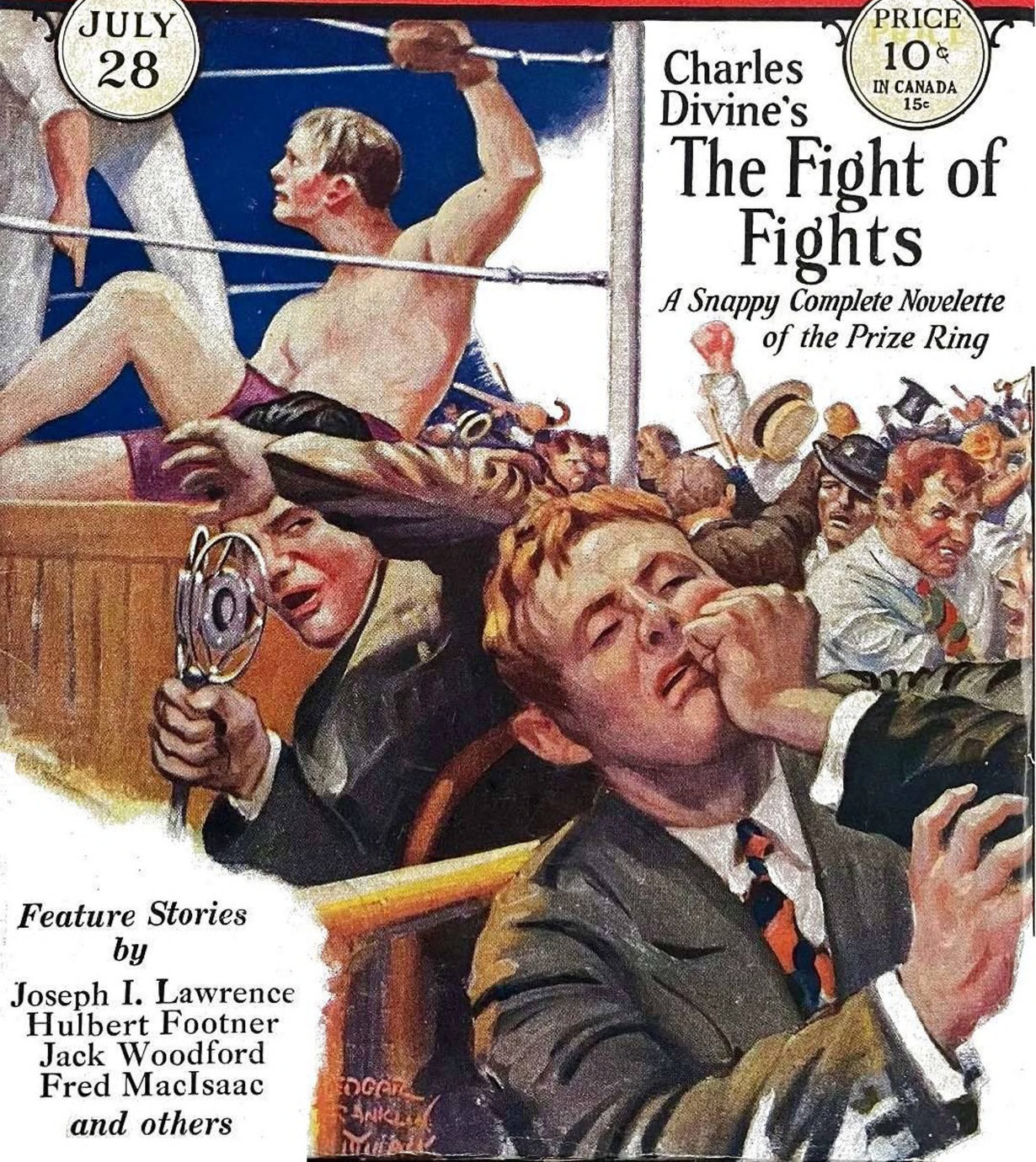
ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

JULY 28

PRICE 10¢ IN CANADA 15¢



Charles Divine's

The Fight of Fights

A Snappy Complete Novelette of the Prize Ring

Feature Stories by

Joseph I. Lawrence
Hulbert Footner
Jack Woodford
Fred MacIsaac
and others

Classified Advertising

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

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

Munsey's Magazine
Argosy-Allstory W'kly
Detective Fiction W'kly
Minimum space 4 lines.

Combination Line Rate **$3.00** less 2% cash discount

Sept. 1st Classified Forms Close August 4th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

MAKE $45 TO $100 WEEKLY—full or part time—and liberal bonus, selling BETTER QUALITY all-wool made-to-measure suits and overcoats. Save $18.50 per suit. No experience necessary. Commissions paid in advance. We furnish handsome large swatch samples and complete instructions FREE. Write today! W. Z. GIBSON, 500 Throop St., Dept. U-409, Chicago.

Brand New Plan—Free suit to each agent—$45 and up weekly, paid in advance. Take orders for our high-grade tailoring. Handsome carrying case outfit of large real cloth samples—furnished free. Spencer Mead Co., Harrison & Throop, Dept. U-709, Chicago.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—TOILET ARTICLES, PERFUMES AND SPECIALTIES. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

EVERY HEADACHE PAYS YOU A PROFIT. MILLIONS USE ASPIRIN. AGENTS CAN MAKE $500 MONTH ON NEW 5C ASPIRIN PLAN. WRITE CHAS. M. HICK, DEPT. 2-K, 1018 S. WABASH AVE., CHICAGO.

Automobile and Motorboat Owners, without the Vacuum Valve Grinder your tool kit is incomplete. Turns out a perfect valve grinding job. Retails at 55 cents. Directions with each grinder. Agents wanted. The Speed Tool Co., 783 6th Av., NYC.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN TO SELL your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, Munsey Combination, 280 B'way, New York.

I Offer You $8.00 a Day and a

Write quick for new proposition. We offer $8.00 a day and a new Chevrolet Coach, for demonstrating and taking orders for Comer All-Weather Topcoats and Raincoats. Spare time. No experience required. Sample outfit free. Write now.

Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. 381-L, Dayton, Ohio

—SHOW— All Wool Tailoring at $23.50

LARGE SIZE SAMPLES DO IT MEN!

$12 a day. $75 a week. Cash daily **IN ADVANCE.** Liberal Bonus. 2000 men doing it. Hustlers make more selling our famous all-wool $23.50 and $33.50 tailored-to-measure union made clothes. Greatest values ever offered. **Customer satisfaction brings 90% repeat orders.** We train the inexperienced. Tailoring's most attractive outfit—over 100 extra large cloth samples—furnished FREE to reliable men willing to work for success. **Write Today.**

Make $12 A DAY Full or Part Time

PIONEER TAILORING COMPANY
Congress and Throop
Dept. U-1008 CHICAGO

HELP AND INSTRUCTION

EARN $120 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. WE ASSIST YOU TO A POSITION AFTER COMPLETION OF THREE MONTHS' SPARE TIME HOME STUDY COURSE, OR REFUND YOUR MONEY. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

HELP WANTED—MALE

MEN—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write AMERICAN FOREIGN DETECTIVE INSTITUTE, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

ADDRESS ENVELOPES AT HOME—Spare Time. Experience unnecessary. Dignified work. $15—$25 weekly easy. Send 2c stamp for particulars. MAZELLE, Dept DC, Gary, Indiana.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. $10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, Lakes, Streams. Write today. SWIGART & CO., M-1276, First National Bank Building, Chicago.

EDUCATIONAL

YOU READ THESE LITTLE ADVERTISEMENTS. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Munsey Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

STORIES WANTED

STORY IDEAS WANTED FOR PHOTOPLAYS AND MAGAZINES. BIG DEMAND. REVISED, TYPED, PUBLISHED, SOLD ON COMMISSION. SEND MANUSCRIPTS FOR FREE CRITICISM. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORPORATION, 409 Security Bldg., Santa Monica & Western Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

TOBACCO

TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our Free Book. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 845, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND ADVICE. WATSON E. COLEMAN, REGISTERED PATENT LAWYER, 724 NINTH STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.

INVENTORS—WRITE FOR OUR GUIDE BOOK, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for our free Guide Book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of Invention for Inspection and Advice Free. Reasonable Terms. Prompt Service. Highest References. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 196 CONTENTS FOR JULY 28, 1928 NUMBER 5

SERIALS

COMPLETE STORIES

OTHER FEATURES

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C.2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary

PUBLISHED WEEKLY AND COPYRIGHT, 1928, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

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

Entered as second-class matter November 22, 1920, at the post office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

ARGOSY
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 196 SATURDAY, JULY 28, 1928 NUMBER 5

"Are you trying to jinx me?"

The Fight of Fights

Of all the great championship "battles of the century," this was the bout which fight fans remembered longest

By CHARLES DIVINE
Author of "Who's in Love?" "Make 'Em Hit," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

GOING UP.

JOHN DEMO was an elevator operator in the new Circle Tower Building which lifted its turreted head above Columbus Circle. The vast city-block of structure housed, in addition to so many obvious office windows, the biggest indoor amphitheater in the world, Circle Garden.

Outside, traffic ran up Broadway roaring and shrieking like a mad woman. But people passed in and out of the Circle Tower Building as if nothing extraordinary were taking place.

It was only the daily pandemonium, and the day was one of the finest in June.

Inside, in the lobby, John Demo leaned out of his elevator to talk to the operator alongside, while his car filled with passengers behind him. Demo's dark little head peered out like a bird from a cage.

"I almost made it that time," he chirped.

"Yeh?"

"Yeh. I got five, six, seven, eight—and then the next guy got off at eleven. I thought sure I was going to get a straight until that guy said: 'eleven.' I ain't had a straight today."

"I've had three."

"Aw, some guys get all the luck," lamented Demo. It was a simple game, but he liked it. It consisted of trying to get straights, as in pokér, with the floor numbers.

If he could carry a carful of people containing enough passengers who got off at successive floors to make five consecutive stops, such as five, six, seven, eight, nine, or two, three, four, five, six, he held a straight.

The game enlivened his day. It gave him something to think about and relieved the monotony of this endless going up and down the shaft.

The sporting element in the game was engendered by environment—the fact that, back of Circle Tower and its offices, spread Circle Garden and its six-day bicycle races, prize fights, and other contests.

"R-r-r-right!" came the starter's voice.

Demo banged the door shut and started up on another journey, hopeful of a straight.

"Two out!" called a voice.

Bang-clang. The door opened and shut at the second floor. Demo listened for the next voice to call.

"Three!"

Bang-clang.

"Four!"

Bang-clang. Maybe he would get a straight this time.

"Five!"

Bang-clang.

Then an impatient voice sounded from the remaining passenger in the car, and Demo grinned to himself. He had won a straight!

He stopped at the sixth floor and jerked back the door with unusual zest.

But the man behind him stood still.

"This is six," said Demo, and looked around at the man. He was surprised to recognize the tall, handsome figure of Pink Heffner, the promoter, in whom he stood in awe; Heffner was a great man, thought Demo, and wondered now why he was frowning.

"I don't want six," said Heffner in an irritated voice. "I said: 'eight.' Take the cotton out of your ears!"

Demo flushed and said nothing. If he had recognized Heffner before he would have known, of course, that the eighth floor was the next stop, leading to the office of Mr. Sherwood, treasurer of the Circle Garden Company.

He watched Heffner stride hurriedly out at the eighth floor, and thought with an injured feeling: "And when I saw the Gorton-Gibbins fight in his place I paid ten dollars for my seat, and sat so far back I might better have had my radio with me."

CHAPTER II.

GOING IN.

HEFFNER paused before the door: Circle Garden Company, Albert Sherwood, Treasurer. In one of the patch pockets of his definitely striped, gray suit he carried the latest edition of the New York *Evening Leader*. He was glad that the story occupied only part of a column headed:

GARDEN DIRECTORS TO ACT TO-DAY ON HEFFNER'S CONTRACT

In the moment of pausing before seizing the doorknob, he thought again

of all it would mean to him to lose this job—if the directors decided not to renew his contract.

For five years he had been the czar of professional sport. The biggest fights, the biggest track meets, the biggest hockey matches, all the great money-making events in the world of sport, had been held in Circle Garden under his direction.

He had grown rich. His name was known from coast to coast. He was a bigger man than the President of the United States.

A sullen frown again settled over his face, a tense look of bitterness, as he faced the possibility of yielding this place to another man.

But when he entered Sherwood's suite of offices and came to the next-to-the-last room, occupied by Jane Reese, Sherwood's secretary, the bitter expression faded from his face. His studied suavity returned to him and, in addition, the genial charm he made so convincing when he found an object of personal interest.

"Hello, Jane! Got a match?"

He paused at her desk, leaned companionably against it, took a cigarette from his silver case, and gazed down at Jane's black hair and vivid black eyes. She was the most beautiful young woman he had ever known.

Jane looked up, radiant. She looked up at various people in that manner, with an almost impersonal radiance, for her enthusiasm at being here in this secretaryship, in this office where celebrities came and went, had never left her since the day Al Sherwood had hired her.

She liked seeing the interesting assortment of people who came here on business: prize fighters, great athletes, aspiring beginners, perspiring circus performers, newspaper reporters, policemen, lawyers, politicians, and men from many colorful walks of life.

They were so different, these walks, from those of her family; her father had only consented to let her work here because he knew Al Sherwood personally—and if she didn't earn her own living here she would have insisted on taking the secretaryship to Assistant District Attorney Bundy. The Bundys were also old friends of the Reeses.

The radiance, however, with which Jane looked up at Pink Heffner was not all impersonal. She had grown to like him, as she liked many others. There was something so typically modern about him.

He always wore the newest clothes from Broadway—not always as quiet as Madison Avenue's—and his rather theatrical gallantry interested her. As she looked up at him now she noted the glow of health—and skillful barbering—which kept his complexion clear and gave him the name of Pink.

"You're early," she said, and handed him the box of matches.

Whenever Pink Heffner received anything from a pretty woman's hand he always believed in touching that hand as well as the object involved in the transaction. He took hold of Jane's hand together with the match-box. As he lit his cigarette he gazed through the flame boldly into her eyes.

"I want to have a word with Al before the directors get here."

"What will you do, Pink, if they don't renew your contract?"

Her question caused him to drop the box of matches upon her desk, without any attempt to touch her hand this time.

"I—I hadn't thought of that," he said, and the muscles tightened along his cheek. He knew that Jane was aware of what was in the air, how young Lee Crosby was being pushed forward as his successor. To conceal his agitation he picked up the framed photograph of Harry Hoyt and pretended to be studying the champion's face.

"Handsome, isn't he?" said Jane.

"Yes," admitted Heffner slowly. "I suppose he's the best-looking man

who ever worked his way to a championship without a cauliflower ear. Some kids have all the breaks," he added with a negative shake of his head. "But he's a boxer, not a fighter."

"That's why I like him."

Heffner smiled.

"You're a woman. Women pick fighters on account of their hair—and then wonder why they have to pay their bets afterward."

Jane laughed.

"But I won when I bet on Hoyt against Gorton." She added: "And I wouldn't have cared if I'd lost."

"There you are!" said Heffner with a conclusive wave of his hand. He would have liked to have gone on with a more personal conversation, but now wasn't the time; this other worry was hammering at his brain. Perhaps, in an hour, he wouldn't be a promoter any longer.

Still he lingered for a moment, fascinated by the thought of Jane, playing with the idea of her in his arms, with the picture of what she might be if, under the proper circumstances, he told her he loved her.

With her, at Sherwood's suggestion, he had worked over many of the details of the Garden's business; to her he had dictated many a statement to be given to reporters; and to her, on his own suggestion, he had sent flowers more than once. Once, when everybody had worked late, he had taken her out to dinner.

But he had never been able to meet her socially outside of business hours. Somehow she had kept that barrier up between them. Somehow, she made him remember, deep down within him, that he had begun life as a welterweight fighter in Buffalo, and she as a girl of good family in a private school.

In spite of his egotism, and in spite of his success with other women, Heffner had been so conscious of the difference in his social standing and Jane's that he had never pressed himself on her for fear of a rebuff.

Yet here in the office he could put his hand on her shoulder, as he did now.

"Be a good girl and ask Al if he'll see me a minute?"

"Certainly, Pink."

CHAPTER III.

GOING OUT.

"WHAT has Crosby done to deserve such consideration?" demanded Heffner of Sherwood. "Nothing at all. He's been manager of the Princeton football team, and then graduate director of athletics—or some such folderol college job! A highbrow! A la-dee-da!

"How can a bird like that hope to handle this kind of business? You have to be smart; you have to know how to handle gamblers, ticket speculators, and prize fighters. In fact, you have to outsmart everybody."

Heffner got out of his chair and strode to the window.

"That's the trouble, Pink. The directors feel that you've been a little too smart."

Heffner wheeled toward him.

"What do they mean by that? They don't mean crooked, do they?"

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that," replied Sherwood slowly.

"They'd better not," snapped Heffner.

"But they've never got over the rumors circulated after the Gorton-Gibbins fight."

"Oh, that stink! We know who made that. A bunch of gamblers sore because they lost. I told you the whole dope, didn't I?"

"Yes, but the story gave the Garden a bad name for awhile. Westcott, the new director, won't stand for anything like that again."

"Neither will I!"

Sherwood was silent a moment.

"Well, I'm sorry, Pink, if they do

you an injustice by not renewing your contract."

"Injustice? It 'll be a damned outrage. Who made the Garden what it is to-day? I did. Who built up the gate receipts for fight after fight until we ran into the millions? I did."

"But the directors don't want prices put up so high that a howl goes up afterward from people who paid for a ringside seat and then found they couldn't get within a hundred yards of the fight."

"Well, if the poor boobs want to pay that much, why not take their money?"

"The directors would rather have more events and less extravagant ones. You know what I mean by that word, don't you?"

"I guess so." Heffner swore under his breath. "But they're all wrong. They don't belong in this game."

"Their money's in this property, though."

Heffner thought a moment and then said:

"Well, Al, you tell them for me that I'm willing to run the Garden any way they want. I know my business, but I'll swing it to their way of thinking if they say so. I've worked hard to give them a clean, honest administration—"

"Don't you want to address the meeting and say all that? Crosby is going to appear so they can look him over and ask him any questions they want to."

"Sure. I'll talk to 'em again. But Westcott is sold on this fellow Crosby in advance. I knew it the last time I saw him."

"Well, that's your hard luck. Westcott's one of the biggest bankers in New York. And he has confidence in Crosby."

"Confidence, hell! I've had experience."

The door opened before Jane, ushering in the first two of the directors to arrive, Aldrich and Elmendorf, who were followed in a couple of minutes by Yeager, Dingman, and Westcott.

"As long as Heffner is here already," announced Sherwood, "I suggest that he talk to us now. Crosby can come in later."

The men sat back in their chairs, informally arranged around Sherwood's desk, and smoked and listened, while Heffner stood up before them and outlined the record he had made. There was an ominous silence when he finished.

"Any questions, gentlemen?" he asked.

Nobody offered any.

"Mr. Heffner has stated his case very clearly," said Westcott to the others. "I think he need have no fear that we will misunderstand him."

The others nodded, and Heffner left the room feeling that there was a hidden sting in Westcott's phraseology. In the outer room his eyes narrowed as he caught sight of Lee Crosby talking to Jane.

If this young man took his job away from him, not only his post in the Garden but also his place here at Jane's side, he would hate him till his dying day!

He felt suddenly so furious that the desire to walk up to Crosby and knock him down ate into his mind like a quick, burning acid. His hands clenched and he put them into his pockets to hide them.

"Hello," said Crosby, and there was an embarrassed air about him. His greeting was frankly friendly—he had come here at Mr. Westcott's request—and it had never been his intention to do anything to undermine Heffner in his post.

The Circle Garden people had sought him out at Princeton with their proposal, and naturally he had jumped at the chance to operate such a vast business. Yet he was sensitive enough to know how Heffner must feel at such a time, and it made him ill at ease.

He was tall and well built, younger

than Heffner, and better looking in a lean, clearer-profiled fashion. He was as handsome, in Jane Reese's opinion, as Harry Hoyt, the champion—and that said a good deal.

Jane watched the two men eye each other, Lee with a smile, Pink with a cool glint in his gaze.

"I know how you two must feel," she said, trying to be sympathetic. "Sit down, and I'll give you both cigarettes to calm your nerves."

"No, thanks," said Heffner, and stared at Crosby a moment. Beyond Crosby's elbow was that framed photograph of Harry Hoyt. One of the new promoter's first duties would be to arrange the match between Gorton and Hoyt, for Sam Gorton had won the right to challenge the champion, had fought his way back up through three matches, and was in a position to try for the championship again.

Most people didn't think he could ever come back, not all the way, and probably he couldn't. But the Gorton-Hoyt fight would be the biggest thing the ring had ever known.

Gorton, the slugger, the killer, the fighter who had, above all, the mob appeal—in Heffner's opinion—would pack the Garden as it had never been packed before. Heffner could already see the money, as clearly as if it consisted of ten-dollar gold pieces stacked around the box office from floor to ceiling.

The thought of losing the chance to promote this fight, and all the graft he knew how to collect so shrewdly, made him realize desperately what a threat young Crosby's presence was.

"No, thanks," repeated Heffner. "No cigarette now, Jane. I want to talk to Crosby a minute." He strode toward the farther door. "Will you come out here a minute?"

"Certainly, Pink."

After several meetings in this building during the past month, Lee had dropped easily into the way of addressing Pink Heffner by his first name. Everybody called him Pink. It seemed the natural thing to do.

But Pink Heffner had never called Lee by anything but his last name, and now he repeated it rather sharply as they stood alone in an outer office.

"Listen, Crosby, I've only got a minute to talk to you, but I want you to think fast. You're young, and this job inside won't stop your career. On the other hand, it wouldn't help it any if you got it. It's not your line. It's mine.

"If you'll drop out of the running, I'll see that you get helped financially to anything you want. I know the fight game, and I can make money at it. Bigger money than anybody else can.

"If you'll go in and tell the directors that you've changed your mind and don't want the job, I'll see that some of the big money comes your way. In fact, it will come your way this minute, before we leave this room. I'll write you any kind of a reasonable check you say. How's that?"

Lee looked at Heffner a moment and shook his head.

"No, Pink. Nothing doing!"

"Don't be a damned fool! This will be money in your pocket."

"I'm sorry, Pink, but you can't buy me off. I'd like to tackle the job if they want to give it to me."

"What do you know about staging a fight?" retorted Heffner, his face suddenly red. "This isn't a kid's game!"

"I'm not a kid. I'm twenty-eight."

Heffner glared at him. All his assumed suavity vanished.

"So you're determined to gyp me out of the job, are you?"

Lee gave him a level glance in return.

"I'm doing no gypping, Pink. I'm working in the open—and that's what the directors want in the Garden."

"Is that a slam at me?"

"No, it's merely a declaration of their policy and mine."

"Well, if I thought for a moment that—"

What Heffner was about to reveal further about his thinking was interrupted by the opening of the door, and Jane's voice calling:

"Lee, they want you to come in now."

Heffner watched Lee's back disappear into the next room. Then, with a savage tightening of his lips, he began to pace up and down. After awhile he paused and looked thoughtfully toward the telephone on a desk. He went over to it and called a number, and finally knew he had Sam Gorton on the other end of the wire.

"Listen, Sam. This is Pink Heffner. Come up to my office right away, will you? Yes, right away. That means now, this minute. Take the subway—no, a taxi's too slow. And if I'm not in my office when you get there, sit down and wait. I'm in the building now. Understand?"

After he hung up the receiver he went out into the corridor and walked back and forth for several minutes. When he returned to the outer office he found Jane and Lee sitting on opposite sides of her desk, talking. The next minute the door to Sherwood's private office opened, and Sherwood came out.

"Come here, Lee," he said, and shook him by the hand. "Congratulations. Go inside; the others want to congratulate you too."

Lee's face lit up. He strode into the other room with a buoyant step.

Sherwood turned to Heffner.

"I'm sorry, Pink, but it's all over. They picked Crosby."

The two men stared at each other.

"It's a rotten deal," said Heffner.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, Pink. The directors tried to be fair. After all, their first duty is to themselves."

"I get you," said Heffner in a low, tense voice. His face was white.

Sherwood took him by the arm reassuringly.

"You'll snap out of it, Pink. I know you."

Heffner let a cold smile cross his face.

"Sure I'll snap out of it. But I'll never forget it."

Newspaper reporters began to appear in the farther doorway. Heffner was suddenly aware of Jane at his side.

"It's been fun working with you, Pink. I'm sorry."

"Thanks, Jane." He turned and took her hand; outwardly he had recovered control of himself. "But I'll be around here for a few weeks yet—in and out, you know."

Inwardly he was seething; his anger was so great that for a moment he couldn't look in Crosby's direction, as that young man came out of the inner room accompanied by the directors. Then the reporters swarmed around, and Heffner faced the situation and their quick questions.

Yes, he had other plans, he told them, but he wasn't at liberty yet to discuss them. He would let them know when he could.

"You know me, boys; when I have any news for you I don't forget you. All I want to say now is that I hope it's all for the best. The new promoter is young and inexperienced, but I'll do all I can to put him onto the ropes.

"As for myself, I've had the feeling for some time that I wanted to get out of promoting and try something else. This job here has taken all my time."

Jane marveled at the ease with which he talked. She always admired the way he handled reporters. After he had gone she turned toward Lee and watched him in his first encounter with the newspaper men. Would he handle himself as well as Heffner did?

Dealing with newspaper men was one of the most important things a promoter had to do. The right kind of publicity was necessary for the Garden's success.

She noted with approval that Lee

met the reporters with a natural, candid air. He was elated, of course, at the directors' action; he was walking in the clouds, and this super-terrestrial journey made him utter words which at any other time he might have realized were out of place. Later on he would come down to earth.

She was struck particularly by an idealistic statement about the Garden's duty to the public. It sounded a little too collegiate. Jane's fingers fairly itched to run a blue pencil through it.

In that moment she knew that she wanted to work with Lee, that anything she could do to make his way less difficult in the new job she would do whole-heartedly.

She studied his face, his nice brown eyes, now lit with a glow of pleasure, and the tight grip of his hands on the lapels of his coat as he leaned back against the wall facing the questions being fired at him. She felt a sudden queer clutch at her heart.

CHAPTER IV.

GOING DOWN.

PINK HEFFNER'S jaw was set decisively as he stepped out of Sherwood's office, leaving the reporters behind him, and rang the elevator bell.

John Demo opened the door for him, and stayed his hand on the lever a moment.

"I didn't know that was you in my car, Mr. Heffner, when I brought you up before and stopped at the wrong floor."

Heffner was in no mood to perceive the kindly intent in the apology.

"Come on, start the car!" he demanded hoarsely. "Don't stand here gabbing all day."

Demo looked hurt. He said nothing more as he took the car down to the third floor and let his passenger out.

Heffner walked down the long corridor toward the back of the building. Through the windows at his elbow he could see the late afternoon sun glaring in a side street. He came to the big iron doors which separated the office building from the Garden, and passed through into the gallery corridors leading to his own office.

On the way he caught a glimpse, through an open doorway of the amphitheater, empty and deserted under the haze of light flooding down through the skylights far overhead. The sight renewed the torture in his mind at what he had lost. He swore to himself and strode on fiercely.

"Miss Fuller," he said to his secretary in the outer room, "Sam Gorton's coming here this afternoon. And when he comes, put him in a chair in my room and make him stay there if you have to sit on him."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Fuller, who was a mousey little creature, weighing only one hundred and seven pounds, and who looked startled at the idea of trying to hold down a heavyweight like Gorton. She saw the taut look on Heffner's face, and repeated: "Yes, sir," deferentially.

Heffner turned on his heel and strode out again. In the lobby of the Tower building he saw the reporters hurrying into the street, and chose a side exit to avoid them.

For an hour he walked about the streets. The sweat gathered under his hat brim, but he paid no attention to it. He was hot, raging, vindictive.

One thought burned in his brain: Lee Crosby had taken the Garden from him; he would ruin Crosby if it was the last thing he did on earth! But it would take time. It would take until the Gorton-Hoyt fight.

When he returned to his office he found Gorton sitting in the swivel chair at the desk. Sam Gorton was a towering, heavy-shouldered fighter, six feet and one inch in height, and one hundred and ninety-two pounds in weight; the black hair on his massive

head was slicked down with some oily substance; his shirt collar suffered in tight folds from the strain of containing his bull neck; and his heavy features contributed no very definite expression as he got up at Heffner's entrance; only his eyes reflected a simple, animal-like curiosity.

"Sam, draw up that chair. I've got some big news to spill to you."

"Yeh?" Sam, gazing back blankly, drew up his chair.

Heffner put his fist on Sam's knee.

"I'm thinking of giving up the Garden job. What do you know about that?"

"Yeh?" Sam's look was blanker than ever, if possible. Then the significance of Heffner's words sank in a little deeper. "You don't mean quit promoting? Quit here?"

Heffner nodded.

"I wouldn't think of doing it except that I see a better chance. I wouldn't dream of quitting here if I didn't see a bigger job in front of me. And I see it right now when I look at you!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you, Sam. You can be the next champion—with the right handling. You can regain the championship—stage a come-back such as nobody ever saw before. Jeffries, Johnson, Dempsey—the whole lot will look sick beside what you can do with me to help you."

"You? With me?"

"Sure, Sam. I'll quit promoting to manage you."

"I'd like to have you. But how can I, Pink? I got a manager—Jerry."

"Oh, you can tie a can to Jerry easy enough. I know how to handle him."

"How?"

"Buy him off. Send him up to me, and I'll explain everything to him; what I can do for you that he can't, and what I can do for him that he can't. He'll be a little sore at the idea at first, but after I've explained it all I'll offer him a good piece of change to let you break the contract."

Sam thought a minute. Things were moving pretty fast.

"Who'll pay him that piece of change? Me?"

"Sure. But you'll get it all back and more, too, out of what I make for you. You know I know this game, Sam, from top to bottom, don't you?"

"Yeh, Pink. Nobody knows it like you do."

"And I can outsmart all the other birds in it."

"Yeh. I'll say you can."

"Then is it a go, Sam? If you say 'yes,' I'll run back to Sherwood's office—the directors are meeting there now to reëlect me, if I'll take it—and I'll tell them to pick another man."

Sam scratched his chin where his dark beard always showed through the skin. He was reflecting.

"You could do a lot for me, couldn't you, Pink?"

"More than anybody else in the world."

"All right. It's a go."

"Fine! Now sign this." Heffner grabbed a fountain pen and hastily wrote something on a sheet of paper. Then he pressed the buzzer under his desk. "Miss Fuller," he called to his secretary when she returned, "will you witness this signature?"

"Hadn't we ought to have a lawyer?" asked Sam.

"Not now. This is only a preliminary agreement. Just to show me you're going to work with me."

"Oh, sure. I see."

Sam scrawled his name on the paper.

"Take it, Miss Fuller," said Heffner. To Sam he said, getting up: "Now, you wait here and I'll be back. It may be half an hour. It may be longer. But stick around. Things are just starting." And he clapped Sam on the shoulder as he went out.

In the outer room he paused long enough to tell Miss Fuller to go out and buy all the evening papers.

When he returned Sam Gorton was walking around the room, examining

the framed photographs of famous fight scenes for the hundredth time.

"Why haven't you got me up here on the wall, Pink?"

"You'll be up there after you fight Hoyt. Don't worry. That's going to be the fight of the century."

Sam's face beamed all around his broken nose and prognathous jaw.

Heffner took the evening papers from Miss Fuller and glanced through them. Finally he selected one and held it out to Sam. The headline read:

HEFFNER OUT

New Promoter Faces Big Task

"I Hope It's All For The Best," Says Pink, Yielding Job To Lee Crosby

Successor a Princeton Man

"There it is, Sam. Front-page stuff."

"Gee, Pink," said Sam admiringly, "you certainly got that story in the paper quick."

"Well, Sam, when you've been in this game as long as I have, you'll know how to handle the newspapers."

"I'll say you do."

"And I'll do the same for you, Sam."

"When will you let 'em know you're managing me?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about right now. Don't breathe a word of this to anybody until I tell you to. I don't want this news to break yet."

"Why not?"

"I've got reasons, Sam. You wouldn't understand. But I'll tell you this much. We've got to wait and let things ride awhile until we see how Crosby handles his new job here. Then we'll spring a surprise on him.

"You'll get more publicity that way—a big smash, Sam, instead of a few little stories dribbling along. You have to time these things the same as a fighter does his blows. You know how timing counts."

"Sure, Pink, I know."

"Then that's settled." They shook hands.

"Do you want me to stay in town, Pink?"

"No, that's not necessary. I can get you down when we sign the articles for your fight with Hoyt. That 'll be time enough."

"Where do you want me to go? Up in the mountains and toughen myself?"

"Anywhere. You're tough enough now."

"But I'm a little overweight."

"We'll talk about training after the articles are signed."

Sam rose and suddenly put his hand to his neck.

"Gee, there goes my collar button! I told you I was overweight."

CHAPTER V.

GOING EASY.

"I'LL be out of here in a few days," Heffner told Lee Crosby, referring to the promoter's suite of rooms in the Garden part of the building. Retaining Miss Fuller as his secretary, Heffner prepared to move into Circle Tower, where he took a much smaller office with a room overlooking Broadway.

For the first time in his career he had to pay rent. The reason he gave Lee for remaining in the neighborhood was that "people have got used to looking for me around these four corners."

Meanwhile Lee occupied a desk in Jane's office near Sherwood's door. He began his first week as promoter by improving his acquaintance with Circle Garden and its employees. He wanted to understand the inside workings of the organization clearly before taking up the problems outside.

"Clarity begins at home," he explained to Jane between interviews at his desk.

One after another the Garden em-

ployees filed in to see him. Most of them found the new boss pleasant to deal with. Some of them had been hired by Sherwood, some by Heffner; and the latter Lee inspected more carefully.

One of them, Pete Webb, had been Heffner's first assistant; to Lee he was sullen, and for more reasons than this Lee decided to give him notice. He realized that Webb was one of the parasites of the first water—and rather muddy at that—to attach themselves to the figure of the former promoter.

Webb's first action was to go to Heffner and tell him:

"The kid fired me. What are you going to do about it?"

"Don't worry. You've always got a job with me. I can't start your salary for a month yet—so take a vacation."

"At whose expense?"

"Your own, damn you! You've cleaned up enough money out of what I threw your way. Don't pull a long face on me, Pete. I know you."

The next employee to come to Heffner was Joe Kleckler, the box office man, who still retained his position under the new promoter.

"What 'll I do, Pink?"

"Stick tight. Hang onto your job and say nothing. If anything happens, you'll still be on my pay roll. We'll pull something yet, Joe."

At the end of two weeks Lee Crosby was established in Heffner's old offices. Heffner had taken with him some papers and clippings, asserting that they were his personal files.

The files Heffner left behind seemed to contain a sufficiency—contracts, letters, records of fights and fighters, lists of private detectives, samples of the work of the New Gotham Printing Company, which got out the tickets and programs for all Garden events; and a miscellaneous collection of papers, all of which Lee turned over to his new secretary, Miss Osterhout, to put in order.

Miss Osterhout came to him recommended by Jane. To Jane, Lee said: "Why don't you recommend yourself to me?" Jane shook her head. "You can always come to me for advice," she said.

The two offices worked together on all the Garden projects, for Sherwood, the treasurer, had to be consulted in many things.

It didn't take Lee long to perceive that some of the sport writers who were used to dropping in to talk to Heffner, in search of news or gossip, came to the office now with a visible slackening in affability.

It wasn't anything he could put his finger on at first, but he got the feeling that some of these men came in a spirit of criticism, quick to note differences where his methods failed to conform to Heffner's.

Lee knew, however, what he was doing; he was following the directors' wishes to foster clean sport and keep out of the Garden influences which had an evil repute attached to them.

At length the time came to begin arrangements for the Gorton-Hoyt fight, which wouldn't take place until the early fall. Lee was gratified to see how prominently the papers played up the news. The story ran on the front page.

CROSBY WILL TAKE UP GORTON-HOYT FIGHT NEXT WEEK

Two days later Lee was surprised to pick up the first edition of the New York *Evening Leader* and see an even bigger story, with a two-column head:

HEFFNER TO MANAGE GORTON

By Friendly Agreement Jerry Drake Drops Out of the Picture—"Best Thing for Sam," He Says

With Proper Handling, Pink Asserts, Gorton Can Regain Crown So Quickly That Hoyt Won't Know What's Happened Till He Wakes Up Outside the Ropes

All the other papers picked up the story. It was the topic of much in-

terested comment around Circle Tower, particularly in Sherwood's office.

"That means that I'll have a hard time signing up Gorton," predicted Lee.

His words proved true at the first meeting in Sherwood's office, attended by Gorton and Heffner, and Hoyt and his manager, Fred Toulson.

Heffner insisted from the start on such a big amount of money for Gorton—with whom he had a fifty-fifty cut—that the conference resulted in nothing but a verbal preliminary of several indecisive rounds. The participants went away promising to renew negotiations the next day.

"The real battle is in the newspapers, I see," commented Lee grimly the next morning when he faced Jane. On her desk lay all the papers. One said:

HEFFNER BLAMES NEW PROMOTER FOR HITCH IN FIGHT

Gorton Will Draw the Crowd, Not Hoyt, Says Pink, Insisting on a Bigger Money Split

Asserts Crosby Lacks Experience

Jane gazed thoughtfully across at Lee. "Sore?" she asked.

Lee started to say no, and then changed his mind.

"How would you feel about it? Being called 'too inexperienced to recognize the fight of fights when he sees it!'"

"I wouldn't let it bother me," said Jane slowly. "Besides, Pink may feel a little natural resentment against you for taking his job."

Lee stared back at her.

"A little resentment? The man hates me!"

Jane looked surprised.

"I don't believe it. How do you know?"

"It's more than a hunch; it even comes closer to a conviction!"

"I think you do Pink an injustice."

Lee walked to the window and back again. Suddenly he paused at Jane's side and looked down at her.

"You like Pink Heffner, don't you?"

"Yes. Pink interests me. Why not?"

Lee felt that he couldn't continue on that subject so casually, caught up, as he was, by the sense of Jane's loveliness, the appeal that her personality had for him, and all the fascination he had found in her during these days of association together.

One night, when he had accompanied her home from a party at Sherwood's house, he had compared notes with her about the moon, life, love, the streets of New York, the boulevards of Paris, and all in a spirit that had stirred his mind to the greatest admiration and had made his heart bound.

The thought of her affection going out to Pink Heffner now, when Heffner had just attacked him publicly in the papers, brought the greatest discomfort.

He sat down and doubled his fists tight in his pockets. He thought of Heffner's espousal of Sam Gorton's interests, and of his own predicament. Was he going to meet failure in his first big job as promoter? Suddenly he said:

"I ought to have an assistant—one who knows the newspaper game as well as Heffner does. How much did Webb get as Heffner's assistant?"

"A hundred and fifty a week. But he couldn't spell."

"Then I'm entitled to a hundred and fifty dollar man, am I?"

"Certainly. Whenever you want one."

"I want one now. No objection to his knowing the alphabet, is there?"

Jane smiled.

"Not the slightest. Got anybody in mind?"

Lee rose suddenly.

"Yes. There's Bob Mason on the *Evening Star*. I used to know him at

Princeton. I think I could get Bob to quit the *Star* and come with me."

"Why don't you talk it over with Mr. Sherwood?"

"I will," said Lee. He had recovered from his fit of depression. Now he strode toward Sherwood's door enthusiastically.

CHAPTER VI.

GOING OVER THINGS.

PINK HEFFNER snapped a match alight with the nail of a freshly-manicured thumb, held the blaze to a cigarette, and flicked the match disdainfully onto the floor of his office.

"Hell!" he said. "You can't do anything with Crosby. You might as well tell the other boys on the papers, privately, that all they'll ever get out of him is their tickets."

Pugh of the *Leader* and McCullough of the *Dispatch*, both smiled cynically. They had been educated by Heffner to expect more than tickets from a promoter. Heffner grabbed up a newspaper from his desk.

"Let me read this drool from Crosby out loud to you:

> "There is no reason why men and women should pay from ten dollars to forty dollars for seats in the Garden so far away from the ring that the combatants look like pygmies.
>
> "And to create a situation which will pay a million dollars to Hoyt and four hundred and fifty thousand to Gorton for ten rounds of fighting is establishing an absurdly false value and a dangerous and undermining one to the sport.
>
> "The new policy of the Garden, as approved by the directors, is to set up a reasonable scale of prices and a reasonable standard of money values. We don't want to over-commercialize sport or to dwell continually on the dizzy heights of extravagance."

Heffner concluded and cocked one eye at Pugh.

"What do you think of it?"

"Sounds grand," said Pugh sarcastically. He and McCullough were the only two sport writers in the city who had yielded so intimately to Heffner's influence.

Heffner glanced at McCullough.

"What do you think, Mack?"

"It sounds to me like a dirty crack at you, Pink."

Heffner nodded grimly.

"Do you know, boys," he went on after a moment, as affably as ever, "I believe one reason they put Crosby in this job is because they think he'll pull New York society to the fights. Social register women and that sort of stuff.

"But that won't make the Gorton-Hoyt match the wow it's going to be. It 'll be my man, Sam Gorton, that will bring the crowd. Boys, what counts in this game is personality! With a dash of color. That gets the fans."

McCullough leaned back in his chair and scoffed.

"Bunk! Hoyt has the personality and color in this case."

"How do you figure that? Sam wades in for the knock-outs every time, and the crowd knows it."

"That isn't 'personality and color,'" continued McCullough. "Look at Harry Hoyt—when has there ever been a fighter like him? Intelligent, reads books, talks good English, almost knows what a split infinitive is, can issue his own statements and write his own signed articles and think his own thoughts. A clean fellow, you've got to admit it.

"And what happens? Is he popular with the mass? No-o-o! He's too highbrow, they think. They prefer a lowbrow like Gorton. Who got the most applause when the news-reel pictures of their last fight were shown? Gorton, every time. Hoyt even got hissed. But Gorton's a slugger."

"Sure," said Pink. "There's your color."

"Color, hell! Gorton is only a low-browed, semianthropoid ape-man who is out to kill his opponent in the ring. There's your mob appeal."

Pink blew a cloud of cigarette smoke slowly from his mouth.

"I take it, Mack, you don't think much of the mob in general."

"Not this year's."

"Well, the mob pays the money to see the boys pummel each other around the ring. If it weren't for them you wouldn't be getting yours." McCullough sat silenced.

Heffner rose from his chair and adjusted his striped foulard tie. "I'm due at Sherwood's office again for another session with Crosby, promoter of the tea fight game. See you later, boys!"

But before he penetrated into the private office where negotiations were to be resumed, Heffner paused for a conversation alone with Jane Reese.

"I didn't want to say anything at first, Jane, for fear I'd be doing the young man an injustice. But Crosby isn't the man for this job. It's too big for him."

"He's trying terribly hard to measure up to it."

"Ah," exclaimed Pink, with a masterly attempt at laughter, "it's like trying to measure the Atlantic with a yard stick."

Jane gave him a level look.

"I hate to see you devoting your energies to a man like Sam Gorton."

"You don't understand Sam as I do, Jane, or you'd be more sympathetic toward him. He's such a simple-hearted fellow that people take advantage of him. He has never had a decent manager in all his career.

"If he had had the right kind of advice he never would have lost the championship so soon. I knew all this before he came to me and asked me to manage him.

"It was really quite pathetic, Jane. 'Pink,' he said, 'I ain't never had a manager who understood me. They've all just picked on me for my money.' And he begged me to take him on with tears in his eyes.

"'My Lord,' I said, 'Sam, are you actually weeping?' 'I can't help it, Pink. I ain't happy.' So I consented to take him on."

Heffner leaned forward and put his hand on Jane's shoulder. "Another thing: Sam interests me psychologically. And look at it this way, Jane: my work in the Garden has brought me in contact with a lot of fighters. I understand 'em. Particularly I understand Sam Gorton. I know he's not the type to appeal to a woman of your intelligence—"

"Thanks, Pink."

"—and eventually, of course, I'll be in another business. It may be engineering—"

"Really, Pink? I think that would be splendid." She spoke enthusiastically.

"But meanwhile I might just as well handle Gorton. I can help him a lot—and I can keep busy."

"I see your point, Pink."

Heffner smiled his most fascinating smile.

"And I can see you once in awhile. That's an important consideration."

Jane flushed.

"Now, Pink—"

"I mean it!" He flung one leg over the corner of the desk and leaned forward from this half-sitting position, his hands gripping the edge of the desk tightly, his eyes suddenly serious. His warm gaze held Jane's eyes.

They were alone in the room, and though interruption might come at any moment, Heffner's senses suddenly swirled so with her beauty that he thought of nothing else. For him Jane had an unattainable quality that maddened him. "I can't think of anything more wonderful than you!"

"Pink!" Jane caught her breath.

Heffner's knuckles showed white where he gripped the desk tensely. At the same time his imagination was playing with the advantage it would be to him to have Jane on his side, working with him against Crosby.

"Jane," he said hoarsely, "you and I would make a great team. What do you say? I'm in love with you, Jane."

She leaned back.

"Do you mean you want to marry me, Pink?" she asked slowly.

Heffner nodded; he had never admitted a question like this before.

"Will you, Jane? You and I could do wonders together." In the back of his mind lurked the never-ceasing thought of his hatred for Crosby, intensifying at this moment his desire for Jane.

"I feel honored, Pink, but I must love the man I marry."

At her words Heffner's hands relaxed their tension and slipped from the desk.

"And—and you don't love me?" he stammered.

"I like you a great deal, Pink. You—you're very likable. But it takes more than that to make a marriage. You see what I mean?"

He stood up and straightened his shoulders. The blow to his ego had come easier than he had expected. He had feared that Jane would rebuff him, and the very fear had driven him on to ask her.

Once over, however, he felt a sense of relief; it wasn't so bad after all; she liked him, and he might get her to love him yet. He was again the self-possessed, resourceful man, confident of what he could do.

"I'm not quitting at this, Jane," he assured her, his desire for her increased. He walked to the window and back, his eyes bright.

Jane gave him a warm smile, and at that moment the door opened before Lee Crosby, who paused for the fraction of a second, struck by some feeling in the air that he had interrupted a scene.

He noted Jane's smile and the look on Heffner's face.

The two men greeted each other coolly.

Half an hour later, they sat on opposite sides of the long table in Sherwood's room, again debating the financial issue of the Gorton-Hoyt match, while the principals sat by listening.

"Sam, with me managing him, is worth more to-day than he ever was," concluded Heffner. "I'm holding out for four hundred and fifty thousand."

"But Harry's the champion," put in Toulson, Hoyt's manager, a small, direct, and businesslike man of thirty-five, who delivered his sentences as he once had blows in the lightweight battles of fifteen years ago, with short punches. "He's entitled to the champion's share. We want no more. The more you get for Sam, the more I have to ask for Harry."

Suddenly Harry Hoyt leaned one elbow on the table and gazed across at Heffner.

"Good Lord, Pink! I don't want more than a million." His voice was earnest, and a look of appealing candor shone from his strong, square-cut face. "What could a champion do with more money than that? It would ruin him."

Toulson chuckled.

"Pink don't think managers get ruined as quick that way as fighters," Sam Gorton suddenly remarked. "Anybody can ruin me in your place, Harry, that wants to."

Heffner waved a pink hand in the air.

"The unfortunate part about Crosby's scheme is that in his first attempt to stage a big fight he's got to deal with me. And I know too much about the game to go in for the collegiate stuff here."

Lee flushed.

"The next thing I do," went on Heffner, "if I walk out of here to-day without the boys signing the articles—is to take Gorton to Chicago and match him there with Jess Hertel. One fight's as good as another—as long as Sam's in it and I'm back of him. Is that as clear as mud?"

What was clearest of all to Lee was Heffner's intention to put difficulties in his way. Again the meeting broke up without an agreement having been reached.

"You know what I said about Chicago?" Heffner reminded Sherwood of his threat.

"He won't do that," Lee assured the treasurer.

"Oh, won't I?" retorted Heffner.

Lee shook his head coolly.

"With the champion in New York, Gorton alone in Chicago might as well be in Oshkosh!"

CHAPTER VII.

GOING UNDER FIRE.

LEE discovered during the next few days that Heffner's influence with certain sport writers was far greater than he had suspected. Lee found himself subjected to the fire of headlines and newspaper adjectives. His position was assailed in many quarters.

"Promoter Crosby Holds Back the Shekels.—Heffner Attacks Crosby. Says New Promoter 'Wants Him to Give the Fight Away.'—The Day of Five-and-Ten-Cent Store Fights Has Passed.—Heffner May Take Gorton to Chicago. New York Fans Protest Against Losing the Fight of Fights.—Pink Says 'Promoting Should Never be Intrusted to the Hands of a Kid-Glove Kid.'"

Lee smarted under these attacks. But what could he do? He told himself, over and over again, that he was only acting according to the directors' wishes.

What galled him a few days later was that the directors suddenly began to view the situation with alarm. They held a hurried meeting in Sherwood's office, and two of them, Aldrich and Elmendorf, seemed to blame Lee for his failure to come to terms with Heffner.

"I want this match a success, Crosby," said Aldrich, "as much for your sake as for ours. But I don't think you've handled Heffner in the right way."

Harvey Westcott silenced the criticism by taking Lee's side. His position as a banker commanded such respect from the others that what he said carried the most weight.

"We're to blame, ourselves."

"But the public is blaming Crosby," returned Aldrich.

"That's his misfortune. The only thing to do now is to let Crosby make the best terms he can with Heffner, even if it means accepting all his conditions. We shouldn't have tied Crosby's hands in the first place."

"I agree," said Dingman. "Take any contract you can get from Pink Heffner to-day—and end all this squabble."

With these instructions to surrender to Heffner's demands, Lee met the ex-promoter at another conference that afternoon. At length the articles were signed whereby Harry Hoyt, the world's heavyweight champion, would defend his title against Sam Gorton, the former champion and now the challenger, in Circle Garden on the night of September 20.

Facing Heffner, who was flushed with his victory, Lee knew very well that the newspapers would say: "Heffner Wins On all Counts." He couldn't resist telling Heffner at the end:

"The place to have thrashed this matter out was here in this room, not in the newspapers."

"How long since you exercised a censorship of the press?" retorted Heffner, rising.

"I play fair," retorted Lee. "That's the new policy here."

Heffner's face reddened. His hatred of Lee would never be satisfied until he had seen the most ignominious failure befall the new promoter who had taken his laurels from him. But all he said at the moment was:

"All right, Crosby; use your own brand of apple sauce!"

CHAPTER VIII.

GOING INTO DETAILS.

AS Lee plunged into the thousand and one details connected with the coming fight—the posting of the forfeit money, the arrangements with the boxing commission, the preparation of tickets, and all—he found that his greatest help came from Jane.

The more he saw of her, in and out of the office, the deeper he fell under the spell of her vivid and sympathetic personality.

Lee Crosby told himself, reluctantly, that any reciprocal feeling she had for him was due to her interest in the work, in which he happened to be included because he was the promoter.

Sometimes she would study him so impersonally, with a straight-from-under gaze, that it made him miserable. He longed to have her look at him, not through him; to reveal some of the warmth which he felt in her presence, and which he eventually realized was love.

His heart beat faster when he was near her, and sent singing thoughts mounting to his brain. He had never known a girl like Jane before, so eager and so beautiful!

He was delighted when she announced her intention to accompany him—chaperoned by Mr. Sherwood, an old friend of her father's—on his inspection trips to the training camps of the two fighters.

First they went to the Catskills, where Harry Hoyt and his manager and sparring partners were quartered in a cottage on a mountainside above Palenville. One day they climbed North Mountain with the champion, picnicked on the summit, and returned by the old Otis railroad cut, now an ancient gash down the steep, wooded slope.

Hoyt and the others went on ahead, leaving Lee and Jane alone in their descent. It proved to be perilous at one point. Jane, failing to heed Lee's advice, suddenly slipped on a shelf of loose sand.

She fell precipitately into the steepest part of the cut. In desperation she clutched at a root growing in the bank, and halted her dizzy descent. But the root was old and began to give way in her hands. Jane's face was white. She cried out.

Below her there was a drop of a hundred feet.

"Hang on!" shouted Lee.

From his ledge above her he swung down the declivity at the side where bushes gave a hand-hold. Then, when he was below Jane, on the last ledge before the sheer drop, swiftly and with an athlete's dexterity he flung himself out into the sandy cut, anchored himself with a firm foothold, and held out his arms.

He was just in time. The root in Jane's hand came away and she fell into his arms—on the very edge of the ledge.

For a moment she rested against his body, limp. He put his hand to her hair and brushed the sand from her face.

His hand was trembling.

"Jane! Jane!" he cried. "You might have been killed, dear."

She looked up at him, wide-eyed, but said nothing.

"I love you, Jane. This is a queer time to tell you, but I do. I love you more than anything else in the world." He bent over and kissed her.

"Don't, Lee!" she said gently, and drew back. "Please!"

He helped her onto the safe ground at the side, where he faced her, demanding:

"You don't love me?"

She shook her head.

"I'm awfully fond of you, Lee—fonder than I've ever been of anybody before. But I've got to be honest: I

don't love you—not like that. I'm sorry," she added when she saw the hurt look in his eyes, "but—but I can't help it, can I?" She appealed to him with a simple, direct gesture.

They returned to the cottage more silently than they had departed.

A week later they visited Sam Gorton's training quarters at Seabright, New Jersey, where Lee found Heffner an amiable host to Jane, affable to Sherwood, but absolutely indifferent to himself. With his indifference there was mingled at times a suave, but ferocious scorn.

Heffner discovered from Lee's behavior that he was in love with Jane.

"I'm not blind, Jane," remarked Heffner as he sat beside her on the beach watching the heads of Lee and Sam swimming far out beyond the breakers. "The new promoter is growing goofy-eyed where you are concerned. But keep your eyes open, Jane," advised Heffner. "Those college days are over."

Jane laughed.

"Pink, your ideas come in a strange sequence."

Out in the water Sam Gorton called to Lee: "I'll race you to the shore, guy." Lee accepted the challenge; he had been captain of the Princeton swimming team in college, and his swift strokes soon enabled him to overtake Sam and beat him to the beach.

Sam was so surprised that, as soon as he recovered his breath, he delivered himself of the momentous comment:

"Say, Crosby, you can swim!"

"Thanks, Sam."

Later Sam said to Heffner when they were alone:

"That guy Crosby can swim."

"He'll have to," returned Heffner, "if he's going to get out of all the trouble I see ahead of him."

Without being aware of Heffner's prophetic eye, Lee returned to New York to be met at the station by Bob Mason, the former *Star* reporter who had become his assistant, and who thrust a newspaper into Lee's hands at once.

Lee read:

TICKET SCANDAL

Speculators Got Large Block of Seats for Gorton-Hoyt Fight—Fans Set Up Howl

"That's a lie, Bob, and we know it," said Lee angrily.

"That's what I thought at first. I tried to stop the story. But there's some truth in it."

Lee stared at him, amazed.

"How could there be? I took great pains to see that no big batch of tickets went to one man unless we knew he was all right. Kleckler has had those instructions in the box office since the day the sale opened."

"Yes, but Kleckler let the speculators buy just the same. I found out how he worked it: he let Epstein send around a dozen men, and they came up to the window again and again, until they had all the tickets they wanted. Now Epstein's selling them on Broadway at double the price. Some of the best seats, too!"

Lee hurried in a taxi with Mason to Circle Tower, and then to Epstein's ticket agency in a hole-in-the-wall office next to an orange juice stand in Times Square, and back to Circle Garden, finding that Mason's words were true and that Joe Kleckler, his box office man, had played into the hands of the speculators.

"Kleckler, you're through," said Lee to him. "Put on your hat and go."

Lee and Mason spent the remainder of the day trying to explain to reporters that the management of Circle Garden had never intended that anything like this should happen.

In spite of their efforts to counteract the adverse publicity, Lee saw that Pugh wrote in his column of fight gossip in the *Leader*: "Crosby's Explanation Doesn't Explain," and that McCullough headed his article in the *Dis-*

patch: "Speculations on Speculators and Lee Crosby."

CHAPTER IX.

GOING CHRISTIAN.

DIVIDING his time between New York and Seabright, Heffner watched the progress of newspaper gossip with satisfaction. His living-room in the Seabright cottage had more newspapers in it than wall paper. There, in the midst of the latest editions, he was greeted by Joe Kleckler, who arrived from New York to announce:

"Well, Crosby fired me."

Sam Gorton wandered into the room from his training quarters at the back and, wearing a bathrobe, sank into a rocking chair and breathed heavily.

"I sold the tickets to Epstein the way you told me to," went on Kleckler. "And here I am—minus a job."

Heffner grinned.

"I expected it. Now you can be box-office man for me."

"For you!"

"Sure. I'm going to charge admission to see Sam work out."

All subjects that came up for discussion he talked about as freely in Sam's presence as if the challenger were a dummy figure without the mental equipment to grasp what was going on. But Sam suddenly said:

"I get half of that money, don't I, Pink?"

"Sure. You get half of everything. Shut up!" Heffner turned to Kleckler.

"Beginning this week we'll have a crowd of fans pouring in on us to watch the big dumb-bell slam his sparring partners around. Go out in back and look the place over. And send Pete Webb in here."

Webb had arrived the day before to resume his rôle of chief henchman. While waiting for him to appear now, Heffner narrowed his eyes thoughtfully, giving himself over to meditation. In a moment he exclaimed irritably to Gorton:

"How can a man think with you breathing like that?"

"I just run six miles."

"It sounds like six hundred."

Webb entered the room.

"Pete," said Heffner, "who was that crazy minister who started the rumpus against our fight a year ago?"

"You mean?—wait a minute." Webb scratched an oily lock of hair at the back of his head. "You mean Apple—no, that wasn't it; it had something to do with a plant or a vegetable." Suddenly he added: "I've got it: Plumley!"

"That's right. The Rev. Mr. Plumley. They still let him run a church somewhere in Madison Avenue, don't they?"

"Good Lord, Pink, don't ask me questions like that!"

Heffner laughed and got up.

"Run along, Sam, and take your shower. I don't want this room smelling like a sweat-shop."

After Gorton left, Heffner continued to Webb: "I'm going into the city. You take care of things while I'm gone. Sam's wife is arriving to-morrow. Fix her up with a nice room and bath at the hotel. I want the little lady to be comfortable."

"Yeh," said Webb as Heffner turned away, "I've noticed that."

In New York, Heffner lost no time in calling at Horace Plumley's office alongside the Madison Avenue Memorial Church. The Rev. Mr. Plumley, a tall, gaunt figure with deep, cavernous eyes in which a fanatic light sometimes burned, received his visitor stiffly and waited. He was afraid of being asked for money.

"I'm interested in missionary work, Dr. Plumley," began Heffner gravely. "Not some distant charity in the Zulu Islands, but a real work of Christian ideals here at home."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Plumley.

"I'm interested in it to the extent that I'd be willing to contribute financially to it—say, a thousand dollars."

Mr. Plumley's eyes brightened.

"Is that so?" This time a warm note sounded in his voice, and he leaned forward eagerly. "What is this work you speak of?"

"On September 20 a prize fight is going to take place at Circle Garden between Gorton and Hoyt—"

"I've been reading about it," interrupted Mr. Plumley excitedly. "It's disgraceful! It ought to be stopped."

"I agree with you, doctor."

"Is that the work you speak of?"

"Yes."

"Fine. Fine!" Mr. Plumley, with an air of pleasurable anticipation, rubbed his knees with his long, white hands, and bent a bright, burning gaze on his visitor. "I started a crusade against prize fighting a year ago, but it met with little success—chiefly, I believe, because I didn't have the necessary funds.

"You'd be surprised what expense there is in connection with a work like that: meetings to be advertised, printing bills; and a stenographer or secretary should always be in charge of the office to answer inquiries. But with a thousand dollars, all that could be managed."

He smiled ingratiatingly. "You are ready, are you, to place that amount at my disposal, Mr.—Mr.—"

"King." Heffner nodded. "But I'm an obscure layman, a quiet and retiring man, and I don't want to play a personal part in this crusade of yours. My money is at your service. But I want to remain in the background. You understand? Think of me as just 'A friend.'"

"Certainly, Mr. King."

"No mention of me in the newspapers," went on Heffner. "All that must fall to you."

Mr. Plumley's face glowed. He accepted these responsibilities.

"I don't mind publicity. In fact, it is absolutely necessary in a campaign such as mine will be."

"Absolutely," agreed Heffner. "I will send you a certified check for five hundred dollars to-morrow, and the rest will follow later."

"Where can I get in touch with you, Mr. King?" Mr. Plumley asked.

"Ah, that I can't say. I'll be in and out of New York from time to time. But it won't be necessary to know where to reach me. I'll simply keep in touch with your work through the newspapers, and when I think the first check for five hundred has been exhausted, I'll send you another."

"That is very fine of you, Mr. King. What is your first name, may I ask?"

"Ah—er—Oswald."

"Oswald King," repeated the doctor, "the world needs more citizens like you."

"Thank you, doctor." Heffner rose and thought a moment. "By the way, do you know that this Gorton-Hoyt fight is being promoted by a man named Crosby who is a Princeton graduate?"

"No, I didn't," said Mr. Plumley with surprise.

"If the colleges are going to turn out young men for such purposes, doctor, where will our great educational institutions come to?"

"Yes, yes, I see. It's a disgraceful condition of affairs." Mr. Plumley found a hasty use for his pencil. "I'll make a note of that. I hadn't realized it before. And all the money being lavished on such a contest between men with fists. It's—it's unthinkable."

"It is," said Heffner, and departed.

CHAPTER X.

GOING INTO THE LAST WEEK.

FOR three weeks the "ministerial campaign," as it was called in some quarters, raged against the Gorton-Hoyt fight, led by the Rev. Horace Plumley in pulpit and press, at-

tacking Crosby as the promoter of "an unchristian spectacle worthy of Rome before its fall, and a disgrace to the city."

The city referred to was New York. Its mayor was at length appealed to by Mr. Plumley—"Urge Mayor To 'Act," ran one of the headlines—but this city official, it so happened, was rather fond of contests between gladiators equipped with boxing gloves, and so he found it possible to explain that the event scheduled to take place at Circle Garden was something over which he could exercise no jurisdiction.

Thereupon Mr. Plumley, carefully followed by reporters, resorted to the courts. On September 13, just a week before the date of the fight, Lee Crosby found himself, in the midst of many pressing duties, summoned before a judge to show cause why an injunction shouldn't be issued restraining him from holding the match.

Lee's replies to Mr. Plumley's attacks up to now had been carefully worded statements of extremely logical appropriateness, but at this juncture he found it necessary to take an expensive lawyer with him for these more legal answers.

Lee won the battle in court.

Forty thousand ticket holders breathed easier. For a moment they had contemplated the emptiness of the great indoor amphitheater without Gorton and Hoyt in the ring. The next day they read, reassured, that the crusade against the fight had come to an end.

"The Rev. Mr. Plumley said that what the committee needed most at this time was a financial contribution. It would enable it to meet expenses that had already run beyond the committee's assets."

These two lines in the newspaper account were read by Heffner with more understanding than by anybody else.

Heffner laughed aloud. In his office in Circle Tower, to which he had returned, bringing Sam Gorton and his retinue of handlers to the Garden, he was sitting at his desk in the inner room, dictating to his secretary, Miss Fuller, while Sam Gorton lounged in a corner listening.

To Miss Fuller, Heffner turned again to continue one of Sam's signed statements for the *Leader*.

"The best Hoyt could do to me in my last fight was to outpoint me, comma, and then, comma, mind you, comma, I wasn't in the best condition either, period. Miss Fuller.

"I don't believe in squawking after a fight is lost, period. But a fighter knows when he's in condition, period. I was never better in my whole life than I am now, period. And I have had the advantage of having Heffner for my manager, period. No man could have better—"

"Gee, you hate yourself, don't you?" remarked Gorton from his corner.

"Shut up! Where were we, Miss Fuller? Never mind; just see who that is came into the outer office."

"Yes, Mr. Heffner." Miss Fuller rose hurriedly and went out the door, returning to put her head in a moment later and say "Mrs. Gorton" in such a mumbled tone that Sam Gorton didn't seem to have heard it. Heffner rose and passed Miss Fuller in the doorway.

Gorton sat silent in his corner, watching Miss Fuller's back dully as she sat in her chair, waiting, with her notebook on her knee. After awhile he grew restless, rose, and went into the other room, where he was surprised to find Heffner talking to his wife.

"I didn't know you was here, deary," said Gorton. "You want that money for a hat, don't you?" He took some bills out of his pocket. "Just remember that berries don't grow on berry bushes." He watched his wife stuff the money in her purse and depart.

"Come on, Sam," said Heffner; "let's get this statement finished."

"You don't need me there to do it," retorted Gorton, suddenly sullen. He scowled at his manager. "Look here, Pink, if you want to handle me, lay off this business of being too nice to my wife. Get that straight?"

"All right, Sam. But there's nothing to get excited about. I just like her because she's your wife — like a sister, see?"

"Yeh, but you don't have to hold your sister's hand every time my back's turned!"

The next day readers of sport pages saw:

"NEVER BETTER," SAYS SLUGGER SAM ON EVE OF THE FIGHT OF FIGHTS

On Wednesday, four days before the fight, they saw pictures of the two combatants ready for the fray. "Will Hoyt be harassed by the old Gorton scowl? John L. Sullivan used to scare his opponents into submission with his ferocious scowl. The upper left picture shows Gorton four years ago when he scowled and knocked out Ike Loomis in the second round.

"Immediately above it is the Gorton scowl as it looked the night he lost the championship to Hoyt. Inset shows the present scowl. Will it still do service against Hoyt? His admirers say yes. Hoyt, they say, will see the old Gorton behind the Gorton scowl."

Among the thousands of persons who scanned the above items, Lee Crosby read with his mind making a picture of what the Garden would look like on Saturday night with every seat occupied, not a ticket remained unsold. Jane Reese studied the pictures and prayed for Harry Hoyt to win.

John Demo, elevator operator in Circle Tower, didn't mind his failure to win straights as he played the floor numbers going up.

He could put his hand to his breast and feel the outline of his pocketbook, in which reposed a ticket for the fight, purchased through Jane Reese's office. Demo was going to sit in a ten-dollar seat, his only luxury in a month that was otherwise economical.

Myron T. Mittle, an underpaid clerk in a haberdashery shop around the corner, possessed a ticket, too, locked in a bureau drawer in the Amsterdam Avenue boarding house where he lived.

Harvey Westcott, the banker, and one of the directors of Circle Garden, was the proud owner of ten tickets for himself and nine guests who would dine with him before going to the fight.

Nelson Heffner, forty-two, married, proprietor of a delicatessen store in West Ninety-Sixth Street, and a cousin of Pink Heffner, kept his precious ticket in the cash register. The Social Register was also represented among the ticket holders.

> Never before, during Pink Heffner's days as promoter, have women evinced such an interest to witness a championship bout as they do now, at Lee Crosby's first big show. Royalty is to be represented by the Princess Marie of Russia and Greece.

Also among the women who were looking forward to the match with a thrill of excitement was Miss Fuller, Heffner's little mouselike secretary, who had two tickets for herself and the only boy friend on whom she could pin any hopes of marriage.

All of these people read on Thursday that "sentiment for Gorton still persists, and the betting odds are almost even." On Friday they read Sam Gorton's statement: "I am ready for Hoyt this time. I will win decisively." And Hoyt's statement: "My first defense of my title finds me confident I will win."

Tucked away in a far corner of a column of sport gossip was the following paragraph:

> A New York fan, who professes to be closer to Heffner than dandruff is

to the bean, says that there is no love lost between the ex-promoter and the present Generalissimo of the Garden—young Lee Crosby.

The fight Heffner would really like to stage, says this informant, is one in which he would meet Crosby, Marquis of Queensbury rules or Queensborough or even Bronx Taxicab Drivers.

That night Lee Crosby slept little. In the bedroom of his Madison Avenue apartment he rolled and tossed until nearly dawn. Whenever he closed his eyes he saw a picture of the ring across a sea of faces, and the figures of Gorton and Hoyt sharp against the light.

He prayed for the success of his first big show. He hoped that no untoward incident would mar the event, that the crowd would be orderly, coming and going—and would go away satisfied.

Yet he dreamed fitfully of all possible disasters. Once, with the cry of "Fire! Fire!" ringing in his ears, and a picture in his mind of a wild, trampling tumult, he woke and felt the sweat on his brow. "Thank Heaven it was only a dream!"

Again he tried to sleep, and this time he dreamed fantastically that he was one of the figures in the ring, and Heffner the other; that Heffner fell before a clean, hard right, and the referee stood over him counting ten until the roar of the crowd filled Lee's ears, triumphant, and he found Jane in his arms, soft, warm, and confessing her love for him.

CHAPTER XI.

GOING INTO FACTS.

Principals—Henry William (Harry) Hoyt, of New York City, the defending heavyweight champion, and Samuel Joseph (Slugger Sam) Gorton, of Chicago, challenger and former champion.

Time—Between 9.30 and 10 P.M., daylight-saving time.

(The preliminaries will start at 8.15.)

Place—Circle Garden, New York.

Number of Rounds—Ten.

Decision—The decision will be made by two judges, with the referee empowered to cast a deciding ballot in case of a tie.

Ticket Prices—$5 to $40.

Receipts—$2,000,000 (estimated).

Ages—Hoyt, 29; Gorton, 33.

Weights—Hoyt, 191; Gorton, 195 (estimated).

Promoter—Lee Crosby, of New York.

Seconds—For Hoyt: Fred Toulson, Jimmy Breck, and Billy Jones. For Gorton: Pink Heffner, Pete Webb, and Joe Kleckler.

Radio—Fifty-six stations in National Broadcasting Company's country-wide hook-up. Announcer: Willis McGee.

THE corridors between Circle Tower and the Garden, between the lobby offices where Lee, Jane, and Sherwood made their headquarters, and the dressing rooms where the fighters and their retinues were in full possession, were alive with a coming and going of official errands at 5 P.M., when Lee made a final tour of inspection.

He visited the policemen on guard at the doors between Circle Tower and the Garden, the ticket takers at the entrances, the additional police outside, and the army of ushers within. All seemed to be in order, and he breathed easier.

"Oh, Lee!" exclaimed Jane when he came back to the lobby office. "I hope everything goes all right."

Lee flung himself into a chair, tried to relax, and then lit a cigarette. He was aware that his hand trembled.

"I know why Rip Van Winkle went into the mountains to sleep for twenty years," he said with a nervous smile. "He had just staged a championship fight."

Jane noted the dark shadows under Lee's eyes. They were very becoming, she decided; they gave his eyes a look of romantic mystery. She remained in the office at six o'clock to share Lee's supper of sandwiches. She had brought an electric grill on which she kept a pail of coffee hot.

From time to time Bob Mason and

others put their heads in at the door to report on what was happening outside.

"The first fans are in their seats eating a supper of ice cream cones."

"There's a crowd already outside waiting in hopes of picking up a ticket somebody loses."

"I saw One-eyed Kelly, the demon gate crasher."

"Let him in!" returned Lee. "For good luck. But don't let him know you let him—a man with an ideal like that ought never to have it shattered."

Jane looked across at Lee admiringly. She liked this trait of his, this ability to find humorous comment even in the tense grip of his greatest difficulties. Studying the back of his head, she felt again a sudden twist of affection for him.

"There's a dozen people at the window who say they've lost their tickets," announced Dibble, the box office man, coming in excitedly chewing on a cigar. "They demand that new tickets be issued to them. What 'll I do?"

Lee got up worried.

"If you're sure of their identity, and they know the seat numbers, and you know from your chart that they're all right, I suppose you could make out new stubs for them, couldn't you?"

"Yes, but what if somebody else turns up at the gate with their ticket? Somebody who found it. And gets in the Garden?"

"Yes," admitted Lee, puzzled, "that would complicate things. You'll have to use your own judgment, Dibble. If you know the man personally, and he's sure he lost the ticket at home, or somewhere where it won't be found by anybody else, make out a pass for him. Otherwise, he's out of luck. I don't see what else we can do."

Dibble withdrew. Then the telephone began ringing. Somebody else had lost his ticket, and couldn't get the box office on the phone; that line was busy. There were three telephones in this lobby office, and in another minute all three were ringing and desperate voices were announcing the loss of their tickets.

"Good Lord," groaned Lee, "I did not know so many people in the world could lose things like this. How do they ever succeed in business?"

Jane helped him answer the calls.

Bob Mason put his head in the door.

"I've never seen such a crowd as there is outside. The whole street is blocked. If we don't have more police right away, somebody will get hurt. Phone for reserves, Lee!"

"I can't. These phones won't stop ringing. Try one in another room."

Meanwhile, John Demo, the elevator operator, stood on the fringe of that milling crowd in the street and felt through all his pockets for the hundredth time. Nowhere could he find his ticket.

He had thought it reposed safely in his pocketbook, with a couple of letters he had been carrying there for several days.

But now, though he searched everywhere, even inside the envelopes, even inside the folded pages of the letters, he could find nothing that at all resembled the ticket for the Gorton-Hoyt match, that luxury in an otherwise economical life.

He moved, bewildered, to a Broadway window and examined his pockets again by the light streaming out from an automobile showroom.

Then, in despair, he turned and hurried toward the subway entrance to return home in search of the missing ticket.

At the same time Myron T. Mittle, the underpaid clerk, stood in his room in the Amsterdam Avenue boarding house and pawed frantically around the contents of his bureau. He was sure he had put the ticket in the top drawer next to his collar box. Then where was it?

The collar box was there, and handkerchiefs and odds and ends of things, including sheets of pasteboard that had

come back from the laundry in shirts. But no ticket!

Eventually he had all the bureau drawers scattered about the floor, and though he wore out the crease in his trousers kneeling and crawling from one to the other, he could get no glimpse of that purple, printed ticket which meant so much to him.

He went to the door and called frantically downstairs to his austere landlady.

"Mrs. Wisham! Have you been in my bureau?"

"No, sir! How dare you, Mr. Mittle? I'll have you distinctly understand I never poke into my roomers' things."

"Then somebody's stolen my ticket."

"Stolen? Not in *my* house. Mr. Mittle, you're crazy. Don't you dare go shouting a thing like that around my halls. I won't have it."

Another pained and aggrieved searcher after his ticket at that moment was Nelson Heffner, forty-two, married, proprietor of the delicatessen store in West Ninety-Sixth Street, and a cousin of Pink Heffner.

"I know I put it in the cash register." He stormed at his wife behind the counter while customers waited. "I know I did! I know! That's what comes of leaving you alone in the store. You can't keep anything in order."

"But, Nelson, I didn't touch it—honest, I didn't."

"Then where is it—where is it, I ask you?"

"Nelson, don't shout at me like that. There's customers waiting."

"To hell with the customers! I want my fight ticket."

Another spot in the city where a similar frustration was causing the utmost distress was the apartment of Miss Fuller, Heffner's secretary, who lived with her mother but wanted desperately to live elsewhere with her boy friend—if he would ever ask her to marry him. Now she stood, crestfallen, in front of him, and confessed the loss of her tickets.

"But they must be here somewhere," he insisted.

"I've looked all over."

"Oh, don't be foolish!" he said sharply. "Look again."

Miss Fuller began to cry.

It was about this time of evening that Harvey Westcott, the banker, pushed back his chair from the dining-room table and smiled at his nine guests. All, like him, were in dinner coats, and all enjoying their cigarettes, after the demi-tasses, and the thought of the ringside seats ahead of them at the big fight.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Westcott, "shall we shove off?"

"Got the tickets, Harvey?" asked one in a bantering tone.

"Yes," added another, laughing, "I'll bet you've lost them, Harvey. Better look and see."

Mr. Westcott laughed. He looked—and an expression of surprise came over his face. All he found in his coat was a handful of blank, white cards and some letters. His guests laughed.

"I told you so!"

Mr. Westcott rose with a chagrined air.

"That's the first time I ever forgot to put the tickets in my pocket. Excuse me, boys—I'll go upstairs and get them."

A gale of merriment followed him.

CHAPTER XII.

GOING INTO DIFFICULTIES.

LEE CROSBY wiped the sweat from his brow and put down the telephone with a shaky hand.

"That was Westcott. He says that he can't find his tickets either. But he found the envelope in which they were sent to him. And inside it are ten pieces of pasteboard with nothing on them."

Jane gasped.

"Is that what we sent him, ten tickets?"

"Yes. They were mailed the day the tickets went on sale."

"And didn't he look inside the envelope between then and now?"

"No. He assumed the tickets were there all right. Instead he finds ten blank cards. Something's wrong."

Jane stared at him dumfounded.

"Maybe that's what's happened to these other people." She rose and stood stunned. "What can it be? Maybe that's why the crowd is so small inside the Garden now, and so big outside."

They stood a moment, struck with wonder.

Bob Mason entered breathlessly.

"There's hell to pay outside, Lee. The crowd's a regular riot—and they are storming the doors trying to get in without tickets. Come quick and see!"

Lee followed Mason on a run. When he peered into the street he saw a scene which caused him to stand aghast, unable to believe his eyes. With Mason he hurried to the other entrances and saw the same thing.

Broadway, Central Park West, and the two side streets were jammed with a howling, pushing mob. Reserves from the West Sixty-Third Street station were trying to help the regular policemen halt the disorder. Night sticks rose in the air and gleamed in the electric light.

Returning to the main entrance, Lee pushed his way among the besieged ticket-takers, flanked by policemen, and tried to discover what was wrong.

"They ain't got tickets. They want to get in with phony cards, Mr. Crosby."

"That's a ticket, I tell you!" retorted an angry fight fan. "I paid twenty dollars for it."

Lee saw that it was the same shape and size as the regular ticket, but it was as blank as a sheet of paper.

On the sidewalk outside a woman screamed and fainted. Men's voices rose in a maniacal fury. Then the sound of the ambulance bells came insistent through the tumult.

Lee saw a group of men rush one of the gates, punching and pummeling the ticket-takers, and he flung himself into the mauling mass. Policemen came to the rescue. One of their blows struck Lee on the ear, but he managed to fight his way back into the lobby, with the ticket-takers still at their posts, unstampeded.

Lee's mind was dazed as he returned to the lobby office, still clutching in his hand one of the pieces of pasteboard.

"Lee!" cried Jane at once. "You're hurt."

"Am I? This night is a bedlam."

"Your face is bleeding."

With her handkerchief she wiped away the blood, while he stood unheeding, staring at the card in his hand.

"What in Heaven's name has happened!" he cried out in despair. The first preliminary fight was due to start in a few minutes; but only five hundred spectators sat in their seats, while fifty thousand battled outside in the street. Some unbelievable disaster had overtaken him and "the fight of fights."

In all that chaotic maelstrom of humanity surrounding Circle Garden there was one determined person, the Rev. Mr. Plumley, who managed to gain entrance to the building.

The fanaticism which carried him into crusades had informed his arms and shoulders and fists in a resolute penetration through the crowds, and at length, showing some slight damage to his clerical collar, he made his way along one of the inner corridors.

He was breathing hard. The physical effort he had been forced to make reminded him unpleasantly of his youth. Then he had been fiery-tempered, too quick to take offense at other boys and fly at them. Thank the Lord he had conquered those adolescent feelings! How he could hold up his head in the world, conscious of the nobility

of restraint and right thinking, even in this environment.

He passed an open door, where he saw a young man stripped to the waist—one of the preliminary fighters—his muscular shoulders gleaming under the light as a trainer sat binding his hands with tape. Preparing for the savage spectacle! Mr. Plumley set his jaw grimly and strode on.

In the room where Sam Gorton rested on a cot, surrounded by his handlers and last-minute friends, Pink Heffner paced up and down. Sometimes his footsteps took him into the adjoining room of the suite, and sometimes out into the corridor and back.

Suddenly Gorton sat up and complained:

"You're more nervous than I am. Anybody would think you're going out there and exchange wallops with Hoyt instead of me. What's eatin' you? Sit down. You ain't in danger of a knock-out."

"Shut up!" retorted Heffner. "Lie down and keep still."

But a moment later Gorton sat up again and flung an agonized glance at Heffner.

"Pink," he begged, "if you gotta walk up and down, turn to the right when you turn around. Not the left! It's bad luck. It gives me the fidgets."

Heffner stood over him and scowled.

"Don't be so damned superstitious!"

"Well, I seen these things happen before." Gorton appealed to him with a grotesque look of anguish on his face. "It's worse than a black cat or an undertaker in a black coat, or a minister, or a blind horse, or a—"

"You'll be blind when Hoyt hits you if you don't shut up and lie down."

Gorton rested his big jaw on his fists and stared petulantly at the floor.

"Well, it 'll be all right if you don't turn to the left, Pink."

Heffner continued to pace up and down. The next moment he turned, irritably, and ordered everybody out of the room except Webb and Kleckler. When the three men were alone with Gorton, Heffner sat down and said, "That's better," and lit a cigarette.

A knock sounded on the door. Heffner growled at Webb:

"See who it is and throw him out!"

But Pete Webb, impressed by the ecclesiastical aspect of the visitor, came back into the room, followed by Horace Plumley.

Heffner stared at him, surprised.

Gorton took one long, horrified look, and cried:

"My Lord! A minister." He added with a groan of despair: "In a black coat. I'm licked! I'm licked!"

"Shut up!" said Heffner, and turned a cold, piercing glance on Mr. Plumley.

For a moment Mr. Plumley hesitated. His deep-set eyes surveyed the room, Webb and Kleckler in their shirt sleeves, Gorton in his bathrobe, and came back to Heffner.

"I discovered your identity in the newspapers this afternoon," announced Mr. Plumley, drawing from his pocket a much-folded sporting page containing the photographs of the fighters and their managers. "I only knew you as Mr. King, Oswald King, of course, not as Mr. Heffner, the manager of a prize fighter.

"I was stunned," he added; and the same thing might have been said of Gorton at the moment, gazing at Mr. Plumley, who continued: "Then I came to the conclusion that your visit to me, to work in the interests of preventing this fight, was undertaken because you realized its disgraceful aspects in spite of your connection with it."

"What's that?" demanded Gorton, leaning forward.

"Shut up!" said Heffner.

Mr. Plumley narrowed his brows and bent a brief scrutiny on Gorton.

"Is this the—er—the champion?" he inquired.

Gorton groaned again.

"Not any more. Not since you came in the room!"

Mr. Plumley turned to Heffner.

"Evidently you failed to read the newspapers thoroughly, Mr. King—I mean, Mr. Heffner—or you would have seen that your first check of five hundred dollars has long since been exhausted. I had to use some of my own private funds to meet the expenses, while waiting to receive your second check. That's why I've called here at this time. I hope you'll pardon me."

Heffner smiled scornfully.

"You don't get any more money out of me."

Mr. Plumley's jaw dropped. Slowly he realized the utter fruitlessness of his errand. Then he turned pale.

"But I've wiped out my own savings account in behalf of this, Mr. Heffner. I haven't a penny left to my name."

Heffner stared at him coldly.

"What did you say your name was?"

Mr. Plumley looked amazed, and replied:

"Plumley. Horace Plumley. Surely you remember."

"I never saw you before."

Mr. Plumley gazed open-mouthed at Heffner. It was several seconds before he could comprehend the duplicity of this man. Then he said:

"I see now. You're a fraud. You led me into this—you enlisted my services under false pretenses. This crowd outside in the street is worse than Sodom at her rottenest—a beastly, brawling humanity inspired by you."

"Open the door, Pete," interrupted Heffner, "and show the gentleman out."

"It's too late now," lamented Gorton, scowling at Mr. Plumley as if he would like to murder him.

Mr. Plumley turned to him in hot disapproval.

"I'm sorry to see you engaged in such an ignoble undertaking—"

"What's that about an undertaker?" cried Gorton, wrinkling his brow. "Are you trying to jinx me?" He leaped to his feet, and his bath robe swung open from his black trunks and bare legs. "Get out!" he shouted. "Get out o' here before I forget you wear your collar hindside foremost."

Mr. Plumley stalked to the door and withdrew.

It was several moments later, after Kleckler had gone out, and after Webb and Heffner were moving about the room, that Gorton, again seated on his cot, pondering chin in hand, reached the point of demanding:

"Say, Pink, why did you want him to stop the fight?"

"Oh, shut up! Don't think. It's beyond you."

"Yeh?"

"Yeh, yeh, yeh!" mocked Heffner.

Still Gorton persisted.

"But you said you was going to do great things for me, Pink. I don't see it now. Stopping the fight wouldn't of helped me."

"Don't think! You ain't built for it."

Gorton lapsed into a moody silence.

Kleckler returned excitedly.

"How's the crowd?" asked Gorton.

"There ain't any! The tickets have gone blooey!" Kleckler told Heffner and Webb about the rumors flying around the place downstairs, and the scenes outside in the street.

A grim look of satisfaction came over Heffner's face.

"Now you ought to be happy," said Kleckler shrewdly.

Heffner seized the two men by the arms.

"Listen, boys," he said sharply, "if you value your lives, you've got to keep your mouths shut about any ideas like that. The tickets have gone wrong. We know that. But we don't know a damned thing more. Get me, Joe?"

"Sure, Pink. I always get you."

"Get me, Pete?"

"Me, too. I get you."

Heffner strode out of the room and

turned down the corridor. Struck with wonder, they watched him go. Then Webb voiced his amazement.

"Why did he pull a stunt like that?"

"He hates Crosby's shadow. That's the answer."

"But—but—do you think he had anything to do with it?"

Kleckler nodded.

"Yeah."

Webb swore fiercely.

"This is going to stir up all kinds of a rumpus, ain't it?"

"Sure. If you ask me, Pete, I think Pink went cuckoo on that point."

Again Gorton reached the stage of grasping something of the situation. He thrust himself between Webb and Kleckler, demanding:

"The crowd paid their money, didn't they?"

"Sure. That's what'll make 'em sore."

"Then if their tickets ain't no good why don't they crash the gate? I would."

Jane, hurrying along the corridor, caught a glimpse through a gallery door of the arena under its blaze of lights, and only a handful of spectators, relatively speaking, for an amphitheater so vast. These spectators realized that something had happened.

Reporters had left their ringside seats, though even at this moment when the first preliminary fighters were climbing through the ropes. Lee had ordered the program to start, in spite of the trouble outside.

In the streets newsboys were crying an extra. "Riot at Garden! Hundreds Hurt!" By the microphone at the ringside Willis McGee, the radio announcer, was broadcasting to the world his breathlessness and his meager reports of what was happening.

Jane, aware of all this, was suddenly stopped in her headlong flight down the corridor by Pink Heffner.

"Oh, Pink," she cried, "the most horrible thing has happened! Have you heard? The tickets?"

"I just heard something."

"Lee is wild. He doesn't know *what* to do."

"Come in a minute." Heffner drew her toward a door. "Tell me about it, Jane."

She followed him into the room and hastily sketched the events. She saw that Pink, in spite of his professed sympathy, seemed unusually buoyant as he faced her. He concluded by putting his hands on her shoulders and smiling down at her warmly.

"I told you all along, Jane, that Crosby isn't the man for the job—any more than he's the man for you. I'm the one," he added, and, aware of the closed door and Jane's nearness, said with sudden breathlessness: "Give me a kiss!"

Jane pulled away.

"Don't be silly, Pink. I'm in a terrible hurry."

"You can wait for this."

He held her firmly by the shoulders.

All at once she saw the queer expression that came over his face, a look which in Heffner's mind was accompanied by the thought that Jane was no longer so maddeningly unattainable; all that he had to do was to reach out and embrace her.

Jane shrank back, repelled by that look on his face. The next moment she found his arms around her, his face pressed hotly against hers.

A feeling like a flash of fire swept through her, and she struggled fiercely to break his hold, succeeding finally by a desperate upward thrust of her arms. She knew in that instant that Pink Heffner stood in a new light before her.

She retreated from him around the table.

"Jane," he stated, following her, "you're not so damned cold as you pretend."

He tried to keep himself between her and the door. Jane didn't want to cry out, to bring an audience of fighters and attendants running in to discover her here, not if she could escape by her

own efforts. Words failed with Heffner now, she saw; even scorn—it only made him crazier for her.

"You won't get out of here till I've had you in my arms as much as I want," he cried in a low, tense voice, suddenly hoarse.

Jane tried to slip past him. He caught her by the arm and swung her around. Her body struck against the table. Still she fought with all her strength. At last she lifted one hand and drove her fist suddenly between Heffner's eyes. For a moment or two, the blow dazed him.

Jane ran to the door and reached it. The next moment she was out in the corridor.

Her heart was beating so fast that twice she had to pause and lean against the wall, resting a moment, on her way back to the downstairs lobby, thinking how furiously she hated Heffner now, how everything to-night was in a state of chaos.

"What's the matter, Jane?" demanded Lee when she reëntered the office. "You look done up." He came over to her through the group of people excitedly engaged in coping with the ticket debacle. "Don't take it so hard," he said. "This is my funeral, not yours."

She pressed his hand in return and sank into a chair. She was too breathless to talk. She watched Lee turn back to Bob Mason and Sherwood, standing over the desk where they were studying a handful of white cards.

"These are the tickets!" cried Lee, and added in despair: "And look at them: not a line of print on them, not a seat number—nothing! I've compared them with the extra tickets I had in the safe. They're the same. And when I put them in the safe they were all right."

"Printed and everything?" demanded Sherwood.

"Down to the last dot!" returned Lee, and paused to wipe the sweat from his brow.

"When did the printing disappear? And what made it?"

"Apparently not until this very evening. Not until around six o'clock. Aldrich said he glanced at one of his tickets when he was going to dinner, and thought that it looked a little queer. The color was fainter than it should be.

"But he was riding in a taxicab then and thought maybe it was the poor light that made the ticket look that way. After dinner he looked at it again—and it was perfectly blank. What happened is that the ink faded. That's the explanation of this howling mob outside in the streets."

"My Lord! My Lord!" Sherwood clenched his fists and beat upon the edge of the desk. "This ruins us. What are we going to do?"

Lee put both hands to his head in an agony of desperation.

"It's half past eight now. We'll have to let the crowd in without tickets."

"But where will they sit? They haven't any seat numbers on their stub."

"Let 'em sit anywhere!" retorted Lee. "First come, first served!"

"No, no," said Sherwood. "We can't let them in without tickets. It would be a regular stampede. It's unheard of it. It—it—" He ended weakly: "It's terrible!"

Suddenly Jane pushed between them and took one of the blank cards. She thrust it on the electric grill, on which she had kept the pail of coffee, and switched on the current. Slowly, under the influence of the heat, the color of the card changed; printed letters and numbers came into view.

"See?" she cried. "That's one way to make invisible ink appear. We used to do it at school. There's your ticket."

They bent over the grill and saw a completely printed ticket, with "Circle Garden, September 20, Section G, Row L, Seat No. 17."

"That proves what happened," said Jane. "Lee is right. The ink faded."

Lee wheeled around toward the door, took a frantic step in its direction, turned, and came back.

"But with fifty thousand people outside in the street what can we do?" He lifted his arms eloquently. "We can't take fifty thousand electric grills out there and cook everybody's ticket until the ink comes back on it.

"I tell you, Sherwood, the only thing to do is to let them all in, ticket or no ticket. Every second that you delay, somebody's being hurt in that mad scene. People are being trampled on. Do you want them killed?"

Lee confronted Sherwood and waited. As he did so, he felt a hand pluck his sleeve, and found the Rev Mr. Plumley at his side. Lee was surprised.

He had seen Mr. Plumley in court, but he hadn't expected to see him again here. Still, his surprise could only occupy a small part of his mind, caught, as he was, by the more amazing sensations of to-night's events; and so he listened to Mr. Plumley's hurried remarks with a brain almost dulled.

Mr. Plumley poured out the story of the "ministerial campaign" against the fight, and Heffner's financial part in it.

"I believe you're more honest than Heffner is," added Mr. Plumley.

"Thanks for the compliment!" said Lee, and turned back to Sherwood.

"All right, Crosby," said Sherwood. "Let the crowd it."

At once Lee started for the door, calling to the others to follow.

"Tell the police and all the ushers," he said. "Tell them, for Heaven's sake, to try to keep the crowd in order. Don't let them pile pell-mell over the seats and break their backs."

Jane remained in the office, for no sooner had Mr. Plumley slipped away than another man stepped forward to beg her to listen to him.

This was John Demo, the elevator operator who had taken her up and down in the Circle Tower Building so often, who had bought his ticket for the fight through her kindly offices, and who, though unable to recognize his ticket to-night, had managed to gain an entrance through his knowledge of the building acquired as an employee.

"I heard what you said about the ink, Miss Reese, and I heard what that minister said about Heffner." He was so excited that he was almost breathless. "Maybe, maybe I know something." His admiration for Jane made him anxious to help her.

"What do you know?" demanded Jane, thinking rapidly of Heffner and how he had subsidized Mr. Plumley. All at once she realized how vindictive Pink Heffner was! He had hated Lee all along. He had been unable to conceal his gloating elation when he heard the news about the tickets.

"Heffner, yes," she said, thinking aloud. "I believe he'd do anything, that man! I believe—what's that?"

She suddenly broke off and listened to a new sound outside the door. It was a roar, a pounding of thousands of feet, a tumult of cries.

The crowd was pouring into the amphitheater, pouring in with a lusty ferocity which had grown as it waited, restrained in the street. Now it was each man for himself.

Hats were lost in the mad rush. Men jumped over seats to get closer to the arena. The sound of seats being banged into place was like machine gun fire. And hundreds, who had come to the Garden with no tickets at all, not even the faded pieces of pasteboard, profited by this open gateway, this free-for-all admission.

Purchasers of ringside seats found them all occupied, and tried to oust the occupants. Fist fights started up here and there. The police, who had been struggling with the crowd outside, now had to concentrate on putting down disorder within.

"I paid twenty dollars for my seat!" cried a man—and his name was legion. "I won't sit back here in a five-dollar seat. I won't."

"You'll sit where you are," retorted a policeman, "or you'll get crowned."

"Look at dem! Look at dem!" cried another, pointing in anguish down over the heads in front of him. "All in dem rinkside seats, and here ve are way back here. It's a disgrace."

"You're lucky to be anywhere!"

The society women, mentioned in the newspapers as among the ticket-holders, were nowhere to be seen. In the seat belonging to Princess Marie of Russia and Greece sat a Second Avenue tailor.

"You can't hear yourself think." Willis McGee was speaking into the microphone to the country-wide hook-up of radio listeners. "The scene is —is—beggars description. Somebody has put his foot in my ear.

"The second preliminary fighters are in the ring, but I can't hear what the referee is saying. There goes the gong, I guess. Anyway they're fighting.

"The police say the emergency ward of Roosevelt Hospital is full of people who have been injured here tonight. Nothing like this has ever happened at the Garden before. Or in New York. Or—or anywhere else in the world.

"It is—it is—it just beggars description, folks. That's what it does. One of the fighters has been knocked down. His name is—what's his name, Bill?—Battling Jerry Murphy.

"He's up again at the count of ten. Now they're fighting. They've stopped. The round must be over, though I didn't hear the bell."

CHAPTER XIII.

GOING UP AGAIN.

"IT was this way, Miss Reese: I was taking Heffner up in my car—it was the 2nd of August, because I was on night duty, and I ain't been on the night shift since—and I thought it was funny he should be wanting to go to the tenth floor, when his office is on the third.

"It was pretty late, and not many people in the building. He had a big package under his arm, and he put it down on the floor of the car. It was wrapped up in a lot of manilla paper, and the paper came loose around the top.

"I saw it was a big bottle of something, a kind of cask. I thought it was liquor. I looked at it and says: 'Gee,' I says, 'that's the blackest liquor I ever saw, Mr. Heffner.'

"'Mind your own business,' he says. So I says nothing more. But now that I think of it, I bet that stuff was ink. It looked deadly."

Jane caught her breath.

"And did Heffner get off at the tenth floor with it?"

"Yes," said John Demo, "and went in the offices of the New Gotham Printing Company."

"Where they printed our tickets!"

"I didn't think anything of it at the time. But maybe I know something now. Maybe."

"Oh, you do," returned Jane excitedly. "You do beyond a doubt." She seized eagerly on Sherwood when he came into the room, and told him what Demo had been saying.

"Was there a light in the New Gotham Printing Company?" demanded Jane.

"Yes," said Demo.

"Did somebody come to the door and let Heffner in?" put in Sherwood.

"No, he had a key."

"A key!" Sherwood looked amazed.

"But there was somebody else in there too," went on Demo, "because I saw his shadow on the glass. That's all I know about it."

"How long did Heffner stay up there?"

"I don't know. I went off duty at ten o'clock. He must have walked down."

"Did anybody else go up to the New Gotham that night?"

"Yes. One of the printers went up right after supper."

Sherwood and Jane looked at each other.

"The New Gotham has been doing our printing ever since Heffner was promoter here," Jane reminded him. "He gave them the first contract three years ago!"

"But Nixon, the head of the firm, is honest. I'd swear by him."

"Yes," returned Jane, "but somebody in his office is not so honest." She grabbed Sherwood by the arm. "In that office our tickets were printed on the third of August. The ink was put on them there.

"And Heffner was there on the night of the second of August on an errand more mysterious than bootlegging. You have a passkey to every office in Circle Tower, haven't you?"

"Yes. Upstairs in my desk."

"Then get it and we'll go up to the Gotham."

Sherwood hesitated, bewildered.

"Do you mean to say you think Heffner engineered all this? That he bribed a printer to use a kind of ink that would fade? Oh, Jane, be reasonable. It's unbelievable!"

"Not with Pink Heffner. I'm beginning to understand him."

"But, Jane, how could our tickets look so good for a month and a half, and then suddenly all fade out?"

"Well, they did, didn't they?"

"Did what?"

"Fade out! You can't deny that."

"No," admitted Sherwood. "But—"

"The ink's the answer," retorted Jane, and turned determinedly toward the door. "I'm going to get those keys."

Sherwood's habitual caution still counseled him to go slow, even in the face of Jane's infectious impetuousness.

"We haven't any right to enter Nixon's shop without his permission. I'll see if I can get him on the phone at home."

Jane checked herself; her eyes flashed.

"In a case like this we have a right to do anything! If you must phone Nixon, go ahead. I'll get the keys. Come on, Demo; come with me."

Two minutes later Jane, Sherwood, and Demo stood on the tenth floor whispering outside the door of the New Gotham Printing Company. Inside there was a faint light and the sound of some one stirring.

Jane inserted the key quietly and swung the door open. They pushed in. In a far corner, under an overhead light, a man stood bending over a press. He straightened up when he heard them, and a look of panic came over his face. Hastily he dropped a piece of ink-stained canvas over the press.

"What are you doing?" demanded Jane as they reached him.

The man stood speechless.

"Just—just working," he stammered. "Overtime."

"With your hat on, and your best clothes?" Jane's quick eyes discovered something else. "And a ticket for the fight beside you?"

She reached forward and seized the canvas hastily. What she saw confirmed her suspicions. "Trying to clean some ink off, were you, in white collar and cuffs? And what's that thing behind you in the sink?" She gave the man a push and dislodged him. "A cask of ink? About to be poured down the sink, was it?"

The man's jaw dropped. His thin face was white, his hands trembling. In fact, this printer, Peter Worthing, was in an absolute funk, a state of mind which had been growing on him for the past hour.

He had come to the Garden to attend the fight, but when he saw the scene outside the building, and learned the cause of it, his mind had gone back to the printing of the tickets and the special ink Heffner had paid him good money to use and say nothing about.

Worthing had handled many a printing order for Heffner in the old days—first when he had his own little job printing business—until he drank himself into bankruptcy—and later here at the New Gotham, where Heffner had got him employment.

Worthing was a timid, pliable man—pliable with liquor as well as money—but he would never have consented to use Heffner's ink on the Gorton-Hoyt tickets if he had known anything like this was going to happen.

He had thought that Heffner was simply interested, commercially interested, in a new kind of ink for tickets; that Heffner wanted the special ink used in this case so that afterward he might point to it as an example of what it could do.

But events at Circle Garden to-night had filled him with consternation. He began to suspect Heffner's motive. He remembered his secrecy and the appointment he had insisted upon here at night—the night Heffner himself brought the ink.

"I knew that ink had something queer in it," said Worthing, confessing everything in this corner of the print shop, where he stood against the wall facing the others. "But I didn't think it was a fugitive dye—not until to-night. I've never been mixed up in anything crooked before."

"So you came up here to destroy the evidence?" put in Jane.

Worthing nodded.

"I got scared. I saw all those people fighting in the streets over their tickets, and the police, and everything. I don't want to go to jail."

"You won't be the one to go to jail," Jane assured him. "But Heffner will." She thought of all the trouble that Heffner had brought down on the head of Lee Crosby. To-night's disaster at the Garden would be something Lee could never live down—not unless Heffner's part in it could be proved to the public.

If the crowd went away from the Garden to-night without knowing the truth, if the reporters left without a word of Heffner's deceit and duplicity, the news that would go out over the country would put all the blame on Lee.

"If you'll testify in court to what you've told us here," said Jane to Worthing, "nothing will happen to you."

"I'll do anything you say, miss," promised Worthing. "I want to be honest."

"Where did Heffner get his ink?"

"From old man Lucas."

"Who's old man Lucas?"

"He lives in Ninth Avenue, back of his laboratory. He's a color chemist."

"Do you know the number?"

"Yes. I've been to old Lucas's shop several times. He ain't really old, but he's been making inks and dyes for years. Ten years ago he made invisible ink, and he's always experimenting, night and day. Heffner found out about him through me.

"But Lucas is honest. He wouldn't do anything crooked. I'm sure of it. He probably didn't know what Heffner was going to use the ink on—no more than I knew how it was going to turn out."

"Come on," said Jane, starting for the door. "I want you to jump in a taxi and take me to Lucas's. And you, too, Demo."

"What are you going to do?" asked Sherwood as they all hurried out to the elevator. To Jane's superior dispatch he was yielding all his own judgment. She knew what she was doing.

"I'm going to collect Lucas and then take them all, just as quick as I can, to Assistant District Attorney Bundy's house. The Bundys are old friends of the family. And if Raymond Bundy doesn't see an indictment in this case, he's a rotten lawyer!"

"What good will that do to-night?"

"It will change the whole story for the newspapers. Otherwise you and the other directors, and Circle Garden, and Lee Crosby—"

"It seems to me you're thinking a lot of Crosby."

Jane smiled grimly.

"Somebody's got to!"

"But how do you know you'll catch Bundy at home to-night? He may be out. May even be here at the fight—"

"No. He's got a radio. He invited my father to a listening-in party to-night. And from what he's heard already, he must know that things have been happening here to-night that never did before."

CHAPTER XIV.

GOING INTO THE RING.

HEFFNER stood in the center of the room and contemplated Gorton, now striding back and forth in his bathrobe.

"What are you pacing up and down for like a caged lion?"

Gorton scowled at him.

"You done your share to-night," he retorted sullenly. "Do you think you got a monopoly on indoor footwork?"

"In a few minutes you'll go into the ring against Hoyt. Save your running till then."

Gorton stopped and scowled more savagely.

"You're a hell of a manager!" He resumed his pacing of the floor.

"What do you want from me? Compliments? Well, then, I'll say this much: You can lick Hoyt to-night if you outbox him, Sam."

"Don't 'Sam' me!"

Gorton's tone had a sudden, new ferocity that startled Heffner. He glanced at him, surprised.

"Something eating you more than usual?"

"Yes. You."

Webb and Kleckler came into the room hurriedly.

"It's a knockout," said Webb, shaking his head in amazement.

"What?" asked Gorton. "Murphy knocked out Ricco?"

"No, the crowd. That's the knockout to-night. I saw Skinny Rogers in a thirty-dollar seat. He never had that much money in a year."

Heffner laughed. There was such a triumphant ring to it, almost hysterical in its undisciplined elation, that the other men glanced at him sharply.

"I'm glad I'm not the box office man here to-morrow," said Kleckler. "He'll have a lot of explaining to do."

Again Heffner laughed so queerly that Webb and Kleckler looked at him astonished.

Gorton paused in front of Heffner, his brows drawn down in a tangle of painful speculation. He had been doing a lot of thinking in the last half hour, and he had won his way, over obstacles, to some definite conclusions.

"Look at the refund on this fight," he told Heffner accusingly. "Everybody in town will want their money back to-morrow. They'll say they wasn't here."

"Don't worry about a little thing like that, Sam."

"Stop 'Samming' me!" commanded Gorton.

Heffner stared at him.

"Say, how long since you thought you could talk back to me?"

"You want to know? Well, about thirty minutes. I'm just beginning to get the low-down on you, Pink, and you're pretty low."

Not only did Gorton realize at last how little Heffner cared about his managerial services toward him, but he remembered many details of the past three months which bore a new light.

He also remembered Heffner's dealings with Plumley, the minister, and Heffner's unnecessary attentions to his wife. Heffner had been more interested in licking Crosby, the new promoter, than in helping Sam.

"All the while you've been stringing me along," went on Gorton with mounting anger. "You thought I was a sap, didn't you? Well, maybe I am, alongside of a double crosser like you."

Heffner glared at him. "Who are you calling a double crosser?"

"You. You gave me a song and dance about what a fine manager you'd be to me. And then you spend all your time trying to spoil my fight to-night. If there's one fight I'd like right now it's to muss up your two-faced mug!"

"Gorton," said Heffner, furious, "you're too stupid to live."

Gorton's retort—and a completely satisfying commentary it was—proved to be worded in the way he knew best—with his big right fist slammed, after a swift swing, straight and devastating, onto Heffner's jaw. The crack was so audible that Webb and Kleckler both cried out at the top of their voices.

Heffner measured his length on the floor—and lay there.

"My Lord, Sam, you may have killed him."

"Then give me a medal."

They picked Heffner up.

"Take him in the other room," directed Gorton. "We don't want any visitors walking in."

They did as he said, depositing Heffner on a cot in the inner room. He lay as still as the dead. Webb began working over him, assisted by Kleckler, who turned from time to time to reproach Gorton.

"You birds shut up," returned Gorton, "or I'll knock both of you for a loop."

Webb stood up after awhile, the sweat shining on his face.

"He's in bad shape, Sam."

"His heart's beating, ain't it?"

"Yes, a little."

"That's enough for him."

"He ought to have a doctor."

"He ain't worth it," replied Gorton, who was still fighting mad.

Kleckler heard the door in the other room open. He went out and came back at once.

"You're due in the ring in ten minutes, Sam."

"What 'll we do with Pink?" demanded Webb.

"Let him lie!" said Gorton, and turned to go. "Come on, you two."

Webb and Kleckler hesitated.

"But, Sam—" Webb began to protest.

Gorton silenced him.

"You guys are my seconds. Remember that. And if anybody wants to know what happened to Heffner, tell 'em he had one of those acute indigestions."

They followed Gorton out.

CHAPTER XV.

GOING FOR HELP.

JANE'S identity was known to the Bundys' maid, who let her in at the door.

"How do you do, Miss Reese?" she said with a smile. "They're all in the living-room. The fight's about to begin."

Through a doorway Jane caught a glimpse of the group of people who had come to the assistant district attorney's radio party, and she could hear in the murmur of talk that hoarser, more metallic voice of the broadcaster. Behind her in the vestibule stood the three men she had brought with her.

To the maid she said breathlessly:

"Ask Mr. Bundy to come out here, will you, please? It's very important. We don't want to go in.

"He isn't here now."

"Not here?" Panic suddenly seized Jane.

"No, he went out of the house just a second ago."

"But—but, isn't he coming back?" With the championship fight about to begin in Circle Garden, Jane's plans couldn't brook a delay.

What she had to do was to enlist Raymond Bundy's help, to add him to her hastily collected array of witnesses, and jump in the taxi waiting outside. In a few minutes they could be back at the Garden, arrest Heffner, and save Lee Crosby's reputation.

But these few minutes were precious. What if the fight shouldn't run its full ten rounds? What if Gorton or Hoyt should be knocked out in the first round, and the crowd poured out of the Garden before Jane got back? It would be too late then.

And without Assistant District Attorney Bundy, without established authority, she would be helpless.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Bundy's coming back," the maid assured her, and Jane felt a great wave of relief sweep over her. "He just chased out to find some store where he could get some cracked ice."

"We'll wait here," said Jane.

She directed her three strange companions to sit down on one of the hall benches while she dropped down on the other, facing them. The maid went away.

Jane looked at the street door and prayed that it would open instantly before the stout figure of Raymond Bundy. Then she glanced at the three men opposite—Demo, the elevator man; Worthing, the printer; and Samuel Lucas, the color chemist.

What an amazing man Lucas was! The picture of his laboratory, from which they had just come, was still stamped on her mind; the long wooden table with its glass jars and graduates of colored water, the shelves of bottles in every degree of fullness, and the apparatus cluttering the corners.

What she remembered most distinctly, however, was the chart on the wall and the particular notations relating to his experiments in fading inks: slow fading, sudden fading after a period of time; date of manufacture; estimated date of fading; actual date of fading; and the perfectly astonishing fact that Lucas had reached the point where he could predict the time a certain ink would fade.

Suddenly Lucas rose from the bench and came over to her. He was a thin, shabby man of forty-five with thoughtful, dark eyes, with eyebrows and mustache as black as if dyed in some of his own ink. He faced Jane in an intensely eager manner and began to repeat himself.

"All that I was interested in was perfecting, perfecting, perfecting. Some day the Government would be glad of my experiments. They could be used in the country's defense. Think of the documents in war-time that must never be read by an enemy! I am a peaceful man."

"I understand, Mr. Lucas. We don't blame you."

"I didn't know what Heffner had in mind."

"Neither did anybody else—until too late."

"Have I committed a crime?"

"Don't worry, Mr. Lucas. You're all right." She turned to the door again. "Oh, if Mr. Bundy would only come! What's keeping the man?"

"I am sorry," said Mr. Lucas, noting the look of desperation on her face. He went back to the other bench beside Worthing.

Jane studied his face again.

He was the obscure, inventive genius, wearing his life out over a test-tube, who furnished the conclusive evidence against Heffner, and the particular item which clenched the case was:

> Ink 192, August 2; purple lake, fugitive; should disappear on September 20 toward evening.

Luck and Lucas's uncanny genius had combined to play into Heffner's scheme.

Jane tapped her heel impatiently on the rug. From the living-room came a hush in the conversation and the sound of the radio again audible.

"And now Harry Hoyt is entering the ring. Here he comes. Oh, what a hand he gets, folks! Can you hear the crowd?" The rest of the speech was lost in the hubbub of conversation which renewed itself in the living-room. Last-minute bets were being made. One woman's voice rose above all the others:

"I'll sell my ticket in the pool for fifty cents!"

Somebody laughed and said: "What did you draw? Hoyt to win in the first round? I won't take it."

"Who offers me forty cents, sight unseen?"

"I'll bid thirty."

"Shut up, everybody!" demanded an anguished voice. "You drown out the radio. Can't hear a thing."

Again silence came from the room, and the breathless voice of Willis McGee through the loud speaker.

"He is now shaking hands with—who's that guy he's shaking hands with?—Jim Jeffries. And now he's being called to the center of the ring by the referee. G-g-g-gorton and Hoyt are conferring with the referee. Now they're back in their corners.

"Everybody's waiting for the bell. The suspense is—is—there it goes! The bell rang! They're at it.

Gorton started with a rush. A left and two rights. Now they're clinching. Those lefts and rights hit Gorton—I mean, Hoyt—in the body, but didn't do much damage.

"Gorton danced away—I mean Hoyt danced away. Now he lands a right to the face. Gorton—no, Hoyt lands a left. They're clinching again.

"This is no stand-off fight, folks. Gorton is wading right in. He's old Gorton still. There he goes with another—a hard right to the body—"

Leaning forward tensely on the bench in the hall, Jane listened with clenched fists. Meanwhile her eyes were riveted on the street door. Why wouldn't Bundy come back? Why would he pick out a time like this to go for cracked ice?

The fight was on, and Gorton was already trying his best to score an early knockout.

Jane hoped and prayed that he wouldn't. She felt as breathless as Willis McGee at the ringside.

"Hoyt is dancing away from Sam. Sam is following him up. There he goes with a hard right—and a left and another right, and another left to the body. Oh, Hoyt felt that! Those were hard blows Sam got in; there's the bell. The round is over. Old Slugger Sam is still the old Sam. That was his round—"

The voices in the living room drowned out Mr. McGee's editorial comments.

"I need a drink."

"Where's Raymond with that cracked ice?"

"He's gone to freeze it himself, I guess."

"Well, what do you think about your Hoyt money now?"

"Oh, I haven't lost the bet yet. That's only the first round—ssss-hhh! Stop talking!"

Mr. McGee's voice had the room to itself again.

"There's the bell. Sam rushed all the way across the ring and met Hoyt in his corner. A right to the body, a left to the head. But Hoyt blocked them. Oh, there's one he didn't block. Oh, that hurt, that hurt.

"Hoyt got that one in the side. It was hard—hard. It staggered him a moment. Old Slugging Sam is living up to his reputation. He's fighting mad—fighting mad. Hoyt is boxing, trying to hold Sam off.

"Sam told him: 'Come on, fight!' Yes, it's the old Sam still. There he goes—a whole flock of blows, a right, a left, another right. Hoyt whipped over a right to Sam's jaw, but it didn't faze him. Hoyt landed another on Gorton's head, but Sam just shook it off. No damage done.

"Sam lands a left to the body. They go in a clench. Sam lands a couple on the back of Hoyt's head while they're in the clench. The referee pulls them apart. Sam swung a terrific one at Hoyt, but Hoyt ducked. There's another swing by Sam—oh, if that had landed! It only hit the air. Another clench.

"Sam is battering Hoyt at close

quarters. Hoyt's stomach looks pretty red from all that battering. Now they're out of the clench. Sam is forcing the fighting again.

"A right, a left, another—Hoyt's down! Sam drove a terrible right into his body and Hoyt is now on the floor. He looks as if he's out. The referee is standing over him counting. No, he's not out; he's watching the referee and getting on one knee. Six, seven, eight, nine—now he's up on his feet. Sam meets with a right and a left. Hoyt breaks away. I guess he can't stand another punch like that last one. Sam tries for his body again. Hoyt blocks it and lands on Sam's head. Hoyt landed two rights and a left on Sam's head. Sam misses a swing, and—and—Hoyt lands on his jaw. Sam misses again.

"Hoyt lands on his head. It was a right and a left that time, one after another—there's the bell! Round two is over and it was all Sam Gorton's. He almost won the championship back. He had Hoyt down and it looked for a minute like a knockout. It certainly looks like the old Sam."

Jane leaped to her feet in the hall. She flung a desperate glance at the street door. Wouldn't Bundy ever come back? She made a rapid mental calculation of the amount of time left if the fight went the full ten rounds: three minutes for each round, and one between—that meant thirty-one minutes, just half an hour left! And it would take fifteen minutes to reach the Garden.

"Oh, if Harry Hoyt would only hold Gorton off!"

Again McGee's voice reached her, and Jane groaned. The third round had begun.

Suddenly the door opened and Raymond Bundy stood in the vestibule with a package under his arm. The next moment Jane ran to him.

"Hello, Jane!" he said, surprised. "You're the first member of your family I've seen in ages."

His surprise was greater when he heard her next words.

Heedless of how wet and dripping the package had become, Bundy stood, amazed, listening to Jane's swift, impetuous recital of what she wanted of him. Instantly he dropped the package of cracked ice, called to the maid to pick it up, and turned back to the street with Jane, followed by the other three men.

In the taxicab going to the Garden, Jane explained everything that she could in that short space of time, repeatedly glancing into the street, and fearfully, to see if she could discover any signs from the passing crowds that the fight at the Garden was over.

The taxicab passed a music store in the open doorway of which a group stood listening to the returns from a horn over the transom. Jane breathed a sigh of relief. The fight was still going on!

A policeman tried to halt their taxi, but Bundy commandeered the officer after making known his identity.

"Jump on the running board, officer, and take us up through traffic."

They reached the Garden a few minutes later.

"What is it?" cried Jane to an attendant. "What round?"

"Seventh round, and it looks like Hoyt."

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Jane.

With the policeman and Bundy leading, they made their way through the aisles of the amphitheater down to the ringside and its circled blaze of light, past all the straining shoulders and staring eyes fixed on the two figures battling inside the ropes.

Jane found Bob Mason near the reporters.

"Where's Lee?" she demanded in a hoarse whisper.

"Down in front," cried a fan behind her, but the policeman's presence gave official sanction to her movements.

"Lee's out by the door," said Bob. "He wouldn't come in. He can't stand

the sight of the place. He's sick of the whole ghastly business. Three people have just died of injuries in Roosevelt Hospital."

"Where's Heffner?" Jane gazed toward Gorton's corner.

"Up in the dressing room. They say he's sick."

"He ought to be!"

With Bob Mason she hurried out up the aisles again. Now three policemen followed her as she went along the corridor in search of Heffner, but their strong-arm support was not needed, for Heffner was found on that same cot on which he had been deposited by Webb and Kleckler after Sam Gorton's brief but effective severance of friendly relations. Heffner was just regaining consciousness.

He opened his eyes and immediately closed them again. He couldn't understand these faces peering down at him. Then he looked once more, and put his hands to his head. His head was splitting. What he saw in the group around him had an awakening effect on his senses.

"You're under arrest," said the nearest officer.

"On whose orders?" demanded Heffner, sitting up.

"Assistant District Attorney Bundy."

Heffner's jaw dropped. A look of utter defeat stamped itself on his face. He saw Worthing and Lucas in the group in front of him. Suddenly he held his head in his hands and stared painfully down at the floor.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOING TOWARD A DECISION.

"THE last round is about to begin," Mr. McGee was saying into the microphone at the ringside, "and Gorton don't look much like the old Gorton. He's groggy. Those accurate blows of Harry's have been telling on him.

"Harry Hoyt has been outboxing him too long for even a slugger like Gorton not to know it. There's the bell! Tenth and last round of the Gorton-Hoyt championship match at Circle Garden, fought amid the wildest—the wildest scenes that ever—er—took place, I mean, preceded a championship battle. I mean the scenes outside here to-night.

"There goes Harry again! He lands a clean right and, yes, yes, a left on Gorton's face. Gorton's left eye is almost closed now."

Farther back in the Garden other less official pieces of reporting were taking place. And in one spot the spectators' comments were directed for a moment, not to the two men in the ring, but to the one man in front of them wearing a black coat and a somewhat damaged clerical collar—the Rev. Mr. Plumley.

"Sit down!"

"You may be a minister, but you're not made of glass. Do you think we can see through you?"

"Hit him, Hoyt!" Mr. Plumley was calling, completely out of his seat and straining forward frantically. "Hit him again, Hoyt! Teach brutality a lesson!"

"Sit down, preacher, or we'll pull you down!"

Mr. Plumley sank reluctantly into his seat, but to himself, while his eyes watched the ring avidly, he uttered the thought: "Oh, I pray that Hoyt may win!"

As the round progressed Gorton grew groggier and Hoyt surer, and McGee, at his microphone, among the newspaper reporters, kept repeating "Hoyt lands a right," "Hoyt lands a left." And then: "Gorton can hardly stand up. The next blow will probably send him down for the count—oh, there goes the bell! The fight is over.

"The fight is over, folks. I can't hear anything, there's so much noise here. The referee is talking to the

judges. They'll announce the decision in a minute. They're all over at one corner conferring. Something's holding them up.

"Just a minute, folks, and we'll know what it's all about. One of the men is—who is he, Bill?—is the district attorney. What's that?

"The district attorney has taken a hand in this fight. We don't know why yet. But enough things have happened here to-night for anything to happen.

"What's the district attorney's name, Bill? District Attorney Grundy —no, what?—Lundy. No, they say it's District Attorney Bundy, and he's made an arrest. There were rumors that Gorton fowled Hoyt in the second round. Here comes the announcement now."

The announcement that came while the crowd still hung in the Garden, and the reporters still held to their pencils, and the countrywide audience still clung to the radios from the parlors of Maine to California, was delivered close to the microphone by the professional Garden announcer:

"Before giving the decision announcement is made that Pink Heffner has been arrested for fraud in connection with the tickets to-night.

"Pink Heffner, the former promoter of Circle Garden, is under arrest charged with causing the trouble outside the Garden to-night, resulting in the death of three people, and injuries to many others.

"The management requests you to be more orderly when you go out. Lee Crosby, the present promoter of the Garden, will say a few words."

Lee made his speech brief. To the sea of faces far out beyond him, and to the reporters peering up over the edge of the ring, he said:

"We had no way of foreseeing the terrible thing that happened outside here to-night. If we had known in time, we would have prevented it. But there was nothing we could do. The tickets were tampered with.

"The effort to ruin the fight will result in a criminal proceeding. In behalf of the directors of the Garden I want to say how sorry we are, how deeply grieved, that such a thing should have taken place."

The cheers that rang through the Garden were an expression of sympathy for Lee Crosby. When he climbed out through the ropes his face flushed but happy in the thought that he was not discredited in the eyes of the public, he found himself surrounded by newspaper men in an interviewing avalanche.

Meanwhile the professional announcer, again in the ring, said:

"The decision in this fight goes to Harry Hoyt, the champion."

Again the crowd roared and began to depart.

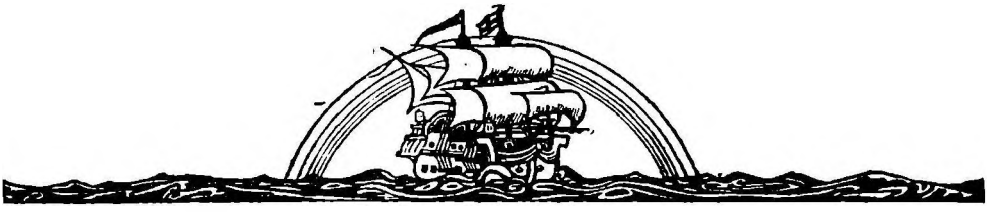
When Lee got away from everybody —that is, everybody except Jane—he faced her in the lobby office alone while Bob Mason stayed outside the door and guarded it.

"It took me a long while to find out how much I loved you, Lee," said Jane. "But this evening proved it to me."

As she rested a moment in his arms, he looked down at her face, elated.

"What an evening!"

THE END



Men were running to see the grim battle

Six-Foot Lightning

"There's enough rough, no-good trouble-hunters here without adding another to the population," his uncle told Bart Dunn—but this addition was soon to make history in Spring Green

By J. M. HOFFMAN

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LANKY BART DUNN rode into the desert village of Spring Green, one day, in response to the invitation of his pompous old uncle, Samuel Halliday. Uncle Sam had asked him to come dressed up in his best clothes, but humble of spirit; Bart, wrote his uncle, should leave his reputation behind when he rode into town, and avoid trouble.

Bart Dunn's reputation was that of being the quickest man on the gun draw in all Arizona. Since it was said that Bart, with his single revolver, was the equal of any two-gun bad man, he bore the widely known nickname of "One-Gun" Dunn.

One-Gun reached Spring Green just in time to save a little boy from the second story of a burning house, because a big, heavy-set man who was standing in front of it was too cowardly to attempt a rescue, in spite of the fact that the youngster's charming young-lady sister was there, almost frantic with anxiety, and ready to jump into the fire herself to get her brother out of it.

The heavy-set man turned out to be Clem Torry, the "yellow" leader of a group of bad men who were trying to get political control of Spring Green. The young lady, whom Torry had followed down the road to her home without any invitation or encouragement from her, was Dorothy Grove, daugh-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 21

ter of Big Ed Grove, the proprietor of the Railroad Café in Spring Green.

One-Gun looked pretty much the worse for wear after his battle with the flames at the Grove house, but managed to avoid riding through town by taking a side road to his uncle's house.

Uncle Sam immediately dressed his nephew up in a swallowtail coat and a "loud" tie, much against One-Gun's will, and rode down with him to the Railroad Café for lunch.

His clothes made the loungers on the main street laugh, and Clem Torry and his side kicks decided to take advantage of this derision, to try to make One-Gun look ridiculous before the townspeople knew who he was.

They sent a gunman named Plug Keffer to tie colored tissue paper to the tail of One-Gun's horse, and to put a wreath around the pony's neck, while Uncle Sam and his nephew were eating in the Railroad Café; and Plug Keffer himself stood waiting for them when they came out, holding a bouquet of waxed flowers in one hand.

One-Gun started the festivities by removing the wreath from his horse's neck, looking at it a moment, and throwing it around the neck of Keffer. Plug did not draw a gun, though he looked uncomfortable; so One-Gun jumped into his saddle. Keffer had been instructed to hand Dunn the waxed flowers at this point.

Bart accepted them, threw them up in the air, whipped out his gun from under his frock coat, and shot off the head of each of the flowers before they reached the ground. Immediately the loungers recognized him as One-Gun Dunn, for they had heard Dorothy Grove call him "Mr. Dunn." Instead of jeering, as they had congregated to do, they burst forth in cheers.

On the way home, Uncle Sam introduced Bart to Jason Flint, the easy-going old sheriff of Spring Green, whom Clem Torry's gang wanted to defeat for reëlection. Then they rode to the house of Jim Lemmon, Uncle Sam's old mining partner, which stood beside his own.

It was to show him off to Jim Lemmon's family that the old uncle had wanted his nephew "dressed up." Too late to escape, One-Gun discovered that Mr. and Mrs. Lemmon had six daughters, all over the age of seventeen. By the time he found it out, they were driving up to the house, returning from a visit to a friend.

CHAPTER III (*Continued*).

SIX GIRLS.

ONE-GUN walked over to the front window, and gazed out. Passing the Halliday house next door was an old buckboard driven by a girl, back of whom were several other female figures. Bart thought he could count at least twenty women, although he knew there could be no more than six.

The wagon turned into the Lemmon driveway, and the girls alighted. One of them wore rather a top-heavy hat somewhat crowded with flowers representative, perhaps, of spring. Another had on a bright pink dress.

They were of varying heights and widths, but in one particular they did not vary at all. Bart drew back as he saw the faces of the arrivals. The six Lemmons! If ever there were six citrus-faced females in one family, here they were.

He conceived the opinion almost subconsciously. He would have been in much the same mood if all of them had looked like the namesake of the one saddled with the name Cleopatra. Bart's one thought was to escape.

He sidled over toward the door, edging between his uncle and Jim Lemmon, hoping to be able to run downstairs, and possibly out the back way.

Already, however, a medley of soprano chatter floated up; at least some of the girls had entered the house.

Back into the room edged Bart. The window was partly open. Bart Dunn furnished the other part; he slid the window completely up—there was no other way out of it now. He looked toward the head of the stairway. Jim Lemmon stood there with a complaisant smile, and there was an expectant expression on the face of Samuel Halliday.

"Come right up, gals," invited Jim Lemmon. "Howdy, Desdemona. Howdy, Cleo. Howdy—" He was greeting the girls one by one as they filed up the stairway.

Bart Dunn crawled out on the little balcony, and whistled softly to his pony, Silver Dollar, that with the reins over his head waited near by. Silver lifted his head, whickered, looked up, and spied his master. He slipped into his elastic stride and came running toward the house.

Bart Dunn slid down to the sloping roof and timed the animal's gait. He did not look up. There might be six girls looking down at him, to say nothing of Jim and Fanny Lemmon and an outraged uncle. He timed his leap perfectly, landed squarely in the saddle. His feet found the stirrups quickly, and he was galloping away before a shout came from the upper window. He did not look back, but gave Silver his head.

Samuel Halliday turned and looked at his old partner. He was stunned.

"Bart's a mighty brave boy, Jim," explained Samuel Halliday, "but he's skeared o' women folk. He is shore 'nough, Jim. My nephew's an orful bashful young man."

CHAPTER IV.

AHEAD OF THE GUNMAN.

ONE-GUN DUNN galloped down almost as far as the creek, then veered to the right and circled so as to approach his uncle's house from the rear. He would have to meet the Lemmon girls some time, there was no way out of that, but first he wanted to get into the house without observation and change into his puncher's outfit.

A wide semicircle brought him back of the lean-to at the side of the Halliday barn, where he dismounted and, still looking cautiously up at the windows of the Lemmon house, sneaked through the kitchen door of the Halliday home and up to his room.

Courage came to him as he stripped himself of the stagy garments and drew on his familiar outfit. The episode in the Lemmon house appeared to him as a bad dream, the dream of a man who imagines himself parading the streets in night clothes, and who feels once more secure and unembarrassed upon waking up in his own comfortable bed.

He knew he would have to answer to his uncle for his seemingly weird conduct back in the Lemmon home, and he was not surprised as, just as he had completed changing and was knotting his neckerchief, he heard a step on the front porch or gallery of the Halliday house.

He heard voices, too, one unmistakably his uncle's, and the other unmistakable feminine. One of the Lemmon girls, probably, or just possibly more than one of the Lemmon girls. Well, at least now he was dressed to face the music.

He ran down the stairs and opened the front door, to look into the indignant face of Samuel Halliday, who was talking to a young lady who had her back turned to the door. As the door opened, the feminine figure turned to face it, and Bart saw that it was not one of the Lemmon girls, as he had anticipated, but Dorothy Grove.

A dappled horse was hitched to a side-bar buggy in front of the house, and the heaving sides of the animal indicated that, for some reason, Dorothy must have driven hard from the center of town up to the Halliday home.

"Howdy, Miss Grove." Bart greet-

ed, removing his wide Stetson hat. "It shore is a pleasure to see you agin."

"Well, I'm—I'm glad to see you," said Dorothy, "and—and maybe you'll think me forward in coming up here. But I wouldn't have felt right if I didn't. I was just starting to tell Mr. Halliday.

"After you and Mr. Halliday rode off from in front of our restaurant, there was quite a little excitement. Some one in the crowd recognized you as One-Gun Dunn, and there was some cheering."

Samuel Halliday, who had been primed to chide his nephew for his embarrassing conduct at the Lemmon home, was forced to smile proudly.

"Well, Bart did shore bring thet thing off right well," he conceded.

"But that's just it," Dorothy cut in. "It made Plug Keffer awfully mad. I reckon you don't know much about Plug Keffer, Mr. Dunn," she explained, "but Mr. Halliday here knows about him, and everybody in Spring Green knows about him. He's a bully that's terrorized most of the town, one of those men that's unbelievably tough, and right proud of it.

"Sheriff Flint came down the street before the crowd broke up, and asked what the exitement was. One of the boys in the crowd told him, and Sheriff Flint almost doubled up laughing. I heard him warn Plug that he'd have to be mighty careful while you were in town, or the next time Keffer might be holding flowers in his hand, and they might be lilies.

"The cursing of this Keffer made me start back into the restaurant so I wouldn't have to hear any more. But I did hear Keffer say that he'd—well, the expression he used was that he'd eat you right up. Plug Keffer is awfully vain, I know that."

"He might jes' have thet vanity thet goes before a fall," said Bart Dunn softly. "An' I reckon thet little meal thet this Keffer's a-promisin' himself'll shore give him a mite of indeegestion. Plug Keffer's a-gunnin' for me—is thet the idee, Miss Grove? Wall, I reckon he knows whar I'm a-livin', an' I ain't seen him yit."

"But you will, I just feel it," insisted Dorothy. "He didn't come this way when he left, but crossed over to Wade & Meadows's law office. Clem Torry lounges around that office a good deal, and I wouldn't be surprised if Keffer wanted to have a talk with Torry about it first.

"And Torry'll be no peacemaker, in anything that you're concerned in. Keffer don't work, and he's almost always drunk, and I know the whisky comes from Clem Torry."

Bart Dunn grinned. "I shore am obliged to you, Miss Grove—for yore intentions," he added. "Now, it's been my experience thet when an hombre talks as loud as this Keffer feller you ben mentionin', he ain't so all-fired dangerous. Ef Keffer'd said nothin', but jes' sorter slid away like a whipped dog after he'd ben caught killin' sheep, waal, then I'll admit as how thar might be a little to worry about.

"An' yore tip-off has been right valuable to me. I reckon I'll take a little lope into town. Ef this Keffer's such a right good talker, it might be as some o' his palaver 'll be amusin' to my ears."

Samuel Halliday had now completely forgotten his indignation. On his face was an expression of mixed concern for his nephew and admiration for him.

"Thar a bad gang, that Torry an' Keffer outfit, Bart," he said.

"I know somethin' about 'em," returned Bart, who, however, did not mention the episode of his first talk with Clem Torry and his sight of the two-gunned henchman—probably Keffer—coming from behind the house where he had been planted by the cautious Torry. "Now, uncle, I jedge you'd admire to have me stay in this here town. Is thet right?"

"Thet's why I got you here, Bart," Halliday admitted.

"Waal, so I was a-figgerin'. An' I reckon I understand yore side o' the case all right, Uncle Sam, an' I'm wantin' you to understand mine. I've been in a few ruckuses on both sides o' the border, an' I've managed somehow to keep my hide hull an' entire. I'd say as much as thet Spring Green won't be no exception.

"But ef I'm goin' to stay in Spring Green, I cain't be no dude as looks like he's afraid. Th' time to meet trouble is 'fore it gets a good head start. I'm aimin' to ride into town. This here's a new puncher's outfit I jes' pulled on, an' it 'ud seem right fittin' to christen it with leather an' hoss hair. I jes. aim to take a peaceablelike lope into town."

"I'm not tryin' to tell you what to do, Bart," said Halliday. "But—" He was about to advise his nephew to be careful, then apparently considered that such advice would be something like telling Plug Keffer and Clem Torry to be honest and decent. "But you know best," he added.

Bart turned to Dorothy Grove. "Mebbe it wouldn't look right to have folks know that you was good 'nough to ride up here an' tip me off," he said. "Ef you don't mind a suggestion, Miss Grove, I'd say it 'ud be better ef you'd circle aroun' with yore buggy, drive over cross the crick and come back into town thet way. I'm thinkin'," he added, "thet I'm goin' to remember you a long time, Miss Grove."

The girl blushed. "I owe you a great deal, for what you did this morning," she said. "And Mr. Halliday and my father have always been good friends. I wish there were more men in town like Mr. Halliday and Mr. Lemmon. Paw says it's a pleasure to do business with men like them."

"Yore paw is a mighty fine man," Halliday acknowledged.

Dorothy bowed her appreciation of the remark and, after Halliday had gallantly assisted her into the side-bar buggy, she flicked the reins over the horse's back and drove on toward the creek, to circle back on the road that led by her burned home.

Bart Dunn had already led his horse, Silver Dollar, from the Halliday barn, and had saddled and bridled him.

"Yo're lookin' a little more pert an' rested, Silver," he said. "Right now we may be ridin' into a little excitement, Silver, an' after thet yo're goin' to have a long rest an' a heap o' fodder, an' you better be keerful, Silver, or you'll grow plumb fat an' sassy, you shore will."

He saw the tall form of his uncle waiting by the gallery of the Halliday house.

The dignified figure caused him to grin again. Samuel Halliday, now with some of the fire out of him within sight of his sixtieth birthday, had once been a sensational character in cattle and mining camps. He'd lived his own life, and he, Bart Dunn, aimed to live his.

To avoid any possible warning from his uncle, he turned Silver's head toward the lean-to, and galloped over the lots back of the Halliday home.

Silver's hoofs splashed through the yellow waters of Pueblo Creek and soon were drumming along the road at a point between the burned Grove dwelling and the center of the town of Spring Green.

He drew up his mount beside a cottonwood tree, fished in his pocket, brought out four .45 shells, and, after ejecting the four discharged ones that had figured in the episode in front of the Railroad Café, inserted the fresh ammunition in his gun. He handled the weapon lovingly before tucking it back into his holster.

The afternoon sun was now resting on the top of the mountains that curled around in the distance from the southwest to the west of the town.

"Miss Dorothy's a right nice gal, Silver," he said, "an' a truth-tellin'

gal. She says Plug Keffer aims to ventilate yore ol' pard's hide afore sundown. Waal, we'll mosey aroun' an' see if this Plug Keffer's a truth-tellin' gent.'

Once more the hoofs of Silver Dollar were drumming along the highway, and the lips of his rider were pursed into a thin red line.

The rider passed a building surrounded by corrals and barns, from which the hoof-pocked trail eased into something more like a conception of a road. Spring Green lay straight ahead now. Nestling against a bluff to the right was the little cemetery, once known as Boots Hill.

A more visionary man might have turned his thoughts to mournful things at the sight of the slanting stones. And such a man might have stopped to consider that before the sun to the west of the town sank again there might be a fresh mound here.

But One-Gun Dunn, who was not a visionary man, galloped on.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," some philosopher once said.

The philosopher, however, did not have One-Gun Dunn in mind. One-Gun was neither a fool nor an angel. Had he been a fool, he would never have lived long enough to see Spring Green. And had he been an angel, he probably would not have lived long after his first sight of Spring Green.

To get along in this bedlam of danger, a man found it politic either to associate himself with the strongest party, which at this time was the gang dominated by Clem Torry, Bail-Bond Wade, and Plug Keffer, or to go about minding his own business, without as much as appearing to be interested in the machinations of the evil triumvirate.

Realizing that rashness was the undertaker's most helpful ally, One-Gun did not gallop into danger on a foaming steed. A short distance beyond the little cemetery he slowed down his mount. He was carefully noting each outstanding feature of the landscape, and constantly, with an eye far ahead of him, taking in each movement of persons in the distance.

He was not a man to underestimate his foes. Plug Keffer, he realized, must have been sufficiently outraged to do almost anything, if he really was as bad an hombre as Dorothy Grove had painted him. And there was every reason to believe he was pretty bad, for Plug must have known from Clem Torry that the man in the frock coat at the Railroad Café was One-Gun Dunn. And nobody but a bad hombre would take chances with a man of Bart Dunn's reputation.

Moreover, it must have been this same Plug Keffer, Dunn was now certain, who had been ready to snipe him off at the time when Torry had displayed so much bravado in the middle of the road.

He recalled the two-gun man's great bulk outlined there in the middle of the road; and the man who had presented him with the flowers was also of great bulk, fully as tall as Dunn himself, but with the spread-out fullness which comes to certain men in early middle age.

Silver Dollar was now in a walk. One-Gun swayed easily in the saddle, his muscles supple and loose, giving no inkling of the tension of the nerves within the rider.

His keen eyes did not fail to observe even the slightest motion of the most insignificant inhabitant as Silver Dollar entered the main street and his rider veered him to the shaded side of the road.

In his present situation, everything and everybody had significance for One-Gun Dunn. He could not afford to overlook the fanning of a fly from a countenance in repose—it might be a signal.

Dunn lowered his head, but not his eyes. Directly through the main street he progressed, slowly, from one end to the other. Nothing happened, nothing,

except that he had looked up at a window diagonally across the street from the Railroad Café and had seen the inscription of Wade & Meadows on the dusty window. There was nothing more to be seen. No faces peered out from behind the lettering.

At the end of the street, where it petered out and became merely a narrow, winding country road, Dunn halted and looked over the landscape. Then he turned around and gazed back over the street he had just traversed.

There were more people to be seen now. No scurrying, no haste, no quickly-moving figures seemingly bent on business demanding rapid action, but now there were men lolling in doorways, leaning up against the sides of buildings at spots where there had been no men before.

There was a group in front of the Pacific Pool Room; another group found a center in front of the Atlantic Hotel, a few rounded the curve in the street where the false-fronted saloon, "The Bank," was located.

One-Gun pulled a sack of tobacco from his pocket, and a sheaf of wheat-straw papers, and calmly rolled himself a cigarette. He struck a match, enjoyed a couple of inhalations, and then turning his horse rode back quietly along the street. He looked very peaceful. He looked a trifle too peaceful for such a world of storm and strife, and particularly for such a stormy part of it as Spring Green.

A few of the youths and men lolling against buildings looked at him, then turned their eyes away. These men and youths had planned to be present solely as spectators of a drama; they wanted no rôles. No one spoke. No one hailed the rider.

Rounding the slight curve in the street, One-Gun Dunn saw a figure which looked familiar. The figure, with a generous circumference of cartridge-belted waist, was coming out of The Bank. Dunn smiled to himself. The man was Sheriff Jason Flint, whose activities seemed to center about the saloon.

The rotund sheriff looked at the lone rider, looked again, and then recognized him. "Hey, Mr. Dunn," he called. "Thought I reckernized you. An' you 'pear a mite more comfortable in them clothes."

"Howdy, sheriff," Bart greeted. "Yes, I reckon this is somethin' more on my reg'lar style."

"I'd sorta suggest that I seize th' opportunity to have a little snort with you," said Sheriff Jason Flint. "I didn't make no sech suggestion front o' yore uncle. Sam'l Halliday's death on licker—these days; in fact, Sam'l has changed in more'n one way. Great ol' hombre, Sam'l is. Waal, ef you'll dismount an' mosey in this here palace o' refined pleasure, I'd admire to be the first citizen o' Spring Green to assist you in wettin' yore whistle."

Bart left Silver Dollar at the hitching-rack and followed the jovial official into the saloon. Business seemed to be slow. An oldish, weather-beaten man was entertaining himself at the end of the bar with a small glass and a tall bottle.

A croupy orchestrion was busy somewhere in the back of the establishment. Another man either very tired or very drunk, sat at a moist table in the rear, his head pillowed in his arms and his wide hat on the floor in close proximity to a cuspidor.

Still farther in the rear was a group of men talking quietly, except for an occasional guffaw. They were gathered about a circular table, and there was the click and clatter of poker chips and now and then the slap of a card or a hand by a disappointed or elated player.

"Meet my frien', One-Gun Dunn," said Flint to the proprietor of The Bank, at this lull in the day acting as his own bartender. "Reckon y'mighta heerd o' One-Gun Dunn. He's Sam'l Halliday's nephew."

The proprietor of The Bank, a man who by virtue of his profession posed

as the friend of every male in Spring Green, reached out a soft and slightly moist palm. "Welcome t' Spring Green, Mr. Dunn," he said. "An' the first drink's on the house. I figger I know that yore bev'rage'll be, sher'f, an' you kin nominate yore pizen, Mr. Dunn, an' I hope it 'll be the best in th' house."

"I'll have a little sody-pop," said One-Gun quietly.

The proprietor of The Bank paused a moment, was about to say something, and then apparently thought better of it.

"Kee-rect," he said.

He served the drinks, and disappeared to the rear room in response to raucous demands of the poker-players.

"Mighty busy place, this 'un," Flint informed Bart, as he balanced his whisky preparatory to tossing it off. "Town itself ain't so busy, sence the Saucepan quieted down. When th' smelter an' the ol' stamp-mill was agoin' it, an hombre'd have to stan' in line to git waited on here.

"Course, they still got a good trade here. Fortunately Spring Green don't depend intirely on minin'. Thar's some good-sized cattle outfits not more'n a lope away, an' on pay-off nights an' Sattidays some time, it seems like ol' times.

"Things has changed a lot sence I first buckled on my official authority. Thet was thirty years ago, or nigh onto it. I've been hearin' as some folks aim to git my star away from me this comin' 'lection, but I'm gamblin' thet when it's all over, ol' Jase Flint'll still represent law an' order in our fair community.

"Purty low-down gang here right now. And speakin' o' thet, One-Gun, this Plug Keffer as bragged he aimed to git you 'fore sundown is one o' the muckymucks o' thet gang, but not th' real leader. Purty tall braggin', thet is, fur Plug Keffer to shoot his mouth off 'bout gittin' One-Gun Dunn."

The sheriff looked out through the half-doors. "He said 'fore sundown, but I reckon he was full o' redeye. More like Plug Keffer to be doin' things like thet *after* sundown."

"I reckon things'll be all right," Bart reassured the law. "Have another drink."

Flint took another whisky. Bart Dunn drank another glass of soda-pop. A few more loungers had come through the swinging doors.

Their drinks finished, the two passed out toward the hitch-rail. Jason Flint, full of volubility, was telling the newcomer several things that his uncle had possibly planned to tell him, but had not time to.

The puncher heard again of Glem Torry's domination, told by Flint, however, in such a way as to soften any reflection upon himself. He also learned that Torry had recently bought a sizable portion of land to the south of the town, the second purchase he had made since coming to Spring Green more than a year before.

"He's one o' them folks like in the Bible," Jason continued. "One o' them as toils not, neither does he do any spinnin', but he allus has the *dinero* to git what he wants. I understan' he made Ed Grove an offer for his land this afternoon. Big Ed's house burned down this mawnin', y'know, an' I reckon Ed'll be glad to git rid of it."

As he left Jason Flint and mounted his horse, One-Gunn Dunn realized that he was learning much about Spring Green. But there was much still to be learned. He was glad his uncle had written him that letter. Spring Green promised excitement for him.

Clem Torry offering to buy Ed Grove's property! Strange, mighty strange, that Torry happened to be in the vicinity of the Grove house at the time of the fire.

Various deductions were passing through his brain as Silver Dollar padded slowly up the main street. The

rider grinned as he noticed that more people lined the streets now. People were coming out to see him, but pretending ignorance of his presence.

They could not fool him, however, for something in the very stillness and attitude of the place breathed with expectant excitement. Evidently the word had passed rapidly among the townsfolk that Plug Keffer had sworn to get the scalp of One-Gun Dunn before sunset, and the townsfolk were eager to see just how that presumably difficult job was going to be accomplished.

This was going to be a Roman holiday in Spring Green, and even the most peaceful citizens were coming out in the air for a sight of the gladiators, one of whom was cantering along the street in defiance of his most dangerous enemy. No hungry lions were necessary to add to the zest. A reckoning between Plug Keffer and One-Gun Dunn would be more than enough.

CHAPTER V.

ICE-COLD FEET.

IN the suite of offices occupied by Wade & Meadows, attorneys-at-law, sat a group of not entirely legal-looking men. Just why a suite of offices was necessary for practitioners of justice in a town the size of Spring Green might not be clear to people who knew how much legal work could be accomplished in a small, single room in other towns larger than Spring Green.

The answer lay partially in the fact that not all the business transacted in this suite was legal. And not a few residents of the little town of Spring Green were entirely conscious of this fact.

Bail-Bond Wade had occupied two rooms even before the entry of the junior partner, Carter Meadows, into the law firm. While these two rooms were contiguous, they were not mutually friendly, for so stout and sturdy were the walls between them that often one room had no inkling of what the other room was doing.

Particularly was this true at such times as when clients were waiting to see Wade, while that genius of the bar was in conference with persons in the other room.

When Carter Meadows had come to town, a third room was added to the suite—for Bail-Bond Wade, the senior partner in the new personnel, had no mind to share already exsisting space with Meadows. The latter would have to sit at a desk in a third room, by himself.

The arrangement was explained away as being more businesslike, and indicative of prosperity becoming to practitioners of the law. But, while Carter Meadows might have been entirely satisfied with this explanation, it was not for the same reason that brought satisfaction to Bail-Bond Wade and his friend, Clem Torry.

These three, Wade, Torry, and Meadows, on seeing the classical exhibition of gun-fanning by One-Gun Dunn in front of the Railroad Café, seemed less moved to genuine appreciation of the artistry than several men at the time who were closer to the scene.

Meadows failed to appreciate the exhibition because he did not know how hard it was for even the most expert marksman to perform in that unerring manner. Meadows had no gun-toting experience, and no understanding whatever of the mysteries of the trigger.

But Clem Torry and Bail-Bond Wade, both of whom were considerably better acquainted with the problems of marksmanship, failed of appreciation because of their utter chagrin. Here they were, witnessing the frustration of their best-laid plan to discredit One-Gun Dunn in the eyes of the populace and probably railroad him out of town.

Here they were, seeing One-Gun Dunn impressing a number of hard-boiled characters with the knowledge that toying with One-Gun Dunn might mean flourishing business for the local grave-diggers.

As Torry and Wade left the window with meaningful glances at each other, Meadows got up closer to the pane for a better view of the man who seemed to be occupying the attention of Wade and Torry for the past few days. He had heard Dunn's name mentioned by them even before the man himself came to town.

"He's a killin' hombre," Torry had told Meadows a few days before, "and Lord knows we got enough trouble on our hands as it is, without a fellow of his reputation comin' in and roundin' up a following. The sooner that hombre's out of Spring Green—one way or another—the better I'll feel!"

Dunn's spectacular shooting convinced Meadows that the newcomer had all the accouterments and abilities of a killer, but seeing him in a frock coat on the man's first sally into town, Meadows retained some doubt as to whether Dunn had the personality of a violent, death-dealing bad man.

Moreover, Dunn was nephew to one of the most respected citizens in Spring Green—Samuel Halliday—respected even though Torry and Bail-Bond Wade had no regard for Halliday.

Meadows wondered. He was a trusting soul, with a frail body; in a community like Spring Green he could do little but wonder at what perplexed him, and let the matter drop without arriving at a solution. Solutions are oft-times dangerous.

In the second room of the original suite, the same room in which so many doings in Spring Green had been conceived and hatched before Meadows or Dunn had ever seen the little town, Clem Torry and Bail-Bond Wade were now closeted.

Torry leaned over and motioned in the direction of the closed door. "Meadows wants to get an eyeful of that dude gun-toter," he said.

Wade bit off the end of a villainous-looking cigar.

"I'm afraid, Clem," he said, dubiously, "that we've not gone about this Dunn person in the right way."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, there were two ways of handling him. One was to get the jump on him and railroad him back where he came from. We tried that—and failed—without even considering the other way. I'm thinking, now, that possibly the other way would have been best; and that would have been to make him a friend and ally from the beginning, instead of an enemy. He's a dangerous enemy, you must admit that."

"I'll admit it," said Torry slowly. "To you, that is—not to anybody else. We can't go around now and do any admittin' like that to any of our boys."

"What do you think of trying the other method now?" Wade looked at Clem's features while asking the question as a feeler.

"With that hombre," replied Torry unhesitatingly, "it would be like waving a red flag in a bull's face and then pullin' out a piece of molasses candy with your other hand and offerin' it to him. You'd prob'ly find a couple o' horns gorin' you before you could duck."

"I reckon you're halfway right," concluded Bail-Bond Wade. "Dunn isn't going to fall for any taffy after this."

"I know I'm right," said Torry, rather elated that his confederate did not press the matter. His enmity against One-Gun Dunn had originally been impersonal; he had not wanted him in Spring Green for commercial reasons.

Now, since the run-in with Dunn he felt thwarted. He had a personal grudge against Dunn, but did not want to feature this end of the matter with the cool lawyer in front of him.

"It's goin' to be somethin' harder than taffy that'll make him fall," said Torry. "But he's got to fall, and he's goin' to!"

Torry clenched a fist, and his eyes narrowed to two slits across a face hard with determination.

Outside in the front room, Meadows was still at the window. Dunn and Halliday had already disappeared, but another scene of interest was occupying his attention.

Sheriff Jason Flint had come up and laughed in Plug Keffer's face, and Plug Keffer was in no laughing mood. Plug was saying something, vociferously; and now he was crossing the street, directly toward the offices of Wade & Meadows, attorneys-at-law.

A moment or two later he stamped into the front office, and nodded gruffly at Meadows. "Clem here?" he asked.

Meadows nodded his head toward the rear of the suite. "He's discussing something with Mr. Wade," he said. "Shall I tell him you're here?"

"You needn't tell 'im nothin'," Plug replied. "Ef he's thar, thet's all I wanta know."

He shuffled to the rear and opened the door of the second office, which on this occasion happened to be unlocked. Clem and Wade looked up somewhat puzzled. The puzzlement left their faces when they saw the angry face of Plug Keffer.

"Oh, you Plug," said Torry. "You should have knocked. Well, now that you're here, what are you lookin' so mad about? What's up?"

Keffer flung his huge hulk into a chair and reached for the bottle of whisky which stood on the table and poured himself a generous slug.

"Plenty's up," he said. "Thar ain't no man in Arizony kin laff in my face, an' Jason Flint jest laffed at me, an' I'm sw'arin' thet—"

"You want to go easy with Flint," Torry cut in. "No use gettin' into—"

But Plug Keffer also cut in to his chief's advice.

"Who's sayin' I'm messin' with Flint?" he demanded. "Flint's too old an' toothless for me to mess with, an' I ain't forgettin' what you tol' me, either, Clem," he added, softening his tone, feeling perhaps that previously it had been too surly and imperious. "Flint laffed at me after thet little happenin' with One-Gun Dunn over thar. You know—"

"We know," interrupted Torry. "We saw it from the window. Keep cool, Plug. Have another drink."

Plug Keffer did not keep any cooler, but he did have another drink.

"I swore I'd git Dunn afore sunset," he said. "I swore it—an' I will!"

"Well, he's gone, ain't he?" asked Torry. "Wade an' me saw him ride off with his uncle. He may not be back again to-day at all."

"He may not be back," agreed Plug. "But I'm gittin' him to-day, whuther he comes back or not. He'd liked to make a fool outa me. I'll git 'im, I tell you."

Torry looked over at his henchman. "Oh, I don't know about that, Plug," he said. "I know you want to get him, and I ain't sayin' that it would make me very sad. I'd like to see this bird planted nice an' safe under the chaparral, but wantin' an' gettin' him are two different things. There's only one way to get Dunn, Plug—and that way is when he ain't lookin'."

Keffer looked up indignantly.

"What all you mean?" he asked.

"Well, what I said is plain enough. Dunn's a fast man on the draw. The best way to get Dunn would be—well, from the back, I'd say."

Keffer's black eyes were gleaming. "Thet mighta ben all right an hour or so ago," he admitted, "but t'ain't all right now. Everybody'd know I done it, for I swore to git him.

"I ain't sayin', either, thet it 'ud make me weep none; but if thet's goin' to happen it 'ud have to be some one else doin' it while I was in some other part o' town, a talkin' to Grove or Jase.

Flint, or some one as could prove me an alibi."

"That's true enough," put in Bail-Bond Wade. "And you don't want to do anything hastily, Plug," added the cool lawyer. "Now, sit down there and cool down. There's a bottle of whisky, and don't punish it all. Great stuff, but it's never been known to make a man cool down.

"Clem and I have a little business to talk over. We don't mind you here—you're in the family, you might say."

Wade and Clem Torry retired to a table near a side window of the office, and began poring over some maps and plats which the lawyer took from a drawer.

Plug, rapidly making friends with the whisky bottle, paid little attention to the low-voiced discussion of the two men; if he had paid any attention, he would not have learned much—simply some loose-ended facts of the cost of the land that Clem Torry had already picked up in and around Spring Green and the sum he had offered to Big Ed Grove for his scant acreage north of the town.

The clock hands marched around, and still the two men talked on. Plug Keffer, his feet now elevated to the altitude of his head, had fallen into a restful snooze. The lawyer and his crony did not wake him up.

Plug Keffer they frequently used as a battle force, to conquer or intimidate inconvenient foes, but he was seldom taken into councils of war. Wade finally put away the maps and plats.

"It's just possible," he said to Torry, "that this Dunn might go along minding his own business."

It was just possible, perhaps, but it was not a fact. At this very moment, Bart Dunn, in his cow-poke outfit, was riding into Spring Green.

"I doubt it very much," was Torry's opinion. "I'd feel safer if he was off the map entirely."

Wade nodded. Then he looked up at Torry. "Well?" he asked.

"Well, there's this Slim Gelder," Torry said. "Slim's been drawin' meal checks on me for some time, and ain't had a thing to do for the last two months. We might give Slim a chance to earn his daily bread."

"Can he be trusted?" asked Wade.

"We could sound him an' find out. I might send Meadows out after Slim and have a little talk with him up here."

This matter was discussed for some time, and finally Torry opened the door to the front of the suite. "Oh, Meadows," he said.

Carter Meadows, now seated at a desk, looked up.

"We got a little business with that hombre they call Slim Gelder," Torry explained. "I'd appreciate it if you'd slip down an' see if you can find him. Slim's always in one of two or three places. You might look in the bar of the Atlantic Hotel, an' if he ain't there he'll prob'ly be in The Bank, or the pool hall."

Carter Meadows, who was an accommodating young man not disposed to object at being made an errand boy for as important personage as Clem Torry, his senior partner's crony, nodded and left the office. A few minutes later he returned and rapped at the door of the rear suite.

"He'll be up in a few minutes, Mr. Torry," he said. "He was finishing up a game of pool."

Some minutes later Slim Gelder appeared in the offices of Wade & Meadows, and greeted Torry and Wade, and nodded gruffly at Plug Keffer, who had now come out of his snooze and was treating himself to an eye-opener from the tall bottle.

Gelder was an emaciated-looking individual, with a pair of sharp eyes and a livid scar that ran down the right cheek from his temple to his lip, where it was lost in the wilderness of a luxuriant mustache, his most vital-looking feature.

"Howdy, Slim," said Torry.

"C'mon in an' sit down. Have a drink."

Slim followed instructions on both counts.

"Didja see what happened over in front o' the Railroad Café?" Clem asked the newcomer.

"Y'mean thet One-Gun Dunn feller?" asked Slim. His speech had a note of caution and respect. He seemed to half sense the reason for his summons by Torry.

"Yes, I reckon they call him that, mebbe. Ol' Halliday's nephew. Mighty fresh sort o' customer. He needs a little tonin' down."

Slim wiped his mustache with the back of his hand. His piercing little eyes were leveled at Torry. He made no remark.

"He needs a little tonin' down," Torry repeated smoothly. "An' I got all the respect in the world for you, Slim," he added. He smiled in what he meant to be a flattering manner. Gelder did not smile back.

"Well?" asked Torry in a sharper tone. "Well?"

Gelder was smoothing his mustache. "No, I ain't as dumb as all thet, Clem," he said. "I sorter figger yo're eggin' me to shoot it out with this Dunn feller.

"I respectfully declines thet job, Clem. I ain't committin' suicide these days. I'm quick on the trigger, but I ain't no blowhard, an' thar's men as I ain't pickin' fights with. An' One-Gun Dunn's one o' sech men.

"In fact, Clem, One-Gun Dunn is 'bout three or four o' sech men. I never made no claims I was quicker'n he is. I never did, an' I ain't makin' no sech claim now. Ef some one's goin' to tangle with One-Gun Dunn, it's shore gotta be some hombre thet has more occasion to git even with him than me."

Torry's expression reflected his disfavor. "An' what the hell d'you think you're gettin' paid for?" he asked.

"Not fur thet," replied Slim promptly. "I'll admit I'm gittin' paid, an' I'm willin' to do as you say—most o' th' time. But life's mighty pleasant these days; an' I reckon I'd admire to live on a little while an' enjoy it."

Torry tried to hold in his wrath. "I sorta figured you'd be a red-hot on this," he told Slim.

The latter shook his head vigorously. "No, sir-ree! I'm plumb lukewarm on't; in fact, 'most ice cold, y'might say." He looked over at Plug Keffer. "I understood as how Plug had been talkin' big 'bout this One-Gun Dunn," he said. "I sorter reckoned Plug was the man to git him."

"An' I'm tellin' you," retorted Torry, "that Plug ain't the man to get him!"

"I was willin'—" commenced Plug, "an'—"

But Torry had leaped up. "Never mind any talk, Plug!" he commanded. "I know *you* ain't yellah."

"An' who're you insinuatin' is yellah?" asked Slim Gelder. "I ain't, ef thet's who yo're hintin' at. It's jes' thet I ain't got no quarrel with Dunn, thet's all. I ain't no more yellah than you are, Clem Torry!"

Clem Torry was beyond words now. He reached over, and with clubbed right fist landed on the scarred cheek of Slim Gelder. The blow caused the little man to topple to the floor. "I'll show you who's yellah!" roared Torry. "Now, get th' hell outa here!"

Slim Gelder picked himself up slowly. His sharp little eyes were flashing. He noticed that Torry's hand was close to his holster, and that Plug Keffer had shifted so as to bring the table between them. It was no time for gun play on the part of Gelder.

He backed over to the door. His right hand hung low while with the back of his left he smoothed his ruffled mustache. "All right, I'll git out!" he said. "I reckon my money sorter stops now.

"An' I jes' wanta say somethin' 'fore leavin', Torry. I ain't yellah. My record kin prove thet. An' while I ain't sayin' I'm quick enough on th' draw fur One-Gun Dunn, I'm too quick, Torry, fur you. Now, put thet in yore pipe, an' puff on it!"

He backed out the door, and a minute later the sound of his feet on the stairs came up to the trio.

"Well, there's another little rat that 'll prob'ly join the good boys o' the town now," was Torry's opinion.

"I don't know, though, Clem, about slinging into him that way," put in Wade, the lawyer, dubiously. "Of course Gelder doesn't know much, but he could be a dangerous little rat."

"He could be a dead little rat, too," was Torry's addition. "I hope, Plug," he said, turning to Keffer with a meaning grin, "that you don't get in any gun fight with Gelder. It 'ud break my soft old heart to see him layin' cold an' implacable in death!"

"Waal, I may break yore heart then, sometime," returned Keffer. "But, y'see, thet plan o' yores didn't come to much. I reckon, after all, thet it's up to me to chastise this here Dunn feller. Y' said I wasn't yaller, an' I ain't! I reckon I kin take keer o' myself."

He patted his guns in his holsters, and made as if to rise.

"Wait a minute, Plug," ordered Torry. "Things are still lookin' pretty good. Fortunately, Gelder ain't got anything on us. He riled up before we mentioned anything about gettin' Dunn from behind. I'd rather it 'ud been done the other way, anyhow. An' if Dunn got Gelder, it 'ud been small loss to me. I'd taken a chance on losin' him—but I ain't takin' any chance on losin' you, Plug."

Keffer, who had risen and was adjusting his holsters, sat down again, flattered by the evidence of Torry's regard.

"Thet's all right, Clem," he said. "One-Gun or ten guns, he don't make no fool outa me."

"But just a minute now," cautioned Torry. "You noticed Gelder didn't want any part o' Dunn, an' Gelder's about as quick on the draw as you are. Just what did you say you'd do to Dunn?"

"I said I'd git him 'fore sundown—git his scalp is th' way I put it, and I tell you, Clem, thet's jes' what I aim to do!"

"All right," agreed Torry smoothly. "Now, let's figure this thing out. We want to give Dunn a dressin' down, run him out o' town. All right. You said you'd get Dunn's scalp before sundown. Well, it ain't sundown yet. An' you didn't say how you'd get it. You might mean, y' know, that you'd pull it out by the roots."

Keffer's face was blank.

"I mean," continued Torry, "that there's no use in your takin' chances—with a gun. It's a little vanity of this Dunn, I understand, that he never draws first. He won't draw on you till he sees you goin' for your hardware. All right."

He looked over the huge bulk of Keffer. "Now, why not humiliate this bird good an' plenty? He's expectin' a gun fight. You can go up to him, pull his nose or somethin', an' slam him in the jaw an' get him down. It's a ten-to-one shot with your size an' strength.

"He'll tangle with you that way, I'm wagerin'. An' when he does, an' you got him down—well, anything goes. You could get him by the windpipe, an' not be in too big a hurry to let go. There's plenty o' men out in Boots Hill that died quick deaths, an' no bullet holes in their body, either!"

"A very good idea," spoke up Wade. "Better, I should say, than a gun fight. A better alibi, too, if anything should happen. Just a good man-to-man tangle — with unforeseen results, possibly," he added.

Plug Keffer, too, seemed to like Torry's idea. It was less of a chance for him, and yet fully as good an op-

portunity to make good his boast to humble One-Gun Dunn. "Clem," he said, grinning, "you allus was good on new idees. You got brains, Clem."

Torry did not deny the charge. He got up, opened the door, walked toward the front of the suite, and looked out of the dusty window.

One-Gun Dunn, now in puncher's clothes, was standing in front of the Railroad Café, talking to Big Ed Grove.

Torry returned to the back room. "Plug," he said to Keffer, "I reckon the Lord is with us. Your meat is right down there now, talkin' peaceable to Ed Grove. He's in front o' the Railroad Café."

Keffer took another drink, and stood up. "In 'bout two minutes," he said, "I'll be in front o' the Railroad Café, too. But I won't be talkin' to Ed Grove. I'll be talkin' to this Dunn feller. "An'—zowie!—what I won't be a sayin' to *him!*"

He shoved a chair aside, stamped out the door and clattered down the stairs.

An instant later the men in the office of Wade & Meadows saw him walking diagonally across the street toward the restaurant.

CHAPTER VI.

GRAPPLING WITH DEATH.

BART DUNN had been standing in front of the Railroad Café for some time, talking with Big Ed Grove, who had hailed him as he rode by after he had left Jason Flint in front of the Bank. He had all but given up the idea of a tangle with Plug Keffer, who seemed nowhere along the main street.

Grove, in his conversation, had happened to mention the bad man. He had been seen going into the office of Wade & Meadows some time before, he averred, but possibly by this time had left.

Big Ed talked of many things, told of the offer he had received from Clem Torry for his lot to the north of town, and, as Carter Meadows, on his errand for Torry, came out of the office and walked down the street, the peaceful-looking young lawyer was pointed out to Dunn by Grove.

The gaze of the latter followed Meadows as he went into the Atlantic Hotel and then, after a moment, came out and crossed to the Pacific Pool-room. "Them's queer places for Meadows to be goin'," said Grove. "I never seen thet feller in a barroom or a pool hall. Waal, I hope bad comp'ny ain't gittin' him. Thet's Wade's partner, an' they say thet little feller's goin' to be our next sheriff."

Bart Dunn spent some time in talking with Grove. If, by any chance, Plug Keffer was still in that law office diagonally across the street, Bart would stand talking with Grove and would give Keffer every opportunity to locate him.

But, as the minutes passed, it looked as if Plug was more vocal than belligerent, and Dunn leaped on his horse and was about to ride down the street and out to his uncle's home. He felt a strange sense of disappointment. When Bart Dunn was hungry for action, he had a prodigious appetite.

It was just as he had jumped upon the back of Silver Dollar, however, that Slim Gelder issued from the stairway doorway of the Wade & Meadows office and crossed the street. He seemed somewhat wrought up, and his right eye was discolored and badly swollen.

"Yo're One-Gun Dunn, I reckon?" he asked, addressing Bart.

The latter coolly surveyed the rail-thin man. "Thar's folks thet call me that," he admitted.

"Waal, I figgered to inform you," said Gelder, "thet thar's a little conspire-acy afoot ag'in' you. Plug Keffer's up talkin' with Clem Torry in thet office 'cross the way, an' I don't calkerlate they mean any good by you."

"I reckon I kin take keer o' myself," said Bart calmly. He viewed the thin little man with disfavor. It was his opinion that, quite possibly, this disreputable-looking character had been sent by Torry in an effort to intimidate him. He rather doubted, now, that Plug Keffer would appear at all to-day. But his doubts disappeared when, a few moments later, looking across the street, he saw the burly figure of Keffer himself approaching.

A sudden and ominous silence seemed to grip Spring Green as the bad man swaggered across the street. It was apparent that other eyes, too, saw the swaggering Keffer, and it seemed that all sounds had stopped as though by a prearranged signal.

The only sound within hearing came from Plug Keffer's boots as they pounded the sun-baked clay of the street, directly toward One-Gun Dunn; and the pounding was heavy and slow, with affected laziness.

All the remainder of Spring Green was stock-still, on its toes, and stooped in whatever it had been doing. In one doorway a man's jaw hung low and silent, for he had ceased speaking in the middle of a word. Up against another low building a man was standing on one leg with a down-turned pipe motionless in his hand; he had stopped in the act of knocking ashes from the pipe against his lifted heel.

Plug Keffer came to a halt directly in front of One-Gun Dunn.

The horseman did not move a muscle, just gazed through steel-blue eyes at the huge bulk of brawn before him. Keffer did not look into those steel-blue eyes, for if he had he must have quailed; no man in a mood of violence had ever stood eye to eye with One-Gun Dunn and come off first in the show-down.

Plug Keffer carefully avoided those eyes, but did not fail to take in every other feature of the man upon the horse. From top of sombrero down to toe of boot and then back to top of sombrero Keffer surveyed Dunn, and as he did so, a sneer that was hard to work up, on account of its artificiality, spread over Plug's countenance.

"Waal!" he said finally. "I'm wagerin' my pet rattlesnake ef it ain't our posie-boy, all dressed up like an ornery hombre. Bran' new suit o' punchin' clothes, jes' like he reckons he belongs in 'em! Ain't y' afeerd you're goin' to git 'em dirty afore Sunday?"

"I reckon I kin keep 'em clean enough, stranger," answered Dunn, still riveting his eyes on Plug, but unable to draw Plug's gaze to his own. "I'll keep 'em clean enough, thet is, pervidin' no scum gits near me. An' I ain't aimin' t' let you git near me. See?"

"Lordy me, oh, my! What an ornery cuss this lil dude do be!" answered Keffer, still affecting inspection of Dunn's new clothes, to avoid the necessity of looking into a pair of steel-blue eyes hinting sudden death.

"Yo're Plug Keffer, I reckon," said Dunn directly, "an' I heared as how you swore high an' holy thet yo're goin' to git my scalp afore sundown. Ef yo're goin' to be a man o' yore word, Plug Keffer, y' ain't got so much time to be beatin' aroun' the bush like, 'cause the sun's gittin' lower every minute.

"I come to town plumb hastylike, so's to give you yore chanst. Don't be disapp'intin' me, 'cause I do hate makin' this trip t' no purpose an' avail. My scalp is right here on my haid," continued One-Gun Dunn, obligingly taking off his sombrero—with his left hand—and exposing a thick thatch of brown hair, vital with the sheen of youth.

"Oh, I aim to be gittin' all th' enj'yment possible outn this here entertainment afore the show's over, youngster," said Keffer, "an' I'm enj'yin' myself aplenty." Which was not exactly so. Keffer knew that the eyes of Torry were upon him from the law-office window.

Torry had said that Dunn never drew

first on a man—but anybody might make mistakes. Torry might have made a mistake. Keffer's grin was unusually wide in his forced amusement.

"But don't turn 'roun' an' lope away on thet hoss o' yourn ef I happens t' come kind o' close t' you," he continued. "'Twouldn't look nice afore all these folks here, ef you'd up an' turn yaller. You got a nice lookin' outfit o' punchin' duds on you, but you got lots to learn 'bout the proprieties o' social conduc', an' I'm aimin' t' give you a lesson right soon. I might spile yore nice new clothes a bit in teachin' you."

It became increasingly evident to One-Gun Dunn that Plug Keffer had no real appetite for a shooting-match, but was banking on superior weight and strength in a hand-to-hand brawl. While Dunn had no fear of a man in a fist fight, he could not refrain from making some remark taunting Keffer with fear to shoot it out.

"I reckon thet yo're mighty close enough now for good shootin', even ef y' ain't no wizard on th' trigger," said Dunn. "An' moreover, I ain't never ben known to make a motion for my shooter till after th' other man starts to draw.

"I'll wait till you've got yore hand right on th' butt o' yore gun, Keffer, afore I as much as starts the trip t' my holster an' coöperates with our popular undertaker."

"Yo're a most obligin' gent, youngster," said Keffer, "but I aim t' prevent yore bein' buried in a clean suit o' clothes. I aim to prevent it fur th' good reppitation of our fair community. Thar ain't never been no young feller in this here town buried in a clean suit o' clothes."

Feeling that the time was ripe for action, Keffer stepped forward toward One-Gun Dunn. The bully had to avoid a gun duel with Dunn, and it was well to stop parleying before Dunn showed him up as not being eager to settle differences with bullets.

"Thet's a smart-lookin' outfit you got on," Plug said, keeping his hands significantly high above his holsters, and taking a pinch of Dunn's breeches between the fingers of both hands.

"Keep yore dirty hooks offn me!" barked Dunn. He turned his boot heel sidewise and with his spur he roweled Keffer in the chest.

With a shout of rage Keffer grabbed the foot at the ankle and yanked the rider from his horse. Dunn, who had by this time freed his feet from the stirrups, was prepared for the attack, and in coming to the ground landed more after the fashion of a voluntary jump than as the result of a fall.

Plug Keffer was taken by surprise, for he had figured on Dunn's landing at full length in the street, and towered ready to hurl himself down upon a prostrate adversary. Dunn, on his feet, whirled around like a flash and caught the burly Plug flush on the jaw with a well-planted right.

From that instant One-Gunn understood why Keffer had stirred up a fist fight. Keffer was the first man in all Dunn's experience who had ever remained on his feet after a solid punch like that. Bart knew that he was in for the biggest tussle of his life.

Plug lashed out mercilessly with his superiority of forty pounds of avoirdupois. Had the two men scaled in before the fight, the younger would probably have hit the beam at one hundred and eighty, while Keffer would be good for close to two hundred and twenty pounds of hard, mature brawn.

As the mammoth Keffer and the lithe Dunn whaled away at each other, the charm of silence seemed to have been broken. Men and youths were running now to the scene of the grim battle.

The Pacific pool hall emptied itself in less than a moment. The doors of the Bank and the Atlantic Hotel Bar swung back and forth crazily as customers forgot their thirsts in an effort to get out through the doors and be at the spot of conflict.

Each combatant, in his way, was a clever man with his fists. Keffer knew his own greatest asset to be his overbearing weight, and steel-taut sinews of maturity, and he constantly bore in with the object of leaning his bulk on the lighter man and grappling with him while he administered fistic punishment.

Dunn, on the other hand, quickly understood that his own best opportunities lay in peppering the huge bulk before him at long range, at least until the other man should weaken before the onslaught.

But Keffer did not show any signs of weakening. He seemed to have a granite jaw and, despite his reputation as a drinker of alcoholic beverages, to have the recuperative powers of an animal.

There was still another threat facing Dunn: Plug was a sniper, and Bart did not know at what instant Plug might suddenly decide that there had been enough of fists, and attempt to seize an opportunity to bring guns into action.

Keffer would do that, of course, when sure that a decided advantage on the draw lay with him, if he would do it at all.

Dunn felt that the increasing ring of observers might put a stop to any sniping on the part of Torry, especially after Keffer had been heard to make a boastful threat against his life. But, during the heat of battle, there was no telling when a man of Plug Keffer's stamp might lose his head and draw a bead on him to put a permanent end to the battle.

Once, Plug drew back his fist to start a long swing from the hip. Dunn took no chance, and on seeing his opponent's hand so close to a holster, rapidly swung his own right down near the gun butt. There was, however, no gunplay.

Several times Keffer started swings near the hip, and finally he noticed the suspicions on Dunn's part. He decided to take advantage of the situation. Starting a right near the hip, he saw Dunn's right drop near the holster. Instantly, Plug lashed over a left, the right only feinting.

The surprise blow caught One-Gun square on the side of the head and sent a ringing tune through his ear. For a second he felt himself swaying, and if it had not been for the crowd now encircling the gladiators, he might have gone to earth. But he reeled backward against a spectator and succeeded in maintaining a footing.

Sensing the advantage, however. Plug ripped into him, but Dunn slipped under the two flailing fists. When the big, oxlike Keffer charged again it was in a spirit of rage which made him forget the essentials of self-defense in an effort to land finishing blows.

It was just the opportunity that Dunn needed. Keffer was playing for the head. Dunn, who had already braised his fists on the unshaved countenance of Plug and discovered that he might easily break his hand without stowing away his adversary for good and all, directed his attention to the midsection of Keffer.

Dropping under Plug's charging fists, he planted two terrific blows, right and left, squarely above the Keffer beltline. They were the most telling blows he had landed. The air fairly whistled out of the flailing gorilla like steam from a siren.

Keffer's eyes were crossed in pain and surprise for a moment, while a sudden and spontaneous outburst of cheers lauded Dunn's success.

Bart now went about his task with determination. Keffer could not take medicine in the stomach with the same unconcern with which he could let blows bounce from his jaw. His recent gymnasium had been the Bank, and Bart Dunn planned to make whisky his ally.

He whaled frantically away at the other's belt-line. Keffer was weakening, there was no doubt about it. He doubled up, his arms lowered, exposing

a goodly portion of jawbone. It was too good an opportunity to resist. Dunn suddenly brought up a right with full force on the point of Keffer's heavy jaw. This time it told a story.

With the wind knocked fairly out of him, Keffer could no longer stand up under a square hit on the jaw. Back he reeled, he staggered, and finally his great hulk struck the ground.

"Stand over 'im. Don't let 'im git up!" some one yelled.

But One-Gun Dunn minded his own business. He had certain ideas on how to carry on a fight properly, and he refrained from falling on the prostrate figure. He kept an eye on Keffer's hand, and his own hand was near his holster. In fighting a Keffer, he felt that it would be good judgment to be ready for anything.

Blinking, Keffer rose to his feet. He was not unsteady. Something of the lion in the man told him that he, the king of the forest, had been felled by a foe for the first time in his life, but not to stay down. A jungle fierceness directed his swaying senses, and he succeeded in defending himself as Dunn charged forward.

Hardly conscious of what he was doing, he leaned forward and wrapped both arms around the lighter man. He put all his garroting strength into the hug, a strength born of desperation.

He realized that the turning point had come. Dunn was getting the best of it. He was in better condition, for one thing. He himself could not stand that battering to his stomach. His wind was all but spent. Something else was necessary to turn the tide.

Somewhere up behind a gilt-lettered window eager eyes were watching, he knew—the eyes of Torry and Wade. The jungle spirit rose in the gorilla's breast and told him that to maintain supremacy anything was fair.

Dunn succeeded in breaking loose from the grizzlylike embrace, but suddenly a knee came up and caught Dunn with terrific impact. Like a bird shot on the wing, Dunn folded up, swung round on knees incapable of supporting him, and curled to the ground.

There were yells from the crowd—yells just loud enough to keep contact between Dunn's reeling senses and the world about him. He knew that he had been badly fouled, that his senses were almost gone, but just enough consciousness remained to tell him that where one foul came from another was likely to proceed.

Through narrowed slits of eyes he kept his sole remaining attention instinctively on Keffer's guns and Keffer hurtled down upon him, and what had been mainly a fist fight was lowered into a rough-and-tumble in which anything would go—gouging, kicking, bone-breaking, choking, biting, anything. Keffer's steely fists grasped Dunn by the throat.

The hands suddenly loosened a trifle, though, even if they did not let go. Dunn had lifted a knee, and it sank squarely into the stomach of Plug and rendered him momentarily as helpless as Dunn himself. Weakly the pair rolled over and over in the dust of Spring Green's main street. Still knotted to each other, they both managed somehow to get to their feet.

Forward and backward they jammed, slugging, clutching, ripping, butting, wrestling, and finally were down again. Little spots of red now flecked the dust. Keffer's stained fangs had been sunk into Dunn's arm. Keffer took a smart thrust in his gory face as his right hand reached down and closed like a vise on the throat of One-Gun Dunn, while his two hundred and twenty pounds sprawled all over the lithe form underneath.

Dunn's breath began to come in short gasps. The puncher knew that he could not hold out very long in this grip. With a supreme effort he succeeded in grasping Plug Keffer's throat with his left hand. The wound in his left arm throbbed from the bite of Keffer.

With his right he clenched the clothing about the abdomen of the gorilla. Dunn's breath was now short and his face was purple. A last act of desperation was necessary.

Jerking his back upward suddenly, with an arching movement of head and heels, he swung Keffer on his side, and with the momentum of the same lurch, managed in continuing the swing till he reached his feet.

The vast bulk of Keffer was now in the air. A rasping intake of precious oxygen, for Keffer's hand still was tearing fingers into his throat, and Dunn whirled about.

There was a wild look of terror in Keffer's eyes. He knew what to expect. Another whirl, and Dunn would smash him down into the street, like a wrestler of the old school. Keffer felt his grip slipping to thinner and thinner skin on the throat of Dunn. It was time for Plug's last act of desperation. Dunn's both hands were busy, high in the air. With catlike rapidity Keffer snatched at his left holster with his left hand, the right still weakly at Dunn's throat.

Dunn, whose eyes were pointing upward for just such a motion, caught the furtive act before Keffer could yank out the weapon. The sight of the sneaky move gave One-Gun Dunn just the added ounce of power that comes with outraged hate.

With a maddened increase of fury, he whirled halfway round again and, with a mighty heave, flung the huge bulk of human body above his head across several feet of main street dust. The body hurtled into the glass doorway of the Railroad Café.

With the sound of crashing glass came the clatter of six-guns rolling along the wooden floor of the low gallery before the restaurant.

One weapon had unloosened in its holster on the right side of Keffer, and rolled away, while the second gun was flung from the giant's hand as he struck glass and floor simultaneously. It clattered across the boards and into the street.

But still the battle was not over. It is said that a blow on the head will often revive an animal of the wilds which is shot, so that he can rise for one more last act of violence. That was true of Keffer. Almost completely out of his senses, as might be seen by the look in his eyes, he came charging from the gallery directly toward Dunn.

One-Gun timed his punch perfectly. It crashed, with every ounce of one hundred and eighty pounds of infuriated hate, directly on the mouth of Plug Keffer. Dunn's hand felt numb for an instant, but he forgot that for the moment.

For Keffer crumpled forward like a scarecrow with the props suddenly removed. When a man is hardest hit he falls forward, on his face. That was how Keffer fell, flat on his face in the dust. He did not move; he just lay there, like a sleeping gorilla whose power had suddenly departed.

For a moment only One-Gun Dunn stood over the prostrate form. He saw that the fight was over. His own head was buzzing. He looked about; there was a hazy circle of faces.

The crowd still was too awed by the intensity of what had passed to burst out into cheers. Shocked into stillness, they merely stood, eyes bulging, mouths open, watching the movements of One-Gun Dunn. No one even picked up the six-guns. No one was interfering in this fight, even now, at its finale.

Dunn happened to catch the staring face of Big Ed Grove, and the puncher pointed to the shattered door.

"Thet 'll be paid for," Dunn said. "I'll pay half—an' he'll pay half. I'll see to thet!"

Grove muttered something unintelligible—something, however, that sounded friendly.

Next to the restaurant owner stood the corpulent form of Sheriff Jason Flint. His eyes also were popping. He

managed to grin at One-Gun Dunn, a sort of mechanical grin.

Dunn stooped and picked up the two guns. A quick movement with each, and the cartridges were ejected into the dust. He handed the guns to Flint.

"Here, sheriff," he said, "I reckon as no low-down hombre like our sleepin' beauty here is safe with playthings like these. He don't know how to use 'em, an' he might git into some mischief when no one's a-lookin'. This hombre tried to snipe me off when I first rode into town. A-hidin' behind a buildin', he was. He's better without guns."

Jason Flint accepted the trophies. He was still somewhat dazed.

"An' I also reckon," continued One-Gun Dunn, "thet you kin tag this here side o' beef an' ship 'im on consignment over yonder t' Clem Torry's hide-out acrost the street. They're waitin' for him, I reckon."

Jumping into his saddle, One-Gun Dunn turned the head of Silver Dollar and rode quietly away from the sudden outburst of cheers that broke out from the crowd behind him.

He rode slowly. There was no hurry. He had ridden slowly into the jaws of death-threats before sundown. And now, just as the sun was sinking beyond the mountains to the west, One-Gun Dunn rode again, just as slowly, away from the death at which he had laughed.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE SAM'S REASON.

AS he rode, Bart ruminated that there was some deep reason back of Clem Torry's immediate hate of him, some reason deeper than their run-in as he came into town, and some reason even deeper than Clem's evident desire to dominate the town politically.

He had seen fights picked before, but seldom had he known of a more flagrant case of starting battle on small grounds than in the case of Clem Torry's henchman, Keffer.

As he rode on and passed the little graveyard, now to his left, he looked over the slanting stones. "Waal, thet little buryin' groun' jes' missed increasin' its popoolation to-day," he said, half to his horse and half to himself. "Oh, I s'pose it 'll git 'em all some day—an' mebbe git some of us right soon."

He passed the entirely destroyed Grove dwelling, and reflected that Ed Grove had remarked that there were rooms above the hotel where the little family could live until he rebuilt on the same lot—assuming that he did not sell the land to Torry.

Humble little place, this was. It couldn't be worth very much. And yet Ed Grove had said that Torry had offered a surprisingly satisfactory price for it.

Dunn got off his horse and looked over the place—the house in ashes, a part of a 'dobe addition, practically useless and charred, its paneless windows staring out like eyeless sockets; a tool house, a brick smoke house, a few weedy acres that ran back to the bend in the creek. What could Clem Torry want with such a place?

Dunn rode on, crossed the creek, and continued on to his uncle's house. He stabled his horse and entered the house.

Samuel Halliday, working at a table over some data on the Saucepan Mine, looked up.

"Waal, I reckon you made out all right, Bart," he said.

"Oh, it didn't 'mount to much, Uncle Sam," his nephew told him. Then he made shift to change the subject. "I reckon we'll have a chanst fur a little talk now, Uncle Sam, you an' me. I wanta learn somethin' 'bout this town."

"An' yo're goin' to, Bart," said his uncle. "But, Lor', you shore do take yore laurels modest like, Bart. I reckon it 'mounted to more'n you represent." Samuel Halliday laughed.

"Jim Lemmon was in town. He jes' dropped in for a minute. Saw the hull thing from Prince's store, Jim did, from the upper windah. Lor', Jim says as how you mopped up the street with thet Plug Keffer."

"Oh, it didn't 'mount to much," Bart repeated.

He tried to change the subject again, and this time to keep it changed.

"Had a talk with Jase Flint an' Ed Grove," he informed his uncle. "Ed p'inted out thet little feller they say Clem Torry's backin' for sheriff. My mind wa'n't much on him just right then, I was sorter primed for battle, but now I think on't, he's a mighty queer little feller to be sheriff o' this town, ain't he?"

"Yeah," said Samuel Halliday, "no matter who holds office in this town, Torry aims to pull the wires. Sorter like a Punch an' Judy show. Clem Torry would handle thet little Meadows feller like a child.

"He's a queer sort, Torry is. Sometimes he kin even act like a gentleman. He's picked up consid'able land hereabout. He's offered me a good price for some o' mine. Seemed like a mighty fair price, 'specially the way this town's been run down."

"Ef I know anything 'bout human nature," was Dunn's opinion, "Clem Torry never offered a fair price fur anything. Thar's a nigger in th' woodpile somewhar."

"Waal, I don't know," objected Halliday, who chose to see the town of Spring Green through colored glasses and was inclined to overrate Torry for seeing it in the same way that he did. "He's no good—but he might see some future in this town. We got th' station—all's we need is the railroad spur t' put this town on th' map right. An' then he may have th' brains t' see thet the Saucepan Mine ain't as dead as some folks think it is.

"Y' see, Bart," he continued, "it's all a part o' the reason why I wanted you here, an' sence I see what you kin do I'm a-thinkin' on't more'n ever. The Saucepan's a fortune in the rough, as y' might say. Some day it's goin' to be producin' agin on a real payin' scale.

"With your young blood, things 'd soon be hummin' agin. I got th' money now to do things, I got th' equipment, an' the silver market's rose all over th' world.

"Up to now I've felt it sorter a civic duty, as y' might say, to hold back on the Saucepan. I figger prosperity 'd do more harm to th' town than it would good, with all them tough characters thet's been seepin' into Spring Green."

Dunn was conscious of a new respect for his uncle; a pompous old fellow, perhaps, but he had the best interests of the town at heart.

"Now, with you in town," went on Halliday, "I reckon we'll git it cleaned up an' git things boomin'. An' thet reminds me. In yore travels, Bart, have y' ever got acquainted with a gal thet you liked more'n you do yoreself?"

Bart grinned bashfully. He did not answer at once, and his uncle looked over at him with a trace of anxiety. "Aw, I ain't never had my affections tied up, ef thet's what you mean."

In most matters Bart Dunn was a very direct young man—in all matters, in fact, except romance.

"Thet's what I do mean, Bart. An' I'm right glad to hear what you say. What I'm aimin' to discover is whuther y' ever promised some gal thet you'd ever come back to her."

"Aw, no," Bart answered. "Nothin' like thet, Uncle Sam. I ain't denyin' thet mebbe I did meet a gal thet I'd 'a' liked a heap to know better."

Samuel Halliday looked at his nephew knowingly. He had not lived fifty-nine years for nothing.

"Waal, I reckon anyhow," said Halliday, "thet yo're not tied up, an' probably ain't never knowed the young woman yo're speakin' of intimately. I recall thet when I was young, I'd the

image o' more'n one gal a-janglin' in my heart afore I up an' married the one an' only. It ain't likely as it 'll be any different with you."

"Y' see, Bart, thar's enough o' the Dunn wanderin' sperrit in you to make me worried thet some day you might up an' leave yore ol' uncle an' Spring Green. I'd like to see you hitched to a good woman—right here in town."

"You speak as ef like you had some un special in mind," said Bart, looking up rather nervously.

"Bart," said Halliday, "Jim Lemmon's got six o' the nicest gals in th' county. I ain't goin' so fur as to say they're purty, but, Lor', thet don't make no difference. Thet's all on th' outside.

"A rattler is purty, when you come t' look over his markin's an' all thet—but it don't keep him from bein' pure pizen. Them gals is all good gals. I'd shore like t' see you runnin' in double harness with one of 'em."

"Uncle, I like Jim an' Mrs. Lemmon all right, but I ain't figgerin' on marryin'."

"It 'd be a fine thing," persisted Halliday. "Jim's got plenty o' money, an' he'd do right smart by a son-in-law. An' you'd be marryin' into good blood, Bart, don't forgit thet. Waal, I reckon y' might git washed up, Bart. Comin' time fur supper."

"I'll walk t' town ruther than ride Silver back agin," said Bart. "I shore like to straddle Silver, but I reckon I'll make th' trip to th' Railroad Café with one o' yore cayuses, Uncle Sam."

Halliday grinned. "We ain't goin' to git our chuck in town to-night, Bart," he said. "Y' ain't met Manuel yet. He's an ol' mestizo thet used to help out at th' Saucepan. Jim Lemmon an' me keep him right busy. He does a leetle gardenin' fur Jim, an' he does some cookin' an' tidyin' up fur me. Mighty good on frijoles an' sech, Manuel is.

"But you won't see Manuel to-night. We're invited over to supper to Jim Lemmon's. I reckon you'll feel better, Bart, in th' clothes you got on now."

"I reckon so," Bart agreed. Since it was inevitable that he should have to meet the Lemmon girls, now might be as good a time as any. A part of his old self-consciousness returned when, in washing up, he discovered that his left eye showed traces of going into mourning. He had been practically unconscious of it until now, and his uncle had not remarked upon it, doubtless believing that it might be a reason for holding back from the Lemmon supper.

Bart put on a new suit of puncher's clothes, knotted a new neckerchief about himself, and followed his uncle over to the Lemmon home.

His unconventional departure from that residence on an earlier occasion was forgotten in Jim Lemmon's enthusiasm to discuss his fight with Keffer. Jim continued harping on this one string until hearing it got to be almost as embarrassing to Bart as the prospect of meeting the girls.

"Uncle Sam was a-tellin' me 'bout yore daughters," he said.

Jim Lemmon perked up, finally willing to drop the subject of the fight. "They're all loco to meet you, son," he said. "They're upstairs—primpin', I reckon," he added with a significant wink. "So Sam'l told you 'bout 'em, did he?"

"He said he'd like t' see me married to one of 'em," said Dunn rather unexpectedly, having nothing else to say.

Jim Lemmon was all attention.

"Which one 'd you like to marry?" he asked eagerly.

Bart reflected on the group of sour-faced females he had seen alighting from the buckboard. There was not much choice in that group.

"Waal—er—which one would you sorter recommend?" he asked lamely.

Lemmon seemed disappointed.

"Oh, then, y' ain't got no ch'ice, I reckon," he said.

"I was just sayin'," Bart replied, "what Uncle Sam wanted me to say. Sorter a duty. I'd go a long ways to please Uncle Sam."

"Waal, you look 'em over, an' make yore own ch'ice," suggested Jim. "I reckon I hear 'em comin' now."

Within the next ten minutes Bart Dunn had passed through the ordeal of meeting all six of the Lemmon girls, and found himself sitting at the Lemmon table with the prospect of a nervous hour before him.

Jim Lemmon sat at one end of the table, Halliday on one side, and the simpering Fanny on the other. Bart had been placed at the other end. On each side of him was a trio of the girls, decked out to look their prettiest—their prettiest, that is, for the Lemmon girls.

The girls, he could now see, were even worse than the view from the buckboard had made them. No wonder, he reflected, they were single, despite Jim's reputed wealth. The Lemmon parents themselves were not bad-looking folks. Jim Lemmon, if not handsome, had a certain Lincolnlike cast of countenance that lent a trace of distinction, and Fanny Lemmon had a sort of motherly charm about her.

But just as a half-caste is said often to inherit the worst traits of both races, so the Lemmon girls seemed to have gathered in the most unsatisfactory physical characteristics of both Jim and Fanny Lemmon.

All of them had inherited old Jim's strongly Roman nose, which rather fitted the big-faced, gaunt ex-miner, but was ill-adapted to feminine beauty.

And all but the misnamed Iago had fallen heir to the prominent teeth that Fanny must have had in her youth, although toothaches in middle-age had removed this outstanding feature in the mother. Especially did Cleopatra, the homeliest of the sextet, show her teeth frequently and generously in smiles possibly meant to be coy.

Cleopatra, Desdemona, and Iago, just the ones who were lacking in stature, had inherited the fleshly tendencies of Fanny Lemmon; while Portia, Octavia, and Ophelia, who could have stood considerable upholstery on their high altitudes of frames, seemed mostly skin and bone.

Iago, the blond one with the less prominent teeth, might have been passable except for a pair of eyes slightly crossed. Cleo, who sat next to Dunn on the right side, was inclined to crowd him somewhat.

This may have been for several reasons, but very likely was due to her general corpulency. Despite her fat and dumpy figure generally, however, she had inherited the long neck of Jim Lemmon.

If Bart Dunn had any emotions other than embarrassment as he sat there, they were principally of pity, which gradually subsided, however, as the meal progressed, for despite the fact that there were mirrors in the Lemmon home the six girls showed plainly that they had no mean opinion of themselves.

Their dresses, too, were expensive; they had taken after Jim, inasmuch as they seemed to pay the highest prices for raiment with the least results. Their gowns ran largely to brilliant pinks and violent purples, and Desdemona carried a feather fan.

Dunn decided that the cross-eyed Iago was the most attractive of the lot; but he agreed that if the best qualities of all of them had been united in one girl he would have been a long way from love at first sight.

As the Lemmons piled Bart's plate high with wholesome food, the young puncher yearned for the trail with the fire at evening and the frijoles bubbling in the pot, and sizzling bacon and scalding coffee minus sweetening or milk. There would be silence there; the volubility of the Lemmon girls was getting on his nerves.

They were full of conversation about the girl they had visited that

morning—the girl who had been "'way back East to Topeka." They giggled frequently, particularly Cleopatra of the ducklike body and the swanlike neck.

As great wedges of Fanny Lemmon's succulent pie were served, however, it became evident that the Lemmons had talked themselves out. The pie was eaten in comparative silence, except for a remark from Cleopatra, who passed the toothpicks and helped herself generously. The silence continued.

Not being sure of the proprieties, no one wanted to be the first to rise from the table. The silence and the lack of action became painful.

Previously no one had mentioned Bart's discolored eye, but now Jim Lemmon, feeling that this might be as good a subject as any, made this the general topic of conversation. It was a badge of honor, Jim Lemmon intimated, although he also found it humorous in its way, and on one occasion he leaned back to give fuller vent to a hearty laugh.

Possibly mistaking this for a gesture of rising from the table, the Lemmon family pushed back their chairs and rose as one individual. Bart followed suit. After that dinner he could stand anything, and he managed to get through a half hour's visit in Fanny's "guest room," although he was careful to fight shy of any further abuse of the family album.

When he finally made his devoirs and took leave with his uncle, he breathed in the fresh night air with delight. The day itself had been somewhat warm, but now the crisp breeze swept down from the mountains.

"Waal," asked Samuel Halliday, when he and his nephew had returned to their own home, "I reckon we had a right smart evenin' o' pleasure."

"I reckon so," Bart agreed without much enthusiasm.

"Nice gals," suggested Halliday. "Not so purty, but—"

"Yeah," said Bart, "thet's right, Uncle Sam."

He looked over at his uncle.

"I wanta ask you somethin', Uncle Sam," he said. "Was th' Lemmon gals the reason you got me here in Spring Green?"

Samuel Halliday hesitated.

"Waal," he admitted, "I ain't sayin' as it wasn't part of it."

"Then I'm goin' to play squar' with you, Uncle Sam," his nephew told him. "I'll slap my cards right on th' table, as y' might say."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Sam Bass Loot?

AFTER fifty-seven years is the gold to be found that Sam Bass, notorious Texas outlaw, removed from a Texas and Pacific Railroad train at the East Dallas station? He and his gang held up the train in broad daylight and made good their escape with the sacks of gold carried on the train.

Now a map has been produced that purports to show where two hundred thousand dollars in gold is buried at Oak Cliff, a Dallas suburb. This is believed to include the T. and P. R. R. gold. The same map is said to show that the Bass gang had a rendezvous near Dallas.

The land on which the loot is supposed to be buried is owned by Marcus Plowman, and he has given several persons the right to dig for the buried treasure, though Plowman admits that no one has yet unearthed any of the spoils of the Sam Bass gang.

Harold J. Ashe.

"Shell out, kiddo"

Clever— ?

In the rôle of rescuing hero he entered Janice's life—and in his wake came doubt and uncertainty

By JACK WOODFORD

JANICE was just about through for the evening. Only one customer tarried over his salad sandwich and tea in the small shop, just around the corner from Lawrence Avenue.

The customer somehow disturbed Janice. That she had never seen the man before this evening she was quite positive. There were things about him that she instinctively disliked, for no reason that she could put into words.

He was so smooth-looking, so altogether immaculate and theatrical.

Glancing at him again, out of the corner of her eye, she judged him to be about thirty-five.

There was a bluish, clean look about his smoothly shaven firm chin. His teeth were even and white, and his black eyes matched the slick black sheen of his hair, which was brushed smoothly back from his forehead. He had long, dark lashes, and a way of looking lazily out from under them that was disconcerting.

Possibly he was an actor, Janice thought. Certainly he dressed much as did the younger among the occasional vaudeville actors who drifted in now and then from the theater over on Wilson Avenue.

When he had ordered, Janice had been struck with the deep, musically vibrating tone of his voice. Soft and liquid it was, a rich barytone, with just the tinge of some foreign accent. Altogether, she told herself, he was too "pretty." Prettiness, in a man, did not appeal to her.

Just as she was deciding that she disliked the man heartily, because of his bold, appraising glances, another man, short, swarthy, and rough-looking, entered the shop.

"Too late to get a cup of tea and a sandwich?" the newcomer asked.

"Certainly not," returned Janice courteously, mindful that the woman who owned the shop needed every cent. "Won't you be seated?"

The newcomer glanced out of the window, then suddenly swung around and, facing her, with his back to the window, pointed a stubby black automatic her way.

"Shell out, kiddo," he said. Janice's heart nearly leaped out of her mouth. It was Saturday night. The neighborhood banks had closed at noon. There was a comparatively large amount of money in the cash register.

"*Move!*" the man snapped throatily, "or I'll let the light through you, sure as—" She quickly went to the register and punched the "No Sale" key; the drawer slid open. Tremblingly she handed all of the bills to him. He snatched them, tucked them into a pocket, and said:

"Come out into the kitchen, baby. I'm going out the back way—I happen to know that the cook's gone home, so don't try to string me. You're a sweet mamma, any way a guy looks at you, an' I'm going to let you kiss me goodby—if you hurry."

Janice backed away from him, but he jammed the gun into his coat pocket and, still covering her with it through his pocket, urged her along toward the kitchen door.

Before the door she halted, but the intruder gave her one final push and she bumped against the swinging door and stumbled through into the kitchen. A momentary blackness rushed to her head. Her knees suddenly doubled beneath her, and she slipped to the floor.

At this juncture she heard the sound of a scuffle. Almost helpless with fright, but not unconscious, she lay supine upon the floor. Presently the back door opened and then immediately closed.

Gathering strength to rise, Janice struggled to her feet and turned on the light. As she did so the back door opened again.

She was about to scream when, to her amazement, not the stocky man, but the customer whose looks she had disliked, came back through the door.

"Here," he said, holding out his hand, "is your dough. I got it out of his pocket. Here, also, is his gun. You ought to keep one around the place."

Mechanically, Janice took the weapon and the wad of bills.

"But how—" she began. "What on earth—"

"I crawled behind the tables to the kitchen door while you were handing him the money, figuring I'd go out the back way and come around front to nail him when he came out.

"He was so interested in you he must have forgotten all about me. When I heard him say he was going out the back door I decided to wait for him out there.

"He'll never succeed. A young man who doesn't keep his mind on his business any more than *he* does ought to take a correspondence course in bookkeeping and settle down to a life of thrift, rather than one of bold, bad enterprise!

"Still, I ought not to criticize. Had I been about to rob you, when I saw you I'd forget all about my plans too."

She blushed and was about to rebuke him, but thought better of it, in view of what he had just done. After a pause and a bold smile he returned to his subject:

"When you two came out into the kitchen, I waited until he let go of the gun in his pocket, in order to kiss you, and then jumped him. Outside he got away while I was getting his gun and your money from him."

"Oh!" breathed Janice. "How can I ever thank you? You endangered your very life!"

"Where would one find a worthier cause?" he asked, with a graceful shrugging movement of his shoulders and arms. "You're white as a sheet," he went on. "Sit down at one of the tables." She obeyed him mechanically.

"Now *I'll* play waiter," he told her. Going to the service counter he secured a napkin, draped it over his arm, drew a glass of water from the cooler, and returned to put the glass down before her with a flourish.

"*Do* try our excellent water!" he advised, standing at her elbow. Despite the fact that her heart was still hammering, Janice laughed aloud and drank the water.

"Isn't it about time you were closing now?" he asked a moment later. "It's pretty late, and nobody except holdup men are likely to come in this time of the evening."

"Yes," she admitted. "I was just going to close up and go home when you came in—and stayed so long—thank goodness you did—there's no telling—"

"I suppose you never suspected, or dreamed, twenty minutes ago," he went on with a twinkle in his bright eyes, "that you were going home escorted by no less a person than the customer whom you eyed so frostily when he presumed to stare at you—he not being able to remove his eyes from the contemplation of such an exquisitely pretty girl."

"Now, *please*," objected Janice, "don't talk like that. You've been so wonderful—don't spoil it."

He became comically solemn, drawing down the corners of his mouth and knitting his fingers across his stomach as he stood across from where she sat at the table, in ludicrous imitation of the comic supplement conventional ministerial type.

"I promise to be good," he told her, "if you'll let me see you safely home."

"It's only a short way—and it will be ever so kind of you. I'd be afraid to go alone *now*—after what nearly happened; especially as I have to carry nearly two hundred dollars that's here."

She glanced down at the wad of bills now reposing on the table before her, with the revolver beside them.

Rising, she put on her coat and hat, shoved the bills into her purse, gingerly carried the revolver over and put it behind the counter, and turned off the lights within the store. In the street, after she had locked the door, he took her arm possessively.

II.

"It's not far," she told him; "just up Kenmore, two blocks, and then a block east on Argyle—but perhaps we ought to see a police officer and report the—"

He laughed aloud.

"It's easy to see that you haven't been in Chicago long. The common or garden variety of holdup wouldn't interest a policeman; they're too busy with fancy robberies—there's always plenty to go around, and one for each cop to work on every evening, if he's ambitious. Never call a cop in Chicago unless you're prepared to pay him well to do his duty.

"And, besides, I've no grudge against that stickup. I could present him with a box of cigars in gratitude for what he's done for me; if it hadn't been for him you would have been lost to me entirely.

"Why, you were eying me poisonously before he came in—and now—it's a great, and eternally queer, life!

"Isn't there some way we could go to your home that's lots farther than the way you usually go?"

Janice did not quite like his glibness. She had never known any man who talked so easily and freely in the presence of a lady. He seemed so appallingly without diffidence; and yet, there *was* something jolly about it, too.

"W-e-e-l," she hesitated, not at all sure that she ought to say it, but tempted because of the loveliness of the night, after the long, hard, confining day in the lunchroom, "perhaps we might walk down to Clarendon Avenue, by the lake, and go around to Argyle that way; it's much farther."

"I wish we could go by way of Gary, Indiana," he told her smoothly. "Still, Clarendon-by-the-Lake is something."

It was queer, Janice thought, that he should be so utterly unconcerned over what had nearly happened. Down home they would have talked about the attempted holdup for years, would have dated subsequent events by placing them at such and such a time after the holdup.

The men folks would have considered that she should be in a state of nervous collapse for days after such an occurrence. Still, his attitude did not displease her. City people were totally different; and, after all, worse things happened every hour in Chicago.

When, a few minutes later, they reached the lake and Clarendon Beach, it was so deliciously cool there that Janice yielded to his persuasion and let him lead her out upon the stone porch of the large Municipal Bathing Pavilion, to sit down upon one of the benches and watch the bathers at play beneath the huge electric spotlights, mounted upon gaunt steel supports.

"Tell me," he began, when they had seated themselves and he had lighted a cigarette, "how a bit of a girl like you comes to be running a lunchroom all alone? It's the last thing any one would expect to see you doing. You don't look the type at all.

"One would expect, seeing you upon the street, that if you worked at all, it must be in a little specialty shop, or the lingerie section of some ritzy store on Sheridan Road; or, possibly, in a beauty salon—"

It had been a long time since Janice had enjoyed a chance to confide in any one—and there was a lovely moon. The jolly voices of the night bathers drifted up to them. It was wonderful to be *sitting down* in a cool breeze, after a day upon one's feet in a hot room.

"Well," began Janice, a little surprised at herself for so willingly becoming confidential, "you see, the lady who ran the lunchroom when I applied for a position there as waitress can't stand more than an hour or so on her feet.

"She seldom comes to the store any more; in fact, she's never coming back to stay. She's getting ready to go to California to live with her son, who has a good position out there.

"I'm going to buy the lunchroom and run it. There's a comfortable profit in the little shop, and it will grow—is growing. With enough capital the store next to it could be leased, too, and the partition knocked out, and a fine business made of the lunchroom.

"Of course, that's out of the question for the present; but, anyway, the woman will sell me the store, fixtures, good will, and lease for fifteen hundred."

"And you've saved up fifteen hundred dollars?"

"Well, no, I haven't fifteen hundred dollars; I haven't fifty dollars to my name. But some one is coming to town very shortly who has fifteen hundred dollars to buy the store with for me—for us, that is—"

"Oh! A sweetheart, eh?"

"My *fiancé*. We are to be married as soon as he arrives."

"That's a terrible blow!" he sighed.

"Now, don't be silly!"

"*Not* being silly—I'm downright heartbroken."

She turned a glance of reproof upon him, but his eyes sparkled so merrily back at her that she withheld any further objections.

"Somewhere," she said very softly, "maybe even among the bright voices we hear down there upon the beach right now, there is another girl for you.

"You are very nice, and very brave. You deserve to be made extraordinarily happy. I hope you will find a lovely girl."

"I have!" His implication was unmistakable, and he was serious now. Janice rose from the bench.

"Don't tell me you want to go *already!*" he exploded, rising hurriedly.

"Really, I must. It's getting late, and I've got to be at the lunch room early in the morning." Making a wry face, he gave in and they started off.

"Tell me something about this luckiest man alive, your *fiancé*," he begged, as they turned down Clarendon Avenue, walking north toward Argyle.

Janice felt that she should not be so loquacious to an utter stranger; but he had proved himself such a wonderful friend, at the risk of his very life, and she was alone in the city, and more than a little lonesome.

"Well, you see, we lived on adjoining farms, his father's and mine, in Nedry, Iowa, a little town you probably never heard of. My father married again, after my own mother died, and his new wife didn't take any particular fancy to me.

"And yet, I had to stay on at the farm, working like a machine; the lunch room work seems like play compared to it.

"Robert, my *fiancé*, came to me one day and insisted that I accept some money he had saved up and go to the city to find a position where I wouldn't have to work so hard.

"I was of age then. He asked me to marry him, and I told him that I would, whenever he wished.

"We've always loved each other, ever since we were kids. I had no hesitancy in taking the money and coming on, especially when he told me that he would arrange to follow, so soon as he conveniently could, and that we would be married when he got here."

"How old were you then?" put in her new friend.

"Eighteen," replied Janice. "Why?"

"Oh—nothing. Go on. I'm very much interested in what you're telling me."

"I came on to Chicago. Found a position in a mail order office, which I detested. Lived out here on the north side, in a furnished room. And then, one day, I saw the 'Waitress Wanted' sign in that little restaurant.

"The place looked so very neat and cozy. I wanted to work with real things, like food and dishes; I was so tired of handling crisp bits of paper, poking slips of things into files and taking them out again, without knowing, or caring, what it was all about.

"I applied and got the job. Then the owner was taken sick. I wrote Bob all the details. He said that he was lonesome and tired of farm life. He'd saved up enough to buy the lunch room. He's coming on to Chicago, right away."

"And you're content to keep right on working in the restaurant, after you're married?"

"I'll simply love it. It will be wonderful—knowing that it's my own, or at least half mine—and that the business I'm helping to build will belong to Bob and me."

"Do you really love him?" her companion suddenly asked, after a short silence.

"Why, of course," replied Janice, without a moment's hesitation. They were before the building which contained her room. She started up the steps and turned to say good night.

"Good night, little princess," he said sadly. "You haven't seen the last of me yet, though—and I'd like to give you something to think over, if you don't mind.

"I haven't the slightest doubt but what this Arcadian hero of yours is a worthy chap. You two were thrown together by circumstances over which neither one of you had any control. You grew up together; you became, probably, like brother and sister to each other.

"He has loaned you money, rescued you from intolerable circumstances. He is now going to have your dreams come true by making it possible for you to own the little lunch room you've taken such an odd fancy to—all very nice and *logical;* but thoughts of *con-*

venience and expedience do not predicate love, my dear girl; are you *sure* that what you feel for the 'Bob' person is *love?*"

Without waiting for a reply he turned, lifted his cap, and strode off.

III.

For several moments Janice stood very still upon the spot where he had left her, watching his tall, slim form stride off down the street. Then she went on up into the building to her tiny, hot room, at the end of the hall, on the third floor. She undressed thoughtfully.

"'*Is it love?*'" The question kept stabbing at her consciousness. It was as though some one had taken hold of her and roughly shaken her. "Is it love?" The question repeated itself over and over again in her mind.

She glanced at the pale, wistful-eyed girl in the mirror. The girl stared back questioningly, with wide, round, startled eyes.

The question pursued her even under the covers, though she pulled them over her head, hot as the room was.

The following evening Janice, as she had half expected that she would, saw the young man enter the shop again, at about the same time that the attempted holdup had occurred the night before.

"Good evening!" he called out confidently, as though he were a friend of years standing.

"Good evening," she greeted.

"You say that to every one," he charged. "Name's Rickey; say 'Good evening, Rickey,'" he ordered, with polite insistence. Janice returned, banteringly:

"Service is the policy here. We strive to please the most exacting—good evening, *Mr.* Rickey."

"No, not '*Mr.* Rickey,'" he mimicked in a ludicrous falsetto exaggeration of her own voice, "just *Rickey.*"

"All right, Just Rickey; what are you going to have this evening?"

"You."

"Now you're being silly again," her tone became a trifle sharp.

"Please forgive me; but, really, what I came in for is to know whether you won't come out with me and have a bite to eat somewhere else? Not that this isn't the finest lunch room on the north side—only, it occurred to me that maybe you were tired of always eating here, and would like a change."

He must be a mind reader, Janice decided. He was so clever and thoughtful. She *was* tired of eating the food that she served all day. Still, was it fair to Bob?

She decided that it was, since she would not hesitate to tell Bob all about it, just as freely as she would have told him all about a friendly companionship with some girl—if there had been any chance for such—if all of the girls in the district hadn't been so impossibly frivolous and man-mad. Her decision made, Janice said:

"All right; tell you what I'll do: if you'll make it a 'Dutch Treat,' I'll go with you."

"But I'm not Dutch," he protested. "I'm French."

Janice laughed.

"I'm not Dutch either, but that's the only way I'll go."

"Why?"

"Because I'm engaged, and I don't think—"

"Goodness, what hair-splitting? If it's wrong for you to let me treat you, it's wrong for you to go out with me at all. And surely even your corn-fed friend wouldn't be so narrow as to deny you a platonic friend, just because the friend happened to be of the same sex he is?"

Janice frowned, she hoped, severely, and he hastened to make amends:

"Please forgive me; I didn't mean to speak lightly of your *fiancé.* I probably did so just because I'm jealous of him. I humbly apologize.

"Tell you what I'll do. I'll match you to see who pays for *both* dinners." He was so good-natured about it all that Janice found herself forgiving him completely and championing the "head" side of a dime.

He threw the coin into the air, caught it in his hand, slapped it down upon the back of his other hand and announced: "Tails! You lose!"

Half an hour later they sat down at a beautifully white table, in the largest hotel of the neighborhood.

It was the first time in her life that Janice had ever been inside such a hostelry. She was enchanted with the glistening white tablecloth of heavy linen, the dainty silver vase containing flowers, in the center of the table. She noticed that they were *real* flowers, and wondered how the management could afford to change them every day.

The pretty dosser over the back of her chair seemed to burn her back, and she hardly dared lean against it, for fear of harming it.

The bewildering menu, with its foreign names, and its almost incredible "teal" and "capon" left her speechless. She knew what they got for capons and teals down home—what they charged for them here was amazing; they got as much for half a capon as her father received from the buyers representing out-of-town hotels for a dozen whole ones.

She wondered how the management dared trust the heavy silver service to their diners in a city like Chicago, not knowing that the theft of this same silverware by some of the diners was paid for by every one who ate a meal there.

She was thinking of her humble little "card" at the lunchroom—which she had previously considered quite fancy—when she noticed that people at surrounding tables were staring at her. At once she felt uncomfortable and self-conscious. She thought of her cheap dress, which she had made herself.

Rickey noticed her obvious discomfiture and instantly guessed its cause.

"My dear, you're superb; don't worry about your clothes. I wouldn't have brought you here if I hadn't seen that you looked up to it.

"You're dressed more prettily than any one else present. That little frock you've got on is so simple and neat that it looks positively Parisy."

"Then why *are* people looking at me?"

"'People'? Isn't it mainly *the men* who are looking at you? Do you not see that they are frankly admiring you?"

The waiter came to take their order, and Rickey thoughtfully ordered for both, not permitting her to be embarrassed by her ignorance of the foreign items upon the menu.

When the waiter had gone he resumed softly:

"You're soothing upon the male optic nerve; that's why they are looking at you. Such clear, soft skin, natural healthy color and bright eyes and lovely, naturally golden hair is not often seen in this high-tone hashery. You're like—" he searched for a minute, "like Aphrodite, after reducing. No wonder they look at you!

"I'll match you another dime to see whether or not I eat you." He saw her look of dismay at his flippant words and suggested quickly:

"Dance?"

They had finished their *hors d'oeuvres* and the orchestra had started a fox trot.

"Oh, no—I'm sorry," she said. "It isn't that I don't want to; I simply don't know how." She blushed and wondered how it would be at all possible to tell such a sophisticated young man that where she came from dancing was still thought to be a device of the devil.

"Impossible," he denied. "Any one as graceful and fairylike as you are has it born in them—and this fox-trot thing—it's a cinch. Anyway, the floor's so packed no one will see, even if you do make a few mistakes at the

start. Let me show you what you can do if you half-try."

Much against her better judgment, she rose and he escorted her out of the loge at the side of the dancing floor, in which they had been sitting. Out upon the polished floor space reserved for dancers, Janice felt as though she had dived into ice water over her head.

The jazz band was beating out a melody that seemed to throb through her like a fever. A potent evocation for some latent sense of rhythm within her, it caused her feet to glide about the floor with surprising ease.

Rickey controlled her lithe young body with just the suggestion of a push or pull, so that she seemed to be dancing expertly, with an almost magical facility.

"Used to be a dancing instructor," he explained. "Quit it because there wasn't one customer in a thousand as graceful and as easy to teach as you are."

"You *will* persist in flattering me, won't you?" she reproved.

"*Because I love you!*" he sang with the song that was at the moment being played, the words happening to fit in perfectly at the time.

The dance over, they went back to the table for the rest of their dinner.

"Tell you what let's do," said Rickey as they finished up with two pink frozen sorbets; "it's a little late, but the moon will be delightful. Let me go around to the 'Drive Your Own' garage and pick up a car. We'll go for a drive out along the north shore."

The rhythm of the dance was still in Janice's head. Like a spell of enchantment, the consciousness of excitement and strange beauty was upon her, seeming to make her unfold to new delights of which she had never dreamed before.

She was intoxicated with the sight of wonderfully gowned women, men in sleek evening wear—brightness, music, flowers, laughter—like some strange new and delightful world.

Surely Bob would not object to this interlude of hectic pleasure. When they were married they should have to work very hard; there wouldn't be much time for fun. Not that she'd object!

IV.

THE car was secured from the garage, and in a few minutes they were rolling along smoothly on the even surface of Sheridan Road. The air, which, a moment before, had been dead and stifling, was now rushing in cool waves against her face.

After a time Rickey stopped the car beside a wooded embankment close to the lake. In Hubbard's Woods.

"Enjoying yourself?" he inquired.

"Oh, wonderfully! But doesn't it cost an awful lot to rent a car? You must be a millionaire, taking me to such an expensive place for dinner, renting a car, never worrying about or even mentioning your job." He laughed heartily.

"Me—a millionaire. What a notion! I'm a poor but honest working men. I sell steel—on a straight commission basis. Since I receive no salary, my time is my own. It costs next to nothing to rent a car.

"Don't let it worry you. I've never known a girl who could be 'taken out' so economically as you; I'm positively ashamed of myself, the way I've treated you."

There was a full moon riding high over the blue-black, sparkling waters of the lake. In some near-by home a radio set was receiving an excellent program, which they could hear filtering softly through the trees. Janice felt that she would remember the moment always.

A moment later she *knew* that she would, for Rickey took her into his arms, lifting her light body off of the seat to his lap. She struggled, but he held her tightly.

"Little angel," he breathed, "I can't help this. I must tell you that I love you. Please don't be angry with me. How can I possibly keep from telling you—you make yourself irresistible without at all trying to—probably, in fact, that's the very secret of it."

"You ought to be able to keep from saying such things to me, after I've told you that I'm engaged," Janice told him firmly.

"But could Bob possibly love you as I do?"

"Bob loves me, I'm sure."

"You don't *sound* as though you were so very sure of it. Just give yourself time and you'll believe as I do that your engagement to Bob was merely a matter of propinquity."

"But I'm *promised* to him!"

"That's just it. You've mistaken his kindness for love. If Bob is the right sort of fellow, and you explain things to him, he'll release you—I feel sure of that. He's *got* to.

"He'll see that you've changed. You're no country girl any more. You're bright and clever; together, dear, we could go far beyond anything you've planned.

"You're made for something better than serving meals in a lunch room—not that you don't considerably raise that profession by your connection with it."

Without giving her any indication of his intention to do so, he pressed his lips down upon hers. She jerked from him and withdrew to the farthest corner of the seat.

"Please let's drive back," she said, calmly enough, though her heart was filled with rage, rage at herself that she could have so thrilled to his kiss, promised, as she was, to another.

It seemed cruel that she should be in such a position. Before her a new life might well open up, with Rickey, a life full of beauty, far removed from the drabness that had always marked her living, marked it just as unmistakably in the city, as back in Iowa.

Was she, she wondered, one of those unlucky ones born under some fateful star, doomed to a commonplace, unlovely life? She bit her lip angrily, as she noticed that the little trefoil device, containing a miniature light, on the radiator cap of the car, was becoming blurred to her vision.

What right, she asked herself angrily, had she to think of a life with Bob as commonplace and unlovely? What had come over her? She looked far out into the somnolent complacency of the lake, as the road paralleled it for a long stretch.

Thoughts bobbed into her head unbidden: Bob, in overalls, his hair creeping out over the edges of his ears; a corncob pipe in his mouth; his face tanned, weather-beaten to a hard bronze; his slow manner of speech; his equally slow way of thinking.

Rickey, in his immaculate clothing, his dark good looks, smooth, white skin, nimble mind, easy fluency.

When he turned to her again, as they passed through Winnetka, she listened silently as he talked and drove.

"You're just a wee bit stubborn," he said in a tone of voice that took the sting out of the words; "you made up your mind and you're determined to *keep* it made up.

"I honestly believe that, deep down in your heart, you recognize, now, your mistake in having become engaged to Bob. But you're going to go ahead and marry him, even though you're beginning to suspect that you do not love him, just for the sake of keeping your mind made up.

"Janice, dear, you *must* reconsider. Your happiness depends upon it; his happiness depends upon it, and so does mine. You two couldn't get along well together. *Your* mind is capable of infinite expansion."

Janice was silent. Something deep within her was agreeing with him; and yet, something else—was it just loyalty, she wondered?—was very violently disagreeing with him.

It was as though a tiny, almost incoherent voice that did not use words at all for its medium of expression which was whispering to her. It was as though the heart itself were meekly striving, in its own language, for recognition, against the dictates of the mind. He cut in upon her thoughts with:

"Afraid of your own best judgment—that's what you are. But forgive me; I won't pester you any more to-night. Think it over, though. I haven't given up; I just don't want to spoil your ride. I won't say anything more about it."

"Thanks, awfully," she said with relief: "you're really so considerate. And it's a mighty good thing you are, because your ability as a salesman is—" She didn't finish it and he, understandingly, after a minute, said:

"How could one be other than gracious with *you?*"

V.

At home, after their ride, Janice sat down alone in her room for the purpose of thinking things out straight. Was she doing wrong? she asked herself. Was she letting herself be superficially attracted by a surface glitter?

Because she happened to love to read, had she let herself be fascinated merely because she had at last met a man who looked and talked like a character in a book, as opposed to the dull, plodding, slow-witted men she had known at home?

And, on the other hand, had she any right to turn from Bob's devotion to her, and his demonstrated sincere regard for her, even though her heart turned from him to another—as she was afraid that it was about to do?

Hadn't Bob a very definite right to *his* happiness? Wasn't it more important to consider Bob's happiness than her own?

She decided that she had no right to break Bob's heart.

But the decision, though she knew that she would stick to it, brought her no peace of mind. Quite the contrary, in fact.

Why was it, she wondered, that love was always so complicated—even in real life, just as in books? Was it a test of some sort that every one had to go through some time, in order to prove themselves really deserving of the priceless gift of true love?

At any rate one thing was clear to her: She would tell Bob the truth, but if he would not release her from their engagement—until she was more certain of her own mind—she would marry him as she had promised. On this final decision she lay down to sleep.

When, the following afternoon, she got Mrs. Halsey to come to the lunch room to watch things for an hour or so, while she went to the station to meet Bob, she was still rather undecided as to what, exactly, her course of action would be.

She was near to panic with the realization that the crucial hour had come. All of the rest of her life might be altered within the hour.

Rickey, thoughtful as ever, had sent around a taxi to take her to the station. He had instructed the driver to tell her that the trip down was paid for in advance. He had even sent a note by the driver, telling her that he had engaged a room for Bob. The key to the room was inclosed with the note.

At the station, while she waited for the train, Janice made up her mind to one thing: she must tell Bob all. But, later, when she saw him, her determination to do this almost fled.

She hardly recognized him. When he swooped down upon her, neat traveling bag in hand, he looked just like any well-dressed city man, so far as his clothing and outward appearance were concerned; but his shoulders were broader, his face healthily tanned.

Before every one he swept her diminutive form into his arms and kissed her. All in a moment, understanding came to her, as she stood strained against his big, protecting body.

It *was* Bob that she loved. What subtle influence could ever for a moment have caused her to think otherwise?

"Oh, Bob!" she breathed. "You mustn't! You mustn't, before all of these people!"

But he was too happy to notice her strange, tense manner. He swept her along with him toward the exit, chatting volubly. She had never heard him talk so much.

It was as though his release from the farm had opened some prison door within him, behind which he had previously confined a different sort of Bob, waiting and longing for emancipation. She remembered that something of the sort had taken place with her, too, when she had first come to the city.

"Everything's lovely," he told her. "Dad found a first-rate hired man to take my place. I sold out all of my own personal things—stock I'd raised myself — everything. Got the fifteen hundred, and more, right with me, in cash.

"Didn't know anybody up here except you. Wasn't taking any chances on having trouble getting a check cashed.

"We'll be regular folks, Janice, dear; isn't it wonderful, after all those dull days down on the farm? I never minded them so much when you were there—but after you'd gone! Lordy! It was as though heaven and earth had passed away and left a great hole with no edge around it."

She remained silent as they climbed into a taxi and started north. She hoped that presently he would talk himself out. Then, maybe, she could summon up courage to tell him what she *must* tell him, in all fairness to both men.

"Let's get married right away, tomorrow," he ended up, beaming down at her and drawing her slim form into the strong circle of his arm. She looked back up at him tragically, finding time, however, to note with approval that his hair was neatly clipped and that he was really handsome, even as judged by city standards.

"Bob," she began, hesitantly, "I've got something to tell you." And then she told him everything, clear down to the fact of Rickey having engaged a room for him.

He said nothing at all, during her recital, never once interrupting her. When she had finished he remarked only:

"You say that this Rickey chap is very clever?"

"W-e-e-l, he's—"

"And you don't consider me, er—precisely *clever,* do you, Janie?"

"Oh, Bob! Why put it *that* way? And, anyway, I *know,* now, that it is you I love."

"Let's not say any more about it," he suggested, "for the present. However, this thing will have to be worked out in the right way before we can talk marriage. I wouldn't for the world have you marry me while there is the slightest notion in your pretty head that it might be some sort of *duty.*

"Is that the post office over there?" he broke off to ask, as they traveled slowly through the traffic on Clark Street.

"Yes," Janice told him mechanically.

"Driver, stop at the post office a minute, please," he ordered, opening the glass panel in the front division of the cab. "Got to get a letter off," he explained cryptically to Janice, as the cab stopped and he swung out and up the post office steps.

Janice watched him mount the steps, her heart heavy. All of the spring had gone out of his step. She had, she told herself, ruined everything.

That it was Bob she truly loved, she knew now beyond any question of a doubt. But he would never believe that there was not some reservation in her mind.

How happy they could have been,

she told herself, and *why was it* that Rickey had come into her life? Providence was most unkind. She furtively dabbed at her hot eyes as she sat alone in the taxi, thinking of poor Bob's dragging steps up the post office ramp.

It was a long time before he came out. When at last he did, he spoke cheerfully of matters "down home," bravely pretending to be happy.

But Janice knew only too well that she had made him miserable, upon what should have been the happiest of his life's days. She hung her head and gazed dejectedly out of the taxi window.

VI.

It was necessary that she go immediately back to the lunch room to relieve Mrs. Halsey, who was white of face, and almost ready to drop when Janice arrived.

Rather glad, Janice was, of the opportunity to work and think alone. Bob, apparently, was almost relieved at their temporary parting.

He bid a cheerful good-by to her from the taxi, when she got out before the lunch room; then he went on to the room Rickey had engaged for him, without once looking back, though Janice watched for him to do so.

All afternoon, while she worked, she waited for Bob to come to the lunch room; and, at dinner time, she thought surely he would appear. But the hours passed, and there was no sign of him.

At last, after closing up, she decided to go to his rooming house. Probably there would be some sort of lobby, where they could talk; perhaps Bob would take her out for a walk.

How lovely it would be to walk with him, to show him the things that had interested her, when she had first come to the city; watch his eyes open wide at the sights she could show him: the huge Municipal Beach, the Lake Shore Drive, and its constant pageant of beautiful motor cars!

How delightful it would have been to rest her arm upon his big, strong one and walk closely to him, side by side, as they often had through the countryside at home, talking so understandingly, without ever a thought of any one coming between them!

And she had ruined all that; her heart was near to breaking as she drew close to the address that had been contained in the note from Rickey.

The building proved to be close to the edge of a run-down section on the north side, where two twisted short streets joined.

A slatternly old woman shuffled up some steps that led down into a basement doorway. The woman eyed Janice strangely when she asked that the young man who had come in that afternoon for the room Rickey had recommended be notified that she was downstairs.

"He's in the hospital," the woman said, with an abruptness that was nothing short of brutal.

"In the *hospital?*" Janice gasped. "*In the hospital!* Oh! I see! You just don't understand who it is that I'm looking for. I suppose more than one man came in for a room this afternoon, of course."

"No, no—I know who you mean," interrupted the woman, "the country jake. Sure. I know. There was a big fight in his room. He was hurt. They took him to the Grant Brothers' hospital."

As fast as she could get there by taxi, Janice rushed out to the hospital on the northwest side. Explaining that she was affianced to the injured man, she was at last dubiously admitted, after some complications due to the fact that it was a time at which visitors were not permitted entry.

"H'lo," Bob greeted her cheerfully, from his bed in a small ward wherein he was, at the time, the only patient.

"*Bob!*" she cried, kneeling down by the side of the bed, taking one of his big, rough hands into her own tiny

ones: "Bob. How badly are you hurt?" She tried to force back the tears, but her lips trembled so that she scarce could speak, and the film of smarting tears almost blinded her eyes.

"Hurt! Shucks! I'm not hurt. Got a wallop over the head with a billy that split open my scalp. Knocked me out for a time. They insist that I've got to lie here until morning.

"I've been hurt worse on the farm, lots of times, and went right on working." His head was bandaged, and there was blood upon the bandage.

"But how did it happen?"

"Stickups; they came into my room. They got my wallet, and everything that was in it," he added.

Janice tried to speak, but it was impossible. Looking into his cheerful face, the tears fell fast. She was thinking of the years it had taken him to save that money.

"Don't mind, dear," she managed at last. "I'll keep on working. If I have to give up the place in the lunch room, when Mrs. Halsey sells it, I'll find another job, and I'll help you find one. We'll be married at once, and work together."

"Maybe," he pointed out, "the police will recover my wallet. They got one of the fellows. I knocked him out before they got me. But he didn't have the wallet on him, they said.

"And, anyway, how about this Rickey chap? Maybe you *do* truly love him. Maybe he could help you to buy the restaurant right away. Maybe you only thought you loved me because there was nobody else around, back home."

"Don't even talk that way," put in Janice, blushing. "I don't ever want to see Rickey again so long as I live—I'll never forgive him for having let you go to a questionable place."

"You're sure you don't love him?"

"Oh, Bob! *Please* believe me when I say that I don't."

He smiled up at her confidently. "I believe you, and I fully understand. There are men who could fool anybody." His eyes told her that she was fully forgiven. She threw herself upon her knees, by the side of the bed, putting her arms about him.

"You *sure* you're not badly hurt?" she asked, holding him so tightly that, strong as he was, he winced and looked up into her face in surprise.

"Honestly, it's nothing," he assured her, a new pleasure in his voice. "And," he added softly, "you *do* really care, don't you, Janie? It doesn't seem possible you could care for a big, awkward stiff like me!"

She lowered her head to his shoulder and hid her face against the side of his neck. He felt the damp of her tears.

"Why! What are you crying about, Janie, little angel? There's nothing for you to cry over."

"I'm crying," she got out, "to think that I ever for a moment supposed that any man but you could hold even a very tiny corner of my heart."

He raised her up and, kissing her, patted her head lovingly. Several moments later a surgeon came in and lifted her up, escorting her to the door with a polite:

"Please—he ought to get a nap now."

Outside the ward she asked the surgeon tensely:

"How badly hurt *is* he? I must know."

"It's almost nothing," the doctor told her with a shrug. "He really could go right now, only I thought it best that he stay until morning, so that I can have one more look at the abrasion on his head.

"There's not the slightest danger, but I don't want to take any chances on an infection setting up. I can check it easily, if I have him where I can watch."

He picked up a paper from the waiting room table and handed it to her.

"Seen this last edition?" he asked politely, "there's an account of the affair in it." Janice took the early

morning edition of one of the city's leading dailies and was confronted with a picture of Rickey.

The news article ran:

"Gentleman Sanders" is in trouble again. This nimble-witted ex-convict, who has kept the smartest minds at the detective bureau busy for several years, met his Waterloo yesterday in the person of a farmer from Iowa who, in company with several of his notorious companions, he succeeded in relieving of his wallet—but only after the gentleman from Iowa had handed him a haymaker which kept him in dreamland until the police arrived.

Unfortunately Gentleman Sanders's companions made off with their victim's wallet, and no trace has been found of them or the wallet.

However, the various rewards on Gentleman, which will naturally go to Iowa's husky son, should more than make up for the contents of the wallet.

Several of Gentleman Sanders's bigamous wives have been searching for the slick young college man who turned to crime.

Early the following morning, Janice went again to the hospital. Another surgeon, then on duty, cheerfully permitted "the hard-hitting gentleman from Iowa," as he called him, to leave with her in a taxi.

As they drove toward the lunch room, Bob took her into his arms, kissed her, and hugged her until Janice squealed for mercy.

"You're not so slow," she told him delightedly, "catching one of the keenest crooks in the city, and carrying on like this in a taxicab—how did you know that city people often kiss and hug in taxicabs?"

"Been getting the Chicago papers ever since you left," he laughed. "All I've thought about since you pulled out was you and Chicago; can't we be married *right away?*"

"I'll get Mrs. Halsey to come to the lunch room for an hour or so this afternoon, and we'll go down town and be married."

"O. K.," he grinned.

When they got to the lunch room and opened up, Bob sat down at a table and grandly ordered breakfast.

"I'll cook it for you myself, before the cook comes," Janice told him.

"No, you won't!" He looked very stern. "I won't have you cooking a meal in a restaurant for me—and I won't have you waiting on table in a restaurant. We're going to have plenty of capital now; we'll rent that store next door, and join it to this one.

"I understand that that reward money will run to nearly five thousand dollars. That 'll be enough to run the new restaurant on, on a good, substantial scale, to start, and yet leave a small, safety-first reserve, in case things don't go well, so that we can get into something else later, if needs be."

Just then the mailman came in. There was the usual deluge of advertising matter, which Janice threw on the table unopened; but, this time, there was also a letter for her. It was a large envelope, registered and insured. After signing for it, Janice excitedly tore it open.

A sheaf of currency fell out upon the table, and with the bills was a letter, which read:

MY OWN DEAR LITTLE JANICE:

From what you've told me about this Rickey chap, I'm afraid. I think he was in on that holdup you described, as a lookout, and that he decided to go after bigger game when he got inside the store and saw beautiful little you.

I am afraid he has engaged the room for me with intentions not wholly kindly; you may have let him trick you into telling him about the money I would have with me when I came to Chicago. It would be so easy for him to get both my money and my girl, if he's the wrong kind.

But he may not give me credit for a little smartness, myself; and he may be overestimating his hold on you. We'll see.

If I'm all wrong, I'll humbly apologize to him. But, in the meantime, I'm going to play safe and mail this money to you for safekeeping.

BOB.

THE END

"Not a sound from you"

World Brigands

When big business pays the fiddler it calls the tune: and its mad dance in 1940 involved the fate of five nations

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Great Commander," "The Pancake Princess," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IN the new order which grew out of the chaos following the World War, America gained control of the world money market, and by 1940 Europe was being forced to the wall. For years, the interest on their war debt to the United States had been paid by borrowing from American financiers; that source refused to lend more.

This situation was particularly desperate to the European war profiteers, who were caught between popular revolt on one hand and loss in money value if the American debt were repudiated. In England, Gus Tuttle, of cockney origin, had risen in 1940 to be Sir Augustus Tuttle, owner of Winstut Abbey, and the nation's most powerful financier. He stood to lose most; and this he was determined not to do.

He conspired with wealthy war profiteers from France, Italy, and Germany, to incite their countries to an allied attack on America, which would result not only in the cancellation of debts, but in acquiring American gold.

Too late the United States was aroused from its apathy, and the country became panicky when the impending attack became evident. There was

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 30

one hope. Eight millionaires representing the principal American industries held a secret conference with a retired general and admiral. The result of that conference was an enormous subscription from the millionaires; the promise of the military men to develop a scientific weapon which would make the Atlantic impassable; and the subsequent leasing of desert lands in Nevada, ostensibly for reclamation.

Alarmed by the strange confidence of the United States administration, and knowing they had no adequate defense, the agents of the European powers discovered this Nevada scheme, but in trying to learn its nature they were forbidden the territory by armed guards. Sir Augustus ordered his chief to attack the spot with an armored airplane.

Meanwhile, Dick Boswell had been removed from the airplane plant of his multimillionaire father in Detroit and commandeered into the service of a secret organization protecting the best interests of America. At Harvard, Dick had a brilliant athletic career, but his first new duty was to build in New York and London the reputation of a wild and silly ne'er-do-well.

This won him an introduction to Roger Tuttle, fool and spendthrift, and gained him an entrée to Winstut Abbey. All he seemed to achieve by this was the acquaintance of Vesta Tuttle, for whom the expression of his love was balked by his necessity of acting the imbecile, and whose evident interest in him was checked by his insane pranks.

The latest prank included a famous French diseuse, Mlle. Prévost, a secret service woman in the employ of the financial cospirators, which caused a definite breach with Vesta and the denial of the Abbey. But when Vesta overheard her father's guests plotting the death of Dick through the French actress, her feelings overcame her reason and she fled to warn him.

Again his pose of fool angered her. and she left him in despair. Dick had nothing to do but wait orders from his mysterious chief, Brown; wait any move against him; and watch with apprehension the growing panic in the United States.

CHAPTER XX (*Continued*).

A NATION IN PANIC.

THE President smiled blandly. "Nothing to say. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

The reporters departed in great excitement and debated the meaning of that statement, "We are not as defenseless, however much we may appear so." Among them were three secret agents of foreign powers who were even more excited than the others, but endeavored to appear more calm.

All trains West were overcrowded, all roads were blocked by passenger cars and trucks, yet ninety-five per cent of the population of the territory where the blow was expected to fall were compelled by circumstances to remain put, and take whatever might be in store for them. They quaked as they went about their daily tasks, shuddered as they thought of big guns and bombs and gas attacks and alternately prayed that it would not happen and cursed a government which taxed them and left them helpless.

The great war of 1914 fell upon Europe without the slightest warning so far as the general public was concerned. This cloud had been visible for a long time and as it grew in size and blackness its import was readable to the most humble.

Many factories shut down because of heavy cancellation of orders. The bear market developed into a panic of a magnitude only to be compared with that which followed the declaration of war in Europe in 1914, and this despite the fact that money was plentiful and the Federal Reserve banks were well equipped to aid.

Each air liner and steamship brought

American business men hurrying home and all agreed that hatred abroad was so rampant that war was inevitable. Though the newspapers stopped publishing pessimistic interviews upon request of Washington all these male Cassandras found large circles of auditors.

The Governors of several States called out the national guard and put them into camp and through intensive drill despite the objections from Washington against such action. The New York police force of twenty thousand men were being drilled daily in Central and Prospect Parks, and their rifles were sent to every station house to be available at an instant's call.

The anguish of those last weeks is fresh in the minds of all Americans, and to go into further details would be only to state what readers remember as well as the writer.

The mayors of Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, and Boston pleaded for regular troops. Yet no orders were issued to move the various organizations from interior and Western posts to the seaboard. The behavior of the national government caused men to foam at the mouth. Had the Presidential election taken place in that interval the incumbent would not have received five per cent of the popular vote.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LODGING HOUSE AT EUSTON.

DICK BOSWELL waited in his rooms for a word. For two days he had evaded Mlle. Renée Prévost, who pursued him with an earnestness which would have been hard to explain, except for Vesta's warning. Then Brown walked into his rooms, arrayed in afternoon dress, minus mustache.

"How are you getting along?" he asked with his usual cheerfulness.

"Horribly," replied Dick. "Where the deuce have you been?"

"Very busy, my boy."

"Why are you rigged up like this?"

"I'm a member of Parliament from the Isle of Wight," grinned Brown. "Have you heard from Winstut recently?"

As briefly as possible Dick told him of Vesta's visit and the determination of the enemy to eliminate him as soon as they could do it conveniently.

"It was inevitable," said Brown. "We made a complete shift in our plans and happened to attract attention to your father for reasons of our own. The mere fact that you are his son would cause you to be singled out, no matter how much of an imbecile you were supposed to be. Well, you did your job and that will be some satisfaction."

"Is that intended to be a eulogy over my dead body?" Dick asked.

"Oh, no. You are still very valuable. We'll have to sneak you out of here and into hiding for a few days. Your knowledge of the interior of Winstut makes it necessary to take care of you. Have you the plan of the house ready for me?"

With some distaste Dick opened a drawer and took out a folded paper. "I hated to do this," he said.

"Your sentiments do you credit," smiled the mysterious Brown.

"What do you want it for, anyway?" Dick demanded. "What's up?"

The secret agent grinned exasperatingly. "Dick, my lad," he said, "I have been on this job since this plot was hatched and the fact that I am sitting here comfortably with you and would be sipping a drink if you had the manners to make the suggestion—"

"I beg your pardon. Certainly."

"—is due to my conviction that the fewer people know of a thing the less chance that it has of reaching the ears of a wrong person. There are seventy-five members of our—ahem—club in London just now—"

"Don't tell me!" Dick exclaimed, astonished.

"Shouldn't have told you. None of them know anything except how to take one step ahead of them."

"But if you were suddenly struck by lightning—"

"I am a non-conductor. Now I want this plan for a purpose which will be revealed to you in good time. You are going to meet your fellow clubmen pretty soon."

"Has the word club any significance?" he asked uneasily.

"That is something for you to consider. Now you put on your things and walk out of here and don't come back. You will find a taxi at the door. Take it and the driver will know where to take you. I may say that our business in this country is rapidly being concluded and let that be your consolation."

"How about my man?"

"Forget about him."

"Won't my disappearance convince them I am a spy of some sort."

"What of it, if they consider you one anyway. Obey orders, Boswell."

"Are you coming with me?"

"No. I'm going to stay in your rooms for awhile."

"Good-by in case we do not meet again," said Dick, thrusting out his hand.

"Good-by," said Brown, shaking it carelessly. "You'll see me soon."

The British people, like the Americans, have always relished freedom from official interference. Half the opposition to prohibition in America was not due to love of strong drink, but distaste for regulation by statute and resentment of government espionage.

During the World War the English had submitted with ill grace to passport restrictions, police registration, and various other petty annoyances which Continental peoples accepted as a matter of course; before many years they had thrown them all overboard and enjoyed hugely the spectacle of their cousins in America meekly submitting to have their drinking glasses inspected by official smellers.

So now, though England with other nations was resolved upon waging war on the United States to get her own back, it had not yet occurred to any one to heckle Americans at the frontier and to keep track of them when they went to lose themselves in London.

Dick, after a circuit of half the city, was delivered by his cabby before the door of a brick house in the vicinity of Euston Station, a house which could not be distinguished from a dozen others in a block.

"Go up and ring the doorbell, sir, and say Mr. Brown sent you," said the chauffeur in a strong American accent.

The door was opened by a young woman, not at all typical of London lodging house slaveys.

"You are expected," she said, and he knew that she also was American. "You will have the square room on the second floor rear. You will share it with two others."

As Dick was a rich man's son and accustomed to all possible ease and luxury, the prospect of sharing one room with two strangers did not appeal to him at all, and he gave voice to his objections.

"I'm sorry," said the young woman. She was well mannered, but very plain. "The house is overcrowded and it's the best I can do. You'll have to put up with it."

Growling inwardly he mounted the stairs. He pricked up his ears as he heard the sound of many voices coming from the room to which he was condemned. He pushed open the door and blinked at six young men who sat around a table in different stages of dishabille, while in front of each was a stack of chips and one of them dealt cards with neatness and dispatch.

"Enter Lord Bolingbrook," exclaimed one of the players. "Would your lordship deign to sit in here and be skinned alive?"

Dick took them in and a broad grin crossed his pleasant countenance.

"A lot of blasted Yankees, as I am

a duke instead of a lord," he exclaimed. "If you crowing infants will move over and give me time to peel off the coat which led you into error I'll show you how they play poker in Detroit."

A chair was placed for him and he found himself at table with a half dozen men about his own age, clean cut, merry devils who introduced themselves and expressed astonishment when he told them his name.

"I've seen you around London and in New York," said Bert Gaylord, "but I thought you were just a gold-plated damn fool. You certainly played your part well, Boswell."

The sextet had come to this quiet house in Euston from Rome, Paris, and Berlin where they had been stationed for months. They told him that there were twenty other members of the service in the establishment and they were all jammed three in a room. They didn't know why they were there, just had followed instructions, and no more than Dick could they identify the mysterious Brown.

"He's a queer duck," said Gaylord. "He has given me some funny assignments, but let's hope he knows what he is about. Our job is about over. This bust is due to take place any time now. Most likely he has gathered us all in one place so he can ship us home by airship some dark night."

They were all college men, most of them well to do, volunteers for a dangerous, unpaid service. They had been living the life of café-haunting Americans in various cities, making acquaintances as instructed, picking up scraps of information which they reported invariably to Brown, who seemed to have roamed all over Europe during the past six months.

"Do you know a tall, dark man with a little black mustache about forty years old?" asked Dick. "He called himself Folsom."

"He's rooming on the floor below. Been here several weeks," said Heenan. "His name is Leftwich."

Dick had come to this queer roost without even a handbag and that night slept in borrowed pyjamas. Next morning there arrived a porter carrying two cheap suitcases for him, which he found to contain linen and a change of clothing, so he was as well equipped as the others.

He met all the inmates at meals in the basement dining room, had a reunion with Folsom, and found them all the sort of men he had chosen for friends in the days before he began his rôle as a public jester.

The young woman who had admitted him served them at table, and her mother a very fat, good-natured woman, originally from Cleveland, Ohio, was the cook. They played bridge or poker from morning until night and chafed because they were prohibited from setting foot out of doors.

A week passed pleasantly enough and, upon arising on the seventh day, Dick heard talking in the hall and Gaylord burst in with the morning paper.

"The Ultimatum," he exclaimed, distributing copies of the *Times* to the three inmates. "This means war, fellows, and it means we are going home."

Dick opened his newspaper. In black headlines the staid old journal declared:

Europe's Challenge to America

He read that, given full powers by their respective governments, the premiers of England, France, Germany, and Italy had met the previous day in Paris and agreed upon a joint note to the United States, the text of which we already know, demanding cancellation of national and private debts, and a sum of gold.

Its phrasing was deliberately provocative. It bluntly accused America of usury and malicious machinations, and demanded full reparation and indemnity in the form of acceptance of non-interest bearing bonds to run a hundred years and totaling forty billions of dollars.

The only possible reply that America could make was a refusal and a refusal meant war.

An hour later Brown, in his original disguise as an honest British laborer, brown mustache and all, entered Dick's chamber and asked the two men who shared it with him to go out.

"Read the papers?" he began.

"Of course."

—"They have a gall, haven't they? Nerviest and most impudent proposal in the history of the world. Now it's up to us."

"They'll get a stiff reply by return cable," said Dick.

Brown shook his head. "No, they won't. The Administration will tell them that such an astonishing proposition requires time for consideration and a special session of Congress will be called to consider it. For shame's sake they have to wait until we have a reply for them and that will give us a couple of weeks. Of course they will mobilize at once."

"What good will a couple of weeks do us?" demanded Dick.

Brown grinned. "You'd be surprised. Now, Boswell, at nine thirty to-night a motor bus will stop outside this house and the gang here will get into it. You are captain of this house. It will move north and a couple of miles out in the suburbs two other busses will fall in behind it.

"They will proceed to a certain spot near Winstut town, turn into a field and unload. There will be seventy-five men, and I shall be in command. You are my first lieutenant.

"Every man will have two automatic revolvers. We shall surround the Abbey and you will go to the main door and ring. The butler, who knows you, will be surprised, but he will admit you. Whereupon you will stick a gun under his nose and let in twenty-five men told off to accompany you.

"You will round up everybody in the house. I happen to know that there will be twenty persons with old Tuttle to-night, and these happen to be the premiers of France, Italy, England, and Germany, the chiefs of staff of the army and navy, and the six richest and most powerful men in Europe. We'll bag the lot. What do you think of that?"

"Absolutely insane," exclaimed Dick. "What good will capturing do us? We are in the heart of England and only seventy-five of us. One company of soldiers will dispose of us. I don't suppose you intend to murder them and if you do you may count me out. The assassination of these men would not avert the war and their countrymen would take a bloody revenge."

Brown shook his head sadly. "You don't think anybody knows anything except you," he said. "We are not going to murder them, though I'd like to, for they certainly deserve it."

"What are you going to do with them?"

"You'll find out when you do your job. You ought to have some confidence in me by this time."

"So far you haven't justified it," Dick said frankly. "However, you are the chief and I'll follow your instructions."

"Good boy. I've got to go now. You pass the word to the rest of the crowd. The pistols and ammunition are in a trunk in the cellar marked 'J. S.' Don't tell the men what we are going to do. Never tell anything until you have to. See you to-night, Richard."

He took himself off, leaving Dick in great excitement and much distress. He had been chafing for action. Here it was. But he was expected to make a treacherous entrance into a house where he had been hospitably received which went against his sense of good taste.

Knowing what he did of Sir Augustus that would not have bothered him, but Vesta was probably in the house. Until now he had been forced to play the fool with her and he was to be ex-

hibited this time as a knave. The whole thing was mad on the face of it.

The capture of these great ones would not paralyze the war movement, but inflame it. The disappearance of the leaders would be attributed to American agency and instead of waiting for the reply to the European note, Europe would declare war at once.

He passed the word around that an expedition would enlist the entire band that night and he was accepted as commander upon his assertion that Brown had placed him in charge. With great enthusiasm the young men got up the trunk from the cellar and planted the automatics upon their persons. Then they waited impatiently for night.

At eight o'clock there drew up before the house a motor bus of a type much in use for trans-city service in England. They took their seats in it like a gay band of excursionists. English roads were wide and smooth and these big vehicles were accustomed to plunge along at fifty miles an hour, in open country making much better time than any railroad trains except the expresses.

Dick did not see the other busses, but he knew that they were following, and the chauffeur had repeated the code word which identified him as one of their association. He now explained the purpose of their journey. All agreed that it seemed a senseless enterprise, but it occurred to none of them to withdraw. In fact, withdrawal was now impossible.

Shortly after ten o'clock they passed through Winstut town, already dark and slumbrous, and a mile beyond the bus turned off the road into an unfenced field.

A couple of moments later the second bus arrived and disgorged its contents, followed by a third. Brown appeared at the side of Dick, no longer disguised.

"The men with you will enter the house," he said. "The men in the third bus will capture the flying field. The others will surround the Abbey and capture any who escape from windows or rear or side doors. This is a surprise attack and there is no reason why a shot should be fired, but you must shoot any person who seems likely to escape.

"Nobody must get away. That is not to be permitted. Boswell, you and your men wait fifteen minutes before you start for the house, to give the others time to reach their stations. You will go through the hedge this side of the lodge instead of entering by the gate. The lodge will be taken by the men assigned to it."

The other bands were evidently captained and instructed and they immediately set out. Dick and his men waited impatiently in the field until a quarter of an hour had elapsed. Then they moved cautiously through the fields parallel to the road until they were close to the gateway of the Abbey grounds.

A neatly trimmed hedge separated the Tuttle estate from the road. Waiting until no lights of passing motor cars might betray them, they crossed the road and worked their way painfully through the hedge to find themselves assembled in a pitch black field.

Although Brown had assured Dick that there were no guards, Dick knew that several gamekeepers were employed on the place and some of these might be abroad. He forbade even whispers, then led the way toward the great house, a way which was familiar to him, as he had wandered all over the grounds.

That a gathering of the most powerful men in Europe would be unprotected was not so strange as it may seem. They came by air to a secluded country house in the heart of England. The only enemy was three thousand miles distant beyond the Atlantic.

They came either alone or with a single secretary or aid-de-camp, assured that they were as safe as if in their own homes. That American agents would venture to attack them in their retreat

was so preposterous that it never occurred to any of them.

It was so preposterous that Dick, leading his division of the storming party, considered the project quite insane. Yet he had to obey his orders.

They moved in a compact body through the fine park of oak trees, and after some moments came in sight of the lights from the Abbey. The lower floor was lighted and the windows of a second-floor room, which Dick knew to be the private sitting room of Sir Augustus, were glowing orange, which told him that the conference was in session.

Dogs barked from the kennels beyond the house, and he knew that this would cause a servant to be sent to discover what alarmed them, so he gave the word to hasten. There was a single electric light shining over the front entrance, unfortunate, for he must hide his men before he rang for admittance.

He disposed of them in the shadow of a group of lilac bushes at the right of the entrance, told off four men to hold the ground floor and keep the servants in hand while the others were to follow him up the stairs to the study of Sir Augustus.

Then he boldly mounted the steps and pressed the electric button, which the family used instead of the heavy bronze knocker now only an ornament.

His fingers closed upon the hilt of the automatic in his right coat pocket as he heard the leisurely footsteps of the footman coming to open. The heavy door swung open and he faced a man whom he had often tipped.

"Why, good evening, Mr. Boswell," said the man. "I did not know you were expected, sir."

"Hello, Evans," he said as he stepped inside and leaned against the open door so that it could not be shut without overturning him. "Not a sound from you." He covered the astonished man with his pistol, saw with satisfaction that the hall was deserted, and gave a low whistle. His followers entered with a rush.

The sound of many footsteps caused the door of the little room in which Vesta had first catechised Dick, to be opened and Vesta Tuttle stepped out in the hall. She recoiled at the sight of a crowd of strange men, then her eyes fell upon Dick, who still covered the terrified footman with his weapon.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAPTURE OF WINSTUT ABBEY.

"RICHARD BOSWELL!" she exclaimed. "What is the meaning of this? How dare you force your way in here. Put away that weapon. Is this another of your mad pranks, or do you dare think—"

She was advancing as she spoke, while the invaders gaped in admiration of her loveliness and quaked at what she might do.

"No," said Dick, who saw she was thinking that he might have been mad enough to bring these men in an attempt to carry her off. "Not that. Please, Vesta, don't make a disturbance."

Her answer was to open her beautiful mouth and emit a shriek. "Father!" she screamed.

Dick was already halfway up the stairs, followed by the men assigned to accompany him, for he had hoped to burst in upon the conference without warning. Her cry, however, proved serviceable, for a key grated in the door of the conference room, and Sir Augustus stood in the doorway just as Dick and his mob appeared before it. The door had been locked.

Dick catapulted against the baronet and drove him back into the room. With shouts and exclamations of alarm the score of men who had been sitting at a long table sprung to their feet. Both Dick's guns were trained on them, and behind him were his men brandishing weapons.

"Sit down, all of you," he commanded. "You gentlemen are my prisoners. Any one who tries to escape will be shot."

"Young Boswell," shouted Sir Augustus. "What do you mean, sir? How dare you draw weapons in my presence?"

"Sit down," commanded Dick. "Sit down."

Sir Augustus, his face purple with rage, sat. The others reluctantly resumed their chairs.

"Come in, men," Dick commanded. "Keep them covered."

"I told you this man was dangerous," said Herr Stutt vindictively. "Why do you say we are prisoners, sir?"

"Because you are conspirators against the peace of the world," replied Dick sternly.

There were several laughs. These men were not the sort to frighten easily.

"Search them for weapons, Gaylord; and you, Lawson," said Dick.

"You are American agents?" asked an Englishman whom Dick had never seen before.

"Unofficial," he replied.

"Wha-wha-what is your purpose, you scoundrel?" blustered Sir Augustus. As Dick really did not know, he made no answer, but superintended the search, which resulted in the confiscation of only three weapons, all automatics.

"My orders were to capture you," he replied when the baronet had repeated his question. "You will soon be told why."

The prisoners were conversing excitedly together in several languages. None made a move to escape, for being all elderly, to jump from a second floor window, with the possibility of being shot in the back, did not appeal to them.

Dick, shaking with excitement and anxiety, glared from man to man. He heard shouts from the floor below, a disturbance at the door, and then Vesta Tuttle forced her way into the room, the guardians of the door being too gallant to lay hands on her.

She threw herself into her father's arms and then faced Dick Boswell defiantly.

"So this is the way you repay our hospitality," she exclaimed, burning him with her eyes. "Are you bandits or pirates, or what have you turned into, Richard Boswell?"

"You might—er—well, say we are patriots, trying to strike a blow for our country," he stammered. A laugh from the prisoners. Vesta turned pale. She knew the guilt of these men, including her father.

"Dick!" she cried. "What are you going to do? You are not going to k-k-kill them?"

Dick did not even know if that was to be the fate of his prisoners, but he was saved from making an answer by a voice from the door.

"No killing," said Brown, the mystery man. "Young lady, you need not be alarmed. These gentlemen are going on a little journey, that's all."

"And who the hades are you?" roared Sir Augustus.

Brown advanced. "You wouldn't know me," he said. "My name is William Fletcher, and I am a private citizen of the United States. Until a year ago I was the chief of the United States Secret Service."

"We are at peace with the United States. You are pirates," exclaimed M. Vaurien.

Mr. Fletcher bowed in his direction. "Precisely. And I hope America and your respective countries will always live in peace. That's why you gentlemen are prisoners. For your information I will state that my men surround this house and are in possession of your flying field.

"All your employees are being well taken care of. Since you gentlemen were careless enough to assemble here to plot against international amity,

you are now in a position where you may be said to be quite helpless."

Sir Augustus took the floor.

"If you are lunatic enough to imagine that you will avert the war which your country has brought upon her by the massacre of myself and these gentlemen, permit me to tell you that it will have no effect save to cause more agony to your countrymen than we were preparing to inflict."

"Sir Augustus Tuttle, I believe. Pleased to meet you." He bowed most politely. "I am not a lunatic, sir, and I have no intention of assassinating such worthy gentlemen. I believe we have here assembled the men whose influence is the greatest in Europe, and I wish that influence to be used to preserve peace.

"Enough of this," demanded Herr Stutt. "What's your game?"

"I and my friends are taking the only way to convince you that this war you have promoted will be a terrific disaster for Europe."

This was received with scornful laughter.

"We have in our possession a weapon so mighty—" began Brown.

"Zut!" exclaimed Vaurien. "Permit me to tell you, sir, we know all about that. It is just American bluff."

"If your great expedition sails for the United States," said Brown earnestly, "it will vanish off the face of the waters. Not an airship, battleship, transport, cruiser, or submarine, will ever again be heard of."

Sir Augustus was on his feet. "Permit me to tell you, sir, that we have investigated. We know all about your Nevada experiment. It is a bluff, just as M. Vaurien has said. Our agents have flown over your forbidden territory and have discovered that you have nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"We have no wish to destroy a million innocent men who are being sent to invade a peaceful country by your will," said Fletcher. "But we recognize that you gentlemen are from Missouri. You are not to be scared by threats or frightened by rumors. So we are going to show you."

"Show us?" cried several.

"Exactly! We feel that if we can convince the men in this room that Europe is committing suicide by going to war with the United States, we shall have performed an act of mercy and humanity."

"And how do you propose to show us?" demanded M. Vaurien eagerly.

Fletcher waved his hand toward the rear of the house. "The landing lights on the flying field are lit. Very shortly a large and comfortable airship will land there. You gentlemen will be the guests of the American Council of Defense, of which Mr. Boswell's father, the father of this young man here, is the president, upon a tour of America, absolutely without cost to any of you."

"Damn your insolence!" exclaimed Sir Augustus.

"A moment!" exclaimed Herr Stutt coming forward and facing Fletcher. "Do you mean that your Council of Defense, so called, wishes to demonstrate your new weapon to these gentlemen?"

"That's it, sir."

The German swung about and faced the company. "If this is so," he exclaimed, "if the Americans actually wish to show the thing to us, it is our business to see it! You say this new weapon would destroy an entire fleet at sea, sir?"

"Or an army of a million men on land," replied Fletcher.

"Are your people willing to pledge to us that they will not hold us prisoners in America?

"That they will give us this demonstration and then return us safely to our homes?"

Fletcher nodded. "You gentlemen are very important persons," he said, "but we are aware that making prisoners of you would not prevent the projected invasion. We believe that you will prevent it when you discover

that it means the extermination of your forces."

"And what is this magic weapon of war?" demanded the Italian representative.

"You are going to see it in action," said Brown. "Gentlemen, this weapon is so powerful that it will destroy a vast territory, hundreds of miles. We have selected a worthless stretch of desert in Nevada because it is without inhabitants.

"Your British government airship was permitted to fly over it because we wished you to know what the country is like before it is devastated. As for our weapon it is too small to be seen from an airship.

"The thing is so terrible that we wish never to use it. We are aware that this war is the result of European desperation, that no ordinary defense would stop it, that you would attack us if we were ten times better prepared in the ordinary military and naval sense.

"You will leave here to-night, and in one week you will be back again."

"Go, father, go!" exclaimed Vesta. "And I'll go with you."

"I am inclined to go," said Stutt.

"My orders were to take you by force if necessary," said Fletcher. "However, men of your type do not have to be forced to act in your best interest. We pledge you every consideration. You will be guests of Mr. Boswell and the council. You will be shown our new method of defense, a method which will end war for good and all. You will return aware of the extent of the catastrophe from which we wish to save you."

Sir Augustus cleared his throat. "Four gentlemen here are prime ministers," he said. "It is impossible for them to make this journey. Their disappearance would be suspected as being due to American agency, and war would break out in twenty-four hours.

"If we others agree to make this journey, I assure you that the report we make will be satisfactory to the governments of England, France, Germany, and Italy. If what you say is proved to our satisfaction I can promise you that there will be no war, unless your people decide to revenge themselves on us for the ultimatum sent to them yesterday."

"The Council of Defense owns this weapon, sir," said Fletcher. "The American government is as unaware of its character as you, and I assure you that the council will not permit it to be used in an aggressive war. War is bad for business and they are business men."

"It is our duty to go," said M. Vaurien. "Tell your men to put up their guns. I would fight against them if they tried to prevent me from witnessing this demonstration. I fear it is not a bluff, your new weapon."

Sir Augustus looked around the table and saw agreement in every face.

"We accept your forcible invitation," he said with a short laugh.

"We shall be ready to start in half an hour," said Fletcher. "The house and grounds will be held by my men until after your departure, and your distinguished government officials will be kept prisoners until an hour after the airship departs. Then they will be set free. In return, I ask Lord Loring," he bowed to the British prime minister, "that no action be taken against the devoted young Americans who enabled me to have this interview."

"If what you allege is true," said the British prime minister, "they have done England a very great service by forcing us to listen to you. We are not yet at war and this is a free country. They may go where they like."

"Thank you, sir. Mr. Boswell, your father wishes you to accompany the party and look after the interests of his guests as his representative."

"I am going, too, father!" exclaimed Vesta.

"Certainly not."

Dick heard her in high hopes, but could not catch her eye.

"Please, father. I have never been to America and I do so want to see this marvelous invention."

"Marvelous poppycock," growled her father. "I still think it's a bluff."

"There is no reason why the young lady should not go. She will have excellent accommodations," said Fletcher. Dick could have kissed him.

Aware of the character of the men whom he had captured, Fletcher withdrew his guards to the lower floor while the prisoners scattered to pack bags and prepare for an unexpected transatlantic journey. Unscrupulous and brutal as they might be in big business, these men, when they had given their word, kept it, and their curiosity demanded satisfaction.

Bad as were conditions in their respective countries, the loss of the expeditionary force would make them infinitely worse, and the social upheaval, which they expected in a few years, would occur immediately.

Some of them would not have acted as had the American Council of Defense in giving an opportunity to see what was being prepared for their destruction, they would have permitted their enemy to plunge into war and then destroy him. But they knew that Americans were notoriously softhearted.

Herr Stutt, for his part, knew the science and ingeniousness of his countrymen. Let him get an inkling of the character of this new force and he would put his own chemists and inventors to work to produce it. Others in the party probably thought likewise and all agreed with M. Vaurien that it was their duty to see the demonstration.

In two or three minutes Dick was left alone with Vesta. She approached him.

"So," she said, "you were not the perfect idiot you made me believe."

"I had to," he pleaded.

"But why?"

"It was necessary," he said, blundering. "I was supposed to make an ass of myself and get in with certain people—"

"Like Roger!" she exclaimed, her quick temper flaming. "You insinuated yourself into Roger's good graces and mine so that you could get into this house. Oh, you cad, you beast. You even made love to me."

"Vesta!" he exclaimed. "Please don't think—"

"Bah," ejaculated Vesta as she rushed from the room.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned. "And I thought everything would be all right."

In half an hour the pressingly invited guests began to assemble in the hall. Fletcher had given them permission to write what letters they might wish to explain their absence for a week to their families and business and official associates.

Reflection had convinced the conspirators that the opportunity offered them by the Americans was to be eagerly grasped instead of being repulsed. The willingness of their soon to be enemy to permit them to be present at a demonstration of the secret weapon of war impressed them tremendously.

Hoping it would turn out to be nothing very fearful, they dared not go forward with their war plot until they were assured of that fact. Logic told them they were personally safe, as American interests would not be served by holding them, and they had assurances that satisfied them.

Dick had been enormously impressed by the personality of Fletcher or Brown as he knew him during the scene in the conference room.

He understood at last how sagacity had designed what seemed a mad plan. Fletcher, as chief of the United States Secret Service, had learned of the financial conspiracy in Europe from its inception and undoubtedly was responsible for the formation of the unof-

ficial espionage service composed of men of a type who could not be secured by the government at government wages.

Things were clearing for him personally, too. Vesta knew now that her first instincts in his regard were correct, that he was a straightforward and intelligent young man, not the clown he was reputed to be. She had reproached him for lack of patriotism at their interview in his rooms. She understood now that he had been working for his country in the most dangerous of all capacities, a secret agent.

Though she had chosen, for the moment, to believe that his love for her as well as his friendship for Roger was a cloak for his design to become familiar with the interior of their home, he hoped he could convince her otherwise, given a few minutes alone with her.

He had despaired of their ever coming together, as the war would have lined them up on opposing sides and left a gulf of bitterness between them. If the war should be averted, if the Europeans decided it was better to lay aside their hostile designs and try to work out their own salvation without recourse to piracy and pillage, why, there was no reason left against his marrying Vesta Tuttle, if she wanted him as he desired her.

Would her father permit her to accompany him or would she change her mind since she affected to believe that Dick had behaved like a cad?

Then he saw her coming down the stairs in a traveling dress and coat, her father following her, prepared for a voyage.

"All aboard," called Fletcher from the front door. While the servants observed the exodus with astonishment, the array of great men moved out of the Abbey, and in a long line followed the leader around to where a great plane, her cabin lights bright, lay in the exact center of the flying field.

She was one of the American Line of passenger airships, chartered for this particular duty by the Council of Defense. She had been guided to her landing place by the flood lights turned on when Fletcher's men had captured the field and had dropped to earth as accurately and as easily as a bird alighting upon the limb of a tree.

Her captain stood at the gangplank to welcome the guests, he had been already informed that they were not prisoners, but willing passengers. They filed into the salon where stewards conducted them to their respective staterooms. Dick hung on the heels of Vesta hoping for a word with her. But the girl, aware of his expectations, went directly to her stateroom and did not appear again.

In ten minutes the Lapwing, which was the name of the craft, lifted herself vertically into the air, and then headed into the west at her normal speed of one hundred and fifty miles per hour.

It was midnight when she left the shore of England, and at midnight, twenty-four hours later, she would be over New York. Eighteen hours later she was due at an unnamed spot in eastern Nevada.

Dick, after vainly waiting for an hour for Vesta to reappear, sought his own berth and slept soundly for eight hours.

He was up, shaved and dressed at eight thirty, and found three or four of the distinguished guests already at breakfast in the salon. In the early days of airplaning the rattle of the propeller and roar of the engine made speech impossible except by means of telephones and head pieces.

But the silencers lately invented had reduced the noise to a low and not disagreeable hum and there was no bar to conversation in the salon of the liner.

There were heavy plate glass windows forward and aft which admitted sunlight and permitted a view to those within. Dick noted that it was a

bright sunny morning, but they were flying above the clouds and there was nothing to see east or west.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OVER THE SEA AND LAND.

HIS arrival was greeted with constrained nods and the conversation ceased at his approach. A few polite remarks about the weather. Dick found he had no antagonism against these bold plotters against the world's peace. They were cultured gentlemen actuated by no hatred or prejudice, but Olympians who had decreed death and destruction to mortals for reasons they considered sufficient.

Not very different from American business men of the high regions who, conditions reversed, would probably have reasoned as did these.

He observed with distress a steward carrying a tray to the stateroom which he knew was occupied by Vesta. This meant that she was breakfasting in bed, and perhaps intended to remain in her room until the end of the voyage. In some way he must settle things with her. Later, if she did not come forth he would muster up his courage and knock on her door. Perhaps she might relent and let him see her.

He finished his breakfast and moved forward. The salon was about sixty-five feet long, fourteen feet wide amidships and tapering to a point fore and aft. The staterooms recalled the early days of transatlantic steamships, boxes just big enough for a six foot berth, a washstand and folding chair. The pilot house was reached by a flight of stairs leading from the salon forward, and the engine room was under the salon.

The captain passed through the salon, greeted Sir Augustus, who had come to the breakfast table, and, at his request, turned on the radio at the chief London station. News bulletins were being broadcast, and Dick heard with relief that the departure of the guests at Winstut for America had not reached the ears of the newspapers.

This indicated that everything had gone well at Winstut after the sailing of the Lapwing; that the premiers had departed, and Fletcher and his daring band had dispersed without molestation.

The morning wore on, the ship sailing as smoothly as a vessel on the surface of the ocean in a calm sea, and the passengers grouped and discussed their affairs in low voices or busied themselves writing or disappeared into their staterooms. Vesta did not appear, but Dick had a surprisingly agreeable conversation with Sir Augustus.

"So," said the baronet, "you are not the fool you were supposed to be after all. I am rarely mistaken in a man, a glance and I can usually place him; but I was misled by your dossier and the fact that you were a chum of my son Roger. I knew he was an ass, and I assumed that his intimate friends must be birds of a feather."

"I think you misjudge your son, sir," said Dick. "He has fine qualities, and I am very fond of him."

"No, sir," replied Sir Augustus. "Roger is clean and decent, but he has no brains, no ambition, no energy except for nonsense. He has never grown up. You appear to be your father's son. I never happened to meet him, but I have heard that he is a very able man."

"I think so, sir."

"All the time you were masquerading as an imbecile you were picking up information. Wormed yourself into my house, listened at doors, I suppose."

"No, sir," replied Dick, grateful that he could deny this. "I made no effort to listen to your conferences. Mr. Fletcher was fully informed of your plans."

"Is that so? Well, we had to work pretty openly because of the situation. We had to lead the movement in per-

son for reparations from the United States to give it force. I assumed that the Americans knew what we were up to, but it didn't matter much, as they were in no position to resist us. Your secret service work would have accomplished nothing if your inventors had not discovered something such as your man Fletcher intimates. Do you know anything about it?"

"No, sir, I am entirely in the dark."

"Well, we'll soon find out. It's pretty courageous of your people to give us a chance to see for ourselves what cards they hold, but they must be unbeatable to avert what is in store for you."

"If you are not convinced I presume we must expect invasion," Dick hazarded.

"Of course."

"I can't see how a man of your great intelligence can justify an unprovoked assault upon a friendly nation, especially one which came to your aid in the last war, as did America."

The English capitalist shrugged his big shoulders. "You came to our aid because it was to your interest to do it, and for that we owe you nothing. You took advantage of our distress to destroy our trade and to build yourselves up at our expense.

"Your demand for repayment of war loans was injudicious, our attempt to meet your demand was equally ill advised, and the result has spelled ruin for Europe. My conscience is entirely at ease as regards this new war.

"Our future existence depends upon rehabilitating ourselves at your expense. It's a plain business matter, young man. We are attacking you because of our necessity. Most of the great wars of history have been fought for the same reason."

"And suppose you find that America can defeat and even destroy your expedition, suppose you are convinced that you have no chance, then what will Europe do?"

"God only knows. We may stagger along for a few years longer, and then —chaos."

"Could nothing save Europe in that case?"

"Complete disarmament, strict economy, greatly increased taxes, and some sort of receivership. But taxes are already too high, no government can be economical, and who would be powerful enough to operate a receivership? And complete disarmament is impossible, nationalism will always prevent it.

"So, while we are glad to learn what you claim to have up your sleeves, we are going ahead with our plans if we consider that we have a possible chance. We shall strike a hard blow at the United States, give your people an opportunity to know what real war taxes are like.

"But you will recover completely in ten years, and Europe will be placed in a position to carry on successfully."

Sir Augustus ended the conversation by bowing and crossing the salon to where Herr Stutt sat glowering at a sheet of paper he had covered with figures. Vesta did not appear at lunch.

About three o'clock, being completely fed up with the four walls of her cabin, or considering that Dick had been disciplined sufficiently, or curious to know what he might have to say for himself, she emerged in a careful toilette of black silk, which was even more becoming to her blond loveliness than she supposed it to be and which had the effect of completely befuddling Richard Boswell.

Nodding to him coldly, she sailed across the salon. In the long skirts women did not walk any more; they glided. Dick was reminded of the verse from a poet who lived in a previous age of long skirts and who observed of his heroine that her little feet like mice crept in and out.

Vesta went directly to her father, who sat with four of his friends absorbed in conversation. They sprang

to their feet upon her approach, but as she was about to seat herself Sir Augustus said curtly:

"We are busy, Vesta. Go talk with young Boswell."

She tossed her head. "I do not care to. I shall return to my cabin."

"Well, anyway, leave us alone."

Somewhat discomfited she retreated, to be confronted by Dick.

"Please, Vesta," he said, "don't be unfair, give me a chance to explain."

She eyed him coldly. "I don't think there is anything to explain. However, I wish to be fair."

"Then come and sit over here by ourselves, please."

She yielded. He led her forward to an observation seat, though there was nothing to be seen save an expanse of bright blue sky with a floor of clouds far below. To these modern young people it was nothing extraordinary to be sitting in a salon a mile above the surface of the ocean, driving like an arrow through the atmosphere at a speed of a hundred and fifty miles an hour. Air travel to them was as humdrum as steamship or motor travel to a previous generation.

"In the first place, I want to say that I fell in love with you the moment I first set eyes on you in Winstut that day when you came into the hall as Roger and I entered the house."

Her eyes sparkled, but he did not see them, because she had turned her head away. "Indeed," she said icily.

"And I've been crazy about you ever since," he finished lamely.

"I find it hard to believe you in view of your subsequent behavior," she said. "I excused your outrageous conduct because it seemed to me that you were mentally undeveloped. I cannot excuse it in a man of intelligence and acumen such as I am forced to believe you are."

"I was playing a part. It was my job."

"From what I learned from Roger, you enjoyed associating with chorus women and notorious persons just as much as he did."

"I didn't."

"You deliberately led my poor simple brother into bad company. That was abominable. You made use of him, regardless of the harm you might have done him to insinuate yourself into the Abbey so you might spy on my father."

"I didn't do him any harm," he pleaded. "Our sports might have been idiotic, but neither Roger nor myself behaved viciously. And you know why I had to get into Winstut."

"Yes, to play the spy."

"Vesta, darling—"

"Don't you dare to call me such names. In fact, you have no right to use my first name. I permitted it to the child I thought you were, not to the paid spy."

This forced him to laugh. "I never got any pay," he said. "I was an amateur, not a professional."

"That does not exculpate you."

"Please, Miss Tuttle, be reasonable."

"I am reasonable."

"You are not. I was working in your father's interests as well as my own. This war will destroy Europe. My purpose was to avert it. You do not, you cannot justify this attack upon a friendly and peaceful nation."

For a moment Vesta dropped her pose. "I think an aggressive war horrible and I was shocked when I learned that my father was concerned in fomenting one. I admit that. On the other hand America has bled Europe for twenty years and deserved to be forced to give up her ill gotten gains."

"These men were planning to attack an unprepared nation, to murder hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children, mostly unarmed. Can you justify that?"

"No," she said faintly.

"Then can you blame me for serving my country, for accepting any rôle, however ignoble? Wouldn't you rath-

er have me as I am, even a spy, than the selfish, unpatriotic idler you thought I was. You liked me despite my fatuity. I know you did."

"I felt, somehow, that you were decent at bottom," she admitted.

"Aren't you glad that I may be a humble instrument in saving the world from an unpardonable war?"

"You burst into my home with armed men, a house where you had been a welcome guest—"

"But these conspirators would not have accepted a formal invitation. We captured them for their own good to save them from themselves. I had to do it, Vesta."

She smiled slightly. "I admit there may be some slight justification for your conduct. I am rather glad you are not the fool you seemed to be."

He laughed joyously. "Then we've come a long ways. Vesta, I know this is not the time nor the place, but I want to ask you this. If we succeed in convincing your father and his friends that they should abandon the war, if England and America remain at peace, do you think—is it possible—if I ask you to marry me—"

He paused, trembling and her glance was kind.

"If these miracles come to pass," she said gently, "why, I suppose we shall be friends. I don't know this new Dick Boswell. I shall have to revise my opinion of you entirely; but one never knows what may happen, does one? What is this marvelous thing we are going five thousand miles to see?"

"I haven't the faintest notion," he admitted.

"For all our sakes I hope it is a peacemaker," she sighed. "Though if so, it will place the world at the mercy of the United States, won't it?"

"The United States is the most generous nation on earth although Europeans have never been able to believe it. You persist in declaring that we came to the aid of Europe from self interest in 1917. Vesta, I have read up about the war and my father lived through it.

"We sent two million men to Europe and swung the balance in favor of the allies. If we had been selfish, we would have kept our army in America and let whoever was the strongest win in Europe. We were prepared and protected against any force the Germans could send against us.

"We had nothing to gain and everything to lose. We refused all indemnity and made the most generous terms with our debtors among the allies. We won the war for you and all we got in repayment was hatred."

"I presume an American would look at it in that way," she said, "but there must be another side to it. Let us talk of something else. Tell me of your life in America. What did you do before you came to Europe? I have understood you were as boisterous in New York as in London."

He told her the whole story: how his New York career was a carefully arranged prelude for his exploits in London, how he had hated it all. He told her of his father and his work in the factory in Detroit. For the first time this young couple met with masks off and she was able to learn something of the real Dick Boswell.

Unconsciously they became absorbed in each other. They talked of the things that two people of their age who are drawn by strings of sympathy discuss. Their views of men and women of life and love. They forgot the grim purpose of their journey, the black war cloud that threatened to make them enemies, they forgot everything until dinner.

Vesta, as the only woman on board, had little time to devote to Dick during the meal. Her father's friends demanded her attention and received it. Dick marveled at the impersonality of these men.

After dinner, Vesta, who seemed to have decided that Dick had made sufficient progress in one day, went im-

mediately to her cabin and did not come out again. Dick retired early.

Next morning the ship was over the Middle Western States. But she was flying high of purpose, and clouds concealed the landscape so far below. The passengers were nervous to-day; there was a current of excitement in the atmosphere of the salon.

They had planned so long for this blow at America; upon it hinged all their hopes of rehabilitation of their own countries, and they dreaded lest they should be convinced, despite themselves, of the futility of it all. Each of the sixteen guests seized opportunity to question Dick and persisted despite his assurances that he was as uninformed as themselves.

Vesta was cool to-day. Perhaps she thought she had gone too far yesterday. Time dragged. They were pursued by the sun which finally overtook them and gradually forged ahead. At last it was low in the west and now the ship had turned her nose earthward and the Western plains appeared seeming to be an ocean of gray green.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREAT SECRET.

AT six o'clock the airship was flying low over a desert country broken by mountain peaks and tablelands, a dreary, dry, yellow, brown, gray light green world apparently without rivers, or forests, or villages or even ranch houses.

Five minutes later a group of buildings surrounded by white specks were sighted ahead, the ship continued to descend and finally lowered herself smoothly and skillfully until she rested upon a sandy field within a hundred yards of a row of tents behind which appeared a number of wooden shacks.

The captain passed through the salon.

"Gentlemen and Miss Tuttle, we have arrived," he announced.

"What a perfectly horrible place," exclaimed Vesta, who found herself standing at the bow window beside Dick.

"The great American desert, or a representative section of it," he replied. "Some people think it is beautiful."

"Grand perhaps, but certainly not beautiful," was her answer.

"Here are people coming."

"My father," exclaimed Dick.

The gangway was already in place and the passengers of the Lapwing were filing ashore, gazing curiously about the country which presented an aspect new to all of them, which resembled neither Arabia, Sahara, nor the waste places of Russia, but had a character all its own.

To north was a range of sawtoothed hills, to the south one of those curious expressions of nature known as a mesa, a great flat table of yellow and red rock, to the west ahead an enormous expanse of flat sage brush-covered country, and in the dim distance a range of lofty mountains behind which the sun was sinking to rest painting the western sky luridly and ominously in red and purple and orange.

Richard Boswell, Sr., accompanied by Admiral Graves and General Peterson, advanced to meet the European tourists. The eyes of the old man sought his son, who advanced delightedly, then with typical Anglo-Saxon restraint they clasped hands instead of embracing. "My son," said Boswell proudly to his companions. "This is General Peterson and Admiral Graves, Dick. We are proud of your part in this job. Now introduce me to our guests."

"This," said Dick, eagerly, "is Miss Vesta Tuttle."

"A most unexpected pleasure to have a lady in the party. A good augury, gentlemen," declared Boswell. Dick then performed the introductions and the representatives of two hemispheres soon to come into conflict greeted one another pleasantly and with interest.

"If you will all follow me I shall be delighted to offer you refreshment," said Mr. Boswell. He conducted them to a large tent within which a buffet supper was spread upon a table.

"We are here, Mr. Boswell," said Sir Augustus as soon as all were within, "under most astonishing circumstances, in a sense as prisoners of war with promise of speedy release."

"You shall be on your way back in twenty-four hours, gentlemen," replied Mr. Boswell.

"That is gratifying," responded the baronet. "We are filled with interest, I may say, and eager to see the demonstration of some new war invention which we are informed is in your possession. However, I would like to know of whom we are the guests? You do not officially represent the United States Government."

Mr. Boswell smiled. "No more than you represent the governments of Europe, and no less. I am president of an association of American industrials who have come to the rescue of our Government. The admiral here and the general are no longer in active service while the military and naval men in your party are not officially representing their governments upon this occasion."

"That is correct," said Sir Augustus.

"Will you all take seats, gentlemen? I have a few words to say," continued Mr. Boswell. "And Miss Tuttle, please take this comfortable chair." Dick seated Vesta and stood beside her chair.

"It is a time for plain speaking," said Mr. Boswell. "You gentlemen have come to the conclusion that the only way to set Europe back on her feet is to confiscate as much of the wealth of America as you can seize.

"My associates and myself, being the rightful owners of much of this wealth, object to being pillaged. Your plans are ready, your armies and navies on the point of mobilization, your ultimatum has been delivered, an ultimatum which America must reject or be forever dishonored.

"Confident in the good will of Europe we have lagged behind in military and naval preparations for many years and we have a small fleet and a weak army to oppose your united forces. There is no question in case of war that you can capture and hold the Eastern part of this country long enough to draw from it a vast store of wealth. That is how you reasoned and how we see the situation."

"Your prosperity is built upon our misfortunes. Your usury is to blame for your debacle," exclaimed M. Vaurien.

Mr. Boswell smiled. "Let us not try to blame or justify. We are all business men. A nation which cannot protect herself deserves whatever fate has in store for her. It happens, however, that American business men have not been as blind to the progress of events in Europe as you must have supposed.

"Two years ago we knew that war was inevitable and must come while your aristocratic and financial classes were still able to control your military and naval forces. We brought our influence to bear upon our Government and induced it to prepare a program which would double our navy and quadruple our army in five years.

"This, of course, you know. But you probably do not know and have wondered why some months ago our Government abandoned its big war bill."

He paused and smiled to see that his audience was palpitating.

"The reason was that certain of our scientific investigators were able to show to our President and his Cabinet a discovery which totally destroys the usefulness of all military and naval arms. A nation provided with this new instrument of war can scrap its ships, lay up its air fleets, and disband its armies.

"One man at a keyboard can work

destruction over an area limited only by his desires."

Herr Stutt was on his feet. "And what is the character of that discovery, may I ask, sir?"

"We have too much respect for the genius of the German race to supply that information," replied Mr. Boswell. "I am sure you do not really expect it of us."

There was a strained laugh.

"You have been brought here to witness the first demonstration of its powers upon a large scale," he continued. "If its effect fails to convince you of its potency, then you will return to Europe and you will launch your thunderbolt, in which case we shall be most reluctantly forced to make a second demonstration, this time upon your warships, transports, airships, and submarines. I am sure that will convince you."

"When shall we see this diabolical invention?" asked Sir Augustus, whose red face had turned waxen. Vesta was pale and trembling and without being aware of it had grasped Dick's hand and held it tight.

"To-morrow morning," said Mr. Boswell. "You have been brought into this wild country because only here could the demonstration be given without loss of life. The Desert Reclamation Corporation of which I am president has interested your secret agents very much during the past five or six weeks and we finally decided to permit the air battleship you sent over to make the crossing.

"Doubtless they reported to you that there were no works of any sort upon the territory in question, thus when you see the result of the action of the new force you will have the advantage of knowing how the country looked when it was untouched."

"Is it an explosive?" demanded Herr Stutt.

"Of a sort. To-morrow's demonstration will consist of an explosion which will destroy everything within a radius of twenty-five miles. It can be increased at will."

"You mean that one application of this force will cause destruction over a hundred square miles?" demanded Herr Stutt incredulously.

"Yes."

"That's impossible. The most powerful shell in existence will only destroy within a radius of a few hundred yards."

"Forty years ago the airship was considered impossible, gentlemen," was the reply.

"How close can we be to observe this?" demanded the Frenchman.

"We shall witness it from a mountain top at a distance of thirty miles," replied Mr. Boswell. "Afterward we shall make a tour of the scene of devastation."

There was a moment's silence.

"Am I to understand?" demanded Herr Stutt, "that you claim that one shot from your new gun or whatever it is, would not only destroy a fleet at sea, but the airships above it and the submarines beneath it?"

"Yes."

"Then I have you. Aside from the impossibility of the thing, you would have to plant your shot in the center of a fleet which means that you must get close enough and we shall know how to prevent that."

"You do not understand, gentlemen," smiled Boswell. "I have informed you that this is not any variety of artillery. It is not shot from a gun, it is not contained in a shell or a bomb, the devastation is not caused by flying pieces of metal."

"Then what in God's name is it?" demanded Sir Augustus.

"Gentlemen," said the president of the Council of Defense gravely. "Our explosion is the air we breathe. You will see to-morrow the explosion of the earth's envelope, many square miles of it."

The Europeans were all on their feet, several were shouting.

"You cannot do it," cried Herr Stutt. "I defy you to do it."

"Why, *monsieur*," cried the chief of the French General Staff. "If you dare to do that you will destroy the world. You cannot limit it. Explode the oxygen and nitrogen in the atmosphere and it will spread all over the world. The human race will be burned to death."

Boswell shrugged his shoulders. "One must take chances. However, we have found a way to limit the extent of the destruction of the atmosphere. We have tested it on a small scale and prevented any such calamity and we hope that we shall also succeed in this, our great demonstration."

"My daughter!" exclaimed Sir Augustus. "You have no right to expose my daughter to this insane experiment, or any of us for that matter. I protest."

"You are in no more danger here than if you were in England," smiled Mr. Boswell. "If our explosion should destroy the envelope of the earth as the general suggests, the human race will perish wherever it may be.

"I am confident that it is properly safeguarded. The explosion of the atmosphere over our selected field will cause a perfect vacuum and there will be a rush of wind from every side to fill it which may cause cyclones that will do much devastation all over this hemisphere; that we cannot prevent.

"A special cyclone proof dugout has been provided where we shall remain for several hours after the demonstration, when it will be safe to approach the scene of the explosion. That is all I have to say to you, gentlemen. There are tents for your accommodation and I shall meet you all at breakfast at seven in the morning."

"I protest against this cursed thing," cried Sir Augustus. The dignified and pompous parvenu was shaking as if with the ague. Ready to hurl the armed forces of Europe against America while he sat safely in Winstut Abbey, he was in terror now of his own life. "You have no right to bring us here. You cannot regulate a thing like that. I forbid this demonstration."

"I am afraid you are condemned to witness it," replied Mr. Boswell. "I can give you all reasonable assurances of safety."

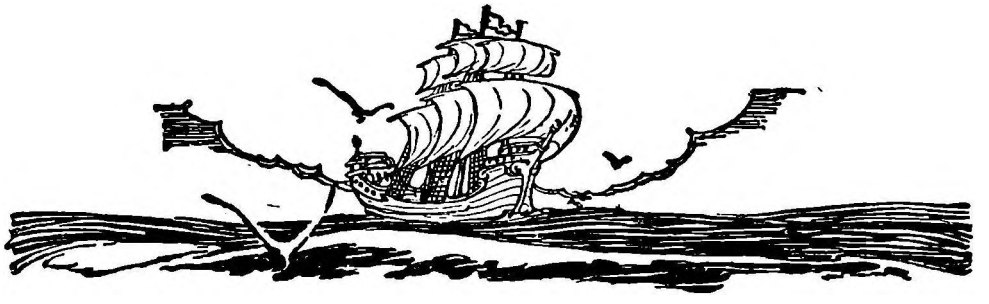
Vesta looked at her father with horror in her eyes. Alone of the whole company he had given way to fear. She tore her hand from Dick's grip.

"I am not afraid," she said in a low tone.

"I am," Dick whispered. "This thing appalls me. I am going to insist that they ship you East to-night."

"No," she declared. "Not one step shall I stir. I'm going to see it through —for the honor of the Tuttles," she added in such a low tone that he could not hear it.

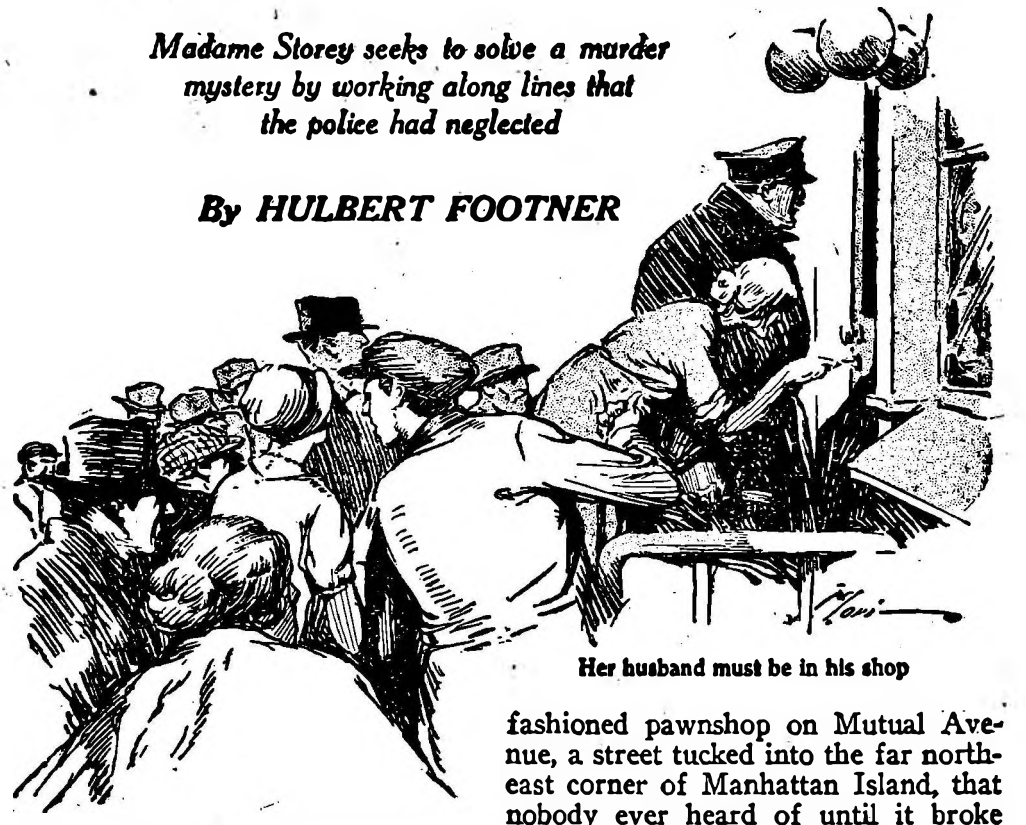
TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



The Perfect Blackguard

Madame Storey seeks to solve a murder mystery by working along lines that the police had neglected

By HULBERT FOOTNER



Her husband must be in his shop

FROM the newspapers Mme. Storey and I had familiarized ourselves with the details of the case before we had any expectation of being drawn into it.

They played it up for all it was worth on account of the quaint and forgotten corner of New York it illustrated, and because of its strong elements of human interest; the wedding so tragically interrupted; the young girl so pretty and gentle who had yielded to an uncontrollable desire to obtain the means to buy pretty clothes to be married in; the honest lad dumfounded by what had happened, yet loyally determined to stand by his girl; it all made a most poignant appeal to the feelings.

This was the story:

Solomon Henniger kept an old-fashioned pawnshop on Mutual Avenue, a street tucked into the far northeast corner of Manhattan Island, that nobody ever heard of until it broke into the newspapers. The photographs of the tragedy depicted a faded sign with the well-known three balls and a pair of show windows crowded with the curious articles that one associates with pawnshop windows.

Inside, the grubby interior was so packed with bulky pledges of all sorts it was impossible to move around. There were even goods hanging from the ceiling.

There were no little booths for privacy, such as the more modern places affect; nothing but an open counter down one side, having a brass cage at the end for money transactions.

On a morning in April a Mrs. Susie Brick, of 627 East Ninety-Seventh Street, was on her way to Henniger's to pawn a pair of chenille portières. She explained to the police that she

was a little short of making up her rent.

As she turned in to the pawnshop she came face to face with a young woman coming out. A pretty girl, and rather better dressed than one might have expected to find in that humble neighborhood.

"Looked like a down town miss," said Mrs. Brick.

The girl was visibly agitated, and when she saw Mrs. Brick, suddenly put her hand inside the door and released the spring that held the night latch. Consequently when the door shut it could not be opened again.

Mrs. Brick, with natural indignation, demanded to know what she had done that for. The girl said something in a mumbling voice, and sped away.

Mrs. Brick understood her to say that Mr. Henniger was sick. She hung about for a moment, at a loss what to do.

She knocked repeatedly and peered through the glass of the door, but could make out nothing in the dark interior.

Presently another woman, who wished to do business with the pawnbroker, Mrs. Gertrude Colfax, of 131 Mutual Avenue, came up, and the two talked it over. They decided that something was wrong, and went in search of a policeman.

They found Officer James Crehan on post at One Hundred and Second Street and Mutual Avenue. Crehan was well acquainted with old Henniger, and knew that he lived in a flat only two doors from his shop.

He went there, and Mrs. Henniger told him her husband had been in his usual health when he left home, and was certainly in his shop. Mrs. Henniger, a spare little woman of German descent, very active notwithstanding her sixty-seven years, had another key, and accompanied the officer to the shop. By this time a small sized crowd had gathered in front.

At first glance the store appeared to be empty. Then Crehan saw what he took to be another bundle of old clothes flung down on the floor of the cage.

It was the body of the little German pawnbroker. His bald pate faintly reflected the shine of the electric bulb which had been turned on. A dark stain was spreading beneath it. His body was still warm.

He had been shot in the back of the head, and death must have been instantaneous. From the huddled position of the body it was apparent that the fatal shot must have been fired as he knelt to open the safe.

The safe door was open, and whatever money it had contained was gone. Nothing else in the cluttered place appeared to have been disturbed.

Sympathetic neighbors helped the stricken old woman home. The couple was highly respected in that quarter, where they had lived for forty years. They had no children or other near relatives.

Meanwhile Crehan kept everybody out of the shop, and telephoned for assistance. A search of the premises revealed the weapon from which the fatal shot had been fired.

It was found lying among the piled goods, where it had evidently been flung at random. It was a brand new .32 automatic, from which one shot had been discharged.

By means of the manufacturer's number on the gun, its sale was traced within an hour to one Charles Vernay, of 193 East Twenty-Fourth Street. Young Vernay was found at the works of the Amsterdam Stamping Company, where he is employed as a shipping clerk.

He was a stalwart, good-looking chap, with a peculiarly open and honest expression, a general favorite in his shop. His employers gave him an excellent character.

It appeared that he had just been promoted to the job of shipping clerk

from that of helper, and that he was shortly to be married. An alibi was instantly established for him, inasmuch as he had been at work upon the shipping platform since eight o'clock in the morning.

Vernay was much troubled by the questions of the police. He claimed that he had bought the pistol as a gift for a friend.

He was reluctant to give his friend's name, but finally stated that it was Miss Jacqueline Pendar, his *fiancée*. Miss Pendar, he explained, rented an unfurnished room in a building to which there was access at all hours, and he considered that she required the gun for her protection.

He supposed that it had been stolen from her, he said.

Inquiry at the offices of the Sterling Securities Company, where Miss Pendar was employed as a filing clerk, revealed the fact that she had not reported for work that morning. She was found at noon in the room she occupied in one of the old dwellings on the north side of Fourteenth Street, that are now rented out in single rooms to small businesses, to artists and the like.

A hall bedroom on the top floor comprised her whole establishment. The detectives were astonished at the neatness and charm with which she had invested it.

Among those somewhat sordid surroundings it was like a little bower of comfort, with a fire burning in the grate, and a brass kettle boiling water for her tea.

The girl was twenty years old, and very pretty and ladylike. She had childlike blue eyes, and a delicate complexion that changed color easily.

She had, so far, refused to give any information concerning her people. It was supposed that she was one among those thousands of girls who come to the city out of good homes to make their living, and find it pretty hard sledding.

Her salary at the Securities Company was only twelve dollars a week. She explained that she lived as she did, because it was the only way she could support herself on such a sum.

She was terrified at the coming of the detectives. She claimed that the gun had been stolen from her.

As she bore a suspicious resemblance to the description furnished by Mrs. Brick, the detectives held her in talk until that woman could be brought down town and confronted with her. Mrs. Brick positively identified her as the young woman she had met leaving Henniger's pawnshop.

Miss Pendar then broke down and confessed that she had been to Henniger's. She went there, she said, to pawn a brooch in order to raise money to make some wedding purchases.

She found Henniger lying dead on the floor, she explained, and ran out, distracted with fear lest she be connected with the scandal.

She could not account for the finding of her pistol there. That had been stolen from her room, she still insisted.

Her story did not hold water at any point. She could not produce the brooch she said she had gone to pawn, nor tell what had become of it. She could give no satisfactory explanation of why she had chosen a pawnshop in such a remote quarter and so far from where she lived.

Still more damaging testimony was furnished by a number of things such as undergarments, shoes, gloves, *et cetera*, that she had just purchased, and which were lying on the bed when the detectives entered. She claimed to have bought these things out of her savings.

When they asked her why she had needed to pawn the brooch, then, all she could say was that a girl never has enough money for her wedding.

She was arrested and taken to headquarters. Young Vernay, who had accompanied the detectives to her room, was broken-hearted at this outcome.

A very affecting scene took place

when the young people were torn apart. It soon appeared that the young man meant to stand by her through thick and thin. Stoutly protesting his belief in her innocence, he hurried off to hire a lawyer.

On the following day, after close and long continued questioning by Inspector Rumsey, Jacqueline Pendar broke down and confessed that she had shot old Henniger. She now said that it was the pistol, the only article of any value she owned, that she had taken to pawn with him.

After an amount had been agreed upon, she said, Henniger came from behind the counter on the pretext that he wanted to give her a little present. The gun was then lying on the counter. It was early, and there was nobody else in the shop.

He became offensively amorous, she said, and finally attacked her, whereupon she snatched up the gun and shot him.

This story had as many holes in it as the other. Nobody believed that an experienced old pawnbroker like Henniger would allow a gun to remain loaded a single moment after he had examined it. The girl said she had dragged the body around the counter and into the cage, to prevent its discovery by any one who chanced to look in the door. But there were no marks on the floor, nor blood stains to bear this story out.

Furthermore, the position of the body when found, gave her the lie. Neither could she explain how the safe came to be open and empty, nor where she got the money to buy her wedding things.

Later in the day it was announced that Leonard Bratton, one of the best known criminal lawyers in the city, had undertaken to defend the girl. Bratton gave out a statement that he was glad to take the case without fee, since it seemed to him a serious miscarriage of justice was in danger of taking place.

He averred his belief in Jacqueline's innocence. The newspapers commented on his statement somewhat ironically since Bratton had never been conspicuous for philanthropic impulses.

While extremely successful, his methods in getting his clients off had been open to question. It was suggested that the publicity entailed would more than make up to him for the lack of a fee.

After having consulted with Bratton, Jacqueline repudiated her confession, claiming that it had been obtained by the police under force and duress; in other words, third degree methods. She now reverted to her former story, claiming that Henniger was already dead when she entered the shop.

Such was the newspaper story. It was generally supposed that Jacqueline had gone to the pawnshop honestly intending to pawn the gun, and had yielded to a sudden temptation upon finding the old man alone, and the safe open.

This, however, left a good many of the circumstances unexplained. A wave of hysterical sympathy went out to her; everybody believed she had done the deed, yet it seemed doubtful if a jury could be got to convict her. Bratton was astute enough to take full advantage of this, hence Jacqueline's denial of all complicity.

Matters were at this juncture when Inspector Rumsey came to our offices to consult with Mme. Storey upon the case. They are old friends.

Rumsey, as everybody knows, is one of the best police officers we have, and moreover, absolutely incorruptible. The story of his having illtreated the girl in order to force her to confess, had made my employer very indignant, and she said so. Rumsey himself attached but small importance to it.

"That's only Bratton," he said; "the story won't stick. Everybody knows what Bratton is."

However, the inspector was in trouble over the case. His position was an

uncomfortable one, because her guilt was clear, yet she had become a popular heroine.

"She has such a terror of the police I can't get anything coherent out of her," he said. "Bratton feeds this terror, and uses it for his own ends. I want the girl to have every chance, but naturally I don't want Bratton to get away with murder."

"What can I do?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Question her yourself," he begged. "You are so wonderful in such cases, particularly with a woman. Your psychological insight leads you directly to the truth. They cannot deceive you."

"Oh, you flatter me!" she said, smiling. "My only merit is that I'm a realist. I'm afraid your suggestion offers difficulties. I should have to talk to her here, because the atmosphere of jail or police office would be fatal; and I would have to talk to her alone—or with only Bella present."

"It's irregular," he said ruefully; "but I'll chance it. I'll send her up under guard, and my men can wait in your outer office."

"Very well," said Mme. Storey. "I have followed the case in the newspapers. It offers interesting possibilities."

II.

I AWAITED the girl's coming with a curious excitement. It is strange what publicity will do. Jacqueline Pendar had become, for the moment, the most eminent person in New York. Publicity had imposed her upon us like a sort of queen.

However, there was nothing queenly in her aspect. She entered my office between two big plainclothes men like a helpless little bird in the hands of the hunters. It caught at the breast.

She was slenderer and more fragile than her photographs had led me to expect, with childish lips, prone to tremble, and big blue eyes prone to fill. My own eyelids prickled at the sight.

I hardened my heart by reminding myself that this physical appeal was merely accidental. Slender little women have committed murders before this, and they are not any the less reprehensible than if they had been Amazons with budding mustaches.

I led her directly into Mme. Storey's room. She paused at the threshold, and her big eyes swept around wonderingly.

Of course that long high chamber resembles anything in the world but an office; with its art treasures it is like a salon in an old Italian castle, and my beautiful, dark-haired mistress, in her clinging Fortuny robe like a princess of the Renaissance.

"Come in," she said, smiling; "I suppose you know who I am."

"Oh, yes," murmured the girl, "everybody has heard of Mme. Storey; but—I expected—"

"What?"

"I expected you to be more severe."

Mme. Storey laughed outright.

"Sit down," she said. "Have a cigarette." She pushed over the big silver box, but the girl shook her head. "We'll have tea in directly. Meanwhile, let us be friends."

The girl gave her a strange look, wary and piteous.

"I mean it," said Mme. Storey. "Have you any women friends?" she broke off to ask.

The girl shook her head dismally.

"I thought as much. A woman has got to have women friends in order to get square with things. Because men never tell us the truth. Even the men who love us never tell us the truth.

"I am your friend. In the beginning I sympathize with every young person who is accused of a crime. I suspect they may not have received a square deal. Life is very hard for the young. And often I go on sympathizing with them, though I am forced to

hand them over to what is called justice.

"I shall be frank with you. Inspector Rumsey sent you to me, hoping that I could persuade you to tell the truth. He thinks I am very clever at it. But there's no magic about my methods. I wish to be friends with you. I tell *you* the truth. That's all there is to it."

A painful struggle became visible in the girl's face. Out of it appeared a dreadful, desperate look of obstinacy, suggesting that she would die sooner than tell the truth.

"It is only fair to warn you," Mme. Storey went on, "that I have read a transcript of all your previous examinations." She touched some papers on her desk. "I must also warn you that anything you say to me can be used against you later. Nevertheless, I recommend you to tell the truth."

"No jury will convict me," murmured the girl obstinately.

"I suspect it was your lawyer who told you that. Perhaps he is right. But if he gets you off through a lie, that will mean you will have to live a lie all the rest of your days. I judge from what I have read of him that Charles Vernay is a man of a peculiar honesty of character. Can you live a lie with him?"

This flicked her. "Charley knows I didn't do it," she cried passionately. "Whatever they may say, he will always know I didn't do it!"

"How will he know that?" asked Mme. Storey mildly.

"He knows I am not brave enough to kill a person."

"H-m!" said Mme. Storey. "Well, let us go over the whole ground. How did you happen to pick on such an out-of-the-way shop as Henniger's?"

The girl quickly commanded her outburst of feeling. She answered warily and slowly as if weighing every word—it was painful to see her: "I am fond of taking long walks, madame. Once while walking on a holiday I passed Henniger's. The old man had a kind look. I always remembered it."

"Well, why didn't you say so when you were first asked that question?"

"I was so confused I didn't know what I was saying."

"What was your purpose in going to Henniger's?"

"To pawn a brooch, madame."

"What became of it?"

"I cannot tell you. I had it in my hand when I went in. But the shock of seeing him—lying there—" She squeezed her eyes tight shut at the recollection. "I cannot remember. I must have dropped it."

"It was not found."

"Whoever found it kept it."

"What sort of brooch was it?"

"An old-fashioned cameo."

"How is it that Mr. Vernay knew nothing about such a brooch?"

"It was given to me by a gentleman before I knew Mr. Vernay well. So I had never told him."

"Who was this gentleman?"

"A gentleman who worked in the same place where I did. He is dead now. That is why I couldn't return the brooch after I became engaged to Mr. Vernay."

"Oh," said Mme. Storey.

Indeed it was only too clear that the unfortunate girl was lying. My mistress passed on to something else.

"Why did you lock the door in Mrs. Brick's face as you came out?"

"Oh, I was so frightened!" whispered the girl with a shudder. This was no doubt genuine enough. "Of being mixed up in a murder case, I mean. I thought if I could only get away they would never find me. I couldn't bear to think that Charley would learn about the brooch and all."

"Then what did you do?"

"The next thing I can remember clearly is riding down town on an elevated train."

"Then you went to buy your wedding things?"

"Yes, madame."

"Where did you get the money?"

"It was fifty dollars. I had been saving it up for years for that purpose, a few cents at a time."

"But isn't it rather strange, after having had such a hideous shock, that you should go out and buy your pretty things then?"

"I had taken the day off for that purpose, madame. Of course it was terrible to see the old man lying like that, but after all he was nothing to me. I soon got over it. New York is so big I never thought they would find me again."

"How did your pistol come to be in Henniger's pawnshop?" asked Mme. Storey softly.

"I don't know, madame. It was stolen from me."

"Now, come, Miss Pendar," said my mistress in friendly fashion, "you cannot expect anybody to believe that somebody just happened to steal your pistol, and that the thief just happened to murder and rob old Henniger in his out-of-the-way shop, and that you just happened to enter the shop a moment later to pawn a brooch!"

"I can't help how unlikely it sounds," murmured the girl. "It's the truth!"

"When did you first miss the pistol?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Not until the detectives came to my room asking about it. I ran to my bureau and—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Mme. Storey kindly. "Don't lie unnecessarily." She turned over the papers on her desk. "The detective makes no mention of your having run to your bureau. He says you accepted the fact that the pistol was yours without question."

"Well—maybe I did," drearily murmured the girl, hanging her head. "It is my character to believe what anybody tells me."

There was something unspeakably piteous in the way she said it. One visualized her as a poor little chip whirled on the currents of life without any power to resist them.

"Where did you keep the pistol?" asked Mme. Storey.

"In the top left-hand drawer of my bureau."

"What else was in that drawer?"

"Handkerchiefs, stockings, and other small articles."

"Was the gun wrapped up in anything?"

"No, madame. Charley said it must be so I could snatch it right up if I needed it."

"Then if you had opened the drawer you must have seen that it was gone."

"I suppose so."

"Hadn't you got out a clean handkerchief that morning?"

"I can't remember."

"When did you see the gun last?"

"The afternoon before, when I came home from work. It was in my drawer."

"Oh, you remember that?"

"Yes, madame."

"According to that, it must have been stolen some time that night?"

"Yes, madame."

"Had you and Vernay ever practiced shooting the gun?"

"No, madame. We had no place where we could. But Charley had showed me how it worked."

"Did the trigger pull easily?" asked Mme. Storey casually.

The girl saw the trap and avoided it. "I don't know, madame. I never tried it." She shivered. "I was afraid of it."

"You were always conscious of the ugly little black thing lying in the drawer there, like an animal alive and vicious?"

Jacqueline gave her a startled glance.

"Y-yes, madame."

"Describe what you did the night the gun was stolen," went on Mme. Storey.

"I came home from the office at the usual time, about half past five."

"The gun was in the drawer then?"

"Yes, madame. I cooked supper. I went to bed about eleven. That's all."

"Didn't Vernay come to see you?"

"No, madame; it was not his night."

"Not his night? What do you mean?"

"Three nights a week, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Charley attended night school to improve himself."

Mme. Storey turned over her papers.

"But in a statement made by Wickford, the artist in the adjoining room, he stated that Vernay came to see you every night."

"He was mistaken," said the girl. "I suppose he saw him different times, and just thought that."

"Did you have any other visitor?"

"No, madame," replied the girl, blushing. "I never had any visitor but Charley."

"You went to bed at the usual time," resumed Mme. Storey, "and you got up at the usual time?"

"Yes, madame."

"What sort of lock was there on your door?"

"An ordinary lock with a key. And besides that Charley had put up a chain so that if anybody knocked I could look out before opening the door."

"Was the chain on when you got up that morning?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then how could you have been robbed?" asked my mistress softly.

The girl was brought to a stand. Her wide eyes started out of her white face. "I—I don't know," she faltered.

"Quiet!" said Mme. Storey. "Nobody is threatening you. We are just three women here together." She lit a fresh cigarette to give the girl time to recover herself. "Why did you tell Inspector Rumsey that you shot him?" she asked after awhile.

"I—I scarcely knew what I was saying," murmured the girl, breathing fast. "It seemed the easiest way out. I knew they wouldn't punish a girl for defending herself."

"The easiest way out of what?" asked Mme. Storey.

The girl clapped her hands to her head.

"Questions! Questions! Questions!" she gasped. "I was frightened out of my wits!"

Mme. Storey's face was grave with pity. "Well, let us go back to the night before," she said.

Though her voice was soothing, Jacqueline was not reassured.

Through her lashes I saw her dart a look of fresh terror at my mistress.

"What did you have for supper?" asked Mme. Storey.

"I bought a chicken croquette on the way home."

"Only one?"

"I am a small eater, madame. I also baked a potato in a pan on top of the gas plate."

"Where did you buy the croquette?"

"In the delicatessen on University Place, just below Fourteenth."

Mme. Storey made a note of this on a pad, and for some reason her act caused the girl to shake with terror. "Did you get anything else there?"

"Not then," said Jacueline tremblingly. "Later I got a loaf of bread."

"Oh, you forgot the bread?"

"Well, I had some, but not enough."

"Oh, you eat a lot of bread, then?"

"No—yes—no," she faltered. "No, not much."

"Did you get anything else?"

"A quarter of a pound of butter for the bread. And—and some cold meat. That was so I wouldn't have to stop the next night," she hastily added.

"I see. How could you keep it?"

"In a little covered dish on the window sill."

"How much meat?"

"Half a pound of cold ham."

"Half a pound!" said Mme. Storey, raising her eyebrows.

A fine sweat had broken out on the girl's forehead. It was pitiful to see

her terror. "I—I was expecting Charley to supper the next night," she stammered.

"I see," said Mme. Storey. "Then the ham and the loaf of bread, or the greater part of it, will still be in your room?"

"How do I know?" cried the girl in a shaking voice. "How do I know who's been in my room?"

"When you were taken away, the police locked it and took the key," said Mme. Storey. "No one can have been in there."

"Well, from what you hear, the police are not above suspicion!" cried Jacqueline hysterically. "If the bread and the meat are gone, it won't prove anything! I'll be lucky if I find anything in my room when I get back."

Mme. Storey interrupted her in a grave voice:

"Jacqueline, who ate the bread and the meat?"

"Nobody! Nobody! Nobody!" she cried, beating her fists against her temples. "It was there when I left!"

"You had an unexpected guest for supper," said Mme. Storey, rising like Nemesis. "That was why you had to go out for more food. While you were out your guest betrayed you. He—I am merely assuming that it was a man—stole the pistol out of the drawer of your bureau.

"You did not discover the theft until you went to the drawer for a clean handkerchief the following morning. Something had been said which led you to suspect that there was a design against the old pawnbroker. You hastened up to his shop to prevent a crime. You found you were just a little too late."

The girl spread her arms on Mme. Storey's desk and dropped her head upon them, weeping piteously.

"You are too clever for me!" she sobbed. "I hope you're satisfied! Oh! I wish I was dead!"

"Nonsense!" said Mme. Storey gently. "You have cleared yourself. Anything is better than being suspected of murder."

"No! No! No!" wailed the girl. "Charley will leave me when he hears this! I cannot live without Charley!"

"You poor child! You poor child!" murmured my mistress, laying a hand on her hair. "Perhaps your fears deceive you. Tell me the whole story."

We had to wait for a little before Jacqueline was able to do this coherently. Mme. Storey had tea in, and we fed the girl.

My dear mistress exhibited a Heavenly kindness toward her, as if to assure her that however "Charley" might take these disclosures, she, Mme. Storey, would stand by her. Finally Jacqueline began to talk. The little thing, with her drawn, white face, looked piteously childish.

"Last summer when I first moved into the Fourteenth Street house," she said, "before Charley had put a chain on the door, one night there was a knock, and when I opened the door a young man pushed into my room before I could keep him out. But he was not rude to me. He was half out of his wits with terror.

"He said the police were after him, and he begged me to hide him. I was so sorry for him I could not say no. He was so young a mere lad, and so nice looking. I let him creep under my bed, and when the police came up I told them he had run up the ladder and out on the roof.

"When they went up there the young man slipped downstairs again. He kissed my hands in gratitude. He was so nice, so well spoken, I could not believe he was a thief; I thought there must be some mistake.

"A week or so afterward he came back. He said the police had forgotten him by that time. He brought me some flowers growing in a pot, and a box of candy, and a pretty brooch—many things; but I made him take them all away again, because of Charley. Except the candy. We ate that.

"He stayed awhile and talked. I thought no harm of it, he was so nice. He did not make himself out to be any better than he was. He told me he had robbed a cigar store that first night, and the police had seen him as he was coming out.

"He said he had been a thief ever since he had been a boy on the streets, but that I had made him ashamed of himself. He said he had a regular job then. He promised to lead a decent life if I would be his friend. It made me proud to think I was a good influence in somebody's life.

"After that he came often. He found out the nights that Charley went to school, and always came then. Sometimes he was broke and hungry when he came, and I fed him. Other times he would come with great armfuls of food, lobster, and plum cake, and all kinds of silly things, enough for a dozen.

"Then he would be in great spirits, and I'd have a time keeping him quiet. I never knew when he was coming. It was so exciting. He would always tap in a certain way to let me know who it was.

"I was terribly uneasy on account of Charley; but I could not tell him. He is so very honest he would have had no sympathy. Jealous, too. If any man so much as looks at me it puts him in a fearful rage.

"And of course when I did not tell him in the very beginning, I could never tell him after.

"The other one's name was Dick Preston. He swore to me that he had gone straight ever since he had known me. But of course I don't know, now. Sometimes he would go down on his knees at my feet, and put his face in my hands and cry, and say that I had saved him.

"Dick told me all about his life before he met me. It was fascinating to me, so wild and strange; robbing and running from the police; traveling all over the country. He had been in prison, too; his adventures would fill a book. It made an ordinary life seem tame.

"I always gave him good advice, and he seemed to be grateful for it. It's true, he fascinated me, but not in any wrong way. I couldn't feel toward any other man like I do toward Charley. There was nothing wrong between us!" she cried. "He called me his good angel. But no one will believe that now."

Her head went down on her arms again.

"I believe it," said Mme. Storey.

Jacqueline resumed with a weary sigh.

"The last time he came he was very depressed. He had lost his job and was broke. So I went out and got bread and meat to feed him. He told me he had met a former pal, who had put up the job to him of robbing an old pawnbroker on Mutual Avenue, up in Harlem. The old man was always alone in his shop mornings, he said, and it would be a cinch.

"But Dick said he had turned his pal down. He said he would sooner starve than go back to that life. Then it all happened just as you said. In the morning I discovered that he had stolen my pistol."

The girl's voice shook.

"Such treachery! I never knew there were people like that. I was stunned! Then I remembered the old pawnbroker. I went up to Mutual Avenue on the L. I was too late.

"It was all lies!" she cried with indescribable bitterness. "I didn't do him any good at all. He was only fooling me!" The childish head went down.

III.

For a moment none of us spoke. For me the story registered a new depth of human baseness. It was incomprehensible how anybody could so deceive and injure the gentle child. One's breast burned with indignation.

"The perfect blackguard!" commented Mme. Storey with a grim air. "I know the type; the emotional blackguard. He *would* hide his face in a woman's hands and confess his sins in tears. Ha! I only hope they catch him!"

"Well—that's all," said Jacqueline with a piteous little shrug. "What are you going to do with me?"

"I must return you to your guards now," said my mistress, "but I promise you you shall soon be free."

"Free!" she exclaimed with a twisted smile. To see such bitterness in a creature so soft and gentle was unspeakably painful.

She finally went away with an apathetic air in the company of her plainclothes men as if nothing mattered to her any more.

At Mme. Storey's command, I immediately called up Charles Vernay at the works of the Amsterdam Stamping Company. Half an hour later he was in our office.

The newspapers had not misrepresented him. Picture a brown-haired young man, radiant with health, every move of whose strong body revealed the elasticity of his muscles. He had that particular look of openness and honesty that only accompanies physical strength.

One likes to think that young men were originally intended to be like that. In the age of heroes they were like that if one may believe old tales; but in these days of jazz and complicated neuroses they have become so rare as to be remarkable.

He was still in his rough clothes, having had no opportunity of changing, but though he was only a shipping clerk he was every inch a man. I could understand Jacqueline's fear of him, too.

To a woman there was a suggestion of danger in his close shut mouth and steady gaze. It added to his attractiveness. He was deeply troubled, as was natural.

He entered Mme. Storey's room with a wondering air. Though he was quite single-hearted as regards women, he was man enough to be sensible of my mistress's beauty and charm, and when he looked at her his strong face softened in that way which is so flattering to women—to my mistress as well as another.

He sat down. It appeared that he knew all about Mme. Storey, so no elaborate explanations were necessary. She said: "Inspector Rumsey is an old friend of mine. He has been here to consult with me about Jacqueline. That's why I asked you to come. You don't need to tell me that you're having a bad time over this."

"I just can't understand it," he said with a strong gesture. "It's impossible that Jack could have shot the man. If you knew her as I do! Why, she couldn't hurt a fly! But there's something— Henniger was certainly shot with the gun I gave her. If it was stolen from her I can't see how she happened on the same shop almost at the moment he was killed. I could stand it if she had killed him, but this uncertainty! They won't let me see Jack alone. It's driving me out of my mind!"

"Well, you can be at ease now," said Mme. Storey. "Jacqueline has told me the whole story. I want you to hear it in her own words before you get any other version."

He sprang out of his chair with wild eagerness—there was fear in his eyes, too. He was no fool. His instinct had already told him there was something here that would make very unpleasant hearing.

"Bella," said my mistress to me, "read Jacqueline's statement from your notes."

I proceeded to do so. I felt so strongly for the young man that I was hard put to it to keep my voice from trembling. He sank back in his chair, and out of the tail of my eye I could see him crouching there, tense and still.

When I had finished he leaped up. "By Heaven!" he cried hoarsely. "Another man!" There was a terrible look in his eyes.

"Sit down," said Mme. Storey quietly.

"No! No!" he said with a violent gesture. "I can't discuss this with anybody." He started for the door.

"Lock the door, Bella, and put the key in your pocket," she said swiftly.

I was near the door. I managed to obey, though he came charging down on me like a locomotive.

"You can't get out unless you attack my secretary," said Mme. Storey mildly. "I don't suppose you want to do that."

He turned away from me with a groan that seemed to be forced from the depths of his being. Dropping in another chair, he rested his elbows on his knees, and pressed his head between his palms. My mistress gave him time to recover himself a little.

"What do you want of me anyway?" he groaned out at last.

"To reason with you," said Mme. Storey.

He lifted a tormented face.

"Reason!" he sneered. "She has deceived me! I staked everything on her!"

"Leave Jacqueline out of it for the moment," said Mme. Storey. "Consider me. When you came in you told me you had followed several of my cases in the newspapers. You expressed an admiration for my psychological acumen. Isn't that so?"

He nodded sullenly, very unwilling to consider anything but his own great trouble.

"Well," said Mme. Storey softly, "my powers, such as they are, are at your service in this crisis of your life. Why not use them?"

"What do you mean?" he demanded scowling.

"I have been called 'a practical psychologist, specializing in the feminine,'" she said with a twinkle. "Do you not wish me to analyze this statement?"

He was greatly struck by this. A struggle took place in his sullen face.

"Let me go away by myself and fight it out," he mumbled. "I'll come back."

"No," said Mme. Storey, "you would certainly do something you would be sorry for all your life. Stay here and fight it out with me."

His head went down between his hands again. His strong fingers twisted in his brown hair. He looked appealingly boyish.

Finally he muttered sheepishly: "All right. Give me hell. Expect it's good for me."

Mme. Storey laughed. She rose and walked about while she talked.

"This Dick Preston is an unmitigated scoundrel," she said, giving my notebook a rap with her knuckles, "but that doesn't reflect on Jacqueline at all. You and I would have known it at a glance, but her innocence was deceived. She was sorry for him, she says. Are you going to blame her because she succored this wretch out of her kindness? The very phrases she uses testify to her sweetness of heart.

"She was fascinated by his stories of crime; of course she was, being so simple and good. She wanted to help him to be good; she felt proud because she thought she was able to help somebody. Everybody else treated her like such a baby.

"There's a word of warning for you, my lad. Treat her less like a baby, and she will reveal unexpected grown-up qualities. This subtle-minded thief knew how to melt a woman's heart; he confessed his weaknesses to her. A strong man might learn something from that, too.

"In short, what is revealed in this confession? Goodness, gentleness, kindness of heart. God in heaven, my friend, what more do you want in a wife? Every sentence here betrays her love for you; an unselfish, all em-

bracing love. I assure you that kind of love is rare in these days of enfranchised women. It's too good for you.

"You must excuse my heat, but a man's jealousy and unreasonableness make me mad! The perfect flower of love is offered to you, and you want to trample it underfoot. It takes a selfish and a self-seeking woman to keep you in order!"

There was a good deal more of this. Mme. Storey did not spare his sex. Her eyes sparkled and her voice was crisp. One gathered, from the hang of his head, that the young man was taking it humbly enough.

Then she smiled at her own heat, and went on smiling. "I tell you, you'll be lucky if you get her. You and she would make a good match. I wouldn't say that to a weak man, but you, I take it, are strong; strong in body and strong in character. However, don't play up your strength too hard. Encourage her to stand alone.

"Confide your weaknesses to her gentle hands, and let her be strong for once in a way. A well matched pair! Oh, I know, an engaged couple isn't going to pay any attention to the opinion of a psychologist upon their marriage, but, anyhow, there it is for what it's worth. A well matched pair!"

She took a cigarette. The young man raised his head, but did not care to meet her glance. His face still wore a hangdog look, but it was much softened. Like a young man, he was trying to hide from her how much softened he was.

"You're right," he muttered. "I'm straightened out now. Certainly it was good of you to take so much trouble with me. I can't properly tell you what I feel—how thankful I am to you."

"Don't try," said Mme. Storey quickly.

"If you'll unlock the door," he muttered, "I promise you I won't do anything foolish now."

"What are you going to do?" she asked, approaching him.

"Going down to see if they will let me see Jack. Going to put myself in her hands," he added softly.

"Good man!" said Mme. Storey, giving him a clap on the shoulder.

He picked up her hand in a sheepish way, and pressed it hard, then hurried out.

Mme. Storey came back to her desk with a beaming smile.

"Not such a bad afternoon's work, my Bella," she said. "Did you hear how I pitched into him? That's the proper tone to take with a jealous man. Mercy! wasn't he good-looking?"

She was much more deeply moved than she cared to show.

"When I first went into business," she went on with a slow smile, "that is how I pictured myself acting; straightening out tangled humans. But, alas! I soon found that tangled humans don't want to be straightened out; they refuse to be straightened out. So nothing remained for the exercise of my talents but solving crime. Well, bring on your crime!" she cried gayly. "Those letters in the Rampayne case must be answered before we close up shop to-night."

It only remains to say that some weeks afterward the young man who described himself to Jacqueline Pendar as Dick Preston—he had many other names—was discovered lying on the steps of Gouverneur Hospital in the early morning, mortally wounded. His friends, after smashing a window of the hospital to call attention to him, drove away.

It turned out that he had been shot in an affray between bootleggers and hijackers. Before he died he made a statement which completely bore out Jacqueline's story, and with him in the grave were laid away all the ghosts that might subsequently have troubled the married life of our young friends.

THE END

The gallery was clear

Drums of Peace

When Holland fought for freedom against the Spain that ruled the world a young Dutchman found himself, and love

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Heartbreak Trail," "Personality Plus," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

DESPITE the caution that is innate in Dutch boys, and the desire of Karel Vreede to spend a peaceful life on his produce farm in Old Holland, destiny seemed to have marked him for a life of glamour, even as Kryn Lukas, the hunchback jester of the court of Countess Pernella, had foretold.

He had done what any spirited Dutchman would have, defended Drina Fruin from the unwelcome advances of Captain Trillot, a Gascon fighting for Holland. In revenge the Gascon burned down Karel's farm, and snatching him almost from the arms of his sweetheart, dragged him to their boat, where he threw him at the feet of Colonel Van Colenbrander, the commander.

The colonel, for amusement, suggested that Karel fight Trillot with Karel's own weapon—cheeses. The proud Gascon refused, and his companion, Lieutenant Dirk Kampen, took his place. Karel surprised them by demanding to fight with their weapon—sword.

Swords crossed, and the unskilled Vreede fell wounded, but not before he had spared Kampen, who had slipped upon the spilled blood. For this brave-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 14

ry, the colonel elected Karel to the ranks of the musketeers, and Dirk Kampen, now his friend, initiated him into the intricacies of fencing.

Karel was advancing steadily in the esteem of his companions and officers when, at a skating festival, he performed before the beautiful Countess Pernella, half Spanish, and thought by many to be in conspiracy with their dreaded enemy Spain, through her cousin, Don Fernando.

These rumors ceased to exist for Karel when she asked him to skate with her. Accustomed to the effeminate graces of her courtiers, the little countess was delighted with the honest bashfulness of Karel, and it was not long before he was stationed in her castle.

From then on events moved so rapidly around Karel, that he lost all sense of balance. Countess Pernella loved him, had him promoted, and he was the favored and envied of the court. In the midst of his glory he learned that Drina and her father, Willem, were in the neighborhood, and the arrogant Captain Trillot was again annoying Drina.

A duel followed between Trillot, the master, and Karel, the pupil; in which a loss of temper by the Gascon left an opening, through which the sturdy Dutch thrust his sword. The camp was alarmed, and Karel, realizing the envy with which he was regarded among his former officers, rushed Willem and Drina into the safety of the castle.

CHAPTER XII.

CONTRASTS.

"SHE'S a lovely, sweet child!" remarked the Countess Pernella, patting Drina's rosy cheek with a lily white hand, and making nothing of the fact that Drina was her better in years by two or three summers, and would tip the scales before they began to feel the weight of the countess.

"We shall adopt her as a sister. Here, poor Drina, you shall be safe from all danger, and I shall make you one of my maids of honor."

Drina could find no words to thank her benefactress for such gracious kindness. She blushed more rosily, and dropped a curtsy to the noble lady.

As woman to woman, they appraised each other with secret earnestness that involved many conflicting passions.

The countess, being honest with herself, saw a country girl more beautiful than half the famous beauties of the older courts of Europe, and wondered how such a prize had so long escaped the roving eyes of the noble gentlemen who indulged a taste for rare examples of the human form divine.

Drina, on the other hand, honest with herself and all the world though the heavens should fall, declared to her inmost soul that Pernella's strange beauty was something beyond the skill of the master painter, and above the eloquence of the laureate poets.

Johanna, the eldest of the maids of honor, took Drina and Willem away to assign them apartments in the castle, and Karel tarried in the boudoir of the chatelaine to add his thanks before going to join the waiting Dirk in his quarters.

Pernella appeared to pay him little attention at the moment. She flicked her pointed boot nervously with a jeweled riding whip, and presently walked over to a tall mirror.

"In Venice a royal painter put me upon his canvas as a Madonna, the Mother of God," she said rather impersonally, thoughtfully studying the reflection in the glass. "You may see the picture there, in a duke's palace. It is surpassingly beautiful!"

"The poorest artist could scarcely make it otherwise."

"Are you honest?" she challenged, arching her brows. "Your tongue gets around gallant speeches with more agility these days, Karel. Am I the most beautiful woman in Europe? Do

I look like a saint—like the Queen of Heaven?"

"You are the queen—the empress of beauty!" he declared hoarsely.

"Do I look like a saint?" she repeated insistently, tapping her boot.

"If the saints surpass all creatures of the world in beauty, you look like a saint," he said solemnly, and sighed.

"Is any beauty so near perfection," she demanded, "that naught could be added to it? Suppose, now, my white cheeks were touched ever so lightly with the color that burns in that country maiden's face. I mean, touched by nature's hand. No perfumer has devised a cosmetic delicate enough for my skin."

"She is a country maiden," he said slowly. "You have lived in palaces while she has toiled in the fields."

"You evade the question!" she said coldly. "If I, too, had toiled in the fields and let the summer sun ripen me like an apple, should I then be more beautiful than this wench Drina?"

There was a smart knocking on the door of the boudoir, and the countess frowned and stamped her foot petulantly.

"It's a bold person that dares knock at my door and interrupt me," she said. "But the knocking is urgent. See who is there!"

Karel opened the door, and the Spanish gallant, Miguel Avila, stepped upon the threshold, with the seneschal of the castle close behind him. Miguel's dark eyes rested on the musketeer for an instant, then shifted to the angry face of the countess, and fell before her glance.

"A thousand pardons for this indiscretion, *madame!*" he muttered. "I should not disturb you in your private apartments, but the matter is of a serious nature. There are soldiers at the gates demanding permission to enter. There has been great trouble at the camp, and it's said that certain fugitives are hiding here. There has been a murder; an officer was killed, and—"

"And I'm to be thus annoyed because one of Colenbrander's officers has been killed. What are they for? They are killed by thousands at the whim of any general. Send word to the colonel that I'm not to be so disturbed at any time for any trifling cause.

"The captain-general himself will have to see me if there's any further business between that troublesome camp and my castle. And hereafter let the seneschal himself use his wits—not get a cavalier to escort him to my door."

Miguel backed through the door, bowing profoundly, while the seneschal bent well-nigh to the floor, mumbling apologies.

"The fault is mine, you see," said Karel, as the door closed. "I am bringing trouble to you. I should give myself up at the camp, and make an end of it. I might have known!"

"No more of that!" she cried, stamping her foot. "It's a great fuss to make over the death of a Gascon captain. And *you,* I believe, are seizing on the diversion to evade the issue between us!

"You'll not deny that I should be more beautiful if my cheeks were touched with rose, will you?

"You dissemble like a Dutch diplomatist! I loved your uncouth country manners—your blundering honesty, but already you're taking lessons from my simpering, chattering human monkeys and cockatoos.

"We'll have truth between us now! Look me well in the eye, Karel! Do you love this wench? Blue eyes, cherry lips, and apple cheeks! Do I *look pale* now that *she's* here? Tell me! Do I seem haggard to you, when you look at her? Perhaps I'm aging prematurely, eh? Women with Spanish blood grow old at sixteen years, they say.

"Come! The truth is kinder in the end. Tell me if I'm a hag, that I may put on caps and slippers, and take to embroidering altar cloths. Perhaps my

jewels, my robes, the ingenious lighting of the rooms—perhaps these things deceived you. But you shall tell me now! Is it the wench or the lady? Name your love!"

He stood stiffly erect, his arms folded on his breast.

"Must I tell you every hour," he said slowly, "that I love you?"

She uttered a little cry, giving vent to rage suppressed.

"Evasions!" she groaned in bitter disgust.

The riding whip flashed in the air and slashed him across the face, leaving a scarlet welt.

She screamed as though the pain were hers, and struck again, and yet again.

The blood surged in his face till it was purple, but he stood unwavering, his arms locked across his breast.

"Will that fetch honesty and truth?" she panted, trembling from head to feet in her frenzy.

His arms flew out and he lunged toward her, his eyes blazing like live coals.

He caught her frail wrist and dragged her, shrinking in terror, to him, and one big hand enveloped her marble throat and held her white face close to his.

"*You* talk of truth!" he roared. "I've given up truth for you! I've yielded my soul to you, and put honesty, love, and life behind me—to be your slave!

"But you shall have the truth! Drina's lovelier than you—in all her sweetness, innocence, and purity. Her face is an angel's, and yours is a face of evil. You are the *Lilith* of the Garden, she the *Eve!*

"Strip off your finery, tear the jewels from your hair, and put on the coarse frock of a milkmaid. Who'd be the wench then?

"Yet it's not that!" he gasped, with a groan of anguish. "I'd love you—in peasant's frock and wooden shoes! I'm bewitched by a sorceress! And *who* am I? Princes come crawling to your feet.

"The Czar of the Russias would kneel to you if he saw your face, your eyes! Yet you're insatiable—demanding more and more! I've made my choice—I've chosen death and ruin, to follow you! All else is cast behind me. Isn't that enough?

"*Isn't* that enough?" he cried again, and he swept her from her feet, held her before him, and shook her frail form violently in his rage.

Her eyes flamed with terror. She caught a breath, and sent forth a piercing shriek.

Instantly a rush of footsteps sounded in the gallery outside, the door burst open, and the household gallants charged across the threshold, brandishing naked swords.

"Ho! The spaniels!" yelled Karel, and dropped the woman in a limp heap at his feet.

His rapier hissed from the scabbard like a lightning bolt. He struck, and the point transfixed the breast of Miguel Avila.

Guy de Boisot and Hans van Galen screamed like women, dropped their swords, and fled bleating down the gallery.

Karel withdrew the blade from the still form of the Spaniard, then turned and looked about him.

The seneschal cowered on his knees by the wall.

"Mercy! Have mercy, master!" he mumbled in abject terror.

In a corner Kryn Lukas stood, white-faced, but grinning.

"*Destiny,* master!" he whispered. "You'd never harm a fool. I must live to see your banner float over a hundred castles. And spare your poor slave, the little countess. You've tamed her now. She's silent for once. Look at her poor eyes!"

Karel glanced down and saw the strange eyes fixed on his face. He caught her by the arm again and lifted her up beside him.

"Karel!" she murmured faintly, and put her arms about him, resting her head on his breast.

The weak surrender, the dependence touched him almost to tenderness, and he put his arm about her shoulders.

"Do you love murder—cruelty?" he whispered with grim irony.

"I love *you!*" she sighed.

She was one of the frail, pallid women who mysteriously abound in vitality. never swoon, endure hardship and shock.

Limp and pathetic in Karel's arms, she had the practical impulse to dismiss the gaping domestics.

"Go!" she said sharply to Kryn Lukas and the seneschal, "and keep your tongues from wagging if you want to keep them in your heads.

"And take the carrion with you," she added coldly, glancing at the body of the Spaniard on the floor.

A shudder flashed over Karel and he peered curiously into her eyes.

"Carrion, eh?" he murmured. "And 'twould be the same if that corpse were mine!"

"You lie, dearest love!" she cried, with a weird little laugh, and raised her arms to clasp them about his neck. "Your death would be mine now. I am sounding the depths of love.

"I shall marry you, Karel; I want you for a husband. I'm a countess, an aristocrat, but you shall be a prince —perhaps a king. You were born to be a king.

"You are terrible — frightful, in your rages!" she said with a thrill of admiration. "You strike—quick as the panther, without counting the costs. Two men have died to-day, and you're alive — strong, fearless, splendid! I could kiss the ground beneath your feet.

"We're so wonderful—you and I, Karel! King and queen—emperor and empress. It's not impossible—it's not too strange. John Bockelson—John of Leyden—was a tailor's son in Leyden, not a hundred years ago. *He* became a king—wore the ermine, and carried globe and scepter. He might have been an emperor, but for the crafty flatterers that turned his head. He lost his head —in spirit and in very truth."

"I'm no budding king!" exclaimed Karel, though he was a little awed by her zeal and fervor. "I have no craft, no cunning, and little knowledge of the world."

"You have the courage, the boldness, the majesty!" she said tensely. "Mine be the craft, the cunning. Yours the body, mine the brain! Together we might win the world.

"Hold me, Karel!" she cried in ecstasy. "Crush me in your arms. And say that the wench is ugly, and I am fair."

"I'll say what I please!" he muttered roughly. "But I love you; that's enough."

CHAPTER XIII.

HOMAGE.

THE castle teemed with excitement, suppressed, but ready to burst into conflagration. The body of Miguel Avila lay in the chapel, with tapers burning at head and feet, and the chaplain, Fra Domenico, intoned prayers for the repose of the unfortunate cavalier's soul, and dared the displeasure of the countess by tolling the great bronze bell in the turret above the chapel.

There were devoted partisans of the deceased in the castle who whispered together in secret places. Frasquita, the Spanish girl, knelt in the chapel and wept while she prayed. Guy de Boisot, who had lately been intent on knifing the living Miguel, mourned him dead with bitter lamentations, and very cautiously whispered vague threats of vengeance.

The situation of the detachment of musketeers was a peculiarly uncomfortable one. They knew that the colonel of the regiment sought their leader to put him to trial for a major violation

of the military law, and that the authority of the colonel and the States General was flouted and defied by the diminutive Countess of Lederbrugge, impudently confident in the security of her impregnable walls of rock.

The men were too well disciplined to reconcile themselves readily to mutinous disregard of the law. But the unexpected presence of Dirk Kampen in the castle prevented them from attempting a demonstration. He told them of the circumstances of the duel between Captain Trillot and Karel, the unequal conditions, and the almost miraculous victory, and they grew more sympathetic and passively neutral.

For all Karel's bravery, buoyant spirits, and the qualities that won him early popularity among the musketeers of the regiment, there was scarcely a person in the castle, save Dirk Kampen, and the countess herself, who was openly disposed in his favor.

His sudden entrance into the life there, and his rapid rise in the favor of the countess, inspired jealousy rather than good will, and it was natural that many of the retainers would have rejoiced at his downfall and ruin.

Colonel Van Colenbrander sent a messenger to the castle demanding for him an audience with the countess, and she granted it. When he came there he was not permitted to see the musketeers in the guard room, and the seneschal conducted him directly to the great hall.

Pernella held formal court there for the occasion, in something more than the usual blaze of light. With her natural instinct for the theatrical touch in real life, she sat on her little throne resplendent in white satin, pearls, and diamonds—an ice queen in festival array, but frigid, glacial, utterly awe-inspiring.

It pleased her in her mood to have Karel seated on the dais beside her, in a lower chair, and in yielding to her caprice he graced the function with a uniform of black velvet, set off with white neck ruff and frills at the breast and sleeves.

The marks of the whip were conspicuous on his face, but he had slain two men that day and had a right to scars without accounting for them in detail.

The pompous, arrogant colonel was nonplused. The scene was a little overpowering.

"Colonel Van Colenbrander has business with us," Pernella murmured as the seneschal presented him in the usual form.

The colonel stared, and strove to keep his countenance and find his voice.

"The Countess of Lederbrugge," he said stiffly, "has been granted many indulgences and privileges by the official representatives of the States General. It is the pleasure of the Stadholder, His Highness Prince Maurice, to be gracious to members of the ancient aristocracy in this new democracy.

"But—the Countess of Lederbrugge will forgive me, I hope, if I remind her that a provincial title does not carry with it the right of the incumbent to defy the ordinances of the States General, or to give aid and comfort to one who is a fugitive from their justice."

"Colonel Van Colenbrander is our friend," said Pernella solemnly, "and we are disposed to be patient, but the colonel speaks with overmuch confidence of the States General as an established institution of government."

"The plethoric countenance of the officer darkened.

"You mean, madame," he said, "that you dare to question the authority of the States General and the Stadholder himself? You challenge the status of the established government of the united provinces, when England and—"

"England is not the arbiter," she said calmly. "Prince Alexander, Duke of Parma, the representative and regent of the King of Spain, recognizes no such status. These are Spanish provinces, and you arrogate too much au-

thority to yourself when you speak of laws and governments. Your status is that of an insurgent, and you stand guilty of treason."

Van Colenbrander breathed heavily and glanced suspiciously about the great room, perhaps expecting to see pikemen appear from behind the tapestries.

He shrugged his shoulders and found voice again.

"You are pleased to present a comedy, madame! Our country is now unfortunate in a divergence of political sentiment, and we are on the verge of a resumption of hostilities, but even His Majesty Philip of Spain has been forced to recognize the authority of the Union of Utrecht, and his majesty does not send women here to be the agents of his imperial policy.

"Were I so disposed, madame, I could seize this castle in a moment, but the matter in hand does not warrant the dignity of such procedure. It is a trifling matter of law and discipline only, but I am forced to demand the person of the soldier who sits at your side."

"The soldier," she said, still unruffled, "is my affianced husband."

"Then I congratulate him upon his good fortune, madame, but your distinguished favor does not release him from the army, nor relieve him of responsibility to the country's laws. I still demand his surrender."

"Your arrogance gains you nothing, colonel," she replied. "I am a woman of no great rank or station, but I do not speak without authority. Your camp is near by, but your force is small compared to the Spanish garrison at Breda."

"Shall I show you, madame, what I can do with my force?" he demanded, losing his temper.

"Why, yes, if you wish to challenge me to show what *I* can do. I have good friends in every Dutch camp and fortress, and I have cousins, kinsfolk, powerful friends, in every Spanish stronghold. I do not jest, Colonel Van Colenbrander! Sound your drums and trumpets if you will this very night, and I will send up rockets from every turret of the castle.

"Your force may get here first, but the troops from Breda will be marching. Don Fernando d'Alcala is my cousin, and he will lend me ten guns for every one of yours—a regiment of horse or foot for every company of your musketeers.

"How, then?" she demanded, her eyes flashing with the light of triumph. "Do you wish the Countess of Lederbrugge to throw down the gage that will set troops in the field again—or would you defer the resumption of war to the coming of the spring?"

"You're a rash woman, madame," he said coldly. "But you exaggerate, you magnify all things. I've more than half a mind to seize this fellow at once, and have done with it, and I doubt much that Don Fernando, or the Duke of Parma himself would be bothered with an affair so trifling."

The castle trumpeter sounded a call in the courtyard—a blast announcing the approach of some visitor of importance.

The unexpected martial note startled the colonel, and he looked about him again with nervous apprehension.

The seneschal came in quickly, approached the dais, and gave the countess a whispered message. She nodded, betraying no emotion, but got up without ceremony, and retired from the hall in haste.

The colonel shrugged his shoulders. He was left standing before the dais, neither dismissed, nor encouraged to remain.

He glanced casually, superciliously at Karel.

"The beggar on horseback rides to the throne, eh?" he murmured quietly. "You have far to fall my friend; you will be hurt."

"God only knows," said Karel tensely, "who shall fall and who shall rise.

It is a strange world, and I am new in it.

"I have no quarrel with you, sir," he went on gravely to the colonel's obvious surprise, "but you have no heart, no human sentiments. I'd leave it to fair judges that I've been a loyal soldier but you would show me no mercy if I surrendered. I killed Trillot in a righteous cause, with all the odds against me."

"You had no right to fight," said the colonel severely. "Your righteous cause should have been presented to a tribunal. I am just, and I support the law. Be sure that I shall not abandon this effort to maintain the law, and justice shall be done."

The seneschal returned.

"Her ladyship requests the presence of Colonel Van Colenbrander and Lieutenant Vreede in her private apartments," he said.

The colonel nodded assent, and Karel joined him in following the servant.

In the boudoir stood Pernella and a man in military dress.

Van Colenbrander stifled an exclamation, and executed the salute.

"Your highness!" he gasped.

"Not so loud!" said the visitor. "I travel as a private citizen, visiting my friends along the way."

Karel rendered the salute, a little tardily. He was thunderstruck, for the identity of the stranger was not hard to guess.

Maurice of Nassau, captain general of the forces and foremost military genius of the day in Europe, was a young man of marked eccentricities. He scorned pomp and display, and affected a simplicity of dress that rendered him conspicuous.

His traveling cloak was thrown back, and Karel saw the plain woolen suit that was famous in the army. There were no insignia of rank, no embellishments. His dusty boots were loose and wrinkled, and he presented a slovenly appearance for a soldier.

"This is the man, then," he said quietly, glancing from Karel to Pernella. "He's a stout fellow; he has a good face.

"And you, colonel," he went on rapidly, "are you not giving yourself an excessive multiplicity of cares and worries? Law is law, but its essence lies in its interpretation. In time of war a colonel of musketeers should not abandon all the activities of training and preparation to play hare-and-hounds with a young man who has fought a duel."

"Your highness, I beg leave to tell my story of—"

"I've heard enough of it," interrupted the prince. "This man saved your life, did he not? Yes! He distinguished himself above the rest of your musketeers, and made fools of Don Fernando's lancers. Yet you, in your official zeal—which is often tiresome—threaten to raze a castle, give battle to the Spaniards, and open a campaign prematurely, in order to discipline a rash, high-spirited boy for an escapade.

"You are pardoned, Vreede," he said, turning to Karel. "Colonel Van Colenbrander is witness to my verbal order that you be pardoned and reinstated in your regiment without loss of rank. It is my will, however, that you shall seek no more quarrels and fight no more duels."

"Your highness is gracious," said Karel huskily.

"I craved another boon from your highness," murmured Pernella. "You will not break my heart by refusing?"

"Always a favor—always another boon!" chuckled the prince, "but you are an eloquent pleader in pearls and diamonds, Pernella. And you're set on marrying this fellow? Well, that's your affair! Myself, I've found troubles enough in the world without adding marriage to the catalogue.

"You can't marry a lieutenant, you say? Well, I'm no king, and I can't make a count or a duke for you. Neither will I make a colonel or a gen-

eral, with Colenbrander here to stare me out of countenance for my folly.

"Let us see! The man has a head, two arms, two legs: he should pass as a captain, eh? We'll call him a captain then if that will make the world brighter for you, Pernella. A captain of musketeers—and that's almost as good a name as count—rather better, in fact, in a democracy."

"Your highness is a great prince—a great man!" exclaimed Pernella gratefully. "Even if you didn't make a colonel for me."

"And do I get nothing more than a compliment for my pains?" asked the prince.

She laughed softly and put up her face.

The captain general drew her closer to him with an arm about her waist, and kissed her; and kissed her—as it seemed to Karel Vreede—with an excess of ardor and emotion.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BELLS.

KAREL walked in the gallery by the great hall next morning with Dirk Kampen, and the two came upon Drina and her father. The little man smiled wistfully and doffed his cap to the two young officers. Drina made a pretty curtsy, but would not raise her eyes.

At a sign fom Karel, Dirk went on, and the former stopped and took Drina's hand.

"Drina!" he said huskily, and stopped, lacking another word.

Slowly she raised her head, and when her eyes reached the level of his they rested there, unwavering. Her lips quivered just perceptibly, but she was of a race strong to repress emotion, and she was brave.

However, in spite of her fortitude, tears found their way into her eyes, and a drop escaped and trickled down her smooth cheek.

"You're good to speak to us," she said then, firmly, and with no note of irony. "We understand—father and I. You've gone out of our world, and you're getting to be a great man, Captain Vreede."

Karel stifled a sob in his throat.

"I'm *not* good—to speak to you!" he protested brokenly. "I'm not worthy to speak to you, Drina. I *have* gone out of your world—that is true, but into no better world. I—"

Willem Fruin stepped forward anxiously.

"Now, now!" he said gently, "your feelings get the better of you, Captain Vreede. You are a good man and tender-hearted, and you give way too much to sympathy. You're not—exactly—like most of the men that are accustomed to the bigger, wider world.

"You mustn't feel that you're unworthy. I'm sure that you have a great mission in the world. You've been called to do a larger task, and the good Lord takes ways of shaping our courses for us which we can never understand."

Later in the day Karel and the musketeers were astounded by the sudden arrival of a strong company of Spanish arquebusiers under a flag of truce. They escorted the Spanish general, young Don Fernando d'Alcala, who passed at once to the great hall where Pernella was with a casual gathering of guests.

It puzzled Karel to see the smartly armored, dandified Spaniards fraternize with the Dutch musketeers in the guard room, but Dirk Kampen assured him that it was nothing unusual, even in times of active warfare and during sieges. Soldiers were soldiers, and they could cheerfully play at dice together, and as cheerfully slit one another's throat the same day.

Presently Karel went to the great hall, but it appeared deserted: the guests and members of the household evidently dispersed on the arrival of the Spanish grandee.

A second look, however, disclosed Don Fernando himself, standing half concealed by the canopy of the dais. And now it was scarcely surprising to Karel that the young general was engaged in the common pastime of the gentlemen of his class. He held a woman in his arms and was caressing her.

The woman raised her head from the Spaniard's shoulder, and Karel saw the fair face of his betrothed.

"Pernella!" he cried out, in something like anguish.

She did not scream; she merely smiled, calmly and sweetly; and without haste she disengaged herself from the Spaniard's unwilling arms.

"Ah, look, Fernando! It is Karel, my betrothed!" she cried joyfully, with every evidence of delight.

"Our new cousin!" exclaimed Don Fernando gayly, speaking in Dutch, as did many of the foreign officers who were veterans of the campaigns in the low countries.

He stepped lightly across the room, seized the astonished Karel's hands, and kissed him on each cheek.

Again Karel's wits were scattered. A moment before, he had been ready to draw his sword and run the Spaniard through, but all in a breath he was hailed as a beloved kinsman and saluted with brotherly affection.

"You perceive, dear Karel, the warmth of the southern nature," said Pernella with apparent artlessness. "No one has shown such pleasure, such delight, as Cousin Fernando. He was in transports of joy over my new happiness just now when you came in."

"Ah!" murmured Karel, and his tongue could find no proper words.

"It is not my first sight of you, cousin," said the Spaniard. "Sitting on my horse, by the bank of the Maas, I saw you play ducks-and-drakes with my lancers. Your skates are better steeds than our Moorish barbs."

Karel blushed boyishly and bowed his thanks for the compliment.

"And you're but a captain of musketeers!" observed Don Fernando with obvious regret. "In our forces a man of such courage and gallantry would command a regiment directly.

"Come, quit these clumsy rebels, cousin!" he cried with a great show of lively humor. "We'll give you silver armor, and sweet Pernella's husband should have a general's baton and girdle before his hair is gray. Faith! You have the manner of a marshal. The heathen Moors would think the Cid returned to earth!"

Karel laughed heartily, striving to affect a humor which he could not understand.

"Much thanks, Don Fernando," he managed to say, "but I was born too far north. I've sworn allegiance to the States General, so—"

"He's sworn allegiance!" cried the Spaniard, in a gale of mirth. "Is he honest, Pernella, or does he always jest like this? Why, I myself have sworn allegiance to Spain—and to Portugal, to the kingdom of Naples, to France—and to a thousand lovely women! Allegiance is for a day, dear cousin! The rising sun brings us a new world each day, and we arise new men—with new friends, new loves, and new allegiances.

"When does the chapel bell peal for the wedding?"

"Why—soon," said Pernella tersely.

"You're of the true faith?" he asked of Karel.

"John Calvin's faith," said the young man gravely.

Don Fernando crossed himself.

"The devil! But you'll change *that* allegiance before another sun, for dear Pernella's sake. Fra Domenico shall purge and purify you before he rings the wedding bells. A lad like you needs no hot irons or boiling brine to make him a true believer, eh?"

"You startle and puzzle my poor lover with your problems, Fernando," Pernella said in nervous haste. "Come, we must dine. Let us meet in half an hour in my apartments, we three; we'll

pledge our faith and happiness in good Spanish wine."

Karel walked to his quarters in a daze. He was indeed, he told himself, a dull, untutored fellow.

The Angelus was sounding from the belfry tower, and some Spanish soldiers were halted in the courtyard, silent, with bowed heads.

It was a peaceful scene, thought Karel, and the bell's tone was pure and sweet.

He wondered if the bell would ring as true for Pernella's wedding.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LURE.

DIRK KAMPEN was preparing for a journey. He had borrowed spurs and high boots, and a heavy cloak for a ride in the winter night, and he confided to Karel that he was Pernella's messenger, bearing a note to Prince Maurice at the Dutch artillery camp on the other side of the Maas.

Karel sighed dismally. Here was more mystery, more intrigue. But he did not bare his thoughts to Dirk.

"It's a dangerous journey for a lone man," he said. "There are Spanish outposts and videttes along the river. Then your note, whatever it may be, would be of interest to Dutchmen as well as Spaniards. His highness might be compromised. The countess—well, she takes the risk."

"Have no fear, Karel," Dirk said lightly. "All is prepared for me. I have a pass with the prince's own seal on it, and another bearing the magic name of Parma, with Don Fernando's signature. Between two fires, you see, but with a straight path cleared for me."

Karel was therefore thoughtful and moody at dinner with Pernella and Don Fernando, grave curiosity and jealousy possessing his mind. He pondered on his right to know what was in the note to the captain-general, but he could not ask Pernella without divulging the fact that Dirk had confided the secret to him.

Don Fernando was garrulous, either by nature or secret design, and told Karel incredible secrets of the Spanish courts and camps, but never roused him from the sullen mood that he was in.

Pernella grew nervous and distraught, and Fernando found the party so dull for one of his high spirits that he excused himself and went to seek other company.

To Karel's surprise, the capricious countess melted suddenly to a tender mood, and exerted herself to woo him back from his disturbing disaffection. She made light of her small infidelities, explaining that her one desire was to gain influence to advance his fortunes.

"Your coldness is freezing my heart, Karel," she complained pathetically. "Are you fickle? Is the apple-cheeked Drina winning you again with her blue eyes, here in my presence?"

"It is you who are fickle," he declared, "and mine the heart that is frozen. As for the poor child Drina, she and her father must leave the castle at once; it is no place for them—they are too innocent and confiding. They are homesick already, and they should be set on their way home to-morrow."

"The old man may go," said she, "but Drina remains; I shall take good care of her here."

"She must go!" he cried angrily. "If I'm to remain here—if my wishes are anything to you, Drina must be allowed to go."

"Your wishes are my law, dearest Karel," she said, "but it is not in my power to let the girl go. One in higher authority has decreed that she shall stay."

"This Spanish—er—cousin! This Don Fernando?"

"No Spaniard, if you please," she retorted, "but one of your own Dutch. You should know; you heard him. The

prince has a fancy for youth and beauty, and I have need of his friendship. He shall find her here, as I promised him, when he comes back."

"Then he's coming back?" challenged Karel. "When? And why?"

"Trust me. I'm building your fortunes, Karel."

"You haven't won my trust, Pernella. And there's something afoot. You're nervous to-night; you start at sudden noises of the wind, or voices in the gallery. If the prince comes back now, what's to be done with Don Fernando?"

"Nothing. This castle has been called neutral ground. I fancy Maurice and Fernando would find no dullness in each other's company. And what an honor, to have such a galaxy of great men under one's roof!"

He grew frightened.

"Pernella, would you dare—"

"If you knew half, my love, you wouldn't doubt. Oh, Karel, we shall be great whatever befalls. You shall have estates in Spain—be governor of a province. Or—if the wind should shift—if one had to reverse one's rudder, you might be—well, a stadholder, captain-general, lord admiral—what not!"

"Are you so wild, so strong in self-conceit, that you attempt to play off one chance against another?"

"If you bet on every bull in the arena, you'll be a winner, come what may," she said shrewdly.

He laughed then, dissembling his anxiety. Further inquiry, he decided, might make her more desperate and rash.

Yielding to her protestations of affection, he found himself almost convinced of her devotion. He was either being exploited as the willing tool of her insatiable ambition, or was the object of a passion too extravagant for comprehension.

It was late when he took leave of her, and she seemed satisfied that his serious doubts were allayed.

Instead of repairing at once to his quarters, however, he mounted swiftly and cautiously to one of the upper galleries and found the room assigned to Willem Fruin.

"Come, you must get Drina at once," he said peremptorily. "She's in danger here, and I shall take you both away to-night. There's mischief and evil here, my friend, and you must not tarry a moment."

His earnestness inspired Willem with fear.

"We wished to go—to go home," he said plaintively. "But perhaps we have no home. They say the war will be terrible and devastating, and the humble people will be the sufferers.

"I have talked with that excellent old man, Admiral Van Tiel, and he owns a fleet of merchant ships. One of them is leaving Hoorn shortly for the Spanish Main, and there will be colonists on board for the warm countries near the great Amazon River.

"People are going to the rich lands along the Demerara and Essequibo, and Drina and I may go with this expedition. The admiral's captain will take care of us, and we may find new friends and a greater peace for the humble folk in that remote land."

"Get Drina, then," said Karel insistently. "You've no time to lose."

Willem tiptoed away, down the gallery, but in a moment he was back.

"Drina's not there!" he whispered fearfully. "She's gone."

"Then she must be found," said Karel grimly. "Go back to your room and remain there. I'll find her, and you must be ready to go."

He went then to the ancient kemenate—the quarters of the women of the household, and found Johanna, the one who had been kind to Drina.

"She was here, Captain Vreede," said Johanna, "and she was about to leave me to go to her father, but scarcely a moment before you came, the countess sent for her, and I took her to her ladyship's apartments."

The girl Alida, with the saucy tongue, peered over Johanna's shoulder.

"Now there's a test for a captain's wits!" she exclaimed. "Philandering's easy enough when mistresses remain apart, but the Countess of Lederbrugge knows her gallants, eh?"

"Her ladyship, knowing her gallants, sets no watch over *you*, Alida," retorted Karel.

The girl's eyes flashed, but she resorted to a disdainful shrug.

"If the captain gains nothing in gallantry," she said, "his wits are growing sharper. A rude and clumsy wit is better than none at all."

He laughed and walked away, taking care to betray no great anxiety over Drina, but forebodings were bearing heavily upon his spirit.

The musketeers of the castle guard were Dutchmen, and that was something. He walked through the dark galleries to the outer court, and approached the guard room.

The men were keeping late hours, and he heard boisterous laughter, the rattle of dice, and snatches of song. But every word that came to his ears was in the unfamiliar Spanish.

Perplexed, he went to the door and looked in. The room was occupied by Don Fernando's arquebusiers: not a musketeer was there.

In sign language he expressed his surprise, his desire to find his own men, and a Spanish sergeant, chattering an unintelligible jargon, indicated with gestures that the musketeers were gone.

Karel pointed to the drawbridge inquiringly, but the sergeant shrugged his shoulders doubtfully.

He was reluctant to leave the castle even for a moment, and a walk to the camp and back would mean an hour, but he felt the need of contact with his own kind. He pondered the situation gravely, and decided to take the chance.

Without haste, and assuming a casual air, he strolled to the drawbridge prepared to answer the old pikeman's familiar challenge, but a man in bright armor stepped out of the shadow and lowered a Spanish halberd across the way.

Anger stirred in Karel's breast, and his hand moved to the hilt of his rapier, but a chorus of insolent laughter broke out behind him, and, turning sharply, he saw a dozen arquebusiers leering at him from the guard room door.

They knew more than he did, it appeared. He swallowed his chagrin and stalked away with an indifferent shrug, making for the shadows of the gallery leading back to the main court.

His nerves were on edge now, and he flashed out his rapier when something moved close in front of him.

"Careful, my lord!" warned a shrill, piping voice. "There's no glory in sticking a fool through the gizzard."

"Your gizzard will never come nearer the steel until it finds it," said Karel. "Have you been set to trail me?"

"Nay, I'm not credited with honesty or truth," said Kryn Lukas merrily. "It saves a fellow many a task, not to be trusted. When I trail a man, it's for my own recreation. To-night I'm tally keeper for Dame Destiny."

"Out of my way with your Destiny folderol!"

"If you had any wisdom, you'd have learned to listen to me by this time, captain. I could read you my tally. It would read, word by word, like my speech to you in the cheese market. And it's coming to the end of the page, master."

"And that," said Karel thoughtfully, "was ruin!"

"Aye, ruin—but with conditions, alternatives. You had but to be a friend to yourself. Your enemies were fear of life, and a treacherous temper.

"It's not too late, captain. Be your own man! Go back into the castle. It's yours if you but want it. The masters fear nothing—either good or evil. Whatever stands in your way, do away with it. Believe me, it's as easy to kill a king or a bishop in flesh and blood as it is to move them on the chessboard.

"Be strong, as you can be, and be ruthless. The women will love you better for a beating, and if you have a score of men, kill half of 'em, and you'll have ten faithful ones."

"You're the devil's prophet!" cried Karel, and brushed past the hunchback.

He went on again slowly, but was arrested by the clown's voice in another conversation. Some other stroller had been halted by him. The new voice was instantly identified as that of the seneschal.

"I'm sent to whip you home, jackanapes," the seneschal said harshly. "The mistress told you to stay in your kennel and not leave it. What do you here, so far from your bed?"

"Tell my troubles to the moon—my only friend," whined Kryn Lukas. "Put up your whip, old badger!"

"And get a whipping myself!" growled the seneschal.

Karel heard the lash whistle in the air, then snap upon flesh. The hunchback squealed and groaned. He cursed the seneschal profanely, and squalled again as the lash fell swiftly and more sharply.

Chills shook Karel's frame, and he felt ill. For a moment he was minded to end the flogging and the flogger with a quick thrust, but there was trouble enough in prospect without taking up the cause of a knave like Kryn Lukas.

He went on, shivering and drawing his cloak closer.

The inner galleries were cold, and he sought the warmth of the great hall with its glowing braziers and huge fireplace.

He stepped softly, desiring no company, and it irked him sorely to find the warm hearth usurped by earlier arrivals. Whispering voices warned him, and he halted.

There was no great surprise in finding Pernella there, in the arms of a man, but his heart stopped beating when the fire leaped up and lighted the familiar face of Dirk Kampen.

He uttered a choking cry of dismay.

"Who's there?" challenged his friend, whirling about.

Karel turned and ran, making for his quarters. There would be time enough for words if Dirk sought him there. But he dreaded the meeting.

A shadow moved, and he leaped aside, but a heavy cloak was flung out and over his head. He fought the cloak as it enveloped him like a living monster, and for an instant he cast it off and clapped his hand to his sword.

The blade came out and he jabbed furiously into the mass of moving shadows. The steel found a billet, and he rammed it home.

The shriek of the victim was terrible in his ears.

"Oh, God—I die! I die—Pernella! Farewell!"

Another man was flapping away down the corridor.

The one who died was Hans van Galen, a pathetic failure as poet, painter, and assassin.

Karel sighed and sheathed his rapier—too soon: there was a sudden clatter and clash of arms, and the Spanish arquebusiers rushed upon him and bore him down.

He was lifted a moment later by strong arms and carried off. There was a march in the dark, through galleries, down steps, along cold, damp passages. Then he was put down on a pavement of stone, and a door or gate of steel clanged shut.

The castle was built in feudal times, and it had dungeons in the earth beneath it.

The last page of Kryn Lukas's tally was turning.

CHAPTER XVI.

"RUIN."

TIME passed slowly in the velvety blackness of the dungeon, even when a man had such a lurid pageant of reflections, regrets, and dying hopes rolling through his mind.

Karel was not bound, but there was no need of chains or steel bands in a grave. He did little exploring after the first vain tour of his chamber. It was all stone and hard-packed earth, save for the gate of steel bars as thick as his thumbs.

The floor was wet and slimy, and he stood up, leaning upon the gate, when he grew weary. Eventually he would be forced to sit or lie down, by exhaustion, but life was not likely to be prolonged in such a guest chamber.

He believed at last in the soothsaying powers of Kryn Lukas, and could fancy that he heard the hunchback's triumphant laughter.

But how, he demanded of the darkness, had this last chapter come about? There was no tangible sequence of events. His good night to Pernella was of the tenderest; there were mutual protestations of love.

The enigma was maddening. The woman was the incarnation of treachery and falsehood. Her love was an injurious miasma, like that of the Lorelei.

He doubted her ability to feel the emotions of a real love, and yet—

Casting about so desperately for a cause of his sudden crash, he could think only of jealousy as the thing that precipitated it. The ill humored maid, Alida, doubtless had lost no time in getting to her mistress with the story of his search for Drina.

Pernella was quick to react to impressions. She would see him turning back, treacherously, to his first love. She would picture him fleeing with Drina, never to come back, and her love—or her vanity, it might be—could not stand the strain.

Even while he walked through the castle, it was put under guard. Even then, as Dirk returned from his night ride, she cast her witchery about him and wooed him in a moment to turn traitor to his friend.

Hunger and thirst told him presently that time was passing. His throat grew parched and the chills that shook him gave place to burning fever. No jailer came to give him bread or water, or to taunt him.

His sore muscles and aching bones told him that the day had passed, and he gave up and sat down on the cold wet stones. He knew well enough that Pernella's hate could be as intense as her love. She would not bury him alive in earth, for the end would come too quickly, so she ordered the solitary death by madness.

Reflecting thus, he was not prepared for any relief. A footfall was a shock to his raw nerves.

Some one was walking along a passage, coming nearer. He got to his feet and waited breathlessly.

A glimmer of light appeared through the iron grid, and he saw a dim lantern of pierced brass.

A man appeared dark and shadowy in the gloom. He undid a lock, swung back the gate, and stepped into the chamber with a flagon.

No word was spoken, but Karel was mad for water. He seized the flagon and the jailer let it go. He raised the flagon to his lips and tipped back his head, never questioning the nature of the draft; but his eyes saw past the earthen jug and caught a sudden movement, then a dull gleam and flash in the dusky gloom.

He dashed the flagon in the jailer's face, then flung his arms about him. Together they crashed into the iron gate, and it swung back and clanged like a tolling bell on the rocky wall.

No word was spoken, there was no cry or groan. The jailer writhed and squirmed to free his pinioned arms, and he was a strong man. He got his right arm up and out, and as Karel shifted his grip and blocked a blow, the point of a knife touched his breast and pricked the flesh.

It remained there for an instant, locked in place, then it was pressed another hair's breadth inward. There was a wrist back of the piercing knife, and

Karel bent his head and sank his teeth in the taut sinews.

The jailer groaned and withdrew the knife.

Karel gained space for movement by an inch, and he bent his knee and drove it into the man's belly. There was a grunt and a gasp, the man recoiled, and they went back through the gate and rolled on the slimy floor.

Karel freed a hand and groped wildly in the dark. He found the wrist that was dripping blood, and felt the knife hilt in the clutching hand.

Then the battle was of hands, of twisting fingers and straining wrists.

The jailer's left hand swung over to aid its mate, and Karel caught it in his left, wrenched it, and snapped the bone.

The man cried out and shuddered, and in that instant the grip of the knife changed hands.

The blade flashed again in the lantern light, and the battle was ended.

"Karel!" murmured the dying man. "Thank God, I've lost!"

"Dirk, my friend!" cried the victor, and seized him in his arms.

"This ends the madness," said Dirk faintly. "I—I was mad for a day. She made me hate you. She said you betrayed your troth—you plotted her death. The clown warned her of death, and she—she went mad, too."

"Dirk, you must not die!" groaned Karel, lifting his head. "We've all been mad. It's over now. We must live."

"I—I'm dead already, Karel," whispered the other. "Leave me now. Make your escape. There's trouble enough in the castle. The prince is there—a prisoner. Your Drina's there. Go! Don't wait. And—good-by, old friend."

Karel held him as though he might keep death away. He found the wound and pressed his hand upon it, stopping the blood. But Dirk smiled and closed his eyes. His head fell back and the eyes opened again.

Karel sobbed aloud.

Then he thought of Drina. There was still a life to save, perhaps. Tarrying no longer, he took the fatal knife, and hurried from the dungeon with the flickering lantern to light the way.

He emerged from the underground passages through an archery close to the spot where the guards had seized him. The gallery was clear. His mind was working swiftly, keenly. He had learned the plan of the castle, and he went by leaps and quick dashes to the upper galleries, and to the castellated roof of the great keep.

The crisp night air revived him like a draft, and he greeted the twinkling stars above him.

There, on the broad roof, was a beacon, always ready to be lighted—a hogshead of tarred waste, with a measure of oil to kindle it. He tore off the top of the hogshead, scattered the oil, then took the guttering candle from the lantern and flung it into the beacon.

The flames crackled, leaped up, and roared toward the clouds.

He heard something like a cheer below him, and hurried to look over the battlements. White faces were there, under the northern wall, and he saw gleaming steel casques.

The musketeers from the camp were formed in companies, waiting there in the shadow for some signal, and he was there to give it.

With his hands for a trumpet, he split his parched and burning throat with mighty shouts.

"The prince!" he screamed. "In danger! Storm the castle!"

His last word was drowned in an answering roar, and the steel helmets went bobbing in a wave around the wall.

Then he went back, down from the roof, through the galleries, and to the boudoir of the countess.

Voices sounded behind the door, and he twisted the knob suddenly and flung it open.

Pernella saw him and sent forth a shriek that chilled the blood.

He paused on the threshold, knife in hand, ready for defense.

Maurice of Nassau was there, and Don Fernando d'Alcala. Drina leaned weakly against the wall, weeping, and Guy de Boisot and Kryn Lukas cowered in a corner, staring at the specter from the dungeon.

The remains of a feast littered a table. There had been something of an orgy there, and Drina was crying, being unused to orgies.

Shouts and the clash of arms in the outer court brought the prince and the Spanish grandee to their feet.

"Your highness," said Karel, "I summoned the musketeers, and they have seized the castle."

Don Fernando cried out sharply, then restrained himself and bowed to the prince with a whimsical smile.

"My thanks, captain," said the prince, "but you gave the signal prematurely. I was hardly ready to order the castle seized, but the musketeers have been waiting my pleasure these three hours."

"Then we were betrayed!" exclaimed Don Fernando, still smiling.

"Betrayed only by my natural caution, if that's a betrayal," said Maurice. "I never go to strange trysts, suddenly conceived and planned, without taking due precautions."

"I have the honor to tender your highness my sword," said Fernando courteously.

Pernella's brain still functioned.

"Now, your highness understands," she said. "Did I not tell you I'd prove my heart was Dutch? I've made you a gift of the commander of the citadel of Breda."

"What treachery is this, Pernella?" cried Fernando. "Let Nassau have the truth. He'll never be your dupe. You coaxed him here — even with a pretty wench as a lure, that Parma might move to-night and take his artillery base."

Maurice laughed gayly.

"Parma is otherwise engaged," he chuckled. "To-night we moved on Breda, by somewhat novel tactics, and by now your citadel has fallen, Don Fernando, and the city's taken."

"Impossible!" gasped the Spaniard. "Breda's impregnable."

"Not to a Trojan horse!" laughed Maurice. "Our Trojan horse was a ship, loaded with peat fuel for your fires. Under the fuel our men rode into your canals to open your gates and let in the Dutch and English allies. I say it's accomplished because our plans were too complete to fail. My presence was unnecessary; the junior officers were sufficient."

Colonel Van Colenbrander burst into the room, brushing Karel aside.

"Highness!" he cried, saluting with his drawn sword, "I've seized this castle to safeguard your person, and I bring great news: Breda has fallen. We occupy the city and Parma is in flight."

"The confirmation's timely," said Maurice.

"Fernando lies!" burst forth Pernella anew. "I swear my heart is truly Dutch!"

"Her heart warms to the prevailing wind, Nassau," said Fernando. "She merits no mercy—not from me! She offered your head to Parma for a castle in Spain. If we failed in the assault on your artillery, she was ready to have you stabbed, here in this room. This Dutchman was to do it, and he was to have a Spanish title as his fee."

"Why didn't you do it, Dutchman?" demanded Maurice.

"I'll tell you why he didn't," said Fernando. "Because he has the thick head of the Dutch, and the sluggish heart. Pernella's witchcraft couldn't move him, and a Spanish coronet never made him blink. The plans were not matured for your assassination, because this fellow would not plot to kill even a Dutch puppy. In the end, Pernella was the fool."

"And where have you been, oh, stupid captain?" asked Maurice.

"In the dungeon," said Karel simply. "The countess ordered my death, but I killed her agent — and he had been my friend."

"Why did you summon my musketeers, as you said? How did you know they were there?"

"I didn't. The man I killed warned me of the plot and of your danger, so I went to the battlements and lighted the beacon fire to summon aid. But the aid was close at hand."

"A very thick-skulled Dutchman, Don Fernando," observed the prince. "You see, he did not think of escaping from this den of conspiracy and murder, though we were sore beset to all appearances, because he deemed it practical to light a beacon fire.

"What boon do you ask, captain?" he went on. "You've lost a fascinating bride, a Spanish coronet, and Spanish lands. What trifling favor in our gift will gratify your simple mind, pray tell us?"

"My freedom!" said Karel fervently. "My freedom, highness, and the certain safety of yonder girl who's been a captive here."

"Freedom, Karl? You're not a prisoner!"

"This is my prison!" he replied, passing his hands over his rumpled uniform. "I want to be released. I want to be free to live a human life. I want to be free among free, simple folk, who have no genius, cleverness, or natural gift for lying, plundering, murdering, or the shattering of souls."

"You ask a good deal, if you ask for peace and happiness, my friend," said the prince reflectively. "But you shall have what peace and freedom is within our gift. Our colonel, here, will write an order. Discharge this captain, colonel, as a veteran, worn by the stress of war, and entitled to peace of mind and ease in his old age—whenever that may come.

"Give him safe conduct to his home, and see that the young woman there goes with him. I fancy she represents the simple folk whose company he craves."

"If I might crave a boon," said Don Fernando, "I'd ask for this woman here to be delivered into the hands of the duke for Spanish justice."

"We grant no boons to enemies," said the prince, "but we'll assure Parma that the Dutch have justice no less orthodox than his. Colonel Van Colenbrander will have the woman seized and put in chains."

"No Dutch hands shall touch me, and no chains!" cried Pernella.

She stepped back, and Don Fernando darted toward her. But he was too late.

A tiny dagger, with a hilt of gold and diamonds, flashed in her hand and was plunged into her marble breast.

"I told it!" yelled Kryn Lukas shrilly. "Never by the headsman's ax or the gibbet, I told her, but by the dagger."

Karel darted forward and seized the terrified Drina by the hand.

"Come, Drina," he said, "we're free to go. You and your father will come with me. I'll take you both home."

She put her head on his breast and clung to him, weeping softly.

"You'll never leave us again, Karel?" she whispered.

"I'm not worthy, Drina, to touch you!" he said bitterly.

"The prince has ruled that you're worthy to have peace and happiness, Karel," she said. "I've loved you so! Can't I be happy, too?"

Kryn Lukas followed them into the corridor.

"Did I speak sooth?" he chirped. "Where's all your rank and finery now, Karel Vreede? You've got the girl, but you're beggared—ruined! Did I not say that ruin would be the end?"

"Oh, blessed ruin!" cried Karel fervently.

THE END

Empty Holsters

What to do when guns are missing and an enemy is unpleasantly close at hand

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

A GUN roared in the little ravine to the left, and Jack Lawton ducked instinctively as a bullet soared through the crown of his heavy gray Stetson. His hands clawed wildly for the two Colts that usually hung in the holsters tied low on each leg, but his fingers encountered nothing but leather—the guns were missing.

As he realized the fact, Lawton cursed fluently and put spurs to his mount, even though the animal was already traveling at a gallop. The little roan uttered a snort of surprise and plunged wildly toward a clump of trees that cast their shadows to the right of the clearing.

In a moment horse and rider had reached the shelter of the cottonwoods, and Lawton brought the roan to a sliding stop. Swiftly the lean cow-puncher leaped from the saddle, and then stood staring intently in the direction from which the shot had come. He was in the shadow of the trees now, and he was sure he could not be seen.

A wave of senseless rage swept over him when he realized that he had probably lost his guns when he had been forced to ford the little stream that crossed the trail a few miles back. The current had proven deceptive, and he had to swim most of the way across in his effort to get the terrified little roan to the opposite side.

He had been traveling in hard luck for the past week anyway. Through an argument with the foreman of the

Cross X he had lost his job, and two wild nights in the gambling halls of the little town of Eagle had cleaned him of every cent he possessed.

Now he was on his way down around the Panhandle section, where he had heard some of the ranchers were in need of good, hard riding waddies.

That had been the way the luck had started, and now some hombre whom he had not even seen was shooting at him from ambush—and he had no guns. All in all Jack Lawton thought it was a rotten world.

He grew tense as a hard-faced, black-haired man on a rangy gray rode slowly out from the shelter of the ravine. The stranger was very much alert, and he held a rifle in one hand, ready for action.

He halted his horse as he reached the edge of the little clearing between the ravine and the trees and gazed sullenly about him.

At last he apparently decided that he had frightened the other man away by his shooting, or it might have been that he had observed those empty holsters. At any rate he rode slowly toward the trees.

Lawton realized that he was in an extremely dangerous position. The other man was well armed, for the puncher saw the butt of a revolver sticking out of a holster on the man's right hip as he drew nearer, and he was evidently eager to use his weapons.

Lawton's mind worked swiftly. It would be useless for him to try to make a dash for it now. The other man was within easy shooting distance, and he was evidently a risky individual with whom to take any chances.

The sight of his rope coiled upon the saddle of the roan put a thought in Jim Lawton's head, and with him to think was to act. Swiftly and silently he unfastened the rope, opened the loop and waited.

Now the other man was within ten feet of the trees as he passed. Lawton expected to be seen any moment, and he was waiting for the sound of the rifle, even though he knew that this time it would probably mean his death.

But the fates were with the lean puncher that morning, for the stranger gave only a casual glance toward the trees as he rode past. That was a mistake on his part. He should have remembered that the rider on the roan had disappeared from view in this direction.

With startling suddenness a rope settled about his shoulders, and he was dragged roughly from his horse to land in a sitting position on the ground, an expression of blank surprise upon his heavy face. Before he more than half realized what it was all about, a hundred and eighty pounds of fighting humanity landed heavily upon him with fists flying.

The stranger was no weakling. He became conscious of the situation in an instant, and there began a mighty struggle amid the tall grass of the clearing.

The jerk of the rope had knocked the rifle from the hands of the black-haired man, and now he was trying desperately to reach the heavy Colt in his holster. As Lawton was clinging firmly to his arm with his right hand, while he rained blows at the stranger's face and chest with his left, the latter found getting his gun was far from a simple matter.

In fact, it appeared so difficult that he changed his tactics and began to strike out wildly at the panting, fighting man on top of him.

Lawton, utilizing an unguarded moment upon the part of the other, swung back his left fist and brought it with a faint thud against the stranger's unshaven chin. The man went limp and lay there, dead to the world from one of the cleanest uppercuts ever seen outside the ring.

Jack Lawton wasted no time in admiration of his handiwork. He swift-

ly drew the heavy revolver from the other man's holster, and then, with the weapon ready for action, he got to his feet and stood panting, his eyes fixed upon the motionless form.

"Yuh, appears like yuh been right busy," drawled a voice from behind him.

Lawton turned to find a tall man dressed in clothes that were much like his own standing a short distance away. There was a faint smile upon the man's tanned face as he covered the puncher with the muzzle of a long-barreled Colt.

"I wouldn't think about usin' that gun if I was yuh," said the tall man sharply, as Lawton made a slight motion. "It ain't likely tuh prove healthy!"

"Who are yuh?" demanded Lawton, putting the captured gun into one of his empty holsters.

"Woods is my name," said the other. "An' I'm sure right much obliged at your knockin' out our friend there—he was gettin' kinda hard tuh handle."

"Yea," remarked Lawton. "But what's it all about? Why was he shootin' at me?"

"Reckon that was a mistake on his part," Woods said. "Yuh and me are kinda dressed th' same, an' my horse that's hidden back there is a roan—same as yours. Yuh see Hawkins kinda wants tuh get rid of me. He woulda done it, too, if yuh hadn't come along. He had me in a tight corner back there in the ravine—but when he seen yuh he thought I'd got away."

"But what's the idea?" demanded Lawton, a frown on his face. "Who are yuh, anyway — why are yuh and Hawkins fightin' it out?"

"Yuh sure ask a lot of questions that ain't none of your business," said Woods, and then he grinned. "But I don't mind tellin' yuh. Hawkins is a bad man—he's wanted for murder, and seeing as how I'm the sheriff of this county, it's been up to me to kinda keep after him."

"You're the sheriff?"

"Right." Woods nodded, his eyes upon the man on the ground. "Sorry I had tuh draw down on yuh, but if I hadn't yuh mighta shot first and let me talk afterward," he laughed as he put his gun back in its holster. "A feller gets kinda excited like when he's wearing no guns and somebody's just shot at him."

"Ain't yuh taking a chance?" asked Lawton, surprised at the sheriff having put his weapon away.

"I don't figure it that way." Woods shook his head. "I seen yuh before; you're one of th' Cross X punchers, ain't you?"

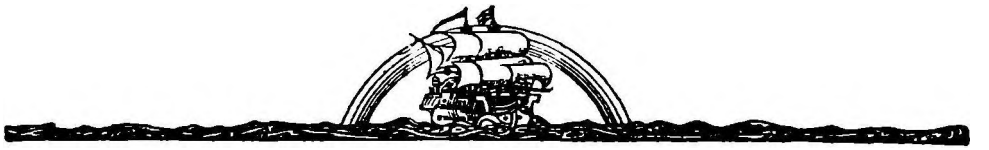
"I was. But I got fired—now I'm broke and outta a job."

"I wouldn't let that worry yuh none." The sheriff moved toward the bad man as the latter started to revive. "There's plenty of jobs around this section." He looked at the puncher. "And there's a reward up for this jasper—five thousand, dead or alive."

Woods laughed.

"An' yuh sure took a long chance in capturin' him; reckon the reward is yours—yuh got me out of a tight place—and I'm right fair-minded 'bout things like that! Empty holsters are kinda lucky sometimes!"

THE END



"I object to a search!"

The Thief

He nearly lost the big chance of his life time through his high sense of honor

By
CORA SCHILLING LAWSON

THE excitement of the explosion was over and the guests filed slowly back into the dining room. At the first sound of the blast, the cry of "Bomb!" had driven the diners out into the night, for they included men prominent in finance and politics, the very kind that would be prey for the fanatics.

Upon learning that the explosion was due to nothing more serious than a too-heavily banked fire, we straggled back to the dining room and sat down to our coffee. The women were still with us, and why not? The majority smoked and added the fumes of their cigarettes to the heavier cigar smoke in the room.

It was just after this interruption that Victoria Bonard discovered her loss.

"My pendant!" she cried, clutching her throat.

We all looked at her smooth white throat, unadorned now by jewelry, and there followed an unpleasant silence. It is not a nice thing when, at a dinner party, a valuable jewel disappears, and Victoria's pendant was valuable, a single emerald, the largest of its kind in the States, incrusted with diamonds and set in platinum.

A search was instituted at once, but not a sign of the pendant was to be seen. Now, Victoria was one of the few who had not stepped outside of the house. She had joined in the rush for the open, but had remained in the doorway until the others returned. Accordingly we knew that the pendant was somewhere in the house.

She could not tell when she had last noticed it. She remembered having fastened it about her neck and hearing the hostess, Mrs. Van Slater, exclaim over it as she removed her cape. Had any one noticed it later than that?

There was an expectant hush. Then—

"You had it on when we—we went into the conservatory," Jimmy Stewart said, a little reluctantly, it seemed to me.

"And when I came out?"

"I—I didn't notice."

Now, probably there was nothing

wrong in Jimmy's statement nor in the way he made it. The loss of the jewel had made us suspicious, that was all, and I could see several of the guests exchange knowing glances.

It was not a large party. It included Mr. Bonard, a wealthy manufacturer, his wife and two daughters, Marie and Victoria, Mr. and Mrs. Curtis of Buenos Aires, the host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Van Slater, who certainly would not take a jewel in their own house even if they needed the money—which they didn't with the neat sum of twenty millions behind them—their son Alec Van Slater, and Jimmy Stewart.

It was Alec Van Slater who introduced Jimmy Stewart to us. They had gone to the same college, been fraternity brothers. Alec had quit the college in his junior year, by request, and Jimmy was still struggling along.

He seemed a nice enough young fellow. Of course I know that medical students are sometimes a bit wild, but Jimmy Stewart was no worse than the rest of them. I'll confess that up to now I had felt rather favorably toward him, and had even thought of giving him a place on the staff of my own pet hospital.

The one thing against him was that he was poor, church-mousely poor. He lived with two other students, even poorer than he, in a suite of rooms, light housekeeping rooms, so the sign on the front of the building announced, and light housekeeping it was most certainly and of necessity.

I had heard Jimmy joke about it, but though he spoke lightly there was an undertone of seriousness about it that made me strongly suspect that he had accepted the dinner invitations, at first at least, for the sake of the meal itself.

"It makes me sick," I overheard him say one time, "to see the perfectly good food they waste at one of these shindigs. I think of Bud and Soupy at home, tightening up their belts and making one dollar do the work of three. I'd just like to turn them loose at that table when we get through."

But Jimmy had been in a fair way to end his financial troubles. With Victoria Bonard and him it had been a case of love at the start. Every one knew it, her parents included, who, like the sensible people they were, did not disdain the young fellow because of his lack of worldly goods. Rather they had regarded him with approval—until now. For now I saw them eying him suspiciously.

We searched everywhere. Even the rugs were taken up. People looked in absurd places such as up the fireplace chimney and under the window seats.

The conservatory was fairly combed, but not a sign of the missing pendant was found. Jimmy joined in the search with gusto, a little too eagerly, I thought, apparently unmindful of the suspicious glances cast his way.

Oh, every one was polite enough. Nobody was accused; there was no hint of a suspicion that the missing jewel could have been stolen.

After every conceivable place had been thoroughly searched we gathered in the drawing-room. There was an ugly silence, ominous, oppressive, and though Victoria came forward nobly and urged us not to give it another thought, we could see that she was grieving over the loss of her valuable pendant.

It had been given to her by an English grandmother of whom Victoria was extremely fond. It had its own story, of course, like all famous jewels, a story closely connected with the history of France and England at the time of Napoleon.

"Never mind about it," she insisted. "I'm sure it will turn up some time. Please just forget about it now."

Forget about it! As if any one could. We laughed in an embarrassed way and fidgeted and talked about the weather and modern poetry and the latest peace conference and other things no one cared a whoop about just

then until Mr. Curtis, an Argentine visitor, spoke up:

"There's no use telling us to forget the loss of the jewel," he declared ponderously. "Of course I didn't take it, and I'm not intimating that any one did take it, but just to ease things up and satisfy our minds, I suggest that every person here be searched."

II.

He took the center of the floor as he spoke and held out his short arms in an encouraging gesture, his fat red face shining with honest righteousness.

"I'll stand for it first," he insisted.

Nobody made a move toward him, but they did look at him and that way did not notice Jimmy Stewart's start of dismay. I was directly opposite him and could not help but notice it.

"Please," Mr. Curtis begged. "I'd feel better. I'd know then that I was exonerated. I move that every one here be searched."

"I agree," Mr. Bonard added, though no one had ever thought of connecting him with the loss of his daughter's emerald.

"And I," put in young Van Slater, who, with his father's twenty millions back of him, had no need of taking a little emerald pendant.

"It's all right with me," giggled little Marie Bonard, "only who's to do the searching?"

I noticed that for several minutes Jimmy Stewart had been stirring restlessly. Now he suddenly jumped up and delivered the thunderbolt.

"I object," he declared, and his voice sounded rough and harsh. "We're ladies and gentlemen here. Why indulge in melodrama? I didn't take the pendant, of course. I hope you know that. But as for a search—I object. I—I appeal to our host and hostess to stop such an outrage."

His face was red clear up to the roots of his dark hair; little drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead. He did not look the picture of innocence as he stood there facing us, protesting against the search.

He was a conspicuous figure at best, partly because of his good looks and his youth, and partly because he was the only man present dressed in a business suit.

He was very frank in giving his reason for dressing as he did. He had no tuxedo; he had no money to buy or rent one. If people wanted him to come as he was— And people had wanted him.

"I appeal to Mr. and Mrs. Van Slater to prevent this outrage," he repeated desperately, and I'll admit that that statement knocked me cold. Up to then I'd tried to give him the benefit of the doubt, but now— Well, what could a fellow think?

The Van Slaters, thus appealed to, looked at each other significantly.

"Of course," he hastened to say. "Of course Stewart is right. There must be some other way—"

"Certainly," Mrs. Van Slater seconded, with the charm of a perfect hostess. "We must find some other way."

"You may suit yourself about this —ah—Stewart," Curtis bellowed. "For myself, I insist upon being searched."

It was decidedly awkward. Victoria stood at one side of the room with her mother and sister. They were looking at Jimmy Stewart, but Victoria did not glance in his direction. I was near enough that I could hear her murmur:

"He didn't take it. I—I'm sure he didn't take it."

To me it sounded as if she were trying to bolster up her faith in him, and I felt a sudden surge of sympathy for her. The atmosphere was decidedly hostile, and the hostility was directed against the one unvouched-for person present, Jimmy Stewart, the only person, too, who would have a motive for taking the pendant.

And if he hadn't taken it, what in

thunder made him object to being searched? While it seemed a bit absurd to me I was perfectly willing to undergo the search. I didn't have the damned emerald. In fact I hadn't even noticed it.

For a minute that seemed endless we stood there, Curtis begging them to come and search him, Jimmy standing aloof, defiance written in every line of his handsome young face, the rest of us just awkward and uncomfortable. I suppose we'd have been standing there yet if Victoria hadn't dropped her handkerchief.

With one accord every man in the room started forward, but the girl was quicker, and picked it up with a little laugh which changed to a cry of surprise as the end of the emerald pendant dropped from her dress.

It had evidently come loose and slipped into the deep folds of her wide sash, where it had remained hidden even when she was feeling for it.

"Well, I'll be everlastingly damned!" Van Slater exclaimed, and he voiced the sentiment of every one of us present.

The talk went on at a high rate of speed then, and I noticed that every one was just a little too nice to Jimmy. Their consciences hurt, because they had suspected him.

We left together, young Van Slater driving us down town so that I had no chance to speak to Jimmy until we reached his rooms.

"I'll get out here, too," I told Alec. "From here I'll walk. Good for the waistline."

III.

THE fact was that I wanted to talk with Jimmy. If he was to take a place in my hospital I wanted to know all about him. He looked surprised, but he invited me up to his rooms pleasantly enough. His roommates were studying, but when they saw me they went into the bedroom and left Jimmy and me alone.

"You know my plans for you," I began abruptly, laying my cane and gloves on a table. "I feel that gives me the privilege of asking just why you chose to make such an infernal idiot of yourself to-night."

"I don't get you," Jimmy stalled, drawing himself up with a pretense of indignation and the symptoms of genuine alarm.

"Yes, you do," I counterstalled. "If that pendant hadn't been found you'd have been in a pretty pickle. As it was, every one there thought you had it. I know I did."

"Victoria never doubted me," he returned, so proudly that I didn't have the heart to take away that crumb of comfort.

"At any rate," I returned, "since I'm thinking of mixing up your future with mine, I feel I'm entitled to an explanation."

Jimmy met my steady gaze, though his face turned an ugly red.

"And if I refuse to—to give an explanation."

"You won't be such a fool," I returned shortly.

"But if I am—such a fool?" he insisted.

"I'll wash my hands of you," I retorted. "I can't have a fool in my hospital."

For a minute he stood there in front of me, big and tall and yet such a boy underneath. I thought he was weakening until he smiled a little.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said slowly.

I turned away, disgusted, and went out, slamming the door after me. I was so hot that I didn't notice that I'd left my cane and gloves on his table until I had gone down two flights.

I'd never have bothered climbing back for the gloves, but the cane was a good one, and I cherished it for sentimental reasons as well. So I labored back to the fourth floor and knocked on the door of Jimmy's apartment.

I could hear voices inside and laughing and talking, enough noise that ap-

parently they did not hear my knock. I repeated it more loudly; still no answer. Finally I grew impatient and opened the door.

Never will I forget the sight that greeted me. The three boys were in the bedroom, but the door was open and I could see them plainly, the two roommates sitting on the bed just reaching out for the messy little paper-wrapped parcel that Jimmy was taking from his coat pocket and handing them. Another little parcel came from the pocket on the other side of his coat.

I didn't want to spy, but I couldn't move for a minute, and by that time the boys had their parcels unwrapped: Two smeary segments of fried chicken in one parcel; two smashed chocolate éclairs from the other. An unfamiliar lump hardened in my old throat as I watched those two boys pounce on the chicken.

"Good old Jimmy," said one of them between bites. "He never forgets us."

I slipped back into the hall and closed the door quietly after me. I knew now why Jimmy had refused the search. And I knew, too, that I could get my gloves and cane when I came to talk to him about that opening in my hospital.

THE END

Where Millions of Dollars Change Hands

LICHTENBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, is perhaps the most unique city on the globe! A primitive street lined by ramshackle huts of corrugated iron is the scene of bartering for fabulous sums in cash, each broker starting with from five million dollars to ten million dollars in currency.

The alluvial deposits of Grasfontein were the scene of one of the most famous diamond rushes in history. Wild excitement prevailed, for there was a great wealth of diamonds which lay practically on the surface to be picked up like stones. Surely the territory around Lichtenburg can be compared to Sinbad's Valley of Diamonds.

At least once a month diamond brokers travel to Lichtenburg by train, or across the desert from Pretoria, or other cities, by automobile. Each man carries with him millions in currency; for all transactions are made for cash. The region boasts of the fact that no special protection is needed for this wealth, as holdups are unknown.

These rude huts are the offices of the brokers, and each contains a table, a couple of chairs, and a pair of scales. When the brokers arrive they put up flags as a signal. The miners then come trooping in with their accumulated diamonds.

The stones are weighed, graded, and bargained for. They go through many hands to find their way to the diamond cutters of Europe and America.

The Grasfontein fields are still thriving, and the output continues to be large. The diamonds are rarely more than two or three carats in weight in the rough and, on the average, less than one carat. Many of them are slightly yellow in cast.

Though the yields are large the demand has more than kept pace with the supply. The alluvial diamonds of Lichtenburg find a ready market.

Guy Rader.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGONOTES seems to have found a ready welcome. Your letters have been coming in thick and fast since it started. Among the many indorsing letters is that of Mr. Russell:

Hazleton, Pa.

I want to thank you for again including a Readers' Viewpoint, "Argonotes." It certainly is fine. When the new style ARGOSY came out I thought to myself, another good magazine gone wrong, but now I see my mistake and find it even better. I happened to notice in this week's ARGOSY a fellow by the name of C. A. Corey has his say, but he doesn't know what he's saying. Fellows like him should *look* and not *glance* at his ARGOSY each week to see if there is a detective story in it. Mr. Corey, please remember there are a number of real ARGOSY fans who enjoy "those damnable Westerns" and they expect their dime's worth. So, Mr. Editor, please forgive Mr. Corey as—we all have our faults. Thank ye again for "Argonotes." That coupon is a great idea. JACK RUSSELL.

BUT, oh, what a riot C. A. Corey stirred up with his letter in the department a few weeks ago. Since its appearance that war has been going on hot and heavy. Here is a Western story champion taking up the gauntlet:

Phœnix, Ariz.

Oh, what the heck has Mr. C. A. Corey got against "Western bunk," I'd like to know? True, the hero always catches the rustlers or bank robbers and marries the rich ranch owner's daughter, but just the same they are what makes the magazine good.

If ARGOSY has a Western in it, I buy it, for after reading a good Western I am capable of enjoying the rest.

"When Killers Meet," by Fred C. Davis, was a wow! MacIsaac and Burroughs can't be beat.

Keep up the Westerns and you will keep up the sales. E. L.

WHILE here is a reader who agrees with Mr. Corey:

Honesdale, Pa.

I am not an old-time reader of the ARGOSY. Having only read it for ten years or so, that leaves me out with the shellbacks that you trot out now and then. But I have some ideas, and, seeing that you have reinstated the Argonotes—which I believe is a good idea—I am going to air them a little.

I am forced to agree with Mr. C. A. Corey, of Hartford, Conn. Western stories—that is, too many of them—make me sick and tired, and of late we have been getting plenty in ARGOSY. In some of them the stern-jawed young puncher rode nowhere, licked the foreman and broke up the gang of rustlers, *et cetera*, damn him! A few for variety would be desired, but it seems to me that if some of the crowd liked them so well they could augment their supply with Western magazines from the stands, still read ARGOSY and have a much greater variety.

ARGOSY is known for its variety and the steady unvarying quality of its stories, and that is one of the big reasons why I subscribe to it.

A good detective serial would not be amiss for variety, nor would an early settlers and Indian serial. McMorrow could give a good account of himself in a serial about the British and the war.

It is a problem, I am sure, to try and pick the best. Judging from some of the Westerns that I have read, not alone in ARGOSY, the demand for them must be terrific or the editors must be getting slightly near-sighted.

Give us variety is all I can say and cut down on the Westerns. Best of luck to ARGOSY.

F. L. BENSCOTER.

THEN comes Mr. Steward, who likes the magazine as it is and has no use for Mr. Corey's desire for a change of any sort.

Watertown, Mass.

Let C. A. Corey read the *Detective Fiction Weekly* and let the ARGOSY stay as it is and has been for years. It is O. K., and you *know* how to run it. *Don't* keep asking for advice about how to run it. You are doing a perfect job. Keep right on. E. R. Burroughs can't be beat.

I have read ARGOSY for years, and I like it as it *is*. Don't change it in any particular. Tell Corey to go take a running jump! I like the *Detective Fiction Weekly* also, but have not *time* to read *both* each week. *Con Carney* is a real joy to read about.

Every one of your regular writers are good. *Hold them.* Yours for ARGOSY as *is*.

GEO. H. STEWARD.

AND Mr. Stembridge, who feels that the magazine is just going to the dogs the way it is being run at present:

Cox City, Okla.

This is to inform you that you have lost one more ARGOSY fan. I have read the ARGOSY for about five years, but I'm through. Say, why don't you just change the name, too? You've changed everything else. The ARGOSY is no different now from a dozen other magazines which I had always considered inferior to it. The old writers are all gone. I think the only reason Mr. Munsey don't come back and haunt you is because they don't have news-stands in the Land Beyond.

I am well aware of the fact that my opinion won't matter, but just leave the ARGOSY as it is—and watch your sales fall off!

Yours in disgust,

ORA STEMBRIDGE.

Yea, verily, it takes all sorts of people to make up a world. We cannot possibly please all of them all of the time, but it is the editor's job to please as many of them as much of the time as possible. So, when you do not like a story of one type or another, remember that some other fellow does like it—and he has no use for the yarn you think is great. For our part, we shall do our best to see that no type of story is published in quantities out of proportion—so that no reader will be displeased too frequently. For we need you all in the great country-wide ARGOSY family.

MR. ROLFE has the attitude we'd like to make universal.

Boston, Mass.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for the last twenty-five years and don't think I have missed a number. This is my first offense in the line of writing to you. But the letter from Mr. Corey, of Hartford, Conn., rather got under my skin. He seems to have got to the point where he thinks he is the only person that reads the ARGOSY and that it should be published according to his own ideas. Thank Heaven I haven't got to that stage yet and if ever I do I hope some one takes a club to me. If Mr. Corey wants detective stories why don't he buy them. There are quite a few magazines that make a specialty of that kind of stories. The ARGOSY has always suited me from the first number that I read, and I like a variety of stories. I am partial to the Western ones, but like nearly all of them. When there is one that I don't care for I simply pass it up. There are plenty of others, and some one else will like that. No matter what kind they are, there has never been any but were good, clean, wholesome reading from cover to cover. As long as I am able to read and the ARGOSY is published I shall continue to read it. Long live the ARGOSY "*as is*" in spite of Mr. Corey.

L. A. ROLFE.

OF course, there are Western stories and Western stories. Joseph T. Kescel's stories always bring hearty applause. Perhaps this is why:

Los Angeles, Calif.

It's refreshing to me, a product of the West, to find an author who can write and in plain and unsugared language depict scenes of our country.

The general line of mush as written by authors who have only a kaleidoscopic or hearsay knowledge of the West is too fatuous and silly to appease the run of us Westerners, and falls in line with the soda fountain cowboy.

Won't you please communicate my appreciation to the author, Joseph T. Kescel, and tell him he reminds me of Chas. Russell, the artist, of Great Falls, Montana, the West's real and unalloyed product. My entire family await his stories with real pleasure.

S. J. GOLD.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

I did not like_____

because_____

*Name*_____

*Street*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____

7-28

Looking Ahead!

Far off across the Pacific we go in next week's Argosy:

HAWAIIAN HEELS

A New Serial

by RICHARD BARRY

Opens amid the hectic cabaret night life of Los Angeles, but quickly shifts to tropical Hawaii—where Lance Houston, celebrated movie star, has a chance to demonstrate what is in him. An unusual story this—with plenty of action throughout.

TEXAS COMES TO WEST POINT

A Complete Novelette

by LIEUT. JOHN HOPPER

Gives us another intimate view of life at Uncle Sam's celebrated military academy. Raw from the plains of Texas Jack Griffin is dropped into academy life—and he tackles it in characteristic Texas style!

Among the short story contributors will be

GEORGE C. JENKS, A. T. LOCKE
JOSEPH T. KESCEL, and others

All in the

Issue of August 4th

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

"First In Fiction" ***Out Every Wednesday***

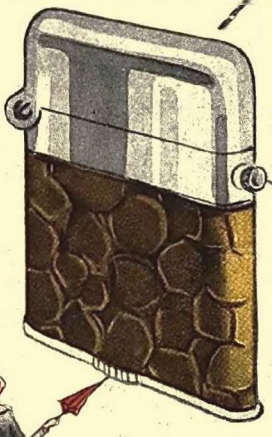
THORENS

The NEW STYLE Lighter

This shining top encloses all working parts—protects hands and clothing from smudge and soil.

Thorens never fails you when you need a light. It is quick as a flash—sure as the day after tomorrow.

The case is thin as a modern watch and snappy in looks. This particular one has a morocco leather cover and is available in many pleasing colors.



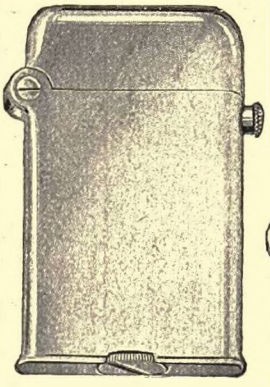
This is the re-filling station and "spare" compartment. Extra flints are carried here.

That little button serves a two-fold purpose: *One*—as a trigger. Just press it and the lid snaps open, producing a fruitful flame. *Two*—it locks the lid when turned to the right.

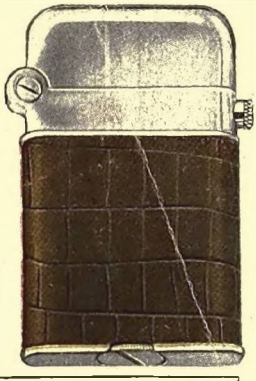
THORENS is the boast of smokers everywhere. They enthuse over its *difference*—revel in its unfailing ability to *always light!* For Thorens is truly The New Style Lighter. Its looks—its trim and slender shape—the way it works—all are different and exclusively Thorens. There are no wheels to turn; just a button to press and it lights. The thin, good-looking case encloses every working part, leaving nothing to soil or catch the clothing. No *wonder* Thorens is the talk of the town—the boast of a nation.

Two sizes are offered in Thorens Lighters—regular size for men and a new small and dainty model—The "Lady Thorens"—for women. Cases may be had in plain, engraved or leather-covered nickel and sterling—with or without emblematic or decorative medallions.

You may have a New Style Thorens in a plain nickel-plated case for as little as $3; in engine-turned monogram design for $5; in leather covered for $5. Others as high as $25. In case your dealer hasn't a Thorens, use coupon below to order direct or to have us send you illustrated folder.



At left, No. 101—Nickel plated, plain, $3. Sterling silver, $20.



At right, No. 102-L—Leather covered, in a wide variety of colors. From $5 to $25. Metal band protects upper edge of leather covering.

THORENS, Inc.

450 Fourth Avenue, New York City

THORENS, Inc.,
450 Fourth Ave., N. Y. City. MC 7-28.

Enclosed please find $..... for which please send [ ] Nickeled [ ] Monogram [ ] Leather covered. [ ] Please send illustrated folder.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Press the button—snap, the top opens, you have an even burning flame.

Few turns of button securely locks the lid. Cannot open in the pocket.