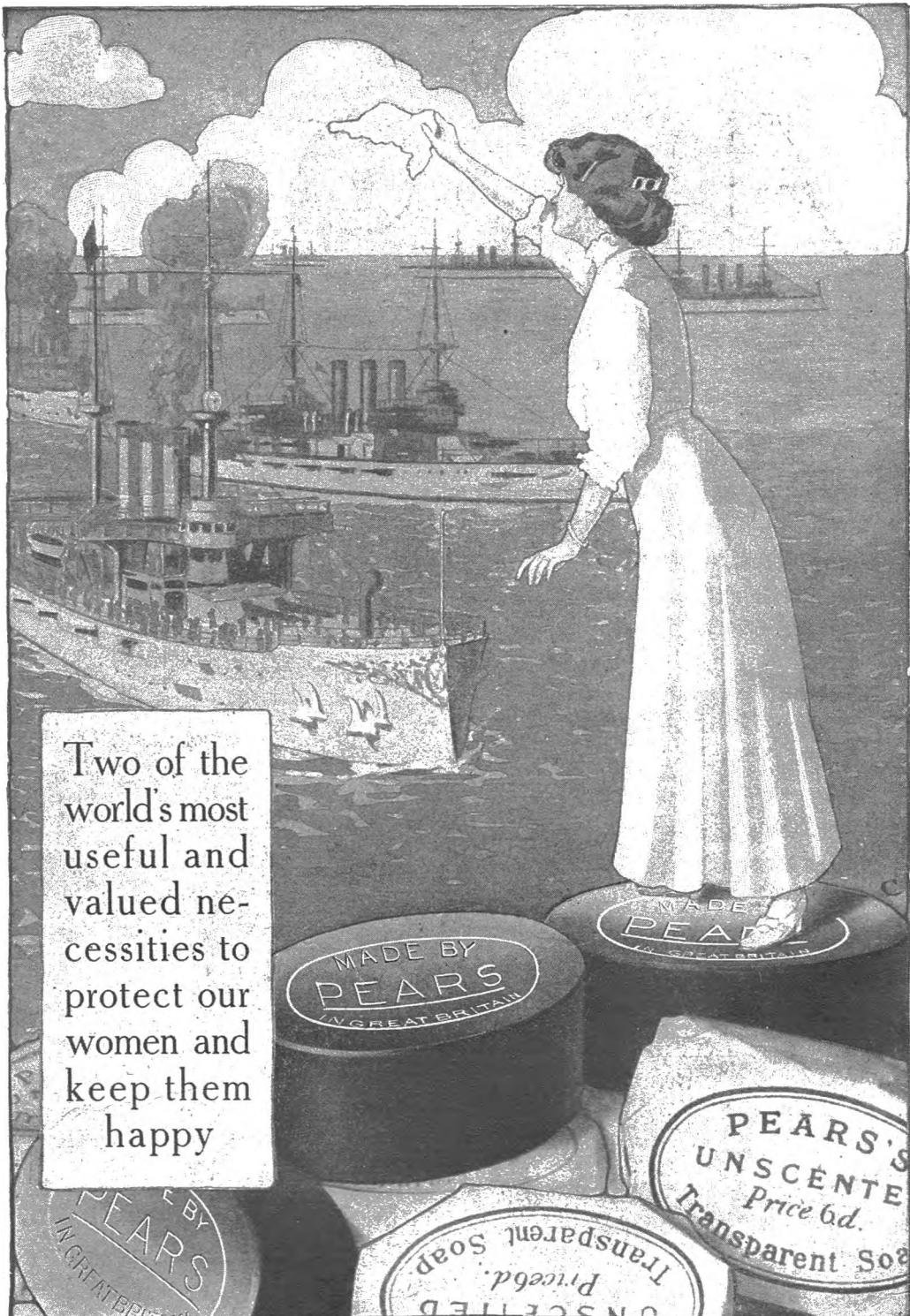


TWO NEW SERIALS BEGIN IN
THIS ISSUE

THE
ARGOSY
FOR APRIL



Single Copies, 10c. || THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY,
175 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK. || By the Year, \$1.00



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world's most
useful and
valued ne-
cessities to
protect our
women and
keep them
happy

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MADE
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UNSCENTED
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Transparent Soap

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Transparent Soap
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OF ALL SCENTED SOAPS PEARS' OTTO OF ROSE IS THE BEST.

"All rights secured."

LEARN TO WRITE ADVERTISEMENTS



I AM A
PAGE-
DAVIS
WOMAN

purpose of improving their present worth and are now enjoying double and treble their former earnings. Every person who wants the greatest measure of success in his work must learn the advertising business.

MANY readers of THE ARGOSY have learned to know us through their friends, for letters like the following come in nearly every mail:

"I have heard much of the Page-Davis School from friends who have increased their income; one in particular holding a position as advertising manager at a handsome salary. Please send me your information."

The staunch friendship that exists between students and the Page-Davis School is based on a practical foundation. It would take every page of this magazine to give even an insight into the lives of men and women who have been lifted from business ruts to profitable positions; but when you write we will send you the records of men and women who were earning small pay before they received our instruction who are today earning from \$25 to \$100 a week. We will also show as many instances where men, who were making good salaries, enrolled for the

advertising business. It doesn't make any difference what his position is at this time, he can increase his earning power from 25% to 100%; if he can say, "I am a Page-Davis Man." It stands for proficiency—there is power in that fact because it carries with it the weight of the Page-Davis reputation, which enables us to publish from time to time the greatest list of employed students known in the history of schools. When a business concern once employs a Page-Davis ad-writer, the heads of that concern will thereafter always apply to us when they have a vacancy to fill.

The following letter just received, illustrates this condition:

"PAGE-DAVIS SCHOOL.

Gentlemen:—Through your kind assistance we have in the past ten years secured the services of two very capable advertising men who have left us for larger fields. We wish to avail ourselves of your kind offices again in requesting you to put us in touch with another capable man. Remember we are willing to pay a good salary, etc."

Letters like this show the value of being able to say: "I am a Page-Davis Man."

If you have common-sense and a common school education we will teach you advertising—the most fascinating and profitable profession in the world—a business that pays from \$25.00 to \$100.00 per week.

If you will write we will send you our beautiful prospectus FREE and our latest list of employed students, and give you a full and practical report of the results of our instruction.

The coupon may be used if you wish, or a postal card will bring the information to you.

FILL IN NAME AND ADDRESS AND SEND THIS COUPON.
Page-Davis School—Send me, without cost, your beautiful
prospectus, and all other information.

41

Earn
a Salary of
\$25. to \$100.
a Week



I AM A
PAGE-
DAVIS
MAN

CREDIT GIVEN TO EVERYBODY

This Book
GIVEN AWAY



Free by America's Great Original Homefurnishings Establishment. The concern with a record of every promise fulfilled for the past 25 years, will send upon request and absolutely without cost to you, the Official Catalog that saves money on housefurnishings, such as Furniture, Stoves, Carpets, Rugs, Sewing and Washing Machines, Talking Machines, Furniture, Silverware, Office Desks, etc., and allows the use of goods while paying for them.

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& REFRIGERATOR
Catalog '10 Just out. FREE

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Send Us

\$1.00 cash and we will ship this handsome, massive Rocker, made of solid oak, elaborately carved. The front of seat is serpentine shaped, back is diamond tufted; upholstered in fine Boston Leather. Exactly like this illustration. Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded. Order Chair No. 70-1125.

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CHICAGO



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is the name of the serial by a new author and written on new lines, which will begin in the May Argosy. Starting in with a flavor of the sea, it bears the reader along on wings of vivid interest to the strange people whither the hero is carried in spite of himself, and yet with every mark of honor.

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175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E.C., London

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President.

RICHARD H. TIDWELL, Secretary.

CHRISTOPHER H. FOYE, Treasurer.

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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

\$1.50 a line. For Argosy and All-Story combined \$2.25 a line. Minimum space four lines; maximum space twelve lines. Ten per cent. discount for six consecutive insertions.

As it is impossible for us to know each advertiser personally, we ask the cooperation of our readers in keeping all questionable advertising out of these columns.

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SALESMEN to sell our Instep Support, as a side line. Retail at 50 cts. per pair. A cracker-jack seller. Write for particulars. C. & H. Allen SHANK CO., Dept. J, Brockton, Mass.

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I Teach Sign Painting

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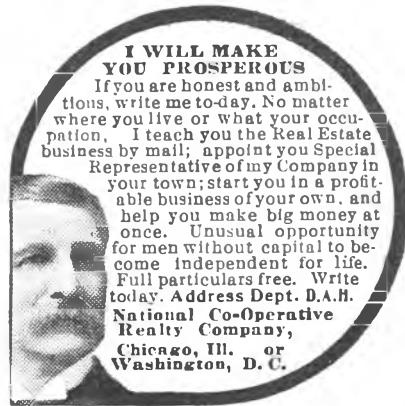
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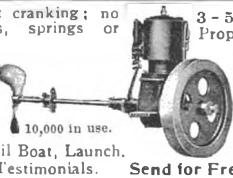
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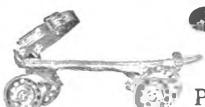
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THE ARGOSY

Vol. LVII

APRIL, 1908.

No. 1

A LUMP OF BULLION.

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "The Tail of the Lumberbeast," "An Age of Madness," "The Hoodoo Ranch," etc.

A quarrel in the family, capped by a mystery that enticed one man into perilous paths.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

THE CHEST UNDER THE BED.

SHELDON'S footsteps were always indicative of his mood. So, when I heard his ponderous hoofs pounding the stairs, I looked toward the door of my room with not a little apprehension.

He flung the door wide open, lumbered in, hurled his battered hat into a corner and fell down in an easy-chair.

"What's the matter now, Jack?" I asked, feeling to see if I had by any accident forgotten to smoke my last cigar. I found it and passed it over.

"Throgmorton's an ass," he said savagely, as he gnawed off the end of the cigar much as though it had been the head of the offending Throgmorton.

"Why? What has the good man done now?"

"Good man nothing! I tell you he's a—a—I don't know what he is. Know what? He says Frank must go at least two hundred miles away from New York if he wants to get well."

"Two hundred miles, eh? And is he set on just that measurement? Must the distance be surveyed even to a few feet more or less?"

"Don't try to be funny. You know it can't be done."

I was perfectly well aware that it couldn't be done. It was so far from being possible that the project almost made me laugh, although I knew it was no laughing matter.

"Two hundred miles!" exclaimed Sheldon wrathfully again. "As if it wasn't hard enough to keep the souls in their two bodies and a makeshift of a roof over their heads as it is. Hang it! And Winnie is crying because it can't be done, and unless it *is* done the case is hopeless. So Throgmorton says, at least."

"He ought to know," I remarked.

"Ought to know! *Ought* to know! That's just what makes me mad. He does know. And it's my fool helplessness that cuts. And the work won't last much longer—my work, anyway."

I sat still, looking at the sunburnt face and the nervously twitching brawny hand.

Nobody would have picked out Jack Sheldon as the possible hero of any sort of romance. Not that he was cut out for a villain. He was square and manly, but a riveter on iron structural work doesn't, as a rule, figure as the main male personage in a love affair.

We were a poor lot altogether.

Sheldon, as I said, was a riveter, and at this time was at work on the Williamsburg Bridge. He earned good wages, but he had his aged mother to care for, and not being married, it cost him something to get a bit of pleasure out of life, and so his wages remained wages and never grew into anything that had the remotest resemblance to cash capital.

Yet he had gone and fallen in love.

Not that the falling in love was either

a sin or a mistake from a general point of view. Sheldon could and would take good care of a wife. But he, a great, big, brawny heathen with hands that were like sledge-hammers, had to go to work and fall in love with a delicate little bit of womanhood as dainty as she was poor, who had a brother who might some day make his mark in the world of art if he didn't make it six feet underground first.

He was scarcely more than a boy, and Winnie was only twenty. They were orphans, and lived in what they could afford to live in, and Winnie earned a small salary in a department-store.

I was no better off. I had plenty of relatives who had money, but what's the use of dwelling on that. I had none, and this story would never have been written if any of us had had a little.

Sheldon couldn't marry Winnie under the existing circumstances, chiefly because she wouldn't let him. She was utterly unselfish and would not saddle an invalid brother on the man she loved.

So that was the situation, and bad enough it was. It was not unique in any way. The great city of New York is filled with these minor tragedies of every-day life that interest nobody save the few vitally concerned.

To me the affairs of Sheldon and Winnie Lyle were as the affairs of a brother and sister. But unlike the elder brother one reads of in novels, I was powerless to help them.

"You see," said Sheldon, when he had smoked himself into something like calmness, "Throgmorton says that it's his mind and nerves. There's nothing organic—is that right?"

"No organic trouble?"

"That's it. No organic trouble. But his failure with that color scheme for an autumn magazine cover has knocked him silly. He's gone all to pieces. He sat up nights to get it ready. By the way, why does a magazine have to have the drawing for a cover about a year or more before the blamed thing is published? But never mind. They didn't want Frank's girl with a fishing-rod at any time.

"He cries half the time. Weeps. Walks the floor. Lies on the bed and wants to die. Ever see a man go on like

that? Most men would get outside of a few drinks and start over again. But—I'll tell you what I think. He's only half fed. Understand?"

"Could I get up two hundred feet on an iron beam a foot wide and rivet if I didn't have good beef in me? Not on your life! And nobody can do anything right unless he's fed. And Winnie—brave girl as she is, shows how little they have. It's maddening!"

"Things do seem to be going wrong," I said as soothingly as I could.

I liked Winnie Lyle and her brother. I did not think him the weak fellow a brawny workman like Sheldon would. But it was certain that Throgmorton was at least half right.

"Did you have a good talk with the doctor?" I asked.

"I had a talk with him. There wasn't anything so howling good about it. I told him I wanted to marry Winnie, and he told me to engage an undertaker the same day. And about Frank—Throgmorton says that he can't possibly get well in New York City.

"It isn't only the noise, and the stuffy rooms, and the anxiety about the rent, and all that, but he constantly sees fellows who are prosperous in the line where he is a failure. Throgmorton says its the environment. That's something of a mouthful for me—like a hot rivet. But that's what he says.

"If we want Frank to get well he's got to get where he can't see an artist, or a magazine cover, and just rest in the mountains and the woods. Now, isn't that a prospect for a fellow who owes two months' rent and eats bread and tea for a square meal?"

Actually the big fellow's eyes were filled with tears.

I don't mind seeing a woman cry. When a child cries, unless there is good reason for it, I feel like spanking it. But when a hundred and eighty pounds of cast iron like Jack Sheldon gets watery around the eyes, it goes deep.

I got up and walked around to relieve the strain.

"What is it like, that country?" asked Sheldon with a grating laugh. "I've seen it in pictures. I went through it once in a train going to Pittsburgh, to look for a job. Lonesome, it looked to me."

Here was a man, born, raised, and now earning his living in New York, who knew nothing else. The great East Side has many such as he.

His remark struck some kind of a chord in me and I stopped.

"The country," I said, "is open fields or shady woods, singing birds and rippling brooks. It—"

"That's enough. And for the lack of these my Winnie has got to waste her life over a sick brother, grow white and thin, while I go crazy or take to drink. Not much like First Avenue and Thirty-Fourth Street, is it?"

"Sheldon," I exclaimed, "let's talk sense. Of course we know that what Throgmorton suggests is impossible. I am sorry he happened to be the physician in the case. He is a young man, and his practise is generally confined to friends of the family who are willing to trust him with a sore toe or a mild attack of indigestion, and who are able to start for Europe the minute he says go. He is not the man for Frank Lyle, because he doesn't know the difference between wealth and poverty. Nevertheless, I am convinced that what he says is so true in the main that we are going to act on his advice."

Sheldon's wet eyes stared at me.

"Have you got 'em, too? Anything wrong with you? Know anybody in the country wants two sick people to take care of for nothing? Got a wad tucked away in your bed somewhere? Ain't you afraid of burglars?"

"Shut up," I said with authority. "Let me think. Throgmorton was born on Seventy-Second Street, went to school and college in New York, and opened his shingle outfit on Seventy-Fourth Street. His New York is bounded on the north by One Hundred and Tenth Street, and on the other sides by water. I'll have Frank and Winnie two hundred miles away from their environment, as Throgmorton calls it, in three days. It'll cost a little, of course."

"Medicine? Tonics? Good grub? Say!"

Sheldon was on his feet by this time. His eyes were shining. I knew he would live on crusts to help Winnie if she would let him.

But the girl had her own views of

propriety and would not let a penny's worth come into the little four-room flat she did not pay for out of her own earnings.

"Bennet," he said, "you've got a scheme. You know how Winnie is. She won't let me help her. I can raise a bit. Come home with me, will you?"

"What for?"

"I want to show you something."

Sheldon lived only a short distance from my boarding-house, and I put on my hat to accompany him.

"Don't say 'boo' if mother's in. I wouldn't let her know this."

Fortunately old Mrs. Sheldon was out, presumably doing the marketing. Sheldon took me into his bedroom.

In a moment all I saw of him was a brace of ponderous feet toed in together on the floor, and two sturdy legs. The rest of him was having some kind of a scuffing match under the bed.

He emerged, however, drawing a chest after him. It was a very old chest. I had never seen it before.

It was strong and well-locked, but Sheldon found the key and opened the lid. I gasped.

"I never said a word about that stuff," he said. "Even Winnie doesn't know I've got it. My mother would die rather than part with a stick of it. But look here, Dick, when your life is in the balance, when the girl you love and her brother are suffering, and when what this junk would bring would put color in Winnie's cheeks and let me marry her, what would you do?"

I began to whistle.

"You wouldn't steal it from your mother?"

"No," he said soberly, "I wouldn't do that. But, somehow, that junk has got to save—everybody."

The chest was filled with heirlooms of silver plate.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST JARRING NOTE.

I'm given much to roaming myself. I know the possibilities of the city of New York much better than Sheldon.

They were all alike, he and Throgmorton and Winnie and Frank. They

thought New York was all deep gashes called streets, blank, dirty walls of things called houses, a hundred distracting noises, and the Board of Health.

But I knew there was another side to New York, and the next morning I took a ramble.

As everybody knows, New York is made up of a large number of spots. These spots were once separate villages with names. Those who live in Manhattan talk glibly of Harlem and Yorkville and Manhattanville as localities, but few know that these were once villages far removed from little old New York. And crossing the Harlem River there are the old-time villages or hamlets of Melrose, Morrisania, Claremont, Tremont, West Farms, and others.

These places, most of them, are now rapidly being devoured by the increasing population, and where once broad fields stretched toward the East River from the Harlem, there are miles of flats and apartment-houses. The scrape of the street-cleaner's shovel has taken the place of the plow.

But I knew a thing or two, or thought I did, and the elevated road took me to Tremont, where I alighted in blissful consciousness that, like the fairy in the story-book, I was going to turn misery into happiness, and unfold possibilities that could not seem real in the stifling atmosphere of the crowded East Side.

The main street of this one-time village is flanked east and west by banks, business houses, and real-estate agents. I visited them all, until at last I struck one who knew what I wanted.

This man's office was located half way between Tremont and West Farms, and the first thing I saw was a pretty girl at a typewriter.

This was encouraging. There is always inspiration in a pretty girl. And when I had told what I wanted she said she was glad somebody wanted it, for they had had it on their books for two years without success.

"You know where Bronxdale is? Yes? Well, any one there can tell you where the house is. I'll give you the key."

I accepted the key and jumped on a trolley-car that passed the door.

If you travel two hundred or two thousand miles from New York you won't

find anything that reminds you of it any less than Bronxdale.

Once it was a thriving little hamlet. There were mills and dye works run by power from the historic Bronx. And the outlying lands were grazing lands. But now!

What New York left when it got through its great spasm of buying parks a few years ago, is still a village, but it is the same village it was sixty years ago without any reason for existing. The mills are gone, the young people have departed to livelier regions, and the restful little place hugs the eastern side of Bronx Park, the most picturesque piece of city property in the world.

And there is a hotel. I wandered into this hostelry, where I quenched a thirst born more of exhilaration than need, and asked the genial landlord where the old Baskin house was located.

He looked at me quizzically.

"It's up the road a bit, nearer the park. Nobody there, though."

"Tell me something about it."

"Oh, it's the oldest house around here. Some say it was Washington's headquarters, but I've seen so many Washington headquarters he must have lived two hundred years to get around. It's an old stone house. That's all there is to tell. They are all alike."

Getting a little more information, I went to the old stone house.

Figuratively speaking, I hugged myself. If it wasn't two hundred miles from New York, it ought to be. Not more than eight hundred feet from a busy trolley line, there was nothing to indicate that it was part of a great and hustling city. It was sleepyland for fair.

The house needed some repairs, such as window-glass, and a new stoop, but it was all there. The garden was a veritable wilderness of forgotten roses gone wild, goldenrod that had jumped the tumbled-down fence, a fruit tree or two, and everything that goes to make up a picturesque ruin.

I let myself in and looked around.

Under the circumstances it was better than I had hoped. I could see where improvements might be made, but I wasn't looking for improvements.

I counted the rooms, and they proved sufficient.

I walked a short distance into the park.

There were thick hemlock groves, great elms and oaks and firs and spruce. Below the great stone mansion, once the home of a wealthy snuff manufacturer, the Bronx River tumbled and tossed in the whitest foam over rocks and through a deep gorge that turned this way and that, and from the brink the scene was equal to any in the Catskills.

I hurried back. In half an hour I had rented that old stone house for a ridiculously low figure, and was on my way back to my boarding-house.

That night I corralled Sheldon and his mother.

"Listen," I said with authority. "I've planned this thing to beat the band. We are all going away from New York. All of us, see? Of course we know we are not, but Winnie and Frank are not to know until they get some health back into them. The scheme is this: I've rented an old house near Bronx Park. Winnie was never there, nor Frank. We'll fool 'em. Mrs. Sheldon does the marketing, and she has suddenly taken a notion to open a country boarding-house. Haven't you, Mrs. Sheldon?"

"A what? Are you crazy? What is he talking about, John?"

"I don't know, mother. He's got 'em bad whatever they are."

"I've rented the house," I continued, serene because I knew everything was coming out right. "It's an old Revolutionary relic. Washington took a rest there on his way across the Delaware. Lafayette nursed a sore leg there after the duel he fought with Mogwogcoochie, the great chief. Oh, it's all right. And you know the work I'm doing requires quiet and peace, and I'm going to take a room. And Jack can start a little earlier and get back later, and we'll find some light work that Winnie can do, and we'll bunch. We'll get along."

Sheldon stared at me like a man whose wits were taking French leave.

"You are doing this for me, Dick," he said. "I'll pay you some time."

"Let's try it first. When can you go?"

"Go! Any time. But don't let Winnie know how we are going to manage. And—" Sheldon followed me to the door

to speak in a low tone. "Don't let Winnie know about the silver-plate. If I have to sacrifice it I will. But she wouldn't let me. Understand?"

"Yes," I said. "But I don't think that will be necessary now."

All this is commonplace enough. And if it had not been for that silver-plate that Jack's mother had hoarded so many years there wouldn't be anything left to tell.

There is no need of making a story of the moving.

Winnie was easily convinced that it was best to go when Mrs. Sheldon, who, to do her justice, entered into the scheme with vigor, had told her she was going to take boarders. Frank, of course, in his weak way was delighted.

I told him of the falls and the gorge and the hills, and his eyes brightened.

And so, with these two innocent beings of little old New York we settled in our old Revolutionary relic, well within the confines of the greater city, and all either of them knew was that we were in the village of Bronxdale, miles away, on a branch of the Mongaup River.

Everything went so well from the start that it was enough to frighten one.

The house wasn't damp, as I expected it would be. It cost less to put the place in order than I feared, and the people who did the work were in no hurry for their pay. A little girl brought fresh milk and eggs every morning, and although she lived only five hundred feet away, we talked glibly about her farm. And she enjoyed it without knowing why we were so funny.

I was working on some short stories, and the cracking of my typewriter was the loudest noise we heard.

Frank had his chosen place under an old apple-tree, and from there he could look into the deep woods of the park and could hear the birds and see them. Bees were plentiful, and there was nothing to mar the serenity of his mind.

He felt better at once and talked of a fishing-rod. But we convinced him that he needed complete rest.

Jack went to work as usual, and Winnie believed he was putting an iron bridge across the Mongaup. A bridge was being built over the Bronx at Pelham Road. It was a stone bridge and Sheldon had

nothing to do with it. But his mother sometimes said she had been to see the new bridge, and everybody was happy.

And so things went along for several weeks.

Frank wanted to begin work again, but we wouldn't let him. Mrs. Sheldon was an admirable housekeeper and cook, and we all thrived.

Jack and I paid the expenses, and it cost neither of us much more than to live as we had been living. And evenings sometimes Jack and I would stroll away to the trolley and visit those haunts in the greater city where we used to spend our idle moments when he wasn't with Winnie.

It is not often that a story-writer and an ironworker are so chummy. But Sheldon was a good riveter and I was not such a good story-writer, and that evened things up.

So things had run on, as I said, for several weeks. Then one night after I had gone to bed I heard angry voices. I lay there amazed, for not once since I had come so intimately within the circle had there been the slightest jar.

I did not wish to listen, but I could hear the voices of Jack and his mother. I heard Jack groan. His mother's voice was raised still higher.

"I knew it," she said. "I suspected it all along. You and your Winnie! She's a thief! A thief! I tell you. Who else?"

I crept from my bed and dressed. I went down on the porch and lit a cigar. I was dazed.

What could this thing mean?

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAGEDY.

EVEN on the porch I was not out of reach of the angry voices. The dispute grew worse. The shrill cries of old Mrs. Sheldon, and the loud, angry tones of Jack were bad enough, and then I thought I heard Winnie scream.

All this was not my affair. I knew that I had no business to interfere, and even if I had, I could do nothing to straighten matters out.

But it was painful to stand there and listen to these people, all of whom I

liked so well, quarreling over something I did not understand.

I left the porch and walked toward the main road. I went down this to the village. My nerves were somewhat shaken, and as the hotel had not closed, I went in and sat down for a bit.

"You look sick, Mr. Bennet," said the proprietor. "Anything wrong?"

"No, I'm a little tired, that's all." "Mustn't work too hard. Don't pay."

I left the hotel and sauntered to the bridge where the Old Boston Road crossed the Bronx.

I stood there looking idly down into the water. My mind was in a muddle.

What was to be the outcome of this? What had happened? How could so black a cloud come over our clear sky so suddenly? What could Winnie have done?

A sweeter girl I never knew. Devoted to her brother, loving Jack, she had seemed to me to be, of all the young women I had ever known, the one I could best have loved, but she belonged to Jack.

I was miserable. I had planned so carefully. Everything had seemed to be working out so satisfactorily. And now this!

I got tired of smoking. It grew late, and I thought that whatever the trouble was, it must be over by this time. I would go back, and in the morning I would have a talk with Jack.

I went back to the old stone house. It was dark, somber, and quiet. The quarrel was over. I hoped that by morning all the anger would have vanished and our household would go on as before.

I entered with my key. Somehow the stillness inside the old hall struck me as being too still. There was a deadness about it as if nobody was in the house.

I could not account for this feeling, and went to my room decidedly uncomfortable in mind.

I lit a lamp, for there was no gas in the old house, and stood thunderstruck when I heard somebody groan.

I listened. Jack's room was on one side of mine, and Winnie's on the other. Frank had chosen a rear room that looked out on the woods. Mrs. Sheldon had the room next to his. That filled the upper floor.

I could not tell from which room the groan had come. It was not like the sound made by a person who had become exhausted through weeping and excitement, and yet my first impression was that Winnie had moaned in her restless sleep.

But again there was that deathlike stillness.

I could not go to bed. There was a feeling of apprehension. I could not shake it off.

I went to Jack's room. The door was open. I carried my lamp with me. I intended to have a talk with him before I slept and learn what the trouble was.

He was not there. I stood looking at the bed, which had not been disturbed, much like a man in a trance. Then I thought that he had possibly done the same thing that I had, and had gone out to smoke down his agitation, and, somehow, we had missed each other.

I knocked on Mrs. Sheldon's door. There was no answer.

I was now filled with genuine alarm. Something was wrong, I was certain.

I cast aside all ideas of what the old lady might think or say and opened the door.

Her room, like Jack's, was empty.

The bed had not been disturbed.

A great and genuine terror seized me. I thought no more of the proprieties. If they had carried the quarrel to Winnie's room, there were perhaps there now. I rushed there with my lamp. The door was open.

On the floor near the bed lay Mrs. Sheldon, while under a window, which was open, lay Frank Lyle.

With a gasp of horror I set the lamp on a dresser and stooped first to see if Mrs. Sheldon was alive.

She was breathing, but that was all. A close examination failed to discover any wound. I thought she had fainted.

I then went over to Frank. There was blood on his night-shirt. He had evidently been to bed and had hastily drawn his trousers on to join the group and take part in the quarrel, or at least learn what it was all about.

A bullet-hole in his side told the story. He was dead.

I was chilled, stunned, too numb to know what to do.

A wave of horror swept over me that almost left me unconscious. A horrid picture swept in grisly clearness before me.

I dared not put it in shape for words or coherent thought. But there was the situation, and I had to face it.

Suddenly, I remembered the chest of silver plate Jack had shown me. I ran back to his room. The chest was there, half drawn from under his bed, but it was empty. The silver plate was gone.

I swept all other thoughts aside and went back to Mrs. Sheldon. I tried to revive her, but she resisted all my efforts. I continued until I knew it was fruitless, and then realized that here was a case for police and hospital.

I knew that policemen were few in that neighborhood. On one side was nothing but park, where I doubted if I could find any. In the village I had seen them, generally mounted, but I knew the beats of the mounted men were very long. Still, I must do something.

I went to the hotel again. It was closed. But I was in no mood to think of people's comfort. I soon had everybody awake.

In ten minutes an ambulance call had been sent in to Fordham Hospital, a hurry call to the police station at Webster Avenue and Mosholu Parkway, and two policemen were with me in the house.

"You'd better have little to say except to help us search," said one. "You'll probably be arrested."

"But I had nothing to do with the quarrel," I protested. "I don't know what it was about."

"But you say you heard it. And you knew the silver was in the chest and the girl didn't. Better keep still. Anything you say can be used against you—if a charge is made."

Stupefied, I sat there watching them.

They examined the premises. Nothing was broken. The windows up-stairs had all been open. Down-stairs they were fastened and had not been disturbed.

The locks on the doors were all in good shape.

There was nothing—absolutely nothing—to indicate which way the two missing ones had gone.

"It's a slick escape," said one of the

policemen. "They've got away all right, or else—"

"Or else what?" I asked.

"You know where they are."

He waved his hand at the dead man as he spoke.

Things soon began to move swiftly. The police wagon was the first to arrive.

"Coroner's case?" asked the officer in charge.

"Don't know yet. Something may turn up. Better take the body in."

The body of young Lyle was covered and placed in the wagon and carried off. Then came the ambulance from the hospital, and Mrs. Sheldon was taken away in that. Next came two detectives, who had been hurriedly detailed on the case.

They at once took me in charge.

"What happened here—before the shooting?" asked one, named Harrison.

I told him all I had heard, and rehearsed my own acts.

While Harrison was questioning me, the other detective was examining the premises.

"There are spring-locks on all the doors," he said.

"Yes," I answered, "we had them put on."

"Any one could get out and pull the door after him and it would lock."

"Yes."

"No outsider could get in unless he had a key?"

"No."

"You had a key?"

"Certainly."

"He says he came in with his own key," put in Harrison.

The other detective, whose name I learned later was Roberts, was busily opening and shutting doors. He was trying to find some clue to the way Sheldon and Winnie had fled.

"Here! What's this?" he exclaimed.

He stooped down just outside the rear door, for we were now in the lower part of the house, and came to Harrison and me with something shining in his hand.

I gasped.

"Did you ever see that revolver before?" asked Roberts.

"Yes," I said with a tightening at my heart. "It is my own."

"I guess, young fellow, we'll have to

lock you up. There is too much about this that looks suspicious. We won't take any chances."

Half an hour later I was in a cell in the Fordham station-house.

CHAPTER IV.

UNEXPLAINED.

I PASSED a wretched, sleepless night. I had never been an inmate of a jail before, and although the cell I was in was sanitary and clean, my brain was so benumbed by what had befallen me that I could scarcely think.

But I knew that I must think. The horror of the situation grew as the night advanced.

I did not lie down. I sat on the edge of the iron strap cot trying to evolve some explanation. I had always believed I was as logical as most men. But when the facts, so far as they were known, stood in a maddening array before my mental vision, it was almost impossible for me to realize the truth.

Frank Lyle was dead, shot with my own revolver.

I knew I had not shot him. How was I to prove it? I did not recall a single word that Sheldon had ever spoken that would indicate any animosity on his part toward the sick brother of the girl he loved.

Yet the startling truth was there always in front of me.

I had heard the quarrel between Jack and his mother, and I had heard the old lady state that Winnie was a thief. This statement was so wildly strange that it seemed as if the woman who made it must have been demented.

Winnie a thief? She had sacrificed her life thus far to an incompetent brother. She loved Sheldon. Yet her nobility was such that she would not become his wife while her burden remained.

And Sheldon was gone with Winnie.

Sitting in the cold, dark cell I tried to piece out a reasonable explanation. I knew Sheldon had no use for firearms. He was so muscular and fearless that he had often said, in my hearing, that he needed no weapon save his fist.

And certainly he was not the man to strike his own mother down.

It was a bewildering problem. Gradually I became cool enough to ask questions, but there was no one to answer them.

My revolver had been lying in the drawer of my dresser. Sheldon and Frank Lyle had both known where it was.

Had the accusation made by Mrs. Sheldon so angered Frank Lyle that, in taking his sister's part, he had rushed to my room and got the revolver, and in a fit of rage attempted to shoot Sheldon, who might have taken his mother's part? Sheldon was a loyal son.

Or had the old lady who was now, probably, lying unconscious in Fordham Hospital, brought such proofs to bear on Winnie's guilt that Frank had shot himself in shame?

Or had Sheldon done the shooting after Frank had struck Mrs. Sheldon? This, in fact, seemed the most plausible theory.

It was, after all, a simple story to work out. Mrs. Sheldon had missed the silver plate she so highly prized, and had accused Winnie of stealing it. I had heard this accusation made to Sheldon.

From that it was an easy step to reason that mother and son had gone to Winnie's room to demand an explanation. The noise of their controversy had attracted Frank, who, sick as he was, had risen and joined the quarreling group.

Some angry word of Mrs. Sheldon had impelled Frank beyond self control, and he had struck her. That, I believed, was when I heard Winnie scream.

Then Sheldon, in his own mad rage, might have stepped into my room, which was next to Winnie's, and taken my revolver to avenge the blow Frank Lyle had given his mother.

But why had Sheldon needed a revolver? His iron fist and great strength would have made short work of Lyle at any time.

And why, if Winnie had stolen the silver plate, had Sheldon gone away with her? This was inexplicable.

Another thought: had Winnie been the one who had taken the revolver to defend herself in case she was attacked and accused after robbing Mrs. Sheldon of her precious heirlooms? And why, after all, had Winnie stolen anything?

Oh, it was a jumble and my head ached and throbbed trying to solve it. And so the hours passed till morning.

I saw no newspaper, and no information was given me. Yet I could find no fault with the way I was treated. The police knew that a crime had been committed, and they were doing their best to unravel it.

At nine o'clock I was taken from the cell and led to the police-wagon. In fifteen minutes I was in Morrisania court.

Here Harrison and Roberts, the two detectives, told their story, which was remarkably simple. The magistrate studied me well.

"It seems to me," he said, "that there must be more in this affair than appears on the surface. Have you engaged counsel?"

"I have not, your honor," I answered. "I don't think I need any."

"Do you mean that you plead guilty?"

"I mean quite the contrary. Yet everything the detectives have told you is true so far as I know. The revolver belonged to me, but I did not fire it."

"You knew there was trouble?"

"I did. I heard Mrs. Sheldon and her son talking. It was clear from the conversation that the old lady was accusing Miss Lyle of stealing."

"Was there anything to steal beside the silver plate?"

"Nothing."

"Did you know anything about the silver?"

"I knew more about it than any one else except Mrs. Sheldon and Jack. Jack Sheldon showed it to me one day in his flat down on the East Side."

"About how valuable was it—as well as you could judge?"

"I think about a thousand dollars would represent its value."

"And what was said at the time Sheldon exhibited this?"

"We were speaking of ways and means. He loved Winnie Lyle, and because Frank Lyle was ill and poor, Sheldon mentioned the silver as a last resort, but said his mother would rather lose her life than part with the stuff."

There was a pause here while the magistrate did some studying.

"Was the income derived from your-

self and Sheldon sufficient to support the house?" he asked.

"It should have been. But of course the various medicines needed by Frank Lyle were expensive."

"Who paid for them?"

"I don't know. After engineering what I thought was a simple scheme to make him think the doctor's orders were being obeyed and he was really quite a distance away from New York, I interested myself in my own affairs and knew little of what was talked over privately by the others. I was a mutual friend, but not in the most sacred confidences."

"Where were you while the shooting was done?"

"I don't know when it was done. I left the house and walked to the Bronx Park Hotel. I stood there and talked a short time and then walked down Boston Road to the bridge over the Bronx and stood on that. When I returned to the house I found what you already know."

"I can see no reason for holding you, Mr. Bennet. But it is quite possible that you will be of material assistance in finding Sheldon and the girl."

"Have they not been found?" I asked in amazement.

"No. It is one of those peculiar mysteries that have no apparent explanation. The police are making as good a search as they can. They are to drag Bronx River in the park this morning."

Here was a supposition that had not occurred to me before. The possibilities were appalling.

Winnie might have run to the river and jumped in. Sheldon may have gone after her, and both drowned. Or Sheldon and Winnie may have entered into a suicide pact and leaped into the river together.

Then, perhaps Frank Lyle had been the one who took the silver, and it was Winnie's shame that led to the dismal end.

"The fact that the revolver was yours amounts to little," said the magistrate, "as it was found near the door. Had you done the shooting, you would have known enough to secrete the pistol. I discharge you from custody. But I wish you would remain in the case. We may need your assistance."

I was free. I breathed a little more

easily. But there was still a ponderous task before me. I could not have shirked it even though my assistance had not been asked.

CHAPTER V.

AN HONEST BUSINESS.

IT did not take me long to hurry back to Bronx Park, and here I found a busy scene.

North from the falls at the old Lorillard mansion, where there is a long reach of quiet water, men were dragging the bottom to find the bodies of Winnie and Sheldon. Through the gorge the water is turbulent, but not deep, and no dragging was necessary. But the place was thoroughly searched.

Below the gorge where the stream becomes once more a peaceful river, and flows under Pelham Road bridge into the broader part under the control of the Zoological Society, more men were at work.

They were not all policemen, although the work was being done under the supervision of the Fordham and Tremont station-houses.

"It knocks me," said a park employee. "How two people, a man and a woman, could get away from Bronxdale without being seen is something extraordinary. How did they go? At the time of night they must have left the house there were few passengers on the Williamsbridge trolleys. They were not seen by any of the conductors or motormen going north or south. Gets me."

"A couple like that would naturally be excited. Something would show. Well, then, there's the station on the New Haven and Hartford at Westchester or Van Nest. They didn't go there. Nobody did. Not a ticket was sold between nine o'clock last night and five o'clock this morning. They didn't walk over to the elevated on Third Avenue, nor were they seen at West Farms to take the Subway. Gets me. That's what it does."

It seemed to get everybody. Not a single trace was found of either Winnie or Sheldon, and that part of the search was abandoned.

Leaving the river, I hurried to Fordham Hospital. Much depended on what

Mrs. Sheldon could tell if she recovered consciousness.

I found the old lady lying in perfect oblivion to all about her, with a policeman sitting near ready to grasp the first intelligible word she spoke. We tried together to get her to speak. She did not even appear to recognize me.

I knew, and am still certain, that the police did all in their power to find Sheldon and Winnie. But they had both vanished apparently from the face of the earth.

Nobody at any railroad station or on any of the roads had seen a couple answering to the description I gave of them. The case resolved itself into one of the unexplained mysteries of New York.

Yet there was no one to blame. The country is wide. Sheldon was shrewd. I believed he would have found it possible to get Winnie away without being seen. But what bothered me was, why he should wish to do so.

Frank Lyle was buried by coroner's permit. Mrs. Sheldon was taken from Fordham Hospital to Bellevue, where she showed little evidence that she would ever speak rationally again.

With my mind so filled with the mystery that I could think of nothing else, I returned to the old stone house and took up my solitary residence therein.

The Bronx Park Hotel was near enough for me to go there for meals, and I felt that, somehow, the explanation of what so perplexed us all would be found on the premises.

I became a hermit, a crank, a recluse, a lone detective, call it what you will. I sat for hours with pencil and paper trying to work out a reasonable theory.

For a few days the papers made much of the matter, most of the stuff being hearsay. I read it all, but found nothing that could lead to any conclusion.

I found that I could do no work. I forgot the themes on which I was to build some more stories for the magazines. I was going insane, perhaps, over the mystery, but I could not help that. I must have some kind of explanation.

I was sitting in the dining-room of the old house one evening, with the great lamp I had bought shedding its bright light over the table on which I had paper and ink, trying to work out my theories.

I don't know where I got the idea that paper and pen or pencil were aids to detective work. Probably because the only detective work I had ever done previous to this was on paper.

Suddenly the bell rang. I had had visitors since returning to the house. Police officers had looked me up to ascertain if I had learned anything, and perhaps to see also that I had not gone from the place.

But there was something about this ring that startled me. I went to the door, holding a smaller lamp in my hand.

I found a little bowed old man standing there with a package in his hand.

"Are you zat Mister Bennet?" he asked.

I looked curiously at his long beard, his little foxy eyes, and his peculiar hat.

"I am," I said. "Are you a pawn-broker?"

"I am not quite that," he said with a grimace. "But I haf somezing I wish to speak to you about. Are you alone?"

He gave a furtive glance around and then eyed me suspiciously.

"So far as I know," I answered, "I am alone."

"Ah. I will come in."

I had not thought to ask him in, but he entered the dining-room and threw his hat on the table, scattering my papers.

"Perhaps you are wondersome that I am here," he said.

"I am a little interested. If you wish to explain I am ready to listen."

"First," he went on, "I am an honest man. I haf my business and I do honest business all times. And I haf read the papers and know what has been done here. And I know the police are watching you. For why? Well, I do not know. Anyway, if I can be of some valuable assistance to you I am glad."

"I shall certainly appreciate any assistance you or any one else may be able to give," I answered. "There is a mystery to be solved."

"So."

He placed the bundle he carried on the floor where I could not see it. When he straightened up in his chair he wore a broad grin.

"You haf seen the silver that was stolen," he said. "So perhaps you will know this."

He held out toward me a fine old silver mug. The chasing was perfect, and the design so odd that I recognized it at once.

"Where did you get this?" I demanded, growing excited. "Where did you obtain this cup? I asked if you were a pawnbroker."

"And I told you I was not. I told the truth. But I do buy old gold and silver. And I bought this. I gave what it was worth. I do honest business all times."

I took the mug from his hand and looked at it with curious emotions.

"This mug, my friend," I said, "was one of the lot owned by Mrs. Sheldon, who is now in Bellevue Hospital. I'd like to know how it came into your possession."

"I tell you that quickly enough. It was brought to me by a young woman."

I felt a sudden chill at this. Winnie was the thief then, after all. The question how she knew of the silver flashed through my mind, but I wanted the old man's story.

"I did not tell those police," he said. "They do not like me. But I haf come to you to tell you. Yes, a young woman sold me this."

"When?" I asked.

"About two weeks ago. I sit in my store and she come. She say how much is this worth? I look at it and give it the test. See where the acid eat in? Well, I tell her twenty-five dollar, and she says she sell him. So I pay her. And it is worth twenty-five dollar and no more. I do honest business all times."

"What kind of woman was she? Describe her to me accurately. You must deal with curious people and learn to read them quickly."

"Oh, yes. She was a little woman, almost but a girl and nothing more. And she haf big hair like wigs. What you call—"

"Marcel waves?" I asked.

"Ah! It is it. And she haf big, blue, innocent eyes so I don't even ask where she get this. I give her twenty-five dollar because I do honest business all times."

"So you've said. I believe you. How was this young woman dressed?"

"Oh, I can tell nothings about that

dresses. She was pretty. Oh, and her dress, yes, it was blue. I remember. But of what it was made I know not. I deal in gold and silver and I do an honest—"

"You have described Winnie Lyle, who disappeared the night her brother was murdered. You have added more to the mystery rather than aiding me, for I could not bring myself to think she was a thief. The mug is not mine. You bought it. Keep it."

"So. I was not to give it to you. But to help you. Now—this one."

He reached down again and fished up a larger piece. It was a small tankard. The chasing was of the same design. It belonged to the same set.

"Did she sell you that, too?" I asked.

"Not so at all. A man brought me this. A strong young man with face that the sun haf burn much. Big, brown, strong hands. Cool eye that look brave and strong. And shoulders like prize fighter. You know? And brown, wavy hair. He sell me this forty dollar, for I do—"

"That was Sheldon," I said as I fondled the silver piece. "Any more?"

"No. That is all. I thought I help you, but not tell the police. They not like me, though I do—"

I shut him off impatiently and began to walk the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

IT is needless to say that I was agitated and perplexed by what I had heard.

I did not for a moment think of doubting the old man's statements. That Winnie had sold him the silver mug and Sheldon the tankard was to be accepted as fact.

But the acceptance of the fact brought up a most uncomfortable train of thought and conjecture.

Had they been working in collusion to rob the old lady of her heirlooms? Sheldon had shown them to me, and intimated that he would dispose of them and use the proceeds for the expenses of Frank Lyle's convalescence.

But he had said in reply to my question that he would not steal them from

his mother. And I had never known Sheldon to tell a lie.

And as for Winnie Lyle turning thief, the idea was revolting and preposterous.

But there were the unalterable facts. Winnie and Sheldon at different times had disposed of at least two of the silver pieces, and now they were all gone.

But the theft sank into insignificance by the side of the shooting of Frank and the assault on Sheldon's mother.

My head ached trying to reconcile these things with what I knew of the tender, loving nature of Winnie, and the manly straightforwardness of Sheldon.

I seemed to be burning up. A mad desire to know the truth had fastened itself on me, and I tried to formulate some plan of action.

Then came the question as to how far I was justified in going.

None of all this was my affair. I had been released from all responsibility in the matter by a judge who used his common sense and knowledge of human nature.

Never before had I been so harassed in my mind. Few men have had to struggle with the problem that confronted me.

So far as I knew, the police had lost interest in the matter. There was no one to push the inquiry. It was not likely that any person would spend much thought on an old woman whose mind was a blank, and her pocket empty.

And Frank Lyle had filled so small a niche in life that his death left no regrets except in my own mind.

If I did enter into the search after Sheldon and Winnie to drag the truth from them, what certainty had I that I would be serving any good end?

There had probably been a fight. Some one had to get hurt, and it had been Lyle and Mrs. Sheldon. And I knew that Mrs. Sheldon had precipitated the quarrel by her accusations against Winnie.

I had forgotten the presence of the old dealer in silver and gold, and was aroused by a slight cough.

"You haf not told me. What you think about this? Will you tell those police?"

This question brought me to a standstill. I had not thought of telling the

police, though manifestly they were entitled to the knowledge.

But did they want the knowledge? Were they not as well content to let the matter drop?

"I can't decide that now," I answered. "I must think over it. What you have told me is startling; but it is very puzzling, too. You have not given me your card."

"My cart? I haf no carts. My name is Ivansig."

"Your address?"

He gave me the number of an East Side avenue far down-town.

"Well, Mr. Ivansig," I said, "leave the matter with me. Of course, neither of the persons who sold you these things had any right to dispose of them. But there is no one to claim them, and will not be unless the old lady recovers. I would advise you to keep them for a time and await developments. It is possible that more will be offered you."

"Ah! Is there more?"

"Much more. Some of the pieces are larger and more valuable than either of these. Keep a sharp lookout. If any person should come with one or more pieces with this peculiar chasing, manage somehow to put off the purchase, make a date for a decision, and let me hear from you. Until then I will keep the secret. I will not tell the police until I have something worth telling. And when it becomes necessary I will see to it that you are not in any way involved."

"Ah! That is good. I like that. So, I will let you know. You will stay in this house, perhaps."

"Yes; I shall remain here for the present."

He gathered up his two treasures and departed. I went to pacing the floor again, but the more I thought over the matter the more perplexed I grew.

That night I rolled and tossed, with the picture of Sheldon knocking his mother down and shooting the brother of the girl he loved, till I began to see murders being committed in all the dark corners of the room. I got up, lit a cigar, and sat down to read.

I could not drag my mind from the mystery. I could not fix it upon anything but the subject that had so upset me.

I recalled expensive tonics that must have cost considerable. Lyle got them somehow, and yet I knew he had no money.

It was clear enough, and yet it wasn't clear at all. I was going off bad mentally over the thing.

It was a trifle after midnight when I left my uncomfortable bed, and I had sat smoking half an hour. The house was very quiet. Now and then I could hear a rumbling, as a trolley-car passed on the White Plains road, but no other sound came to the silent room.

Suddenly the door-bell rang, with a peal that brought me to my feet with my heart beating at double quick. Who could want me at that time of night unless the police?

I went to the door with a lamp. I opened it only a crack, and peered out. The figure of a tall man confronted me.

"Are you Mr. Richard Bennet?" he asked.

"I am. What do you want at this hour?"

"It is late to disturb a man who must already be uneasy in his mind. I have just arrived in New York, and came to you not knowing how far you were from the Grand Central Station. Now I've found you I might as well come in and say what I came to say."

"Who are you? What is your name?"

"My name is Robert Lyle."

Involuntarily I threw back the door and he walked in. He was a man probably about sixty years of age, and seemed to be well dressed.

I led the way to the dining-room and lit the larger lamp. The face of my visitor was reassuring.

"You say your name is Robert Lyle?" I said. "Can it be possible that you are a relative of—of the—"

"I am their father's own brother. Sit down, and I will tell you enough of myself to give you confidence. I want you to have confidence in me, for I need you."

"To begin; I am younger than my brother. I had not seen him for many years when he died. We had no special quarrel, but we did not agree. He was a plodding fellow, with few advanced ideas, and I was a roving, unmarried man—sort of a soldier of fortune. I left the country when Frank was a baby."

"When I returned I learned that my brother and his wife had both died, and I could learn nothing of the children. I had interests in Australia that took me there again; and so, as years went by, I let them slip from my mind. But I returned again, and have been living in the West."

"The papers gave exhaustive accounts of this tragedy, and I knew that the boy who had been killed, and the girl who had run away with this strange cloud on her fair name, were my brother's children."

"I read of your arrest, and the fact that you were discharged from custody. Now that I have seen you I am not surprised. You did not kill Frank, and you have not run off with Winnie. The question I have come to New York to determine is who did. You must help me."

He spoke firmly, without excitement. I sat staring at him across the table.

He had a handsome face. Courage and indomitable will were written all over it.

"But the police?" I said. "Could they not help you more?"

"Hang the police!" he answered, banging the table with his fist. "I have told you that you must help me, and you shall."

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING A START.

His sudden vehemence, so quickly following upon his mild, calm manner, rather disconcerted me.

He noticed this probably in my changing expression.

"Is there any one else in this house?" he asked abruptly. "Are we entirely alone?"

"Absolutely alone," I answered. "There is no person near enough to hear you even if you shouted."

"A well-chosen place for such a crime. Marvelously well planned."

"What do you mean?" I demanded, with something like anger in my voice. "Do you mean that I planned the crime and chose the house for the purpose?"

"I read that you chose the house. It was an attempt to make Frank Lyle believe he was two hundred miles away from New York, I believe."

"It was, with the intent to get him well."

"He is wondrously well now, it seems. Now, understand, Bennet, I am not accusing you of shooting my nephew, although he was shot with your revolver. But there is in all this a link that is lacking. The entire story, as told in the papers—and I assume they were as correct as possible—shows a smoothing over. I am not accusing you at all, but I tell you frankly I have thought you knew more about the matter than was told. In other words, John Sheldon committed the robbery and murder, and it looks as though your friendship for him had led you to shield him all you could."

"If that is your idea, listen to me. I have no more knowledge of the matter than you have, with the exception of one bit of information that came to me unsolicited this very night. Part of that information is that Winnie Lyle sold the first pièce of the silver that was taken."

He stared at me, and I could tell from the gripping of his hands that the statement had affected him much as it had me.

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

"The man to whom she sold it."

"Ah! There is more to this than I thought. Then she has been led into it. She was young. In her baby days she gave promise of great beauty. Is that promise fulfilled?"

"Well—I don't think you would call Winnie a beautiful woman. She was a very sweet and pretty girl."

"Under the dominating influence of this Sheldon?"

"She loved him. But she would not marry him while she had a sick brother to care for."

"See the womanliness of that! And yet you say she sold one of the silver pieces. Now, why did she sell it and how did she get it? Had they been speaking of the old heirlooms?"

"To the best of my knowledge, Winnie knew nothing of them until—"

"Until you came to this house."

"Exactly."

He was evidently very much troubled.

"Was there any—any rivalry? Tell me the truth. Were you—"

"If you mean in love with Winnie, I

can honestly say no, although as a friend I thought a good deal of her."

"Did you, now? I like to hear that. Then promise me this: You will work with me. You will devote all your time to it until this matter is settled, the mystery cleared up, and her honesty vindicated?"

"I am a poor man. I will help when—"

"I am a rich man. I ask no service that will not be well paid. But this means much to me. Winnie Lyle is now my only living relative. I am too old to think of marrying—don't want to marry, anyway. And if I can find Winnie and prove her to be innocent of this crime, all I have shall be hers. To be frank with you, I suspect Sheldon, and you must have some suspicion of him yourself. How can you help it? Perhaps he began it from the purest motives. Who knows?"

"But, great Heavens, Mr. Lyle!" I exclaimed, "why should he first take the silver to help Frank and then kill him?"

"Take what silver? You said Winnie sold it."

"One piece was sold by Winnie. Another by Sheldon."

He leaned his elbows on the table and rested his chin in his palms.

"It is a problem, after all. About how many pieces were there in the set?"

"I should think about twenty."

"And only two accounted for?"

"Only two. And no one knows that except you and me."

"Then keep that knowledge to yourself. There is something inexplicable in all this. Did Sheldon ever show any signs of madness?"

"None."

"Did Frank?"

"Not madness. His nerves were pretty well gone, and the doctor thought his mind influenced his condition. That was the reason he ordered him so far from New York."

"And this ruse, taking him to a small settlement in New York City, was done from a motive of economy?"

"Nothing else. It enabled Sheldon and me to board with Sheldon's mother and keep the house going."

"Well, it's the greatest puzzle I ever knew, and I've solved a few," he said.

"And we'll solve this. But we must do it alone. I don't want Winnie's name published any more. We've talked a long time. I think we understand each other. You have extra beds, since so many of you lived here. Give me a bed for the night. We'll get at the matter further in the morning."

The night was nearly gone. It seemed scarcely any time when I woke from a slumber that had been sound and refreshing, and I found Mr. Lyle already up and dressed.

"How do you manage about eating?" he asked. "You don't do your cooking?"

"No, there is a hotel here. I get my meals there."

"Then, let's have some breakfast. Not that I would object to your cooking. I've done it myself."

We started for the hotel.

"What do you propose, Bennet, as a start? Shall we remain in the house? Shall we begin our investigations at the very door? Or have you something better to suggest?"

"I returned to the house for that purpose. But what investigating I did amounted to nothing. The information I received last night from Ivansig, the dealer in old gold and silver, may give me a fresh start; but I confess I scarcely know what to do first."

"It is difficult to decide. It is fairly certain that no more of the stuff will be offered to that same man."

"Perhaps not, although he agreed to let me know if there was."

"There will not be. This Sheldon is no fool, whatever else he may be. I see you are still reluctant to suspect him. What other deduction you can find is beyond me."

"But I knew him so well."

"Yes, that makes a difference."

It was clear that Mr. Lyle was trying to be fair.

We bought papers and sat down in the hotel to wait for our breakfast.

We were both reading. I carefully, and Mr. Lyle hurriedly, not being as interested in New York news as I was, and he suddenly threw his paper down in front of me.

"That must be your man!" he exclaimed.

I picked up the paper. He had been reading advertisements. And tucked away in a column of "For Sale" notices I found this:

IVAN IVANSIG, SECOND AVENUE,
Dealer in old silver and gold. All
articles assayed at fair value and cash
paid.

"That's the man," I answered. "I never saw the advertisement before."

"It must be an old one. How else would Winnie know where to go?"

"I don't know," I answered, "unless—"

"Ah—finish it. Unless Sheldon told her. Now you are beginning to see things clearly."

I ate my breakfast in silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LUMP OF SILVER.

THE advertisement, although commonplace enough, and perhaps a permanent feature in that same column, set both Mr. Lyle and me to thinking.

"It is evident," said Lyle, "that your honest Ivansig is nothing more nor less than a receiver of stolen goods."

"I suppose he does get a lot of that stuff," I answered. "But why should he have come to me with his statement? He showed me the two pieces."

Mr. Lyle laughed—a short grunt of a laugh it was.

"You say he told you the police did not like him. Undoubtedly there are a few indictments hanging over his head now, and when he read of the murder he got frightened. He took the safest course. He told you the truth, kept the goods, and made an ally of you."

"True, so he did."

"But unless my experience in this little old world goes for nothing, it was all useless—to him. Of course, it gave you information that we need now. But he won't get any more. As I told you, Sheldon is no fool. He took his one piece there before there was any hue and cry. He won't go there again."

A sudden thought made my heart jump.

"But—" I began, and then stopped suddenly.

I had promised Lyle I would do all I could to help him. Yet, when it came right down to the real thing, I felt a repugnance to turning on my friend and companion of years.

"You were going to speak," said Lyle eagerly. "You must know something of the ways of New York—more than I do. What was it caused you to start like that?"

"If," I said, "it is as you suggest—that Sheldon would not go to Ivansig again, admitting that he has the silver, he might go elsewhere."

"Yes—yes—of course. The very idea I was driving at. Now, where is another such place?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I never knew where this was until Ivansig came to see me."

"But you had an idea. What was it?"

"It was simply this. We can open a place like that ourselves, and advertise the same as he does, and wait. If Sheldon has committed this crime, he will want money. He surely will not go back to work."

"Doesn't the fact that he has not been to work since that night prove to you that he did it?"

"It—"

"It looks that way, you mean."

I did not like his quiet smile of triumph, but I realized that his point of view was different from mine. He could not be expected to regard Sheldon in the same light I did.

"Your idea is an excellent one," he said. "I will supply the money. But this involves an understanding with the police. We don't want to get locked up ourselves."

I had not thought of that.

"Those things can easily be adjusted when we get our plans laid," said my companion. "With plenty of money, all our time, and some brains, we'll get at this thing right."

"I think our first step should be to visit the hospital and see Mrs. Sheldon. If she recovers her mind, she can set us entirely straight—if she would denounce her son. But if she dies—"

"By thunder! She can't die. She mustn't die. If a dozen doctors and a whole hospital staff must be employed, we must recover. We'll see to that."

Having finished our breakfast, we rode in a trolley-car to West Farms and then took the Subway down-town. At Bellevue we found Mrs. Sheldon evidently sinking, and no better, so far as mind was concerned, than before.

Mr. Lyle questioned the attendants, and then made arrangements to have no expense spared in giving the aged patient everything that was needed to nourish her, and he provided liberally for the outlay.

"Now for Ivansig's," I said.

"Why to Ivansig's?"

"We can take a look at the place and see what we want."

"Of course."

We found the place of Ivansig a dusty, dull old store. The old man himself was behind the counter, with a pair of scales, which he was adjusting. He looked up, recognized me, and seemed startled at the appearance of Mr. Lyle.

"I thought you promise me something," he said.

"I have kept that promise, friend Ivansig," I answered, "as far as the police are concerned. But this gentleman is more vitally interested in our case than we are ourselves. I told him, and it goes no further. We stopped in to see if anything has turned up."

"No. Nothing vich is of matter to us in that mystery. Nobody comes to sell articles. Only—"

He smiled, waved his hand deprecatingly, and went to tinkering with his scales.

"Only what?" I asked. "What do you mean by your gestures?"

"You see, I must be careful. I told you those police not like me, although I do honest business all times. But I cannot always tell when something is stolen. So they find stolen goots, and I suffer. And they lock me up, vich is bad. So I take nothing now vich I think is stolen. That's what I mean. She comes in with a—"

"She comes? Has that girl been here again?"

"Non—non—non. Not that one. But another young laty comes in with a lump of silver."

"A lump of silver! Bullion?"

"Eggsactly. And I say, No, I don't vant that. You see, ven they take the

trouble to melt it. I know it is stolen. So I don't buy it."

"But you'd be safe, wouldn't you?"

"A man is never safe ven the police are after him. And I do an—"

"We know you do an honest business. I ought to know. You've told me often enough. About how much was there in this lump of silver?"

"Oh, maybe ten, twelve pounds."

"And it was melted into a mass—nothing in it to identify the thing by?"

"No; but I know it is stolen. Then they maybe arrest the thief and he squeal, and they arrest me."

"And you say this wasn't the same girl who sold you the silver mug?"

"Ah, no. Then I would have sent for you. No, this vas a young laty—maybe twenty-one, two."

"American?"

"I think American. She is no Irish, Hebrew, no distinct type. American, look like everybody else. Very goot. I think she is American."

"Did you make any effort to learn where she came from?"

He shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"I never ask dose questions. What I never know I can't tell those police."

Lyle was looking at me quizzically.

"What are you thinking of, Bennett?" he asked. "Are you going to follow every impossible clue?"

"No. But there is some kind of a little thinking machine inside of me that tells me this lump of bullion was part of that old plate. The hue and cry made over Frank's death would deter the murderer and robber from bringing the stuff in its easily recognized form. They would naturally melt it up. And it must be stolen stuff, or they could sell it at the mint, I should think. But what bothers me is the girl. If Sheldon is the man, how did he find another accomplice so soon? He knew no young women that I ever heard of."

"Oh, New York is a large place with shady corners. He might have known women you never heard of. But I have my doubts about this being connected with our matter at all."

"You said Sheldon was no fool. I always knew it. Anyway, I'm going to have a try for that silver. And we have

no time to lose. There are other cities beside New York."

"That's so," he said, as we walked out. "Now to business."

CHAPTER IX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

BEFORE that day came to an end we had a small vacant store rented, and sufficient furniture in it to give the proper impression.

Mr. Lyle was as good as his word. He cared nothing for expense. Of course, we could not tell how long we might need the place. It all depended on how soon we succeeded in the purpose of the undertaking or decided that we could not expect to succeed at all.

The morning papers carried the following advertisement:

DAVID MASGOWITZ.

—Dealer in old gold and silver. Cash paid for old jewelry, plate, or household ornaments. Cash paid.

We spent some time thinking and talking on the subject of a disguise for me. Of course Mr. Lyle needed none, for nobody in New York knew him.

The idea of a disguise was obnoxious to me. I had disguised myself once for some amateur theatricals, and my experience was not the success that usually comes to an amateur masquerader in books. My wig would get out of place, and the beard was so noticeably a false one that the seriousness of the part I played, or was supposed to have played, was almost turned into a farce.

"You see," I said in my argument, "this girl, whoever she is, who tried to sell the bullion to Ivansig, wouldn't know me. I doubt if anybody would ever come in here who does. Certainly neither Sheldon nor Winnie is going to risk capture now by appearing with gold or silver to sell. And even if they did, I need no disguise, for I would nab the one who did appear on the spot."

"Would you? Suppose your good friend Sheldon comes in here. Suppose he has something to sell. Suppose it does not happen to be one of the silver pieces you could recognize. What would you do?"

"Demand an explanation, and, if it wasn't satisfactory, have him arrested."

"All right, except the order of things. I should have him arrested first."

"I'm willing," said I. "More so since I am certain he will not appear."

We sat around all morning, and nobody came. During the afternoon a few came in, but no one who could, by any stretch of the imagination, be connected with the Bronxdale crime.

One was a poor woman, whose poverty was apparent in her white, pinched face and shabby clothing. She had some old jewelry. It was worth practically nothing, but Mr. Lyle became interested in her story, and, after asking her a few questions, gave her about three times the value of the stuff and sent her home happy.

Another was a young man, evidently of the underworld, who wanted to sell a gold watch. We believed it was stolen, but we were not refusing anything. We bought the watch, and I took it to the police.

We kept the advertisement standing, and still another day passed without incident.

But on the third day there entered a young woman, carrying what appeared to be a heavy package.

My heart gave a jump. She seemed to fit the description given by Ivansig.

"Do you buy uncoined silver?" she asked, giving me a keen scrutiny. "I mean silver that has been melted down."

"We do," I said. "Of course, we like to know where it comes from."

"I have some here. It is no trouble to tell what it is. I live with my brother, who does a great deal of traveling and has had money. He used to be a crank on buying things made of silver, and sometimes gold, but the gold would be small and easy to carry."

"He was living in Albany, and his house got on fire. It did not burn to the ground quite, but everything in it was burned or destroyed. He had then three expensive silver services, and they were so bent and twisted and almost melted by the heat that nothing could be done with them."

"It ruined him—the fire, I mean—and he had to come to New York. He did not want to pay for bringing all that ruined stuff, so he just melted it down. Now he wants money for it."

Mr. Lyle listened attentively with a

half smile on his lips. I weighed the stuff. It was in an irregular mass. I gave her a fair price, and she went out.

"Now, you can run the business till I come back," I said, getting my hat.

"Why, where are you going?" he asked in surprise.

"I'm going to follow that girl."

"Pshaw! That girl is innocent. I can read a face."

"She may be innocent herself, but that yarn won't wash. You can sell old gold and silver as well in Albany as you can here. Just wait. I'll know more when you see me again."

I truly would and did. But I had no idea I was going to learn so much, or in the way I did learn it.

The girl walked quickly, but had not got out of sight when I reached the street.

She went down Second Avenue a short distance and then turned east. She walked along easily, neither looking to the left or right, and it certainly seemed as though Lyle was correct. She appeared to be in no fear of being followed.

She turned several corners, and kept on getting nearer to the East River. I gained confidence as she continued on her way without looking round, and I grew so interested that I paid no attention to the street we walked on.

Suddenly a heavy hand struck me in the back with such force that I turned swiftly. The nature of my errand there caused me to think that I was attacked. But when I turned to face my assailant I saw a face I knew.

It was a fellow worker of Sheldon's. His name was Barsty, and though his habits were not such as to commend him to me as a friend, I had seen him with Sheldon and knew they were on fairly good terms. Other than that, I knew little of him.

"How do you do, Mr. Bennet?" he asked in a quiet way. "Queer place for you to be walking, isn't it?"

I felt my face grow warm as the blood mounted to it, and of course knew that he could see my confusion.

"I've walked here before." I replied.

I turned again as I spoke. The girl I had been following had disappeared.

Barsty laughed, and there was meaning in his laugh. A queer glint came into

his eyes, and he looked squarely into mine.

"Bennet," he said in a low voice, "I like you. You are a true friend. You're looking for Sheldon."

Then I felt myself turning white. What did this man know? How far could he be trusted?

"You know you are, and I don't wonder. But—there are two sides to every story. When you know the truth you won't wonder at what he did."

"How am I going to learn the true story?" I inquired.

"Can we trust you? You know that Jack and I have always been good friends. I'm not one to see a friend hounded to his death by the New York police. And I won't have Sheldon given up. I know where he is. I know you were closer to him than any one else. Now, if I let you see him and listen to his own story, will you promise to keep it secret?"

"I'd like to see him. I can't promise to shield a murderer."

"I told you there were two sides to that story. Sheldon a murderer? He wouldn't hurt a fly. You ought to know that."

"I always thought so."

"Well, will you promise? It's nothing to me. I am offering this to ease your mind. If I don't take you to see Sheldon you'll never find him."

"Am I to see him alone—to have a talk with him?"

"Certainly. That's the offer I am making."

"Very well. I'll promise."

Again there came that peculiar flash in his eyes, this time showing triumph.

"You'll do. Walk along with me."

I walked along with him about a hundred and fifty feet.

CHAPTER X.

A BEWILDERING ATTACK.

BARSTY stopped before a dingy-looking, old-fashioned brick house and turned toward the step. This was about the distance the girl I had been following had had time to make, and I concluded she had entered here.

My mind was in a tumult. No such ending to the pursuit could have been imagined.

If Sheldon was in that house, he was certainly guilty. If he and Winnie Lyle were hiding there, then some terrible twist had come to their natures, and they were equally guilty of a double crime.

But I was so determined to carry the thing through that I did not hesitate. I knew that if I showed any weakness now that I would get no other opportunity to see Sheldon and learn what explanation he could give.

Barsty did not wait to ring, but opened the door with a latch-key. The girl had been slower in the hall than he expected, and I heard him mutter a curse as she turned.

Her own face was blank with amazement when she saw me. It was clear that she had not known I was following her.

"Why—you are the—"

"Shut up," said Barsty. "And another thing, don't you ever let on that you have seen him here. He's a friend of mine. See?"

The girl's hands came together and her eyes took on a frightened look.

"Oh, what is—"

"That'll do, now," said Barsty. "Go get us something to eat. Keep your mouth shut and you'll get along. He's here on business."

The door was shut, and the girl disappeared.

"Come with me," said Barsty.

I was beginning to feel queer about the visit, but there could be no faltering now. I felt to see if I had my revolver. I had left it home. But I tried to reason away my doubts.

Surely there could be no danger if Sheldon was in the house, and it was equally certain that if he wasn't in the house, Barsty would not want me there. I had nothing against Barsty. I certainly wasn't looking for him.

We went up a rickety stairs. I was surprised that there were no carpets anywhere, and but little furniture.

"Mustn't mind the roughness of it," he said. "I've only just taken the house, and haven't got the furniture and carpets yet. I'll soon have it to rights."

"Was that your sister?" I asked.

"Yes."

"But she said—"

"What did she say, and when?" he demanded sharply.

I was dumb. I dared not tell him of the sale of the melted silver. Yet I could scarcely believe he had lived in Albany without my being aware of it.

He had, so far as I knew, been working on the Williamsburg Bridge as long as Sheldon had.

There was something wrong. This was certain, and I was determined now to learn what it was.

We entered a room as poorly furnished as the halls. There was an old wooden chair in it. The light came from a small skylight in the ceiling.

"I want to warn you," said Barsty. "I have brought you here to do you and Sheldon a good turn. Let him tell his own story. Believe him or not, as you please. But whatever else you see that doesn't concern you, forget it. Because some things don't belong to Sheldon's end of the game. See?"

I tried to find an answer. What kind of man was he? I tried to recall something about him. But there was nothing.

I had seen him with Sheldon. That was all.

He turned away. The door shut behind him and I heard a lock click. I leaped to it. Cold chills chased up and down my spine.

It was as I feared. The door was locked.

Now a flood of tears began assailing me. I knew I was in a trap; but what trap, and whose, and why was I there?

There was no doubt in my mind that Barsty had lied when he said Sheldon was in the house. He had brought me here for his own purpose. But what purpose could he have?

If Sheldon wasn't in the house, he hadn't sent the silver. Then it wasn't the silver that had been stolen from the old house at Bronxdale. I had stumbled upon another mystery of New York with which I had no concern.

Why had I been made a prisoner? Because I had followed the girl? She had evidently been oblivious to the fact that she was followed at all.

Where had Barsty first seen me? Did he know that I had followed the girl from the store? Or had he chanced upon me in the nick of time to suit his purpose?

Or was Barsty ignorant of the trans-

action in silver? The girl had said that it was her brother's, but I could not bring myself to the conclusion that Barsty had lived in Albany recently. And, after all, the girl did not say it was recently.

All I could do was to walk around the bare apartment and try to think. And the more I tried the less the thoughts came, and my head throbbed and ached, and I felt myself going insane.

I tried to reach the skylight, but even by standing on the chair I could not do it. And there was nothing else in the room to help me.

There was no side window from which I might try to escape. Nothing but the little skylight above, and this absolutely out of reach.

Here, on the East Side of the great city of New York, with probably a dozen policemen within the reach of my voice if I could get to a window, I was as completely at the mercy of my captors as if I was in a cage in the heart of an African forest.

All I could do was wait, but it was impossible to be patient.

I knocked on the door and shouted, but received no reply.

I twisted and turned at the knob, but with no result. I tried to kick through a panel, but the old-fashioned oaken doors didn't kick through as easily as some modern ones.

I examined the walls to see if there was, by any chance, a mysterious opening. But this was an old house, and nothing but an old house. The only thing mysterious about it was its present occupant.

I grew tired finally, and sat down again in the chair.

The time seemed so long that there is no way for me to adequately tell how long it did seem.

Hours seemed to drag along. I knew it was still daylight by the skylight. I became hungry, and no one came to feed me.

Had they locked me in to let me starve? What inhuman monster would do that in New York?

After this long and sickening wait I suddenly heard some one at the door. I jumped to my feet, not knowing what to expect.

The door was flung open quickly, and a man stood in the threshold.

A wave of great joy welled up within me.

"Jack! Good old Jack!" I cried, rushing to him with both hands extended.

To my absolute amazement and horror, instead of greeting me with even half-way friendship, a look of demoniac hate came over Sheldon's face, and his eyes seemed to flash lurid gleams of light that I had never seen before. And before I could even make a motion in self-defense or step backward, he had swung his ponderous fist, made hard with his work and moved by an arm of iron.

It struck me full in the face and sent me scuttling into the corner of the room, almost stunned.

"Ha, you cowardly dog!" he cried, as he bent over me with a long knife raised ready to strike.

"Ha!" he cried with the exultant glee of a madman. "I've got you at last, have I? Dog of a coward! You, I thought, was my best friend on earth. You planned it well, Bennet. Blast you, you planned it well. You got us up in that dismal place, and when I was at work you played your part. You stole my sweetheart and my silver. Devil! Fiend! You'll never live to enjoy Winnie Lyle. I don't want her now. Take that—and—"

"Jack," I tried to scream.

But the infuriated man would not hear me. I caught his arm, but my grip was like a flea-bite to his gigantic strength.

I saw the knife descending like a flash of lightning. I felt it. My head went round. I heard him roaring in his madness. Then I knew nothing.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ANGEL OF MERCY.

How long I lay on the bare floor of the bedroom, bleeding from the wounds inflicted by the infuriated Sheldon, I did not know. My period of unconsciousness lasted well into the night, and my first awakening was so slow and incomplete that I did not at first realize where I was or what had happened.

Gradually, however, memory returned,

and the horror of the situation seemed increased by the intense darkness that enveloped me.

It seemed so black that I scarcely knew whether it was really the darkness of the night or blindness that the attack had brought on.

But after a while, still lying on my back and looking upward, I fancied the skylight showed somewhat lighter than the surrounding ceiling.

I tried to rise, but fell back helpless.

I dared not make a noise. Undoubtedly Sheldon had supposed he had killed me. If I attracted his attention or that of Barsty, the work would be made complete. Weakness makes cowards of us all, and I shook with terror lest the powerful riveter return and find me alive.

The house was very still. As my mind gained its full activity, it seemed to be keen and active, in strange contrast to the weakened condition of my body.

The full significance of what had happened came to me not at once, but little by little, as I tried to grapple with each question brought up by this new phase of the mystery.

Barsty had invited me into the house on the plea that he was protecting Sheldon from the police because he had been justified in killing Frank Lyle. Sheldon had attacked me and accused me of killing Lyle and stealing the silver and running away with Winnie.

And yet the melted silver, which I now felt certain was part of the booty stolen from the Bronxdale house, had been taken to the store by Barsty's sister.

It was clear enough to my mind that, at least, two of the three people I knew were in the house held the key to the entire mystery. The question was, which two?

There was no mistaking the rage of Sheldon. He either fully believed in the truth of his accusation or he had gone completely mad.

If he had gone to Barsty with any kind of story that would enlist his sympathy, it did not seem possible that Barsty would lure me to what he thought would be my death if he believed I had committed the Bronxdale crimes. In the first place, he would not probably have supposed that a guilty man would walk into the trap as easily as I had.

It was worse than the first shape of the puzzle that Mr. Lyle and I had tried to straighten out. And where was Winnie, anyway?

I lay trying to get some tangible explanation into my head, when I heard a footstep on the stairs.

It was not the heavy tread of Sheldon, nor was it the stealthy tread of a murderer coming to finish his victim. The step was light and rather uncertain.

Then, to my surprise, I saw a light through the door. The surprise was not caused so much by the light itself as by the fact that the door of my room had been left open. This proved to my mind that Sheldon had believed me to be dead when he left me.

The light was evidently from a lantern. It swung uncertainly, and at times a shadow was sent ahead, as though part of the person who carried it had got in front of the light.

It approached the door and stopped. Whoever was there was in no hurry to come in. I heard a heavy, panting-like breathing, and then the words "Oh, Heaven!" half spoken and half groaned.

This was not, then, some one come to finish me. I tried to call out, but before the feeble words had left my lips the lantern moved in at the doorway.

It was carried by a woman, and as she held it up to enable her to look about the room, I gasped with astonishment. It was the girl who had brought me the silver.

When she saw me she stepped quickly to my side. I shut my eyes and pretended to be dead, for there seemed no possible doubt that she had been sent to learn if I was done for and to kill me if Sheldon had not completed his work.

"Poor fellow!" I heard her murmur. "What is it? Oh, what is this terrible thing into which I have walked so innocently?"

I opened my eyes at the words.

"Ah!" she murmured, with a little gasp and catch in her voice. "You live? They did not kill you? Thank God, thank God!"

"I am severely injured," I said in what was little better than a whisper. "I don't understand. It is all a terrible mystery to me. Why did your brother bring me here?"

"I know no more about it than you do," she said, and she began to sob. "All I know is that somewhere there is a mystery and a crime, and I have walked into it without knowing. Oh, why did you come here? Did you follow me from your shop? Why did you do that? I would have told you what I could if you had asked me."

"But I wanted to find Sheldon," I said.

"We have much to talk about," she replied. "Now, you must tell me what to do. Do you think you are dying?"

"No, I will not die if Sheldon doesn't come back. Is he still here?"

"No. They have gone—and I went with them. But let me get you something. Do you want a doctor? Shall I send for an ambulance? Shall I call a policeman?"

I remained quiet for a time, thinking.

Certainly, I needed the care of somebody who knew how to prevent my wounds from becoming worse injuries than they were. But the very nature of the case made me hesitate about calling in the police before I had held a conference with Mr. Lyle.

And I knew that if a doctor came into that vacant house and saw the work of Sheldon's knife, it would become a police case at once. And a police case becomes a newspaper case, and that would give my assailants time to get away.

"No," I said, "I don't want a policeman now, and I think between us we can fix up my wounds. I don't think I am stabbed in any vital spot. Sheldon's mighty fist almost stunned me, and I became unconscious so quickly that he thought I was killed. That saved my life. Do you know all the house? Is there any water? If we could manage to get some bandages, I think we can do this ourselves, and when we know the condition of things with Mr. Lyle we will know how to act."

"Who is Mr. Lyle?"

"My partner in that business. I am David Masgowitz. My real name is Bennet."

"I don't understand—I can't understand," she said. "It is such a strange mystery. But I'll find water—and bandages."

I did not ask her where the bandages came from. She either tore up a clean sheet from a bed or something she had been wearing. In the light of the lantern we bathed the few knife-wounds and she deftly placed the strips of linen.

I felt much better, and she helped me to my feet.

"I thank you," I said. "In spite of the story you told concerning the silver, I feel that I can trust you."

"Trust me? When I have risked my life to come back to you? Why should you not trust me? And what is that I told? I told you the truth, Mr. Bennet."

"You told me the truth? And yet Sheldon stabbed me? Then, for Heaven's sake, tell me why you came back to me to-night."

For a moment she looked at me with a peculiar expression on her face. And as the cheeks took on a rich redness, and her eyes lighted up with an expression that certainly did not seem to fit the tragedies of the case, I was struck by the fact that hitherto I had been blind to the beauty of her face.

I had been so absorbed in my search after the murderer of Frank Lyle that to me she had been merely a woman who was involved in the crime. Now, her innocent eyes and certain beauty startled me.

"Why did I come back to you?" she said slowly. "Do you wish me to make an unwomanly answer? I will, because you have been wounded on my account. I came back because I thought a man who had been so fascinated by my face that he would follow me home the first time he saw me, and who was injured—and perhaps killed—because of it, deserved to have me return and do what I could for him if he was alive. Now you know why I came back to you."

CHAPTER XII.

A CONFERENCE.

At the girl's explanation, which certainly was about the furthest possible from any I could have expected, I stood swaying in my weakness, almost overcome by my absolute amazement.

Did the girl mean what she said? It did not seem possible. Yet her face,

still red in the lantern-light, was perfectly innocent in appearance.

"You are more ill than you thought," she said. "Isn't there something more than I have done that would help you? It is late and the stores are closed. But perhaps I could get some brandy in a saloon."

"In this neighborhood?"

"I would risk it for you, if you asked."

"No. I scarcely know what to say. What you have told me has staggered me a little. I don't suppose it is safe to remain here."

"No. I got away after they went to bed. I took my own key, so I didn't need to enter their room. But either of them might waken and look for me, and would perhaps think I was here. If they came and found us, they would kill us both."

"I suppose Mr. Lyle is away up in Bronxdale," I said, "and the journey is too much for me to-night. However, if you can help me get to the place where I bought your silver I can pass the night there. But what will you do?"

"I can go back where I came from."

"Then, let us go. We had better put out the lantern. Where did you get it?"

"I brought it from our new boarding-house. I carried it under my shirt, so no one would ask any questions."

"And you came along these East Side streets alone at night and no one spoke to you?"

"Yes—some spoke—but I shut my ears and did not answer."

"You are certainly a brave little woman."

"But come," she said. "Since we know where to go, let us go. If they come, they will kill us both."

"I am ready, Miss Barsty."

"Miss—oh, I forgot that you did not know. My name is not Barsty."

"But Barsty told me you were his sister."

"I am his half-sister. His mother was my mother. My name is Edna Wall."

"Edna Wall! That certainly is better than Barsty, and smacks less of mystery and tragedy. Now, Miss Wall, I shall need all my strength to walk to the store. If you will let me take your arm, I will not lean too heavily. If my

strength should prove too little and I faint, just have a policeman get a cab and take me to the store. Remember, my name is Masgowitz."

"I'll remember," she said.

We reached the street. It was far from a pleasant night, and there was no one to be seen. We started westward, and I found that I was not as helpless as I feared.

We reached the store without incident and without much further conversation. I did a lot of thinking on the way.

Even though the mystery of the change in Sheldon, the absence of Winnie and the murder of Frank formed the great subject that absorbed all my intellect, this girl who was so bravely assisting me was still of consequence enough as a puzzle to keep me thinking of her.

I knew that my weight was telling on her, but she walked with a firm tread, and it was only the heavier breathing that let me know what a burdèn I had become.

The store was dark except for a light we had decided to keep burning all night, as so many stores do. When we reached the door my companion gave a little cry.

"Why, there's a man in there!" she said.

I peered through the glass. It was Lyle, sleeping in a big armchair.

He heard me fumbling with the lock, and sprang to his feet. I saw him reach instinctively for a revolver, but he took a second look and recognized me.

His face was a study as he leaped for the door. He opened it, and I fell into his arms. My strength was exhausted.

"Ah—I saw a girl with you. I thought it might be Winnie. It is the girl who brought the silver. And—my God, man, what's the matter with you? You followed her—who struck you?"

"Jack Sheldon," I said, as I sank into a chair.

"Sheldon?" he repeated slowly, as he stood staring at me in a stupefied way. "You found Sheldon—and not Winnie? You found Sheldon with this girl?"

"Sheldon was not with me," said the girl. "He was a guest—a strangely secreted guest—in my brother's house."

"Your brother's house! Was that Barsty's house?" I asked.

"He had just rented it."

Barsty had told me that himself. Truth and falsehood, innocence and the blackest guilt, seemed to be so interwoven in the case that no one could separate the tangled shreds.

"There is a good deal to be told," said Mr. Lyle, looking at his watch. "I must know all there is for this young woman to tell, and we will continue our work."

"Miss Wall and I are tangled as yet ourselves," I replied. "You have not heard her name. It is Edna Wall."

Lyle gave her one of his piercing, disconcerting looks of scrutiny.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked. "Have I not proven that I, at least, have done nothing wrong?"

"Come in the rear room," said Lyle, without answering the question. "We will attract attention here, and we can't have the police inquiring into the reason of our presence with Miss Wall. Inside we will be unmolested. You are not afraid, Miss Wall?"

"I am not afraid. I am anxious to know the truth as well as you."

Lyle lighted up the rear room, and we sat down for a conference. Before sitting down Lyle took a bottle from his desk.

"In the West," he said, "when a man is battered up a good deal, a good pull at a bottle like this is supposed to fix him up a little. I suppose it helps in New York as well."

I did take a drink from the bottle, and it invigorated me for a time.

"Now," said Lyle, "tell me just what happened. Miss Wall, I think, unless my friend Bennet knows your story, you had better explain about that bullion."

Her face flushed.

"I have already explained about that. Of course, I can see now that what I told you was not the truth, but it is as near the truth as I know."

"And it was really your brother's? It really came from Albany?"

For a moment she looked at him, and then at me. Then a look of embarrassment and shame spread over her countenance and she burst into tears.

"I understand!" she cried. "I understand all now. This is not your regular business. Something has been stolen. A crime has been committed. You are detectives who have pretended

this business to catch the criminals. And you suspected me. And you followed me because you thought I was a thief. And it wasn't because you liked me—the reason I risked my life to come back to you."

Lyle gazed in silent astonishment at the girl, and then, as she stopped, he turned to me.

"What in Heaven's name does she mean?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STORY OF EDNA WALL.

It was almost as much a puzzle to me as to him just what the girl did mean. Thrusting aside all theories connecting her with the mystery of the Bronxdale house, it sounded as if she were insane.

But I knew she was far from that. She was a beautiful, resourceful, and brave girl. And now her emotion, I fancied, was more the result of embarrassment over the fact that she had spoken of my fascination for her when nothing of the kind existed.

But she had befriended me greatly, and now that I saw what a splendid specimen of womanhood she was, and how innocent she appeared of all participation in crime, I had begun to take an interest in her.

"Miss Wall is tired," I said, "and the night has been a hard one for her. If she is laboring under what she thinks was a misapprehension of facts, it might not all be misapprehension, and perhaps it would be better to begin this thing at the beginning. She is as much entitled to an explanation as we are, and if we begin with the first crime and proceed with events in their regular sequence it will avoid confusion."

"I agree with you, Bennet. Pardon me, Miss Wall, if I have hurt your feelings. This has been a shock to me, although practically I might be said to be a stranger to my nephew who was murdered and my niece who is missing."

"Your nephew murdered! Your niece missing!"

"Such is the mystery we are trying to solve. We are not detectives, as you imagined. We are only interested, trying in our own way to get at the truth."

"But the silver?"

"You shall hear. You will understand as much as we do. Bennet, proceed with the story, beginning with the decision to go to Bronxdale and the cause therefor."

Lyle lighted a cigar and settled himself to hear a story he knew by heart, and Miss Wall sat looking straight into my eyes while I gave a complete history of the matter as fully as I knew it. Lyle nodded at intervals when I brought out some particular point in the story, but he did not interrupt.

"Now," I went on, turning more to Lyle, "it is your turn to listen intently. As you know, when Miss Wall brought the silver it was decided I should follow her and learn where she went. I followed her, but before she entered a house I was accosted by a man I had known as Barsty, a fellow workman of Sheldon, with whom I had seen him several times, but of whose character I knew little. He told me he had Sheldon hidden from the police, and said I could go in and get his own story if I promised secrecy.

"I entered a house with him, and Miss Wall was there. Barsty told me it was his sister. So far it corresponded with her own story about the silver.

"I waited in a room, in which I was locked, until Sheldon came. But instead of my Sheldon—my good, old, patient, honest Jack—he came a madman. He accused me of stealing the silver, of killing Frank, and of making love to Winnie and running off with her.

"He would listen to nothing. He knocked me down and stabbed me with a knife, and left me, I suppose, for dead. Miss Wall came to me during the night and helped me get here."

Lyle sat and stared at me as if he, like Sheldon, was going mad.

"Let me get this in my head," he gasped hoarsely. "You found Sheldon, but not Winnie?"

"True. I found Sheldon. Winnie could not be in the house, as he accused me of having run away with her."

"But—but—the silver was in the house, and he accused you of stealing that!"

I sank lower into my chair in sheer helplessness.

"It can't be possible that Winnie was in the house," I managed to gasp.

"Sheldon would not have stabbed me for taking her away."

"But the silver—the silver," insisted Lyle. "There is something extraordinary about this. Now, Miss Wall, let us hear what you have to say. Tell me the truth.

"I thought I knew something of the mysteries of life. I have been all over the world and have made money, and now want to find my niece, the only relative I have. Please help me all you can.

"The silver is simply a factor in the story. I promise you that no harm will come to you for any part that you may have played in that."

The girl was silent for a moment while she braced herself to begin.

"I assure you, Mr. Lyle, and you, Mr. Bennet, that I have told you nothing but the truth so far as I know. My name is what I have told you. William Barsty is my half-brother. My mother married Mr. Edward Wall, of Trenton, New Jersey, after Mr. Barsty, William's father, died. I know little about Mr. Barsty, my half-brother's father. I know he did not leave my mother well provided for.

"Mr. Wall, my father, was a kind man, but ill luck made him poor and ill health prevented his recuperating his losses. He died, too. I went to work in Trenton, and lived with my mother until she, too, died two years ago. Since then I have been boarding in Trenton. All this I can prove to you if you will take the trouble to come with me to Trenton.

"My life in Trenton has been as straightforward as that of any girl on earth. I can safely assure you that you will hear no breath of scandal concerning me in the city where I was born and where I spent all my life up to a very short time ago.

"William Barsty, my half-brother, came to Trenton at long intervals to see us. He seemed to care for our mother in a way, but he was not a man who showed emotions, and we thought him hard and cold. But we believed that his work and the associations in which he found himself made him that way.

"It may not be true, but I have heard that occupations do influence men's minds, and we thought perhaps an iron-worker was a hard sort of man. And he was always going to some strange place for a job. Being a bridge-builder, of course

it was natural for him to go where they were building big iron bridges, and so we imagined him in all the places he said or wrote he was going to.

"A short time ago I received a letter from him that said that he had been living in Albany, where he had worked for a year, in a little house he had furnished himself, and that it had burned down. He had given up work there and had taken a job here on a big bridge, and wanted me to come and keep house for him. He wrote that his wages were good and he would take good care of me.

"My own work was getting poor, owing to changes in the place, and I accepted. I came here, and he met me at Jersey City. He acted in every way like an affectionate brother, and I began to think that we had misjudged him.

"He took me to that same house where you—where Mr. Bennet had his severe experience. He said that as his furniture had been burned in Albany, all he had in the house were a couple of beds and a few chairs. He had the money to buy more, but couldn't use it all at once, but that I was to have the choosing of it, and that everything should be just as I wanted it.

"What sister would not have believed a brother who told her such things?

"Then about the boarder. Mr. Sheldon, he told me, was an old friend who had suffered a great loss, and who had been suspected by the police of a terrible crime. But he was innocent. His mother had been attacked and robbed.

"I did not know of what she was robbed, nor was anything said about a murder or a missing girl. I saw Mr. Sheldon but seldom, and I was cautioned by my brother not to say anything about his being there, because they were working silently together to get the real culprit, who had disappeared. Of course, I believed that. And when my brother told me why he had melted the silver, to make it easier and cheaper to get it here, I believed him, and at his request brought it here to sell.

"No one could have been more surprised than I was when I turned in the hall and saw Mr. Bennet. I wondered what had brought him there so soon after I had left. I went about my duties in the house, because the money from the silver was to go for furniture. I sus-

pected nothing until I was told by my brother that he had changed his mind, had given up that house and had taken another, partly furnished.

"We went away in what I thought was a hurry, and Mr. Sheldon acted very strange. We rode in a carriage, and Mr. Sheldon laughed in a crazy sort of way, and said to my brother: 'We got him—we got him.'

"When we reached the new house, which is on Fifty-Second Street, I got an opportunity to ask my brother what he meant. He seemed angry. He said that an old gold and silver fellow had fallen in love with me and had followed me home; that Sheldon was also in love with me, and the two had had a fight.

"I was greatly wrought up. I listened at their door. I heard that Mr. Bennet had been left in the house. And because I thought he had been injured for—for—being attracted by me, I returned at night and—"

"That's enough, my dear girl," said Mr. Lyle. "Your story is as clear as could be. Much clearer, in fact, than ours. Now, don't go yet. Sleep in a chair if you can. Let me think. Something must be done, and done at once."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

It seemed to me that Lyle took a very long time to consider, but that was perhaps because I was weak and full of pains, and wanted to get somewhere where I could stretch out in a bed with my clothes off and get back my strength.

Lyle sat with his head bowed. I could not see his eyes. He might almost have been asleep, but I knew he was not.

Miss Wall did not close her eyes. She sat with one white cheek resting in the palm of her hand and her gaze fixed on a spot in the floor.

All I could do was to sit and look at her. I studied her hair. It was heavier and longer than Winnie's, and a lighter brown. Just now it was somewhat disheveled, but I fancied it would adorn any beautiful head in any style.

I looked at her clear, innocent brow. It was not exactly a high forehead, and I liked it better. I never cared for a

high-browed woman. In fact, I had never cared for a woman at all.

I looked at her eyes. They were, perhaps, a little wider than usual, as she stared, apparently unconscious of my existence, at the floor.

And her delicate nose, her firm but sweet and womanly mouth, the turn of her neck, all seemed to me perfect. I had never studied a woman before with such a scrutiny.

I was beginning to take a great interest in Edna Wall. Somehow it seemed as though she was destined to give us great assistance in unraveling the mystery of the Bronxdale house. A willing assistance, and an efficient one.

Lyle stretched up suddenly.

"I have gone over every phase of the situation," he said. "I am convinced that we have to deal with a subtlety of criminal talent that will require all our united skill. And even with that conclusion I am still reluctant to call in the police. I think we can do it alone, with Miss Wall's help.

"I will explain my reason for not wishing the police. I have promised, on my own responsibility, that Miss Wall shall hear nothing further to her disadvantage concerning the silver bullion. I am convinced she is telling us the truth, and yet it may be difficult to so convince the police.

"I know something of police in the large cities of the world, and while it may not apply to the police of this city, I have found them ready, as a rule, to seize upon the most convenient theory and force it to a conclusion rather than risk a failure in their records. Thus, having assured Miss Wall that she shall not be molested, I do not wish that promise to be nullified by powers over which I have no control.

"Up to this moment we have done well. We will continue in our well-doing. Am I understood? And do you both agree with me?"

I simply nodded.

"I thank you for your consideration," said Miss Wall. "I have no fear, for my conscience is perfectly clear. I am ready, however, to do all in my power to assist you to find the missing young lady. I do not believe she is in my brother's house."

"Possibly not," rejoined Mr. Lyle. "And naturally, feeling that now your brother is in a way under our suspicion, you will do what you can to clear his name."

"Certainly, sir."

"But suppose you find that he is guilty? Suppose you find that he and Sheldon have been partners in this crime? What would be your course?"

"Having given my promise, I will stand by it. I can do no more."

"Certainly not. And mind you, I am not saying that your brother is guilty. There is something wonderfully tangled in all this. We know he told you that Bennet followed you because he had fallen in love with you."

"Yes—that was untrue," she said, with a painfully vivid blush. "But I thought the—I really fancied he had followed me because—you see, I knew no other reason."

"Of course. We will not speak of that again. Now, we must come to some agreement as to what must be done. Morning is nearly here, and you must be worn out. The first thing is this: Does your brother or Sheldon know you are here—that you left the house?"

"They did not know it when I left. They had both been drinking a little and went to bed early."

"Then the supposition is that having been drinking last night they will sleep late?"

"Unless my brother gets up early to go to work."

"And has he been going to work of late?"

"Oh, yes. Every morning."

"That speaks in his favor. Then there is a possibility—a probability we will say—that you can get into the house without either of them knowing you have been out."

"I think so."

"Then that is the best thing for you to do. Go back to them. You said it was a house your brother had just rented. I'll write the number down."

She gave him the address.

"To-day you need not communicate with us," continued Mr. Lyle. "We need rest, and so do you. If your brother gets up to go to work you will be obliged to get his breakfast to avoid explanations.

Then you can get some sleep. This evening it is possible there will be further developments. There may be conversation between your half-brother and Sheldon. This you must in some way manage to overhear. Then to-morrow, if you have learned anything, communicate with us in the manner most convenient to yourself."

"It will not be necessary to communicate with us until you learn something, or you are in trouble and need help. If you find that they suspect you and you fear violence, come to us at once."

"I will, sir."

"That's all, then, that we need speak of now. Will you have a cab to go home?"

"No, sir, I am not afraid."

"I will walk a distance with you."

"You need not, Mr. Lyle. I am accustomed to going about alone. And it is growing lighter now. I have no fear. And Mr. Bennet needs you."

Her face as she turned it to me was more beautiful than ever. I started to say something, but perhaps the admiration she saw in my eyes disturbed her, for she turned and started for the door.

Lyle let her out, and returned rubbing his hands.

"We've gained a mighty big step," he said. "Of course, my dear Bennet, I regret more than words can express that you have met with such an unfortunate accident. But as you are not killed, and my bank account has not suffered yet, we will cover the wounds with wholesome plasters that will make you forget them. And now, if you feel strong enough, we'll get up to Bronxdale and go to bed."

"I'm ready," I replied. "We had better take the Subway to West Farms and trust to luck to get a carriage there. I am rather afraid of the trolley."

I managed to walk to the Subway station, and in less than an hour we were in West Farms. We did not, after all, find a carriage handy, so we boarded a car for the White Plains road. At Bronxdale we left it and walked to the house.

"The postman has been here," said Mr. Lyle, picking up a letter. "Ah! From Bellevue Hospital."

"What can that be?" I asked feverishly. "Perhaps Mrs. Sheldon is dead."

He opened the envelope feverishly.

"No! Thank God!" he exclaimed. "Listen to this—*Mr. Lyle*: DEAR SIR: Acting upon instructions given by you at your recent visit, it is our pleasure to inform you that the patient, Mrs. Sheldon, has completely regained consciousness and is capable of conducting a rational and coherent conversation."

His eyes shone with hope.

"Now go to sleep, boy. We must get down there this afternoon. This day will be a good one for us. And I want you there to ask the questions. You know the old lady and can get the truth."

In ten minutes I was in bed and fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. SHELDON'S STATEMENT.

PROBABLY the best stimulant is excitement compounded with hope. Certain it is that I felt much stronger when I woke up than I had expected to be. And Mr. Lyle was so alert and eager that I thrust aside what little discomfort I did feel.

I removed the bandages Miss Wall had put on, and with Lyle's help, made a more thorough job of it. In his wanderings he had picked up quite a smattering of surgical knowledge, and the pain of the wounds was relieved when he had finished with me.

"Now for Bellevue," he said eagerly. "We will stop for a bite to eat."

We had our bite, and, in a short time were once more on our way down-town. We found Mrs. Sheldon propped up in bed. She looked up at us as we entered the room.

"You, Dick? I have been expecting Jack. It is strange that since they sent him word I wanted him, he has not been to see me."

Lyle shot a look at me that meant much. I felt the touch of an attendant's hand.

"We have not told her that Sheldon is missing," he explained. "She wanted to see him, and we told her we had sent him word. Instead, we sent to Mr. Lyle."

"That was right," I said.

Still, as a matter of fact, it was a difficult matter to begin the conversation with the old lady. It was clear that her disappointment was keen.

"You have been quite ill, Mrs. Sheldon," I said. "Was it a surprise to find yourself in the hospital?"

"In what? In a hospital? Are you crazy?"

This certainly was a staggerer to start off with. I glanced at the attendant for some word to guide me.

"Mrs. Sheldon does not know she is in a hospital," he said. "Of course, she knew nothing about that while she was unconscious, and we thought it better not to tell her until some one came. The shock and her demand for an explanation might send her off again."

"You did well," I replied. "It is true, Mrs. Sheldon, that you are in a hospital. You were severely injured that night that—do you remember anything of the night that your silver was all stolen from the chest?"

"My silver all stolen?" she repeated, in amazement. "But my silver was not all stolen. My memory is perfectly clear. Nothing was missing, except a mug and a tankard."

"We are not getting on very well," I said, stumbling along as best I could. "Let us begin right. You remember, do you not, that you had a little quarrel with Jack about the mug? You insisted that Winnie stole it?"

"I remember. I seldom had looked into the chest, but having moved so far up in the country, or to such a remote part of New York, I thought I would look at it. And I found those two things missing. Then I found, by making a search, that Winnie had money."

"I knew she had no money when we went there, and I knew that she had earned none. I did not at first make the direct accusation against Winnie. I spoke to Jack about it, thinking perhaps he had taken it. That would, of course, have hurt me, for he could have had it all for the asking."

"But he flared up at the insinuation that Winnie would do such a thing as that, and then I lost my temper. I guess I was too hasty in what I said, for one would not call a girl a thief for an old

silver mug. But I am an old woman, and old women sometimes lose their tempers."

"Well—while you and Jack were having the argument, did any one come into your room?"

"No. We did not remain in my room. Jack insisted on having it out with Winnie. We went to Winnie's room, and Jack told her that I had called her a thief. She screamed. Then I told her she had stolen from Jack's room a silver mug and a tankard. She looked wild, and I berated her; and Jack thought she was guilty, for he stood like a dumb man, staring at her.

"Then Frank came in and joined in, and we all got hot-headed. I think Frank was the worst, for he talked the loudest. But Winnie—something came over Winnie, and she gave a louder scream and ran down-stairs. Jack ran after her."

"Did he bring her back?"

"I don't know. I woke up here, and they told me I was sick. I didn't ask where. They didn't want to answer questions, so I said I wanted to see Jack. They said they had sent for him. I don't know where. I thought Winnie and he had run away somewhere."

"But where did you think you were? Surely this room is not like any room in the old stone house at Bronxdale."

She looked curiously around.

"No—the walls were not so clean there. But I was bewildered. I did not know how long I had been here, and it took me a long time to remember everything."

"And are you quite sure you remember everything now? What happened after Jack pursued Winnie down-stairs?"

"Why—I fainted, I think. It seemed as though there was a sudden shock. Perhaps I fell and struck my head on the bedstead. I don't exactly remember. I was feeling rather dizzy, for excitement is not good for an old woman. Anyway, I woke up here; and if I am in a hospital, I have been sicker than I thought. But that doesn't explain about Jack."

It certainly did not explain about Jack.

"Did you hear a shot? Was there a pistol fired?"

"A pistol? No, I saw no pistol. I heard no pistol. What do you mean? Was Jack shot?"

She was getting excited. I glanced at the attendant.

"One or two more—not too many," he said.

"Mrs. Sheldon," I said, "we must not tire you. There was a tragedy that night. Jack was not shot. He is safe enough, and you will probably see him soon. But when I returned to the house, after a walk to the hotel, I found you unconscious and Frank Lyle dead. He had been shot and you struck, and all your silver was gone."

She stared at me so that I thought her reason had fled again.

"Did Jack do it? Did Winnie get him to do that?"

"We don't know, Mrs. Sheldon. We have been trying to learn. We do not know where Winnie is. We do know where Jack is, and we may hear from him to-morrow. This is Mr. Lyle, Winnie's uncle. He wants to find her."

She did not answer, and the attendant waved us away.

Once outside, Lyle turned to me with a face, every feature of which spelled triumph.

"Bennet," he said, "my original proposition is true. Whether my poor niece sold a mug or not, I am convinced she did not steal it. She is as innocent in the matter as Edna Wall in selling the melted silver. It was Sheldon. The fellow you trusted. Sheldon, who pretended to love his mother. Sheldon, who won and imposed on the love of my little girl. Sheldon is the brute, the slayer of my nephew, and the robber of his mother."

"It is as clear, now, as daylight through a thin glass. He went out after Winnie. What he did with her, we cannot conjecture. But certain it is that he went back to the house. He knew where your revolver was kept. You were out, and it was an easy matter to take it from your bureau. He shot Frank, after knocking his mother on the head from behind. And then he took the silver."

"What was more natural than that he should seek the protection of Barsty, his fellow workman and friend? You did

not see him all the time. He may have had two sides to his nature. One, a good side for home use, and another for his pals.

"It is clear now. We will have him, and we will wring from his cowardly lips the truth about Winnie. If he has harmed that girl, I'll tear him apart without recourse to the law. We do these things in the West. I'll tear him apart. I fear now that he has killed Winnie."

For a few minutes I could make no answer. So far as Sheldon's part in the crime was concerned, it did seem, as Lyle had said, really clear. But if it was, why in the world had he stabbed me for doing it?

"All I can suggest," I said, "is that Sheldon is a madman of the most violent type."

"We'll see," Lyle said grimly. "Wait till we hear from Miss Wall."

CHAPTER XVI.

A SPLIT.

I WAS exhausted by the experience. The afternoon was almost gone, and Mr. Lyle had nothing to suggest for the rest of the day except that he believed we ought to stop at the shop and see if Miss Wall had sent a note.

"It is possible," he said, "that she has learned something. Sometimes things do happen quickly."

We went there in a carriage, but there was no word from Miss Wall.

"Curious," he said as he rejoined me.

"I don't think so," I answered. "Remember that you told her not to write to-day. You said we would not be here."

"Still," he insisted, "it is curious."

I saw that he was upset and nervous and irritable. I did not wish to cross him with contradiction, so I let the matter drop.

But down in my heart I resented his imputation that Miss Wall was slow. He had distinctly told her not to write that day. Why he should now find it curious because she had obeyed him I could not imagine.

We said little on our way to the station, and the effort to talk above the roar of the Subway was altogether too much

for me. Nothing was said until we were in the old stone house.

"Bennet," said Lyle, throwing himself wearily into a chair, "I am completely done up. I don't see how you stand it with those wounds."

"I don't stand it," I said in reply, and to my astonishment my voice sounded a mile off.

I sank down near him. The reaction was coming and I knew it.

"I am going to be ill," I said. "Can't you manage to pull me together without calling in a doctor? I'll have to give an explanation of how I was wounded, and it may open up the whole publicity again."

"I'll look you over."

I paid little attention to what he did. I knew that he helped me to my room, worked over me, and took off my clothes and put me to bed.

"I'm going out a few minutes," he said. "About half an hour. I'll be back as soon as possible. I want to go to a drug-store."

I was too far gone to make any reply. I heard him go out and heard the door close after him. Then I sank into a deep, untroubled slumber or else I fainted. I don't know which.

But it seemed only a few minutes before I heard him again. He was standing in my room with the lamp lit, and a glass of something in his hand.

"Take this. I'll guarantee you'll sleep all night and get up a new man in the morning."

I drank it. It was bitter enough to be potent, and the effect was magical. A deep drowsiness came over me. All sense of anxiety left me, and I slid off into a dreamless slumber which held me till the sun was high in the morning.

I was refreshed and invigorated, and after a good sponge off, Lyle rubbed something into the wounds that took away all soreness.

"Now do you feel equal to what the day may bring forth?" he asked. "There is no telling. This may prove the most eventful day of all."

"If I continue to feel as strong as I do now I can go through it," I answered.

"We'll take along a bottle of the stuff, and when you feel weak we can easily get some water and fix you a dose."

"What is it?"

"Oh, it's a powerful combination. It's too good to tell a young fellow like you. You're apt to take to it when you feel a little tired and want to brace up for a night out. No, we'll use it while you need it, and then forget it."

I smiled at his care over me, and we started down-town.

"I think we might as well give up the store to-day," he said. "Of course, the rent is paid for the month, but nobody will come to sell any old silver that we want now. We've finished that part of the job."

This was so, and there was no need of keeping up the farce of Mr. Masgowitz's establishment any longer.

We reached the store and, as Lyle opened the door, he stooped and picked up a letter. His face was somewhat flushed and eager as he opened it, and I stood patiently by while he read it to himself.

Then, with a curse, he handed it to me.

"She is one of the gang," he said hoarsely, and walked to the rear room.

This is what I read as I held the letter in hands trembling with apprehension:

MR. LYLE:

I am sorry to inform you that my half-brother and Mr. Sheldon have disappeared. When I reached home from your shop I went right to bed, not looking to see if they were in their room. When I woke they were not there, and I waited, supposing they had gone out together and would return for supper. They did not come, however, and I waited all evening. Still they did not come.

I am writing this to catch the early post. I am sure they woke up in the night and missed me. I fear they went to the old house, and not finding Mr. Bennet, they knew I had been there, and were frightened. I cannot tell where they have gone. Of course, after having supposed Mr. Bennet followed me through an attraction he felt for me, I cannot meet him any more. And as I am afraid of my brother, I am going away where he cannot find me. I am not going to Trenton. I hope you will find your niece. Yours very truly,

EDNA WALL.

I walked back to where Lyle sat. His face was set and rigid.

"For the first time since I began to have any experience in the world," he said angrily, "I have been deceived by a face. That woman fooled me as completely as she did you."

"I am not yet convinced that I was fooled," I told him. "I still believe that what she said was true and that what she writes is true."

He laughed harshly and scornfully.

"Then you are a fool, and as such worthless in this search. I can see now where I made the mistake of my life. While she was telling her story I should have got the police, had her arrested, and then sent to the house and taken the two scoundrels."

"But why do you say she is false?" I demanded, nettled beyond my own calm at his manner. "I can't see your reasoning."

"That's because you are a fool. Can't you understand? While she was telling us her story and making us, like two first class idiots, tell her all we knew, the men were getting themselves into a safe place, where the police could not find them, and where undoubtedly she joined them. It was a skilful and well-played game to win our confidence so we wouldn't get the police before they could cover their escape."

"And Winnie is with them. Gamble on that. This girl is no more the half-sister of Barsty than I am. She may be his wife, though even that is doubtful. And with her to help. Winnie could easily be kept a prisoner."

"I see it all as plainly now as the nose on your face. They worked together. Sheldon undoubtedly did the shooting and took the silver. But these other two were ready to give him assistance and shelter. Oh, why did I trust that hateful face?"

"I don't agree with you," I said somewhat coldly. "I may not have had the experience with people that you have, but I am convinced that Edna Wall is an honest girl and that what she said was true."

He laughed scornfully.

"You are worse than I thought. She has beguiled you. If you were not infatuated with her when you followed her home you certainly are now. Her modest shame because she told you that

is pitiful in the extreme. It is likely that she would feel that way, isn't it? She's a liar, sir. A liar. And any man who takes her part is no friend of mine!"

"Then, Mr. Lyle," I said, "I fear I can no longer call myself a friend of yours. I do take Edna Wall's part, and shall do so till I am convinced that she is wrong."

"What she states here is perfectly plausible. They might have looked for her and found she was absent from the house. It would be natural to suspect her of going to the one they had left. And after going there and finding me missing, they could easily have become terror-stricken and fled again. I believe it was that way, and shall continue to work on that line till I know to the contrary."

"Then you no longer work in my employ!" he roared.

"I was not aware that I had entered your employ. You have paid the expenses so far, and I have taken the stabs. We are even."

He stared at me for a moment and then tore some money from his pocket.

"Take that!" he roared.

"I want none of your money. You owe me nothing."

Leaving him sitting there silent and angry, I walked out of the old gold and silver shop of David Masgowitz.

And my heart was heavy indeed! For I realized that I loved Edna Wall.

CHAPTER XVII.

LAYING A TRAP.

I WAS still determined to work out a solution of the mystery of the Bronx-dale house, of which I was still the occupant.

I did not know whether the peppery Mr. Lyle would come there again or not, and I did not care. His assistance in the actual work that had been done had consisted merely in the use of his money, and I believed that without that assistance I could win.

And now I had another trouble on my mind, for the disappearance of Miss Wall disturbed me greatly.

I will not go so far as to say that after seeing the girl twice I was so deep-

ly in love that I would lose all interest in life if I could not find her, but the manner of our meeting and the girl's courage in returning to aid me were enough in themselves to hold my interest even though she had not been beautiful. Add the beauty to the rest, and my feelings can well be understood.

But I had gone so deeply into the matter of Sheldon's affair that I resolved to do what I could to clear that up first and then devote my time to finding Miss Wall, and—marrying her if she would have me.

I went back to the old stone house and sat down to determine on some step that would promise something better than Lyle and I had achieved so far, although we had not utterly failed. Our successes, however, if they could be called such, had done nothing apparently but add mystery upon mystery.

I spent the night studying over the matter, and toward morning was so convinced that I had decided on a satisfactory start that I went to sleep.

In the morning, after my breakfast at the Bronx Park Hotel, I went direct to police headquarters.

The captain received me courteously, and remembered me well.

"Captain," I began, "I have spent my time since I was honorably discharged by the court in trying to fathom that murder mystery. It is one of the greatest puzzles that ever occurred."

"It certainly baffled everybody," was his frank reply. "What have you learned?"

"I haven't learned very much, but enough to keep me working till the truth is known. I have come to you now for a purpose. It is right that you should know what I have done."

"I should be very glad to hear it, certainly."

I began then and gave him a detailed statement of everything I knew from the visit of Ivansig to that very moment. He listened attentively.

"So," he said with a smile, "you and the Western man thought you could do better than the police. I admit you have done well, but it was old Ivansig who gave you the clue. Had the police had the same information probably the case would have been cleared up by now."

However, you have done pretty well, and you certainly had a close shave. And so you and the old fellow split on the guilt or innocence of Miss Wall?"

"Yes. I cannot convince myself that she told us a falsehood."

"It is difficult to believe. Still, women do those things sometimes, and this is a very queer case. But cling to your belief as long as you can. We'll take it up from here."

"Yes, but I've got a plan. You may do anything else you like. But I tell you you won't find Sheldon and Barsty by merely pursuing them. They are a couple of cool rascals, or else Sheldon is a crazy man."

The captain shook his head.

"He isn't crazy. But tell me what you want to do."

"Our former plan," I said, "was to carry on our work in the dark. To keep everything from the police and from publicity. In that way we hoped to increase the confidence of the murderer so that he would not get away. The plan failed, as I have told you. Now, my plan is to take the opposite tack. Instead of trying to find the murderer, let the murderer come to us."

"That sounds interesting, at least," said the captain. "My experience has not shown me that murderers are apt to come and introduce themselves, but since you already know them, an introduction is not necessary. Explain your idea."

I fancied there was a vein of sarcasm in his remark, but he went on, unheeding:

"My idea is this. Having gone to the house where I was attacked, and found that I not only was not dead, but missing, undoubtedly they will fear me. They will fear that I may denounce them. If they had a chance they would kill me."

"That goes without argument. Go on. I see you have some kind of an idea, after all."

"A good one, I think. Now, without letting them know that I have said anything about them to the police, it is still possible to work a story into the papers that I am still on the job hunting the murderer of Frank Lyle. Nothing is to be said about the experience I had with Sheldon or Barsty, and their names are not even to be mentioned."

"It can be stated that I have grown morose brooding over the thing. That instead of taking the police into my confidence, I am trying to solve the mystery alone. That I am still living alone in the old house at Bronxdale, and the lights of my lonely domicile can be seen every night as I sit in my solitude striv- ing with a weakening brain to solve the riddle."

"Sounds interesting; something like a novel. But go on. Evidently you have not finished the last chapter."

"No. The idea is that the picture of me, alone, and an easy prey to a prowling enemy, will operate on them so that they will make an effort either to kill me in the house or come and get me and do it somewhere else."

"Well, certainly they would. It stands to reason that having attacked you when you knew little, they would be more anxious to attack you now. But where do you come in? Either one of them would be able to kill you now with a single blow."

"It isn't my plan to give them a chance to strike that single blow. I'm to be the lure. The trap is yours."

"Ha! There is, then, some method in your madness. You are advertised as moping alone in the old house, waiting for an inspiration. Is that what you writer-fellows call it?"

"Some do. I call it hard work. But that's the idea. I am written up by a clever reporter as being alone in the old house. As a matter of fact, one or two of your men are on hand to grab whoever comes. Fight, possibly, handcuffs, third degree, and there you are."

"And, by thunder, it sounds well! Let me see. This old house is right on the edge of Bronx Park, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"It's above the Zoological portion?"

"Yes, quite a distance above Pelham Road?"

"Then there is no high wire fence to prevent any one going in?"

"None. That part of the park is quite wild and open."

"Good. We'll try that, anyway. If anything else occurs to me I'll add it on and I'll report what you say secretly to headquarters. Now the first thing you want is the two men to watch you."

"Yes. The two who arrested me would please me. Although they did arrest me, they only did their duty, and were decent about it."

"That was very nice of them. Let's see. It was Harrison and Roberts, I think."

"Yes."

"Very good. You know them. Sheldon and this Barsty don't. Now you attend to the newspaper business. You must know how to work in an interesting story. I'll take care of the rest."

"You pray sometimes, I suppose. Then pray for success. For I'd like to solve this thing myself. And—if anybody comes and you don't see my men, don't worry. They'll be there."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FIGHT IN THE DARK.

My return alone to the old stone house was not particularly inspiriting. I had dwelt so much on my plan, and talked so much about it at the interview with the captain, that it seemed the same idea must certainly have occurred to Barsty and Sheldon.

I seemed to see their forms in every person that came within the range of my vision. Nevertheless, I reached the house, having met no one I knew, and at once sat down to write the article that was to lure the villains to their doom.

I drew a gloomy picture of a solitary and disappointed man, sitting in the old stone house studying over a problem that the police had long ago given up. I made it about half a column long. I threw a shadow over it that would appeal to everybody.

I had been suspected. Friends had turned against me, not fully agreeing with the full exoneration of the magistrate. There was a romance in it all that I divulged to no one. Even a woman I had loved had turned me down, fearing there might be a lurking streak of villainy in me.

And I cunningly worked in a little tale about a beautiful woman I had met during my amateur detective work who had seemed to be a friend, and toward whom my weary and hungry mind had turned for solace, but who, for a fanciful

reason of her own, had fled, leaving me plunged in darkness.

To the writer of the article I had confided the statement that when I had finished with the murder mystery I intended to search for this young woman for whom I still was pining.

I had a hope that Edna Wall would read this. What effect it would have on her I could not conjecture. But I simply could not leave it out.

By the time I had it written, what with studying the best phraseology and getting up every few minutes to peer outside to see if the expected assassins had inopportunely arrived, I was worked up into a nervous state that would render me perfectly useless if they did come.

I then wrote a short note to a friend on one of the papers who had access to the columns of several others, urging secrecy and asking him to father the story, and then walked out to mail it.

This accomplished, I went to the Bronx Park Hotel, smoked a couple of cigars, and went back to the house to wait for developments.

There were none that day. I sat up half the night with my revolver in my hand listening for strange noises.

It is a remarkable fact that when one is timorous and nervous and listens for strange noises, there are always strange noises to be heard. And the longer the listener listens the stranger and louder the noises become.

And in an old house so sold that the timbers of the floors sagged, noises were plentiful.

A rat ran across the floor, and I nearly fired at him. I knew it was not my part of the job to fire, anyway, unless my life was actually in danger. And I had screened all the windows with the shades so that, while the lights showed that I was home, I could not be seen from the outside, and I made sure that no shadow fell on a curtain.

I did not care to be shot down in cold blood, even if the detectives did get my murderers afterward.

But I grew sleepy watching, and finally went to bed. Early the next morning I went out to get a paper, and, sure enough, my story was in it.

Alas! It was not exactly as I had

written it. That portion of it that had to do with the mystery was correct, but my journalistic friend had taken liberties with the affair of Edna Wall and myself.

It was made even stronger than I had written it. And it wound up with the statement that the girl with whom I had fallen in love during my detective work believed that I had been in love with Winnie Lyle and had left me because I could not convince her to the contrary.

This for a moment displeased me, but I forgot it in my interest in the greater matter.

Two days passed and absolutely nothing happened. The plan seemed doomed to failure, after all. And I had not set eyes on the two detectives. This seemed strange.

Then, one day I received a letter which read:

DEAR MR. BENNET:

I have seen the article about you in the papers. It is wrong for them to write you up like that because it exposes you not only to ridicule but danger as well, and you are too brave to be killed by a rogue.

I believe I saw my half-brother in New York the other day, but was too much afraid of him to try to follow. I did try to see Mr. Lyle, but found the store closed. If he is not with you where is he?

I am writing you this to warn you. The newspaper article will be read by my brother and Sheldon, and may stir them to attack you. Please leave that old house and take care of yourself.

And about that girl you met. Who was she? Certainly not the silly thing who sold a lump of silver to you. I was very foolish to say what I did, but now perhaps I can help you, and I will if you wish. If an arrest is made in the case and you want me to give any testimony I can be found at the Martha Washington Hotel.

Yours very truly,
EDNA WALL.

I almost yelled for very joy. What now became of Lyle's theory that she had played us false? I wished he was here, so that I could jeer at him.

My first impulse was to rush down to the Martha Washington, but on second thought I desisted. It might add to the complications.

If Barsty was looking for her and saw

me, it would lead to her discovery and not help me any. So I contented myself with writing her a short letter, thanking her for her warning and assuring her that within reason she must have been the person of the article. I asked if our acquaintance might not continue when the mystery was solved.

I had become accustomed again to being alone, and the nights had become less wearisome, but Edna's letter and warning brought all my nervousness back. I could not afford to be shot now, when the prospects of happiness were so bright.

So that night again I sat up listening, and I heard all the old sounds. The wind was blowing, and every corner of the building had a hole in it that played a different tune.

But suddenly there was a new sound. It was a real sound, and was not caused by the wind or creaking timbers. It was a stealthy footstep outside.

I grabbed my revolver and jumped to my feet. I faced the window where the sound was, and fancied I could hear voices.

Then there was a peculiar scratching at the window. Some one was trying to get in.

The shade being down, I could not see who it was, but I had no doubt. I was ready to shoot if a head appeared.

Heavens! Where were Harrison and Roberts? Had they deserted me? Had the long delay disgusted them? Had they gone away for a drink just when they were going to be needed?

The cold sweat stood out all over me. It was a terrible moment.

I think I felt worse just then than when I saw Sheldon over me with his knife.

Then there was a short, sharp exclamation, a loud curse, and the sound of a scuffle.

"Throw up your hands," came a strong voice, "or I'll blow your head off!"

"Not yet," came in Sheldon's voice.

I did not believe there was a detective in New York his match in strength. I rushed from the house through the back door.

Sheldon's great form stood out plainly in the light that came through the curtain, and the detective, being much

smaller, was almost hidden. I made a leap and landed on Sheldon's back.

We went down together, and in an instant Roberts had a pair of steel cuffs on him that put an end to his fighting.

"Where's Harrison?" gasped Roberts.

"Here I am. This fellow is like an ox. I had to hit him with a club. But I got him."

It was Barsty.

My plan had succeeded. In a moment we were on our way to the station-house.

CHAPTER XIX.

SHELDON'S STORY.

THE prisoners would not speak on the way, nor after we had reached the police station. The case was no ordinary one, and called for unusual methods.

They were simply held waiting while headquarters was notified by telephone of the capture. The order came back to bring them right down, and we were soon on the way.

At headquarters they were separated, and Barsty was put in a cell, while Sheldon was put through an examination.

He glared at me savagely.

"Is this the man?" asked the inspector in command, the chief of the detective bureau.

"That's Sheldon," I answered.

"Mr. Sheldon," said the chief, "you know why you are wanted. You murdered your friend, Frank Lyle, and robbed your mother."

A look of stupid, blank amazement came over the riveter's face.

"I!" he roared. "I murdered Frank Lyle? There's the man who murdered Frank Lyle. There's the miscreant who robbed my mother and ran away with the girl I was to marry."

"And the man you stabbed," I said. "Why did you do that, Jack?"

"Because you did all the others and saddled it on to me."

The police officials looked at me curiously. There was something actually convincing in Sheldon's manner, and he did not appear like a madman.

"There is something in this that's very strange," said the chief.

"I know the case very well. May I ask him a few questions?" I ventured.

"Certainly. Ask all you like. What we want is the truth."

"Jack," I said, as soothingly as I could. "either you are the greatest villain on earth, or you have been lied to most devilishly. I did not shoot Frank Lyle. I did not run away with Winnie. I did not rob your mother.

"Now, if you did not, for God's sake drop this business about me, and tell us what happened that night. Tell it fully and unreservedly. I will tell you what I know. You and Winnie each sold a piece of silver from the chest, and Edna Wall sold a lot of it melted down."

He staggered.

"Winnie sold—sold one of our silver pieces? Winnie? It's a lie."

"It is the truth. She sold it to Ivansig, the same as you did. It was a mug. I saw it."

"And—Edna Wall sold the melted silver?"

"Yes. Barsty told her it was a lot of stuff he had in a house in Albany that was burned. She sold it to me. I opened a place like Ivansig's to get a clue."

Sheldon's face blanched, but it was with demoniac rage.

He sprang from the detectives who held him and, manacled as he was, started for the door. He was instantly seized.

"Let me at him! Let me get my hands on his lying throat! Oh, Dick! And I nearly killed you. I suppose I'll go to prison for that. But I'll go to the electric-chair for him. He's lied to me. He's lied—"

He began to choke.

"Give him some water," said the chief. "We'll get it now."

"Now, Jack," I said, "keep cool. I've told you enough to convince you that I had nothing to do with it. Now, if you know anything, tell it. At any rate, tell what you did that night."

He sank into a chair, and passed his hands blindly over his eyes.

"Let me think," he said. "I've lived in rage and hate and sorrow. Give me a chance. You say I sold a piece of the silver—a tankard. Yes, God help me, I took one. Frank pleaded with me for money. His lungs hurt him, and he said his money and Winnie's was all gone, and he'd die, and he talked till I was half crazy with grief for him."

"I had no money. You know that, Dick. It took all we had to get the stuff up to the house and have the old ranch patched up to live in. I couldn't give him money. But I knew I could sell the tankard.

"It was mother's, of course, but we never used it, and she was old, and it would soon be mine anyway. I didn't like to do it without asking her. I knew it would hurt her so, and if she found it out I could tell her it was for medicine for Frank to save his life. I took the tankard and sold it. If Winnie did—oh, it's all right. Where is she?"

"We don't know. Now, we know what your mother has said, but you don't know all. Have you read the papers?"

"No. God-help me! That scoundrel kept me posted. Posted! Let me at him."

"Keep cool; he's safe enough," said the chief. "Go on with your story."

"I was out, Jack," I said, "because I heard you quarreling. When I got back your mother was unconscious, Frank was shot dead, and the silver was all gone."

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, and now there was something strange in his laugh. "I rode all the way to his house, with my mother's stolen silver almost under me. Oh, let me at him! I'll save you the trouble."

"Keep cool. We want all the story."

"You quarreled with your mother, Jack," I said. "Now, begin with that. She accused Winnie of stealing the mug."

"Yes. Poor old soul. She said my Winnie was a thief, and I got wild. My Winnie a thief? Find her and I'll show you who's a thief. My Winnie; oh, my Winnie!"

"Brace up, Jack, and be a man," I said, the agony of the giant taking the nerve out of me. "What happened?"

"Give me a drink. I'll tell you. I'll help you hang him or shrivel him up or whatever you do. Give me a drink. I'm burning."

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONFESSION.

"WHEN my mother accused Winnie," went on Sheldon in a calmer mood, "I told her I had taken the tankard. She

had said mug and I thought she had made a mistake. But she insisted and wouldn't listen. She said I was shielding Winnie. Then I got angry. I said we would go to Winnie and prove that she didn't steal any silver.

"Winnie was in her room, but had not retired. Nobody had, I guess, because they all came quick enough. I told Winnie what mother had said. She looked at me white and scared.

"'Yes,' mother shrieked at her. 'You stole my silver mug!'"

He paused, and then continued calmly:

"When Winnie heard that she gave me the wildest kind of look and screamed, 'Frank! oh, Frank!' Then with another terrible scream she turned and ran down-stairs.

"I thought she was going down for water, or Frank, or something, and stayed there like a fool until I heard the door. Then I realized she had run away and I ran after her. I did not find her. I called her and thought I heard her off in the woods. I went that way, but got bewildered and thrashed around a long time. Then I went back, and the house was dark, and I thought the rest had gone to bed. So I continued my search."

"I was down the White Plains Road quite a way when a horse and buggy came along. It happened to catch me under a big light and I saw the driver was Barsty. I was surprised to see him.

"Hello!" he said with a strange laugh. "Looking for Winnie?"

"Yes," I said. It seemed strange he should know. "Have you seen her?"

"Why, yes. She passed me a while ago in a big red automobile with Bennett."

"I cursed you then, Dick. And I got in the carriage with him and we tried to find the big automobile with you and Winnie."

"I thought you had met Winnie, and she had told you mother called her a thief and you had taken her away. I didn't stop to think where you would get the automobile. I went home with Barsty and stayed there that night. The next morning he said that mother had been robbed and Frank murdered, and that you, Dick, had told the police I did it.

"Was I to blame for being wild? And he kept telling me these things, but

wouldn't bring in a paper. I didn't dare go out. I knew I was innocent. But if you had fixed the police what could I do? I had no proof.

"And so it went till that day you came in. Barsty told me he had talked with you and you laughed when he asked how Winnie was. He said you told him you could smooth it over with me with a few lies.

"I was crazy when I went to you. I went there to kill you. Thank God I didn't, Dick. I'll take all that's coming to me. But I was crazy then."

"There is nothing coming to you, Jack," I said, extending my hand. "We all understand. I wasn't hurt so very much, and you did me a good turn anyway. I'll explain later. Now, gentlemen, I fancy you know who murdered Frank Lyle, do not you?"

"Sheldon," said the chief, "did Barsty know you had that old silver plate?"

"Yes. I told him. I didn't know what kind of a fellow he was. After I sold the tankard I had the money in my pocket in the afternoon. He knew I had money and wanted to borrow some. I told him I couldn't let him have it. That the only way I could raise it for Frank was to sell one of the old heirlooms."

"We've got the man," said the chief. "Now we'll give him a taste. Bring Barsty here."

The face of Barsty when he was confronted by the white face of Sheldon grew ashen in hue.

"Now, you cowardly murderer," said Sheldon, "you tell the truth as I have. Tell how you murdered Frank Lyle and knocked my mother on the head. Tell the truth!"

Barsty's eyes shot shiftily around.

"The jig's up, Barsty," said the chief. "We know you did it. The game has gone against you and you'd better give up. Take those cuffs off Sheldon. See what it is to be innocent, Barsty? Now tell the truth."

I never saw a mad dog, but I fancy Barsty looked like one. He snarled and bit his lips till the blood ran.

"You've got me foul," he growled out. "No use kicking now. But if the kid hadn't put up a fight I wouldn't have shot him. And he knew me after the mask came off."

"So you wore a mask, eh?"

"You've caught that, eh? Well, I might as well tell it all. I wanted money and I knew Sheldon had this silver in the house. He said it was worth a pile of money. I went up there two or three times, but Sheldon and Bennet were always there. And I wanted the stuff all myself, so didn't take a partner.

"Well, that night I left the horse in a dark place, and when I got to the house I heard them quarreling. I saw Bennet go, and then I saw Winnie go. Then I saw Sheldon go after her. It was my chance.

"There was a window over a shed and I got in that way. I got in the wrong room and went into a bureau. I found a gun, and thought it was Sheldon's. I thought I could throw suspicion on him. I took that and went into the wrong room again. Here was the old woman and the kid still quarreling. He said he took the mug."

"Frank took it!" I gasped.

"Go on, Barsty," said the chief sternly.

"Oh, there's little more. I knocked the old woman and then the kid. He put up a puny fight and knocked the mask off, and I shot him and dropped the revolver at the door as I went out. When I met Sheldon in the road I thought the game was discovered. But I had seen Winnie and Bennet leave, and a big automobile had gone past me, and that gave me the idea of Bennet and Winnie going together. That's all. I melted the stuff up and gave Edna a story and she sold it. No use telling what you know."

"That's enough," said the chief. "You've told enough."

Once outside Sheldon said:

"Dick, my life is yours when you want it. But help me find Winnie first."

"I'll try, old fellow," I said.

We went back to Bronxdale and to rest.

The next morning the papers were full of it. The whole story was told again and all of Barsty's confession. Sheldon and I read it at the Bronx Park Hotel while we ate our breakfast slowly.

It was late in the morning and we had just lit cigars when a big automobile ran

up. A tall, good-looking fellow came inside.

"Say," he said to the proprietor, "where is that old stone house where that tragedy took place?"

"Why, it's up—"

Sheldon glanced through a window. The automobile stood on the corner of Pelham and Boston roads. With a yell that frightened me, he rushed out. I followed.

He was hugging a girl who was yelling "Jack" and he was yelling "Winnie." I went back.

"It's up to you," I said to the young man.

"You bet it's up to me. It would have been done long ago, but we didn't know. You see, I was coming down Boston Road that night, and I was crossing the bridge at the park over the Bronx, and I saw a girl run straight into the river. I stopped the machine and went after her. She was unconscious. I took her home—I live with my mother on the West Side. Mother took her and put her to bed, and she went raving. She was so pretty and so ill that mother—mother's a strong minded person. I tell you—she said she wasn't going to give

her up to the police till the rest of the business was cleared up. The girl got pretty well, and we told her some of it, and when the whole story came out this morning—well, there she is."

There is very little more to tell. Mr. Lyle showed up, and there were introductions, and a reconciliation between him and me.

Winnie said in regard to the mug that Frank had told her he found it, and as he wanted money, asked her to sell it at Ivansig's, and say nothing. This was his way of doing things, and she took it.

Mrs. Sheldon cared nothing for the silver when she heard the entire history, and when that was all settled I made a journey to the Martha Washington, and a certain other little matter was settled also.

There are two weddings in prospect, two happy men, two pretty girls, one happy uncle who is going to do the Santa Claus act for all hands, and a big hunk of melted silver nobody knows what to do with.

It was bought with Lyle's money, it was stolen from Mrs. Sheldon, and neither wants it. Up to date it remains in my possession.

THE END.

MY DIRE DILEMMA.

By EDWIN BLISS.

Setting forth that while it is always unpleasant to lose one's purse, there are times when the thing may be more fiendishly annoying than usual.

IT was a most embarrassing situation. I am accustomed to taking what I want and hearing nothing further about it till the first of the month, when the bill comes in, which I promptly meet with a check. One is apt to get in the habit after living long in hotels.

Consequently, when the man behind the counter insinuated that I was trying to beat him out of the price of a paltry cigar, the idea was so preposterous that, even in the face of my dilemma, I could not repress a smile.

This only seemed to anger him the more, and forthwith he demanded back

the cigar I had purchased and was then puffing on.

Now, I was perfectly willing to agree to anything in reason, but the man wanted not only the part which I was smoking, but also that portion which I had smoked—an obvious impossibility.

Calmly and dispassionately, I retraced my line of argument. First, explaining again that I had lost my pocketbook—a thing likely to happen to any man; second, that his refusal to take my check for the amount of the purchase made payment out of the question, unless some one of the string of customers con-

stantly trailing in—each one adding to my mortification—should happen to be a friend from whom I could secure a loan.

As for returning the cigar, I stood perfectly willing to return that portion unsmoked; but as for returning him a *whole* cigar, I could not do that, unless—as I suggested with a smile designed to wipe away any ill feeling on his part—he was willing to make me a present of another, which I could hand back to him in payment for the first.

"Now, don't get fresh!" he snarled.

"Why—why," I stammered in perplexity, "what are we going to do, then?"

"I'm going to get my cigar back, or know the reason why!"

He came from behind the counter as he spoke.

I smiled rather foolishly, for I was ashamed of my part in the affair, and, moreover, had no desire whatever to know "the reason why." "My good man—" I began, but he interrupted.

"Aw! Cut that 'good man' business out!" he fumed.

I have often observed that nothing so excites a common person as to call him "good," and why I always let it slip when I am most desirous of pacifying any one, is a mystery to which I have given much thought.

"I tell you, I've lost my pocket-book!"

I was beginning to lose my temper also, for a great many customers had closed around us as his voice grew louder, and outside the window-pane was one vista of nose-flattened faces. I was uncomfortably conscious that the bystanders' attitude was hostile.

"Come on, an' pay the man for his cigar," a voice behind me suggested.

I had explained so often the circumstances that my declaration was becoming listless.

"I tell you, I've lost my—"

"Don't seem bothered much about it!" another man sarcastically remarked.

I turned angrily on the speaker.

"This is none of your business." My tone was cutting. "However, as you seem so interested, I'll tell you again, that I've just had the misfortune to lose my—"

"What did you *get* the cigar for, then, if you didn't have any money?"

"I just discovered my loss," I snapped, enraged at myself and the crowd for being led into discussing my troubles with them at all. "Here's your cigar."

I carefully deposited the cause of the trouble on the glass case under the tobacconist's nose, trying to be dignified, and realizing at the time that I was only appearing petty and small. "And tomorrow," I went on, "I'll either send or bring you the fifteen cents. Now, I have an important engagement to take a gentleman to Murger's to dinner. Good-by!"

With that, I angrily jerked the door open.

"No, you don't!" The cross-examining young party grabbed me firmly by the shoulder and whirled me round. "How're you going to take anybody to dinner if you've lost your pocketbook? Eh?"

There was a disgusting triumph in his voice and face, and I realized the chagrin that must have shown on my own countenance. That difficulty had not occurred to me before.

How? How, indeed?

Here I was in Harlem, one hundred blocks from Murger's, where old Mr. Bennett was to meet me at six-thirty, and it was now half past five.

Had it been a pleasure engagement, I would not have minded so much; but it was a most pressing business matter I was to see him about, and only after the greatest ingenuity had I been able to persuade him to give me even this time.

He was in the city for but a few days, having made a flying trip from Chicago for the purpose of subletting certain building contracts. Now, I was after those contracts, and had been for a long time; consequently, it was with great anticipation that I looked forward to an opportunity of personally laying before him my right to them.

Wagner & Co., an older firm, appeared to stand a better chance than I, and for this, if no other reason, I was doubly anxious to beat them. I had only been in business half the time they had, but in that period had built up a commanding trade, and was already recognized by them as a dangerous rival.

Hitherto they had looked upon Mr. Bennett's custom as a sinecure, and it was with no little trepidation they regarded my effort to alienate him. I felt that all I needed to convince him of my ability and desire to spend more time, effort, and money on his contracts was to have a talk with him. Being a younger man, and not so long established, I would naturally be more anxious to please than Wagner & Co.

For weeks my wife and I had discussed my ultimate chance of success till, I fear, we had set our hearts on it too much for our own good. She—blessed little woman!—had the most implicit confidence in my ability to do anything I put my mind to, and since hearing of my dinner engagement, regarded the contracts as already in my possession.

It was with a great flutter of excitement she had despatched me that morning, with a promise to telephone her the result of my interview the instant we separated. Indeed, it had been her idea, that of taking Mr. Bennett to the finest restaurant in the city, where the delicious viands might aid in thawing him out. At the time I agreed enthusiastically with her, but now—now, how deeply I regretted not having followed my original plan of consulting with him in my own office, where the whole affair could have been negotiated in a much more business-like manner.

Rapidly all these things flashed through my mind as I gazed on the mocking faces about me. The legal gentleman, proud of his keenness, repeated. "How're you going to take a man to dinner without any money?" then looked about as though expectant of a burst of applause.

"I presume," I retorted spiritedly, now determined to squelch this young man once for all, "because they are able to recognize a gentleman there!"

I could feel by the titter beginning to circulate among them that this sally had slightly changed the current of unpopularity with which I was regarded, so I quickly followed it up by taking a few business-cards from my pocket, and passed one to the shopkeeper and another to my tormentor. The crowd surged about to get a peep at the name, but no one appeared greatly edified.

I was mildly surprised, for although not a giant in the business world, I have a good reputation, and doubtless, having lived with it so long, had exaggerated its importance.

"All right, John! I'll stand good for it," one man volunteered to the proprietor, who thanked him very profusely.

I realized more than ever what his opinion as to my intentions were.

"I am very grateful to you, sir."

I turned to the man and offered him my card, which he calmly brushed aside with a rather chilly, "Oh, that's all right!"

"But I want to know who I have to thank and—to pay," I insisted.

"My friend." He laid his hand lightly on my shoulder and we passed out of the shop. "My friend," he repeated, "I don't know who you are and you don't know who I am. But I've got an idea that if I wanted a smoke I'd be pretty apt to get it. However—mind you, I'm not saying a word about whether you're telling the truth or not," he added hastily, as my face began to burn with the rage I was suppressing—"if I'd been hit as hard as this blamed panic and bank-closing has hit a lot of mighty good, honest men, I'd think of something better to tell than losing my pocketbook, whether it was the truth or not."

"But—" I began; then became conscious of his rapidly receding back, and brought myself down to business with a jolt.

It was the truth—the bitter truth. Conditions in the entire country had been so upturned that no one seemed above suspicion.

The thought of this, and the proximity of the hour of my engagement, made my heart leap with a frightened bound as I stood on the pavement taking stock of my situation.

My first impulse was to hustle, run, do anything to get some relief in action from the sickening feeling that overpowered me. This I mastered with an effort, laying a stern hand on my emotions as I said to myself: "Easy! Go easy now! Don't get excited! You are acquainted with hundreds of people in New York who know you well enough to cash your check

for anything in reason, or to loan you enough to get through the night. Now, the thing for you to do, my boy, is, think where to find just one of them."

My heart resumed its normal gait as I cogitated thus sensibly, and I rapidly ran over in my mind at least a score of the hundreds. Naturally enough, they all lived near me, and as my hotel was in the forties, I realized I must go farther afield in my mental inventory. But when it came down to street and number in Harlem, I could not connect these with a single soul of them.

Again my heart began thumping wildly, and a sickening feeling crept over me. I must do something at any rate, so I walked briskly in the direction of downtown.

Suddenly I burst out laughing. People turned and stared at me, as though thinking me bereft of my senses, and doubtless my mirth was a bit hysterical.

How ridiculous that I hadn't thought of it before!

"Public Telephone!"

I entered the pharmacy where I saw the familiar blue sign, and began thumbing the leaves of the telephone-book, when, with one dull, sickening thud all the old burden rolled back on me again.

I had not a nickel to telephone with. A nickel! A measly, paltry, little five-cent piece was lacking, and I was afraid to take a chance. The outlandish row and the humiliation I had endured because of a fifteen-cent cigar, and the later warning of the Good Samaritan as to the thinness of my tale of a lost pocketbook, these combined had made me regard small sums with a greater respect than at any time since my childhood, and had effectually shattered my nerve.

The drug-store proprietor was a jolly looking man, and for a moment I felt warmed toward him, but after many indecisive steps forward I turned away with a sigh and the memory of my first boss, a stout, jolly looking man, too, but with a temper ugly in the extreme.

Besides, who would I telephone to with any certainty of catching him in? Around half past one o'clock one cannot be sure of locating any business man. I knew that my wife was dining with friends, and would be out till nine o'clock, hoping thereby to mitigate to

some extent the strain of waiting for the message of success or failure I had promised to send her.

Ashamed, I wended my way toward One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street—the main artery of up-town—letting my brain run riot in a mad jumble of crazy schemes and fantastic impulses, finding in them some relief from the gloom that was now thoroughly depressing me. Every man I passed made me envy him in the certain knowledge that he had car fare and enough money to take a friend to dinner.

Idly I stood on the corner, waiting for something to turn up, speculating on my chances of borrowing a nickel from a beggar who was reaping a small harvest before my famished eyes, trying to persuade my self that he would understand what my position was. If I only had the five cents with which to get down-town I felt sure I could fix matters with the head waiter at the restaurant who knew me well.

The sight of another public telephone sign inspired me with desperate courage, and forthwith I determined to wire the restaurant, instructing them to hold any one calling for me, and myself walk down-town.

For an athlete this will appear a little pleasure jaunt, but even in my youngest days I had never been robust, and the sedentary office life, to which for so long I had been tied down, was in nowise calculated to increase my physical powers.

I was wide of girth, but keen of resolution, and stepped boldly into the public telephone station aforesaid and explained my plight to the young lady in charge. The tale of a lost pocketbook did not seem to impress her nearly so pitifully as the fact that the number I gave indicated that I was being bereft of a most delightful meal.

Every one in New York knows the Murger telephone number, and catching her sympathetic eye on emerging from the booth, after giving my message, I was momentarily minded again to put myself in her debt by borrowing car fare.

Resolution wavered before an old scruple that no gentleman would borrow from a lady, and sadly turning away I realized I had cast aside the best chance

that, as yet, had come to me of securing assistance. She had a kind eye, that girl.

Firmly as I could I trod off the weary, interminable blocks. My feet began to smart and burn, and every step was like dancing on red-hot coals. Now, doubtless, all this was because I *had* to walk, and had I been possessed of car fare I could have covered ten times the distance with less suffering. However that may be, I left Harlem a healthy man of forty-five, and landed in the upper seventies a decrepit, broken-down octogenarian, according to my feelings.

Numbly I thought of the vain years I had spent in the town, without even making enough friends to be able to see one in a walk of thirty blocks of city pavement, in the most crowded hour of the day. Mentally I resolved that hereafter a much greater portion of my existence should be spent in enlarging my circle of acquaintances.

Wild ideas of going to stores in a radius of ten squares of each other in the entire city and depositing at least a dollar, as a drawing account, in case I should ever again be caught in such a fix, occupied my harassed mind. I resolved to tell my wife that—

My wife! How could I ever explain to her that I had let the contracts slip through my fingers without even seeing the man? Would she ever believe in me again? Would not all her beautiful trust be smothered in contempt?

For a woman always figures by results, and a minus sign in the ledger spells failure to her, and no circumstances, however reasonable, can excuse such a result.

The hands on the next clock I passed pointed to twenty after six, and I realized, with a pang, that getting to the restaurant by walking was impossible.

Why hadn't I stopped to think of that in Harlem, when at least my physical being was sound. What could I do? I had almost made up my desperate mind to stop the next passer-by and beg from him the sum of five cents, when the sight of three gleaming objects just ahead gave me an idea. The three golden balls of a pawnbroker's shop, and—thank Heaven!—I had a watch and diamond stud.

Idiot that I was not to have thought of it before; and yet, natural enough, for

I had never had experience of pawnshops, and had always regarded them as dens of iniquity, which honest men shunned.

I had time enough to go in, raise the money on my watch and catch an Elevated or Subway train down-town.

Blushing furiously, I turned up my coat collar, ducked my head, darted up to the door and gazed into the brilliantly lighted window.

Time and again I tried to close my hand on the knob, but each time some one would come by, and I was sure, whoever it was, regarded me accusingly. At last a man sauntered leisurely past and, throwing wide the door, stepped boldly inside. I have no doubt that I made myself small enough to have glided through the keyhole as I sneaked in behind him.

The man stepped up to a small cage over which was marked, "Cashier," and hauling out a great roll of yellow bills and some silver, paid it over. There was some little rummaging behind the counter, and then he received a small tissue-paper bundle which he unfolded and disclosed a watch, which he slipped into his vest-pocket.

It was rather a shock to me to see that this man *paid out* money. I had always associated pawnshops with need.

Noting how bold this fellow was, I approached the man behind the cage, and tremblingly disengaging my watch, handed it to him.

"Other counter!" he snapped.

Meekly I took my timepiece and laid it on another counter.

The man regarded it a moment, picked it up and took it to the cashier, who gazed at it admiringly.

"A beauty!" the proprietor remarked, handing the watch back to me.

"Yes," I agreed. "But I want some money. I want to pawn it."

"We're not loaning now," he laughed. "Only in business for the redemption of pledges."

"Why—why—what's the matter?" I stammered, feeling that everything was topsy-turvy.

"Money's too tight!" he explained. "The Pawnbrokers' Association ruled that no money shall be loaned till the panic has subsided and things readjust themselves."

"But I've lost my pocketbook!" I cried in despair; "and I'll be willing to take a nickel!"

"We're not in that kind of business," the man replied coldly, turning his back on me.

"I know where you can get something on it," he of the redeemed watch chimed in. "Of course nothing like what it's worth, but *something*, if you want to get rid of it quick."

"Why—why—why should I want to get rid of it quick?" I wanted to know.

"Is it monogrammed?" and he winked knowingly at me.

"Oh, yes!"

"That's bad!" he rejoined thoughtfully. "What can you give him on it?"

He took the watch from me and handed it confidently to the pawnbroker.

"Nothing, I said!" that worthy replied sharply. "I don't want it found in here. They got that Rowan stuff here last month, and I don't want any more of *that* kind."

The man actually thought the watch was stolen! This was too much!

I began to expostulate, but my newly found friend reassured me that the belief was perfectly natural when I was willing to let go such a valuable article for a nickel.

"Looks like you wanted to get it out of your possession," he added.

"But I tell you I've lost my—"

"All right! I understand!"

He slipped a dime into my hand with a knowing wink, which I was willing to forgive under the circumstances.

I made hurriedly for the door, and had it half opened when I sprang back as though electrified.

My chief bookkeeper stood outside, with his face close to the window, looking intently at a diamond ring.

"Hello! not gone yet!" the man exclaimed in surprise as I plumped into him in my hurried retreat.

"There's a man I know outside!" I cried, and drew myself behind the screened glass.

"Whe-ew!" His lips puckered up in a long drawn-out whistle.

"He's my chief bookkeeper," I hurriedly explained; "and it wouldn't do at all for him to see me here."

All the time I had one eye around the

corner of the doorway on my clerk, anathematizing his slowness, while with the other I regarded the hands of the big clock as they moved over the face of the dial.

As my bookkeeper turned from the window, I made another jump forward, but again he came back and began counting the money in his pocketbook.

Oh, if I had only waited a minute more, I could have borrowed enough of him to have put me out of my troubles, and now—here he was contemplating coming in and catching me—his boss—in a pawnshop!

This time, however, I was not left in doubt as to my course. The pawnbroker had stepped out from behind his cage and was brutally urging my exit. "Come on, now! Get out o' here!" he cried. "I don't want you hiding in here!"

I ducked my head farther into my coat and darted away. As I left I had a fleeting feeling of my coat being lifted by a hostile boot. I did not think I had it in me to run, in my cramped state; but run I did, until a booth of the Subway threw its protecting shadows about me. Tenderly clutching my dime, I sprang down the steps, and not till I was safe on a train did I venture to look around.

II.

ONLY a few minutes late, I entered the swinging doors of Murger's, and found my man waiting for me. Hurriedly excusing myself for a moment, under pretense of inquiring of Otto for the table I had reserved, I stood in the entrance trying to make out from the many immaculately clad waiters the tall figure of their chief.

He was always as hard to put your hand on as a flea—umping here, there, everywhere; smiling, bowing, explaining, apologizing, complimenting—the very essence of unceasing energy. To-night it was harder than ever to locate him, for the reason that, as somebody presently explained to me, he was "off for the night."

Somehow I had never thought of Otto's "being off"; to me he was always a well-made piece of machinery within the body of a pleasing jumping-jack. I had thought all would be easy when once I

reached my destination. Yet here, the very first thing, I was in trouble again.

I knew no one else connected with the restaurant who, in the face of the prevailing financial conditions, would be willing to take any chances on cashing my check. However, here I was with Bennett, and I must have a clear head for my talk with him; so I desperately pushed aside all fears and beckoned him to follow me to our table.

I would not attempt to cross any bridges till I came to them, and surely I had gone through enough in the last hour to make anything that could now happen seem trivial.

My surroundings were soothing in the extreme. I stretched out luxuriously in my chair and, dismissing all worries from my mind, gave myself up to a full enjoyment of the moment. The strains of the orchestra were now rising and falling in a throbbing waltz measure that drove away all thoughts of strife and struggle. The tables were crowded with gay, laughing men and women—taking their full measure of enjoyment from their dinner. Laughter and smiles and flirtings and noddings were the rule, and he on whom dull care sat heavily would assuredly have found it hard to resist the infectious ease that pervaded the very atmosphere of the place.

Fortunately I had ordered in advance, and so was spared even the annoyance of seeing how much farther I was putting myself in a hole every time I set my eyes on the *menu*. The dinner was well along, and my appetite fairly ravenous from my unaccustomed exertions, before I skilfully brought the conversation around to the business in hand.

Putting all other thoughts out of my consideration, I laid my proposition before the old gentleman, asking what bids he had already received, and skilfully parrying his objections and meeting all his shrewd pitfalls.

Being a self-made man, and like all such men thoroughly practical in every department of his work, he had little use for theories, and I was consequently at considerable disadvantage, for he regarded me as a child. Skilfully laying out my plans in a few well-chosen words, with the aid of knives, forks, salt-cellars, pepper-shakers, and all the other appur-

tenances of a well-laid table, I soon had him engrossed. But try as I might, it was impossible to pin him down to anything even the most sanguine could take for encouragement.

He was shift as a weasel; cunning as a fox; cleverly eluding any question or argument that could be construed as leading up to the contracts he had it in his power to award.

Finally, knowing I had done everything mortal man could do, and feeling satisfied that, at any rate, I had earned later consideration from him, I changed the subject and absently listened to the old man as he told of his beginnings and struggles, the while I mentally figured on some way of getting out of the restaurant without his knowing the state of my finances.

Perhaps my wife might be able to suggest something, or even to get the money at our hotel. Strange the possibility had not occurred to me before!

A decent opportunity offering, I excused myself on the ground of an important telephone communication, and strolled leisurely to the booths in the hall outside.

I was nervous, on edge with the suspense and the reaction of the afternoon's events.

Besides, I was in no frame of mind to answer the inevitable questions my wife was sure to ask regarding the result of my interview.

It took what seemed ages to get her, and I had about given up in disgust, thinking she might not yet have left her friends. When her voice, clear, sweet, vibrating with ill-suppressed excitement, came over the wire:

“Oh, Dick! did you get them?”

I knew she was going to ask *that*, and perhaps the fact that I had keyed myself up for it made the thing jar the more.

“No,” I shortly replied. “I've lost—”

“Oh, Dick!” Her voice was almost sobbing.

“I've lost—” I began once more impatiently, but she again interrupted.

“Well, I think it isn't fair, that's all, and I'd like to see him and tell him so. I think—”

“My dear,” I cut in sharply. “Try to listen to me.”

“Yes, dear!”

"The contracts have not been given out as yet. I have as good a chance as any one still. I've lost—"

"Oh, I'm *so* glad. I knew it all the time! You're sure to get them. You startled me so! Oh—"

I was beginning to fear she would drop the receiver in her excitement. So, my temper completely lost now, I almost roared:

"Be quiet a minute, can't you? I've lost my pocketbook, and haven't got a cent with me. Can you get the money right away and send it to me by a messenger?"

"How funny!" Her soft voice went rippling off in gales of merry laughter.

"Funny!" I stormed. "Funny! May-be you'd think it funny if your legs were stiff and sore from walking ten miles, and everybody took you for a thief or worse, and—"

I paused for breath and to regain control of my temper.

"What suit have you got on, dear?"

Evidently my tirade had had no effect on her, for her tones were still sweet.

The idea of her thinking of my personal appearance after hearing all I had been through! In the first impulse of anger I jammed the receiver down on the hook and slammed out of the door.

In five minutes I was back, contrite and chastened in spirit.

"My dear," I began humbly, when connection had been reestablished, "are you trying to get that money?"

"Did you cut off, or was it Central?"

It was now her turn to be on the offensive.

"Central." I lied meekly.

"Humph!" The accent was doubtful. "What suit have you got on?"

"My brown suit." I knew her well enough to realize I must let her take her own good time in getting to what she wanted to say.

An exclamation of triumph escaped her.

"I thought so. Well, of all the disappointing men! And you know how becoming your blue is to you! Why, dear, you know, I thought you would certainly respect my wishes enough to wear it, so I changed your pocketbook last night to that suit."

"What!" I cried. "And I haven't had it all day!"

"Oh, Dick, do you think that means good luck about the contracts? Yes, dear, I'll send it right away. Good-by, dear."

With a sigh of relief I settled back in my seat, and for the first time joined in the conversation with a light heart.

At last the messenger-boy arrived, and I had to hold myself down in my chair to keep from rushing up to meet him. I beckoned, and he handed me a fat envelope, which I hurriedly tore open, and extracted therefrom my lost pocketbook.

How good the leather felt to my fingers! How happy I was at last to be able to call for my check and know I was safe in doing so.

I scanned it carelessly and, opening the wallet with much dignity, extracted from the bill-fold two fresh, crinkly five-dollar bills and a check, made out to my order for ninety dollars and uncertified.

I knew my dinner-check would be at the very least twelve dollars. If I had only had my pocketbook with me that day at the office—

But it was too absurd to take seriously—too ridiculous. I did not even stop to get angry with my wife. There was no other thing to do so I turned my unruffled face to the old gentleman, who whenever the subject of his beginnings and self-made life was interrupted became cold and silent as a cake of ice.

I told him of what had happened to me since half past five, giving in detail all my troubles in keeping the appointment. "And now," I concluded, "I must throw myself in your debt by asking you to cash this check."

He regarded the check frowningly a moment, and then scowled fiercely at me.

"My boy," he finally answered, "I've told you something about my early life to-night. I started without a dollar, and I've made my pile. But I've often thought if I'd started without a dollar in New York, I'd still be without one. No, I won't cash your check."

My face fell, and I mentally berated the old curmudgeon, who was still making a great show of fumbling in his pockets.

"But," and he brought from under the table a great yellow roll, tied with an

elastic, and peeling off two of the largest bills tossed them over the table to me. "But," he continued, "there's a thousand in advance on those contracts. Any man who can raise car fare from a stranger, in this town, and get away with a dinner

here as gracefully as you did, without a cent in your pocket, has got the *practical nerve* for me. Why, when I was a boy—"

But I was rushing to the telephone booths and missed *that* story.

GORDON'S GETAWAY.

By STEPHEN BRANDISH,

Author of "When Suspicion Struck Hard," "At the Mercy of the Unseen," etc.

Certain astounding happenings that arose from the chance translation of a cipher into sense.

CHAPTER I.

A CIPHER AMID THE GLOOM.

DOWN the broad, white, lower corridor, lighted and bedecked in the lavish fashion which distinguishes every cubic inch of the huge Hotel Belmere, the typewriter ceased to send its clatter.

A jerk of suppressed impatience—exasperation, perhaps—and the last sheet came out of the machine and was slapped upon the desk.

And young Mr. Gordon Russell rested an elbow on his typewriter-desk and his chin on his hand, and stared wearily upward at the sign of his bondage, neatly executed on the white wall beside him in gold letters:

PUBLIC STENOGRAPHER.

"Public stenographer 'be—'" he began under his breath, stopping abruptly.

Just what was the use of cursing that sign, anyway? It furnished his bread and butter, at least, as was evidenced by the pile of half dozen newly finished letters.

It kept the proverbial wolf at just a safe distance, and—Russell's eyes dropped, and a queer little sound escaped him that was half sigh and half groan.

He listened for a little to the subdued purr of conversation that floated from the manicuring-room behind, where divers strange specimens of gilded youth hid themselves, that their dainty nails might be polished and their more or less intelligent eyes be feasted upon masses of startlingly waved and perilously pompadoured blond hair.

He heard the faint clink of dishes in

the Australian-room ahead, where late lunchers reveled and chatted in the shadow of boomerangs and Bush relics, and consumed near-first-class viands at astoundingly first-class prices—and he frowned suddenly.

Why, on busy nights, even some of those confounded, wooden-faced waiters were not strangers to eight and ten-dollar accumulations of tips!

Whereas he, Gordon Russell, with a first-class education and a large fund of half-developed musical talent, was doomed to sit beneath his sign and take what stenographic crumbs were passed him.

He sighed again and stared at the several short notes he had finished. He took to wondering why—and he looked up suddenly as a hand came down on his shoulder, and cried:

"Dick Caswell!"

The rather better-clothed young man grinned, as he drew up a chair beside him.

"The same," he agreed. "Well? What is it?"

"What's what?"

"The air of settled gloom—the massive brow contracted in moody meditation—the erstwhile sparkling eye clouded with impenetrable sorrow—all that sort of thing?"

Russell smiled faintly.

"Do I look all that?"

"You look sour enough to strike a chill to the soul of a blind man!"

"Thanks. I—I feel even sourer."

His lips shut tightly. Plainly, the public stenographer was not in a particularly talkative mood.

Caswell looked him over for a time, with a little line between his eyes. When he spoke at last it was in rather soothing fashion.

"Same old dumps—fringed with dead black embroidery, seven inches deep and hand-made, Gordon?"

"Monotony and poverty? Yes."

"You're an ass!" Mr. Caswell informed him cheerfully.

The stenographer bowed in ironical submission. Caswell crossed his legs and smiled as he tapped the toe of one shoe with his cane.

"A particularly idiotic variety of long-eared, faulty-hoofed, stub-tailed jackass!" he pursued calmly. "You haven't even enough sense to be thankful for having enough to be thankful for!"

"In other words," said Russell, "if you were here in my job, squatted before a rattling old machine for ten hours or so daily, and matching pennies with yourself to find out whether your daily earnings would be ten cents or ten dollars, you would devote an hour or so each morning to falling on your knees and offering up a long song of praise?"

"Under certain circumstances—yes."

"I can't imagine the circumstances."

"For one thing, if I had a wife like yours, instead of supporting an indigent nephew for the sake of human society."

Russell almost winced.

"For another, if I had a kid like yours to romp with and look after and bring up, instead of a bulldog for rare frisky moments."

The stenographer shrugged his shoulders meaninglessly.

"And for a third, if I had a home of my own, with my own trash strewed all around, wherever I pleased, instead of contributing something like a hundred and a quarter monthly for the privilege of living in two-and-bath, with maid, hall, and telephone service thrown in free!"

"Those things aren't particularly to be detested, when a man happens to have income enough to support them."

"No, and they're not particularly to be cherished, even if a man happened to be worth a million millions. But *home*, Gordon—"

His tone had grown almost reproving. Russell started up with a scowl.

"Do you suppose I'm gloomy because I've got the responsibilities of a home, you imbecile?" he demanded. "Do you suppose I don't know that I'm married to the best—"

"And prettiest!" Caswell added.

"—and most capable little woman in the world?"

"Who could make the inside of a packing-case look like a home any fellow'd be glad to go back to!" the other muttered.

"That's precisely it!" Russell snapped angrily. "That's precisely the stunt I'm not anxious to force her into doing. Do you think there's anything comforting in the idea of Dorothy pottering over a gas-range in a Harlem flat and sitting up till midnight sewing on clothes for Billy? And before I was cad enough to persuade her to marry me—"

"Morbid, maudlin muck!" commented the visitor.

"It's not! Before we were married, and for a year afterward, I simply knew that by this time I'd be making money hand over fist, and I was glad to get along on a very little cash and a great deal of hope; but now—"

"But then," sighed Caswell, "the allowance-giving uncle died inconsiderately and seventeen dozen heirs did you out of what belonged to you, and the bright hope of being the world's foremost fiddler went up in smoke!"

He ended with a snap of the fingers; then came closer to Russell and leaned forward.

"Gordon," he went on, "about how many more times am I to offer you sufficient cash to grub-stake you to a finish in the musical-education business before you accept?"

"I can't do it, old man."

"Bosh! Brace up! Take the coin and go abroad. Live cheap. Get all the finishing touches you need and come back here and paralyze the public. Heaven knows the critics were kind enough to you as a kid. They predicted all sorts of futures for you, when you'd been trained enough. Go on and *do* it! I don't know anything about the fiddling business, but I'll back you to win—and you'll do that fast enough! And once you're—"

Russell was not listening, and their friendship was too old for Caswell to

take offense. Instead, the stenographer was running back over the four years he had spent before that very desk, the amount of distasteful work he had covered, the snubs and sharp words he had taken in silence—and, more than all, the deadly, flat monotony of the whole thing, the apparent dying out of ambition that seemed to be taking place within him, the down-town ride in the morning, the up-town ride in the evening, the waits, and the hurry jobs in between.

Caswell watched him silently for a time. Consolation was not in line that day, it seemed. He had better look for diversion—and it came in a bit of paper that fluttered from the stenographer's desk.

Caswell stooped and picked it up and stared at it.

And suddenly a laugh burst from his lips.

"Will you kindly tell me just what 'Thmat xhmkjmb. Tsbqu unohhgu' means in English?" he inquired.

"What?" Even Russell was forced to laugh.

"It fell from your desk just now." Caswell surveyed the scrap critically. "Now that 'uno' looks rather like Latin, and there is a hint of Russian about the 'Tsbqu,' but—what in thunder is it?"

"Something or other that an Incarnation of Prosperity gave me to insert in these letters, Dick. That's all I can tell you."

"And you did it without smashing the machine?"

"Evidently, since I've rung it in as the last paragraph of those last three sheets," said Russell with a jerk of his thumb toward the notes. "This machine's used to anything now."

"But—I say!" Caswell laughed a little. "Was the gentleman *right*? Did he do anything else queer?"

Russell, interested, began to rise from the depths. His eyes lightened a little as he turned his pivot-chair to the other.

"Several things," he replied. "For one thing, he didn't address the letters to any one by his full name—they're simply 'Dear Jim' or 'Dear Louis,' as the case may be."

"Ah? Anything else?"

"And he declined my offer to address the envelopes for him."

"Why?"

"Well, I didn't ask him," Russell smiled. "He was altogether too prosperous and important to stand impudent questions."

"And I presume that with these suspicious circumstances in mind, you immediately informed the house-detective and had a close watch set upon him at once?"

"I did not," Russell laughed shortly. "I watched him myself until I saw him pass out thirty dollars for a box of cigars at the cigar-stand—and then I ceased to watch him, in sheer disgust. When a man gets down to a five-cent smoke as a treat after dinner, he is not likely to have enough sublimity in his nature to enjoy—"

"Forget it!" advised Mr. Caswell.

He had laid the paper on the desk. Now a queer, hazy little expression stole over his face.

He reached for the scrap of paper and once more studied the letters, hurriedly printed in lead-pencil capitals. He scratched his head for a time and frowned, and Russell watched with some amusement.

"This," said his visitor, "is plainly a cipher sentence—or two of them, to judge from the capitals."

"Do you know," said Russell, "that, despite everything else on my mind, I, too, had almost guessed that?"

"You don't mean it?" Caswell looked up in mock amazement and returned to his study of the thing. "But there's something about this that you didn't guess, my astute friend, and that is: Why does that devilish 'unohhgu' look so utterly familiar to me?"

"Well—does it?"

"It has the general aspect of some friend that I knew long ago and have long ago forgotten," Caswell responded sagely. "I seem to know his name, but I can't place his face, as it were, and—"

His voice died away again. He scowled at the puzzling little slip of white paper. Then, suddenly, he looked up with:

"Gordon, the man who gave you this idiotic thing wasn't a short sort of chap, with a gray, pointed beard and a little stoop of the shoulders—round eye-glasses and a thick cane?"

"Hardly, *Sherlock*," laughed the stenographer. "In fact, you missed fire at every trial that time. He was over six feet, had only a blond mustache, wore no eye-glasses, had military shoulders, and didn't seem to need a cane, thick or otherwise."

"Then it wasn't Delton?"

"I never said it was. Who is he, and what has he to do with this?"

"Delton, Gordon, is an individual with whom I used to do a little business some time back. This thingumajig bears a powerful resemblance to the kindergarten-cipher system he used once in a while."

"Aha?" Russell seemed not overwhelmingly interested.

"And furthermore, I have placed the word 'unohhgu,' which might be taken for Congo dialect, but which I will gamble actually stands for 'to-night!'"

"What?"

"Surest thing you ever knew, my friend. Hand me a pencil and a piece of paper, and I'll guarantee to dig out the revelation for you, free of all charges of any kind. Hurry up! I don't want him to return and find me delving into his innermost thoughts or—thanks."

Pencil in hand, he laid the paper on the desk and set about a lightning alphabet.

It was completed in a few seconds. The pencil poised above it, and Caswell pursed his lips. One eye upon the meaningless cipher, the other, apparently upon the pencil-point, he muttered to himself and punctuated the mutterings with a nod here and there.

Then he looked up with some animation and more satisfaction.

"I have the honor to inform you," he announced, "that 'unohhgu' does signify 'to-night!'"

"Yes? Well—"

"Look here: This whole cipher's a kid's affair, any way. It isn't worth a continental cuss to my way of thinking, but Delton and some of his people used to employ it now and then. Catch on to the idea?"

"Hardly."

"Well, it's simply this: If a man gets a sane thought and wants to make it look crazy by this system, he simply starts each word with the letter next ahead of

it; for the next letter, he counts one back, for the next he counts one forward—and so on till he's made his message look like Chinese. If it happens that you have to count back from 'a' or forward from 'z,' you simply use the same letter instead. Simple, isn't it?"

"Too simple to be much good."

"Which argues that this particular gentleman's communication isn't important enough to warrant much secrecy, but important enough that he doesn't want the information in the papers before the early afternoon editions. Now for the rest of it, and—"

He broke off, and his pencil began to dart up and down again. He jotted down letter after letter, until he looked up with a triumphant:

"Bucolic message, Gordon! First word's 'Silas!'"

"Yes."

"And the second—" The pencil began its travels once more. Caswell whistled softly as he worked; then:

"And the second is 'willing,' which completes sentence number one."

For the third time he took up his investigation; and the cloud of fragrant smoke transferred Russell's thoughts to more important matters, and he leaned forward and extracted a cigar from his friend's vest-pocket.

He had just leaned back to the reflection of such joys as may be had by the comparatively wealthy, when—

"'Tsbqu' is also elucidated!" came to his ears in triumphant tones. "It signifies 'start!'"

"Eh?"

"And the communication of your expensive friend, taken as a whole," Caswell ended. "might reasonably be supposed to represent, 'Silas willing. Start to-night!'"

CHAPTER II.

AN APPOINTMENT AT NINE.

THE decipherer of ciphers dropped the slip of paper to the desk again, his translation written beneath the original words, and thrust out his chest triumphantly.

"'Silas!'" he quoted impressively, "is 'willing!'" Also—"Start to-night," Gordon!"

"Well, what of it?"

"Eh?"

"What in blazes—now that I've captured this cigar—do I care whether Silas is willing or not, or whether anybody starts to-night?"

"Does that mean you don't appreciate my five minutes of hard mental labor in putting this into English for you?" Caswell asked ironically.

"It does!"

"Well, you're—" he broke off hopelessly. "Cut out fiddle-strings and the butcher's bill, and you're as dead to curiosity as a telegraph-pole, Gordon."

"Can you tell me any lucid and coherent reason why I should sit here and worry about Silas's willingness?"

"Hardly," grinned the visitor, "but—say, that thing *is* rather peculiar, isn't it?"

"Perhaps."

"Did he mention the aforesaid Si in any of the letters?"

"Do you suppose I'm here to reveal the secrets of my valued patrons' correspondence?"

"No, but—did he?"

Russell laughed a little.

"As a matter of fact—no. He had nothing to say about Silas at all, Dick."

"Sure?"

"Quite. They're all short notes."

"Then did he seem to hint at—"

"Look here, Dick, all that I recall of those notes is that he seemed to be making appointments, in a somewhat veiled way, with several people. I'm certainly not going to read them aloud here."

"Well, I don't want you to, but—oh, there's something curious about that old cipher turning up here, and—"

"And it doesn't rouse me a little bit," Russell laughed discouragingly.

Caswell leaned back. His hands were rammed into his pockets and he stared thoughtfully at the floor. He whistled again, too, and seemed to be essaying a connection between the four words that had come out of the past.

For Russell's part, he smoked on silently and looked at the frescoed ceiling of the corridor. He leaned deskward and thought on; his elbow came down upon his keyboard and set the type-bars clattering. Caswell started; Russell, all oblivious, stared on.

And then, just as the visitor seemed ready to deliver new information on the subject of ciphers, came:

"Dick, do you know it's hell to sit here and try to figure out whether you can spare two dollars for a pair of rubber boots for the kid, when the management insists on your being at least decently dressed for this part?"

Caswell arose with a jerk.

"My morbid friend," he said, "I presume that it is the smoldering spark of divine genius that sends you into these glooms about every two months. If it wasn't for that lurking suspicion, I should call it sheer da—er—folly. I'm going."

"Good-by, Dick."

"Farewell," droned Caswell. "I shall be around here for an hour or two, still. You're coming to the club with me for dinner. Did you know it?"

"I can't very well."

"Eh?"

"I'm going home and turn in early, Dick."

"But it's very nearly a year—"

"And it'll probably be nearly another," Russell smiled faintly. "I'm awfully obliged to you, Dick, but—"

"But you're afraid you might be cheered up despite yourself, eh? Well, will you kindly go to blazes until we meet again?"

"With pleasure," said the public stenographer.

He sat down again as the other departed with a wave of the hand. He watched Caswell as, thoughtlessly, that gentleman walked to the cigar-stand and tendered a yellow bank-note in payment for a handful of smoking material and received a handful of greenbacks in change.

A thoughtful smile played about the stenographer's lips as he stared at the doorway through which his friend had vanished.

After all, he—Russell—*was* a fool, and in more ways than one!

In health and home and happiness, he had very much more to be thankful for than many hundreds of thousands in New York. He had capacity for work, too, and all days were not so profitless as this particular day had been.

And as for his blighted musical hopes,

as for all the dreams he had cherished of playing his way into fame and prosperity, they were not dead, because he chose to think them so; they merely slept, and when matters brushed up a little, he would manage to make some sort of terms with the great Lansonne or one of the other preeminent violinists, even if he went without food. And after that would come a really important concert engagement or two and then—

He drifted away for a time; he returned to earth pleasantly.

He might even have accepted that dinner invitation of Caswell's and gone to the club and drawn new strength and freshness from the lights and the bustle and the crowd of men there; but—home was best, after all. Home and Dorothy and that five-year growth of tow-hair and fat cheeks and inexhaustible energy, who romped through the days and broke the night stillness, now and then, with a laugh in his sleep.

Yes, what an eternal fool he was! And what a tremendous future he had been glooming away with his dark-blue maunderies!

Why, he had hardly settled his mind on a piece of work for the last month! He'd have to alter that state of affairs and alter it quickly—and he *would!* A very little hustling might easily bring him some lucrative night-work, and the profit of that could be laid away, bit by bit, until it amounted to something really substantial.

And his beloved violin should have that new E string this very evening, and he would begin some really earnest practise work on his own account.

Yes, he had been a fool, but it was over with now for good, and—he looked up suddenly.

A big figure had halted beside him, and a long blond mustache appeared well above him. His last patron had returned.

He was, indeed, as Russell had termed him, an Incarnation of Prosperity. The lining of his coat was sable, of the sort that defies questionings; his thick boots were London made; the solitaire ring—his one jewel—would have kept the stenographer in comfort for a year or so.

Russell straightened suddenly. The other smiled a little.

"All through now? I haven't given you much time, I know."

The public stenographer smiled.

"I finished them up some time ago."

"Aha? Get the — er — cryptogram straight?"

"I think so." Russell handed over the sheets, and a certain faint curiosity rose within him. "There they are, sir."

The stranger looked them over rapidly.

"That's all right enough, I believe. Well, I'll ask you for half a dozen envelopes, if you please?"

The stenographer produced them. The letters were laid again on the desk, and the stranger's hand went to his pocket.

"Now, as to our settlement—"

He stopped short. Russell, not yet quite out of his self-centered mood, hardly noticed it, because of his covert and critical observation of the other's person. Some of those outward marks of prosperity would mark him and his family before long.

And then the stranger seemed to start, and his eyes narrowed markedly—and as suddenly opened wide again. Without any obvious reason, he laughed rather loudly.

"Er—Mr. —"

"Russell."

"Quite so. Mr. Russell, may I ask another favor of you?"

"Certainly."

"Will you go in person to the Western Union office, wherever that may be located in this tremendous tangle of rooms and corridors, and bring me three messenger boys?"

"Certainly. I—"

"It's only that I don't want to stir up any excitement, such as might afflict the average bell-boy, Mr. Russell," the stranger laughed. "There are three letters here that I want delivered as quickly and as quietly as possible, and I'm—well, not anxious to be seen up in the main office handing them to the boys—you understand."

The public stenographer succumbed to the charming smile behind the blond mustache, and any faint resentment at the errand was replaced by a sensation of the gentle warmth of confidence reposed.

He turned and left briskly, and as he

reached the stairs he saw that the ornate unknown had taken his own chair and was folding his notes, and, with fountain pen poised between his fingers, was even then thrusting one into the envelope.

Pocuring a messenger in the Hotel Belmere is more or less of a simple proposition. Should there be none at the telegraph office, one simply turns the knob on the little iron box, which rings around the corner, at the larger office.

Thereafter, a uniformed infant is certain to appear, exhibiting signs of genuine breathlessness, for when people have attained the eminence of even temporary residence at the Belmere, tips are as much an accompaniment of service as tooth-powder to the brush.

With perhaps a hundred yards and as many seconds between them, the trio arrived in answer to the triplicate summons. Russell led them to the regions below street.

His patron was sitting back. He nodded approval as the little procession halted before him. He called the first of the boys close to him and spoke very softly, and Russell instinctively drew to one side.

He watched the performance repeated with the second, and with the third.

The stranger dropped his other envelopes into his pocket, and rose smilingly.

"As to your bill, Mr. Russell?"

The public stenographer named the amount. A bank-note came forth; he succeeded in breaking it at the flower-stand, and returned with his change, to find the stranger looking thoughtfully at the bare desk.

Slowly he folded up the bank-notes and thrust them into his pocket. He turned then to Russell.

"About that little slip I left with you—that bit of cipher?"

"I—I beg pardon, sir?"

The stenographer started suddenly. The thing had disappeared—just in what direction he could not say.

"Did you destroy it as I asked you?"

"I don't think you directed me to destroy it." Russell smiled uncertainly, as he looked about.

"Well, I—I certainly intended to do so, and—"

"But it is very probable that I have," the stenographer hastened on. "As a

general thing, I dispose of anything about the desk that is not of immediate use."

"By—well, by tearing it in small pieces, say?" the stranger inquired oddly.

"It's my rule to tear up everything," Russell laughed. "I think that that waste-basket will give testimony to that fact."

The stranger considered it thoughtfully for a moment.

"So that if you had thrown away that slip, it would unquestionably have been torn in a number of pieces?"

"Of course!" A little sharpness seemed to have crept into Russell's tone.

The stranger surveyed him keenly for a second or two.

"I wish that you were entirely positive of it, Mr. Russell," he remarked. "It was—nothing of astounding importance, but I should hardly like to think of it as lying around loose."

"My dear sir," said the stenographer, somewhat acidly, "as I tell you, I remember neither any injunction on your part to destroy that slip, nor the act of doing so. The chances, however, are very much in favor of its being somewhere on top of that pile of waste-paper, or possibly somewhere about the floor. If you wish I will make a thorough search immediately."

The other laughed slightly. His good humor seemed to have returned, and his peculiar fears to have vanished.

"Tut, tut!" he said. "After all, it's of no consequence, I suppose. If you should happen to run across the thing, subdivide it thoroughly—that's all. Good afternoon."

He sauntered slowly down the big corridor. At the end he stopped and considered the Australian-room for a matter of many seconds. He turned then, and found his way to the news-stand, and spent another half dozen minutes looking over the papers and magazines.

The stenographer, meanwhile, was casting an eye here and there and everywhere.

What had become of his confounded slip of paper, anyway? Wherever it might be, it held also Caswell's presumed translation of the mild enigma—and that, very likely, would not have proven altogether pleasing to the gentleman of the sable coat.

Where was it now, though? In his rather absent frame of mind, Russell reflected, he might have torn it to shreds and thrown it away, as he did a hundred times daily with other bits of paper; but certainly he had not the faintest remembrance of such an act.

To the best of his recollection, the little thing had been lying on the pile of letters when Caswell left, and he had paid no attention whatever to it thereafter. And that lower corridor of the Belmere, like all the rest of the house, was provided with scientifically perfect ventilation and scientifically perfect elimination of drafts and—where the dickens had his slip of paper betaken itself?

Russell straightened up with a shrug. It didn't matter, anyway, apparently. The unknown had left without showing signs of frenzied worry, so that there was no particular need of his fuming about it.

He set to straightening out his desk, probably for the night and—what? Yes, surely enough, the big man was approaching again.

He seemed in a thoughtful mood now, for a slight frown had appeared. He halted beside the desk and spoke gently:

"Mr. Russell, are you here evenings?"

"Very rarely. The man up-stairs attends to what business there is after six."

"Can you conscientiously say that you're a first-class shorthand writer?"

"I sincerely hope so, sir."

"Well, do you ever work evenings?"

"Once in a while."

"Anything on for this evening?"

"No."

The stranger drew a long breath and smiled meditatively.

"I shall have some *extremely* particular work this particular evening, Mr. Russell," he said. "Could you come down here, say at nine, and devote a couple of hours to it?"

"Why—yes."

"And I am perfectly willing, for very exact work, to pay you five dollars an hour, Mr. Russell," the stranger continued, very earnestly. "Will that be satisfactory?"

"Quite." The public stenographer suppressed a gulp of amazed joy. The other straightened up.

"Then I can look for you, with certainty, at nine o'clock sharp?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! Ask for Mr. Waters, then, and—*be on the minute!*"

He nodded pleasantly. He turned again and sauntered away; and as he disappeared, Russell dropped back in his chair and stifled a yell of joy.

Two hours' work—ten dollars! That ten would afford the tidiest kind of nest-egg for the fund he meant to amass by night-work.

Russell had read very frequently of the good effect of optimistic consideration of the future. Well, he was ready to believe it all now, for he had been optimistic only for about ten minutes and—it was going to pay him ten dollars!

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GOLD-PLATED SUITE.

IMAGINATION is a curious thing; prodded by unusual excitement, it is likely to grow into a very curious thing.

For example, some thirty minutes later, as Russell was finally stowing away his paraphernalia, he imagined that the dapper youth who loitered down the corridor and purchased a bunch of violets was staring at him markedly.

As a matter of fact, there was no earthly reason why any one should or should not stare at him; yet the impression remained.

And it bobbed up in another queer way in the subway car, for Russell could have sworn—during the minute or two that he thought of it at all—that that man across the aisle, in the shabby overcoat and worn hat, was the identical fellow in different clothes.

Dinner was the same happy little meal he had suddenly grown to appreciate so much more; the happier now, indeed, by reason of the good news and the absence of the gloom which had sat upon Russell's countenance during the immediate past.

The little ceremony over, the scorned cigar smoked with real enjoyment, a romp with the smallest Russell preceded the nightly tucking-in process—and the public stenographer was ready to return to the Belmere and the mysterious Mr. Waters, and put in his two lucrative hours.

And once more that shabby man appeared.

There was, certainly, nothing strikingly peculiar about the fact; in absolute truth, Russell could not feel entirely positive that it was the same man; and if it happened to be, there was no conceivable reason why he should not be riding down-town again, just as was Russell. And yet—

The stenographer gave over his speculation and, chin deep in his upturned collar in the cold car, meditated in roseate fashion and fancied the ten-dollar bill already in his pocket. He would start an independent little saving-bank account for that fund; that was ever so much better than leaving it around the house and subject to temptation.

He rose suddenly and hurried out of the car at last, as his station was called. He bethought himself of the "shadow" and looked about quickly. The man, to be sure, had left the car with him, but he was hurrying up the other staircase now, hands deep in his pockets, collar up, shabby shoulders bent, as if beneath a weight of care.

If he had ever noticed Russell at all, he had forgotten him now—and the stenographer stepped briskly toward his hotel.

A minute or two, and he was in the blaze of light that reigns in the lobby of the Belmere.

He enjoyed the sensation of walking up to the new night-clerk and, unrecognized, sending up his card to Mr. Waters. The man stared at him for an instant as he heard the name, and then his card was passed to a bell-boy, and the public stenographer found himself in the elevator.

It was a considerable walk that they took after arriving at the third floor, and a walk which the boy utilized for the gratification of his own curiosity on current matters.

"You going to work for him in there, Mr. Russell?" came suddenly to his ears.

"What? Yes!" Russell, who had forgotten that the youth was well aware of his identity, started.

"What's on in there to-night?"

"In where?"

"In the gold-plated suite—you know, the hundred-a-day bunch o' rooms that Waters took."

"I'm sure I don't know."

"The rest of the crowd is there, anyway," the youngster went on, tentatively.

"And who are they?"

A spasm of silent, cautious mirth convulsed the bell-boy.

"Well, they—they're Mr. Smith, and Mr. Jones, and Mr. Brown, I guess. Them's the names they sent up, anyway."

"And what the dickens is there so funny about that?"

The boy stared at him.

"Say, ain't you *wise*?"

"I certainly don't know who's up here," Russell said impatiently. "Who is it?"

The stifled giggle came again.

"Oh, I guess it's Smith, Jones, and Brown, Mr. Russell!"

He was at the door now. He tapped softly. A moment's pause, and a grave person with "valet" written on every inch of him opened the door. He surveyed Russell for a second and glanced at his card.

He stepped aside with:

"If you'll please step in here, sir, and have a seat."

The door closed on the large-eyed bell-boy. The public stenographer found himself in a little reception-room of white and gold—the "gold-plated" suite.

He had read of it in the papers; curiously, he had never had sufficient desire to travel up-stairs and inspect it when empty.

The grave person disappeared without comment, through a side door. Another brief wait, and the larger portal before him opened, and the big man of the afternoon stepped in briskly.

His smile was broad and friendly. He shook hands with the stenographer and—

"All ready for work?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Note-books and everything?"

"I'm prepared to work from now until daylight, Mr. Waters."

"All right. Good enough. I'm going to ask you to sit here for a few minutes, Mr. Russell. Then we'll be ready for you, I think."

He stepped through the door by which the valet had left, and for a moment there was a subdued murmur of low conversation. He reappeared; then, with a nod, crossed the little apartment, and

vanished into the regions from which he had emerged.

Russell looked around with mild curiosity. So this was the famous suite for which the hotel received one hundred dollars a day—when the man with the hundred happened along and desired to expedite its spending!

Well, it was ornate enough and artistic enough, surely, if one might judge from this particular small apartment. But why the deuce should any one want to pay a hundred dollars a day for it?

And, continuing the thought a little further, who was this man Waters, that he could and did afford it? Plainly, he must be a person of large wealth, and—Russell started. Could this be Trendon Waters, the Philadelphia millionaire?

Rather actively, he took to wondering. It was months since he had run across a magazine-picture of the gentleman, and in that instance he had worn no mustache. But Russell did recall that *the* Waters had been reported as growing a mustache, and he was also celebrated for his physical bigness.

Yes, this must be the same individual—and small wonder, therefore, that he was content to pay five dollars an hour for his work.

But who were the visitors who seemed to be with him? A low hum of soft, animated talk reached him, without a single word being distinguishable. The stenographer found himself listening with much interest; indeed, after a moment or two, sheer curiosity took him to the chair beside the big door.

The hum went on. Now a deep, rich voice laughed and said something about "only a side issue and a jaunt, after all." And a thin, rasping tone seemed to snap an answer to the effect that something was "all damned nonsense!" and that "too much care was impossible!"

Thereafter, Waters's even tones appeared to confirm the latter, and there was the faint sound of a chair being shoved back.

Russell was studying a choice little painting across the room when the big door opened and Waters spoke:

"If you will come in with us now, Mr. Russell?"

The stenographer turned quickly and followed him. The big man shut the

door carefully and turned the key—and Russell was at liberty to look about for the moment as pleased him.

He looked and—he stifled a gasp.

In the center of the apartment, evidently the drawing-room of the suite, stood a table of carved mahogany. A vacant chair stood at one side; on the other three the chairs were filled, presumably by Messrs. Smith, Jones, and Brown.

A second glance was hardly necessary. That man at the right, as surely as Fate, was none other than Henry Felling, small, shriveled, lynx-eyed traction magnate and multi-millionaire.

That other big, round fellow, too—Russell knew him at first glance. *That* happened to be William Carford himself, the man whose home on the Drive was the target of every sightseer, the man to whom rumor gave the credit of extracting a solid ten million dollars from the Produce Exchange in a single year!

And the third, the ordinary-appearing, medium-sized, mild-looking man was absolutely and positively none other than Carroll Ringdon, who had more to say about a certain industrial enterprise than any other man in the world, and whose million-dollar private yacht alone would seem to indicate that the saying had not been without gain.

Well, he was in choice company, at least! Russell regained his regular breathing with an effort and turned questioningly to Mr. Waters.

The expression of that gentleman, it struck him suddenly, had changed remarkably in the last few seconds. His friendly smile was altogether gone; in its place was a stern and severe look which puzzled the stenographer mightily.

Introductions, evidently, were not in order. Russell shed his overcoat without invitation, placed it upon a chair, opened his note-book, and looked about inquiringly.

Waters was in his seat now, and the others seemed to be looking to him to open up affairs. He stared at the table angrily for a minute, and then turned suddenly to Russell.

"You may stick that book in your pocket!" he said sharply.

"I—I beg pardon."

"Put that book away, or hold it, if you like!" snapped Waters. "It's immaterial. There'll be nothing for you to take down—just yet, at any rate, Russell."

"But I understood—"

"I don't care what you understood," the large man replied. "Come over here and stand—right there!"

His big finger pointed to a spot some two yards away from his chair. For the moment Russell's temper rose, and a rather brisk retort was on his lips. He checked it quickly and obeyed.

Waters cleared his throat and glanced at the other three.

"Now, sir," he continued tartly, "we're going to ask you to remember one thing in the very beginning: that is, to tell the truth!"

"I am not accustomed—" the public stenographer began warmly.

A snap of the fingers stopped him.

"First of all, what became of that slip of paper this afternoon—the one with the four cipher words?"

"To the best of my knowledge—"

"Never mind the 'best of your knowledge!'" sneered Felling suddenly. "You tell the *truth!*"

"I was about to do so by saying that I destroyed it!" Russell responded hotly.

"You'd be willing to go into court and swear to that, eh?" Waters demanded.

"I would not! As I told you this afternoon, the waste-basket is the only place where it could have landed!" The stenographer moistened his lips. "And I wish to say right here, gentlemen, that I fail to see the point of this imitation cross-examination. I was asked to come here to—"

"You don't know why you were asked to come here!" Waters informed him. "And as to the general point of my words, they're primarily to prove that you're a confounded liar!"

"Mr.—"

"For the excellent reason that that slip of paper is—right here!"

With a jerk, he drew something from his pocket and slapped it upon the table. Before the stenographer's eyes appeared the identical slip—with Caswell's translation beneath.

Guiltless of any evil intent, he nevertheless started, and a very sour smile ran

around the group. Waters, in particular, seemed to have acquired acidity of expression and tone.

"That paper is here, young man, solely because you didn't expect me to return this afternoon, and that you had no time to get it out of the way when I appeared so suddenly behind you!"

"My dear sir—"

"Hold on! You'll have a chance to talk presently. You'd worked the thing back into ordinary English, and you were doubtless going to pocket it in a second or two. Then I interrupted you, and you dared not pick it up from where it lay so neatly concealed under the edge of a sheet you shoved forward just as I caught sight of it!" The smile grew bitter. "Not much in those statements besides plain eighteen-carat truth, is there, Russell?"

"I tell you—"

"And when I asked you to come here to-night, you were tickled to death, for you fancied that even with such evidence, we'd be unsophisticated and unsuspecting enough to spurt forth endless further information for your benefit!"

"I came here for the purpose of taking dictation or reporting a meeting or something of the sort," Russell replied coolly. "If there is nothing of the sort to be done, I am going to leave and put in a bill to you for wasted time!"

Waters laughed back—and it impressed the stenographer as about the most mirthless mirth he had ever heard.

"Young man, you have not observed that the door is neatly locked; and you are not going through it again until I say so!" Waters leaned forward, and his fist came down on the table in a distinctly business-like manner. "Now! We'll drop the nonsense and get down to facts! *Just where* did you get the key to that cipher?"

"I have no key!"

"Damn it! Haven't you sense enough not to lie by this time?" Felling inquired.

"I tell you I have no key!"

"Then who—er—translated it for you?" Waters asked sarcastically.

"A friend of mine came in after I had finished your letters. He saw the slip and made an attempt to translate it. You will find his writing under your own printed words."

"And your friend's name? Perhaps you will tell us that?"

"On the contrary, I see no reason for telling you!" Russell's innate obstinacy was coming rapidly to the surface.

Carford's round, jolly countenance confronted him, and upon it there was a queer little smile.

"It wasn't, by any odd, impossible, unearthly chance—Burlow?" he questioned.

"I know nobody of that name."

"Nor, of course, was it any employee or agent or acquaintance of this Burlow?" Waters pursued.

"Inasmuch as I've never heard of Burlow, I am hardly likely to know his agents."

The big man snapped his fingers impatiently, and for a moment or two stroked his long mustache. When he faced Russell again, it was with something very like anger.

"See here, my man," he said, "if you'll take what is really a piece of friendly advice, you'll drop the bluff altogether and tell the absolute truth and—"

"I have told the whole and absolute truth."

"Bosh! And, if you do it conscientiously, you'll make a trifle more than ten dollars. I think, this evening. Now—go on! Just what connection have you with Burlow—"

"Confound Burlow!" Russell cried angrily. "I tell you—"

"Don't!" A dry smile came over Waters's lips for a little. He eyed the group and the group eyed him. In the end he turned back to Russell and said quietly:

"Russell, you've taken a very foolish tack, to the best of my thinking. I wish you to step into that room—over there—and close the door, for, perhaps five minutes."

"And if—"

"Do as I say, *please!*" The voice was wholly persuasive now. "You've let yourself into the tangle. The simplest thing now will be to oblige me in this small particular—the simplest thing for all concerned."

He arose and piloted the almost dazed stenographer to the third door through which he had passed that evening in the

suite. He then opened it and pressed a switch.

And the door closed behind Russell—and the lock clicked!

CHAPTER IV.

WHICH RUNS INTO THOUSANDS.

FOR a moment or two, Russell held his breath.

Had he gone entirely mad—was he absolutely helpless, that he had allowed himself to be shut up in this latest apartment? He gasped aloud.

"Lord! If I was down there on Broadway and had the price of a good, reliable gold-brick—" he muttered.

His voice died away. With bewildered eyes, he looked around.

The apartment, evidently Waters's bedroom, was a marvel of beauty and artistic taste; Russell seemed to see nothing of it, save that it possessed only the door through which he had entered and a window that showed no hint of a fire-escape without.

Weakly, he dropped into a chair.

Why was he here and what should he do?

For the first question, he could find no answer at all, save that his own lack of resistance had brought him to Waters's bedroom. How long he might be going to stay there passively, too, was a question.

As to what he should do, he pondered for minute after minute. Whatever the mysterious things of which he was accused might be, he certainly could no more than guess vaguely.

That they were important was indicated plainly enough by the character of the men who were plainly involved in them. That these men were not sticking at small trifles was indicated by the manner in which he had been brought to the Belmore and locked up here.

Should he let out his very capable voice and call for help?

For an instant, he contemplated such a din as would rouse the entire establishment—and he paused in good time. The end of that was plainly to be seen.

Let him create all the disturbance he chose. Undoubtedly the first to pass through the door would be a policeman,

ready to cart him off on a charge of intoxication or assault or something of the sort. And, be the republican government and system of justice what it may in regard to the theory of equality, Russell needed no very violent effort of imagination to see himself convicted and very likely sent Islandward, when four such complainants were arraigned against him.

No, his sole course was to wait for whatever disposition they might choose to make of him next—and to consider a disturbance as the very last resort.

Meanwhile, though, there seemed little use in wasting his time.

He tiptoed back to the door and dropped to his knees. He placed his eye to the keyhole—and discovered that somebody's handkerchief had been draped neatly from the knob, and that all he could see was a very small section of white linen.

It counted for little, however. He could listen, perhaps, and possibly learn something that would give him a clue to the riddle. The eye was replaced with an ear, and Russell attempted that vague process described as "straining."

Then, as voices rose a little, came distinct snatches:

"Absolutely certain that he lies—and he's a fool, in addition!" Felling announced.

Another period of low humming.

"Not a solitary doubt in my mind that he's connected with Burlow's people—and very intimately, at that!" Ringdon contributed. "That confounded cipher was too simple to use, anyway—if a cipher was necessary at all. Mr. Waters!"

"You can put more blame than that on Waters!" Carford added, with a characteristic chuckle. "What other man would be able to walk, head on, into a public stenographer in a hotel who was connected with the very thing Waters wanted to veil?"

"So far as that goes, it's easily enough explained, I suppose, and I was considerable of an idiot to go to him. I've been here two weeks, now, and he was probably sent to cover just such a contingency," replied Waters.

"What amazing astuteness!" observed Carford, with another laugh.

Felling's voice broke in again, more harshly than ever.

"That's not the point. Whatever the amount of mischief, it is done already. The mere fact that he didn't, apparently, communicate with any one after leaving here and before returning doesn't—"

The voice dropped. Russell's eyes widened. He could make a deal of sense out of that last remark, anyway. The erstwhile dapper youth of the violets, later the shabby man of the subway train, had been shadowing him, after all!

He listened the harder. For a time, again, he heard nothing at all.

Very literally, he imagined, the four were putting their heads together, for only the vaguest rustle of talk reached him, thirty feet away. Some ten minutes, perhaps, the low, indefinite sound continued; then Felling's thin tones rose:

"But it isn't a matter in which we can consider thousands!" he snapped angrily. "It isn't a matter in which we need even consider the lives of a fool or two, if necessary!"

A sudden, extremely cold chill ran down the stenographer's spine! What in the name of conscience did that last remark mean, and did it apply to himself? He gulped and listened again with vibrating interest.

"No less a person than the Secretary of—" Felling began, raspingly.

"Sssh!"

"Well, you know who I mean—informed me himself that government contracts for the thing alone would certainly run into hundreds of millions eventually, if such a thing were once perfected! And you're perfectly aware that the navy of this country alone—"

"Don't shout so like thunder, Felling!" Waters muttered.

Russell, at the keyhole, licked his lips. Putting two and two together again, they seemed to have switched from apparent murder to the Secretary of the Navy and government matters!

His head took to reeling. He caught himself quickly, and barely breathed.

"And more than all that!" Ringdon was going on in a quiet tone. "you know that my scheme of buying out the—well, the line I spoke about—would end in an absolute monopoly of ocean traffic before we had finished our workings."

"And even at that," Waters supplemented, "it isn't a matter of ocean traffic alone, or of all traffic together. There's still a world full of land left to operate on. Now, I don't make any effort to explain how this deuced inconvenient bunch of circumstances worked itself out at the very last moment, but I do agree absolutely with Felling, that the time has come when we can't stick at trifles. So that—"

His words became inaudible. Try as he might, Russell could not catch one of them. He waited, upon his knees, until a sudden thump upon the table preceded a determined:

"We'll do it, and *he'll* do it! It's the safest, cheapest thing all around. It's settled!"

Heavy steps came toward his door again, and Russell shot to his feet. The key was fitted, the portal opened, and Waters said shortly:

"Step out here, please, Russell!"

With as much of fearless defiance in his mien as might be summoned, the stenographer obeyed.

Vaguely, he felt that some such sensations as his own must belong to the prisoner brought before the judge for sentence; he was allowed little time for emotional analysis, however, for Waters almost jerked him back to his old position beside the table, and dropped into his own chair.

"Russell," he said briefly, "we have decided to give you a last chance this time."

"It is more than kind of you."

"And it isn't necessary to pull on that ironical smile, either, my young friend. You are up against a proposition now of which you fully realize the magnitude—but are too much of a fool to appreciate it."

"Which, in other words, means that you were either born without fear or without brains," Felling interpolated. "And you haven't the general appearance of one born without fear."

The stenographer stepped forward.

"See here, gentlemen," he said, flatly, "I did not come here this evening to be locked up in one room after another. Neither did I come here to be abused by you in whatever manner you see fit, or—"

"Be calm, Russell!" Carford cau-

tioned him with a suspicion of a grin. "A great boon is about to descend upon you."

Waters frowned angrily at his colleague's levity as he turned again to the stenographer.

"In the first place, Russell, you are lying in a very foolish manner. Drop that attitude altogether, and tell us the full and complete truth, and we may perhaps make it worth your while."

"If you wish me to tell the truth about a matter of which I have no knowledge whatever, you'll have to give me the details and let me repeat them," said the other tartly.

Waters's face blackened.

"*Drop it!*" he roared. "You're in Burlow's service, aren't you?"

"If you say so, I presume that I am. I never heard of Burlow."

Waters held himself in with a gulp.

"Then go on and tell us precisely how you got the key to that cipher, what Burlow paid to have you get the information, how he knew I was staying here, and how he arranged to have you put here."

Despite himself, Russell was forced to smile broadly.

"I'm afraid you'll have to ask Burlow. I don't know," he said.

The big man's temper was gone. His lips opened, and it seemed that another roar was about to issue and blast Russell from human ken.

But the little man, Felling, laid a hand upon his arm and whispered something, and Waters dropped back almost weakly. Felling's biting little eyes settled steadily upon the stenographer.

"Young man," he said, evenly, "since you have adopted this—er—asinine pose, there seems but one way to deal with the situation. You refuse absolutely to inform us of just the amount of information possessed by the opposition, I take it?"

Russell threw up his hands almost despairingly.

"My dear man!" he cried, "if you'll tell me what information you want, what or who the opposition is or what it's opposed to, and what it knows, or how I'm expected to know what it knows, I may be able to help you. If it's about your damned Silas, the only Silas I ever knew was an uncle who died twenty years ago,

and as for this Silas of yours and his starting-to-night business, so far as I'm concerned he may start for—”

“Sufficient! Sufficient! Quite—quite sufficient!” Felling's waving, thin finger brought him to a breathless standstill. “It's not in the slightest necessary to become excited, young man. You're gaining nothing, and we are losing time.”

“But—”

“I'll not deny that we should like to know just how far Burlow has gone, and that we will pay for it gladly. This—this absurd attitude of yours, in the face of discovery, however, narrows down the whole proposition to the disposition of yourself!”

He pursed his thin lips and nodded his head in momentary thought—and Russell caught his breath.

Was it possible that he, a free and independent and law-abiding citizen, was standing there, in one of New York's biggest hostelleries, and actually allowing any man calmly to prattle of the “disposition of himself?”

He came forward with a stride, and his own fist landed upon the table with a resounding bang.

“Look here! you blasted old fossil!” he thundered. “I don't care whether you're a billion times a billionaire, or what you control or what you can do! There's one thing you *can't* do, and that is to sit there and tell me—”

“So that we have concluded to make a proposal to you,” the little man went on.

The utter calm of the tone staggered Russell. His breath literally left him for the moment. Felling faced him again, with as little emotion as one might have displayed in considering a lead-pencil.

“For the first item, you will realize that it is utterly impossible to turn you loose at this juncture.”

“I realize nothing of the sort! But I do realize that—”

“And, therefore, since we can't turn you loose, and as we wish to be completely certain, we must necessarily keep you with us!”

Felling smiled slightly at his own logic, and his thin, wrinkled fingers tapped the polished table.

“And as we rarely ask for service without giving adequate compensation, we are going to pay you the sum of five thousand dollars, here and now, young man!” he finished.

The stenographer's expression was neither more nor less than a plain, senseless gape.

“What for?” he choked.

“For the simple pleasure of your society for three uninterrupted days and nights, Mr. Russell.”

The stenographer struggled in vain for speech. The shriveled old man thrust a hand into his pocket and brought forth a large yellow roll.

Carefully he stripped the outer five bills from it, and before Russell's amazed eyes lay five separate sheets of paper, with “M” in one corner and “1000” in the other.

Felling rolled them together and looked at him once more.

“You will understand, Mr. Russell, that in keeping to your part of the contract, you will, for three days, communicate with nobody whatsoever, in any way, shape or form. For that time, you will be, to an extent, our private property, from which we shall require no service whatever save silence, entire and absolute. Here is your money.”

He thrust it forward, and before he quite realized it, Russell's fingers had closed about the potent little roll.

And then, in a flash, his wits seemed to return. His eyes began to glitter and his hands twitched. He fairly glared at Felling as he cried:

“And for just what purpose am I supposed to be receiving this money?”

“For silence—and kindly do not raise your voice.”

The stenographer drew a long breath. The bills suddenly were hurled on the table.

“Felling!” he roared. “I have nothing to be silent about. If I had, and wished to talk about it, all your millions wouldn't stop me. There's your money, Felling. I don't know why you're trying to buy me, but I do know that I'm not going to be bought, and—”

“Here!” Carford cried softly. “Don't be a fool, Russell. Take the coin and have some fun with us! It's more than Burlow'd pay, anyway, and—”

He picked up the little roll and thrust it into Russell's pocket. The stenographer, white with rage, was unaware of the move. He glanced toward his overcoat and decided to abandon it and his hat as well for the moment.

"And unless that door into the outer corridor is unlocked and I am allowed to leave this room unhindered, I'll smash the blamed thing down and smash any man's head who gets in my way!"

His fists were clenched and his jaw was set. He faced them furiously for an instant and made a dart toward the door.

In the fraction of a second, the quartet was on its feet. A violent oath escaped Waters. Felling looked distinctly annoyed, and Carford's mouth had dropped open for the moment. For Ringdon's part, he was half way around the table as Russell turned.

The stenographer made no pause, however. Another bound and he was at the portal. He seized the knob and jerked violently at it. The thing was held hard and fast by the heavy bolt. He drew back one foot and landed it upon the gilded panel. The board shattered with a crash that seemed almost deafening.

Forbearing even a look behind, he drew back a pace and hurled his hard-knit body against the door. It seemed to give a little as it quivered under the shock, and a little shout escaped him.

He drew back again and—something irresistible gripped his neck. He ducked and twisted loose, and saw the mighty Waters, above him, preparing for a newer, better grip. His fist crashed suddenly against the big man's chin and he slid lithely away from him, and prepared for a new onslaught, and—

And then, save for Felling, they seemed to have fallen upon him as one man, and he landed violently upon his back!

With strong fingers at his throat, precluding the faintest shout for help, with Felling's remark as to the insignificance of a life or two standing out clearly in his whirling mind, with arms and legs pinned down resistlessly, and Waters's heavy knee crushing in his chest, Russell relaxed suddenly.

There was nothing to prevent their doing as they pleased with him—for he was absolutely helpless, and another two minutes of that maddening choking and crushing would mean—death!

(To be continued.)

A F T E R B I G G A M E .

By HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY.

The tenderfoot who wanted a bear pelt out of season, and how close he got to it—on the bear.

CHARLIE went into Winona one morning after supplies, and brought back Archibald. It seems that his fond papa had let him come up into the Big Woods for a couple of weeks for recreation and to sort o' rub up against nature.

Papa had shipped him up to Houghton with a lefter to a friend he had there, asking him to see that Archibald was provided with a good guide and well taken care of.

This friend knew that me and Charlie were out in the Elm River country trapping muskrats, and collecting wolf scalps

on the side for the bounty. He had in turn shipped Archie out to Winona, which was the nearest settlement to our camp, with a letter telling us to take him to our shack, show him a good time, and see that he didn't get hurt, and that Archie would see to it that we were well paid for our trouble.

Archibald was a splendid specimen of what hadn't ought to come into the woods. The only proper place in the world for him would be on a parlor shelf.

He looked to me like a cross between a clothing-store advertisement and a lady; leastwise, his hands were as soft

and small and pink as any I ever gazed on, and the rest of him was made up to match.

The only man I could see about him was his age. He must 'a' been thirty.

He hadn't been in camp fifteen minutes before he began telling us what he was expecting.

"Youah see," says he, screwing half a pair of spectacles into his left eye and aiming it at me, "I am not up heah for long, and I want to make the best of my time, y' know. I've come pweeahed for —aw—big game, and I am weal anxious to take home a beah with me. I want youah to—aw—help me shoot one, y' know. Youah know how, I pwesume."

It's funny how they'll spring it on you sometimes, ain't it? If he'd told me he had come up here to train for a prize-fight I wouldn't 'a' been more surprised.

Not that he wasn't "pweahed" for big game—that is, so far as the hardware went. He had as likely a looking Winchester as ever came into the woods, but I couldn't quite reconcile myself to the idea of Archie backing the gun up. He didn't look like he could handle a pop-gun intelligently.

And the idea of him asking me if I knew how to hunt bear sort o' rubbed along the raw edges, too. I ain't killed more'n four or five hundred in my little lifetime.

"Well," says I, "I reckon I *might* know how, on a pinch. But it ain't bear time now; their fur won't be noways good—just thin and scraggly. Better wait until they fur up."

"Aw, but weally I can't, y' know," answered Archibald. "I must get back to my—aw—home in two weeks. My fawthah just sent me up heah to get a bweath of the woods and to—aw—wecupahwate, y' know, and said I mustn't stay longer. Cawn't we get one, anyway? I don't caah if they ah thin and scwaggly."

"Well, I dunno," says I. "Bear ain't so plentiful 'round here as they used to be, and there ain't no use spoiling a good pelt just for the sport of the thing. When they get good and prime they'll fetch twenty-five dollars in the fur-market, and that's how me and Charlie makes our living, you know."

"Aw, but weally, that will be of 'no

consequence," Archibald assured me. "Youah get me a beah and I will give youah double that pwice. I just want to take back a—aw—pelt, so as to show my fwiends that I am something of a huntah, y' know."

"If you really mean that it is worth fifty dollars to us to get you a bear, I reckon we can do business," says I.

"Aw, but I am puhfectly sinceah, I assuah youah," he says, with a pained expression. "My wawd is absolutely good, Mistah—aw—Beam."

"In that case, we'll take you up," says I. "We'll have a bear for you inside of three days, and a dozen more if you want to pay that price for 'em."

"Aw, but weally, one will be quite sufficient, y' know. I am not a—aw—gamehog."

"All right," says I, "we'll call it a bargain. After dinner we'll scout around and see what's doing. I'll get one located and then back away and you can do the shooting."

"Do youah anticahpate any dangah?" asked Archie, tremulous-like.

".Well," says I, willing to kid him a little, "the last city feller that was up here after bear took a pot-shot at one and only managed to wound him. The bear got away, but that night all his bear relations, numbering about forty-nine, descended down on the feller's camp, took him right out of his bed, carried him out of the woods, and tied him to a tree, and—"

"Tied him to a twee!" gasped Archie, looking horrified. "Pawdon me for in-tuhwupting, but the beahs didn't weally do that?"

"Certain," says I, solemn as a hoot-owl. "Bears are real sagacious 'round here. It's plumb amazing, some of the capers they cut up."

"I shouldn't caah to take any chawnces, y' know," says Archie, looking worried. "I had no ideah they banded together that way! Weally, it is most extwadinaway. Is theah any dangah of theah coming awound the camp and attacking us unawaahs?"

He looked around apprehensively, like he expected to see any number of 'em creeping up on him, and moved closer to Charlie.

"Once in a while they do," says Char-

lie, willing to continue the kidding. "Once when I was up in the Pickerel Lake country a lot of them came down to the camp one day, and—"

I left him entertaining our guest, and went into the shack to get dinner.

Charlie must 'a' stretched his imagination something powerful, judging by the expression on Archie's face when I called them in to eat. He looked like he'd just as soon be anywhere else than in the Big Woods, and he sat so close to Charlie that he had to eat with one hand.

While we were eating, a chipmunk popped in through the door; Archie caught a glimpse of it out the corner of his eye, and I thought he was going to jump clean over the table, he was that nervous.

Charlie sure had him keyed up to a high tension by his stories of bear antics.

After we'd finished dinner Archibald rigged himself out in his hunting-costume, which same was sure amazing, and we sallied forth to slay a bear.

I headed for the blueberry swamp. While passing through there a few days before, I had noticed fresh bear signs, and judged that we'd get track of our game there as quick as any place.

As I anticipated, there was plenty of fresh signs in the swamp, and it was plain to see that several of the critters were in the habit of coming there regularly to eat berries, and I figured that they must have a den or two in the near vicinity. We scouted around until we found a track leading out of the swamp on a deer-trail, and followed it.

The tracks kept to the trail for some distance into the woods, and then left it and struck off cross-country, and we soon lost them in the underbrush. However, we kept plugging along through the woods, keeping an eye out on all sides for anything that looked like a den.

Archibald trotted right alongside, never getting more'n a foot away from me, and jumping every time a twig snapped or a leaf rustled. He kept his mouth shut pretty good for a spell, but after we left the trail and had been plugging around in the hemlocks for a couple of hours he began to get nervous.

"Pawdon me," says he finally, "but is theah any dangah of ouah getting lost?"

"I reckon not. I've lived in these woods 'most twenty years, and ought to be able to find my way around."

"Didn't youah ever get lost?"

"Well, just once," I admitted. "But that was a long time ago, when I was young and didn't know much."

"Was youah lost for long?"

"Well, it was this way: I was up in the Kratt's Lake country one fall, and was making for the McDonnell lumber-camp. The boys told me that if I'd follow the wagon-trail for about so far, and then strike off north and keep going until I struck another wagon-trail, and follow that west, it'd get me there quicker. I followed their directions, and found the second wagon-trail, just as they said I would.

"I hadn't followed it more'n three mile, however, when it began to peter out, until by'n by it wasn't nothing but a horse-trail.

"I didn't have no choice but to go ahead, seeing that I was in a strange country, so I plugged right along down that horse-trail until suddenly it dwindled down to nothing but a measly little deer-trail."

"And then youah was lost!" gasped Archie.

"Nope. I didn't give up even then, but kept on down that deer-trail, never getting discouraged, until blessed if that didn't peter out into a bear-track! And a little farther on the bear-track ran up a tree, and I was lost for certain."

"Wun up a twee!" gasped Archie. "Do beahs do that?"

"Certain. See that big stump yonder with the scratches all over it? They were made by bears."

I pointed to a big basswood ahead of us, that had been broken off about fifteen feet from the ground and was covered with what I thought were porcupine or bobcat scratches.

Archie wanted to go right back the minute he saw it, but I assured him that there were no bears around just then, and we went on to the stump. When I reached it I saw that I'd guessed wrong about the scratches.

The stump was about fifteen feet high and fully seven in diameter: it was stripped of bark and covered with long, deep scratches that couldn't 'a' been made

by any other animal around there except a bear.

Naturally I got interested right off.

Alongside of it grew a little poplar sapling about six inches thick, and I decided to climb that and take a look down inside the stump.

I had a notion that I'd find something interesting there.

I handed my gun to Archie, and shipped up the sapling until I was a little above the stump, and, getting foothold on a small branch, I hung on to another with one hand and leaned over to take an inventory.

It was pretty black inside, but down at the bottom I thought I could distinguish something blacker. Then I made out four little sparks shining up at me.

"That's either bear or bobcats," says I to myself.

"What do youah see?" asked Archie anxiously from below. "Is theah a beah in theah?"

"I dunno. Climb up here and see what you think about it," I answered, and blessed if he didn't take me up and come shinning up the sapling.

There wasn't more'n enough room for one man there, and as the limb I had my foot on was the only one handy, he put his foot on it, too. Then he hung on to me and leaned over to look down into the stump.

"I cawn't see anything," he said.

"We'll just drop down a match, which will light things up, and then I reckon you will," I answered, reaching in my pocket for the match.

But the poplar saved us the trouble, for just then the branch I was hanging on to broke off sudden, and we both took a header to the bottom of that stump without even the privilege of a stop-over.

I wasn't more'n half a second discovering that the contents consisted of me and Archie and two cub bears. The latter resented our intrusion with considerable vigor and a vocal accompaniment that made me wish I had a bottle of paregoric along to hush 'em up with.

They seemed to feel that it was their bounden duty to claw and chew the hides off us, and would 'a' succeeded fine if I hadn't had sense enough to grab 'em by the naps of their necks and hold 'em where they couldn't do any damage.

Then I bumped their heads together and boxed their ears until I had them in a state of submission, then set 'em down on the other side of the hollow and decided that we would go right straight home.

I had a vague but impelling feeling that the old lady of the house might happen back at any minute, and that I'd just as soon be somewhere else when she arrived. She wasn't expecting company, and might raise a few objections.

Archibald was what you might call "scared stiff." He was backed up against the inside of that stump as straight as a fish-pole, and just about as big, and hadn't said a word, so far.

"Well," says I, "what do you think about this?"

"I want to go home," he whimpered.

So did I, but when I sized up the situation I saw that it was a case for a fire department or a blasting outfit. The wall of that stump was all right for anything with claws to travel on, but it didn't furnish much foundation for plain human beings to navigate.

All the soft deadwood that you usually find inside of stumps had been scraped off, and the wall was hard and corrugated with deep scratches, where the critter's claws had dug in. I tried to get toe-and-finger hold in these, and did succeed in climbing up fully six inches before I slipped back again, which promptly started the cubs snapping, and I had to rebox them into quietness.

I then tried boosting Archie up, but he was too short by a foot to reach the top, and whenever I tried to toss him high enough to catch the edge, he'd drop on the cubs and start 'em up again.

The situation was sure desperate. That old she-bear was due to arrive any minute, and what she'd do to me and Archie when she discovered that we'd invaded her little domicile fairly made my hair stand on tiptoe.

As a general rule, I ain't afraid of the bears they raise in the Upper Peninsula, but when it comes to mixing with one under these circumstances, it is a different matter.

I sat down and drew my feet up, so's to be as far away from the children as possible, and tried to think it over. If I'd only had a ladder or a rope I'd 'a' had

some tangible assets to do business on, but them requisites weren't forthcoming.

It then occurred to me that I might cut our coats into strips and make a rope, but how to fasten it to the top of the stump was a problem I couldn't solve for the time. Then it suddenly struck me that I might tie one of the cubs to one end and throw him over, taking a chance on the rope catching on the jagged edge of the stump and holding strong enough to allow us to climb out.

I explained this to Archibald, told him to get out of his coat, and got out my hunting-knife. But we were saved the trouble and unnecessary waste, for just then there came a sound from the outside that told me it was probably too late to make a rope and that there would be doings in that stump directly.

I wasn't amiss in my conjecture, for there came a scratching and grunting on the outside of the stump, and a minute later the head of old ma-bear appeared in the opening above.

The cubs promptly let off a squeal of joy, to which the old lady responded with a series of good-natured grunts, showing that she wasn't yet aware of the fact that she had callers.

Why on earth she didn't scent us the minute she got her head over the top is more than I'll ever know, unless it was because she was deaf and had lost her sense of smell. As it was, she didn't seem to notice us at all, and I cuddled down on top of Archie, who'd sunk back when he heard her coming, with my hand over his mouth and fully determined not to let our presence become known any sooner than was absolutely necessary.

I was kind o' hoping that she'd remember something she'd forgotten and go away again, giving us one more chance for our lives. But no such thing; the old lady calmly proceeded to h'ist her helm around and prepare to descend, backwards, as is the custom of all members of the bear tribe.

And right there's where your Uncle

Dudley did some tall thinking. I had to figure out and decide on a plan of action in just about nine forty-thirds of a second by the watch. It had me some pushed hard for time, but I fetched her.

As the old lady began to come down, I commenced to come up, with my hunting-knife in one hand. When her hind quarters came within reach I wrapped the fingers of my right hand gently but firmly around her four inches of tail, gave her a jab in the hind leg with my knife, and let off a mighty yell.

The result exceeded my fondest hopes. With a scared howl that she-bear started up, and I went with her, gaily swinging from her tail with one hand, jabbing with the other, and whooping to beat a steam calliope.

I don't know what the old lady thought had hold of her, but I do know that she didn't wait to find out: as soon as she'd got her hind feet braced on the top of the stump she gave a mighty leap into space without the slightest reference to where she was going to land, and left me hanging on the edge.

She hit the ground running, and never stopped to say good-by or go to thunder, but just lit out for some other place and safety like a scared sky-rocket.

I jerked off my coat and let it down to Archie and pulled him out. We didn't linger to inquire of the children what they thought of their ma deserting them that way, but slid down the poplar and lit out for home a good deal faster than was probably necessary.

I didn't know how soon the old lady would recover her senses and nerve and come back to protect her cubs, and I wasn't going to stay and find out. We arrived at the shack just about three seconds ahead of the Nancy Hanks record.

And that settled Archibald's bear-hunting aspirations. I sure did want to earn that fifty dollars, and we both coaxed him for all we were worth. But it was no go, and he lit out for Winona and home the first thing after breakfast.

FLATTERY.

'Tis an old maxim in the schools,
That flattery's the food of fools;
Yet now and then you men of wit
Will condescend to take a bit.

Dean Swift.

Through No Fault of His Own.

By CASPER CARSON.

Author of "The Trump Card," "When Reuben Came to Town," "Playing Against the Colors," etc.

The tale of a conspiracy that revolved about a treasure from Italy and became tangled up in a baggage-check at Buffalo.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOLLY OF A MAN IN LOVE.

WHEN she first saw me I was lunging away with a sword. One, two, up and down, side slash and tierce.

Probably she imagined she had run into an escaped lunatic of some sort; for, utterly oblivious to my surroundings, I was flourishing my blade around in the narrow entryway with all the swash-buckling abandon of a D'Artagnan.

Meadows, the stage doorkeeper at the Alcazar had been with Kitchener to Khartum, you must understand; and in relating some of his experiences to me had been illustrating his points with an old cavalry saber which had been left with him by one of the actors for safe-keeping.

So, when he was called away for a moment, and requested me to tend door in his place, I picked up the weapon and essayed some of the thrusts for myself, pretending, as I skipped about, hacking ferociously away at the air, that Albert Pike, my dearest foe, was at the other end of my point.

Suddenly, however, my pastime was interrupted by a sharp exclamation of surprise: and, turning, I encountered the most bewitching eyes I have ever beheld.

That was all I saw for the moment—those glorious brown eyes changing from wide amazement to a sparkle of amused comprehension—the eyes and a cloudy nimbus of pale gold hair; then, when the haze which benumbed my senses slightly cleared away, I realized that the rest of her was in keeping.

Nose with just the suspicion of a tip-tilt to it, two lurking dimples on either side of a fun-loving mouth, a figure exquisitely gowned and trim as wax from the jaunty toque which rested on her

curls to the soles of her little patent-leather shoes. The typical New York girl at her best, as one may see her on the avenue or driving in the park.

I perceived now, too, as my vision resumed its normal functions, that she was accompanied by a portly, silk-hatted old fellow with a rosy face and gray mutton-chop side-whiskers. High finance and the Union Club stood out all over him as plainly as though it had been lettered on a sign and hung around his neck.

"Hum! Ha!" he ejaculated, bending a disapproving glance upon the sword which with shame-faced embarrassment I was vainly striving to conceal behind my back. "I wonder," he went on, as he fumbled in his pocket and produced two cards, "if you could be trusted to take these to Mr. Richard Hamilton and request from him for my daughter and myself the pleasure of a brief—a very brief—interview?"

I hesitated. Hamilton was our star, and, like most actors who have attained that eminence in the profession, was a good deal of a Tartar, his especial aversion being the reception of visitors in his dressing-room.

In addition, I had heard him instruct Meadows that he was not to be disturbed that evening upon any pretext. It was the last night of our New York engagement, and he had to pack up for the fitting to Chicago on the morrow. He mentioned, too, that he was suffering from a raging headache.

I started to explain something of this to the old gentleman; but halted, flushing, before a satiric twinkle I saw dancing in the girl's brown eyes.

It said to me plainly, as in so many words, that the prowess I had been showing toward my imaginary adversary matched ill with my present unwillingness to face a mere sulky matinée idol.

Like a flash I straightened up, almost grabbed the cards from the old man's hand, and without another word marched away to beard the lion in his den.

And it required some valor, too; I can tell you that. Meadows would never have dared risk it, and I am free to confess that the courage was rather oozing from my own shoes when a deeply growled "Come in!" answered my timid knock at the dressing-room door.

I was only a beginner in the profession, you must understand, and a discharge for annoying the star—which Hamilton was quite capable of demanding from the management—might mean a serious black eye to my prospects.

Therefore, it is not perhaps strange that I advanced a bit diffidently into the room and poked the cards out to him at arm's length, with no attempt at explanation.

Yet it was my very trepidation which saved me. He had glared up angrily at my entrance, and a savage rebuke was plainly on the tip of his tongue; but when he observed my shaking knees and apprehensive eye, his scowl relaxed and he burst into a roar of laughter.

"By Jove!" he chuckled, "if you could hit that expression out in front, you'd make a fortune. You are the most perfect picture of a coward I ever saw. I suppose you've had your ears filled with stories making me out a regular ogre, eh?"

I admitted, still a trifle shakily, that he had not been represented to me exactly as an angel of patience and good temper.

"How, then?" he demanded curiously, "did you ever screw your nerve up to the point of disobeying my orders? You heard me tell Meadows that I was not to be bothered to-night. I know, for you were chatting to him when I stopped and gave him his instructions."

"Yes, sir," I confessed; "but—"

Then I halted, blushing and confused.

"But what?" he probed, and although I tried to wriggle out of it with several stammering excuses, he kept at me until he finally forced me into a corner.

"Well, if you must know the truth," I muttered at last, "I came because I wasn't going to let that girl think I was afraid."

"Ah," he cried quizzically, "the old story, eh? *Cherchez la femme.*"

He turned over the cards in his hand and glanced at them with a new interest.

"Miss Grace Tracy," he read. "She must certainly be a paragon to have outweighed those fears of yours," with the same bantering smile. "I guess I will have to break my rule to-night and see her, if only to find out what a young lady of such hypnotic charm looks like."

He considered a moment longer, stroking his chin with his hand; and he sat there looking at the other card.

"Oh," he said with a start, "she's the daughter of Everett Tracy, the big banker, isn't she? I suppose they've called to see me about some art matter. The old man is as enthusiastic over antiques as I am, I understand, and he probably wants to consult me. Yes," he decided sharply, "you may show them up. I have fifteen minutes yet before I go on in the next act."

Fearful that he might recall his consent, I scurried off before the words were fairly out of his mouth, and a few seconds later ushered Miss Tracy and her father into his presence.

I must admit that I lingered a bit in the corridor after I withdrew; for I had left the door of the dressing-room ajar, and through the crevice I could see her where she sat inside and watch the changes of expression upon her lovely face.

The banker, as well as I could make out, was expecting to receive shortly from Italy a famous picture, which he was very anxious the actor should see, in order that he might pass his judgment upon it and attest its genuineness.

Yet there seemed to be some mystery about the thing; for the old fellow was most guarded in all his references to the painting, refusing, although Hamilton asked him the pointblank questions, to tell who painted it, or its name, or even to give a general description of it.

"You must take my word for it, Mr. Hamilton," he insisted, "that if genuine, the work is on no account one you would be willing to miss seeing. But there are reasons which would make it highly imprudent for me to give out any information concerning it, until it is safely hung on the walls of my gallery."

I had to steal away at this point, for I heard some one coming along the passage, and I did not want to be caught enacting the rôle of an eavesdropper.

I was not content, however, to let Miss Tracy depart from the theater without having another glimpse of her, and, accordingly, I returned to my post of vantage at the stage door, and once more engaged Meadows in conversation.

While he rambled on through his war-stories I was busily thinking.

Grace Tracy! Grace Tracy! Where had I heard or read that name recently in such a way that it had made a strong impression upon me?

For several minutes I cudgeled my wits in vain, unable to hit upon the connection; then it suddenly burst upon me.

Why, it was only the Sunday previous that I had read with a spasm of bitter feeling the announcement of the betrothal of Everett Tracy's daughter to Albert Pike.

Not knowing her except by report as the daughter of a millionaire, the news had aroused in me merely a sense of resentment that Pike, the scoundrel, should be able so well to feather his nest; but now that I had seen and spcken to the real woman, a very different sentiment possessed me.

Cynics and philosophers may deny as much as they please that there is such a thing as love at first sight. I know better; for if ever a chap was bowled over at one stroke by the little god with the bow and arrows, I was undoubtedly that chap.

The realization came to me with the knowledge that it was she whom Pike had in some way managed to beguile into an engagement; but I was aware that, although unconfessed by name, my passion must have sprung into life the moment that I set eyes on her there in the entryway.

As I made this discovery, her light laugh floating down the corridor set all my nerves to tingling once more; and I offended old Meadows irreparably by turning away at one of his most thrilling climaxes to gaze eagerly in the direction from which she was approaching.

On they came—Hamilton, to Meadows's undisguised amazement—escort-ing his visitors as far as the doorway;

and I drew back a little to allow the three to pass.

But as she came up she held out her hand to me with unaffected grace, and said:

"I must both apologize and thank you, Mr. Sivers. When my father asked you to take our cards to Mr. Hamilton, he nor I had any idea that we were addressing a member of the company.

"However," she added, her dimples showing as she smiled. "we certainly have no cause to regret our mistake, since Mr. Hamilton tells us that had any one but you announced us, we should undoubtedly have failed to see him."

I glanced up sharply, thinking she was making game of me; but the absolute candor of her face and a friendly wink tipped me over her head by Hamilton reassured me that the actor had not given away the real secret of his complaisance.

The old gentleman also remarked patronizingly: "Yes, it must be very gratifying to a young man like you to feel that you enjoy the confidence of your chief. No doubt he is annoyed constantly by requests for a personal interview, and it is a high compliment to you that he should have trusted to your sense of discrimination in this case. I, too, have to thank you."

I was so flustered by all this, and so afraid that Hamilton would laugh or begin to "josh," that I hardly knew whether I was standing on my head or my heels; but, happily, the ordeal didn't last long.

The call scounded for both the star and myself to "go on," so we hurriedly shook hands all around once more and bade Miss Tracy and her father good night.

Yet, at the risk of losing my proper "entrance," I loitered behind to get a last sight of her graceful form, as she passed out of the dingy stage doorway; and how I ever got through my lines that night has always been a conundrum to me.

For my mind was in a maze of conflicting emotions.

Love, palpitant and assertive! Wonder that she could have looked with favor on that selfish and cold-blooded schemer, Albert Pike. Rage against him. Finally, a resolute and settled determination that he should never have

her, but that I would win and wear her for myself.

All very well to determine; but how to accomplish this was, I had to admit, a somewhat difficult question.

Albert Pike was a man of the world, handsome, plausible, and with an *entrée* into the society in which she moved. She must trust and believe in him, or she would never have engaged herself to him.

Would she be likely then to credit me if I denounced him to her as a rascal, especially as I had no evidence to back me up save my own unsupported word?

Or, even though she should throw Pike over for any possible reason, what show could I have—I, with neither money nor position, a mere boy on beginner's wages, one grade above a "supe"?

Yet, such is the folly of a man in love, I would not have been afraid to bet the last cent I had on earth that I would win!

CHAPTER II.

FORTUNE'S FAVORITE.

My enmity to Albert Pike dated back to a period three years before, when I first came of age, and learned that the comfortable estate left by my father had been practically wiped out of existence.

It required very little investigation for me to discover that the money had been lost in one of those fake South American coffee plantation schemes into which my mother had been coaxed by Pike's glittering representations.

It was so bald and open a fraud, however, that even her unwary innocence balked at it, and she would never have been persuaded to invest, had he not personally guaranteed to stand good for every dollar she might lose.

He was under obligations to my father for assistance rendered him when he was first starting out for himself, and he protested so loudly of his gratitude that she relied upon his mere spoken word, and did not require from him any written agreement or contract.

Accordingly, when the inevitable crash came, she remained perfectly serene, and kept assuring me that we need not worry

our heads over the affair. Mr. Pike would see to it that we did not suffer.

I, however, was less easy in my mind, and took an early opportunity to interview Pike in regard to the matter.

At first he was suave as oil, and kept putting off my requests for a statement of how we stood, with one plausible excuse after another; but when I waxed persistent, he finally turned on me roughly one day, and told me we had not a single cent coming to us.

"The scheme turned out disastrously, and the failure is complete," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I do not believe the company will pay out as much as one mill on the dollar."

"But," I cried, "that does not apply to our money, Mr. Pike. You must remember that you guaranteed we should come out whole, no matter whether the enterprise won or lost."

He wheeled around in his chair, and scowled at me from under his brows.

"I don't recall signing any such agreement," he said curtly. "Has your mother any memorandum of the sort properly acknowledged and attested?"

"Why, no," I admitted. "It was entirely a verbal arrangement. You surely cannot have forgotten. She says you promised, not once, but many times, that she should be fully protected."

"In the presence of witnesses?" he demanded coolly.

I was by this time convinced that he purposed to repudiate his agreement; but I still struggled to keep my temper.

"No," I again confessed. "Owing to the relations which existed between you and father, she asked for nothing more than your simple word of honor."

He did not answer immediately, but rose from his chair and paced two or three times up and down the room. At length he paused in front of me.

"I'll tell you, Fred," he said in a more conciliatory tone, "I never regretted anything so much in my life as that your mother came in on this deal, and if I were able, nothing would please me more than to make good her losses; but, to tell the truth, I am pretty well swamped by the failure myself. I lost a cool two hundred thousand dollars in money, to say nothing of all the time and energy I wasted on the project."

I knew all about that two hundred thousand dollars. He had lost it, all right, but he was wrong when he said it was money. It was a lot of worthless concessions which he had turned in to the company at their face value.

In fact, if I was not badly off in my calculations, he had made one hundred thousand dollars in real cash out of the failure.

"No," he went on, shaking his head sorrowfully, "much as I would like to, I feel that I cannot afford to do anything for you. We are all in the same boat, and your bad luck is no worse than mine or any of the others."

"But we were guaranteed against loss," I persisted. "How are you going to get away from that, Mr. Pike?"

A frown of irritation crossed his face.

"Guaranteed nothing," he snapped out. "Your mother is simply mistaken. I never made such an agreement with her."

"You are a liar," I retorted hotly; and from that, we went at it hammer and tongs.

I read his pedigree from a to izzard, and scoffed at his pretensions that he was in any way financially injured by the failure.

"Why, I happen to know that you ordered a new ten-thousand-dollar automobile only yesterday," I jeered. "That looks like you were hard up, doesn't it? And it's to be paid for out of money that you've stolen—stolen from us and your other dupes, you thief. You robber of widows and orphans!"

White-hot with passion by this time, he grabbed me by the arm and ordered me out of his office. For two cents, I would have mixed it up with him then and there; but he had, of course, the right of the situation on his side, and after a minute's reflection I decided it was better to accede.

As I went down-stairs he yelled after me that if I ever came to his office again, or attempted to annoy him in any way, he would have me arrested.

I went home to mother, and, telling her that Pike was nothing more than a low-down swindler and cheat, begged her to sue him for the amount we had lost; but she wouldn't hear to it. Like lots of other women, she was scared to

death of going on the witness-stand; and she said that, since it was only her word we had to go on, if the jury should chance to bring in a verdict against us, she would feel as though she had been branded untruthful, and would never dare hold up her head again.

Nor could I get her to see the matter in any other light; so at last, finding that I was only worrying her to no purpose, I ceased my efforts, and began to look around for the next best thing to do.

We had enough left between us, I learned, to support one person in reasonable comfort, but not sufficient for two. It was, therefore, very plainly up to me to turn everything over to mother, and for my own three meals a day get out and hustle.

Having reached this conclusion, I lost very little time in putting it into execution. I "pulled my freight" as speedily as possible, and a week later was in New York, questing about for the elusive job, as thousands of other country boys do every year—some to find it and succeed, while others fail and drift back, broken-spirited and with their ambitions crushed, to the places whence they came.

I somehow did not fit into either class, however. I certainly did not give up the struggle and go back; yet, neither did I achieve any particular success.

I lived after a fashion—sometimes pretty poorly, it is true—and I went through all sorts of experiences which are funny looked upon in retrospect, but which, at the time they occurred, did not strike me as especially ludicrous or diverting. I had jobs of one kind and another, and I worked at them because I had to or starve.

But I never won a promotion, and I was always the first man to be let out when work got slack. The trouble with me was, I had not yet found my niche.

At last, after three years of this unsatisfactory existence, I secured, through the good offices of a friend, a minor position in the company supporting Richard Hamilton, the actor.

I had never thought of going on the stage, and had no particular aptitude for it that I knew of; but I had been out of work a long time, and it was a case of "any port in a storm," so I grasped eagerly at the offer.

And, strange to say, I "made good" in a measure. No very brilliant triumph, you understand, but a creditable showing, and promise, as the critics said, of better things in the future.

Yet, I cannot honestly say I was fond of the work at that time. I looked forward a good deal more ardently to the coming of my weekly pay envelope than I did to any bit of applause which might chance to fall my way.

My retention with the company simply meant to me an assurance of bed and board. I still had not found my niche.

All the time now, as during my previous vicissitudes, I brooded over the fact that I was compelled to work, solely because I had been swindled out of my patrimony by Albert Pike. Had my money not been lost through his chicanery I would be free from the necessity to toil, able to live my life in travel, as I wanted to.

Often, I would lie awake for long hours on my bed at night, thinking what I would do if I only had my rights, or trying to plan out some scheme to make Pike disgorge.

But even while I pondered them, I knew that all such hopes were futile. There was no possible way to get at him; for my mother remained firm in her determination not to sue, and, anyway, the lapse of time rendered the chances of success in an action more or less dubious, even though she consented to bring it.

Yet, it made me grit my teeth in rage every time I heard of the man's prosperity; for he seemed to be flourishing like the proverbial green bay tree.

He had long since no doubt forgotten all about me; but I sedulously kept track of his movements, and knew pretty well at all times just how he stood.

And just at present, I was aware, he was floating on the top crest of the wave. He had organized another fake concern called the International Curio Company, with the avowed object of collecting works of art and antiques from all over the world, and disposing of them to wealthy collectors. Now, with the money gathered from his dupes, he was swelling around New York, and living like a millionaire.

Through the acquaintanceships formed

in his business, he had been able to break into society, and his name figured constantly in the lists of guests at fashionable functions in Newport and Lennox.

Finally, as I have already told, I read with resentful spirit that Pike had "copped out" one of the richest heiresses in New York as his bride.

"Everything comes his way," I cried with a bitter sense of the injustice. "He is worse than thousands of men who are behind the bars at this very minute, yet Fortune seems for some reason to have picked him out as her especial favorite, and to toss into his lap all."

I little dreamed, then, of the stern retribution which Fate was already preparing for him, or of the thrilling rôle which was to be allotted to me in the development of the drama.

CHAPTER III.

WHICH HAS A SENSATIONAL FINISH.

THE evening that I met Miss Grace Tracy was, as I have already stated, the last night of Hamilton's engagement in New York, and the company was booked to leave for Chicago the first thing in the morning.

I thought I had my instructions down pat; but, whether it was because I was new to the game, or whether Miss Tracy had so turned my head that my brains worked askew, I found when I arrived at the station that the train was already gone.

Then there was some lively hustling on my part, as you may well imagine. I raced about from one official to another, and consulted time-tables in the meanwhile, with the net result that I finally learned that by taking one road to Buffalo, and there transferring across the city to another line, I could reach Chicago just in time for the opening performance.

It was a hazardous chance even at that, for under the most favorable circumstances I had but nine minutes in which to make the connection, and should I be a few minutes late in reaching Buffalo, or should anything go wrong *en route*, there would be no possible hope of getting through on time.

Still, it was the only expedient left to me, and after wiring ahead my plans to

the manager of the company, I boarded the Buffalo train, and started out.

And for a wonder my scheme of operations moved along like clockwork. On time to the second, we rolled into the Buffalo station, and before the wheels had ceased to revolve I had leaped from the steps and was running along the platform.

Only once did I stop in my mad career, in order to engage a cab and send it hustling around to the side door of the depot; then on I raced to the baggage-room.

"Hey!" I called to a baggageman who was leisurely trundling a truck toward the door. "Get me this trunk off the New York train and rush it over here on the double-quick, will you? I have just nine minutes in which to get across the city."

As I spoke, I thrust into his hand my check and a dollar with it.

And, by the way, isn't it wonderful how a dose of coin of the realm, judiciously administered, will stir people up to action? As a tonic and invigorator, it has all the sarsaparilla and burdock compounds fairly left at the post.

A moment before that fellow had been the very picture of lazy inconsequence; but with the touch of my bill against his palm, he became a personification of life and energy.

Off he went with his truck at a 2:10 gait, dived into the pile of luggage being thrown off the train, and was back before even my impatience had a chance to complain.

One little spasm of doubt crossed my mind as he came up.

"Are you sure that is my trunk?" I questioned sharply.

I had bought the thing second-hand only a day or two before, and hence was not very well acquainted with its appearance. Still, I had an uneasy feeling that it did not look just the same as when I packed it.

He compared the two checks.

"Both of them 467,843," he said. "I guess there can't very well be any mistake."

That of course settled it, and I wasted no further time in debating the question, but with his assistance rushed it out of the station to the waiting cab.

Another tip to my driver for extra speed, and I was off across town, clattering over car-tracks, and cutting corners perilously on two wheels, with pedestrians scurrying out of our way like affrighted chickens as we came whirling on.

But we made it. That was the main thing.

We made it, although I must admit there was not a second to spare. I had just time to recheck my trunk, and with a final sprint along the platform, swing myself, dress suit-case in hand, upon the rear car before the train pulled out of the station.

Leaning out from the steps, I also had the satisfaction of seeing my trunk hurled aboard by a couple of brawny porters; and then, my troubles over, I passed on into the parlor-car to lounge luxuriously in a big plush chair, and relax from my recent exciting experience.

Much good all my efforts and exertions did me, though. I reached Chicago on time all right; but when I repaired to the theater to report, I learned to my chagrin that the headache of which Hamilton had complained in New York had been but the precursor of a very serious illness.

He was now in a hospital, I was informed, the Chicago engagement had been called off, and we were all to be sent back home. I need never have stirred off Broadway, as things had turned out, and all the trouble to which I had been put in reaching Chicago was so much wasted endeavor.

Worse than that, I was thrown out of work in the middle of the season, with the chances of securing another engagement very dubious, and only a meager two weeks' salary in my pocket to tide me over until I should again be able to join the ranks of the wage-earners.

Naturally, therefore, it was not with the gayest and most festive spirit in the world that I received the news.

There was no use in moping, however. I had simply got it in the neck once more, and the only thing I could do was to face the situation with the best grace possible.

And, truth to tell, when I came to think it over, I found that the cloud had a trace of silver lining after all. For

there was nothing now to keep me in Chicago. I must perforce return to New York; and back on little, old Manhattan Island, I stood a chance at least of occasionally seeing Grace Tracy, and, perhaps, of being able to put a spoke in the triumphant wheel of Albert Pike.

Returning to the station which I had left only an hour or so before, I found that I could catch a train East almost at once; so, simply purchasing a ticket, and once more checking my trunk, which had never left the baggage-room, I started on my return.

The journey that night and the next morning was an uneventful one. I had a through train this time without any necessity for hair-raising scrambles across a strange city, and, anyway, I cared very little what time I arrived. An hour, or five, what difference did it make to me?

So I passed the time gazing out at the scenery as it flitted by, and rather forlornly wondering what would be the best thing to do after reaching New York.

As we approached Albany, however, there arose a diversion. The train-boy came through the car, calling "New York afternoon papers!" and somewhat perfunctorily I bought a copy of the *Clarion*.

Leisurely I unfolded it, settled myself back in a corner of the seat, glanced at the sheet—then started up with a gasp of incredulous consternation.

For right at the top of the front page was an excellent half-tone portrait of myself, and below stood forth the screaming head-line:

ACTOR STEALS MASTERPIECE.

FRED SIVERS, OF THE RICHARD HAMILTON COMPANY, CLEVERLY NABS PAINTING VALUED AT \$100,000.

THESPIAN THIEF IS STILL AT LARGE WITH HIS BOOTY, BUT WARRANT IS OUT FOR HIS ARREST, AND POLICE ARE CONFIDENT HE WILL SOON BE APPREHENDED.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FACTS AGAINST ME.

A FELLOW thinks quick in such emergencies. I was, of course, innocent of any crime, and the whole thing was a mis-

take; but just the same I was quite willing to have the mistake cleared up without being arrested, and, possibly, having to spend a night or two in a cell.

After I got to New York and learned exactly what the allegations against me were, and could arrange for bail, I would probably give myself up if my connection with the affair had not been disproven before that time. But, if I could help it, I certainly did not propose to be yanked from the train at some strange place and locked up as a desperate criminal.

And that was just what was going to happen to me unless I took steps to prevent it; for the newspaper likeness was so good I could not hope to escape identification. Even though the police should fail to inspect this train, some passenger or trainman would be sure to spot me as the so-called fugitive, and notify the authorities ahead to be on the lookout.

As this thought came to me I realized with a thrill that we were running into Albany. If I was to act at all, it must be at once, for it was almost a moral certainty that the police at the capital would be on the watch for me.

And out of the very desperation of my predicament, a plan was born in my mind which seemed to promise a possibility of success.

Fortunately for me, when I was leaving for Chicago I had been afraid that my trunk might not get through in time for the opening performance, and hence just before starting had transferred the chief articles of my stage make-up to my suit-case.

Included among these was a heavy mustache and side-whiskers which completely transformed my appearance, and furnished as effective a disguise as I could possibly procure.

I cast a cautious glance around the car. It was a sleeper, and the only other passengers in it were a couple of women and a portly old fellow who was snoring away in the corner of his seat with his head propped back against a pillow.

None of them had papers, so it was evident that I was safe from detection for the present at least. Nevertheless, I pulled down by hat over my eyes, and screened my face as much as possible while I grabbed up the suit-case and

made my way hurriedly to the dressing-room in the rear.

Luckily, it was unoccupied; so, as the porter was busy brushing up toward the front of the car, I felt secure from interruption, and was thus able to make the changes in my appearance even more elaborate than I had at first contemplated.

I not only adorned myself with the false mustache and whiskers, but with a few deft touches from a stick of grease-paint added some artistic lines and wrinkles to my countenance. Then I changed my brown coat for a blue, stuffing the former in about my waist so as to give a semblance of stoutness to my figure, altered my style of collar and necktie, and donned a hat in place of my soft traveling cap.

When I had finished and surveyed my reflection in the glass, I was satisfied that not even my own mother would have been able to recognize me in my new get-up.

Yet, there was no time for me to spend in admiring my handiwork. The train was even then gliding into the Albany station, and I knew that although my disguise might pass in a crowd, or where no suspicion was excited, it could not stand the test of a searching inspection.

It therefore behooved me to get a move on myself in putting the remainder of my plan into execution.

Passing quickly to the car just back of ours, I stood just inside the doorway until the train had stopped, and our porter had come out and taken his station at the foot of the steps.

Then I stepped briskly out and past him, while he, supposing of course that I had come from the other car, never even so much as glanced at me.

A second later my heart came up in my mouth, though, for directly behind the porter was a big, burly policeman whom I had not hitherto seen, and as I started off full tilt up the platform, I almost ran squarely into him.

Otherwise the start I gave at the sight of him, and my little exclamation of dismay, would surely have betrayed me; but he evidently attributed both to the narrowness with which we had averted a collision, for beyond one quick glance at me, he paid no further attention, but turned

eagerly back to scan the faces of the other passengers alighting from the train.

Nor did I linger, as may well be imagined. That platform, I speedily saw, was no healthy place for me to remain, for it was fairly swarming with bluecoats; and, although I strove to restrain myself to only a normal semblance of haste, I breathed much freer when I had passed through the gates and was out in the main body of the station.

I had reasoned out that even should the "cops" come to realize that I had sneaked off the train under their very noses, their last idea would be that I should remain anywhere in the vicinity. They would naturally argue that my first step would be to make myself scarce as soon as possible, and hence they would look for me everywhere rather than in the station itself.

With this idea in mind, accordingly, I strolled boldly into the main waiting-room, and having provided myself with a sheaf of New York papers, sought out a secluded corner where I might absorb at my leisure the details of the baseless charge which had been brought against me. For up to this time, it must be remembered, I knew no more than I had been able to gather from my hasty survey of the head-lines in the *Clarion*.

Consequently, my feelings may be better imagined than described when I learned upon reading the fuller report that my accuser was none other than my ancient enemy, Albert Pike.

He had brought, it seems, a very valuable painting to this country from Italy—a genuine Raphael he claimed, although he declined to tell the newspaper-men where he had got hold of it, or how he had managed to smuggle it out of the country in contravention to the rigorous Italian laws forbidding the removal from the land of any great masterpieces of art.

All he would say was that his International Curio Company had received a commission from a certain millionaire to secure this painting, if possible, and that they had done so.

"How we accomplished it," said Pike pointedly, "is our business. We might want to turn the trick again some time in the future, and it doesn't do to give away trade secrets."

This much he did admit, though, that

the canvas had been brought to New York in a trunk, and had duly passed through the custom-house, the appraiser there being ignorant of its true character, and having placed a ridiculously small value on it as a work of art.

With the thing safely in this country, Pike had naturally supposed that all his troubles were over; but he speedily found out his mistake.

Three times in as many days, desperate efforts were made to break into the loft where he had the painting temporarily stored, and he became conscious, too, that he himself was being followed wherever he went.

There was evidently a determination on the part of some one to get hold of that picture; and Pike, feeling himself constantly dogged, fearful that the prize he had risked so much to obtain might be wrested from him, decided to send it away to Buffalo, where his company maintained their principal storage vaults.

And in order to divert suspicion, for he had realized from the character of the attempts made to steal the picture that the person desirous of it would stop at nothing, he shipped the trunk containing it not by express, but in the regular way as a piece of ordinary baggage.

The millionaire who had ordered the canvas was, it appears, not yet ready to receive it, owing to the fact that he was making some architectural changes in his gallery; and it was consequently up to Pike to safeguard and protect the picture until such time as the other was prepared to take it over.

Fancy Pike's consternation, therefore, when, on arriving in Buffalo, and presenting his check for the trunk, he was informed that no such piece of baggage awaited him.

Wildly he appealed to the railway officials; and so urgent did he make his demands and protests, that double speed was imparted to the machinery of investigation.

It cost Pike a pretty penny in the way of telegraph tolls and extras; but by the next morning he was able to learn that his trunk had reached Buffalo safely—coming on a train two hours earlier than that which he himself took—but had been claimed immediately on its arrival and carted away by some other person.

"It has all been a mistake," the officials assured him. "The check on your trunk was No. 467,843, while the person who got it in such a hurry presented check No. 467,848. The trunk corresponding to that number is still in the baggage-room, and the passenger who made the mistake will no doubt be as much upset over the matter when he finds out about it as you are now. We shall probably be hearing from him before any very great length of time."

"Just to make sure, though," suggested Pike anxiously, "can't we take a peep at the inside of that trunk, and find out who he is. We might be able in that way to hurry things up a bit."

The railroad people demurred that it was against the rules; but they had learned by this time that the art-dealer had a pretty strong pull with some of the powers higher up, so they did not make their protests any too strenuous, and in the end he gained his point.

Yet, even so, he had, for quite a time, his trouble for his pains. There was apparently nothing either in or about the trunk to indicate to whom it might belong.

Finally, however, in turning over the contents, Pike chanced to spy a name written upon the fob-pocket lining of a pair of trousers.

With a cry of triumph, he snatched the telltale garment up and held it to the light; then his expression changed, and a savage imprecation burst from his lips.

"Mistake nothing," he howled, almost beside himself with fury. "This is a deliberate plot, I tell you; and were it not for the name on these pants, which he either did not know about or had forgotten, we should never have learned who stole my picture."

"Why, the whole thing is as plain as B to a bull," he declared excitedly. "This fellow has been following me about, and trying in every way to get hold of that picture. Learning in some way, then, how I intended to ship it here, he procured a trunk like mine, dumped a few old clothes in it, and somehow, probably through the connivance of a baggage-master, secured a check which would pass for mine if presented in a rush. It was simple, but the

very simplicity of it made it all the easier to carry out."

"You know this man, then?" questioned the official to whom he was speaking. "This Fred Sivers?" reading my name off the cloth.

"Know him?" with an oath. "Well, I should rather say I do. He is a worthless young whelp who has always cherished a grievance against me, and has repeatedly sworn that he would get even in one way or another. This is the method he has chosen, and he is probably looking for his reward to the Italian government, who know by this time that the picture is gone, and will no doubt be willing to pay high for its return."

"It certainly looks like an open and shut case against him," assented the railroad man. "Yet, he cannot have got away very far by this time. You go up and swear out a warrant for him, Mr. Pike, and command us for any assistance we can render."

CHAPTER V.

PUTTING ON A BOLD FRONT.

"WELL, wouldn't that jar you?" was about all the comment I could make after I had completed the perusal of the newspapers, and I kept repeating the expressive phrase over and over to myself in stupid, parrot fashion.

But, really, wasn't it enough to numb a man's wits temporarily, suddenly to find himself the victim of such a curious chapter of accidents?

Who would believe in my innocence with such a damning array of facts against me? As the railroad man had said, it looked like an open and shut case; and I could not hope that any magistrate before whom I might be brought would take any different view of it.

I realized more than ever, therefore, that it behooved me to get speedily back to New York, where I had friends, and where I would be in a position to make some sort of adequate defense.

My trunk—or, rather, Pike's—containing the picture had, of course, gone on ahead on the train which I had so abruptly abandoned, and would be in

New York awaiting my arrival. My best plan, I consequently reasoned out, was to follow it at once, get it away from the baggage-room, and then give both myself and it up to the police, with an explanation of how it had happened to come into my possession.

An excellent scheme, if I could pull it off without being apprehended on the road; for of course, in that case, my story of what I *intended* to do would not carry much weight.

The officers would simply say that I was trying to get out of the country with the property I had stolen; and to a man up a tree, I was forced to confess that was very much the way it must look.

Every step of that one hundred and forty miles down from Albany was fraught with peril; for I could not trust too much to my disguise, and, as I had read, I had not only the police to fear, but the employees of the railroad as well.

In fact, from my feelings on that occasion, I can picture very vividly what must be the state of mind of a hare when he finds himself pursued by a half dozen hunters and a pack of dogs, with no cover anywhere in sight.

Oh, how I longed for wings, for an air-ship, for any mode of transportation which would serve to elude that phalanx of sleuths through which I must pass!

But it was no use wishing. There was but one path by which I could reach New York, and that was the railroad; for I did not dare leave the station, knowing that the police were in all probability ransacking the entire city outside for me.

Yet, every moment, too, that I remained in the waiting-room added to my danger. It may have been only imagination, but it seemed to me that already the employees about the place were beginning to cast curious glances in my direction.

I became possessed of a dread that my whiskers or mustache would slip out of place and demonstrate their falsity.

In short, I was very rapidly verging into a condition of mortal funk; and if any one had chanced inadvertently to touch me on the shoulder, I verily believe I should have screamed.

At length, however, I caught myself

together with a realization that the only hope I could possibly have was in a superb audacity.

"The chances against you are a hundred to one," I told myself; "but history is full of instances where boldness has won out against even greater odds. You can't do worse than fail, and you are sure to do that, if you keep on loitering here."

As if in response to my resolution, the caller-out appeared at that moment and announced a train to New York. I arose briskly, as though I had simply been awaiting the summons, and stepping over to the window, purchased a ticket.

Then I sauntered nonchalantly out through the gates, and without any appearance of undue haste boarded the parlor-car.

I may never be a great actor on the stage; but I do not believe that Richard Hamilton himself could have surpassed the representation I gave of absolute unconcern as I made my way to that train. And all the time my heart was thumping a tattoo against my ribs, and my tongue was cleaving to the roof of my mouth as though it had been pasted there with mucilage.

Once inside the parlor-car, however, I breathed more easily. If I had passed the gateman, and all those lynx-eyed police along the platform, undetected, the chances were now, of course, vastly increased that I would get through in safety.

But I was not permitted long to bask in this welcome sense of security; for hardly had I settled myself back in my chair and opened a magazine which I had bought at the news-stand, when the door at the end of the car was thrown sharply open, and I was staggered to behold Albert Pike advancing toward me.

For one awful moment I had no other idea than that he was coming to point me out to the police and order my arrest; then, with almost a gasp of relief, I comprehended that his advent was entirely fortuitous, and that he had, as yet, no knowledge of my proximity.

He fidgeted about the car a minute or two, while I, wheeling my chair sharply about toward the window, drew my hat

down over my face and feigned to be deeply absorbed in my magazine.

There was some difficulty about his seat, I learned, and he and the porter engaged in quite a little argument upon the matter. I was hoping earnestly, of course, that Pike would become disgruntled and leave the car. But it was not to be; after a vehement protest, he finally gave in and accepted the chair which the porter insisted belonged to him—a chair, to my further discomfort, directly adjoining my own.

I had taken the parlor-car, I should perhaps explain, on the theory that it was the very thing the police—knowing I was anxious to avoid observation—would regard as most unlikely for me to do; but now I roundly cursed the seeming sagacity which had led me into such a trap.

I could not leave the car, I could not move, I scarcely dared to stir, for fear of attracting Pike's attention, and cause him to recognize something about me which would give him a clue to my identity.

And the worst of it was that he sat with his chair turned directly toward mine, his eyes ready to bend their piercing glance upon me the moment I should give him the slightest provocation.

So we rode for perhaps a dozen miles, my limbs cramping with excruciating pain from being held so rigidly in one position, yet not daring to move a muscle; then a little dark man, who had entered the car a moment or two after Pike, leaned over and addressed him by name.

He whirled about at the interruption, and I gladly seized the opportunity to stretch my stiffened tendons; but a second later I had forgotten all about my cramps, or even that I had limbs to cramp, in the amazement which filled me over the conversation in progress between my two neighbors.

"I see," said the stranger, with a distinctly foreign accent, "you are certain, Mr. Pike, that your great Raphael has been stolen by a young man named Sivers?"

"Yes," growled the art dealer. "He has been after it for some time now, and he has finally got hold of it by a trick. But no one need think he can keep it. In

fact, I expect to hear of his arrest before to-morrow morning."

"Ah, that is very interesting," commented the other with a deprecating shrug of his shoulders; "but, pardon, I am very sure, Mr. Pike, that you have made a big mistake in charging this Sivers with the theft. I know for certain, at least, that it was not he who made the attempts to steal it while it was in New York."

"The blazes you do!" sneered Pike. "And how, pray, does it happen that you know so much?"

"Because," said the other suavely, "it was I who made those attempts myself."

"I am Count Testudini, the former owner of the picture," he went on rapidly, heedless of the profane outburst in which his companion was indulging, "and, as you will remember, wrote to you long before the canvas ever came to this country, telling you that I regretted its sale more than anything I had ever done in my life, and offering to buy it back from you at whatever price you might ask. You refused, however, and then there was of course nothing left for me but to attempt to steal it; for I tell you frankly that it is a matter of life and death with me to get that picture back. Unless I succeed in doing so, I shall be compelled to commit suicide."

"It is this way, you see, Mr. Pike," he explained, "when your agents first approached me, I needed money, I was dreadfully—what you call it?—hard up, and I had nothing left in the world save this one picture. So, I said to myself, what do I care about the Italian law? With this money I can go live in Paris and never come near Italy again; and I consented."

"But no sooner had I parted with it, and assisted your men in getting it across the frontier, than word came to me I had unexpectedly fallen heir to a large estate. I am rich now. I do not need the money paid me for the picture; but I cannot claim my wealth, for to do so, I must return to Italy, and I cannot go there without my Raphael."

"Moreover, the rumor has reached the government by this time of my having sold the picture; and unless I can deny the charge, and disprove it by pub-

licly showing the canvas, I shall be dishonored."

"What, then, was left for me to do?" he demanded. "You would not sell the picture back to me. I had to get it some way, and I cared not whether it was by fair means or foul."

"You admit, then," said Pike tensely, and I could imagine the dark scowl with which he was regarding the count, "that you were at the bottom of those attempts to steal the picture in New York? Are you also behind the present attempt which has proven temporarily successful? In other words, is Sivers merely your tool in the deal, and are you now approaching me in the hope of getting money out of me for the return of the canvas?"

"If so," he broke out, unable to restrain himself longer, and smashing one of his big fists down upon the other, "I can tell you very plainly that you have come to the wrong shop. Your confederate is known to be in Albany, I don't mind informing you, and, as I told you a bit ago, is morally certain to be rounded up and chucked behind the bars before to-morrow morning. And as for you, you sneaking little dago, I intend to keep my eye upon you, and to turn you over to the police the moment we arrive in New York."

Count Testudini appeared, however, to be very little disturbed by the other's blustering threats.

"You are one big fool, Pike," he said contemptuously. "Do you suppose for a minute that if I believed your picture were stolen, I would have confessed my attempts upon it to you. No; I would have sought out the thieves and tried to bargain with them."

"It is because I am confident that it has not been stolen, but has merely come into Sivers's possession through a series of mistakes, and in due course of time will be restored to you, that I have hunted you up in the effort to make terms."

"Why, it stands to reason," he pointed out, "that Sivers did not knowingly purloin that trunk: for to whom could he have disposed of the canvas? This newspaper talk about his being an agent of the Italian government is all rot, and as for a purchaser, I was the only one to whom he could come without branding

himself as a thief, and I'll take my oath that he knew nothing about me.

"No," he went on; "you can rest perfectly easy, Mr. Pike, on the score of getting your picture back. It is concerning what you will do with it after its recovery that I wish to speak to you.

"You will not sell it to me; no, I have tried that and failed. I have also about decided that it is no use to steal it. You will guard it so closely now that the effort to do so would be rendered doubly difficult, and in addition I have learned that the task of getting it out of the country would be harder than I believed was the case when I made my former attempts.

"There is a third method, though," he suggested insinuatingly, "which I hesitated about proposing to you until I found out what sort of a man you were. I have learned some things about you, however, Mr. Pike, which are not generally known, and I now am quite ready to submit my plan to your consideration."

There was something in the man's tone which evidently aroused Pike's interest. He waited a minute before he answered, then he leaned forward and inquired in a low voice: "What is your scheme?"

"A plan," rejoined the count, "whereby you can return the picture to me, and at the same time sell it to your millionaire purchaser. As you put it in your English proverb, you can both eat your cake and have it, too!"

CHAPTER VI.

A CRITICAL MOMENT.

"LISTEN," went on the count, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, and emphasizing his points by tapping on the other's knee with a beringed forefinger. "When I came to this country to recover my lost Raphael, I brought with me a copy of it, which was executed upon an order from my grandfather, and which is so perfectly done that it will almost defy detection at the hands of the experts.

"My idea was, of course, that I might catch you napping and be able somehow to substitute this copy upon you for the original. But you were too sharp for me," with a little appreciative laugh,

"and I had to give up the project. Since then the copy has been lying idly in my trunk, and I have given no further thought to it.

"To-day, however," he proceeded, "the idea came to me that perhaps it might be put to use after all, although in a different way from that which I originally intended.

"'Why,' I asked myself, to put it bluntly, 'cannot Pike sell this copy to his purchaser, who probably does not know the difference between a Raphael and a fifty-cent chromo, making him believe it is genuine, while the real picture would be returned to me at the price for which I sold it?'"

But Pike promptly shook his head.

"Can't be done," he said, not without a trace of regret in his tone. "The purchaser is old Everett Tracy, and he is so finicky that he'll have a whole jury of experts there to pass upon it before he'll ever be satisfied to let it go on his walls."

The count, however, did not seem at all cast down by this objection.

"But after it has been passed upon, and is on his walls," he interposed meaningly. "How about then?"

Pike gave a little start.

"I don't know that I exactly fellow you," he said uncertainly.

"Ah, let me explain, then," returned the count; "and you will pardon me, I trust, if I touch for a moment upon your private and personal affairs.

"In the first place, Mr. Pike, you are at this time upon the very verge of bankruptcy—"

"It's a lie!" broke in Pike sharply. "Whoever told you any such tommy-rot must be out of his head. I was never in better financial position in my life."

"Oh, no, it is not a lie," insisted Testudini. "You keep up what you call a good bluff; but you have been plunging heavily, and there are those who know that, unless you recoup your losses in some way, the crash is bound to come."

"I have, of course, made it my business to find out all I could about you," he explained; "and since I have a cousin who is one of the biggest Italian bankers down-town, this was not very difficult to discover.

"And if the crash should come," he hissed. "you know, Mr. Pike, what it

means to you. You have been speculating with the funds of your International Curio Company, and for once you have not been smooth enough to cover up your tracks. What will your defrauded stockholders say, do you think, when they learn that the money they entrusted to you has been gambled away down on Wall Street?"

I was pretending to be asleep all this time, leaning back in my chair; but at this point I could not resist the temptation to turn slightly on my side and steal a cautious glance in the direction of Pike.

All I could see, it is true, was the back of his neck, but that was enough. There was more abject terror and dismay expressed upon it than I have seen in many a man's face.

The fellow was nothing but a blustering coward, you understand, and, pushed into a corner by the wily little Italian, he weakened like a dog.

"Well," he ejaculated hoarsely, "why do you tell me this? What is it to you? You are not in the International Curio Company?"

"Why do I tell you?" repeated the count. "Because I wish to help you. Because I see a way whereby, if you listen to reason, you may yet be saved."

"You are simply drifting along now in the hope that the rich Miss Tracy will marry you, and you are raising money to keep you afloat on the strength of your engagement to her; but she keeps putting off the wedding-day, and the money-lenders, commencing to grow suspicious, have already refused some of your demands. Is not this so?" he challenged.

Pike gave a little gasp of consternation.

"How the dickens you have found it all out beats me," he muttered. "You must be the very old Beelzebub himself!"

"Ah," smiled the count, "we Italians have a way of finding out things, and we are clannish, you know. The task was not so hard as you might think."

He leaned forward suddenly and held the other with his glittering glance.

"Suppose," he remarked thoughtfully, "this cousin of mine to whom I have referred, and whose position is such as to give weight to his words, should

chance to drop a whisper of your real condition to old Everett Tracy?"

A visible shudder ran through Pike's frame.

"I guess that would about settle me," he said with a hollow laugh. "But, good Heavens, man," he broke off sharply, "why do you sit there and torture me? You spoke of having some plan in view which would be to my benefit. What is it? Let us get down to business."

The Italian smiled again in his soft, deferential fashion. "I merely wanted to let you see, Mr. Pike, how completely I have you in my power. Now, I am ready to state my terms to you; and under the circumstances, I think you must agree that I am treating you more than generously.

"You have your schemes, of course, and I do not want to interfere with them; but I must have my picture.

"You will probably say, however: 'How can I give you back your picture? I have already agreed to deliver it to Mr. Tracy, and I cannot afford to offend the man whom I am using every endeavor to make my father-in-law.' Now, you will also tell me, can you dare to risk palming off my copy upon him, since he will insist upon knowing that he has bought the genuine before he accepts the canvas.

"To these objections I reply that the whole thing is very simple. Sell the picture to Mr. Tracy, and sell him the genuine. Let him have all the experts view it that he requires; then, when he is fully satisfied, and the Raphael is hung in his gallery, substitute the copy for it and turn over the real one to me."

"Oh," said Pike, comprehending at last the other's plan.

He made no further answer at once, but, sinking his head down between his shoulders, sat in deep thought.

"It will be so easy," urged Testudini eagerly. "You have the *entrée* to the house, and you can easily select a time to call when you know that both father and daughter are out. Then it is but a step from the drawing-room to the picture gallery. Zip! Three minutes' work and the change is made. You walk out of the door with the Raphael under your arm and turn it over to me. Could anything be more simple?"

"Look, too," he expatiated enticingly, "how thereby your financial difficulties will be relieved! You will have not only the one hundred thousand dollars which you will get from Mr. Tracy for the painting, but also the purchase price you paid me, and which, as I told you, I am willing to return. With that amount you should certainly be able to keep your head above water until such time as the heiress consents to accompany you to the altar, and with all her worldly goods does thee endow. Come," he paused inquiringly, "is it not an agreement?"

Pike roused himself from his reverie.

"The scheme certainly sounds feasible," he granted. "But," with an evident desire not to bind himself, "after all, are we not counting our chickens somewhat before they are hatched? Remember, neither of us has the canvas in his possession at present. It is off sky-larking around the country somewhere with that good-for-nothing Fred Sivers."

The other gave his shoulders a shrug.

"I have already told you that there can be no question of a theft on the part of Sivers," he said. "I would almost be willing to wager the Raphael itself that it will turn up safe and sound, and the alleged purloining of it conclusively proved to be a mistake."

"And even though I should be in error on this theory," he argued, "do you not yourself say that the police are certain to get him? Ah, I'm not at all alarmed in regard to the picture eventually turning up. What I want to know is, are you willing to cooperate with me on the plan I have proposed? I am waiting for my answer; is it yes or no?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose," replied Pike with a gesture of resignation. "Indeed, the way you have me sewed up, there doesn't seem anything else for me to do. And, after all," half in soliloquy, "there ought not to be so very much risk in the project. Even if old Tracy should ever come to learn that a substitution had been worked on him, there would be nothing to prove that I had had a hand in it."

"Yes," more cheerfully, as he stretched out a hand to grasp that of the count, "granted that we get the picture back, it's a bargain. We will put the thing through as you say."

I had been so absorbed and interested in the conversation behind me, so engaged in straining my ears that I might not miss a single word of the disclosures, that I had paid no heed to the time, and now I realized with a little start that we were rapidly approaching the city of New York.

The lights glittered out like fireflies across a vast, dark meadow; one saw regular rows of houses on either side of the track; and down below from the elevated structure on which we were entering glimpses could be caught of occasional trolley-cars at the street intersections.

A moment's stop at the One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street Station, and then we plunged into the gloom of the tunnel. Passengers began to rise and gather together their belongings, and I became filled with anxious thought as to how best I might evade Pike's scrutiny in getting from the car.

Thus preoccupied, I did not notice until he was almost on top of me a plain-clothes detective, who had boarded the train at One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street, and was now passing along the aisle, carefully scanning the faces to right and left.

When I saw him and recognized his evident purpose, I gave myself up for lost.

Never would that searchlight vision fail to spot that I was in disguise. Another moment, and I should be called to account, my identity disclosed, and, in all probability, myself dragged away to prison.

And I was more than ever anxious to avoid recognition now; for with the revelations I had overheard I thought I saw a way of very effectually circumventing Mr. Albert Pike and his tricky plots and schemes.

I bowed my head and pretended to be tying a shoe-lace, hoping against hope that in some manner the fellow might pass me by.

Steadily he came on, until I felt his presence just behind me. Then he paused, gave a slight exclamation, and stood still. To my uneasy conscience his eyes seemed to be boring holes in the back of my head.

(To be continued.)

THE MAKING OF A HERO.

By WALTER DURANTY.

The remarkable achievement of a London policeman, aided and abetted by his friend the plumber, and—but that's in the story.

A DISTINGUISHED American once remarked that with the exception of Niagara Falls, he had seen nothing in the whole realm of nature so grand and impressive as a London policeman.

He is not the first to admire this supreme product of British beef and beer, or to envy the dignified ease with which he stays the hurrying crowds.

Yet Police Constable X73, as he regulated the traffic of Upper Tooting, presented no such inspiring spectacle. That mighty arm before whose sweep the boldest carman shrank dismayed seemed almost flabby now, while his portly figure had the shrunken appearance of a balloon when the air has begun to ooze out.

It was too bad. There was he, Jonas Palfryman, one of the finest and most important officers in the city of London, threatened and bullied by a little slip of a man like the superintendent, and all because a gang of scoundrels had chosen Upper Tooting as the scene of two of the smartest burglaries on record.

"Says he can't have men who are useless, does he?" murmured the outraged policeman to himself.

"Says I must do something to restore public confidence, for the credit of the force. Dash the man, wot does he expect when these bloomin' thieves are as cunning as eighty monkeys, and an honest man has ter keep an eye on six streets at once?"

But when the edge of his anger had worn off, the honest guardian of the six streets had to admit that the outlook was gloomy. In mournful anticipation he saw himself, a discharged and discredited being, begging for work from the very warehousemen whose carts he had so often delayed.

Never would he fall so low. But what was to be done?

Like a flash in the darkness the answer came to him—he would go to Timson

MacArthur. Timson would tell him what to do.

From his youth up it had been Palfryman's privilege to know and admire Timson MacArthur, who combined the position of plumber with that of general adviser to all his friends. With equal ease he could patch a water-main or a quarrel, with equal swiftness cure a cistern that was always empty and a husband that was always full. No detail was too small for him to notice, no difficulty too large for him to tackle.

II.

WITH a heart already cheered and lightened, the stalwart officer made his way into the sage's kitchen.

Timson MacArthur was sitting by the fire in an easy chair, with the comfortable feeling of a good day's work well done.

His practised eye at once perceived that this was more than a friendly visit, and after the usual greetings he threw out a delicate inquiry as to the nature of the trouble.

He listened in silence to the doleful tale of injustice and oppression, and when the victim of official harshness finally paused for refreshments he remained buried in thought.

For some moments no sound broke the stillness, while MacArthur sat wrapped in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, like a prophet of old in a halo, his massive forehead damp with heat and intensity of concentration.

At last when the silence had grown terrific, the oracle delivered its response.

"It is plain to me, friend Jonas," said Timson MacArthur, "that you have got to do a something. I mean a something great, to get your name in the newspapers and make you a gallant hero."

"Yes," replied Jonas, "I understand, but how can I do it? Oh, if I could

only nab a murderer, or even a bloomin' burgeler, but I can't."

"I know it is hard," continued Timson solemnly, "therefore the something must be put where you can find it, so that you can 'win a place on the scroll of Fame by heroic self-sacrifice,' as the *Daily Mail* said of the cop who fell off the Tower Bridge in trying to save a lunatic as didn't want to be saved. You must do a noble deed, and since you have no opportunity of doing one, you must be given that opportunity—and I am the man to give it you."

Jonas looked puzzled.

"You mean—" he began.

"I mean that I will put something in your way and give you the opportunity you want, and more than that, without risking a hair of your head."

His last words brought relief to his hearer's face, who already saw himself grappling on a dizzy height with a madman let loose by Timson, expressly as an opportunity—and the prospect had not been a pleasant one.

"Without risk," went on Timson, "and I have already thought how I am to do it. You know that new monument the Dook of Fife is to unveil next Wednesday, just near Waterloo Bridge?"

"Oh, yes; oberisk, they call it. I have to be on dooty there. But how—"

"So much the better, as the only trouble was getting you to the spot. Well, the foundation of this here monument is made like a model bridge with three arches."

"Yes, but—"

"Well, these arches are more or less out of sight and anything put into 'em wouldn't be noticed, unless you looked for it."

"But wot have I—"

"You have got to look for it, and there you will see a small box. What is it? It is an infernal machine. With a shout of warning to the dook you rush forward, seize the deadly object and hurl it far into the river. That is all; you are a hero at once."

But Jonas did not look heroic. Nay, he was palpably nervous as he stammered: "But s-s-s-supposin' it w-w-went off?"

With the mildness of a truly noble heart, Timson soothed his anxiety.

"Leave that to me. Didn't I say there wouldn't be no risk? Trust me, Jonas, it won't really be an infernal machine. I'll take care of that, for I'll put it there myself in the middle arch, so's there'll be no mistake. Besides, if any one does suspect anything, the bomb will be at the bottom of the Thames and it won't be easy to fish it up again."

He finished speaking and blew his nose thunderously, then sat looking at Jonas as Apollo might have looked at the suppliant whose prayer he had heard.

Jonas could not speak. His heart was too full of gratitude. He had come to Timson MacArthur in the hour of his despair; he had tried to follow him through the mists of doubt, and now his way was plain, his faith was justified. A sergeant, perchance a superintendent, complimented by royalty itself, his future would be assured, his merits recognized at last.

Vainly he tried to murmur his thanks. With a superb wave of the hand, his benefactor silenced him.

"No thanks are necessary; for an old friend I will always do my best."

III.

WHILE Jonas was receiving comfort and counsel in MacArthur's kitchen, a meeting of quite another sort was being held in a dingy room in the Italian quarter of London. They were not all Italians. French, Swedes, Russians, and a few Englishmen, were among those present, but Italian was the language spoken by them all.

A somber-faced Russian was exhorting his comrades to be cautious. "You know me, brothers," he cried, "and you know that it is for our order and not for myself that I fear. You do not realize what an effect the success of our scheme will have on our oppressors. Remember the wrongs done to hundreds of innocent people after the removal of the Czar Alexander. This will happen again. Let suspicion once come upon us, and the whole order will be blotted out and the sacred cause of anarchy set back. Let us strike indeed, but secretly, that none may guess whence comes the blow."

His words were received in gloomy silence. Your true anarchist is a fanatic, and like all fanatics, though careless of

his life, prefers to die in a flourish of trumpets, feeling that he is a martyr and a hero. But here the existence of their order was at stake and secrecy was imperative.

At last a young Italian sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing, his face lit up by the fervent soul within.

"Hear me!" he cried in ringing tones. "I have an idea which will enable us to terrorize those in power without endangering our beloved cause. Our Russian brother is right. The cause is too sacred to be risked, but by following my plan we shall avoid the least suspicion.

"On Wednesday next," he went on, "a royal duke will unveil the obelisk near Waterloo Bridge. The pedestal of the obelisk is a model bridge, dark, and below the level of the ground. Anything hid in its arches will lie unnoticed—until it makes its presence known. For myself I claim the task of placing the bomb beneath the arch. Let mine be the hand to strike this blow for liberty."

He sat down amidst loud applause, and his request was unanimously granted, while he himself received the eager congratulations of his comrades.

A sudden damper was thrown on the joy of all by the calm, passionless utterance of an Englishman.

"I don't see," said the latter, "how, if you place the bomb there hours beforehand, accurately timed, and if it goes off all right and blows the duke to his fathers, the cause of anarchy will be advanced. They are sure to try to hush it up by saying it was a dynamite cartridge left there by the workmen, or something of the sort; and even if they do admit it was a bomb, they'll never believe it wasn't a personal revenge on the duke instead of an attack on the aristocracy he represents."

The speaker paused, confident that he had given these excitable foreigners something to think about. He himself did not hold a very high opinion of his objection, and would have pooh-poohed it coming from any one else, but he "could not bear to see these bally Italians running the whole show by themselves, as he expressed it in a whisper to a countryman.

His speech, however, had kindled the fiery blood of the scheme's originator.

"Your words are just, brother," he cried. "Anarchy needs an advocate. Some one must preach our fatal gospel to the doomed aristocrats, even though he is overwhelmed by the bolt that slays them. I will do this also. When it is too late to escape I will stand forth and denounce them, will exalt our glorious cause, and will perish doing my duty. No danger can come nigh the order, for I will proclaim that alone and unaided I have done this thing for the glory of anarchy and the liberty of men."

To devotion like this there was no reply, and even the Englishman joined in the chorus of admiration. After a short discussion as to details the meeting broke up, the members retiring one by one, convinced that a decisive moment in the history of their cause was at hand.

IV.

At 3.30 A.M. on Wednesday morning a tattered figure, dignified even in its rags, crept stealthily up to the new obelisk which was to be unveiled that day. With a gesture of annoyance Timson MacArthur, for it was he, perceived that there were four arches in the model bridge instead of three. Of course it could make no difference, but it irritated him to have made even a trifling blunder.

With deft rapidity he placed a sardine tin, with the works of a broken alarm-clock attached to it, in the left of the two middle arches, and satisfied himself that it could not be easily seen. He then stole quietly away, confident that even if the sham bomb should be discovered, no harm could befall him or his protégé, Jonas Palfryman.

At 3.50 A.M. on Wednesday morning another figure made its way with even greater caution toward the obelisk. He, too, carried a small object like a sardine tin plus clockwork, and he, too, carefully deposited it in one of the middle arches.

By a mere accident he approached the right arch first, and consequently he failed to see the little remembrance left by Timson in the other arch. His task accomplished, he turned a glowing face to heaven, as if praying for destruction upon his enemies, then turned and hurried swiftly from the spot.

That same afternoon a large and illustrious gathering assembled to view the unveiling of the new monument.

The obelisk itself was of some historical interest, and the royal duke was supported by a brilliant throng of peers and ladies. By the barrier which kept back the surging crowd from the reserved enclosure stood P. C. X73 in pompous grandeur. Before his frown the most riotous and impudent cowered and shrank back. Yet in his own heart Jonas felt sundry qualms.

To begin with, there were four arches instead of three; which, then, was the middle one? Secondly, he could not get near enough to see anything in their dim obscurity. But no sign of his perturbation appeared as the duke stepped forward.

Suddenly a tall figure sprang out from the crowd, eluded Jonas, and leaped upon the pedestal.

"You are doomed!" he shouted in menacing tones. "In ten seconds you will be blown to pieces, and I, I alone, and anarchy will be triumphant."

Ere the words were out of his mouth a man in blue dived into the right arch. It was Jonas Palfryman. He realized that he had misjudged the mighty Timson—Timson the thorough. This was his cue; this wild harangue enabled him to approach close and see the bogus bomb lying in the right arch.

Amidst a tense silence he emerged and hurled something far into the river. Hardly had it left his hand when it exploded with a deafening roar and a

blinding flash, leaving him half-stunned and wholly bewildered.

The anarchist was the first to recover himself. With a cry of rage he sprang from the pedestal and tried to escape among the crowd, but in vain. He was seized and led away to expiate his daring attempt at wholesale murder.

Of the members of the London police force none is so universally respected as Superintendent Palfryman. The hero of the people, the idol of the newspapers, he proudly wears on his manly breast medals pinned there by grateful royalty.

His courage and presence of mind have been praised by many a glowing pen, but he bears his honors with modest dignity.

To all admirers he replies that he was but an humble instrument in the hands of Providence, that he only did his duty, but in his heart he utters a *pæan* of gratitude to Timson MacArthur, the author of his success.

That wise man keeps his own counsel. If Jonas thinks that the episode of the Italian and the genuine explosion was merely an elaboration of his scheme, so much the better. He is too great-hearted to destroy a lesser man's illusions.

Three nights later Tommy Timms, seller of matches, slept under the left arch of the new monument.

The next morning, greasy and fishy of visage, he was the proud possessor of the works of an ancient clock, while in the bosom of Father Thames an empty sardine tin sank softly into the mud.

THE FADING ROSE.

Here—for they could not help but die—
The daughters of the Rose-Bush lie;
Here rest, interred without a stone,
What dear Lucinda gave to none,
What forward beau, or curious belle,
Could hardly touch, and rarely smell.

Dear Rose, of all the blooming kind
You had a happier place assigned.
And nearer grew to all that's fair,
And more engaged Lucinda's care.
Than ever courting, coaxing swain,
Or ever all who love, shall gain.

Philip Freneau.

WITH SEALED LIPS.*

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,

Author of "On Glory's Trail," "Their Last Hope," "The Scarlet Scarab," etc.

A story of the sixties in which an army officer obtains leave of absence from the President and finds himself in worse case than any that the war thrust upon him.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

GUY BRUCE, a captain in the Union Army, obtains with difficulty permission to go to London for the purpose of straightening out an affair which involves his father's honor.

Guy's cousin, Stephen Kent, has offered for payment to O'Hara Bradway, the London partner of Mr. Bruce's banking house, three forged drafts. These drafts Bradway is holding as instruments of blackmail, and it is young Bruce's purpose to gain possession of them.

On board the steamer he meets and falls in love with a beautiful girl, Ruth Osborne, who turns out to be Bradway's niece. Bruce is traveling under the name of Brian Meagher, an Irishman who, also incognito, is on the same steamer. At Liverpool he is introduced by Miss Osborne to Bradway under this name. Bradway invites him to a dinner party which proves to be a meeting of some political secret-society. Kent comes in, recognizes Bruce, and accuses him of being a spy. Instantly the guests close threateningly around him, but Bradway succeeds in getting him out of the room.

Though he has really heard little of what was said during the dinner, Bruce succeeds in forcing from Bradway a promise to give him the drafts in return for his own silence and a sum of eight thousand dollars. He returns at one o'clock on the same night to close the bargain. Bradway gives him the drafts, which he puts into a hidden inner pocket, then sits down and writes the check in payment. Suddenly there is a crash and a glare, and Bruce sinks into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VII.

TRAPPED!

WITH a blinding, brain-splitting anguish of head and numbness of body, I awoke. I thought I had slept for centuries; but I was still in Bradway's study. The same lamp was burning, and no gray of coming dawn filtered through the long windows.

I lay there, slowly regaining my scattered wits. Suddenly I remembered everything up to that second of dazed surprise when the desk had seemed to strike me in the face.

The memory stung me into life. I started up, though the movement turned me faint, and glared about me. Then I made two discoveries:

First, that I was alone in the room, and that the clock registered just 1.25; second, that I was cunningly tied, hand and foot, and a coarse cloth strapped tight across my mouth.

I sank back with the impotent, impersonal dulness of a man in a nightmare.

It was so unreal, so impossible!

But common sense, long neglected, crept back to my aid. I pieced together the broken facts that made up the mystery.

Bradway had undoubtedly come behind me as I wrote and struck me senseless. This deduction I verified from the sight of a heavy hammer lying on the floor beside the overturned desk-chair.

Why had he done it? That, too, was simple. To get me out of the way, because he thought I might betray his connection with the revolutionists, and, incidentally, to get back the drafts.

But why had he not struck me down when I entered the room in the darkness? Again came the instant reply: He had wanted the eight-thousand-dollar check. He could not be sure I had the money upon me in ready cash (I recalled his look of chagrin when I had

*Began March ARGOSY.

Single copies, 10 cents.

said I did not carry so large a sum), and preferred to wait until I should make out the check in due form, so that he would have no difficulty cashing it. It was all absurdly simple, except—

Why had he left me lying alone there? Did he judge me dead? No. For then he would not have bound and gagged me. No, he had gone for assistance—to summon, perhaps, some of his fellow revolutionists.

This was probably a plot of theirs to silence me. Willing to trap me, Bradway had yet paused short of outright murder and had gone to summon a less squeamish helper to complete the deed.

A cold fury possessed me. How idiotically self-confident and complacent in my own success I had been! I had played the fool, if ever man did.

And, I like to remember, even in this crucial moment my thoughts were less of the possible fate in store for me than the effect my failure would have on my father. He would be left wholly at Bradway's mercy.

Then, somewhat belatedly, I admit, my wits began to work. If I might even yet enable father to escape his persecutor, and balk Bradway of his blackmail schemes, it would be easy to endure anything that might befall me.

With infinite difficulty I raised my bound hands to my breast, and with my finger-tips searched for the secret pocket wherein I had placed the addressed envelope containing the drafts. At the very least, I might roll to the fireplace and toss it in among the dying coals.

The finding of the envelope was a herculean task, which, in my weakened state, brought a sweat of agony to my face. But at last I secured and drew out the precious missive.

I gathered my body together for the effort of wriggling to the grate. Then a new thought deterred me: The drafts would be destroyed; but how was my father to learn of this?

If I were killed, Bradway might still pretend to possess the papers, and could hold them over him as before. No, I must think of something better. And with the setback came the inspiration.

It was a fighting chance at best. Still, it was a chance. The post-bag!

I rolled to the desk and raised myself

upon my knees. Trembling with haste—for at any moment my assassins might return—I picked up half a dozen stamps from the little pile before me.

Stamps and envelope! But how to affix one to the other? My mouth was strapped across. I could move only my finger-tips, and those not sufficiently to slip the gag a half-inch. How was I to moisten the stamp?

A great drop of perspiration, rolling from my forehead and falling with a splash on the desk, answered the question for me. It was a matter of seconds to touch the stamps to my wet brow and then stick them to the envelope.

I heard soft footsteps in the stillness of the hall outside. There was no time to waste. Frantically I rolled across to the table, reared up high enough to reach the post-bag, and dropped the precious letter into its capacious mouth.

Snatching between my finger-tips an empty envelope from the litter of papers at one side of the table, I rolled back to the fireplace and tossed it into the smoldering coals of the grate. Then I collapsed.

My ruse was good. This I knew. The post-bag evidently contained the day's accumulation of mail. It would be the last place Bradway would think of looking for my (supposedly) unstamped packet. The butler, according to immemorial English custom, would dump the entire contents of the bag into the postman's sack early next morning. My letter would be on its way to America by night.

The fire was nearly out. The envelope I had dropped on the coals, though beginning to smoke, did not blaze up. The footsteps were at the door and a hand on the knob. Should Bradway see the unburned envelope my deception must go for nothing.

Accordingly I rolled over twice, in the direction of the desk, just as the door opened and Bradway entered.

He was quite alone and was clad in dressing-gown and slippers. The fear had all been wiped from his face as with a sponge, leaving an expression of almost genial amusement.

"So you've come to yourself, my lad?" he observed pleasantly. "'I hardly thought it would be so soon. But your

head is uncommonly thick, as I judged from our negotiations earlier in the evening. I've come back for a little chat with you. It must be a monologue, for I can't quite trust you unengaged. But I've several things to say before I dismiss you.

"First of all, I'll be obliged to search you for those drafts. People will be here later into whose hands neither of us would wish such important documents to fall. An inside breast-pocket I think it was, eh?"

He stooped over me and began to go through my pockets. I offered no resistance. Not only would it have been futile, but I wanted to gain time for that empty envelope on the coals to catch fire.

But as he was in the middle of his quest a flash of flame from the fireplace caught his eye. He glanced up, saw the envelope writhing and blazing above the embers, and with a little grunt of horror ran over to the grate.

He snatched out the burning paper, heedless of burnt fingers. But by this time it was almost destroyed and wholly unrecognizable.

He looked at me, mingled chagrin and inquiry filling his bloated face. I nodded. He dropped the charred, fluffy bits of ash back on the hearth, and stood scowling at me. Of a sudden his countenance cleared.

"It was clever!" he vouchsafed. "Quite the cleverest thing you have done. I didn't give you credit for it. It was clever. But not clever enough. You've burned the drafts; but how is your father to know that? To all intents and purposes, they're still in my strong-box."

I lowered my eyes to shut out the look of triumph I knew must fill them. Helpless, bound, utterly in his power as I was, I had defeated him. My father was safe!

"And now," he resumed, seating himself comfortably before the table, "as you are about to undergo some rather unpleasant experience, I may as well gratify your unspoken curiosity on a few points. You perhaps wonder, for one thing, why Stephen Kent chances to be a visitor here, when I'm constantly threatening your excellent father with sending the young man to jail. In the first place, Kent is very useful to me; in the second, he does not

know—and for the present is not going to know—of my power to imprison him.

"In the third place, your father is a very rich man and in very feeble health. He has but one child. That child is a son who is foolish enough to risk his life constantly on the battle-field. Soon or late he was due to be killed. In case of his death, who would inherit the Bruce fortune? Who but my dear young friend, Sterling Bruce's nephew?

"Now, not only would part of that fortune serve me very well—even if I had to use those same three forged drafts to draw it from the legatee—but Stephen happens to be head and heels in love with my pretty niece and ward, Ruth Osborne. As I have had the misfortune to lose her inheritance in unfortunate investments, it would be uncommonly handy to have her marry a rich man who would take her without dowry. Also, it would be a very tidy act of reparation on my part."

I was tugging in futile rage at my bonds. If I could have got so much as one hand free I should have killed him where he sat.

That she—my dainty, flower-faced, sun-shine-haired sweetheart—should be the destined bride of such a man as Stephen Kent! And that her guardian should be thus forcing her into the match!

But he was speaking again:

"That touches you? I gathered from Ruth's manner that there was some silly flirtation. Don't worry, I beg. She will soon get over it. Women do."

But this time my tormentor wrung no sign of pain from me. I braced myself to suffer as stolidly as the far less tortured Indian at the stake.

"So," resumed Bradway, "you can see how highly desirable your death has seemed to me. When I found out who you were to-night I decided you must not go back to America. And you shall not. You were deplorably easy to catch. I had feared at first that I might be forced to use cruder methods. I am glad such means were unnecessary. The present way is much simpler."

What could he mean? And what could be "cruder" than to knock a man over the head with a hammer? I was not left long to wonder.

Bradway walked to his safe, which still swung open, and ransacked it, throwing

its contents in wild confusion on the ground.

From one compartment he extracted a roll of bank-notes. These he thrust into the breast-pocket of my coat. Then he broke a chair over the steel fender and overturned the desk.

I eyed him in stupid wonder. His work finished, he returned to his chair and began to declaim as though reading aloud from a newspaper:

“‘Attempted Robbery in Hampton!’” he began. “‘Daring Attempt to Plunder the House of O’Hara Bradway, M. P.—By Rare Presence of Mind Mr. Bradway Captures the Offender.’ Catch the idea?” he asked, in his normal tones.

Yes, I caught the idea. It required little effort of mind to do so. He went on:

“Here is the story for the police: Being troubled with insomnia, I arose about 1.30 A.M., threw on a dressing-gown, and, taking a night-lamp in my hand, came down to my study for a book. My slippers feet made no sound. I entered the room, to find a man crouched over my safe, which he had opened and whose contents he had strewn on the floor.

“A candle was his only light. As I came in I saw him snatch up a package of Bank of England notes, of which I had thoughtfully taken down the numbers, and put them in his pocket. A picture-hanger had been at work in the room yesterday, and had thoughtlessly left his hammer on my study-table. It was the work of a moment for me to secure this, steal up behind the thief, and strike him senseless.

“Then, securely binding him—the gag will be removed before then—I aroused the household and summoned the police. In my absence he recovered his senses and made frantic struggles to free himself. A desk was overturned and a chair broken.

“When I return with the police, and a stronger light illuminates the room, what will be my horror to recognize in the thief a smooth-spoken stranger who picked an acquaintance with my wife and niece on the way from America, and whom, at their request, I invited to dine here last evening. He left early, and, before doing so, doubtless found occasion to purloin the garden-gate key—which usually lies

on my study-mantel, and which will be found in his pocket. This smooth thief waited till the household was well asleep, then returned, forced the window-fastenings, and rifled the safe.

“An open kit of burglars’ tools will be found beside the overturned desk. The penalty, I think, is seven years’ transportation. They say the Australian climate is most salubrious. You can sketch in for yourself the details of the trial and Miss Osborne’s reluctant but terribly damaging testimony. If anything will drive her into Stephen Kent’s arms, such an exposure ought.”

Again, in spite of my good resolves, I writhed in dumb fury.

That she should look on me as a common malefactor! That she should think the love in my every look and gesture the ruse of a clever robber! Oh, the black shame of it all!

“You are rather stupid,” continued Bradway, “so perhaps you are thinking how easy it will be to clear yourself. Think once more. Can you tell the court the real reason why you entered my house by stealth at one o’clock in the morning? Can you say you came to buy back the evidences of your own cousin’s forgery? Can you expose him to the world like that and let the shame of it kill your old father? Can you, eh?

“Can you explain to the judge how you, an officer in the United States army, happened to leave your country in the midst of war and come to England under a false name? You doubtless had some good reason. Can you make it sound plausible in court? I think not. It is bound to expose your father’s shame; and, what’s more, it’s bound to give the anti-Federal press of England a splendid weapon.

“They will point you out as the typical United States officer—a man traveling in this country under an *alias*, and on trial for burglary. England needs little, just now, to make her acknowledge formally the Confederacy. Less scandalous things than this case of yours have been known to turn public opinion and official action. How about it?

“Can you give your real name and your errand in England without ruining your father and perhaps permanently injuring the government you are sworn to defend?

Can you blab about the meeting you attended here last night without bringing out the true facts of your presence in London? Think it over, my friend."

What need to think it over? I saw the diabolical truth of every word he said.

Should I tell the truth about myself, not even the facts of my sending the drafts safely to my father would avert the exposure he so dreaded—the exposure that might mean his death. Bradway was right—right in everything he had said.

President Lincoln had trusted me. Could I give the British press the opportunity of again lampooning him—of sneering at the officers who fought his battles?

No: a seal of silence must forever close my lips, even as now the gag was choking back my every word.

My mind was made up. After all, such a sacrifice was little worse than the death I had so often braved in the field. None would know of my disgrace. No one would recognize Brian Meagher, convict, as Guy Bruce, cavalry captain. I would pay my debt like a white man.

Again came the stinging memory of my pledge to Lincoln that I would return to my regiment within three months. He would regard me as a liar. I would be branded by Stanton as a deserter and a traitor.

I could almost see the pain in the President's big, kindly eyes and hear the War Secretary's rasping laugh.

Well, in a sense I was working to save my country from ill-repute. What better should a good soldier desire? I was saving my father from ignominy and perhaps death. What more could a good son wish?

I looked over at the waiting Bradway, and again I nodded.

A grin chased away the worried look that had begun to gather about his eyes. He crossed to the window and threw it wide open, lighted a half-burned candle, and trailed its grease along the floor near the safe, leaving the tallow-dip itself lying extinguished among the débris. Then he cut my gag and pocketed it.

Next he opened the door and screamed up the dark hallway:

"Help! Thieves! Police!"

He ran back to the window, repeating

the cry. As he passed me I caught up the heavy, lighted, iron night-lamp in my manacled hands.

Exerting every atom of my cramped strength, I dashed the odd projectile full into his pasty face.

"There!" I shouted, as the scared, undressed servants rushed in and Bradway collapsed with a shriek of pain and terror, beating madly at the mass of liquid flame that poured over his bleeding head. "It's only fair that you, too, should show a few evidences of the struggle."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN PRISON GARB.

I LAY idly, chin on hands, in front of the crackling fire, blinking miserably at the blaze and now and then looking upward at the glowing sky.

There was no moon, but here in West Australia the great stars cast a light whereby a man with good eyes might readily decipher print.

The Southern Cross gleamed and twinkled with uncanny radiance in mid-zennith. Far and low in the east hung the constellation Orion, turned completely upside down, the "sword" protruding *above* the "belt," instead of below, as we Northerners see it.

The dry, pungent air carried sound like a telephone. The "barking" of wallabies far out in the bush was as audible as though the queer little creatures were close at hand.

The month was June—the anniversary of my arrival in the God-forsaken penal settlement of Duleggin. It would have taken more than a second glance for my own father to recognize the well-groomed, natty Guy Bruce in the tanned, bearded, shock-haired convict, Brian Meagher, in ill-fitting, arrow-branded canvas suit, who with a clump of fellow prisoners lay sprawled before the camp-fire in the first chill of Australia's winter.

For in the antipodes, June, July, and August are the "cold months," even as the hottest summer weather of the year usually falls about New Year's time.

I will tell, in a mere handful of words, what had befallen me in those nightmare-like twelve months.

True to my mental pledge, I had spoken no word in defense or explanation of my presence in O'Hara Bradway's study that night in the spring of 1863. Bradway's testimony and the bank-notes in my pocket had been condemning enough without any further proofs against me. Yet Ruth Osborne had been called to the stand to tell what she knew of the man who had robbed her uncle. She had calmly refused to testify, even when warned by the judge that her refusal might make her incur a charge of "contempt."

Her silence was the first ray of light in all my darkness. As she left the court-room on her uncle's arm, I had leaned far forward in the dock, regardless of my guards. But the one long, disdainful, reproach-laden look that met my eager gaze sent me staggering back to my place, my last hope gone.

For I saw now that her silence had been a mere tribute to the man she had once believed me to be, while she regarded the *real* man, in the dock, with all the abhorrence her gentle nature could summon up.

"Nine years' imprisonment in her majesty's penal settlement at Duladgin, West Australia."

Thus my sentence had read. And within a week I had been on my way, with some four hundred unfortunates of both sexes, for the antipodes.

Fully one hundred and thirty thousand convicts in all had been shipped thither during the past seventy years. First to Botany Bay, in New South Wales; then to Van Diemen's Land, far to the south; and now to West Australia.

Many convicts had been encouraged, on the expiration of their sentences, to turn colonists. The penal settlements were past their heyday of horrible fame, and now only a few scattered "camps" like the Duladgin remained to mark a dying custom.

In fact, the last convict-ship sailed from England four years later, and "transportation" died a natural death.

The approach of this end was already in sight. The prisoners were no longer regularly jailed, but allowed to live a semirestricted life within guarded stockades.

Here at Duladgin, huts, barracks, and

a central calaboose held convicts, soldiers, and officials; and about the settlement ran an eight-foot wooden wall.

But the hundred miles of waterless desert between us and the coast, and the vigilance that watched every seaport, formed the strongest barrier against liberty. Especially was the capital city, Perth, under surveillance.

A few of the more violent of us were kept in the chain-gang, under whip and rifle of warders, but the rest might roam at will through the enclosures, outside of work-hours, gather wood, improve our squalid huts, or find such pathetically meager amusements as our ingenuity could invent.

Our warden, an elderly ex-soldier, was lenient to a fault. The governor of the province's prisons, foreseeing the coming downfall of the "transportation" system, winked at his inferior's clemency. So, all in all, my first year had not been so arduous as I had expected.

I had suffered little at the hands of my fellows. They were, for the most part, the scum of the British Isles, yet there were one or two in whom I found sparks of congeniality.

On my arrival I had been exposed to a rough form of hazing, but my muscular fists and my continuous readiness and facility in using them, soon won me a place of toleration among the scoundrels.

Perhaps it was my prowess as a boxer and rough-and-tumble fighter; perhaps it was the unconscious authority that becomes part of a man who has led men into battle—in any case, I found myself within a very few months a sort of leader in the community.

My judgment was consulted in quarrels, my advice asked in the countless plots for breaking jail.

My supremacy became universally recognized when I thrashed in fair fight "Ballarat" Sneed, the acknowledged champion and bully of the camp. Ever since that victory I might, had I chosen, have ruled as an autocrat. My word came as near being law as could that of any one thus placed, and my urgent counsels had more than once averted a futile outbreak against authority.

Yet Napoleon, finding himself chosen king of the monkeys, would have relished the honor little less than did I

my lordship over those two hundred malefactors. I kept to myself as much as possible, did my work stolidly, and tried to keep thoughts of the past from rending my heart and brain.

This evening, as I lay before the fire, the influence of night and stars conspired to force memory back upon me. So, to get out of myself, I turned my attention to the gang of brutes who lay, sat, or lounged on all sides of me.

They were singing that dreary, time-dishonored ditty, "Botany Bay," which has served as national anthem for Australia's penal colonies since the eighteenth century. Verse by verse has been tacked on from time to time by some inspired blackguard, until, in my day, the song contained some ninety stanzas.

"Ballarat" had struck up the air, and growled out the first verse:

"Come all of you dukes and you duchesses
And listen to what I shall say;
Look out what your singers toucheses.
Or you'll join us in Botany Bay."

The chorus dutifully droned out an unintelligible refrain. Then a ferret-faced little man across the fire from me took up the burden of song in a quavering whine:

"Seven long, weary years have I been here,
And seven more have I to stay,
Just for chasin' a cove up an alleyway
And taking his ticker away."

-- Again the chorus. A fresh, clear, feminine voice broke in on "Ballarat's" preliminary growl, and trolled forth a third verse:

"The check was made out for five shillings,
And I changed the sum to a pound;
But before I could spend it or change it,
For Botany Bay I was bound."

I had heard it all so many hundred times! How I hated each of the ninety doggerel stanzas! I had not the heart to break in on the chant, for in their way the poor creatures seemed to enjoy singing it.

So, under cover of the chorus, I rose, made my way out of the circle, walked off fifty yards, and threw myself down on the sand, my arms under my head, my unhappy gaze among the stars.

I lay there, fighting back the furtive longings and memories that ever crouched

waiting to leap into my brain and to crowd out every lesser thought. And, after a longer struggle than usual, I conquered.

I shut my eyes and tried to sleep. Cold as was the night, I preferred the clear, open air to the foul atmosphere of the huts. Yet the chill crept through my canvas clothes and sent shivers down my spine.

Something was thrown lightly over me as I hovered between sleeping and waking—something warm and light. I opened my eyes. A blanket covered me from foot to shoulder.

I started up on one elbow. A figure was stealing away from me toward the huts. In that clear, tropical light every detail was visible. At a glance I recognized the girl who had sung the third verse of "Botany Bay."

"Kate!" I called.

She stopped, hesitated, then returned shamefacedly to where I sat. I held the blanket out to her and asked:

"What did you give me this for?"

She eyed me sullenly from under her heavy black brows.

She was a handsome woman in her own Amazonian way, and had in her time won the doubtful glory of being the cleverest shoplifter in Southampton Road. She was now waitress and cook for the Duladgin warder's wife.

"Why did you do it?" I repeated.

"You were sleeping there on the ground," she muttered confusedly.

"But how about *you*? You'd have caught your death of cold. You've only one blanket. Why did you give it to me?"

"Because you were fool enough to give your blanket to Darrow when he had the smallpox and thought he was freezing to death. You might have known the doctor'd have your blanket burned when Darrow died, and that there wouldn't be any new ones given out till next month. You were a juggins to give it to Darrow."

"Then what were you, to give me yours?"

"I didn't need it. I'm not going to turn in yet. I'd have come back and taken it away, at bedtime."

"Take it now. I'm going back to my hut. Thank you for lending it to me."

"I s'pose you'll be bragging to-morrow about my letting you have it, and say I'm sweet on you," she grumbled ungraciously, as she folded up the coarse covering.

"You know very well I shall not!"

She dropped the blanket and came nearer to me.

"No," she agreed, "you won't. That was a mean thing for me to say. I don't know why I said it, except that some devil in me always makes me say horrid things to you. You don't swear back at me or hit me. Maybe that's why. And you're the only man in this camp that hasn't made love to me in one way or another. Why haven't you?"

"Why should I?" I retorted, amused.

"Don't!" she cried sharply "Don't talk like that. It's worse than hitting me. I s'pose you don't think it's possible to make love to me because I'm a thief and you're a gentleman. That's why, isn't it?"

"No one has the right to call himself a gentleman here."

"Rot! None of the rest has, perhaps. But you're no blackleg. You were sent out here for robbery, weren't you? Well, do you s'pose any one in this stockade doesn't know you're innocent?"

"But—"

"We've all been born and raised with crooks. We know 'em a mile off. Any one-eyed man would know *you* aren't one of us. We don't know what's behind it all, and most of us don't care. But—does she love you enough to make it worth the price you're paying?"

I turned my back on her, angry, puzzled, surprised.

"Don't turn rusty," she begged, "I don't know the story. But no man ever put himself where you are unless there was a woman mixed up in it somewhere or somehow. And if *I* was that woman, you'd not stay here another day."

"Let's drop it," I suggested. "It's time to go to bed."

"Wait a bit!" she urged. "It's stupid for a gentleman like you to have to talk with a girl like me, but I've got some news that'll maybe interest you. I'm not telling the rest, for I don't want to go to the cells for babbling about what I hear at the warden's. But *you'll* keep mum, I know, and perhaps it'll take

you out of your grumpiness to hear what's going to happen in Deladgin next week. I got hold of a newspaper to-day, too. The *Sydney Herald*. Only six months old. I read it near half an hour before I had to stop."

"News?"

No free man can possibly imagine what that word means to the prisoner, nor how the affairs of the outer world loom up in importance when one is debarred from reading or hearing of them. We at Dulladgin—as at all the penal colonies—were allowed no intercourse whatsoever, either by letter, newspaper, or word of mouth, with the life we had left behind.

Kate, in her position as servant, was an exception to the rule.

The order was enforced, of course, as stringently with her as with us; but she had sharp ears and a faculty for remembering such scraps of talk on the part of the warden, his family, and guests as she could pick up while waiting on table.

She also, now and then, found a minute or two for a surreptitious peep at one of the newspapers that strewed the warden's desk.

There was scarce one of us who would not gladly have served an extra year for the privilege of reading these harmless news-sheets. Kate was forever besieged with questions from the men and women of the settlement. But she was chary of passing along the information she had gleaned.

The fear of spies and stool-pigeons was strong on us all. Should it become known to the authorities that the girl had listened or read, her sinecure as house-servant would be at an end and she would be at once put into the oakum-picking or the wool-weaving gang, with perhaps four weeks of the hated "treadmill work" for punishment.

So it was that her hint of news and her willingness to impart it to me was a joy no mere words can describe.

"Well," she said, noting with amusement the excited eagerness of my manner, "which shall it be first? The stuff that I read in that stupid old paper or the changes that they're going to make here? The changes will mean a lot more to—"

"Tell me about those later," I broke in. "It's the news I want. The news!"

"Where'll I begin? Let's see—Palmerston has—"

"Never mind Palmerston. England's ministry doesn't interest me. Any news of—?"

"And the Chartists have managed to—"

"To blazes with the Chartists!" I fumed, forgetting manners and self-restraint in my longing for tidings of the one world-theme dear to me.

"Here's something that'll strike you as int'resting, then: Since that Corn Laws row, the Fenians—"

"What do I care about Fenians or Corn Laws? *"I—"*

"And you an Irishman! Here I was fixing up a treat for you and you act like you'd found me with a hand in your cash-pocket. I'll keep my news for those that want it. Good night."

"Forgive me," I begged, having at last the grace to be ashamed of myself for my rudeness to the poor girl who had sought to please me. "Don't go away angry. You see—"

"I see!" she laughed with a return to good humor as sudden as her little gust of wrath. "I see you're aching to find out about something, but I can't make out what that something is. I didn't think there was an Irishman on the earth who wasn't int'rested in the Corn Laws and—"

"I'm not an Irishman. I'm an American."

"No! Honest, are you a Yankee? I never talked to one before. You speak English, fine."

"Yes," I assented dryly, "quite a number of my countrymen have taken the trouble to learn the language. Tell me, is there—"

"Any news of America? Let me see."

She knitted her heavy black brows and sat silent, while I fairly squirmed with impatience.

More than a year ago I had left my country in the throes of the most fearful civil war that ever convulsed a nation. Since then I had heard not one word of the struggle's progress or outcome. Is it to be wondered that I was mad for news?

"Yes," she said at last. "There was quite a lot about America, but I didn't trouble to read it all, and there was a good bit of it I couldn't understand. Is

there a place called Gett—Gettburg—some such name as that—in—?"

"There's a town named Gettysburg. What about it?"

"Gettysburg. That's the name. There's been a terrible battle there—July, last year."

"Impossible! Gettysburg is in Pennsylvania. The war is in Virginia and—"

"Maybe you know more than the newspaper," she sneered, "so I won't bother to go on."

"No, no!" I assured her hastily, in deadly fear of shutting off my one chance of hearing the tidings, "you're right, no doubt. A battle at Gettysburg, last July. Eleven months ago. Yes. Who won?"

"I don't remember. You see, I don't know which side is which. But it lasted three days, and there was more'n forty thousand killed. I don't know who got beat."

I drove my nails into my palms in an anguish of suspense.

Forty thousand killed! A battle, then, such as had never been fought before in America. Such a fight as must have decided the whole fortune of the war. And I must go in ignorance of its outcome!

"Do you remember any names?" I asked, in despair. "Any of the names of generals or—?"

"Meade was the name of one of them. I remember that name because it's the same as the warden's. He—"

"He must have led a division." I explained. "For, in a battle where so many were engaged the commander-in-chief—McClellan, you know—would have been in command. Meade is just a major-general. Unless he's been promoted since last year. Did his side win?"

"I don't know. Do you s'pose they scalped all the—?"

"Were there any other names?"

"A dozen or so. But I—oh, yes, I remember another one now, 'cause it's the name of the parliament member from our old borough. It's Lee. It was in one of the top lines of the column. It read something like this: 'Lee's Splendid Advance Into Pen—' what did you say the country was?"

"Pennsylvania!" I croaked, hoarse with excitement. "Go on!"

"Lee's Splendid Advance into Penn'slvania Turned to Flight in a Three Days' Battle at—"

I had grasped both her hands in a grip that wrung from her an exclamation of pain, and was fairly dancing in my insane glee.

"Are you drunk?" she cried. "Leave go my hands, can't yer? You're smashing my fingers. Leave go!"

I apologized and tried to calm myself. I was ashamed to think how easily the stolid shell that had encased me for the past twelve months had fallen away at the first word from home. Kate was eying me with keen curiosity.

"I've sized you up, I think," she said at last. "I suspicioned it all along, except the part about your being a Yankee. You're a soldier. A cavalryman at that. I've seen too many of 'em not to know the walk and the shoulders. A Yankee orf'cer of cavalry with an Irish name in an English 'pen.' There's a combination, ain't it!"

"Well, it's none of my business, eh? Never mind explaining. You'd only lie. It ain't for a Bloomsbury shoplifter to question an orf'cer and a gentleman, even if we are all on the one level here. But there's a girl mixed up in it somewhere. Is she prettier'n me?"

A vision of Ruth's dainty, high-bred face in its aureole of gold-red hair crossed my mind. It irked me unreasonably that this swarthy, Amazonian thief should, even by inference, compare herself to my lost love.

Some of my thought may have shown itself in my face, or Kate with feminine intuition may have divined it. For she drew back the hand she had laid on my arm and winced as though I had struck her.

Yet, when a moment later she spoke, her deep voice was void of all emotion. Perhaps I had been mistaken in thinking she was hurt.

"All this Yankee news may be int'resting," said she, "but it don't have much to do with us here. There's something bigger on the cards. We're to have a new warden next week and there's to be a new prison gov'nor at Perth."

"That means a course of 'new broom' treatment and good-by to the easy times for us all," I hazarded.

"Just so. We'll be made to sweat as we haven't in years. Say, Brian, how about breaking jail? Wouldn't it be a good time—while everything's unsettled and—"

"No!" I contradicted firmly. "The worst time possible. The new warden and the new governor are probably politicians that the British government had to find berths for; and they'll be just the sort to think that we are a lot of desperadoes. They'll double the guards and put on a new batch of spies and watch us as a cat watches a mouse."

"We must be quiet and orderly. More so than ever. Then in a few months they'll get to thinking we're as harmless as sheep. And little by little, they'll relax discipline. That will be the time. Preferably in the hot weather when the Englishmen are getting their first taste of what West Australia can do in the way of scorching newcomers. After a sirocco or two they'll be too sick to care if we escape or not. We must wait till then. Pass the word on."

"Maybe you're right," she rejoined; "but, oh, it would be good to see noisy, smelly old Southampton Road again just now; or even dingy old Bloomsbury! I guess there's places you'd like to look in on, too. Some of those Penns'lvania wigwams, p'rhaps, or scalping parties, or—?"

"Isn't this change of warden and governor rather sudden?"

"Yes. Old Meade only got the notice to-day. The whole family was so excited over it they jabbered right before me, all through dinner. The new gov'nor is a rich M. P. that his party had to get a giddy job for. The warden's a chap that found the old country too warm for him and his debts. He's a chum of the gov'nor, and got the wardenship that way, Meade says. His name's Kent—Cap'n Stephen Kent. The gov'nor's named Bradway."

CHAPTER IX.

I MEET AN OLD ENEMY.

We were lined up for inspection, two hundred of us, in our arrow-dotted, dirty canvas clothes, our tanned, bearded faces, tousled hair and general hang-dog as-

pect. I make no doubt we looked as sorry and villainous a crew as ever met the eye.

The new warden had arrived that morning. Easy-going old Meade had taken his departure an hour later, and now at noon the commanding officer of the guard had been sent to order us all into the open space before Government House, near the gate of the stockade.

There we stood, in the baking noonday sun, awaiting the new incumbent's appearance on the veranda. The guards, rifle-armed, were on either side of our double rank.

I have, in my boyhood, seen slaves on the auction-block. I have seen cattle in the village markets awaiting the butcher's purchase. Neither had seemed to me so pathetic a sight as did this band of miserable outcasts sullenly, helplessly standing before the lodging of the man whose power over them was far greater than the slave-buyer's.

Scoundrels they were—to a man. Nearly all merited their wretched fate. But the thought that a human being of God's making should be so subject to the cruel caprices and heartless sternness of any one person stirred me to impotent fury.

The more so when I remembered the sort of man England had sent out to rule this handful of blackguards. Stephen Kent—weak, violent, passionate, cruel. He possessed not one single virtue that any of his victims lacked.

They had not, probably, a vice he did not share. Yet he was placed above them, sole arbiter of their daily lives.

The front door opened and a man clad in white stepped out on the veranda, advanced to the head of the short flight of steps and stood gazing down at us, cigar in mouth. The whiff of good smoke blew across the narrow, intervening space to where we stood. And as it did so, a restless movement shook our ill-formed line. When chronic smokers have not seen nor smelt tobacco for years, the odor of it is maddening.

Stephen Kent had changed but little since I had last seen him grinning at me from the witness-stand in Old Bailey. A little more bloated, perhaps, and a slightly redder of face. That was all.

He glanced us over, impersonally, a half sneer on his thick lips. Then he took the cigar from his mouth and spoke.

"I'm the new warden," he began. "I know all about you. You've all been treated a long sight too easy and you've got to thinking you're human. You aren't. You're a pack of dirty jail-birds, and you're going to be handled without gloves. I am an officer in her majesty's army, and since I'm sent out here to command the Devil's Own Brigade, I'm going to rule it in a way that'll make you remember me. My predecessor was content if you got your work done and behaved yourselves so as not to call out the guard. I'm going to change all that. You're convicts, and as convicts you'll be treated. The fare here is too good and too plentiful for such as you. And the former warden didn't get all the work out of you he might. I'm going to change both these things."

He paused and puffed at his cigar. The double line of convicts glanced furtively at one another, and sullen faces grew more sullen.

"How about a break?" whispered my right-hand neighbor under his breath. "Kill him and rush the gate?"

"No," I whispered. "The guard's doubled at the gate. Be quiet."

"I hear, too," resumed Kent, "that the good old punishments that were so effective at Botany Bay and Van Diemen's Land have been lightened here. That's going to be remedied. The log, the whipping-post and the starving system are coming back. And the first man or woman who breaks the least one of the set of rules I'm going to post up is going to get such penalties as will make an example for the others. As long as you choose to work your twelve hours a day and follow the other orders you'll get on all right. But if there's any shirking or disobeying, by the Eternal I'll make this settlement such a place for you that the first man who dies will be thought the luckiest of the whole lot. Understand that? I—"

He broke off short. His bloodshot eyes, searing the ranks of his prisoners, had met mine.

Kent looked at me a full half minute. First doubtfully, then with a wondering certainty; and, last of all, with a glow of

triumphant malice that transformed his whole bloated face.

He had known, of course, that I was somewhere in Australia, but evidently the fact that I had been consigned to this particular settlement had escaped him. The joy in his eyes was something to sicken and scare any less hopeless man than I.

"Stand up there like a man, you!" he roared, pointing at me with one stubby forefinger. "Your shoulders slump like an ape's. I'll have no slouching at ease while I'm talking. You look clumsy and foolish enough to be an American army officer."

The taunt drove the blood from my face and sent a mad, murderous fury whirling through my veins. But I remembered, just in time, the animus of the speech and reflected that no word a cur like Stephen Kent could speak had power to cast a slur on my country or its army.

So I stiffened into stone. I knew Kent was aiming to exasperate me into some word or act of insubordination. Then the whipping-post, or even, possibly, a shot from the guard, would satiate the grudge of a lifetime.

For the sake of the men who looked up to me to guide and advise them I must give this tyrant no such opportunity as he sought.

I had, moreover, read something else in Kent's face during that moment of silent inspection. He had resolved that I should not live to return, a free man, from Duladgin. In case of my death he would be my father's heir, and he knew it. His recognition of me had sealed my fate. It was now merely a matter of time.

He was still glowering at me, while these thoughts ran through my numbed brain.

"Step forward!" he commanded.

I obeyed and stood in the strip of sunlit sand midway between him and my fellows.

I had the wild impulse to shout the word we had agreed on among ourselves as the signal for general attack. In such event, Kent would assuredly be killed. I should thus be forever quit of him and of the plans he would make for my destruction.

But we could not hope, at this moment,

to escape, and men would die in the ensuing struggle before we should be subdued by the guard. I had no right to sacrifice the lives of others for my chances of personal safety. So I dismissed the idea and stood silent, at attention.

"What is your name?" demanded Kent.

"Brian Meagher."

"An Irish name. But you have the coarse, low-bred voice of an American. What are you?"

"I am your first cousin, the son of your mother's brother," I answered loudly, that all might hear.

Whatever reply he had expected, he surely had not looked for this. It visibly took him aback. I listened with relish to the very audible murmur of amazement from guards and convicts.

"Silence in the ranks!" bellowed Kent, his face purple. "Officer, have your men seize the first prisoner who speaks or moves, and give him twenty lashes!"

He turned on me again.

"You lie!" said he. "And if I hear of your spreading such a story I'll order you three days' starvation and fifty lashes. Come here."

I advanced to the foot of the steps.

"My shoe is untied," he went on, thrusting forth one foot. "Kneel down and tie it."

I paused irresolute. I had no idea whatsoever of kneeling at this brute's feet and performing a menial service for him. But what was the best way to avoid doing so? Should I refuse outright or stand stubbornly silent?

He saw my dilemma, and watched my face with glee. I must choose obedience or else submit to the initiative of the long course of torture to which I saw he had determined to subject me.

Well, a man can die but once. I only hoped I should not be sent first to the whipping-post.

"Tie my shoe!" he repeated.

Out from the doorway behind him slipped Kate. With incredible agility she was on her knees at his side and had tied the shoe.

"I didn't know you meant me, sir, the first time you gave the order," she remarked, with humble innocence.

Kent glared at her, in dumb wrath. But she smiled up at him with a respectful yet trusting expression that would have fooled a wiser man.

Like most of his kind, Stephen Kent could seldom resist the lure of a pretty face. And Kate, as she knelt there in the sunshine, was a splendid type of physical womanhood.

So the scowl departed from our tyrant's brow. He nodded with an ungracious leniency.

"All right," he vouchsafed. "Go back to your housework. But next time be sure an order is addressed to you and not to some one else, before you obey it. When I want my shoe tied I'll get some one like that ruffian to do it, not a pretty girl."

As she passed into the house Kate met my look of gratitude with a fleeting, inscrutable glance that left me more than ever at a loss to understand her motive in risking punishment to save me from humiliation. As a rule, she held aloof from us men, and openly rejoiced that her position of house-servant gave her advantages and privileges we did not share.

Though the "cold season" was at its height, yet the midday sun, beating down on the dry sand of the enclosure, was tremendous in its strength. Little Frayser, a Whitechapel pickpocket, swayed drunkenly in the ranks and would have collapsed, had not "Ballarat" held him up.

Frayser was newly convalescent of fever, this being his first day out of bed. Heat and excitement were proving too much for him.

Instinctively I took a step toward the poor fellow. My sympathy must have been apparent to Kent, for he ordered me to halt. Then, pointing to Frayser, he shouted to the guard officer:

"That fellow is malingering. I'll have no one playing sick. Strap him to the veranda rail. That will have to serve till a whipping-post can be set up."

Two of the guard dragged the fainting little fellow from the ranks and fastened him, hand and foot, to the railing. Kent vanished into the house and reappeared a moment later with a long, ugly, black-snake whip.

"Strip him to the waist!" he commanded. "Now, then," he went on, thrusting the whip into my hand, "give

him twenty-five lashes. And if you don't lay them on with all the strength you've got, I'll have you put in his place and the guard shall take turns at giving you double the number. Begin!"

The consummate deviltry of the man! He had seen my look of horror at the unjust punishment he had planned for my comrade. He knew, too, that if I obeyed the order I should suffer tenfold the pain I could inflict, and that I should in all probability rebel. This would give him the opportunity whereof Kate's former intervention had balked him.

"Begin!" he repeated fiercely.

I took one look at the pitiable, inert body of the little pickpocket. Then I flung the whip down on the sand, folded my arms and looked my cousin squarely in the eyes.

His gaze shifted under mine, and he turned to the guard officer once more.

"Give that malingerer his twenty-five lashes," said he, "and then have this man tied up and give him fifty."

The officer picked up the whip and advanced on Frayser. I jumped between the two.

"This man is still weak from fever," I cried, "and he is swooning. The whipping will kill him. You will have trouble, Mr. Warden, in explaining his death to the authorities. There are too many witnesses."

Angry as he was, Kent saw the force of my warning. He bit his lip, hesitated, then said to the officer:

"Unstrap him. I will attend to his case later. Tie up this man here and give him seventy-five."

Three of the guards caught hold of me and dragged me toward the rail. The officer ran the black whip-lash through his fingers and stood by, waiting to do his part. Kate stood in the doorway, her swarthy face dead white, her black eyes blazing.

I saw she was about to do something rash, though what I could not guess.

But I would save her the trouble. For I was of no mind to be flogged. Far better snatch one of the guard's rifles and end my life then and there than that I, an American army officer, should submit to such a degradation at the hands of a British master.

I wrenched myself free from my cap-

tors and sprang to the side of the house, where I stood, my back to the wall, on guard, and ready to sell my life as dearly as a single unarmed prisoner might hope to against a hundred riflemen.

After all, it would not be such a bad end. I should at least die fighting. What more could a soldier ask?

CHAPTER X.

THE CROWNING SHAME.

THERE I stood.

A dozen rifles were leveled at me. The officer's sword was raised and his eyes fixed on Kent, awaiting the warden's order to fire or to rush in upon the defenseless, unarmed wretch who dared defy the majesty of Great Britain's power by refusing to submit to a flogging at the hands of its representative.

I gave little thought, at the time, to dramatic effects. But, looking back, I can see the whole scene now as if I had watched it enacted on the stage.

The broiling antipodes sunlight, the hot white sand, the black stockade, the clump of excited convicts, Kate's set face peering forth in irresolute fear. And—the center and cynosure of it all—my own desperate, unkempt figure crouching furious and fearless against the house wall, waiting for the pitiable unequal life-battle to begin.

I had conscious eyes only for the nearest of my impending assailants. All present, it seemed, had eyes only for me. The time appeared interminable. Yet, I suppose, not more than three seconds elapsed between my breaking away from the guards and the advent of the most unlooked-for of interruptions.

And that same interruption befel in a very undramatic fashion. It consisted of the arrival of a great, creaky travelling carriage.

The vehicle had doubtless been admitted through the stockade gate, a minute or so before, unnoticed by any of us, and had trundled along the oyster-shell road to the front of Government House. There it pulled up, midway between me and my guards.

The lumbering old vehicle came to a halt with a jangle of its four mules' chains. The black driver slid off his

seat and slouched around to the carriage door, which he flung open.

Doubtless he had seen the leveled rifles, but the black of Australia, when once he has been laboriously trained as a servant, will go through his routine of duty, even if a series of bombs are about to explode around his feet.

Noisy and leisurely as had been the approach of the coach, it could not have burst upon us all more suddenly and unexpectedly had it dropped from the cloudless, blazing sky. Kent, at sight of it, broke into a volley of bellowed profanity.

But as the carriage's first occupant stepped out, the oath died in his throat as though a hand had been clapped across his thick lips.

I, too, forgot that I had, an instant before, been at the very door of death, and stared doggedly, unbelievingly, at the dainty vision in white that emerged from the coach. Then, as I regained my wits, I turned my back sharply upon her and sidled in among my fellows with averted face.

It was Ruth Osborne!

Had the visitor been the Queen of England herself, I could not have been more aghast, nor could her coming have been more unlooked-for. Yet, on saner thought, I saw there was nothing surprising in Ruth's being here.

Was not her uncle (who even now was piling his unwieldy bulk out into the road) the new prison governor of West Australia? What more natural than that he should make a tour of his settlements, taking his niece for companion, and that Duladgin should be honored with his presence?

His eagerness to press Kent's suit with Ruth would more than plausibly account for his bringing the poor girl along.

Kent was bowing over her hand, muttering ardent greetings that did not reach me. Then he straightened up and shook hands effusively with the dust-powdered, perspiring Bradway.

"Holding inspection, eh?" queried the latter, glancing about at our huddled, irregular ranks.

"It's finished now, sir," replied Stephen. "Officer, have these cattle marched back."

"But I came to look them over," protested Bradway.

"Plenty of time for that, sir, afterward. Come inside and have a glass of something cool and a bite of luncheon. Later, when you're rested—"

"All right. Come on, Ruth."

The governor tapped his niece on the shoulder. She started as though from a trance. She had been looking around the miserable enclosure and at ourselves.

From over "Ballarat's" shoulder I could see that her big azure eyes were full of tears. The girl, who had turned with scorn from me when she heard me proven a thief, had only infinite pity for the herd of similar brutes whom she now saw. Women are strange, are they not?

The shadows were beginning to slant before the westering ball of sun-fire that afternoon when a keeper came to the hut where I and three others were carding wool. With a nod he summoned me outside.

I wonder if any free man can realize what it means to be for years in a position where the words "Please" and "Thank you" are never used? Those simple terms of civility mean little to us in ordinary life. But when they are no longer heard we begin to feel the overwhelming loss of them.

I have seen a convict weep aloud at the sudden joy and surprise of hearing a prison visitor speak a casual word of thanks to him for some trifling service.

The keeper, when I joined him in the sunlight, said:

"Go to the Gov'ment House. Warden wants you."

I trudged off through the burning sand, my mind in a whirl.

Was I to receive the lashes I had escaped earlier in the day? Was Kent's fiendish ingenuity prompting him to have me flogged, perhaps in the presence of the woman who had once loved me?

No, for when punishment is afoot guards are present, and where there are guards there are rifles. Sooner than submit I should tear a rifle from one of these men and end the whole miserable story.

Curiosity gave place to indifference, and as I rounded the corner of the house and reached the veranda I was as stolidly

glum as the most hardened of my fellow sufferers. Yet my self-control was at once to receive a severe wrench.

For there, on the steps, stood Kent, alone. No guard, no official near him.

"Guy," he said, with a sort of mocking familiarity, as I came up, "Miss Osborne wants to look over the place. She is silly enough to feel an interest in you blackguards. I'm sending a couple of guards with her, but they'll follow at a distance. I want you to be her escort. Take her around and show her everything, and answer any questions she may ask. Mind you're civil or you'll sweat for any insolence. She is to be my wife, and I want her treated with all respect."

Those would have been Stephen Kent's last words on earth were it not that, at their conclusion, Ruth stepped out on the veranda beside him, tying on her sun-hat as she came. At sight of her my muscles, that had tightened convulsively for the attack, relaxed, and I stood dumbly awaiting her recognition.

I had already thought on the limits to which Stephen's malice might lead him. But never in my wildest dreams of cruelty had I imagined he would hit on so subtle a torture.

To force me to accompany the girl I loved and had lost, to expose me to her contempt, to parade me before her as an embruted convict commanded to show her around my prison! Compared to this crowning shame, the attempted flogging I had expected would have been as a mere pin-prick.

In my horror, even Kent's statement that she was to be his wife made for the moment a lesser impression than did the thought of this vilest of torments.

Yet I stood inert, with not even the impulse to run away. Her glorious eyes rested on me as Kent beckoned up the two guards. Yet, looking up under the tattered rim of my wide leaf-hat, I saw there was no glint of recognition in her face.

And I heaved a mighty sigh of relief. Was it not barely possible she might fail, throughout, to recognize me?

It was a year since she had set eyes on me. At that time I had been a smooth-shaven, nattily attired young fellow, with military carriage, and slender, well set-up figure. To-day I was clad in shapeless

convict garb, a matted beard covered the whole lower half of my face, my skin was tanned like an Indian's, and my hair hung untrimmed over my forehead. To add to the disguise my broad-brimmed hat flapped down over the upper part of my countenance.

Moreover, a year such as I had spent makes terrible changes in a man's features and expression. Taken all in all, my own father would not have known me. If only I could equally well disguise my voice—

"Here, you!" Kent was commanding. "Take this lady wherever she wishes to go. Miss Osborne, if this fellow is uncivil, or displeases you in any way, tell me on your return, and I'll order him enough lashes to pound a little politeness into him. He's a hardened scoundrel—a burglar by trade—but the guards will keep within sight of you all the time, so don't be nervous."

"I sha'n't be," she answered (and the hearing of her dear voice for the first time in so long sent a stab of pain through me). "Come, shall we start?"

I nodded, and fell in step beside her, slouching along with intentional clownishness, my hat pulled far over my eyes. I had a fleeting glimpse of Kent's grin as he turned on his heel and reentered the house. Then I nerved myself to my task.

"Suppose we make a round of the enclosure first," she suggested; "and then go later through the workshops?"

I nodded again, and we set off.

For a few moments we walked in silence. The rustle of her white skirt, the sense of her presence, set my heart to throbbing crazily. I remembered how the strand of her red-gold hair had thrilled me as it blew across my face that night on shipboard.

And now she—the girl of my dreams, whom I had never dared hope to see again—was once more at my side. Yet not all the oceans on earth were so deep as the gulf that yawned between us.

"You are barefoot," she said at last. "Doesn't the heat of the sand burn your feet?"

I shook my head.

"I'm afraid it must," she went on. "I shall speak to my uncle about providing shoes for the people here."

I made no reply, though she glanced at my averted face as though expecting some word.

"Tell me," she went on, "are there other needless discomforts you and your companions have to bear? If there are, I can bring them to my uncle's attention. You know, he is the new prison governor, and I am sure he wants to treat the men under his charge as kindly as his duties will permit."

Again I made no answer. She evidently set down my silence to the sulkiness of a hardened criminal, for she said nothing for a minute or two. Then she went on:

"I cared less to see the prison itself than to talk with one of the prisoners. That is why I asked to investigate Duladgin. I hoped to see or hear things that would help me make life easier for you all. It is punishment enough, surely, to be condemned to come out here and live in such quarters, without having to bear any added discomforts. Won't you let me help you?"

I shook my head, still keeping my face turned surlily away. She was not angry at my boorishness, but I heard a little sigh of regret such as might escape the lips of a gentle mother over the unruliness of a fractious child.

"I am sorry," she said at last.

Then, with a furtive note in her voice, and glancing around to make sure the guards were out of earshot: "I want to ask a question that means much to me. You have been here some time, I suppose. A man was transported last year to Australia, but to what part I don't know. I am wondering if he can by any chance be at Duladgin. I have not been able to examine the roster, and I don't like to ask Captain Kent. So, perhaps, you can tell me if he is here. His name is Meagher—Mr. Brian Meagher. Did he come to this settlement?"

Before I could check myself I had again nodded. There was a catch in her voice as she asked:

"Then he is here now?"

But by this time I had myself in hand. I shook my head. I had no intention of being asked to point myself out among the convict gangs.

She started, and I could hear that same catch of the breath as she half-whispered:

"He is not—not *dead*?"
I nodded.

The fragile ivory-handled fan with which she was toying snapped in her suddenly contracted fingers and dropped to the ground. Then I spoiled everything.

On the instant the past year slipped away, and the old instincts of a lifetime flashed back upon me. I dropped on one knee, picked up the broken bauble and, rising, lifted my hat as I handed it back to her.

Even before I realized what I had done I noted, with a secret joy, that her cheeks had gone dead-white and her blue eyes were swimming. But, as she mechanically took the proffered fan from me her glance fell full on my unshielded face.

And she knew me!

CHAPTER XI.

A MAN AND A MAID.

Yes, she knew me. Through the tan, the tangled hair and beard, the arrow-dotted canvas clothes, the haggard mask of misery. Through it all, she knew me.

How long we stood facing each other I do not know. She with a deepening look of wonder and recognition, and another, more all-engrossing expression, whose meaning I could not fathom. I, hat still raised, awkward, dumfounded.

It was she who broke the silence. It is always the woman, I think, who first recovers herself.

"I think I will go back to the house now," she said.

That was all. Yet her tone and that unreadable look in her face stung me like a whip.

"You were told by my cousin that I was a burglar—a hardened criminal!" I burst forth. "Knowing that, you still accepted my escort. Now that you recognize me, am I so vile that you can no longer endure to be with me? To-day when you looked over our 'Devil's Own Brigade,' as Kent calls us, your eyes filled with tears. I was one of those poor wretches whose misery made you weep. Yet now you shrink from me in disgust. Since when have I merited to be singled out as worse than my fellows?"

"I was wrong," she said slowly.
"Shall we go on with our walk?"

Now, so foolish and inconsistent a thing is man that at once I felt she was doing me deep injury by offering to make me keep up the agony of walking beside her.

"No," I said; "let us go back. Perhaps Kent can pick out some less dangerous and unworthy man in the gang to take you around."

"Is that fair to me?" she murmured, reproach and tears both faintly underlying her words.

"No," I made haste to protest. "Forgive me! What decency or good breeding could you expect of a transported convict? I would not hurt or offend you for all the world."

"Come," she decided, with gentle imperiousness, as she moved onward. "You shall walk with me if you will or not. I have much to ask you."

"I fear I have pitifully little to answer."

"Mr. Meagher," she began, after a pause, "you were captured in the act of robbing my uncle's safe. The proof against you was strong and conclusive. I have learned nothing to shake my belief in your guilt. Yet when I looked into your face, in the court-room that day, a doubt crept into my heart. I have never since been able to drive it out. Tell me, are you guilty?"

I was myself again. My course was clear.

"The court decided my guilt," I answered; "and I have nothing to add to the jury's verdict. It was just."

"Then you *are* guilty?" she said, and there was so little of questioning in her tone that I did not deem it necessary to answer.

On we walked without speaking. I glanced covertly at her. Her pretty brows were knit as if in deep thought. Finally she spoke.

"I do not wish to wound you," she began; "but a woman is proverbially inquisitive, and there are a few points I would like cleared up. You know, after the shameful way you cultivated my acquaintance, for the sake of robbing my uncle, some little reparation is due me. Even *you* must admit that. So I will exact payment by asking you questions."

I stared at her, puzzled. Neither the light tone nor the heartless words were such as I had expected from her. But her face was expressionless.

"I will answer what questions I can," I said miserably.

If she was merely inquisitive as to the details of my supposed crime, I could manage to find lies enough to satisfy her cruel curiosity.

"In the first place," she went on, speaking slowly and after an interval of thought, "why did you take that bundle of notes and put it into your pocket before making sure of the jewel-case that stood in the very front of the safe?"

"The notes were easier to dispose of in case I should be interrupted before I had rifled the whole safe," I lied glibly.

"I wonder if you opened the case before passing on to the back of the safe where the notes were."

"Yes; I opened it."

"But it was found closed."

"I closed it again."

"Methodical burglar! And you closed it even after you had seen the diamond and sapphire necklace that lay in the top of the case? Why didn't you take that necklace out? Didn't you know it was worth more than the notes?"

"I—I thought it might be paste."

"My uncle's watchdog was found dead in his kennel in the morning. Yet no mark was found on him. You killed him, I suppose?"

"Yes. I threw him a piece of poisoned meat, when I first left the house, earlier in the evening. One must be prepared for such emergencies, you see."

"Yes," she assented smilingly; "one must. And one must be prepared with a better set of falsehoods if one intends to make people believe him a burglar."

"I don't understand," I stammered.

"Neither do I," she retorted. "I wish I did. It may interest you to know my uncle owned no watchdog, that there was no jewel-case in the safe, and that none of us ever had a diamond and sapphire necklace."

I did not try to answer. Nor did she at once speak. A pretty mess I had made of my "confession"! What, then, had been the trend of all her strange questions?

"Mr. Brian Meagher," she said by and

by, "you did not rob my uncle's safe at all."

"I did," I protested, like a sulky schoolboy.

"You did nothing of the sort. If you had, would you have confessed to all this rigmarole about the dog and the jewel-case? No, you want me—you want *everybody*—to believe you a felon. I don't know why, but you do. And so you have let yourself be sent to this horrible place and wrecked your life, when you are as innocent of crime as I am!"

"There is another thing I have learned about you during this past year. You are not Brian Meagher. I talked last winter with an old Irish tenant of my uncle's. He had lived all his life in County Meath. He spoke with real regret of Brian Meagher's conviction, and said he had known him from a boy. The Brian Meagher he described was not you. The description was more like that of your bashful cabin-mate on the City of Berlin. Tell me, was it he who committed the burglary? Are you taking the blame in order to shield him?"

"No, no," I answered wearily; "you are altogether wrong. Please don't let us talk of it. Here is the road to the workshops. Shall we—"

"No, thank you. We sha'n't. Listen to me, you man of mystery. Who and what are you?"

"Why do you ask? Woman's curiosity again?"

"I might answer," she murmured, looking away, "that what you said to me one night on shipboard gave me some right to wish to know more about you—to try to help make right the terrible wrong that has been done you. It—it means much to me. Oh, won't you let me save you?"

All the torments of self-control that had gone before were as nothing to this. I would—oh, so eagerly—have thrown down my way-worn life for the right to tell her everything—to set myself straight in her eyes, to win her understanding and sympathy. But the seal of silence on my lips could not be lifted.

How could I tell her the truth? Knowing her as I did, I knew she would not then for a moment let matters remain as they were.

She would go to Kent—to Bradway.

Failing to find justice there, she would appeal to the law. Then the whole horrible story must come out, and the year-long sacrifice I had made must go for naught.

No, I could not tell her. Yet the knowledge that she at last held me guiltless of vulgar crime lifted an inexpressible load from my heart. The rest would be so much easier to bear now; the price so much lighter to pay.

"I can't tell you any more," I said. "Of all I have suffered this past year, the bitterest pain was in the knowledge that *you* believed me a thief. That you thought all I said to you on shipboard was spoken in order to win your confidence that I might rob your uncle. Now, since you no longer think that, I carry the gladdest heart in all Australia."

"Have *you* had all the suffering?" she cried, turning on me almost fiercely. "Has it been nothing to me that I let such a man (as I was compelled to think you were) speak to me as you had spoken? That I had trusted a malefactor? The shame of it has been with me every hour!"

I looked at her with new eyes. Yes, the gay, light-hearted, sunshiny girl of a year ago was now a woman. Sorrow and humiliation had done their work with her as well as with me.

"Some day," I told her, holding my tongue in leash as I spoke; "some day the whole wretched business can be cleaned up. When that day comes I shall find you and tell you," and I thought with misery of her betrothal to Stephen Kent, "not the story I had once hoped to tell—that dream is dead—but enough to clear me, to satisfy you that you are right in believing me a decent man."

"And meantime I am to sit idly by and see an injustice done you? I am to raise no hand to end your unjust imprisonment? What manner of woman do you think I am?"

"The best and loveliest that God ever placed on this abominable old earth of His," I made reply. "But you can do nothing for me. Nor shall I permit you to. What reason could you assign for declaring me innocent? Even if the case were reopened there is no new evidence. I should only assert my guilt once more."

"You are the most obstinate man alive!" she declared, stamping her little white-shod foot. "I shall, at any rate, tell Stephen Kent and my uncle what I think. They—"

"You can do me *one* service, and only one," I interrupted her solemnly. "Breathe no word whatever to either of them on the subject."

"But why not? I—"

"I cannot explain. But, take my word for it, in speaking so to them you will be pronouncing my death sentence. And, since seeing you again, I want to live. Not for what I once hoped. That is past and gone. But for the mere joy of being in the same world with you."

CHAPTER XII.

A WHISPER OF FATE.

I WAS lying, utterly worn out, by the embers of our camp-fire. The night was far advanced, but I could not sleep. My body was too weary. I fairly ached with fatigue. For weariness, carried to its full extreme, can be as painful and sleep-eluding, in its way, as toothache.

Two weeks had passed since Ruth and Bradway had come to Duladgin. Since that first happy afternoon I had never again had a chance of speaking alone with the girl of my heart.

A convict, naturally, can find scant opportunity to converse with a member of his warden's household. But I had seen her, from afar, every day. And the sight had kept me content.

Twice, too, when she was inspecting our workshops, in company with the head-keeper (for I had not again been sent for to act as her escort), she had found occasion to stop and speak to me as I bent over my tasks. Brief, commonplace words of cheer, such as the keeper might not misinterpret, but I could read the divine pity that lay beneath them.

Yes, "pity," not "love." I saw that now. A year ago she had fancied for a moment she loved me. The glamour of moonlight and sea, and the enforced idleness of an ocean voyage, had combined to make her respond to my ardor. But the shock of disillusion, the twelvemonth of separation, the daily propinquity with Kent, the pressure of her uncle's wishes—

all these had doubtless combined against me, until now she was visiting Duladgin as the affianced wife of its warden.

It was not merely Kent's word that had led me to this conclusion. He was ever a liar. But unless this were true even *he* would scarcely have dared, I thought, announce the fact to me at a time when she might readily have been within earshot. Moreover, I remembered Bradway's plans, and knew what pressure he could have brought to bear in fulfilling them.

Since the arrival of the visitors a fortnight before, Kent had not publicly sought to punish me. Yet I felt the daily increasing force of his malice.

Extra tasks were ever heaped on me by the head-keeper. Instead of working in one of the three eight-hour shifts, I was now usually kept on two of them. This would be the result of a failure of the keeper to call my name when ordering members of the gang to quit work.

It was a case of apparent forgetfulness that entailed on me sixteen hours a day of hard labor in a climate where even a stern home government imposed on its most fractious prisoners a maximum scale of eight work hours.

Then, too, for the first time since my arrival, I found myself accused of laziness and neglect, and still harder tasks were imposed as the penalty. I was put to work alone on the fanning-mill—a machine usually operated by at least two powerful men. Double loads of oakum, or wool were my portion in the "carrying-gang."

At close of day every muscle in my body ached. Not with healthy fatigue, but with a harmful, overstrained exhaustion that robbed me of all chance at recuperation or of restful slumber.

To complain would have been worse than useless. I recognized the devilish brain behind it all, and knew how eagerly Kent must be awaiting my first symptom of breakdown. Sooner than give him such satisfaction I toiled stolidly, unmurmuringly.

I had far greater strength than the normal man, or I could never have endured the strain for ever so brief a time. As it was, I knew there was merely the question of a few weeks before I must succumb. In the meantime, the knowl-

edge of Ruth's nearness to me kept up my heart and nerve as could nothing else.

To-night the stifling atmosphere of the huts had sent me out once more under the great white stars. There was little warmth left in the coals, and the night was cold. Yet the sand strip was better than the ill-ventilated, snore-resounding huts. I was grateful that Kent had not yet made good his threat of forbidding camp-fires.

I lay there, courting sleep, and idly counting the stars in the blazing, twinkling Southern Cross. A step behind me caused me to turn my head in dull curiosity. A woman was coming toward me. And in the elusive starlight I thought for a moment it was Ruth Osborne. I sprang to my feet and—saw it was but Kate.

She must have noticed my change of expression on making this discovery, for as she drew near she said crossly:

"I've risked three days dark cell to sneak out of my window and talk to you. And you act as if I was a kangaroo rat that had gnawed your blanket."

"I didn't mean to," I replied. "Sit down here by the fire. You'll catch cold coming out of doors this time of night. Here!" and as she seated herself on the box I had pulled up to the embers I threw my new blanket about her.

"What is that for?" she asked suspiciously.

"What?"

"Setting a chair for me and putting your blanket over me like I was a lady? Are you making fun of me?"

"Why, no," I said, surprised. "I hadn't noticed I did it."

"That's so," she sighed, puzzled. "I s'pose that's the difference between a real gentleman and one of our sort. Gentlemen are trained to be polite, and get so they do it without knowing. And the real gent does it just the same whether the woman's a duchess or a laundress. And the make-believe gent only does it when she's some one he's trying to make a hit with. Ain't that right?"

"Upon my soul, I don't know. I never thought it out. Why do you ask?"

"New warden treats his sweetheart that way. But the workwomen he orders around like dogs if they don't happen to be pretty. I s'pose *he's* the make-b'lieve kind of gent, ain't he?"

"Did you risk three days in the cells to come out here and discuss etiquette?" I asked, for the subject was growing painful.

"No, I didn't," she snapped. "And I didn't come out here to get snubbed, neither. And what's more, I didn't come just to be with you, though I s'pose you're vain enough to think I did. You men are always fools enough to be thinking someone's sweet on you."

I did not answer. There was no need. Her gusts of bad temper always passed as quickly as they came. I was of no mind to speculate as to the possible reasons of her presence here on the sand-strip at 1 A.M., when all the settlement except the sentries was supposed to be asleep.

"There!" she said at length. "That was a nasty way for me to talk, wasn't it? Why don't you hit me over the head when I say such things?"

"Whatever brought you out," I answered, "I am grateful to you for risking

the cells for my sake. And I'm still more grateful to you for interfering in my behalf that day two weeks ago. I've been hoping to see you ever since, to tell you so."

"Pshaw!" she muttered, laughing confusedly. "I'd 'a' done it for any of the crowd. We crooks must hang together—those of us that don't get hanged sep'rately."

She stirred up the embers with her foot. Then, on a sudden, she turned toward me.

"Meagher's an ugly name," she said.

"Is it?" I asked, wondering at the turn her caprice had taken.

"Yes," she went on; "it's an ugly name. If I was a man I'd pick out a prettier one. 'Guy Bruce,' for instance."

I was on my feet, stunned, marveling. She watched me amusedly. Then her manner changed.

"Sit down!" she commanded. "I've got something to tell you. Mr. Guy Bruce, you are going to be killed!"

(To be continued.)

A SHUFFLE IN FLOWERS.

By ZOB ANDERSON NORRIS.

Setting forth how a careless shop-boy chanced to play into the hands of Fate.

LIKE those of many others, Tucker's finances were in a state of collapse on account of the panic; but it was Elsie's birthday, and it was absolutely necessary that she should be remembered. A little bouquet of flowers, at the very least.

He stopped and looked through the window of a side-street florist's. Not beautiful enough. Not arranged with sufficient art.

He walked around to the avenue and stood before a window there. Exquisite! A miniature lake on which floated water-lilies—about this, lake orchids, roses, ferns.

As he stood longingly there, face pressed to glass, a clerk within walked to the edge of the lily-pond and frowned upon him. His frown was in all probability entirely accidental, the result of

some train of introspection; but to Tucker's morbid knowledge of his own pecuniary distress it seemed reproach.

He was perhaps interfering with the view of the passing throng.

Though he feared that there was no flower in that shop to fit his pocketbook, he turned the knob, opened the door, and entered.

He walked through the perfume of the roses and smiled at the clerk in a conciliatory way.

"I want a few flowers," he said; "but they must be reasonable. The panic, you know."

The clerk fingered the long, green stems of some roses of a rare and delicate pink.

"Not these, then?" he queried.

"Oh, no," sighed Tucker. "I am afraid I can't afford those."

At that moment an automobile stopped at the curb. Tucker looked in its direction.

It was one of more than ordinary magnificence, one of those machines fronted by gilt-framed glass and adorned with lamps that had all the glitter of gold. Standing at the curb in the sunlight, it was like nothing so much as a modern chariot of gold, richly bedecked and bewilderingly agleam.

A tall young man sprang out, entered the shop, and pointing to a huge bouquet of American Beauty roses in the case, said:

"A dozen of those."

The clerk bowed and smiled in the suave manner employed with customers of wealth.

"To be sent to the same address?" he questioned.

"The same," said his customer. "Miss Florence Van Ness. And send them quickly, please. Get them there if you can within the hour. It is her birthday," and taking out a roll of bills, he paid for the roses, walked out, entered the automobile, and sped away.

Tucker looked after the glitter of the machine with envious eyes. If only he could point out a dozen American Beauty roses for Elsie, pay for them from such a roll, and ride away to her in a glittering chariot of gold!

Well! Well! He scanned the case for some inexpensive flowers in the absence of the clerk, who was attending to the order for Miss Florence Van Ness.

When it had been satisfactorily arranged the clerk remembered the existence of Tucker.

"We have some seconds," he said to him in a kindly way, aware of the panic and its disastrous consequences to some of those who had been formerly his most lavish patrons.

"What are seconds?" Tucker asked.

The clerk lifted a polite hand in the effort to conceal a yawn. "Flowers that are not quite fresh," he replied.

"Let me see some seconds, then," said Tucker. "Some little dainty flower. What have you in a little flower? Oh! Forget-me-nots?"

Remembering that once he and Elsie had gone to look for forget-me-nots in a swampy place out in the country and

had been very happy together. Very happy. Perhaps she would remember that day, too.

The clerk brought out a little bouquet of forget-me-nots. Tucker fingered them lovingly as they seemed to look up at him with smiling kindness in their small starry eyes.

"This is her birthday," he mused. "Will they last until to-morrow?"

"They will last until the day after," promised the clerk.

"Then, will you send them right away?" Tucker implored. "And they are only half price, being seconds?"

"They are only half price," answered the clerk languidly.

Tucker took out a depleted purse.

"Then send them at once," he said, paid for them, gave Elsie's address, and left the shop.

II.

FLORENCE VAN NESS sat before her dressing-table looking at her beautiful face in the mirror. The maid was putting the last touches to her hair. Her friend Jeanette stood by.

"You can go now for a while," she said to the maid when the Marcel wave was perfect and all the little curls had been fastened with infinitesimal pins. "Put the silk kimono on me first. I will wear that until I am ready to dress for dinner. And, Mary, take those roses with you, the American Beauty roses in the vase. They are beginning to fade. Throw them out. Throw them a long way out. I suppose," poutingly, "that I shall have a fresh lot in a few minutes. It is about time. Always American Beauty roses. Nothing else, ever. I am sick of them, sick and tired!"

The maid took the roses from the vase, wiped the dripping water from the stems, and left the room.

Jeanette seated herself near Florence by the dressing-table, toying with the silver monogrammed articles of the toilet that lay richly about.

"Why are you tired of the roses?" she asked. "Imagine it! American Beauty roses in the panic period, when people are begging for bread! How spoiled you are!"

Florence pinned up a refractory curl.

"It is this," she explained. "He

goes into those expensive flower-shops and orders the roses without a spark of sentiment. It has become a habit with him. I am soon to be married to him. I must, therefore, have flowers, just as when I am his wife I must be splendidly gowned. The fiancée of a man of wealth must breathe the odor of flowers. He keeps me in flowers, as he insists upon the perfect grooming of his coachman, his footman, his chauffeur."

She rested her round elbow on the lace of the dressing-table and gazed on the reflection of herself without seeing it.

"He is very particular in the matter of detail," she went on. "Very particular. There is a bronze statue in his hall. There is also a lackey. The lackey matches exactly the bronze of the statue, a mulatto of a yellowish brown color."

"No!" exclaimed Jeanette.

"It is quite true," nodded Florence wearily. "The first one matched the bronze to perfection. He died. Oliver went wildly about among the servant furnishing establishments picking out another. He was days at it. He took a piece of cloth the color of the bronze—satin, it was—and matched it to the face. He succeeded very well. You can hardly tell which is which. One bats the eye and the other doesn't—that is all."

"It is exactly the same way," she continued by and by, "that he buys me the American Beauty roses. He calls me his beauty. Of course, I am an American beauty, so he sends me the American Beauty roses. I can see him now. Stopping that chariot of his at the curb, rushing in, pointing to a great bouquet of those flowers, and saying tersely, 'A dozen of those!' paying for them from a roll of bills as big as your fist, and hurrying out. No tender dallying over them, no sentiment—"

"But twelve dollars!" Jeanette interpolated.

"That doesn't matter," declared Florence, who was rich in her own right. "Sometimes I feel like breaking off our engagement and finding some one who has a slight modicum of sentiment in his make-up."

"Rich or poor?" queried Jeanette.

"Rich or poor," answered Florence.

Jeanette turned to the furniture in her appeal.

"Listen," she cried, "to this young woman who was born with a silver hair-brush—spoon, I mean—in her mouth! To this young woman who has never known what it was to stand in a Bowery bread-line!"

"I should like," continued Florence moodily, "to have this man who loved me go to a shop and stand outside, looking in and wishing, wishing with all his heart, that he might be able to buy me some little flower and send it to me, all for love of me—some little, inexpensive flower, costing next to nothing, but a flower that we two had picked together. I should like—I should like—"

Jeanette leaned forward.

"What flower?" she asked.

"Once," remembered Florence, "we went together, Oliver and I, and found some forget-me-nots.

"It was in a swampy place that we found them, those tiny, little forget-me-nots, and we got our feet quite wet, but that was nothing. We laughed at it. That was at the very first, when I was sure he loved me, when I was not so near to marrying him and becoming part of his establishment as I am now, and he had sentiment.

"Do you know what would make me happy? Very, very happy?" The eyes in the mirror grew beautifully big. "This: for him to send me a little bunch of forget-me-nots. Not those arrogant, haughty, supercilious American Beauties, but a little tiny blue-eyed bunch of forget-me-nots."

There was a knock, and the maid entered with a little box. She laid it on the dressing-table.

"Flowers," she said, "from Mr. Worthington."

Florence waked from her dream with a sigh.

"At any rate," she said, "it cannot be American Beauties in such a little box."

She cut the strings and lifted the lid. She carelessly turned the delicate tissue of the paper and sat radiantly looking at the flowers that lay 'within.'

"I can hardly believe it," she said at last.

Jeanette arose and stood over her, gazing at the flowers.

"Forget-me-nots!" she exclaimed. "It is almost as if he had read your thought."

Florence took the flowers out and held them tenderly to her cheek.

"I believe in those things," she murmured. "He did! He did! While I sat here wishing for them, he was buying them—these dear little beautiful forget-me-nots!"

III.

HER maid had taken out her most beautiful gown to make her radiant in his eyes, a ruff of trailing lace; she had fastened the forget-me-nots at her waist on the heart side, and now, Jeanette gone, she stood back of the curtains in the drawing-room, waiting for him.

The little forget-me-nots! Then he really loved her. Then he, too, remembered when they had found the little flowers together. There was, then, beneath his polished exterior a depth of real sentiment.

She could hardly wait for him to come to put her arms around his neck and express to him her thanks for that tender sentiment.

At last, the chariot of gold spun up and stopped. She saw him spring out and hurry up the steps. In another moment he was announced.

He came in, closed the door behind him, and stood smiling at her. She ran to him.

"And so," she breathed, her arms about his neck, "you really loved me, after all."

He held her off at arm's length, looking at her.

"Of course," said he. "Didn't you know it all the time?"

"I was not quite sure," she said, "until you sent me these," and lovingly she touched the forget-me-nots that nestled at her waist.

Worthington suppressed an inclination to whistle. Then the mistake flashed over him. The seedy young fellow who had stood at the flower-shop counter waiting for him to be waited on. He remembered him now.

"Oh, yes," he smiled, "the forget-me-nots," and awaited her next word.

She came into his arms again.

"After all," she sighed contentedly,

"you did remember that day and how we went looking for the little flowers?"

"Of course," said he.

"And you remembered to send them to me on my birthday," she went on, "because of that?"

He bent and kissed her little curls.

"Why, certainly," said he.

IV.

ELsie was laying the cloth for dinner, and her mother, who was an invalid, sat in a big-pillowed chair near by under the reading-lamp, when the boy from the florist's rang the bell.

She ran to the door and when she opened it she stood amazed at the size of the box he handed to her.

"I wish you would look, mother," she said, coming back into the room and putting it on the table. "What do you suppose Jack has sent me for my birthday? A flower garden?"

Without waiting for an answer, she cut the strings and opened the box. With trembling fingers she lifted the tissue-paper, took out the great odorous bunch of American Beauty roses, and held them up to her mother for closer inspection.

"Look, look!" she panted. "What do you suppose has happened to Jack? Has he had his salary raised, do you think, or fallen heir to a fortune?"

"Bring them here and let me smell them," implored the invalid. "Ah! They are sweet!"

It was not long before Tucker, who had been invited to dinner, arrived. Elsie took him by the hand and drew him into the little dining-room, where the roses in the tallest vase she could find had been placed in the center of the table.

"You darling," she cooed, "to send me these! But how did you manage it? The panic! These hard times!"

Tucker gazed in a bewildered way at the beautiful flowers whose perfume filled the little room. The remembrance of the man who had ordered them flashed over him, the roll of bills, the chariot of gold.

"A fellow must give his sweetheart roses on her birthday," he explained shamelessly, "if it takes his last cent."

LEFT IN THE LURCH.*

By GRANT L. CONRAD.

A hard-luck story, with an account of the desperate device resorted to by a man with money owing him which he couldn't collect.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THREE young reporters, Brewster, McKay, and Winters, lose their positions at the same time. McKay at once finds other employment, and Brewster, on the same day, marries, and takes over the management of his wife's affairs. Winters is thus left alone. One of his friends owes him one hundred and twenty-five dollars, of which he can only pay fifty, though he gives a note for the remainder, payable at the end of the month.

Winters moves to a cheap boarding-house, after lending his fifty dollars to McKay. That evening he receives an invitation to the wedding of an old college chum, and realizes with dismay that he must somehow obtain a present. McKay repudiates his debt in a scene which makes the two men bitter enemies.

As Winters is walking down a street his eye falls on a sign: "Typewriters for Sale or Rent." In desperation he hires a typewriter, pawns it, and with the money buys a present.

At the wedding reception he meets Miss Ransom, to whom McKay is attentive, and escorts her home. On his return he misses his card-case containing the pawn-ticket, whose loss may mean for him two years in prison. He searches everywhere, and finally goes to Miss Ransom's house to ask if he has left it there.

McKay, who is in the house at the time, restores the card-case to him; but a glance through its contents shows Winters that the pawnbroker's red slip is missing.

CHAPTER VI.

M'KAY EXCEEDS HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

IT is curious how human beings can at times, under the cloak of conventional behavior, conceal any expression of their true feelings.

Positive that McKay knew the full truth about that very questionable transaction of his with the typewriter, and expecting each moment to be denounced, Winters sat on there, chatting and laughing lightly with Miss Ransom and appearing as though he had not a care in the world.

It was the same spirit, though, that induces a condemned murderer to appear "game" and to smoke a cigar on the way to the scaffold; for all the time Winters was wondering dully how soon the blow would fall, and his tense nerves, strained almost to the breaking-point, were shrieking against the torture of being kept so long upon the gridiron.

McKay, however, gloomed silently from the sofa and made no move to speak until Miss Ransom was summoned from

the room to answer a telephone call, when he quickly arose, his features convulsed, and advanced upon Winters.

"See here, you dog," he ejaculated hoarsely, "I don't choose to have you come snooping around this house any more, and I give you fair warning that you'd better stay away."

"Ah," thought Winters, with what he believed to be a comprehension of the other's purpose, "he doesn't intend to denounce me as I supposed, but to hold this knowledge over my head as a club to force me to do whatever he wishes."

Aloud, however, he merely said quietly: "Is that to be construed as a bargain or a threat?"

Meantime, he studied his antagonist through narrowing eyes, trying to decide just what tactics to pursue with him.

"I don't understand you," growled McKay impatiently. "Is what a bargain or a threat?"

"Why, the genial proposition you just made me to stay away from here. If it is a bargain, I want to be sure before considering it that the *quid pro quo* will

*Began March ARGOSY. Single copies, 10 cents.

be duly forthcoming. You see, your promises to pay don't exactly rate at face value with me."

"Well, let's make a bargain, then," proposed the other eagerly. "If you'll agree to stay away from here and have nothing further to do with Miss Ransom, I'll hand you over your fifty dollars this minute."

"And what about something else of mine that you have in your possession?" inquired Winters pointedly.

He had no intention of complying with such stipulations; but he hoped to lead McKay along into producing the pawn-ticket, when he was determined to gain possession of it by the exercise of physical force.

But he had no sooner put the question than he would willingly have had it unsaid; for he saw plainly from the other's puzzled expression that he had no idea what was meant.

"Something else of yours?" protested McKay. "What are you talking about? I haven't got anything of yours except that measly fifty dollars, and, as I say, if you'll do the right thing, I'll give that back to you."

Their conversation was interrupted at this point by the return of Miss Ransom, and of course nothing more could be said: but Winters had gained food for thought.

Strange as it might appear, the missing pawn-ticket was evidently not in his enemy's keeping. McKay's perplexity was too genuine, his denial too quick and spontaneous to be feigned. His visit and query that morning at the boarding-house, his significant remarks, even the absence of the red slip from the card-case after passing through his hands, must have some other explanation.

And such, in fact, was the case.

The reason the man had called at Mrs. Sowerby's was from fear lest Winters might tell something to his disadvantage to Miss Ransom. He thought that possibly he might square things up with his old associate by paying back the borrowed fifty, and it was for that purpose alone he had hunted the other up; while, as to his question concerning the typewriter, that had merely been prompted by idle curiosity because, knowing that Winters had no machine, he was a little

surprised to see a letter to him from typewriter agents lying there upon the hall-table.

Of course, Winters knew nothing of this, however, and he was consequently thrown into a maze of perplexity. Now that the pawn-ticket evidently was not in McKay's hands, where was it, and what steps could he take to recover it?

But he did not have very long to ponder upon the new shape into which the situation had formed itself; for Miss Ransom with a by no means wobegone manner informed McKay that the telephone message had been from her father, and had stated that he would require the services of his secretary all that afternoon.

"That will, of course, prevent your accompanying auntie and myself to the matinée, as we had arranged, Mr. McKay," she added, "so I am going to ask Mr. Winters if he won't remain to lunch with us, and then go on to the theater in your place?"

Naturally, Lockwood jumped at the chance, for it was a play he had long wished to see, and to see it with Miss Ransom made the prospect all the more alluring; but he was forced to admit that he expected to see nothing upon the stage that afternoon which would amuse him quite so much as McKay's expression at this announcement.

To add to his disgust, Winters stepped up to him as he was leaving the room and whispered in his ear:

"I don't think we will make that bargain you proposed, after all. In fact, McKay, not for fifty times fifty, nor indeed for five hundred times that, would I agree to stop coming to this house."

Yet, for all his rage at the time, the afternoon had not passed before McKay was thanking his lucky stars that he had been left out of the theater-party. For, after the various details of correspondence which Mr. Ransom wished attended to had been finished, the old grain merchant turned to him with a sly wink and said:

"McKay, can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, indeed, sir. Anything you may ever confide to me is safe, I can assure you. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. Only I thought you might be interested in knowing that there

will be something doing down on the Corn Exchange next Tuesday.

"And, by the way," he added over his shoulder as he went out, "place an order for me with Wingate & Robinson," naming his brokers, "to buy a million bushels, will you?"

That was all he said; but it was enough for McKay. He didn't need a brick house to fall on him in order to get an idea through his skull.

Since old Isaac Ransom was going to "buy" a million bushels, it was practically a copper-riveted cinch that the "something doing in corn" predicted for next Tuesday was a rising market. By George, it was ten to one that the veteran operator had a "corner" started.

A chap would be a fool, said McKay to himself, who failed to profit by a tip like that.

"Now, here am I," he reflected, "entrusted by Ransom to buy a million bushels. What is the matter with my swelling the figures to just double that amount? The brokers, knowing for whom I am acting, will never think of questioning the order, and when it comes to settling-up time, I can cap off the profits on that extra million bushels for myself, and nobody the wiser. There isn't a possible chance to lose on it; a pointer of that kind from a man like Ransom is as sure as sunrise."

Accordingly, he placed the order the following morning for two million bushels, instead of the one which his employer had directed, and thereafter went about indulging in roseate dreams of the wealth which was soon to be his, hardly able to wait until Tuesday should come and bring with it the realization of his hopes.

There was but one thorn in his pillow during those days of delirious expectation, and that was the growing favor with which Lockwood Winters was coming to be regarded by Miss Ransom.

However, he promised himself that he would attend to that as soon as the more important matter of making a fortune upon the corn market was off his hands.

"That fellow has a secret of some kind bothering him," he muttered to himself, "and as soon as I have time I am going to find out what it is. He was frightened to death for some reason

when I first started in on him the other morning; and he certainly meant something when he said I had other things of his besides the fifty dollars.

"Jove," he exclaimed, twisting his face up into an evil smile, "I wish I could get hold of some secret of that duck's which would result in his ruin and disgrace. Wouldn't I make him sweat before I got through with him!"

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE LOST WAS FOUND.

AND all this time the red slip of paper which stood as a redemption-ticket for the typewriter at the pawn-shop was reposing peacefully along with some samples of dress-goods, a diminutive powder-puff, two or three keys, and various other articles of *bric-à-brac* in Miss Bernice Ransom's hand-bag.

How it got there is very simple.

Winters, it will be remembered, had extracted a card from the case and handed it to Miss Ransom on the night of the wedding; but neither he nor she noticed that he handed her at the same time the pawn-ticket snugly affixed to the back of the card by the aid of two doubled-over postage-stamps which happened to be lying just at that point in the card-case.

The girl had tucked the card in her bosom at the time, and later transferred it to her bag without more than a glance at the face of it, and had consequently remained totally ignorant of the fact that it was carrying "excess baggage."

Its continued and inexplicable absence, though, had certainly plunged Winters into a quandary. He supposed, of course, that he had dropped it somewhere; but how to recover it was a very ticklish question. He was afraid to advertise, afraid to let any one know that he had sustained such a loss, lest the owners of the machine might in some way learn of it, and, having their suspicions aroused, start an investigation.

All he could do, in fact, was to notify the pawn-broker not to deliver the typewriter to any one else appearing with the ticket; but when he did this he was also informed to his dismay that without the slip neither could he himself redeem it within any period short of a year.

Hence he realized that if the ticket were haply destroyed, or if for any reason he failed very shortly to recover it, his day of reckoning could not long be delayed; since, even though he were willing to pay rental on the machine until the year had elapsed and he was able to redeem it, that would not save him from detection. Agents of the company visited its clients periodically to inspect the machines, and the first time one of these called on him, exposure was, of course, inevitable.

And yet what could he do? The probabilities were almost overwhelming that the ticket had fallen to the floor when he gave his card to Miss Ransom, and had been swept up unnoticed with the other débris of the wedding on the following morning, thence to mix with the daily refuse of the great city, and be conveyed to Barren Island, or towed in the garbage-scows far out to sea.

If he had a hundred dollars, or even possibly a lesser sum, he could no doubt buy the machine and be relieved from his trepidation; but where was he to get a hundred dollars? The seventy-five-dollar check still remained in his pocket, not yet worth its face value; the chances of getting a job appeared no more favorable for all his hustling about.

To add to his trouble, Miss Ransom, as is the way with a girl when she begins to find out that she really likes a man, had started in to flout and rebuff him, and was just now bestowing all her choicest smiles on McKay.

Neither of the rivals understood this feminine foible, and as a consequence Winters waxed glum and morose, while the private secretary stuck out his chest and strutting about under the impression that he was irresistible.

Everything was coming his way, McKay thought. On Tuesday he would make his great *coup* down on the Corn Exchange, and that night he would be elected captain of his company, for he had now little doubt of the success of his candidacy.

In order to gain votes, he had whispered to some half dozen or more men of undoubted influence in the regiment an intimation of the valuable tip old Ransom had given him, and had been assured by them that in return for the

favor they would do all in their power to forward his ambitions.

And in addition to this, for the purpose of raising money with which to entertain the boys and prejudice them in his favor, he deliberately went to a rival broker opposed to his employer's interests, and sold out the information he had received.

"Keep a secret? Of course, I can keep a secret," he muttered boastfully; "but I can tell one, too, when I see it is going to be worth my while to do so."

So, Tuesday he felt was to be his lucky day. At its close he would not only be a wealthy man, but would also have the honor and prestige of being commanding officer in the crack company of the swell One Hundred and Twenty-First.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed as these considerations recurred to him. "what's the matter with my playing this winning streak to the limit? Bernice is evidently in love with me, ready to drop into my hands like a ripe peach the moment I say the word. Why, then, should I delay saying it? Why not ask her, too, on Tuesday, and thus sweep the whole board?

"I'll do it," he decided. "There isn't a chance in a million of her refusing me at any time, but especially not on the day when all my dreams will come true."

And so, at last, the fateful day arrived. McKay, sure though he was of the girl's consent, naturally spent a little more time than usual primping over his toilet, and consequently was late to breakfast.

Bernice was already down and, expecting to go out at once to keep an engagement at her dressmaker's, had left her gloves and bag lying on the hall-table; and as the private secretary hurried past toward the breakfast-room he accidentally knocked them off, with the result that the contents of the bag were scattered all over the floor. With an exclamation of impatience, he hurriedly stooped to gather the things up; but was suddenly halted in his task by the sight of Lockwood Winters's card staring up at him from out the huddle.

Growling out a curse, he crumpled it up vindictively in his hand; but as he did so his eye was caught by something red attached to the back of it.

"A pawn-ticket!" he exclaimed sharply under his breath. "And for a typewriter!"

Slowly his eyes narrowed as he detached the ticket and smoothed it out upon his palm.

"Why, Winters had no typewriter," he muttered thoughtfully. "At least, he had none when he was at the apartment, and he certainly has not had enough money to get one since. Besides, his landlady distinctly told me that he didn't have any."

He glanced at the ticket again, and saw that the date upon it was not two weeks old.

"Ah!" excitedly, as a comprehension of the real state of affairs began to dawn upon him. "What was that typewriter concern from whom I saw a letter directed to Winters lying upon his hall-table? By Jove! it was the same firm from which we bought that new machine down at the office last Friday. And they *rent* them, too; I remember seeing the sign in their windows."

With this much of a clue, it was not hard for one of McKay's dishonest turn of mind to trace out the whole transaction, and as every fact which presented itself dovetailed into his theory and pointed more and more conclusively to Lockwood's guilt, the slow smile of crafty triumph deepened on his face.

"That was why he was in such a way over the loss of his old card-case," he ruminated; "and the reason he was so afraid of me was because he thought I had taken out this ticket. Oh, I'll bet he has been in a sweat ever since he discovered it was gone. And well he may be, too; it's a State's prison job that he has let himself in for."

"Didn't I say that Tuesday was my lucky day?" he exulted. "Here, first crack out of the box, comes along a chance to get even with that young man and pay him back for all his smartness. I guess I won't use it," carefully fastening the ticket back upon the card with the stamps. "Oh, no," laughing sardonically, "I won't use a thing like this!"

A slight noise behind him interrupted his satisfied comments, and, thrusting the card into his pocket, he whirled swiftly about to encounter James, the butler.

"What the mischief do you want?" demanded McKay with a scowl.

The butler's countenance was as impassive as that of a graven image.

"Hi was just 'unting you hup, sir, to tell you that breakfast was served."

"All right, I'll be there in a minute." And hastily scooping up the remaining contents of the bag, McKay stuffed them into it, laid the receptacle back upon the table, and went on to the dining-room.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE MERCY OF THE ENEMY.

THE private secretary was in such a flurry of excitement that morning over what he expected the day to bring forth that he could not eat, and consequently he folded his napkin and shoved back his chair before any of the rest were through.

As he went out he stopped for a moment at Bernice's side.

"Are you going to be in this morning?" he inquired in a low voice.

"Why, yes," glancing up in surprise. "That is, I have to go out for an hour or two; but I shall be back by eleven. Why do you ask? Is there anything you wanted to see me about?"

"Well, I want to have a few moments with you some time to-day."

He saw her aunt's eye bent curiously upon him and hastily invented an excuse.

"You know your father wished us to consult together concerning the redecoration of the library. However, suit your own convenience in regard to the interview. Any time to-day will do."

"Very well," she assented. "I am obliged, as I say, to go to the dress-maker's for a short time; but after that I will be at your service, and I shall send for you as soon as I come in."

He bowed and passed out, and she resumed the discussion of her coffee and rolls, leisurely turning over the pages of the morning paper as she ate.

At last she, too, finished, and rising with her aunt, was about to follow the latter from the room, when she was stayed by a discreet but significant cough from James.

She dropped back a step, and waiting until her aunt was out of hearing, turned to the butler with a glance of inquiry.

"Well, James," she asked, "what is it?"

"Why, beggin' your pardon, miss, for bein' so bold; but might Hi hast hif there was hanything of value-like in that there little bag you carries around with you?"

"Anything of value in my hand-bag?" she laughed. "Oh, dear, no; merely a few little trifles, and possibly a dollar or so in change. What could have put any such question as that into your head?"

"Well, Hi didn't know, hand my suspicions was aroused somew'at this mornin', miss, by seein' Mr. McKay swipe a harticle of some kind hout of it. Hi don't trust that fellow none too much, you see, miss—'e jumped like 'e was shot when I come up be'ind him—so Hi didn't know but what there might be some funny business going hon."

"You saw Mr. McKay take an article of some kind out of my hand-bag?" demanded the girl incredulously. "Are you sure, James?"

"Oh, yes, miss. 'E'd spilt what was in hit hall hover the floor, hand 'e was picking the things hup when Hi come hupon 'im; but this one harticle 'e 'eld hout, hand stuffed it hinto 'is pocket."

"And what was this article you speak of?"

"Well, that Hi don't know has Hi can rightly say, miss. Hi thought at first hit was a visiting-card; but hif it was, it must 'ave 'ad something fastened to hits back, for when 'e turned it hover in 'is 'and Hi plainly saw that it was red."

Bernice shook her head perplexedly; there was nothing of such a description among the contents of her hand-bag that she could recall.

"Bring me the bag, James," she said. "I can soon tell what it is that is missing."

When it was brought, accordingly, she emptied it out upon the table and carefully inventoried the heterogeneous collection; but still she had to confess herself at a loss.

Everything was there, apparently—samples, powder-puff, keys, the verses of poetry she had clipped out of a newspaper—

Ah! James had said the thing which

McKay had taken seemed to be a visiting-card. And where was the one which Lockwood Winters had given her?

Still, she pondered bewilderedly, why should McKay have abstracted that? He knew she did not need it to communicate with Winters, for he had seen her mark the latter's telephone number upon a slip pasted up in the booth.

However, she reflected angrily, it made no difference what he wanted with it. He had no right to tamper with anything that belonged to her.

"James," she said peremptorily, "go tell Mr. McKay that I wish to see him here at once—or, stay," halting him at the door. "on second thought, you needn't mind. I will go to him instead."

The idea had just occurred to her that perhaps in some way McKay could use that card to Winters's disadvantage. She didn't understand just how, but she knew that the two men were bitter foes, and there must be some reason back of the private secretary's action in taking it.

It might, therefore, be better, she concluded, to communicate with Winters before acting too hastily.

Full of this purpose, she hurried to the telephone, but when she reached it she found McKay already using the instrument. Moreover, he had neglected to close the door of the booth completely, and while she waited for him to come out she could not help overhearing some scraps of his conversation.

"Is this the Whoopemup Typewriter Agency?" she heard him ask; and then he went on: "Well, some evidence of a fraud which is being practised upon your people has just come into my possession, and I thought I had better report it to you."

There were some more questions and answers which she could not catch, and then McKay's voice sounded clear and distinct again.

"Yes," he said, "the pawn-ticket is in Winters's name, and is made out for a loan of twenty dollars on one typewriter. It came into my hands in a peculiar manner; he had evidently been carrying it around in his card-case, and the fool permitted it to get stuck to one of his cards with some loose postage-stamps, and then handed out the card, never thinking that by so doing he was opening

to himself the doors of State's prison. It is a State's prison offense, isn't it?" he inquired eagerly.

The answer evidently pleased him.

"Two years, eh?" he chuckled. "Well, that's good enough, although a still longer term wouldn't hurt for such a brazen rascal as this Winters appears to be."

There was a moment's silence as the man at the other end of the wire said something; then McKay rejoined: "Oh, yes; I shall be here after lunch, and if you send up a responsible man I shall be pleased to turn over the card and the ticket to him. You owe me no thanks; I am only too happy to have been instrumental in bringing such a rogue to justice."

Bernice drew back aghast at what she had overheard, and while McKay was ringing off, hurried away in order that he might not discover that she had been eavesdropping.

What it was all about she could not understand, but she grasped clearly that the man she loved was in danger.

She did not believe—any more than would your sweetheart or mine under similar circumstances—that Winters had committed a crime; but she saw that he was involved in some sort of a hideous complication, and that McKay derived from that visiting-card the power to send him to State's prison.

And what could she do to prevent it? She pressed her hands to her temples and tried to think.

It would be useless to demand the card from McKay now; for he had promised to deliver it to the typewriter people after luncheon, and he would certainly insist upon doing so.

Probably—she knew so little of law—he would have no legal right to give it back to her, now that it had become evidence in a State's prison case.

And yet she must regain possession of that card in some way. Must have it in her keeping before those men arrived after luncheon!

After luncheon? She glanced despairingly at the clock. At the most, she had but a few scant hours in which to act, and as yet no plan had suggested itself which seemed to promise success. There was no way—

Or stop! A sudden inspiration flashed over her. There *was* a way, after all. The feminine way—the way of strategy!

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

MEANWHILE, on leaving the telephone-booth, McKay had returned to Mr. Ransom's rooms on the third floor, where the millionaire transacted a large proportion of his business, and which were consequently fitted up with all the paraphernalia of a regular office—desks, typewriters, even a ticker clicking away over in the corner.

The old grain merchant himself was away this morning—he had stated that he would be obliged to be on the floor of the exchange all that day; but he had left plenty of work behind to be looked after by his secretary.

McKay, however, contemptuously pushed the mass of correspondence to one side and closed down the lid of his desk.

Was he going to slave and toil on this glorious day of his destiny? Well, not exactly. And wheeling a chair up to the ticker, he lighted a cigar, and while he sat there in luxurious ease, let the tape reel off through his fingers.

And it was a beautiful story that tape had to tell him; one which bore fruitful promise of realizing his brightest hopes; for the market, opening at about the average which it had maintained for the past week, was developing unexpected strength, and, despite the vigorous hammering of a strong bear clique, was showing a steadily more buoyant tendency.

By eighths and quarters it advanced; the fluctuations, a trifle sluggish at the start, becoming more rapid as the morning proceeded, and the "bull" operators gained fuller confidence; and with each point gained and held, the lone watcher's exultation swelled proportionately.

At eleven o'clock the quotation was 46½, which was a clean two-point rise from the price at opening, and by half past eleven it stood at even 48.

Then began a series of rapid upward jumps, as though some gigantic fist were underneath the market, driving it higher with trip-hammer jolts.

"48, 48½, 48¼, 48¾, 49." The figures danced along before McKay's fascinated gaze. "49¾, 49½, 49¾, 50."

He felt like kicking up his heels and dancing in his delight.

"By Jove, it's a runaway!" he exclaimed gleefully; "and there's no telling where she'll be headed off. That suspicion of mine about the 'boss' having a corner on it must have been correct. Fifty and a half now she is," glancing again at the tape. "Why, it's a cinch she'll reach sixty before the close of the day. I wish I had placed an order for two million bushels extra, instead of only one."

His rapturous contemplation of the tape was interrupted by a knock on the door, which caused him to spring swiftly away from the ticker and, sticking a pen behind his ear, appear immersed in work.

"Come in," he called sharply, and the door opened to admit James.

"Mr. McKay, sir," the butler announced. "Miss Ransom sends 'er compliments, and says as 'ow 'aving returned 'ome, and being hotherwise disengaged, she is now ready to see you, sir, whenever it suits your convenience. She said as 'ow you could find 'er in the conservatory."

"All right," curtly. "Tell her I'll be along presently."

But when the butler had withdrawn, and he was alone once more, a smile of broad elation spread over McKay's features.

"I said she was like a ripe peach," he chuckled. "She knows what's coming all right, and like every other woman she wants it as romantic as possible. That is the reason she has chosen the conservatory for our meeting, and she will expect me to play the regular stage lover.

"Oh, I guess I can fill the bill all right," strolling over to survey himself in the mirror, and conceitedly twirling his mustache. "But I musn't let her think I am too anxious. If I keep her waiting a few minutes, she will be all the more ready to fall."

Consequently, it was in his most leisurely manner, and with all the air of an assured conqueror, that he strolled into the conservatory some fifteen or twenty minutes later; and his first glimpse of the waiting maiden confirmed him in the

belief that he had but to say the word to win her.

Gowned becomingly, she was seated on a rustic bench underneath a huge, tropical fern, and close beside a fountain which plashed musically as it fell. In one hand she carried a gorgeous crimson rose, and her proud head drooped a little pensively toward it, as though she had grown weary waiting for his coming.

At the sound of his footstep, however, she roused up and greeted him with a welcoming smile, moving her skirts aside to make a place for him beside her.

"Oh, she is mine! She is mine without a struggle!" McKay told himself rapturously. Yet somehow, when they had talked a few minutes, and he started to introduce a sentimental tinge into the conversation, she deftly turned him aside.

Again and again he reverted to the purpose he had in view; but each time—just how he could not understand—before he reached the point of declaring himself, she would have him switched off to quite another tack.

Still she did it so ingenuously, with such apparent unconsciousness, that he could not feel disgruntled. Indeed, he had seldom enjoyed himself better; for although she kept him off, she subtly flattered and deferred to him all the while, and he was continually thinking that in the next moment or two she would give him the opportunity he wanted.

Brilliantly and entertainingly she talked—an unprejudiced observer might have considered her manner almost feverish—and McKay surrendered himself more and more to her spell, until he too was talking more freely than his wont, and entirely without his usual caution and reserve.

In some way, Winters's name came up, and the girl confessed that she had found him a very pleasant acquaintance.

"Don't say that where anybody else would be apt to hear you," advised McKay sharply; "for by this time to-morrow you'll be ashamed you ever had anything to do with him. That young man is booked for a straight trip right through to Sing Sing."

"Mr. Winters?" she exclaimed incredulously. "Oh, I cannot believe it!"

"Nevertheless it is a fact," the other asserted stoutly. "I happen to know that

he is to be arrested this very afternoon for having pawned a typewriter which did not belong to him. He cannot escape under a two years' sentence, I am informed."

"But it is a baseless charge, of course," she scoffed. "He will, no doubt, be able to clear himself without any trouble."

"Will he?" sneered McKay. "I guess not, with the proofs that can be shown of his guilt. See here," irritated by her continued air of skepticism. "Here is the pawn-ticket made out in his name, and for a typewriter; whereas, I happen to know of my own knowledge that he never owned such a thing in his life."

He jerked the ticket and its attached card out of his pocket as he spoke, and held them up triumphantly before her.

She gave a slight exclamation, and, reaching up, drew them from his hand, as though for the purpose of a closer inspection, and at the same moment let fall quite naturally the rose she had been holding.

"Oh, my rose!" she cried, and McKay stooped to recover it for her; but before he could hand it back James entered hurriedly. How was McKay to know that he had been stationed in the doorway, and that the dropping of the rose was a prearranged signal for his appearance?

"Beg pardon, sir," he said hurriedly; "but I've been looking for you all hover the 'ouse for the last ten minutes. There's a 'urry call on the phone from Mr. Ransom. 'E said it was 'ighly important 'e should speak to you at once."

CHAPTER X.

AN AWFUL MOMENT.

MCKAY gave vent to a quick exclamation of impatience; but, merely calling to Bernice over his shoulder that he would be back immediately, hurried away, forgetting in his haste the important documents he had left in her hands.

Out into the lower hall he sped, and stepping into the automatic elevator, pressed the button which would carry it to the third floor.

James, the butler, who had panting

closedly after him, stood at the lower grating, narrowly watching the progress of the ascending car until it had passed the second doorway: then, with a quick movement, he reached in and cut off the electric current.

The elevator halted with a jar, slipped back a few inches, caught on the brakes, and stood still midway between the third and second floors.

There was a moment's silence as James stood looking upward; then there came down the shaft the sound of frenzied cursing, mingled with loud calls for assistance.

With no especial haste, the butler mounted solemnly to the third floor, threw open the barred door there, and thrusting his head into the aperture, observed calmly:

"Hi thought Hi 'eard you calling, sir. Was there hanything you wanted?"

"Anything I wanted, you block-head? I want to get out of here. This blasted thing has stopped for some reason; I can't make it move either up or down."

"Hindeed, sir? Likely, there's something gone wrong with the machinery. If you'll just bide patient, sir, I'll send out for a helectrician."

"Bide patient until you send out for an electrician?" snarled McKay. "Why, that may take as long as half an hour, and I have to get out at once. Is there no way that you can raise or lower the confounded thing so as to get me to one of the doors? I'll give you fifty dollars if you can manage it, James."

"Sorry, sir," with unmoved demeanor; "but there isn't no way that I knows how, and the master 'as given special borders that none of us was to monkey with the machinery. 'E said as 'ow if hanything was wrong, we was to send out for a helectrician."

And neither prayers, pleading, nor protestation could alter that calm determination. McKay was at last compelled to submit, and with a realization that further argument was merely to prolong his imprisonment, urged the butler to use all haste in securing the desired relief.

James faithfully promised; but as he withdrew his head from the grating he treated himself to a large and significant

wink, and there was no acceleration to his usual dignified progress as he made his way down-stairs and to the conservatory to report to his mistress.

Meanwhile, she had not been idle. With the departure of the secretary, she had sprung to her feet, and had stood breathlessly listening until his exasperated shouts from the balky elevator assured her that her carefully laid plans were working to a charm.

Then she indulged in a low laugh of triumph, and thrusting the rescued card and pawn-ticket into her bosom, she started for the telephone.

In the hall she met James coming back from above to inform her of the exact nature of the situation there.

"Hoh, yes, miss," he responded in answer to her eager inquiries, "'e's there, hall right, snug as a bug hin a rug. Hi told 'im Hi would use hall possible despatch in getting a helectrician; but for all that I can do, miss, Hi'm hafrain it will be some time before one puts in a happearence."

And for the first and only time in his career, the butler's masklike countenance relaxed into something resembling a smile. Indeed, so cordially hated was McKay by all the servants for his domineering and inconsiderate manners, that their mistress could have given them no greater satisfaction than to enlist their aid, as she had done, in a project for his humiliation.

"You have been a trump, James," she said warmly. "The slightest mistake at any point would have spoiled everything; but I knew that I could trust you. I shall see that my father hears of this, and that you lose nothing for having stood by me so faithfully."

Then she hurried on to the telephone to call up Lockwood Winters.

He had just come in, when Mrs. Sowerby appeared puffing at his door to inform him of the summons.

"It's a call for you on the phone," she announced as soon as she could get her breath after her climb. "I s'pose from them Whoopemup Typewriter people again."

"The Whoopemup Typewriter people?" ejaculated Winters, giving her a startled glance.

"Yes; they've been trying to get you

all morning—called up twice on the wire, and even sent a man here to the house. Seems like they're mighty anxious to see you for some reason, Mr. Winters. Are you having any business dealings with them?"

"No," shortly; "and I have no desire to hold any communication with them. You can go back and tell them that I am not at home, Mrs. Sowerby, and that you have no idea when I will be in."

"Well," she objected, "of course, I only suspicion that it is them because they've been pestering at the phone so much; but it might be somebody else. It was a young lady's voice that called."

"So?" starting up. "Then, perhaps, I had better see, after all."

And pushing past Mrs. Sowerby, he rushed down the flights so fast that he had completed his conversation and was ringing off before she reached the lower hall, where the telephone was stationed.

"I guess it wasn't anybody that he didn't want to see, though," she commented shrewdly to herself. "That is, if a body is to judge from that there chessy-cat grin he had on his face."

Yet, despite his smile, Winters was in somewhat of a quandary as he left the phone.

There had been a suggestion of strain to Miss Ransom's voice, almost of entreaty. Nor would she explain her peculiar request that he should come over to her house at once.

When he asked her reasons for such haste she had said she could not tell him over the wire, and had renewed her pleadings that he make no delay.

What could it mean? he questioned. Was she in trouble of some sort? How could that be possible? Still—

He broke off short in his reflections. Here he was, wasting valuable time, and she had told him to hurry.

With a snort of disgust for his dawdling inactivity, he snatched up his hat, and racing down the steps, tore off across town as though he were determined to make up for the time he had lost at any cost.

He was still heaving and panting from his exertions when James admitted him at the door and ushered him back into the conservatory; and it was consequently with some surprise that he observed

Miss Ransom was perfectly prepossessed and at her ease as she rose to greet him.

A dozen eager questions were trembling on his lips when he stepped toward her; but his powers of speech suddenly froze, for unsmilingly she held out the card he had given her at the wedding.

It was Bernice's way of bringing up the subject she wished to discuss with him, and of assuring him that he had nothing to fear; but he placed an entirely different construction upon the unusual proceeding.

To his mind it signified a dismissal, a notification that his presence was no longer desired at her house, and that she was willing the acquaintanceship between them should cease.

Confused and overwhelmed, he started back, and the card which she had been holding out for him to take fell to the floor.

(To be continued.)

USAL TUCKER'S AWAKENING.

By FRED V. GREENE, Jr.

A game of bluff in which a farmer's shrewdness is matched against the cunning of a man from town.

"I DUNNO what to make of that man Spencer," Tucker observed, as he reached across the table, and spearing determinedly with his fork at another sausage, transferred it to his own plate. "I was over in the east pasture to-day, fixin' the fence, and I seen him a walkin' 'round the base of the mount'in with his eyes glued to the ground, and ev'ry once in a while he'd bend down, pick up somethin', and put it in a bag he was carryin'."

"Don't seem like he was very sociable, Usal," his wife ventured.

"Sociable!" Tucker sneeringly exclaimed. "Well, I guess not." Then in a low tone of confidence he cautioned: "Cele, there's somethin' wrong about that man."

"Usal, you—"

"Oh, I ain't *accusin'* him," Tucker hastened to cut short her faint rebuke. "But it all looks mighty funny to me. I don't mean to say he's done anythin'

Fluttering downward, it turned over and lay reverse side up upon the tiling, showing still affixed to it the undeniable evidence of his guilt—the damning pawn-ticket!

He gazed at it a moment as though petrified. Then, in a flash of miserable comprehension, the whole thing swept over him. She *knew*!

Fate had by some mischance thrown into her hands the proofs of the false step he had taken; and, ignorant of the motives which had dictated his action—simply seeing the deed itself in all its heinous enormity—she despised him as a thief.

For a moment he stood there, his shamed eyes sinking before hers, the blood surging to his face in a scarlet tide. Then he stooped to pick up the card and ticket from the floor; and, rising once more, threw back his head and faced her.

contrary to law, but mebbe he's been disappointed in love, or somethin' like that."

"Mebbe."

"Why, Cele, what man would act as that man Spencer has and be right in body and soul? First off, he comes up here and loafers aroun' town for a couple of months, pickin' up all kinds of stones and rocks. Then the next we hears, he buys Haystack Mount'in fer two hundred dollars from Jim Humphreys, which was two hundred dollars more'n it was worth, bein' as Jim has cut all the timber off."

Tucker stopped long enough to bite off a huge mouthful of hot biscuit, and continued through the partially masticated food:

"Then puttin' up that little cabin 'longside the road and livin' there all alone like a hermit. And, last of all"—he paused to allow the full importance of his announcement to be realized—"he

had a telephone put in yesterday! Fred Whitney told me about it this mornin'. Jest as if there wa'n't enough people on the line already—his makes nine—and between the bells ringin' continual and ev'ry one listenin'—"

He stopped abruptly as the tinkle of the telephone-bell on the wall drew his attention toward it and brought forth an angry look.

The telephone service for the town of Norwood is not the most improved, and on one line there are often as many as twelve subscribers, each designated by a different ring. But when any subscriber is called, every bell upon that particular line rings, and it is an open secret that the conversations are invariably listened to by more than one person other than the party called.

The bell tinkled clearly, one short ring, two long ones, and then a short one. After a pause these same rings were repeated, and then continued for the third time.

"Thet's a new ring to me," Tucker observed, still gazing at the instrument. "By cracky, Cele! I'll bet that is fer that man Spencer!"

He jumped up from his chair and strode heavily toward the telephone.

"Usal, ye ain't goin' to listen, are ye?" his wife remonstrated, realizing what he was about to do.

"Yes, I am!" he retorted positively.

Taking the receiver off the hook, he listened intently for some moments, his wife watching curiously.

Carefully replacing it, he began:

"Well, that man may be all right, but I think— My soul and body, Cecilia!" His wife gazed at him inquiringly, feeling that the use of her full name meant some great discovery.

"I know now jest what it all means," he went on. "I know now why he's a pokin' all over Haystack Mount'in, and why he hez been walkin' over my pasture-land that joins his."

"I don't understand ye, Usal," his wife said questioningly.

"No, of course not. A woman never does," was the disgusted response. "But I'll tell ye what I jest heard. Frank Vaughan was callin' from the telegraph-office—he's the operator, ye know, in Norwood—and told that man Spencer he had

a telegram fer him. Spencer told him to read it to him, 'cause he hadn't time to go after it. Near as I can remember, it was somethin' like this: 'Samples of rock submitted, examined, run high in iron. Very valuable property. Would advise buyin' adjoinin' land at west of yours. Our engineer will be at your place to-morrow. Hamilton and Company.' I remembered the name, 'cause I wondered if they was any relation to the ones on the Sandisfield Road."

"Well, Usal, what of it all. I don't see—"

"If that ain't jest like a woman!" he sneered "Why, can't ye see it all now? That man Spencer is a mining man, and they's probably a fortune right there in Haystack Mount'in, wot none of us ever dreamed of. He's found it out, and now I s'pose he'll be snoopin' 'round tryin' to buy our land, 'cause we're adjoinin' on the west."

A self-satisfied smile spread over his weather-stained countenance.

"See it now, don't ye? Well, he thinks he's a pretty smart city chap, but I guess he'll find out when he comes to dicker with me that I'm jest as smart as he is."

But still Mrs. Tucker seemed in the dark.

"How do ye mean, Usal?"

"My soul and body, Cecilia, can't ye understand?" he contended, raising his voice much higher than usual. "I mean that that man Spencer will come nosin' 'round, not knowin' I heard the telegram read to him over the telephone, an' expect me to sell the place to him. But I won't at any figure—not with an iron mine upon it! He probably thinks we're country up here and don't know nothin'. But I guess he'll find out different 'fore many days."

He ended his speech with a chuckle.

"But wimmen surely weren't cut out fer bizness," he added, as he carefully sliced off some tobacco from a large black plug and, filling his pipe with it, puffed in silence.

The incident was apparently closed, and shortly after the old couple retired. But Tucker did not sleep. Instead, he was revolving in his mind the news he had so unexpectedly heard.

The next morning he was up earlier

than usual, and after hurrying through his chores hastily swallowed his breakfast. Seizing his hat, he remarked: "I'm goin' down in the pasture to fix that fence. I ought to hev done it long ago, but jest couldn't seem to git time."

Stopping at the tool-house long enough to get a hatchet, hammer, nails, and staples, he headed toward the base of Haystack Mountain, rapidly covering the ground with long strides, which quickly brought him to the boundary of his land, marked by a dilapidated fence of barbed wire, brush, and fallen tree-trunks.

With a determination unusual with Usal Tucker, he started upon his task, chopping and hammering noisily, causing the echoes to reverberate with regularity against the mountainside. As he worked on, every few minutes he cast furtive glances in the direction of the little cottage by the highway.

He was rapidly coming to realize that what he considered his strategy was unsuccessful, although he hammered and chopped with all the noise possible. His glances toward the road became more frequent, and his unusual labor caused the perspiration to collect in large beads upon his forehead.

He stood erect, resting a moment and staring angrily at Spencer's house.

"Consarn him!" he muttered. "I'll git him here if I hev to pull down the hull durned fence and built it up again. I'll—"

He stopped abruptly as his eyes caught sight of a man emerging from the house he had watched so hopefully. With renewed vigor he started upon the fence again, working as though his life depended upon it.

For some moments he labored on, apparently oblivious to everything except the task before him. It seemed as if that man could not be coming, although when he left the house he was heading directly for the pasture lot.

Tucker glanced anxiously from under the broad brim of his hat and saw Spencer, who was now only about fifty feet away, bend to the ground and pick up a stone, which he examined carefully and then dropped into his pocket.

Tucker worked on feverishly.

"Good morning, Mr. Tucker," Spencer called cheerily as he approached.

The farmer glanced up with a well-feigned start.

"Mornin', sir," he returned, as he leaned heavily against the fence and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Going to be a warm day, I guess," Spencer observed carelessly.

"Shouldn't wonder if it was," the fence-repairer agreed.

"Have a cigar?" Spencer queried, holding a perfecto toward the farmer.

As they both leaned against the fence from opposite sides Spencer allowed his eyes to glance admiringly over the level pasture land before him, the farmer watching him with catlike cunning.

"Look here, Mr. Tucker, that's a fine piece of land you have there—very different from my mountain here. It's quite level, and I'd like to have a piece of smooth land. Don't suppose you would want to sell it?"

"No—don't think I would," was the calm, unruffled reply. "It's part and parcel of the farm as my father left it to me—no, I ain't got it fer sale."

"I just thought that if it was I might buy it, if the price was low enough. If you change your mind come and see me. I'm going to look over my mountain again. Good day, sir."

Tucker watched the retreating figure as it disappeared in the thick growth of underbrush which crowned the brow of the hill, then slowly gathered up his tools and headed toward the house.

The rest of the day he spent busying himself around the barns, but always with a clear view of the road, down which he continually glanced.

Plainly, Usal Tucker's mind was greatly disturbed, and his wife easily divined the telegram he had overheard the night before as the cause. But with a meekness that had always marked her, she refrained from inquiry.

The farmer's life had been to him a great disappointment. From his earliest boyhood he had been endowed with a desire to do something—to be somebody. His parents were well-to-do country folks and encouraged him in his ambitions, intending to fit him for a college career.

It had been one of the bitterest disappointments of his life when, after a few months at college, his health failed to

such a degree that he was forced to return home, the doctor advising him to keep in the air as much as possible.

From the day he reached the farm all his ambitions fled, and he settled down as a tiller of the soil. Some years later his parents died, leaving him the place and a comfortable sum of about thirty thousand dollars.

He married and worked hard, but each year the earnings of the farm seemed just a trifle under the expenses, and the thirty thousand had now dwindled to about nineteen.

The rattle of a vehicle, and a look of hope suddenly spread over his face. From the earnestness of his glance Tucker plainly showed his interest, and he walked aimlessly toward the house, intending to secure a nearer view of the carriage that was rapidly drawing near, and which he now saw contained a stranger. The driver he recognized as one from the livery-stable in Norwood.

His eyes followed the buckboard as it moved on rapidly and drew up before Spencer's little house. The stranger jumped to the ground, and when near the cottage was greeted by the owner himself; then they disappeared within the building.

Usal Tucker's heart beat quickly and he turned toward the barn. There was a grim, determined look in his face, and even his footsteps were short and jerky.

For years he had dreamed of wealth—had longed for it in his strange, selfish way, and had watched with envious eyes the stylish turnouts of the city people who came every summer. But he felt now *his* time had come—the time he had awaited so patiently. He even pictured himself a wealthy mine owner, living in the lap of luxury, with servants at every hand, waiting to do his bidding.

Slowly and mechanically he proceeded with the usual evening chores. He wondered to himself just how many more times he would have to do them.

What matter if the cows were not bedded down as carefully as usual, or the horses' hay, now dry and dusty from standing all winter, was not dampened? It was only a matter of a week or so, he reasoned, when his servants would be doing this work for him, and he would see to it personally that his own negli-

gence was made up by the care and attention he would exact in the future.

After the evening meal he seated himself in the large armchair and smoked in silence. Mrs. Tucker, realizing he was in what she called a mood, refrained from questioning, and he smoked on, even unmindful of the fact that his wife had retired.

At last he arose, stretched his cramped limbs, and went to bed. But the sleep he needed would not come to his tired eyes. His brain, ordinarily inactive and sluggish, was now being put to a severe strain. Eventually he fell into a troubled slumber, but was awake and dressed at the first approach of dawn.

After a hastily consumed breakfast he again started, tools in hand, toward the pasture fence, hoping the arrival of the night before, whom he felt certain was the mining engineer spoken of in the telegram, would stroll in that direction.

Down deep in his heart there was a conviction that in his own quiet and cunning way he would be able to draw the man out.

He was not kept long in suspense. One of his regular glances in the direction of Spencer's house disclosed the person he wanted to see ambling along toward him. From out of the corner of his eye he could see the man approaching, stopping frequently to pick up a stone and examine it thoughtfully.

The stranger walked to within fifty feet of where the farmer was working, then veered off suddenly to the right in the direction of the summit of the mountain.

Tucker's heart sank as he dropped his tools and leaned wearily against the fence.

"Good mornin', stranger," he called. "Ye haven't a match with ye, hev ye?"

The man stopped and, feeling in his pocket, advanced toward the farmer.

"Good morning, sir," he greeted cheerfully, then holding out a silver match-box, added: "Help yourself!"

Tucker hastily sliced off some tobacco, filled his pipe, and accepted one of the proffered matches. As he blew a cloud of smoke from his mouth, he ventured: "Stranger 'round here, ain't ye?"

"Yes, I—" The other stopped short, then sprang over the fence, and, pick-

ing up a stone that lay at Tucker's feet, examined it eagerly.

"More of it!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"What's that ye say?" Tucker asked.

The stranger caught himself, and trying to laugh off his sudden excitement, replied: "I was only thinking what a beautiful meadow you have here. Mr. Spencer tells me he hopes to buy it."

"It ain't fer sale. I wouldn't part with it at any price."

This reply plunged the stranger into thought. Then he began:

"Look here, Mr. Tucker—oh, I neglected to introduce myself. My name is Gardiner, from Hamilton & Company, of New York. I'm a mining expert, and I have been sent here by my firm at Mr. Spencer's request. But he is a crank and we have had some words. Now you seem a very decent chap, and I'm going to let you into a secret. But never breathe it to a soul—it would cost me my position, as well as my future as a mining expert."

Tucker was eagerly drinking in every word.

"Ye kin trust me, sir," he said hoarsely.

"Then, listen!" He dropped his voice to a confidential whisper. "Spencer is something of a mining man himself, and has located a very valuable iron deposit upon that mountain of his. But the geological survey of the United States government claims the largest and most important deposits lie to the west of the mountain—right here on your pasture land!"

"Is that so?" Tucker queried anxiously.

"Yes, and if you will promise me a fair proportion of the profits and say nothing to any one, I'll tell you even more. It takes some money to run a mine, but our company will finance it, if I say so. Now, if you only had Spencer's land, too, I could get my company to loan all the capital necessary to operate the mines, and you could make a fortune in a year or so."

"But I haven't Spencer's land," objected Tucker sadly.

"Very well; but that need not worry you," Gardiner replied buoyantly. "Spencer knows we will not advance

the capital unless he has your land, too. So we've got him, because I know he has not enough money to pay what your land is worth, or anywhere near it."

The other paused a moment, but Tucker made no reply; his brain was in a whirl. He was thinking of the nineteen thousand dollars he had in the bank at Norwood, and wondering if this amount would buy the land that would make him independently wealthy in a few months.

"Now, if you go to him," Gardiner continued. "Or better yet, if you think you can raise some money—"

"I have about nineteen thousand dollars in the bank," the farmer interrupted.

"Fine! Fine!" returned the mining engineer. "Now let me give you some advice. I've known Spencer for years, and he played me a dirty trick once, so you see why I am anxious to get back at him. When I started out this morning I was to see you and induce you to sell. Now I shall go back, tell him you will not, and when he comes to you—and he will—refuse to sell at any price."

"He knows his land is worthless without yours as far as our company advancing money is concerned, and rather than lose all, I feel certain he will eventually be willing to sell at a reasonable figure. But you must be cute and clever with him, and I know from what little I have seen of you that you are just the one to handle the proposition correctly."

Tucker beamed at the man before him, delighted at last to find a person who appreciated him.

"Young man," he burst out, "I like ye, and I don't know how I kin thank ye fer what ye hev jest told me. Folks 'round here don't think Usal Tucker 'mouts to much, but I guess I'll make 'em open their eyes soon. And if ye'll stay right here and run the mines I'll give ye a half interest in 'em. We'll be partners!"

"Mr. Tucker, that's too much—"

But the farmer raised his hand in protest.

"Not at all, Mr. Gardiner—not one bit too much."

"Well, if you insist. But the best thing to do now is for me to leave you and go back to Spencer. I'll tell him you will not sell. He'll soon come to

you, and you buy from him as cheaply as you can. Then I'll stay right on after he goes and run everything for you. Good-by for the present."

Turning quickly, he retraced his steps toward Spencer's abode.

Tucker's thoughts were in a whirl. Already he could see himself gloating over his neighbors, and being looked up to as the wealthiest man in the community. Slowly and reluctantly he picked up his tools and began his labors again, all the time keeping a watchful eye on Spencer's house.

But no one came, and just as he was about to return for dinner he saw Spencer walking slowly toward him. The farmer's heart beat rapidly as he realized the future of the wealth he had planned for lay in his success with this man.

"You seem to be a hard-working man, Mr. Tucker," was the other's greeting.

"Yes, they's allus work on a farm that hez to be done," was the response.

"Mr. Tucker, I've come to talk a little business with you. I want to buy this pasture of yours."

"Well, it ain't fer sale," the farmer snapped.

"But I'll pay a good price," Spencer remonstrated. "It's land you never would miss, and I'll pay you—well, say a thousand dollars for it."

"Nope! As I said afore, it ain't fer sale."

"Well, I'll give you two thousand, but not another cent for it. Better think before you answer."

"Nope!" Tucker's voice was without a trace of indecision.

A dark look of disappointment spread over the other's face.

"But aren't you open to reason? My mountain is really of no use to me without some level land. I'm not rich, but I'll pay you two thousand five hundred, and not another cent. You can take it or leave it."

Baffled rage showed itself plainly in the speaker's face.

But Tucker remained cool and collected.

"I said the land was not fer sale!" he replied decisively.

Spencer stamped his foot in disgust, then turned on his heel.

But the farmer stopped him.

"I don't want no hard feelin' with my neighbors, Mr. Spencer, but I don't want to sell and that ends it. But bein' as ye say yer mount'in ain't no good 'thout my pasture, I'll buy yer mount'in."

This declaration caused Spencer to gaze at him in amazement.

"Why—why—" he stammered. "What good is the mountain to you?"

"Well, I want it and I'll buy it. Pay cash, too. I'll give ye five hundred dollars fer it."

A harsh laugh broke from the other's lips.

"Why, man, the cottage cost double that."

"All right, then, I'll give ye fifteen hundred fer the hull thing."

A quizzical look came into Spencer's face and he stared at the farmer as if to read his thoughts. Then he began deliberately, tantalizingly: "I'm different from you, Mr. Tucker. My place is for sale—at my own price. That is twenty thousand dollars—no more—no less!"

The farmer staggered as he realized the prohibitive price he had just heard. All his hope of the future quickly faded away and left him weak and trembling, holding to the fence for support.

The miner now felt certain something had leaked out, and that without a doubt Tucker knew of his plans. This was plainly the cause of his refusal to sell and of his sudden offer to buy.

The farmer had regained his scattered wits and was rapidly doing some mental calculating. He thought of the nineteen thousand in the bank—

"I'll give ye fifteen," he declared in a strangely hollow voice.

"No, twenty or nothing," Spencer replied.

Tucker's hopes sank as he realized that was impossible.

"No, I'll tell you what I'll do," Spencer added. "I'll split the difference. Make it seventeen thousand five hundred."

"I'll buy it!" the farmer announced eagerly, the light of victory radiating from his eyes. "We'll drive over to Norwood after dinner and git the money."

"I'm almost afraid I've made a mistake," Spencer remarked thoughtfully.

Then noting a look of fear in the other's face, he added: "But it's all right. I always stick to my word."

"I'll drive up fer ye after dinner and we'll go over together." Tucker was all excitement as the men parted, each heading for his home.

Mrs. Tucker noted the preoccupied manner of her husband, but did not question him regarding it. Wishing to carry through the great project himself, he avoided mentioning the scheme in any way, except to remark as he left the house to hitch up the horse: "I'm going over to Norwood."

The ride was a silent one, each taken up with his own thoughts. The money was withdrawn from the bank and paid over, and all papers signed and deeds changed and recorded. The county clerk endeavored to question Tucker, but finding him uncommunicative, gave it up.

When they returned to Spencer's house they found Gardiner awaiting them.

"I've bought Haystack Mount'in," Tucker exclaimed, expecting he would take this as good news for them both.

The young engineer gave a knowing smile, and the farmer realized he understood.

That night was an eventful one in Tucker's life. He could not sleep, and the first light of the early dawn was a great relief. But as the morning passed without any word from Gardiner, he wondered at the young man's silence. As hour after hour drifted slowly by, Tucker felt he could stand it no longer and hurried up the road to the little cottage.

It was deserted! Not a sign or trace of either of the two men—they had evidently left in the night.

The farmer could not understand it, but reasoned with himself that undoubtedly Spencer had gone for good and Gardiner had only returned to the city—perhaps he had to report his progress to his employers—and would be back the next day.

But the next day came and went without any word from the mining engineer.

That night the farmer decided to go to New York the following day. Probably Gardiner had been detained at the office.

Early the next morning, in a state bordering on collapse brought on by worry and loss of sleep, Tucker boarded the train and was soon being rushed toward New York, where he arrived without incident, and was directed by a kindly policeman to the offices of Hamilton & Company.

Arrived here, he was greeted by a clerk, who in response to the farmer's inquiries for Mr. Gardiner, replied: "We have no one by that name in our employ."

Tucker was dazed for the moment.

"I mean the man who has been up to Norwood for the past few days," he ventured huskily.

"I do not understand you. But perhaps Mr. Hamilton will. I'll ask him," and the clerk disappeared into an inner room.

He quickly returned and ushered the farmer into the private office of the head of the firm, to whom Tucker briefly related the object of his trip.

"I am very sorry for you," Mr. Hamilton said, "but I fear you have fallen an easy victim to a plot to rob you. And further, I cannot see that you have any redress."

Tucker's face had grown white under his tan of weather exposure, and words failed to come. He seemed too stunned to speak and sank deep into his chair, a pitiable object of despair.

"I do not see how I can help you," Hamilton added ruefully.

"But the telegram you sent?" Tucker gasped.

"We sent none, sir. That was evidently only a part of the plot to get your money. I fear there is no mineral—"

"But — there is *iron* there! I know it!"

The old man's desperation as he fought against realizing he had been a dupe and had fallen an easy prey to two unscrupulous men touched the heart of the mining expert.

"Let me see," he remarked, reaching for some large volumes on his desk. Opening one, he queried: "You say Norwood, Connecticut? This shows no traces of iron there—and it's the United States geological survey."

"It's wrong—all wrong!" Tucker exclaimed wrathfully in such a strange

tone that Mr. Hamilton looked up from the volume he was perusing.

Instead of the pitiable, cringing, helpless man, he saw the old farmer turned into a fiery, positive person. Their eyes were fastened upon one another for a moment, then Tucker continued.

"I know it's there, and I can soon pove it. If ye don't want to finance it I'll git some one else. If Mr. Gardiner wus only here—" He paused a moment, then went on determinedly: "I want ye to send a minin' man back with me. He'll soon find the iron, jest as that man Spencer and Mr. Gardiner did."

Mr. Hamilton was at a loss just what to say. In his own heart he felt the old man had been cheated, but at the intimation of such a thing he had plainly shown he was not to be convinced of it.

"Well, of course, Mr. Tucker, we will be glad to send a man, but—"

"Oh, don't ye worry about yer money," was the sneering interruption. "I've got a bit left yet—enough to pay your bill and hev some left, too."

"Very well, sir, if you want a man I will send one whenever you say."

"Thet is now—with me—quick as we kin git there!"

Mr. Hamilton could not understand the man, but realizing his determination, called a clerk and, introducing him to Mr. Tucker, bade him prepare for a short trip. Looking up the trains to Norwood, they learned there was one leaving New York at two o'clock.

"It is now ten minutes to one," Mr. Hamilton said, glancing at his watch. "Can you get your bag, Waters, and meet Mr. Tucker for that train?"

"I think so, sir."

"Very well. Mr. Tucker will instruct you on the way there. Give hin' your verbal statement when you complete the study; after your return you can make out a detailed one."

Reluctantly Waters left the room, and shortly after the old farmer did the same, heading in the direction of the Grand Central Station, where he waited impatiently for the arrival of the engineer, who reached there only a few moments before the time for the train to depart.

The three and a half hour ride was a quiet one, neither of the men being in

a conversational mood. Waters plainly showed his distaste for the work he was ordered to do, and after asking a few questions he settled back in his seat, trying to interest himself in the passing scenery.

Tucker could not even think, much less talk. Although he would not consider the idea that he had been swindled, he could not refrain from realizing what it meant to him should such be the case.

The train rushed on, and on reaching Norwood the two men alighted. Tucker called a hackman, and the homeward journey was soon concluded. Then, after a plain country supper, Waters was shown to his room.

Early the next morning he arose, and descending to the dining-room, heard Mrs. Tucker say quietly: "Usal, they's somethin' on your mind, and it hez been there for the last few days. What is it?"

"Nothin' thet—"

Waters's curt "Good morning" cut the farmer's reply short, and the three sat down to a silent meal, from which they presently arose, as the engineer remarked briefly: "Now, Mr. Tucker, I am ready to see that prospect of yours."

Tucker immediately led the way through the back door and down the lane that led to the pasture lot. Taking down the bars, he muttered as he waved his hand toward the brush-covered area: "Thet's the lot—there's plenty of mineral there, if ye want to find it."

Kicking at a stone that lay at his feet, Waters loosened it and, brushing off the sod and grass, held it critically in his hand. A glance, and without a word he dropped it again.

Tucker eyed him anxiously, feeling the engineer was determined not to find anything there.

Waters walked slowly away from the spot, his eyes bent upon the ground, with the farmer following close at his heels. Very few feet a stone was picked up, but hastily discarded. At last he turned to Tucker with disgust plainly written all over his features.

"You are only wasting my time and yours, sir," he said. "There is absolutely nothing here, and from the rock formation it is impossible that there could be."

The farmer stared at him helplessly, then burst out: "Mebbe there is on Haystack! Look over that, too."

With Tucker leading the way, they tramped through the underbrush and climbed the fence he had worked so industriously upon only a few days before.

But although Waters kicked at different stones as they made their way up the rough side of the mountain, he did not deign to pick up any.

When about half way up the mountainside he stopped abruptly and facing the farmer, declared: "I cannot understand why I was ever sent out here. There is absolutely nothing in the mineral line upon the surface, and positive proof that there is not below it. I am going to return to the city."

"But Mr. Gardiner found it, even if you can't," the farmer demurred.

"Yes, but he is the only one who can. Mr. Tucker, you have been swindled, and that is all there is to it."

With his face drawn as if in mortal agony, the farmer begged:

"Try to find it. If ye can't, I'm ruined. Find somethin'—I'll give ye a half of it if ye only will."

Waters noted the misery of the man and a feeling of pity surged over him.

"I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Tucker, but I can't find what isn't here." He nervously kicked a stone that protruded through the sod. "If I could—"

He stopped abruptly. A gleam of light flashed plainly in his eyes as he eagerly reached down for a piece of the stone that had broken off as his shoe struck it. The farmer noted the movement and checked his breathing.

Waters held it up, and feeling in his pocket for his glass, examined it excitedly, then crushed it into little particles between his fingers. Shaking the dust off, he rubbed them together, then held them before the now thoroughly aroused farmer.

"You have something better than iron here!" he burst out. "Do you know what that is?"

Tucker only stared blankly, uncertain whether his ears were deceiving him.

"It's graphite—amorphous graphite! This is an outcropping. The Lord only knows how much of it this mountain holds!"

Waters dropped upon his knees and feverishly pulled away the sod and grass from about the stone, forgetting entirely his carefully manicured hands.

"Mr. Tucker, did you mean it when you said you would give me half of anything I found here?" he questioned, glancing up at the man who was bending over him.

"Yes, I did," was the brief reply.

Waters rose to his feet.

"Mr. Tucker," he began gleefully, "as iron land, you paid just seventeen thousand five hundred too much for this mountain. But as graphite land, you got it dirt cheap. Undoubtedly there are thousands of dollars' worth of it here. And the best of it is, I should say from a cursory examination of this sample, that it can be sold as a paint pigment without any refining whatever, just as we"—he laughed quietly—"you note I say we—dig it from the ground."

Tucker seemed unable to grasp the good news.

"But I can't understand that Mr. Spencer—"

"Why, that's plain as can be," Waters interrupted. "I figure it out like this: He heard in some way you had a few thousand dollars, and laid a careful plot to get as much of it as possible. The telegram was a fake, and he knew it would be phoned up to him. He also knew the people on the telephone line were in the habit of listening to the conversations of others, and he felt positive that if you did not hear this particular one some one else would, and that they would tell you of it. At any rate, he took a chance—and won out."

"But Gardiner—"

"Oh, he was in it as much as this Spencer. They are no doubt laughing to themselves now as to how you bit and were fleeced, little realizing that, after all, they are the ones who are stung. As it is, you are congratulated sincerely by your partner."

"When shall we start?" Tucker inquired in a dazed way.

"Right away! Get some men and teams. I'll block out the vein and set them to work, then hurry back to the city for a day or so and secure orders for our output for a year to come. I was talking only the other day to a concern who were

bemoaning their bad luck in not being able to get nearly enough graphite to supply their demands. They use it in the raw state as a paint pigment and for making crucibles."

A broad smile spread over Tucker's

face. Then all the pent-up worries of the past few days faded away as he burst into a hearty laugh.

" 'Scuse me jest a moment, sir. I'll be right back. I want to tell Cecilia of our good fortune."

THE TIME LIMIT.*

By BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "The Isle of Mysteries," "When a Man's Hungry," "King or Counterfeit?" etc.

A disappearance which seemed to have no explanation but one which was beyond belief.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MAX CRARY is in love with Hildegarde Crandall, but his father, old Farmer Crary, forbids the match, as he wishes Max to marry Ruth Merriweather, the daughter of one of his friends. The two young people plan to be married secretly, but on the very evening Hildegarde disappears. Word comes that she has been seen riding through town with a young man in an automobile bearing a New York license-tag.

Even Mr. and Mrs. Macomber, the uncle and aunt with whom Hildegarde lives, are forced to the conclusion that she has eloped. Max, however, believes that she has been kidnaped, and announces his intention of going to New York in search of her. His father, enraged, forbids him to return, and swears to disinherit him. But Max is determined, even after the Macombers have received a telegram from Hildegarde, in which she says that she has been married and will return home later.

Mr. Macomber gives him what money he can spare, and Max goes to New York, where he tries to trace Hildegarde by means of the police. Failing here, he is starting out for the newspaper offices on a street-car, when he discovers that he has lost the wallet which contained all his money. A well-dressed man who stood next to him on the platform jumps from the car, and Max pursues and accuses him of theft, calling on a policeman to arrest him. The man turns calmly to the officer, gives his name and address, and assures him that Max must be crazy.

CHAPTER X.

"MIGHTY LUCKY."

THE policeman looked from one to the other of the two men in perplexity.

"I guess I'll take you both to the house," he said finally. "You can there straighten out this matter before the sergeant. Come along."

The other man shrugged his shoulders with an air of resignation.

"If you insist," he said, "I'm perfectly willing to go along with you. It's a deuced nuisance, though. I have just left my office to keep an important business engagement, and this delay will mean a considerable financial loss to me."

"Well, if you're what you say you are, you've got a come-back. You can sue this

young feller for false arrest," said the officer, with a grin.

"I'll not only bring civil suit against him for this outrage, but I'll have him put in a cell as soon as we reach the station-house. He dared to lay forcible hands upon me, and, under the law, that constitutes technical assault," said the man.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Max coolly. "You can't bluff me as easily as that. I'm from the country, but I'm not so green. You can't frighten me out of making this charge. Give me my wallet and I'll let you go. otherwise I'll see this through to the end."

"You'll see it through, anyway, young feller," said the policeman. "You made a charge now, and you can't back out."

The station-house was not far away, and they soon arrived there.

"Which one is the prisoner?" asked the sergeant, taking his pen from the ink-stand, as the officer arraigned the two men before the rail.

"I accuse this man of picking my pocket on a street-car and stealing a wallet which contained over two hundred and fifty dollars in gold and bills," cried Max hurriedly.

"And I charge this young fool with assault, sergeant," said the other man. "I am a reputable citizen—a member of the bar of this city. Apparently this is a case of mistaken identity, for I have never seen this fellow before; but since he is so persistent, he shall suffer for it. I will make a technical charge of assault against him."

The sergeant looked searchingly at Max.

"Are you sure this is the man who robbed you?"

"Yes," replied Max, "I feel almost positive."

"'Almost positive' is not good enough for me. Did you see him take the wallet?"

"No," stammered Max, "of course I didn't actually see him take it; but he was standing beside me on the platform of the car, and he kept falling against me, and when I discovered my wallet was gone and cried out, he hurriedly jumped from the car. I feel sure he took it."

"That isn't any proof," said the sergeant, with a frown. "I often fall against people when I'm standing up in a street-car, and just because he decided to leave the car at the moment you discovered your wallet was missing is no proof that he took it."

"Your reasoning is very good, sergeant," remarked the accused man approvingly. "This young man would have no evidence against me, even if I had been on the car; but, as a matter of fact, I was not on board. He has got me mixed up with somebody else."

"Humph! Where did you make this arrest?" inquired the sergeant, turning to the policeman.

"On the sidewalk, in front of the Central Hotel," replied the latter.

"I followed him there," explained Max. "As soon as he jumped off the car, I jumped off after him. He tried to hide himself among the crowds on the

sidewalk, but a second later I spied and grabbed him."

"What!" growled the sergeant indignantly. "You admit that when he left the car you lost sight of the man who robbed you, eh?"

"Only for a second," cried Max earnestly. "I recognized him again, almost immediately."

"And how do I know that you didn't 'recognize' the wrong man? The fellow who really robbed you may be miles away by this time. This is a very serious charge you're making, young fellow. You'd better be careful. This man says he was never on that car."

"I'm sure that he was," persisted Max doggedly.

"Well, it's his word against yours. If he can prove he's a reputable citizen, I won't hold him on your flimsy charge."

"I can easily prove that," said the man. "I shouldn't be surprised if some of your policemen can identify me. I've had cases in the police courts."

The sergeant rang for the doorman.

"Tell some of the men inside to come out here for a minute," he commanded.

Some of the "reserves," who were playing dominoes in the back room, answered his summons.

"Do any of you fellows know this man?" asked the sergeant, pointing to the alleged pickpocket.

"Sure," said one of the policemen, "I know him. His name is Pennington. He's a lawyer with an office in the Victor Building. I've seen him in court many times."

"You see, sergeant!" exclaimed the accused man triumphantly.

"What have you got to say now?" growled the sergeant, scowling at Max.

"I don't care who or what he is," cried the latter, "I believe he stole my wallet."

"Well, beliefs don't go here. You've got to be mighty certain. You admit that you didn't see him take it, and you've got no witnesses. You can't prove that he's the man who stole your wallet. You can't even prove that he was on the car."

"Well, why not search him? If you do, I'm sure you'll find my wallet on him," said Max doggedly.

"I haven't any right to search him, unless I make a prisoner of him, and I

don't feel justified in doing that under the circumstances."

"I'll waive my rights, sergeant," broke in the accused man eagerly. "It's an outrage that a respectable citizen should be subjected to such an indignity; but I'm willing to permit your men to search me—just to satisfy the obstinate young fool."

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders.

"If you're willing, all right," he said. "Go ahead, men. Search him."

Two of the patrolmen stepped forward and carefully went through the accused man's pockets. This done, they examined his shoes and the lining of his derby hat.

There was no sign of the wallet.

Max was amazed. He was in complete ignorance of the fact that professional thieves have many clever ways of concealing or getting rid of their loot when under arrest, and, therefore, he regarded the fact that the wallet was not on the man's person as proof positive that he had made a mistake.

"I beg your pardon," he gasped, turning contritely to the lawyer. "I see now that I have been too hasty. I realize my mistake and apologize to you most humbly. I beg everybody's pardon for the trouble I have caused. You see, I'm from the country, and not used to city ways."

His distress was so evident that the sergeant's manner softened.

"My advice to you, sonny, is to go right back to the farm," he said. "It ain't safe to have the likes of you running around loose in this city. If this gentleman desires to press his charge of assault against you, I'll have to put you in a cell—and you richly deserve it, at that. But I reckon he won't be mean, seeing that it was all an honest mistake on your part."

"No," said the vindicated Mr. Pennington generously, "I have no desire to be spiteful. Since this young man is now willing to acknowledge his error, I'll withdraw my charge."

"Let this be a lesson to you to be more careful in future," observed the sergeant severely. "You can go now."

"Thank you," said Max humbly, and he left the police station thoroughly humiliated and looking more like a man who had stolen a wallet than like one who had lost one.

"I suppose I'm mighty lucky to get off so easy, after wrongfully accusing that lawyer," he reflected. "I reckon he could have made it pretty hot for me if he wanted to. It was a bad blunder on my part."

But after he had walked a few blocks he began to think differently.

"After all," he mused, "I'm not so sure that I was wrong. That fellow may not be as innocent as he appears. He swore that he was not on board that car, and I'm still positive that he was. What would he lie about that for, unless he was guilty of taking my wallet?"

"The more I think of it, the more I believe that I had the right man, after all. That blundering police sergeant has let the thief slip through my hands. I don't believe that his name is Pennington, and I don't believe that he's a lawyer. That policeman who identified him may have been mistaken."

"I can soon settle that point, however. He said he has an office in the Victor Building. I'll pay a visit there and find out if he's really located in the place."

He inquired of a passer-by and learned that the Victor Building was situated not many blocks away.

It was a tall office-building on Broadway—one of the many sky-scrappers which are scattered along that thoroughfare.

Max gazed in awe at the lofty pile of granite, and when he had gone inside and gazed admiringly at the handsome, marble-lined interior, his awe increased.

"What a magnificent building!" he gasped. "I wonder if that fellow really can have an office in a place like this?"

And, as though in answer to his unspoken thought, his eyes fell just then upon the floor-directory, printed on one of the walls in letters of gold. Along with a thousand other names, alphabetically arranged, were the lines:

ALFRED PENNINGTON, *Attorney.*
ROOMS 908-9.

"Gee-whillikens! He is here, after all," gasped Max. "What a bad mistake I've made!"

But, a second later, it occurred to him that, after all, the man he had accused of robbing him might not be the real Pennington, but an impostor.

He was gaining fresh courage from this thought, when he saw the street-door suddenly swung open, and the very man he was endeavoring to learn something of entered the building.

Not wishing to be recognized by him, Max darted around the side of the elevator-cage, where he could see without being seen.

He saw the man he had accused walk toward the elevators and nod in a friendly way to the uniformed starter.

And from his place of concealment he heard the latter say respectfully, "Good evening, Mr. Pennington. Pleasant weather, isn't it, sir?"

"By jimminy!" muttered Max. "He spoke the truth, after all. His name is Pennington, and he's a lawyer with an office in this building. And to think that I accused him of being a thief. I'm mighty lucky to have got off so easy."

CHAPTER XI.

A JOB.

MAX felt sure that any man who could boast offices in so fine a building as the Victor must be a very important person and one of the shining lights of the community.

He was in total ignorance of the fact that New York's big office-buildings shelter all sorts and conditions of men, and that the most ostentatious and high-priced offices are sometimes tenanted by men with scarcely a penny to their names.

He was anxious to find out just how great was the man he had charged with picking his pocket; so, after he had seen Pennington enter one of the elevators and disappear roofward, he approached the uniformed starter.

"Can you tell me anything about Mr. Pennington?" he asked. "I suppose he's a great lawyer?"

"I don't know how great a lawyer he is," was the reply. "All I know about him is that he's been here about a month, has offices on the ninth floor, and seems a pleasant gentleman. What are you after, anyway?"

"Er—nothing," stammered Max. "I met him once, and I wanted to find out what kind of a man he was."

"Well, why don't you go up to his office and ask him?" snapped the elevator-starter.

But, of course, Max did not act on this suggestion.

"I suppose you're a newspaper reporter, looking for information of some sort, eh?" added the other, with a frown.

Max hastened to assure him to the contrary, and the fellow's manner became less distant.

"I took you for one of those yell-
er-journal guys," he explained. "They come nosing around here sometimes, trying to dig up scandal about one or other of the tenants; and if you're foolish enough to tell them anything, they always quotes you wrong and makes you say things you never even thought of. You see that feller over there who's running the third elevator? Well, he's going to be fired to-morrow just for talking to a newspaper reporter. The poor chap told the nosey cuss all he knew about something that happened in the building the other day, and when the agents saw what was printed they got sore and ordered me to fire the elevator-man."

Max expressed his sympathy for the unfortunate victim of journalistic inquisitiveness.

"I suppose you don't know of any young man who wants a job on an elevator, do you, young feller?" inquired the starter casually. "I've got to get somebody to fill that chap's place."

Max was about to reply that he was sorry he could not suggest anybody for the vacancy, when suddenly a daring inspiration came to him.

The loss of his wallet had left him penniless, save for the handful of loose change he still carried in his trousers' pocket.

While his original intention had been not to tie himself down with a job until he had completed his search for Hildegarde, the sudden loss of his resources made it necessary for him either to obtain lucrative employment at once or to appeal to Mr. Macomber to send him some more money.

To this latter course he was opposed, for he had already received two hundred dollars from Hilda's uncle. Therefore, the procuring of work of some kind was

the only solution of the problem. And here, apparently, was a good job going a begging.

"I suppose you need an experienced man?" he inquired anxiously.

"Not necessarily. It ain't hard to learn to run an elevator. What I need is a careful young man of sober habits and steady nerves."

"How would I do?"

"You?" The elevator-starter looked him over searchingly from head to foot. "I didn't have any idea that you wanted the job when I spoke; but, if you're serious, come and see the agents of the building. I kind of like your looks, young feller, and, if they approve of you, I'll give you a trial."

"Tell me first what the job is worth," demanded Max.

"Ten dollars a week and your uniform. I guess that other feller's uniform would just about fit you."

"Ten dollars a week! That isn't very much. Why, my board and lodging cost me ten dollars a week."

"Well, if that's the case, I guess this ain't the kind of position you want. Ten dollars is the most this job pays."

"Well, I suppose I could find a cheaper boarding-house," said Max reflectively.

"I should say so," rejoined the starter. "Ten dollars a week for board is downright extravagant for a young feller, I think. Well, if you want to try the job, hurry up and say so, and I'll take you to the agents."

Max thought hard. There were certain things about this position which appealed to him. The pay was not very big, but the work appeared to be easy, and did not require a knowledge of the city, which Max lacked.

If he took the job, he must give up the search for Hildegarde in the daytime; but, after all, he would have his nights to himself, and he had often heard it said that New York was more awake at night than by day.

"You're sure that I could do the work?" he said hesitatingly.

"Sure. You appear to be intelligent and in good health. You've got steady nerves, eh?"

"Pretty steady, I guess. I'm reckoned a pretty good shotgun marksman at home."

"And you don't drink much?"

"I never touch liquor—not even cider."

"Well, then. I don't see why you shouldn't fill the bill. There ain't anything to running an elevator except pulling a lever backward and forward, and paying close attention to signals, and opening and shutting doors. The doors work automatically, so it ain't hard to handle them. Keep your eyes open, and be polite to passengers, and don't get rattled, and you'll make out all right."

"Very well," said Max. "I'll take the job."

"Good! Come with me, and we'll see the agents right away. Their office is in the building. They told me that they'd leave the hiring of a new man entirely to me, but I'd rather they'd look you over before I take you on. When can you start work?"

"Any time you say."

"Well, if the agents approve of you, come here at seven o'clock to-morrow morning, and I'll show you how to run the car. We'll practise on the freight-elevator first. It'll be safer."

Max's interview with Lazard & Sells, the agents of the Victor Building, was short, but satisfactory in its result. Both members of the firm expressed themselves as being well satisfied with the young man's appearance.

"He looks intelligent and alert," said Mr. Lazard.

"He appears to be a steady and sober young man," added Mr. Sells.

Max proved himself worthy of their approbation next morning when he received his first lesson in running an elevator.

He mastered the details so quickly that Tom Curran, the starter, slapped him on the back and exclaimed approvingly:

"You'll do first-rate, Max. You're the quickest feller to catch on I've ever come across. Why, you do it now as if you'd been running an elevator all your life!"

And thus Max became an elevator-man in the Victor Building, and wore a gold-braided blue uniform of decided military cut.

"Maybe this ain't much of a job," he told himself, "but at any rate I'm earning my own living and I'm independent. It's much better than being on the old farm,

where I wasn't allowed to move a step without asking permission. If only I could find Hildegarde, now, I think I'd be thoroughly happy."

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER AND A DREAD.

A WEEK after his arrival in New York, Max wrote the following letter to Hiram Macomber:

MY DEAR MR. MACOMBER:

I suppose you have been surprised at not having heard from me before this; but I have been waiting in the hope that I might be able to send you some good news regarding Hildy.

I am sorry to say, however, that this is not the case. Up to date I have been unable to obtain a single clue as to where she is or what has become of her; but I am still doing everything in my power to find her, and am not yet discouraged.

Upon my arrival in this city I went to the police and asked them to help me in my search. But the police of New York are no good. They only sneer at you and tell you to go away and not bother them.

What they do to earn their salaries I can't imagine. I think our constable, Hank Billings, could give them pointers in doing real detective-work.

You remember how cleverly Hank caught those chicken-thieves last fall. If you went to these smart city detectives and told them your chickens had been stolen, instead of trying to find the thieves they would try to make you believe that there wasn't any such things as chickens in the world.

I have also been to the newspapers and asked the editor fellows to help me find Hildy. These chaps did not give me much encouragement.

They grinned when I told them the story of how Hildy had been kidnaped, and they said that if they came across her they would not fail to let me know.

And the next morning they all printed josh stories in their papers, making fun of me and Hildy and the old farm, as though it was all a great joke.

When I get some time I think I am going to see some of those editors again and give them a thrashing.

You will see, therefore, that it isn't much use expecting anybody to help you in this cold, unfriendly city.

But I am wrong in saying that. I have found one good friend, and with his help I hope to find Hildy. His name is Marshall White, and he is the head of a private detective agency, with an office in the Victor Building.

By the way, I must tell you that I have got a job since I arrived here, and am earning ten dollars a week. It keeps me busy in the daytime, but I search for Hildy every night.

I am employed as an elevator-man in the Victor Building, and that is how I came to meet Mr. White.

He rides up and down on my car, and he seems to take an interest in me.

I told him to-day about Hildy, in a few words, and he became greatly interested in the case, and did not laugh at me for saying Hildy had been kidnaped, as other folks had done.

Instead, he has invited me to pay him a visit to-morrow night, when I get through with my work, and he is going to talk over the whole matter with me and see if he can help me find Hildy.

He is a little man, but he seems like a bright fellow who understands his business, so perhaps this may lead to something.

I like my present job pretty much. At first it was hard on my eyes, dashing past the various floors, and the jarring of the elevator made me feel quite sick, but I am getting used to it now.

I am living at present in a ten-dollar-a-week boarding-house, where the fare is simply grand; but after my week is up there I am going to live in a cheaper place.

Give my kind regards to Mrs. Macomber, and don't fail to write me if you have any news of Hildy.

Please watch Si Merriweather closely, and see if he acts suspiciously, as I still think he may have something to do with Hildy's disappearance.

I am writing to my mother and father by this mail. Yours,

MAX.

It may be noted that in this letter the young man made no mention of Pennington and the incident of the lost wallet.

It goes against a man's grain to admit to his friends that he has made a fool of himself, and Max was by this time convinced that he was guilty in this respect.

There were three elevators in the Victor Building. They were all in a row, and Max presided over the middle car. This car, when on the ninth floor, was directly

in front of the door of Pennington's office, and, as the elevator shot upward, Max could get a glimpse through the transom of the handsome furniture inside.

Often, too, he saw Pennington sitting at a massive mahogany roll-top desk, and as he glanced at these evidences of affluence Max would gasp with horror at the thought that this was the man he had accused of picking his pocket.

He knew that, sooner or later, he must meet the lawyer, for it was only natural to suppose that the latter would some time or other step into his car.

Thus far, Max's luck had been with him, for Pennington, by a mere freak of circumstances, had always chanced to use one of the two other elevators in going to or from his office.

But it was unreasonable to expect that this happy state of affairs would continue.

An encounter seemed to be inevitable, and Max shrank from the prospect, feeling sure that the lawyer would recognize him at first glance.

Every time the indicator in his car pointed to the figure 9, Max would stop at that floor with a fast-beating heart, fearing that the would-be passenger might be Pennington.

"I suppose when he recognizes me he'll be abusive or sarcastic at my expense," he told himself. "Perhaps, even, he'll be vindictive enough to go to the agents of the building and insist upon my being fired. Well, I reckon it'll serve me right if he does. Imagine me having the nerve to accuse a howling swell like him of being a thief!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THEORIES AND A FACT.

MR. MARSHALL WHITE was an extraordinary little man.

His success in ferreting out the solution of all sorts of perplexing mysteries was phenomenal; and all kinds and conditions of people came to his office on the third floor of the Victor Building to beseech his aid.

Mr. White's aid, however, was not always forthcoming.

He had his own peculiar way of run-

ning his business, and many would-be clients were flatly turned down despite their protests and appeals.

If a case was commonplace and uninteresting, he would have nothing to do with it, for he abhorred the commonplace. If, on the other hand, it presented unusual features, he would undertake it eagerly, and would work on it night and day, scarcely taking time to eat or sleep until he had solved the problem.

At various stages of his career Mr. White had been, respectively, a physician, a lawyer, and an expert accountant; but his love of the weird and the mysterious had caused him to forsake each of these callings in turn.

Now, although he was running a private detective agency, conducted, presumably, on a commercial basis, so keen was his interest in his work that financial remuneration was a minor consideration with him.

This was evidenced by the fact that he would cheerfully undertake a case free of charge, where the circumstances were strange and interesting and the client unable to pay for his services.

Thus, when he struck up a casual acquaintance with the new elevator-man of the Victor Building, and heard from the latter that he was searching night and day for a missing girl, he became interested immediately.

He scented the possibility of this being the kind of case he heartily enjoyed, and he was anxious to hear more concerning the disappearance of Hildegarde Cran dall.

"Of course, it may be an ordinary case of voluntary flight," he cautiously told Max, as he rode in the latter's elevator. "There are many girls who run away from home every day—especially in the country. But, since you seem so positive that the girl has been kidnaped, I shall be glad to hear all the details and look into the matter. Come to my office after you get through your work here, and we will talk it over."

Max eagerly availed himself of this invitation. Tom Curran, the elevator-starter, had previously told him of the skill of this little man and of his ability to solve the most intricate problems.

"This is my lucky day," Max told him.

self joyfully. "If this chap is really so clever, he ought to be able to find Hildy. This is the best thing I've had happen to me since I struck New York."

After he got through with his work that night, he doffed his uniform, put on his street-clothes, and walked up-stairs to the third floor, where he entered the office of Mr. Marshall White.

The door of this office bore the sign:

MARSHALL WHITE, *Detective Agency.*

Mr. White's one assistant had gone home, and Max found the detective the sole occupant of the office. He was seated at his roll-top desk, attentively poring over some important papers. He often stayed in his office until long after midnight.

He looked up quickly as Max entered.

"Ah, it's you, is it?" he exclaimed genially. "Sit down in that armchair and make yourself comfortable. So you think the young lady has been kidnaped, eh? Take your time, now, and tell me all about it."

Max told him everything, leaving out no detail.

He even confided to him the fact that he and Hildy had planned to get secretly married on the day the girl had disappeared in the red automobile.

"It's that which makes me sure that Hildy didn't go away of her own free will," he explained. "If she loved me enough to consent to a secret marriage, why should she have eloped with this other chap?"

"Humph!" exclaimed the detective. "Do you know if she ever had a previous love-affair—before she met you?"

"No. I am sure she did not. She told me, only two days before she disappeared, that I was the only man she had ever loved."

The detective shrugged his shoulders cynically.

"The fact that she told you that doesn't prove anything. Young women always tell their sweethearts that fib. You could hardly expect them to adhere to the truth under such circumstances."

"Now, let us suppose that while she was at boarding-school your Hildy met an attractive young man. She fell in love with him, but something happened to bring the affair to an end—a lovers'

quarrel, or something of that sort, we'll say."

"She comes back to the farm, after her school-days are completed, and, meeting you, she tries to help herself forget all about this other fellow by allowing you to pay her attentions.

"After a time she gets to like you so well that she imagines she's in love with you, and when you propose a secret marriage she consents.

"Then, suddenly, this other chap puts in an appearance. He comes to her home in a red automobile, and confronts her without a word of warning.

"She has deluded herself into the belief that she has forgotten all about him; but at sight of him she knows that this is not the case and that she cares for him as much as ever.

"In the midst of her happiness at seeing him again, she suddenly recollects that she has promised to marry you that very night, and she is aghast at the thought. She tells this other fellow about the mistake she has made, and he urges her to run off with him and get married to him instead.

"She gets in his automobile and rides away with him to New York. Now, doesn't that sound plausible?"

"No," cried Max angrily, "it does not! If you knew Hildy, you'd never think her capable of such double dealing. Only a girl with a bad heart could throw a fellow down in that cruel way; and Hildy has a heart of gold."

"Besides, she is as honest as the day is long. If she had found that she had made a mistake and that she really loved this other fellow better than she loved me, she'd have come to me and looked me straight in the eye and told me so. That's the kind of girl Hildegarde Crandall is."

"I might have known before I came here that you'd talk in this way. I was a fool to expect anything different of you. Everybody thinks as you think. I can't make anybody believe that Hildy was carried off against her will."

"But, nevertheless, I know it's the truth. I know that there's been foul play. Since you don't think so, however, Mr. White, I guess it isn't any use bothering you any longer. I won't take up any more of your time."

The indignant Max rose from his chair as though about to leave the room; but the detective restrained him with a commanding gesture.

"One minute, young man," he said quietly. "Let us not get excited. Let us be perfectly cool and collected. It won't do you a bit of good to turn hot-headed about this matter. You had better listen to all I have to say. Thus far you have only heard half."

"I didn't say that I held the particular theory I have just advanced. I merely stated that it was a plausible theory; and it is so. There are several other ways of accounting for your sweetheart's disappearance—"

"Ha!" exclaimed Max hopefully.

"Personally," went on the detective, "I am inclined to believe that your kidnaping theory may be correct, after all."

Max uttered a cry of delight.

"Oh, thank you for saying that, sir! If you only knew how glad it makes me to hear you say it! Then you'll help me track down this villain and rescue poor Hildy?" he exclaimed eagerly.

"I will tell you why I believe that the girl may have been forcibly carried away," went on the detective, ignoring the interruption.

"You tell me that she left the farmhouse without hat or jacket and in her working-clothes. Now, from what I know of feminine nature, it is not logical to suppose that a self-respecting young woman would voluntarily set out on a wedding-trip in such a condition as that.

"Even if she had not wished to take time to change her clothes and put on her best dress, she would at least have gone inside the house for her hat.

"Even if she hadn't gone away with the intention of being married—if she was merely taking an automobile-trip to New York—she wouldn't have gone hatless. The fact that she did so would seem to indicate that she was taken away in the automobile by force."

Max nodded approvingly.

"Now, on the other hand," went on the detective, "she was seen in the village by several disinterested witnesses, you say, riding away, apparently of her own free will, which was evidenced by the fact that she gaily waved her handkerchief to several persons she knew. That fact

would seem to do away with the theory of force."

"She may have been lured away under false pretenses," suggested Max.

The detective nodded.

"That is very true. I was just about to advance that theory. The man in the automobile may have come to her with some alarming story which induced her to go with him.

"He may have told her, for instance, that you were hurt or in trouble, some miles away, and that you wanted to see her at once. He must have told her that there was not a second to lose, otherwise she would not have left those dumplings to burn in the oven.

"If she loved you as much as you think, she of course would have forgotten everything else, at the startling news the man brought her, and would have jumped into the automobile, anxious to get to you as soon as possible. That, also, is a plausible theory, I think."

"Very plausible," assented Max.

"But, after all, it is only a theory," added White, with a queer smile. "We must not count too much upon its being the correct solution of the mystery.

"We must not fail to take into consideration the incident of the telegram. If we are going to assume that she was lured away by treachery, how are we going to account for the fact that she sent that telegram to her folks, stating that she was happily married and would soon return home for their blessing?"

"By gosh! I was forgetting that," said Max gloomily. "But she may have been forced to send that message."

"No, we have the Western Union man's word for it that she wrote it voluntarily in his presence, and requested him to see that it was sent immediately, as she wanted it to reach her folks as soon as possible. Isn't that what the man at the telegraph-office told you?"

"Yes, he told me that; but he may not have been telling the truth."

"Oh, yes, I guess he was telling the truth," said White. "He wouldn't have had any object in misleading you. Those telegraphers generally have pretty good memories. I guess there is no doubt that the man and the girl did enter his office, as he says, and that the girl wrote out the message and handed it to him."

"Then, how do you account for it, sir?" cried Max despairingly.

"Well, if the girl sent that telegram, it looks as if we shall have to accept the elopement theory, after all, despite one or two apparent inconsistencies. There is only one other solution of the mystery that presents itself."

"And what is that?" cried Max eagerly.

"That is the possibility that the girl was hypnotized. The mysterious man in the red automobile may have used hypnotic influence to force her to accompany him in the motor-car, and while under his influence she may have sent that telegram at his suggestion."

"Good Heavens!" gasped Max. "Is such a thing possible? I have heard and read a lot about hypnotism, but I never placed much stock in it. Do you think it possible that that scoundrel could have hypnotized poor Hildy into running off with him?"

"If she sent that telegram, it seems clear that she either eloped willingly, or else was hypnotized into eloping. But wait a minute—"

Mr. White took up the telephone-directory and began hunting through its pages.

Having found the number he sought, he lifted the telephone from his desk.

"Hello, Central!" he called. "Give me 5623 A Bryant."

"I'm calling up the Western Union office at Fortieth Street and Broadway," he explained to Max as he waited for the connection to be made. "We may be lucky enough to find the same despatcher on duty now."

"Hello! Is this the Western Union? I want to talk to the despatcher. You are he, eh? Well, do you recall a detective sergeant and a young man from the country calling on you the other day to ask you for some information concerning a telegram about a secret marriage?"

"You do, eh? Then, it was you who sent that telegram over the wire? Good! It was brought in by a man and woman, eh? The woman wrote it right in your presence? You are sure of that?"

"Well, my name is White. I'm a detective, and I want to get a description of the man. Can you tell me what the fellow looked like?"

"Tall, eh, and with a long black mustache? That's all you can remember about him? And can you give me a description of the woman?"

Max of course could not hear the other man's answer, and the detective did not repeat it. But a minute later he replaced the receiver on the hook and turned to Max with a smile lighting up his sharp features.

"Tell me, young man," he said, "is this Hildegarde of yours a blond woman about thirty years of age, and has she blue eyes?"

"Of course not," cried Max emphatically. "Hildy is a brunette, and she's nowhere near thirty. And her eyes are brown—the prettiest brown eyes you ever saw. I—"

"That being the case," interrupted the detective hastily, "I take pleasure in informing you that the woman who sent that telegram to Mr. Macomber was not Hildegarde Crandall."

"The Western Union man tells me that the woman who came to his office with the man and wrote the message was a blond, blue-eyed woman, about thirty years of age."

CHAPTER XIV.

A FLEETING GLIMPSE.

"GEE-WHILLIKENS!" gasped Max. "Then Hildy was never in that telegraph-office at all. It was this other woman who took the liberty of signing Hildy's name to that telegram. What does it mean, Mr. White?"

"It means," replied the detective slowly, "that you are right in suspecting that there has been foul play. Your Hildy has been kidnaped. I have no doubt of it now."

"And you will help me to find her?" cried Max eagerly.

"Of course I will, my boy. I am in this case now, heart and soul. It has features which appeal to me strongly. I am convinced now that the girl was either lured from home or carried off by force."

"She was not hypnotized?"

"No. The fact that this blond woman wrote the telegram proves that Hildy was not under hypnotic influence. If she had been, the fellow could easily have made

her go to the Western Union office and write the telegram herself. She would cheerfully have done anything he suggested if she had been under his influence."

"And you think that they sent that fake telegram just to fool us?"

"Undoubtedly. They hoped to prevent a search for the girl by causing her folks and friends to believe that she had left home of her own accord. It was quite a clever scheme, too."

"Clever? I call it infernal!" growled Max savagely. "Wait till I lay hands on that scoundrel. We *must* find him, Mr. White."

"If he's still on this earth we'll find him," said the detective grimly. "I shall spare no effort to run down this daring kidnapers, or kidnapers—it looks as if we have more than one to deal with. That blond woman is probably one of the gang."

"But what could have been their object in carrying off poor Hildy?"

Mr. White shook his head.

"I don't know yet. It is perfectly evident that they didn't take her with the idea of demanding a ransom—otherwise they wouldn't have sent that fake telegram. They must have had some other object in view. That is why the case appeals to me so strongly."

"Don't you think Si Merriweather is at the bottom of it?" asked Max, with a scowl.

The detective's brow wrinkled thoughtfully.

"Yes," he said very slowly. "It's quite possible that Merriweather hired these people to carry off the girl. There appears to be a good and sufficient motive there. You say that he was very anxious that you should marry his daughter?"

"Yes. He and my father were set upon the plan."

"And why were they both so anxious to bring about this marriage?"

"Well, Ruth Merriweather is such an unattractive girl that I reckoned her father realized that she was doomed to be an old maid unless he could get me to marry her. He and my father are old friends, and I suppose he persuaded my old man into agreeing to bring about the 'match'."

"Humph! And Si knew that you were in love with Hildy Crandall?"

"Yes, he knew that. I didn't make any secret of it."

"And did he know that you were to be secretly married to her on the day she disappeared?"

"I don't see how he could have learned that," said Max. "We didn't tell a soul about it. We had planned to keep it absolutely secret for fear that my father would hear of our plan and forcibly put a stop to it."

The detective frowned.

"And you don't think it possible that anybody could have overheard you and Hildy talking it over, do you?" he inquired.

"By gosh!" cried Max excitedly. "Now that you speak of it, I remember distinctly that at the time I was telling Hildy of my plan I had an idea that somebody was eavesdropping. We were sitting in her uncle's parlor, and the window was open, and I thought I heard somebody moving about outside. I mentioned my suspicion to Hildy, but she said it was merely the leaves of the trees rustling."

"Ha!" exclaimed the detective triumphantly. "That sounds a little better. It is very possible that somebody might have been listening outside the window and might have overheard the whole plan."

"It may have been Si Merriweather himself, or it may have been some friend of his who, chancing to overhear the conversation, ran off to tell Si of your intention to get married the following night."

"Naturally, the farmer would have wished to prevent the marriage. Thus he would have a strong motive for kidnaping the girl."

"In fact, he would have a double motive; for he might reasonably assume that when you found that Hildy had gone away in a red automobile in the company of a handsome stranger, and when you saw that telegram stating that she was married in New York, you would come to the conclusion that the girl had played you false, and out of pique you might consent to marry his daughter Ruth."

"The scheming old red-head!" cried Max furiously. "I knew I was right in suspecting the ugly villain. I shall go to him at once and force him to tell me what he has done with poor Hildy."

"You will do nothing of the sort," said the detective sternly. "You will stay right here and go on attending to your duties as an elevator-man."

"But I must find Hildy as soon as possible," protested Max. "There isn't a minute to be lost."

"I agree with you. But you would accomplish absolutely nothing by confronting Merriweather at the present time and accusing him of stealing the girl. You have tried that once already, and it did you no good. You would meet with equal failure now."

"But what is to be done?" cried Max.

"Leave the case in my hands. If you want me to help you, young man, you must obey my orders implicitly. When I want you to do anything, I will let you know. At present there is nothing you can do."

"I could go to Hank Billings, our village constable, and get him to arrest Merriweather on suspicion of kidnaping Hildy," said Max confidently.

"That would be a foolish proceeding, my boy. If that constable knows his business he would refuse to make the arrest. What legal grounds have you for suspecting Merriweather?"

"It is only a theory on our part that he is responsible in any way for the girl's disappearance, and, after all, it may not be the correct theory. Si may be absolutely innocent."

"Well, who else could have any object in getting her out of the way?" demanded Max dubiously.

"I don't know yet. Perhaps when I come back to town I may be able to give you some information on that point."

"When you come back to town!" exclaimed Max blankly. "Are you going away, Mr. White?"

"Yes, for a day or two. You may be relieved to hear, however, that I am going to take a trip to your village. I want to look the ground over carefully and I want to meet this fellow Merriweather."

"Let me go with you," said Max eagerly.

"And spoil everything. I should say not. Si must not be allowed to have the slightest suspicion of the nature of my business. I think, after I have had a talk with him and made a few investigations, I shall be able to decide defi-

nitely whether or not he has any connection with this crime."

"And if you find that he has?" inquired Max.

"Then I shall let you know, my boy, and we will try a plan or two which will force our gentleman to confess. Leave everything to me and don't worry."

And with this arrangement the impatient young man had to be content.

All next day, as he ran his elevator up and down from basement to roof of the Victor Building, his thoughts were of White and the errand on which the detective had gone.

Once he took out his watch and noted that it was 3 P.M.

"He must have arrived there by this time," he meditated. "Probably at this very minute he's talking to Si Merriweather, or Mr. Macomber, or maybe to my father."

"I wonder if he'll really succeed in finding Hildy. There isn't anything I wouldn't give to see my girl again."

As this thought passed through his mind his elevator, filled with passengers, was slowly ascending.

As it rose a few feet above the ninth floor, Max as usual caught a glimpse of the interior of Pennington's office across the corridor.

It was merely a casual glance. As has been said, Max was in the habit of taking a peep, half curious, half perfunctory, through the fanlight above the lawyer's door, every time his car rose above the ninth floor.

But what he saw now almost caused his heart to stop beating.

Seated in the lawyer's office were two persons. One was the lawyer, Alfred Pennington, the other was a girl.

And fleeting as was the glimpse he caught of her, the astonished Max recognized that girl beyond the peradventure of a doubt.

It was Hildy—his Hildy—the missing Hildegarde Crandall—or else her ghost.

CHAPTER XV.

A CRASH.

At this startling discovery Max cried out Hildy's name in a loud, tense voice.

His passengers looked at him apprehensively, doubtless fearing that their operator had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

This fear seemed to be alarmingly confirmed a moment later when the elevator, crowded with its human freight, shot upward with an increasing momentum which almost tossed them off their feet.

Anxious to bring the elevator back to the ninth floor and rush to Hildegarde without a moment's delay, Max had pulled frantically at the lever.

But in his nervous haste he pulled the lever in the wrong direction as far as it would go, and instead of having its course reversed the car continued upward at full speed.

The dazed elevator-man realized his error and sought to rectify it by reversing the lever.

So frantic had been his pull, however, that he had jerked the mechanism out of order and his control of the car was gone.

It all happened in less than a minute. The big iron cage shot backward and struck the roof of the elevator-shaft with a crash that reverberated throughout the building.

The panic-stricken passengers shrieked with terror. Doors of offices opened on every floor and frightened tenants, startled by the crash and the shrieks, rushed out into the halls, believing their lives were in danger. Some shouted that the building was collapsing, and others cried, "Fire! Fire!"

There are always persons who raise the cry of "Fire" on such occasions.

Meanwhile the disabled car remained at the top of the shaft. Beyond the shock and a few bruises, the frightened passengers were thus far unharmed, but they were in great and imminent peril, for the relentless tugging of the machinery was straining the wire cables to the breaking point.

Showers of sparks caused by the friction gave warning that this unnatural state of affairs could not long continue.

The abused cables must soon give way beneath the tremendous strain, in which case the car would fall to the bottom of the shaft and the wretched passengers be dashed to death.

It was this appalling thought which caused the men and women in his car to cry out with terror and beseech the elevator-man to do something to save them.

Max pulled frantically at the lever, but it failed to respond. He realized his helplessness and groaned.

And strange to record, it was not because his life and the lives of his passengers were in danger that he groaned.

It was because he chafed at this exasperating delay which kept him from gaining the ninth floor and rushing to the side of Hildegarde Crandall.

His mind was filled with the vivid recollection of the vision he had seen through the fanlight above the door of Pennington's office, and he could think of nothing else.

The clamor of the panic-stricken passengers filled him with unreasonable anger. What could be their mental agony compared to his?

They were merely confronted with the prospect of losing their lives, while he was forced to face the (to him) far greater calamity of losing Hildegarde again because of this delay.

Probably by the time help came and he got out of this confounded elevator the girl would have disappeared beyond his reach!

While he waited, helplessly caged like a rat in a trap, every minute seemed an hour to him.

But aid soon came. The elevator-starter on the ground floor, quick to realize what had happened, had rushed to the house-telephone and yelled to the engineer in the basement to shut off the power.

The stopping of the motors removed the strain on the cables, and the danger of the car falling to the bottom of the shaft was over.

It took fifteen minutes, however, before the force of rescuers could get the imprisoned passengers out of the elevator.

Mr. Lazard, of the firm of Lazard & Sells, agents of the building, was on the top floor, superintending the work of rescue.

As Max stepped out of the elevator the agent seized him fiercely by the shoulder.

"You young fool!" he growled. "Your blamed carelessness is responsible for this. Go down-stairs and take off that uniform. You're discharged. We don't want people like you working in this building."

"That's right," cried the vengeful passengers in chorus. "He deserves it. It was his fault. He isn't fit to run an elevator. We might all have been killed through his criminal carelessness. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for employing such incompetent help."

"So I ought," said Mr. Lazard contritely. "He looked like a careful young man, though; and those elevators are considered the safest in the city—if they're used right. He must have been asleep at his post, otherwise—"

"My opinion is that he's crazy," declared one of the passengers, a portly architect with an office on the nineteenth floor. "Just before the crash came he shouted out some girl's name and pulled on the lever with such force that I expected to see it come out of its socket. I tell you it isn't his fault that we're alive now to tell the tale."

These frank expressions of opinion did not worry Max, for the reason that he was not there to hear them.

He had dashed past the angry agent and darted down the stone staircase in a manner which seemed to justify suspicions as to his sanity.

Taking two steps at a time, he sped

down stairway after stairway until he reached the ninth floor.

Out of breath, his face flushed, his eyes wild, he rushed into Pennington's office.

"Hilda! Hilda!" he gasped. "Where is Hilda?"

Pennington, seated at his desk, looked at him wonderingly.

The lawyer was all alone in the room. He had his pen in his hand, and apparently was engaged in writing a letter. There was no sign of the girl.

"What is it you want, young man?" inquired Pennington sternly. "And what the deuce do you mean by bursting into my office in this boisterous fashion?"

"I want Hilda!" cried Max. "I want Hildegardine Crandall. What have you done with her?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," said the lawyer irritably. "Who the deuce is Hildegardine Crandall, and why do you come here to look for her? Don't you see that she is not here?"

"She was here a short while ago," cried Max. "I saw her sitting here in that chair. Where has she gone? What have you done with her?"

"Bah!" said the lawyer scornfully. "You're mad—raving mad. There hasn't been any woman in this office to-day. I've been alone here for the past three hours. Get out of here, now, or I shall have to call the police."

(To be continued.)

O. K. AT REHEARSAL.

By WILLIAM R. ROSE.

The strange adventures of a new writer's vaudeville sketch.

THE tall young man who had just stepped from the street-car turned sharply. Somebody was calling him.

For a moment the direction of the voice puzzled him. Then he looked toward the curb and saw the caller, a smooth-faced young fellow a little inclined to stoutness.

"Hi, Billy!"

The tall young man answered this with an outstretched hand.

"Hullo, Jack!"

"You're the very man I want to see, Billy. It's funny that I was thinking of you just now."

"At the same time," said the tall man, "I don't see why your coincident cerebration gave you any right to stand on the curb and shout my name like a town crier."

"Cut the shop, Billy, with your coincident cerebration. A little free adver-

tising won't hurt your standing in the profesh. I want you to come up to my office for a moment or two."

"What is it—your first client locked in?"

"Locked in! Why, my dear boy, I have to lock 'em out. Come on!"

He took the tall man by the arm and hurried him along.

"And why were you haunting the curb, Jack—ambulance chasing?"

"I've got beyond that, Billy. My office is no longer merely a Mecca for collectors."

"Good!" cried the tall man. "It's been a long row to hoe."

"Here we are," said the other man, and they turned in at the entrance to a lofty office-building and then were carried to the tenth floor. "This is the shop."

"Fine view," said the tall man as he looked from one of the broad windows.

"Never mind the view, Billy. We don't get people up here to show them the landscape. Sit down and have a cigar."

There was a little pause.

"Want me for best man, Jack?"

"Not yet. I want you for something more serious. Ever do anything in the censor line, Billy?"

"Make it clearer."

The young lawyer leaned forward.

"You mustn't let it go any farther, Billy, but I've been flirting with Thalia."

"Eh? Who is she?"

"Pig-headed sawbones, I've written a play!"

"You, Jack!"

"Oh, well, it isn't really a play. It's only a playlet—my first offense, and such a little one. You remember, back there in the old school, I used to try my hand along the same line. This is simply a vaudeville act with a cast of two. And I want you to go and see it, Billy."

"Of course I will. Tell me about it."

The young lawyer shook the ashes from his cigar.

"It's a little embarrassing for a fellow to talk about the cleverness of his first born. But the thing is only a skit, and it's sure to be lost in a big bill. I've done a little legal work for Pringle, of the Empire, and one day I showed him the piece, and he seemed to think well of

it and is going to give it a try-out. It's a comedy trifé which I have called 'The Fatal Blow'—and no doubt that's what it will get from the critics the next morning. The name sounds melodramatic, I know, but—oh, well, I won't tell you about it. You must see it."

"Of course I'll see it. You can't expect me to take your word for it."

"All right," laughed the lawyer, "but don't say I didn't warn you. Between ourselves, Billy, the sketch is quite as good as the only people I could find to do it. They are really something fierce. The stage manager at the Empire put me onto them."

He paused with a little scowl.

"Do you find this entertaining, Billy?"

"Your cigars are very good, Jack," the other man replied. "Go on."

"Well, this precious pair of mine had been out of work for a month, and jumped at the chance of even the briefest of engagements. But, lackaday! My leading man has rather less flexibility than a trolley-pole, and the girl is about as graceful as a Dutch wind-mill."

The other man grinned.

"Why didn't you engage Miller and Anglin to do the thing?"

"Miller couldn't play the part."

"Too subtle for him?"

"Well, I won't quite say that, but you'll understand what I mean when you see the piece. Perhaps I'm too hard on these dramatic castaways of mine. They're a well-meaning pair with a high regard for my cleverness as a lawyer, and a sublime contempt for my ability as a playwright."

"They listen with commendable patience when I say, 'Wouldn't it be better to come in from this side?' or 'Let's try the chair a little nearer center.' Then they go ahead and do as they please. Of course there is a possibility that their way is the right way, but I know I'd like them better if they had a little more regard for my feelings."

"They certainly seem to interest you, Jack."

"Yes, they do, Billy. I find them a really interesting study. Life with these vagabonds is a perpetual struggle for plain bread and butter—and a mighty

thin coating of butter at that. Yet they're so delightfully optimistic and inconsequential. The man has confided to me that it is his ambition to play *Iago*. 'Why not *Hamlet*?' I asked him. 'They all want to play *Hamlet*,' he replied. 'They don't know that *Iago* is the deeper personality!'

He laughed at the remembrance.

"How about the girl?" the other man asked. "Is she an unappreciated *Juliet*?"

"I believe she includes *Juliet* in her 'repertwar.' She has told me, however, that her favorite rôle is *Ophelia*, and at our last rehearsal she offered to show me how the 'mad scene' should be done. Ah, if they would only do my sketch as they say they can do Shakespeare!"

And he shook his head ruefully.

"Naturally, you see only the worst side of the thing," said the other man. "I'm not a dramatic author, thank Heaven! but I think I can appreciate your feelings. At the same time, if you take a twenty-minute playlet so seriously, what will happen to you when you put on a four-act play?"

The lawyer scowled.

"If I ever do get a real play on, you can bet your professional shingle there'll be no Clay Hastings or May Lorimer in it. But there, old man, I want you to see it. I want your honest opinion."

"Even if I lose your friendship?"

"I'll take my chances on that. You are to look upon the thing with those calm, discerning eyes, and let no weak liking for the author rose-tint your glasses. This is what made me think of you down there on the curb. I said to myself, 'I'd like to have old Billy Barclay see this bantling of mine. He'd give me the truth about it straight from the shoulder.' And lo! there was your elongated self dropping from a car-platform!"

Barclay laughed.

"Don't harp too much about my unprejudiced judgment. I may feel that I have to live up to it. When does your playlet make its bow to the public?"

"To-morrow night. And, say, Billy, if you've the time and want to prepare yourself for the ordeal, drop into the Empire at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. They are going to have the last rehearsal

before the stage hands get round. I can't be there myself, and I'm rather glad of it. A final rehearsal is usually the most dismal and unsatisfactory thing imaginable. On second thought, you'd better stay away. And say, Billy, you are not to tell anybody I'm the author. If it happens to be a go, I reserve the right to lift the lid."

"It's your lid, Jack," said Barclay. He dropped the residue of his cigar into the ash-receiver and arose. "This half hour with a well-known author will have to be cut short."

"Thank you for coming up, Billy. And say, old man, you needn't bother yourself to lead the applause. Hastings tells me he's fixed the ushers. I'll see you to-morrow night. Good-by."

"Good-by," Barclay called to him from the doorway, "and good luck—and may 'The Fatal Blow' prove a ten-strike."

Barclay stopped off at the Empire Theater on the way down-town the next morning. As he turned from the box-office after securing a seat, he looked at his watch.

It was five minutes past nine. The rehearsals should be on. He turned back and, finding one of the auditorium doors unlocked, entered and, groping his way across the dark foyer and down the center aisle, quietly took a seat near the middle of the house.

Barclay had never attended a performance of this character, had never seen a playhouse in its morning ugliness. He was unpleasantly impressed by the gaunt stage, the bare brick walls, the dangling ropes, and the stacks of painted canvas. The odor peculiar to the empty theater, that strange commingling of paints and mustiness, was disagreeable to his sensitive nostrils.

As Barclay looked about he remembered the warning given him by his friend Burns, the dramatic critic.

"If you have any regard for dramatic illusions," he had said, "keep away from the theater when it is *en dishabille*."

The rehearsal had begun, and Barclay's wandering attention quickly centered itself on the two figures in the foreground of the huge stage. He had missed the opening of the scene, but the first few sentences made it clear that the

dialogue was built up around a quarrel—a quarrel between lovers, possibly with jealousy as the fundamental cause.

Barclay smiled. Jack Emmett had deceived him. This wasn't a light-comedy trifle. There was no comedy in the tense, dramatic dialogue. Jack had fooled him, too, concerning the ability of the players.

The man he had likened to a trolley-pole was virile and earnest, with a mobile face that swiftly reflected his emotions. The woman Jack had compared to a windmill was remarkably natural and sincere, and her speeches were delivered with an unstudied cleverness that was highly effective.

Barclay quickly decided that Jack had underrated the sketch. The dialogue didn't sparkle with epigrams, and it lacked the customary polish, but it seemed to ring true.

The watcher forgot the bare walls and the gaunt stage. These two people in their street clothes, with no scenery to give them the aid of illusion, held his close attention.

"I tell you, I'm not going to lose you now, after all we've been through," cried the man. His manner was impetuous, and his voice seemed hoarse with emotion. "I want a better hold on you than I've got. I want you to bear my name."

The girl regarded him with a steady look.

"That's all wasted," she said. "I'm not going to marry you."

"And why not?" he demanded.

"It's the same old reason," she replied. "You know what it is. I don't love you. Maybe I thought I did once. That's all past. I don't want your name—I don't want your love."

He took a step nearer, and she instantly drew back. His voice softened.

"I see how it is. You are doing this to try me."

"You're mad!" she cried.

"Yes," he answered, "I'm mad with love for you."

Again his voice softened.

"You can't forget that your old mother trusted me. She knew I was the man to keep you straight. 'Take care of her,' she said to me. 'Marry him,' she said to you. 'Promise you will marry him.' And you promised."

The girl's voice was hard and cold.

"I would not have said it, but she was dying."

He raised his shaking hand and pointed upward. He was terribly in earnest.

"Promises to the dying are recorded there," he said.

The girl shook her head.

"It is useless to try to work upon my feelings," she told him. "I'm no longer a child." Her voice suddenly rose. "I'm what you helped to make me. But that's all ended. I'm going to stand alone. I don't need your care. I don't want it."

His head suddenly dropped. His twitching hands fell to his sides.

"You can't mean it?" he hoarsely murmured.

"I do mean it," she quickly answered.

"The time has come for us to part!"

She spoke with a naturalness that robbed the words of all melodramatic weakness.

"No, no," he cried. "I will not give you up. I no longer implore you. I command. You shall marry me!"

The eyes of the woman blazed.

"You command me?"

"Yes. You must become my wife today—now! Come! There is a church close at hand."

"You are mad!"

"Yes, I'm mad. Don't goad me any further. Come!"

He advanced toward her with arms outstretched. For a moment the look in his eyes seemed to terrify her. She glanced about as if seeking aid.

"You're a bully and a coward!" she panted. "If you dare come nearer I'll scream for help!"

He advanced again. She drew back until she came into contact with a gilded chair. She leaned upon it lightly, her hands clutching the back. He was very close to her now.

"Come!"

"I will not!"

"Then I'll make you!"

Another step and the clutching hands would have seized her. With catlike quickness she lifted the light chair, and then, with all her strength, swung it through the air and brought it down with a crash upon the man's head.

He staggered back and fell headlong behind a pillar of the proscenium arch.

The chair dropped from the grasp of the excited girl. For a moment she seemed dazed. Then she rushed from the stage.

Barclay drew a long breath.

"Great!" he muttered.

He arose and stumbled up the dark aisle and out into the dazzling sunlight.

When he reached his office his first thought was to call up his friend, but he remembered Emmett had said he had an engagement, and Barclay decided to reserve his congratulations until after the performance.

He was in his seat early that evening. He had looked about the lobby as he entered, but Jack wasn't to be seen. Now he glanced around.

The audience was a large one, and he could only hope it would prove responsive. He meant to watch it closely and study the impression the playlet was certain to make.

For Barclay the program moved slowly. As Jack's sketch was to be introduced as an extra, it might be used in any portion of the entertainment. This kept Barclay in a state of keen expectancy.

A "sister team" opened the bill, and their act was followed by "The Modern Atlas," who in turn gave way to a musical mélange, and still "The Fatal Blow" was not announced. Then came a black-face monologue artist, a team of German comedians, and a ventriloquist. The playlet was still delayed.

Barclay grew more and more impatient. A singer, billed as "The Swiss Soprano,"

followed the man of many voices, and then came "Slips and Slides," two active young fellows who are technically known as knockabout comedians.

Barclay stared at his program. Could it be possible that they had paid Jack's sketch the unusual compliment of giving it the last place on the bill? The knock-about comedians slipped and slid from the stage, and a moment later the lights were lowered and down came the white curtain for the moving pictures that closed the entertainment.

Barclay was greatly disappointed. He grasped his hat and stalked from the darkened auditorium. As he pushed open the door into the lobby he came face to face with his friend.

"Why, Jack!" he exclaimed. "What was the trouble?"

"It's all off, old man," Emmett answered, with a little catch in his voice. "Sorry I couldn't let you know in time."

"But why didn't they give it?"

Emmett shrugged his shoulders.

"They threw me down," he answered. "I told you what they were. The man had the grace to send word he was sick. Nothing's been heard from the girl. I guess it's all for the best. They'd have murdered the piece."

"But, my boy," Barclay cried, "the rehearsal was great!"

Emmett stared at him.

"There wasn't any rehearsal," he said. "The property-man told me. It seems they had a devil of a row on the stage. The girl smashed a chair over the man's head and ran away!"

A SPRING DITTY.

MUSIC o' the mockin'-birds where wild the blossoms glow;
Fifty million roses in a perfect storm of snow!
An' all the groves rejoicin', an' all the greenin' hills
A-lookin' glad an' giddy with the ripple o' the rills!

There's a twinkle in the maples, there's a whisper in the pines,
An' the hummin'-bird is hummin' fer the mornin'-glory vines;
There's a thrill of life pervadin' all the mountains an' the dells,
An' music in the breezes where the cattle shake their bells.

Oh, the country's growin' brighter, an' the world in glory rolls;
The sunshine's streamin' whiter through the winders of our souls.
The Lord's unlocked His storehouse, with all He's got to give,
An' if life would last forever we'd jest live, an' live, an' live!

THE BATTLE OF THE WEAK.*

By BLIZABETH YORK MILLER,

Author of "The Score Against Him," "Larry's Luck," "His Automobile or Theirs?" etc.

The story of what happened in one case after riches took to themselves wings.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE RACK.

THE master of Derricourt had come to pay his family a visit.

If Anne had not been absolutely certain of this thrilling fact when she recognized the shabby black coat and wide-brimmed Western hat which passed her with James, Jr., in the dog-cart, the note of nervous expectancy in the household would have told her.

When Anne left to post her letter, the place was pervaded by a calm Sunday afternoon stillness. On her return she found everybody astir.

The housekeeper, in rustling black silk, was busily superintending the opening of new rooms; those of the maids who were on duty exhibited a certain apprehensiveness, no doubt borrowed from their chief, and Anne herself was filled with a sense of vague alarm as she heard the electric-bell in her room summoning her insistently.

She had no time to speculate upon the identity of that familiar figure in the dog-cart. She was convinced, however, that Jim Derrick and the wealthy, eccentric-looking stranger who had purchased Westchester property through the firm of Hardman & Henry, and who had ventured to give her a certain protection from the threats of Mr. Hardman, were one and the same.

As she hurriedly removed her hat—the bell meantime clamoring incessantly—and put on her dainty work-apron, she ventured a brief prayer that if Jim Derrick really were the eccentric stranger, he would fail to recognize her.

In Miss Rosamund's boudoir Anne found that young lady in a high state of excitement and ill-temper.

"Well, where have you been?" she exclaimed crossly as Anne slipped into the room. "I've been ringing ten minutes—if not more."

"I went out," replied Anne, busying herself with the hair-brushes.

She had schooled herself to ignore Miss Rosamund's flights of temper.

Silently Anne unwound the heavy coil of black hair and started to brush it.

Miss Rosamund herself was staring moodily into the dressing-glass, her elbows resting on the low table and a frown disfiguring her low white brow. Anne thought she looked rather pretty in her figured silk *négligée*. If only she would smile, and stop looking petulant.

There was a *négligée* just like this one among Anne's belongings. In fact, it had come from the same shop. Anne remembered they had told her it was an exclusive design. She wished she dared get it out and wear it in her own room.

Only, of course, there was never time. She must always be dressed for duty, except when she slept. Even at that moment her bell rang again.

Anne stopped, the brush poised in her hand, and met Miss Rosamund's gaze in the glass with a look of inquiry.

"Mother can wait," said the young lady sharply.

The frown on her forehead deepened. She dipped her finger in a little pot of rose-colored cream and massaged the line thoughtfully.

Again the bell sounded.

"Perhaps I had better tell her," ventured Anne, again hesitating.

"Will you kindly go on and finish my hair, Annie?" retorted Miss Rosamund in an exasperated voice. "If you had been here attending to your business you might be ready for her. I haven't got

any time to fool, and she can wait. I suppose you know my father's here."

"Yes, Miss Rosamund," answered Anne, in the stereotyped manner custom required of her.

She wondered what connection there was between Mrs. Derrick's waiting and the arrival of Mr. Derrick.

As though in answer to her thoughts there appeared in the doorway the disheveled, uncorseted figure of Mrs. Derrick herself.

Without the moral support of her stays, clad only in a thick, wadded silk dressing-gown, she presented a singularly unaristocratic appearance.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a tone of dismay. Then: "Your father's come, Rosamund, and here am I not dressed. He hates me not to be dressed in the daytime. If I'd only known he was coming—"

"Well, why aren't you dressed, then?" questioned Miss Rosamund pertly.

"I say—if I'd only known he was coming. But he telephoned Jimmie to meet him, and Jimmie didn't say anything about it. He might have known I wouldn't like *that* kind of a surprise."

"It wasn't you my dear brother was planning to surprise," answered the young lady scornfully. "It was I. He knew about those people coming to-night, and he thought it would be a joke."

Mrs. Derrick looked at her daughter in positive fright.

"Oh, Rosamund!" she cried plaintively. "I forgot all about them. I truly did. You promised them bridge, didn't you?"

Rosamund nodded grimly.

"You know perfectly well they wouldn't have come without it—"

"And your father positively forbade us playing the last time you lost so much."

Mrs. Derrick sank heavily down upon a chintz-covered couch and sighed miserably.

"Why do you play so recklessly, Rosamund?" she inquired querulously. "If it hadn't been for that—"

"Oh, drop it!" exclaimed Rosamund crossly. "That isn't what's worrying me. I don't care anything about bridge, anyway. It's only—"

She flushed darkly, and plucked at the ribbons on her gown.

"Father's so queer sometimes, and he will insist upon wearing those clothes. I'm not exactly ashamed of him, but tonight—I—"

She paused, and bit her lip to hide her irritation.

Mrs. Derrick's heavy chin sagged sympathetically, and her lips quivered. Anne fancied there were tears in her eyes.

"Rosamund!" the older woman exclaimed in dismay; "I know! You mean Mr. Calhoun is coming!"

Rosamund nodded silently, and quite forgot to administer a deserved rebuke when the ivory gold-mounted hair-brush slipped from Anne's nerveless fingers and fell to the floor.

Anne recovered it quickly. She wondered if she had heard aright, or if it was some cruel trick her senses had played her.

It couldn't be possible that Dickson Calhoun was on visiting terms with these people. It couldn't be possible, and yet—

Mrs. Derrick was talking. In her perturbation she forgot her acquired high-bred accent, and became quite frankly and garrulously plebeian.

"I was sure he was taken with you, Rosamund, at Palm Beach, only you wouldn't have it so. Else why did he come back with us?"

(So it was Dick! He had met them at Palm Beach. Anne remembered the newspaper item which had recorded his return and the Derricks' simultaneously.)

She parted Rosamund Derrick's heavy black hair with hands that were cold as ice, and ran the brush down its long shining surface. The two women paid no more attention to her than if she had been some statue endowed with the ability to move.

Milady's maid may be interested in milady's love-affairs, but she is scarcely expected to be quite as personally concerned in them as was Anne in this instance.

Rosamund interrupted her mother frigidly.

"He liked me—yes, mama. We have been corresponding, and last week, you know, I lunched with him at Sherry's. Then he said he would try to come, and would try to get some friends of his. Of course you know what that means.

Those people must be attended to properly."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" said her mother anxiously.

"Because I wasn't certain he'd come. Mr. Craig Gordon, the man he talked so much about, is coming, and a married couple—I forget their name. He telephoned this morning. With those people from the Lodge, there'll be eight besides ourselves."

Mrs. Derrick got up from the divan and ambled off in the direction of the door. Her grizzled hair hung about her temples forlornly, and her heavy face was the picture of wo.

"Your father's coming home at this time will ruin your chances, Rosamund."

"Mr. Calhoun must meet papa some time."

"But not until after—until—Rosamund, I want to ask you something. Did you hear anything about his being engaged to another girl? A society girl, who lost her money or something?"

Anne thrust the last hairpin into Rosamund Derrick's hair with an uncertain hand, and stood aside to let the young lady inspect her work.

Her face was white and drawn, and she looked ten years older.

How could she manage to stand it any longer! How was it possible to listen calmly while these two women unconsciously raked over the ashes of her past?

Ah, those ashes! Underneath, the fire still glowed. It would not do to stir them too ruthlessly.

Rosamund craned her neck to get a better view of the finished coiffure before she replied. Then she said slowly:

"I think there was another girl. But, as you say, she lost her money, and the engagement was broken off." She paused, and pushed a stray lock into place carefully. "Dick—Mr. Calhoun—can't afford to marry a poor girl, I suppose. He's awfully clever, and awfully swell, but he hasn't anything himself."

"Your father might not like—"

"Papa can like it or not, as he chooses. You can't get something for nothing in this world," snapped her daughter crossly. "I'm sensible enough to understand. He's got position, and he can lift me where I want to be. And, mama. I really am awfully fond of him."

Anne hurriedly straightened the things on Rosamund's dressing-table and rushed out of the room. She felt that she could not bear to hear another word. She must get by herself and think the thing out.

She had loved Dick devotedly. More even than that; she loved him now, faithless though he was.

The thought that he was coming here to the very house where she was staying, that perhaps she would catch a glimpse of him, made her heart beat painfully.

"I do love him!" she whispered to herself. "Oh, Dick! Dick! How could you forget me so soon? I am really jealous of her. I can't understand it, and—oh, I can't bear it!"

Mrs. Derrick waited long and patiently. Finally, however, she was obliged to summon her recalcitrant maid.

Up to that moment Anne's strength had been supreme. It tottered now, and threatened to give way. She was afraid, for the first time in her life, of what in a moment of unreason she might do or say.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ARGUMENT.

ANNE realized that it would be impossible for her to go about her appointed tasks calmly that evening. She was apprehensive in the extreme for her own sanity.

It seemed as though she must face Dickson Calhoun and tell him how she had suffered and what she had gone through since last she had seen him. Craig Gordon, too, who had been the means of a girl's slaying herself.

What right had these two men to come into the home of Rosamund Derrick as though their hands were clean?

There was blood on them. To Anne's tortured brain it was as clearly seen as though the actual stains were there.

Wasn't it her duty to accuse them both? Didn't honor and decency demand it? What if she should go to Mrs. Derrick and tell her all she knew?

Dickson Calhoun was a heartless fortune-hunter; his intimate friend was one of those unspeakable creatures who are a menace to every decent woman.

To save herself from any chance of

self-betrayal, Anne went quietly to Mrs. Derrick and asked that she might be excused from further duty that evening.

"My head aches," she said truthfully; "and if you possibly can spare me I think I had better lie down."

Mrs. Derrick, kind of heart beneath her acquired veneer of worldliness, gave a sympathetic acquiescence to the request, and even went so far as to offer a headache-wafer from her own medicine cabinet.

But Miss Rosamund stormed angrily.

It was just the way, she exclaimed. Troubles never came singly. When you need somebody particularly, something always had to be the matter. And who, pray, was to assist the ladies with their wraps?

Anne stood dumb before this volley of inquiry, waiting for it to subside before she dared trust herself to answer. But Mrs. Derrick saved her the necessity.

"Go to your room, Annie," she said kindly. "One of the other maids can take your place. Miss Rosamund is worried; otherwise I'm sure she wouldn't talk so."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Rosamund, stamping her foot vehemently. "I don't believe she has a headache at all." Anne flushed and clenched her hands angrily, but she stood steadily enough, with shining eyes and chin held high.

"It's just a scheme to get out of working. This afternoon she was gone for more than an hour. I rang and rang; and now she *has a headache!* How much of this sort of thing do you expect to put up with, mama? She has more airs than she ought to have, anyway. It's a pity somebody wouldn't teach her her place."

"*It's a pity somebody wouldn't teach you some manners!*" exclaimed Anne, goaded to desperation.

She stood straight and tall, like some fair-haired young goddess, in her simple black dress and ruffled apron, and shot defiance from a pair of steely blue eyes at the little dark-haired vulgarian who had roused her to wrath.

There was an instant's silence, then a cool voice from the doorway said: "Scrappy as ever—eh?"

Anne turned quickly, and so did the mother and daughter.

There stood Jim Derrick, imperturbably puffing at a long black cigar, his wide-brimmed hat set on the back of his head, his feet apart, one lean hand thrust into his trousers' pocket, and an amused glitter in his black eyes.

Anne went deathly pale, and shot a quick glance at Rosamund and their mother. They, however, took the remark to apply to them. She flashed him an imploring glance.

"What's this young lady doing here?" he questioned, waving his hand to indicate Anne.

"That's what I'd like to know, too," remarked James, Jr., who had stepped quietly into the room behind his father.

Mrs. Derrick stepped nervously into the breach, with an apologetic air.

"It's nothing, Jim," she said anxiously. "Or rather—Rosamund was unpleasant—"

"That's not unusual," remarked James, Jr., by way of parenthesis.

"Hush, Jimmie! Annie is our maid. She has a headache, and she asked to be excused from duty this evening. Rosamund objected, and we were—discussing the matter when you chose to interrupt."

Jim Derrick threw back his head and laughed.

"Oh! that's the way of it, is it? Lady's maid, eh?"

Again he laughed. James, Jr., gave his father a quick, suspicious glance.

"You know her?" he asked quietly.

His father continued to chuckle.

"How's the real-estate market?" he inquired. "Caught any more suckers?"

Anne's face grew even whiter. She was fair game, it seemed, for their taunts and jokes and insults. She was only a servant, and must put up with anything they chose to offer her.

"Only a servant!" Well, servant or no servant, she'd show them.

She leaned forward, looking Jim Derrick full in his small black eyes.

"And how," she asked evenly, "is Baccaras Central? Have you caught the particular sucker you're looking for yet?"

Without waiting for a reply, she turned swiftly and left the room.

After Anne had closed the door of her own apartment, and locked it, she

had an hour of quiet communion with herself.

"You've been a fool, Anne Gravestock," she said severely. "Why did you insist upon returning to life? You've simply ruined 'Annie Graves.' That poor girl will go out of here to-morrow, bag and baggage, and all because you cropped up and lost your temper. It was stupid and vulgar—quite as stupid and vulgar as Miss Rosamund herself."

"What did you care what she said? What did you care if he chose to make fun of you? And, after all, what were you so afraid of him for? It was no disgrace to have been in an office."

The exciting discussion with the Derrick family for the moment put Dickson Calhoun out of her mind. Even the headache was forgotten.

But presently both Dick and the headache came back. Her room was in the rear of the house, but she could hear the confused murmur of voices, which told of the guests' arrival, and shortly afterward the chatter of the ladies in Rosamund's dressing-room, where Hilma, the pretty Swedish chambermaid, was helping them with their wraps.

Anne's head throbbed painfully. She sat on the edge of her bed, miserable and forlorn. It was twice as lonesome in this great mansion as it had been at Mrs. Kidder's, or even at Mrs. Bevis's unspeakable lodging-house.

She thought of Nettie and Louise, and wondered if they wore their new clothes the night of the Truck-Drivers' Ball, a festivity they had been planning for many weeks in advance.

It was better, oh! infinitely better, to be like Nettie and Louise than to endure this! They, at least, had their free moments. They could preserve some shred of independence in spite of their poverty. While she—here Anne rose from the bed to answer a knock at the door.

She turned the key, and the door swung open. There stood one of the other maids, with a small tray.

"Mrs. Derrick's afther sendin' you some tea an' toast. She thinks maybe your head'll feel betther if you'll try to take ut."

She held out the tray, and Anne took it with trembling hands and set it down on her table.

"Thank you, Katy," she said gratefully. "And thank Mrs. Derrick, too. It was kind of her—"

"Oh, she's kind," replied Katy laconically. "It's not her I'd ever be mindin'—it's the little wan. Mrs. Derrick says to get some sleep, an' she hopes you'll feel more like yourself in the marnin'."

Anne's heart softened. She drank her tea and ate her toast humbly, sorry for having shown temper, and determined that in the morning she would try to act more like herself.

Much as she disliked Rosamund Derrick, she made up her mind to overcome the feeling. But what of Dick?

He was down-stairs with the others, enjoying his after-dinner game of bridge and making love to Rosamund.

Anne did not trust herself to think of Dick.

She realized that it was better to put him completely out of her mind for the present. Perhaps in some future day she could regard the matter calmly.

CHAPTER XV.

"JUST A MAN I KNOW."

ROSAMUND herself seemed to have forgotten the affair of Sunday night when Anne responded to her ring the next morning.

Something had happened to plunge the young lady into the depths of gloom.

Anne went about her usual tasks quietly, schooling herself to keep her temper in check, and trying to remember that it was not Anne Gravestock at all who suffered these indignities, but only Annie Graves, the lady's-maid.

Her repression, however, was unnecessary.

Rosamund apparently had forgotten the unpleasant incident. Or else, something of greater importance had happened to throw her quarrel with Anne into the shade.

Her face was pasty-looking, and there were dark circles under her eyes; the eyes themselves were troubled.

To the anxious inquiries of her mother she replied, evasively, that she was quite well. Well enough, in fact, to go into town that afternoon.

Mrs. Derrick protested, and then final-

ly, as a compromise, offered to accompany her, which offer was promptly rejected.

"You can't go alone," she said finally. "You will have to take Annie. I can't understand why you're so stubborn. Has Mr. Calhoun—"

"No, he hasn't," snapped Rosamund. "It has nothing to do with him. I mean, there isn't anything the matter. And I won't take Annie, either. I'm only going to the dressmaker's, and I can take a cab at the station."

"Then you'll go after lunch?"

"Yes, and be back before dinner," replied Rosamund shortly. "Annie, please lay out my dark-blue cloth suit and tan hat. How did you manage to entertain papa so long last evening?"

"We went over the plans for the town-house. That took some time, and then I got him into a long argument about the decorations. I knew he would be in a towering rage if he knew you were—what he calls 'gambling' again."

Rosamund shrugged her shoulders wearily.

"I know something about that," she said suggestively. "He used to gamble himself—"

"Hush, Rosamund!" said her mother warningly.

"Anyway, he's a pig! All that money, and yet he only gives me—"

"Well, he's your father," said Mrs. Derrick defensively; "and he knows what's best for you."

"That's all right, but look what he does for Jimmie. Do you suppose you could get Jimmie to lend you a couple of hundred?"

"Why?" asked Mrs. Derrick anxiously. "You had your month's allowance only last week. I'm afraid Jimmie won't lend it to me. He'll know I want it for you—and you know—"

"Well, I ought to by this time," retorted Rosamund glumly.

"But what do you want with it?" persisted her mother. "You didn't lose last night, did you?"

Rosamund's face darkened.

"A little," she replied evasively.

"Who to?"

"Mr. Calhoun."

"How silly. He wouldn't expect you to pay."

"Mother, you don't understand. That's the very reason why I must pay. Besides, I know he does expect me to pay. I—"

She paused and bit her lip vexatiously.

"It's so hard to make you understand social customs," she said despairingly. "But let's not talk of it any more. I'm tired of the subject. I'm tired of everything. Annie, you may bring me up some clam-broth and biscuits. I'm not going down-stairs to lunch."

"But, Rosamund—" pleaded her mother.

"*Don't talk to me!* Haven't I told you I'm tired. I'm going to get a nap—"

"Then why go to the dressmaker's?"

Anne slipped out of the room to get the broth and biscuits.

She wondered if it could be true that Dick had played bridge with this young girl and got her into his debt for even a trifling sum? It hardly seemed possible. He had always seemed so innocently boyish.

Then she remembered that it had not been very long since she herself had regarded the questionable amusements of society with a leniency they did not altogether deserve.

True, Anne had been one of the few women of her own set who refused to play for money. But she had looked on while others played. She remembered, too, that Dick played inveterately, and that he told her once, in a burst of confidence, that his winnings at bridge paid many of his small expenses.

She wondered why the idea of his having won money from Rosamund Derrick irritated her and in a way made him seem despicable.

Again she compared Dick with Tom Goodwin. She always felt instinctively just how Tom would act under given circumstances. Dick's moods and manners sometimes surprised her. She felt that if she counted upon his manliness, he would prove a weakling; on the other hand, if she decided he was altogether unworthy, no doubt some latent good quality would convince her that she had been mistaken.

Dick was a combination of impulses hewn out by his environment; Tom Goodwin hewed his own environment and made it over to suit himself.

After much persuading, Rosamund compromised on the argument concerning her trip to town by allowing Anne to accompany her. Her consent was given reluctantly, and only after her mother had threatened to call upon Mr. Derrick to enforce obedience.

At the station, Rosamund told Anne to wait while she telephoned. This took some little time, and when she returned her eyes shone feverishly, and there was a little spot of red on either cheek.

Rosamund's appearance indicated that something unusual had happened, but Anne could only speculate upon its nature. In a moment, however, she understood a little of what had occurred.

In her hurry Rosamund had forgotten to pay for her telephone call. The uniformed boy who is detailed to attend to all such delinquents followed her and, touching his cap, said:

"You called 1330A Madison, didn't you, miss? Five cents, please."

Rosamund dived hurriedly into her change-purse for the money, while Anne waited beside her nervously.

1330A Madison was Dick's club. It was possible that Rosamund had summoned him to meet her in the station. And if he came, what then?

Anne was at her wit's end, but Rosamund herself solved the difficulty.

"I won't need you, Annie," she said. "If you have any shopping, or anything to do, go ahead and do it. Be back here in time for the six-ten. I'll meet you at the gate—for the six-ten, remember."

Under the circumstances, Anne was glad enough to be set at liberty, although her conscience troubled her on Mrs. Derrick's account. She knew that the older lady would disapprove of her leaving Rosamund.

Moreover, there was some trick in the air. By that clever sixth sense which all women possess, Anne divined it. But just what it was she could not determine.

After all, it might not be anything very wrong. Possibly Rosamund had planned to have tea with Dickson at one of the restaurants. It was not regular, of course, but Rosamund had not been brought up as strictly as Anne herself.

Whatever it was, however, Anne was powerless to prevent it. Rosamund had dismissed her for the afternoon.

Having nothing to do, and with only enough money to pay for a few street-car rides, Anne was at a loss how to pass her few hours of liberty. She took a car to Twenty-Third Street and walked across to Fifth Avenue, then slowly north. In the stream of cabs and carriages she recognized several old friends, but they did not see her, or perhaps, even, they had ceased to look for her, since none are forgotten so quickly as the Annes of this world.

She stopped for a moment in front of a linen-shop to admire some Irish point blouses, and while standing there, felt a light hand on her shoulder. Simultaneously, a familiar voice exclaimed: "Hullo! Where did you drop from?"

Anne turned quickly.

"Miss Jackson!" she cried, taking the white-gloved hand held out to her.

There was an unspoken question in her eyes as she raised them to the young girl's.

Miss Jackson took the look to be a compliment. She patted the front of her velvet jacket with evident satisfaction, and the long sweeping plume on her picture-hat nodded cheerfully.

"Ain't I the grandest ever!" she exclaimed merrily. "Look at that!"

She waved one hand toward a low Victoria standing at the curb. Over its seat was thrown a costly mink lap-robe, and two men in plum-colored livery sat stiffly erect upon the box.

"That's mine, too," she said with conscious pride, "and a house on the av'neue. You'd hardly believe it, would you?"

"But—Miss Jackson—" stuttered Anne confusedly.

"Now, I *am* surprised at you! Miss Jackson! No, indeedy! 'Mrs. Henry,' if you've got time. We were married last week—I thought it would surprise you—"

Anne flung her arms around the girl's neck and kissed her for all the world to see.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried. "It's just fine—"

"Come on in the carriage and I'll tell you all about it. And you must tell me what you're doin'," cried the genial Mrs. Henry.

She took no notice whatever of Anne's

shabby dress, but chattered inconsequently about her own happiness, the delayed wedding-trip that was to be taken in June when real-estate matters grew a little lax, the trousseau which she had purchased after her marriage, and the two Japanese servants, who were proving real treasures in the matter of house-keeping.

But after a while a silence fell between them, and Anne knew that Mrs. Henry was wondering what had happened to her since last they met.

Some explanation seemed necessary.

"I suppose you thought it funny," she said, with real embarrassment, "the—the way I left the office."

"No, I didn't," answered the other bluntly. "We all knew what had happened. You ain't the first girl that's got out of there. If it hadn't been for my husband standin' between me and trouble, I'd a got out long ago. But I guess you taught Hardman a lesson. He ain't been half so fresh since."

She turned and looked at Anne curiously.

"What are you doing now? I sent word up to that boarding-house—wanted you to come to my wedding supper—but a girl there said you had left to go into the country. Are you working in the country?"

Anne flushed. Somehow, she found it hard to answer. She tried to remember that all labor is dignified, and that there was no shame in earning an honest living, but with Mrs. Henry's frank brown eyes questioning her, she became confused.

"Yes," she said, "I am in the country. I'm with a rich family—maid for a mother and daughter. There was nothing else to do, and my money was all gone—"

The ex-stenographer laid a sympathetic hand over Anne's shabby black-gloved one.

"Never mind," she said, "you just keep up your heart. Give me your address, and when something comes along, I'll see that you get it. I won't forget—and don't you care! There's always brighter times coming. Look at me! Why, I've had my ups and downs, too—and now look at me!"

Something choked in Anne's throat, and she hastily brushed the tears from

her eyes. This large-hearted girl, for all her wretched taste in dress and manners, had shown her how not to play the snob.

Anne was suddenly ashamed of herself.

"Is there any special place I can take you?" asked Mrs. Henry, when they had made the circuit of the Park and were driving back toward Fifty-Ninth Street.

"N-no," said Anne doubtfully. "I—Oh, yes, if you don't mind, I think I should like to pay a short call upon my old landlady—where I boarded before I went to that place on Second Avenue. She was very good, and it's been a long time since I've seen her. She'll think me ungrateful."

Mrs. Henry cheerfully acquiesced, and directed the coachman to drive to the address Anne gave her.

A moment later they were caught in a jam of vehicles crossing Fifty-Ninth Street and forced to halt. The upward stream of carriages moved along slowly, cabs, victorias, automobiles, and traps. An electric hansom came to a halt directly beside their carriage, and Anne suddenly found herself looking straight into the eyes of Dickson Calhoun.

Beside him, her tan hat shielding her face, which was turned the other way, sat Rosamund.

For a brief moment the two sat staring at each other. Then the electric hansom moved forward slowly, and Anne found the strength to bow gravely.

Dick's face was white, and he looked older, somehow. She heard him breathe a startled "Anne!" as the hansom and the victoria passed each other, and the girl at his side turned, but not in time to observe the two women in the carriage.

Anne leaned back against the cushions and closed her eyes.

"Who was he?" asked Mrs. Henry curiously.

"Oh, just a man I know," Anne replied wearily.

She had no heart for any further elaboration of the truth. He was a man, and it was true that she knew him; who else or what else he was to her, did not matter.

And then the old question again came

up to torture her: Was she going to keep on loving Dickson Calhoun to the end of her days?

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. DERRICK'S BRACELET.

ROSAMUND DERRICK rushed breathlessly into the station just a scant thirty seconds before the gates were closed for the six-ten train.

Anne had been waiting in an agony of suspense that grew intolerable as the minutes sped away and her charge failed to appear.

Anne experienced a guilty pang of conscience when she remembered how pleasantly her own afternoon had passed, and how, toward the last, she had quite forgotten Rosamund and her obvious duty.

Mrs. Derrick had entrusted Anne with her daughter, and she should have insisted upon staying with Rosamund, even at the certain risk of displeasing that young lady.

However, when she had given up all hope of their making that train, Rosamund finally did appear. Anne seized the several small parcels which the girl thrust out to her, and together they dashed through the gate.

It was growing dark when the train slid out of the long tunnel, and countless rows of twinkling lights sprang suddenly into life, stretching in double rows up the narrow side streets. Lights glimmered, too, in those human hives; the flat-houses and all the hundreds of little shops were ablaze.

Everywhere there were people, people, people!

Long, nervous streams of them pushed and jostled each other in the streets and on the pavements, dodging trucks and trolleys and automobiles, each human atom intent upon preserving that spark of life which God had vouchsafed him; crowded hordes of them clung like flies to the cross-town cars; screaming little children romped hazardously in the side streets, and, still more, grown-ups and children could be seen through the illuminated windows of the flat-houses.

Anne settled wearily back into her seat, abandoning herself to a retrospect

of the past few hours and speculating again upon that indeterminate future.

Life must hold something more for her than this. Somewhere in the world there must be a real place for her where her earnest soul might grow. She wondered where it was, and along what paths it lay.

At this stage of her fortunes—or perhaps misfortunes is a better word—Anne was in some danger of developing a morbidness of mind foreign to her nature. She had remained consistently cheerful through dire poverty, and hopeful when it would seem that there remained nothing more for which to hope.

Even now she was far from despairing.

If she could have disposed of that one question which troubled her, the way would have been reasonably clear. And the question, of course, was Dickson Calhoun.

The ride through the Park that afternoon with Mrs. Henry had been a grateful diversion. The counsel and cheer which that hearty young person offered her was just what Anne needed most.

Her subsequent call upon Mrs. Kidder, and the good soul's open delight at seeing her again, had warmed her heart through and through.

Mrs. Kidder had much to tell. She fairly bubbled over with newsy gossip, and Anne found herself listening with more genuine interest than she had felt in anything for months.

There was the little old gentleman beside whom she used to sit at table—he had been ill with an attack with pleurisy, and was only now able to be back at the bank. He, it seems, missed Anne, and inquired after her constantly.

Mrs. Kidder thought it would be nice if Anne would write to him. He would be so pleased to know that she was comfortably fixed—Mrs. Kidder thought it had worried him not to know where she was.

The upholstery drummer was on the road, and the two manicure girls had moved.

And, oh, yes! The same young man who called to see Anne once before had been again, and seemed much disturbed at not finding her. Mrs. Kidder had given him her address at the Second

Avenue house, not knowing, of course, that she was no longer there.

On the train, Anne recalled Mrs. Kidder's statement that Howard Keating had called to see her, and she wondered if it had been anything of importance he wanted.

And then, as by a miracle, she raised her eyes and saw the answer to her question. It was contained in the headlines of a paper which the man in the seat ahead of her was reading.

JIM DERRICK PREPARED TO PAY TOP PRICE FOR CONTROL OF BAC CARAS CENTRAL.

Anne leaned forward in her seat, oblivious to the fact that Rosamund Derrick was watching her.

Below the larger type she managed to make out the sub-heads.

Silver Magnate Needs Mexican Railroad in His Business.—Rumored that Estate of John Graves stock Holds Balance of Stock.—Jim Derrick, at the Mercy of a Woman, Hopes to Find Missing Heiress Who Is Supposed to be in Europe.

Anne clasped her hands convulsively, and her face paled.

Rosamund Derrick regarded her insolently from between half-closed lids.

"Yes—that's my father," she said. "You seem interested."

A light, happy laugh rippled from between Anne's curved lips. Suddenly, indeed, had all the world bloomed again for her.

She was rich—and free once more! Oh, the moral chains of poverty, how they bound your very soul!

Still, she must go cautiously until this thing was settled. To-morrow she would know. Until then she must resolutely crush down all expectation. If disappointment had to come, it must not cost too dearly.

"Yes, I am interested," she replied quietly.

For the first time she noticed that Rosamund herself seemed more than usually distract and out of temper. The girl's face was white to ghastliness, and the heavy lines under her eyes were clearly marked.

"Are you ill, Miss Rosamund?" she inquired quickly, her look of happiness changing to one of solicitude.

Rosamund jerked her shoulders irritably.

"No," she answered with some petulance. Then a moment later, she exclaimed: "Yes, I am ill—at least, I'm tired."

The rest of the way they rode in silence. Anne was fully occupied with her thoughts, and Rosamund, it seemed, with hers.

Rosamund went straight to bed as soon as she reached home.

She said that she wanted no dinner, and refused to see anybody.

As for Mrs. Derrick, she was the center of a bubbling caldron of excitement, the cause of which Anne was not slow to discover.

A diamond and ruby bracelet which she owned had been lost or misplaced—or stolen! No one had exactly decided which calamity of the three had overtaken it, but the premises were being gone over as with a drag-net. Meanwhile, the servants went about with a guilty consciousness that they were all under suspicion.

Even Anne was affected by the feeling, and could not escape from its oppression.

She remembered the bracelet well. It was on Mrs. Derrick's dressing-table that very morning when she straightened up.

She had wondered then, why it was not locked in the jewel-case, as the Silver King's wife was most apprehensive for the safety of her jewels, and kept them constantly under lock and key. She always attended to putting them away herself, and the key she wore on a slender gold chain about her neck.

Mrs. Derrick questioned Anne with disconcerting minuteness, as she had questioned the other servants. Anne felt herself grow hot under the scrutiny. There were, indeed, even deeps upon deeps of indignity to which one might be subjected.

She forgot her impending good fortune in this fresh calamity. The honor of friendless Annie Graves was in danger. For the moment, she was Annie Graves, with a humble name to clear and a reputation for honesty to sustain.

Mr. Derrick himself was away. Mrs. Derrick and Jimmie had to carry on the burden of inquiry by themselves.

The servants were notified that none of them were to leave the premises upon any excuse whatever; the matter would be sifted to the bottom, and the guilty party could not hope to get away. As a precautionary measure against the culprit escaping, James, Jr., had invoked the aid of three county detectives, and Derricourt was practically under guard.

Anne went to her room that night, sick and miserable.

To-morrow, at any cost, she must leave this house. The first thing in the morning she would communicate with Howard Keating, tell him where she was, and find out how much truth there was in the newspaper rumor concerning her stock.

If it should happen—as it might—that the reports signified nothing, she would arrange with young Keating for the sale of the rest of her wardrobe, and with his help, or Tom Goodwin's, she would find something else to do.

Indeed, there was a partial solution of her difficulty in a letter from Tom himself which she found on her bureau.

He had written immediately after hearing from her, and his letter was characteristic as well as brief.

DEAR ANNE:

I was glad to get your letter, and I want you to know that for your sake I'm refraining from jumping on the neck of the biggest newspaper beat I've seen in sight this year. If you've got any of Jim Derrick's stock—at least he thinks it ought to be his—now is the time to give it to him, for a consideration.

Fancy, your being a maid in his very house! I wish you were not too scrupulous. I know you can write, and if you'll accept a job on this paper and hand them the scoop, it's yours. Come anyway. I'll back you to the chief. You're a game little lady and I'm proud to know you—and love you, Anne.

You're still a ghost haunting me, you know. And when you're ready to take me, I'm here waiting for you. Think it over. Also think over the other proposition—about the paper stunt. It isn't much, but it's a lot sight better than brushing another girl's hair.

Anne laughed happily as she finished reading this letter. Then she read it through again and again. It was so fresh

and breezy and wholesome—just like Tom himself!

Tom had never had time to study the tricks that go with love-making, yet there was a genuineness back of him that bred confidence, and the backbone of all true love is confidence.

"It must be wonderful to love a man like that!" exclaimed Anne, her eyes shining softly. "He's going to make a fine husband for—for some other woman!"

Unconsciously she sighed, irritated a little that the notion of Tom's marrying some other girl should displease her.

"I'm a dog in the manger," she said, smiling whimsically, and she tore the letter into bits.

She hated to destroy it, but in the present state of the household, she felt that it was the only thing to do.

Before going to sleep Anne decided to look over the remains of her once elaborate wardrobe and select those garments which she would get Howard Keating to sell for her. To her surprise, she found that both her trunks were unlocked.

Hastily she raised the lid of each in turn and lifted the trays.

The contents were in the wildest disorder, costly laces torn, silks rumpled and twisted, feathers crushed, and the countless small belongings, *lingerie*, dainty handkerchiefs, flowers, ribbons, silk stockings, etc., in the most appalling disarray.

Anne regarded the wreck of her possessions with incredulous amazement.

Who had dared to do this thing, and why?

CHAPTER XVII.

UNDER SUSPICION.

MRS. BEEKS, the housekeeper, was speaking in slow, measured tones calculated to impress her listeners and at the same time conceal her own agitation. Her peckish little face wore a frightened expression, and she strove with difficulty to maintain her composure.

Anne Gravestock stood calmly in front of the library table, one hand resting lightly on its smooth, polished surface. Annie Graves, the harassed lady's-maid, appeared suddenly to have lost her

identity in this graceful, dignified young creature who bore an unmistakable resemblance to the haughty Anne of old.

True enough, she still wore Annie Graves's apron, but so, too, may a bit of the chrysalis cling to the butterfly even after it has emerged from its prison.

Annie Graves, under similar circumstances, might have shown temper; Anne Gravestock was as cold and unmoved as a chiseled block of ice.

Mrs. Derrick was in the library, too, stout and worried-looking and most uncomfortable. And there was James, Jr., with his mean mouth and eyes.

He leaned against the back of the leather chair in which his mother was sitting, and from time to time, as the occasion seemed to require, smiled his cruel, down-twisted smile.

Mrs. Beeks moistened her lips and went on with her story, studiously avoiding Anne's eyes.

"I had her trunks searched according to your orders, ma'am, and while I didn't find the bracelet, I found other things that she has stolen. Miss Rosamund's dressing-gown, among them—and no end of dresses and things—"

Mrs. Derrick's bewilderment grew by the minute.

"But we have missed only the bracelet—" she began, in a flurried voice. "I don't quite see—"

"Oh, she probably took those from some other place where she was before. I'm sorry, Mrs. Derrick. I dare say I wasn't as particular about the reference as I should have been—but we were so pressed for time, and she came well recommended to Mis' Bevis, who kept the boarding-house. Mis' Bevis is very careful about her boarders."

"You say you actually found Miss Rosamund's dressing-gown in her trunk?" again inquired Mrs. Derrick, flinging a reproachful, half-angry look at Anne. "Which dressing-gown?"

"The white silk one, with the pink flowers on it."

"Not the one with the slit-up sleeves and the Mechlin lace?" cried Mrs. Derrick.

"Yes, that's the one," interrupted Anne coolly, "although I dare say Mrs. Beeks doesn't know Mechlin lace when she sees it."

Here James, Jr., elected to smile.

"I dare say you do," he said insolently.

"Oh, yes, I do," answered Anne pleasantly. "I was brought up on Mechlin lace, so to speak. It was a fad of my infancy."

Jimmie's mouth twisted into a smile at this sly dig. Well, let her have her little spell of sarcasm; she'd have to answer for it later.

Mrs. Derrick sat frigidly erect.

"You admit that you took it, then?" she said severely. "You admit taking the dressing-gown—"

"Oh, no," said Anne hastily. "I was merely confirming Mrs. Beeks's statement as to *which* gown she meant. Of course I didn't take it. Why should I?"

Mrs. Beeks snorted contemptuously, and flung back her head like a horse charging into battle.

"Why should you, indeed! How can you stand there and deny taking it when it's right there in your trunk—I saw it with my own eyes. That—and all the rest of the things you—"

"Brought with me," finished Anne coolly. "The gown you were pleased to inspect is my own, as is everything else in those two trunks. When you have time, Mrs. Beeks, I will be glad to have you go to my room and straighten out my things as well as you can. They are in frightful disorder. Meanwhile, Mrs. Derrick, I don't know that I altogether blame you for thinking what you do. I haven't got your bracelet, nor anything else belonging to you or to Miss Rosamund. The dressing-gown is mine—"

"It isn't possible," interrupted Mrs. Derrick. "That gown came from Clarice's, and she assured me it had no duplicate."

"Exactly what she told me," said Anne. "I was much surprised when I saw Miss Rosamund's—and I shall tell Clarice what I think of her."

"Superb!" exclaimed James, Jr. "Blamed if I don't admire your spunk, Annie!"

"Jimmie, please keep still," implored his mother fretfully. "Of course, Annie, what you say may be true, as far as we are concerned—but still you must explain how you came by all those expensive things, a girl in your position—"

"I agree with you," replied Anne, striving to keep her eyes from dancing. "As for the dressing-gown, you can easily satisfy yourself about that. Miss Rosamund has hers on at present—"

"I say—where is Rosamund? Why doesn't she join this family powwow?" interrupted Jimmie. "Perhaps she knows something about the bracelet."

"Rosamund's very ill with a headache," said his mother, "and she must not be disturbed. The child hasn't been well for a day or two. That trip to town yesterday was too much for her—"

She turned and fixed Anne severely with her eye.

"Now, there is one thing I haven't said to you, Annie, but I'm going to now. I missed the bracelet yesterday, just after you and Miss Rosamund went to New York—Rosamund tells me that you were away from her part of the time on errands of your own. I haven't mentioned losing the bracelet to her, because she was too ill to be worried, but I did ask her that. Where were you while Rosamund was at the dressmaker's?"

"I'm sorry to be rude, Mrs. Derrick, but it doesn't happen to be anybody's affair where I was."

Mrs. Derrick's face showed how horrified she was at this impudent retort, but she exclaimed hastily: "Oh, Jimmie, it has just occurred to me that perhaps Rosamund wore the bracelet yesterday. She may have seen it on my table and slipped it on her arm—and afterward left it in her hand-bag, as I've known her to do before."

Her eye ran quickly from Mrs. Beeks to Anne, as though wondering which of the two to send for the bag; then she said: "You get it, Jimmie—but don't disturb Rosamund. I want the poor child to get over her headache."

James, Jr., departed on the errand. Mrs. Beeks solemnly folded her arms and turned away so that she would not have to look at the accused lady's-maid, and Mrs. Derrick silently resigned herself to await the results of this new clue. At its best, it seemed unpromising.

Jimmie returned presently with Rosamund's smart little seal-leather handbag. He gave it to his mother with the terse comment that he had looked into it, but there were so many pockets and

boxes and things that she had better see for herself.

Mrs. Derrick spread an ample lap and poured the contents of the bag into it. There was no bracelet. Slowly she sifted over every article—coin-purse, card-case, letters, vanity-box, handkerchiefs, memorandum-book, pencils, and various slips of paper. James, Jr., leaned over her, watching the inspection.

Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Hey—wait a minute—what's that printed slip there—"

"The pink one? It's a cleaner's check—for some gloves she's having cleaned."

"No. Not that one. The other one—right under your left hand."

Mrs. Derrick raised the slip of paper slowly and looked it over. She turned it around and upside down, as much mystified as though it had been a Chinese laundry-check. Then she read it through several times.

Gradually the color faded from her cheeks, and she raised a haggard, old face to her son.

"Jimmie!" she whispered. "Jimmie—" Her voice shook and she swallowed hard at a lump in her throat. "It's—a pawn-ticket—for my—bracelet!"

James, Jr., snatched the slip of paper from her hand. He, too, turned pale as he read it.

Silently he handed it back to her, running his finger along the signature.

"Rosamund's name!" he said dryly.

Mrs. Derrick rose from the chair, and all of Rosamund's pretty little trinkets fell clattering from her lap to the floor. She covered her face with her hands.

"I understand—I understand! Oh, my poor little girl!"

"Hush!" interrupted James, Jr., warningly. "Control yourself, mother. There's been a mistake, of course. It's all right. I'll—"

He stopped short and looked toward the door, where one of the footmen had appeared, apparently oblivious to the tragic scene. The man held a silver tray on which was a familiar-looking yellow envelope.

"Well?" questioned Jimmie sharply.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the footman, "for interruptin'. But here's a telegram come for Miss Anne Grave-

stock. There's no such party in the house, sir; but it's directed care of Mr. Derrick, and I thought—”

Anne held out her hand calmly and smiled with all her old graciousness restored. This would pave the way for the explanations which she knew must shortly be forthcoming.

“The telegram is for me, Thomas,” she said.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOM GOODWIN'S GHOST.

THE various events which followed hard upon the heels of Howard Keating's telegram—he had obtained her address from Mrs. Bevis—left Anne in a daze.

Young Keating appeared at Derricourt half an hour after the message which announced his coming. With him were Bates, her father's friend and lawyer, and Jim Derrick himself.

No one, it seemed, quite understood just why Anne was in the Derrick household.

James, Jr., by reason of having seen the envelope addressed to Tom Goodwin, held to it stubbornly that it was all part of a newspaper trick calculated to drag the Derricks once more into the limelight. Keating was frankly and miserably puzzled, as well as reproachful to Anne, for not letting him know of her plight.

Mr. Bates said little, but his eyes told Anne that his conscience smote him cruelly for having permitted her to slip out of his sight. Jim Derrick was too pleased at having run his quarry to earth to question the absurdity of her having been under his own roof-tree for the past fortnight.

The matter which gave Jim Derrick control of the Baccaras Central Railroad and made Anne Gravestock once more a rich woman was settled speedily.

“Three hundred thousand dollars!” she sighed ecstatically, leaning back in the chair so lately occupied by Mrs. Derrick. “I can hardly believe it's true—it doesn't seem possible!”

“That's the jolly part of it!” exclaimed young Keating, his eyes glowing. “It's not only possible—but true.”

Afterward Anne went back to her little room across the hall from Rosamund's boudoir. There she found Mrs. Beeks and Hilma carefully repacking her trunks. She could scarcely restrain a smile as she noticed Mrs. Beeks's embarrassment.

Presently the housekeeper sent Hilma away on an errand, and then she turned to Anne apologetically.

“I hope you'll excuse me, miss,” she said. “You see, it was those dresses you sold the girls at the boarding-house that first made me suspicious. You'll own it did look queer, miss?”

“Perhaps it did,” answered Anne frankly.

After all, why should she hold a grudge just because the tables were reversed and she was in a position to be unkind.

“It's all right, Mrs. Beeks,” she added, “and I want to thank you for having engaged me for the place. I was in great need.”

At the door of her room stood Mrs. Derrick, her eyes red and swollen from weeping. Piteously she flung an arm over Anne's shoulder.

“I don't understand it, quite—Annie,” she said. “Mr. Derrick says you're really a lady, although I don't see just how it can be.” (Anne smiled at the joke on herself.) “But what I do understand is that you've been terribly wronged—and I'm not the sort of person who won't admit it when I've wronged anybody, even a maid. Miss Rosamund would apologize, I'm sure, if she understood, but she's ill, poor child. I'm sending for the doctor. Of course, she must have been very ill, or she certainly would not have done such a thing—and you will forgive me, won't you?”

Her poor pathetic face, with its sagging chins and haggard, tear-drawn eyes, was twice as appealing in its simple anguish as in all its panoply of acquired gentility. Anne stroked her shoulders soothingly.

“Indeed I will,” she said generously, her own eyes filling with tears. “And don't be too hard upon Miss Rosamund. She's only a child—and perhaps this will be a lesson to her—”

“About playing cards for money, you

mean? I hope so, too. It's her father's fault, anyway, for being so close with her. And, oh, Annie! Here's your half-month's wages—"

She held out some crisp bills to Anne.

For a moment Anne stared at them, uncomprehending. Then she laughed.

"Thank you, Mrs. Derrick," she said, taking the money and thrusting it into her bag. "I've earned it, haven't I? And strange as it may seem to you, although I'm fearfully and wonderfully rich, at the present moment, I've got just thirty cents to my name—besides what you've just given me."

"Indeed, it doesn't seem at all strange to me," replied Mrs. Derrick, making an effort to smile through her tears. "for I'm frequently that way myself."

It was almost dusk when Anne slipped quietly out of the Derrick house. She left orders where her trunks were to be sent, and set out for the station on foot, having firmly refused the offer of James, Jr., to drive her over.

It was a mild, warm night in early spring. In the almost leafless trees the first birds twittered anxiously, wondering no doubt if they had ventured north in advance of the season, and the air was heavy with a sweet, earthy smell.

Anne wanted to be alone and to think. She walked slowly, for there was plenty of time, and she planned her future in a vague, happy sort of way.

There were Nettie and Louise, and lots of girls like them, whom she would help. There was work waiting for her out in that world, in spite of her money, and even should she go about clothed in the outward habiliments of the old Anne, it was the spirit of the new Anne—the helpful, *understanding* Anne—that would dominate her.

Yes, it was quite true. The old Anne had perished forever. She had no place in the new order of things, and while her face had been sweet and pretty, and her heart innately good, it was the new Anne who possessed the understanding soul.

At the park gate Anne almost collided in the dusk with a man who was coming in. Startled for the moment, she drew back, and then she exclaimed softly: "Oh, it's you, Dick Calhoun!"

At first Dickson Calhoun failed to recognize his ex-fiancée. Then he cried:

"Anne Gravestock, by all that's wonderful! What are you doing here?"

"I'm coming from the Derrick's," answered Anne, striving to make her voice quite calm; "on my way to the station. You, I take it, are coming from the station, on your way to the Derricks?"

He laughed shortly.

"Yes," he said; "that's about right. I understand Miss Rosamund is ill. I telephoned—"

"Too ill to play bridge to-night," replied Anne quietly.

But Calhoun chose to ignore the insinuation.

"Tell me what you are doing here," he urged; "or—no. I don't know that I care about that. Where have you been—and why did you throw me over, Anne?"

He stepped nearer to her, and tried to take one of her hands.

Again his boyish appearance jarred upon Anne, as it had done before. A man of his age had no right to look so young. A man who got out in the world and did real work couldn't look so young.

She slipped her hand away from him and squared her chin.

"It's all right, Dick," she said firmly. "I've forgiven you, and we won't talk about it—"

"But I've hunted for you, Anne. They said you were in Europe with your cousins. Yesterday—in the Park—I would have given my soul to take you into my arms. Anne, once you promised to marry me—"

"Dick," said Anne resolutely, "do you want me to marry you, now?"

"Indeed I do, my darling girl," he said earnestly. "I've dreamed of you—longed for you—"

"But surely, Dick, you've heard? You know that when father died everything was swept away—that I was a pauper?"

For a few seconds he did not reply; then he said quietly:

"Yes, I did hear that. It was dreadful. I hurried back to New York as soon as I could, but you had gone, and there was nothing for me to do but wait until you came back. And now I see that you've fallen into luck again. To-night's paper has it that you've disposed of some worthless stock for a fortune just because

this millionaire eccentric has a notion he ought to own a railroad. I hope, for your sake, that it's true," he concluded anxiously.

"Yes, it's true," replied Anne, quietly holding out her hand. "And now I must go on, Dick, or I'll miss my train. I can't marry you, Dick—and we won't talk about it. No, please don't come with me. I like it, you know—being alone. I think it's good for one, occasionally. Good-night, and good-luck!"

THE END.

The telegraph operator at the little Scarborough station on the New York Central puzzled long over a message he had been commissioned to despatch shortly before the seven-thirty train left for New York.

It was directed to one Thomas Goodwin, of the *Comet*, and it said:

Meet me Croton local at 8.30, Grand Central Station. It is time to lay your ghost. I've laid mine. A. G.

The Maid and the Masquerader.

By CHARLES B. FREMONT.

A cloak of celebrity assumed in haste and repented of at leisure.

IT was the hotel clerk's fault. If, in the first place, his manner had not been so exceedingly haughty and overbearing, I am sure the idea never would have entered my mind.

It was merely a desire to impress the conceited young coxcomb and to have the satisfaction of forcing him to drop his supercilious airs which prompted me to take advantage of the coincidence.

"Sign the register," he commanded loftily after I had signified my desire to hire a room in the little summer resort hotel.

I obediently took the pen from the inkstand and wrote my name across the page.

The clerk's look was almost disdainful as he turned the register around to glance at what I had written; but as his gaze fell upon my signature, his manner instantly changed and he regarded me deferentially and with much surprise.

"Sanford W. Strange!" he gasped. "Pardon me sir—but you are not *the* Sanford W. Strange—the famous magazine writer are you?"

Now, as a matter of fact, I have never in my life written a magazine story and there is no blood relationship between myself and my literary namesake. That our names happen to be the same is simply a coincidence, nothing more, and I am constantly kept busy explaining that fact to people to whom I am introduced.

But now, the clerk's respectful tone

and his suddenly subdued manner tempted me—and I fell!

"You are a good guesser," I replied condescendingly.

As a matter of fact, he certainly was.

"Then I can't tell you, sir, how proud I am to have the honor of meeting you," he declared effusively. "I read every one of your stories, Mr. Strange. They're great!"

"Thanks," I rejoined, with becoming modesty. "I'm glad you like them, I'm sure."

"Like them!" he exclaimed enthusiastically, "I think they're the finest stories ever written. I could stay up all night reading them! I never thought I should have the good fortune of meeting the author face to face. I had an idea that you were a much older man. Your writings seem to indicate that you have seen so much of the world, you know!"

"One can see a great deal of the world in a few years, if one keeps one's eyes open," I replied. "You'll do me a favor, now, if you'll have somebody show me up to my room. I want to freshen up a bit before dinner."

"Certainly. If you'll permit me, I'll conduct you there myself," and he hurried from behind the desk to seize my dress-suit case.

After we had reached my quarters and he had bowed himself out, I locked the door, sat down on the bed, and laughed

until my sides ached to think that I, a humble dry-goods salesman, had managed to command such deference from a supercilious hotel clerk.

This, as I have said, was the only end I sought to attain by posing as my literary namesake. I did not dream of the honors that were to be showered upon me, nor of the sea of trouble into which I was to be plunged as a result of my little deception.

It was not until I went down to dinner that I obtained the first inkling of what was in store for me.

The dining-room was well filled, and my entry seemed to attract so much attention that I felt the blood rising to my cheeks.

Although I am very modest by nature, I could not fail to observe that every eye was turned upon me, and that everybody appeared to be whispering to his or her neighbor concerning me.

Evidently that hotel clerk had lost no time in spreading the news of the arrival of the supposed literary celebrity.

There were many pretty girls in the room, and the admiring glances with which they favored me as I took my seat caused me to regret exceedingly that I was not really the person they imagined me to be.

Doubtless as a token of his esteem and devotion that hotel clerk (whose name, by the way, was Horace Simkins) had taken care to allot me a seat at table next to the most beautiful girl in the hotel.

She was the handsomest woman I had ever seen.

I made up my mind that I would secure an introduction with as little delay as possible and, indeed, I did not have long to wait.

I had no sooner given my order to the waiter than a pompous little old man who sat opposite coughed nervously and said: "Pardon me, sir. I believe I have the honor of addressing Mr. Sanford W. Strange."

I bowed.

"I am proud to meet you, sir—very proud," he continued. "My name is Smithers—Maximilian Smithers. You will forgive me for waiving formality and introducing myself to you. As a matter of fact, I feel that I have known

you for some time, for I have read so many of your truly admirable stories. Allow me to present you to my wife, sir. She, too, is an ardent admirer of your writings."

Mastering my embarrassment, I bowed to the portly lady seated at his side.

"And now that we know each other," went on the smiling Mr. Smithers, "let me go a step further and do the honors for the rest of the guests at this table. They are all dying to meet you, Mr. Strange."

He thereupon made me acquainted with the half-dozen persons at our table, winding up by introducing me to the beautiful girl at my left hand.

"And last, but by no means least, let me present you to Miss Queenie Barrison," was the way he put it.

I turned eagerly toward the fair divinity.

"Miss Barrison," I said, putting my whole soul into my words, "I can't tell you how charmed I am to meet you."

"I deem this a great honor," she answered in a voice so sweet that it thrilled me through and through. "I read your latest story in *Manfield's Magazine*, and it interested me more than I can tell you."

"Awfully glad you liked it," I murmured awkwardly. "I fear, however, that you are bestowing too much praise upon a feeble effort."

"It is refreshing to find that you are so modest," she declared with a smile. "Most literary people are so conceited that they are intolerable. Seriously, though, I have enjoyed your stories more than any I have ever read."

"Then I am more than repaid for having written them," I replied, the look of frank admiration in her glorious eyes causing my heart to beat wildly.

After that, much to my regret, the conversation became general; old Smithers and the others at our table apparently being determined that Miss Barrison should not be allowed to monopolize me!

I was kept busy answering questions as to how long it took me to write one of my stories; whether I used a typewriter or pen and ink; whether I thought out the entire story before I started to put it on paper; whether my plots were founded on fact, etc., etc.

To all of these questions I replied glibly; doubtless not in the way the real Sanford W. Strange would have answered them, but in a manner which seemed to give perfect satisfaction and which, at any rate, did not excite suspicion.

I could not help noticing that many envious glances were cast toward our table by the guests at the others and, when the meal was finished, many of the latter approached old Smithers and eagerly sought an introduction to the supposed literary lion.

With an air of great importance, and, evidently very much pleased with the rôle he played, the pompous Smithers presented me to everybody, and the flattering attentions which I received made my head swim.

To be introduced to pretty girls galore and to be greeted in every case with cordial and admiring smiles is a pleasant experience; but when several of them made me promise to "please write something original" in their autograph albums, my spirits began to experience a slight chill.

For I had never in my life written in an autograph album, and the only compositions I had penned since my school-days were distinctly commercial communications, beginning with such prosaic phrases as "Your favor of the 16th instant received and in reply would state—" or "We are to-day shipping your esteemed order and trust that the goods will be found O. K."

It was then that I began to realize the precariousness of the situation which I had created by my foolish masquerading; but it was now too late to retreat.

There was nothing for me to do but to go on with the game, relying upon my wits to see me through it.

With great relief, I suddenly recollect that I had a volume of miscellaneous poems up-stairs in my trunk. Some of the verses were by anonymous writers, and I determined to copy the shortest of these and to write them in the autograph albums.

Of course this expedient was anything but honorable; but I was desperate and felt ready to do anything rather than stand exposed as a faker before Horace Simkins, the hotel clerk, and the beautiful Miss Queenie Barrison.

To avoid further embarrassments, I took advantage of the first opportunity to escape from my enthusiastic admirers and went for a solitary stroll on the beach.

And there, sitting on the sand, leaning against an upturned rowboat, I encountered Miss Barrison, all alone and absorbed in the pages of a magazine!

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure," I exclaimed heartily. "May I sit down beside you? Thank you. I'm afraid I have interrupted your reading."

"That's all right," she assured me smilingly. "This is last month's *Manfield's*. I was reading your story."

"I thought you told me that you had already read it," I said, as reproachfully as if I had indeed been the author of it.

She blushed delightfully.

"I have read it; but it interests me so much that I find pleasure in reading it over again. Isn't the sea beautiful today? Doesn't this scene remind you somewhat of Naples?"

"I have never been in Naples," I replied unguardedly.

"What!" she cried in amazement. "Never been there. Then, how did you manage to describe the scene so faithfully in this story?"

This was a staggerer. Unfortunately, I had neglected to read the latest tale from the pen of Sanford W. Strange. I inwardly resolved to get a copy of last month's *Manfield's* at the earliest opportunity.

"That's easily explained," I said finally. "I described that scene by hearsay. A friend told me about it."

"How very wonderful!" she exclaimed admiringly. "Your details are so very accurate that I could have sworn you had been there. I don't see how you can write such a realistic description, second-hand."

"Oh, it's very easy when you know how," I replied modestly.

"It must be glorious to be able to write so well," she went on. "It's a great gift. By the way, Mr. Strange, I would like to ask you a question. I am just dying to hear the answer."

"What is it?" I inquired nervously.

"In one of your stories you have a hero named John Curtin—a splendid fellow. Does any such man live? Did you copy

him from life or is he merely a creature of your imagination?"

"He's purely a creature of my imagination," I replied promptly.

"Dear me," sighed the girl, "I'm so disappointed. I hoped to hear you say that he was a real man. He is such a charming character. I fell in love with him immediately. I think if such a man really existed I would marry him, even if I had to do the proposing myself."

"Believe me, there is no such man," I cried earnestly. "I invented him. He's wholly imaginary."

"I'm sorry to hear it," she said, with another deep sigh. "I hoped to meet him in the flesh—some day! As it is, he will always be my ideal."

"Tell me, Miss Barrison, what do you most admire in him?" I inquired eagerly.

"His sterling honesty!" she cried enthusiastically. "His noble adherence to the truth at such an awful cost; his detestation of lies and deceit. Those are the qualities I most admire in a man."

I winced. If she had lashed me with a whip she could not have cut me more deeply.

How bitterly I regretted, then, that I had yielded to the temptation of masquerading in borrowed plumes! I trembled to think of the scorn that would flash from the eyes of this glorious girl if ever she learned the truth concerning me.

Almost fiercely, I changed the subject and turned the conversation to less painful and safer channels.

We chatted together until dusk and the girl said it was high time she returned to the hotel. By this time, I was head over heels in love with her.

As we entered the lobby of our little hostelry. Horace Simkins, the hotel clerk, whose face I noticed was quite pale, cried out excitedly: "I'm glad you've come in, Mr. Strange. Now we shall be able to learn the truth. There's been some sensational doings here, sir, since you left!"

"What's the matter?" I inquired, inwardly quaking.

"It happened shortly after you went out," the clerk continued, "a tall, handsome man with a scar on his forehead came here to engage a room. He was just about to sign the register when the

chief of police happened to stroll in and at once recognized the stranger as Billy Burke, the forger, who is wanted by the New York police! Our chief says the fellow fits the description minutely and that the scar on his forehead, alone, is enough to identify him.

"There's a big reward offered for the capture of Burke, and the chief feels confident he will get it. I'm not so sure, however! Our chief has made mistakes before now, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it turns out that he's locked up the wrong man. I'm glad you've come to straighten things out, Mr. Strange."

"I straighten things out?" I gasped. "Why, what the dickens can I do? I don't know Billy Burke, the forger."

"Well, you see, sir, the stranger indignantly denies that he's Billy Burke! He swears that his name is Alfred Livingstone and that he's the editor of *Manfield's Magazine*. He threatens to make it hot for the chief of police by the time he gets through!

"I whispered to the chief that we had a gentleman staying with us who knew the real Mr. Livingstone and could tell at a glance whether the fellow is really the editor of *Manfield's Magazine* or an impostor!

"The chief asked me to request you to go to the lockup as soon as possible and see if you can identify this man."

Here, truly, was a pleasant state of affairs! I had never seen Alfred Livingstone, the editor of *Manfield's*, and would not know him from Adam; but I could not afford to make such an admission. As a frequent contributor to *Manfield's* I was of course expected to know the editor well!

I was indeed in a pretty fix. If I took a chance and, after looking at the prisoner declared that he was not the magazine editor, I might be doing a great injustice to a worthy and thoroughly respectable gentleman!

If, on the other hand, I took a chance the other way and, pretending to recognize the prisoner, declared positively that he was Mr. Alfred Livingstone, and if on the strength of my identification the police turned their prisoner loose and discovered afterward that they had arrested the right man after all, doubtless the authorities would punish me severely!

In all probability I should be arrested as an accessory of Billy Burke, the forger, and sent to prison for a long term.

I tried to dodge the issue by declaring that I was too tired to go to the jail; but that ruse did not work at all.

"Why, the lockup is only a short distance from here," protested the clerk. "You can walk it easily in five minutes."

"I saw the prisoner when he was arrested and he certainly did look distinguished," exclaimed old Smithers, who was near by. "I shouldn't be surprised if he really is the magazine editor."

"In which case, I am sure Mr. Strange will not be mean enough to refuse to come to the rescue of his friend!" cried Miss Barrison.

Under these circumstances there was nothing for me to do but to consent. Old Smithers and some of the guests volunteered to go along with me, and Horace Simkins announced that he deemed it his duty to escort me to the chief.

Like a prisoner walking to his execution, I marched with them to the lockup.

On the way I made up my mind as to the course of action I would pursue!

I would declare that the prisoner was not the editor of *Manfield's Magazine*!

It seemed to me that that was the best way out of the dilemma.

Of course, if the man under arrest really was Livingstone, the editor, he might make it pretty hot for me afterward, when his real friends came to his rescue and identified him.

But he could not make it nearly as hot for me as would the authorities if I vouched for the prisoner and the latter afterwards turned out to be Billy Burke.

Between the wrath of Livingstone and the wrath of the authorities, the choice was easy.

We reached the jail in due course and I was introduced to the chief of police by Horace Simkins. Then I was led to the cells.

I took a good look at the tall, handsome man glancing at us from behind the bars, and announced with positiveness: "That fellow is not Mr. Livingstone, the editor of *Manfield's*!"

"You are sure of what you say, sir!" cried the chief eagerly.

"Absolutely sure," I replied. "I have never seen this fellow before."

"Why, confound you!" cried the man in the cell indignantly, "how dare you make such a statement? I don't know you."

"Of course you don't, my hearty!" exclaimed the chief exultantly. "Of course you don't know this gentleman! Why should you? You *would* know him, though, if you were the man you claim to be! This gentleman is a frequent contributor to the pages of *Manfield's Magazine*."

"That's a lie!" cried the prisoner angrily. "That fellow has never written a line for us in his life! Confound him, he shall suffer for this impertinence, and so shall you all, by the time I get through."

The chief laughed mockingly. "I guess your bluster won't go any more, Mr. Billy Burke," he sneered. "Thanks to this gentleman, I am now sure I've got you right."

But I was by no means so sure myself. The man's indignation appeared so unmistakably genuine that I now had little doubt but that he really was the magazine editor.

The scornful, contemptuous glare which he concentrated upon me made me feel so heartily ashamed of myself that I left the place feeling that I was the meanest man on earth.

Even the congratulations of my companions upon the fact that I had so successfully exposed the supposed impostor did not serve to help me regain my lost self-respect. In fact, they had quite the opposite effect.

As we walked back to the hotel, I inwardly cursed the unhappy impulse which had prompted me to masquerade as Sanford Strange, magazine writer.

When we reached the hotel I found more trouble awaiting me.

As I stepped into the lobby an excited-looking man, with a distinctly foreign cast of countenance adorned by a pair of long black *mustachios*, which gave him a truly ferocious appearance, pushed his way toward me.

"Pardon me; ees thees Señor Sanford W. Strange?" he demanded fiercely.

"That's my name," I replied, with some apprehension.

"You write for zee magazines, eh?" he demanded, still more fiercely.

I nodded.

"Then, *señor*, I take pleasure in informing you, in zee presence of all thees good people, zat you are a liar and a scoundrel!" he thundered.

"What do you mean?" I stammered, feeling sure that my deception was about to be exposed, after all.

"I mean zat I am going to make you eat your words!" he shouted. "In thees month's *Manfield's Magazine* ees a story bearing your signature. In zat story you have written these outrageous words: 'Show me a Spaniard, and I vill show you a coward.'"

"Good Heavens!" I gasped. "Does the story say that?"

"Si, *señor*. You cannot deny it. Eet ees in black and white. I am a Spaniard, *señor*, and I haf come to demand satisfaction in zee name of my slandered countrymen."

"Of course I did not mean what I wrote," I explained hastily.

"Pardon, *señor*, but zat excuse weel not suffice," he retorted. "Whether you meant eet or not makes no difference. Zat insult to my race ees published all over zee world and eet can only be wiped out with blood."

"My name is Du Barrios, *señor*, and I am stopping at one of zee cottages yonder. As soon as I heard zat you were at thees hotel, I hurried over to demand satisfaction, and I haf ben waiting patiently for your return. As you are zee challenged party, *señor*, I leef to you zee choice of weapons."

"You don't mean to say you want me to fight a duel with you?" I gasped. "Why, my dear fellow, this is the twentieth century, and we are in the United States. The days of dueling have gone by."

"Señor Strange ees forgetting zat a few months ago he wrote an article een *Manfield's Magazine* entitled, 'A Defense of Dueling,' was the startling retort. "I read zat article wiz great interest, *señor*. In eet you express regrets that the custom of dueling ees now obsolete in most countries. You stated zat, in your opinion, dueling ees zee only fair and square way of settling a difference and avenging a slight. I indorsed zat article fully, *señor*. Eet exactly coincided with my own views. As zee author

of eet, you, of course, cannot now refuse to meet me."

I looked around at the little group of onlookers appealingly, expeoting that somebody would interfere and protest against the carrying out of this blood-thirsty proposition. But nobody uttered a word. The silence was so profound that I fancied I could hear my own heart beating.

I glanced at Miss Queenie Barrison, who was in the group. Her beautiful face was very pale, but she seemed to be looking at me expectantly, and I saw her lips curl scornfully as I hesitated.

That settled it. I could not bear the thought of being branded as a coward in her presence.

"Very well," I said doggedly. "I'll fight. I'll give you the satisfaction you seek."

"Very good, *señor*," replied the Spaniard, with a profound bow. "Eef you weel be good enough to name your second, my friend weel be pleased to call upon heem shortly and arrange as to zee time, zee place, and zee weapons to be used."

"I'll be glad to act as your second, Mr. Strange," cried old Smithers eagerly. "I've read a whole lot about dueling, so I feel entirely competent to handle the situation."

"All right," I responded, without any enthusiasm. "You can have the job, if you want it."

"Send your friend over to see me, sir," said Smithers to the Spaniard. "He and I will arrange all the details of this little affair."

The Spaniard bowed and withdrew. Smithers turned to me with a cheerful smile.

"Now, Mr. Strange," he said, "let's get down to business. For the honor of America you've got to lick this Spaniard. Luckily, we have the choice of weapons. Which will you take, swords or revolvers?"

"Revolvers," I answered moodily. "I have never handled a sword in my life."

To tell the truth, I was not very expert with a revolver, either. I comforted myself, however, with the reflection that perhaps, after all, my opponent was also a poor marksman, and that we would be almost evenly matched.

But when, a little later on, I happened to overhear one guest telling another that the Spaniard was one of the best revolver experts in the world and had captured all the prizes at the last international pistol tournament, my courage forsook me, and, panic-stricken, I decided to seek safety in flight.

I was willing to take a fair chance of being killed, but I was not going to court certain death. I determined to leave the hotel immediately, without waiting to pack up my baggage, and to take the first train back to New York.

Stealthily I sneaked out of a side-door and was hurrying down the road, when, as luck would have it, I ran into Miss Queenie Barrison, sitting all alone on a rustic bench, gazing dreamily at the moon.

As my gaze fell upon the beautiful girl, I groaned with agony at the thought that within a few hours she would hear of my flight and that later on, undoubtedly, she would learn of my deception and would despise me as a coward and a liar.

With a sudden impulse, I resolved to confess the whole truth to her before I

went. It would be the only manly act I had done since my arrival, and, after all, it would be better for her to hear the truth from my own lips.

"Miss Barrison," I cried hoarsely, "I have something to tell you."

She had not heard my approach, and at my words she gave utterance to a little scream.

"Oh, it is you, Mr. Strange!" she cried. "How you startled me!"

"I am going back to New York," I said grimly, "and before I go I have a terrible confession to make to you. I have been deceiving you, Miss Barrison. I am not what you think I am. My name is Sanford W. Strange, but I am not *the* Sanford W. Strange, the magazine writer."

"Of course you're not," she answered calmly. "I've known that all along."

"Known it all along!" I gasped, completely staggered by this unexpected reply. "Good Heavens, Miss Barrison, how did you guess it?"

"Easily," she answered, with a cold smile. "You see, I'm the real Sanford W. Strange; that happens to be my *nom-de-plume*."

A TASTE OF THE REAL THING.

By GARRETT SWIFT.

From wealth to poverty at the behest of love, and the amazing things one man found out in making the transition.

SOME PLAIN TALK.

"I SUPPOSE," said Maitland, in his hard, cold, matter-of-fact way, "that you are going to that fool dinner to-night."

"The live Teddy Bear dinner at Derry's?" I answered. "Oh, of course. Great scheme that of Forbes, to get live Teddy Bears. Comical little things. Saw one of them yesterday. Cute—no name for it."

"Denland," said Maitland earnestly, "you are made for better things than that. I should think the inane stupidities and absurdities of your set would disgust you."

I looked at him in astonishment.

Maitland was older than I, a good deal. He was a physician, well known for his skill, his charities, and something his friends called human sympathy, or humanity, or something like that. These had prevented him from piling up a comfortable fortune, which he might easily have done had he limited his practise to the rich, who could afford to pay big fees, instead of spending more than half his time in free hospitals, and doctoring poor people who could pay no fees at all.

But Maitland had his own way of looking at life, and I recognized his worth, his wisdom, and his kind-heartedness.

Moreover, I was in love with his daughter Constance, and had roused my-

self to a degree of courage wherein I expected to propose to her at that very dinner, for I knew she would be there. And I had rejoiced on meeting Maitland at the club in the afternoon, as that would give me a chance to speak to him first. And now this!

"But," I said, "I have nothing else to do."

He made a gesture of dissent, or disgust, I hardly knew which.

"Nothing else to do!" he repeated in his calm way, which, however, was more stinging than the fury of anybody else. "Nothing else to do! I am amazed! What is the amount of your income, Denland?"

"Sixty thousand a year."

"Income from money left by your father, of course."

"Yes, income left me by my father."

"You never earned a dollar in your life?"

"I never needed to. I've got enough."

"Yes—yes, you've enough. There is no gainsaying that. But the waste of talent! The waste of time! The waste of money! You could do wonders if you tried, Denland."

"But why should I want to do wonders?" I asked, still surprised at the turn the conversation had taken. "I don't want to do wonders. I am no scientist. I couldn't, like you, discover a cure for something hitherto deemed incurable. I couldn't, like Saxton, discover new planets.

"I know the sun from the moon, and can pick out the Great Bear. That's about as deep as my knowledge of astronomy goes. I couldn't invent anything—unless it was a new *menu*, or a new dance. What wonders do you want me to perform? Go as a soldier and win battles?"

"There is no war. I am not doubting your courage if that were to be tried. But this inane existence! I should think your brain would grow sick of it. The conversation of your set is stupid. Now, take this dinner to-night. Forbes is rich—richer, I guess, than you are. His mind is capable only of such things. They've had monkey dinners and canary-bird dinners, and pie-dinners, and now comes a Teddy Bear dinner with dancing bears on the table. Hand-organs for

orchestra, I suppose. And not a word of intellectual conversation all night long. It is disgusting to me. I should think it would be to you."

"It is," I said as earnestly as he had spoken. "But, look here. I have already told you I am neither scientist nor inventor. I am not an enthusiast on airships. I own a good yacht, but I can't live on board all the time. The men I know are either too busy to bother with me or else they are idlers like myself. These dinners and dances serve to kill time.

"I do think of other ways of living, but you must remember I am not married. I have no women folk to take an interest in me, and all the companionship I have is in the frivolous class, as you call it. But I could settle down and be a home man if I had the right kind of wife. And that leads up to something I wanted to say. I love Constance. I want to ask her to marry me. I want your permission to speak to her to-night."

It was his turn to stare.

"You love Constance! Constance! Why, that's more absurd than Forbes's dinner."

"Nevertheless, Constance told me she was going to attend, and I want to speak to her to-night."

"And have you never yet spoken to her on this subject?"

"Never."

"M."

He was, for the first time since I had made his acquaintance, distinctly nervous. He lit a fresh cigar and sat for several minutes looking out of the window.

"This is a surprise to me, Denland, and I will admit that it is not an unmitigated pleasure. As a man—morally and physically—I have no objection to you. But—"

"I have money enough, haven't I?"

"It is not a question of money. I doubt very much if you and Constance are suited to each other. Why she attends such dinners I don't know. But she has her own way in everything. 'M. This is a surprise indeed."

"Your manner is not particularly flattering. Am I to assume that you object?"

"I don't know whether I do or not.

As I told you before, as far as your morality and physical being go, I see nothing wrong—certainly not physically, and I've never heard anything very bad about you in any way. But you are—
are—"

"Oh, say it. Say it. I give you fair warning that I shall ask Constance anyway, so I can stand whatever you care to say. What am I?"

"Such a confounded ass."

"You make yourself clear at any rate. Why am I that, any more than the other fellows girls marry who do nothing but live on their money?"

"You are not: They are most of them the same. But—go ahead. Constance is a young woman of ideas. I suppose you know that I have not supported her for the last two years."

"I didn't know it. Why not?"

"Simply because she won't let me. Constance is a young woman who believes in action and independence. She is an illustrator for books and magazines. She makes almost as much as I do. Of course I could not very well forbid her acceptance of you if I wished to, and I am not sure I wish to. I won't say any more. Go to this dinner and ask her yourself. I'll wager, though, that she will put several pointed questions. I have the distinct honor of being pretty well acquainted with my daughter."

"In case she does accept—I trust I shall not forfeit your friendship?"

"By no means. I tell you Constance is absolutely independent. If she marries you I shall welcome you as my son-in-law. If she refuses we shall still be friends."

"If she does accept I'll study medicine if you want me to."

"I don't. It's a dog's life. You are never your own master. And it is doubly disagreeable for a wife. She plans something for your mutual enjoyment, and lo! you are out all night taking care of the sick. It is a noble profession—for somebody else. Not my daughter's husband, unless she might happen to fall in love with a man already in the harness."

"Well, what shall I do to remove your only objection to me—my idleness?"

He laughed.

"It is rather premature to ask that now. Get her first. I imagine you will

do what she says rather than what I say.. And now I must go. I've got three severe cases on the East Side, and just stopped in for a brief rest. I have had no sleep since night before last."

He showed no weariness in his iron frame as he rose. To my surprise he offered me his hand.

"Don't take what I have said too much to heart. We physicians sometimes have a blunt way of expressing ourselves."

"You have not offended me. You have set me thinking." I replied. "And I'll speak to Constance to-night."

II.

MAKING A BARGAIN FOR LOVE.

I WAS in a peculiar mood when I reached Derry's. Somehow, the chatter and laughter I heard as I entered the room where the guests of Forbes had gathered, jarred on me.

Yet I had been looked upon as a sort of wit to keep that chatter and laughter going.

"Oh, here's Tommy! Hello, Tommy!" exclaimed a young married woman, rushing to greet me. "What do you think? Billy Forbes is going to give prizes for the best impromptu essays on bears. And the prizes are to be the Teddy Bears that perform for us. Isn't it great?"

"What'll anybody do with a bear?" I asked.

"Hock it when he goes broke," said Jimmy Dodds, whose income was derived from a patent smoke-jacket his grandfather had invented. "I hope I'll win one. Let's see. I've got to do some thinking. What do bears eat, anyway, Denland?"

"People."

"Goodness!" cried a young unmarried woman who had joined us. "I don't want to win a bear. Think of having a pet in the house always wanting to eat you up."

"Like Sarah Bennings and her husband, eh?" said Jimmy. "They say he almost eats her up, and she calls him a bear."

"Aw, cut it out!" broke in Lemmy Helpin, whose life was a series of ad-

ventures as told by himself and never witnessed by any one else. "Bears are not the ferocious monsters you think they are. I've seen them in the primeval forests so tame they would stand still while you cut off a steak, and then go off licking the sore spot."

A young lady had joined the group. I looked to see who this newcomer was. It was Constance.

"This is a brilliant conversation," remarked Miss Maitland. "Mr. Denland, if you are to take me in to dinner, please think of something else to talk about."

She was clearly and plainly disgusted. I felt a little cheap. I remembered what Maitland had said that afternoon. I was at her side in an instant.

"I didn't start that electrical display of enlightenment," I said. "It was sprung on me as I came in. I've got a much finer subject to talk about tonight."

"You? A real subject to talk about? You don't feel ill, do you?"

"I ought not to. I was in your father's company a portion of the afternoon."

Perhaps this aroused some suspicion in her mind. She colored a little, and began to talk about the weather.

"And I heard that you were going to sell your yacht," she said. "Are you really going to give up yachting?"

"No. I am going in heavier. I'm going to get a larger boat. I want one that can stand a bit of rough weather next summer. I'm going to start on a voyage of discovery."

"For what? The North Pole?"

"Or the South. I haven't decided which. A friend of mine wants it for a clothes-pole."

"That's right. Be as ridiculous as you can. Is that your new subject to talk about?"

"No. That was a flash of wisdom I didn't expect. The subject I brought with me to talk about is too sacred to bring up now. We'll dine first, and then in a secluded corner, while the others are dancing, I'll tell you all about it."

The signal was given. It was time to go in to dinner. With Constance on my arm, I joined the parade.

The dining-room was fitted up as a forest. Somehow, the whole thing

seemed garish to me. Yet I had enjoyed just such things.

The dinner, as a dinner, was a success. Constance seemed rather ill at ease. Instead of eating she began drawing on the back of her menu.

I glanced at it. It was a picture of one of the little trick bears that were now on the table. And—it had my face.

This was certainly inspiring to a fellow who was going to propose. But I covered my feelings with a laugh.

When it came time to deliver the essays on bears I couldn't think of a witty thing to say to save my life. Constance passed the contest.

"Give them an essay on the bears of Wall Street," she whispered.

I did. Although I knew very little about the bears of Wall Street, I knew the rest of the crowd knew no more and I was safe.

The turn I had given the contest was a decided hit. To my chagrin I won a Teddy Bear.

Constance laughed.

"What'll I do with it?" I asked.

"Give it to the Zoo."

It was perhaps midnight before I succeeded in getting Constance cornered.

"Now," I said, when I could speak in a moderate tone without any one else hearing me, "we are in a position to discuss the important subject I spoke about."

"Well," she said, looking at the floor, "what is it?"

"You."

"What about me? Don't you admire my new gown?"

"Your new gown is stunning. It isn't your gown—not this one—that I wish to speak about. It is, that I desire the privilege of buying you other new gowns all your life. In short, I wanted to ask you to marry me. I don't want to get down on my knees and make a scene. But I love you, Constance. Will you be my wife?"

"Absurd!"

"Why is it absurd? Don't say that. I love you, and can afford to marry."

"I know you can. But I can't."

"You can't? Can't afford to marry? What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that I cannot afford to marry a man who has nothing but money. I

I don't know that I can explain very well here just what I mean. I like you, Mr. Denland. As a matter of fact, I like you better than the others—here. You know I have little sympathy in these silly affairs. And I love my work. With the exception of my father and mother, that is all I have ever loved—yet, I like you. But I don't admire you. And I certainly do not love you!"

I was sitting close to her. I looked at her face. It had turned pale.

"I think I know what you mean," I said. "Your father warned me. You don't like an idler."

She was silent a moment.

"I will try to explain," she said finally. "You are believed to be a rich man, Mr. Denland. How rich, it is not my business to inquire. But you have honored me with a proposal of marriage, and I must make myself clear. Do you manage your own fortune?"

"Why—no. It is in the hands of my bankers, who were my father's bankers. I receive a check from them every three months."

"And if anything happened—if your fortune was involved in a financial crisis—you could do nothing to save it. Do you know what your fortune really is? What it consists of?"

"You mean the investments? No, I do not."

"Now you ought to see what I mean without making me go through an unpleasant explanation."

"But I don't. What difference does it make so long as I get the income?"

"All the difference in the world. At present I am independent of financial crashes. I make my own living, and a good one. When a woman marries she assumes new duties and responsibilities. I could do no more illustrating.

"My ambition reaches out higher than illustrating. If I marry I must put that ambition behind me. I must depend—not on you for a living, but on those who have your fortune in charge. If they prove dishonest or incapable and you should lose the fortune you inherited, and we had a family, we would be impoverished. I would have the care of a home with no money to support it. You could not earn a living. Now you understand."

"I understand what you mean. But I could make a living. Why, lots of fellows make a good living who don't know any more than I do."

"They may not know any more as far as education goes. But they know how to work. They know something that means progress in the world. They know how to put their hands to a pen, a brush, or a machine. They know how to conduct a business, build up a business, or work for some one else who is willing to pay for this knowledge. You have nothing to offer such a man except the fact that you once had money. I can't take any such risk."

This was a stunner. I knew half the girls in our set would hurl themselves at my head—or at my income, which is the same thing. But I wanted only this hard-headed young woman who was giving me a more severe talk even than her father.

"I am sure I could earn a living if I was forced to. And I don't expect any such condition. And I love you honestly, sincerely, and deeply."

"I believe you. I know you are truthful. I appreciate your love as that of a good man. But I must think of the future."

"Well," I said stubbornly, "let's think of the future. You don't love any one else. You said so."

"My father and mother and my art."

"I won't bother you with urging. Let me ask this: If I prove to you that I can do something in the world beside spend money, will you love me—marry me, then?"

She placed her hand in mine.

"Are you willing to forego all this nonsense and prove it?"

"I am willing to do anything except die to get you. If I died I wouldn't get you. I love you too well to want to die for you. Let me live for you and I will prove it."

She pressed her lips together.

"It must be a real proof. No make-believe with money to help you. How would you manage it?"

"I'll stop drawing my income and go to work."

There was another silence.

"I'll tell you what I will do," she said, again breaking the pause. "I have

not thought of marriage till to-night, and I would not hurry anyway. I have work I must finish before I think of that. Give me a year to love you as I ought, and yourself a year to fight the world so that I will know if I do marry you my future is safe in the hands of a man who can battle for me if necessary.

"Tie up your fortune so that you cannot use it for a year. Not only that. You must rid yourself of the capacity to borrow. Let it be known, or believed by everybody, that you have lost your money. It must not be known that you are merely experimenting for a year with a whole year's income waiting for you. It must be believed by everybody that you are—broke. Flat, dead broke.

"There isn't a noodle in this crowd who would lend you a dollar if you were poor. Forbes himself wouldn't. Go tackle the world like a man, without a cent. I don't care for wealth so much. But I must marry a man who is capable by his own exertions of making as good a home as I can, and of managing his own affairs."

I breathed hard.

"I'll do it, Constance," I said. "I'll do it. I'll fix things to-morrow, and begin at once. You will wait a year?"

"I'll wait a year—and marry you at the end of it if you make good."

"And I may call on you?"

"Of course."

"Hey, Tommy," called Forbes. "Going to spoon all night? We want you two for this set."

"Hang the set," I growled.

"We are his guests—for the last time for a year at least," said Constance. "I will not make the conditions too hard. As a poor man you will get no more invitations from this crowd. And I will not accept any. Is that not fair?"

"Constance," I said in a low tone, "I believe you half love me now."

"Perhaps—I do—half," she whispered, and we joined the others.

III.

FLAT BROKE, AND WORSE.

THE first thing I had to do was to get rid of the ridiculous prize I had won at the Teddy Bear dinner. Previous to

my talks with Maitland and Constance I would have laughed at the thing as a lark. Now I felt flat as a man could feel going around trying to dispose of a young bear I did not want. I finally succeeded in giving the thing away.

The estate left by my father was in the hands of the private banking firm of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. What the X. in his name stood for I don't know. I didn't even know him.

I knew the name of the firm was Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. I did not know who the company was.

I had never taken time to look into matters even to the extent of ascertaining the standing of the firm in financial circles. I received my income regularly, and spent it with the same regularity, and had been satisfied. I had never met the heads of the firm.

I went to the office of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. and asked for Mr. Rellbun. He was not in the city. The junior partner was there, and I found him to be Caleb W. Gash.

Mr. Gash was a cold, smooth proposition. His immobile face seemed never to light up with any emotion. When I was taken into his private office he greeted me with a cold handshake and offered me a chair.

He was signing some papers. He coolly went on doing this until he had finished. Then he swung round in his chair and faced me.

"Now, Mr. Denland, what can I do for you?" he asked. "Pardon me for keeping you waiting. The absence of Mr. Rellbun on business of importance throws a great deal of extra work on me. But now I am at liberty to talk."

"My errand here," I said, "will probably strike you as unique—even queer—perhaps absurd. The fact is, I want to become a poor man for a year."

"You want—let me get this clear. You want to make some disposition of your income that will deprive you of it for a year. Is that the idea? There is no reason, however, why you should impoverish yourself for a whole year. You can draw in advance, or you can use some of your principal. We are merely your bankers. Not your guardians. The estate, as you know, is at your own disposal."

"You haven't hit it just right. This is—well, call it a wager if you like. I am going to get along without my income for a whole year. I am going to work. I am going to put it beyond my power to touch a penny of my income for a year, and I want you to help me."

"M. The idea does seem rather quixotic. I suppose you know your own business best. I have heard of poor men wanting to be rich. I never before ran across a rich man who wanted to be poor, even for a year."

"I have a strong reason for this. I can't very well go into details."

"I have no wish to urge you to do so. The idea is that you wish to tie yourself up for a year."

"That's about it."

"It's an easy thing to do. We will stop sending you remittances."

"But suppose after a few months I came in here and asked for money?"

"You'd get it—all you wanted."

"That won't do, you see. I want things fixed so that I can't do that."

"Well, as I said, you probably know your own business best. Let me think."

"And it must be known—published—that I am a poor man. I must be a ruined man, compelled to begin life all over again."

"Have you contracted large debts?"

"I don't owe a man a dollar."

"Well, it's a queer idea. But it can be done. You want the thing made iron-clad. You want it put absolutely out of your power to get any of your income, and out of my power to give you any for a year."

"Exactly."

"Very well. I will have an agreement drawn up establishing the house of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. trustees for the period of one year, to hold and manage your estate, reserving the income for one year. The lump sum of accrued income to be paid over to you at the expiration of one year."

"That will do very well."

"Then come in this afternoon. I will have the papers ready for you to sign. Now, have you considered this matter well? Will there be regrets?"

"I have considered well. My happiness depends on this thing."

He nodded, I went out, and returned

that afternoon. I signed the papers making it impossible for me to handle a dollar of my own income for a year.

I had something like five thousand dollars in cash still unexpended of my last remittance. This was to be the working capital with which I would start out on my new career.

I left the club, explaining that my fortune had been swept away and I must find cheaper quarters and go to work.

Constance was right. I heard expressions of sympathy, but the voices that spoke them were far different from the voices of the same men who had eagerly accepted my invitations and offered others in return. I felt the hollowness of the friendships I had made before an hour had passed.

I found cheaper lodgings, and began to look around for a business investment that would yield me an income and occupy my time.

I studied the advertised business opportunities in the papers. I found just what I wanted. The real-estate concern known as the Greater New York House and Lot Association advertised for a working partner with capital.

Anybody could sell real-estate. It was always there. It couldn't run away. There was no danger of such a concern failing, because there was always land to sell and men to buy it. I made a visit to the offices.

Others were there before me, and I had to await my turn before I had an interview with the president. He was a suave, genial fellow, well-dressed, a good talker, and I liked him at once. We entered right into a discussion of the subject.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Denland," he said. "I have heard of you and read of you. Your affiliations in high society will be a great help to you and us. It will enable you to retrieve your fallen fortunes. Really, I cannot even be hypocrite enough to sympathize with you. You will make another fortune and add to ours."

Well, the matter was settled. Papers were signed, and I became a partner in the association, and drew my check for my five thousand dollars.

I looked over the lists of houses and lots and unimproved acres for sale. I

studied the maps. Then after three days of preparations I went out to sell goods.

My affiliations with high society amounted to nothing. I tried to interest Billy Forbes, but he was too busy to talk about it. He was as rank an idler as I had ever been. Yet now he was suddenly over his head in business.

I went to several of the old set and sold nothing. My reception at every place was frigid.

Nettled, but not discouraged, I resolved to shake my old friends, if they ever had been real friends, and tackle strangers.

I had no better success. I could tell funny stories, sing funny songs, but I didn't know a good factory site from a tillable farm. I didn't know whether a house was worth more or less than we were asking for it.

One day the president showed me a letter from a man in Philadelphia. It was a good, straightforward business letter.

It went on to say that the writer had retired from business, and intended to make New York his home. He wished to make some good investments in real-estate. He was not in good health, and would be pleased if the association would go to a little trouble. He was willing to pay for this.

"There's your man, Denland," said the president. "Go to Philadelphia and talk Fifth Avenue lots to him. They will increase at least twenty-five per cent in two years. Tell of the vast improvements going on. The new railroad terminals, and all that."

I went to Philadelphia and, after some little trouble, located the man whose name had been attached to the letter. He had not retired from business. He had no business to retire from. He had no money.

He looked at me in amazement when I began to talk investment to him.

"Young man," he said, "I couldn't buy a picket fence. I never wrote to your firm. I can't pay my debts."

I went back to New York enraged. I could not understand why such a trick should be played on me.

When I reached New York I knew more. The Greater New York House and Lot Company had disappeared during

my absence, taking my five thousand dollars with them, and leaving me a load of debts which the papers I had signed condemned me to carry or pay.

I was broke then to the limit. I had a few dollars left from what I had used to go to Philadelphia.

I could pay no debts. The office furniture had been taken.

Attachments were slapped on to me, but I had nothing to attach. The company was gone—defunct.

I was arrested on a warrant charged with fraud. I was locked up in Ludlow Street Jail. My bail had been fixed at five thousand dollars because the frauds had been gigantic.

I tried to get Dr. Maitland to go my bail. He refused and upbraided me for stooping to such a fraudulent method of winning the love of Constance.

I sent word to Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. stating the plight I was in. I received a curt note in reply which read:

DEAR MR. DENLAND:

This was your own suggestion. We can do nothing at present to relieve you from your embarrassment. Remember your agreement.

I wrote to Forbes. I received no answer. I suppose he was congratulating himself that I had not roped him in.

I wrote to Constance, who wrote back:

DEAR TOM:

I know you are simply trying my own firmness. I glory in your spunk. Fight away.

Yours,

CONSTANCE.

It was maddening.

IV.

DOWN TO HARD PAN.

I LAY in Ludlow Street jail a week before I was taken to court. I had no money to purchase anything better than prison fare.

I was arraigned before a judge who looked at me with a frozen face. His cold, keen eyes seemed to be studying every line of my countenance. It was a trial by jury, and the twelve good men and true seemed solid, well-to-do, and quite satisfied with their own virtues.

I had no witnesses, of course. But I

was appalled at the array of complainants who had been buncoed out of money on one pretext or another by the House and Lot Association.

I was put on the stand. I had no money to pay a lawyer. The court appointed one who knew as much law as I did, and didn't hurt himself to use that much. But I had a chance to tell my story, and I told the truth.

It wasn't believed. That any man with an income of sixty thousand dollars would be fool enough to tie it up so that he could not touch a dollar of it for a year, was too much for these successful business men of New York to believe.

I insisted.

The court ordered a postponement to give the opposite side time to make inquiries. They did. They were told by some one at the banking house of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. that I had had money but it had been all lost in unfortunate investments and I was now a ruined man.

I, personally, had nothing to do with the frauds.

The judge declared that it had become a question of law, and not of fact, therefore he would not give it to the jury to decide.

"It is clear in my own mind," he said, "that the defendant in this case is more fool than rogue. He has lived a life of ease and idleness, using his brains to further the silly performances he called pleasure, and when his fortune was swept away he used the little remnant left in an effort to rehabilitate himself.

"You cannot draw blood from a stone. To imprison this man would accomplish no good to the plaintiffs nor to society. The defendant is not a born rogue. As his money is all gone it will be necessary for him to go to work for wages, and the power to prey on society will be lost. The prisoner is discharged."

I walked out of the court-room a free man, but I cannot say I gloried in my freedom. The rankling sores in my heart grew worse as I thought of the way in which all my friends had treated me.

I was a pariah. I saw workingmen and women, office-boys and typewriters, and girls who worked in stores, all hurrying home to dinner, happy in the fact that they were earning enough to get a bare living.

I, with over a million dollars all my own, didn't have the price of a meal.

I had just fifteen cents when I left the court.

I had in my other days often eaten at a café up-town. It was high-priced, stylish, and the food was good. The manager had always been obsequious and tried to be friendly. I was hungry. I must eat.

I boarded a Broadway surface car and got off at the café.

"Mr. Hinxley," I said to the manager, "I am in temporary hard luck. You perhaps have read my unfortunate story. It was not all true as printed. I will soon have plenty of money. In fact, I have now, but cannot at this moment lay my hands on it. Nevertheless, I must eat. Is my credit good here?"

He smiled deprecatingly, and linked his arm in mine. Unconsciously, perhaps, but no less certainly, we gravitated toward the door.

"You know, Mr. Denland, I would be glad to accommodate you if I could. Unfortunately, however, some of the owners are not very generous, and I am not allowed to give credit."

I found myself in the street, hungrier than before.

Not allowed to give credit! I had given suppers and dinners in that place costing thousands of dollars, and nothing had been said about the pay until I got my quarterly remittance. Things had changed.

My heart was on fire with indignation. I had looked upon the world with eyes that saw nothing but rose-beds. I was beginning to feel the thorns that had been invisible.

I had ten cents left. And I was up-town. Fortunately my room rent was paid a week in advance when I was arrested. I had not occupied the room while I had been in jail. I would ask the landlady for a bite to eat.

I spent another nickel to get to my lodging. I was met on the stairs by the landlady.

"Mr. Denland," she said, "fortunately your time has expired. You paid, you know, a week in advance, and I could not let the room conscientiously while you were away. But I have let it now, and it is occupied by a very nice young

man. Your trunk is in the cellar. I wish you would get an expressman and have it taken out of the way."

I was breathless with rage. But what could I do?

"I have just five cents," I said. "Those charges were malicious and false. I never defrauded a person out of a dollar. And I am starving. I thought you had charity enough to give me a bite to eat."

"Oh, as to that, I am not hard-hearted toward an unfortunate. Go down to the kitchen. The cook will give you a cup of coffee and a sandwich."

I was suffocating. I! Thomas Denland, owner of over a million, once the petted and welcome guest in one of the gayest and most reckless sets in New York, called an unfortunate, and sent to the kitchen for a cup of coffee and a sandwich like a common tramp!

But I was hungry and knew no other place to go. I knew I must save my strength for the hunt for work the following day. I swallowed my pride and my anger and went to the kitchen.

The cook was kinder than the mistress, and when I left I was no longer hungry, but I had no place to sleep.

Even the Bowery lodging-houses demand something. I had my five cents left. In sheer desperation I laughed. Five cents!

I had spent five thousand dollars thinking less of it than I did of that nickel. I still had time, I thought, to catch somebody in the office of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co., and spent my last nickel getting down there as fast as possible.

I found Mr. Gash detained alone with his unusual amount of work. He smiled when he saw me.

"You are getting your money's worth," he said.

"My money's worth! I am destroyed body and soul! You knew that I was honest! Why didn't you come to my relief?"

"Because," he said coldly, "it is not the policy of the house of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. to assist people to make fools of themselves. I did what I did wholly in your interest. Having made the astonishing agreement that you insisted on. I was compelled to take the stand I did or see you ruined.

"Undoubtedly the House and Lot Association has buncoed more people than you heard about. I knew, of course, that you were honest. But if I had admitted that the story you told was true, and that you were really a millionaire masquerading as a poor man for some fool reason of your own, creditors would have sprung up like mushrooms all over New York.

"They would have grown over night between the paving-stones on Broadway. They would grow like Virginia creepers on the cornices of skyscrapers and office-buildings for miles. There wouldn't be enough left of your fortune to buy a meal."

"Well, I haven't got enough to buy a meal now, and I want to eat. When I went into this thing I didn't expect to be robbed first thing. Circumstances alter cases, and I want some money."

"Circumstances don't alter agreements and contracts and affidavits. I obeyed you when you wanted an agreement. I have signed the firm's name. I am entitled to do that. But I have no right, as an individual, to abrogate an agreement once it is so signed. I can't give you any money."

"But I've got to have some. I actually have no place to sleep to-night."

"Well, if you are doing a stunt to win a wager with a friend, it wouldn't be fair for me to help you out. You didn't take me into your confidence, but you spoke about it being a wager. I am no hand to spoil sport. The other fellow deserves fair treatment. Otherwise I would give you some money. I couldn't lend you any, because that would be the same as drawing your own money, which you have signed not to do."

"But, my Heavens, Gash! I can't walk the streets all night! And I've got to have a shave and a bath to get work. And my clothes are in my trunk in my old lodgings and I can't open it till I take it out. What am I going to do?"

"What the devil did you go into this fool thing for? You a millionaire!"

"To win the love of a girl with ideas!"

His face cracked open in the most peculiar smile I had ever seen.

"I've heard of things," he said, "many things, that were downright

idiotic. If the income of sixty thousand dollars wouldn't win a girl with or without ideas I don't know what the ideas are that can be won by turning yourself into a disreputable tramp. And a rogue as well."

"The girl is all right. The idea was that I was a rich idler and didn't know enough to take care of my own fortune if Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. should prove dishonest or make bad investments."

His peculiar eyes were bent on me like two corkscrews.

"Pray tell me what girl was brilliant enough to think of all that."

"Her name is Maitland. Constance Maitland, daughter of Dr. Maitland."

"Well—"

He seemed to choke, and did not finish what he had started to say.

"I agree with her," I said. "I look on life with different eyes, and this year will be an education to me. But I can't starve at the outset. I must have a place to eat, and I must have a place to sleep, and I must look presentable to get work to-morrow."

"Where are you going to work?"

"I don't know. Say, why can't you give me a job in your banking-house?"

He shook his head.

"It wouldn't do. Rellbun would have a fit if he knew I had employed one of our largest clients."

"But I'll quit when the year is up."

"Can't do it, Denland. But I'll see you started right. I don't know but what there is good sense in what Miss Maitland says. It is a good thing for every man to be able to manage his affairs whether he cares about doing it or not. The knowledge that he can do it makes him more careful that others do it right. I'll tell you what I'll do."

He rammed his hand in his pocket and brought out half a dollar.

"That won't do," he said. "It's all I've got with me, and the safe is closed. I want that on the way home. I'll give you a check. And mind you, this is not a loan to be paid out of your income. We'll stick to our agreement. This is a little present from an ardent admirer to see you started on your heroic career."

He let out a peculiar grunt as he drew up to the desk and wrote out a check for twenty-five dollars.

It was his personal check, and not signed by the firm. It looked as big to me as my quarterly check of fifteen thousand dollars had looked. I grabbed it as a starving man might grab a loaf of bread.

"I'm going to get shaved and go to a Turkish bath and get some of this Ludlow Street jail odor off me," I said. "And I'll get my trunk. I'll pay you back with interest somehow. I thank you. I won't want any more."

He grunted again.

"I'm glad of that," he said.

V.

FROM PILLAR TO POST.

WITH the check in my pocket I sallied gaily forth, feeling as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

The first thing to do was to get the check cashed. I used frequently to cash my checks in cafés, hotels, wherever I happened to need money and was in a place where I was known. But there was no place near the office of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. where I was known.

Still, the name of the junior partner of the company ought to be good almost anywhere.

There was a well-known hotel on a near-by corner of Broadway. I went to the clerk. I doubt if I had ever been in the hotel before.

"Can I ask you to cash this check for me?" I asked.

He looked at me dubiously.

"I don't know any Caleb W. Gash," he said, "and I don't know you."

"Mr. Gash is the silent partner, or the junior partner of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co.," I explained. "My name is Thomas Denland."

"Oh, the—"

He stopped short, and looked at me again.

"The check is good enough," I said somewhat hotly. "I know what you were going to say about me."

"You see—if it was signed by Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co. I might risk it," he replied. "We know the firm. We don't know any Mr. Gash."

"He's half the firm."

" Possibly, but I can't cash the check on your say-so. I'm sorry if you are inconvenienced any."

" Inconvenienced!" I laughed again in bitterness. " I have no money except this, and no place to sleep to-night unless I can turn this into money."

" Really, I am sorry. But I can't do it. I can't afford to risk the money, and the management would make it deuced hot for me if I lost it for them."

" Well, can you give me a room for the night? When Mr. Gash comes down-town in the morning I will get the cash for the check."

" Sorry. We don't do business that way with strangers."

Crushed, humiliated beyond what I ever believed could be possible, I hurried from the hotel.

I had now absolutely not a cent except that check. I went to drug-stores. Nobody knew any Caleb W. Gash, and nobody knew me except what they had read in the papers, and that did not incline them to cash a check on the strength of my indorsement.

I was in a terrible quandary. The time was passing. I needed a shave and a bath, and my linen was soiled. There seemed to be no prospect of getting the check cashed.

Suddenly, I was seized with a happy inspiration. I still wore my gold watch and charm, in which there was a diamond. To the pawn-shop for mine.

I knew there were some on the Bowery. I knew of none on Broadway.

I had never been inside of such a place in my life. What I had heard and read about them had led me to believe that anybody, rogue, thief, murderer, and robber, could walk in, display his goods, get his money and walk out again.

There were no romantic sentiments attached to my watch. I had bought it with my own money. I could easily buy another as good when the year was up.

It was a long way to the Bowery, but I was a good walker. I had never beaten my way on a street-car, and did not know the little tricks that sometimes take a passenger through without paying his fare. So I started to walk.

It was about nine o'clock at night when I reached the region I expected would set me free from my dilemma. I

saw the usual sign of three balls, and entered a pawn-shop.

There was a cunning, sharp-eyed fellow inside. I pulled the chain from my vest and handed it over to him.

" What will you give me on these—the whole thing, charm and all?"

He squinted at the watch and then at me. He did more than squint at me. He studied me as I had never been studied before. I felt my face burn under his scrutiny.

He looked at my rumpled clothes, my soiled collar, my dirty-looking face with a week's growth of beard, and shook his head.

" Vere you git dis vatch? Hein?"

" I bought it. I am temporarily in need of money and wish to pawn or sell it. I don't suppose I can redeem it inside of a year."

" No? Not insite von year. How's dat?"

" I don't expect to have much money till a year from now. Then I'll have plenty."

" Mein vrendt," he said, " I don'd vant id."

" Don't want that watch? That diamond is a full carat. Look at it! The whole thing cost me four hundred dollars."

He looked me over again.

" I don'd vant id."

" You think I stole it?"

" I don'd dink anydings. I know id."

" But I didn't, I tell you! If I told you my name you would believe me."

" Vell, vy you don't dell me your name?"

" Thomas Denland."

" Oh! Don'd dell anypody else your name, my vrendt. Go hide dot vatch avay. Some day you lands pack in Lutlow Sdreed chail."

Disgusted, disheartened, I left the shop and tried another.

Is there a system of quick information between these places, I wondered? I believed there was. The next place I entered was governed by a woman. I asked her the same question.

" Naw," she said, shaking her head. " Ve don'd do dot kint of pizness needer. Take it avay. I von't haf id round my blace. I know you. Your name id iss Domas Tenlant."

"How did you know?" I asked angrily.

"Oh, I reet him in de babers. Take id avay. I gall a bolecmans."

I took it away. I walked several blocks to find another place where communication was not so easy.

Entering here, I handed the watch over the counter with the same question.

"You seem to be having a lot of trouble with this watch," said the young man in charge. "You ought not to have given old Shandriski your name. The whole place is looking for you now. I'd like to accommodate you, but—get out—quick!"

Alarmed by his whispered and unmistakably earnest warning I turned to go. I was too late.

A policeman was coming in the door.

"Here, you!" he said. "You'd better come to the station-house with me. You may be all right this time, and you may not. I won't take any chances. I'll place you under arrest as a suspicious person, and to-morrow we'll give you a chance to explain."

I had a place to sleep that night.

VI.

HUNTING A JOB.

I WAS the maddest man in New York by morning.

Of course I had no sleep. Some drunken hoodlums had been brought in and they kept up a hideous racket till they were clubbed into submission. But there was coming and going all night, and the nervous condition I was in drove all thoughts of sleep out of my mind. I sat on the cot and nursed my wrath.

In the morning they gave me a chance to prove that I was really the owner of the watch. I telephoned to the jeweler's firm where I had purchased that and a hundred other expensive presents for friends—at least people I thought were my friends—and they sent an employee who knew me down to the station.

He had formerly almost cringed before me. I had spent thousands of dollars in that store. But he looked at me with cold, haughty glances, and then at the watch.

"I know this man, captain," he said.

"He used to be a pretty high-flier, and spent a lot of money, wherever he got it from. I don't know anything about him only that. He did buy the watch of us all right."

"Well, that settles it, then. There's no charge against this man, is there, officer?"

"No. He was running all over the place trying to pawn the watch, and I knew his record was bad. He is the fellow who was arrested for the House and Lots Association frauds."

"Oh! Look here, young fellow," said the captain. "Let me give you a piece of advice. New York is a pretty big place, I know. But I don't think it is quite big enough for you. You'd better skedaddle. It's a good time to go now while there is no charge hanging over you. A fellow like you is liable to get into trouble most any time. Take my advice and get out of town."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I have been a little unfortunate of late, but I am honest. And now that you have satisfied yourself that this is my watch, and my appearance satisfies you that I need some cash, perhaps you will permit me to return to the Bowery and pawn my jewelry?"

"Well, so long as it is really yours, I don't care what you do with it. But you'd better take my advice and use the money to get out of town. If we get you again it may go harder with you."

I went back to the Bowery, and to the last pawn-shop—where I had been arrested. I rather liked the young fellow there. He had liked the watch and had tried to warn me that the officer was coming.

"Hello!" he said. "You back again?"

"Yes," I replied. "I spent the night in the station, but this morning convinced them that the watch was mine. Now I want to sell it. I don't want to pawn it. I want all the money you will give me with the understanding that the watch and charm are yours. I paid four hundred dollars for the outfit."

"Well—it isn't our business—but it is a fine watch, and the stone is a good one. I'll take a chance on two hundred."

I jumped at it like a hungry trout at his favorite fly.

With two hundred dollars in cash I went forth a new man. Yet two hundred dollars had been a bit of spending money before.

I treated myself to a good breakfast. Then I went to a barber's and got shaved. Then I went and had a Turkish bath. Then I found another cheap lodging and sent an expressman after my trunk.

I still had the twenty-five-dollar check of Gash's in my pocket. My first thought was that I would get it cashed. But I resolved now to be independent. I took it back.

"What's this? What's the matter?" asked Gash. "You look spruced up a lot. And you didn't use this?"

"No. I couldn't get it cashed last night, and now I don't need it. I'm just as much obliged to you, though, for your kindness."

He grunted something about some other time, but I was eager to get to work. I was weary, after a sleepless night, but cared nothing for that.

The Turkish bath had refreshed me, and the money in my pocket gave me strength and confidence.

But it didn't get me a job.

I began at the very lowest end of Broadway. I bought all the morning papers, and tabulated the advertisements for help wanted, and went wearily, one by one, toward the upper part of the city.

It was killing work. I had never given a thought to the unemployed. The mere fact that a man was out of work had interested me not at all, or had seemed to be just a little temporary inconvenience.

But I was learning what it was. I was learning something of the realities of life. I compared my weary work looking for a job with the Teddy Bear dinner and my yacht now lying up in one of the big yards on City Island.

I had had great times on board with those who were — supposedly — my friends.

That day I found nothing. When I told my name it shut off all further negotiations. Then I grew wiser and changed my name, and found that Constance was right. I knew nothing.

Shrewd business men who spoke quickly and sharply, and men who looked like

good spenders and livers, all said the same thing. They did want help, but they wanted experience. They must have either technical or practical knowledge. I had neither.

I went to one house that imported champagne. They wanted somebody who had the entry to rich society. It need not necessarily be good society, but the crowd that spent money.

They thought I might do till I told them I drank so little champagne that I was no judge, and couldn't keep ordering and drinking it. It didn't agree with me. That ended what might have been a successful venture.

All the next day and the next I hunted. I found that constant walking and talking made me hungry, and to satisfy my appetite made my little pile dwindle rapidly.

As yet I had not called on Constance. My mind was in no condition. I was learning that she was right. I was learning now what she, several years younger, and a girl at that, already knew.

Yet she had never suffered poverty. How had she learned such worldly wisdom. I was almost afraid of her. I shrank in comparison.

It was thought, study, looking into things. And she had determined that I should do the same thing. To know the world as it was, and not as a powder-puff on which fairies might dance. It was a schooling nobody could ever forget.

And so a week passed, and still another week, and I was still out of work.

If you are as fortunately situated as I had been, and still believe the world owes you a living and is falling all over itself trying to pay it, tie up your fortune as I did and try to collect. It will open your eyes.

Mine were well open by the time my money was gone again, and I was still out of work.

What to do now I didn't know. Pride prevented me from going back to Gash for money. Yet I had not enough left to last three days longer, and no prospects of work.

But there was a fate in store for me. I was looking over the advertisements, sitting in Battery Park, when I chanced upon "Men Wanted."

There was something encouraging about the fact that more than one was wanted, and as no occupation was mentioned, there seemed to be a chance.

I went to the address given. It was a private detective agency.

There were other applicants. I waited my turn, and was taken into the private office of the chief of the concern. He looked me over.

"You ought to do," he said. "What's your name?"

I told him my real name. A sardonic grin came upon his face.

Then he relapsed into a moment of silent study.

"When you were arrested on that charge connected with the House and Lot Association," he said, "didn't you say something about Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co.?"

"Yes. I won't hide anything from you. I am not really in need of work. I am, too, through my own act in tying up my money so that for a year I could not touch any of it, and they are the custodians of the fortune my father left me."

"How big a fortune is it?"

"Over a million."

He looked at me very queerly.

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"I'll swear it. I was in love with a girl of brains who objected to the idle life I was living. Not so much, in fact, to the idleness, but the fact that I was a dawdler in life, and that if I lost my money I couldn't make a living."

His queer expression grew queerer.

"And are you still in love with that girl?"

"More than ever."

"Does she love you?"

"I think so. At least she will if I make good during the year of my trial."

"And you haven't made good yet?"

"No. My first venture was with the House and Lot Company, and they robbed me. Then my arrest has been a hoodoo ever since."

"Naturally. Are you personally acquainted with Cyrus X. Rellbun?"

"I never saw the man in my life."

"Who is the girl who loves you so well that she gave you this terrible task to prove your worthiness?"

"Constance Maitland, the daughter of

Dr. Maitland. You have probably heard of him. He is celebrated for his skill and for his charity."

The great detective—he was a celebrated detective—left his chair and walked back and forth in the room. A man came in and said the line of men outside was growing so that it obstructed the street.

"Line them up against the front of the building. I only want them as strike-breakers. I am very busy on a more important case just now."

Then he turned to me.

"Denland," he said, "I like a young fellow with nerve. I know more about you than you have any idea. I can give you rather a vivid history of all the fellows in your old set, and I am glad to say you are best of the lot."

"Yes, we have reasons to do that sometimes. No need to tell you why, as there isn't a black mark against you. And I know Dr. Maitland well. Come in to-night at five o'clock when I can talk to you with a little more freedom."

"I'll be here," I said.

"Don't fail," he added. "I am going to give you the chance of your life to make good."

VII.

ON THE TRAIL OF A VILLAIN.

I WAS there on time. The great detective was in his private office smoking a very big and very black cigar. He offered me one.

"Denland," he began, "I don't know what blessed chance sent you to me to-day. It couldn't be all chance. There must have been some guidance of Providence about it. And Constance Maitland builded better than she knew when she made you turn yourself out into the world practically a pauper. You have learned things, Denland."

"I have certainly learned a lot," I answered; "but not what she wanted me to learn. I know little more about business than before."

"You don't need to. But you have had your eye-teeth cut. You have learned shrewdness. You have been up against the grindstone and have grown sharper."

"I think I am keener than I was in the ways of the world."

"Exactly so. Now, when you were enjoying your wealth you had a valet."

"Yes. I had to let him go when I started over again."

"As the employer of a valet, you know the duties of a valet?"

"Yes, of course."

"And the body-servant of a rich man generally knows more about him, more of his inner life, his social and business secrets, than anybody else?"

"Yes. In a hundred different ways knowledge of that kind comes to a valet. A man might better have a mad dog as a companion than a valet he can't trust."

"Exactly," said the great detective. "And now, from a homeless seeker after work, you are going to transform yourself into that very thing."

"What—a mad dog or a valet who can't be trusted?"

"Either—or both. I'll explain. As you know, perhaps, Mr. Cyrus X. Rellbun has been away from New York for some time. He is now in the city, and has resumed active management of his banking business. Mr. Gash is now enjoying a well-earned rest in Bermuda, after doing double work while Rellbun was away.

"Mr. Cyrus X. Rellbun is trustee, not only of your fortune, but of many others. It may be of interest to you to know that what little the charitable Dr. Maitland has been able to put away is in funds invested for him by the house of Cyrus X. Rellbun & Co., and is in their keeping. This house is also the trustee of the estates of several orphans and widows. The amount of trust moneys held by them must go far up into the millions. And Mr. Cyrus X. Rellbun is doing some queer things that have made a few people think, and thus we reach the position you are to fill."

"Do you mean to say that Rellbun has wasted the trust funds and is going to abscond?" I asked, aghast.

"I don't mean any such thing. Mr. Rellbun is too shrewd a financier to waste anything. But it is suspected that he is converting the invested funds into cash slowly, preparing to take a very much longer vacation, and let you fellows pay the bills."

"The scoundrel!"

"He is one, if this is true. But as yet we have no proof. One of the queer things he is doing is to get rid of all those personal employees who are too honest and shrewd for a man who is contemplating such a crime. And among them he has sent away his valet, and now wants a new one. A stipulation is that the new valet shall not be a New York man, nor have worked for a New York man. You see the point in that? Such a man would have friends. He would learn of the plans of Cyrus X. Rellbun, and in order to protect his friends he would give the thing away.

"Or, if he did not do that, he would be as big a scoundrel as Rellbun himself, and demand a big slice of the plunder, which Rellbun is not the kind of man to give. Now you begin to understand."

"I do. I am to try to obtain the position of valet and learn his plans."

"The position is already yours. This is no new thing. We have been on the case for some time, but have not succeeded in cornering the old fox. Whether Gash is honest or not, we don't know. We don't care, if we can grab Rellbun before he gets away with the goods. We don't want to punish a man for robbing people. We want to prevent the robbery. And you are the very man to do it. You have so much at stake that you would do more than an ordinary man. Rellbun will be pleased with you because you know just what a valet should do. As I say, the position is yours."

He leaned over his desk, scribbled something on a paper, put it in an envelope unsealed, and handed it to me.

"Take that to Lord Cheffingwell, at the Waldorf."

"Lord Cheffingwell? I have met him. An English swell, with plenty of money and American interests that keep him here."

"I don't mind telling you. The real name of Lord Cheffingwell is Jim Hatsu, and he is my partner in this business. Now, are your eyes open a little more?"

"Very much wider than before," I said with a laugh. "No wonder you know all about our old crowd."

"And a good many other crowds who entertain Lord Cheffingwell. Now, go to him. He will recommend you to Rell-

bun. You can manage a little English accent, I suppose?"

"Yes, but my clothes are of American cut."

"You'll be all right when you leave Lord Cheffingwell. He's more English than the king."

I had no difficulty in finding Lord Cheffingwell. He laughed as he greeted me.

"We'll soon fix you up. Lucky you wanted a job. You are just the man we want on this case."

I was soon transferred into a typical English valet.

"Remember," said Lord Cheffingwell. "You have just arrived on the Campania, after I sent for you."

"I'll remember."

He gave me a letter to Rellbun, written on paper with a crest.

The banker received me coldly. He studied me well. But I had learned a few things, and the fact that I was a rich client of his office could never enter his head. I was accepted.

I entered upon my duties with an energy and skill that wafted me at once into his good graces. In a few days he was telling me his plans.

"Are you a good traveler, Tolmain?" he asked.

That was the name Lord Cheffingwell had given me.

"Tolerable, sir," I answered. "Tolerable. Hi 'aven't been habout much hof late. Lord Just, my last employer, was han hininvalid, sir. We remained at 'ome most hof the time."

"Well, I am going to travel a great deal. I am not sure that I shall return to New Yor in a good many years. Perhaps, if I like France better, I shall stay there. Do you like France, Tolmain?"

"Frawnce his hexcellent, sir," I said. "Very fine, sir. Hi like Frawnce, sir."

"I expect to sail on the *Lucania* in two weeks."

Two weeks! I had just two weeks in which to gather evidence that would save my own fortune and the funds of numberless orphan children, and prevent the savings of Dr. Maitland from being stolen by this wretch.

For years he had posed as a model man and honorable banker. Perhaps he

had been until the lust of great spending had come upon him.

Perhaps he had robbed many, and there would be no redress. Perhaps a portion of my own fortune was gone, 'd Gash had known it. I recalled how he had stared when I told him that Constance wanted me to know enough to manage my own money.

I got busy in earnest. Every letter that Rellbun wrote and gave me to mail, and every letter that came to him, I took to my room, steamed open and copied. Then I sealed them again, and passed them along either to him or to the post.

Chapter after chapter of contemplated villainy was unfolded. I kept Lord Cheffingwell informed every day as to what I had discovered.

Railroad securities and United States bonds were turned into cash. They were not sacrificed, for Rellbun suspected nothing, and was in no hurry. And as he was hoarding the cash to take it with him, or forward it in a lump sum to Gash, there was no need of arresting him till we had him sure.

I saw all my own securities sold and the cash salted down, where Rellbun could place his fist on it when he wanted to run. I saw the invested savings of Dr. Maitland sold and the cash put with mine.

I helped him carry the cash, several millions, in satchels to his house, where I aided him to pack it for shipment.

It was all in gold. He did not risk exchanging the lot for foreign money here. He could do that little by little in Europe.

And I kept Lord Cheffingwell informed every hour of what was being done. That was my duty. The rest was his and the big chief's down-town.

And the day came—the great day—when millions of stolen gold were to be sent to Europe on the *Lucania*, to be spent by this scoundrel in riotous living. His face was red and puffy from excitement. He never left the strong boxes.

"Queer the expressman doesn't come. Tolmain," he said. "I'm afraid of being late."

A few minutes later the bell rang.

"There's the expressman now," I said. The great detective from the office

entered. Lord Cheffingwell was not there. It was never his duty to make an arrest. That would end his usefulness where he was.

"Cyrus X. Rellbun," said the big chief, "I arrest you in the name of the law. You need no explanation. Those boxes are filled with stolen gold. Come with me."

Rellbun was too much overcome to speak.

"You did well, Denland," said the big chief.

"Denland!" shrieked Rellbun. "Are you Thomas Denland?"

"I am," I said. "I entered into poverty to learn how to take care of my

fortune. I think I've done pretty well, don't you?"

He sank to the floor unconscious, but was bundled into a cab by an unfeeling detective and taken to Ludlow Street jail.

One month later the business of the banking-house of Cyrus X. Rellbun was turned over to that of Maitland & Denland without a depositor losing a dollar.

Dr. Maitland gave up his practise temporarily because he wanted an honest man at the head of the concern. He is there yet. And two months after the new firm opened its doors to a successful business Constance became my wife.

But we never went back to the old crowd.

THE EXCEPTIONAL GIRL.

By MABEL GERTRUDE DUNNING.

What one man saw in the street, and the bearing
it had on a trial of voices for a church choir.

"**B**Y Jove! I like that. I call it a mighty nice thing to do, and it certainly was unusual."

Spense Graham muttered the words beneath his breath as he watched her.

He had been conscious in a sort of way of a girl hurrying before him, as he walked down Twenty-Third Street, but, then, everybody hurried on that street, pushing and jostling all who stood in the way, so that one girl more or less had made no impression on Graham, until at the busy corner of Fifth Avenue she stopped suddenly.

Her abrupt action, or rather cessation of action, drew Graham's wandering attention instantly, and, with an unconscious feeling of surprise, he saw her bend over a tiny, shrunken old colored woman, who stood on the edge of the curb looking wildly up and down the crowded street, evidently too bewildered and frightened to attempt to cross.

With a few words in her ear, the tall young woman tucked her arm beneath that of the old "mammy," and, with an encouraging smile, led her down off the curb and guided her safely through the crowds to the other side, where she directed her charge safely on her way.

The whole thing was done in a moment, but the sight of this modern young woman pausing on her busy way to aid a bent old cripple left a deep impression on Graham's sensitive, chivalrous mind.

There were, alas! too few such women in these times, were his thoughts as he followed her toward the Subway station, where he soon lost sight of her in the crowd at the ticket-office.

Seated in a northbound train, he unfolded his paper, intending to while away the few moments between stations, when, glancing up, he saw the same exceptional girl opposite him calmly reading a small book which lay on her knees.

All thought of the daily news flew out of his head as he stole quick glances at her.

Yes, she certainly was an exceptional girl—every line of her face spoke refinement. Her clear, clean-cut features, and deep, calm eyes betrayed a tender yet strong, womanly nature, while she carried herself with a reserved dignity which delighted Graham's sense of the fitness of things.

He wished that he might talk to her, and felt sorry for himself because he could not. He wondered what she would

think if he should speak to her, although he knew as he watched her firm, kind mouth, that she would be indignant and annoyed at any attempt on his part to infringe upon the conventions, and in his heart he was glad that she would be.

The train was nearing the point where the double platform denoted an express-stop. The girl, looking up from her book, realized that she had reached her station. Gathering together two or three large volumes which she carried, she tucked them under her arm and hastened from the train, dropping a letter from her books as she did so.

As the little white envelope fell at his feet, Graham, sensing immediately who had dropped it, picked it quickly from the floor of the car and hurried after the girl, only to meet the slamming of the gate as he reached the door.

"Here, let me out—that lady has dropped something, and I want to restore it to her," he shouted at the guard, who stood like a carved image between the cars.

"Sorry, sir, bell's rung. Against the rules to open the gates." And with a magnificent unconcern for Graham's excited explanations he entered the rear car.

What did he care because Graham had lost the chance of a lifetime to speak to the one girl?

Graham turned the envelope over in his hand. It had been opened, and judging from the date stamped upon it, had been received that morning.

He looked at the name.

MISS PATIENCE WEST,
703 West 57th St.,
New York City.

"Patience West!" Was even a name so perfectly suited to its wearer? Patience! Why, to look at her was to know her name was Patience, he rhapsodized, forgetting that he had looked a long time without knowing.

The guard, returning from the end car to open the gates at the next station, found him standing with the letter still in his hand, eyes looking into space.

The man's amused scrutiny roused Graham, and thrusting the letter into his pocket he left the train and hurried to the street.

But the girl remained in his mind all

day, and that evening as he sat in his library waiting for the sound of the dinner-gong, he again brought the letter to light.

"I wonder if I had better return this to Miss West," he mused, as he turned it over. "It might be important to her. Oh, pshaw! I'm just trying to make an excuse to see her again. Why can't I be frank with myself? I'll read the blamed thing, and if it's anything valuable to her I'll take it to her myself and run the chance of a freeze-out," and before he could change his mind he pulled the letter from its envelope.

For a few seconds he read eagerly, then, throwing back his head, laughed silently to himself.

The note was brief and businesslike—merely requesting Miss Patience West to be at St. Edward's Church that evening to sing for the committee appointed to conduct the voice-trial which was to be held there.

"Well, if this isn't luck!" exclaimed Graham. "I'm supposed to be on that music committee myself, although I had no intention of acting; but I reckon I'll be on hand, after all, and my vote goes for Miss Patience West," he chuckled gleefully.

While not a deeply religious man, Spense Graham, as a member of an old and wealthy family, had, since his father's death, held many offices in the famous old church which his family's wealth had helped to build. Of his privileges as a member of the music committee, however, he had never taken advantage, not caring enough about it to give his time to listening to the warblings of would-be soloists.

"Mother, I think I'll go around and do my duty at the voice-trial this evening," he announced, as he seated himself at the dinner-table a few moments later.

Mrs. Graham smiled affectionately across at this dear, big son of hers.

"I'm very glad, Spense, and I am sure your interest in the search for soloists will be appreciated by the rest of the committee. I think you will enjoy it, too, aside from the business end of it. They want both a soprano and contralto, so there will probably be many applicants for the positions."

"Yes, mother, I shall enjoy it hugely," answered Spense, with a meaning which was quite lost upon Mrs. Graham. "By the way, *mater*, I saw something to-day which left an impression. I was walking along Twenty-Third Street, and in the midst of that pushing, pulling, hurrying crowd I saw a girl, evidently in a great hurry herself, stop and safely pilot an old colored cripple across the street. Don't you think that was a pretty thing to see in this unconcerned and unsympathetic old town?"

Mrs. Graham listened to her son's enthusiastic words, with the gentle, comprehending manner that had helped make her such a dear chum to him.

"She must have been an exceptional girl, dear," she said. "Perhaps she had not been here long. It certainly was a very sweet thing to do, and the girl is probably just as sweet as her action. But, Spense, if you are going to hear the voices, hadn't you better hurry? Dinner was very late this evening, and I think they usually begin hearing applicants at eight o'clock."

Graham pulled out his watch.

"Why, it's nearly half past eight now. I had no idea it was so late. If you'll excuse me, mother, I'll go right along; it will be quarter to nine when I get there as it is," and, kissing his mother affectionately, he departed hurriedly from the room.

The indistinct rumbling of the organ, heard as he approached the church, warned Graham that proceedings had begun, and, entering the dimly lighted vestibule, he slipped noiselessly into the church, where he stood listening behind the last of the empty pews.

A thin, tall soprano was declaiming the aria from "Elijah" in a hard, throaty voice very much off the key, but with assurance and self-confidence worthy a better cause. With a final forward thrust of her chin, she finished her effort, and, her manner blatant with self-approval, noisily made way for the next applicant, probably morally certain that the position was hers.

A young, timid girl appeared at the choir-rail. Inexperienced, frightened, her voice, a weak contralto, stuck painfully in her throat, dull and without resonance. The organist, pitying her nervous

fright, mercifully ended it by playing only a few bars of her solo.

Graham found himself feeling sorry for her, and when, looking about at the other waiting "would-bes," he saw many barely suppressed smiles of amusement, and in some cases satisfaction, at the poor child's dismal failure, he grew very hot and angry.

"So," he thought indignantly, "it's the same in this as in everything else. Each for herself, and ready to step on the one who's down. They stand up there and sing the words of divine love, while in their hearts they are glad because of the failure of others to make good, and are pleased at their own superior efforts."

Suddenly he remembered where he was and what had brought him. Was she here?

He looked eagerly at the faces of the women scattered about the church. The lights were so dim that he could hardly see those farthest from him, but sitting in one of the pews under the balcony he discerned two women, one of whom his heart told him was the "exceptional girl"—the girl of the morning's adventure—Patience West.

He was surprised at the quick throb of his heart as he caught sight of the familiar face.

She was talking, with occasional quick nods of her head, to the girl next her, and Graham found her even more charming with that bright, alert manner which characterized her when speaking.

He stood for a moment pondering what to do.

Should he take the letter over to her and make her acquaintance that way, or should he wait until he had heard her sing, and then make an effort to talk to her? His mind was fully made up that she must not leave the church until he had spoken to her. It was now or never, and Graham was certain he wanted it to be now.

As he waited, undecided what to do, his roving eyes fell upon a small group of men in the corner—the music committee. Graham moved forward to speak to them, but as he turned they rose from their places and walked to the front of the church and disappeared through the door beneath the organ.

Wondering a little, Graham followed

and caught up with them in the study, which occupied a small space behind the platform.

The three men bending over the writing-table glanced up as he entered.

"Well, of all people, you're the last person we expected, Graham," said the youngest of them heartily, as he advanced with outstretched hand. "How long since you've awakened to the fact that you owe a duty to this committee? Been here long?"

"Oh, I came in a few moments ago. I stood for some time in the back, listening," answered Graham, shaking the proffered hand cordially.

"Then you didn't hear the new soprano?" broke in the man at the table. "She is the very first one we listened to, and she is a wonder. She would sing your hat off, and we've made up our minds to take her on the spot. Miller's made out the contract, and we've all signed it, so put your mark on it."

"Yes," added Miller enthusiastically; "we want to make sure of her before some one else gets her. Honestly, she's a wonder. Graham—wait until you hear her. Her name is Miss West."

Graham stared.

"Miss West? Not Patience West?" he questioned.

"Wait a minute, I'll look at her letter," said Miller, opening a small note which lay on the table. "Yes, that's it—Patience West. Why, do you know her?" he added, with a glance of surprise at Graham.

What mischievous imp prompted Graham's answer?

"Why, yes, I know her," he replied, with a self-conscious smile which was, fortunately, unobserved by the others. "I saw her listening to the voices as I came in."

"Then, don't waste any more time, but sign this and take it out to her before she leaves the church. Tell her the position is hers, and ask her to sign the paper to-night. That'll leave only the contralto position to be filled," the other finished, with satisfaction.

Graham, a bit bewildered and flurried by the turn events had taken, wrote his name mechanically, and, with the small piece of paper in his hand, entered the church again.

She was still there when he opened the door, and with a strange thrill of pleasure he approached her. Without preliminary explanations, Graham placed the contract before her.

"Good evening," he began abruptly, his usual self-possession disappearing before her surprised eyes, which looked straight into his own. "We've been so pleased with your singing that we have hastened matters a little, and decided to engage you at once. I wonder if you will just sign your name right here," and he indicated the place as he gave her his fountain-pen and the contract. "You see, we do things quickly here," he went on, gaining his self-possession as he grew accustomed to the nearness of her.

She signed the paper quickly, without more than a glance at it, and passed it back to him.

"Then, I'm really engaged here?" she questioned eagerly. "It certainly was quick work. I had no idea of leaving here with my contract all signed and sealed. But," with a puzzled glance at the organ-loft, "why do they still try the voices if the position is filled?"

Graham glanced upward indifferently.

"Oh, they still have the other position to fill, but as soon as they hear what they want they will cease to be interested in those who come after. That's the way with music committees."

"Just a little bit cruel to those others, though, isn't it, Mr.—" She paused, with raised brows.

"Mr. Graham," he filled in quickly. "By the way, I think I have some of your property in my possession."

The girl looked at him in wide-eyed surprise.

"Yes, I came through the Subway in the train with you this morning, and picked up this letter which you dropped when you left your station. I was unable to return it to you because the gates were closed before I could reach you, but I remembered your face perfectly, for I had noticed your thoughtful kindness to the poor woman at the Fifth Avenue crossing."

She blushed rosily at his unconcealed though respectful admiration.

"Oh, that was nothing," she murmured. "But the letter?"

She took it, a puzzled frown on her

brow, but, examining the addressed side of it, she laughed silently and turned to the girl with her, whom Graham had quite ignored. "Oh, Pat," she exclaimed, "here's your letter that you left in the book you gave me to take home for you!"

Then to Graham, who was watching in consternation: "Miss West and I live together. We're both music students, and I was carrying her books home for her, one of which contained the letter which she had slipped in there rather carelessly."

Graham continued to look at her stupidly.

"Er—yes, yes, I see; but I must take this back to Mr. Miller. Will you please wait a moment until I see if everything is correct?"

He turned quickly, anxious to get away from her observing eyes. With the door leading to the church closed safely behind him, he halted outside the study where he knew the others were awaiting him.

Leaning limply against the wall, he stared long and vacantly at the paper in his hand.

"Well, I've certainly done it this time. Not Patience West! What is her name, then?" Lifting the paper nearer the light, he read that Janet Hardy had agreed to sing at St. Edward's Church for the period of one year at a salary of one thousand dollars.

"Isn't that the toughest luck?" he asked of the wall-paper. "What man in a thousand would have even dreamed that letter was not her own. Heavens! How shall I explain to those men in there that I gave the soprano's contract to the wrong woman? I can't say it was a mistake, because, like an idiot, I told them I knew her."

"To think that all this trouble could come from that girl's kind and thoughtful action of this morning! I suppose she's in there now, delighted as a child because she has the position," he told himself grimly, and at the thought of having to undeceive her he grew hot, then cold.

As he stood there racking his brain for a plan to extricate himself from his disagreeable position, the voices of the men in the study floated out to him.

"If Miss Hardy is still out there, why don't we finish the whole business tonight? You all say you like her."

It was Miller, and at the mention of Miss Hardy, Graham crept nearer the door and listened eagerly for more.

"We'll send Graham out for her when he returns, and if she's there he can get her signature, and that'll end it."

Suppressing a wild desire to shout his relief aloud, Graham straightened himself, and, throwing the door open, walked into the study hurriedly. His way out of trouble was plain before him.

"Any of you people own a pen? Mine doesn't work, and I need one for Miss West to sign with," he said breezily.

"Here's mine," answered Miller, "and while you're out there, see if Miss Hardy is there. She sang before you came in, and we've decided that she'll do for the contralto. If she's there, let her sign this other paper; if not, we'll send it to her by mail."

"All right, in just a minute," replied Graham, leaving the room rapidly, that they might not have time to change their minds.

In the small passageway between the church and the study he stopped, and, carefully erasing the figures seven hundred dollars in Miss West's contract, replaced them with one thousand dollars, while erasing one thousand dollars from Janet Hardy's he filled in seven hundred dollars.

"There, that makes them all correct," he muttered under his breath. "Everybody gets what's coming to him, and no one will ever know how near I came to playing the rôle of a blundering idiot."

Five minutes later he returned to the study and laid two small white papers before Miller. One was a contract signed by Patience West, in which she agreed to sing at St. Edward's for one year at a salary of one thousand dollars. The other was a similar contract in which Janet Hardy agreed to sing during the same period at a salary of seven hundred dollars.

It was not until she had been Mrs. Spense Graham for nearly a year that Janet Hardy learned of the uncomfortable fifteen minutes she cost her husband when she tried for the position at St. Edward's Church.

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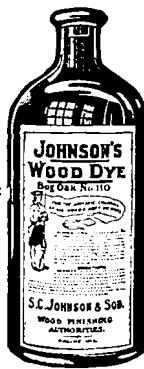
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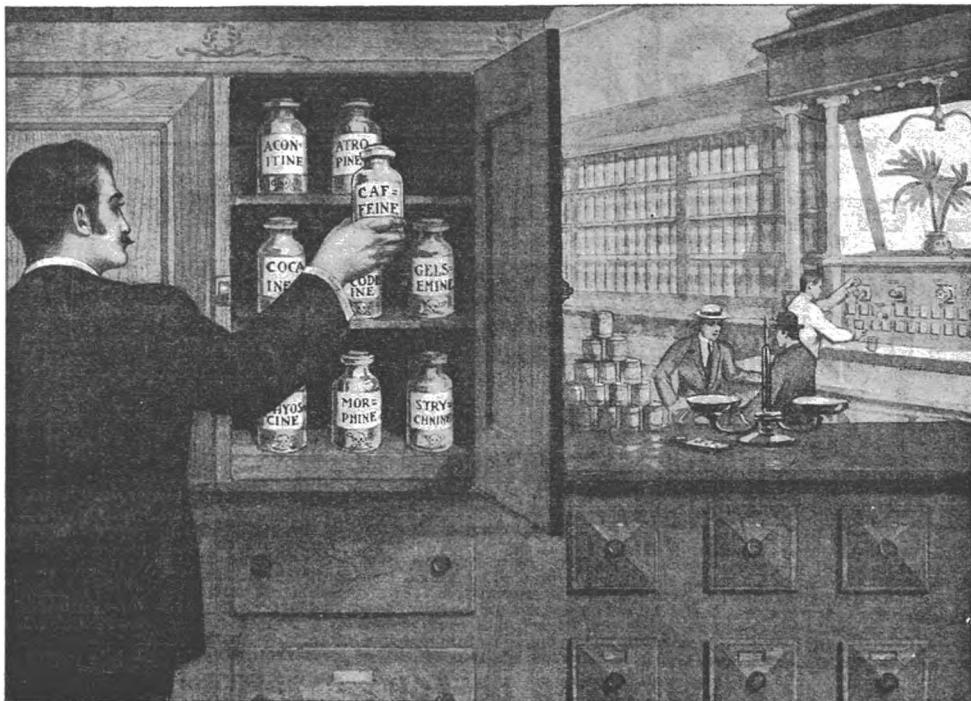
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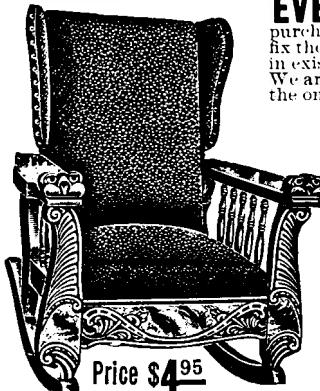
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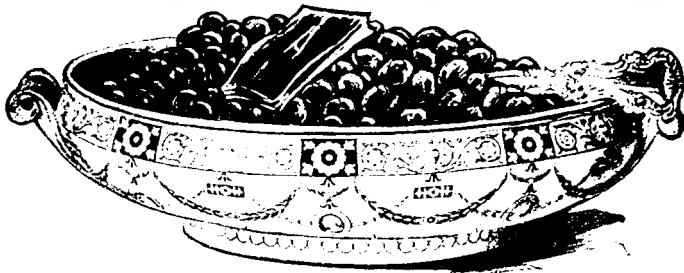
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Send us 25 cents in stamps or 25 cents cash and we will at once mail you razor, with frame and blade complete. **Money promptly refunded if not entirely satisfactory.** Biggest bargain on market. Send for it to-day.

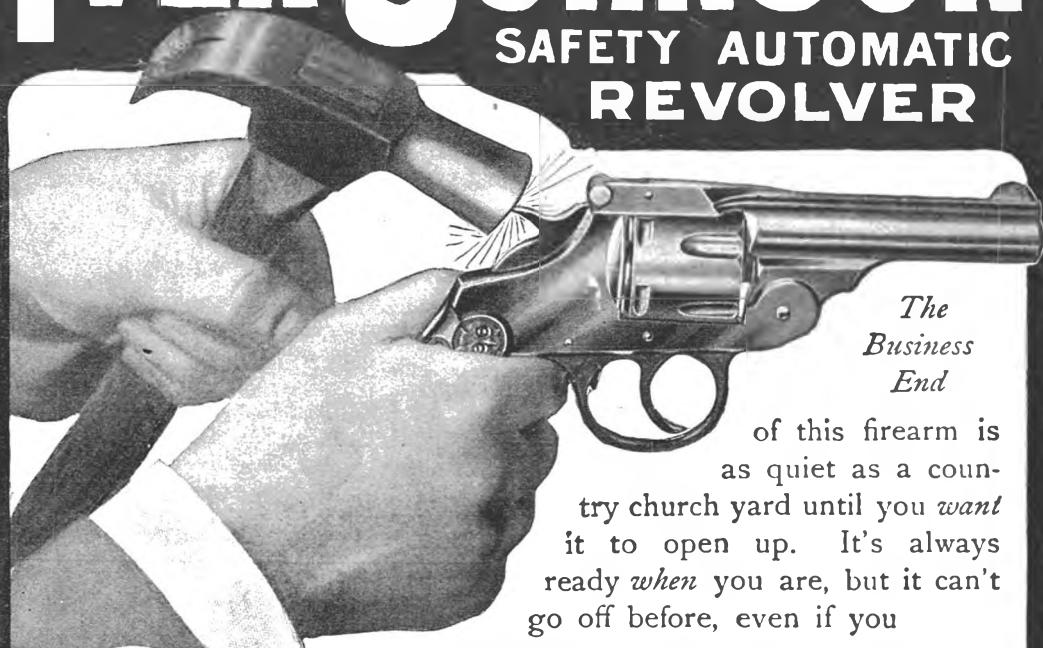
PLENTY OF MONEY FOR ALL

who will introduce the Shrp-Shavr among their friends. No agent could want a grander chance. It's the talk of town wherever known. Quick sales made everywhere.

CLEMENS SCHROEDER COMPANY, Dept. 6,
220 Broadway,
New York City.

IVER JOHNSON

SAFETY AUTOMATIC REVOLVER



*The
Business
End*

of this firearm is as quiet as a country church yard until you *want* it to open up. It's always ready *when* you are, but it can't go off before, even if you

"Hammer the Hammer"

It may be knocked off your desk, fall off your dresser, slip from your hand as you draw it—but it can't shoot until *you* pull the trigger.

In proportion and design it's a work of art. Mechanically it is perfect. And in the experience of thousands and thousands of purchasers, it is the surest and most mechanically perfect revolver ever made.

Our Free Booklet "Shots"

tells more in detail why the Iver Johnson has outstripped competitors in public favor. Our handsome catalogue goes with it, showing details of construction.

Iver Johnson Safety Hammer Revolver

Richly nickelated, 22 cal. rim fire or 32 cal. centre fire, 3-in. bbl. or 38 cal. centre fire, 3½-in. bbl. (Extra length bbl. or blued finish at slight extra cost) **\$600**

Sold by Hardware and Sporting Goods dealers everywhere, or sent prepaid on receipt of price if dealer will not supply. Look for the owl's head on the grip and our name on the barrel.

IVER JOHNSON'S ARMS AND CYCLE WORKS, 140 River St., Fitchburg, Mass.

NEW YORK: 99 Chambers Street

SAN FRANCISCO: Phil. B. Bekeart Co., 717 Market St.

Makers of Iver Johnson Single Barrel Shotguns and Iver Johnson Truss Bridge Bicycles.

Iver Johnson Safety Hammerless Revolver

Richly nickelated, 32 cal. centre fire, 3-in. bbl. or 38 cal. centre fire, 3½-in. bbl. (Extra length bbl. or blued finish at slight extra cost) **\$700**

HAMBURG, GERMANY: Pickhuben 4

LONDON, ENGLAND: 13 Cullum St., E. C.



VOSE PIANOS



The VOSE UPRIGHT PIANO

is a remarkable example of the artistic in tone, combined with the beauty in casing. This piano is especially appreciated by those who desire to harmonize the furnishings of their parlors or music rooms.

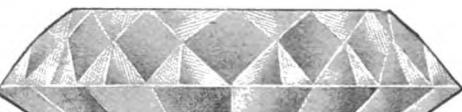
We Challenge Comparisons

During fifty-six years the Vose Piano has been purchased for use in over 60,000 homes and its popularity is attested by the continually increasing demand for home use.

We make a liberal allowance for old instruments and, if desired, offer liberal arrangements for deferred payments, and deliver piano at your home.

Send for catalogue

VOSE & SONS PIANO CO.
155 Boylston St., Boston, Mass.



DIAMONDS ON CREDIT

Terms: 20% Down, 10% a Month.

We never sell a diamond without giving the buyer a written certificate in which we guarantee the gem and agree to take it back any time at full price, in exchange for a larger stone.

Furthermore, if you can duplicate at your dealer's, for the same price, the diamond we sell you, return it, and we will refund your money.

We want our patrons to put the same confidence in us that they do in their bank, and we are doing all in our power to merit such a confidence.

Goods forwarded prepaid for examination.

Our illustrated catalogue is rich in diamond information. Write for the latest edition¹⁰.

J. M. LYON & CO.
71-73 Nassau St., New York.



**"IT'S ALL
IN THE
STEELS"**



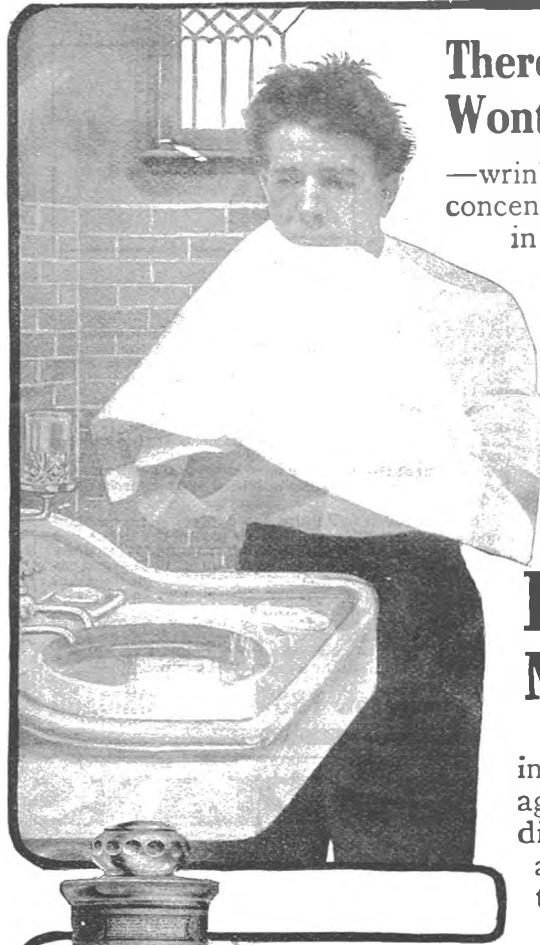
Would you wear a Shoulder Brace if you could find one that just suited you? Place your hands on some one's shoulders with the thumbs on the shoulder blades and press in. Notice how quickly it straightens the figure.

Gamble's Improved Shoulder Brace

is made with non-rustable steels that press in upon the shoulder blades exactly as the thumbs do, and it is the only brace that actually makes and keeps the figure straight and at the same time allows all possible freedom of action—such materials as elastic, webbing, etc., conform to the figure and will not give the desired support. The Gamble is a perfect shoulder brace and an excellent suspender. Has stood the test for 14 years.

Your dealer will sell you a Gamble Brace and guarantee satisfaction. He will refund the purchase price in full should you care to return the brace after wearing it one week. Or, we will fill your order direct, under same guarantee. Prices—for men and women, \$1.25; for boys and misses, \$1.00 prepaid. Special springs for extreme cases, 50c extra. Give snug (not tight) chest measure over vest.

The Gamble Shoulder Brace Co., 1069 Willard Avenue, Chicago, Ill.



There are Lots of Things that Wont "Come Out in the Wash"

—wrinkles, lines that come from long-concentrated thought, pore dirt that ends in facial blemishes. There's just one way to get rid of all these—massage with Pompeian Massage Cream.

You can do it at home or have your barber do it for you. Don't let him use a substitute. Anything that contains grease serves only to clog up the pores the more. Here's the "why": You rub

POMPEIAN Massage Cream

The Largest Selling Face Cream

into the pores and then rub it out again. It carries with it all the pore dirt, leaving the skin absolutely clean and with that healthy, athletic glow that all men desire.

Your wife or sister will be glad to have Pompeian Massage Cream in the house. Most women to-day recognize its value in maintaining a clean, clear, healthy skin. It contains no grease. 10,000 jars made and sold daily.

Sold by all first-class druggists. If your dealer does not keep it we will send a 50c. or \$1.00 jar of the cream, postpaid, to any part of the world, on receipt of price.

GENEROUS SAMPLE MAILED FREE

Our booklet on Facial Massage, sent free with sample, gives simple directions for massage at home. Your name on the coupon or a postal will bring it. Any man or woman who will follow its suggestions will have a face free of blemishes and with that look of health that all covet.

THE POMPEIAN MFG. COMPANY
31 Prospect Street, Cleveland, O.

Pompeian Massage Soap we believe to be the best toilet and bath soap on sale to-day. As surface cleanser it is wonderfully efficient—contains same properties as Pompeian Cream. 25c a cake; 60c a box of 3 cakes.



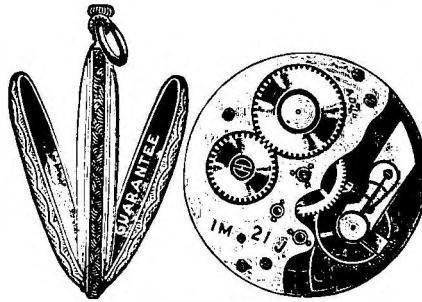
Pompeian
Mfg. Co.
31 Prospect St.
Cleveland, Ohio

Gentlemen:—

Please send, without cost to me, one copy of your book on facial massage and a liberal sample of Pompeian Massage Cream.

CUT OUT ALONG DOTTED LINE. FILL IN AND MAIL, OR SEND POSTAL TO-DAY
Name.....
Address.....

Panic In Watches



Genuine Evington \$5.45 Watch

WHEN the tight money panic struck the country last November, one of the world's biggest and best manufacturers of watches was put in a bad way for money. He needed money just as bad as you need air to breathe. He simply had to have it. The banks tightened up and called in their loans and wouldn't make any more. They wouldn't let him have money. He had just one way of getting it. That was to sell off at once, at any price, the great stock he had made up for the winter trade. These 10,000 watches were his only hope, and he sold them to us at a price that was almost like giving them away. But we gave him the money he had to have and we got the watches at our own figure, and that's why we can sell you a \$20 watch for only \$5.45. This is a genuine Evington watch, made to sell regularly in stores for \$20. We are not trying to exaggerate. We don't want to tell you the watch is a \$40 watch or a \$50 watch because it isn't, but it is a real \$20 Evington, and when we sell you such a watch for only \$5.45 that's the greatest riddle ever offered in watches in America. But we are satisfied with a small and quick profit.

This Evington watch which we will sell you for \$5.45 is an in. 21 jeweled, finely balanced and perfectly adjusted movement. It has specially selected jewels, dust band, patent regulator, enameled dial, jeweled compensation

balance. The case is a double hunting case, genuine gold, hand and handsomely engraved. Each watch is thoroughly tested, tested and regulated before leaving the factory, and both the case and movement are guaranteed for 20 years, and our guarantee accompanies each watch and is put in the front case of the watch.

These watches will certainly sell fast, so you'd better send in for yours at once. Clip out this advertisement and mail it to us today with your name, postoffice address and nearest express office. Tell us whether you want a lady's or a gent's watch we have large and small sizes in both, and we will send the watch to your express office at once.

When the watch arrives at the express office we want you to call and examine it before paying the agent one cent of money, and when you have examined it carefully and are positive as to its value, pay the agent \$5.45 and express charges, but if it does not satisfy, you need not accept it but return it to us at our expense and be under no obligations to us whatsoever.

Watch Chain Free.

We have a number of watch chains on hand and to the first 100 customers we will send, free, either a lady's longnett chain or a gent's vest chain.

NATIONAL CONSOLIDATED WATCH CO.

Dept. 750

CHICAGO

SAY, BOYS and GIRLS ZENO

Means Good Chewing Gum

It's on sale everywhere. Buy it. Save the wrappers from each stick. Send them to us and get valuable presents. Also

Money Prizes

\$25 CASH Each to the **five** sending in **The Largest** number of Zeno Wrappers before September 1, 1908.

\$15 CASH To the one sending in the **Second** largest number of Zeno Wrappers before September 1, 1908.

\$10 CASH To the one sending in the **Third** largest number of Zeno Wrappers before September 1, 1908.

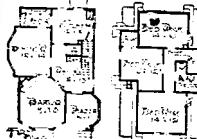
TEN: \$5 cash prizes for the ten next largest numbers.

You may send Zeno Gum Wrappers as often as you like for the regular presents, but if you want to try for one of the cash prizes send for entrance certificate and prospectus. **Cash Contest** will close September 1, 1908. No one not enrolled can be considered in awarding the cash prizes.

Write for BIG FREE list of presents.

ZENO MFG. CO., Dept. Q
150-160 W. Van Buren St., Chicago

200 PLANS



only 25¢ in silver
and 1¢ for postage

The new edition of "Modern Homes," containing 200 designs of practical homes, double houses, flats and apartments built in frame, stone, brick, cement, etc., costing from \$800 to \$20,000, showing views and floor plans and estimated cost of each house.

DAVERMAN'S BUNGALOWS

A new book of 68 designs of summer cottages, bungalows and low-cost houses from \$800 to \$9,000. Sent for 25¢ and 5¢ postage.



This house has been built over 2,000 times in all parts of the world for \$1,000 to \$2,200 complete.

Full Blue Print working plans, specifications and details for this house, without charge for \$10.

These books are the best bargain ever offered. "Modern Homes" alone equals any \$2 architectural book on the market today. Send for them now while the edition lasts.

OUR MONTHLY MAGAZINE \$1.00

Send for Art in Architecture, a magazine devoted to building and furnishing. Subscription \$1.00 per year.

J. H. DAVERMAN & SON, Architects
1215 Porter Block, Est. 1882, Grand Rapids, Mich.

REGALS

FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Oxford Time Again!

You'll wear Oxfords this Spring—if you care for style and comfort in your footwear. The best-dressed New Yorkers are wearing them right now.

Regal Oxfords never gape at the ankle or chafe the heel. They give you exactly that perfect fitting you always desire in low shoes—but rarely get, unless you wear Regals.

Semi-narrow toe, hand-shaped extension sole, blucher-cut uppers and Military heel—these are the principal features of the Burleigh model, and it has every bit of the "snap" of the newest 1908 Oxford styles. Regal materials and workmanship are the best you can buy—and there's a special Regal model for every requirement.

\$3.50
and
\$4.00

Custom
Specials,
\$5.00



BURLEIGH, \$4.00

Delivered prepaid, \$4.25

Style 4 FP3—As illustrated. Blucher Oxford.
Made of Black Wax Calf.

Style 4 FP5—Same model in Blucher Boot. Made
of Black King Calf.

SPRING and SUMMER STYLE BOOK
Illustrates the correct models for both **men**
and **women**. It's an acknowledged authority on styles. Handsome cover in colors.
Postpaid on request.

If you don't live near one of the Regal Stores or Agencies order from the Mail Order Department. If the shoes are not exactly as ordered we will cheerfully exchange or will refund money if desired.

REGAL SHOE COMPANY

Mail Order Department: 509 SUMMER STREET, Boston, Mass.

Mail Order Sub-Stations: Whitman, Mass. Box 905. San Francisco, Cal.
791 Market St.—New Store. London, Eng., 97 Cheapside. cor. Lawrence Lane, E. C.

**Bristles
You Can't.
Pull Out**



Ruberset bristles are held together in vulcanized rubber. You can't work them loose by rubbing them. You can't soak them loose by boiling them. You can't pull them out by force. Men with wiry beards use

RUBerset
TRADE MARK

Shaving Brushes

because they work in the lather without working out the bristles. Men with soft skins use them because of their caressing touch. You should use one not only for comfort but economy. It will cost you no more than an ordinary brush. Every brush guaranteed. The name appears on every brush.

At all dealers and barbers, in all styles and sizes, 25, 50, 75 cents to \$6.00. If not at your dealer's, send for booklet from which you may order by mail.

To the average man we commend the \$1.00 brush.

THE RUBerset BRUSH COMPANY, 53 Ferry Street, Newark, N. J.

**\$8,000 to \$10,000
YEARLY**



Make Money Out of Others' Fun

Pleasing the Public Pays Big Profits and owners of our famous Merry-Go-Rounds frequently make from \$8,000 to \$10,000 every year. They seat fifty-six people on galloping horses or in comfortable chariots and whirl away to the accompaniment of entrancing music. Bring in hundreds of dollars daily. It is a delightful, attractive, big paying, healthful business. Just the thing for the man who can't stand indoor work, or is not fit for heavy work.

Just the business for the man who has some money and wants to invest it to the best advantage. We make the finest appearing and easiest running Merry-Go-Rounds manufactured. They are simple in construction and require no special knowledge to operate. If you want to get into a money-making business, write today for catalogue and particulars.

HERSCHELL-SPIELMAN CO.
Park Amusement Outfitters 272 Sweeney St., N. Tonawanda, N.Y., U.S.A.

Vapo-Cresolene

(ESTABLISHED 1879.)

An Inhalation for
**Whooping-Cough, Croup,
Bronchitis, Coughs,
Diphtheria, Catarrh.**

CONFIDENCE can be placed in a remedy which for a quarter of a century has earned unqualified praise. Restful nights are assured at once.

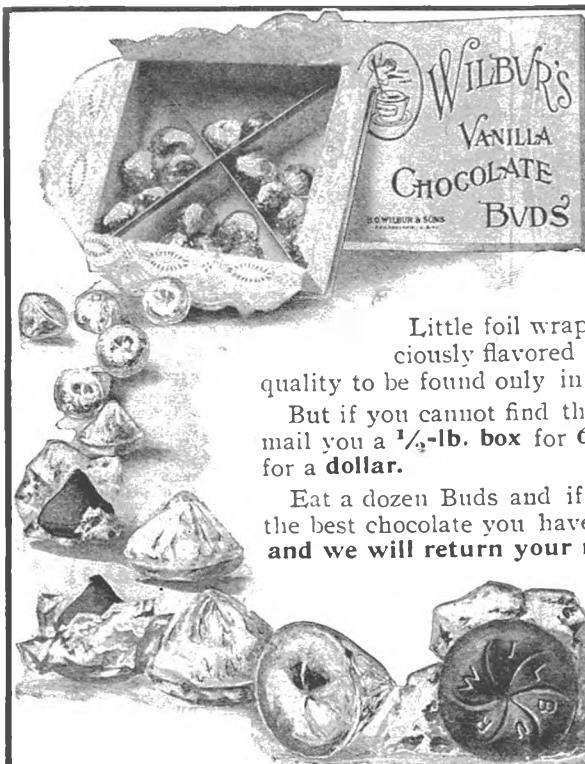
**Cresolene is a Boon to
Asthmatics.**

ALL DRUGGISTS
Send Postal for Descriptive Booklet.

Cresolene Antiseptic Throat Tablets for the irritated throat, of your druggist or from us. 10c. in stamps.

The Vapo-Cresolene Co.
180 Fulton St., N.Y.
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WILBUR'S CHOCOLATE BUDS

Imitated but never equalled.

Little foil wrapped forms of solid chocolate, deliciously flavored and possessing that smooth melting quality to be found only in the very highest class.

But if you cannot find the Buds on sale, we will mail you a $\frac{1}{4}$ -lb. box for 60 cents or one pound for a dollar.

Eat a dozen Buds and if you do not find them the best chocolate you have ever known write us and we will return your money.



Reg. in U. S. Pat. Off.

A sample box for your dealer's name and 30 cents in stamps, if you prefer; but only one box to the same address.

H. O. WILBUR & SONS
240 N. Third St. Philadelphia, Pa.

Wilbur's American Milk Chocolate

MENNEN'S

Borated
The Box that Lox
TOILET POWDER

Talcum

TRADE MARK

At Easter Tide

when custom decrees that men, and especially women, should look their best, the raw spring winds cause much damage to tender skins and complexions.

Mennen's Borated Talcum Toilet Powder

is then doubly necessary. It soothes and heals the skin, prevents Chapping, Chafing, Prickly Heat, Sunburn and all skin troubles of summer. After bathing and shaving it is delightful, and in the nursery indispensable.

For your protection the genuine is put up in non-refillable boxes—the "Box that Lox," with Mennen's face on top. Guaranteed under the Food and Drugs Act, June 30, 1906. Serial No. 1542. Sold everywhere, or by mail 25 cents. Sample free.

GERHARD MENNEN CO., Newark, N. J.

Try Mennen's Violet (Borated) Talcum Toilet Powder—it has the scent of fresh-cut Parma Violets.

STYLE NEATNESS COMFORT THE IMPROVED

BOSTON GARTER

The Name is stamped on every loop—Be sure it's there

THE *Velvet Grip* CUSHION BUTTON CLASP LIES FLAT TO THE LEG—NEVER SLIPS, TEARS, NOR UNFASTENS

WORN ALL OVER THE WORLD

Sample pair, Silk 50c., Cotton 25c.
Mailed on receipt of price.

GEORGE FROST CO., Makers
Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

INSIST ON HAVING THE GENUINE
REFUSE ALL SUBSTITUTES



The GREATEST "small" Comforts in traveling.

LITHOLIN WATERPROOFED LINEN COLLARS and CUFFS

They cut down baggage and expense, and keep one always looking neat with fine linen, without laundering. When soiled they wipe perfectly clean and white as new, with a damp cloth. Being linen they look it. Not celluloid or rubber. Never wilt, crack or fray. In all the latest styles.

Collars 25c.

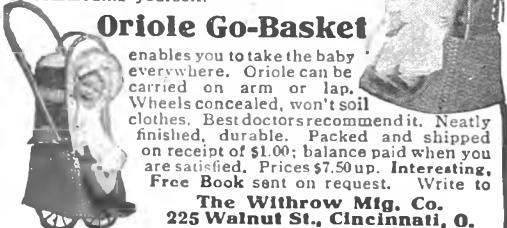
If not at your dealer's, send, giving styles, size, number wanted, with remittance, and we will mail, postpaid. Booklet of styles free on request.

THE FIBEROID CO., Dept. 6, 7 Waverly Place, New York.



Send Only \$1.00

and we'll ship you for examination this beautiful, handy Oriole Go-Basket—a combination Go-Cart, High-Chair, Jumper and Bassinet. You change instantly from one to the other without removing child or discommoding yourself.

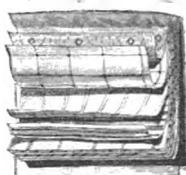


Oriole Go-Basket

enables you to take the baby everywhere. Oriole can be carried on arm or lap. Wheels concealed, won't soil clothes. Best doctors recommend it. Neatly finished, durable. Packed and shipped on receipt of \$1.00; balance paid when you are satisfied. Prices \$7.50 up. Interesting, Free Book sent on request. Write to

The Withrow Mfg. Co.
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Seasonable Shirts that Stand by their color.



3 SHIRTS
\$ 5.00

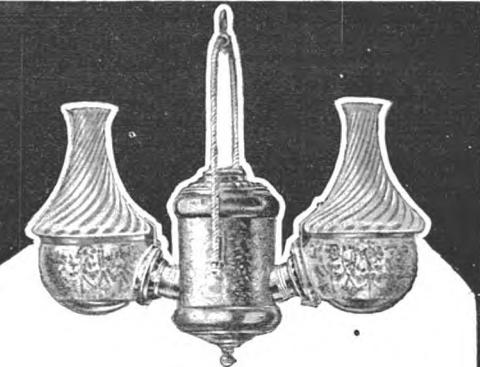
3 SHIRTS FOR \$5.00 Express Made to Your Measure

It means for you a new standard of shirt fit and shirt comfort, to say nothing of a saving in price. I let you choose materials from over 60 patterns of the latest and most fashionable designs in shirting.

Send for Free Samples

and I will send also a measurement blank and full directions for ordering. I make only to individual order. My shirts fit—at the neck, across the shoulders, at the wrists—everywhere. I will take them back if you are not satisfied. Prompt delivery. Higher priced fabrics, too. Write for free samples now.

CLARENCE E. HEAD · Master of Shirts · 3RD ST., ITHACA, N. Y.



"Saved 20 Times Its Cost"

"I am writing this," says E. C. Parmelee, Highlands, N. J., "by the light of one of your Angle Lamps. In fact, I would not think of using any other light. They are THE lamps. Everyone who has seen me is impressed with them. Why, I have saved at least 20 times their cost in oil, burners, chimneys and 'cuss' words."

The Angle Lamp is not an improvement on the old style lamp, but an entirely new principle of oil lighting which has made common kerosene (or coal oil) the most satisfactory of all lighting methods. Safer and more reliable than gasoline or acetylene, yet as convenient to operate as gas or electricity.

The 1908 Improved Angle Lamp

is lighted and extinguished like gas. May be turned high or low without odor. No smoke, no danger. Filled while lighted and without moving. Requires filling but once or twice a week. It floods a room with its beautiful, soft, mellow light that has no equal. WRITE FOR OUR CATALOG "26" and our proposition for a

30 Days' Free Trial

Just write for our free catalog "26" fully describing The Angle Lamp and listing 32 varieties from \$2.00 up. And we'll send you our 32 page book free, with the trial proposition. Lighting is an important matter, Reader, this is a case where the best is by far the cheapest; we suggest that you "do it now."

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Best Birds, Best Eggs, Lowest Prices

Allied varieties pure-bred Chickens, Ducks, Geese and Turkeys. Largest Poultry Farm in the world. Fowls Northern-raised, healthy and vigorous. Fowls, Eggs and Incubators at lowest prices. Send for our big 132-page Look-in "Poultry For Profit," full of pictures. It tells you how to raise poultry and run Incubators successfully. Send 4 cents for the book, no cover postage.

J. W. MILLER COMPANY, Box 927, FREEPORT, ILL.

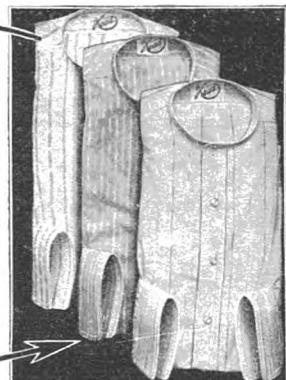
Geisha Diamonds

THE LATEST SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY

Bright, sparkling, beautiful. For brilliancy, they equal the genuine, standing all test and puzzle experts. One twentieth the expense. Sent free with privilege of examination. For particulars, prices, etc., address

THE R. GREGG MFG. & IMP. CO.

Dept. 15, 52-58 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.



The First Real Safety Revolver

THIS revolver is not like the ordinary "Safety Revolvers"—"made safe" by devices added on in the hope of securing safety. It is built safe. Its basic construction (patented and exclusive with this revolver) absolutely guarantees safety.

HERE are three distinct movements of the hammer: First, the cock with finger or trigger (same as a double action revolver); second, the discharge, straight and hard to the firing pin (same as a double action); and third and last, the rise of the hammer to a position of safety above the firing pin, not in line with it as is the case with every other revolver. This last is an invention no other revolver has or can have, because it is patented; and it insures for the HOPKINS & ALLEN an absolute safety no other arm has ever possessed or can possess.



A popular type of the "Safety Police"—for pocket or house use.
SENT DIRECT FROM FACTORY AT ABOVE PRICE
by registered mail, post-paid, if your dealer does not keep it.

OUR CATALOG AND GUN GUIDE FOR 1908 SENT FREE. Send for this book. It not only gives a complete description of all "Safety Police" revolvers, but also gives much useful information about firearms and the care of them. Illustrates and describes our entire line of revolvers, rifles and shotguns.

THE HOPKINS & ALLEN ARMS CO., - 10 Chestnut Street, Norwich, Conn.

**THE
HOPKINS
& ALLEN
Triple Action
"SAFETY
POLICE"**

32 or 38 Cal.
4 in. barrel, \$8.00
5 in. " 8.50
6 in. " 9.00
Blued Finish, 50c Extra

Gould

**MARTIN'S
KINGFISHER**
Silk Fish Lines

Represent the highest art, the largest variety, the smoothest running and the best wearing lines in the world. They are unsurpassed in quality, strength or finish. Regardless of what anyone tells you, remember that if a line is not labeled with the "KINGFISHER" bird or the word "KINGFISHER," it is not genuine. Look for the trade mark when you buy fish lines. It is your protection and our unqualified guarantee that the line is absolutely perfect.

...Brook Trout
...Lake Trout
...Black Bass
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...Grayling
...Pike
...Pickerel
...Mascalonge
...Bait Casting
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Mark X in the coupon opposite your favorite fishing, and we will send you FREE SAMPLES of the best lines known (selected by experts) for that kind of fishing.

E. J. MARTIN'S SONS
10 Kingfisher St. ROCKVILLE, CONN.

"Bristol"
TRADE MARK REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.
Steel Fishing Rods

For Big fish—pickerel, salmon, tarpon, muscalonge; for gamy smaller fish—trout, grayling, pike, bass; for fly casting, bait casting, trolling, or still fishing, no other rod equals the "BRISTOL." 20 years of deserved international reputation, backed by a **three-year guarantee**, attached to each rod. A complete variety of Rods exactly suited to each kind of fishing. The supreme standard in lightness, pliancy, resiliency, strength, reliability. Never ask merely for a steel fishing rod—always ask for "BRISTOL" Rods by name. Look for the word "BRISTOL" on the handle. Write us if offered an imitation.

Beautiful illustrated catalogue mailed free.

The Horton Mfg. Co.,
45 Horton Street,
BRISTOL,
CONN.

A SURE THING IN CIGARS

5 Inches
Full Weight

\$5 Per 100
Delivered

DON'T BOTHER SENDING CASH

Write to us on your business letter-head, or enclose your business card, and we will send you 100 Cuban Smoker Cigars. Try them at our expense.

We were the first manufacturer in America to eliuate the expenses and profits of salesmen, jobbers and dealers by selling cigars to discriminating smokers directly from our factory at strictly wholesale prices. We are today the largest manufacturing mail-order cigar dealers in the world and the only company selling cigars entirely on their merits directly to the smoker, *without advance payment*. This means a saving to you of their profits, and our Free Trial method of filling every order guarantees the maintenance of quality, workmanship and uniformity.

FREE TRIAL OFFER

All you need do is to write us on your business letter-head, or enclose your business card, and we will send you a box of 100 Cuban Smoker cigars **ON TRIAL**. If you like them send us \$5.00, but if for any reason you do not care for them, return the balance at our expense and no charge will be made for the few smoked. *We pay expressage both ways.*

Our complete line of over 36 styles is sold to business men, professional men and clubs everywhere. We make cigars as high as 15c. each, which compare favorably with those sold at 25c. straight, in the usual retail way. As a means of introduction, send today for a box of Cuban Smoker cigars **ON TRIAL**—just to **CONVINCE** yourself. *No advance payment, no risk if you don't like them.*

LA RECLAMA CUBAN FACTORY, 112 Lenox Avenue, NEW YORK CITY

EMBERT H. RIDGEWAY, Pres.

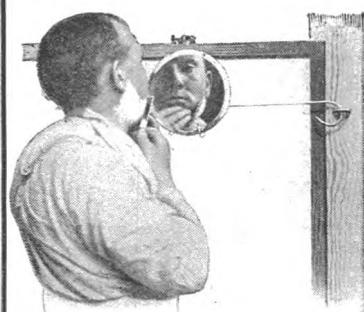
OUR CUBAN SMOKER

is made by the most expert workmen from the best grade of imported tobaccos, and contains a long, clean, carefully selected Havana filler, which is wrapped with a fine grade of silky Sumatra. It is equal to the best cigar sold over retail counters at 10c., and every test to which you can subject it will only emphasize its unapproachable superiority.

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5lb Sealed Boxes Only! • Best Sugar for Tea and Coffee! • By Grocers Everywhere!



A Necessity! Not a Luxury BOUCHER ADJUSTABLE SHAVING GLASS

Every man should have one.

It makes shaving safe and comfortable. It may be applied to any window, or elsewhere to obtain a strong light, and instantly adjusted to any angle. It may be carried safely in a satchel.

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32

Name _____

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The New One—The Best One

a safety razor that is correct in principle—one that shaves with the Freehand Shaving Stroke.

Yale Safety Razor Set

comprises a Yale Safety Razor, a Yale Patent Stropper, and a set of keen, double-edged Yale Blades, all conveniently packed in a handsome, velvet lined case.

The Yale Safety Razor has but two parts, a handsome triple silver plated holder, and a keen, finely tempered, rigid, double edged blade. It is adjusted in a second and quickly cleaned. The simplest, cleanest, most convenient and economical safety razor ever invented.

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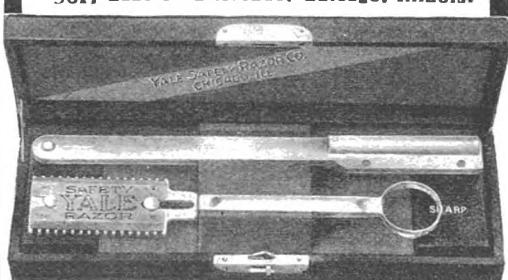
and if he cannot supply you, send us \$3.50, the regular price, and we will send you a Yale Safety Razor Set prepaid, on thirty days' trial. After thirty days' use if you are not perfectly satisfied, and don't honestly think the Yale is the best razor you ever used, send it back, and we will refund your money without asking a single question.

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and let us send you free, our booklet about the Yale Safety Razor Set, and full particulars regarding our "Special Thirty Days' Free Trial" Offer.

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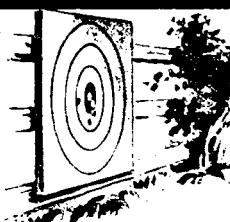
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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT
Munsey's Magazine = 175 Fifth Avenue, New York City



Advantages of New

There is no sport that inspires one with more confidence, coolness and self-reliance than shooting. To be a good shot is a rare accomplishment. But it is within the province of every man and woman.

The New Target Grip herewith illustrated in connection with the H & R Revolver fits the hand naturally — insures a secure hold — prevents slipping and twisting — affording a steady aim and greater accuracy in shooting.

The FIRST combination of a medium priced revolver with a perfect full grip.

H & R REVOLVERS

THE ALL-WAYS A NEW RAZOR

The only razor ever made to turn to any angle required. The man who cannot shave with each hand will especially appreciate this invention.

Made for long, as well as satisfactory service. The blades are hollow-ground Sheffield Steel. Every metal part is triple-plated so it cannot corrode.

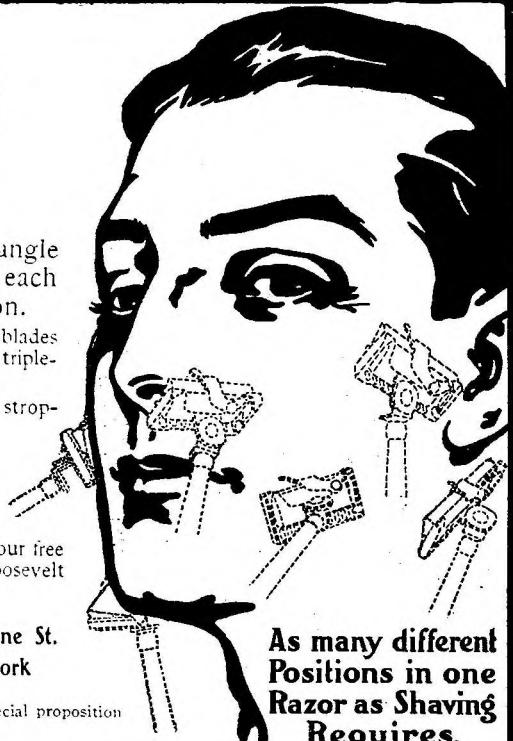
There is an ebony shaving handle and a long nickelized stroping handle. Three blades in each set.

Our guarantee of "Money Back" means you don't have to even explain why, in case a trial does not satisfy you that the **ALL-WAYS** is the razor you want.

Price complete in velvet-lined Morocco leather case with your name in gold on the box **\$6.00**. Write for our free book on "Shaving, from Alexander the Great to Roosevelt the Strenuous."

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New York

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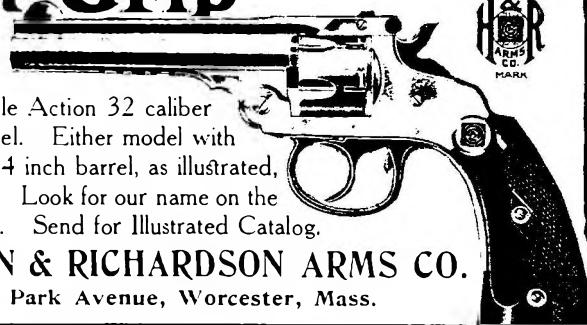
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22 caliber 7 shot, or 32 caliber 5 shot.

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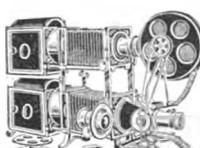
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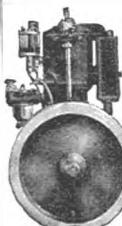
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A SHAVING CREAM IN STICK FORM

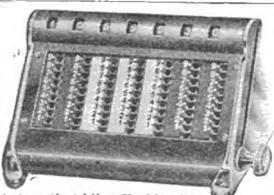
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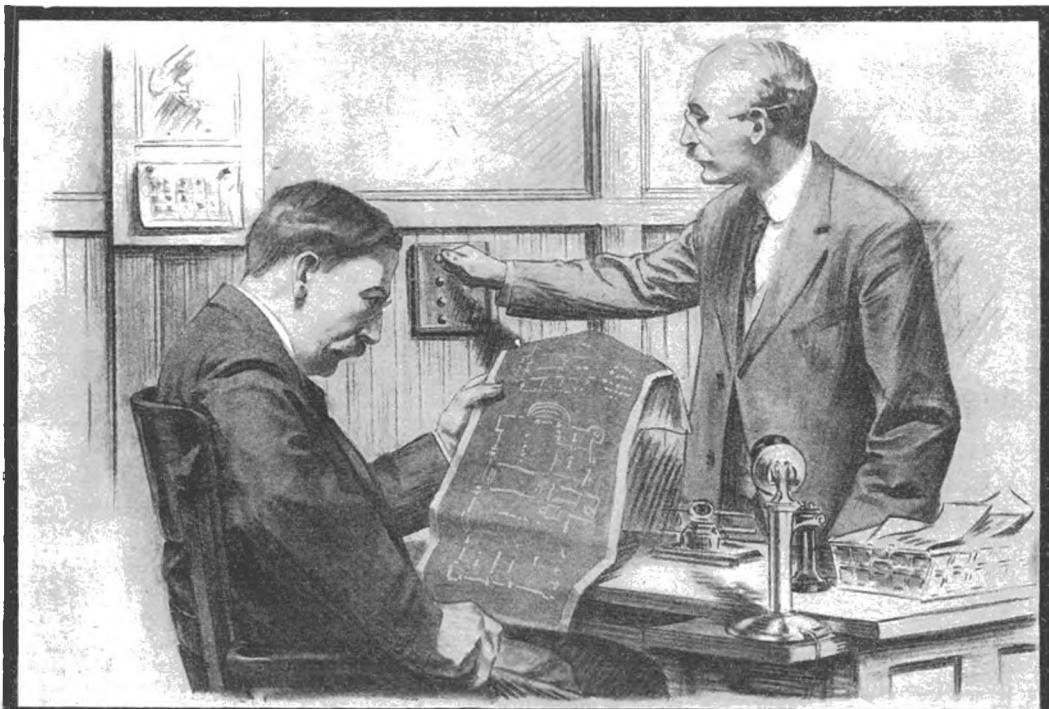


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61—Engraved Belcher Ring	42.50
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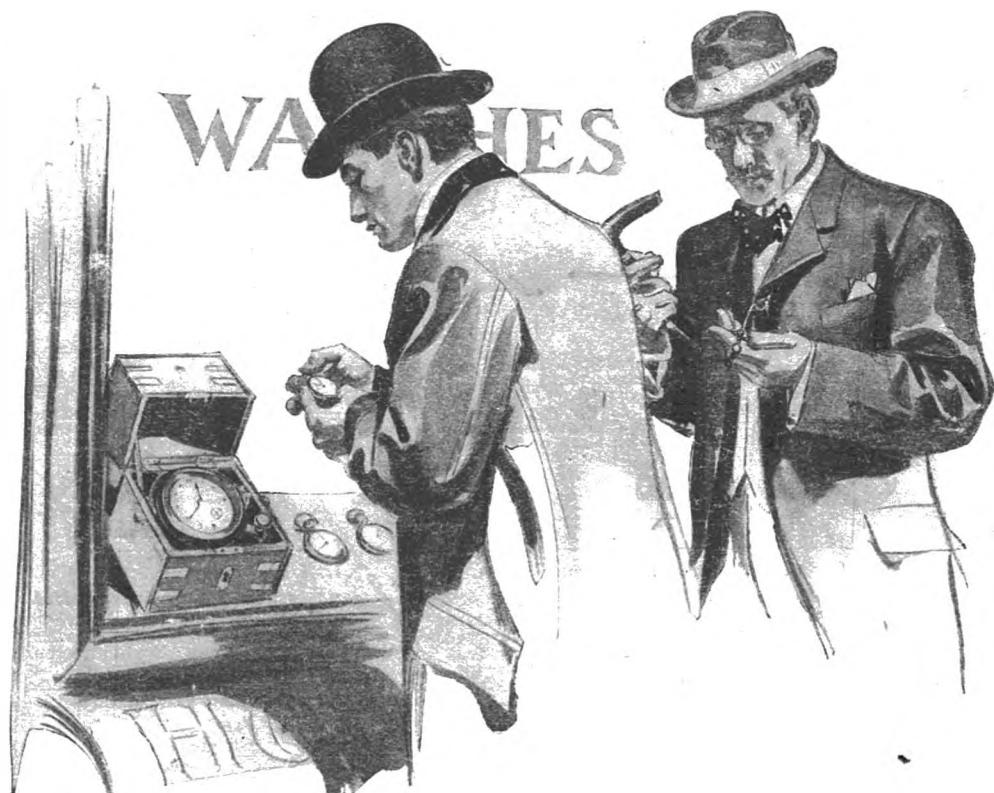
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