

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



A Boob
There
Was

by

C.C. Waddell

*All About an
Under Dog*

10¢ PER
COPY

MARCH 24

BY THE YEAR \$4.00

\$100 Brings 9^{FT} x 12^{FT} Congoleum Rug and 3 Small Rugs to Match—

All Four only

\$15⁹⁵

Less than the Price of One



The price of the famous Congoleum Gold Seal Art Rug is just as well known, absolutely as standard, as sugar, salt or flour used to be.

Go anywhere, look everywhere, in stores, catalogs, magazines and newspapers—and once more refresh your memory of the actual universal standard price of a full size Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rug.

Here we bring you not one rug alone, but four—and all four for less than the regular price of one. A full room size, 9 foot by 12 foot, Congoleum Rug and three small companion Congoleum Rugs to match—each small rug 18 x 36 inches.

30 Days Free Trial

We'll send all four rugs on trial for 30 days. We want you and urge you to put them down on the floor and use them for a whole month—free of expense and without promise or obligation of any kind.

We guarantee that if you would rather return the rugs after making this kind of a trial, just say so and send them back. We will refund to you every penny of transportation charges, both going and coming.

Pay Little by Little Take a Full Year

And that's not all! No matter who you are, or where you live—regardless of your circumstances—we'll send all four rugs immediately, without waiting, red tape or bother, for just a dollar pinned to the coupon.

And we'll wait a year for the balance of the money. If you keep your rugs after making a 30 day's trial, you can pay little by little, almost as you please, taking a full year. That's the way we sell everything.

The Most Famous of All Congoleum Patterns

Congoleum Gold Seal Art Rugs are rapidly becoming the national floor covering—universally used in the kitchen, bathroom and dining room in good homes.

They lay flat from the very first moment without fastening. They never curl or kick up at edges or corners. No need to tack them down. Dirt cannot accumulate underneath.

Less work. Congoleum floors mean less worry and no back-breaking drudgery. Dirt, ashes, grit, dust or mud cannot "grind into" Congoleum Rugs, because the surface is hard and does not absorb. A damp rag keeps a Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rug clean and doesn't hurt it.

Waterproof. These rugs are guaranteed waterproof. There is no burlap in Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs for water to rot. The surface is hard and smooth and wear resisting.

This stunning pattern is a superb tile design that looks exactly like the finest mosaic tile that you have ever seen, in lovely robins' egg blue and stone gray colorings. Such a rug in your kitchen will change the appearance of the whole room. In the dining room it gives an effect impossibly beautiful to describe. For a bedroom it is the most appropriate pattern imaginable. For the bathroom it is absolutely ideal.

This Offer Ends in 30 Days Send Your Dollar NOW

We cannot hold this offer open long. We make it for quick action to prove to you our ability to sell you similar bargains in all kinds of house furnishings from cellar to garret, on the same wonderful terms.

Clip the Coupon and pin a Dollar to it.

No. D4C408 9 ft. x 12 ft. Genuine Congoleum Gold Seal Art Rug and 3 companion rugs to match, ea. 18 x 36 in. \$15.95

FREE

Mail Postcard for Book of 10,000 Bargains

This Congoleum Rug bargain is just a sample of the ten thousand other bargains in our great big furniture book. A postcard will bring it to you free for the asking. It shows *everything* for the home. It is probably the largest book of the kind published. A great many things are shown in their actual colors.

Always a Year to Pay

You never need to ask for credit. It's the way we sell everything. And we always loan articles free for a whole month before you need to decide.

A Few Departments

Wood Beds	Steel Beds	Curtains
Furniture	Clocks	Sewing
Linens	Floor	Machines
Cooking	Coverings	Brass Beds
Utensils	Silverware	Dishes
Musical Instruments	Lamps	Bedding

Rugs and carpets in all weaves and patterns and colors. All sorts of odds and ends like wringers, irons, drapes, tools, fixtures, trunks and bags. And a great big department of diamonds, watches and jewelry.

Ask for it now. A plain letter or postcard will do.

Spiegel, May, Stern Co.

1625 35th Street, CHICAGO, ILL.

Spiegel, May, Stern Co.

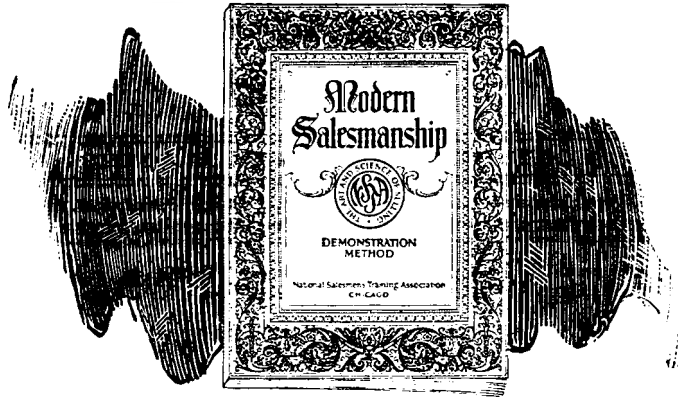
1625 Thirty-fifth Street, CHICAGO, ILL.

I enclose \$1. Send me on approval the 4 Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs here described, No. D4C408—on 30 days Free Trial. If I am not delighted with the rugs, I can return them and get my \$1 back, also all transportation costs. Otherwise I will pay easy terms, \$1.25 monthly, until special bargain price, \$15.95, is paid.

Name
Street R. F. D.
or Box No.

Shipping Point.....

City.....State.....
Also Send Me Your Latest Free Style Book



NOW FREE!

The Book That Has Shown Thousands the Way to Amazing Salary Increases

Do you want to leave the rut of routine work and start right out making more money than you ever dreamed possible? We have done exactly this for thousands of men. Here is the book which gave them their start. Read how it is now offered to you—FREE!

TAKE this situation: A man who had worked all his life in a routine job at low pay suddenly surprises his friends by moving into a better neighborhood, taking a big house, buying a car and blossoming out as a well-to-do and influential citizen in his new community. How did he do it? What is the secret that he used? Simple enough. He knew that the biggest money in business is in Selling, and though he felt that he couldn't sell a thing, he suddenly learned the secrets that make Master Salesmen and then began to make big money.

If only one man had found inspiration enough in this remarkable book to jump to a sudden brilliant success in the Selling field—into a job paying him many times his former salary—then you might call it luck. But thousands have done it.

Read!

Charles Beery of Winterset, Iowa, stepped from \$18 a week as a clerk to a position making him \$1,000 the very first month. J. P. Overstreet of Dennison, Texas, read this amazing book, left a job on the Capitol Police Force at a salary of less than \$1,000 a year and in six weeks earned \$1,800. F. Wynn, Portland, Ore., an ex-service man, earned \$554.37 in one week. Geo. W. Kearns of Oklahoma City found in this book a way to jump his earnings from \$60.00 a month to \$524.00 in two weeks, and C. W. Campbell learned from it how he could quit a clerking job on the railroad to earn \$1,032 in thirty days.

Your One Chance to Make the Biggest Money of Your Life

Not one of the men whose names appear in the panel at left had ever sold a thing before—not a dime's worth. Yet every one of these men through reading this book discovered an amazingly easy way to jump suddenly from low pay to extraordinary earnings in the selling field.

Sounds remarkable, doesn't it? Yet there is nothing remarkable about it. There are certain

ways to approach different types of prospects to get their undivided attention—certain ways to stimulate keen interest—certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudices, outwit competition and make the prospects act.

Simple as A B C

"Modern Salesmanship" tells exactly how the National Salesmen's Training Association will teach you these principles in your spare time at home.

As soon as you are qualified and ready, the Association's Employment Service helps you to select and secure a selling position as city or traveling salesman.

Now Free to Every Man Who Will Act at Once

We are not making any extravagant claims about what we will do for you. We don't have to. All of the amazing proof and many important features about Salesmanship are contained in our new salary-raising book, "Modern Salesmanship." It is yours—FREE. Send the coupon for it today. It will show you how you can quickly become a Master Salesman—a big money maker. It will tell you about the National Salesmen's Training Association system of Salesmanship training—about the National Demonstration method that gives you actual experience while studying—and all about the amazing opportunities that await you in the selling field.

This may be the one big chance of your life to leave forever behind you the low pay of a routine job for a sudden, brilliant success at a big salary.

Is it worth 2c to find out? Then mail this coupon NOW.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 2-C-2, Chicago, Illinois

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION
Dept. 2-C-2, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

Please send me, without any obligation on my part, your free book, "Modern Salesmanship," and full information about the N. S. T. A. system of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service.

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CL

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HULBERT FOOTNER'S GENTLEMAN ROGER'S GIRL BEGINS NEXT WEEK.

The story of a great scamp and what befell when the inexorable years brought out of the convent his innocent, high-principled daughter. Celesta takes her place among the fascinating female characters of real literature.

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

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RICHARD H. TITHEKINGTON, Secretary

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Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879



"I'm Making Real Money Now!"

"SEE that coupon? Remember the day you urged me to send it to Scranton? Mary, that was a red letter day for us.

"Mr. Carter called me in to-day, and said he had been watching my work ever since he had learned that I was studying with the International Correspondence Schools.

"Then he asked me if I thought I could take over George Stevens' job. I told him I was sure that I could—that I had had that goal in view ever since I began studying with the I. C. S.

"I start to-morrow, Mary, at an increase of \$60 a month."

HOW about *you*? Are you always going to work for a small salary? Are you going to waste your natural ability all your life? Or are you going to get ahead in a big way? It all depends on what you do with your spare time.

Opportunity is here—this time in the form of that familiar I. C. S. coupon. It may seem like a little thing, but it has been the means of bringing better jobs and bigger salaries to thousands of men and women.

You *can* have the position you want in the work you like best, a salary that will give you and your family the home, the comforts, the little luxuries you would like them to have.

No matter what your age, your occupation, your education, or your means—you can do it!

All we ask is the chance to prove it. That's fair, isn't it? Then mark and mail this coupon. There's no obligation and not a penny of cost. It's a little thing that takes but a moment, but it's the most important thing you can do to-day. Do it now!

----- TEAR OUT HERE -----
INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
 Box 2183-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING DEPARTMENT

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Business Management | ☐ Salesmanship |
| ☐ Industrial Management | ☐ Advertising |
| ☐ Personnel Organization | ☐ Better Letters |
| ☐ Traffic Management | ☐ Foreign Trade |
| ☐ Business Law | ☐ Stenography and Typing |
| ☐ Banking and Banking Law | ☐ Business English |
| ☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.) | ☐ Civil Service |
| ☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting | ☐ Railway Mail Clerk |
| ☐ Bookkeeping | ☐ Common School Subjects |
| ☐ Private Secretary | ☐ High School Subjects |
| ☐ Business Spanish | ☐ Illustrating |
| ☐ French | ☐ Cartooning |

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Electrical Engineering | ☐ Architect |
| ☐ Electric Lighting | ☐ Blue Print Reading |
| ☐ Mechanical Engineer | ☐ Contractor and Builder |
| ☐ Mechanical Draftsman | ☐ Architectural Draftsman |
| ☐ Machine Shop Practice | ☐ Concrete Builder |
| ☐ Railroad Positions | ☐ Structural Engineer |
| ☐ Gas Engine Operating | ☐ Plumbing and Heating |
| ☐ Civil Engineer | ☐ Chemistry |
| ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ Pharmacy |
| ☐ Metallurgy | ☐ Automobile Work |
| ☐ Steam Engineering | ☐ Navigation |
| ☐ Radio | ☐ Agriculture and Poultry |
| ☐ Airplane Engines | ☐ Mathematics |

Name.....
 Street.....
 Address.....
 City..... State.....

Occupation.....
 Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the nearest needful 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:

	LINE RATE	Combination line rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$1.60	\$4.00
Argosy Allstory	2.60	less 2 per cent cash discount.
Weekly		

Minimum space four lines.

Apr. 28th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close March 31st.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

TAILORING SALESMEN MAKE \$75 A WEEK SELLING OUR STRICTLY ALL-WOOL MADE-TO-MEASURE SUITS AT \$26.50. YOU COLLECT PROFITS IN ADVANCE AND KEEP THEM. WE SUPPLY FINEST SELLING OUTFIT IN AMERICA. MANY EXCLUSIVE MONEY-MAKING FEATURES. Tailoring, raincoat, and side-line m-n, part or full time, get in touch with us immediately. **GOODWEAR (CHICAGO, INC., 844 W. Adams St., Dept. 286, Chicago, Ill.**

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. **Carnation Co., Dept. 200, St. Louis, Mo.**

Only One Policy Daily Means \$130 Per Month Profit. Same on renewals. Policy pays \$3000 death; \$25 weekly benefit for injury or sickness. Men or women acceptable. Premium \$10 yearly. Full or spare time. Easy seller. Write quick for territory. Underwriters, Dept. R. B., 196 Market St., Newark, N. J.

OUR AGENTS MAKE \$35 TO \$50 DAILY and are getting it with our marvelous invention. Sells to everybody. Low price. Pocket outfit. Write **STERN CO., 25 N. Dearborn St., Chicago.**

AGENTS: A Brand New Hosiery Proposition for men, women and children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles, colors and finest silk hose. You can sell at less than store prices. Write for samples. **THOMAS MANUFACTURING COMPANY, Class 607, Dayton, Ohio.**

\$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular \$25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make \$35.00 to \$40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. **WASHINGTON TAILORING CO., Dept. Q-304, Chicago.**

\$9 TO \$18 DAY Easy Taking Orders new "extra thread" guaranteed silk hosiery and "Bonnie Maid" silk lingerie. Commissions advanced. Powerful selling aids. We deliver and collect. **MOORE KNITTING MILLS CO., 206 S. La Salle St., Chicago, Ill.**

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. **Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.**

AGENTS—CLEAN UP \$100 WEEKLY WITH "FIFTY NINE", weekly average 100 sales—dollar profit each. 30—40 sales daily frequently made; demonstrating outfit catches order. 30 other coin-coasters, all daily necessities. Postal brings our unique plans. **DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 68, Chicago.**

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. **American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.**

Sell Guaranteed Hosiery. Lowest prices. Sample Outfit FREE, with patented Demonstrator Sample Case. 50 per cent more sales guaranteed. **JOSEPH BROS., 54-M Burnside Ave., New York.**

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 137 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address **Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.**

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write **Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.**

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD FARM LANDS! Near thriving city in lower Mich. 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts; only \$10 to \$50 down; bal. long time. Write today for big booklet free. **Swigart Land Co., Y-1245, First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.**

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES: \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. **PRODUCERS LEAGUE, 388 Mainwright, St. Louis, Mo.**

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR \$5—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. **UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.**

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I WANT 100 MEN AND WOMEN QUICK TO TAKE ORDERS FOR RAINCOATS, RAINCAPES AND WATERPROOF APRONS. THOUSANDS OF ORDERS WAITING FOR YOU. \$2.00 AN HOUR FOR SPARE TIME. MAHER MADE \$597.50 IN JUNE. NISSEN \$19 IN THREE HOURS. PURVIANCE \$207 IN SEVEN DAYS. \$2500 A YEAR PROFIT FOR FOUR AVERAGE ORDERS A DAY. NO DELIVERING OR COLLECTING. NO EXPERIENCE OR CAPITAL REQUIRED. WRITE QUICK FOR INFORMATION. **COMER MFG. CO., DEPT. Y-154, DAYTON, OHIO.**

TAILORING Agent—Good men now earning \$50.00 to \$150.00 week year around selling our wonderful \$29.50 virgin wool tailored to order suits, overcoats. They sell fast because \$20.00 cheaper than store prices. You get paid in advance. Protected territory. Prefer experienced; will train inexperienced if right man. Write J. B. SIMPSON, personal, 821 W. Adams St., Chicago, Dept. 525.

HERE IT IS—Fifty Fast Sellers. Everybody needs and buys. Fifty dollars weekly easily made. **B. & G. RUBBER COMPANY, Dept. 265, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.**

"\$10 A DAY AND MORE." our new book, shows clearly how you may gain sure success and large profits selling Guaranteed Hosiery and Underwear, factory to family. It is Free. Write today. **C. & D. CO., 13-E Grand Rapids, Mich.**

Agents Sell Harper's Ten Use Household Cleaning Set. It washes and dries windows, cleans walls, sweeps, scrubs, mops and does five other things. Sells for only \$2.85. Over 100% profit. Free information, **Harper Brush Works, 107 A St., Fairfield, Iowa.**

Capable Men May Earn \$15 to \$25 day selling high-grade Double-Wear Shoes direct from factory to wearer. Big opportunity for you. Clever Selling Plan insures your success. Write today for full particulars, style sheets, etc. **Doublewear Shoe Co., Manufacturers, 12-A, Minneapolis, Minn.**

AGENTS—\$10.00 ON SIDE. FACTORY OFFICE EMPLOYEES—MILK, GROCERY, LAUNDRY, BUTTER DELIVERERS — COLLECTORS, SELL SOAPS, FLAVORING, TOILET GOODS. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. BICK CO., 113A OLIVE, ST. LOUIS, MO.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factor's" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. **W. Hillier Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.**

WE PAY \$200 monthly salary, furnish rig and expenses to introduce our guaranteed poultry and stock powders. **BIGLER COMPANY, X-506, Springfield, Illinois.**

AGENTS—\$15 A DAY—EASY, QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG WEEKLY BONUS—\$1.50 premium Free to every customer. Simply show our beautiful 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. **NEW ERA MFG. CO., 805 Madison St., Dept. 20-T, Chicago.**

27,000 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE; new, different; cannot injure records; \$10.00 daily easy. Free sample to workers. **EVERPLAY, Desk 312, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.**

FOR SALE

FOR SALE. Complete set **ARGOSY, R. R. MAN'S MAGAZINE, GOLDEN DAYS** and others, for best offer received up to May 1st. Make offer. **L. D. WEBSTER, Aurora, N. Y.**

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE A SONG. ANY SUBJECT. YOU CAN DO IT. SEND WORDS TODAY. I WILL COMPOSE THE MUSIC. FRANK RADNER, 6048 PRAIRIE AVE., DEPT. 651, CHICAGO.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. **NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403 Fitzgerald Building, New York.**

WANTED—MISCELLANEOUS

Cash for Old Gold, Platinum, Silver, Diamonds, Liberty Bonds, War, Thrift, Unused Postage Stamps, False Teeth, Magneto Points, Jobs, any valuables. Mail in today. Cash sent return mail. Goods returned in ten days if you are not satisfied. **Ohio Smelting Co., 301 Hippodrome Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.**

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



"Your Future in Electricity"

This book tells you
how you can make
good in the greatest
field of all—Electricity

Get your **FREE**
copy—Use the
coupon

American School

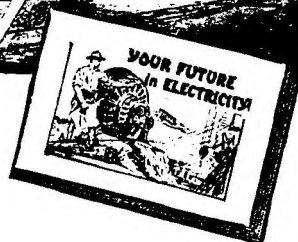
Dept. E-35, Drexel Avenue & 58th Street
CHICAGO

☐ Send me the free book "Your Future in Electricity." This request puts me under no obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....



Free Book

This big, handsomely printed 32-page book tells of the wonderful opportunities awaiting for you in Electricity. It tells how you may become a big pay Electrical Expert in 1 year. Send for it.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

A Dress of Exquisite Beauty

Well
Worth
\$6.00

Flowered Voile

and Organdy

Low
Special
Price **\$2.49**



Extremely smart model with fashionable low waist line. The full new style skirt is gathered at waist and has two rows of white organdy insert, making it specially attractive and picturesque.

Front of dress has dainty vestee, lace trimmed. Tuxedo collar is of fine texture organdy. Sash and cuffs are also made of organdy. A very remarkable dress at a very low price.

Send No MONEY

Dress will be sent without a penny deposit. Just send your name, size and color wanted—then pay postman the low price of \$2.49 plus postage. Order by No. AD119. Do it now.

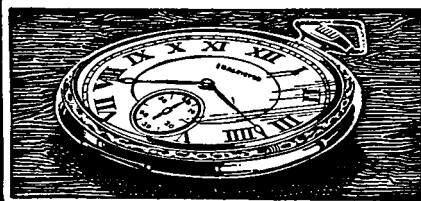
Sizes
16
to
46

COLORS:
Blue,
Lavender,
Rose or Pink

**Money Back
GUARANTEE**

LEE-THOMAS CO.
Dept. 319, Chicago, Ill.

21 Jewel—Burlington



Only \$1.00 Down

The 21-Jewel Burlington is sold to you at a very low price and on the very special terms (after free examination) of only \$1.00 down. Send today for information. **Free Book** Send for the most complete watch book ever produced. 100 pictures and engravings beautifully illustrated in colors. Write for it today, it is free. A letter or a postcard will do.

Burlington Watch Co. 19th St. & Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1453, Chicago

HELP WANTED

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. Wilson Methods, Ltd., Dept. G, Toronto, Canada.

BE A DETECTIVE. \$50-\$100 WEEKLY: travel over world, experience unnecessary. **AMERICAN DETECTIVE AGENCY,** 1107 Lucas, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS. STENOGRAPHERS. CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T. payment after securing position. **CSS, 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.**

MEN—WOMEN—18 UP. Get U. S. Government Jobs. \$1140—\$1800 year. Common education sufficient with our coaching. Sample lessons free. **FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. P-1, Rochester, N. Y.**

HELP WANTED—MALE

EARN \$110 TO \$250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. POSITION GUARANTEED AFTER 2 MONTHS' SPARE TIME STUDY OR MONEY REFUNDED. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30, STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, Train Porters (colored), \$140—\$200. Experience unnecessary. 836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ill.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

WE PAY BIG MONEY for painting pillow tops and lamp shades. Simple, easy, quick. Experience unnecessary. **NILEART COMPANY, 2255, Ft. Wayne, Ind.**

Wanted—Women—Girls. Learn Dress Designing—Making. \$35 week. Learn while earning. Sewing experience unnecessary. Sample lessons free. Write immediately. **FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. R-522, Rochester, N. Y.**

HELP WANTED—GENERAL

EARN UP TO \$400 MONTHLY, LIVING EXPENSES PAID, IN HOTEL WORK. STUNNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINED MEN AND WOMEN—MANY OPENINGS. WE HAVE MORE THAN WE CAN FILL. 30,000 HOTEL POSITIONS TO BE FILLED THE COMING YEAR. WE TRAIN YOU AT HOME. SEND FOR FREE BOOKLET. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., 200 CARLTON COURT, BUFFALO, N. Y.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY. **WATSON E. COLEMAN, 624 F ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.**

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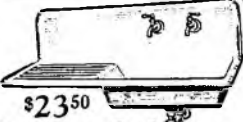
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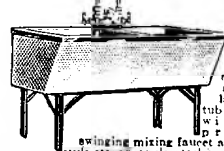


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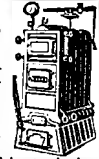
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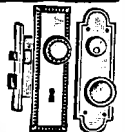
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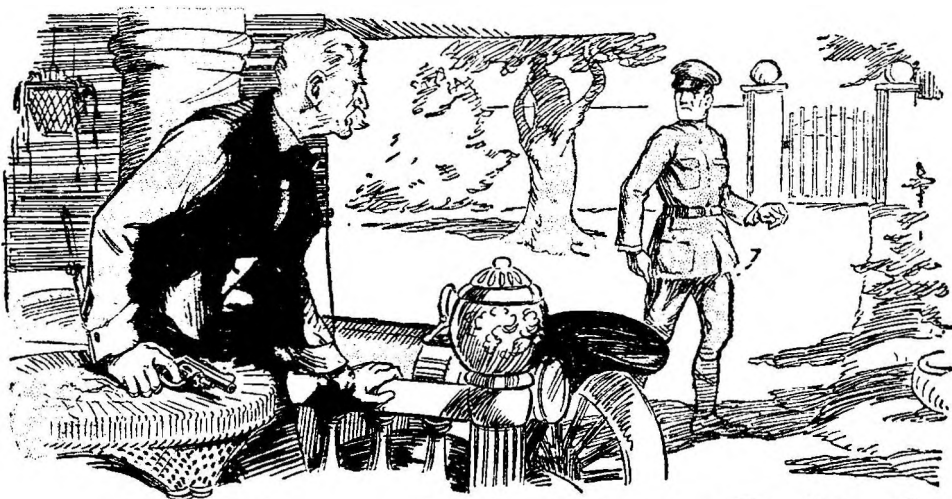
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NUMBER 2



A Boob There Was

By C. C. WADDELL

Author of "So This Is Arizona!" etc.

CHAPTER I.

MUD AND SAND.

SEATED in a barber's chair, with a slowly hardening layer of black paste smeared over his face, Bob Moore submitted one hand to the ministrations of the manicure girl, while he dabbled the other in a silver bowl of soapy water. He little knew that fortune lay just at the tips of those idly dabbling fingers.

The manicure girl glanced up at his miry visage. She was Broadway-built and a "kidder," as manicures must learn to be.

"All you need," she giggled, "is some pussy-willows and a few green frogs, and

you'd be a ringer for the Great Dismal Swamp."

Bob made no response; he didn't even smile. He couldn't; that mudlike cosmetic as it dried held his face stiff and immovable as the death mask of the Emperor Napoleon. He couldn't lift his eyelids, his jaws were set, his lips puckered as if he had been eating green persimmons.

To his own surprise, too—for he was not usually gifted at repartee—he thought of a bright retort to her sally. But he might as well have been dead and buried, for all his ability to express it. It is thus that opportunity often passes us by.

His silence made no difference to the

manicure girl, however. She prattled on lightly and unconcernedly like a dentist when he has his victim gagged and helpless.

"Who's the dame, Bobby?" she asked. "Nix! Nix!" as he made a dissenting gesture with the hand on which she was employed. "Don't try to tell me that you're booking the whole show here—shave, haircut, shampoo, manicure and massage—just to impress the subway guards or the waiter where you eat.

"A guy can get his hair trimmed, or treat himself to a clean shave, and nothing doing," she observed sagely. "Even a shampoo or a manicure ain't grounds for undue suspicion. But when they play it clean across the board, and especially when they torture 'emselves with a mud massage, you can bet there's a skirt flapping somewhere around, and it ain't on no clothesline either."

She might probably have kept on in the same teasing vein; but the barber now decided to excavate for Bob's true features, and with the aid of hot towels, cold cream and an electric vibrator that buzzed like a pneumatic drill, brought him back to the semblance of a Caucasian, finally jerking him upright in the chair to brush his hair and wipe the powder from his chin.

As the closing rite was performed, that of holding a mirror behind the customer so that he might observe the artistry of the line at the back of his neck, Jean—the manicure girl's name was Jean—gave Bob another glance, this time a frankly admiring one.

He deserved it. Bob was no Apollo Belvedere, but he was a wholesome, square-looking young fellow; and now his freshly shaved cheeks were glowing from the energetic treatment they had received, his eyes were bright, his hair crisped back from his wide, smooth forehead, showing little glints and sparkles of gold. From the folds of the barber's apron, swathed about his broad shoulders, his neck rose a pillar of strength.

"Some boy!" Jean approved. "Whoever that dame is, I'll say she's got to step lively to-night to gait up with you, Bobby, old top. Come over to the table now, and I'll finish up on the other hand."

His face, no longer crusted with the obscuring compound, betrayed a heightened color as he divested himself of the apron and followed her over to her little glass-topped table.

"Regular 'Mme. Mysto,' aren't you?" he attempted to josh back. "'Tells the past, present and future, and the name of the person you are destined to marry.' You ought to set up a shop on Twenty-Third Street. Now, since you are so wise, I'll just inform you that I'm going to spend the evening with some old friends of my father's from New Mexico, Colonel and Mrs. Howland. They're both over sixty."

The manicure girl did not look up from the nail she was scraping.

"Where's Miss Howland going?" she asked demurely. "Isn't she to be with you?"

"Miss Howland?" Bob's jaw sagged. "Who told you anything about her?" Then, as he caught the twinkle in Jean's mocking eyes and realized that he had been trapped, he flushed a deeper crimson with chagrin.

"Rolled seven that time, didn't I, bo?" she chuckled. "But, gee, what else was there to it? I knew darned well you weren't getting dolled up like Astor's horse just to chin with a couple of old folks. There must be a girl in the picture; and who was she? She might be a niece or a ward or somebody in their charge, but the chances were that it was their daughter."

"Granddaughter," corrected Bob stiffly.

"H-m. That makes her about twenty, I suppose. And a peach, of course; else, why the mud massage? Known her long, Bobby?"

"I met her when I was out there last spring," he mumbled. "Colonel Howland was awfully nice to me, and naturally I want to show some return now that they are in New York."

Here was another opening for Jean's stiletto tongue, but she let it pass. She really liked Bob: he was different from most of the men who came there, never fresh. She told herself it was a shame to try to get his goat.

And if she had actually wanted to find out anything, this new, more sympathetic

manner served a better purpose than the sharp fencing of her wit. Under it he gradually lost his diffidence, and began to talk freely.

He did not discuss Miss Howland herself; but through his descriptions of rides and motor drives, and various excursions to points of interest, Jean caught a pretty accurate picture of a lithe, slender Western girl, and of a romance, as yet unspoken, which had its inception out there in the desert under the brazen blue of the New Mexican sky.

"Colonel Howland's a banker, and the biggest man in Guadalajara County," he ran on. "Their house—"

The buffer which Jean was wielding stopped suddenly. She looked up.

"Guadalajara County, New Mexico!" she repeated. "That's a name to memory dear in this quarter, all right, all right. There was a time when I used to have dreams of sable coats on the strength of it."

"How's that?" asked Bob, surprised.

"Why, I own Guadalajara County, old dear, or at least a good-sized slice of it. My husband—"

"Your husband?" he exclaimed.

"Didn't know I was married, eh? Well, I was—am still, for that matter, although I'm not working at it—and to one of the most expert little four-flushers that ever hit Broadway. He passed himself off as a Western millionaire, and I was green enough in those days to fall for it. He gave me a deed to twenty thousand acres of land in Guadalajara County for a wedding present."

"Which he didn't own, of course?"

"Oh, no; he owned it, all right. The title was straight as a string. He'd got hold of it one time when he and some other crooks were planning a land swindle that never panned out. He had it on his hands, and he tossed it over to me in his big-acting way."

"There's a little something to make you feel independent, honey," he said; and it was only when I woke up out of my trance that I found the gift was as counterfeit as he was—just twenty thousand acres of sand and alkali dust, that you couldn't raise anything on but cactus."

Bob leaned forward as if about to speak, but checked himself.

"You've sold the property, I suppose," he said carelessly; "or more likely let it go for taxes?"

"No." She spoke a little defiantly. "I guess you'll think I'm an awful boob—every woman's a fool for sentiment, they say—but I've always held on to it. Not that I care anything about him. I don't. But I do care about the girl who could believe in him and trust and dream, if you understand what I mean. So I've hung on to that land, and kept the taxes paid on it, just as people will hang on to a withered rose, or a shred of ribbon, or some other worthless thing of the sort. And whenever I get to feeling soft or mushy or wishing I had some one to love me, I fish out that deed and take a look at it. It's a sure cure; once bitten, twice shy."

"You don't happen to know where the land is located?" Bob still strove to hold that casual tone. "Naturally you wouldn't, if you've never been out there."

"Oh, but I do," she cried. "I looked it up on the map. It's right in the northeastern corner of Guadalajara County. The dividing line between Guadalajara and Moon Counties is one of my boundaries."

"Good Lord!" He could no longer restrain his excitement. "Why, girl, do you know that you are right on the edge of one of the most promising oil territories that has come in within the last ten years? Sable coats? You can have one for every day in the year, if this works out as it looks."

She dropped her buffer to the table with a little clatter and stared at him.

"Bob, you're crazy. That mud massage has scrambled your brains."

"Don't you believe it. I know what I'm talking about. It was an oil proposition that took me out there, and I've studied the entire situation. If this deed you have is really on the level, and the property yours, you're worth a fortune."

"The only thing I can't understand"—he shook his head perplexedly—"is why you haven't had a thousand offers for it."

"Well, it's mine, all right," she protested. "Here, I can prove it to you."

She snatched her bag from the back of

her chair, and, digging into its varied contents, fished out an official-looking envelope, from which she extracted the inclosure and tossed it over to him.

It was a tax receipt for seven dollars and forty-two cents, half yearly taxes, from the treasurer of Guadalajara County, New Mexico, made out to Mrs. Jean Rawlinson, and under date of that month.

"Rawlinson?" Bob glanced up inquiringly from his study of the slip.

"Yes; that's my married name." She nodded. "Generally speaking, my husband calls himself any old thing that comes handy. A skunk cabbage by any other name will smell as sweet, you know. But when he took the fatal step with me, he used the one his parents tagged him by—Arthur Rawlinson."

Bob handed her back the receipt.

"Well," he agreed, "as you say, that's pretty clear proof that you're at least the owner of record to this property. You ought to do something about it, Jean—put it in the hands of a responsible broker to investigate and sell for you, if it turns out to be worth anything like what I think it is."

She looked up at him with her shrewd, sophisticated glance.

"You're in that line yourself, aren't you, Bobby?"

"Why, yes." He flushed. "But I don't want you to think I was fishing for your business. I'm only a little fellow, anyhow. What you need for a proposition of this size is one of the big firms that have connection with wealthy investors. I can give you the address of two or three down town that might be willing to take it up for you."

"No, thank you." She crinkled her nose at him. "I'm always suspicious of those heavyweight concerns. If they want to do you, they can get away with it so easy. They can commit murder, and nobody'd believe it on account of their respectability. Now, with you, it's different. You couldn't fool a baby, and you wouldn't dare be anything but straight."

"I'll tell you, old thing," she suggested. "Suppose you and I go into this on a partnership basis? You put in your more or less expert knowledge, and I'll put in my

sand and alkali dust. And if anything comes of it, we'll split fifty-fifty."

"But that's an exorbitant commission," he expostulated. "The highest-priced firm in town wouldn't charge you—"

"Not on paper, they wouldn't," she broke in; "but I'm betting that before I got through it'd cost me a whole lot more. No; you're the one that tipped me off to the land's having any value, and with you, as I say, I won't be worrying myself gray-headed all the time. Then, too, I don't imagine you're overburdened with business, so you'll have all the more time for my little affair. Fair enough, Bobby. It's fifty-fifty, or I don't play."

She took up her buffer and resumed polishing his nails, as if the matter were decided and no further room for argument. He sat frowning thoughtfully.

"Well," he admitted at length, "there's something in what you say. I'd probably give more time and energy to looking after your interests than anybody else would. I'm just as well qualified, too, for what has to be done. And I don't doubt but what I could make you as much money, even on the arrangement you name. Still I hate to seem—"

"Oh, forget it." She gave a finishing rub at his nails with her warm palms, and dropped a little pat on the back of his hand to signify that her task was done.

"I'll tell you," said Bob, as he gathered up the check on which she had scribbled the amount of her manicure charge, "I'll send a wire to-night to the clerk of Guadalajara County, inquiring as to your title to that land, and if it's all as straight as it appears we'll talk business."

If he had only known whither and to what adventures that lightly given promise was to lead him!

CHAPTER II.

ALL AROUND THE RASPBERRY BUSH.

THE barber shop where Jean dispensed her arts both of nail clipping and conversation happened to be in the basement of the hotel where Colonel Howland was stopping, and Bob went directly from

it up into the lobby. He was just about due for his appointment.

Before having himself announced, though, he decided to send the wire he had promised, and get it off his mind.

The telegraph desk was off at one side in a rather unfrequented corner; and consequently he was a little surprised as he turned from filing his message to see Faith Howland, the colonel's granddaughter, standing not far away.

At least he was ready to swear that it was she, although some palms intervened, and she was partly behind a pillar with her back toward him.

He hurried in that direction; but by the time he had circumnavigated the palms and reached the spot where she had been standing, she was no longer in sight.

Instead, as he rounded the pillar, he almost collided with a young man of about his own age who was just starting away.

Both drew back murmuring an apology, and then stopped, staring at each other in a startled, mutual recognition.

"Bob Moore!" The other spoke. It was Lieutenant Cale Northrup of Bob's unit in the air service in France. He thrust out his hand.

Bob did not offer to take it. Youth can be terribly cruel. It knows no compromises, no shadings. A man is either a "regular guy," or a "rotter."

Northrup had been court-martialed for cowardice and ignominiously dismissed from the service. There was even a rumor that he had been caught trafficking with the enemy, but had been able to muster sufficient influence to save him from the open charge.

Bob had been away from the squadron in hospital at the time of the affair, and really knew very little about the rights or wrongs of it. But the court-martial record stood. He felt that it justified him in giving Northrup the raspberry.

The discredited officer flushed scarlet at the rebuff, and drew back his hand.

"Won't you let me explain?" he pleaded.

Bob's face was like a rock.

"There is nothing to explain," he said stiffly. "I don't care to know you, and that is all there is to it."

"But you are condemning me wholly on hearsay," persisted the other. "Faith said—"

"Who?"

"Faith. Faith Howland. I was just talking to her; and she said that, no matter what the rest of the squadron did, she believed you would listen to me and give me a square deal. I want to tell you—"

"Look here!" Bob interrupted, his brow darkening. "I don't intend to have anything to do with you. You can't come crawling to me from behind a girl's skirts. More than that, I consider that young lady's name on your lips an insult to her, and if I hear you speaking it again I'll drive it down your throat."

Northrup gaped bewilderedly. He seemed utterly taken aback at Bob's burst of resentment; and before he could gather his wits together, Moore had turned on his heel and was marching haughtily away. Northrup gazed after his retreating figure a moment; then shrugged his shoulders dejectedly, and drifted out of the hotel.

Still scowling from the encounter, Bob approached the desk and sent up his name to Colonel Howland. Word came back asking him to wait in the lobby as the colonel and his wife would be down at once; and before he had time fully to recover his equanimity they appeared, coming from the elevator, the colonel in his rumpled evening clothes leading the way, Mrs. Howland, palpably overdressed, following, and Faith, sweetly and simply girlish, bringing up the rear.

Bob had arranged to show them something of Broadway, and piloting Faith about, he had expected to have the time of his life; but the colonel's first words came as a dampener upon the program.

"Sorry, Moore," he said; "but I've had a telegram that calls me home at once, and we're leaving to-night on the midnight train. So we'll have to be back here at the hotel by eleven o'clock in order to get packed up and down to the station."

Bob gasped.

"But that gives you no time at all," he stammered. "I had planned to take you to dinner and the theater, and after that I thought we'd make a round of the cabarets

and dancing clubs. But they don't get into full blast until after twelve o'clock. Can't you postpone your leaving until to-morrow, colonel?"

"No, it's a matter of importance that's come up at the bank, and in which I can't delegate my authority, have to be present in person. As it is, I can just get there in time by starting to-night."

"Well, in that case," Bob conceded disappointedly, "I suppose we'll just have to do the best we can. It would hardly be worth while to attempt the theater. That would leave us no chance for anything else."

"I tell you," he suggested after a moment's thought; "what do you say, we tackle Jennifer's? That will give us a sort of combination of everything. We're just about in time for the dinner show"—glancing at the clock over the desk—"and we can watch it while we eat. Then afterward, when the floor is cleared, we can enjoy the dancing."

"Is it a thoroughly respectable place?" questioned Mrs. Howland with a small-town fear of not doing the proper thing. She was got up in an elaborate evening costume, and with her gray hair marceled as if for a gala night at the opera, and she did not propose to waste her magnificence on any resort of *hoi polloi*.

"Oh, gran!" Faith protested. "Don't be so old-fashioned. Everything is respectable nowadays. It sounds to me as if it would be all sorts of fun."

The colonel decided the matter.

"You know the ropes, Moore," he said. "We place ourselves in your hands."

So to Jennifer's they went. It was one of those garish Broadway places run chiefly for the benefit of out-of-town buyers, college boys with plethoric allowances, and young men with an itching to see what they call "life." Life at Jennifer's consisted in paying six prices and a cover charge for rather indifferent food, seeing a cabaret show with the usual array of scantily clad girls, and having one's ears deafened by the racket of a band of uniformed syncopaters. As in most places of the kind, if you happened to know the waiter's first name, you could kick a hole in the Eighteenth Amendment.

While not an habitu   of Jennifer's, Bob had been there before, and it had suggested itself to him as the sort of gay, colorful diversion that would most appeal to his out-of-town guests.

But seated now at a cramped table with them, some pale, flabby-looking oysters in front of him, he found himself feeling vaguely dissatisfied and ill at ease.

The encounter with Northrup had upset him in the first place, and the latter's reproachful glance kept recurring to him. It wasn't very noble, his conscience kept accusing, to kick a man when he was down.

Then the scrambling of the evening's entertainment he had mapped out was another grievance, but he was hardly able to congratulate himself on the result.

Jennifer's somehow did not jibe with Faith Howland. She made its tinsel and glitter look tawdry and vulgar and cheap.

No; the evening was not proving a success. Mrs. Howland's nose rose higher every minute as she looked about at the berouged, cigarette-smoking women and listened to their high-pitched, noisy shrieks of laughter. It seemed a rough-and-ready crowd to her, not at all the sort of Vere-de-Vere environment to suit her regal magnificence of costume.

The colonel, with her disapproving eye upon him, dared not loosen up. In addition, he had struck a bad oyster. He sat slumped down in his chair, glumly absorbed in thoughts of the business that was calling him home.

Faith made an effort to be animated; but she, too, seemed to have something on her mind, and the depression of the others plainly reacted on her. Only by the hardest kind of work did she and Bob manage to keep a thin trickle of conversation going.

But at last the dinner dragged through, and the show was over. As the jazz band broke into a toe-tickling blare, he suggested to the girl that they take a turn on the floor.

It ought to have been elysium to him—this lovely girl lithe and graceful in his arms, the quick, lively music, the polished, frictionless floor under their feet.

Unfortunately Faith introduced a discordant note almost before they were in motion.

"Did Cale Northrup speak to you to-night?" she asked eagerly.

Bob stiffened at the question and lost a step. The scruples he had felt for his rebuff of the disgraced man evaporated in a flare of resentment. Why this interest on her part in the fellow.

"He tried to speak to me," he returned grimly, "but he didn't get very far. You talked to him, though; I saw you. Good Lord!" His jealousy flamed up. "I should think you'd have more self-respect."

She seemed staggered for a moment. Then she drew swiftly back. Her eyes blazed. A hot retort was evidently on her tongue. But she restrained it.

"I don't believe I care to dance," she said coldly. "Would you mind taking me back to the table?"

Bob knew that he had made a mistake. He had no right to censor her acquaintance list, or question anything she chose to do. It was an inexcusable presumption. But instead of admitting this, and seeking to make amends, his jealousy drove him into a fit of sulky pique.

They returned in silence to the table, and seated themselves. Mrs. Howland's nose was elevated higher than ever.

"I'm glad you came back, my dear," she said with a disparaging glance at Bob. "I don't like to have you mingle with such a rowdy crew."

Faith made no answer. She was still angry; a bright scarlet spot burned on either cheek. She did not look at her offending escort, but sat without speaking, gazing fixedly at the dancers on the floor.

The colonel chewed at a cigar and abstractedly pondered his business affairs. Bob sullenly nursed his wrath.

The occasion became a Quaker meeting, except for its utter absence of peace and serenity.

A party of young men entered the place and stood idly looking over the assemblage. The roving glance of one of them fell upon Faith, and halted there in undisguised admiration. Then with a little start the fellow noticed that Bob was in her company. He turned to his associates with a word of excuse and made his way carelessly in the direction of Moore's table.

Passing by, he stopped with an expression of pleased surprise and greeted Bob so heartily that it was impossible not to present him to the others.

"Mr. Van Carpen," Bob mumbled an introduction.

Mrs. Howland's nose came down a trifle as she surveyed the newcomer. He was of the type which plays the millionaire's son in the movies—tall and slender, rather good looking, eminently correct in every detail from his patent leather hair to his patent leather pumps.

He had the waiter place a chair for him beside her, and for a moment or two devoted himself almost exclusively to her, with an easy, sophisticated, deferential manner which she found distinctly flattering.

The music struck up again.

"Won't you try this one with me, Mrs. Howland?" pleaded Van Carpen. Then as she drew back a little: "Oh, I can see that like myself this sort of thing grates on you a bit. But"—he laughed engagingly—"since we are in Rome let us do as the Romans do."

Almost before she realized what she was doing she had let him lead her out on the floor.

It was years since Mrs. Howland had danced with any other man than her husband, and that only an occasional sedate fox-trot or waltz at some social gathering. A very different thing she found from being guided by an expert dancer over a floor that was a marvel and to the sensuous swing of the music at Jennifer's. The homage of this handsome young man gave her a thrill. She returned to her seat, flushed, uplifted, her eyes sparkling.

She regarded Mr. Van Carpen as charming; the evening which had been so wearily boresome took on a zest and a halo. But the fact that she was beginning to enjoy herself did not enhance Bob's stock in any way.

Van Carpen's supercilious attitude toward Jennifer's—he had aptly caught his cue from her—confirmed her opinion that it was a low place to which Bob had brought them because he wanted to get off cheap.

She did not understand that later on, when the aftertheater throng appeared,

Jennifer's would shimmer and shimmy with an array of dresses and jewels that would pale her own display into insignificance. Neither did she realize that the simple entertainment they were receiving was putting a fatal crimp into a hundred-dollar bill.

Meanwhile, Van Carpen, without neglecting her in any way, had been ingratiating himself with the other members of her family. He had a gift for making himself agreeable, an almost uncanny instinct for sensing the especial interests of those with whom he came in contact.

In almost no time he had the colonel drawn from his abstraction and discussing Western politics. Similarly, he fell to talking airplanes with Faith. She was crazy to fly, he discovered, and was only restrained from learning by the absolute veto of her grandfather.

In opening up a family dispute of this sort, an outsider would seem to be courting disaster; but Van Carpen expressed himself so tactfully that both sides regarded him as an adherent.

Faith's face grew animated, she turned more and more to Van Carpen as she appealed to him to support this or that contention.

Nobody paid any further attention to Bob. Sore, disgruntled, under a cloud, he was left to kick his heels and feverishly gulp ice water. The host of the party, he felt as much outside it as if he had been in the middle of Central Park.

Van Carpen, with his glib patter and engaging address, was the central figure. A dozen times Bob could have corrected some of the wild statements he made, but he saw that he might just as well save his breath. And the other, whenever he was driven into a corner, always managed to slide out by laughingly turning to either Faith or Mrs. Howland and proposing a dance.

He had just brought the elder lady back to the table for the fifth time, when the colonel, glancing at his watch, gave an exclamation of surprise. It was after eleven, he announced, and they would have to go.

"I refuse to be got rid of so easily," declared Van Carpen as they rose. "I insist on going with you and seeing you off on the train."

"Oh, that will be delightful," bridled Mrs. Howland coquettishly, and Faith also smiled an acquiescence.

So the party of four returned to the hotel a party of five; for Bob tagged obstinately along, although un urged to do so.

He had hoped miserably that in these moments of parting he might have a chance to patch things up with Faith and find out how he had succeeded in so deeply offending her; but the presence of Van Carpen and the general nature of the chatter he kept up prevented any opportunity of that sort.

Then, while the Westerners were upstairs to gather their bags together, Van Carpen dashed away and returned just as Faith and Mrs. Howland reappeared in the lobby, with great bunches of flowers for both of them. Again he had scored, where Bob, wrapped in a moody forgetfulness of the amenities, had failed.

The latter still doggedly hung on, accompanying the travelers to the station, and even through the gates to their train; but all he got out of it was a perfunctory handshake from the colonel and a very frigid acknowledgment of his courtesies from Mrs. Howland and Faith.

Very different was the farewell extended to Van Carpen.

"If you're ever out in our part of the world, remember, my boy, you're to stop with us." The colonel clapped him heartily on the shoulder.

"I may take you up on that, sir. I have some business which is quite likely to bring me West within the next few weeks."

"Oh, do come," breathed Mrs. Howland and Faith together. "We shall be more than delighted."

They went aboard the train. Bob turned back dismally with Van Carpen. Just as the two passed out of the gate they heard a cry behind them, and swung about to see Faith come running toward them along the platform.

Bob's heart gave a great leap of joy. She was unwilling to part from him in anger. She was going to give him a chance to square himself.

He took a hasty step back toward the gate. But before he could reach it, another man dashed by him, passed through the

barrier and joined her. That eager cry, that flying rush along the platform had not been for him, but for Cale Northrup.

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor. The two joined hands, and racing down the line of the train, scrambled up the steps of her moving car.

She had not given a look, a farewell wave of the hand to Bob, although she must have seen him standing there. It was the climax to his evening misfortune.

He had sown one raspberry. He had reaped a crop of them.

CHAPTER III.

"YOU BOOB!"

BOB turned back from the gate and made his way out of the station, riddled with hate, jealousy, wretchedness, chagrin, all the pangs and emotions of a lover whose lady has given him the air in favor of another.

He did not notice that Van Carpen was no longer with him, had, in fact, forgotten all about Van Carpen until, as he reached the street, the latter edged out of a dark corner at one side of the station entrance, and after looking cautiously about, joined him.

"Where's Northrup?" he asked agitatedly.

"On the train with Miss Howland," Bob growled.

Van Carpen's manner instantly changed. He became bold and aggressive.

"I just had to get away from there," he explained. "To see a nice girl like that chumming up with such a skunk gets my goat. I had no right to interfere; but I felt that if I stayed I couldn't be responsible for myself. I should probably have smashed him."

"I know," agreed Bob bitterly. "I'm just the same way myself."

"Don't she know about him?" frowned Van Carpen. "If not, somebody ought to tell her."

"I tried to," Bob mourned; "but—Well, she didn't take to it very kindly."

"Then somebody ought to go to the colonel," insisted Van Carpen. "Northrup's down in the world, I understand; and

he's after her money. She's got a lot, hasn't she?"

He darted a quick, sidewise glance at Bob as he put the question.

"Well, if she hasn't, she will have," Bob nodded. "The old colonel's one of the wealthiest men in that part of the State. Cattle and mines and oil lands and—"

He broke off with a sudden exclamation of annoyance.

"By gum!" he muttered vexedly. "I wanted to ask him this evening about a proposition I have out there; but so many things happened that it slipped my mind."

"Too bad," said Van Carpen lightly. His thoughts were evidently busy in another direction. Deftly he began to pump his companion regarding what he knew of the colonel—his characteristics, his associates, his interests, his resources.

Bob artlessly responded with all the information he had, and even volunteered to lend Van Carpen a newspaper which he had brought back from New Mexico with him—a sort of boom edition of the *Guadalupe County News*, setting forth in detail the industries, products and prospects of the region and giving biographical sketches of all the leading citizens.

"If you want to drop up to the apartment with me I'll get it for you right now," he offered; and accordingly they hailed a taxi and drove to the apartment house on Fifty-Eighth Street, where Bob maintained his bachelor two rooms and bath.

As they headed for the elevator the West Indian at the switchboard halted them by holding up a yellow envelope.

"Tellygram fo' you, Mr. Moore, sar."

Bob tore it open and glanced at the contents. Either the jinx which had been so persistently perching on his shoulder all evening had got tired and decided to call it a day; or else the old adage held good, that unlucky in love, lucky at chance.

The telegram was an answer to the wire of inquiry he had sent to the clerk of Guadalupe County a few hours earlier—the promptness of the reply being accounted for by the difference in time—and it unqualifiedly confirmed Jean's claim to the ownership of the twenty thousand acres.

In spite of his bruised and battered spirit,

Bob could not restrain an exclamation of triumph as he grasped the purport of the message.

He had not allowed himself to get excited over the matter before. He had listened to too many glowing pipe dreams of the sort not to regard the manicure girl's story with a degree of suspicion. But here was official corroboration. She held absolute and unassailable title to the property.

And if he knew anything about values down there—and he felt confident that he did—that land was worth millions. Millions! And she insisted on giving him a half interest in it.

"Good news, eh?" Van Carpen glanced at his glowing face.

"I'll say so!" Bob exulted. "This little slip of paper just about covers the firmament with dollar signs for yours truly."

That oft-quoted line of the late Lord Byron's: "Man's love of man's life is a thing apart," isn't far off. In the glow and dazzle of his prospective riches Bob forgot the misery of his raspberry-tinted evening. Even the sting of Faith's coldness was hardly more than a reminiscent throb.

So full was he of his expansive visions that he couldn't help spilling the story to his companion. Some measure of discretion restrained him from disclosing Jean's name; he referred to her rather importantly as a "client." But outside of that, he divulged practically every essential detail: the location and extent of the property, his reasons for believing it a part of the oil belt, an outline of his plans for developing and exploiting it.

Van Carpen was properly congratulatory. He encouraged Bob to talk by praising his good business judgment and by offering an occasional comment or objection which stimulated explanations.

He seemed overjoyed at his friend's good fortune and interested in the matter solely on the latter's account; but under his surface enthusiasm a close observer might have detected that he was revolving some purpose of his own and that his curiosity was not without an object.

At last, though, he took his leave, carrying off with him the newspaper for which he had come.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to have that back to-morrow, Van," said Bob as he handed it to him. "The people I intend to talk to about this deal will want a lot of information of course, and most of it can be found right there. So I shall need the paper for reference."

"Certainly. I understand," Van Carpen replied. "It don't mean anything special in my young life, you know; just a general thirst for knowledge. I'll glance over it to-night, and send or bring it back to you first thing in the morning."

After his departure Bob turned in; but he found it no easy thing to compose himself to rest. His pulses were leaping, his mind in a whirl of elation. Even Faith's apparent infatuation for Northrup became of minor consequence. He told himself, falling into the usual error of his sex, that he was silly to let himself be tortured by jealousy. When he appeared in all the new glamour of wealth and success, she would be sure to decide in his favor against such a down-and-outer as Northrup.

His last conscious thought as he finally dropped off to sleep was a sort of cinema picture of himself and Faith clasped in each other's arms, while Northrup slunk away into a deserved oblivion.

This must have been some time about four o'clock; for he had not gone to bed until after one, and since then he had heard a near-by church clock twice strike the hour.

Nevertheless, he was up at seven in the morning and as wideawake and alert as if he had put in his regulation eight hours. He sang lustily if somewhat off key as he splashed about in his tub. He jig-stepped at intervals all the time he was dressing. He tucked away a breakfast that would have staggered an anconda or an eight-year-old boy.

In short, if Miss Faith Howland, speeding on her westward journey, was picturing him as a blighted being, lovelorn and disconsolate, she could safely have told her accusing conscience to go away back and sit down. He had never appeared more fit in his life.

"I seem to catch the fragrance of orange blossoms in the air," Jean hailed him as he

came bustling into the barber-shop at nine o'clock. "From your blithe and gleeful air this morning, friend Robert, one would hazard a guess that the lady had fallen for the old 'Voice-that-breathed-o'er-Eden' stuff?"

She had just come in herself, and having hung up her hat, was standing in front of a mirror fluffing out her hair with the tips of her fingers before starting in on the day's work.

Bob glanced at her warily. Her greeting sounded dangerously like sarcasm; and yet how could she know anything of his disastrous evening? To play safe, he adopted a hurried, businesslike manner.

"I have received an answer from the clerk of Guadalajara County," he said, laying the telegram before her. "The land is unquestionably yours, and I feel it only fair to tell you that in my opinion it is very valuable. If oil is struck there, it may be worth millions. Under these circumstances, do you still wish to enter into the arrangement you mentioned last night?"

"I never welch, old dear." Jean shrugged her shoulders. "Get your papers ready so as to have the agreement in black and white, and I'll be there with the little old 'John Hancock,' whenever you want it."

Bob felt like hugging her.

"By George, Jean," he said a little huskily, "the fellow that wouldn't be square with you 'd deserve to be hung."

"Then there's several that are due for the black cap." She laughed, but not altogether mirthfully. "One in particular. You'll find, Bobby, that there's quite a fair percentage of crooks in this world, just waiting for a chance to abuse somebody's confidence.

"By the way," she eyed him keenly, "you haven't been spilling this proposition around promiscuously, have you? Didn't get to feeling so good over it, that you had to tell the world what a grand little scout you were?"

"Of course not," he replied indignantly. "What sort of a fool do you think I am? I haven't spoken of it to a soul—that is, to nobody except Van Carpen. I did mention it to him in a vague kind of a way, but it

isn't in his line at all. I doubt if he could tell you now what I was talking about."

"Van Carpen?" She wrinkled her brows. "I don't believe I know him."

"Oh, he's all right," Bob assured her impatiently. "Fellow, I know; was with our squadron for a while over in France."

Then he turned to a discussion of the details of their partnership, and having settled that they would meet at noon and sign up all the necessary papers, hurried out.

When she next saw him in accordance with their appointment he was in higher feather than ever. The legal formalities concluded and their agreement duly ratified, he rushed her off to take luncheon with him, and there revealed that he had put in the morning to good advantage.

As he had previously told her, some capital, about seventy-five thousand dollars, would be necessary for the proper exploitation of their venture, and he thought he knew where he could raise it. But he had warned her that it would take time. He might encounter considerable delay before he succeeded in rounding up the amount he required.

Now, however, he informed her that the sum was practically in hand. He had managed to interest three men that morning, two of whom were already pledged to put in twenty-five thousand dollars apiece, while the third had as good as promised a similar amount, but would not give his definite answer until that afternoon.

"Some fast worker, I'll advise the whirling cosmos." Jean beamed at him gratifyingly. "Guess this goofy fingernail-filer don't know how to pick a live one. Well, keep the pot a-boiling, dearie. You can't jerk me into the Rockefeller class any too soon. I always did feel that I was born to adorn the circles of the idle rich."

They spent a congenial hour, felicitating each other and indulging in rosy dreams of the future. Then Jean went back to the shop, while Bob set forth to nail his man.

It proved a somewhat harder job than he had anticipated, for the chap was full of questions and required a lot of argument before he was satisfied. But Bob's enthusiasm and faith in the project overrode all obstacles, and finally late in the afternoon

he got the fellow's name down on the dotted line.

There were one or two points, however, which he had promised the man to confirm by statistics, and he knew that the figures he wanted could be gleaned from the newspaper he had loaned Van Carpen.

Therefore, he hurried up to his apartment to get it, feeling sure that by this time it had been returned as promised.

But the hall-boy shook his head when asked in regard to it. Nothing had been left there that day for Mr. Moore.

There was no use wasting time in telephoning, Bob decided. He would drop around to the hotel where Van Carpen stopped and get it in person. So with a muttered expletive at the other's annoying negligence, he started out.

But at the desk of the hotel he had a shock coming to him, for when he inquired if Van Carpen was in, the clerk blandly informed him that Mr. Van Carpen was no longer stopping there; he and his roommate, Mr. Perkins, had just checked out.

"But you know where I can find him?" demanded Bob impatiently. "They left some address of course?"

The clerk consulted his records.

"The only forwarding address we have is Mr. Van Carpen's club. But," he shook his head, "I don't imagine you will find him there."

Bob frowned. He needed that newspaper, and he needed it right away. Then a sudden inspiration came to him. He turned again to the clerk.

"Say; if Van Carpen has just left, his rooms probably haven't been cleaned up yet? Do you mind if I go up there and look around? He failed to return a newspaper he borrowed from me, and he may have left it behind."

Permission being accorded, he hastened to the vacated rooms, but no sign of the desired newspaper could he find. While he was still searching, the telephone bell rang.

Thinking it might be some word from the desk, Bob answered the call.

"Hello!" a voice hailed him over the wire. "Is this Van Carpen?"

"No," returned Bob. "Van Carpen's no longer here. He's left the hotel."

"Left the hotel?" There was a thrill of excitement in the voice. "Then he's done it. I'm too late." A momentary pause ensued; then the voice asked sharply: "Who's this talking?"

"Moore."

"Not Bob Moore?"

"Yes; Bob Moore."

"And you don't know where Van Carpen's gone?"

"No."

"Then I'll tell you. It's to Guadalupe County, New Mexico. He must have taken the Pennsylvania train for the West. Catch the ten o'clock on the Central, and go after him, you boob."

"But who is this talking?" stammered Bob in turn.

"Cale Northrup."

Then the connection was shut off.

A slow-witted man will sometimes act fast in an emergency. It required only a little inquiry among the taxicab drivers and baggage men about the door of the hotel to confirm the information that Bob had so strangely secured.

It looked as if he were being double-crossed; and it didn't take him long to decide what to do.

That night four trains were speeding west across the continent. Out the other side of Chicago sleeping in her berth was Faith Howland.

Behind her on a Pennsylvania flyer was Van Carpen with his side-partner Perkins. On the later New York Central train was Bob, with eyes hard and teeth grimly set. And on a still later train on the B. & O. was Lieutenant Cale Northrup.

Avarice and duplicity was in the pursuit against love and ambition. And Mystery in the person of the discredited lieutenant was also on the trail.

Which would win?

CHAPTER IV.

LEFT AT THE POST.

THE course of true love never did run smooth.

Likewise, the pathway of ambition, we are told, is set with thorns.

That New York Central train on which Bob Moore was riding, therefore, carried a heavy handicap. And its performance was just about what might have been expected.

This is no reflection upon the New York Central. It was no more to blame for what happened than was the unfortunate ship upon which Jonah sailed for Tarshish.

If Bob had bought his ticket via the Pennsylvania, Erie, Lehigh Valley, Lackawanna, or B. & O., the ill-luck would probably have shifted to one of those lines. No railroad can successfully stand up under that sort of thing.

So the poor train that had the hoodoo aboard wallowed all the way up the Hudson through a blinding storm of wind, rain, hail, sleet and snow, with the waves from the river washing up over the track and compelling the engineer to feel out every foot of the road.

At Albany they were two hours late.

The other side of Utica they encountered a washout which delayed them three hours more.

Out of Buffalo they ran into a freight wreck which held them up for another hour until the littered tracks were cleared.

And so it went all along the line, with the persistent jinx interposing the entire fifty-seven varieties of mishap and delay.

When they finally limped into Chicago, they were seven hours behind schedule time; just an hour and forty-five minutes too late for Bob to make the connection on which he had been counting.

He would have to wait twelve hours for another train to the Southwest.

To add to the pleasure of this discovery, he learned that the train on the Pennsylvania, escaping flood, fire, earthquake, invasion of foreign enemies and all other casualties and acts of God, had arrived in Chicago strictly on time, and in ample season to catch an even earlier train to New Mexico than the one Bob had hoped to take.

By this time, the perfidious Van Carpen and his side partner were no doubt almost at Kansas City.

It looked as if Avarice and Duplicity had gained an insurmountable lead over hapless Love and Ambition, especially as the dark

horse entry in the race, Mystery, was also in difficulties; for the B. & O. train on which Lieutenant Cale Northrup had embarked, had fared but little better than the Central. It, too, was badly delayed, still hours out of St. Louis.

Meanwhile, the unsuspecting leaders in this transcontinental dash, Colonel Howland and his family, were making an uneventful journey westward, and ultimately arrived safely in Guadalajara City.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when they got in, and the colonel, sending Mrs. Howland and Faith on to the house, went direct from the railroad station to his bank, a one-story structure in the prevailing mission style of architecture, and located on the main street directly across from the courthouse.

Hurriedly greeting Jeff Taggart, his cashier, teller and general factotum, he retired with the latter to the privacy of the back room.

"Tell me now just what's the trouble, Jeff?" he inquired. "Your telegram naturally didn't go into details."

Neither of them sat down. The colonel, standing with one foot on a chair, tilted his broad-brimmed hat back from his forehead and clamped his teeth down on his cigar as if to brace himself against a recital of bad news.

He got it—an avalanche of it. Apparently, everything had gone wrong during his absence.

Like many another man rated as wealthy, Colonel Howland's riches were more conditional than absolute. He had a good many different interests, but most of them were still in a state of development; they might or might not prove valuable. And it took a lot of money to keep them all going. He was almost always hard pressed for ready cash.

His financial position was very like that of a juggler who has built up an inverted pyramid of odd-sized and odd-shaped objects, and is trying to keep them all in the air. The least slip of hand or eye, the drawing of an uneven breath means disaster. It had required some very adroit balancing at times and some lively jumping around for the colonel to avoid a crash.

And now, according to Taggart's account, the cataclysm was upon him.

As he listened to the tale of one calamity after another, the colonel's ruddy face went gray and deep lines etched themselves on either side of his mouth. The ends of his white mustache drooped disconsolately.

"I've held out as long as I could," Taggart finally concluded; "but the situation's got me beat. I had to send for you to come home. We've simply got to raise twenty-five thousand dollars by bank opening time Saturday."

"By Saturday?" repeated the banker.

"Yes; that is the day the two big oil companies draw their payrolls, and unless we can meet the amount, the bank will have to close its doors."

"And this is Wednesday," the colonel muttered.

"And this is Wednesday," hopelessly echoed the cashier.

They stood gazing at each other with the stricken look of men who have reached the last ditch. Three days in which to accomplish the impossible; for both of them knew that for all practical purposes the sum named was as far beyond their capabilities as to settle the combined war debt of Europe.

"What is there left that we can raise money on?" asked the colonel.

He realized that the question was a futile one, but he had to say something. They couldn't stand there all day, staring at each other in dumb despair.

Taggart shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing. I've worn my finger nails off scratching for a stray dollar or two. I've hypothecated and re-hypothecated every scrap of paper in our possession. I've stretched our credit until it isn't as thick as the strand of a spider's web. There isn't a share of stock or security of any kind, nor a foot of real estate that isn't mortgaged to the hilt.

"The only asset we've got that isn't sold or hocked," he added with a dreary smile, "is that deed to the Rawlinson tract."

"And nobody would give ten cents for that in Bolshevik rubles."

"I'll say they won't," assented the cashier. "Funny thing about that territory,

though. Gusheis on both sides of it; every indication of oil; never an expert yet, geological sharps and practical oil men alike, that didn't give a favorable report on it. And yet with all the holes that have been drilled in it—as many as a hundred, I suppose, and some of them down five thousand feet—never a sign of grease. Must be over a sort of barren island, I imagine, in the lake of oil that's down there."

"Probably," the colonel nodded absently. His mind had reverted to the far more pressing problem of how he was to raise that necessary twenty-five thousand dollars by Saturday.

"If we only had a little time," he muttered. "Those options on my copper properties are certain to be taken up inside of three weeks. I got assurance in New York that the deal would go through just as soon as Bagley gets back from Europe. Then there are those State bonds we bid on. If we win, we could sell out for fifty thousand dollars in an hour's time; and if we lose, we'd at least get back our twenty-five thousand dollars deposit. But that isn't to be decided for a month yet. Isn't there some way we can stall along, Jeff—for a week or so, anyhow?"

Taggart shook his head.

"Not with those payrolls on our hands, colonel. I tell you, I've racked my brains over the question until I am dizzy. If I could have seen even a glimmer of a way out, I'd never have sent for you. But there isn't. We're done."

The colonel flung up his head impatiently at this confession of defeat.

"On account of a measly twenty-five thousand?" he scoffed. "Nonsense, Jeff. Why, as soon as the copper deal is closed—"

"But in the meantime what happens?" broke in the cashier. "With the bank shutting, your creditors will be after you like a pack of wolves. It will be like taking away the prop from under a toppling wall; everything will come down. And then, financially ruined and at their mercy, how long do you think Bagley and his associates will hold to the price on the copper deal that they've agreed to? What you'll get from them you can put in your eye; or else

they're a different breed of Wall Street birds from any I've ever known."

The colonel did not attempt to controvert this opinion. He knew that Taggart was speaking the truth. Let but a whisper get out that he was embarrassed, and the copper deal on which he was so heavily counting would collapse. Everything would collapse. He would be ruined.

"Still there must be some way out!" he exclaimed desperately. "There's always a way, if one can only manage to hit on it."

"The only way that I can see," observed Taggart, "is to find somebody willing to give twenty-five thousand dollars for the Rawlinson proposition."

"We're not looking for miracles," rejoined the colonel. "If that's all you can suggest, Jeff, get out and give me a chance to think. I'll figure out some scheme to get that money."

Figuring out how to raise money was the colonel's principal indoor sport, and he had grown extremely adept at it; but this time he had to confess himself stumped.

Short of collecting the necessary funds by means of a piece of lead pipe, or holding up a mail train, he could conceive of no possible expedient; and it is questionable if he would have balked at these in his present dilemma, if he had thought he could get away with it.

The colonel was the soul of integrity, of course; but— Well, if you have ever been in a very bad box, you know how it is yourself.

All that day he devoted to the problem, but without discovering a ray of hope anywhere on his horizon. When he went home that evening, his none too luxuriant gray locks were noticeably thinned as a result of the way he had been running his fingers through them.

He passed a hideous night, tossing and turning wakefully on his pillow; and when he did drop off into fitful slumber, found his dreams haunted by the gaunt specters of bankruptcy.

He railed at himself for his speculative folly, for his lack of prudence in letting himself get in so far over his head, and vowed a hundred good resolutions for the future: then, realizing that there was little

use in locking the stable door after the horse was gone, he would revert to that all-important issue—where was he to get twenty-five thousand dollars by Saturday?

Hollow-eyed and wan, he arose in the morning, and with merely an excuse for breakfast, went down to the bank to resume his pondering and weighing of chances in his fruitless quest for some way out.

As he sat there frowning and absorbed, his attention was attracted by the sound of excited voices and a rush of feet in the outer office; and with some vague idea that a hold-up might be in progress, he snatched a revolver from his desk drawer and dashed out to the front.

But there were no masked bandits before the counter or at the safe, although if there had been they would have had an easy job at that minute, for the bank was deserted. Clerks and customers alike had betaken themselves to the sidewalk, and were standing there gazing skyward.

The colonel pushed his way to the entrance and joined the crowd.

"What is it?" he asked Jeff Taggart, who was on the doorstep.

"Airyoplane," Jeff returned, without lowering his eyes. "Gee! Will you look at that?"

Now, even in Guadalajara City, a passing airplane is hardly enough of a novelty to call for more than a curious glance, certainly not a thing to draw a staring crowd of people from their shops and places of business.

But this aviator seemed bent on compelling attention. He kept circling the town again and again, all the while performing a variety of daring stunts, nose-dives, tail-spins, looping the loop.

At times he would swoop so low as almost to brush the cupola of the courthouse, then shoot up, up, up, until he was nearly out of sight.

"Must be advertising something," the colonel observed, interested in spite of himself. "You wait a bit, and you'll see him throw out a bunch of hand-bills or something."

But he didn't. Instead, after one last wide circuit over the town, the venturesome aviator streaked away toward the range of

mountains on the west, and was soon lost to view in the clouds about their summits. The purpose of his dare-devil exhibition, if any, remained an enigma.

The crowd of spectators disintegrated, and the colonel returned to his profitless meditations. Every way he turned he seemed to be confronted by a blank wall.

At noon he went up to the house for luncheon, and found his wife in a flutter of pleased excitement.

"Do you remember that interesting young Mr. Van Carpen we met the last night we were in New York?" she asked.

The colonel nodded indifferently. He had heard little but praises of Van Carpen for the last five days, and was getting pretty well fed up on the subject.

"Well, he's coming here. I've had a telegram from him, saying that he'll arrive this afternoon."

The colonel ceased moodily crumbling his bread and looked up.

"Coming here?" he exclaimed. "This afternoon?"

"Yes; and we must do everything in our power to make his visit pleasant. We'll have to stir up something unusual in the way of entertainment."

The colonel reflected grimly that there'd be something unusual all right. It isn't often that a guest runs into such dramatic happenings as the bankruptcy and suicide of his host: for he had now made up his mind that rather than face the impending crash he would kill himself. The sag against his hip of the revolver he had snatched up and still carried in his pocket had given him the idea on the way home. That was the one way out.

But he gave no hint of this dark resolution to his wife. Ignorant of what was in his thoughts, she had been steadily rattling on.

"Isn't it too annoying about Faith?" she said.

"Faith?" he repeated. "What has she done?"

"Why, I just got through telling you. But you never do listen to anything I say. Faith's gone off in her car. She left word that she wouldn't be back for luncheon, and I'm afraid she's away for the day. I

telephoned down to the garage, and they said she'd started in the direction of the mountains. I really think you ought to put your foot down, Robert, against her running off alone to those wild places. I wanted her to go to the train with me to meet Mr. Van Carpen."

The colonel gave a slight start.

"What time does Van Carpen get in?" he asked.

"At three o'clock. If she isn't back by that time, I suppose I'll have to go to the station alone."

Three o'clock! That settled it. Unconsciously she had named the time for this thing he had in his mind. He had been wondering how best to manage it, so that it would appear an accident. Not at the office; there was too much chance of interruption. But if at the house, he wanted his wife and Faith out of the way. And here it was all arranged for him. Three o'clock, then, it was to be. No use waiting any longer. He had calculated every contingency. The crash was inevitable.

His wife noticed the sudden shadow that fell over his face.

"What's the matter, Robert?" she asked. "Are you ill?"

"A touch of headache. I don't believe I'll go to the bank this afternoon. If I lie down and keep quiet, I'll probably be all right by the time you get back with Van Carpen."

He went up to his own room and spent some time over a number of small matters he wanted to arrange. Then he got down a bottle of oil and some rags—he wanted to make it appear that he had been cleaning the weapon—and seated himself to wait.

At half past two he heard his wife leave the house. He had his chance now if he wanted to take it. But he had fixed three o'clock as his hour, and he decided to stand by it. He fastened his glance on the clock, watching its hands advance as the slow minutes ticked away.

The quarter hour came. Then suddenly the colonel threw up his head and listened. His ear had caught the sound of a motor turning in at the gate. It advanced rapidly up the drive and stopped before the front door.

That must be Faith. He thrust the revolver into his pocket, the oil and rags into a drawer, and rising, went downstairs to tell the girl to drive on to the station and join her grandmother.

He had made no mistake; it was Faith. Out through the open front door he could see the nose of her roadster as he came down the stairs. But when he reached the veranda, the girl was nowhere about; she must have gone into the house.

A young man was standing out beside the car, however; and, as the latter turned, the colonel stiffened into stupefied anger. The fellow was Cale Northrup.

And then across the tense stillness sounded from the farther side of town the shrill, long-drawn note of a locomotive whistling for the stop at Guadalajara City.

It was three o'clock.

So "Mystery" had won the cross-continent race after all; for, unlike poor Bob, Northrup had not allowed the earlier start of Van Carpen nor a sadly belated train to daunt him. He had dropped from the St. Louis express en route, taken a short trolley ride up to Dayton, Ohio, and there had secured an airplane and in two long jumps had made Guadalajara City.

He was the aviator who had given the exhibition above the town that morning, and the purpose of his stunts was to apprise Faith that he had arrived.

CHAPTER V.

PROOF OF PERFIDY.

THE colonel stood glaring down from the porch at Northrup there on the drive, speechless for the moment.

Then he found his voice and let it loose in one great, devastating blast.

"You!"

Northrup flung up his hand and advanced a step.

"Wait just a moment, sir. I have something to say—"

"Not to me!" the colonel cut him short.

His voice was choked with rage; but his face was as hard as flint, his eyes like points of steel.

"I told you once before, you yellow cur,

that I never wanted to speak to you, never wanted to see your cowardly face again. And I meant every word of it.

"Now, maybe, you'll believe me!" His hand swung back to his hip and jerked the revolver into view. "I'll give you just two minutes to get off my premises. If you are here at the end of that time, or if you attempt to address me in any way, I'll shoot to kill."

Cale Northrup knew that it was no idle threat. That gun was leveled at him with every indication of a deadly purpose. There was no sign of wavering in the old man's steady wrist nor in the eye that glinted along the barrel of the weapon. And the colonel was a dead shot. He had won his title with the redoubtable Texas Rangers in the old bad days of the "Panhandle."

Yet the man who had been branded as a coward showed no symptom of fear. He stood unflinchingly in his tracks, his head flung up, his face set like an Indian's.

One would have said that he proposed to force the old man to a showdown—compel him to prove whether he was bluffing or would make good.

Then, as if reconsidering and deciding that it really wasn't worth while to bring the issue to a head, he turned, and thrusting his hands into the pockets of his aviator's jacket, sauntered off down the drive. Without a single backward glance or any show of hurry, he reached the gate, and passing through, took the road toward the mountains.

The old man was still standing there, gazing after him, when Faith came running down the stairs and out to the veranda.

At the sight of the colonel she stopped short in the doorway with a little gasp of dismay.

"Grandfather!" she exclaimed.

He turned toward her sternly.

"You brought that scoundrel here," he accused. "Where did you meet him?"

"Up in the mountains," she faltered.

"You started off this morning for that purpose." He eyed her shrewdly. "Then you must have known that he was to be there?"

"Yes." She flushed under his reproving gaze, but her tone was defiant. "I saw

him in New York. He had learned that we were there and came to the hotel that last evening. I met him down in the lobby, but we did not have time to finish our talk, as he caught the same train that we did, and rode with me as far as Philadelphia."

"Rode with you?" He stared incredulously. "On our train?"

"Yes. You and grandmother went directly to your berths; but I stayed up, and he and I went to the observation platform at the rear of the train, and sat there and talked. He told me then that he was coming out here soon, and that he would probably make the trip by 'plane. He said that when I saw an aviator performing stunts over the town, I was to go up to a certain spot in the mountains and meet him."

"And you did all this, knowing that it was in direct disobedience to my wishes?" The colonel shook his head as though he could hardly believe it.

"Grandfather, you had no right to forbid me to see him." The tears were standing in her eyes, but her voice held a ring of passionate determination. "I am no longer a child. I am a grown woman, and I can make my own decisions as to what is best for me.

"You and grandmother have been lovely to me. Don't imagine that I am ungrateful." Her lip quivered a little here, then stiffened again. "But don't forget either that I am a free agent with a sufficient income of my own. I would willingly give up to you on any other point, but rather than yield to you in this one thing, I'll leave your roof. You have no right to ask it."

"I have at least the right to say who shall come to my house," retorted the old man angrily. "You attempted to sneak him in here, believing that I was absent."

"I did not," she denied. "I brought him here because he had something important to say to you. We were going to try to get grandmother to persuade you to see him after you came home, and then if you consented, I was going to bring him in."

"I have nothing to say to the fellow, nor do I wish to hear anything he may want to say to me," muttered the colonel.

The fierce flame of his indignation had burned itself out. He sank down a bit

heavily into one of the chairs on the porch. That mention of her grandmother by Faith had recalled to him his thwarted purpose. After all, what was the use of getting excited over a family disagreement when he would soon be out of it all.

"There, there, little girl." He caught her hand and fondled it a moment. "You and I are not going to quarrel."

Then, realizing that he must make haste or he would be late, he released her.

"Run along now, and drive down to join your grandmother at the station. She has gone there to meet that young sprig, Van Carpen, we were introduced to in New York."

He caught her again to him, and with a somewhat unusual show of affection, kissed her. Then he gave her a little push toward the steps of the veranda.

But she stopped before she descended to the drive, and turning, came back.

"Grandfather," she asked a little timidly, "have you a deed to some property known as the Rawlinson tract?"

"Why, yes." He looked at her in surprise. "It isn't worth the paper it is written on. But why do you ask?"

"Well, Mr. Van Carpen is going to try to buy it from you, and you had better hold fast to a price of twenty-five thousand dollars. He will try to get it for less, of course, but that is the amount he is prepared to pay."

"What?" The colonel bounced out of his chair, stammering and stuttering with excitement. "Van Carpen? The Rawlinson tract? Twenty-five thou—"

"Where did you get any such information?" he demanded, catching her by the arm.

She wrenched herself free, and ran down the steps.

"Why, that is what Cale was trying to tell you, the thing you so stubbornly refused to hear."

And with a little giggle of triumph, she sprang into her car and whirled away down the drive.

The colonel gazed after her with something of the expression of a movie comedian who had just been hit over the head with a sledge hammer.

"That fellow!" he growled, as he slowly came to. "I wouldn't believe anything that came from him, not if he swore to it on a stack of Bibles. Anyway, how would he know?"

Nevertheless, he postponed that session he had planned in the room upstairs with the revolver.

It was two days afterward that Bob Moore, rumped both in appearance and spirits, and woefully begrimed by travel, descended from his train at Guadalajara City station.

With his hoodoo still working overtime, he had been able to catch only an overcrowded slow train and had had to take an upper berth on that.

From every standpoint it had been a far from comfortable journey; and now that he had reached his destination, he was a little at sea just what to do.

He didn't want to go bursting in on the Howlands without some reasonable excuse for his appearance; and that was hard to furnish just at present, since he couldn't very well charge Van Carpen with attempting to double cross him until he had some adequate proof of the fact.

It seemed to him wisest on the whole to go up to the hotel and defer any announcement of his presence in town to the colonel's family until he had prospected around a bit, and was able to see how the land lay.

Accordingly, he climbed with his bag into the rickety station bus, and after a jolting ride of six or seven blocks was landed in front of the Palace, Guadalajara City's leading hostelry.

As he climbed down to the sidewalk, and reached in his pocket to pay the driver, his eye happened to stray across the street to a formerly vacant store where desks and office furniture were being moved in with the greatest celerity, and a large and gaudy sign was being raised into place over the front door.

At that moment the workman swung the sign around, and Bob's roving glance took in the legend upon the face of it:

THE VAN CARPEN OIL CO.

Exploiting the Rawlinson Tract

For a second Bob stood petrified. Then, dropping his bag to the sidewalk, he charged across the street with blood in his eye.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



THE SUNBEAM AND THE ICICLE

THE South Wind slept, while the North Wind swept

The snow o'er the withered leaves;

A Sunbeam bold wooed an Icicle cold

Beneath the cottage eaves.

"In the realm above I will guard thee, love,

From the North Wind's chill alarms!"

And he pleaded well, until she fell,

And melted in his arms.

The South Wind slept, but the North Wind wept

And mourned 'neath the empty eaves;

What he held most dear was merely a tear

'Neath a mound of withered leaves!

Jane Thomas.



The Thief in the Night

By **EDGAR WALLACE**

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

... Also ask your wife where she was on Saturday the 23rd, when she was supposed to be in the country. I can tell you that she was dining *tête-à-tête* with a young Guards officer at his flat.

Yours sincerely,
A CANDID FRIEND.

LORD WIDDICOMBE put down the letter with a contemptuous smile. For a second he was inclined to tear it up and throw the written venom into the fire. Of this, however, he thought better and rang the bell for his valet.

"Frank, will you ask her ladyship to be so good as to come to me?"

In a few minutes came Lady Widdicombe, slight and pretty. She was twenty years younger than her lord, but there was no happier pair in the land.

"My dear," said the Earl with a twinkle in his gray eyes, "somebody has been trying to break up our happy home."

He passed the letter to her and watched the anger kindle in her face as she read.

"What a beast!" she gasped. "The 23rd? Why, I dined with Ronnie that night, of course!"

"A young Guards officer! My stepson!"

Lord Widdicombe chuckled and patted her cheek.

"You're a wicked woman," he declared solemnly, "and I've found you out. But who the devil is the writer?"

Lady Widdicombe shook her head.

"It's wicked, abominable," she asserted vehemently. "Of course, it does no mischief where you and I are concerned, but think what it means when that kind of letter goes into a household where a suspicion already exists? And, by the way, Willie, the burglar has been busy again—Mrs. Crewe-Sanders has lost a most valuable diamond plaque."

His lordship raised his eyebrows.

"Another plaque? That is about the fourth that has been taken in a month—I admire that burglar's consistency. Don't tell Diana, she'll be fearfully worried."

His wife was silent. She stared through the long French windows across the rain-soaked park, and it was clear that the dismal prospect was not the cause of her absorption.

"I wonder why Diana so dislikes Barbara May?" she asked thoughtfully.

His lordship grinned.

"It is such a joy to find Diana holding strong views on any subject," he observed, "that I'll forgive even her dislike of Barbara May. But don't tell her about the letter—I'm sending it up to Scotland Yard. By the way, talking of Scotland Yard, I have asked Jack Danton to come down for the cricket week. It's rum, a fellow like that being in the police."

But Lady Widdicombe was thinking of something else as she drifted out of the library.

She found Diana Wold sitting in the little drawing room overlooking the rosary—a sodden rosary that bore no resemblance to the lovely pleasance which the summer would bring—and Diana, looking ethereal in white, had a volume of poetry open on her knees.

She raised her violet blue eyes as her cousin entered, and put down the book.

Diana's beauty was the fragile beauty of delicate china, her quick smile was appealing and just a little sad.

She arose and kissed the other on the cheek, and gave the impression, by a certain timidity, that she was a little frightened of her self-possessed relative.

"Why do you dislike Barbara?" asked Elsie Widdicombe with that directness which was her most disconcerting quality.

The girl laughed, and when Diana laughed she was very beautiful.

"You are so queer, Elsie," she said. "Do I dislike Barbara at all? Perhaps—no, I think I just don't like her. She is a charming girl, but somehow we do not harmonize—we swear at each other like purple and pink. I am the pink. She hates poetry and I adore it. She loves hunting

and golf; I like motoring and tennis. I am constitutionally lazy and she is amazonically robust and energetic. Why this interrogation—has Willie been rhapsodizing over Barbara?"

Lady Widdicombe seated herself in the big settee.

"I was just thinking—I saw you had a letter from Mrs. Crewe-Sanders this morning—I had one, too. Did she tell you?"

Diana nodded and there was a twinkle in her fine eyes.

"Now I know why you mention Barbara—she was staying with the Crewe-Sanderses."

Lady Widdicombe protested, a little feebly.

"Barbara was staying with them," the girl went on teasingly, "and she was staying with the Colebrooks when Mrs. Carter lost *her* plaque, and she was a guest of the Fairholms when Lady Fairholm lost *hers*."

"Diana!"

"Oh, yes, I know! But it is true, isn't it? And isn't this true also"—the smile left the girl's face and she spoke slowly—"that all those beastly anonymous letters from 'A Candid Friend' are addressed to people who are known to Barbara May?"

Lady Widdicombe arose.

"Really, Diana, I never dreamt that you could be so uncharitable! They are our friends, too. I don't think you know what you are saying; you are suggesting that Barbara is not only a thief, but a—"

"I know," Diana nodded sadly, "it is a rotten suggestion, but we are faced with the irresistible logic of facts."

Lady Widdicombe sniffed.

"Facts! Preposterous! Blackening a girl's character—an innocent girl—now I know that you hate her!"

Diana shook her golden head and again her eyes lighted with amusement.

"Really, I don't, and really I'm not doing anything more hateful than exercising my latent qualities of detection."

She jumped up suddenly, put her arm about her cousin's waist and kissed her.

"Forgive me, Elsie," she wheedled, "I'm a pig and Barbara only bores me."

But Lady Widdicombe required a great deal of mollification.

For this was the sting in Diana's suspicions, that she herself had been struck by the same remarkable coincidence.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMMISSIONER LAUGHS.

AUXILIARY INSPECTOR JACK DANTON turned into the office of the Second Commissioner perfectly certain in his own mind as to the reason his chief had recalled him urgently from Paris.

On the way up from Dover he had read all the newspaper accounts of the latest adventure of the mysterious jewel thief, with whose activities the local police were, apparently, quite unable to cope.

It was a job after Jack's own heart. He was one of the new police; the type that had found its way to Scotland Yard from the commissioned ranks of the army, and although he had already to his credit a wholly meritorious capture of warehouse thieves, the real big case had not as yet come along. And here it was!

The story of the last jewel theft was an exact copy of all the earlier robberies. Mrs. Crewe-Sanders had a house party. The jewel (a diamond plaque with a center composed of three triangular emeralds) had been stolen on the night before the majority of the house party had dispersed.

That was the story he expected to hear repeated when he walked into his chief's office.

"Sit down, Danton," was the greeting; "I want you rather badly."

"I think I know why, sir," he said. "That last theft seems to have been a particularly daring one."

He saw the chief frown, and wondered.

"What are you talking about?" asked the Commissioner, and it was Jack Danton's turn to be puzzled.

"I am referring to the Crewe-Sanders jewel robbery in Shropshire," he said.

"Oh, that!" The Commissioner shrugged his shoulders. "It is the 'Candid Friend' I am looking for, rather than the burglar, and, anyway, the local police have not asked our assistance."

Jack laughed.

"I am all at sea, sir: I don't even know who the 'Candid Friend' is!"

The chief consulted some papers on the desk before him.

"The 'Candid Friend,'" he explained, "is an anonymous letter-writer who has been directing his or her attention to some of the best people in society. The result of this scoundrel's activities has been disastrous. Whoever the writer is, he or she knows some of the grisly secrets which certain society people hide within their breasts, and which, I suppose, they firmly believed would never be dragged into the light of day.

"Honestly, I think the writer is a woman. The letters are in a woman's handwriting, disguised, but undoubtedly feminine. Here is one."

He passed a letter across the table and Jack read it with a little grimace of disgust.

"That is rather poisonous," he said, "to whom was it addressed?"

"It was sent to the Earl of Widdicombe and it deals, as you see, with the Countess of Widdicombe and a supposed indiscretion. Happily, Lord Widdicombe is an intelligent, well-balanced man, with absolute faith in Lady Widdicombe, to whom the letter has been shown, and who has sent it to us. I want you to go down into Shropshire, you will have entrée to the best houses—and probably you would have without my assistance; you know the county?"

"Very well, indeed, sir," said Jack with a half smile, "as a matter of fact, the Widdicombes are old friends of mine, and I have already been asked down."

Now that the disappointment of what he had considered to be the more exciting task had passed away, Jack looked forward with considerable interest to a stay in his beloved Shropshire.

He took the available data into his office, and spent the morning comparing the various handwritings in the letters which the Commissioner had collected. Then he put them down and sat for some time thinking.

"Shropshire," he mused.

And Barbara May came from Shropshire. The thought of her made him glance at the clock and rise hurriedly. There was

a chance, the dimmest chance, that she was riding in the Row that morning.

A taxi dropped him at Hyde Park Corner, and he strolled along the crowded path, his eyes searching the equestrians. Suddenly his heart gave a little leap. Near the rail, and talking to a man whom he recognized as a Member of Parliament, was the girl he sought. She sat astride a big black horse, a beautiful virile figure.

"Why, Mr. Danton," she said, bending down to give him her gloved hand, "I thought you were in Paris?"

"I thought I was, too, yesterday morning," he said good humoredly, "but my—er—people wired me to come back."

He had had many talks with Barbara May; in fact, they had first met at Lady Widdicombe's house in town, but not once had he confided to her the nature of his profession. She, for her part, evinced very little curiosity.

He knew that she was the daughter of a Foreign Office official, and that she herself had worked within that stately mansion during the war. This and the fact that she was very poor, and that Lady Widdicombe was looking for a desirable match, were the only facts that he knew about her, save this: that every time he met her he grew more and more impatient for their next meeting.

"You swore you would come riding with me," said Barbara May accusingly, "and now you have lost your opportunity, Mr. Danton, I am leaving town to-morrow."

She saw the look of dismay on his face and laughed.

"I am going down into Shropshire," she said, "the Widdicombes are having their 'week.' Are you coming?"

He heaved a deep sigh of relief. For once duty and pleasure went hand in hand.

"Yes, curiously enough I am leaving for the Widdicombe's place to-morrow—we shall have that ride yet!"

She nodded.

"Have you been in town all the time?"

For a second she hesitated.

"No, I have been staying at Morply Castle with Mrs. Crewe-Sanders."

He stared at her for a second.

"The lady who lost the jewelry?"

It seemed to him that a queer look came into the girl's eyes, and that her color deepened.

"Yes," she said shortly, and then with a curt nod, turned her horse's head and rode away, leaving him staring after her.

Had he said anything to annoy her? That was the last thing in the world he desired. He had never known her so touchy before. So she had been at Morply Castle when the plaque was stolen. It was a thousand pities, he thought regretfully, that he had not been put on that job; he would have been vastly interested in hearing the story of the crime from the girl.

Danton went back to Scotland Yard with an uncomfortable feeling, though he failed to analyze the cause of his discomfort. Usually any such vague irritation can be traced to a cause, but Jack was wholly incapable of finding a reason for his present perturbation.

He was in the midst of his work that afternoon when there came a diversion. The telephone rang and the chief Commissioner's voice hailed him.

"While you are at the Widdicombe's—keep an eye open for the Plaque Fiend. I have an idea he will pay you a visit."

He heard the Commissioner laugh as he hung up the receiver, and wondered why.

CHAPTER III.

CALLED OFF THE SCENT.

JACK went home to his flat that afternoon and arranged to leave the following morning for Shropshire. In the evening he dined alone, returning home by the longest route, for he needed the exercise before he went to bed.

His way took him down Piccadilly, on the park side of that thoroughfare, and his mind was completely occupied with Barbara May. The girl exercised an influence upon him which at once annoyed and amused him. He was not a particularly susceptible character; he was puzzled to discover what quality there was in her which other girls did not possess, which had so completely centered all his interests on one woman.

Nearing Constitution Hill, he passed a large limousine which was drawn up by the curb. He merely glanced at it, but in that one glimpse he saw something that made him check in his walk. The street light threw a ray into the dark interior of the car, and by that light he recognized Barbara May! There was no mistaking her; he would have known her among a million others.

She was talking to somebody, earnestly, seriously, and who that somebody was, Jack could not see.

He continued his walk; apparently she had not noticed him. A queer little sense of restriction crept into his heart at the natural conclusion he drew. Barbara May had a love affair, and liked some man well enough to meet him in this clandestine fashion. And yet—Barbara May was poor—the car was a luxurious one.

He waited fifty yards farther along the road, standing in the shadow of the railings. It was hateful of him to spy on her, but he was very human, and wished to know who was the man to whom Barbara granted such privileges.

Presently the door of the limousine opened and the man stepped out; he was middle aged and stout. Moreover, he was respectful, and from that tone in his voice, Jack gathered that his first conclusion had been unjust.

"Very good, miss," said the man, "I will let you know in the morning."

Almost immediately the car moved off, and the man, raising his hat, stood for a moment before he turned and walked briskly in the direction where Jack was standing. He turned down Constitution Hill, crossing the road so that he followed the line of the wall which surrounded Buckingham Palace.

Jack, without any particular idea as to what he was going to do, followed in his wake. He was wearing rubber-soled shoes, which made little or no sound. Once the man glanced back uneasily as if he had some suspicion that he was being followed, but he held on his way.

He was nearing the Victoria Memorial when the surprising thing happened. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief; but he pulled out something

else, and Jack heard it fall with a clatter on the gravel walk.

He stooped and picked it up as the man turned with an exclamation. It was a square leather jewel case, and in falling, the snap had unfastened, and as Jack handled it, the lid flew open.

Instantly the man turned.

"That's mine!" he said roughly, and he would have snatched it away, but Jack was gazing in dumfounded horror upon a great diamond cluster, in the center of which were three large emeralds. It was Mrs. Crewe-Sanders's missing jewel plaque!

He could not believe it possible, and yet—Barbara May was a thief, and this man was the receiver!

"Come on, I want my property."

The stout man tried to snatch it from him, but Jack was too quick for him.

"You'll have to explain where you got this, my friend," he said.

"I'll explain nothing," snapped the other. "If you don't hand it to me I shall call a policeman."

"Then call me," said Jack, and he saw the stout man start.

"I don't understand you."

"I'm Inspector Danton, of Scotland Yard," said Jack, "and I think there are a few explanations due from you. Will you walk with me to the nearest police station?"

The fellow hesitated.

"Certainly," he said after a while, and they walked side by side in silence.

Jack's dilemma was a cruel one. The arrest of this man meant inevitably the exposure of the girl, and he only now realized how strong a hold she had upon his heart. But he had his duty to do, that came first and foremost in his mind. He set his teeth to the task; he must go through with it.

In the Westminster Police Station the prisoner described himself as John Smith, refused to give any explanation as to how the property came into his possession, and stood silently in the steel pen while Jack and the sergeant discussed the ownership of the recovered property.

"There is no doubt about it at all, sir," said the sergeant, consulting a list. "This is the jewel the lady lost; you'll prefer a charge against him, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Jack.

He was sick at heart; he dare not even question his prisoner as to how the jewel came into his possession. He must have time to think matters out.

"I am going to the chief commissioner at his club," he said. "Detain him until I return, and keep that piece of jewelry locked up."

He walked to Pall Mall and walked slowly. Some solution would come to him perhaps—he would find some way out for Barbara.

His brain was a confusion of thought and he was slowly ascending the steps of the New Carlton Club before he could put two consecutive thoughts together.

To his surprise the commissioner was waiting in the vestibule.

"Come into the smoking room, Danton," he said slowly, and Jack obeyed, wondering how his chief had come to know of the impending visit.

His first words explained.

"I have had a phone message from the Westminster Police Station about the arrest of Smith," he said. "After you left a friend of the man arrived and explained to my satisfaction that the jewelry found on him is his legitimate property. He is a jeweler and had been to show the plaque to a friend."

Jack listened, incredulous, but vastly relieved.

"But it answered the description—" he began.

The police commissioner interrupted him.

"I know—it was an exact copy of the plaque which Streetley's sold to Mrs. Crewe-Sanders. In fact, the man you arrested was one of Streetley's managers."

Jack could say nothing.

He was too grateful to know that his suspicions of Barbara May were unfounded to care about his own error.

"And by the way, Danton"—the chief commissioner looked at his cigar thoughtfully—"that little joke of mine about keeping an eye open for the jewel thief at Lord Widdicombe's was—well, it was a joke. I've got the matter of the thief-in-the-night well in hand, and if you interfere you might spoil everything."

"I see, sir," said Jack, although in truth he saw nothing.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KALI DIAMOND.

"SOCIETY," remarked the Countess of Widdicombe in her severest manner, "will more readily forgive a theft than a slander."

Diana laughed.

"Which shows how thoroughly immoral society is," she said lightly.

She sat swaying her fan, her eyes fixed upon the floor of the ballroom below, crowded with dancing couples.

Lady Widdicombe's dances during the cricket week attracted the whole county, and outside in the drive the waiting motor cars reached from the lodge gates to the hospitable doors of High Felsham.

"Mrs. Crewe-Sanders tells me," said Diana, still watching the glittering throng below, "that nobody except a person acquainted with the ins and outs of Morpely Castle could have got in."

"She was the chief sufferer," observed Lady Widdicombe, and Diana laughed, and when Diana laughed her delicate face was singularly beautiful.

"The poor dear woman so plasters herself with diamonds that the wonderful thing to me is that she has missed any at all!" she said. "The curious thing is that although there were a lot of other guests, and diamonds galore, the thief took nobody's property but hers."

"I could forgive that," Lady Widdicombe averred, reverting to her pet topic, "but the 'Candid Friend' business is unpardonable. Any kind of anonymous letter-writer is contemptible, but an anonymous letter-writer who works wholesale and who takes a wicked and malicious delight in breaking hearts and ruining lives—there is no punishment too severe for her."

"Why her?" asked Diana curiously.

"Because a man wouldn't do such a thing."

Diana's fan waved slowly.

"I've known some men who would do most things," she mused and turned her

head to answer the greeting of the girl who came swinging along the gallery to where they were sitting.

"Hello, Barbara May," she said lazily. "Aren't you dancing?"

In her evening gown, Barbara was good to look upon, for she was in the first flush and beauty of womanhood. Her laughing eyes fell upon Lady Diana.

"Aren't you afraid to wear your diamonds, Diana?" she inquired, nodding to the plaque that sparkled on Diana's dress.

"No, I don't think our burglar will come here."

"Do you want me, dear?" asked Lady Widdicombe.

"I wanted to tell you that I'd changed my room."

"Oh, that's good of you," Lady Widdicombe declared gratefully. "You are sure you don't mind?"

"Not a bit," laughed the girl.

"One of Widdicombe's innumerable cousins has been taken ill," explained Lady Widdicombe, "and Barbara most kindly offered to change rooms with her."

Her eyes followed the girl admiringly as she swept down the gallery.

"By the way," she said, "Barbara told me that the mysterious Candid Friend had written a perfectly horrible note about her to one of her relations."

"She seems to bear up very well," said Diana, smiling.

"I think it is abominable," Lady Widdicombe declared angrily; "abominable! The person who writes those letters should be tarred and feathered."

In the spacious library, which had been turned into a smoke room for the night, the Morply burglary and the activities of the Candid Friend were the principal topics of conversation. Lord Widdicombe, a tall, thin dyspeptic man with a sense of humor which so few dyspeptics possess, had already held forth on the iniquity of the anonymous letter-writer.

Whoever was this devilish mischief-maker, he or she had already worked havoc in three homes and the poison was working in a fourth under their very eyes. It was on the subject of the burglary that Lord Widdicombe was most entertaining, for, as usual,

he found something in these crimes to remind him of his Indian experiences, and the Earl of Widdicombe on India was worth going a long way to hear.

"Diamonds?" he said. "Well, I suppose he takes diamonds because they're most marketable. When I was governor of Bombay there was staged one of the most sensational diamond robberies which, had it succeeded, would have landed the British government in a devil of a mess. You've heard of the Kali diamond? I bet you haven't, though," he chuckled. "Well, it's a famous stone, of no great size, worth one to a few hundred pounds intrinsically.

"As a matter of fact, a million wouldn't buy it because on one of the facets is engraved by some extraordinary native artisan a whole verse from one of the sacred books. The microscopic character of the writing and the difficulty of the engraving you may imagine, and it is not strange that the natives believe that this inscription is of divine origin.

"There have been one or two attempts to steal the stone, and at last the British government intervened, knowing that if this thing was missing there would be trouble in the province. They took charge of the stone, which has to be shown on one of their holy days—I think it is next month some time—in fact, I am sure. Well, this infernal jewel was guarded with the greatest care.

"Nevertheless, a gang of native burglars broke into the vault where it was deposited and got away with it. It happened a week or two before the ceremony which is called 'The Showing of the Stone,' and all connected with the government were in a cold sweat of fear. Happily we managed to get in touch with the rascally robbers, but it cost us the greater part of a hundred thousand pounds to restore it."

"I suppose you let it be pretty well known that the stone was missing?"

"Good Lord, no!" said his lordship aghast at the idea. "Let the people know that their sacred stone had gone? That would have been the most lunatic proceeding. No, we kept it as quiet as possible. We dared not breathe a word about the loss, for rumor runs fast in the East."

Barbara May had strayed into the smoke

room, and going up behind a young man, touched him on the shoulder. He turned round with a start.

"I'm awfully sorry," he apologized. "I was listening to a most engrossing story."

He led her out into the ballroom, and a few seconds later they were two-stepping to the plebeian strains of "Whose Little Baby Are You?"

CHAPTER V.

THE PEACE OFFERING.

"DO you know, Mr. Danton, I've been thinking an awful lot about you?" said Barbara as the band finished with a crash and they walked out on to the terrace.

"I'm sorry I've been responsible for so much mental activity," said Jack.

"I've been wondering what is your job. Everybody knows that you have some mysterious employment—and now I've got it."

"The dickens you have!" he said coolly, sitting down by her side. "And what am I?"

"You're a policeman."

His look of dismay made her gurggle with laughter.

"Do I really look like a policeman?" he said.

"Not like an ordinary policeman, but very much like one of those very smart ex-officers who are joining the special branch just now."

"If I really was a policeman," he bantered, "I should feel that I had made a very bad beginning."

"But you are, aren't you?" she insisted.

"If I wasn't a policeman I should be very annoyed, and I couldn't possibly be annoyed with you, Miss May."

"The question is," she said, knitting her brows, "are you after the Candid Friend or a bad, bold burglar?"

"Would Scotland Yard move in the matter of the Candid Friend unless complaints had been made?"

"That's true," she replied. "Then you are after the bad, bold burglar. Mopley Mike."

"Do they call him that?" he asked.

"I call him that," she said solemnly. "I almost wished you were after the Candid Friend. I wonder who she is?"

"You think it is a woman, then?"

"Well," said Barbara, shrugging her shapely shoulders, "'Cat' is written in every line of them, and they are really horribly wicked. You know she has parted the Flatterleys and that Tom Fowler is suing for a divorce, and that Mrs. Snee has gone abroad—it is killing her mother."

He nodded gravely.

"I think that sort of crime is abominable," he said unconsciously echoing Lady Widdicombe's words. "I can respect a burglar, but a slanderer, a person who stabs in the back, must be an obnoxious beast."

As she was going up to her room that night, Barbara May saw Jack talking earnestly to Lord Widdicombe and smiled within herself.

"What is amusing you, Barbara May?" drawled Diana, who was coming up the stairs behind her.

"Thoughts," replied Barbara.

"You're lucky to be able to smile," said Diana. "At the end of one of these evenings I am bored cold—bored to weariness—bored wide awake, if you can understand."

Barbara turned and faced the girl squarely.

"Why do you come?" she asked quietly.

Diana's shoulders arose.

"One must do something," she said.

"Why don't you work?" was the brutal question, and Diana shrank delicately.

She was the heiress of one of the richest landowners in the kingdom, as Barbara well knew.

Had Lady Widdicombe seen the two girls at that moment, she would have realized that the antagonism between them was not one-sided.

"What do you call work?" drawled Diana. "To join a nursing institution, or become a Foreign Office clerk or something?"

"Both of which I have done," asserted Barbara, "and both are excellent sedatives. My experience is that the useless day produces the sleepless night."

"Barbara May," said the other with a

laugh, "aren't you just a little—er—prigishly capable?"

"Don't taunt me with my usefulness!" smiled Barbara.

Even the astute Mr. Jack Danton, had he overheard this conversation, could not have guessed that that scene on the stairs had been as carefully rehearsed and forced upon Diana as if Barbara had spent the morning in teaching her her lines. For Barbara had gone up those stairs just a little ahead of Diana, determined to annoy her, and as determined to apologize for her rudeness.

Diana was in the hands of her maid when there came a knock at the bedroom door and Barbara came in.

"Diana, I've come to say that I'm so sorry I was rude to you," she said.

"My dear," smiled Diana sweetly, "it was quite my fault; I think one gets a little overtired this time in the morning."

"What a beautiful room you have, and what wonderful brushes!" Barbara admired the set upon the dressing table. "If I have any fault to find with this room, the ceiling is a little low," she rattled on.

"I sleep with my windows open," said Diana.

"In spite of the burglar?"

"There isn't much danger, is there?"

Barbara looked out of the window.

"A man could hardly walk along this parapet," she replied. "Your room is a good thirty feet from the ground."

She said good night and was at the door when she turned.

"Would you like a cup of chocolate?" she asked.

Now, Diana's weakness was for chocolate, as Barbara well knew, but she was amazed at the invitation. The girl laughed.

"I've just made some in my room," Barbara explained. "I have an electric kettle and I'm supposed to make chocolate rather well."

"I should love some. I'll send Amile for it."

"It will be ready in three minutes," said Barbara. "Are you sure you've forgiven me?"

"If I hadn't forgiven you before, I should fall on your neck now," Diana replied with a laugh.

And it really was delicious chocolate. Diana sat up in bed, a dainty, beautiful picture, and sipped the hot and fragrant fluid and felt as nearly friendly to Barbara as it was possible for her to feel. She finished the cup and handed it to the maid.

"I will put the light out and lock the door, Amile," she said. "Good night. I think I shall sleep."

Barbara thought Diana would sleep, too. She replaced a tiny bottle half full of colorless liquid which she had taken from her dressing case and looked at her watch. Then she raised the window. Her room was on the same floor as Diana's, and between her and the girl was an empty suite. She pulled down the blinds and undressed.

From her wardrobe she took a pair of riding breeches, put them on and pulled thick woollen stockings over the silken hose. She stuffed her arms into a jersey coat, put out the light and sat down to wait.

At two o'clock she let the blinds up noiselessly and climbed out of the window onto the parapet. It was no more than twelve inches wide, but this girl had nerves like steel, and she walked without faltering along the narrow ledge.

A slip, and nothing could have saved her from death, but she did not hesitate. She came abreast of Diana's window, and without a pause crept in.

Diana was sleeping heavily, and Barbara stepped to the side of the bed and listened. Her breathing was regular and she did not move when Barbara laid her hand gently on her shoulder. The drug she had put into the chocolate had done its work most effectively, and she could, without danger, have switched on the light, save that it might attract attention from anybody passing along the corridor.

She took an electric torch from her pocket and a small bunch of keys. She had only come into the room to apologize to Diana to discover just where Diana put her jewel case. The lock of the steel-lined box yielded after the third attempt, and Barbara made her selection, which was the plaque which had sparkled on Diana's breast.

She was not, however, satisfied with this inspection, and pursued certain investigations. They were well rewarded. Her work

finished, she hesitated. Very carefully she unlocked the door and peeped out. Only a dim light was burning in the corridor. Should she risk it?

She closed Diana's door behind her and walked swiftly up the corridor to her own room and was at the door, her hand on the handle, when she heard the swish of feet on the carpeted stairs.

She turned the handle and could have screamed in her vexation. She had locked the door before she went through the window! She remembered it now and raged at her folly. There was just one chance. It was that the door of the empty suite was open, and she ran quickly. The door yielded to her touch and only in time.

From where she stood closing the door she could see the back of a man's head coming up to the last landing on the stairs. It was Jack Danton.

She closed the door softly and went to the window, which fortunately was open. Her nerves were shaken, she discovered, when she again reached her perilous foothold, but she came to her own room without mishap.

From her trunk—the trunk which she had forbidden her maid to unlock—she took out a square black box of dull steel, and to this she added various articles which she laid on the table. From the steel box ran a long, flexible connection, to the end of which was attached a plug, which she fitted into one of the electric light brackets. For two hours she worked, and as the light of dawn showed she went out through the window, traversing the perilous parapet to Diana's room. She was back in five minutes, and, putting away her apparatus, she carefully packed the diamond plaque in a small cardboard box and placed it under her pillow.

CHAPTER VI.

FALSE CLEWS.

BARBARA was one of the first down next morning, a cool, healthy figure in gray, and Jack, who had just come in from his morning stroll, appeared to be the only other guest about.

"Good morning, Miss May, you're a very early riser," he observed.

"Aren't I?" she agreed. "But there isn't much virtue in early rising, you know. The worm is an earlier riser—or the bird wouldn't have got him!"

They strolled out again onto the drive and stood looking across the glorious landscape at the meadow land that sloped down to the river and the forest of lordly oaks which crowned the ridge on the far side of the Stour.

"It's good to be alive!" announced Barbara.

"I wish I had sufficient energy to walk to the post office."

"I'll encourage you," she said, "wait 'til I get my hat."

They swung down the drive together, past the lodge gates and through the quaint village street. Jack had a small packet to send.

"A report to his chief!" thought Barbara.

They had left the shop when suddenly she stopped.

"I must get some stamps," she said, and turned back. "No, don't come with me, I won't be a second."

She walked back into the shop and drew a packet from the pocket of her sports coat.

"This is to be expressed," she said, "it is stamped and weighed."

"Very good, miss," said the postmaster.

He examined the address and dropped the packet into a bag.

"I'm capricious, and decided not to buy any stamps at all," she said as she rejoined Jack. "I feared to keep you waiting, and the masculine temper before breakfast is notoriously savage."

"When are you going to London?" he asked.

"This afternoon, I think," she replied. "I would have gone this morning, but it would have looked so suspicious leaving the house, supposing a burglar had come, and one doesn't know whether there has been a burglar until all these lazy people wake up."

He smiled.

"I don't think there was a burglar last night," he declared.

They went into breakfast together and found Lord and Lady Widdicombe were down. Two or three other guests strolled in.

"Where's Diana?" asked Lord Widdicombe, attacking a kidney.

"Diana doesn't wake till twelve," said Lady Widdicombe. "Surely you know that."

"I wish Diana would take a little more cheerful view of things," grumbled his lordship with whom Diana was no great favorite, although she was ward and cousin.

Diana did not, in fact, awake until one o'clock, and she then felt exceptionally refreshed. She had slept the clock around, an unusual experience for her.

"I must get Barbara to give me the recipe for that chocolate," she said, as she sipped her morning tea while her maid prepared her bath. "Are there any letters, Amile?"

A budget of letters was placed on the coverlet, and Diana glanced through them. Half an hour later she was dressed. She wore during the day a pearl necklace and her rings, and she unlocked her little strong-box to get these. And as she stared into the interior her face turned white.

"Amile, quickly!" she called. "Where is my plaque?"

"You put it into the box last night. I saw you."

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly, *mademoiselle*," declared the agitated maid.

Diana made a quick search. No other jewelry was missing, although there was an emerald ring in the box which was worth a small fortune. Only the diamonds! She rang the bell, and then, remembering she was dressed, ran down the stairs and met Lord Widdicombe in the hall.

"Willie," she announced rapidly, "somebody has taken my diamond plaque."

"Oh, damn!" exclaimed Lord Widdicombe. He caught the eye of the young man talking to Barbara May, and Danton came across.

"Diana has been robbed of a diamond plaque," said Lord Widdicombe in a low voice. "I wish you'd see her and search the rooms."

His search produced no results. The plaque had gone, and Jack, greatly perturbed, joined his lordship in the library.

"I can't understand it," he said. "She tells me that she always locks her door at night and leaves the key on the inside. This morning the door was unlocked."

"Could it be unlocked by an instrument used outside?"

"I tried that," Danton replied, "and I found it is impossible."

"Then, how the devil could it have happened?" demanded the exasperated peer. "Didn't Diana hear any kind of noise?"

"None whatever," Jack answered, "and it is obviously impossible to get into the house from the outside unless one of the guests occupying a room on the same floor walked along the parapet."

"That's unlikely. He would want the nerve of a steeplejack to do that."

"There's no doubt about the nerve of the gentleman who stole this plaque," said Jack grimly. "I can only suggest that you see the guests and put the matter before them, and say that it is possible that one of the servants may have taken the plaque and concealed it in his mistress's or master's room. Under these circumstances they will not object to a search."

"That is a good idea," nodded his lordship, and proceeded to interview his guests, who readily acquiesced.

The search, conducted ostensibly by Lord Widdicombe, but in reality by Jack who had "volunteered to help," was thorough but fruitless. Diana revelling in an unaccustomed atmosphere of sympathy treated the matter lightly.

"I don't mind the loss of the plaque because it is insured," she declared. "It was a beautiful thing. I only bought it a month ago from Streetleys."

"That's queer," Widdicombe remarked, with a frown.

His wife looked at him in surprise.

"What is that, Widdicombe?" she asked.

"Why, that Crewe-Sanders woman who lost her diamonds had only bought them a month or so before at Streetleys."

"Well, that is not remarkable," said a guest.

They were taking tea in the big drawing

room in the afternoon, when the exchange of views occurred.

"Streetleys is the biggest of the fashionable jewelers, and I suppose half the stuff one sees women wearing came from that firm."

"What I worry about," said Diana, bringing attention back to her own misfortune, "is the knowledge that this wretched man was in my room while I was asleep."

"I wonder he had the heart to do it, Diana," declared his lordship sarcastically, and then seriously: "I'm very annoyed it has happened. I thought we should get through our week without this kind of trouble."

"I wonder the thief had the heart to do it," said Diana sarcastically.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THIEF.

JACK made a very complete search of the grounds, particularly in the vicinity of the mansion. Beneath Diana's window he looked for the telltale trace of a ladder, but there was none.

All the time he was searching he had the certainty in his mind that the crime had been committed from the inside of the house. Who was there to suspect?

Strangely enough, he had already ruled out the possibility of a servant being responsible for the robbery. Most of the guests had brought their own maids, but they were housed in a part of the building which made it impossible that they could reach Diana's room in the middle of the night.

He came back in a troubled frame of mind to interview Lord Widdicombe. His lordship was pacing his library when the detective entered.

"Well, Danton," he inquired, "have you discovered anything?"

Jack shook his head.

"Nothing."

Widdicombe resumed his pacing.

"I wish to Heaven it hadn't happened," he said. "Diana can well afford the loss—she is very rich. It is the thought that it is somebody in this house, a guest possibly,

who is the thief, that bothers me. When are you going back to town?" he asked suddenly.

"To-day. I thought of going back by the same train as Miss May."

Lord Widdicombe frowned.

"Barbara May, eh?" he observed. "A very nice girl, but a very unfortunate girl, too," he added significantly.

"What do you mean?" asked Jack, alert to defend, where no defense was called for.

"Unfortunate because she has been in every house where a burglary has been committed. In other words, Danton, whenever this mysterious visitor has come, Miss May has been a guest. Wait, wait," he said, holding up his hand, "I am not suggesting that Barbara knows anything about this wretched thief—that would be too preposterous a suggestion; but there is the fact. It has been rubbed into me by Diana, and you can't get away from it, Danton."

Jack shrugged.

"For the matter of that, Miss Wold has been at most of the places where the burglaries have been committed."

"By jove, so she has," Lord Widdicombe agreed thoughtfully; "but pshaw! I don't think we need consider either Diana or Barbara. Now the point that strikes me, and I am not a detective, is—if the thief is a guest in this house the jewel must be in this house still. Unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Jack.

"Unless," Lord Widdicombe replied slowly, "they have managed to get it away."

"That pre-supposes a confederate," said Jack Danton, "and I have an idea that the thief is playing a lone hand."

"Either a confederate, or else the plaque has been—well, posted."

Jack laughed.

"They must have got up very early," he explained. "The only person who went to the post office in the first part of the morning was myself." He stopped suddenly. Barbara also had been to the post office, and—

"Nobody else?" asked Lord Widdicombe curiously.

"Nobody."

He got away from his host as soon as he

could. He must settle this torturous suspicion which was disturbing his mind. Barbara May! It was impossible.

He went to the post office and found the old postmaster making up his books.

"Mr. Villers, as a servant of the government, you will understand that what I tell you is very confidential."

He passed his card across the counter, and the old man, fixing his glasses, read and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"I had no idea, sir, you were in the police," he said. "I've got a nephew—"

But Jack cut short the recital of his relative's qualities.

"Mr. Villers, can you tell me how many registered parcels have been despatched from the post office to-day?"

"None, sir," the old man answered promptly. "Not a single one."

Jack heaved a sigh of relief.

"And the letters, of course, you could not keep track of?"

"No, sir, the only one I know anything about is an express letter which was handed in early this morning."

"By whom?" asked Jack quickly.

"By that young lady, Miss May, I think her name is."

The heart of Jack Danton sank.

"Are you sure?"

"Why yes, sir; she came in with you early this morning, and then she came back and said she had forgotten she had the letter to send."

He remembered now that Barbara had said she was going back to buy some stamps.

"What sort of letter was it?" he asked, feeling a little sick at heart.

"Well, it was a pretty bulky letter, sir; it felt to me as if there was a cardboard box inside."

"To where was it addressed? I suppose you don't remember that?" asked Jack.

"Yes, I do, sir; I took a note of it, because it was an unusual thing to send an express letter from here."

He turned up a book.

"It was sent to Mr. Singh, 903, Bird-in-Bush Road, Peckham. That's what made me notice the address particularly; I never knew there was such a road in London."

Jack jotted down the address mechanically.

Singh! An Indian name. He frowned, and tried to associate this circumstance with something he had heard only recently. He must know the truth, he felt, as he walked slowly back to the house, for her sake and for his.

He realized now all that Barbara May meant to him, all the high hopes that had been planted in his heart, and while he could not bring himself to believe that the girl was a thief, yet every new fact which was disclosed went to support that view. The meeting she had had with the mysterious Mr. Smith at Hyde Park Corner, the discovery that he had in his possession a diamond plaque similar to that which had been stolen, this was a damning confirmation of his worst fears.

Diana Wold treated the matter of her loss very lightly; she strolled into Barbara May's room and watched her packing for her departure.

"The world's sympathy is very precious to me," she declared cheerfully. "It is almost worth the loss of my plaque."

"I don't believe that," smiled Barbara.

"What a tremendous lot of baggage you bring," said Diana interested. "That great box and two suit cases; really, Barbara, you are equipped for a world tour."

"Aren't I," laughed the girl, and then Lady Diana smelt something. It was a fragrant and peculiar perfume. What was more, it was a perfume which was made especially for her.

"Excuse me if I sniff," she remarked. "What scent is that, Barbara?"

"Scent," said Barbara in surprise, and then slowly, "I have noticed it before. I never use any other perfume than lavender water."

Diana changed the subject, and a few minutes after went back to her own room and rang for her maid.

"Amile, where is my perfume?"

"You put it in your jewel case, *mademoiselle*," the girl replied.

Diana unlocked the little steel box and putting in her hand, brought out a squat cut-glass bottle. She knew before she touched it that the stopper was out, and

feeling gingerly on the bottom of the box she found it was damp.

"I remember now," she murmured slowly, "I put it away in a hurry, and I must have split a little. That will do, Amile."

She sat down on the bed to think.

So it was Barbara May whose hand had been inside that box! Suddenly Diana went white, and unlocking the little safe again she took out some papers and examined them. They were all there. She sighed her relief. All there, but they reeked of her perfume.

She carried the papers to the fireplace, put them in and set a match to them. As she watched the flames curl upward, there came to her the faint fragrance of the perfume with which they were saturated.

So Barbara May was the thief.

CHAPTER VIII.

BLACK DOUBT.

SHE said no more, and both Widdicombe and Jack Danton found her unusually quiet that afternoon.

After Barbara had gone up to her room to make her final preparations for departure, Jack asked a question about something which had puzzled him. They were alone together in the big conservatory that looked out over the park.

"I can't understand, Miss Wold," he said, "how the thief could get into your room, unlock the door and not disturb you. Are you a heavy sleeper?"

She shook her head.

"As a matter of fact, I am a very light sleeper," she replied, and added deliberately, "Probably it was Barbara May's chocolate which proved such an excellent sedative."

"What do you mean?" asked Jack quickly.

"Barbara brought me a cup of chocolate before I went to sleep," Diana answered carelessly. "We had a little quarrel, and this was her love gift to make up," she added with a grim smile.

"What happened after?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Diana. "I know I must have fallen asleep

immediately, and I must have slept like a log. I did not awake until nearly luncheon time, and I certainly heard nobody come into my room or leave it."

Jack Danton spoke very little on the way to town, and Barbara May, on the contrary, was unusually vivacious and gay.

He put her in a cab (the handsome car he had seen at Hyde Park Corner was evidently reserved for special occasions) and went to his diggings and changed. Half-an-hour later he was riding on top of a southbound tram car wondering what result his investigations would have. He made an inquiry of the conductor.

"Bird-in-Bush Road? Yes, sir, it is near the Canal Bridge in the Old Kent Road. I'll tell you when we get there."

The thoroughfare proved to be a long winding road of respectable middle-class houses. No. 903 was a corner house with a yellow stucco front and plaster half-columns, which gave it an appearance curiously reminiscent of an Egyptian tomb.

He did not go to the house, but strolled up and down on the opposite side of the road. The place itself showed no sign of life. The garden was neglected and weed-grown, its windows had not received attention for months.

It was getting dark when a cab came rattling along the road, stopping some distance from the house. A girl alighted and Jack's heart leaped, for he recognized the trim figure of the woman he loved.

She dismissed the cab and came along without hesitation, turning into the front garden, and he saw her walk up the half-a-dozen steps which led to the front door. She had hardly knocked before the door was opened. The unknown occupant had been watching for her, thought Jack. What was happening there?

He walked down the side street parallel with the garden of No. 903, and here he could obtain a view of the back of the house. The view, however, offered him no satisfaction, and he resumed his vigil along the sidewalk of Bird-in-Bush Road.

Presently the door opened and the girl came out. Nobody accompanied her to the gate, and she turned and walked swiftly in the direction of the Old Kent Road.

Should he follow her? He decided to wait a while, and conduct a little private investigation. First he must know who was the occupant of this house, and he waited until the girl was out of sight before he crossed and entered the unkempt garden.

His knock was not answered. He knocked again. Presently he heard soft footsteps in the passage, the rattling of chains, and the door opened a few inches to disclose a dark, suspicious face.

"Does Mr. Singh live here?"

"Yes, sir," answered the Indian in perfect English. "But he is engaged."

"I want to see him," said Jack impatiently.

"I will tell him, sir."

The man attempted to close the door, but Jack's foot formed a wedge which could not be overcome.

"You cannot come in," the Indian announced agitatedly. "I will tell Mr. Singh you wish to see him, but you must wait outside."

"I'll wait inside," said Jack, and with a heave of his shoulders pushed open the door.

So far he got when a door at the end of the passage opened and a man came out. He was not, as the detective had anticipated, an Indian, but a matter-of-fact, commonplace European, respectably attired, and of excellent physique.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want to see Mr. Singh."

"Well, you can't see him," said the other.

"I not only can, but will see him," Jack declared savagely, and to his amazement the man laughed.

"I don't think I should try. Mr. Danton," he said, and Jack stared at him.

"You know me?"

"Oh, yes; you are Mr. Danton of Scotland Yard, I know you very well," said the other, evidently amused at the sensation he had created, "and I assure you that Mr. Singh is not able to see you because he is a very sick man. This English climate doesn't agree with him, and I have strict orders to see that he is not disturbed. And under any circumstances, Mr. Danton, you have no right to force your way into the house without a search warrant."

Which was so absolutely true that Jack felt extremely foolish.

"There is no question of a search warrant," he agreed. "I merely want to ask a few questions."

"Those questions cannot be answered until—" the man hesitated, "until Mr. Singh is well enough to see you."

Thus the adventure ended—lopsidedly, as he told himself.

He was turning the key to admit himself into his flat, when there flashed upon him the recollection of Lord Widdicombe's story. The Kali Diamond! That was why the Indian association had been familiar. But he had no sooner thought of this connection than he realized its absurdity. If the Kali Diamond were in England, he could understand Miss May's activity, and the reason why she was working hand-in-glove with the Indian Singh.

He tried all that night to find some logical and plausible explanation that would acquit Barbara of any kind of complicity, and at the end he went to sleep with an aching head and a sense of despair.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER POISON LETTER.

"**R**EAD this," said the Commissioner next morning, when Jack reported himself to headquarters.

The Detective Inspector took the letter. It was written on a gray paper that was strangely familiar to him:

DEAR SIR:

I think it is only right that you should know that Inspector John Danton is working hand-in-glove with a jewel thief who recently stole Miss Diana Wold's diamond plaque. He is not only working with her, but he is in love with her. The girl's name is Barbara May, and she was a guest of Lord Widdicombe's on the night that the plaque was stolen. If you take the trouble to inquire, you will discover that she was a guest in every house where the plaques have been stolen.

Yours truly,

A CANDID FRIEND.

"Posted in London," said the Commissioner. "What have you got to say to that, Danton?"

Jack's face turned red and white.

"It is monstrous," he gasped.

"It is certainly unkind," said the Commissioner dryly. "Do you know Miss May?"

"Very well, indeed," Jack replied stoutly, "and this is a disgraceful charge."

"What is there disgraceful about it? What is the most annoying thing about it? The suggestion that you are in love with her?" asked the other with a twinkle in his eye.

"The whole thing is dastardly," said Jack hotly, and the Commissioner nodded.

"Exactly," he agreed. "Your job is to find the writer of those letters. Diana Wold, by the way, has been the recipient of a scandalous epistle—she got me on the telephone a little while ago—and told me about it."

Jack examined the letter. The writing was obviously disguised, but it was the letter of an educated person.

"You were with the Widdicombes when the plaque was stolen?" the Commissioner went on. "Did you get any kind of a clew?"

Jack shook his head.

"No, sir," Jack lied and tried to keep his eyes steady.

"Humph!" said the Commissioner, "anyway, it isn't your job. And by the way, no word of these robberies is to be made public. We must keep the matter secret for reasons of our own."

Although it was not Jack's job, and he well knew it, he had an interest in the stealer of the stones which the Commissioner could not guess, unless he gave credence to the malicious charge which the Candid Friend had made.

His first call that morning, after leaving Scotland Yard, was on Streetleys, the jewelers, and he was taken into the office of the proprietor, an elderly, saturnine man, who gave him a cold welcome.

"You quite understand, Mr. Streetley, that I am not officially engaged in the case," explained Jack, "but I have a personal interest, inasmuch as Lord Widdicombe is a friend of mine and I know Miss Diana Wold, who was the last person to lose her jewelry. It is common gossip that the

plaques that have been stolen have been purchased from your firm within the last six months."

Mr. Streetley nodded.

"That is true," he said. "We are the biggest firm in London who sell and purchase cut diamonds, and we certainly have the most valuable selection of stones in Europe."

"Can you account for the fact that these plaques have been stolen? There is nobody who has an especial grudge against your firm?"

Old Streetley smiled.

"I can't see that they would be revenged upon us by stealing property which we have sold."

"Then you can offer no explanation?"

"None whatever," said Mr. Streetley, and was evidently relieved that the interview was finished.

As he went out of the big shop, Jack looked around for some sign of the man Smith, who was described as Streetley's manager. If he was on the premises, he was not visible.

Danton was not satisfied. He remembered that a friend of his, a very wealthy stockbroker, had told him a month or two ago that he had bought his wife a plaque at Streetley's. Probably she would be the next recipient of the burglar's attention.

He called him up on the phone to find that he was not at his office. A second call he put through was more successful. Mr. Bordle was at home at his Park Lane flat, and to there Jack repaired.

"Come in Danton," said the other heartily, "my wife's out of town. I've a touch of the 'flu, and I'm bored to death."

"And I am going to bore you a little more," smiled Jack. "Do you remember some time ago, Bordle, you told me that you were buying your wife some jewelry at Streetley's?"

The other nodded.

"That's perfectly true. I bought two plaques, one for my wife and one for my sister. I gave it to her as a wedding present, she was getting married just about then. And the next time I get jewelry," he added with a little grimace, "I assure you it will not be at Streetley's!"

"Why?" asked Jack eagerly.

"Because they're fussy," Bordle replied. "We hadn't had the jewel a month before they sent a man to ask if we would return it because they had made some mistake about the setting and they wanted to put it right. As far as I could see, the setting was perfect, and my wife at first refused to send it back—so did my sister."

"They made the same request of her?" said Jack in surprise.

"That's so. Anyway, we sent them back. They kept the darned things for nearly a month before they returned them, and, as far as I could see, they had made no alteration whatever in the setting. They played the same trick with a fellow I know."

"Asked for the plaque back?" said Jack in surprise. "How many plaques do they sell in the course of a year?"

"Hundreds I should think. They're the best people in London for that kind of work; they're scrupulously honest, and they do not ask for a big profit, so they get a tremendous lot of custom. But why are you so interested?"

"If I tell you, you've to keep the facts as a secret," said Jack, "they have not yet been made public," and he explained the curious fate of all plaques which had been purchased at Streetley's.

"Well, they won't get mine," Bordle declared with a laugh, "it is in the strong room at my bank. But I must warn my sister, Carrie."

CHAPTER X.

THE CENSORSHIP.

THE *Daily Telephone* had an item of news in its columns, the following morning, which interested quite a number of people:

It is an open secret that society has been greatly disturbed through the activities of an unknown letter-writer signing himself "A Candid Friend." The real secrets of society are well kept, and until a few days ago few people outside of an exclusive circle knew about this pestiferous correspondence, which has been going on now for nearly a year. Nobody has been spared the malignant attentions of this unknown scoundrel. In consequence

wives have been separated from husbands, whole families estranged, and there is at least one case of suicide traceable to the vicious writer of the letters. A painful feature is the apparent fact that the writer is himself a society man and acquainted, and possibly on terms of friendship, with his victims. The police are sparing no effort to bring the miscreant to justice.

That afternoon, Mason, the star reporter of the *Daily Telephone*, walked into his chief's room, closing the door carefully behind him.

The editor looked up and nodded inquiringly.

"I've found a good story," said Mason, "and I got on to it quite by accident. Do you know that for some considerable time, for three months I believe, there have been a succession of jewel robberies, and that properties of the value of eighty thousand pounds have been stolen from various country houses?"

The editor frowned.

"I have never heard of it," he replied. "There have been no police reports—"

"No, for some reason the robberies have been kept quiet. I rather fancy that the people who have been victimized suspect one of their own number."

"The police have circulated no description of the missing property?" asked the editor.

Mason shook his head.

"I got the story from a man who was making inquiries at Lord Widdicombe's place on quite another matter. One of the servants told him, and then begged him to say nothing because, apparently, they had all been sworn to secrecy."

"That's curious," said the editor, leaning back in his chair. "It sounds like a good story to me. Have you particulars of the other robberies?"

"Three of them," nodded Mason. "I have two or three reporters out making inquiries in other places, and I think if we can get it confirmed from elsewhere this ought to be a very big story indeed."

He went back to his own room, and all that afternoon there came to him scraps of information that enabled him to piece together a story which promised to be sensational. In one respect he drew a blank.

Scotland Yard knew nothing of the robberies, or, if they knew, for their own purpose declined to make a statement.

It was not remarkable, because Scotland Yard sometimes resents newspaper publicity about a crime which it is investigating. Publicity very often means the undoing of all the secret work, the cutting open of the net which is being drawn around the unsuspecting criminal.

Mason did not expect much help from that grim stone building on the Thames Embankment. He relied more upon the searching inquiries which the reporters were making in half a dozen places.

By six o'clock that night he had the skeleton of a narrative sketched out, and reported to his chief.

"It is going to be a big story," he said. "The very fact that people are being shielded, that Scotland Yard has issued no warning to jewelers, seems to prove that this is a bigger thing than I at first anticipated."

That night the editor, dining at his club, saw Jack Danton wandering disconsolately into the smoke room, and buttonholed him.

"You're the very man I want to see," he declared.

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Jack dismally, "you're not going to ask me who the 'Candid Friend' is?"

"Something more important than that," said the editor. "We've got a big story in the office, and I want some sort of confirmation before I print it."

He was not speaking the exact truth. The story would be printed whether it was confirmed from headquarters or not. The character of mystery which surrounded the robberies was sufficient justification.

"What about these jewel robberies?" he asked, eying the other keenly.

Jack presented a blank face. The word had gone out from the Commissioner's office that no word about the jewel robberies must be spoken.

"Jewel robberies?" he asked, with a heroic attempt to appear puzzled. "Which particular robbery? Do you mean the smashing of Carter and Smith's shop in Regent Street?"

"You know jolly well I don't mean that," said the editor. "I am referring to

the extraordinary burglaries that have been committed at various country houses. A number of diamond plaques have been stolen, presumably by somebody who is a guest in the house."

"I've never heard of them," Jack asserted, shaking his head. "What wonderful fellows you newspaper men are; you get stories of crimes which Scotland Yard has never heard about—upon my word, I believe you commit them yourselves to make news."

The editor was an old friend of his, and friendship has its privileges.

"I'd like to bet any amount of money that you're lying," he remarked. "Your air of innocence is one of the worst camouflages I have ever seen. I am going to print that story."

"Print it, my dear lad," said Jack wearily. "Only don't expect me to read it. I never read your beastly paper, anyway."

The editor chuckled, finished his coffee and went quickly back to the office.

The pressure of a bell brought Mason.

"Have you any further facts about these diamond plaques?" he asked.

"Sufficient to make a good story," replied the other with relish. "Mrs. Crewe-Sanders lost a plaque only a week ago, and Miss Diana Wold, the society beauty, lost another in exactly similar circumstances. I'll go ahead."

He went ahead to the extent of two columns with glaring headlines:

SOCIETY'S MYSTERIOUS ROBBER

The Criminal Who Only Steals Diamond Plaques. Who Is the Thief?

It was an excellent story, excellently done, and at eleven o'clock that night, when the pages had been "plated," and all was ready for printing, nothing seemed to prevent the *Telephone* making a big scoop.

Before the plates were on the machine, however, there arrived at the *Telephone* office two important police officers, one of whom was the commissioner. They were shown immediately to the editor's room.

"We hear you've got a big story to-night," remarked the commissioner; "a

pretty little fairy story about stolen jewelry."

"That's right," the editor replied with a smile. "Have you come to give us a few more details?"

"Not on your life," said the commissioner, as he sat himself on the other side of the editor's desk; "only—you will not print that story."

"Why not?" asked the editor.

"There are many reasons, and one is the interest of justice. It is an old one which I have trotted out before, but I am trotting it out with greater emphasis than heretofore."

"But why on earth not?"

The commissioner took an envelope from his pocket, extracted a slip of paper, and pushed it toward the journalist.

"I hate to remind you that certain sections of the Defence of the Realm Act are still in force," he said apologetically; "but here is an order."

The editor read the slip with a frown.

"Damn!" he exclaimed.

The story of the jewel robbery did not appear.

That was not the only mysterious circumstance attached to the theft. Diana had a woman friend in Cannes, and the day after the theft she despatched a long telegram describing the loss. Two hours after she had sent the wire to the post office it came back to her in an envelope, and written across the telegraph form in red ink were the words:

"This cannot be dispatched."

She got on to the telephone and demanded furiously from an important official the meaning of this extraordinary happening.

"I am exceedingly sorry that you should have been inconvenienced, Miss Wold," said that gentleman suavely, "but, as a matter of fact, I stopped the message going myself."

"But why?" she demanded.

"The police requested us to allow no reference to the robberies to pass over the wire—you see, we are anxious to catch the thief," he went on soothingly, "and the greater secrecy there is, and the less said about this matter the easier it will be for the police to make their capture."

She hung up the receiver, wondering what on earth it all meant.

CHAPTER XI.

SELF-CONDEMNED.

JACK did not see Barbara for three or four days, although he was in the Row every morning, cursing himself for his folly, but bitterly disappointed when she failed to appear. At last he could stand it no longer. He would see her; he would talk to her, and would not mince his words.

At least he might dispel the cloud of suspicion which surrounded her, and if the worse came to the worst he might help her to evade the consequence of her mad acts. That she was a victim, the dupe of others, he was certain.

Barbara had a little flat in Weatherhall Mansions, Victoria. He thought at first of ringing her up to tell her he was coming, but decided that on the whole there was a chance of her refusing to see him.

As he entered the vestibule of the residential mansions the elevator was coming down, and he stepped aside as the door rattled back and two men stepped out. The first was the man he had seen at Bird-in-Bush Road; the second was he who had called himself Smith, and who had been described to him as the manager of Streetley's. They were talking together in low tones as they walked out.

What did it mean? He must have an end to this mystery, although he told himself as the lift carried him up to the third floor that he had no more right to inquire into Miss May's private life than he had to take out of the hands of the police officers a case in which he had no concern.

A trim maid showed him into a small and pretty drawing-room. A few minutes afterward Barbara came in.

"This is a great surprise, Mr. Danton," she said. "I am very glad to see you. Is it anything serious?" she asked quickly, noticing the look in his face.

"It is rather serious, Barbara," he replied, and she flushed slightly. "I saw two men coming out of the elevator as I came in. Are they friends of yours?"

She hesitated.

"I don't know which two men you refer to," she drawled. "I had two men to see me to-day on a matter of business."

"I refer to Smith, the manager of Streetley's; and the man who lives in Bird-in-Bush Road," he explained bluntly, and he saw her color change.

"You are being very mysterious, Mr. Danton," she said after a while, and her voice was quiet and even. She met his gaze without flinching. "Won't you tell me just what you mean?"

"I mean this," Jack declared quietly, "that wherever this strange thief in the night has stolen into people's bedrooms and taken their jewelry, you have been a guest in the same house. I mean also that you sent away by post from the Widdicombes' place a package containing a box which I have every reason to believe held the diamond plaque of Diana Wold. That packet was addressed to a house in Bird-in-Bush road, which is in the occupation of an Indian."

He paused, but she was silent, and he went on.

"Barbara, won't you let me help you? I know you visited that house the day you came back from London, and I am worried to death about the whole business. I haven't come here because I am a police officer, I have come here because I am—a—a—friend. I will help you, even though it means my eternal disgrace and my being thrown out of the police service."

He saw her face soften, and impulsively she laid her hand on his.

"Jack Danton, you are very good," she said gently, "but I think you are wasting your sympathy. Anyway," she went on after another brief silence, "I could never accept such a sacrifice at your hands."

"But won't you tell me what it all means? Barbara, did you take Diana's plaque?"

She did not answer.

"Tell me. For God's sake, tell me! This thing is driving me mad."

Suddenly she arose and she was a shade paler.

"I cannot explain anything, Jack," she said. "If you think I stole the jewelry, if

you believe I am a thief, I must let you think so for a little while. You don't think I am the 'Candid Friend' also, do you?" she asked with a little smile.

"No, no, I'll swear you are not that. Barbara, are you in somebody's hands? Are you being—are they using you as a tool? Can't I help you?"

He grew almost incoherent in his anxiety. She shook her head.

"You cannot help me at all, except—except"—her voice sank, and the words were almost whispered—"except by trusting me. And now," she added briskly, "I am going to ring for tea and you are not to ask me any more questions."

"Barbara," he interrupted slowly, "is this mystery connected with the Kali Diamond?"

She went white, and put out her hand to grip a table for support.

"What do you mean?" she breathed. "Kali Diamond? I—I don't understand, Jack," and then, turning suddenly, she walked swiftly from the room.

A few minutes later her maid came in.

"Miss May has a very bad headache, and she asked you to excuse her. Can I get you some tea, sir?"

"No, thank you," Jack answered, rising unsteadily. His brain was in a whirl, his thoughts confused. He went out into the street like a man in a dream. Barbara May was a thief—a *thief*!

CHAPTER XII.

THE HUNTRESS.

DIANA WOLD was blessed with great possessions. She had a great house in Carlton House Terrace, an estate in Norfolk, a villa at Cannes, and a miniature palace on the shores of Lake Como. The loss of a couple of thousand pounds worth of jewelry did not worry her at all; it was, indeed, well worth the excitement the burglary had, and the interest which had come in consequence into her bored life.

Many men had wooed Diana and had found her as cold as stone and less responsive. Men had little or no attraction for her; her interests lay elsewhere. Beautiful

as she indubitably was, a consciousness of her charms awakened no desire to employ them until she came against the polished granite of Jack Danton's personality.

He was the one good-looking man she had met who did not approach her with that possessive confidence which she had invariably found was the attitude of presentable men. He had neither courted nor flattered her, and when he had neglected her it had not been a studious, but a natural neglect.

She had known him when he was in the army, and before he had begun to serve the state in another capacity. The war had matured him, made him something different to the rather gawky lad she had known when she was in short frocks, but even in those days he had never flattered her, never even asked her to dance with him, but his magnificent aloofness had not piqued her until now.

"Jack Danton treats me as if I were a very elegant piece of furniture," she had said to Widdicombe as they came up to town together. "There are times when I like to be regarded as human."

"In other words, he doesn't make love to you," Widdicombe commented bluntly. "Well, that must be a relief, Diana, and the poor fellow is saving himself a great many heartaches."

She laughed softly.

"I don't think Jack Danton's heart is of the aching kind," she said.

She expected him to call on her when she was in town, and when he did not she wrote him a note and asked him to tea.

He arrived to the minute—his very punctuality annoyed her—he was so obviously paying a polite call, that the girl was unexpectedly annoyed.

"Jack," she said at last with a touch of asperity in her tone, "one would imagine, to hear you talk, that you had been reading a manual on the art of polite and meaningless conversation."

"I'm sorry if I have been quiet," he apologized in surprise.

"I expected you to be interesting," she asserted almost tartly. "Can't you tell me about murders and criminals, and bank robberies and things like that?"

He stared at her and she laughed.

"Really, Jack, you don't suppose that your occupation is a secret, do you? We all know you're a policeman; that is why it is so fascinating to know you."

He laughed awkwardly.

"I am sorry I can't tell you about the amazing mysteries I have unraveled," he said. "The fact is, I haven't unraveled them. Police work is a very mundane, humdrum sort of a business, and the purple spots occur at horribly long intervals."

"Why don't you marry?" she asked.

"Marry?" he said, astonished. "My dear Miss Wold—"

"And please don't call me Miss Wold! You used to call me by my Christian name, and if you don't do that I shall feel uncomfortable when I call you Jack."

"Then I'll relieve you from that embarrassment, Diana," he smiled. "Why haven't I married? Heaven knows. In the first place, I am a poor man and couldn't support a wife; in the second place—"

"In the second place," she repeated when he paused.

"Well, there is nobody who wants me particularly."

"Is there anybody you want?"

"No," he answered shortly.

She was looking down at the handkerchief she held in her hand.

"I don't think that the question of money ought to come into marriage," she remarked. "Why don't you marry a rich girl? There are plenty of them about."

"But none that I'm particularly in love with," smiled Jack, "and anyway, Diana, I couldn't marry a woman who was immensely wealthy and live on her; it would be a hateful life."

"That is your conceit," she said, looking up. "If you were a rich man you wouldn't think twice about asking a poor girl to marry you, and she wouldn't think twice of accepting. You would do that because such a marriage would give you a lordly feeling of patronage."

Jack shook his head.

"I don't agree with you and, anyway, I should never give a woman an opportunity of being particularly lordly or patronizing where I was concerned."

Diana Wold was annoyed; she had no desire to marry Jack or any other man, but she would dearly love to add his proposal to a score of others that had come her way, and he was tantalizingly and mad-deningly aloof. She almost hated him for that.

"Are you in love with Barbara?" she asked, and Jim started.

"That's exactly the question the 'Candid Friend' asked the Commissioner."

"Oh, do tell me about the 'Candid Friend,'" she broke in eagerly. "Is it a man or a woman, and did he really say you were in love with Barbara? How wonderful! How clever of him!"

"I can't think it is particularly clever, and one of these days I shall take the 'Candid Friend' by the arm and lead her to the nearest police station, and she will cut an ignoble and ignominious figure in the bright steel pen," Jack declared savagely.

So he *was* in love with Barbara May, she thought. Her intuition had divined his secret. And, as she thought, a wave of anger swept over her. She did not like Barbara and knew that the dislike was mutual. And if all her suspicions had justification, what an ironical situation would be created!

Jack Danton would be called on to arrest the woman he loved! The very thought of this possibility brought a new interest into her jaded young life.

After Jack had gone she considered the situation in her beautiful little boudoir overlooking the Mall. Barbara's address she knew. She must obtain admission to those apartments and have time to make her search, and she was certain that she could discover evidence which would leave no possible doubt of Barbara's guilt.

CHAPTER XIII.

CRAFT VERSUS CUNNING.

LATER in the evening, in answer to a telephone call, the chief of a private detective agency called upon her and was shown into her study.

"I am going to be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Day," said Diana after the visitor

was seated. "I have reason to suspect that a girl friend of mine is the 'Candid Friend' of whom you have heard."

"The anonymous letter-writer?" Day remarked in surprise.

Diana nodded.

"I do not want the police to interfere, as I am most anxious that she should not be exposed publicly," she said sweetly. "One hates the thought of a young girl facing the ordeal of police court proceedings, but at the same time I want to discover whether my suspicions are correct. In fact, Mr. Day, I want to search her flat while she and her maid are out."

The detective pulled a long face.

"That's rather a serious business, miss," he observed, "and it is interfering with the work of the regular police, which I do not like to do. You see, I am an ex-sergeant of the police myself."

"I will compensate you for any risks you may run," said Diana steadily, "and at any rate there is no reason why you should not make the necessary inquiries, and—" she paused, "secure me a key which will open the flat door. I am not asking you to help me in the search."

"That's different!" the man exclaimed, relieved. "And though, of course, I can't get you the key of the flat, I daresay I could call here one day and leave a key by accident, which you might find would fit the lock, and I could also help you by discovering when the lady and her servant are out."

"That is all I ask you to do," said Diana. She opened the little bureau and took out a bank note. "This is for a hundred pounds, and is only on account, Mr. Day."

Mr. Day pocketed the note with every evidence of satisfaction.

On the Thursday, three days later, he called again, but made no reference to Barbara May or the Weatherhall Mansions flat. When he left she found a key on the table and put it into her bag with a smile.

The next morning she was called by telephone.

"The person you are interested in has gone to Sunningdale to stay with Mrs. Merstham. She has taken her maid," said a voice.

"Thank you."

She collected all the bureau keys she could find in the house; they might be useful, she thought, for if there was any evidence of her crime in the flat, Barbara would certainly lock it up.

She walked into the vestibule of the Mansions, and to her relief, the elevator had just gone up. She was able to walk up the stairs without the lift man seeing her. Yet it was with a beating heart that she opened the door of Barbara's flat, walked in and closed the door softly behind her.

From room to room she went, opening drawers, peering into cupboards, but without making a discovery until she went into Barbara's bedroom. There were few articles of furniture in the room, which was a large and airy one, and the only locked drawer proved amenable to the attentions of one of the keys she had brought with her. But here she drew blank, to her disappointment, for the drawer contained nothing that was in any way helpful.

She was leaving the room disappointed when it occurred to her to turn down the pillows of the bed. It looked as if she had failed again, when by accident her hand touched the sheeted overlay and she felt something hard. To pull aside the sheet was the work of a second, and then she saw and gasped.

Neatly let into the mattress was a square space occupied by a cash box. She extracted this with shaking hands and carried the box to a table near the window. It was locked, but the lock was of a flimsy character. The third of her keys fitted and the lid swung back. And as she took out the trays with which the box was fitted she gasped, for each tray contained two diamond pendants!

Open-mouthed, Diana examined the jewels; each bore a neat little linen label on which the name of the owner was written. She saw her own plaque, it was the third she examined.

What should she do? She was in some dilemma. She could not carry the box to the police and say that she had made a search. That would look bad. Society would not view her actions very kindly, however noble her intentions might have been.

And then she had an inspiration.

She replaced the jewels carefully on their trays, closed the lid of the box and locked it, and placed it back in the square hole that was cut in the mattress, covering this with the sheet and placing the two pillows neatly where she had found them. In a few minutes she was driving back to Carlton House Terrace. It would be a lovely revenge!

She called Scotland Yard by telephone, and as luck would have it Jack was in the office.

"Will you come to me at once?" she pleaded. "It is very important."

"I am awfully busy," he excused himself.

"But this is tremendously important. It affects Barbara May."

"I'll come," he said shortly.

She awaited his arrival, hugging herself with joy. There was in her composition a streak of malignity which Jack had yet to discover.

He found her sitting at a tea-table, and was a little brusque in his manner.

"I can't stay to tea, Diana," he began.

"You *will* stay to tea," she said sweetly, "I have a lot to tell you and I must have the right atmosphere, and the atmosphere for scandal is the tea-table."

He seated himself reluctantly, waiting and wondering what her news would be.

"You are a police officer, Jack?" she demanded, as she handed him his tea.

"I believe I am," he replied curtly.

"You have taken all sorts of oaths and things, haven't you? I understand that the police are bound, just as soldiers are bound, by promises to do their duty in any circumstances."

He put down the tea.

"What is the idea, Diana?" he asked quietly.

"I have found the jewel thief," she announced.

His jaw dropped.

"I have found the jewel thief, and I can tell you where the jewels are. And I am reporting this to you officially," she added with emphasis. "The jewels are in Barbara May's flat. They are contained in a steel box beneath her pillow and it is your

duty to secure a search warrant and verify my statement."

He was stunned by the news.

"Where is Barbara?" he asked huskily.

"I really don't know where Barbara is. I am not concerned in that respect. I am telling you, Jack, that the jewels are in her flat. You must report this."

He arose unsteadily.

"I suppose I must," he agreed, and she knew that he would do his duty.

The Chief Commissioner listened to the story unmoved.

"How does Miss Wold know that the jewels are in Miss May's flat?"

"I don't know, sir," Jack replied wearily, "I have reported the matter, and that is as far as my duty goes."

"Very good," said the Commissioner, pressing a bell, "but since you have come into this case, you had better conduct a search yourself. I will get the necessary warrant for you, and I daresay you will be able to manage to get into the flat. Oh, by the way, as Miss Wold is interested in this matter, she had better be present when the search is made."

"Is that necessary?" asked Jack.

"Absolutely," said the Commissioner firmly. "This lady has brought an accusation against Miss May, and I must have the search made in her presence."

It was a savage Jack Danton whose voice Diana heard over the telephone.

"The Commissioner wants you to be present when the search is made"—and she heard the tremble of fury in his voice, and smiled.

"When will that be?" she asked sweetly.

"At once," was the reply, and she heard the click of the receiver being hung up, and laughed softly.

She was waiting in the vestibule at Weatherhall Mansions when Jack, accompanied by two detectives, arrived. Although she greeted him he did not reply.

"You're being very foolish," she murmured as they went up in the elevator together. "I am not to blame. Is it unnatural that I should want to recover my stolen property?"

He did not reply.

By some means the police had secured a

master key of the flat, and the door was opened and Diana led the way to the bedroom.

"First of all, Miss Wold," said Jack, planting himself squarely in the doorway of the bedroom, "how came you to know that the property was here?"

"I know 'from information received,'" she replied maliciously, "that is the correct terminology, isn't it?"

"Then perhaps you will show us where it is."

"With pleasure," said Diana.

She turned back the pillows, and pulled down the sheet.

"There!" she exclaimed triumphantly, and pointed to the black box.

Jack pulled it out with a groan, and placed it on the identical table where a few hours before she had rapturously examined its contents.

One of the detectives had a skeleton key, and the box was opened.

"There!" Diana repeated.

"Where?" asked Jack.

She stared.

The first tray was empty!

CHAPTER XIV.

"I TRUST YOU."

HASTILY she pulled out the tray. The second also was empty, and the third contained nothing but a typewritten slip of paper which Jack read and passed without a word to the girl. The inscription ran:

Sorry to disappoint you.
—and that was all.

The reaction after that tense hour of agony through which he had passed was such that Jack laughed.

"Well, Miss Wold?" he demanded, "Where is your plaque?"

"It was here an hour ago, I'll swear," she retorted furiously; "I saw it with my own eyes."

"Oh, you saw it? So I gather you secured an entrance to the flat and searched it?" said Jack.

"I did," she answered. "It is no use glaring at me, Jack. I tell you, the plaques

were here a little more than an hour ago. I saw them with my own eyes, there were six of them."

"And now we are looking with our own eyes," said Jack sardonically, "and they are not here. I won't tell you, Miss Wold, what I think of you. You have tried to bring an innocent girl to ruin. You are despicable."

Without a word, she turned and left the room; her rage made speech impossible.

"Well, that's that," said Jack after she had gone. "And now I have to explain to Miss May how I came to her flat armed with a search warrant. Phew!"

He wiped his streaming forehead. And yet he was puzzled. He knew that Diana would never have brought the charges unless she were certain that the jewelry was there. The discovery of the slip at the bottom of the box was proof positive that something had been concealed therein, and had been removed before the arrival of the search party.

But Barbara was out of London. She was staying with people in the country, and could not have been the girl who took away the jewels—if they were ever there.

When he heard that Miss May had returned to town he made it his business to call, but before he could frame his apology she stopped him with a smile.

"I've heard all about it, Mr. Danton," she said, "and I know that you were not responsible. Really, you should take Diana into Scotland Yard; she seems a most admirable detective," she added dryly.

"I don't want to put it on to Diana," protested Jack. "I was a fool ever to carry the story to the Commissioner."

"You had to do it," she said quietly, "it was your duty, Jack, and I should have blamed you if you hadn't."

She laughed quietly.

"Poor Diana, it must have been an awful blow to her when she found I was not the jewel thief. Thank heavens," she added piously, "no jewelry was missing from Ascot!"

They laughed together.

"A surprising thing has happened, though," he said more seriously. "Do you know that all the jewelry that was stolen

during the last three months has been returned, even Diana's?"

"Is that so," she raised her eyebrows. "Returned to their rightful owners?"

He nodded.

She expressed no curiosity, and went on to talk about other matters. He thought she was looking ill; there were tired lines about her eyes, and her manner was nervous.

She reverted to the subject of Diana just before he left.

"In proof that I have forgiven Diana," she said, "I am going to her party to-night. Will you be there?"

He had received an invitation, which he had ignored.

This was surprising news.

"Really, that is awfully sporting of you, Barbara," he said warmly, "and if you go, I'll go, too."

"You see," she went on with a twinkle in her eye, "Diana has two diamond plaques and maybe there will be a chance of my getting the other. I've rather a passion for plaques, you know."

"Please don't talk about it," he begged; "you make me feel very uncomfortable."

Diana's parties were invariably lavish entertainments. Jack expected the place to be crowded, but he had no idea of the exclusive nature of the invitation.

As he made his way up the broad staircase, at the head of which Diana, a radiant, beautiful figure in silver tissue, stood waiting to receive her guests, he rubbed elbows with Cabinet ministers, great ambassadors, eminent peers whose names figure prominently in the daily press.

"I am glad you came, Jack."

Diana offered him her little hand.

"You have forgiven me?"

"There is nothing to forgive," he said, evading the question, for he had not forgiven her, nor would he.

"I see you haven't," she laughed lightly. "Now run along and find Barbara. She is looking beautiful to-night."

He found the girl in a corner of the crowded ballroom, and, disengaging herself from her friends, she came toward him.

"I want to speak to you," she said in a low voice. "Come into Diana's drawing-

room. There's nobody there, and she told me I might use it if I wanted."

Diana saw them disappear, and a hard look came into her eyes. She saw them only as lovers anxious to find some secluded place where they might enjoy each other's association without interruption. She would have been a much surprised woman if she had heard the first words which Barbara addressed to the young man.

"Jack, I want you to do me a favor," she said as she closed the door behind her. Her voice was urgent and worried.

"Why, anything I can do for you, Barbara—" he began.

"But this is an unusual thing, Jack; I want ten uninterrupted minutes to make a search in Diana's bedroom."

He could only gaze at her.

"At twelve o'clock Diana allows all her servants to come down to the gallery overlooking the ballroom to see the dancing," she explained rapidly. "That is an opportunity which I cannot afford to miss. I want you to stand at the foot of the stairs and keep watch. If anybody comes I want you to signal me."

"But—but—how—" he stammered.

"There is an electric light switch on the second floor," she went on rapidly. "It turns on the light outside Diana's bedroom door. There is plenty of excuse for you being on the stairs. It is just outside the billiard room, where nobody will be to-night. And you can always say that you were bored and wanted to knock the balls about."

"But Barbara, what does it mean? I don't understand you. What do you wish to find in Diana's bedroom?"

"Will you help me?" she almost pleaded, her hands clasped together and a look of earnest entreaty in her eyes. "Don't you realize that this is the fourteenth? No, no; I don't mean that," she said hurriedly. "You don't understand, but will you do it for me?"

He thought a moment.

"Yes," he answered huskily. "I don't know what you're going to do, Barbara, but I trust you."

She gripped his two hands between hers and there was something in her face that

made him tremble; then suddenly she bent to him and he felt the flutter of her lips against his—and was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

TO SAVE A SCANDAL.

"HAVE you two people exchanged confidences?" laughed Diana, as they came back to the ballroom together.

"I suppose you've been telling each other what a horrible pig I am."

"We never mentioned you once, dear," said Barbara, and Jack marveled at her self-possession.

When he had followed her and had overtaken her at the door of the ballroom, all trace of her anxiety had passed. She was her old, equable self. Women are funny things, thought Jack, and waited uneasily for the midnight hour to approach.

He saw the servants come one by one into the little gallery, trim maids, staid footmen, a matronly housekeeper, and two stout cooks, and then he caught Barbara's eye and strolled out.

The ballroom of Diana's house was on the ground floor. On the first was her drawing-room, her study, and the billiard room. Above were the bedrooms.

He strolled carelessly up the stairs, relieved that nobody saw him. One light burned in the billiard room, and he switched on the remainder, took out a cue and laid it on the table. Then he went back to the landing in time to meet Barbara May.

She uttered no word, just a friendly nod, and in a second she was flying up the stairs, leaving him in any agony of apprehension. Five minutes passed, ten minutes, and then he saw a figure at the bottom of the stairs.

It was Diana. He had time to turn over the switch when she saw him.

"Why, Jack, whatever are you doing?"

"I've come up to play a game of billiards, but I can't find a partner," he explained.

He was in a panic. Barbara might come down at any moment.

"Billiards? You foolish man, why aren't you dancing? And where is Barbara?"

"I expect Barbara is less foolish than I am. I left her in the ballroom."

"Come along; I will play billiards with you," Diana suggested, and walked into the billiard room.

He followed, closing the door behind him.

"Don't close the door, Jack," she said, "it is very hot in here."

He turned the handle and opened the door a few inches.

"Open it wide. Think of the proprieties!" she mocked him.

He threw the door open reluctantly.

"And I don't really want to play billiards, and neither do you," said Diana, throwing down the cue she had picked up. "It is a hateful game. Jack, what is the matter with you? You look as if you've seen a ghost."

He laughed nervously.

"I spend a whole lot of my time chasing ghosts," he said. "Come along, Diana, play me one game."

He wanted to maneuver her with her back to the open door. At some part of the game that must surely occur.

"No, I won't play billiards," she declared. "I'm going up to my room to get a sedative for poor Molly Banton. She has a splitting headache."

"But she can wait," he urged.

"So can you," she bantered him.

His heart stood still as he heard her going up the stairs, and he waited. Presently he heard a cry.

"Jack! Jack!"

"What is it?" he asked hoarsely.

"Come quickly!"

He dashed up the stairs into the beautiful bedroom. Diana was standing by her dressing-table.

"Look!" she gasped. "Somebody has opened this safe. I've lost my other plaque!"

His mouth was dry; his tongue refused to speak.

"Lost your plaque!" he stammered, and all the time he was wondering where Barbara was concealed.

She must have been listening at the head of the stairs when Diana went into the billiard room and had seized the momentary closing of the door as an opportunity for

slipping past. He was relieved — so relieved that he could conduct a search of the room.

"Have you seen anybody come up the stairs?" Diana asked suddenly, with growing suspicion.

"Nobody," he answered boldly.

"Jack, are you speaking the truth? Has Barbara been up here?"

Her eyes were fixed on his accusingly.

"No; I swear she hasn't."

"Why were you downstairs? You don't play billiards, Jack. Where is Barbara?"

"In the ballroom, I tell you."

"We shall see," said Diana determinedly.

They went downstairs together, and her first question was addressed to the butler, who was arranging a buffet in a little room off the ballroom.

"Miss May, madam? She's gone home. I saw her go about four minutes ago. She had to come into the ladies' room opposite to get her cloak."

"I see," Diana said slowly, and turned to Jack.

"Will you please find Barbara and save a scandal?" she suggested, and Jack, immensely relieved to get away, needed no further bidding.

A taxi took him to Barbara's flat and the lift man told him that she had been in a few minutes.

He knocked at the flat door and rang the bell, but there was no answer. He saw through the transom that a light was burning in the hall, and knocked again.

It was Barbara who opened the door, but she made no pretense of being glad to see him.

"I can't see you now, Jack," she said, "will you please go away?"

"But I want to ask you something, Barbara."

"Will you go," she demanded in agony.

"I refuse to go," said Jack doggedly; "there is some mystery here which I must unravel."

"Please don't," she begged, but he pushed her aside, and striding down the passage, passed into her little sitting room.

The sight that met his eyes struck him dumb. Sitting at a table were three men. One was the tall native he had seen in Bird-

in-Bush Road. The second was "Mr. Smith," the jeweler. The third was a wizened little Indian in a white turban.

He held in his hand the missing plaque, and with deft fingers he was wrenching aside the settings of a stone, the great diamond in the center.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INNOCENT BURGLAR.

"WHAT is the meaning of this?" demanded Jack hoarsely.

The big man looked up and saw him, and spoke swiftly.

"Don't move," he said. "Put up your hands!"

A pistol had appeared as if by magic in his hand, and Jack obeyed.

"Take him, Smith, and put him in the next room, and if you make trouble, Mr. Danton, there will be worse trouble for you. No, let him stay here," he said as an afterthought. "Put the bracelets on him, Jim."

Before Jack realized what had happened, his hands were scientifically manacled.

"Sit down and don't make trouble," the big man ordered, "and, believe me, Mr. Danton, it hurts me more than it hurts you."

The girl had not appeared. Jack thought he heard her sobbing in the passage. Once he was disposed of, the three men paid him no further attention.

"You are sure?" Smith demanded.

"I am sure," replied the little Indian, and held the stone in the palm of his hand.

The big man looked at his watch.

"One o'clock," he said. "Jim, you might get on the telephone to Croydon: tell them to have an airplane out and ready by half past four, and warn Paris to have landing lights for us. There is no need to warn Milan. When shall we reach Baghdad?"

"Three days—two days with any luck," said the other.

Jack listened open-mouthed.

"It will be a close shave," the big man observed thoughtfully. "We can only pray that we have no engine trouble. Now, Singh, you'd better fix this plaque and get that matter settled."

Smith took a long flat case from his pocket and opened it, and Jack saw the glitter of many diamonds.

"Here's one, a little bigger than the other. Can you fix it?"

He handed it to the Indian, who picked it up with a pair of tweezers and placed it in the cavity from whence he had taken the big diamond. They watched him in silence, and presently he handed the plaque to the big man, who passed it back to Smith.

"Take that to Miss Diana Wold tonight. Tell her we've caught the thief," he added, and then glancing at Jack, walked over to him. "I'm very sorry to treat you as I have done, inspector," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "but it will be some satisfaction for you to know that I am a Commissioner of the Indian Police."

"The devil you are!" Jack exclaimed.

"The devil I am," the other agreed, "and I can assure you I have had a very unhappy time."

He stooped down, turned the key into the handcuffs, and in a second Jack was free.

"I'm going along now, and I'll leave Miss May to explain just what has happened."

"Then Miss May was the jewel thief?" gasped Jack.

"She was indeed," said the other. "The cleverest thief you've had in London for years. And"—he glanced at Jack slyly—"the prettiest."

CHAPTER XVII.

PLAQUES OF THE OBDURATE PURCHASERS.

"I DON'T know how to tell you the story, Jack—not coherently," the girl began. "But it is all about the Kali Diamond."

"The Kali Diamond?" repeated Jack in surprise. "Why, that was the stone that Lord Widdicombe was talking about! It was once stolen and they had great trouble to get it back."

She nodded gravely.

"It has been stolen since then," she said, "and we have had even greater trouble. The stone isn't a very valuable one as you count diamonds, but on one of the facets

there is a microscopic writing, which is believed by the natives to be divinely inscribed.

"About six months ago an Indian jewel thief broke into the sanctuary and stole this stone, and the theft was not discovered for some time, and then only by the high priest of the sect, who communicated with the police, knowing that there would be trouble if the stone was not exhibited and examined by the elders on the Day of Showing. The thief was traced, but unfortunately, he had sold the stone and several others to a dealer who had sent them to Europe.

"The buyer was traced to London, and that is where I came in, for I have been in the Foreign Office secret service for three years." She smiled up at his astonished face.

"Secret service? Then you are—"

"I'm a real detective," she said demurely, "but don't interrupt, please. All the stones that the receiver brought to London were sold to one firm, and that the firm of Streetley.

"The receiver was found and confessed. He had no idea that any of the diamonds was the famous Kali diamond.

"The Indian Commissioner who came to London brought with him Mr. Singh, who is not only a member of the sect which owns the Kali diamond, but is a clever jeweler, who knows the diamond so well that he could recognize it immediately. The Kali stone is very much like every other stone, and it requires an expert to detect the difference."

"That was the man who lived in Bird-in-Bush Road," said Jack.

She nodded.

"He lived in a little quiet place in Peckham, and to him were brought all the stones that were stolen."

"But why steal them at all?" asked Jack.

"We didn't steal them all," said the girl with a smile. "Streetley's had used all the diamonds they bought in various plaques. They were large and beautiful, and the very things to center that kind of jewel. When they found that they had disposed of the stone, they sent to all the people to whom they sold jewelry, making some excuse for getting the jewels back.

"In many cases the plaques were returned, but in some cases the owners refused to part with the property they had bought, probably believing that Streetley's had, unwittingly, given them more value for their money than they were entitled to. There was only one way to get the plaques back from these obdurate people, and that was to steal them, and I was given that unpleasant task."

A light dawned on Jack.

"So really you were acting as an official of the government?"

She nodded.

"It was a very close call," she said gravely. "In ten days the stone has to be shown. They are taking it to India by airplane, as you probably guessed from what Mr. Smith said. Every stone had to be examined carefully. It wasn't necessary to make so thorough an examination of Diana's second plaque, because that was the very last that Streetley's had sold, and which we had not seen."

"Then Diana's story was true? The jewels were in the box under your pillow?"

She nodded.

"Yes, but your commissioner knew all about it, too," she said with twinkling eyes. "The moment he heard that Diana had made the discovery, he telephoned to Mr. Smith, who came to the flat, took away the jewels, and left an impertinent note behind."

The commissioner knew it all the time! No wonder he had kept Jack from the jewel thieves.

"I am afraid I've hurt Diana's feelings," Jack remarked ruefully. "After all, she had some reason for her belief."

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXTRACTING THE FANGS.

IT was on the following afternoon that Barbara May was announced and Diana Wold arose to meet her.

"I have had my plaque back, Barbara," said Diana. "I presume the police found it? Jack is an admirable detective, and he knew just where it was."

"And where was that?" asked Barbara.

"In your flat, my dear," said the girl sweetly. "And he is not going to hush it up this time. I think it is only fair to tell you that I have written to every one of our friends, telling them the true circumstances of the case."

"In fact, that I'm a thief?" Barbara inquired quietly.

"That you're a thief. It is an ugly word, but it doesn't seem an exaggeration to describe you that way."

"That's mystery number one explained," Barbara declared with a sigh. "I'm very glad it is all over, and that everybody knows. Mystery number two ends simultaneously."

"What is mystery number two?" Diana demanded with a curl of her lips.

"The identity of the 'Candid Friend,'" said Barbara. "When I drugged you—yes, I did drug you—though it is one of the nicest drugs in the world for the purpose, and has no bad after-effects—I found your plaque, Diana, but I found something else. A bundle of letters written ready for posting."

There was a deadly silence.

"Go on," said Diana at last.

"They were written to various people, and they were all signed 'Candid Friend,' and they were full of scurrilous, slanderous accusations against people who think you are their dearest friend."

"That is a lie," Diana asserted, white to the lips.

"It is true."

"Prove it," said the girl harshly.

"You know I am a Foreign Office detective, I suppose?" Barbara volunteered.

Diana started.

"A Foreign Office detective?" she said incredulously. "That isn't true."

"Can't you think of anything else to call

me but a liar," Barbara remarked wearily. "It is perfectly true, as you will discover. I was looking for a certain diamond which the government was most anxious to recover. That is why I stole your plaque, and stole the plaques of everybody else concerned."

"But I had a double object in going to Widdicombe. I was pretty certain that you were the 'Candid Friend,' and I thought that when I made my search for your plaque I would also look around for letters, and these I found with no difficulty and took away."

"That's a lie," Diana declared. "Nothing was missing from my box but the jewel."

"I brought the letters back," said Barbara cheerfully, "after I had photographed them. I took down a portable apparatus and spent the whole of that night taking blue prints of your letters, and if it is true, as you say, that you have written to everybody telling them that I am a thief, then it will be my painful duty to write to the same people enclosing copies of the 'Candid Friend' letters that you wrote."

Again a silence.

"I haven't written yet," Diana explained sulkily; "I intended writing."

"Then, if you haven't written," said Barbara significantly, "don't!"

She gathered up her cloak and walked to the door.

"You might find something better to do, Diana," she observed. "Why don't you get married—I am speaking to you as an old married woman!"

"What!" Diana exclaimed in amazement. "Married?"

"I married Jack at the registrar's office this morning," said Barbara, "and I will dispense with your wedding present."

THE END.



BRASS COMMANDMENTS

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

(ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, May 20—June 24, 1922), has been made into a motion picture for WILLIAM FARNUM and can now be seen on screens throughout the country. Released by William Fox.



Graft

By **WOLCOTT LECLÉAR BEARD**

Author of "For the Flag," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

WHEN Phil Herondene, a young architect, refuses to be a party to municipal graft, the politicians decide upon a frame-up. They plan to discover marked bills upon Phil's person and convict him of accepting a bribe. But his aunt, Miss Sophronia, a lovable New England spinster past sixty, discovers the plot and engages a burglar, Spike Creach, to steal the marked bills before they can be used. Spike appears at Miss Herondene's home the same night, with the bills, while a party is in progress. The mayor and the district attorney are there. The burglar gives the bills to Miss Sophronia and tries to help her expose the grafters, especially the big boss, who is the moving figure. Just as he starts to speak the name of the big boss a shot is fired, and a body is heard falling.

CHAPTER VIII.

REVERSAL.

PEGGY, sitting behind the palms, sprang to her feet and ran forward through the darkness. She needed no light to guide her footsteps, for she had lived in that house all her life and knew it as she knew her own hand.

She found herself jammed in the library doorway with Edith, Horton and Jack—with all, in short, who had been close

enough to hear the shot. In some occult manner, for, of course, she could see nothing, she became aware that Horton had slipped an arm around Edith's waist as though to support her, a fact of which Edith herself was totally unconscious. She heard the click of an electric switch. Nothing happened. It clicked again, still without results.

Then the voice of Aunt Sophronia was heard. At first there was a suspicion of tremor in that voice; its owner would hard-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 17.

ly have been human and feminine otherwise. Nevertheless it was cool and controlled, competently dominating the situation, dark though that situation was.

"Somebody has thrown the master-switch," said she. "You know where it is, Phil—there in the back passage. Go and turn it on."

No one else spoke, just then. Somebody, presumably Phil, stumbled against a chair. A few seconds afterward the library once more was bathed in light. From the ball-room there came the sound of laughter and light jests, called forth by that moment of darkness. Peggy noted these details as she noted all others, great and small, important and otherwise, with a photographic accuracy that never faded from her mind.

Thus she noted that the room still was fragrant with the bluish, aromatic haze of good tobacco. She saw Phil stoop as he reëntered the room from that back passage, and when he straightened again she saw a pistol in his hand—a wicked automatic, blue and sinister. She saw Dunning, his face and fingers both twitching from a nervous strain born of present terror and dawning hope. She saw Aunt Sophronia, who now was standing, her face pale and drawn, but resolute and undaunted. She noted the fact that Mr. Ayres, a forgotten cigar still smoking in his hand, was kneeling upon the floor beside a form that lay there, very still. The form of a man whom she never before had seen—of Spike Creach, the burglar.

"He's done for, poor chap," said Mr. Ayres, rising. "I don't suppose he ever knew what happened. We ought to call a doctor, though—and the police, too."

"The police, too!" echoed Horton, stepping forward. "Dunning, will you—?"

He did not finish the sentence; there was no need. Peggy saw that he caught the district attorney's eyes, and she sensed that a look of intense meaning passed between them. She saw also, although she did not then understand its significance, a look of triumph cross Dunning's face as he started for the door.

"Stop! There was a man at that window! A man with a cloth over his face. He can't be far away—he's only just gone. Catch him!"

It was Peggy who spoke. She had caught only a glimpse of this man. Only his eyes were visible, the rest of his face being hidden by a napkin that he held over it. Nevertheless she knew it was the same man she had seen at the dining room window a little while before.

Mr. Ayres, who stood nearest the window, flung it open. Pushing him rudely aside, Dunning leaned out, sounding a shrill call upon a whistle he had taken from his waistcoat pocket. He was answered by shouts of the two policemen whom he had brought with him and posted outside the house. They approached, but for a little were unable to identify the unexpected window from which the call had come. Dunning did not hurry them.

"A man has been shot," said he, when at last they had come. "This girl says she saw a masked face looking in through the window. It's probably a pipe dream, but you might as well have a look around. When you finish, report back here, to me."

The men left. With an evil grin, Dunning turned from the window and picked up the desk telephone.

"What do you *mean* by saying what I saw was a pipe dream?" stormed Peggy, furiously. "But he may be a mile away by now. I think you wasted time on purpose! I don't believe you *wanted* to catch him!"

"Let no one leave this room," commanded the district attorney, without answering, as he removed the telephone receiver from its hook.

"Peggy dear, will you go and ask Dr. Gray to come here, please? Quietly, you know, so that people won't suspect that anything has happened. Go now."

It was Aunt Sophronia who issued this counter-command—or rather, counter request, and—naturally—it was this which Peggy elected to obey. Dunning made a motion as though to stop her, and then thought better of his intention, perhaps because Horton stood aside to let her pass. So she went, her pretty head held defiantly high, to find kindly old Dr. Gray, who had ushered her into the world.

She found him, after some search, in company with Aunt Sophronia's pet clergy-

man and the principal of the high school. Peggy touched his arm, and Dr. Gray turned and followed her without question. When they reached the hall, where for the moment it was comparatively deserted, Peggy turned, intending to speak. He started with surprise.

"Why, Peggy, I'd no idea it was you!" he exclaimed. "What a beautiful young woman you've grown to be—overnight, one might say. But you are troubled. What's wrong, my dear—who's ill? Not your Aunt Sophronia, I hope!"

Until that moment the finery that she had commandeered had wholly slipped from Peggy's mind, and the doctor's compliment failed utterly to bring the thrill that it would have done a little while before. To meet opposition with defiance was easy, but to bear up in the face of sympathetic interest she found to be quite another and far more difficult matter. Therefore, she did not feel at all like a "beautiful young woman," but rather like a frightened and unhappy little girl. She led the way to her aunt's library.

It seemed to Peggy that no one in the room had moved a muscle since she left it. The doctor found no need for an extended examination of the burglar's body; a small red spot on the forehead told everything, so far as the cause of death was concerned.

"What has happened?" the doctor asked Aunt Sophronia.

But the district attorney answered, with an unpleasant leer:

"Murder!"

The old doctor contemptuously ignored Dunning and again addressed Aunt Sophronia.

"Who committed this murder—and why?"

"We don't know," Aunt Sophronia shook her head. "We can't imagine."

The two policemen who had been brought by Dunning reappeared at the window, having returned from their fruitless search of the grounds. Replacing the telephone on the table with a triumphant bang, Dunning leered again, impartially at Aunt Sophronia and Dr. Gray.

"We do know it—and why. So we don't have to imagine," said he.

Then he beckoned to the policemen.

"Take those two men!" he commanded. "Yes, Ayres—the old man, not the kid—and Herondene. Take 'em and take care of them! It's murder they're charged with. Murder in the first degree!"

The policemen themselves were astonished, but their professional imperturbability reasserted itself, and their duty was plain. One of them produced a pair of handcuffs. Phil, his face livid, made an instinctive movement of resistance, but instantly thought better of it and held out his wrist. A shackle was snapped around it, chaining him to his senior partner. The district attorney waved his hand.

"Take 'em away," said he.

The police officers were about to do as they were told, but as Aunt Sophronia rose from her seat they delayed for a moment, prompted by instinctive consideration for one whom, from their childhood, they had been taught to respect. She said nothing; just kissed Phil, shook the unshackled hand of her old friend and then returned, dry-eyed, to her chair. Too wise by far was she to offer remonstrances that she knew would be unavailing.

The old doctor, however, possessed no such wisdom. His face turned crimson, and he bristled like an angry turkey-cock.

"Do you—you, a guest in this house and the chief magistrate of this city—intend to permit official blackguardism such as this?" he demanded, hotly, of Horton.

Uncertainly—unhappily, also, for he knew not what to do—Horton stepped forward, as though about to interfere. Before he could speak, the district attorney forestalled him.

"You 'tend to your own affairs, Mr. Mayor—this is my department," he said, briskly. "I've 'phoned for the coroner and for more police. They'll both get here any minute now. That foolishness in the other rooms must be stopped and the house cleared before they come. But I'll see to that."

He left the room. No one spoke. A moment later the music ceased abruptly, in the middle of a bar. In the hush that followed the voice of the district attorney, raised with the distinct utterance of a prac-

tised public speaker, could be heard by all who remained in the library.

"Ladies and gentlemen. I regret that I am obliged to inform you that these festivities are now at an end. It is to be doubted, however, whether in any case you would care to remain longer in this house. The nephew of your hostess, together with one of the guests of honor, have both been arrested, charged not only with an attempt to steal public money, but also with committing a deliberate murder in order to conceal the lesser crime. Therefore, though I have no wish to discommode you, I must request that you vacate these premises as expeditiously as your convenience permits."

No one spoke. The only comment upon this tactful speech was a glance of deep disgust that passed between the two policemen; but as their duty demanded, they started to lead their prisoners away.

Then Edith, standing motionless, silent and mentally stunned until that moment, gave a gasping sob. She would have gone to the two men—to her father and her lover—but after a faltering step or two she stopped, and stood swaying. It was Jack, her brother, who caught her as she swooned and laid her on a nearby lounge. Horton, who was nearer, sprang forward to render this service, but only to be sent reeling sideways by Peggy's small, but vigorous hands.

"Don't you touch her! You traitor—you beast! Don't you dare!" she hissed.

Aunt Sophronia had risen as Edith fainted. Now she turned, astounded and—even at such a time—with her ingrained sense of hospitality shocked. She beheld a lovely little virago, both fists clenched, standing at bay, with bright hair that had broken from its unaccustomed confinement, streaming around her, and a borrowed frock that had come unpinned and was about to become indiscreet in its revelations.

"Peggy!" said Aunt Sophronia, with automatic reproof. "Such language—to our guest!" But no mere words could daunt Peggy now; she was in a state of excitement that took her far beyond any such possibility.

"I don't care—he is a traitor—guest or not!" she panted, defiantly. "I saw him talking with that horrid Dunning. They're

friends. One is as bad as the other. And it was Dunning who fired that shot—I'm sure it was!"

In her last statement Peggy was mistaken, but Horton was by no means certain of this. In fact, what she had said coincided closely with a fleeting suspicion of his own, and he had no way of knowing how much she might have seen.

Therefore, the mayor's heart sank, and once more his mind was filled with the darkest apprehensions. Without a word he turned, and as soon as he could, left the stricken house just as the coroner and the police entered it.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER THE BALL.

"HOW are they?" asked Jack Ayres.

"Asleep," answered the doctor. "When I herded Peggy into bed she dropped off instantly, like a tired child. The others I had to dope—all three of them."

"All *three* of them?" repeated Jack, puzzled.

"Yes. I include old Libby Wilson," was the reply. "With that bad heart of hers this affair has affected Libby far more seriously than any of the others. She collapsed on the stairway leading to her room, it appears, where she was found by some of the other servants. If her constitution wasn't as tough as white hickory, she wouldn't be alive. As things stand, she's in a state of absolute coma, from which I doubt if she will ever emerge."

"The affairs of this world surely do seem to be badly managed, in spots, don't they?" Jack attempted to grin.

Jack tried to disguise his real feeling. But he did not deceive Dr. Gray. The doctor was more than the trusted family physician of both the Ayres and Herondenes; he was a lifelong friend. Besides he was a bachelor, with no close relatives of his own. He knew perfectly well of what the boy was thinking. His own thoughts ran along parallel lines.

Dr. Gray went to one of the windows, lifted aside the curtain and looked out. The

sky was black except for the faint gray of the false dawn that gives an hour's warning of the approaching real one. It was a drab and dismal beginning for what would be the most drab and dismal day.

Dr. Gray turned back, so as to face his young companion.

"Jack, my boy," said he, "there'll be a lot of things to do, and you are one of the very few who can help do them, so it behooves you to keep yourself fit. There's just time for you to get a couple of hours sleep, a cold plunge and a change. Go to it!"

"Wouldn't you better take a bit of your own prescription, sir?" asked Jack, rising.

"I'm going to. I've telephoned for fresh clothes and a trained nurse—the nurse for Libby, of course. Until they come, I shall rest in this big armchair. You clear out, and do as I tell you."

The doctor settled himself in the big easy chair. He did not intend to sleep. He rather prided himself upon the supposed fact that a seasoned physician like himself, accustomed to lack of sleep caused by countless hours of watching beside sickbeds, could carry on comfortably, remaining wakeful and alert, while husky youngsters like Jack Ayres was "all in." And with this pleasing fiction in his mind, he fell into a profound slumber, from which he was awakened by the trained nurse, his fresh clothing and broad daylight, all three of which arrived simultaneously.

The doctor felt more himself and more capable of dealing with the problems when once more properly shaved and dressed. Hardly had he finished dressing when the mellow resonance of the old breakfast gong sounded through the house as it had every morning since Uriah Herondene had brought it home from the Far East more than a century before.

He descended to the breakfast room and found the table arrayed with crisp bacon, unimpeachable eggs, muffins, rolls and coffee. Aunt Sophronia, trim as ever, her aspect unchanged, was in her place, behind the tall, silver coffee-urn. She even managed a smile as she saw the surprise on the doctor's face. It was a brave smile, but a very sad one.

"Even though one's nearest and dearest is falsely accused of a terrible crime, the world has got to go on, and folks have got to eat," said she. "Peggy and Jack ought to be down by this time; I called them both. It was good of you, Eliphalet, to stay on as you have. How is Libby?"

"Unchanged," answered the physician. "I'm not looking for any change at present—not for a considerable time, probably."

"No," sighed Aunt Sophronia, "I suppose there can't be. Perhaps it's just as well; when she does come to herself, things'll prob'ly be brighter than now. Almost I wish that Edith would keep on sleeping as she is sleeping now, and know nothing more about all this until it's happily over. As things stand, it's an awful thing for a girl to wake up to the realization—"

Aunt Sophronia was spared going into details, and Dr. Gray was not called upon to reply because of the advent of Peggy and, a moment afterward, of Jack. Both were subdued, yet both were determined to assume the cheer that they could not feel. Their game efforts in this direction were very difficult to endure, but had nevertheless to be endured out of respect for the motive that prompted them. Besides these efforts had the merit of precluding the necessity for conversation on the part of the elders.

Aunt Sophronia was left to her reflections undisturbed, and the doctor, to his admiration of her, which was greater than ever. Of course, what she said was true. A murder had been mysteriously committed within Edith's hearing and almost within her sight. The dead body still lay where it fell, before her eyes, when her father and brother had been accused of the crime. To what more terrible realization could a girl awake? It was like Sophronia Herondene to think of this and at the same time to forget that she herself had been through the same experience.

The meal passed silently, so far as Aunt Sophronia was concerned, until, at its close she rang the bell, and as usual gave orders for the day to the servant who answered. Hardly had that servant gone when another appeared and stood in the doorway, uncertain as what to do. Instantly Jack Ayres

rose and left the table to see what was wanted. Aunt Sophronia's eyes followed him, and she smiled.

"He's a dear boy. I'm glad I shall have him to help me. He's like his father," she said; and then, after a pause, she asked, "At what hours do they admit visitors at the jail, Eliphalet?"

Dr. Gray did not know. But before he could reply Jack Ayres reappeared.

"It's O'Rourke—that chap who keeps a saloon, down in the Butt-End district," said Jack, frowning in perplexity. "He insists upon seeing you, Aunt Sophronia. Yet he hasn't anything in especial to see you about, so far as I could make out. But he won't go away."

"He wants to see me because he used to live on this place; because he's heard what has happened, and is sorry, and will do anything for us that he can. I shall be glad to see him. I want to ask him some questions, for he knows so much about so many things. If any one else calls, you see them, Peggy. Tell 'em I'm not able to see 'em—which will be the truth, for there's no time for useless talk. Be polite, but firm. You'll know what to say."

"I'll know what to say," Peggy assured her. Peggy longed to be of service, and, as the doctor observed to himself, departing on his professional duties, she was not Aunt Sophronia's niece for nothing.

"Jack," Aunt Sophronia said. "Don't go 'way, please; I shall want you in a little while."

She passed on into the library. Phelim O'Rourke awaited her.

The library had been put to rights while the family was at breakfast, but it was the same room, and Aunt Sophronia could not repress a little shudder, which she tried bravely to conceal, as once more she crossed its threshold. Phelim was painfully embarrassed. Prompted by mixed motives, as all men invariably are, but with the kindly ones specified by Aunt Sophronia in the ascendant, he had come to offer his services, for whatever these services might be worth; but now that he saw her he did not know how to begin. Aunt Sophronia had to do it for him.

"It's good of you to come, Phelim," she

offered her hand. "You can help me a lot if you will. I want to know so many things. Sit down. You know what happened I suppose."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Phelim. "That is, if the morning papers didn't lie—as they mostly do."

"I don't know," answered Aunt Sophronia. "I haven't had time to read any papers. But the lights went out and a shot was fired—from over there. The man was killed. My nephew was accused—by the district attorney—of having killed him. That is what happened, Phelim. My nephew, even if he had wanted to, could never have done it—"

"Whisht, Miss Sophronia!" interrupted Phelim. "Beggin' yer pardon for the interruption, ma'am—but faith, it's meself thot knows Masther Phil niver killed annywan. But he's got a bad gang ag'inst him; men what are high up an' what want to be higher, and are scared half out av their loives for fear they'll be shown up for what they are. And it's them men, ma'am, what owns the police. Not that it matthers much—the police we have in this town cuddn't foind out annything—cuddn't catch a cold! No matther how much they wanted to, they'd be no help. But I have men—and ways—of findin' out things. So I thought, Miss Sophronia, that if ye'd not moind answerin' a question or two—"

He left his sentence unfinished, hesitating with a delicacy unexpected in such a man. But Aunt Sophronia understood. She understood most people because under their external peculiarities they are so very much like everybody else. She smiled at him.

"The thing has got to be faced, Phelim," said she. "Ask what you like."

"Then, ma'am, that matther of the gun," said he. "Is it thrue that 'twas Masther Phil's own gun what foired the shot?"

"No," answered Aunt Sophronia. "Phil stumbled over it when I sent him to turn on the lights. It was lyin' on the floor, by the door over there. He picked it up."

"It didn't belong in the house?" pursued Phelim.

"No. None of us ever saw it before."

"But Masther Phil had a gun just loike it?"

"Yes. He has it yet—or at least I have. It was in his dressing-table drawer, up in his bedroom, all the time."

"Then the gun will be a clew to its owner—the one what fired the shot, I mean. Who has it now, ma'am?"

"Dunning, the district attorney, I suppose. At least, he took it away with him, after the inquest."

"An' thot little scut Dunning—could he have fired the shot himself, be anny chance, Miss Sophronia?"

"No," answered she, with a shake of her head. "He was standing against the wall, right behind the place where you sit, and my nephew wasn't a yard away from him when the lights went out. There wasn't time for him—or for Phil, either—to move a step before the shot came."

"And Horton, ma'am. Where was he? Could he have foired thot shot?"

"Horton!" repeated Aunt Sophronia, frowning incredulously. "You mean Lawrence Horton—the mayor? Why, Phelim, I've known him and his people for years! I knew his mother when she was a girl. He was one of my invited guests. Of course, he didn't fire it!"

Phelim struggled hard to suppress a grin. Notwithstanding Miss Sophronia's shrewdness, which Phelim, himself more shrewd than most men, always admired, her reluctance to believe in the possibility of treachery in one she knew was quite characteristic of her.

"Meself, ma'am, I don't really think 'twas Horton what done it," said he, patiently. "But we've got to look at the possibilities, do ye moind. So tell me, if ye know, just where was he when the shot was foired?"

"I don't know," answered Aunt Sophronia, after a moment of thought. "He wasn't in the room when the lights went out. He came in directly afterward, but I didn't see when he came. He couldn't have come in through that far door, though, or I would have been sure to see him. No; it wasn't he, Phelim. I don't think it would have been physically possible for him to do it."

"Maybe not, ma'am," agreed Phelim, soothingly, making a mental note to look

farther into this matter of Horton. Nevertheless he wisely refrained from further questioning on this score.

"And then, ma'am, the papers said Miss Peggy had claimed to have seen some wan lookin' in t'rough the windy, here. How about this man? Could he have been the wan?"

"No. I thought of that," answered Aunt Sophronia, regretfully. "It seemed such a good clew. But the outer door of that back passage was locked on the inside. And the police couldn't find any trace—"

"Miss Sophronia," interrupted Phelim, impressively, as he rose, "them police, as I said, cuddn't foind a ton of coal what had just been dumped in an acre av snow! But not all men is as blind as them. So don't ye go to worritin' yerself, Miss Sophronia! Faith, we'll be havin' Masther Phil—yes, an' Mr. Ayres, too—out befor ye know ut—wit' somebody else in their places, if we have luck. I'll let ye know, as soon as I hov annything to tell ye—and belave me, ma'am, it'll be soon!"

And so, with a heartiness that Aunt Sophronia knew well was exaggerated, Phelim left her. She knew also that it was assumed in order to cheer her, and she was grateful for this attempt, but she was not cheered. She had intended to question Phelim, but it was he who had done the questioning. Before this, she had unconsciously assumed that innocence must be vindicated—that evil, and such evil as would fasten a horrible crime on honorable men, could not prevail. But the questions of Phelim, and her answers, brought her to a sickening realization of how weak the defenses and how strong the powers of evil were, in the present case.

Her heart was heavy within her, but her courage was undaunted as she turned away to take up the grim task before her.

CHAPTER X.

SHERLOCK O'ROURKE.

EDITH was awake. She wished to get up and behave like a rational being; but she was frowned upon instantly by Dr. Gray. She was obliged to stay in

bed, while the care of the house devolved upon Peggy, left in sole charge.

Old Peter, his hickory-nut face reflecting his sadness, brought the landau to the door. Aunt Sophronia appeared, accompanied by Jack. Peter extended his pad. Aunt Sophronia took it, wrote her message and handed it back. Peter read, "To the City Prison." Peter had expected this, and as soon as the two had taken their seats set forth at his usual leisurely pace.

Jack had been under a terrible mental strain, and though he would have denied it, the strain had its effect upon his nerves. He was in a state of mental rebellion that he was struggling, with only fair success, to control. Of course, he wanted to see his father and Phil. He wanted to assure them of what both knew already, that his loyalty and affection were wholly theirs.

Moreover, Jack loved and respected Aunt Sophronia. But why—oh, *why*—did she have to go, and take him with her, in that absurd, antediluvian landau at a time like this? Dragging herself and him through the town, as criminals formerly were drawn on a tumbril, for all the world to see? To him such an act amounted to indecent exposure of their personal grief.

Jack tried to show no sign of this inward turmoil. He unfurled Aunt Sophronia's tiny black parasol and tilted its top at the angle to shield her face, and resigned himself to martyrdom. The placid, pattering hoofs of the two fat horses drummed a staccato dirge. Very soon their speechless progress became unendurable to him.

"There's that fellow O'Rourke, who came to see you this morning," he remarked, for the sake of something to say. "He got out of that runabout by the sidewalk just ahead, and went into that building."

Turning, Aunt Sophronia glanced at the young man sharply. Then she poked Peter's back with her parasol. The carriage stopped.

"Jack," said Aunt Sophronia, "there's one or two little matters that I didn't speak to Phelim about this mornin'. So I wish you'd wait here till he comes out, and then ask him to come with you to the prison any time within an hour or two. I'll be there, waiting. I want to see you both."

Jack sprang to the ground. He gave the "go ahead" signal to Peter, and lifted his hat as the carriage started once more.

"We could have taken the closed car and come quicker and more privately, Peter," said Aunt Sophronia, addressing her coachman's uncompromising back, as the horses resumed their leisurely trot. "But there are a lot of people in this town, mostly women, that I don't know very well or won't know at all, who'd say, if they saw my closed car, that I was ashamed to be seen, because I knew, in my heart, that Phil was guilty. They'd like to think he was guilty because they envy me, and would like to see me humbled. And what they'd like to think, they'll make their men folks think. And those men may be on a jury—"

Here Aunt Sophronia abruptly froze into temporary silence as a large and glittering touring car, its tonneau occupied by middle-aged women, handsomely dressed, was about to meet and pass them. As those women caught her eyes, she bowed with exactly the same degree of frigid acknowledgment which she had been accustomed to accord them; not an atom more nor less.

"There, Peter!" she exclaimed, as the touring car passed, "wasn't I right? What if that Wixon tribe had a chance to say that I was any way different from what I commonly am? Wouldn't they delight to spread it far and wide, and embroider the news and amplify it? You know they would, Peter!"

Peter knew the "Wixon tribe" by sight, and his disapproval of those social aspirants was even more unmeasured than was that of his mistress. Therefore his back, usually as immovable and expressionless as the sphinx, was guilty of a faint but eloquent wriggle, significant of abysmal contempt.

"Exactly," agreed Aunt Sophronia, in reply to this indirect statement of Peter's sentiments. "You and I, Peter, have our duty to perform in the face of people such as those, but there's no reason why poor Jack should be made to share that duty. He's a good boy—a mighty good boy. And I really did want to see Phelim O'Rourke again. I wonder if Jack will have long to wait."

Hardly had Aunt Sophronia's carriage

pattered out of sight when Phelim appeared, striding toward his runabout. He stopped short as he caught sight of Jack.

"Ye'll be comin' from Miss Sophronia?" he asked; and as Jack nodded, went on: "In thot case I'd not be afraid to bet she wants an accountin' for the five thousand dollars I have. I meant to have told her this mornin' that I have it, all roight—but, faith, I clean forgot!"

"No. I never heard of the money till now," answered the young man. "She wants to see you, at the City Prison."

"Now—right off?" asked Phelim.

"No such hurry as that. Within an hour or two, she said."

"Good! I'm on her work now, and I'd loike to finish what I'm at; I may have somethin' for to tell her. As it is, I've not done so bad. I was just in that newspaper office—the *Times*. The editor was a fri'nd av Dunning's—but he'll be tratin' Miss Sophronia dacent, from now on. I just seen him."

"How do you know he will—did you make him promise to?" asked Jack, curiously.

"He did not!" answered Phelim. "He promised nothin'. 'Twas me what done the promisin'. I promised him faithful thot if he didn't do what I told him to, he'd be bate up till he thought his dirty hide held naught but sausage meat. But say now, lad, will ye go along wit' me till I can take ye back to Miss Sophronia? Yes? Good! Jump in!"

Their progress, in sharp contrast with the gait of Aunt Sophronia's horses, could best be described as a whizz, a skid or two and an appearance somewhere else—in this case the City Hall. Here Phelim alighted, and for a moment stood thoughtfully regarding his companion.

"Listhen, Masther Jack Ayres, to me," said he, at the end of his scrutiny. "Is it true, as I'm told, that ye're a lawyer?"

"Yes," answered Jack, trying not to blush self-consciously.

"Can ye fight?"

"Well—I'm not in Phil's class, of course. But I played football—'varsity—left guard—for two years."

"'Tis a usheful thrainin' for a lawyer.

Maybe I'll be needin' counsel av joost that sorr. Annyway, I'll be glad for to have a witness. I'm on me way to thry an' see our little fri'nd the district attorney now. Will ye come along?"

Jack replied by vaulting from the roadster. There was no need of words. Phelim grinned approvingly and led the way.

Their mission, however, was destined to be successful only in part. They were met by a young assistant district attorney, whose respectful manner was a revelation to Jack as to the extent of Phelim's local political power. With evident truth this young man assured Phelim that Dunning was not in the office—was not in the city at all, having dropped a note through the letter slot of his office door, saying that he was leaving very early in the morning on a shooting trip he had been contemplating for some time in company with Mr. Lafayette Feelin, the contractor.

"But, of course, Mr. O'Rourke," the young assistant excused his chief, "Mr. Dunning hadn't a notion that you'd want to talk with him this morning."

"I'm thinkin' thot maybe he had a very strong notion av just that," remarked Phelim, grimly. "But that's neither here nor there, now," he went on. "What I want is a soight av the pistol that killed Spike Creach. It's here, ain't it?"

"Yes, the police brought it. Of course, it's irregular, but—"

"Aw, ferget it!" growled Phelim.

The pistol was brought, but there was little to be learned from it. It was an automatic of a caliber and make that is duplicated throughout the country literally by the hundreds of thousands. Phil's pistol was admittedly of the same sort—an exact duplicate, so far as the ordinary observer could tell; so far, undoubtedly, as Phil himself could tell.

"But the serial factory numbers won't be the same," said Jack.

"But who knows the number on his own gun—let alone on annybody else's?" asked Phelim, gloomily.

"The dealers do—sometimes," rejoined the young lawyer. "It gives us a chance to trace it. It may not be much of a chance—but it's a chance."

"Yes—it's a chance, if we can get to them dealers befor the police do," admitted Phelim. "Annyway, there's sense inside that bean av yours. Will ye take down the number?"

Jack took down the number and followed Phelim down the corridor. Outside the mayor's office Phelim halted, and turned to face his young companion.

"I'm goin' in here," said he. "Since I can't see Dunning, I think it's best. I'll go into the private office. You stay just outside. Don't let annybody come in on me—havin' played football, ye'll know how to prevent that. But, above all, if Horton's in there, as I think he is, listen! Listen to ivery word what's said!"

Without giving Jack time to reply, Phelim opened the door of the mayor's outer office and entered abruptly, with Jack close at his heels. Several of the attendants rose as they saw him, but to their greetings he gave a curt nod. Striding over the dividing rail without stopping to open the gate, before anyone could interfere to stop them the pair had gained an inner passage with many closed doors on one of its sides and one door only on the other.

This door Phelim uncereemoniously opened, and having entered, shut it behind him. The instant during which it was open enabled Jack to see Horton, sitting at his desk, turn indignantly upon the intruder. Then the closing door shut off the view, but the thin partition was far from sound-proof.

"What does this mean?" Jack heard the mayor demand. "What right have you to force your way—"

"Hush!" commanded Phelim. "And forgit the play-actin'. Spake when ye're spoken to, and not sooner. Why? Becus I say so. And keep yer hand away from them push buttons on yer desk, or I'll make jelly of yer fingers wit' this here brass ink-pot. Now answer me. What d'ye mane by allowin' Dunning, thot dirrty little flunkey av yours, to thry an' fasten a murder on two men ye know to be innocent? And one of 'em the nevvie av a fr'ind av mine at that! What d'ye mane, I ask?"

"I don't know that they're innocent—and anyway, I haven't anything to do with the matter," answered Horton, defiantly.

"Don't lie to me! I admit that to interfere wit' a man's graft is an offense. But is it a capital offense? To the meanest 'dip' what hangs around my dump it wuddent be. Is it to the loikes av you? Are ye willin' to send men to their deaths for that?"

"I tell you that I'm not sending them to their deaths—that I have nothing to do with it!" cried Horton, and then, with an inarticulate exclamation of impatience, he added, "Why in blazes couldn't they have played the game and left things alone? Nothing would have happened then."

"They wuddent lave things be becus they're not loike you an' me; they're honest men, both Mr. Ayres an' Masther Phil. They—"

"Honest!" cried Horton. "Do you call the man who was shot—shot in that house and in their company—an honest man? Do you know who he was?"

"I do," answered Phelim, composedly. "He was Spike Creach, recommended by me for the worrk he did. And that worrk was to get the goods on you—ah! Would ye, now? Then take it!"

There was the smack that a fist makes when striking flesh. Then once more the office door opened to give Jack, waiting with intense excitement, another glimpse of the interior. He saw that Horton's chair was empty now, and that Horton himself, terribly limp and inert, lay stretched on the floor by its side.

"He—he isn't dead, is he?" whispered Jack, hardly daring to voice his question, when he and Phelim once more had reached the outer corridor.

"He is not," answered Phelim, regretfully. "But tell me, for you heard what was said, an' ye're a lawyer. Did he spill annything that was anny good—as evidence, or the loike?"

"No," answered Jack. "He made it plain he was a crook—as I suppose you knew before. But that's all."

"Yes, that's all—as I thought," agreed Phelim, with a disgust in his tones that no words could measure. "That's all! And so I'll have to go an' report to Miss Sophronia—where, if I had the sense that God gave pigs, I'd have gone in the firrst place,

as she wanted me to—go to her and own that I've gummed the game by scarin' that rotten coward to such a pitch of desperation that he was goin' to stage a scene with himself in the spotlight and me cast for the 'heavy!' Scared him so I had to hit him to stop his ringin' in a lot av thim little boys in the outer office to hear him denounce me, in clear, ringin' tones, as a villain! That's what I'll have to tell her. And I'd rather be where Horton is this minute than do it."

"But after all, you squared that newspaper and got the number of the gun," said Jack consolingly. "And anyway, Aunt Sophronia won't say much."

"It ain't what she'll say," answered O'Rourke, dismally, as he got into his car. "If she'd damn me in heaps I wuddent moind so much. But it's what she *won't* say that'll get my goat. Faith, there's no way out av it; as a gumshoe sleuth Phelim O'Rourke wud make a mighty good ribbon-counter saleslady!"

He punched the self-starter viciously.

"But what's the good av talkin'?" asked Phelim, of nobody at all. "Let's get a move on, take the medicine an' have it over wit'!"

So the car leaped, skidded, whizzed—and the City Hall was left behind.

CHAPTER XI.

WEAK THREADS.

THE City Prison loomed gloomily before them as O'Rourke's car came to an abrupt stand. The two men leaped to the sidewalk and went briskly into the office, where the warden sat augustly and chewed a black and uncompromising cigar.

"H'lo, Mike," grunted Phelim.

"H'lo, Phelim," said Mike, bringing his feet to the floor with a bang and reaching for his desk telephone. "Say! Miss Herondene's here. She come before visitin' hours, and hadn't any authority to see them prisoners at any time. I go an' tell her so. But d'yuh think it makes any differ'nce?"

"I do not," answered Phelim, confidently. "I know it didn't."

"You said it! Before I knew where I

was at, she had me, with me cap in me hand, chaperonin' her up to the tier where them prisoners was put. She didn't like the way we keep house, here in the jail, and she said so. But did I get mad?"

"Ye did not," answered Phelim. "Ye felt ashamed av yerself, an' promised to do better."

"That's about right. Dam' 'f it ain't! An' now she's got about half of the keepers, an' the trusties, too, jumpin' around up there, and doin'—well, I dunno just what she's havin' 'em do, but it's whatever she wants done. An' she told me to let her know as soon as you come, so I gotta tell her."

"Say, Phelim," he added, as he placed the telephone instrument on his desk. "D'yuh know, I kinder hate to think of what that little lady is up against."

"Ye mane that the wan little lady is buckin' the whole political machine of this town—as ripsinted by Horton and Dunning?" asked Phelim.

"Sure," assented the warden. "That's about the size of it—ain't it?"

"It is. And a dom' bad day it'll be for the partry machine in this town when it takes her on for a finish bout. There'll not be enough left to carry an election fer dog-catcher, whin she's t'rough wit' it. You mind what I say!"

The warden frowned thoughtfully and gave a final puff at his remnant of a cigar, then regretfully tossed it into a cuspidor. Phelim handed him a fresh weed, which he lighted and smoked in silence.

"I think I get you," he said at last slowly. "I been pretty sure for some time that you was a-lookin' for a fair chance to ditch the old party machine so's to build a new one, of your own, in its place. And now you see a chance to use Miss Herondene, and the people she can swing—the respectable, silk-stockin' crowd—to do it with. Well—at that I ain't so sure it can't be done."

"It can an' will be done; you don't want to overlook thot bet, Mike," returned Phelim. "And maybe ye have me reason, too—in parrt. But not all me reason—not all! Why shouldn't I—why shouldn't you—after all we've seen—want to take on a

thrifle av real respectability? Faith, 'twud hurrt neither av us, Mike—neither you ner me. Think it over—and ye'll see where ye'd best get off. An' here comes Miss Sophronia!"

Aunt Sophronia put an end to the conversation, which had been perfectly free despite Jack's presence. The warden assumed, not knowing Jack, that he must be some trusted henchman of Phelim's. Mike was distinctly thoughtful, Phelim having perhaps impressed him with a certainty of victory that he himself did not wholly share—after the manner of politicians, great and small.

Nodding and smiling a greeting, Aunt Sophronia laid her hand on Phelim's arm.

"I want to talk with you, Phelim," said she. "I can do that while Jack goes up to see his father and Phil for a few minutes. They'll be glad to see you, Jack."

Jack was ushered into the presence of the prisoners, as Aunt Sophronia had decreed. He went prepared to do his best to cheer his father and Phil, but speedily found that nothing was less necessary on his part than an attempt of this sort. As they discussed the case, he learned from them what hitherto had been a mystery to him—namely, the exact part in the affair that had been played by Spike Creach, which information had just been given them by Aunt Sophronia.

Jack found that his father and Phil were indignant—naturally—at the false accusation made against them, but that in no way were they cast down by it, for no doubt of their immediate vindication, full and complete, ever crossed their minds.

"Why," Phil had said, "Horton's testimony in itself would be enough to clear me—to say nothing of Aunt Sophronia's. For when Horton came into the room he could see that it would have been utterly impossible for me to do what they said I did."

Phil's optimism, contrasted with the facts as Jack knew them, inexpressibly saddened the latter, and his fear that he might not be able to remain as optimistic as they were, made him glad when his visit came to an end.

He found Aunt Sophronia, outside the jail, defiantly in view of all who passed, sit-

ting in her carriage, talking to Phelim. Plainly he had made a clean breast of what he considered his failure, and now was receiving absolution at her hands.

"You mustn't feel so badly; we all of us make mistakes," she was saying. "And even so, you accomplished something. I can't believe that Mr. Horton is what you say, Phelim. I mustn't believe such a thing till it's proved—and you yourself say you have no proof."

"Very good, ma'am," said Phelim, meekly.

"But to get to more important matters," Aunt Sophronia resumed, "the clews we know that we have to work on are—first, Feelin, the contractor—when we can get hold of him. He's a thread that may lead us to something."

"A mighty wake thread, ma'am, I fear," sighed Phelim.

But Aunt Sophronia resolutely persisted in numbering the contractor among the possible clews that might lead to the establishing of the innocence of the accused, and as such ticked him off on her forefinger.

"Second," she went on, "there's the number on that pistol."

Phelim assented to this. Aunt Sophronia ticked the pistol off on her second finger.

"Third," said she, "is that strange man that my niece, Miss Peggy, saw. I'm sure he couldn't have been one of my guests, and it occurred to me that he might have been one of the caterer's—Luden's—waiters. Will you see Luden, and find out what you can, Phelim?"

"I will, ma'am," answered Phelim. "I'll attind to all thot ye've named."

"Thank you, Phelim; I was sure you would. Then the fourth thread is Jimmy Wilson. I don't count much on him, but he may be able to tell us something. But anyway, I want him to come to the house; his mother's very sick. Do you know where to find him, Phelim—at once?"

"I think so, ma'am. Will ye let Masther Jack, here, come wit' me now? I'll thry an' get Jimmy an' sind him right back to ye. But, before ye go, ma'am, there's the matther av the foive thousand dollars of yours that I have—"

"It's not mine," interrupted Aunt So-

phronia. "It belongs to Mrs. Creach, if there is one. See that it's given to her, please, Phelim—or to whatever heir there may be. But send Jimmy to me at once."

Thus it was settled. Jack went his way, but for a little Aunt Sophronia did not stir. From the seat of her old carriage she sat looking at the grim façade of the building before her.

It was of massive stone, erected in the first half of the last century by John Herondene, her father's younger brother, with the intention that it was to stand throughout the ages, as a home for him and his descendants after him. As Aunt Sophronia looked, the years seemed to roll backward, the building was no longer grim, but once more had become a gracious mansion, surrounded by verandas long vanished, and standing in the midst of tree-studded, green-velvet lawns now covered by the city's stony structure and streets.

She felt that no detail, however small, hardly even a pebble or a nailhead, was missing from her memory. For that house had been a second home to her. Also it had been the home of him who was dearest to her of all on earth, whose memory was undimmed because it still lived in that sacred shrine where women hold such memories.

There had been two children, there at Uncle John's. One of them, Lois, was Sophronia's own age and had been her closest girl friend. No one, save Sophronia herself, had ever known what John, Junior, Lois's elder brother, had meant to her.

But they were dead now. For almost forty years Sophronia had been the only one left of the family which had foregathered there. The growing city, taking over the house, had turned it into a prison. And now Phil, charged with murder, was confined in what once had been his great-uncle's home.

Aunt Sophronia sighed and poked Peter with her parasol, and the carriage pattered sedately away. It passed Phelim, who stood by his car, looking at a doubtful tire. Phelim watched her erect, black-bonneted figure until the carriage made a turn that concealed it. Then he blew his nose with resonant violence.

"Creach's widders!" he snapped. "Faith, Spike Creach left three that I know about. The innocence av her—and the pluck! Her and her 'threads'! Please God we'll find stronger threads than thim befoor we're done! Masther Jack, I'm afther thryin' to get a line on the whereabouts of that blaggard contractor an' the district attorney. So you take me car. Go an' tell Dinny, me head bartender, that I said to send Jimmy Wilson. If he ain't in the place, get him quick!"

Phelim walked quickly away. Jack took the car, and did as he was told. Jimmy was in the saloon, as it happened, and Jack took him to the house of Aunt Sophronia.

"I'm glad you could be found, Jimmy," said Aunt Sophronia. "Your mother would want you to be here, even though she won't know you—don't know anybody, now, and maybe never will again. But you can see her for a minute. Come!"

Jimmy was led away by Aunt Sophronia, and Jack sat down on the veranda to wait for her. He did not want to think. Desperately he tried not to think, but he could neither help doing so, nor could he divert his thoughts from the channels in which they persisted.

He was desperately depressed, for to him the case against his father and—especially—Phil looked uncompromisingly dark. If Dunning should swear on the stand, as, in order to protect his official life, he would have no compunctions to swearing, that he saw Phil Herondene fire that shot, his testimony would outweigh that of any number of people who, at best, could swear to little more than that they did not see him fire it. And the fact that the murdered man had previously borne a very bad character of course did not affect the matter one way or another. Jack was not an experienced lawyer, and did not claim to be, but no legal experience was necessary to perceive obvious truths.

Jimmy and Aunt Sophronia came out of the house. They did not see Jack, who noted that Jimmy was crying, but trying hard to stifle the sobs, which nevertheless broke forth and shook his whole frame.

Old Libby must be worse, then, perhaps dying. Nothing else could cause such grief.

Then that graceless little blackguard after all really did care for his mother, as Aunt Sophronia had averred; there was at least that much good in him. Jack began to realize that Jimmy's air of cheap bravado was a defensive pose, and found old Libby's son to be somewhat more human than at first.

When Aunt Sophronia offered him her hand, as she did, Jimmy took it and clung to it while he struggled to express what he had to say. Jack had no desire to witness the other's self-revelation. He felt that it was like reading a letter addressed to somebody else. But he could not leave without revealing his presence, and thereby also revealing the fact that he had seen Jimmy's tears, so he chose what he considered to be the kinder course, and remained where he was.

"I know I ain't been what I ought to be, Miss Sophrony," sobbed Jimmy. "I know I've been rotten bad—worse than you or ma ever knew. There ain't no use in my sayin' I'm sorry—though I am. I know how good you've been to her. But I want you to believe this, for it's God's truth! If I could clear Master Phil, I'd take a chance of goin' to the chair to do it—and that's straight!"

Snatching his hand from Aunt Sophronia, Jimmy bolted through the shrubbery and disappeared. Jack almost groaned aloud. The first of Aunt Sophronia's "threads" had snapped even before its length could be traced.

Great heavens, how frail those threads were! And upon them hung the lives of his father and Phil.

CHAPTER XII.

WHY PETER SPOKE.

IT was a long day of heartbreaking, useless work, further complicated by interviews with reporters, whom Aunt Sophronia insisted upon seeing for the sake of Phil and of Mr. Ayres.

"For," said she, "they have to put *something* in the papers, and at least I can give 'em a chance to print the truth."

At heavy cost to her own feelings she

painstakingly gave them all the chance there was. To be sure, the ungarbled truth was printed only in the one paper whose editor Phelim O'Rourke had interviewed, but this Aunt Sophronia did not know.

The day began long before dawn. It began with a cry of "Fire!" hoarsely bawled by some home-going night worker. Other voices took up the cry. Somewhere a woman began hysterically to scream the alarm, and kept on screaming. The voices penetrated Aunt Sophronia's uneasy slumbers, and she woke to find them real, and not dreams.

Aunt Sophronia's first thought was for the two women under her roof, one old, one young, but both ill, and one of them desperately so. She ran into an adjoining room, where Edith lay. A glance at the sleeping girl showed no change there, and another glance through the windows revealed nothing save the leaden night outside.

Old Libby slept on the other side of the house, and as Aunt Sophronia turned in that direction, she heard the door of Jack Ayres's bedroom flung violently open and heard the young man's swift footsteps as he ran down the stairs and outdoors.

"Thank goodness!" sighed Aunt Sophronia. "If there was a fire in or near the house, Jack wouldn't be running out of it like that. But I wonder where the fire can be?"

She had not long to wonder. As she entered the room, she saw that old Libby lay, as she had lain throughout the days that had elapsed since the murder, in a stupor which nevertheless allowed her now and then to mutter incoherently.

This could be seen plainly enough, for the room was lighted by an increasing red glare that shone in through the windows. By one of these windows stood the trained nurse, her form showing in black silhouette against the redness outside. She turned as Aunt Sophronia entered.

"Oh, that poor, deaf old man!" she cried. "That poor, *poor* old man! It's horrible—*awful*!"

The tremor of the nurse's voice as well as her words sent Aunt Sophronia's heart into her throat. But she gave no sign as she

hurried across the room to take her place by the nurse's side, nor even when she looked out upon the scene beyond and below her.

From the back of the house proper extended the kitchen garden, partially and loosely bounded by various domestic offices, the stables and the little cottage in which old Peter, the coachman, lived alone. It was the cottage that was burning. Already the lower windows, so far as they could be seen from the house, were vomiting forth flame, which already was showing its light in some of the upper windows.

It was a small cottage and an old one, its timbers tinder-dry. It had been built by Aunt Sophronia's father for Peter, when Peter and he had been young men. Here the coachman had brought his young bride, here the pair had lived their married life and here his old wife had died. And here, despite Aunt Sophronia's entreaties, Peter still lived. He slept, as Aunt Sophronia well knew, in the front room of the upper story. The windows of this room, it is true, were as yet unlighted from flames within them. But Peter, like many of his class, greatly dreaded the "night air," and those windows were closed. That room must already be filled with stupefying smoke in which no creature could breathe, and even if this were not so, the old man was so deaf that, as Aunt Sophronia was wont to observe, the Last Trumpet must indeed be far louder than any mortal sound if it was to wake him for the Day of Judgment.

She saw men—stablemen and under-gardeners of her own, for the most part—running with buckets that she knew must be useless, even though the old head gardener started to marshal them in line so that the buckets could be passed from hand to hand. She saw Jack Ayres, in pyjamas and tennis shoes, sprinting swiftly toward the fire with Peggy, also in unconventional and sketchy attire, close at his heels.

She saw the head gardener's wife, and knew her for the woman who had screamed, because she was screaming still; but she was also lugging a ladder that she had dragged from an outhouse.

Jack darted aside into the outhouse that had sheltered the ladder, and ran out in an

instant bearing an ax. Swinging it over his shoulder, he ran to the front door of the cottage. He brought down the heavy ax-head and smashed the lock. The door flew open; a cloud of dense smoke billowed out and upward.

Dropping the ax, Jack drew back a step or two. Crouching, he took a last look to get his bearings before he sprang forward for a dash through the smoke. Then the smoke eddied and parted as some solid object forced its way through. For a moment only the outlines of this object were dimmed; then it emerged clearly into the open. It was Peter. Peter, whom they had pictured as smoke-strangled and senseless!

Peter's semi-livery of dark blue was as carefully adjusted as ever, each shiny metal button in its appointed buttonhole. His archaic top hat was set, mathematically plumb, on his bald head. Under one arm was a framed picture that Aunt Sophronia knew to be a villainous crayon enlargement of his dead wife's photograph, while with his other arm he tightly hugged a bundle of disreputable appearance that Aunt Sophronia was unable to identify.

Peter's sphinx-like face was turned toward the great house, looking neither to right nor left, nor even giving one backward glance at the burning home where he had lived and which he loved for the memories it held for him. So ludicrous was his sudden dignified appearance after the gruesome conceptions that had been formed, that the few spectators broke out into cheers and choked with merriment.

"If there ever was a ridic'lous old man, Peter's that one!" exclaimed Aunt Sophronia, and she smiled affectionately. The old man's preposterous dignity was as ingrained as her self-restraint. She knew that Peter had come to the house because he had something to say, something that he considered as being of so much importance that nothing else mattered, not even the burning of his home.

Aunt Sophronia did not at once leave the window where she had posted herself. She stood there watching while Jack, ably hindered by the enthusiastic Peggy, reformed the bucket lines and placed the ladder so

that the end of the stable and its roof should be protected by having water constantly poured upon them. The danger was not very great, and would not continue for long; the night was still, and the little cottage soon would be consumed.

Still she stood, while the fire reached and passed the apex of its fury. All the time she was waiting—and thinking. Waiting for the sound or sight of fire engines, which should have come long before. She waited until the danger was almost past before she heard the belated jingle of the engine gongs. Then, with a final glance at old Libby's still form, she returned to her room.

Finding sleep impossible, Aunt Sophronia dressed and went downstairs, still thinking, and her thoughts were mostly of those fire engines that did not come until so late. Their delay had opened a line of thought that was new to her, and also intensely unwelcome because it tended to destroy beliefs in the fundamental decency of humanity. That belief was part of her very nature.

In the front passage she found old Peter waiting for her, just as he usually waited, to receive his orders for the day when she came down to breakfast.

Aunt Sophronia stood on the lowest stair, while Peter, looking up at her from the bottom landing, produced his pad and pencil, laying them on the newel-post in order that they might be ready if needed, and then proceeded to make his report.

"I wa'n't asleep, Miss Sophrony, when the fire bruk out," said he. "One of the horses was aillin', so I sot up with him, like. I'd cooked him a mash, and I'd done the cookin' in me house becus there's no gas in the stable, but only 'lictricity, as well ye know."

The last sentence he uttered with reproachful emphasis. Peter had bitterly opposed the removal of gas connections from the stable, but had been overruled by Aunt Sophronia. Now he made an impressive pause in order that a realization of her mistake in opposing him in his own domain might sink into her mind. She nodded impatiently, once and yet again. After what he considered a suitable time, Peter went on.

"I was mendin' the bow on the old holly whip—the one yer father bought, Miss Sophrony—while waitin' for the mash to heat. As soon as it did heat, I tuk it to the stable, goin' out, of course, be the back door. Nacherly I left everything the way it was; luggin' the kittle of mash, me hands was full."

Again Peter paused, this time, as Aunt Sophronia knew, in order to arrange in proper sequence the exasperatingly minute details that she dared not interrupt for fear of hopelessly disarranging the whole tale. At this moment the sound of footsteps made her look around. It was Jack Ayres who approached. Peter did not see, and Aunt Sophronia signalled Jack aside.

"There wasn't nothin' so much wrong with the horse," Peter resumed. "He took his mash. I seen him take it. I was gone maybe half an hour. Then, after makin' sure that all was right in the stable, I went back to me house. Then it was that I saw me house on fire—the kitchen all in a blaze—and a man who seemed tryin' to put it out. It was the mayor."

"It was who?" cried Sophronia, startled out of her composure.

Peter could not hear the question, of course, but his eyes were on her face, so he read the words from her lips as he uttered them.

"The mayor," he repeated, doggedly. "Larry Horton himself; the biggest blagyard we ever had in the head offices at City Hall. And all of this I told Horton with me own mouth the last time I'd see him before, which was no more than day before yistiddy. I told him what he was an' what he'd done. I told him 'twas him who fired that shot. I told him he'd not be mayor much longer nor governor ever—unless it was in the States Prison or in hell—because I cud prove ivery word I said."

The old man's face turned a brickier red than ever, and his eyes glared forth a blood-shot defiance as he talked, and continued so to glare as his employer, snatching his pad, scribbled some hasty words and shoved the pad back to him. He took it, and slowly read its message aloud.

"Where had you been when you saw Mr. Horton? What had you been doing

just before seeing him? How dared you to say that you could prove him guilty of that awful murder when you know perfectly well that you can do nothing of the kind?"

Peter laid down the pad, and his eyes, bloodshot from the smoke that had stung them, looked straight into hers, their dogged defiance unabated.

"I'll answer yer questions, Miss Sophrony, each in turn," said he. "I seen Larry Horton on Jefferson Street, just outside of a saloon where I'd been haven' a few drinks. I wasn't drunk—but I'm not denyin' that the liquor got a grip on me. Otherwise, as ye said, ma'am, I'd never have dared to tell Larry Horton what I did tell him. For, as ye said, ma'am, devil the bit of proof had I—*then!* I have none even now that would go in a court, maybe. But I have enough to give a start along the road that will lead to more. I spoke to Larry Horton as I did becus I felt sure in me own mind; also becus I hoped he'd bethray himself. And what was the consequences?"

The question, of course, was purely rhetorical. Aunt Sophronia stood, tense and silent, through a moment's pause. Then Peter furnished his own reply.

"I come back to me house—find it on fire. The fire was not purposely set. I had shellac, there in the kitchen, for the finishin' of the lashin's of that whip-bow. When Horton climbed in t'rough the winda—him not knowin' that the door was open—he kicked over the shellac bottle into the flamin' gas stove. Thinkin' I knew far more than I did—druv by his guilty conscience—'twas to bribe or to murder me that he came—not to burn the house. So he was fightin' the fire as best he could—beat-in' at it with the coat of him, what he'd took off. I jumps for him—but he hears me comin', an' gets out of the winda, an' clean away, before I can grip him in me hands."

Once more Aunt Sophronia reached for the pad and wrote, this time using the flat top of the newel-post for a desk. Bending over, Peter read as she wrote, and answered her question before she had finished writing.

"Did I see his face? I did not: 'twas turned away. How did I know it was him? I knew by the size of him, by the form of

him—by the clothes he wears and more especial—by the coat he leaves behind. So I roll up that coat. I put on me good clo'es. I gets poor Molly's portrait. Then, becus me hands is both full, I can't open the front door, but somebody smashes it in. So I come here—bringin' the proof to you."

He stooped, and even as he did so, the ghost of a smile flitted across Aunt Sophronia's face; it was so like Peter never to think of laying down his burdens in order more easily to open his front door. The smile vanished, however, when he straightened and held out the bundle he had carried from his burning house. He flitted it open: it was the coat. Though charred and blackened in places, it still had been an expensive coat; Aunt Sophronia's feminine knowledge of textiles instantly told her that much.

Also, it had a pronounced pattern of gray and black checks. The mayor was rather given to conspicuous clothing, and the old lady distinctly remembered seeing him wearing a suit of this sort. Still, this fact proved nothing, she thought. Any number of men might have suits of that same cloth.

Then, as though guessing this thought—which he probably did—Peter turned down the lining of the coat's inner pocket. There was a label there, bearing in print the tailor's name, and under it the words, "made for" followed by the name of the customer, written in ink. This name was, "Lawrence Horton, Esq."

CHAPTER XIII.

SOPHRONIUS IN COUNCIL.

WITH his accustomed dignity, to which was now added a touch of triumph, Peter stalked kitchenward. Aunt Sophronia carried the coat in her hands. Many strange thoughts and speculations were chasing each other through her brain.

She walked to the door of the library where she transacted all business and solved all problems that presented themselves in her home. For the moment the memory of what had happened there sent a sickening dread of the place through her mind,

but then she put that dread resolutely behind her, entered and took her customary chair.

Spreading the tattered coat on her desk, she began to examine it. Perhaps Aunt Sophronia had never heard of *Sherlock Holmes*. No thought of the impossibly acute individual was in her mind. Yet the methods of those two—the great detective of fiction, and the snowy-haired little New England lady of fact—were not entirely dissimilar.

There was a certain divergence in their lines of procedure, of course. Where *Sherlock Holmes*, for example, depended for sympathetic counsel upon the much-enduring *Dr. Watson*, Aunt Sophronia—Peter's back being available only in the carriage—impressed into service her great-grandfather, whose face, so grim and yet so strangely like her own, looked down upon her from the library wall.

She sat looking up at the picture, then went softly to the door and glanced warily up and down the passage. No one was near and so, returning, she spoke aloud; to speak aloud meant so much to her in arranging her thoughts.

"Gran'ther," she said, "you saw what happened here. You know who it is that's guilty, and you'd tell me, if you could. But you can't; so you'll just have to help me find out for myself."

She paused thoughtfully.

"I know that Lawrence Horton didn't fire that shot; he couldn't have done it. But he may know who did fire it. Of course, it does seem possible that he could know and yet leave our blessed Phil, and Edward Ayres, imprisoned with such a horrible charge hanging over them, when a word from him could set them clear. It don't seem as though there was a human being in the world who could do a thing like that—does it? And yet—"

She paused, and the two pairs of eyes, hers and those of great-grandfather Sophronius, met with an understanding so uncannily perfect that there was no need for words between them. At the end she nodded, as though her ancestor's opinion was in thorough accordance with her own.

"Of course, I fear that Lawrence Horton

isn't all he should be. I've suspected it for some time. I'm almost sure of it. But I have no *proof*. So I try not to believe, even though there isn't any use in trying, because I believe whether I want to or not. All the same, one has to be fair so long as one isn't really positive.

So sure was she of her great-grandfather's concurrence with these statements that she accepted his assent as having been given.

"It's Lawrence Horton's coat, sure enough," she remarked, turning back to it. "There's no use discussing that. But it's just as sure that when it was last worn he wasn't the man inside of it. No matter what Peter says—what anybody says—we can't ever believe that Lawrence Horton, the mayor of this town, could go and break into that house—my coachman's cottage—just to do harm to that poor old man. It isn't reasonable—it's too silly to think of. He'd never be such a fool, leaving out any other reason.

"If he wasn't wearing it he must have given it to somebody, or else it was stolen, because it's a new fall suit he was wearing only last week. It isn't likely that it was stolen, because nobody'd go and break into Lawrence Horton's place to steal a suit of clothes, and if there was a burglary, it would have been in the papers. So he gave it away. He wouldn't give it to a tramp—a new suit like that. He wouldn't give it as part of a bribe for anybody to go in and beat up old Peter, because of what Peter said to him: it would be too easy to identify and trace. Then what sort of a man did he give it to?"

This was a very hard question. Aunt Sophronia found herself unable to make a plausible guess. Then she went through the coat pockets, and arranged their meager contents neatly on her desk. There came a knock at the library door, and an announcement that breakfast was on the table.

The routine of Aunt Sophronia's household, crystallized by years of habit, was like the oft-cited laws of the ancient Medes and Persians. She herself never dreamed of violating it. Now she rose, locked the library door behind her, and went to find Peggy and Jack waiting for her, ready to sit down. Though her mind was elsewhere, she felt

instinctively that the routine was not quite as usual. She glanced out of the window; the sun had hardly risen.

"Isn't it early?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Peggy. "You'll need a good breakfast, Aunt Sophy. We all will; there's so much to do, and especially for you—and Jack. So, as everybody was up anyway, I ordered it."

Aunt Sophronia said nothing. Her first thought was one of displeasure; but as she looked from one young face to the other she noted that in some mysterious way they both seemed to have grown older. It was not only that the strain of the position in which they found themselves was written there. There also was something quite different from this. Just what it was that their faces showed she could not at once decide. Then Peggy spoke again.

"You mustn't think that because I'm not very old that I don't realize what we're up against." She spoke with a sort of impetuous gravity. "I do realize it, and so does Jack. We've talked it over. And we realize how alone we are—just we three, against pretty much the rest of the world, so it seems. Of course, there are others—Dr. Gray and a few more—who would help us if they could. But those others are interested only because they're friends of ours, and there'll be a big proportion of them who'll fade unobtrusively away at the first chance rather than be associated with people mixed up in a scandal. So whatever is done must be done by us. I know I can't do much. But as part of my share I can at least take the care of this place off your shoulders—and I mean to. So there!"

Aunt Sophronia continued to say nothing. She became inarticulate when deeply touched, as she was touched now. She would have known, had she stopped to think about it, that she could rely utterly on the loyalty of the two youngsters. But Peggy's speech and the new aspect of their young faces, brought comfort to her.

But Aunt Sophronia only nodded and changed the subject.

"There is a lot to be done," she agreed. "What time is it?"

"I don't know," answered Peggy. "I left my watch upstairs."

There was no clock in the room. Jack rose with unnecessary haste.

"I'll find out," he said. "Then, if you'll excuse me, I'll beat it. I don't care for any more breakfast, and as Peg says, there's a lot to do."

Aunt Sophronia gave him so searching a look that he colored deeply. Then she smiled, and also rose.

"We'll let Peggy 'tend to the house, as she says, and I'd be glad if you'd come with me for a few minutes before you go," said she. "You may be able to give me some help that I want."

So Jack followed Aunt Sophronia back into the library. As soon as she had closed the door she turned to confront him.

"Jack," she demanded, "what have you done with your watch?"

Jack made no reply. Aunt Sophronia went on.

"You borrowed money on it—pawned it," said she. "I couldn't think what was missing until I saw that the chain was gone. Why did you do such a thing? Do you think—"

"It's like this," interrupted Jack, driven to explanations in order to defend himself. "That beast of a district attorney has got out an injunction that prevents any of the banks from paying out a penny of father's accounts. He made those graft charges the excuse for that. Yesterday, when dad wanted some money—not much, but some—for extra expenses, there in that damned jail, he gave me a check and told me to go and get it cashed. Could I tell him—in his position—what had happened? You know, Aunt Sophy, that I couldn't do that. And I had almost enough of my own to make up the amount, but not quite. So—my watch was the only thing at hand—so what could I do?"

"Do!" she echoed. "You could have come to me! No!" she continued, seeing that Jack was about to reply. "Don't talk yet; I've got something to say. We must settle this business right now!"

However important it may have been that the business in question be settled at once, Aunt Sophronia seemed to find great and unexpected difficulties in going about it. A delicate color crept into her wrinkled

cheeks, only to retreat, leaving them very pale. She swallowed once or twice as though to rid herself of something that choked her throat; then resolutely spoke.

"Jack," said she, quietly, "your sister is to marry Phil, who is like an older son to me. You are like a younger son who is maybe even nearer still. You may not know it—but your father and I were very dear to each other once, many years ago. But we were fools, I s'pose as young folks so often are. I never mentioned it from that time until this—but it's true, and I tell you now so that you'll understand. I never forgot. Here I am—a poor old woman!"

She stopped for an instant in order to dash from her eyes a moisture that had gathered there. She did it angrily, as though resenting it as an evidence of weakness, and then went on.

"A poor old woman!" she repeated. "Poor because, in spite of everything, she's a lonely woman in some ways. But a rich old woman, too. So rich that for forty years she never has been able to spend a quarter of her income. But now she's willing and anxious to spend every cent she has in the world to get justice for those she loves. So let's have no more talk of money, Jack; that's something that must simply be used now, without stopping to count it."

She sat down at her desk. Her manner had changed with startling suddenness. She was again the efficient, precise Aunt Sophronia. From the top of the desk she picked up a gaudily colored carton which she had taken from a pocket of the coat. It held a few cigarettes; she held it out to him.

"Jack," she said, with a twinkle in her blue eyes, "if I were to take up cigarette-smoking as a habit, would you advise me to begin on this brand?"

"I should say not!" he laughed in spite of himself. "They're Bagdads, about the worst of all—made of sweepings of some factory, I guess. But why did you want to know, Aunt Sophy—what's the game?"

"I can't take the time to go into that now," she replied. "I've got too much to 'tend to. A little later I'll tell you all about it. What were you thinkin' of doin' just now, Jack?"

"That's a matter I have to speak to you about, Aunt Sophy," he replied. "I hate to, but I must. I don't believe that you quite know what we're up against, and you'll have to know. There's no need to make a long tale out of it, but the gist of it is this: The political machine, with Chapin, the Governor, at its head, is the strongest organization of its sort, not even excepting Tammany of New York, that there is in the United States, and its main source of strength has always been here—in this town."

"Yes," agreed Aunt Sophronia. "I know that. Anybody who reads the papers knows it."

"You don't realize what it is. You can't. Nobody can unless they're on the inside or unless they have pushed it to the wall. I didn't until—until after what happened. Father and Phil don't realize it even yet, and there's no reason why they should, for a while, anyway; it would only upset them. But it's a fact that even before father and Phil had run openly against them, Chapin and his gang were on the eve of the greatest fight of their lives.

"It's more than a mere question of political power; it's a fight to a finish. They've run things so high-handedly and so selfishly, presuming on this power, that a revolt is imminent. They've been so openly rotten—still presuming on their power—that they have put weapons into the hands of their enemies. These weapons will take the form of exposure and criminal proceedings—for graft and other corruption only, at first, but now an element of murder is added. Naturally, then—but if you're busy writing, Aunt Sophy, I'll wait until you've finished."

Aunt Sophronia, busily scribbling, did not look up. "Go on talking," she said. "I'm listening to every word."

"Naturally, then," Jack resumed, "these people will stop at nothing—*nothing*—to shift the blame of this murder—not to mention their graft—onto other shoulders. Chapin, who has served two terms as Governor, has slated his henchman, Larry Horton, to succeed him. Election is at hand, and they intend to win it—they *must* win it! The police—the bench—all officialdom—are cogs in this great machine that still

runs like good clockwork. The press is corrupted and the bar, for the most part, scared stiff. Aunt Sophy, in thinking over the names of men who are competent to defend my father and Phil, I swear I don't know where I can find one to be trusted."

"I'll 'tend to that," answered Aunt Sophronia. "Jack, just write my name—'Sophronia Herondene'—and then your own, on this slip of paper."

Wondering, Jack did as he was told, and handed the paper back to her. She enclosed it, together with a note she had written, in an envelope, which she addressed and gave to Jack.

"You were thinkin' of goin' downtown?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm going to take Peggy to see Phil. It's before visiting hours, but Mike Kilrannon, the warden, will let her in; Phelim O'Rourke arranged that. Then I'm going to see O'Rourke. I want to find out what move the machine is making against us, and he'll know if anyone will. And—with your permission, Aunt Sophy—I'm going to make arrangements for the protection of this place. After what happened this morning—"

"Do as you like, Jack," she interrupted. "But, when you see Phelim, consult with him, and if he thinks best, go and buy some newspapers, editors and all—two or three of 'em."

"But do you know what they'll cost?" he cried.

"I don't care what they cost. Give this letter I've written to the cashier of the First National Bank—then you can sign checks. You'd better take Phil's car; it's a low-swung thing, but he says it's the best. Tell Phelim I want to see him, as soon as he can find time to come here. And now go, dear; I'm busy."

So Jack went away, and as the door closed behind him, Aunt Sophronia sighed, and, leaning back in her chair, once more looked up into the grim, pictured face of old Sophronius.

"Did you hear what Jack said, great-gran'father?" she asked, wistfully. "Somehow I think you did. Somehow I think you must have learned it all, and told me, for I seemed to know, even before Jack be-

gan to speak, what he would say, and I'm sure that three days ago I never in the world would have believed that such things could be. Great-gran'father, stand by me! For truly I need help. Need it more by far than ever in my life until now, and more than I ever can again!"

Aunt Sophronia's words came forth of their own accord, and it was not until she had finished that a realization of their import brought her, with a guilty start, to her feet. Why, what she had said was a petition to the dead—almost a prayer, such as a Chinese might make to an ancestor! And old Sophronius was not, from all accounts, at all the sort of an ancestor to whom a devout church-woman should address prayers.

Mechanically, according to lifelong habit, Aunt Sophronia began to rearrange her desk-top with its accustomed neatness. That desk, and indeed all the library furniture—heavy, massive and chosen long before her day by her burly and massive forebears—caused her wisp of a black-clad figure to appear more frail and helpless than ever in contrast. It would indeed be a hard-hearted great-grandfather, spectral or mundane, who could refuse aid to such as she.

Aunt Sophronia, however, sensed nothing of this. The feeling of guilt still burdened her.

"I'll just run and see that Edith and Libby are all right, then get to work," she murmured.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOB'S COMFORTERS.

THERE had been many letters to despatch, all of them important, but one that was the most important and most difficult of them all. It was addressed to one Horace Reynolds, who had formerly been Aunt Sophronia's lawyer. He had, it is true, retired first from practice of the law and afterward from the United States Senate, in which he had long served. He was an old man, now—old and infirm as well, she feared. But he was also an old friend, and the only counsellor in whom Aunt Sophronia felt that she could rely. She knew

that he would never desert her and hers in a time of trouble.

Later, sitting in the garden, she saw that men—most capable men, from a physical point of view—were stationed at each of the gates in the wall around the Herondene place, and that others were beginning to patrol that wall on its inner side. She saw that posts were erected on top of the wall, and from one post to the others several strands of barbed wire were being stretched. These were the measures Jack had taken to protect her from intrusion.

As she made herself comfortable on the rustic bench, Edith was led out on the sunny veranda and settled in a long steamer chair. All she could see of Edith was an end of the chair, protruding from behind a corner of the house, supporting the girl's feet. But Edith's presence afforded Aunt Sophronia precisely the touch of distant companionship she needed.

The atmosphere was restful, and Aunt Sophronia sighed contentedly. She picked up her book, upon the faded leather cover of which was carefully written, in faded ink, "Journall of Sophronius Herondene," followed by a date which time had rendered illegible. She opened its pages of crabbed manuscript and began to read the paragraph—for all parts of this book were equally well known to her—upon which her eyes first happened to fall:

So fell mine Enemy, slain less by my Bullet than by the Gold I had Spent to the end that I might be Able to Fire it. For Munnie at times, and at other times Pouders and Ledds, are the most Presious things upon the Globe, having in them a Power which Religion or other Righteousness cannot Give. Therefore it Behoves the Wise Man to Waste neether One nor the Other, to the end that both may be used for the Comfort of Self and Kin, or Spent without Stint or Mercy, wen the Need ariseth, for the Destruxion of the Foe that Menaces them.

Aunt Sophronia smiled as she perused the well-remembered passage. Great-grandfather Sophronius may have left something to be desired not only in his spelling and use of capitals, but even in ethics—at any rate according to accepted modern standards—but at least he was neither a weakling nor a hypocrite; and weaklings and hypo-

crites Aunt Sophronia hated more than anything. She owned to a sneaking sympathy with great-grandfather Sophronius's way of doing things. She wondered if it was sinful.

Then the sound of footsteps on the gravel walk reached her ears. She looked up, frowning, to see Reverend Wilfred Lamb bearing down upon her retreat.

Aunt Sophronia was not, and had never been, an admirer of the Reverend Wilfred Lamb. When he had been called to the church wherein she and her family had worshipped for generations, it was much against her will; so much so, in fact, that of late years she seldom or never had been seen there. Not that she considered him a hypocrite, for as a matter of fact she was not at all of that opinion. Not even a weakling, perhaps. But—well, he just was not the sort of person she regarded as fit for the position he held.

It is said that all human beings resemble some one of the lower animals. If this is true, the Reverend Wilfred was misnamed. He did not look in the least like a lamb. Aunt Sophronia had always associated him with the White Rabbit of *Alice in Wonderland*. Phil had dubbed him, "The Rabbit that Bleats," and perhaps that nickname described him as well as anything.

She wondered how it was that he had obtained admittance, and reflected, with distinct displeasure, that never had he been so unwelcome as now. But her respect for the cloth, if not for its wearer, was strong, and her sense of duty as a hostess even more so. She greeted him with what cordiality she could muster.

"I could not refrain from coming to offer my condolences and sympathy, Miss Herondene," said he. "It is my duty, even though you may not approve of my ministrations in our church."

His speech could not be regarded as tactful. His manner seemed designed to express severe, though dignified, disapproval; and such a manner does not rest becomingly upon one whose face suggests that of a white rabbit. Yet Aunt Sophronia regarded him with more kindness than she had previously done, for those sharp, blue eyes of hers looked behind the manner, and saw

that it was only an ill-adjusted cloak, assumed to conceal a real fear of receiving a rebuff in the execution of what he conceived to be his duty.

There followed an awkward pause, and in order to end it, he reached for the volume in Aunt Sophronia's lap.

"It looks like a mediæval book of devotions," said he. "May I see it?"

"I wouldn't call it exactly devotional," observed his hostess, dryly, as she handed it to him. Opening it, he began curiously to read aloud some lines of the crabbed, but legible script of which its text was composed.

"In beginning an Emprise, see to it that it is of such a nature that one wisheth to followe it threw to the End. Then, as my experience sheweth me, it should Bee thus followed. If another oppose thee, then is the time above all to see that thine Emprise bee not Relinquished, but rather bee pushed Forward with the utmost Furie, even though it taketh both thee and thine Enemie into Helle and out the far Side thereof, in Spite of the Devill and all his black and flaming Angells who try to Restrain thee!"

Closing the book, the Reverend Wilfred glanced at the name written on the cover. He laid the book down, took off his glasses and tapped them on the rail.

"I have heard of the—er—of the author of this volume," he said. "And certainly, Miss Herondene, a work of his hardly seems to be one in which a Christian woman should seek consolation at a time like this."

"I don't know. At least he was a *man*!" countered Aunt Sophronia, impulsively.

The aspersion upon her ancestor had roused her peppery temper, which, in turn, had carried her beyond the bounds which she considered that a hostess, even an unwilling one, should permit herself. She was instantly repentant, and would have said so; but her response, it appeared, had aroused the clergyman's ire, which at least had the beneficial effect of causing him to embark at once upon the mission that brought him.

"Miss Herondene," he said, "I came here filled with sympathy for you in this hour of misfortune. That sympathy remains unabated. I wished and still wish to do what I can to alleviate your unhappi-

ness. Most deeply do I regret that what little I can do must take so unwelcome a form."

Aunt Sophronia looked at him with quick enquiry. "What in the world do you mean?" she asked.

"In telling you, will you allow me to say what I must say without anger on your part?" he asked, in return. "Will you regard any pain inflicted by my words like that inflicted by a surgeon's knife—cruel only in order to save?"

This conduct was very unrabbitlike. The soft, pale little man was plainly lifted above his normal personality by his belief in the cause that he had espoused—whatever that cause might be. Aunt Sophronia was curious to learn. She nodded. He hastened to continue.

"I must begin with your attitude toward your neighbors, of which I have heard only a short time since," he said. "You refused to see them. You utterly disregard the fact that they were actuated solely by a desire to make plain to you that whatever may be true of others, they looked upon you, at least, as guiltless, and that their feeling toward you was unchanged by the horrible occurrence, and the consequent revelations, that we all so keenly regret."

Aunt Sophronia's face first showed perplexity, which was followed by white anger that increased in direct proportion to her comprehension of the preacher's words. She might have essayed to speak, but the Reverend Wilfred went bravely on.

"To me, Miss Herondene, it seems incredible that you should so have misread the motives of those who would have comforted you. Now I come here to find that it is because you deliberately refuse to admit what you know—what you *must* know—to be true. I grant that it is most improbable that your nephew ever deliberately planned to fire that fatal shot. Undoubtedly he was led, little by little, into ways of dishonesty by his older and more experienced partner. Then came detection and impending exposure, exposure proved by the testimony of this wretched man, Creach. Then followed your refusal to refund to the city the money stolen from its coffers by your nephew and his partner—"

"What?"

So explosively sudden was that monsyllable of the old lady's that for an instant it arrested even the Reverend Wilfred Lamb in the midst of his own dearly beloved eloquence. Only for an instant, however.

"That Mr. Horton, the mayor of this city, should influence his friend, the district attorney, so that the latter was induced to offer immunity to the two guilty partners at the price of restitution of the city's stolen funds, was wrong; wrong both morally and legally," he bleated. "I am the last who would deny that fact. But there was much excuse. He loved the daughter of Ayres, the older of the two guilty partners. Therefore, he would spare her, if he could, from vicarious disgrace. Had he been rich enough, he himself would have made the restitution. As it is—"

"Mr. Lamb," Aunt Sophronia cut in, "stop for one moment!"

She was not angry now. In the more or less confused bleating of the man she perceived that there was information to be gained—vital information, fresh and hot from the enemy's camp. And, after all, anger with this vain and silly, but quite sincere, little man was not worth while. Moreover, she saw Peggy, her face full of trouble, running down the veranda steps on her way to the summer house. This meant that the opportunity for learning of the enemy's plans soon would be interrupted.

Therefore, she refrained from asking the questions she had in mind, she waited impatiently for the end of the pause that she had caused. She had not long to wait; Mr. Lamb also had seen Peggy. Therefore, he hurried to launch forth a short peroration.

"In short," he declaimed, his bleating voice taking on a near-thunderous tone in what he intended to be scathing, but dignified pastoral reproof, "I find you, Miss Herondene, here alone communing—not with the Scriptures—not with any devotional work—but with the personal record of an ancestor who, if history speaks truth, was no better than a pirate and a trader in human flesh—in slaves! I find you apparently intending—not to prepare your nephew and your friend

to face with fortitude the consequences of their acts—but instead to assist them with all your power in shifting their unquestionable guilt upon innocent shoulders."

This was enough. Aunt Sophronia felt that she had learned all that the reverend gentleman's oratory could tell her, and now she desired information on other lines.

"Mr. Lamb," she said, in that decisive manner of hers, "I want to know how you obtained admittance to these grounds."

The Reverend Wilfred Lamb was a different little man when interrupted in his self-appointed task. Now he gasped, as he might have gasped had a piece of ice been dropped between his soft, white neck and the back of his faultless clerical collar.

Peggy indignantly broke out:

"That man—that Horton—that *beast*—and that little Lamb-rabbit—sneaked in through Peter's burned cottage!" she cried, on the verge of tears. "Horton has been with Edith for *ages*—there on the veranda. I don't know what he said to her, but Edith's crying—half in hysterics. And Horton wouldn't go away when I told him to. He called me a 'child'—"

The recollection of this last indignity was too much for Peggy. Her voice choked, and she struggled to regain her self-command. Doubtless Aunt Sophronia would have rebuked her for her uncivil reference to the Reverend Wilfred, but upon looking around she discovered that he had left.

But this was a minor matter. The intrusion of Horton, however, was an affront not to be overlooked. Besides, even apart from that, Aunt Sophronia greatly desired the privilege of a few plain words with the gentleman in question. With her face set in a manner that rendered its likeness to her unregenerate great-grandfather far more marked than usual, she went to the veranda.

There she found disappointment and fresh trouble awaiting her. Edith was perilously near a state of collapse. Horton had followed the discreet example of his clerical friend. And it was not until Edith was restored to her bed and comparative tranquillity that it was discovered that the "*Journall of Sophronius Herondene*" had also disappeared.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



An Act of Faith

By **LESLIE RAMÓN**

IT was approaching dawn when Michael Fairweather laid his pen on the rack of his desk easel. The decorative sketch he was working on was not quite finished, but Michael was very near the end of his capacity of endurance. With the exception of a few minutes taken off to heat the coffee pot and many seconds to light cigarettes, he had been sitting at that sloping drawing board since the middle of the previous day. For over fourteen hours he had concentrated with feverish intensity on the making of the delicately intricate pattern of his design. In one furious bout he had set himself to redeem a long procession of loose hours spent in pottering and putting off the moment of starting. Now, back of Michael's mind was the fear that fatigue was beckoning to failure *again*.

The situation was self-invited, ludicrous, heart-aching. So, to use a forbiddingly long and ugly word, runs the curse on the procrastinator in its gentlest results. Sometimes it takes a malign twist and deals a

poisonous blow to hopes and faiths held sacred.

Relaxing against the back of his chair, Michael stared moodily at the polished, hard-surfaced card pinned to his board. There was good, creditable work there. Those massed blacks; those well placed high lights and the gray half-tones of fine penwork, testified to his artistic ability; but there was that blank space in the lower right hand corner! *That* was a reproach. Worse still, unless he could fill that blankness and complete the drawing before the first out-going mail, there would be no check forthcoming until the end of the next week. For days he had pleasantly, indolently dreamed of what he would do with the hundred dollars he was to receive for the finished drawing. Tucked between the leaves of a book of verse lying among his pencils and brushes, was a neatly folded slip of paper. It bore a meticulously thought-out list of the things he was going to buy—

From the blue-covered book, Michael's

eyes lifted to the framed photograph hanging on the wall near his desk. His upward gaze was one of tender adoring rapture.

"You dear," he murmured, and for a moment winged thought embraced a vast circle of exquisite memories woven around the living original of that profile on the wall. There was that gracious, vivid moment when he had first met Alma. The heartlift of it; the pure ecstasy of the love that had blazed cometlike into being. From that moment to this the arc of that love spanned seven years. Had the light of it waned? It was not himself that Michael questioned, and, he told himself, the idea of there being any difference in Alma was an impossibility. Yet—doubt, misgiving gnawed at the buttresses of faith and vanity. He was the *one* man. Alma the only girl. "Love—never—dies."

There was the trustful note of a fervent prayer in the softly uttered words, but when Michael looked down at his unfinished drawing, the threat of self-inflicted defeat brought a miserable sensation of fear. He sat up abruptly; rubbed his fingers together nervously and picked up his pen. Carefully, he scraped off the ink dried on the fine point; he adjusted his position to work—to finish, but, the urge of his spirit could not combat the poison of fatigue in his blood. His fingers cramped; twitched; the surety of his line wavered. With a hopeless sigh of despair he put down his pen.

"I can't go on," he thought. "If I try, I'll spoil it. I must rest. That's it—the best thing. An hour's sleep will steady me."

Setting the alarm clock, which had served often, too often, for just such a last-minute rally as this, Michael stretched himself on the fold-up bed. He had left the light burning over his desk. He was going to rest for one hour. No more.

When the clock dutifully rattled its summons, he stirred slightly, sighed in his sleep, and, victim and easy captive in slumber to the curse of the long word, slept on. While his day-dreams found enlargement and a roseate glamour in magnifying slumber, the gray-clad carriers of the morning's mail trudged with loaded bags out of the sorting room of the mile-away post office. The

shabby little three-room house where Michael slept, was on the edge of the delivery route, and it was past nine o'clock when the postman's shrill whistle did what the alarm had failed to do.

Dazed with sleep-numbed senses, Michael sprang off the bed. His startled glance took in the sun blazing through the window; the hour marked by the clock. Opportunity had gone—into the past. The hours of forced labor were lost, and what was an added cause for self-disgust, there was not even time to clean up; tidy up the place. Barely a chance to wash and shave. In fifteen—twenty minutes at the most—Alma would arrive. Radiant with expectation and the inherent charm of herself, she would come into that hole of neglect. Then she would subtly change; she would not blame or reproach, but the vitality of her would retreat; retire behind a veil of oddly stoic submission to disappointment.

"Cursed fool that I am."

With frantic quickness, Michael removed the drawing from the board. It would never do to let that be the first thing Alma set eyes on. He would tell her later. Explain everything first; woo her, prepare her mind. Point out, maybe, that perhaps, after all, it was just as well that they would have to wait another week for the check. That way they would have time to think things over; decide what bills should be paid, and—and— In a whirl of specious reasoning, Michael builded for himself an intricate alibi of excuses. Into his drawer he swept a jumble of drawing materials and cigarette ends. Then, with nervous haste, he hurried to the kitchen. He lit the oil stove; put on water for shaving. Next thing to do was to sweep up a bit; dust; open the windows; let in some fresh air—sunshine—get a few flowers. They would brighten up the place. A comforting thought came to Michael as he reached for the broom. What a good job it was that he had not slept on and on until Alma had come. On the heels of this came a sharp question. What was it that had woke him up? He had been dreaming of fields white with daisies, languorous with scented warmth; soothing with the drone of insects, and then—that harsh, shrilling call.

"The mail man," ejaculated Michael, "of course that was it."

Smiling faintly at the circumstance that it was probably the delivery of some long overdue bill which had served the purpose of rousing him from sleep, he went to the box nailed by the side of the front door.

Born of countless subconscious misgivings, a chill of evil presage came over him when he saw the handwriting on the envelope was Alma's. For a moment he held the sealed envelope. Dread held him prisoner to suspense. It was only a matter of a few seconds before he ripped open his wife's letter, but time is no measure of the dimensions of an emotional heaven or—hell. In a single heartbeat is concentrated the happiness or woe of a lifetime. It is only after the pinnacle has been touched or the deeps reached, that the mind can grasp what it has won, or—lost.

For a little while, Michael stood staring down at Alma's few lines. Then he went into the house. Slowly, gently, he closed the door.

II.

ANDREW FABER was a fisherman. Not one of the kind who dig for earth worms or scratch in the sand for crimson, wriggling tidbits for tasty, but indiscriminatingly greedy flounders and creek eels; neither was he one who, combining a love for nature with a penchant for trout for breakfast, specializes in multitudinous rods and reels and pretty lures in the form of artificial flies. All the same, from the tips of his blunt, practical fingers to the core of his placid, enthusiastic soul, Andrew was a sportsman, even if the only real fishing he had ever done had been with a line of black thread and a bent pin. That had been rather a long time ago, now—

Andrew leaned a little nearer to the hospital cot. As an angler would read the still surface of a pool mirroring external things and revealing nothing of its own secrets except to the initiated, he studied the face of the man pillowed in the exact center between the white enameled bedposts. The features were those of a young man; their expression, immobile in sealing unconsciousness, was that of one who had broken down

under the crushing torment of great suffering.

"Well, Parson Andy, what do you make of him? Think he's worth saving?"

"They all are, and you know it, or you wouldn't be working here sixteen or eighteen hours out of every twenty-four," replied Andrew as he looked up at the doctor. "He is not a drug addict?"

The doctor shook his head. He pointed to the sleeper's left hand lying relaxed on the coverlet. The middle and forefinger were stained brown with nicotine. "There's the brand of his pet habit," he said: "a bad one, but a minor vice. The only drug he has had is what I gave him when he was brought in. After that long sleep he's had, it's an even chance that he'll wake up sane, but whether he'll stay so is more than I can tell. If we could have found out who he is; get his wife or mother here—have some friend or relative right here to hold him true to form if he wakes normal, it would have been a ninety per cent help to warding off another mental collapse. As it is, I'm looking to you. If you can fix him with those magnetic eyes of yours; get those brotherly hooks of yours into him, why—you'll hold him. If it hadn't been for you that broken-hearted girl we had here a month ago would have been booked for a padded cell. If you'll mother this chap during the first few minutes of his return to conscious perception of whatever it was caused a cog to slip in his brain, why—he'll have a fighting chance to get a grip on himself. He doesn't look a weakling."

Andrew's firm lips twitched with the hint of a smile. "Perhaps," he suggested, "he's only an idealist. He has the head of a poet—a visionary. No, he's no weakling, but too great a bias toward the unsubstantially beautiful is a dangerous weakness. I'll stay and mother him. Tell them to send me up whatever odds and ends were in his pockets."

"It's precious little you'll have to tempt him with," stated the doctor as he turned to follow a beckoning nurse. "It's out of your own personality—heart, faith, or whatever it is you draw upon that you'll have to weave your charm. There was not a scrap of anything on him ever so remotely

suggestive of having some sentimental association. You're all on your own, Andy-boy."

Andy-boy moved his head slightly from side to side, but he did not put into words his own deep-seated conviction that he was not *alone* in anything he undertook. It wasn't at all necessary, either. There was not the least need to unfurl a banner of proclaimed faith. Not to that doctor. They had known each other for years enough for words to be mainly a decoration to understanding.

When the envelope came containing the property of the unknown patient, Andrew Faber found that his friend had not exaggerated the paucity of the material where-with he was to construct some associative lien on the young man's memory. There was a partly filled packet of crumpled cigarettes, a nail file, a few coins, and a key. Little enough with which to assist in attracting the attention of a mind which might wake to consciousness only to detach itself from the bonds of reason. Yet, although not a bona fide wielder of the rod piscatorial, Andrew was angler enough to know that a very insignificant fly will sometimes succeed in tempting a shy and suspicious fish to take the hook. He contemplatively straightened out one of the cigarettes and felt in his pocket for a box of matches.

Twenty minutes later, when the patient's eyes were barely open, he was caught to the performance of a commonplace, mechanical action.

"Light up," said Faber, tendering cigarette and match, and added before the daze of wonder had time to fade from those vaguely questioning eyes, "then we'll talk. What is your name?"

"Michael — Fairweather." The reply came in involuntary obedience to automatic impulse.

"Where do you live?"

Faber put this important question with casual matter-of-factness, but memory; the power to choose: to select the right or the wrong path, came too quickly to the man he wanted to get a saving grip on.

Intelligence flamed for an instant in Michael's eyes; he flicked the cigarette out

of his fingers. He turned abruptly on his pillow.

"Leave me alone. I want to think," he said, pettishly.

Faber considered this repulse. One less understanding, less patient, less of an ardent fisherman of human hearts and souls, would have perhaps taken Michael at his word and left him to his fate. Left him to pile hopelessness on sorrow and sink beyond the strength to rise. Time and again Andrew had sat by beds in that ward and probed through layers of stubborn ignorance and triumphed in reaching a response to his sympathy. The simple-hearted have the gift of yielding to a fundamental appeal. They rise instinctively. The intellectual, when thrown off his mental balance, is a creature bonded by a complexity of immaterial pros and cons. When in a condition of the subnormal, the cultured brain is a tricky obstacle and enemy. In that profile turned away from him, Faber read the signs of a deep hurt flowing to an implacable aloofness. Grief would be nursed to cynic bitterness. Then—a spoiled life—insanity—death. Yet, sympathy was not for this man. Not in his present mood. His physical strength was at a low ebb, but he had nervous force—pride. Possibly a sense of humor. Thing to do was to sting him to surprised resentment; rouse him at all costs from brooding lethargy. He was weak, but no weakling.

"While you are laying there thinking," said Andrew with deliberate coldness, "you are putting us to a great inconvenience and making yourself an incumbrance. You were brought here to be put on your feet, not to occupy a bed that is needed for some other and probably greater sufferer than yourself. This is a clearing house for those who have, by accident or design, drifted into trouble. We don't want you to *stay* here."

For a short moment the face on the pillow did not move. When action came, it was satisfyingly energetic. The young man turned over; propped himself on his elbow. His staring amazement was positive and direct. He frowned with angry resentfulness. For the time being, the irritant had jolted him to forgetfulness of selfish indulgence,

And if it be considered strange to accuse a grief-ridden man of being selfish, it may not seem so odd when it is allowed that nearly all forms of sorrow are rooted in—*self-pity*.

"Now," continued Andrew, "having shown me that you have something of a man and a good fellow in you, perhaps you will be reasonable enough to meet me on a fair and square footing. I'll qualify that remark about your not being wanted here. It applies to those who will not aid us to help them. Just now, you are not in a fit condition to leave that bed, but you are able to help yourself climb out of trouble and danger."

"Danger? I'm all right. There's nothing the matter with me. I suppose I fainted or something. Had a—*a shock*—I—"

Michael's voice trailed off. An expression of uncertainty came over his face.

"Do you remember when you left home?" asked Andrew quickly.

"Of course. A few hours ago. This morning."

"Tuesday?" asked Faber.

"Tuesday? Thursday, you mean."

"You are referring to *last* Thursday. You were brought in here on Sunday night. For nearly four days you had been wandering around. Since Sunday you've been resting. They have fed you, builded up your strength. Now it is for you to control your brain. To rebuild."

"Rebuild," echoed Michael. "You do not understand. There is nothing—I—you mean to tell me that it is six days since I—where—where is that letter?"

Suddenly brilliant and intense with an anguish beyond tears, Michael's eyes fixed on the key lying among the few coins on his bed.

Andrew took the trembling, outstretched hand between his own firm palms. "Steady," he said, "and listen. I am here to *help* you. Hold on, now, and don't struggle with thoughts of the past. Fix your mind on the future. We can rebuild—*regain*."

The warm clasp of Andrew's hands; the quiet, compelling conviction of his voice; the sincerity shining in his eyes; all these were signs that had their influence on Mi-

chael. He could see, feel their combined invitation to confidence; but, greater than all these overt evidences of manful help was something deeper—stronger. The weakness of despair flowed away from him. A subtle, fluid current pervaded him; buoyed him. It was a transcendence, elusive of the alchemy of words except in groping simile. It is in the throbbing crash of a military band hailing victory for right; it is in the whispering winds; in chanting voices and in loving eyes. It permeates eternity.

"Regain." Michael clung to the word. A questing eagerness brought a flush of color into his cheeks. "You seem to know—to understand. I have told you nothing. Yet—you say, and I *believe* you, that I can *regain*—how do you—how can you know?"

Andrew Faber smiled. "For the moment," he said with comradely cheerfulness, "let us not pull the flower to pieces. You have faith. It is a power which grows by active effort. There was a letter. It is probable that it is not lost. You may have left it at home. Now, before the doctor comes and puts a ban on talking, give me simple answers to a few questions. Don't try to explain anything. You have my promise that I will help you—in—*deed*."

III.

THERE are chariots and—chariots. Some are plain push-carts, some are wagons hitched to stars, and some are material monsters of the ilk autocratic and swagger. Andrew Faber owned two chariots. One was a spiritualized vehicle of a power beyond measure; the other was a humble conveyance of shabby, rusty raiment and an uncertain cough. She chattered a lot, squeaked upon occasion, and expressed motion in a small riot of rattles. All the same, whenever Andrew used her on one of his frequent joy rides of mercy, Elizabeth responded faithfully to his studious care in manipulation of the controls of her temperamental mechanism. Also, although ignorant strangers might snigger at Elizabeth, and lordly chauffeurs grin, anywhere within a three-mile circle of Andrew's home quarters, she had the right-of-way. From doc-

tors, nurses, and cops, Andrew Faber had respect, and—something more vital—affection. No traffic officer would halt Elizabeth if there was the slightest margin for getting her through. And no corner-cutting, slick taxi driver could get from one point to another of the city on less time and gas than Andrew. Elizabeth's anatomy was antique, but she was a nimble queen.

An hour after he left the hospital with Michael's key in his pocket, Elizabeth chugged off a tree shaded length of oiled road flanked by homes upkept by regular wages and common sense, and bumped an eighth of a mile over rutted dirt. When he stopped Elizabeth and sat for a moment looking at the gray little house set fifty feet back in patch of neglected garden, Andrew knew why there had been a half-shamed reluctance in Michael's manner when he had described where he lived.

"I—we were going to fix it up some day," he had said. "It is only a shack now, but it could be made pretty and comfortable."

As he walked up the path to the porch, Andrew nodded as his kindly and keen eyes noted the beginnings of many attempts to bring order and beauty out of chaos and ugliness. In the center of a hummocky patch of grass was a flower bed which showed the signs of care. The paint was peeling off the supports of the porch; patches of bare wood showed on the door and window frames. The curtains were neatly hung and tasteful in design. A pane of glass was broken; patched with a piece of card.

"In the room where my desk is, that's where you will find the letter if I did not put it in my pocket and lose it."

This had been all that Michael could remember between the moment he had stood on the porch and the time he had wakened in the hospital cot, and the hope of finding that letter was uppermost in Andrew's mind when he unlocked the door. The light still burning over the desk easel; a host of other peculiar abnormalities; a confusion of contradictory impressions assailed him when he entered the room where Michael had worked, and slept, and failed.

The rug on the bed was torn and crumpled; scattered with flecks of paper. On

the floor was the half of an envelope and a narrow, torn slip about three inches long. The line of writing it bore was incomplete, but enough.

—not stand it any more. Good-by, Alma.

In those few words was the destroying agent which had thrown Michael off his mental balance and sent him a wandering automaton for four days. The terrible power of a few simple words. Andrew walked across the room. He looked up at the photograph. He noted the lift of the short upper lip; the tender curve of the mouth; the poise of the head.

"High spirited and of good blood. A lovely face—character—no cruelty or meanness there. Impulsive—immature, maybe, but why this?"

One word stood out as Andrew reread that torn slip—the last line of Alma's letter.

"It," he muttered, and looking about him, envisaged the potential inclusiveness of that little word of two letters. "It," he repeated, and wondered to what highways and byways of thwarted hopes and ambitions the word was tethered. Michael was an artist; gentle natured. The girl—Andrew glanced up at the portrait again—she was lovable and loving. Michael had hinted at poverty; the struggles they had had.

"Privation alone would not have caused that girl to give up. She looks *good*. That husband of her's adores her. Hardship alone would not cause her to leave him. The problem has a kink in it somewhere."

Patiently gathering up the scraps of the letter off the rug, Andrew placed them in his pocketbook, lifted the picture of Alma from the wall, and switched off the light. Besides the letter and the photograph he took with him the memory of that flower bed, those cheap but pretty window curtains, the book of verses, tokens of refinement, culture, in conflict with a suggestion of an abandonment to careless neglect. Had Alma been trying to rise and Michael content to stay put?

"Nice fellow, like him," thought Andrew as Elizabeth started off with a jerk. "No real bad in him, but—the sins of omission, they'll sink a man and just as surely cause

a woman to hide her love and herself as committed acts of unkindness. Strange how some fine natures, keen minds, have a blindness to some basic principle of safety. In some degree or another, I believe the pair of them have played truant with conventional rules of good sailing. Now their little ship is on the rocks and the danger signals are flying for Michael Fairweather. If he loses heart, his mind will slip beyond our reach. Too late will that exotic Alma of his return. Possibly she struck to redeem. The result—tragedy. We must prevent that. We must hold him until we can find her."

Before he had gone very far on his return trip to the hospital Andrew decided that he would not show Michael the torn bits of Alma's letter or give him her picture until he was sure the young man was on the up-grade to hope of recovery and faith in the future.

"It'll hurt him less to be told that he tore up her letter than to hold the fragments," he reflected. "I'll have to nurse him along. As it is, I expect trouble. He's a high-tensioned, nervous fellow."

Yet, to judge by all the outward indications, Michael was calmer and more in control of himself than Andrew was prepared for.

"It does not matter," he said when he was told he had destroyed the letter. "I have remembered all there was in it. Every word has come back to me. I have had time to think. I want you to know that—that she is not to blame. I let things slide. When we were married, I had money. We traveled—cut ourselves off from all friends. We adventured—lived only for each other. The money went. Art had been a hobby with me, I took it up as a living. Gradually we sank—lower and lower. There have been times when we had scarcely enough food. Then Alma would help. She would work for a season as a model. I would get a check. For a little while we would be happy together. Then—this last time—was too much for her. She is not coming back to me."

"Because you could not make enough money to keep both of you in comfort?"

"No, it was not that. I *could* make

money. I dreamed—let material things slide. To me they did not matter. I had Fleurette. She never reproached me. I pandered to my indolence and called it hard luck when we went down to the last few cents."

"Fleurette?" queried Andrew after a long pause.

"It was the name I gave Alma. She was so very beautiful—and dear—and good."

On the last whispered word Michael closed his eyes. His face was in repose.

IV.

FOUR days later it was the doctor who gave a name to the strange calm of Michael Fairweather.

"He will not tell you, Andy, because you have been so decent, but he has given up hope. He is committing—unconsciously, maybe, samadhi. He is willing himself to die. He can do it, too, and we cannot stop him. For a time the body can resist, but in the end the will dominates."

"How long?"

"Two or three days."

Andrew Faber smiled with serene confidence. "It is enough," he said; "there is plenty of time. Michael Fairweather will not die, because his Fleurette is coming to him. She will be here on Sunday night or Monday."

"You have heard from her?"

"No."

"What then?"

"To-morrow, Sunday evening, I will show you the beginning of an act of faith. Wait until then before you ask for explanations."

The next evening Andrew and the doctor occupied a seat under the pulpit of a church famed for the size of its congregation. Before the preacher commenced his sermon he told a simple and very brief story of a man who was dying for the love of one woman.

"We will pray," he ended, "for the return of Fleurette."

For a moment the ranks of upturned faces remained fixed—wondering. Then, as a field of corn bows to the will of the wind, the congregation leaned forward. It

was only after the sermon had commenced that the doctor realized that he too had made one in that appeal. He had prayed unquestioningly, fervently.

"You think she is in this church?" he asked Faber when the service was over.

"I do not know. All I am sure of is she will come."

Sunday passed.

On Monday morning the preacher came to Andrew Faber's rooms. He brought with him a girl.

"I have been traveling all night—I came as quickly as I could," she exclaimed. "I—I am not too late?"

"The Power who brought you here, who caused you to hear the call for you, will not fail you at the eleventh hour," said An-

drew. "How—Fleurette, did the word reach you?"

"I was passing a tent—there was a revival meeting on. I had no intention of going in, but something—something compelled me to. Almost as soon as I entered I heard a voice: 'We will pray for the return of Fleurette,' it said. It stunned—frightened me. I rushed out of the tent."

"Radio," murmured Andrew. "I was not aware—"

"My whole sermon was broadcasted," put in the preacher.

A little later Andrew smiled down at the transfigured face of Michael. "You have got her back," he said, "now let us see how it can be an act of faith with you to *keep* her."



PIPE-DREAM OF A WOULD-BE BACHELOR

YES (*puff*), I like to talk (*puff, puff*);
 But there are days (*puff, puff*)
 One's simply got to (*puff*) be by oneself (*puff*),
 Free (*puff*) to walk (*puff, puff*)
 Alone (*puff, puff, puff*)
 In the woods (*puff*) or on a shelf (*puff*)
 Of the seashore (*puff*), stone to stone (*puff*)
 In a mood like that (*puff, puff*) I balk (*puff*)
 At having to answer (*puff, puff*) fool "good days."

Yes (*puff*), I like companions (*puff*)
 Once in a while (*puff, puff*);
 If men (*puff, puff, puff*),
 The sort (*puff, puff*) like cañons (*puff*),
 The dry ones (*puff*), deep (*puff*),
 And quiet (*puff, puff*) like sound sleep (*puff*);
 Or a pal (*puff, puff*) with a slow smile (*puff*);
 More often (*puff*) a dog (*puff*) with dog-true eyes.
 Yes (*puff*), I like companions (*puff*),
 Now (*puff*) and then (*puff, puff, puff*);
 But not (*puff*) love (*puff, puff*) ties.

Richard Butler Glaenzer.



The Double Chance

By **J. S. FLETCHER**

Author of "*The Middle Temple Murder*," etc.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MISSING FINGER.

INSPECTOR CORTELYOU had just unlocked the door of the study and let himself out into the corridor when he saw Dauncey advancing from the inner hall. Behind the old butler the detective saw two shapes which, in the dim light, he did not recognize.

"I beg your pardon, Inspector," said Dauncey. "I didn't mean to disturb you, but there's the chief constable and Mr. Illingworth here, sir, and they're wanting to see you particularly, so I was coming to let you know."

"All right," replied Inspector Cortelyou. "I've finished—for the present. I'll come and speak to them."

He followed the butler down to the hall,

and found Illingworth to be accompanied by a tall, handsome man, whom Inspector Cortelyou immediately set down as an ex-cavalry officer, and who gave the little man from Scotland Yard a keen and searching look of interest.

"Good evening inspector," said Illingworth. "This gentleman is Major Bryson, our chief constable. He has come specially over to see how things are going on, and to hear if you have anything to tell him."

"We will go back to the study," said the detective.

He led the way back to the scene of his operations, and turned up the electric light in both study and library. Major Bryson looked about him with swift glances. He turned to Inspector Cortelyou as the detective came back from switching on the lights in the further apartment.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 10.

"I understand you have been here some hours, inspector," he said.

"I have been here five hours, sir," replied the detective.

"I have heard a great deal of your powers," said Major Bryson. "Have you come to any conclusion about the matter?"

Inspector Cortelyou sat down near the desk at which Sir Robert Mannersley had been murdered.

"I have been on my feet ever since I got here," he said. "I must sit down. You were not at the hearing before the magistrates, sir?"

"No," answered Major Bryson. "I was in another part of the county. But I have read the evidence over since arriving this evening."

"And what is your opinion, sir?" asked the detective.

The chief constable bit one end of his fine mustache—a trick which those who were best acquainted with him knew to denote considerable perplexity.

"Well," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "on the first view of the case I should have considered Sir Clinton guilty. I should have looked at it in this way—that, being of a hottish temper, as was shown, he lost control over himself, snatched up the knife, or struck blindly at his uncle."

"From behind, sir?" observed Inspector Cortelyou quietly.

"It scarcely seems likely," answered Major Bryson. "And I confess that the evidence of the collier, King, is startling, for I understand that the footprints outside correspond with the nailed boots he was wearing, and that the blind—that blind, I suppose—is as he said. Isn't that so, Illingworth?"

"That's quite so, sir," answered Illingworth.

Major Bryson bit his mustache and looked at Inspector Cortelyou.

"But I want to know what you think," he said suddenly. "You've a reputation for these affairs, you know. What's your opinion?"

"My opinion, sir," answered the detective, slowly—"my opinion is that Sir Clinton Mannersley did not murder his uncle. He had no motive—"

"He felt resentment," interrupted Illingworth.

"Whatever resentment or anger he felt," answered Inspector Cortelyou, "had been swept away the night before by the fact that his cousin, Miss Phillipa, had promised to marry him. She is not the sort of young woman to break her word, and it is not within the bounds of probability that a man should murder the father of the girl he is going to marry. I believe that Sir Clinton's account of his visit to this room was the truth. I also believe that the collier, King, spoke the truth. Sir Clinton did not do this thing."

The chief constable and Illingworth stared at each other and then at the little man from Scotland Yard.

"Then, in Heaven's name, who did?" exclaimed Major Bryson.

Inspector Cortelyou produced his snuffbox and took a pinch. He pointed with the closed snuffbox to the library door.

"Somebody who entered this room from that, sir," he said.

Illingworth uttered a sharp exclamation. "But Mr. Stead was in that room all the time!" he said.

The detective put his snuffbox deliberately in his pocket. "Just so," he said dryly.

Illingworth stared at him. "You don't mean to say that you suggest—" he began.

Inspector Cortelyou got up from his chair. "I suggest nothing—at present," he said. "And I don't care very much for suggestions at any time. I prefer certainties. But come this way, gentlemen."

He led them into the library and to the door of the secret staircase, which he opened carefully. Major Bryson and Illingworth gazed with surprise at the cavity within.

"Now, gentlemen," said the detective, "this is a staircase which communicates with the big picture gallery above. There are sixteen steps, each a foot high, in it. Come back with me to the study."

"Now here," he continued, leading them to the corresponding stair in the adjoining room, "is a companion staircase also leading to the gallery in exactly forty-five feet; therefore, from this door in the study,

round by the gallery, to the door in the library, it is, roughly speaking, well within eighty feet. It could be traversed by any one who knows the secrets of these staircases and door within one minute."

Major Bryson and Illingworth, not yet comprehending anything of what Inspector Cortelyou was after, stared at him in wonder. He went on, after another consultation with his snuffbox:

"I say, by any one who knows the secret of these staircases, gentlemen," he continued. "Now, observe that those doors in the paneling do not open by locks or handles, but by springs, and therefore whoever it was who used them on the night of the murder, was some person conversant with their peculiarities."

"Yes, but what is there to show that they were used on the night of the murder?" asked Illingworth, half incredulous of all that the detective had said.

"I will come to that," answered Inspector Cortelyou. "Now, I have ascertained from the butler, Dauncey, that these staircases were specially designed by the late Sir Robert for his own use, and that for a long time he had never made use of them. No other person in the house would be likely to use them. It is only a few days since that they, in conjunction with this study, were thoroughly cleaned. Yet they have been used, and within the past forty-eight hours, and, in my opinion, by the murderer."

The other two looked at him expectantly, wondering what they were going to hear.

"Then you think—" began Major Bryson.

"I believe," said the detective, with emphasis, "I believe that whoever killed Sir Robert Mannersley used those stairs. Observe that the dead man's desk in this study faces the door of the library. Impossible to enter that way in the brief time available. But quite possible, easy—knowing the secret stairways and the springs—to enter the study from behind, to commit the crime, and to retreat by the same way. And, gentlemen, I will stake my professional reputation that that was how the deed was done!"

Major Bryson began to bite his mus-

tache again; Illingworth, who had listened to Inspector Cortelyou with evident impatience, smiled somewhat superciliously.

"You forget," he said, "that Mr. Stead was in the library there all the time, all the ten minutes, during which, according to Dr. Childe's emphatic testimony, the murder must have been committed."

"I forget nothing," said Inspector Cortelyou.

"But whoever was in the library at that time must surely have seen the murderer enter or leave the staircase!" said Illingworth. "It's inconceivable that he or they shouldn't."

"I quite agree with you," replied the detective.

"Well, Stead was there—he said so," continued Illingworth.

Inspector Cortelyou made a slight bow and took another pinch of snuff. Major Bryson, who had been watching him keenly, spoke again.

"It strikes me you have found something," he said.

"Yes," answered Inspector Cortelyou. "I have. Fingerprints."

Both men looked further inquiries.

"Come this way, gentlemen," said the detective. He led them into the library again, on his way picking up the acetylene lamp, which he carefully relighted. "Now, if you will kindly turn that electric light off, Mr. Illingworth, I will show you something."

Advancing to the door in the panelling, he handed to Major Bryson a peculiar looking-glass set in a metal holder, and, directing his attention to a certain part of the outer frame, turned the powerful rays of the lamp full on it.

"Now, sir," he said, "what do you see there?"

"Oh, that's quite plain," answered Major Bryson. "I see the marks of fingers—of three fingers."

"Do you see any peculiarity about them?" asked the detective.

"No," answered Major Bryson. "No—I can't say that I do. I see the prints plainly enough on the light wood."

"Allow Mr. Illingworth to look, if you please, sir."

Illingworth looked with undisguised curiosity at the marks, which showed clearly through the powerful magnifying glass. But he, too, failed to point out any peculiarity.

"No," he said, "I see nothing out of the common."

Inspector Cortelyou smiled. "Perhaps you gentlemen are not so used as I am to observing these things," he said. "Allow me to instruct you. These are the fingers of a left hand. The hand was turned upside down—that is, with the thumb downward—as it grasped the edge of the door. It grasped the door very tightly—convulsively. One reason why the marks are as plain as they are is that the owner of the hand smokes a great many cigarettes, that his fingers are much stained at the tips, and that when he grasped this door he was perspiring—very likely with fear or apprehension. But the peculiarity is that these fingers, following them upward, are the first, the third, and the fourth. The second finger is missing."

The detective walked across the room, switched on the electric light, and put out his lamp.

"I could show you more than that, gentlemen," he said, returning to his companions, "but that is sufficient. Now, Mr. Illingworth, you, I believe, have been acquainted with this place some time?"

"Ever since I was a boy," answered Illingworth, in a tone which showed that he was wondering what the detective was trying to get at.

"Then you doubtless know the people well—the prominent people, at any rate?" said Inspector Cortelyou. "Now, do you know any well-known man hereabouts who has lost the second finger of his left hand?"

Illingworth considered this question for some time. He was trying to recollect the facts of various shooting accidents of which he had heard from time to time. But he could remember nothing.

"No," he answered. "I don't."

"Well," said the detective, "I do, then. And that's the man who was in this room while the murder was being committed in the next—if the doctor is right."

Both men started with astonishment.

"What—Stead!" exclaimed Illingworth.

"Just so—Stead," replied the inspector. "In my line of life I have to observe everything, and as he sat near me at the solicitor's table this morning I noticed that the second finger of his left hand was missing. I also noticed that his fingers were much stained."

"But you don't mean to tell me that you suspect him because of that, and of that!" exclaimed Illingworth, pointing to the door in the paneling. "Why, Mr. Stead's one of the most respected gentlemen in the district. He's a church warden!"

"Is he really?" said the detective. "Ah! I should have thought so from his general appearance. All the same, I haven't a doubt that those are his fingerprints, and that they were made on the night of the murder."

Major Bryson pulled on his gloves.

"What are you going to do, Cortelyou?" he asked.

"I am going to wire to headquarters for one of our most expert photographers and for additional help, sir," answered the inspector. "In the meantime, and before we leave here, I want all this place—library, study, staircases, windows—sealed up. That must be done."

"See to that, Illingworth," said Major Bryson. "And, of course, all this is to be kept absolutely quiet—not a word, Illingworth, to a soul. And your special line, Cortelyou?"

The detective consulted his snuffbox again.

"Ah!" he said. "You can leave that to me, sir. I sometimes work in what others might call a curious fashion. What's concerning me now is—the motive. You understand? The motive!"

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING STATEMENT.

A GOOD many hard-working people would have considered that after a journey from London, an attendance at a sitting of magistrates, and a painstaking investigation of certain facts of a murder, a man might be fully justified in knocking off work for that day; but when

he had finally got rid of the chief constable and Illingworth, Inspector Cortelyou prepared to do some more, being a firm believer in the doctrine that one should always work when one has the chance.

There was just one little matter that he wanted to attend to that night, and it was one which could be attended to in pleasant fashion.

"Now that I've finished," he said to Dauncey, to whom he had explained the arrangements about the rooms, "I can spare a few minutes to have that little drop of something that you were so kind as to offer me. Just between ourselves, eh?"

"Miss Mannersley said I was to be sure to see that you took some supper here, sir," said the old butler. "Do now, inspector."

"Thank'ee," replied the detective, "but I've ordered my supper for a certain hour at the inn—give my respects to your mistress all the same. No, I've just got a bit of time to spare for a glass with you—I'm a bit tired now."

"Then come this way, sir," said Dauncey, and led him off to the butler's pantry, and installed him in an easy chair while he produced decanters and glasses.

"Aye, I dare say you are tired, inspector," he continued, as he himself sat down and they clinked glasses, "and I wish your work had been of a less sorrowful nature, sir."

Inspector Cortelyou made a suitable reply, and for a few minutes devoted his attention to the cigar which Dauncey had given him. Then, with the practiced skill of an old hand, he led the conversation in the way he wished it to go, and by devious and gentle paths brought the old butler, who was by no means disinclined to talk, to the subject of Marshall Stead.

"A talented young man, that, I should say, Mr. Dauncey," he remarked. "Much trusted by the late Sir Robert, I should think, to have attained such a position."

Dauncey wagged his head. "Ah, indeed, sir!" he said. "Yes, it's seldom that a young man gets on so fast. Dear me! I've thought many a time when I've seen him dining here—for my poor master came to treating him quite as a gentleman, and asked him here often—that no one ever

would have thought such a thing could be. For you know, sir, his mother was at one time housekeeper here at the castle."

The detective pricked up his ears. "Bless me!" he exclaimed. "You don't say so!"

"Yes, sir, and not so many years ago," replied Dauncey. "Ah, I remember Mrs. Stead coming and going very well, because, of course, I've been here a long, long time. I always understood that she was the widow of some poor clergyman in whom Sir Robert was interested—at any rate, she had very superior manners. And it was Sir Robert who sent this boy to school at Stelford and got him a place when he left school."

"Ah, in the colliery counting house, I suppose?" said Inspector Cortelyou.

"No, sir, that was before the colliery was in full go. No, he got him on the railway as a clerk," replied Dauncey. "But, of course, as soon as the colliery started he put him in there, and he rose from one step to another until he's now head of the counting house."

"Aye, to be sure," said the inspector. "Mother still living?"

"No, sir, Mrs. Stead's dead—died a year ago," replied Dauncey.

"Young man married?" asked the inspector.

"No, sir, he's a single man; not but what there's young women in the place would be glad to have him," said the butler. "Steady young man, sir—a church warden."

"Ah, that's your sort to save and get on," remarked the detective. He drank off the contents of his glass, refused more refreshment, and said he must be going. And within another hour Inspector Cortelyou was in his bed and fast asleep.

But he was wide enough awake next morning when he plunged into his day's work. His assistants and the expert photographer came down by the first train from London, and he was busy with them for nearly all the time up to noon. And if Mr. Marshall Stead had but known it, there was not a moment from that time forward that Inspector Cortelyou was not aware of his doings, through the assistant, who was a past master in the art of disguise, and contrived to mingle in the industrial life of Mannersley without attracting attention.

For the inspector, being one of those men

who take a strong line from the first, had at an early stage of his own appearance on the scene formed the conclusion that the cashier at the colliery had either committed the murder or was implicated in it.

Beyond the question of the finger-prints he would have been at a loss to explain his reasons for his belief, yet it was there. And often in the course of a long career an impression had been formed, an instinct had arisen in his mind, which had set him on the track, and he had seldom been deceived by it; and the instinct which was part of his nature told him that in this case, if he followed the scent, he would run his quarry down.

He was not the sort of man to follow conventional methods of procedure, nor to stick at anything in gaining his end. On the second day after his examination of the room at the castle he went to Mark Quinton's rooms and asked to see him. They had met only an hour before at the inquest then being held on Sir Robert's body, but the detective had at that time said nothing of the call, and Quinton was obviously surprised to see him. But he made him welcome all the same.

"You are just in time to take a cup of tea with me, inspector," he said, ringing the bell of his sitting room. "Or perhaps you would like something a little stronger—a drop of whisky, now?"

"Thank you, sir; a cup of tea is exactly what I was longing for as I came up the hill," answered the detective.

He took the chair which the manager pointed out, and looked round him at the room in which Quinton had arranged his own books and pictures.

"Nice quarters you have here, sir—an old farmhouse, if I mistake not?"

"Yes," answered Quinton. "I was fortunate in finding such comfortable rooms so close to a colliery village. Here, you see, one might fancy oneself quite in the country. Now, here's the tea, and I can promise you real farmhouse cream and butter."

Inspector Cortelyou made no mention of business until they had drunk their tea. Instead, he talked of books and pictures, of which he soon made it evident that he had a good knowledge. But when Quinton had

given him a cigar and a light for it, and he had taken the first few whiffs at it, he looked his host fairly and squarely in the face.

"Mr. Quinton," he said. "I'm a man of plain words—that is, when I like to be. I've come here for a straight talk with you."

Quinton, who had lighted a big briar pipe, bowed his head.

"And I'll tell you why," continued the detective. "I've come to you because, from what I've seen of you and the people here, you're the only man that's likely to be of use to me. I've watched you. You're a straight man and a resolute man, and a man with brains—and you can keep confidence."

Quinton nodded without speaking.

"I want somebody to talk to," said the inspector, "and I'll talk to you. Also, I want some help which only you can give."

"You mean in this case?" said Quinton.

"Certainly, in this case," answered the inspector. "And to waste no more words, I'll tell you straight out that I believe Sir Clinton innocent, and Marshall Stead implicated, if not actually guilty."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Quinton. "Stead! But why?"

"Listen carefully and I'll tell you," answered the detective, and told him of all he had discovered, and of the theory he had built and was building in his own mind. And Quinton listened without saying a word, and in some way or other was fascinated.

"Well, that's extraordinarily strange about the finger-prints," he said when Inspector Cortelyou had finished. "Of course, I can't follow you in everything, but I see the reason of most of what you say. But—the motive?"

"Ah, that's where you can be of use!" exclaimed the detective. "Now, Mr. Quinton, are you absolute boss of affairs at this place—the colliery, I mean?"

"I am, now," answered Quinton. "I received a formal notification from Sir Robert's solicitors, acting on behalf of the executors and of Miss Mannersley, only this morning, of my appointment as absolute manager until further notice. Of course, Sir Robert was his own manager in chief until his death."

"Then you are in control of everything. Does that include the counting house?"

asked the inspector. "It does?—good! Now, I suppose Stead has full control of the books, and that they are periodically audited?"

"They are audited twice a year," answered Quinton. "In March and September."

"Could you arrange a surprise audit?" asked Inspector Cortelyou.

Quinton considered matters.

"Absolutely a surprise one?" he asked.

"Yes. One of which nobody but you and the auditors would know anything whatever," replied the inspector.

Quinton considered matters a little more.

"Yes," he said, "it can be done."

"Then, if you want to help me, do it," said Inspector Cortelyou.

"You suspect something?" said the manager. "I can assure you that Stead has the reputation of being a thoroughly straight man."

"I want to know all I can," answered the detective. "You have a good excuse for auditing the books."

"Well, it shall be done as soon as possible after the funeral is over," said Quinton.

Inspector Cortelyou rose to go. But instead of going directly he remained gazing thoughtfully at a picture.

"By the bye," he said, suddenly turning on Quinton, "what were the exact circumstances of that case of forgery against Sir Clinton Mannersley?"

Quinton knocked the ashes out of his pipe before slowly refilling it. "Well," he said, "I know the circumstances. They have been told to me. I was not here at the time. But—they've nothing to do with this case, have they?"

Inspector Cortelyou smiled—one of the smiles which brought out all the many wrinkles in his face.

"How can I answer that question, sir, unless I know what they were?" he said.

"Ah, just so," said Quinton. "Well, briefly—for it's an affair I don't care to talk about—the facts were these. A check for two thousand pounds drawn by Sir Robert Mannersley in favor of Mr. Clinton Mannersley was presented at the bank in Stelford through a bank in London, and after expert examination was refused payment,

and was submitted to Sir Robert, who unhesitatingly repudiated it.

"Mr. Clinton Mannersley, questioned, stated that he received the check inclosed in a letter from his uncle, which he produced. That letter Sir Robert also repudiated, though it was written on his own note paper, and had, without doubt, been posted here. Mr. Clinton Mannersley had, unfortunately, cashed this check with a money-lender of his acquaintance, and as the man could not get his money he accused Clinton of forgery, and informed the police.

"When the case came on Sir Robert was most emphatic in his denial of check and letter, and an expert showed that Sir Robert's and Mr. Clinton's handwriting were much alike, but that in the nephew's there were certain oddities which were in both letter and check. And the result was—what you know."

"Ah!" said Inspector Cortelyou. "A pretty case! Did Sir Robert always stand to his opinion?"

"Sir Robert Mannersley," answered Quinton, rising and putting on his hat, "was not the sort of man to change an opinion. Besides, he knew his own signature."

"Aye, of course he would," said the detective. "But, I suppose it never occurred to him that some one might have forged letter and signature—some one who wasn't his nephew, eh?"

"Good Heavens! But why?" exclaimed Quinton.

"Why, to get his nephew into his bad books, and out of the way, and all sorts of things," said Inspector Cortelyou. "There, that's something to think of, sir. Ah, we shall see daylight yet!"

He went away smiling, leaving Quinton mystified. And for the next few days nothing seemed to happen. Sir Robert Mannersley was laid to rest in the old churchyard. Sir Clinton waited in Stelford Gaol. Inspector Cortelyou appeared to be doing nothing in particular beyond paying occasional visits to the scene of the murder. Everybody else was looking forward to the day of the adjourned hearing.

But before that day something happened. One evening, as Phillipa sat with a relative who had come to stay with her, Dauncey

announced that Mr. Stead was in the morning room, and begged to see her. Phillippa immediately went to interview the man in whom she believed her father to have had a faithful servant. To her he seemed the same Marshall Stead she had always known, and she sat down to talk to him.

And, without wasting words, the cashier, sure they were alone, said, in a low voice:

"Miss Phillippa, it is in my power to clear Sir Clinton Mannersley of the charge of your father's murder!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"I, ALONE, CAN SAVE HIM!"

IF some one had suddenly told Phillippa Mannersley that her father had come to life again, she could scarcely have been more surprised than she was by the cashier's announcement. She stared at him with dilating eyes, wondering if he had taken leave of his senses—if some strange event, some sudden illness, had upset his mental balance.

But the Stead she saw sitting before her was the Stead she had always known—the cool, calm, imperturbable young man, scrupulously dressed after his quiet and almost somber fashion, and evidently quite master of himself. And she turned white and then red and then white again, as she realized the significance of the announcement which he had made to her almost as unconcernedly as he might have announced any trivial event connected with the colliery.

"I—I do not understand," she faltered.

The cashier drew his chair a little nearer to hers, and spoke again in his usual even tones and in a guardedly low voice.

"I will repeat what I said," he almost whispered. "It is in my power to clear your cousin Sir Clinton on the charge of—"

Phillippa raised a hand.

"Don't, please!" she said. "I can't bear to hear that mentioned. But"—she paused and continued to gaze at him in astonishment—"but if that is so," she continued at last, "why did you not do so at the hearing before the magistrates?"

Stead, who never ceased to watch her, smiled faintly. It was rarely, as all who

knew him were aware, that he ever *did* smile, and when he did the smile was inscrutable. It seemed to Phillippa that it was more inscrutable than ever on this occasion.

"It was perhaps not in my power to do so then," he said.

"Ah, I see," said Phillippa; "you have heard of new evidence—perhaps you have discovered some? Of course, you will see the solicitor and the police at once, Mr. Stead?"

She was wondering why he had not gone to police and solicitor before, instead of coming to her. And, as if his deep-set eyes were able to read her very thoughts, he immediately referred to what was in her mind.

"I came to you in the first instance," he said.

"Yes—why particularly to me?" she asked.

"Because you are the first person concerned," he answered.

Again Phillippa gazed at him in blank wonder. It was a full minute before she could find words.

"I?" she exclaimed. "I think my cousin, Sir Clinton, is the first person concerned, Mr. Stead."

The cashier again smiled his faint, inscrutable smile.

"In a certain sense, yes," he said; "in another sense, no."

"I still fail to comprehend your meaning," she said.

Stead, who had been smoothing the hat which lay on his knee, and regarding it as he might have regarded a cat or a pet dog, suddenly looked at her with a penetrating gaze.

"On the evidence that was put before the magistrates do you think your cousin will be acquitted?" he asked her.

Phillippa felt herself beginning to be annoyed. She knew that her father had trusted Marshall Stead, that he had encouraged and helped him, and had invited him to the house. But she herself had always felt a curious dislike of him, amounting almost to repulsion, and she had no desire to enter into any personal arguments with him. And her tone unconsciously assumed something of coldness and hauteur.

"I do not see any necessity for discussing that," she replied.

"Pardon me," said Stead, "but I do. It is relative to what I have to say, Miss Mannersley. Otherwise I should not have asked you the question—naturally."

Phillipa felt that he had got the best of her there, and was none the better pleased with herself.

"In that case," she said, "yes, I do think Sir Clinton will be acquitted."

Stead inclined his head as if he had quite expected her answer.

"So a great many people think and say," he observed. "They rely on the evidence of the man King—Ginger King."

"I believe," said Phillipa, who was becoming more and more displeased, "I believe that King's evidence has been proved to be true."

"By whom?" asked Stead.

"By the police," answered Phillipa.

Stead smiled. He looked round the room, not as if searching for possible eavesdroppers, but as though considering something. After a moment's silence he faced Phillipa again.

"Miss Mannersley," he said, "King's evidence was false. King was not outside the castle that night. As a matter of fact—of truth—King, at the time he said he was at the castle, outside that particular window, was poaching. And at the next hearing King's evidence will be rebutted—by the two men who were with him in Littlecote Spinney."

Phillipa stared at him with eyes in which incredulosity struggled with fear. "But the boot-prints!" she exclaimed.

"These men will prove that King, seeing a light in the study window as they passed, all three, down the lane at the side of your grounds, climbed over the wall to look through the window," replied Stead. "It is quite true that he did that, and that the boot-prints were undoubtedly his. But it was after eleven o'clock when he was there—a long time after the—"

"Yes, yes!" said Phillipa, hurriedly. "But why did not these men speak before? I suppose they were in court?"

"I don't think they were in court," said Stead. "Their appearances in court, like

King's, are usually in the dock. They are notorious poachers, and they naturally did not want their whereabouts that night known."

"But why did King say what he did?" asked Phillipa. "What was his object?"

"Ginger King, Miss Mannersley," answered Stead, "is a notorious liar and bragger, as his associates at the pot-houses can prove. Moreover, King that morning was, as anybody might have seen, somewhat the worse for liquor."

"Further, your cousin has always been popular with the miners because he used to give them racing tips, and King no doubt thought he was doing a fine thing in making some return. Lastly, you must remember that King gave his evidence after hearing your cousin's statement. If he had offered it before, there might have been something in it. As it is there is nothing. It will not avail Sir Clinton anything."

Phillipa felt as if a heavy blow had been dealt her. Both Miller Stanford and Inspector Cortelyou had laid great stress upon the high importance of King's evidence, and during the last dark days of sorrow she had comforted herself greatly with the hope that Clinton would soon be released. She was quick-witted enough to grasp the fact that if what Stead had told her about the two poachers was true, King's testimony would be worse than worthless, and the strongest point of the defence would be gone.

She sat, miserable and uncertain, in silence for a moment or two, and Stead watched her.

"I suppose these men came to you?" she said at last.

"They did," he answered. "As a great many of our men do—when they are in trouble."

"Then are you the only person who knows about this?" she asked.

"I am," he answered.

Phillipa rose and walked restlessly across the room; she scarcely knew why. On the other side of the table, which stood in the center, she suddenly turned and faced the cashier.

"Would it not be possible to—to get these men out of the way?" she asked.

"To—to give them so much money to go away to America, or Canada, or some? where? Surely they could be—"

"Could be bought off?" he interrupted, with one of the smiles which Phillippa so much disliked. "I daresay, Miss Mannersley, I daresay they could. Men of that sort always can be bought off. Oh, yes, we could furnish them with money and send them to Timbuctoo or the Fiji Islands, and set them up, and in a year's time they would write for more, and they would probably come home and try blackmail."

"And, in addition to that, Miss Mannersley, tampering with the law is a very serious offence, and, in this case, to remove highly important witnesses would be regarded as a most reprehensible crime. No, I don't think we can do that."

"Then what do you propose?" exclaimed Phillippa, who was rapidly becoming too perplexed for her patience to bear. "You come to me saying you can clear Sir Clinton, you tell me of these men, who seem to be the only stumbling-block, and then you say you can do nothing with them. Why do you not explain?"

Stead, who had risen when she did, and now stood on the hearth rug, looked across the table at her. It struck her afterward, in reviewing the situation, that he was cooler and more imperturbable than ever at that moment.

"I have explained what I have," he said, "because I wished to make the situation clear to you. If these men rebut King's evidence, as they will, and nothing else is brought forward on Sir Clinton's behalf—as nothing else can be—Sir Clinton will infallibly be found guilty, if not of murder, most certainly of manslaughter. That is as certain as that we are here. Now, Miss Mannersley, do we speak in perfect confidence?"

Phillippa looked her astonishment at him without speaking.

"I mean," continued Stead, without showing any discomposure—"I mean—do I understand that you will regard this conversation as being strictly private as between ourselves—that you will not breathe a syllable of what I say to any one?"

Phillippa drew herself up proudly. She

gave the cashier a glance which would have made any right-feeling man ashamed of himself. But Stead received it with his usual imperturbability.

"I have never been accustomed to revealing confidences, Mr. Stead," she replied, icily. "It is not likely I should form such a habit now."

"Just so," he said. "All the same, I should like you to give me your word that you will not divulge to any one what I have said and wish to say to you. I know you so well that I am certain if you once give your word nothing could possibly induce you to break it."

"Thank you," she answered, half-contemptuously. "I should have thought that went without saying."

"Then you give me your word?" he asked.

"I give you my word," she replied.

Stead laid his hat, which he had all this time kept in his hands, on the table, and, leaning his knuckles on the table edge, bent forward and looked across at her with an intense expression. As for Phillippa she, from some cause which she could not explain, felt inclined to shrink from him.

"Then listen!" he said, in a tense whisper. "It does not matter what these men say as regards King—it does not matter what evidence is brought against Sir Clinton—I, and I alone, can save him!"

"You—only you?" she breathed, rather than spoke.

"Only I!"

"But why?" she whispered, leaning forward in her eagerness.

The answer came in a tenser whisper than before. "Because I know who killed your father!"

Phillippa started back as if she had received a sudden blow. Then she drew nearer, and looked at the man with staring eyes.

"Who?" she said, with dry lips. "Who?"

But the cashier shook his head.

"No," he answered—"that is my secret, until the proper time comes. In the meantime I must know if you accept my terms."

"Terms?" she exclaimed; and suddenly she saw that something was to be paid, some bargain to be made, some sacrifice to be

offered, before the man before her would speak. "Terms?" she repeated.

"Precisely," replied Stead, in his smoothest tones. "And my terms are these—I agree at the adjourned hearing to reveal the truth, which will set your cousin free, on condition that you give me your word of honor—which I know you will not break—to marry me on the same day, which can easily be done by Archbishop's license. I will show my faith in you by honorably fulfilling my part of the contract first; if I do not, you can repudiate yours. But I know you would keep your word."

Phillipa felt as if the room were whirling round her. She felt herself clutching at the table. She heard what she knew must be her own voice, though it sounded a long way off.

"You must be mad—mad!" the voice was saying.

"On the contrary," said the voice across the table. "I was never saner. Come, Miss Mannersley, I have loved you for a long time, and I shall make you a better husband than a gambler, a spendthrift, and a convicted forger could ever do. Your father respected me, trusted me, invited me here as his equal.

"Besides, I come of good stock. If my father was poor, he was a gentleman and a clergyman, and I am well educated and well read. My character is unblemished, and—"

Phillipa found strength to life a hand and wave it in entreaty. "For pity's sake!" she said. "Go, for pity's sake, if not for mine!"

"Yes," he answered, "I will go. But I shall return for your answer at this time to-morrow evening. And you will again see me alone."

CHAPTER XIV.

STEAD PLAYS SAMARITAN.

IT was already dusk when the cashier walked out of the castle gates and turned in the direction of the mining village in the valley. But it was not so dusk that, had he looked in that direction, he would have failed to see a man emerge from the

churchyard opposite, and, after a momentary hesitation as to whether to go up or down, proceed toward the lights below, walking for some little distance parallel with Stead himself, but gradually, because of his slouching gait, dropping behind and into the rear.

If Stead had looked at this man in that uncertain light, he would have been unable to identify him as a Mannersley Main man. But that would not have occasioned him any surprise, for the colliery was growing, and new faces were appearing in the streets by scores and dozens. He would have set the man down as one who wanted, or had perhaps found work at carpentering, or plumbing, or painting, or some similar job, and had come out for an evening stroll in his second-best suit and with his pipe, having as yet found neither mate nor sweetheart to keep him company.

In no case would he have recognized him as Mr. Perrett, who, as one of Inspector Cortelyou's faithful and trusted lieutenants, was keeping, under various disguises and in his own inimitable fashion, a very pertinacious and sharp watch upon Mr. Stead's movements.

Perrett slowly followed the cashier down the narrow lane which led from the old village to the new. Now and then they passed groups of miners. It was too dark for the miners to recognize the powerful colliery official. But when they came into the lighted streets of the new village, and Stead began to nod to people here and there, Perrett crossed over to the other side, so as to obtain a better view of anything that might happen.

He was not afraid of losing sight of his quarry—he had followed a man for a whole day in the crowded London streets, and never allowed him to get out of touch with himself, and it seemed child's play to him to keep an eye on the cashier, who, so far, seemed to have done nothing out of the very ordinary—nothing, indeed, except to go to the counting-house at the colliery, and to the bank, and to his own house for meals and rest, and so on, and now, to-night, to the castle. It was humdrum; but, Perrett reflected, at any moment something might happen.

This particular evening more incidents seemed to be crowded into the cashier's prosaic promenade of the principal street; but they were, in Perrett's mind, of a distinctly domestic nature. Stead turned in at a shop, and Perrett beheld him go through the exciting process of choosing and buying a couple of chickens, which he carried away with him in a basket, evidently refusing a pressing and polite invitation on the part of the shopman to send the chickens to his house. Thence he repaired to a green grocer's and bought some grapes—Perrett saw the green grocer select a very fine bunch. Next the cashier visited a grocery establishment—what he bought there Perrett did not know, but the basket was now full.

Thence he followed him to a wine and spirit merchant's. Stead came out of that with a bottle protruding from the side-pocket of his summer overcoat, and thereafter went straight along the street, as if he were going home.

Perrett's private impression was that the cashier was going to have a supper party, or enjoy himself at dinner to-morrow, and he began to think about his own supper. But instead of Stead going straight home, he suddenly turned into one of the new streets which led toward the river, and at the foot of this turned again across a piece of waste land, at the further side of which a row of cottages stood outlined against the sky.

Here and there on the waste land, the last remnants of the coppices and hedgerows which had once covered it, stood isolated bushes. Perrett skillfully followed his quarry across the waste by means of these, and at last saw him approach one of the cottages, and, after a tap at the door, enter without further ceremony. And then Mr. Perrett began to wish that he knew what was going on inside.

If he had been inside he would only have been surprised, for the cashier was visiting the cottage on an errand of mercy. It was an old-fashioned cottage—one of three or four which had been left among the fields by the riverside when the great colliery was made—and when he lifted the latch he walked into a rafted living room, with an

open fireplace wide enough for half a dozen people to sit in. At that moment, however, there was nobody there but a woman of rather over middle age, who, at Stead's entrance, rose and made him a curtsy.

"Well, Mrs. Hardacre," said the cashier, with a voice and manner which Phillipa, had she been there, would scarcely have recognized as those which had been recently used in her presence, "and how is the patient to-night? Better?"

The woman came nearer the table on which Stead had set down the basket containing his purchases.

"Why, Mr. Stead," she answered, "he's neither better nor worse. The doctor, he's been in twice during the day—he was here not an hour ago, and give him something, and he's left me a draft for the night for him—and, of course, he says, does the doctor, that the broken leg's nothing, and the broken ribs not so much worse, though he doesn't like them, 'cause of possible complications, as he calls them, but neither leg nor ribs bothers the doctor much."

"What does bother him, then?" asked Stead.

"He's that restless," replied Mrs. Hardacre, nodding in the direction of the stairs. "Me and the nurse has a fine time with him now and again, I can tell you!"

"Never been delirious, has he?" asked Stead.

"Never what you might really call delirious," answered Mrs. Hardacre. "No—shouts in his sleep now and then, but that's natural to broken legs. I remember that when my poor mother broke her leg—you'll not recollect her, Mr. Stead, you being too young when you came here, but your good mother would—she used to talk and chatter in her sleep something curdling to the blood. It's the pain as makes 'em do it, sir."

"You've never heard him say anything?" asked Stead. "That is, anything definite?"

"Nay, sir—they never do. It's naught but a mumble, mumble, or a sudden shout," answered Mrs. Hardacre. "They shout and call out, sir, when the pain tweaks 'em."

Stead looked round the cottage. "I suppose the nurse is out?" he said.

"Yes, sir, she's gone up to the village—

she knows some people there. But she'll not be long," added Mrs. Hardacre. "It's her turn to sit up to-night—it was mine last night."

Stead began to unpack the contents of his basket and to lay them on the table.

"Well, here are the things that were wanted, Mrs. Hardacre," he said. "Here are the chickens to make the broth, and here are the meat extracts and the jellies, and those are the groceries you said you could make him some light puddings from, and—I think that's all. Oh, here's the brandy; but mind, the doctor said you were not to use that except in case of any fainting or collapse."

"Oh, I know, sir—we know what to do, me and the nurse," said Mrs. Hardacre. "Of course, you know, Mr. Stead, she's younger nor what I am, and she has the new-fangled ways; but we get on very well, sir, and we've had no disagreements, thank goodness!"

"No, that's not worth while," said Stead. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out some gold. "Well, here's a pound or two to be going on with, Mrs. Hardacre," he continued, handing it over to her. "That's for yourself, you know."

"Thanking you kindly, sir, and you're very generous," said Mrs. Hardacre. "Depend upon it, sir, the poor gentleman shall have all the attention I can give him."

Stead picked up the bunch of grapes, half showing from its wrappings, and glanced at the stairs. "I wonder if he's asleep," he said. "I should just like to see how he is."

"Why, you'd do no harm by stepping up and seeing, sir," said Mrs. Hardacre. "He does a deal of dozing, off and on."

The cashier stole up the staircase as softly as a cat. Just as softly and quietly he turned the handle of a bedroom door and, entering, closed it behind him. Mrs. Hardacre in the living room beneath heard no sound from above.

The room which Stead had entered was of considerable size; it filled, indeed, the whole of the upper story of the cottage. The floor of plain wooden planks was bare of carpet or rug save in places, but was as scrupulously clean as soap and water could

make it. The walls, color washed in a pale lilac tint, were destitute of picture or ornament save for a few texts printed in the midst of floral designs on strips of cardboard. The furniture was plain but neat. There was a scent of lavender in the room which seemed to add to its homeliness.

But Stead was noticing none of these things. He tiptoed across the floor to the side of the bed, which stood between the door and the window, and looked down. Seeing that the occupant was asleep, he remained perfectly quiet, watching him with speculative eyes.

The man who lay in the bed, muttering incoherently in his uneasy slumbers, was apparently of middle age and of over medium height. His head, well formed and handsome, was covered with a mass of hair which, originally dark in color, was now thickly shot with gray. His beard, somewhat thin and straggling, was also rapidly grizzling, and had here and there a white hair in it.

The face was thin, especially about the nose and the temples; and the eyes, around which were many wrinkles, were deeply sunk. As for the features, they were finely modeled and intellectual. One hand, which lay outside the coverlet, was long and shapely, with the slender, tapering fingers of the artist or the inventor of delicate mechanism.

Stead remained at the bedside in an attitude of perfect quiet, until the man in the bed stirred restlessly, and at last opened his eyes with a murmured "Who's there,"

He seemed as if meditating a rising movement. The cashier laid a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Don't try to rise," he said, soothingly. "You've only just awaked. Lie still a minute or two."

The man turned his eyes on him with something like a frown, and then let his head drop back.

"Ah, yes," he said, in a half-weary, half-irritable tone. "I remember now. This confounded broken leg—and ribs, too! Let's see, you're the doctor, aren't you, No, no—you're the other one, the one who's been kind. I'm much obliged to you, sir—you're very good."

"Not at all—not at all," said Stead. "I'm glad to find you so much better to-night. See, I have brought some grapes for your acceptance. Let me break some off for you, they'll cool your mouth."

The sick man eyed him wonderingly as he gave him some grapes one by one, and at last he passed his hand over his forehead with a half-impatient gesture.

"You're very kind," he said again. "It's queer that I can't—of course, I know that I've got a broken leg, and broken ribs, and that I'm among strangers and being very well and kindly looked after—but I can't remember how I got here. How did I get here, and where am I?"

"The doctor has given strict orders," said Stead, "that you are on no account to talk, or to be talked to, on that subject. You are to rest and be nursed, and you will be all right."

The man's fingers toyed restlessly with the bedclothes. "I expect I've injured my head somehow," he muttered. "Otherwise I'm all right."

"Oh, you're all right," said the cashier, reassuringly.

"The last thing I remember," said the man, dreamily, as if he were half asleep, "the last thing I remember—"

He paused, and Stead made no comment, although he was listening keenly for what the other might say. But the man laughed gently, as if amused at his own discomfiture.

"It's queer," he said, "but I can't remember what is the last thing that I remember. Anyway, I've got smashed up somehow. Those are very good grapes. Thank you."

Just then the nurse came into the room, and, after a word or two with her, Stead quietly took his departure. He said good night to Mrs. Hardacre, and went out into the now dark night. And Perrett, who had kept a patient watch behind a convenient bush, once more dogged the cashier's footsteps.

This time Stead went straight home. He lived not far away from the cottages he had just left, in an old house which stood near a disused lime quarry. He passed within its portals, and for that night Perrett saw him no more.

Once at home, Stead went to his private room and ate the simple supper set out for him. And that over, after some striding about the room, he went to a safe set in the deep wall, and, unlocking it with a combination key, took from it a brown-paper parcel, from which he drew an object that would have seemed of no significance to any one but him, but which he knew to contain the real clew to the Mannersley mystery.

That object was—a man's deerstalker hat.

CHAPTER XV.

PHILLIPA ACTS.

WHEN Marshall Stead left Phillippa Mannersley in the morning room at the castle, he left perhaps the unhappiest young woman in England behind him. For fully a quarter of an hour Phillippa remained where she stood by the table, drumming upon it ceaselessly with her fingers and staring at the vacant space where the cashier had stood.

She could not realize what had happened. She had never liked Stead, but she had never actually disliked him. She knew that her father liked and trusted him, and that had been enough for her. But she had always had an uneasy feeling, an instinct, that there was something behind Stead's smooth and quiet manner. Now that he had revealed himself to her, she knew him not only for a schemer, but for a villain.

She felt the blood in her veins turn to fire and then to ice as she remembered what had just occurred—she—she was to be the price of this man's bargain! She felt shamed and humiliated to the very core.

And she had given him her word to keep confidence! She was to go about with this shameful secret, live with it, be with it always—that he was bartering his knowledge against her. She was to give her life, herself, her all to him in exchange for divulging a secret which, if he had been an honest man, would have been no secret. And she had given him her word—her word!

"Oh, if I only had some one," she said to herself, "to whom I could turn and tell everything! But—"

And then the dreadful truth forced itself upon her once more—she had given her word. And to a girl of Phillippa Mannersley's stamp, a girl who had been brought up with the strictest notions of honor, and who, moreover, had equally strict and natural notions of her own, the mere idea of breaking faith was as dreadful as the idea of high treason would be to an ardent royalist.

She knew little of sleep that night, and she could eat no breakfast next morning. The distant relative who was staying with her—she had no near relations except her cousin Clinton—was anxious and troubled about her, but thought that she was still fretting over her father's death. But before she came down Phillippa had formed a resolution, and early in the forenoon she left the castle to carry it out.

She was going to ask advice on a question of conscience, and so she went across the road and through the churchyard to the vicarage to find the old vicar, who had known her ever since she was born, and had a great affection for her. Him she found in his study poring over one of his treasured books, and she plunged at once into the matter which had brought her there.

"Mr. Scott," she said when she had dropped into her favorite chair at the old parson's side, "is it ever right to break one's word?"

The vicar pushed his spectacles high up on his forehead and looked at her as if he wanted to hear more.

"I mean under any circumstances," she said.

"It is generally held that one should never break one's word under any circumstances whatever, my dear," replied the old man. "But," he added, thoughtfully, "I must confess that it has often occurred to me that there might be circumstances which would justify one in doing so."

"Supposing," said Phillippa; "supposing you had given your word to somebody whom you subsequently found out to be very bad, very wicked, indeed, and that that somebody ought never to have exacted your word from you—what then?"

The old vicar took off his spectacles and polished them thoughtfully.

"You mean, I suppose, my dear, a case

where one's word has been given under compulsion?" he said.

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Phillippa with great eagerness. "Yes—that's it—under compulsion. Where you were made to give it, you know."

"Under a threat of what might happen to yourself, or to some other person, to your or the other person's hurt?" asked the vicar.

"Yes, yes!" replied Phillippa.

Mr. Scott put his spectacles on again with calm deliberation.

"There is a certain school of theologians," he said with a sly smile which Phillippa did not understand, "which would tell you that a promise made under such conditions is no promise at all; that a promise or vow exacted by threat, or compulsion, or necessity has no moral or religious obligations.

"And I am not sure that I do not agree with that school," he continued with a quiet chuckle. "I am quite sure that if a man came in here and held a pistol to my head and threatened to shoot me unless I promised to give him his dinner next Sunday I should certainly promise, but I should feel very reluctant to keep my promise."

"Oh, thank you, thank you—you are always so wise!" exclaimed Phillippa, and darted out of the room as suddenly as she had entered it, leaving the old vicar to wonder what was the matter with her. She ran across to the castle and into the hall.

"I want the brougham at once, Dauncey, please," she said. "Tell them to be quick."

Within a quarter of an hour she was driving down to the colliery. Naturally quick-witted and active, she had determined to lose no time in doing what she had made up her mind to do. And in the interval of leaving the vicarage and getting into the brougham she had decided to tell Mark Quinton of all that had passed on the previous night between Stead and herself. She felt that of all the people about her Quinton was most to be trusted.

But Phillippa was not the girl to take a mean advantage. She was going to break her word to Marshall Stead, but she was also going to tell Marshall Stead what she was about to do before she did it. She would not speak behind his back. And so, when the brougham drew up at the offices

of the colliery, and Phillippa stepped out, she turned to the counting house, and, entering the cashier's department, asked to see the principal.

There was scarcely a clerk in the counting house who could remember ever seeing Miss Mannersley there before, and the young proprietress of Mannersley Main was received as if she had been a princess. And Mr. Marshall Stead himself came out all business, decorum, and politeness, and bowed her into the private office where Phillippa at one glance saw that they were alone.

"I do not wish to sit down," she said, ignoring the chair which he placed for her. "What I have to say will be said in a few words. I have come to tell you that I unreservedly take back that promise which I gave you—or, rather, which you forced from me—last night. I intend to make known all you told me—and at once."

If a sudden explosion in the workings far beneath them had happened at that moment Marshall Stead could scarcely have been more astounded than he was. His usual sang-froid left him; he turned red and white, and finally a sickly gray; his mouth opened, and his face twitched.

"But—your—your word of honor!" he stammered.

"You extorted my word from me in the vilest of fashions!" she said with blazing eyes. "I am advised that I am under no obligation to you to keep it. I am not going to do so. There is one thing more I have to say to you. After last night I know what sort of man you are. I will no longer have you in my employ. Mr. Quinton will pay you a year's salary—two—five—ten years' salary, if necessary, and you will go!"

Stead had recovered himself by that time. He allowed a little of his true self to peep out.

"So you mean your cousin to be hanged!" he said with the sneer of the man who suddenly discovers that his game is up.

"I would rather see my cousin hanged, drawn, and quartered than owe his life to a man like you!" she exclaimed. "But I am not afraid, for now I do not believe your story!"

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"We will see," he answered quietly. "You do ill to turn me into an enemy."

Phillippa made no reply. But with her hand on the door she turned and looked at him.

"Remember!" she said. "I am mistress here. I will not have you in my employ one hour longer."

Then she swept out, feeling very dignified and much older, through the counting house and round to the general offices, and there demanded the manager. And while she waited during the moment which elapsed before Quinton came to her, she realized that all the weight of the horrible night had dropped clean away from her.

If Mark Quinton was astonished to see Miss Mannersley at the offices so soon after her father's death, he was much more astonished to hear the story which she poured out to him. It had seemed to her that she would never be able to tell it to a human soul, but her indignation against Stead had roused her to such a pitch that she told the manager everything without hesitation.

And Quinton, who listened with his hands tightly clenched in his trouser pockets, heartily wishing that he could kick Stead all around the yard and then hand him over to the colliers, heard her out, and said nothing to interrupt her.

"There is only one thing to do, Miss Mannersley," he said when Phillippa had finished. "You must tell all this to the police. But after what has happened, it will not surprise me if Stead attempts to clear out. Now I have particular reasons why he should not clear out—at least, out of Mannersley. The fact of the case is, between ourselves, I am going more closely into the books of the colliery than has been done for years, and I do not want to lose touch of Mr. Stead."

"You don't mean—" began Phillippa.

"Never mind what I mean just now," said Quinton, smiling at her in a reassuring fashion. "Just excuse me a moment while I step into the outer office—there's a small matter I must attend to."

Left alone, Phillippa, who had no mind to look at the illustrated paper which Quinton had handed her, reflected on the events of the last eighteen hours. She had been su-

premely miserable; she now felt, if not happy, at any rate, immensely relieved.

What astonished her was the conduct of Stead—that the mild-mannered, suave, studiously polite young man, who had always seemed the very pink of propriety, should suddenly show himself in such a new light, was to her a thing hard of understanding. She was still meditating on this curious psychological instance when Quinton came back, and, closing the door, stood with his hand upon the knob without advancing into the room.

"Here's a new development, Miss Mannersley," he said. "You know Jim Britten, of course. He has just brought one of the miners here—that big man. Moses Pogmore, whom they call Black Moses. He has a story to tell which bears a very significant relation to what you have just told me. Shall I bring them in?"

"Oh, do, do, Mr. Quinton!" exclaimed Phillipa. "Do let us hear anything!"

Jim Britten and Black Moses had evidently been in close proximity to the door, for they entered as soon as the manager opened it.

Phillipa shook hands with Jim, and then with Black Moses, who had evidently considered the affair on which he had come so serious that he had put on his best clothes and a bowler hat which, being two sizes too small for him, made him look like an enlarged schoolboy.

"Sit down, Britten—sit down, Pogmore," said Quinton, handing them chairs close to his desk, near which Phillipa was sitting.

"Now, Pogmore, I've just told Miss Mannersley that you've something to tell, and she wants to hear it. So fire away!"

Black Moses, who, like all the miners, had an admiration for Phillipa which bordered almost on worship, summoned up all his courage, and, after various preliminary groans and coughs, expressive of his sense of gratitude in being allowed to address such a young divinity, began to hold forth.

"Well, ye see, missie, likewise mum, which I'm no great hand at tellin' a tale, it were this way," he said. "Ye see, mum, I live, as Jim there knows, in that cottage in the old brick field, and nat'rally, as no one else lives thereabouts, I've come to look

on that there brick field as the chap did what lived on the desert island—I disremember his name.

"And sometimes of an evenin', there being nought to do, and happen not carin' about the public house, I take a stroll round the old buildin's, as is now tumble down—there's a fine bit o' ratting to be done in that brick field, only just now I ain't got a dog, more's the pity—and sometimes I sits down and smokes a pipe here or there. And that's how this here happened, sir," he said, turning to Quinton. "Weren't it, Jim, as I told you?"

"Yes, that's it," replied Jim. "Now, then, go on, Moses. Tell Miss Mannersley what did happen."

"Yes, and please tell it just your own way, Moses," said Phillipa. "And if you want a dog to go after the rats you shall have one from my fox terriers."

Thus emboldened, and feeling more at his ease, Mr. Pogmore proceeded to relate how on the previous evening, after dark, he chanced to overhear a conversation between two disreputable fellows, Steve Grandidge and Jack Moorsom, with respect to a transaction which they two were having with Marshall Stead, from which conversation it appeared that Messrs. Grandidge and Moorsom were to rebut the evidence of Ginger King, on lines supplied to them by Mr. Stead; that during the intervening space of time they were to keep sober; and that when things were settled they were to receive so much coin of the realm from Mr. Stead, who would further pay their passages to Canada.

He also heard their evidence carefully rehearsed, one checking the other in the matter of times, and so on.

"An' that there is the gospelled truth, s'elp me!" concluded Black Moses. "And if so be as I might come up for that there little dog, mum—"

When Jim Britten and Black Moses had gone the manager looked at Miss Mannersley, and Miss Mannersley looked at the manager. And suddenly, without a word, Quinton seized one of the many tubes lying on his desk.

"Find out," he said, "if Mr. Stead is in his room at the counting house."

Within a moment the answer came back.

"Mr. Stead left the office some time ago, sir."

Quinton laid down the tube and shook his head.

CHAPTER XVI.

"FORGERY!"

IF Phillippa Mannersley had been surprised by Marshall Stead's conduct at the castle, Marshall Stead was infinitely more surprised by Phillippa Mannersley's behavior at the counting house.

He was, in fact, so much surprised that when she walked out with her cheeks aflame, her fine eyes blazing, and her head in the air, he felt as if he had been turned to stone, and for the moment stood staring at the door through which she had vanished with eyes which certainly did not see it or anything. If he had been a man of more perception, if he had understood the language of the prize ring, he would have known that he was completely knocked out.

But the truth was that Marshall Stead, in spite of all his cleverness, was neither more nor less than that worst of all fools—a conceited one. He was sly, vain, and naturally bumptious; but he had early found out the advantages of concealing all sorts of feelings and qualities under a mask of smoothness.

He had got round the late Sir Robert Mannersley by a consistent politeness, deference, and strict attention to business; he had won the applause of most people by steady conduct and regular attendance at church. And he had gradually come to regard himself as so clever as to be able to deceive everybody.

That he had overshot his bolt in tackling Miss Phillippa Mannersley came as a regular revelation to him. He knew nothing, and never had known anything, of the world outside his own narrow limits; he knew just as little of women as he knew of the world.

His mother, the only woman he ever had really known, was an old-fashioned, easy-going woman, whose sole idea, from the time he remembered her, was a perpetual devotion to the service of Sir Robert, who had so befriended her at a time of need. She

was an easily managed, soft-natured woman; when he himself had grown up he had bullied her. In his foolishness he believed that all women were like her; you had only to cow them, to let them see that you held the upper hand, and they would come to heel like curs who fear the whip.

And now to find that this girl—this proud young beauty, whom he had fondly believed would agree to anything simply because he had threatened her, had dared to ignore the promise he had forced out of her, and had treated him as if he were mere dirt, was to him such a shock as he had never expected to receive. He had thought himself secure, simply because his cheap slyness had placed him in possession of a secret, and he had forced the pace. And now—

He shook himself together at last, and realized that he had made a mess of things. And at that he smiled, evilly.

"Never mind," he said. "She shan't have all her own way."

Then, remembering that Phillippa had gone to Quinton, and knowing that Quinton now was in full possession of power, he bustled into activity. Putting on his light overcoat he hastily filled the inside pockets with certain papers and documents. He took a check book from a drawer of his desk, and within five minutes of Phillippa's departure from the room, he, too, departed, and set off in the direction of the village.

A new set of thoughts and feelings had suddenly entered into Stead's imagination. The ineradicable vanity in him was urging him to show the proud daughter of a long line of baronets that whether she could keep her word or not, he, her summarily discharged servant, could. And with that end in view he made his way to the house in which Inspector Cortelyou had taken lodgings.

While Stead was thus journeying toward the queer little man from Scotland Yard, that astute personage was making a late breakfast, and at the same time interviewing Perrett. Naturally enough, the cashier was the subject of their conversation.

"Nothing much to do, eh, Perrett?" said the inspector pleasantly. "Ah, well, that's rather for me to decide, isn't it? What have you to report?"

Perrett pulled out a notebook and consulted some memoranda. "I went on at noon when Stevens went off," he said. "Stead came out of the offices at the usual time—one o'clock; went to his lodgings to dinner; came back to the offices at three; left at six; went home again, and at seven came out and went up to the castle; stayed there some time—"

"Some time? What time?" asked Inspector Cortelyou, sharply.

"Exactly three-quarters of an hour. Came out at eight forty; walked down to mining village. I followed him—"

"You might have left that out, Perrett," said the inspector. "You must have followed him or you couldn't have kept an eye on him. Well?"

"He called and made a purchase at a poulterer's, a grocer's, a greengrocer's, and a wine and spirits," continued Perrett. "Went on carrying a basket, and had a bottle in his pocket; proceeded to some cottages on a waste piece of ground.

"I subsequently ascertained cottages to be called Parker's Lane. Went into the middle one—there are only three of them—remained there about twenty minutes. I saw his shadow against the blind in the upper room. There is only one upper room in each cottage. He came out and went home; this morning went to offices as usual."

"Ah!" said Inspector Cortelyou. "Doesn't sound very interesting or illuminating, does it, Perrett? Anything else?"

"Yes, sir," replied Perrett, "but I have made a separate note of it. About a quarter of an hour after he entered the cottage a woman in a nurse's uniform came along and went in. I concluded from that, and from the fact that he purchased chickens at one shop, grapes at another, and either spirits or wine at a third, and took them to the cottage, that there was somebody ill there."

"A very reasonable deduction, Perrett," said Inspector Cortelyou, pouring himself out fresh coffee. "It does you credit. All right—off you go—if I want you or Stevens I shall let you know in the usual way."

Then the inspector turned to certain letters and documents, and Perrett went off. And if, on leaving the house, he had turned

to the right instead of to the left, he would have met Marshall Stead, who a minute or two later came up, knocked at the door, and in his usual quietly confidential manner, intimated that he desired to see Inspector Cortelyou.

The detective told his landlady to admit the visitor at once, and Stead came in, important and self-assured, but suave as ever. The inspector motioned him to a seat, and handed him a cigar case. Stead shook his head in some surprise.

"Oh, no, it's cigarettes that you smoke, isn't it?" said Inspector Cortelyou, and produced a box. "Help yourself, sir."

Stead took a cigarette, and looked surprised. "How did you know I smoked cigarettes?" he asked.

"By your fingers," replied Inspector Cortelyou. "I noticed them in court the other day. It's my way to notice everything. Well, what can I do for you, Mr. Stead?"

Stead, feeling somewhat nonplused by the detective's cool reception, was slightly embarrassed.

"The fact is, inspector," he said, "I—I called to speak to you about the murder of my late friend, Sir Robert."

"Aye, just so," said Inspector Cortelyou. "I know that, of course. And what about it, Mr. Stead? Have you anything to tell me?"

"If I chose I could tell you a great deal," replied Stead, who felt more and more nettled. "I came to tell you something."

"Then I shall be very glad to hear it," said the inspector. "Come, sir—I am known to be rather eccentric in speech and manner. If you can assist me, pray do so. I shall be obliged to you."

"Well, inspector," said Stead, somewhat mollified by this, "it will be in your recollection that on the night of the murder I called at the castle, and went into the library to wait. Now, for purposes of my own, I did not tell all I might have done at the magisterial inquiry."

"Ah, indeed?" said Inspector Cortelyou.

"No. When I entered the library," continued Stead, "I immediately noticed that one of the windows opening on the lawn was open. They are French windows, as you know, opening down to the ground.

That on the right hand side was open, and the blind, slightly drawn, was flapping. I crossed over and closed it, and drew down the blind."

Inspector Cortelyou took out a notebook.

"You don't mind if I make a memorandum of what you tell me?" he said. "It will, of course, be useful."

"Oh, by no means!" replied Stead. "I intend, of course, to relate all this at the adjourned hearing, but I wished you to know now."

"Just so," said the detective, who had been writing. "Pray proceed, Mr. Stead."

"Well," continued Stead, "in turning from the window I noticed something lying on a chair. Something, you understand, unusual!"

"Ah. Unusual in that place—the library? And what was it?" asked Inspector Cortelyou, busy with his pencil.

"It was a deer-stalker hat."

Inspector Cortelyou continued to write for a moment or two without looking up or betraying any undue interest.

"A deer-stalker hat? Ah, probably one of Sir Robert's," he said.

"No," replied Stead, who scarcely understood the detective's manner. "It was certainly not one of Sir Robert's! It was an old, much-worn, rather greasy hat—not at all the sort of thing that Sir Robert would have worn. It had been a good hat—it bore the name of a good maker—Heath, of Oxford Street."

Inspector Cortelyou smiled. "You would have been a credit to my profession, Mr. Stead," he remarked. "You know how to notice little things. Pray proceed."

"Well," continued Stead, who drank in compliment of any sort with avidity, "after—after the discovery of the dreadful event—"

"You mean Sir Robert's murder?" interrupted the detective, shortly.

"Yes, after that—and, of course, when the natural flurry had subsided—I remembered the hat," said Stead, "and I went back to the library and put it in my pocket and took it home."

"Mention it to anybody?" asked Inspector Cortelyou.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have always made it a rule," answered Stead, "not to tell my business to any one until the right moment comes."

"A very excellent rule. Go on," said the inspector.

"I come to the next point of my story," continued Stead. "I do not know whether you are aware of the exact position of my residence—I shall be pleased to see you to a cup of tea there one of these days—but close by it is a quarry which has long been out of use. It is very badly fenced in, and at one part the railings are broken down. There are no lights about there, and a stranger wandering about or losing his way could easily fall over the edge. Now, on the night of Sir Robert's death—"

"Murder!" corrected the detective, laconically.

"As I was returning home," Stead went on, ignoring the interruption, "I heard groans proceeding from this quarry as from some one in great pain. The quarry lies between my house and some old cottages which were left in the fields when the colliery was laid out.

"I procured help from the cottages, and a lantern, and went down into the quarry. There I found a man lying at the foot of a steep wall of rock over which he had evidently fallen. He was groaning, but unconscious. As soon as I saw him I recognized him."

Inspector Cortelyou looked up with quickened interest. "Ah, you recognized him!" he exclaimed. "As whom?"

"As a certain Dr. Julius Steinthal, from London, who for many years had from time to time pestered Sir Robert with a scheme for neutralizing the effect of after-damp in the case of an explosion, and had given him a great deal of annoyance," answered Stead.

"In fact, lately he had scarcely left Sir Robert alone; and though Sir Robert did not believe in the invention or scheme, Steinthal's letters became almost threatening. My own impression is that he is not quite sane."

"Well, you found him in the quarry—what then?" asked the detective.

"I had him conveyed to the cottage of a woman who goes out nursing and has a

room to spare, Mrs. Hardacre," answered Stead.

"I sent for Dr. Hibbert and a nurse. The doctor found that Steinthal had broken a leg and some ribs, and that there was some injury to his head. As a matter of fact, he has lost his memory."

Inspector Cortelyou closed his pocket-book with a snap.

"He is still, then, at the cottage?" he said.

"Oh, yes, and is being well looked after," answered Stead. "He can't get away."

"Now then, what is your theory?" asked the detective.

"I believe he killed Sir Robert," replied Stead, slowly. "He had no hat or cap when I found him—the deer-stalker fits him; moreover, I have seen him in it, for he has visited Mannersley several times. He knew the castle well—my theory is that he obtained admission through that open window, and left by it after he had committed the murder."

The detective, who had put on his hat and picked up his umbrella, nodded.

"I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Stead," he said. "You are helping considerably to clear matters up. Now, you won't object to walking down to the station

with me? We must tell this to Illingworth."

"Oh, not at all!" replied Stead. "I am glad to be of help. Anything to clear Sir Clinton of this dreadful charge."

He accompanied Inspector Cortelyou to the station and into Illingworth's room. The latter looked at them in surprise—Inspector Cortelyou gave him a look and a wink. And somehow the little man from Scotland Yard managed to get between Stead and the door. He suddenly spoke, and his voice sounded strangely different.

"Now, Mr. Stead," he said, "it's no use mincing matters. Quite apart from what you've told me this morning, all of which I can quickly verify for myself, Mr. Illingworth and I were going to call on you a little later, as we wished to see you on an important matter. However, here you are, so we needn't waste time. The fact is, Mr. Stead, we hold a warrant for your arrest."

Stead, who had been staring at the detective as if he were trying to make out the sudden change in his voice and manner, started back.

"A warrant—for my arrest?" he exclaimed. "But—but on what charge?"

Inspector Cortelyou rapped out the answer in one word. "Forgery!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



TO A LOVER

BEFORE I knew you, did sun rise,
Sun set, or did the skies
Grow spangled with the Milky Way,
Or crimson into breaking day?

Before I knew you, did rose blush
At kiss of bee, or day's life hush
To silence of the night, or water fall
In splash of joy, or wild birds call?

Before I knew you, was life buried seed
Or chrysalis, or undone deed?
And was it you who made me see
And hear and feel life's ecstasy?

Eva Anne Madden.



Exploits of Beau Quicksilver

By FLORENCE M. PETTEE

V.—THE GREEN RAJAH

C RAGMORELAND was in the grip of a diabolical epidemic. But the prevalent pest was not that of disease. It pertained to a series of most audacious gem thefts. Moreover, the purloinings were consummated on a scale seldom met with, either in this country or abroad.

In the midst of the epidemic Chief Cartman of the police department was hastily summoned one morning to a private conclave in the office of Waite Claverly—a financial and commercial power in the community.

"I suppose," sneered the chief, "that you think you can give the department some dope on how to solve these jewel riddles! Undoubtedly you believe that the answer to the vanished baubles is just meat and drink to the layman! Or have you asked me here to set up another infuriated howl—"

Waite Claverly shrugged his shoulders.

"You haven't hit it yet," he remarked quietly, proffering a box of cigars.

Waite Claverly was president of an influential insurance company, as well as a big personal loser by one of the thefts. Mrs.

The first story of this series appeared in the Argosy-Allstory for February 24.

Claverly had missed her marvelous diamonds at a dance given in the famous ballroom of the Hotel Galland. The Claverlys had made loud, repeated and violent protestations concerning the kidnaped necklace. The C. I. D. had done its level best. Uselessly, however. The diamonds, worth a queen's ransom, had flown on obscure, swift, but entirely effective wings. This crime, like others, had occurred almost under the very noses of the police.

Then the noted diva, Mlle. Zerani, was minus her string of perfect pearls. The robbery occurred shamelessly, and with great embarrassment to those present, at an exclusive afternoon tea given by Lady Allenwhite in honor of the popular songbird. Hereupon the police put down their square-toed, inelegant boots firmly. They penned the guests willy-nilly in the house of Lady Allenwhite. They searched the shocked inmates. They used a fine-toothed comb over the house. Again without result.

Straightway each and every guest set up such a ferocious roar at the indignity, that the police even now get hot under the collar at the mere mention of the distressing affair. So one might continue with the narration of other jewel thefts occurring under seemingly insoluble circumstances.

Waite Claverly's interest in running down the miscreants was twofold. In addition to the loss of Mrs. Claverly's valuable necklace, his firm was daily being importuned to pay out huge indemnities. For the major part of the jewels carried heavy insurance.

"The company has met in executive session," confided Waite Claverly to Chief Cartman. "The gem thefts have got to stop. The papers and the people at large are still protesting violently even though your department is doing its best. There is only one man who can dig out the answer—"

Chief Cartman raised his big head. "You're right. To hell with the Seine drownings and the needs of the Prefect of Police at Paris! We've got to have Beau Quicksilver back in a hurry!"

"Now you're talking!" agreed Waite Claverly. "Here's a cable form."

Puffing like a volcano, Chief Cartman grabbed the sheet. He wrote in barbed code. The S. O. S. summons set down with a reckless disregard of expense a skeleton outline of the amazing jewel robberies. And he finished the mandate with those very agreeable words, "Expense no object."

The cablegram was dispatched with all possible celerity. In due time:

"Coming on the Xavia," flashed back Beau Quicksilver.

II.

A GOODLY crowd assembled for the docking of the Xavia. The big ocean liner had dropped anchor in the harbor the night before. For she had steamed in after hours, and her passengers could not be landed until the quarantine guardians of public safety boarded her the next morning. While the passengers fumed and fretted, the big wireless sputtered and chuckled with fiery glee. Messages in code went skipping skyward, ultimately to be transferred from their celestial orbit to decidedly mundane destinations.

At last the gangplank was down. The big sea-monster began to disgorge its cargo of human freight. Norling, a reporter from the *Breeze*, occupied a front place by the restraining rope. An admiring companion was with him.

"Got wind that there's a notable bunch aboard," he confided, slipping a couple of extra plates into his celebrity shooter as he poised the camera in readiness.

Then the first passenger alighted—a dapper, fashionably attired figure in the nobbiest of great-coats and swinging a Mahowa cane.

"Did you pipe that guy there?" whispered Norling. "That's Beau Quicksilver, the famous dude detective, answering a hurry call from headquarters. Got to get the answer to these wholesale gem kidnappings. They'd loaned him to the Parisian police. But I understand they cabled him to beat it in a hurry. Say, he's the Marconi of the criminal world. A regular wiz. Clever! Why, nobody can even guess what the fellow does know! Regular mine of queer information."

The smartly clad newcomer flipped back his coat to an official. On seeing the little silver badge there, that custom's dignitary passed his luggage without even the formality of a search. Then the slight, swagger figure peremptorily put up a suede-gloved finger for a taxi. In a twinkling the door shut him from sight and the cab shot away.

At this moment there was a stir and the craning of necks. A grande dame was disembarking accompanied by her suite. The woman's haughty bearing and snow-white hair would set her apart anywhere. It branded her as a somebody without the necessity for any formal introduction.

"Some valuable birds aboard," continued Norling. "That's the Countess Zer and her retainers. She's here for a social season. They say her jewels would make a queen choke with envy. Among them is the Green Rajah. It is said to be a magnificent, pear-shaped emerald. Nobody knows its value in money. The countess comes at a critical time. For if I were a crook I should throw an itching at the palms to nab that big, sea-green bauble."

Two of the titled stranger's party parleyed with the custom's inspector and remained with the stack of luggage bearing the Zer coat-of-arms. Meantime the countess and her remaining attendants entered two huge limousines and disappeared from the sight of the gaping crowd.

III.

WITH the coming of the aristocratic lady from overseas Cragmoreland's wholesale jewel crimes were temporarily forgotten. And no wonder! For the noble visitor distinguished herself almost immediately as a person of dazzling brilliancy, and of clever bon mots. Her repartee was at times almost epigrammatic. Cragmoreland sat up and took notice.

The Countess Zer and her notable retinue were soon established in the town-house of the Claverlys—a lease of the fine mansion becoming possible with the departure of the Claverlys for an ocean voyage on their yacht. The Countess Zer immediately entered upon a round of social affairs. She was fêted and entertained lavishly. Her

wardrobe was the envy and despair of all feminine Cragmoreland. Assuredly the elegant, snowy-haired dame believe that variety was the spice—nay the very essence—of daily apparel.

But added to her beautiful wardrobe were her gems. These were the last straw to break the backs of any hesitating stiff-necks. Her collection was marvelous. She seemed to have gems to match each gown. Daily Cragmoreland watched and wondered. They were avid for a glimpse of the wonderful Green Rajah—said to be the world's finest emerald. Yet with tantalizing remissness, the Countess Zer did not appear with the pear-shaped gem strung about her throat on its platinum chain. Cragmoreland felt cheated. They hungered for a glimpse of the stone.

Then, one momentous day, the Countess Zer's imposing limousine with the Zer coat-of-arms emblazoned on the door, drove up with a flourish of cylinders and a fanfare of adulatory glances to the offices of the chief of police. The lady made a considerable visit within that drab interior.

Subsequently it was whispered in the papers, like a stage aside, that the Countess Zer had sought police protection for her wonderful gems after hearing considerable alarming conversation concerning the hauls which had recently been taking place.

This knowing whisper soon gained substance. For almost immediately afterward the Countess Zer sent out invitations for a week-end which was to wind up with her first ball. Yet, in all, only two dozen invitations went forth to cause havoc and hatred among certain aspiring hearts in Cragmoreland. The buzzing increased daily. Assuredly the Countess Zer ignored precedent with a lavish and autocratic hand. But the chosen few plumed and prepared themselves for the momentous occasion.

Already it was noised about that at this ball the Countess Zer would wear for the first time the famous Green Rajah. Subtly queried on the matter, the Countess Zer smiled knowingly and discussed the Russian ballet. Then Cragmoreland knew for a certainty that the Green Rajah would be worn for the first time on the night of the ball.

Big limousines, snappy roadsters and every other genus of the automobile family, rolled up the splendid drive to the Countess Zer's Cragmoreland "castle." The weekend was on with a flourish. Cragmoreland held its breath—and waited expectantly for the ball. The entire atmosphere of the city was strung up for some unexpected dénouement. And now that the first glamour surrounding the titled lady had dimmed a bit, the sinister circumstances surrounding the momentarily forgotten gem hauls returned with redoubled vigor.

The time preceding the ball passed all too swiftly for the super-elect who numbered the Countess Zer's chosen few. Since the reporters received no new copy concerning what was going on within, they contented themselves with a rehash of certain bon mots of the distinguished lady.

"A person's *arteries* don't harden—it's his *ideas*," the countess had responded to the would-be personal gibe made by Mrs. Porter-Rockford when she solicitously inquired if the visiting stranger had yet been troubled with that malady. Again, she was asked by the young social favorite, Lalla Marlborough, a stately beauty, "Now, Countess Zer, do tell us what Continental artists consider the ideal height for a woman." Promptly Countess Zer answered, "Five feet four and three-quarters." "But I am five feet seven," pouted Lalla Marlborough. "Ah," flashed back the countess, "you, my dear young lady, are more than ideal!"

Within the temporary abode of the Countess Zer full-fledged preparations continued for the ball.

But the brilliant social function was doomed not to occur. For at eight twenty-five on that unforgettable evening the Countess Zer dashed out of her suite. Her hair was disheveled, her beautiful dressing-robe twisted and awry.

"My ancestral heritage!" she screamed two tones higher than her usual high-pitched voice. "The Green Rajah! It's gone!"

Then two unknown "guests" stepped forward. They were plain-clothes men, loaned by the police for any emergency. They moved with belated but sincere rapid-

ity. They called up the chief. Presumably that dignitary swore vehemently in unprintable billingsgate. He dispatched a motorcycle corps to the house immediately.

The facts were few. The Countess Zer had merely stepped from her sleeping-chamber into her dressing-room for the briefest time—not more than three minutes, she declared. She had just brought forth the Green Rajah from its secret hiding-place—which to this day remains unknown. She had placed it on her dressing-table, which stood between the two windows across the room from the dressing-room door. And when she went back the Green Rajah was gone.

The guests were instantly detained in the house. Men were posted at all exits. There was no possibility of a single premature escape.

Bellamy, a young man from headquarters, took charge of the preliminary skirmishings. He issued orders like a martinet.

"Now you first, Madame la Comtesse," he suggested briskly.

He was using as his temporary inquisitorial chamber the big sitting-room on the second floor which he had commandeered for the unpleasant task. The guests he had ordered to remain in their rooms where they presumably had been when the Green Rajah vanished.

"Was the door of your sleeping-room locked, madame?" he asked.

The countess, pale and distraught, twisted her satin dressing-gown. "But no, *mon-sieur*. I thought I had shot the bolt. Alas, now it appears that this was not so. I should not otherwise have left the Green Rajah for a second had I believed the room to be unlocked."

Young Bellamy jotted down the fact in an imposing looking notebook.

"I'll look into that," he said. "It bears examination. If you did shoot the bolt—uselessly—well, we shall see. Now, have I the layout of your suite correctly? Your sleeping-chamber from whose dresser the Green Rajah was taken, is the middle room between your sitting-room and your dressing-room. There are connecting doors between these rooms and each one has a door on the corridor?"

"Of a verity, that is so."

"Now, beyond your dressing-room into which you stepped for the briefest time is only your bathroom with its single entrance into the dressing-room?"

She nodded affirmation.

"Were the corridor doors of the other rooms locked when you discovered the robbery?"

"Yes, they were, and still remain so."

Bellamy tapped on his notebook with his pencil. "Your servants now, are they trustworthy?"

"They all come splendidly recommended. But that isn't all," she added with agitation.

"Well?" he asked bluntly.

"That Mr. Green, whom your chief sent down from headquarters, was posted in the alcove at the foot of the stairs to see that no one came up. And the other man—I do not recall his name—was in the vicinity of the other staircase—"

"Which entirely eliminates the servants," granted Bellamy. "Awkward, isn't it?"

"*Mon Dieu! C'est terrible—terrible—*"

"May I see the list of your invited guests?"

"I have it with me. I had anticipated that request." With trembling fingers she proffered him a sheet of paper.

For a moment, only the rustle of the list and Bellamy's narrowed lids told of anything unusual occurring within the guarded house.

Then he whistled. "Pretty kettle of fish! Every name here is a regular bulwark of respectability—a monument of family, money and breeding!"

The countess raised her aristocratic brows a bit haughtily. "The list was the result of much cogitation. I would invite only the elite of your city. The proletariat and the *nouveau riches* are so crass. They irk me like cubist painting, free verse and stucco. They are so very new and garish, don't you know?"

"Ya—as," answered Bellamy glibly. Then he reddened to the tips of his ears. But she seemed unconscious of his impertinent retort.

"Well, there is nothing to it," he decided, "but to make a personal examination of

each guest. I'll phone headquarters for a matron. Before I begin the personal inspection I'll give the billiard room on this floor the once-over to be sure the gem isn't cached there. Then as fast as we go through each guest we'll corral him—or her—in this previously searched billiard room. If a personal examination does not produce the Green Rajah, I shall go through each guest's room, not once but several times. *For the gem must be in this house, either on the person of the thief or cunningly salted somewhere.*"

"A tremendous task," sighed the lady.

"Yes, but not impossible of result. Heretofore, in this epidemic of jewel robberies, the cases have been bungled at the outset. There have been loopholes. This time there are none. The gem is hermetically sealed in this house, as it were."

The countess arose to depart. She had aged unbelievably. The wrinkles showed now with the makeup forgotten.

"You know," she said significantly, before opening the door, "that a great reward is the price for quick and expert investigation. The gem *must be recovered.*"

"I'll do my best, madam," he answered.

Then the countess retired hastily to her own apartments.

IV.

BELLAMY searched the billiard room. He was satisfied that there was nothing there. Then, one by one, the indignant and protesting guests were marshaled for the personal search. Each one who entered could show as an alibi a pedigree the proverbial foot long, an impressive bank-roll, and near-scandal-proof social connections. As the countess had said, she had skimmed only the rich cream from Cragmoreland's exclusive social set.

While Bellamy and the matron in turn were overtly busy with each person in the sitting room, another figure crept with noiseless and lightning rapidity from room to room of each guest. The sixth member of the exclusive assemblage had hardly disappeared into the billiard room, when this slight, stealing figure hurried down to a phone in a sound-proof box at the foot of the stairs.

A low colloquy ensued. "Chief. All right. *You know my voice.* Chief, get Lalla Marlborough's residence at once. Find out for me if—" Then the mysterious, elusive figure spoke directly into the mouthpiece.

Fifteen minutes later this same stealthy figure slid up the stairs, three steps at a time. He knocked on the door of the commandeered room.

"Bellamy," he ordered crisply, "go to the billiard room. Ask Miss Marlborough to come here at once."

"B-but, sir, the matron has already examined her," answered young Bellamy perplexedly. "She just left."

"Bring her back," insisted the slim stranger, and he strode to a window.

Shortly an exceedingly furious and stunning looking woman re-entered.

"What does this repeated outrage mean?" she demanded. "You shall smart for this! I'll have my attorneys—"

Like a slight-of-hand performer the unknown stranger made a quick, expert movement. A woman's enraged and baffled scream followed.

For in his hand lay the well-known bronze mode of coiffure characteristic of Lalla Marlborough. A woman of blondish hair faced him. Moreover, with the removal of the wig, so carefully fashioned and tinted to resemble startlingly Lalla Marlborough's hair, a subtle change had crept into the woman's features. Fury had wrought some of the metamorphosis. She looked less like the oft-pictured, well-known social favorite.

"*Geel!*" exclaimed young Bellamy, "as I'm a dick—*it's a double!* A dead ringer for Miss Marlborough with the wig on, and minus the fury! Can you beat it?"

"You'll find," went on the slim unknown, "with the application of grease and other makeup removers, that the lady," he bowed mockingly, "will not so closely resemble the absent Lalla Marlborough. I have just learned from the chief that Miss Marlborough was strangely missing from her home for dinner when she should have been there making final preparations for the affair here. The answer becomes clear. Miss Marlborough was kidnaped, held an

unwilling captive, that this woman might play her part and take possession of her wardrobe."

"Can you beat it! Where is the real lady?"

"We shall soon see," answered the inquisitor firmly.

Then, as the others left the room, he began his questioning of the unmasked woman before him.

V.

"It's an extraordinary development in crime," averred Beau Quicksilver, who, as you may have guessed, was the mysterious stranger who had appeared so very opportunely at the countess's abode to unmask the clever impersonator of Lalla Marlborough. "The woman in the case is known to this superior, new, criminal clique as The Chameleon for her really extraordinary ability to reflect personality in manner and voice as well as facial expression. To be sure, there are other women in the gang who play dual rôles as well. But this one was chosen because of her rather close resemblance to Miss Marlborough, for her mental alertness and her daring. These new crooks are headed by a new type of Fagin. The man has trained a bunch, women principally, to play high-class Raffles rôles for the purpose of spiriting away rare jewels. They work in many ways, most often as servants. Then they bribe the kidnaped maid or valet with money enough to keep dark the enforced absence—while the masquerading crook plays the rôle and takes the gems. As you know, we have not only rounded up the ring of jewel-thieves and impersonators, but we have learned the truth concerning the clever crimes."

Penn Markham smiled. "A big job," he said, "—a rich haul!"

Quicksilver continued, "We dragged the truth out of Lalla Marlborough's impersonator first. Made her tell where her real double was held. The rest was easy. While Bellamy or the matron searched each guest, I gave that particular person's room a thoroughgoing examination. When the pseudo Miss Marlborough was in the billiard room, I located the stolen and hidden Green Rajah."

"I am curious as to where she concealed it," confessed Penn Markham.

"You couldn't guess in an elephant's age," smiled Beau Quicksilver. "Only the smell of linseed oil put me on the trail. My olfactory nerves are trained, you know."

Penn Markham smiled reminiscently. "I have reason to know," he recalled.

"The fake Miss Marlborough with rooms opposite the Countess Zer's—" Quicksilver smiled whimsically — "had previously doctored the bolt in the countess's sleeping-room door, so that it would stop just short of locking. When this bolt was presumably shot, you see, nothing happened to make the room entrance-proof."

"Clever," nodded Markham, "but ordinary."

"The rest is not. The lady took long chances in opening that door. But had the Countess Zer discovered her she would undoubtedly have coolly asked for smelling-salts or a lip-stick—and tried again. But everything was bound to go well for her. It was the work of a moment to open the bedroom door, slip across the rich carpet to the dresser, and help herself to the gem. She was out again and behind her own locked door before the theft was discovered. She had a hiding-place all prepared. This is where my nose put me wise. For as I went over the room, even tapping the dark woodwork for some hidden panel, I caught the smell of linseed oil high in the wood on the door frame. The reason was soon patent. The Chameleon had bored a hole with an inch auger-bit into the flat, plain, dark wood of the door-casing. She made the hiding-spot high up, probably standing on a chair, and she is tall. This height would strengthen the illusion that the woodwork remained natural and intact. For when she slipped the Green Rajah into the prepared hole she merely temporarily covered the gem with a wad of plastine the exact shade of the wood. This she leveled off flat with the surface of the plain door-casing. It would stand the closest scrutiny. Plastine, you know, is the new form of modeling wax used by sculptors in preference to clay because the oil in its composition keeps

it pliable. It comes in many shades. I smelled the linseed oil. But no painting had been done in the room. Then I kept prodding around the area of the smell with my fingers. So I found the soft spot."

"Were all the jewels that have been taken cached in such a way?"

"Along the same lines. Other spots in the woodwork or under the furniture were bored into, and different shades of plastine were used to match the wood."

"Hm-m," observed Penn Markham, "quite an idea!"

"Well," went on Beau Quicksilver, "it has cost the irate losers of the gems, and Waite Claverly's company, a pretty penny to stage this big showdown. But they are satisfied. Much of the loot has been recovered. The lawbreakers have been brought to book. So a pretty crafty bunch of crooks won't trouble the community for some years to come. Besides, baiting the trap was rare sport."

"You were superb," admired Penn Markham. "Quite unbelievable!"

"It was a magnificent, faked emerald—a synthetic stone that would have fooled an expert as it did The Chameleon."

"Ah," commented Markham, "but the gem wasn't half as much of a sell as was—"

"Extra! Extra! All about the fake Countess Zer! All about the dude detective's impersonation of an unknown noblewoman! Extra! Extra!" came the shrill cry of the newsboys.

"The city won't get over laughing for many weeks to come," roared Penn Markham. "The titled stranger will go down as history in criminal annals. As that paradoxical enigma, the Countess Zer, you were incomparable. The stage lost a great actor when you elected to become a great crime chaser!"

"I should worry," retorted Beau Quicksilver with a shrug. "For that matter, you yourself displayed real histrionic ability in playing my double. You were rich from the start. I can still see you, strutting down the gangplank and imperiously waving up a cab in true Quicksilver style. Classy acting, Penn, old man. Let's make it a pair!"

Next Week: "BLISTERING TONGUES."



The Doom Dealer

By DAVID FOX

Author of "The Super-Swing," "The Man Who Convicted Himself," etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARY JANE HELPS.

THE long avenue leading from the gateway to Miss Wyatt's house was plunged in darkness. Not even a glimmer of light showed from the close-drawn shutters ahead as George slipped and slid along the sheet of ice with which a sudden nip of frost had covered the melting snow. All at once his long legs flew out from under him and he seated himself precipitately, with an expletive which did greater credit to his former profession than his present one.

A tiny spark had winked occasionally at a discreet distance in his rear, but now it darted forward, and Phil's good-natured jeer reached the ears of the prostrate one.

"Tired, George? It's only a little farther—"

"You go to thunder!" George growled, nevertheless accepting the wiry arm which his younger confrere offered and struggling to his feet. "I tripped over a confounded rut in the dark!"

"Haven't you got a flash light?"

"I had!" the other retorted. "I used it at Haynes Corners late yesterday afternoon, and I distinctly recall bringing it home from Cliff's last night, but when I looked for it an hour ago it was gone. Moreover, there are infinitesimal but new scratches around the keyhole of my door."

"You don't think—" Phil stopped in the driveway. "You—did you miss anything else? You don't suppose Cox's gang are on to us?"

"No, I think it lies nearer home than that!" Exasperation mingled with covert amusement in George's tone. "Nothing else was taken from my room that I could

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for February 24.

discover in a hasty search. But I remembered how that code letter of Rex's disappeared from Henry's coat pocket so mysteriously last night. Before he started from the hotel a little while ago I buttonholed him in the upper hall and asked him who he had seen from the time he left you in the car until he reached his room. He said no one but Ethel; that she had followed him but lost him in the storm, and had waited for him to reappear, so overcome with cold that she almost collapsed in his arms. Now I may be doing our Ethel a grave injustice, but I know her speed, and she won't rest until she finds out where Rex is, and if he is safe. That note may have given her an inkling—"

"But it was in code!" Phil objected.

George gave him a pitying glance.

"My boy, I firmly believe the secret writing of the ancients would be a mere primer to her sharp eyes. Her scheme of life is a terrifyingly simple one; what she wishes to know she finds out for herself, and what she wants she takes! If she knows that Rex is in that san, and now has, ahem, borrowed my flash light, I fear it means mischief!"

Mary Jane admitted them to the house and ushered them into the parlor, where they found that Henry had preceded them and was deep in conversation with Miss Wyatt. Their client's delicately pretty face was pale and drawn with the strain of the past few days, but the lines about her gentle brown eyes relaxed as she greeted them and motioned them to chairs.

"Dr. Corliss tells me that Mr. Nichols has news for me," she observed.

"I do not know that it is definite." George shook his head deprecatingly. "I understood that he wanted to question you directly about some of your neighbors. But before his arrival, Miss Wyatt, there is something I should like to ask you, myself. I shall have to revert to a painful subject, recall memories that will be distressing, but after all we are here to put those memories forever in the background of your thoughts, are we not? In order to do that we must sort them thoroughly and help you to lay them away."

She folded her slim hands tightly in her

lap, but her low voice was quite steady as she replied:

"I understand, Mr. Roper. I will gladly answer any questions you ask."

"I want you to think back to that afternoon in June when you and Mr. Ronalds had tea in the garden—the afternoon when he collapsed and you learned for the first time of his weak heart. In just what part of the grounds were you seated, Miss Wyatt? Will you describe it to me exactly, as well as you can remember?"

A sad little smile hovered for a moment about her mobile lips.

"I have not forgotten. Tea had been served out on the brick terrace, on a rustic table set close to the old wall with the crimson ramblers rioting all over it. The scent of the roses and honeysuckle came up almost overpoweringly from just over the rail. I was seated with my back to the high wall, facing Mr. Ronalds across the table, but looking down beyond the low balustrade at my side into Arabella's Walk. It is a hedged-in space, named for my great-grandmother who planted it, and in summer is a tangled mass of old-fashioned flowers with a narrow path winding between."

George nodded, ignoring Henry's stare. "Mr. Ronalds, then, was facing that high brick wall. What is on the other side of it?"

"A grove of oaks which reaches for a hundred yards or more to the iron fence that surrounds all the property."

"Was Mr. Ronalds in his usual spirits? I think you told us that he had not seemed quite himself since his return from New York three days before," George prompted.

Miss Wyatt glanced thoughtfully into the fire.

"He was quiet, but—but very happy, I think." Her low tone was almost a whisper. "He had seemed nervous and tired when he came, but the tea refreshed him, and I remember he was discussing our honeymoon when all at once his eyes became fixed and dilated, his lips whitened, and he fell forward over the tea table. Is that what you wanted to know, Mr. Roper?"

"Partly. It is rather what you did which interests me now," he responded.

"When Mr. Ronalds ceased speaking so suddenly you naturally glanced at him and saw that his eyes were glazed?"

"Yes! It was almost as though he were looking through and beyond me, at something which was hidden from my sight!" She shivered.

"Was it hidden, Miss Wyatt?" George had bent forward, and his voice sank to a deep, compelling monotone. "You glanced at him and saw that he was looking above and beyond you with white lips and staring eyes. What did you do in that instant before he fell forward across the table? Didn't you turn to see what had startled or amazed him? The perfume of flowers was all about you, the crimson ramblers hung like a glowing curtain before your eyes, but above them? *What did you see* before the crash of china came?"

"The face—the face over the wall!" Miss Wyatt started from her chair. "Great Heavens, I remember now! It was the face of the man with the scar! I must have turned, although I did not realize it, for I know now that I did not see Mr. Ronalds fall! One instant he sat there staring horribly, and the next he was sprawled inertly across the table! I cannot explain it! I could not have been mad, but it all happened so quickly!"

She paused with one slender white hand at her throat, and George nodded again.

"That is the reason. You had been startled by Mr. Ronalds's expression, you turned, and the instantaneous glimpse of that man over the wall was erased from your conscious memory by the crash of the table and the need for immediate action. What did you do then, Miss Wyatt? What were your impressions as you can recall them?"

"They are confused—a blur like something imperfectly seen." She sank into her chair once more, her hand passing over her hair where the white streak lay like a frosty finger. "I must have cried out, although I don't remember doing so, for Mary Jane seemed to be instantly at my side.

"Together we lifted Mr. Ronalds and settled him back in his chair. His lips were parted, his eyes half closed, and I could not feel his heart beat when I placed my hand

over it. I rubbed his wrists, and Mary Jane ran for some ice, but before she returned with it he drew a long, quivering breath and opened his eyes. Almost immediately he spoke."

"What did he say? Did he appear bewildered?"

"No—merely apologetic for having frightened me and for the few poor bits of china which had been broken. His voice was strong and natural, too, and he tried to rise, but I would not permit it. He—he seemed ashamed, as if it had been an exhibition of weakness which he could have avoided, but I don't think he was sorry when I insisted upon phoning for Dr. Weir. He came quickly in his big car—Mary Jane and the housemaid had barely finished clearing away the debris of the tea table—and I left him alone with Mr. Ronalds on the terrace until he called me. It was then I learned Mr. Ronalds had a weak heart."

She paused again, and an expression of bewildered distress darkened her soft eyes.

"That face over the wall! I can see it distinctly, now, but there is something absurdly incongruous, unreal about it! The broad, clear sunshine of mid-afternoon was flooding the terrace, and yet—yet there seem to be colored lights—purple and crimson and a deep blue—playing over that man's head and shoulders. Surely, surely I must be imagining all this!"

"Not at all!" George shot a triumphant glance at Henry. "You are confusing it with the second time you saw him, when he stood outside a half-open stained glass window."

"At the church!" Miss Wyatt cried. "I know! It all comes back to me at last! It was when I stood at the steps of the altar with the final strains of the wedding march sounding in my ears. Then the minister spoke and Mr. Ronalds collapsed at my side! But how did you know? How could you guess?"

"On the strength of a theory which Dr. Corliss advanced when we first undertook your case, Miss Wyatt," George replied generously. "He said you must have seen this man more than once, but on each occasion you were in such a highly emotional state that the fact only impressed itself on

your subconscious memory. Do you recall our discussion, doctor?"

Henry nodded solemnly, and Phil, who had been listening with tense interest, made an indistinguishable noise in his throat. Miss Wyatt glanced from one to another of them and remarked slowly:

"You have wakened that subconscious memory to life, then, gentlemen, for I recall the third occasion on which I encountered that man—the third, I mean, before last week. It was in the cemetery, as Mr. Ronalds's body was being lowered into the grave! He was standing apart, on the fringe of the crowd of morbid sightseers who had gathered in spite of the sexton and the constable's deputies. When his eyes met mine he slipped away.

"His seems to be the only face that I do recall now, though I know Judge Tompkins and Dr. Weir and Mary Jane were all close at my side. They led me to my car and took me home, and then real delirium came! Oh, Mr. Roper, gentlemen, what does it mean? What had that man to do with Mr. Ronalds's death, and for what purpose was he here last week? Why should he persecute me now? Is it he who has been writing those anonymous letters?"

Before any of the three could reply a bell clanged in a subdued fashion through the house and Mary Jane opened the parlor door to announce:

"Mr. Nichols, ma'am."

Cliff greeted his hostess, nodded to his colleagues, and then asked:

"Where is Lucian?"

"He found it impossible to be present," Henry responded with a meaning contraction of one eyelid. "Miss Wyatt has been very patient, realizing that the investigation into Mr. Ronalds's death after so long a period has elapsed must necessarily be slow. But the letters are another matter, and we are all hoping you will have definite results for us soon."

"The letters are indeed another matter," Cliff responded as he seated himself in the chair indicated by Miss Wyatt. "I can safely say that they have nothing whatever to do with Mr. Ronalds's death but are the expression of one person's suspicions concerning it.

"I am sure you have been perfectly candid with Dr. Corliss and all of us, Miss Wyatt; but at the time of your bereavement you were in a state of prostration and later delirium. Many significant things may have occurred which another member of your family less keenly affected by the tragedy would have noted. It is unfortunate that you lived alone, that you had not at least an intimate woman friend constantly at hand—"

"I had Mary Jane," interrupted Miss Wyatt. "I have many friends in my own circle here, but no intimates, and she has been with me for more than twenty years. I know her to be absolutely loyal, and our relations have been confidential to a greater extent than usual between mistress and maid.

"Mary Jane never left me for an hour during the—the tragedy and the dark days that followed. Since then she has been more devoted to me than ever, if that were possible. If anything occurred at the time of Mr. Ronalds's death which another member of my household might have noted, I am sure that Mary Jane would have done so. But has she not told you already all she knows?"

"She told Mr. Powell, I think, but since you have mentioned her I should like, with your permission, to ask her a question or two now," Cliff replied. "She may not understand, and may resent any query on my part. But if you will be so good as to summon her and assure her that she will be helping you, rendering you a service by replying to me, I may be able to recall to her mind several incidents which will be of value to the investigation."

Miss Wyatt rose and pressed a bell in the wall, but almost before she had resumed her seat the door flew open and Mary Jane appeared once more on the threshold. Faint spots of color glowed on her angular cheek bones, and her cold blue eyes snapped expectantly as she gazed from her employer to the four guests. It was obvious to the latter, at least, that little of the preceding conversation had missed her keen ears.

"Mary Jane," Miss Wyatt began, "these gentlemen, and especially Mr. Nichols, want to ask you about—about some things

which may have happened after Mr. Ronalds died. They think another member of my household would have seen more than I of what was going on, and I suggested you. I have told them that you would do anything in the world for me, and promised you would answer any questions they may ask. You do want to help me, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am." Mary Jane's prim, slightly nasal tones were devoid of any emotional response to this appeal, but her eyes softened for a moment. "I've done it the best I knew how for quite some time now."

"I know you have!" There was affection in her employer's tone. "Sit down and tell Mr. Nichols whatever you can; you know these gentlemen have my complete confidence."

Mary Jane seated herself sedately on the edge of a haircloth chair and smoothed her black silk apron down carefully over the sharp knees outlined through her gown. Then she looked up at Cliff and waited.

"During Miss Wyatt's long illness after Mr. Ronalds's death, who took care of her, Mary Jane?" Cliff turned slightly in his chair. "Did you have trained nurses?"

Mary Jane sniffed.

"From what I've seen of them, they want considerable more waiting on and catering to than the body that's sick! Not a soul except the doctors was near Miss Wyatt day or night but me, and what sleeping I done was on a sofa at the foot of her bed."

"In her delirium did she say anything about that man with the scar on his face?"

"I should think so!" Mary Jane ejaculated. "I couldn't make head nor tail of it except that she was scairt to death of him!"

Miss Wyatt moved slightly, but Cliff asked before she could speak:

"Did anything in her—er—words lead you to believe she was afraid Mr. Ronalds's death was not a natural one; that he had been murdered?"

Mary Jane set her thin lips and nodded.

"It was a mercy nobody else heard her but me, and I wouldn't tell you now if you didn't know as much as you do, sir!"

This time Miss Wyatt was not to be silenced.

"Why, Mary Jane, I thought you never knew a thing about what was in my mind until I told you myself after those dreadful letters began coming only three months ago!"

Mary Jane stiffened in her chair.

"Folks ain't accountable for what they say when they're out of their heads, and it wasn't my place to mention it to you, ma'am."

"What did you think about Mr. Ronalds's death yourself?" Cliff asked suddenly. "You liked him, did you not? You were glad that Miss Wyatt was going to marry him?"

Mary Jane glared at him.

"What I thought ain't anybody's business!" she snapped. "My opinion ain't going to help Miss Wyatt now, nor poor Mr. Ronalds neither! I liked him, yes. He was a fine man, and if Miss Wyatt had made up her mind at her time of life that she wanted a husband under foot I'd rather seen her married to him than anybody else."

"But you don't like Mr. Dilworth! You don't want to see her married to him, do you?" Cliff had risen, and his voice rang out sternly. "You pretend to be faithful to her, and yet you disturb her peace of mind for months, you threaten her, you declare that she will never be the wife of any man—"

"Mr. Nichols!" Miss Wyatt exclaimed, aghast.

Mary Jane rose and confronted him with flashing eyes, and her worn, bony hands clenched at her flat breast.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, her nasal tones trembling. "You're a passel of busybodies! I won't listen to another word!"

"Yes, you will!" Cliff drew some papers from his pocket and thrust them before her eyes. "You wrote these anonymous letters, Mary Jane! After all Miss Wyatt's kindness to you, after all her sorrow, when you saw that she might be happy at last you tried to prevent it! You played on her fears in the most wicked, deceitful, cowardly way to make her give up Frank Dilworth!"

Mary Jane drew a deep breath and threw

back her head with its thin knot of iron-gray hair.

"Yes, I did!" she cried. "I'd go through fire and water right now to keep her from marrying him! He killed Mr. Ronalds!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"WORSE THAN MURDER!"

MARY JANE'S astounding accusation brought a moment of electrified silence, and then Miss Wyatt sprang to her feet with a cry.

"You are mad! Do not listen to her, gentlemen, her mind is unhinged! If she really wrote those strange letters that is evidence of it!"

"No, ma'am, I ain't crazy!" There was pity and a yearning affection almost maternal in the woman's voice now. "You was the one that couldn't be brought to your senses no other way! It was bad enough to keep in what I knew when even the judge and the coroner and Dr. Weir was fooled, and you laying at death's door from grief, raving about murder till it turned a body's blood cold to hear you!"

"I've always been one to speak my mind, but if I'd have done it all them wiseacres would have thought what you're thinking about me now! The farthest I dared go was to get rid of your own doctor and have Dr. Weir tend you, him being Mr. Ronalds's friend and thinking that your ravings might give him an idea, but he was just as blind as the rest. I'm glad it's out now! I couldn't have held it in here much longer!"

She beat her meager breast while Miss Wyatt stared at her in growing horror and consternation. It was George who stepped into the breach.

"We don't think Mary Jane is crazy, Miss Wyatt, however mistaken she may be! Suppose we all sit down again and talk this over quietly? The truth about the letters is out now and we must learn all that lies back of them."

"I can't believe that Mary Jane wrote them!" Miss Wyatt dropped into her chair, clutching its arms convulsively. "If I were not sure of her affection for me I would

think she was trying to shield some one else!"

"I did write them, ma'am, and I would have done worse if I'd had to! When you left your bed last year and crept round the house like a ghost my heart was breaking for you. But nothing could have brought Mr. Ronalds back, and as you perked up and got to be yourself again I thought I'd better leave vengeance in the Lord's hands, though I must say it went against the grain! Then Frank Dilworth began coming round, and I saw it was meant I should do something to discredit him or you'd take him after all!"

"Why do you say he killed Mr. Ronalds?" Henry interposed. "How you felt doesn't matter. It's what you know, or think you know, that we're here to find out!"

"You wouldn't have been here at all, doctor, if it hadn't been for me!" Mary Jane eyed him loftily. "I knew how to handle Miss Wyatt from the time that circular of yours came, and now I'll tell my story in my own way or never open my lips about it. My feelings don't matter to you, maybe, but I want Miss Wyatt should know only why I scared her with them letters, me that wouldn't have hurt a hair of her head!"

"Let her go on," George advised in an undertone. Aloud he added: "I'm glad you had confidence in us, Mary Jane. We're prepared to believe every word you say, no matter what the wiseacres would have thought. What put the notion about the letters into your head?"

"A story that was running in the weekly paper." Mary Jane flushed. "It was last July when Miss Wyatt was in Albany having her jewels seen to. Mr. Dilworth had just commenced to take notice again, and I was at my wit's end, and on top of it all the old library was broke into! The housemaid and I found the mess in the morning and though nothing was took it upset me something terrible, but not more so than Miss Wyatt's actions when she come back from Albany. I could see she was keeping something from me for the first time in her life and I 'most went crazy, knowing what I was keeping back myself and seeing Mr.

Dilworth here every day, near, with a smile on his face and—*and blood on his hands!*

"Then your circular came, and Miss Wyatt told me all her wonderful old jewelry had been stole and false stones put in the settings somehow, and, thinks I, 'these Shadowers call themselves gentlemen and promise to keep everything quiet and confidential; maybe Miss Wyatt will use the sense she was born with and call them in. If they're worth their salt they'll find out about Mr. Ronalds's death, too, before they're through.'

"But she didn't! She shilly-sallied even when the house was broke into the second time and I see I'd have to take things into my own hands. I harped on that circular, pretending to look on it as a piece of impertinence, but bringing Mr. Ronalds back to her mind all the time and knowing full well she'd be more apt to act contrarywise if I talked against you.

"It didn't work, and the neighbors commenced talking about poor, patient Mr. Dilworth coming back after he'd been put aside once. At last I remembered that story in the paper; there'd been one of them anonymous letters in it, and I—I copied the general wording of it, changing my hand the best I could and making it as plain as I dast to about Mr. Dilworth. A knife going through me couldn't have been worse than Miss Wyatt's look when she got it, but still she wouldn't do nothing!"

"Mary Jane!" Miss Wyatt gasped. "Oh, how could you!"

"I don't know, me that's been a regular church member all my life!" Mary Jane retorted grimly. "I fit it out with my own conscience, though, and I kept right on sending them to you till I drove you to New York, to these Shadowers; and all they've done is to give me away!"

Cliff smiled slightly.

"You gave yourself away. Why did you walk out toward Haynes Corners and ask a passing motorist to mail the last letter from there instead of sending it through the post office here as you had the others?"

"Because the postmaster was acting kind of funny and I thought maybe he suspicioned it was me sending letters to Miss Wyatt in strange writing, as if I'd lost my

mind! Not that it would have worried *me* if I could only prove the truth to her about Mr. Dilworth!"

"Perhaps we can help you to do that!" George leaned forward. "Why do you think he had anything to do with Mr. Ronalds's death?"

But Mary Jane did not answer. She was staring past him, at the doorway leading into the hall. All at once a shrill cry issued from her lips. Frank Dilworth himself stood there looking in upon them.

"I seem to have intruded, Arabella, at a most untimely moment—" he began, but Miss Wyatt stretched out her hands in welcome to him.

"I am glad you have come! Poor Mary Jane has made some terrible mistake, but you have a right to hear, Frank! I want you to know first, however, before—before she goes on that I—I would never have believed for an instant what she imagines!"

Dilworth came slowly forward with a stunned expression as though he had received a blow between the eyes.

"You telephoned that you were ill and could not see me this evening." He spoke with evident difficulty. "I came to ask if you were better, if there was anything I could do, and finding the front door ajar I was about to ring when the sound of voices came from this room and my own name coupled with a—a most unbelievable accusation! You would scarcely discuss such a matter with four comparative strangers who have no standing, official or otherwise, in this community. May I ask you who these gentlemen really are?"

"Not impostors, Frank!" Miss Wyatt cried quickly. "I went to New York last week to enlist their aid and it was at my request they pretended to be other than what they are! Dr. Corliss, will you tell Mr. Dilworth the truth, please, all of it? My jewels, the letters, my—my fears about Mr. Ronalds! I wish I had taken him into my confidence from the first! Frank, these are the Shadowers!"

Henry cast a glance of agonized indecision at George, but seeing that the latter had no intention of coming to the rescue he turned to the newcomer, briefly defining his position and that of his colleagues, and outlining

the case as Miss Wyatt had first presented it to them.

For a moment after he had finished Dilworth was silent, his homely, good-natured face blank with amazement. Then his jaw set and with narrowed eyes he turned to Mary Jane. But when he spoke it was without a shade of resentment in his tone.

"Whatever notion you've got, I guess you'd better get it off your mind as quick as you can, Mary Jane, so that it'll be settled once for all. It's a pretty awful subject, but we're facing facts now."

"They're facts you won't find it very easy to face, Mr. Dilworth, though you're taking it so calm!" Mary Jane retorted. "I'm going to speak out at last if I die for it! Miss Wyatt will have to excuse me for bringing her name in so much, but it can't be helped. When Mr. Ronalds began coming round and you just stood aside I guess most folks thought you was only poor-spirited. I knew better and I was s'prised after all the years you've been setting on the doorstep, so to speak, but it wasn't none of my business. She got engaged and you went away. *How many folks knew when you come back?*"

Dilworth was eying her steadily.

"Go on," he said.

"I aim to!" declared the woman determinedly. "Miss Wyatt got engaged the middle of April and Mr. Ronalds went to New York to bring her his dead mother's jewelry, and before he come back you was gone. Your sister-in-law's girl Effie told me you was in Albany settling up some estate or other that would take maybe till July."

"We was so busy all during May getting ready for the wedding, with Mr. Ronalds running back and forth between New York and the Quincey House here, that I didn't give you a thought till one night when I come home from prayer meeting and seen you prowling round our grounds! I knew Mr. Ronalds was calling on Miss Wyatt and you acted 's if you was waiting, so I—I waited, too. When he come out I seen you go down the drive ahead of him and meet him just outside the gate, and I followed; I heard you quarrel with him, I heard your very words when you told him you'd kill him!"

She paused triumphantly, but Dilworth asked in perfect self-possession:

"Did you hear anything of what you took to be a quarrel, Mary Jane? Any other words except that supposed threat of mine?"

"No, I didn't," she responded with dogged honesty. "I asked Effie the next day, though, how long you'd been home from Albany and she told me you was still there. I didn't say a word, not even to Miss Wyatt."

"Things went on till the night of the 10th of June—the night Mr. Ronalds come up from New York for the last time. I went to the post office real late to mail some wedding invitations that had been forgotten and I saw you again—you was dropping a flat package into the mail slit in the door, the office being closed. You hurried off 's if you was afraid of being caught at something!"

"The next day I run into Effie at the grocery store and she said you'd gone up to Canada from Albany on that estate business and wouldn't likely be home all summer. That evening when Mr. Ronalds come for supper he looked real sick and didn't eat much—it all come over me afterward, when it was too late! He had a deep cut on his wrist and I heard Miss Wyatt ask him about it. Do you remember, ma'am?"

Mary Jane hesitated for an answer.

"Yes." Miss Wyatt spoke very low. "He said he had scratched it on a wedding present which had been mailed directly to him at the hotel instead of here—a gold knife with a trick blade opening on a spring that he had unknowingly touched."

"Did you ever see that knife, Arabella?" Dilworth turned to her.

"No. I do not even know who sent it; I never thought to ask. I recall saying that such a gift was bad luck, but Mr. Ronalds laughed at me. Please go on, Mary Jane."

"There ain't much to go on about." Mary Jane was twisting the folds of her apron in her lap. "I noticed that cut didn't heal and Mr. Ronalds kept looking sicker, and two days later he fell over in a faint on the terrace. It was working in him then, if we'd only known!"

Her voice sank to a sepulchral whisper

and she glanced half defiantly at the four Shadows as Henry asked:

"What was?"

"The p'ison! The p'ison on that knife that I'd seen mailed! On the morning of the eighteenth—the wedding day—Mr. Ronalds's hand baggage was brought over here ready packed from the hotel and put with Miss Wyatt's in the back entry so's to be handy when they left for their train after the reception. Instead of that, when—when we brought Miss Wyatt home alone from the church, Judge Tompkins and me, I seen Mr. Dilworth as plain as day standing behind a tree as we drove up from the gate. I was too upset to think anything about it, one way or another.

"Late in the afternoon Dr. Weir called to talk with the judge about the arrangements for the funeral and he offered to take charge of poor Mr. Ronalds's personal baggage till Miss Wyatt would be well enough to say what should be done with it. When I went to the back entry to get it I found Mr. Ronalds's dressing bag open and so was the leather case with his cuff buttons and scarfpins and things just inside. I was so wrought up, anyway, over Miss Wyatt and all that I just shut the bag and took it out with the rest to Dr. Weir, never thinking that nobody'd been in that entry since morning—not since I seen Mr. Dilworth hiding behind a tree!"

"Oh, Mary Jane! I cannot let you go on!" Miss Wyatt exclaimed. "If you had told me—"

"How could I, ma'am? You was like the dead walkin' yourself, till after the funeral and as soon as we got you home you took to your bed. During all those days that I set beside you listening to you raving that Mr. Ronalds had been murdered I had time to piece things together and I see it all, but what could I do?"

"Nobody would have believed me, and I couldn't prove anything nor bring Mr. Ronalds back to you. I'd have kept it till my dying day if Mr. Dilworth hadn't started courting you again, and I see you was making up your mind to take him. There! I've said my say and I ain't going back on a word of it!"

"Oh, but you will, Mary Jane, you

will—" Miss Wyatt wrung her hands, and there was a note of hysteria in her tones, but Mr. Dilworth interrupted her.

"Have I your permission to speak, Arabella?"

"It isn't even necessary! I know—I knew from the minute Mary Jane accused you to-night that she had conceived some absurd idea—absurd if it were not hideous—but I did not dream it was based on anything so impossible!"

"On the contrary it appears to me that Mary Jane has made out rather a strong case of circumstantial evidence against me, and if these gentlemen are acting in your interests they should be in possession of all the facts." He smiled, and his plain face was almost radiant. "I won't thank you for your confidence in me, Arabella, but may I explain?"

Silently she bowed her head and he turned with sudden dignity to the others.

"Gentlemen, I need not speak of my regard for Miss Wyatt except to say that I wished only for her happiness. You can appreciate my motive in leaving Millers-town when her engagement was announced, but I could not stay away. She was as unsophisticated as a girl, and alone, with no one to advise her except Judge Tompkins, who is a very old man.

"I speak no ill of the dead when I say that Mr. Ronalds was unknown to any one here but Dr. Weir, who is practically a stranger among us himself. I had met Mr. Ronalds, and quite understood the attraction he would have had for a woman, but I could not rest until I assured myself that Miss Wyatt was making no mistake—that he would be good to her. Call it jealousy if you like, but I was determined he should know she had one firm friend, one protector, if necessary, and so I came back. On the first occasion when Mary Jane saw me, I was waiting for him to come out of this house to talk to him. I met him at the gate, but there was no quarrel.

"Mr. Ronalds was amused at the attitude I had assumed, and I grew emphatic—ridiculously so, I suppose. I told him that I would kill him if he did not make Miss Wyatt happy. I did not go near the home of my brother, with whom I lived, for I

could not endure my sister-in-law's remarks—she would not have been in sympathy with my state of mind. So I thought it best to let them think I would be away indefinitely. I stopped at the home of a friend some miles out of town and motored in with his roadster.

"When Mary Jane encountered me at the post office on the evening of the 10th of June, it is quite true that I was mailing a small, flat package. Can you guess what it was, Arabella?"

Miss Wyatt nodded, flushing.

"I received it the next day," she said softly. "It was your wedding gift to me—the diamond pendant, which I returned later together with all the other gifts from my many friends when—when there was no wedding!"

"It—it ain't true!" Mary Jane cried brokenly. "I didn't get the mail that day, and there was so many presents coming! Tell me it ain't true, ma'am!"

"But it is, Mary Jane! Do you begin to see what a terrible mistake you have made?" Miss Wyatt's gentle voice was deep with reproach, and she did not wait for the woman to reply. "Mr. Ronalds telephoned to me just after his bags had been brought over from the hotel on the morning when we were to have been married, asking me to look in his scarf-pin case and see if his star sapphire pin was safe; it was I who left the bag open as you found it! Of course, Frank, you knew nothing about the gold knife, but were you really here on—on my wedding day?"

"I could not stay away." He seemed for a moment to have forgotten the presence of the Shadowers. "I wanted to catch one glimpse of you in your bridal gown even though it would be torture! I could not bring myself to go near the church, but I did hide behind a tree on your driveway and when I saw you pass alone with the judge and Mary Jane, I—I did not know what to think!"

"I got the roadster from where I had left it, drove back to my friend's, and then returned by train to Millerstown, where I learned what had come to pass. Are there any questions you would like to ask, gentlemen?"

Henry glanced at the others and then shook his head.

"I don't think so, Mr. Dilworth. You've helped us to clear up what might have been a mighty puzzling twist to this case, and I'm glad you took it as you did."

A slight twinkle came into Dilworth's mild blue eyes.

"I shouldn't wonder if I've been under suspicion, anyway, since I recognize this young man here as the chauffeur for that city millionaire who was going to buy up most of the mills hereabouts through me!" He glanced at Phil, who grinned. "I am really glad that Mary Jane gave me this opportunity—"

"May the Lord forgive me!" Mary Jane broke down, and throwing her apron over her head, she rocked herself back and forth in a paroxysm of remorse, her muffled wail rising thinly.

"I done it all! I'll never look myself in the face again for writing them letters and near breaking her heart! For more'n a year I been thinking turr'ble things of Mr. Dilworth, and now I—I'll have to go away and never see Miss Wyatt no more! I wish I was dead!"

"Of course you won't have to go away, Mary Jane!" Miss Wyatt was beside her as she spoke. "Mr. Dilworth will forgive you as I do, I know! You will, won't you, Frank? After all, it was my own fear, my delirious raving which first put the notion into her head."

"I'll do more than forgive, Arabella; I will thank Mary Jane for what she has done, for if your fears and her notion of—of foul play have any basis in fact, it was she who influenced you to call in these gentlemen!"

"And the Lord knows where they'll stop!" wailed Mary Jane. "Busybodies, them, and that young hussy—"

"Come, Mary Jane, I'm going to take you upstairs," Miss Wyatt interrupted firmly. "Frank, will you stay and talk to these gentlemen? I shall welcome your advice and help."

"I am at your service, Arabella." The stilted phrase took on added meaning in the simple sincerity of his tone. When she had led the noisily weeping maid from the

room he turned and surveyed the four Shadowers keenly.

"First, will you tell me, gentlemen, how you discovered that Mary Jane was the author of the anonymous letters you told me about?"

"Our handwriting expert, Mr. Nichols." Henry waved a pudgy but grandiloquent hand. "We each have our own line of investigation. Mr. Roper is our general cross-examiner, and Mr. Howe the, ahem, chauffeur, is our specialist on safes, with us this evening to study the one from which Miss Wyatt's jewels were taken and substitutes put in their place. Your millionaire client is perhaps the greatest authority on precious stones and their imitations in this country. Cliff, you haven't told any of us yet about those letters, and since we're bound to take Mr. Dilworth into our confidence, now—"

Cliff laughed and spread out the papers with which he had confronted Mary Jane.

"Here are the two which were given to me by Miss Wyatt to work upon, and this is the flyleaf torn from a book that Mary Jane gave her employer last Christmas. It came into my possession through an agent of ours only yesterday, Mr. Dilworth. I saw at once, of course, that my search was ended, but I had a previous hint of her unaccountable antagonism to you from a letter written to your sister-in-law's maid, Effie, commenting on some reference of hers to Mary Jane's changed attitude."

"By jingo! You fellows are thorough!" Dilworth exclaimed with a chuckle. Then, glancing down at the flyleaf, he read aloud: "'To Miss Arabella Wyatt, with best wishes for a Merry Christmas, from Mary Jane.' But the writing doesn't seem at all like these two letters!"

"Not to you, perhaps, Mr. Dilworth!" Henry beamed at Cliff with honest pride. "I told you Mr. Nichols was an expert."

"But you did not tell me, sir, what your own individual line of investigation is in this affair, although Miss Wyatt introduced you as Dr. Corliss," Dilworth interrupted with sudden gravity. "If I am to assume that you are a medical expert, does it follow that her fears regarding Mr. Ronalds's strange death are actually based on truth?"

That a horrible crime has been committed? Doctor, was that man murdered?"

"Mr. Dilworth"—Henry's tones held a note which none of his colleagues had ever heard—"however Mr. Ronalds came to his end, there are crimes worse than murder!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MERRINGTON DIAMOND.

LUCIAN'S train was delayed, and he reached the city that night just as the crowds homeward bound from its many theaters filled the central district.

It would have been difficult for him in any case to determine whether he was being trailed or not, and his efforts to do so were purely mechanical. He believed, as Henry had declared, that the way was clear before him, and his thoughts were busied with the forthcoming interview with Florio Guardini in the house of the Cellini Ganymede.

Serenely unconscious of the taxi that followed him, he proceeded to the apartment which he shared with Cliff, and from there telephoned to Mr. Gideon Ormsby. He doubted that that gentleman could have any information for them which would be of the slightest use in the Ronalds affair, since he was ignorant of Rex Powell's profession and real purpose in Millerstown, but it was a command from the head of the Shadowers, and Lucian felt constrained to execute it before going about his own investigation.

A polite Nipponese voice answered the call, and became almost hysterical with excitement when Lucian announced himself as an agent of Mr. Redmond Parr. Honorable Mr. Ormsby had met with a most distressful accident, but he, Matzu—perhaps the illustrious agent of the so noble Mr. Parr had been instructed concerning him? No? It had been his good fortune to serve the honorable Mr. Ormsby for many years, and when he had been brought home that night with his all-powerful arm very completely broken, he had commanded Matzu, before the doctors gave him the sleep of the evil smell, to ask the august agent if he should arrive to condescend to remain until

his wake-upping. No one could say, maybe one hour, maybe two, three. Even now in his sleep he was cursing his own hell devil, and there was fever! Would the illustrious agent come at once? The house of the honorable Mr. Ormsby was his! At the second hour after midnight? He, the worthless Matzu, would listen for his ring—the private two-stop-one ring of the so noble Mr. Parr.

Lucian hung up the receiver before he remembered that he had not asked how the accident had occurred, but it didn't matter, anyway. He'd go to Ormsby's rooms at two and wait until he came out of the ether. There would be plenty of time before that to renew his acquaintance with Florio and his patron.

The house of the Cellini Ganymede differed in no way from the other stately stone residences in a uniform row on the highly exclusive side street. As Lucian pressed the bell he smiled reminiscently to himself. Not so many years ago he had slouched to the tradesmen's entrance in overalls with that priceless stolen statuette concealed ignominiously in a plumber's kit!

His thoughts on the past, he failed to hear a taxi stop just around the corner or note the powerfully built figure which came into view at the moment that the door swung open and a butler eyed him in obsequious inquiry.

"Mr. Yohalem?" Lucian produced a Ballyntine card. "Please say that I regret calling at so late an hour, but I have just reached the city and my time is limited."

"Mr. Yohalem has retired, sir, but if you will be seated here I will see if he can be disturbed."

The butler ushered him into a small, begilt Louis Seize reception room of the type copied cheaply in many a parvenu home. But Lucian knew that he was gazing upon the actual chattels of that unfortunate monarch.

In a few moments slipped feet shuffled slowly along the hall, and an aged man entered attired in a dressing gown and skull cap. He was bent almost double, and shaking as though with palsy, but his rheumy eyes gleamed avidly as he held out both hands to his visitor.

"My dear Ballyntine! You haff some-t'ing for me, eh? Somet'ing vort' vile?" the cracked voice squeaked. "Nefer since you bring to me de Ganymede haff you come again. You t'ink maybe de oldt man hass no longer a lofe for de t'ings of dis vorltd ven soon he must leave dem? Ninety-one years haff I, Ballyntine, but yet I vill pay vell for de beautiful, de imperishable!"

"You are not yet too old, Mr. Yohalem, to get into serious trouble," Lucian responded significantly. "I bring you something more valuable this time than a masterpiece—a friendly warning to you and to Florio Guardini."

"Guardini?" A crafty look spread over the finely seamed face. "Often haff I wondered, too, vere iss it our clever Guardini?"

"Then look in his room!" interrupted Lucian brusquely. "Good Heavens, Yohalem, you have reason enough to trust me! I have a verbal message for him from Vito Colucci; see, he put this letter into my hands."

"So!" Yohalem peered at the closely written page and then back at his guest. "Your varning, my friendt; it iss for me as vell as Florio?"

Lucian nodded.

"They're watching Vito. I've arranged, though, for Florio to sail for Cuba in the morning if he can fulfill one condition first. But he must not leave this house until the last moment, and then I'll get him away. You know me, Yohalem! Vito will join him later—that is arranged, too, but why in the name of all that's prudent have you harbored this gem-maker under your roof? He can't squeal about your possessions without incriminating himself, any more than Vito or I could! You've always paid well, generously."

"In goldt; but Florio brings to me some-t'ing for vich I shouldt pay also in hospitality—a few days, only." The shaking, skeleton hand gripped his arm. "I know you, I trust you, my goodt Ballyntine! Come, I show you why iss it I couldn't refuse not'ing!"

Lucian permitted himself to be led to a diminutive elevator and descended to a vault which he well remembered beneath the cellar. From there a cunningly con-

cealed staircase wound down to yet a lower crypt so small that a man standing in its center could touch all four walls with his outstretched finger tips.

It was here, in a flat safe of unique design, that the unscrupulous old art fanatic kept his most sacred treasure. Now he knelt stiffly before it, manipulated the combination, and, rising, placed in Lucian's hand an enormous oval of scintillating azure fire.

"You know?" The shrewd aged eyes had read the uncontrollable expression upon his guest's face. Lucian nodded once more, trying to keep his tones cool as he replied:

"The Merrington Blue Diamond. I was afraid of this, Yohalem! You are in more danger with this in your possession than with all your other precious things besides!" He drew a deep breath and added portentously: "Have you heard of the Shadows?"

"'Shadows'? Vat iss?" The clutching fingers closed again about the great diamond as though already he felt it slipping from his grasp and his voice rose shrilly: "Danger, you talk! Who knows it Yohalem hass from Florio bought?"

"The Shadows will know before noon to-morrow! They are a secret organization of the greatest private investigators of the age, with powerful international affiliations and agents everywhere. To my knowledge they have never failed. They have a line on Vito, they're closing in on Florio's trail, they're after the Merrington Diamond!" Lucian had staked much and now he waited tensely.

"Detectives? Pfui!" The old man shrugged contemptuously. "I did not t'ink to see you, Ballyntine, of detectives afraidt, yet!"

"Listen, Yohalem; you have never known me to lie, have you? I have come here to warn you—the man who came to warn *me* of the Shadows when I held in my hand the supreme treasure of the Manchus had his throat slit within the hour and the Three Burning Black Pearls were on their return journey to the survivors of the dynasty!"

"Dey vass in diss country, de lost pearls!" Yohalem's withered jaw dropped

and he gazed down almost piteously at the glittering jewel which seemed to dart blue flames between his viselike talons. "You gave dem up to de man who mit de varning came?"

Lucian shrugged.

"I thought he stood a chance. I didn't, any more than Florio or Vito do now, or you because you have this diamond which they are determined to restore to its last owner. You ask me why I have brought you nothing since the Ganymede? It is because of the Shadows. I've quit the game, Yohalem, but I couldn't refuse Vito in his extremity, while Florio and I have been partners and you most lavish in remuneration for our efforts. Life still looks good to me, though, and I won't buck the Shadows; I know their strength."

He paused, studying the old man narrowly. "The only condition under which I would have helped Florio out of the country to-morrow was that he tell me where and how I could obtain this diamond and see that it reached a discreet representative of the Merrington descendant before sailing time.

"The Shadows know it has not been cut down, that he had it in his possession last Sunday, and when they come to-morrow—for come they will unless they have news of its restoration!—they will find not only this but the Ganymede, the jade bracelet of Mumtaz-i-Mahal, the jeweled headdress from the museum at Gizeh—the cream of your collection, Yohalem, which they can strip from you! It was an unfortunate bargain that you made with Florio!"

For a moment longer the old man hesitated in an agony of indecision. Then with a sudden frantic gesture he thrust the diamond once more into Lucian's hands.

"Take it!" he groaned. "Any one but you, and a trick I shouldt t'ink it vass, Ballyntine! How do I know dat anyvays dey vill not come, dese Shadows?"

"They only want Florio for the diamond." Lucian firmly suppressed the rising elation in his tone. "With that restored their interest in his whereabouts ceases, for there are reasons, Yohalem, why there must be no legal prosecution of him. You understand?"

"Your vordt iss goodt, Ballyntine." His host clawed at his sleeve. "I understandt, but giff me your vordt dat you will get Florio outd of my house, also! Dat dese Shadowers shouldt know he hass gone and no cause haff dey to bother oldt Yohalem!"

"I give you my word that the Shadowers shall know, and that they will not molest you," Lucian responded solemnly.

"Come, then!" Yohalem closed the safe and pointed to the stairs. "Now I take you to Florio. Dat diamondt, it vass my pride, Ballyntine, but better dat I lose it as lose all!"

In a small upper room at the back of the house they found a tall, dark, slender man with a drooping black mustache and soft, dreamy eyes which flashed suddenly as he sprang to his feet.

"Our goodt friendt Ballyntine, Florio!" Yohalem cried hastily. "From Vito Colucci he comes yet and all is fixed dat to-morrow you sail! You shouldt talk now togeder—to-morrow I see you, Ballyntine?"

"To-morrow, Yohalem!" Lucian promised. As the door closed on their host he held out his hand. "Florio, I've got five minutes! Here's that letter you wrote Colucci. He's been pinched for what he was pulling up there in Haynes Corners, but he managed to smuggle this to me and tell you to save yourself! I imagine they'll need you pretty badly, so I've arranged to get you on board ship to-morrow for Havana, where you'll be taken care of. But you'll have to come clean with me first."

"Mi' amic'!" Florio wrung his hand. "After all-a dees years! And you feex dat I taka da sheep to-morrow? Dio mio, I am glad! But w'at you know 'bout Vito, eh? W'at you know 'bout dat place?"

A shade of suspicion had crossed his face, but Lucian laughed and clapped him on the shoulder.

"What do I know about the pearls—they were a rotten grade, Florio!—and the rubies and the square-cut emerald and the sapphire and the big blue diamond? We know its name, you and I! You were a fool to hide away when it was I who sought you Saturday night and most of Sunday! Florio, if I am to get you safely away to-morrow you've got to tell me now how you

came to be mixed up in that affair a year ago last spring!"

"Peegs!" exclaimed his companion with seeming irrelevance. "Peegs and da cheeldren of peegs!"

"Not Colucci!" Lucian observed quickly. "He and you and I—we've all three been double-crossed, Florio! I didn't even know you were in it until a few weeks ago, and I don't believe you knew about me; they were pretty foxy! But tell me!"

"Eet was Vito who send for me a year ago last May; he say he have beeg-a da commish' and I go to dat Haynes Corners!"

He rolled the name with venom on his tongue. "T'ree year I do not see Vito and I find heem een a miserrable w'at you call-a far-rm'ouse. He tell-a me nosing 'bout w'at he do, and I ask heem nosing, but soon two men come een a motor car, one Vito call-a Mike—"

"I know him," Lucian interrupted. "Who was the other?"

Florio shrugged.

"Never do I know, but he have weeth heem a bag and een eet da jewels. We maka da deal and Mike and da man depart. Da jewels he leave weeth me on da word of Vito. Soon Mike, he come back in da car, and da next-a morn' I r-return to da cit' and I work like da hell! Da pearls I must buy and da great-a diamond, eet ees not so good, for I must r-rush too queeck, but een two weeks all-a ees feenish."

"Vito comes and I geeve heem da fake een da old settings and da real jewels, loose; all-a but da beega stone. Dat I am to sell and send-a da mon' to Vito, eeven eef eet take two-t'ree mont'. Vito, he pay me da price for da fakes w'at da man have agreed, but w'en da jewels are sold I am to have my share. Da Merrington Diamond I no can sell een dees-a countree—too much-a well known—and Europe ees close' to me, so I send for Vito and he come and taka eet away; da man, he weel not have eet cut down. Dat ees een October. I wait for my share from da jewels, but da man all-a time tell-a Vito he no can sell, no can get-a price. One year I wait, mio amic', ontill las' June. Den I find dat da jewels are sold, all but da great-a stone, and I write-a

da lett' to Vito, I want my share from da man or I go to da lady w'at ees rob and I tell she got-a da fake, onlee."

"Florio, I want the truth or I cannot help you!" Lucian said sternly. "The lady who owns the Merrington Diamond; you know who she is—"

"W'at jewel expert does not?" Florio shrugged again. "Mees-a Wyatt, she whose man fall-a dead at da alt' een da church not t'ree week after I feenish da fake. But dat ees da work of w'at you call-a fate, eet have nosing to do weeth da peeg who rob her and cheat me!"

"Vito, too, w'atever eet ees dat he do for dat man he ees cheat, but he have great a-fright; he ees scare even of dat Mike! Me, I am not a-fright and my letter to Vito, eet scare da man so dat he stall-a for seex-seven week, but den he send me by Vito da Merrington Diamond again, and he say I can cut eet down, sell-a da small stones and keep half w'at I get. Dat ees een August, but Florio ees not-a da beeg fool twice!"

"I wait, I theenk of da Signor Yohalem, and Sunda' night I come, sell-a da diamond to heem and he geeves to me and to Vito eef I have reech heem in time safety until we can skeep-a da countree. Onlee las' week I get-a da warn' from Vito; he ees a-fright, da man ees a-fright, for Mees-a Wyatt, she deescover da fake at las', and she start-a sometheeng! Eet ees da truth dat I tell-a you, mio amic', I swear it by all da saints!"

"You only saw the man once, then, when you went to Colucci's farm a year ago last May?"

"Onlee once." Florio nodded with a sneer. "He ees w'at you call-a pretty man—beeg-a eyes, weeth brows lika da pencil stroke, long, curling lashes, lips of a woman and a deemple een hees chin! He would not-a have been so-a preet' eef he have not send back to me da Blue Diamond, and I find heem! I do not cheat even a peëg, but I keep hees share of w'at da Signor Yohalem pay until I learn eef he have cheat Vito! Now you know all, mi' amic'; you weel arrange dat I taka de sheep to-morrow?"

"Yes." Lucian rose and once more held out his hand. "Do nothing until I come."

He took his leave, and the butler waiting in the lower hall showed him out. The street was seemingly deserted and he walked on as though in a dream, forgetful for the moment even of the famous jewel beneath his coat. One phrase which Florio Guardini had used was hammering upon his brain, dulling his consciousness to all else.

So it was that he did not glance into the shadowed spaces as he proceeded toward the avenue, he did not hear the quick, stealthy steps behind him nor did that sleeping sixth sense, which had more than once saved him, waken to warn him of danger now. Like a searing dart of fire the sharp steel blade pierced his back and with a single choking cry he fell prone upon his face, with the world blotted out.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

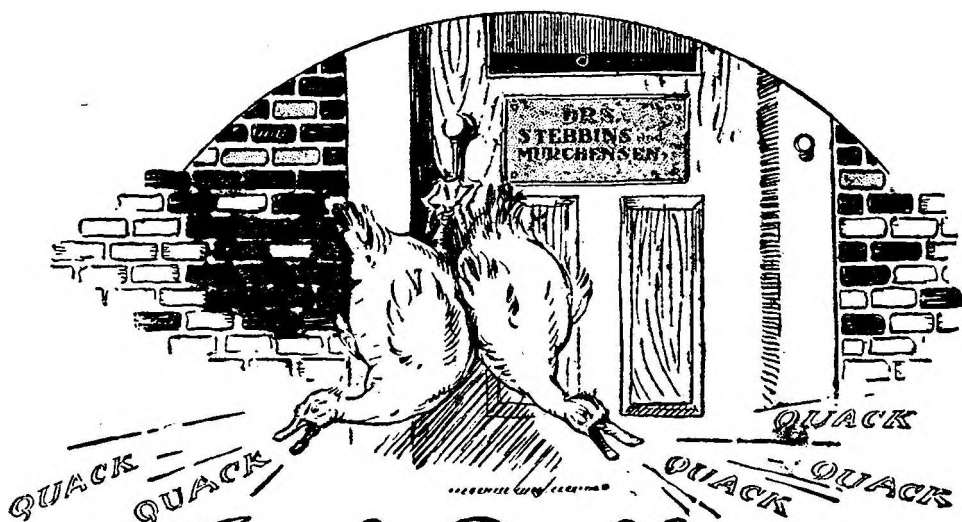


THE CONQUEROR

IT is not Love that frightens me,
 Though he be cruel as a sword
 And bitter as the hungry sea,
 More worthless than a wanton's word.

To Love's bright blade my heart is bare,
 Knowing Love himself shall soon lie still,
 Slain, with all lovely things and rare,
 By Time's inexorable will.

Edna Valentine Trapnell.



Josh Stebbins, Cold Storage Expert

By A. D. TEMPLE

OUTSIDE the snow lay deep and a January blizzard howled among the treetops and whistled shrilly through the telephone and telegraph wires.

In the back store of McGoogle's cash grocery, gathered around the glowing red-hot stove, members of the Coonburg Sportsman's Club discussed the weather and other topics of general interest, refreshing themselves meantime by an occasional raid on the cider barrel, the smoked herring box or the cracker can, all three of which were within convenient reach.

Link Brown was reading the latest news telegram in the *Weekly Clarion* just as a gust of freezing air caused a shiver to run through the crowd at Jeff Tate's entrance from the windswept street. He shook the snow off his heavy overcoat and fur cap as the door closed behind him.

"This storm is a humdinger, boys!" he declared, taking a seat and reaching for his

pipe and tobacco. "It's cold enough to freeze the hair off a brass monkey, an' gettin' colder every minit."

Link Brown looked up from his paper. "They're having it worse up in Canada," he announced. "Listen to this," and he read aloud:

"Halifax, Jan. 6.—Associated Press Dispatch.

"Advices from the Straits of Belle Isle state that the fishing steamer *Weary Willie*, of St. Johns, Newfoundland, went ashore December 31 on the coast of Labrador, and when discovered by the coast guard, was covered with a sheet of ice. The entire crew of twenty-seven souls were frozen to death. They were given Christian burial on a point of land in full view of the scene of their disaster, the Rev. Mr. Greenwood, missionary to the Eskimos, reading the burial service over them."

Josh Stebbins, who, luxuriously seated on the mackerel keg at just the right distance from the stove, was lunching on a sandwich

composed of two soda crackers, with a slice of cheese, half a dill pickle and a sliver of smoked herring in between, arose to his feet. He next served himself with a drink of McGoogle's celebrated denatured cider, which, for some occult reason, was a favorite beverage among his regular customers whose discretion and secrecy had been put to the acid test.

Wiping his lips with one hand, Josh waved the other in the air with a gesture of righteous indignation.

"Them fellers," he said bitterly, "thet buried the crew o' the Weary Willie an' the parson thet read the service fer the dead over 'em oughter be hung fer murder in the full degree!"

"How come, Josh?" asked Link Brown. "You wouldn't have 'em leave 'em unburied, would you, for the wolves an' bears an' sea lions to eat up?"

"O' course not, Link; I'm a humane man, I am, an' a scientific one besides. But it most makes me cry when I think of a hull ship's crew—cap'n, mates, foremast hands, cook, an' steward—all hevin' been buried alive, all on account o' pure boneheadedness. Mebbe ef they'd only buried the cap'n an' the mates I wouldn't feel it so deeply, fer most of 'em need killin', anyway. Ask any before-the-mast, deep-water sailor ef it ain't so."

"Buried alive? What d'ye mean, Josh?" came in a chorus from his audience.

"Yeah, thet's what I said, fellers, an' I meant it! Them sailormen wa'n't no more dead than me or you, this minit. They was jest in a state of suspended animation from the cold, an ef they'd been thawed out keerfully by intelligent men on scientific principles, they'd be doin' their work an' eatin' their vittles to-day."

"Excuse me, Mr. Stebbins," interrupted the shoalmaster, who was an interested listener. "Have you ever known personally of an instance of a person who was frozen to death having been resuscitated?"

"Now yer shoutin', purfesser! I hev so, an' me an' my shipmate, Byron Murchensen, did it. We diskivered it by accident the way most other great diskiveries hez been found out.

"Benjamin Franklin was playin' with a

kite when he diskivered electricity, an' I read somewhere thet a monk or a monkey, I don't remember which, was fryin' bacon an' by puttin' too much saltpeter in the seasonin' got blowed up an' diskivered gunpowder, which, used right, is the greatest civilizer the world hez ever seen. Some claim thet the chinks diskivered it a thousand years before thet, but I don't believe it, fer ef they hed they'd be more civilized than we are, an' they ain't.

II.

"YE see, it happened this way: Me an' my partner was fishin' through the ice one winter up North. It was so cold thet every time we ketched a fish we'd throw him out on the ice an' after flappin' round fer two or three minits he'd be froze stiffer'n a poker.

"Wal, we was hevin' all kinds o' luck an' jest piled the fish up at the edge o' the hole like cordwood, callatin' when we hed a sled load we'd sell 'em in the nearest town at ten cents a pound. We fished steady fer a week, an' must 'a' hed a ton of lake trout, muskellunge, an' pike piled up on the ice when we went over to a ranch to borrow a team an' sled to haul 'em over to town an' sell 'em.

"When we got to the ranch there was a dance under way with plenty of whisky, an' between dancin' with the gals an' drinkin' hot whisky punches we forgot what we'd come fer fer a couple o' days. When we went back the weather hed changed an' it was thawin' with the sun shinin' bright and warm.

"From the lake shore the fish pile looked kinda small to us, an' when we got nearer we seen thet the fish was slippin' down off the pile an' flappin' round on the ice. Most of 'em hed flapped inter the water when we got thar, an' we only managed to grab a forty-pound lake trout an' a fifty-pound muskellunge thet was at the bottom o' the pile an' wasn't thawed out enough to flap.

"It got out goat to see them fish thet was good an' dead come to life an' swim off, but we seen thet we was about to find out a great scientific fact thet would be of use to thousands, ef it would work on humans.

"So when the ice broke up in the spring we went East an' took a course o' study in a college thet guaranteed to make doctors of us in three months fer fifty dollars a head. We sure learned a heap o' things thet was new to us, in them three months.

"When we got our dyplomy ez doctors, the president o' the college said thet in consideration of the ability we hed showed, ef we could qualify, he'd give us a surgeon's dyplomy fer ten dollars extry. I told him I'd worked a year in a pork-packin' plant in Chicago, an' knowed my partner hed worked six months in a butcher shop, so he said ef we'd thet much experience we could have 'em at half price. An' we paid it!

"We got our dyplomys framed, an' then, buyin' a long-tailed coat an' a plug hat apiece, we hired an office an' started in doctorin', hopin' ef there was a hard winter ahead of us, we might raise the dead an' git a repytation by thawin' out some poor devil thet hed got froze to death. But instead o' raisin' the dead we raised hell, an' mighta been tarred an' feathered ef we hedn't pulled our freight mighty quick."

"What was they goin' to tar and feather you fer, Josh?" asked Jeff Tate.

"Fer nothin', jest nothin' at all, Jeff. Ye see, I got my medicines mixed up, an' kinda absent-minded like, I prescribed a dose of tartar emetic when I oughta give cream o' tartar.

"An' my partner queered himself by givin' all his patients pills made outa bread-crumbs, opium, and red pepper. It didn't make no difference whether they hed the mumps or a bellyache, he give 'em the same dose every time.

"Then a doctor thet was purfeshunally jealous of us hired somebody to hang a couple o' live ducks on our front door knob while we was out visitin' our patients at five dollars a visit. When we come back the ducks was quackin' 'Quack-quack-quack!' an' a crowd of people, most of 'em folks thet we'd been doctorin', was standin' there lookin on.

"When they seen us they commenced hootin' an' yellin': 'Lynch 'em! Hang 'em! Tar an' feather 'em!' We seen we was mighty unpopular an', barrin' the door when we got inside, we packed our grips an' slid

over the back fence, quietlike, an' took the first train outa town, bound East.

"By the time they got the tar hot an' hed the feathers ready we was a hundred miles away, ridin' the 'flier' headed fer New Bedford an' salt water, where ef we got tarred up they wouldn't be no feathers mixed with it.

III.

"THE whaler Wild Goose was shippin' a crew fer a v'y'ge to Baffins Bay an' the north Greenland coast after right whale an' walrus. The skipper was old Ebenezer Oldbuck, a down-Easter from Skowhegan.

We shipped with him, an' while I don't like to speak ill of a dead man, I'll just tell the world thet a bigger skinflint an' man-killer than him never walked the quarter deck."

"Why, don't doctors git good treatment on shipboard?" asked Link Brown.

"We didn't ship ez doctors, we jest shipped ez A. B.'s before the mast, on a two-hundred-an'-fifty bar'l lay, meanin' thet ef we got a full ship with five thousand bar'ls we'd hev twenty bar'ls fer our pay.

"We didn't let on thet we was medical men, though we come aboard in our plug hats an' long-tailed coats, fer we left town in sech a hurry thet we didn't hev time to change, an' hed ter git our seagoin' togs outa the ship's slop chest after we was off soundin's in blue water.

"All they was in the slop chest was Cape Ann oilskins; sou'westers, cotton shirts, low-cut canvas shoes, an' a lot of Palm Beach suits with straw hats, thet would 'a' been all right ef we'd been goin' after sperm whale in the South Seas, but was too cool fer the climate o' Greenland.

"We'd 'a' froze to death ef we hedn't run foul of an iceberg no'th o' Newfoundland thet hed five white bears on it. We made breeches and coats outa their hides thet would 'a' give cards an' spades to ol' Robinson Crusoe in his goat skins."

"Who vas dot Robumzun Cruzo? Is he der man vot vent proke mit raisin' goats on der Schwartz ranch across de river?" inquired Fritz Spreckelmyer, the Mud Creek rancher, who had just come in and was warming his hands before the stove.

"No! You durned Dutchman, didn't you never hear o' Robinson Crusoe thet was a sailorman like me an' got wrecked on an island where they wasn't nothin' but parrots an' cannibals an' goats? He was marooned there fer ten years, an' ez they wasn't no tailors handy, when his close wore out, he hed ter do his own tailorin' with nothin' but raw goat hides ter work with an' a palm needle threaded with oakum ter sew with."

Jed Styles, the ex-aviator, remarked:

"I remember when I was goin' to school we used to have a song:

" 'Poor old Robinson Crusoe;
Oh, dear, what made him do so?
He made him a coat
Of the skin of a goat.
Hurrah for Robinson Crusoe! "

"Wal, this ain't no literary congress, so we'll let it go at that," Josh retorted testily. "What I was tellin' about was how the Wild Goose was fixed fer ship's stores an' outfit fer whalin' in the arctic.

"The hard tack was weevilly an' the salt horse must 'a' been salt mule, fer it hed lots o' kick. It purty near kicked the cook outa the galley when he took a chunk of it fer the lobsouse, an' when he passed out a mess kit of it to the watch on deck they jest took one whiff at it an' made out a round-robin to the skipper askin' him to order the cook from then on to make the lobsouse with straight hard tack. They said thet the weevils in the hard tack was all the meat they needed an' thet they tasted better an' didn't smell quite so loud ez the salt mule.

"The skipper got mad an' allowed he'd put the hull watch in irons fer mutinous conduct, but ez he was short-handed he never did it.

"I hed a chance ter peek inter the medicine chest, an' all they was in it was about five pounds o' calomel, a five-gallon can of castor oil, an' four dozen boxes o' pills fer chills an' fever! In the chest thet was marked 'For Surgical Instruments' they was only a carvin' knife, a butcher's cleaver, an' a hand saw. I reckon the hull lot cost the skipper ez much ez six bits in a hock shop."

"The whalin' gear was better, but was

purty old-fashioned, like the skipper. They was bomb guns, harpoons an' lances with good whale line a-plenty, but we didn't hev no live hogs aboard fer trollin' with live bait, like we hed on the Gray Wolf when I made my fust v'y'ge whalin'.

"I told the captain 'bout the way we ketched whales on thet v'y'ge, an' I was never so insulted in my life, fer he told me thet I was a damned liar an' wuss'n thet, he said he didn't believe I hed ever been outa sight o' land on blue water in all my life. An' thet to me, thet hed sailed the seven seas an' couldn't no more tell a lie than George Washington himself!"

"Josh, for the luvva Mike," interrupted Pat McGoogle, "quit ruining that old Yankee skipper's character and tell us what you did on the coast of Greenland before I have to shut up the store and turn all you fellows out on the street."

"Thet was jest what I was tryin' ter do, Pat, when you chipped in. Ye see, we sailed inter Baffins Bay an' hed purty good luck with the whales, considerin' our outfit, but the ol' man kept pushin' no'th among the field ice, huntin' whales an' walrus.

"In the open places between the floes we got lots o' walrus, but some was fighters an' they smashed up half of our boats an' drowned part o' the crew, thet was short-handed when we sailed, but the skipper kept us steerin' N.W.N., callatin', I reckon, to sail round the no'th side of Greenland, an' come back by the east coast with a full ship.

IV.

"It didn't come out thet way, though, fer when we was up somewhere between the North Pole an' Greenland we got froze in hard an' fast an' before we seen blue water agen the hull crew hed died o' the scurvy, exceptin' me an' Byron Murchensen, my side partner.

"We was up against it right, with a seven-hundred-ton bark on our hands froze in the ice, with none o' them new-fangled wireless outfits to tell the world where we was located an' how to find us, like they do nowa-days. All we could do was to sit tight an' hope the weather would moderate an' the ice let loose of us, but the way it kept git-

tin' colder it seemed more likely thet hell would freeze over before the next thaw.

"Ez long ez we kept below decks we wasn't so badly off, fer we hed plenty of whale oil to burn an' keep us warm, an' whale beef an' walrus steaks, with hard tack to eat. It took good teeth to chew the steaks, but they was very fillin'; besides, in the skipper's private stores we found a whole bar'l o' whisky, about ten gallons o' the fightin'est Jersey lightnin' I ever tasted, an' a big stone jug full o' mellow peach brandy."

"How'd you know that Jersey lightning was fightin' stuff? You an' yer partner didn't fight, did you?" asked Link Brown.

"Wal, no, we didn't fight, but we come mighty near it every time we took a couple o' horns of it, so we laid off of it an' drunk whisky an' peach brandy. I wish I hed a bottle o' thet peach brandy right now; it's great stuff.

"We jest eat an' slept an' mixed hot tod-dies all winter, fer it was too dark an' cold to go huntin' or projeckin' round to find out where we was at. But when it commenced to lighten up about the last of February we chirked up a bit an' went huntin' fer bear an' seal to git a bit o' fresh meat.

"They was a big, tall iceberg about five miles from the ship, an' one day we went over toward it, thinkin' mebbe we'd find a bear or two hangin' round there. Howsomever, we made a dry haul an' was turnin' back for the ship when a sort of a cave in the side o' the berg thet we hedn't noticed till then looked ez ef they might be a bear sleepin' inside, an' so we crawled in.

"The hole growed bigger the farther in we went until we could stand up straight an' see ahead of us by the light thet showed through the ice. All to once we seen ahead of us the bow of a boat stickin' up outa the ice in the cave dead ahead of us."

"It was a lost whale boat, wasn't it?" asked one of his listeners.

"It was not! It was the derndest queerest craft I ever laid eyes on. It hed a high prow with a bear's head carved on the end of it fer a figgerhead. From there aft she was built purty much the same model ez thet big dugout war canoe they've got in the New York Mooseyum of Nacheral Hist'ry.

thet was built by the Haidah Injuns up in Alaska out of a single white cedar log.

"This wasn't a dugout, but was of oak planking, rigged with a single mast an' long sweeps fer rowin' when the wind give out. The steerin' gear was an oar lashed to the stern post, like we steer a whaleboat. She was about nine foot beam an' sixty-five or seventy foot overall, with a purty high free-board. I reckon she was eighteen or twenty tons register.

"We went up alongside to look over the gunnel, keepin' our rifles ready ef we found a bear hed been makin' his headquarters there, but they wasn't no need. Everything was peaceable an' quiet on board."

Josh paused and helped himself to another tumbler of denatured cider, took a fresh chew of plug and resumed his yarn.

"Fellers, what we seen was a bunch o' thirty men, all froze ez stiff ez pokers! They was big husky squareheads every one, but ez harmless ez lambs when we found 'em. There they lay under the thwarts, wrapped up in bear skins, musk-ox hides, an' reindeer hides, with their arms alongside of 'em.

"First off, I thought we'd found some Dutch opery company thet hed drifted no'th while on a v'y'ge an' got froze in, fer the only time I'd ever seen sech a lookin' outfit before was once in New York where, after bein' paid off from a v'y'ge from Rio, I got spificated an' bought a ten dollar ticket to see grand opery in the Metropolitan opery house. A mighty good-lookin' lady thet set next to me told me the play was called 'Low Hen Green,' but how in time they give a civilized name ter sech on-civilized lookin' folks, beat me.

"Them singers was most of 'em dressed in bear hide coats with britches thet reached only to their knees, bare shins, an' rawhide moccasins in place o' shoes. All the arms they hed was spears, swords, battle axes an' shields. They wasn't a rifle, six-shooter or shotgun amongst the hull crowd.

"Wal, them frozen squareheads in the iceberg looked ez ef they'd jest come off the opery house stage. We climbed aboard an' looked 'em over an' I asked Byron: 'How d'ye think these actors got adrift an' froze in so far no'th?'

" 'Actors?' he sez, 'why them guys never seen a theayter.'

" 'How come?' I sez, 'ef they never seen a theayter thet they're all togged out like theayter actors?'

" 'Why you big lubberhead,' he sez, 'hain't ye ever studied ancient hist'ry? They're dressed from the latest fashion plates thet the tailors was workin' from about twelve hundred years back when this crew left port to go huntin' or to do some piratin'."

" 'Do I git ye right?' I sez, 'or am I hard o' hearin'? D'ye mean ter tell me thet these 'ere stiffs heaved their anchor and started on a cruise more'n a thousand years ago? You go an' tell it to Sweeny!'

" 'Yeah, thets what I sed,' he sez, 'an' it's right! When I was sailin' outa Bremen in the Baltic trade, I went ashore in Stockholm an' there in a mooseyum they hed a craft jest like this one with a crew o' stuffed dummies to man her, dressed the same ez these stiffs are an' with the same kind of weapons.

" 'The man thet showed me round told me the boat hed been dug up on the coast o' Norway where it had been buried fer twelve hundred years at the very least, an' the dummies in her was dressed jest like the most fashionable people togged themselves out in them times, long before plug hats an' six-shooters was invented.'

" 'All right! You win,' I sez, 'but what'll we do with 'em? Give 'em a Christian burial or leave 'em ez they are?'

V.

" 'We won't do neither,' he sez. 'It'd be wastin' time to pray over 'em, fer they're jest savages thet worship a Pagan god they call "Odin," an' they think the more throats they cut the more he thinks of 'em. Ez fer leavin' 'em ez they are; we're short-handed on the Wild Goose. What's the matter o' haulin' 'em aboard an' thawin' 'em out?'

" 'Help! Help!' I hollered. 'Partner, you're sure goin' bughouse! What'll we do with these frozen squareheads after they're thawed out? It's springtime an' ef the weather changes to warmer, we'll have 'em

goin' bad on us in less'n a week. Better leave 'em here in cold storage, like they've been fer the last thousand years.'

" 'Josh, where yer brains oughter to be there's enough ivory fer the makin' of a dozen billiard balls,' he sez. 'Can't ye see thet here we hev a chance ter make our names known all over the world ez diskiverers of a great an' wonderful diskivery in medical science?'

" 'What diskivery?' I asks him. 'An' how are we goin' ter make it known ter the hull world when we're here about three degrees so'th of the North Pole an' froze hard an' fast in the ice, with no telegraph office or newspaper reporters within a thousand miles.'

" 'Why we can thaw 'em out an' set 'em to work,' he replied. 'They ain't dead, they're jest in a state o' suspended animation. All we got ter do is to thaw 'em out with care.

" 'Don't ye remember thet wagon load o' fish thet we caught in Lake Weepesaukee through the ice, thet thawed out when the sun come out an' flapped back inter the lake through the same hole we cut in the ice to ketch 'em? It was seein' them fish, thet we thought was dead, a-flappin' round fresh and lively thet set us to studyin' medicine fer the good of sufferin' humanity. An' now we've got a chance to put what we learned inter practice an' ef we make a mistake they ain't nobody around to tar an' feather us, like in Greenville.'"

" 'Wal, they've been suspended a long time, but ef you want to try it, why, all right,' I told him. 'But how are we goin' to start in?'

" 'We'll pry 'em loose an' get a sled an' pack 'em over to the ship an' bury 'em in thet snowdrift on the weather beam an' treat 'em one by one, jest like we treat a frosted ear or foot.'"

Josh paused and heaved a sigh as he took another chew and slaked his thirst with a sip of denatured cider.

" 'It was hard work, fellers! They was big, heavy men an' froze so hard they was ez brittle ez glass. We got a block an' fall to hist 'em over the side onto the sled.

" 'One of 'em slipped outa the sling an' fell about four foot, an' the fall broke off his

head an' left leg jest es ef it was a marble stacher. Then the sled turned turtle in the rough ice, breakin' two more in sech small pieces they was no further use, bein' past mendin'.

"But we got twenty-seven inter the snowdrift, whar we thawed 'em out slow an' easy. It was mighty ticklish work an' only our scientific studies in medicine turned the trick.

"At the end of a week we'd drawed the frost out of 'em so we could handle 'em without breakin', then we put 'em in the blubber room an' kept 'em at a temperature o' one degree above freezin', 'til they hed life enough in 'em to wink one eye an' ask fer another drink each time we opened their mouths an' poured a horn o' whisky into 'em.

"In a week more they was up an' around. Byron could talk to 'em, an' he told me their lingo was purty near to what is talked nowadays among the Swede an' Norwegian sailormen.

"We taught 'em the ropes an' fed 'em on whale beef, salt mule an' walrus meat so thet when the ice begun to break up we hed a good crew to work her out to open water. Ez the weather got warmer we served out each one a Palm Beach suit from the slop chest an' a straw hat with a blue band an' a gilt foul anchor onto it. It tickled 'em to death."

VI.

"WHAT sort of a moral character did these resuscitated mariners appear to have?" asked the schoolmaster. "I've read that these Vikings from the north of Europe were robbers and pirates."

"Purfessor, you called the turn ez fer ez I know anything about 'em. I couldn't talk to 'em much, but it's said, 'Actions speak louder'n words,' an' the way they double-crossed us after we'd saved 'em from an icy grave, showed thet besides bein' pirates an' robbers their moral character was no better'n ef they was boardin' house runners.

"Byron said thet one big, red-headed feller with a long red beard an' mustache was called 'Red Eric' by the rest of 'em an' was their cap'n, but aboard the 'Wild

Goose' he was a deck hand before the mast, an' he didn't like bein' made ter work an' gettin' ropes-ended now an' then.

"Mebbe it would'nt turned out so bad fer us ef it hed'nt been fer the Jersey Lightnin' thet we hed. We was outa the ice and blue water, homeward bound an' everything fine, when trouble struck us like a white squall an' knocked us silly.

"Ye see, our whisky hed give out, ez we used it fer both beverage an' medicinal purposes, an' them squareheads soaked up a heap of it. The peach brandy we wanted to keep fer special occasions, like the Fourth o' July or Christmas, so we broached the lightnin'.

"It's fightin' stuff, like I told ye, an' purty soon Byron an' me was in a scrap. While we was scrappin', friendly like, the deck watch with Red Eric ez ringleader stole a five gallon jug o' Jersey lightnin' outa the cabin, an' in less'n an hour the hull deck was in a reg'lar free-for-all with the air full o' belayin' pins an' marlin spikes.

"I remember hittin' Red Eric with a capstan bar, then somebody put me to sleep. When I woke up me an' my partner was adrift in the ship's dingey, an' the 'Wild Goose' was hull down, her tops'ls jest showin' ez she steered due east.

"A cod fisherman picked us up an' landed us in St. Johns, but we'd lost the salvage thet was comin' to us on the 'Wild Goose,' an' the livin' witnesses thet we could raise the dead hed gone blooey."

"Haven't you ever heard of the ship and crew since?" inquired Jed Styles.

"Sure! Last summer I seen Red Eric. He was the big bouncer of a soft drink an' dance hall saloon in Chicagy. They called him 'The Big Swede!'"

"He knowed me all right, but when I asked him fer a testimonial of what we'd done fer him an' his pals in the Arctic, he crawfished. He sed ef his boss seen sech a testimonial and found out how old he was, he'd sure git fired ez he was too derned iar past the age limit.

"There's gratitood fer ye! I reckon he had it in fer me because I broke his nose with thet capstan bar.

"Good night, boys; I'm goin' home."



Secret of Powder Basin*

By **EMERSON HOUGH**

Author of "The Covered Wagon," "54-40 or Fight," "The Magnificent Adventure," etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TIME, THE PLACE, THE GIRL.

A FULL day passed, and, too, another night. Meantime, there had been yet other shiftings of the scenes on this remote mountain stage. Neighbors came, and many men, uncovered, stood beside one more infrequent grave on the hillside. These neighbors returned.

Dr. Burlingham wrote out and signed a statement covering the nature of the death and interment of Richard Washburn. There would yet remain the visits to the county seat; and there, in due course, must be carried out the provisions of Washburn's will, as the law later might provide.

On the morning after these last events the Ballantyne family, with the exception of Amos, met for discussion of their own

affairs. By this time, of course, they all knew the nature of the late encounter with the sheep man, the advent of the oil train, and all the other events connected.

The very presence of Ben Schooley on his strange errand was proof that there was imminent such a boom in Powder Basin as never yet had been known. It required no great intelligence to see that values thereabout might go kiting.

"That scoundrel got away before I could see what he took with him," said John Ballantyne. "What you signed, Jennie, may have been a deed or option. I don't know what. In any case, we'll have the place or forty thousand dollars—or more."

Poor Annie was sore troubled by all these things. Moreover, there was something concealed in her mind, of which she had not told her nearest friend.

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Twenty-four hours after she had received them, she had opened the letters addressed to her. Both envelopes had been inscribed to her, not in the handwriting of the man who had written them. But there had been some mistake. One communication—stiff, formal, expressed the thanks of Mr. Daniel Allison Powers to her for her many courtesies during his late illness. It was quite correct.

She turned to the other letter. Geraldine! In the name of heaven, who was Geraldine? And if a man must be so silly as to write thus, why could he not be more careful for his correspondence? Dear Jerry, forsooth! So that was why he had never come to the O-A Ranch.

Her little basket of sandwiches on her arm, she followed her usual trail that morning to the crossing of the roads where stood the edifice in which she made the most part of the Ballantyne living. She spread out on the rough pine board of the counter once more the two letters which she had carried in her hand bag.

Dear Jerry, forsooth! But it would have been rather nice after all to have been dear Jerry, would it not? She fell to wondering what Daniel Allison Powers looked like. Amos liked him—he never had tired of describing his prowess in the round pen with the cattle. He seemed to be a man used to being among men.

Oh, perhaps he would do as a homesteader, yes. You could not expect much out there. And it had been quite natural that Dr. Burlingham, with so few friends present from whom to make a selection, should always have spoken well of Mr. Powers. Still, that gave her no definite idea of the personal appearance of the young man.

She had for some time busied herself about minor matters when at length she heard a car draw up at the gate. Instinctively she smoothed her hair, adjusted the cuffs of her flannel shirt, and stood at her best professional attention behind the counter awaiting her unknown visitor.

She looked up and saw him hesitant at the door. He was leaning just a little against the stick he carried. Against the light she saw him to be as she had thought, tall, slender, and of good proportions.

Apparently turned out in the best he could muster at the time, his boots and puttees were very neat, his military breeches exceedingly well cut, his flannel shirt and dark tie equally correct. On his head was a soft hat, and he carried over his arm a civilian coat, which he now proceeded to put on, as at once he had removed his hat.

Then he advanced a step straight toward her and stopped. He had not spoken.

"Good morning, sir," said Annie Ballantyne, with professional calm. "Will you sit here, please?"

He was silent, and she looked up. The young man's face was flushed—he was staring at her strangely, his eyes not leaving her face. He advanced slowly and stood, one hand against the edge of the counter, still looking at her.

Embarrassed and flushed, she spoke again. "What shall I do for you, sir?" He surely seemed a gentleman, and yet how strange his actions. She heard him speak, now, his voice low and, as it seemed to her, unduly tense.

"I came here to find out what that name over the door means," said he. "Now I know."

"Yes?" Annie's eyes were aside. "Rather an unusual name, yes. We didn't want this to be confused with any other place along the road."

"You don't know me?" said the young man, stepping still closer and putting both hands on the edge of the counter.

"We don't usually ask," she replied.

"I'm Mr. Powers, from down the lake. I see my own letter lying there. I can't help knowing it, of course, as my own handwriting."

"Oh!" Annie put out her little hand to him, stiffly, as was always her wont, for a certain shyness regarding men always had remained with her. "Of course, I'm glad to see you. I thank you for writing."

"I have been some time in reaching my privilege of seeing you for the first time!"

"So, since we didn't seem to meet," she said evenly, "I'm sorry it's to be so brief now."

She was about to turn away.

"What do you mean? Do you want me to go? Why, Annie Ballantyne,"—he

had followed her along the counter which separated them—he went on astonishingly, strangely, “it’s a miracle that brings us here. When I heard about the name of this place, why then I knew there couldn’t be any mistake.”

“I’ve been here all the time. But as to seeing you before—”

“Sit down there,” he said suddenly. As he would have placed a hand on her shoulder, she sat down as he seated himself opposite.

“You say that to me,” he went on, “when this might be the very same place that we met, and now you deny it, even under your own title! You’re going to try to tell me that you don’t remember the Silver Dot in Chicago, and the night you sat there in your little hat and jacket with the hand bag by your side, over against the wall beyond the cashier.”

“And I’ve wondered and wondered all this time where you went, and if I’d see you again. And now here we are both a thousand miles away. Why, that’s not accident—it had to be. It always was.”

She sat for a time silent. “I do not—remember. It must have been very long ago.”

“It was last March in Chicago.”

“Many people come into a public place. Many come here—more in a city. You surely are mistaken. There are many girls a man might see in a café.”

“Yes, but only one like you.”

“You seem to have confidence,” said Annie Ballantyne quietly.

“I wasn’t much then and I’m not much now,” rejoined Dan Powers. “But from that time I first saw you I’ve been different, I’ll say that much. I came out here to settle down and do the best I could for a start. I swore that some day I’d find you, and that I’d be worth while when I did.”

He arose and stepped back a pace. “But you are glorious!” said he exultantly. “You are glorious.”

She felt the crimson rush to her face, felt herself begin to tremble.

“Do you stop to think what you’re saying? I’m not used to this sort of thing.”

Powers spoke grimly. “It’s just detail, so far as I’m concerned. I’ve not changed.”

He was leaning toward her now across the counter top, checked, at something, he knew not what, her indifference, her coldness. Her eyes were now raised, clear and cool.

“You have me at a disadvantage. I’m a business woman here and alone. You feel free. I despise a man who flirts with a cashier or a waitress—or with a decent girl who isn’t either.”

“You think that of me?”

“Why not?”

She flung toward him across the counter the other letter which had laid there. “I think this was not meant for me. You’d better have it back.”

He took the letter and looked it over quietly, thoroughly.

“You wrote it, of course?”

“Yes! But it was meant for you. If I had to write it all over again I don’t know that I could do better.”

“You are very facile!”

“I am nothing of the sort.” Now he leaned toward her once more, and his intentness held her. “Yes, I wrote it. I did write it to another girl—a girl you don’t know, more wonderful and more beautiful than you can imagine—because you don’t know how wonderful and beautiful you are. I did tell Geraldine I love her—and I do. You think we were engaged, and we are. I signed it—and I’ll sign it again.”

And did so, before her eyes, and pushed it back to her.

“Jerry was you—and you’re Jerry, only more—very much more.”

There was so much gravity now in his tones that she was unable to make any reply at all. She sat silent, her head turned away. Her hands, interlaced, still lay upon the counter. He caught them swiftly in his own grasp before she could move.

“I’ve asked Jerry to marry me,” said he. “You know what that means.”

She could not withdraw her hands from the strength of his, which lay upon them. She heard his voice go on, steadily. “And you know it, and cannot deny it—Jerry was you, and you are Jerry, only more.”

She struggled back from him, a sudden gust of sobs shaking her, although her eyes were dry. Her lover had come as she would

have had him come. But love was not for her.

She could see before her the picture of her own life, its past, its future, drab and uninviting, full of odious duties. But Annie Ballantyne had courage.

"You don't know. If you knew, you'd not talk this way to me. This is the first time you've met me. You must—go away."

"There's some one else!"

"Yes! There is—some one else—I have no right, nor have you."

"You've promised?"

"Yes! I've given my promise."

It seemed to Annie Ballantyne that the little white clock on the little board shelf covered with white oilcloth never had ticked so loudly. It seemed an age before she heard his chair pushed back, heard him step unevenly toward the door, heard his uneven footfall on the porch.

She threw her head down upon her arm, her hands clenched. And now Annie Ballantyne, a traitor to her own soul, wept indeed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DIRECT ACTION.

BURLINGHAM greeted Dan Powers on his appearance at the clubhouse with no more than a grunt. He seemed so well contented with his pipe that it was some moments before he was disposed to conversation. He began by telling Powers briefly the story of the late swift events around the lake, including the episode of Dick Washburn and explaining that Battersleigh for the time was incommunicado at his own place.

"How are things over at Centennial?" he asked, at length. "Where do we stand?"

"Shot to pieces," Dan replied. "There isn't any oil company or any place for one."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Our friend Sanders is breaking in. Option filed by one of his men at Centennial—two weeks—forty thousand dollars for the Ballantyne place. That gives him a place all his own and he doesn't have to lease. The title's good."

"Forty thousand dollars is a lot of money when you haven't got it. Those people paid Ed Stanley five thousand dollars five months ago; fifteen hundred down and the balance in three years. Did Sanders pay anything down?"

"Ten thousand. He sent a man up there in the middle of the night, so it seems. The whole thing looked phoney, but as near as I can tell the option's valid."

"I hope it is! That's a good thing for those people. It doesn't affect the ice cream works, because there's two acres there that I bought for the girl myself and fenced in. Not so bad for them—no matter which way the cat jumps—that's not bad for a bunch of pilgrims, one summer's work, is it? How about us?"

"Shot to pieces. Sanders must be strong over at the land office. Stilson told me the U. S. reclamation project is being pushed down at the foot of the lake—they're crowding it through as fast as they can. A dam there would flood a lot of the land down where we are; not on my claim, but all along the lowlands. It wouldn't affect Batty's place very much. But the reclamation people are just as apt as not to condemn my homestead and take it off the agricultural market."

"Stilson says it was withdrawn from homestead entry before I filed, but he didn't know it then."

"So now we've got one more complication in our titles. If you want to begin to drill on land with nothing but a fight and a lawsuit and a red tape wrangle under it, I'll have to own it doesn't look good to me. Which 'll win, oil or water, I don't know, but it doesn't look as though we would."

"Well, don't get excited, son. We seem to be ready for whatever can happen. Our outfit's already on the ground—payroll and all. The question is, what is Sanders going to do? He's putting up forty thousand dollars, not because he's got nerve, but because he hasn't. He's scared. I've known a man to kill another man just because he was afraid of him. It isn't nerve, but nervousness that's got him going."

"It looks as if you'd have to take a brief vacation, though, my son," he added presently. "One of us has got to go to

Washington, and I can't. I don't know how long you'll have to be in the east."

"I don't care how long."

"Sometimes a homesteader can be gone six months and get by. Most of 'em do. Besides, I think the Thompson boys would make the continuous residence of anybody else on your claim a right unhappy sort of existence."

"I'll be glad to go," said Powers. Something in his tone made the other man look up quickly.

"All right. You can start to-night. I'll give you letters to department men in Washington, which may make these other people think they've been to a shooting match, anyhow. If it's going to be oil or irrigation in this little old valley, we'll make the irrigation people think they've been somewhere. I think we can take a chance on your homestead, but maybe you can come back this winter and sleep there a few nights just for the sake of form."

"And are you ready to forget Geraldine?" Burlingham chuckled to himself unctuously.

Powers saw that he could no longer evade a full explanation of all the curious coil which had only within the last hour found its own unraveling. So he told the story of Geraldine and of Annie Ballantyne from the start to its finish, bravely enough and modestly enough. His auditor sat quietly smoking, his face immobile.

"You can't get around that name of Annie's lunch room—Silver Dot, eh? There's the proof right there. The girl suggested that name to me herself. She's deeper than I thought, maybe. You spent about half an hour there. You probably talked too damned much."

Dan pushed back his chair and turned his back, hands in pockets.

"I don't think that sort of thing is to be discussed," said he.

"Tut, tut. What argument did the girl give when you wanted to marry her this morning, the second time you ever saw her?"

"She told me there was some one else. Well, that's why I'm ready to go to Washington, if you want to know the truth and all of it."

"All life is one continuous no, Dan."

"I didn't say I'd accept it for final," said Powers.

"No, but you want to go to Washington. Very well, you shall. All I want you to feel is that, in general terms, women classify as of the same species. The sainted mother of my six expensive daughters made the same sort of play at me for quite a while. So she said there was some one else. She lied to you. I know there isn't."

"You don't know that girl! She couldn't tell anything but the truth if she tried."

"If I thought that was true I wouldn't want you to marry her."

"If you'll excuse me, sir, I don't think this is quite cricket," Powers remarked.

"No? Well, maybe not. None the less I want to tell you that there isn't any one else. I know what's the trouble. Well, when you come back we may know more about a good many things."

At half past ten of the following morning, after Dan Powers had left Powder Basin, Hard-Boiled Burlingham pushed back his chair from the breakfast table at the shooting club. He opened a tin locker case and took out a full uniform of colonel in the Medical Corps, U. S. A. Reserves.

Observing this to be pressed to his satisfaction, he proceeded methodically to array himself therein, boots, spurs, and all. He placed a fine silk handkerchief around his left wrist and strapped on the wrist watch which he had discarded. He found clean woolen socks in the uniform case, and placing one on his hand, removed the last trace of dust from his boots.

"Regulations say officers of the Reserve may wear uniform upon occasions of ceremony," said Burlingham to himself, grinning. "If this isn't an occasion of ceremony, I never saw one."

He brushed back the tangle of heavy gray hair, and with a pair of scissors clipped off more closely the edge of a grizzled mustache. Buttoning the last button of his jacket, he picked up his swagger stick and gloves, carrying folded under the gloves the wool sock which army men sometimes find useful when no orderly is handy.

He strode out of the gate and up the road. When he reached the corner, he

stalked westward, and turned in at the great wagon gate of the Ballantyne ranch. He knocked at the side door.

As he expected, it was John Ballantyne who came to meet him, and they two shook hands, the medical man complimenting the other on his swift recovery. He had been an occasional caller at the place, and had Jennie Ballantyne had her way his visits would have been yet more frequent, but he steadily had refused even to investigate her case, saying that he was altogether out of medical practice.

"You're looking fine, John," said he. "By next year or very soon after that, the clot will be fully absorbed. You have been a pretty good man in your time." He ran a practiced hand along the great arm of old John, heavy and powerful even now.

He went on to tell him the latest events in the oil development, explaining a great number of things which otherwise might not have been plain. He added that he heard of the option of sale on the Ballantyne place, and strongly counselled it.

"Let it go, I'd say," he concluded. "It's a big turnover for your money. Oil booms don't come often. Get while the getting's good."

"My wife is crying all the time over it. She doesn't listen to me."

"Of course not. She doesn't listen to anybody."

The crippled old man sat silent for some time. "Those are things not to be discussed," said he.

"No. Not with any one but a medical man. If I were not that, I would not be here now."

"John, I've come up here to tell you about your wife. Not all the medicine in the world can ever help Jennie Ballantyne, my friend. You can't help her, and I can't, and neither could all the doctors in the world."

The old man nodded. "We have always regarded her as incurable."

"But she isn't incurable."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if she's ever cured, she'll cure herself. I can send you to the finest specialist in the world in New York. Your forty thousand will last there about two

months. At the end of it your wife will be sicker than she was when she started there."

"She's been helpless all her life—for years, I might say."

"I know all about it. I don't know that she can be cured, but there's just a fighting chance. Now when I think of that splendid girl over there, willing to sacrifice all her life trying to pull a load like that, and when I think of you, as honest as they make them, and as decent, trying to pull a load like that—which neither nor both of you ever can pull—well, that's why I thought the chance worth fighting for."

"I thought I'd come up and ask you what you thought. Your wife is a bad hysteric, the more you pity her and sympathize with her, the worse she'll be. The more she doctors the sicker she'll get. If you really want to kill her, get her plenty of doctors and plenty of medicine. The great thing for such a case is to get the patient absolutely honest with herself for one instant—just plain honest and honest with Almighty God. I came up here this morning to tell you that, John Ballantyne."

"Now if you let this thing run on," resumed Burlingham, after a time, "she'll kill you all—kill all your happiness."

"Yes, John, your wife is sick, awfully sick, I don't know anything worse in all the world. But she's not going to die. If it were my wife, so help me God, I'd rather have her dead honest than alive dishonest. Now, how are you going to make her honest—how are you going to give her poor weak feet a place to stand while she's getting started the right way?"

"What you say is hard to hear?" broke out Ballantyne. "Haven't we had enough? This has been the worst thing."

"Yes, I've come up here this morning to tell you I'd take that case—the only one in more than ten years. You can't pay me. The cure will be very brief. It may shock her mind. It may cure her. There is a fighting chance."

"You mean an operation?"

"Yes. I have come prepared to operate this morning. If all should come out well, you'll have less occasion to worry, John Ballantyne, than you have had for forty years."

"We'll ask her. Come." A white resolution was on the old man's face.

They stood at the bedside of Jennie Ballantyne as she lay white and thin. She looked up curiously, and extended a thin hand.

"Jennie," said John Ballantyne, "you know Doctor Burlingham. He is the only doctor within more than sixty miles. His experience is wider than that of any man within many times that distance. He thinks—Jennie, he thinks he might be of use to you."

"You mean an operation? Of what sort, doctor? I'm sure it's my spine. If I could only make people understand what pain I suffer, all over my body everywhere. If I could only tell people."

"Don't try to tell me. I know all about it. I'll have to be plain. If you and your husband wish to put your case unreservedly in my hands, I'll take it. I'm not urging that, of course. I've only come this time because you asked me once before, and I told you then I would not take your case. I'll only take it now on one condition."

"Doctor! You don't know how I've suffered."

"Do you wish me to take this case—without reservations?"

"Is it dangerous, doctor?"

"It may be. I'll do my best."

"Let me think it over, doctor."

"Five minutes. I'll go out and talk it over with your husband."

He drew the troubled man aside once more and led him out again to the log seat in the sunshine. There he laid a hand on old John's arm and talked to him more gently and more kindly than any one ever would have dreamed of Hard-Boiled Burlingham. Indeed, he spoke as priest, rather than as physician.

"It's to make her honest, John, and fit to die," he concluded. "It's for you, and Annie, too."

They stood once more at Jennie Ballantyne's bedside.

"Do you wish me to undertake the treatment I have in mind, Mrs. Ballantyne," asked Burlingham. "Your husband thinks it may be best."

She turned her face with just a trace of

womanliness which made even Burlingham wince. "Why, if John says so," said she and nodded. "Yes!"

"What medicine do you give, doctor?" she began an instant later.

"There is no medicine, madam. Shall I begin now?" He took John Ballantyne out of the room and out of the house.

In the kitchen he dragged from its nail a large washtub which he carried into the sick woman's room. Methodically he began to fill this with one pailful after another of water which he got at the kitchen pump—cold water indeed it was. He had laid off his jacket by now, and rolled up his sleeves.

"Get up out of that bed," he said to Jennie Ballantyne, quietly.

She shrank back shivering. "I'll never get into that water, it's cold. What do you mean? Do you suppose I'll fool with the water cure? Why didn't you tell me you were a hydrotherapist?"

"I didn't tell you anything. Do what I tell you and get out of that bed. You're not sick. You're shamming, and have been for years. Now, get up."

Jennie Ballantyne's reply to this was to drop back upon the farther side of the bed in a condition of catalepsy. She lay in a trance, rigid, motionless. He shook her by the arm, but she did not respond. Apparently, she might have been dead, indeed. "You heard me," said the relentless voice. "You hear me now. Get up! What, you won't?"

He stooped and dipped a pailful of water from the tub, without hesitation flinging it full in the face of the motionless figure which lay before him. He repeated it and stooped for a third pailful.

There came then a shriek. The catalepsy was gone. Jennie Ballantyne had been transformed into a genuinely angry woman, a woman outraged, scorned, humiliated, wounded in her most sensitive point—that is to say her egotism.

She fought back at him, protesting, wailing, screaming. All the answer he made was to dash one pailful after another of cold water full against her, until the bed dripped and the floor was wet. At length, just some sign the woman made of something genuine

seemed to show a victory a possibility. The man before her—merciless as though he had been an executioner and he was well-nigh that—paused, the pail of water still in his hands.

"Get out of that bed! Quit your acting and shamming, Jennie Ballantyne, and be an honest Christian woman, the kind you ought to be for such a husband. Die if you want to and if you must, but in the name of God, if you must die, die like a woman worth while, and not like this."

She was huddled in a wet heap on the farther side of the bed, trembling, unable to speak. He threw the pail of water on the floor, allowing it to run where it liked, and picked up his coat.

"I'm ashamed of you, Jennie Ballantyne," he said. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Put on dry clothes and come out into the sunshine."

He found Ballantyne sitting bent over, his hands over his ears, rocking from side to side. He laid a hand on the old man's shoulder. "It was fighting with a wild beast in there. The swine ran over a high place in the sea. Let us hope that we have cast out what they used to call demons in the Middle Ages. It was her only hope. I think they're exorcised."

He would not leave John for a time, but sat with him, giving him a word now and then. The house was silent as death. Indeed there had been death—the death of the former Jennie Ballantyne.

Burlingham did not turn his head for some time and then he heard a hesitant footfall at the kitchen door. When he did turn there was an old woman standing there in raiment quite dry. She looked out, hesitant and trembling.

"Come on out, Jennie Ballantyne," said Burlingham, "and sit on the log here with John. We are your friends. It's a wonderful morning, I wish I could stop here and talk with you both, but I'll come back again. I'll stop in and see Annie, I believe, as I go by."

This time as he passed along the road, Hard-Boiled Burlingham, very grave of face—for his had been an ordeal—turned in at the little white gate of the Silver Dot, swagger stick, gloves, wool stockings, and

all. He stooped at the gallery step and scrupulously brushed off the last trace of white dust from his boots, shook out his stocking and hung it on a nail before he entered.

"Good morning, Annie," he said gruffly. "Get me a dish of cream. I've come in to adjust a little matter here with you. I'm on the war trail this morning."

"I see you're all painted up. I never saw you in uniform before Colonel—doctor. You look fine." She always broke her reticence with this one man. "You've come in to tell me all about the oil news?" she questioned.

"If I get around to it. Annie, you haven't been telling the truth. I didn't think that of you."

"What do you mean?" Her color rose sharply.

"Why did you tell my friend, that young man, that there was some one else? Why did you say you'd given your promise? You know it wasn't true. And there wasn't any use in that at all. It wasn't true. It was a crime."

"My Uncle John was sick; my Aunt Jennie was helpless. You don't know our family. There's no one but me. Yes, I did; I promised I'd never marry."

Then, her color rising. "That doesn't mean that in any case I'd be apt to marry the first young man who came in here and asked me within ten minutes after he first had spoken to me."

"But what if your Aunt Jennie got well, and if your Uncle John was going to be well soon?"

"She'll never be well. We've all known that. I couldn't—I couldn't—" Her lip was trembling just a little now. "Well, that's why."

"Annie, your Aunt Jennie's well right now. She's up and dressed. She's out of doors talking with her husband right now. She's cured."

She could only stare at him.

"I operated on your Aunt Jennie, my dear, since you saw me go by here. I hope it's been successful. Now what are you going to do about it? Name of God! Annie, if you're going to lie to a man, lie to him honest, and lie to him for fair."

Hard-Boiled Burlingham pushed his dish of ice cream to one side. His great hands dropped on the fingers of the girl's hands, nervously interlacing as they lay on the counter before him—just as another man's hands had fallen upon them at almost the same place.

"I'll tell you a good many things about the oil boom after a while," said he. "If Sanders completes the option—or if he doesn't—you'll have money enough so that you can all get out of here for the winter—California's not bad. And by next spring—"

But Hard-Boiled Burlingham had his limitations, also his divinations. He concluded that it was time once more to dust off his riding boots, whereupon, arising and passing out of the door, he did so and stalked off down the road.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DUEL IN OIL.

THE smoothness of mentality owned by Mr. Andrew Sanders might have been called into evidence within the next two days. That gentleman was by no means idle or unresourceful, but events had given him cause for thought.

Dick Washburn had taken certain things with him beyond the grave. As to Ben Schooley, what had become of him? Rumor brought no news.

Sanders did one thing quite natural with him, for the man of most cunning nature may at times be bold. He resolved to go direct and call upon Hard-Boiled Burlingham.

He found the latter gentleman, as not unusually employed, pipe in mouth, sitting in a rustic chair on his clubhouse veranda and staring out across the lake. He offered Sanders a very excellent cigar. The caller was not long in coming to the middle of things.

"About my sheep," he said. "Let's forget it. I'm sorry there was any trouble. We flock men have had our way in here so long, that we do get to feeling as though we owned the earth. It's hard to see eight-
een dollar sheep shot up, of course, and

scattered around over the country. But I reckon I'll have to grin and look pleasant."

"That's a good way," assented Burlingham.

"Yes. To be frank with you, I see that I've got some new neighbors. I'd a lot rather stand with them than fight them."

"Sometimes that's good business," assented Burlingham again.

"Yes. I'm not fool enough to believe that there isn't more money in oil than there is in sheep."

"I don't know much about sheep."

"And you think there's oil in this valley?" Sanders's question was entirely naïve.

"Well, I did think so."

"Can't be kept under cover for very long."

"No. For instance, I know that you bought the Ballantyne place on the strength of there being oil in Powder Basin. You paid a good price. Why didn't you lease?"

Sanders grinned pleasantly. "I just didn't have time," said he.

"And you'll make good on the option?" Burlingham was equally innocent.

"I thought first I'd come and have a fair talk with you. I know a strong man when I see him. You're a business man."

"You were saying you're going to drill on the Ballantyne place, then?" artlessly inquired Burlingham.

"I hadn't said so yet. I don't know much about oil."

"It's a nice game, but expensive. Blue chips. Wish I could see where to get funds, so I could drill myself. And here's winter coming on."

Sanders pricked up his ears. Burlingham seemed quite dejected, and obviously a victim of remorse over his hasty importation of oil machinery. "It'd be pretty tough if you couldn't start, after all," the visitor said.

"I'll tell it to the world, it's tough! If I could sell my rigs and piping, that'd be good judgment. Trouble with me is, I'm too stubborn. Of course, all sorts of oil-well stuff next year will be double. How much do you propose to work this fall?" he continued, still quite artlessly.

"Swell chance! Snow may come here in

thirty days, and when it comes here it does come. You can't freight across the passes then. A man eats what he can carry on his back on snowshoes. You can't carry very much twelve-inch iron pipe on snowshoes."

"No. And if you've got a trainload of stuff piled up and no way to use it—" Then he stopped suddenly, seized by a sudden impulse of inspiration deeply colored with doubt. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Sanders," he said, "just to show I'm a good scout. I know you feel as though you belong to this valley and I don't. Maybe you're right—I won't deny it. I have a warm heart, yes, but sometimes I get cold feet. I'll just sell you all my stuff down there on the flat, if you're prepared to take it. I know about you. You're not suffering from want."

"Well, now," said Sanders, "that's pretty sudden, isn't it?" He staged his own poker face.

"That's the way I trade."

"Is that so? Well, now, what do you want for it?"

"I want just thirty per cent more than I paid for it, Sanders. That is thirty per cent less than you can lay it down for next year. You couldn't get delivery of that outfit sure, maybe not in more than a year. I hate to say it, neighbor, but if you bought my stuff and moved it up to the Ballantyne place, you'd be here in the middle of the game about the time I was paying off my debts. I like excitement. Can't say I'm sorry that I brought this stuff in here."

"And about how much would that total up?" asked Andrew Sanders nonchalantly.

Burlingham named a sum in five figures which caused the other to catch the arm of his chair to keep from starting. "You don't want anything much, do you?"

"I told you it's blue chips, Sanders. I just thought maybe you'd like to take advantage of a neighbor."

Sanders engaged in deep thought. "Give me time to run over to Centennial," said he; "say five days."

"Oh, all right, all right; any way you like. Make it expire the same day your option on the Ballantyne land does, and you needn't pay anything down except a

pleasant smile. That option's already five days old, isn't it?"

"How do you know about that?"

"I know all about it. A good oil man has got to know all about everything. I know a lot of things that I don't necessarily have to talk about. But I'll sell you that stuff for that price and deliver it the day I get your cash. Then you can spud in as soon as you want to, and get your feet wet in oil. I don't have to flatter you, and I won't. There are the cards on the table."

Sanders was beginning to feel that he was considerable of a man. "Well, I trade quick," said he. "I'll let you know when I get back from Centennial. By the way," he added, "it was too bad about that chap, Dick Washburn, wasn't it? Wonder who'll get the reward?"

"Nobody—not even you. Why didn't you take him when he was down at your camp?"

Sanders thought it would be very much better to take that as a pleasantry. "Oh, all sorts of men hang around a sheep camp," said he carelessly. "Well, so long—I've got to be on my way."

On the whole, Sanders chuckled to himself after he left Burlingham. He did not know that Burlingham was chuckling at the same time. He had saved a rather high banking interest on sixty-five thousand dollars for a period of perhaps six months—which six months would give him time to certify himself regarding land titles in his part of Powder Basin. He had his own game fairly well in his own hands, and he smiled complacently.

That same day he hurried across to the county seat and land office. There he learned many things, among others the fact that Mr. Ben Schooley had been in a highly inebriated condition for these thirty-six hours. He also learned that his faithful ally in the land office had the Washington wires working in regard to the reclamation project which might so quickly affect all the land values and land titles in Powder Basin. In fact, there had already been staged the larger duel, that between oil and irrigation. Sanders felt that with the Ballantyne place in his name and a good oil outfit also in

his possession, he had altogether the better of his late antagonist.

He then went to see his emissary, Mr. Schooley, whom he found weak and remorseful at Centennial's frame hotel.

"The trouble with me," remarked Schooley early in the conversation, "was, I didn't know how much of this new stuff not to drink."

"If you asked me," rejoined his late employer contemptuously, "I'll say you never did know how much to drink, you boob! Forty thousand when I told you ten!"

Schooley's agitation caused him to stammer. "I c-c-couldn't do no other way. They wouldn't t-t-trade for ten."

"Shut up. Thirty thousand dollars more than I ever intended to pay! Now, on your way. I don't want anything more to do with you."

"You said I'd have a ch-chance with you."

"You did have, once. No chance now. You get on the train here, and don't come back. I'll hire every one of Burlingham's men except you."

However, after his return to Powder Basin, he found that the hiring of Dr. Burlingham's men was more difficult than he had planned. The head men treated him with the same Homeric mirth they always had shown him. Burlingham showed commiseration.

Sanders, although of the feeling which comes to a man in deep water when he finds his footing slipping, was obliged to emerge the best he might.

"I'll get men somewhere," said he savagely, "if I have to hire train robbers. Anyhow, I don't want you to think I'm a piker. Here's your check, certified. I'm pretty strong in the banking circles of this State, but that much money is hard to lay hands on these days, and you know it."

Burlingham tossed the check on the table without looking at it. "Oh, that's all right," said he. "I never called you a piker, did I? On the contrary, I think you're some considerable plunger. That means, of course, you've completed the Ballyntyne option."

"I haven't, but I'm going to." Sanders tapped his breast pocket. "Just one other

trifling little certified check of thirty-seven thousand dollars. We were all sweating blood over there, let me tell you. They didn't want to lend me any money on my wool—what do you know about that? Well, I shouldn't wonder if it did go down, and a good many other things, too."

"Well, you said you were a quick trader. I'll say you've got nerve. If I had your nerve, and my own connections back East, I could make some money."

Again the Sanders ears became more erect.

"Why should you and I have any difficulties, Burlingham?" he demanded, with the air of one aggrieved. "We belong together, men like you and me. If we did throw in together, we could pull off the biggest thing ever sprung in all the Western oils."

"But how do I know there's any oil in this valley?" asked Burlingham innocently. "I don't. The truth is, this valley is surrounded by a solid rim of wild cats, and if you try laying awake at night you'll hear them scream. No one knows the first thing about there being oil in here."

"You were going to try it yourself, weren't you?"

"That's asking questions! How do you know I was? I've sold all my outfit to you, haven't I? I don't know about the oil, but I do know about those wildcats."

"There are other ways of playing safe," argued Sanders. "I can pay out and so can you, selling stock. The public is in oil big. I can sell them anything."

"Spoken like a man, sir, spoken like a man! Well, I'll think it over. I should think you'd hate to loosen up for that Ballyntyne option money."

"I'm going up there this afternoon."

"I believe I would—I believe I would. The quicker the safer. If you don't buy that place, I'm going to."

"Well, why don't you come in now, with me, and take all the chances? I have, haven't I?"

"Well, I don't believe in taking chances. I like to see the other fellow take them. Fact, Sanders, I'm going to watch you in your work up there with the greatest personal interest. I like to see a good man

spend good money when he sure is in on a good thing!"

When Sanders went away he was in a state of doubt regarding many things, although he assured himself that he ought to be very happy.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DIVINING ROD.

EVEN when spring had come, and the grizzlies back in the mountains were hunting grass on the trail of the late snow slides, the winter of Andrew Sanders's discontent seemed not fair to find any summer. He was learning a great many things hitherto new in his experience.

He was learning about women from Annie Ballantyne, with whom he had fallen desperately in love. Also he was learning about men from Hard-Boiled Burlingham. He began to think himself generally ag-grieved.

One thing with another, the grizzly bears feeding on the mountainsides back of Targee Pass, while the snow still lay deep upon the levels, saw the second train of Hard-Boiled Burlingham's oil outfit bucking the snow; this time with motor transport. Sanders gasped when he learned the truth. He declared himself betrayed by this man Burlingham, and grievously injured by this girl Annie.

Still, Sanders was in, and must win out. His men struck for more money, and he gave it. The merchants and freighters struck for more money, and he gave it. The men who sold him additional supplies asked him for more money, and he gave it.

He had in bank considerable paper to swing his annual wool crop, and secured on wool. He had certain other papers secured on wool—since he could not secure it on hope—and wool was going down. Men told him there might be a pinch all across the country.

Stock men and flock men were liquidating the range product, because they neither could afford nor could get money needed to bank them through. When Sanders looked at the possibilities of the future, his little

flock of greasy oil rigs in the mountains gave him no perfect satisfaction.

He troubled himself no longer about the reclamation enterprise, and did not plan conquest at the lower end of the lake. Had he done so, he might have learned yet of other complications. The young Thompson boy had passed the winter in Dan Powers's shack. Sanders had no interest in that. If the wolf was not at his door, at least the wildcat was on his roof.

It was during the time of certain of his ponderings that Annie Ballantyne and Amos quietly came back from their winter outside and established their quarters in the little Silver Dot bungalow on the corner. Sanders was living in the Ballantyne house which he had bought so dear.

He heard in a general way that the lunch counter would be opened again as soon as the roads permitted travel, and that the old folks also would come in later. They had concluded not to go back to Iowa.

Burlingham still talked to him with apparent frankness; indeed, told him everything he knew, with very few exceptions. One thing he did make plain to Sanders, which was that the chiefest and most onerous difficulty about the oil industry was the determination as to exactly where to sink an oil well.

He explained to Mr. Sanders that, for instance, a sheep was a visible and concrete object. You could visualize a sheep; it appealed to all your senses, for you could even run your hand along its back and feel the wool; whereas, upon the other hand, you could not see, touch, taste, smell, or hear oil, concealed in the caverns of the earth's secrets. So there you were.

It all did not leave Mr. Sanders happy. Indeed, almost the only thing which made him happy, and that but partly, was the presence of Annie Ballantyne back at her little place at the corner of the roads.

Summoned from nowhere, there were five hundred people now living in Powder Basin. The trains kept on bringing more adventurers, speculators, settlers, job hunters, gamblers, bootleggers, hangers-on, scenting afar off the greatest adventure of America to-day—the search for the secret of the inner earth, holding back, giving only to the

avored that which the world to-day must have. These at least would be on the ground if anything happened. Some of them had followed Hard-Boiled Burlingham before.

In this tide of comers and goers, Dan Powers arrived also at Powder Basin that spring, without that fact being known to Sanders. Indeed, he would not have known Powers when he saw him—for in their closest personal contact they had been something like two hundred yards apart.

Sanders would have consulted the office boy as to where next to sink a drill. He chartered an expert to come and advise him, and the expert charged him much gold, and told him he didn't know. Sanders was ready to assert that though Paul might plant and Apollo water an oil find, God alone could give it the increase.

But at least it was easy to go down the road and call on Annie at the Silver Dot. There were several things he hoped one day to say to her. He purchased at the going rates much fried chicken and hot coffee, in advance of the season of ice cream.

The girl always treated him with the smiling civility or quizzical indifference which she gave all her customers. He made no headway; he could not tell why. He was rich, not too old, had fine prospects, could give her everything she could ask. Yet he dared not speak what was in his soul.

There came a day when he could not remain in his own bachelor quarters. Morning is not the best time of the day to engage in love making, but Andrew Sanders could stay at home no longer.

He reached the corner of Annie's little plot, where the new pole fence divided it from his own land. He paused, touched his necktie, cleared his throat, and cleared the dust from the front of each shoe by carefully rubbing it on the opposite trouser leg. He experienced a sudden desire to be immaculate.

He would have entered the gate, but something arrested his attention. He stepped quickly to the other side of the road into the screening cover of a quaking asp thicket.

A man was walking up and down not far from the fence which divided Annie's land

from his. He was a tall young man, in puttees, riding breeches and flannel shirt. His conduct was most singular, and this it was which caused Sanders to seek concealment while he watched.

At first he thought the man was crazy. He would stride on for maybe two or three score paces rapidly, and then turn back, beating and quartering like a dog on the scent of game. He had all the look of a man on the scent of game, too, but what was the game?

Sanders now saw that the young man carried in his hands a stick about as thick as a walking cane and somewhat longer. One end of it appeared to be forked. He carried this wand in his upturned hands across the front of his body, and kept walking up and down, quartering or crossing his first trail and now and then stopping suddenly and turning back.

It became obvious that there was one particular spot near which the crazy man always would stop and turn back sharply. He noticed always that this was attended with a peculiar phenomenon as to the forked walking stick. At first he doubted his eyes, but a repetition of the same thing convinced him. Every time the bearer came to that certain spot, the forked stick would roll over in his hand and bend sharply down.

There came all at once to Sanders's mind the sensation of one who has taken a large gulp of ice water. With a shock there came to him what he had heard or read about the use of the divining rod in finding water. In his experience he knew at least three range men who had had artesian water located on their land by these strange men who possessed the faculty of divining the presence of subterranean water.

And if water, why not oil? Indeed, Sanders recalled now that he had read somewhere of the location of entirely new oil fields by means of such practice as this, which until now he had always regarded as mere superstition. He had himself seen—and thrown away as worthless, before he became an oil man himself—a scientific description of an appliance which was thought to promise infallibility in the location of oil. As these recollections came to his mind he stood fascinated.

One thing was sure. When the man came back to that particular spot there was an invisible force of very considerable strength applied to the divining rod. There was not the least doubt of this.

Of course, Sanders did not know that it was always at this particular spot that Dan Powers put his foot on the end of an invisible black thread which was attached to one fork of the divining rod so that it very naturally bent considerably when he pulled up on the main part of the wand.

Sanders did not recognize Powers. Even had he recognized him, he never would have been able to fathom all the vagaries of that young man's mind.

It was temperamentally necessary to Dan to assume a seriousness with life, continually he gravely trifled, for sake of his own peace of mind. For his temporary occupation now he was an oil hunter, an oil seer. Not mentioning the black string, he now had located the place below which there lay oil.

He knew all the time that Sanders was watching him, although at first he had made his toy for his own grave amusement. He did not know that one day men would in reality locate oil as easily as he now did so in his mockery.

A warm feeling of cheerfulness came to Sanders's heart. He had found where one of these mysterious oil scouts, of whom he had heard, had located oil. Probably before long somebody would come to him, and try to buy or lease that corner. He decided to sink there, at that very spot; he lined it up with two trees. Something was up. Some one was trying to get in.

Suddenly the young man turned, and lightly vaulted the pole fence, walked rapidly into the door of the Silver Dot—precisely where Mr. Sanders had intended to be at or before that very moment. As the nature of his intended conversation with Annie Ballantyne did not include the presence of a third party, Sanders turned and walked back toward his own bachelor quarters, viewing as he passed, with mingled emotions, the black beams of his rigs, which had not gained their color, as yet, from any of his own oil.

But now, so he said, he knew where to

drill. It would make him all the more money for Annie. He knew now why he wanted success in his new game of man and man—it was for following success in the old, old game of man and woman. As to that, the unsmiling mountains, somber with vision of coming thousands to wrest at their bowels, gave him no sign at all.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SILVER DOT.

"ANNIE," began Dan Powers, quietly, as he sat down uninvited, quite as if he had been absent only a day or so; "I have come back. It is now on the order of unfinished business."

Truth to tell, Annie had been watching him through the window all the time. She could not evade noticing with what free and unhalting stride he now walked, indeed how goodly he was, withal. And half frightened, she knew now that the hour indeed had come for her decision, that it could no longer be evaded.

"Annie," said Dan, still quietly, without preliminary, "I love you more than I'm ever going to be able to tell. It's no use my trying. It's no use my waiting. I knew it from the very first."

Annie's complexion was of the very white skin which goes with practically all shades of auburn hair. In spite of all, the quick blood came to her cheeks now. She cast down her eyes, the long lashes drooping over them. He reached out both his hands to her, but she moved away.

He begun untying the string from the end of the divining rod.

"If Sanders starts a well right across your fence, that will leave this no place for the Silver Dot, Annie. Our new town is called Franklin City. There is going to be an oil well—on our land. I'm not going to be a dead-broke homesteader forever, I hope. I believe I've struck it coming out here. It was all for you, Annie. It scares me, it's all so foreordained about you and me. From the very first."

He was leaning forward against the edge of the counter. He never once had removed his gaze from her.

"I'd be glad—I don't know what you mean about moving my place. Of course, I mean I'd be glad if you found oil down there." Annie Ballantyne now was pale again.

"We're going to find it. We've *got* to find it, I need it for you. It is my love for you that has given me life and success, can't you see?"

She could not make any answer at all. He did not even see the little fluttering in her throat, so strongly was he swept forward now by his love, which he could not rule, with which he could no longer trifle. Then he said:

"A year ago to-day I saw you in the Silver Dot back East. A year's long enough to wait. It's seemed a great deal longer than a year to me. But it's the only part of my life that ever was worth while. It was all through you!"

"You don't know your own mind, and how can I know mine?" pleaded Annie. "This is so—it's too soon. You take too much for granted. A girl—a girl likes to be—to be—well, a little longer. How can I believe you? I don't know."

"I can't prove it to you. But somehow, do you know, I'd like it if you'd just take a chance now. It's oil and the chances that have rolled ten years into one for me and left me free to love you, and to—to ask you, Annie. At any price, Annie; any way you like to say, but that's the way I'd like it best of all.

"Before it's really settled, don't you see?—before I've really got anything, except just my love. That's the finest way in the world, don't you think?"

Annie, the conservative, began to wring her hands. Her forehead began to pucker in the little frown habitual with her when any mental problem came.

"I can't! I can't!" said she. "It's too soon." And then in a voice which she herself was now sure she heard: "I don't see how I could."

"Name of God, Annie Ballantyne, if you're going to be a woman, why don't you be one? You'll have to answer. I love you, Annie, I can't tell how much. I don't know I'll ever know how much. But always it will be more and more."

He reached out both his hands across the very spot on the rough pine counter where Annie Ballantyne had shed many tears, although he did not know it. She dropped into the seat opposite, as they once had sat, a year ago.

But this time his hands came so gently, in so new and strange a touch, that she almost felt the tears come into her eyes in her swift new relief. She had been tired, and had not known it; had been waiting, and had not known. Something new, something she had never known in all her life, was all about her—she could not fathom the new universe.

She did not really know when the young man walked around the head of the counter, raised her from her place bodily and took her up in his arms, so gently, so very tenderly, that she felt sure the world had never known a man like this. And as he felt her sink against his breast, saw her wet cheek turn, he knew that never in the world had there been a woman like to her.

At last there came a day when Burlingham called Powers to him and told him what no one else knew or would know.

"We're in the sands, Dan," said he quietly. "We're in the sands, and we've got it."

The two men sat with averted faces for quite a while. It was large news. Neither of them must seem unmanly over it.

"I wish I knew how to say thank God without seeming irreverent," said Dan Powers at length. "I take it that you're sure."

Burlingham spoke after quite a time. "There are two or three things which we can do. We can sell out now and land rich, because we've proved a new field. Or we can go on and pump a little oil at a time as she is. Or we can shoot her, and blow the bottom out of her, maybe, or maybe bring in a real one. I've always thought we'd have to loosen strata down there. What do you say?"

"Name of God, man, if you're going to be an oil man, be one!" said Dan simply.

Burlingham spoke as though irrelevantly. "Dr. Ransford, about the best duck shot in our club, will be here at ten forty-five this morning. Episcopal. Go and get Annie. It's no place at the Silver Dot."

It was as man and wife that, in the early evening of that very day, the two young people stood in the yard of Dan Powers's homestead shack. In front of the little house there were even now traces of green grass and shrubs, freshened by water found far back in the hills and brought down. But they stood beside a great mechanical creation now. She looked confidently at the airplane and its master.

They walked toward the edge of the little plateau, almost even with the crown of which they could see the top of the rig whose legs straddled the spot where the little rifle pit once had been. The grunt of the little engine was silent. The steel had done its work. Certain of the gear now was passing on wagons across the new log bridge which spanned the outlet. Beyond that stood many houses, clustered. A town had been born.

Plainly visible below them, at the side of the "hole," stood the figure of a middle-aged man, solid, gray and grizzled. He was bending slightly forward, and in his hands there was some object, not easily distinguishable at that distance.

The ultimate determining of such questions as these was the sport which Hard-Boiled Burlingham most enjoyed of all things in life. His men stood back now, stolid, begrimed, professionally indifferent, yet tensely alert. The boss always liked to shoot her.

It had cost him more than a hundred thousand dollars now to shoot her this time when they got into the sands. She was a deep one. She had taken nerve. And, roof or cellar floor as these sands might be, much oil or little oil or none, the next moment would establish. A man's game, Burlingham's.

Dan, standing with his arm around Annie's shoulders, saw the figure of the solid man relax and change its lines. His hands were empty. He stepped back swiftly, as from an abyss.

There was a faint sensation, indescribable, a very faint feeling of pressure, not to be localized. And then in a wide, high fan came the tremendous rush of released gases from the inner hidden earth below. There

were faint streaks of murk which thickened—the air filled with a tremendous column, darkening, overpowering.

The gusher, later known as the Only Annie, had been brought in!

Battersleigh sank on the ground, his face in his hands. Ed Stanley turned a quick face up the hill. He saw two figures there. The two Thompson boys took each a fresh chew.

"Well, Annie," said Dan, husbandlike, "we can't be standing around here. You'll get all mussed up with that stuff."

He led her again to the side of the strange creature with the wings, helped her into the fuselage and motioned to the man who acted as assistant. So was a new miracle performed here in the ancient basin under Powder Peak.

For always the world must go on and times and men must change, slowly or miraculously fast, as the great unknown powers may determine. The world had need, and the world is fed. The age brings with it alike its needs and its remedies. Men now must read beneath the ancient earth as they have read the sky, the sea.

The roar of the engine swept over the crest of the hill. Straight for the edge the airplane headed until at length it caught the air. It climbed to the side of this other new born, roaring, gasping thing of like giant force. One giant called out to its cousin joyously, strong unto strong, new unto new.

Dan Powers banked across the outlet as he said he one day would do. He swung in over the lake, and along the surface they skimmed low like swans of a new world—toward the splendor of the mountain sunset which lay before them like their dawn. And even toward this they rose in this giant day.

The silver of the sun shone on the upward flashing wings until the mountain rose before them, and they swung up into the gold and glory, on and onward, until the craft that carried them seemed to others no more than a Silver Dot high up in the sky—the wings were carrying them into the new and changing world of to-day, but into the ancient and unaltered heaven.

THE END.



You Can't Always Sometimes Tell

By FRED B. MANN

"SLIM" WEYBURN rounded third and headed for the plate, spurred on by the orders of the coacher and the shouts of the home crowd. There was a swift relay of the ball from center to second, then the sphere came forward on a line in a desperate race with the runner. It was one of those exciting moments in baseball that are the foundations of its popularity. The crowd rose on its hind legs.

It was nip and tuck, the issue in the balance, when suddenly the result became certain. Ten feet from the home plate Weyburn faltered in his stride, turned as green as the grass of the diamond, and collapsed on the path. The ball struck the catcher's mitt with a thud, and, running forward, the receiver touched the prostrate form in a manner emphatic. The Tadpoles had lost another game to the Frogs who had been only a jump ahead of them in the race for the pennant. And Weyburn had failed to score the tying run because he had swallowed his chew of tobacco.

"Slim" Weyburn, like the hero of most baseball stories, was a great player who was having an uncanny streak of bad luck on the diamond. The manager of his team should be telling this tale. Most baseball stories are so constructed. But the manager of the Tadpoles had contracted writer's cramp, when the burning desire to unleash this story came to him, because of his arduous labors in the past as manager of the Wildcats, Turtles, Blue Sox, Porcupines, Bears, and other What-nots in the Fiction League. He was compelled to allow one not of his profession to have a hand in it.

"Slim" had lost four straight games for the Tadpoles, in spite of his reputation as a finished player, not one who was finished. Not only was he being ridden by the home fans, threatened with the bench by his manager, and cursed by his teammates, but it was beginning to be whispered that the gamblers had gotten to him. Hints were made that he was throwing games for a gang of those sweet-scented individuals.

And yet it was nothing but a series of unfortunate accidents that had caused his poor playing. This last game was a sample of his hard luck; he had lost control of his quid just at the moment when the results would be the most injurious to his own well-being and that of the team.

One game he had struck out at a critical time because "Bull" Delaney, the umpire, had miscalled the third strike due to his having one eye fixed on the first dollar he had ever earned. The coin had worked through a hole in "Bull's" pocket and fallen to the ground just as the pitcher delivered the ball. Another game, "Slim" had crossed first base safely on a close play, but he had turned to the left, as though bound for second base, and been tagged as he leisurely returned to the bag, and all because he had read in a newspaper coming out to the park how in England people turned to the left instead of the right. Just as he went to turn back to first, "Slim" had been thinking how foolish the English were. Another, he had stolen second when it was already occupied by "Tip" Corley, his rival for the affections of a certain maiden. He was so used to trying to get ahead of Corley that out of habit he had attempted to do so then.

And now is the time to introduce the girl. Her name was Marcia Magrew, and she supported herself and her widowed mother by tending the cigar-stand in the Rocco Stucco Hotel, where all of the ball teams stopped when in the home city of the Tadpoles. It is the customary occupation of heroines in baseball stories to tend a hotel cigar-stand.

Marcia was as beautiful as moonlight on the sea and seemed almost as good as a steel stock was during the war.

It was a pretty sight to see her, on evenings when two teams were in the city, handing out expensive tobacco necessities and luxuries to the players lined up along the show-cases and raking in their coin. Her sparkling eyes outshone the diamond rings of the ball-tossers and bright repartee gurgled musically from her lovely lips, while traveling salesmen sat sadly in their deep chairs, lamenting their being cast in the shade by knights of such romantic leather.

But gradually all of the customers would drop away except Weyburn and Corley, the recognized leaders of the pack. The hotel management didn't mind these two running off the others, since their exposure thus in the limelight made the twain of swains purchase as freely of Marcia's wares as any twenty others combined.

There Corley and Weyburn would stand, leaning jauntily against the cases as they made cute remarks to the girl and cutting ones to each other, while ever and anon and in between times they spent their money.

The evening of the day upon which "Slim" had not hitched his wagon to a star, his Star having escaped the tongue, he went as usual to the Rocco Stucco after he had finished supper at his boarding house. He was still somewhat pale around the gills, which may have made him appeal a whit more to the beautiful Marcia than formerly.

At any rate that night she gave the first indication that she might discard her former policy of armed neutrality as regards him and Corley. The latter had stepped away temporarily and "Slim" was alone with the girl.

She leaned a trifle nearer to the show case. "Don't buy so many cigars, pipes and cigarettes, and so much chewing-tobacco, chewing-gum and Death-Destroyers, Slim," she pleaded. "A ball-player ought to save for a rainy day."

"What for?" asked "Slim" boldly. "So he can play the ponies on them days or so he can go home and play with the babies?"

A blush spread over Marcia's face and in her agitation she let fall a thirty dollar meerschaum pipe. She had just recovered her poise and the shattered remnants of the pipe when Corley returned.

"What can I sell you, Mr. Corley?" she inquired.

Weyburn's heart bounded upward in his breast like a hard hit ball on a clay diamond. Marcia was trying to get him to save his money and Corley to spend his.

Next day he lost another game for the Tadpoles, he being so blind from love he did not see until too late that "Cupid" Stratton, the Muskrats' catcher, had shot

the ball like an arrow to second and nipped him off the bag.

In front of the clubhouse, after the contest, the blow fell.

"You're suspended without pay, you blankety, blank, blank," shouted Manager "Muggsy" Mulligan, an individual who now looked like a huge ice-wagon full of fresh lava.

As Mulligan turned on his heel, Corley came by. He had overheard the decree of suspension.

"Now we'll have some chance to win!" he sneered, shaking his fist in Slim's face.

Back of the clubhouse more blows fell. This being a true story it must be set down as they finished. Corley gave our hero two beautiful hand-painted eyes, while remaining unmarked himself.

That night the team left for its last Western trip of the season, minus its Jonah and plus renewed hopes in consequence.

The hopes were justified. The Tadpoles took three out of four games from the Frogs, took all four from the Muskrats, and went on to the stronghold of the Katydid full of fighting spirit. The recent playing of Weyburn looked fishier than ever in the light of the way the club was going without him.

The spurt of the Tadpoles was watched narrowly by a certain coterie of gamblers. It did not suit the plans of this clique to have the club win the pennant. The season was waning. After the Western trip the Tadpoles would return home for four games. It would then be the end of the schedule. The Master Hand summoned his executives to a conference in his palatial rooms at the Rocco Stucco.

"We gotta get this fellow Weyburn back in the game," he announced, when they'd all had a round of the forbidden fluid. "We gotta work some scheme to put him back on the field. There ain't no use tryin' to buy the others. It's been tried, and nothin' doin'. I never sounded him out because he was playin' rotten enough without it. Now what we want to do is get him back and take a chance on him losin' enough games to beat the club. If he don't play rotten enough, then we'll try handin' him a piece of money."

"He'll be ripe," said his right hand man. "He's always been a spender, and now his pay-day's been wiped off the calendar. Don't believe he's got a dollar. He never even spends any money now with that girl he's sweet on at the cigar-stand."

It was practically true. "Slim" Weyburn was almost broke, and he was spending little money at the cigar-stand, although he came to the Rocco Stucco nightly.

When a woman is interested in a man she is apt to soon know how he stands financially. Marcia was no exception. She quickly ascertained that "Slim" was not smoking a seven cent "Mullenleaf" out of preference for that brand nor from a desire to save his money, but because of shyness in the wallet. Pity, Love's poor relation, came to pay a visit. Marcia permitted an innovation—she allowed the ball-player to walk home with her evenings after the cigar-stand had closed.

And so, one night as they stood at her gate, he blurted out a proposal of marriage. The girl gazed at him in manner sentimental, but her tone of voice and her words were practical.

"Upon what would we marry?" she inquired.

This was a haymaker to the heart of things. Weyburn hung his head.

"I'll come back yet," he muttered.

"You must get back, Slim," said Marcia. "You must get on the team again and show them what you can do. Save your money and when there's enough to support us both, I'll talk turkey with you."

The Tadpoles returned home for those last four games, and they were scheduled with the Crawfish, the league leaders. It was to be a crucial series indeed—the Crawfish were but one game ahead of them.

But injuries had placed the chances of the Tadpoles in a precarious condition. It was with difficulty that Manager Mulligan could put nine sound men upon the field. He sent for Weyburn.

"I'm gonna give you another chance," he growled; "but I'll have my eye on you every minute, and if you don't come across with a brand of ball that's ahead of anything ever put out your name will hereafter be Dennis. Take your old job at third,

and have something with you besides a glove."

The first game "Slim" won by making a marvelous stop in the ninth, with two men out, the Tadpoles one run ahead, and two Crawfish on the bags. When he had dived for the ball and secured it, he found himself resting on one ear. There was no time to straighten up, as the hitter was going like a streak for first, the two base-runners tearing for home. He must throw from that lowly position. But as he glanced quickly toward his first-baseman, his heart sprang into his mouth—a dandelion reared its stem and its yellow head half-way across the diamond in the path that the ball must take. "Slim" would have hesitated then if hesitation had been possible. But it was not—time pressed too closely, demanding action. His powerful arm swept in a wide arc just above the grass and the ball sped onward to land in the first baseman's glove a half-second before the hitter reached the bag. "Slim" had curved the ball around that dandelion.

He won the next game by scoring from second on a single by Spike Terrall. As he rounded third, the coacher tried to hold him back, but "Slim" kept on for the plate. It looked like a certain "out," as the ball landed in the catcher's mitt ten feet up the base-line before "Slim" had even arrived there. But when he did arrive it was for a phenomenal performance. Gathering his energies for one final effort, he sprang into the air, dived over the confident catcher's head, and untouched by the ball, touched the plate with his nose.

The Tadpoles were now one game ahead of the Crawfish. If they could win one of the two games remaining, the pennant was theirs. Two wins for the Crawfish and they would have the pennant. The excitement in the city left nothing to be desired by the business manager of either team.

The night after the second game of the four, "Slim" Weyburn returned to his room at the boarding-house for an early retirement because of the importance of the morrow's contest.

As he entered the room he saw his laundry package, returned that day. Carelessly he opened it and began to lay out the

contents. Among the silk shirts he found a letter and a sheaf of bills.

Slowly "Slim" read through that letter, then sat a long time looking at the bills. The total was a large sum. Never before in all his life had he so much desired money. Marcia had intimated that she might be his if he had money enough. Finally he laid the bills and the letter carefully away beneath the shirts in a drawer, and went to bed.

Next day, before the thousands jammed into that park, our hero was watched narrowly by three persons for possible results of his play, Manager Mulligan, the Master Hand of the gamblers, and Mr. Fan. And up to the ninth inning the results had been negative. No important plays had come "Slim's" way. It was one of those quiet days so rare in the life of a third baseman.

Then came the ninth. The score stood 0 to 0, and the Tadpoles, last at bat, had two out and nobody on bases. It was Weyburn's turn to hit. Mulligan took a chance—he put in no pinch hitter.

A hush fell upon that famous ball-yard. Even the sellers of soft drinks, of ice-cream cones, of cigars, chewing-tobacco and candy, ceased to call their wares and turned to see what Weyburn would do.

He sauntered to the plate, swinging three bats. Then he had let two of these slip behind him and he stood in position slowly waving the third at the pitcher.

There came a fast one inside. He let it go. A ball! An inshoot slanted swiftly over the outer corner of the plate. He took a cut at it and missed. One strike! Then came one too high and one too wide, but the next shot over the center of the pan while his bat remained listlessly upon his shoulder. The count was two and three!

Carefully the pitcher caught the signal of the catcher. He wanted to make sure of this last pitch. There must be no preliminary hurry to disturb the accuracy of this last attempt. It was to be a fast one straight over the plate and delivered with all of the force at his command.

Suddenly, as "Slim" stood waiting for that bullet delivery to be unleashed, a fresh-painted sign in the suburbs of center-field caught his eye. Completed but the

day before, it had escaped his attention until now. He peered forward to read it more clearly:

DE LUXE LAUNDRY

**We will wash the shirts for a year
Of the player who hits this sign,
And give him a thousand dollars.**

It was a clever advertising dodge, and apparently an economical one. There seemed little chance that the laundry ever would be called upon to make good on its offer. The sign was almost in the next county.

When the meaning of that sign became clear to Weyburn a strange light came into his eyes. It was still there as he took a step forward and swung with all his might at that horsehide covered bullet.

There came the sweet sound of a bat kissing a ball good-by, and then in a high looping curve the sphere started for the fence. Over second and over the center-fielder's head it flew as though there was no such thing as gravity. And when at last it arched to earth its route was through the sign of the De Luxe Laundry. The Tadpoles had won the pennant and "Slim" Weyburn had won a thousand dollars and a year's free laundry bill.

When he had torn himself away from the admiring fans who still clustered around the exit gate as he emerged from the clubhouse, "Slim" hurried to his boarding-house. In his room he hastily drew from the drawer the bundle of silk shirts he had placed there the night before. His gaze fell upon the letter and the sheaf of bills. He did not pick them up, but stood smiling down at them.

"You will send me a dun for my laun-

dry, will you?" he said to the name in the upper left hand corner of the envelope—The De Luxe Laundry. "You will send me my laundry bills for a year back, will you? To-morrow you can receipt them bills and hand me a thousand bones besides."

He reached out and picked a brilliant hued shirt from the pile on the bureau. He must array himself extra becomingly for to-night.

On his way downtown to the Rocco Stucco, "Slim" catalogued in his mind the prospective riches which were to be his. He would have his salary for the time he was suspended (with a slap on the back Mulligan had assured him of that), the thousand dollars from the laundry company, and his share of the world's series split. Marcia would sure talk turkey now.

He shouldered his way through the crowd that filled the lobby of the hotel, and near the center of the throng met "Tip" Corley. Their former enmity was forgotten in the great victory. They exchanged greetings this time instead of rights.

Corley's countenance wore a sheepish grin. "Well, old man, we failed to make a hit over there," he said, his thumb curved in the direction of the cigar-stand.

This delivery was a puzzle to "Slim." "What's eatin' you?" he inquired.

"Look at the dame on duty," said Corley.

Weyburn peered around a pillar. An astringent-looking female presided over the cigars and tobacco in place of their former beautiful guardian.

"Where's Marcia?" asked "Slim" quickly.

"She's through," said Corley. "Just heard she married Charley Monte, the main squeeze of the gamblers, this morning."



"OH, PROMISE ME!"

BY FRED JACKSON

a vivid love story, will be next week's Complete Novelette. Don't miss it.



The Hell Driver

By **ARTHUR HUNT CHUTE**

IN their office overlooking Gloucester Harbor sat John Mystic, John Startling, and John Bluejacket—John MacDonalds all, but differentiated by the names of vessels they had formerly commanded. With them was their junior partner, Eddie Campbell.

It was the hour when the old timers lit their pipes and let their fancies roam. Always those fancies turned toward Judique, their boyhood home, on the north shore of Cape Breton, a section inhabited by Canadian Highlanders who still spoke the Gaelic of the Western Isles. Judique was a land of long ago, and these three, looking backward, beheld it through eyes of fond enchantment.

This afternoon the talk turned to what Eddie Campbell regarded as daring sailing on the part of some of the MacDonald captains.

Word had come of one of their schooners jumping a bar on the gulf shore of Prince Edward Island to escape foundering in a hurricane.

"That fellow must have been a nervy skipper," ventured the new partner in admiration.

"A nervy nothing," exclaimed John Startling with contempt. "We've got no high line devils in our fleets these days. If ye want a true blue hell driver, ye should go down north and see the white ships of Judique. Aye, we've had some dogs down there. But a son of Diarmuid of yer ain ilk was the king of 'em all."

"Who's that?" inquired Eddie.

"Captain Red Alec Campbell, of the Pass of Balmaha."

With voice from wistful memory, John Startling told the tale of the greatest ship-handler that ever came out of Judique.

Red Alec was the bonnie dog of a fleet where they could all crack on the dimty. It was a love affair that helped him on in his wild career. The Campbell and one Ronald Donn were both smitten on a lass named Mary MacLeod. She liked the Campbell best, but her folks prevailed upon her to take the more sober, steady Ronald Donn, after which the disappointed lover went to hell with a bang. Whenever Red Alec saw Ronald Donn with his lost sweetheart he was smitten with fits of long-continued madness. When these fits were on him he would do the desperate things

that became the talk of the north shore ports.

No ordinary shipowner would have given him a vessel, but Charles P. Maclehorse, owner of the white ships of Judique, was no ordinary shipowner. Maclehorse was a bluff Glasgow Scotchman, past the prime of life, who enjoyed owning speedy, handsome vessels. In truth he was the ~~magnate~~ ^{owner} of Cape Breton; the steel works, the coal mines and the Caledonia fisheries all served to swell his income. The white fleet was his one extravagance.

He was wont to exclaim: "Some that have the money keep fast women, some keep fast horses; I keep fast ships."

Far from being fancy racing machines, his vessels were built to stand any amount of driving and hard weather. He cared for nothing but the best in design and construction, and fitted them with spare gear, stores and provisions in the most generous scale. Then he turned them over to masters and crews from Judique for service on the Banks. Some would have it that the chief was crazy, the way he made a sport of the fishing business, but he could afford to pay for his whims.

Red Alec Campbell's madness, with other owners a vice, with Maclehorse was a virtue. For him torn canvas and split spars were incidentals to a record run.

It was a custom which the chief had instituted to have a race among his fleet every year to the Western Bank at the opening up of the fishing season.

The queen of his beautiful white schooners had always been named the Pass of Balmaha. There had been three of that name, the first two having run their bows under from foolhardy sail carrying. The Pass of Balmaha, third, the last and finest vessel, had experienced bad luck under Captain Roary MacDonald. Just before the big race that year the chief replaced Captain Roary by Captain Alec Campbell.

The dark horse for the coming contest was none other than the Campbell's late rival in love, Ronald Donn, who with the Royal Stuart had already shown his wake to the queen of the fleet.

Just before the event odds were pretty even. The heavy gamblers backed the Pass

of Balmaha, while the more conservative shook their heads and put their money on the Royal Stuart.

Among the crew of the Pass of Balmaha were some of the hardest lads out of Judique, including wild Archie MacEacheren, the champion fighter, his brother Allan, Little Roary the Piper, and a dozen others. They were a gang that would follow their skipper to the death, all except Arch Campbell, whose heart was too weak for the company he kept.

When the day of the race came it was what the bloods had prayed for—a day with a wind to blow the barn over the house.

The fleet was due to sail from MacNairs at four in the afternoon. Just before that time at the wharves along the Sunnyside Bend there was a merry babel—the *clomp, clomp, clomp* of the windlass pawl, the Jacobite songs of the Highland crews, the hum of the running gear, reaving through the blocks, and the music of the straining sheaves to last long pulls on sheets and halyards.

The Pass of Balmaha was the first to push her nose into the strait. Half a gale was blowing from the northeast. To show his respect for the weather Red Alec immediately began to shake out his topsails.

As the graceful schooner gathered headway the onlookers agreed that they had never seen a vessel which in passing through the water disturbed it less. Hardly a ripple curled at the cut-water, nor did the sea break at any place along her sides. She left a wake as straight as an arrow. Then getting the wind with increasing speed, she began to raise the arc of her forefoot gently to meet the coming swell.

The Royal Stuart under four lowers was the second to cat her anchor and lie down in the wake of Red Alec, who was already standing back from the opposite shore.

Soon the strait was alive with the snowy wings, tearing back and forth in the narrow channel.

At high tide, which occurred that afternoon at four, the vessels were due to cross the lime. Two blasts of the foundry whistle was the five-minute warning. One blast at the hour was the signal for the start.

It was now nearly high water, and the tide would soon be running ebb. Most of the fleet were bunched together on the off-shore. But Red Alec, the canny fox, was far out of the crowd well up to windward. In the jockeying for position his strategy had gained the first advantage.

As the two blasts of the warning whistle sounded, Red Alec emerged from the companion, an unearthly pallor upon his face, a fiendish hatred glinting in his eye. He had been drinking Demerara rum below. Under the influence of liquor he kept his head, but, seized with a strange madness, he began to regard the sea as his bitterest foe.

Taking the wheel from Wild Archie, the skipper sent his eye up along the bellying canvas, while the vessel responded to his touch like a thoroughbred to the hand of a master.

"What's the record for the run to the Western Ground?" he inquired as he trimmed his wheel.

"Cap'n Hooty Mac Askill in Pass of Balmaha, first, thirteen hours; Cap'n John Cameron in Pass of Balmaha, second, eleven hours," answered Wild Archie.

"All right; fer us it's Western Ground or hell in ten hours."

With a final swing he threw the vessel into the course for the take off, bellowing as he did so: "Sheet home yer foretops'l and set yer stays'l."

Having made his last gaging of time and distance, with the daring of a born cavalry leader he shot like a rocket straight down upon the starting line. Ten seconds after the whistle the Pass of Balmaha flashed across the line, her lee side buried in a smother of foam.

The Royal Stuart, the Lochaber, the Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Glengary, the Airlie, the Keppoch and the Dundee, in order named, came storming after.

Bowling along wing and wing through the straits with all sail drawing except the jibs, the white fleet sped away before the wind at a tremendous clip.

An hour later the Pass of Balmaha, pressed close by the Royal Stuart, shot out of the protecting straits into Chedabucto Bay, where she encountered a nasty rolling

sea upon her port quarter. With every stitch cracked on she began to roll into it like a drunkard.

Red Alec lost no time preparing for bad weather. The dories nested in the waist were turned bottom up and made doubly secure. Extra lashings were put on spare spars and gear.

At six o'clock that evening they raised Cranberry Light. By this time the weather was looking wilder and the glass had begun to fall.

With a growing gale offshore the redoubtable skipper respected the prospects enough to order: "Put the tops'l in gaskets and stow away yer stays'l."

Before reaching Cranberry Island all hands were ordered to put a single reef in the great mainsail.

The skipper set his course on the inside channel, tearing through the shipping of Canso Harbor, grazing fishermen and storm-staid coasters, who looked after him aghast racing thus before a rising gale.

For a short time in the lee of the mainland the crew had a breathing space, while they tussled with reef points of the slotting mainsail. Then around by Glasgow Head, at the farther end of the harbor, they struck the full force of the open sea.

"Here comes the Atlantic," yelled Wild Archie, who had taken his place beside the skipper at the wheel. Through the dangerous waters just off of Glasgow Head, with the lead going, the Pass of Balmaha raced hell for leather.

Fishermen beating in against the storm looked askance at the great Judiquer outbound into the smother of the howling night.

After a short turn at the wheel Wild Archie came gasping into the fore-castle, exclaiming: "Talk about yer stunts! This auld lass is sure acting now; this minute she's waltzin' on her bowsprit, the next standin' on her counter."

"D'ye think Red Alec 'll make it in ten hours?"

"Sure thing he'll make it. We may take our trick at the wheel an' be relieved, but the skipper 'll stand by up there till he's clubbed his mud hook to the lee o' west point lights."

This conversation was cut short by a voice shouting: "Hi, there, all hands rouse out quick! Here's ice close aboard!"

Tearing along under single-reefed mainsail, whole foresail, and jib with the bonnet out, all the sail she could carry, it needed no second alarm. Meeting floating ice at such speed meant that if the vessel struck her bows would be crushed like eggshell.

There was no time to wait for oilskins or jackets. Bareheaded, in shirt sleeves, all hands came rushing up into the freezing night. A lookout jumped into the rigging, and for nearly an hour clung there directing the captain how to steer.

Fortunately it was bright moonlight. Hundreds of isolated cakes appeared before the ship. Realizing the magnitude of the peril, Red Alec yelled: "Take in the fores'l."

This order none were loath to obey. Indeed, the crew would gladly have stripped off every stitch. But it was heartbreaking enough for the skipper to give up the foresail.

At reduced speed he threaded his way through the floating ice pans. After fifty minutes of nerve-racking vigilance they emerged into open water.

"Is she all clear ahead?"

"All clear ahead!" came back from the lookout.

"All right, then, up again with the fores'l."

Very gingerly the hands began to obey.

"Come on now, put some snap into it an' get that sail aloft."

Soon the Pass of Balmaha was staggering under an incredible pressure of canvas. With her sheets well off she went rushing through the darkness like some black-winged specter.

As if this were not enough for a driving gale, Red Alec, who had been haunted by thoughts of Ronald Donn during the time lost in the ice field, sang out: "Get the stays'l out and bend it on her."

A muttered protest came from the horrified crew.

"It's suicide."

"It's murder."

"It's tempting Providence too far."

Such ejaculations were immediately

smothered. "Get that stays'l up, I tell ye!"

Red Alec was a man master as well as a shipmaster. Some men were finally pausing, as if the job were complete, when the whiplash tongue urged them on.

"Break yer backs on that halyard till she's flat as a board."

Over and over went the lee rail till every roll nigh stopped the heartbeat. While all hands were still on deck the skipper addressed them from the wheel:

"Now, then, ye lads frae below what got caught napping, get into yer oilskins and stay in 'em. Don't forget that this here hooker's fightin' sudden death. That means every mother's son o' ye on board is fightin', too. Watch on and watch off. Keep oiled up, ready to jump fer yer lives at every call. Those on deck stand by every minute to tend sheets, fer we're goin' to be on our berth in ten hours, or we're goin' to be in hell."

Once Allan MacEacheren, beside the master, suggested: "That stays'l's too much sail, ain't it, skip?"

"I know it is, but she's up hard, and no one this side of eternity 'll bring her down. Not a rag o' canvas 'll come off frae now on unless it's ripped off wi' the hand o' God 'lmighty."

At the wheel, sometimes buried to the waist in water, Red Alec was fighting the seas in earnest. With cool-headed daring, not too bold and not too cautious, he gauged his chances to the utmost and ventured always to that very limit.

Every minute he kept his watch on deck, fighting to gain every last ounce of advantage. Under single-reeved, double-reeved, close reefed mainsail, reefs in and reefs out, with watchful eye he made use of every lull and slant to drive his vessel across the long, fierce, swooping combers.

Such driving was too much for Arch Campbell.

"He'll crack the sticks out of her or run her bow clear under," he muttered, his fingers itching to ease the sheets.

As he kept up his ominous muttering, Little Roary exclaimed: "Should 'ave left the likes of 'im at home. He'll be our Jonah yet."

About an hour after clearing the ice the Pass of Belmaha, caught unawares by a sudden squall, was thrown completely on her beam ends. A Niagara of water went pouring down the forehatch. The watch below thought that the end had come, but before they had time to gather their wits through her own momentum the racing vessel righted herself and began to come up.

As the wind struck into her sails she started again with a rush and drew herself out from beneath the seas that swept her from the mainmast aft.

Like souls redeemed from the bottomless pit, those below came bursting through the scuttle, breathing with thankful gasps the fresh keen air, gazing with gratitude upon the moon and stars.

More than one deep-souled Highlander sent up his prayer of thanks to Mary, who had miraculously saved them, and to St. Michael, the guardian and patron of those upon the sea.

But if the rest of his crew were devoutly thankful, no such emotion welled up in the rum-fired heart of Red Alec. Hearing a Gaelic "Ave" muttered by one of the MacEacherens set him into an insensate rage.

"No Mary and no Michael will save ye aboard this hooded hooker. It's only yer two fists and the leapin' lightnin' in yer heels that can preserve for ye the breath o' life that's in yer nostrils.

"If it's devotions yer wantin' one gang o' ye can take it out in sweat and elbow grease on yer prayer handles cleaning up that mess along the waist. The other gang can haul for the salvation of yer souls on them sheets and halyards.

"Now, there, jump my bullies and don't forget that ye're Judique Men."

Such was the potency of the man-driving skipper that his passion was soon flaming up throughout his crew, while his vessel rode again serene.

Hove to under double-reefed foresail, the watch of a coaster saw far off in the fitful moonlight, a soaring white ship, tearing on before the gales, like some archangel of the tempest.

While the watch of the coaster looked aghast they beheld a foretopsail broken out and added to the billowy mass of canvas.

"Howling Lucifer!" exclaimed a deck-hand. "Did ye ever see the likes o' that before, goin' by in a full gale with every stitch cracked on, an' summer kites to boot! Do I see right, or am I dreaming? Is that real timber and canvas, or is it the Flying Dutchman?"

"That's real timber and canvas," answered the coaster's captain, "but it ain't goin' to be real much longer. That's one o' them crazy, wild-driving, hell-roaring ships from Judique, full o' Cape Breton Jacobites and Demerara Rum. Oh, my Lord! Oh, my Lord! But ain't they drunk!"

Yes, drunk they were, with a wine undreamed of to that breed upon the coaster's deck.

The viking horde that raped the mouth of the Western Isles did not take all. They left behind that viking soul, which now lived on in Red Alec and his Highland shipmates. No wonder the ground hogs on a wallowing coaster called them "drunk." What could they understand? But across the centuries a crew of Norsemen would have hailed them as blood brothers from the stormy coasts of Skye.

In the wild tearing flight even the passage of time seemed to fade. But Red Alec did not forget. Finally he sang out.

"Run down into the cabin, one of ye, and tell me what's the hour o' night."

"Eleven o'clock," came back the answer.

"Eleven," he repeated, "seven hours, and by the log ninety-five miles. Thirty yet to go. Yea, we'll make it in ten hours, and beat every record of the Hielan fleet. Aye, lads, but am I not a dog and a bonnie driver? I'll show—"

The Highlanders' vainglorious song was suddenly cut short by a *whir—rupp—bang!*

The great staysail, torn to tatters, flapped and slatted away to leeward. This was followed by another long, ripping tear and a booming crack as the foretopsail and foretopmast carried away together.

Almost instantaneously there came a shout of dismay from Wild Archie, who had been hanging on to the after rail.

Intent only on that before, no one had heeded what might be aft or on the quarter. It was a casual glance which revealed with startling suddenness the fact that another

schooner was pressing them close, a half a mile to windward.

All hands started in surprise while the skipper, with far-seeing eye, cried out:

"My God, if that there ain't Ronald Donn!"

"That looks bad," commented Wild Archie. "Jest after our foretopmast carried away! A pretty mess yon 'll put us into when we round the nor'wes' bar, and start our thrash to windward."

"Yes, it do look bad, but I've a trick that 'll settle wi' Ronald Donn."

On the run from MacNairs fortune had favored the Royal Stuart. When Red Alec split tacks and went through Canso Harbor Ronald Donn held his course, steering straight for sea. Thus he escaped the delaying ice. With foretopmast intact he was obviously in better condition for the windward work of the last lap.

Gradually, but none the less surely, Ronald Donn closed down upon the queen of the fleet. For some time both vessels had been taking soundings and each had its lookout aloft to pick up the first flash of the west point light of Sable Island.

Simultaneously there came the cry:

"Light on the starboard bow!"

With that cry Ronald Donn sang out: "Ready about, hard a lee!"

The next minute steering south-southeast with wind aft, he came bearing down upon Red Alec.

Every hand aboard the Pass of Balmaha stood ready waiting for the same order. A murderous light, glinted in the eye of the undefeated smuggling captain, but not a word escaped him.

The Pass of Balmaha had the right of way. But why did she continue on her old course southeast when every second now she should be driving it south-southeast to round the dreadful bar?

"Ain't ye goin' to come about now, skipper?" inquired Allan MacEacheren.

"Hold her to her auld course," snapped the skipper.

"He's going to drown us all to gain his vengeance over Ronald Donn," muttered Arch Campbell in despair.

Like mad bulls charging for a finish the two great racing schooners bore down upon

each other. Red Alec held to his purpose with the determination of grim death, while Ronald Donn, just as sure that he would round to jibe, continued on a course which brought him fair across the other's bows.

Nearer and nearer the distance closed between the opposing captains, with the crews of each pleading in vain to cease their fatal obstinacy. When the impending crash was imminent it dawned upon the unwilling brain of Ronald Donn that his rival proposed holding to his suicidal purpose. Reluctantly he gave the order that brought his vessel's head up to the wind, with an abruptness that buried his lee rail, and threatened to splinter his spars. At the same time the Pass of Balmaha went forging onward. With vast relief the respective crews watched as they swiftly drew asunder.

After he had put nearly a mile between himself and Ronald Donn, Red Alec shouted:

"Douse the lights!"

The intended strategy flashed upon his shipmates and the order was carried out with a rush.

Looking backward Ronald Donn saw the lights of his rival suddenly swallowed up in darkness.

"God be about us! The Pass of Balmaha has gone under!" he exclaimed aghast. "They might 'a' kenned it the way they was heading. That Red Alec was mad if ever a man was. No use to put about, though. It would only be death for us, too, if we ventured too close to that uncanny shoal."

For twenty miles to the westward of Sable Island there extended a sandy bar, known as the graveyard of the North Atlantic. It was a spot reeking with wrecks. Straight into the teeth of this most dreaded menace the Pass of Balmaha went tearing with her lights extinguished.

The roar of breakers that could be heard for many miles boomed about the racing schooner. The sounding lead was kept going continually. With increasing shallowness, the seas were piling up to incredible heights while the breath of the gale lashed the night with foaming spindrift.

Such gambling with death was too much for Arch Campbell. Coming up to the wheel he began to implore the skipper to head off.

"She'll never live in that!" he almost screamed.

At the first note of fear the skipper cut him short. Striving for his very existence he was in no mood to brook remonstrance.

"Git the hell out o' me sight!"

Arch Campbell stood for a moment, irresolute, when the boot of a giant, Wild Archie, caught him fair and sent him headlong down the companion.

With the chicken heart removed, all the rest were one with the captain, ready with him to venture to the end.

Red Alec, during one of his rum-running expeditions, had been chased by a government cruiser into this self-same northeast bar. Rather than capture he risked running aground. By that strange fortune that sometimes guards the desperate he tripped upon a navigable channel and safely made the passage through. Toward this veritable leap in the dark he once more set his hazardous course.

"We're shaving corners," he exclaimed. "But I ken a ticklish passage that 'll put us over."

They were tearing on at a twelve knot clip, with a living gale abeam.

"By the deep six," came the man at the sounding.

"What's coming next, skipper?" inquired Allan MacEacheren.

"Five fathoms is coming next," answered the other, and almost simultaneously a voice shrieked: "By the mark five!"

Out of respect for that shrieking tone Red Alec spat to windward with supreme disdain.

Arch Campbell, respectful and subdued, but still in agonizing terror emerged trembling from below. The sight that greeted him was awe-inspiring and sublime. The full moon was flooding with its silver light the gale-lashed seas. Above the shallow bar great, shining, shimmering combers went soaring skyward, filling the night with the deep diapason of their roar. In the trough of the waves were valleys of inky blackness, while aloft the breaking crests shone like snowy, glistening peaks.

In this grand panorama Arch Campbell beheld only a yawning ocean graveyard.

"Ye can't go through there," he screamed.

"I looked at the chart below. Ye've only five fathoms, then four, then three, then two. How can a vessel drawing fifteen feet go over a bar that at high tide gives only twelve feet of water?"

"Ye looked at the chart, did ye?" taunted Red Alec. "Well, ye're sailin' wi' a skipper that kens more about these waters than any chart."

Momentarily Arch Campbell found reassurance in this note of bravado. Then another hail from forward renewed his panic.

"By the mark four."

His heart beat paused at that last call. Four fathoms, shoaling every minute and driving toward the most ominous bar on the northern seas!

Ahead, astern, on every quarter nothing could be seen but mountains of tumbling water. But over all Red Alec caught the intermittent flashes of the revolving light. By that flash he set his course.

Currents changeable and unchartable were forever working ruin to old landmarks and old soundings. A westward sweep of the Arctic current varying with the wind tore across the snary floor, carving out amid its shifting shoals a deep channel, whose wild environment was enough to daunt the most intrepid.

Arch Campbell was paralyzed with terror. Jumping a bar was too much for his cautious nature. But all the rest, like the skipper, were reckless gamblers, reckless alike with life or death.

The spirit of Red Alec was rising with the rising odds. As though it were a human being, he continued a dance of scorn in the face of his arch enemy, the sea.

"Come on and do your damndest, ye blasted seas!" he roared. "Judique is on the floor, and who the hell will dare to put her off?"

This was enough to start Wild Archie, and all the rest of that battling breed into a whooping outburst. Little Roary the Piper could not withstand the inspiration of such a moment. Leaving his toiling watchmates on the deck, he went tumbling down into the sodden cabin to loosen his immortal soul upon the sheepskins.

"Ye can no tune yer pipes down there, can ye?" sang out the skipper.

"Aye, aye! I could tune 'em on the hinges o' hell at sic a moment," answered the piper, and soon the music of his drones came booming through the cabin skylight.

At the skirl of the pipes the Highland crew became like men possessed.

"We may be dead in a minute," sang out Red Alec, "but we're in our glory now."

Little Roary remained at his pipes, doing the work of twenty with his wonderful lungs of leather, for the witching strains of his screaming drones made every other man as good as two.

Shriller and louder the pipes skirled while every Hielanman leaped and whooped, accomplishing his tasks with rushing ecstasy. These Gaelic shipmates were aroused at last to the acme of conflict with waves and tempest. What mattered now Arch Campbell's shrieks of terror? Such coward tones were drowned by the gallant pibroch.

Suddenly over the skirl of the pipes came the cry of the man at the sounding.

"By the deep eight."

In the midst of broken water the racing schooner had found the current which ran like a river across the sandy shoals.

Following the trend marked out by the smoother surface Red Alec threaded his way amid what from to seaward had appeared like a mammoth boiling caldron. Arch Campbell had prophesied that no ship could live there, but the Pass of Balmaha raced merrily past shoals and destruction, while the pipes of Little Roary shrieked out defiance to the fiercest howlings of the sea.

When they were almost across the lookout screamed: "Luff! Luff! Breakers ahead!"

Though his Hielan heart was aflame his

hand maintained its cunning, and Red Alec once again cheated death by inches. A few more crowded, breathless minutes and the white water disappeared on port and starboard and the Atlantic opened out before.

The skipper ran on, coming gradually into the lee of the island. There he ran into the wind and came to anchor with the west point light bearing east-northeast on the point of rendezvous for the fleet.

"What's the time below?" he sang out as he left the wheel.

"One o'clock," came back the answer.

"Nine hours to the Western Bank!" said the skipper. "They'll say we've cheated the sea, and by the leaping lightning so we have. But we shan't tell 'em it was the music o' the pipes that done it."

The Royal Stuart leading the remainder of the fleet, after an arduous beating to windward arrived on her berth two hours and a half after Red Alec.

Great was the amazement of Ronald Donn when he beheld two lights instead of one. He expected the flash of the light-house, but not the gleam of a schooner clubbed down at her riding hawser.

"That can't be the Pass of Balmaha?" exclaimed the captain of the other vessel. "Surely that can't be her. She foundered on the other side of the bar."

As the Royal Stuart went ranging past her victorious rival, the unmistakable voice of Little Roary hailed him through the darkness yelling:

"Hey, there, Ronald Donn! Gang hame an' git another chart afore ye match yersel' wi' a skipper that kens his way to the Western Bank."

A PRESCRIPTION

WHENEVER you feel like a Failure,
Just think I can't fail—if I try—
Keep thinking: I'm going to get there;
For work is the coin that will buy.

Wake up with a smile on your face, lad—
Or lass—as the case may be,
Then just do your darn level best—and
You'll get there—*sure*—take it from me.

Margaret G. Hays.



Magic

Lies in pretty teeth—Remove that film

Why will any woman in these days have dingy film on teeth?

There is now a way to end it. Millions of people employ it. You can see the results in glistening teeth everywhere you look.

This is to offer a ten-day test, to show *you* how to beautify the teeth.

Film is cloudy

Film is that viscous coat you feel. It clings to the teeth, enters crevices and stays. When left it forms the basis of tartar. Teeth look discolored more or less.

But film does more. It causes most tooth troubles. It

holds food substances which ferment and form acid. It holds the acid in contact with the teeth to cause decay.

Germs breed by millions in it. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyorrhea.

Avoid harmful grit

Pepsodent curdles the film and removes it without harmful scouring. Its polishing agent is far softer than enamel. Never use a film combatant which contains harsh grit.

You leave it

Old ways of brushing leave much of that film intact. It dims the teeth and, night and

day, threatens serious damage. That's why so many well-brushed teeth discolor and decay. Tooth troubles have been constantly increasing. So dental science has been seeking ways to fight that film.

A new-type tooth paste has been perfected, correcting some old mistakes. These two film combatants are embodied in it. The name is Pepsodent, and by its use millions now combat that film.

Two other foes

It also fights two other foes of teeth. It multiplies the starch digestant in the saliva. To digest starch deposits on teeth which may otherwise cling and form acids.

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The way to know this is to send the coupon for a 10-Day Tube. Note how clean the teeth feel after using. Mark the absence of the viscous film. See how teeth whiten as the film-coats disappear.

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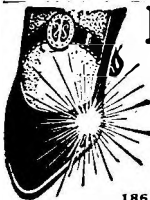
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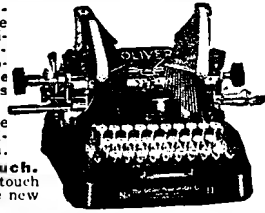
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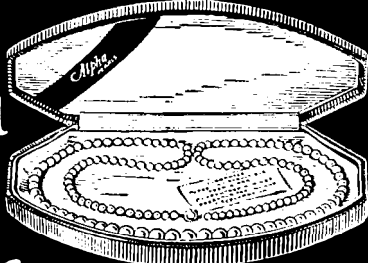
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AT the Merke Institute on Fifth Avenue, New York, you will see every day scores of men and women, once troubled with thin, falling hair, who now possess beautifully thick, luxuriant hair that is the admiration of all their friends.

These men and women were saved from the humiliation of baldness by a new European discovery—a discovery which works on a simple natural principle, but which is bringing results that would seem nothing short of astonishing.

Formerly this treatment was within reach of only the very wealthy. But thanks to an ingenious invention, the very same results for which others have paid as high as \$1,000 are now available to everyone—in their own homes, and at a cost of *only a few cents a treatment*.

When the hair falls out it does not necessarily mean that the hair roots are *dead*. For it is now a matter of scientific fact that in most cases of baldness the hair roots are simply *dormant*, and if properly stimulated, *can be made to grow hair again*.

Ordinary hair tonics and foods cannot reach the hair roots, which are embedded deeply in the scalp. That is why these methods are so often ineffective in restoring hair. It has been found that the only possible way of stimulating the hair roots to activity is by properly *opening the pores*—then feeding the roots.

At first the only way in which best results could be secured was by using a very expensive apparatus. That is why these treatments were so expensive. Now, however, these same results can be had at an astonishingly small cost. This is through the home treatment given by the Allied Merke Institutes, which is known as the Merke Thermocap Treatment.

The Thermocap Treatment is entirely different from anything known or used before. It can be used in any home in which there is electricity.

It was perfected by Prof. Alois Merke, a dermatologist of international reputation, and founder of the now famous Merke Institute.

So remarkable have been the results secured by Prof. Merke through his system that people have come to him from all over the country to receive the benefits of this new discovery. Among Prof. Merke's patients are numbered many stage and social celebrities, and the results that have been secured are in many cases nothing short of astonishing.

Results

Marvelous Increase in Growth

"After three weeks of your treatment I notice the most marvelous increase in the growth and thickness of my hair. I have consulted most of the noted specialists in America and Europe and I have found none to compare with your method for satisfactory and quick results." W. Deuth, Editor "American News," Hamburg.

Growing Rapidly

"My hair is growing so fast that each hair seems to be running a race with its brothers and sisters, to see who will get 'here first.'" Miss A. M. S., New York City. (This woman, before treatment, was completely bald.)

Absolutely Wonderful

"Splendid are the results noticed since your treatment of my scalp began. It is absolutely wonderful. My everlasting thanks to you. Lieut. Col. P., Washington, D. C.

(The above excerpts are typical of hundreds of letters received from delighted users of the Merke Institute Treatment for baldness and falling hair.)

People who have been bald for years—many of whom were *completely bald*—now possess beautiful, thick hair, without even the slightest suggestion of "bald spots." Such ailments as dandruff, itching scalp, falling hair—these have in every case quickly disappeared

under the seemingly miraculous influence of this new method of treatment.

The Merke Thermocap Treatment is positively guaranteed to stop the falling out of hair—to cure dandruff, and to stimulate the growth of hair on bald or semi-bald heads provided, of course, that the hair bulbs are still alive and (as in the case of most types of baldness) are simply dormant. If, within thirty days, you are not more than delighted with results, the small cost of the Thermocap Treatment will be refunded instantly.

So many thousands of people have regained thick, luxuriant hair through the Thermocap Treatment that if you are at all bald, or if your hair shows signs of falling, you owe it to yourself to investigate, at least, this remarkable new method of growing hair.

A vitally interesting booklet, describing the Merke Thermocap Treatment in detail, will be sent to you entirely free of any cost if you merely fill out and mail the coupon below.

No matter how long you have been bald, no matter if you are completely bald, no matter how many different treatments you have taken without results, this booklet will prove to be of deepest interest to you. So send for it today. Merely mail the coupon below, and it will be sent to you by return mail. ALLIED MERKE INSTITUTES, Inc., 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City, Dept. 123.

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