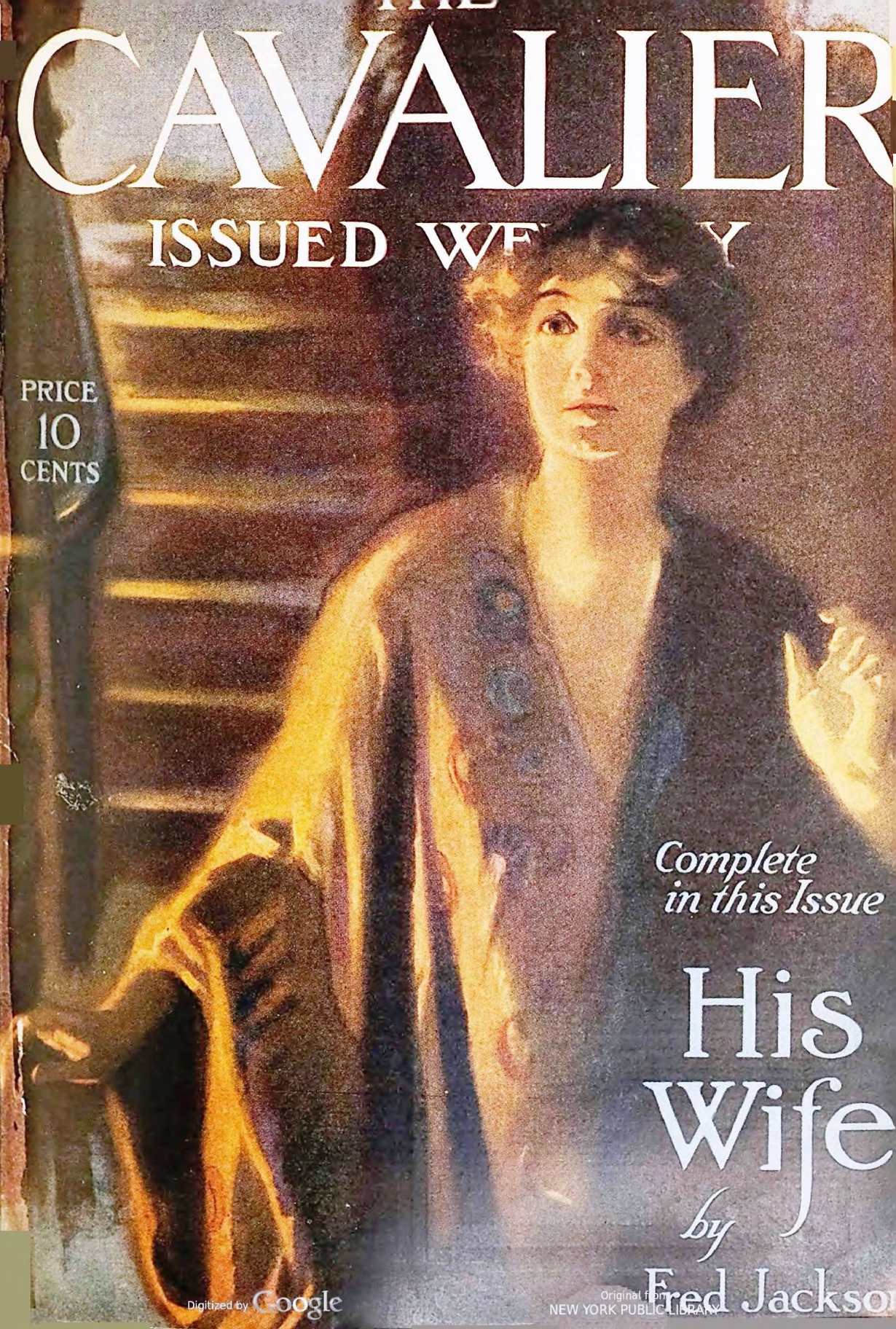

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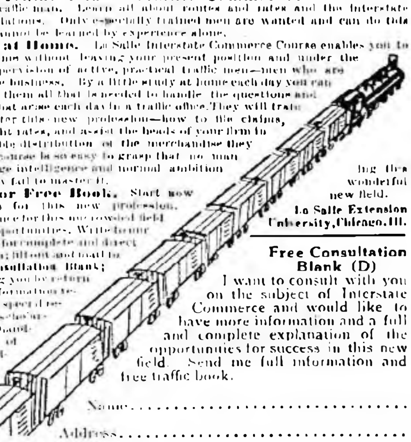

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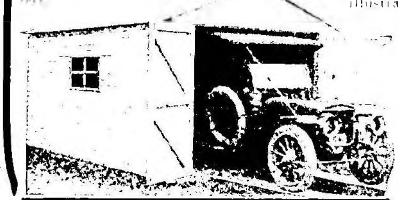

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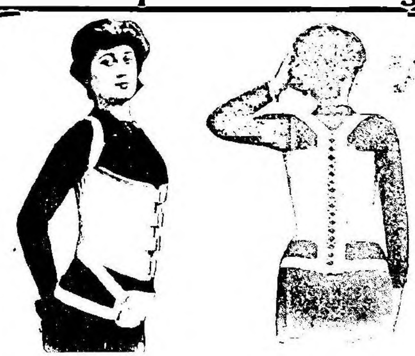

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THE CAVALIER

Vol. XXVI CONTENTS FOR MARCH 1 No. 1

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

POETRY

ISSUED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
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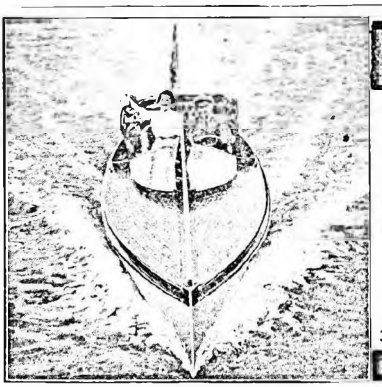

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THE CAVALIER

MARCH 1, 1913

Vol. XXVI No. 1

HIS WIFE

A NOVELETTE

BY FRED JACKSON

Author of "The Masked Bride," "Glorious Gloria," "The Serpent," "Lizette," "The Undertow," "Galatea the Second," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Husband.

MAYBURY, with Conquest at his heels, made a last careful tour of the rooms. So far as the eye could make certain, everything seemed in perfect order—in indisputable and admirable taste. It was easily apparent that no effort had been spared, and that the price had not been counted.

In the most minute details this wonderful house — that Maybury had planned for his bride—was complete. And yet, as he went from room to room, appraising, seeking flaws, though he found none, he was conscious of a vague uneasiness—a presentiment that he tried to tell himself was due to his natural nervousness. The occasion was so very irregular.

"Hadn't we better be starting?" asked Conquest, snapping the lid of his old-fashioned watch. "It is eleven now."

"Yes," answered Maybury. "I suppose so. We can usually get to the station in four minutes in the car; but something might happen, and we can wait there as well as here."

"Quite so," said Conquest, nodding. "And there's nothing more to do here. There's nothing more mortal hands could do."

"If only she is pleased," sighed Maybury. "If I only knew her more intimately—if I knew her little likes and dislikes, her preferences, her daydreams! Her letters have grown more and more formal and reserved as the years passed. Once she used to pour out her whole little heart and soul in funny, scrawling characteristic hieroglyphics. But that was when she was very, very young."

"She's quite a young lady now, you'll find," said Conquest, smiling.

"It seems impossible," sighed Maybury. "I remember her as a child of twelve. That was the last time I saw her — when she was twelve — all legs and arms and huge, dark eyes; and a

tangle of brown-gold hair that was astoundingly lovely even then."

"It is still astoundingly lovely," admitted the older man, nodding. "Many a heart it's caught in its meshes, I'll be bound."

They passed down the broad stairway, crossed the hall, and were put into their top-coats by the footman. The motor was already waiting in the driveway outside. Conquest donned a black hat that fitted snugly on his white hair. Maybury chose a cap that matched his great-coat, and took his stick.

Conquest, eying him thoughtfully, approved, tried to picture Mrs. Maybury's delight in this great bulk of a man — six foot and more of sturdy strength—won at some pains from the wilds that he had penetrated. His blue eyes and fair hair went oddly with the tanned skin. But this was not the only reason one's glance rested upon him, once it had found him.

Often Conquest had parried her questions concerning this man. He had told her just enough to excite her curiosity—to hold her interest fast—not enough to occasion impossible daydreams and so pave the way to disappointment. But he awaited their meeting with little less impatience than Maybury himself.

They rode the short way to the station in silence. Conquest was thinking of a night, nine years back — the strangest adventure of his life. Of what Maybury thought it would have been impossible to say—perhaps of the very same adventure, for, after all, it concerned him more closely than the old lawyer.

When the car backed up beside the station platform and halted there both men started and began to grow restless, although the train was not due for several minutes. In the end, Maybury, unable to endure the confinement of the big limousine, stepped out and began to stride up and down the long platform. It was bitter cold and snowing slightly, but the icy wind whirled the white heaven-dust wildly about.

They were the only ones who met the eleven-eight. There were many trains from town during the day, and Bradside was not so very thickly populated. In weather like this the later trains were more popular. So it happened that when the train finally pulled in and remained for a short space, panting before the little red-brick station, the one woman who descended was almost conspicuous.

Maybury realized at a glance that it was not his wife, for this woman was short, stout, and obviously "of years." The heavy black veil and stuffy fur coat she wore did not conceal the fact. His heart sank. He was overcome with disappointment — with dread of going through another period of anxiety and suspense — with fear that something had occurred. Then he recognized Sarah.

At the same instant she recognized him, dropped her bag, and advanced upon him, curtsying.

"Mr. Mayb'ry, sir," she said, and her voice quavered with emotion.

"How do you do, Sarah? Is Mrs. Maybury not with you?"

"No, sir. Mrs. Mayb'ry stopped in town for the day, sir—with Miss Vandelear. She is coming by the afternoon train, sir—the five-twenty-three."

He said nothing for an instant. Sarah recovered her bag. The footman was descending — was holding open the door of the car — and Conquest was peering curiously out.

"Get in, Sarah," said Maybury.

She obeyed, taking the seat in front and greeting the lawyer respectfully. Maybury stepped in after her.

"Where *is* Mrs. Maybury?" asked Conquest.

"Stopped in town for the day," said Maybury gravely.

"With Miss Vandelear, sir," said Sarah.

Conquest nodded. "I see. Miss Vandelear," he explained to Maybury, "shared her suite at the seminary. They have been close friends through the school year."

Maybury nodded his thanks for the information.

"I suppose she was tired and wanted to rest up before meeting you," ventured Conquest then.

"Yes, sir," said Sarah. "And she wanted to freshen a bit, sir. And she had appointments at the milliner's."

"Yes, of course," agreed Maybury.

A little silence fell.

"You are looking splendid, sir, if I may make so bold," said Sarah. "Little older than when you went away, sir."

Maybury smiled.

"I feel a lot older, Sarah," he said. "I'm thirty-two, past—if you please."

"I'm fifty—past," said Sarah. And then she shook her head and sighed. "Nine years since the mistress went," she added; "it don't seem possible."

Neither man answered. Conquest nodded. Maybury looked out of the window. His face was expressionless.

"I remember the night like it was a week past," said Sarah. "The dreadful noise that woke me; and Miss Andrea in her night-dress, wrapped in a blanket like an Indian, with her hair straggling round, and the doctors and the dreadful smells of medicines; and Master Richard, breathing so hard and calling for you, sir, and begging me to hurry, and his eyes so pleading and wild. And the poor mistress—"

"Please — please!" broke in Maybury rather hoarsely.

It was still too vivid in his mind—the memory of that awful night!

Sarah was silent an instant, wiping her eyes.

"It brings things back so, sir—seeing you," she said. "You'll find Miss Andrea—Mrs. Maybury, sir—begging pardon — changed, sir. Nine years makes a difference in one so young, sir."

"Yes," said Maybury more kindly. "I expect to find her a young lady, Sarah. She was nineteen in June, if I remember."

As though he could possibly forget it.

"Nineteen it was, sir," said Sarah. "The wonderful necklace you sent from Egypt pleased her mightily."

"Quite so," said he.

The car halted before the house. The footman on the box stepped down and opened the door of the limousine, and at the same instant the door of the house flew open. Maybury's disappointment, forgotten as they talked, surged back upon him. Six more hours to wait!

And then he smiled, remembering the long years he had waited. Ranged alongside of them six hours seemed of little moment.

"You have breakfasted?" he asked Sarah.

"Yes, sir."

"Perhaps you will like to change your clothes, then, and unpack Mrs. Maybury's trunks? They arrived yesterday. Miller will show you."

"Thank you, sir," said Sarah, and nodded to Miller, the second-man.

"I shall be at hand if you want anything," added Maybury. And, turning to Miller, he added: "Tell Bagby not to hold breakfast any longer. Mrs. Maybury is not to arrive until five-twenty-three. For to-night, at least, dinner at six-thirty."

Miller and Sarah withdrew. Maybury divested himself of his coat and cap and gloves.

"I think I shall go on home," said Conquest. "If I can, I'll drop in again to-night."

"Have a little drink first?" suggested Maybury.

Thanks."

He followed his host into the library, from where Maybury rang for what he wanted. There was a roaring log-fire in the open hearth.

"She is not so impatient to see me as I am to see her evidently," said Maybury. "The years have seemed centuries to me, no matter how I spent them. India, Japan, Egypt, South America—none of them could interest me enough to drive out the thought of her. Perhaps the fact that she was so

young, and that she was dependent on me, and that I had given her my name, appealed to my imagination. I could hardly resign myself to the years of waiting I thought best."

"It is quite natural," ventured Conquest, "that she should want to appear at the best possible advantage. First impressions mean a lot, and the meeting with you probably assumes vast importance in her eyes."

"I suppose so, naturally."

"And, after the long train-ride, no wonder she wanted to rest and freshen up before coming on."

"I suppose it was natural. But I am so horribly impatient."

The butler brought Conquest's brandy and soda and Maybury's sherry.

"To Mrs. Maybury!" said Conquest, toasting.

Maybury's eyes lighted, and he nodded as he drank. Then, flushing slightly, he cast the empty glass into the grate, where it splintered and disappeared in the white ash.

"That will demonstrate to you," said he, "how I have thought of her all these years—in what regard I have held her. There was a custom, long ago, to splinter the glasses after a toast to the queen, so that toasts to no less lovely and esteemed lady should be drunk from the same tumbler."

Conquest smiled. "You've idealized her. The situation did appeal to your imagination."

"She looked — I can't describe to you how she looked—at Dickie's bedside in her nightgown, with a blanket over it so that she might not catch cold, and her little, white bare feet in slippers much too big for her, and her big eyes swimming with tears of sympathy and pain for Dickie; and her mouth quivering, and that astoundingly lovely hair in a tangle about her thin face! It was not because Dickie was dying that the men who carried him in tore off their hats. It was the sight of her!"

"I remember," said Conquest.

"Not as I remember, I dare say! I was twenty-two then, Conquest. I led the life of a boy of twenty-two. I was no different from any other. I was just coming into man's estates, trying my strength. The taste of life was like wine to me. The very night Dickie ran into that wall I'd been out with some of my chums, raising the dust. The very night. When they phoned they'd the devil of a time getting me. Poor old Dickie thought he'd never live to see me. But I came in in time and rushed to his place. And she was there by the side of his bed, as I told you. I think if heaven were to open before my eyes, and I should see the angels through, I could not feel what I felt at the sight of that child. She was mine then."

Conquest nodded.

"From that night," said Maybury. "The memory of her has kept me true to her. I've kept my oaths. Sometimes it was very hard, for I'm a man with a man's blood in me—a man's desires. And I was lonely. But I wanted to save all I have to give for her! To the world she was my wife only in name. She was nine years old! In my heart and soul she was my wife, too. I made good my promise to Dickie to love and cherish her and take care of her."

He threw up his head proudly.

"If he had not known you through and through—if he had not been sure you would — he would not have entrusted her to you," said Conquest. "It was a wild scheme—a last resort—an extremity. It was an unheard-of thing to do, this marrying of a child to a grown man. But he trusted you."

Maybury paced the floor.

"He had no one else with whom he could leave her. At first the thought paralyzed me. And then I looked at her and into Dick's eyes, and I agreed. The thought of her drifting about this rotten world alone was as terrible to me as it was to him."

"So you sold ten years of your life."

"Ten years?"

Conquest nodded.

"Why ten years?"

"Because she's grown now. If there's any other woman you would approach if you were free, she can be released—married to some one else."

"What!" gasped Maybury. "Impossible. I've—I've never thought of another woman. I shall never think of any other! The very idea seems sort of sacrilegious. You've no idea what a grip this child has upon my heart, my mind, my imagination."

"The romance of it appeals to you—the fact that you are married to, you might say, a woman you have never seen and do not know. For certainly as a woman she is a stranger to you. I'll wager you would pass her on the street unrecognized."

"Has she changed so much, then?"

"Naturally a girl of nineteen is unlike an undeveloped, rather elflike miss of nine."

"Still," said Maybury, "I should know her. Her big, dark eyes would be the same. And you say her hair is still that wonderful brown-gold!"

"I wonder," mused Conquest, "if she will nurture this feeling you have for her, or if she will annihilate it. It seems too remarkable an affection to exist in such a workaday world as this. And yet, knowing her—"

"Well?" asked Maybury impatiently.

"I wonder," said Conquest.

CHAPTER II.

Her Confession.

MRS. MAYBURY arrived on the five-twenty-three.

Maybury, standing beside the limousine at the station's edge, recognized her instantly, and went forward to meet her with hands outstretched, to become aware that she was not alone. She did not offer him her lips.

Instead, her gloved hand lay for an instant in his, and her dark eyes swept over him, and then she presented Mr. Whitney Vandelear and Miss Vandelear. Maybury was speechless with disappointment. He had hoped to have her to himself at last. But he hid this from her and her guests. And on the way to the house he discoursed pleasantly and politely of—he never could remember what. It was enough that he discoursed.

He was conscious only of her undreamed-of loveliness. There was no hint of the elflike child in this slender, lithe, rounded girl-woman, unless it was that the same questioning look was in the dark eyes, the same golden glint in the brown hair. Her skin was quite wonderful, soft and clear, blending ivory and cream and warm rose.

Her mouth was destined to tempt many men beyond endurance. Her nose was short and straight; her brows were delicately arched; her lashes were thick and darker than her hair, and they curled upward at the edges. She was in black, save for a white cluster of aigrets in her hat and a huge bunch of violets on her muff.

Miss Vandelear was red-haired, with the greenish-blue eyes that sometimes go with it, and very white skin. Her brother was dark, but he had the same greenish eyes. These things, however, he did not observe until afterward. During that long four minutes from the station he gazed only at Andrea, and she was busily appraising him. She talked little. It was Vandelear and Miss Vandelear who helped him keep the conversation going.

Arrived at the house, he explained that he had ordered early dinner in their honor, and that less than an hour was at their disposal if they cared to rest or change. Miss Vandelear and her brother admitted that they would like to go to their rooms. And so presently Maybury and his wife found themselves alone together in the library.

She had thrown back her furs, and had disclosed underneath a soft silk blouse peeping through the gap in her

coat. The long frills of lace now fell over her rosy-tipped fingers, from which she had drawn her gloves.

"It seems incredible," he said a little huskily, "that this is really you, and that I have got you at last in my house. I can't tell you how long my years of exile have seemed!"

"You have changed very little," said she. "And yet very much."

"And you have blossomed," said Maybury.

She flushed. He stood with his back to the roaring fire and smiled down at her a little wonderingly.

"I suppose," said he, "they haven't let you grow up ignorant of the fact that you are very, very beautiful?"

"I have been told so," she admitted sweetly, a glint of laughter in her eyes.

He sighed.

"The hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life," he said, "was to stay away from you. I used to think of your growing up, with no one to pet you and spoil you. And twice it was too much. I started for Washington, once from Australia, the second time from Peru, where I found you that beaten-gold chain. Each time I remembered that it would be taking an advantage, would be doing you a great wrong, to be near you, and so I went back to my loneliness."

There was the brightness of tears in her eyes. The faint fragrance of her violets drifted through the room.

"I counted the days," said he. "I will show you my diary some day. Each page keeps track of the hours that must pass until we were together again. Did you think of me at all, I wonder?"

"You know that I did," said she. "Could I forget you, and the thing that you have done for me? Do you imagine that I don't know what a wonderful thing you have done, and that I am not grateful?"

"I don't want gratitude," he said slowly.

"But that cannot alter what I feel."

He looked down at her, and suddenly advanced, drawing a stool close to the big chair in which she sat. She sank back the veriest trifle. He crimsoned.

"Are you afraid of me?" he asked gently, wide-eyed.

"N-no," said Mrs. Maybury.

"But you drew back?"

She was silent. He sprang to his feet abruptly.

"Andrea," he cried, "is that why you brought your friends with you? Because you feared to trust yourself alone with me?"

"No," she said quietly. "That is not why. There is another reason. I —may I go to my room and change before we talk of it? I hate suits like this in the house. I want a softer gown. And after dinner we shall talk, just you and I. Adelaide and Whitney shall amuse themselves."

She rose.

He said slowly: "It would hurt me more than I can say if you were to fear me—if there could be anything but absolute faith and trust in your feeling for me!"

"There could be only that," she said. "Have I not had ample proof of your generosity?"

"Thank you," said he.

She caught up her muff and turned to him sweetly.

"Will you show me the way?"

He nodded, and, with a little wistful glance at her, slipped his arm through hers. She clung to him.

"When you were a child," he said, "you were fond of me. Have you forgotten, Andrea?"

"No," said she. "I remember."

"And the fondness has not gone?"

"No; it has not gone."

He drew a great breath, and they advanced into the wide hallway. The servant, kneeling at the hearth replenishing the fire, looked after them and chuckled. They began to mount the steps.

"I like your house," said Andrea.

"Our house," said he. And then, as her color deepened: "I have

planned it for you. Conquest helped me. He knew things about your likes and dislikes that I did not know. You may believe that hurt me and made me horribly jealous."

"Of Mr. Conquest?"

He nodded emphatically.

"Of any one! Here is your suite."

He threw open the door. A boudoir was revealed, done in pale lavender. Even the woodwork was the same color—the furniture, too, upholstered in pink-lavender brocade through which ran a thread of gold. The pastels on the walls—Japanese pastels they were, set into panels—were edged with a tiny gold beading.

Through a swaying brocade portière, her bedroom, in white and lavender and gilt could be seen. Soft Oriental silken stuffs adorned the dressing-table, the windows, the bed-canopy; there were also gold toilet things set with amethysts. Then a bath, all in white tile.

She turned and looked up at him.

"You have arranged all this for me?" she asked in an uncertain voice.

He nodded.

She burst into tears.

He was taken so completely by surprise that for a moment he could only gaze down on her bewildered, as she stood with her face hidden in one curved arm. Then he caught her heaving shoulders gently.

"Why, Andrea!" he whispered. "What's the trouble, sweetheart?"

She made no answer.

"What's hurting you?" he repeated. "What's gone wrong?"

"You're so—so good to me," said Andrea. "And I'm a little beast."

"What?" he cried, astonished.

"Please go away," said Andrea.

"But I can't let you cry," he said. "I can't have you crying the very first day in your new home!"

"I'll stop," said Andrea.

At that very instant Sarah opened the door. She stopped, drew back at the sight of Maybury and Andrea there together, but he bade her come in with a little wave of his hand, and then went quietly out, leaving Andrea in her care.

Maybury hurriedly changed for dinner things, but he found the Vandelears down before him—Miss Vandelear in soft, clinging draperies of sapphire blue, with sapphires in her ears and on her fingers and in a thick chain about her white throat.

She had the porcelain whiteness that only occurs with auburn hair, and Maybury suspected that she owed the darkness of her brows and the cherry redness of her lips to art, but the effect was worth striving for. She looked very handsome.

Vandelear, too, was distinguished-looking in his evening things. The upper part of his face, anyway, was more or less attractive, and the weakness of his mouth was skilfully hidden beneath a short, fastidiously cared for, upcurled mustache. He lounged near the fire, smoking his own cigarettes, which he took from time to time from a gold case that he carried in his waistcoat-pocket.

It contained about thirty or forty, I should think. Attached to it, on a slender chain strung across his waistcoat, was an imported lighter. He smoked through a cigarette-holder of amber and gold, and deeply inhaled every puff. And the subject that he had been discussing with his sister before Maybury's entrance had evidently been an unpleasant one, for he was scowling at the fire—continued scowling, in fact, although the conversation languished.

Miss Vandelear amiably attempted to establish friendly relations.

"What a perfect little home you have here," she said. "I've been taking the liberty of strolling about."

"I've been years planning it," said Maybury pleasantly. "If it seems complete, small wonder."

"It's all new, isn't it?" asked Miss Vandelear.

She advanced and sank into a back-

less chair and clasped her hands about one silken knee. The soft draperies outlined her form startlingly, and fell in graceful folds about her slender feet. Several generations of social leaders, and many years of training behind her, had taught Miss Vandelear exactly how to move, how to remain still, how to speak, how to listen, and when to smile.

Instinctively she had chosen a seat that would place her in a good light and give her an effective background. The library was done in vivid blue. Her chair was between Maybury and the hangings before the window—deep blue hangings edged with dull galoon.

"I've been here only a week," said Maybury. "The house was built and furnished for Andrea, of course. Alone, I had no need of such elaborate diggings."

"Rather not, I suppose," said she.

"At any rate, I was roaming about, as you've probably heard, since you were at school with my wife."

Young Vandelear looked up, still with lowering brows, and appraised Maybury again. And the sight of his host's physical charms in no wise relieved his evident uneasiness. His life, leaving his face as yet unmarred, had still recorded itself in his flabby muscles and colorlessness.

"Yes," he broke in gravely, "I suppose we know the ins and outs of the whole unusual business, you may say. Dandy spent most of her holidays with us in town."

"Dandy?" repeated Maybury, puzzled.

"Andrea," said Miss Vandelear, smiling. "Dandy was her nickname at school. Andrea is such an uncommon name. And she is a dandy, you know—every way."

From the doorway one of the servants was announcing dinner. It covered Maybury's annoyance.

"Will you go up and tell Mrs. Maybury, please," he said to the servant. The servant turned to obey, and, finding Andrea approaching, held the portières back for her.

She was in plain white, unrelieved, very simply made, falling away to leave her throat and shoulders bare, clinging closely to the lithe, splendid lines of her as she moved.

"Am I late?" she asked.

The traces of her tears had been effaced. She smiled faintly up at Maybury.

"Not at all," said he. "Shall I lead the way?"

He offered Miss Vandelear his arm. Mrs. Maybury went in with Whitney Vandelear, but the small round table brought them all together again, and only general conversation was possible. In this, Adelaide Vandelear and Andrea and Maybury joined. Young Mr. Vandelear seemed to be in a taciturn mood.

Several times Maybury attempted to draw him into it by referring questions to him and asking his opinion, but young Mr. Vandelear never vouchsafed more than a syllable or two. By the time coffee had arrived, therefore, Maybury was holding the center of the stage.

He told stories of his travels and various strange things he had seen, and Miss Vandelear and Andrea hung upon his words. By this time Miss Vandelear and Maybury were smoking, too—and sipping cordials. Andrea was eating bits of marrons from a frosted *bonbonnière* before her.

They remained at table until after eight. Then, when Maybury had finished his recital of an adventure after orchids in Brazil, Andrea rose.

"Del," she said gravely, "could you and Whitney manage to amuse yourselves for a little while? I've something rather important to discuss with —my—with—Will."

His Christian name was evidently very hard to say.

"*I* can," said Miss Vandelear, smiling; "but Whitney never amuses himself."

Andrea glanced at him.

"I shall try not to be long," said she.

"Don't hurry on my account," said young Vandelear.

He followed his sister into the library.

"I don't blame you for having a grouch, old boy," said Miss Vandelear, sinking into a big armchair. "No girl in her senses would choose you — of the two Andrea has offered her."

"Stow it!" he growled, beginning to pace the floor nervously. Miss Vandelear watched him with thoughtful eyes.

Alone together again, Maybury followed his wife to the piano and leaned upon the side of it, as she sank a little listlessly upon the long bench. They had not consciously chosen the music-room for their important talk. They had somehow drifted in there when Miss Vandelear and her brother had taken possession of the library again.

Now Maybury was glad, for Andrea looked like some captive wood-nymph in the white and green surroundings. And thinking this, he was conscious, suddenly, of the restless, troubled look in the depths of her dark eyes.

"What is it?" he asked.

She looked up at him, her hands lying idle in her lap.

"What makes you look so distressed?"

"I've an unpleasant thing to say," she said. "I abhor saying unpleasant things. I wish there were no unhappiness in the world."

"Say it quickly, then," he advised. "The longer one hesitates the harder things always are to do."

She drew a long breath.

"I will," she said. But she paused again, then presently went on: "Of course, it isn't possible for you to *love* me. You don't really love me; that makes things simpler, doesn't it? A man of your age, of your wisdom and experience, doesn't love a mere girl like me. And, besides, we're almost strangers to each other."

He looked at her keenly, turning a little pale, and moved away from the piano—began pacing the room. She half turned, watching him questioningly.

"Go on," he said. "I'm listening."

"You didn't like my saying that," she suggested gravely. "Why?"

"It doesn't matter. I— Perhaps I shall tell you another time. Please go on now with what you want to say. I am endlessly curious and concerned, as you might imagine."

She dropped her head a little. Her fingers busied themselves with her handkerchief.

"I was a child when you married me," she went on then. "Nine years old, you remember. But my father and mother had made a sort of companion of me. I was older than I should have been."

She glanced up. He nodded from across the room and smiled a little at her.

"I realized, I think, why it all had to be. I felt very important. And the ceremony overawed me. And Sarah called me 'Mrs.' No wonder I lay awake most of that night. I'd lost my mother and father within several hours of each other, and I had been married to you so that I should not be alone in the world. I was at the side of the bed when my father asked you to do him this tremendous service. I realized that you married me, not because you wanted to especially, but because I had to be saved from being left quite alone. Of course, you couldn't have thought of marrying me under ordinary circumstances. You were grown up—a wonderful personage of twenty-odd—and I was nine. I was in short dresses and pig-tails. I was going to school. I was a freckled, snub-nosed youngster, all arms and legs."

He smiled again—reminiscently.

"You were an extraordinary person," he admitted.

"I was just beginning to read whatever I could get my hands on. The romance of my situation appealed to me."

She looked up at him wistfully.

"I was disappointed when you continued to treat me as you had before. I was expecting you to fall in love with me, as in books. The shock of my young life was your informing me that I was going back to school. I was expecting to put my hair up and lengthen my dresses, and go to housekeeping."

"At nine?" he cried, astounded.

"I was precocious, I told you. I went away from you with rebellion in my heart, and a little humiliation. I felt slighted. I felt as if you had insulted me by not falling head over heels in love with me. Conceive of it!"

"I think I *had* fallen in love with you, though," he mused. "You said the most astonishing things!"

She sighed.

"It took me a year or more to recover from my disappointment. Of course, as I grew older, I realized how necessary it was for me to continue my education before undertaking the responsibilities of matrimony."

She smiled again. There was something irresistibly fascinating about her smile. It was unspeakably winsome.

"I should think so," said he.

"In time I came to understand that the marriage resulting from my father's death-bed plea had been meant only as a sort of safeguard for me—a sort of guardianship. So I came to look upon you in that light. Your staying away lent color to the theory. When I was sixteen—and in own mind at that time — fully grown and marriageable, and you did not come back to claim me, I was sure of it. So I began to look upon myself as single—like any other girl. It occurred to me that you might mean to divorce yourself from me when I should finish at school."

He halted in his walk and faced her, staring.

"So," she went on slowly, her color rising, "I let the men that I met believe me single. I went about with other girls of my age. And I had numerous admirers. One of them attracted me. When he proposed I told him my secret and promised to marry him after my divorce."

"Andrea?" he cried.

She met his eyes appealingly. And there was an instant's silence in the room.

"Young Vandelear?" he asked then, a little hoarsely.

She nodded.

"That's why he came down with me. He is terribly jealous. He couldn't endure the thought of my being here alone with you, under the circumstances."

Maybury looked hard at her, his eyes searching hers. Then he moved the length of the room and stood at the window, staring out into the darkness, his hands in his pockets. She waited in miserable silence, watching him.

"So," he said, turning at last, "you love this chap?"

She nodded slowly.

"Don't you want me to?" she asked.

"That can't alter matters, can it—whether I am pleased or not?"

"Yes, it can. If—if you want to—want me to be your wife—I will. I'll send him away."

He advanced a step or two, staring. "*What's that?*"

"If you don't want to divorce me I'll send him away, I say."

"I don't think I understand," said Maybury weakly.

She looked up at him wistfully.

"It is for you to say," she said gravely. "I belong to you, in a way. My father left me to you, in your hands. I had no money—no one to look out for me. You arranged to have me reared and trained to be what I am. Whatever I am now, I am through you. So, you see, it is for you to say whether or not you will give me up to Whitney."

He caught his breath.

"But I—but you love him!"

"There are things," said she, "greater than love."

He shook his head slowly.

"There is nothing greater than love," he said. "If you have not realized this, go slow. You are deceived in your feeling for this boy."

"I wish I were," she announced moodily.

"Why?"

"I don't think you want me to be in love with him."

"I want you to be happy," he said. "If Vandelear can make you happy, I certainly do want you to be in love with him."

"And you don't want me yourself?" she asked timidly.

"Not unless you wanted me more than any other man on earth," he answered.

"I might in time," she suggested. "We could risk that."

"No. It's not a thing to take risks with."

She sat studying him.

"You do want me?" she said.

He smiled faintly.

"Yes, of course I want you. But that cannot influence my conduct in this matter."

"Why?"

"Because your happiness is the paramount thing."

She reflected, with frowning brows.

"I don't know that he will make me so very happy. Often he makes me angry and hurts me and disappoints me. But, other times, he pleases me so. And no matter whether he hurts me or not, I don't cease to want to be near him."

Maybury frowned.

"I should think twice before marrying him, then," said he.

"You don't think it wise for me to marry him?"

"That is for you only to decide."

"If you really were my guardian you'd help me."

"No one can help you about such a matter. It is for your heart to reach the decision alone."

She stretched out her hands and touched a chord or two.

"I think I understand," she said, nodding. "You don't really care anything for me. How could you? You've not seen me since I was nine. But you were going to stay married to me just out of genuine niceness. I expect you are glad to be rid of me."

"Nonsense," said Maybury.

"I shouldn't blame you in the least. Of course my father was desperate. He had to leave me, and there was no one to leave me with but you. Still, it was rather unkind, saddling a young fellow of twenty-two with a wife of nine."

He leaned back and closed his eyes, his hands clasped upon the arms of his chair.

"If you could know what a blessed thing the thought of you has been to me all these years."

She turned and regarded him.

"Honor bright?"

"Honor bright," he admitted, smiling. "You were my anchor—the reward for which I toiled—and made myself fit."

She rose and stared down at him.

"But you are casting the reward away!"

"It is not for me," he answered grimly, rising, too. "Shall we go back and join the others?"

She hesitated.

"But we've reached no conclusion."

"Yes, I've told you that you shall be freed as soon as it can be arranged. If you'll not mind driving with me tomorrow we'll rouse out old Conquest and set him to work."

He held the door for her. She passed through, with a little inclination of her head. Maybury felt that all his dreams lay slain; his castles in ruins about him. He wished that he might have an hour or two alone in the dark to fight this out and learn to face his fate calmly. But he did not bolt for it.

He followed his wife into the library and invited Miss Vandelear to view the stars with him from the window niche in the back. And there he kept her, engaged in conversation, leaving

Andrea and young Vandelear together at the other end of the room.

CHAPTER III.

Planning a Way Out.

"WELL?" asked Vandelear impatiently.

She sank down on the low stool that Adelaide had quitted.

"He's going to have it arranged as quickly as possible," she said a little dully. "We're going to see the lawyer to-morrow."

Vandelear's eyes lighted. Swiftly—observing that the others were intent on the stars—he caught her hands and kissed them.

"Only a little longer, then," he said.

"Doesn't it take long to dissolve marriages?"

She drew away her hands gently and flushed.

"I don't believe this will take long. It isn't a real marriage, you see. It can be annulled."

"Why isn't it a real marriage?" she asked wonderingly. "We had a license and a minister and everything."

"But you have never really been his wife, you have simply borne his name."

"Oh," said Andrea, lovely in her embarrassment.

"No matter how quickly it's arranged," said Vandelear, "it will be all I can do to wait. I shall be wild with jealousy while you are here."

"Foolish," said she, shaking her head. "Don't you trust me?"

"He's entirely too interesting. Adelaide's lost her head already."

Andrea looked across at them. They were seated side by side on the window-seat, intent upon their conversation, and as usual, Miss Vandelear was skilfully posed. There were dark green cushions behind her auburn head. The effect was striking.

"I was hard put to it not to peep through the keyhole while you were there in the music-room with him," added Vandelear.

She turned and looked at him.

"For shame!"

"You were in there a long time. I don't see why it took so long to simply ask him to do the square thing and release you. The vows you made at nine were worth nothing anyway. The whole ceremony was a farce."

Into Andrea's head flashed the memory of that night. There seemed nothing the least farcical about it as it returned to her. Tears welled up in her eyes.

"What would have become of me," she asked wistfully, "but for him?"

"Something would have turned up."

"I had no money, remember," said she. "My father left nothing. And neither my father nor my mother had any kith nor kin."

He was silent.

"I'd have had to go into an asylum," she whispered. "Think of it! To be raised by the State, with innumerable other unfortunate children. Think of it, Whit!"

Vandelear looked glum.

"At any rate," he said, "Maybury didn't do it for you! He took care of you because he was a friend of your father's. You need entertain no sense of obligation."

"But I benefited as well as my father."

"That's merely an accident."

"Not at all. I should be unspeakable if I were not grateful for all my life, and with all my heart."

He scowled.

"Be sensible," he said. "To him the whole thing probably meant the spending of so much money. And he's so well fixed; the little you've cost him certainly never bothered him. I dare say the fact that he had married you hasn't incommoded him."

She flushed.

"I don't like you to belittle what he has done, Whit. Not many boys of twenty-two would take upon themselves the burden of a nine-year-old wife. I may have prevented his marrying any one else. I—how do we

know what sacrifices he has been compelled to make because of me."

"I wonder you don't want to be his wife really, just out of gratitude," said Vandelear.

"I should if he wanted me. He doesn't."

Vandelear stared.

"You made him the offer?"

"Yes," said she.

He sat speechless for an instant, gazing at her, his eyes like jade in the light.

"You would have thrown me over, then?" he gasped at last. "It is just the fact that he doesn't want you that casts you my way."

Her dark eyes rested on him appealingly.

"Isn't it?" he cried angrily.

"My first duty is to him," said Andrea positively.

"And I am second choice?"

He leaped to his feet, loomed over her, his eyes stormy, his brows drawn down and knotted.

"It wasn't a question of choice. Do you suppose I would endure your beastly temper and your dreadful disposition an instant if I weren't in love with you?" she asked quietly.

It was like oil upon the waters. He was quelled instantly. His frown faded.

"I am a brute to you," he said. "It's because I'm jealous. I'd like to lock you up somewhere so that nobody else'd ever so much as see you. Then I could be sure of you. I've never even wanted to marry any one before, Dandy."

She shrugged.

"I don't think I should like being locked up away from the rest of the world," said she.

"I'd be with you every blessed minute."

"You'd soon be bored to distraction," said she.

"Not with you there! I think I should be contented in hell with you there, Dandy. I can't quite see how that should make any difference, but I know it would. I've found that out. It isn't so much where you are, or what you are doing that matters. It's who is with you and doing it, too. I—I must have kissed hundreds of girls before I ever saw you, and lots of them were pretty; but kisses had no meaning until I kissed you. It turns me to fire to kiss you. I burn with a sort of holy fever."

"Do hush!" she said softly. "I don't think it is quite nice to—to my husband to talk that way to me."

"He isn't your husband, really. Besides, I've been saying such things to you for two years, now, and you never objected before."

"We're in his house, now. And—anyway—it's different. He was a sort of vague memory until to-day. Now he isn't. I can't help remembering how much I owe him."

"When we're married," he said sourly, "I'll send him a check in full for whatever he spent on you. I shall want to."

"It isn't that!" she protested weakly. "It's the fact that he did it; that he was willing to."

"I wish your father had left you to me," said young Vandelear sadly. "I shouldn't have chucked you into school and gone wandering over the face of the earth, I assure you."

"What should you have done?" asked Andrea gravely.

"I should have stayed right by you until I could have claimed you for my wife. And you bet no other chap would have had so much as a glimpse of you."

She sighed.

"Your idea of holding a woman's love is to keep her from seeing other men, evidently," said she.

"I'm not taking chances," said he. "I'm not such a blind, conceited ass that I can't see there are a few others who are a deal more worth having than I am."

She laughed.

"Sometimes," said she, "I love you so much I could eat you all up!"

He leaned nearer.

"Sweetheart," he said fervently.

"And sometimes," said she calmly, a little troubled, "I simply hate you, and want to go away from you and never see you again."

"Dandy!" he gasped.

"That's when you are in a bad temper, or when you are selfish and unkind in your judgment."

He looked uncomfortable — very, very gloomy.

"If you ever threw me over," he said, "I should kill myself."

"Nonsense!"

"I should. I never had a very good time until I met you. I simply should blow the whole rotten show if you jilted me. I'd try the next stopping place."

"Whitney! You mustn't say such things. They sound so cowardly!"

"And you would be my murderess," he went on grimly, "because it would be your robbing me of yourself that would make me do it. The hand that took my life would be mine, but you would be the power behind it."

"Whitney!"

She was white, terrified, shrinking before his blazing, accusing, very strange green eyes.

The corners of his mouth twitched slightly.

"However," he said, "if you stand by me I shall overcome the defects in my character and disposition as soon as we are married. You can do anything you please with me. I'm clay in your hands. You will make of me what you desire."

She was silent, observing him thoughtfully. The room was lighted only by shaded electroliers here and there, and by the leaping flames in the grate. He looked well in the dim, rather pinkish radiance. The color of his face was gone, robbing him of the bored, ennuied, reckless air that was so captivating, but giving him instead an air of youth. His green eyes, very long lashed, were almost like a cat's eyes. He wore his evening things with an "air." He was, in fact, renowned for the cut of his clothes. Observing, she found him unusually handsome, and a little smile dawned in her eyes and curved her lips.

"It sounds rather a lot to undertake," she said, "but since he has rejected me after all, I suppose I may as well keep you on."

"Thanks, awfully," drawled Vandelear.

"At least until some one else turns up," she added mischievously.

"As far as that goes," he said, "I'd rather kill you than hand you over. I've a gun up-stairs now, among my traps."

"Whitney!" she cried again, uncomfortably, vexedly.

"I have too much imagination," said he. "I couldn't endure the thought of any other man's being to you what I have dreamed of being. I'd rather kill you."

He leaned over and looked straight into her eyes. With a deep, gasping breath she rose unsteadily. He was smiling.

"You frightened me," said Andrea in a whisper. "You must never say such things again, or think them. Promise me!"

"I cannot control the thoughts that come and go in my head," said he, shrugging.

"But you were not in earnest!" she cried.

"I love you so much," said he. "I haven't the least idea how far I should go to hold you. It's a kind of madness in me, Dandy. I can't help it."

"I've no intention of marrying a madman," said she, "nor a murderer. I couldn't love any one who had such dreadful things as envy and malice and jealousy in his soul. If you ever say such things again, or think them, I'll go away from you and never, never see you again."

"You couldn't."

"Why?"

"I should search the world for you."

"But if I would not see you?"

"After all," he smiled. "These things will never happen. Maybury's going to give you your freedom, and I'm going to marry you, and we're going to be happy together. Aren't we?"

"I suppose so," said Andrea. And as he tried to catch her in his arms, and she eluded, she saw Maybury look up with the strangest expression, and rise, and the next instant the two little tête-à-têtes were ended, and they joined in one little group of four. And Vandelear's taciturn mood returned, nor did it leave him before they parted for the night.

Andrea's suite of rooms opened into Maybury's suite. At least they had been designed by the architect to so open. But the communicating door was closed, of course, and locked, with the key on Andrea's side. The sight of it fascinated her all during her disrobing.

She heard him moving about on the other side of the door for perhaps half an hour, pacing the floor, moving furniture about. Then there was silence.

She told herself that he had retired. And she crept into bed herself, and Sarah tucked her in, and arranged the night-light and ice-water and the windows and shades, and vanished. Mrs. Maybury composed herself to sleep. She thought dreamily of Whitney's jealousy and his idle threats that had so frightened her.

Then her thoughts drifted on to Maybury. She liked his attitude. She decided that he talked most fascinatingly. And his size and strength rather awed her. And she was amazed to find him so young. At nine she had considered him grown up. Consequently she had half expected a middle-aged gentleman, of courtly bearing, and polite manner. She realized that she was glad she was disappointed in this. Then her thoughts became confused, intermittent, and she fell asleep.

In the adjoining suite, or rather the suite that had been designed to be adjoining, Maybury sat before the grate with a big pipe between his teeth. The light was out. The fire burned low, and on it his blue eyes were fixed with an expression that would have astonished any chance observer. Bitterness dwelt there, and grief and protest and resignation tried hard for a foothold.

What he had not let her see, what no human being should ever see, was revealed when he was there alone, locked in, secure. Like the lower animals with whom he had mingled in the wilds, he crept away into his lair to suffer what he could not conquer. At least he need not take the world into his confidence.

CHAPTER IV.

Retrospection.

ANDREA awoke at ten; and rang for Sarah, who responded promptly and reported that neither of the Vandelears had yet put in an appearance, but Mr. Maybury had been up and about since eight. As a matter of fact, he had not been to bed, having dozed for an hour or two in his chair. He had simply bathed and shaved and changed his clothes at eight, descending in the faint hope that Andrea might likewise be an early riser.

But it was half after ten when she finally appeared, clad in a coat-suit of gray corduroy, with white furs and a gray hat trimmed with white fur-tails. Maybury, who was in the hallway superintending the building of the fire there, watched her curiously as she came down the stairs.

"Are you going out?" he asked.

"Aren't we going to the lawyer's?"

Neither had thought to say good morning. His first fear was that she was leaving his roof.

"Oh," he cried, relieved, "I see!"

"I didn't know what time you would want to be starting," she explained, moving toward him, "so I thought I would be ready."

"As a matter of fact," said he, "we can't go to-day. I telephoned, and found that he's gone in town. He may be back to-night. He may be back to-morrow night. So we'll have to postpone the trip for the present. I hope you will not be seriously annoyed over the delay."

"I will not," she answered. "But I think I will take off my outer wrappings, meanwhile, since we've such a long wait."

Before the mirror she drew the pins out of her hat and laid it aside, running her fingers carelessly through the soft waves of her hair, adjusting it with light pats here and there, then tossing away her thick fur scarf, and slipping out of the long, belted coat. Underneath was a loose blouse, of pale lavender silk to-day; collar and broad cuffs and jabot-tie, finished off in very fine Irish lace.

Round her neck hung a chain of amethysts, to which a small watch was attached. The watch was heavily incrusted with amethysts and pearls. She wore no rings, no earrings, no other jewelry of any sort. But no, I have not told the exact truth. She had a tiny gold vanity box concealed about her person. Just before she turned from the mirror she produced it and dusted an infinitesimal puff across her straight nose and white forehead and rounded chin. He was amused and hardly thrilled, but something very like it as he watched her so intimately.

She smiled at him.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good morning," said Maybury. "Did you sleep well?"

"Beautifully," said Andrea. "And you?"

"Fairly."

"You might have been tactful enough to spend a wretched night, after deciding to lose your wife," she said mischievously.

His expression, swiftly hidden, startled her. It was as though she had hurt him. She flushed.

"As a matter of fact," said he, "I did not rest as well as usual. That must have been the reason."

But she still regarded him anxiously. He was standing with his back to the fire now. She sat facing him on a low, brass-bound chest. One knee was crossed over the other, and her fingers were clasped about the topmost one.

"Have you breakfasted?" he asked.

"Yes. Sarah brought a tray to my room. If I had known you were alone, though, I should have come down."

"I am used to being alone," he answered quietly. "I have been in that benighted state for many years now. I am almost accustomed to it."

"Perhaps," said Andrea, "if my father had not tied you down to me you might have married some one really suited to you, and might, by this time, be rearing a fine family."

"I should never have married any one else," said he.

"And why not, please?"

She frowned up at him disapprovingly.

"Because I have never found any one whom I could love as I must love my wife."

"And have you known many women?"

"Very, very many."

"I am glad you did not say too many," said she, smiling. "And why, please, does none of them suit you? Are you so very particular and discriminating?"

"Perhaps," he said.

"But surely you don't mean to end your days a bachelor?"

"What can I do? I can't advertise for the sort of wife I want."

"Perhaps you don't give the ones you've known a fair chance. Perhaps you haven't really known them."

"Perhaps I want the moon," he said. "That's my nature. I want the very greatest I can conceive. If I can't win that I'll have nothing."

"But then there is a particular moon?"

"Ye-es," he admitted.

"Beyond your reach?"

"It seems so."

"I am sorry," she said gravely.

He took up the poker and rearranged a log. Outside the wind was blowing hard, howling around corners, whistling through the trees. Her eyes wandered from him to the window, then back to the blazing hearth.

"Doesn't it sound desolate out there?" she said, breaking the silence.

"Doesn't it. Like wolves beating at the door."

Another short silence fell.

"Life is very perplexing," mused Andrea. "Nothing ever seems to come out right. There must be a big reason back of it all."

"There must be," he agreed.

She looked up at him, smiling faintly.

"Let's believe that, and tell ourselves that the big reason is going to compensate for everything, and then let's stop being so very, very serious at half past ten in the morning."

"What shall we talk about that is not serious?" he queried meekly.

"Why," she asked thoughtfully, "did you stay away from me all these years?"

"So that you might develop naturally, and grow up into a lovely woman. If I had stayed— Well, I simply would not be led into temptation. I could not put responsibilities on you too soon. I wanted you to feel free, in spite of the fact that you bore my name. I wanted you to meet other men. All this would be more difficult if I had been near you."

"I see. Then it was not because you didn't want to be bothered with me. It was not because you wanted to feel freer."

"No," he said simply. "It was not that. I could not feel freer away from you. I had no desire to feel free. I reveled in the thought of your belonging to me. I liked the responsibility of you. I kept in constant touch with Conquest, as he will tell you. I discussed your welfare with him in every particular. My wanderings were really exile. I wanted to be near you. It was only my reason and sense of justice prevented."

"I see," said Andrea softly.

"Did you think I gave you my name reluctantly, and then fled to forget all about it?"

"I wondered."

"And now you know."

"Yes, now I know."

She smiled radiantly up at him, with tears shining in her eyes.

"No wonder my father wanted to leave me with you," she said. "He knew you."

Maybury flushed.

"I like your saying that," he said. "And I will tell you something no less nice in return. I am not disappointed in the way you have grown up. You have fulfilled the promise of —of when you were nine."

She made a grimace.

"I don't consider that a very nice thing to say. I was hideous when I was nine, pig-tailed, freckled, long-legged. I despised myself. I rejoiced that my father arranged to marry me to you, because I felt that I should have been a spinster otherwise. And I thought you something little less than a god."

He laughed.

"I was rather a lot less at twenty-two, as a matter of fact."

"You seemed quite wonderful to me then."

"Nine is not a very discriminating age," he said.

"I was glad my father did not choose the Marquis of Macatti nor Drake Wheeler. Both of them reached him before you did, you know, and both volunteered to look out for me. I rather liked titles, but I hated the marquis."

"Naturally," said he. "Instinctively, and yet I was in a fair way to imitate his record, those days. *You* pulled me up short."

"I?" she cried incredulously.

He nodded.

"I had to be worthy of you, so I turned the leaf. I'd been an idler before then, with more money than was good for me. The taste of freedom and fortune had affected me like a strong wine. I was pampered too much—spoiled. The night I married you I felt myself altering some way inside. The sight of you did it. You looked so—well—unusual, in your nightgown, and the blanket over it, and your hair all straggling around your thin face, and your big eyes, inquiring, accusing, demanding. Mostly, I think, it was your eyes."

"I think you might have been gentlemanly enough to forget my apparel," she said with mock severity. "Remember, I dressed in haste for my wedding. I had no warning of your intentions. They were indeed sudden."

"They were," said Maybury, nodding. "As a matter of fact, I hardly remembered that Dickie had a child—except when you chanced to be about. Even then you were rather inconspicuous, a part of the background."

She acquiesced.

"I liked to creep in quietly and curl up in some corner, and just watch and listen to what went on. At first my father and mother objected and were sending me off to play, or were reminding each other that 'little pitchers have big ears.' But as time went on, they became accustomed to my being there, and soon they forgot all about me—and *how* I enjoyed myself!"

"I dare say," he admitted drolly.

"I made up stories about all who came and went. Perhaps some of the stories were not all made up. Unobserved, I studied faces. And of all the lot I liked you best. I made up golden romances about you."

"Not really?" cried Mr. Maybury, interested.

"Yes, really. You were the youngest, of course—and by far the best looking. And you always had a fresh orchid in your buttonhole. And my father was so fond of you. I seemed to adopt my father's likes and dislikes instinctively."

"A child can tell," he acknowledged.

"It's odd, isn't it? But I suppose children move by instinct largely, as animals do. I wonder why the development of the mind annihilates instincts."

She fell silent, pondering the question. He watched her as though he would never have done looking, as though he were storing up this mental portrait of her against the time when she would have passed out of his life completely, and he would have only memories. He almost prayed that Vandelear and Adelaide would go on sleeping.

"I disapproved of my mother," said Andrea, presently, reflectively. "I suppose that was instinct, too—or was it because I realized that she cared little for me, I wonder?"

"Poor Nell!" said he. "She should never have been a wife or mother at all. She wasn't intended for captivity, nor for responsibility. She fretted under the yoke."

"Poor father," said Andrea.

"He loved her. She was all he required."

"I used to think sometimes that he would have liked her different. Sometimes he was very kind to me and gentle as—as if he realized I hadn't much care, except by good old Sarah. But there was nothing to be done about it. My mother did not care for children. She loved horses and dogs and riding and hunting. *How* she loved them!"

"Still she was good to you in her way."

"Always polite and friendly when she remembered me, and always on the verge of overindulging me with bon-bons and ices and toys and clothes. She vaguely realized her shortcomings as a parent, I think, and

tried to make it up to me that way when she thought of it."

"Poor Nell!"

"I used to love watching her dress," said Andrea, reminiscently. "I used to creep in and sit on a little stool beside her dressing-table. If she was in a merry mood, she'd let me stay, and sometimes fasten her boots, or hand her this or that, when her maid was doing something else. I loved to watch her being combed. Her hair was adorable."

"Yours is just like it," he cut in.

She flushed.

"Once," she said, "*I* was permitted to comb it—when my mother had a headache and the maid was 'off.' It was a very great joy."

"After all," he said slowly, "of the three, you were most to be pitied. Dickie, of course, had my sympathy. He gave up everything he had for her. And she—well, she wasn't the sort he should have married. She tried her best, but it just wasn't in her to be different. Sometimes she was unhappy about it, so I was sorry for her, too. But she was not the sort to grow melancholy. Temperamentally, she looked on the bright side of things. So poor, little, neglected you—you had the worst of it all the way round."

Andrea smiled up at him sweetly.

"Still," she said, "I was happy in a way. They were both good to me. And the training and discipline I missed then I've had since, thanks to you."

She rose and stood before him.

"When I first went off to school I hated it—hated it. The only way I could content myself there was to remind myself that my only hope of showing my gratitude lay in becoming the sort of woman you could be proud of. Have I succeeded?"

"Beyond my wildest expectations!"

She smiled and dimpled.

"Considering what I must have been like at nine, that might not be saying very much."

"You were delicious at nine."

"Oh!"

She pretended to be astonished and a little shocked.

"Such a serious, thoughtful little creature, with such a vague, preoccupied expression."

"I cultivated that," she admitted shyly, "so that no one would suspect I was interested in what was going on about me. I used to pretend to be playing, too. I carried on the most elaborate deceptions, and all the time another part of me was missing nothing that occurred in the room. I was an uncanny child."

"You were a neglected child—criminally neglected—by every one but Sarah."

"Dear old Sarah! And she hadn't so very much time to give me. The whole household rested upon her capable shoulders. There were no other servants, you know, except mother's maid. Many a night I went to bed with my clothes on, and nobody knew."

He nodded, wincing a little.

"I know—I know. I was meaning to make up to you for some of that. But now Vandelear must. He must erase those memories—bury them deep under sweeter ones. He must love you so much that nothing will matter except that, and you will forget that you ever lived before you knew him. That's how he must love you."

She looked up into his eyes, her own very wide and grave.

"Is that how *you* would have loved me?" she asked.

He rose without answering and turned his back upon her, and beat at the fire viciously. She drew a deep breath.

"*Is* it?" she demanded, in a whisper, leaning toward him.

"Yes," he answered grimly, without turning.

She shook her head a little.

"But it isn't possible that you love me," she said.

"No; of course not," he agreed, still with his face from her.

"You don't know me at all."

"That's true."

"And you're so—why, there's nobody *you* couldn't win."

"Oh, no!"

She frowned.

"I wish you would look at me. The fire is burning beautifully."

"I like to watch it," he said, turning at last. His face was expressionless. "In my wanderings I used to like to lounge about a bonfire, the camp-fire, you know, and watch the flames leap up. Sometimes there would be a ring of smoldering eyes watching, too, from the surrounding darkness. Fire seems to fascinate animals, especially wild ones."

"I should have liked that, too," she said breathlessly.

"The circle of forest creatures enjoying my fire?"

"Yes. Weren't you afraid?"

"No. They keep their distance when there is fire about. Besides, I had my gun at my hand, and the guides were all armed."

He had steered away from the dangerous ground.

"I have always thought I should like to go into the woods," she said wistfully — "the great, trackless, fathomless woods—and live there as men and women lived ages and ages ago. I should abhor the desert! But I think I should love the forests and the forest people."

"Cities seem cramped and insane and very foolish," he admitted, "once you have reached the open spaces. The wind is so—so sweet—and the skies are so vast and starry. And there is so much breathing space. And you tread upon last year's fallen leaves—yes, on the fallen leaves of many, many years. And you drink at some spring. And you can't imagine any other beverage. And you sleep beside a camp-fire, in the open, and you wonder why there are men who box themselves up within four walls."

She was leaning forward, her rapt eyes on him, her lips a bit apart, her bosom rising and falling unevenly as she breathed.

"And then," he went on gravely, "suddenly it rains, and all the romance goes out of things, and you cry for a warm house and a warm bed, and all the comforts of civilization."

She sighed.

"You don't. You wrap something around you and watch the storm, and the rain beats into your face and you love it, and the lightning turns night to day, and the thunder echoes through the trees, until your heart stands still from very fright, and all the wild things tremble in their lairs; but you love it."

"How do you know all this?" he asked quietly.

"I can imagine it."

"Well, of all the barbaric and impossible imaginations!" said Miss Vandelear from behind them.

She had descended unheard, so intent had they been upon their conversation. But then, of course, she made scarcely any sound beside the swish of her draperies.

Maybury rose and, after a few moments' conversation, excused himself on the plea that he had rather important letters to write. Adelaide and Andrea were left alone together.

CHAPTER V.

Drifting.

ADELAIDE was in a seminegligee this morning. It was a certain shade of yellow—a burnt orange, perhaps—something of the sort. At any rate, you may be sure it went excellently with her auburn hair.

The long drop earrings — she was never without them — were of topaz to-day, and her white fingers were laden with topaz and diamond rings. She had a penchant for jewelry, and was always wearing a great deal—no matter what hour of the day it chanced

to be, nor what she chanced to be wearing otherwise. A boudoir-cap to match her gown completed her costume.

As Maybury disappeared she lighted a cigarette from the gold case she always carried, and inhaled with some indication of satisfaction.

"You are early birds, you two," said she.

"We were to go to the lawyer's," explained Andrea, leaning back and clasping her hands behind her head; "but he phoned and discovered it would be useless, as Conquest is not at home."

"Do you mean you've already got him to agree to release you?" Miss Vandelear raised her head curiously.

"Yes."

"I congratulate you," she said, smiling grimly. "Although you don't seem particularly happy over it."

"It's a beastly situation all around," said Andrea moodily. "I owe him so much. And he's—I've prevented his marrying any one else all these years. And— Oh, I don't know! I don't like to feel that my happiness is making any one else unhappy."

"I see." Miss Vandelear nodded. "Did he seem reluctant?"

"N-not exactly. He agreed instantly when he knew what I wanted. But I got the impression—"

"I understand," nodded Adelaide, smiling. "It does seem a little inconsiderate of you. But never mind. Perhaps I can console him. Personally, I like him and—well, Whitney's my brother, of course, and I probably see him through unprejudiced eyes on that account—but how *can* you prefer him of the two?"

"There is something between us," said Andrea thoughtfully; "some sort of attraction. Half the time I despise him cordially, and a fourth of the time I pity him. But the rest of the time I simply can't resist his fascination."

"He has a lot of magnetism. I realize that, of course. But it's quite ineffective after you are 'on to him.' He's just clever enough to know that, though; and he takes precious care not to let you 'get on.' When I select a husband, Dandy, or when I permit myself to be caught, you may rest assured it will be some one entirely trustworthy I'll choose—some one serious, settled, reliable, generous, considerate, and all that. Magnetism won't enter in. I'll have some one that will make a satisfactory life companion. Whitney's sort is well enough to flirt with and so on, but not for marrying."

Andrea looked grave.

"However," said Miss Vandelear, smiling, "it's hardly my place to dissuade you, or to criticize him unfavorably. Everybody's the best judge of his own affairs."

She blew a smoke-ring toward the ceiling.

There was an instant's silence between them.

"Have you quite determined upon Whitney?" asked his sister, then.

"Yes," said Andrea, "of course."

"Then," said Del, "I suppose you'll have no objections to my taking Maybury on?"

Andrea stared.

"Of course not," she answered. "Do you like him?"

"Tremendously. And what is more still, I approve of him. He's thirty-two—a sensible age—he's healthy, has a fine physique, is splendid looking, has acknowledged position, considerable wealth, and—well, the way he has behaved to you shows what sort of man he is. I may be the next Mrs. Maybury, Dandy."

Andrea flushed.

"You're not serious?" she gasped.

"Quite. I've been studying him very carefully since last night. I've only been waiting to learn your plans before laying mine. Will you help me?"

"Do you mean you are actually going to try to—"

"To what — interest him? Of course. I'm going to ensnare him deliberately."

"You are jesting," said Andrea.

"Absolutely not. What makes you say that?"

"Why, surely you want to love a man before you think of marrying him?" cried Andrea.

"I shall love him, right enough—when it's safe for me to do so."

"But you can't govern that sort of thing," protested Andrea.

"But you certainly can! One's fancies must be disciplined if one is to be happy!"

"I don't want to love that way."

"You want to leap before you look—and marry blindly, I know. You want the sort of man who has the art of flirtation down pat."

"No; but I want to marry the man I want to marry," remarked Andrea. "I don't want to reason about him. I want to follow my instincts."

"Animals can do that," said Adelaide. "Reason is a better standard to judge by, under these conditions, Dandy."

"I can't argue," said Andrea. "You always win arguments with me. I can just *feel* about things."

"Woman's intuition," said Adelaide, sighing. "How many crimes are perpetrated in its name!"

She lighted another cigarette, and nodded to Whitney, who advanced at that instant and took possession of the jeweled case.

"I've run out," he said. "'Morning, Dandy."

"Being merely a sister," said Adelaide, "I don't get any good-morning wishes. Wait until you are married, Dandy. You'll not, either."

Whitney said nothing, being engaged in the business of lighting the cigarette he had borrowed. Then he stood with his back to the grate, and still said nothing. He was looking colorless—rather more colorless than usual—and the dark aura underneath his eyes lent him a dissipated air. Perhaps it was not due to the aura alone. The corners of his mouth drooped. His eyes were moody.

"I suppose if you hadn't run out of cigarettes you'd not have gotten up yet," said Adelaide.

"I hate mornings," he said. "And I knew there would be nothing interesting to do when I did get up."

"You can come and talk to me," said Andrea.

"I wish you'd get this bally mix-up settled, so that we can be married and go south and get away from this snow," he growled. "I wonder if I can have a drink?"

"I suppose so," said Andrea dubiously.

"Ring," said Adelaide.

He found the bell and pushed it, and was presently giving his order to a servant, who indicated by his expression that he was not accustomed to fill drink orders in the morning.

"I can't see how you live," pondered Andrea. "Cigarettes, cocktails, late hours, and no exercise."

"I get enough in the warm weather to last me, and I hate the cold, and I wouldn't care a rap if I should scramble off. This world doesn't make an awful hit with me!"

"You're cheerful company in the morning, Whit," said Adelaide. "I'll leave you to Dandy. I'm going to read in the library until luncheon."

She waved and moved off. Andrea continued to observe Whitney.

"When we are married," she said, "you are going to give up both cigarettes and cocktails."

"What's the use?" he asked, shrugging.

"They're bad for you."

"I haven't pain anywhere."

"You will have."

"When I do have I'll stop, of course."

"And, anyway," added Andrea, "you can be sick without having pain. I'm sure they're shortening your life."

"Let them. The few years make no difference. I'm not having such a howling good time."

"I guess you slept badly," said Andrea.

"I didn't even sleep badly," he answered grimly. "I scarcely slept at all!"

"It's your own fault. It's the life you lead."

The servant returned with his drink and he raised it.

"Here's hoping you can make me give it up and lead a better one," he said, toast fashion. "If any one can, you can!"

And then he drank it off.

She shook her head at him.

"Sometimes I think I must be mad to think of marrying you," she said. "I can't imagine how you are going to make me happy."

"Thinking of chucking me?" he asked.

"I'm wondering why I'm not thinking of it."

"Because you care about me."

"Not this instant," said she. "Sometimes I do, but not this instant."

"Yes you do," he said, smiling at her. A light leaped up in his eyes. He was transformed. She felt a sudden sympathy for him—a sudden tenderness overwhelm her. It was a little like magic.

"Yes, I do now," admitted Andrea. "But I didn't before."

"Because I was in the dumps."

"I wonder how much of the time you'll be in the dumps after we're married?"

"I don't know. It's going to be an experiment. I've never been married before. If it isn't a success, I'll blow off that part of my head that in others is a receptacle for brains. And then you can try again. Divorces aren't quite respectable yet, but widows may marry again with universal approval!"

"I wish you wouldn't say such things," said Andrea.

He sat down beside her on the brass-bound chest.

"Let's be plebeian and make love," he said, slipping his arm about her. She leaped up angrily.

"Whitney!" she cried, flushing.

"Aren't you engaged to me?"

"Not yet."

"But you promised to marry me."

"I'm not free yet. And we're both under my husband's roof."

"Let's go driving, then?" he suggested.

She smiled.

"That wouldn't make any difference. You know how I feel about my obligation to him."

"If I stole a kiss now and then, without warning, you'd not be to blame."

"I'd advise you not to try it."

"What could you possibly do?" he wondered.

"Make it impossible for the thing to happen again."

"How?"

"Send you away."

He sighed.

"Kill-joy!" he said. "I'll wager you a kiss that log doesn't fall in the next fifteen minutes."

"No," said Andrea, smiling.

"I'll wager you a kiss it does fall in the next fifteen minutes. I'll go you either way!"

"No," said Andrea.

"Then I shall have to go and beg more cigarettes from Del."

She followed him to the library.

Maybury and Miss Vandelear were discovered there in, evidently, a most interesting conversation. And Miss Vandelear was strikingly posed against the green pillows on the davenport, her knees drawn up, her toes peeping, her auburn hair and white skin and yellow draperies in relief against the dull greens and blues.

They played bridge presently—a table being brought by one of the under footmen and set up in the library, and Maybury and Adelaide opposed Andrea and Vandelear. They played the game with the auction attachment, which adds indescribably to its interest, and Vandelear forgot that life was not worth living and played

hard, as usual, and was unspeakably distracted when Andrea played carelessly or talked or let her mind wander from the matter in hand.

She could play brilliantly, and usually did when she was running the "dummy hand," but at other times she lost interest. Miss Vandelear played a splendid, reasonable game, and Maybury played rather badly. He confessed that he cared next to nothing for cards.

So on toward tea-time, they settled. Only Maybury and Vandelear had real money up. Maybury preferred that the ladies content themselves with the interest in the game itself. And then they played "old maid" and fantan—and, finally, baccarat.

By this time Adelaide had rebelled at her brother's inroads on her cigarettes, and so he had made her a side bet in which cigarettes stood as stakes against promissory silk stockings, and he won enough to go on until a supply should come down from town. He had telephoned over the long-distance for them.

Afterward when, at Whitney's instigation, Maybury was showing Adelaide some trick pool shots, he cornered Andrea in the alcove, and continued from where he had left off at dinner. As a matter of fact, she looked unspeakably alluring in pink lavender charmeuse, decorated in orchid shades. She had tulle in her hair, and wore orchids and no jewels.

"It's a good thing I've had a little experience," he sighed, "or I'd have to write you love-letters, even though you are right here in the same house with me. It keeps me busy devising ways to make love to you."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't whisper such absurd things when there are others present who might chance to overhear," Andrea gravely replied. "You behaved very badly at dinner."

"Nobody could have overheard. Besides, suppose any one had. Both Maybury and Del know I'm crazy about you."

"But it's very bad taste to act that way when there are others about."

"It's your fault," said Whitney, shrugging. "Why do you look so irresistible. I can't help it if you are so lovely you draw the words right out of my mouth."

"That's nonsense," said Andrea sedately.

"My love is stronger than I," he declaimed theatrically, beating his breast.

She was compelled to smile.

"Everything is a joke to you," she sighed.

"Nothing is. Nothing is funny, at any rate! Everything is da-arned serious! But I refuse to spend all of my time in the seventh depth of gloom. I am gay. I disport myself and mock! In a word, I disapprove of everything so heartily that I simply won't 'play.' I make a jest of the whole bally business.

"Other people strive for fame—for careers, to establish themselves socially, to acquire wealth! Poor fools! I can't imagine how they blind themselves to the one fact, that they are going to die in five years or ten—or twenty. And then of what use are the things they have accomplished? I'm not so wasteful of the little time allotted me. I—well, of course, I have a rotten time, but I try to amuse myself. I do everything that other people find amusing. When I die I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that I didn't waste a moment in anything serious."

"What absurd ideas, Whitney!" said Andrea. "There'd have been no civilization if our ancestors had arrived at these conclusions."

"And a jolly lot better off we might have been," said he, "scouting through the woods in animals' skins and living in teepees and caves, with nothing to do but shoot and fish and fight. Do you know, I've an idea I might like that. No, I rather think I prefer my tub and my bed and my cocktails and the newspapers."

"Serious endeavor has accomplished those things, you see."

"Mighty good of those old chaps. Personally, I refuse to bother about the future of the race."

He lighted a cigarette deliberately.

"You are selfish," she said, accusingly.

"No doubt," said he, unruffled. "Unselfish people have to die and turn to dust, too."

"Good-by," said Andrea, rising. "I don't like you to-night. You are just like Adelaide. She gets me all mixed up in arguments and makes things I know to be wrong sound exactly right. I'm going to talk to my—husband."

"Please stay," said he penitently, "and I'll talk whatever way you like."

"No," said she.

"I believe you want to talk to him," said Whitney; then, grimly: "Do you suppose I haven't noticed how your eyes have kept wandering in that direction?"

She flushed.

"Jealous again?"

"Of course I'm jealous. I'm always jealous. I'd be an imbecile if I failed to realize how attractive you are to men. It would be a miracle if they didn't swarm about you."

She smiled.

"Flattery's no use. Good-by."

She moved toward the others. He followed sulkily. But Maybury showed no disposition to seek a *tête-à-tête* with her. All four remained together until they parted for the night.

CHAPTER VI.

A Drop in the Bucket.

THERE is an old saw about leading a horse to the water. And, as occasionally happens, it is a true one.

Similarly, one can array oneself for slumber, and turn off the light, and creep between the sheets, and lie for hours staring at nothing and thinking of everything under heaven.

This night, such a fate befell Andrea. The reason of it, of course, was not far to seek. She had not been out-of-doors all day, and, accustomed to air and exercise, she missed them.

Perhaps on this account — perhaps for other reasons — she was restless. She tossed about. She tried lying on her right side and lying on her left. She could not woo Morpheus at all. He yielded not even a little, so after a while she sat up and switched on her night-light and wondered what to do to tire herself. Obviously the wisest course would be to read, but there was nothing about to read.

On one elbow, her face in her hand, she pondered the matter. The house was very quiet.

She stepped slowly out of bed and moved one bare toe about upon the thick rug until she found her slipper. Then she wriggled into it, crossed her knees, and pulled it on firmly. In the same fashion she found the second slipper and donned it. A slip-on — bedroom gown—whatever you choose to call it — of quilted blue silk, embroidered in lavender, was thrown across the chair next her bed.

She slipped into it. Its wide sleeves fell to her wrists. With the heavy lavender cord she bound it in at the waist, knotted the cord, and glanced at herself in the mirror to be quite sure none of her nightie was in evidence. She saw herself completely submerged in blue and lavender, her cheeks flushed from tossing about; her soft, thick, brown-gold hair, parted accurately in the center and arranged in two heavy braids, Indian fashion. One of them fell over each shoulder below her waist.

She approved the reflection with a little nod, moved cautiously to the door, and noiselessly opened it.

On the stair-landing a dim light burned.

She approached the landing and descended. The lower hall was in darkness, too, save for a single light.

She reached the library and opened the door. The lights were not off here.

The room was ablaze with them. The fire still burned merrily, and Maybury lounged at ease before it, with his pipe in his mouth and a book on his knee. But the book was turned down. His eyes were fixed upon the leaping flames in the grate. He had such a stern, bitter, weary look stamped upon his face, she stared in wonder and sympathy.

But something told her it were better not to disclose her nearness. She was stepping quietly back, drawing the door closed, too, when a board creaked. Listlessly, vaguely, he glanced up and sat staring. It was obvious that at first glance he thought he was imagining her. Then he realized that she was actually standing there.

"I beg your pardon," she said softly. "I'd no idea any one else was about, and I couldn't sleep. And I wanted a book."

He was on his feet instantly.

"Come in," he said, and waved toward the book-shelves with which the room was lined.

Hesitatingly she obeyed.

"Name your choice," said he. "All of your favorites are in the collection, I think. I consulted Conquest, and I added my own best friends."

"Anything," said Andrea. "Anything that will tire my eyes and send me off to dreamland."

"Sit down a moment," he said, smiling. "This matter requires consideration. It must be nothing interesting enough to set your mind working, and nothing so dull that you are apt to read mechanically and think of other things at the same time. Let me see."

She sat down. He remained silent an instant, deep in thought.

"It's nice and warm in here," said Andrea. "Do you always sit up half the night like this?"

"Not always," said he.

"I wondered how you could and still rise so early."

She was on the edge of the davenport, one foot curled up under her. And she was beginning to wish that he would forget about the book and would come and talk instead, although such a proceeding would probably be very indiscreet.

His blue eyes were scanning the nearer shelves reflectively.

"Doesn't it make you feel lonely and neglected and little and helpless and insignificant to lie awake when every one else is sleeping?" she ventured.

"Not exactly," said he with a smile.

"It does me. I like to fall asleep directly. I'm a little afraid of nighttime."

"Why?" he asked, standing before the book-shelves still, but turned toward her now attentively.

"I don't know. Everything seems different than in the light. The air seems different. I feel excited. And then, of course, I'm not in the least superstitious. Superstition is ignorance, I know; but everything hasn't been discovered yet. And there may be scary things that only come out in the dark."

He was compelled to laugh at that. She blushed.

"That sounds childish, doesn't it?" she asked mournfully.

"It is an admission that doesn't quite damn you. I had suspected that you were not altogether so old and wise as you sometimes seem."

"Do I seem old and wise sometimes?"

"You sound so—now and then."

She laughed.

"I thought I couldn't look so."

She hugged her knees and rocked herself gently.

"Anyway," she added thoughtfully, "I've no ambition to be one of these new-style women. Frankly, I have not a man's intellect. I am not practical enough. And I do enjoy having people do things for me and take care of me. I cannot understand time-tables. I never count change nor look to see if bills are correct. I suppose I am a clinging-vine person."

"Thank Heaven," he added, smiling approval.

"I'm going out of style," she informed him sadly. "Men admire clubby women nowadays—the sort that can smoke and drink and play games like a man!"

He leaned toward her confidentially.

"Don't you believe it," he told her in a whisper.

"But they don't care for a woman who is just a dainty, soft, pretty, helpless burden hung around their necks."

"They do! They just do. They always will. What's the use of being strong and capable if you have no one to guard and protect and care for? What's the use of being intellectual if you have no one to think for? It's no fun winning laurels for a woman who can win them for herself."

"I never thought of it that way," admitted Andrea.

He drew his big chair up to the davenport so that their heads were very close together — his very, very blond one shining in the light, hers dark and brownish.

"Opposites attract," said he, as teacher to pupil.

"Ye-es. I think that that is true."

"Nature devises it so, in order to retain the balance and guard her races. The strong mate with the weak. The tall mate with the small. Extremes meet and from them springs the halfway type which is nature's beloved."

"It's all quite clear, isn't it?" she cried, pleased. "I like the way you think."

He drew back, the red blood leaping up under his tan.

"I like the way you listen," said he.

She dimpled.

"Is there more than one way to listen?"

"To be sure. You keep your eyes fastened upon mine, questioningly, attentively, and sit absolutely still. I never have to doubt whether you are interested or not."

"Of course, I'm interested because you say interesting things! Whatever you tell me I seem to feel instinctively is right."

"Perhaps that is because you have grown up to respect me."

He smiled whimsically.

"No," said she. "The way you put things convinces me at once that you are quite right."

"The things you say," said he, "as well as the way you say them, convince me at once that you are tremendously impulsive."

"I am!" she admitted, with a sigh. "I told you I am not at all reasonable and up to date."

"I approve of some old-fashioned things," said he.

"Being impulsive?" she wondered.

"Being natural and — well, having your share of glorious faults and failings."

"I don't like perfect people either," she reflected.

"You see? The law of opposites again."

She shook her head at him reproachfully.

"Now you remind me of Whitney."

"In what way?"

"Saying such extravagantly complimentary things. It is so foolish, because I have enough common sense to know that they can't be true."

He polished the bowl of his pipe meditatively.

"Does he do that? Young Vandelear? Say such extravagantly complimentary things?"

"That's all he does!"

Mr. Maybury was silent. He had placed his bowl of tobacco between his knees, and, holding it there firmly, was filling his pipe from it.

"But, of course," said Andrea, "he can't talk much except about—well, the people we know and what happens and what is being read and discussed. Not many people can, I notice."

Maybury eyed her thoughtfully.

"Some of us," said he, "have got to keep the best of us locked up tight inside, because we haven't the right words, or because fear of misunderstanding and ridicule seals our lips."

She nodded, sighing.

"It's a pity, isn't it?"

"Yes," said he. And then he struck a match and suddenly recollected. "May I?" he asked.

"Please do."

"You don't share the universal prejudice against pipes?"

"No indeed. I like to see them being smoked. Cigarettes are so transient. Cigars, too. A pipe seems so conservative and reliable and friendly. I wish men would cultivate the habit of smoking them generally in public as once they did."

He lighted up and inhaled contentedly.

"This pipe," he said, "has been with me over half the world. I had dogs, but they died. Once I had a horse, but it was very difficult shipping him about, and finally he became ill and had to be shot. Only my pipe shared my solitude and stood by me."

She drew a long, unsteady breath, and to his astonishment big tears crept into her dark eyes.

"I hadn't even a pipe," she said.

He stared at her.

"But my dear child! You hadn't solitude, either?"

"Hadn't I?" she whispered wearily. "Do you suppose I haven't been horribly, horribly lonely? Do you think the fact that there were always other girls about meant anything? I couldn't forget that I had no one belonging to me. I tried to think of you as being really and truly mine! But you were so far away! Always, you were far away. And everybody else had mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and lovers to talk about. They—"

She stopped abruptly and her eyes met his, dark with remorse. Her lips quivered.

"Andrea!" he cried, letting his hand rest upon her clasped ones. They trembled beneath his touch.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm a little beast. That sounded as if I was reproaching you—scolding. But I didn't mean it that way. Truly, truly I didn't! When you talked of being so lonely I just—just remembered vividly how very lonely I was, too—and I thought that if you hadn't gone away from—we both might have been happier."

He got up and began to stride the length of the room and back, restlessly.

"I thought it fairer to you. I did not want to go. I wanted to be just to you. I wanted to do the right thing by you. I didn't want to tie you down to me before you could decide for yourself whom you would love and honor and obey. I wanted you to feel our marriage tie, something that would guard you and keep you safe and yet that would not hold you, once you desired to be free. It would not have been kind or manly to stay. You were a child. You could not know your own mind. And you would have grown up to think of me as your destiny ultimately. You would not have met other men. Don't you suppose I wanted to stay? Do you imagine that a single day passed without my thinking of you, wondering about you, worrying about you, too?"

She was watching him wide eyed.

"What made you?" she whispered wonderingly.

"From the instant that ceremony was spoken at the side of your father's death-bed I have thought of you as my wife. Before that I hardly recalled your existence unless my eyes fell upon you in your mother's drawing-room. After that I loved you. I don't know why. I don't quite understand it myself. It was a sort of miracle. Perhaps the fact that you were dependent on me had something to do with it. At any rate, from that day to this you have been first in my heart and in my thoughts."

Her tears began again.

"And I think I—it was just the wanting to have somebody to belong to that made me listen to Whitney at first. It was just that I was tired and lonely and I wanted to be petted."

The blood crept up under his tan again.

"And now you love him," he said.

She was silent.

"Don't you?"

She raised her lashes. Her dark eyes were troubled.

"I wish I knew," she said.

"Is there doubt in your mind?"

"I think so," she said helplessly.

"I don't think I understand," said Maybury. "You either love him or you don't. There can't be any doubt about it."

"But sometimes I do and sometimes I don't," said Andrea.

"That doesn't sound a very tremendous devotion," he said, smiling faintly. "I think you should make sure before you commit yourself definitely to anything."

"I will," she promised.

"And in urging you to hesitate and think hard," he went on, "bear in mind that it is only your own happiness that I have in mind. The fact that I—I love you—mustn't influence you. Forget that you are bound to me and that I have ever had the joy of being of use to you. Think only of your own heart and what it holds. I would rather lose you than win you through your gratitude."

She sat meditating, her brow wrinkled, a frown in her eyes—a curious, questioning frown.

"You love me?" she whispered, as though she were trying to realize.

He loomed above her with folded arms and nodded.

"Yes," he said.

"But it isn't possible."

"It does seem a little absurd of me, considering my age."

She smiled.

"That wasn't what I meant at all. Why you—are you past thirty?"

"Precisely thirty-two."

"And I am nineteen. There is not such a dreadful difference."

"Perhaps not," he admitted in a grave tone. "After all, what has age to do with it?"

"What makes you think you love me?" she wanted to know.

He smiled.

"I don't think," he said. "I know I love you, because my greatest happiness is to be near you. Because you are of more importance to me than the rest of the world all together. I could endure the destruction of all the continent of Europe. I should—I could not bear patiently the thought of the least harm or unhappiness coming to you. I know I love you because I can't keep you out of my head. Because you seem sweeter to me and finer and daintier and dearer and lovelier than any other woman I have ever known. Are these reasons enough?"

"You may be horribly disillusioned when you know me better."

He smiled.

"Nothing could make any difference. I adore your weakness as well as your strength. I can help you overcome any faults I may discover that are not lovable faults. I do not desire perfection. I want you."

She sighed in delicious bewilderment.

"Now I am confused," she said. "Just at this moment I—"

She stopped. Her confusion told him what she was on the point of admitting.

"Yes," he whispered a little hoarsely, "for God's sake be sure before you say it." The clock in the corner began to chime two as he finished speaking.

They listened, startled. She sprang to her feet.

"If we should be found!" she cried in horror. "I have been very indiscreet. Good night."

She turned, poised for instant flight.

"After all," he said, "you are my wife, you know."

"It is sometimes difficult to remember," said Andrea.

She was at the door now.

"Your book!" he reminded her.

"I do not think I shall want it now."

He approached her then slowly.

"Good night," he said.

"You had better go to bed, too," she announced, lingering. "You may come as far as the head of the stairs to keep me company."

"And guard you from the scary things that might crawl about in the dark," he added lightly.

She waited as he moved about switching off the lamps—the illumination grew gradually less and less. He touched the buttons by the door—only the glow from the dying embers remained.

They turned and crept cautiously up the broad stairway. Her silken gown flapped about her slippered feet; the faint fragrance of lilacs hung over her.

Once they stopped with wildly beating hearts, thinking that they were about to be discovered; but the sound was only the flapping of a blind.

At the head of the stairs they faced each other.

"Good night," said Andrea in a whisper.

"Good night," he answered. "You will—search your heart—and think hard?"

"Yes," she told him slowly, "but already—I'm almost sure—"

She did not finish. They stood a long time, searching each other's eyes. She swayed a little unsteadily and caught her breath.

He lost control of himself completely. His will weakened before the onrush of his mad desire. Then, somehow, she was in his arms — crushed to him with a great violence.

And his lips were brushing her hair, her throat, her eyes, finally seeking her lips and clinging there. Her arms were around his neck, so that in the end, when he drew back and put her away from him, he had to loosen her hold.

They did not speak again. Sobbing a little, with her head dropped, her lashes shielding her eyes, she caught the stair-rail for support, steadied herself, and moved slowly down the corridor to her door.

It stood slightly ajar. She passed in and shut it behind her. Then Maybury moved wearily on to his own rooms.

CHAPTER VII.

Her Offer.

HIS first remorse over having let his passion sway him was succeeded by a transfiguring joy. He lay for hours in the dark, dreaming, planning, reliving the moment in which he had held her in his arms. A moment! It could not have been more. And it was to turn the course of his life. It was to make history—his history and hers. Against the wonder of it nothing else that had ever befallen him seemed to count.

When at last he slept it was to struggle with young Vandelear, who contested vigorously for Andrea and only yielded her up after the fiercest combat. His sleeping dreams were full of her, as his waking dreams had always been.

He slept until nine, bathed, shaved, dressed, and descended. At his place at table he found a note hastily penned by Andrea and delivered by Sarah. It was on stationery of the palest lavender and sealed with a wafer of lavender wax, stamped with her initials—A. M. The thought that the name she bore was his gave him a new thrill.

Before it had been merely an indication that she was under his protection. Now it meant that she belonged to him—as she would never belong to any other man.

He broke the seal, unfolded the note, and read:

I am not coming down. You may say I have a headache. I haven't. I never have them. But I am a sight. My eyes are red from crying. And I am ashamed to face you. I don't know what you will think of me. I don't know what to think of myself.

I have never, *never* done such a thing before. Even Whitney has never kissed me. I despise a girl whose lips are for this man to-day and for that one to-morrow. I

loathe myself. I do, for it was not love that prompted me. I know it was not love, because I cannot, even now, decide which of you I prefer.

I have wanted to kiss Whitney, you see, as I wanted to kiss you. But I never did actually kiss him. My face is flaming even as I write.

I went to my room thinking that now it was all settled. And a picture of Whitney on my dressing-table brought me up short. There are moments when I care nothing for him. I cared nothing for him while I was with you. I forgot that such a man existed. When I saw that picture—and the memories connected with it came surging back—I felt dizzy and weak and helpless, for I realized it would be hard to put him out of my life altogether.

I think I must be very wicked. I am humiliated beyond speech.

I have let you kiss me. I have kissed you, too, and have clung to you, and I am not sure that I love you.

I should like to creep away somewhere and never, never show myself again. I am ashamed.

That was all. No signature. Just the bare confession.

The butler was serving his breakfast, but Maybury pushed back his chair and bade the man keep things warm for him for the present. Then he went into the library to answer his communication.

The room was redolent with memories. The pillows of the davenport still bore the impress of her. Her faint, elusive lilac fragrance hung in the air.

He seated himself at the long table, drew pen and paper toward him, and began to write:

MY DEAR CHILD:

It is I who must be in the dust, not you. It was all my fault. I took a cowardly advantage. I should have been strong enough to prevent such an occurrence. I should have been wise enough to foresee it. God knows I am old enough and worldly enough. But I lost my head.

And there you are. It is not your fault at all. You are blameless—absolved by this confession. I tempted you. Any woman under heaven—any mortal woman with red blood leaping through her young body—if she were as lonely and neglected and as starved for petting as you are, dear—must have yielded to my hot-headed advance. Why, I swept you off your feet. I gave you no chance to draw back, to think, to consider. I seized you forcibly in my arms and held you and kissed you.

He stopped there, and closed his eyes at the recollection, and drew a deep breath. Then he sighed and presently continued:

It was base and contemptible and cowardly to play upon your weakness. But I was starved for you, too. I've loved you so long, and—I've wanted you so badly. However, I'm not going to plead for myself. I am guilty. You are innocent. Can you ever forgive me and forget the whole thing, and go back to a consideration of the problem before you with a light heart?

He folded it and sealed it and carried it himself to her door. There he thrust it through the aperture underneath and knocked. He heard the rustle or her draperies as she advanced. Then he went back to his breakfast. Before he had finished entirely Sarah brought him a second note:

I am not surprised that you intend taking the whole blame. You shall not. Perhaps we were both guilty of weakness. I shall try to forget it, and as soon as the traces of hurricane are removed from my face I shall come down.

He was slipping it into his inner pocket when Miss Vandelear appeared.

"Good morning," she said sweetly. "Oh, have you finished?"

"Just," said Maybury, smiling.

"I am disappointed. I meant to breakfast with you."

She was in a breakfast gown and cap of peach-colored silk; it went strikingly with her shining dark auburn hair. She wore drop earrings of coral, the same curious shade, and a long chain of coral and diamonds held her vanity box, cigarette-case, and lighter. She wore a large cameo of coral surrounded by diamonds at the ruffle of her low collar and a smaller cameo set in dull gold on the little finger of her left hand.

"Sit down," said he, his eyes paying tribute to her. "At least I may have the pleasure of keeping you company."

They were by this time both in

arm-chairs at opposite ends of the table. But that did not place them very far apart. Maybury had planned the breakfast table for Andrea and himself, and it was small enough to—to be quite comfortable.

"How deliciously cozy," said Miss Vandelear. "Just room enough for two."

He nodded.

"I designed it, or planned it, rather, before I heard anything of Andrea's intention to divorce me."

She smiled, with a little flash of sympathy in her jade-green eyes.

"Does that quite spoil your party?" she asked softly.

"Utterly," he answered.

She shook her head sadly.

"What a beastly world! One casts away what another desires. Enough falls from the tables of the rich to feed the poor. I call it a rotten destiny that lets such things be."

"But a girl can't marry all the men who are in love with her," he said.

"Not all at the same time, at any rate. That's why I favor trial marriage. Every one could have a chance."

She smiled, delighted at her own wickedness.

"But it would complicate things dreadfully," he objected, "and rob life of most of its romance and tragedy. There'd be no more pining away from unrequited passion. A rejected lover would console himself with the reflection that the lady might eventually prefer him next term or the next one. Women wouldn't elope with other men. They'd simply and decently wait for their terms to be up. People wouldn't kill themselves when they were unhappily married. And think of the relations one would be burdened with."

"I'd rather not, if you please," said she. "I always think of mine as enemies in the disguise of friends and with a friend's opportunities to get at one."

He smiled and fumbled for his cigarette-case.

"Try mine," said Miss Vandelear, and promptly opened the jeweled case that hung at her side, extracted a cigarette and, holding it between her red lips, lighted it for him before she passed it across.

"Thank you," said he.

She had inhaled the single puff that she had taken in the lighting. Now she pursed her lips and blew the thin smoke ceilingward.

"Trial marriage would be ideal for me," she said. "I am a creature of little loves—loves that flame and die and are succeeded."

He smiled.

"The real one has not come, then," he told her.

"I hope it doesn't ever come," she said with a shrug. "I am afraid of it."

"Why?"

"I can't be depended upon. It will be a pugilist or an Eskimo, most likely—certainly some one utterly out of the question."

"Why are you so sure of that?"

"Things always happen that way for me," she answered absently.

"How old are you?" he asked curiously.

"Twenty."

"Twenty—and such a pessimist?"

"Not a pessimist. I simply look facts in the face."

And then, meeting his rather frowning glance, she laughed.

"Sh!" she said. "I shall be merrier as the day grows. It runs in the family to rise wrong foot first, as the saying is."

She leaned back and lighted a cigarette. She held it firmly between her lips, without chewing it, and when she struck the match shielded the blaze with her cupped palm as a man would have done it. Then, eyes half closed, she looked through the smoke rings at Maybury.

"Dandy tells me," she said quietly, "that it's all settled about the divorce and her marrying Whit."

"When did she tell you this?"

"Yesterday."

He nodded reflectively.

"Well?" he asked.

She studied the burning end of her cigarette.

"I take it, you mind, to some extent."

"I have always hoped that she would be content with me," said Maybury. "I've always taken it for granted, someway, that she would come to love me in time."

"What are you going to do?" asked Miss Vandelear.

"To do?"

"If she turns you down finally and marries Whit?"

He shrugged.

"I haven't thought. I—oh, I suppose I should just go on roaming about as I've always done."

She raised her eyes gravely to his.

"Isn't it rather dull gadding about alone?"

"Very dull," said Maybury. "I endured it before, because I thought Andrea was to be my eventual reward."

"So now it will be worse?"

"Much worse."

She flicked the ash from her cigarette.

"Has it occurred to you that you might marry somebody else?"

He stared.

"Still loving Andrea?"

She nodded.

"Just for companionship and children and so on."

"No," said he quietly.

"You wouldn't care for it?"

"I think not."

"If you could marry some one who knew about Andrea and understood?"

He looked at her. She was flushed, but her eyes met his steadily.

"Yes," she said. "I was thinking of myself. If Dandy throws you over, you might do worse than marry me."

He blushed and his embarrassment was painful.

"I should not be exacting," went on Miss Vandelear. "I should not expect any great devotion. I should be content with such care and consideration as you would want to give me. And we should come to be quite good chums—in time. At least, you would not be so horribly alone—and I should be safeguarded. I should be safely married to a man I could admire and respect and be proud of."

"You can't be in earnest," said Maybury.

"Why not? I don't believe in love. I think what people consider love is only passion masquerading. And it is so unwise to—to let an attraction of that sort influence one's choice of a life-mate. Look at Dandy and Whit! They do these things better abroad. And so—so I thought, since Dandy is out of the question, you might consider my suggestion. I am strong, not unlovely. I am accomplished. I am wealthy. I've recognized social position. I am considered more or less interesting and amusing and clever—"

"Please," he begged, horrified. "You must not catalogue your attractions as though you were a slave being purchased."

She smiled.

"I am," she said. "Well, will you think it over?"

He studied her, his brows knitted.

"You put me in a most unadmirable position. I must admit that at the outset what you propose simply horrifies me! It is useless to try to conceal this."

"Naturally. I have reversed the positions of the sexes. Pursued, one's instinct is always to flee. And the idea being a new one seems strange and terrible. Unfamiliar things always frighten us."

"That is true," he admitted.

"You will think it over, then?"

"Yes. And if I—if I am unable to undertake it—if I feel that I cannot give you such consideration and affection as would be your due as my wife, you will not misunderstand? You will believe that I am not intending a slur upon your obvious attractions?"

"My vanity will not be hurt," she promised, "for only you and I will know of it, of course. But I shall be disappointed."

He smiled wistfully.

"You have flattered me and honored me, I think, beyond words."

She shrugged.

"Will you give me another round at pool?" she asked coolly.

"Willingly," responded Maybury.

They left the breakfast-room together and for the present did not refer to the matter again.

Whitney came down an hour before noon, looked in on his sister and Maybury in the game-room, went on in search of Andrea, and failing to find her down-stairs, went finally to her door and knocked. His first tattoo received no answer. The second time, she took her courage "in both hands" and asked:

"Well?"

"I'm going to walk to the village to see if my cigarettes have come," said he. "Want to join me?"

"I'm not nearly toileted," said she. She had believed it to be Maybury and was rather relieved.

"I'll wait. Hurry, though. It's not far off to luncheon-time."

"Perhaps I'd better not delay you," said Andrea.

"Come on. You need the air. I'm going to sit here on the steps."

He went off five or six paces and sat down at the head of the flight. There was a little pause. Then her voice drifted out to him.

"Whitney?"

"Right."

"I've my stockings on."

"Good," said he.

"And just putting on my shoes."

"That's the stuff."

Another pause.

"Sarah is doing my hair now."

He made no answer.

"Do you hear?" she called.

"Yes."

Another long pause.

"I'm fastening my jabot and powdering my nose again and putting on my hat."

He got up and went to the door.

"Open," he called.

"Not quite ready yet."

"Let me peep into your room."

"Good gracious, no!" said she; "it's all untidy."

"Just a peep," said he appealingly.

Sarah came and opened the door. He got one glimpse of Andrea surveying herself in the full-length cheval-glass; was conscious of the pale-lavender luxury of her nest. Then she whisked across and slipped out, driving him before her and closing the boudoir door.

"Begone, sir," she said, scowling.

She was all in white serge. A neatly, trimly tailored suit it was. Underneath was a white silk blouse, embroidered in black. There was a black-edged frill at her throat, and another falling from each cuff. Her hat was white, too—small and jaunty, and decorated with black pompon and tassels. She wore heavy black lynx furs and carried a muff.

"If you were to close your eyes," said he, "and somebody kissed you—you couldn't be sure who had done it, could you? And it wouldn't be fair to accuse any one and be angry if you couldn't be sure."

She flushed—the thought of kissing bringing confusing recollections.

"I could ask the person I suspected," said Andrea calmly.

"And if he refused to answer?"

"I should form my own conclusions."

"If he should deny it?"

"He wouldn't, if he'd really done it," said Andrea, "because I abhor liars. And then I should have to send him away."

"You are simply stingy, or else you have a beastly disposition. Miser. That's what you are. Kiss-miser. You would never miss what you gave me, and yet you won't make me foolishly happy."

"Why should I kiss you?" she asked.

"Because I want you to."

"Shall I kiss every one who wants me to?"

"No," Whitney replied, "but I'm going to marry you."

"Maybe," said she. "At the present moment I'm still married."

They had descended the stairs and had gone through the lower hallway to the door without meeting any one. Now they stepped out into the winter sunshine. Andrea filled her lungs happily.

"Do you mean there's a doubt about your getting your freedom and marrying me?" he asked anxiously.

"Of course there is," she said, flushing. "There's a doubt about everything until it happens, Whitney. This is an uncertain world."

He stared at her angrily.

"What's up?" he asked shortly.

"Nothing."

"You didn't talk this way yesterday."

"I've told you frequently that I'm often uncertain about you. Sometimes I dislike you heartily."

He searched her eyes. They dropped before his.

"When do you expect to make up your mind definitely?" he asked.

"About marrying you?"

"Yes."

She sighed.

"I'm trying to decide," she said plaintively. "How can one be sure?"

"Sure of what?"

"Sure of loving anybody."

He smiled a little sarcastically.

"What do you mean by sure?"

She opened her eyes at him.

"I mean," she explained gravely, "how am I to know whether or not I love you enough to marry you and be happy with you?"

"The only thing I can suggest is that you try it and learn by experience."

"Nonsense," said she. "This is a serious matter to me."

"Not nearly so serious as it to to me," he said grimly. "I thought it was quite settled."

She answered slowly: "It was—until I saw Maybury again."

"That's it, then," said Whitney meditatively.

"I owe him so much and he's been so good to me. I can't help liking him."

"You can like him and be grateful," said Whitney. "No one is objecting to that."

"But I—I like him a great deal."

He turned and stared at her.

"Are you trying to break it gently to me that you have decided to remain Mrs. Maybury, Dandy?" he asked quietly.

"No. I haven't decided. I'm trying to be fair with you and tell you that I am confused and that I don't know what to do. It isn't possible for a girl to love two men, of course?"

Her voice rose at the end inquiringly.

"No," said he.

She shrugged and sighed.

"One moment I am sure I love you," she said. "Then I see him and I think I love him. I think I must be very, very bad inside. I can't seem to be sure."

Big tears welled up in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"Help! Help!" cried Vandelear. "Turn off the shower, Dandy, for Heaven's sake! I—nothing makes me so wretched as to see you do that. I wish you wouldn't. Everything is quite bad enough."

Andrea resolutely dried away the tears.

"Think of clowns and things," said he, "and ice-cream and marrons. There—that's better."

"I'm not a child," said Andrea. "And I—I don't know what to do about it all. It looks as if I must make one of you wretched!"

Vandelear nodded.

"And I have a hunch which one of us it will be," he said. "It will

be the one of us that usually comes a cropper."

She said nothing. Her dark, sympathetic eyes sought his anxiously.

"What is there about me that makes you hate me sometimes?" he asked. "Because I'm grumpy and cynical and selfish?"

"I—perhaps," said Andrea.

"I see. I should have hidden that from you. I should have shown you my very best side! Only sooner or later you'd have found me out, of course. The whole thing goes back to this: I ought to be nicer than I am. Why am I not?"

"I guess you never bothered about being nicer," said Andrea. "You are spoiled. You've had too much money and too much liberty."

"And too much flattering," said he, "and too much pampering. And then again, I inherited a rotten disposition. And they began indulging me before I was old enough to know things. And they gave into me when I got into a temper. I have some temper!"

"No doubt you've had a lot to contend with," she admitted. "But now you are old enough to be different."

"I don't think I want to be different, though," he explained. "You'd never suffer from my selfishness or my thoughtlessness or my grumps. And it pays to be that sort in the end. People make allowances for you and don't impose on you. It's really good policy."

She sighed.

"Somehow I can't feel pleased because you are that way, though," she answered, "whether it is good policy or not. And I—I wasn't proud to introduce you to Will and explain that you are the man I mean to marry. The fact that you are a Vandelear doesn't matter to him. He judged you as a man."

"And disapproved cordially, I suppose."

"He didn't say so. He didn't even hint it or look it. But I suddenly got a new viewpoint. I'd been seeing only the Vandelear part of you, I think. I was being consciously mercenary. But in the set we traveled in in Washington and New York it was something to be a Vandelear. There was a golden glamour about your family. And I was fond of Del and she was sweet to me. And as I've said, there are times when—when you simply fascinate me."

He smiled down at her.

"Do I now?"

"A little."

"Let's elope, then. Let's catch the next train to town."

"Why, you're jesting. You know I couldn't do that. I'm married!"

"Bother. So you are. That's a nuisance. If you weren't we could run away, and you'd be married to me before you'd have time to change your mind. And all the good things of the earth would pop into your lap. I'd—I'd lock myself in my room when I felt the grumps coming. And I'd never be cross to you. I'd give you a pretty little pistol, with leave to use it on me the first time I uttered a cross word or even scowled. If you knew how much I want you, Dandy. I've been bored to distraction all my life. You're the one single creature on earth that's ever interested me and kept me contented. Can't you manage some way to choose me?"

Andrea sighed.

"Now, this instant I could," she said. "If he'd only turn up now I think I could decide."

They had reached the station. Vandelear shrugged.

"After all," he said, "it's not up to you or me. It's up to a whimsical jade named Chance or Fate or Destiny. I may as well be patient until she makes up her mind. And then—"

"What?" asked Andrea, as he paused.

"When I was a youngster," said he, "if I couldn't make my playmates do as I pleased I wouldn't play."

And then he went into the express

office and left her staring after him, exceedingly distressed.

CHAPTER VIII.

Complications.

AFTER luncheon Miss Vandelear suggested that they all go over to the country club, where Maybury had told her winter polo was played. The others agreed at once, and so Miss Vandelear went off to change her peach-colored gown for a severe tailored suit of deep-blue velvet, trimmed with ermine, earrings and ornaments of pearl, and a big blue velvet hat, trimmed with roses in American Beauty shades. Whitney went up, too, to change his soft collar for another sort, and Maybury and Andrea were left alone together.

"Are you contented not to change anything?" he asked conversationally.

"The only thing I seem to keep changing is my mind," said Andrea meekly and with a deep sigh.

Maybury smiled.

"You are worrying about it too much," he said. "Don't think of it. Don't try to force yourself to a decision. Sooner or later your doubts will vanish of their own accord and the whole tangle will straighten out for you."

"Do you really think so?" she asked wistfully.

"I'm sure of it."

"If I had only been twins," she added, "there would have been one of me for each of you."

"True," said he. "I couldn't have married you both."

She sighed.

"If I could only dislike one of you," said Andrea gravely, "it would simplify everything. But you are both so nice. In stories there's always one much nicer than the other. The heroine has no difficulty in choosing."

"Sooner or later," said he, "you'll find yourself in precisely the same situation."

"I wish it would happen sooner, then," said she.

"Time is the only chap that can fix it up, I'm afraid," said Maybury. "Living here under the same roof with us both you're bound to prefer one of us, eventually."

"I almost wish the whole thing were taken out of my hands and decided for me," murmured Andrea. "I've always hated deciding things."

"Your husband will be glad to do that for you. Nowadays they rarely get the chance."

Whitney came in, already in his topcoat; and Andrea instantly sought the mirror to adjust her hat and hair.

"How are we going?" asked Whitney, drawing on his gloves.

"We can walk or go in the motor, whichever you prefer," answered Maybury.

"Is there a touring-car?" asked Andrea. "I should like to get the air. It's not cold, do you think?"

"Not too cold," said Whitney conservatively.

Maybury rang and ordered the open car, and Whitney, discovering that it was a high-power car, the same make as his own pet vehicle, received permission to drive it, so the chauffeur was left behind.

Andrea sat beside him, Adelaide and Maybury shared the tonneau. The roads were quite passable, the air was considerably warmer than when Whitney and Andrea had walked to the station, so driving was very pleasant. Within half an hour they were at the club. But winter polo bored Whitney as much as it interested his sister. She chanced to know two of the men who were playing, and that made a difference.

The others, however, found it more or less monotonous, and when Whitney finally proposed escaping, Andrea was quite ready. Maybury expressed a willingness to stay until the finish with Del, if she cared about it, and she did, so it was agreed that Whitney and Andrea should return to the house and

send the car back with the chauffeur for the others.

It was close upon four by this time, and a light snow had begun to fall. In high good humor Whitney and Andrea started down the road. Whitney was certain he remembered exactly how they had come. Andrea, too, had ideas upon the subject. At the end of an hour, during which they had covered a considerable distance, they were compelled to admit that somebody was mistaken. They were in a strange neighborhood, and Andrea was chilled through, and it was coming on to dusk.

They asked their way of various pedestrians and received and followed various directions for a half-hour longer. Then they hove in sight of a huge, well-lighted building, which was instantly recognizable as an inn, and there they joyfully disembarked. They were well on the way to New York, it appeared.

The inn was filled with diners. Andrea and Whitney decided to stay to dine, and, raising Maybury's place on the telephone, they left a simple explanation with the butler. Maybury and Del had not yet returned. The butler was advised to send the limousine for them.

Then, while Andrea thawed out before the fire, Whitney ordered dinner and consulted the "starter" of the inn as to directions and locations and roads.

The whole misadventure had seemed anything but amusing while they were in the midst of it, but when they were snug and warm at a little table in the small dining-room, and an excellent dinner was in progress, it all assumed the proportions of a lark. Whitney jested and punned, aided by a bottle of good champagne. And the coon-shouters in the big dining-room dispensed melody in generous portions.

They reached the inn at twenty-five minutes to six, cold and starved. At seven, well-fed and thoroughly warmed and more or less in a pleasant frame of mind, they set forth again for Maybury's. At a quarter of ten something happened to the car, and Whitney, after a brief examination, announced that it was unfixable with the tools at hand. He reconnoitered and found a house, which was minus telephone and motor service, but would put them up for the night.

He reported this to Andrea. She still sat in the car, cold and frightened, and with that horrible sinking sensation that marks one's ventures into strange places. She was afraid to stay in a strange house. She wondered what Maybury and Adelaide would think! And yet she could not sit in the car all night and freeze. She cried a little out of sheer helplessness and terror, and Whitney put his arm about her and patted her shoulder consolingly and advised her to "buck up!"

Mrs. Pringle, at whose door they had stopped, had already retired for the night, but she appeared in a flowered purple wrapper, to light a fire in the front room and fix them a hot toddy and some cinnamon cookies.

Andrea, looking like a child, with her hat off and her hair loose and big tears stealing down her cheeks now and then, munched the cakes and sipped the hot red stuff and gazed sadly at the fire. Whitney had explained their predicament to Mrs. Pringle; at least the fact that they had lost their way and were unable to fix the car or communicate with their people, and she was sympathetic and no little amused.

"'Twill be all right in the morning," she kept saying to Andrea. "You drink this now, like a good gurrl, and don't fret you!"

"After all," added Whitney, "we told the butler to tell them not to worry."

Andrea faced him a little shamefacedly, but with resolution in her eyes.

"I am not going to stay here overnight," she said. "I am not going to stay anywhere overnight. I am going home!"

"Now, can you?" he asked sensibly.

"I don't know. I don't care. I'd rather walk than stay here. Don't you see? They'll think we did it on purpose! They'll never believe everybody gave us wrong directions. It doesn't sound true."

"Suppose they don't believe it was an accident?" he ventured.

"Don't you see?" she gasped. "It will look as if we ran away—eloped!"

His eyes rested thoughtfully upon her. "Well?"

"We-ll?" She repeated it in amazement. "Do you think I am pleased to have them think such a thing of me?"

He shrugged. "It will solve your difficulties. We'll be married. Maybury will set you free and there'll be no scandal. Only he and Del will know, and they won't talk."

She grew rigid, her hands clutching her chair-arms.

"But they'll believe we went of our own accord."

"Suppose they do?"

She rose and stamped her foot. "I don't want them to," she cried angrily. "I won't have any one believing I would do such a thing! You forget I'm married. Do you suppose I want my husband to believe I hadn't the common decency to wait until he divorced me before running away with you. It's dreadful. I'll walk home."

"You'll get there for breakfast if you don't freeze to death *en route!*"

"What can we do?" she cried tearfully.

He shrugged. "Weeping won't help us any. If it would, I'd weep, too. But as it is, you might better drop it. We'll turn in, and in the morning things will look different. Something may turn up!"

She regarded him frowningly.

"What can we do to-morrow we can't do to-night?"

"We-ll, we might be able to get a buckboard somewhere, or I might be able to do something with the car."

"After it's been standing all night in the cold?"

"We-ll."

She stood up.

"You can do as you please, Whitney," she said. "I am going to start for home, anyway. I'd rather freeze to death on the road than stop here overnight under the circumstances. That's the way I feel about it."

She fastened her furs again with firm fingers—cold fingers they were, too. She was cold all through, and trembling with rage and protest against this latest development.

Whitney sat looking at her an instant. Then, with a sigh, he rose.

"Now, Dandy," he said. "Be sensible. What good can come of our starting out on such a senseless trip, walking at this time of night over strange roads!"

"I'm quite determined to go," she said, "if not with you, then alone."

She moved to the door.

"Are you coming?"

He sighed and threw away his cigarette.

"Yes," he said, "I'll come. Sit down again and I'll have another try at the car."

She hesitated.

"I thought you had investigated it? I thought it couldn't be fixed with the tools you have?"

Whitney paused by the door, turned and faced her.

"To tell you the truth," he said quietly, "the car isn't broken at all. I simply stopped it at the door. I brought you here purposely from the inn. I got this address there. It's a sort of lodging-house. We didn't lose our way. All the people I asked didn't give us wrong directions. And what is more, I know this country thoroughly, as Del very well knows."

She sat transfixed. First the blood rushed into her face, then it receded, leaving her ghastly pale. Mr. Vandelear waited quietly.

"Whitney!" she gasped.

"I thought it a good maneuver. I

overheard you tell Mr. Maybury only yesterday that you wished for something to happen to take the deciding out of your hands. So I made it happen!"

"You meant them to think we'd stayed away purposely?"

"Why not? If we are to be married?"

She shook with rage.

"I can't believe it. I can't believe you capable of such a despicable trick!"

"All is fair, you know, Dandy! Don't you see I want you badly enough to win you any way I can?"

She drew a deep breath.

"But, by lying to me—by deceiving me—by resorting to such—such—intrigue!"

"Anyway, I wanted the matter settled."

She was compelled to wait an instant to control the passion of anger that threatened to overmaster her. He watched, fascinated by her fury. And, presently, she said calmly enough:

"Let us go."

"Wait until I explain to the woman here and pay her."

She merely inclined her head. He went out. Big tears began to creep down Andrea's cheeks, the storm broke. He found her in a tempest of tears when he returned.

"Dandy!" he cried softly, "for Heaven's sake!"

She made no answer—wept on violently.

"If you don't stop crying," he said, "I shall simply be unable to keep from comforting you."

He whispered the words, his lips close to her ear.

She stemmed the tide while he watched.

And when at last she had stopped, they went out again into the snow, and he started the car. The water in the radiator was still warm. And they set out again for Maybury's place. They went in silence — ominous silence. And this time they reached their destination.

A dim light burned in the hallway. The rest of the house seemed dark. The first two rings at the bell remained unanswered. Andrea began to cry again, weakly. The third big ring brought a servant, still fully dressed, but looking as though he had been stealing a nap. The fire in the hearth had died down, but the house still felt warm. The clock on the stair-landing pointed to three. Andrea's horrified eyes dwelt upon it.

"Is it three o'clock?" she gasped, in a low voice.

"Yes, *madame*," said the footman wearily.

She turned to Whitney.

"I shall go straight to my room," she said.

The footman had moved off, and was busy locking the door for the night and turning on the burglar-alarm.

"You're not angry with me, Dandy?" said Whitney wistfully. "You can't blame me for wanting you, and doing my best to get you!"

"I blame you for the way you selected to force my decision," she said bitterly. "I blame you for dishonoring me, or trying to, in the eyes of your sister and my husband. It's that —I'm afraid I can't quite forgive, Whitney."

And then she turned and went up the stairs. The second floor was in gloom, but from her own boudoir came a glow as of many shaded lights. She advanced. Sarah was sitting in a big chair by the hearth, her mouth open, her eyes closed. She had waited up, but sleep had overcome her. The fire burned brightly. The room was cozy and warm.

Andrea, with a little shiver and a deep sigh, laid her hand on the older woman's shoulder.

"Sarah!" she called.

Sarah leaped up, startled, and looked about her.

"Oh, Mrs. Maybury," she said, "I — I was that worried. I didn't know what to do, ma'am."

Andrea threw off her furs and wraps and hat under Sarah's gentle persuasion.

"Mr. Maybury is in bed?" she asked lifelessly.

"No'm," said Sarah.

Andrea brightened a little.

"He's sitting up, too?"

"No'm. Mr. Maybury went away directly he got your message. He didn't even wait for dinner."

"Went away?" repeated Andrea. "Where?"

"I don't know, ma'am," said Sarah.

Andrea turned wide, curious eyes upon her. There was something significant in Sarah's attitude.

"Is Miss Vandelear waiting up?" she asked.

"Miss Vandelear went, too, ma'am," said Sarah.

Andrea sat motionless an instant, failing to realize the meaning of what the serving-woman had said. Then it flashed upon her. Her wide eyes fastened upon Sarah's face.

"They went together?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"As soon as they'd had our message from the inn?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And they left no word?"

"No, ma'am."

Andrea remained sitting just where she was, and a sort of lethargy engulfed her. She did not speak again. Sarah loosened her garments and slipped them off, with no more assistance from Andrea than if she had been a lay figure. Then Sarah slipped the nightgown over her dark head and fastened its ribbon ties.

"Come to bed, ma'am," she said gently.

Andrea crept in beneath the warm covers. The light was switched off. Sarah departed, closing the door softly behind her.

Andrea lay staring into the darkness. The first shock of the disclosure had worn off. Gradually, as the lethargy wore away, a great rage possessed her. A rage against Adelaide for capturing this man, a rage against him for succumbing to Adelaide's attractions. She scoffed at their puny weakness. She mocked her own unenviable position.

She stormed and wept and tossed about in helpless fury. There was no doubt in her mind. She knew they had eloped. She knew that no other woman could be so blind to Maybury's attraction as she had been. She knew no other woman could have hesitated an instant in deciding between Whitney and Maybury. Adelaide had been quick to choose.

Andrea felt in her heart the desire to kill Adelaide, to tear her asunder, to rend her. She felt in her heart a madness to slay Maybury, too, for his weakness.

She stormed and raged. She wept tears of weakness, of helplessness.

She wished that she had stayed away with Whitney that Maybury and Adelaide might never suspect she minded. As her anger died and the feeling of helplessness overwhelmed her, the one remaining determination in her mind was to keep them from ever finding out that she cared.

It was no longer a secret to her. She read her heart by the sudden flare of rage and jealousy that had almost devoured her.

She knew that she loved Maybury with all her heart and soul and strength. And she knew, likewise, that it was too late, now, for this love to matter!

CHAPTER IX.

Cross Purposes.

ANDREA was awakened by Sarah bringing the breakfast tray at eleven. On it was a note from Whitney. He said:

Now you must forgive me. Neither Maybury nor Del need know how late we

were, because they both went out before dinner last night, and haven't come back yet. They went as soon as they got our message from the inn, and left no word. What do you make of it?

She did not answer, but after breakfast, dressed as becomingly as she could and descended. She had a part to play, and she played it valiantly. She graciously forgave Whitney. She was very sweet to him, and indifferent as to Maybury and Adelaide. She succeeded in convincing him that she cared nothing about what had taken them off together. Women are really wonderful in this respect.

He hadn't the vaguest notion how her heart was aching, nor how every ring at the telephone, every sound of wheels from the driveway set her pulses beating. She convinced him easily that she had never cared anything for Maybury, that her feeling for him had been simply gratitude. This was how she sought to save herself shame and humiliation. Maybury should never suspect that she cared—no one should ever suspect. Her secret should die, locked in her heart.

But the day was interminable. She thought it would never end. Her spirits sank at the thought of spending all of her days with this man. And she planned the gayest sort of life for them—a life made livable by constant excitement, filled with dinners, teas, receptions, weddings, dances, traveling, theater, opera, a busy life that would leave her no time nor inclination to brood.

She welcomed five o'clock as she had never welcomed it before, and sought her rooms to dress for dinner, with a sigh of relief for their solitude. And as she sat at her dressing-table, her head buried in her arms, Sarah brought her a wire. It read:

"Conquest and I coming at nine." And it was signed simply "Maybury."

She was a little frightened. There was a sensation somewhere within her as of seasickness. The same sensation she had when she went up in a lift, or looked out of a high window. She felt terribly alone, abandoned. All her life she had had Maybury as a solid bulwark behind her. Now he was about to turn her over to Whitney's tender mercies. His coming with Conquest could mean nothing else.

The thought of it struck terror to her heart. Once, as a child, she had drifted out in an open boat from the seashore where she and Sarah were spending the summer. The same feeling of helpless terror that had overwhelmed her then overwhelmed her now. Even in the moments when she had most loved him she had not found Whitney infinitely reliable.

But this should be her secret. Maybury should never suspect she saw a flaw in Vandelear. When he came at nine, he should find her happy with Whitney, if it took every atom of will-power and nerve force that she possessed.

So she arrayed for battle. First, she sent Whitney a message, announcing the impending interview and begged him to dine alone this once. She dined in her room and tried to rest, but she could not sleep. At eight she began to dress. She implored Sarah to do her best, and the faithful Sarah worked wonders. Andrea, coming down the great staircase, less than an hour later, was a vision to behold.

Her dark eyes were shining with importance and excitement, her skin was faintly flushed with the bloom of perfect health, her brown-gold hair was dressed high, exceptionally high, with a wreath of wild roses around the psyche. The extra height was to add youthfulness—and it certainly did. Her arms were bare, the simple chiffon robe fell almost from the bust, over an underslip of flowered silk. And there was a broad girdle and sash of silver.

Whitney, bored and lonely, was waiting in the hallway, and he capitulated at sight of her. When Conquest

and Maybury arrived, Andrea and Whitney were sitting side by side on the piano-bench, very, very close, enjoying themselves by "ragging" together.

Conquest, assuming the privilege of his age and long friendship, kissed Andrea. Maybury merely smiled complacently and nodded. She greeted him, too, impersonally, but it was very hard.

And then Whitney excused himself and the others found themselves alone. Maybury paced the floor restlessly. Andrea schooled herself to remain quiet, almost indifferent; Conquest studied them both.

"I have told Conquest," said Maybury, "that we have discovered we shall be happier apart, leading different lives. Naturally, we want the legal matter adjusted as quietly and speedily as possible. Tell, Andrea, please, what can be done about it."

Conquest polished his glasses.

"Offhand," he said, "I should say the marriage could be annulled, assuming, of course, that—that a simple ceremony spoken over you nine or ten years ago has never led to your living together as man and wife. In this I am correct, I take it?"

"Yes," answered Maybury, flushing. "And this annulment can be arranged without notoriety?"

"I believe so," answered Conquest sedately.

"I wish you to take charge of it, then," said Maybury. "And an even half of my possessions goes to my wife, this house to be included in her half."

Andrea rose abruptly.

"No," she said. "I—I can take nothing from you."

He flushed, and so they stood an instant, facing each other, while Conquest looked gravely on.

"Why not?" asked Maybury in tones of surprise.

"I am entitled to nothing," said Andrea. "I have been a burden upon you for years, with no claim upon you for protection and care save that my father asked this of you."

"You were my wife."

"A travesty of a wife," said she. "A wife at the other end of the world from you. A mere schoolgirl accepting freely and giving in return nothing!"

He said slowly: "You wouldn't make me unhappy, surely, by refusing this. I pledged my word to your father to look out for you."

"You have looked out for me."

"But I can't set you free with no means of support."

"I—I'm going to be married again at once. He has plenty. I shall need nothing."

Maybury took a turn up and down the room in silence.

"I want you to be independent, even of him," he said. "In case you are not happy, in case things do not turn out for you as you would, as you hope, I want you to be in a position to help yourself, for you will not have me to come to then."

She flushed.

"I can't feel right about taking any more," she said. "I am already far too deeply in your debt."

He looked at her.

"You don't understand," he said gently. "All that I have done for you has been my simple duty. You need feel no obligation. There is none. I have been redeeming my promise to your father. He died believing that he could safely entrust you to me. I gave him my word that so far as it was in my power I would take care of you. If you had desired to remain my wife, I could have done this better. As it is, the best I can do is to place at your disposal money enough to make you independent. If you make it impossible for me to keep my promise you will make me unhappy. I do not think you want to do that?"

"No," she said slowly.

"You will let me provide for you then against the uncertainty of the fu-

ture. I want to do this for my own peace of mind. I am selfish in this. The money means nothing to me. I inherited it, more than I shall ever require, even if I marry again."

"Oh," she said dully. "I—I did not understand!" She raised her eyes to his. He was amazed at the expression deep in them. It was the sort of expression he had seen in the eyes of a dog that had been beaten.

"In this case, I accept," she said, "whatever you please to give me. Not this house. Set what money you like aside in my name. That will liquidate your promise to my father. The rest I leave to you. I think that is all. Good night."

She was gone before Maybury could answer, before Conquest could rise. And for hours afterward she lay upon the lavender chaise-lounge in her boudoir, her hot cheek pillowed on her bare arm, her eyes staring dully into the darkness. She was wretched. Her heart ached.

She had heard of this phenomenon, but it had never before occurred to her. A dull, endless pain was there inside her and she felt ill and weak and a little dizzy, as one at some great height, with the ground crumbling away on all sides.

Lying there on the lounge, her past flashing before her, she told herself that he had never cared anything for her; that he had done what he had done because he had promised. He had said it himself.

The realization was agony unspeakable. He had only pretended to love her and want her, because he thought it his duty! He had urged her to reconsider divorcing him because he thought it his duty. And he had seized eagerly the first pretext to hand her over to Vandelear.

Black desolation settled down upon her like a pall. There was no longer any excuse for deliberating. She must marry Whitney now. The matter had been taken out of her hands as she had wished.

But instead of rejoicing, she had never been so wretchedly unhappy in all her life.

CHAPTER X.

The Surprise.

ANDREA awoke at noon—awoke suddenly, with the vague impression of disaster weighing her down; and, raising herself on one elbow, glanced questioningly about her. She was alone in the room. The cause of her awakening had come from within, not from without.

Her eyes wandered to the clock, and widened as she saw the time. Ten minutes past twelve! She rarely slept so late. Then she remembered, and she sat up, the horrible sensation of terror and loneliness coming back.

For a moment or two she sat thinking. Then she stepped out of bed and rang for Sarah. A very long time elapsed before the old woman answered the summons, then she came in smiling.

"Well," said she, "'tis time you were stirring. Noon it is and the day half gone."

Andrea sank into the chair by the dressing-table and frowned thoughtfully at the array of gold toilet articles.

"Sarah—" she said finally.

"What now?" asked Sarah.

"I shall want a suit, the one I came in, and a hat and blouse."

"Very good," said Sarah.

"And after you've finished me, you can pack."

"Pack?" repeated the serving woman, staring. "Pack, is it?"

"I'm going away from here to-day," announced Andrea. "You will have to know it sooner or later. Mr. Maybury and I are separating, and I am going to marry Mr. Vandelear afterward."

Sarah looked at her doubtfully, hesitated, opened her mouth, shut it, pursed up her lips and said nothing. Andrea paid no heed. She was still

frowning at the gold toilet things. And so she remained in the same attitude as Sarah hurried about noiselessly, laying out the proper lingerie and stockings and shoes, starting the shower and tempering it, warming the towels. But while Andrea splashed in her bath, Sarah shook her head dubiously and sighed several times.

Only the most necessary conversation passed between them, until Andrea stood at the door arrayed for departure. She was all in black and white again, her furs in her arms.

"I'll find out about the trains and let you know," she said. "Be ready as soon as you can!"

"Very good," said Sarah.

Andrea went out and down the stairs.

There was on one in the hall. She went on to the breakfast-room. Maybury was breakfasting alone, the newspapers and his mail about his plate. As she hesitated in the doorway he looked up.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly.

"Good morning," said Andrea, flushing.

"Have you breakfasted?"

She shook her head.

"I'm not hungry. I—has Whitney come down yet?"

"Not yet," said he, and began to reach into his inner pocket. "Last night," he added, "when you disappeared so quickly, I was prevented from giving you a message. Will you have it now?"

He extended an envelope toward her. It was addressed to "Mrs. Maybury, kindness of Mr. Maybury." And it was in Adelaide Vandelear's huge scrawl. Flushing, raising her eyes thoughtfully to his, Andrea drew out the enclosure and read:

MY DEAR DANDY:

No doubt you are wondering what became of me. I'll tell you.

To-day, at the club, after you and Whitney left, I met Bobby Dowling. You remember about Bobby and me last season. I didn't want to marry him, then. I didn't believe in love. I tried to trample on my instincts. I was determined to make a more sensible and more ambitious marriage. Bob hasn't a great deal of money, and he worked his way through college, and his people—well, they're fine and all that, but they don't know the people I know, nor do they move in the same circles. There's no need to rehearse all this, though. You probably remember. We talked about it at the time. To-day, Dandy, I don't know what was the matter with me. When I saw Bobby on the field, so much stronger and handsomer than all the others, and all that sort of thing, I—well it was all up with me, that's all. I came to my senses. I began to see things as other people see them—sensible people—and I sent Maybury down to bring Bobby up to me, and I told him so.

The consequence is, I'm engaged to marry a nobody, and thirty devils, Dandy, but I'm happy. Laura Dowling was here to see the game, and when she heard, she insisted upon my going back with them. They drove us over to Maybury's place when you didn't send the car back, and when we got your message, Maybury promised to deliver this for me. I had intended telling you myself, but the Dowlings were anxious to get back to town, as Mrs. Dowling would be anxious to hear about the game. She always worries when Bobby plays. So I couldn't wait until you turned up.

Dandy, I'm so happy I don't know what to do with myself. I just keep looking at Bobby with an idiotic grin of pride and satisfaction on my face, and he keeps looking at me the same way, and Laura looks at us both and laughs. She says Bobby's been a regular "grouch" for the past year. Fancy a man's remembering so long.

For pity's sake, Dandy, make sure this time before you marry. Can you picture a girl's relinquishing such unadulterated joy for any material reasons? I must have been mad last season. Maybury has just told me he wants to go to see his lawyer, and we are going to take him that far in the motor on our way to town. For Heaven's sake be sure of yourself this time, Dandy, and get the happiness that's coming to each of us by right. I've got mine.

Write to me care of the Dowling's, and break it to Whit. We're announcing it next week.

Always yours devotedly,

DEL.

Crimson, with tears hanging on her long lashes, Andrea looked across at Maybury.

"Surprised?" he asked, smiling.

She dropped her head.

"I'm overcome with joy," she said, "and so ashamed."

"Why?" He was clearly astonished.

"I thought you went away together—you and Del," she said. "Because there was no sign of you when we came back—and no word."

"We did go away together. At least, they took me as far as Conquest's place," answered Maybury.

She smiled faintly.

"But I thought you had eloped."

"Eloped? Miss Vandelear and I? Whatever put such an outrageous idea in your head?"

She was silent.

"I can't see how you could think such a thing when I've made it so plain to you I—I care for you."

"But you did that on account of your promise to my father," said Andrea.

"What nonsense!" he cried. "I did that because I do care for you."

"You do?" she whispered. "Really and truly?"

"Of course," he answered, astonished.

"But the divorce?"

"I can't let you sacrifice yourself to me out of gratitude," he answered gently, "just because I happen to love you and want you."

She drew a long breath. Her heart was beating wildly.

"Suppose," she said, "I were to tell you it wouldn't be gratitude, but something else quite different."

"What!" he cried, staring.

Their eyes met, and the next instant she was in his arms. His lips sought hers, and clung there. Her arms went round his neck.

"Thirty devils; but I'm happy," she whispered, laughing and quoting Adelaide's letter.

Conquest was notified that the annulment proceedings must halt. Whereat he rejoiced and was exceeding glad. Whitney, taking his *congé* quietly, returned to town, and from there, Adelaide reported of him:

"Whit has become involved with a most improper person and is terrifying the family with threats to marry her. He declares that she bores him less than any other girl he knows, is pally, and a good fellow, and that he proposes to please himself when he marries, not the rest of us."

So he didn't shoot himself? They rarely do.

Andrea scarcely remembered that such a man had ever lived. It was not that she was hard-hearted, nor selfish, nor cold. It was just that she had given Maybury, at last, everything that a woman could give, and the rest of the world found no room in her thoughts nor in her life. Perched on the arm of his chair, before the open grate, her arm around his neck, her cheek against his, they were alone in the world. No one else counted.

(The end.)

LOVELY CHILD

A TRAMP DITTY

By Harry Kemp

LOVELY child, make haste to play
While the dew is on your day—
Half a score of years ahead
You will labor for your bread.

MISS "X"

A LONDON MYSTERY

A SERIAL IN VI PARTS—PART I

BY WATKIN BEAL

CHAPTER I.

The Terrible Secret.

DAPHNE BLATCHINGTON descended the broad marble stairs of Berkshire House on the arm of an ambassador. A crowd of people, women in full dress and diamonds, men in uniform, with orders and stars on their coats proclaiming their rank and distinctions, all sorts and conditions of exalted persons, thronged the stairs, but made way for Daphne and her distinguished escort.

At that instant London said that her triumph was complete, and at that same instant she suddenly thought of the secret of her life, which she had concealed so carefully from all these brilliant people, the secret which would have justified them for the criticisms with which they had greeted her into their midst, and to which she at last seemed to have given the lie.

Perhaps just for that instant a shadow crossed her radiant face, but, if it did, it was dispelled immediately, for at the foot of the stairs, among the guests arriving and departing between lines of liveried men servants, waited her lover, Lord Lauriston.

He received her from the ambassador, who relinquished her with a bow of homage to her beauty and an undisguised compliment, which she accepted carelessly. She was used to admiration. She was the type of woman who attracts men irresistibly by nature, and not by art.

To-night she looked magnificent. Her pale hair, her cheeks flushed with health, her eyes sparkling with pleasure and excitement, her full, palpitating figure, all combined to form her brilliant, almost dazzling personality.

A few minutes later, when she sat in the motor beside Lord Lauriston, she lay back against the thick drab upholstery and smiled with satisfaction.

"Have I done you credit?" she whispered.

"You have made me the proudest of men," was the answer.

Daphne smiled the smile of the woman who is conscious of her personal charm and its attendant power.

As they drove along Piccadilly it occurred to her that London lay subject before her. Lord Lauriston was the hostage.

"The prince complimented me on my appearance," she observed, after a pause.

"He has the best taste in Europe," said Lauriston.

"In women?" queried Daphne, laughing.

"In everything," answered Lauriston solemnly.

Daphne laughed again, though he did not notice it, nor hear the sigh that followed. She was tremendously proud to be going to marry Lord Lauriston, but his serious method of life was trying—and she thought of

another man whose light humor was as delicate as his love-making.

But then Laurence—that was Lord Lauriston—was a politician, and politicians were always serious, she reflected.

In a very little while the car drew up and Lauriston helped her out. Daphne ran into the house—her home—with her filmy skirts gathered up, and he followed her; but, before they entered the dining-room where her aunt, with whom she lived, was waiting, he suddenly bent down and, entwining her in his arms, kissed her passionately. The servant who had opened the door had disappeared, and for a second they were alone.

"My beautiful Daphne," he murmured, and she felt his arms tremble. She was amazed, so seldom did the smoldering fire of his admiration flame into raptures of this description.

"Are you very happy?" he asked.

"Divinely."

"So am I, Daphne."

They passed on into the dining-room, where he greeted her aunt—Mrs. Maddox—with polite austerity. The table was spread with a dainty supper, but Daphne merely had her accustomed cup of chocolate, and Lauriston poured himself out a drink.

"The Prince de Carole complimented me," cried Daphne again to her aunt.

"Daphne has scored a complete and overpowering success," said Lauriston, much more animated than usual.

"My dear, I am so proud and pleased," cried Mrs. Maddox, smiling with bright eyes toward Daphne, who was standing by the mantelpiece holding two or three letters in her hand.

"Her greatest triumph—and mine," said Lauriston, "will be in six weeks' time." He meant the date which had been fixed for their marriage. His face lit up, but Daphne was engrossed in studying her letters. One, she saw, was from her solicitor, and, as she examined the superscription, she felt a distinct premonition of evil.

"Oh, will you excuse me?" she said, and split open the envelope.

Lord Lauriston and her aunt were discussing the details of the big reception from which he had just brought Daphne, and as the girl glanced over the sheet of note-paper she heard him say:

"Yes, Daphne outshone every woman in the rooms."

"Ah, but you are biased," cried Mrs. Maddox. Then Daphne heard no more.

The blow fell!

"Your husband has come back," she read, and the words blurred before her eyes; "he is not dead, but is in London, living his old life, and he knows your address and of your approaching marriage. I must see you at once." So wrote her solicitor.

Daphne could not read further; the room swam, the walls seemed to recede until everything was immense and Lauriston's voice droned away into the distance.

She did not turn faint or rush out of the room, as many women would have done; she merely folded up the letter and stuffed it into her corsage, and steeled herself to retain her self-control.

"He has come back," were the words which echoed relentlessly in her mind, and she pictured the evil face of the husband whom she had believed to be dead, the husband whom she hated and loathed!

And her eyes rested dully on the man she was to have married within a few weeks.

It seemed ages before Lauriston rose to take his leave.

She went out into the hall with him, he whispered a playful, tender word or two, and their lips met; then the motor-car whirred away, and she came back into the dining-room. Her aunt noticed her look of lassitude.

"I am very tired; I am going to bed," murmured Daphne.

"Very tired, but very happy, my dear?" smiled Mrs. Maddox.

"Yes, very, very happy," replied Daphne. She kissed her aunt and escaped out of the room.

"He has come back," she whispered again when she was alone in the hall, and she swayed a little as she mounted the first stair; her pale hair, bare shoulders, and filmy gown showing up in contrast to the dark background of the walls.

Eight years ago, as a girl of seventeen, she had married one of those men who, in spite of their failings, exercise a powerful fascination for women. After a few months of unhappy married life she had left him, and come to live with her aunt. From time to time he had molested her, then a train, in which he had been crossing America, had been wrecked and caught fire, and most of the victims had been burned beyond recognition. Her husband, Victor Scruit, had been among the officially named dead. He had been fleeing from his creditors at the time. She saw it clearly now. Evidently he had used the train disaster as an ingenious mask for his disappearance, and had not been actually killed, as she and every one else had assumed. And now he had come back.

When she got up to her room her maid was waiting for her, and she had to endure more minutes of torture while she was undressed; then, when at last she could find a reasonable excuse to dismiss the woman and be alone, she threw herself down in a chair and collapsed utterly. She seemed to shrink, the light died out of her eyes and the delicate pink from her cheeks; her youth changed to age. She was still quite young, hardly twenty-six. To the world she was known as Miss Blatchington, for it had been arranged between her and her aunt when she had sought peace and shelter with the latter that the fact of her wretched marriage should be concealed. They had migrated to London, and there began a new life, over which, for Daphne, there had always hung, however, a somber cloud.

A year ago Lauriston had crossed her path. He had been attracted by her; she had not cared for him much, but she and her aunt were not too fortunately placed financially, and he offered her everything that she could desire—and she had accepted him.

She rose and paced the room.

"I will fight, I will fight," she told herself passionately. "I do not deserve this, Heaven knows that I do not!"

Gradually one single determination began to dominate her, a determination to conceal from every one the fact of her husband's return, and to try to discover some means of ridding herself of him. Yes—she would make a fight.

CHAPTER II.

Back from the Dead.

WHEN Daphne woke the next morning the recollection of what had happened came slowly back to her.

It was already late. She had scarcely slept at all, but toward morning she had dozed and had not been roused, for it was her practise to save her constitution and her looks by prolonging her night far into the day after she had been prolonging the day far into the night at some big entertainment the evening before.

It was the middle of the morning, therefore, before she had breakfasted, or, rather, had attempted to do so, for she was too racked with apprehension to be able to eat.

He had come back. He was alive. He might come to her house at any moment. The husband she loathed, hated, despised—above all, feared!

Directly she could she telephoned to her solicitor, Mr. Pennistone, and arranged to see him that afternoon at two. She would have liked to ask him innumerable questions, but she did not dare for fear of being overheard.

She went out. She could not stay in the house. Her thoughts tortured her.

To know that her husband might come to her at any moment; that he might meet Lauriston. It would mean social disgrace.

She walked leisurely, very trim in her serge morning dress, with a large fur twined round her neck and a voluminous bag in her hand, and made her way in the direction of Piccadilly.

When she reached the shops she was unpleasantly reminded of a further difficulty of her position. She had been extravagant, and had been relying on her approaching marriage to settle her bills; moreover, she had been obtaining unlimited credit on the strength of her engagement to Lord Lauriston, and shopkeepers and modistes who had seen her name in the society papers as his future wife had been only too glad to let her run up large accounts.

Now — she could not marry him. Her credit would come to an abrupt end, and her bills would have to be paid.

This financial difficulty brought more terror to her than had the much more serious one of her husband being in London.

If her marriage did not take place —as, of course, now it never would— she would be faced with immediate demands for all that she owed. It was a horrible position.

"Virtually," she reflected, "I have been going to sell myself."

She flushed, glancing distastefully at the crowd of idle, thoughtless women on the pavements around her—inconsequent, careless women, bent on nothing but their vapid pleasures; women to whom the trifles of life, their dress, their engagements, their freaks and fashions, were of vastly more importance to them than anything that really mattered.

She watched them chattering, trailing along the public streets in extravagant dresses, staring and being stared at, and she sickened when she thought of her own life.

It was now nearly one o'clock. Her appointment with Mr. Pennistone was at two. She went and had lunch at a restaurant, then she took a cab and drove to the neighborhood of the Temple, where, having reached the first floor of a large, gaunt house, she was shown at once into Mr. Pennistone's room.

Her heart was beating painfully, but he was quite unsympathetic, and merely begged her to sit down. She shivered. The room was forbidding. The big, curtainless windows, the dusty bundles of papers, the naked marble mantelpiece, all the objects which constituted its furnishings, seemed to breathe the cold, hard spirit of the man who inhabited it.

"There is no need for us to waste time with preliminaries, Miss Blatchington," he said, giving her the name by which she was known, though he knew it to be false. "I hope I explained the situation clearly."

"Quite so," murmured Daphne. "Only, how—how was it that he escaped alive from that railroad accident?"

"Ah, that I do not know, except that he apparently let it be given out he was dead so as to hoodwink his creditors. It is in his letter. Perhaps I cannot do better than let you read it." He handed it to her. "He evidently means to molest you."

He did not notice that the hand she put out to take it trembled violently. The letter was an untidy scrawl on common paper. It ran:

DEAR SIR:

No doubt it will surprise you to hear from me, Victor Scruit, whom you believed to be dead. My object in writing to you is to notify you that I am alive, and that I desire to see my wife. I am not ignorant of her whereabouts, but I think it will be better for both of us if I communicate with you first.

I must explain that I was not killed in the Kansas train smash in 1905, but for certain reasons preferred to let it be thought that I had died. I started life afresh under an assumed name which I am still using. I went right south and started in business, but I regret to say that of late I have not been successful, and I have

therefore come to this country to obtain help from my wife, which I feel it is only fair she should give me. I now intend to exercise my legal rights as her husband. Will you please communicate with her and tell her that I wish to see her without delay? I know her address at Hill Street and all the circumstances of her present life, but I feel that, were I to visit her, it would only be compromising and unpleasant for her, and I therefore wish her to come and see me at the above address at three o'clock in the afternoon on Thursday next. I shall expect to hear from you without delay. Please address me as L. Ward.

Daphne finished the letter and then stared at the signature at the foot which she knew so well. She sat motionless.

"What am I to do?" she whispered.

"That is what we must carefully consider," said Mr. Pennistone. He took the letter from her and reread it. "You see," he went on, "this is a distinct menace. 'I now intend to exercise my legal rights.' That can mean only one thing, that he is going to try to make you live with him again—"

Daphne stood up breathless.

"Never!" she cried. "That can never be!"

"Of course it is impossible," said Mr. Pennistone; "that is what we have got to avoid—somehow."

"Of course you know that I am engaged to be married to Lord Lauriston?"

"Certainly. No doubt he knows also. You see he says: 'I know her address and all the circumstances of her present life.' That phrase means a great deal, I am afraid."

"Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?" cried Daphne. "He may make some terrible scene, may come to our house at Hill Street."

"Not if you accede to his demands to go and see him, I think," said Mr. Pennistone.

"I will not see him—I could not endure it!" cried Daphne with conviction.

"Nevertheless, that was what I was going to suggest to you," said Mr. Pennistone. He looked up at her unsympathetically, unemotionally.

"I cannot," repeated Daphne. "You must see him for me."

"Ah, I am afraid he would not be satisfied; and, you see, if we refuse him his request, he might go to your house or accost you in the street at any time. You are entirely in his power."

"Oh, why can't you help me, Mr. Pennistone, instead of merely telling me of my misfortune?" burst out Daphne. "Don't you realize what this means to me? I thought my husband dead. I am engaged to another man. I shall have to break off that engagement without giving him any reason. I shall have to cut myself adrift from all my friends, abandon my life, give myself over to this creature, and all you can suggest is that I should go to see him. He may kill me. He hates me. He must, he has every reason to. I deserted him." She gave way utterly.

"Come, come," murmured Mr. Pennistone, more irritated than distressed at her emotion. "I merely suggested you should do that to pacify him, temporarily, till we can come to some sort of bargain with him. What he wants, of course, is money."

"I cannot give him that!" cried Daphne. "I am in debt. I was relying on my marriage to get myself out of my difficulties. It is useless for me to attempt to disguise my position from you. My marriage to Lord Lauriston was to be purely one of convenience so far as I myself was concerned. Now it cannot take place. I have no money to give my husband. I owe much more than my entire year's income already. Oh, I don't know what I can do!"

"As I said," repeated Mr. Pennistone, "the first thing is for you or me to see him and find out exactly how high he is going to place his demands. Then we can consider how to act. I do not think it would be the least good my seeing him with you—or alone.

A lawyer is like a red rag to a bull in such a case as this. My suggestion is that you go to this address which he writes from at the time he names—that is, at three o'clock to-morrow."

"To that house!" cried Daphne. "He may do me some horrible injury."

"My dear Miss Blatchington, he does not want to kill you or hurt you in any way; all he wants to do, I am convinced, is to extract money from you. In other words, he wants to blackmail you. It will be to his interest to preserve you in your present position, and not to injure it by disclosing himself and so ruining you. I think we may rest assured on that point. My idea is that a comparatively small sum paid down would keep him quiet, and most likely induce him to go back to America. Now, will you go and see him as I suggest? Mind, I advise it."

"And you think it is the only way?"

"I think it is the best way."

"And after that, if I do go, what do you propose I shall do afterward?"

"That depends on what he demands. Make any sacrifice, I should suggest, in order to pay; make him some regular payment on condition, for instance, of his leaving England."

"But I couldn't possibly. You know how ridiculously small my income is. Even if I gave up everything and lived very quietly somewhere, I couldn't afford to pay out, say, a hundred a year."

"We must see," said Mr. Pennistone. "The question is, shall I write to him and tell him you will go to see him to-morrow?"

Daphne looked out of the window at the leaden sky. She saw a man's face, dark, evil, cunning, forbidding. Could she go? Could she bear to see him again, to perhaps endure his caresses or his insults? She thought of Lauriston, of Lancelot Welde, of all the men and women who had made up her comparatively happy life since the time of horror had ended and she had believed herself to be freed from her husband. She could not realize that she would have to see him again within a few hours.

"Very well, I will go if you insist," she said in a low voice, turning to Mr. Pennistone.

"I do insist," he said.

So it was settled. She was to go to the house where her husband was lodging at three o'clock the next afternoon, and afterward she was to come back and report to Mr. Pennistone the result of her interview.

When she had left him, Mr. Pennistone remained standing. It was an extraordinary case, quite the most extraordinary one he had ever come across. He stroked his chin thoughtfully. Then he sat down again and had a clerk in and dictated a letter to Victor Scruit.

CHAPTER III.

Fangs of Conscience.

MEANWHILE Daphne had got home and was told by the parlormaid that Mr. Welde was waiting in the drawing-room.

Daphne pushed back a stray piece of hair from her forehead with a movement of weariness.

"Yes, I will see him," she murmured, and going into the dining-room hastily examined herself in the glass over the fireplace. She saw that she looked careworn.

"Something must happen," she said to herself. "I feel that something will happen and set me free."

Then she began to arrange her hair and dab her lips with her handkerchief.

"Why need he have come to-day of all days?" she murmured discontentedly to herself, alluding to Welde.

She would have been so happy in different circumstances to go up-stairs now to Lancelot Welde; as it was, it was a pain rather than a joy to see him.

"Oh, why am I tormented so?" she burst out to her own heart. "Why, why, why—"

She stood for a time with her eyes closed, her delicate hands gripping the ledge of the mantelpiece, a look of intense pain on her face. Then she suddenly pulled herself together by an amazing effort, and went up-stairs to the drawing-room.

Welde was standing with his back to her, gazing out of the window. He turned, and a smile spread over his features, a smile of such genuine pleasure and welcome, and — Daphne hesitated to place the last word even in her mind—love.

"At last," he murmured, and took her hand and held it. "I have waited five minutes. It has seemed five hours."

"How nice of you to come," she said. "I was feeling fearfully down."

"Really?" he murmured in a quiet tone. He was always quiet, and his eyes sought hers quizzically. "What's the trouble now?"

There was something very comforting in the way he spoke, as if he could put all the troubles in the world right. The man who can give that impression is delightful to women.

"The same old trouble," she laughed.

"Only a little worse," he observed, looking at her closely and seriously. "Daphne, what is it?"

He always used her Christian name. They had been good friends for years. It seemed as if they were never destined to be anything more to one another.

"Money, or rather the want of it," she said, and sat down, turning away. She was anxious to let him think that her anxiety was financial. Welde had no suspicions of anything else.

"I suppose a fiver would be no good," he said dubiously. "I am so stupidly poor myself or I would offer you more; you know I would."

"Yes, I know you would. No, Lance, I don't think a fiver would be the least little bit of good. A few hundred fivers might make a difference. Oh, Lance, why can't you get rich, and I could marry you, and it would be all right!"

"I'm beastly sorry," he said contritely. "You know I would marry you like a shot if I had any money—and you'd let me."

"But you haven't, and I can't let you," she smiled with brimming eyes.

"That's the devil of it," he said. "I beg your pardon."

"Yes, it's just the very, very devil of it," she laughed.

Then there was silence, and afterward they fell to talking of things less personal. After a time she said:

"It's too sweet of you to have come, Lance; and you have bucked me up no end, but, uncharitable as it sounds, I must ask you to go. I have to go to a big dinner with"—she gulped the word out awkwardly — "Lord Lauriston to-night, and I'm dead tired as it is."

He jumped up at once.

"Of course," he said. "Have I been keeping you like the selfish chap that I am? But it's good to see you, Daphne, and—when you're married I sha'n't be able to see you very often."

"Not very often," she laughed.

Another, a more uneasy silence, fell between them—a silence pregnant with meaning—though no word passed their lips. Each knew what thoughts were passing in the mind of the other, each was too brave to show any sadness or the white feather.

"It is to be in exactly six weeks' time from to-day," she said. "It's funny, isn't it?" She was alluding to the date of her marriage.

"Very funny," said Welde with the first touch of bitterness he had shown.

"Oh, don't speak like that!" she breathed. "You know I must!"

"Yes, you must," he murmured. "But I am not an Oriental fatalist, and I can't help—well—kicking just a bit against fate now and then; but I soon quiet down and keep inside the traces."

He held out his hand. "Good-by, then, Daphne," he said. "And good luck."

"Good luck!" she echoed so wretchedly that her words tore at his heart.

"Daphne, it's not as bad as that, is it?" he asked. For a second he could scarcely restrain himself from taking her in his arms and kissing her. But he did restrain himself, for Welde was honorable as well as brave; and, besides keeping a smiling face turned to life, he never did a mean action.

"Good-by," he said again, and turned away hastily.

"*Au revoir!*" she cried, but her voice almost broke.

Welde went toward the door, smiling. He was determined not to wear his heart on his coat-sleeve.

As he reached the door the parlor-maid threw it open and announced:

"Lord Lauriston."

And Welde gave place to the other man without kicking over the traces again, as he would have put it.

Lord Lauriston came in quickly, giving him the curtest of nods; there was something almost proprietary in the method of his entry, as much as to say: "I have a right here." Daphne noticed this and thought: "Supposing he knew!"

But, directly he was alone with her, his manner changed and softened. His greeting was affectionate in the extreme, and she had to submit to his caresses, thinking every moment of her horrible secret. Every loving sentence that he spoke set her nerves on edge; she felt ready to burst from his embrace, to turn and hold him from her and confess her wretched story. But she could not—she knew that she could not.

"Something must happen," she said to herself, and again she had the strange presentiment that even now some event would take place which would make that confession unnecessary.

Yet she knew that every minute that she spent in Lord Lauriston's company she was deceiving him grossly, acting the part of an impostor. It was all horrible; she had not realized how horrible it would be. It could not go on long. A few weeks at the most—and then—

She dared not think of the future.

After a time he rose, reminding her gaily that they would very shortly meet again that evening at the dinner to which they were both going. "Do you know, Daphne," he said, "I feel that an hour spent away from you is an hour wasted? What should I feel if we were to be separated forever and I had to spend a whole lifetime without you? How could I, when a single hour is torture?"

"But nothing can come between us," she whispered, trembling in his arms.

"I am determined that it sha'n't," he murmured. Then he went.

How could she tell him?

CHAPTER IV.

"Mr. Ward Is Dead."

THE house where Victor Scruit was living in lodgings, as Mr. Pennistone had surmised, and under the assumed name of Ward — was in the neighborhood of Holloway.

It was a tall, dingy, stucco-fronted house, sandwiched into a long, dreary row of similar houses; a house that had once been quite pretentiously respectable, but which now was dirty and squalid and broken-down-looking to a terrible degree. Its stucco was chipped and grimed, its windows smeary, its patch of front garden a tangle of wretched bushes, and its paint blistered and old.

Inside—and the inside of a house is more important than the outside, for it is there that the inmates live their lives and sometimes gruesome tragedies are enacted—inside it was very dirty and very commonplace. It had a dark, narrow hall, with a filthy, shiny paper on its walls, a narrow staircase, and on each floor there were two rooms, a big front one and a mean back one. On

the first half-landing also there was an apology for a conservatory, which was reached through a red and green and orange glass-paneled door.

And if you stood at the top of the stairs you could see right down to the bottom of the house through the narrow well formed by each half flight as it doubled back on the other. The house belonged to one George Maberly, who let the greater part of it out, and lived with his wife and little girl in the basement.

On the Thursday afternoon which Victor Scruit had fixed for Daphne to make her visit, George Maberly's wife was sitting in the kitchen, which was the basement front room. It had a bay window, with stout, perpendicular bars fixed outside it, as if to convert it into a prison, and it was so gloomy that it was not unlike one.

Mrs. Maberly had with her her little girl and her sister Rose. The two women were sewing, and the child was playing miserably in the window, for life at George Maberly's house was of a rather squalid and depressing kind. The only cheerful thing in the room was the fire, which glowed brightly and threw shadows about the walls and the ceiling as the January afternoon began to fade.

The two women were silent while their needles darted backward and forward with quick thrusts, but at last Mrs. Maberly spoke:

"There's a lady comin' to see the new man on the second floor this afternoon," she observed. "He told me most particular. Said she was coming at three o'clock. She's late, though."

"What's he like?" asked her sister with toneless lack of interest.

"Queer," mumbled Mrs. Maberly, with a couple of pins in her mouth. She took them out, fixing her work with them. "And a bit of a brute, too, I should say," she added. "I pity her."

"What—the lady?"

"Yes."

"Wonder what sort she is?" remarked Rose.

"Couldn't say, as I've never seen her yet." Mrs. Maberly made an exclamation; "why, if she hasn't arrived this minute. Well, just as we were talking about her." She craned her head downward and round to get a view of Daphne through the side of the bay window as she stood on the front steps above. "Smartish, and no mistake," ejaculated Mrs. Maberly, "and pretty, I should think, if her face weren't so twisted up in that motor veil till one can hardly see it."

The knocker was rapped decisively.

"Quite the lady," commented Rose, craning her neck also to get a good view.

Mrs. Maberly ran up-stairs and let Daphne in. It was not Mrs. Maberly's practise to show her lodgers' visitors up to their rooms. She merely indicated the floor and the door, and retreated.

"Yes, Mr. Ward," she said, in answer to Daphne's question. "Second floor front, if you please. You'll find your way up quite easy."

And she left Daphne to go hesitatingly forward, while she herself dived again to the kitchen regions and rejoined her sister.

"Got a nice voice, from what I could judge," she said, in comment upon Daphne. "Seemed nervous like, too. I wonder what that Mr. Ward's game is with her? But that's no business of mine, is it?"

"Certainly not," answered Rose.

The light dwindled a little, and Mrs. Maberly moved a shade closer to the window. The women resumed their sewing, and silence pervaded the little room until it was suddenly rudely disturbed by a shrill howl from the little girl, who had succeeded in pulling the kettle over almost on to the top of herself, only just escaping a bad scalding.

Mrs. Maberly sprang up with a "Bother the child!" Pandemonium raged; and when the child's howls had been stilled, the water mopped up, the fender wiped, and peace restored more or less, the subject of the visitor to the

lodger on the second floor had momentarily slipped from the women's minds.

After perhaps a quarter of an hour or more had passed, however, Mrs. Maberly remarked:

"That lady don't seem to have gone yet. I hope we sha'n't miss her; I'd like to get another sight of her."

"She mayn't go for an hour or more," observed Rose.

"And that reminds me, I've always taken him up a cup of tea about four. Wonder if I ought to take it up to-day—with an extra cup for her?"

"I don't see why not," agreed Rose, anxious to hear any further details there were to be gleaned about the interesting lady visitor up-stairs.

"All right, I will," said Mrs. Maberly, coming to a decision and rising.

She picked up the kettle, which was empty, after having been upset by the child, and went into the scullery to fill it.

In a minute or two she came back, put it on the fire, and began collecting cups and saucers and plates, and arranging them on a tray.

In a little while the kettle boiled, and Mrs. Maberly made the tea. Then having set the tray, she went carefully out of the room with it.

Rose sat thinking of the lady up-stairs—and the man—and wondered what their story was. She was the sort of young woman who is always scenting a sordid romance.

She heard her sister go with a heavy, laborious tread up the first flight of stairs, along the hall, and then begin the ascent of the next flight. Then she ceased to think about her, and reverted again to her speculations about the lodger.

The house was perfectly still, when suddenly she was brought to herself with a start by an appalling crash, as if the tea-tray and its contents had fallen. Then she heard her sister crying out frantically:

"Rose, Rose, for goodness' sake come quick, and bring some matches!"

Rose sprang to her feet, and little Dora, the child, clung to her. Because the room was now quite dark, she could not find the matches for a second or two.

"Coming this minute!" she cried out, thinking that nothing worse had happened than that her sister had smashed her tea things. But the next instant she was struck with horror. Mrs. Maberly herself rushed into the room with a face that, even in the dusk, Rose could see was drawn and white with fear.

"Rose, something awful's happened!" she cried. "I think Mr. Ward's dead or ill! Come quick with me!"

Rose needed no urging. Instinctively she realized that they were in the face of some horrible calamity, and together, with the sobbing child clinging to their skirts, they ran up the stairs to the first floor, where Mrs. Maberly lit the gas, which flared for a minute with an eery shriek.

"He's up there," she said to Rose; and as soon as their eyes got accustomed to the glare after the darkness they saw, lying just in front of them on the half landing, a few steps up, the recumbent form of Mrs. Maberly's lodger, his head toward them, and slightly hanging over the top stair, the mouth open, the glassy eyes looking back and up, with the whites exposed.

For a second the two women stood transfixed with horror. Then Mrs. Maberly, clinging with one hand to Rose, took two trembling steps up toward the half-landing and peered just for a second at the face of her lodger.

"He's dead, Rose!" she gasped.

Then blindly they rushed down the stairs and out into the street.

CHAPTER V.

"Wanted."

MRS. MABERLY and Rose rushed out into the dim, misty evening.

"Help! Help!" they both shrieked, but their cries echoes weirdly down an

empty street for a minute or two. Then an errand-boy ran up with his mouth agape; heads appeared at neighboring windows, and a constable came across the road out of the gloom at a double.

"Hi! What's the matter? What's up?" he cried.

Mrs. Maberly was supporting herself against the stucco gate-post.

"Murder!" she gasped. "There's a man dead in there!" She pointed to the open front door, and tried to control herself.

"Murder, d'you say?" asked the constable, excited, and the errand-boy's eyes became as round as saucers, while several neighbors who had come up began asking frantic, incredulous questions.

"Go in an' see!" gasped Mrs. Maberly, with her hand pressed to the region of her heart.

The constable went up the pathway.

"You come along in and show me," he said, and he gripped her by the arm and guided her into the house. All the crowd followed, including another constable, who had come up in response to his comrade's whistle. They all went up-stairs, but at the actual sight of the body some of the crowd drew back, and a subdued murmur—subdued because of the strange presence of death—arose. One of the constables, a young man new to the force, ejaculated: "'Eaven!" Then they both went up the five or six stairs to the body and bent over it.

"Murder or suicide, Bob?" said one to the other.

"Might be either."

In a second or so they drew back, and one of them almost immediately went down-stairs and out of the house.

"He's gorn for a doctor, and to telephone for an inspector," said the one who remained. "Now, then, all of you keep back!"

He pushed some of the curious men and women down the stairs, and they all waited like a group of frightened animals.

Suddenly horrible laughter broke unnervingly on the group. It was Rose, who, overcome by terror, had given way to violent hysterics. They took her down-stairs and tried to calm her, and almost immediately a doctor arrived, and a minute or so later a police inspector and more constables.

The constables were despatched over the house, into the garden at the back, and stationed in the front. The doctor, with the inspector, bent down over the body. It was not, of course, moved. All was now pandemonium.

A curious, incredulous crowd had assembled in the quiet street. No one could tell from whence such a crowd had been able to collect so quickly. In the house there were now only a few people besides the police. The latter had ejected all except one or two neighbors—women—who were with Rose and Mrs. Maberly. Rose was still hysterical, but Mrs. Maberly stood white, but self-possessed, on the landing while the doctor made his examination.

"Yes," he said, coming down at last. "I think it is murder, from the nature of the wound; in fact, I feel certain about it."

"I think so, too," said the inspector, "and there is no weapon; but it's early to talk yet."

Then he began making copious notes, the answers mainly to numerous questions which he put to Mrs. Maberly.

He took down her full name and address, Rose's, George Maberly's name and occupation, what lodgers they had in the house, what she was doing when she last saw Scruit, or rather Ward, as he had been known, and how she and her sister discovered the crime.

"And your husband has not been home all day?" the inspector asked her.

"No, he never comes home; it 'ud be as much as his place is worth. Nine till seven's his hours—no variation."

"And there's been no one else here except the visitor to the dead man whom you told me about?" Mrs. Ma-

berly had, of course, mentioned Daphne at once.

"No."

"Tell me more about her."

The inspector was intensely eager over this. Directly Mrs. Maberly had mentioned the lady's visit he had told her to stop, and that he would go into that later. Now he showed a desire to go into it very fully; this and her husband's whereabouts seemed to interest the inspector most.

"And you did let her in?" said the inspector, trying to keep pace in his note-book with Mrs. Maberly's garrulous utterances.

"Yes, I let her in, an' told her 'second floor front'; then I went down-stairs."

"And did you see her go out?"

"No, I did not, more's the pity; because little Dora, here, she got playing about and—"

But the inspector interposed.

"Would you know her again if you saw her?" he asked.

"Well, I might and I might not," said Mrs. Maberly; "for her face was so wrapped up in one of these motor-veils that it was all I could do to see if she was dark or fair."

"Which was she?" asked the inspector promptly.

"Fairish, and tall, and quite the lady," answered Mrs. Maberly.

"And her clothes — any distinctive colors or garments—anything noticeable?"

"All black," said Mrs. Maberly. "Black with a purpose, I'll lay."

The inspector paused and thought.

"It was funny," he said, "that you didn't see her go out. There is no back entrance, is there?"

"No, there is not. I think she must ha' gone almost directly—that is, while Rose and me were fiddling about with the child when she upset the kettle."

"What time would that be?" asked the inspector.

"It was a quarter to four," said Mrs. Maberly. "I happened to catch the clock with my eye as I was mopping up the fender. Yes, I'm sure of that—exactly a quarter to four."

"And this lady came at half past three, did you say?"

"She was supposed to be coming at three, but it was a long, long time after," said Mrs. Maberly. "I should say it was quite half after the hour, or even later still."

"And that is practically all you can tell me, I suppose?" said the inspector.

Mrs. Maberly agreed, and after being asked a few more questions she was released from this cross-examination. Later, when her husband came in, he too was closely questioned, but only with the result of the inspector being quite convinced of his innocence of any complicity in the crime. No clues of any sort were forthcoming, in fact, except the woman who had visited the dead man, and whose identity was unknown. And so the mystery of Victor Scruit's death passed almost immediately into the strange category of the unexplained.

CHAPTER VI.

"I Am Innocent."

MR. PENNISTONE was a most methodical man, and he lived a life so strictly ordered by rote that the slightest divergence from his recognized daily habits caused him acute annoyance.

One of his habits was to leave his office punctually at half past five every evening and then to walk leisurely westward to his club. On the Wednesday afternoon when Daphne was to go to her husband, Mr. Pennistone was in his office, and, punctually as a neighboring clock chimed the half-hour, he put on his coat, placed his top hat on his head at the exactly accustomed angle, and took up his stick preparatory to departure.

All these movements he accomplished with precision, while his mind turned over his various business concerns of the day and, incidentally, dwelt for a

moment on Daphne's case. He recollected quite well that that afternoon she was to have gone to see her husband, and he wondered what the result had been.

He walked toward the door now; but just as his hand reached the knob, one of his clerks came in in a manner almost too hurried to be respectful.

Mr. Pennistone glared.

"Miss Blatchington to see you, sir," said the clerk.

"Miss Blatchington?" echoed Mr. Pennistone.

"Yes, sir. She says she must see you at once."

"Well, well, I must see her," replied Mr. Pennistone. "Put on that light and show her in." He turned round, laid down his stick, hung up his hat, and removed his coat, wondering irritably why women did such irresponsible things as to come without warning when they had an appointment a few hours later.

In a second Daphne swept into the room. Her manner was extraordinary. She did not greet him, did not take the chair he proffered her; instead, she stood waiting till the clerk had gone, and then glanced apprehensively toward the door which had just closed upon him.

"Mr. Pennistone, I had to see you," she said breathlessly. "I have—horrible news; horrible, and yet it is a deliverance to me. My husband is dead!"

Mr. Pennistone started visibly.

"Your husband is what?" he cried.

"Dead!"

"Dead," repeated Mr. Pennistone incredulously. "When?"

"This afternoon, before I got there." Daphne spoke in deep tones, and stared him wildly in the face with her big eyes wide opened, as if she were asking him a question.

"But how and when?" cried Mr. Pennistone, "and how do you know?"

"He has been murdered."

"Murdered! Murdered, do you say?" Mr. Pennistone started again violently.

"Yes," whispered Daphne. "It is like a divine release for me."

"But how did it happen? Tell me how, for Heaven's sake!" he cried.

Daphne seemed to hesitate as if she had expected the question and had dreaded it.

"That is what I do not know," she replied in a low tone.

"You do not know? Surely some one must have told you."

"I suppose some one knows," she said, "by now."

She had seated herself now, and she gazed before her in the peculiar, trance-like way which was a habit of hers. Her big eyes seemed to look pathetically into space as if they saw there all kinds of horrors.

"But surely," cried Mr. Pennistone, "the people of the house knew of this terrible occurrence, did they not? Surely they could tell you something?"

Daphne seemed to search for words.

"I didn't see any one," she replied; "at least, only the landlady for a minute. I must explain—" She paused uneasily. "I was let in by the landlady, and she told me that my husband's rooms were on the second floor. It was quite a poor sort of lodging-house, and she did not offer to show me up—I did not expect her to. I went up alone, and she went down-stairs to the basement again, where I suppose she lived. There seemed to be no one moving in the house. As I said, I went up the stairs—" She stopped, as if to make a final effort, and Mr. Pennistone, whose expression had been growing more and more amazed during her speech, stared at her with growing incredulity. "I reached the first floor," continued Daphne, "and then went up the next flight of stairs. On the half-landing I saw a body, a man's body, my husband's—"

She suddenly stopped with a queer catch in her voice, and burst into hysterical crying.

"Good Heavens!"

"He was lying there dead," gasped Daphne, pressing her handkerchief to

her mouth to stifle her sobs, "a wound on his temple!"

Mr. Pennistone stared at her like a man fascinated; his stare grew into a look of fixed, horrified, utter amazement, and then into a peculiar dawning comprehension.

"But you mean that you went upstairs in this strange house," cried Mr. Pennistone, "and when you came to the top you saw your husband lying dead? The shock was sufficient to kill you. What did you do?"

"I looked at his face," shuddered Daphne, like some one speaking under the influence of mesmerism. "I saw that it was he." She spoke in low tones and rapidly. "I bent down over the body," she went on. "I looked just once into his lifeless face. I made sure that it was he—my husband. Then I crept down the stairs softly—oh, so softly, and out of the house."

"And you saw no one — spoke to none after you were let in?" he queried. "You didn't even go down and call the landlady?"

"How could I dare to? If I had been found there, what could any one have thought except that I had done it?"

Then Mr. Pennistone seemed to pull himself together and become alert.

"I can't believe it," he said.

"It is true," averred Daphne; yet she scarcely spoke as if she were telling the truth.

Mr. Pennistone thought once more. After each statement by Daphne he seemed to fit facts together in his mind like a person doing a puzzle. "And you really tell me that you came away from the house where this awful tragedy had been enacted, apparently just before you got there, as if nothing at all out of the ordinary had happened? I cannot conceive how you could have done so."

Unconsciously he was beginning to cross-examine her in just the same way that a hostile counsel would have done in a court of law.

"Not as if nothing had happened," she replied in a low voice, as if she were repeating a lesson, the while she stared before her in the same trance-like way that was so characteristic of her. "Not as if nothing had happened," she repeated with growing passion. "I fled like a thief in the night; for I realized"—her voice dropped again as if she were afraid to speak the words—"I realized that if I was found there I should be accused of my husband's murder? Can't you understand?" she added, pushing her head forward and looking at him anxiously.

Mr. Pennistone walked about with his eyes bent upon the carpet, and his face was gradually assuming a very stern expression.

"I understand," he said; "but I do not—believe!"

"What do you mean?" she said.

Suddenly Mr. Pennistone, standing half turned away from her, wheeled round.

"I do not believe you," he repeated sternly. "I cannot! What is this cock-and-bull story, this amazing fabrication?"

"Oh, but it is the truth!" cried Daphne. "I swear that it is so! What else could I do?"

"It is the last thing you could or would do," replied Mr. Pennistone. "I can believe that you went there, as you say, but I cannot believe that you found Victor Scruit lying there murdered; or, if you did, that you came away like you did—"

"But I have told you why I did!" cried Daphne, with terrified eyes. "I had to creep away, at the peril of my life almost. I should be in custody now if I had not."

"You repeat this story that you found your husband murdered, that you took a calm look to see if it was he, and that then you came away? Why, how could his body have lain there undiscovered — how could you yourself have got away unseen?"

"I did, I did!" cried Daphne.

Mr. Pennistone turned on her furiously.

"I cannot believe you," he said.

Daphne started back.

"You must be mad," she whispered. "I did not expect this from you. I came here to ask you to help me. Of course, the landlady will tell the police of my visit. I must preserve the secrecy of my identity at all costs. If it was discovered, not only would it ruin me; I should be arrested. I even think that there might be enough circumstantial evidence for people to believe me guilty. Oh, can't you realize my awful position?"-she ended frantically. "I shall be hounded down. Already they may be tracking me. Oh, why did you ever tell me to go to that horrible place? I was afraid before I went. It was an awful premonition of evil. You must realize!"

"Yes, I realize," said Mr. Pennistone, with slow, terrible sternness, and he fixed his eyes upon her with a peculiar cold, immovable gaze. "I realize—the truth."

He hurled the last word at her.

"Then what do you advise me to do? Oh, you will help me; you must help me; you must."

But her voice suddenly died away on her lips, and she seemed to shrink, visibly shrink, before his cold, hard look.

"Oh, don't look at me like that!" she cried in an access of agony. "Don't, Mr. Pennistone—don't! Help me! Don't accuse me, too! They are looking for me—hunting for me. Oh, have a little pity on—"

Then once again her voice died away, and her plea for mercy died before his merciless gaze.

"I am innocent," she suddenly blurted out, going down upon her knees before him. "I swear that I am!"

But Mr. Pennistone remained silent, absolutely motionless; he appeared the lifeless figure of pitiless and merciless justice that saw only right and could pity no wrong.

Suddenly she stumbled forward, casting her arms out wide.

"I am innocent, before God I am innocent," she cried, with a pitiful shriek.

But Mr. Pennistone remained silent and motionless, his cold eyes seemed to pierce into her soul, then he slowly turned his back upon her and went to his desk. As he did so she fell forward on her face. She had fainted.

CHAPTER VII.

Watched!

DAPHNE lay stretched at full length upon her bed. Her upturned face looked very white, and she watched the light from the fire-dance on the ceiling. But for the flickering firelight the room was in darkness, and no sound broke the silence except the occasional fall of a cinder and the painful beating of her own heart. She lay motionless, but she was not ill.

It was already a couple of hours since she had got back from Mr. Pennistone's office, yet she remained just as she had thrown herself down.

"He thought that I murdered him. Others will think so, too," she murmured unconsciously aloud, and her words fell eerily on the silent room and startled her.

She kept thinking of her interview with Mr. Pennistone, and her cheeks burned with anger and shame.

When she had come to herself in his room she had found him bending over her with a glass of water in his hand.

"There, you are better," he said. "Drink a little of this," and she took a sip obediently.

Anger against the man beside her who had brought such a vile and brutal accusation against her gave her strength, however.

"I must go, let me go," she murmured, struggling to her feet.

"Not until you're quite recovered," he said.

"I am," she cried. A bright red spot began to show in the center of each of her cheeks, a flush of anger.

Mr. Pennistone showed not the

slightest intention of referring again to what had just passed between them, nor did he express any kind and sympathetic wish that she should stay longer in his office.

"If you are quite sure you feel all right now," he said, "I will send one of my clerks for a cab for you. I am happy to say no one knows that you fainted or overheard any word that we said."

Daphne pressed back the hair on her forehead nervously.

"What you told me," he added, looking pointedly at her, "remains a secret forever. It was, of course, a privileged communication between you and myself as your professional adviser. It will remain so, although I shall not continue to act for you in the future."

She turned away; his cold, pitiless words fell like a death-knell upon her ears. She dared not ask him what reasons he thought she had for lying to him, but he might just as well said outright to her, "I accuse you of the murder of your husband." There are some silences which speak more plainly than words.

Then a clerk came in saying the cab was waiting, and without a word to Mr. Pennistone, and without a word from him, she left his room. He was remorseless, and she was too crushed by the vileness of his accusation to try to defend herself further.

And now that she was alone in her own room she saw her position clearly in all its horror at last.

At any moment her identity might be discovered, and there was little that could prove that she was not the author of her husband's death.

She lay and thought, and thought painfully, in a kind of stupor until she became aware that a paper-boy was shouting some item of news very vigorously in the street below, bawling repeatedly the same sentence, with the same intonation, until at last she began to feel curious as to what he was actually crying out.

She got up and threw open the window. He was just beneath her, and she could see him, his figure ridiculously foreshortened, striding along with a sheaf of papers under his arm.

"Speshul edition," he yelled. "Terrible crime in North London! Horrible murder!"

Daphne withdrew sharply into the room. In a second she understood.

The boy was crying the news of her husband's murder.

For a minute she listened, rigid with horror, and in that minute she realized to the very fullest extent her awful position. To-morrow it would all be in the papers, all but her name; then as the boy's cries began to grow fainter—he had come up the street, passed the house, and was now going away—she darted across the room and rang the bell furiously.

Her maid came in, surprised, and stared with even more surprise at the open window. Daphne saw her look, and suddenly remembered how careful she must be not to betray herself in the slightest degree.

"Oh, Walters," she said, making a great effort to appear quite unconcerned, "there is some boy shouting out some wonderful piece of news in the street. I tried to hear what it was, but I wasn't able to. Just send some one after him to get a paper."

"Yes, miss," said Walters.

"He has gone toward Knightsbridge," added Daphne. In her trepidation she again went to the window as soon as Walters had gone, and stood looking down into the quiet street.

Suddenly she noticed that a man was standing in front of the houses opposite. He was standing very much in shadow, but a motor-car happened to drive slowly past, and the bright rays from its headlights had shown up the outlines of his figure. Daphne could just distinguish the paler outline of his face indistinctly, and now she felt sure that he was looking fixedly and directly at her window. Having the window up and the blind not drawn down,

she realized that he must be able to see in quite clearly.

"How horrid to have him see me!" she reflected, and then as suddenly the thought flashed across her mind: "He is a detective; he is watching me."

"Already, already," she murmured, "they are on my track," and she covered her face with her hands in an agony of terror.

She had stepped back into the room, but she did not dare to close the window down, and now, in her fear, she felt that she must look again and see if the man was still there. She stole forward very cautiously.

Yes, he was still staring directly up at the window. She hid herself by the wall behind the curtains at the side. He seemed to have moved a little, and the light from a lamp now fell quite brightly on his face. She gave a low, shuddering cry. The man's face was exactly like her dead husband's. She put her hands up to her throat, gasping, and then glanced nervously round the room. She knew that it was her fancy, that it must be her fancy, merely the horrible picturing of her overwrought brain; and yet it was so exactly like.

For a minute she felt very faint, but just then Walters brought the paper.

"Thank you, Walters," said Daphne, and she opened it idly, but with a wildly beating heart. At the top right-hand corner she saw what she was looking for, and her heart bounded again.

"Terrible crime in Holloway," she read in ugly, staring letters. But she dared not read more until she was alone.

"I hope you feel better, miss," Walters was saying in her correct way. "Couldn't you eat a little something now? A little cold fowl and a glass of wine?" Daphne had told the woman she felt ill, and had not dined.

"Oh, no, no!" cried she. "I am better without."

"Very well, miss."

Walters prepared to withdraw. Daphne suddenly recollected that she dared not close the window herself.

"Oh, and please close that window and draw the curtains, Walters."

"Yes, miss."

Walters went over to the window, and there was the slightest pause before she pulled down the sash.

"It's funny, miss," she said as she did so; "but there's a man looking so intently up at this window." She laughed a little.

Daphne had jumped. She sat shaking, almost breathless, and again feeling faint.

"I expect he's waiting for one of the servants opposite," she said.

"I hope you never keep your friends waiting outside, Walters."

"Oh, no, miss," said the correct Walters, very scandalized. "Leastwise, I never have any friends"—she simpered—"of the inferior sex."

Daphne managed to laugh.

Walters withdrew and closed the door with hypocritical softness, and Daphne was once more alone—and now at last she could devour the paper.

The fact that Walters also had noticed the man had shaken her terribly.

"A revolting crime of a curious nature was brought to light at Holloway this afternoon," ran the short paragraph, "a man named L. Ward, who is understood to have lately come from South America, having been found murdered in a lodging-house in Klito Road. Though the landlady and her sister must have been in the house at the time, they heard no sound, and the only clue is the visit of a woman to the man. She was let in by the landlady, and went up to the man's room on the second floor. She was not seen to leave. The police are searching for any trace of her identity."

Daphne stared at the paper as if mesmerized by the printed words; then she gradually relaxed the grip of her fingers on it and it slithered to her

feet and rested against the hem of her skirt.

The worst had happened. The police were searching for her!

"The only clue is a visit of a woman to the man," she reread, having picked up the paper. "She was let in by the landlady. . . . The police are searching for any trace of her identity."

She continued to stare at the paper.

"What can I do? What can I do?" she thought in a perfect fever of terror. She jumped up and ran across the room and pulled back the edge of the curtain to see if the man was still there. She found that she could not see with the light on. She turned it off, and looked again. Yes, he was there still, the white face under the gas-lamp. The illusion that he looked like her dead husband had worn off, but the terrifying fact remained —she was being watched.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Valuable Pearl Is Found.

THE next morning when Daphne awoke she forgot for the moment the tragic events of the day before, then she gradually recollected them one by one with a slow, numbing pain and with fear.

When she actually got up she found that it was a gray, wet, forbidding-looking day. She shivered and felt nerveless; then, remembering that above all she must not give way, she dressed more quickly than usual and went down-stairs, not, however, without first anxiously scanning the street. To her relief, there was no watching figure now.

Mrs. Maddox greeted her cheerfully, but she could hardly respond. Instead, her eyes anxiously sought her place, where her letters were laid out, and also a morning's paper.

She glanced with misgiving at the letters, on the top of which she saw one from Mr. Pennistone. Her aunt noticed the glance and wondered if she could have had any disagreement with Lord Lauriston. There was a letter from him also, but Daphne did not open this first. She opened Mr. Pennistone's. This was very short, and must have been written just after she had left him on the previous afternoon. It merely stated that he did not wish to act for her further. She folded it up with a long indrawn breath and a compression of her lips. It was too clear what Mr. Pennistone's meaning was. He suspected her, suspected her of the most horrible crime that could be found in a statute book, and he delicately hinted that he was too respectable to take up her case. She trembled and drank a sip of coffee.

"Don't you feel well, Daphne?" asked Mrs. Maddox.

"Oh, yes," answered the girl, and made a pretense of enjoying her breakfast. Then she opened Lauriston's letter. It was merely making an appointment. She folded it under one of her plates and reached for the papers. There were two papers, a penny one, which was taken purely for its social chronicle, and a halfpenny one, which she and her aunt read for its news. Daphne took this one and tried to unfold it leisurely. She had no need to, however, for there on the first page were staring head-lines similar to those she had seen in the previous evening's paper. She experienced a sick sensation. There was a column of close print beneath them, and she read it greedily.

It was the same story, only elaborated; the finding of the body, Mrs. Maberly's statements, the visit of the mysterious woman, and the fact that the police were making a vigilant search for her. "It is evident that this woman could throw a very strong light on this strange crime," one of the paragraphs wound up, "and if she is not the author of it, could at any rate enlighten the police as to the motive of the person who is. At present they are entirely in the dark."

Daphne laid down the paper and sat staring in wide-eyed thought.

"Is there any news this morning?" asked her aunt, recalling her to the present.

Daphne handed her the paper.

"I don't think so," she said, but her aunt's speech had aroused her. She looked round the familiar little room, and wondered if it was real. Her connection with this sordid crime, with that terrible house at Holloway, seemed so extraordinary that she could hardly believe that she was really living her usual existence, and not dreaming. Everything around her seemed so unreal, and those long columns of print, containing facts with which she was so familiar, dazed her.

She finished her breakfast, and wondered what she should do. What could she do but go on living her ordinary every-day existence and pray that her vile secret would not be discovered?

She realized it suddenly. She would have to live a continual lie, practise a continual deception. When she went up to her room some time later her maid met her with an anxious expression.

"Oh, miss, the brooch that you wore yesterday—the eagle brooch—the pearl pendant has gone."

"Gone!" echoed Daphne.

She looked at the ornament that the maid held out. It was in the form of a golden eagle with outstretched wings and originally there had been attached to its beak a large, pear-shaped pearl. Lauriston had given her the trifle, saying that the bird was his fate, bearing the priceless jewel herself to him. She had prized it very much, not only for its original design, but also because the large pearl was immensely valuable.

"You must have lost it when you were out, I fear," said the woman.

"When I was out," echoed Daphne. "Let me see, where did I go yesterday?" She stopped suddenly, remembering, and a terrifying thought crossed her mind. Supposing she had lost the pearl at Klito Road?

"I can't have lost it?" she gasped frenziedly. "Perhaps it is somewhere in the house, Walters. Look for it carefully. I will, too. I would rather anything happened than that I should lose that."

"I have looked everywhere here," said Walters. "I will look about the house and on the stairs, miss."

"I must find it!" cried Daphne excitedly. "I do not know what I should do if I lost it entirely."

But her efforts were fruitless, and after a time she had to desist.

"I can't think how it can have slipped off," she remarked.

"Perhaps the little ring snapped," said Walters; "gold will sometimes."

"Perhaps," said Daphne.

But she was thinking of that shabby house at Holloway.

About twelve the rain ceased and the sun came out, and it was quite a bright day. Daphne, restless and miserable and apprehensive, could not endure the confinement of the house, yet she equally dreaded going out. Half a dozen times that morning she had looked furtively from the upper windows at the street to see if any waiting figure should be there like the one she had seen the previous evening. But she saw none, and at last she dressed and made her way across the park to Oxford Street.

She spent half an hour or so shopping, and by then it was time to have lunch. She thought she would not go home, but began to walk in the direction of Bond Street, where the club which she belonged to was situated. At Oxford Circus she paused and bought a couple of bunches of violets. As she was extracting the pennies for them from her purse her eyes happened to travel down and light on the poster of a newsboy standing a little way along the curb.

She read the poster unthinkingly, but no sooner had she done so than her eyes became riveted to its surface and her pulses were set throbbing. Now and then the paper twisted over in the wind.

There staring her in big letters were the awful words:

HOLLOWAY CRIME.

Clue to Identity of Mysterious Woman.

Daphne read the words again and again, while the flower woman wondered what she was staring at. Wild thoughts raced through her mind, even the thought of possible suicide. Then, feeling that the eyes of every passer-by were upon her, she walked along and fumblingly bought a paper of the boy.

She did not dare to open it there, for all of a sudden she felt weak and ill, but she called a cab. Once in the privacy of its interior she tore open the paper frantically.

The head-lines were even more unnerving than the posters. "Sensational Development in the Holloway Crime," they ran; "Pearl Supposed to Belong to Mysterious Woman Found."

Daphne read the letterpress beneath feverishly and with a sickening conviction that what she had most feared had come to pass.

Of course, this was her pearl.

The paragraph ran:

Shortly after nine o'clock this morning, a dramatic turn to the Holloway mystery was given by the finding of a large and valuable pearl on the landing of the house in close proximity to where the body had been discovered lying. The police have ascertained that this does not belong to any one in the house, nor can any one throw any light upon it, and it must therefore be assumed that it is the property of the missing woman who is said to have visited the dead man just before his death. In these circumstances the finding of this jewel must be regarded as a valuable piece of evidence. On the other hand, the likelihood of tracing the owner is remote unless some other clue to her identity is forthcoming. It is also pointed out that from the shape of the pearl, which is what is called pear-shaped, it might equally well have belonged to a man and come out of a scarf-pin. The police will probably make inquiries of all the jewelers in London to see if any of them can identify the jewel as having been mounted by them.

Then followed a short description of the pearl. Daphne had read this with tightening hands and shortening breath. Yes, the description tallied with her own pearl. There could be no doubt about that—and they were going to search for the jeweler who had mounted it.

Immediately she wondered from whom Lord Lauriston had purchased the brooch, or rather who had made it for him, for, of course, it had been specially manufactured. Probably one of the very biggest West End jewelers, to whom the police would most likely go first.

"I must stop that search," she murmured to herself. "Somehow or other I must do something to stop a description of my pearl being circulated."

Yet how? She pressed her hands to her temples and tried to think. Ordinarily she was not a girl of much force of character. She had never had to fight her own battle in the world, and her troubles connected with her first marriage would have beaten her down entirely had not her aunt and Mr. Pennistone come to her rescue.

Now, however, within the last twenty-four hours a danger so great and real had gripped her that her weak nature was being driven at last to defend itself.

It was pitiful to see her, her eyes agonized, half in terror, half in mute complaint against her misfortune. As she sat in the cab her face looked white and drawn and pitiful. She was still quite young, quite girlish in appearance, and at this moment so terrible was her case that even Mr. Pennistone's adamantine heart might have been softened toward her.

In her anxiety she thought not of her acknowledged lover, Lord Lauriston, but of Lancelot Welde. "If only I could go to him," she reflected. "But I daren't! I can't! I must fight alone!"

She had told the cabman to drive slowly home; now she found herself in Hill Street with thankfulness. She got

out and went into the house only to be confronted with Lord Lauriston.

"My dear Daphne, forgive me!" he cried. "I know I am using you abominally by these surprise visits. But you have just come in the very nick of time. I want to bear you off to a luncheon-party right away."

"I can't, Laurence."

"But, my dear Daphne, you must!" cried Mrs. Maddox, who now emerged out of the dining-room. "Lord Lauriston's sister, Mildred, has come back and wants to see you. She has arranged a little luncheon at the Savoy at two. You have just a quarter of an hour."

"But I feel ill, and I have on a shocking frock!" cried Daphne.

"You look charming—as always," whispered Lauriston. There could be no doubt about his genuine admiration for her. It amounted to an absurd worship.

"You must come!" he cried. "My sister, Lady Farjeohn, is so anxious to meet you, and I am so anxious to show you to her." He spoke lower. "I am so proud of you, Daphne. Please!"

She could not refuse.

"Very well, give me ten minutes to be vain in, and I will come."

"Good!" he cried. "But, mind, not a minute more. It is a quarter to two now."

She rushed up-stairs. There was no help for it; she had to stifle her terrors and go, for above all she feared betraying her anxieties to Lauriston.

"Quick, Walters!" she cried to her maid. "I have to go to a luncheon-party, something very smart, in five minutes."

Even in the face of her greatest anxieties, even in the face of danger, some one has said that woman's first instinct is vanity. Even now in her fearful position Daphne felt that innate desire to look as beautiful in her lover's eyes and to do him as great a credit as possible.

The changing of her gown was very expeditiously accomplished, almost miraculously, in fact, for Walters was a very excellent maid, and by five minutes to two Daphne was in the hall again, swathed in a perfectly new Paris confection of peach-colored silk.

"It is a miracle," he cried—"a delicious transformation. Daphne, you look perfect." And they hurried out to the cab which she had come in and which had been kept waiting.

"I hope your sister will like me," she said as they sped along toward the Strand and she buttoned her long gloves.

"Of course," he said, with just a trifle of hesitation. "Why shouldn't she?"

"Relations have a knack of disliking the people one likes generally," observed Daphne. "And you worship me so ridiculously, Laurence."

"Not ridiculously," he said. "I only give you your due."

"You mean that if I ceased to be deserving in your eyes you would hate me," said Daphne, quickly thinking of what might happen perhaps in a few days.

"I should never hate you," he said slowly. "Whatever you did, nothing could ever kill my love for you."

And something in his vibrating tones told her that this was the truth.

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DISCOMFITING DIANA*

A SERIAL IN III PARTS—PART II

BY ROTHVIN WALLACE

Author of "The Peril," "The Elopers," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

DIANA DARLING, a perfectly charming young woman, reared in luxury, finds that her father's death has left her just about penniless. Instead of accepting the offer of marriage that has been made her by the tremendously wealthy Jack Sherbrook, who loves her, and whom she loves, she decides to take a job. An opportunity presents itself in a certain "want ad" calling for the services of just such a girl as she is, even to the size of the shoes she wears, and with the sole distinction that she must have a "small mole on her left cheek." She quickly paints the necessary mole on her cheek, applies for and secures the position offered. To her surprise, she finds that her new employer, John Sartelle, requires that she impersonate herself, *Diana Darling*. The man appears to be as honest as he is bluff, so Diana accepts the offer. She is to receive ten thousand dollars a year and expenses. The principal duty, as outlined to her thus far, is to wear good clothes and travel in Europe. She is required, however, to carry with her the petrified hand of a South Sea queen, which has been in her family for years and has come to be regarded as a sort of talisman for the daughters of the house when they marry. Diana goes to England, in her strange rôle, and is mildly worried to find that she is being followed by an attractive young Englishman whom she doesn't know, and by a Spanish woman, Doña Isabel, with whom she became acquainted on shipboard.

CHAPTER IX.

Diana Discerns.

DIANA'S evening was fraught with suppressed excitement and an apprehensive dread of future potentialities. Exhausted nature, however, blessed her with sound and refreshing sleep on her first night in London; but in the morning a new problem presented itself. How was she to elude Doña Isabel long enough to call on Mr. William Higgleston in Regent Street? She revolved the matter in her mind until ten o'clock, and then, to her surprised delight, Doña Isabel played into her hands.

"My dear," said the *señora*, entering Diana's room, "I am compelled to do some shopping. Do you mind if I desert you for an hour or two?"

"Of course not," replied Diana, with a barely successful effort to conceal her elation at being so deserted. "I should hate to feel that I was a charge."

"Then I'll be off. Shall we have luncheon at one?"

"That will suit me," said Diana.

The *señora*, who was attired becomingly in a smart tailored suit, departed, and Diana lost no time in preparing herself for the street. The hotel clerk gave her Mr. Higgleston's office number, after seeming surprised that she should not know exactly where to find so important a man.

Diana's first impression on entering the Higgleston office was one of disappointment. The furnishings looked

* This story began in The Cavalier for February 22.

as if they had descended from the Middle Ages, and in an outer room a dozen anemic clerks were at work over a row of high, worm-eaten desks. She lingered there only a moment, however, before being conducted into the august presence of Mr. Higgleston—a stolid, bull-necked, red-faced, beef-fed Englishman, who was typical of his race and station. Diana handed him the letter that she had been directed to deliver, and he waved her toward a nonagenarian chair that groaned its distress as she ventured to sit on it.

"I say, Miss Darling," remarked Mr. Higgleston heavily, after having read the letter, "it 'pears to me like a dashed silly question, but may I ask the size of your shoe?"

"No. 4," answered Diana sweetly.

She was becoming so used to this absurd interrogation that it had ceased to offend her; but why so many men, on both sides of the Atlantic, should be interested in the size of her shoe still puzzled her sorely. It seemed ridiculous, and yet it must be of vast importance, to come from the lips of solid bankers like Mr. Higgleston, of London, and Mr. Matthews, of New York.

"And I say," continued Mr. Higgleston, "I must ask for your signature, Miss Darling—here, please."

Mr. Higgleston produced a familiar blank visiting-card, and Diana obediently wrote her name on it. Mr. Higgleston then left the room for a few minutes, during which time Diana watched him delving into a large, old-fashioned safe in the outer office. When he returned he handed to her a long, bulky envelope.

"I have been instructed to ask you to open this when you return to your hotel, and to follow the directions that you will find within," said Mr. Higgleston.

Diana thanked the banker and departed, eager to examine this new link in the chain of amazing circumstances. As she descended the steps into Regent Street she was chagrined to find the Englishman whose espionage had so annoyed her lounging nonchalantly at the corner. She was impelled to stop and ask him what his purpose was in following her; but, instead, she signaled a passing taxicab and hurried away.

On her return to the Carlton, Diana was subjected to still another shock. She entered her room, to find everything topsyturvy. The contents of bureau, dressing-table, trunks, and hand-bags had been turned out on the floor in a heterogeneous heap. A glance at Doña Isabel's room showed that her belongings had shared a similar fate.

The suite was deserted, even Marie having disappeared. And Diana, in view of her suspicions regarding the maid, was inclined to fix the blame of this robbery on her. But was it a robbery? Diana took her things up one by one. Nothing was missing, so far as she could discover. What, then, had been the object of the untidy intruder? Ah! Perhaps he—or she—had sought to purloin the hand of the Polynesian queen. Diana was glad that she had taken it out with her.

Scarcely had Diana reached her conclusions, when the door opened and Marie entered.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the girl, as she noted the condition of the rooms. "Is it that we have been robbed, *mademoiselle?*" The girl's surprise and alarm seemed genuine.

"It appears that an attempt has been made in that direction. Do you know anything about it?"

"Oh, *non, mademoiselle!*" Marie crossed herself religiously as her frightened eyes swept the apartment. "How should I know when I am in ze laundry, pressing one suit for *mademoiselle?* When I leave, *mademoiselle's* friend ees here, and—"

"You left Doña Isabel here when you went out?"

"*Oui.* She say she forgot her *bourse.*"

"Forgot her purse, did she?" mused Diana. "Well—but straighten things

up, Marie; that is, in my room. Let her belongings remain as they are until she sees them."

A new light had dawned on Diana. Perhaps, after all, the *señora* herself had committed the depredation, and had treated her own room similarly in an effort to avert suspicion.

Diana dismissed the subject from her mind long enough to open the envelope that had been given to her by Mr. Higgleston. As she had suspected, it contained money—two hundred pounds in Bank of England notes. The communication that accompanied them was almost a counterpart of the one she had received in New York just before sailing. It was couched bluntly, as follows:

The enclosed two hundred pounds are for the further expenses of your trip. Please remember that there shall be no stint of money, and that you are to purchase whatever you desire. On the fourth day of your stay in London, at two o'clock in the afternoon, you are to go into the ladies' reception-room at the Carlton and play on the piano the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin." If a person approach you and ask the size of your foot, you are to deliver the queen's hand and be guided by the directions that you shall receive from this person. Otherwise, you will go at once to Paris. Register as Diana Darling, at the Hôtel Ritz, in the Place Vendôme, and there await further instructions. Be ever on the alert.

"Be ever on the alert," repeated Diana musingly. "Why, I wonder? Oh, if I only could gain a faint inkling of the meaning of all this mystery! It would help me if I could but see Mr. Sartelle."

But Sartelle remained hidden, and the mystery, as revolved in Diana's imaginative mind, took many sinister shapes. She thought at one time that perhaps fate had called on her to pay the price for some error of her father's. Again, she was the pawn in a great international game of chess, in which the intricate moves were being made by the masters of intrigue. Then her thoughts reverted to Jack Sherbrook—always to Jack—and she saw him facing dire, intangible peril in the midst of enemies. And finally she beat her fair head in anguish, and did not know what to think.

It was while Diana was in this mood that Doña Isabel burst into the apartment.

"Oh, Miss Darling," she cried vivaciously, "I have the most delightful luncheon invitation for you! I met two old friends while I was out—Viscount Ozaki, a charming member of the Japanese nobility, and Marchese Rosseto, an equally interesting Italian. I told them that you were with me, and they insisted on taking us to luncheon. You'll come, won't you? They are waiting for us in the parlor."

Diana hesitated before answering. Were these titled foreigners, she wondered, other pawns or knights or bishops in the great game? Was this proposed luncheon but another incident in the inscrutable plot? In any event, it could not harm her to go to luncheon with them; and maybe the fast-moving wheel of fortune might pause long enough in its mad flight for her to glimpse a ray of light between its spinning spokes.

"It's very good of you to invite me," said Diana, "and I'll go with pleasure. And, by the way," she added indifferently, "I went out for a stroll shortly after you departed. While we were absent an attempt was made at robbery."

"Is it possible?" cried Doña Isabel. Her surprise either was genuine or she was an exceedingly clever actress. "But you say an attempt. Was nothing stolen?"

"Not from my room. The would-be thief evidently was looking for something that he—or she—could not find. Perhaps you'd better look over your effects."

"No, nothing has been taken," said Doña Isabel a few minutes later. "Why, this is most amazing! Have you reported it to the manager?"

"Not yet. I was waiting to see you."

"Perhaps your maid—"

"My maid said that you returned after you left, and I thought you might have seen some one acting suspiciously about the halls."

"No, I did not." The *señora* bit her lip. "Yes," she added slowly, "I did return—for my purse. Your maid was just leaving the apartment."

"And she returned from the servant's quarters after I got back," said Diana.

"Had her long?" insinuated Doña Isabel.

"*Madame,* I—"

"Be quiet, Marie," reproved Diana, and the girl retreated to the corner where she had stood throughout the colloquy. "Yes," she replied to Doña Isabel, "quite long enough to know that she is reliable."

Why she should come to the defense of the maid, against whom her suspicions already had been directed, puzzled Diana. She knew only that she had obeyed a sudden impulse, and she felt repaid when she saw a look of gratitude flash in the girl's eyes.

"Oh, well, no matter!" shrugged Doña Isabel. "Let us prepare for luncheon."

"*Merci, mademoiselle,*" curtsied Marie, when Doña Isabel had entered her own room.

"You are quite welcome," said Diana.

"*Mademoiselle* ees too generous—to others."

"What do you mean?"

"*Rien*—nossing."

"Well, don't express your suspicions to any one else. Now help me to dress."

Diana found her hosts at luncheon quite up to the standards of Doña Isabel's description, but, having an inherent prejudice against foreigners, it became more of an exertion than a pleasure for her to be agreeable. Marchese Rosseto annoyed her particularly, because, while his lips were engaged with society small talk, his eyes constantly were making love to her, and his very manner was a subtle caress.

Viscount Ozaki, on the other hand, devoted most of his attention to Doña Isabel, and, during the occasional moments when Rosseto was silent, she caught snatches of a conversation that was of infinitely greater interest to her. Once she heard the name of the Czar mentioned, and again reference was made to the German Emperor.

But invariably, before Diana could catch the import of the words that the viscount was addressing to Doña Isabel, the Italian would resume his animated chatter.

Another disturbing element, that served to intensify Diana's discomfort, was the guest at an adjoining table. She turned her head casually, and there, to her dismay, she saw her shadow—the Englishman. His very presence was disconcerting, although he appeared to be devoting his undivided attention to a dainty salad before him. Diana felt relieved when, a few minutes later, he arose and left the room.

"Do you know that man who has just gone out?" she asked indifferently of Rosseto.

"Never saw him before," replied the Italian promptly.

"I had no particular reason for asking," explained Diana, "except that I noticed him on the steamer on which I came over."

The incident, however, assured Diana of one thing. The Englishman was not in league—or did not appear to be—with Doña Isabel and her friends. Of course, the lack of recognition between them might be a pose, but she did not believe so. Yes, she was convinced that he had an independent interest in watching her as he did.

An hour later, after her hosts had departed, Diana went to the desk and inquired for mail. She had a lingering hope that there might be some word from Sartelle. There was only one communication, however, and that had been written on hotel stationery. She tore it open wonderingly, and read this

single line, scrawled with a lead pencil:

"Beware of your companion and her friends."

CHAPTER X.

Diana Disconcerted.

DIANA crumpled the note of warning in her hand and stared for a moment into vacancy.

"Beware of your companion and her friends," she repeated.

"Who, she wondered, had penciled the brief admonition? Sartelle? The Englishman? Perhaps it had been the Englishman, and perhaps, after all, he was not a foe. But who was he? Why did he pursue her? What was his object? And why should she beware of Doña Isabel and her friends?"

As Diana turned into the hallway that led to her apartment, she came face to face with the Englishman. At the same moment, she caught a fleeting glimpse of her maid, as the latter disappeared through the door to her rooms. Diana waived another impulse to accost the Englishman and demand an explanation of his actions. When she entered her chamber she found Marie making a confused effort to appear busy. She ruthlessly interrupted a lilting French melody that was issuing from the maid's rosy lips.

"Were you talking to that Englishman again?" Diana demanded angrily.

Marie was silent and her eyes sought the floor.

"Were you?" insisted Diana.

"*Oui, mademoiselle.*"

"About the weather, I suppose?"

"Zat, too," confessed the maid.

"What else?"

"Oh, please, *mademoiselle,* but I—I cannot tell."

"Was he making love to you?"

"Oh, *non, non!*"

"Well," said Diana firmly, "I warned you twice before. Now I am going to dismiss you. You shall have your wages and transportation back to New York."

Marie was visibly alarmed.

"But maybe—maybe M. Sartelle would not like," she ventured.

So that was it. Diana, by a supreme effort, checked a flood of anger and remained silent. Sartelle, then, as she suspected, had engaged Marie as a spy, rather than as a maid. The only answer was that he did not trust her—Diana.

"For whom are you working, me or Mr. Sartelle?" she asked calmly.

"You, but I—I—oh, I can't say it, *mademoiselle.*"

"You must say it—or return at once to New York."

"Please, I—"

"Say it." Diana's determination was unmistakable.

"M. Sartelle will be so angry, but I—he engage me to look after *mademoiselle.*"

"To watch me, you mean?"

"Oh, *non*—not to watch; to—to be *une protectrice.* Zat ees it—to see zat no harm come to *mademoiselle.*"

"But what has that to do with this Englishman?"

Marie flushed, but remained silent.

"Answer me."

"*L'anglais* ees a—a friend to me—to *mademoiselle. Voilà!* I can say no more. M. Sartelle would be ver' angry. Please pardon, but I—I love *mademoiselle;* an' I do nossing but to help her. Will *mademoiselle* not believe?"

Diana searched the girl's eyes, and found therein only truth and faithfulness. She was impelled to question further—to force Marie to make a full confession; but that, she argued, would be unwomanly, since the maid was struggling to remain loyal to whatever trust had been imposed in her. No; she would refrain from further inquisition. Now, she thought, she was beginning to classify the factions for her and against her, and she must work out her problems bit by bit.

"You may go," she said to the maid.

"And zis is my— my *congé?*" Marie's eyes grew big with fright.

"No, you are not dismissed," said Diana. "I am inclined to believe what you have said; but I want to think—to think."

Diana, however, gleaned little solace from all her thinking, although she came to two definite conclusions—that Doña Isabel was not to be trusted, and that Marie was faithful to her interests in so far as those interests related to John Sartelle. The maid, of course, did not know that she was the real Diana Darling, and she must be careful to conceal that fact from her. Otherwise she might report the fact to John Sartelle, and spoil all her chances of learning this great secret that had come into her life.

And, too, Sartelle had told her not to allow even her maid to know that she was the custodian of the object with which she had been sent to Europe. The Englishman still was a puzzle, though Marie had admitted reluctantly that he was her friend. But why was he her friend? Was he, also, an agent for John Sartelle? If so, why did he elect to act so mysteriously? Perhaps, she reasoned, he had been sent merely to maintain a protectorate over her. That, though, did not seem to be within the bonds of probability. So far, she had needed no protector; and unless Doña Isabel were hatching some sinister counterplot against her, she felt capable of taking care of herself. At the moment, Diana's fighting blood was boiling, and her large blue eyes, usually aflame with love and tenderness, flashed ominously.

As usual, Doña Isabel intruded on her thoughts—this time with a suggestion that they take a sightseeing trip about the city. And having nothing else to occupy her time, and feeling that, by remaining close to the Spanish lady, she might learn something to her advantage, Diana consented.

"By the way," remarked Doña Isabel, as they were spinning through Hyde Park in a motor-cab, "the clerk told me, just before we left the hotel, that a thief had visited another apartment on our floor to-day. So I guess that exculpates your maid from suspicion."

"I hadn't suspected her," said Diana. "It's strange," she added sententiously, "that this thief did not take your string of pearls."

"Isn't it?" returned Doña Isabel lightly, and the subject was dropped.

Once again the uncomfortable proximity of the Englishman was forced on Diana. The car in which she was riding, at a direction from Doña Isabel, turned suddenly and doubled on its course. It was then that Diana saw him—pursuing her placidly in another taxicab. When she returned to the hotel she found him lounging lazily in the lobby. Diana determined to seize the bull by the horns, and have it out with him. Doña Isabel had gone on to their apartment, so that she was free to follow her inclination without feeling that she must account for it to her companion.

"I demand to know why you have been following me," she said impulsively, suddenly facing the startled young Englishman.

A moment later Diana was sorry that she had spoken; but now that she had recklessly cast the die, she must brave the situation to the finish.

"I—I beg your pardon!" The man scrambled to his feet, doffed his hat, and stood at polite, though amazed, attention.

"I asked why you have been f-following me," repeated Diana, in a voice that wavered ever so slightly.

"I—following you! Why, by Jove! There must be some beastly mistake, don't you know."

"Do you deny that you have been watching me—that you followed me to-day in a taxicab? Do you deny that you have held clandestine meetings with my maid?"

"I repeat, madam, that you have made a mistake. I'm not quite such

a rotter, you know, as you seem to suspect."

The man's eyes were bent on her in reproachful wonderment, and Diana felt herself growing weak. She knew that she had stultified herself, and that the hot blood of humiliation had left its stamp on her cheeks. She stood—oh, an interminably long time, it seemed, until her head began to reel dizzily.

"Please — please pardon me," she murmured.

Then she turned and fled, as though pursued by an avenging ogre. Nor did she pause until she had reached her own room. There she slammed the door, locked it, and, throwing herself on the bed, gave way to tears.

After a time Diana's paroxysm was superseded by a feeling of resentment —resentment at this imperturbable Englishman who had humiliated her; resentment at herself for her lack of courage, and for her failure to give this exasperating person the condign reprimand that she had intended.

"Mistake, indeed!" she cried, with all the bitterness of self-condemnation. "No, there was no mistake. And I stood there and let him lie—but did he lie? No, he didn't; he didn't deny a single charge I made; he just stood there and evaded, and made me look ridiculous." Diana arose and surveyed her tear-stained face in the glass. "Diana Darling," she said aloud to the attractive reflection, "you are a fool; yes, just a plain little fool! And you deserve all that has happened to you."

Having thus delivered herself, Diana began to see the humorous side of the situation; and presently she was laughing at the Englishman—and at herself. Then she called Marie and dressed for dinner.

The next day passed uneventfully, in desultory sightseeing with Doña Isabel. And that night Diana's rest was broken with direful dreams of the morrow—the fourth day of her stay in London. What would happen? she wondered.

The morning dawned all too soon, and then time sped toward the eventful hour of two o'clock. Diana was glad that Doña Isabel had been called out on a shopping expedition, and she was swept by another wave of gratitude when she saw that the ladies' reception-room was unoccupied. The piano, however, was closed. It stood at the far side of the room, and Diana approached it nervously. What should she do if it were locked? To ask for the key would direct attention to herself; and that it was two o'clock, as she informed herself by the little watch in her bracelet.

But her fears were groundless. The cover of the piano responded easily to her touch, and, as she had done on the steamer, she passed her trembling fingers carelessly over the keys. Then, with sudden determination, she played the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin." Her heart seemed to cease beating as she waited breathlessly for something to happen. She was almost afraid to turn lest she should come face to face with something dreadful—she knew not what. She closed the piano. Then:

"Amusing yourself, dear?"

The voice seemed to crack like a pistol-shot on a frosty night, and its effect on Diana was electrical.

"Trying to, Doña Isabel," she said with creditable calmness. "How do you do, Viscount Ozaki — and Marchese Rosseto? I am glad to see you again."

She shook hands with the men who had accompanied Doña Isabel into the room. Rosseto bowed low and brushed her fingers with his lips.

"And will you not be kind — and amuse us?" said the Italian.

"That's not a bit complimentary to Doña Isabel," smiled Diana.

"But it is at least generous," he returned. "I want her to be spared further boredom on our account."

"And then we should like to place ourselves further in your debt," interposed the viscount.

"How?"

For the moment Diana was startled. Her mind still was on the queen's hand. Was the viscount about to give the password and lay claim to it?

"By giving us the pleasure of your company at dinner this evening." The viscount smiled complacently—perhaps at his neat way of extending the invitation.

"Of course you'll come, dear," supplemented Doña Isabel.

There seemed no way out of it, and Diana was forced to accept.

"But first the music!" cried the Italian. "Will not Miss Darling play for us?"

Miss Darling, however, begged to be excused. She had some important letters to write, she told them. In reality, she wanted only to get away—to be alone.

"Until to-night, then," sighed Marchese Rosseto, again kissing her hand.

"Until to-night," repeated Diana, as with a feeling of revulsion she withdrew her fingers from the Italian's too fervent clasp.

And then Diana sped from the presence of these people whom she both disliked and distrusted. Just outside the door she met the Englishman, sauntering indifferently along the corridor. Diana flushed as she passed him, and in his eyes she thought she caught a gleam of kindly warning.

The next moment she entered the lift and was whisked upward to her own chamber.

CHAPTER XI.

Diana Discouraged.

ALONE again in her room, Diana was seized with a wild, unreasoning panic of fear. All her fine courage vanished; all her determination to combat and surmount the evil influences that hovered about her was blasted. She became, once more, just a woman, with all a woman's dread of the unknown and impalpable, and with an infinite longing for some strong arm to lean on, some broad shoulder on which to lay her weary head and shed her tears. Surrounded, as she believed, by inexorable enemies, she surrendered to this overpowering attack of nerves, and wept bitterly.

"Why," she cried in her anguish, "did I ever attempt this mad exploit alone? Why did I not tell Jack?"

Jack! Why, it was not too late yet to tell Jack. He would help her, she knew. Ah! But would he—now? The scene of her parting with Jack, there in the parlor of the Plaza, came back to haunt her. She remembered the cruel words he had spoken as he bade her a curt good-by; she visualized the look of scorn on his clean-cut, handsome face, as he turned away and strode from the room. Oh, but she could explain. He must understand; she would make him understand. And if he really loved her, as he had said, nothing could make any difference.

The mere thought of Jack turned the trend of Diana's mind into other, pleasanter channels, and when Doña Isabel came up to dress for dinner she had regained much of her accustomed poise. But her cogitations had left her with no taste for dinner with these men, whom she detested.

"You will have to convey my compliments and regrets to the gentlemen," she said to Doña Isabel. "I'm down with another sick headache."

Protests were vain. Diana remained firm, and, with grudging sympathy, Doña Isabel went alone to rejoin her friends.

Once more left to herself, Diana lay back on her pillows in luxurious ease. Presently she dozed and dreamed. From the nebulous reaches of nowhere there stretched forth a great, dark, bony hand, with fingers like talons, long, sharp, and curling. She saw, in the dim distance, a row of sinister faces, of both men and women, whose half-closed eyes gleamed and glittered malevolently.

Sartelle was there; also Doña Isabel

and the Italian marquis. She recognized them all. They were watching the movements of that hideous, sinuous hand, that was drawing nearer, ever nearer. Somewhere a bell sounded a doleful knell. A choir chanted sweetly, dismally. Was this death? she wondered.

And then, with sudden demoniac fury, that awful hand darted forth and seized her by the throat. She screamed. Then into the vivid picture there sprang another shape—that of a man, strong, masterful and compelling. He grasped the murderous hand, tore its claws from her neck, and, snapping its terrible fingers, one by one, cast it from him. The other faces faded and vanished, and there remained before her only that of her savior. He stood there silently, smiling at her.

"Jack!" she cried aloud.

The dream presence roused her, and she sprang upright, into a sitting posture.

"Jack!" she called again more softly.

Then the flow of consciousness dispelled the imagery of her sleep-world. She laughed nervously and looked at the clock. Her slumber had occupied only fifteen minutes. She pondered her dream and wondered if it could have contained some portent of actuality. The more she thought about it the more convinced she became that it did. Was it really a warning? Should she abandon her lonely travail and write to Jack? Yes, she would.

Diana felt almost happy, as, with silken negligee aflutter, she flew to the desk with which her room was provided and took up pen and paper. She wrote:

DEAR, DEAR JACK:

If you love me as you did, please, please come to me at once. I want you, dear; I need you. Oh, Jack, I know it is awfully selfish of me to ask you to come all the way across the ocean, and perhaps you will feel that I am vacillating and do not know my own mind. But I do, Jack dearest; have known all the time that I love you, and want—oh, so much—to be your wife. I have done with the foolish pride that made me reject your love when it was offered; have done with the silly regard for what I thought to be my duty that night at the Plaza, when you so grossly misjudged me. I thought I was strong, Jack, but I am weak—wofully weak. I need your strong arms around me, and the counsel of your wise head. I want you to take hold of me and shake me, as I deserve, and make me behave—oh, not that I have done anything wrong. Don't think that. It is only that I have tried to be independent and self-supporting, and have failed—miserably. I have succeeded only in enmeshing myself in a maze of mystery, and surrounding myself with secret enemies, who are trying to do—I know not what. But there is a great plot afoot, Jack—a plot that concerns me vitally, and seems to involve you. What it is I have no idea. But come to me, dearest Jack—please. If this letter seems incoherent, it is because I am so troubled that I can scarcely think. Help me, my own, only darling Jack—at once.

Yours,

DIANA.

Diana threw down her pen and read her letter. Somehow, the mere reading of it—the satisfaction of having poured forth all the trouble of her woman's heart—made her stronger. Should she post the letter? What would Jack think? she wondered. And suppose he was angry and would not respond? Well, she could not blame him. But, then, she should have stultified herself, indeed. The thought of that was like a knife-thrust to her vanity and she felt a wave of that foolish pride she had foresworn.

Diana sat for ten minutes, staring blankly at the wall. Then, with one of the mutable decisions of capricious womankind, she heaved a deep sigh, tore her letter into a thousand tiny pieces, and threw the scraps into the waste-paper basket. She felt better now and stronger; and since Jack Sherbrook had misjudged her, and had not been so determined to win her as he might, she would show him that she could do things without his assistance. Yes, she was brave again now, and would fight her own fight—for a while, at least.

Ah! Another thought. She must go to Paris at once. Her instructions had said that, if the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin" should fail to bring the expected response, she was to leave London immediately. And here it was night. Should she go to-night? Why not? The time was quite propitious, as, with Doña Isabel absent at dinner, she could slip away without having to make extended explanations. Of course, she would leave behind her a brief note of excuse.

Diana summoned her maid and despatched her at once for time-tables. The first one that she took up discouraged her, as the last train, which would have taken her to Paris by way of Southampton and Havre, had gone. That, though, was the longest route, and there still were three others from which to choose. Finally, she discovered that a train would leave Charing Cross Station for Dover at nine o'clock. Then she must go by boat to Calais. She would arrive in Paris within eight hours from the time of departure.

Diana glanced at the clock, saw that she had an hour and a half in which to prepare, and decided to act immediately. She dressed herself while Marie packed the trunks, and, while the maid was arranging for their conveyance to the station, she penned the following note to Señora Doña Isabel de Albornoz:

MY DEAR DONA ISABEL:

Much as I regret to desert you in this precipitous fashion, I am compelled to depart for Paris at once, on an urgent matter of business. I hope you will forgive me. I retain many happy memories of our brief, though pleasant, sojourn together.

Sincerely yours,

DIANA DARLING.

Diana left this note at the desk, paid her hotel bill, and hurried to a waiting taxicab. The click of the meter was sweet music to Diana's ears, and she was swept with a great joy. She was going away — away from the grim shadow of trouble, to Paris—Paris, the bright, the gay, the evanescent.

But was she leaving trouble behind her, or was the unrelenting specter of Nemesis still stalking at her heels? At that moment, however, she gave such a prospect no thought.

Marie, turning to look behind, saw a dapper young Englishman, bag in hand, rush from the Carlton and spring into a taxicab. But even if she thought the incident worthy of mention, she said nothing of it to her mistress.

CHAPTER XII.

Diana Dumfounded.

PARIS at last—Paris the beautiful! How good it was to be in Paris, Diana told herself. The skies were blue, the sun shone brightly, and all the world seemed to radiate the joy of living; a cheerful contrast, indeed, to the dull, drab, murky atmosphere of phlegmatic London. And Diana at once was infected with that gladsome germ that is indigenous to Paris —the insidious microbe that generates a feverish love of Life, with a capital L.

Diana established herself in luxurious quarters at the Ritz, had a bath, breakfast, and a few hours' sleep. Then, on the afternoon of her first day, she gave herself the enjoyment of a long motor-trip about the city. Never did the Bois de Boulogne appear more attractive; never did the Avenue des Champs Elysées possess a greater charm. The Place de l'Etoile, with its myriad avenues radiating in all directions, seemed to be the hub of joy eternal. Her troubles fell from her as easily as one drops a discarded mantle.

Yes, Diana was happy—almost. She felt just a little apprehension because of her folly in writing Doña Isabel that she was coming to Paris, and thus giving a clue to follow her, if the *señora* should be so disposed.

She was glad, on the other hand, that she had not mailed her letter to Jack. Now she could meet him without the shame of failure to force her into unwilling contrition. And of course she should meet him—some day.

The first partial eclipse of her new happiness came when Diana returned to her hotel. She glided divinely through the palatial lobby, the cynosure of all the idlers—and almost walked over the Englishman! Yes, there he was, strolling toward the door with his usual languid grace. He gave her no more attention than a passing glance, but the shock of meeting him again, in Paris, brought Diana back to the realization that she still was the storm-center of fate's mysterious weavings. Of one thing she now felt absolutely sure. It was indubitable that the Englishman was following her.

The next dark spot on the roseate nebula appeared when Diana went to the desk for her key.

"*Une lettre pour mademoiselle,*" said the clerk.

"A letter?" repeated Diana. "Oh, yes. Thank you."

Diana had grown familiar with the style of envelope and the typewritten address. She noted that it bore a Paris postmark, then turned toward her apartment with a sigh of regret. Her care-free enjoyment of the glittering world in which she found herself had been all too brief. She had forgotten, momentarily, that she was not traveling for pleasure, as of old. She remembered now that she had duties to perform. The letter in her hand recalled all that had happened within the last two weeks, and awoke within her a new dread of the unfathomable future.

Arrived in her room, Diana cut the envelope and found the usual note:

DEAR MISS DARLING:

Promptly at noon, on the day following your receipt of this, you will deliver the enclosed letter to the address given thereon. Go in person, and be careful not to conceal the mole on your left cheek. Answer any questions that are asked of you, and obey any instructions that you may receive.

JOHN SARTELLE.

The letter which Diana was to deliver was addressed to M. Henri d'Orsay, D'Orsay Frères, Rue Vivienne. From his location near the Bourse, and from her past experiences, Diana judged that M. d'Orsay was a banker or broker—probably both.

Promptly at noon the next day Diana presented herself at the handsome offices of D'Orsay Frères, in the Rue Vivienne. M. Henri—an immaculately clad, shrewd-looking Frenchman, with sharp eyes and pointed beard—received her courteously.

"May I ask the size of the shoe worn by Mlle. Darling?" he inquired deferentially in most excellent English, after having read the letter that she had given him.

"No. 4," responded Diana wearily. She had grown used to the formula and somewhat bored with it.

"Then I shall ask *mademoiselle* to sign her name—here."

M. d'Orsay produced one of the familiar visiting cards, handed her a pen, and Diana hastily scratched her signature.

"Thank you," said the Frenchman. Then, like the bankers whom she had met previously, he left the room for a few moments. When he returned he handed her a long envelope.

"To be opened when *mademoiselle* reaches her hotel," he said. "*Bon jour, mademoiselle.*"

"*Bon jour, monsieur,*" said Diana. "And thank you."

As she gained the street Diana paused and took an expectant survey of the Rue Vivienne. She was not disappointed, for, on the opposite pavement, she saw her Englishman loitering aimlessly. Somehow his presence annoyed her more than ever, and she flew back to her hotel in a towering rage. The whole thing was getting dreadfully on her nerves.

"I suppose you know your English friend has followed us to Paris," she flung at Marie on entering her apartment.

"Has he, *mademoiselle?* I did not know."

Marie stared at her with large, guileless eyes, and Diana, too angry to trust herself to speak further, flounced into her boudoir and closed the door. Then she did something that was not her habit to do. She ordered a cocktail. It was an atrocious concoction, such as one can get only in Paris; but, after making a wry face and gagging several times, she managed to swallow it.

Presently Diana began to feel a comforting warmth through her body. Her nerves became calmer, and she cherished less resentment toward things in general. Even the Englishman did not seem quite so bad as she had thought. In this mood she opened her letter, and out dropped a bundle of notes that represented five thousand francs. Truly, her mysterious employer was keeping her well supplied with funds. Then, too, there was a typewritten communication, again without superscription or signature. She unfolded it and read:

On the fourth day of your stay in Paris, at two o'clock in the afternoon, you will go into the ladies' reception-room at the Ritz, and play, on the piano, the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin." If a person approach you and ask the size of your foot, you are to deliver the queen's hand. Then you will follow any instructions that this person may give you. If again nothing should happen, you will go immediately to Berlin. Take a conveyance at the station and drive to the Hotel Bismarck—a small, though fashionable hostelry near Charlottenburg, overlooking the River Spree. Remember to keep your own counsel, and to guard the queen's hand carefully.

"Might have had his letters mimeographed and spared the trouble of typewriting," sniffed Diana.

Well, there were forty-eight hours—two whole days—in which she might enjoy life before she should be required to move the next piece on the chessboard. Perhaps in the mean time Sartelle might look her up. The postmark on his first letter indicated that he now was in Paris. But in any event it was of no use to sit in her hotel and nurse morbid thoughts. She was in the city of life, and, while she could, she would live.

For the succeeding two days, therefore, Diana gave herself over to the delights that abounded. She browsed around the Printemps, the Louvre, the Magasin du Bon Marché and other fashionable shops; she enjoyed light opera from a box at the Bouffes Parisiens; she dined at Voisin's; she visited the Ecole des Beaux Arts, the galleries of the Louvre and the Luxembourg, and took a boat ride to Auteuil. And in the end—at two o'clock on the afternoon of her fourth day—she brought herself up with a sudden halt. She was too tired to care what happened—only she hoped that whatever should occur would not be too disagreeable.

It had afforded her some pleasure, in the last mad two days to keep the Englishman guessing as to her movements. Several times she had eluded him, but usually he was close on her trail. When she went to her room after luncheon she had left him sitting in the lobby. And somehow she conceived the suspicion that he was to play a part in the ladies' reception-room at two o'clock.

As the hour of her ordeal drew near, Diana's old nervousness returned fullfold. She approached the reception-room weak-kneed and trembling. Nor was fortune so good to her as on other similar occasions. A man and a woman were sitting in the room, not far from the piano. They glanced at her sharply as she passed, and the thought entered her mind that perhaps they would come forward to claim the queen's hand.

Only one small factor militated in Diana's favor. The piano stood open, and she was spared the conspicuity of

throwing up the lid. She approached the instrument casually, and in an abstracted manner ventured to run a scale. Then she closed her eyes and shut her teeth hard—and the silence was shattered by the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin."

Diana lifted her fingers from the keys and caught her breath sharply. She felt the glances of the man and woman sitting behind her burning into the back of her head. She knew that something was about to happen—knew it! On the steamer she had turned from her absurd performance to face the Englishman. In London it had been Doña Isabel and her friends. Who now? she wondered. A mist seemed to rise before her eyes, and the weight of portentous calamity pressed heavily upon her brain.

"Diana!"

The voice had a familiar ring, though it was as unreal and far-away as the wavering lines of a chimera.

"Diana dear."

Again the voice, now soft and closer to her. She turned.

"Jack!"

Diana almost shrieked the name. Ah, indeed the world—her world—was upside down. Had she gone mad? No. It *was* Jack—Jack Sherbrook. The man and woman who had been sitting in the room but a moment before were gone and Jack was coming toward her.

CHAPTER XIII.

Diana Delighted.

THERE was an awkward pause, then the usual banalities of greeting. Diana, in a swift, maddening moment, took a firm grip on her staggering thoughts, and gained control of her voice. She asked casually:

"How are you, Jack? What are you doing here—in Paris?"

"I am quite well, thank you. And I am here on—on business."

"Business?"

"Yes. I came to the Ritz only half an hour ago, saw your name on the register, and began looking for you. What are *you* doing here?"

"I, too, am on business."

"Sartelle's?"

"Yes." Diana averted her eyes. She wondered if he were thinking—what he had implied during their last previous meeting at the Plaza.

"Won't you sit down—and let me talk to you?" he asked irrelevantly.

She allowed him to lead her to a divan, in a secluded corner of the room. Another silence intervened, then he said:

"I want to apologize to you for—for the mean inference I made that night in New York."

"What inference?" asked Diana, maliciously.

It occurred to her suddenly to punish him for the suffering that he had caused her.

"What inference! Don't you know?" He gave her an alarmed glance, and she exulted, inwardly, at the stupidity of man. How pliable even the strongest of the sex is, in the hands of a clever woman. The beauty of the apple still blinds his eyes to the artifices of Eve.

"You left me rather rudely, of course. Are you apologizing for that?"

"No—yes." His face flamed. "I—I thought I had offended you."

"Not at all." She dismissed the matter lightly, now that she was filled with the consciousness that she had him again at her feet.

"What *are* you doing in Paris?" he repeated.

"Business, I told you."

"You won't tell what?"

"I can't."

"That is what you said in New York."

"I must repeat it here. The conditions have not changed."

"I wish you would confide in me—and let me help you."

"I wish I could. Some day I shall, perhaps."

"Perhaps?"

"I *will*."

Diana suddenly grew brave and strong. The mere presence of Jack Sherbrook gave her a feeling of confidence and security. It was good to have him near—in case she should need him. But it was better to keep him on the *qui vive*. Maybe she could work out her problems without assistance, and then she would enjoy the satisfaction of having been loyal to her trust—and game. And he would love her all the more for it, she thought.

"How long shall you be in Paris?" she asked.

"As long as you are here," he answered sententiously.

"I may leave this afternoon," she replied.

"This afternoon? Where are you going?"

"Probably to Berlin."

"Why?"

"Oh, I can't tell you, Jack."

"Pardon me."

The old hardness came into his voice, and he sat, for a time, in gloomy silence. And as she watched him askance, Diana was obsessed with a feeling of capricious resentment. Why did he not renew his offer of marriage? Was he so blind that he could not see her love for him?

Oh, why did he not seize her violently in his strong arms, smother her with kisses, and just *make* her tell him all? That was what she should have liked; and had he done so, she realized that she would have capitulated; she could not have found the strength to resist such an attack as she visualized. And then, lest he should do so, through some telepathic communication of her own wild thoughts, she shrank a little farther from him. Such is the delightful inconsistency of the eternal feminine.

But Jack made no overt move in her direction, and again she cherished the belief that he was lacking in manly aggressiveness. Perhaps, though, he had ceased to love her as he once did! The thought filled her with alarm.

"Jack," she murmured softly.

"Well?"

"Are—are you angry?"

"I feel," he said ambiguously, "like the ass that made love to the butterfly."

"Jack!"

"Yes, that's just the way I feel. You know the fable, of course. The foolish ass loved the beautiful butterfly that flitted before the window of his stable. So one day he eluded his master and pursued her through the garden and across the clover-field for a long distance.

"There was work, real work, to be done, but in his desire for the fickle butterfly he heeded it not. And as she flitted gaily from flower to flower he followed her clumsily, conscious only that she was beautiful and that he loved her.

"But she mocked him, laughed at his love, and led him a hopeless chase into a dense wood. Then night came on, and he was lost, far from home."

He paused and sighed deeply.

"And what happened to the butterfly?" asked Diana.

"Thinking of the butterfly, eh?" He turned on her with a half-contemptuous tone. "Well, the butterfly, I suppose, curled up snugly under a protecting leaf, and the next day came forth into the glittering sunlight to command further adoration. But the poor ass lost his supper, spent a lonesome night in the dark forest, and, when he finally found his way home, received a severe beating from his master."

Another tense silence. Then she asked:

"And you think I—I am like the butterfly, Jack?"

"I did not say so."

"But you *think* so?"

"I would not be so unchivalrous."

He laughed mirthlessly. "I have no scruples, however, in comparing myself to the ass."

Then he did love her after all. His recital of the fable, with its unmistakable inference, should have made Diana very angry. She realized that she should have rebelled and given him the condign rebuke that his veiled insult called for. But the joyous consciousness that he still loved her overshadowed all else—even counterbalanced the invidious sting of his false opinion. Therefore, the words of reprisal that surged within her remained unuttered.

"You are not—not like the ass, Jack," she faltered finally.

"Yes, I am," he said doggedly, with a boyish nod of the head.

"No; not any more than I am like the butterfly."

She smiled at him archly, invitingly, but still he did not seem to see the great love that beckoned him to its fond embrace. He retained a tantalizing silence.

"You are still thinking of — Sartelle?" Diana, too late, attempted to check herself. Then, knowing that she had made an opening in her armor, she added, with naive abandon: "Don't think that, Jack—please. Mr. Sartelle is only my employer."

"I believe you, dear," he sighed. "But—"

"What?"

"Why must you leave Paris to-day? Can't you give me one evening—just one before you go?"

Temptation is the final test of courage. It is so easy to do one's duty, when fate does not strew one's path with interesting and seductive *divertissements*. Diana was human—and she loved.

"What would you have me do?" she asked. She still was battling with her conscience—still was not decided. Jack brightened.

"Dinner—theater, if you like. Will you?"

"Yes." The lure was too great, even for one of Diana's constancy to the demands of duty.

They sat and looked at each other without speaking; and Diana saw the love-light creep into his eyes, and suffuse his face with tenderness. Her own eyes drooped, and her voice became choked with the depth of her feeling.

"He loves me—he loves me," she repeated to herself.

And then, as if echoing her own thoughts, Jack's voice came in a choking whisper.

"I love you—oh, I love you, dearest!" he cried passionately.

She found herself crushed suddenly to his breast, with his warm lips showering kisses on her mouth, her eyes, her throat, her hair. She made a brief, half-hearted, ineffectual show of resistance; then, while her senses reeled and her breath came gaspingly, she lay inert and satisfied in his strong arms.

When he released her, Diana was covered with confusion. What if somebody had seen? She flashed a guilty look around. She and Jack still were the only occupants of the room.

"My!" she exclaimed irrelevantly; "we have been sitting here for three hours."

"It seemed scarcely more than that many minutes," he said.

"And I must dress for dinner," she added.

"How long shall you be?"

"Perhaps an hour."

"So long?" He made a grimace of disapproval.

"Will it seem long?" she smiled coquettishly.

"Terribly. Well, if you'll let me kiss—"

"No, no! Not any more—now."

Diana turned and fled. In the hall outside she met her Englishman, and she imagined that, in passing, he gave her a patronizing smile. She hurried to her room, happy at the dénouement, glad that she was to spend the evening with Jack, and all unconscious of the

trouble that was destined to result from her careless disregard of duty's mandate.

CHAPTER XIV.

Diana Dines.

NEVER was a woman lovelier than Diana Darling that night in Paris, when she came down-stairs at the Hôtel Ritz to join Jack Sherbrook for dinner. Her beauty was set off attractively by a stunning evening gown; nature had dyed her cheeks with a becoming hue of carmine, and the intangible light of love had made her blue eyes soft and luminous. Diana was sparkling with brilliance, radiant with the sheer joy of living, and happy beyond her fondest dreams.

Four hours before she could not have conceived that she would be so transmogrified in so short a time. And Jack, too, seemed translated by the new pleasure that had come to him. He had improved the interval of separation by attiring himself in evening clothes, and now appeared at his best. He and Diana indeed were a handsome couple, and many admiring glances were turned upon them.

"Where shall we go?" he asked.

"I have no preference."

"Then we shall go to the Café de Paris."

Arrived at the restaurant, Jack conferred with the *maître d'hôtel,* handed him a liberal tip, and succeeded in obtaining a choice table, with a superlatively delectable dinner evetually spread upon it.

"They used to serve an excellent Burgundy," said Jack. "Have some? Or do you prefer champagne?"

"Oh, please, don't make me think," she protested; "I'm too happy. You order."

So Jack ordered the Burgundy.

"A toast," he cried gaily, lifting his bubbling glass; "to love and laughter and happiness—and may the joys of to-day displace all the cares of yesterday, and give us good cheer for the to-morrow."

"I don't like that," she pouted. "You said there was to be no yesterday and no to-morrow—just to-day."

"Then I'll modify my toast. We'll drink, then, to the delights of the glorious present; may they always last."

"May they always last," she repeated gravely, touching her glass to his.

"Yes," he added, after they had sipped their wine, "I should like the present to be the to-morrow—always."

For a moment there flashed into Diana's mind the grim unhappiness of yesterday and the dread specter of to-morrow.

"I wonder if you really would," she said. "I wonder if you would be happy."

"Tremendously happy," he murmured.

"And yet," she mused, "one must suffer to enjoy. We must pay the price for everything we have. Even this might grow monotonous—to you."

"Would it to you?"

"Women," she answered ambiguously, "are satisfied with less. Given the man she loves, a woman knows joy supernal. A flower, a caress, a little sympathy — and she can endure anything. It is the man who tires, who wanders, who must be amused. *N'est-ce pas?*"

"Perhaps. But, my dear, there are some men like the woman of your picture—some men who are steadfast; and there are some women who grow weary. The polarities of human nature are as diversified as were the tongues of Babel. You can't judge one by the other."

"Are you—steadfast?"

"You shall know that I am—some day."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

Jack sipped his wine reflectively, while she waited for an answer.

"I met a very good friend of yours the other day," he said irrelevantly.

"Who?"

"Mabel Randolph — and her husband. They had been detained in Liverpool longer than they expected, and I ran into them on the street. She told me that you were headed for London, in company with Doña Isabel de Albornoz. When I arrived in London, I found that you had left for Paris."

"How did you learn that?"

"Looked about the hotels and made inquiries."

"Were—were you following me?"

"I am traveling on business, I told you; but I confess that I did want to see you. By the way, what did you do with Doña Isabel?"

"Ran away from her—while she was at dinner. But, oh, Jack! You said there was to be no yesterday. Let us try to forget—"

Diana paused, with mouth open and eyes staring. Could she believe the evidence of her senses, or had a wild fantasy of her brain conjured the vision that was approaching her in a silken evening gown?

"What's the matter?" cried Jack.

"Why," gasped Diana, "speaking of that woman—Doña Isabel de Albornoz — she's coming — coming toward us at this moment!"

Jack scarcely had time to turn in his chair before Doña Isabel was beside their table. He arose hastily.

"Why, you little runaway," she greeted gaily; "and Jack—Jack Sherbrook! It is *so* good to meet one's old friends in this fashion."

Diana took the proffered hand mechanically. She felt her own cheeks burning, and she saw that Jack's face, too, was flushed. And she had called him Jack! They must, then, be old friends. Yes, Doña Isabel had just said that they were. What could it mean? And, ah, the yesterday had thrust its hated presence into the idyl of to-day, and the sinister forces of destiny seemed to be brewing another nightmare for the to-morrow. She regained her equipoise as Jack bowed the intruder into a chair at their table.

"And now," Doña Isabel said sweetly, "I insist on knowing why you deserted me so suddenly in London. And I thought we were getting to be such good friends, too," she added reproachfully.

"You received my note?" asked Diana, a trifle stiffly.

"Yes; but it was so unsatisfactory."

"I am sorry that I can make no other explanation. I was forced to hurry to Paris—on business."

"And is Jack—Mr. Sherbrook—here—on business?" She glanced from one to the other, with a sententious smile of veiled understanding.

"You have guessed correctly," he answered shortly, but with an attempt to be polite.

"Well, Miss Darling," went on Doña Isabel, "I'll forgive you—if you will come out to St. Germain-en-Laye and pay me a visit."

"I should like to," said Diana, "but I must leave Paris to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Doña Isabel, elevating her eyebrows. "Why so hasty, my dear? Oh, come now; I shall ask Jack, too, and—"

"Jack, too, must decline; thank you," he interrupted.

"More business?" she laughed mockingly.

"Yes."

"Well, then, I have one more proposal for Miss Darling. You must let me come for you to-morrow morning and take you to luncheon. Now, you can't refuse me that pleasure, my dear."

No, Diana could not combat the woman's insistence any longer. She felt that the easiest way to be rid of her was to accept. Jack sat in glum silence while the arrangements for the luncheon were being made, then got on his feet as Doña Isabel arose to depart.

"I wish both of you would come with me," she said. "I am dining with Marchese Rosseto and Viscount Ozaki, and we could have such a jolly party. Won't you join us?"

But both Diana and Jack begged to be excused, and Doña Isabel returned to her table alone. She left behind her, however, the pall of gloom that her appearance had caused.

"You and she seem to be rather well acquainted," observed Diana, with a trace of jealous suspicion that she tried hard to conceal.

"Yes, I've known her for five years," replied Jack. "I met her first here in Paris."

"Do you like her?"

"No; she's a dangerous woman."

"How?"

"Oh, in many ways. Do *you* like her?"

"I loathe her," said Diana fiercely. "Her presence always makes me creepy and uncomfortable. When she is about I feel much as I should if a snake were in the room."

"Same here," murmured Jack.

"And she came and spilled the dregs of yesterday into the sparkling wine of to-day," added Diana ruefully. "But come, my friend. Let us not be morose, just as our evening is beginning. I want to be gay to-night—and a little wicked. I want to see life and to hear laughter. So let us go to the—what do you call it—the Bal Tabarin?"

"Diana!"

"Yes, I mean it, Jack. I want to look on at the fun, and forget—things. And then I want you to take me to other places where we can find music and noise and frivolity."

It was very late when they returned to the Place Vendôme. As Jack handed her from the taxicab at the door of the Ritz, he said:

"I don't want you to go to luncheon with Doña Isabel de Albornoz."

"Why?" she asked.

"It might be—dangerous."

That was all he would say, and she promised only to try to break the engagement. But the reference to Doña Isabel reminded her again that there *had* been a yesterday, and that there *would* be a to-morrow.

As she hurried through the lobby, Diana looked instinctively for her Englishman, and was surprised to find that he was nowhere in sight. Nor had he followed her at all during the evening, she now remembered.

CHAPTER XV.

Diana Dazed.

DIANA was awakened at ten o'clock in the morning by the ringing of her telephone-bell. She arose, startled, with the vague realization that the to-morrow had dawned.

"Yes?" she said sleepily, into the transmitter.

"This is Jack," came the answer. Her eyes brightened, and she became wide awake at once. "How do you feel?"

"Fine," she prevaricated. "And you?"

"The same. I want to take you to luncheon—or breakfast, if you prefer to call it that."

"*Déjeuner*—in Paris," she laughed. "But I have an engagement with Doña Isabel."

"I advised you last night to call that off."

"But you wouldn't tell me why."

He was silent for a moment. When he spoke again his voice had a tone of deep earnestness.

"I think, Diana, that you can trust me to be fair; and you know that I have only your best interests at heart. Now, let me urge you, for your own sake and mine, to have *déjeuner* with me. Doña Isabel was to come for you at one o'clock, I believe. Let me call for you at noon, and leave word for her that you have departed from Paris."

"But why—"

"I'll tell you later. It is rude, I know, dear, but in certain cases the means always justifies the end. Please take my advice."

"I'll do it," said Diana suddenly. It was what she had wanted to do all

the time, but it required persuasion to bring her to a decision and make her feel at ease.

"At noon, then?" he asked elatedly.

"At noon," she agreed.

An hour later Diana went downstairs, intending to motor in the boulevards until the time for Jack to arrive. She was radiant as she stepped from the lift, but a shadow crossed her face when she beheld her Englishman again sitting in the lobby. She asked one of the clerks to get a taxicab for her, but as she was about to enter it she heard her name called from a limousine that was just drawing up at the door.

"Running away again?" inquired a cheery voice. And to Diana's chagrin, Doña Isabel stepped lightly from the limousine and came toward her.

"Only for an hour's drive," replied Diana as graciously as she could.

"Then I find you in exactly the right mood," beamed Doña Isabel. "That was my object in coming for you so early. I thought you might like a breath of fresh air."

"But I—I have engaged a motor cab," protested Diana weakly.

"I feel fortunate that you did not get away in it before my arrival. And I assure you that you will find my car infinitely more comfortable."

So there was nothing for poor Diana to do but hand the chauffeur a gratuity for his trouble and dismiss him. She murmured a few perfunctory words of thanks to Doña Isabel, and the next moment she was whirled away in the big limousine, an unwilling and unhappy guest.

Diana felt grateful for at least one thing—that Doña Isabel was in a mood to do most of the talking. And while the brilliant and loquacious *señora* was pointing out and discussing the places of interest that lined their route, Diana's thoughts were busy with the fears and misgivings that filled her heart. Why, she wondered, did she have such a deep distrust of Doña Isabel? What was Doña Isabel's object in being so unfailingly nice to her, unless Doña Isabel knew what had brought her to Europe, and, for some ulterior reason, was scheming to gain possession of the queen's hand?

The queen's hand! Diana gasped inwardly. She had left it at the hotel, hidden insecurely at the bottom of one of her trunks. Would it be safe there? she wondered. Then Diana's mind reverted to the woman by her side, and she tried to reason why Jack had warned her to be on her guard. And what are the relations between Jack and Doña Isabel? she asked herself. Did Jack have an inkling of why she had come to Europe, and did he know that Doña Isabel had designs against her?

"Why, we are in the suburbs!" cried Diana suddenly, as, with a start of frightened comprehension, she took account of their environment.

"Of course," smiled Doña Isabel blandly. "Where did you think we were?"

"I—I didn't know. Where are we going?"

"To St. Germain-en-Laye — the home of the kings of France."

"But I don't—don't want to go," protested Diana.

"Why, you made a luncheon engagement with me last night. Have you forgotten?" Doña Isabel elevated her eyebrows with polite incredulity.

"No, but that was for one o'clock, wasn't it?" Doña Isabel nodded. "I was to have seen Jack—Mr. Sherbrook—at noon, and it is that hour now. What *am* I to do?" Diana turned an appealing glance toward her companion.

"If that is all that is troubling you, matters will be easily arranged," said the latter. "We are nearly home now. When we arrive I shall telephone to Mr. Sherbrook, to relieve his anxiety, and then I shall send the car for him and fetch him out for

luncheon. I couldn't think of letting you go back—now."

The last sentence was spoken with just a little hardening of tone, and, somehow, Diana conceived the idea that she would not have been permitted to return to Paris, even though she had pressed the point. She shrank intuitively from her companion and sank into the cushions with a sigh of resignation. Anyway, Jack soon would be with her. The thought of his coming appeased her nascent forebodings.

They had passed the quaint old town now, and, emerging from a strip of woodland, came suddenly upon a stately edifice, one of the few remaining links between modern progress and medievalism.

"Here we are at last!" cried Doña Isabel, as the limousine whirred through a massive gateway and came to a halt in an ancient courtyard.

As Diana's feet pressed the time-worn stones she thought how incongruous was a motor-car in this place. She gave a half-expectant glance around as she took in the surroundings, and would not have been surprised to see a cavalcade of armored knights march from the donjon.

"This way," she heard Doña Isabel say.

A heavy door swung open, and she followed her hostess into—a prison, was it? Diana shuddered. The frowning walls, covered with armor and ancient implements of war, gave her a queer creepy sensation and filled her with apprehension. Doña Isabel led the way to a luxurious boudoir, modern in every detail, and overlooking the famous seventeenth-century terrace.

"Please don't be formal," she said. "Throw your hat and coat off and be comfortable, while I telephone to Mr. Sherbrook. Ah!" She paused at the door, as a step sounded outside. She spoke a few words in Spanish, and then a man, tall, lithe, dark and handsome, stood at the threshold, smiling. "Miss Darling," she added, "pray allow me to present my brother, Señor Don Joaquin Camaño."

Diana, though nonplused for a moment, extended her hand, over which Don Joaquin bowed with the grandiose manner of a courtier.

"Now, if I may be excused, I shall go to the telephone," said Doña Isabel.

"Think of a telephone in this grand, old medieval castle!" exclaimed Diana. "I wonder what the original tenant would say?"

"Probably would have had us burned for witchcraft," Don Joaquin replied, smiling.

His voice was mellifluous and his English excellent. In a snap estimate, Diana rather liked the man, although there was an intangible something about him that did not exactly inspire confidence. They chatted pleasantly on trivial subjects until his sister returned, fifteen minutes later.

"Well," she announced cheerily, "we shall have Mr. Sherbrook with us in less than two hours. He agreed to come, and I have sent the car for him."

"Thank you very much," said Diana. She was more thankful than mere words implied, because she did not particularly like the atmosphere of this grim, thick-walled castle.

Presently Don Joaquin excused himself, with the promise to join his sister and her guest at luncheon.

"You look fatigued," remarked Doña Isabel, surveying Diana critically. "May I offer you a glass of wine?"

"Thank you, no."

"A cup of tea, then? We shall not have luncheon for some time, and it would refresh you."

"I believe it would," agreed Diana gratefully. "I will have a cup."

Doña Isabel gave the order to a servant, and in a few minutes the steaming beverage was before them. Diana tasted hers and set the cup down. It had a peculiar flavor.

"Perhaps you don't like the exotic flavor?" observed Doña Isabel.

"It is rather—unusual."

"I consider it quite piquant," said the *señora*. "It's a private brand."

She finished her own cup, and Diana, not wishing to seem impolite, followed her example. The conversation continued in a desultory fashion. Presently Diana began to feel drowsy. She stifled a yawn with her handkerchief. The room became warm and the atmosphere oppressive. Finally the walls seemed to quiver and the furniture to race around, as if in a drunken revel.

"I—I believe I'm sleepy," murmured Diana. She tried to rise, and fell back in her chair. "Why, I'm dizzy. I don't know what's the matter with me. J—Jack—come—"

That was all. Diana's head rolled backward, her arms hung limply at her sides, her eyes closed heavily, her breath came in stertorous gasps. She was unconscious.

"No, my beauty," said Doña Isabel; "Jack won't come. And your tea *was* peculiar, but you did not guess why. Little fool! Thought you could cope with me, did you?" She gave a hard, triumphant laugh, then went to the door. "Joaquin! Pietro!" she called.

Her brother reentered the room, accompanied by a large, muscular man servant.

"I don't like this business," said Don Joaquin, with a deprecatory shake of the head.

"Oh, go to the devil with your croaking!" retorted Doña Isabel harshly. "Carry the little fool to the tower room, and be sure that she does not escape."

As Diana's inert form was borne away, Doña Isabel nonchalantly lighted a gold-tipped Russian cigarette. She had shown her claws at last.

Outside a dapper young Englishman was reentering a taxicab in which he had followed a big limousine from Paris.

"Return to the Hôtel Ritz," he said to the chauffeur.

CHAPTER XVI.

Diana Detained.

DIANA, bound hand and foot, with thongs that cut cruelly into her tender flesh, lay on the brink of a fearsome precipice. It was night, but looking down into the dark depths she could sense the vague outline of jagged rocks that lined the black infinitude below. She shuddered and tried to draw away; but she was helpless. For a long time she struggled to break her bonds. It was useless. And then she heard footsteps approaching her. Was it friend or foe? She tried to cry out, but her voice was hoarse and inarticulate. She managed to turn her head—and looked up into the unrelenting face of Doña Isabel.

Other heavier footsteps came toward her, and again, through great effort, she turned her eyes in their direction. One glance sufficed to fill her with unbounded joy. It was Jack—Jack coming to her rescue. And then she heard Doña Isabel speaking. She could not distinguish her words, they were so faint and far away. But she saw the *señora* fling one arm out with a commanding gesture, and—horrors! Jack wheeled about obediently and returned into the murky haze whence he had come! He was deserting her! She tried to call after him, but in vain. Her voice gave only a choking rattle.

Then Doña Isabel bent over her, searing her with a look of malevolent hatred. She felt the *señora's* hands on her shoulders, and they seemed to burn like white-hot irons. She was being thrust—oh, God! Doña Isabel intended to hurl her into that awful, black abyss! She fought madly for life, but she was slipping surely, remorselessly, irrevocably toward the brink of death. And then she fell—down, down, down! through the immeasurable reaches of appalling space.

Diana opened her eyes with a start. She found herself in a lying posture—but where? The golden sunlight of noon was streaming through a window near by. She arose and hastened toward it, to look out over a romantic valley, with the tortuous lines of a river stringing a silver thread between undulating banks of emerald green. She turned and took a swift survey of her surroundings.

She was in a large, square room, handsomely furnished, with the massive pieces of a bygone century. And she had just arisen from the huge, canopied bed. After all, there were no precipice, no murderous hands that had sent her to her doom. She had been dreaming. But where was she? She had been in Paris, she remembered. This, though, was not the Ritz. Nor could she have gone—ah!

In a flash, Diana correlated the happenings of the past with the hazy substance of the present. She recalled the ride to St. Germain with Doña Isabel, and Jack Sherbrook's reputed promise to follow her there for luncheon. But what had occurred since? What had given her such a dull, heavy ache in her head? She had drunk a cup of tea in Doña Isabel's boudoir, and—why, she remembered nothing since!

She must have become ill and was still in the castle. But she could have been asleep only a few minutes, she reasoned, because the sun still hung high in the heavens. She thought it strange, though, that her clothing had been removed and that she found herself alone, attired only in a nightgown that did not belong to her. Well, she must dress herself and hurry to meet Jack, for, surely, he would be due in a few minutes.

Diana looked in vain for her clothes, and finally was forced to the puzzled realization that they were not in the room. However, she would summon a servant. There appeared to be no call-bell, so she went to open the door. To her amazement, it was locked.

Diana sat down on the edge of the bed to ponder the curious situation, but understanding refused to master the chaos of her mind. Presently she heard a key scrape in a rusty lock. The door of her room was opened unceremoniously and a large, middle-aged, stern-visaged duenna entered.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with a strong Spanish accent. "The *señorita* is awake. Will she have breakfast now?"

"Breakfast?" said Diana. "Why, we are to have luncheon soon—are we not? But of course we are. Mr. Sherbrook will be here in a few minutes. Come, bring my clothes."

"The *señorita* is mistaken," rasped the woman.

"Mistaken? How?"

"No Señor Sherbrook is coming and there is to be no luncheon. The *señorita* has been asleep since this time yesterday."

"Asleep since yesterday!" gasped Diana. "Why, that seems impossible. What has been the matter with me?"

"I guess — sick," shrugged the duenna.

"Why, then, I must return to Paris without delay. Bring my clothes at once."

"The *señorita* cannot return to Paris."

"Cannot? Why?"

"It is the order of my mistress—Doña Isabel. The *señorita* must know that she is a—prisoner."

For a moment Diana sat as if stunned.

"I demand to see Doña Isabel at once," she burst forth angrily.

"Doña Isabel is not at home."

"Then I want my release—now! This is outrageous. I—"

"Will the *señorita* have breakfast?" interrupted the servitor.

Diana looked at her, comprehended her meaning, and controlled her indignation.

"Very well," she said evenly; "you may bring my breakfast."

The duenna bowed and turned toward the door.

"I am Pepita," she said, pausing. "I will serve the *señorita* while she is here."

"Which I trust shall not be for long," murmured Diana.

Pepita carefully locked the door after she had passed out and Diana fell back on her bed with a heavy heart. Presently she arose and went to the window, arguing her chances of escape. There was none, however, in that quarter. She guessed that she was in the tower of the castle, and the distance to the ground was a sheer drop of at least seventy-five feet. An open door, leading into an adjoining chamber, attracted her attention, and she went thither to investigate.

She found herself in a bath-room—another anomaly of this strange, feudal house. The room was of unusual size for the purpose to which it had been adapted. There was only one small window, however, and this also overlooked the sloping garden that surrounded the castle. The thought entered Diana's mind that she might overcome Pepita and effect her escape by the door; but the remembrance of Pepita's dour countenance and brawny arms dispelled the idea as quickly as it had come. Even though she were successful, she still would be in the castle, and without proper clothing for her body. No, she had been effectually imprisoned and was at the mercy of her captors.

Diana's dolorous cogitations were interrupted by the return of Pepita, who bore a dainty breakfast on a silver tray. It was a welcome sight, as she was beginning to feel keenly the pangs of hunger.

The servitor, after arranging Diana's repast on a table, left the room without a word. She was gone only a few minutes, however, when she came back with a handsome silken negligee, evidently the property of Doña Isabel, and a pair of slippers. She helped Diana into these, dressed her hair becomingly, then retired to the bath-room. After fifteen minutes Diana stepped lightly to the door to see what the wrinkled duenna could be doing. She found her sitting idly in a chair, staring into vacancy.

"Are you my jailer, too—staying to see that I do not leap from the window nor break the door down?"

"I am here only to serve the *señorita*," crooned the woman.

"Then you may go. I shall call you when I need you."

"My place is here," said the old servant doggedly.

"I thought so. Perhaps you will tell me why I am being held a prisoner?"

Pepita shrugged her bent shoulders.

"I know not, *señorita*," she said.

Satisfied that there was nothing to be learned from Pepita, Diana returned to the window of her sleeping-room. Maybe she could see some one to whom she could signal and who would comprehend her situation. But she scanned the rolling acres of parkland in vain. Far off, on the terrace, she saw several human forms, but they were too far away even to hear her if she should call.

Diana swept the picturesque vista that lay before her with eyes that failed to appreciate its charms. Her alarmed thoughts were revolving this new and unexpected development in the chain of mystery that was winding itself inexorably around her. Why had she been imprisoned? was the persistent question—and one that defied a satisfactory answer.

Was it Doña Isabel's desire to possess the queen's hand—that barbaric relic that had cost her so much apprehension and wonderment and misery? If so, she was comforted by the thought that Doña Isabel might be foiled. She was glad now that she had forgotten to bring it with her—had left it at the bottom of one of her trunks in her room at the Hôtel Ritz.

Jack's presence in Paris on some secret business, his acquaintance with Doña Isabel, his reserved warning against this sinister woman, his prob-

able connection with the very plot in which she herself was involved so disastrously—these things troubled Diana egregiously and served further to entangle the complexities that were racking her distressed mind.

And for all her frenzied reasoning she could arrive at no sane conclusion. At every step of the way the mystery seemed to deepen, and instead of solving her problems she found herself only drifting farther out on the turgid sea of trouble.

Diana raised her weary eyes, and, with perfunctory hopelessness, again scanned the flower-decked garden and the open country beyond. And at last beneficent fate had rewarded her vigil.

Two persons were approaching—a man and a woman. They were walking close together and seemed to be engaged in earnest conversation. As they drew nearer, Diana strained her eyes to see their features. Soon they would be close enough to hear a call for help. Her heart beat faster as she gathered force for the appeal. Suddenly, however, her face blanched and she shrank backward, with an inarticulate cry.

"My God!" she sobbed. "It's Jack—Jack and that woman—Doña Isabel!"

And then, with the lightninglike resourcefulness of desperation, Diana rallied. She was glad that it was Jack. He would help her, of course. Perhaps, even now, he was looking for her, trying to discover her whereabouts, and her momentary pang of jealousy might cost her her release from her luxurious prison. She rushed again to the window.

"Jack! Jack!" she shrieked. But he did not seem to hear, as at that moment he and his companion were entering a copse of trees, following a path that made a wide détour of the house. She tried again, more loudly. "Jack! Ja—"

Diana's voice expired in a choking gurgle, as a coarse hand was clapped firmly over her mouth. The next moment she was hurled violently on the bed, with the muscular fingers of Pepita gripping like talons into her tender shoulders.

"The *señorita* must not make so much of the noise," said Pepita calmly.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

LEST YOU FORGET

By Gladys Hall

LEST you forget—some time a day will come
With kiss of sun and song of summer sea
To waken memory from her long, deep sleep,
Then, sweetheart mine, you will remember me.

Lest you forget—midsummer moon will rise
And bathe the world in tender, shrouding light,
While trooping back those bygone hours will come—
Love's golden day and silver, moonlit night.

Forget me not—for memory's ghost will cause
Unbidden tears to flow and head to bow
In sudden pain—because in years gone by
We loved, sweetheart, and vowed a faithless vow.

ONE WONDERFUL NIGHT*

A SERIAL IN V PARTS—PART III

BY LOUIS TRACY

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "Mirabel's Island," "The Final War," "The Red Year," "The Stowaway," "A Son of the Immortals," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

JOHN DELANCY CURTIS, a young American engineer, just back in New York after a long absence in the Far East, sees two assassins murder a young man who had been stopping in the same hostelry. In the mêlée, Curtis, in his attempt to succor the victim, loses his own overcoat and has thrust upon him that of the victim, the assassins betimes escaping in an automobile. Shortly afterward Curtis discovers in the pocket of the strange overcoat a marriage certificate, made out in the names of Jean de Courtois, of France, and Hermione Beauregard Grandison, of England. Filled with sympathy for the unknown bride, Curtis obeys that impulse and goes to her address. There he discovers that the lady is exceedingly beautiful, young, and aristocratic; daughter of the Earl of Valletort. She tells Curtis everything—how her father had attempted to coerce her into marrying Count Ladislas Vassilan, a villainous Hungarian of noble lineage, and how, as a means of escape, she had arranged a platonic wedding with her French music-master, the recent victim of the assassins. Curtis offers to take the dead man's place, and Lady Hermione becomes Mrs. John D. Curtis, under promise, of course, that Curtis is to demand none of the marital privileges.

In the mean time the police have begun work on the murder mystery at the Central Hotel. Curtis is implicated by the fact that his overcoat is discovered at the murdered man's side. Then the earl and the count arrive at the Central to further accuse him of being a dangerous adventurer. On the other hand, at the same instant arrive Curtis's friend Devar, and his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Horace P. Curtis, who stoutly assert the alleged assassin's character. In the mean time Detective Steingall has discovered that the victim was not Jean de Courtois at all, but an American journalist named Hunter. And just as the principal actors in the tragedy are all assembling at the Central Hotel, thither returns John D. Curtis himself—having left his wife in a Fifth Avenue hotel—in quest of clothing, and wholly in love with the woman fate has delivered into his hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ten-Thirty.

THE Earl of Valletort turned on his heel and went out abruptly. Therefore, he missed Steingall's first words to the hotel clerk, which would have given him furiously to think, while it is reasonable to suppose that he would have paid quite a large sum of money to have heard the clerk's answer.

For the detective said:

"Do you happen to know anything about a Frenchman, name of Jean de Courtois?"

And the clerk replied:

"Why, yes. He's in his room now, I believe."

"In his room—where?"

"Here, of course. He came in about six-thirty, took his key and a marconigram, and has not showed up since."

Uncle Horace could withstand the strain no longer.

"Would you mind sending the

* This story began in The Cavalier for February 15.

waiter again?" he gasped. "If I don't get a pick-me-up of some sort quickly I'll collapse."

Aunt Louisa would dearly have loved to put in a word, but she knew not what to say. Life at Bloomington supplied no parallel to the rapidity of existence in New York that evening. She was aware of statements being made in language which rang familiarly in her ears, but they had no more coherence in her clogged understanding than the gabble of dementia.

Steingall was the least surprised of the five people who listened to the clerk's words. The notion that De Courtois might be close at hand had dawned on him already; still, he was not prepared to hear that the man was actually a resident in the hotel.

"Has M. de Courtois lived here some time?" he asked, not without a sharp glance at Curtis to see how the suspect was taking this new phase in his adventure.

"About a month," said the clerk.

"Has he received many visitors?"

"A few, mostly foreigners. A Mr. Hunter called here occasionally, and they dined together last evening. I believe Mr. Hunter is connected with the press."

The clerk wondered why he was being catechized about the Frenchman. He had no more notion that De Courtois and Hunter were connected with the tragedy than the man in the moon.

"Take me to M. de Courtois's room," said Steingall, after a momentary pause.

"May I come with you?" inquired Curtis.

"Why?"

"I am deeply interested in De Courtois, and I may be able to help you in questioning him. I speak French well."

"So do I," said Steingall. "But come if you like."

"For the love of Heaven, don't leave me out of this, Steingall," pleaded Devar.

The detective was blessed with a sense of humor; he realized that the inquiry had long since passed the bounds of official decorum, and its irregularities had proved so illuminative that he was not anxious to check them yet a while.

"Yes," he said, "you'll do no harm if you keep a still tongue in your head."

"You'll come back to us, John, won't you?" broke in Mrs. Curtis, desperately contributing the first commonplace remark that occurred to her bemused brain.

"Yes, aunt. I'll rejoin you here. Shall I have some supper sent in for both of you?"

"No, my boy," said Uncle Horace, who had revived under the prospect of a long drink. "If any feasting is to be done later it is up to me to arrange it. The night is young. I hope to have the honor of toasting your wife before I go to bed."

Curtis smiled at that, but made no reply, the moment being inopportune for explanations, but Devar murmured, as they crossed the lobby with Steingall and the clerk:

"That uncle of yours is a peach, John D. He points the moral like a Greek chorus."

"I fear he will regard me as a harebrained nephew," said Curtis. "As for my aunt, poor lady, she must think me the most extraordinary human being she has ever set eyes on. What puzzles me most is—"

"Wow! I know what aunts are capable of," broke in Devar rapidly, for he was doubtful now how his friend would regard the publicity he had not desired. "Mrs. Curtis, Sr., is thanking her stars at this minute that she will have a chance of paralyzing Bloomington with full details of her nephew's marriage into the ranks of the British aristocracy. The odd thing is that I'm tickled to death by the notion that I, little Howard, put you in for this night's gorgeous doings.

"Didn't you wonder why I passed up an introduction to *my* aunt and my cousins in the Customs shed? Man

alive, if Mrs. Morgan Apjohn had made your acquaintance to-day she would have insisted on your dining with the family to-night, and at 7.30 P.M. your feet would have been safely tucked under the mahogany in her home on Riverside Drive instead of leading you into the maze you seem to have found so readily. All *I* wanted was an excuse to get away soon. Gee whiz! What a fireworks display you've put up in the meantime!"

"Fifth," said the clerk to the elevator attendant, and the four men shot skyward.

As each floor above the street level was a replica of the next higher one, Curtis happened to note that the route followed to the Frenchman's room was similar to that leading to No. 605.

"What number does M. de Courtois occupy?" he inquired.

"No. 505," said the clerk.

"Then it is directly beneath mine?"

"Yes, sir. He must have heard us breaking open your door."

"I beg your pardon. Heard what?"

"We committed some minor offenses with regard to your property during your absence," said Steingall, "but they were of slight account as compared with your own extravagances. Let me warn you not to say too much before De Courtois. Even taking your version of events, Mr. Curtis, Lord Valletort will probably raise a wasp's nest about your ears in the morning."

"But why *break open* the door? Surely there was a pass-key—"

"Sh-s-sh! Here we are!"

Steingall tapped lightly on a panel of No. 505, and the four listened silently for any response. None came—that is, there was nothing which could be recognized as the sound of a voice or of human movement inside the room. Nevertheless, they fancied they heard something, and the detective knocked again, somewhat more insistently. Now they were intent for the slightest noise behind that closed door, and they caught a subdued groan or whine, followed by the metallic creak of a bedframe.

At that instant a chambermaid hurried up.

"I was just going to phone the office," she said to the clerk. "A little while ago I tried to enter that room, but my key would not turn in the lock."

"Did you hear any one stirring within?" asked the clerk.

"No, sir. I knocked, and there was no answer."

"Listen now, then."

A third time did Steingall rap on the door, and the strange whine was repeated, while there could be no question that a bed was being dragged or shoved to and fro on a carpeted floor.

"My land!" whispered the girl in an awed tone. "There's something wrong in there!"

"Let me try your key," said the clerk. He rattled the master-key in the keyhole, but with no avail.

"I suppose it acts all right in every other lock?" he growled.

"Oh, yes, sir. I've been using it all the evening."

"Some one has tampered with the lock from the outside," he said savagely. "There is nothing for it but to sent for the engineer. Before we're through with this business we'll pull the d—d hotel to pieces. A nice reputation the place will get if all this door-forcing appears in the papers to-morrow."

Certainly the clerk was to be pitied. Never before had the decorum of the Central Hotel been so outraged. Its air of smug respectability seemed to have vanished. Even to the clerk's own disturbed imagination the establishment had suddenly grown raffish, and its dingy paint and drab upholstery resembled the make-up and cloak of a scowling tragedian.

A strong-armed workman came joyously. He had already figured as a personage below stairs, because of his earlier experiences, and it was a cheering thing to be called on twice in one night to participate in a mystery which

was undoubtedly connected with the murder in the street.

Before adopting more strenuous methods he inserted a piece of strong wire into the keyhole, thinking to pick the lock by that means; but he soon desisted.

"Some joker has been at that game before me," he announced. "A chunk of wire has been forced in there after the door was locked."

"From the outside?" inquired Steingall.

"Yes, sir. These locks work by a key only from without. There is a handle inside. Well, here goes!"

A few blows with a sharp chisel soon cut away sufficient of the frame to allow the door to be forced open. On this occasion, there being no wedge in the center, it was not necessary to attack the hinges, and, once the lock was freed, the door swung back readily into the interior darkness.

The engineer, remembering his needless alarm at falling head foremost into Curtis's room, went forward boldly enough now, and paid for his temerity. He was so anxious to be the first to discover whatever horror existed there that he made for the center of the apartment without waiting to turn on the light, and, as a consequence, when he stumbled over something which he knew was a human body, and was greeted with a subdued though savage whine, he was even more frightened than before.

But no one was concerned about him or his feelings when Steingall touched an electric switch and revealed a bound and gagged man fastened to a leg of the bed. At first, owing to the extraordinary posture of the body, it was feared that another tragedy had been enacted. The victim of an uncanny outrage was lying on his side, and his arms and legs were roughly but skilfully tied with a stout rope in such wise that he resembled a fowl trussed for the oven.

After securing him in this fashion, his assailants had fastened the ends of the rope to the iron frame of the bed, and his only possible movement was an ignominious half roll, back and forth, in a space of less than eight inches. This maneuver he had evidently been engaged in as soon as he heard voices and knocking outside, but he had been gagged with such brutal efficacy that his sole effort at speech was a species of whinny through his nose.

The detective's knife speedily liberated him; when he was lifted from the floor and laid gently on the bed, he remained there, quite speechless and overcome.

Steingall turned to the agitated chambermaid, whose eyes were round with terror, and who would certainly have alarmed the hotel with her screams had she come upon the occupant of the room in the course of her rounds.

"Bring a glass of hot milk, as quickly as you can," he said, and the girl sped away to the service telephone.

"Wouldn't brandy be better?" inquired Devar.

"No. Milk is the most soothing liquid in a case like this. The man's jaws are sore and aching. Probably, too, he is faint from fright and want of food. If we can get him to sip some milk he will be able to tell us, perhaps, just what has happened."

While they awaited the return of the chambermaid, the party of rescuers gazed curiously at the prostrate figure on the bed. They saw a small, slight, neatly built man, attired in evening dress, whose sallow face was in harmony with a shock of black hair. A large and somewhat vicious mouth was partly concealed by a heavy black mustache, and the long-fingered, nervous hands were sure tokens of the artistic temperament. There could be no manner of doubt that this hapless individual was Jean de Courtois. He looked exactly what he was, a French musician, while initials on his boxes, and a number of letters on the dressing-table, all testified to his identity.

Curtis, Devar, and the hotel clerk seemed to be more interested in the appearance of the half-insensible De Courtois than Steingall. He gave him one penetrating glance, and would have known the man again after ten years had they been parted that instant; but, if he favored the Frenchman with scant attention, he made no scruples about examining the documents on the table, though his first care was to thank the workman, and send him from the room.

"Now," he muttered to the others in a low tone, "leave the questioning to me, and mention no names."

He picked up a marconigram lying among the letters and read it. Without a word, but smiling slightly, he handed it unobtrusively to Curtis. It bore that day's date, and the decoded time of delivery was 4 P.M.

"Arriving to-night," it ran. "Coming direct Fifty-Ninth Street. Expect us there about eight-thirty."

Curtis smiled, too. He grasped the detective's unspoken thought. Steingall had as good as said that the message bore out Curtis's counter charge against Count Vassilan and the Earl of Valletort of conspiring with De Courtois himself to defeat Lady Hermione's marriage project. Indeed, before replacing the slip of paper on the table, the detective produced a notebook, and entered therein particulars which would secure proof of the marconigram's origin if necessary.

The maid hurried in with the milk and Steingall, who had covered more ground among the Frenchman's correspondence than the others gave him credit for, now acted as nurse. With some difficulty he succeeded in persuading the stricken man on the bed to relax his firmly closed jaws and endeavor to swallow the fluid. It was a tedious business, but progress became more rapid when De Courtois realized that he was in the hands of those who meant well by him.

It was noticeable, too, as his senses returned and the panic glare left his eyes, that his expression changed from one of abject fear to a lowering look of suspicious uncertainty. He peered at Steingall and the hotel clerk many times, but gave Curtis and Devar only a perfunctory glance. Oddly enough, the fact that these two latter were in evening dress seemed to reassure him, and it became evident later that the presence of the clerk led him to regard these strangers as guests in the hotel, who had been attracted to his room by the mere accident of propinquity.

His first intelligible words, uttered in broken English, were:

"Vat time ees eet?"

"Ten-thirty," said Steingall.

"*Ah, sacré nom d'un nom!* I haf to go, queek!"

"Where to?"

"No mattaire. I tank you all tomorrow. I explain eferyting den. Now, I go."

"You had better stay where you are, M. de Courtois," said Steingall in French. "Milord Valletort and Count Vassilan have arrived. I have seen them and nothing more can be done with respect to their affair tonight. I am the chief of the New York Detective Bureau, and I want you to tell me how you came to be in the state in which you were found."

But De Courtois was regaining his wits rapidly, and the clarifying of his senses rendered him obviously unwilling to give any information as to the cause of his own plight. Nor would he speak French. For some reason, probably because of a permissible vagueness in statements couched in a foreign tongue, he insisted on using English.

"Eef you haf seen my frien's you tell me vare I fin' dem. I come your office to-morrow an' make ze complete explanation," he said.

"I must trouble you to-night, please," insisted Steingall. "You don't understand what has occurred while you were fastened up here. You know Mr. Henry R. Hunter?"

"Yes, yes. I know heem."

"Well, he was stabbed while alighting from an automobile outside this hotel shortly before eight o'clock, and I imagine he was coming to see you."

"Stabbed! Did zey keel heem?"

"Yes. Now, tell me who 'they' were."

M. Jean de Courtois was taken instantly and violently ill. He dropped back on the bed, from which he had risen valiantly in his eagerness to be stirring, and faintly proclaimed his inability to grasp what the detective was saying.

"Ah, *Grand Dieu!*" he murmured. "I am eel; fetch a doctaire. My brain, eet ees, vat you say, *étourdi.*"

"You will soon recover from your illness. Come, now, pull yourself together, and tell me who the men were who tied you up, and why, if you can give a reason."

The Frenchman shut his eyes and groaned.

"I am stranjare here, *Monsieur le Commissaire,*" he said brokenly. "I know no ones, nodings. Milor' Valletort, he ees acquaint. Send for heem, and bring ze doctaire."

"Don't you understand that your friend, Mr. Hunter, the journalist, who was helping you in the matter of Lady Hermione Grandison's marriage, has been murdered?"

The other men in the room caught a new quality in Steingall's voice. Contempt, disgust, utter disdain of a type of rascal whom he would prefer to deal with most fittingly by kicking him, were revealed in each syllable; but Jean de Courtois was apparently deaf to the mean opinion his conduct was inducing among those who had extricated him from a disagreeable if not actually dangerous predicament. He squirmed convulsively, and half sobbed his inability to realize the true nature of anything that had happened.

"Very well," said the detective, "if you are so thoroughly knocked out I'll see that you are kept quiet for the rest of the evening."

He turned to the clerk.

"Kindly arrange that two trustworthy men shall undress this ill-used gentleman. He may be given anything to eat or drink that he requires, but if he shows signs of delirium, such as a desire to go out, or write letters, or use the telephone, he must be stopped, forcibly if necessary. Should he become violent, ring up the nearest police station-house. I'll send a doctor to him in a few minutes."

De Courtois revived slightly under the stimulus of these emphatic directions.

"I haf not done ze wrong," he protested. "Eet ees me who suffare, and I do not permeet dis interference wid my leebairty."

"You see," said Steingall coolly. "His mind is wandering already. Just phone for a couple of attendants, will you, and I'll give them instructions. I take full responsibility, of course."

"But *monsieur*—" protested the Frenchman.

"Would you mind getting a move on? I am losing time here," said Steingall quietly to the clerk.

"I claim ze protection of my consul," sputtered De Courtois.

"Poor fellow! He is quite lightheaded," said the detective sympathetically, addressing the company at large but speaking in French. "I do hope most sincerely that I may arrest those infernal Hungarians to-night. Not only did they kill Hunter, but they have brought this little man to death's door."

The effect of these few harmless sounding words was electrical. M. de Courtois's angry demeanor suddenly changed to that of a sufferer almost as seriously injured as Steingall made out. He collapsed utterly, and never lifted his head even when most drastic measures were enjoined on a couple of sturdy negroes as to the care that must be devoted to the invalid.

Steingall was astonishingly outspoken to Curtis and Devar while they were walking to the elevator.

"I am surprised that that miserable whelp escaped with his life," he said. "Usually, in cases of this sort, the rascal who betrays his friends receives short shrift from those who make use of him. He knows too much for their safety, and gets a knife between his ribs as soon as his services cease to be valuable."

"I must confess that I don't begin to grasp the bearings of this affair," admitted Curtis. "It is almost grotesque to imagine that a number of men could be found in New York who would stop short of no crime, however daring, simply to prevent a young lady from marrying in despite of her father's wishes."

"Of course, the young lady figures largely in your eyes," said Steingall with a dry laugh. "You haven't thought this matter out, Mr. Curtis. When the fact dawns upon you that there are other people in the world than Lady Hermione you will realize that she is a mere pawn around whom a number of persons are contending.

"I don't wish to say a word to depreciate her as a star of the first magnitude, but I am greatly mistaken if there is not another woman, either here or in Europe, whose personality, if known, would attract far more attention from the police. By the way, has it occurred to you that Providence has certainly befriended you to-night? The daredevils who murdered Hunter were inclined to kill you in error. Now, I want you to concentrate your mind on the face and expression of that chauffeur, Anatole. Keep him constantly in your thoughts. If you can swear to him when we parade him before you with half a dozen other men, I shall soon strip the inquiry of its mystery."

In the hall they were surrounded by a squad of reporters, and three photographers took flashlight pictures.

"Hello!" muttered the detective to Curtis, "they've found you! Now we must use our brains to get you out of this."

They escaped the journalists by closing the door of the office on them. Then the clerk was summoned, and solved the first difficulty by revealing a back-stairs exit by way of the basement. An attendant was sent to Curtis's room to pack a grip with some clothes and linen, and, by adroit maneuvering, the whole party got away from the hotel.

Steingall insisted on interviewing Lady Hermione that night. He pointed out, reasonably enough, that she might possess a good deal of valuable information concerning Count Ladislas Vassilan; if, as Curtis believed was the case, she had already retired to rest, she must be aroused. The hour was not so late, and Vassilan's movements in New York might be elucidated by knowledge of his previous career.

So Curtis announced that his bride was installed in the Plaza Hotel, and, while Devar and he escaped through the cellars, Steingall took Uncle Horace and Aunt Louisa boldly through the lobby. A taxi was waiting there, and he gave the driver the address of the police headquarters down-town, but redirected him when they were safe from pursuit, and the three, so oddly assorted as companions, arrived at the Plaza within a minute of the two young men.

Steingall went straight to the telephone-room, and Curtis ascended to his suite of apartments. He knocked at Hermione's door and her "Yes, who is there?" came with disconcerting speed.

"It is I—dear," said Curtis, in whom the mere sense of being near his "wife" induced a species of vertigo. Indeed, he was horribly nervous, since he could not form the slightest notion as to the manner in which she would receive the latest news of De Courtois.

The door was opened without delay, and Hermione appeared, dressed exactly as she was when he bade her farewell.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said, "but it cannot be helped. Things have been happening since I left you."

Her face blanched, but she tried to smile, though the corners of her mouth drooped piteously.

"They are not here already?" she cried, and he had no occasion to ask who "they" were.

"No," he said, with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. "The fact is I—I—have brought some friends to see you. That is, some of them will, I hope, be your very good friends—my uncle and aunt, and young Howard Devar, whom I spoke about earlier. There is a detective, too—a very decent fellow named Steingall. Shall I bring them here? It will be pleasanter than being stared at in a crowded supper-room."

She was surprised, but the relief in her tone was unmistakable.

"I don't want any supper," she said. "I shall be glad to meet your relatives, of course, though—"

"Though you think I might have mentioned them sooner? Well, the strangest part of the business is that they should be in New York at all. I haven't the remotest idea as to why they are here, or how they dropped across me. But isn't it a rather fortunate thing? They may prove useful in a hundred ways."

"Please don't keep them waiting. What does the detective want?"

"Every syllable you can tell him about Count Vassilan."

"I hardly know the man at all. I always avoided him in Paris."

"You may be astonished by the number of facts you will produce when Steingall questions you. And I had better warn you that my uncle is even now consulting the head-waiter about a wedding-feast. He has adopted you without reservation on my poor description."

His frankly admiring look brought a blush to her cheeks; but she only laughed a little constrainedly, and murmured that she would try to be as complacent as the occasion demanded. Events were certainly in league to lend her wedding night a remarkably close semblance to the real thing. And as Curtis descended to the foyer to summon their waiting guests, he decided then and there not to mar the festivities by any explanations concerning Jean de Courtois's second time on earth. Steingall had practically settled the question by confining the Frenchman to his room for the remainder of the night. Why interfere with an admirable arrangement? Let the wretched intriguer be forgotten till the morrow, at any rate.

CHAPTER IX.

Eleven O'Clock.

"IN multitude of counselors there is safety," says the book of Proverbs. Usually, the philosophy attributed to Solomon exhibits a soundness of judgment which is unrivaled; so it is reasonable to assume that in Hebrew gnomic thought four do not constitute a multitude, because four people agreed with Curtis that there was not the slightest need to mention Jean de Courtois to Hermoine that evening, and five people were wrong, though in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they might have been right.

Hermoine herself admitted afterward that she would have believed Curtis implicitly had he explained the circumstances which accounted for his undoubted conviction that De Courtois was dead; indeed, she went so far as to say that, as a matter of choice, she infinitely preferred the American to the Frenchman in the rôle of a husband *pro tem.* She had never regarded De Courtois from any other point of view than as her paid ally, and she was beginning to share Curtis's belief that the man was a double-dealer, a fact which helped to modify her natural regret at the report of his death in her behalf.

In a calmer mood, too, Curtis would have been quick to realize that a girl

who had reposed such supreme confidence in his probity was entitled to share his fullest knowledge of the extraordinary bond which united them; but for one half-hour he was swayed by expediency, and expediency often exercises a disrupting influence on a friendship founded on faith. He only meant to spare her the dismay which could hardly fail to manifest itself when she heard that De Courtois was alive, and that additional complications must now arise with reference to the wrongful use of the marriage license; in reality, he was doing himself a bitter injustice.

But, having elected for a definite course, he was not a man who would deviate from it by a hair's breadth. When the junta in the vestibule of the Plaza Hotel had promised to remain mute on the topic of De Courtois, he dismissed the matter from his mind as having no further influence on the night's doings.

"Is there any means of recovering my overcoat?" he asked Steingall, remembering the change of garments when a waiter asked if the gentlemen cared to deposit their hats and coats in the cloak-room.

"Yes," said the detective. "Just empty the pockets of the coat you are wearing, and I'll send a messenger to the police station-house with a note. You won't mind if I retain your documents till after the inquest? One never knows what questions will be asked, and you must remember that an attempt may be made to fasten the crime upon you."

Curtis laughed at the absurdity of any such notion; but, for the first time, he examined the contents of the dead man's coat pockets methodically. The pocket in which the license had reposed was empty. Its fellow contained a note-book and pencil. There were also some newspaper cuttings — items of current interest in New York, but devoid of bearing on the crime or its cognate developments.

An elastic band caused the book to open at a definite page, and Steingall, who knew a little of everything, and a great deal of all matters appertaining to his profession, deciphered some shorthand characters which promised enlightenment. He passed no comment, however; but pocketed the book, scribbled a few lines on a sheet of paper bearing the name of the hotel, and entrusted coat and letter to an attendant.

Uncle Horace, after a momentary qualm, gave instructions to the head-waiter in the approved manner of a trust magnate.

"We're up against it now, Louisa," he whispered confidentially to his wife, "so let's have one wonderful night if me never have another."

Mrs. Curtis nodded her complete agreement. She would have sanctioned a mortgage on her home rather than forego any material part of an experience which would command the breathless attention of many a future gathering of matrons and maids in far-away Bloomington.

Lady Hermione received her visitors with a shy cordiality which won their prompt approval. Aunt Louisa had been perplexed by indecision as to what she was to say or how she was to act when she met the bride, but one glance of her keen, motherly eyes at the blushing and timid girl resolved any doubts on both scores.

"God bless you, my dear!" she said, throwing her arms around Hermione's neck and kissing her heartily. "Perhaps everything is for the best, and, anyway, you've married into a family of honest men and true women."

"Ma'am," said Uncle Horace, when his turn came to be introduced, "strange as it may sound, I know less about my nephew than you yourself; but if he resembles his father in character as he does in appearance, you've chosen well; and let me add, ma'am, that *he* seems to have made a first-rate selection at sight."

Of course, such congratulations were wofully misplaced; but Hermione was

too well-bred to reveal any cause for disquietude other than the normal embarrassment any young woman would display in like conditions.

Curtis, too, put in a quiet word which threw light on the situation.

"As I told you a few minutes since, I was not aware that my uncle and aunt were in New York," he said. "I cannot even guess how they came to find me so opportunely, and we have hardly been able to say a word to each other yet, because they were in the thick of the police inquiry when I met them in my hotel."

"Why, that's the easiest thing," declared Aunt Louisa, rejoicing in a long looked-for opportunity to hear her own voice in full volume. "This young gentleman here"—and she nodded at the dismayed Devar—"told us that he cottoned on to your husband, my dear, something remarkable on board the steamer, so he sent a message by wireless to the editor of a New York paper, asking him to let America know that one of her citizens who had won distinction in China was homeward bound, and the editor circulated a real nice paragraph about it. It quite took my breath away when Mrs. Harvey, our mayor's wife—such a charming woman, my dear, and I do hope I may have the pleasure of bringing you to one of her delightful tea-and-bridge afternoons—said to me on Monday:

"'Surely, Mrs. Curtis, this John Delancy Curtis who is on board the Lusitania must be a son of that brother of your husband who died in China some years ago?' and I said: 'What in the world are you talking about, Mrs. Harvey?' so she showed me the newspaper, and I was that taken aback that I revoked in the next hand, and the only mean player we have in the club claimed three tricks 'without' and went game, being a woman herself who hasn't a chick nor child, but devotes far too much time and money to toy dogs; anyhow, I couldn't give my mind to cards any more that day, so off I rushed home and phoned Horace, and here we are, after such a flurry as you never would imagine, what between packing in a hurry for the trip East and missing the steamer's arrival by nearly an hour and turning up in the Central Hotel just in time to hear—"

Then Aunt Louisa, assuredly at no loss for words, but remembering in a hazy way the compact made in the vestibule, found it incumbent on her to break away from the main trend of the narrative, so she concluded:

"Just in time to hear things being said about our nephew which we felt bound to deny, both for his sake and our own."

Curtis had favored Devar with a questioning scowl when he learned how his advent had been heralded in the press, but Devar merely vouchsafed a brazen wink, and in the next breath Hermione herself became his unconscious and most persuasive advocate.

"I have been bothering my brains to discover when or where I had seen Mr. Curtis's name before—before we met to-night," she said, smiling at the ridiculous vagueness of her own phrase. "Now I remember. I used to read the newspaper reports about every ship that arrived, and I noticed that identical paragraph."

"Thank you, Lady Hermione," cried Devar, crowing inwardly over his friend's discomfiture. "John D. will begin to believe soon what I have been telling him during the last half-hour—that I am the real *Deus ex machina* of the whole business. Why, if it hadn't been for me you two would never have got married and this merry party couldn't have happened!"

A knock at the door caused Hermione to turn with a startled look. Try as she might, she dreaded every such incident as the preliminary to a stormy interview with her father.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, ma'am," interposed Uncle Horace blandly, "this will be a waiter coming to tell us that supper is ready."

As usual, he said the correct thing,

and Steingall drew Hermione aside while the table was being spread for the feast. He lost no time in coming to the point. His first demand showed that he took nothing for granted.

"I am bound to speak plainly, your ladyship," he said. "Is the story told by Mr. John D. Curtis true?"

"Regarding the marriage?" said Hermione promptly.

"Yes."

"Well, as I do not know what he may have said, you can decide that matter for yourself after you have heard my version. I am a fugitive from Paris, where my father was endeavoring to force me into a detestable union; I am practically a complete stranger in New York; I had arranged with M. de Courtois to become my husband, under a clear agreement for money paid that the marriage should serve only as a shield against my pursuers; he was prevented by some dreadful men from keeping to-night's appointment, and Mr. Curtis came to me, intending to break the news somewhat more gently than one might look for otherwise.

"He heard my sad little explanation, and was sorry for me. As it happened, he appreciated the real nature of my predicament, and having no ties to prevent such a daring step, offered me the protection of his name until such time as I become my own mistress and am free to secure a dissolution of the marriage."

"Will you tell me exactly what you mean?" said the detective. His voice was kindly, and his expression gravely sympathetic, and Hermione could not read the amused tolerance lurking behind the mask of those keen eyes.

"I mean that I am yet what lawyers call an infant. In six months I shall be twenty-one, and the coercion which has been used to force me into marrying Count Ladislas Vassilan will be no longer possible."

"Do you forfeit an inheritance by refusing to obey Lord Valletort's wishes?"

"No, unless with respect to my father's estate. My mother was very wealthy, and her money is settled on me most securely."

"In trust?"

"Yes, I have trustees—an English banker and a clergyman."

"But if they are men of good standing they ought to have protected you from undue interference."

"An earl is of good standing, too, in my country, and Count Vassilan claims royal rank in Hungary. I loathe the man, yet every one of my friends and relatives urge me to accept him."

"Why?"

"Because he has a chance of obtaining a throne when the Austro-Hungarian empire breaks up, and my wealth will help his cause materially."

Steingall allowed himself to appear surprised.

"Is your income so large, then?" he said.

"Yes, I suppose so. My trustees tell me that I am worth nearly a hundred thousand a year."

"Dollars?"

"No—pounds sterling."

They were conversing in subdued tones, yet the detective behaved like a commonplace mortal in giving a rabbit-peep sidewise to ascertain if the girl's astounding statement had been overheard by the others. But the members of the Curtis family of honest men and true women had withdrawn purposely to the far side of the room, and Devar was laboring to convince his friend that he had acted wisely in placarding his name and fame throughout the United States.

"To your knowledge, Lady Hermione, is any other person in New York aware that you are several times a millionaire?"

"I think not. Poor Jean de Courtois may have had some notion of the fact, but I lived so unostentatiously in Paris that he would necessarily be inclined to minimize the amount of my fortune. Tell me, Mr. Steingall, do you really think he—"

The detective shook his head, and laughed with official dryness.

"Forgive me, Lady Hermione," he said, "but I must not advance any theories at present. Now, as to Count Vassilan—how long have you known him?"

"About a year."

"Has he been your suitor practically all that time?"

"Yes. The first day we met I was told by my father that I ought to be proud if he chose me as his wife. So I hated him from the very beginning."

"You took a dislike to him, I suppose?"

"Yes, an instant and violent dislike. But that is not all. There are things I cannot mention, though they are the common property of any one who has mixed in Parisian society during the past twelve months. Surely you will be able to find men and women in this great city who can supply enough of Paris gossip to show you clearly what manner of man this Hungarian prince really is!"

Hermione's face showed the distress she felt, and Steingall's disposition was far too generous to permit of any further probing in this direction when the inquiry gave pain to a young and innocent-minded girl.

"To-morrow," he said grimly, "I may read several chapters of Count Vassilan's life. But so much depends on this night's work. At any minute —certainly within an hour—I shall have news which may be affected most markedly by some chance hint supplied by you. I want you to understand, Lady Hermione, that Mr. Curtis's share in the queer tangle of the past few hours is not so simple or unimportant as you seem to imagine. I believe he has been actuated by the best of motives—"

"Oh, yes, I am sure of it," she broke in eagerly. "If I am fated never to see him again after to-night I shall always remember him as a true friend and gallant gentleman."

Steingall bit back the words which rose unbidden to his lips. He had certainly been wallowing in romance since the telephone called him to the Central Hotel, but even in the pages of fiction he had never found a more wildly improbable theory than the likelihood of John Delancy Curtis allowing any consideration short of death to separate him from such a bride as Lady Hermione within the short space of time she apparently regarded as the possible span of her married life.

"Ah," he murmured, "if he is wise he will call you to give evidence in his behalf. Judges exercise a good deal of latitude in these matters."

"But will he be arrested for marrying me? If any wrong has been done with respect to the marriage license, I am equally to blame," she said loyally.

Steingall frowned judicially. Their conversation was approaching perilously near the forbidden topic of De Courtois.

"In law, as in most affairs of life, it does no good to meet trouble halfway, your ladyship," he said. "Now, reverting to the Hungarian prince—do you remember the names of any persons, of either sex, whom he associated with in Paris? Of course, such a man would be widely known in what is called society, but I want you to try and recall some of his intimate friends."

"I believe you would find his boon companions in certain cafés on the Grand Boulevard and in the vaudeville theaters on Montmartre; but would it not help you a little if I told you of his enemies?"

"Most certainly."

"Well, I do happen to know that he is hated most cordially by the Countess Marie Zapolya, who lives in the Hôtel Ritz."

"In Paris?"

"Yes. She advised me to shun him as I would the plague."

"Did she give any reason?"

"It may sound strange, but I really

believe she wants him to marry her daughter."

"Ah, that is interesting! Pray go on."

"I never understood the thing rightly, but I heard once, through a servant, that Count Vassilan was expected to wed Elizabetta Zapolya—the succession to the Hungarian monarchy if ever it were revived was involved—but Count Vassilan spurned the lady. The countess is furious because her daughter was slighted, yet wishes to compel him to fulfil his obligations."

"In that event she would be anxious to see you safely married to some other person?"

"Oh, she was! She visited me several times, and advised me not to risk a life-long unhappiness by becoming mixed up in the maze of mid-Europe politics. And—there is something else. Poor Elizabetta Zapolya, who is somewhat older than me, is in love with an attaché at the Austro-Hungarian Embassy in Paris."

"Have you his name?"

"Yes. Captain Eugene de Karely."

"How does he stand with regard to Count Vassilan?"

"I was told that he has challenged him repeatedly to a duel, but Count Vassilan cannot meet him because they are not equals in the grades of Hungarian aristocracy. I am glad that Mr. Curtis did not wait to consult the Almanach de Gotha when *he* encountered the wretch. Has he told you that he hit him?"

"I have seen the count," said Steingall.

"Where?"

The detective was not deaf to the note of alarm in her voice, but the matter must be broached some time, and why not now?

"At the Central Hotel, about an hour ago," he said.

"Was my father with him?"

"Yes. The earl has also had the pleasure of a few minutes' talk with Mr. Curtis."

Hermione was surprised.

"Mr. Curtis has not said a word of this to me!" she cried, and her louder tone traveled across the room.

"Said a word about what?" inquired Curtis, being not unwilling to break in on the conversation, which he thought had lasted quite long enough.

"That my father and Count Vassilan had met you at your hotel."

"No, not Count Vassilan," explained the detective. "He had gone before Mr. Curtis came, but Lord Valletort returned."

"Did he ask you where I was?" demanded the girl, addressing Curtis.

"No. He tried to have me arrested, and failed. I think he looked on me as an unlikely subject to yield unnecessary information."

"Supper is served, sir," said a *maître d'hôtel* to Uncle Horace, and further discussion of Count Vassilan's tangled matrimonial schemes became difficult for the moment.

Steingall was pressed to join the party—without prejudice to any official duties he might be called on to perform next day, as Curtis put it pleasantly—and consented. Once again had his instinct been justified, for he was sure that Lady Hermoine's Parisian reminiscences would prove important in some way not yet determinable. Moreover, his colleagues knew he was at the Plaza Hotel, and he was content to remain there while his trusted aid, Clancy, was acting as chauffeur during Count Vassilan's belated excursion.

The police captain was keeping an eye on the Waldorf-Astoria, a detective was searching the apartment rented by the murdered journalist, and other men of the bureau were hunting the record of the automobile, though Steingall was convinced that this branch of the inquiry would end in a blind alley, because the car had undoubtedly been stolen, and its lawful owner would only be able to identify it, and declare that, to the best of his belief, it was locked in a garage at the time it was being used for the commission of a crime.

Steingall assumed that the unfortunate Hunter—or it might have been De Courtois—was led to hire this particular vehicle by adroit misrepresentation on the part of some unknown scoundrels who were aware of the contemplated marriage. The shorthand notes in Hunter's book bore out this theory, because they were obviously data supplied by De Courtois which would have enabled the journalist to write a thoroughly sensational story next day. He was convinced, when the truth was known, it would be discovered that Hunter made the Frenchman's acquaintance owing to his habit of mixing with the strange underworld from the continent of Europe which has its lost legion in New York. De Courtois was just the sort of vainglorious little man who would welcome the notoriety of such an adventure as the prevented marriage ceremony, wherein his name would figure with those of distinguished people, and the last thing he counted on was the murder of the scribe who had promised him columns of descriptive matter in the press.

The pert musician was not the first, nor would he be the last, to find that the rôle of cat's-paw is apt to prove more exacting than was anticipated. To his chagrin he saw himself changed suddenly from a trusted agent into a dupe, and his utter collapse on hearing of the murder fitted in exactly with the theory taking shape in the detective's mind—that there were two implacable forces at war in New York that night, that Lady Hermione's marriage to Count Vassilan or the Frenchman provided the immediate bone of contention, and that the struggle had been complicated by a too literal interpretation of instructions carried out by bitter partizans.

In the midst of a lively conversation the telephone jangled its imperative message from a wall bracket in the room. Devar was nearest the instrument, and he answered the call.

"It's for you, Mr. Steingall," he said.

The detective would have preferred greater privacy, but he rose at once and answered.

"And who is Mr. Krantz?" he demanded. Then, after a pause: "Oh, yes. Is he? You needn't trouble at all about that. The police surgeon, at my request, has dosed him with sufficient bromid to keep him quiet till to-morrow morning. Yes, I understand. Tell them it can't be done, and refer them to the Centre Street Bureau. What? No, so far as I can guess, the engineer won't be wanted again to-night."

He hung up the receiver and returned to his seat, though he had just been informed that the Earl of Valletort and another person, having ascertained by some means that De Courtois still lived, were raising a commotion at the Central Hotel and demanding access to the Frenchman's room.

"Please, am I mixed up with Mr. Krantz?" inquired Hermione, smiling, for it was a bizarre experience to find herself interested in all sorts and conditions of people whom she had never heard of.

"Mr. Krantz is the reception clerk at the Central Hotel," was the answer, which conveyed fuller information to other ears than the girl's. Then Steingall glanced at his watch.

"I think some of you people must be tired after a strenuous day," he said. "I expect to be called away soon, and it is possible that I may want to disturb you, Mr. Curtis, before you retire for the night. Do you intend to remain here?"

"Yes."

For an instant, an appreciable constraint manifested its presence, and Uncle Horace did not display his wonted tact when he accentuated it by a dry chuckle, apropos of nothing in particular. Curtis relieved the situation after a slight hesitation.

"Lady Hermione, I take it, will now go to bed," he said coolly, "and,

if she is wise, will refuse to unlock her door again till her maid comes in the morning. I purpose changing my clothes, in case I may have to accompany you on some midnight expedition. My uncle and aunt will tell us where they are staying, and arrange to meet us here at lunch to-morrow. You, Devar, being an approved night-hawk, will join me in a cigar. How is that for a reasonable disposal of the company, Mr. Steingall?"

As though in reply, the telephone rang again, and the detective lifted the receiver from its hook.

"Hello! That you, Clancy?" he said. "Right. I'll come along by the subway from Fifty-Ninth Street—that will be quicker than a taxi. Yes."

He turned, and the five people in the room saw that his face was glowing with the fire of action.

"You can defer that change of suits, Mr. Curtis. We must be off at once. Mr. Devar, have you an automobile? Can you get hold of it now? Well, phone your chauffeur to be at Centre Street headquarters in as much under half an hour as he can manage. Taxi-drivers gossip among themselves, so a private car is better. Excuse the rush, Lady Hermione, and you, too, Mrs. Curtis. I haven't another minute to spare."

Luckily, Curtis found his overcoat awaiting him in the cloak-room, or he might have been in a difficulty, for New York in November is not a city which encourages midnight journeys in evening dress.

Uncle Horace and Aunt Louisa were hurried into a taxi, and as they were being whisked off to the quiet hotel to which their baggage had been consigned, the stout man began polishing his domed forehead once more.

"Lou," he said, "I can't make head nor tail of this business. Can you?"

"Not yet, Horace," was the hopeful response.

"But—what sort of marriage is this, anyway?"

"Oh, that's all right. Those two haven't begun courting yet. But it won't be long before they start. Did you notice—"

And details observed by Aunt Louisa endured till the taxi stopped.

CHAPTER X.

Midnight.

AFTER a quick journey by New York's unrivaled system of rapid transit, the three men alighted at Spring Street, and a couple of minutes' brisk walk brought them to a large, white-fronted building of severe architecture. Above the main entrance two green lamps stared solemnly into the night, and their monitory gleam seemed to bid evil-doers "Beware!" nor was there aught far-fetched in the notion, because from this imposing center New York's guardians kept watch and ward over the city.

"Clancy still waiting?" demanded Steingall of a policeman in uniform who was on duty in an inquiry office.

"Yes, sir. He asked me to be on the lookout in case you turned up unexpectedly, as he didn't want to miss you."

The chief inspector led his companions straight to the detective bureau, taking good care to avoid the room in which the "covering" reporters were gathered, because the police headquarters of New York, unlike any similar department outside the bounds of the United States, makes the press welcome, and gives details of all arrests, fires, accidents, and other occurrences of a noteworthy nature as soon as the facts are telegraphed or telephoned from outlying districts.

Passing through the general office, Steingall entered his own sanctum. A small, slightly built man was bent over a table and scrutinizing a rogues' gallery of photographs in a large album. He turned as the door opened, straightened himself, and revealed a wizened face, somewhat of the actor type, its

prominent features being an expressive mouth, a thin, hooked nose, and a pair of piercing and deeply sunken eyes.

"Hello, Bob!" he said to Steingall. Then, without a moment's hesitation, he added: "Good evening, Mr. Curtis—glad to see you, Mr. Devar."

"Good evening, Mr. Clancy," said Curtis, not to be outdone in this exchange of compliments, though he could not imagine how a person who had never seen him should not only know his name but apply it so confidently.

"May we smoke here?" asked Devar, who had lighted a cigar on emerging from the subway station.

"Oh, yes," said Steingall. "Make yourselves at home in that respect. I am a hard smoker. Let me offer you a good American cigar, Mr. Curtis."

"Thank you. Perhaps you will try one of mine. I bought them in London, but they are of a fair brand. You, too, Mr. Clancy?"

"I'll take one with pleasure, though I don't smoke," said the little man. Seeing the question on the faces of both visitors, he cackled in a queer, high-pitched voice:

"I refuse to poison my gastric juices with nicotin, but I like the smell of tobacco. Poor old Steingall there has pretty fair eyesight, but his nose wouldn't sniff brimstone in a volcano, all because he insists on smoking."

"Gastric juice!" laughed Steingall. "You don't possess the article. Skin, bones, and tongue are your chief constituents. I'm not surprised you make an occasional hit as a detective, because the average crook would never suspect a funny little gazook like you of being that celebrated sleuth, Eugene Clancy."

Clancy's long, nervous fingers had cracked the wrapper of the cigar given him by Curtis, and he was now passing it to and fro beneath his nostrils.

"You will observe the difference, gentlemen, between beef and brains," he said, nodding derisively at the bulky chief inspector. "He rubbers along because he looks like a prizefighter and can drive his fist through a three-quarter-inch pine plank. But we hunt well together, being a unique combination of science and brute force. By the way, that reminds me. If I have got the story right, Count Ladislas Vassilan only landed in New York tonight. Did he drive straight to a boxing contest, or what?"

"Wait a second, Clancy," interrupted Steingall. "Is there anything doing? How much time have we?"

"Exactly twenty minutes. At twelve-thirty I must be in East Broadway."

"Good! Now, Mr. Curtis, tell Clancy exactly what happened since you put on poor Hunter's overcoat at the corner of Broadway and Twenty-Seventh Street."

Curtis obeyed, though he fancied he had never encountered a more unofficial official than Clancy. Shrewd judge of character as he was, he could hardly be expected to guess, after such a momentary glimpse of a man of extraordinary genius in unraveling crime, that Clancy was never more discursive, never more prone to chaff and sneer at his special friend, Steingall, than when hot on the trail of some particularly acute and daring malefactor. The chief of the bureau, of course, knew by these signs that his trusted aide had obtained information of a really startling nature, but neither Curtis nor Devar was aware of Clancy's idiosyncrasies, and some few minutes elapsed before they began to suspect that he had a good deal more up his sleeve than they gave him credit for at first.

From the outset he took an original view of Curtis's marriage.

"The girl is young and good-looking, you say?" was his opening question.

"Not yet twenty-one, and remarkably attractive," said Curtis, though hardly prepared for the detective's interest in this direction.

"Well-educated and ladylike, I suppose?"

"Yes, as befits her position."

"Cut out her position, which doesn't amount to a row of beans where intellect is concerned. Well, a man never knows much about a woman, anyway, and what little he learns is acquired by a process of rejection after marriage."

"May I ask what you mean?"

"Judging from your history and apparent age, Mr. Curtis, I take it you have not had time to go fooling about after girls?"

"You are certainly right in that respect."

"Naturally, or you wouldn't be so ignorant concerning the dear creatures. You are to be congratulated, 'pon my soul. You will have the rare experience of constructing a divinity out of a wife, whereas the average man begins by choosing a divinity and finds he has only secured a wife."

Curtis laughed, but met the detective's penetrating gaze frankly.

"Your bitter philosophy may be sound, Mr. Clancy," he said; "but it is built on a false premise. My marriage is only a matter of form. It may be legal—indeed, I believe it is—but there can be no dispute as to the nature of the bond between Lady Hermione and myself. She regards me as a husband in name only, and will dissolve the tie at her own convenience."

"You'll place no obstacles in her way?"

"None."

"Quite sure?"

"Absolutely."

Clancy giggled, as though he were a comedian who had scored a point with his audience.

"Then you're married for keeps," he announced, with the grin of a man who has solved a humorous riddle. "By refusing to thwart the lady you throw away your last slender chance of freedom, and you will find her waiting at the gate of the State penitentiary when you come out. By Jove, you've been pretty rapid, though. No wonder people say the East is waking up. Are there many more like you in China?"

Curtis was not altogether pleased by this banter, nor did he trouble to conceal his opinion that the New York detective bureau was treating a grave crime with scandalous levity.

"Whether Lady Hermione married me or Jean de Courtois is a rather immaterial side issue," he said, somewhat emphatically. "From what little I can grasp of a curiously involved affair it seems to me that there are weightier interests than ours at stake. And, if I may venture to differ from you, a lot of things may happen before I see the inside of a prison."

"After your meteoric career during the past few hours I am inclined to agree with that last remark," and Clancy's tone became so serious that Devar laughed outright. "Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Curtis. I am lost in admiration of your nerve, but you have told me just what I wanted to make sure of."

"I have expressed no opinions. I confined myself to actual facts."

"And isn't it a highly significant fact that you are over head and ears in love with your wife? *Nom d'un pipe!* Doesn't that complicate the thing worse than a Chinese puzzle?"

"I really don't see—" began Curtis, yielding to a feeling of annoyance which was not altogether unwarrantable, but Clancy jerked out his hands as though they were attached to arms moved by the strings of a marionette.

"Of course you don't!" he cried. "You're in love! You're gorged with the amococcus microbe! It's the worst case I've ever heard of. I once knew a man who met a girl for the first time at the Park Row end of Brooklyn Bridge and proposed to her before they had crossed the East River, but you've set up a record that will never be beaten.

"You find a marriage license in the pocket of a murdered man, rush off in a taxi to the address of the lady

named therein, marry her, punch a frantic rival on the nose, take the fair one to a hotel, flout her father, a British peer, and hold a banquet at which the chief of the New York detective bureau is an honored guest; and then you have the hardihood to tell me that your actions constitute an immaterial side issue in the biggest sensation New York has produced this year. Young man, wait till the interviewers get hold of you to-morrow! Wait till the sob sisters begin gushing over your bride—a pretty one—with a title! Name of good little gray man! They'll whoop your side issues into a scare-head front page!

"Before you know where you are, they'll have you bleating about the color of her eyes, the exquisite curve of her Cupid's bow lips, and the way her hair shone when the electric light fell on it, while she, on her part, will be confiding, with a suspicious break in her voice, what a perfectly darling specimen of the American man at his best you are. Mr. Curtis, you're married good and hard, and if you want to cinch the job you ought to go to jail for a while."

Unquestionably, the two civilians present thought that Clancy was slightly mad, so Steingall intervened.

"Hop off your perch, Eugene," he said, "and tell us how you came to drive Count Vassilan's taxi, and where you took him."

"It was a case of intelligent anticipation of forthcoming events," said Clancy, whose excitability disappeared instantly, leaving him calm.

"When Evans (the police captain) gave me the bearings of the affair—though, of course, being a creature of handcuffs and bludgeons, he thought our friend Curtis was the real scoundrel—I realized at once that Vassilan's indisposition was a bad attack of blue funk. Such a man could no more remain quietly in his room at the hotel than a fox-terrier could pass a dog-fight without taking hold.

"As soon as I saw the earl go out alone, and heard him direct the taxi to the Central Hotel, in Twenty-Seventh Street, I decided that my best place was at the driving-wheel of another taxi. I picked out a man on the rank who was about my size, and might be mistaken for me in a half-light, and got him to lend me his coat and cap. He took mine, and a word to the door porter fixed things so that I was whistled up quite naturally when his countship appeared.

"He had changed his clothes and linen, but one glance at his nose showed that I had marked my bird, even if the porter hadn't given me the mystic sign at the right moment. I received my orders, and off we went, a second cab following, with the driver of my taxi as a fare. Evidently, the count was not well posted in New York distances, because he grew restive, and wondered where I was taking him. He tried to be artful, too, and when we reached East Broadway he pulled me up at the corner of Market Street, told me to wait, and lodged a five-dollar bill as security, saying I would have 'annozzaire' when we got back to the hotel.

"Didn't that make things easy? He plunged into the crowd—you know what a bunch of Russians, Hungarians, and Polish Jews get together in East Broadway about ten-thirty—so I rushed to the second cab, swapped coats and hats again, gave the taximan the five-spot, and put him in charge of his own cab. In less than a minute I overtook the count, just as he was crossing the street, and saw him enter a house, after saying something to a second-hand clothes man who was bawling out his goods from the open store on the ground floor.

"By the time I had bought two silk handkerchiefs and a pair of boots, and was haggling like mad over a collection of linen collars, size sixteen—a present for you, Steingall—his nobility came down-stairs, but not alone; there was a girl with him. Luckily, she was no Hungarian, but Italian, and they talked in broken English.

"'They no come-a here-a now-a-time, *excellenzá,*' she said; 'but yo-a fin' dem at Morris Siegelman's restaurant at 'alf-a-pass twelve.' He said something choice—in pure Magyar, I guess—and headed for the taxi. That is all, or practically all. I tried to go back on my bargains with the Israelite in the store, but he made such a row that I paid him, and when I reached the second cab the driver told me that my man nodded as he passed, showing that Vassilan was returning to the hotel. So I came here and phoned you."

Steingall glanced at a clock on the mantelpiece. He rose, threw open a door, and switched on a light.

"Mr. Curtis," he said, "we must risk something, but I think I can make you up sufficiently to escape recognition, not so much by the count as by others who may attend that supper-party. You come, too, Mr. Devar. There is safety in numbers."

With a deftness that was worthy of a theatrical *costumier,* the detectives converted themselves and the two young men into ship's firemen. No more effective or simpler disguise could have been devised on the spur of the moment, nor one that might be assumed more readily. Boots offered the main difficulty, but Clancy's purchase fitted Devar, and Curtis made the best of a pair of canvas shoes, while a mixture of grease and coffee extract applied to face and hands changed four respectable-looking persons into a gang which would certainly attract the attention of the police anywhere outside the bounds of just such a locality as they were bound for.

In case the exigencies of the chase separated them, Steingall gave some instructions to the man in the inquiry office, and Devar tested the realism of his appearance by disregarding the chauffeur of the splendidly appointed automobile waiting at the exit. Walking up to the car, he opened the door and said gruffly:

"Jump in, boys!"

The chauffeur wriggled out of his seat instantly, and leaped to the pavement.

"Here, what the—" he began, whereupon Devar laughed.

"It's all right, Arthur," he said.

"What's all right? This car is here for Mr. Howard Devar!" cried the man angrily.

"Well, you cuckoo, and who am I?" he queried.

Something familiar in the voice caused the chauffeur to look closely at the speaker, whom he had not seen for a considerable time except for a fleeting glimpse on the arrival of the Lusitania at New York that afternoon. He was perplexed, but was evidently not devoid of humor.

"It's either you or your ghost, sir," he said, "and if it's your ghost you must have been badly treated in the next world."

A roundsman was entering headquarters at the moment, and gave the quartet a sharp glance.

"Here, Parker," said Steingall, "tell this man my name."

The policeman came up, looked at the detective, and laughed.

"This is Mr. Steingall, chief of the detective bureau," he said to the bewildered driver, who resumed charge of the car without further ado, but nevertheless remained uneasy in his mind. And not without cause. He, poor fellow, all unconsciously, was now gathered into the net which had spread its meshes so wide in New York that night. He could not understand why his employer's son should be gallivanting around the city in company with such questionable looking characters, even though one of them might be the famous "man with the microscopic eye," but he was far from realizing that he and his car would help to make history before morning.

In obedience to orders, he ran along Grand Street, and halted the car on the south side of W. H. Seward Park.

"Remain here, if we do not return earlier, till one o'clock," Steingall told

him, "and then run slowly along East Broadway to the corner of Montgomery Street. We are going to Morris Siegelman's restaurant, which is a few doors higher up, on the north side. If we stroll past you, pay no heed, but follow at a little distance. Have you got that right?"

"Yes, sir."

Devar was hugely delighted by the man's discomfited tone.

"Cheer up, Arthur," he said. "You'll be tickled to death to-morrow when you read the newspapers and discover the part you played in a big news item."

"Now, don't forget to lurch about the sidewalk," was Steingall's next injunction to the amateurs. "Think of all the bad language you ever heard, and use it. We're toughs, and must behave as such. Can either of you sing?"

"I can," admitted Curtis.

"That will help some. Strike up any sort of sailor's chantey when we're in the restaurant."

Late as the hour, East Broadway was full to repletion with a cosmopolitan crowd. It was a Thursday evening, and the Hebrew Sabbath began at sunset on the following day, so the poor Jews of the quarter were out in their thousands, either buying provisions for the coming holiday or attracted by the light and bustle.

Heavy-looking Russians, olive-skinned Italians, placid Germans, wild-eyed and pallid Czechs, lounged along the thoroughfare, chatting with compatriots, or gathering in amused groups to hear the strange patter of some voluble merchant retailing goods from a barrow.

From the interiors of tiny shops and cellars came eldritch voices, crying the nature and remarkable qualities of the wares within.

Every hand-cart carried a flaring naphtha-lamp, and the glare of these innumerable torches created strong lights and flickering shadows which would have gladdened the heart of Rembrandt were his artistic wraith permitted to roam the byways of a city which, perhaps, he never heard of, even in its early Dutch guise as New Amsterdam.

The lofty tenement-houses seemed to be crowded as the streets. Within a square mile of that section of New York a quarter of a million people find habitation, food, and employment. They supply each other's needs, speak their own weird tongues, and by slow degrees become absorbed by the great continent which harbors them, and then only when a second or third generation becomes Americanized.

In such a motley throng four prowling stokers, ashore for a night's spree, attracted scant attention, and Morris Siegelman's hospitable door was reached without incident.

A taxicab was standing by the curb, and the driver, gazing at the living panorama of the street, little guessed that he had changed garments with one of the half-drunken firemen two hours earlier.

"Here y'are, maties!" cried Steingall, joyously surveying a printed legend displayed among the bottles of a dingy bar running along the side of an apartment which had once been the parlor of a pretentious house, "this is the right sort o' dope—vodka—same as is supplied to the Czar of all the Roossias. Get a pint of vodka into yer gizzards an' you'll think you've swallowed a lump of red-hot clinker."

Clancy hopped on to a high stool, and curled himself up on the rounded seat in the accepted posture of Buddha, while Devar, who was by way of being a gymnast, stood on his hands and beat a tattoo with his feet against the edge of the counter. Not to be outdone, Curtis began to sing. He had a good barytone voice, and entered with zest into the mad spirit of the frolic. The song he chose was redolent of the sea. It related a tar's escapades among witches, cruisers, and girls. Three of the latter claimed him at one and the same time—so "What was a sailor-

boy to do? Yeo-ho, yeo-ho, yeo-ho!" The chorus decided the point:

Why, we went strolling down by the rolling,
Down by the rolling sea.
If you can't be true to one or two,
You're much better off with three.

Evidently, the roisterers' antics commanded the general approval of Morris Siegelman's patrons, and loud cries of "Brava!" "Encore!" "Bis!" "Herrlich!" rewarded Curtis's lyrical effort. Some thirty people or more were scattered about the room, mostly in small parties seated around marble-topped tables. Beer was the favorite beverage; a minority was eating, the menu being strange and wondrous, and every one was smoking cigarettes.

When Curtis received his share of the poisonous decoction so vaunted by Steingall, he faced the company, glass in hand, and saw Count Vassilan seated in a corner close to a window. With him were a good-looking Italian girl and a youth, and the three were deep in eager converse, giving no heed to the other revelers, but rather taking advantage of the prevalent clatter of talk and drinking utensils to discuss whatever topic it was which proved so interesting.

Steingall's eyes carried a question, and Curtis shook his head. Vassilan's male companion bore only the slight resemblance of a kindred nationality to the men who committed the murder, while he differed essentially from the treacherous "Anatole."

"I wish your best girl could see you now, John D.," whispered Devar, who had just recovered from a violent fit of coughing induced by the raw whisky which Siegelman dispensed under the seal of vodka. Curtis laughed at the conceit, which was grotesque in its very essence. Wild and bizarre as his experiences had been that night, none was more whimsical than this bawling of a ballad in an East Broadway saloon while posing as a sailor with three sheets in the wind.

"Mostly Hungarians here," muttered Steingall. "We seem to be in the right place, anyhow."

"Let's eat," said Clancy suddenly.

Reflected in a cracked mirror he had seen a man and two women rise and leave a table in the corner occupied by the count. He skipped off the stool, and made for the vacant place; the others followed, and Curtis had several glasses raised to his honor as he passed through the merry-makers.

Clancy noisily summoned a waitress, and ordered four plates of spaghetti with tomatoes. He sat with his back to the absorbed party beneath the window, and apologized with exaggerated politeness when his chair touched that of the Italian girl, though his accent, needless to say, was redolent of the East Side.

"They do not come, then?" he heard Vassilan say impatiently.

"P'raps notta to-night," said the girl, "but you sure meet-a dem here, mebbe to-morrow, mebbe de nex' day."

The count tore a leaf from a notebook and scribbled something rapidly. When he spoke it was to the Hungarian, and in Magyar, but it was easy to guess that he was giving earnest directions as to the delivery of the note.

"Now would be a good time to raise a row if we could manage it," growled Steingall.

Curtis was toying with his fourth meal since sunset, and admitted that he was ready for anything rather than spaghetti *à la* tomato.

"If there's enough varieties of Hungarians and Slavs in the street I can start a riot in less than no time," confided Devar.

"How?" asked the detective.

"This way," and Devar began to sing. He owned a light tenor, clear and melodious, and the air had a curiously barbaric lilt which, musically considered, was reminiscent of the gipsies' chorus in "The Bohemian Girl." But the words were couched in a strange tongue, sonorous and full voweled, and the Hungarians in the

room became greatly stirred when it dawned on them that a semi-intoxicated American stoker was chanting a forbidden national melody.

Far better than he knew, he sounded uncharted deeps in human nature. Andrew Fletcher of Saltown stated an eternal truth when he wrote to the Marquis of Montrose: "I know a very wise man that believed that if a man were permitted to make all the ballads he need not care who should make the laws of a nation." Before Devar had finished the first verse people from the street were crowding in through the open door, and flashing eyes and strange ejaculations showed that the Czechs thought they were witnessing a miracle. As the second verse rang out, vibrant and challenging, the mob, eager to share in the interior excitement, rushed the entrance. Many could hear, but few could see, and all were roused to exaltation by a melody the public singing of which would have brought imprisonment or death in their own land.

"Now for it!" roared Steingall, and over went table and crockery with a crash. Of course, this added to the turmoil, and some women in the café began to shriek. Not knowing in the least what was causing the commotion, the crowd surged into that particular corner, and Steingall, apparently frenzied, sprang to the window, opened it, and said to Count Vassilan:

"Get out, quick! They'll be knifing you in a minute!"

The Italian screamed at that, so she was lifted into the safety of the street. Vassilan followed, or rather was practically thrown out, and the young Hungarian could have climbed after him nimbly enough had not Curtis insisted on helping him, and, pinioning his arms, forced him head foremost over the sill, but not so rapidly that Steingall should be unable to "go through him" scientifically for the note.

"Be off, you two! Take the car and go home!"

It was no time for argument. Both Curtis and Devar read into Steingall's muttered injunction the belief that the hunt had ended for the night. They knew that the detectives could take care of themselves, and they had scrambled through the window and made off swiftly in the direction of the waiting automobile before the despoiled Hungarian regained his feet. The hour yet wanted nearly ten minutes of being one o'clock, so the chauffeur had not budged from his post in the park. Devar told him to start the engine and be ready to jump off without delay.

Then they waited and watched the corner of the square intersected by East Broadway, but neither Steingall nor Clancy appeared, so they judged it best to obey orders and make for the police headquarters. There they washed and resumed their own clothes, an operation which consumed another quarter of an hour. Still there was no sign of the detectives, and they decided, somewhat reluctantly, to do as they had been bidden and go home.

"What sort of witches' shibboleth was that which you brought off in Siegelman's?" asked Curtis, while the car was humming placidly up Broadway.

"Oh, that was an inspiration!" chuckled Devar.

"An inspiration founded on a solid basis of fact. Now, out with it!"

"Well, I was a year at Heidelberg, you know, and a fellow there told me that one evening, in a café at Temesvar, a student kicked up a shindy by singing that song. In less than a minute an officer had been stabbed with his own sword, and a policeman shot, and it took a squadron of cavalry to clear the street. He learned the blessed ditty, out of sheer curiosity, and I picked it up from him."

"What is it all about?"

"I don't know. I believe it tells the Austrians their real name, but I couldn't translate a line of it to save my life."

Curtis leaned back and laughed.

" You are by way of being a genius," he said. " I have seen a crowd go stark, staring mad because some idiot waved a black flag, but that was a symbol of the Boxer rebellion, and it meant something. In this instance, among people so far away from their own country, one would hardly expect—"

He broke off suddenly, and leaned forward.

The car had just entered Madison Square, at the junction of Broadway and Fifth Avenue, south of Twenty-Third Street. A Columbus Avenue street-car had halted to allow traffic to pass, and a gray automobile which was coming out of Fifth Avenue had been held up by a policeman stationed there. Curtis's attention was caught by the color and shape of the vehicle, and in the flood of light cast by the powerful lamps and brilliant electric devices concentrated on that important crossing, he obtained a vivid glimpse of the chauffeur's face.

" Devar," he said, and some electrical quality in his voice startled his mercurial companion into instant attention, " tell your man to overtake that car and run it into the sidewalk. The driver is ' Anatole," and it is our duty to stop him! "

At that moment the policeman signaled the up-town traffic to move on.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

THE STRENGTH OF SAMSON*

A SERIAL IN IV PARTS—PART IV

BY CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

Author of " The Portal of Dreams," " The Key of Yesterday," " The Lighted Match," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Bearing the Truce.

THE letter was written in the cramped hand of Brother Spicer. Through its faulty diction ran a plainly discernible undernote of disapproval for Samson, though there was no word of reproof or criticism. It was plain that it was sent, as a matter of courtesy, to one who, having proven an apostate, scarcely merited such consideration. It informed him that old Spicer South had been " mighty porely," but was now better, barring the breaking of age. Every one was " tolerable."

Then came the announcement which the letter had been written to convey. The term of the South-Hollman truce had ended, and it had been renewed for an indefinite period.

" Some of your folks thought they ought to let you know because they promised to give you a say," wrote the informant. " But they decided that it couldn't hardly make no difference to you, since you have left the mountains, and, if you cared anything about it, you knew the time and could of been here. Hoping this finds you well."

Samson's face clouded. He threw the soiled and scribbled missive down on the table and sat with unseeing eyes fixed on the studio wall. So they had

* This story began in The Cavalier for February 8.

cast him out of their councils! They already thought of him as one who had been!

He rose and paced the floor, with teeth and hands clenched, and the sweat standing out on his forehead. His advisers had of late been urging him to go to Paris. He had refused, and his unconfessed reason had been that in Paris he could not answer a sudden call. He would go back to them now and compel them to admit his leadership.

Then his eyes fell on the unfinished portrait of Adrienne. The face gazed at him with its grave sweetness, its fragrant subtlety, and its fine-grained delicacy. Her pictured lips were silently arguing for the life he had found among strangers, and her victory would have been an easy one but for the fact that just now his conscience seemed to be on the other side. Samson's civilization was two years old—a thin veneer over a century of feudalism—and now the century was thundering its call of blood.

But as the man struggled over the dilemma the pendulum swung back. The hundred years had left also a heritage of quickness and bitterness to resent injury and injustice. His own people had cast him out. They had branded him as the deserter; they felt no need of him or his counsel. Very well, let them have it so. His problem had been settled for him. His Gordion knot was cut.

Sally and his uncle alone had his address. This letter casting him out must have been authorized by them, Brother Spicer acting merely as amanuensis. They, too, had repudiated him—and if that were true, except for the graves of his parents, the hills had no tie to hold him.

"Sally, Sally!" he groaned, dropping his face on his crossed arms while his shoulders heaved in an agony of heart-break, and his words came in the old, crude syllables: "I 'lowed *you'd* believe in me ef hell froze!" He rose after that and made a fierce gesture with his clenched fists. "All right," he said bitterly, "I'm shet of the lot of ye. I'm done."

But it is easier to say the words of repudiation than to cut the ties that were knotted about his heart. Again he saw Sally standing by the old stile in the starlight with sweet, loyal eyes lifted to his own, and again he heard her vow that if he came back she would be waiting. Now that picture lay across a sea over which he could not return. Sally and his uncle had authorized his excommunication.

There was, after all, in the entire world no faith which would stand unaltered, and there was in all the world no reward that could be a better thing than Dead Sea fruit without the love of that barefooted girl back there in the log cabin, whose sweet tongue could not fashion phrases except in illiteracy.

He would have gambled his soul on her steadfastness without fear—and he bitterly told himself he would have lost. And yet—some voice sounded to him as he stood there alone in the studio with the arteries knotted on his temples and the blood running cold and bitter in his veins—and yet what right had he, the deserter, to demand faith?

One hand went up and clasped his forehead — and the hand fell on the head that had been shorn because a foreign woman had asked it. What tradition had he kept inviolate? And in his bitter mood that small matter of shortened hair meant as great and bitter surrender as it had meant to the Samson before him, whose mighty strength had gone out with the snipping of shears. What course was open to him now, except that of following the precedent of the other Samson, of pulling down the whole temple of his past? He was disowned and could not return. He would go ahead with the other life, though at the moment he hated it.

With a rankling soul the mountaineer left New York. He wrote Sally a brief note, telling her that he was going to cross the ocean; but his hurt

pride forbade his pleading for her confidence or adding, "I love you." He plunged into the art-life of the "other side of the Seine," and worked voraciously. He was trying to learn much —and to forget much.

Adrienne had not yet seen her portrait. Samson had needed a few hours of finishing when he left New York, though it was work which could be done away from the model. So it was natural that when Adrienne with a party reached Paris, some months later, she should soon insist on crossing the river to Samson's studio for an inspection of her commissioned canvas. For a while she wandered about the businesslike place, littered with the gear of the painter's craft. It was in a way a form of mind-reading, for Samson's brush was the tongue of his soul.

The girl's eyes grew thoughtful as she saw that he still drew the leering, saturnine face of Jim Asberry. He had not outgrown hate, then? But she said nothing until he brought out and set on an easel her own portrait.

For a moment she gasped with sheer delight, and she would have been hard to please had she not. It was a face through which the soul showed, and the soul was strong and flawless. The girl's personality radiated from the canvas—and yet—a disappointed little look crossed and clouded her eyes. She was conscious of an indefinable catch of pain at her heart. Samson stepped forward, and his waiting eyes were disappointed.

"You don't like it, Drennie?" he anxiously questioned. But she smiled in answer and declared: "I love it."

He went out a few minutes later to telephone for her to Mrs. Lescott, and gave Adrienne *carte blanche* to browse among his portfolios and stacked canvases until his return. In a few minutes she discovered one of those efforts which she called his "rebellious pictures."

These were such things as he painted, using no model except memory perhaps, not for the making of finished pictures, or even for the value of the work, but merely to give outlet to his feelings — an outlet which some men might have found in talk.

This particular canvas was roughly blocked in, and it was elementally simple; but each brush-stroke had been thrown against the surface with the concentrated fire and energy of a blow, except the strokes that had painted the face, and there the brush had seemed to kiss the canvas.

The picture showed a barefooted girl standing in barbaric simplicity of dress in the glare of the arena, while a gaunt lion crouched eying her. Her head was lifted as though she were listening to far-away music. In the eyes was indomitable courage. That canvas was at once a declaration of love and a *miserere*. Adrienne set it up beside her own portrait, and as she studied the two, with her chin resting on her gloved hand, her eyes cleared of questioning.

Now she knew what she missed in her own more beautiful likeness. It had been painted with all the admiration of the mind. This other had been dashed off straight from the heart—and this other was Sally. She replaced the sketch where she had found it, and Samson, returning, found her busy with little sketches of the Seine.

Tamarack Spicer sat on the top of a box car, swinging his legs over the side. He was clad in overalls, and in the pockets of his breeches reposed a bulging flask of red liquor and an unbulging pay-envelope. Tamarack had been "railroading" for several months this time. He had made a new record for sustained effort and industry, but now June was beckoning him to the mountains with vagabond yearnings for freedom and leisure. Many things invited his soul.

Almost four years had passed since Samson had left the mountains, and in four years a woman can change her

mind. Sally might, when they met on the road, greet him once more as a kinsman and agree to forget his faulty method of courtship. This time he would be more diplomatic. Yesterday he had gone to the boss and "called for his time." To-day he was paid off and a free lance.

As he reflected on these matters a fellow trainman came along the top of the car and sat down at Tamarack's side. This brakeman had also been recruited from the mountains, though from another section—over toward the Virginia line.

"So yer quittin'?" observed the newcomer.

Spicer nodded.

"Goin' back thar on Misery?"

Again Tamarack answered with a jerk of his head.

"I've been layin' off ter tell ye somethin', Tam'rack."

"Cut her loose."

"I laid over in Hixon last week, an' some fellers that used ter know my mother's folks took me down in the cellar of Hollman's store, an' give me some licker."

"What of hit?"

"They was talkin' 'bout you."

"What did they say?"

"I seen that they was enemies of yours, an' they wasn't in no good humor, so when they axed me ef I knowed ye, I 'lowed I didn't know nothin' good about ye. I had ter cuss ye out or git in trouble myself."

Tamarack cursed the whole Hollman tribe, and his companion went on:

"Jim Asberry was thar. He 'lowed they'd found out thet you'd done shot Purvy thet time, an' he said"—the brakeman paused to add emphasis to his conclusion—"thet the next time you come home he 'lowed ter git you plumb shore."

Tamarack scowled. "Much obleeged," he replied.

At Hixon, Tamarack Spicer strolled along the street toward the courthouse. He wished to be seen. So long as it was broad daylight and he displayed no hostility he knew he was safe—and he had plans.

Standing before the Hollman store were Jim Asberry and several companions. They greeted Tamarack affably.

"Ridin' over ter Misery?" inquired Asberry.

"'Lowed I mout es well."

"Mind ef I rides with ye es fur es Jesse's place?"

"Plumb glad ter have company," drawled Tamarack.

They chatted of many things and traveled slowly, but when they came to those narrows where they could not ride stirrup to stirrup, each jockeyed for the rear position, and the man who found himself forced into the lead turned in his saddle and talked back over his shoulder, with wary though seemingly careless eyes. Each knew the other was bent on murder.

At Purvy's gate Asberry waved farewell and turned in. Tamarack rode on, but shortly he hitched his horse in the concealment of a hollow, walled with huge rocks, and disappeared into the laurel.

He began climbing, in a crouched position, bringing each foot down noiselessly, and pausing often to listen.

Jim Asberry had not been outwardly armed when he left Spicer. But soon the brakeman's delicately attuned ears caught a sound which made him lie flat in the lee of a great log, where he was masked in clumps of flowering rhododendron. Soon Asberry passed him, also walking cautiously, but hurriedly, and cradling a rifle in the hollow of his arm. Then Tamarack knew that he was taking a short cut to head him off and "layway" him in the gorge a mile away by road, but a short distance only over the hill.

Tamarack Spicer held his heavy revolver cocked in his hand, but it was too near the Purvy house to risk a shot. He waited a moment, and then, rising, went on noiselessly with a snarling grin, stalking the man who was stalking him.

Asberry found a place at the foot of

a huge pine where the undergrowth would cloak him. Twenty yards below ran the creek-bed road, returning from its long horseshoe deviation.

When he had taken his position his faded butternut clothing matched the earth as inconspicuously as a quail matches dead leaves, and he settled himself to wait. Slowly and with infinite caution his intended victim stole down, guarding each step, until he was in short and certain range. He also lay flat on his stomach, and raised the already cocked pistol. He steadied it in a two-handed grip against a tree-trunk and trained it with deliberate care on a point to the left of the other man's spine just below the shoulder-blades.

Then he pulled the trigger. He did not go down to inspect his work. It was not necessary. The instantaneous fashion with which the head of the ambuscader settled forward on its face told him all he wanted to know. He slipped back to his horse, mounted, and rode fast to the house of Spicer South, demanding asylum.

The next day came word that if Tamarack Spicer would surrender and stand trial in a court dominated by the Hollmans, the truce would continue. Otherwise, the "war was on." The Souths flung back the message: "Come and git him."

But Hollman and Purvy, hypocritically clamoring for the sanctity of the law, made no effort to come and "git him." They knew that Spicer South's house was now a fortress prepared for siege. They knew that every trail hither was picketed. Also, they knew a better way. This time they had the color of the law on their side.

The circuit judge, through the sheriff, asked for troops, and troops came. Their tents dotted the river-bank below the Hixon Bridge. A detail under a white flag went out after Tamarack Spicer. The militia captain, in command, who feared neither feudist nor death, was courteously received. He had brains, and he assured them that he acted under orders which could not be disobeyed.

Unless they surrendered the prisoner, Gatling guns would follow. If necessary they would be dragged behind ox-teams. Many militiamen might be killed, but for each of them the State had another. If Tamarack would surrender, the officer would guarantee him personal protection; and, if it seemed necessary, a change of venue would secure him trial in another circuit.

For hours the clan deliberated. For the soldiers they felt no enmity. For the young captain they felt an instinctive liking. He was a man.

Old Spicer South, restored to an echo of his former robustness by the call of action, gave the clan's verdict:

"Hit hain't the co't we're sceered of. Ef this boy goes ter town, he won't never git inter no co't. He'll be murdered."

The officer held out his hand.

"As man to man," he said, "I pledge you my word, that no one shall take him except by process of law. I'm not working for the Hollmans or the Purvys. I know their breed."

For a space old South looked into the soldier's eyes, and the soldier looked back.

"I'll take yore handshake on thet bargain," said the mountaineer gravely. "Tam'rack," he added, in a voice of finality, "ye've got ter go."

The officer had meant what he said. He marched his prisoner into Hixon at the center of a hollow square, with muskets at the ready. And yet, as the boy passed into the court-house yard, with a soldier rubbing elbows on each side, a cleanly aimed shot sounded from somewhere. The smokeless powder told no tale, and with blue shirts and army hats circling him, Tamarack fell and died.

That afternoon one of Hollman's henchmen was found lying in the road, with his lifeless face in the water of the creek. The next day, as old Spicer South stood at the door of his cabin, a rifle barked from the hillside, and he

fell, shot through the left shoulder by a bullet intended for his heart. All this while the troops were helplessly camped at Hixon.

They had power and inclination to go out and get men, but there was no man to get.

The Hollmans had used the soldiers as far as they wished; they had made them pull the chestnuts out of the fire and Tamarack Spicer out of his stronghold. They now refused to swear out additional warrants.

A detail had rushed into Hollman's store an instant after the shot which killed Tamarack was fired. Except for a woman buying a card of buttons, and a fair-haired clerk waiting on her, they found the house empty.

Back beyond, the hills were impenetrable, and answered no questions.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Call of the Hills.

OLD Spicer South would ten years ago have put a bandage on his wound and gone about his business, but now he tossed under his patchwork quilt, and Brother Spicer expressed grave doubts for his recovery. With his counsel unavailable, Wile McCager, by common consent, assumed something like the powers of a regent, and took upon himself the duties to which Samson should have succeeded.

That a Hollman should have been able to elude the pickets, and penetrate the heart of South territory to Spicer South's cabin, was both astounding and alarming. The war was on without question now, and there must be council. Wile McCager had sent out a summons for the family heads to meet that afternoon at his mill. It was Saturday—"mill day"—and, in accordance with ancient custom, the lanes would be more traveled than usual.

Those men who came by the wagon-road afforded no unusual spectacle, for behind each saddle sagged a sack of grist. Their faces bore no stamp of unwonted excitement, but every man balanced a rifle across his pommel. None the less, their purpose was grim, and their talk, when they had gathered, was to the point.

Old McCager, himself sorely perplexed, voiced the sentiment that the others had been too courteous to express. With Spicer South bedridden and Samson a renegade, they had no adequate leader. McCager was a solid man of intrepid courage and honesty, but grinding grist was his avocation, not strategy and tactics. The enemy had such masters of intrigue as Purvy and Judge Hollman.

Then a lean sorrel mare came jogging into view, switching her fly-bitten tail; and on the mare's back, urging him with a long, leafy switch, sat a woman. Behind her sagged the two loaded ends of a corn-sack. She rode like the mountain-women, facing much to the side, yet unlike them. Her arms did not flap. She did not bump gawkily up and down in her saddle. Her blue calico dress caught the sun at a distance, but her blue sunbonnet shaded and masked her face. She was lithe and slim, and her violet eyes were profoundly serious, and her lips were as resolutely set as Joan of Arc's might have been; for Sally Miller had come only ostensibly to have her corn ground to meal.

She had really come to speak for the absent chief, and she knew that she would be met with derision. The years had sobered the girl, but her beauty had increased, though it was now of a chastened type, which gave her a strange and rather exalted refinement of expression.

Wile McCager came to the mill door as she rode up and lifted the sack from her horse.

"Howdy, Sally?" he greeted.

"Tol'able, thank ye," said Sally; "I'm goin' ter get off."

As she entered the great, half-lighted room, where the millstones creaked on their cumbersome shafts, the hum of discussion sank to silence. The

place was brown with age and dirt, and powdered with a coarse dusting of meal. The girl nodded to the dozen mountaineers gathered in conclave; then, turning to the miller, she announced: "I'm going to send for Samson."

The statement was at first met with dead silence, then came a rumble of indignant dissent; but for that she was prepared, as she was prepared for the scornful laughter which followed.

"I reckon if Samson was here," she said dryly, "you all wouldn't think it was quite so funny."

Old Caleb Wiley spat through his bristling beard, and his voice was a quavering rumble.

"What we wants is a man. We hain't got no use fer no traitors thet's too almighty damn busy doin' fancy work ter stand by their kith an' kin."

"That's a lie!" said the girl scornfully. "There's just one man living that's smart enough to match Jesse Purvy—an' that one man is Samson. Samson's got the right to lead the Souths, and he's going to do it—ef he wants to."

"Sally," Wile McCager spoke soothingly, "don't go gittin' mad. Caleb talks hasty. We knows ye used ter be Samson's gal, an' we hain't aimin' ter hurt yore feelin's. But Samson's done left the mountings. I reckon ef he wanted ter come back, he'd 'a' come afore now. Let him stay whar he's at."

"Whar *is* he at?" demanded old Caleb Wiley in a truculent voice.

"That's his business," Sally flashed back; "but I know. All I want to tell you is this: don't you make a move till I have time to get word to him. I tell you, he's got to have his say."

"I reckon we hain't a goin' ter wait," sneered Caleb, "fer a feller thet won't let hit be known whar he's a sojournin' at. Ef ye air so shore of him, why won't ye tell us whar he is now?"

"That's my business, too." Sally's voice was resolute. "I've got a letter here—it'll take two days to get to Samson. It'll take him two or three days more to get here. You've got to wait a week."

"Sally"—the temporary chieftain spoke, still in a patient, humoring sort of voice, as to a tempestuous child—"thar hain't no place ter mail a litter nigher then Hixon. No South can't ride inter Hixon, an' ride out again. The mail-carrier won't be down this way fer two days yit."

"I'm not askin' any South to ride into Hixon. I recollect another time when Samson was the only one that would do that," she answered, still scornfully. "I didn't come here to ask favors. I came to give orders—for *him*. A train leaves soon in the morning. My letter's goin' on that train."

"Who's goin' ter take hit ter town fer ye?"

"I'm goin' to take it for myself." Her reply was given as a matter of course.

"That wouldn't hardly be safe, Sally," the miller demurred. "This hain't no time fer a gal ter be galivantin' around by herself in the nighttime. Hit's a comin' up ter storm, an' ye've got thirty miles ter ride an' thirty-five back ter yore house."

"I'm not scared," she replied. "I'm goin'; an' I'm warnin' you now, if you do anything that Samson don't like you'll have to answer to him when he comes."

She turned, walking very erect and dauntless to her sorrel mare, and disappeared at a gallop.

"I reckon," said Wile McCager, breaking the silence at last, "hit don't make no great dif'rence. He won't hardly come nohow." Then he added: "But thet boy *is* smart."

Samson's return from Europe, after a year's study, was in the nature of a moderate triumph. With the art sponsorship of George Lescott and the social sponsorship of Adrienne, he found that orders for portraits from those who could pay munificently seemed to seek him. He was tasting the novelty of being lionized.

That summer Mrs. Lescott opened her house on Long Island early, and the life there was full of the sort of gaiety that comes to pleasant places when young men in flannels and girls in soft, summery gowns and tanned cheeks are playing wholesomely and singing tunefully and making love—not too seriously.

Samson, tremendously busy these days in a new studio of his own, had run over for a week. Horton was, of course, of the party; and George Lescott was doing the honors as host. Besides these, all of whom regarded themselves as members of the family, there was a group of even younger folk, and the broad halls and terraces and tennis-courts rang all day long with their laughter, and the floors trembled at night under the rhythmical tread of their dancing.

Off across the lawns and woodlands stretched the blue, sail-flecked waters of the Sound, and on the next hill rose the tile roofs and cream-white walls of the country club.

One evening when Adrienne drifted to the pergola, where she took refuge under a mass of honeysuckle, Samson South followed her. She saw him coming, and smiled. She was contrasting this Samson, loosely clad in flannels, with the Samson she had first seen rising awkwardly to greet her in the studio.

"You should have stayed inside and made yourself agreeable to the girls," Adrienne reproved him as he came up. "What's the use of making a lion of you if you won't roar for the visitors?"

"I've been roaring!" laughed the man. "I've just been explaining to Miss Willoughby that we only eat the people we kill in Kentucky on certain days of solemn observance and sacrifice. I wanted to be agreeable to you, Drennie, for a while."

The girl shook her head sternly, but she smiled and made a place for him at her side. She wondered what form his being agreeable to her would take.

"I wonder if the man or woman lives," mused Samson, "to whom the fragrance of honeysuckle doesn't bring back some old memory that is as strong—and sweet—as itself."

The girl did not at once answer him. The breeze was stirring the hair on her temples and neck. The moon was weaving a lace pattern on the ground, and filtering its silver light through the vines. At last she asked:

"Do you ever find yourself homesick, Samson, these days?"

The man answered with a short laugh. Then his words came softly—and not his own words, but those of one more eloquent:

> Who hath desired the sea? Her excellent loneliness rather
> Than the forecourts of kings, and her uttermost pits than the streets where men gather . . .
> His sea that his being fulfils?
> So and no otherwise—so and no otherwise hillmen desire their hills.

"And yet"—she said, and a trace of the argumentative stole into her voice—"you haven't gone back."

"No." There was a note of self-reproach in his voice. "But soon I shall go. At least for a time. I'm just beginning to understand my relation to them and my duty."

"Your duty is no more to go back there and throw away your life," she found herself instantly contending, "than it is the duty of the young eagle who has learned to fly to go back to the nest where he was hatched."

"But, Drennie," he said gently, "suppose the young eagle is the only one that knows how to fly—and suppose he could teach the others? Don't you see? I've only seen it myself for a little while."

"What is it that you see now?"

"I must go back, not to relapse, but to become a constructive force. I must carry some of the outside world to Misery, gifts that they would reject from other hands."

"Will they accept them even from you?"

"Drennie, you once said that if I grew ashamed of my people, ashamed even of their boorish manners, their ignorance, their crudity, you would have no use for me."

"I still say that," she answered.

"Well, I'm not ashamed of them. I went through that, but it's over."

She sat silent for a while, then cried suddenly: "I don't want you to go, Samson!"

The moment she had said it she caught herself with a nervous little laugh and added a postscript of whimsical nonsense to disarm her utterance of its telltale feeling. "Why, I'm just getting you civilized yourself. It took two years to get your hair cut."

He ran his palm over his smoothly trimmed head and laughed.

"Delilah—oh, Delilah!" he said.

"Don't!" she exclaimed. "Don't call me that."

"Then, Drennie dear," he answered lightly, "don't dissuade me from the most decent resolve I have lately made."

From the house came the strains of an alluring waltz. For a little time they listened without speech, then the girl said very gravely:

"You won't—you won't still feel bound to kill your enemies, will you Samson?"

The man's face hardened.

"I believe I'd rather not talk about that. I shall have to win back the confidence I have lost. I shall have to take a place at the head of my clan, by proving myself a man—and a man by their own standards. It is only at their head that I can lead them. If the lives of a few assassins have to be forfeited, I sha'n't hesitate at that. I shall stake my own against them fairly. The end is worth it."

The girl breathed deeply, then she heard Samson's voice again. "Drennie, I want you to understand that if I succeed it is your success. You took me raw and unfashioned and you have made me. There is no way of thanking you."

"There is a way," she contradicted; "you can thank me by feeling just that way about it."

"Then I do thank you."

She sat looking up at him, her eyes wide and questioning. "Exactly what do you feel, Samson," she asked—"I mean about me?"

He leaned a little toward he, and the fragrance and subtle beauty of her stole into his veins and brain in a sudden intoxication. His hand went out to seize hers. This beauty which would last and not wither into a hag's ugliness with the first breath of age—as mountain beauty does—was hypnotizing him. Then he straightened and stood looking down.

"Don't ask me that, please," he said in a carefully controlled voice. "I don't even want to ask myself. My God, Drennie, don't you see that I'm afraid to answer that?"

The next afternoon Adrienne and Samson were sitting with a gaily chattering group at the side-lines of the tennis courts.

"When you go back to the mountains, Samson," Wilfred was suggesting, "we might form a partnership—'South, Horton & Co.'; development of coal and timber. There are millions in it."

"I'll go with you, Horton, and make a sketch or two," volunteered George Lescott, who just then arrived from town. "And by the way, Samson, here's a letter that came for you just as I left the studio."

The mountaineer took the envelope with a Hixon postmark and for an instant gazed at it with a puzzled expression. It was addressed in a feminine hand, which he did not recognize. It was careful but perfect writing, such as one sees in a school copy-book. With an apology he tore open the covering and read the letter. Adrienne, glancing at his face, saw it turn suddenly pale and grow as set and hard as marble.

Samson's eyes were dwelling with

only partial comprehension on the script. This is what he read:

DEAR SAMSON: The war is on again. Tamarack Spicer has killed Jim Asberry, and the Hollmans have killed Tamarack. Uncle Spicer is shot, but he may get well. There is nobody to lead the Souths. I am trying to hold them down until I hear from you. Don't come if you don't want to—but the gun is ready. With love,

SALLY.

Slowly Samson South came to his feet. His voice was in the dead level pitch which Wilfred had once before heard. His eyes were as clear and hard as transparent flint.

"I'm sorry to be of trouble, George," he said quietly. "But you must get me to New York at once—by motor. I must take a train South to-night."

"No bad news, I hope," suggested Lescott.

For an instant Samson forgot his four years of veneer. The century broke out fiercely. He was seeing things far away—and forgetting things near by. His eyes blazed and his fingers twitched.

"Hell, no!" he exclaimed. "The war's on, and my hands are freed!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"Vengeance Is Mine."

SAMSON, throwing things hurriedly into his bag, heard a knock on his door. He opened it, and outside in the hall stood Adrienne. Her face was pale, and she leaned a little on the hand which rested against the white jamb.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

He came over. "It means, Drennie," he said, "that you may make a pet of a leopard-cub, but there will come a day when something of the jungle comes out in him—and he must go. My uncle has been shot, and the feud is on—I've been sent for."

He paused, and she half whispered in an appealing voice: "Don't go."

"You don't mean that," he said quietly. "If it were you, you would go. Whether I get back here or not"—he hesitated—"my gratitude will be with you—always." He broke off, and said suddenly: "Drennie, I don't want to say good-by to you. I can't."

"It's not necessary yet," she answered. "I'm going to drive you to New York."

"No!" he exclaimed; "it's too far, and I've got to go fast—"

"That's why I'm going," she promptly assured him. "I'm the only fool on these premises that can get all the speed out of a car that's in her engine—and the constables are good to me. I just came up here to—" She hesitated, then added: "And to say God keep you, boy."

He seized her hand in both his own and gripped it hard. He tried to speak, but only shook his head with a rueful smile.

"I'll be waiting at the door with the car," she told him as she left.

Horton, too, came in to volunteer assistance.

"Wilfred," said Samson feelingly, "there isn't any man I'd rather have at my back in a stand-up fight. But this isn't exactly that sort. Where I'm going a fellow has got to be invisible. No, you can't help now. Come down later. We'll organize Horton, South & Co."

"South, Horton & Co.," corrected Wilfred. "Native sons first."

At that moment Adrienne believed she had decided the long-mooted question. Of course she had not. It was merely the stress of the moment, exaggerating the importance of one she was losing at the expense of the one who was left. Still, as she sat in the car waiting, her world seemed slipping into chaos under her feet, and when Samson had taken his place at her side the machine leaped forward into a reckless plunge of speed.

Samson stopped at his studio and threw open an old closet, where, from a littered pile of discarded back-

ground draperies, canvases, and stretchers, he fished out a buried and dust-covered pair of saddle-bags. They had long lain there forgotten, but they held the rusty clothes in which he had left Misery. He dropped them at Adrienne's feet as he handed her the studio keys.

"Will you please have George look after things and make the necessary excuses to my sitters? He'll find a list of appointments in the desk."

The girl nodded. "What are those?" she asked, gazing at the great leather pockets as at some relic unearthed from Pompeian excavations.

"Saddle-bags, Drennie," he said; "and in them are homespun and jeans. One can't lead his 'fluttered folk and wild' in a cutaway coat."

Shortly they were at the station, and the man standing at the side of the machine took her hand.

"It's not good-by, you know," he said, smiling. "Just *auf wiedersehen.*"

She nodded and smiled, too, but as she smiled she shivered and turned the car slowly. There was no need to hurry now.

Samson had caught the fastest west-bound express on the schedule. In thirty-six hours he would be at Hixon. There were many things which his brain must attack and digest in these hours. He must arrange his plan of action to its minutest detail, because he would have as little time for reflection, once he had reached his own country, as a wild-cat flung into a pack of hounds.

He took out Sally's letter and read it once more. He read it mechanically and as a piece of news that had brought evil tidings. Then suddenly another aspect of it struck him—an aspect to which the shock of its reception had, until this tardy moment, blinded him. The letter was perfectly grammatical and penned in a hand of copy-book roundness and evenness. The address, the body of the missive, and the signature were all in one chirography. She would not have entrusted the writing of this letter to any one else.

Sally had learned to write!

Moreover, at the end were the words "with love." It was all plain now. Sally had never repudiated him. She was declaring herself true to her mission and her love. All that heart-break through which he had gone had been due to his own misconception, and in that misconception he had drawn into himself and had stopped writing to her.

Even his occasional letters had for two years ceased to brighten her heart-strangling isolation — and she was still waiting! She had sent no word of appeal until the moment had come of which she had promised to inform him. Sally, abandoned and alone, had been fighting her way up—that she might stand on his level!

"Good God!" groaned the man in abjectly bitter self-contempt. His hand went involuntarily to his cropped head, and dropped with a gesture of self-doubting. He looked down at his tan shoes and silk socks. He rolled back his shirt-sleeve and contemplated the forearm that had once been as brown and tough as leather. It was now the arm of a city man, except for the burning of one outdoor week.

He was returning at the eleventh hour—stripped of the faith of his kinsmen; half-stripped of his faith in himself! If he were to realize the constructive dreams of which he had last night so confidently prattled to Adrienne, he must lead his people from under the blighting shadow of the feud.

Yet if he was to lead them at all he must first regain their shaken confidence, and to do that he must go, at their head, through this mire of war to vindication. Only a fighting South could hope to be heard in behalf of peace. He must reappear before his kinsmen as much as possible the boy who had left them—not the fop with "new-fangled" affectations.

His eyes fell upon the saddle-bags on the floor of the Pullman, and he smiled satirically. He would like to step from the train at Hixon and walk brazenly through the town in those old clothes, challenging every hostile glance. If they shot him down on the streets, as they certainly would do, it would end his questioning and his anguish of dilemma. He could welcome that, but it would, after all, be shirking the issue.

He must get out of Hixon and into his own country unrecognized. The lean boy of four years ago was the somewhat filled out man now. The one concession that he had made to Paris life was the wearing of a closely cropped mustache. That he still wore —had worn it chiefly because he liked to hear Adrienne's humorous denunciation of it. He knew that, in his present guise and dress, he had an excellent chance of walking through the streets of Hixon as a stranger. And, after leaving Hixon, there was a mission to be performed at Jesse Purvy's store. As he thought of that mission a grim glint came to his pupils.

As Samson passed through the tawdry cars of the local train near Hixon he saw several faces which he recognized, but they either eyed him in inexpressive silence or gave him the greeting of the " furriner."

Then the whistle shrieked for the trestle over the Middle Fork, and at only a short distance rose the cupola of the brick court-house and the scattered roofs of the town. Scattered over the green slopes by the river-bank lay the white spread of a tented company street, and as he looked out he saw uniformed figures moving to and fro and caught the ring of the bugle-call.

So the militia was on deck. Things must be bad, he reflected.

He stood on the platform and looked down as the engine roared along the trestle. There were two quick-fire guns. One pointed its muzzle toward the town and the other scowled up at the face of the mountain. Sentries paced their beats. Men in undershirts lay dozing outside tent-flaps. It was all a picture of disciplined readiness, and yet Samson knew that soldiers made of painted tin would be equally effective. These military forces must remain subservient to local civil authorities, and the local civil authorities obeyed the nod of Judge Hollman and Jesse Purvy.

As Samson crossed the toll-bridge to the town proper he passed two brown-shirted militiamen, lounging on the rail of the middle span. They grinned at him, and, recognizing the outsider from his clothes, one of them commented: " Ain't this the hell of a town? "

" It's going to be," replied Samson enigmatically as he went on.

Still unrecognized, he hired a horse at the livery stable, and for two hours rode in silence, save for the easy creaking of his stirrup-leathers and the soft thud of hoofs.

The silence soothed him. The brooding hills lulled his spirit as a crooning song lulls a fretful child. Mile after mile unrolled forgotten vistas. Something deep in himself murmured " Home."

It was late afternoon when he saw ahead of him the orchard of Purvy's place and read on the store wall, a little more weather-stained but otherwise unchanged, " Jesse Purvy, General Merchandise."

The porch of the store was empty, and as Samson flung himself from his saddle there was no one to greet him. This was surprising, since ordinarily two or three of Purvy's personal guardsmen loafed at the front to watch the road. Just now the guard should logically be doubled. Samson still wore his Eastern clothes—for he wanted to go through that door unknown. As Samson South he could not cross its threshold either way.

But when he stepped up onto the rough porch flooring no one challenged his advance. The yard and

orchard were quiet from their front fence to the grisly stockade at the rear, and wondering at these things, the young man stood for a moment looking about at the afternoon peace before he announced himself.

Yet Samson had not come to the stronghold of his enemy for the purpose of assassination. There had been another object in his mind—an absurdly mad idea, it is true, yet so bold of conception that it held a ghost of promise.

He had meant to go into Jesse Purvy's store and chat artlessly, like some inquisitive "furriner." He would ask questions which, by their very impertinence, might be forgiven on the score of a stranger's folly. But most of all he wanted to drop the casual information, which he should assume to have heard on the train, that Samson South was returning, and to mark, on the assassin leader, the effect of the news.

In his new code it was necessary to give at least the rattler's warning before he struck, and he meant to strike. If he were recognized — well — he shrugged his shoulders.

But as he stood on the outside wiping the perspiration from his forehead, for the ride had been warm, he heard voices within. They were such loud and angry voices that it occurred to him that, by remaining where he was, he might gain more information than by hurrying in.

"I've done been your executioner fer twenty years," complained a voice which Samson at once recognized as that of Aaron Hollis, the most trusted of Purvy's personal guards. "I hain't never layed down on ye yet. Me an' Jim Asberry killed old Henry South. We laid fer his boy, an' would a got him ef ye'd only said ther word. I went inter Hixon and killed Tam'rack Spicer, with soldiers all 'round me.

"There hain't no other damn fool in these mountings would 'a' took such a long chanct es thet. I'm tired of hit. They're a goin' ter git me, an' I wants ter leave, an' you won't come clean with the price of a railroad ticket to Oklahoma. Now, damn yore stingy soul, I gits that ticket or I gits you."

"Aaron, ye can't scare me into doin' nothin' I ain't aimin' to do." The old baron of the vendetta spoke in a cold, stoical voice. "I tell ye I ain't quite through with ye yet. In due an' proper time I'll see that ye get yer ticket." Then he added with conciliating softness: "We've been friends a long while. Let's talk this thing over before we fall out."

"Thar hain't nothin' ter talk over," stormed Aaron. "Ye're jest tryin' ter kill time till the boys gits hyar, and then I reckon ye 'lows ter have me kilt like yer've had me kill them others. Hit hain't no use. I've done sent 'em away. When they gits back hyar either you'll be in hell or I'll be on my way outen the mountings."

Samson stood rigid. Here was the confession of one murderer, with no denial from the other. The truce was off. Why should he wait? Cataracts seemed to thunder in his brain, and yet he stood there, his hand in his coat-pocket clutching the grip of a magazine pistol.

Samson South, the old, and Samson South, the new, were writhing in the life-and-death grapple of two codes.

Then, before decision came, he heard a sharp report inside, and the heavy fall of a body to the floor. A wildly excited figure came plunging through the door, and Samson's left hand swept out and seized Aaron Hollis's shoulder in a sudden, viselike grip.

"Do you know me?" he inquired, as the mountaineer crouched back.

"No, damn ye; git outen my road." Aaron thrust his cocked rifle close against the stranger's face. From its muzzle came the acrid stench of freshly burned powder.

"My name is Samson South."

Before the astounded finger on the rifle-trigger could be crooked Sam-

son's pistol spoke from the pocket, and as though in echo the rifle blazed, a little too late and a shade too high, as the dead man's arms went up.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Wildcat Samson's Home."

EXCEPT for those two reports there was no sound. Samson stood still anticipating an uproar of alarm. Now he should doubtless have to pay with his life for both the deaths which would inevitably and logically be attributed to him. But strangely enough no clamor arose.

The shot inside had been muffled, and those outside broken by the intervening store did not arouse the house. Purvy's body-guard had been sent away by Hollis on a false alarm. Only the "wimmen folks" and children remained indoors, and they were drowning with a piano any sounds that might have come from without.

That piano was the chief emblem of Purvy's wealth. It represented the acme of "having things hung up"; that ancient and expressive phrase which had come down from days when the pioneer's worldly condition was gaged by the hams hanging in the smoke-house and the peppers, tobacco, and herbs strung high against the rafters.

Now Samson South stood looking down uninterrupted on the body of Aaron Hollis as it lay motionless at his feet.

The breeze was harping sleepily among the branches, and several geese stalked pompously along the creek's edge. On the top of the stockade a gray squirrel, sole witness to the tragedy, rose on his haunches, flirted his brush, and then, in a sudden leap of alarm, disappeared.

Samson turned to the darkened doorway. Inside was emptiness except for the other body, which had crumpled forward and face down across the counter. A glance showed that Jesse Purvy would no more fight back the coming of death. He was quite unarmed. Behind his spent body ranged shelves of general merchandise. Boxes of sardines and cans of peaches were lined in homely array above him. His lifeless hand rested as though flung out in an oratorical gesture, on a bolt of blue calico.

Samson paused only for a momentary survey. His score was clean. He would not again have to agonize over the dilemma of old ethics and new. To-morrow the word would spread like wild-fire along Misery and Cripple-shin, that Samson South was back, and that his coming had been signalized by these two deaths.

The fact that he was responsible for only one—and that in self-defense—would not matter. They would prefer to believe that he had invaded the store and killed Purvy, and that Hollis had fallen in his master's defense at the threshold. Samson went out, still meeting no one, and continued his journey.

Dusk was falling when he hitched his horse in a clump of timber, and, lifting his saddle-bags, began climbing to a cabin set far back in a thicketed cove. He was now well within South territory and the need of masquerade had ended.

The cabin had not, for years, been occupied. Its roof-tree was leaning askew under rotting shingles. The doorstep was ivy-covered and the stones of the hearth were broken. But it lay well hidden, and would serve his purpose.

Shortly a candle flickered inside, before a small hand-mirror. Scissors and safety razor were for a while busy. The man who entered in impeccable clothes emerged fifteen minutes later—transformed. There appeared under the rising June crescent, a smooth-faced native, clad in stained store clothes, with rough woolen socks showing at his brogan tops, and a battered felt hat drawn over his face. No one who had known the Samson

South of four years ago would fail to recognize him now. And the strangest part, he told himself, was that he *felt* the old Samson.

He no longer doubted his courage. He had come home, and his conscience was once more clear.

The mountain-roads and the mountainsides themselves were sweetly silent. Moon-mist engulfed the flats in a lake of dreams, and as the livery-stable horse halted to pant at the top of the final ridge, he could see below him his destination.

The smaller knobs rose like little islands out of the vapor, and yonder, catching the moonlight, like scraps of gray paper, were two roofs—those of his uncle's house and that of the widow Miller.

At a point where a hand-bridge crossed the skirting creek, the boy dismounted. Ahead of him lay the stile where he had said good-by to Sally. The place was dark and the chimney smokeless; but as he came nearer, holding the shadows of the trees, he saw one sliver of light at the bottom of a solid shutter; the shutter of Sally's room. Yet for a while Samson stopped there, looking and making no sound.

He stood at his Rubicon—and behind him lay all the glitter and culture of that other world, a world that had been good to him.

And Sally—would she be changed? His heart was hammering wildly now. Sally had remained loyal. It was a miracle, but it was the one thing that counted. He was going to her and nothing else mattered. All the questions of dilemma were answered. He was Samson South come back to his own—to Sally and the rifle.

He lifted his head and sent out a long clear whippoorwill call which quavered on the night much like the other calls in the black hills around him. After a moment he went nearer, in the shadow of a poplar, and repeated the call.

Then the cabin-door opened. Its jamb framed a patch of yellow candle-light, and at the center a slender silhouetted figure in a fluttering eager attitude of uncertainty. The figure turned slightly to one side, and as it did so, the man saw clasped in her right hand the rifle, which had been his mission, bequeathed to her in trust.

He saw, too, the delicate outline of her profile, with anxiously parted lips and a red halo about her soft hair. He watched the eager heave of her breast, and the spasmodic clutching of the gun to her heart. For four years he had not given that familiar signal. Possibly it had lost some of its characteristic quality, for she still seemed in doubt.

She hesitated, and the man invisible in the shadow once more imitated the bird-note, but this time it was so low and soft that it seemed the voice of a whispering whippoorwill.

Then, with a sudden glad little cry, she came running with her old fleet grace down to the road.

Samson had vaulted the stile, and stood in the full moonlight. As he saw her coming he stretched out his arms, and his voice broke from his throat in a half hoarse, passionate cry: "Sally!"

It was the only word he could have spoken just then, but it was all that was necessary. It told her everything. It was an outburst from a heart too full of emotion to grope after speech, the cry of a man for the one woman who alone can call forth an inflection more eloquent than phrases and poetry. And as she came into his outstretched arms as straight and direct as a homing pigeon, they closed about her in a convulsive grip that held her straining to him, almost crushing her in the tempest of his emotion.

For a time there was no speech, but to each of them it seemed that their tumultuous heart-beating must sound above the night music, and the telegraphy of heart-beats tells enough.

Later they would talk; but now, with a gloriously wild sense of being

together, with a mutual intoxication of joy because all that they had dreamed was true, and all that they had feared was untrue, they stood there under the skies clasping each other — with the rifle between their breasts. Then, as he held her close, he wondered that a shadow of doubt could ever have existed. He wondered if, except in some nightmare of hallucination, it *had* ever existed.

He felt the flutter of her heart, like that of a rapturous bird, and the play of her breath on his face, like the fragrance of elder-blossoms.

These were *their* stars twinkling overhead. These were *their* hills, and *their* moon was smiling on their tryst.

He had gone and seen the world that lured him; he had met its difficulties and faced its puzzles. He had even felt his feet wandering at the last from the path that led back to her, and now, with her lithe figure close held in his embrace, and her red-brown hair brushing his temples, he marveled how such an instant of doubt could have existed. He knew only that the silver of the moon and the kiss of the breeze and the clasp of her soft arms about his neck were all parts of one great miracle.

And she, who had waited and almost despaired, not taking count of what she had suffered, felt her knees grow weak and her head grow dizzy with sheer happiness, and wondered if it were not too marvelous to be true. And looking very steadfastly into his eyes, she saw there the gleam which once had frightened her — the gleam that spoke of something stronger and more compelling than his love.

It no longer frightened her, but made her soul sing, though it was more intense than it had ever been before, for now she knew that it was she herself who brought it to his pupils, and that nothing would ever be stronger.

"Did ye think I wasn't a comin' back, Sally?" Samson questioned softly. At that moment he had no realization that his tongue had ever fashioned smoother phrases. And she, who had also been making war on crude idioms, forgot, too, as she answered:

"Ye done said ye was a comin'." Then she added a happy lie: "I knowed plumb shore ye'd do hit."

After a long while she drew away and said slowly: "Samson, I've done kept the old rifle-gun ready fer ye. Ye said ye'd need it bad when ye came back, an' I've took care of it."

She stood there holding it, and her voice dropped almost to a whisper as she added: "It's been a lot of comfort to me sometimes, because it was yourn. I knew if ye stopped keerin' fer me, ye wouldn't let me keep it— an' as long as I had it—" she broke off, and the fingers of one hand touched the weapon caressingly.

The man knew many things now that he had not known when he said good-by. He recognized in the very gesture with which she stroked the old walnut stock the pathetic heart-hunger of a nature which had been denied the fulfilment of its strength and which had been bestowing on an inanimate object something that might almost have been the stirring of the mother instinct for a child. Now, thank God, her life should never lack anything that a flood-tide of love could bring to it. He bent his head in a mute sort of reverence.

After a long while they found time for the less wonderful things.

"I got your letter," he said seriously, "and I came at once." As he began to speak of concrete facts he dropped again into ordinary English and did not know that he had changed his manner of speech.

For an instant Sally looked up into his face, then, with a sudden laugh, she informed him: "I can say 'isn't' instead of 'hain't,' too. How did you like my writing?"

He held her off at arm's length and looked at her pridefully; but under his gaze her eyes fell, and her face flushed with a sudden diffidence and a new shyness of realization.

She wore a calico dress, but at her throat was a soft little bow of ribbon. She was no longer the totally unself-conscious wood-nymph, though as natural and instinctive as in the other days. Suddenly she drew away from him a little, and her hands went slowly to her breast and rested there. She was fronting a great crisis, but in the first flush of joy she had forgotten it.

She had spent lonely nights struggling for rudiments; she had sought and fought to refashion herself, so that if he came he need not be ashamed of her. And now he *had* come, and, with a terrible clarity and distinctness, she realized how pitifully little she had been able to accomplish. Would she pass muster? She stood there before him, frightened, self-conscious, palpitating, then her voice came in a whisper:

"Samson dear, I'm not holdin' you to any promise. Those things we said were a long time back. Maybe we'd better forget 'em now and begin all over again."

But again he crushed her in his arms, and his voice rose triumphantly: "Sally, I have no promises to take back, and you have made none that I'm ever going to let you take back. Not while life lasts."

Her laugh was the delicious music of happiness.

As they talked, sitting on the stile, Sally held the rifle across her knees. Except for their own voices and the soft chorus of night sounds, the hills were wrapped in silence—a silence as soft as velvet.

Suddenly in a pause there came to the girl's ears the cracking of a twig in the woods. With the old instinctive training of the mountains she leaped noiselessly down, and for an instant stood listening with intent ears. Then, in a low tense whisper as she thrust the gun into the man's hands, she cautioned:

"Git out of sight. Maybe they've done found out ye've come back; maybe they're trailin' ye!"

With an instant shock she realized what mission had brought him back, and what was his peril, and he, too, for whom the happiness of the moment had swallowed up other things, came back to a recognition of facts.

Dropping into the old woodcraft, he melted out of sight into the shadow, thrusting the girl behind him, and crouched against the fence, throwing the rifle forward and peering into the shadows. As he stood there, balancing the gun once more in his hands, old instincts began to stir, old battle-hunger to rise, and old realizations of primitive things to assault him.

Then, when they had waited with bated breath until they were both reassured, he rose and swung the stock to his shoulder several times. With something like a sigh of contentment, he said half to himself: "Hit feels mighty natural ter throw this old rifle-gun up. I reckon maybe I kin still shoot hit."

"I learned some things down there at school, Samson," said the girl with painful hesitation, "and I wish—I wish you didn't have to use it."

"Jim Asberry is dead," said the man gravely.

"Yes," she echoed. "Jim Asberry's dead." She stopped there, but her sigh completed the sentence as though she had added, "but he was only one of several. Your vow went further."

After a moment's pause, Samson added: "Jesse Purvy is dead and Aaron Hollis is dead."

The girl drew back with a frightened gasp. She knew what that meant, or thought she did.

"Jesse Purvy," she repeated. "Oh, Samson, did ye—" She broke off, and covered her face with her hands.

"No, Sally," he told her. "I didn't have to." He recited the day's occurrence, and they sat together on the stile until the moon had sunk to the ridge-top.

Captain Sidney Callomb, who had been despatched in command of a mi-

litia company to "quell" the trouble in the mountains, should have been a soldier by profession. All his enthusiasms were martial. His precision was military. His cool eye held a note of command. He had a rare gift of handling men, which made them ready to execute the impossible.

But the elder Callomb had trained his son to succeed him near the head of a railroad-system, and the young man had philosophically undertaken to satisfy himself with State Guard shoulder-straps.

The deepest sorrow and mortification he had ever known was that which came to him when Tamarack Spicer, his prisoner of war, and a man who had been surrendered on the strength of his personal guarantee, had been assassinated before his eyes.

Besides being on duty as an officer of militia, Callomb was a Kentuckian, interested in the problems of his commonwealth, and when he went back he knew that his cousin who occupied the executive mansion at Frankfort would be interested in his suggestions. The Governor had asked him to report his impressions, and he meant to form them after analysis.

So, smarting under his impotency, Captain Callomb came out of his tent one morning and strolled across the curved bridge to the town proper. He knew that the grand jury was convening, and he meant to sit as a spectator in the court-house and study proceedings when they were instructed.

Callomb saw without being told that over the town lay a sense of portentous tidings. Faces were more sullen than usual. Men fell into scowling knots and groups. A clerk at a store where he stopped for tobacco, inquired as he made change: "Heerd the news, stranger?"

"What news?"

"This here 'Wildcat Samson' South come back yistiddy, an' last evenin' tor'ds sundown, Jesse Purvy an' Aaron Hollis was shot dead."

For an instant the soldier stood looking at the young clerk, his eyes kindling into a wrathful blaze. Then he cursed under his breath. At the door he turned on his heel. "Where can Judge Smithers be found at this time of day?" he demanded.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Whole Truth.

THE HON. ASA SMITHERS was not the regular judge of the circuit which numbered Hixon among its county seats. The duly elected incumbent was ill, and Smithers had been named as his *pro tem.* successor. Callomb climbed to the second story of the frame bank-building and pounded loudly on a door which bore the boldly typed shingle, "Asa Smithers, Attorney at Law."

The judge was placid and smiling. The lawyer who was for the time being exalted to the bench hoped to ascend it more permanently by the votes of the Hollman faction, since only Hollman votes were counted. He was a young man of powerful physique, with a face ruggedly strong and honest.

It was such an honest and fearless face that it was extremely valuable to its owner in concealing a crookedness as resourceful as that of a fox and a moral cowardice which made him a spineless tool in evil hands. A shock of tumbled red hair over a fighting face added to the appearance of combative strength.

The Honorable Asa was conventionally dressed and his linen was white, but his collar was innocent of a necktie. Callomb stood for a moment inside the door, and when he spoke it was to demand crisply:

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"About what, captain?" inquired the other mildly.

"Is it possible you haven't heard? Since yesterday noon two more murders have been added to the holocaust.

You represent the courts of law. I represent the military arm of the State. Are we going to stand by and see this go on?"

The judge shook his head, and his visage was sternly thoughtful and hypocritical. He did not mention that he had just come from conference with the Hollman leaders. He did not explain that the venire he had drawn from the jury-drum had borne a singularly solid Hollman complexion.

"Until the grand jury acts I don't see that we can take any steps."

"And," stormed Captain Callomb, "the grand jury will, like former grand juries, lie down in terror and inactivity. Either there are no courageous men in your county or these panels are selected to avoid including them."

Judge Smithers's face darkened. If he was a moral coward, he was at least a coward crouching behind a seeming of fearlessness.

"Captain," he said coolly but with a dangerous hint of warning, "I don't see that your duties include contempt of court."

"No!" Callomb was now thoroughly angered, and his voice rose. "I am sent down here subject to your orders, and it seems you are also subject to orders. Here are two murders in a day, capping a climax of twenty years of bloodshed. You have information as to the arrival of a man known as a desperado with a grudge against the two dead men, yet you know of no steps to take.

"Give me the word, and I'll go out and bring that man and any others you name to your bar of justice—if it is a bar of justice. For God's sake, give me something else to do than to bring in prisoners to be shot down in cold blood!"

The judge sat balancing a pencil on his extended forefinger as though it were a scale of justice.

"You have been heated in your language, sir," he said sternly, "but it is a heat rising from an indignation which I share. Consequently I pass it over. I cannot instruct you to arrest Samson South before the grand jury has accused him. The law does not contemplate hasty or unadvised action. All men are innocent until proven guilty. If the grand jury wants South I'll instruct you to go and get him. Until then you may leave my part of the work to me."

The next day the mail-carrier brought in a note for the temporary judge. His honor read it at recess, and hastened across to Hollman's Mammoth Department Store. There, in council with his masters, he asked instructions.

This was the note:

THE HON. ASA SMITHERS.

SIR: I arrived in this county yesterday, and am prepared, if called as a witness, to give to the grand jury full and true particulars of the murder of Jesse Purvy and the killing of Aaron Hollis. I am willing to come under escort of my own kinsmen, or of the militiamen, as the court may advise.

The requirement of any bodyguard, I deplore, but in meeting my legal obligations I do not regard it as necessary or proper to walk into a trap.

Respectfully,
SAMSON SOUTH.

Smithers looked perplexedly at Judge Hollman.

"Shall I have him come?" he inquired.

Hollman threw the letter down on his desk with a burst of blasphemy.

"Have him come?" he echoed. "Hell and damnation, no! What do we want him to come here and spill the milk for? When we get ready we'll indict him.

"Then let your damned soldiers go after him—as a criminal, not a witness. After that we'll continue this case until these outsiders go away and we can operate to suit ourselves. We don't fall for Samson South's tricks. No, sir; you never got that letter. It miscarried. Do you hear? You never got it."

Smithers nodded grudging acquiescence. Most men would much rather be independent officials than collar-wearers.

Out on Misery, Samson South had gladdened the soul of his uncle with his return. The old man was mending, and, for a long time, the two had talked. The failing head of the clan looked vainly for signs of degeneration in his nephew, and, failing to find them, was happy.

Sally went to mill that Saturday, and with her rode Samson. There, besides Wile McCager, he met Caleb Wiley and several others. At first they received him skeptically; but they knew of the visit to Purvy's store, and they were willing to admit that in part at least he had erased the blot from his escutcheon. Then, too, except for cropped hair and a white skin, he had come back as he had gone, in homespun and hickory. There was nothing high-falutin in his manners. In short, the impression was good.

"I reckon now that ye're back, Samson," suggested McCager, "an' seein' how yore Uncle Spicer is gettin' along all right, I'll jest let the two of ye run things. I've done had enough."

It was a simple fashion of resigning a regency, but effectual. Old Caleb, however, still insurgent and unconvinced, brought in a minority report.

"We wants fighting men," he grumbled, with the senile reiteration of his age, as he spat tobacco and beat a rat-tat on the mill floor with his long hickory staff. "We don't want no deserters."

"Samson ain't a deserter," defended Sally. "There isn't one of you fit to tie his shoes."

Sally and old Spicer South alone knew of her lover's letter to the circuit judge, and they were pledged to secrecy.

"Never mind, Sally." It was Samson himself who answered her. "The proof of a fighting man is his fighting, I reckon. I'm willing to let 'em judge me by what I'm going to do."

So Samson slipped back, tentatively at least, into his place as clan head, though for a time he found it a post without action. After the fierce outburst of bloodshed quiet had settled, and it was tacitly understood that unless the Hollman forces had some coup in mind which they were secreting, this peace would last until the soldiers were withdrawn.

"When the world's a lookin'," commented Judge Hollman, "hit's a right good idea to crawl under a log —an' lay still."

Purvy had been too famous a feudist to pass unsung. Reporters came as far as Hixon, gathered there such news as the Hollmans chose to give them, and went back to write lurid stories and description, from hearsay, of the stockaded seat of tragedy.

Nor did they overlook the dramatic coincidence of the return of "Wildcat" Samson South from civilization to savagery. They made no accusation, but they pointed an inference and a moral—as they thought. It was a sermon on the triumph of heredity over the advantages of environment.

Meanwhile, it came insistently to the ears of Captain Callomb that some plan was on foot, the intricacies of which he could not fathom, to manufacture a case against a number of the Souths, quite apart from their actual guilt or likelihood of guilt.

Once more he would be called upon to go out and drag in men too well fortified to be taken by the posses and deputies of the Hollman civil machinery. At this news he chafed bitterly, and, still rankling with a sense of shame at the loss of his first prisoner, he formed a plan of his own.

"I'm going to ride over on Misery," he said, "and hear what the other side has to say."

And next day Captain Callomb rode out of Hixon unaccompanied. Curious stares followed him, and Judge Smithers turned narrowing and unpleasant eyes after him. And at the point where the ridge separated the territory of the Hollmans from that of the Souths, Captain Callomb

saw waiting in the road a mounted figure sitting his horse straight and clad in the rough habilaments of the mountaineer.

As Callomb rode up he saluted, and the mounted figure with perfect gravity and correctness returned that salute as one officer to another. The captain was surprised. Where had this mountaineer, with the steady eyes and the clean-cut jaw, learned the niceties of military etiquette?

"I am Captain Callomb of F Company," said the officer. "I'm riding over to Spicer South's house. Did you come to meet me?"

"To meet and guide you," replied a pleasant voice. "My name is Samson South."

The militiaman stared. This man, whose countenance was calmly thoughtful scarcely comported with the descriptions he had heard of the "wildcat of the mountains"; the man who had come home at the first note of trouble and marked his coming with double murder. He had not read newspapers of late. He had heard only that Samson had "been away."

While he wondered, Samson went on: "I'm glad you came. If it had been possible I would have come to you." As he told of the letter he had written the judge, volunteering to present himself as a witness, the officer's wonder grew.

"They said that you had been away," suggested Callomb. "If it's not an impertinent question, what part of the mountains have you been visiting?"

Samson laughed. "Not any part of the mountains," he said. "I've been living chiefly in New York—and for a time in Paris."

Callomb drew his horse to a dead halt. "In the name of God, what manner of man are you?"

"I hope," came the instant reply, "it may be summed up by saying that I'm exactly the opposite of the man you've had described for you back there at Hixon."

"I suspected it," exclaimed the soldier; "I knew that I was being fed on lies. That's why I came. I wanted to get the straight of it, and I felt that the solution lay over here."

They rode the rest of the way in deep conversation. Samson outlined his ambitions for his people. He told, too, of the scene that had been enacted at Purvy's store. Callomb listened with absorption, feeling that the narrative bore axiomatic truth on its face.

At last he inquired: "Did you succeed up there—as a painter?"

"That's a long road," Samson told him; "but I think I had a fair start. I was getting commissions when I left."

"Then I am to understand"—the officer met the steady gray eyes and put the question like a cross-examiner bullying a witness—"I am to understand that you deliberately put behind you a career to come down here and herd these fence-jumping sheep?"

"Hardly that," deprecated the head of the Souths. "They sent for me—that's all. Of course I had to come."

"Why?"

"Because they had sent. They were my people."

The officer leaned in his saddle.

"South," he said, "would you mind shaking hands with me? Some day I want to brag about it to my grandchildren."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

On Business of State.

CALLOMB spent the night at the house of Spicer South. He met and talked with a number of the kinsmen, and if he read in the eyes of some of them a smoldering and unforgiving remembrance of his unkept pledge, at least they repressed all other expression of censure.

Tamarack Spicer had been a constant menace. His people had stood by him, because their code was rigidly clannish, but there was more than one

man who thought with a sense of relief that he would no more be a thorn in their flesh and a trouble-maker.

With Spicer South and Samson, the captain talked long into the night. He made many jottings in a note-book. He, with Samson abetting him, pointed out to the older and more stubborn men the necessity of a new régime in the mountains, under which the individual could walk in greater personal safety. As for the younger South, the officer felt when he rode away the next morning that he had discovered the one man who combined with the courage and honesty that many of his clansmen shared the mental equipment and local influence to prove a constructive leader.

When he returned to the Bluegrass he meant to have a long and unofficial talk with his relative, the Governor.

He rode back to the ridge with a strong body-guard. Upon this Samson had insisted. He had learned of Callomb's hasty and unwise denunciation of Smithers, and he knew that Smithers had lost no time in relating it to his masters. Callomb would be safe enough in Hollman country, because the faction which had called for troops could not afford to let him be killed within their own precincts.

But if Callomb could be shot down in his uniform, under circumstances which seemed to bear the earmarks of South authorship, it would arouse in the State at large a tidal wave of resentment against the Souths, which they could never hope to stem.

On reaching Hixon, Callomb apologized to Judge Smithers for his recent outburst of temper. Now that he understood the hand that gentleman was playing, he wished to be strategic and in a position of seeming accord. He must match craft against craft. He did not intimate that he knew of Samson's letter, and rather encouraged the idea that he had been received on Misery with surly and grudging hospitality.

Smithers, presuming that the Souths still burned with anger over the shooting of Tamarack, swallowed that bait and was beguiled.

The grand jury trooped each day to the court-house and transacted its business. The petty juries went and came, occupied with several minor homicide cases. The captain, from a chair which Judge Smithers had ordered placed beside him on the bench, was looking on and intently studying. One morning Smithers confided to him that in a day or two more the grand jury would bring in a true bill against Samson South, charging him with murder. The officer did not show surprise. He merely nodded.

"I suppose I'll be called on to go and get him?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to ask you to do that."

"What caused the change of heart? I thought Purvy's people didn't want it done." It was Callomb's first allusion, except for his apology, to their former altercation. For an instant only Smithers was a little confused.

"To be quite frank with you, Callomb," he said, "I got to thinking over the matter in the light of your own view-point, and after due deliberation I came to see that to the State at large it might bear the same appearance. So I had the grand jury take the matter up. We must stamp out such lawlessness as Samson South stands for. He is the more dangerous because he has brains."

Callomb nodded, but at noon he slipped out on a pretense of sight-seeing and rode by a somewhat circuitous route to the ridge. At night-fall he came to the house of the clan head.

"South," he said to Samson, when he had led him aside, "they didn't want to hear what you had to tell the grand jury, but they are going ahead to indict you on manufactured evidence." Samson was for a moment thoughtful, then he nodded.

"I suppose," he said, "you know that while I am entirely willing to face any fair court of justice, I don't pro-

pose to walk into a packed jury, whose only object is to get me where I can be made way with. What do you suggest?"

"If the court orders the militia to make an arrest, the militia has no option. In the long run resistance would only alienate the sympathy of the world at large. There is just one thing to be done, South. It's a thing I don't like to suggest, and a thing which, if we were not fighting the devil with fire, it would be traitorous for me to suggest." He paused, then added emphatically: "When my detail arrives here, which will probably be in three or four days, you must not be here. You must not be in any place where we can find you."

For a little while Samson looked at the other man with a slow smile of amusement, but soon it died and his face grew hard and determined.

"I'm obliged to you, Callomb," he said seriously. "It was more than I had the right to expect—this warning. I understand the cost of giving it. But it's no use. I can't cut and run. No, you wouldn't do it. You can't ask me to do it."

"You can and will," Callomb spoke with determination. "This isn't a time for quibbling. You've got work to do. We both have work to do. We can't stand on a matter of vainglorious pride, and let big issues of humanity go to pot. We haven't the right to spend useless lives in fighting each other, when we are the only two men in this entanglement who are in perfect accord—and honest."

The mountaineer spent some minutes in silent self-debate. The working of his face, under the play of alternating doubt, resolution, hatred and insurgency, told the militia-man what a struggle was progressing. At last Samson's eyes cleared with an expression of discovered solution.

"All right, Callomb," he said briefly, "you won't find me." He smiled, as he added: "Make as thorough a search as your duty demands. It needn't be perfunctory or superficial. Every South cabin will stand open to you. I shall be extremely busy, to ends which you will approve. I can't tell you what I shall be doing, because to do that I should have to tell where I mean to be."

In two days the grand jury, with much secrecy, returned a true bill, and a day later a considerable detachment of infantry started on a dusty hike up Misery. Furtive and inscrutable, Hollman eyes along the way watched them from cabin-doors and counted them. They meant also to count them coming back, and they did not expect the totals to tally.

Back of an iron-spiked fence, and a dusty, sunburned lawn, the barrack-like façades of the old administration building and Kentucky State capitol frowned on the street and railroad track. About it, on two sides of the Kentucky River, sprawled the town of Frankfort; sleepy, more or less disheviled at the center, and stretching to shaded environs of colonial houses set in lawns of rich bluegrass, amid the shade of forest trees. Circling the town in an embrace of quiet beauty, rose the Kentucky River hills.

Turning in to the gate of the Statehouse enclosure, a man, who seemed to be an Easterner by the cut of his clothes, walked slowly up the brick walk and passed around the fountain at the front of the capitol. He smiled to himself as his wandering eyes caught the distant walls and roofs of the State prison on the hillside.

His steps carried him direct to the main entrance of the administration building, and having paused a moment in the rotunda he entered the secretary's office of the executive suite, and asked for an interview with the Governor. The secretary, whose duties were in part playing Cerberus at that threshold, made his customary swift though unobtrusive survey of the applicant for audience, and saw nothing to excite suspicion.

"Have you an appointment?" he asked.

The visitor shook his head. Scribbling a brief note on a slip of paper, he enclosed it in an envelope and handed it to his questioner.

"You must pardon my seeming mysteriousness," he said, "but if you will let me send in that note, I think the Governor will see me."

Once more the secretary studied his man with a slightly puzzled air, then nodded and went through the door that gave admission to the executive's private office.

His excellency opened the envelope and his face showed an expression of surprise. He raised his brows questioningly.

"Rough-looking sort?" he inquired. "Mountaineer?"

"No, sir. New Yorker would be my guess. Is there anything suspicious?"

"I guess not," the Governor laughed. "Rather extraordinary note, but send him in."

Through his eastern window the Governor gazed off across the hills of South Frankfort, to the ribbon of river that came down from the troublesome hills. Then, hearing a movement at his back, he turned, and his eyes took in a well-dressed figure with confidence-inspiring features.

He picked up the slip from his desk and for a moment stood comparing the name and the message with the man who had sent them in. There seemed to be in his mind some irreconcilable contradiction between the two. With a slightly frowning seriousness the executive suggested: "This note says that you are Samson South, and that you want to see me with reference to a pardon. Whose pardon is it, Mr. South?"

"My own, sir."

The Governor raised his brows slightly.

"Your pardon for what? The newspapers do not even report that you have yet been indicted." He shaded the word "yet" with a slight emphasis.

"I think I have been indicted within the past day or two. I'm not sure myself."

The Governor continued to stare. The impression he had formed of the "Wildcat" from press despatches was warring with the pleasing personal presence of this visitor. Then his forehead wrinkled under his black hair, and his lips drew themselves sternly.

"You have come to me too soon, sir," he said curtly; "the pardoning power is a thing to be most cautiously used at all times, and certainly never until the courts have acted. A case not yet adjudicated cannot address itself to executive clemency."

Samson nodded. "Quite true," he admitted. "If I announced that I had come on the matter of a pardon, it was largely that I had to state some business and that seemed the briefest way of putting it."

"Then there is something else?"

"Yes. If it were only a plea for clemency, I should expect the matter to be chiefly important to myself. In point of fact, I hope to make it equally interesting to you. Whether you give me a pardon in a fashion which violates all precedent, or whether I surrender myself and go back to a trial, which will be merely a form of assassination, rests entirely with you, sir. You will not find me insistent."

"If," said the Governor, with a trace of warning in his voice, "your preamble is simply a device to pique my interest with its unheard-of novelty, I may as well confess that so far it has succeeded."

"In that case, sir," responded Samson gravely, "I have scored a point. If, when I am through, you find that I have been employing a subterfuge, I fancy a touch of that bell under your finger will give you the means of summoning an officer. I am ready to turn myself over."

Then Samson launched into the story of his desires and the details of

conditions which outside influences had been powerless to remedy—because they were outside influences. Some man of sufficient vigor and comprehension, acting from the center of disturbance, must be armed with the power to undertake the house-cleaning and for a while must do work which would not be pretty. So far as he were personally concerned, a pardon after trial would be a matter of purely academic interest. He could not expect to survive a trial.

He was at present able to hold the Souths in leash. If the Governor was not of that mind, he was now ready to surrender himself, and permit matters to take their course.

"And now, Mr. South," suggested the Governor, after a half hour of absorbed listening, "there is one point you have overlooked. Since, in the end, the whole thing comes back to the exercise of the pardoning power, that is the crux of the situation. You may be able to render such services as those for which you volunteer. Let us for the moment assume that to be true. You have not yet told me a very important thing. Did you or did you not kill Purvy and Hollis?"

"I killed Hollis," said Samson, as though he were answering a question as to the time of day; "and I did not kill Purvy."

"Kindly," suggested the Governor, "give me the full particulars of that affair."

The two were still closeted when a second visitor called and was told that his excellency could not be disturbed. The second visitor, however, was so insistent that the secretary finally consented to take in the card, and after a glance at it his chief ordered his admission. The door opened and Captain Callomb entered.

He was now in civilian clothes, and with portentous news written on his face. He paused in annoyance at the sight of a second figure standing with back turned at the window. As he stood, Samson turned and the two men recognized each other. They had met before only when one was in olive drab; the other in jeans and butternut. At recognition, Callomb's face fell and grew troubled.

"You here, South!" he exclaimed. "I thought you promised me that I shouldn't find you. God knows I didn't want to meet you."

The officer took a step toward the center of the room. His face was weary and his eyes wore the deep disgust and fatigue which comes from the necessity of performing a hard duty.

"You are under arrest," he added, quietly; but his composure broke and he stormed. "Now I've got to take you back and let them murder you—you the one man who might have been useful to the State."

CHAPTER XXIX.

War to the End.

THE Governor had been more influenced by watching the two as they talked than by what he had heard.

"It seems to me, gentlemen," he suggested quietly, "that you are both overlooking my presence." He turned to Callomb. "Your coming, Sid, unless it was prearranged between the two of you—which, since I know you, I know was not the case—has shed more light on this matter than the testimony of a dozen witnesses. After all, I'm still the Governor."

The militiaman seemed to have forgotten the existence of his distinguished kinsman, and at the voice his eyes came away from the face of the man he had not wanted to capture, and he shook his head.

"You are merely the head of the executive branch," he said. "You are as helpless here as I am. Neither of us can interfere with the judicial gentry, though we may know that they stink to high heaven with the stench of blood. After a conviction you can

pardon, but a pardon won't help the dead. I don't see that you can do much of anything, Crit."

"I don't know yet what I can do, but I can tell you I'm going to do something," said the Governor. "I believe I am commander-in-chief of the State troops."

"And I am a captain of F Company, but all I can do is to obey the orders of a bunch of Borgias."

"As your superior officer," smiled the Governor, "I can give you orders. I'm going to give you one now. Mr. South has applied to me for a pardon in advance of trial. Technically, I have the power to grant that request. Morally, I doubt my right. Certainly I shall not do it without a very thorough sifting of evidence and a very grave consideration of the necessities of the case—and the danger of the precedent. However, I am considering it; and for the present you will parole your prisoner in my custody. Mr. South, you will not leave Frankfort without my permission. You will take every precaution to conceal your actual identity. You will treat as utterly confidential all that has transpired here—and, above all, you will not let any newspapermen discover you. Those are my orders. Report here to-morrow afternoon, and remember that you are my prisoner."

Samson bowed, and left the two cousins together, where shortly they were joined by the Attorney-General. That evening the three dined at the executive mansion, and sat until midnight in the Governor's private office still deep in discussion.

During the long session Callomb opened the bulky volume of the Kentucky Statutes and laid his finger on Section 2673. "There's the rub," he protested, reading aloud: "'The military shall be at all times, and in all cases in strict subordination to the civil power.'"

The Governor glanced down to the next paragraph, and read in part: "'The Governor may direct the commanding officer of the military force to report to any one of the following named officers of the district in which the said force is employed: mayor of a city, sheriff, jailer or marshal.'"

"Which list," stormed Callomb, "is the honor-roll of the assassins."

"At all events," the Governor had derived from Callomb much information as to Samson South which the mountaineer himself had modestly withheld — "South gets his pardon. That is only a step. I wish I could make him satrap over his province, and provide him with troops to rule it. Unfortunately, our form of government has its drawbacks."

"It might be possible," ventured the attorney-general, "to impeach the sheriff and appoint this, or some other suitable man to fill the vacancy until the next election."

"The Legislature doesn't meet until next winter," objected Callomb. "There is one bare chance. The sheriff down there is a sick man. Let us hope he may die."

One day the Hixon conclave met in the room over Hollman's Mammoth Department Store, and with much profanity read a communication from Frankfort announcing the pardon of Samson South. In that episode they foresaw the beginning of the end for their dynasty. The outside world was looking on and their régime could not survive the spotlight of outside scrutiny.

"The fust thing," declared Judge Hollman curtly, "is to get rid of these damned soldiers. We'll attend to our own business later, and we don't want them watchin' us. Just now we want to lie mighty quiet for a spell—teetotally quiet until I pass the word."

Samson had won back the confidence of his tribe and enlisted the faith of the State administration. He had been authorized to organize a local militia company, and to drill them, provided he could stand answerable for their conduct. The younger Souths took gleefully to that idea. The

mountain-boy makes a good soldier, once he has grasped the idea of discipline.

For ten weeks they drilled daily in squads and weekly in platoons. Then the fortuitous came to pass. Sheriff Forbin died, leaving behind him an unexpired term of two years, and Samson was summoned hastily to Frankfort. He returned bearing his commission as high sheriff, though when that news reached Hixon there were few men who envied him his post, and none who cared to bet that he would live to take his oath of office.

That August court day was a memorable one in Hixon. Samson South was coming to town to take up his duties. Every one recognized it as the day of final issue and one that could hardly pass without bloodshed. The Hollmans, standing in their last trench saw only the blunt question of Hollman-South supremacy. For years the feud had flared and slept and broken again into eruption, but never before had a South sought to throw his outposts of power across the waters of Crippleshin, and into the county seat. That the present South came bearing commission as an officer of the law only made his effrontery the more unendurable.

Samson had not called for outside troops. The drilling and disciplining of his own company had progressed in silence along the waters of Misery. They were a slouching, unmilitary band of uniformed vagabonds, but they were longing to fight, and Callomb had been with them tirelessly whipping them into rudimentary shape.

After all, they were as much partizans as they had been before they were issued State rifles. The battle, if it came, would be as factional as the fight of twenty-five years ago when the Hollmans held the store and the Souths the court-house. But back of all that lay one essential difference, and it was this difference which had urged the Governor to stretch the forms of law and put such dangerous power into the hands of one man.

That difference was the man himself. He was to take drastic steps, but he was to take them under the forms of law, and the State Executive believed that, having gone through worse to better, he would maintain the improved condition.

Early that morning men began to assemble along the streets of Hixon, and to congregate into sullen clumps with set faces that denoted a grim, unsmiling determination. Not only the Hollmans from the town and immediate neighborhod were there, but their shaggier, fiercer brethren from remote creeks and "coves," who came only at urgent call, and did not come without intent to vindicating their presence.

Old Jake Hollman from "over yon" on the headwaters of Dryhole Creek, brought his son and fourteen-year-old grandson, and all of them carried rifles.

Long before the hour for the court-house bell to sound the call which would bring matters to a crisis, women disappeared from the streets and front shutters and doors closed themselves.

At last the Souths began to ride in by half-dozens and to hitch their horses at the racks. They also fell into groups well apart. The two factions eyed each other somberly, sometimes nodding or exchanging greetings for the time had not yet come to fight. Slowly, however, the Hollmans began centering about the court-house. They swarmed in the yard and entered the jail, and overran the halls and offices of the building itself. They took their places massed at the windows.

The Souths, now coming in a solid stream, flowed with equal unanimity to McEwer's Hotel, near the square, and disappeared inside. Besides their rifles, they carried saddle-bags, but not one of the uniforms which some of these bags contained, nor one of the cartridge-belts, had yet been exposed to view.

Stores opened, but only for a desultory pretense of business. Horsemen led their mounts away from the more public racks and tethered them to back fences and willow-branches in the shelter of the river banks, where stray bullets would not find them.

The dawn that morning had still been gray when Samson South and Captain Callomb had passed the Miller cabin. Callomb had ridden slowly on around the turn of the road and waited about a quarter of a mile away. He was to command the militia that day, if the high sheriff should call upon him.

Samson went in and knocked, and instantly to the cabin door came Sally's slender, fluttering figure. She put both arms about him, and her eyes, as she looked into his face, were terrified but tearless.

"I'm frightened, Samson," she whispered. "God knows I'm going to be praying all this day."

"Sally," he said softly, "I'm coming back to you—but if I don't"—he held her very close—"Uncle Spicer has my will. The farm is full of coal, and days are coming when roads will take it out, and every ridge will glow with coke-furnaces. That farm will make you rich, if we win to-day's fight."

"Don't!" she cried with a sudden gasp. "Don't talk like that."

"I must," he said gently. "I want you to make me a promise, Sally."

"It's made," she declared.

"If, by any chance I should not come back, I want you to hold Uncle Spicer and old Wile McCager to their pledge. They must not privately avenge me. They must still stand for the law. I want you, and this is most important of all, to leave these mountains—"

Her hands tightened on his shoulders.

"Not that, Samson," she pleaded—"not these mountains where we've been together."

"You promised. I want you to go to the Lescotts in New York. In a year you can come back—if you want to, but you must promise that."

"I promise," she repeated.

It was half past nine o'clock when Samson South and Sidney Callomb rode, side by side, into Hixon from the east. A dozen of the older Souths who had not become soldiers met them there and with no word separated to close about them in a circle of protection. As Callomb's eyes swept the almost deserted streets, so silent that the trident switching of a freight-train could be heard down at the edge of town, he shook his head. As he met the sullen glances of the gathering in the court-house yard he turned to Samson.

"They'll fight," he said briefly.

Samson nodded.

"I don't understand the method," demurred the officer with perplexity. "Why don't they shoot you at once? What are they waiting for?"

"They want to see," Samson assured him, "what tack I mean to take. They want to let the thing play itself out. They're inquisitive—and they're cautious, because now they are bucking the State and the world."

Samson with his escort rode up to the court-house door and dismounted. He was for the moment unarmed, and his men walked on each side of him, while the onlooking Hollmans stood back in surly silence to let him pass. In the office of the county judge, Samson said briefly, "I want to get my deputies sworn in."

"We've got plenty deputy sheriffs," was the quietly insolent rejoinder.

"Not now—we haven't any." Samson's voice was sharply incisive. "I'll name my own deputies."

"What's the matter with these boys?" The county judge waved his hand toward two holdover deputies.

"They're fired."

The county judge laughed. "Well, I reckon I can't attend to that right now."

"Then you refuse?"

"Mebby you might call it that."

Samson leaned on the judge's table and rapped sharply with his knuckles. His handful of men stood close and Callomb caught his breath, in the heavy air of storm-freighted suspense. The Hollman partizans filled the room and others were crowding to the doors.

"I'm high sheriff of this county now," said Samson sharply. "You are county judge. Do we cooperate—or fight?"

"I reckon," drawled the other, "that's a matter we'll work out as we goes along. Depends on how obedient ye air."

"I'm responsible for the peace and quiet of this county," continued Samson. "We're going to have peace and quiet."

The judge looked about him. The indications did not appear to him indicative of peace and quiet.

"Air we?" he inquired.

"I'm coming back here in a half-hour," said the new sheriff. "This is an unlawful and armed assembly. When I get back I want to find the court-house occupied only by unarmed citizens who have business to transact here."

"When ye comes back," suggested the county judge, "I'd advise that ye resigns yore job. A half-hour is about as long as ye ought ter try ter hold hit."

Samson turned and walked through the scowling crowd to the court-house steps.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a clear, far-carrying voice, "there is no need of an armed congregation at this court-house. I call on you in the name of the law to lay aside your arms or scatter."

There was a murmur which for an instant threatened to become a roar, but trailed into a chorus of derisive laughter.

Samson went to the hotel accompanied by Callomb. A half-hour later the two were back at the court-house, with a half-dozen companions. The yard was empty. Samson carried his father's rifle. In that half-hour a telegram, prepared in advance, had flashed to Frankfort: "Mob holds court-house—need troops"; and a reply had flashed back: "Use local company—Callomb commanding." So that form of law was met.

The court-house doors were closed and its windows barricaded. The place was no longer a judicial building. It was a fortress. As Samson's party paused at the gate, a warning voice called:

"Don't come no nigher!"

The body-guard began dropping back to shelter.

"I demand admission to the court-house to make arrests," shouted the new sheriff. In answer a spattering of reports came from the jail and two of the Souths fell.

At a nod from Samson, Callomb left on a run for the hotel. The sheriff himself took his position in a small store across the street, which he miraculously reached unhurt under a desultory fire.

Then again silence settled on the town, to remain for five minutes unbroken. The sun glared mercilessly on clay streets, now as empty as a cemetery. A single horse, incautiously hitched at the side of the court-house, switched its tail against the assaults of the flies. Otherwise, there was no outward sign of life.

Then Callomb's newly organized force of ragamuffin soldiers clattered down the street at double-time. For a moment or two after they came into sight, only the massed uniforms caught the eyes of the entrenched Hollmans, and an alarmed murmur broke from the court-house. They had seen no troops detrain or pitch camp. These men had sprung from the earth as startlingly as Jason's crop of dragon's teeth.

But when the command rounded the shoulder of a protecting wall to await further orders, the ragged stride

of their marching, and the all too obvious bearing of the mountaineer, proclaimed them native amateurs. The murmur turned to a howl of derision and challenge. They were nothing more or less than Souths masquerading in the uniforms of soldiers.

"What orders?" inquired Callomb briefly, joining Samson in the store.

"Demand surrender once more—then take the court-house and jail," was the short reply.

There was little conversation in the ranks of the new company, but their faces grew black as they listened to the jeers and insults across the way, and they fingered their new rifles greedily. They would be ready when the command of execution came.

Callomb himself went forward with the flag of truce. He shouted his message, and a bearded man came to the court-house door.

"Tell 'em," he said without redundency, "that we're all here. Come an' git us."

The officer went back and distributed his forces under such cover as offered itself, about the four walls. Then a volley was fired over the roof, and instantly the two buildings in the public square awoke to a volcanic response of rifle-fire.

All day the duel between the streets and county buildings went on with desultory intervals of quiet and wild outbursts of musketry. The troops were firing as sharpshooters, and the court-house had its sharpshooters, too. When a head showed itself at a barricaded window a report from the outside greeted it. Samson was everywhere, his rifle smoking and hot-barreled.

His life seemed protected by a talisman. Yet most of the firing, after the first hour, was from within. The troops were, except for occasional pot-shots, holding their fire. There was neither provisions nor water inside the building, and, at last, night closed and the cordon drew tighter to prevent escape.

The Hollmans, like rats in a trap, grimly held on, realizing that it was to be a siege.

On the following morning a detatchment of F Company arrived, dragging two quick-fire guns. The Hollmans saw them detraining from their lookout in the court-house cupola and, realizing that the end of the struggle had come, resolved upon a desperate sortie.

Simultaneously every door and lower window of the court-house burst open to discharge a frenzied rush of men, firing as they came. They meant to eat their way out and leave as many hostile dead as possible in their wake. Their one chance now was to scatter before the machine-guns came into action. They came like human lava of fire, and their guns were never silent as they bore down on the barricades where the single, outnumbered company seemed insufficient to hold them. But the new militiamen, looking for reassurance not so much to Callomb as to the grim, granitelike face of Samson South, rallied, and rose with a yell to meet them on bayonet and smoking muzzle. The rush wavered, fell back, came desperately on again, then broke in scattered remnants for the shelter of the building.

Old Jake Hollman fell near the door, and his grandson, rushing out, picked up his fallen rifle and sent farewell defiance from it, as he, too, threw up both arms and dropped.

Then a white flag wavered at a window, and, as the newly arrived troops halted in the street, the noise died suddenly to quiet. Samson went out to meet a man who opened the door and said shortly: "We lays down."

Judge Hollman, who had not participated, turned from the slit in his shuttered window, through which he had since the beginning been watching the conflict.

"That ends it," he said with a despairing shrug of his shoulders.

He picked up a magazine-pistol which lay on his table, and, carefully

counting down his chest to the fifth rib, placed the muzzle against his breast.

CHAPTER XXX.

Love and Moonlight.

BEFORE the mountain-roads were mired with the coming of the rains, and while the air held its sparkle of autumnal zestfulness, Samson South wrote to Wilfred Horton that if he still meant to come to the hills for his inspection of coal and timber, the time was ripe. Soon men would appear bearing transit and chain, drawing a line which a railroad was to follow to Misery and across it to the heart of untouched forests and coal-fields. With that wave of innovation would come the speculators.

Besides, Samson's fingers were itching to be out in the hills with a palette and a sheaf of brushes in the society of George Lescott.

For a while, after the battle at Hixon, the country had lain in a torpid paralysis of dread. Many illiterate feudists on each side remembered the directing and exposed figure of Samson South seen through eddies of gun-smoke and believed him immune from death. With Purvy dead, and Hollman the victim of his own hand, the backbone of the murder-syndicate was broken. Its heart had ceased to beat.

Those Hollman survivors who bore the potentialities for leadership had only signed pledges of peace, but were afraid to break them; and the triumphant Souths, instead of vaunting their victory, had subscribed to the doctrine of order and declared the war over. Souths who broke the law were as speedily arrested as Hollmans. Their boys were drilling as militia-men and —wonder of wonders—inviting the sons of the enemy to join them. Of course, these things changed gradually, but the beginnings of them were most noticeable in the first few months, just as a newly painted and renovated house is more conspicuous than one that has been long respectable.

Hollman's Mammoth Department Store passed into new hands and trafficked only in merchandise, and the town was open to the men and wome of Misery, as well as those of Crippleshin.

These things Samson had explained in his letters to the Lescotts and Horton. Men from down below could still find trouble in the wink of an eye by seeking it, for under all the transformation the nature of the individual remained much the same; but without seeking to give offense they could ride as securely through the hills as through the streets of a policed city —and meet a readier hospitality.

And when these things were discussed, and the two men prepared to cross the Mason and Dixon Line and visit the Cumberlands, Adrienne promptly and definitely announced that she would accompany her brother. No argument was effective to dissuade her, and, after all, Lescott, who had been there, saw no good reason why she should not go with him.

He had said little but watched much, and he had known that after receiving a certain letter from Samson South, his sister had seemed strangely quiet and distressed. These young people had snarled their lives in perplexity. They could definitely find themselves and permanently adjust themselves, only by meeting on common ground.

Perhaps Samson had shone in an exaggerated high-light of fascination by the strong contrast into which New York had thrown him. Wilfred Horton had the right to be seen also in contrast with mountain-life, and then only could the girl decide for all time and irrevocably. The painter learns something of confused values.

Horton himself had seen small reason for a growth of hope in these months; but he, like Lescott, felt that the matter must come to issue, and he was not of that type which shrinks

from putting to the touch a question of vital consequence. He knew that her happiness as well as his own was in the balance. He was not embittered or deluded, as a narrower man might have been, into the fallacy that her treatment of him denoted fickleness.

Adrienne was merely running the boundary line that separates deep friendship from love — a boundary which is often confusing. When she had finally staked out the disputed frontier it would never again be questioned. But on which side he would find himself he did not know.

At Hixon they found that deceptive air of serenity, which made the history of less than three months ago seem paradoxical and fantastically unreal. Only about the court-house square, where numerous small holes in frame walls told of fusillades, and in the interior of the building itself, where the woodwork was scarred and torn and the plaster freshly patched, did they find grimly reminiscent evidence.

Samson had not met them at the town because he wished their first impressions of his people to reach them uninfluenced by his escort. It was a form of the mountain pride—an honest resolve to soften nothing and make no apologies. But they found arrangements made for horses and saddle-bags, and the girl discovered that for her especially had been provided a mount as evenly gaited as any in her own stables.

When she and her two companions came out to the hotel-porch to start, they found a guide waiting who said he was instructed to take them as far as the ridge, where the sheriff himself would be waiting, and the cavalcade struck into the hills.

Men at whose houses they paused to ask a dipper of water or to make an inquiry, gravely advised that they "had better light and stay all night." In the coloring forests squirrels scampered and scurried out of sight, and here and there on the tall slopes they saw shy-looking children regarding them with inquisitive eyes.

The guide led them silently, gazing in frank amazement though deferential politeness at this girl in corduroys, who rode cross saddle, and rode so well. Yet it was evident that he would have preferred talking had not diffidence restrained him.

He was a young man and rather handsome in a shaggy, unkempt way. Across one cheek ran a long scar still red; and the girl, looking into his clear, intelligent eyes, wondered what that scar stood for. Adrienne had the power of melting masculine diffidence, and her smile as she rode at his side and asked, "What is your name?" brought an answering smile to his grim lips.

"Joe Hollman, ma'am," he answered, and the girl gave an involuntary start. The two men who caught the name closed up the gap between the horses with suddenly piqued interest.

"Hollman!" exclaimed the girl; "then you—" She stopped and flushed. "I beg your pardon," she said quickly.

"That's all right," reassured the man; "I know what yer a thinkin,' but I hain't takin' no offense. The high sheriff sent me over. I'm one of his deputies."

"Were you" — she paused and added rather timidly—"were you in the court-house?"

He nodded, and with a brown forefinger traced the scar on his cheek. "Samson South done that thar with his rifle-gun," he enlightened. "He's a funny sort of feller, is Samson South."

"How?" she asked.

"Wall, he licked us; an' he licked us so plumb damn hard we was sceered ter fight agin, an' then 'stid of tramplin' on us, he turned right round and made me a deputy. My brother's a corporal in this hyar new-fangled milishy. I reckon this time the peace is a goin' ter last. Hit's a mighty funny

way ter act, but 'pears like it works all right."

Then, at the ridge, the girl's heart gave a sudden bound, for there, at the highest point where the road went up and dipped again, waited the mounted figure of Samson South; and as they came into sight he waved his felt hat and rode down to meet them.

"Greetings!" he shouted; then as he leaned over and took Adrienne's hand, he added: "The Goops send you their welcome." His smile was unchanged, but the girl noted that his hair had again grown long.

Finally, as the sun was setting, they reached a roadside-cabin and the mountaineer said briefly to the other men: "You fellows ride on; I want Drennie to stop with me a moment. We'll join you later."

Lescott nodded. He remembered the cabin of the Widow Miller, and Horton rode on with him, albeit grudgingly.

Adrienne sprang lightly to the ground, laughingly rejecting Samson's assistance, and came with him to the top of a stile, from which he pointed to the log-cabin set back in its small yard wherein geese and chickens picked industriously about in the sandy earth.

A huge poplar and a great oak nodded to each other at either side of the door, and over the walls a clambering profusion of honeysuckle-vine contended with a mass of wild grape, in joint effort to hide the white chinking between the dark logs. From the crude milk-benches to the sweep of the well, every note was one of neatness and rustic charm. Slowly he said, looking straight into her eyes:

"This is Sally's cabin, Drennie."

He watched her expression and her lips curved up in the same sweetness of smile that had first captivated and helped to mold him.

"It's lovely," she cried with frank delight. "It's a picture."

"Wait," he commanded. Then turning toward the house he sent out the long, peculiarly mournful call of the whippoorwill, and at the signal the door opened and on the threshold Adrienne saw a slender figure. She had called the cabin with its shaded dooryard a picture, but now she knew she had been wrong. It was only a background. It was the girl herself, who made and completed the picture. She stood there in the wild simplicity that artists seek vainly to reproduce in posed figures. Her red calico dress was patched, but fell in graceful lines to her slim, bare ankles, though the first faint frosts had already fallen.

Her red-brown hair hung loose and in masses about the oval of a face in which the half-parted lips were dashes of scarlet and the eyes large violet pools. She stood with her little chin tilted in a half-wild attitude of reconnoiter, as a fawn might have stood. One brown arm and hand rested on the door-frame, and as she saw the other woman she colored adorably.

Adrienne thought she had never seen so instinctively and unaffectedly lovely a face or figure; then the girl came down the steps and ran toward them.

"Drennie," said the man, "this is Sally. I want you two to love each other." For an instant Adrienne Lescott stood looking at the mountain-girl and then she opened both her arms.

"Sally," she cried, "you adorable child, I do love you."

The girl in the calico dress raised her face and her eyes were glistening.

"I'm obleeged ter ye," she faltered. Then with open and wondering admiration she stood gazing at the first "fine lady" upon whom her glance had ever fallen.

Samson went over and took Sally's hand.

"Drennie," he said softly, "is there anything the matter with her?"

Adrienne Lescott shook her head.

"I understand," she said.

"I sent the others on," he went on quietly, "because I wanted that first

we three should meet alone. George and Wilfred are going to stop at my uncle's house, but unless you'd rather have it otherwise, Sally wants you here."

There were transformations, too, in the house of Spicer South. Windows had been cut and lamps adopted. It was no longer so nearly a pioneer abode.

While they waited for dinner a girl lightly crossed the stile and came up to the house. Adrienne met her at the door, while Samson and Horton stood back waiting. Suddenly, Miss Lescott halted and regarded the newcomer in surprise. It was the same girl she had seen, yet a different girl. Her hair no longer fell in tangled masses. Her feet were no longer bare. Her dress, though simple, was charming; and when she spoke her English had dropped its half-illiterate peculiarities, though the voice still held its birdlike melody.

"Oh, Samson," cried Adrienne, "you two have been deceiving me. Sally, you were making up, dressing the part back there, and letting me patronize you.

Sally's laughter broke from her throat in a musical peal, but it still held the note of shyness, and it was Samson who spoke.

That evening the four of them walked together over to the cabin of the Widow Miller. At the stile Adrienne Lescott turned to the girl and said, "I suppose this place is preempted. I'm going to take Wilfred down there by the creek, and leave you two alone."

Sally protested with mountain hospitality, but even under the moon she once more colored adorably.

Adrienne turned up the collar of her sweater, and when she and the man who had waited stood leaning on the rail of the foot-bridge she laid a hand on his arm.

"Has the water flowed by my mill, Wilfred?" she asked

"What do you mean?" His voice trembled.

"Will you have anything to ask me when Christmas comes?"

"If I can wait that long, Drennie," he told her.

"Don't wait, dear," she suddenly exclaimed, turning toward him and raising eyes that held his answer. "Ask me now."

But the question which he asked was one that his lips smothered as he pressed them against her own.

And back where the poplar threw its sooty shadow on the road, two figures sat close together on the top of a stile, talking happily in whispers. A girl raised her face and the moon shone on the deepness of her eyes, as her lips curved in a trembling smile.

"You come back, Samson," she said in a low voice; "but if I'd known how lovely *she* was, I'd have given up hoping. I don't see what made you come."

Her voice dropped again into the tender cadence of dialect.

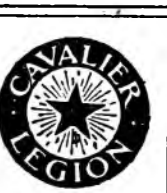
"I couldn't live withouten ye, Samson. I jest couldn't do hit."

Would he remember when she had said that before?

"I reckon, Sally," he promptly told her, "I couldn't live withouten you, neither." Then he added fervently: "I'm plumb dead shore I couldn't."

(The end.)

Wear THE CAVALIER LEGION red button with the green star. None but people of discrimination, good taste, and intelligence belong to the order. Better come in, stranger, and stay in.



LITTLE HOHENZOLLERN

A SHORT STORY

BY JULIAN JOHNSON

THREE years ago — it was in the last month of 1913—I saw a policeman of the Dominion of Canada split a murderer's skull with his club.

I was ill a week. When I would eat or sleep or work or walk abroad I had the visual obsession of black blood freezing in clotted hair.

Had one told me then that in thirty months I, rifle in hand, should kill, and smile, and kill again, and laugh aloud—well, I should have thought him mad. But, you see, the red eagle of war, hovering then as always, had not yet alighted on troubled Europe.

There were no Prussian sentries on the docks of Liverpool; the Pilsener battery captains were not stabling their Schleswig mares in Windsor; the pale cliffs of Dover still looked upon an empty, tossing sea, and not, as to-day, upon the fire-warped hulls of fifteen British battle-ships and cruisers at their base, a Teuton-piled junk-heap for the gods.

War's simply assassination glorified and transfigured—conscience and mercy together drowning in a primeval deluge of "holy" frenzy.

Yet deeper than love of country, wider than the instinctive cult of patriotism, louder than the ear-split of steel shell, quicker than the leap of fulminate flame through the cotton bag of satanite comes—but wait!

Last night I shot three battle-drunk Germans who swaggered forth with red swords from burning Ipswich.

To-night every man with a weapon in East Suffolk knows that if he kills me on sight his majesty — I still say God bless him! for kings cannot understand—will probably give him thanks and a medal to boot.

Barrows, my sergeant, is in quicklime. It was my lead which laid him there, and if that isn't treason, there isn't treason any more. War spins heads and tails at speed, and yesterday's glory is all reddened by what they are pleased to call my shame. But the big War Lord up above knows that Barrows was not fit to be called a dog, and there are men in our Canadian reserves who know it, too.

Dunn and his New York yacht are non-combatants at Lowestoft, and if I make Lowestoft by dawn, with *her* —well, when they've bottled Bill's tin ships in Kiel again, as they will, I'm coming back and tell George Rex just how it was.

They say he's a real man; I'll wait on what he says, and if he tells me I must stretch after all—why, good-by, sweet sunshine, but I drop smiling!

Under the stars at two this morning we stumbled back from Woodbridge and Orford, lame, but happy, for with six thousand we had beaten fifteen, and we trailed as iron captives twenty wonderful pieces of artillery the Krupps have just wrought for Wilhelm.

Volunteers, too, we are—some of us from the Canadian woods; some from the wheat-ocean of the West, and some—like me—were peaceful clerks or white-handed office-men,

from the towns of Montreal, Quebec, Toronto; while the big pretzel-eaters, I know, had never done anything else but soldier.

Martindale, my colonel — the same that has decreed my death—clapped me on the shoulder and called me the bravest man out of the Dominion. That wasn't twenty-four hours ago, understand!

Barrows, whom I have killed, and whom I am glad that I killed, dropped prone on the turf, and slept. I, too, threw myself down alongside him, but my gun-barrel was still hot; I couldn't sleep.

Above me the warm night looked down like the first of all the sweet spring nights of the world. I knew that in the fresh grass wee blue and yellow flowers would open like the eyes of little children at the first flash of dawn; that the plain and the hills always were covered with tender growing things, and flowers yellow and blue—but that to the south and west, where the pyres of Ipswich still put hell's aurora on the sleeping sky, many flowers, and many tender blades of grass were crushed flat by dead, writhed bodies — bodies blood-blackened, but perhaps hidden in fragrant bloom.

Once upon a time men killed and ate and slept and made love all in a place and at a time. They don't do that any more. Fifty warless years have invited sickness, when one slays a fellow creature.

I sat up, deathly ill, till nearly daylight; thinking, thinking of those three stark Dutchmen I had ended. But by and by, through sheer physical weariness, I fell over on my face.

"Blime me, sir, Hi wants to see me mother in London!"

It was Connie the Kid blubbering to Barrows.

"You'll do damned well to stay where you are, with the Moltke and ten destroyers in the Naze!" snorted Barrows, hardly awake in a dawn that was thick with fog.

"Hi wants to see me old woman—"

"Shut up, you laughing jackass!"

It was the flat of Barrows's saber on Connie's shoulders that really made me open my eyes. It was a nasty blow, and it broke the lad's heart, along with the welt it raised. He'd never shaved; he'd gone to Quebec an Allan line stowaway; he'd come back to be one of last night's unsung heroes; and, like the rest of us, he was sick on his new diet of cardinal corpuscles.

He showed it, in his green innocence, while we swallowed the thing in our throats and whistled. He blubbered and dug his jowl into the turf. Barrows swore at being awakened, and presently, with quiet deliberation, came over and planted three tremendous kicks under Connie's ribs.

I jumped to my legs, and old Partington, who had faced the Sepoys, cleared his throat and, for no reason at all, called out loudly that I was a dirty liar. Amazed, I put my hand to my belt. Barrows, turning from Connie, stalked menacingly toward us. When he turned away Partington winked and lay down again. I followed suit.

But there was no more sleep. A frightened farmer, who had a daughter that he feared might fall into German hands, came through the lines with cakes and home-brewed ale, and begged the colonel to take the girl with the regiment.

But the colonel assured him that the Prussian eagle had flown its farthest at Ipswich; that its pinions were bruised, if not broken, and that the legions under young Lord Chatham in Middlesex were even now striking steel and lead through the helmets of Von Reyer's hundred thousand—that hundred thousand which, coming up the Thames like a cavalry squadron, had turned the capital into a beleagured town of the Middle Ages, with no railroads or telephones or telegraph — save wireless — with no food save that within the hasty ram-

parts, but with five million unwarlike souls—and the king!

"Southwold is on fire — they are behind us!"

An orderly, clattering through the roused but still recumbent line, could not restrain his excitement and shouted his private news to the colonel.

"Oh, Gawd—oh, Gawd!"

The farmer dropped his cakes and ale to the ground and, upon his knees, began to pray. Barrows passed a sign, and his man appropriated all the provender quietly. But the yokel wouldn't have known had he been despoiled by a battery of Maxims. War hits common folk strangely nowadays. He was frightened almost out of his reason. Barrows laughed at his prayer and cursed him for a fool.

A man might be a fool, but I could not curse even a fool's prayer!

There came a thunder of hoofs out of the wet mist. Bright in their scarlet and azure, the Fifth of the Dominion cavalry flung by us. How many would come back from Southwold? I felt that we were in a hole, and already I seemed to shiver in the chill of the new-made war-jails on the Frisian Islands.

We were all white about the mouths, and, with the exception of still-sobbing Connie, we were all loudly cheerful—all save Partington, who smiled, and lit his cigarette, amusedly, philosophically content at prospect of peace or doom. Had we known that there had been but one German at Southwold, or rather, above Southwold—

Barrows was a coward at heart. His lip-noise was always a roar to hide the rattle of his quaking bowels. Connie was unnerving him. With another kick he ordered the lad to stand up. The boy rose, his arm across his eyes.

"Get out of my sight, you whiner!" howled the sergeant in his ear. "Go over on top of that mound and cry your silly eyes out, you puppy, but don't come near me!" His punctuation was his toe.

Connie moved off slowly, and I shall never forget the childish pathos in his weary voice as he murmured, over and over again, until we could no longer hear him:

"Hi wants to go 'ome! Hi wants to go 'ome!"

I watched him idly, pitying him from the bottom of my heart. The fog had lifted just a bit, and as he climbed the little rise he stood outlined against the white sky.

With no quicker throb of my pulses I saw a small, black thing drop down out of the fog and to the ground just beside Connie. The sight had not sensibly impressed me before Connie, and the white sky, and even the hillock, disappeared in a splash of black earth, topped and edged with creamy smoke, and shot through with blinding reds and yellows. I thought my ears had burst inward, and when the smoke rose there was no more Connie, nor any more hillock, but a hole!—and beside me and all around dirt-covered men and conflagrant consternation.

The colonel dashed by me on foot, shouting:

"The aeroplane gun! The aeroplane gun!" to everybody and nobody.

Barrows, who had cursed prayer, dropped to his knees and yelled to the God he had adjured. The rank and file cowered and chattered as though they were a brood of chicks peeping at the shadow of a hawk. Only Partington, the ash on his cigarette not even jarred away, smiled and said:

"Steady, boy! Under that thing you know you're as safe here as yonder!"

"And as good as dead anywhere!" I almost screamed at him; but his poise steadied me wonderfully, and in a moment I was gazing coolly, though yet breathing hard, at the unmilitary pandemonium around us.

Suddenly Partington caught my

arm in his steel hand, quickly, but not nervously. I had scarce time to follow his eyes when the ground to our left—the colonel's tent and his culinary Frenchman had been there—hurled itself into the air in a hideous paroxysm of writhing earthy death.

"Every man fall back and reform!"

The captain's voice, singing out behind our shoulders, was insistently cheerful. Other captains took up the cry.

As yet not a man had been knocked out of the line by the monstrous comet—save poor obliterated Connie—and it was good to see their instant, even orderly, response to his summons. His voice alone had brought discipline back upon a rout that in a moment more had been chaos.

A gleam of sunshine fell palely on the turf. The fog was turning to cloud and the clouds were breaking. Soon we should see our destroyer. Partington slouched away, but I saw that Barrows was still supplicating his Maker. I touched the sergeant on the shoulder.

"Go to hell!" he muttered.

Rising, he swaggered boldly after Partington. But at every little sound his bullet head shot like a turtle's down into his wide shoulders.

The gun came up, and with it the colonel, hatless. But only the hostlers had brought it. The batterymen, somewhere, were sleeping.

"For God's sake," shouted the regimental commander, "get the gunners!"

No one seemed to hear. I touched my cap.

"If necessary, colonel, I know something of—"

I paused and looked up, for they were all looking up, even the colonel, and Barrows had stopped in the middle of the field to stare.

The wind had beaten clean a great patch of blue, and poised in its middle, but so far above us that we could not, against the adverse breeze, discern the noise of its motor, hung a Deperdussin.

Its shovel-nose pointed down. It came, in eagle-circles, straight toward us. One and everybody, the Canadian defenders of mother England were motionless, eye-paralyzed. The hum of its engine presently smote our eyes with opiate drone. It was Partington who broke the spell. He dropped a box at our feet, and, saluting, said simply:

"Ammunition!"

Then he stood at attention. I nodded to him, and between us we forced up the muzzle of the long rifle—U. S. A., for it came from Watervliet.

I jammed steel-tipped shells into the automatic feed, closed the breech, set the recoil mechanism, guessed at the force of the wind when I adjusted the range-finder—waited.

The colonel, open-mouthed, had never removed his eyes from the brown blood-bird above him. He murmured something to me, and raised his hand. As well as I could I swept the rifle's muzzle after our prey, but I knew it was not yet time to fire.

Down, as if heading for the sea beyond the cliffs, came the nitro-laden monoplane. In front of us she did that horror of aviators, a left turn, perfectly executed.

The rider for a moment hung almost at a right angle, his tonneau tilted toward us. He was a very little man. With her motor fairly snarling, the Deperdussin leaped up the steepest of aerial hills, shooting at terrific speed over the line the captain had formed. The Germans themselves have manufactured no such craft. The plane turned above that line and came our way, on its final rush toward Ipswich.

But on the turn it vomited not one, but two black pills!

"Oh, God!" murmured the colonel, burying his face in his hands.

The explosions were simultaneous. I knew that the line of transfixed

soldiers became a wet squirm of spurting trunks, jetting limbs and death-squeaking heads, but I had neither inclination nor time to look, for Partington, hurling his body full across the tilting lever, swung her muzzle to the zenith and cried:

"Your eye to the finder, boy, and when she's in the middle of the cob-web—yell for Canada!"

I jammed my right eye so close into the brass that the sharp edge clipped my brow and cut my lid. I saw nothing but quiet, vacant blue. Then I beheld blurred darkness such as a fish must sense when a liner passes above. It almost shut out my light—a second more and it did so, quite; I could see nothing. I formed no especial word, but I made a mighty sound!

Partington's arm struck my cheek a savage blow as he tore at the lanyard spring. The recoil knocked me to my back, and even as I lay, I was conscious that the engine in the air had ceased its terrible purring.

The destroyer, its motor dead, its driver panic-stricken, was not even volplaning to earth. Though his planes were unharmed, he was allowing himself to fall!

Barrows, ever brave before a vanquished foe, came up, again cursing at the top of his voice. The rent-line, half in red meat and my captain in atoms, was so demoralized that I doubt if it even knew the destroyer had been hit. The colonel was laughing hysterically.

The falling monoplane struck a tree in the dense growth at the edge of the gully, scarce a quarter-mile beyond. I saw the driver go bouncing through limbs and foliage to the earth.

Like a torn kite, the broken tree-top thrusting through its right wing, the monster hung suspended forty feet from the ground, only its heavy engine, tearing out, crashing to the sod below.

I am the fastest runner in the regiment, but Barrows arrived not much behind me. The rest were far distanced. Before me was a thick copse of young willow. Broken shoots showed where the body of the aviator had plunged. I leaped into the thicket, parting the saplings and the undergrowth.

On her back, her arms helplessly above her head, her little gauntleted hands uselessly open, in the fatigue uniform of the Potsdammer Guards, lay a young girl, dainty as Sèvres china! She was so very young! And helpless, and I knew by the flax of her hair that she had blue eyes. I stood, staring, not daring to touch her. I was roused by the guttural chuckle of Barrows. I turned toward him.

He had his revolver in his hand, and he was taking deliberate aim at the prostrate small body.

"Wait!" I cried. "Are you a soldier and a man—you're not going to shoot—"

"Shut up!" he gurgled, and, blubbering and sobbing in his cowardly orgy, he pulled the trigger.

But the God of battles had unsteadied the craven's hand; the bullet just pinked the tip of her right ear. She opened her eyes—yes, they *were* blue!—and gave a pathetic, weak little cry, like a baby.

"Har! Har! Har!" Barrows laughed insanely, and, calling her the foulest of names, again raised his gun. I threw up my own automatic and shot him through the heart!

So help me!—I only meant to break his wrist, but I was on a line with him, you see, and when I missed his gun-hand—why, of course, the bullet just went through his breast.

He neither fell forward nor backward; he crumpled like a snow man in August sunshine, and, with his body at my feet, I heard the colonel calling my name and ordering Partington to shoot me. Partington drew his revolver—I knew he was only *pretending* that the hammer was broken.

Another man, in the group around the colonel, threw his rifle to his shoulder, and the bullet clipped a twig just

above my head. Weakly the girl tried to rise, but fell back.

Bending forward, I seized her in my arms, and, plunging and sliding, came to the bottom of the ravine. There was shouting and uproar above, but I concealed myself as best I could beneath a shelf of rock.

"Get him this time, Partington—take my gun!" I heard the colonel's voice above me, and I heard Partington slide and scramble, as I had done, to the floor of the big earthen bowl.

The copse waved away in front of me; I raised my gun; Partington stood before me; we covered each other. A moment, but a moment only, did he look into my eyes. Then he turned his back upon me and made a megaphone of his hands.

"He is not here, colonel!" he shouted. "The broken undergrowth shows that he is running out of the gully under its cover. He has gone toward the sea!"

Partington did not wait for the command which came. He was already "searching," and each instant moving farther away. I listened until not only Partington's footsteps in the gravel, but the sound of their myriad voices and all their clatter, had quite sunk into silence. There remained in that warm spring air only a fugitive and peace—and she!

She lay warm and still in my arms. Again she had fainted. The small cut on her ear had ceased to bleed. I took out my handkerchief, and, as best I could, wiped the blood away from the softest, whitest neck I had ever touched—from the nape of which her blond hair curled quaintly.

Her buff coat, its big silver buttons starting militarily at her shoulders and almost meeting at her half-armful waist, was smart as the cloak of a prince. I drew off her right gauntlet. Four pink fingers and a thumb, manicured exquisitely, flopped limp in my palm.

Callouses at the base of her fingers told of multitudinous grips upon a steering-wheel she would grip no more. Her shapely, slender thighs were incased in the tightest of riding-breeches. Her calves were wound in tan riding-thongs. And I wondered how I should get rid of her!

Tenderly I laid her in the smooth sand, and noted for the first time how aristocratic was her face. Undeniably Teutonic, but straight from Sans Souci, I should wager. She was quite still.

I parted the willows in front and stepped out cautiously. For several minutes, perhaps, I stood listening intently. There came no sound from above, but a noise of tearing cloth, behind, caused me to turn abruptly.

My captive had risen, and, as I wheeled, was yanking from her hip a blue service gun whose barrel, to my distended eyes, seemed half as long as her leg. The speed of her impatient hand had caught the breech in the lining of her coat—fate had set nine stitches of ripping silk between me and death.

When you're at the brink of the great jump-off, sex and chivalry—in reality—dare not stand defiantly between you and life. What did I do? Why, I caught her in the jaw, as hard as I could and as neatly as I knew, with my right, just as I would have rammed a barroom loafer who annoyed me; and with my left, simultaneously, I knocked that cannon from her hand.

But even as I leaned forward to help the blow, I tripped in a root; her chin took only a glancing stroke after all; I fell against her, and as the breath blew out of her lungs like air from a bursting bellows, we both went sprawling to the sand. Up, like a rubber ball, she reached for her artillery. With an arm-twist I bore her back.

Then I caught her other arm and pinioned her. Like a wrestler, she did a writhing somersault from her shoulders. I don't know how she went over, but as she fell across me, with her face upon my hands, she bit my right wrist so sharply that involuntarily I squealed

and released my one remaining clutch upon her.

To the primitive, for both of us! I know she swore at me, but to me German is Greek, and I could make only the word "*Teufel!*" oft-repeated.

When the gun seemed within her fingers I could reach her with but one hand. Hurling myself forward I grabbed, and caught only her coat and the shirt beneath, which I tore from her shoulder, and her very femininity saved me. She yielded a little—just a little in unconscious modesty—to prevent complete exposure. Instantly my hand fell to her wrist, and, whirling her about, I dropped her flat to the sand, back toward me. In a moment my right forearm was locked under hers.

She did the very thing I wished her to: Her left hand flashed around, and with her nails she tried to tear my restraining fingers; but the arm-lock had left that hand free, and in a second her wee left hand was being crushed in my right. Now, with both her arms bent back and useless, I dragged her to me.

She came, sliding over the gravel in a sitting posture—slowly, hissing, snarling, swearing, writhing, furious as a beautiful tormented kitten. I drew her up until her blond head was under my chin; until her white, blue-veined shoulder, creamy as warm Holstein milk could have been, scratched by my three-day beard.

Suddenly she ceased straining and hurling her little oaths; her muscles relaxed; her curved, red mouth began to tremble in defeat; in a moment she was sobbing. My grip on her hands slackened unconsciously. Yet she did not try to regain her feet or her weapon. She only put her hands over her eyes, and cried, forlornly and pitifully.

Something like a flash of spiritual lightning shot through me. I knelt, blasted inwardly, behind her. The perfume from her awry hair climbed into my nostrils. I stretched out my arms, but not as a foe. I thought her the most beautiful thing in the world. My left hand fell softly, but quite unconsciously, upon her bared shoulder. Trembling, she leaped away. Again she murmured:

"*Teufel!*"

Her face was a deep red; with quick fingers she began to fasten the rent in her shirt with a woman's miraculously ever-ready pins.

Rising, I stepped into the open. I spoke to her in English; she shook her head, and wept again. In pantomime I showed her what had happened; how she had fallen, how the sergeant had shot her—once; how I had killed the sergeant. I think she comprehended my outlawry in her service then, for she laid her tiny hand in mine and smiled.

Then presently she began to cry again and clung to me. I stroked her hair; the white of her neck was close to my mouth. I could not resist that vital marble—I pressed my rough lips into its soft warmth. She struggled in my embrace; I kissed her again, and I grew mad as I kissed her.

It was the stone age all over again. We were cave-folk, hunted and hunting. Our lives were worth nothing. We hated each other and we loved each other—at least, I loved her as the hairy Adam loved his carnivorous Eve. She beat my breast, she kicked me, she screamed, and at that I put my hand over her lips. With that hand I forced her head back until I gazed straight into her terrorized blue eyes.

I was the terror in them, and I was wildly, primitively glad. She had no breath left to cry, so tightly was I crushing her against my heart. I put my hand upon her brow and turned her face up to mine. She closed her eyes. I pressed my mouth upon hers—again—and again—and again.

But something, in these thousand centuries, has done for the cave-man after all. Suddenly I felt wretchedly ashamed of myself. A horror of rav-

ishing this tender girl of her kisses, so brutally and shamefully, came over me as quickly and as completely as my furious love.

Releasing her, I stepped back, dropped to my knee, and caught her hand. This I kissed, and, rising, turned away. She stood motionless, surprised out of speech and action. I walked out of the copse determined to give myself up, but only after making an inflexible condition that she should be exchanged. I had not set my foot into the embankment before she caught my hand.

Surprised, I looked down at her. Another fear stood in her eyes: a fear not *of*, but *for* me. Again in pantomime, I explained what I was about to do. She seized both my hands.

"*Nein! Nein!*" she cried in a sweet, low voice.

I shrugged my shoulders. Remember—we had no words for each other. Rather wearily I thrust her aside, and once more I began to climb. This time, with powerful determination, she seized the skirt of my coat and dragged me back so speedily that I tumbled in a heap at her feet.

With an unconscious sort of oath I scrambled up, and, as I tried to brush the soil from my coat, I ceased—because my hands were held. She was staring at the ground, but I saw that a flush was even mounting into her forehead.

"Well?" I asked. Once more I drew her toward me.

She understood not the word, but the rising inflection. She looked up into my face, her eyes stormy with tears, her mouth sunshiny in a fitful timid smile. Confused, she looked away as she spoke.

"What is your name, dear?" I asked presently.

"*Namen? Namen?*" she repeated, venturing.

"*Ja,*" I affirmed, like a good burgher.

"Wilhelmine," she answered, smiling.

"Wilhelmine," I said, "I thought I should have to call you just 'Little Hohenzollern.'"

At the expression a look of alarm chased the brightness out of her face. She gazed long and earnestly into my eyes, and then, the sweet, womanly smile again setting itself upon her mouth, she lifted toward my glance the tiny tonneau-cased watch strapped upon her wrist.

It bears the arms of Prussia's reigning house. By the Lord, the girl is royal!

Midnight, you say? Thanks! Both our watches have gone to the bad now.

With two horses we'll make Lowestoft, and Dunn, by dawn. Then to New York and a clergyman—

Yes, I'll find the horses! I found my princess, didn't I?

FOR YOUR THREE BEST FRIENDS

HERE IS AN IDEA

Send me the names and addresses of three of your friends who you think will be interested in the stories in THE CAVALIER, and I will send them sample copies direct from this office. You might, if you wish, to prepare them for the coming of the magazine, write to them as well, and say that sample copies of THE CAVALIER are being sent them at your request.

This is just a suggestion. If it is too much trouble, don't do it, but I will appreciate it if you do, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have let your friends in on a good thing.

EDITOR, THE CAVALIER, Flatiron Building, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York

KILLING MOREHEAD PRIDE

A SHORT STORY

BY J. BRANT

WHEN there are three hundred and fifty in the freshman class you can't expect them all to be dime-novel college heroes—big, brave, generous and modest. It's even possible that a few seniors don't come quite up to this standard.

Four years at college is a sure cure for a good many faults, but some are bound to get by and be carried out into the world beyond.

But if you ever meet a Bohunk man you don't like, don't blame Bohunk; think what a mess he must have been when he entered, and be grateful to the college for doing what it did!

There's one course in which Bohunk seldom fails to do a good job. That's the course in modesty. By this I mean personal modesty, which is quite different from college pride. Every Bohunk man is conceited about Bohunk, and proud that he is a Bohunk man, which is perfectly right and proper and as it should be.

It's the other kind of conceit—the kind that makes a Bohunk man show that he thinks he is better than other Bohunk men—that I'm talking about.

The word "freshman" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon, "fresh" meaning fresh, and "man" meaning man. This ought to be plain enough for anybody. All freshmen are fresh in some respects, and take a year's training to get over it.

Then they become sophomores, which is a suggestive word, but its derivation is too deep for me. I never took Greek, so perhaps it's Greek.

Every now and then a freshman comes along who is too blooming fresh. This is a serious matter, and it is up to the whole college to see that his special fault is corrected as soon as possible. The species of too-fresh freshman has been known ever since colleges were invented, and the ancient and honorable science of hazing was devoloped for his express benefit.

Hazing proved tremendously effective, and for generations the too-fresh freshman was kept under control.

As beheadings and guillotines and racks and thumb-screws became unpopular in the outside world, so methods of hazing became milder in the colleges. Which is civilization, and a good thing unless it is carried too far.

When crime was first discovered punishment was a thing that nobody knew much about. The ancient judges, wishing to be on the safe side, inflicted the full penalty each time regardless of the offense, wisely leaving to posterity the task of grading down the sentences from the electric chair to five dollars' fine for the second offense.

Opinions differ as to the effectiveness of this grading at the present day. But nearly everybody admits that some system of punishment in this world is a mighty good thing.

Colleges have been said to be "small worlds unto themselves," a good saying and true. The inference is that if left alone the system of hazing, which may have been extreme in its early stages, would be graded down to fit each case as perfectly as the outside system of punishment.

It was an effective device for meeting an existing evil, and as worthy as the world's mthod of treating crime. Of course there were some mistakes where innocent men were made to suffer; but no system is perfect, and a few sacrifices are necessary for the public good.

And now comes the blundering, sympathetic, shocked, and ignorant outside world and butts into the college world where it has no business or jurisdiction, and stops hazing!

The reason it gives is that every now and then a man dies from eating tobasco sauce or from blood-poisoning by burns or from frightening a weak heart. The world hears these things, and says it knows, and passes sentence on hazing. The college is not given a hearing.

No allowance is made for the benefit that the college or the world derives from hazing, or for the comparative newness of the system with that of other curative methods, or for mistakes, and no credit is given the college for brains to take care of its own affairs. And we submit like a slapped child. Which is disgraceful!

At the beginning of our sophomore year, Thomas Morehead Morehead, 2nd, entered as a freshman. That same year hazing was abolished at Bohunk, and we were helpless.

Thomas M. was the freshest of fresh freshmen. Conceit stuck out all over him like the quills on a hedgehog. His family was the whole thing where he came from, and he'd been raised on the principle that ordinary people were made for the purpose of falling down and asking the wonderful Moreheads to walk over them.

He entered with the idea that he was going to do just what he liked, and if that interfered with any of the old ways of running the college, why, they'd have to be changed, that was all.

We have a few simple little rules for freshmen at Bohunk that are traditions. We all respected them when we were freshmen, as has every graduate since I don't know when, and while they don't mean much, it is pleasant to see a freshman refrain from doing what we didn't dare do at his stage of the game. Tight skullcaps are prescribed.

Plug hats, pipes on the street, and taking pippins to the games are prohibited. He should keep close to the wall in going up-stairs to recitations, and his loud talking should not disturb the dignity of upper-classmen. Boardwalks are not to be used in passing. Seniors are to be addressed as "Sir," and sweaters are not to be worn to morning chapel.

Thomas Morehead Morehead, 2nd, wasn't an anarchist. Quite the opposite. He believed in the general rule of the humbleness of freshmen. But he claimed he was the exception that made it a good rule. The idea of anybody trying to regulate the habits of a Morehead Morehead!

So he wore pipes and sweaters and walked on boardwalks until he got himself notorious.

If he noticed the antagonism he was creating it didn't worry him any. He had an unhealthy amount of money, and could always find plenty of his classmates to play with, of the type that say nice things to spenders for the fun of riding in their automobiles. And while he was giving parties and dinners to his loud-mouthed admirers the rest of the college was getting sore.

With such a case on our hands it's likely that the rule against hazing would have been suddenly violated. But we realized the necessity of inventing some other method that could be used openly.

Breaking the rules once might have helped Thomas M., but it wouldn't help much as a precedent for future cases. Our job was to find a substitute for hazing, if such a thing was possible. We could fall back on breaking the rules as a last resort.

Ridicule was the thing. If we could make a Morehead Morehead the laugh-

ing stock of the college, we figured it would have as much effect as violence. So the question narrowed down to "how?"

Thomas M. imagined that he was some artist with the boxing-gloves. Lefty Murphy, who gave instruction in that art, encouraged this belief for reasons of his own; Thomas M. paid big prices for private lessons, with extra bonuses for the divulging of secrets of the professional ring, and all Murphy had to do was to shake the plum-tree.

We got Burns, the football coach, to look him over at one of his lessons. This was easy, for Thomas M. was willing to show off before any one he thought knew. Burns praised him to the sky, and then came back and told us that, with the exception of a tricky uppercut, he was a cinch, and any man on the team could knock him out in two rounds. Which was what we wanted to hear.

The way was now clear to a series of challenges from the most unlikely looking boxers on the team, which would mean a series of lickings for Thomas M., and the instilling of a healthy spirit of respect in his soul.

But our plan was deeper than this. This would hurt his pride, but not bring upon him a sufficient amount of ridicule to be lasting. And we wanted complete humiliation.

We got the idea out of a sporting paper, under the heading, "Battling Burke to Box Bohunk Man." It said there that overtures had been made to Burke's manager for a match with a Bohunk amateur, to be pulled off before the Longmeadow A. A.

Battling Burke was at one time the middle-weight champion of England, Scotland, and Wales, and had a list of victories following his name as long as your arm. The name of the Bohunk athlete was not given.

Of course there wasn't any truth in this article. The reporter had been hard up for material, and had weaved this fairy-tale to fill up space. Papers are full of them all the time. It helps the reporter, and is a little advertising for Battling Burke, and the thing drops.

But this time we fooled them. We wrote to Burke's manager, and got a letter stating that the match could be arranged, and kept strictly quiet, if we would furnish the hall and one thousand dollars.

We wrote back that we would give five hundred dollars. In about three weeks we got a reply that that amount would do if we could set the match for the fifteenth. Then we approached Thomas M.

It took a good deal of tact to manage it, but at last he consented, for the good of the college. That sounded pretty gritty of him, but it wasn't. We put it up to him in such a way that he didn't dare refuse.

He'd talked too much about his ability to back down on the first opportunity to show what was in him that we gave him. The prospect of an ex-champion frightened him, but he was too proud to say no.

We figured that after Battling Burke had started the reform we'd arrange a match with some little fellow on the team and fix Morehead pride for good.

There was a big sheet-iron hay barn about two miles from the college that happened to be empty, just the place for the bout. We made arrangements with the farmer that owned it, and sold five hundred and ten tickets at the college for a dollar a ticket, and paid all expenses. The first thing we knew everything was ready, and the night had arrived.

It was some splendid sight. The ring was roped off in the middle of that big, bare barn. There was a sputtering light hanging over it, and it was made as light as day by the subdued search-lights from four automobiles, one on each side.

All around the ring was the crowd —in the automobiles and standing and sitting on the floor. In the little shed

back of the barn Battling Burke and Gunboat Jones (which was the name Thomas M. was appearing under) were dressing for the fight.

Maddon, Burke's manager, came in with a long cigar in his mouth, nodded with approval at the arrangements, and took a big roll of bills out of his pocket.

"Anybody want to bet on Jones?" he asked easily.

Nobody seemed to. We were all in on the deal, and were ready to see Jones get the licking of his life.

Then a sportily dressed old gentleman appeared in a corner. Nobody seemed to know who he was, or how he had got in, but there he was. He stood up.

"Bet?" says he. "Of course I'll bet on Jones. You didn't think I'd come way from New York to see my nephew fight and be willing to leave any of this Burke money uncovered? That's not the way the Moreheads play! I've a thousand here that says Jones will win, and if that's not enough I've got checks. I'm his Uncle Bill."

And he pulled out a roll of yellowbacks that would choke a camel.

We all gasped. Thomas M.'s uncle here? But Thomas M. had probably notified him so that he could come up and witness the glory of the family. And a sport, with a thousand in cash! It was too good to be true. Alas for Morehead pride that night!

Maddon made a modest bet of twenty-five dollars, and then we rushed the old man. In ten minutes that thousand was covered, and he was writing checks. Each bet was put in an envelope marked with the name of the betters, and stuck in an old gunny-sack.

When Battling Burke and Gunboat Jones came in, wearing tights below and nothing above, there was over four thousand dollars in that sack, and half of it belonged to five hundred and ten college men.

Jimmy, the janitor of Storrow Hall, was referee. Jimmy had been in the ring in the days of his balmy youth, and knew Maddon, and could be relied on for a square deal. The fight was to run fifteen rounds. Lefty Murphy acted for Jones, and Maddon for Burke. Tom Burns, the football coach, was timekeeper.

Jimmy announced that there was but two pounds difference in the contestants' weights, and introduced them by their stage names. Furious applause. Then the gloves were tied on under Jimmy's inspection. More applause.

They met with a four-handed handshake in the middle of the ring. Then Jones swung with the right, and missed Burke's nose by half an inch. The fight was on!

The first round was a dazzle of blows, each working hard. Burke used straight rights and lefts, and we couldn't help feeling a glow of pride for the college the way Jones handled them. He came back, too, with short uppercuts and hooks, but they were not effective. Still, we decided he wasn't the cinch we had expected.

In the next round, and the next, Jones seemed to have lost his hitting ability. He covered, and let Burke do the forcing, only giving a few short punches when Burke got too aggressive. He blocked so well that he had Burke puzzled. Every now and then Burke would rush and crowd Jones to the ropes.

Burke danced around and wasted enough energy to lick a heavy-weight, but could not seem to land a blow where it would do any real damage. We forgot we hated Thomas M., forgot which side we were betting on, and cheered as one man for the college.

Burke opened the fourth with another of his straight lefts. Jones covered again, and the round progressed like the two preceding. Then Jones dodged a hard right, and landed a sound hook on the jaw. Burke staggered, and Jones followed up with an uppercut and a couple of jolts on the

ribs before Burns called time. The applause was tremendous!

Jones forced the attack in the fifth. Burke tried to cover, but Jones beat his guard away with uppercuts and a mixture of overswings and underswings. Burke began hitting again in desperation and caught Jones a good one on the nose, he bumping a right by accident. Burke followed this up with a series of hot lefts and got in two rib smashes. It looked bad for Jones.

Then it happened!

Burke missed another straight left. Jones came back with a sort of loop-the-loop blow that completely fooled Burke's guard. On it went, gaining force all the time, and landed square on the point of the jaw. Burke's hands fell to his side, his knees gave way under him, and down he went.

"—eight — nine — ten!" finished Jimmy. Burke did not get up, and we made a dash for Thomas M.!

Sometime later a sportily dressed old gentleman left the barn with a heavy gunny-sack, and we realized we had lost two thousand dollars. But we were too drunk with a college victory to worry about that just then.

Served us right for not backing the college!

We gave up the idea of reforming Thomas M. right there. He had the goods, and if a fellow has the goods he has a right to be proud. And he turned out to be a good fellow after all, when you got to know him.

But it's a funny thing that in the next fight he had a little fellow half his size licked him to a red pulp.

And he swears that no member of his family knew about the Burke-Jones fight, and—*he never had an Uncle Bill!*

THE ESCAPE

A SHORT STORY

BY PAUL WEST

IT was characteristic of the man that, when he discovered a way out of the prison through that window in the kitchen pantry, he should keep it all to himself.

His taciturnity had long since earned for him the sobriquet of "The Grouch," and in his nine years behind the high stone walls he had shared few secrets with his fellow convicts, who knew little of his history beyond the fact that his name was Carnivan, that he was paying the penalty for killing a man, and that he was apparently resigned to his fate.

He had never, so far as recent records shown, received a visitor.

But there are many men like him in those great, pitiful tombs that we call reform institutions, men forgotten by the world, yet who have not forgotten the world themselves, hating it more and more bitterly as the endless years drag by. Carnivan was not a curiosity.

It was not that he did not trust his fellows, and feared that to take any one into his confidence would result in an exposure of his plans, that made Carnivan hug his secret silently to his bosom. It was only that, having made

the discovery by himself, he saw only himself concerned in the matter.

He would have taken advantage of his suddenly found opportunity for freedom on the instant it was presented to him only that his naturally suspecting nature scented a trap; and he decided to make sure that the thing was as easy as it looked before taking the chance.

Carnivan had been assigned to work in the kitchen over two years when he made his discovery. It was while he was in the pantry after some oatmeal to be cooked for the hospital that he accidentally found the open way, and for a moment he was doubtful if he really saw correctly. The pantry was at the extreme end of the new one-story wing which contained the kitchens, joined to the cooking-room by a passageway where were hung and piled the copper kettles, pans, and pots. It was lighted by a small window eight feet from the floor, and, of course, barred.

Now, a barred window naturally suggests escape to a prisoner; but at the same time it brings a realization of the necessity for saws; so, though Carnivan had many times glanced at this little aperture and unconsciously compared its square dimensions with the girth of his thin body, he had never given it careful thought as a door to freedom. It was by the merest accident, therefore, that he now found out something almost incredible.

The oatmeal was on a high shelf, to reach which he was obliged to use some portable steps provided for the purpose. He lost his balance slightly as he mounted these steps, and put his hand on the sill of the window to steady himself. His fingers touched the bars, and, with a suddenness that made his heart stop beating, he realized that these bars were loose. A quick sidewise glance showed that they had always been loose.

There were many little windows of the size of this one in the new part of the prison, and the bars were all alike. There were three bars, fastened together to a solid steel rod at top and bottom, these rods being embedded in the concrete. But in this particular window Carnivan found that the lower bar fell short at either end of reaching the sides of the opening, so that, while the upper bar projected into the concrete walls and held fast, the grating could be swung inward like a gate hinged at the top.

Doubtless it was an accident; the defect had been overlooked. The unlikelihood of any prisoner selecting this part of the prison as the point of escape had resulted in slack inspections. Perhaps—but why speculate? The defective bars were there, a man of the size of Carnivan could easily squeeze through, and freedom lay beyond.

But the caution of an experienced nature held him from seizing the immediate opportunity which presented itself. Did freedom lie beyond? As he remembered that remote part of the prison yard, there was nothing beyond the kitchen walls but a space of perhaps twenty feet of yard, and then the high prison wall.

If the wall could be scaled the rest was easy—and the scaling of a twenty-foot wall is a minor feat when it means liberty. It seemed too easy—it might be a trap. Carnivan did not put it past the prison authorities to lead a man into making a dash for freedom merely that they might have the pleasure of shooting him down, thus keeping in practise with their rifles! He would investigate before he took the chance.

This he did next day, during the afternoon hour of exercise, and, while he did not dare go too near the spot, he discovered enough to make him wish that he had taken his chance on the previous evening. At all events, he would take it to-night. The kitchen walls, in which the little pantry window seemed to stare at him like a winking eye, were even nearer than he had recollected to the large wall surrounding the yard. But the height

of that wall appalled the man, and he could figure no way of getting over it without a ladder, until he noted the gutter and leader pipe at the eaves of the kitchen.

If this pipe, which was certainly strong enough to support a man, could be detached, it could be placed against the prison wall, and would reach pretty nearly to the top. Carnivan could not go near enough to this pipe now to examine its attachment, but there was a similar pipe at a near corner of the building, and he decided, after glancing at it once or twice, that it would be a matter of very few minutes' work to detach it, if a fellow had a knife. And there were plenty of knives in the kitchen!

Carnivan was unusually nervous during the day after his discovery that the outside elements in his Providence-sent plan of escape were as feasible as those on the inner side of the unbarred window. This nervousness was not allayed by the fact that on several occasions he fancied he caught the glances of the keepers on him.

It could not be possible that they had discovered anything. He had been overcareful, in his inspection of the premises, not to do anything that might arouse suspicion. No, he finally put it down to the condition of his mind under the circumstances, and took a firmer hold on himself.

The prison kitchen squad was marched to its supper work at four o'clock in the afternoon, and Carnivan fell into the long line of forty odd men with feelings that all but overcame him. As he answered the roll-call he realized that, if all went well, this would be the last time his voice would be raised to the echoes of those walls.

When the line turned, and Carnivan placed his hand on the shoulder of the man ahead of him, there was a queer lump in his throat, for never again would he keep step with this man, nor look at the back of that close-cropped, bullet-shaped head with the livid knife-scar behind the left ear. And this he had been doing for two years now, ever since he had been put to work in the kitchen.

He felt the heavy touch of the hand on his own shoulder, the touch of another killer's hand; only this hand had taken a woman's life—strangled her. Carnivan, strange anomaly, had sometimes shuddered at feeling this hand so near his throat, knowing its history. Well, if the man did not strangle him now, between the corridor and the kitchen, he would never have another chance!

There were no uniformed keepers in the kitchen to watch over the cooking squad, but there were none needed. The five head cooks and their assistants were, without exception, outside men, not convicts, and each was well armed. An under-cook, a Frenchman, had once forgotten that and attacked one of the chefs. Four bullet-holes in the fool's carcass had testified to the fact that these men, feeding the State's unwilling guests tor high wages, knew the crowd they were dealing with.

Carnivan reported for work to another convict, who had once been under-steward in a five-hundred-room hotel. The grafting had not been heavy enough to meet his demands, so he had stolen, with the result that the State now allowed him to supervise its pantry. Carnivan put on his apron, received a short, sharp knife, and was put to paring potatoes.

He welcomed the knife (which, this time, he would not surrender after working hours), but he resented the fact that his potatoes were already piled on the long table before which he and six others stood paring them. He must find some way of getting into the pantry. For half an hour he peeled potatoes, cudgeling his not overbright mind for an excuse for going into the pantry.

Other helpers were sent in by the cooks; but even if he had been among

them it would have done him no good, because his boss, the ex-under steward, was in the doorway of that important little room most of the time, keeping an eye on the supplies, and checking them off as they were called for. No; Carnivan must get in there with a minute to himself, as he had done more than once.

The tramp, tramp, scuffle, scuffle, of nine hundred pairs of feet sounded from the big dining-room beyond the swinging doors as the convicts were herded in for supper. A throng of their fellows assigned to do waiter duty hurried back and forth with big, nozled kettles filled with soup to pour into the tin cups awaiting them.

Steaming pots of coffee were filled, emptied, and refilled from the steaming tubs on the stoves; potatoes and bread were shot out of the kitchen. The hustle was on. Carnivan was already washing dishes, with his eyes on the pantry. He sighed hopelessly.

Suddenly a cook raised a big ladle commandingly. Carnivan hurried to him.

"Oatmeal!" said the cook, and Carnivan rushed to fill the order, saying to the ex-under steward, as he passed him: "Oatmeal!"

"Well, you know where it is," was the careless reply, spoken with more than necessary prison gruffness. Even the ex-under-steward did not like Carnivan much.

Carnivan scuttled toward the pantry. As he went something occurred to show him that another moment would have ruined his plans. The knives were being collected, and he had his tucked in the front of his striped jacket. He hurried. It was as the ex-under-steward had said — Carnivan knew where the oatmeal was. But he did not look toward the shelf on which the box reposed.

Pushing the portable steps to that side of the room, against the wall under the little window, he raised the grating inward. Then he caught the outer sill firmly, and raised himself up. He gasped as his head went through from the steamy brightness of the prison into the crisp, cold darkness of the winter night.

It was a feeling he had not experienced—this exhilaration of the outdoor night—for many years, and he dived into it, filling his lungs with the grateful coolness. His coat caught momentarily on the grating, and he groaned at this suggestion of a power forbidding him to go on. But he wrenched free, and, in another moment, was sprawling on hands and knees in the yard below the window.

He wanted to spring to his feet and shout aloud; but there was much to do before that privilege would be his, and he hastened to his task. Whipping the potato-knife from his jacket, he applied it to the hasps holding the rain-water leader to the prison building. They were of lead, and gave easily. The pipe was free but for the joint at the top, and with a tug he tore this loose, heedless of the slight noise it made.

He flew to the prison wall and placed the pipe against it, and, almost before the top of it had touched the stones, he was clambering up, his hands holding the corrugated surface of the pipe with a strength born of the circumstances, his toes finding and resting for support on almost non-existent projections.

Twice he fell, but alighted softly, before he was able to reach the top of the wall with one hand. He drew himself quietly and carefully up, taking care not to disturh the pipe so that it would fall with a clatter, and at last he sprawled, breathless and frightened, flat on the ample top of the wall. It was then for the first time that he thought of the guards.

He had not taken the trouble to locate the sentry stations precisely, though he knew that there was none within a hundred feet of where he lay. But the guards patroled, or were supposed to patrol, the walls, and at any moment he might be discovered.

He felt of the potato-knife, which he had tucked into his coat, and cast a glance in either direction. But it was dark. There was no star or moon; no light except from behind him, through the window from which he had escaped.

Beyond, down below, on the side where there was freedom, it was quite as dark; for over there was a country road, lighted at rare intervals until a mile or so farther along, where the trolley-cars came to the end of their suburban runs, four or five miles to the city.

A thousand thoughts ran pell-mell through his mind for the brief space he rested on top of the wall, but foremost among them was the idea that he must waste no time. Already he seemed to hear in his head that horrible warning of the prison siren which they blew when a convict escaped.

He had heard it five or six times during his nine years there, and twice out of the six there had been a funeral from the prison chapel a day or so later. Always there had been a man, dead or alive, brought back. This time there should be no man returned in shackles. He dropped from the wall.

He was free!

In the shadow of the wall he brought himself to his full stature, and filled his lungs with the cold air of one of God's perfect winter nights. Perfect for him, at all events, for, while some would have considered it lacking because the skies were overcast, hiding the stars, and there was no moon at all, its very blackness cheered him to think that at least the elements were on his side.

As the air filled him he wanted to shriek for joy. If you have ever gone for any length of time without letting your voice out to its fullest, you may appreciate his feelings. There was little surplus energy in the man, usually—in fact, the sickness which had been thinning him down, and bringing to his cheeks a pallor even noticeable where all the faces were pale, had been one of their reasons for taking him out of the shoe-shop and putting him into the kitchen, where the hours were shorter and the work easier.

But now he was all energy, all life—all from that one lungful of air. He wanted to voice his happiness, as a small boy hallooes as he dashes out of the house in the morning and meets the world for another day. But time for that later.

Carnivan knew of the trolley-line only vaguely, for it had not been there when they brought him out to the prison, nine years earlier. They had driven out in a springless wagon, he and some other unfortunates, with the guards, miles from the city, where he had been taken in a railroad train.

He did not remember passing many houses, but now, he supposed, there would be changes, and he would be on the lookout. It might be safer to travel for a while on the side of the road where the prison lay, and he did this, going along as fast as he dared, with his body scraping the wall.

For leagues, it seemed to him, the wall extended, but finally the end came in view; and, with his eyes somewhat accustomed to the darkness, he could see the sentry-box looming at the vanishing-point of the high barrier.

He shuddered; for up there, he knew, sat a man with a loaded rifle across his knees!

Carnivan darted across the silent road, not knowing what he would find over there. There were woods, and it was very dark. He rested among the outer, brushlike trees for a while, not daring to push his way farther along the road for fear of being seen from the sentry-box, nor daring enter the thicker woods lest he crack the twigs and raise an alarm. But he knew that he could not stay where he was much longer. Soon they would discover that he was gone, and the siren would shriek the tidings.

He parted the leafless bushes and made his path silently into the woods.

For a mile he went quietly, and then broke into a run, for there was now nothing to be gained by stealthiness. The siren must scream before long, and when it did he must be as far away as possible. So on he floundered. Why did not the whistle sound? What was the matter? Why was his disappearance not discovered? He felt almost slighted as the minutes passed and no alarm to tell that they missed him.

Suddenly he stopped; for in his wanderings he had again come out upon the road, and this time he saw a light. It was far away; how far he could not tell; but it marked the presence of human beings, and they were all his enemies, at least for a while, for he wore still his stripes, and until he could get rid of them he would be a hunted being. But how he longed to go forward toward that light!

How he longed to mingle with the men who had placed the light there! To feel the shoulders of free human beings rubbing his; to look—if askance and in fear—into honest, or at least free, eyes; to hear voices that did not tremble or growl! He could scarcely control the desire.

Now, for the first time, the realization that he must find some way of obtaining other clothing struck him with its full importance. Why had he not waited until he could have arranged for a change of clothing to be left somewhere for him? He remembered how one man had done it.

This fellow's wife had brought a bundle into the woods, somewhere near the prison, by night. The next night the convict had escaped, and made for the hidden bundle. They did not catch him for some days after that, since, having walked several miles to a carline, he had ridden, unsuspected, into the city. He wouldn't have been caught at all if he had not gone to his wife. Carnivan had no wife. He was rather glad of that.

But, he reflected, he had nobody. There was not a soul to whom he could go now—not a soul who would be glad to see him. Oh, well, what of that? He could make friends in his new life, whatever that might be! If only he could get rid of these stripes!

Carnivan had not once, be it said to his credit, contemplated going back to that drunken, slum existence which had made him a murderer in a fit of intoxicated rage. But all at once, as he heard a sound in the road, an idea—excusable, it may be—came over him.

There was a human being coming along the road!

That human being must be a man, to be there alone and at that time of night, for now it was close to nine o'clock. He was not a guard from the prison, for he was coming toward the prison. Carnivan clutched his potato-knife, not with the idea of murder, but merely intending to use it as a means of intimidation.

The steps were brisk — hurried, in fact — and the lone wayfarer rapidly approached the place where Carnivan crouched. It was a man, no doubt of that. Carnivan made ready to spring.

Out of the darkness a figure loomed, and, like a tiger, the desperate creature leaped upon it. There was a cry of frightened astonishment from the man, who staggered back under the force of Carnivan's impact with him, and he would have run, but Carnivan held him. He tugged at the man's overcoat, and cried:

"Hold still, damn you, and give me them clothes! Quick!"

"Let me go!" came the reply.

"Your clothes!" repeated Carnivan, as they struggled in the dark road. "Your clothes, or I'll—I'll kill you!"

The man made no reply. But now he had ceased to try to escape from his adversary. Instead, he was fighting to overcome him, and with a strength that Carnivan did not like.

His right hand had the convict's lean throat, and with the other he was striking savage, trip-hammer blows that brought grunts of pain and spluttering oaths when they landed.

The convict pulled and tore at the

man's clothing, its possession first in his desperate mind; but his purpose of fighting changed likewise, and he found himself now protecting his own life and seeking to destroy the other, who was rapidly wearing him down. He could not cry out, or he would have called for help, even if he had been heard at the prison. Then he remembered the potato-knife.

The man had bent him back, his fingers digging into Carnivan's windpipe. Carnivan knew that he was going. His eyes seemed to be bursting from his head; there was a ringing in his ears; his lips were bleeding from more than one well-directed blow.

He drew back his knife-holding hand and brought it forward!

Once, twice, it sank into something that yielded, and there was a shuddering cry from the other man. A third time the blade was withdrawn and shot forward, and this time the clutch on Carnivan's throat relaxed, and something collapsed upon him, with a shuddering, ghastly sound!

Carnivan, for the moment, lay upon his back, the man's limp body lying across his, and he was nearly as helpless as his victim. But he struggled to his feet, pushing the load from his breast, and stood, staggering, panting, looking down at what he had done.

"Oh, God!" he cried. "I didn't want to! I didn't want to! Why didn't he gimme the clothes without a fight?"

But the sense of his situation overcame his horror for the moment, and, stooping, he began divesting the dead man of his garments. If it had been a little lighter, so that Carnivan had seen the staring face, perhaps he would have turned away and run.

The darkness gave him courage, and, though he shook with a palsy as he felt the wetness on the breast of the man's coat, he tore it off the helpless arms and thrust his own into it. Then the trousers and finally the overcoat, which he had flung upon the ground. He did not take the trouble to reclothe the dead man in his stripes, though some such idea had happened into his head for a moment.

He flung the striped bundle far away into the woods, and listened as it fell with a thud. But as that sound came, another came with it, and this sound brought him no gladness, for it was the scream of the prison's siren whistle.

The man stood frozen, with his arm still raised from the motion of throwing his clothes into the woods, his feet far apart. He could not move under the fascination of that sound.

"You-oo-oo-oo-oo! You-oo-oo-oo-oo!" It seemed to scream, in ever increasing volume and rising pitch!

It echoed in the woods at his side, it resounded along the road. He could see the picture in the prison, too, the guards running back and forth with their rifles and pistols ready for action, searching dark corners, rounding up the grinning, frightened prisoners and counting them.

He could fancy the little body of armed hunters setting forth by foot and in the prison motor cars to scour the country for him. He could picture himself, the hunted thing, with them coming nearer and nearer.

It broke the spell, and, clapping the hat of the man who lay dead at his feet tightly on his cropped head, he sped through the woods. As he ran he heard another sound, and, looking back, saw an automobile's light as the machine flew along the road which he had just left.

He could not see who was in it, but he knew, and he knew that their rifles were cocked, and that they were ready for him.

There was a shout, and the machine stopped. Carnivan knew why. They had found the body! He ran faster than before.

By and by he came to a field, and, as the going became easier, his weakness seemed to assert itself. He had overdone himself in his frenzy to escape, his little strength was gone, and

he could scarcely pull one foot in front of the other.

Many times he stumbled, but when he fell he dragged himself along on his hands and knees by the stubble, until he could get to his feet and keep his balance again. But the time at last came when he could go no further, and he lay where he fell.

It was swampy, but he cared not. His body was half in the freezing water of a marshy depression, and the edges of the ice cut his hands as he tottered, but he lay there, and must have slept, for he dreamed.

They were wild, insane dreams, of course, but they were interspersed with pleasant visions.

He seemed to be lying on a soft, comfortable bed, during these pleasanter fantasies, and he was free to rise or stay there, to come and go. But it would get cold, and he could not draw sufficient covering over him.

Finally it grew very cozy and warm!

Suddenly he awoke. He did not know that it was morning. He only knew that he was choking, that hideous pains clutched him by the throat.

"The clothes! Gimme them clothes! I gotter have them, I tell you!" he gasped, in a queer, hoarse voice so unlike his own that it brought him partly to his senses.

He was burning up with a shaking fever, his lungs were on fire—where was he? Ah! He remembered it! He must go on and on!

He staggered to his feet, and as he did so the edge of his overcoat pulled him back to his knees, being held in the ice of the swamp, where it had frozen. He tore it loose with an oath and once more pulled himself up to his tottering feet.

He stumbled on, his head reeling, pounding, the fever eating him alive, but with a definite, crazed idea in his mind, which was to reach that big, golden ball which was just coming over the hills ahead—to reach it and kiss it, for it was the rising sun, and it was shining on him, a free man!

Suddenly the heat which had been consuming him gave way to a killing cold. He could not move his arms and legs, his teeth chattered, and he huddled to the ground in a quivering, gibbering bundle.

As he drew the coat about him something in the pocket crinkled. It was a paper and he drew it out!

It occurred to him that if he had matches he could make a fire and warm himself. Feeling in the pockets of the clothes his fingers found a box, but he could scarcely light one, so numb were his hands.

At length, after many efforts, he struck a light, and held the paper to the flame. It caught badly, because it was thick paper, so he opened the folded sheet to make the ignition easier. As he did this he wished it was money instead of merely a useless paper.

Well, he would get some money later, when he reached—the sun, and got warmer. Perhaps there was money in these pockets, anyway. He would see when his hands were thawed out and he got rid of this horrible chill.

His fingers pulled the folded paper apart, and he shuddered even a little more, because now he noted that the paper was blood soaked.

What of it? It had to be some one's blood! Good—it wasn't his own!

The man shouldn't have got in his way. What was he doing there, going in the direction of the prison at that time of night! God!

They did not hear the shriek, nor did they see what he did, which was merely to stagger backward, fall, struggle feebly to his feet and fall again, this time not to get up any more. But between running and falling and going on until the last time he managed to cover perhaps a hundred feet before he went down for good.

And that was just the distance from his body, when they did find him, later, that they picked up a blood-soaked, charred bit of paper—THE STATE'S PARDON OF EDWARD CARNIVAN!

You can join THE CAVALIER LEGION and receive the red button with the green star free of charge by sending your name and address to the editor of THE CAVALIER, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Everybody's reading it now.

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR

IN these days of reform, when bright and shining lights are receiving the harpoon at the hands of the populace, it seems more or less reasonable that THE CAVALIER should take advantage of the opportunity and join the cavalcade with a piece of fiction dealing with these conditions. You can look for it in the issue of March 8 under the title of

THE PURCHASE

BY E. J. RATH

It is the story of a young architect who has been elected mayor of a suburban town, and at the same time is forced to earn his living in New York. He is poor; he is honest; he is the kind of man that powerful criminals like to tickle under the chin while kicking him in the pit of the stomach.

The surest plan they have for unseating his reason is to make him a millionaire and then catch him with some real money on his person. This whole plan works out perfectly in theory, but in this instance a little rich girl got tangled up in a heart affair with the mayor, and together they made the strongest combination ever bucked by the villains.

The story is as alluring as spring water and as intoxicating as wine.

E. J. Rath is the author of "TWO WOMEN, OR ONE?" which ran serially in THE CAVALIER last September. Few stories printed in this magazine made such a tremendous impression as this latter novel, and "THE PURCHASE" is even better.

Owing to the fact that I have a great deal of correspondence to deal with this week, I trust you will pardon me if I hurry through the list of other good things and give you an abbreviated menu.

Albert M. Treynor, a writer new to CAVALIER readers, appears with a novelette entitled "A FOREST FREE LANCE." It is a romance of the Southern pine-woods, with the scent of fresh sawdust and pine-trees in every chapter. There is the charm of the distant song of woodmen, the sound of the ax in the tall forest, the complications of a big love-story, the adventure and romance that hold one's interest. And, to cap the climax, it has the punch.

If you like Treynor's work, you shall have more of it.

Edwin Carlile Litsey crosses the line again with a story born in the Cumberland Mountains, the title of which is "MELINDY." Small wonder those mountaineers fight to the death for their sweethearts.

Litsey has a way of painting a woman that makes her worth dying for, even if her best garment is gingham and her threshold is pressed only by bare feet.

Frank Condon wins laughter with "CUPID ALWAYS CASHES." In fact, Condon always attacks one's sense of humor. If Condon cannot make you laugh, you might just as well go on reading Fox's "Book of Martyrs" the rest of your life.

Read "THE CALL OF HOME," by Mary Rider Mechtold. There is so much truth in it, so much humanity, so much real life, that you may catch a glimpse of yourself somewhere in its pages.

Mary Rider Mechtold is the author of "THE WOMAN WHO PAID," which made such a sensation in THE CAVALIER for April 20, 1912.

Friends of Ruby M. Ayres will read with infinite pleasure "A YOUNG BLOOD."

This is a story for gentlemen, because if you are not a gentleman in every sense of the word you won't appreciate it. Any coarse lowbrow bereft of the finer instincts cannot possibly see the beauty of this yarn. The more class and quality you have, the more sympathy it will awaken.

THE CAVALIER is always grateful for an opportunity to print a story of this sort, and its subscribers share this gratitude.

J. N. Cole, Jr., has a very funny story entitled "JEWELRY FOR A GENTLEMAN" in the next issue. It is about a bunch of college athletes and a skinny string-bean who answered to the name of Skeeter. He wasn't much of a heavyweight, but he certainly had the kind of sand in his spinal column that makes men do the big thing at the right time.

MAKE WAY FOR THE LADIES!

Tally one for Los Angeles, where the people live in eternal sunshine and pick flowers all the year round. I lived there myself in 1887-1888, when Pico Street was the scene of some very wonderful electric railway experiments. It was the only railroad line in the world where the cars got in ahead of the schedule, mainly due to the fact that when one of these electrics got started the combined mechanical department and all the engineers to boot could not stop her. I used to stand under the eucalyptus-trees along the route in the hope that there would be a bust-up near enough for me to get aboard and sit there as though I had paid my fare.

But nothing is like it used to be in Los Angeles. To-day it is indeed the city of the angels, eminent among whom reigns the writer of the following letter:

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have very often wondered if you have any girl readers, for when I read your "Heart to Heart Talks" I find only men's names mentioned. Therefore I want to tell you that "the female of the species" are as enthusiastic as the male over your dandy magazine —at least *I* am, which is not exaggerating a bit, for it's great from cover to cover. I confess to being the worst bookworm that ever was. I verily believe I can say with truth that I have read most of the CAVALIERS from the very first issue up to now, and I only hope that the book may grow larger.

I am sincere in my praise for this clever magazine and recommend it to all book-lovers.

(MISS) ELLEN ANDERSON.

1248 Elden Avenue,
Los Angeles, Cal.

I am going to prove to Miss Anderson that there are plenty of ladies reading THE CAVALIER. Just run through the batch of correspondence which follows:

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I am president of a CAVALIER Club consisting of ten members. Will you please send me ten CAVALIER buttons? We think it is the best magazine ever.

MRS. H. F. BACON.

37 Jenness Street,
East Lynn, Mass.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I want to tell you how glad I was when I began to read "Beyond the Great Oblivion." I had read "Darkness and Dawn," but had forgotten the names. When I began reading the sequel to-day I was delighted.

I tell everybody about THE CAVALIER.

MRS. HELLEN ROBBINS.

Hannibal, Mo.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

"The Law of Love" was a dandy. Of course, there are some who would hold up their hands in holy horror at the ending and expect the heroine to commit suicide so as not to be found alone on an island without a chaperon.

In "The Undertow" I recognized many things in "show life," as I have had quite a little experience there myself. Why is it that people who love the theater will balk when an actor or actress is mentioned?

We live eight miles from Detroit, but my

husband's business is in Detroit and on Thursday evenings he brings me your magazine. So you see one cavalier brings the other.

Another story like "Ice-Bound Hearts" from James Oliver Curwood would surely be appreciated.

MRS. B. W. ALLEN.

Greenfield Hotel,
Highland Park,
Detroit, Michigan.

THE WAY TO REAR A CHILD

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Won't you be so kind as to send me four CAVALIER buttons? One is for my baby to wear. I am going to bring her up in the right way.

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate THE CAVALIER. I wouldn't miss a copy of it for a hundred dollars.

"Ice-Bound Hearts" gripped right hold of me. There is something so big, clean, and noble about it, not to say pathetic, and I am not ashamed to admit that it made me shed a few tears.

Fred Jackson is great. I also enjoy George Allan England's work.

I think the stories that deal with science are particularly interesting.

Wishing THE CAVALIER success in its second and every other year of its existence and the editor every good fortune,

MRS. E. F. PLATT.

P. S. I forgot the most important praise of all—your "Heart to Heart Talks." I do enjoy them and read them first of all.

E. F. P.

Creston, B. C.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

We are organizing a CAVALIER Club in this vicinity. I am having several stories out of last year's magazine bound in book form for my library.

It is impossible for me to offer any suggestions for an improvement in THE CAVALIER, so I remain,

A constant reader,

MRS. A. C. AIKEN.

Charleston, W. Va.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

The perfect local coloring and atmosphere of that delightful little pen sketch, "That Throb Feeling," has excited in me a throb feeling for more of that kind of sentiment—that sentiment peculiar to the Middle West. I have seen several of Mr. Sweet's stories along this vein, and have often wondered why this field has been overlooked.

MRS. P. HAYMOND.

451 Almond Avenue,
Long Beach, Cal.

ALWAYS ROOM FOR A ROCHESTER GIRL

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Have you room for a Rochester girl?

Last August I stepped into an East Avenue drug-store and came across THE CAVALIER. The cover attracted my attention. I have been a reader ever since, and I think it is fine. All the stories are good.

Do not change the covers, as I think they are splendid for mounting.

Come on, Fred Jackson, with some more of your novelettes.

ALICE M. HARTZ.

P. S. Please send me one of your CAVALIER LEGION buttons, as I want to become a member for life.

A. M. H.

Rochester, N. Y.

STILL AFTER FRED'S PHOTO

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I would like to shake Fred Jackson's hand. Say, Fred, "The Serpent" was sure some story.

As to Mary Germaine, I am in love with her. She is there with the goods, believe me, in "The Red Dawn."

Mr. Editor, I agree with John Collins Tague, of New York. I would like Mr. Fred Jackson's photo. I am a most devoted reader of THE CAVALIER, and I think his picture on THE CAVALIER cover would be a good drawing card.

MISS MARY QUITE CONTRARY.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

My mother and father have read THE CAVALIER since its first issue and I am interested in lots of the stories, especially Frank Condon's contributions. I have formed a club of twelve of my classmates. We call it the CAVALIER LEGION and read a story from THE CAVALIER once a week.

Please send us twelve buttons.

DOROTHY ROWLEY,
President.

1518 Iowa Street,
Davenport, Iowa.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

My husband always wondered why I read THE CAVALIER. He read "Shifting Sands" and "The Master Mind," and says he wants more.

I would be glad to wear one of your buttons to let people know that I know something good.

Do not let Giesy and Smith stop writing. Just keep them at it.

I should like to know just what "The Lure of the Lavender Trees" was. I am rather inquisitive.

I hope you will send me my button soon.

With three cheers for THE CAVALIER,

(MRS.) FREDA KRAFT.

737 S. Broadway,
Baltimore, Maryland.

Note—I never attempt to explain mysteries in literature. Maryland Allen evidently attempted to impress her readers with a sense of dread mingled with fear, and she did it very effectively in "THE LURE OF THE LAVENDER TREES." It would be quite as difficult to explain any of the terror stories of Poe or Bulwer-Lytton or Bierce.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

If anybody were to ask me the name of the best magazine published I should at once respond, "THE CAVALIER, of course."

I think Frank L. Packard's "GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN" is fine. He is a very brilliant writer, and I cannot say enough of his good qualities.

I sincerely hope THE CAVALIER will live forever and the editor also.

BABE FITZSIMMONS.
("The Hills of Tennessee" Company.)
San Francisco, California.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Whoop-e-e! Hurrah for E. M. Jameson! That is just the way I felt when I had finished his story, "Kennedy's Marriage."

Now, Mr. Editor, I don't want you to think I am a turn-coat, and I love Mr. Fred Jackson—er—er—his stories, just as well as ever, and, believe me, he's some writer. But what's the matter with E. M. Jameson? That is positively one of the very best stories ever published in THE CAVALIER, and that is saying a lot.

MISS J. MACUMBER.
Omaha, Nebraska.

STEP THIS WAY, GENTS, PLEASE!

Having convinced Miss Anderson that the ladies know a good CAVALIER when they see one, I beg to quote from a batch of correspondence from my gentlemen friends.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Well, Mr. James French Dorrance, to begin with, you are *some* writer. Your story, "The Honor of the Mounted," has got them all skinned a city block. I do not like to dictate to any one, but I think you would undoubtedly make a success if you went in for book writing. When you get a good one on the market you will make a killing worth making. However, as long as you write for magazines I will surely read them.

Put this in the waste-paper basket, don't think of it for a week, and then start to work on that book.

G. W. TERRY.
Centerville, Wayne County,
Indiana.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have read your magazine ever since the weekly issue began, and, in my opinion, it is A1.

Shoot us some more of Fred Jackson's stories like "The Masked Bride." Wasn't she a peach? Now, since you have got Fred Jackson going, keep him going. If you don't, you will see a little blond party, about five feet nine, walk into your office some time soon and start something.

EDWARD B. MILLARD.
246 Lansing Street,
Utica, New York.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Since you have made THE CAVALIER a weekly, its last objectionable feature has become a thing of the past.

I have noticed that very few of the contributors to the "Heart to Heart Talks" mention the poetry found in your pages. This is deplorable. I wish to state that I should not be nearly so well satisfied with THE CAVALIER if it did not contain at least one contribution from the pen of Paul West. I am not a direct subscriber, but order THE CAVALIER permanently from the Gibson Drug Store here, and get it a day earlier that way.

With best wishes for your continued success,

RAY SCHUCHERT, D. V. M.
Marengo, Iowa.

HOOKS 'EM ALL

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

For a long time I passed your magazine up as being too cheap, but finally picked up a back number with which to idle away a little time and became interested in one of the stories. That first copy was sure some eye-opener to me and converted me into a regular reader. . . .

Provided "The Cradle of the Deep" is not finished in the number I have asked for, will you kindly include such other numbers as I will require to finish the story?

M. J. EARLEY.
Box No. 4,
Bloomington, Illinois.

CAVALIER clubs already formed will receive buttons for their entire membership upon application to the editor of THE CAVALIER, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Join the procession.

A DOG DECIDES

A SHORT STORY

BY KATHARINE EGGLESTON

AFTER all, a man's a man even if he is in love.

So is a dog a dog, even if he is in bad.

And a real man and a good dog must find each other out, sooner or later.

Mason Armstrong and Snip, a small black-and-tan, were in these two extremities. Perhaps, rather, Snip's extremity was in and Mason's whole being was involved.

Just as, in the Garden days, a woman was to blame for the vicissitudes of man and beast, so was Olive Brice the Eve of this Adam and the dog.

Mason thought he knew her, but she never ceased to surprise him. Snip knew her better; but even he could never guess that she would put a panful of molasses candy on the window-seat.

So he got in bad—which, geographically speaking, was in the candy. Naturally, he sat down on his tail. Nature put it at the sitting end of him with a kind intention to soften the hard spots; but she never meant to substitute pans of candy for said spots.

"Oh, you Snip!" Olive cried, losing the irritating composure which had aggravated Mason, holding him off from a subject toward which he had been edging for months.

"You've spoiled the candy!" she cried, thoughtless of the probable injury to his tail.

With a yelp he bounded off the window-seat. Wildly snapping at the offending sweet, he converted himself into a canine gyroscope. Olive tried to catch him, but he whirled away.

The performance struck the man's funny spot. With blissful, boyish abandon he laughed.

"Don't be silly!" Olive advised. "It's not funny at all!"

"Isn't it?" the man cried, as if he condemned a sense of humor that slept at its post under such circumstances.

For one ecstatic instant Snip caught up with his tail. He licked it. Then he knew why the big man laughed. He knew how sweet was the sticky stuff; he was enjoying in anticipation the joy that was to come to the little dog when he sampled it.

Snip had always thought his tail good enough to sit on; but now it seemed good enough to eat!

In those ecstatic moments Snip knew that he had found the way to express his feelings. To him, from that auspicious time, any unusual occurrence was celebrated by wildly pursuing his tail.

Olive saw only a mad little dog, utterly losing his head in the chasing of his tail and narrowly missing death at rapidly revolving intervals when the davenport and the table-legs loomed up in his route.

"Mercy! Mercy! Stop him! He'll hurt himself!" she wailed, expecting to see him reduced to pulp if he actually met the table-legs, coming or going in his convolutions.

Armstrong watched with the joy he had known as he egged on many a dog-fight in his boyhood days. He flung himself on the couch and howled with appreciation while he urged on the chase.

"Go it, doggie! Go it! You'll get it on the next turn! Easy there by the table-leg! Tail! Tail! Tail!" he cheered.

Snip's heart thrilled. He had not known there existed in the six-foot anatomy of the man such love of sport, such sympathetic appreciation of the delights of the appetite.

Neither man nor dog took the slightest note of the girl. And if ever a man or a dog lived who did not regret forgetfulness of a girl who controls the menu of the one and the heart-strings of the other, neither has left record of himself.

Suddenly Mason Armstrong felt two small hands close securely on an ear each. He was literally jerked to attention.

"Listen to me! You're a big, cruel thing! I knew it! If you don't stop that dog before he breaks his head, I'll think it's true!"

Armstrong saw a face that needed no interpretation.

It was perfectly clear he must make amends for his uproarious conduct and anchor the dog till he could untwist himself from his spiral springing and take intelligent interest in the location of the table-legs.

He leaped up. He plunged after Snip. One small dog going in a comparatively straight and narrow path is hard enough to catch; but the same small dog describing an erratic and circular course about a room, with no intention of getting anywhere but succeeding in being everywhere, is a canine impossibility.

Just as Armstrong had urged Snip on, Olive urged him. Only more so! In her voice there was the steadily accumulating force of disapproval. Her comments made Armstrong desperate.

"You're so big that you never really live up to a situation. And you're thoughtless! Little Mr. Purch has more consideration, more courage, more real manhood in his five feet five than you—"

"Nell told me Pinky Purch was—" Armstrong paused to remark.

"Tell Nell to mind her own affairs. You chase the dog!" Olive snapped as Snip swung dangerously near a marble pedestal.

Armstrong chased. Snip gathered new energy. He thought Armstrong was just in the game for the love of sport.

"Jove! I wish he had salt on his tail, instead of candy," Mason panted as Snip eluded him.

"He likes salt, too," Olive announced discouragingly.

Suddenly Mason stopped.

"Let's phone for all the Hedley kids. They'd catch the dog!" he suggested, a firm intention to make no further efforts himself written large on his strong face.

"Wouldn't that be nice!" Olive exclaimed, with suspicious enthusiasm. "While they were catching the dog, their papa could be trying to catch the mistress."

"Great guns! You don't mean that Arthur Hedley, with that houseful of youngsters, has the nerve to try—"

"You never can tell what a man will do!" Olive observed irritatingly.

She might have added the same about a dog. Snip circled toward the door into the hall. Another revolution would bring him, spattering probably, at the rate he was going, against the frame. Olive darted toward him. Snip escaped the frame by an inch and waltzed into the hall. Olive started after; but suddenly the unexpectedness of man was demonstrated. Mason Armstrong secured her firmly in the circle of his arms.

"Olive! I want to say something!" he announced, dazed, as he realized that he actually held her in his arms.

"Let me go!"

"No."

She glanced up at him, then stopped struggling. With a self-repression which she did not appreciate, he made his clasp merely one of retention, keeping himself from presuming upon the

circumstance which was so fraught with possibilities.

"I love you, Olive. I have never loved—"

"Oh, they all say that!" the girl exclaimed with that exasperating levity by which a girl cheapens a moment which, to the man, is sacredly serious and important.

A girl never knows why she interpolates some superficial observation at the moment of a man's highest exaltation; but Nature, forever shaping means to her own end, knows. The irritant invariably joggles the man down from inactive and devotional aspiration to practical acquisition.

Armstrong closed his deferential clasp. It became the possessive pressure of the physically dominant man. He pressed his lips against the waves of her hair, bending her head back till her startled eyes and trembling mouth were open to the resistless approach of his craving lips.

Then Olive's deaf Aunt Millie walked into the interesting group. Snip had "tailed" gaily into her room, gripped her skirt with his small white teeth, and dragged her cheerfully to where she was neither needed nor desired.

The interesting group dissolved. It fell into its component parts before the old lady's astonished gaze, the feminine element displaying an inexcusable tendency to laugh at the awkward and embarrassed masculine element.

"Olive, I'll see you again—later!" Mason growled, with the normal man's hatred of being caught in a romantic situation he loves if undetected.

"When do you go back to the city?" Olive asked, with an irrepressible smile.

"Monday morning, unless something happens to take me sooner," Mason replied grimly and suggestively, wondering, as every man living has at one time or another, how a woman can have the face to act comfortable when circumstances are so purgatorial.

"I'll see you at church," Olive said.

"When?" he asked eagerly.

"We're still having it on Sunday here," Olive replied, with her eyes sparkling. "Have they changed it in the city?"

Crimson with impatience and embarrassment, Armstrong scuffled by Aunt Millie with a half-hearted handshake that had a queer effect on Olive.

"He is a kind of a coward!" she thought. "Big men just assume that they produce the impression of courage, and then fail to actually make good at meeting and mastering small occasions. They are always letting awkward pauses happen in the talk. They never know how to smooth over things. They embarrass a girl, and then leave her to wriggle out alone."

Armstrong called twice in the interval between Wednesday and Sunday. Olive was engaged once and out once. At the engaged time he heard gales of laughter coming from the living-room.

Snip, excited by a sudden move on the part of Mr. Purch, began to "tail." No wonder! Any small dog might get excited when a swift hand swept him from his mistress's lap and deposited him gently but positively out of the way on the floor. Mr. Purch acted excited, too.

"Why — how — how — extraordinary! Is he having a fit?" Mr. Purch asked fearfully.

Olive laughed—at Snip. She no longer feared battered brains; and she laughed with her ripe young lips and her bright, clear eyes, while deep gasps for breath made her round breast rise and fall.

But Purch was uneasy. Nothing could spring about like that and not develop hydrophobia. He looked his anxiety; and Olive looked at him.

"He hasn't any sense of humor!" she said to herself, forgetting the attention with which she had just listened to his well-selected words descriptive of her perfect equipment for the lofty calling of a minister's wife.

Snip had merely interrupted the minister's proposal. Then four Hed-

ley children, followed by their well-groomed, well-set-up and sell-off father burst into the room.

Tots, the little one, flew to Olive.

"We wants to take Snip fuh a wide!" he announced.

"An' father wants you to go, too!" Dimples added.

Olive looked quickly at the widower to see if the frankness of his offspring disconcerted him. But he smiled at her as if he silently seconded the invitation.

Mr. Purch was uncomfortable, and showed it. Olive made a quick, womanish comparison of the two men; and the big, calm, self-possessed, if somewhat self-satisfied banker, reached that chord in her which vibrates to the appeal of power in men.

Olive remembered Armstrong's awkward discomfort when her aunt caught him making love. She approved of the adequacy to dominate any occasion which she thought she read in the banker's manner.

"I'll be glad to go," she said, smiling down into Tot's upturned face.

"Snip?" the four chorused as if their lives depended upon the presence of the black-and-tan.

"Yes, Snip, too," Olive consented.

A whoop burst forth.

Snip began to celebrate the joyful occasion that the Hedley throats proclaimed by tailing all around the room. The minister stumbled over him, then found him right under his feet at every step he took trying wildly to recover his balance. Hedley and his tribe laughed uproariously.

Olive came back just in time to see the minister grasp the front door-knob desperately, while the whole crowd of children, with one little dog so mixed among them that he looked like a half-dozen, yelled wildly at Mr. Purch's discomfiture.

Olive's blue eyes flashed. She looked to see if Mr. Hedley was allowing the persecution of the minister by his small vandals.

He was standing before the fireplace, intent upon lighting a cigar, apparently entirely unmoved by the misbehavior of his offspring.

He looked up as she entered. A long fur coat, new and luxurious, covered her completely, and a veil the blue of her eyes was wrapped about her fur hat. The banker's eyes lit with approval.

"You are ready?" he asked.

The question had a peculiar significance. It was the first time that the quiet attentions of the banker had taken visible form. Her going out in his car had a little the nature of a declaration of intentions.

Olive nodded.

Seated in the tonneau with the children and Snip, she enjoyed the curiosity she was exciting. Not knowing that she had pulled the heavy blue veil over her face, nor guessing that she wore a cloak new to the eyes that gazed, Hedley was bowing with gracious urbanity to acquaintances, confidently believing that the lovely face of the girl on whom his choice rested was plainly visible to the passers-by.

Olive understood his maneuver when he emptied his family out at his own imposing house and climbed into the tonneau with her.

"Miss Olive," he said, as the car sped on again, "I'm not going to beat about the bush. I'm going to ask you to marry me. And I'm going to take advantage of the appeal that my motherless children make to a woman like you to help me win you."

His frankness had something engaging about it. His eyes burned as they sought hers. The beauty of her face, the fresh, fine vigor of her mind and body, fired his desire and satisfied his pride.

"What do you say?" he urged.

"I don't—I can't say anything—yet," she answered.

The car rolled up to her door.

"Of course. It's a serious matter; but will you let me know the moment you have decided?" the banker asked.

Olive nodded as she took Snip under her arm and entered the house.

Sunday morning, Olive, wearing the new fur coat, entered the small but stately edifice in which the Episcopal congregation did its dignified devotions, with Mr. Purch as shepherd of the fold. Mr. Hedley was just before her at the head of his flock.

She never entered the church unnoted; but this morning several who had seen the new fur coat in Mr. Hedley's machine thrilled with interest as they recognized her as its wearer.

Hedley's seat was in front of hers. She fell to studying the back of his neck. Many men have asked women for which of their charms they have loved them; but probably no woman has been honest enough to acknowledge the attraction of a clean-shaven, healthily colored, strongly set neck.

It is an index to masculine character which tells them more than an imaginative fortune-teller could. Perhaps Hedley's was too heavy a trifle. It might have bulging fat beneath the ears some day; but it was strong in its lines now.

Then the rector, Purch, with his inspired eyes and somewhat insignificant physique, interrupted her meditations. In the black and white of his robes, he was such a figure of a man as might lure the dreams of a girl as romantic at least as she was red-blooded into a vision of usefulness in association devotion to the church he served. Mason Armstrong had taken an unnoticed place in the rear pew.

Then the service began; and Snip entered the church—late. Armstrong grinned appreciatively as he trotted by in a businesslike search for the young mistress who had carefully shut him in the house when she left. He and the dog had apparently come for the same reason.

Snip missed seeing his mistress and trotted up by the Hedley pew. Olive missed seeing him.

But the Hedleys saw and welcomed. Silently the older ones looked at him; but Tots, undeterred by conventions, shouted "Snip!"

The unmistakable welcome went to Snip's legs. He began to tail. The Hedleys — the little ones — with one wild accord leaped up in the seat. Olive leaned forward and beheld her dog.

She saw the smiles that rippled over the faces of the congregation at the familiarity Mr. Hedley's children showed with his name. Snip was no trapesing cur. Naturally, the Hedley youngsters could only have met him at home, where their widowed father must have taken them to visit, with a view to insinuating them into the good graces of the dog's charming mistress.

It was an illuminating situation. Snip seemed bent upon giving new sidelights.

He tailed toward the chancel. Mr. Purch saw him coming. He was keenly sensitive to anything that detracted from the solemnity of his service. His inspired eyes fixed in unmitigated terror on the revolving dog. He knew that nothing short of seizure by force stopped the circuitous performance. He heard the Hedleys giggling. His morning service would be turned into a farce if he did not rise to the occasion—or, rather, descend to the dog.

"Snip! Snip!" called the minister softly.

A smile suffused the congregation. The widower and the pale young priest were both on speaking terms with Miss Brice's dog. Glances of understanding flashed from face to face.

Olive caught some of them as they passed. She turned rosy all over.

Her eyes suddenly fixed on Mr. Hedley's back. He was laughing, literally shaking with laughter, instead of curbing his children. Her lips drew together.

If Snip labored under the delusion that he had lost his tail, and had gone chasing it, Mr. Purch should have been perfectly certain that he had lost his head. No one in the congregation doubted it. He stepped out in the encumbering dignity of his robes and made a grab at the dog. Snip slid under his hand with the ease of a practised

acrobat. Mr. Purch flushed redder, and then turned white. His reason departed utterly.

"Will the owner of this dog please remove it?" he said tensely.

If Mr. Hedley's laughter had vexed Olive, Mr. Purch's order enraged her. She turned as white as he.

But the young minister had gone too far to recede. The memory of himself stumbling over the front of his gown, grabbing at the dog and missing, forced him to redeem his dignity by an uncompromising front.

Meanwhile, the proverbial mule had an able imitator in Olive. She sat as still as stone.

It was a crucial moment. Hedley, not unwilling to let the preacher meet his Waterloo, remained, complacent and enjoying, in his seat. Snip waltzed till he was dizzy in front of the font, then reversed and gamboled around the lecturn.

Purch was adamant. If Snip had revolved on his boot-tips, he would not have moved.

The situation assumed the importance of a deadlock. The girl in the seat and the man in the chancel were fighting it out.

Mason Armstrong was silently applauding Olive's attitude. The preacher should have picked up the dog, emptied him into the vestry-room, and resumed his ordained activities. His making so much of the ludicrous situation and trying to force the girl to help him out of the dilemma enraged Mason.

Then he saw Olive rise as if she meant to yield. He sprang up and ran out of the church.

Olive, with contempt curling her red lips, had made up her mind that it was her dog, and the easiest way to end the absurd scene was to catch him.

The congregation had entered one of those hysterical hiatuses which are most virulent in their effect when the odor of sanctity permeates the atmosphere and they all know they ought to behave better—so they act worse!

Some were aghast. Some were horrified; but the majority—just normal Episcopalians—took the situation with relish and a broad gleam of humor cutting through their cloak of propriety.

Olive stepped forward slowly.

Suddenly the side door was flung open. Mason Armstrong, large, self-contained in the unusual rôle of dog-catcher, walked toward the chancel and picked up Snip, who submitted because of that mystic bond between them.

Olive paused. She began to see the humor in the episode; but the look in her eyes as she gazed at Armstrong shone with a luster brighter than laughter. It was a cheap little scene perhaps, but it took a big man to act largely under trivial circumstances. Armstrong was doing it!

Armstrong offered his arm to Olive. She took it; and they walked out of church together.

Curiously enough, the banker no longer laughed; and the rector ceased to care what a mess he made of the service.

Armstrong and Olive met again in the church—later. But not Snip! He was shut in a shirt-waist box at home. A man may be equal to every other situation in the world and yet fail to grasp the wedding-ring firmly in his trembling fingers if something distracts his already distracted wits. And a whirling dervish of a dog *is* distracting when the wedding is your own!

CAVALIER LEGION

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CAVALIER LEGION

STOLEN WATER

A SHORT STORY

BY JENNIE HARRIS OLIVER

I.

"I SUPPOSED you had too much pride," protested Eastman cleverly, "to be jealous of one of your pupils. It's as I tell you, Lois—that country is a regular hades, and will be until the drought is broken. Frail as you are, the heat would wilt you down inside of a week. I'm trying to get loose for that reason, as well as others that I haven't said anything about. We've been engaged three years, and this is the first time you have questioned my honesty. Try and be sensible, girl, and next spring when I ship my cattle—"

"I'm not hearing a word you say, Jim!"

The speaker's thin little hand, clutching the door behind her, tightened to steady her trembling body, and her dark eyes, bright with unshed tears, turned to the catalpa grove beyond the schoolhouse, where a tall, handsome girl saddled her pony with a slap and creak of leather.

"I gave you the benefit of the doubt," she went on hotly, "until this morning when Rella herself told me the truth. You and she have corresponded ever since you were here in the winter. You have exchanged photographs and presents—"

"I only sent her postcards," contended Eastman, "and souvenirs—beadwork, and the like."

"But you have held me to a stricter conception of what was honorable. To please you I gave up my last boy correspondent—a classmate who was like a brother. No, Jim, you just can't be honest with either of us; but I know it is Rella Darst you want. Now take your ring and ride on with her. You should have saddled her pony, only it seems you have forgotten how to be straightforward about anything. Go, now—I *mean* it!"

The girl removed a band ring from her left hand and held it out. "Here it is," she urged. "Don't be a coward!"

"But I don't want it, Lois. You're so hot-headed you won't let me—"

"Waste any more words—no. If you haven't the strength to break a snarled thread, I have. There!"

She leaned to the well near the door and dropped the ring down the curbing.

It fell with a loud tinkle that caught the listening ear of dark, red-lipped Rella as she circled her pony close to the step and leaned for her strap of books.

Seventeen was Rella—vain, coquettish, and—there was no question in her mind—now that the ring had left Lois Hernden's hand—she had captured teacher's handsome "beau."

Her full lips curved into an amiable smile as she drawled good-by and left the pair facing their wrecked engagement. Of course Eastman would join her before she had reached the osage hedges, where they could loiter in the shadow and come to a better understanding. There had not been much satisfaction in letters.

Rella bit her lips into a more subtle

crimson and rode slowly on, listening for the clap of hoofs behind her; but Eastman did not hurry—he had forgotten her for the time, so uncomfortable had Lois Hernden's candor made him. It was his way to blend out of a difficulty—not to snap the thread short like this.

"You hate me, don't you, girl?" he asked miserably after the lithe form had swayed out between the catalpa branches. "You think I'm a cur?"

At his weak appeal Lois's lips curved into a marring smile. "Life is too short to hate—anybody," she told him wearily. "Jim, I wish you'd go away!"

Eastman leaned down, quite white. "You don't mind—this once?"

The girl lifted shrinking lips.

"Not particularly; but I'm very tired. Last days leave me limp and dead. Good-by."

For a time the girl stood where Eastman left her—leaning back heavily—a little thing very forlorn in her abandonment.

Her black skirt smudged by the clutch of small hands sagged from her slender hips; her white shirt-waist, pulled awry by the abandon of last embraces, emphasized her frailness.

All color had ebbed from her, save in her hair — soft, fine, abundant — glinting brown meshes, now blowsed about her delicate temples and cheeks.

As she lifted a cold hand to push back the wayward locks, she thought of Rella's hair—vigorous, waving, black as a rook's wing above the richness of burning cheek and lip.

"*Rella!*" — the name made her wince. This girl—the pupil with whom she had been the most painstaking—had started a flirtation with Eastman the winter before when he had come up for the holidays.

She had scarcely noticed at first, so full were her days and so thoroughly did she trust the man she loved; but all through the tedium of a summer term she had been tortured by pinpricks of warning.

Well, the uncertainty was over. Everything was over, even her youth; for in that humdrum corner of the earth a girl early won the title of "old maid." She was adrift. Twenty-four, and nothing to look forward to!

She flushed miserably, remembering with what satisfaction she had smuggled to school, piece by piece, her wedding finery. That morning she had brought the last thing, not expecting to return to her grudging shelter. By this time she was to have been Mrs. James Eastman.

Shaken into activity by a vivid recurrence of it all—of the humiliating moment when Eastman had suggested postponing the ceremony—Lois drew back from the door and opened the stove.

A few coals from the morning fire smoldered there, and gathering an armload of letters from her desk, she crammed them in upon the embers and watched the ragged edge of an envelope kindle into flame.

Her wedding garments followed, and her "keepsakes"—last the locket that hung by its slender chain in the hollow of her delicate neck; and while the flames leaped hungrily, shaking the stove with fierce gusts, she walked away and turned her back, clenching her hands tight.

Before her, between two of the shuttered windows, was a big United States map now emblazoned by the low, red sun. When the roaring had quite ceased, the girl's hands relaxed, and one of them sought the sun-reddened surface, tracing slowly down the flatness of the sunflower country, southwest across desert wastes to Arizona and the plateau with the bungalow that was to have been her home, nestled on its emerald bosom.

She knew from Eastman every kink of the favored place of the gods. He had been fortunate in striking at once an abundant vein of water—a mountain current, never-failing. It was, so he said, the shadiest and greenest spot in Arizona; so it had been a pretext—

his concern about her health—a plan to bring about their final estrangement.

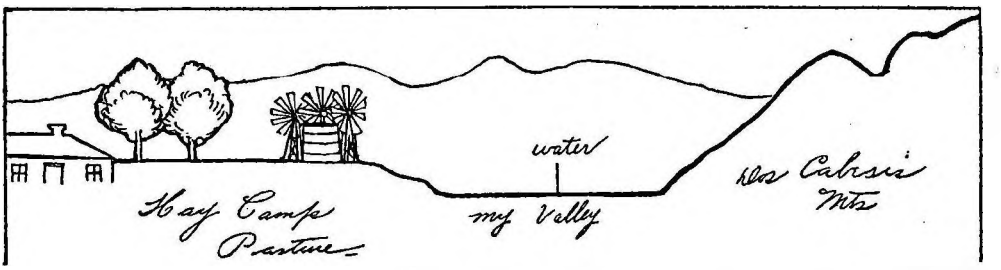
And how she had come to love the country that was to have been hers! How familiar was the gorgeous going and coming of the sun; the glory of the low-hung stars; the clear, dry, sun-enraptured distances; the mountains, holding purple shadows in their bosoms!

Could she not live there? She would like to show him how well she could live. And why not? She had, in her five years' service, saved as many hundred dollars. There would be other schools to teach. Girls may homestead as well as men. Why not?

The sun dropped to the edge of the map, and Lois, following her new thread of hope, turned to her desk and gave the messenger time to unfold. It was quite dusk before she knew what she would do.

She had been very still, one hand cupping her pretty chin, the other expressing the new chapter of her life in a rude diagram — a picture absurdly out of proportion, but eloquent in its simple details.

After she had closed the door behind her and turned into the path leading across-field to the station, the early moon, poking a silver finger between the shutters, examined quite brazenly outlines like these:



II.

It was old Juana's belief that the drillers were hoaxing the homesteader girl. Not that it was to be wondered at—they had known in the beginning exactly how many dollars' worth they might drill.

Of course they would drill and drill until the three hundred dollars was gone, and fall back until they had received a new offer. Already they had started the third probing finger downward. It would be like the other two. Old *Juana* knew!

Juana was a delightful mystery to Lois Hernden. On returning from a day's teaching up Box Cañon, she had found the old woman hunched on a bench by the door, calmly stringing beads.

"Ah, Chiquita, you come," she had greeted the tired girl, in dialect as distinctive as her looks. "I have put on the bean-pot."

By "Chiquita" Lois understood her to refer to her diminutive size. The beans—there was a bag of frijoles behind the door, thrust upon the new homesteader girl by a rancher who was sure she could cook them, if she tried.

Lois looked at old Juana with her darkness of Indian, Spanish, or some strange blood, picturesque in clay-brown garments and black rebosa; then she tasted the contents of the bean-pot and rejoiced.

To ride in at the end of a hot, tiresome day and find a caldron of such sweetness simmering on the hearth; to eat and eat—a big spoon in one hand and a lump of brown bread in the other—was indeed a comfort. The girl knew no one else could cook such beans!

Later she closely questioned Juana, and could see her browning the lump of juicy beef in crispy fat with little onions, red and white peppers, and a sprinkle of strange herbs; could see her dump in the parboiled beans, and

smell them simmer into the clear, delectable richness that nothing else could equal.

In the following months she witnessed the adding of bushels of beans, gallons of water, pounds of beef, and dozens of peppers; but it was the same pot of beans, grown more delectable with time.

After the girl could eat no more, she sat on the bench outside, watching Juana work beads into purses. This bench was by the door of her temporary hut, on the mountain-side of her valley.

Here one could look across at the blossomy splendor of Hay Camp, as Eastman practically dubbed his oasis, and catch the outline of the big reservoir spilling water over its mossy side —a limpid lake guarded by three gray windmills.

One could feel the shadow of the plumy trees and the swish of the velvet turf. One could, in that clear air, almost count the occupants of the pasture nosing knee-deep in clover.

Eastman had made many attempts to see his new neighbor, but she had desperately avoided him. Losing hope, he crossed the valley on a legitimate errand, and came face to face with her, homing at the close of the day.

After the first swift survey, the man had whitened and drawn rein, but Lois rode on in apparent serenity, brown hair glinting under her turned-up sombrero—a gallant little defender of the desert. As a matter of fact, she was trembling and seeing strange hazes against the shimmer of the sun-kissed valley.

It was in her to ask him to observe how well the climate became her, how firm and lithe she had become; if even Rella, whom she doubted not was waiting for him back at the bungalow among the trees, bore better the furnace-heat; but coming eye to eye the impulse skulked away, and she rode dumbly on.

Old Juana noted her pallor as she came in from staking Pinto by the spring, and as she uncovered the bean-pot and got out a big spoon, she opened conversation on the one never-failing subject—the well-driller men. All the murderous threats that the old woman knew she poured forth upon the lagging heads of the workmen and the monotonous hum of their engine as it vibrated across the flatness of the desert.

Lois tried to smile as she removed her gauntlets and began a languid attack on the beans.

"And I thought before this the morning-glories would be blossoming over a brand-new porch," she finally said. "If this keeps up we'll not have much left to put in our ditches. I had no idea the water would be such a proposition."

Juana frowned until her eyes looked like two little black pools in a walnut meat. "You listen to old Juana," she wheedled, "and to the voice of the water-witch. Fool *hombre*—they try not to find it!"

She rummaged under the pillow of her cot and brought out a dingy bundle which she unwrapped, disclosing a forked stick of greasewood, dark with handling; sleek with the clutch of water-seeker and miner. She thrust it into the girl's hand lying by the idle spoon.

"Take it, Chiquita. It hears the voice of the underground river, crying out in the darkness. Trust it and it will give you the message!"

The appeal was well-timed. Drought still burned upon the land. Every day Lois considered more hopelessly the sacks of grain that awaited the surety of water.

Without water there is little for the desert homesteader—even an ambitious young person, with an old brown guardian who can curtail expenses by cooking delectable beans. But her sudden meeting with Eastman marked her first surrender to the blues.

It was the eternal feminine going out to rest on the judgment of the master man. So long as she did not

see him she was strong. Now she was conscious of her unwisdom in pitching her camp where their paths were likely at any time to cross.

Old Juana, being wise, understood. Closing the girl's yielding fingers over the greasewood stick, she led the way out into the desert; and Lois followed mechanically, holding the wand by its two prongs, the handle pointing up.

The handle, Juana assured her, would flip down the minute it heard the voice of the water. And Juana *knew*—for half-way across the sun-baked homestead the water-witch shifted forcibly in the small hands that gripped it. Then the old woman stood still and cackled quaintly. "How you like it, Chiquita *mia?*"

Lois sank the wand into the earth and straightened, looking curiously about her. It was like the diagram she had made back in the dusk of the school-room. To eastward lay Hay Camp, plainly defined beneath the whiteness of the risen moon. To westward were the black heads of the Dos Cabeses, circling around to meet the snow-crowned Grahams on the north, and melting into the arid reaches southward.

"It is very good," she smiled indulgently. "Let us go now and have it out with the well-driller men."

III.

To influence the drillers was not easy, but Lois had her way. For an extra consideration the engine chuffed its way up the valley till it met the greasewood stick.

Down, down went the probing finger one hundred feet, two hundred; and then one night, working in the coolness, a crack like that of doom shook the desert, and a world-old flood came up to meet the light.

Listening on the bench by the door, Lois and old Juana witnessed it—a column of spurting water like smoke, wavering skyward against the full silver moon.

"Ah, ha!" exulted Juana, "did I not tell you we would be big water people! Chiquita *mia,* for what you cry?"

The valley smiled! Millions upon millions of seeds from the four winds swelled to bursting wherever Lois's ditches, criss-crossing it, sent out submoisture or distilled mist; and in proportion as the valley luxuriated Hay Camp grew sickly and brown.

Every one else knew what had happened before it came to the girl's understanding.

Pondering over the gradual searing of the plateau paradise, Lois went as close as the line fence that divided it from her hundred and sixty, and there found that even the moss on the big reservoir and the many troughs at the ends of the rust-red pipes was crisped as by fire; that a white-faced calf, lank and wabbly, nosed between the wires of the fence and eyed a lush bunch of grass just beyond its reach.

It was as if a magic door had opened to receive the glory of the once-lovely oasis, and closed, leaving behind it an old dry husk.

Lois spoke of it to Juana, and the old woman wagged her head.

"Water," she said, "is sensible; it takes the shortest way home. Did I not tell you the water-witch knew?"

"Do you mean," Lois demanded, "that we have stolen the water supply of Hay Camp?"

Again Juana wagged her head.

"Jim Eastman is driving his cattle over to Deep Fork twice a day," she told Lois. "It is his month of shipment, and now he must spend the time in keeping them alive. By and by he will be hauling them off to the cañons. The sun grows hotter and hotter. The medicine men no longer make medicine. *Hay Camp only was!*"

What Juana said was true. Such a thing as the cutting off of Eastman's water-supply had been prophesied by lesser men to whom he had dictated terms.

"Just let some fellow with a barrel

of money to experiment camp in the valley!" they threatened. "The water's under there, and when it is located Jim Eastman's a gone gosling!"

The remarkable thing was that the phenomenon should come by way of a homesteader girl and a water-witch!

After this conversation Lois crossed the valley and looked thoughtfully over the high wire fence. The ground was crisped, smiting cruelly the noses of the animals browsing over its barrens.

Hides that had once been glossy were now lumped and shrunken. The white-faced calf still eyed lush bunches of grass with a strained brightness of its beautiful eyes. The girl pulled armloads of green and poked them between the wires; then she leaned her face on her folded arms and the present fled away. She was back between the Osage hedges, smuggling her wedding-dress to school.

It had been a foolish gown, sheer white embroidered with graceful, delicate tracery. It had cost a summer's eye-strain and all her solitary hours. That very morning the woman to whom her brother, now dead, surrendered the peace of ten long years had complained of Eastman's slowness.

"You'll be an old maid yet," she prophesied, with a knowing toss of her head. "I was married and had two children before I was your age!"

Lois had smiled to herself, comfortingly. After the long day was over she and Jim would go over to the parsonage in the village, then she would write a line of good-by, signed "Lois Eastman." She could afford to smile over the insult.

When the girl's musings reached this point she lifted her white face from her arms, and, without looking behind, went straight back across the valley.

Old Juana, stringing beads by the door, looked up slyly, but only asked Lois whether in her opinion red or orange looked the better next to black. For some reason the girl's depression was not displeasing to the old brown keeper of the bean-pot.

But that night Lois did not sit with Juana on the bench by the door. She was stretched rigid on her cot in the stifling heat of the low 'dobe room, her palms held to her ears, muffling the dismal low of Eastman's suffering herds.

Now and then a sob shook her throat —when she remembered the plucky face of the coveter of lush bunches between the wires of the fence. How wide he was between his bright eyes; how perkily he held his ears. Not a discouraged line in his tottering body, and—he was starving!

The girl finally sat up, clenching her hands tight, as was her way of bearing misery. So had she shut her fingers upon the audible destruction of her wedding finery.

Five minutes later old Juana, dozing on the bench, lifted one corner of the rebosa that shut in the dreams of the old.

Lois had come out of the door with the heavy wire-cutters they had used in fencing the new vegetable and flower garden. When she had blended into the mystery of the cloud-ridden night, old Juana slipped back her scarf and studied the heavens.

"One week of clouds," she muttered, "and the snakes will go back to the mountains."

Then she straightened her active old body and followed the rapid footsteps of the girl.

On her knees Lois tugged at the wires of Eastman's fence, bruising herself cruelly each time a barrier fell apart. If she realized her danger at that moment she did not care, so intent was she upon the thing she should have, in mercy, done before.

"You poor things!" she sobbed, watching the first staggering entrance into her paradise. And when she found the plucky, white-faced calf, lifted it through, and started its plunging journey down the slope.

Nosing along the fence night after night; smelling water and lush vegeta-

tion, the cattle realized—as mortals sometimes feel good news—what had happened; and from the stampède that followed the girl fled for her life, running along the fence toward a front exit.

Her dress was torn from contact with the barbed wire; her hair came loose and swept, a confusing web, across her face.

It was Eastman himself who found her and swung her bodily over the fence into his grounds. Before he had spoken, Lois knew.

She freed herself, staggering, and put out a hand to keep him back.

"Don't touch me again!" she cried, very low. "I didn't do it for you. It was for a poor little wabbly calf!"

She paused, choking, and into the silence thrilled the contented low of cattle browsing in the valley. The man spoke huskily.

"One thing I must tell you, Lois. I didn't mean you to know; but since you have done—this thing—" He hesitated, choosing his words. "Of course it was for the little animal you did it; but, Lois, I sent old Juana to you. I sent you the greasewood stick."

"And ruined yourself!" gasped the girl. "Why?"

"One thing—I knew this would happen some time. It has been threatened me often. That is why I spoke of getting loose from this country. But you came and—I just couldn't go."

"And you deliberately put into my hands the key to your destruction!"

"Yes, since it had to be, I wanted the one benefited to be you. I just hadn't counted on it so soon, that is all."

"I should think you would have considered what was best for—her—Rella!"

"Why should I consider another man's wife? Rella is married to a rich fellow over in Texas Cañon. He took the correspondence off my hands as soon as I got back. You see, dear, I never really made love to her, and that's a fact. I don't know what did make me act the fool that way; but I'm certainly punished for it. Practically ruined. Despised by the only girl in the world—who would do more for a starving animal—"

"I don't despise you. I—"

Eastman groped and gently captured a little scratched hand.

"You—*what?*"

"If I had pride—" The tired girl swayed forward, and her free hand crept up to Eastman's neck. "I can't have proper pride," she sighed brokenly.

Old Juana, who, despite her terror of cattle, had in some way managed to get across the valley, peered across in the dimness to where two dark shadows blended into one, then she wagged her head and stole quietly away.

"There'll be another mouth to feed now," she muttered, with a puckery grin. "Juana must get home and put over some more beans!"

REALITY

By Wanda May

THROUGH misty eyes I view the long dead years,
And was it I, beyond that veil of tears,
Who walked serene or wept in throbbing pain,
Who knew the depths and yet the heights attained?
Nay, 'tis some romance from fantastic pen
That wakens mem'ry's echoes now and then;
So dim the past—it all seems vague, untrue,
The only real thing in life's dream is you.

ONE MODERN KNIGHT

A SHORT STORY

BY HELEN A. SPAFFORD

THE boy's name was David Pennock, and there was nothing noticeable about his appearance except his sturdy, country-bred frame and the fidelity to be seen in his wide, soft, brown eyes, with a broad sweep of forehead above them.

As he was a quiet, reticent boy, and few are close observers, even these characteristic marks were never mentioned. Indeed, those who carelessly alluded to him usually commented on the unruly thickness of his nondescript hair—which he despised in youth and would be grateful for in age—and on his freckles, with which he was well supplied.

David sat at the far side of the boarding-house table when the landlady ushered the girl in to take a hurriedly indicated place. Mrs. Rolfs muttered her name to some one as she passed to the regions in the back where no boarder ever penetrated.

"Royce," the boy said softly. Later, he learned her name was Lois Hepburn Royce; now she seated herself opposite David's place in a pretty flurry of interest.

Her place was beside Oliver Kennerly, and from the first the boy hated to have her near Kennerly.

Nearly everybody at the table stopped eating long enough to take a prolonged stare at Lois Royce's pretty face; Kennerly's stare was the longest and most impudent of any. But, if all stared, none but the country boy across the table analyzed the atmosphere the girl brought with her.

It was as if the windows of the dingy dining-room were opened on a clear, spring day to let in golden sunshine and show a sward of pure white blossoms without.

Even the women admitted the girl was absolutely fresh and unjaded. Her big, blue eyes took an eager interest in her surroundings, and nothing but unsophistication could have put the friendly regard in the glance she bestowed on all the diners at the table. When the boy caught a smile from her he answered it shyly.

Kennerly, with his black, oily hair brushed in a rounded sleek across his forehead, his full face massaged to a chalky whiteness that showed all the broken veins under his skin, dropped the puffy lids over his bold eyes to hide his relish in his proximity to Lois.

He addressed a few remarks to a neighbor before he casually passed her the salt. She smiled so gratefully as she accepted it, he was encouraged to continue.

"Your first visit to Mrs. Rolfs's?" Oliver Kennerly inquired cordially.

"Yes," she answered, very pleased to talk. "But I am to stay," she confided to Kennerly, whose eyes drank in every line of her young freshness.

"Going to stay," he repeated. "With mother, I suppose, to do the theaters and so forth." He was plainly curious.

"With mother," she echoed in amusement and entire candor. "Why, mother has never been beyond the county town in all her life. Mother just revolves around Hillbro. Hill-

bro's where I come from. I am a stenographer, and I have a new place to go to in the morning. Judge Stokes got it for me."

She beamed the information on Oliver Kennerly, who listened with avid interest.

"There will be some theaters, too, I hope," she said wistfully, and gave a little sigh. "That's the advantage of a big city, is it not? So many places to go. I'll tell you a secret," she said, "and you may tell any one you want." She lowered her voice to a whisper. "Hillbro was dull," and she laughed a gay, girlish laugh that made all around her smile in sympathy.

Oliver Kennerly was now on familiar ground, and grew eloquent. He absorbed the girl's attention with tales of theaters and amusements, while David Pennock watched moodily and longed to think of some appropriate remark to address to her across the table.

Soon every one in the boarding-house knew all there was to know of pretty Lois Royce, and she frankly told it all. The faces of the workers and the derelicts the cheap boarding-house sheltered brightened when she entered the dining-room, and unconsciously they absorbed some of her innocent delight in everything that was new to her. Even crabbed, old Mr. Peters, who worked behind the blanket-counter at White's, began to inquire for her father and mother when the pretty country girl received a letter.

Every one wanted to know about the various cakes and pickles her mother made, and she promised to bring jam and preserves to all when she returned from a visit to her home.

David Pennock always listened eagerly to her. From a town some miles west of Hillbro, he knew just the atmosphere of the latter. When she described Judge Stokes's law-office, where she had worked as stenographer, and had so much spare time to read the Sunday papers with their gay descriptions of city life, the boy could see the big, sunny room that was over the drug-store opposite the common. No, mother did not mind her coming to the city. She wanted more money, and she wanted a change; and she wanted to see things in a big city. Mother said the city was only a big Hillbro, after all. She gave a perfect description of the usual parental uncomprehension of anything beyond its own environment.

When smooth-faced Oliver Kennerly, glove-buyer at Phipp's emporium, and with better clothes and more money than any other man in the boarding-house, first asked her to what he called "a show," she bubbled with delight.

The women looked enviously at Lois, and the men looked at Kennerly for his motive. On his suave features there was no other expression than a genial good-will. No one searched further; in a big city one's business is one's own until the dénouement.

The news made David Pennock grow red with jealousy and indignation. He had not forgotten a night when he had seen Kennerly swagger from his office-door. Behind a side wall a woman had waited, and David saw her hurry to Kennerly's side. He saw the man's start of recognition and annoyance, and the woman's face, with big, despairing eyes. She pleaded and clutched Kennerly's arm. He shook her off as he would a fawning dog and rushed to leap on a moving car. The boy choked over a glass of water as Lois exulted in the pleasure of seeing a noted actress.

It took David two weeks to gain courage to speak to her. Lois's room was across the hall from his, and he waited at the top of the stair for her one night.

"Say," David began boyishly, "I come from near your place, you know."

"From where?" She wheeled around delighted.

"From Redmond." He was as happy as she to have found a common interest. And he knew the Crocketts and the Reads. The Reads, it transpired, were his cousins.

"What do you do down here?" she asked of David.

A relative had a shoe-factory, and he was learning the business. The possibilities of the shoe business grew enormous, as he told her all about it, and they said good night quite like old friends.

After her first outing with Kennerly his invitations were frequent, and Lois made no secret of them, nor of where she was going, nor of where she had been. Once, sometimes twice a week, she went to theaters or concerts with Oliver Kennerly. He began to assume an air of proprietorship over the girl that was galling to David.

Then David Pennock began to do a singular thing; he began to sit up at night until Lois returned from these excursions with Oliver Kennerly. He would read until weary, and then sit in the darkness with his door ajar until he heard the opening click of the front door and the girl's light step down the hall. When she softly closed her door he closed his more softly still, and gave a sigh of relief.

Each time Lois returned from these outings a little later and, half-asleep with boyish exhaustion, David always awaited her return. He saw the women look queerly at her when she mentioned her trips as volubly as ever; the men, he saw, fixed their gaze on their plates.

David chafed at his inability to change the situation. His meager salary only sufficed for his board and a few extras. He knew things would be better for him soon; that his relative was only trying his mettle. However, the uncomfortable condition existed; he could not afford to provide amusement for Lois. But it was the late part of June and the boarders sat out of doors, and this gave him an opportunity to see Lois more frequently.

Once, he walked with her to a gilded palace, where, with other couples, they ate ice-cream and looked in each other's eyes. Not much to offer against the other man's entertaining; yet she was pleased and grateful. The boy was too young to reason that all the pretty, young thing needed was a healthy, youthful society with all its varied interests.

One night the clock in the hall struck three and Lois had not returned with Kennerly. The boy had begun to pace his room when he heard her slip down the hall. In a fury he tore his necktie and collar from his neck and threw them on the floor. He made up his mind to warn her.

There was no one else to take an interest in her, he told himself as he drew her toward the cheerless parlor in the morning. There he found himself smiling into her happy face and looking at the brown curls that tumbled on her forehead. She did not wait for him to begin.

"Such a delightful time as I had last night." Her eyes were reminiscent. "Mr. Kennerly had me meet some friends of his and we went to supper. I am going to write mother a long letter about it. Mother loves me to have a good time." Her honest, blue eyes met his fearlessly.

"That was nice." He actually commended her. He felt baffled and despised his doubting before her innocence.

For the next two days David saw that Lois was very busy planning for some event. In the evenings she flew back and forth from Miss Engel's room on the top floor with ribbons and lace and spools of thread, and the boy found no opportunity to speak to her in the midst of this preparing.

It was evident to all in the house—for now it was time for their neighbor's business to be their own—that Oliver Kennerly was obsessed by the young girl's beauty. He watched her incessantly at the table, and fairly gloated over each fresh appearance she

made, prettier than ever with a piece of lace or a new bow at her neck.

The excitement put a brighter light in her eyes, a deeper color in her cheeks; but she talked less. Evidently Kennerly had given her some hint as to the inadvisability of telling all their plans. However, she was too frank and unconscious of evil to keep altogether still.

Some one heard she was going to a picnic; and then David heard it. She hurried from the supper-table to prepare for this excursion. From his room David saw Lois go out to meet the waiting man in a flower-sprigged muslin, looking like a flower herself. The boy peered jealously through his door and saw each detail of her appearance. Without premeditation David jumped from his door to the dresser to grab his hat and jam it on his head and to start after Lois.

Afterward, when he thought over his amazing conduct, he knew he obeyed an indefinable impulse. Only one thought was in his mind—what and where was this picnic that Kennerly told her not to talk about. David got out of the door as Lois and Oliver Kennerly passed up the street.

The man hailed a car on the corner and with Lois boarded it. David dashed madly down the street, caught the car with a flying leap, and took a seat in the rear. They had not seen him.

Where were they going? David asked himself. The car went through the city's streets, more and more couples entered, and then it slid out in the suburbs. Through the suburbs in the growing dark; that was left behind in the open country, and David knew where they were going—"Belton's Park"!

A surge of indignation made him furious. Belton's Park—that rowdy place for her!

It was easy for David to avoid Lois and Kennerly among the crowds in the cheap, sordid surroundings of Belton's Park. From the trolley landing the road wound up a hill to a plateau, where there was a wide dance hall. One side had a wing for refreshments, one side the entrance, the other two sides all grove, with twinkling lights among the trees.

Through the trees at one end of the grove could be seen low-roofed buildings with varied amusements to catch the pennies. In the pavilion a good orchestra played swinging two-steps and languorous waltzes, and outside David kept watch over Lois as she danced.

It was an interminable evening to David. He had made up his mind to go home, but when he lost sight of Lois for a few moments the keenness of his anxiety made him know he could not leave. He must see the girl safe on a car for home.

When some performers danced on a stage at the end, and others sang, David watched them in boyish amusement. They finished, and without warning the band played "Home, Sweet Home." The merrymakers thronged to the entrance. David hurried down the hill, looking for Lois and Kennerly as he walked.

The boy pushed in and out in the groups on the car platform, and could not see Lois. He craned his neck to scan the women's hats; hers had a pink flower. He went close to the crowded cars, peering in, reckless of being seen by Kennerly. The girl was not in the waiting row of cars. A few couples came hurrying down the hill and his heart lightened with hope; they approached the waiting cars and entered. Lois and Oliver Kennerly were not with them.

The cars moved slowly from the platform; one more slowly that halted.

"Last car!" shouted the deep-voiced conductor.

The car filled and went out on the rail that shone a silver streak in the darkness. David remained on the empty platform, regardless of the curious glances cast on him.

David looked blankly up the hill to

the grove where the twinkling lights still burned; across the dark road was a tavern, down the shadowy road a few houses. He turned quickly to race up the hill to the pavilion.

He stared in the grove; over from a corner a couple moved leisurely toward him, and he stepped behind a tree where they must pass. If she needed him, he was there to aid her; if not, she need never know he had seen her.

As they came nearer, Oliver Kennerly was pointing to the stars and heavens in admiration. A sickening conviction came to David that the man was deliberately loitering.

"Why!" he heard Lois ejaculate in astonishment, "every one has gone. They are putting out the lights."

Oliver Kennerly stopped in surprise. David saw them look toward the empty station in amazement. A sleepy boy neared them who was putting out the lights.

"Where are the cars?" Kennerly asked the boy.

"All gone," said the boy. "Last one just left—no more to-night."

"Are you sure?" Kennerly again questioned the boy and turned to Lois as if perplexed.

"You can't get no car here after two o'clock," the boy repeated in delight at their plight.

Kennerly fumbled at a pocket, and anxiously scanned a time-table.

"The boy's right," he said; "we have missed the last car." His tone was smoothly regretful.

"Don't get nervous over it," he said to Lois. "Make the best of it. We can find some place to stay," and he pointed vaguely in the direction of the road.

"I will walk home," said Lois with a little catch in her voice.

"It is twenty miles," laughed Kennerly. "That is a hopeless idea. We will find some place to stay," he repeated.

"We must get home," the girl said again with a horrified stare in her pretty eyes.

The last light was out in the pavilion, and, grinning at their mishap, the sleepy boy took himself off. Then, in concert, the twinkling lights in the grove went out and left the place dark, dim, and lonely.

"We cannot get home," said Kennerly in a rough tone to Lois, "and we cannot stay here all night."

"You made me linger," Lois accused him suddenly. "I wanted to hurry, and you would not."

"Well, the thing's done, is it not?" asked the man. "You won't get home to-night, so let us find some shelter," and he took a forcible hold of Lois's arm.

"She *will* get home!" said David, and stepped from behind the tree. "I'll take her home, Kennerly, if you find it so difficult!"

"Oh, is it you?" Lois turned in quick relief to David. She did not seem surprised to have David come from behind a tree to aid her. The start was all Kennerly's; the look of ugly annoyance was all Kennerly's. It was reward enough for David to see relief on Lois's features when he came.

"We'll find a way home," said David, and stepped to the girl's side.

Kennerly recovered his suavity. He moved nearer to Lois. "We'll all find a way home," he said.

"Get out of this Kennerly," said the boy bluntly. "I—I happened to hear you a moment ago."

With one frightened look at Oliver Kennerly, Lois put her arm in David's. When they walked down the hill, Kennerly kept in the rear. On the way a straggler was making for the tavern, and David hailed him to find the next car was at half past four o'clock.

"We'll wait for it," David said gently to Lois. He took out his watch. "It's past two o'clock, and we've two hours to wait."

They waited on the gloomy station platform where there was one light in the center and the ends were caves of darkness. There was a dawning comprehension and fear in the girl's eyes

as she stared across the car rail, and David hated to see it there. Suddenly Lois turned to the boy and said what he had been thinking:

"I cannot go back to the boarding-house. It will be six o'clock when we reach there, and every one will be up. What will they think of me?"

"No, you cannot go back," he agreed with her. Gad! he would not let her go back to face that gamut of suspicious faces at the boarding-house. She watched him eagerly for a suggestion, and he looked at the floor to find it. When he raised his face he was exultant.

"I've got it! You must go back to your home in Hillbro. There is a morning train up our way at five-thirty, and the station is near the end of this car's route. You can easily make the train. I'll stay at the house until you will come back for your things. But don't you ever come back," begged the boy. "Your kind don't belong down here."

"I'll go," she agreed. "I'll go home," she repeated, and her face lost its strained look of fear.

"Don't you ever try it here again," he commanded her. "Haven't you had enough?" he asked her angrily.

"I have had enough. I will stay home," she promised him.

When the whistle of the car sounded in the distance, and Oliver Kennerly lounged over from the tavern, David took Lois's arm in his and advanced to meet him.

"Kennerly," said the boy with a little quaver in his voice, "Miss Royce is going to her home in Hillbro this morning. But—you tell them at the house she went there last night. She received a telegram as she left the house with you and had to leave at once. I—I saw her get the telegram. If you should meet any one as you enter the boarding-house — why, you went out early to get a newspaper.

"It's one story, Kennerly," added the boy quickly. "You tell that or I'll tell the other." Kennerly turned surlily away, but his curt nod meant acquiescence.

They took the long ride to the station in silence, and there David found time to buy her ticket and to badger a drowsy girl at the lunch-counter to wrap some doughnuts and a sandwich in a package for Lois. Always, he watched the girl with adoring eyes.

A kindly guard let him through the gate to see her depart, and they passed through the long lines of empty cars together. It was a dreary, desolate exit for the girl who had entered the city so blithely.

She went slowly up the train steps and turned. The boy had nothing to hand her but the package with the sandwich and the doughnuts; he bared his head as he did so, and stood like a courtier before a queen.

"Say," he asked her diffidently, "when I come up home for my vacation I'd like to come over to see you. It is not far; may I come?"

"Yes," she said in a still, soft voice; "that is—if you care to see me."

"Care to," he laughed happily. "Didn't you know that all I cared for was just to speak to you sometimes?"

The train groaned, and jerked, and moved slowly on; David had to move to keep up with it. Lois held to the railing with one hand and lowered the other.

"Oh, you are good—*good!*" she whispered, turned swiftly, and went in the car.

David stumbled away in a dream of happiness and hastened on; he was oblivious that he knocked over a valise and blocked a rush of incoming passengers.

His thick hair was disheveled, and his thin suit was creased in multiple places from the damp, night air. His steady, faithful eyes were alight over his wealth of tawny freckles as he hurried and hurried on to be with Oliver Kennerly at the early breakfast at the boarding-house.

Blaze a motto on his escutcheon — for he was a gallant knight!

THE STORY

A SHORT STORY

BY FRANK CONDON

WE were sitting around the big, shining table in the famous billiard-room off Broadway. Scores of men were clicking ivory balls within hearing, and Lyon, the man who writes, was talking about something or other. There sat at the table, beside Lyon, Chick Miller, the general advertising man; Bill Miller, the street-car advertising man; Frank Walton, the composer, and the transmitter of this mystery.

"I'll tell you a story," said Lyon, without preface. "You can write it or not. It comes straight from a diamond salesman."

"Go ahead," rejoined the crowd in a critical tone.

"This diamond salesman," Lyon continued, "was brought up with Gibboney's. You know Gibboney's. Every diamond ring in the world tries to pretend that it once came from Gibboney's.

"Well, this boy — mind you, his name is Ellis, told me the story himself, having witnessed it with his own eyes. On a sunny afternoon a motor-car drives up to the front door and out steps a dignified woman of great wealth, judging from her appearance. She was perhaps fifty, faultlessly gowned in black silk, and looked like thirty thousand dollars in yellow money. Young Ellis adjusted his silk cravat and prepared to wait upon her.

"Her demands were simple. She wanted to select a diamond or two, and Ellis brought forth a tray of velvet containing a dozen or more sparklers. Not a stone in the tray was worth less than a thousand, but the dowager duchess looked them over somewhat haughtily and pronounced it as her opinion that they were a somewhat inferior cluster of gems. Young Ellis explained to the empress that one would have to walk a long walk before coming upon better gems; but there was nothing doing.

"With a sigh of disappointment he prepared to put the tray back in the case, and, in doing so, he noticed that one of the diamonds was missing. Believing that his eyes had deceived him, he gave the gem-tray a quick recount and proved it. He looked at the dowager, who was calmly putting on her gloves.

"Ellis wriggled his left ear, which is the house signal summoning the head detective, and in a few moments a conference began which included young Ellis, the detective, and the strange lady in black silk.

"Ellis explained the circumstances briefly, being withered meanwhile by the glances of the outraged queen. There were eighteen expensive and unset diamonds in the tray before the lady pawed them over, and at the conclusion of her examination there were seventeen.

"Therefore, it followed that she must have been perniciously active. The strange lady called young Ellis a low person and froze him into a state of speechlessness; but it is somewhat difficult to freeze a head detective at Gibboney's. This latter person, who was of Irish descent, and whose jaw protruded some distance, decided that the society leader must be searched, and, without further formalities, she was led away to the ladies' searching department, where a couple of expert

female feelers went through her from Alpha to Zed, exploring herself and her garments to such a fulsome extent that one blushes to write it down.

"In an hour the lady searchers opened the door and announced to the officials that if the lady had a diamond about her it must be buried in her heart. Three or four head bookkeepers had spent the searching hour looking over Gibboney's books, and had found out that the missing diamond was No. 66789, valued at fourteen hundred dollars, and resembling in size a small chestnut.

"There was nothing to do but release the strange lady in black silk. Gibboney Company sent down-town to a detective agency for a man. Detective Ratty listened gravely, and finally gave orders.

"He explained that no person should be permitted to enter the aisle upon which the case of jewels was located. He ordered that scrubwomen, floor-walkers, customers, and salesmen be kept away from the particular section of the store from which the fourteen hundred dollars' worth of unset diamond had disappeared, and the Gibboney Company gladly followed his instruction, feeling mightily unhappy, but seeing a ray of hope in the mysterious air of the detective and his strange commands.

"For three days nothing happened. Detective Ratty stood guard, in company with the head store-detective. On the third day a dapper young man in a light-blue suit, wearing gray spats and carrying a white cane, pushed open the swinging door and entered. He walked straight down the forbidden aisle and paused to converse with young Ellis.

"Five minutes later Detective Ratty walked up to the newcomer, placed his hand on his shoulder, and arrested him. The stranger was instantly searched, and immediately the expensive diamond was found!

"Now," said Lyon, pausing and casting a triumphant glance upon the group of cynical listeners, "how did the detective know that this strange young man had the diamond? Of course, the detective knew where the diamond was; but, in order to make the arrest legally and to get the thief with the diamond on his person, the arrest had to be made just that way. But how did he know?"

All of the crowd, except Chick Miller, looked mystified and inquiring. During the latter part of Lyon's sketchy recital Chick Miller had picked up an evening newspaper and had scribbled upon the margin two words in pencil writing. He tore off the bit of margin and handed it to Frank Walton, who read it uncomprehendingly.

"You don't know, so it's a story," Lyon went on, after a slight pause. "The woman in the black silk lifted the diamond, rolled it up in a piece of gum she had been chewing, and stuck it under the jewelry-case. The young man had come to retrieve the piece of gum and its valuable kernel. Is that a story or not?"

Frank Walton held up the piece of paper on which Chick Miller had scribbled.

"Chewing-gum," he read.

"Certainly," Chick Miller said. "I knew the answer when you got halfway through the story. The point is, I read that same thing a long time ago, and to prove it I wrote down the answer and handed it to Frank Walton."

"But this man Ellis told me that it happened to him," Lyon argued.

"And I tell you I read it somewhere," Chick Miller answered. "There was an article somewhere telling about the various smooth tricks swindlers use to cop the coin. That was one of them."

"Well," Lyon replied, "if you read it somewhere, I suppose it isn't a story."

"No," I put in, studying the whole thing out carefully, "it isn't a story if I don't write it. If I do write it—well, you never can tell."