artistic masterpieces have been inspired by the transcending delirium of rage. And if this is true of Art, so also is it true of its calm but more deadly sisters, Science and Invention.

Hate drove me to the discovery of the Purple Veil—hate and fear. The leering, evil face of the portrait lashed me to herculean mental efforts.

"Perhaps," I thought, "my salvation rests in such a discovery. This grimacing, painted thing has life—life hard to touch, indeed; but still life—and what has life can surely be smothered in the Purple Veil.

Thinking in this wise, I redoubled my efforts to reach the goal, slaving both day and night till my brain reeled and my nerves seemed like tightly drawn, throbbing wires. And while I toiled thus, my portrait looked down on me calmly, ironically, seemingly quite safe in its impregnable immortality. Often now it conversed with me.

"Why do you toil thus?"

"Because I hate deeply."

"And whom do you hate?"

"I hate the world. It has taken another to its breast in my place."

"And you would destroy the world?"

"Yes, I would destroy it! I would clothe it in the Purple Veil! Death shall hover over its cities and towns, over its valleys and mountain-tops."

And then my portrait would smile as though well pleased; and it would moisten its crimson lips like one who is athirst. Ah, my cunning was more than a match for it!

How eagerly it swallowed the bait! Little did it guess for whom I was so carefully preparing the Purple Veil.

Once it said: "But is there no one among the multitudes, no especial enemy whom you have signaled out?"

At that, I nearly dropped the test-tube I was holding. Had it guessed my secret? No, evidently not. It was smiling at me with a new, strange affection in its eyes—a loathsome affection which made my flesh crawl with unspeakable horror and dread.

For an instant I felt that I was stripped bare, that I could move neither hand nor foot, and that its eyes had multiplied into thousands of cold, slimy creatures which were crawling over me in a noisome wave—creatures which nestled against my body with a sickening sentimentality! It was possible to bear its hatred, but its love—

After a moment I answered:

"Yes, there *is* one. No doubt you have guessed. I would strike the false friend who robbed me of my discovery—that false friend whose treachery was responsible for your existence."

And then my portrait laughed a low laugh of satisfaction.

"We have become as brothers," it murmured, barely moving its lips. "No longer will we struggle with one another. We will enjoy a lifelong peace."

There came a day at last when my toil culminated in triumph—a day when the Purple Veil became a reality. A dozen tiny glass globes lay on the laboratory table, each one of which contained a thimbleful of crimson liquid—glass globes which, if broken, would exude a poisonous purple vapor spangled here and there with tiny iridescent sparks of living fire.

And my own self-protection had not been neglected. I had taken no risks. Up-stairs, in my bedroom, there hung a suit of asbestos and a gas-mask warranted to protect its wearer from the fatal fumes. Also I had designed a covering of asbestos for the picture-frame.

It was a melancholy afternoon in late autumn, an afternoon when Nature seems grieving over the sins of a prodigal youth. Through the laboratory window I could see the rain-swept street glistening dully where the early electric illuminations touched it. Above the heads of passers-by, umbrellas would open their petals like parched buds welcoming the moisture.

And I thought with a grim smile: "What a commotion would be caused in this slow-moving stream of people if I dropped one of the little glass globes at their feet! How they would take to their heels if the Purple Veil were cast among them! Then this multitude of umbrellas, which are passing so sedately, would be caught up and blown away in an instant by a gale of fear."

"Why not do it?" the portrait murmured from its shadowed corner.

But I shook my head.

"You must not forget my personal enemy," I answered. "He comes first, so that others may follow."

"True," said the portrait, believing that I spoke of Paul. "Of course he must be the first and then—"

Suddenly it broke off and cautioned me to silence by a stealthy finger lifted to its lips.

Some one was coming. I heard footsteps

in the hall, the murmuring of voices; and then the door swung open, letting in a stream of golden light. I rose to my feet, my heart beating great waves of blood up into my head.

Paul stood on the threshold in the very center of this river of light—Paul, like a vision of the past, who had stolen from me both love and fame! Time had not even touched him in its passage. He looked not a day older than when I had seen him last.

"So you have come!" I cried.

He shaded his eyes with his hand and peered in.

"Is that you, Gustave?" he asked. "It's so dark in here that it's hard to make things out. I can see your face now, but—"

He broke off suddenly and uttered an ejaculation of astonishment.

"Why, what are you doing?" he cried. "Why are you standing on a chair before the fireplace?"

Instinctively my eyes followed his. A shaft of light from the street rested on the portrait's face; but everything else was in unstable, tottering shadow. One could see indistinctly the leather armchair beneath it; but that was all.

He had evidently taken Anthony Worthington's painted lie to be his friend whom it so brazenly caricatured. It was scarcely complimentary.

A month before, no doubt, I would have been unable to control my temper at this insult. But since then I had learned caution from close association with the portrait.

Now my answer was cooled by cunning before it left my lips. One had to be on guard against the stupid misapprehension of the world.

"This is a case of mistaken identity, Paul," I replied, touching the electric button at my elbow which illumined the room.

He evinced a ludicrous surprise when he realized his mistake. Wheeling about, he stammered:

"Why, I could have sworn that it was you! It seemed to move and smile!"

"Merely the play of light and shadow," I rejoined carelessly. "Surely to a scientific mind there can be nothing incomprehensible in natural phenomena? But what do you think of the portrait?"

"Not at all flattering," he muttered at length. "It portrays you in an ugly mood. But it's you, old man; it's undoubtedly you. I've seen you look just like that."

"When?" I asked curiously.

"Let me see." He paused for an instant and plucked at his lower lip with nervous fingers. "Why, the last time I saw you."

"You were put out because I had deserted the laboratory for a week to get married. I remember—"

"You didn't lose anything by that desertion," my portrait broke in ironically.

As was usual on such occasions, its words seemed to come from my own mouth. Paul thought that I had spoken to upbraid him for his theft of my discovery. His face flushed to a dark-crimson.

"I came here to see you about that, Gustave," he began in a halting voice. "You don't know how I've suffered ever since. I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for Evelyn. All my money went in that Wall Street panic and I had to do something."

"Your money went?" I said kindly enough. "How was that?"

He ran his hand feverishly through his flaxen hair.

"It was my father's fault," he continued hastily. "He was always a gambler, you know. Some one gave him the wrong tip; he put everything he had on it and even borrowed Evelyn's little fortune."

"Then came the crash. Everything went—everything! We were all in debt up to our ears."

"That left—Zodium," I suggested.

"Yes, Zodium was our only chance. I tried to get hold of you; but your father didn't know where you were. From the first I knew that there was a practical side to Zodium—a side worth millions if we could get the medical profession interested."

"Here was a great scheme lying idle, Evelyn and I at our wits' end, and you somewhere in the wilds."

"It was a temptation. I couldn't wait for you—I simply couldn't! You had shown me the formula; I went ahead and made Zodium and put it to a practical, money-getting use."

"You appeared in the eyes of the world as its discoverer," the portrait said calmly.

"That was necessary," Paul answered, evidently again laboring under the delusion that I had spoken. "I couldn't have sold it otherwise."

"But now," I cried joyfully, "you'll make full reparation; won't you, Paul?"

All my confidence in him had returned. As I spoke, I gazed challengingly at the portrait, which repaid my regard with an almost imperceptible curl of the lip. Evidently it was my friend's enemy as well as mine.

"Most certainly, Gustave," Paul rejoined solemnly. "I've come to offer full reparation. I have prospered in the last year. I am now able to pay you back every cent Zodium has made for me."

"And as for the fame, I will renounce that, too. I have already sent a letter to the *Scientific Monthly*, telling the whole truth about the matter and naming you as the discoverer."

I was overjoyed. All my old-time affection for Paul returned. His offense had not been so heinous as I had imagined.

When one considered the temptation, one had to acknowledge that it would have taken a supernaturally moral man to have resisted. And besides, was he not making full reparation?

Grasping his hand, I told him that there was now nothing to forgive; I assured him of my friendship and spoke so warmly that I soon saw suspicious drops of moisture in his eyes.

And all the time, behind his back, my evil painted passion and mocked and moued, parodying our emotions with ugly grimaces which furrowed its face into wicked lines.

And on the table, within arm's reach, lay the little glass globes, each with a beating, crimson heart--the little glass globes in which lay waiting for any murderous hand, the Purple Veil.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LABORATORY.

I SPENT that evening with Paul. He insisted that I return home with him; and I, nothing loath, accompanied him through the glistening streets.

As we sauntered along, side by side, two united shadows in a world of shadows, it seemed to me that nothing could ever again come between us.

A ten-minute walk brought us to his house. It was a large, pretentious-looking building--a building which reminded me of public libraries one finds in small Southern towns. It exuded an atmosphere of frigid learning not at all in keeping with its laughter-loving master.

At first I rather dreaded meeting Evelyn again. Perhaps she could still play upon my emotion--perhaps I had not yet outgrown my passion. And if this were so, would not my reborn affection for Paul be eaten away in an instant by that deadly chemical, jealousy?

But I might have spared myself all fears. That foolish sentiment had been buried somewhere in the past. As I greeted her, it was as though I were meeting her for the first time.

I saw a rather tall, anemic-looking girl with the dissatisfied expression of one who attempts to find happiness in material luxuries. What had become of that languid lily which had grown to such rare beauty in the fertile soil of my imagination?

I dined with Paul and his wife; and he and I talked of the past. We went over again our school and college days, while Evelyn struggled against boredom. At last our conversation flowed into the present.

"What are you working on now, Paul?" I asked.

"Nothing at present," he murmured, flushing slightly. "Evelyn has me nicely crucified on the cross of society. What with bridge, dances, and receptions, I haven't been able to draw a free breath in months."

"But it's a very good thing for you to go about!" Evelyn broke in with a note of irritation in her voice. "You were almost a hermit when I married you."

Paul a hermit! I allowed myself a smile. My friend had never been *that*. On the contrary, his mixing propensities had interfered greatly with his scientific studies.

"And what are *you* doing now?" Paul asked eagerly. "Have you made another remarkable discovery?"

Before I answered him, my eyes wandered

to a large oil landscape which hung on the opposite wall. To my horror, a familiar figure suddenly stepped out of a grove of trees in the background of this painting and warned me to silence with a ghostly finger lifted to its lips.

There was something immeasurably terrifying in thus being confronted by my relentless enemy. With a muffled exclamation of dismay, I stared at the canvas.

"Why, what is it?" Evelyn cried in alarm. "What do you see, Mr. Ericson?"

With a superhuman effort of will, I turned my head, glanced at her, and even smiled.

"Nothing," I murmured. "I was trying to discover if there were any human figures in that landscape. A shepherd, perhaps?"

"No," Evelyn answered wonderingly. "There are no figures."

"Quite so," I said lightly. "My eyes have been playing me tricks lately."

"But you haven't told me what you've been doing!" Paul broke in. "Have you come across anything as good as Zodium?"

Stiffening my will, forcing my eyes away from the tiny figure of fear in the painted meadow, I answered truthfully:

"Yes, I believe I have discovered something as good as Zodium."

Paul's cheeks were suddenly suffused with blood, his eyes shone brightly.

"I'd like to be let into the secret, old man," he muttered. "Perhaps I could be of some help. Of course, after what has happened, it seems--"

He broke off lamely with a muttered "damn" under his breath and a quick look at Evelyn. Evidently she knew nothing of what had formerly transpired.

And now the tiny figure in the painted meadow was waving its arms about as though possessed. "Stop! Stop!" it seemed to be screaming through its wide-open mouth.

But my determination to trust Paul was adamant. There was a look in his eyes that wrung my heart. For the once I would prove that I was stronger than my enemy—I would speak.

"My new discovery is called 'The Purple Veil,'" I began. "It is the most powerful, the most deadly chemical compound

ever known to man. It is invaluable for military purposes. A shell containing the Purple Veil could destroy a city and the population of a city."

"If that is true," Paul cried with flashing eyes, "you can ask your own price for it! Any nation in command of such a secret would soon rule the world. I suppose you invented it with the idea of making it the most powerful weapon of modern warfare?"

Smiling slightly, I bent forward and murmured in his ear:

"I invented it to destroy a portrait which has become loathsome to me."

Evidently Paul considered this remark as an attempted joke. He laughed rather foolishly and immediately suggested showing me his laboratory which was situated in the garden at the rear of the house. Evelyn excused herself, saying that she had some domestic matters to attend to and would perhaps join us later.

Strange as it might once have seemed to me, I was glad to be rid of her. To-night I wanted no one but Paul. We had so many things to talk over, he and I, that the presence of an unsympathetic listener seemed an irksome encumbrance.

With a sigh of relief, I followed my friend out of the house and down a winding garden-path which led to a small cement building a score of yards away.

"Why didn't you have your laboratory in the house?" I asked idly.

"Because of Evelyn," he called back over his shoulder. "She didn't like the idea of having all those combustibles so near her."

"What a blessed escape I have had!" was my thought as I followed him up a flight of stone steps and waited while he swung back the heavy door of his laboratory.

The out-house consisted of a single large room lighted by electricity. The walls and ceiling were of stone: and in the center was a long metal table, on which were grouped several bottles of chemicals and the various appliances to be found in most laboratories. There was a musty odor about the place which called out for thorough airing and cleansing.

"You haven't been very busy here?" I

suggested, pointing out several glass jars which were gray with dust.

"No," he answered with an almost inaudible sigh. "I have let my ambition go to the dogs. I've always needed you, Gustave, to keep me going."

He seated himself on the table.

"This is a wonderful work-shop," he continued, glancing about him, "and yet it's of no use to me. No ideas stirring, Gustave."

"Why not help me with the Purple Veil?" I asked.

Paul leaped down and took a stride toward me with outstretched hands.

"You mean that, Gustave?" he cried. "After all that's happened, you can still trust me? That's awfully decent of you, old man! I'd work my fingers to the bone; I'd—"

I have always had a dread of sentimental outbursts. Now I broke in on him abruptly.

"This is an excellent place to experiment with such a powerful chemical. Nothing can be hurt in this vault."

"When can we begin?" he cried excitedly. "I'd like to start to-night."

"Would you?" I asked. "Well, why not? I've got several vials of the Purple Veil in my laboratory now. It's barely a ten-minute walk. I'll step around and bring them over, if you say the word."

"That would be corking! I'm in just the mood for a little work. Shall I go with you?"

"No, don't do that," I answered. "You stay here and remove every inflammable object that may be about. I tell you the Purple Veil is the nearest thing to hell's fire ever uncorked."

"Very well," he said with a laugh. "I'll see that everything's shipshape before you get back."

"Will I have to go out through the house?" I asked.

"No, there's a gate in the garden which opens on the street. Come this way."

Paul conducted me to a large iron gate set in the garden wall. At first he had some difficulty in unlocking it; but at last, with a shrill, complaining sound, the key turned in the lock and the gate swung slowly outward. I followed my friend through this aperture and into a side street.

"I'll leave the gate on the latch," Paul said as we parted. "You can come right in any time. You'll find me in the laboratory when you get back."

"Very well," I answered. "I won't be long."

Turning, I left him standing bareheaded under an arc light and hurried up the street. At the corner, I turned and looked back.

He was still standing where I had left him. To this day I can see him thus—one hand resting on the rusted bars of the gate; the other shading his eyes from the bright electric rays which streamed down on his flaxen hair. And to this day there is a great love in my heart for that slim, upright figure—a great love and a great sorrow.

CHAPTER VII.

CONQUERED!

NOW, as I near the end of my tale, once more horror holds my beating heart in the hollow of her hand. It is as if I were once again facing the terrors of the past. I am cold, bitterly cold—so cold that the pencil shakes between my trembling fingers.

And yet I must force myself to finish this chronicle. Truth has lain for months buried deep. Before she crumbles to dust, I must unearth her! Yes, although it is a ghastly business, I must unearth her!

After I had left Paul, I hurried home. Opening the door with my latch-key, I mounted the stairs to my own room. Here I found everything as I had left it—the asbestos suit over the back of a chair, the gas-mask hanging from a peg on the wall.

It was but the work of a moment to don this gray uniform; and then, resembling some tattered derelict who has slept all night on a dust-heap, I began to descend the stairs to the laboratory. At every step I made a swishing sound as though I were clothed in paper.

I had not as yet put on the gas-mask. I carried it in my hand as if it were a lantern. Now and then it swung against my thigh, causing me to start involuntarily.

The laboratory was plunged in blackness.

Turning on the lights, I took a quick survey of the premises. *There* were the tiny globes in which glistened the Purple Veil; *there* was the picture-frame cover of asbestos in which I intended placing the portrait at the last moment.

The portrait! I wheeled about and met its satanic regard. During the last few days it had grown ever more lifelike. Now one could fairly see the blood coursing behind the swarthy skin, the beastlike moisture on the crimson lips, the vibrating tension of the curling fingers.

There it crouched—malevolent as a spider—studying me with its unbearable eyes. Would I be able to destroy it? Would I *ever* be able to destroy it?

"Well," I said at last, "why do you stare at me thus?"

Then its thin, red lips curled in a sneer.

"You interest me," it murmured. "You are such a fool—such a weak fool!"

"I do not understand you," I answered coldly.

"You do not understand me?" it cried vehemently. "I thought we had become friends, you and I! Well, I will make my meaning clear. Is it wise to trust one who is untrustworthy—one who has proved himself untrustworthy?"

"Did you not see me warning you from that picture in Paul's house? Surely you saw me; and yet you still persevered. Why have you given yourself into the hands of your enemy?"

Veiling the hatred in my eyes, I laughed aloud. Surely I was more than a match for it! It had called itself a crimson thought—well, even a *crimson thought* can be the toy of man. Now I would play a little game with it—a game of life or death.

"I do not trust Paul," I answered. "Have I not told you that I intend to kill him?"

"Then why did you speak to him of the Purple Veil?"

"Crude, stupid passion," I cried, "you are like some frenzied wild beast! You have no cunning, no subtlety. I spoke to Paul of the Purple Veil because I intend to choke him with it.

"He himself has opened the way. He has offered to help me in an experiment to-

night—he has given me the use of his laboratory."

"So that he may rob you again," the portrait broke in.

"Perhaps. But in reality I shall rob him. I shall take his most precious possession—his life!"

"There will be an unavoidable accident, you understand? His widow will have the consolation of knowing that her husband died in the service of science."

The portrait began to chuckle. The rasping sound of its merriment, the gray film which covered its eyes, and lastly the greedy way it licked its lips, made my flesh crawl. And yet it was necessary for me to go on building a dwelling of lies in which it might feel secure.

"That is the reason I came back and put on my asbestos suit," I continued, "Paul is now awaiting me in the laboratory. I shall take him one of these little glass globes and then we will experiment."

"How I wish I could be there!" the portrait murmured. "Are there any paintings in his laboratory? If so, I might manage it. I have access to all paintings."

"I'm sorry to say that there are not," I said regretfully. "However, I think it could be managed. I'll take you under my arm as a gift to him—you understand?"

"But first you must put on this picture-frame cover of asbestos. It will protect you from the Purple Veil."

The portrait gave me a look of loathsome affection.

"You are growing very fond of me," it whispered. "We are becoming as brothers. Let us hurry. I am anxious to see Paul enshrouded in the Purple Veil."

Still masking the hate in my eyes, I slipped the asbestos cover over its frame; next I went to the table and picked up one of the tiny glass globes. Then I returned to the portrait which still regarded me with its loose-lipped smile.

"Does it suspect anything?" I wondered. "If I can only put on my gas-mask before it suspects anything!"

At that instant, the portrait pointed out my path. It said anxiously:

"How can you carry me when you have that mask in your hand?"

"That is true!" I cried with a laugh. "I'll have to wear the mask then."

With fingers that shook, I slipped the contrivance over my head.

"You will appear ridiculous on the street," the portrait expostulated. "But take me down and let us hurry."

Suddenly its voice changed and it eyed me intently.

"What are you waiting for?" it cried. "Ah, traitor--traitor! You dare not!"

"I dare everything!" I cried exultantly and cast the tiny glass globe straight at its terror-stricken eyes.

What happened then was photographed on the film of my brain for all time. The blinding flash as the glass globe exploded, the thin stream of purplish vapor which coiled over the canvas like twisting snakes, the iridescent sparks of flame which whirled hither and thither in a mad dance—all these I had expected to see.

But the passing of the portrait! Ah, that was different--that was enough to turn a strong man's brain to quivering jelly!

At first the portrait remained motionless, its mouth agape in ludicrous astonishment. But when a stream of the Purple Veil coiled about its knees, it began to struggle.

With distended eyeballs and lolling tongue, with foaming lips and bursting lungs, it writhed back and forth in its efforts to escape. And as it fought for life, silently, vindictively, its venomous eyes were still fixed upon my face.

But soon there came a change. The Purple Veil squirmed upward till it reached the portrait's gaping mouth. For an instant I saw my enemy's breast rise and fall in a last convulsive movement.

At that superhuman effort, its lungs must have broken like wind-distended bags. At the next moment, the portrait toppled forward on its face.

Yet all was not over. It still held tenaciously to life. Like a wounded spider it lay there, quivering slightly.

And now the tiny sparks of flame gathered on the fallen body like fireflies settling on a withered branch. Burning now green, now white, now green again, they fell on the portrait in a shower. In vain it writhed beneath their fiery weight.

Soon they had buried it; and the whole canvas was aflame. Then long fingers of fire reached upward till they touched the asbestos-covered frame, retiring sullenly and attempting an outlet on another side.

And I stood looking aghast at this living painting of hell. Long after my enemy had fallen, I saw the heap of red-hot ashes, under which it lay, stir slightly.

At that I turned on my heel, sick and dizzy, and dared not look again till the canvas was but blackened ashes. Then, at last, I realized that I was free.

Trembling with excitement, I then opened the window and let the cool night air cleanse the poisonous atmosphere. Next I removed the gas-mask, and, sinking into the nearest chair, closed my eyes.

A great fatigue had overmastered me. As on a former occasion, I felt myself drifting out on the drowsy sea of dreams. Even Paul had become a secondary consideration.

Why should I not sleep? Had I not earned the right to sleep? I had at last conquered; and to the conqueror what more blessed wreath than sleep?

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARGED WITH MURDER.

I AWOKE with a start to a feeling of dread. Sitting up, I rubbed my eyes and looked about me. A pallid, ghostly light stole in through the open window; and the air was damp with the promise of dawn.

While I had slept a breeze had sprung up. Now the curtains in the alcove, like fancies of bygone courtiers, seemed curt-sying and bowing to one another.

Long habit turned my eyes to the portrait. With a feeling of unbounded joy, I saw that this time I had really succeeded. The entire surface of the canvas was charred a deep-black.

What delight took possession of me then!—a delight which carried me to childish lengths. I rose and capered about the room, I shook my fist at it, I even laughed aloud.

Suddenly I was brought to myself by the far-away, brazen voice of the door-bell. Who could be ringing at this hour, I won-

dered. And as I turned this question over in my mind, I once again glanced at the charred canvas.

My God! Will I ever be able to forget what I saw then?

My eyes had fallen on the left-hand corner of the portrait—the side nearest the window. With an inarticulate cry of horror, I saw something stirring there.

It was yellow and small, and not unlike an oddly shaped autumn-leaf; and it twitched spasmodically.

"It *must* be a leaf," I told myself firmly—"a leaf which has blown in through the open window and caught there."

Once more I looked, and hope deserted me. It was not a leaf—ah, no! It was a human hand—a human hand which felt its way with writhing fingers—a human hand which I knew only too well!

Ah, *there* was the arm, long and slender; and there was the body itself sidling into the canvas! Like a thief in the night, it stole forward with averted face.

Crouching, it crawled along till it reached its old spot; and then—ah, then it turned and I saw its eyes!

For an instant I stood there, motionless, dumb, staring into my enemy's face; and then, with a cry of terror, I fled to the door and threw it open. As I hesitated on the threshold, I heard the sound of footsteps in the hall.

"There he is now, sir," I heard Tom's voice say; and the next moment I was confronted by two strangers.

Any human manifestation was welcome indeed on such a night. Instantly I was calm and even smiling.

"You wish to see me, gentlemen?" I asked, wiping the cold perspiration from my forehead. "Won't you step into my laboratory?"

The presence of these strangers had given me confidence. Perhaps, after all, I had dreamed of the reappearance of my enemy. At any rate, it would be as well to get normal opinion on such a phenomenon.

"Now, gentlemen, will you kindly fix your attention on that canvas," I said. "Is there a figure in it, or is there not? My common sense tells me that there is not."

"Certainly, there's a figure there," said

one of my guests bruskly. "It's a full-length portrait of you; and a very good likeness, I'd call it."

I turned to the other one in despair. "Do you also see it?" I cried.

But he cut me short with even more brusqueness than his companion.

"We've got a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Ericson," he said.

"My arrest! You are police officers, then? Under what charge?"

But before he answered me, I knew well enough what had happened while I had slept. I saw it all in a blinding flash.

Not I, but my portrait, had kept the rendezvous with Paul. As on a previous occasion, in my attempt to destroy my enemy I had only succeeded in loosing it on the world.

"You are charged with the murder of Paul Grey," one of the police officers said heavily.

It was as I had suspected then—Paul was dead! Poor old Paul whom I had loved like a brother! And now I was charged with his death, *I* who would not have harmed a hair of his head!

"You're going a little bit too far in this!" I cried angrily. "You have no reason to accuse *me*. Are there not others about as capable of committing crimes as I—others who hated Paul while I loved him?"

"Look at that face on the canvas! What does it tell you?"

I glanced full at the portrait as I spoke; and, to my joy, it was bowing and smiling—bowing and smiling with its hand on its heart.

"Look, look!" I cried in an agonized voice. "Can't you see it silently affirming my words? Where are you taking me? Stop! I demand justice! The real murderer hangs on the wall!"

But my captors were deaf to my words. They had handcuffed me and were leading me toward the door. On the threshold I cast a last glance over my shoulder.

My portrait was still bowing and smiling like a mechanical doll. And I knew then that it had conquered for all time.

And *I*? Why, I must suffer for it in silence and solitude. And because of its victory—like a famous actor who has played

his rôle to the applause of the house—it would continue bowing and smiling, bowing and smiling, bowing and smiling.

CHAPTER IX.

FIND THE MURDERER!

I HAVE but little more to add. You, who have followed my trial in the papers, will remember Evelyn's testimony—how, on the night of the murder, she visited her husband's laboratory at a late hour to find his charred remains on the stone floor and a crazed being, whom she falsely declared to be Gustave Ericson, crouched in one corner, mumbling to itself; how, when it saw her, this creature leaped to its feet and fled screaming; how she made her way back to the house and called in the police.

And also you will remember that, in spite of my brilliant speech accusing the portrait of the crime, the jury was swayed by the opinions of certain learned asses and brought in a verdict of homicidal mania; and that shortly after my trial, I was removed to this asylum for the criminal insane.

But have you ever thought of what a terrible punishment it is to be incarcerated among mental derelicts—to be exposed night after night to the caresses of our mother of madness, the moon? When *she* commands us to play it is difficult to resist.

And have you ever longed, in your safety and sanity, to throw back your head and howl like wolves? We do strange, unaccountable things here—acts which we blush for when the sun again rules the world.

No, this is not a healthy spot. While I still possess all my mental powers undimmed, I have certain presentiments which make me anxious for the future.

It is on account of these presentiments that I have written this truthful chronicle, hoping that it will fall into the hands of some worthy person who will gather sufficient evidence to secure my release.

And yet, how few there are who can see the truth even when it is pointed out to them! For instance, we hear on all sides such phrases as these: "That painting has

life," "this book will live." Yet, who of us actually believes that these statements are true?

When I tried to prove that Anthony Worthington's portrait of me had life, I was laughed at and labeled insane. And even my fellow sufferers mock me when I tell them that I have actually discovered that books may live.

We have a library in the asylum with some splendid books. They whisper all night long. They tell their separate stories over and over again, each vying with the other, each attempting to drown out the other with its low, sibilant whisper.

I have sat in this library listening to them until sometimes my brain began to swim—there are so many of them, each is so convinced of its own immortality!

Please pardon this digression, which perhaps is not such a great digression after all. It may at least be of interest to the kind of man who will be my savior and friend—a man broad enough to acknowledge the still, small area of plowed soil in this wilderness we call the "world"—a man with humanity enough to acknowledge that there may be phenomena of which he is ignorant.

And when my unknown friend has read this chronicle and believed, let him go out and hunt my portrait down. I understand that my relatives have sold all my effects, therefore, the search may be difficult.

But to the strong in heart all things are possible. Somewhere in the city—perhaps in some art-dealer's—the real murderer of Paul Grey is lurking. Hunt down the assassin and deliver it to justice!

Now, give heed, my unknown friend. It is the portrait of a strikingly handsome young man—swarthy, with cruel, crimson lips and a mole on its right cheek. But if this description is not sufficient, it has other telltale characteristics.

The portrait to which I refer—that living portrait of an evil passion—like a great actor responding to an encore, is continually bowing and smiling, bowing and smiling, bowing and smiling.

And because of these calm, graceful salutations, it should not be difficult to recognize it among thousands.

(The end.)



Colleen Rhue

Raymond Lester

A FUGITIVE from futile remorse and stinging memories of shame and degradation, Robert Mawson stood motionless in the cool, sheltering darkness.

The night befriended him; and the deep, shadowy arches of dense foliage, the soft hillocks of moss-carpeted loam, were his aids. There, blended with his surroundings, he could watch and wait unseen. He could move unheard and unsuspected. He could advance or retreat, and none would be aware of his coming or going. Sadness could dwell in his somber eyes, or grim resolve harden his jaw. He could sigh regretfully for the long-past days, or curse the bleak prospect of his future.

There was no one to smile and jeer at his weakness, or shrink from him in fear. Within the span of this late summer night he could plot and plan and, perchance, perform. He could choose whether to sink negatively into oblivion, or by his own acts shape the course of events to some approach of his desires.

"Can I?"

The muttered, self-questioning words showed the trend of Mawson's thoughts were toward the achievement of some definite purpose. For three years and more he had been a helpless creature of fate. He had existed as a cipher where he had once been a free agent and an independent power. Could he now, at this late stage, take an active part and compel redress for his folly and wrongs?

"At least I may get vengeance. It can do me no material benefit; but if I could give that dog Simpson and that scrawny rascal Bax, a taste of the fare that's been mine, I guess it would help some.

"The smug, yellow hypocrites! I was the goat. Now— What is the use? No money, no credit, no friends. Even the loving trustfulness of Colleen Rhue broke under the strain. Where is she now? Does she ever think of or remember me? The fool who played a pawn's part and became the scapegoat of dishonor."

A man may upon occasions be near to tears and yet feel no shame. In the grip of his past so poignantly revived by his surroundings, Mawson looked down the hillside. Momentarily he remained unconscious that his blurred vision was caused by his own emotion, and not by a rising ground mist; but when he realized that he was giving way to a useless, nerve-destroying indulgence, he shook himself free from this softening influence.

"That kind of thing is for women and children," he muttered. "I thought I was toughened beyond the point of succumbing to mawkish sentiment. Yet— what am I here for?"

Mawson mocked at himself. He knew that behind the one purpose that had brought him to this spot was another inducement. He had been drawn thither, not only for the fulfilment of a design that had grown to an intense obsession, but he had

also come in obedience to a longing wish that he cynically refused to acknowledge.

He was waiting to pick up the trail of his Judas friends, Simpson and Bax, and found himself haunted by luring ghosts of the past. Below him, he could see the road where, one moonlit night, he had walked with Colleen Rhue. Here in the very woods where he now waited in slinking, secret watchfulness, he had divided with her the contents of an elaborately fitted lunch-basket.

Those had been the days of honor, luxury, and care-free laughter. This was a night of ignominy, poverty, and harassing need for action.

In token of her glory of copper-red hair and smiling blue eyes, Robert Mawson had named this girl of dreams and memories, Colleen Rhue. In tribute to her grace and beauty, he had so christened the forty-foot launch that had been his pride before his career had crumbled, and all his high hopes and ambitions had been mired and swamped in disgrace.

What had become of this Colleen Rhue? Had his boat been sold for mooring and storage charges, or was she one of those long, narrow shapes ranked on the ways in the shipyard? Was she there, as of old, in company with the Banshee, the boat owned by Simpson and Bax?

This last was an important question—for where the Banshee was berthed, the men that Robert Mawson was bent on confronting were bound to come.

"Ah, at last! He's finished his rounds."

There was satisfaction in Mawson's low exclamation. For over two hours he had stood watching a storm lantern bobbing about in the shipyard, and he sighed with relief when the night guard finally entered the shack that stood apart from the office buildings.

Moving with care, Mawson noiselessly descended the hillside, and when he arrived ten feet below the place where he had commanded a wide view of the yard, he could see through the open window of the hut where the watchman was comfortably settled, smoking. For ten years or more the old man had conscientiously carried out the same routine, and his position was a sine-

cure, his duties a matter of form. Nothing had ever happened, therefore nothing ever would; and having carried his lantern as a warning evidence to all and sundry that he was doing his duty, the watchman would sit and doze in his shack until he was relieved in the morning by the timekeeper.

Mawson, however, was not aware of the old man's set ideas of duty, and when he reached the foot of the hill, he stood for a moment pondering on the chance he risked of being observed. There was only a narrow strip of roadway to cross; but if the watchman took it into his head to lean out of the window, Mawson knew that even if he succeeded in passing unchallenged, he might be noted and remembered as a stranger, and possibly pledge himself to further suspicion.

To-morrow or a week hence events might happen that would necessitate a triple-plated alibi, and a man with his record could not afford to take any chances.

Concealed by the tangled growth of bramble and weed bordering the swampy depression at the side of the road, Mawson kept his gaze fixed on the figure seated in the shack. The throaty, hollow, and lugubrious croak of a bullfrog punctuated at irregular intervals the incessant whine and buzzing whir of a swarm of mosquitoes and a myriad night-born insects. Moths, drawn to adventure by the fascination of the watchman's lantern, forsook the safe obscurity of the damp, dense foliage and fluttered in erratic flight toward the open window.

For a full ten minutes Mawson stoically endured the tortures of having his neck, face, and hands probed with a dozen hypodermic needles of the winged variety. Then, judging by the old man's bent head and lack of movement that he was calmly dozing, he ran lightly across the road. Crouched, and noiseless as a shadow, he passed beneath the window and, a moment later, reached the sandy slope of the shipyard.

Ankle deep in the fine sand, and no longer fearful of being heard or seen, Mawson went rapidly from one canvas-shrouded boat to another. Each in turn, and with no more than a scant glance, he passed

over the long, rakish lines of the modern speedsters and cradled, towering, deep-keeled yachts. He did not have to look twice in order to convince himself that the Colleen Rhue was not there.

"She was probably sold months ago," he reflected bitterly; "but how about the Banshee? It stated plainly enough in the paper that she was being put into commission. Simpson and Bax are supposed to start for the South to-morrow. She ought at least be down here, ready to launch on the morning tide. Yet she's not here, and she's not on the water. I may as well give up hope of getting even for the next three months and slink back to town."

Thwarted in the achievement of both a sentimental wish to see the Colleen Rhue, and the sterner hope of locating the Banshee, Robert Mawson turned reluctantly away. Subconsciously he was busy thinking about the misleading news that he had read in the motor paper reports, but the newly painted, gleaming white hull of a magnificently designed cabin cruiser attracted his attention. He forgot for the moment that he was practically penniless and a discredited outcast. He stopped to admire. With the habit of years, he looked up at the stern.

An angry glow burned in his eyes when he read the name.

"Banshee II," he muttered. "So that's the explanation. The pair have prospered since they left me to pay for their own smooth rascality. No wonder I didn't find her at first. The old Banshee wasn't good enough for them, so they discarded her and bought this ten-thousand-dollar flier *de luxe*. All the better. The higher up they are the greater will be their fall when I get hold of them. If I can't bluff them, I'll squeeze the truth out of Simpson's fat throat with my bare hands."

With the discovery of Banshee II, the plan that Mawson had sketchily formulated came into consideration with revitalized intensity. He would climb aboard, conceal himself in one of the cabins, and wait his opportunity of pouncing on either Simpson or Bax when they reached the open Sound. It was probable that they would have a party of friends; but it was not likely that

these would come on board at the shipyard. Simpson and Bax would take their trip in style and pick up their guests at some fashionable resort, such as Narraganset or Newport. So there would be ample time for him to catch the pair alone.

Hoisting himself from the cradle to the deck, Mawson's hopes of hiding himself met with instant disappointment. All about him was a litter of empty cans and wood shavings. There was a strong odor of paint and varnish. Doors and port-holes were all open. He knew it was impossible that the Banshee could be ready to sail on the morrow. It was also equally impossible that he could wait in the vicinity for another week.

"Yet," he muttered, "there's no other way of cornering the brutes. I can't tackle either of them in their offices, clubs, or on the street. I can't make them disgorge unless I can get them alone and isolated. They have the law on their side, and can laugh at me while the police are within call. To break them, I've got to frighten them, and the only place where I can do that is on this boat. Now, my chance of doing that isn't worth a nickel."

Defeated by circumstances from getting at close grips with his betrayers, yet stubbornly clinging to the forlorn hope that some plausible, alternative scheme would occur to him, Robert Mawson descended again to the shore and walked disconsolately away. With no defined purpose, he followed the edge of the water for a short distance, and presently became aware that to proceed any farther in the direction he had taken, he would either have to wade through the water or turn upshore.

A gray hulk barred his progress. The waves lapped at her rudderless keel. Limpets and trails of seaweed clung to her sides. Except for a rope curving upward to the timbers of a rotting dock, the boat bore every evidence of being an abandoned derelict. The cleats had been taken from her decks. The cabin port-holes gaped. A shred of torn canvas hung from the roof of her cabin.

To some, a boat is merely a conglomerate, hollow shell for getting about on the water. No more attention is given to an

old and apparently useless hulk than to a worn-out shoe. But a love of boats was second nature to Robert, and it was with a queer touch of pain that he stepped closer to the dismantled hulk. This feeling quickened to sudden horror that struck keener and deeper than an impersonal sense of regard.

This battered, mistreated castaway was his own boat. He had found Colleen Rhue!

There was no need for him to peer closely at the all but obliterated name. Every line of her was familiar. The years had changed Mawson so that he had passed unrecognized among old friends and one-time acquaintances; but time, neglect, and ill treatment could not destroy the graceful lines of the Colleen. By touch more than by sight, Mawson knew that her paint-work was cracked and scarred. The varnish on her cabin was peeling off in scales, but until the planking fell away from her oaken frame, Mawson could have picked her out of a thousand.

"So the shipyard people tore the fittings out of her, and left her here for the sun and tide to warp, rot, and break up," he murmured. "I suppose they thought I would never return to claim her. It seems that destiny to-night is conspiring to show me how well rogues can prosper, and how thoroughly a fool can pay for his folly. What's this?"

A board nailed over the cabin door caught Mawson's attention. It was daubed with two faded words: "For Sale."

Robert knew what that meant. Colleen Rhue was fated to become a shanty boat. Some wastrel beach-comber or lazy clam-digger would claim the boat for a few dollars, and she would end her days half sunken in the thatch of some muddy, evil-smelling creek.

Dawn was brightening in the east when Mawson stole out of the shipyard and climbed the hill. He was going back to town with exactly one dollar and thirty-five cents as the sum total of his wealth.

II.

YET, because the sight of the Colleen Rhue had fired him with a dynamic pur-

pose and stirred ambition to life, he returned in three days with a hundred and fifty dollars in his pocket.

He had neither begged, borrowed, nor stolen the money. It had been honestly earned, and the movie fans who weeks later gasped at the deeds of daring performed by their pet star, did not suspect that they were gazing upon the desperate bravery of a substitute.

The film favorite had nerve enough to lounge through a parlor scene, or dally in love-making on a fake balcony *à la Romeo and Juliet*. Also, he was quite capable of absorbing the eight hundred a week that rewarded his silent, languid grace; but he hadn't sand enough to go through with the thrilling chances that Mawson put over at a flat rate of fifty dollars a jump. Twice he leaped from Brooklyn Bridge for a retake, and once from an airplane. Then he rubbed the make-up from his face, threw aside the curly wig that had camouflaged him for his impersonation of the hero pictured on the screen, and then quit while he was sound in wind and limb.

Disreputably clad, he shuffled into the shipyard office on the morning following his final appearance before the camera. The owner of the shipyard met him with a stony glare that was reassuring proof that no thought of Robert Mawson was coupled in his mind with this unpromising-looking stranger.

"What d' you want?" he demanded ungraciously.

"How much 'll you take f'r that old boat what's moored alongside th' dock?" asked Robert in a husky whisper.

"What 'll you offer?"

"Fifty bucks."

"She's yours!" snapped the shipyard man promptly, and raised his eyebrows in surprise when his frowzy caller counted out the money.

"Y'u don't mind if I spend a day or so in y'r yard calkin' an' fixin', so's I c'n tow her away without her sinkin' on me?" asked Mawson.

"N-no. Not at all," replied the other, and immediately the purchaser of Colleen Rhue had gone, he gave orders that no tackle or portable property was to be left

laying around within reach of the dubious-looking stranger.

During the first few days, Mawson was an object of ridicule and covert gibes from the yard hands; but they soon tired of their fun, and left him alone. With each seam that he calked, he noted with satisfaction that the refitting of the Banshee was proceeding rapidly. She was launched on Friday morning, and that same afternoon a big, shiny limousine drove into the yard. Two men—one stout, pompous, and domineering, the other thin, furtive-eyed, and nervous—walked down to the water and stepped into a waiting tender.

Robert Mawson turned white, but the regular tap of his calking tool did not vary.

"Simpson and Bax, come to inspect their boat," he reflected. "That means they are going to start off to-morrow."

A little later the rage-white pallor of Robert's face changed. A wave of resentment surged over him. Hot blood tingled in his veins. His temples throbbed and his cheeks burned as he stooped lower and rammed the cotton into the gaping crevice of the garboard strake.

When Simpson and Bax returned from their inspection of the Banshee and strolled up the sloping shore, a breeze wafted the heavy smoke from their cigars around him. His nervous tension was raised to savage irritability, and his nostrils dilated. He remembered the days when he had favored that same brand of costly cigar and smoked in unsuspecting good fellowship with the men who now stood behind him, talking. Perception of how easily he had been fooled came to Mawson with torturing clarity, yet he dared not rise and confront his betrayers.

Fear, which had no kinship with physical cowardice, tormented Robert when he heard the feet of Simpson and Bax shuffling in the sand. Would they come nearer still and, by some casual, condescending remark, force their unwelcome presence upon him?

Glad as he was that the pair had come to the shipyard, Mawson desired no nearer view of them. Not yet. In too intimate a proximity there was danger that he would be recognized. If he were discovered, the

mere fact of his presence would operate as a warning, and his opportunity for trapping his enemies would dwindle to vanishing point.

"*Some* boat," said Simpson in evident reference to the Banshee II, and the smug, complacent boastfulness in his voice was another drop of cloying poison in Mawson's cup of bitterness. Robert envied no man the luxury of possessing whatsoever had been worthily obtained, but knowing the ways and means of acquiring wealth employed by these well-tailored blood-suckers, he clenched his teeth and—kept his peace. Patience, and still more patience, was his watchword.

"Yeah," drawled Bax. "She's a dandy, all right. What?"

"Say, ain't that Mawson's old boat? Who's been fool enough to buy that old junk-heap?"

Simpson's inquiry was made regardless whether he was heard by other than Bax, and Mawson had a hard job to prevent himself from a mad impulse to find relief in violence.

It is a legacy of cave days and a man's natural instinct to avenge a wrong with an actual blow, but Mawson mastered his desire to rise and plant his fist in Simpson's fat visage; and affecting not to hear the latter's rude comments, he bent closer over his job. He had passed unrecognized by the shipyard owner and others, but he was not going to let either Simpson or Bax have a good look at him.

Bax did not trouble to reply to Simpson's remark. Mawson heard him walk away, and presently Simpson followed. The air was purer for their going, and Robert gave a deep sigh of relief.

"To think that I was ever taken in and done for by that pair of shallow rascals," he thought, and forgot that Simpson's smooth sleekness concealed a crafty slyness that had enabled him to grow rich by doubtful methods and still keep beyond the reach of the law. There was the secret of the ample bank balances that stood to the credit of Simpson and Bax. They ventured far in risky finance, but it was no part of their policy to do the dirty work.

Morally they were foul, prime movers in

rogue, but legally there was no hook that could be baited to attract them. There was nothing against them.

Some of their cat's-paws and victims had taken the last plunge. Others were in prison; but there was one who, while reclaiming his derelict, mistreated boat, was listening to their retreating footsteps, and holding himself in control until he could shape circumstances to the undoing of the men who had wrecked him.

Following the departure of the limousine, Mawson strolled unnoticed about the yard. The men had grown accustomed to his presence, and the good work he had put in on the Colleen Rhue had caused a feeling of respect to spread among them. They gossiped freely as they finished work for the day, and Mawson learned a piece of news that induced him to take a swim that night.

Simpson and Bax were to return with a car-load of provisions and effects required for their sea voyage. Mawson decided to carry out his original plan, and a little after nine o'clock he crept under the dock, took off his clothes, rolled them into a tight bundle, and tied them on his head. He waded out and, using the silent breast-stroke, swam in a wide half-circle. Reaching the Banshee on the off-side, he climbed aboard and took refuge in the engine-room, which was aft and below the level of the main cabin. He flattered himself that he had left no trace that could betray his presence. The marks left by his wet feet on the warm, sun-dried deck would vanish almost immediately.

"Couldn't be better," reflected Mawson, as he dressed and took stock of the advantages of his position. "From this port-hole I can see them coming, and if they come on board alone and enter that cabin, I can be on them in two jumps. They'll get the surprise of their lives, and if I can bulldoze them into thinking I know more than I do I'll score. If I can't, then I'll try a little rough stuff and—score just the same. I'm tough, and Simpson is nothing but a mound of flesh. The three years that I've been through haven't made me any softer in the head or fist."

With set jaws and resolute eyes, Maw-

son waited for the men he had vowed to corner, and for once gossip proved a reliable agent of information.

At ten o'clock he heard a car stop at the gates of the yard, and a little later four men came down to the well-lighted landing stage where was anchored the Banshee's tender.

"Simpson, Bax, the watchman, and the chauffeur," muttered Mawson, and watched in anxious uncertainty while the chauffeur dumped two large suit-cases into the launch. Three to one were big odds, and Mawson heaved a great sigh of relief when the tender shot toward the Banshee bearing only the two men whom he wanted.

After that everything happened as Mawson had hoped, and more or less foreseen. Yet it was he that had the surprise, and it was he who failed to carry out completely the program he had mentally outlined.

"Let's have a drink," wheezed Simpson as he lumbered into the cabin and switched on the lights. "After that we can talk. We'll have a half-a-million little confab—eh, Bax? No place like this for a private settlement. Hotel walls have ears, old boy, but I guess the Banshee won't tell no tales. We can lay our cards face up on the table and fix everything so's there can't be a slip anywhere."

It was at this stage that Robert Mawson, crouched with one foot on the stairs leading to the cabin, changed his mind about forcing matters. He had waited three years. He could afford to wait a little longer. In less than three minutes it was possible that Simpson and Bax would fashion a noose for their own necks. Mawson withdrew his foot and sat down to listen.

Following the clink of glasses and the sizzle of charged water, Simpson heaved a prodigious grunt of satisfaction.

"Velvet, Bax," he chortled with glee. "We're on the softest pile of silk velvet that we've ever been near since we kidded that simp Mawson into getting us twenty thousand good dollars. What?"

"That's the second time to-day you've mentioned that feller's name," said Bax irritably.

"Aw, forget it!" cut in the fat man with prompt rudeness. "I suppose seeing that

old boat of his put me in mind of him more than anything. It must have been stored up on the ways until the last week or so. I'd forgotten it was in the yard, but I ain't losing any sleep over it, Bax."

"Sure that boat didn't remind you of some one else?" retorted Bax. "I've forgotten the girl's name, but Mawson gave the boat his fancy name for her. Colleen Rhue. Ah, I have it! Nancy Weston! That's the red-headed charmer's name. You always were a bold and dashing cavalier with the ladies, Simpson, but that one—"

"Say, shut up and leave my private affairs out of the discussion," grunted Simpson. "We've business to talk over, and there's no time to waste raking up old history. Don't you worry about Nancy Weston; I haven't finished with her yet. You don't know everything, Bax. Not yet. One of these days maybe I'll write the story of my life and give you a free copy. How 'll that do?"

"It might make funny reading, but I wouldn't advise you to risk putting the facts down in black and white," observed Bax dryly. "It's a cert you'd land in jail."

"And so would a good many others," retorted Simpson. "Say, you'd better have another tonic. There's something wrong with your liver, or maybe you've a touch of the bile. Think of the melon we're going to cut between us within the next week. I've fixed everything with Pete, down to the plan of the house. Shekels, Bax, oodles of 'em! Maybe over a hundred thousand apiece in real money. Now listen." Simpson's voice dropped, but not much of his husky, rapid monotone escaped the ears of the listener in the engine-room.

The unfinished reference to Nancy Weston had stirred Robert to the verge of flinging himself into the cabin and choking the truth from Simpson, but patient caution persisted, and he held his rage well in hand.

"Now listen," had said Simpson, and knew not how well he was being obeyed by one other than his thin-faced partner, Bax.

It was close on midnight before the partners left the Banshee, and for upward of

four hours Robert Mawson sat inactive in the grip of thoughts that reached back over the blank, wasted years and far into the future. The conversation between the two men had been constantly interrupted by peevish, petty outbursts of temper; and from the scraps of rejoinder forced from Simpson by Bax's taunting remarks, Mawson had gathered a hint of past and prospective deviltry that he had not hitherto suspected or imagined possible.

The pair, bold with success, had grown greedy. They were launching out on a new line of villainy.

Also, he had been totally blind to another phase of Simpson's craft; for, not content with making Robert the scapegoat of his fraudulent schemes, Simpson had also poisoned the mind of Nancy Weston against him. The three years' silence of Colleen Rhue was accounted for by a reason other than that of shame for her lover.

"So that vile beast made Colleen believe that I took the money for another girl," muttered Mawson. "He wanted her for himself all the time, and now that he knows that he can't win her by lies, he intends to try a dirtier trick by endeavoring to get her dazzled with his ill-gotten wealth. Liar, braggart, and thief! There is no need to warn her about his latest piece of folly. Money has no power over Colleen Rhue; I know that—*now*."

"Shall I inform the police and lose the chance of pinning them both? Or shall I risk giving them a running noose? I'll have to. Suspicions are no proof. My word would go for naught. If I told what I've overheard, who would believe a man who's done time? I must catch them right on the job, and make them talk."

Previous to his fatal mistake—misappropriation of trust funds had been the legal terminology of his misdeed—Robert Mawson had been a rising young lawyer, and now his legal training stood him in good stead. Faced by a difficult and dangerous task, with every fiber of him straining toward instant action, he tackled his problem with calm dispassionateness and envisagement of all its angles. Before dawn came, his plans were revised and widened in scope, and when he swam ashore and

crept into the cabin of the Colleen Rhue his mind was settled. He slept for three hours, and when at ten o'clock the Banshee's anchor was raised, and her propeller thrashed the water, he gave the boat no more than a casual glance. It makes all the difference when a man is not only sure of himself, but certain of the moves of others.

"I see," said Simpson, as the Banshee drew away from the shore. "that surly bum is still tinkering with his fifty-dollar colander. It makes me sick the way some fellers fritter away their time. Lack of brains, I suppose."

Which remark also proves that a man who *thinks* he is sure of the status of another is in a bad position, however crafty he may be.

During that day Robert Mawson performed wonders. By nightfall an old but still serviceable fifteen-horse, heavy-duty engine was firmly bedded in the Colleen Rhue. A coat of gray paint worked with her the same outward miracle that a new outfit does with a down-at-heel, human derelict. Then Mawson finished a strenuous day by going to town and calling at the head office of a private detective agency.

"Name, please," said the night clerk when Mawson stated he wished to see the chief.

"Jones," replied Robert, and added with bland disregard of the clerk's suspicious gaze. "Make it John Jones; that will do just as well as any other name."

The clerk hesitated. He was puzzled by the contrast between Mawson's manner, his easy, confident style of address, and his rough, not to say shabby, appearance. A bright idea struck him.

"Operative?" he asked.

Mawson shrugged his shoulders. "*Pro tem.*," he answered briefly. "But I would prefer to state the rest of my business to your chief."

Without further cross-examination, Mawson was shown to an inner office. A broad-shouldered, placid-eyed man turned from a desk as "Mr. John Jones" was announced. His gaze dwelt impersonally on his visitor, and with no shade of expression in his voice he observed dryly:

"Evening! Rather an uncommon name, yours. What can I do for you?"

"I want one of your men to be at a certain place from 12 midnight until 3 A.M."

"May I ask for what purpose?"

"Legitimate. Further than that I cannot state."

The detective bent forward and slowly flicked the ash from his cigar. His mild eyes fixed a moment on the back of Mawson's left hand, then traveled downward to his feet. He noted the red lead clinging to his strange visitor's finger-nails, and the faint, irregular white line where the salt water had dried on his shoes. When the chief leaned back in his chair and looked up at Mawson, his eyes held a bored expression, and he stifled a yawn.

"Dare say it can be managed," he said gently. "Bit unusual, but it's none of my business so long as our clients are acting within the law, and are willing to pay our fees in advance." There was the faintest stress on the last two words, and Mawson laid a twenty-dollar bill on the detective's desk.

"Will that cover it?" he asked.

The detective nodded and drew a sheet of paper toward him.

"What day, and where do you want our man posted?"

"From Wednesday midnight until 3 A.M. Thursday morning."

When he gave the place where he wanted the man stationed, Robert Mawson kept his eyes fixed intently on the detective's down-bent face. He saw no sign of surprise on those impassive features. In bold, steady hand, the detective wrote down the name of a semi-private landing situated on the north shore of Long Island.

Mawson backed away. "You'll have him there without fail?"

"Without fail," repeated the chief, and sat staring at the closed door until he heard the sound of Mawson's footsteps dwindle away. Then, with unhurried gesture, the detective's plump fingers toyed with a set of buttons let into the under side of his desk.

"Sometimes," he murmured, "we have to go out and dig for our clues, and sometimes we have them handed to us on a plat-

ier. That young man is either overeager to bring off a pet scheme, or else he has a very poor opinion of the way a reputable agency does business. Is he on the level, or is he a very amateurish crook? *Is he Robert Mawson?* If so, the Nancy Weston reward for tracing him comes into our cash-box. That anchor tattooed on the back of his left hand seems fairly conclusive evidence that he is the man we want. If so, there's one or two things I must verify before I spring my bit on him and start things humming. I'll call on the young lady right away. She may be able to shed a side light on this John Jones alias Robert Mawson mystery, and perhaps I can prevail upon her to tell me why, since she's so anxious to meet R. M., she didn't get him directly he was set free. For three years he was under lock and key, and she didn't bother her head. Then directly he comes out and, very naturally, disappears, she wants to find him, and retains the services of half a dozen detective agencies. Lucky for us that he drifted into our bureau. Women are queer!"

III.

"You've found him?" exclaimed Nancy Weston, when the detective entered the sitting-room in the down-town but select section where the girl had lived in retired seclusion that was not caused by lack of money or friends.

"No! He found me. That is, a rather badly dressed young man called on business. He gave his name as John Jones. Then, after giving me a rather peculiar commission, he went away."

"You let him go."

"Yes, but not without a string tied to him. I have no legal right to detain him, and I thought it better to see you first. One of my best trailers is after him, and I can get him when I want him. That is, of course, if I'm not mistaken. There are hundreds of men with anchors tattooed on their hands."

The girl took a locket from a chain round her neck and handed it to the detective.

"That's a picture of him before he—went away," she said.

The detective handed the locket back.

"I'm sorry," he said, gently. "I wouldn't be able to identify him from that. You can understand there's bound to be a difference and—"

"Perhaps this will settle the matter," interrupted the girl. "I cut this from this evening's paper. I was going to send it to you. See if you can pick out the man who called upon you."

The half-tone reproduction of a photograph depicted a crowd of men waiting outside the offices of a moving-picture company. Attached to the cutting was a paragraph headed: "A hundred heroes at fifty dollars a head."

"The third from the end is the man who called on me!" exclaimed the detective.

"That proves it was Robert!" cried the girl. "There's no doubt about it, for when I saw this photograph I picked out the same man and partly recognized Robert. I made inquiries of the movie people, but they could give me no information. For a hundred and fifty dollars Robert risked his life, and that's all they know or care. Now you—"

"I was compelled to act with caution, and, besides, there are several reasons why it would have been inadvisable for me to spring my knowledge at him. Was there ever any doubt about his guilt? The chances he took to get that money from the movie people, and his errand to me this evening, point to some urgent motive. Tell me, what has suddenly aroused your interest in him after all this time?"

Nancy Weston flushed, but her eyes met the detective's bravely.

"Robert was guilty," she said. "But that was not the true reason why I abandoned him. I was blinded by jealousy. I was told by a specious, lying scoundrel that Robert stole the money for— for another girl. Pride kept me silent for nearly three years, and it was only about two weeks ago that I spoke to the girl about Robert, and learned the falsity of the accusation. I went straight to the prison, but Robert had been set free only three days before. I believe now that Robert wanted to raise himself to a position equal to mine, from a worldly point of view. He risked his honor and became a thief for my sake."

"Yet, if I remember the case rightly, Robert Mawson didn't profit thereby. There were two others in the background. Shady stockbrokers, I believe. More correctly speaking, bucket-shop sharpers."

"Yes!" exclaimed Nancy sharply. "And one of them—Simpson—was the very man who blackened Robert to me. Robert was wicked, foolish, but he was not—not—"

"False to your love," finished the detective, "or rogue enough to let somebody else pay for his misdeeds. Now listen, young lady. We are both behind the scenes, but we don't know all, and it is my opinion that Robert Mawson has something on hand that it would be as well for us not to interfere with. We might spoil his plans. He cannot be engaged in anything crooked, or he wouldn't have come to me. He hooked one of my men for a purpose he couldn't define, but if you wait until Thursday I'll promise you that I'll make it a personal matter. For Mawson's sake, I advise you to wait just a few days."

Nancy gave her consent, which, as things turned out, was just as well for the detective. When he returned to the office, he met with a disconcerting surprise. The operative that he had signaled to shadow Robert was sitting glumly waiting for his chief's arrival.

"I don't know whether he did it on purpose, or whether it was one of them derved accidents, but I lost him on Sixth Avenue."

Following a single, expressive word, the chief wasted no time in useless recriminations. He remembered the items of red lead on Mawson's hands and the sea-water mark on his shoes. It was a fairly obvious deduction that Mawson had been recently employed somewhere on the shore of Long Island. Six men were put on the job of making a careful search within ten miles either side of the landing Mawson had named. They found—nothing. On Wednesday the truth had to be told to Nancy Weston, and she instantly remembered the Colleen Rhue.

"If only you had told me!" she cried reproachfully. "That's where he is—or was."

In less than three-quarters of an hour the detective and girl put this theory to

test. They drew blank. The Colleen Rhue had gone out that very afternoon. Tears of disappointment stood in Nancy's eyes, but there was no sign of weakness about her words or manner. "I'm going with you to-night," she stated. "I'll keep out of sight, but I'm going. I have something to tell Robert."

IV.

SLOWING down to quarter speed, the Banshee glided between the rocky walls of a private dock. The murmuring purr of the engine ceased entirely as her stern cleared the entrance, and steering skilfully enough on the impetus from the now stationary propeller, Simpson brought her alongside the elevated landing stage.

A mist shrouded the shore, the rising hillside, and the water. The Banshee carried no lights, but the man at the wheel knew what he was doing. Simpson and Bax were meticulously attentive to details when the forfeiture of their liberty was the price of a mistake.

The Banshee was moored in a jiffy, and, followed by Bax, Simpson led the way along the dock.

"Eleven forty-five," muttered Simpson, as his watch-dial glowed in the gloom. "Pete is late. He said he'd be here on the minute. Ah, there's the signal. The job's done. 'S all over bar shouting."

"And—handing over the cash," added Bax, after the tiny point of light on the hillside had flashed and dimmed three times. "Say, you'll have a good look at the stuff before you part? Pete's a slippery guy and might try to work us with some gold-brick stunt."

"Trust me," grunted Simpson. "Maybe I ain't going to stick to our program to the letter of the plan I gave you the other night aboard the Banshee. I've got something up my sleeve that I ain't told you yet, an' something in my pocket that talks mighty persuasive like. All you'll have to do is to keep mum and give me elbow room."

"You mean you'll—"

"Dead men tell no tales," interrupted Simpson callously. "Pete's served his

turn. Why give him the chance to blab about us, and most likely hold us up for blackmail. Shut up now; he's coming."

Over the low wall circling the grounds clambered a figure. Simpson gave a low whistle, and the man came running. He carried a bag under his arm.

"Th' coop's cleaned out," he whispered hoarsely, peering up at Simpson. "It's all in here—certificates, bonds, an' th' jewels. Believe muh, it was some job. Had t' put one of th' watchmen t' sleep. It's worth all of that five thou' you promised me. Hand over th' cash an' let me be on my way."

"Good," murmured Simpson as he took the bag. "Here's—your pay."

Hard against the breast of the man he had hired to commit robbery Simpson suddenly pressed the barrel of his automatic. The muffled explosion was followed by the stench of burning cloth.

"Double-crossed! You—"

Victim to a rogue deeper in guile and treachery than himself, Pete sank to the ground.

"That saves us a neat little roll," muttered the murderer. "Now for the Banshee and a trip to Florida. Pull yourself together, Bax, a—h—hurry!"

"You should talk," snarled Bax. "Why, you're all of a tremble, and your voice—Well, you did it, not I. Stop shoving; I ain't going to chance falling into the water in this mist. Neither—am I going to be pushed in. You go first."

Quarreling and snarling at each other beneath their breath, the pair reached the deck of the Banshee.

"All's well," said Simpson, as he cast off. "Quit grousing and get into the engine-room, Bax. She'll drift out with the wind and tide. Don't start the engine till I give the word.

"Right!" called Simpson, as the swell of the open water plopped under the stern. "Start her up."

No answering purr came to him.

"Why don't you start her? What are you fooling around for?"

Crouched over the steering wheel, his face flabby and livid with anxiety, Simpson's harsh, half-whispered shout ended

in a squeal of sudden terror. His fingers clawed at his hip pocket, but a stronger hand reached the automatic and tore it free.

"Another yelp and I'll plug you!" warned a tense voice.

Cowering and powerless to resist, Simpson was forced at the point of his own gun to enter the cabin. He stared with stupid, unbelieving gaze at the man who motioned him to sit down.

"Who—why—a—what—" he stuttered.

"Call Bax," ordered his captor as he stepped behind the cabin door. "Call him, but don't utter a word after that or give a sign of warning. If you do you'll pay. Call him! Say you're sick. Quick! The engine won't start; I've seen to that. We're drifting onto the rocks, *and you can't swim!*"

Simpson raised his voice in a yell of quavering, redoubled terror. His fear of a watery grave was even greater than the fright induced by the threat of the automatic.

Cursing, Bax ran into the cabin.

"What's the matter with you?" he yelled. "You know that every second counts and you—"

"Put 'em up!"

Bax wheeled swiftly. His snarling lips writhed, but quicker, less craven than his partner, he recognized the man who held them trapped.

"Mawson!" he gasped. "You were on the shore."

"Yes; I'm the boob who bought back his own boat for fifty dollars. Now I've come not to buy or beg, but to compel. There's no time for you to ask questions. You've got about two minutes to make up your minds whether to drown, to make restitution of the money you led me to embezzle. I want this signed, and a check for twenty thousand dollars. I could bleed you for every cent you possess, but I want what I stole and you pocketed. Now!"

"But this is a confession that we—that we were guilty of fraud and misrepresentation!" shouted Bax.

"It is a statement of the truth," snapped Mawson. "You'll sign or— Listen!"

"If we sign," cried Simpson, "what then?"

"I'll put you ashore at the landing. My boat is towing behind this on two hundred yards of rope. When you do what I say I'll haul her in. I know that you've just committed a barefaced robbery. According to your own statement, you have a quarter of a million in loot in that bag. Get away with it if you can, but you'll not have the chance of a cat tied in a bag if you don't sign check and statement right away. Another ten seconds, and I'll lock you in here and leave you to feed the fishes. I can swim, but I'm not going to chance piling up the Colleen Rhue."

The Banshee lurched as she swung broadside to the current. The booming bell sounded nearer and clearer. Simpson grabbed the paper. He signed and thrust his pen toward his partner's hand.

The keel of the Banshee grated on a sunken rock even as Bax flung down the pen, and Mawson gathered up the check and paper that would enable him to make restitution and prove him to have been more of a fool than a rascal.

Keeping the two now frantic men at bay with the automatic, Mawson hauled on Colleen's mooring. He compelled them to march forward of his engine, where he could watch every movement. Simpson was not a pretty sight, for he wept tears of hysterical relief when, immediately following the splintering crash of the Banshee, Mawson's engine started to fire and settled to a steady, powerful stroke.

"I'll give you fifty thousand if you'll land us across the Sound," offered Simpson.

Mawson pondered this remark without immediate reply. It was a big sum of money. What was behind it? Neither Simpson nor Bax were aware of the detective that should be posted at the landing.

"I'll make it twice that," jerked Bax, and Mawson noted his furtive eyes rested again and again on the gun he still held. The plausible reason for this stupendous offer dawned upon Mawson. He opened the cartridge clip of the automatic he had taken from Simpson. He saw that one had been fired, and a glance at the fat rascal's perturbed face caused a disturbing thought to dart into Mawson's mind.

"So," he said slowly, "it is not only a case of low-down robbery that you've done, but violence, probably murder. That frees me from any half promises. You would have been better off had you stayed with the Banshee. In case you had been plucky enough to refuse to sign the confession. I had a detective posted ready to arrest you. I have no doubt he'll come in useful now."

There was no triumph, no pleasure of conquest, in Robert Mawson's manner when he brought the Colleen Rhue to the side of the landing.

He handed a key to the waiting detective. "I see you have kept your word," he said. "Well, there was a bare chance that I would have let my men go: as it is, I've brought you more than I expected. In the cabin you'll find two men and their bag of loot. They are the ringleaders of a band of thugs and crooks. I had proof that they intended to commit robbery. Now I suspicion worse. I believe them guilty of murder. Here is the gun I took from Simpson. I've obtained all I wanted from them. You can have them now."

"All right. Say no more," whispered the detective. "Leave the rest to me. There's a lady back there. She is waiting to tell you something. Take her away in case there's a scene."

It is hardly necessary to repeat in exact words what Nancy Weston had to tell the man who had paid his debt in full. Suffice it to add that late that fall a new and daintily equipped Colleen Rhue headed South. At the wheel stood a laughing girl. Her red mane of hair streamed behind her in the breeze.

"Who's the skipper of this boat?" she called.

"Colleen Rhue—mavourneen."

The voice drifted up from the hatchway, and the throb of the engine dulled the reply to a deep murmur, but the girl heard, and her blue eyes grew violet with tenderness. She leaned away from the wheel. An odor, not of frankincense and myrrh, but, with your permission, an aroma of warm engine oil and strong tobacco enveloped her, and Nancy sniffed appreciatively.

"Bob," she said softly, "come and help me steer."

Children of Night

by Max Brand

Author of "The Untamed," "Who Am I?" "Fate's Honeymoon," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JERROLD JARVICE JONES, the banker, was engaged to Anne Manister, but he was in love with money, not with a woman.

Caught in the crowd on the avenue as he left his club, it was suddenly borne in on him that life was more than money.

Then when Sylvia Ensor, of the Society of the Cross, gave him the countersign of that secret order he fell in with her lead, directed the rescue of Salvatore Zenia from Blackwell's Island, and had been admitted into the secret session of the committee of the society, in the basement of Zenia's gambling-house, as Alexis Trouvain, their Belgian chief, before Trouvain could convince them that he, and not Jones, was their head.

With Sylvia's assistance Jones had escaped, after wrenching a door from its hinges and crushing his pursuers with it.

Then Jones carried Sylvia off to a dance at the house of one of his rich friends, Miss Atworthy, Sylvia having first borrowed some evening clothes from her actress friend, Molly Harris.

Here Anne Manister, seeing Sylvia's hold on Jones, decided to keep him for herself; emotion succeeded indifference.

But Jones had led Sylvia to a retired spot, and had exacted a promise from her to flout the claims of the society, when he discovered a cross of iron at his feet. Sylvia fled from this symbol of the society's vengeance, and late that night, as Jones lay awake dreaming of the girl, she entered his rooms by the fire escape, and before the man had led the girl to her room for the night they had both confessed their love, over which hung the menace of the society.

But in the morning Jones found himself locked in his room, and from the other side Sylvia told him how Trouvain had come that morning and promised to spare Jones's life and her own if she would return to the society. And Sylvia, with a tragic good-by, rushed from the house.

Then Jones, with a new determination in his mind and a warmer feeling about the heart for all his fellow men, went down to his Broad Street office, and after putting his new philosophy of love into practise, crossed to Manister's office to tell him that he gladly surrendered his claim on Anne to Barry Dunbar.

But Manister insisted that Jones speak to his daughter himself, and Jones left for his interview with Anne.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HEART OF A CHILD.

JONES turned away, but the older man called him back once more.

"There's another thing I've got to say to you, Jerrold. When I see that color in your face—the breadth and the swing of those shoulders—I think by contrast of

my boy Lee. He's out at the house now—first time he's been home in a month."

He hesitated. The failings of Lee Manister were pretty widely known through the social world, and beyond it through all the region of disrepute. A fortune had come to him from his mother and he had been seriously engaged during the last three years in throwing it away.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for March 22.

"There's something I can help in?" queried Jones gently.

"It's this way. I mentioned to Lee that Anne and I found you apparently quite at home in that gambling-house yesterday, and your stock, I'm ashamed to say, went booming with Lee. But you know how these youngsters are. He's very eager to meet such an accomplished man of the world—particularly one who has been able to conceal it for so long. Gad, Jerrold, you've played a smooth game, boy! Excuse me: the point is that if you were to get at the inside of Lee's doings you won't find him a half-bad chap. There's one infernal club of some sort that seems to get him into half his mischief. Jones, if you were to speak to him as a friend I think you might do something with him."

"I'll try, though I don't like giving advice." He smiled. "But I've given a lot of it this morning, I think. I'll talk to Lee."

The eye of Manister grew moist. As he said good-by he was smiling.

"If you change your mind about Anne—and our proposition, you needn't bother to tell me."

"What does he mean by that?" thought Jones as he went down in the elevator. "He seems to expect me to change it. H-m."

He should have been able to overhear Manister saying to Anne over the phone: "He's coming out now—be there in a few minutes. Do you really care, Anne? Yes, he's a rare fellow. Then tell him so. No, I don't mean in just so many words; but his mind is open. I know, because he was enthusiastic about the prospect of seeing you. Explain it? My dear, if I could explain J. J. Jones, of Broad Street, I would be a much richer man than I am to-day. No, don't try to explain him. If you have to understand a man before you can care for him you're the first woman of that sort the world has seen."

Two saddled horses, beautiful animals, were held by a groom in front of the house of Manister. Inside he found Barry Dunbar, dressed for riding, talking with Anne. She wore the same mannish costume, save that the trousers were a little more puffy

above the knees. A derby hat pressed down the golden hair, and she was tapping her boots with a riding crop.

Surely there could not have been a greater change than that between the gown she had worn the night before and these masculine clothes, yet they only served to accent her femininity. They made her steps as she came forward to meet him ridiculously short and wonderfully graceful; they made her hand small and exceedingly soft to his touch.

He held that hand a moment while he surveyed her with a look that would have been brazenly impertinent had it not held such a genuine and deep admiration.

"It's mighty good to see you, Anne, and you, Dunbar."

He shook hands with the other, scarcely noticing the flush of impatience on Dunbar's face.

"Father rang up and said that you wished to see me about something important. Should we be alone?"

"Alone?" He considered a moment. "Yes, I guess it would be better."

"Do you mind, Barry?"

"No; but make it quick, will you, Anne, or there'll be nothing left of the morning for us to ride in."

He closed the door with unnecessary loudness behind him.

"He's a dear," smiled Anne; "but such a boy, Jerry."

She paused a little before the familiar nickname and stood looking at Jones wistfully, as if wondering if he would resent her use of it. Something stirred in Jones.

He said: "By Jove, Anne, there's something about you—"

"Something?" she smiled.

"Well, something about you; that's all. My words break down. When I look at you I want to invent a new vocabulary."

She flushed a little, answering: "I wish you would, then."

Certainly this was an odd beginning for such business as she knew had brought him there. She began to feel that her father was a very wise man indeed.

Without prelude to bridge the way to serious talk, he said suddenly: "Anne, you'll be glad to know that I've given up

the financial scheme that included our marriage as part of it."

She sat a little straighter in her chair and still smiled upon him, though the meaning was gone from it.

"You see, I had been thinking of you just as the daughter of John Manister, and not as a person all by yourself. And of course you looked on me in the same way—impersonally, I mean."

"I suppose—" she began, and could say no more.

"I don't know what made me see the other angle of things, but perhaps it was the other night when I suddenly discovered that you were a very real and very beautiful human being."

He laughed heartily at his blindness, and did not see her flush and tremble slightly.

"And then I remembered that your will hadn't been consulted once during the whole proceeding: you were simply being the obedient daughter. I thought of all that while I was dancing with you. There was something so fresh and clear-eyed about you, Anne, that I felt as if I held the whole spirit of youth in my arms. That's odd, isn't it?"

"Yes, and very beautiful, Jerry."

"Is it? Well, it occurred to me what a crime it would be to waste all that loveliness on such a man as me—a man of steel, you know. And there's Barry Dunbar, who's eating his heart out for you. By Jove! what a couple you two would make. Call him in, will you, Anne. I'd like to see you two together."

"No, no! I don't like him—much. He's—he's very tiresome—sometimes. And—Jerry, you're *not* a man of steel."

He spread out his great hands with the powerful, square-tipped fingers, saying: "Look at these and then say that over again. You can't, you see."

She had covered her eyes with one hand, perhaps in thought.

He went on: "Well, if it isn't Barry Dunbar it will be some other young fellow just as fine as he. And it will be some man who loves the very ground you walk on. Do you know, Anne, as I sit here now I'm surprised that I'm not in love with you."

She dropped her hand at that and looked up to him with a rather uneven laugh. It grew so shaky, in fact, that she had to stop it short in something like a sigh.

"Some of the things you say would make a person think that you were, Jerry—if you weren't known."

"Would they? That's odd."

He rose, smiling.

"So that ends it. And a good thing for you that the elephant is off your hands, Anne."

She rose also, and stood at the fireplace, turned partly away from him so that her face might be hidden.

"Yes, this ends it—I suppose."

"You don't seem very happy about it."

"Don't I?"

"But of course you are."

"Of course."

"So-long, Anne."

"Good-by."

"But I say—you're going to shake hands with a fellow, aren't you?"

She held out a limp, left hand toward him without raising her fallen head. He stepped in front of her, frowning.

"Why, Anne, there's a mist—or tears—or something in your eyes."

"A mist—that's all. I was thinking of something else. Forgive me, Jerry."

"I see. You're just absent-minded."

He considered her gravely for a moment.

"I wonder what it is that makes you so attractive, no matter what you do? Well, whatever this sad thought is that has come to you, it has made you more beautiful than ever. In fact, I'd like to stay here and just look at you."

"I won't drive you away, Jerry."

"But I've got to go up to your brother's room and talk to him. Your father asked me to. Good-by."

"Good-by."

When he was at the door she called after him in a strained, changed voice: "Will you tell Barry that I can't possibly go riding with him this morning—and that I can't see him again?"

"Of course," said Jones: "but you're missing a perfectly bully morning by staying in. It's as clear as a bell, Anne."

And he passed out into the hall. There Barry Dunbar rose, still a little red with impatience.

"Dunbar," said Jones with unfeigned cordiality, "go in and win her."

Barry Dunbar turned as pale as he had been crimson before.

He stammered: "She told you—she said that I—you—"

"The point is," explained J. J. Jones, "that my little talk with you the other day cleared my mind up a bit. In fact, Dunbar, I want to thank you for the way you stood up and hit me straight from the shoulder."

He extended his great paw and shook hands with the other.

Dunbar said slowly, dazed: "But what you said just before this—"

"It simply means that having come to life, Dunbar, I saw how damned criminal it would be for me to marry a girl I don't love. I came out here and told her so, and I have called the whole deal off with John Manister. That's all. I've stepped aside, Barry, and she's held by no promise to me. Go in and win her, my boy."

The life came back to Dunbar's eye. He said excitedly: "You mean to say that you actually came out here and stood in front of her—in front of Anne Manister—and gave up your claims on her?"

"I see what you are driving at. Yes, she's very beautiful. I had to tell her so, you know, just now."

"You told her so?"

"Nobody could have helped it: that golden hair and those amazingly deep blue eyes, Dunbar."

"By Jove, you *have* changed. Jones. And she—how did she take it?"

"That was the odd part. I mattered so little to her, Dunbar, that she began to think of something else."

His rare laugh boomed musically down the hall.

"Yes, she grew positively absent-minded, and when I was saying good-by there were tears in her eyes. I'd give a great deal to know what she was thinking of."

The eyes of Dunbar grew dull again.

He said dryly: "So would I. Tears, did you say?"

"By the way, she gave me a message for you. Said that she was out of sorts, a bit, and that she wouldn't be able to go out riding this morning. In fact, she didn't think she could see you again to-day. That's odd, isn't it?"

"Very," said Dunbar hoarsely.

"But don't listen to her, my boy. Open that door and go in to her. Take her to the window and show her the sky and the clouds. Why, it's a glorious day, lad, and the nip of the air sets your blood positively singing. If I were you I'd go right in and tell her that."

"I think you would," said Dunbar without enthusiasm, yet as he stared into those keen eyes the sense of power, of boundless power, which he caught there, made him straighten himself by sympathy. "I used to think that you were one-third man and two-thirds devil. Now I see that you're two-thirds man and the other third—the Lord knows what!"

"You're a lucky chap, Dunbar. She's a rare girl. Compared to others—well, she's like the morning compared to the noon of the day—she has all the freshness, the color, the charm. She lifts you out of yourself, eh?"

"I suppose you told her that?"

"Something like that, I guess."

"And then she grew absent-minded?"

"Yes, about the same time. So-long, Dunbar."

"The heart of a child and the brain of a man," said Dunbar grimly.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing. Good-by."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LOCKET.

J. J. JONES went up the stairs toward the room of Lee Manister after he had learned from a servant that the son of the house was still in bed. Some of the exultation which possessed him that morning went out, as the glow of a street lamp becomes dim when the mist rolls over it. The mist was the thought of his coming interview with young Manister.

Advice is always ungracious, especially,

from a man to another not much his junior; above all from the successful to the unsuccessful. Only the memory of the appeal in the eyes of John Manister drove him on. He knocked on the door just as the servant who had gone to announce him left it.

Some one called: "Come in!" and he entered in time to see Lee Manister straightening up in his bed and extending a hand for the cigarettes on the little table beside him. He reached the other hand to Jones.

"You're one of these early people, Jones? Mighty good of you to look me up. Smoke?"

"Thanks. I hardly ever do."

"No? The day is all wrong with me unless I get a whiff of good smoke in my lungs to start it. So!"

He lighted the cigarette, inhaled a long breath, and leaned back in the pillows with half-closed eyes to enjoy the sensation. So sharp was his pallor that only a slight tinge of yellow really distinguished it from the color of the bed linen. Jones recognized that color. He had noticed it for the first time the night before; he had seen it here and there in the faces which passed him on the street; he had seen it again in the countenances of the committee of the Society of the Cross.

"Manister," said Jones, "I hardly know how to begin. You aren't much interested in business, are you?"

The other smiled faintly and flicked his ash into a tray.

"Not a bit."

"Well, then, I've got to try to interest you. Money means something to you?"

A smile changed the handsome, weary face a little.

"Only the spending."

"Then," said Jones heartily, "you're just the man for me."

"Eh?"

"You're just the man I need."

"You—need—me—"

"Right."

"J. J. Jones of Broad Street? Why, I'm just the—well, I'll be damned!"

But he sat up straight in the bed, and there was a flush on his face that might have passed for at least a good imitation

of life. Jones was thinking desperately fast.

Then came the sharp question: "Has father sent you up here to me?"

It shook Jones shrewdly, but those years of training, that rocklike expression which had baffled the seers of the Street, stood him in stead now.

"Your father, Manister, is not my business adviser."

The glance of young Manister challenged him steadily for a moment, and then the eyes of Lee drooped a little.

"Beg pardon. Of course not."

"I'll tell you why I need you. I can find plenty of men who will work *under* me, but none who will work *with* me. Understand?"

"Not a bit. It's all thick night to me. Why, Jones, I've never done a lick of thinking about business in my life."

"That's exactly why I need you."

"The devil!"

"You see, every one down on the Street is out in a desperate fight to rake in the dollars. They don't see what finance can be; they quite lose sight of the wonderful game that it is. The millions overwhelm them. They don't see that the millions are really no more than building-blocks. If I have any success, Manister, it's because money in itself means nothing to me. What I love is the power it controls. I like to know, for instance, that it means something to perhaps a hundred thousand people if I get up ten minutes earlier. It may mean happiness to them; it may mean sorrow. Why, Manister, as I sit in my office I feel as if ten thousand fingers went out from it and tapped the life of the world and brought me back word of how its pulse is beating. Understand?"

As he talked, Manister had risen slowly until the pillows no longer supported him. The cigarette burned down and the ashes fell on the bedcover unheeded.

"I think I begin to see—"

"Why I need a man to whom money means nothing? That is, money in the counting-house sense of the term. Of course you do. I want a man with imagination, and by Jove, Manister, you are he!"

The other slipped out of bed and came with lighted face and hand extended. Jones was startled by the resemblance between the fellow and Anne, but all the bloom that was hers had been spent here. The thought of it made him sick within.

He said seriously: "I don't ask you to work for me, but with me. It's a partnership, in a way."

He had his eye on the fine, high forehead now, and the chin, which promised many things, with its square cut.

"That's a little too much, Jones."

"I don't mean a partnership with an equal division of the profits. In fact, you may make devilish little at first, but you will have a lot of real pleasure. You may have to start with small things. The Street is a pretty big book, but if you keep your eyes open there's something fascinating on every page of it. Manister, I can take you down to one corner within five minutes' walk of which lies the whole heart of the nation. I can take you down there and tell you where the kings of finance live during the working day. And if you give me a chance I'll—make you one of them!"

He had talked himself into real earnestness. His own imagination flew out before him, and now, looking at the kindling face of Manister, he knew that his steel had struck fire from flint.

"When?" said Manister. "I'll dive into my clothes and be with you in a minute. I never eat breakfast. One drink will put me on my feet. In fact, I think I can even do without the drink, to-day."

"To-day? Not for thousands of dollars. I'm through with business."

For he was thinking that he had gone too far now to draw back, and he must know more about this youth than his dissipated reputation and his fine forehead, before he ventured to initiate him in certain methods which men on the Street would have paid a great deal to learn.

"As a matter of fact, business bores me a bit to-day. I feel like a good time. What the deuce could we do, Manister?"

"To-day? I don't know. I'm not much interested in the day, as a rule, but as for to-night—"

Then he hesitated. Afterward he laughed a little uneasily.

"I'd forgotten for a minute that you were really one of us. But father told me that he saw you in Zenia's yesterday?"

"Yes, I happened to be there. Do you know the place pretty well?"

"Of course."

"And the places under the gaming hall?"

"H-m!" said Manister. "To be frank with you, Jones, I don't—but I'd like awfully to see them."

"Some time I'll take you around."

Manister was deeply impressed.

"You've played it deep, Jones, haven't you—seen life from all angles, in fact."

"Quite a bit of it, but there's a lot of New York that's under lock and key, as far as I'm concerned."

"For instance?"

"Well"—he drummed his fingers idly against the arm of his chair hunting for an example—"for instance, that little club of yours, you know."

Manister started and surveyed Jones cautiously. However, he could make out nothing.

"Would you like to go to it? There's a meeting to-night."

"Just what's the order of it?"

"Merely a place where the bars are down, you know. One attendance makes you a member."

"And it meets to-night?"

"Always at night."

Jones sighed.

"I've an engagement for to-night."

"Too bad. Can't you put it off?"

"No, I'm afraid I can't. I don't know just when the meeting will take place, but it must be some time to-night."

For it came to him suddenly that his happiness would go out with the setting of the sun, and all through the hours of the dark he would be desperately alone unless he found Sylvia again.

"By Jove," murmured Manister, "you look as if you were seeing a ghost, old man!"

"To keep from that," said Jones grimly, "I'm going to be one of you to-night. I'll go with you, Manister, if I may."

"It will be a great night for me—playing sponsor to J. J. Jones of Broad Street. And to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow I'll take you down to the Street."

Manister sat on the side of the bed and fingered a locket which was suspended from about his throat by a fine silver chain.

"Do you know," he said in a subdued voice, "I have an idea that there's a turn come to my life?"

He added after a moment in a tone which was barely audible to Jones: "I think my mother would be glad of it."

And Jones knew, somehow, that it was her picture that was in the locket.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EGYPT.

YET if he had been able to think of some way of coming on a clue to Sylvia's whereabouts during the rest of that day he would never have joined Manister at the appointed hour, but one glance at the tangled mobs of Broadway convinced him how futile it would be to start a blind search for her.

When the darkness came he remembered what she had said about starting at once for some distant country, but that he would not believe. Eventually he was glad of the meeting with Manister. Any employment would have been welcome that night.

At the appointed time he met the other and they hired a car for the night, for it was Manister's suggestion that it would be unwise to use one of their own machines. Down Fifty-Ninth Street they drove to the east, and then across the bridge and into Brooklyn. They held steadily on, Manister silent with expectation, and Jones quietly watching his companion.

The pale, sickly man of the morning was changed with the coming of the darkness. There was a suggestion of color in his cheeks, the color that comes from nervous excitement and not from richness of the blood; and his eyes were bright and restless.

Already Jones knew that shifting glance. It belonged only to the people of the night,

the lovers of the dark; those who could live a lifetime between evening and dawn. Sylvia Ensor was one of those; and to sit beside one of her kind brought him nearer to her, in some mysterious manner.

The car cleared the suburbs and entered finally the spacious grounds of a country estate. The scent of the winter trees came to them, the melancholy scent of the dead season of the year—moldering leaves and the taint of moss. Looking out from the window of the car he saw the naked branches whipping across the stars. Then they stopped under the vaulted automobile entrance of the mansion.

They stepped out on a thick carpet which had been spread for the occasion down the outer stones to the very edge of the wheels. Yes, one muddy streak showed where some careless driver had encroached upon that soft, priceless surface. On either side of the door stood tall jars of flowers, and their fragrance was like a promise of the festival within. Crouched above and behind the flowers two granite sphinxes smiled sardonically on the new arrivals.

"I forgot to tell you," said Manister, "that this is Egyptian night. By Jove, Harvey has done it up well, hasn't he?"

The outer door opened before them by no visible means, and they entered a small reception hall, on either side of which sat a sculptured Pharaoh, his hands pressed stiffly down upon his knees of stone, staring far through the mist of centuries with a half-obiterated smile. The very odor in the air suggested musty antiquity, and yet the scent of the roses lingered sadly about them. They scarcely made a dozen steps across that hall, but with every step they brushed aside a century.

The ponderous doors before them swung slowly, slowly open, and were held wide by two bronze-skinned giants, each naked save for a curiously twisted loin cloth of unbleached linen and a head-dress that completely covered the hair, and had two strips of metal plates that descended in front of the shoulders. Each held the door with one hand and extended the other skinny arm to point within. They were as solemn as the dumb who have never known speech, and yet those broad lips seemed to have

just stopped smiling, or to be in the act of beginning another smile of mockery.

The newcomers stepped rather hastily past these grim porters and into what was evidently a dressing-room, for two attendants came to meet them, slant-eyed, black-haired fellows, as silent as the keepers of the doors.

They must have rehearsed their parts long and carefully. Their movements were like those of some futuristic dancer, slow, and angular, and halting. They took the clothes which the two men hastily threw off and brought in their place gorgeous robes of silk. To Manister was given a short, broad dagger; to Jones went a heavy, short sword something after the fashion of the weapons of the Roman legionary. On their feet were sandals, held in place with buckles of gold, and a flexible circlet of gold was placed on the head of each, and around the circlet was bound a wreath of flowers. Manister stopped in his dressing to stare at Jones.

"You look the part to the life. I say, there, have you a mirror?"

The man crossed his arms before his face and bowed low. He went to a table at the side of the room and returned with a great circular mirror of polished steel, which he held before Jones. Back at J. J. Jones looked a face which might well have served as model for one of those ancient Egyptian sculptors. There dwelt in his face the same mystery of waiting silence, and the new-learned smile which came to his lips held the faint mockery of the sphinx.

"It gives me the chills to look at you, Jones. Another minute and I'll be calling you Rameses, or some such rot as that, and kotowing like that crooked-eyed scoundrel."

The servants, in the mean time, approached the side of the room and lifted away what to all appearances was a great slab of granite, save that real rock would have been far too ponderous for them to budge. On either side of the black entrance now revealed they took up their positions, as silent as before, their arms folded rigidly across their breasts. The whole hoax had been so carefully arranged that Manister, who was nearest the opening, held back a

moment and glanced with a half-whimsical smile toward Jones. The latter was as unmoved as ever. He bowed his great shoulders before the low opening and was immediately swallowed by utter dark.

Manister followed at once, and he had scarcely entered the passage before the slab of stone was set back in place with a jar. The darkness of the moment before was light compared with the complete blackness which now fell upon them, and Jones heard Manister swearing softly behind him. Perhaps started by some artificial means, a draft of chilly air swept upon them, and in the wind there were damp odors of moist stone and earth, a close and musty smell. This was the reason, possibly, that they seemed to be descending toward the very bowels of the earth while the darkness exaggerated tenfold the length of the passage. At length Jones came against an abrupt termination of the passage. It was smooth rock, a little wet to the touch, and slippery. He set his shoulder to it.

At once it gave way. The darkness diminished not at all, but music sounded in the distance, so faint and soft that they could not distinguish whether it were string or wind instruments, and there was an accompanying murmur of voices still fainter. Something soft came under his touch. He pulled aside a heavy curtain of some thick, velvety stuff, and they stepped forth into the very heart of music, laughter, gay voices, and a flood of light.

Even on this scale the gorgeous mimicry was continued. They stood in a great hall, down either side of which marched mighty pillars of granite, or what seemed granite, cut with a thousand figurings, grotesque and grave. The flat roof above was supported by massive beams high, high above them. All this upper region of the room was plunged in gloom that made the pillars seem topless, and gave, at the first moment, an impression that the night-sky stood bare above them, and that they had only to strain their eyes upward to see the stars.

For the lights of the hall, ostensibly the barbaric torches whose flames flared and glimmered from niches along the wall but really a thousand hidden electric globes, shone down only on the bottom of the hall.

It fell upon the gaiety of the revelers who were dwarfed by the immensity of the pillars that shot up on either side and by that almost measureless gloom above.

The two newcomers had hardly gathered all this in their first wondering glance when they were met by a youth and a girl, flower-crowned children with naked, slender limbs, who waved toward them great bouquets of roses, out of which fell a shower of fine spray upon them charged with a rare and delicate scent. At the same time a shout of welcome came tingling toward them from the crowd of feasters.

And the whole company rose, a glorious sight, decked with flowers, brilliant in robes of every dye from deep-green to yellow and flaunting crimson, and everywhere the lights flashed on gold and jewels. One man, the last to rise, moved out toward them, and the whole company shouted: "Pharaoh!"

He wore, in fact, a crown of golden spikes tipped with great jewels, but it was tipped to a merry angle over his forehead, and the laughter with which he greeted them was wholly unkingly.

"Deveney," said Manister, "I've brought you a new member. He hasn't been voted upon, but I know every one of the boys will be glad to have J. J. Jones, of Broad Street, one of us."

The smile died upon Deveney's lips as he looked up to the somber face of the giant, and then he glanced with some apprehension at the gay company behind them. Wonder, however, mastered both dismay and apprehension.

He said: "Jones? J. J. Jones, of Broad Street? By Jove—and here— Mr. Jones, I'm very happy to have you with us."

He turned and ran back to his chair, upon which he leaped, and from this eminence shouted: "A new member, a new citizen in Egypt—Jerrold Jarvice Jones, of Broad Street."

What a shout answered him, and the light flashed blinding on the goblets of rare crystal which the banqueters raised as they drank to him. It dazzled Jones for the moment. He was hardly conscious how he was led to a chair, or rather to a bench, for each chair was of ample size for two, piled

with cushions and draped in gleaming velvet of different hues so that the color-scheme varied in differing harmonies all round the table. But the drapery of each chair chimed with the colors of the robes of him who sat in it. All this Jones had barely had time to note when the music died down to a single thin, whistling note, like the calling of some shepherd's pipes over the hills of Egypt two thousand years ago.

And it grew closer, slowly, as if the piper were walking toward them. When it was full and sweet and clear, ringing down the hall, it broke off sharply, but like a continuation of the music a troop of girls came dancing into the banquet chamber.

As they fled circling round the table, with the applause of the guests echoing after them, Jones strove vainly to see each clearly in turn, for the beauty of each one called the eye here and there in a wild confusion. It seemed, indeed, as if all the beauty of the world had come with laughter and with music to that hall of feasting. Round the long table they flashed, each one finding the color which went with the dress she wore, and then, at the signal of a long, soft chord of that hidden music, they took their places on the benches.

The hum of voices swelled; Jones turned to look at the red-haired, green-eyed goddess beside him, and then the lights winked out. That was the meaning, then, of those bronze, half-naked figures who stood with folded arms, one beside each pillar. They were the keepers of the torches.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE QUEEN'S CHOICE.

THE voices and the music ceased with the lights. A little complaining whisper rose as the dark continued for a long moment, but the murmur in turn died with a sudden gasp of many indrawn breaths. There had appeared in the utter blackness, in the midst of the banquet hall, silent as the coming of a thief in the night, the figure of death!

It was visible by its own light, a grinning skeleton, and it danced with all the solemnity of prophesy the dance of life.

And all was in time with a faint, half-whispering, half-moaning music from that hidden orchestra.

First, there were quick, light steps, and almost gaiety in the music, like a faint remembrance of youth, and then through all the gamut of life the grim dancer ranged until, with fallen head and sagging knees, he moved toward the end of all creation. The end, and with it the figure turned and stretched its horrible arms wide as though including all that assemblage in its embrace, and gathered them back slowly to its breast.

Then, like a dismal thought, the image went out. The cold, breathless dark held all in silence for a moment more—then a ray like the coming of hope dawned on them. A single torch flared high along a pillar. Another and another shone down the long row of columns, and the faces of the banqueter's seemed wan and haggard indeed beneath that grim light till, with a welcome flare, the whole former radiance burst upon them.

At once the talk began; the music sounded cheerfully; in an instant that solemn warning was forgotten and the revelry rang high again.

"And who are you, old Father Egypt?" asked the voice beside him, and Jones turned and stared down in the sea-green eyes. He forgot to answer.

"Don't do that!" she cried at last. "I've just seen Death dance, and now I guess I'm going to hear judgment spoken!"

Jones was thinking back over the miracles of a single day—a single twenty-four hours.

"It's wonderful," he said, "that there should be so much beauty in a single world."

She watched him with a whimsical smile, prepared for a jest in spite of its serious beginning. Before he spoke again he took her goblet and extended it to a negro who passed with a great flask of wine. A golden liquid tumbled into the crystal, and he replaced it in her hands.

He said: "Can you drink, and eat, and be happy?"

"Watch me, King Egypt!"

"I'd give a great deal if you'd just sit here and not say a word."

She glanced sharply up, hardly knowing whether or not she might take offense.

"Because if you talk," he explained, "I'm apt to find out that you were born in Harlem, and that your father was born in Dublin. And both those places, you know, won't come into existence for a couple of thousand years yet."

"Think of it!" she laughed. "Two thousand years before Broadway! What a lot we have to look forward to!"

A light, musical voice broke in upon them. Jones turned and found a child of not more than ten years standing behind the chair. In old Egypt beggars had been admitted to the feast, and this one stood in a single tattered garment, stringing out in shreds at the knees. His hand was stretched out.

"Give, lord," he asked again.

The girl took the crown of flowers from her head and placed it on that of the boy; Jones brought out a handful of silver and dropped it in a chiming shower. The child dropped to one knee and struck his forehead three times against the floor.

"Have you no father? Or were you just born for to-night?" asked the girl.

The boy straightened himself.

"My father was a mighty man of war. He went out against the Hittites with chariots, and where he went the dead lay thickest!"

He stopped and turned his eyes gravely upward, sighing.

"But he brought back to us only his glory and his wounds and died without riches; they were given in the wars. And I am left to thy charity, lord: and to thine, lady!"

Once more he prostrated himself.

The girl had already forgotten the child. She was staring into the crystal cup, holding it up to the light.

She said: "If you look long into yellow wine—long and long—and then wave it three times and spill once a drop for the gods of heaven, and once a drop for the gods of death, and once a drop for forgetfulness—you may sit at this table forever and never rise after you drink. Shall I drink?"

"Drink!"

She performed the little ceremony: "One drop to heaven—one drop to death—one drop to forgetfulness"—and here she splashed a little wine into the empty cup of Jones—"then drink."

And she drained the wine.

"Now," she said, "I can live a whole life in a single night." She fell into the solemn speech of the boy. "Your robes are blue and mine are blue. Until dawn, lord, you are master, you are Pharaoh. Look!"

She pointed, and Jones saw a strange procession enter the further end of the hall. First came a hunchback of hideous countenance, bearing a great burden on his shoulders. After him followed a litter borne by two representations of the Egyptian gods, dog-faced Anubis first, and the second was a deity with the head of an owl and great staring eyes. The masks were perfect works of art. On the litter sat a girl erect, cross-legged, her bronze arms folded. She had the dignity of an angered queen about to pronounce sentence on her people.

And to Jones it seemed that he had never looked on such a beautiful face, or one so ominous.

The black hair was drawn straight and low across the forehead; two great black eyes stared vengefully straight before her, and her face was framed by the strange head-dress of the queens of Pharaoh. Round the table the procession moved with a measured gait, and returning to the further end the dwarf stopped, and with a single movement cast off his burden, which unrolled in a long strip of crimson carpet across the floor. The gods dropped to their knees, and the girl stepped from the litter to the carpet. Dog-faced Anubis held out a naked simitar which she took and raised with both hands high above her head.

Then, as the music began with an angry flare, she danced that sword dance which the whole Orient loves to this day, and about her the flash of the keen steel went like a flickering fire. It seemed to Jones—though he knew it was only a fancy—that he had seen either the dance or that sullen, beautiful face before, he could not tell which; but a great uneasiness took hold of him.

The rest of the guests were rising, even standing in their chairs in order to see every movement of the artist. He rose likewise. There was movement forward; all places were lost. Then the music went out like a snuffed candle, and she stood as before with the sword held over her head by both hands. The applause rang up and reechoed from the dim heights of the hall, and Deveney went to her and brought her to the table. He lifted her lightly to the board.

"Choose!" he said.

She walked slowly down the cleared center of the table—the wide, sullen eyes still steadily before her, without heeding the uplifted hands and the clamor of voices. One youth in battle armor, carried away by the wildness of the dance, and the strange beauty of the girl, leaped up in his chair and reached out for her. A dozen hands drew him back.

"Free choice or no game!" they cried, and she went on down the table with the same slow step, the same wide, unseeing eyes, most like a sleep-walker.

All that had gone before was a hollow mockery, perhaps, but this was the actual spirit of old, dead Egypt walking before them. Nothing but conscious power could have taught her that slow pace. Nothing but authority to give thousands life or death with a word could have set that cruel, dangerous light in her eyes.

Of all the crowd only Jones was silent; he alone did not lift up his hand as she passed and shout his invitation. Some of them held up goblets of wine. Others held out their golden crowns. Yet she did not stop, though she seemed to pause at every step. And a wild exhilaration swept over Jones, and a breathlessness such as he had felt when they shot down the river with the guard-boats in hot pursuit.

She was closer and closer; the small sandaled feet crushed a crimson blossom very near and left a red stain on the cloth. She was there; beautiful, how beautiful! Her eyes were as deep and dark as night, and her lips were like the flush of the morning. And now she seemed to pause. The foot stayed, half-lifted. Yes, she had stopped, and all the table grew hushed with expectancy. She turned, knelt, and placed

both hands, palm up, above her head, in the ancient gesture of surrender.

She said: "Thy servant, lord!"

She had chosen Jones—J. J. Jones, of Broad Street—from all that wild throng. His heart stopped and then thundered in his breast. All else went out of his memory; Sylvia herself was swept into oblivion as he looked into those marvelously night-dark eyes.

He leaned out and raised her from the table. Holding her by the waist and by the knees with his great hands he lifted her bodily high above his head and laughed aloud with barbaric triumph. What a shout answered him!

Then he placed her on the nearest bench and sat beside her. The music swept into a noisy strain; there was shouting and laughter everywhere; the flood of sound left them practically alone.

She said: "Taking it all in all, you've got to admit that I knocked 'em dead, Jerry, what?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHALLENGE.

"SYLVIA!"

"On the level, Jerry, weren't you wise to me?"

"Sylvia Ensor!"

"Present! Say, Jerry, if you didn't know me, what made you look at me that way? I felt your eyes on me every minute. Do you give every girl a once-over like that?"

"No. I must have known you. Not my mind, Sylvia, but something that knew you and made me happy the moment you were brought into the room."

"You looked me over, J. J. J., like a commuter sizing up a scare-head. But lead on the cats! I feel like the lion at feeding-time."

He summoned half a dozen menials with a single compelling gesture. And since the feast proceeded not in courses, but according to the whim or the pleasure of each individual, he soon had the table before her crowded.

She ate with all the hunger which she promised, and he sat back contentedly to

watch. Culture in speech must be gained by association, but grace of manner can be gained by observation, and all that observation can teach was Sylvia's. So he watched her with a deep, contented joy, and saw her glances, in the old way, go quickly up and down the table, observing all things, drinking in the radiance of light and the flushing color, living wholly in the moment.

She turned to him, suddenly serious, saying: "Jerry Jarvice Jones, you haven't said that you're glad to have me here; you haven't said that you've been unhappy without me."

"I haven't," answered Jones truthfully. "I've been wonderfully happy all day!"

She settled back beside him, grown all at once appealing.

"Was it only a flirtation last night? Was it no more than that?"

He stared into those moody, dark eyes for a moment, and then answered slowly: "It was something that awakened me, Sylvia, and brushed the mist away from my eyes, so that I've been able to see the beauty of the world ever since. Think of it! Yesterday I never dreamed that there was so much happiness, so much beauty in creation as there is to-night in this one room."

She ran her bright, insolent glance up and down the table.

"This is a pretty good showing," she said, "but none of these girls are very Cleopatra. Maybe there's one exception—that one with the red hair and the green eyes, who seems so very interested in you, Jerry. And she probably wouldn't pass muster at close range."

"All wrong, Sylvia. She was sitting where you are now a moment ago."

Sylvia shifted a little uneasily and frowned openly on him, but her anger was not unpleasant to Jones.

He said: "She's very rarely lovely." He glanced at the bronze-stained skin of Sylvia and added: "See her as she turns and how the light flashes on that white skin! And all the rest of them; they are not so perfect, but nearly so. And they are happy, frank, and young. They are unspoiled and unstained, and unconscious, almost, of the admiration of the men around them."

"You sound," said Sylvia, "exactly like a serious-minded freshman out seeing the world. On the whole, I guess it's lucky for you that I came back to take care of you. Happy, frank, unstained? Say, Jerry, it's certainly a scream to hear Broadway turned into words of one syllable! I'll take you behind the scenes for a minute. You see that yellow-haired slip of a girl with the big, childish eyes?"

"Yes. She's very fragile, Sylvia, isn't she? The sort of person you should think should be screened away from the world!"

"Is that the way you figure her? Well, these are the facts; everybody knows them. She married a sixty-five-year-old banker when she was eighteen. He took her off the stage. She taught him to dance and substituted wine for his usual beer. One year later he died of apoplexy brought on by a strenuous *thé dansant*. She took all his money, which was a comfortable pile of the long green, and ran away, two days after the funeral, with Andy Galway, the billiard player. They couldn't spend the stuff fast enough on this side, so they went across to Monte Carlo, and dropped it all in ten days. Andy tried to make a raise for both of them, and landed in jail making the try. She shook him while he was in the cooler and beat it back to London. She copped a stake there pushing the queer, and came back on this side to spend it. That's part of her story—just the head-lines."

Some of the glow, some of the illusive brilliancy, died away from the picture of the revel for Jones.

"Want to hear some more of their stories?"

"I suppose they're a good deal alike, all of them?"

"Just as if they came out of one family, Jerry."

He looked at her with a sharp question, and under his stare she winced a little and then straightened defiantly.

"Me, too, Jerry. There's only one difference. Most of the rest of these girls make a business out of pleasure, but I make a business out of fighting the world."

"To-night?"

"D'you know why I'm here? D'you guess?"

"Tell me."

"You see the owl and the dog-faced gent?"

"Yes."

"They're part of my frame. Say, Jerry, have you got much in your pocketbook?"

"Quite a bit."

There was a light half-whimsical and half-dangerous in her eyes as she smiled up to him, and he saw that for the instant, at least, he was only one of the crowd, one of the stupid gulls who might be preyed upon by her and her companions. It made him dull of heart for some seconds, but a moment later, recalling the swarm of people in the hall, the intricate entrance, the host of servants, he lost his aversion, remembering only the danger which the girl and her coworkers dared. And he glanced in turn down the row of faces of the men—no longer so frankly young and gay to him, but weak, luxurious, spendthrift of money which they had never earned. The things of which they might be pillaged were hardly theirs to lose.

"Take what you can get, Sylvia. The game is fair," he said at last. "If I had them on the Street I suppose I'd pluck them as clean as you will, but I'd run no danger doing it. As for my pocketbook, if you can get it, you're welcome. How will you go about it?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"I'll never repeat."

"I won't tell you how we got in. That was the hardest part, but it doesn't sound exciting. Anyway, we're here. And we have a couple more working outside. Their part is to cut the connections of this house at a certain hour and minute. Can you imagine what will happen when this hall goes dark all at once? Ha, ha, ha!"

He joined the laughter with a deep, rumbling bass, and his eyes were shining.

"We have had time already to spot everything worth while in the crowd. We know where to put our hands on everything. The minute the hall goes dark we have only to go out and pick the fruit that's ripe. Easy? Say, Jerry, it's like being fed with a spoon."

"Then I want you to do something for me."

"Shoot."

"You see the handsome young fellow over there—Manister?"

She eyed him suspiciously.

"That's the name of the girl you were going to be spliced to?"

He answered indirectly: "Around his neck there's a thin chain, and on the chain there's a locket. Can you cut the chain and bring me that locket?"

"Does that have anything to do with the girl, the tall girl with the blue eyes and the yellow hair, Jerry?"

She was worried and a little flushed.

He said: "Perhaps it's—the girl."

Now she sat bolt upright, angered.

"You don't like to name her—in here?"

"About that locket, Sylvia?"

She propped her chin in the hollow of one small hand and frowned steadily down toward the table. The noise of the revel swelled shrill and high and higher. The waves of sound left them alone. It fenced them in like a secret wall.

"I will get your locket," she said. "Miss—the girl—asked you for it?"

"Thank you," said J. J. Jones.

And Sylvia Ensor listened to the cold, short words and understood how far she had driven him away from her. She glanced quickly up and down the table at the narrow, hollow-eyed faces of the men, and she knew that she had made her great mistake in treating him lightly, as she might almost have treated one of those. She did not need to look up to see those stern, immobile features, changeless as if they had been cut from the granite of old Egypt. It was as if she lay on the knees of the Sphinx trying to woo a smile from those mocking lips, and the challenge of the suggestion made her blood dance.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ANSWER.

BUT Jones saw nothing of that rising excitement in her. He only felt that the gay independence was leaving her. She seemed to be drooping where she sat, and the lowered head with its strange head-dress, the very curves of her body suggested

a new humility. It roused him as the mention of untraveled lands stirs the wanderer. It brought her back to him.

One moment she had been the essence of all that characterized the lower classes, with shallow sauciness in place of womanly pride, with cheap alertness in the place of warm humor. The very shadow of the half-world seemed to sit beside him. She lifted deep, dark, melancholy eyes that dwelt hopelessly upon him.

The very tone of her voice, always low and vibrant, was softened and changed, and held an appeal that reached out for him like a claiming hand: "I've made you angry, Jerry?"

By way of an answer he merely kept his curious, considering gaze upon her. Her pulse leaped with the excitement of the contest, but all that Jones saw was a light of alarm in her face. She slipped back suddenly upon the cushions of the seat, leaning close to him, with her head pillowed on one bronze, bare arm. And he was aware of the crimson of her lips, bright as the stain of henna, and a fragrance unlike all perfumes reached him. It seemed like the soul of the girl, beautiful, sad, unreal. And then, far away, as if through a mist, he glimpsed his lady of the rich red hair and the green eyes. She was leaning forward, and smiling, half with excitement, and half with amusement, as she watched them. It was like a handful of cold water dashed in his face.

He said: "How much is real; how much is acting, Sylvia?"

She started, and then sat up and regarded him with that whimsical smile he knew.

"Honest, Jerry, I don't know."

His scrutiny grew hard and close, and she was uneasy under it.

"Don't do that. I know I've lost you, Jerry, but don't rub it in."

And she added with a quick passion: "I'm sorry—so sorry; but I couldn't help it. I've wanted you so. I've dreamed of you and had your name just behind my lips all day. And when I saw you to-night I was dazed and sick with the joy of finding you. Of all the men in the world there's no one but you that's clean and strong inside and out, Jerry—dear, dear Jerry."

The last words came slowly, a little pause in between them, as if she were hunting for some stronger way of telling him, but could find none. He could not have spoken if he would. A barefoot girl bearing a Grecian wine-cup of gold, was dancing down the cleared center of the table, and every guest was on his feet cheering her. So Jones sat in the deafening clamor and merely stared upon Sylvia Ensor.

He had to lean very close to say: "No, what torments me now, Sylvia, is that I know you've won."

The brown, cool arms slipped round his neck, and she kissed him and whispered his name. He made no effort to hold her, but with all the light and the clamor of the hall shut away from him he said: "It was only a game, a chance, an adventure before; but this is reality."

His voice lowered and deepened infinitely.

"Sylvia, I love you with all my heart. What a little gipsy-eyed devil you are! I can see the mockery come dancing up to meet me, but I've no care for that. You have me, and you shall never lose me."

She caught her breath, and then the gipsy glimmer flickered in her eyes.

"Never?"

"No," he said, and raised his hand and clenched and unclenched the strong, square-tipped fingers. They would hold her.

"And now?"

"You are coming home with me."

The lights flashed out as if his words had been a signal. He caught at her and felt her body stiffening in his arms. There was no sound. The sudden coming of the darkness cut off all the noise of the revel. Then some one laughed, a thin girl's voice that died off in a frightened tremor, but it roused the others. There were cries for the host, and then some one shouted in alarm and cursed. Sylvia cried out at that. Jones tightened his arms about her, but she slipped away with a sudden twist. He lunged after her, but his arms closed on the body of a man; a tingling laugh came back through the darkness to mock him.

Then the confusion rose to a wild pitch and stayed there. The darkness at the beginning of the feast had not troubled them, but in this darkness there was a hint

of danger that maddened them. Over the pouch into which he had dropped his wallet Jones kept one hand firmly pressed till a hand tapped him on the back. He whirled, ready to strike, but nothing more happened. When he straightened around again the pouch was empty, and he thought of that glimmering gipsy light in the eyes of Sylvia Ensor. And he knew what was happening, just as she had described it: the people of night preying on the blind people of the day. In his wrath he shouted his warning to the crowd, but other shouts drowned his voice.

Another hand touched his and dropped into his palm the cold coil of a little chain. He reached out quickly with his other hand and gripped a slender wrist. It twisted and nearly slipped from his grip, but by two fingers he held it still and in an instant a woman's body was in his arms, and the voice of Sylvia, half frightened, half laughing, at his ear.

"Jerry, let me go—please!"

"What devil-work have you and your men been up to?"

"Only what I told you of. Honest. Let me go. The time has come. The others are leaving."

"No."

"The lights will come on again in a minute. What if they find me here? Let me go!"

There was no laughter now, only a low, scared whisper.

He chuckled with grim pleasure: "No."

"Are you going to keep me, then?"

"Yes."

"I hate you, Jerry; I hate you. Don't you see that it means ruin for me. Worse than that, if they find me here after the light comes."

"Yes."

"And you don't care?"

"No. I have you here. I'm going to hold you. I'd rather run a thousand chances of shame than to let you get away from me for another whole day."

She stood perfectly passive for a moment. Then her whole body gave to the pressure of his arms.

"Keep me, then, Jerry. I'll resign myself to you. I sha'n't worry."

With one hand he held her strongly. The other went up and found her hair, and went slowly over the soft silk of it.

She was saying: "You won't let them take me away? You'll bring me safely home, Jerry?"

"Yes."

Her head was on his shoulder, and now she sighed in contented resignation. The grip of his other hand relaxed to a caress.

Then it happened in a way which he could not fathom. A single wrench and twist away and she was out of his arms, and only her laughter coming back to him once more.

Jones groaned and drove swiftly after her. His lowered shoulder struck a body and flung it to the floor. Over it he tripped and fell to his knees; as he struggled back to his feet the lights flashed on.

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.

Wuggles and Timmy Todd

by Freeman Putney, Jr.



THERE is a tradition in Mylesham that when Timmy Todd was three years old his mother left him alone in the house for an afternoon. Within easy reach were a loaded shotgun, a razor, plenty of lucifer matches, and a jar of paris green.

Nothing happened. The reason was that his older sister, Viney, had told him not to touch anything.

As Timmy grew up through childhood and through boyhood, the neighbors unanimously predicted a bad end for him. He was just too good to be true.

His father died when he was small. His mother, an invalid, lived until he was well-grown, but his sister Viney brought him up.

In spite of the predictions, Timmy Todd not only grew to manhood, but reached his

thirtieth birthday without enrolling his name in a single sensational paragraph of the chronicles of the village. He was not even known as Mr. Todd, except to strangers, nor had he graduated to the common use of his full baptismal name of Timothy. He was still Timmy.

For the last eight years Timmy had lived in the old house with his older sister, Viney, pursuing the occupation of market-gardener on the twenty-acre farm. He was a man of medium height and spare form, with a smooth face bearing an expression of unusual placidity, a patient mouth, blinking gray eyes and thin hair of a faded mouse color.

Wuggles, P. H. D., the young graduate of Mylesham Poorhouse, now beginning to make his way up in the village world as a

pedler of teas and coffees, came to Timmy Todd one evening. Seated on a slippery haircloth sofa in the front parlor of the Todd house, Wuggles made known his business.

"Timmy, I'm figgerin' to set up a store, a grocery store, here in Mylesham."

"I've heard tell you was thinkin' on it," replied Timmy. "Mebbe it's a good idee, but most folks seem to think Collarmore & Son will run you out o' business if you try it."

"They've got a pretty good trade established, they bein' in business so long, an' folks seem to have the idee that if you try to buck up ag'in' 'em you'll have an uphill job."

"Mebbe," assented Wuggles, "and mebbe not. Folks thought I wouldn't last a week when I started peddlin' in competition with Collarmore, but I've worked up a good trade."

"Now about that store I'm figgerin' to start. I'm lookin' for a good location and it struck me mebbe you'd sell that lot o' land o' yourn up in the square."

Timmy Todd glanced toward the door.

"Why, er—er—" he stammered. "I—I—dunno, I ain't never thought much about sellin' it and Viney—"

"It's assessed for seven hundred dollars, I understand," said Wuggles.

"I b'lieve so," replied Timmy.

"Costin' ye taxes every year besides interest on your money," continued Wuggles. "You'd better sell it to me, Timmy, now that you've got a chance."

"I guess that's a good idee," assented Timmy.

"I kinder figgered you'd look at it that way."

Timmy glanced toward the door.

"Why—er—er—you see, Wuggles, I ain't really never considered—Viney, she—that is—I'm kinder used to talkin' over things with Viney so I guess I better tell her about this. She an' me will thrash it over to-night an' if you come round to-morrow I'll try an' give you a price."

With which promise, Wuggles was forced for that evening to be content.

When he sought the Todd house the next afternoon, however, Wuggles instantly noted

a change in Timmy Todd's attitude. That gentleman appeared very nervous and ill at ease.

"Viney ain't home," he began, "but I talked it over with her an' she thinks it ain't a good idee to sell."

"It ain't!" echoed Wuggles. "Here you been holdin' that lot for twelve years waitin' for a customer an' now a cash buyer comes along and—well, you better take your chance while you've got it, Timmy."

"I know, I know," replied Mr. Todd, "but Viney don't think it's a good idee. You see, there's reasons."

"No reason I can see," returned Wuggles, "why you shouldn't sell a piece of real estate that eats its head off in interest and taxes. What's the matter, anyway, Timmy?"

Mr. Todd looked about nervously, as if afraid of eavesdroppers.

"Well, the real reason, Wuggles, is this. I'll tell you, but I don't want it to get round. Viney don't think it's a good idee jest yet. I'm engaged to be married."

"Engaged to be married!" echoed Wuggles. "What's that got to do with the building lot?"

"Well, you see," stammered Mr. Todd, "the girl I'm engaged to marry is Mame Collins, Hardy Collarmore's cousin. If I sell you the building lot, Hardy Collarmore 'd be mad, an' Viney, she don't think it's a good idee to start a family quarrel quite so early."

Wuggles sighed.

"All right, if you say so, Timmy. I'd be the last to try and start trouble between you and your wife before you've got married."

"It is a s'prise to me to know you're engaged, though, an' I guess it will be a s'prise to most people. Folks kinder thought you was an old bach for keeps. Mame Collins is a good-lookin' girl, though, an' bright an' smart. I hope you'll be happy, both of ye."

Timmy Todd sighed.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Mame Collins is good-lookin' an' she's bright an' she's smart, jest as you say, Wuggles, but for my part, I don't like her very well."

"You don't like her!" echoed Wuggles.

"Then what on airth are you engaged to marry her for?"

Again Mr. Todd looked cautiously about and lowered his voice.

"Well, ye see, Wuggles," he said patiently, "Viney—she thought it would be a good idee."

To his friend Mr. Swink that night, Wuggles reported the failure of his mission.

"Looks as if you would have to seek another lot of land, doesn't it, Wuggles?" said Mr. Swink.

"I ain't so sure about that," returned Wuggles. "I'm exercisin' the brain a little."

For weeks Wuggles awaited an opportunity, meanwhile "exercisin' the brain." One morning late in the fall, he called at the Todd house and found in the kitchen Timmy Todd himself, black smudges and an anxious expression on his usually patient face, and a large apron tied about his neck. Mr. Todd was washing an accumulation of dishes.

"Where's Viney?" asked Wuggles.

"Up-stairs, in bed, laid up with rheumatics," explained Timmy Todd, "and here I be doin' the housework an' washin' dishes when I ought to be out finishing up my fall plowin' before a freeze comes."

He looked about cautiously, lowered his voice, and ended with a half whispered:

"Darn it!"

"Why don't you git help?" suggested Wuggles.

"Help!" echoed Mr. Todd. "Well, I only wisht I could get help to do this work in the kitchen. But Viney, she don't think it's a good idee unless we can get somebody for not over three dollars a week an' there ain't no woman I know round here now who'll work for three dollars a week!"

He slammed a tin pie-plate into the dish-pan.

"Darn it! I can't get the burned sugar off the dratted thing."

He picked up a pail of garbage and started for the barn to feed the hogs. The sympathetic Wuggles followed.

"What's the matter, anyway, Timmy?" asked the coffee merchant when they were safely out of earshot of the house. "Can't you afford to hire help while Viney's sick, even if you do have to pay for it?"

Timmy Todd emptied the bucket of garbage in the hogs' trough and then, in a sudden movement of unusual exasperation, flung the bucket after it with such force that it produced several squeals of porcine protest.

"Afford it!" he echoed. "Course I can afford it. I been puttin' money into the bank ever since I can remember. I got government bonds, too."

"I jest save money right along. There ain't nothin' else I can do with it. Viney, she don't think it's a good idee to spend a cent on things that ain't necessary."

"Probably Viney figgers you're savin' up ag'in' the time when you git married," suggested Wuggles slyly.

"Married!" Timmy Todd echoed. "There's another of my troubles. Here I went an' got engaged to Mame Collins because Viney thought it was a good idee. I never liked Mame Collins very well, anyhow, an' now I'll bet you she don't like me."

"She don't like you? What do you mean, Timmy?"

"Ain't it reasonable?" persisted Timmy. "Here I sent her word day before yesterday that Viney was sick, thinkin' perhaps she might come over an' at least help me red up a bit an' perhaps do the dishes. But she ain't been near."

"Seems to me a woman that loved a man wouldn't want him to get his work all bogged down with dish-water when his fall plowin' was sufferin' to be done."

"Mebbe she's away," suggested Wuggles charitably.

"Away nothin'!" returned Timmy. "Not with the Odd Fellows' dance comin' this week. That reminds me, she kinder hinted last time I saw her she'd like to have me take her to that dance an' I told her mebbe I would if Viney thought it was a good idee."

"But I can't take care of Viney an' wash dishes an' do my fall plowin', provided I get the chance, an' go to dances, too, can I?"

"I don't see how you can," laughed Wuggles. "But, cheer up! They say the course of true love never does run smooth."

"True love!" echoed Timmy Todd.

"There ain't no love about it, so fur as I can see. You know, Wuggles, I'd be willin' to marry Mame Collins, even if I don't like her very well, as long as Viney think's it's a good idee, but I been thinkin' it over this mornin' an' I'll be darned if I want to marry a woman that don't love me.

"You see, Wuggles, it seems to me that if a woman loves you, she'll kinder put up with you, but if she don't love ye, I'll bet a female can be awful exasperatin'."

Wuggles thought rapidly. Then he proceeded to sound Timmy's sentiments further.

"It looks to me, Timmy, as if you'd kinder like to get rid of Mame Collins. To get disengaged, so to speak."

Timmy glanced about the barn cautiously and then dropped his voice as if fearful that even the pigs might hear.

"I'll own up, Wuggles, I'd jest be tickled to death to get out of it. Here I be engaged to a girl a lot younger'n I be that I don't like very well an' now I believe she don't like me an' jest said yes on account o' my money. But how can I get out of it when Viney thinks it's a good idee?"

Wuggles considered.

"Mame Collins is fairly high-sperited, ain't she?" he asked.

"Folks say so," replied Timmy Todd. "I can't say's I know her well enough to swear to it."

"Then I'll tell you what to do," continued Wuggles. "Instead of you tryin' to get out of it yourself, s'pose you get Mame Collins to throw you over. Then Viney can't say nothin'."

"That's a good idee!" exclaimed Timmy Todd. "But how am I going to do it, Wuggles?"

"You can't do it alone," replied Wuggles. "That is, in my judgment, you can't."

"Then who'll help me?"

"I will," returned Wuggles. "But only on condition that when it's all over, you will sell me that buildin' lot of yourn up in the square for seven hundred dollars."

Timmy Todd took a long breath.

"Mebbe that's a good idee, Wuggles. I'll agree to it. But it beats me how you're goin' to force Mame Collins to give me the mitten."

"I been considerin'," returned Wuggles carefully, "and it strikes me that the surest way to do it is to kinder start a scandal."

"A scandal!" echoed Mr. Todd in alarm. "What kind of a scandal?"

"I think we'll have to mix you up in some doin's that 'll cause talk and will git Mame Collins so mad she'll throw you over."

He left Timmy Todd, his mouth open, gazing at the pigs with an expression of anxious doubt shadowing his face.

"I've given him suthin' to keep his mind busy," chuckled the coffee-peddler.

That evening Wuggles borrowed a horse and wagon and journeyed to the North Village. There, after some inquiry, he located a boarding-house and asked for Miss Atkins. Wuggles was invited into the sitting-room and the lady summoned.

"Evenin', Ardelia Abigail Atkins," said Wuggles, shaking hands. "It's a long time since I've seen ye."

"It is some time, Wuggles, since I left the poor farm to go into the shoe-shop, and you are still working around the place. I hear you are a rising business man now."

Ardelia Abigail Atkins was a vigorous woman several years older than Wuggles. Despite years of hard work at the poor farm and in the factory, however, her ruddy complexion seemed to have preserved the freshness of a young girl's and her black hair had the gloss and abundance of health. Ardelia Abigail, to the most casual observer, appeared a very capable person.

"I called," continued Wuggles, going straight to the point, "to see if I could get you to do me a favor. An' I'm willin' to pay for it."

"A favor?" echoed Ardelia Abigail. "What kind of a favor?"

"Jest this. There's a feller down my way got a lot o' land I want to buy an' his sister won't let him sell it. Reason is he's engaged to get married to a girl that's a cousin of my business competitor, an' his sister, she's afraid it 'll start trouble. Now, in order to git that land, it looks to me as if I'd got to bust up this engagement."

"Why, how horrid, Wuggles! I won't have anything to do with it."

"Hold on a minute, Ardelia Abigail. I

wouldn't have nothin' to do with it myself, only this feller, whose name is Timmy Todd, don't care nothin' for the girl an' it's plain to me she don't care nothin' for him neither."

"What a heartless creature. But what do you want me to do about it?" questioned Miss Atkins.

"I want you to leave your job in the factory for a while an' go keep house for Timmy Todd an' his sister Viney. His sister's laid up with rheumatics an' they need a housekeeper."

Miss Atkins looked doubtful. "All right," she said after thinking it over, "Tell me what you want me to do."

Half an hour later, Wuggles rose to go.

"I'll carry out your orders," Ardelia Atkins promised. "But I'll tell you frankly, Wuggles, that in some ways I don't like your scheme. But I promised to help you out, and I'll do it."

"I'll admit there's some resk," returned Wuggles, "but the harder you push Timmy Todd on this new program, the more chance there is of Mame Collins bustin' up her engagement an' my gettin' that buildin' lot."

"I figger that in three weeks either it 'll be a success or else sister Viney will be up an' around again, an' my chances o' doin' business with Timmy Todd will be gone forever. Good night."

The next morning Wuggles saw Timmy Todd and arranged that Ardelia Abigail Atkins should come and take the housekeeping burdens off the mild gentleman's shoulders until his sister recovered. Even Viney was willing to employ the new housekeeper at the low wages of three dollars a week. Ardelia Abigail, of course, was to receive her real pay for her services from Wuggles.

Two weeks and six days later, Wuggles sat late in the afternoon with Mr. Swink in the old shack, his day's peddling done. The two were basking in the heat of a vigorous fire in their little stove when there was a knock at the door. A little girl stood there.

"Please, Wuggles, there's a woman in a wagon out in the road wants to talk to you. She said she's kinder stiff in the

limbs an' don't want to get out of the team and to tell you to come out there to see her."

"All right," replied Wuggles. "I suspect I know who she is."

Seated in a democrat wagon, upright and stern, was Viney Todd. Even in the obscurity of the late fall twilight, Wuggles could see that her face was wrinkled in a scowl and her thin lips were pursed tightly.

"I come to tell you, Wuggles, that you ain't to come to my house any more."

"Your house?" queried Wuggles politely. "I always thought it was Timmy's. Glad to see you're feelin' well enough to be out, Miss Todd."

"I don't care nothing about your gladness," responded the lady tartly. "You've done mischief enough in my family. Here Timmy got engaged to Mame Collins with my approval, me thinkin' it would keep him out of mischief, and save him from the designin' wiles of other women."

"And this mornin', after I'm up, I get a note from Mame Collins saying the engagement's broke off. And Timmy, when I asked him, owned up that it wa'n't his idee at all, and he confessed to me, his sister, that has brought him up, you might say from childhood, in the way that he should go, that it was you that put him up to breakin' his lawful engagement when I was on my sick bed an' not able to interfere."

"Then the engagement's broke?" asked Wuggles.

"It's broke, if that's any satisfaction to you," replied Miss Viney. "But that's all the satisfaction you'll get. As I told you before, Timmy owned up to the whole thing, an' I'll tell you right now, that he ain't never goin' to sell you that buildin' lot you want, not if he gets to be as old as Methuselum an' you offer him a million dollars for it."

"Ain't Timmy got no mind or rights of his own?" objected Wuggles.

"Timmy needs some one to take care of him and I'm her," returned Sister Viney.

"I guess he needs some one, all right," replied Wuggles. "Where is he now?"

"It's none of your business, but he's home now. I left him sweepin' the kitchen."

"That Atkins woman we had for house-

keeper went away last night and I'll tell you, Wuggles, that from now on, Timmy Todd is going to be right under my eye where he can be watched. There ain't goin' to be no more such actions in the Todd family."

"Sorry I don't git the buildin' lot," returned Wuggles. "If that's all you got to say, I'll bid you good night, Miss Todd. It's cold standin' out here without a coat."

"Well," commented Mr. Swink when Wuggles reported, "it looks to me as if you'd lost the game this time. There isn't much use in trying to contest with a determined woman."

"I ain't so sure," replied Wuggles. "Mebbe they's a way out. I ain't seen Timmy yet, nor Ardelia Abigail Atkins."

Half an hour later there was another knock at the door. At Wuggles's summons, there entered the hut Mr. Timmy Todd. He was freshly shaved, his hair was carefully slicked smooth, and he wore his best suit of clothes.

"Hello, Timmy!" cried Wuggles. "Gettin' to be a regular dude the way ye dress, ain't ye?"

Mr. Todd sat down on a box.

"Dude!" he groaned. "I've got so used to wearin' these dunned good clothes for the last three weeks that it's a wonder I ain't growed into 'em. But Mame Collins busted the engagement. She busted it herself. I got a letter from her sayin' so, yesterday afternoon."

"Sho!" exclaimed Wuggles. "Why did she bust it?"

"I dunno." Mr. Todd shook his head. "I didn't do nothin' at all to make her bust it. Land knows how much I put myself out for Mame Collins in the last three weeks! And it was Ardelia Abigail Atkins that made me do it, too."

"What do you mean, Timmy?"

"Why, the very night that you was last to our house, Ardelia Abigail said that as long as I was engaged to Mame Collins, I'd oughter call on her. She said it wasn't right for engaged people not to be together so as they could get acquainted with each other."

"And Ardelia Abigail, she made me dress up in my best go-to-meetin' clothes an' go

call on Mame Collins at seven o'clock an' she told me that I wasn't to come home before twelve an' if I did, she wouldn't let me in."

"So you called on Mame Collins for five hours steady that night?"

Mr. Todd groaned.

"Not only that night, but every night for 'most three weeks. Jest as soon as the cow was milked, I had to get into them dunned go-to-meetin' duds an' my stiff shoes an' traipse up to Mame Collins's house an' set there in the parlor all the evenin'."

"After the fust three nights, Ardelia Abigail told me that as long as I'd begun to get broke in I mustn't start home before one o'clock. So I didn't."

"Did you have a lively time?" asked Wuggles.

"Lively!" echoed Mr. Todd. "Mame Collins is a pretty good talker, but I ain't no talker at all, unless I got suthin' to say. She got talked out after the fust few nights an' after that we jest set there in the parlor an' set, an' set, an' set."

"Didn't you play games or suthin'?"

"I don't know none of these games. Viney, she never thought it was a good idee to waste time playin' games. Mame, she tried to teach me a game with playin'-cards one night called—what was it—bean—bean—no not bean, pea-peanuckle, that was it."

"But I couldn't remember whether spades was the black ones or the red ones, an' so we kinder give up. After that we jest set, an' set, an' set."

"Do I understand," interposed Mr. Swink, "that this sedentary tête-à-tête continued uninterruptedly six hours each evening for three weeks?"

"Almost," acknowledged Timmy Todd. "I did get there earlier on Sundays an' there was three or four evenin's when we went to a church sociable or to prayer-meetin', but I stayed later other nights to make up. Ardelia Abigail Atkins thought it was a good idee."

Mr. Swink sighed.

"Really, I'm beginning to acquire a feeling of sympathy for Mame Collins," he ruminated.

"I don't see why!" exclaimed Mr. Todd

with some indignation. "I was jest per-lite an' quiet as could be all them evenin's except one night when I went to sleep. Of course, I can't tell, but then I might have snored."

"Did she give any reason in her letter why she give ye the mitten?" asked Wuggles curiously.

"Yes. She said she'd seen so much of me the last three weeks that she'd come to the conclusion that our temperatures wasn't suited to each other. An' she said also that she wasn't in no condition to be engaged to anybody until she got her sleep made up."

"Well," said Wuggles, "no matter how it happened, the engagement's busted up an' it looks to me as if both you an' Mame Collins was glad of it. I s'pose from now on, you'll let Viney do your figgerin' for you."

Mr. Todd's face and features reflected a conflict of emotions. Then he spoke:

"No, I ain't, Wuggles. Viney, she thinks I'm home now reddin' up the house. Jest as soon as she went away, though, I got into my go-to-meetin' duds an' I set out.

"I'm goin' to walk to the North Village. An' I come in here to tell ye about this fust because she thought it was a good idee."

"Who did? Viney?"

"No, sir, not Viney. Ardelia Abigail Atkins. I'm goin' to walk to the North Village and at eight o'clock we're goin' to get married an' Viney won't know nothin' about it. We fixed it up and agreed to it yesterday, jest as soon as I got that letter from Mame Collins bustin' the engagement."

"I'm glad to hear it, Timmy," said Wuggles. "Are you goin' to marry Ardelia Abigail Atkins because she thought it was a good idea?"

"No, I ain't!" returned Timmy Todd indignantly. "Ardelia Abigail Atkins is a fine woman. She's the first woman I've ever had in my house that treated me like a growed-up human bein' an' not like a little boy.

"Every night when I was callin' on Mame Collins an' settin' an' settin', an' settin', I got to thinkin' about Ardelia Abi-

gail an' how different it might be if it was her. An' those evenin's while I was settin' an' settin' an' settin'—"

"No wonder you hatched an idea," murmured Mr. Swink.

"Them evenin's I jest made up my mind that if Mame Collins ever busted the engagement, though I didn't see why she should, I'd jest ask Ardelia Abigail Atkins to marry me. So you see it was my own idee, every bit of it."

"All right," returned Wuggles. "I'll take your word for it. If you're goin' to git to the North Village on time, you'd better be steppin' out now."

"I'm goin'," returned Timmy Todd. "One thing I most forgot to say, though, I'll sell you that buildin' lot to-morrer. Ardelia Abigail, she thinks it would be a good idee."

"Wuggles," said Mr. Swink after Timmy Todd had gone, "you can't tell me that you planned it all out so that the affair with Mame Collins would be broken off and Timmy Todd would marry Ardelia Abigail Atkins."

"I can't say," returned Wuggles, "that I planned every bit of it definite. Human nature's queer thing an' you always have to take a chance with it.

"But when I was at the poor farm, Ardelia Abigail was the kind of girl that always mothered the little ones that couldn't take care o' themselves. Anybody that's helpless and needs a guardian like Timmy Todd would jest naturally appeal to her.

"An' as for Timmy Todd, I figgered that, compared with the treatment he got from his sister Viney an' from Mame Collins, Ardelia Abigail would jest seem like an angel.

"But I do claim the credit o' bustin' up his old engagement. I planned out the program of his callin' every night on Mame Collins. Unbeknown to him, Ardelia Abigail agreed to make him see it through.

"As for Mame Collins, I figgered that any woman that didn't care for Timmy Todd an' had him inflicted on her six hours a night or so steady for three weeks, would begin to look forward kinder serious to such a prospect for the rest of her natural life. And it worked."

Misery Mansions by Philip Gibbs

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

AFTER three years of travel, Paul Whiteleaf, youngest son of William Whiteleaf, a wealthy, self-made manufacturer, returned to his English home. He was welcomed by his father and mother; by Matthew, the eldest son and a power in the business; by Christopher, the second son, a man-about-town; and by Margaret, his sister. Paul had not decided upon his life-work. He studied the problems of the poor; met Lydia Faversham, a patrician beauty; and learned that James Brent, one of the footmen, was a real man. One night Lizzie Legg, a girl of the slums, and Alf Stagers, whose hand had been withered by a process used in one of the Whiteleaf shops, broke in to steal and were discovered by Paul. He treated them kindly, and let them go. Later he visited the factory, and learned that what they had told him about conditions was true.

William Whiteleaf, on the fiftieth anniversary of his start in business, divided his fortune among his children. Each of the sons received £500,000. Paul told his father that he would use his share to help improve the condition of the workers, and was ordered to leave the house forever. Accompanied by Brent, he took a room in a tenement called "Misery Mansions," and secured a job in the Whiteleaf factory, living on what he earned. One night they heard a struggle outside their door, and found Loo Larkin trying to protect a woman from the attack of her drunken husband, Jake Parfitt. After the man was subdued Paul learned that Loo and her married sister, Emmy Gurney, did "home work" for his father's firm. He grew fond of Emmy's child, a boy called "little Brown Mouse." Loo fell in love with him, although she was already engaged to Bert Jennings. Paul induced Jake Parfitt to stop drinking. He also decided to start a penny eating-house for the poor. He met Lizzie Legg and Alf Stagers again, and learned that the latter had become a street-corner labor agitator.

Little Brown Mouse became ill and Paul started for a doctor. He was delayed by an attack by jealous Bert Jennings, and when the doctor came the child was dead. Loo was going to become a girl of the streets to give the child a decent funeral, but Paul saved her by paying the expenses.

Then the Whiteleaf workers went on strike.

BOOK IV

The Breaking of Chains

CHAPTER I.

OUTSIDE THE GATES.

THE strike on the south side of the river will be remembered because it marked the beginning of a new chapter in industrial history—the uprising of sweated labor, the union of the unor-

ganized, and the breaking of many chains. Out of that conflict, too, a leader arose with a message of hope for those who had been starved of human joy, and with a practical solution of some of the great problems of modern industrial conditions which are a constant menace to the social peace of Europe.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for March 15.

In a small way, at least, though with the inspiration of a great ideal, this new leader put his theories to the test and proved the virtue of them. But it is characteristic of the English people that public interest was not attracted so much by his ideals or achievements, as by the personal drama in which he played a strange part.

It was a conflict between a father and son, the son's leadership of rebellion against a father's power as the master of men, that made the name of Paul Whiteleaf ring in the ears of society, and resound in the columns of the press, until new sensations obliterated the memory of his words and work.

The first sign of trouble which led to a sudden outbreak of rebellion among men and women who had been tamed by misery, and whose blood seemed to have been weakened into water by semi-starvation, were certain placards pasted up one morning outside the pottery-works, the box-factories, the timber-sheds, and the goods yards of William Whiteleaf & Sons.

Paul himself was attracted by one of those placards on his way to work, and stared at the printed words across the shoulders of a group of men and women who were discussing the notice with a fierce excitement.

Under the heading of "Revised Wages Lists" it was announced that in consequence of the increased cost of raw material, including timber, clay, fiber, and glue, and as a result of the severe taxation imposed by the government on the capital of the employers, the wages in the Whiteleaf works would be reduced according to the various rates for skilled and unskilled labor, piece-work, and home-work.

Then followed a list of occupations and the scale of reductions which would prevail until further notice. At the bottom of the placard was the name of Matthew Whiteleaf, managing director of William Whiteleaf & Sons.

"It's damnable!" said Paul. "It's an outrage!"

The words sprang to his lips, and he spoke them loudly, moved to a passion of anger, so that he was hardly conscious of the people around him. But he was an-

swered by a number of voices speaking with hoarse and sullen rage.

"It's a bleeding outrage! The capital of the employer! Gord Almighty! What about the capital of the workers? 'Ow about our bellies, and our brats?"

"The cost of raw material! Ain't we the raw material? Our lives and labor? Is the price of 'uman souls to go down again, because the price of wood goes up?"

"'Oo said damnable? That's a sawny-dawny kind o' word to use!"

The speaker used another word, frightful in its obscenity, yet not shocking to the ears of Paul Whiteleaf, who guessed that it was torn from the heart of a man who knew that the reduction of his week's wages would mean the difference between semi-starvation and starvation, perhaps between living children and dead children, certainly between a just-endurable life, and a life quite unendurable.

A girl in the crowd began to sob, and her words were hysterical.

"I've been workin' my bleedin' fingers to the bone to keep the little 'ome together. An' now they're goin' to dock the wages agin! I'll see myself dead fust. I'd rather be a moldy corpse."

There was a scene of fierce despair round the factory gates as other "hands" came tramping up, not knowing the cause of the excitement until they had stared with dazed eyes at the big black letters on the placard, or heard the news from their mates. The babble of tongues rose up with a monkey-like chatter, the shrill voices of the factory girls clamoring above the sullen rumble of the men's oaths and protests.

But suddenly there was a quietness when Paul raised his hand for silence, and standing with his back to the factory wall, spoke to them words which rang out clearly through the dank mist in which the crowd huddled.

"We're not going to accept the new scale of wages," he said. "If we go through these gates this morning, if we put our hands to any kind of job, it means that we submit to another turn of the screw which is grinding us down into the pit."

"Isn't it about time we showed a bit of pluck, and demanded the right of a living

wage? I'm a new man in this district, but it seems to me, mates, that you have been too soft and slavish.

"It's got to come to a fight sooner or later. Let it be now. It isn't the first time wages have been put down. It won't be the last, if we submit to this new scale.

"They'll turn the screw again, in six months or so. And then it will be a question of fighting like beasts for dear life, with less strength than we have now, and with less heart, because we shall have been so much longer in chains.

"In other trades men and women have the strength of union. They have organized themselves into a power which makes the master afraid of them. Can't we do the same?

"Good Heavens! Are we such poor creatures that we can only whine and groan when the slave-drivers crack their whips? My lads—and I speak to the women, too—you will only deserve the wages of slaves if you go through those gates this morning and accept the new conditions.

"Tell the foremen of Whiteleaf & Sons that you will see them in hell before you have your wages docked. Tell them that so far from working on a lower wage, you demand an all-round increase, and that you will wait outside the gates so that not a box will be made, not a piece of timber sawed, not a tile glazed, not a hammer lifted, not a crane worked, until your demands are fulfilled.

"See! This is our answer to Mr. Matthew Whiteleaf, of William Whiteleaf & Sons!"

He turned quickly, and reaching up to the white placard, tore it off the wall in strips which were caught by the wind, so that they were wisped away above the heads of the crowd.

The men and women had listened to his words in a kind of stupor. Once or twice he had hesitated, believing that he was but wasting his breath, and that these people had been too long stupefied by slavery to understand his meaning, or to respond to any call upon their intelligence and pluck.

Pluck! The poor wretches had had their manhood and womanhood crushed under the grinding millstone of misery in this

world of sweated labor. How could they have any kind of pluck, when they were bitten by the sharp tooth of hunger, when they lived in foul dens of the most hideous squalor, when to be out of work for more than a week or two meant the final plunge into the abyss of destitution, from which there was no escape except to the prison, the workhouse, or the pauper's grave?

Paul was startled when out of their strange quietude there came a wild storm of cheers which beat in waves against the blank walls of the factories and shattered against the iron roofs of the worksheds on the other side of the way.

The tearing down of the notice on the wall was a symbolic act which had set their imagination on fire. Like all symbols which by some small dramatic sign interpret the faith or passion of a people, it had a greater power than the spoken word.

Just as when Camille Desmoulins plucked a bunch of leaves off a tree in the garden of the Palais Royal and made the green cockade which was the badge of revolution, so now Paul Whiteleaf's tearing of the placard inflamed a crowd with the spirit of revolt.

"Gord's truth! The lad is right!" shouted a man. "Let's strike, boys!"

"Strike!" shouted a score of hoarse voices.

"Blast the notices!" screamed a woman.

"Tear the bleeding things down!"

By one of those concerted movements which seem, at a moment of crisis, to give a single individuality to a street mob, the crowd set off running to one of the other gates, where another placard had been posted up, and struggled with each other to reach it, to pull it to pieces, into tiny bits of paper which fluttered above their heads through the morning mist of the riverside like white butterflies.

It was the beginning of the great strike which brought the works of William Whiteleaf & Sons to a dead halt. Paul's words had started the revolt, yet, like all leaders, he had only expressed at the psychological moment the thought and faith of those who had taken up his watchword.

He had come at the breaking point between patient servitude and the limit of en-

duration. The new notice proclaiming a reduction in the wage scale had passed that boundary mark, and the silent broodings of thousands of sweated toilers, the tears of women through nights of feverish, weary toil, the sullen words of rebels in factories and workshops for many months past, the speeches of street-corner orators on Saturday nights, the pinch of poverty which had grown harder to bear as rents had been raised and food prices put up, had worked to a pitch of passionate protest which reached its climax when Matthew Whiteleaf signed his name to that document of damnable oppression.

Without preparation, without canvassing or propaganda, the rebellion spread like a flame throughout the district on the south side of the river, so that even the factories which the workpeople had entered in the morning were deserted after the lunch-hour, so that even the home-workers in Misery Mansions and other dwellings, tenements, and overcrowded houses, flung down their cardboards and their sacks, their painted toys and their paper-bags, and came out into the streets to swell the throng which surged up and down the highways, forming themselves into scratch committees, gathering round men who, by force of character or loudness of voice, assumed the divine right of leadership, arguing, quarreling, shouting, cursing, and laughing.

Paul, who forced his way through the crowds, was startled above all by the strange gaiety which had taken possession of them. It seemed as though, for the first time in their lives, they knew the meaning of joy, and as though the declaration of the strike had broken the chain of their serfdom, so that they felt themselves to be free men and women—children of liberty.

Girls, linked arm in arm, marched through the market singing, "I Don't Care What Becomes of Me!" and shrieking in witchlike choruses of laughter. Women with pinched and haggard faces stood in their doorways cackling with shrill mirth.

Slouching men and boys clapped each other on the shoulder, punched each other, shouted with hoarse-voiced hilarity. A laughing madness had intoxicated the

brains of these people of poverty. They were drunk with the spirit of revolt.

And yet Paul, who was among them, though not of them, knew that they had no strike funds and no material resources upon which they could fall back in this industrial war which they had declared upon his advice. In a little while they would be starving and dying, unless they won a quick victory or surrendered speedily.

It was amazing to think that he, dressed in their own livery of labor, in working clothes bought in a second-hand slop shop, with a red scarf round his neck and a stubble of beard on his chin, should stand between them and death.

It was ironical that the fortune of the youngest son of William Whiteleaf should provide the war-stores for this revolt against his father's tyranny of mastership. Yet no man or woman in the crowd knew that the silent young fellow who passed them was the one hope they had in this conflict between the powers of Mammon and Misery.

CHAPTER II.

THE LEADER.

IT is one of the mysteries of human nature that in most great crises a leader emerges from the mob in which he was previously undistinguished from his fellows, and obtains an authority quickly recognized and loyally obeyed, apart from envious rivals and jealous enemies and the traitors who are found in every camp, by the great crowd.

Until the strike came Paul was known only as a "nice young feller" with a quiet way and a "touch of the toff" about him to his fellow workers in the timber yards and the various inhabitants of Trump's Buildings, who liked the tone of his cheery voice, the readiness with which he put himself at the service of his neighbors, and the peculiar pleasure which he seemed to find in the society of the "nippers."

So, at least, it seemed. Yet these people must have perceived some unusual qualities in him, something differentiating him from themselves, some aristocracy of manhood,

which made them seek his guidance and help when, after the first day of neurotic enthusiasm for the strike they became like huddled sheep escaped from their pens.

It was Jake Parfitt—he had gained a local notoriety as a man touched by some miracle so that he had “sworn off the booze”—who led a deputation of working men into the courtyard on the morning after the tearing down of the notices, and, thrusting his bullet head through Paul’s door, requested his presence in the yard below.

“I’ve brought the boys along,” he said. “The steady-goers.

“It seems to us, matey, that as you’re a young feller of eddication and gab you can give us a few straight tips as to carrying on this ‘ere strike. We’re all waitin’ for a lead, and I’ve told the boys that you’re the bloke to give it.”

Jake came at an inconvenient time. At that moment Paul was very busy with Jem Brent over certain estimates which had been sent in from wholesale provision merchants, furniture dealers, and miscellaneous contractors, for the supply of material for a new restaurant for workmen, which was to open its doors to the public under the title of the People’s Eating House.

None of these merchants and dealers expressed in their formal letters any surprise at addressing Paul Whiteleaf, Esq., at such an extremely democratic dwelling-place as No. 80 Trump’s Buildings.

He had given them a banker’s reference, of which they had taken immediate advantage, evidently to their perfect satisfaction, if one might judge from the obsequiousness of their literary style and their eagerness to fulfil Mr. Whiteleaf’s “esteemed orders.”

Every night for weeks, with Jem Brent on the other side of the deal-table, Paul had been studying these documents, and Jem’s eyes had grown brighter every day as the time approached when he might prove himself worthy of the great trust which Paul had placed in him, by taking charge of a building which had been converted from a warehouse into a spacious restaurant, and by the management of a business which would test his character and common sense.

Now he was watching with awe and ad-

miration the easy way in which Paul was writing out checks for the first consignment of goods, signing away hundreds of pounds without waiting to blot the ink, although he still wore second-hand shoddy and boots which hurt his feet, and denied himself tobacco because he could not afford it on “fourteen bob a week.”

It happened, therefore, that when Jake thrust his head through the door on the fifth floor, of Misery Mansions, he was surprised to find two young men who had taken their coats off, and who seemed to be engaged in literary adventures of a kind which lay beyond the imagination of a workingman who was “no scholar.”

But Paul sprang to his feet with a cheery greeting, and accepted the invitation to talk to the men below.

“I’m obliged to you, Jake, for rounding up some of the best men. We’ve got to get a kind of committee together.

“Unless we all pull the same way and put up a central authority to express the views of the majority, we shall be beaten before the game has begun, and have to crawl back to work like whipped dogs.”

Jake spat out of the open window to express his disgust at such a prospect, and Jem put on his coat with the air of a man who means business.

“Hadn’t you better stay here, Jem?” asked Paul.

“I am coming down with you,” said Jem. “It’s quite on the cards you’ll get into trouble unless I’m standing at your elbow.”

The arrogance of the words was softened by the twinkle in Jem’s eyes, and Paul laughed when he heard them, having a profound respect for the sterling common sense of a comrade, whose loyalty had been proved by months of faithful service.

“Come along, then, old stick-in-the-mud, and if I say the wrong thing, don’t keep your superior wisdom in that hard nut of yours!”

As they clattered down the stone steps Jem put his hand on Paul’s sleeve and whispered some oracular words which seemed to give him a secret joy.

“Things are moving, sir!”

“Pretty fast, Jem. But they may be a

bit too rapid for us. We've got to keep our heads screwed on—pretty tight."

A man less cool in the head than Paul Whiteleaf might have lost his presence of mind in the courtyard of Trump's Buildings, where he was received with a cheer by a bigger crowd than had been suggested by Jake's reference to "some of the boys."

Five hundred men, at least, and some scores of women, had assembled there in the dusk, and the noise of their voices, the tramp of their feet over the stone flags, had aroused the excitement of the dwellers in Misery Mansions, so that the heads of frowzy women looked down from the windows, and white faces peered through broken panes.

"Now, then, mates!" shouted Jake in a voice that rang across the courtyard, "another cheer for the lad what began the bleedin' strike!"

From hundreds of husky throats the cheer went up, and in the forefront of the crowd a group of women gave shrill yells of hysterical enthusiasm.

"Better get up on a box," said Jem. "There's one handy."

It was characteristic of the man that he could provide a platform at a moment's notice, and that his quick eyes had noticed the old sugar box which had been used as a chariot by gutter-urchins. It was from this rostrum that Paul Whiteleaf spoke to the people who had been his father's serfs.

He spoke without flowers of speech or any attempt at oratory, though now and again his voice thrilled, and some burning phrase leaped to his lips and fired the imagination of the crowd.

He pointed out to them fairly and squarely the danger that lay ahead of them in this revolt against employers who were seeking to rob them of a living wage, who for years had bought their strength and skill at sweated rates.

On the one side was immense capital; on the other, naked poverty. On the employers' side there was the strength that came from absolute unity of purpose and security of life; on the work-people's side there was the weakness of divided counsels, an utter lack of organization, the desperate need of food.

Women with hungry children could not afford to hold out long against their wailing cries. Men with starving families could not hold fast to courage. The cruelty of their torture would make cowards of them, if it lasted beyond the limit of endurance.

Nevertheless, if they would form themselves into a union, or a group of unions, electing their leaders, and pledging themselves to act in common according to the advice of their leaders, they might hope to gain a victory which would, at least, keep up the level of their wages to the old rates.

Food supplies were at hand. In a few days there would be opened a People's Eating House, which would provide meals at the lowest rates. For a penny piece a man would be able to fill his belly.

That at least was a piece of work which would help them to hold out longer than was otherwise possible. In addition, there would be free soup kitchens for those, to whom even a penny was too great a price.

A tumult of cheers rose in waves against the walls of Trump's Buildings, and from the high windows, where white faces peered out, there were answering shouts. This promise of food came to them as though Paul were a miracle-worker, who, by the power of his words, had led them out of the Valley of Despair into the Land of Promise.

When the echoes of their cheering faded out into silence, the crowd held its breath to hear other words of this young man on the sugar-box who spoke in such a quiet and masterful way. The spirit of the mob seemed to wait upon his lips with one great listening ear as he told them of the need for self-sacrifice and good fellowship, so that those who had saved up for a rainy day should help those whose cupboards were quite bare, and so that no man or woman should ask for a free ticket to a soup-kitchen so long as he or she could afford to pay for a meal in the People's Eating House.

If they won the victory it would be by brotherhood, by self-denial, and by loyalty to their leaders, whoever they might be. Out of the present conflict they might gain great fruits of victory which would be gathered in a future harvest.

For if it lead to the union of sweated workers, if it drew together all those women who had toiled in loneliness in dark, little rooms, where they hid their poverty and their tears, if it made a league of all those girls who competed against each other by undercutting their prices in piecework for the factories, if it organized casual laborers and skilled hands into trades' unions, with established rights defended by the law, the curse of sweated labor would be lifted at last from the children of poverty, and they could hold their heads up as free men and women, claiming and possessing the decencies of life.

Amidst the clamor of voices which greeted this speech, the applause of hard hands clapping, like the volley-firing of troops, Jem Brent pulled Paul's coat and whispered up to him:

"There's a queer-looking beggar over there, sir, who seems to be giving you the civil-eye! I should keep a watch on him!"

"I have noticed him," said Paul. "It's an old friend of ours."

It was the twisted figure of a man who had wormed his way through the crowd and stood within a yard of Paul's sugar-box, scowling horribly, while his lips muttered inarticulate words.

But now he raised high a withered hand—and by that gesture Paul had recognized the strange personality of Alf Staggers, who had once taken supper with him in his father's library, and whom he had met in the public-house with Lizzie Legg.

"Friends!" the man shouted above the tumult of tongues. "What's the sense o' listenin' to a bloke who spits out lies as fast as fleas can hop on a bed?"

"I'm the horganizing secretary of the Social Club, as some 'ere can bear me out. There's not a blarsted thing done in this district which don't come to my bleedin' eyes an' ears."

"But strike me down dead if I've 'eard tell of a People's Heating 'Ouse, to say nuffink of free soup kitchens! It's blinkin' fairy tales, that's what it is!"

"The bloke's balmy on the crumpet. He's got a bleeding maggot in 'is nut! And do yer 'appen to know what nime 'e bears?"

"Paul!" shouted the crowd. "Good old Paul!"

"Paul? Paul what?" asked Alf Staggers, with a snort of scorn at the eternal folly of mankind. "I'd like to ask you for 'is second nime."

He stared at the young man mounted on the sugar-box with a sullen suspicion, as though the name he bore made it impossible that he was to play an honest part or be a friend to the working people.

"Yes, you know my secret, Alf Staggers," said Paul. "And you know I am a man of my word."

"I'm not so sure," said the man. "You come of a bad breed."

There was something in his words, some queer look in his eyes which impressed the crowd about him. A dozen voices questioned him, and tried to discover the secret which he seemed to know about this young man Paul.

At last he spoke, and his thin voice rasped into the silence of the crowd.

"D'yer want ter know 'is nime? What'll ye say when I tell yer it's old Whiteleaf's son? Paul Whiteleaf! The youngest of 'em. Blight me if it ain't the truth!"

From the group of women standing in the forefront of the crowd, the single figure of a slim, white-faced girl sprang forward with both her hands raised. It was Lizzie Legg.

"It's naked truth!" she said. "It's Whiteleaf's son, and the best young feller that ever trod the earth. Why, 'e's been workin' among yer, and yer didn't know 'im! I and Alf was the only ones ter know 'im, an' I'll be proud of it all my giddy life, swelp me Gord, I will!"

Another woman sprang forward, and, seizing Lizzie Legg, swung her backward with a strangle grip. By her uncoiled hair and the long curve of her white neck and the lithe movement of her body, Paul, standing there in the dusk, peering at the ghostly figures of the crowd, knew that Loo Larkin had come into this queer scene to play a part.

"You silly she-tyke!" she cried. "Keep yer jaws shut, carn't yer?"

"Split on a pal, will yer? I'll knock yer clappers down yer gory throat, I will!"

But the secret was out. The excited speech of Alf Staggers, the strange cry of Lizzie Legg, and the violence of Loo Larkin, convinced the crowd that they had in their presence, by some fantastic freak of fate, a son of that old man whom they hated as a mean and merciless tyrant.

That this young man, Paul Whiteleaf, should be dressed in shoddy, that he should wear a red scarf round his neck, that he should be living in Misery Mansions, that he should have worked among them in his father's timber-sheds, was a baffling mystery which struck them dumb for a time, while, with the suspiciousness of savages, they tried to grope their way to some meaning in it.

"A quick retreat is my advice!" said Jem. "You've just got time, sir, if I fight a bit of rear-guard action!"

"I'm staying," said Paul. "They had to know sooner or later. And, after all, why not?"

Jem answered in a whisper.

"They'll tear you to bits, sir, if that lot on the left get the upper hand!"

It was from the left that the first ominous shouts came:

"Bloodsucker!"

"A pup of the Whiteleaf's!"

"Let's bash 'im, lads!"

"'E's a spy, that's what 'e is!"

"'E's been a kiddin' of us!"

"Tear 'is vitals out!"

"A copper's nark, my boys!"

Several men were thrusting their way forward from the rear ranks with ugly faces. There was a scuffle going on by the steps leading into the buildings.

Paul bent down and spoke to Alf Staggers, who still looked dazed.

"Alf, I did you a good turn once. Have you forgotten it? Or will you stand by me?"

The man with the withered hand seemed to have a struggle between suspicion and loyalty. Then he came close to the sugar-box and faced the crowd.

"Don't 'urt 'im, friends! P'raps 'e means well in spite of 'is nime. I'm willing to give 'im a chanst. Just as 'e gave me a chanst when 'e might 'ave given me ter the p'leece."

"Maybe I was a bit too 'asty and suspicious-like. One learns ter be in this part of the world."

Alf Staggers seemed to have been shamed by Paul's appeal to him, by the reminder of his old debt. At least he came over to Paul's side and tried to restrain the passions that he had unleashed in the mob.

Other men came out of the ranks and formed a bodyguard round the son of their taskmaster. They were the men who first and last stood as the bodyguard of Paul Whiteleaf in the great work of his life, who, after this scene in the courtyard became his henchmen, trusty as steel, faithful as dogs, with a loyalty which would have made any one of them lay down his life for their leader.

They were Jake Parfitt, Simon Garth, Will Tunks, Andrew Brant, 'Arry Sloan, Tom James, and Steenie Smith.

"Keep back there, carn't yer, yer balmy blighters!" shouted Jake Parfitt, ex-drunkard and first-class wood-carver.

But it was not Jake's heavy fist which kept the crowd back. It was the magic of Paul's voice, and the power and the sweetness of the words which, before the revelation of his name, had held them quiet until their cheers had stormed up to him on his wooden box. He had no fear of them, and his quietude kept at bay the brutes among them.

He acknowledged himself to be the son of William Whiteleaf. It was because he was his father's son that he had come to live among them.

There were men—and women, too—whose faces he could see before him, who knew that he had worked as one of them on less than a living wage, that he had suffered the hardships they had suffered, had hungered as they had hungered, had lived without luxury, without self-indulgence, with some thought for his neighbors in Misery Mansions.

Why had he done these things? Because he had wished to learn, by painful and personal experience, the secrets of their lives and the meaning of poverty.

Now he knew. He knew the courage of his father's work-people and their charity to one another. He knew their struggle for

existence and the tragedy of their lives. And out of that knowledge he hoped to help them.

Because in his heart and his conscience he knew that the wages for their labors were but a mockery of justice, and that the fortune which had been built up out of their daily toil was the product of starved lives and stunted souls.

His father had sinned in ignorance. He was not a cruel man—he was only blind to the facts of his own life. But as the son of William Whiteleaf, who had inherited some of his father's wealth, he, Paul, would pay back part of the debt which was owing to the people, and if they would have him for their leader, he would pledge his honor, and all that he had in the world and in his own heart to win a victory for them over the tyranny of wealth.

"Men and women," said Paul Whiteleaf in a voice that rang out with a fine and thrilling note, "I offer myself to you as a leader—not only through this strike but afterward through life.

"If you will follow me, I dedicate all the strength of my spirit and body to do you service, all the wealth that I have, and shall have, and the love that is in my heart for all of you because I have shared your lives and have seen the tears of your women and have been the playmate of your little ones.

"It was this right hand of mine which pulled down the notices from the walls of my father's factory. Do you not remember that? And it is this right hand of mine—see, I hold it up before you—which, by God's help, will build for you better houses than Misery Mansions, and will give you more joyful work than the sweated labor of my father's sheds.

"Is it a bargain? Shall I be your leader, and will you follow me in loyalty and faith?"

They were quiet for a moment or two, and the silence of the courtyard was broken only by the sound of a woman's sob. Then there broke out a tempest of cheers, and upon those waves of hoarse sound Paul Whiteleaf was lifted up to the leadership of men.

Only Alf Staggers was silent, and stood

aloof, biting his finger-nails like a *Hamlet* of the slums, full of doubt and self-questioning.

CHAPTER III.

THE BANQUET HOUSE OF POVERTY.

THE strike had lasted a fortnight when the People's Eating House opened its doors to a hungry mob of working men and women, and when Jem Brent had to retire at intervals behind the glass door of the manager's office, to assure himself in private that, although this was the proudest day of his life, he had done nothing entitling him to a swelled head, and had merely carried out the orders of a man who had provided the money and the brains for this establishment.

Yet it was to Jem that Paul Whiteleaf gave his congratulations when at rows of snow-white benches in a great hall with tiled walls a thousand people sat down to a meal at the price of a penny a head, and when fifty waitresses, under the command of Loo Larkin, ladled out bowls of pea-soup, filled up plates with slices of jam roly-poly, handed round cups of cocoa with slices of currant cake, and ministered to appetites which had been sharpened by starvation.

Paul himself, in his working clothes, sat at the head of one of the long tables, surrounded by a little group of men who had formed themselves into the strike committee, and as he dipped a hunk of bread into the thick soup he gazed along the vista of faces, and was glad because there was a cheerful light in the eyes of all his guests at this good banquet.

There were queer faces there, all bent forward over the soup-bowls, from which a steaming fragrance came to tempt their nostrils. The brand of poverty was upon all of them. Most of them were undersized, bloodless, and haggard, with the sharp features of the cockney slum-dweller, with thin lips and sunken eyes.

They ate greedily, lapping up the succulent liquid with strange gurglings and the noise of swine feeding in farmyard troughs. Here and there among them was a throw-

back to the refinement of ancestors who had not dwelt in the abyss of destitution, and one or two of these faces, with delicate profiles, thoughtful foreheads, finely modeled features, were in striking contrast to the miserable degradation of manhood which had been stamped upon the physiognomy of their fellows.

Here were criminal faces of the weakest type, with slobbering mouths and furtive eyes and receding brows and chins; and faces criminal also in their strength of beastlike jaws and blunted features. A few seats away from where Paul sat was a man who might have been a model of *Bill Sykes*, but he had as his neighbor an elderly man with a white beard and shaggy eyes, who was like a Herkomer painting of a Hebrew prophet.

The women were the most pitiable to watch. Old and young, the great majority of them had the wan, pinched, weary-eyed ugliness of the lowest class of social life. From childhood they had been ill-nourished, overworked, and underpaid.

Now in their girlhood and in their womanhood they had been fretted and worn by the deadly struggle for livelihood, by the sharp anxieties of a continual warfare with the wolf at the door. The wolf had put its teeth into them. It had left the mark of its paws upon them.

And yet, here again were exceptions to the general rule of drab misery. Here and there about the long table was a woman's face unmarked by the struggle with life; a girl's pink-and-white complexion that had survived even the unhealthful living conditions of Misery Mansions and the other rookeries "across the river." And as with the men of the slums, an occasional countenance had the finely cut features of a far different class of society; the remnants of a refinement almost killed by the terrible life of the very poor.

To the creating of this Peoples' Eating House, Paul had brought a masterly attention to detail, a quiet energy which swept past all obstacles, speeded up indolent contractors, and cut down expenses to the bare limits. The project promised to be a triumphant success.

At least a man might have a full belly as

long as he had a penny in his pocket. For that small sum a woman could keep up her strength and go about her daily work without being dragged down to despair by the devilish grip of hunger.

For the children of the strikers, and for the men and women entirely destitute, Paul had organized a system of free meals, and by the agency of the strike leaders, who had established a vigilance committee to inquire into the financial conditions of each family in the district, there was not much fear of unnecessary charity.

Indeed, the honesty of the great mass of the people was astounding. The strike seemed to have pulled them up above the level of everyday morality, with its slackness and vicious habits. It was a point of pride with them not to call for a free meal so long as they had a few shillings in a savings' box, or a rag of superfluous clothing to pawn for a few pennies.

One man who had put his name down on the "hunger list" had been severely handled when it was discovered that he had a little hoard of money—amounting to two weeks' wages—hidden away in a corner of his evil-smelling den.

The mauling of Pete Martin, who was taken to a hospital covered with blood and bruises, had been the only crime since the strike began, and was significant of the spirit which Paul Whiteleaf had called forth when he made himself their leader and demanded their loyalty.

Their loyalty was not in doubt now when Jake Parfitt, who had once been known by the name of "Boozy Jake," rose to his feet, and, after a stumbling speech of rough eloquence, full of strange, cockney oaths, and emphasized by repeated bangs of a great fist on the table, so that all the cups clattered in their saucers, called out:

"Three cheers for Mr. Paul, and may the food choke in the throat of any swine who don't shout his damndest for our honored friend and leader!"

From end to end of the long table the people rose and cheered, the women's shrill voices making an ear-splitting din between the tiled walls and under the high rafters. Before the sound had died away Paul was on his feet, answering them.

"My friends, you owe me no thanks, for this is not a house of charity, and the meal that you have eaten has been paid for by your pennies. But my heart has rejoiced, because by the opening of this Peoples' Eating House, which will be conducted at cost-price instead of for the profit of those who make fortunes out of the hunger of the poor, we shall be able to carry through the strike without the haunting fears of starvation which would have weakened our purpose and endurance.

"And, afterward, when peace comes with victory on our side, this house of refreshment will be a boon to all the workers who have had to cook their food in tiny rooms, above a gas-jet or an oil-stove, with poor results.

"I know the misery of it. I have cooked the saucy kipper over my bedroom gas, and have slept in the fumes of its filthy reek. I know the beastliness of an oil-stove with a smoldering wick and a failing supply of oil, so that the chop won't cook and the grease hardens in the frying-pan.

"And I knew how wretched it is for our women to prepare their meals in the rooms where their babes are sleeping, and where the table is strewn with their work, and where the bed has to be the sideboard and the plate-rack. It's because I've lived in Misery Mansions that I may be of use to you all."

These allusions to personal experience were greeted with squeals of laughter from the women and renewed cheers from the men. It seemed to them still a kind of miracle that the son of William Whiteleaf, their master, should have come to live among them.

The knowledge that he had been one of them, that even now he lived on the fifth floor of Trump's Buildings, and wore shoddy and clumping boots, gave him in their eyes a touch of heroic virtue, and his power over them was like that of a medieval saint who renounced a life of luxury to live among lepers. These people knew the leprosy of their lives, and that Paul Whiteleaf should come to share it had a spiritual meaning to them which they could not put into words, but which throbbed at their hearts.

"This banqueting house," said Paul, "will remain after the strike. There will also be good food here at the lowest prices. And in the reading-rooms and club-rooms, which will soon be ready, you will have a place of rest and cheerfulness to come to when your day's work is done.

"The hall speaks for itself, and the food inside you is warmer than any words can be—but there is one man here who won't speak for himself, because, although all the credit of this good meal and of this fine house are due to him, he is a modest fellow, and doesn't brag about his own achievements.

"My friends, it is to my comrade, James Brent, to his industry and energy and active brain that you owe the opening of this eating-house in record time. Jem, you retiring old scallywag, get up on your hind-legs and look pleasant while the boys and girls give you their thanks. Now, then, a rousing cheer for Jemmy Brent!"

Jem took the cheer modestly, blushing like a schoolboy, but nothing would induce him to make a speech, beyond a few mumbled words, in which the name "Mr. Paul" was the only thing heard by the crowd.

To Paul he apologized for his breakdown when they were alone together in the little office behind the glass door.

"I'm not afraid of work, sir, but I'd rather be fried in oil than go in for word-making. As for any credit, you know as well as I do that I've just done my duty in helping to carry out your ideas, with your authority, check-book and advice. Any fool could do that, so what's the good of humbugging myself!"

Paul gave him a friendly punch in the ribs.

"You know you're as proud as *Punch*, Jem! And if you're not, you ought to be. Why, I'm hanged if I believe there's another man in London who could have done the job in the same time, or at the same price.

"Unless we're very careful we shall begin to make a profit, and then the old devil will pull my leg and jeer at me as another philanthropist with an eye on the main chance! Jem, you ought to have been inspector-general of the forces. Fraudulent

contractors wouldn't be able to palm off rotten goods onto innocent officers with miniature mustaches and a lack of arithmetic."

"I'll come to you for a character when the post is vacant, sir," said Jem with a deliberate hark-back to his footman's manner. But then he laughed and said:

"Talking about philanthropists, what do you think of this article in the *Evening Star*? It's given you away with both hands."

He spread out a newspaper on his desk and pointed to a column of type with splash head-lines.

SON AGAINST FATHER.

The Youngest Son of William Whiteleaf Becomes Leader of the Great Strike.

ROMANCE IN THE SLUMS.

The Idealist of Misery Mansions.

Paul seized the paper, read the article with angry eyes, and then crumpled it up and crushed it under his heel.

"If I meet the man who wrote that I'll plug his eye up. Where, in Heaven's name, did he get it all? Jem, you scoundrel, have you been interviewing any of these damned reporters?"

"Not I," said Jem. "One of them came round yesterday, and I threatened him with Loo's rolling-pin. I expect that's the fellow who has been nosing around Misery Mansions."

"If he noses round again it will be the worse for his nose!"

Paul was distressed by the revelations in these columns of print.

The writer must have been at some trouble to get at his facts. He gave a very intimate account of Paul's life in Misery Mansions, of his fight with Jake Parfitt, of his work in the Whiteleaf timber yards, of his endeavors to live on fourteen shillings a week.

The scene outside the factory gates when Paul had torn down the revised wage list was described in detail with more than a touch of exaggeration, and the organization

of the strike committee and of the vigilance committee was analyzed with fair accuracy.

The reporter of the *Evening Star* had also obtained a somewhat distorted account of the scene which had happened a few nights previously when Paul had had to exert both his moral influence and his physical strength to prevent looting down by the riverside.

The real facts were painful enough. It was Jake Parfitt who brought word to Misery Mansions that some of "the boys" had gone wild and were making a violent attack upon a Jewish store down by the pottery works.

Jem Brent was away at the Peoples' Eating House, "up to his neck," as he called it, in preparations for the opening day, so without this trusty comrade, who was always useful in a tight corner, Paul set off alone to the scene of disorder, refusing to take Jake with him on account of his hasty temper, which might lead to trouble.

At the corner of Deadman's Alley there was a mob, consisting of thirty or forty of the younger and wilder spirits of the district. They had already broken into the store and were hauling out biscuit boxes, sardine tins, cheeses, jam-pots, and other articles of plunder, while the unhappy proprietor shouted his curses at them, until a clout over the jaw laid him out across his threshold and silenced him.

A group of girls with disheveled hair and tattered clothes shrieked with hysterical mirth as they broke open the boxes and stuffed their mouths with biscuits.

A volley of the jam-pots came hurtling through the windows as the looters in the shop tossed them to their comrades outside, and every time a catch was missed and a pot of jam smashed upon the pavement a yell of laughter went up, while some gutter-urchins scrambled about the broken glass and slobbered their faces with the sticky mixture as they scooped it up in their grubby hands.

"Nah, then, maties," shouted a young man burdened with a heavy cheese, "come an' fill yer bellies with this prime old Dutch!"

Paul's hand gripped his coat-collar, swung him against a lamp-post, and nearly

throttled him, so that he dropped his booty on the ground.

"My lad," he said very quietly, "if you don't learn to behave like an honest man, I'll give you a lesson you won't forget."

The young rough stared at him with the fierce eyes of a dog robbed of its bone.

"Blast your bleedin' impudence!" he snarled. "What the blazes do you mean by ketchin' 'old o' my coat-collar? Leave go, carn't yer?"

The scuffle had startled the attention of the little mob. They crowded round the lamp-post to peer into the face of the stranger who had come among them.

There was a murmur of voices when he was recognized, and at the sound of his name, called out by a girl, some of the men slunk away into a dark alley, as though ashamed to be seen by the man who had been chosen as the leader of the strike.

But the others showed fight, the lust of loot having aroused the brute in them.

"It's a blighted Jew's shop!" said one of them. "We're gettin' our own back from the dirty swine. And mean to 'ave it, too, mister!"

The lad whom Paul had seized by the collar wrenched himself free and flung himself into a fighting pose.

"I'll bash your blasted 'ead off!" he shouted.

Paul took off his coat and handed it to the nearest man.

"Stand back while I thrash this brat!" he said quietly.

"Brat!" said the man with a hoarse gurgle in his throat. "'E's a nipper wiv 'is fists, mate. 'E'll give you a thick ear in two swipes of 'is flapper!"

"Ready?" asked Paul.

The young rough came for him with a whirlwind of blows, but he had no science, and Paul sent him backward with a hard tap on the jaw. Then he slapped him on each side of the face with the open palm of his hand until the whole crowd roared with laughter at those resounding thwacks which ended with the ignominious flight of the youth.

"Now, then," said Paul, "does anybody else want a turn?"

Nobody accepted his challenge, and they

listened quietly when he spoke stern words to them.

"Don't you see what a fool's game this is?" he asked. "The one thing which will spoil this strike is looting and violence. It will rob us of the public sympathy which has been aroused by the rise of sweated labor to break free from its chains.

"It's worse than a fool's game! It's damned treachery! It's treachery to me and to all the men who have been elected as your leaders.

"Do you think I am going to pour out the sweat of my heart and brain to work on behalf of a gang of dishonest devils who break into a poor man's shop and steal his hard-earned goods?"

"'E's a dog of a Jew!" growled a voice. "What's the blasted 'arm?"

"And you are dogs of Christians!" said Paul. "Christians! You're brute beasts! If I had a whip with me I would flog you back to your kennels!

"If you knew the first law of the Christian faith, which is love for one's neighbor, you would hide your heads for shame, and sneak away out of the lamplight which shows the evil in your eyes.

"Is it Christian to attack a defenseless man like this poor Jew? Is it Christian to bring a man to ruin because you are greedy for a few biscuits and because you think it funny to smash his jam-pots?

"Yes, it is funny! I laugh to think that I, the son of William Whiteleaf, have left my father's house, have lived and worked among you, have denied myself all the comforts of life in order to win a victory for men who are worse than savages—and deserve to be kept in chains!"

So he flogged them with his scorn, and they winced under his bitter words as though each sentence were the lash of a whip.

But presently he spoke more pleadingly, almost tenderly:

"My lads, don't go spoiling a big ideal by miserable work like this. For this fight of ours should be a noble thing. We want our children to remember it as the story of their redemption from the bondage of sweated labor.

"If we play the game decently—if we

fight with clean hands, relying upon honest hearts and the courage of a great endurance. God will be on our side, and help us to win a victory over the devilish injustice of starvation wages and cutthroat conditions of work, and all the dirt and damnation of this poverty.

"For God's sake, keep the peace and don't dishonor your fellow-workers by thieving ways! I have dedicated myself to your service. All I have in the world is yours.

"I want to be proud of your loyalty and conduct. When I face my father in your behalf I want to say: 'These people whom you have kept in misery are good citizens and honest men. Is not the laborer worthy of his hire?' Help me to plead for justice by the virtue of your lives."

He shamed them. His words got home to them. By the pure fire of his spiritual enthusiasm he burned up the brutish instincts which had made their fingers itch for loot.

Before he left them they had put back all but the broken jam-pots into the Jew's shop, and had learned a lesson which they did not soon forget.

Well, that was the story which the reporter of the *Evening Star* had exaggerated into a great riot with baton charges of police, and with Paul Whiteleaf fighting at the head of a hundred men against a mass of rioters who were rebels against the authority of his leadership.

It was an absurd and garbled narrative, in which the true and the false were inextricably mingled, and it ended with a sentimental paragraph which brought a flame of color to Paul's cheeks.

This young man, who has challenged the life-work of his father, who has raised the banner of revolt on behalf of the slaves of civilization, is the new saint who has arisen in this modern world to lift the people of poverty out of the slough of despond, and to lead humanity to greater heights of spiritual nobility. The name of Paul Whiteleaf will be canonized in the sacred book of labor.

"A plague on the crazy fellow!" cried Paul.

He vowed that he could never forgive the man, but within a few hours he had forgiven

him, because he was the cause of bringing Margaret to the south side of the river.

CHAPTER IV.

NEWS OF THE FAMILY.

IT was Loo Larkin who gave the strange news of a lady visitor in Misery Mansions when Paul had mounted the five flights of stone steps which led to his room. She had put off her waitress's dress after coming back from the restaurant, and was in her old cotton frock, with her bodice open at the neck.

Only by degrees would she learn the lesson of tidiness which Paul was trying to teach her by hints which would not hurt her pride. But her eyes were alight with a great excitement, and at the head of the stairs she grabbed Paul's arm and whispered to him:

"There's a lidy to see yer! Like one of them 'eroines in the movin' pictures: Pink cheeks, white 'ands, an' a smile what makes one's backbone wabble—all 'oney and 'eart!

"Does Mr. Paul Whiteleaf live 'ere?' she axes in a voice like a canary bird. 'E do,' sez I, keepin' my eyes on 'er silk frock. 'Will 'e be long?' she sez, pretendin' not to see the 'oles in my boots.

"It's time 'e came back to eat 'is addick,' I sez, gettin' a squint at 'er diming ring. 'Then I'll wait for 'im,' she sez, 'an' p'raps you'll let me sit in 'is room.'

"So there she is now, sittin' with 'er 'ands in 'er muff like a princess in a pantomime."

Paul's eyes had grown big with wonder at this account of his unknown visitor. Then he gave a gay laugh.

"I'll bet a thousand pounds to a brass tack it's my little sister Madge! All right, Loo!"

He burst open his door and went into his room, transfigured with the joy of expectation.

"Madge—by all that's wonderful!"

She was sitting as Loo had described her: on one of his deal chairs, with her hands in her muff, truly like a princess in this poorly furnished room with bare boards and

cracked walls, an iron bedstead, a deal table, and a rickety chest of drawers.

But now she dropped her muff as she sprang to her feet with outstretched hands and a tremulous cry:

"Paul!"

He hugged her tight to his breast and kissed her a dozen times, and put one hand up to touch her hair. He was like a lover with his lady after years of absence, and, indeed, these weeks in Misery Mansions seemed like years since he had last seen Margaret for a few moments in the carriage outside the factory gates.

She laid her hands on his shoulders, and then stepped back a little way from him and, smiling through a mist of tears, looked him up and down from head to foot, and searched his face.

"My poor boy! How thin and tired you look! No wonder you are ill in a place like this!"

"Ill?" said Paul. "Now that I've seen you once more, I never felt better in my life. And as for this place, I wouldn't change it for a palace, now that you are here."

"But how did you track me down? How, by all that's marvelous, did you find your way to Misery Mansions?"

"I read all about you in the papers. It was Christopher who brought in the news."

"Half an hour later I slipped out of doors, jumped into the nearest cab, and here I am! Now I have found you again I sha'n't leave you in a hurry!"

"Certainly not!" said Paul. "Leave me in a hurry, indeed! I shall be terribly offended if you don't stay and have supper with me."

"Madge! We'll have a feast, like we used to in the old nursery. You and I together, pretending to be a king and queen, and much happier than if we were."

"But, before I begin to lay the table, tell me—how is the old governor, and how's the mater, and how's Matthew, and how's Christopher, and how is all the world on the other side of the river? By Jove, I'm just aching to hear news of you all."

Margaret shook her head rather sorrowfully.

"Father will never forgive you. Since

you went away he hasn't spoken your name once. And after seeing you that day outside the factory he had your portrait taken down from the library. I rescued it from the lumber-room, and it is now hanging in my bedroom."

"I think he read the article about you this afternoon, for he sat very silent and brooding, with a sad look in his eyes. So frightfully sad, Paul, though his mouth was stern."

"I'm sorry!" said Paul. "I hate to hurt him, but I have thought it all out a million times, and I can't go back on my resolve, which is to better the conditions of the people who work for him."

"It's all very well, Madge, but if you had lived among these poor wretches here, as I have done, you would know that the sadness of the governor's eyes should not be because I have crossed over to the people's side, but because the success of his business has come from the sufferings of his workers. That's what ought to hurt him most."

"Sad eyes! My God! there's worse sadness in the eyes of women here who lose their little ones because they can't give them enough to eat. There's the sadness of hatred and despair in the eyes of men who see the beauty of their womenfolk pinched and spoiled by endless toil, by consumption and disease, by hunger and lack of air."

"I have sad eyes, too, when I wander about these streets and watch the pageant of poverty and think of the governor's great house with its pictures and tapestries and blatant luxury. However, tell me about the mater."

"She just weeps for you!" said Madge. "I see her sitting over her needlework while often the tears fall upon her dear hands, and she does not notice them unless father is in the room."

"Then she tries not to cry, and pretends to smile when he makes believe to chaff her in the old way. But they are both pretending all the time, and hide the ache in their hearts."

Paul laughed quietly, but with a mist in his eyes.

"Dear old mater!"

"She steals into your room at night," said Madge, "and stays there a long time in the darkness. It is as though she goes to say good night to you, as in the old days."

"Nothing has been moved in your room. It is dusted every day, and mother puts flowers there on your dressing-table, and has the sheets aired once a week."

"I think she hopes against hope that you will come back and be friends again with father, after asking his forgiveness."

"I sha'n't do that," said Paul. "I sha'n't ask his forgiveness, because that would be a lie to my own conscience. I know I am right in what I am doing. I know it as clearly as though God had come into the room and spoken to me!"

"God *has* come into the room and spoken to me as clearly as you do now, and has told me that I must go on with a valiant heart!"

"But what about Christopher? Hasn't he a good word for his old pal, after our heart-to-heart talk in the carriage?"

Madge laughed.

"Kit is just the same, the soul of good nature, and as careless as a schoolboy. He doesn't understand you, but he admires your pluck. He believe you have got a bee in your bonnet, Paul, but he thinks you have a perfect right to work out your own destiny."

"If that's his idea of sport," he said to me only last night—it seems to me a pretty rotten game. But as long as he gets some fun out of it, I don't blame him." That's Christopher's point of view."

Paul chuckled at this portrait study.

"Good old Chris! He has a broad-minded way of looking at things, anyhow. If there were more men like him in the world there would be no religious hatreds, no jealousy between the classes, no narrow controversies, no clash of rival views."

"He is perfectly prepared to let every man 'gang his ain gait,' and be as happy as he can on his own particular pitch. So, after all, Chris is a shining light in a naughty world, and a noble example to his fellow men."

"What's he doing with his money, Madge? Has he carved out a career for himself?"

Madge laughed again, as most people laughed when they spoke of handsome Christopher, immaculately dressed, with perfect manners, with high spirits, and a temper that was seldom ruffled.

"He has started a racing stable and entered a horse for the Derby. It's frightfully expensive, but father is pleased with the idea, because it brings Kit into touch with a crowd of peers and pomposities, and gives him a purpose in life."

"It's better to try and win the Derby," says father, 'than to be without any ambition in the world. The blue ribbon of the turf is an honor worth fighting for.' So Christopher is a favorite at present."

"He has taken my place," said Paul, without a trace of envy in his voice. "And now, what's the latest about Matthew? How does he like the turn of events?"

Madge's sigh was sufficient answer, but she entered into details.

"Since the strike began Matt is more furious with you than ever. And now that these articles have been published in the papers, giving your name as the strike leader, and showing how you are supporting the strikers with the family money, Matt is as black as thunder."

"I had a quarrel with him this afternoon. A bad one, Paul!"

"Was it worth it?" asked Paul. "I don't believe in quarrels or arguments. They tear at one's nerves, and don't convince a mind that is already made up. What was Matthew's special grievance?"

"He called you a traitor!" said Madge.

"Not for the first time."

"He swears that he will continue the lockout until the hands come whining to be taken back. He vows that he will see every man, woman, and child starve to death before he revises the wages lists or grants their demands."

"It is your leadership which angers him most. He is determined to fight you to the last gasp!"

Paul smiled rather grimly.

"It will be his last gasp, not mine, if he doesn't yield to just claims. I have got my spirit up, too, Madge. I have more than Matthew's own doggedness."

"And if you like to take a message to

him, you can tell him this: Tell him that I will subsidize the strikers until every penny of my fortune is gone, and after that I will carry the fiery torch through the country and get more funds for the sweated slaves.

"Tell him that I have other plans not yet revealed by newspaper reporters, clever as those young gentlemen may be, which, if Matthew holds out too long, will smash the business of William Whiteleaf & Sons, and make him managing director of ruined industries, from which the laborers have gone to other fields of work, where they will be paid more than a living wage. Can you remember all this, Madge?"

"I can remember," said Madge, "but I am not going to tell Matthew."

Paul raised his eyebrows with a look of surprise. There was a mysterious thrill in Margaret's voice which seemed to cloak some hidden meaning.

"Why not?"

"Because," said Madge very quietly, "because I am going to stay with you."

Paul was silent for a little while, staring at his sister with startled eyes. Then he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Stay with me? That's a good joke! Pretty Madge Whiteleaf, in a twenty-guinea frock, comes to live in Misery Mansions, with three maids and an automobile in the courtyard."

But Madge was very serious and did not echo his laughter.

"It is no joke, Paul. I mean it. I have made up my mind."

Then she spoke eagerly, quickly, and there was a bright light in her eyes. Since Paul had left home she had been thinking about her own life, and wondering what was the purpose and use of it.

Gradually it had come to her that Paul's way was her way also. She, too, would try to pay back the debt which the family owed to those who had toiled for them. She would try to make their lives happier and brighter.

She was a rich woman. She had more money than she could spend on herself if she lived a hundred years.

Some of Paul's words—which he had spoken on the day of the anniversary—had

rung in her ears. She had dreamed of them, and they had haunted her in the day as well as in the night. And she knew they were true.

Her money as well as his was forfeit to those poor people who had been poisoned and withered and maimed in the building of the family fortune, who had sold their bodies and souls to William Whiteleaf & Sons for less than a living wage.

"Paul, since you spoke those words I have been praying that I might have the courage to follow you and share your work. My prayers have been answered, and now I have the courage!"

"You?" said Paul. "You, my pretty lady-bird?"

He was tremendously moved. All his nature was stirred by his sister's desire for self-sacrifice. But at the sight of her fragile beauty and exquisite daintiness he revolted from the thought, and was passionate in his protest.

"No, no, Madge! It's impossible! You weren't cut out for slum-work, for a life of hardship and squalid toil."

"God made you to live in beautiful surroundings, to be a flower in the garden of life. You are the type of all that womanhood should be, and you must be kept unspoiled, my dear, by the roughness of the world!"

Margaret Whiteleaf took her brother's hands and clasped them tightly.

"I shall be angry with you if you speak like that. You make me out a kind of dolly creature, to be stuck in a glass-case and looked at as though I were a bit of Dresden china or a milliner's wax model."

"Why does it strike you as being grotesque and hideous that I should do as you have done? God may have the same purpose with my heart as with yours, Paul!"

She released his hands and cried out with a hint of trouble in her voice:

"Surely He has some purpose with me! Why should I be kept a prisoner of frivolity, without work to do, or any kind of interest or duty?"

"These hands were made to work, Paul. See, they are strong hands! And this heart of mine is made to love, Paul, with a bigger love than I can give to pretty, empty-

headed girls and simpering young men. I want to help in this big, splendid work of yours among the people of poverty."

Paul shook his head, and then sprang from his chair and paced up and down the bare floor of his little room.

"My dear kid! You say you have no duty in life. But surely you have a duty to the pater and mater—a daughter's duty.

"And as for love—what would they do without that loving heart of yours, Madge? I hit them hard enough, God knows, when I went away. But they have other sons.

"If you were to leave them, Madge, it would be the knock-out blow. It would be too cruel!"

Margaret linked her hands through one of his arms and stopped his feverish pacing to and fro.

"You are arguing against yourself, Paul, and against your conscience. You know that when one is called to a big work all the ties of family must not hold one back. What did our Lord say, 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.' 'And he that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me.'"

"But your cross is at home," said Paul—"by the mater's side. Oh, I know it is a narrow way of life, that even the governor's fine house is not large enough for that heart of yours, Madge, but sometimes the biggest duty is enclosed in the smallest patch of ground, as it is found by the peasants who hoe and sow and reap in a tiny plot, and do greater work for God than the proprietor of ten thousand acres!"

"Then why did you come into this great field?" asked Madge, with a break in her voice. "Why didn't you stay at home, content with holding mother's skeins of silk and listening to father's stories of his early days? But it is no use arguing, Paul. You said, only a little while ago, that arguments were futile when a person's mind was made up. I have made up my mind, and I have the doggedness of the Whiteleaves. I shall join you here as soon as I can find an empty room."

Paul was alarmed by the determination of his sister's voice, by the resolute line of her mouth.

"Madge!" he cried, "you mustn't! In a little while—in a few weeks, at the most—I shall come face to face with the governor when he sends for the strike committee to come to terms.

"I sha'n't have the pluck to look squarely at him if I have robbed him of his daughter. The thought of the mater's tears will turn my blood to water!"

"Mother will spare me," said Madge. "I know she would be happier if I were by your side, looking after your health and making things less hard and cheerless for you."

He pleaded with her to wait, at least to wait. If she would only wait until the strike were ended he might send for her. He had big plans in which she might help.

They lay beyond the slums in the open country. He vowed to her that if she would be patient and stay at home until he had won his victory on behalf of the sweated laborers, he would call to her, and ask her to share his work and help forward his ideas. But nothing would prevail on him to let her come to Misery Mansions.

"You don't know the beastliness of it all, Madge, the lack of common decency, the stench and squalor and misery, before which even the spirit of a strong man faints and sickens!"

With that pledge she had to be content, and was happier when he had given a solemn promise to fulfil it before a year had passed.

When Jem Brent came back he was astounded to see the brother and sister sitting opposite to each other at a picnic meal. They were laughing like a schoolboy and girl, and it was a strange thing to see Paul in his shoddy suit, with the red scarf round his neck, spreading bread and butter for a young lady whose elegance and beauty made the poverty of the room seem more threadbare and miserable, though her light laughter filled it with music.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Jem very meekly, apologizing for his abrupt intrusion.

"Why, it's James!" cried Madge, who had forgotten the going-away of her father's footman.

"I should think it is James!" said Paul,

hauling the man into the room, when he was about to retire hurriedly and bashfully. "To say nothing of its being Jem, the handiest man that ever made order out of chaos, the master bug-hunter, the carpenter without fear of rivals, the cook who makes delectable dishes in a frying-pan over an oil-stove, the champion organizer of People's Eating Houses, and the best comrade that ever stood by a man in time of trouble.

"He has nursed me in sickness and in health, tended me as though I were a newborn babe, and taught me a thousand things of wisdom and truth. Jim, you ruffian, sit down to table and ply in, because you have been feeding the hungry multitude and have forgotten your own starvation."

"If you please, sir," said Jem, very quietly but doggedly. "I'll get a bite of something in the next room."

He moved quickly to the other door, but Paul grabbed him by the arm again.

"You'll do no such thing. Margaret will be more than offended if you deny her the company of her brother's friend."

Jem's eyes looked pleadingly at Margaret.

"If you please, miss, I'm not used to eating in the company of ladies. If you'll speak to Mr. Paul and ask him to excuse me—"

But Margaret would not let him off.

"It's a picnic party, James, and it's not often I have such happiness. You don't mean to spoil it?"

So Jem Brent sat at the same table with those whom he desired to serve, but who, to his embarrassment, insisted upon serving him, because his need was greater than theirs.

But in a little while the simplicity of the girl and the genial good temper of his master and comrade put him at his ease again, so that he was astonished to find himself describing some of the adventures he had had with Paul in Misery Mansions, as though he had never bowed to Margaret Whiteleaf in the hall of the great house on the other side of the river, as though there were a great gulf between his humanity and hers.

Her smiles, her laughing eyes, her thanks for his good care of her brother, made a bridge across that gulf, so that in this room on the fifth floor of Trump's Buildings they

seemed like children in one of life's nurseries.

Paul walked back arm in arm with Madge to the south side of the bridge, and then put her into a cab.

But before she went away he clasped her tight again, and kissed her cheek, and could hardly bear to let her go.

"It has been splendid to see you again. Like a draft of water to a traveler in the desert."

"Don't forget your promise," said Madge. "I shall keep you to your word—in less than a year."

Then she put her hand in her muff, and gave a little cry, before pulling out two letters and thrusting them out of the cab.

"One is from Chris, and the other from Lydia Faversham. I had almost forgotten."

Paul took the letters, and kissed her hand.

"Good-by, my dear. I am thankful for your visit."

He watched the cab as it went across the bridge, until it was swallowed up into the darkness, and listened to the tinkle of its bell until it could no longer be heard above the murmur of traffic.

Margaret had gone back again to the great house, and Paul felt very much alone at this second parting. In his clumsy boots he tramped back to Misery Mansions, and read the two letters under the gas-jet.

Out of the letter from Chris a check fluttered and fell to the floor. He did not stoop to pick it up until he had read his brother's words. They brought a smile to his lips.

DEAR OLD MAN:

You're playing a rum game, but a sporting one. Good luck to you, anyhow. I enclose a small contribution toward the strike funds, but for the Lord's sake keep it dark from the governor, and from the self-righteous Matthew, who is like a bear with a sore head ever since you have become a labor agitator.

Always your affectionate pal,

CHRISTOPHER.

Then Paul stooped down and picked up the piece of pink paper. It was a check for one thousand pounds.

The other letter took him longer to read. It was from Lydia Faversham, and it had

the fragrance of that perfume which had thrilled him once when he stooped over her as she sat in the box at the theater.

The faint scent of it now tricked his senses again in a subtle way, and was a spell which brought into his mind's vision the beauty of that girl who more than once had seemed to him more desirable than anything in life, except truth and honor, and a man's work. She wrote:

DEAR MR. WHITELEAF:

I have been reading all about your romantic doings in the slums, and although it seems to me a terrible waste of your talents and opportunities—surely you could do bigger things with all your money and all your imagination—I find a queer pleasure in thinking of you and trying to realize your life in the underworld. I would like to see you in your working clothes. That grave face of yours must look odd above a red scarf! I would like to come across the river and peep in upon you as you sit in that den of yours, high up in Trump's Buildings. How awful that sounds! There is something horribly expressive of dirt and devilry in that name of your new dwelling-place. I haven't the pluck to make the expedition, because I shudder at the sight of dirt and misery. But I wish that now and again you would come back to your real place in the world, and tell us of your adventures, and of all those savages whom you are trying to tame, and of all your plans for their regeneration. I should tease you, and I should argue with you, and I should try to tempt you to stay with the nice people, and give up your fantastic dreams of a new and impossible world, where those who are dirty shall be made clean, and those who are down shall be put up. Because you know, when you face realities, that those dreams will never come true! But, all the same, at the end of the teasing, I should praise you for your courage and your knight-errantry, and I should love to exhibit you in my drawing-room as the new St. Paul, less ferocious and better looking, I am sure, than his prototype, or whatever the funny old word is! Won't you be tempted back, even for a little while, even if I sign myself,

Your sincere admirer,

LYDIA FAVERSHAM.

P. S.—I believe in caste, but as the other St. Paul once remarked in a candid moment: "He that hath not charity becomes as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal"—or words to that effect. Therefore, as I have no desire to be brazen, I enclose a check for £10, which you may use, if you like, to feed some of your hungry ones. It is as much as I can afford, having just been frightened by my milliner's bill.

Paul read this letter with a strange, flickering smile about his lips, and for a long time he sat with his elbows on the

table, not seeing the words, but the laughing face and the tempting eyes of Lydia Faversham on the fragrant note-paper.

There was no need to go back to come under the spell of her temptation. This letter tempted him, calling him with a siren voice to the other side of the river.

Jem Brent had gone to bed, calling out good night from the other room before Paul stirred and raised his head from the letter. He went over to the window and stared out into the gloomy courtyard of Misery Mansions.

Here and there through drawn curtains there was a glimmer of light where men and women remained awake in cheerless little rooms, more airy now that they had pawned most of their "sticks," and all but their working-clothes. The babies were wailing again with that thin, fretful chorus of the night; on the flat roof tomcats were shrieking like witches on their black sabbath; from the other side of the yard came the wailing of a woman, ill or drunk or beaten, and into Paul's open window came the foul miasma of all the night odors like the living spirit of uncleanness which prowled out of the refuse heaps and the overcrowded tenements and the dark alleys in which dirt and despair made a breeding ground of vice.

The scent of Lydia Faversham's letter, this smell of the slums, seemed to symbolize in a mystical way all the contrast between the life of luxury which Paul had once known and of sacrifice which he had adopted as his own. But it was only for a moment that the sacrifice seemed too hard. He raised his head and smiled to himself as he undressed in the darkness.

"I'm not going to turn back now," he said. "I'm going straight on, however hard the way may be. Thank God, I'm pretty tough."

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND SON.

THE lockout on the south side of the river had lasted sixteen weeks before the strike committee received a formal letter from the directors of William White-

leaf & Sons, suggesting a conference for the purpose of discussing terms of settlement. It was signed Matthew Whiteleaf, managing director.

Reading it in the committee-rooms—they were the future reading-rooms of the People's Eating House—Paul, whose face was watched eagerly by Jake Parfitt, Alf Staggers, Simon Garth, Will Tunks, Andrew Brant, 'Arry Sloan, Tony James, and Steenie Smith, his fellow committeemen, did not show by the flicker of an eyelid, or the quiver of his lips, that this formal note stirred him with a great wave of hopefulness and triumph.

It was the first sign of surrender. The first acknowledgment at least that William Whiteleaf & Sons recognized the strike committee's authority and power to formulate terms.

And it was time. Paul was beginning to feel the tremendous strain of this fight against a silent and well-entrenched foe—the capital and management of his father's business.

In spite of his own money, and of many contributions from unexpected sources, there was a vast drain upon the funds which had been set aside for the strikers and their families. Even then all the work of the vigilance committee, all the ceaseless endeavor of Paul himself, all the organizing genius of Jem Brent, in charge of the commissariat at the People's Eating House, had not prevented a great deal of suffering and sickness.

Many of the home workers, too proud, or too ignorant, or too weak to get their names put on the hunger lists, starved in silence. Owing, perhaps, to the necessity of staying at home in small, evil-smelling, airless rooms, now that the factories were closed, an epidemic amounting to something like a plague, crept through the tenements and workmen's dwellings, and breathed upon the faces of degenerate men and weakened women, so that they sickened and died.

But it was the children who fell in greatest numbers before this destroyer, and many tiny coffins followed the little Brown Mouse to his resting-place in the great cemetery. The stifling heat in which even

strong men drooped, increased the statistics of mortality, and drew out the foulest odors from the gutters and rubbish-heaps and rotten drains.

It was, perhaps, no more than a coincidence that this pestilence should have made its way into the slums during the strike, yet it seemed to be a result of it, and it tempted men and women to cowardice, and broke their spirit. Only the confidence of Paul in victory, his burning words, his material support, kept the mass of workers patient in their idleness, and unwavering in their loyalty.

On the material side he had been helped marvelously, so that as yet the bulk of his own fortune, which he desired to save for future plans, was not in jeopardy. The revolt of sweated labor had aroused the sympathy of men and women all over the country, who had no friendly feelings toward the strongly organized trades in other fields of labor.

It had annihilated the ordinary political prejudices, and owing to the newspaper articles describing the awful conditions of toil in the riverside slum, the incredibly small wages paid for box-making, bag-making, and other branches of the Whiteleaf industries, the public conscience was shocked out of its usual complacency.

Subscriptions flowed in from men of wealth and ladies of quality. A duchess organized a relief committee. A Tory peer started a fund in a daily newspaper.

The trade unions voted a heavy subsidy out of their own funds for the support of the sweated workers during the strike, and a Liberal Member of Parliament dragged forth an ancient bill to prevent sweating, and put new life into it by a debate urging the government to establish a minimum living wage.

Yet with all this help, Paul Whiteleaf as the strike leader, knew that the spirit of the workers was wearing down, and that surrender must soon come on one side or the other. It was therefore with immense and inexpressible relief that he received the invitation for direct negotiations, which suggested the beginning of the end.

"They're climbin' down," said Jake Parfitt, expressing the feelings of his mates.

"We've put the strangle-grip on to 'em, Mr. Paul!"

Paul uttered a word of caution. As the leader he must not encourage hopes that might prove false.

"We've got to keep a stiff upper lip till it's time for the shouting," he said. "These negotiations may last a long time. I know Mr. Matthew Whiteleaf."

"'E's a blighted—"

Alf Stagers banged his withered hand on the table, and then was silent, remembering that the blighted man was the blood-brother of this young leader at the end of the table.

"He's hard," said Paul. "Let's call him that, without thinking of bad names. But we must be hard, too. It's the quality of courage, whatever side a man's on."

It was to Jem Brent that Paul allowed himself more enthusiasm and hopefulness.

"It looks as though my brother were beginning to feel the pinch. What do you think about it, Jem?"

Jem thought a lot before speaking. It was a habit of his. Then he uttered a few words of common sense.

"It may be just a trick to find out where we stand, and the quality of our spirit. If you show too much eagerness for a settlement, sir, Mr. Matthew will know we're getting tired. Then he'll close up the negotiations, and wait till we hoist the white flag.

"But if you show him you don't care a damn — if you'll pardon the word — how soon or how long it is before he yields to your demands, he'll climb down a peg or two. The first meeting has got to be a game of bluff on both sides, and I'd give my left ear to be in the council-chamber."

Paul was thoughtful. He would have given more than his left ear to avoid the conflict which was to take place.

"It won't be pleasant, Jem. My brother and I meet for the first time as enemies. And we were born of the same mother, who weeps at the civil war in the family. It's an unnatural business, and I shall need all my pluck."

"It's never failed you yet," said Jem. "You have got plenty to spare, sir."

"I feel drained of it," said Paul. "At

this moment I'm a quaking coward, with my soul in my hobnailed boots."

He called himself a quaking coward when three days later he went with the strike committee to the head offices of William Whiteleaf & Sons, and clumped up the wooden stairs to the room where he had first learned the secrets of the business.

Yet his face was calm in its strength, his gray eyes keen and quiet, his voice stern and resolute, when he told one of the clerks to announce the arrival of the committee to the managing director.

It was only the beating of his pulse which told him that his heart was thumping like a piston-rod, and only the weakness of his knees which accused him of cowardice.

Then the door into the inner room was opened, and Paul pulled his soul up from his hobnailed boots and was master of himself as he entered with his men and came face to face with those whom he had challenged.

For a second he was only conscious of his brother Matthew's face, hard as though carved out of granite. He sat at his desk, just as he had been sitting when Paul had first come to the office after his journey abroad, and with his finger-nails he was playing the same tattoo on the mahogany slab.

But at his right hand sat the founder of the business, Paul's father, with his chin sunk between the ears of his collar, and with stern, impenetrable eyes which only flickered for a moment over his son's face, and then, as though unrecognizing of his own flesh and blood, stared at the other men who were grouped behind their leader.

The managers of the various trades grouped under the general business of the firm, sat in a semicircle round the desk, silent and expressionless. Not one of them revealed his consciousness that here was the beginning of an extraordinary drama in which a son was against his father, brother against brother, the heir of a fortune against the methods which had built it up.

Matthew was the first to speak, and his voice was metallic, and as hard as the ring of steel.

"Good morning. Find seats for yourselves."

"Good morning," said Paul, with a cheerfulness which contrasted with the gloom on the faces of the managers. "My lads, there are six of us here, and five chairs. I will stand."

"No you won't!" said William Whiteleaf, with a sudden sign of irritable temper. "A man who stands when his opponents are seated has an advantage over 'em. We're taking no risks."

The old man touched an electric-bell, and when a clerk appeared said, "Bring another chair."

"Just as you like, sir," said Paul.

A flicker of a smile passed over his lips as he glanced at his father. He was glad the old gentleman had not lost his mastery of manner. When the chair was brought, Paul placed it directly opposite Matthew, and sat in the center of his supporters.

"Well, we may as well begin the palaver," he said. "I haven't got too much time to spare."

These words brought a flush of anger to Matthew's face. His lips moved, as though he were about to make some savage retort, but then they thinned into a hard line, and he was silent. William Whiteleaf grunted in his throat, and fumbled nervously at his gold watch-chain. Paul's easy self-confidence seemed to enrage him.

"Perhaps you had better open the proceedings, sir," said Matthew, turning slightly to his father. "And I may as well explain to these—gentlemen"—he hesitated over the word and then pronounced it with sarcastic emphasis—"that although I am managing director, you, as the founder of the firm, are taking up your old command to-day. Anything you say will be accepted by the board of management."

"Naturally," said Paul. "My friends and I thoroughly understand that."

"Oh, you do, do you?" said William Whiteleaf. "Do those friends of yours also understand that you are one of my sons, and that you are in the position here of a traitor, who has turned against his own family and challenged the authority of the man to whom he owes his life, and his education, and—and everything he has in the world?"

He spoke with a rising storm of rage, as

though all the barriers of his self-restraint were breaking down by a violent assault upon his emotion.

"My friends know that I am your son, sir," answered Paul very quietly. "I have explained to them the reasons why I am acting on their behalf against the methods and management of your business. The reasons seem good to them."

Matthew's hand touched his father's sleeve, to remind him perhaps of some pledge to be calm. It had the effect of steadying the old man, though his face was flushed, and there was a fierce light in his eyes.

"We won't argue the point," he said. "The Lord God will be the judge between us—hereafter."

"I agree to that, sir," said Paul very gently and without sarcasm.

William Whiteleaf glowered at his son, and then turned to the other men, as though desiring to ignore their leader.

"You are all rebels," he said, "and if there were a strong law in the land it would make you pay, and heavily, too—for your insolence and insubordination."

"But the law has gone soft, like the younger generation. It don't uphold the old creed of duty and obedience. It's weighted against capital, and encourages labor in its damned laziness and greed."

"You have been on strike now for sixteen weeks. For four months my yards have been silent, my industries paralyzed, my trade ruined."

"I suppose you're proud of yourselves, eh? A fine and noble work! To ruin a great trade built up by my hard work, by my brain and sweat of brow, by my incessant labors—oh, a grand achievement! It's the new gospel, I expect, which is going to create a new heaven and a new earth."

"But what's the net result of it, so far? You've done some pretty considerable damage to me. I'll admit that. But what have you gained for yourselves?"

"You've lost sixteen weeks' wages. Are you growing fat on your loss? You've started an epidemic which is sweeping your children into the graveyards. Does that make you more cheerful?"

"You have robbed me of the power to

carry out thousands of orders which have now gone to foreign firms and will never come back again. But what benefit are you going to get out of that? Less business means less work, and less work less wages.

"You've been cutting your own noses off, my lads, making the future conditions of your labor worse instead of better. Because, in spite of your precious new gospel, the laws of life will go on just the same, and one of these laws is that if a man don't work, neither shall he eat.

"Ain't that common sense? Put it to yourselves, and give me the answer."

Jake Parfitt looked around for a spittoon, and, failing to see one, spat on the floor, with an expression of sullen scorn. Simon Garth, whose hand had been cut off in the timber sheds, owing to a moment's carelessness which had deprived him of compensation, cleared his throat huskily and seemed as though about to answer the question with a burst of eloquence, but then thought better of it, and shuffled his feet uneasily.

Alf Staggars, whose hand had been withered by blood poisoning in the Whiteleaf tile-works, flopped his twisted limb convulsively over his heart, and licked his lips as though they were parched.

Paul waited for a few moments, in case any of his men cared to take up the challenge, but they all looked to him as the man of words.

Then he spoke.

"We have put these things to ourselves, sir, and we have our answer ready. You have quoted an old law, 'If a man won't work, neither shall he eat.' That is a good law, and we abide by it.

"But there is another law involved in it: 'If a man does work, by God's justice he shall eat.' That is what has been forgotten in the management of the Whiteleaf works.

"During all the years in which the business has been growing, increasing its trade and its profits so that a colossal fortune has been made, thousands of men and women have been working, not only with ordinary industry, but as poor slaves, by day and night. They have worked their fingers to the bone. They have worked themselves blind.

"They have worn out their bodies, and many of them have worn out their spirit also. But though they have worked like this, they have not been able to eat. They have just been able to starve.

"These people have never had enough to eat. They have put up with half rations. Their children have been underfed, ill-nourished, even at their mother's breasts.

"And, apart from food, have they eaten of the fruits of life, such as should be included in the laborer's hire? Have they worked in decent homes? Have they been well clothed? Have they had any leisure or pleasure? Have they been able to indulge in any of the comforts of a civilized world?

"You know they have had none of these things. You know the misery and squalor of their homes, the wretchedness of their conditions. The wage-lists were so devised that women are almost forced into immorality to keep themselves alive. They are the wages of slaves, and not of free men or women.

"Yet even those old wage-lists were altered, and the new notices posted up on the factory gates sixteen weeks ago, meant a deeper misery, a worse slavery, for ten thousand human beings, utterly intolerable.

"It is for that reason that the business of William Whiteleaf & Sons has been brought to a standstill, not because we wish to ruin its industries, but because there is a limit to human endurance and submission, where even death is to be preferred to a living damnation. Here is your answer, sir."

From Paul's men came an "'Ear, 'ear!" spoken in a burst of low applause. On the other side of the room there was silence, but some of the managers shifted in their chairs uneasily, as though their conscience had been twinged by these straight words from the son of their old master.

"Fool's talk!" snapped out William Whiteleaf.

"Slavering, sentimental tosh!" said Matthew.

"It's Gord's truth!" said Alf Staggars, "an' yer know it!"

"Aye," said Simon Garth, with a glance at the stump of his wrist. "It's written on our bodies and brains. But until Mr. Paul came—"

"You're right," said old William Whiteleaf. "Until that son of mine came among you as a damned agitator, with his Yankee ideals, and political-economic nonsense—God knows where he got it from—you hadn't a thought of rebelling against your conditions of work."

"He's been stirring you up, putting his sentimental muck into your minds, calling on you to play this suicidal game of bluff."

"For bluff it is. You've got to take the wages or go without the work. They're regulated by the labor market, by the cost of raw material, by the expenses of working this class of business."

"It's all a question of arithmetic, and if you weren't such blamed asses, you'd know that half a loaf is better than no bread."

"We mean to 'ave a loaf and a 'alf," said Alf Staggers, "and by Gord we will. It's our right."

"Rights!" echoed William Whiteleaf. "Rights! The only right that I recognize is the power of the strong hand."

"I've always been master, not a hard one neither, looking at all I've paid away to labor, and I'm master yet. If you speak me civil, and ask for a bit more, that's another question."

Matthew raised his hand, as though to silence his father, and leaning forward, looked steadily at Paul.

"We haven't met here to discuss philosophy or religion, or to wrangle over the rights of man. I suppose each side has a fixed point of view. What are your demands?"

"They're quite simple," said Paul. "On behalf of all the work-people we demand a fair scale of wages according to the class of work, and a minimum living wage."

"Here is the wage-list as drawn up by the committee. You can take it or leave it. It's not open to compromise."

He handed over a sheet on which was drawn up a rate for all classes of work, and Matthew scanned it through in a leisurely way, making a few notes on a slip of paper before passing it to his father.

The old man put on a pair of gold pincenez with a shaky hand, and the paper trembled violently as he read the items.

"There was a tense silence in the room

until the old man burst out into a violent and explosive sentence.

"It's stark, staring, raving madness!"

"I agree!" said Matthew.

Paul raised his eyebrows with an air of mild surprise.

"It seems very reasonable to me. What's wrong with it?"

"Wrong with it?" said the old man. "It's worse than wrong. It's—it's criminal."

"Such wages have never been paid on this side of the river. They're twice as much as the old rates. They're skilled labor wages."

"And it's skilled labor which has to be paid for," said Paul. "That's another injustice which has to be scotched. For twenty-five years the work-people in this district have been classed and paid as unskilled laborers."

"It's a lie! Bring over the casual laborers from other parts. Put them to making paper-bags, cardboard boxes, children's toys, sacks, brushes, glazed tiles, any kind of work done in your yards, and sheds, and workmen's tenements. A fine botch they will make of it!"

"Why, they would waste half the material, and take four times as long over each article. The people here have been born to bag-making and box-making and toy-making and all the rest of it. Their eyes and hands have been trained to it from childhood. I have watched them at work, and they have an uncanny skill and an incredible rapidity."

"This strike would have been smashed weeks ago if you had been able to import unskilled workers. Father, you know that I am speaking the truth! In your heart you must acknowledge the justice of what I say."

It was the first time during the meeting that he had called William Whiteleaf "father," and the old man blinked his eyes and puffed out his lips, as though the word had hurt him.

But it was Matthew who answered.

"Damn your arguments!" he said. "Let's come down to facts. These wage-lists are preposterous, and as managing director of this firm I refuse to accept them."

"My father and I are willing to meet the

men and women part of the way; that is to say, by canceling the lists that were posted up sixteen weeks ago, and reverting to the old condition of things. That is as far as we go, and it is for the sake of the deluded strikers who have been led astray by false counsels. Let me have your decision within twenty-four hours."

Paul looked at his men, and then turned round again after a glance at their grim faces. He had no fear of being outvoted. They were strong in their support.

"You can have our decision now. There will be no reverting to the old conditions of sweated labor. When the people come back to work for you it will be on a new plane, as earners of a living wage.

"You have our lists. We leave them with you. When you are ready to accept them, we shall be glad to hear from you—in three weeks, six months, or a year.

"Obviously we are wasting time now. We will therefore say good morning."

He rose from his chair, and at the same time his five committeemen stood up, so that there was a noise of chair-legs scraping on bare boards.

Paul turned to the door, and there was nothing in his face to show the desperate anxiety he had to stay in this room until he had gained the victory, nothing to reveal the prayer on his lips that his father and Matthew might yield before he went out into the sun-baked streets where pestilence was on the prowl and where the spirits of the people were strained to breaking-point.

Before he had touched the door-handle his father spoke.

"You're obstinate devils, all of you. But don't be in such a hurry. It's open to negotiation, ain't it?"

"We might go a step further, Matthew, to save all this miserable idleness, eh? Now what do you say?"

Paul thanked God in his heart. The old man was climbing down. There was a break in his voice.

He could not hide his desperate anxiety. He had his old white head close to Matthew's oiled hair, and was whispering to him.

Paul turned at the door, and all his men faced round again.

"We're in no hurry, sir, if you want time to meet our demands. A few weeks more or less won't hurt us much."

Matthew spoke in his hard, level tones.

"My father suggests that we meet you half-way. It is against my own wishes, but I bow to his word."

"Half-way is still a long way off," said Paul. "All the way is our ultimatum."

"Ultimatum!" shouted William Whiteleaf. "Ultimatum be damned! Have you taken leave of your senses, man?"

"No," said Paul, "but perhaps I had better take leave of this meeting. I will await your answer at the committee-rooms."

Before he turned to the door again he saw a dumb look of appeal in his father's eyes. The old man seemed to be speaking to him across Matthew's head. It was a plea for mercy.

"I would like to say this," said Paul. "It is only honest and fair of me to say it now. If you accept the demands on that slip of paper the men and women will return loyally to work and will try to make up for lost time.

"But it will be no binding pledge that they won't try to better their conditions in the future or elsewhere. As far as I am concerned I sha'n't be satisfied to let them remain in the squalor of these foul, overcrowded houses, whatever their wages.

"I have other plans, and in the near future I hope to take away with me to another place many of your best workers, many of those whom you call unskilled, in order to show that the same work may be done in a better way, and in conditions of health and happiness, and with a fair share of profit for each pair of hands."

These words were heard in silence, and even Paul's own men were surprised, and did not understand the drift of them. For the first time among the directors and managers fear was visible in their eyes, as though some hidden menace lurked in that speech by a young man who had a way of making his words come true.

"Is that another threat?" asked William Whiteleaf.

There was a tremor in his voice, and his hands were shaky as he fumbled at the string of his pince-nez.

"Or another dream?" asked Matthew scathingly.

"It is one of my plans," said Paul. "I am going to set up in business on my own, and to compete with you from another part of the country."

Silence settled upon the room again. Then the founder of the firm cried out in a queer, broken voice:

"Paul, you've got the devil in you!"

"I have got something of your own spirit, sir."

This quiet answer seemed to hit the old man in the chest.

He sat back in his chair, and stared at Paul with extraordinary ferocity, which was presently belied by a grim chuckle.

"I'll not deny there's something in what you say—if by spirit you mean demnition obstinacy. And if it comes to competition, my lad, I don't mind telling you I'll smash you at that game.

"Try it, that's all I ask. And if you can make it pay on fancy wages, I'll own myself beaten, fair and square."

"Is that a bargain?" asked Paul, quickly and eagerly.

"Aye. I'll make it so. But when you've failed to the wide world, don't come whining round my back door, because I'll put the dogs on to you."

Paul laughed cheerfully.

"I shall always keep a little rag of pride, father."

"Enough for the dogs to bite," said the old man.

This duel between the father and son was heard in amazed silence by both parties in the room, but it was interrupted by Matthew, who tapped on the table angrily and impatiently.

"We're here for business," he said, "and it's time it was settled. I propose that the strike committee retires into the next room, so that we can deliberate privately."

"I second that," said one of the managers.

"It's a sound idea, lad," said the old man.

Paul beckoned to his men, and led them into the other room. They whispered their anxiety and their hopes to him. They were eager to know his view of the situation.

"Give us a lead, Mr. Paul," said Jake Parfitt. "I'm that nervous I feel tempted to go on the booze again. Strike me down dead if I don't!"

"I'll strike you down dead if you do!" said Paul.

"Lord A'mighty!" said Alf Stagers. "if I was a religious bloke, I'd say a prayer or two. Swelp me, I would!"

Simon Garth's wild eyes reproached the man with the withered hand.

"It ain't a time to be blasphemious, mate. The lives of unborn nippers 'ang on the balance of this bleedin' meetin'. Gord blimey, they does! So don't you go easin' them swear words, Alf."

Paul had an unnatural craving for something to smoke, to steady his nerves, which were torn on the sharp edge of anxiety. After half an hour had passed he felt like a limp rag, which had been washed and mangled.

After an hour had passed he had to walk up and down the room with clenched hands to keep control of himself. It was only the presence of his fellow committeemen which put a check upon his lips, so that he choked back the desire to cry out to relieve the awful tension.

What was happening inside that room? He could hear the murmur of voices rising and falling, his father's voice and his brother's voice dominating the others.

They were quarreling sharply. There was a savage note in Matthew's metallic barytone. The old man seemed to go from sternness to pleading.

He was trying to argue Matthew into surrender. Paul could guess that. He was almost certain of it. While the committee was in the room the old man had spoken more harshly than he really felt.

While Paul had been speaking of the misery of the work-people the old man had looked pained and ashamed, though he had stormed and raged.

At last the tension snapped. The inner door was opened, and one of the branch managers appeared.

"If you'll kindly come in—" he said.

"For a decision, or for further argument?" asked Paul.

"For a decision."

Paul allowed his men to go first. But when he had taken his place again, it was to him that Matthew turned.

The elder brother was very pale, but he spoke in the same hard, unyielding voice. It was not a long speech, but it contained a new charter for the sweated laborer.

"By my father's wish," he said, "and against my own judgment, but overruled by the various managers of departments, I accept the revised list of wages as presented to me this morning.

"You will find my formal note of acceptance, duly signed as the managing director of this firm. I have nothing more to say."

"There is nothing more to be said," answered Paul, very quietly. "On behalf of all the working men and women, I thank you."

From the men behind him there came a hoarse, ringing cheer, and Jake Parfitt relieved his emotion by spitting in Matthew's waste-paper basket.

"But I have something more to say," said William Whiteleaf, "and it is this: From boyhood, and through my young manhood to old age, I devoted myself to this great business, and had a hard struggle to bring it to success.

"It is a hard blow to me that it is one of my own sons who has stood here, my accuser and enemy, demanding outrageous terms, like a highwayman in a black mask with a bludgeon in his hand. I've given into him this time, and it's a bitter pill.

"But I say here and now that I'll see him strangle himself before I budge again to any of his threats of revolutionary measures. As for competing against this business, why, I give him leave to try. It is a free country, and any scatter-brain has a right to make a fool of himself.

"If he can teach me anything in this business I'll be glad to know it. Devilish glad."

The old man had begun his speech solemnly, but he advanced blustering and fuming and stuttering to a lame ending. Even then, in his father's rage, Paul saw signs of an emotion not produced by hatred or passion.

"I can teach you something worth knowing, sir. It's on this bit of paper. I've

been making a few experiments in the back sink of my room in Trump's Buildings.

"It's the formula of a leadless glaze. It's better than the Whiteleaf glaze, and it will save the health and bodies of men. I make you a present of it."

"What's this? What's this?" cried the old man. He took the paper, and tore it in half savagely, but Paul noticed that after that demonstration of anger at what he seemed to regard as another insult, he folded up the two halves and put them quickly into his breast pocket.

"There's nothing more to wait for," said Matthew grimly. "The strike is at an end."

"Thank God," said Paul, "for all our sakes. Come on, boys."

The strike committee shuffled out of the room, hardly able to contain the immensity of their satisfaction. Paul was the last to leave, and before he had passed through the door his father clutched him by the arm, and whispered to him:

"Paul, you're a stubborn rascal! It's the first time I've been beaten. Confound you, sir!"

Paul held out his hand to the old man and said:

"Father, it's been a straight fight. Can't we bury the hatchet now?"

For a moment William Whiteleaf seemed inclined to grip his hand, but seeing that Matthew's eyes were upon him, he became very red in the face, and turned sharply away.

"I'll never forgive you," he said. "Never! As long as I live. Get out of my room, sir!"

Paul went out smiling. He had seen through his father's mask. Beneath all that mock fury there was a relenting spirit. His bark was more ferocious than his bite.

Out in the streets to which Alf Stagers had rushed first, the news of victory was already known. The crowd which had gathered in the roadways, from Whiteleaf's yards to Trump's Buildings, cheered with frantic enthusiasm, and Paul was borne shoulder high through a mob frenzied with enthusiasm.

All their suffering, all the agony of this long idleness, all the little coffins which had been taken to the cemetery, were forgotten

in that hour of triumph which had given a living wage to those who had been born to the deadly serfdom of sweated labor.

Women were weeping and laughing and screeching in a wild hysteria. They plucked at him as he sat on the shoulders of Jake Parlitt and Simon Garth. They tried to touch him as he passed, as though virtue were in him. They praised God with obscene oaths which were really prayers. They lifted grimy children to see the man who had saved them.

In the courtyard of Misery Mansions he had to make a speech to a great multitude who thronged into that gloomy space, and when he praised the people for their courage and bade them look forward with hope to a better and brighter future, tears trickled down the cheeks of men who had not often wept because of gladness.

Then at last Paul was able to steal away to his own room, though the courtyard still resounded with the clamor of that cheering crowd. Out of the darkness of the passage a woman's form came swiftly forward, and his hand was seized and kissed by a girl whose face was wet with tears.

It was Loo Larkin, once the wildest spirit in the mansions, but tamed now by the miracle that had changed her life—the miracle of the People's Eating House, where she was the head-waitress, and of this young man whom once she desired as a lover, but now worshiped with a strange reverence.

"It's all owin' to you, Mr. Paul," she said. "The wimmen ought to go down on their bended knees to you."

"I've done little," said Paul. "Without the pluck of the women I could have done nothing. It was the women who put courage into the hearts of their men."

Up-stairs Jem Brent was waiting in the doorway. He was smiling with a steady, shining light in his eyes. He had heard the great news out in the streets, but he had hurried home to make some tea for Paul as soon as he came back.

"Well?" said Paul, "what have you got to say about it, Jem?"

"Well done, sir."

That was all. But it was enough from this silent fellow, who thought more than he spoke, whose loyalty and service had pulled his comrade through all this time of strain and stress, who knew all that Paul had suffered, all that he had done to pay back something of the debt which was due to his father's laborers.

That "well done" from Jem Brent was better even than the shouts of the mob, for Jem knew and understood.

Yet not even Jem quite understood the reason why, after the settlement of the strike, Paul Whiteleaf wandered off alone for days in the country, coming back with a bronzed face and eyes that held a dream in them.

He seemed to be idling; he called himself "a tramp on the loose"; but his comrade guessed that he was preparing a new adventure, and a new test of courage. When the secret of those idle days was revealed, Jem Brent drew a long breath, as though he had heard good tidings.

"It's the best thing that ever was!" he said.

"It's the way of escape," said Paul. "The best way out of Misery Mansions."

It was the adventure in which Paul Whiteleaf put all his idealism, his knowledge, and his philosophy of life to a vital proof.

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.

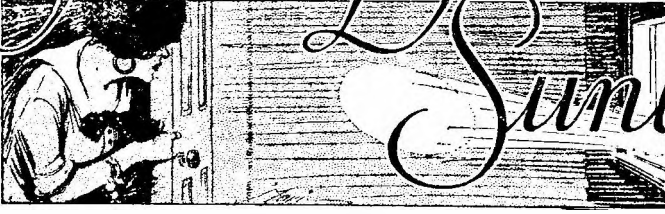


THRESHOLD

BY KATHARINE METCALF ROOF

"I PASSED you in the dark,
My eyes filled with the light."
"Blinded I saw you not,
I came in from the night."

That Dancing Sunbeam



by Knight Dundy

THE tall, slightly cadaverous man with a furtive, almost stealthy manner, slid through the door of the Crown Hotel in Pasq del Norte and blinked owlishly, to accustom his eyes to the gloom of the interior. Outside, the cloudless day permitted the pitiless June sun to shower the semitropic border city with one all-inclusive, dazzling glare. The burnished sky was like a huge blue mirror; the earth beneath a passive receiver of thermal torture.

Stealthily, yet with a certainty that showed a well-laid plan, the tall man slipped into the bar; thence, through another door, to the basement; after which, making sure he was not followed, he again ascended to an angle of the hotel lobby, hidden from view of the desk or the few loungers in the big, cretonne-covered leather chairs, and began walking up a staircase.

He reached the first floor above the office and ascended to the second. There, pausing by the elevator, he pressed the button. When the lift appeared he entered, and stood gazing into his reflection in the mirror until the tenth floor had been reached.

The mirror showed him about five feet eleven inches tall; thin of feature, spare of frame, and slightly stooping; a mustache that had once been blond draped his thin lips; his gray eyes were allowed only the merest slits between the lids, as if twin lenses in the sliding shutter of a focal-plane camera.

His face was tanned, his nose large, ag-

gressive, and ready to peel the outer skin from too much exposure to the sun; his jaw grim, and the impression one got from his face was that he was ready for some unusual, perhaps dangerous, but expected, event.

At the tenth floor he left the car and went to a door at the far end of the turn around the first corridor, where he rapped twice.

The door opened and, without greeting, the newcomer hurried in, whereupon it closed. Within, the visitor kept on through a private hall to a small but neat suite of parlor, bedroom, and bath, into which the short private hall led.

Here, without ceremony, he divested himself of his coat, mopped the perspiration from his brow, flung himself into a chair, and remarked:

"Mike, somebody's slipping us something."

The man addressed as Mike, albeit registered at the hotel as Michael Rafferty, Scranton, Pennsylvania, received the statement with the courteous deference a subordinate should exhibit to a superior.

"Try a Carrie Nation cocktail, inspector," said he in the slight pause, as he reached for a beaded pitcher. "And you'll find a palm-leaf fan at your elbow. My own mixture—equal parts of pineapple, orange, and lemon juice, well-iced, and add seltzer to taste."

"Thanks," returned Inspector William Dowling, of the customs service, tilting the glass he tendered. "Well, Mike, I guess

it's up to you, seeing as how you are one of my few dependables, to go over the river and ferret out the rats."

"What are they up to now, inspector?"

"I only wish I knew all of their tricks," gloomed the other. "I got this"—he waved a long, cylindrical object, wrapped in paper and resembling a candle—"when I put in Yen Sam's joint with Kane and Jackson day before yesterday. But I didn't get Yen Sam nor any of the others who were smoking the hop. Somebody in my own office must have tipped my mitt to that Celestial, or I'm a Yaqui papoose, instead of being an American customs officer."

"What makes you think that, inspector?"

"I don't think it—I know it," returned Dowling. "Listen, Mike! I'm coming down San Antonio Street, night before last. I smell something that hadn't ought to be smelled—not since the Boylan Act became a law. Yen Sam's place is a laundry. It's about ten fifteen or ten twenty at night. I keep right on. I go to the office and don't say a word to any one."

"I just phoned to Kane and Jackson, and we go out the west basement door about an hour later. We put in the joint. There's the layout—lamp, needle, even a pipe that's just stopped bubbling—the whole place reeking with opium smoke—you could cut it with a knife."

"But—no Yen Sam—and nobody else. Now, if some one didn't give me a tumble, why didn't I get them right in the act? It takes a lot to pry an opium fiend loose from a pipe."

"I frisked the place. No getaway that I could find. And all I got was—this."

He again indicated the paper-wrapped object which was lying on the spindle-legged desk in the corner.

"Somebody's cleaning up a ton of money with this hop—right under my nose," went on Dowling bitterly. "Of course, they could have a cave of it over in Diaz and they've only got to bring it over the river to clean up."

"Opium is worth about four hundred dollars a pound, this side of the international line. That means the gang is well organized, with plenty of money. They're

not occasional smugglers—they're regulars. They must know my men, too. That's why I wired Kansas City for you to come down."

"Well," said Rafferty. "I've been in only about two hours. Let's hope they don't know me yet."

"I saw you get off the train and didn't give you a tumble for that very reason," said the inspector. "I came in under cover, for the same reason. You've been down here before, Mike. I can't give you another lead, of any kind. That's all. I'm going down-stairs and play billiards. Good-by and good luck!"

When he had gone, Rafferty, florid, slender, sinewy, stepped over to the end of his parlor and dropped into another chair by the window, where a faint breeze filtered through the orifice. He lighted a cigar and surveyed the strip of landscape between the Crown Hotel and the republic on the south—smoking on half dreamily. The sheen of the Rio Grande lay barely a half-mile distant, forming, at this point, the boundary line.

On the side of the American city of Paso del Norte groups of squalid adobe houses ran down Bridge Street on each side, to within a hundred yards of the bank.

Beyond the river, aside from a few buildings where soldiers lounged in front of the guard-house and the customs-shed on the Mexican side, there was an interval, broken only by the rutty, winding road which led to Diaz.

From his aerie ten stories above the street Rafferty could visualize clearly the white ribbon of highway. It was the siesta hour, and the road was without a traveler for some minutes.

Then, out of the hollow into which the road dipped as it entered the Mexican city, a blotch pricked itself against the whiteness and crept, snail-like, toward the international boundary.

Rafferty rose, went to his grip, and whisked out a short but powerful pair of binoculars. He focused them on the highway and studied the approaching vehicle. It was a two-wheeled cart, drawn by a pair of oxen, accompanied by a ragamuffin native, who guided the team with a long goad,

by laying it on either side of the straining beasts.

On the whole a rather primitive vehicle, piled high with vegetables, he judged, and the peon who manipulated it patiently toward the boundary was as listless and indifferent as any peon.

The cart paused at the Mexican boundary. A perfunctory examination, and it was permitted to proceed.

Midway at the international bridge a guard mounted it, examined it with more than usual care, and waved it on. At the American end of the bridge two more customs men went through it with a speed and thoroughness that made Rafferty smile.

Behind their alertness he sensed the rigid orders of Inspector Dowling. But, as before, the cart moved on, and presently was lost in the huddle of adobe huts leading into the business section of Paso del Norte.

Rafferty's resumed reverie was broken by a knock at the door.

He slid the glass into his coat-pocket, yawned, and cried:

"Come in!"

A trim, light-colored Mexican woman entered, over her arm a bundle of towels, from her waist-line a small chain with pendant keys.

"Are you supply?" she queried, with a smile far from displeasing, as she gestured with the towels.

Rafferty nodded.

"The maid fixed me up about half an hour ago," said he.

The girl tossed her head coquettishly.

"That maid gone," she volunteered.

"No good—half naygro. I'm Chiquita."

She bared her perfect teeth in a dazzling smile as she stepped lightly over toward him.

"*Buenos dias, señorita,*" he returned.

"Well, I'm glad they sent me a pretty girl. Look after my room carefully. I'm a tidy man."

He tendered her a quarter, as she was evidently negotiating a tip. She took it with a curtsy.

"*Gracias, señor! Habla v. Español?*"

"*Pocita!*" he countered. "But, if you come often, I may learn more Spanish."

Her eyes drooped. A slight flush spread over her comely face. Like many other young Mexican women, Chiquita possessed the pulchritude of a budding flower. It is a characteristic of the race, as Rafferty well knew—as well as he knew that five or ten years hence the pretty creature bowing herself out would become even as one of tens of thousands of other Mexican women: squat, obese, shriveled, and go about with the inevitable black mantilla over her head.

The other maid had been of this kind. Only she had also been as brown as the inner skin of a peanut, while Chiquita's complexion was tinted a yellowish white, like the peanut itself.

When she had gone Rafferty picked up the paper-covered cylinder which Inspector Dowling had left, and scanned it closely. The texture of the paper was Chinese, he knew without further examination. The weight of the opium it concealed was anywhere from six to eight ounces—worth, at the price Dowling had mentioned, from one hundred and seventy-five to two hundred dollars, at the very least.

That it had been left behind argued that Yen Sam and his confederates, whoever they were, had been warned barely in time to escape arrest. Otherwise, they would not have left this precious narcotic behind.

"He didn't say if he had frisked the town for them," ruminated Rafferty. "But it goes without saying that an old bird like him wouldn't overlook a simple bet like that. They probably took a flit over the river. And now he wants me to go over after them."

He replaced the package on the green blotter covering the top of the tiny writing-desk, and leaned back in the cool chair by the window to think a bit.

On the whole, it was a big task.

Over the river he would be shorn of the authority that was his on this side of the Rio Grande.

Over the river, for that matter, authority was a thing which was, to put it mildly, rather unstable. One day it was in the hands of one faction. A month, a week, a day—nay, even an hour—might see it

transferred to other hands, hands hostile to those previously wielding the ghost of law and order.

He heard a creaking sound in the somnolent air below him. From the pavement came also the shuffling of animal feet on the heated asphalt.

Rafferty peered down as the sound floated up to him.

He saw the same cart which he had seen crossing the river, the same oxen, barefoot peon, but now the vehicle was plainly piled high with melons.

"Melons for mine," said Rafferty with an almost boyish smile.

He locked the door and descended to the street.

II.

"How much?" asked Rafferty as he stepped through the lobby into the street and held up his hand to the padding peon.

The man looked startled.

He even seemed a little surly as the other inspected the luscious fruit piled high on the two-wheeled cart. Rafferty had to stretch to tiptoe to see them, for the cart had a pair of enormous and antiquated wheels, but substantial ones, in contrast to its rickety body. Also, one of the spokes was obviously much newer than its fellows, albeit one of the broad tires was askew.

Rafferty's smattering of Spanish might have been sufficient to make a palaver, but, for divers and sundry reasons, he did not wish to disclose undue familiarity with the patois used by the lower classes of Mexicans. So, he merely picked out a large melon, thumped it, held up both hands, and grinned broadly as he said:

"*Diez centavos?*"

"*Sí, señor,*" said the peon as Rafferty took the melon from the cart and tendered him the American dime.

The sleuth turned to reenter the bar as the cart creaked wearily onward. Then he saw that he was observed.

A tall, heavily built, swarthy chap, with a glossy-black mustache which he was stroking with a bediamonded finger, stood in the door. His eyes were cold and held a snaky look.

Rafferty wondered why the purchase of a melon by a stranger in Paso del Norte should call for such intentness of gaze by a casual looker-on and such a really sinister quality latent in the menacing eyes. However, he dismissed the matter as one of no consequence and tugged his luscious prize into the bar.

"Pack this in ice for me, will you?" he said to the chap in white apron and jacket. "I'll get it after it cools off. And make me a nice lemonade, pretty sweet, with charged water—strain out the ice. Gee, but it's hot!"

"Yes, sir," replied the other. "You're not here long, are you, sir?"

"Just got in to-day," smiled Rafferty. "Now, a couple of straws."

He sat down in the swirl of the revolving fan and sipped his lemonade thoughtfully. The task before him again engrossed his thoughts.

Scheduled in the mental card-index of his superiors in the customs service as a dependable—that is, as a man of imagination, resourcefulness, and able to transmit his theories into swift, relentless action—he was trying to figure out how to begin his unpromising work.

One thing was in his favor.

He was utterly unknown to the other operatives of the district or to the smugglers whom Inspector Dowling expected him to unearth and arrest.

He wore neither badge nor uniform. Simply but neatly garbed, as befitted the character he assumed of a coal operative interested in Mexican oil-fields, he appeared an average, successful type of American business man.

Yet Rafferty moved and had his being in a world far removed from what he appeared to be—a world of chicane, intrigue, hazard; more than often a world of hardship, fatigue, and downright peril. Upon this last Rafferty possessed no illusions whatever.

Rosy dreams found scant place in his thoughts. He was a hard, matter-of-fact, almost mathematical thinker. He first appraised his chances on the projected visit over the river.

They were not exactly reassuring.

At that time Diaz, like other border towns, was held by one group of Mexican bandits. The import duties and the export duties made such holding profitable to the commander in charge.

At the same time, while nominally peaceful, so far as American visitors were concerned, it was not exactly a safe-deposit box in which to repose one's life, under ordinary circumstances.

The gringo was not exactly loved.

And it required no special clairvoyant powers for Rafferty to reason that General Tortilla or Colonel Frijole, or whoever else was in command of Diaz at that time, was undoubtedly "in the know" with the smugglers of opium.

Once, therefore, over the river, beyond the safe and sane confines of Uncle Sam's domain and in the hinterland of lawless turbulence, anarchy, and bloodshed, Michael Rafferty would last about as long as the proverbial snowball in a hotter climate than Paso del Norte possessed.

"It's a *chilli con carne* to an ice-cream cone that I'd be planted *pronto*," he smiled to himself. "They wouldn't need any reason, and 'most any old excuse would be plenty—once they mugged me for a hop-hunter."

He rose leisurely, paid for his lemonade and added a gratuity to the man who had taken charge of his melon, while he wiped the sweat from his florid face. Then, deliberately, Michael went back to his apartment.

A little patch of light flitted on the carpet in the corridor as he approached his door. Instantly his eyes gleamed. But, with the utmost nonchalance, he passed on, unlocked the door, and entered.

He shot the bolt, passed through the private hall, and came into the little parlor, where he doffed his coat.

Then, sitting down by the window, where the breeze was now more noticeable, his eyes fell on the cylindrical package of opium whose presence had dragged him from Kansas City to this border-town.

"I wonder why they put it up in that shape?" he muttered to himself. "All the dope I ever heard of being grabbed in raids was in cans."

He regarded it with more intentness than at any other time since Inspector Dowling had left it there. The cryptic cylinder became invested with an interest that almost fascinated him.

Mentally he tried to account for its shape.

The effort led him to visualize it from its place of origin to the resting-place on the top of the green blotter covering the spindle-legged writing-desk on the tenth floor of the Crown Hotel.

Rafferty could see the flaming fields of poppies; the Orientals, with their conical hats, moving through the scarlet-yellow vegetation, plucking with talon-fingers the stalks whose weedy bodies dripped the juice from which gum opium is derived.

He saw it dried in the sun, shipped in kegs to some Oriental port, loaded on a steamship; then the vast wastes of sun-smeared ocean, league after league, ere it arrived at some port where an alien flag flew over the wharves.

He could see the steaming stevedores as they toiled up out of the holds with their trucks; the gloom of the warehouse where the cargo was heaped up; the chatter of consignees, as they came with their bills of lading, to pay the port duties; the distribution of the innocent articles of merchandise brought overseas, as well as the nefarious, soul-destroying narcotic, whose fragment, worth twenty-five dollars an ounce, lay there, wrapped in the typically Oriental-textured paper, as if challenging him to solve the secret of how it had come over the river.

"All to make a poor devil of an Irishman earn his salary," grunted Rafferty. "Come to me, ye haythen candlestick of dope. Bedad, it's a tough job they've cut out for poor Mike this time—"

He broke off suddenly, staring at the object he was adjuring.

Beneath his eyes there loomed something new—something as nefariously sinister in a way as the ophidian gleam in the eyes of the big Mexican who had so closely watched him purchase the watermelon from the peon in front of the Crown Hotel.

Rafferty could hardly credit his senses.

He was sure the thing had *not* been there

when he had gone down to procure the melon from its itinerant vender—as sure as he was that it was staring up at him now.

And this is what he saw:

It was a rough somewhat blurred smear, made evidently when the wrapper had been undone, the drug within it examined, and the paper replaced.

The stain, as Rafferty instantly conjectured, came from contact with the contents of the paper itself.



Aside from the manner in which the stain had been made, this was of relatively little importance.

The one big and ominous fact that stuck out, "like a sore thumb," was that some one had visited his room when he had gone out.

In swift succession Rafferty asked himself:

"Why should any one come in here?"

"How did they get in here when I had locked the door?"

"Why didn't they steal this opium, if they came in here to steal anything?"

"Begorrah!" he exclaimed, *sotto voce*. "I come down here to sniff out a trail—and the devil's dance begins with them smelling me out before I hardly get a scent myself.

"And I'm to go over the river, eh? I am if I carry out orders. Well, why all this impatience? Couldn't the lads wait a bit for me to come over the river to them, instead of them coming over the river to me?"

A steely light, cold and penetrating, crowded out the merry gleam in his eyes. He laid the package back on the green desk-blotter with a smile in which there was no mirth.

Then, as if being hunted were the one thing which appealed to him more than anything else, Michael Rafferty cast conjectures to the knees of whatever gods there be, walked jauntily from the room, descended the elevator, and strode cockily into the bar, outwardly a care-free and affluent gentleman of affairs, inwardly in a ferment of anticipation.

The room was now fairly crowded. Bare-legged Mexican newsboys, shrilling evening extras, popped in and out from the street entrance. Cow-men, with big Stetson hats pushed back on their foreheads, clinked the spurs on their high-heeled boots, clinked glasses, chattered volubly, and laughed noisily.

Several flashily dressed young men, with predatory faces common to the gambling fraternity, were grouped around the news-ticker purring in one corner; and from their conversation Rafferty judged that the returns from the first race at Belmont were beginning to arrive.

A vagrant with his arm in a sling, peddling court-plaster, came up, whining.

Rafferty tossed him a dime.

Other groups came in from the street or the hotel lobby.

The siesta hour was over; Paso del Norte was beginning to wake up; and presently, when the cool breeze filtered down from the saw-toothed range to fan the enfevered city with their balmy breaths, the hectic night life would surge through the heretofore all but deserted streets.

Rafferty, however, with a prescience bred of knowledge that he was, in some way not altogether clear to him, now a hunted man, instead of a hunter of men, continued his casual appraisal of the room's interior as he paused to order another lemonade.

Presently he caught sight of the fellow he was seeking—the same Spanish-American or Mexican who had witnessed his purchase of the watermelon. He was reading an afternoon paper which almost obscured him from Rafferty's scrutiny.

As the custodian of the melon strained the detective's drink, Rafferty asked:

"Who is that distinguished-looking gentleman yonder?"

The bartender looked.

"It is Señor Manuel de la Torres," he replied. "You have heard of him?"

"Can't say that I have," smiled the sleuth. "I'm new down here, you know."

"Formerly," explained the affable servitor. "he was very wealthy. Owned immense estates in Chihuahua. The revolution beggared him."

"Tough luck," said Rafferty sympa-

thetically. "I wonder if he'd honor me by joining me?"

"He's very democratic, but rather proud."

It was at this juncture that Rafferty, turning again, saw the former magnate looking indifferently in his direction. The Mexican had a peculiar and most impressive face.

One could almost fancy that in the human lineaments had been preserved the distinguishing characteristics of the old serpent type.

The width and flatness of the frontal view, the tapering elegance from brow to chin, had a certainly deadly contour, disguising to some extent the strength of the jaw; his eyes had an emerald hue, glittering and green; and, over and above all, he radiated a sense of deadly calm, suggesting a ruthless purpose, as if thoroughly conscious of his power.

He responded, however, to Rafferty's courteous invitation with quiet politeness.

"You are going into Mexico?" he asked when the glasses had been drained.

"Do you think it is safe?" countered Rafferty.

De la Torres shrugged his shoulders.

"It all depends," said he suavely, "on your errand. For me, Mexico is no longer safe. For you—" He shrugged his shoulders smilingly, and added, "*Quien sabe?*"

"Yes—who knows?" grinned Rafferty, ignoring the deft query, and, Yankee-like, turning the conversation into a new channel. He picked up the goblet from which the other had just drank, and held its vapor-covered bulk between him and the window.

"A fine bit of glass," said Rafferty. "From Monessen, Pennsylvania. I used to play baseball, summers, with some glass-blowers from down that way, years ago," he rattled on.

"They were a great bunch. In summer, you know, the trade is a bit hotter than this climate. That got me started on glassware—I have been a crank on the different patterns ever since.

"Well, I think I'll have a whirl around this burg in a jitney. It's getting cooler, and I want to see a little of the city before going over the river."

"But not," protested De la Torres, "until I have reciprocated the hospitality you have accorded me."

Rafferty complied. Then, with a courteous adieu, he went out for his announced ride through the highways of Paso del Norte.

III.

"CHIQUITA," observed Rafferty, about midway of the following forenoon, as he looked up from the game of solitaire he was playing on the green blotter of the spindle-legged desk in his apartment, "I'm going to change your first name to 'Dimples.' You certainly have two of the most fascinating dimples I ever saw."

"You theenk so, *señor?*" drawled the maid, with veiled eyes and a heightened color.

"I can point them out," gravely returned Rafferty, "if you'll take one look in the mirror over this desk. Didn't any one else ever mention them to you?"

Chiquita came over, tossing her head coquettishly.

"Count 'em—two," scoffed Rafferty. "Chiquita, beware how you turn those dimples on the mere men around Paso del Norte. They're positively dangerous."

"What game are you playing?" simpered the girl.

"I'll show you a trick," countered Rafferty, shuffling the cards. "Pick out one—any one in the deck."

She complied.

"Put it back in the deck, and keep the card fixed in your mind," he directed. "You won't forget it, will you?"

"No, *señor.*"

"Now, give me one of those towels you just brought in. See, it's a perfectly substantial towel, clean and ironed. Now, we'll put the deck, after shuffling the cards, under the towel—so."

He suited the action to the words.

"The trick is to make this card you've just picked out come up out of the deck and through the towel," he went on.

Chiquita's eyes grew large and lustrous.

"But how can—" she began.

"Here's a better way," rattled on Rafferty. "I'll make the card leave the deck

while you hold it in your hand on top of the towel, pass through the towel, and down through it on top of the blotter."

He brought the cards into view again.

"Hold them tight."

She obeyed.

"Think of the card," he continued.

Chiquita's white teeth gleamed as she smiled.

"Now, Dimples, what was the card?"

"The queen of hearts, *señor*."

"Queen of hearts," he gravely continued, "I command you to leave the deck and pass down through the towel to the blotter below. Hold them tight—it takes a minute," he commanded.

His free hand stole over toward her, unseen.

Chiquita, still smiling, held the cards firmly.

A dancing sunbeam played here and there across the room. Rafferty's eyes mocked it with an answering gleam.

That sunbeam was exactly like one he had encountered in the shaded corridor of the hall the afternoon before—and, prior to the entrance of the maid it had been wandering, gipsylike, around his parlor, at intervals, the whole morning.

"Now," said he, "look through the deck for the card."

Chiquita complied. Rafferty surreptitiously drew back his free hand.

"It is not here, *señor*," said the girl, in an awed voice.

"Pick up the towel," he ordered.

She did so. A card lay there, back up. The girl turned it over, avidly. It was the queen of hearts.

She gazed at him in awe.

Rafferty laughed.

"But how—"

He held up a hand.

"Dimples, some day I may show you how. To-day, I'm going out for a ride in a jitney bus. This place is the most interesting place I've been in for a long while. Take good care of my room while I'm gone."

He laid another coin on the desk, put on his hat and went out, still laughing.

During the ride, Michael Rafferty sent the jitney whirling hither and yon, but he

never stopped. Once, the driver looked back and thought he saw his patron whittling.

For three hours Rafferty wended his way in and out of the streets of Paso del Norte and the environs. He returned to the Crown Hotel by way of San Antonio Street, passing the laundry of the late Yen Sam, now mournful and deserted. A bill poster was pasting the announcement of a burlesque show on one of the windows.

Rafferty paid and dismissed his driver, ate lunch, returned to his apartment, noting that the stick of opium was still on the desk, sat down at the window, smoked a cigar, and watched, every now and again, the same gipsylike bit of sunshine come flickering into the little parlor.

His lips curved into an amused smile of contempt.

The eccentric spot roamed hither and yon, like the tentacle of an invisible monster, seeking some object at which to launch some terrific destroying force.

"Lay on, ye devils," muttered Rafferty, between teeth that clenched themselves over his cigar. "'Tis a foine game ye play. Well, I've drawn a card or two, mesself."

"And, when we lay thim down, we'll see—begorrah! We'll see."

The somnolent air outside hung heavy with the heat as on the day before his arrival. Rafferty rose, languidly, went to the house phone, and directed a bell-boy to bring him up the melon he had bought the day before.

When he had devoured it, he threw himself down for a nap, but not before placing a chair beneath the knob of the door leading into the outer hall, and bracing it in such a way that the door could not be opened, without waking him.

Rafferty slept like a man who needed rest.

It was evening when he woke. He took a cool bath, arrayed himself in clean linen throughout, slipped something from a paper bag into the side-pocket of his coat, and descended to the lobby.

Before dining, he quenched his thirst with another of the long, cool, refreshing glasses of lemonade, which the man behind the bar was so expert in preparing.

He was finishing it when a voice behind him observed:

"Good evening, *señor*."

"*Buenos noches*, Señor de la Torres."

"You have not gone down into our country—yet, I see," observed the Mexican.

"Going day after to-morrow," said Rafferty, urbanely. "I'm sorry that I can't have the pleasure of some gentleman, like yourself, on my trip over the river."

His bland face was utterly inscrutable as he faced the Mexican, behind whose mask was studiously concealed, as Rafferty well knew, a certain wild daring coupled with a restless profligacy.

"I've concluded it's safe," continued Rafferty, boastfully, "that is, for me. Anyway, if it isn't, they've got to show me. Uncle Sam has given me a passport."

He drew out a document, plentifully adorned with signatures, seals, and bearing his photograph.

"Anyway, why should your countrymen want to harm a man who only wants to invest a little money in fuel oil? The profits ought to be worth the risk—don't you think so?" continued Rafferty.

"All profits require risk, of some kind. The fellow who tries to play safe may earn four or five per cent by sticking his money into bonds. But, if he's out to really make a big piece of money, he's got to take chances.

"I've figured it all out. The game is worth the candle. Oil is the biggest thing in the fuel line, and will be for the next twenty years.

"Coal's played out. Too scarce—too bulky—too costly. Since they put oil burners on battle-ships, I've switched over to oil.

"There's oil in Mexico and that means there's money there. They need my money to locate and develop the new field that I've been tipped off about."

"A new field?" queried De la Torres, his eyes bulging. "Where is it, *señor*?"

"Ah!" enigmatically returned Rafferty, "that's telling! I may tell you when I have my *denouements* filled—on my return. Well, I'm going in to eat dinner. See you later."

He vanished out of the door without waiting for a reply.

Paso del Norte basked under the beauties of a tropic night.

Behind the city, rose the extravagantly dented profile of the saw-toothed mountains, from whose harsh breasts filtered the cool breeze, while against the ashy blue of the horizon the starlit sky which capped them looked down.

The groups of gay and frivolous persons passed and repassed along the brilliant streets like fantastic shadows beneath the solemnity of transparency piled upon transparency which the blue deeps above them contained. Between the two republics the sluggish river, like a giant ophidian, wended its sinuous way from a sinister beginning to where it faded out in the dim, cloudless distance, in a deluge of silver and bronze—the silver from the rising moon, the bronze from the brown mesas which at last engulfed it in their monotone of color.

At eleven o'clock, sharp, three men entered the basement of the Crown Hotel. They were Inspector Dowling, Kane, and Jackson. They padded noiselessly to the second story, pressed the button for the elevator, entered, and were regurgitated from it at the tenth floor.

With almost military celerity the three swung down toward the apartment where Michael Rafferty, coal dealer, from Scranton, Pennsylvania, was lodged.

As they made the turn of the hall, however, leading to the door of his suite, a tremendous dissonance rose from the adjoining apartment.

When opposite it, they paused at the open door.

From within came groans, oaths, and a general hysteria of sound coupled with a queer series of rasps and thumps which none of the three could comprehend. Inspector Dowling's ready pistol flashed as he led the way into the room.

Señor Manuel de la Torres, in pajamas, was blindly seeking the faucet in the corner of his room above the marble basin, and dragging after him the bed which he had so lately occupied.

"You're under arrest!" announced In-

spector Dowling, as the trio advanced upon him.

Then they saw that he was already handcuffed to the bed.

"*Madre de Dios!*" moaned the Mexican. "Gentlemen, I implore you, cleanse my eyes. I think I am going blind!"

"After I get your gun," returned the inspector, passing an exploratory hand over the other's body.

"I assure you I am unarmed. The weapon, it is under my pillow," protested the prisoner. "For the love of—"

"Never mind," consoled Dowling, as Kane whipped the big, blue-barreled automatic from the place named, "we'll have your eyes all right, presently."

He gnawed his mustache to stifle a smile.

"What happened?" he asked.

"May the foul fiend seize on him!" shrieked the Mexican. "He has fled. The one whom they call 'El Rubio!'"

"'El Rubio!' means 'The Red One,'" muttered Kane. "Who is he talking about?"

"Me," said a voice from the door.

The four whirled, although Torres continued to lave his eyes with his free hand.

It was the florid Rafferty, grinning, who confronted them.

"Take him down, boys," directed Dowling to his two aids, "after you get him into his clothes. Now, sir," he turned to Rafferty, "you occupy the room next to this, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," said Rafferty, meekly.

"I've had my eye on you for several days—"

"Only two, sir."

"Since your arrival," continued Dowling. "I'll go in there, with you, and have a look around, if you don't object."

"I never waste an objection when I know it's going to be overruled," rather impudently returned Rafferty, for the benefit of the other two officers. He turned and entered his own suite.

Kane and Jackson aided their prisoner to dress.

When it came to shoes, there were none in the room.

Jackson thumped on the adjoining door. Dowling answered the knock. He was

holding a pair of shoes in his hand. Jackson stared at the missing footgear.

"Use slippers or take him in his socks," snapped the other officer. "These," he swung the shoes, "are evidence."

Jackson obeyed. Kane and he took the prisoner down to the immigration building, put him in a cell and called the surgeon to treat his eyes.

IV.

"WELL, Mike?" said Dowling, as he accepted a cigar.

"I didn't go over the river," grinned the pseudo coal-dealer, "for several reasons—among them the Dancing Sunbeam."

"The Dancing Sunbeam?" reiterated his puzzled superior.

"The devils wouldn't wait for me," continued Rafferty, "to come to them. They insisted on comin' after me—before I could even go over the river. You weren't out of this room an hour, before they were after me."

"Tell me about it," continued the inspector. "I wish I knew where their plant is on the other side."

"Oh, that's easy. It's next to Sikou-San's place, on the Avenida Centrale, in Diaz, over the river."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know the Chinese I told you to pinch down at the bureau—your own interpreter—isn't a Chinese at all, but is really Sikou-San, which is Japanese?"

"And that he's the owner of the Donko-Tchaya restaurant, next door to where this plant is on the Avenida Centrale—to be exact at No. 23?" scoffed Rafferty, semi-maliciously, as he settled back to enjoy the look of mystification spreading over the other's face.

"That's what I want to know, Mike," retorted the inspector, irritably.

"Then I'll tell you the yarn, consecutively," said the dependable one. "It all began right here in this room, when you assigned me to the job."

"You told me of that blow-off and Yen Sam getting away from his hop-emporium, the bubbling pipe, the lamp, and all that, didn't you?"

Dowling nodded.

"I put two and two together," went on Rafferty. "I had to. If somebody could tip you off like that, when all you'd done was to phone to Kane and Jackson, after you piped off Yen Sam's place by the odor of smoking opium, that showed me you were shadowed—and well-shadowed. Of course, you admitted that the blow-off couldn't have come off the way it did, unless somebody in your office had given the tip.

"If they were watching you *that* closely, didn't it argue that they'd seen you come in to meet me at this hotel—no matter what precautions you had taken?"

Dowling flushed. "Y-yes," he reluctantly admitted.

"I figured it out that way," said Rafferty, imperturbably. "So, I stand pat. I sit here, smoking, and having a look at things—through a glass.

"I've got that stick of opium, wrapped in paper. Its shape puzzles me. I never heard of opium put up in that shape before. Almost always it's in cans.

"It's too precious to get mixed up, for one thing, with other things. The fact that they brought it over in that shape showed me they had only a short distance to bring it, and that the method they used was one practically undiscoverable by the bridge inspectors.

"Now, you also mentioned the profits—and the fact that the gang was well established. I'm trying to figure all of this out. I take my glass and study the country between here and Diaz.

"I may want to make a quick getaway out of that burg, in case somebody gives me a tumble, when I go over there to ferret out the rats, as you directed."

Dowling gave a sign of assent to show he was listening closely.

"Well," resumed Rafferty, "they began to overplay their hand. Too confident—see? They sent one of their gang in here, to pipe off my joint.

"She's a nifty gal—Chiquita is—I call her 'Dimples.' Comes right in, with a bundle of towels over her arm, for a stall. I'm sitting by the window, wondering who'll pipe me off first—that is, if my theory is

right that they've tumbled to your coming to my room.

"Chiquita tells me that she has taken the place of the other maid. The other maid's part negro—no good," according to Chiquita. And, while she's telling me that, she takes a peep at the stick of dope that's lying on my desk.

"I know then that the fat's in the fire. No use to go over the river. If I do, not being a non-puncturable tire, I'll get punctured with a bullet or a knife. Get me?"

"But the girl's glance might have been one of mere curiosity," interjected Dowling.

"I tell you they were overplaying their hand. Chiquita is entirely too pretty to be a mere chambermaid. She wouldn't work for twenty or thirty dollars a month and tips—when every *Don Jose* of a bandit over the river would be lavishing all he could borrow, beg or steal on those dimples.

"That's where they played it too strong—lamp the chambermaids around this or any other border town. Do they hire prize beauties, even half-bloods? They do *not*!

"But Chiquita didn't know that I had tumbled to something else, when I sat here with the window, looking over the country with the glass I drop into my pocket when she comes in. I've seen something else—a big two-wheeled cart, with a peon driving a team of oxen, padding over here, in the siesta hour."

Rafferty paused to chuckle.

"An industrious peon—when they all live by gambling on the roosters, or play keno, or do anything—except work! And whoever heard of a Mexican taking the hottest hour of the day to peddle vegetables?"

"You're right, there," admitted Dowling.

"Of course. Just as I'm in wrong the minute Chiquita comes in here, and goes back to tell whoever sent her in here what she's seen. So, after a bit, I go down to the street and buy a melon off this paragon of the laziest race in the world.

"I've got two reasons—I want to look him over at close range and I want to give somebody time to come in here and frisk my room. You see, Chiquita wears a bundle of keys—among them the master key to all the rooms on this floor.

"Likewise, after the fellow that mugged

you when you came in here has mugged me, down on the street floor, I figure he'll be the lad to come up and frisk my room, while Chiquita keeps her eye on the elevator indicator, at the turn in the hall, and tips him off whenever the dial shows the car's coming up. Then, all she has to do, is to sprint down the hall and lock the door.

"Even if I do catch her--what's the difference? She's the maid. She may have come in to put soap in my room--any old stall.

"The point is that I took my time. I gave them a lot of leeway, because, after that first tumble by the altogether too pretty chambermaid--the fact that they had the inside on the Yen Sam raid--and the remark you dropped about the gang 'cleaning up a ton of money on hop,' I know I've got to work from *this* end, instead of over the river."

He paused to relight his cigar.

"They bit, all right. I come back and find a thumb-print on the paper. A faint one, but one that wasn't there, when I went down-stairs. Now, as sure as two and two make four, somebody's been in here and unwrapped the paper from that opium.

"Who is it? Well, I've got an idea it's the same lad that watched me buy the melon. I don't know--for sure.

"But, the Dancing Sunbeam is right on the job when I come up, and is dancing around in the hall."

"The Dancing Sunbeam?" echoed Dowling.

"You heard me correctly," smiled Rafferty. "I'll get to that after a bit. But, let me go on, just now, in my own way. I buy the melon for *diez centavos*, that is, for ten cents.

"It's a perfectly good melon, sound of wind and limb, warranted not to rip, ravel, or run down at the heel. At the same time, while the melon's genuine enough, the peon, as I suspected when I saw his industry in the hottest part of the day, is a phony peon.

"I know it the minute I see his make-up. He's an artist in make-up--all but one thing: He forgot that a regular peon never takes his feet to a chiropodist to have the nails trimmed on his toes.

"So, inasmuch as I know he's phony, as

his errand is phony, I also know that he has a good reason for coming over the river in the hottest part of the day.

"Now, what reason could a high-caste Mexican have for peddling melons? Some reason that didn't have anything to do with melons, for the same reason that he was playing at being a peon, when he wasn't a peon at all."

"Great!" interjected Dowling.

"Well, I call it fair reasoning, myself," smiled Rafferty. "But, at the same time, I've also lamped his Mexican license plate--No. 23 Avenada Centrale. Now, it so happens I've been in Diaz, before.

"I know where the Avenada Centrale is. It's the street that leads from the customs house to the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows. And, it's chockfull of shops--or used to be--and gambling dens, and this same Japanese restaurant, the Donko-Tchaya, I mentioned.

"In English, that name means the 'Tea House of the Tree-Toads,' and it's owned and run by Sikou-San, a Japanese gentleman who plays both ends against the middle, and poses as a Chinaman, while on your pay-roll. Rather costly quarters for a peon-peddler of melons!

"They're hunting me, however, don't forget that. That is, they think they are!" scoffed the sleuth. "Well, I go down-stairs again and mugg Mr. Manuel de la Bull--Torres means Bull.

"I throw the animal at the bartender. He tells me Mr. Bull has been a big guy in his day, over the river--and is now beggared by the revolutions. Almost as tough on Manuel Bull to be beggared by his brother Miguel Bull--who's the lad that's peddling the nice melons. Only Manuel wears silk shirts, carries a wad of at least ten grand--"

"Ten what?"

"Excuse me, inspector. I should have said ten thousand dollars in his kick--I mean pocket, and lounges around barrooms while Miguel, which is Spanish for Mike--peddles melons to earn an honest living, and brings over the hop in the spokes of the wheels of the cart, as I told you this evening, when I told you to pinch Charlie Go Wah, alias Sikou-San.

"You found the cart and Yen Sam in the San Antonio Street blacksmith shop on this side, didn't you?"

"Yes. How did you locate that?"

"A little Japanese tree-toad told me to get Mr. Manuel de la Bull to have a drink with me. The glasses steam up in this climate. I picked up his, throwing a little of his last name into him as I told him about some glass-blowers I used to play ball with.

"That was true. But I wanted to lamp his thumb-print. It was very like the one on the piece of paper around this opium. Then the Jap tree-toad whispered to me to take a jitney-ride and see if my honest peon, with his manicured toes, wasn't tired of peddling melons, by now.

"I ran around town, here and there, and then switched to San Antonio Street. Sure enough, just across from Yen Sam's place, there's a blacksmith shop. Miguel had a bad tire. There's where they pulled off the tire and the fellow of the wheel and pulled out the hop from the hollow spokes.

"I figured that Yen Sam must be there, because of the quick way he got out of your sight. I figured right."

"You did, Mike. You're still a dependable. I'll give the department at Washington a tip that you get the credit. But, how about this Dancing Sunbeam?"

"Oh, yes. Well, when I came up-stairs, after buying the melon, I met the merry little sunbeam, meandering around the dark hall. Now, no honest little sunbeam ought to stray so far from the sunshine, outside.

"I came on into my apartment, and let it wander—although I thought I was hep. Next day, when I pulled a little card trick for Chiquita, while I took an impression of her master key in some putty, the little sunbeam persisted in wandering into my parlor.

"I lived in Philadelphia, when I was a kid, inspector. Philadelphia is the city of homes, the city of front parlors on the second floor, and the city of telltales. The telltales are tiny mirrors, hanging on a bracket from the second story front windows, and any one in the parlor can see who is down ringing the front door bell, by looking into the telltale.

"I suspect Mr. Manuel de la Bull must

have been in Quakertown, to arrange for a market in Race Street for some of his surplus dope. Anyway, he was working a telltale on me, first to see when I came up the hall, next to see if I was making love to Chiquita, in the parlor. It was only near love, inspector. I like my dimples pure Caucasian. Tell him that.

"Also, that I slipped into his room, to steal that telltale and, as well, his shoes, to-night, with my phony master key, which I filed out while riding around in a jitney. Also, as you will see, the slack coal dust from the blacksmith's forge is in the nice patent leathers that our good friend, Mr. Manuel de la Bull wore when he went down to the blacksmith shop, to make sure of getting all the dope. The rest of the lost hop is in his room.

"Present my compliments, inspector, to both Chiquita and Mr. Bull. Tell them that it was El Rubio who hid out in the park, and listened to them, right back of this hotel, while they exchanged ideas in Spanish.

"Tell him, especially, that it was El Rubio who slammed that pepper of the same hue into his eyes when he woke up and found me in his room, just before you came up-stairs, and then slipped one handcuff on his wrist and the other cuff on the foot of the bed, so he couldn't get that gun from under his pillow."

"Why did you do that?" asked Inspector Dowling.

"I was born with sunbeams dancing in my hair," returned Rafferty, with an impish grin, "and any time a Greaser tells his sweetheart that he's got me bluffed off, and then tries to bluff me to my face, I'm back at him, strong.

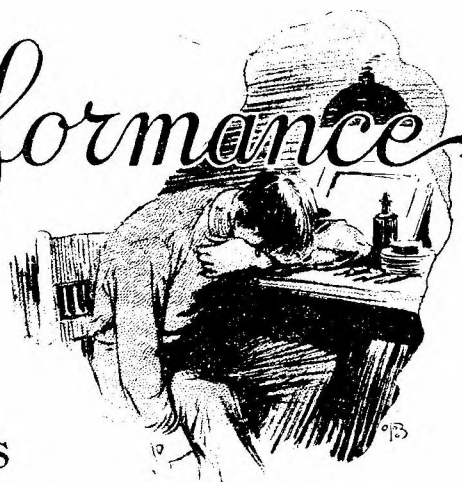
"I had him framing me up over the river for day after to-morrow, by which time I'll be back in good old Kansas City, with a prettier girl than Chiquita—a girl that could give her cards, spades and big casino—and then win under wraps, dimples and all.

"Her name's Maggie and I'm her Mike. That's another reason I preferred to stay this side of the river, after I met up with the Dancing Sunbeam—and all the rest of it."

One Performance

by

Barry Connors



BUNNY sat up in bed eagerly searching the morning papers. Some six years before, his nearest and dearest had pleaded with him—warned him—not to try to become an actor.

But he *would*! He just simply *would*—that's all!

Some driving urge within him had forced him on and on, and now, after years of grilling apprenticeship in the wild haunts of the repertoire shows and small stocks—Ah! if his nearest and dearest could only see him.

The *Morning Post* called the "Boots of the Boss" a gripping truth splendidly told. Henri Balzar, in the *Daily Times*, pronounced it the best production seen in Bellingham in the history of the new theater. The *Chronicle*—oh! but you've guessed all about Bunny by this time, no doubt—his splendid success after years of striving, and all that—what?

Don't be deceived.

Bunny's eye was going up and down the columns of the want ads. He was just about twenty-four dollars short of having enough money to pay a twenty-four-dollar hotel bill, and the proprietor, the night before, had given him a strange look—not so strange, to be sure, as the one nature had given him on his birthday—but nevertheless a queer look. And you know how one *will* construe looks when one's pocketbook is flatter than an egg out of a ten-story window.

Of course he knew the "Boots of the

Boss" was playing in town. He had seen the lithographs on the billboards, and he had not done what some of the Bellinghamites had done: mistaken them for shoe advertisements; but further than that he wotted not. In fact, he was paying no attention whatever to wotting. Let those wot whose pleasure it was to wot.

Money was what worried him—the lack of it—the need of it—how to get it—where—and how quickly.

There was one place he could always send for money—any time he needed it—and that was home. But strangely enough, every time he sent home for money his folks refused to answer his letter and generally stopped writing to him altogether; and as there was no other place he could get a loan, it looked as though he was going to be forced to go to work. But don't be alarmed—it only *looked* that way.

He was not one of those who believe the tommyrot about the dark hour coming just before the dawn. Being quite sensible, he knew very well where the dark hour came—just ahead of a still darker one.

If a bright moment happened between times, it was only to cheer him up and coax him along until something worse could happen. Oh, no! you couldn't fool Bunny; he knew exactly what to do when the worst was coming to the worst—he let it come. So, therefore, after devoutly searching over the want columns and putting down all the likely looking jobs on a piece of paper, he wisely decided it was silly to coax good

luck by going out and hunting jobs, anyhow.

La bas! Bankruptcy! To Hades with landlords!—only not expurgated like that. *Viva la snooze!* He curled up in the sheets and went to sleep again.

And right here we discover that the Lord takes care of children, idiots, the little birds, and actors who won't save their money. About half after one that afternoon, Bunny arose and dressed—not that he wanted to get up so soon, or any such nonsense as that; but he had a personal creditor he couldn't placate—his stomach. He had tried his best to get it to wait until that night for the day-before's breakfast; but it wouldn't. It demanded immediate satisfaction—or liquidation, as it were; so he had to take it out to a restaurant and spend his last dime on it for coffee and “do-nots”—as the doctor calls them.

As he went down-stairs to the lobby of the hotel, he observed the proprietor standing in such a strategic position that he couldn't pass him without being seen; so he boldly sneaked up-stairs again and induced one of the chambermaids to let him out the back way—a fortunate stroke which made the plot sit up and take notice; for when he emerged from the alley running past the rear of the hotel, where should he find himself but right in front of the theater where the “Roots of the Boss” was playing.

An idea! Perhaps the manager would let him in to see the *matinée*. It was worth trying, at any rate. He had his coffee and dyspepsia, strolled about until two o'clock, and then presented his card at the box-office.

“Do you recognize the profession?” he asked of a little, frozen-eyed man inside.

“What profession?” insinuated Frozen Eye.

Bunny had just heard him tell an old lady the ancient stuff about “nothing but dollar seats left,” and he had a great notion to say: “What profession? A crook like yourself.” But that's no way to get into a theater for nothing; so he said: “Theatrical profession.”

“Where are you workin'?” the man quizzed.

“I was with a show that closed near here three weeks ago.”

“Nothin' doin',” snapped the man; and Bunny turned away, breaking the Second Commandment and a lot of the rules of grammar and etiquette. He wasn't so very disappointed after all. Of course he hadn't been as lucky as he had expected; but then, he hadn't expected that he would—as you might say. Besides, judging by the name of the play, it couldn't be much good anyway, and he was just about to feel glad he hadn't wasted a whole precious afternoon watching the dull thing, when a large, red-faced man came bursting out of the box-office and called him back.

“Hey! Did you say you was an actor?” he asked Bunny.

Bunny hadn't been to New York yet, and didn't know that this was the psychological moment at which to blow the loudest tune on the bugle; so he said: “Well, I've been in the business six years.”

“What do you do?”

“Comedy. Character comedy,” answered Bunny.

“Are you working?”

No question in the English language is so eloquent to an actor out of work as “Are you working?” It surpasses even “What are you going to have?” Bunny hurried to assure him he was looking for a job at that very moment.

“Step in the office a minute,” said the big man.

Inside, he introduced himself as Mr. Blackwell, manager of the show, and outlined a serious predicament. A man playing the only comedy part in the show was leaving the coming Saturday night and refused to stay longer. The New York office had sent a man on; but the man had failed to appear, and no trace of him was to be had. He described the part.

“Could you get up in it in four days?” he asked Bunny.

“Positively,” Bunny assured him. He had been with lots of shows that “got up in” three plays a week, and had twice been with old Dr. Sweitzer's medicine show, where the company put on a different play every night.

Blackwell ended the interview by per-

sonally escorting him to a box seat, where he was to see the show and decide whether or not he could play the part. But what nonsense! How would anybody in the world decide under the circumstances? Certainly. And the next morning Bunny was the principal feature at a rehearsal of the "Boots of the Boss."

A rehearsal, of course, is not so doleful a thing as a funeral, nor so irritating and unnecessary as the prickly heat; but no actor will believe these things at ten o'clock in the morning. Bunny was well aware of the fact, and quite expected to find a bored and peevish company awaiting him at the theater—and he was not disappointed in the least. The company was very bored and very peevish. But Mr. Kramer, the director, was a cruel and unusual punishment he had not counted upon—a flagrant violation of the Constitution of the United States—to say the least.

He was about half a man high and two men and a half wide, with a sort of bulldog aspect from the front, and a chinless effect viewed from the side. He had been sent on to the "Boots of the Boss" to whip it into shape—supplanting a Mr. Forrester, who had produced the piece—and until the appearance of Bunny he had not had a real opportunity to show his ability as a whipper; so he welcomed the new recruit with the joy of a vivisectionist who has just captured the poodle of the president of the Anti-Vivisectionist Society.

After introducing Bunny to the company with the air of one who knows the proprieties and *will* observe them—no matter how painful, he gave him a sort of third degree.

"Who have you been with?" he asked accusingly.

Bunny mentioned a few of the stock companies he had worked for, and quite sensibly added a few pretty good ones he had heard about.

Mr. Kramer looked at him for a moment with the expression of a man who has just discovered a toothache in his favorite tooth.

"Ever play comedy before?" he asked suspiciously.

The assembled company was eying Bunny with a you'd-better-confess-all-and-escape-the-extreme-penalty look.

"That's my line," he managed to say, feeling smaller and more offensive every moment. He was not at all bad looking, Bunny; but if he had looked the way he felt, Mr. Kramer and the company really would have had something to astonish them.

His figure was trim and of medium height, his dark clothes fitted him, his black hair was brushed neatly, and his tanned face, introducing a set of pleasant dark eyes, was passably regular; but under the scrutiny of the company he felt acutely conscious of a couple of hands full of fingers and a mouthful of teeth, something inside of him was insistently pleading with him to please find a rat hole, and every time Mr. Kramer's fishy eyes gave him what is known as the "up and down," his knees, which had grown to feel the size of a trotting horse's, tried to knock one against the other.

In short, he felt exactly as every obscure actor feels the first time he rehearses with a big show—for a moment scared stiff; after that, soft-boiled—and finally, scrambled.

Mr. Kramer's face had just lighted up as though he had thought of another insult, when Mr. Blackwell entered through the stage-door and offered the company a bright, managerial "Good morning." Whereupon Mr. Kramer suddenly assumed a very sad expression—like old Mother Hubbard peeking into the boneless cupboard—and went over to him, shaking his head sadly, as much as to say: "No bone!"—and the two talked together solemnly, occasionally glancing over at Bunny.

This brought the boy's humility to a lower temperature. He realized at last the enormity of his offense. And if it hadn't been for that twenty-four-dollar hotel-bill, and having to sneak out of the hotel to escape his landlord, he'd have known what to do—and it would have been a very *hum-ble* apology, too.

But suddenly Kramer and Blackwell seemed to arrive at a difference. Their conversation became louder and louder until at last the manager said, very distinctly: "You'll do what I tell you. Go ahead and rehearse him." Then he walked down

to the director's table and took a seat beside it, closely followed by Mr. Kramer, who took a part from his pocket and handed it to Bunny.

He affixed a pair of glasses to his nose, picked up the script, penetrated Bunny with a glare, and said: "This is a rather peculiar part, Mr.—er—I've forgotten your name."

"Trent," prompted Bunny.

"Mr. Trent. It is imperative to start the audience laughing before the end of the first act; otherwise they consider the character a heavy throughout the whole show—that's been our experience."

"Yes, sir," put in Bunny, alertly—trying desperately to make friends with the teacher, as it were.

"The part hasn't yet been played as it should be played, and I have decided to radically change the character," said Kramer, by way of giving himself a sly pat on the back. "I'd like to have you forget any impression you may have gathered about playing it when you saw the show yesterday."

"Very well, sir," agreed Bunny.

"First act," called the director, and the players involved arose and came forward. A young man named Norton, who aspired to higher things, and who considered himself assistant stage-director, set chairs and tables about and laid down stage braces to indicate the boundaries of the set and the entrances. Mr. Kramer then explained, briefly, what the set was, and the rehearsal started.

When Bunny heard his first cue, he knocked, as the part directed, was invited to enter, and read his first speech.

Mr. Kramer laid the script down on the table and turned to Mr. Blackwell as much as to say: "There you are! There's the man you hired! Did you hear him?" But the manager was evidently the bull-headed sort of person who doesn't know when he ought to be ashamed of himself. He read the meaning of the director's action instantly, and it seemed to peeve him considerably.

"Why don't you tell him how you want it read?" he snapped. "That's what you're here for, ain't it?"

Squelched again, Mr. Kramer started to make a retort, and then thought better of it. He knew the players, despite sober faces and uninterested expressions, were inwardly gleeful over his rebuff; but a new employee of a firm mustn't be too spontaneous about his opinions, so he picked up the script again. He transfixed Bunny with a glare that said: "Wait till I get you outside," and then proceeded sweetly:

"This boy is a would-be crook. He thinks he's a desperado; but he has a terror of the police. You must make him tough and illiterate; but remember he's in the office of the chief of detectives, now, and he's scared. You've got to work on that. If the audience doesn't laugh in this act, the rest of the part plays like a funeral. Here—read it like this"—he took Bunny's position and read the line with a queer grimace, and what, to Bunny, seemed meaningless expression.

The boy was dumfounded! Was it possible that this sort of thing was considered comedy in big productions? He glanced at Blackwell, almost expecting to see him arise and discharge the director on the spot; but the manager seemed to see nothing ridiculous about the matter whatever.

"Try it like that," directed Mr. Kramer.

Bunny copied him—he was clever at mimicry.

"There you are!" exclaimed the director.

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Blackwell, who immediately arose and went to the front of the house.

But something away down deep in Bunny's heart sat up, gave a wild gasp, and fell over in a swoon. So this was Paris!—as the cartoonist says. He had looked upon this engagement as his big opportunity—a chance at success: now he recognized it as merely one of the bright moments that happen between the dark hours. And if it hadn't been for that twenty-four dollar hotel-bill—

"All right!" exclaimed Mr. Kramer, and the rehearsal proceeded. But with Mr. Blackwell gone, it turned into a horse of a different color.

An old, established director can afford

to be kindly and patient. He can even risk giving people credit for the plain, or garden variety of intelligence. But a new one! Ah, wo! Wo is everybody!

If he doesn't pounce upon things and tear them to pieces people might think he was only an ordinary human being or something—and Kramer had a lot of lost ground to recover. He read every line of Bunny's part, and no matter how correctly the boy copied him he found fault, made him repeat, nagged him, insulted him, called on the Lord and all his angels to please come down and give the fellow some brains, threw down the script, and held his head so it wouldn't explode with impatience—in short, judging by the treatment he offered, any one would have thought Bunny was his wife.

When the rehearsal was finished the boy was too whipped and disappointed to care much what happened further. He put his part in his pocket and seated himself on a pile of grass-mats in a dark corner of the stage to wait until the company had left. He didn't want to meet any of them.

Out in the "sticks," with the small shows, people were friendly and democratic. When a new man came to the show he was welcomed. People came up and made themselves acquainted. A fellow was invited up to somebody's room to parse a can of beer and conjugate a cheese sandwich—maybe the leading lady would give a chafing-dish free-for-all. The men came to one and offered the loan of wardrobe, if there was anything one needed—or the loan of a few dollars until pay-day.

Good old "rep" shows!

For the first time in his life he was homesick and lonely. He'd have liked to tell the whole show where to go to so there wouldn't be any mistake about the place he meant; and as for Kramer, he hoped he'd wind up a mile deep in the devil's residence with his throat cut.

He was still holding the wishing party when Mrs. Harcourt, who played a *grande dame* in the piece, started toward the stage-door—the last of the company to leave. She was a little near-sighted, and had to squint at Bunny several times before she recognized him. Then she turned back.

"You're the new man," she said pleasantly as she neared him. She was very stout, her hair was gray, and her face wore a kindly, motherly smile.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Bunny.

She gently patted him on the shoulder.

"Don't take it to heart, my boy. Stick it out. You can play the part. You just do the best you know how—and don't let any one discourage you. You'll try—won't you?"

Bunny tried to say something; but the old lady's motherly interest had strangely affected the well-known lump-in-the-throat. He had an accumulation of lump there a sword-swallower couldn't have got rid of with a broom-handle. So he merely smiled—a very twisted and rather tremulous smile—and nodded his head.

"I understand, sonny," she said, again patting his shoulder. "Just you stick it out, no matter what happens."

She beamed another motherly smile upon him, wished him good luck, and disappeared through the stage-door, waddling heavily.

Bunny's spirits came back with a rush! Stick it out! That was the thing to do: stick it out—dog-gone it—stick it out! He braced up and made for his hotel to study the part.

That night the show left Bellingham. Mr. Blackwell, much to Bunny's surprise, made no fuss whatever about advancing him money to get him out of town, and so, with his hotel-bill paid, and a few dollars in his pocket, he joined the company at the train—quite a new and cheerful youngster.

Shortly after the train got under way, Mr. Kramer, walking through the coach, observed Bunny reading a newspaper.

"You ought to be studying that part," he said.

"I know it," Bunny answered.

"Then why ain't you studying it?"

"I mean, I know the part," Bunny explained.

Kramer gave him a Lord-help-us-all look and passed on, while Mr. Ledinger, one of the principals, who was seated just behind Bunny, and who had heard the conversation, sniffed: "Repertoire actor!" To him

any person gifted with a quick study was guilty of repertoire in the first degree. He belonged to the Broadway school which doesn't countenance beginnings—present or past—a school very similar to the social circle which will not admit that people have legs.

Bunny turned around and looked at Ledinger. Ledinger glared at him. Bunny returned the glare. They exchanged glares for several moments—but believe it, Bunny had the last glare. The incident disturbed him, however, to such an extent that he got out the part and spent a couple of hours over it before retiring.

The next morning, and the morning following, the rehearsals were very similar to the first. Kramer raved and tore as usual, and continually changed the reading of lines and the "business." And Bunny, for his part, finished, as usual, blue and disheartened.

And it was after one of these heartbreaking sessions that Jimmy Dougherty, the property-man with the show, stopped Bunny on his way out of the theater and added further to his worries.

"Lemme tip you off to somethin', kid," he said to Bunny, out of the corner of his mouth. "This Kramer guy is got it in fer you, and he's keepin' the wires hot to New York huntin' fer a guy named Redding to play that part. I jest thought I'd wise you up; so keep it under your hat, see—under your hat."

This was bad enough, but it was at the rehearsal in Rochester that Kramer laid on the finishing touches. Bunny was to open that night, and had carefully prepared his wardrobe, according to the director's previous instructions.

"I've decided to change the dressing of the part altogether," he told Bunny. "I want you to wear a loud, check suit and a red wig—you've got to let the audience know it's comedy. Have you got a red wig?"

"Yes, I've got one," answered Bunny, hopelessly and all-gone.

"All right," said Kramer—and left him.

A red wig—to let the audience know it was comedy! He went up-stairs to his dressing-room and, figuratively speaking,

dropped dead. Oh! for a show where the director walks in of a morning and says: "Folks, we'll put on 'Zaza' to-night!" Oh! for the audience that comes back and tells the black-face comedian what a good Irishman he makes. Oh!—and a couple more ohs—for a good, sensible medicine-show.

In a daze he laid out the wardrobe as ordered and brushed up a red wig. This done, he left the theater and spent the remainder of the day wandering aimlessly about the streets—too worried to eat, and too nervous to rest.

Eight o'clock, arriving that night at about its usual time, found him in his dressing-room, made up, and dressed in the loud check suit. The day of mental anguish had left its effects on him. When half-hour was called he had experienced a nervous shock. Hundreds of times he had heard the warning sounded before, but this time he had noticed something ominous about it.

He had felt a woful slump settling over him, and he knew it was the incipient stages of stage-fright—that sickening paralysis that leaves one with his mouth open and his mind shut—the acute and ghastly consciousness of every individual eye in an audience looking up at one like an oyster on a saucer. It was only after a desperate effort that he had thrown off the spell and pulled himself together.

Now, at the call of fifteen minutes, the feeling attacked him again, and this time it was harder to fight. He felt himself growing sick. His knees trembled, and he felt a choking dryness in his mouth and throat that a half dozen drinks of water couldn't wet again.

He was fighting hopelessly for the control of his nerves when there came a rap at his door, and the next instant Kramer was in the room with a telegram in his hand.

"I might as well tell you, Trent," the director said, "you won't do for this part—I guess you know it as well as I do. You'll get through a week from to-night"—and without further remark he closed the door again and left.

Bunny sat down before his make-up

shelf. All his nervousness had left him; he was suddenly very calm. They were letting him go without even waiting to see his first performance—they had evidently found the other man they were looking for. A feeling of bitterness surged up in his heart against Kramer and the whole show. A nice bit of encouragement to offer a man breaking into a new part—one week's notice that he was through. Very professional! He looked up at his reflection in the mirror and suddenly he stiffened.

The next moment the red wig was behind his trunk and he was furiously tearing off the check suit. With a smear of cold cream he took off his make-up, and began to put on another, a very light one—merely a touching up of the eyes and a slight flush of rouge.

"You'll rag me to death, will you?" he hissed under his breath as he hastily powdered. "I'm going to play this part just once to suit myself if I wreck the show—and if you don't like it, you can ring down on me, you fathead!"

He opened his trunk and got out a plain dark suit and a gray cap, and had just donned them when the stage-manager yelled: "Places." Force of habit started him toward the door; but he suddenly remembered and stopped. It wouldn't do to let Kramer see him in the new make-up and dressing until the show had started and it was too late to hold the curtain. He listened until he was sure the curtain had gone up and the piece was under way, and then, utterly indifferent as to what happened next, he went down-stairs.

As he reached the stage, Kramer, who was standing near the switchboard, saw him and started toward him.

"Hey! What's the matter?" he cried. "I thought I told you to—"

With a plunge Bunny reached him, and the next instant the director was flat against a stack of scenery—his eyes bulging with the pressure of the youngster's fingers at his throat.

"Listen, you," growled Bunny; "maybe I can't act—maybe I can't—but I can do one thing: I can make money licking dubs like you at ten cents a dozen. Do you get me?" He dug his thumbs further into the

director's fat throat. "And if you even speak to me again to-night I'm going to beat you into a mess of mush. Do you hear me?"

"Grab him, Dougherty," gasped Kramer to the property-man, who had rushed over to them; but Dougherty contented himself with merely breaking Bunny's hold and pushing him away—his sympathies were not on Kramer's side.

"Don't make any mistake and forget," warned Bunny; and without even a look backward, he went to the entrance and waited for his cue.

Kramer watched him with bulging eyes. In spite of his dreadnought type, he was no battler, and the encounter left him in a semiparalytic state. His first impulse was to order the curtain rung down; but he didn't know what might follow such drastic action. Then, suddenly, he turned and made a dash for the door-tender.

"Go out and get Mr. Blackwell here as fast as you can—the manager of the show—Mr. Blackwell," he gasped to the astonished old man. "Tell him to come back here—maybe we got to ring down. Tell him to hurry!" He pushed the old fellow to a flying start, and then, distracted, rushed back to the stage. Bunny had made his entrance, and he frantically rushed from entrance to entrance trying to watch him. He didn't know what the boy would do—any one crazy enough to assault a director was liable to do anything, he figured.

"Oh! Look at him!" he groaned, as he saw Bunny, wholly disregarding all his direction, cringing in a chair and regarding the chief of detectives with open mouth and staring eyes. "Look at him! I told him to stand up there. He's killing the scene. Look!" He turned and walked in a circle, raving. "Listen to him! Listen how he's reading it," he groaned to a couple of the company who had hurried to see what was wrong. "He's killing it! He's killing it!"

The stage-door burst open with a bang, and Blackwell hurried in, accompanied by the excited door-tender. Kramer almost ran to him.

"That new man!" he cried—"he's out there without any make-up on. He grabbed

me and tried to choke me. He's gone crazy. I told him to wear a wig and a check suit. He's gone all to pieces—he's putting the show on the bum!"

Blackwell let a ripping oath out of him.

"Did you ever see such damnable luck! Buckley and the author are out in front—they jumped up from New York to see the show—just got in."

Buckley, the head of the firm! Kramer turned pale.

"There's my luck for you!" he moaned. "They'll think I'm responsible for that idiot. I told you, Mr. Blackwell, you can't depend on these amateurs. You never can tell what they're going to do."

"What the devil's got into him—did you give him his notice?"

"Yes, I told him," said Kramer.

"That's what's the matter. Why didn't you wait till after the show? Like as not we'll have to ring down on—"

But suddenly a roar from the audience stopped him. When it died down, the voice of Bunny was heard for a moment, and then there was another roar—longer and louder. Blackwell and Kramer looked at each other in surprise—there wasn't supposed to be any laugh as early as this; and the two started for the nearest entrance.

Blackwell found a crack in the corner of the set and peered through trying to see what was going on. Kramer, behind him, mopped the perspiration from his face and alternately prayed and swore.

Another yell went up from the audience, and Blackwell deserted the crack and went down to the first entrance to get a better view. The yell continued, punctuated here and there with the shrill shrieks of laughter from women.

Bunny still crouched in the chair, apparently doing nothing; the chief of detectives, with a strangely working face, tried to stare at him fiercely, as the part directed; but his large stomach belied the glare. It was quivering like disturbed jelly. On the other side of Bunny a district attorney's assistant had turned his back to the audience and was laughing without any regard whatever for the proprieties. In some manner or other, the boy had "broken up" everybody—including the audience.

The laughter died down and the scene went on. The chief of detectives roared a question at the shrinking victim in the chair. The district attorney's assistant shot another question on top of it. Then, glaring at him, they awaited the boy's answer. The youngster looked appealingly, first at one and then the other of his questioners, and then, as seriously as could be, read the line his part called for.

There was another prolonged yell from the audience. Blackwell craned his neck for a better view. Somebody must be doing something—he knew the show so well from repeated hearings he was able to recognize the slightest irregularity, and he had never heard laughs so early or so loud.

The scene went on, and the laughs came faster and faster. Every member of the company not working in the scene crowded into the entrances to watch. The climax came up with a smash—and the laughter and applause rocked the house. There were curtains and curtains!

When the bowing had finished, and the curtain had come down to stay, the man playing the chief of detectives turned to Bunny with an oath.

"You better get back to the sawdust," he snarled, insinuating that Bunny belonged with the three-ringed amusements. Heretofore he had dominated the first act throughout. No one had ever taken it away from him before, and he was duly outraged.

"Would you like to know where to go to?" inquired Bunny; but the enraged chief of detectives evidently knew where to go without any direction from any one.

He had almost reached the stairs leading up from the stage when Blackwell called to him: "Just a minute—I want to see you, Trent."

"If you want to talk to me, my dressing-room is up-stairs," retorted Bunny. When one has lost all one can lose, one can afford to be gloriously impudent, can't one?

He went to his dressing-room savagely gleeful. Maybe it wasn't New York acting—let them call it what they pleased; but they had told him he had to be funny, and he had made a dollar-and-a-half audience howl. In the actor language of "the

sticks," he had taken that part and "kicked the stuffing out of it."

He didn't go on until late in the second act, and he was leisurely changing his clothes when the door opened and Blackwell entered.

"Mr. Kramer tells me—" he began; but Bunny interrupted.

"Don't tell me what Kramer tells you. If you don't like what I'm doing, ring down—it would tickle me to death."

"Oh! that's the way you feel about it, eh?" said Blackwell. "Well, you're done after to-night. I'll close the show before I'll let you run it. Who the devil do you think you are, anyway?"

"I'll quit now, if you like," snapped Bunny.

"What's the matter? What's this stuff about quitting?" asked a man who had suddenly appeared at the door. Bunny looked at him surprised—he had never seen the man before. He was middle-aged, with gray hair, and a strong, pleasant face; his clothes fitted perfectly, and he wore the air of much prosperity.

"This man is around here threatening to lick Kramer, and he's out there slapstickin' the part to suit himself," explained Blackwell.

At this moment Kramer, himself, appeared. He edged himself into the room and hurried to get his story in first.

"He's going directly opposite to all the directions, Mr. Buckley—he—" but Buckley stopped him.

"Just a minute," he said. "There seems to be quite a misunderstanding here. This man is going to play the part—and he's going to play it just the way he's playing it now."

Kramer's mouth came open, and his eyes nearly fell out on his cheeks; but Bunny was affected very differently. All the pent-up fury in him burst out.

"No, he isn't going to play the part. He's done after the show to-night." He turned on Kramer. "You fired me before the show to-night—you weren't even decent enough to wait till afterward." He turned to Blackwell. "And you—you told me I was done to-night. Well, I *am* done."

He reached down behind the trunk and

brought out the red wig. He flourished it before Kramer's face.

"This is what I was told to wear—so the audience would know it was comedy.' I've been called every name in the catalogue. I've been sneered at, and ragged, and insulted—and just one person in the whole show has ever said a pleasant word to me." On top of his rage, the recollection of old Mrs. Harcourt's motherly words were too much for him. He started to cry. "You poor fish," he sobbed, glaring at Kramer, "if you're a director, I'm a theater. I needed the job so bad I let you make a dirty dog out of me; but I'm done—and I'm done to-night."

"Wait a minute, my boy," put in Buckley. "You're all shot to pieces, now; but we'll straighten this out all right. I'm the owner of the show—and you're going to play the part just the way you're playing it. It's just what I want."

"I don't want to play it," sobbed Bunny. "I don't want to ever see a big show again. I'm goin' back where I belong—back to the sticks, where you can get a pleasant look once in a while—and I'm going to stay there."

Buckley made a sign to Kramer and Blackwell, and they quietly departed. He watched the boy with a quizzical, half-amused smile, and then he went to him and laid his hand on a heaving shoulder.

"A man that gets mad enough to cry always puts up a good fight, kid," he said gently; "and I just like your spunk enough to want you to stay with me." "You're going right down-stairs and play the rest of the show, and you're going to keep right on knocking 'em out for a home-run—just the way you did in the first act—and after the show, you and I are going out to get supper somewhere and sign a contract. How about it?"

He waited a moment in silence, and finally Bunny nodded.

"I'll meet you right here after the last act," said Buckley, and quietly went out.

The boy lifted his head and looked at himself in the mirror.

"Had to bawl, didn't you?" he said in disgust—"you poor, South African, hump-backed doughnut."

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



IN next week's issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY you will find the first instalment of one of the most astounding tales that has ever been printed. Those readers who have been with us for some time will remember "The Rebel Soul," a novelette published in the issue of June 30, 1917, as a story of great dramatic force and far-reaching power. They will remember George Witherspoon, the "Rebel Soul"—for he is a character that it is impossible to forget.

It was unthinkable that there were not more and greater adventures in store for the people of this story. A sequel was demanded by hundreds of readers. Now it is ready—a greater story on a broader canvas, but with all the subtle charm and weird beauty of the earlier tale. So when you take up next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY look for the beginning of this far-above-the-usual six-part serial—

INTO THE INFINITE

BY AUSTIN HALL

Sequel to "The Rebel Soul"

(A "Different" Serial)

Don't miss reading this wonderful story just because you didn't read "The Rebel Soul." "INTO THE INFINITE," although some of the characters appeared in the earlier work, is complete in itself. George Witherspoon is a marvelous inception; a being of this world, yet not of it; a man unfettered by man-made laws or man-made morals, yet with tremendous powers of good in his mighty brain; a creature of common clay, yet with the unlimited forces of eternity at his command—this superman desiring nothing so much as to be as other men; pursued "into the infinite" by good friends intent on saving him from himself, despite all risks. And of course there is a woman—a pure, beautiful girl, who is loved by this supernatural being and is a tremendous force in his life.

We won't try further to describe this story to you. To do it justice in a few words is impossible. But if you like fiction that takes you out of the beaten path, in which the author's powerful imagination carries you far over the clouds that hang above every-day living and thinking—read it.

LOOKING over the illustrated Sunday supplements leaves poor, respectable breadwinners like you and me with a grouch against the beach-combers on sun-kissed shores and sands, who sport and splash in the surf, while we lose our tempers and our trains trying to get the furnace to draw or the coffee to boil before we set out for our day's discipline at the office or the shop. We think we would also like to take a fling in Arcady or be a duke for a day, with never a thought of the morning alarm-clock or the butcher's bills or the amount of coal in the cellar. But if "virtue is

its own reward," no doubt we are not lacking in our compensations, though at times we are hard put to it to assess them.

Anyhow, if we can't all go to Florida or California, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY provides free transportation to Tickfall, which, as you all must know, is in Louisiana, where care slips from your soul by its own weight, like overripe fruit, and where Skeeter Butts and Hitch Diamond, Figger Bush and Mustard Prophet, Pap Curtain and Vinegar Atts provide a continuous performance of riotous, rollicking fun, beside which the tame

feasting of the five hundred, farther South, looks like a family funeral party. In proof of this Tickfall boost, see in next week's magazine our latest budget from the Louisiana front—

THE 'FRAID CAT

BY E. K. MEANS

Author of "The Squeeze-Wheel," "Diada, Daughter of Discord," "Two Sorry Sons of Sorrow," etc.

Here is a divertisement in black and white of how Dazzle Zenor spilled the beans when Hopey Prophet goaded her to a confirmation of her faith in the powerful protection of her gallant knight-errant, Skeeter Butts.

MORALE is a term that has been used often in the last few years. There are all kinds of morale—that of the soldier's particular regiment or corps; the morale of the citizen when it comes to giving up a part of his income to help pay the bills of the nation; the morale of caste, which sometimes keeps a man from sinking too far into the depths, and sometimes helps him back after he has gone down. In "A WELL-KNOWN CLUBMAN," in our next issue, Ben Ames Williams tells a story of morale. It's a corking piece of work, with a most surprising turn at the end. Be sure to read it. It is very much worth while.

If you found a narrative written on goat-skin in a secret compartment of a richly carved, gold-inlaid seventeenth century treasure coffer dug out of a ruined palace in Guatemala, it would raise high expectations in your mind, wouldn't it? It is in the form of such a narrative that Richard Butler Glaenzer tells his story of "THE MIRACLE OF SANTA CHIRIMIA" in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY. This charming tale is an episode from the life of Gonzalo Zapatero, of Granada and Guatemala, in 1511. In addition to being an interesting and entertaining tale of high adventure, it is a story of the highest artistic merit, and one that you are certain to be enthusiastic about.

WHEN the mate of the Tuna Fish brought a black cat aboard as a mascot, Skipper Dave Fenton was pleased—that is, he was pleased until he noticed that the animal had a white spot on its chest. Perhaps the cat and the white spot had something to do with the fortunes of Skipper Dave on that voyage; perhaps what happened would have happened anyhow. At any rate Dave's experiences make a mighty good story. We are sure that every reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY will like "A WHITE SPOT," by H. P. Holt, in next week's issue; but it will be an especial treat to the man who likes the tang of the sea in his fiction. There are few tellers of salt-water tales as skilful as Mr. Holt.

THE facile materialism of the nineteenth century has been knocked into the limbo of dead generalizations by the common acceptance of the spiritualism of the twentieth. The Society for Psychical Research has an accredited standing in the eyes of the learned, and most men are willing to confess a belief in some variety of supernaturalism. Ghosts have their backers as well as prime ministers. But there is still something to be said for the philosophy of "You will have to show me." In support of this view see in next week's magazine "OUT OF SUCH THINGS," by Clinton Dangerfield, a story that will make your flesh creep and fix your convictions that— But we propose to let you do your own fixing.

HANGS IT OVER THEM ALL

TO THE EDITOR:

Since the beginning of my journey into the realms of ALL-STORY WEEKLY literature, I have come to admire many of your writers, such as Herman Howard Matteson, Max Brand, J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith, Samuel G. Camp, George Allan England, and Perley Poore Sheehan. The serials by the last named I like best of all, especially the one that is now appearing, "If You Believe It, It's So." "The Untamed" was great.

Give us some more stories by Max Brand. I have read a good many stories in a good many magazines, but the ones the ALL-STORY WEEKLY puts out "hangs it over them all." I like the ALL-STORY WEEKLY the way it is published now and the way the stories come out—four serials running and one or two novelettes; then the short stories. I read all the Heart to Heart Talks, and read what all the kickers say. I am glad there are not many of them. For my part, I cannot kick. I see nothing at all to kick about.

One author I would like to meet some day and shake hands with is Stephen Allen Reynolds. I would, like many others, like to see a sequel to "The Texan." That was the best story I ever read, bar none. Well, if this is to be printed, it will almost have to appear as a serial. Wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY to continue the way it is, I am,

JAMES P. HALLAN.

Springfield, Ohio.

MR. MERRITT ON IMAGINATION

TO THE EDITOR:

Just finished reading the instalment of "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" published in this week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY. My father would like to know what Mr. A. Merritt had to drink, as he would like to get a barrel. Thanking you in advance,

I. M. PAYNE.

Whitneyville, Hamden, Connecticut.

TO THE EDITOR:

Would that I could answer little Miss or Master Payne's question and send a sample to pop. But, alas, where do they bottle the gin that is the

corner-stone of the arch of ima-gin-ation? Where are the distilleries of the booze of beauty and the hooch of horror? If I only knew I would get, not one barrel, but several to tip into myself when the springs of my spirit run dry. The soon-to-be-banished demon is some lamp-lighter—from whence we get our expression, "all lit up." But you can never count upon him to touch his torch to the candles of creation while there are other things around to ignite.

But I'm open to conviction. If pop's a good sport, we might experiment together some time before July 1.

Yours,
ABE MERRITT.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I have been reading your magazine for a long time, and think it is fine. It contains some of the best stories I have ever read. I am especially interested in good Western stories, such as "The Holy Scare," "The Short Cut," "On a Stallion Shod with Fire," and "The Golden Hope"; but "The Untamed" would have been the best story you have ever published if it had ended right. Why on earth did Max Brand give it such an ending, or is he going to write a sequel to it? I don't believe there has ever been a story published before that held the interest of every one like that one did. Everybody here was reading it and talking about it. They could hardly wait till the last instalment came out, but when it did, they were all so disappointed, and so mad, I believe if Max Brand had been anywhere in reach they would have got up a mob, ha, ha; so tell Mr. Brand to get busy and give us a sequel to "The Untamed." If he doesn't, he is sure blowed up in this part of the world. With best wishes for the

ALL-STORY WEEKLY,

H. B. T.

Marshall, Texas.

Enclosed you will find twenty cents, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY in which "A Good Indian" is concluded. I gave my sis

some back copies, but that one is missing. I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for some time, and like it very much. But I must say that Mr. Malone is right—"Safe and Sane" is some "stuff." I couldn't get interested in it. The ones I liked were "The Joyous Trouble-Maker," "The Texan," "A Substitute Millionaire," "Broadway Bab," "The Untamed"—and, oh! so many others. I would like to correspond with some of the readers who would care to write. Good luck to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

MISS BEATRICE ZAHRADWICK.
Bronx, New York.

Could you please tell me when was "The Thunder of Doom" published? Also where could I get that serial? Accidentally I stumbled on the first, and now am anxious for the rest. Although I am a new reader, I, too, would like to compliment you on your exceptional authors on your staff.

L. W.

Columbus, Ohio.

NOTE: "The Thunder of Doom," by Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton, was published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, December 8 to December 22, 1917. It has not been published in book form, but we can supply the three numbers containing it for twenty cents each.

After having read Max Brand's last story in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, "The Untamed," I wish you would, as a favor, please ask him to write another long story. I think that was the best ever. His ideas are wonderful, the subjects perfect, and, best of all, his stories always leave an impression, something to think of long after one has finished the story. I hope you will please do this, as I am an old friend of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, but a new one to voice my opinion. Another is E. K. Means, which are exceedingly good. Hoping I will soon be able to read another of Max Brand's (I have read all his stories), I will thank you in advance,

MRS. D. DALY.

Boston, Massachusetts.

THIS BOOK APPEARED SERIALLY IN THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY

NOVEL
NUMBER 88

THE TWENTY-SIX CLUES BY ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "Suspense," "Between Heaven and Earth,"
"Mystery of the Poison Pen," etc.

ISABEL OSTRANDER, as the readers of this magazine know, is a supreme artist when it comes to mixing the elements of a ripping detective story. The plot of "THE TWENTY-SIX CLUES" is as baffling as life itself. Just as you have decided, definitely, that you are at last on the right track, and have discovered the motive as well as the man, further developments force on you the unwilling conviction that you are as dense and precipitate as *Inspector Druet* himself. In fact all the very latest scientific and laboratory tests are shriveled to fragments by the native common sense of a self-possessed Irishman. (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, November 23 to December 21, 1918.)

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(Mennen Salesman)

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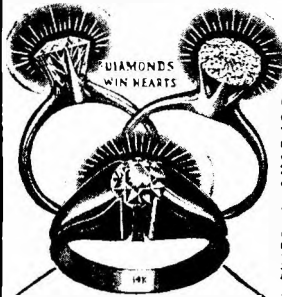
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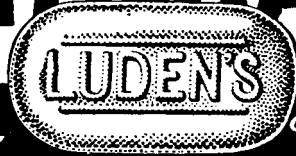
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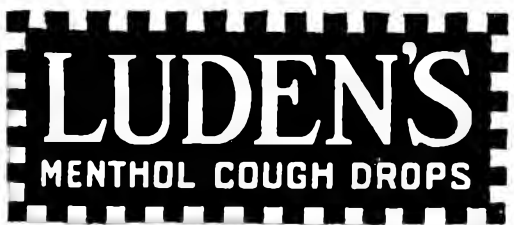
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Shorthand—Its Possibilities

The world is full of examples of what a shorthand writer can rise to, beyond stenography. Young people beginning in business as stenographers

soon learn the details of the business they are in—how it is conducted—the firm's policy—special conditions in the trade—trade secrets, prices, discounts and the most vital things concerning that business. All of these things are dictated to you. This in itself forms the basis of valuable experience in shaping the course of young men and women looking forward to business careers. And when vacancies occur, you are the logical candidate for promotion to a more responsible and better-paying position because of your intimate knowledge of the business.

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Take the ordinary longhand letter *A*. Eliminate everything but the long downstroke and there will remain *Λ*. This is the Paragon symbol for D. It is always written downward.

From the longhand letter *E* rub out everything except the upper part—the circle—and you will have the Paragon E. *o*

Write this circle at the beginning of *Λ* and you will have Ed.

By letting the circle remain open it will be a hook, and this hook stands for A. Thus will be Ad. Add another A at the end, thus and you will have a girl's name, Ada.

From *O* eliminate the initial and final strokes and *O* will remain, which is the Paragon symbol for O.

For the longhand *M*, which is made of 7 strokes, you use this one horizontal stroke —

Therefore, — would be Me.

Now continue the E across the M, so as to add D—thus — and you will have Ad. Now add the large circle for O, and you will have (medo), which is Meadow, with the silent A and W omitted.

You now have 8 of the characters. There are only 26 in all. Then you memorize 26 simple word-signs, 6 prefix contractions and one natural rule for abbreviations. That is all.

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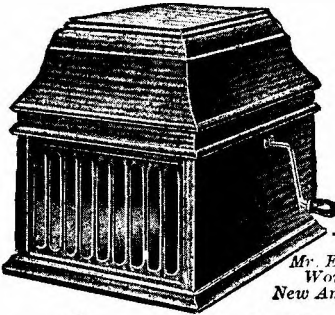
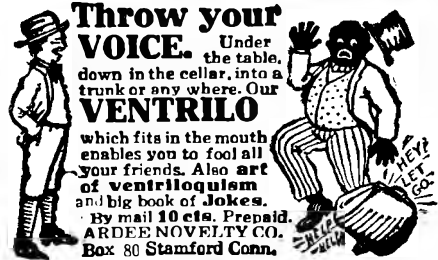
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