

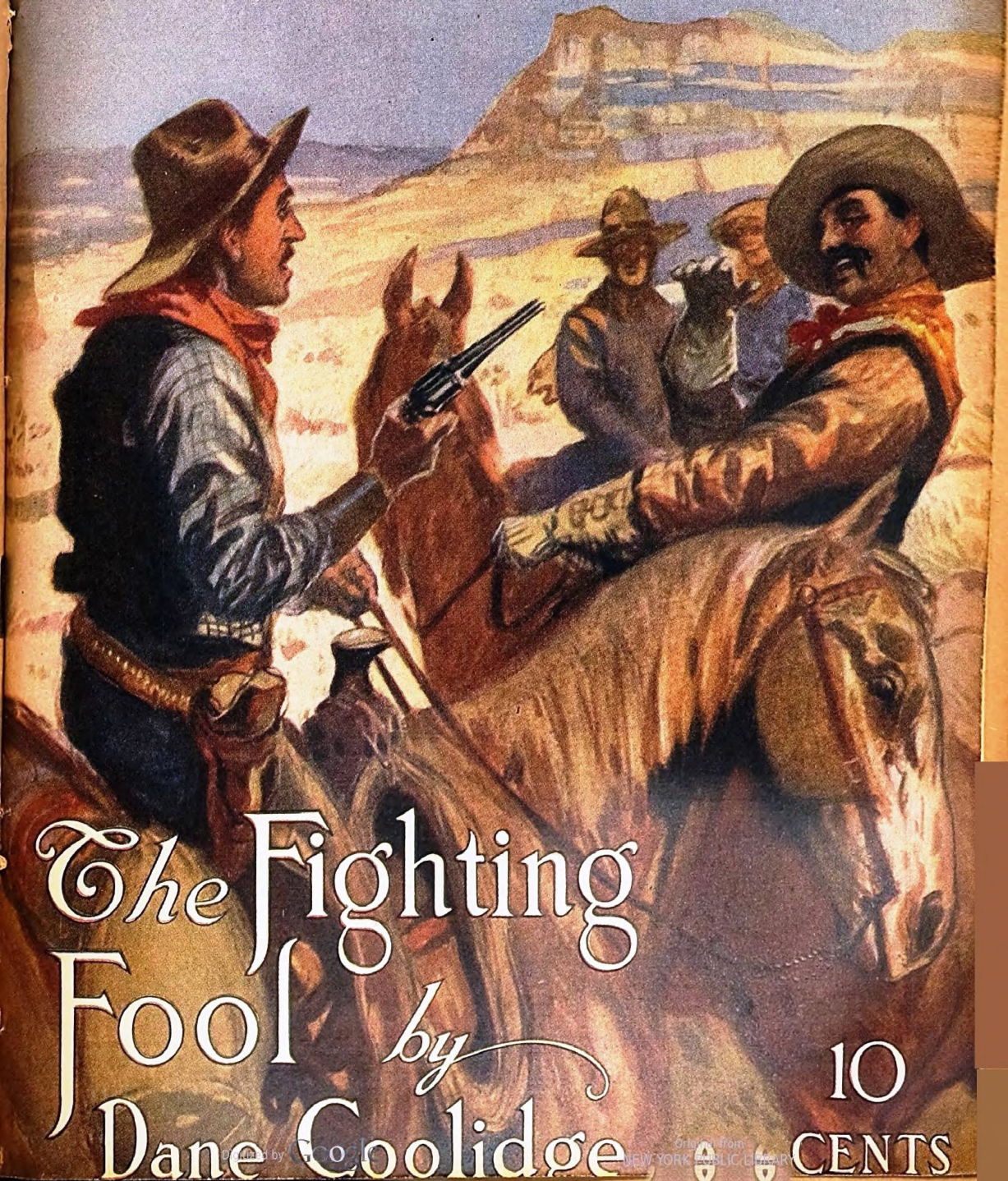
SATURDAY

THE

MARCH 1

# CAVALIER

ISSUED WEEKLY



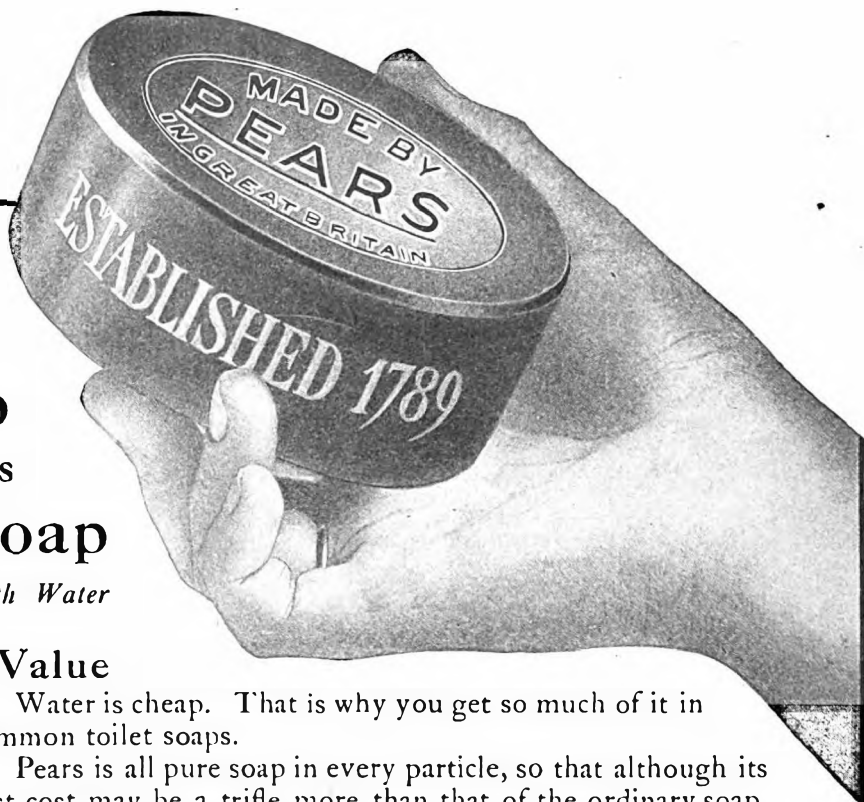
*The Fighting  
Fool* *by*  
Dane Coolidge

10

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# THE CAVALIER

Vol. XXVI

CONTENTS FOR MARCH 15

No. 3

## FOUR SERIAL STORIES

- The Fighting Fool. Part I . . . . . Dane Coolidge . . . . . 385 X  
Of one who rushed in where angels feared to tread.
- The Purchase. Part II . . . . . E. J. Rath . . . . . 412 X  
A strong story of straight love and crooked politics.
- Miss "X." Part III . . . . . Watkin Beal . . . . . 431 X  
Who became entangled in a web of circumstance.
- One Wonderful Night. Part V . . . . . Louis Tracy . . . . . 450 X  
The midnight madness which molded a real man and woman.

## ONE NOVELETTE

- The Official Introducer . . . . . Mary Rider Mechtold . . . . . 476 X

## EIGHT SHORT STORIES

- A Hill Man . . . . . Maria Chipman Topping . . . . . 514 ✓
- The Devil's Doll. . . . . Mary Germaine . . . . . 522 ✓
- Skipper Keelson's Cowboy . . . . . D. A. Wasson . . . . . 533 ✓
- His Chosen Field . . . . . John Barton Oxford . . . . . 539 ✓
- The Crimson Ladder . . . . . Jennie Harris Oliver . . . . . 545 X
- Soul Salvé . . . . . Martina Gardner Owen . . . . . 556 ✓
- From the Silence . . . . . Harriet Lummis Smith . . . . . 563 ✓
- Turner "Up!" . . . . . Henry Edward Warner . . . . . 570 ✓

## POETRY

- Woman . . . . Elizabeth Clarke Hardy 411 | The World's Mirror . . . . Betty A. Beall 562
- To the Egotist . . . . Strickland Gillilan 544 | Protest . . . . Gladys Hall 569

- Heart to Heart Talks . . . . . The Editor . . . . . 552

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# THE CAVALIER

MARCH 15, 1913

Vol. XXVI

No. 3

## THE FIGHTING FOOL

A SERIAL IN V PARTS—PART I

BY DANE COOLIDGE

Author of "Hidden Water," "The Texican,"

### CHAPTER I.

#### The Calling of Sycamore Brown.

**I**T wasn't the Fourth of July in Hackamore—and no one was getting killed, either—but the prairie-dogs out along the edge of the town, who were gun-shy, had already taken to their holes, and several prominent citizens had done the same. Farther out on the flats the dogs were sitting up on their mounds in families, jerking their tails and chirruping; within the city the houses were closed; and up and down the main street a band of twenty or thirty cowboys rode and rollicked, casting their ropes at everything that moved and shooting off their pistols,

It was the wild and woolly G Bar outfit in on a drunk; and, like a flock of ducks that rise for flight, they circled back and forth, wearing themselves out with meaningless maneuvers until such time as their leaders should feel the call and lead them back to the ranch.

At the head of the bunch rode G Bar Hopkins, as reckless a border Texan as ever branded a freighter's ox-team or swam wet horses across the Rio Grande. G Bar was a good hand with cattle, and caught lots of mavericks for the boss; but he had one limitation, common to his kind—he hated the sight of a Mexican worse than a hydrophobia skunk. Not that a Mex. was not all right, in his place; but that place, according to G Bar, was up on a wood-wagon or swamping around some corral—assuredly not on the saloon corner with a big badge labeled "Town Marshal."

G Bar and his punchers had spent many a pay-check in Hackamore, spent it gladly, and never asked for change; and if in their cups they had happened to go too far they had always been arrested by an officer who was a Texan and a gentleman—a man to whom any cowboy might give up his gun with good grace.

But now what had this prairie-dog village done but elect a Mexican town marshal? A Mexican! And it a cow-

town, dependent upon the good-will of Lone Star punchers!

This thought rankled deep in G Bar Hopkins's breast and would not down with drink; he could not leave the town until he had registered his protest. So he rioted up and down the street, whooping and shooting and making a show, and at last he pulled up before Garcia's store, where the recreant marshal was supposed to be hid, and gave voice to his proud defiance.

"Come out of thar, you saddle-colored ossifer!" he shouted, as his clan wheeled in at his back. "Come out and arrest us, you chili-con-carne greaser! We done heerd you was elected and we want to see you act! You're scairt, hey?" He turned to his gang and laughed hectoringly.

"Bill, you low-down Teehanno cow-thief," he yelled, "I'll dare you to go in thar and git 'im!"

"I'll go you!" shouted three cow-boys named Bill, and the rest, not to be kept back by the mere accident of a name, responded to the general call for cow-thieves. The result was a wilful, malicious, and felonious invasion of private property, in which two or three dozen silk shirts and handkerchiefs were taken from the stock of E. Garcia y Cia. and ordered charged to the account of Juan Bustamente, the same being the Mexican marshal, who had important business elsewhere; and the peace and dignity of the Territory of Arizona was, in fact, by these strenuous acts, all shot to pieces.

In a community that numbered a lawyer or two among its population, this dereliction might have ended in bench-warrants and scurrying deputies, but the only jack-lawyer in town was holding down the office of judge, and the citizens of Hackamore were mad clear through. The minute the G Bar boys galloped out across the plain they swarmed out of their houses like ants from a trampled nest, some dragging ropes and all bearing arms, and at sight of the devastation the cry went

up for revenge—revenge and a cow-boy hanging.

This was not the first time that lawlessness had whirled through Hackamore. The new marshal, who had been elected through some oversight on the part of the gentlemen who counted the Mexican vote, had been on the dodge ever since his induction into office, and now the G Bar cow-boys were getting rampant. It was evident, even to Mr. McMonagle, of the Cow Ranch Saloon, that something would have to be done; and while E. Garcia, who, by a liberal dispensation of mescal, had elected his brother-in-law marshal, pulled down bolt after bolt of calico and showed the bullet-holes to sympathetic citizens, the vigilance committee went into executive session on the spot.

"These G Bar boys *are* getting a little rough," conceded McMonagle, who had sold them most of their liquor. "That fellow Hopkins is a wild one."

"A wild one!" repeated Garcia, raising his elbows and eyebrows. "I guess *so*—look at *dat*! Forty yards in thees bolte, gentlemen—at twenty centes a yard—and luke at dat hole clear t'rough!"

"Oh, what do we care about your straw-colored calico!" broke out an indignant citizen. "Why didn't you call in that brother-in-law of yours and have them boys arrested?"

"Arrested!" shrieked Garcia, throwing up his hands. "Arrested! Them Texanos? Eef he—"

"Well, if he can't hold down the office, let 'im git out!" broke in the citizen again, and his words roused a chorus of approval.

"Sure," thundered J. F. Benson, the principal American merchant, "and be quick about it, too! What are we paying him for, anyway?"

"I move we abolish the office," chimed in the indignant citizen, whose pet dog had been roped and "drug." "and clean up this town ourselves! Them G Bar boys is worse than Apache

Injuns—it's gittin' so a man ain't safe to walk the streets."

"Nor a woman, neither!" added another. "My wife was coming out the gate and—"

"They busted three winders for me!" interpolated a third, and a babel of clamoring voices showed the damage to be universal.

"But this here breaking into stores is what gets me," rumbled Benson, speaking loud for the crowd to hear. "First thing we know, boys, we'll be nothing but a wide place in the road. We won't have no town—it'll be all tore up or burned down by these here Texas cowboys. Now, you all know me—I'm a law-abiding citizen; but, judge, I think we ought to abolish this job of constable and town marshal and tend to Hopkins ourselves. What do you think about it?"

It was a momentous question, and, while the gentleman addressed as judge did not know it, the peace of half of Arizona was waiting on his words. Old Judge Purdy was a weak, cadaverous little man with sunken black eyes and wiry whiskers, which he stroked when he studied the law. There was mighty little law in his few dusty books—and little of that he knew—but respect for authority had struck in through the calf-skin bindings, and he made the wrong guess for Arizona. Also for Sycamore Brown, the fighting fool.

"Well—ahem—gentlemen," he began, "of course, while I deprecate the lawless acts which have prevailed, and—ahem—well, it seems to me that the machinery of our law is not at fault so much as—well—"

"That's it!" broke in McMonagle, the saloonkeeper, who had seen his profits in the jackpot—"that's the idee! Git a gunman on the job and let him do the work! These cowboys spend their money free, gentlemen, as you all know; and not only at my place, but with you all. They're good-hearted boys—we don't want to do nothin' hasty—just a good town marshal to

tame them down a little, and you wouldn't know the bunch!"

"Well, somebody's got to take their guns away from 'em," announced J. F. Benson, "and enforce this ordinance about riding through the streets! Do you know a man that can do it?—because if you do, he can have the job!"

"What's the matter with Buckskin Bill?" queried McMonagle eagerly.

"He's worse than any of 'em when he's drunk."

"Well—Sim McDougall, then."

"No good; he's a cowboy himself; he wouldn't stand up to 'em for a minute. No, sir," continued Benson, beginning his oration, "this is a job for the whole town; we take the law into our own hands, gentlemen, and—"

"Lum Martin!" shouted McMonagle, waving his finger in front of Benson's face—that's the man—Lum Martin! He's ridin' shotgun for Wells Fargo—or was until last week—and he's over in my saloon right now, playin' solitaire!"

"He killed a man over in El Paso last year," interposed E. Garcia hastily.

"It was only a Mexican!" retorted McMonagle ruthlessly. "What do you say, Jim?"

"That Lum Martin is a dumb kind of a feller," observed Benson, squinting his eyes up shrewdly. "We want to look out who we get for this place—or we may wish we had the wild bunch back on our hands. That's why I say we ought to tend to this ourselves and—"

"But Lum's all right," protested the saloonkeeper; "ain't he guarded treasure for Wells Fargo? What do you want, then? Now listen to me, Jim Benson! I know cowboys—I been one myself for years—and if you rise up and lynch G Bar Hopkins, or make some such ranikaboo play, they ain't a puncher in the Cimarron Valley that will come here for so much as a drink—no, by Joe, not if he was snake-bit! But if Hopkins should happen to come into town and git into a racket with the town marshal—well, you see your-

self there won't be no hard feeling, and—"

"Well, bring Lum down here, then," ordered Benson, whose political authority had never been questioned in Hackamore yet; "there's a majority of the town council present! Bring 'im down and we'll see what he has to say!"

So it came that Lum Martin, express messenger, border deputy, and gun-fighter, was summoned before the council, and he listened till they had all finished before he said a word. He was a tall, hulking man, close-eyed and silent, and those who knew him best said that his dark skin was from a strain of Indian blood.

As each man began to speak he glanced up at him, and the rest of the time he looked at the ground; but when they all sat waiting for his answer he wet his lips and seemed to want for words.

"What's the matter, Lum?" urged McMonagle. "Ain't the pay enough? You ain't scairt, are ye?"

The piercing black eyes leaped up and met his for a moment, and then Lum Martin spoke.

"I might have to kill some of them boys," he said, and a nervous thrill passed over the crowd.

But J. F. Benson was game.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said. "That's what you're hired for—only don't go and pick a row. But we'll stand by you, all right!"

The quick eyes of the fighting man sought out his again—it took the place of words—and then they fell to the ground. Something else was on his mind. Impatiently they sat and waited for him as he plotted out his task, and at last he looked up again.

"Well?" demanded McMonagle.

"I got to have a lookout," he said—"some outside man. I'll go you if you'll give me Syc Brown."

Sycamore was far to the west, watching the sun go down over the desert and peaceful Papagueria, but with those words his destiny was

changed—the wires summoned him, and he came, to be the outfightiest fool in Arizona.

## CHAPTER II.

### The War with Texas.

IT was a cold, windy morning in March when Sycamore Brown rode over the high Dragoon divide and looked down into the broad valley of the Cimarron. Behind him and far to the west lay the limitless desert of Papagueria, a land of heat and sand and hidden water, green with the flamboyant tops of creosote-bushes and forested by full-bodied giant-cactus, but unpeopled by the drought—Papagueria, the home of Indians and Mexicans and big families by the name of Brown.

Before him in this land from whence the cold wind came there was nothing much but bunch-grass and soap-weeds and prairie-dogs, creeping about on the flats; but the light of a great adventure was in his eyes, and he rode down into it joyously. No longer would they need to call him Sycamore Brown to differentiate him from his clan—the malefactors of Hackamore would spread his name in a circle, and his front name would be just plain Mister.

A cheerful grin mantled Sycamore's sunburnt face as he dwelt upon these dreams, and every time a prairie-dog sat up and barked at him he pulled his gun and shot. There was something startling and sinister about that whip-like movement, the flash of the gleaming weapon, and the *pop-pop* of the shots; but it was a game often practised by idle riders in Arizona at that time. The first great wave of the Texan invasion had thrown the southeast into a turmoil, and in the struggle of the old settlers to hold the range it was often left to old Judge Colt to decide which man was right.

At Dragoon summit, where the prairie-dogs had reached their farthest west, the sons of wind-swept Texas

had halted, too—and all to the west of that was old-time Arizona. There the native cowboys still rode single-cinch saddles, as their fathers and the early Spaniards had done before them. Their spurs were the spurs of the *conquistadores*—heavy-roweled and clanking with chains; their bits the same barbarous combination of curb and spade and wheels; their *chapparajos* were leathern trousers, with strings and conchos, and their ropes *reatas* of plaited rawhide, held free in the left hand until the steer was noosed and then wrapped around the horn in a Mexican turn or *dalavuelta*.

In such a school had Sycamore Brown learned his calling, riding a center-fire saddle, and taking his "dally" at every throw; but now he was in the land of the Texanos, the wild horsemen of Texas, who hung two "girts" to their saddles and tied their short-grass ropes to the pommel.

More than once he had thrown it into some wandering Texan about his rigging, and he knew his welcome would be a rough one in return, but trouble was what he was looking for, and he had never seen the "Teehanno" yet that looked real bad to him. With his leg across old Round Valley and his wooden-handled Colt in his chaps, he would take his chances with the best of them, and take them as fast as they came.

Fights and brawls had had their full part in his life, but until he had met Lum Martin and learned the part of a shotgun messenger, Sycamore had never dreamed of fighting for pay. With him it was a pleasure in itself—a wild delirium, fiercer than the joy of getting drunk; and when he got Lum's telegram, with the prospect of another shotgun job, he had quit without drawing his pay, and ridden until it was dark. On this, the second day, his ecstasy had subsided and he was riding easier; but when in the shimmering distance he made out the mirage of Hackamore he leaned forward and shook Round Valley into a lope.

Always before him stretched the railroad that binds the two oceans together and makes the thirsty desert safe; but as he rode down, down toward the gleam of water and the bed of the dry alkali lake, quivering patches of white rose up before him, with crazy mirage-trees waving above them—the whitewashed walls of adobe houses, with windmills towering beyond—and that was Hackamore.

At intervals great clouds of dust would whirl in upon him from the southeast, blinding him with their sand and fury; and again long, lazy whirlwinds would trail down from mountain-passes to the west and wander aimlessly out across the plain; but there was one cloud of dust to the south that never dwindled, and as it fell in behind him Sycamore saw that it rose from a group of horsemen, galloping furiously toward the town.

Soon he could make out their hats and ponies, and his keen eye told him that they were Texas cowboys. They came up behind him rapidly, slowed down, and then rode by in the high rough trot that cow-punchers affect for show, rising on their long legs in the stirrups and spreading their elbows until they looked like a flock of sand-hill cranes just stretching their wings in flight.

"Look at them spurs," said one, in passing.

"And that rigging," added another, with biting scorn.

Then a tall, hawk-eyed man who wore a high-crowned hat, a pair of chaps like a blacksmith's apron, and two pearl-handled pistols in his belt, pulled up short before the stranger and looked him in the eye.

"Hello thar, Dally," he cried; "whar'd you steal that hawse?"

"Huh?" inquired Sycamore, looking him over in return.

"Whar'd you steal that hawse? I said," repeated the tall Texan, and if he was jesting he masked it all too well. Only the boisterous comments of his companions as they scrutinized

his mount conveyed to Sycamore the general intention to make a show out of him, and instantly his pride was roused to match them, gibe for gibe.

"I stole him back in Texas," he answered, "like the rest of you!"

A grim smile crept over his rugged features as he launched this barbed jest, and it evidently touched a sore spot with the Texans, for their faces came suddenly straight.

"What's that?" demanded the hawk-nosed leader, pulling the glove from his pistol-hand—"what's that you say?"

"I say I stole him back in Texas," answered Sycamore stoutly, "like the rest of you gentlemen."

He edged his horse out of the road as he spoke, putting them all to the right of him, and he also stripped the glove from his hand. This was a strong play to make, and it evidently served the purpose, for the talk switched back suddenly to derisive personalities.

"Yes, like hell you did!" responded the Texan, smiling scornfully at the thought; "you've never been within a thousand miles of Texas, you box-headed, center-fire stiff. What're you doin' over here in a white man's country—d'ye reckon yuh can git a job with that outfit? Lawzy, lawzy, jest look at that catgut rope! Looks to me like you done robbed some pore widow-woman of her clothes-line and run away to be a cowboy!"

A chorus of hectoring laughter rose at this sally, and, finding himself at a loss for a ready answer, Sycamore reached suddenly for his six-shooter.

"Don't you worry none about my rope," he snarled, and, with the same whiplike motion that he had used to surprise the prairie-dogs, he jerked out his gun and covered them as they wheeled to face him.

"Come on, you smart-aleck, rim-fire Texicans, you!" he shouted. "You can't run it over me none, I don't care how many you are! Come on!" he yelled, as they motioned and

muttered among themselves. "Come on, if you're huntin' for trouble! I'll take you all on at once!"

"Aw, you talk too much!" retorted their leader scornfully. "We got no time to monkey with a little squirt like you, nohow! Come on, fellers, let 'im go to hell! We got a *man* on our hands!"

He whirled his horse as he spoke, and, as a cloud of dust enveloped them, they tipped their broad hats to meet the blast, and galloped on toward town.

"Huh!" grunted Sycamore, putting up his gun, and though he had been talking with G Bar Hopkins and his gang, his opinion of the fighting qualities of Texas cowboys went down to stay. A man can never be too careful, however, especially when he is off his range, and when, upon riding into town, he saw their horses standing in front of the Cow Ranch Saloon, Sycamore passed it by without stopping for a drink.

Even to Sycamore Brown's frontier eyes, which were educated to regard any house with a pitch roof and a front porch as palatial, the city where he was to get his start did not meet with favor. From a distance it looked too much like a freight-wreck, strewn along the railroad-track, and a closer view did not entirely obliterate the impression. There were wide gaps and holes between the houses, and absence of gardens and trees, and a rear view gave the idea that the burg had sprung up during a strong wind.

In this the residents were not altogether at fault, as it takes a strong windmill to hold its own in those parts; but the principal cause of all this devastation was G Bar Hopkins. What the wind could not tip over, two cowboys and a rope could, and there is no doubt that Hackamore needed a new town marshal.

There was only one man in Hackamore that knew the stranger, and he was not the kind to show it; but everybody looked Sycamore over furtively

as he jogged by on his dust-covered horse. The dally man was not very much to look at—just young and sandy and eager, with a bristling red mustache and a forward thrust of the head, but he carried himself like a fighting-cock, and the citizens knew that pose.

At the corner by the hotel he met his prospective superior, and grinned impersonally, but Martin gave him a forbidding glance, and he continued to the Lone Star Corral. There he turned Round Valley over to a roustabout, with orders to rub him down and stuff him full of hay, and returned to meet old Lum.

No feeling of resentment or concern came over him at the cold reception he had received. Lum Martin was a silent man, full of subterranean thoughts and worries; the only way to get along with him was to take orders and not talk too much. If there was any talking to do, Lum would do it; otherwise he wanted to chew tobacco and look at the ground.

For three months they had convoyed treasure together from the Gold King Mine, and Sycamore had pleased him well. From a rattle-headed cowboy, always singing songs and making jokes, he had changed under Lum's tuition to a quiet guard, watchful at all times and intent upon small things—old tracks in the road, the flight of birds, faint clouds of dust against the sky. That was a shotgun-messenger's job—never to go to sleep and never to show his hand—and if Lum didn't want to recognize him in public there was some good reason therefor. So Sycamore walked back along the plank sidewalk to meet him privately, and incidentally he took in the town.

Two big stores, a hotel, and a Chinese restaurant, four saloons and a dance-hall behind—these, with the shipping-pens and water-tanks, made up the greater part of Hackamore. An uneven plank walk, very deceiving to drunken men after dark, extended the full length of the street, which faced the railroad-track, and crosswise led

back through the sand to the family-men's residences behind.

Sycamore took it all in in passing; also a rear view of Lum Martin, disappearing significantly into an alley. Thither he followed, clanking his spurs as he walked, and Martin scowled, for the enemy was in town and he was nervous.

"Well," he said, fixing him with his eye, "you come, huh? Did you see that bunch down at the Cow Ranch?"

"Sure," responded Sycamore; "G Bar outfit."

"Well, them's the fellers—they've certainly been raising merry hell in this town! Had a Mexican marshal, and now they won't mind no kind. The citizens got together and was goin' to shoot a few of 'em; but that would hurt business, so they made me marshal. Do you get the idee?"

"Sure!" answered Sycamore; "but where do I come in?"

"I want you for a lookout—your job is deputy marshal. My orders is to disarm every man that comes to town and enforce this ordinance against ridin' through the streets. That means trouble, you understand, and I expect you to stand up to it. Now, how about it? You draw seventy-five a month."

"It's a go!" cried Sycamore with enthusiasm. "Is that little bunch down in the saloon all you got to handle?"

"No," said Martin, his voice going harsh as he spoke; "it's only seven of 'em—but G Bar Hopkins is there, and he's the leader."

"Is he a tall, ganglin' proposition, with a hook nose and eyes like holes in a blanket?" inquired Sycamore eagerly. "Then I know the dastard—I had a round-up with him and his bunch this mornin' and stood the whole outfit off with a six-shooter. Huh, he don't look bad to me!"

"You don't know him," observed Martin, and fell into one of his silences.

"What's that you say he said?" he snapped as Sycamore was giving the details of his encounter.

"He said," repeated Sycamore, with grievous emphasis, "'We can't stop to monkey with a little squirt like you—we got a man on our hands!' I'd like to show 'im!"

"Aha!" muttered Martin, turning over his cud of tobacco and spitting thoughtfully; "them fellers come in here to kill me, then. Well, that's all I want to know. You come along with me and I'll git you sworn in."

Ten minutes later Sycamore Brown emerged from Judge Purdy's office a full-fledged deputy, with a nickel star pinned to his left suspender, where he could flash it at a moment's notice. Lum Martin lingered for a few hasty words with the judge, and then they went down to the big store where J. F. Benson was to be found.

"Benson," said the marshal, when they had retired to his private office. "G Bar Hopkins and six of his punchers are down at the Cow Ranch, and I git it straight from Mr. Brown here that they come in to do me up. Now, the question is: What do you want done about it?"

"Mr. Martin," began J. F. Benson, speaking very slowly and impressively, as became the boss of the town, "the citizens of this town have engaged you to enforce the law. I don't want to make any suggestions to you whatever, *but*, in case you get into any trouble in the performance of your duty, J. F. Benson will stay with you till the hair slips."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Martin, and without further words he rose up to do his duty.

They went down the street together, the marshal and his deputy, but as they passed a convenient alley Lum Martin turned aside and looked at his guns. One was a heavy Colt .45, and hung low at his right side; the other was a light, long-barreled pistol, thrust inside the waistband of his trousers and ready for his left hand. These he

drew out, one after the other, and, after twirling the cylinders and testing the action, he filled the hammer-chambers, ordinarily left empty, with a couple of cartridges from his belt.

"Them fellers come into town to kill me," he said, casting one of his sudden glances at his deputy, "and I'm goin' to shoot it out with 'em right now. Either they give up their guns or we down 'em, I don't care which. That G Bar Hopkins is left-handed. You want to look out for him."

"All right," said Sycamore, overhauling his old Colt; "but say, Lum, that bunch don't look bad to me. I bet yuh I can clean the whole outfit!"

"Nope!" responded Lum; "them boys is dangerous. They've killed men back in Texas. G Bar has downed three that I know of."

"All the same," continued Sycamore, "I bet yuh a new hat I can do it. Now, you stay just outside and let me go in first, and I bet yuh I git the drop on 'em. That G Bar Hopkins feller insulted me this mornin', and I want to git my revenge."

For one tense moment Lum Martin gazed at his deputy, and then he laughed harshly, half to himself.

"Well, you *are* a fighting fool!" he said; "but go to it!"

"You jest watch me," answered Sycamore, shaking his gun loose in the holster, and without more words he walked briskly over to the Cow Ranch Saloon.

The Cow Ranch stood on a corner, with a side door opening out on the cross-street. A wide acquaintance with border saloons told the new deputy marshal that this door would probably put him in close to the bar, and, shutting his eyes for a moment to get the sunlight out of them, he cocked his pistol and stepped inside.

The entire G Bar outfit was lined up against the bar with their glasses before them, when they saw his image in the mirror. They turned, but quick as a flash Sycamore twitched out his ready pistol and had them covered.

"I'm the new deputy marshal," he announced, holding his gun by his hip. "Now, you fellows onbuckle your belts and drop 'em on the floor—and the first man that bats an eye I'll kill 'im!"

There was a ring of sincerity in his words that convinced them against their will, and one by one the belts fell to the floor. Only one man held out, his gun still at his side. It was G Bar Hopkins.

"I never give up my gun yet," he said, "and I never will."

"You'll give up your gun," answered Sycamore, "or I'll kill you!"

For a minute they stood glaring at each other, the Texan scowling and malignant, Sycamore frowning and resolute. Then G Bar unlatched his belt-buckle and his heavy guns fell to the floor.

"Now back away from there," ordered the deputy, and as the gang slouched reluctantly over toward the wall he advanced and stood straddle of their weapons.

"Next time you boys come to town you better leave your guns with the barkeep," he said, as he hung the heavy belts over his arm. "All right, Lum!"

The town marshal of Hackamore stepped in through the side door as he spoke and looked the G Bar outfit over quietly. There was still a bad glint to his eye, and his jaws were set tight—so tight he could hardly hear himself speak.

"You boys can come round to my office before you go," he said at last, "and git yore guns. You know the laws here—a man has to leave his gun with the barkeep within half an hour after he hits town—and no fast ridin' through the streets. Come on, Syc!"

Sycamore followed, and half an hour later the G Bar boys rode up to the marshal's office and asked for their guns. There was an ominous calm about their manner that spoke louder than any threats, but Sycamore delivered up their belts to them unhes-

itatingly and Martin stood by without a word. Not until they turned their horses to go did the G Bars show their hand. Then G Bar Hopkins looked over his shoulder and said:

"All right, Mr. Town Marshal—we'll be back!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### Passing of G Bar Hopkins.

A WEEK passed, dull and uneventful, and then the G Bars came back. There were thirty of them, and they traveled in a cloud of dust. War was painted on every visage, but Lum Martin did not weaken—he went down to the Cow Ranch alone, and saw that they put up their arms. Then he came away and left them to get drunk. Only one untoward event had happened to shake his iron nerve.

An old acquaintance among them, Joe Sykes by name, had stumbled up against him as he was going out and cursed him in the jovial, smiling way which is allowed to pass between friends on the frontier.

"Lum," he said—"you big, left-handed man-killer, I'm goin' to shoot you! Yes, sir, I'm goin' to shoot you before the sun goes down! They'll be a dead dog around here pretty soon!"

To this he had replied lightly, putting the matter off with a jest; but, as he waited for the trouble to break, Martin began to get uneasy.

"Syc," he said at last, turning to his faithful lieutenant, "go down and see what them fellers are doin'—and say, there's a little feller down there by the name of Joe Sykes that talks too much. Find out if he's got a gun on 'im."

"All right," answered Sycamore Brown, and, thrusting his pistol well down inside his waistband, where no drunken roisterer could grab it and turn it upon him, he sauntered off down the street. It was already well along into the afternoon, and the G Bar horses, still saddled as they had

come in, stood in dreary groups along the Cow Ranch horse-racks, waiting for their masters. From within came the noise of loud talking and boisterous laughter, and Sycamore paused a minute outside the swinging doors before he entered.

"Yes, sir," a voice was saying, "I cut the low card and I'm goin' to kill him! I'm goin' to shoot him before the sun goes down! Gimme another drink, Bill—or Charley. Come on, fellers; let's have another one." It was the voice of Joe Sykes, the man who talked too much.

Sycamore had noticed him earlier in the day—a small, grizzled man with a wild, excited look in his eye—and, though he drank continually, the liquor did not seem to affect him. Even yet he was perfectly sober, but the wild look was still in his eyes, and he talked incessantly about killing—killing.

Sycamore followed along behind him as the crowd trooped noisily up to the bar, and he noticed it the more because every other man in the outfit was half drunk. G Bar Hopkins himself was boisterous and unsteady on his feet; but his eye had lost none of its quickness, for the moment Sycamore stepped through the door he saw him. At the bar he drank with Joe Sykes, and they lingered there together, engaged in an earnest conversation, while the others went back to their games.

As the deputy marshal came up they watched him closely, and Sykes put one hand under his arm where a slight bulge suggested a gun in a harness.

"Hello there, Dally!" said Sykes, smiling insolently as he signaled for a bottle; "come up and have a drink before I kill you!"

"No, thanks," responded Sycamore distantly; "I'm not drinking to-day."

"Come on," urged G Bar with feigned solicitude; "have a drink with white folks."

"Nope!" answered Sycamore; "it's my treat if it's anybody's. You fellers better have a drink with a gentleman."

"Huh!" sneered G Bar; "you're gittin' swelled up some fer a Mexican. Whar's that Injun marshal you're a workin' for? Does he think he can run it over this whole G Bar outfit?"

"That's what," replied Sycamore. "How are they comin', McMonagle?"

The saloon-keeper, who was perspiring behind his bar, mumbled sulkily and went on with his work. To him it seemed very poor taste on the part of the deputy marshal to pull off this war-talk in front of his five-hundred-dollar mirror—and that with thirty G Bar pistols behind the bar—so after an awkward pause he set out two drinks for the cowboys, and Sycamore took the hint to depart.

"He said he was goin' to shoot me, did he?" inquired Lum Martin as his lookout made his report. "Huh, we'll see about that!" He sat looking at the ground for a minute, then he rose up and put on his coat. "Come on," he said, cloaking his pistols beneath it; "that feller's got a gun."

They entered the side door together, and, without a glance for any one, Lum Martin walked straight over to Sykes, who rose up to meet him, startled.

"You come out into the back yard, Joe," he said, fixing him with his eye; "I want to talk with you."

And before the G Bar boys realized what was happening he had led Joe Sykes to the door. There for a moment they paused together, both conscious of the conflict to come—both distrustful of the other's intent. Then Lum Martin took the lead, never looking back. He passed out, walking with a masterful stride. Joe Sykes followed like a man in a daze, and before the door swung back a muffled shot was heard—a shot and the thud of a fall.

Then the door opened again, and Lum Martin appeared on the threshold, thrusting his pistol into his holster.

"You'll find your friend Sykes out in the back yard," he said as the G

Bar men halted in their rush. "I just killed him."

He looked them over a moment coldly, glanced at Sycamore Brown, and then stepped out the door. Sycamore followed, but he was silent, stunned by the swiftness of the tragedy. Yes, and by more than the swiftness—he felt that Joe Sykes had been killed, as he had said he would kill Lum Martin, like a Mexican dog—a dog that is taken out and shot. It was that which held him silent, for he had always fought on the square, and, for all his gun-plays and broiling, he had no man's blood on his hands.

A sudden doubt as to the chivalry of his chief swept over him, and he felt the revulsion which assails a soldier when he witnesses an execution beneath the flag. But for his pride he would have quit and turned in his badge, but the war was on now and he could not abandon his leader.

Lum Martin stood alone against the crowd, and, right or wrong, Sycamore knew that his place was at his side. Even as he followed along behind him, he heard a rush of feet in the Cow Ranch, and the G Bar men belched out into the street, cursing as they ran for their horses. Already they had regained their gun-belts and were strapping them on again, and the hasty tightening of cinches showed that they would come a riding.

At the doorway of the little shack that served the marshal for an office, Lum Martin turned and looked down the street—then he laid aside the coat which had concealed his pistols and stood quietly waiting for the charge. A thrill went over Sycamore as he beheld him, and, throwing aside all scruples as to the past, he shoved his six-shooter well up in front and ranged himself alongside his chief.

But war to the knife was not what the G Bar punchers wanted, strong as was their lust for revenge. They had been gazing upon their dead, and it had killed the drink in their breasts. Even the best of them were daunted

by Lum Martin's ruthless action, and their rage, tamed by more prudent thoughts, turned away from that grim figure by the marshal's office to wreak itself upon the town.

It was Lum Martin indeed who had killed their friend, but Hackamore had hired the killer and paid him to do the deed. So they reasoned, and rightly, and turned upon the town. First it was up a side street, shooting and roping at lap-dogs as they dashed by the dance-hall; then, as they became emboldened, they swung back down a sandy passage and swept the whole main street.

All day the citizens of Hackamore had lain low, waiting for the battle to begin, and very few of them were caught out. E. Garcia y Cia. had even closed their iron fire-shutters, and for once they escaped unscathed; but J. F. Benson was not so fortunate, nor were others along that street. But as the procession whirled past Lum Martin, he only stood there waiting, and they in turn were content to pass.

Once more they swept up the street, whooping and spurring madly, and even then he did not shoot. But by now the mad blood was coursing freely in their veins, and as they rode back again they taunted him openly and called him a coward. Still he stood there, his black eyes burning, letting them do their worst.

"He's afraid!" shouted G Bar Hopkins, reining in his bronco, which had taken to pitching. "Whoa, you fightin' breed—stan' up hyar, now! Come on, boys; let's make him fight!"

With a shrill yell he put spurs to his half-wild pony and went charging up the street, and at every shot from his gun the bronco leaped and plunged.

"You're afraid, Lum Martin!" he cried, reining up before him. "You're scairt, you murderin' whelp! I dare you to arrest me! I dare you!"

He drew a spare gun from his saddle-flap and emptied it into the air defiantly, but Lum Martin only stood facing them, with his teeth skinned

back like a wolf's. At the shots G Bar Hopkins's horse rose up beneath him, but he jerked him back on his haunches and leaned down to sheathe his weapon.

"You're afraid!" he yelled, and whirled his horse to go; but in that very moment Lum Martin's murderous left hand leaped to the scabbard, and he shot him three times in the back. It was a thing too quick to see, like a trick of legerdemain, and few of the G Bar men heard the shots as they turned to follow their leader.

Only his bronco mount sensed the change, and, as G Bar flinched and reeled, he threw down his head and bucked. But even in his death anguish G Bar was game. For fifty yards he rode as he had always ridden, head back and swaying in the saddle; then, as his knee-grip loosened and the blood burst from his lips, he pitched forward, and before he hit the ground he was dead.

So passed G Bar Hopkins, and as they rode slowly out of town each puncher turned back in his saddle and cursed the name of Martin.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A Man with a Past.

DAYS passed, and there was a reward up for Lum Martin. Though he was still town marshal of Hackamore, and a deputy sheriff to boot, he kept in the shadows like a criminal and went warily upon his way. Even as he had killed Joe Sykes and G Bar Hopkins, so his enemies were trying to wipe him out by guile and a resort to swift treachery.

Many was the evil story that was spread against him, and men who had known him fell silent as they passed. Not that G Bar and Sykes had not died with guns in their hands, but they had been taken at an advantage and killed before they could shoot, and so the feud was declared. Strange men dropped into Hackamore and watched

for Martin after dark, and in the end he hired a Texan to join them and find out all their plans.

Often at night they would meet in secret—Lum Martin, Jack Haines, and Sycamore Brown—and as the Texan spoke more freely it was clear that he was a man with a past. That his past was not at all to his credit, and that his true name was not Jack Haines, the stranger did not deny; he seemed, in fact, to glory in the acts which prudence forbade him to discuss, and at each meeting Sycamore Brown felt more and more abashed before him, like a boy in the presence of men. Jack Haines was a tall, slender man, very dark, with a long, black, snaky mustache and a sinister squint to his eyes, and all his plans and counsels bespoke a man who was lawless as well as bold. He went among their enemies fearlessly, and, as plot after plot was frustrated and a dead man was found on the flats, the men who had sworn to kill Lum Martin weakened and slipped away and peace fell upon the town.

But peace is a deceptive thing, and Hackamore had suffered much. On the day that Lum Martin and his deputies left, the G Bar outfit and their friends might come back, as they had threatened, and wipe their fair city off the map. So reasoned the citizens of Hackamore, and, as prosperity had come upon them suddenly in the shape of a mining-boom in the hills, they decided to retain all three of their peace officers and practise municipal economies elsewhere.

But the weight of this burden was soon lifted in part, for the fame of Lum Martin and his assistant had spread throughout Arizona, and both Lum and Sycamore were soon on the pay-roll of Gunsight County as deputy sheriffs, with headquarters, as usual, at Hackamore. Jack Haines, being of a more retiring disposition and extremely averse to public gatherings, was given a position as night-watchman, and so the peace of Hacka-

more seemed safeguarded for all time. But it has often been observed that the only guarantee of order in a community is a law-abiding spirit among its citizens—and in this Hackamore was lacking in at least three instances.

Shortly after the town had been pacified Sycamore Brown got into a row with a faro-dealer and left the Cow Ranch a wreck; Jack Haines, in a jealous rage, beat up a woman at the dance-hall; and Lum Martin, though his sins were not known for certain, was suspected of breaking the decalogue. Discontented murmurings began to rise; the victims moved to cut down the budget, and in return the three officials denounced them as ingrates.

"Huh!" commented Sycamore Brown, who was the talkative one of the three, "it's all right for you folks to talk, but I noticed when the G Bars come to town and Lum and me took 'em off your hands, you was glad enough to pay our salaries and hunt yore holes like prairie-dogs. You pay a man two dollars and a half a day to risk his life, and then, when things quiet down a little, you want to can him right away, or win all his wages back at faro."

This to Mike McMonagle, who hated him worse than a till-tapper and was already trying to get him fired.

"At faro!" cried McMonagle, getting red in the face and preparing to pound the bar; "who are you to talk of pinching when you broke four chairs and a table to get back a four-bit bet?"

"Your dealer tried to rob me!" retorted Sycamore hotly. "I had the queen copped to lose and turned my head, and he up and raked in my stake. He never played no queen—win, lose, or splits—and his own lookout told him so; but he thought he'd get fresh and keep my money, anyhow. But I moneyed him! I guess I know a crooked deal when I see it, and if I can't collect my bet from the dealer I'll take it out of his hide!"

"Yes," sneered McMonagle, "that's what I'm kicking about. You knowed very well you wouldn't be arrested, and so you come into a nice, quiet saloon where as you know I'm trying to keep everything decent and orderly, and raise a big hooraw and rough-house over nawthin'. Why didn't ye complain to me, if ye wasn't satisfied, instead of breakin' the table? But that's it—you think because you're an officer ye can run the town! But I'll tell ye right now, you're mistaken!"

So spoke McMonagle with ten big drinks under his belt and the courage of his emotions, but other citizens were more circumspect and wary; and Lum Martin did, as a matter of fact, run the town.

At first he ran it right, and all went well; but, as bad men and evildoers learned to give him a wide berth, Lum began to get lonely. More and more he was seen in the company of Jack Haines, the man with a past, and one day in a fit of confidence he whispered Jack's real name to Sycamore, and told him he was on the dodge for train robbery.

Jack Richardson! It was a name known far and wide on the Texas frontier—the only member of Bass's gang who had escaped the posse at Round Rock—the man who had even whipped the Texas rangers in his long flight to the Rio Grande and liberty.

When he had whispered that glamorous name Lum Martin slipped away and left Sycamore to himself, and only at the end of a long line of wonderments did he wonder why Lum didn't give Jack up. For, after all, Lum was an officer of the law. But on the border the law is a relative thing, and men have not learned to fall down in worship of any statute. The rows of books are nothing to them—it is the sheriff and his deputies who represent what little majesty the law has, and even those officials are known to be distinctly human and fallible.

The real hero of the frontier, even as he is the hero of the city streets, is

the outlaw; the man who defies all the minions of vested authority, who robs and kills and then, by boldness and cunning and the strength of his good right hand, sets all the powers at naught. Jesse James, Cole Younger, and Sam Bass—those are the men whose names are known to song and story, and Sycamore had often sung their fame. Lolling in his saddle on the long night-guard he would sing the tale of each, but chiefly he sang "Sam Bass."

Sam Bass was born in Indiana, that was his native home,  
And at the age of seventeen, young Sam began to roam;  
He first came out to Texas, a cowboy for to be;  
A better-hearted fellow you'd scarcely ever see!

The swift and easy way in which poor Sam got shot full of holes and planted "six-foot under clay" conveyed no sinister impression to Sycamore. He was young yet and his mind dwelt by preference upon the robbing of trains—"passenger, mail, and express cars, too," and that happy verse about how:

Sam used to coin the money, but you bet he spent it free,  
He always drank good whisky wherever he might be.

Sycamore could understand that.

And now he actually had been sitting at the same card-table with Richardson; the man mentioned in the song as chief of Sam's "bold and daring lads." At that very moment he owed him half of his next month's salary as the result of an injudicious bluff at poker—the idea of a kid like him trying to run a bluff on Jack Richardson!

No, there was no tense moral struggle in Sycamore's swelling breast as he wondered why Lum didn't give Jack up. Six months of loafing around a tough border town had not served to tone up his moral fiber at all; but it had always been his religion that Lum Martin was right, and he wouldn't give Jack up himself.

That evening Lum Martin invited Sycamore to come out to his house to sit in on the usual game. In the perilous days, when the G Bar boys were on his trail, Martin had moved to a lone adobe house out on the alkali flat, and there he had continued to abide when the danger of ambush was past.

It was a square structure, built solidly of twelve-inch mud bricks. There were no windows to invite the treacherous, and Lum tended the door himself. It was a good, safe house to live in, and particularly so at night, since not even an Apache Indian could creep up to it across the flat, and no one passed that way. The fact is, people were afraid of Lum Martin, and they left him strictly alone. Even Sycamore Brown, light-hearted roisterer though he was, had begun to feel the chill of social ostracism, and since his fight at the Cow Ranch he had thrown in with Lum and Jack Haines.

Sometimes they played poker together in the card-room of one of the saloons, but, when the town was quiet, with no cowboys in from below, Lum and Jack formed the habit of retiring to the 'dobe—and now Sycamore was called in, too.

It was a great event in his young life when these two men first took him in. For the yellow down had hardly stiffened to a bristle on his lip, and they had seen the great world. There was hardly a town in the West where Lum had not lived or stopped, and he had guarded the treasure from many a city and mine.

On stages, or driving at midnight, he had brought in great ingots of gold; and for years he had been messenger and outside man for the railroad express, guarding the express-car with a sawed-off shotgun or slipping out on mysterious quests. Even as far as old Mexico his name was known, and when the mood was on him he would tell of hold-ups and sudden adventures, but in general he sat in silence, chewing tobacco and looking at the ground.

Jack Haines, too, was a man of deep silences, but with a fierce manner of speaking out his mind, and when any crisis called for action he seemed to dominate them all. Now that the fighting was over, he had become morose and restless, and his black eyes wandered about as if seeking some man who would dare oppose him. Of late he had taken to wearing loud clothes and lording it over the cringing creatures of the night-world; but his nature seemed to crave some greater excitement commensurate with his wild past, to which he reverted constantly in spite of his attempts at concealment.

But now that the secret of his name was out, he told of nothing but hold-ups and robberies, of flights and pursuits and wild orgies in towns where his identity was not known—all this to two deputy sheriffs, both sworn to enforce the law.

He seemed to take it for granted that no treachery would enmesh him, and, after the tale was ended, he walked back to the town with Sycamore, talking so confidentially that the deputy was pleased against his will. So it was that a new outlook was opened before his eyes, and every evening he went back to the house to hear the strange tale again.

How it came about Sycamore Brown never rightly knew, but one night as they sat by the dim light Lum Martin began to talk about express shipments.

"There's a big shipment of gold goes through here every Friday," he said; "sacks of specie from the Denver mint. Sometimes when I was messenger the through-safe wouldn't hold it all and they'd put part of it in the local. You was a fool, Jack, to be robbing them little Jim Crow trains in Texas—No. 9 carries more gold and bills than Sam Bass ever dreamed of."

There was silence for a moment and then Jack Haines spoke up sharply.

"Well, what's the matter if we hold it up, then?" he challenged, and though Sycamore did not notice it,

they both waited for him to speak. But conflicting thoughts were racing through his brain, and he did not make any reply. The question was addressed to Lum, and Lum ought to know what to say. So he held his peace and Lum made some laughing rejoinder, but the next night they brought it up again.

"Where would you hold up old No. 9, Jack?" inquired Lum Martin casually, as Jack Haines reverted to the gold shipment. "This here is a mighty open country—I bet I could trail you up and bring you back in a blanket."

"You might trail me," retorted Haines with spirit; "but you'd never bring me back—blanket or no blanket. I'd be across the line and into Mexico before you could see my dust."

"Sure," returned Lum grimly, "but how would you get the gold? Where would you hold her up at?"

The outlaw sat studying a minute, and then he laughed.

"You're tryin' to cap me into tellin' you my plans," he said; "so when I do the job and make my gitaway you can ketch me and make a rep!"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Lum Martin; "my services as an officer don't seem to be appreciated in these parts—I might throw in with you."

He spoke so easily that Sycamore was deceived at first, and then he sat up and began to listen eagerly. All of a sudden the hidden intent of their talk became evident to him. If he had known how carefully they had planned it he would have been less ready to show his hand; but caution with him was a thing entirely reserved for his enemies.

"Well, you wouldn't lose nothin' by it," answered Haines, still speaking in the half-bantering tone they had maintained from the start; "how would you like to come in with us, Syc, and see a little high life?"

"It'd suit me all right," grinned Sycamore, convinced at last that they were joking, "only I ain't got nerve enough."

"Whoo! Listen to the boy!" exclaimed Haines, with an unction well calculated to flatter his pride. "He's the finest kid in the country. I bet he'd go further than Lum!"

"Oh, he's got nerve enough," agreed Martin. "That ain't what's worryin' him. It's how to spend all the money!"

The joke went no further that night, but in the days that followed Jack Haines took Sycamore under his wing and prepared his mind for great things. Then, on another night, as they sat around the dim and mysterious lamp and took drinks by turns from a quart bottle, they came back to the subject again.

"That Mike McMonagle makes me tired!" declared Haines with bitter emphasis; "him and the whole bunch of those yahoos up there — talkin' about layin' us off because they's nothin' goin' on! I'd jest like to go out some night and start something and then pursue the perpetrators — we'd have 'em sittin' up around their holes like prairie-dogs — eh, Lum? What's the matter with holdin' up old No. 9 some night and give 'em something to talk about?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," volunteered Sycamore with enthusiasm; "I'll come into town like a drunk cowboy some night and shoot out all the lights. Then you and Lum can chase me and we'll have a drink together."

"We can do that as it is," suggested Haines, passing him the bottle; "but what's the matter with makin' something out of it? We're the only officers this side of Gun Sight, and that's more'n forty miles, across country. Gimme a chance at that express-car when they open her up at Mohawk Junction and I'll clean her in half an hour and be back here again before daylight. Then we can organize a posse and lead them off to the mountains, and when the excitement is over we can go back and dig up the gold."

"No, by Joe, I mean it! Didn't I tell you I was a hold-up? Well, let's

scarce these yahoos up and git some of that express company gold!"

"Count me in," responded Sycamore, swaying bravely in his drunken valor. "I never laid down on a job yet!"

And so, without further reference to the moralities of the case or the penalties that follow such crimes, Sycamore Brown shook hands with them both—the ex-train-robber and the recreant town marshal—and swore to stay with them till hell froze over and the devil learned how to skate.

## CHAPTER V.

### On No. 9.

CONSIDERED in the light of later events it is very probable that Sycamore Brown never gave the moral aspect of his defection a second thought. The world is full of men who would rob trains if they had the nerve, just as it is of people who would swear if "Oh, dear!" meant the same as "Oh, damn!"—which, as a matter of fact, it does. A cowboy without nerve is a contradiction of terms, since every act of his life calls for resolution and courage, and Sycamore happened to have so much that it got away with his judgment.

In their assault upon No. 9—a scheme which they had cherished for months—Lum Martin and Jack Haines needed a boy to do the dirty work and take the unnecessary chances, and Sycamore filled the part to perfection. If any one had to be killed, Sycamore could be relied upon to kill him; and if by any chance their plans should happen to go wrong, Sycamore Brown was foreordained to be found there holding the sack.

Very craftily they had moved in upon him, taking advantage of his impetuous youth, and now that he had joined, they were quick to send him running, the better to keep him in hand.

First of all, they would need some

dynamite — for the through safe was locked except at junctions — and the messenger might not open the car. So Sycamore was sent to the mountains, where the gold excitement was still on, and by skirmishing around in the night-time he got it, a stick at a time, from different shafts, so that it would never be missed. With equal caution he prowled for the caps and fuse, covering his activities with a John Doe warrant for an imaginary horse-thief.

Next he was sent out for canvas — to make bags to hold the plunder — but in this his search was vain. Now, in the plan laid down by Jack Haines, canvas-bags played an important part. The gold was to be divided into equal packs and hung across their saddles for the flight — and only new canvas would do. Gold-coin is heavy and old cloth might rip and spill. To buy the new material at a store would be suicidal, since the detectives would be sent into the country to look up just such clues — and yet canvas they must have.

So far it had been Jack Haines who had led in the plotting, but now that they were thwarted, Lum Martin came forward with an idea.

"Jack," he said, "your scheme is a good one, but I'll tell you one place where you're wrong. You're spendin' too much time figgerin' out how to get them sacks."

"Well, why not?" inquired Haines with heat. He was a hot-headed man, jealous of his right to leadership, and quick to take offense. "Why not, then? Ain't we got to have bags?"

"Not unless we git the gold," answered Lum with a cautious smile. "Now, f'r instance, it's been nigh onto a year since I rode messenger on the express. Mebbe they don't ship that gold on Fridays no more — and mebbe they don't open the through-safe at Mohawk no more. They's lots of things we don't know that might leave us belly-up."

"Well, what you goin' to do about it?" demanded Haines. "Don't sit there lookin' wise now — talk up!"

"The thing to do," responded Lum calmly, "is for me to ride that train through on Friday and see how they handle the stuff. Then I can buy the canvas for you in Los Angeles and bring it back in my grip."

Past experience with men of his profession had given Haines a dour view of life. He squinted his eyes down suspiciously and tried to figure out some double cross in this simple solution of their ills.

"Who do you want to see in Los Angeles?" he drawled, sarcastically.

"Nobody," replied Lum succinctly, and his manner of chewing tobacco told Sycamore that he was sore.

Again Haines pondered upon the project, and he could not deny that it was good. He could not deny it, and yet it pained him to admit it. So far he had been the leader, but for once Lum had showed up the best. A doubt rose up in his poisoned mind — perhaps Lum Martin was deeper than he knew. Perhaps — but there are a thousand such fears that come to those who steal.

Spoilers and self-seekers themselves, the one thing they seek most vehemently in life is a partner who will be honest and true. Of Sycamore Brown there could be no doubt; but Lum Martin was deep — deep!

Yet in the end Lum went to Los Angeles and he brought back Jack's canvas in his grip. As they worked over the bags in the 'dobe that night Jack Haines returned again to his plan, but when he had finished and was silent Lum came out against him once more, and this time with more sinister intent.

"You got a good scheme, Jack," he said again, "but they's one place where you're wrong — Mohawk Junction is too big a town."

"Well, what do we care?" retorted Haines. "The train gets in there after midnight — we frisk the express and get away before the folks are wise. I've done the trick before."

"Sure, but supposen that express

messenger should happen to get his gun—or refuse to open the door. No time to do any dynamitin’—and you’re sixty miles from home.”

“Beat him to it,” grumbled Haines, scowling menacingly; “git the drop on him and *make* ‘im open up!”

“Sand tanks up here is better,” continued Lum with ponderous certitude; “there’s nobody there but the operator and it’s only eleven miles from home.”

“But the through safe is closed!” objected Jack Haines.

“Shoot it open,” said Lum.

“It’s too *darned* close to home!” protested Haines petulently.

“Nope,” responded Martin; “that’s the best part of it!”

“Say, lookee here!” cried the ex-train-robber, rising up suddenly in a rage, “who’s doin’ this, anyhow?”

“Well—I am!” answered the marshal, with brutal directness—“that is, if I do it at all. It’s all right for you to go ahead and take fool chances—you’re nothin’ but a train robber on the dodge nohow, and likely to get took up any time. But I’m a town marshal, I want you to know, and deputy sheriff to boot—and I’ve got something to lose.”

“Oh!” sneered the bandit, a bitter smile distorting his face, “so I’m only a common train robber, hey—and you’re a dep-u-ty sher-riff! Mebbe you was figurin’ on takin’ me up yourself and gettin’ a cut on that reward? Because if you was, Lum Martin, or if I ever for a minute ketch you snitchin’, I’ll kill you, by God, if it’s my last act!”

It was dark in the low-ceiled room, except for the smoky lamp, and the man who had fought rangers with Sam Bass paced back and forth in the murk, but Lum Martin sat stolidly in his place and his nerveless gaze never flinched.

“You’re a hard man to git along with, too,” he stated, “and that’s another reason why I’m goin’ to quit.”

“Are ye goin’ to *quit*?” screamed

Jack Haines, his voice breaking in dismay.

“Unless I have my way, I am,” answered Martin.

“Yes, but Lum,” begged Haines, “look what a chance you’re missin’! The whole through safe—full of gold! We’re officers—nobody’ll suspect us—we can lead the posse away!”

“All well and good,” responded Lum; “but if you’re goin’ to git excited—if you’re goin’ to make these talks about killin’ me, and all that—then I don’t want a thing to do with you. I’m done.”

For a moment the man who had been so defiant and self-sufficient stood gaping at him, all his plans fallen to the ground, and in that moment he realized that he needed Lum Martin far more than Lum Martin needed him. More than that, he saw himself conquered, outmastered by the nerve of the man, and as the realization of his position swept over him he weakened and lowered his head.

“You’re right,” he said, and left off pacing. “You’re right, Lum, and I’m sorry I spoke. But if you want to go ahead on this hold-up I’ll do anything you say. Will you shake on it?”

“Don’t need to shake hands!” grunted Martin, turning sulkily away.

“I’m not goin’ into this because I like you. It’s a business proposition—with me—and if I can’t make a big stake I don’t run. Now, I got a plan, and you can listen to it, and if you want to go in you can. But I don’t want no more of this war-talk. And if you think you’re as good a man as I am you want to git over it—because you ain’t. No matter what I tell you to do now, I don’t want no come-back—do what you’re told to and you git yore share of the loot. Otherwise you don’t git nothin’. Now listen!”

The new chief glanced from one to the other—from Jack Haines, now crushed and subdued, to Sycamore, who looked on in silence—and then he laid forth his plan.

“No. 9 stops at Sand Tanks for

water," he said, "and that's our first station west, across the lakes. Now I want you two boys to pull off yore horses' shoes and ride over there bareback—and when you've robbed the train I want you to come back across the dry lake-bed and give me the treasure, and then turn them horses loose. I'll hide the boodle while you're walkin' into town—and right there you prove yore alibi. Them flats is covered with wild mustang tracks and no one can foller yore trail—yore horses is turned loose and they's no way to prove where you've ben. Then I summon you for my posse and we ride back along with the rest. What's the matter with that, now?"

He gazed about him triumphantly and Sycamore Brown leaped to his feet.

"Lum," he cried, "you got a head like a tack! It's a cinch, Jack; we can't lose nohow! Come on, let's finish up them sacks."

They returned to their sewing with renewed vigor, but Jack Haines was strangely silent. Though he said nothing he had discovered the joker already—they were both working for Lum. Who was it that was to rob the train? Who took the big chances on getting shot? And once again—who was it that took the treasure while they walked back to town? But a single glance at the stern face, the tight, thin lips and the dominating eye, told him that it would do him no good to object.

Lum Martin was master of all their destinies, and unless they played the game his way it would never be played at all. So he sighed—and bided his time—for even the lion must sleep.

## CHAPTER VI.

### The Hold-Up.

IT was a beautiful evening in September when Sycamore Brown set forth to be a hold-up, and like many a

lonely cowboy he had no one to talk it over with but his horse. Just after dark he went out to the gate of the pasture where Round Valley was kept, and whistled. It did not require a hatful of grain to bring Round Valley to the bars. He had that same loyalty that we love in dogs, and came when his master called.

He was a good horse, better than most, for he came from the old Mexican strain called *palomino*—cream-colored, with silver mane and tail—which, if current report is true, are descended from Arabian chargers, brought to Spain by the conquering Moors.

The *conquistadores* brought them across the sea to Mexico, and nowhere in the West are they excelled, either for speed or bottom or for faithfulness to a kind master. Sycamore had raised Round Valley from a colt and trained him to understand his voice—so now he rubbed his nose and talked to him about bags of gold before he slipped on the rope.

But the lure of the great adventure was before him and he mounted eagerly, riding bareback as gracefully as an Indian, with his knees clamped close to the ribs. At the adobe house he joined his partner—they exchanged the last words with Lum, slung the sacks on their horses for saddles and then drifted out into the night.

The train was not due till eleven-thirty and they had time for their ride and to spare. Sand Tanks lay off to the west, a single light in the dim distance, and as they passed down through the dry bed of the lake where the ground lay naked and bare, their horses' hoofs rang out on the packed bottom as if they were actually back on the asphalt, spending their money in gay New York.

It was a ghostly place, that broad, white alkali flat, and the glisten of the slick crust in the moonlight made it look as if it was frozen, like the land of their dreams. But all that great flat was dead and deserted, for no one

ever passed that way. The wagon road followed the railway, securely fenced off with barbed wire, and all the travel went round that way, whether the lake was empty or full.

Now it was dry—dry and desolate—and only stray bands of wild horses, going down to the lower water to drink, saw the conspirators as they passed.

They both rode silent, for voices carry far in the windless night, and there was nothing much to say. Since he had had his quarrel with Lum, Sycamore did not think so much of Jack Haines. He struck him now as being something of a blowhard; rough and lawless, to be sure, but weak on management and likely to ball things up. It was for this reason more than any other that he had volunteered to hold up the express car while Haines brought back the night crew.

Of course there were more chances of getting into trouble on the express car, for they carried an extra shotgun messenger on Fridays and he was hired and instructed to shoot; but rather than be compelled to blow the car open later, Sycamore had undertaken to get the drop on the shotgun man and make him come out of his hole. That was better than to let Jack bungle it, anyway.

As for Jack, he had part of a charge of buckshot in one shoulder, and that was reason enough for him. And besides, he was no dynamite expert, while Sycamore had worked in the mines. So they rode along together, mutually despising and mistrusting each other, until they had gone a full mile past Sand Tanks and come to the place that they sought.

Here they tied their horses to a mesquit-tree a hundred yards or more from the track and, taking with them the giant powder and money-bags, went over to view the scene. The country is all alike around Sand Tanks—a low, level sand-flat, studded evenly with salt bushes and scrubby trees; but at this point there stood a white

milepost and a pile of railroad ties that would help them know it at night. Beneath the ties they concealed the bags and dynamite, and a canteen of water to mix mud to confine the powder; and after a long look at their identification marks set out slowly down the track.

The station at Sand Tanks is small and lonely—nothing but a double-roofed house, the tank, and a disused cattle-pen. Not even a passing hobo wandered by to break the long monotony of their wait. No. 9 was late, as usual, and when her headlight finally pierced the eastern gloom, both Haines and Sycamore were glad of it, if it meant they were both going to get shot.

Waiting is a thing that kills men's nerve, be they train robbers or soldiers under fire; but once they are in the open with their guns in their hands and the hot sweat running down, then they are brave again.

Up the track they came now, from their hiding place by the shipping-pens, and Haines stepped behind the water-tank to surprise the engineer while Sycamore crept up to the station to lie in wait for the express car.

Yes, it was a lonely place—this Sand Tanks—nobody there but the telegraph operator, and he was shut up inside. Sycamore crouched in the shadow of the building, a dark silk handkerchief drawn tight over the bridge of his nose for a mask, and as the train pulled in he loosened a pistol at his belt and breathed hard, for courage.

He was stripped to his shirt and trousers—two pairs, after the custom of all cowboys—and in the belt of these he had two pistols, held in place by the ejector-flange, one ready for each hand. On his head he had a Texas sombrero, pulled far down over his eyes to conceal his face; and on his heels Texas spurs, to hurry him over the plains. No dally-man's outfit for him on this emprise—there would be a description out for him later, and

he was willing to let the G Bars claim all the glory.

And now the agent ran out and set the light. Then he hurried back inside—and the great train rumbled in, shaking the earth.

A lantern dropped down to the ground as the conductor got off for his running orders. The air-brakes were thrown on explosively—the train stopped—and with a wary eye on the conductor's back Sycamore slipped out and stepped up close to the train. To the casual eye he was a hobo, for that is their way of doing when they are trying to dodge the "shacks," but at that moment Sycamore was afraid of no man—not even the shotgun messenger.

He looked up ahead and saw Jack Haines swing up on the engine—then as he waited before it the broad door of the express car rolled open and the messenger stuck out his head. He was smoking very peacefully and his eyes opened wide as he stared out into the night. Here was the chance that Sycamore had waited for, for it was the shotgun man himself and he was caught without his gun.

Rising up slowly out of the gloom Sycamore whipped out his heavy pistol and pointed it full at his chest.

"Jump down out of there," he ordered quietly; "and be quick about it," he added, "or I'll blow your head off!"

There was no doubt about his intentions, but for a moment the messenger wavered, his thoughts on his sawed-off shotgun. A messenger is hired for his nerve, and it pained the man to do it, but he had to jump or die. The gun was too far away and the pistol-point too compelling.

"Now call yore pardner out," continued Sycamore, "and call him so he'll come or I'll shoot a hole in you!" He stepped behind the shotgun man as he spoke, still menacing him with his pistol, and at the call the express clerk, still wearing his eye-shade, came running to the door. But either he caught

the note of trouble or, in looking out, glimpsed Sycamore with his black mask, for the instant he showed himself he leaped back again and ducked down behind a safe.

Here was a bad fix, and the chances were good that it would get worse, but Sycamore had seen the man's face and knew that he would not fight; so, ducking quickly down behind his prisoner, he leveled his pistol at the doorway and made a grand-stand play.

"Don't you move away from there, you big stiff," he said to the messenger. "I'm goin' to kill that feller, if he shoots at me—but if he comes out it'll be all right." There was tense silence for a minute—and then the clerk came out.

"Don't shoot!" he pleaded. "I'll come!"

"Well, hurry up, then," answered Sycamore, and as the man held up his hands and jumped he swore fervently under his breath, for it took a great load off his mind. If that clerk had wanted to be bull-headed he could have made him a lot of trouble. As it was he paid particular attention to the shotgun man, who was a tall, square-jawed proposition and ready to jump him any minute.

Meanwhile the train stood still and nobody knew it was being robbed. The conductor had gone inside the station, the passengers were all asleep, and the clerk in the mail-car ahead never so much as looked out. So for a few minutes they waited, Sycamore and the shotgun man eying each other furtively, and then there was a crunch of gravel from up in front and Jack Haines appeared, herding the engine-driver and fireman before him.

"Keep yore guns on these men," he directed, taking command on the instant, "while I frisk them for the gats." He searched each of the prisoners in succession and then herded them off to one side.

"Now uncouple that express-car," he said, turning to the engine-driver and fireman, "and we'll take a run up

the track. And remember now—no monkey business!"

He stood at their backs as they worked and followed them off into the darkness. Then the engine puffed, the coaches began to roll and, as the express car trundled by, Sycamore sheathed his guns with a triumphant gesture and swung up on the rear end of his treasure ship. Just at that moment the conductor, not knowing what was the matter, came rushing out of the station waving his lantern frantically; and Sycamore, having nothing at hand to answer with, responded with a high, shrill yell.

They could talk as much as they wanted to about punching cattle, or being deputy everything at a hundred a month, but plain, ordinary train robbery was good enough for him!

But now to get at the gold—the gold which filled the through safe to the doors and sometimes overflowed to the local.

The moment the train stopped at the rendezvous Sycamore was off and running for the tie-pile. First he fetched four or five ties to make a step beneath the high door—then, as Jack Haines filed by with the engine-crew and the mail clerks and went back to guard the approach, Sycamore passed the dynamite up ahead of himself and leaped lightly into the car.

There on the further side stood two safes, one locked and the other half open; and as he looked into the local safe his heart almost stopped, for it was crammed with bags of money. Money, money! The car seemed to be filled with it—and the bags were heavy, awfully heavy. He reached for his knife and cut into one, but as he grabbed out a handful of coin his rapture began to subside.

It was money, all right; but silver money, and Mexican money at that. Ten thousand dollars in Mexican silver, a load that would break a mule's back and was hardly worth carrying away—that is, if a posse was after you.

With a scornful grunt Sycamore heaved the heavy bags aside and went further into the safe. There were packages of all descriptions—mostly heavy and small—and these he grabbed out in eager handfuls and shoveled into his sack. So much, then, for the local! He finished with it quickly and turned his attention to the through safe, which offered a more fitting return.

It was a large and ponderous affair, built to withstand dynamite, fire and wrecks, and fitted out with a time lock which was set to open at Mohawk. But Sycamore's time was too valuable to wait upon any such a mechanism and, all things having been prepared in advance, he laid four sticks of giant powder on top of it, all carefully tied together and equipped with caps and fuse. Then with his canteen of water he mixed up some mud on the ground and, slinging it in a canvas, climbed up and plastered it over the charge.

A minute later and the fuse was sputtering—he ran out across the prairie—and then a great light flashed out against the night, the earth heaved, and a loud explosion rent the air. A few seconds later and splinters of wood began to fall, but when he ran up to the car and swung his lantern inside the great safe stood firm and solid as adamant, and a hole in the roof of the car showed the course the explosion had taken.

Against that massive body of chilled steel the dynamite had been as nothing—its force was lost and dissipated and thrown off against the roof.

But all was not lost yet. Sycamore still had six sticks of dynamite in his powder cache and, hurrying out to where it was buried, he wrapped it in a sack and carried it back to the car. Once more he piled it on the safe and connected the caps and fuse—and then he looked about for something heavy enough to confine it. He kicked one of the sacks of Mexican pesos.

Yes, they were heavy, fully sixty pounds to the sack, and since there

was gold within the safe the silver would be no more than an ante, to sweeten this fabulous jack-pot.

So he reasoned, and quickly, for the time was passing; and lifting them one by one he piled five or six of the sacks on top of the giant powder. Once more the fuse hissed and sputtered, and this time he ran far away; but even then the explosion was deafening and the Mexican pesos, blown sideways through the car, whistled by him like shots from a cannon. Then a hail of them began to fall, Mexican dollars from high up in the air, but Sycamore did not wait for it to slacken.

He had shot off his last stick of dynamite; yes, he had played his last card to win, and in the intoxication of his great expectations he rushed back through the rain of money, unheeding its heavy strokes.

Once more he swung up his lantern, and the whole roof of the car had vanished. A great hole had been blown in the back as well, and there before it, crushed and dismantled, stood the through safe, its top broken, its massive gate ajar. With a cry of delight Sycamore Brown ran back to get his pack-sacks; then with both pairs of them slung over his arm he swarmed up into the car and stuffed them full with the treasure.

Bags, bundles, papers, flat packages that looked like sheafs of bills, everything that he could find in the scattered wreckage he grabbed up and shoved into his bags, and only when they hung heavy and he heard his partner's hail did he finally quit his scrambling and think about getting away. For that glorious moment he had rolled in riches, spurning common silver dollars like iron washers, and it lit a fire of avarice in his heart that it took years of punishment to quench.

But now he shouldered the bags—for they were hung together in pairs—and went staggering down the railroad track to where Haines was flagging him with a lantern.

"Now you fellers sit down on the track," he heard Jack say, "and stay there, and the first man that starts for the station will git a bullet in his back."

Then he came running up through the darkness and made a grab for the gold.

"Come on!" he cried, shouldering a pair of the sacks as he ran. "For God's sake, what you been doin'—you been monkeyin' around here for an hour!"

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## CHAPTER VII.

### The Stall.

IT is one thing to steal a big jag of money, and another to get away with it; but Lum Martin had a plan of flight laid out that would baffle an Indian trailer, although it was intended only for express-company detectives.

Due south of Sand Tanks lay the headquarters of the G Bar outfit; and beyond that the Mexican line. South also, as well as east, lay the bed of the wet-weather lake, now baked so hard and solid that an unshod horse would not dent it by so much as a footprint. There was mounting and riding in hot haste when Sycamore Brown and Haines reached their horses with the money-bags—and they rode due south as they had been directed, until they reached the dry bed of the lake. Then they whirled and rode east again, never drawing rein till they saw the lights of Hackamore.

There are some towns of the size of Hackamore where the folks ring the curfew bell at eight and go to bed with the chickens, but a certain part of the business of Hackamore flourished better at night, and even at 2 A.M. it was not uncommon to see the lights.

On the morning when Jack Haines and Sycamore Brown came riding in with their booty the streets were bobbing with lanterns and the bright lights of the Cow Ranch Saloon shone upon an excited group of citizens summoned

hastily from their slumbers. Not that Sycamore and Jack Haines rode near enough to be seen, but as they came in across the flats they could see the dark forms darting to and fro like insects around a lamp. They rode more cautiously then, heading straight for the lone adobe house, and soon they made out the bowed form of Lum, sneaking stealthily out to meet them.

In one hand he held an armful of clothes and in the other he bore their hats, which they had left at home for the occasion.

"You're late, boys," he whispered, grabbing the high Texas sombreros off their heads and jamming on their old ones. "Now change yore clothes and boots—hurry up, now—and give me yore other ones—and chase yoreselves over to the saloon. Here, gimme them bags—I'll turn yore horses loose—and you keep them boys busy over there while I go and hide this plunder!"

Without letting them answer a word he threw each of them his change of clothes and boots, stripped the winded horses of their rope hackamores and, slapping them on the rump, sent them trotting off into the darkness. Then he shouldered the heavy bags, grabbed up their discarded clothes and, peering hastily about to see that no telltale garment had been left, went scuttling off toward the adobe.

It was a cyclone finish that he had planned for them, and so perfectly were they hypnotized that neither of them even looked up to see which way he went, although they had a third interest apiece in the money he was about to hide. It was the alibi they were thinking about—but the devil only knows what Lum had in his mind.

It was a wild-eyed and talkative bunch of men that they encountered when, with all the appearances of a hasty arising, Jack Haines and Sycamore butted into the Cow Ranch Saloon and asked what was all the excitement.

A chorus of different answers con-

veyed the general idea that No. 9 had been held up at Sand Tanks, the passengers beaten and robbed and the express and mail-cars blown up with dynamite. Some claimed that they were entirely destroyed and that the train crew had all been killed; but the telegraph-operator, who had come running with a message for Lum Martin, corrected this by the statement that 9 had already been reported out from Sand Tanks.

"Where's Lum Martin?" he cried, waving the sheet of yellow paper above his head, "here's a message from the sheriff!"

"I dunno," said one; "he was here a minute ago!"

"He's gone to hunt horses," spoke up another.

"Well, who'll take this to him?" appealed the operator; "I've got to git back to my wire. Oh, you?" And he thrust it into Sycamore Brown's hands and flew.

"What does it say?" the crowd clamored. "Read it!"

"Train robbed at Sand Tanks," read Sycamore. "Summon posse and be on grounds by daylight. Wire which way they went and follow. Dillon, Sheriff."

"Well," remarked Sycamore, as the noise died down, "I guess I can attend to this as good as Lum. Who wants to volunteer for this posse?"

There was a rush to sign up—and that killed some time—and a great deal of explaining and protestations from those who refused, which took more. Then there was a general scattering for guns and pistols and wild attempts to catch bronco horses out of big pastures in the dark, and when Lum Martin finally rode in, leading two horses for his deputies, he was in plenty of time to lead the posse.

In fact, he was so far ahead in general preparedness that no one could have suspected him of other business than that which was immediately at hand. In some miraculous way Jack Haines and Sycamore were also armed

and equipped to the minute and when the posse comitatus finally went dashing off down the track to Sand Tanks the two hold-ups and their general manager were well up in the lead.

It was daylight when they arrived at the lonely station, and by the time they got to the scene of the robbery the sun was over the mountains. They rode up the track, inside the barbed wire fences that served to keep out the stock, and were proceeding at a canter when suddenly one of the leaders stopped short and flung himself from his horse.

"Look at that!" he cried, holding up a battered dollar; and then there was another rush, and another man dropped off his horse. They had encountered the furthest fringe of that great hail of pesos which had followed Sycamore Brown's last shot, and as they worked up toward the storm-center the posse became demoralized.

It was like a band of boys at a money scramble, and Lum Martin and his stern-eyed brother officers glanced back at them with well-simulated disapproval as they dashed forward to the scene of the wreck.

"By Gawd, Syc," muttered Lum, gazing about at the splintered upper-works of the express-car, "you shore shot things up some—but you did well, boy," he added hurriedly; "you did well. Now ride around and tromple out all the tracks you can and we'll lead 'em off to the north."

As deputy sheriffs the posse that came out from Hackamore had promised well, but as sleuths they were far from being a success. Several of them were ex-Indian fighters and old trailers, but in spite of their past training the lure of the Mexican dollars was too much for them and in the general rush that followed the tracks were badly trampled.

Even after Lum Martin had called a halt and made every man empty his loot at his feet the tracking did not improve; for the posse, instead of looking the ground over with an eye single to

the detection of criminals, succumbed once more to the gleam of the scattered pesos and, under the pretext of trailing the hold-ups, spread out across the desert and picked up money on the sly. There was no one then to deny him when Lum Martin hastily announced his conclusions, and with their boots and pockets full of Mexican silver the posse rode back to the station and followed him off to the north.

Had Mr. Slocum, the head detective for the express company—who was now on his way to the scene—been present and had he lined up the bunch and looked them in the eye to detect the thief, his old-sleuth methods would have led him astray; for every man in the outfit looked false as Judas, and all but three of them had pockets full of money.

And to show to what depths a shower of Mexican dollars will sink a free and law-abiding people, the members of that posse began to drop away by ones and twos—and the minute Lum Martin was out of sight they headed their ponies for the storm belt. By twelve o'clock, when Mr. Slocum and his assistants did arrive, the ground was stamped flat for a great distance and there was hardly a peso to be found.

Chief of Detectives Slocum arrived on a special that came panting in from the west, and the first thing he did was to make every looter shell out his Mexican money, down to the last dollar. Then he cleared the ground entirely, allowing no outsiders to come near, and began to search for evidence. With him in the special car were the two express messengers who had been robbed, the engineer, and a squad of railroad detectives.

There were other men also, men dressed roughly enough to pass for hobos, who dropped off the car unobtrusively and mixed with the retreating crowd to snoop for news. Then Dillon, the sheriff, and his posse rode in from Gunsight; and when Lum Martin and his faithful deputies final-

ly returned from their trip to the north they found something big going on. Nobody knew for sure, but it was rumored that from forty to eighty thousand dollars had been lost and Slocum was working frantically to get a clue.

The engineer who had been held up had showed him just where the robbers went through the fence and had sworn to it that they rode off to the south, so when Martin rode in from the north he was called upon to explain.

"What's the matter with you, Lum?" inquired Dillon, the sheriff. "What'd you go chasin' off up there for? We found a trail here leadin' off to the south!"

"Well, that's it, then," agreed Lum, shifting wearily in his saddle. "I'll tell you, Dillon," he went on, as Slocum drew near and fixed him with his hunter's eyes. "That posse I got at Hackamore was nothin' but a gang of bums and I ain't goin' to pay 'em a cent. The minute we got here they began scramblin' for money, 'n trompled all the tracks down, 'n rather'n see 'em spoil the whole thing for you and Slocum I called 'em off and hit out for the mountains. How'd do, Mr. Slocum!"

He nodded familiarly to the head detective, whom he had known in his messenger days, and Slocum wiped the sweat from his brow and stared at him again. He was a small, eager man, with a shock of grizzled hair that stood straight up from his broad forehead and a pair of eyes that stood wide open, like an owl's.

Though he was of no more than average height, he was muscled like a tiger-cat, and every line in his leonine face bespoke the man of power. His hard-boiled shirt was melted down by the sweat of his exertions and his derby hat was no protection against the sun, but even though his attire was incongruous, Lum knew him for a dangerous antagonist. More than once he had gone on such jaunts as this himself, to help out on the trailing, and

every detail of his plan has been worked out with old Sam in mind.

They had met now, the arch-conspirator and the master sleuth, and Lum glanced at him once and looked away, just as he had always done.

"Lum," said the detective, coming over to him, "you're the man I'm looking for."

He beckoned him off to one side and laid the whole matter before him.

"Now here," he concluded, "I've got a description of those two fellows, and that's about all I have got. Just look this over and see if you can guess who they are."

He thrust a careful description of the robbers into his hands and waited impatiently while he pored over it; but Lum's education, though he carefully concealed the fact, had been completed in seven days and the paper did not give him much information.

"Um-m, what kind of hats does this say they had?" he inquired, pretending to squint at the handwriting.

"High hats!" snapped Slocum. "High crowned, with broad brims, turned up along the edge!"

"Well," answered Lum, handing back the paper with an air of finality, "if that's the case they was Texas cowboys, because them fellers wear nothin' else. What kind of spurs was they?"

"The man that got on the engine had a pair of long-shanked ones, with a rowel in the shape of a star—"

"That's them!" broke in Lum. "Them fellers was cowboys, and I miss my guess a mile if I can't trail 'em to the G Bar headquarters, down there at the foot of the lake. Them G Bar boys have been raisin' hell around here for years and it's a wonder they hain't took to train-robbin' before this. Come on, let's foller them tracks!"

They followed, and when the bare-foot pony-tracks were lost on the hard floor of the lake the posse kept on to the south, where the G Bar boys suffered a crowning affront at the hands of Town Marshal Martin.

With the sheriff of the county at his back and Sam Slocum well up in front Lum Martin searched the G Bar bunk-house from fireplace to war-bags, prying into their intimate affairs with such an assumption of virtue that it left the outfit in tears.

There was no occasion for a cut at the cards to see who should kill Martin now. Once before when the G Bars were after his scalp they had resorted to a cut, so rumor said, and Joe Sykes had drawn the deuce and died—but now a call for volunteers would have been answered by the whole G Bar outfit. Not only had their Texas records been called to public notice and

their private love-letters read, but their reputation had suffered a cruel blow, and if a train could not be robbed twenty miles away without their bunk-house being rustled for the loot it was time that somebody got killed.

Or so the G Bar boys said; and while they never quite got Mr. Martin in the days to come, they certainly tried until men could truthfully put on their tombstone those proud lines which end: "Angels could do no more!"

But in the meanwhile, well pleased and laughing at their stratagem, Lum Martin and his partners rode back to Hackamore, leaving the G Bar funeral in the hands of old Sam Slocum.

**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.

## W O M A N

**By Elizabeth Clarke Hardy**

**M**OLDED of ice and of fire,  
Of sorrow, of joy, and of mirth,  
Of hate and of love and desire.  
And all that is sweetest on earth.

Tints of the lily and rose,  
Sympathy, beauty, and bloom,  
Passion and peace and repose,  
Sunshine and shadow and gloom.

Strength and endurance of steel,  
Weakness of frail, clinging vine,  
Courage to scorn or to kneel,  
Sparkle and froth of the wine.

Mystery ever unsolved,  
Problem for angels and men,  
Sinner forever absolved,  
Shriven again and again.

Gift of the gods unto man,  
Siren or angel or curse,  
Infinite blessing or ban,  
Take her for better or worse.

# THE PURCHASE\*

A SERIAL IN IV PARTS—PART II

BY E. J. RATH

Author of "Two Women, or One?" "The Projectile," etc.

## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THE town of Thomas from time immemorial has been in the grip of a political gang, headed by the notorious boss, Harvey Johnson, when a younger reform element, satirically known as the "college boys," put through a ticket of their own, headed by Winston Harris as mayor, Jim Wayne as commissioner of public works, etc. Harris, by the way, is a New York architect who has never been able to make more than a scant living. Not so very long after he has been placed in office, however, he is dazzled by the receipt of a letter from a firm of stock-brokers, informing him that a certain deal which he negotiated through them has been so successful that he has won no less than \$25,000. Harris immediately calls on the brokers and assures them that he has never given such orders. They answer, however, that the order has reached them through his agent. They insist that there has been no mistake, and they insist on his taking the money. Still protesting that the money does not belong to him, he, none the less, banks the check, determined not to touch it, but to leave it there until the whole thing can be cleared up. His troubles, however, if you can call them such, have just begun. Scarcely a day goes by without equally mysterious winnings pouring in on him. He calls in his friends, Billy McAllister, managing editor of the *Star*, and Phil Sharkey, a political reporter. They point out that to print the story would be political suicide. Harris remembers his friend, Jim Wayne, commissioner of public works. Jim Wayne, by the way, is son of Peter Wayne, a retired millionaire, and brother of the fascinating Constance Wayne, with whom the distracted mayor could very easily fall in love. Jim invites his friend, the mayor, out to dinner, and there he and Harris and Constance become convinced that all this mysterious wealth is part of a plot hatched by the political boss, Harvey Johnson, for Harris's ruin. They become allies.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### Through Locked Doors.



HARRIS made two discoveries when he paid one of his desultory visits to the little office on the fourteenth floor of the Bonanza Building. One discovery did not surprise him. It was another check, come in that very morning's mail, as he could see by the postmark on the envelope. He glanced at the amount, thrust it into his pocket, and sighed. The second discovery startled him.

His desk was open!

For half a minute the significance of that fact did not impress itself upon him. Then he leaped forward with a cry and cast a swift glance at the contents of the desk. There was a confused mass of papers piled on the blotting pad. The contents of the pigeonholes had been removed and dumped helter-skelter on the floor. Letters had been taken from envelopes and apparently thrown aside after examination. The office was in disarray.

It took but a swift glance to show that no key had been used to open the roll-top; the brass plate set into the

\* This story began in *The Cavalier* for March 8.

desk was partly lifted from its socket and bent, and there were marks which seemed to have been made by a chisel, showing on the varnished wood.

Harris contemplated the scene of disorder in silence for a moment, then smiled slowly as the humor of the thing forced itself upon him. It must have been a sadly misinformed burglar, or else an arrant novice, who sought reward in the office of an impecunious architect. Why, there had not been even a dollar's worth of postage-stamps in the place. He pulled open the drawer where the stamps were kept. They were still there. Evidently a disgusted thief had scorned the only thing that had a cash value, not having yet descended to the level of stealing stamps.

"I'm jiggered if I know which one of us the joke is on," murmured Harris, a broad grin on his face.

Then the grin froze. What if—Harris made a mad dash for the other end of the office, upsetting a chair that stood in his path. He had remembered the safe, guardian of a secret of far greater concern to him than any amount of money in the world. He dropped to his knees in front of the heavy steel door and examined the knob. Yes, the safe had been tried.

Ragged scratches in the enamel around the dial showed that some sharp instrument, probably the same chisel which had been employed to force the desk, had been used in an attempt on the lock. He turned the knob, but it moved less than half a circle and then jammed fast. A close examination of the nickel revealed dents and bruises in the smooth finish. The burglar had been trying to knock off the knob evidently with a hammer.

Harris tried to move the knob backward, but it was caught and would not budge. He seized the handle near the edge of the door and pulled. The bolts were still in their sockets, for the door did not move.

Well, the old safe had done him a

good turn, after all, thought Harris. Yet was he certain about that? Suppose it had been opened, ransacked, closed again, and then damaged in a way to baffle the attempts of its owner? He seized the knob again and exerted all his strength in an endeavor to work the combination, but it was useless....

Harris rose to his feet and paced the office in a frenzy of doubt. All the letters—the letters that brought the money—were there, together with the narrative written in his own hand. Were they there now? The young mayor turned half sick at the thought that they had fallen into the hands of a thief. Would a thief know what to do with them? Would a common burglar realize the opportunity for blackmail, or worse?

The first impulse of Harris was to call the police, and he had the receiver off the telephone hook when second thought cautioned him to pause.

"Never mind, Central," he said, putting back the receiver.

What good could the police do? Nothing of value had been stolen, except possibly certain papers. He could not explain what those papers were and could not take the ordinary measures employed in such cases to recover them. He wanted no notoriety; that was certain. Harris studied the matter for a moment, then reached for the telephone book and sought a number.

"Send up one of your experts," he said, when Central had given him the connection. "My safe has been tampered with and I cannot open it. The lock has been damaged some, I think. Yes; right away, please."

While awaiting the arrival of a man from the office of the safe company, Harris set about arranging the papers scattered so promiscuously about his office. As he busied himself at this task he tried to recall whether every scrap that related to the mystery of the money had been placed in the safe, or whether he had carelessly left

some links in the chain of paper-evidence lying in his desk.

He had been careful, he thought, to do this; but now he was assailed by doubts. It would have been easy to overlook something, and he realized with a feeling of self-accusation that he was not a very methodical man concerning matters in his private office.

Yet the scattered papers, as he examined them one by one, bore no relation to the secret of the safe. This fact, however, did not go far to relieve his anxiety. Such papers, if any had been found in the desk, might have been carried away. What would a thief want with such papers, unless, indeed, that thief happened to be—

Harris's unpleasant speculations were interrupted by the arrival of the expert from the safe company.

"See what you can do with it," said Harris, pointing to the safe. "I've had a visit from a burglar."

The man dropped his tool-kit on the floor beside the safe and examined the marred door.

"A burglar?" he said, with a short laugh. "Then he was a beginner, all right. My little boy could do a better job on a safe than that. This fellow has made a shoemaker's job of it."

"Has it been opened?" asked Harris, anxiously.

"Can't tell. If he hit the combination right he could have opened it, of course, then closed it again and banged it up some; although I don't see what purpose there would be in that. Chances are it has not been opened. You're the only man who can tell that, after I get it open."

"Go ahead," said Harris, impatiently.

"I'll have to damage that door some more, I'm afraid," said the safeman, as he opened his kit.

"I don't care if you dynamite it," declared Harris. "Just get it open."

The man went to work with a small electrically driven drill, after having made a connection with one of the

lighting sockets, and began boring a series of holes close to the damaged dial. Harris busied himself with some of the papers which he had not yet straightened out. He searched the office carefully in the hope that the intruder might have left behind him something which would serve as a clue, but was not rewarded.

It was evident that a skeleton-key had been used on the door which opened from the hall, because there was no sign there that the lock had been tampered with. His own key operated it smoothly. While the man worked at the safe Harris sent for the superintendent of the Bonanza Building, who started an inquiry to discover if any other tenants had been robbed. This soon revealed the fact that Harris alone had been favored by the intrusion of a thief.

There was something suggestive in this, even to the mind of a somewhat excited young man. His thoughts flashed back instantly to the city of Thomas, to his political enemies there, even to Harvey Johnson himself. Would they go as far as burglary in their attempts to "get him"? He knew what the cynical Phil Sharkey would say in answer to that question. Sharkey would answer:

"Would they!"

Harris realized it was foolish to suppose that a casual thief in search of money would select his office alone out of all the hundreds in the Bonanza Building. Why, there were offices on every floor infinitely more promising of booty than his, which even an amateur might select by a mere reading of the signs on the doors.

"Can a stranger get into this building at night?" he asked the superintendent.

"Yes; it's open. A good many of our tenants come to their offices occasionally at night, and we have to accommodate them. The elevators stop at eight o'clock, however. After that a man has to walk. If his office is more than half a dozen flights up he

has to want to get there pretty bad, I guess."

Harris wondered whether his thief had made his call before the elevators stopped, or whether he had wanted to reach that office so badly that he was willing to climb fourteen flights of stairs. It seemed out of the question to put him in the category of a common thief.

A call from the man who was working at the safe told him that the lock was about to yield to the drill, and Harris hurried over to watch the opening of the door. There was a clicking of bolts, a grinding of tumblers that were grudgingly performing their function, and the job was done. Harris reached swiftly to a drawer in an inner compartment, drew it forth, and uttered a cry of relief.

The marked envelopes containing the story that had burdened his life for the last two months were there, every one of them. He broke the seals and examined the contents of each, even counting the pages of the bulky manuscript. Not a sheet was missing.

"Thank God for that!" he said aloud, after he had tallied every item.

The man from the safe company was watching him with amusement.

"Is that all there was in it?" he asked, finally.

"That's all, my friend. But it's enough."

"Shucks!" said the safe expert, as he wrapped up his drill carefully. "I thought by the way you acted that there must be at least a million in it."

Well, that much was safe, anyhow; but Harris would have given worlds to be certain that he had left no scrap of evidence lying carelessly in his desk.

"Whoever tried to tap that," said the safe man, "didn't know as much about a safe as I know about paradise. He was a rank amateur. Just scratched the door up with a chisel, as if he'd been trying to knock the dial off, then hammered the knob sufficient-

ly to put it out of business, and gave up the job.

"Busted your desk open, too, eh? Let's see. Yep; a cheap amateur. I thought so. Take my word for it, Mr. Harris, because I've seen a good many real jobs, that whoever did this trick is not in the profession and never has been. Whoever came here wasn't fixed to tackle a safe and didn't know how, anyway."

When the workman had gone Harris went to the telephone and asked for a long-distance number. Presently he was talking:

"That you, McAllister? This is Harris, Mac. Yes; talking from my down-town office. Say, there was a burglar here last night, or maybe the night before; can't tell. Busted open my desk, searched all the papers, and then tried to get into the safe. No; he couldn't open the safe. Did I have anything in it? Why, yes; you know—certain papers. No; everything was in the safe. That is, I'm quite sure.

"What? No, I couldn't swear there were none in the desk, but I don't think so—almost positive, in fact. What? Yes; that's what I think, too. It wasn't a professional job.

"What I want you to do is this, Mac. Hello—hello! That you, Mac? Listen. There are some papers in my desk in my apartment. No, not about this business; but some of them are confidential and deal with city matters. I'm worried about them. Yes; they were there when I left this morning. But—you know—anything might happen after this. Can you send somebody around there, make sure that nobody's been in, and then have it watched for me till I get back? Yes; yes; that's what I want. Send Phil? Good! And hurry him, will you, Mac? I'm worried.

"Yes; that's right—no police. No; I haven't notified 'em here. I'll catch the one-fourteen. Sure. Good-by."

Harris closed the damaged desk, put the precious envelopes in his pocket, cast a farewell look at the mutilated

safe, and left the office. Half a block from the Bonanza Building he turned in at the entrance of a massive stone building, whose windows were heavily barred with steel, and there he hired a safe-deposit box. It was with a feeling of relief that he stepped into the street again, having left a dangerous packet, where it was safe from the hands of thieves, either amateur or professional.

"That's what I ought to have done in the beginning," he muttered as he started for the one-fourteen train that would take him to Thomas.

While the mayor was on his way back to the city, of which he was the official head, a keen-faced young man sat on a stone balustrade in front of an apartment-house in the residence-quarter of Thomas, swinging his feet lazily and smoking a cigarette. A little while before he had been upstairs on the second floor, examining the lock on the door which barred the entrance to the rooms of Harris.

His inspection satisfied him that there was nothing amiss with it; and, after he had returned to the street and taken a casual glance at the windows and the fire-escape which passed them, he assumed a perch on the railing and gave himself up to cigarettes and reflections.

Phil Sharkey had sharp eyes, and sometimes he seemed able to see amazingly well out of the corners of them. He had not consumed more than two cigarettes when, a block and a half up the street, he sighted a figure that seemed instantly familiar—sighted it, apparently, without even having looked in the direction from which it approached. Sharkey swung himself backward off the railing into the courtyard and leaned carelessly in the shelter of a large stone pillar.

The figure that had attracted his attention came briskly down the street, paused for an instant in front of the apartment, and then began ascending the steps. It was that of a man still

in his twenties, short, thin to the point of starvation, but quick and birdlike in his movements. His nose had been broken and apparently never readjusted by a surgeon, for it was cocked noticeably to the left. The bridge was sharp and narrow—it had to be narrow, for the small, shiny black eyes were set close. He wore a leather cap, a trim brown suit, and a pair of leather puttees. Sharkey stepped from behind his stone shelter, glanced up at the ascending figure and said evenly:

"Hello, Clutch!"

The man with the leather cap stopped suddenly and looked down into the courtyard.

"Hello, Phil," he answered. There was a look of swift inquiry in his little eyes. "Wot you doin' here?"

"Oh, just waiting for my friend, the mayor," answered Sharkey. "Have a cigarette?"

"Sure."

The man on the steps selected one from the box that Sharkey passed up and lighted it rather deliberately. He seemed to be considering a situation.

"So the mayor lives here, eh?" he said. "I'm lookin' for a party named Jackson. This is the address they give me. Know if anybody by that name lives here?"

"Nope," said Sharkey, indifferently. "The names are in the vestibule. Why don't you take a look?"

"That's so," said the little man. He stepped briskly into the vestibule and was back on the steps again in a few seconds. "No Jackson here. Guess they give me the wrong number."

"Guess so, Clutch," answered Sharkey, smiling pleasantly. "Somehow or other, Clutch, I've got an idea that the party named Jackson that you're looking for lives a long ways from here. It's just a sort of hunch, perhaps."

The man in the leather cap eyed him for a couple of seconds.

"Wouldn't wonder," he said. "Guess I'll go back an' git the right address. S'long, Phil!"

"By-by, Clutch!"

Sharkey smiled faintly as he watched the wiry little man go briskly down the block and turn the corner. Then he swung himself back on the railing and resumed his wait.

Winston Harris came breathless from the railroad station and found the city hall man of the *Star* still at his post. Together they went up to the mayor's apartment. Harris's desk was intact and nothing had been disturbed in the apartment.

"That's one load off my mind," he said, as he placed a batch of papers in his pocket. "I'll never leave those here again."

"I wouldn't," said Sharkey. "You came pretty near having a caller."

"Who?"

"Clutch Mangin."

"Who's he?"

"Harve Johnson's chauffeur."

Harris whistled.

"Now, I'm satisfied," he said.

"But I can't prove a thing. Clutch Mangin, eh? Good name for a chauffeur."

"Yes," assented Sharkey. "Most people think he got it on that account. But Clutch got his name from his previous occupation—it so happens."

"You mean—"

"That Clutch was a dip. He was nifty at clutching watches. He clutched Harve Johnson's watch once, and the boss was so pleased with the neatness of the job that he took him into service. Clutch is a good chauffeur, too."

"Was he ever a burglar?" asked Harris.

"No, but I guess he's willing to try. He'd make a stab at a bank if Johnson asked him to."

## CHAPTER IX.

### Constance Gives Advice.

"NO, I didn't call to talk about my money," said Harris, as he seated himself beside the desk of Jim

Wayne, in the department of public works. "I wanted to talk about the bond issue."

Wayne shook his head gloomily. The bond issue had progressed to a point where it now seemed to have encountered an invisible wall, through which it could not pass, over which it could not climb, and around which there seemed to be no way.

When the young band of reformers took charge of the municipal affairs of Thomas they were pledged to an extension of the system of water-mains, an improvement of which the city was badly in need if it was to continue a healthy development. The council lost no time in voting an issue of two hundred thousand dollars' worth of bonds to meet the cost of the extension. All that remained to be done was to market the bonds and go ahead with the work.

But it had been the boast of Johnson and the crowd that had been retired from power that the city of Thomas could sell no bonds so long as it was in the hands of an irresponsible set of idealists. And it seemed as if the boast was not an idle one.

"No luck at all," said Wayne. "Win, it is simply amazing to realize the number and variety of connections that can be established by a corrupt gang which has had a long lease of power. The roots run out in every direction. They even run into the bond houses."

"And you can't find any prospective bidders?"

Wayne shook his head.

"Those houses that are not directly influenced by Johnson, either through past friendship or community of interest, are shy because of the attitude taken by the others. It doesn't take much to scare an investor, you know."

"But the city's credit is perfectly good," grumbled Harris. "They ought to know that."

"That doesn't make any difference, Win. Johnson and his people have been busy. They've spread the report

that there is some flaw in the issue and they've got lawyers willing to plug the game along. I understand they're ready to start a taxpayer's suit, if necessary. They're bragging around that the financial world won't invest in our kind of government, and it looks as if they were right. I haven't landed a single bond house yet that will even promise to consider making a bid. And if we can't sell bonds and give the people improvements we may as well shut up shop."

"Did you try White Brothers?" asked Harris.

"Yes; everybody. Harve Johnson has done his work with his usual thoroughness."

"Suppose we offer four per cent?" suggested the mayor.

"No use, I'm afraid. I spoke of that in several places. I tell you, Win, they're afraid of the bonds at any interest you can name. It would be a confession to have to sell at four, when the old gang could market bonds at three and three and a half; yet I wouldn't hesitate at even that if I thought we could find the market. But it's no use."

Harris sat thinking, knitting his forehead into wrinkles. Finally he said, hesitatingly:

"Do you imagine, Jim, that your father would help us out?"

"No; he wouldn't. In fact, I sounded him on that. He doesn't want to get mixed up in this administration at all. Of course, the old man could take the whole issue if he wanted to, but he doesn't think it wise. He says it's up to us to fight it out somehow and make good."

"I guess he's right," answered Harris. "We can't well ask him to do more than he's already done. What are the chances of a popular subscription, in small lots, Jim?"

"I'm afraid of it. If it failed we'd be in a fine hole. This is our first bond issue, Win, and it's simply got to be taken. It's the acid test for us. With the bond houses scared out, the little

investors will be equally shy. And yet, Win, we've just got to sell those bonds!"

Wayne banged his first on the desk until the room echoed; then added lamely:

"How we are going to sell 'em, however, is beyond me."

"This administration," said Harris in a preoccupied way, "is a liberal education in what our friend Sharkey calls predatory politics and gouge government; isn't it, Jim? We go against it at every turn. They're in with the crooks; they're in with the financiers. Lord, I'm almost ready to believe that they're in with the societies for ethical culture, the promoters of higher education and the Boy Scouts. The only people they're not in with are us."

Wayne laughed without mirth.

"Have we advertised the sale yet?" asked Harris.

Wayne nodded. "The first ads will appear this afternoon," he said.

Harris rose and walked over to the window. That was a habit of his when a problem baffled him. He seemed to find relief in staring out at the world. He wheeled after a moment and turned toward the door.

"We'll sell those bonds somehow, Jim," he said grimly. "I just know it. We can't fail now."

The door opened in his face and Constance Wayne entered the room.

"Why, good morning, Mr. Mayor," she said smiling. Then she looked at him quizzically for a moment and added: "My, how stern you look! You and the commissioner haven't been quarreling, have you?"

Harris smiled and held the door open for her.

"I just came down to see if I could be of any assistance to the commissioner," she said demurely. "You see, I haven't been formally discharged yet."

Jim Wayne grinned, picked up his hat, and prepared to depart.

"Stay here and tell your troubles to Constance, Win," he said. "I'm

going out to have a look at a paving job. I may need you a little later, Miss Secretary."

The mayor and Constance stood smiling at each other doubtfully as Wayne closed the door after him.

"Well, Mr. Mayor," she said after a pause, "so you are having troubles, are you?"

"Oh, mere trifles, I assure you," replied Harris, with a wave of his hand. "Just little incidentals, such as the probable failure of the entire administration. Nothing much, you see."

"So?" The girl puckered her forehead and looked at him gravely. "Really, Mr. Mayor?"

"Don't call me 'Mr. Mayor,'" said Harris. "It sounds foolish."

"Foolish? Why, of course I shall call you 'Mr. Mayor,' when you're at the City Hall attending to official business. It's a perfectly correct title. I always call my brother 'Mr. Commissioner' when I come here to work, and he always calls me 'Miss Secretary.' We are very formal and businesslike, I assure you."

Harris looked at her, half amused, half doubtful. He was never sure that Constance Wayne took him seriously—never without expectation of a sudden flash of boyish raillery.

"Miss Secretary," said Harris gravely, "the commissioner just suggested that I tell my troubles to you—official troubles, you know. Do you think you would be interested?"

"Interested! Indeed I would. Jim—I mean the commissioner—tells me some things, and others I just pick up by working here. I know about the bond issue."

She nodded her head wisely at him and smiled encouragingly. Harris drew up a chair and motioned her to it. Then he seated himself on Jim Wayne's desk, facing her; and as he talked he punctuated his words with a forefinger.

"We'll cut out the bond issue, then," said Harris. "But I'll tell you

some other things. It relieves my mind to tell them to people once in a while."

Constance sat in her chair and watched with growing interest as Harris sketched in vigorous English the still short yet troublesome story of the reform administration. Gradually she found her attention more centered in the mayor than in his story. This was a new kind of Winston Harris to her—an aggressive, earnest, fighting sort of a young man, with a few practical ideals to which he was trying to cling amid desperate discouragements and defeats. His voice rose as he talked.

The girl in the chair became to him merely an embodiment of the citizenship of Thomas. He was telling her what he would like to tell them. Constance was fascinated, almost breathless. Presently he jumped from the desk and began striding back and forth in front of her, but the story never flagged. He told it fervently and dramatically; even wrathfully.

"And that's what it means," he cried, standing in front of her and shaking his fist almost under her nose, "to try to take a city out of the grip of a gang of thieves!"

He stood staring at her for half a minute, then shrugged his shoulders and smiled apologetically.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't mean to make a stump speech, but when I get on this subject I can't help it, somehow. I imagine it must have sounded rather absurd."

"It was great!" she exclaimed joyously. "I never realized until now what it all meant. I wouldn't have missed that for the world. But it was a shame to waste a speech like that on an audience of one."

"How do you mean?" asked the mayor.

"Why don't you go out and make that speech to the people?"

"By George, I'd like to!"

"Do," she said, her face aglow with enthusiasm. "You must. Go and tell the people what you've just told

me. Tell it all over this city. Make them understand. Don't you see? You owe it to yourself—to Jim—oh, to everybody!"

Harris crossed the room restlessly and came back to where she was standing.

"I'd like to," he said. "But I fear I can't."

Her face showed disappointment and surprise.

"No, I can't," repeated Harris. "Not now, at any rate."

"But why? Why not fight back? Why not make the people who elected you understand why you cannot carry out your plans?"

Harris hesitated. The reason in his own mind was clear. The nameless shadow that hung over him had made him afraid. He had not told her of that. Yes; he was afraid that one bitter outburst from him, made broadcast to the people, would precipitate the crash. Perhaps that was all the gang were waiting for; perhaps they were trying to goad him to it, to make his downfall doubly crushing.

Still he hesitated. Something in her frank blue eyes urged him to tell that other story—and then something within himself restrained his tongue. He shook his head slowly.

"There are reasons just now why I cannot," he said rather lamely. "Personal reasons, perhaps. Some day probably I'll see my way clear to do it."

The girl was unmistakably disappointed, even chagrined; it seemed like such a complaisant shirking of the issue.

"Of course you know best," she said quietly. "Only it seemed—well, never mind."

"I know what you mean," broke in Harris. "I know it sounds as if I were a coward not to go out and fight Johnson as he ought to be fought. Perhaps it is cowardly. But the time hasn't come for that yet. I wish to Heaven it had. I wish—"

He stopped abruptly and scowled at

the floor. Then he lifted his eyes to hers and said:

"Constance, if anybody tries to make you believe that I am a crook, will you?"

She was startled.

"Why, Win! Of course not. How absurd!"

"I wish I could rely on public opinion in the same manner," he said.

"I haven't the least idea what you mean, Win. Why, everybody knows you are honest."

"Well, I believe that most of them think so—now," he answered. "But this is a fact, Constance: the old crowd are going to try to make the people of this city believe that I have done something dishonest."

"Do they dare a thing like that?"

"Dare! Why, that's a little thing for them to do. They'd send me to jail if they thought they could."

The girl stared at him as though she could scarcely comprehend.

"But I don't see how they can possibly do anything like that, even if they try," she said slowly.

"It's the trying that hurts," answered Harris. "They'll be satisfied if they can only make people think so, whether they can prove it or not."

"But what ground have they to say such a thing?"

"It's about the Blythewood franchise," he replied shortly.

"But Jim told me about that," she cried. "He said it was all as straight as a string—even in the council. How can they accuse you?"

How? Harris had a vision of a little slip of paper, with his name upon it and the figures "\$45,000." That check had gone through the bank. Where was it now? Again as he looked at her he had the impulse to tell the other part of the story. Then he shook his head gloomily.

"I don't know just how they can accuse me," he said. "I don't know. But they're going to try, Constance. I know that much. And I don't know how to stop them!"

She watched him with grave eyes as he walked aimlessly over to Wayne's desk and began toying with a paper-weight. He seemed to have forgotten that she was in the room. Her forehead knitted itself into little wrinkles and she shook her head in a puzzled way. Then she shrugged her shoulders and walked over to the big window.

"I beg your pardon," said the mayor in a contrite voice. He was standing at her side. "I didn't intend to be rude—but I was thinking of something."

"Then let's think about something else," she said, with sudden gaiety. "We've both been dreadfully serious and we've been forgetting to call each other by our proper titles, Mr. Mayor."

"Can't you drop that?" pleaded Harris.

"Certainly not," she laughed. "Not in the city hall. When I forget you must remind me. You must be very particular and formal with your subordinates."

"But you're not a subordinate."

"Surely I am. Why, I am the unofficial secretary of the commissioner of public works; clearly a subordinate person, although I think it is a fine sounding title."

Her sudden change from seriousness to merriment astonished him, but it was infectious.

"Very well, then, Miss Secretary. May I ask when the mayor will be invited to dine again?"

"Immediately," she answered. "It is now five-thirty. Dinner is served in an hour. Do you see that little gray runabout on the opposite side of the street? It was given to me by a foolish father. If you will escort me to it and do me the honor to take the seat next to the driver, I will give you an hour's run before dinner that will improve your appetite amazingly."

"Done!" said the mayor. "But first I really ought to go back to my office and see—"

"Oh, shoot the taxpayers!" ex-

claimed Constance. She was frivolous, whimsical, irresponsible as a child. She challenged him with a glance and a tantalizing smile. And the mayor accepted the challenge.

"Come on, then," he cried boyishly. "But I warn you that if you are arrested for violating the speed laws not to come to the mayor for help."

"Pooh!" said Constance, with a wave of her hand.

## CHAPTER X.

### A Momentous Bid.

THE city of Thomas was not long in learning that the young mayor and the old boss were coming to grips over the bond issue. The newspapers picked up the story and made it plain that this was a crucial test of the reform administration. Harvey Johnson and his satellites quickly disclaimed, of course, that they were in any way concerned in an effort to prevent the city from selling its bonds.

"Why, I'd buy 'em myself," Johnson told the reporters, "if I could raise the cash. Not that I'm strong on investing in reform bonds, you understand, boys; but I'd do anything I could to help the city out. Far be it from me to hold up improvements. Of course"—and he smiled dryly when he said this—"it's too bad that the city's credit is getting a black eye, if that turns out to be true; but don't blame me for it. Why, I've even advised some of my friends to pitch in and help out the sale. But they can't seem to see anything in it."

Time and again Johnson repeated this statement in one form or another, nearly always with a solemn face and deprecatory gesture. Some of the taxpayers even took him at his word, although the reporters who interviewed the boss for their papers treated it with that private cynicism which is an essential part of the make-up of a news writer. They knew that Johnson was blocking the sale, just as well as did

the mayor and his friends; although it was something that could not be proved and, even if proved, did not constitute a crime.

Jim Wayne, and even McAllister, who was always willing to take a gambler's chance in a tight place, had abandoned any hope of securing buyers for the bonds and had been urging Harris to withdraw the advertising and postpone the sale.

"Call it off, Win," pleaded McAllister, two days before the day set for the opening of bids. "It's no use."

"That would be worse than losing out," said Harris grimly. "No; it's got to go on."

"Nonsense, man. You can explain a postponement. Most of the taxpayers understand now where the blame will lie. But if you go blindly ahead you're going to do deliberate damage to the credit of the city, and that's something they won't be so ready to forgive."

"That's right," nodded Wayne, who formed one of the little group in the mayor's office that had been discussing the outlook in a cheerless way.

Harris shook his head stubbornly and Wayne made an exasperated gesture.

"I'm going to see it through," declared the mayor stolidly. "It must go through. Somehow or other, I've got an obsession tucked away in the back of my head that we're going to pull out. Do you think I'm going to let that gang put one over on me in this fashion, without even making a fight of it?"

Wayne and McAllister looked at each other hopelessly and shook their heads.

"Beside, we've gone to the expense of advertising," added Harris, "and we're entitled to a run for our money."

"I'll see that the *Star* cancels the advertising bill if you'll call it off," exclaimed McAllister. "And I honestly believe I could get Maxson of the *Times* to do the same thing."

"Out of commiseration, I suppose,"

said Harris sourly. "No, Mac, I'm much obliged, but I'm going to play the string through. They may lick me, but I'm not going to quit."

The day of the bond sale brought no cheer to the reform administration of Thomas. There was not a bidder in sight when the day's work of the city began, and noon was the hour set for the opening of proposals. By eleven o'clock an audience began to straggle into the office of the commissioner of public works, where a big tin box, sealed and padlocked, rested on a table in the center of the room.

Wayne had been eying that box grimly all morning. He knew that it was empty. The faces of those who came to witness the issue of the mayor's fight gave him no hope. They were all familiar. Not one of them represented a bidder.

As it drew nearer the noon hour a few of the Johnson people sauntered in, nodded familiarly to the commissioner and settled themselves patiently for "the show." It was evident that they expected to enjoy it. The boss himself was not there; but the boss would know the news within the minute it happened, if he had not already accurately discounted it.

The room filled with tobacco-smoke and the air became heavy and oppressive, a fitting atmosphere for the first downfall of the "college boys." Presently Harris himself appeared, and his entrance caused a slight stir among the representatives of the old gang.

"Didn't think he'd be here to take his medicine," whispered one, nudging his companion.

"Just a front," was the response. "Looks like he'd got the punch already, doesn't he?"

Harris did look worried. He glanced several times at the big clock, whose hands lacked but a few minutes of indicating the noon hour. He sought a seat by himself, not even troubling himself to glance at Wayne, and the latter was well satisfied to be ignored, for his spirit was sore and at

that moment he was nearer to being angry at his chief than ever before in his life. Several reporters were on hand, ready to rush to telephones and "release" stories of the failure of the sale which were already standing in type, awaiting only a message to go ahead.

As the clock indicated five minutes short of noon there seemed to be a tacit understanding that conversation was to be suspended, and a hush succeeded the low murmur of voices. The crowd lounged about silently and contented itself with smoking. Harris chewed an unlighted cigar and occasionally swept the room with a half-defiant glance. Wayne pretended to be busy with some papers on his desk.

It was during this lull in the voices that the big door leading to the outer offices opened briskly at the entrance of a young man. He was out of breath, evidently having run up the stairs at a break-neck pace. Every man in the room knew that he was a stranger in the city of Thomas.

"Is the commissioner of public works here?" asked the newcomer, panting. He addressed nobody in particular, but rather the crowd that confronted him. Wayne looked up from his desk almost startled.

"I'm the commissioner," he said.

"Are the bids closed?"

"No."

Wayne glanced apprehensively at the clock as if to confirm his statement. Then he stared at the young man incredulously.

"That's good," said the stranger.

Men were rising from their chairs to watch him in fascination as he began fumbling in an inner pocket. Wayne came around from behind his desk and approached the visitor like a man walking in a trance. Harris did not move a muscle, but kept his eyes on the center of attraction, his cigar tilted at a fighting angle.

Finally there appeared in the stranger's hand a large white envelope, which he held out toward Wayne.

"Here's a bid," he said. "What'll I do with it?"

Wayne motioned him toward the tin box.

"It goes there," he said, with an effort.

In absolute silence the young man with the envelope walked over to the table and slipped it through the slot in the top of the box. Every man in the room could hear it hit the bottom.

"Gee!" said the young man, with an understanding grin. "It sounds as if it was lonesome in there. Well, good day."

He walked out of the room as briskly as he had entered, the crowd staring after him as if trying to convince itself of his reality. Wayne turned an eye on his chief and breathed a deep sigh. Harris caught the glance, but sat without making a sign, like a man in a dream. A moment later the clock on the wall began to strike, and within a few seconds the tolling of the bell in the city hall tower was informing the people of the city that the noon-hour had arrived. Two reporters slipped out and dashed madly for telephones.

"The bids are closed," said Wayne. "The box will be opened."

There was a stir then and a sudden crowding forward of the men who had come to see the new administration take a whipping. A clerk from the commissioner's office produced a key from his pocket and slipped it into the padlock. Then he broke the seals with a penknife and the lid was thrown back.

Wayne reached into the box and lifted out the white envelope which, but a moment before, had been dropped through the slot.

"There appears to be but one bid," he said, in a tone of suppressed excitement and incredulity, although he strove to make his voice calm. He examined the envelope half doubtfully, then ran his finger under the flap and opened it. As he unfolded several sheets of large paper and began to examine them the crowd became restive,

and finally a voice from the back of the room called:

"Read it out!"

Wayne glanced up with a faint smile. The only eye he sought was that of Harris, but the mayor was as stolid as an image.

"This bid," he said slowly, "is for the entire issue of \$200,000 worth of water extension bonds, at 104½."

Then he glanced at the bottom of one of the sheets.

"From Whiteridge, Hunter & Co., representing clients."

There was a confusion of voices. A man standing near Wayne made a faint attempt to start a cheer, but nobody followed his lead.

"Any check with that?" called a voice.

Harris unpinned a yellow slip of paper from one of the sheets and held it aloft.

"A certified check for four thousand dollars, two per cent of the par value of the issue, as required by law," he announced.

The crowd waited for no further information, but began pushing its way out of the office. The Johnson men departed with a mystified, even dismayed, look upon their faces, talking to each other in low tones and shaking their heads. Reporters jostled their way through the throng, on a run for their offices in the next square, for there was a new story to write now. The one in type was "dead."

A few people remained to congratulate the mayor. Harris had paused deliberately to light his cigar after Wayne announced the result, and now he shook hands smilingly with some citizens who were genuinely glad that the administration had safely passed a crisis.

"Oh, I had faith in the city's credit," he said lightly. "Now, you'll get your water mains."

Jim Wayne was the last to approach him. The commissioner had been seeing to it that the precious bid and check were deposited where no misad-

venture could cause their disappearance. He gripped Harris's hand and wrung it violently.

"You win," he said. "I didn't believe it. I can hardly believe it now. Whew, what a close thing it was! Congratulations, old man! What a grand nerve you've got!"

The noise of newsboys selling extras floated in through the open window of the mayor's office when Harris entered a few minutes later. He found McAllister and Sharkey waiting for him. The latter walked over to the door which the mayor had closed behind him and turned the key in the lock.

"Well, you killed about three columns of perfectly good type," said McAllister, with a grin. "And we haven't got as good an extra as we ought to have. We had a rattling story, telling how the old gang had killed the bond sale. Phil is actually sore about it, because he wrote it."

Harris laughed as he observed the twinkle in Sharkey's eyes.

"You newspaper folks ought to have experience enough to allow for the unexpected once in a while," he said.

"It doesn't matter," said Sharkey easily. "We'll have a peach of a story in the regular edition, with a seven-column head — '*Mayor Harris Takes the Whole Bond Issue Himself*'!"

McAllister whirled around and stared at his reporter. Then he turned to Harris. The mayor had flushed to his hair.

"What?" cried McAllister.

"Sure. He bought 'em," said Sharkey. "Ask him."

Harris looked at his two friends in dismay, and then slowly nodded his head.

"But, for God's sake," he said, laying a hand on the shoulder of each, "don't even suggest it!"

McAllister, struggling with his astonishment, looked resentfully at Sharkey and burst out:

"You didn't tell me. Why didn't you? How did you know?"

"I didn't know until about two minutes ago," said Sharkey. "Then it flashed on me. It was that name, you know—Whiteridge, Hunter & Company."

Harris nodded gravely. "You've got a good memory," he said.

"You remember," said Sharkey, turning to his chief. "One of the concerns that have been sending the—you know."

A light dawned upon the managing editor of the *Star*, and he looked at the mayor, consternation in his face.

"You've used that money!" he exclaimed.

Harris shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"What else was there to do?" he said. "I couldn't see the thing fail."

"But—" McAllister broke off abruptly and began striding up and down the room, with a nearer approach to nervous agitation than he had ever revealed.

"Oh, I know you think I've taken an awful chance," said Harris. "Maybe I did. Probably I've got myself into a fine pickle. But the city gets the water mains. Now, nobody but you two fellows know this, and it's utterly impossible to print it."

McAllister paused in his walk.

"No; of course it can't be printed," he said. "But how do you know that we're the only people who are on? Don't you suppose Johnson and his crowd know? Why, in Heaven's name, did you go to the same concern?"

"I didn't think it was safe to go to a strange house; that's why. I figured that if they kept a secret from me they'd keep my secret from somebody else. I believe they're honest."

"Oh, probably; probably," exclaimed McAllister impatiently. "But don't you suppose the gang will remember the names of their own brokers?"

"I suppose so," said Harris indif-

ferently. "They ought to—that is, if they are responsible for the other thing."

"And do you doubt that?" demanded McAllister sharply.

"No, I can't say that I do, Mac. But what difference does it make, in the long run? If they've got me, they've got me; that's all. The damage was done before I bought those bonds. Now I'll fight 'em with their own money."

"I don't like it; I don't like it," muttered McAllister, shaking his head. "There was a chance of explaining things before. But now, Win, I'm afraid you're in for it."

This view of the situation seemed to grow upon him, for a moment later he said:

"Have that bid rejected, Win. Find a flaw in it somehow. Your corporation counsel can do that. Back out of this while you can. You're getting over your head, man."

Harris shook his head.

"The bid goes," he said. "I won't back water now. The people who put the bid in for me gave me their assurance that the name of the client will not be disclosed. The newspapers can't get it. I can't see this issue fail now. Lord, Mac! I waited until yesterday, hoping and almost praying that somebody would come to the front and put in a bid. Then I couldn't take a chance any longer."

McAllister gave himself up to apparently gloomy reflections for a couple of minutes.

"Well," he growled, "you might have tipped us off, so that we'd have had a decent extra, anyhow."

"If I did that," said Harris, "and didn't tip the other papers, everybody would know that something was queer. It had to come as a surprise, you know. And, I'll tell you fellows, I was getting mighty nervous a little before twelve o'clock. I began to think that messenger had missed the train."

"So I suppose we go to press this afternoon just as much mystified as

all the other folks," observed McAllister.

"I hope so, Mac."

"Oh, of course we will, Win. You know that. We're standing by you. Phil, you might as well go over to the office and start your story. Run an interview with the mayor, expressing his pleasure and surprise, etc., and telling about his steadfast confidence in the credit of the city, and all that. You understand."

"Sure," supplemented Harris, with a nod at Sharkey. "You know what to fix up."

"Just the same, I'm worried," said McAllister musingly, as Sharkey let himself out of the office. "I wish you hadn't touched the money, Win."

## CHAPTER XI.

### Meade Visits Constance Wayne.

HARRISON MEADE turned in from the Blythewood Road when he reached the Wayne place and drove his car through the green and brown canopy of oaks that lined the drive. It was early afternoon. There had been nothing to detain him at the office; it was an off day in the courts, and, besides, he wanted to see Constance Wayne. It was with a pleasant sense of satisfaction that he sighted her in a porch hammock, off in a shady corner where the warm spring sunshine found passage baffled by a wistaria vine, heavy with blooms.

Meade stepped from his car briskly, hat in hand, and ran up the steps. Always precise in his dress, Constance none the less marveled that a man could drive an automobile over a dusty road and arrive at the end of his journey immaculate and cool.

Meade was slightly past forty, slenderly built; in fact, he was almost delicate. Save for the presence of a bald spot on the top of his head he would easily have passed for a man of thirty. Eye-glasses gave him the appearance of a student rather than that

of a prosecutor of men. Yet he was serving his second term as district attorney of the county and, so far as the prompt pursuit of the ordinary criminal went, was serving it well. He was one of the "silk stocking" assets of Harvey Johnson; the best claim that Johnson had put forth in asking the suffrage of the people of the county and city.

After the landslide of the previous fall Johnson's intimates told him that Harrison Meade should have been running for mayor, instead of district attorney; and the boss had acknowledged the wisdom of the criticism with a nod and grunt.

The Meade family was one of the oldest and "best" in the county, and found pride in the fact that the district attorney was well launched upon a career that would maintain the traditions of his house. He not only would inherit money; he had made money.

Long before he had been elected to public office Meade had revealed legal attainments that won him a private practise of generous proportions. It was this fact that had attracted the boss and which ultimately led to the young lawyer becoming private counsel to the most powerful politician in the county. When he assumed the district attorneyship Meade technically severed the relations of lawyer and client which existed between himself and Johnson, but it was no secret that he continued to be the confidential adviser of the big man in all matters of a legal nature.

He also possessed a sense of political obligation, which was a quality that Johnson demanded of his "people." Not that Harrison Meade would commit an overt wrong at the behest of the boss; he was simply "useful," and in times of stress could be relied upon not to embarrass. In mere terms of cash, Meade was strictly honest.

"How do you do?" said Constance, smiling and tossing her book into a chair.

"Just thought I'd run out for a

little chat, you know," said Meade in well-bred tones.

His eyes, so far as they ever expressed anything, rested admiringly upon the trim, white-clad figure that rose from the hammock. There was not much of outward warmth in Meade, still less of any within; yet something stirred him as he met the frank gaze of Peter Wayne's daughter. She attracted him as no other young woman ever had. Her family, he often reflected, was excellent; her education and breeding exceptional. And Peter Wayne liked him. This combination of circumstances made a strong appeal to the analytical mind of Meade, even after he had considered it with the utmost caution.

He felt, too, that Constance was interested in him. He did not consider the fact—perhaps he did not know—that Constance was interested in any man who had brains, who did things in the world and who could talk intelligently and sensibly about them. He accepted her interest, however, not as any mark of favor to him; but rather as the recognition in a well-balanced feminine mind of qualities of which he felt himself in secure possession. Meade was given to few enthusiasms and to no self-deceptions.

If Constance was interested in him the reasons, he knew, were sufficiently obvious.

For an hour they talked, mostly of Europe and art and summer vacations, Meade's well-modulated voice always dominating the conversation and leading it easily from one topic to another. It was not until he glanced at his watch and announced that his call must come to an end that he touched upon a matter which caused Constance to betray an instant's surprise.

"By the way," Meade said in his easy voice, as he stood at the top of the steps, "I heard that the mayor was out here a day or two ago."

"Yes, indeed," she answered. "He and Jim are old friends and, of course, associates now."

"Will you pardon me if I say something which might otherwise seem officious?" he asked.

Before she could answer he continued:

"I do it only to save you from possible embarrassment, Miss Wayne, and I know that you will not misunderstand my motives. The fact is, the mayor is facing a rather difficult situation, the outcome of which is problematical. It may result rather badly for him, you know. It may, in fact, very seriously injure him."

Constance felt a spirit of rebellion and battle rising within her. Why had Meade come to tell her this? And why had he glossed it with an hour of desultory conversation? The indirect way of doing things always aroused resentment in her, and this she swiftly recognized as an indirection. She bit her lip, then felt angry with herself at having shown even that trace of annoyance, and bade him with a nod to proceed.

"I simply felt that it was only fair to you," he added, "to let you know. If things should develop as now indicated, why—you will understand the reason for my speaking."

"I see," she said slowly. "Or rather, I do not understand exactly, Mr. Meade. What is the difficult situation of the mayor?"

There was a bluntness in the question that caused Meade to hesitate for an instant. His judgment, in that instant, told him that he had said enough. A hint might serve a purpose better than frank brutality.

"Why," he said smoothly, "it is a rather confidential matter at present; one that I am really not at liberty to discuss. I have probably said more than I should have. Yet I felt that it was only fair that you should know."

"Is—is it something about his office?" she ventured. She wanted Meade to talk now; but she felt instinctively that he was not a man easily led into revelations; that even now he was withdrawing cautiously,

after having told as much as he had planned.

Meade pursed his lips doubtfully and smiled at her.

"If I say, perhaps, that the grand jury may have an interest in the matter you can probably draw a reasonably correct inference."

"The grand jury!" she echoed.

"There! I knew I had said too much," answered Meade.

"Please tell me about it," she pleaded. "Please!"

He shook his head, smiled at her again and stepped into the waiting car.

"Were it not for the fact that I have confidence in you," he said, "I should chide myself for having spoken as freely as I have. But I did it solely with the idea of performing a possible service and I am sure you will not misunderstand. Good-by, Miss Wayne."

She watched him with rising wrath as the car sped out into the Blythewood Road. Why had he told that much and no more? And she had pleaded with him, too! Her face grew hot at the thought, for Constance Wayne was not accustomed to a denial of her pleas. For a moment she stood irresolute. Then, snatching a hat from its resting-place on a porch chair, she ran swiftly down the steps and around the corner of the house.

The low-bodied gray runabout stood, bright and dustless, in the Wayne garage. Constance stooped to the crank, gave it a swift half turn, leaped into the car and the machine shot out into the driveway with a jolt that threatened the clutch. Swinging around the house with a reckless sweep, she headed for the main road. Past the gates, she swerved the car sharply to the left, threw on the high speed and went like a gray projectile in the direction of the city of Thomas.

The road was, for the most part, straight, but over rolling hills, and she let the little car have its head. The wind seized her broad Panama hat, lifted it and whirled it into the ditch at the roadside; but she did not even

look behind. Her eyes were strained ahead, watching for a glimpse of a red car. As she topped a hill near the outskirts of the city she gave a nod of satisfaction and slowed the pace. The red car was ahead of her, a quarter of a mile away.

She had no desire to pass Meade, although she could have done it easily. But she wanted to get into the city without Meade seeing her. Cautiously now she followed the car ahead. When Meade reached the city pavements he slowed down and the girl followed suit. After a run of several blocks he turned to the right, then to the left again. He was now driving briskly through the outlying part of Meadow Street, which would take him directly to the city square, on either side of which stood the court-house and the city hall. Although the pace seemed to suit Meade, it was irritatingly slow to the girl. She was in a hurry. She wanted to reach the city hall, and she did not want Meade to see her.

With an impatient exclamation she wheeled sharply into a side street, ran northward for a block, then turned again into an avenue that paralleled Meadow Street. Once more there was a grating of gears and the gray runabout jumped forward. She was not breaking the law now—she was shattering it, pulverizing it; but she did not care. At each street crossing she glanced swiftly to the right, but it was not until she neared the center of the city that her eyes were rewarded with a flash of the red car on Meadow Street.

Four policemen had hailed her and had been unheeded when the gray car swung up to the curb beside the city hall and Constance jumped out, her face flushed, her chestnut hair wind-swept, her eyes bright with the excitement of the chase. She paused a moment in the corridor of the building to capture a few of the wildest tresses, then marched into the waiting-room of the mayor's office, across it and into the

office beyond. A doorman nodded to her as she went in unannounced.

Harris was dictating to his secretary as she entered and looked up sharply at the interruption. Then he jumped to his feet with an exclamation of pleasure and advanced to meet her.

"This is fine," he said heartily. "Glad to see you. It's been a dull, tedious day."

"Good afternoon," she said crisply; then turned a significant glance in the direction of the secretary.

"We'll suspend that for a while, Warner," said Harris, taking the hint. The secretary gathered up his papers and left the office.

The mayor turned to Constance as the door closed after Warner and his quick eye read the signs of demolished speed laws. He shook his head, with a laugh.

"Burning the roads again, I see. And without a hat. Really, you ought not to take chances like that," he said.

"Can a grand jury do anything to a mayor?" she asked explosively, without paying the slightest heed to his words.

Harris looked at her in amazement.

"Can a grand jury—" he began repeating mechanically.

"Do anything to a mayor?" She finished the question for him impatiently. Harris saw that the girl was very serious and excited.

"Why—yes, I suppose it could," he answered mystified. "What's up now?"

"Something about the grand jury—and you!"

Harris frowned unconsciously, still a little bewildered by the suddenness of her attack.

"And Meade," she supplemented.

Then he understood, and whistled softly.

"It's going as far as the grand jury, is it?" he said musingly.

The girl nodded.

"How in the world do you know anything about it?" he demanded, with returning astonishment.

"From Mr. Meade."

"He told you?" Harris's voice was incredulous.

"Yes; not half an hour ago."

"But why in the world should he tell you?"

She hesitated and colored slightly. Quite clearly she knew why Meade had told her. Equally clearly she knew that she would not give the mayor that reason.

"Why—he just told me, that's all," she answered. "It doesn't really matter why, or what his motive was. He told me."

"Did you say only half an hour back?"

"Less than that. I hurried."

Something of eagerness, gratitude, and admiration shone in the mayor's eyes. He took her hands, clasping them strongly, and gazed at her silently for half a minute.

"Oh, this is fine of you!" he exclaimed. "Fine and loyal! You're your brother Jim all over again."

She smiled brightly at him, yet half shyly.

"You're a good girl, Constance. I don't deserve it. Now sit down and tell me all about it."

He led her to a chair at the side of his desk and she told him with painstaking detail the story of Meade's call. Harris listened without interrupting her.

"And I felt that you ought to know," she concluded. "So I came right away, before I could forget even a little part of it."

Again the eager look came into his eyes.

"Of course, I knew they were after me," he said. "I told you that. I even knew that Meade was working up something about that franchise. But I did not know that the thing had reached the grand jury stage. Did he mention the franchise?"

"No. He was mysterious, tantalizing—mean!"

Harris smiled involuntarily at the feminine conclusion.

"Will it help any—what I have told you?" she asked.

"Of course," he answered, though how it would help he could not understand. "Every single bit of information helps. Before you can fight an enemy successfully you must know what he is trying to do."

"And can you stop it?"

He shook his head slowly and answered:

"I don't know that we can. You see, I haven't got anything to say about the district attorney, or the grand jury, either. They're beyond my control. If they want to investigate, it's their legal right to do it."

"But there isn't anything to find!" she exclaimed.

"No—there isn't. That franchise was as straight as a plumb-line. They can't show that I had a—"

He stopped short. Something that he had been vainly trying to forget flashed into his mental vision again. She sat watching him, her eyes expectant.

"You were saying—" she ventured.

Again the other story was at his lips, but Harris hesitated. No; he could not tell her—yet. He had promised. Anyhow, she would not understand; she could not help to solve the mystery.

"There is something else, isn't there?" she asked quietly, unconsciously reaching out and laying her hand on his.

"Yes, there is, Constance," he answered, imprisoning the hand. "But I can't tell you now. I'm under a pledge—to my friends."

**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.

"I'm a friend, Win."

"Oh, don't you think I know that!" he exclaimed. "You're the finest friend of all. But I cannot—now."

"Never mind," she said gently. "I won't ask."

"But you believe I'm honest, don't you?" His tone was anxious, even pleading.

"You know I do."

He read a vague disappointment in her eyes as she said good-by, and he lingered at the door, watching her as she crossed the waiting-room. Then, with a sigh and an impatient fling of his arms, he called sharply:

"Warner! We'll go on with that work now."

Constance Wayne nearly collided with a tall, stalwart figure as she hurried down the corridor toward the entrance.

"Why, good afternoon, Miss Wayne," said a deep, rough voice.

She glanced up and saw the ex-boss of Thomas.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Johnson," she answered.

He had stopped in his walk and was regarding her with a quizzical pair of eyes.

"Been calling on the mayor, eh?" he observed, smiling.

There was an implied sneer that goaded her instantly to the verge of a retort, but she checked herself. Instead she answered coolly:

"Good day, sir."

Johnson stood looking after her as she ran down the steps. Then he chuckled and resumed his walk.



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# MISS "X"

## A LONDON MYSTERY

A SERIAL IN VI PARTS—PART III

BY WATKIN BEAL

### SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

**D**APHNE BLATCHINGTON is a beautiful young girl in London society, engaged to be married to Lord Lauriston, M. P., a wealthy politician and society man—a coming cabinet minister. Daphne is marrying Lauriston for the sake of wealth and position. She is really in love with Lancelot Welde, a handsome young man, who is too poor to marry her. Neither he nor Lauriston has any suspicion that Daphne had been married when quite young to a man whom she believes to have been killed in a railway accident. Daphne receives a letter from John Pennistone, her solicitor. In it he tells her that Victor Scruit, the man she had married, is alive and in England, and asking to see her. It is a terrible blow to Daphne. She resolves to conceal from every one the fact of her husband's return, and to try to discover some means of ridding herself of him.

When she sees her solicitor he advises her to go and see Scruit at the lodging-house where he is living under the name of "Ward" at Holloway, and make terms with him. Daphne needs a lot of persuading, but finally she consents to go. She returns to Pennistone and tells him that she found her husband lying murdered on the stairs, and came away too frightened to tell any one of her discovery.

Pennistone disbelieves her and refuses to act for her. The next day the papers are full of the crime and of the story of the unknown woman (Daphne) who visited the house. A pearl belonging to Daphne is found at the house, and in terror of being traced by the police, she goes to see Sir Arthur Ainley, of Scotland Yard, tells him the whole story, and asks him to have her part in the affair hushed up for Lauriston's sake. After consulting with the home secretary, he promises to do what Daphne asks.

George Maberly, landlord of the lodging-house in which Scruit was killed, has, however, found Daphne's calling-card, and he immediately looks her up and threatens to inform the police. Terror-stricken, she pays him blackmail. Then, as the date for her wedding with Lord Lauriston draws near, her old sweetheart, Welde, calls to inform her that he has been retained to defend a woman named Olive Mason, who has just been arrested for Scruit's murder. Daphne is so upset by the announcement that she drives Welde from her with an unmerited reproach. Daphne is now in a state bordering on panic.

### CHAPTER XVI.

#### "The Only Way."



**L**LEFT alone, Daphne sank into a kind of stupor, in which her body lay inert, while her brain worked with terrible activity.

One thought dominated her mind—a dreadful, conscience-stricken thought. Another woman was suffer-

ing an injustice—worse, was almost in danger of her life—because she herself was too cowardly and too jealous of her own good name to go forward and publish her wretched story of deception to the world.

Again and again her conscience said to her, "Confess, confess; it is your duty, and the only way by which you can save this other woman." And in reply a voice within her told her, "You

\* This story began in *The Cavalier* for March 1.

cannot, you dare not, and you have not the courage."

The afternoon wore away, and it became time for her to dress. She was supposed to be going out with her aunt that evening, but she went to her and pleaded a headache, and they put off the engagement.

She spent a sleepless, terrible night, tossing during the greater part of it with writhing, feverish thought, in which her mind reacted again and again on itself in the hope of finding some solution from the extreme courses which she proposed to take. Her head throbbed, and she felt ill.

She came down to breakfast haggard. Mrs. Maddox observed this, but wisely did not comment upon it.

Very early Daphne went out. She drove straight to New Scotland Yard.

This time she sent up her name, and was admitted without any demur to Sir Arthur's sacred presence.

"I have come to you, Sir Arthur, again as a last resource," she said. "I am nearly beyond myself. I hear that some poor girl has been arrested"—she paused very slightly—"for my husband's murder," she finished in a lower and slightly quavering tone.

"Yes, I know," answered he. "It simply means that the police think they have found the woman they are looking for." His tone was very quiet, but it said as plainly as anything: "In other words, you."

"But of course they are wrong!" cried Daphne. "They must be. They think she is the woman who went to the house when I did."

"I suppose so," he answered.

"But it can't go on!" cried Daphne. "It must be stopped! Sir Arthur, I appeal to you to stop it, or else I shall have to come forward and say that I am the woman who was at that house."

"You could not do that," he said. "It would be absurd."

"But this woman is imprisoned!" cried Daphne. "She may even be tried for my husband's murder. Surely you will never allow that."

"I cannot possibly interfere," said Sir Arthur.

"Oh, but you are too brutal!" cried Daphne. "Sir Arthur, you must! It would be so easy for you to. I do not know what I shall do if you don't. I shall go mad."

Sir Arthur rose.

"Miss Blatchington," he said sternly, "you are very foolish, and you are worrying yourself unnecessarily. The police have no case against this woman beyond the fact that she was seen in your husband's company the night before. Probably she is some low-class woman, and a slight term of imprisonment while the police are finding out that they have made a mistake will not do her any particular harm. Believe me, the police will need much more evidence than they have got to get her sent to trial."

"But even then there is the risk!" cried Daphne.

"Well, she must take the risk," said Sir Arthur brutally.

Daphne was horrified.

"Oh, how can you be so callous!" she cried. "Think what it means for her to be arrested like this—unjustly! Think of the horror of it! Oh, you must exert your influence!"

"How do you know it is an injustice! She may be guilty!" cried Sir Arthur sharply. Suddenly there occurred to him the possibility that, after all, Daphne might be guilty. Her agitation was so extreme.

"But how can she be, when I was the woman who went to the house?" Daphne stopped dead. The coldness and harshness of Sir Arthur's face suddenly struck her. She had not noticed it before. She shrank from him a little, and then pulled herself together.

"What I mean is," she cried, "that the police have arrested this woman because they think she was the woman who went to the house when I did. If they knew she was not, they would have no particular suspicion of her."

"Why not?" asked Sir Arthur.

"Because, because—" cried Daphne.

Then once more she stopped dead. The only answer she could make to his question was: "Because they would immediately fasten their suspicion upon me."

There was a curious silence in the room. Sir Arthur remained looking her straight in the face with cold inquiry.

"Don't—don't you see what I mean?" said Daphne faintly.

"No."

Suddenly her restraint gave way. All her anxiety, remorse, misery, bitterness flared out in one passionate sentence.

"You do—you do!" she cried, "and you believe me guilty. Me—yes, me! Just because I come here and plead for this poor wretched woman, who is suffering because I cannot make public my miserable story, you think the very worst you can of me. Just because I am overcome you think I am in an access of remorse and terror. You have no pity. You know well enough why I cannot face the horror of my story being made public. Not because I am afraid of unjust suspicions, but because of the loathsome scandal of my marriage coming to light. I am a coward—yes, I am a coward, I suppose; you may call me so if you like, but it is brutal and vile of you to call me—anything worse."

She suddenly collapsed in hysterical sobbing.

Sir Arthur took a step toward her. He felt a little shamefaced; and now, as she bent her face tremblingly into her hands, she looked so girlish that his compunction was aroused.

"Come—come, Miss Blatchington, you are scarcely just to me," he said. "You forget—you misjudge me—I—"

But Daphne cut him short.

"No, Sir Arthur," she cried, at the same time moving with determination toward the door, "I do not misjudge you. I judge you only too keenly. You are pitiless to her because, while you do not think her guilty, you will not bestir yourself to help her. As for my-

self, you doubt—yes, in your heart of hearts you doubt me, misbelieve me. Yes, it's true," she added, as he made a sign of protest. "And, realizing that, I shall not ask any further favor of you. But I myself will do my utmost for her, whatever it may cost me."

Then, before he could frame the stammering sentences that rose to his lips, she went melodramatically from his room.

Once free from it, she hurried out of the building.

"It is the only way," she murmured to herself, and before her she saw only one possible course—confession to Welde.

And she hailed a passing cab and drove to his chambers.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### Confession.

DAPHNE found Welde in a small room, the walls of which were lined with books. A single, old-fashioned franted window looked out on a small court. He rose to greet her with the utmost surprise, for, after their wretched parting the day before, he had not expected she would wish to see him. He did not show the constraint he felt, however. "My dear Daphne," he murmured, "why this stupendous honor?" Then the smile died off his face when he discovered how fearfully anxious, almost deathly, she looked.

"Daphne, nothing dreadful's happened, has it?" he added, and a wild hope could not be kept out of his mind that something had happened concerning her engagement.

"No, nothing dreadful, Lance," she whispered, "but—"

She stopped and wondered if she could go on. Now that it came to the point of making this extraordinary confession, her courage all but failed her.

"Well, what is this terrible but?" Welde was saying to her in his whim-

sical way, and his eyes laughed, expecting some absurd childish secret.

"You remember the case you have got that you told me about," she said—"the Holloway murder case?"

"It is about that case that I came to see you, Lance," she went on. "I—I happen to know that this woman whom you have to defend cannot be the one who was at the house on the day of the murder. I thought I ought to tell you."

"How do you know?" cried Welde. "Whatever do you mean?"

"Because I know the woman who was really there," she said.

Welde immediately became excited. "You know the woman who was at the house, Daphne! Why didn't you tell me yesterday? Why haven't you told the police? Good Heavens, you can't realize the importance of this knowledge!" He leaned forward in his eagerness, and she in turn shrank back.

"I know," she breathed. "I know! Oh, Lance, that is why I have come, because I couldn't bear to work this injustice any longer, because it was driving me mad almost, because my conscience goaded me to such an extent! Oh, you don't know what I have suffered!"

Welde stared at her dumfounded. "My dear Daphne, it's not your fault if some other woman won't come forward and give herself up to the police. But I am so amazed. How in the world did you come to know this woman or her story? Who is she? This poor woman is accused of murder. You must reveal this other woman's name if she is too great a coward to come forward herself."

"Then I will tell you," she cried in such a strange, loud voice that he stared. "I am the other woman—I am the woman who was at the house. I am the Miss X. of the inquest. I—I—" She burst into shuddering tears and sank back again, burying her face in her hands.

There was a moment's tense silence. Welde was so astounded that he could

not speak, but her words left no doubt in his mind as to her meaning. All kinds of thoughts rushed through his mind, but first, and most horrible of all, the thought that she might be the author of the crime. He looked at her again. A tremendous pity, a tremendous wave of love for her swept over him.

"Daphne—Daphne," he cried, "tell me about it—explain!" and as he spoke a horrible fear possessed him that she might even confess to the murder.

She raised her head; there were hollows under her eyes, and she still panted slightly. "I am the woman who was at the house on the day of the murder," she said. "The pearl that was found was mine. Lord Lauriston gave it to me," she added, with a tightening of her voice. "When it was found I thought I should be discovered. I went to Sir Arthur Ainley, the chief commissioner of the police, and persuaded him to drop the investigation of the ownership of the pearl. He consulted with the home secretary, I believe. At any rate, it was done. You see, if I had been discovered the scandal would have been so terrible for Lord Lauriston!"

"Then the rumor that was about that the undiscovered woman was some one of good position was true?" cried Welde.

"Yes."

"Good Heavens, Daphne, what did you come and tell me this for? Can't you see—"

"I told you so that you may save this unfortunate woman," she cried. "It is driving me mad to think of her having been arrested, being in prison, to be tried for her life, when I—"

"That is just it!" cried Welde. "Can't you see what I mean? I can't go and tell any one this. I should incriminate you. On the other hand, I can't, as an honorable, as a just man, keep it back when this poor woman is in this plight. Oh, Daphne—Daphne, what did you tell me—me of all men—"

for? What am I to do? What can I do?"

"Lance, you must save this woman," replied Daphne.

"But how—how? Can't you see that if I went to any one with this story the first question they would ask would be: Who is the woman who has confessed this to you, or you have been told about? I should have to tell, and then—then you would be arrested in this woman's place."

"Lance, no!" she cried. "Surely there is some way."

"There is no way," he said. He stepped closer to her. "Daphne, can't you realize what I mean, or must I tell you brutally?"

"What—" She faltered, and yet she did know.

"Every one who heard your story would think that you were guilty of the murder."

"Oh, no—no—no!" she cried.

"Daphne, it's the truth."

"No—no! It's not!" she cried so vehemently that for a minute Welde, even in spite of his great love for her, doubted her. He looked at her curiously, doubtfully, as if he could not fathom her eyes, just as Mr. Pennistone had looked at her that night that she had gone and told him of her husband's death—just as Sir Arthur Ainley had looked at her a few hours before.

"Lance, you don't think—you cannot— Oh, tell me that you don't suspect me, too!" she cried frantically.

"You know I could not. I am telling you what other people will immediately think—what you do not seem to see. It is impossible that I can reveal what you have told me—reveal your identity. Whatever it may cost my conscience, I must keep silence forever—"

"Then you do not believe me!" she cried. "In your heart of hearts you suspect me of this horrible thing, as Mr. Pennistone did, as Sir Arthur Ainley did—"

The atmosphere of the little room

suddenly seemed to have become surcharged with tragedy. "Yes—yes, you doubt me; you suspect me!" she cried, and he could not deny it. Her frantic outburst, her trembling passion had indeed influenced him. He stood stupidly, shamefacedly silent.

"Yes—yes, you doubt me!" she repeated. "Oh, how cruel and brutal the world is! Oh, Lance," she cried out in her misery, "I could have borne anything but this!"

In a second he was stooping beside her, putting his arms round her tenderly, his love sweeping away his suspicions before a passionate torrent of overwhelming feelings.

"Daphne—Daphne!" he cried. "How can you for a moment dream that I could have thought what you think I did? Of course I could not. Come—come, you are hysterical and overdone. Go home now and rest, and I will come and see you later on."

"Oh, but I cannot believe you, Lance! I could see it in your eyes. The way you looked at me—"

"No, Daphne, you are wrong, and you must believe me," he said. "I have nothing but pity for you for the terrible position you are in. Come, try and calm yourself, and later on I will come to Hill Street and we will talk it over."

Daphne stumbled to her feet and walked to the window, smoothing back the hair from her forehead. She looked wonderfully tall and graceful and girlish.

Welde looked at her curiously, one might almost have said suspiciously. "By the way, Daphne," he said, "there is one thing I do not understand—how you came to go to the house at all, what your connection with the case was."

It had come—the question that she dreaded so terribly! Her heart seemed to stop.

The slight pause that had elapsed since he had spoken seemed enormously long; then she lied; where the truth had stuck on her lips, a lie came glibly. "I went to the house to see a relation,"

she said, raising her chin and clenching her hands. "The murdered man was a relative of mine."

"A relative!" echoed Welde.

The faculty to lie came readily now.

"Yes, a relative, I must tell you, Lance. Although my father was well off, many of his relations are quite poor. This man was really his brother; he appealed to me for help, and I went to see him—"

"You went to see him—and found that he had been murdered. You mean you went up-stairs and found him dead? But where was the landlady, the woman of the house?"

"She had gone down-stairs."

"Then you didn't go to her; of course, she didn't know till afterward?"

"No. I fled. Oh, Lance, it was so horrible, and I saw that if I stayed an instant some one might come, and—and they would think that I had done it."

Welde could say nothing. He stared at Daphne as if she had changed before his eyes, as she had in fact, for she had suddenly become invested with a terrible suspicion.

"Oh, Lance, Lance, speak; say something!" she cried suddenly.

He started. He had been unconscious of his silence, just as he had been of the curious stare of incredulity and doubt which he had fixed upon her, and which she could not fail to interpret.

"I cannot think how you have borne it all," he said.

"I haven't," she cried. "I haven't! It is almost killing me. It is killing me slowly." She burst into frantic tears. The knowledge of her lie to him; the knowledge of his suspicions; the knowledge that the other woman was suffering and would suffer until she confessed her horrible secret; the knowledge of the whole wretched tangle of her life—the horror of it all combined overtaxed her already overwrought nerves.

Welde saw that she was at the end

of her strength. "Come, come, Daphne," he murmured, taking her gently by her arm after she had recovered a little. "you are quite overdone. You must let me put you into a cab and go home. Later on I will come to Hill Street and talk it all over with you, as I said."

She made some weak objections, then gave way. Welde had a cab called, and he led Daphne down to it. His clerk stared and wondered what the meaning of this strange visit was.

"And the other woman?" she whispered as they went down the stairs. "What will you do about that?"

"I'll try and think," murmured Welde. "In any case, I will come this afternoon."

Then he went back to his room; it seemed to him now like the charnel-house of all his faith in anything in life. The cinders of his love and hope lay about it.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### Does He Still Live?

AFTER Daphne's visit to him, Welde let things drift, neither telephoning to postpone his appointment to see the woman, Olive Mason, nor keeping it. Nor did he go to Daphne later, as he had promised. Instead, he sank into a fit of abstraction, from which he did not rouse himself until late in the afternoon. Again and again he thought over every single thing that she had told him, and each time he reviewed the facts the more horribly were his suspicions aroused.

She must have lied to him; he felt certain of it. The fact of her going to see a relation could not have been her only reason for going to that house; or, if it had, could she have gone there and found the man dead and said nothing if her reason for going had been absolutely innocent?

So he thought—thought hard, looking very much more serious than was

his wont. His handsome, sensitive face took upon it an expression of the intensest misery, and his forehead wrinkled with lines of anxiety; for, in spite of his suspicions, he could not help feeling the pity for her which was the natural outcome of his love.

Meanwhile Daphne sat alone at Hill Street waiting for Welde, who did not come. As the clock slipped round from five to six, and six to seven, she began to realize that she would not see him.

"After all," she thought, "Lance can do nothing; nothing can be done unless I am willing to sacrifice myself." And the image of the pale face of the other woman floated accusingly before her eyes.

Lord Lauriston called for her a little later, and they drove to the restaurant where they were booked to dine with Lady Farjeohn.

"To think that I haven't seen you all to-day, Daphne dearest!" he cried. "I do not know how I have endured it. What have you been doing?"

"I really forget—shopping principally, I expect."

"I thought I saw you in a cab in the Strand," he added.

For a minute she was going to deny it; then the sickening thought that he might have seen her outside Welde's chambers occurred to her.

"Yes, I was there," she said.

"Why didn't you let me accompany you?" he went on. "I am always at your beck and call, you know, if you want me. I always shall be now, Daphne."

"Oh, you are too foolish!" she cried. "The obedient husband, just like the obedient lover, has gone out of date."

"I suppose I am out of date, then," he said, a trifle hurt, and thinking, as he often thought, that when he was affectionate or very solicitous for her she was apt to be bored.

"At any rate, Daphne, I comfort myself that now it is only days and not months to our wedding. Such a little time."

"Yes, such a little time," she answered tonelessly.

She pressed his hand, which he had laid on hers, and closed her eyes. She closed them tight—to try to shut out the vision of that other woman.

She seemed to be in the car with them, coming between her and her lover. She saw her pale face and reproachful eyes looking in at the windows, looking with bitter reproach—and pleading.

The car sped on, with a steady, muffled beat of its powerful engines, slipping over the roads with easy luxury. They were in Piccadilly now, and in a second or so they arrived at the restaurant. A gorgeous and towering porter ran lumberingly to the curb and opened the door even before the car had stopped. He was deference personified. Lord Lauriston alighted, and one or two people hurrying by paused to gratify their curiosity by staring at whoever might get out of the car with him.

The woman is always the center of interest. People look at the man, and then at the woman to see what she is like; then they look at the man again, and wonder what their relations are.

Daphne alighted with her skirts gathered carefully up and her elaborate cloak drawn round her.

As she put her foot on the pavement her glance encountered a man standing just a little way back to the right of the hotel entrance.

It was the face of her husband—of Victor Scruit!

Daphne almost cried out, and as her eyes met the man's he moved sharply and turned to go away, but some one coming in the opposite direction collided with him, and just for a second he turned his face again so that she saw it—this time not full, but in profile. Yes, it was her husband's face!

She went up the steps into the foyer trembling so violently that she could hardly walk, and had veritably to lean upon Lord Lauriston's arm.

Immediately she thought of that

night she had seen the man watching her house under the lamp-post in Hill Street. That face had been so like her dead husband's! And now this one! What was the meaning of it? Was it a ghastly coincidence, or—was the man who had died at Klito Road not her husband?

For the first time the actual possibility of this occurred to her—occurred to her with horrible dawning suddenness—and she thought of the man at the inquest who had declared that he had seen her husband alive. She wondered if it could be possible. If so, he might come back at any time, and then—she dared not think what that might mean to her. Resolutely she broke off her thoughts and tried to apply her mind to her present surroundings—the crimson-carpeted foyer with its white and gold walls, palms, and mirrors; men and women passing in evening dress; silent-footed liveried waiters, and in the distance the cadence of the band playing in the restaurant, now loud, now soft, as the communicating doors opened and closed.

But it was useless; she could not efface the image of that man she had seen in the crowd from her mind, she felt so certain it was her husband's face. She glanced round, almost feeling that he would come in and confront her. Then she came to herself with a sudden start; Lady Farjeohn had just come up.

• “So sorry to be late!” she cried. “I’m afraid you were here first. Thank Heaven, none of the others have come yet; it would have been too awful if you’d all been waitin’ for me. How are you, Laurie? Dreadfully bored; and you, Miss Blatchington? I really shall have to get into the way of callin’ you Daphne now.”

Great emphasis was laid on the “now,” as much as to say: “Now that I really can’t help my brother marrying you, I must make the best of it.”

Daphne smiled and shook hands, and managed to make some remark.

“I’ve four other people comin’,”

went on Lady Farjeohn, who never listened to what any one said. “Made-line Lanksbury and Mr. and Mrs. Ashwell and another man. You know George Ashwell, of course, Laurie?”

It was the home secretary. Daphne turned cold. Was she never to be free of her other life? Was she always to be pursued by reminders of it? Were those who knew always to dog her footsteps, guided by the malicious fate which seemed to deliberately torment her? Just then the others did arrive. Mrs. Lanksbury, gaunter and more bitter-looking than ever; she had come specially to torture herself by seeing Daphne and Lord Lauriston together. Also the Ashwells.

Daphne thought he gave her a look of keen perception, and once or twice, later on, she caught him staring at her. The other man did not count, and Daphne did not catch his name. Then they all trooped into the restaurant.

Daphne felt ghastly.

The music, the lights, the ripple and murmur of laughter and conversation, the brilliance of dresses and jewels, glass, and silver, all seemed garish and horrible to her.

So, also, for another of the party—Mrs. Lanksbury, who, as usual, was tortured unbearably by her fierce passions, her soul eaten with the ever-burning fire of jealousy which she could not subdue, her nerves on edge, her pulse throbbing, her mind dwelling on the bitterness of her life, while she smiled and talked.

She sat next to Lord Lauriston, and so strong were her feelings that she could hardly bring herself to speak to him rationally, and her voice almost trembled.

Lady Farjeohn judged what was in her mind, and smiled secretly. If, however, she wanted to injure Daphne, she had no conception that had she tried deliberately she could not have done so more effectually. To Daphne it was torture to sit next to Ashwell. She knew he had discussed her at Lady Murchiston’s reception—he had be-

trayed her. She felt from his manner that he was hostile to her.

Ashwell was, as a matter of fact, quite conscious of Daphne's feelings, though she disguised them. He was a man of the keenest and quickest perceptions; a clever student of human nature, not because he particularly cared about the study, but simply because it came naturally to his able mind to judge what was passing in the minds of others—an invaluable gift which assisted him in his dealings with men. He was also a cruel, almost brutal man.

Sitting now next to Daphne, and chatting to her on various commonplace subjects, he wondered again whether she had been the innocent woman in a terrible position that his friend Ainley had judged her to be. Innumerable as were Ashwell's interests in life, and arduous as was his work, he had not forgotten the details of Daphne's case in the least. Its peculiarity had appealed to his imagination, and he had thought it worth remembering and following up.

Now chance had suddenly given him the opportunity of, to a certain extent, testing his suspicions, and he cast about in his mind for some means of utilizing this opportunity.

Conversation had turned on a case then being tried in the law courts, a case in which some very startling revelations on the life of a well-known man had come out quite accidentally—revelations which had shown him to the world who knew him in quite a new and much less favorable light.

"I could never have believed," said Lord Lauriston apropos of the man in question, "that any one could have led such a double existence. Fancy the anxiety of keeping up such continual deception, the terror that that man must have suffered of being found out."

"Ah, it would be interesting," remarked Lady Farjeohn, "to know the secret histories of just a few of one's friends. Just fancy what one would hear."

"One does hear a good deal as it is," remarked some one else. "That is what we call scandal."

"Ah," I don't mean that," said Lady Farjeohn. "What I was thinking of was different. Now, do you think there are many criminals in society, for instance?"

Suddenly the home secretary chimed in. "Dozens!" he said emphatically.

Daphne started ever so imperceptibly, but he did not fail to notice the start. He had been waiting for it. He had noticed her slightly paling as this topic had progressed.

Lady Farjeohn laughed.

"Do you really think so, Mr. Ashwell?" she said. "How interesting."

"I'm sure of it," said Ashwell.

Mrs. Lanksbury moved uneasily, not from fear, but excitement. She remembered quite well, too well, what he and Sir Arthur Ainley had said about Daphne; she had, in fact, thought of it unceasingly ever since. Now she stared at Ashwell fascinatingly, the hate for Daphne in her mind crystalizing into a kind of fiendish exultation. She wondered what Ashwell was going to say next.

"But how are you sure?" pursued Lady Farjeohn, in response to Ashwell's last remark. "Could you now, Mr. Ashwell, point out to me any criminal in this room?"

Daphne drew in her breath, waiting for Ashwell's answer. The band, playing a selection from "Carmen," seemed to blare in her ears. She took a sip of wine—champagne—to steady herself. The room swam a little, and everything sounded far away.

"Certainly I could," cried Ashwell, "and within twenty feet of you!"

Lady Farjeohn went off into a scream of laughter, and Lord Lauriston smiled slightly and said:

"Really, Ashwell, you'll be had up for slander."

"A man or a woman?" cried Lady Farjeohn.

Mrs. Lanksbury stared. Then she ate a small bit of bread and stared

again. Her fingers were twitching with nervousness.

"A woman," answered Ashwell. "A lovely and charming woman."

"George is pulling all our legs, I'm sure!" cried Mrs. Ashwell.

"Really, is that the truth?" cried Lady Farjeohn.

"The absolute truth, Lady Farjeohn. I happen to know." He turned slightly toward Daphne. "I can assure everybody that it is the truth. A home secretary's duties are very varied. I reprieved her, but I have thought ever since that she was guilty."

Daphne sat back. Her face was bloodless. This was almost too much; and Ashwell, brutal and determined, was observing her, noting the twitching of her fingers, the quick rise and fall of her bosom, her untouched plate.

Lady Farjeohn looked at him, first laughing, then more seriously, for Ashwell himself was very serious. "Good Heavens! You make me feel quite creepy!" she cried. "Why, I shall begin to think I've done something awful myself. But you haven't told us what it was—what she did."

"No, I haven't told you that," replied Ashwell.

"Won't you?" cried Lady Farjeohn, laughing again. "Or was it so shocking that you daren't?"

Ashwell hesitated. Daphne leaned forward and took her glass between her fingers. She wondered if he could hear the thumping of her heart. She was conscious, too, that Mrs. Lanksbury was staring fixedly at her.

"Do tell us," coaxed Lady Farjeohn, "or whisper it to me, Mr. Ashwell. I'm dyin' to know."

Ashwell did not smile, however; his face was set.

"There's nothing shocking about it in the sense you mean," he said. He paused momentarily, and added: "It happened to be murder."

His words fell distinctly on the expectant circle of listeners, and there was a strange, surprised hush.

"Oh!" cried Lady Farjeohn, sobered in spite of herself. "I thought it was something improper."

Then suddenly they were startled by a peculiar sound.

As he spoke Daphne had tried to drink a sip of wine to steady herself; but the room had gone dark, she had choked, the glass had fallen from her grasp, spilling its contents on the cloth in among the roses and silver, and she sank back in her chair, almost falling to the floor. She had fainted!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### Ashwell Threatens.

**DIRECTLY** it was realized that Daphne was ill, the whole of the dinner-table was convulsed with excitement. Ashwell jumped up, and Sir John Farjeohn, and they both supported her.

But she opened her eyes almost immediately. "Oh, I am so sorry!" she stammered, though only half remembering exactly what had happened. "The room was so hot, it was stupid of me not to have gone out."

Lauriston was at her side in an instant, and took the place of Ashwell; the latter withdrew, and stood looking coldly toward her, almost accusingly, Mrs. Lanksbury thought. The latter did not attempt to assist Daphne; but Mrs. Ashwell suggested they should help her out of the room; so they led her slowly along. People at adjoining tables stared, and waiters came forward obsequiously. The commotion was unavoidable.

Mrs. Lanksbury was the first to reseat herself—she was most unsympathetic; then they all sat down—except Ashwell, who remained standing, with his napkin crumpled in his hand, watching Daphne's retreating figure thoughtfully as she was half pushed and half walked toward the doors.

"It must have been the heat," said Mrs. Lanksbury in so peculiar a tone that Ashwell glanced at her sharply.

"Yes, the heat," he murmured, not troubling to gratify the suspicions which he divined Mrs. Lanksbury, for some reason or other, had. "Nothing is so unpleasant as to turn faint."

But he knew and thought otherwise; and, to his mind, Daphne had confessed her guilt as surely as any prisoner does who pleads guilty at the bar of a court of justice.

Meanwhile she—his victim—supported between Lauriston and Mrs. Ashwell, had been helped to a little room off the foyer, where she was set down by an open window, and where she quickly recovered; but her paleness and a look of anxiety remained, facts which Ashwell could have explained, though the others were unable to account for them.

"My poor Daphne, I am so sorry," murmured Lauriston. "I will take you home at once."

"Yes, please do."

The motor was called, she was helped in, and Mrs. Ashwell went back to the dinner party.

"She is better," she said. "Lord Lauriston has taken her home."

"I'm so glad," cried Lady Farjeohn, who herself was never ill. "Poor thing. But it was annoyin', all the same."

"Any one would think," remarked Ashwell slowly, "that, considering what I had just been saying, Miss Blatchington had something to conceal." And he laughed unpleasantly.

Meanwhile Daphne was driving home with Lauriston. She sat with her face thrust toward the open window of the car and drank in the cool reviving air, and her lover, sitting silent beside her, watched her, and noted the delicate beauty of her profile, and once again his passion for her welled up and overwhelmed him.

By the time they got to Hill Street she was quite recovered, and then her dominant anxiety became to conceal from him the real cause of her fainting attack; partly with this object, and partly with the object of avoiding

spending the evening alone with him, which just then would have been particularly distasteful to her, she proposed that they should go straight on to an At Home which they had been invited to after the dinner.

At first he demurred, for he was fussy and solicitous where she was concerned to an absurd degree, but she insisted, and by half past ten they were again in the motor.

Once arrived at the house where the At Home was being held, she was freed from Lauriston's surveillance, for the hostess bore him off—he was always more or less lionized in society—and she found herself talking and chatting to numberless people and quickly forgetting her anxieties. But she was not to remain long in forgetfulness, for she had barely spoken to a dozen people when some one brought up a man to present to her.

It was Ashwell!

The meeting was unavoidable, he had evidently come on from the dinner at the Stafford and arrived just about the same time as she had. Now, however, that they had been brought together by an acquaintance who was quite unconscious of the drama in which these two were playing such hostile parts they could hardly do otherwise than speak.

Daphne paled, and she saw only coldness in Ashwell's hard eyes. It died at once, and he murmured a few conventional words, but that fleeting expression had been sufficient to prove conclusively to her in what manner he regarded her.

The acquaintance moved away, and they were left face to face alone in the crowd. Suddenly it occurred to Daphne that Ashwell might even go further, and reveal her story to Lauriston, and, at the same instant, she conceived the idea of pleading with this man for mercy.

"Mr. Ashwell," she said to him in a low voice, "I should like to speak to you privately; would you be good enough to take me somewhere where

we can talk without being interrupted?"

For a second she fancied he was surprised, and he seemed to show it by the slightest raising of his eyebrows and the slightest contemptuous shrug of his shoulders.

"Certainly," he murmured, and offered her his arm and led her through the packed room to an alcove at the back of the conservatory. It was screened off from the landing by palms.

Daphne had scarcely been able to let her hand rest on his coat sleeve as they had made their way to this retreat, and directly they were sheltered from observation she sat down frigidly and faced him. A band was playing somewhere, and the murmur of conversation and laughter, the rustle of women's frocks and the movement of the crowd that filled the rooms seethed around them.

In their retreat, however, it seemed tensely silent. Ashwell evidently meant to wait for her to begin. She raised her eyes to his face. There was a kind of reproach in them.

"Mr. Ashwell, you know Sir. Arthur Ainley?" she said.

"Yes," he replied.

"It was he, in fact, who told you my story."

"Your story—" His query was insolent.

"Please don't treat me like that," she said with dignity. "I know that you know my story, that you have heard it in your official capacity. I want to know what you meant by your pointed remarks at Lady Farjeohn's dinner this evening. You believe me guilty?" she said.

"I have done nothing to justify that remark," he answered.

"I think that you have," answered Daphne. "But that is not what I wish to discuss. It is immaterial to me whether you judge me as I suppose every one would who heard my story. I cannot prove my innocence to you, and I do not intend to try. On the other hand, your base suspicions cannot rob

me of it. I wish to know what you are going to do."

"I should not do anything unjust."

"Wouldn't you, Mr. Ashwell? Do you think your behavior to-night has been just? You heard my story—my wretched story"—she showed a tendency to become hysterical—"in your official capacity. Don't you think it was a breach of trust, don't you think it was dishonorable, to attack me, as you did, when I could not defend myself?"

"Perhaps," he said. "But is this a case where honor is demanded? Are you behaving honorably in deceiving all of us as you are doing? Would you be at this house at this instant, do you think, if people knew the truth?"

Daphne rose trembling. "Oh, how can you insult me so brutally?" she cried.

"Am I not putting to you the plain truth?"

"Oh, yes, the truth!" she cried bitterly. "No one would blame you, Mr. Ashwell, for telling the truth brutally to a defenseless woman."

"Have you said all that you wished to say to me?" he asked her at last.

Daphne drew in her breath and seemed to try and gather her strength. "No," she replied. "Although I recognize that I am in the hands, in the power, of a pitiless man, I am going to ask for pity, ask a favor. I wish to ask you not to reveal what you know to Lord Lauriston."

"On what ground?"

"Because I am innocent," she answered.

"Could you prove your innocence to me?"

"No. Nevertheless I repeat that I beg you not to reveal my story to Lord Lauriston."

"Until this evening," he said with deliberation, "I had not the slightest intention of doing—what you are now asking me not to do. What has happened this evening, however, has entirely altered my position. I feel sure now of what I only had the greatest

doubt of before—your guilt, Miss Blatchington. What I said at Lady Farjeohn's dinner this evening I said with a particular object, with the object, not of making a disclosure of your history, but of testing whether your denial to my friend Ainley was well founded.

"In my opinion you have now proved your guilt, by what happened at the dinner this evening, more conclusively than the verdict of any jury would have ever proved you guilty. That being the case, I feel that it is absolutely my duty to go to Lauriston and reveal to him all that I know about you."

"Oh, no, no!" she gasped.

"Why not?" cried Ashwell, speaking less deliberately. "Originally Ainley and I had your story suppressed simply in order to save Lauriston the unpleasantness of having his name mixed up in such a case, purely for that reason. But then when we did that I, at any rate, presumed your innocence. Now I know your guilt. That being so, there is no obligation upon me to hold my peace any longer, rather the reverse. When, and so soon as I think fit, I shall go to Lauriston with all that I know about you, unless"—he paused—"unless you yourself will voluntarily break off your engagement. That is the condition of my silence."

"Never," cried Daphne, rising suddenly, trembling and furious. "I would rather do anything than gratify you by doing that. I will do nothing of the sort. Please do not presume to coerce me. If you wish to go to Lord Lauriston, if you feel driven to do so by your sense of duty, Mr. Ashwell, go to him by all means, but, let me warn you, he will judge of your conduct as any man of honor would, and he will show a great deal of loyalty to me. Now, please leave me."

Ashwell raised himself and stood erect. His face was ugly, and the sting of her last word had evidently touched him.

"I only think," he said bitingly,

"what an impartial judge of the facts of your story as known to me would think."

## CHAPTER XX.

### Watchers in the Dark.

DAPHNE sat in the firelight on the afternoon following Lady Farjeohn's dinner.

She was too restless to read, to work, or to occupy herself in any way; now and again she poked the fire into a blaze and tried to make it dispel the shadows of the gathering gloom and bring warmth to her limbs, which felt numbed and chilled with apprehension.

Why did Lauriston not come?

Usually solicitous to the point of absurdity for her health, it was inconceivable that some extraordinary reason was not keeping him away after her supposed illness at the dinner. Daphne had expected him early; as the day had worn on her doubts had grown; now they had changed into sickening fears.

He knew. He must know. Already Ashwell must have done his brutal work; the blow she had dreaded so long, and had striven so hard to avoid, must have fallen.

She shivered, and her thoughts turned to the other woman, the woman who was suffering the retribution which was hers by rights.

As the afternoon died and night took its place mournfully, the wind rose a little and howled desultorily round roofs and chimneys, and up the street came a woman's figure battling against the wet gusts. A tall figure enveloped in a long coat, a gaunt, almost tragic figure; and when one obtained a glimpse of her face under her umbrella, one saw that it was a pale, bitter face framed by golden hair which looked an incongruous setting for it.

The woman was Madeline Lanksbury—Madeline Lanksbury soothing her surging emotions with exposure to the wind and the rain, and seeking,

with a mad, unconsidering design, to find some evil fact about Daphne by childishly watching her house.

Mrs. Lanksbury was not a bad woman at heart, nor was she of a mean or deceitful nature, yet heartily as she despised herself for this strange action, her burning hatred and jealousy of Daphne drove her to it—drove her to it against her will.

She paced feverishly up and down Hill Street, keeping ever-keen eyes on the innocent windows of Daphne's house.

As many people know, one side of the street is occupied by a blank wall, the wall of a large building. In the shadow of this Mrs. Lanksbury felt that she was secure from the observation of any curious people who might otherwise have noted her eccentric movements. Strange and terrible was the passion that forced this woman, almost middle-aged, who should have been so happy and contented, out into the streets in the wind and rain, on such a fool's errand—to watch the windows of another woman's house.

And for what? She did not know. All that she had was a vague idea of lying in wait to take revenge, a revenge for which she despised herself.

Suddenly Mrs. Lanksbury paused and withdrew against the wall. A man who had come up the street looked up at the number of Daphne's house, then went up the steps—a queer looking man. He rang the bell. Then a woman came from the same direction, slowly and curiously, and her eyes were fixed on the man. She crossed the road. Mrs. Lanksbury observed her, but continued to watch the man.

The door opened and a parlor maid was seen for the instant in the light.

"I am Mr. Maberly," said the man. "I want to see Miss Blatchington."

The maid said she would see if her mistress was in.

"Oh, she's in, right enough, such a beautiful day as this," said Maberly. "You jus' tell her, will you, that Mr.

George Maberly is here? She'll see me, no fear."

The parlor maid flushed, but admitted him as far as the hall and closed the door.

Mrs. Lanksbury saw all this and wondered. The other woman saw it all, too. It was George Maberly's wife.

After a time the woman walked toward Mrs. Lanksbury and, forcing her way against the wind, knocked up against her. She started, surprised, then passed on embarrassed; but a few paces on she stopped and glanced nervously at Mrs. Lanksbury, then walked farther away.

Then she turned again and passed Mrs. Lanksbury. Mrs. Lanksbury's pulses beat. She went behind the strange woman.

"You are watching that house," she said.

Mrs. Maberly started. "What if I am?" she said suspiciously.

Mrs. Lanksbury hesitated for a moment.

"I am watching it, too," she said in a lower tone.

"Why?" asked the woman dully.

"I cannot tell you that," replied Mrs. Lanksbury, "unless you can tell me who that man is who has gone in?"

The woman considered. "If it's anything to you," she replied, "he's my husband."

"And he has gone to see Miss Blatchington?"

"Yes, though I'm not so sure that she wants to see him. But, yes, she—she must, that's the pinch of it." The woman's manner became excited, and she seemed to be talking to herself. "To give him fifty pounds; there must be something in it. Something more than I know."

"Why, what do you know?" asked Mrs. Lanksbury eagerly.

"Nothing to 'er credit."

"What is it?" demanded Mrs. Lanksbury.

"That I wouldn't dare tell. What

have you to do with her? Perhaps you're a friend of hers, for all I know, and will tell. No, thank you, I don't chatter about them sort of things. When it's that sort the less said the better."

"I am not a friend of hers," said Mrs. Lanksbury, "and I have no reason to be kind to her. Rather the reverse. Tell me what you know. Perhaps she has wronged you, too." She was shaking now with excitement, a dreadful eagerness. "I hate her."

"Well, I dare say you've reason, and I dare say others have, too. If she had her rights I reckon she's be in prison now—not living there playing with men as don't belong to her."

"In prison," repeated Mrs. Lanksbury. "What do you mean?"

"What I ses." All the time the woman kept her eyes fixed wretchedly on Daphne's house.

Suddenly Mrs. Lanksbury gripped her by the arm. "Woman, do you mean murder?" she whispered.

"Who told you?" breathed Mrs. Maberly.

Mrs. Lanksbury could hardly control herself.

"The man who went into the house was your husband, wasn't he?" she said. "What had he to do with the lady who lives there?"

"Ah, that's just what I want to know," cried Mrs. Maberly. "What did she want to give him that money for?"

"She gave him money?" cried Mrs. Lanksbury. "How much?"

"Fifty pounds."

"But why?"

"To hush up what he knew, so he says," cried Mrs. Maberly. "But I can't believe it. No, I can't. Fifty pounds's a lot of money."

"But to hush up what?" asked Mrs. Lanksbury.

"What he knew about her, about how she came to our house the day of the murder."

"What murder?" Mrs. Lanksbury tried to keep calm.

"Don't you know?" cried Mrs. Maberly, now forgetting her own worries to become loquacious on her pet theme. "Didn't you ever hear of the Holloway case that there was such a to-do about a little while back? You must have heard."

Mrs. Lanksbury shook her head. "Perhaps I did," she said, "but I don't remember. Tell me."

"Why, it was in our house," went on Mrs. Maberly eagerly. "Me and my husband let apartments and we had a man there, a gentleman, I should say, called Ward. Well, the long and the short of it was he was found murdered. I found him," she added, with a touch of importance. "It was one afternoon; but there, it was that awful I can hardly talk about it. Found him lying on the stairs dead—murdered."

Mrs. Lanksbury shuddered, but even her horror at this grim revelation could not deaden her intense feverish excitement.

"Yes, yes," she cried. "It must have been horrible. A dreadful thing for you to have happen in your house. But what has that got to do with Miss Blatchington?"

Mrs. Maberly's eyes opened wide. "Why, don't you understand?" she cried. "Miss Blatchington turns out to be the lady as I let in, and who must have been there just about the time the murder was done. No one else can have done it but her. My husband found a card of hers, and went and told her he knew, and she paid him to keep quiet."

"But I don't understand," Mrs. Lanksbury said. "You say Miss Blatchington went to your house. If you knew she went, how was it you didn't know exactly what happened?"

Mrs. Maberly, immediately becoming loquacious again, repeated the whole story of the murder at great length, not forgetting the subsequent finding of the pearl.

"And it's my belief," she said, "there was more in that than we was allowed to know; but the police, or

some one, knew, though they were supposed to be hunting so hard for this lady. But it was strange. That pearl, oh, it was a beautiful one, must have belonged to this Miss Blatchington; but of course the police didn't know then, but they were going to try and find out. Then it was all hushed up of a sudden; and, would you believe it, they had it put in the papers that it belonged to a friend of mine?"

"Why don't you go to the police now that you know that Miss Blatchington is the person they want?" Mrs. Lanksbury suggested.

"My husband won't let me, not that I think it's right to keep such knowledge, but it would be more than my life is worth to do what he says I sha'n't."

"And that is all you can tell me?"

"Yes, that's all, madam," replied Mrs. Maberly, seeing now that the interview was at an end, and wondering what it would be worth to her.

Mrs. Lanksbury thought of this, too. Now that she had got what she wanted, so much that she wanted, from this woman, she was only too anxious to be rid of her, to be alone, to be able to gloat over her strangely acquired knowledge, to enjoy the sense of power that at last she felt she had over Daphne.

She even felt in a generous mood, so appeasing was the knowledge to her tormented senses which had writhed so long without any prospect of revenge.

She fumbled in her bag for an instant, withdrawing, in the end, a bank-note.

Then she held it out to Mrs. Maberly. "Buy something with that for yourself," she said. "It is ten pounds. And—and let me know if you are ever in trouble."

Mrs. Maberly thanked her cringingly and moved away.

Mrs. Lanksbury walked in the opposite direction. Her fingers tightened and loosened convulsively in her muff, her whole body was held rigidly, and

her nerves were tingling with intense excitement.

Could she do it? Dared she do it? she asked herself, for suddenly, now that the instrument of revenge had been placed in her hands, her conscience stepped before her and cried, "You shall not!"

Dare she go to Lauriston and bare this secret of Daphne's life to him?

A few seconds later she crossed the pavement and called a cab.

"Twenty Uppingham Square," she said.

It was Lord Lauriston's address.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### Lauriston Denies.

**L**AURISTON, although he was an unmarried man, considered himself so important a person that it was incumbent upon him to keep up a large house of his own, instead of living in chambers or in his father's mansion. An establishment added to his dignity, and dignity and self-respect were the very gist of his life.

At nine o'clock on the same evening that Mrs. Lanksbury set out in a cab to go to his house, after her interview with Mrs. Maberly, Lauriston was sitting in his library, reading.

The atmosphere of refined repose which surrounded him was stifling, and into the midst of this there was suddenly launched a bombshell.

The door opened and a man-servant in knee-breeches came in, and stood deferentially before his master until he, having read to the end of a paragraph, looked up.

"A lady to see you, my lord—Mrs. Lanksbury. On business, she asked me to tell you, my lord."

"Mrs. Lanksbury," echoed Lauriston, his mind still deep in the subject in which it had been immersed.

"Yes, my lord. Shall I bring her here?"

"Well—very well; in here, Robins." There was a short interval, during

which Lauriston got up, put aside his book, and prepared for his visitor. He was still wondering what the reason of Mrs. Lanksbury's visit could be, and perhaps had the slightest premonition of something unpleasant. Then the door was thrown open, and the footman announced: "Mrs. Lanksbury, my lord." There was a rustling of a woman's dress, and she swept into the room.

Lauriston went forward to receive her. "This is a very great honor," he smiled, as he drew up a chair for her by the fire. "A brutal day, hasn't it been?" he said. "Why on earth do we live in England?"

"Horrible," said Mrs. Lanksbury; then, as he obviously waited to hear the purport of her strange visit, she went on: "Lord Lauriston, you will think it strange that I have come to you so unceremoniously, so unconventionally, as this. But I had to come because, as an old friend"—her voice shook—"I felt it my duty to."

Lauriston inclined his head. "Please go on," said he coldly.

Mrs. Lanksbury drew herself up. She felt that his remark was a rebuke. "You are now engaged to Miss Blatchington," she said, and could not prevent her voice from shaking. "It is about Miss Blatchington that I want to speak. Quite by accident I have discovered something about her—something discreditable to her. I felt that I must tell you, that I could not keep it from you, now that the day of your marriage is close."

Lauriston's face betrayed a variety of emotions, but chiefly a slow hardening in his gaze toward Mrs. Lanksbury. She noticed it, and seemed to draw in to herself a little. "That is, I will tell you if you wish it," she added.

"By all means, tell me," said Lauriston. "But, knowing Daphne as well as I naturally do, I cannot believe that it is anything more than a malicious libel upon her; whatever it may be." He spoke gravely, not disagree-

ably or with excitement, and Mrs. Lanksbury felt with a pang that he was very loyal to this girl.

"I do not think it is a libel," she said. "It is simply that by a strange accident I have discovered that Miss Blatchington is connected with a case that was talked about a good deal, I believe, a little while ago—a murder at Holloway."

"A murder?" Lauriston's well-bred calmness had broken down.

"Yes, I am sorry to have to tell you. There was a mysterious woman in the case. That woman was Miss Blatchington."

"Daphne! It can't have been."

"But I am certain of it," went on Mrs. Lanksbury, loosening her cloak a little and displaying the diamonds at her throat. Lauriston observed the movement, and noted her pale hair and darkened eyebrows, and thought how very vulgar the woman looked. Secretly he was thankful that he had repented of his folly in time.

"I am certain of it," repeated Mrs. Lanksbury. "Perhaps you remember the case. It was in all the papers. The Holloway murder, it was known as."

"Yes, yes; I remember something about that; but I repeat, it can have no connection with Daphne."

"The matter was hushed up, as I happen to have discovered since, by the home secretary."

"The home secretary!" echoed Lauriston. The mention of his colleague's name did arouse him, and for the first time he felt a tinge of real fear. "The home secretary!" he repeated. "Ashwell? What had he to do with it?"

"Apparently Miss Blatchington went to him and confessed that she was the woman, and that if the matter were not hushed up she would be discovered."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Lauriston; yet his mind was gripped with a horrible feeling that this was true. In a flash he remembered the tale that had been going the round of the clubs.

"Well, as a matter of fact," Mrs. Lanksbury said, "I happened to overhear Mr. Ashwell talking about Miss Blatchington with some one whom I did not know at Lady Murchiston's reception. You remember the one. You were there. Mr. Ashwell actually mentioned Miss Blatchington's name, and said that he believed, after all, she was guilty."

"Guilty!" echoed Lauriston, starting. "Guilty, after all! What did he mean?"

"Yes, guilty. Guilty of this murder. Whoever the other man was he was talking to, he knew the story also. He took a different view. He seemed to argue that she could not be guilty, but that is not all."

"Well, what else?" he asked.

"You were at Lady Farjeohn's dinner, the other night, at the Stafford Hotel. Miss Blatchington fainted. Don't you remember what we had been talking about? Mr. Ashwell was there. Don't you remember what he said?"

Lauriston thought, and suddenly he recollected. "Yes, I remember," he said. "About criminals. And you think that Ashwell was alluding to her?" he cried.

"I am certain of it."

"He couldn't — he couldn't have been."

"Why not?" cried Mrs. Lanksbury, and there was a note of triumph in her question.

Lauriston noticed it. "Why do you come and tell me all this?" he cried suddenly. "It cannot be true. I will not believe it."

"I only say what I think and what I believe to be true," replied Mrs. Lanksbury with intense bitterness. "You must judge, you who know Miss Blatchington so well."

"How can I judge when you come here to poison my mind with these malicious lies?" he cried furiously. "What interest had you to repeat all this absurd rigmarole—except to poison my mind, to injure Miss Blatchington—to separate us?"

"What I have told you is not—a malicious lie," she retorted. "It is the truth so far as I can judge; it would appear the truth to every reasonable person who considered the facts with an unbiased mind. They all tally. If you doubt me, go to your friend, Mr. Ashwell. I am positive that he could confirm what I have told you and the inference which I have drawn."

"How did you come to hear all this?" asked Lauriston.

For a minute Mrs. Lanksbury hesitated. She had thought of him asking that question, but for the moment she had no lie ready.

"That I cannot disclose. It was in a curious manner," she answered.

"I demand to know," said Lauriston. "I have a right to know, as I am engaged to be married to Miss Blatchington."

Again the anger flashed into his eyes and again it cut Mrs. Lanksbury to the very root of her sensitiveness. Now that she had committed this mean, this despicable act, she realized that she had only made the position the worse and not the better.

"I cannot tell you," she said. "Why should I tell you? You have no right to ask me, no right to my confidence. I have told you all this, painful as it was to me to come to you, simply because I considered it my duty to. Yes, I only came because I felt that I must do it—as an old friend—and you have rewarded me with your anger and your contempt. I am sorry. But nothing will make me reveal to you how I have discovered what I have told you."

She stood up imperiously.

"Very well," he said. "I have no right to ask you for anything that you do not wish to tell me—and—and I am obliged to you for what you have told me."

Mrs. Lanksbury drew back, and there was silence. He was evidently determined to say nothing else, and she stood irresolute for a second. Then she realized that she could say or do nothing more. She had played her

last hopeless card, and failed—lost more disastrously than if she had thrown up the game without this final despicable effort. She was on the verge of hysterical tears.

"You—you do not resent my having come to you like this?" she murmured.

"No."

His cold negative cut her brutally. In it he implied not only indifference, absolute indifference to her, but also contempt. She knew that he understood quite well the real motive that had actuated her.

"Then good-night, Lord Lauriston," she said.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### Doubt—and Dread.

LAURISTON was in his library. To all appearances he was as undisturbed now as he had been before Mrs. Lanksbury's visit—except that now his book was still laid aside and he stood by the fire with his elbow on the mantel-shelf and his face resting on his hand in the attitude of a tired man.

He was thinking. Loyal as he was to Daphne, deeply as he really loved her in spite of his apparently cold nature, the poison of Mrs. Lanksbury's words had entered into his mind, as it could not fail to.

For all he knew, the whole tale might be a malicious lie, as he had stigmatized it to Mrs. Lanksbury, but, in spite of that, there was the suspicion—the unendurable suspicion—that it might be true—and more, assuming that it had a substratum of truth, there was the much more horrible suspicion that Daphne had been concealing something from him. Lauriston, whatever his other failings might be, was a man of the strictest honesty.

A thoroughly straight man, a man of high ideals, of good, clean ambitions; a man who was honorable and straight for the sake of honesty and straightness, and not merely because

he regarded it as incumbent upon him, or because he feared the penalties of wrong-doing.

And, being such himself, he expected the same of all other people; those whom he found to fall short of his ideals he simply severed himself from with contempt.

Now there was this horrible suspicion of Daphne in his mind—a suspicion based on firm grounds, he could not but admit.

He remembered the Holloway case now perfectly, remembered what the men at his club had told him about the mysterious woman being supposed to be some one well known; remembered what Daphne's friend Welde had said that afternoon at her house after he had been to the inquest; remembered all sorts of trifling things that had been said to him about the case which had created such an excitement at the time, mainly because of the persistent rumor that had somehow or other got about that the woman the police were searching for was a woman in society.

Then a new point occurred to him. If Daphne was this woman, what was her connection with the murdered man—what could it be? He knew that she was little known in society; that people had said before he became engaged to her that she had dropped from the clouds; that, as people always will say in such a case, she had a discreditable past to conceal; that she was, in other words, an adventuress.

He had believed none of these malicious sayings; but on account of his great love for her—his infatuation—he had felt certain that she was honest and what she held herself out to be—a young girl of good position and a fair amount of money who had lost her parents, and was being taken about by her aunt.

Supposing, after all, his fears were well founded?

He pressed his hand against his forehead and groaned. He could not bear to think of losing Daphne; and yet could he, Lauriston, a future cabinet

minister probably—a gentleman and a man of position—could he marry a woman who had a tithe of these unpleasant circumstances attaching to her life? He could not! He knew it. It would ruin his career, make him an object of contempt, be an insult to his name and his position.

If only he could be certain! He was in an agony of doubt. He took up a portrait of Daphne, a large, full-length portrait which stood upon his desk. Daphne in evening dress, with a little mock crown of diamonds in her hair,

and a long string of pearls depending from her delicate neck, both the diamonds and the pearls being gifts of his.

No, he could not believe any evil of her, and yet— Still that little germ of suspicion!

He must go to Daphne as soon as possible, go and know the truth once and for all. It was too late that night, of course, though he hardly believed he could wait through such hours of suspense as putting it off until the next morning would mean. But he must know soon.

**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.

# ONE WONDERFUL NIGHT \*

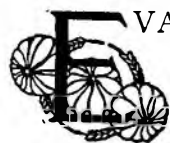
A SERIAL IN V PARTS—PART V

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.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Threë O'Clock in the Morning.



**E**VANS, the police captain of the Twenty - Third Precinct, had a fairly long story to hear from McCulloch. The roundsman did not spare himself in the recital. He pleaded guilty to three errors of judgment. In the first instance, he would have done well had he taken the advice given by Devar during the halt at Forty-Second Street, and arrested the supposed "Anatole" then and there; secondly, he might have secured corroborative evidence of the cleansing of parts of the automobile—evidence now destroyed by the waters of the Hudson; and, thirdly, he should have asked Brodie to intercept the

fugitive long before it became possible to plunge the car into the river.

"All I can say is, I sized up the situation and acted accordingly. It did look like a good plan to give him rope enough"—here he checked his utterance and glanced at the prisoner—"but he fairly got the better of me when I went aboard that barge. I ought to have left one of these gentlemen to watch the quay. My excuse is that the barge seemed to offer the only probable hiding-place, and there was always the chance that he had gone into the river with the car."

"Anyhow, you got him," observed Evans sympathetically, for McCulloch was a valued and trustworthy officer.

"Well, he's here; but Mr. Brodie got him," whereupon Brodie tried not to look sheepish.

\* This story began in *The Cavalier* for February 15.

Steingall and Clancy arrived before the roundsman had made an end of his experiences, which he had to recount for their benefit. The two detectives had resumed their ordinary clothing. They looked tired, but quietly elated, and it was noticeable that Clancy's mercurial spirits seemed to have evaporated. Those who knew him would have augured from that fact that the chase was reaching its climax, but Curtis and Devar fancied that the little man was thoroughly worn out and pining for rest. Never had they been more egregiously deceived. He resembled a hound which bays its excitement when the quarry is scented, but restrains all its energies for the last desperate struggle when the flying prey is in sight.

The Frenchman sat as though in a stupor, and seemingly gave no attention to the details of the hunt; but he sprang to his feet in sheer fright when Steingall walked up to him and said sternly:

"Now, Antoine Lamotte, listen to what I have to say."

"I am betrayed, then?" snarled the man viciously, though his voice went off into a curious yelp of agony as a twinge reminded him of Brodie's vigorous aim with half a brick.

"Yes, the game is up. I know your confederates, and you will be confronted with them before daybreak. No, I am not bluffing. That is not my way. Their names are Gregor Martiny and Ferdinand Rossi. Now, are you satisfied?"

Lamotte sank back into his chair. His features were wrung with pain; but the momentary excitement vanished, and his manner grew sullen again.

"If you know so much I can tell you nothing," he growled.

"No. You can give me little or no information I do not possess already. But, unless you are more fool than knave, you can at least try to save your own miserable life."

"How?"

"By a full confession. Did you know that Martiny and Rossi meant to kill Mr. Hunter?"

"No, I swear it!"

"Then why don't you take the hint I have given you? It will be too late when you are brought before a judge. Believe me, I shall waste no more breath in persuading you. It is now or never."

The Frenchman rose again, this time more slowly. He glanced around at the ring of faces and, for a moment, his gaze dwelt contemplatively on Clancy. Perhaps he was vouchsafed some intuition that this man was to be feared, but Clancy remained unemotional as a Sioux Indian. When he spoke, it was with a certain dignity, and, oddly enough, his words, though uttered in English, savored of a literal translation from the French mint which coined them.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "I am a man who regards loyalty to his friends before all."

"An excellent quality, even in a criminal, if your friends are loyal to you," replied Steingall with equal seriousness of manner.

"But the woman who betrayed us—may she be eaten up with cancer!—is not my friend. Those others are."

"I have met with no woman. I have good reason to think that you have no real notion of the influences which led your Hungarian friends, as you call them, to commit a murder. But I rather respect your sentiment; so, to give you one final chance, I tell you now just how you were brought into this thing. You are a thief, and the associate of thieves, but you have never, so far as our records go, been convicted. Your real name is not Lamotte, though you have passed under it long enough in New York to establish some sort of claim to it, and you were sentenced to two years' imprisonment at Toulon eight years ago for a breach of military discipline.

"On your release you consorted with anarchists in Paris, and, to es-

cape arrest as a suspect after a dynamite outrage, you emigrated to America. You are a clever mechanic, and, had you tried to earn an honest living, you would have succeeded, but some kink in your nature drove you to crime, mixed up with a good deal of political froth. When you heard that precious pair of fanatics, Martiny and Rossi, plotting in Morris Siegelman's café to prevent a marriage between an English lady of great wealth and a wretched little Frenchman, so that the cause of a Hungarian party might benefit if Count Ladislas Vassilan secured the lady and the money—especially the money—you thought you saw a way toward striking a blow at the Austrian monarchy and also benefiting yourself. So you offered your services, and your acute brain put them up to a dodge they would never have thought of.

"It was necessary for your purpose that you should figure as a respectable man, so you had cards printed in the name of Anatole Labergerie, and addressed letters to yourself under that same name at Morris Siegelman's restaurant. I do not know yet where you obtained the car, but I shall know tomorrow—the fact is immaterial now. What is of real importance is the method whereby you humbugged the janitor at Mr. Hunter's office by pretending that you had been sent there by Mr. Labergerie because the car was at liberty somewhat earlier than was expected, and the unfortunate journalist took it as a compliment, drove to his rooms, changed his clothes, and returned to the office, thus playing into your hands, because the car sent to his order by Mr. Labergerie was thereby prevented from picking him up at the appointed time.

"It was shrewd of you to guess that a busy man on the staff of a newspaper would be glad to utilize an automobile placed unexpectedly at his disposal, and fate played into your hands by the delay in issuing the duplicate marriage license, which he had promised De Courtois to obtain from the city hall."

"Sir, I knew nothing of any marriage license."

"Probably not. You were concerned only with taking your confederates' money, and posing as the clever brain of the outfit. But I imagine, and not another word shall I say, that they overreached you a bit when they knifed Mr. Hunter."

Lamotte, to describe him by the name under which he figured in the annals of the crime, stretched out his hands in a gesture of emphatic protest.

"No matter what becomes of me," he said eagerly, "I ask you to believe that I did not even know they had killed Mr. Hunter until I saw the blood on the panel when I took them to Market Street."

"So. You have been slow to adopt the lead I offered you. But why, in God's name, did they stab the man? That could hardly have been their deliberate plan."

"It was a sort of accident. So they said. They really meant to force him into the car and overpower him. The scheme was to bring him to Market Street and keep him there until—"

He hesitated. He had given up hope for himself, but he stopped short of introducing other names into prominence.

"Until the Switzerland had reached New York, with Count Ladislas Vassilan and the English lord on board."

Then Lamotte yielded.

"You know everything," he said, with a dejected shrug. "Either you are a wizard, or Gregor and Rossi are open-mouthed fools."

Steingall smiled inscrutably, but Clancy, who had remained strangely quiet, did not relax the close attention he was giving to the Frenchman's least word or action. It was about this time that Curtis noticed the little detective's air of complete absorption, and he wondered at it, since Clancy and his chief seemed to have unfolded the whole mystery in a way that was at once admirable and bewildering.

"Then why don't you exercise your wits, man? I have been candor itself in my statement, but it is your own words which will be taken down by the police captain here, as you are charged in his presence with complicity in the murder, and they will be on record for or against you when you are brought to trial."

"You want me to admit that what you have said is true?"

"Just as you wish," said Steingall, half contemptuously. "I now charge you formally with taking part in the murder of Mr. Hunter. If you have anything to say, say it, and it will be written at once, and signed by you, if you choose."

He waited a moment and then turned aside.

"Put him in the cells," he said. "I shall not trouble further about him now."

"One moment, *monsieur*," exclaimed Lamotte, evidently believing that he was seriously jeopardizing his life by not taking the advice given so openly. "I admit that you are well informed, but I must add that I was ignorant of the murder till nearly half an hour after it had occurred."

"Pooh! that's no use. Make a full statement, or take the consequences." Steingall's tone was so offhanded that Lamotte was afraid he had lost a good opportunity of saving his neck.

"But what is there to tell?" he cried.

"Just what happened outside the Central Hotel and afterward."

"I brought Mr. Hunter there, and nodded to Martiny and Rossi, who were waiting on the sidewalk, to show that he was inside the car. I remained at the wheel, and any one can perceive that my position made it impossible to see what was going on when the door opened. Martiny was nearest to me, and I am sure he never used a knife, so it must have been Rossi. Is that correct?"

"I believe so, absolutely. What next?"

"Martiny said '*Vite, allez!*' so I shoved in the clutch and made off at top speed. In Fifth Avenue I glanced over my shoulder to look at Mr. Hunter, and see whether or not he was struggling, but my friends alone were visible in the back seat, so I believed they had put him on the floor, and did not stop or look at them again until I reached De Silva's house in Market Street. Then, to my annoyance, when I got down to help carry in Mr. Hunter, I found blood on the step and the panel, and the idiots told me what they had done. It is only fair to say that De Silva is innocent of any part in the affair. He didn't even know that we were bringing any one to Rossi's room, and we took care that he should be out at the time we counted on arriving at Market Street."

"You didn't attack Mr. Hunter sooner because your orders were to wait until the last possible moment?"

"That is so."

Devar was unaware of any change in the manner of either of the detectives, because he was watching Lamotte's livid face with a species of fascinated horror; but Curtis, who had often been compelled to hold similar inquiries into cold-blooded crimes committed by Chinese coolies, found greater interest in observing Clancy. A subtle exultation had suddenly danced into the diminutive Franco-Irishman's expressive features when Market Street was first mentioned, and his coal-black eyes blazed in their slits at the sound of that name, De Silva.

A queer thought flitted through Curtis's mind, but he put it aside, because Steingall was speaking again.

"Well, you got rid of your friends. Then what did you do?"

"The rest was simple. I cleaned the car in a hurry with a bit of oily waste, took it to a yard which I have used at times, at an address which I beg you to permit me to forget, changed the number plate, and, at an hour which I deemed discreet, drove up-

town in order to dispose of the car by leaving it deserted near the garage from which it came. The owner's house is on Riverside Drive. His name is Morris; he is absent in Chicago on business, while I learned that his chauffeur was ill."

A gasp of uncontrollable excitement from Devar drew all eyes to him.

"Great Jerusalem!" he cried. "Next house to my aunt's!"

"There's a mistake somewhere," broke in Brodie. "I know Mr. Morris's car, and that isn't it."

Lamotte was positively annoyed that his word should appear to be doubted.

"*Messieurs*," he said grandiloquently, "I assure you on my honor that I am not misleading you."

Nor was he. The discrepancy was cleared up next day. The Morris automobile was undergoing repairs, and the motor manufacturers had supplied the gray car for use in the interim.

Steingall swept the matter aside impatiently.

"Go on," he said to the Frenchman. "You're taking a note of this?" he added, glancing at Police Captain Evans.

"Got it," was the laconic reply.

"There is nothing else," said Lamotte. "I noticed that I was being followed, and soon discovered that I could not shake off a more powerful car. I was armed, but did not want to get into trouble on my own account, and I knew that I would have to deal with three men. So I decided to throw the car in the river, and trust to my wits for a means of escape. I would have succeeded, too, had I been aware that there was a fourth man in the party. From where I lay hidden beneath the wharf I could only count the number of people who crossed to the barge. I was unable to see them, so I included the chauffeur among the three. I was wrong. Perhaps it is as well, because I meant to get away, and would have fought. That is all. Will one of you give me a cigarette?"

Devar produced a case, and, in re-

sponse to Steingall's nod, offered its contents to the prisoner, who took two cigarettes; nor could he be prevailed on to accept more. Despite his hangdog looks he had an undoubted air of refinement. Degeneracy had claimed him as its own, yet some streak of a nobler heredity had struggled to exert its influence, only to fail.

Steingall put no more questions, and Lamotte relapsed into silence, smoking nonchalantly while the police captain's pen was scratching a transcript of the shorthand notes.

Curtis caught Steingall's eye and drew him aside.

"That fellow told the truth about the actual murder, I think," he said. "My story coincides with his in every detail."

"I'm sure you are right," agreed the detective. "The odd thing is that Clancy should have spotted him from your description telephoned to headquarters. You remember, Clancy was looking at a book of photographs when I brought you to the bureau?"

"Yes."

"He had found him then. Some time since, during the anarchist troubles in Chicago, the French police sent us a lot of pictures, and this fellow's was among them."

"Why didn't he ask me if I recognized him?"

"That is not pretty Fanny's way. Clancy never does what any other man would do. He hates to have any one verify an opinion he has once formed. Had you said the photograph resembled the man you saw outside the hotel, Clancy would actually have begun to believe that he might be mistaken."

"At any rate," said Curtis, smiling, "you two seem to have made marvelous progress with the inquiry since a set of drunken stokers broke up a harmonious gathering at Morris Siegelman's."

"We have done pretty well, but this"—and Steingall glanced at Lamotte—"this goes far beyond any-

thing we hoped for to-night, or this morning, for the new day is growing old."

Curtis was puzzled. He realized that the capture of the chauffeur was important, but it shrank into insignificance beside the connected history of events which the detective seemed to have at his fingers' ends.

"I suppose I must not ask questions," he said with a quizzical look into the extraordinary eyes which had earned the chief of the detective bureau the picturesque description coined by an enthusiastic reporter.

"No need," said Steingall. "Unless you are fed up with excitement, I purpose taking you and Mr. Devar down-town again, just as soon as Evans has stopped slinging ink. Then you will appreciate the importance of the things said here."

Curtis remembered that fleeting impression he had garnered while watching Clancy during the Frenchman's statement, which, however, appeared only to confirm the ample history already in Steingall's possession. But again his thoughts were diverted from the matter by Steingall's next words.

"I take it you have not called at the Plaza Hotel since we came away together?" he said. "You certainly could not stop there during the rush after the missing chauffeur, and I suppose McCulloch brought you straight here after the arrest?"

"Yes. We passed the hotel on the outward journey, and I thought I saw a light in—in my wife's suite, but we returned by a different route."

He fancied that the detective was about to explain a somewhat peculiar question, but at that instant the police captain summoned Lamotte to his desk.

"I'll read what I have written," he said, "and, if it is correct, you will sign it. You need not sign unless you wish, but the statement will be given in court, and, if you attest it now, may count in your favor."

He recited an exact record of the

Frenchman's words, and Lamotte took the pen and scrawled his name. Then, at a nod from Evans, the roundsman took the prisoner to a cell.

"By Jove! George—or perhaps I ought to say 'By George, Jove!'—you did that well," exclaimed Clancy, speaking for the first time since he had entered the station-house, and addressing Steingall.

"I thought I was going to fail, but I stuck to my guns, and it came off," was the modest if rather cryptic reply.

"We, too, have fought with beasts at Ephesus, so let us into this," cried Devar. "What came off, and where was the risk of failure? To my mind, you had Lamotte in a double Nelson grip all the time."

"That's where you are in error, young man," said Steingall cheerfully. "Sometimes it pays to pretend a knowledge you don't possess, and this was one of the occasions. Mr. Clancy and I knew that somewhere in New York were two Hungarians named Gregor Martiny and Ferdinand Rossi. We knew that they were the men who killed Mr. Hunter, but we had no more notion where they were hiding, or how to lay hands on them, than the man in the moon."

"Great Scott! Haven't you arrested them?"

"No, sir. That is a pleasure deferred."

"Do you mean that you wanted that address out of the Frenchman?"

"That's about the size of it. I might have searched for a week for Martiny and Rossi, but no one in East Broadway would have owned up to seeing or even hearing of them."

"Still, you had their names pat?"

"Yes," said the detective, cutting the end off a cigar, "we had their names, and we ascertained why they killed Hunter, or would have killed any other person who tried to balk their scheme, but our information stopped there."

Steingall, usually so communicative, evidently meant to keep to himself the

source of his inspiration, and in a few minutes Brodie was driving the four men to the police headquarters.

They went to the detective bureau, and Steingall telephoned the Clinton Street police station-house.

"You know De Silva's place in Market Street?" he said. "Well, within ten minutes half a dozen men gather quietly near the door. Two others should watch the back, and stop any one making a bolt that way. Yes, of course, there may be shooting. I'll turn up in a private auto, and stop off at the corner of East Broadway. Leave the rest to Clancy and myself. No, only two, but they're hot stuff."

He unlocked a drawer in a desk, and took out a pair of revolvers. After examining them to make sure they were fully loaded, he handed one to Clancy.

"I hope we shall not require them, Eugene; but there's no telling," he said.

"I suppose I'm not allowed to shoot anybody, so you might lend me a stick," suggested Devar.

"You and Mr. Curtis are remaining right here," said the detective.

"Oh, be a man, Steingall!" cried Devar disgustedly. "Don't play dog when there's a chance of a real row. Look how I swung things your way in Morris Siegelman's!"

"You might let us peep round the corner, at any rate," smiled Curtis.

Steingall meant to be obdurate, but yielded, and it was well that he allowed his sympathies to sway his judgment, or there might have been an early vacancy in the chief inspectorship.

At that middle hour of the night even New York's prowlers of the dark had retired to their foul rookeries. The streets were almost deserted, and the glare of gas and naphtha had vanished. The houses of the Hungarian quarter were stark and gloomy now, many wobegone in their semidismantled aspect, and all sinister. When the automobile drew up noiselessly at the cor-

ner of Market Street, a broad enough thoroughfare, but broken and battered in appearance, the only visible forms were those of three or four patrolmen, who were sauntering aimlessly along the sidewalk. But there were eyes watching through unknown chinks in shutters, or peering through soiled curtains behind dirt-stained windows, and the quiet concentration of the police in one special quarter evidently did not pass unnoticed.

When the battle began, it partook of the vagaries of real warfare by opening unexpectedly.

It was ascertained afterward that two men darted like shadows out of a passage in Market Street, and separated instantly. One came toward East Broadway, where the detectives and their companions had just alighted from the car, and the other, breaking into a run, dived into Henry Street, with two patrolmen after him. He it was who opened the fray, and the peace of the night was suddenly disrupted by the loud bark of an automatic pistol. Three shots were fired with a quick irregularity, and then came the deeper report of a service revolver.

Steingall and Clancy ran forward, and the fugitive coming their way had actually passed them, with two more patrolmen in pursuit, when Steingall saw him and turned instantly.

"Stop!" he shouted.

The man only increased his pace, and the detective, astonishingly active for one of his bulk, raced along at top speed.

"Stop or I shoot!" he cried again.

By that time the self-confessed outlaw was nearly opposite the car. He checked his pace, half turned, luckily not to the side where Curtis and the others were standing, and leveled a Browning pistol at the detective. He even hesitated an instant to take aim, but before his finger had pressed the trigger, Curtis had sprung at him. There was no time for a blow, but a well-placed kick spun the would-be

murderer off his feet, and the crash of the shot came as infinitesimal part of a second too late. As it was, the bullet struck a lamp higher up the street, and a line taken subsequently showed that it must have missed Steingall by only a few inches.

The miscreant reeled and lost his balance. Then Curtis closed with him, caught his right wrist, and threw him heavily; but such was the man's frenzied resolve not to be arrested that he fired twice again before the deadly weapon fell from his grasp. He did no damage, but the uproar brought a motley crowd from the neighboring dwellings. Market Street, which had seemed asleep or dead, proved itself very much alive and awake; but the sight of uniformed police hurrying up from several directions restrained any undue curiosity on the part of its denizens.

The desperado on the ground was handcuffed at once, and, while a policeman was searching his pockets rapidly to ascertain if he carried another pistol, Steingall gripped Curtis by the shoulder.

"I owe you something for that," he said quietly. "I rather fancy he would have dropped me if it hadn't been for you. Oh, I know what I am saying. I shall not forget. Show a light here," he added to a patrolman who had run from East Broadway on hearing the shooting. "Now, Mr. Curtis, do you recognize him?"

"Yes," said Curtis—whose experiences in New York were revealing an unsuspected side of his character, for in Fifty-Sixth Street, in Morris Siegelman's, and now again in Market Street, he had proved himself what Allen Breck would have termed "a bonnie fighter"—"yes, that is the man who spoke to me in the Central Hotel. I imagine he is Martiny."

"Good! Put him in the car!"

The detective rushed off, but soon returned.

"Sorry to trouble you, but will you come this way a minute?" he said.

Curtis went with him. In Henry Street a small group was gathered in the roadway. A policeman had proved himself a better shot than Rossi, and Hunter's murder was already avenged in part.

The dead man was left to the district police, to be carried to the mortuary in an ambulance. Steingall, with his prisoner, returned to headquarters, while Clancy made a thorough search of the room the pair had occupied in De Silva's house.

The Hungarian did not deny his name nor his share in the earlier crime.

"It is fate," he said doggedly, in his broken French. "When they tell me we have killed the man I know the police get us."

He would say no more. His words seemed to imply that neither he nor Rossi meant to do other than maim the journalist whom they regarded as De Courtois's dangerous helper; but he did not urge the plea. Perhaps he felt that when a Hungarian uses a knife, a trifling error in the matter of direction is pardonable.

"I shall not go home now," said Steingall, bidding farewell to his allies when Martiny had been formally identified and charged. "I must get this thing thoroughly straightened out before morning, though the inquest and police court proceedings will be mere adjournments. Good night, Mr. Devar. Good night, Mr. Curtis. Once more, thank you. And, by the way, if all is not well at the Plaza, phone me at once. Remember, won't you? Good night!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### Peking and Manhattan.

"SAY, old man," muttered Devar, gazing fixedly at Brodie's broad shoulders as Broadway unrolled its even width before the car on the up-town journey, "are we the same couple of blighters who met in a bath-room gateway, 'B' Deck, near state-

rooms fifty-one and fifty-two, on board the Cunard steamship *Lusitania*, about twenty-one hours since; or have we become dematerialized?"

Curtis knew that the boy was quivering with excitement, but it was useless to advise a slackening of the tension, so he merely said:

"Do you feel like a mahatma?"

"If a mahatma is a fellow with a head like a balloon, not in size, but in contents, yes. Have you ever had a real jag on you, not the big dinner, big bottle, big cigar sort of imitation, but the wild-eyed, imp-seeing, genuine rip-snorter?"

"No. Neither have you."

"I should have denied the charge before to-night. But I know now what it means. It is a brainstorm induced by rum. There are many other varieties, at least fifty-seven, and I've sampled fifty-six different sorts in nine hours. Do you realize that it is just nine hours since I walked into the Central Hotel, and the orchestra struck up?"

"Good Lord! Nine hours! And do you remember, Curtis, I said as we came up the harbor that you would have a hell of a good time in New York. Ha, ha! likewise ho, ho! A good time! Eating, fighting, marrying, plunging neck and crop out of one frantic revel into another. Talk about delirium tremens, and its little green devils with little pink eyes—why, it's commonplace, that's what it is—a poor sort of pipe-dream compared with the reality of life in New York as seen in company with John Delancy Curtis, of Peking."

Devar was not by any means the first person in the city who had associated the name of the capital of China with some bizarre and elusive element of fantasy in connection with the man who gave "Peking" as his address. There was no explaining the conceit; it was just one of those whimsies which are alike plausible yet enigmatical. Had Curtis described himself as being of London, or Paris, or even of

Yokohama, no sense of mystery would have attached itself to his personality.

But, to the world at large, Peking represents the unknown, and therefore the incongruous. It is the Forbidden City, the inner shrine of the East, the symbolic rallying point of a race which occupies no common ground with the peoples of Europe or America. Had Curtis written that he hailed from Lhasa, his legal domicile would have lost its occult extravagance save to the discriminating few.

The mere mention of Peking now brought back to Curtis's mind the last time he had written the word, and, by association of ideas, the queer way in which Steingall had twice alluded to the Plaza Hotel. He said nothing of this to Devar. He thought, and with good reason, that the sooner that young man was in bed and asleep the better it would be for his health, because a mercurial temperament was levying heavy drafts on physical powers, so he gave no hint of the nebulous doubt induced by the detective's words.

"The order of the day is bed for each of us," he said, bidding his friend farewell at the door of the hotel. "Therefore, I shall not offer you any sort of hospitality at this hour, except the kindest one of saying good-by speedily. You are coming to lunch, I think?"

"Lunch!" Devar's head wagged solemnly. Feverishly wakeful, he was really half asleep. "Don't talk to me of lunch. You haven't had breakfast yet, John D. New York will keep you busy yet awhile, or I don't size her up right. Good old New York! Isn't she a peach? Well, so-long! If you want me, phone. I'll pull a couch under the instrument and sleep with my clothes on. If I shove my head beneath a tap I'll be as right as rain. Home, Arthur."

Then Curtis entered the hotel, and a night porter took him up in the elevator. When he opened the door of Suite F, its tiny lobby was in darkness.

but the lights in the sitting-room were switched on. Evidently, then, neither he nor Devar was mistaken in identifying those illuminated windows when the chase led them past the hotel. But he was struck instantly by the fact that the door leading to Hermione's room was wide open, and, before he could assimilate this singular fact, he saw a note lying on a small table just where it must catch his eye on entering his own bedroom.

Curtis was no soothsayer, but he was endowed with a penetrating and usually accurate judgment, and he knew at once that Hermione had left him. Although he had only seen her handwriting when she signed the register at the clergyman's house he recognized the same free, well-formed characters in the "John Delancy Curtis, Esq.," on the envelope. He paled, perhaps, and a pang of a pain crueler than bodily ill may have wrung his heart, but he hesitated not a second about opening the letter.

Then he read:

DEAR MR. CURTIS: My father has been here, and with him a Mr. Otto Schmidt, a lawyer. They told me that Jean de Courtois is alive, and that you know it, and have known it throughout. Gladly would I have refused to believe them, but, sometimes, there are statements which cannot be lies—which partake of truth in their very essence—which sear their way into one's consciousness as white-hot iron scorches the flesh. Still, owing to my trust in you, I clung to the frail hope that there might be some mistake, so, when they had gone, I telephoned the Central Hotel, and a clerk there assured me that M. de Courtois was in bed and asleep.

What am I to say? Perhaps, silence is best. Marcelle and I are returning to my apartments in Fifty-Ninth Street. Please do not come there. I feel now that I have been selfish and misguided. I fear it will hurt you if I ask to be permitted to bear the heavy expense you must incur with regard to the wretched affair into which I have dragged you, though involuntarily, or, shall I put it? with the blind striving for succor of one sinking in deep waters. Yet do me one last kindness, and let me reimburse you. That would be a small concession to my pride, because, in some respects, sorely as I am wounded, I shall

regard myself as ever in your debt. Sincerely yours,

HERMIONE.

P. S.—This person, Schmidt, seems to be reliable. You might arrange matters with him.

Now, above and beyond every other characteristic, Curtis was fair-minded. He read the girl's letter once in order to learn what had happened and why she had gone; then he reread it critically, word for word, trying to distil from its disjointed phrases "that essence of truth" which Hermione had spoken of.

Evidently, she had determined to keep her words within the bare walls of necessity. The note had a jerkiness of style that was certainly absent from her speech, and the fact argued that she was compelling herself to write with restraint.

She was brimming over with reproach, grief-stricken, and miserable, and unquestionably shocked beyond measure, but she had forced the reflection: "I have no real claim on this man, nor wrong to lay at his door, and, although he has deceived me, I am under heavy obligation to him, so I must neither condemn nor reproach, but say nothing that goes beyond a temperate explanation of my action."

The signature itself was eloquent of the conflict which raged in her troubled brain while the pen was framing those formal sentences. Well-bred young ladies do not sign themselves by their Christian names, *tout court*, in notes written to young gentlemen of an evening's acquaintance. Yet what was she to do? "Hermione Beauregard Grandison" had gone beyond recovery with the marriage ceremony, but "Hermione Curtis" was almost ludicrous, considering the text of this, the first note she had written to her "husband."

It was only one side of Curtis's self-reliant nature which analyzed, and criticized, and weighed matters with such judicial calm. There was another which brought a hard glint into his eyes, and caused a hand which

gripped the molded back of a lightly built chair to exert a force of which he was unconscious until the mahogany rail snapped.

Then he remembered Steingall and his enigmatical inquiries, and turned to the telephone.

At sound of his voice the detective cleared away any doubt as to the reason which inspired those vague questions.

"Lady Hermione has gone, has she?" he said sympathetically. "I thought as much. There was no use in worrying you about it sooner, but I was told that the earl and Schmidt had visited her, and that she and the maid had left the hotel in a taxi a few minutes after the departure of the visitors. Will you take my advice?"

"What is it?"

"You ought to have said 'Yes' at once. Go to bed, and force yourself to sleep. Give no instructions to be called, but get up when you waken, and start a new day with a clear head. You'll need it."

"I'm not going to disturb the peace of Lady Hermione's apartments in Fifty-Ninth Street, if that is what you mean."

"Not quite. In fact, not at all. You are not that kind of a man. Did she leave any message?"

"Yes, a letter. Would you care to hear it?"

"If you have no objection."

Curtis read the note instantly, and, so delicate is the perceptiveness of the ear, he could almost follow the trend of the detective's unspoken thought by a hiss of breath or a muttered "Hum," as a name was mentioned or a reason given for some particular action.

"Like the majority of women, she conveys the most important fact in a postscript," was Steingall's dry comment when Curtis had finished.

"Where shall I find this man, Schmidt?" inquired Curtis.

"Are you in a hurry, then, to begin the suit for dissolution?"

"That does not account for my anxiety to meet Schmidt."

"He is a stoutly built individual, with a large, soft neck, and eyes which would protrude most satisfactorily under pressure. Is that what you mean?"

"I want to make his acquaintance, and soon—that is all."

"Now, Mr. Curtis, don't destroy the good opinion I have formed of you. Let well enough alone. Schmidt has done you a splendid turn, and it would be foolish on your part to requite a benefactor by trying to strangle him."

"Mr. Steingall, I am tired, and very, very uncertain of myself—"

"So you don't want even to pretend that there is any humor in the situation. Yet, unless I err greatly, before many hours have passed you will agree with me that nothing more directly fortunate in your behalf could have occurred than Schmidt's interference as Lord Valletort's legal adviser. I know Schmidt, and Schmidt knows me. In this affair you would be a baby in his hands, just as he would resemble a bladder of lard in yours. My difficulty is that I really cannot give reasons, but you will appreciate the position when I say that, for the moment, the murder of Mr. Hunter has become an affair of state, and all information regarding recent developments will be withheld from the press. Do you follow?"

"Yes."

"I take it, too, that if Lady Hermione were restored to you, and it was left to the pair of you to determine whether or not the marriage entered into under such extraordinary conditions should become a real union, you would be satisfied?"

"I don't see how—"

"You can at least take my word for it, Mr. Curtis, that the chance of such an outcome will be greatly forwarded if you go straight to bed, whereas any design you may have formed as to assaulting and battering Otto Schmidt would, if put into execution, probably

defeat the more important object, or, at any rate, cripple its prospects of success."

"Do you really mean that?"

"I am almost sure of it. There is only one thing of which I am more certain at the moment."

"And that is?"

"That if it were not for your quickness of eye and hand—and foot, for that matter—I would now be laid out in a mortuary or on an hospital table. I appreciate those qualities when exercised on a person like Martiny, whose main argument is centered in an automatic pistol, but they would be singularly out of place if tested on Otto Schmidt, when backed by the laws of the United States, which, strange as it may seem, I also represent."

"If you put it that way, Steingall—"

"I do, most emphatically. Let me be more precise. Promise me now that you will not stir out of the Plaza Hotel until I come to you."

"Is that really essential?"

"I would not ask you if it were not."

"What time may I expect you?"

"Let me see. It is now nearly five o'clock. I hope to sleep till eight. I give you till nine. Bath and breakfast bring you to ten. Say eleven."

"I owe you a good deal, so I shall await you till noon. After that hour I reserve my freedom of action."

The detective laughed.

"Good-by," he said, and, as though in keeping with the other fantasies of the night, Curtis was sound asleep in a quarter of an hour. He had acquired the faculty of sleeping under any conditions of mental or physical stress, short of illness or severe bodily pain, and he could awake at any hour previously determined on, so a few minutes before nine o'clock he was in his bath. At a quarter past nine he rang for a waiter and ordered breakfast.

"For one, sir?" asked the man, who had not been on duty the previous evening, but had taken care to ascertain

the names of the guests on his section of the floor.

"Yes, for one," said Curtis. "My wife and her maid are not breakfasting in the hotel. Will you kindly send up a batch of morning newspapers?"

It was only to be expected that the keen and bright intelligence of New York journalism should have fastened on to the murder in Twenty-Seventh Street as something out of the ordinary. But its methods were new to the man whose adult years had been passed far from his native city, and he was astounded now to find how the descriptive reporter, aided by the photographer, had depicted and dissected nearly every feature of the crime. On one point the press was silent—as yet. There was no mention of Lady Hermione, and, with a reticence which spoke volumes for the close relations existing between police and reporters, the Earl of Valletort and Count Vasilan were represented as merely "inquiring for" John Delancy Curtis, "the man from Peking."

Curtis had spread the newspapers on the table, and, when a tap on the door of the sitting-room seemed to indicate the reappearance of the waiter, he swept them up in a heap, meaning to go through them at leisure after breakfast.

"Come in," he said, turning casually.

The door opened, and Hermione entered.

It was what dramatists term "a psychological moment," and, according to Berkeley, one of the axioms of psychology is that it never transcends the limits of the individual. Most certainly, at that moment, the truth of this dictum was demonstrated in a manner which would have surprised even the doughty philosopher himself.

Curtis saw nothing, knew nothing, thought of nothing not strictly bounded by the fact that Hermione, and none other, stood there. He gazed at her spellbound for a second or two. He neither moved nor spoke, but remained stock-still, with the newspa-

pers gathered in his hands, while his eyes blazed into her without any pretense of restraint.

She was rosy red, partly because of the winelike morning air through which she had walked swiftly, but more, perhaps, because of a very real embarrassment and contriteness of spirit.

"I came," she faltered—"I am here—that is—will you ever forgive me?"

Down went the papers, and round Hermione went Curtis's strong arms. He was a man of thew and sinew, against whom a slender girl's strength might not hope to prevail. The last thing she looked for was to be embraced at sight.

It is the last thing any woman expects, and the one thing to which she is most apt to yield. And really, despite her fluttered cry of protest, there was something very comforting and dependable about that masculine hug. Hermione had never before been clasped in a man's arms. She was a highly kissable person, and women would embrace her readily, but the total absence of any milk-and-water convention about Curtis's method of showing delight at meeting her was at once bewildering and stupefying.

There must be a great deal, too, which does not leap promptly to the eye in the study of such a dry-as-dust subject as psychology, because three of its fixed principles are: "Experience is the process of becoming expert by experiment," "One finds a measure of truth in the naive realism of common sense," and "Action and reaction are strictly correlative."

Applying these tests to the remarkable rapidity of decision and fixity of purpose displayed by Curtis in squeezing the breath out of Hermione, and gazing into her eyes until her proud head bent and sought refuge for a glowing face by hiding it on his breast, it will be noted first, that, for a man who had no experience in love-making, Curtis was quickly becoming ex-

pert; secondly, that common sense teaches that if one would win a wife one must also woo her; and thirdly, that a wonderfully effective way to obtain a satisfactory response from Hermione was to reveal the educational value of a hug.

At last, then—though not before Hermione's arms had gone around his neck of their own accord, and her lips had met his with a sigh of sheer content—he permitted her to speak. And of all things in the world she said that which it thrilled him to hear.

"John dear," she murmured, "we have become husband and wife in a strange, mad way, but perhaps it is for the best, and I shall try never to give you cause for regret."

By this time one hand was firmly braced around her waist, but the other was free to lift her chin until her swimming eyes met his.

"Hermione," he said, "I vowed last night that not all the men and laws in America would tear you from me. If we parted, it was you, and you alone, who could send me away, and I am glad, oh, so glad, that you have come back to me."

"Dearest, it sounds like a dream," she said brokenly. "Can a man and a woman truly love each other who have only met as you and I have met?"

"I think we have solved that problem for all time," he said, tilting her hat with the joyous abandon of a lover jealous even of the flowers and plaited straw which should hide any of the sweet perfections of his mistress.

"But you have plunged me into a sort of trance," she whispered. "I came here to explain—"

An ominous rattle of a laden tray at the outer door drove them apart as though a thunderbolt had fallen between them. Hermione rushed to her own room, there to consult a mirror and readjust her hat and veil and disordered hair, but Curtis met a hurrying waiter.

"Sorry to bother you," he said, "but my wife has come in unexpect-

edly, and we shall want breakfast for two." He raised his voice: "Coffee for you, Hermione, or would you prefer tea?"

"Coffee, of course," was the answer, in so calm and collected a tone that the waiter thought he must have been mistaken in his first impression.

"No trouble at all, sir," he said, with the ready civility of his class. "Unless you wish to wait, sir, I'll bring another cup and some hot plates, and order a further supply from the kitchen."

"You're a man of resource," cried Curtis cheerfully. "I leave the arrangements to you with confidence. Come along, Hermione. Don't say you have breakfasted already."

"I won't, because I haven't," she said, reappearing with a smiling nonchalance which removed the last shred of doubt from the waiter's mind. But for all that she electrified Curtis with a timidly grateful glance, for she appreciated his thoughtfulness in giving her an opportunity to collect her scattered wits. There was need of some such respite; she had much to relate, she thought, before he could possibly understand the motives which led to her flight.

Barely half an hour ago Mr. Steingall had put in an appearance at her apartment. He had told her, with convincing brevity, exactly why Curtis refrained from adding to her perplexities by announcing the comparative well-being of Jean de Courtois.

"He was very kind," said Hermione, sweetly penitent, "but he made me feel rather like a worm when he said that if I were his own daughter he would thank God that I had fallen into the hands of a man like you. He said, too, that if I owed you something, he owed you more, because you had saved his life last night; so, being an impulsive creature, I hurried here to ask your forgiveness for that horrible note."

"There is no lie so difficult to combat as a half truth," said John. "That

fellow Schmidt impressed you because he probably believed what he was saying. As for Steingall, he makes rather too much of what I did for him; but, if there was any debt on his side, he has repaid me with ample interest."

The waiter had left the room, and Hermione was free to blush without restraint, a privilege she availed herself of fully now.

"But, dear, you and I can hardly feel that we are really married," she said. "Yesterday—it was—different. I cannot remain here now. Perhaps your uncle and aunt will receive me—until—"

"It is surprising how easily one can get married if one is really bent on the act," said Curtis, discussing the point as coolly as if it were a question as to where they would lunch. "At any rate, we shall settle that difficulty to your complete satisfaction. I expect Steingall here in less than an hour. Meanwhile, we have lots to tell each other. I want you to know just what sort of husband you have drawn in the lottery."

"Do you take me on trust, then?"

"Absolutely without reservation."

Obviously, the conversation did not flag before the detective was announced. He looked tired and preoccupied when he came in, but his shrewd, pleasant face brightened with a cheery smile when he saw Hermione, who was pretending to be interested in a newspaper.

"I am glad to find that two people, at least, have taken my advice," he said. "Now, Mr. Curtis, I want you for an hour. The various official inquiries are adjourned till next week, and your presence was dispensed with. But we are going now to the office of Mr. Otto Schmidt, where we shall have the pleasure of meeting the Earl of Valletort, Count Ladislav Vassilan, and, possibly, M. Jean de Courtois. On no account, young lady"—and he turned to Hermione—"must you run away again during our absence."

"I shall not," said Hermione, so emphatically that they all laughed.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### Explanations.

NATURE was kind that morning. A flood of sunshine greeted Curtis when he turned into Fifth Avenue with the detective, as the latter had suggested that they might walk a little way before taking a taxi, there being plenty of time before the hour fixed for the meeting in Schmidt's office. It was a morning when life and good health assumed their fitting places in the forefront of those many and varied considerations which form the sum of human happiness. The world had suddenly resumed its everyday aspect of bustle and content. New York smiled at its new citizen, and the new citizen beamed appreciatively on New York.

"I cannot explain matters to you fully even yet," Steingall was saying, when an automobile drew up close to the curb and a well-known voice cried joyously:

"Just in time. Where's the fire? There's bound to be a blaze when you two run in a leash."

Devar bounced out of the car, and Brodie grinned with pleasure. The chauffeur was beginning to like the excitement of acting as supernumerary on the staff of the detective bureau.

"Will you jump in, or shall I prowl with you down Fifth Avenue?" asked Devar, blithely ignoring Steingall's somewhat strained welcome.

"We are keeping an appointment," said Curtis. "I, for one, shall be more than pleased if the combination which proved so effective last night may remain intact this morning."

"Steingall daren't cut adrift from me," said Devar. "If you knew the truth about him, you'd find that he is deeply superstitious, and I'm a real mascot for bringing good luck. Perhaps he is not aware, John D., that I

was the impresario who 'presented' you to an admiring public. Tell him that, and see if he has the nerve to say I'm not wanted."

"Come along, Mr. Devar," said the detective, apparently yielding to a sudden resolve. "I think I can make use of you—justify your presence, that is. Tell your chauffeur to wait for us at Forty-Second Street."

Off went Brodie, jubilant at the prospect of his services being in requisition again. He had not yet learned the application to all things mundane of Disraeli's quip that it is the unexpected which happens.

"Now, I want you two gentlemen to attend closely to what I have to say," said Steingall seriously, placing himself between them, so that his words might not reach other ears than those for which they were intended. "Mr. Hunter's murder has passed long ago out of the common class of crimes. It will be inquired into thoroughly, of course, and punishment will be dealt out impartially to those responsible for its commission. But—and this is the point I want to emphasize—neither of you know, nor am I at liberty to inform you, just what bounds the authorities may reach or stop at. Have I made my meaning clear?"

"Yes," said Curtis.

"We're to be good little boys, and sit still, and say nothing, and do as we're told," said Devar.

"I'm not asking impossibilities," said Steingall, who had a dry humor, and seldom missed a chance of gratifying it. "I have merely laid down a proviso which must be observed, not for a day or a week, but as long as any of us is alive. State affairs are not the property of individuals. They come first, all the time. If they don't suit our convenience, we must simply adjust ourselves to the new conditions."

"You alarm me, Steingall!" cried Devar. "Have we been drawn into an international squabble? Don't tell me that Devar's canned salmon is really a deadly sort of bomb."

"I've heard more improbable things. But you would not be your father's son, Mr. Devar, if you can't keep a tight lip when statements are made in your presence which may astonish you. Mr. Curtis and you are now about to meet a very clever man, Otto Schmidt, the lawyer, and I fancy your name will help in the argument. Is your father in New York?"

"He arrives here from Chicago to-night."

"He has never met Mr. Curtis?"

"No, but he jolly soon will."

"But, if it were possible to get hold of him by telephone or telegraph to-day, he would say he had never heard of him."

"I guess that's so. What are you driving at?"

"Schmidt must know your father. They are bound to have come together in more than one important deal."

"Well?"

"It seems to me that, if the father's evidence is not available, the son's gains a trifle more weight."

"Dash me if I can imagine where you are getting off at, Steingall."

"You regard Mr. Curtis as a friend?"

"I am proud of the fact."

"Stick to that, and you will do him good service."

"Well, that's easy."

The detective seemed to be picking his words with a good deal of care. He covered several paces in silence, and Curtis, who had reverted to his normal habit of sober gravity, took no part in the conversation. His estimate of its purport differed from Devar's. That light-hearted youngster was somewhat annoyed by the detective's implied hint that his friendship with Curtis rested on no more solid foundation than a steamer acquaintance, and would hardly bear the test of close scrutiny if it came to analysis on the score of prior knowledge, or if his testimony were sought as to Curtis's earlier career. But he had the good sense to understand that Steingall was

actuated by no light motive, so he held his peace. Curtis went farther. He believed that the detective was telling Devar what to say and how to say it.

"Now that we have settled the matter of Mr. Curtis's references," said Steingall, resuming the talk as though it had not been interrupted, "I reach the next item. Both of you are aware that two men have been arrested, and one is dead, and that all three were concerned in the attack on Mr. Hunter."

"Yes," came the simultaneous answer.

"I want you to forget names, except with regard to Lamotte, the chauffeur. Martiny and Rossi, for the time being, vanish into the Ewigkeit."

"What — forever?" Curtis could not help saying.

"No, for a week or so." Steingall darted a quick glance to his questioner.

"I have a stupid trick of adopting phrases from my pet authors," he said. "Does Ewigkeit mean eternity?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I withdraw it."

"Try Nifheim."

"Or Rüdeshheim," suggested Devar wickedly.

Steingall laughed. Despite his German-sounding name, he spoke French fluently, but German not at all.

"They're off the map," he said. "There, that's good American, and I'll get on with my story, or rather, with the lack of it. I cannot, of course, foretell the exact lines our discussion with Schmidt and his clients will follow, but if I have made you understand that your combined share in it is to say little and be thoroughly non-committal in anything you may have to say, I am content."

"You are as mysterious as an astrologer," vowed Devar. "Having money to burn one day in Paris, I visited one of those jokers, and he told me I was born in Capricorn, under the sign of Aries, and I as good as told him he was a liar, because I was born in Manhattan under an ordinary roof."

By Jove! that reminds me, John D., you're a whale on stars. Did you spot those two last night, low down in the west?"

"Yes."

"And what did they prognosticate?"

"That you and I would promise Mr. Steingall not to spoil any scheme he may have in mind by interfering at an inopportune moment."

"I suppose I ought to feel crushed, but I don't," said Devar.

"My dear fellow, if it hadn't been for you and your loyal championship at the right moment, I might easily have been in jail as an accomplice of the unknown scoundrels who killed Mr. Hunter."

"That's the right kind of remark," broke in the detective. "I think I'll offer each of you a post in the bureau after this business is ended."

"Give me a pointer on one matter," said Devar. "You spoke of Schmidt's clients. Who are they?"

He whistled softly when he heard the names of Valletort and Vassilan and De Courtois.

"Up to the neck in it again!" he crowed. "Oh, it's me that is the happy youth because I blew into New York at the right time yesterday."

Otto Schmidt's office was in Madison Square, perched high above the clatter of Twenty-Third Street. The windows of the lawyer's private sanctum commanded magnificent views of the city to south and west, and in that marvelously clear air the Statue of Liberty seemed to be little more than a mile away, while the villas of Montclair and other heights in the neighboring State were distinctly visible.

Steingall and his friends were the first to arrive, and Schmidt received them with the air of armed neutrality a lawyer displays toward the opposite camp. He begged them to be seated, smiled pleasantly when Curtis asked to be allowed to admire the interesting panorama spread before his eyes, but

gave Devar a contemplative look when Steingall introduced him.

"Mr. Howard Devar, son of my friend William B. Devar?" he asked.

"Yes," said Devar, feeling that this was safe ground. "My father and you put it that way since you pulled off the Saskatchewan combine together, but I've heard him describe you differently."

Schmidt, who looked more egglike than ever at this hour of the morning, disapproved of such flippancy.

"William B. Devar is a fair fighter," he said. "He gives and takes hard knocks with perfect good humor. But may I inquire how you come to figure in a matter which, if I understand aright a message received from Mr. Steingall, concerns persons with whom you can have little in common?"

"It was a mere toss-up whether I or my friend, John Delancy Curtis, took the floor against the combination of noble lords who have retained you to look after their interests—or protect them, I ought to say; but fate favored him, so I am a mere bottleholder. To push the simile a bit farther, Mr. Schmidt, I may describe Mr. Steingall as the referee and watchholder. When he cries 'Time' some one will go to Sing Sing."

Perhaps some attribute of the father revealed itself in the son, because Steingall, who thought at first that Devar had allowed his tongue to run away with him, fancied that the lawyer dropped his inquiries somewhat suddenly.

"The Earl of Valletort and Count Vassilan are due now," he said, glancing at a clock.

"Oh, they will be here without fail," said the detective. "Mr. Clancy, of the bureau, is bringing De Courtois."

"Bringing him," repeated Schmidt.

"Yes."

"Unofficially?"

"That, depends wholly on De Courtois. He has to come, whether

he likes it or not. Whether he will be allowed to go away again is another matter."

Schmidt's eyelids fell in thought. Probably he reflected that there are two sides to every argument, and he had heard but one. Certainly, John Delancy Curtis did not strike him as the daredevil meddler, if not worse, he had been depicted by the fiery earl.

"The Earl of Valletort and Count Ladislas Vassilan," announced a clerk, and Curtis took one square look at his rival. He needed no more to confirm Hermione's unfavorable opinion. The count's appearance was not prepossessing. His nose was still swollen, and the earnest effort of a doctor to paint out two black eyes had not been wholly successful.

His lordship looked mightily displeased when he discovered the presence of Curtis and Devar, but he was a self-confident man, and regarded himself as a personage of such importance that he assumed the lead in this company at once. Moreover, it was evident that he had resolved to keep a firm rein on his temper.

"Now, Mr. Schmidt," he said brusquely, "your time and mine is valuable. Why have Count Vassilan and I been summoned here this morning by the police authorities?"

Schmidt looked at Steingall, and the detective seemed to be almost at a loss for words.

"I am—not aware—there is any particular call—for hurry," he said. "Are you, my lord, and Count Vassilan thinking of returning to Europe to-morrow?"

The Hungarian laughed, not mirthfully, but with the forced gaiety of a man who had considered how to act, and meant to adopt a decided attitude.

"Certainly not," said the earl stiffly, with uplifted eyebrows.

Steingall pursed his lips, and his forehead seamed in a reflective frown.

"I ought to explain," he said, "that I put that question as offering what appeared to me an easy way out of a

situation which bristles with difficulties otherwise."

His hesitancy had suddenly been replaced by slowness of utterance, but it is reasonable to suppose that, of those present, Curtis and Schmidt alone noted the marked distinction.

"My good man," said the earl, "you must have the strangest notion of the reason which accounts for my presence in New York. I came here to rescue my daughter from a set of designing ruffians, some of whom I knew of, and others whom I had never heard of. Why you should think that I may have it in mind to leave the country without being accompanied by Lady Hermione Grandison I cannot tell, and it is in the highest degree improbable that she will be prepared to sail to-morrow. Apart from my private arrangements, too, I mean to remain here until I have punished at least one person as he deserves."

"Jean de Courtois?" inquired Steingall.

"No, sir. That man who stands there, and whose name is given, as Curtis."

The earl nearly grew wrathful. It annoyed him to find that Curtis was not looking at him at all, but was greatly interested in Schmidt. That was another trait of Curtis's. He had learned long ago to select the ablest among his adversaries, and watch that man's face. Mere impassivity supplied no real cloak, for Curtis, in his time, had dealt with Chinese mandarins whose countenances betrayed no more expression than a carved ivory mask.

"But it was De Courtois who meant to marry Lady Hermione?" persisted Steingall.

"That remains to be seen. The person who did marry her signed himself John Delancy Curtis."

Instantly the detective turned to Otto Schmidt.

"It will assist the inquiry if you tell us whether or not such a marriage, if it took place under the assumed conditions—that is, by use of a marriage

license not intended for one of the parties—is legal,” he said.

“I have no doubt whatever that, in the circumstances, the courts will find it to be illegal,” was the answer.

“What circumstances?”

“That the lady quitted her supposed husband as soon as she discovered the fraud which had been practised on her.”

Steingall weighed the point for a moment.

“I see,” he nodded. “If she refused to remain with him, the marriage would be declared void. But if she elected to treat the marriage as a binding act, no matter how it was procured, and continued to live with her husband, that vital fact would affect the question of validity?”

“As you say, it would be a vital fact.”

The detective was clearly impressed, but Lord Valletort swept aside these quibbles of jurisprudence.

“My daughter’s actions will be revealed in detail to a judge,” he said loftily. “At present I fail to see what bearing they have on the discussion, unless, indeed, you mean to arrest Curtis immediately on a charge which I am prepared to formulate.”

“No, that is not why I requested your lordship and Count Vassilan to come here this morning,” said Steingall, gazing anxiously at the clock. “I would prefer to await the arrival of Detective Clancy with Jean de Courtois, but if the Frenchman refuses to come he is within his rights, and I suppose I shall have to apply for a warrant—though, if I choose, I can arrest him merely on suspicion.”

“Suspicion of what?” demanded the earl.

“Of complicity in the murder of Mr. Hunter last night.”

“The man was tied in his room at the time of the murder,” cried the Hungarian hoarsely, speaking for the first time since he had entered Schmidt’s office. He was obviously excited, and excitement is a powerful

foe of good resolutions, with which the moral pavement is littered in Hungary and elsewhere.

“That does not affect the charge of complicity,” said Steingall thoughtfully. “A man may be an accomplice, though the actual crime is committed at a time and place when he is far distant. It is possible for an accomplice to be in Paris, or on the high seas, while a victim is falling under an assassin’s knife in New York. A man, or a number of men, can even be what I may term unconscious accomplices, in the sense that their actions and instructions have brought about a crime, though their intent may have stopped short of actual violence.

“I assure you, my lord, the arm of the law reaches far when life is taken, and the death of a popular and prominent journalist like Mr. Hunter will be inquired into most searchingly.”

The detective spoke so impressively that Lord Valletort eyed him with a species of misgiving, while Count Vassilan, whose knowledge of English was excellent, had broken out into a perspiration.

A smooth, mellifluous voice suddenly intervened. Otto Schmidt thought fit to assume a rôle for which Lord Valletort was manifestly ill equipped.

“We seem to be dealing with two items which, though related, by accident, as it were, yet differ widely. The Earl of Valletort is interested only in his daughter’s marriage, Mr. Steingall.”

The detective wheeled round on him.

“Precisely, Mr. Schmidt, but it happens, unfortunately, that the marriage of Lady Hermione and Mr. Curtis was the direct outcome of the murder of Mr. Hunter. More than that, Mr. Hunter met his death because of the plot and counterplot attending the preliminary arrangements for her ladyship’s marriage. The two events, so far apart in their nature, thus become indissolubly connected.”

“And is that why we are to have the pleasure of seeing M. de Courtois?”

"Yes."

"Perhaps, before he comes, you will be good enough to give us some idea, informally of course, as to the statement, or, shall I say revelation?—he may make."

"It is asking a good deal of a police official," said Steingall, smiling pleasantly, "but if I am assured that the discussion will really be regarded as informal, I am ready to speak quite openly."

"It is a characteristic of yours, Mr. Steingall, which has often commanded the admiration of the New York bar," said Schmidt.

"Then," said the detective, "I must begin by telling you that Mr. Clancy and I were in Morris Siegelman's saloon in East Broadway shortly after midnight last night."

A curious click issued from the throat of that distinguished Hungarian magnate, Count Ladislas Vassilan, and every one present noticed it except the chief of the detective bureau. He, it would appear, was busy marshaling his thoughts.

"For all practical purposes, our inquiry began there," he continued. "We intercepted a note written by a certain gentleman, and intended to be conveyed to a Pole named Peter Balusky. He, and a Hungarian, Franz Vивиadi, together with a French chauffeur, whose real name is Lamotte, but who has been passing recently as Anatole Labergerie, are now under arrest. Mr. Curtis has recognized Lamotte as the driver of the automobile out of which Mr. Hunter stepped to meet his death, and Lamotte himself has confessed his share in the crime."

"The precise connection of Balusky and Vивиadi with it remains yet to be determined. They undoubtedly visited the Central Hotel last night. They undoubtedly were the paid agents of some person or persons interested in preventing the marriage of Lady Hermione Grandison. They undoubtedly received letters and wireless messages which seem to implicate others, far re-

moved from them in social position, in the plot, or undertaking, that her ladyship's marriage should not take place.

"As a lawyer, Mr. Schmidt, you will see that I cannot possibly enter into full details, but I think I have said sufficient to prove my main contention, which is, you will remember, that it will be difficult, very difficult, to dissociate the two incidents—I mean the marriage and the murder."

During quite an appreciable time there was no sound in the spacious apartment other than the heavy breathing of Count Ladislas Vassilan. He had openly and candidly abandoned all pretense. He was now nothing more or less than a burly, well-fed, well-dressed evil-doer quaking with fear.

"Difficult, you say, Mr. Steingall?" repeated the lawyer, selecting, as was his way, the word which supplied the key to a whole sentence.

"Very difficult," corrected the detective.

"But not impossible?"

"I would not care to hazard a reasoned opinion, but it seems to me that, in certain conditions, the district attorney might elect to confine the inquiry to its main issues, which are, of course, the causes of the crime, and the conviction of the persons actually engaged in it."

"Why did you want to bring Jean de Courtois here?"

"Because he is the connecting link between the one set of circumstances and the other."

"Is he coming, do you think?"

Steingall looked at the clock, and showed a disappointment which he did not try to conceal.

"I fear not," he said. "I told Clancy only to try and persuade him to come. The Frenchman is pretending to be ill, but he is not ill, only frightened."

"Frightened of what?"

"Of the consequences of his own acts. In a sense, Mr. Hunter was his ally, but only from a journalist's standpoint, which centered in the sensation

which would be provided by the projected marriage."

Schmidt's eyelids had fallen and risen regularly during the past few minutes. They dropped now for a longer period than usual. As for Lord Valletort and his would-be son-in-law, they were profoundly and unfeignedly ill at ease. Even a British earl cannot afford to play fast and loose with the law, and it did seem most convincingly clear that they had brought themselves within measurable reach of the law by the tactics they had employed prior to their arrival in New York.

Oddly enough, their own possible connection with the murder of the journalist was a good deal more patent to them than to Curtis and Devar, who were vastly better posted in the evidence affecting them. Still more curiously, not a word had been said about Martiny or Rossi.

"Let us suppose," said Schmidt, when his eyes had opened again, "that Lady Hermione elects to return to Europe at once with her father, the Earl—"

Steingall shook his head with a weary smile, and the lawyer's voice ceased suddenly.

"Out of the question, Mr. Schmidt, out of the question. I am sure of it. Why, little more than half an hour ago I found her with Mr. Curtis in their apartments at the Plaza Hotel—"

"Ridiculous!" shrieked Lord Valletort in a shrill falsetto. "My daughter passed the night in her apartment in Fifty-Ninth Street. I myself saw her go there."

"Probably. Your lordship would know the facts if you watched her departure from the Plaza Hotel. But a woman has the inalienable privilege of changing her mind, and Lady Hermione has returned to her husband. In fact, I am given to understand that she and Mr. Curtis are arranging a new marriage, not because the earlier ceremony is illegal, or can be upset, but in deference to certain natural scruples which such a charming young lady

would be bound to entertain. There can be no manner of doubt as to the correctness of what I am saying," and the detective's tone grew emphatic in view of the earl's pish-tush gestures. "You have a telephone there, Mr. Schmidt. Ring up the Plaza, and speak to the lady yourself."

The lawyer did nothing of the sort. He eyed Curtis in his contemplative way, being aware that the quiet man standing near a window had favored him with his exclusive attention during the proceedings.

But Lord Valletort was moved now to stormy protest. He was convulsed with passion, and seemed to be careless what the outcome might be so long as he lashed Curtis with venom.

"You are the only person in this infernal city whose actions are consistent," he roared at him. "It is quite evident that you have ascertained by some means that my daughter is exceedingly wealthy, and you have managed to delude her into the belief that your conduct is altruistic and above reproach. But you make a great mistake if you believe that I can be set aside as an incompetent fool. I shall go straight from this office to that of the district attorney, and lay the whole of the facts before him. I—"

"Does your lordship wish to dispense with my services?" broke in Schmidt, speaking without flurry or heat. The angry earl choked, but remained silent, and the lawyer kept on in the same even tone:

"May I suggest, Mr. Steingall, that you and Mr. Curtis and Mr. Devar should step into another room while I have a brief consultation with Lord Valletort and Count Vassilan?"

"I cannot become a party to any arrangement—" began Steingall; but Otto Schmidt bowed him and his companions out suavely. Those two understood each other fully, no matter what divergencies of opinion might exist elsewhere.

When the door had closed on the three men in a smaller room, Devar

was about to say something, but Steingall checked him with a warning hand. Walking to a window, he stood there, with his back turned on his companions, and stared out into the square beneath. Once they fancied they saw him nod his head in a species of signal, but they might have been in error. At any rate, their thoughts were soon distracted by the entrance of the stout lawyer.

"On some occasions, the fewest words are the most satisfactory," he said, "so I wish to inform you, Mr. Steingall, that Lord Valletort and Count Vassilan intend to sail for Europe by to-morrow's steamer. They have empowered me to offer to pay the passage money to France of the music-teacher, Jean de Courtois, though not by the same vessel as that in which they purpose traveling.

"As for you, Mr. Curtis, the earl withdraws all threats, and leaves you to settle your dispute with the authorities as you may think fit. May I add that, if you choose to consult me, I shall be glad to act for you. I would not say this if it was merely a professional matter, but there are circumstances— Certainly I shall be here at eleven o'clock on Monday. Till then, sir, I wish you good day. Good day, Mr. Devar. Remember me to your father. By-by, Mr. Steingall. You and I will meet at Philippi."

Once the three were in Madison Square, Devar could not be restrained.

"Steingall," he said, "if you don't tell me how you managed it, I'll sit down right here on the sidewalk and blubber like a child."

"You were present. You heard every word," answered the detective blandly.

"Yes, I know you scared them stiff. But who, in Heaven's name, are Peter Balusky and Franz Viviadi? Where did you find 'em? Did they drop from the skies, or come up from— Well, where *did* you get 'em?"

"Clancy and I bagged them quite easily after Mr. Curtis and you left Siegelman's café. All we had to do was wait till Vassilan quit. They were hanging about all the time, but afraid to meet him. Now, you must ask me no more questions. I am going to Clancy. He is keeping an eye on Jean de Courtois."

"Did you ever intend to have the Frenchman brought to Schmidt's office?"

"Of course I did. What a question. Good-by. There's your car. I'm off," and the detective swung himself into a passing street-car.

"Do you know," said Devar thoughtfully, "I am beginning to believe that Steingall says a lot of things he really doesn't mean. I haven't quite made up my mind yet as to whether or not he hasn't run an awful bluff on the noble lord and the most noble count. And the weird thing is Schmidt didn't call it. Did it strike you, Curtis, that—"

Then he looked at his friend, whose silent indifference to what he was saying could no longer pass unnoticed.

"What is it, old man?" he asked, with ready solicitude. "Are you feeling the strain, or what?"

"It is nothing," said Curtis. "A run in the car will soon clear my head. Perhaps you and I might arrange for a long week-end, far away from New York."

Devar looked curiously at his friend, but, being really a good-natured and sympathetic person, repressed the imminent cry of amazement. Somehow, he realized the one spear-thrust which had pierced Curtis's armor. It was hateful that such a man should be told he had married Hermione for her money. It was hateful to think that this might be said of him in the years to come.

It was even possible that she herself might come to believe it of him, and John Delancy Curtis's knight-errant soul shrank and cringed under the

thought, even while the memory of Hermione's first kiss of love was still hot on his lips.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### John and Hermione.

**B**UT the phase passed like a disturbing dream. Hermione herself laughed the notion to scorn; and a ready opportunity for such effective exorcism of an evil spirit was supplied by Devar's tact.

When the two young men reached the hotel Devar insisted that Curtis should take Hermione for an hour's run in the park.

"Here's the car, and it's a fine morning, and you've got the girl. What more do you want?" he cried. "If Uncle Horace and Aunt Louisa show up before you return I'll take care of 'em. Now, who helps her ladyship to put on her hat and fur coat—you or I?" That duty, however, was discharged by a smiling and voluble maid named Marcelle Leroux.

So it befell that when Brodie piloted his charges into Central Park, Curtis behaved like a man deeply in love but gravely ill at ease, and Hermione, also in love, but afire with the divine flame of womanly faith, and therefore serenely blind to any possible obstacle which should thrust itself between her and the beloved, saw instantly that something was wrong.

Curtis was just the type of man who would torture himself unnecessarily about a consideration which certainly would not have rendered his inamorata less desirable in the eyes of the average wooer. He knew that he had waited all his life to meet Hermione—to meet her, and none other—and the thought that, having found her, having snatched her, as it were, from the sacrificial altar of a false god, he should now lose her, was inflicting exquisite agony.

Happily, this girl-wife of his was adorably feminine, and she decided

without inquiry that she was the cause of his melancholy.

"Tell me, John," she said suddenly. "I am brave. I can bear it."

The unexpected words stirred him from his disconsolate mood.

"Bear what, dear one?" he asked, looking at her with the wistful eyes of Tantalus gazing at the luscious fruits which the wrathful winds wafted ever from his parched lips.

"You know that you have made a mistake, and have brought me out here to—to—"

"Ah, dear Heaven!" he sighed; "if I had but the strength of will to adopt that subterfuge it might prove easier for you. But one thing I cannot do, Hermione. I refuse to set you free by means of a lie. I love you, and will love you till life itself has sped."

The trouble was not so bad, then. She nestled closer.

"What is it, John dear?" she cooed, quite confident of her ability to slay dragons so long as he talked in that strain.

He trembled a little, so overflowing was the bitter-sweet sense of her nearness.

"It is rather horrible that you and I should have to discuss dollars and cents," he said, speaking with the slow distinctness of a man pronouncing his own death sentence; "but your father taunted me with the fact that you are very wealthy. Is that true?"

"Of course it is."

She affected to treat the matter seriously. It was rather delicious to find her lover distressing himself about money, if that was all.

"What is your income?" he demanded curtly.

"I am quite rich. I am worth about half a million dollars a year."

He groaned and shrank away from her.

"Why did you not tell me that sooner?" he said, almost with a scowl.

"Why should I? Does it matter?"

Isn't it rather nice to have plenty of money?"

"Good God! It is hard to—to—" His hands covered his face in sheer agony.

"John, don't be stupid. Why alarm me in that way? Wealth doesn't bring happiness—far from it. But didn't you and I—discover each other—before—before—"

"But I know now," he said brokenly, "and it is a mad absurdity to think that a woman of your place in the world should marry a poor engineer. Do you realize that you receive every fortnight more than I earn in twelve months? King Cophetua marrying a beggar-maid sounds excellent in romance, but who ever heard of a queen wedding a pauper?"

"You are describing yourself rather lamely, John."

"Hermione, don't drive me beyond endurance. I can't bear it, I tell you."

She caught his right hand and imprisoned it lovingly in hers. Her left hand went around his neck, and she drew him closer.

"John," she whispered, and the fragrance of her was intoxicating, "you must not break my poor heart after taking it by storm. I want you, and shall keep you if I were ten times as rich and you were in rags. What joy has money brought hitherto in my short life? It killed my mother, and has alienated me from my father. It has driven me to the verge of a folly I now shudder at. It has caused death and suffering to men whom I have never seen.

"It has separated a man and a woman who love each other even as you and I love. If I were a poor girl, working for a living in office or shop, I should know what laughter meant, and cheerfulness, and the bright, care-less hours when the heart is light and the world goes well. You have brought these things to me, dear, and you must not take them away now. I forbid it. I deny you that wrongful act with my very soul. John, do you

wish to see me in tears on this—our first day—together?"

Brodie summed up the remainder of the situation with unconscious accuracy in a subsequent disquisition delivered to an admiring circle in the servants' hall at Mrs. Morgan Apjohn's house.

"Spooning is a right and proper thing in the right and proper place," he said, "but Central Park on a fine morning is not the locality. I was jogging along comfortably when I saw some guys in Columbus Plaza rubbering around at the car, and grinning like clowns at a circus, so I just opened up the engine a bit and let her rip, except when a mounted cop cocked his eye at me.

"But, bless you, them two inside didn't care if it snowed. When I brought 'em back to the hotel, Mr. Curtis sez to me: 'We've enjoyed that ride thoroughly, Brodie, but I had a notion that Central Park was larger.' Dash me, I took 'em over nine miles of roadway, and they thought I had gone in at Fifty-Ninth Street and come out at Eighth Avenue."

Devar, too, appreciated the success of his maneuver when he saw Hermione's sparkling eyes and Curtis's complacent air.

"Have you got a sister, Lady Hermione?" he asked apropos to nothing which she or any other person had said.

"No," she answered.

"I was only wondering," he said.

"If you had, you might have cabled for her. I'd just love to take her round the park in that car."

But the rest of that day, not to mention many successive days, was devoted to other matters than love-making. Shoals of interviewers descended on Curtis and Hermione, on Devar, on Uncle Horace and Aunt Louisa, on Brodie, even on Mrs. Morgan Apjohn when it was discovered that she came to lunch, and on "Vancouver" Devar when he arrived at the Central Station that evening.

Steingall's orders were imperative, however. Not a syllable was to be uttered about the one topic concerning which the press was hungering for information, because the shooting affray in Market Street had now become known, and the gray car had been dragged out of the Hudson, and the reporters were agog for the news which was withheld at headquarters.

It was then that the magic term, *sub judice*, proved very useful. Even in outspoken America, witnesses do not retail their evidence to all when men's lives are at stake, and it was determined to charge all four prisoners under one and the same indictment.

Yet, for reasons never understood by the public, Balusky and Viviadi were discharged, and Jean de Courtois was deported. Martiny was sentenced to capital punishment, and Lamotte received a long term of imprisonment. But these eventualities came long after Curtis and Hermione had been remarried in strict privacy, and in the presence of a small but select circle of friends, an occasion which supplied Aunt Louisa with fresh oceans of talk for the delectation of society in Bloomington, Indiana.

At the wedding breakfast, Steingall made a speech.

"Once," he said, "when the present happy event did not seem to be quite so easy of attainment as it looks to all of us now, my friend, Mr. Curtis, playing upon a weakness of mine in the matter of literary allusions, suggested that I should substitute *Niflheim* for *Ewigkeit* as a simile. I didn't know what *Niflheim* meant, but I have ascertained since that it is a Scandinavian word describing a region of cold and darkness, a place, therefore, where people might easily get lost. Well, it might have suited certain conditions I had then in my mind, but Mr. Curtis will never go to Scandinavian mythology when he wants to describe New York. To my thinking, it will figure in his mind as more akin to Elysium."

Clancy led the applause with sardonic appreciation, whereupon his chief allowed a severe eye to dwell on him, though his glance traveled instantly to the egg-shell dome of Otto Schmidt, whose aid had been invaluable in stilling certain qualms in the breast of authority.

"My singularly boisterous and most esteemed friend, Mr. Clancy," he continued, "seems to be delighted by the success of that trope. I might gladden your hearts with other he has coined, because the bride and bridegroom owe more, far more, to him than they imagine at this moment. I remember—"

A loud "No, no!" from Clancy indicated that revelations were imminent.

"Well," said Steingall, "I forget just what he said on one memorable night when four semi-intoxicated stokers held up a down-town saloon, but I do wish to assure you of this—if it were not for Clancy's genius as a detective, and his splendid qualities of heart and mind as a man, this wedding might never have taken place, or if that is putting a strain on your imagination, let me say that its principals would have encountered difficulties which are now, happily, the dim ghosts of what might have been."

Curtis took an opportunity later to ask Steingall what those cryptic words meant, and the chief of the bureau set at rest a doubt which had long perplexed him.

"It was Clancy who prompted the idea of mixing up the two branches of the inquiry," he said. "Under that wizened skin of his he has a heart of gold. 'Why shouldn't those two young people be made happy?' he said. 'I haven't seen the girl,' nor had he, then, 'but I like Curtis, and she won't get a better husband if she searches the Island of Manhattan.' So we allowed Lord Valletort and the count to believe that it was their set of hirelings who killed poor Hunter, whereas Balusky and Viviadi only tied up De Courtois, and were quaking with fear when they heard of the murder, because they

assumed he had been killed by some other scoundrels, and that they would be held responsible. It was they who gave up the names of Rossi and Martiny as the likely pair, and the bluff I threw with Lamotte came off."

"For whom were Rossi and Martiny acting? You have never told me, said Curtis.

"Don't ask, sir. But I don't mind giving you a sort of hint. You know, better than I do probably, that Hungary is seething with revolutionary parties, which are more bitter against each other than against the common enemy, Austria. Now, two of these organizations were keen to have Count Vassilan married to Lady Hermione, one because of a patriotic desire to draw her money into the war-chest, the other because they suspected him, and rightly, as a mere tool in the hands of Austria, and they believed again, with justice, I think, that when he was married it would be Paris and the gay life for him rather than a throne which might be shattered by Austrian bullets.

"The Earl of Valletort has degenerated into little better than a company-promoter, and he had made his own compact with Vassilan. Add to these certain facts one other—Elizabeth Zapolya, whom Lady Hermione knows, married an attaché in the Austrian Embassy in Paris last week."

Curtis remained silent for a moment. Then he seized Steingall's hand and wrung it warmly.

"Hermione and I have been wondering what we can do to show our gratitude to you and Mr. Clancy."

"Nothing, sir," broke in the detective. "It was all in the way of business, so to speak."

"Yes, and our recognition of your services will take shape in that direction," said Curtis. "Why, man, if it were not for you I might have been charged with murder, and if it were not for Clancy and you, Hermione might now be in Paris with her good-for-nothing father. I'll talk this over with Schmidt."

"Schmidt is a good fellow, but he doesn't know everything, even though he may be a mighty fine guesser," said Steingall.

"I'll tell him just as much as is good for any lawyer," laughed Curtis. "He is acting for my wife and myself now in the matter of providing for Hunter's relatives. We look forward to meeting Clancy and you when we return from the West."

"Is that where you are going for the honeymoon?" asked the detective.

"Yes. We debated the point during a whole day, but some enterprising agent settled it for us by exhibiting a catchy sign—'Why not see America?' And we both cried 'Why not?' Mr. Devar, senior, who has what you call a pull in such matters, has secured us the use of a railway president's car for the trip, and a whole lot of friends join us at Chicago. Can you come, too?"

"No, sir," he said ruefully. "I can't get away from headquarters. I have too much on hand. As for Clancy, he'll be carried out before he quits."

So, for two people at least, a wonderful night merged into a more wonderful month, and the dawn of a new year found them on the threshold of a happy, and therefore, quite wonderful life.

(The end.)



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# THE OFFICIAL INTRODUCER

A NOVELETTE

BY MARY RIDER MECHTOLD

Author of "The Woman Who Paid," "The Decoy," "Her Last Victim," etc.

## CHAPTER I.

"You Are Beneath Me."



"AGNES, you are lovelier than any rose in the shop," declared Jerome Howard enthusiastically.

The florist's cashier put the huge bunch of American Beauties she was showing down on the desk, folded her hands over them and gave the young millionaire one long, searching look.

"Say, what are you handing me?" she said. But there was a lingering wistfulness in the intensity of her gaze.

It seemed as if the pretty cashier, accustomed to such speeches from the men who went in and out of the shop, tried to find in this particular instance, at least, something genuine which she craved.

"If I could paint, I'd catch that pose," Jerome went on easily, unconscious of the contempt which her voice had endeavored to convey.

"Those tropical plants are just the right background. You belong to the luxuriant type yourself. You're an exotic. Your mouth, of course, is *not* perfect—the lips are too full—but the coloring makes up for that defect."

"Oh, cut it out, Mr. Howard," Agnes drawled, in her most impressive Four Hundred intonation.

Agnes carried herself with the air of a queen, or, at least, as she imagined a queen would carry herself. Howard, whose life of leisure had given

him ample opportunity to graduate as a connoisseur of womanly beauty, had classified her type correctly as luxuriant.

She was still a girl in years, but her beauty had flowered mysteriously into maturity, the maturity which marriage generally brings to a woman. Agnes, however, was still Miss Murray. She had abundant reddish-brown hair, her features were clear-cut, just escaping coarseness, her eyes dark brown with yellow lights and full, white lids.

Her lips were red and dewy with the tempting look of a ripe cherry, with rather a plaintive droop at the corners. Her black silk bodice, with its demure touch of white at wrist and throat, were suitable for her position, but at the same time its closely fitting lines were well calculated to bring out the curves of her fine figure.

Agnes cultivated as nearly as possible the accent of the society women who fluttered in and out of the store in their gorgeous furs and Parisian hats. With delightful unconcern she sandwiched broad A's and rolling R's with bits of slang, executed with a nasal finish.

But occasionally she dropped her vigilance and relapsed entirely into the picturesque vernacular which is the shop-girl's own.

"Now, Agnes," laughed Jerome, his lazy blue eyes taking in every detail of her face and figure. "it's all very well for you to say 'cut it out,' but wouldn't you feel hurt if you

found your fascinating glances had no effect on me?"

"Say, Mr. Howard, what's your game?" asked the girl pointedly.

"My game?" repeated Jerome with much amusement. "Why, pure enjoyment. I like to look at you." Then he hastened to add, "You're remarkably pretty," with a pretense of believing he had not made the remark innumerable times before, and a manner of conveying some especial information.

"So you drop in every morning to tell me that!"

"Unfortunately, I have nothing better to do than to cultivate my pleasures," said Howard.

"Ain't you got any lady friends of your own to talk to?" The girl shot him a piercing glance of more than idle curiosity.

"None that is more attractive than you are," he said smoothly. He folded his arms on the desk and stared intently into her face.

The girl met his gaze with something less than her usual assurance, a softening of the eyes and a fluctuation of color which showed an unusual tremor.

"Want these flowers sent to the same address?" she said abruptly, in a businesslike tone and with underlying meaning.

"The same—Miss Helen Barnes—you know the rest of it," answered Jerome in a curiously absent-minded voice. Incorrigible student of women as he was, he had been conscious of the girl's lack of self-possession under his fixed gaze, and the underlying note of jealousy in her question.

He was stirred for the moment by the vague feeling of triumph natural to the male under such circumstances. But the feeling was brief and left him slightly ashamed.

"Miss Barnes comes in here sometimes," said Agnes, watching him narrowly. "She's the real thing; such clothes and such a figure. A tall brunette is always striking. Don't you

think so?" She asked the question with a wistful eagerness, as though anxious to hear his denial and openly avowed preference for her own type.

Jerome, still gazing at her with an absent air, did not answer. To deny would have been disloyal to the lady in question, and to agree would have appeared to the girl as a disparagement of her own charms upon which he had been so vigorously insisting.

Agnes felt a dull sense of disappointment. "Say," she said suddenly, inwardly calling herself a fool, "are you engaged to the lady?"

"Well," answered Jerome equivocally, "Miss Barnes hasn't as yet taken up her option." Then he added humbly, "She could have me if she wanted me."

Agnes looked at him wonderingly. Humility in men as far as women were concerned was an unknown factor to her.

"Gee," she sighed involuntarily, "she's lucky!"

"Thank you," said Jerome. "That's a real compliment." His blue eyes beamed upon her with an expression which did not lack a certain impersonal tenderness which the young man carried in his nature for all women who were in the least attractive.

"Oh, don't get conceited," Agnes retorted. "I don't mean she's lucky to get you. One man's the same as another." She shrugged her shoulders with a well-assumed air of magnificent indifference to the male sex. "It's your coin I was thinking of."

Jerome felt slightly piqued. Then his self-love prompted the thought that the girl was merely acting, putting up a barrier of defense between herself and him.

Her entire make-up denied the mercenary impression she tried to create. Nature intended all women to be mothers, but some in their personality deny this primary intent, and others suggest it before and above everything. Agnes belonged to the latter type.

In her full, red lips and glowing brown eyes Jerome's experienced eyes discerned great qualities of warmth and tenderness, and he felt a natural inclination toward experiment.

"Dear child," he said gently, "no one will ever love me for my money. I'm a mere beggar on an allowance. Father's the catch in our household. And believe me, Agnes, a rich widower has his trials with the ladies."

Jerome chuckled in memory of some amusing experiences of which the elder Howard had been the victim.

"Don't you ever work?" asked the girl in an interested tone.

"Work!" echoed Jerome with an air of barely understanding a word in a foreign tongue. "Why work? The governor's got more money stored up now than I could squander in a lifetime."

"Mother dead?" inquired Agnes. She felt the stirring of a maternal tenderness for this six feet of naive amiability. There was something so clean and frank to her in his handsome blond face, and in the easy familiarity of his manner there was a tinge of deference and respect which she was quick to feel and appreciate.

Her experience as a shop-girl had not brought her in contact with many men of the stamp of young Howard.

"Yes," nodded Jerome. His sunny blue eyes clouded for a moment. The death of the mother he adored, when he was a boy of fourteen, had been the only shadow on his young life.

She eyed him sympathetically. "So is mine," she said quickly. Her arms dropped to her side and her lips quivered. "Mine went two years ago. Everything was all right up to that time."

She was silent for a moment, and a peculiar tragic look crept into her eyes, leaving Jerome to suspect that since then everything had been all wrong.

"When I was fourteen I was cash-girl in a basement store. I worked up to neckwear, and then afterward—" She hesitated, then the tragic look

changed to one of hard defiance. "Well, a gentleman friend helped me to an easier position."

Jerome understood, and a slight depression crept over him.

Agnes's story, condensed though it was, gave the millionaire's son some slight conception of the problem of the working girl fighting the world against odds and succumbing to temptation.

"Since I've been cashier in this branch of the swellest flower-store in town I ain't got no kick comin'. I don't have much to do—just keep track of the orders. In fact, I got the place on my looks. They wanted some one who was pleasing to customers."

"I'll wager you've doubled the trade here," ventured Jerome eagerly, anxious to divert her mind from the thoughts which had suddenly hardened her young face.

"Yes; but I get dead sick of the jollyng. A string of rich fellows trail in that I've got to take a lot from. Why, some of the remarks they pass around here would jar the arms off that Venus if she had any."

Jerome frowned. He knew well enough the sort of persecution a girl like Agnes was subjected to from the rich young fellows of his own class. "I'm sorry if I've ever annoyed you," he said quickly.

She gave him a grateful look. "You've been nice straight through, and it was sure grand of you to take me home that rainy night in your closed-up automobile. Gosh, but it did seem swell to lean back with cushions all around me."

She closed her eyes in ecstatic remembrance of a certain stormy night when Jerome had offered her the shelter of his motor as though she were conferring a favor upon him, his manner to the shop-girl differing not one whit from what it would have been to any young lady in his own class.

Leaning back luxuriously, listening to Jerome's pleasant laughter and talk while the wind raged outside and the rain pelted, the drive had seemed in-

credibly short to Agnes, passing like a swift dream which leaves a memory of something vague and sweet.

"That ride brought Nick to time some, believe me," said Agnes reminiscently.

"Who is Nick—your brother?" inquired Jerome with a keen look.

"I haven't any belongings. He's the gentleman friend I was just speaking of," returned Agnes haughtily.

Jerome caught the same tragic gleam in her handsome eyes that he had noticed a moment ago.

"Ho, ho, young lady!" he exclaimed lightly. "The cat is out of the bag. So you've been trifling with my young affections, telling me I'm the handsomest—"

"Well, every girl admires a six-footer with broad shoulders," she answered with a challenging glance.

"—most polite man whoever came in here," continued Jerome. "And all the time in love with some one else. Now, see here—"

"Don't guy," interposed Agnes suddenly. She looked at him with an expression of desperate misery, then dropped her head on her folded arms.

Like all men, Jerome hated a scene. Something was wrong with the girl; that was evident, he thought.

"Had a quarrel with your steady?" he asked sympathetically. "Now, if I've been the cause I'll promise to efface myself." Then, prompted by a genuine interest in the girl's welfare, he said bluntly: "A shop is no place for a pretty girl like you. Why don't you get married, Agnes?"

"Married?" she exclaimed bitterly. "Marriage is only for rich people. In our class"—a hopeless expression settled on her face—"a man may mean all right, but if he ain't got a job he ain't marrying, that's all."

Jerome felt a degree of surprise, confronted for the first time with this common problem of the poor. "That is a side I never thought of," he said. "It's tough on the girl."

"You bet it's tough!" she cried

with sudden passion. "Sometimes, Mr. Howard, I get to thinking—" She stopped abruptly, biting her lips to keep back the rush of bitter words. Then she raised her arms, stretched them tensely as if for an outlet to her pent-up feelings, then brought them down on the flowers again and looked straight at Jerome. "God, but I hate men!"

Jerome was startled, and moved. The girl's exclamation, combined with the bitterness of her voice and the look in her eyes, was as good as a confession.

He felt conscience-stricken when he thought that all the while he had been flirting and amusing himself with the girl she had carried this tragedy within her, suffering and laughing at the same time.

His own careless life passed in swift review before him with not a serious thought or care, its sole object to kill time.

"And you're so young," was his only comment.

"Just in years—I don't feel it." Her eyes filled with tears, and she stared through the palms out of the window.

Jerome stepped back abashed. For the first time he saw the real self which lives behind the flippant, gum-chewing, becoiffured shop-girl.

It never occurred to him to wonder what feelings he had inspired in the girl to cause her to betray her secret to him.

He only felt an immense sympathy for her and a desire to do something that would banish her tears and bring the smile back to her lips.

Acting on the impulse, he took the violets from the box he had just directed to be sent, carefully shook the moisture from them, reached in his pocket for an unused handkerchief, wiped the tinfoil about the stems and, leaning over, pinned them on Agnes.

She sat perfectly still, scarcely breathing while he arranged them, and gradually, under the influence of the

graceful act, the hard, worn look faded from her face. When he had finished, she was all smiles and dimples.

Jerome's heart warmed to her. She was really very young and simple, he thought, when a little thing like that could give her so much pleasure as to change her whole expression from that of a hardened woman to a girl's again.

And such a pretty girl! But the action which he regarded so lightly meant much to Agnes.

A spark had been kindled in her emotional nature.

Jerome held out his hand. "Now, whom do you hate?" he demanded.

She took his hand and gripped it tightly. It was several seconds before she could manage to answer: "It's a cinch I like you some."

The two young people were suddenly startled by the presence of some one in the shop. Suddenly, by a simultaneous impulse, they turned and saw Helen Barnes. They had been so engrossed in each other that they had not seen her enter.

On her part, confronted by the scene on entering the store, she had been too astonished to retreat. A quick resentment flared up in her against Jerome for placing her in this humiliating position.

She loved him genuinely, and there was no deeper proof of it than the shock which she received on seeing him holding the hand of the shop-girl.

Jerome advanced to meet her without betraying the slightest confusion. In fact, he seemed agreeably surprised to see her. In spite of being deeply hurt, Helen could not but admire his assurance which she told herself was assumed for the occasion.

"Good morning, Jerome," she said pleasantly, and there was no trace in her manner which betrayed to the others the slightest consciousness of what she had seen.

She gave an order to Agnes with just a touch of hauteur. Their eyes met for an instant, those of the girl who had everything and the eyes of

the girl who had nothing. Both were wrought up to an exaggerated degree of consciousness.

To Helen Barnes the covert glance of the shop-girl, which took in her face and figure and clothes, betrayed a veiled triumph. Agnes's glance translated meant: "You ain't the whole show to him. He knows there's somebody else livin'."

And in Helen's clear, proud glance, Agnes read the words: "I am above competing with a shop-girl. His attentions to you are beneath my notice, but it does not speak well for a girl of your class to receive them."

Helen was taller and slimmer than Agnes. She carried her height with a natural queenliness of bearing. She had a clear, transparent skin and beautifully cut features. Her eyes were dark.

She wore a long sealskin coat, trimmed with ermine, and a sealskin hat, with an ermine rim, rested on the smooth waves of her dark hair. Agnes's gaze followed her admiringly, taking in every detail of her toilet as she turned to go, without another glance at Jerome.

"A moment, Helen," called Jerome. "I was on my way to your house. I'll come with you." Then he turned to the cashier. "Another bunch of violets."

"Not for me," returned Helen coolly. "I don't care for flowers in the daytime."

Jerome knew the reason of refusal, and thought it wise to refrain from pressing the point.

"Well, send the other order, then," he said imperturbably. Then he bowed cordially to Agnes and followed Helen into her automobile.

## CHAPTER II.

### Between Two Girls.

JEROME HOWARD was a flourishing example of the idle rich. He had not yet suffered from the per-

icious effects popularly considered to be the inevitable accompaniment of too much wealth.

He was neither dissipated nor a degenerate. A cleaner-living, cleaner-minded young man could not be found in any walk of life.

At college he had distinguished himself by a series of escapades, the natural outlet of a fund of high animal spirits. After he left college he showed no especial abilities beyond spending money.

But to that charge he could answer he had never been given a chance. Idleness had been forced upon him. The elder Howard, who had worked hard all his life, absolutely denied this privilege to his son. It was his strange whim that Jerome should not work.

When Jerome left college he naturally wished to employ himself in some way, but he soon saw all argument was futile. So he shrugged his shoulders philosophically and set about to kill time. It was only a temporary compromise, he told himself.

Then, in the lack of other occupation, he did the most natural thing under the circumstances. He fell in love. This met with his father's instant and complete approval.

The object of Jerome's choice was the daughter of an old and valued friend, and in herself a daughter-in-law to be proud of.

Old Howard looked hopefully forward to a thriving crop of grandchildren, and chuckled at the prospect of supporting them all.

Helen Barnes had been Jerome's playmate as a child. He felt that he had always loved her, but did not realize the fact until he called on her one evening and found her dressed in rose-colored chiffon for a ball to which he had not been invited.

Jerome went home and gnashed his teeth at the mental picture of Helen waltzing in the arms of his fortunate rivals.

He lost no time in disclosing the state of his feelings, and when Helen,

in a charming confusion, confessed she returned his love, he was immediately overwhelmed by the sense of his own unworthiness. But that self-depreciation did not remain an abiding conviction.

In the first days of their engagement Jerome was blissfully happy. Even after the first glamour had worn off, and, rubbing his eyes, Jerome saw the world was still there, and that everything was in beautiful working order, he loved Helen not a whit less sincerely.

But he could not monopolize her entirely. There were other claims besides his. She had her family and her bevy of girl friends; her dressmaker, her music, and her French lessons.

No immediate date for the marriage had been set. They were young, and there was no particular hurry, and in the interim Jerome amused himself to the best of his ability.

He had a predilection for pretty girls, and saw no harm, or even disrespect to Helen, in flirting a little.

But it did rather spoil his enjoyment of this perfectly innocent pastime that Helen did not share his broad views on the matter.

After leaving the florist's, the engaged couple drove for some minutes in silence. Jerome racked his brain for an original remark. "Lovely day!" he said, at length.

Helen did not seem to think this required any answer, the fact being so evident.

"Let's drive out to the Country Club for luncheon," he ventured.

"I don't care to, thank you," said Helen.

"Very well," he responded, and, wise to the ways of women, waited in silence for the opening attack.

Helen sat for a while, struggling with herself. "Jerome," she said finally, "if you cannot curb your fancy for—for—common girls of this sort, just say so, and we will—break our engagement." She held her breath for his answer.

Jerome's face changed. "As bitter as that over such a mere trifle?" he said, in a tone which showed he was deeply hurt.

"It is no trifle," Helen returned, flushing. "Jerry, I know you love things that are beautiful, whether they are women, dogs, horses, or some vase of rare workmanship—and I've known you all my life, your ways and your habits. Now, I don't want to be narrow-minded, but really, Jerry, this exposition has been too much."

"There is so need of my attempting an explanation," replied Jerome, "for you wouldn't understand it. That poor little girl is living her tragedy, and I just gave her the flowers as I'd give a coin to a starving beggar."

"Of course," cried Helen impatiently, "there is vindication for any act if one is clever enough to discover it. And you are clever, Jerry," she added quickly, "even if you have allowed all visible signs of it to atrophy."

Jerome looked at Helen imploringly. "Be good to me, Helen," he said tenderly. "I'm sorry if I've hurt you."

"Why do you do such things?" she demanded. "Flirting with shop-girls is so utterly common."

"Beauty is never common," he answered. "I refer you to Ruskin, or your own mirror." He smiled into her eyes.

"Can't you be serious with me?" she demanded passionately. "Do you care for this girl?"

"No," said Jerome emphatically. "Great Scott, no—and no again!"

"Jerry, I love you," Helen said slowly, "and you say you love me. If you do, then why do you go daily—yes, I know all about it; your chauffeur is engaged to my maid, remember—why should you go daily to talk to this shop-girl?"

"I go," whispered Jerome, leaning close and catching her hand caressingly, "to buy flowers for you, dearest."

Helen gave him a look of scorn; then, realizing her contempt was unheeded, sighed and at last let her hand nestle within his contentedly.

"I love you, only you, and always you," said Jerome. "Don't you believe it?"

"Yes," replied the girl—"not because it is evident, but because I long to."

"Go on to the Country Club," called Jerome to the chauffeur. "If it is your pleasure," he added quickly to Helen.

She smiled in answer. She could not be angry with him for very long. Her pride had been up in arms, but there was a sincerity in his blue eyes when he said he loved her which it was impossible to doubt.

"Helen," he whispered, "why not set the date for our marriage? Why should we wait because our families have an absurd notion that we are too young?"

Helen smiled, won by his eager, impassioned tone.

"Let it be soon, dearest," he whispered, pressing her hand. "When we are once married you will have no fault to find with me."

"I'll see if you behave," she compromised.

Jerome sighed.

At the club they met some friends. They all drove back together. Amid the laughter and chatter, Jerome's thoughts reverted strangely to Agnes.

He saw her brown eyes with the tears trembling on the long lashes. He felt the warm pressure of her hand as she said, "It's a cinch I like you some!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### Violets and Tears.

WHEN Helen and Jerome drove away from the florist's that morning, Agnes succumbed to one of those fits of the blues which had not been infrequent with her of late.

She was beginning to hate the life she had led the last two years. It held her in a sort of bondage from which she lacked the strength of mind to escape.

Like most impulsive people who act first and think afterward, she regretted speaking so frankly to Jerome, and wondered what had made her do so.

At the same time a dumb chord within her was still vibrating under his sympathy so gracefully conveyed with the violets. Her breast heaved under the stirring of something newborn, the very consciousness of which made her heart beat strangely.

The telephone rang and she hurried to answer. She had taken the message and was starting to deliver it to the clerks in the back room who were getting out a rush order, when she heard her name called. She turned and saw a man inserting his head cautiously in the door.

She shivered. The man represented that part of her life which was crushing her, and from which she did not know how to escape.

"Ag, come here!" he commanded.

"Just a minute, Nick," she called nervously. "I got to put in some orders." She disappeared, and Nick, after casting a sweeping glance around to make sure he was alone, admired his dapper appearance in a long, paneled looking-glass.

He was medium-sized, slim, strong as an ox, and quick in movement as a panther. He was carefully groomed, and wore a plain blue suit, blue tie, and silk socks to match. His waistcoat alone was a bit fancy.

"Nick, you hadn't ought to come here," was Agnes's greeting when she joined him.

"Quit bawling. I know what's what," he said coolly. "Ag, lend me a five-spot."

"I ain't got one," she flashed back.

"Well, why ain't you?" he sneered. "Haven't I been waiting an hour for that millionaire gink to get through talking to you?"

"Shut up," said Agnes. An intense anger flamed up in her against him. He had been hanging about, spying upon her.

"Oh, I'm not jealous," he said coolly. "Hang on to him; he's one good bet, only—" An avaricious look crept into the man's beady eyes. "You've got to let me in on it."

Agnes looked at him with all the scorn of which she was capable. The coarseness of the man, in contrast to Jerome, hurt her like a physical pain. The insinuation of his words robbed her of every vestige of self-respect.

"Say, but you're low down," she replied. "You ain't in his class, just let me tell you."

The rebuff glanced harmlessly off the man's enormous self-assurance.

"Agie, I've got to have money—see? Got a straight tip on a sure winner. Cough up what you've got, old gal, and to-night I'll give you a party that's a hummer."

There was a suppressed eagerness in the man's manner, and his fingers worked nervously. Under the oily persuasiveness of his tone, Agnes felt the force of a threat.

"I've only got enough money to pay this week's rent," she faltered, weakening, "and you know it. Besides, I've got to save up for clothes."

"When I make a clean-up I'll take care of you," said he. "See here, kid, I haven't been stingy with you. It was my coin that set you on your feet and got you a soft snap like this."

"And I saw you through that bad sick spell. Now you're trying to chuck me for the guy with the jingle."

"Tain't so," said Agnes, with a pang of self-reproach, "and you know it ain't. Nick, if we could only get married, I'd never say a word back, no matter what you did. I'd be happy."

It was pathetic that in spite of her knowledge of the man Agnes still hoped for marriage with him. She knew of no other solution to her problem.

The man did not figure. It was the

married state upon which she calculated to restore her self-respect and that of her class for her.

And sometimes she dreamed of little arms about her neck, and baby lips pressed to hers.

"Well, I've helped you. Now, old gal, it's your showdown," said Nick, pressing his advantage. He moved closer to her.

"I got a deal on to go into partnership in a game." He spoke slowly, his hand on her wrist, holding her eyes with his.

"I *got* to raise fifteen hundred dollars. Then we'll be on velvet. I'm dead stuck on you, Ag, and I'll marry you as soon as I'm landed. Are you with me or against me?"

"With you, of course," said the girl.

"Well, I see a way of getting that money through the swell that was in here a minute ago. Are you on?" He tightened his grip on her wrist.

"Leave him out, Nick," she said uneasily. "Nick, you're hurting me! He's been kind to me. Don't you try any funny business with him!"

"Hold your gab!" said the man fiercely. "You'll do as you're told! See?" His black eyes slowly burned their way into the girl's brain.

"Can we be married soon?" she said faintly.

"That depends on you," said Nick with an expression of triumph. "Loan me two bucks."

Agnes took out her purse and handed it to him. He emptied it of all but a quarter.

"I'll leave you car fare and lunch money," said Nick. "Meet me to-night at Mooney's and I'll blow you for dinner."

He hurried out. Agnes stood looking after him, filled with apprehension concerning Nick's suddenly conceived scheme involving Jerome Howard.

She felt she could hardly bear the suspense of waiting until she heard the details at Mooney's that night. But, whatever it was, she resolved she would do nothing to hurt Jerome.

Then she realized bitterly that her resolve would only melt when she was again with Nick. When they were apart she hated him, but together, she knew his power over her.

"You coward!" she called herself. Then she climbed back to her stool and sat trembling, white-lipped and miserable, trying to gather courage for the evening, to fight Nick for Jerome.

But the uppermost desire of the girl's life was to right her relations with Nick. If she aided Nick in his scheme they could be married.

This insidious thought beat recurrently upon her brain as she sat there during the long afternoon. Motherhood cried within her. Temptation presented itself in the alluring form of baby gurgles and kisses.

Suddenly looking down she became conscious of her violets. And she commenced to sob, deep sobs of physical pain, as though she were beaten by furies.

## CHAPTER IV.

### Disgrace.

**DURING** the following month Jerome made it easy for Nick to develop the scheme which he regarded in the light of a veritable inspiration, though the lover of Agnes Murray might not have expressed himself in just those words.

Young Howard, without any voluntary intent, drifted daily into the florist's and whiled away an hour or so, talking to Agnes.

More violets followed the way of the first.

When Agnes went home she preserved them tenderly in water, cherishing them while there was still a vestige of life left.

They stood in the thick tumbler, looking surprised at their strange environment; the squalidly furnished room of the shop-girl was an abrupt descent for violets from the swellest florist in town.

The other employees in the store expressed the undivided opinion that Agnes Murray had "struck it rich" and winked significantly when Jerome's car stopped before the door.

Agnes's sudden flutter of excitement, the instinctive movement of her hands to her hair or her belt before Jerome's entrance, was also not lost upon them.

Agnes looked forward to the hour that Jerome spent with her, chatting and laughing, as the only one of the day in which she really lived. The rest of her life was ugly by comparison.

Yet, strange to say, all this time she was fully conscious of the fact that she had pledged herself to Nick to act against him.

She also felt vaguely conscious that she was in the power of something stronger than her love or her fear or her self-esteem. The voice of nature is stronger than all other voices.

She made the most of this time, knowing that her hour was short-lived. There were moments when Jerome was fascinated by the tigerish intensity of her yellow-brown eyes.

He was also drawn toward her at times by a sense of her strong womanhood.

He felt there was something in this shop-girl which had not awakened in the girl he loved.

One night as Jerome was entering his home, Nick threw his bomb. Jerome was served with papers for a breach-of-promise suit brought by Agnes Murray.

He was absolutely stunned, so stunned that he did not have even the capability of feeling wounded at first by the fact that the girl he had been kind to should have behaved so ungratefully. After a moment's indecision, he went to the library and told his father.

His father asked him a few curt questions, to which Jerome gave curt answers, absolutely disclaiming any responsibility or reason for the suit.

In spite of the consciousness of the absurdity of the thing and his own in-

nocence, Jerome felt shaken by the attitude of his father, which implied that he had brought a deep disgrace upon the family name.

There was an expression on the face of the elder Howard which presaged a storm, and Jerome inwardly braced himself.

He wondered whether he could save Helen from the knowledge of the suit, consoling himself with the thought that there was really no need for her to worry about it, as he was innocent of the charge. He did not consider for a moment that she might not take the same view.

The elder Howard was still a fine-looking man with broad shoulders, who held himself straight like a soldier.

He darted a sidelong glance at his son and saw his own youthful counterpart, except for the fact that in his youth he had not been so immaculately groomed; neither had he possessed that light, careless ease and grace of manner.

The old gentleman reviewed his early life in a flash. His struggles after leaving his New England home, his marriage to his employer's daughter, his phenomenal rise in the business world.

Then his wife's death, and his resolve to give to their boy everything that had been denied him.

And now, after all these years of honorable effort, this paper which lay upon the table before him, this disgrace!

"What have you to say for yourself?" the father demanded.

"Why, I am stunned," said the son, "and just now I don't feel like talking about it. Father, I don't want to say another word to-night; I'll answer any questions in the morning. I'll go to my room now."

It was apparent from Jerome's nervousness that he was incapable of discussing the suit calmly.

"Go!" said his father furiously. "You're of no possible use. You have got yourself into this scrape, and it

will take older heads than yours to get you out of it. I shall call up Helen's father and talk it over with him, also my attorney."

"But Helen — she does not need to know," said Jerome.

"Helen must know the truth," said his father sternly. "Why should she be kept in ignorance of the character of the man she is engaged to marry?"

"Then, father, I—" commenced Jerome indignantly—"I will write to her."

"That will do — leave the summons — I'll look it over. I'm disgusted — utterly disgusted. Get out now!"

Jerome obeyed him with a burning sense of injustice.

The next morning his father breakfasted before him, and sent word that he would see him as soon as possible in the library.

Jerome found him pacing up and down excitedly. He was quite prepared for a scene. The night before had been only a respite.

On seeing his son, Howard senior stopped his wild pacing and brought his fist down on the library-table.

"See here, Jerome, I've overlooked all your wild escapades; but this is just one scrape too many. Such disgrace, such notoriety!

"You, engaged to one of the most charming girls in town, sued for breach of promise by some Agnes Murray! Who is the girl?"

"She is the pretty cashier at Marberry's, the florist," Jerome answered.

"Then you don't deny knowing her?"

"No," returned Jerome testily, "I don't deny anything except that the girl has any claims against me, either morally or legally. I told you that last night when the papers were served on me."

"Humph!" sneered his father. "It's too late for that kind of talk. I want you to make a clean breast of everything."

"I have," Jerome answered.

Father and son eyed each other.

Grim lines drew their tightly closed lips into a remarkable resemblance.

"Jerome," said the father, "we can't let this thing get into the newspapers. If it wasn't for Helen I'd wash my hands of the whole matter. Yes, sir; if you are my only child, and the last in line, I'd rather the line petered out than have it end in degeneracy."

"Be careful, father," warned Jerome. "No one regrets this suit more than I do. But I tell you, except for talking with the girl, giving her a few automobile-rides, flowers, and such things, there's nothing to it."

"I've been a fool — I see that now!" cried Jerome desperately. "Never had anything to do but blow in money. It's a wonder—well, a man with red blood in his veins has got to do something to kill time. You should have let me go into business when I wanted to."

"Business!" yelled the old man. "Lord, you know as much about business as a five-dollar-a-week clerk does. You couldn't earn a cent if you had to."

"I think I could," answered Jerome grimly; "but if I couldn't, whose fault would it be? Why, I begged when I came out of college to go in with you."

"When you're married and settled down with four or five country places, a town house, a yacht or two, and some shooting boxes, you'll have all you can attend to," returned his father.

"I've never objected to furnishing you money. It's my pleasure to make it, but I can't be bothered."

"Well, father, I'm naturally just as active and stubborn as you are. If I've given you trouble by using my energies wrongly, you're partly to blame for it."

"You young upstart!" cried the older man. "You'll be suggesting next thing that I am the party mentioned in this fifty-thousand-dollar breach-of-promise suit."

"You're as guilty as I am," the son maintained stoutly.

Too exasperated to answer. Mr. Howard paced the floor again and re-read the legal paper he was holding.

Jerome lolled back in an easy chair and played with the brass paper-cutter.

Then Mr. Howard stopped and delivered his ultimatum.

"Jerome, as far as I'm concerned I'm through with you. But because Helen has been magnanimous enough not to denounce you outright, and has consented to see you again and hear what you have to say, I am willing to compromise.

"I've sent for this Agnes Murray and my lawyer to come here this morning and arrange for a settlement."

"Do you mean," demanded Jerome, "that you expect me to face that girl and tell her she hasn't anything against me, then offer her—"

"Say, ten thousand dollars," suggested his father.

"If that's what you think I'm going to do," said Jerome, "you're mistaken. Let her push her suit."

"That would make public the scandal. Besides, a jury would more than likely side with the woman—they usually do. As long as I'm willing to settle the thing, you should be."

"But I tell you, father, I'll not be blackmailed."

"That woman would never have brought suit without pretty good evidence," declared the old man sternly.

"Then you think I'm lying when I deny it all?" said Jerome, paling. "I tell you it's raw blackmail. Won't you believe me?" He looked appealingly at his father.

"I'm willing to settle the suit," replied the father, ignoring his son's direct question.

"You needn't do it in my name," said Jerome furiously. "Father, if you can't believe me, we're finished. Now, I'm going to see Helen." He dashed toward the hall door.

"Jerome," called the father, "I demand that you meet this Agnes Murray. If you are so sure of your conduct, deny the charge to her face—make her own that she's wronging you."

"Ask a favor of a girl who would

stoop to such a thing? Father, do you think I'm crazy?"

Without further argument Jerome left the room, jumped into his car, and, recklessly disregarding the speed laws, started for Helen's home.

## CHAPTER V.

### Face to Face.

HOWARD senior sat down beside the fire, holding his head in his hands.

It seemed unbelievable that his son had refused to tell the truth. Jerome always had been honest with him. Now he chose deliberately to carry the affair off with a high hand, to brazen the thing out with a lie.

He had certainly put up a magnificent bluff, thought the old man bitterly. Jerome's supposed lack of confidence hurt him deeply, and his son's attitude seemed to him the most contemptible part of the disgraceful affair.

His secretary came to him with some letters, but he waved him off impatiently. His disappointment in his son was so keen he felt that his mind was incapable of another idea.

A little later the secretary came again with an apologetic air. "Your attorney, sir, and a young lady."

"Show them in," said the millionaire, and seated himself at his desk.

Agnes entered, followed by Mr. Murdock, the lawyer. The girl was pale and very nervous, but braced with a frantic determination to get through the ordeal.

She went at once to a chair in the most remote part of the room. Sitting with her back to the light, Mr. Howard could not see her very well; but, from the big, plumed hat she wore, he judged she had put on her finery for the occasion.

The lawyer whispered a few words to his client, then motioned to Agnes.

"If you'll come up nearer, Miss Murray, we'll talk over this matter."

"There ain't anything to talk over," the girl answered nervously, holding

for dear life to the arms of her chair. "It's all in that paper."

A note in her voice caught Mr. Howard's attention. "She's appealing and pretty," he muttered to Murdock; "just the kind a young fool would fall for."

"Where is your son?" asked the attorney.

"He just left. Denies the whole business. Won't face the girl," replied the father with an air of absolute disgust.

"Now, young woman," he went on sternly, looking at Agnes, "I suppose you have evidence to back up your charges?"

Agnes shrank into herself. She felt completely intimidated by the voice and the personality of Jerome's father. She screwed up her courage with an effort.

"I've been seen by lots to get out of an automobile late at night when Mr. Jerome was with me."

"Well? Is that all your proof?" Mr. Howard demanded.

Agnes rose and looked about fearfully, as if seeking some means of escape from his catechism. Then, with an effort, she controlled her emotion.

"I won't say anything about the case," she answered hysterically. "I don't have to say any more, and you can't make me. I'm going to push my suit against Mr. Jerome unless you got some proposition to make me."

"She's rehearsed," whispered the lawyer to Mr. Howard. "We'll have to buy her up, but no use talking settlement until Jerome lets us know how much of a hold she has on him."

Then, turning to Agnes, he said: "I'm sorry to detain you, but if you will kindly wait in the hall we will see you again in a few minutes."

He opened the door and directed her. She crept into a big hand-carved chair that a French queen had once treasured. The shadows, falling from the leaded glass windows on the white marble staircase and pieces of statuary, sent a shiver through her.

She felt lost and miserable in the unaccustomed magnificence.

Closing the door behind him, Mr. Murdock said to his client: "I'm convinced that the girl can make things very uncomfortable for us. We must find Jerome."

"Have Harvey phone him," replied Mr. Howard senior. "He'll reach him at Miss Barnes's residence."

## CHAPTER VI.

### "Do You Believe Me?"

JEROME raced through the streets at a mad pace. His fresh young color had vanished.

The lines in his face were set.

He was hurt to his very soul by the fact that his father had refused to believe him. The very thought was monstrous, incredible.

He had never in his life lied to his father. When he broke the college rules and the faculty had complained, he had told the truth plainly.

He had never dreamed of denying one of the charges brought against him. But his father, without taking into consideration his past record, had assumed that he feared to tell the truth—that he had lied to save himself.

He feared nothing, he told himself—courts or lawyers or fathers—there was nothing in the whole world that he feared.

But, as he braced himself with this assurance, the car stopped at Helen's door and his heart sank. What was he going to meet here? When his own father refused to believe him, what could he expect from Helen?

His heart ached with suspense as he walked slowly up the steps.

"I'm in a hurry, Banks," said he to the houseman. "Will you tell Miss Barnes that I'm here?"

"Miss Barnes is expecting you," said the man, ushering Jerome into the morning-room.

The room was partially glass. The sun streamed through filmy, trans-

parent yellow curtains. There were divans of flowered yellow silk and cozy wicker easy chairs with flowered yellow cushions.

Ferns reared their delicate green fronds from yellow jardinières. A vine wandered at its will about the window-casing.

Goldfish darted busily to and fro in a large aquarium. It was a perfect background for a brunette like Helen.

She stood in the warm, yellow light, feeding some love-birds—Jerome had brought them for her from South America—looking more beautiful in these surroundings than when she had entered the florist's in her furs so inopportunely a month before.

She wore a soft, yellow silk gown with an old ivory lace collar rolled back to show the firm lines of her throat.

Two long braids of bluish-black hair were caught about her head with large tortoise-shell pins.

Jerome felt a sudden sensation of choking at the prospect of losing her.

"Helen!" he said impulsively, holding out his arms with a great longing for sympathy from the woman he loved.

She turned and looked at Jerome searchingly with her dreamy, dark eyes, but she did not move toward him.

He saw that she was very pale, and her lips trembled.

Jerome's face clouded. He placed a chair for her, sat down near her, and began abruptly:

"Last night I sent you the letter about the breach-of-promise suit because I didn't want you to get any second-hand information. On your account, Helen, I'm terribly cut up over this matter."

"I should think you would be," she replied.

"If the girl had any foundation for the charges she's bringing, believe me, I wouldn't come to you now and ask you to stand by me."

He looked directly at her, searching her face for some evidence of belief in himself.

"Jerome," Helen answered with emotion, "I haven't slept all night. I can't tell you how deeply I feel this. At first I thought I would never see you again; I thought that I hated you."

"Toward daylight, when I was tired out and desperate, I cried myself to sleep believing so. When I woke up this morning I found that I still love you."

She bared her heart, as if to shame herself for her weakness in loving him.

"You're very good to me, Helen," said Jerome humbly. He felt deeply grateful to her, and made an inward promise to atone to her for what she had suffered through him.

"I have brothers," Helen went on more quietly. "I know what temptations fall in the way of young men who are rich and attractive. I'm trying not to judge you, but to be broad-minded."

Then she broke out indignantly. "The idea, Jerome Howard, of your daring to make love to that shop-girl and to me at the same time!"

"I didn't, Helen," said Jerome, hurt and surprised.

She turned on him angrily. "If what I saw publicly in the florist's shop that morning was a sample of your conduct toward her, then I can't help being suspicious of your feelings when alone with her."

"Whatever my mistakes have been," Jerome replied sharply, "I've never tried to lie out of them. I was fond of that little girl—she's had a hard life—and I liked seeing her smile when I did anything nice for her."

"She's never known much kindness. I suppose she brought this suit because she just had to have money. Lord, if I'd known she was so desperate I'd have pawned my watch for her. But when it comes to blackmailing me, that's another matter. Helen, do you believe what I've told you?"

His voice rang out with a sharp appeal. There was a sudden fear in his eyes. In her manner and expression he had seen no trace of the faith which

he looked for in the woman who had professed to love him.

"Jerry," she answered, suddenly throwing her arms about him and hiding her head on his shoulder, "you don't know how I've suffered.

"I love you, and I've been horribly jealous. Pay this girl what she asks, and I'll try to forget it. Your past is your past—only give me your future."

"No, Helen," said Jerome, resisting the temptation to press her to his heart and accept her on the terms she offered.

The words, which had been a tremendous sacrifice of Helen's pride, lacked the one vital essential for which he had sought vainly since he entered the room.

He took her arms from about his neck, though it cost him a terrible effort to do so.

"I'm sorry, but this way things would never be right between us. There's no doubt but what I owe you an atonement. For your sake I'll submit to this blackmail and settle the suit. But first and last I want to declare my innocence. Do you believe me?"

There was a sharp note of entreaty in his voice as he made this one last appeal. But Helen was proof against it.

Jerome had a sensation, as he looked searchingly in her eyes, of hurling his strength against an invincible wall.

"I can forgive you," Helen answered stubbornly. His repulse had angered her terribly.

She felt her sacrifice had been totally unappreciated by Jerome.

He insisted upon something which she could not honestly give him after the evidence she had seen.

His action in pinning the violets upon the shop-girl was quite conclusive to her in the light of the recent developments. At that moment she was so swayed by conflicting emotions that she was hardly capable of appreciating the fact that Jerome was fighting for his honor.

Her love seemed everything.

The point upon which Jerome was insisting was insignificant compared to what she offered.

There was a gentle knock at the door. Then Banks entered, his entire expression and manner one profuse apology for disturbing them.

He had heard their voices raised when he was in the hall, and realized there was a lovers' quarrel in progress.

"A telephone call for you, Mr. Howard," he said.

Jerome excused himself and received his father's message.

He replied that he would be home at once. Then he returned to Helen, who had not moved during his absence.

She stood in the middle of the room.

Her face was absolutely colorless; her eyes brimming with tears of wounded pride; her hands clenched.

Jerome looked at her with a strange expression which pierced her outraged senses, stirring her heart in a vague, incomprehensible manner.

He felt that Helen's lack of faith had put an immense distance between them. Suddenly she appeared to him in the light of a stranger.

He was conscious of a great sorrow in the thought that she had failed him, but he was also sustained by the conviction that the stand he had taken was the only one possible for him.

"I release you from all promises you have made me," he said. "The kind of man for which you take me is not fit for you to marry."

He turned to the door.

Helen saw her happiness slowly retreating from her. In another second he would reach the door, it would close, and all would be over.

"Jerome!" she cried desperately.

He turned with a sudden hope and waited for her next words.

"I said I forgave you," she said brokenly.

"I don't wish your forgiveness," he said steadily. "I have done nothing to warrant it."

"I don't care what you've done," she cried wildly. "I love you, Jerome, and if you love me, you'll not break our engagement."

"It's because I care so much that I couldn't marry you like this," he declared fiercely. "It's time I stood on my own feet. Do I represent nothing to you? Do you want me to be your lap-dog?"

"You're stubborn and unreasonable," retorted Helen angrily. "You do an atrocious thing, then turn on those who are willing to stand by you—"

He turned again to the door, refraining from answer.

"Perhaps you prefer this—this other woman," cried Helen hysterically.

"Helen!" cried Jerome with fierce anguish. Then he added shortly: "Good-by!"

Helen stood staring at the door which closed behind Jerome. Then, realizing he had gone, she threw herself down upon a divan, sobbing convulsively.

Possessed with a firm purpose, Jerome drove to his home at the same furious rate of speed with which he had left it.

He opened the front door with his latch-key, and made straight for the library.

Agnes, sitting in the hall, saw him rush past her.

She started to stop him, with a wild desire to put herself right in his eyes, losing sight of the fact that by doing so she might risk losing the stakes in the desperate game that she and Nick were playing.

He did not appear to see her, and she shrank back, frightened at his white face and set jaw.

He looked ten years older than the gay young fellow who had laughed and flirted with her almost every day of the past month.

All his kindness came to her mind; his flowers, the rides he had given her in his car, the invariable respect

with which he treated her and which her experience of men taught her to appreciate.

"Good Lord," she moaned, "good Lord! I hadn't ought to have done it."

That one glimpse of his white, set face had forced some realization upon the girl. She felt a wild desire to throw herself at his feet and beg his forgiveness.

Jerome had left the door of the library partially open in his haste, and Agnes heard the men's voices talking in low, strained tones. She stole nearer and listened.

The family lawyer said suavely; "Only make a clean breast of it, Jerome, so we know where we stand and can arrange a settlement."

He looked significantly at Jerome, trying to warn him that his father's mood was dangerous and the wisest policy was to comply with his demand.

He had known Jerome from a little chap and had often advised him on the side when it came to a clash of wills between father and son.

"There's no settlement to make," Jerome reiterated calmly. "Let the girl push her claim. Now I'm through with the whole matter."

"Young man," said his father with decision, "we are not going to have any notoriety. If you don't care for yourself or me, at least have consideration for a woman. Helen Barnes's rights must be respected."

"She thinks as you do, that I'm lying," Jerome quietly answered; "so our engagement is ended."

He threw back his shoulders and faced his father with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"You stubborn young idiot!" cried his father angrily. "You do as I say, or I'll cut you off without a cent and have you thrown from out of the house!"

"You needn't bother, I'm leaving," flashed back the son, "and when I come back it will be because you beg me to."

Regardless of Mr. Murdock's re-

monstrances, Jerome stalked through the hall and down the front steps.

Agnes, shrinking against the wall in the shadow, had overheard everything.

The situation appalled her.

Suddenly she made a desperate resolve to bring Jerome back and confess the truth to his father and the lawyer.

She ran out of the door and down the street in pursuit.

"Mr. Jerome!" she called wildly.

He did not hear her. She ran as fast as her strength would allow, but her limbs seemed to bend beneath her. She was weak from nervousness, and the fact that she had eaten hardly anything that morning.

He had reached the next corner, and she was about to overtake him when he boarded a passing car.

She stood on the corner, panting and helpless. She was frantic with love and remorse, willing to immolate herself for Jerome.

She quite realized that if she confessed the truth and Nick discovered her treachery, he might kill her in one of his furious passions.

She began to retrace her steps mechanically toward the Howard mansion, then she paused undecided.

Finally with the instinct of a beset animal for its hole she made her way homeward.

## CHAPTER VII.

### Deserted.

SHE dragged herself up the dark, dirty stairs of the house where she lived, reached her own room with its shaft window, threw herself on her unmade bed and lay there shivering.

Later, Nick came in, dapper, excited, and happy.

"What's the news, Ag?" he asked, kicking her foot roughly. "Wake up!"

"What do you want?" she asked dully.

"Want? Where's the dough?" he

cried breezily, his eyes shining in anticipation.

"Didn't get it," she answered.

"You didn't?" Nick demanded savagely.

"I told you not to leave that house till you got something, if it was only the fifteen hundred dollars that I need for the business. Say, you ain't double-crossing me?"

He bent down and looked threateningly into her eyes.

"I didn't get any money," she repeated wearily.

Her remorse for the plight in which she had plunged Jerome had almost swallowed up her former fear of Nick.

"They sent for you—didn't they agree to settle?"

"I didn't wait to hear," she cried, springing up and facing him.

"On account of this suit Mr. Jerome's been jilted by his girl and kicked out by his father. I didn't know that he loved her or was engaged to her, or I'd never have done this thing."

"You little fool," shouted Nick, "you ain't made a mess of it when we had 'em beaten to a frazzle? You flop back there, quick, and get what you can from the old man."

His ruddy color had faded with disappointment, and there was a menace in his comment to which Agnes was not insensible.

"I won't," she answered, clenching her hands and looking defiantly at Nick.

"You will," he threatened, between his teeth, "or I won't marry you."

A gleam of vindictive triumph lit up his face as he hurled this weapon at the girl.

It struck home. Agnes sank back on the bed, clutching the iron framework, as though she were bracing herself against a physical blow.

"You mean you won't ever," she gasped.

"You guessed it," he sneered, looking into her face with savage satisfaction.

Agnes gazed back with astonished eyes widening and darkening between their long fringes as they looked into depths of treachery of which she had never conceived.

She had always understood that Nick was capable of striking her—of even killing her—in a fit of jealous rage, but she had never dreamed of his throwing up his right of possession in her.

She had always justified her relations with him by the thought that their marriage was only a question of time. Now, he had taken the ground from beneath her feet.

For a moment she was crushed, as he meant her to be, then a slow fire of contempt and anger commenced to kindle in her at his perfidy.

"I'll pay you for backing down on me," sneered Nick; "always yelping about wanting to be spliced on the level."

"You won't find no other man to take my leavin's. I'll keep track of you, and if ever I see signs of a weddin' ceremony, I'll bawl you out. Catch me?"

Agnes continued to stare at him. She saw him in a new light. Despite his many faults, he had been her "man," for whom even personal violence, cruelty, was to be overlooked.

Now, at this flagrant breach of faith, he had cut the only cord between them.

He represented something unspeakably vile. She commenced to loathe and hate him.

"For the last time, will you get the coin from the old duffer?" said Nick, quite positive he had taken the needful steps to bend her to his will, and already commencing to congratulate himself on his success.

"No!" screamed Agnes fiercely. "I don't want to marry you; now I know what a real man is."

"Mr. Jerome was kind to me. I thought he wouldn't miss the money. I never dreamed of hurting him. I only sued him because you made me."

"I was always on the level—till I

met you. You've made me what I am—you've dragged me down—you've—"

"Stop yelling!" cried Nick brutally, slipping his hand over her mouth. "Do you mean you're going to give up a sure winner? Why, I've got the proofs against him cinched!"

Agnes struggled away from him, crying defiantly: "I don't care if you have. I won't go to his house again, and I won't go to court against him."

She threw herself on the bed again, burying her face in the pillow.

"In love with him, are you?" he sneered.

"Well, my gal, as you're both down and out, you'll be a great pair to draw to. I'll hike now and sell this yarn to a yellow journal for five hundred. Then me and Fanny'll take in a show or two."

"No paper would dare print such a story, just on your say!" flashed Agnes. "And if they come to me, I'll tell 'em it's a lie!"

"Oh, you will, will you?" he jeered. "Well, you go to the devil!"

He went to a bureau-drawer and took out all his belongings, made them up into a rough parcel, then lit a cigarette, and, puffing it nonchalantly, went whistling down the stairs.

Agnes listened until the last sound of his footsteps died away.

Then she drew a deep breath of relief.

She was free now from that which had crushed her and to which she had resigned herself without seeing any possibility of escape.

She was free now to love Jerome with all her soul. Nevertheless, she commenced to sob—inconsistently—realizing what it meant in her world to be "chucked" by Nick.

She sobbed, not for Nick, but for her man who, drunk or violent, would still have been hers, and for the wedding-ring he had refused her; not for Nick, but for the restitution which he owed her; for the right of being a mother.

Toward evening she rose, intending to go out and get some supper. But when she looked in her purse she found Nick had emptied it.

She had no money to pay her room-rent and her landlady was not of the sort to make allowances.

"Sadie Nolens'll stake me to supper," she thought, as she twisted her heavy, coppery hair before the glass into some likeness of neatness.

Sadie was a girl whose acquaintance she had made when she was in a department-store, and they were chums.

Agnes remembered Sadie's various periods of hard luck when she had not hesitated to borrow from her.

Agnes bent forward suddenly, surveying herself in the stingy mirror, surmounted by a bunch of artificial roses which she wore when she went to dance-halls with Nick.

Her face looked haggard and her eyes were swollen.

"I'm all in," she murmured with sudden self-pity.

She was not at all worried as far as her financial condition was concerned. Her employer was good-natured and would advance her the money for her rent.

She smarted from an acute sense of Nick's perfidy and she shriveled inwardly whenever she thought of how Jerome must despise her.

The longing to see him and hear his voice, to set her temptation before him and plead her cause, and perhaps hear a word of forgiveness, commenced to grow in her.

But suddenly the pangs of hunger asserted themselves above all these emotions and she hastened her toilet.

Sadie Nolens took her to supper, but was not able to do more, as her money was needed at home. Still, Agnes did not worry about finances. Her main thought was to see Jerome.

The hot supper and the society of an intimate combined to cheer her somewhat. The coffee braced her nerves and she resolved to confess all to Jerome's father. That would make

things right. She would be the only one to suffer.

Sadie had seen something was wrong, of course, when Agnes begged her to take her out and "blow" her to something to eat, but she wisely refrained from questions until she pressed the second cup of coffee upon her. Then Agnes confided a part of the truth, that she had quarreled with Nick.

The rest she learned, wide-eyed, in a yellow journal next morning, where the suit of breach of promise by Agnes Murray was set forth with due elaboration.

In ignorance of this, Agnes presented herself at the florist's. But she was met there by the startling news that her services were no longer needed.

When she asked for an explanation she was shown the yellow journal, where her name figured in large letters.

Nick had made his threat good.

She slunk from the store, crushed more by the printed scandal in the yellow journal than her dismissal. In this she did not consider herself for a moment.

But the thought of what this ugly scandal would mean to Jerome and those connected with him plunged her deeper and deeper in a veritable sea of self-abasement.

She had two cents left from the money Sadie had given her for her breakfast, and she bought a paper. Her blood boiled as she read it at the news-stand.

But she grabbed the final item. Jerome Howard was staying at the Beach Club, refusing to be interviewed.

## CHAPTER VII.

### Remorse.

IT was a long distance to the Beach Club building, but Agnes walked it briskly.

Knowing it would be useless to in-

quire for Jerome, she waited near the entrance, watching.

It was late in the afternoon when she recognized his tall figure walking toward the club at a swinging gait. Her heart gave a bound.

She was chilled from the hours of waiting. Her nose was red with exposure to the cold, and her face was haggard and pale.

She had eaten nothing since breakfast.

But her blood ran suddenly swiftly through her veins.

Looking neither to right nor left, Jerome was about to mount the steps when he felt his coat-sleeve pulled timidly.

He turned suddenly, to see Agnes looking at him with piteous, imploring eyes.

A strange feeling came over him at the sight of this figure suddenly appearing before him. It was a feeling which he had never before in his life experienced, and which surprised himself—the desire to perpetrate a deed of violence on another human creature, and a woman at that.

"Miss Murray, I am now without the means you covet," he said sternly, fighting the impulse to take her and shake her, then fling her out of his way like a loathsome thing.

"Mr. Howard," she said, "God knows I'm sorry. I did it for the money. Nick said he'd marry me if I'd get enough to start him. He forced me—"

"This doesn't interest me in the least," replied Jerome. He moved on. Agnes clutched his overcoat and went with him.

"You've got to listen to me," she said. "I didn't know you loved her. I didn't mean to hurt you—I only thought of the money and how I could get married."

"So you remarked before," Jerome interposed. "If you hadn't sold the story to the papers my father would undoubtedly have bought you up at a much bigger figure."

Jerome's contempt for the girl increased as she tried to defend herself.

"Nick done that," she said fiercely. "Mr. Howard, I want to make it all up to you; I want to go to Miss Barnes and your father and tell them there's no truth in those charges. I'll tell them I'm a blackmailer—and let them send me to prison."

Her frantic desire to atone made no impression on Jerome. On the contrary, as the girl groveled in her abject remorse, his disgust grew.

"I positively forbid you to do it," he rejoined. "I'm well satisfied as things are—they may believe what they please about me."

"It's my fault you're kicked out without a cent," cried Agnes.

"I have no doubt I can earn my living." He smiled sarcastically, recalling his father's scathing contempt of his ability.

He had already telephoned to three friends, proffering himself for managerial positions, and he had been politely turned down. But he was far from discouraged.

"You've got to let me make things right, or I'll kill myself," Agnes threatened, clenching her hands. She moved a little nearer to him.

The lamps at the clubhouse entrance had just been lit. For the first time Jerome saw her face clearly in their light.

He was shocked at the change. There was no longer any trace of beauty. But there was a desperate intensity of purpose about her eyes that made him uneasy.

His anger slowly gave way to an impersonal pity. He began to take the girl's ignorance into account and realized that though she had returned his kindness with malice, from all appearances she had suffered for it.

Always sensitive to suffering in others, he was the more so now, from having himself deeply suffered because Helen and his father, the two beings he loved best in the world, had placed no faith in his integrity.

Outside of this he rather liked being thrown on his own resources.

"Agnes," he said kindly, after he had surveyed her a moment in silence, "I haven't a thing against you. You've opened my eyes, that's all."

"Go back to your work and forget this ever happened."

She smiled bitterly, shivering and pulling up her coat collar against the keen November blast.

"I ain't got no job," she said. "The boss fired me after he read the paper."

"Then let Nick take care of you," Jerome rejoined bluntly. "That's the least he can do after you've done his dirty work."

"He's chucked me," she said, in a low voice.

Jerome shut his lips tight to keep back an oath. The thing seemed monstrous, unbelievable. There in the light of the clubhouse lamps he saw exemplified one of the most sordid, pitiable, and also one of the most common, tragedies of life.

The girl chafed her hands to keep them warm. Jerome saw that she was illy protected from the coming winter by her shabby thin jacket.

But surmounting the beautiful, heavy masses of reddish hair was a hat with showy plumes, the record of the shop-girl's love of finery.

He reached for her purse, opened it and saw that it was empty. From his pocket he took some loose change, and two bills, and dropped them into it.

"I'm sorry I can't give you more," he said. "I've no longer a bank account. Maybe this will tide you over."

"You're a gentleman clean through," said Agnes. "I'll take it as a loan—till I get a new job. Won't you let me tell that girl the truth?" she pleaded.

"Positively, no," Jerome answered, "and, Agnes, don't worry over what's done. I don't feel the least resentment toward you."

He tipped his hat as if saluting a grand duchess, then mounted the clubhouse steps.

Agnes watched him until he disappeared within its doors. Then she went slowly from the lamplight into the shadow. She kissed the purse where Jerome had touched it.

"Why didn't I die before I made all that trouble for him?" she sighed.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### An Invitation.

THE next morning after his interview with Agnes Murray, Jerome paid a visit to a pawn-shop.

As it was the end of the month and he was short of funds, he had discovered that he was burdened with a great many useless articles.

For instance, why wear gold cuff-buttons set with sapphires, when plain ones would do as well? Gold match-boxes and cigarette-cases and stick-pins were superfluous luxuries.

He continued living at his club till the checks piled up on him. Then he moved to a cheap hotel.

As time went on he was hurt and mystified that his father made no sign. In spite of his frequent clashes, the bond between father and son had been a close one.

When Jerome heard from a mutual friend that the break had aged his father greatly, his heart softened to him; but, though he no longer felt the same bitterness, he could not make the first overtures.

He was the one who had been wronged. Both men felt they were in the right and neither would give in.

Every morning Jerome was hopeful of securing a position.

He now merely solicited a clerk's place in a banking-house that he might learn the business.

But no one wanted a beginner of his age. At last a friend in the wholesale grocery business gave him a salesman's job on a commission basis. It was the dull season and Jerome could not make enough to pay his hotel bill.

So he moved to a cheaper place, and

tried selling lots in a suburban promotion. Then he went down the line of all the get-rich-quick schemes.

The friends who hadn't turned from him at the time of the exposure, now shunned him for fear he might want to borrow from them.

Jerome, proud and sensitive, disappeared from his old haunts. He kept track of Helen and his father's whereabouts through the papers, but of him they knew nothing—and didn't care to know, he thought bitterly.

Winter found him still persistent but dazed by his failures. He sat in his hall-room and ran his eye down the "help-wanted" column of the daily paper.

"Well, I'm a big, beefy down-and-outer," he thought. "I can't do a blame thing. I could be a chauffeur, but that might take me in the upper part of town and Helen would see me. It would just break her heart.

"Well, if the governor can stick it out, I can, but if I ever have a son, I'll bring him up to earn his living."

Then he looked out of the window at some expressmen unloading a wagon. He decided to try manual labor, and secured work in a baggage-room. The lifting was easy, but not being careful he let a pile of trunks slip one day and broke a wrist-bone. For several weeks he was helpless. Everything he had left was pawned, even to his overcoat.

One night, cold and hungry, he saw a sign "Waiter wanted" in a cheap restaurant, so he went in to make application.

At a counter he saw Agnes, sitting with a row of shop-girls.

Then he changed his mind about applying for the position, for he was shy of letting even a girl like Agnes know things were so bad with him.

The appetizing odor of food increased his hunger, but he did not possess the slightest means to appease it.

There was a crowd before him at the counter, so the fact of his not asking for something passed unnoticed.

In his forlorn condition it seemed good to him to see a familiar face.

But Agnes had changed, he thought; then, after a moment's inspection, he decided considerably for the better.

She looked vastly different from the pretty cashier who tossed her airy replies to him from her desk at the florist's, and there was no similarity between her and the despairing, haggard woman who had excited his pity under the clubhouse lamps.

She was dressed plainly in black, with a white shirt-waist, and looked scrupulously clean. Her coppery hair vaunted itself no longer in puffs and curls, but was arranged plainly under her hat. Nevertheless, the beauty of the shining coils was evident.

Her face was guiltless of powder and showed traces of the emotional phases through which she had passed. She was very pale, the only color in her face the red of her full lips.

But she was very pretty, prettier than when he first saw her, Jerome admitted, and he noted an air of quiet purpose and refinement.

The change within had left its mark upon the outer woman. Jerome's free forgiveness and his action in sharing his slender resources with her had altered the face of the world to Agnes.

Nick had destroyed her faith in men; Jerome had restored it to her. In the months during which she had not seen or heard of him her love had grown silently into worship.

She had carried an ideal within her—to live "decent" so Jerome could respect her.

Suddenly Sadie Nolens stopped in the midst of a highly dramatic tale to whisper, "Look at the swell guy at the counter staring at you."

At first Agnes could hardly believe it was Jerome. He looked so much thinner and older than her remembrance of him. It was only his hair brushed back in the same careful manner, and the look of absolute cleanliness about him that made her sure it was he.

She rushed up to him. "Why—why, Mr. Howard!" she gasped. "For a second I didn't know you."

She held out her hand, her face beaming with joy and undisguised adoration.

Her unfeigned delight brought a lump to Howard's throat. It was the first cordial greeting he had received in months.

His disposition had never been one to cherish grudges, and it did not occur to him for a moment that he owed his present position to the girl who stood before him. He took her outstretched hand cordially.

"Sometimes I've wondered whether I'd ever see you again in this world," said the girl solemnly, holding his hand tightly in hers. "Now I'm glad I'm living."

"You're looking fine, Agnes," said Jerome easily.

The clasp of her hand brought him a warm sense of needed human sympathy, and, as her big brown eyes with their yellow lights dwelt on his, he felt drawn toward her again, as in the first days of their acquaintance.

"I trust you are getting along nicely."

"Well, I'm back at neckwear; only get eight a week, but the peace of knowing that I'm living straight helps a lot, I tell you," she answered.

"Then Nick didn't come back and marry you?" he asked gently.

"No," she replied, brokenly. "I'm always afraid he will bob up. Are—are you made up at home yet?"

"No," he answered. "We'd better not discuss things that have happened."

Agnes's girl friends began giggling and coughing. Sadie, who was nearest, gave Agnes a nudge and said in an audible undertone, "Who's the gink? Introduce us."

"Can I?" asked Agnes of Jerome. "If I don't," she added aside, "they'll get sore on me."

"Why, certainly," replied Jerome. "only just drop my last name."

Mr. Jerome at once became the idol of the group of girls with much-puffed-out hair, and indifferently brushed garments. Because he was clean-shaven and wore clothes that were pressed and spotless, he didn't appear to them in the least shabby.

"Ain't he got the grand air!" whispered Sadie to Agnes.

"We just finished grub," volunteered another. "We'll wait while you eat if you want us to."

"Oh, I've dined," Jerome lied glibly.

"Come on to the dance with us, won't you?" begged Sadie.

"I haven't on my evening clothes," Jerome apologized.

At that they all laughed convulsively.

"Nobody wears 'em down here," Agnes informed him. "We go to one of the new model dance halls. It's run straight. Some rich people started it. They come down sometimes to inspect us. It costs three cents a dance, or twenty-five cents for the whole evening."

"I'm sorry—" Jerome began.

"Here's a pass for you," insisted Sadie. "Belongs to my sister; she's sick and can't use it. Our boss is getting married to-night, so he stood treat by shelling out these blue tickets. You see, the place is run so much on the level that it ain't very popular, so there won't be a jam of fellows and we'll need partners."

"Come on, please, Mr. Jerome," they all chorused.

The streets were cold, Jerome's room was colder; these girls admired him; their faces were bright, some of them very pretty, so he went to the hall with them.

## CHAPTER IX.

### Ten a Week.

THE place was big and well-ventilated. Around the sides of the wall were benches, and at one end a

lunch-counter where sandwiches, coffee and soda were served for ten cents an order.

The center of the floor was enclosed by an oak railing with a gate at each end.

"What's that rail for?" asked Jerome.

"When you want to dance," Agnes explained, "you go in this gate and drop your ticket, and when it's over go out the other side. Want to dance with me?" she asked shyly.

"With that pass it won't cost you nothing."

"I haven't danced in eight months," replied Jerome, "but I suppose now that I'm here, I shall have to do the polite thing and dance with you girls, or else say good evening. It is pleasant here," he added, "not hot or crowded."

With Agnes clinging proudly to his arm, Jerome passed through the gate and swung into the waltz-step.

The music called up memories. He wondered where Helen was—if she had missed him as he had missed her.

Then he thought of his father, and grim lines drew his lips together.

He was so unstrung from actual weakness and a flood of homesickness that he abruptly ceased dancing.

"Don't mind, keep on," whispered Agnes excitedly. "They've all stopped to watch us—you sure are some dancer."

"Allow me to return the compliment," he began. "You—"

To his amazement, as he glanced about, he saw that they were the only couple waltzing. The others were staring at them—the young fellows with envy, the girls with admiration.

"Let us get out of this," said Jerome, blushing hotly. When they had reached the next gate he guided Agnes through it.

Then there was a burst of applause and they were surrounded by a bevy of gushing shop-girls.

A refined, pale-faced little man with a shiny bald spot, a black suit, and a

white pearl-buttoned waistcoat, came up to them.

Diagonally across his breast was a wide blue ribbon, and on it in gold letters were the words, "Official Introducer."

Agnes presented Mr. Jerome to Mr. Pomeroy, the manager.

"Miss Sadie has just told me how you happened to come here, Mr. Jerome," said the official politely, "and I hope we'll see you often."

"If the young ladies you already know don't sufficiently entertain you,"—he bowed to Agnes—"you see I must have my jokes, Miss Murray—and you see any one you wish to meet, just call upon me. I'll speak to the lady indicated, and if she's favorably inclined, I'll introduce you to her."

"I see now the meaning of your badge," Jerome rejoined. He wanted to laugh, but managed to keep perfectly sober.

"It's your method of getting the young people acquainted without their resorting to flirtations."

"The idea, exactly," assented Mr. Pomeroy. "We are trying to provide wholesome recreation here for young working people. Our doorman is an ex-detective, and undesirables of either sex are ejected the moment they are recognized."

Agnes gave Jerome a furtive look of apprehension; he smiled back at her reassuringly.

"This is all very interesting to me, Mr. Pomeroy," said Jerome. "I'd like to hear more about it. Who thought up the scheme?"

"I did," said the little man modestly. "I was a dancing master and got interested in settlement work. But we couldn't get hold of the class that needed help, so I got some society people to back me in this venture."

"It ought to be successful, but, somehow, it hasn't paid so far, and I'm afraid we'll have to close up. It's the boys that hang back—they want to go where they can get liquor."

"Oh, the boys will follow the girls,"

laughed Jerome, "once you get the right crowd started."

His assurance cheered Mr. Pomeroy. They began discussing ways and means of putting the business on a paying basis, and finally launched into a long conversation on economic topics.

Jerome could cite figures and theories, while Mr. Pomeroy knew the human side of the subject.

"Are you a college man, interested in settlement work?" asked the introducer suddenly.

"Yes, to the first question; and, well, since this discussion, yes, to the second also," Jerome answered. "At present, I've no definite occupation."

"Sadie's dying to dance with you," interposed Agnes, as Mr. Pomeroy departed.

"I'm afraid, Agnes, I'll have to duck," Jerome answered.

Agnes felt strangely shy with Jerome. He revived the past which she was trying to live down.

What she had been, not what she was, seemed to her the only fact any one could consider. She felt she must say something. She wanted him to know how he had helped her.

"Mr. Jerome," she began brokenly. "I know you wouldn't squeal about my past to the crowd here. I'm ashamed of it!"

"You needn't be," Jerome answered.

"If you hadn't helped me and been so kind, I'd gone to the devil!"

"No, you wouldn't, not a girl with your spirit!" he interrupted. "Agnes, you're worth ten of me."

He felt suddenly weak, and he started toward a chair to keep from falling. Agnes, in sudden alarm, noticed that his face was pinched and and drawn-looking. She understood in an instant.

"Mr. Jerome," she protested, "why didn't you tell me? You're broke and you're hungry!"

"Not a bit," he denied.

"You can't fool me," she said. "I

know the signs—I've been through it. Besides, I owe you some money."

"Well, you're not going to pay me back out of your eight-dollars-a-week earnings. I can't even make as good a showing as you can! I never appreciated before how plucky girls like you are."

"Can't you get a job?" she asked in amazement.

"Don't you bother about me—now I must look up Sadie," he said, rising.

He danced the whole evening, and gave the girls the time of their lives. When "Home, Sweet Home" sounded, he staggered toward Agnes.

"I don't want to dance any more; I want to cool off," she said. "Besides, Mr. Pomeroy wants to see you. I told him you was a rich society man who'd lost his money—that I knew all about you—"

"Agnes, you shouldn't have," Jerome began sternly.

Just then Mr. Pomeroy joined them.

"Mr. Jerome," he began hesitatingly, "from what I've heard of you, our long conversation, and your unmistakable bearing of a gentleman, I've decided to ask you to help us out here evenings."

"In what way?" stammered Jerome.

"The place is too much for me," said Mr. Pomeroy. "I can't attend to everything, and I think that's one reason the business hasn't been better; so I wondered if you would act as 'Official Introducer'?"

"I'm afraid I'm not qualified," Jerome replied hastily.

"I beg to differ with you," smiled Mr. Pomeroy. "We could only offer you ten dollars a week, but if you'd care to consider it, we could just discuss it now, over a bite of supper."

He indicated the lunch-counter where a row of girls and boys greedily munched sandwiches.

"I'll take the position," Jerome replied quickly. He could not withstand the temptation of eating.

"Agnes," he said, turning toward

her, "I know you arranged this; I am very grateful."

"Oh, Mr. Jerome!" she replied in an undertone "After all the mischief I've made, it's grand of you to even look at me, and give me the chance to show you that I'm plumb rotten."

Agnes dreamed that night of the smile he had flashed back at her.

The news of the model dance hall's acquisition spread quickly. By Saturday night the place was crowded. For the boys, true to Jerome's prediction, followed the girls; and the girls came because their hearts drew them.

They all promptly fell head over heels in love with the new "Official Introducer."

## CHAPTER X.

### The Meeting.

EACH night Jerome would look at the dancers and marvel. The girls, most of them frail, half starved in body and soul, compelled to work all day in bad air, were always cheerful and vivacious. And the young fellows, big, strong, flashily dressed, rough in their manners and conversation, yet carried themselves with an air of assurance.

They knew that if one job failed they could always get another—they had been brought up to work, and they weren't afraid of it.

The genuine respect Jerome came to have for their courage in facing life added a note of sympathy to his charm of manner and increased their liking for him. They came to him for advice on all sorts of subjects.

Often the patronesses of the dance hall would come in. At first Jerome was a bit nervous for fear of being recognized, but he decided there was no danger, as they were not from the idle rich set he had belonged to.

"Gee, Mr. Jerome," said Agnes one night as she put her hands on her hips and adjusted her figure, "this place is getting awful—a regular society

hang-out. Look, there are more swells coming! They stand around and glare as if we were freaks in a side-show!"

"I'll have to inspect their credentials and see if we shall admit them," laughed the "Official Introducer," crossing toward the arrivals.

"Look at the beauty in the apple-green satin, all covered with soft lace!" exclaimed Sadie.

Agnes looked. Jerome was standing stock-still, staring at the lovely brunette vision.

"Why, it's—it's—" Then Agnes choked back the name and sought out a far corner. She worshiped Jerome. Now she felt she would lose him forever.

Helen Barnes and Jerome eyed each other in silence.

For a moment both were too startled for words. Then Jerome's never-failing sense of humor came to his rescue. He advanced toward Helen, smiling.

"Pardon me," he said, bowing with an exaggerated curtsy. "I—er—I am presiding here, as you may observe from my badge. I should be delighted to extend to you the courtesy of the hall!"

"Jerome," gasped Helen, in surprise, gazing in horrified unbelief at the blue ribbon with the flaunting gold letters.

"We are supposed to ask for credentials," he said airily, "but we will dispense with them in your case, at my own personal risk. Can you vouch for your friend?" He indicated her male escort.

That personification of respectability drew himself up haughtily at the question.

Suddenly looking into Jerome's twinkling eyes, Helen felt the infection of his humor.

Then, with a mutual impulse, the two young people commenced to laugh immoderately.

Helen was slightly hysterical from the reaction of her first shock of seeing

Jerome, but in the main she laughed from pure joy of heart, for, after all, in spite of the absurd blue badge and these surroundings, it was Jerome—the same old Jerome.

Yet these lines on his face which she questioned curiously—ignorant of the suffering and the struggles which had caused them.

"Yes, I'll answer for my friend, Mr. Rainey," she said gaily, falling in with the situation.

"Then—can I provide you with a partner?" inquired Jerome of Rainey. "Just look about and see if there is any one who would attract your fancy. If so, I would be delighted to introduce you."

He was only too anxious to dispose of Rainey, so he could speak to Helen alone.

"I don't care to dance, thank you," said Rainey stiffly.

"May I have the pleasure?" said Jerome, looking pleadingly into Helen's eyes.

Fortune was with him. The orchestra suddenly started a waltz which he and Helen had often danced together. It awakened memories. Helen put her hand on his arm, and they floated away to the familiar strains.

"Rainey is ready to eat me," he whispered.

She laughed joyously, and Jerome's heart beat high to the tune of the waltz. To be near her, to have his arms about her, quickened every pulse in him.

He felt like a cave man. He wanted to snatch up this woman and carry her off to a hidden place. He wanted to crush her and hurt her and kiss her—

Their lips were very near, their eyes mirrored a mutual feeling. All past differences were forgotten in the joy of being together.

"I'm only allowed to dance once around with the same lady," said Jerome, slyly—

"Nonsense," returned Helen, not realizing his meaning until later.

"Let us have one more round—our step always suited perfectly—"

"Darling!" said Jerome irrelevantly, with a fervent squeeze.

Admiring remarks, such as "Gee, ain't they handsome?" and other open comments of approval now became audible from every side.

As they neared the gate on the second round, there were cries of remonstrance and laughter from a bevy of girls.

"That ain't fair to go around again, Mr. Jerome—we're waitin' fer our turn," they cried.

"You see, Helen," said Jerome, laughing, "they're jealous of you."

"Jerome!" cried Helen, her eyes blazing with indignation. "Do you mean to say that you dance with these—these girls—every night?"

"Certainly I do," said Jerome coldly. "It's a part of my duties—"

"Then I am afraid I have been a little too impulsive in renewing our acquaintance!" said Helen, her old jealousy clutching at her heart and giving bitterness to her voice.

"To think you'd sink to this. You've gone as far down as a man can go."

He caught his breath sharply.

"Pardon me, in my own estimation I've risen."

"All these months how I've suffered," continued Helen. "I deceived myself into thinking I'd misjudged you. But now I've seen you, smiling and happy, in your chosen environment, surrounded by shop-girls."

"I'm sorry if you've been unhappy on my account," Jerome replied evenly. "Perhaps now that you see how unworthy I am, you can forget me."

"I shall," she replied. "To think you would wear that blue ribbon! Kindly take me to Mr. Rainey."

"Certainly," assented Jerome.

"Rainey," Jerome said easily. "Miss Barnes wishes to go on to the next dance-hall. There's a fascination in slumming when once you get started."

"So it seems," replied Rainey, staring hard at Jerome's badge.

"Drop in again some time; I'll do what I can for you," Jerome said nonchalantly.

With courteous cordiality he took them to the exit. Not once did he let his eyes rest on Helen. When they had gone he stoically returned to his duties.

But in his eye was a new fire, in his step determination. Helen's scorn was the flint that kindled his ambition. Ways, means, plans for making a future even she would not be ashamed of began to arouse him. There would be no more drifting.

He felt a hand timidly catch at his coat sleeve—it was Agnes.

"You—you didn't make up with her?" she faltered.

"No," he said, shortly. "My life is going to be lived out right here."

Then a great hope seized Agnes. Maybe in time he would come to love her—he was always so kind, perhaps he already cared a little; perhaps that was why he let Miss Barnes go.

The thought blinded her. She got her wraps and rushed into the street alone, in order not to hear the chatter of her companions.

As she neared her rooming-place a man lurched against her.

It was Nick, debonair as ever.

"Say, Ag," he cried, "I found out where you lived. I was waitin' for you."

"Let me go!" she cried, terrified.

"Kiss me! What ails you? I've come to tell you that I've made a nice pile and I'm ready to marry you."

"I'm not taking up with your kind," she said fiercely. "I hate you, and if you stop me again, I'll get a cop to arrest you!"

"Aggie, you're prettier than ever," he said, approvingly, "and from your clothes I take it you ain't on your uppers. But there ain't no ring on that third finger yet—"

"If you don't let me pass," Agnes cried, "I'll jab this hatpin into you!"

"Quit your bluffin', Ag," he said brutally. "You're my gal and you know it."

"Got some one else on the string, have you? Well, I'll can that for you. I'll see you agin when I'm ready to," he added. Then he swaggered off.

From then on Agnes lived in dread of exposure. Her life was a misery to her, and, as Jerome became absorbed just then in new schemes and ideas, she would not burden him with her affairs.

## CHAPTER XI.

### "She's My Woman."

THAT night when the dancers had gone, Jerome called Mr. Pomeroy into the office, and proposed that they start another model dance-hall on their own account.

The business would warrant it, and they could easily borrow capital from neighboring shopkeepers whose confidence they had already won.

Mr. Pomeroy hesitatingly consented. In two weeks the new place was opened with a grand ball.

Jerome, though half owner, still wore the badge of "Official Introducer."

He and Mr. Pomeroy alternated at the two halls, so as to keep business moving, and reconcile their clientele to Jerome's absence, for he was the drawing card.

The second hall was soon as overcrowded as the first one, and a third one was opened.

The expenses were slight compared to the income, and Jerome found himself once more living in comfort.

But he wasn't satisfied, the fever took hold of him—his brain was at work on new schemes.

He had found himself when he found his capabilities; he didn't rebel at their being so limited.

To run the halls straight, as their success demanded, required shrewdness and diplomacy. The new men

they installed to assist them were sometimes too slack, and again over-conscientious.

It kept Mr. Pomeroy busy arbitrating matters; Jerome left that part of it to him, as, with his long experience, he was best qualified to handle it.

One night Agnes came to Jerome in tears.

"Oh, Mr. Jerome, the new man at the other place just fired me out in front of the whole crowd! Oh, it was awful!"

"Well, I'll fire him," exclaimed Jerome enraged. "How did it happen?"

"Nick came," she said, dropping her head ashamed.

"Did you bring him?" he demanded.

"No—he followed me. He's bothered me lately," she answered.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Jerome asked.

"I didn't think—I didn't think you'd want to bother about me," Agnes murmured.

"But I would, Agnes. I know what you've lived through, and, by George, you deserve credit. Any girl who'll exist on eight dollars a week, when she could get more so easily, I take off my hat to."

"Don't let them put me out!" pleaded Agnes. "These are the only decent places I got to come to. And I might never see you again—"

"Did Nick talk about you openly?" inquired Jerome.

"He came and asked me to go out with him. I wouldn't. Then he passed some remarks about me, and sat down in a corner and everybody giggled. Mr. Black, the new introducer, went over and talked to him—and then he fired me out."

"There's Nick now!" she cried frantically; "he's followed me!"

"So that's the cur, is it?" asked Jerome, breathing hard.

"Don't let him come near me," Agnes begged. "He said if I didn't come back to him, he'd croak me."

Mr. Pomeroy came hurrying in. "I ran over from the other hall to see you about the Murray case," he said, then he turned sharply toward Agnes.

"We told you that you'd have to keep away from our places."

"Let her alone," commanded Jerome.

Nick came boldly toward them, and grasped Agnes's arm.

"Come, Aggie, have a spin with me?"

"You get out of here!" Jerome ordered, eying Nick coolly.

"I'll get when Ag does." Then he shouted aloud insolently. "Don't you butt in—she's my woman."

All the dancers stopped and pushed forward.

"Come into the office," said Jerome, "and we'll settle this quietly."

"Oh, no, my boy. You don't get rid of me that way," sneered Nick. "A straight place, this! Why," he said, turning to Mr. Pomeroy, "he stole that girl from me! On her account he was kicked out by—"

Nick didn't get farther. He came to in a corner of the office with Jerome standing over him.

"You keep away from that girl," Jerome thundered, "or I'll smash you to jelly."

"Catch a man when he's off guard," sneered Nick, rising. "You're a square fighter, you are."

"Shut up and clear out," snapped Jerome.

"Oh, all right," said Nick jauntily, making the best of a bad bargain; "this will make some newspaper story."

"You sold me out once before," remarked Jerome calmly. "I guess I'll collect what you owe me."

He then proceeded to give Nick a thrashing such as that young thug had often administered to others.

At last Pomeroy, with the doorman, fearful of the consequences, interfered.

Nick, weak and bleeding, was thrown from the side entrance.

"Pomeroy," said Jerome, straightening his tie and official blue ribbon, "I don't intend to explain anything, but Agnes is going to be made welcome in our dance-halls."

"Certainly, certainly," murmured Mr. Pomeroy.

"And by the way, I forgot to tell you that the chain of model dance-halls, lunch-rooms, and moving-picture shows that I spoke to you about, has been arranged for and financed. We get control of the stock, the rest was taken up by a Wall Street house."

"I never thought I'd be rich," stammered Mr. Pomeroy, "and it's all come so suddenly—just in a few months. Why, Mr. Jerome, I can't understand how you ever failed once in business. Your ability to organize and push things is simply marvelous."

"I inherit it," smiled Jerome, "along with my stubbornness. I've taken a suite of offices in the Singer Building. I'll be there in the daytime, but at night I'll circulate in our places of amusement as usual."

## CHAPTER XII.

### Father and Son.

WITH the establishment of his chain of model amusement places, Jerome's identity became known, and once more he figured in the daily headlines. Now, instead of being dubbed a profligate, he was called a philanthropist.

While he was at work in his private office one morning his secretary presented a card. Jerome looked at it, sprang from his chair with a cry of joy, then sat down again.

"I'm busy now," he said. "I'll see the gentleman presently."

"Well? Well?" asked the caller as the secretary reappeared.

When the message was delivered there was a grand explosion.

"Of all the high-handed impudence! Are you sure you gave that card to Mr. Jerome Howard?"

"I did, sir."

"Then he's there in that office?" demanded the enraged visitor.

"Mr. Howard is very busy," the secretary answered. "I will notify you when he can see you!"

"Humph!" exclaimed the caller. He started out, reconsidered, came back, and sat down again.

He looked over the mahogany office furniture, watched the messenger boys enter and exit, saw the stenographers going into different offices marked "private," and all the time got madder and madder.

"How many people do you employ here?" he asked of the telephone operator.

"I don't know, sir," she answered politely.

"Well, you must have some idea," he said testily, "whether there are ten, twenty, or thirty people about?"

"Oh, all together in Mr. Howard's enterprises," she informed him, "he must employ several hundred."

"Well, I'll be damned!" the caller ejaculated.

He sat down again, fidgeted, looked at his watch and summoned the office-boy.

"You tell Mr. Jerome Howard that I cannot be kept waiting."

"I'll speak to his secretary," said the boy.

The secretary came, after more waiting, to explain that it was difficult to see Mr. Howard without an appointment.

The visitor gave an exclamation that sounded like a volcanic upheaval, jabbed a cigar in his mouth and made for the hall.

As he turned, a door was thrown open.

"You may see Mr. Howard now, sir."

For a moment the visitor hesitated, then savagely stalked into the office.

"Hello, father," cried Jerome, affably extending his one hand—with the other he held the telephone receiver. He said "Yes, yes," several

times while his father looked at him dumbly—then he put down the receiver and indicated a chair.

"Please be seated, I'll be back in a moment," then he darted from the room.

Howard senior turned crimson. For more than a year his boy had been on his mind constantly. He had swallowed his pride and come to capitulate, and this was his welcome.

He knew the boy was stubborn, but he had always before felt sure of his affection. He felt strangely hurt, but showed only annoyance and anger when Jerome came dashing in.

"Gad, father, I'm glad to see you," said the son. Then he stopped and looked over a statement his secretary handed him before he continued genially, "You're looking fit as ever; just a bit grayer—"

"With such a son, it's a wonder I'm not bald-headed and palsied!"

He brushed the tears from his eyes as he surveyed with pride the object he was decrying.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," said Jerome, "but business is business."

Here he again paused to answer a telephone call, and ring for a messenger.

"You seem to be rushed," said the millionaire, again bristling.

"Not more than usual. Why, I remember sometimes," said Jerome smiling, "that it would take me a whole day to get a word with you, father."

"That's different. I've always been a busy man," replied the old gentleman with dignity. "With me time is money."

"Here, too. Say, dad, would you mind if I asked you to run along now?"

"What?" gasped the older man.

"Take lunch with me at Cary's this noon and then we can have a long talk. My, but it's good to see you!"

"Of all the insolence," exclaimed Mr. Howard, enraged, "when I gave

in—humbled my pride—and came here to see you."

"Now, father, don't flare up. I'm really rushed every minute. Just run your eye down this daily balance sheet."

Jerome handed his father the book-keeper's statement. "You see my share runs into three figures daily. Now, dad," he said jocosely, "fess up. At my age, you weren't making any such money—and just remember it's not two years yet since I started in!"

"Humph!" was all Howard senior answered. Once more he surveyed his offspring. "See here, Jerome—" He hesitated, then came the outburst.

"Jerome," cried the older man, "you're my son, my only child. I love you more than anything on earth. I've spent a miserable year yearning for you, and now when I come to you, to meet you half-way, you treat me like a stranger. Haven't you any feeling for your father?"

It seemed to Jerome that his heart was like a pipe box at a church festival, and the hundred strings that ran out from it were all pulled simultaneously. He wanted to throw his arms about his father, but a feeling of bitterness overwhelmed him.

"Father," he said, struggling, "you kicked me out—you wouldn't believe me. You didn't care whether I lived or died, and now, when the struggles are over, you come to me with outstretched hand. Perhaps I've suffered, too."

"Well, if I'm stubborn," cried the old man, "I'm more than matched in my offspring. Jerome, boy, I want you back—I'm sorry for everything."

"Don't apologize to me, father," cried the son quickly; "I've been in the wrong, too."

He grabbed his father's hand—they looked long at each other. The older man sniffed and Jerome winked to keep the tears back.

"I don't care what you've done," said his father at last; "I just want you to know that I'm proud of you."

You're just like me and you couldn't have done differently."

"Well, say, I am some business man—for a duffer?" questioned Jerome.

"Why shouldn't you be!" exclaimed the millionaire. "A child is bound to have some good qualities. But you must get out of this line. I'm going to make you my partner."

Jerome burst into a loud peal of laughter. "No, sir-ee," answered Jerome. "No wild speculations for me. Before I'm through with this game I'll be owning your concern."

"Father, you don't know how glad I am to see you," with an abrupt transition from levity to seriousness.

"I want you back home, Jerome," said the elder man huskily. "The house is simply awful without you, and I don't care a continental whether you bring a black-haired or a red-haired girl. Marry whoever you please."

"I'm not thinking of marrying," said Jerome.

"I see Helen occasionally," said his father diffidently. "I know that she has missed you, too."

"Father, do you still believe that I didn't make a clean breast of that breach-of-promise affair?"

"I don't care a rap whether you did or didn't!" exclaimed the parent.

"I won't come home till you believe in me absolutely," Jerome proclaimed—but his eyes twinkled.

"You are the stubbornest fool ever born!" cried his father.

"Lunch with me at once," called Jerome.

"I'll be hanged if I will!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### Temptation.

**H**ELEN BARNES was surprised that night to receive a call from Mr. Jerome Howard, Sr.

She was gowned in black, and wore a long string of pearls. Over all was a silver brocade evening wrap. She had never looked lovelier.

"We are going to the opera," Helen said, graciously greeting her caller. "Can't you come with us, Mr. Howard?"

"I wanted to talk to you about Jerome," said the millionaire bluntly, "if you will permit me. Of course, you've read in the papers of his latest doings?"

Helen hesitated for a few moments, and turned her head away to conceal her emotion.

"We can join the family later," she assented.

"Helen, we've got to meet this boy more than half-way, because we were a bit hard on him," announced Mr. Howard.

"Why, I can't do anything to help you," she answered. "Jerome broke our engagement."

"You aren't going to marry young Rainey?" he asked abruptly.

"I haven't promised to," she answered evasively. "Mr. Howard, you don't know all. I asked the friends who were with me to be silent, but one night last winter we went slumming and I met Jerome in a dance-hall."

"Across his shabby coat he wore a blue ribbon, and on it were the words, 'Official Introducer.' I was heart-broken and humiliated—he was surrounded by a crowd of common girls and seemed perfectly contented."

"Well, all that's changed now. I'll get him out of this business, though I'll admit it's a great money-maker," said Mr. Howard. "Helen, I want you to help me get my boy back home. I think that we both love him."

"I've loved him through it all," she said softly. She found herself sobbing on his fatherly shoulder, then she smiled and dried her eyes.

"Well," she sighed, "if I have to go to him, where can I find him?"

"We'll locate him at once," said the millionaire with alacrity. "I have a detective keeping track of his movements. So far, this evening, he's been in ten different places."

A little while later Helen, a prey

of conflicting emotions, entered the dance-hall where she had last met Jerome.

She saw him at the farther end of the room, and made her way toward him. When she noticed that he still wore the obnoxious blue ribbon, she paused uncertainly, but the sight of him awoke all her pent-up love, and she brushed aside petty prejudices.

Almost roughly she pushed through the crowd, but just as she reached him he turned toward a young girl, smiled at her fondly, and led her out on the dance-floor.

Helen, unable to attract his attention, followed him through the gate, and put her hand on his arm.

When Jerome realized who it was before him he became deadly pale, then his whole being radiated joyousness.

"Helen! Helen!" he said tenderly.

But Helen neither heard him nor saw him. Her eyes, like blazing coals, were fixed on his partner, the girl with the Titian hair whom she had seen in the florist's shop.

"Come out of the crowd," Jerome said. He led both girls toward the office.

As they crossed he whispered, "Helen dearest, you've come to me! You don't know how I love you for it."

"Please send that girl away," said Helen, pausing in the office doorway.

"Oh, Miss Murray, this is Miss Barnes," Jerome said quickly.

"Jerome!" exclaimed Helen. "How can you insult me?"

"What do you mean?" he asked hotly.

Agnes abruptly left them.

"I came here," said Helen, "to tell you that I'd overlook everything; to tell you I loved you and that I believed you told me the truth about that disgraceful breach-of-promise affair, but now" — she went on furiously — "I know that you lied to me. You liked the girl all along, and you came back to her—"

"Helen," Jerome interrupted, "if you will calm down for a moment I'll tell you—"

"You can't tell me anything—ever again. I've seen you twice with this girl, and both times observed the way that you looked at her. A man who'd stoop to wear that blue ribbon, and be known as an 'Official Introducer,' would stoop to anything! Your business success means nothing to me—look up in the dictionary a word that is spelled c-h-a-r-a-c-t-e-r."

"May I see you to your car?" Jerome asked icily.

"No," returned Helen. With head erect and eyes blazing she swept proudly to her auto.

Jerome walked unseeingly through the door into his private office. His burning sense of injustice soon gave way to despair, as he realized that it was all over between him and Helen. His feeling of loss was almost intolerable.

In spite of her false pride, her lack of understanding, she was the girl he had carried in his heart from a boy.

She had been guilty of the worst of snobbery in despising his badge of "Official Introducer," but from the depth of his love he began to excuse her. Brought up in luxury, sheltered from the world, how could she have any idea of the fight he had made?

It was only a girl like Agnes, a girl who had suffered and starved and loved and fallen and fought her way upward again, who could understand what he had achieved.

He realized suddenly what help the shop-girl's sympathy and cooperation had been to him.

What an interest she had taken at the start, as soon as she realized it was vital to him, coming every night and dragging with her a bevy of boys and girls. He saw her brown eyes glowing softly with admiration and worship, in contrast to Helen's scornful stare.

He saw that from the very beginning she had helped him unconsciously

by her attitude of absolute confidence in his ability.

And she was still going on, earning eight dollars a week at neckwear! He felt guilty of the grossest ingratitude. He went to the door of his office and spied Pomeroy.

"Pomeroy, will you send Miss Murray to me?"

Agnes came in slowly with head drooping. She had been deeply hurt by Helen's scorn.

"Is the lady gone?" she asked bitterly.

"Yes," answered Jerome shortly. "But that isn't what I wish to talk over. I'd like to improve our dressing-room system. I need a clever woman's assistance, and she'll get a good salary. Will you help me, Agnes?"

"You know I will," she cried passionately. "I don't care about the money. Mr. Jerome, I've always been dippy about you—only, lately, it's got so I can hardly stand it.

"I know I'm not in your class, and I wouldn't care if you never married me. I'd just be a slave for you, if you'd only let me stay near you. That's all I'd ask—"

"Be quiet, Agnes," Jerome interrupted. He was taken unawares and was too surprised to say more.

"Do you know what love is?" she demanded wildly. "It's a stirring within you that just plays the devil! And I've kept back my feelings so long I can't stand it. Mr. Jerome, can't you like me a little?"

She sank on her knees suddenly beside his chair.

"Don't talk of such things," said Jerome hoarsely.

Her head dropped at the rebuke. He gazed at her intently, at the well-shaped head with its wealth of lustrous hair close to his knee, the white, downcast eyelids with their thick lashes; the full, pouting lips, and he thought her wonderfully pretty. Crushed and heart-sore as he was, this unconditional surrender, this offer of warm human love was grateful to him.

He was in no mood to resist the strong magnetism of this warm, womanliness by which he had always felt attracted.

"Agnes," he said unsteadily, "I—I am not ungrateful for what you offer me, but—I have no love to give you. My heart belonged always to Helen.

"But to-night has ended things between us for good."

"For good?" said Agnes, with a sudden throb of joy which subsided suddenly when she saw the set misery of his expression. "Was it all because—she saw you with me? I'm always bringing trouble on you."

"Don't blame yourself, Agnes. It was not only that," said Jerome wearily.

"The whole thing is, she has no belief in me. She distrusts me—always has—and a man can't stand for that."

"And you as straight as a die!" said Agnes, catching his hand and kissing it suddenly.

The pressure of her lips on his hand unnerved Jerome. He lifted his other hand and let it fall heavily on her head.

"Can't you like me a little?" whispered Agnes, lifting her eyes, soft and swimming with tears.

"I can like you more than a little," he said, growing pale. His hand shook and he looked at her again intently.

"Only let me be your slave," she repeated passionately.

He was human enough to be tempted. He told himself nine men out of ten would take what she offered.

Her lips were perilously near, but still he hesitated with an instinctive comprehension of the sterling worth of the girl he was about to take in his arms.

She had suffered enough from men's sensuality and selfishness, he thought. She should not suffer through him.

"It would seem, Agnes," he said at last gently, with a slowly-forming resolve, "that a girl who's made the fight you have ought to get something

out of life. I'm sorry that I couldn't give you some compensation."

"I don't want nothin' but to be near you," she said pathetically.

"You shall be my wife, Agnes," he said with sudden determination.

"Your *wife*?" she repeated.

"Yes," he said, suddenly drawing her to him.

"No, no!" she cried, struggling. "I ain't fit—"

"Indeed, you are," he said fiercely, recklessly abandoning himself to the passion she aroused in him.

With a convulsive effort she tore herself from his arms.

"Agnes," he cried fiercely, "you're playing with me! You offered yourself to me on any terms—and I've asked you to be my wife!"

"You don't love me!" she cried. "That ain't love, and you know it. You just told me you loved—Helen."

"I'll be your slave—anything you want—but not your wife. I ain't low enough to take you at your word when you're feelin' sore and down on everything."

"You're just ready to go off on a good drunk, and to-morrow you'd wake up and laugh at yourself for what you wanted to do—marry me, Agnes Murray!" She laughed mirthlessly.

"You shall be my wife, Agnes, or nothing," said Jerome grimly, "and I'm willing to repeat the offer to-morrow or six months from now. I'm—I'm lonely. Will you marry me?"

Agnes looked at him, her face working strangely. He was trying her beyond her strength.

Jerome waited a second, then he turned from her and threw his head down upon his arms on the desk near him, in prostration of body and soul.

He knew Agnes was right, but with the innate Howard obstinacy he stuck out for his point.

He loved Helen, and would always love her, but he was human and needed human sympathy and love, needed it at that moment urgently.

But he would take it only on a just compact, not at a loss of the fine human creature who was willing to sacrifice herself.

Agnes stood looking at his prostrate form in an agony of indecision, controlling herself by a terrible effort from rushing to him and pouring out the love he needed.

"I ain't right for him," she murmured. "I ain't right for him." The tears rolled down her face. She tore her handkerchief with her teeth in the effort to keep back her sobs.

When Jerome suddenly lifted his head and looked around for her she was gone.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### Partners.

WHEN Helen arrived home she was told that Rainey had called her up by telephone.

In the height of her anger against Jerome it seemed opportune. The family had all gone to the opera.

He had been begging her for an answer for weeks.

She might just as well, in justice to him, clinch things at once, now she was sure about Jerome.

For months she had lived in an agony of doubt as to whether she had really done him an injustice. Now she thought she had discovered these doubts had no foundation.

He was absolutely unworthy.

She took the receiver in her hand with a dull pain at her heart, which she felt would always be there, and called up Rainey's house.

He was there, awaiting her call, and he said he would be with her immediately.

She went to the yellow room, where she had last taken leave of Jerome, and waited for him.

There was none of the nervous expectancy of a girl awaiting her lover.

She was calm and deadly pale.

Her uppermost idea was what

Jerome would think when he read the announcement of the engagement in the morning paper.

Perhaps when he saw that he had lost her forever, he would realize that he loved her after all, and suffer a little of the pain which he had made her endure all these months.

With this purpose in mind, she was quite prepared to go through the farce of an engagement with Rainey. Her thoughts did not run as far as marriage.

Half an hour passed. Helen commenced to realize that if young Rainey had flown to her on the wings of love, he should have already been there.

Her ardor to punish Jerome meanwhile commenced to cool.

She grew more miserable as the moments went by.

Suddenly the telephone rang. She hoped something had happened to prevent Rainey from coming.

But, unfortunately, it was only a delay. He was driving his own car, and a tire had burst.

He was obliged to telephone a garage, it was just his luck, but he would not lose an instant, he assured her. In ten minutes, at the latest, he would be there.

Helen hoped the ten minutes would never pass, but they did, and Rainey did not materialize.

Ten minutes more and Helen wondered what she should say if he finally did arrive and why she had ever sent for him at all.

The door-bell rang. Helen denounced herself as a coward and tried to gather strength for her original intention.

"Mr. Rainey," said Banks hesitatingly.

"Yes—show him up," said Helen indifferently. "Well, what is it, Banks?"—as he lingered.

"There's a young woman, too. She says she must see you immediately on a matter of great importance. Her name is Miss Murray."

Helen's heart bounded as she recog-

nized the name of the girl who had brought the suit against Jerome, the girl with the Titian hair whom he had tried to present to her.

What did she want?

Perhaps he had sent her.

"Tell Miss Murray I will not see her," she said haughtily. "I do not know any one of that name."

"Well, I was lookin' for such a reception," said Agnes, who had followed Banks up the stairs, "so I took things in my own hands."

She looked pleadingly at Helen. "Let me speak to you for five minutes," she said. "I just got to!"

The desperate intensity of the girl had its effect upon Helen. For a second a sick fear gripped her by the throat.

Perhaps something had happened to Jerome.

"Ask Mr. Rainey to wait five minutes," said Helen.

"What is it, Banks?" as he hesitated about leaving the room.

Banks came closely up to Helen. "I'll be in the hall, Miss Helen. She looks dangerous," she whispered.

Banks had recognized the name, and knew Agnes as the girl who had figured in the suit.

"I'm not afraid, Banks," said Helen reassuringly. "You can go. I'll ring if I want you."

Agnes had advanced slowly into the middle of the room and stood gazing wonderingly about her at the luxury of the yellow-cushioned divans and chairs, the ferns and flowers, the soft yellow-shaded lights.

Then her eyes leveled themselves upon Helen, noting her small, queenly head crowned with its coils of black hair; her long, slender throat; her perfect, slender shoulders.

"You're a thoroughbred, sure enough," said Agnes, her eyes glowing with envy.

"Will you be kind enough to tell me why you have forced yourself on me?" said Helen, not altogether insensible to Agnes's open admiration.

"Has—has anything happened to Mr. Howard?"

"Maybe you ain't lowering yourself as much as you think in seeing me," said Agnes.

"Your love means life or death to Mr. Howard. That's why I'm here. I left him all broke up."

Helen went toward the bell. "I suppose he sent you. It is quite useless."

Agnes darted toward her and seized her hand as it was about to touch the bell for Banks.

"You got to listen to me," she said intensely.

"I am not at all interested in what you say about Mr. Howard," said Helen. "There is a gentleman below waiting to see me."

"Yes, I come in with him. Why, he ain't a man; he's a walking stick."

"Did you come here to speak insultingly to me?" gasped Helen.

"We've got to have this thing out," said Agnes. "Miss Barnes, I got a chance to marry Mr. Howard."

"You'd better take it," said Helen.

"I'd be glad to get him," declared Agnes, "if—" She hesitated. "I love him," she moaned pathetically, "because I know him."

"Then go to him," said Helen.

"He'd marry me now, because of what you've done this evening. He likes me, and he'd try to make up for your scorning me. He'll marry me—he offered to. But Mr. Jerome don't love me; he'd never be proud of me; I'd just be—just be—"

"Do you mean to tell me there has never been any sort of a love-affair between you and Jerome Howard?" demanded Helen.

"Never, but it ain't my fault that there wasn't! I blackmailed him for money to marry another man!"

Helen looked at her incredulously. Such a thing was beyond her knowledge and experience.

"You don't know what it is to be alone—to want for food," said Agnes. "At the florist's where I worked, they

wrapped the gardenias in cotton wool when they sent them out in winter—you're like that, a white gardenia wrapped in cotton-wool.

"My mother died, I got sick and lost my job. I was a good-looker, and a man I knew helped me. He took care of me and gave me presents and he promised to marry me some day—"

Agnes hid her face in her hands.

Helen came nearer and touched her shoulder with a pitying gesture, but she did not speak. She had read of this thing, but it had never come so near her, and she was moved and fascinated by the passion and tragedy of Agnes's voice.

"Then Nick—my man—thought of this scheme to get money out of Mr. Howard, and I didn't think it was going to separate him from his girl—I didn't even know he was engaged to you. All I thought of was, if we got the money I could get married.

"I'd waited so long and I wanted a home and kids—I wanted them awful bad. You don't know what that feeling is, either. You ain't woke up yet.

"Sometimes I've wondered whether girls in your class have feelings, or whether you're just dolls to hang clothes on."

"We're just the same," said Helen, smiling, "only we're artificial; we're taught to disguise and control our feelings. I'm—I'm crazy about children myself."

"Are you?" said Agnes, her face lighting up.

Their hands suddenly touched and clung.

"When I saw what harm I'd done Mr. Howard, I wouldn't go through with the suit, and the other man chucked me. I went to Mr. Jerome and told him, and instead of despising me he helped me. That night a wonderful feeling came over me—and I knew then I could be decent—and I've lived decent ever since."

"You'll marry some day, Agnes, and have children and be happy."

"I don't want nothin' no more,"

said Agnes with intensity, "only to make things right for him."

"If I had only known," faltered Helen.

"He wouldn't let me tell you. He's dead stuck on you and I left him all broke up. Now you're goin' to let me take you back to him."

"I wonder," said Helen suddenly, "if you're sure Jerome doesn't love you. You're very attractive."

She stared at Agnes, struck by this new thought and as though she had never seen her before.

"Oh, I'm dead sure he don't care for me," replied Agnes bitterly. "Don't get switched off on that track. I'm done with men, I tell you! There's nothing in this heart-throb game for me."

"No," said Helen curiously, looking intently into her eyes. "I suppose—" she hesitated at touching a sore spot—"I suppose you were dreadfully hurt by this man—"

"Say, are you just waking up?" exclaimed Agnes. "Dreadfully hurt! I guess I've lived through enough for one lifetime. You don't know what life is or what men are."

"You don't know what you're risking when you fool this way with the straightest man on earth. Why, he's a lot better than you are."

"You're right," said Helen humbly, "and, Agnes, I will go back and tell him I've been terribly in the wrong."

"Just tell him that you love him," Agnes observed dryly, "and he won't ask for explanations."

She took Helen's opera coat lying upon a chair, and threw it about her.

"What's to become of you, Agnes?" asked Helen.

"Oh, don't you worry. I got my work cut out, and I'm not going to sulk, either, believe me. There's a world of people yelling for a wise friend, and I'm going to be that to any girl who needs me."

Agnes seized Helen's hand and tried to draw her toward the door.

"Wait until I order the car," said Helen softly; "and gracious me, I've forgotten all about Mr. Rainey!"

Jerome was still in his office, his head in his hands. He did not even look up when the door opened softly.

"Mr. Jerome! Mr. Jerome!" said Agnes in a voice of suppressed excitement.

Jerome looked up. Behind Agnes he saw—Helen!

"She loves you," said Agnes laconically.

Jerome looked at Agnes first, understanding. A rare smile lit up his face. "Thank you, Agnes," he said.

Then he drew Helen, who stood white and trembling, silently into his arms. Agnes stole away, sobbing, but with an indescribable feeling of happiness at her heart.

A little while later there was an unwonted sound of cheering from the dance-hall. Jerome opened the door of the office, still encircling Helen with his arm. Sadie Nolens ran up to him.

"Agnes is blowing the crowd," she said, and they saw Agnes, glass in hand, laughing hilariously amid the cheering girls and boys.

Jerome closed the door again, and looked at Helen as if he could not quite believe the evidence of his eyes.

"I'm ashamed, Jerome," Helen whispered.

"Don't, dearest," coaxed Jerome. "I've been a stubborn idiot, and I'm going right home and tell father so."

"I'll accompany you," said Helen.

"But, Jerome, I want you to go on with your work here, and I want to help you."

Jerome kissed her several times, and pressed her head against his shoulder, then, looking down at her, he said in his old teasing manner: "Oh, very well, lovely lady, I'll resign to you the star rôle."

And across Helen's shimmering evening coat he pinned the "Official Introducer."

# A HILL MAN

A SHORT STORY

BY MARIA CHIPMAN TOPPING



DEVEREAUX, of the revenue service, leaned his elbow on the window-sill in his dark little office, his fat bulk hunched together, his eyes half shut, reading over and over a flamboyant editorial in the *Sun*.

Outside, dull clouds hung low over the narrow street and rain swept the pavements. Within, the corners were filled with gloom while the one small window stood out a bisected rectangle of gray. There was scarcely enough light to see the print, but Devereaux followed the lines with his stubby forefinger, while on his round moon face an angry scowl gathered. He flung the paper down and pushed a button on the wall.

"Send Haslett," he snapped at the boy who answered.

Haslett came in quietly. He was a great towering figure of a man, with a silent, stolid face lighted by a pair of eager eyes. Devereaux shoved the paper across the desk and sank into a chair, breathing heavily.

"Read that," he ordered, pointing.

Haslett stood with his back to the desk, reading with difficulty in the failing light. Then he turned and handed back the paper.

"Well?" he questioned, his face expressionless.

"Well?" demanded Devereaux, mocking him. "I don't see anything well about it."

"Somebody evidently has it in for us," Haslett suggested.

Devereaux thumped the desk with

his fat fist. "If I knew as much about running my office as these newspaper fellows do, I'd be Secretary of the Interior right now."

"This fellow seems to have it pretty straight," Haslett observed with provoking coolness.

Devereaux's voice rose in anger. "Straight?" he bawled out. "Of course it's straight. Of course they're making moonshine up on Roney's Ridge. They always have made it up there, and they always will, I reckon, even when you and I are playing harps in the new Jerusalem. We can't stop 'em. The devil himself can't stop 'em. They're hid away up there and a man can walk round 'em and under 'em and over 'em and never even smell their smoke."

Haslett leaned on the window-sill, staring out into the dusky street. Even in the gloom the keen eyes of Devereaux, accustomed to judging men, could see that the young deputy was troubled. His face was white, his jaw set and his fingers worked themselves unconsciously into clenched fists. Devereaux smiled a queer, cruel smile.

"Every month or so," he said, stretching his legs, "some young fool of an editor who wants to make himself solid with the State-Widers and the women, sets up a howl about the moonshine traffic over on Roney's Ridge. He writes a lot of stuff like this here in the *Sun* about the inefficiency and corruption in the revenue service, and then, of course, to satisfy the dear people that we are earning our pay,

I've got to send some men up to the ridge to investigate the shameful state of things which brother editor has exposed. Two or three fellows go, all grouching like the devil. They wander around that brush for a week or two, get lost and snake-bit or their hides full of shot, and then they come back with the expense account as long as the book of Exodus and have to take a vacation to get the pricklers out of their clothes. And never a sign of a moonshiner or a drop of the stuff do they see. I know how 'tis. I've been up there—every man in the service has been up there some time or other. We can't get 'em. Nobody can get that gang unless"—here he sat suddenly upright—"unless it's a man who was raised up there and who knows that confounded country."

Outside, the October rain splashed on the gray panes. The gutters ran floods and the streets were full of shrieking sparrows hopping among the puddles. Inside, the figure of Haslett shut out the light, and against the window his shoulders rose and fell. He started as the voice of his chief came through the gloom.

"Haslett," said Devereaux, "I'm going to send you up to Roney's Ridge."

Haslett turned quickly. His hands were clenched defiantly and his brow came down over his half-shut eyes.

"You've got to go up there and get those fellows," continued Devereaux. "These newspapermen think I can't get those moonshiners, but I'll show 'em. You've got to go, Haslett, and you've got to get 'em."

Haslett flung back his head, setting all his yellow hair stiffly erect. "Why do you think I can do it, when everybody else has failed?" he demanded.

Devereaux opened a drawer and held out a worn, little, red spelling-book. Haslett took it, his stolid face dumb and pitiful with suffering. He opened the cover with fingers that shook. Across the fly-leaf these words straggled in childish script:

"Dannie haslett—Roney's rij—Tenn. 84."

The room was still as death. The ticking of the clock boomed like a Gatling gun and the clicking of the typewriters in the outer office came through the thin partition like the firing of artillery. With a deep breath Haslett closed the little book tenderly and put it in his pocket.

"You were always mighty quiet about yourself, Dan," Devereaux said, "even when I first found you half-starved in a cotton-mill and took you in here. I guess if I hadn't found that little book accidentally I never would have known about you. But now I do know that you come from that blasted country up there. I know that you can find those stills we have been hunting for the last twenty years, and by the Eternal—you've got to do it!"

"My God—Devereaux—" Haslett begged in a husky voice, "don't send me up there. I can't go back where I was born and raised and turn my hand against my own kin."

Devereaux stared. He had hardly expected mutiny from Haslett. "Look here, boy," he said testily "if your kin happen to have so little judgment as to make whisky in a prohibition State, it ain't none of my business. If your old dad's running a still up there, why he's a lawbreaker, that's all, and as an officer of the law, it's your duty to stop him. You take Powell and Adams—they's the best men in the hills, and you keep your mouth shut. They won't suspicion you. And when you git up there, Dan"—Devereaux put his hand on the tall deputy's shoulder with a softening voice at the sight of Haslett's suffering—"you forgit that you ever learned your A-B Abs in that little spellin'-book. Just remember that you are the feller that I took out of a cotton-mill and made a revenue man out of. Remember that, Dan—and make good."

Stumbling wearily, a deep and gnawing misery in his soul, Haslett weaved his way home through the

hurrying throng of umbrella-laden humanity who filled the wet streets. Lights gleaned from cheerful windows, making the pavements gleam. The rain dripped ceaselessly, but Haslett saw nothing. He was thinking, thinking, and his thoughts were far away, up out of the steaming, smelling city back in the eternal mountains, leaning their purple heads against the sky, their jagged sides hidden in fragrant tumult of pine—his country.

To go back—to breathe the keen air of his own hills—the thought made his heart leap within him. He realized what he had never owned to himself before. He was homesick—homesick with the longing which is part of the hill-born man—for the great heights and the unmeasured distances and the eternal vastness of things.

Then came the other thought which sickened him like the fumes of a drug. To go back like this—a traitor—a hunter of his own—a revenue man, whom the hillfolk hated and feared with the relentless bitterness of ignorance—to raise his hand against his old father, afraid to look into his old mother's face. The thought was torment. That which was in him of the hills strove with justice and honor, strove until he was blinded and numbed with a dead pain.

At last, nerve strained and utterly weary, he turned in to a shabby house set squarely on the street. Opening the door with a latch-key, he groped his way up twisted stairs, through dim halls where sickly gas-jets exuded a flickering radiance, to his little room under the roof. It was hot and dark and filled with the sound of the rain on the roof and the odor of stale cooking.

He lighted the gas, and sitting down on the bed, took the little book from his pocket. As he turned the leaves reminiscently a scrap of paper fluttered to the floor—a bit of the soiled margin of a newspaper, one of the few which found their way like floating dust from the great wheels of civilization into the loneliness of Roney's

Ridge. Upon it was written in a cramped and awkward hand "When this U see, remember me, Ellie Hook."

Like the flashing of a picture upon the screen there came to him the vision of this girl, barefooted, bareheaded, a wild little thing of the hills. She had waved her bonnet at him the day he went away—as long as he could see her far back up the river trail she had stood there under the pine on top of the ridge. That was the day he had quarreled with his father, and hot with anger had walked out of their world. Only one thing he had gained. He had made good. In all the district there was no better deputy than he; but what good was it?

He turned the contents of a little tin trunk out upon the floor and searched through the heap to find a suit of jeans, greasy and shrunken, the same clothes that he had worn that last June morning. He put the spelling-book into the pocket of the coat and pinned it there, then he spread the things out on the bed and surveyed them, smoothing their shabby folds with reverent fingers. On the sleeve of the coat a great patch was sewed with coarse thread and straggling stitches. He caressed it with his hand, and a mist rose before his eyes.

"Ah'm a comin' back, maw," he said hoarsely, lapsing unconsciously into the familiar vernacular of the hills. "Ah 'lowed Ah never would, and Ah'd rather be took back daid than thisaway, but Ah got to go."

There was sunset on the hills of Tennessee. Sunset flashing like flame from the hilltops and kindling the mists in the valleys into all the warm hues of opal. The keen scent of autumn was in the air—the smell of burning wood and new frosted leaves and the spick odor of the cedars.

At the top of the bluff eastward and across the creek from where Roney's Ridge rears its purple length along the westward sky, three men crept out from the timber and scanned the western country.

Powell spoke first. He had grown old in the service and was rough as though he had been molded with a pick.

"There she lays, boys," he said, settling himself on a rock and biting into a huge plug of tobacco; "there's the most God-forsaken country this side of hell. Twenty-two miles of wilderness with not a blasted livin' thing in it but rattlesnakes and moonshiners. Every man in the service hates that ridge. They're afraid of it. It's got three good men since old man Prescott went in '83. They don't argy none up here. They just lay you out with a hole in you that a team could drive in; they figger that if you ain't a revenue man you might be kin to one. That's their religion and they sure follow it consistent."

Haslett sat upon a rock gazing at his own misty gray hills crowded against the flaring sky, and there was a cold thing in his heart that gnawed without pity. This was his country, yet he dared not claim it.

"Somewhere off yonder," Powell pointed, "off to that north where the timber has fell into the river and left a bald knob, is where Dave Hook's still is at. I've hunted Dave off and on for twenty years. Two years ago the old man himself took a crack at David. I come along to keep him from getting stuck in the thick timber. We got to where we could smell Dave's smoke, and then the old man fell into a cave with water in the bottom and I was all day getting him out while Mr. Hook and most of his livin' relations stood around on these knobs and shot at us. The old man's no good in the hills. He's too durned heavy, and when he gets mad he talks too loud."

"He used to be a hummer once, though," Adams remarked. "Once when Marshall made a raid up into North Carolina—"

"That was about the time," Powell interrupted dryly, "that you et all the buttons off your little red shoes and got the colic."

Adams, who was very young, flushed and shrugged his shoulders. Powell got to his feet. "Well, Dan'el," he said, "as you're the capt'in of this expedition, we'd better be movin'. I hain't got no hump to be roamin' around these parts after dark. The inhabitants are too blamed unsociable. I reckon if we git one wicked moonshiner and drag him back with the strong arm of the law the old man will be plumb satisfied. I know I will. So we might as well git David Hook. He's the nearest, so we won't have so fur to run."

Down the tangled slope they passed in silence, save for Adams's complaints as the briers tangled across his path and caught at his trousers. They crossed the log that spanned the creek just as two crouching figures crept out from the tangled cedars and slipped cautiously into the open place where the men had been watching them from behind the rocks.

One was a girl of twenty, her bonnet flapping down her back, her thin face framed in smooth bands of hair the color of ripe wheat. The other was an undersized boy who might have been either six or sixteen. He was clad in a motley assortment of garments far too large for him, his little peaked face was hidden under a great coonskin cap and he trailed a great squirrel rifle behind him.

"Ellie," he whispered, as he peered through the green boughs, "is them shure-'nough revenoors?"

The girl's face was white and her eyes wide with terror as she watched the men climb the winding trail up the side of the ridge. Her hands were clenched tightly about the handle of a small bucket she carried.

"Hesh you, Buddy!" she hissed. "Ef'n they hear you they might come cl'ar back here and put us in jail."

Buddy lapsed into frightened silence. For a moment only the dropping of the chestnuts broke the stillness. In the west the glowing red had melted into purple.

"I 'low I could shoot them revenoors from here," Buddy whispered, dragging the gun to his shoulder. "Pappy he learned me once how to shoot revenoors, and I could kill every one powerful easy."

Ellie sprang up and snatched the gun from his hands. "Don't you dast to shoot, Buddy Hook!" she cried. "Do you want them men to put you in jail where you won't git nothin' to eat?"

"Don't they give you nothin' at all?" he questioned, his big eyes wide with wonder.

"Nothin' but corn bread and water."

"Never no roastin' ears nor fried pies?"

"Never, no nothin'," she answered. "Now you hesh, Buddy! Did you hear what they said? They're a goin' to git pap. They've done gone to git him now and mebbe they'll shoot him and burn we-all's house down. And they'll put pappy in jail where we-all won't see him no more."

A keen, crafty look came into the boy's wizened face, a look which is born part of the hillfolk and is engendered of much evasion of the law.

"Then we better run and tell pappy, Ellie, and he kin go out and kill them there revenoors."

The girl shook her head. "They ain't goin' to git pappy, Buddy," she said sternly, upon her face a look of defiance, "an' we hain't goin' to tell him nuther. He'd go down to the still and git cotched. We're a goin' to watch that there still, Buddy."

The light of battle shone in Buddy's weak little eyes. "They better not meddle with us now," he declared. "We got the gun. We ought to have two guns, Ellie."

"I reckon we can't shoot but one," she sighed. "I'll have to hold it and you can pull the trigger."

"Le's go round by the creek and climb over the hill where the 'simmon tree's at," he suggested, "then we can get there a heap quicker and they can't see us."

Darkness comes quickly in the hills.

The rising ridges shut out the light and mists rise in the ravines, gray, shapeless and groping. Great shapeless masses of rock reared themselves in the path of the three men, tangled over with wet vines and slippery with frost. Savage thorn bushes thrust at them and damp branches of cedar swung into their faces and clung there stickily. But by dim and invisible trails they went along, straight up the steep sides of the ridge toward the naked knob above the river.

Haslett had taken the lead and his feet, obeying some slumbering instinct, which years of treading the asphalt ways of civilization had not smothered out, sought out the old paths they had known. Powell followed. There was a curious look on his shrewd old face whenever Haslett led them safely around a boulder or skirted a sinkhole filled with mist which no man could see in the darkness. But he said nothing until they stood upon the bare gravelly knob straight up from the river and looked down into a ravine where broad slabs of rock lay heaped in wild chaos. Through the crevices a tiny light shone like the dying embers of a fire. Powell knew the place well. It was Dave Hook's still. Never before had he found the path to it.

He spat out the tobacco and regarded Haslett quizzically. "I reckon you been here before, Dan'el?" he said.

Haslett started. His teeth shut together with a click. For a moment the men stood looking each other in the face, a tense look that cut through the darkness like the flash of steel. Then Haslett's body sagged wearily, his hands fell to his sides, and he turned and looked off over the ridge. There, near the crest, among the black shadows of the forest, a light shone, small and bright as a star from some cabin window. And with the shine of that light in his eyes Haslett swallowed the lie that would have been wasted upon Powell.

"Mebbe I have, Jim," he answered simply.

Powell grasped his hand in the dark. "I reckon when the Lord made you, Dan," he said, "He dipped right down into the dish."

Haslett gripped the hard old hand as he would clutch at a rope, for obedience was growing very hard for him. With the shine of his mother's candle in his eyes, the service and the honor of the great power whom he had sworn to obey had grown vague and intangible things. He was a hill man after all. And he had eaten Dave Hook's salt before he had learned to walk.

"There's one lone man down there," Powell was saying, "and when he goes away he'll cover that fire. We might as well go down and git him now we've come this fur."

"All right, Jim." Haslett sat down on a rock and clasped his hands about his knees.

"Ain't gittin' cold feet are you?" Powell questioned in bewilderment.

Haslett shook his head. "I can't lay my hands on a man who has fed me, Jim," he said at last. "I've kept my oath. I've brought you to Dave Hook's still. Now go down and get your man."

There was a long silence. Then without a word Powell started gingerly down the rocks, Adams stumbling after him.

Overhead the stars leaned very near and to Haslett they possessed a comradeship as of old. He drew in great breaths of the spicy air and the tenseness of his nerves relaxed. As far back as he could remember this rock had been his resting place.

When he was little and barefooted, his outgrown overalls half-way to his knees, he had waited here for Dave Hook to cover the fire. When Dave's heavy boots had tramped up from the ravine the man's strong hands had swung the boy to his shoulder and then Dave had run with him, squealing and kicking, to the low cabin door. The door was so low that Haslett had ducked his head as they went in, and

then Dave whirled him off to the bench where Ellie sat and they had shared the same cup and plate.

Later, when he had grown big and bashful, he had waited in the twilight until the man's heavy tread was followed up the rocky stairway by the light steps of the girl. Then he would steal away into the shadow of the chestnuts to wait for her to pass, and lingering in the woods would moon away half the night.

But the quarrel had come, and, hot with resentment and fancied injustice, he had gone away down into the big world—the hill man, with his quaint ideas of right and wrong—to readjust himself and all his previous conceptions.

But one principle had clung to Dan Haslett and would not yield—his unflinching loyalty to the cause he served. The relentless government had demanded that he search out the lawbreaker. And with unquestioning obedience, which is part of the simple code of the hill people, he had kept his oath. He had hunted out the moonshiner's lair. But to go down there and lay hands on Dave Hook—his heart stiffened at the thought.

When Powell and Adams were halfway down the incline two shots echoed through the night.

"Damn you, Adams," he heard Powell mutter, "I've told you times enough not to carry a gun by the trigger. Now, we'll have the hull pack to fight."

As if in answer a shot came from over the hill. Roney's Ridge was awake. Then Haslett jumped to his feet, for down in the ravine echoed a fierce pantherlike scream of "Ellie!" Stumbling over the rocks he hurried down the hill, fearing he knew not what. At the bottom of the incline a woman screamed.

"God, don't let me be too late!" he panted; "he's got her—Powell has—"

He sprang to the door of the still, but something small and savage leaped through the opening and flung itself

upon him, clutching and biting. Twice he threw it off and it went down screaming only to spring back again and drag at his gun. Then the faint light of the fire shone upon it and he saw a small, peaked face under a big fur cap.

"God, it's a kid!" he said; "I thought it was a cat."

He stepped back into the open. War was now on in the hills. He could hear the booming of Powell's big forty-fives and the barking of Adams's low calibers, and in the rocks on the hill-side squirrel shot rained like hail. No further sound came from the girl.

Suddenly from the door of the still came a flash and a stifling smell of powder. For a bewildering instant he stood dazed, then there came a quick spasm of agony in his thigh. Cold sweat broke out on his body and oozed over him and he crumpled into a quivering heap, his pistols clattering as he fell. A cold mist of pain came down and shut him in. Everything throbbed in agony, then the world grew black and bitter.

After a long time he wrenched his eyelids open. It was as still as death, but above him lingered a vision of a face, pale and framed in bands of wheat-colored hair. As he came slowly back from the tortuous darkness where he had been groping, he knew her; but there was no recognition in her eyes, only a black look of hate. In her hand she held a long-barreled rifle still hot with smoke.

"I reckon you ain't daid?" she remarked as Haslett groaned.

He turned and tried to raise himself. His hand came in contact with his trouser-leg, all stiff and sticky with blood.

"Somebody's shot me," he muttered thickly.

"I shot you," she answered spitefully, "but I didn't aim high enough."

Shaking with pain he pulled himself to his elbow. The girl had kindled a fire, and by its light he saw that the ravine was deserted.

"They're gone," she observed, in reply to his look of questioning. "them other two fellers. They got Buddy, but I pulled him loose and one of 'em ketched me, but I bit him good and he leggo. I reckon I'll be pizened. Pap and the rest took after 'em and I 'low they're runnin' yit."

"If you'll help me to the fire," he pleaded, "I'll bind up this leg so it won't bleed so bad."

"I'd as soon tech a snake," she returned dubiously. But, laying down the gun and pushing the pistols out of his reach, she helped him to hitch and drag himself to the fire, where he lay back faint and sick.

She tucked her bonnet under his face and then stooped and picked up something which had slid out of his pocket. It was the little red spelling-book.

Slowly, as one dazed, she turned the leaves, and the little scrap of paper slipped out into her hand. Her face grew white and transfigured.

Bending down, she looked closely into his face with a gasp of unbelief.

"Dan," she hoarsely whispered, "it ain't you—come back thisaway?"

And, dropping to the rocks beside him and winding her arms around her head, she wept like a child.

"Don't, Ellie!" he pleaded. Then a groan of pain escaped him. Quickly she drew from her neck a bright red kerchief and tied it about his leg, twisting it with a stick until he writhed in pain.

"I shot you, Dan, but I ain't goin' to let you die," she said. "I s'pect pap'll kill you."

"I deserve it, Ellie," he whispered. Then the world went away again, leaving only hot pain flashing through his veins and a dull anguish about his heart.

Then he roused sharply. Hard, knotted hands were bathing his face. The cavern was filled with the rumbling of gruff voices, and he could hear Ellie crying and the angry voice of Dave Hook.

"Ef we let him go he'll go back and sick the whole pack on us again," the big mountaineer was saying.

The woman who bathed his face began to sob. Haslett's heart stood still. He wrenched himself loose from her arms and, shaking off the lethargy which was creeping over him, sat up. It was his mother.

"Dannie! Dannie!" she wailed as he looked at her. "How could you come back thisaway?"

Haslett drew a long breath. Moving a stiff arm, he patted her rough old hand and then faced the company of rugged men.

"Dave Hook," he addressed them in a voice that shook, "if you all aim to kill me—go ahead. But don't never say I'm a goin' back, because I ain't. I give my oath to the government; but if I'd 'a' knowed that they would send me like a bloodhound to scent out my own kin, I'd 'a' bit my tongue out first." For a minute he rested a heavy hand on his mother's shoulder. The agony in his leg was making him very faint. "If I'd 'a' come down here to the still with the other two fellers," he went on, "you'd 'a' never got away, Dave Hook. I never let anything loose when I git a hold on it. But what could I do? When they found out I come from Roney's Ridge it was hell. It was the little book that give it away, Ellie." He groped for her hand and found it. His mother's sobs were filling the cavern. "I took my oath, Dave Hook"—he went on, simply, earnestly—"and I had to mind orders same as a soldier does. But I never come down here after you. I stayed back until I heard Ellie scream—then I come down—and if any feller had teched her"—he gasped a little—"he'd never got away."

Cold drops of moisture stood out on his forehead. His mother took a flask from one of the men and held it to his lips, while Ellie wiped his brow with the frill of her bonnet.

There was a troubled conference among the mountaineers. At last

Dave Hook and his strapping son approached and took him not very gently from the women and lifted him to his feet.

"Kin you stand?" Dave demanded.

Haslett trembled. His legs shook under him, but by a miracle he kept his feet.

"Kin you climb the trail?" Dave asked again. "You're Job Haslett's son and we cain't forgit blood. We can't kill you like a rat as we would any other revenoor. If you kin git over the top yonder, go on, and don't never come back here. We'll give you a start, and hit's growin' mighty dark."

Haslett looked about on the lowering faces. Only too well he knew how they hated a traitor, and how at this moment some of them thirsted for his life. By an agonizing effort he moved his stricken limb. Then he smiled faintly at them, his face as white as death.

"I ain't a goin' to run, Dave," he said simply; "you can shoot now if you want to." And then like a reed that feels the fire he crumpled down before their eyes, the wound, having reopened, making a crimson stain upon the floor.

Dave Hook's rough face worked. Twice he bit his lips and twisted his brow into an angry scowl, but the anger vanished from his face, and with a wave of his hand he sent the others out of the cavern.

"Take him home, Job," he muttered briefly; "he'll likely die, anyway. I cain't hurt a man that's down already. Come along, Ellie."

But Ellie faced him bravely, her arms under Haslett's shoulders, as he lay across his mother's lap.

"You go home, pap," she said; "I'm agoin' to help Dan. I'll be home come sunup."

And without a word Dave Hook went out.

In the office of Devereaux, Adams and Powell sat, bandaged and swollen

and glowering, while Devereaux, bent over a penciled document, fired oaths at them like bullets.

"Haslett's resignation," he sneered; "great bunch you are, to let a good man get away like that;" his voice trailed away in smoldering profanity.


Then he banged the desk with his fist. "You watch me if another editor takes a crack at this office about Roney's Ridge. Damn me, if he wants moonshiners let him go and get them—I've sent my last man up there, so help me Jeremiah."

# THE DEVIL'S DOLL

A SHORT STORY

BY MARY GERMAINE

## I.

HE leaned back against the luxuriously cushioned seat of the limousine and drew a sharp breath.

There had never been any quick changes in her life. Events, especially the few pleasant ones she had known, had worked along slowly, as though dealt out by a grudging hand.

This one startled her.

She kept her eyes closed, trying to regain her customary poise. She could not get back. She seemed whirled off her little, monotonous plane into an entirely different one. Her head buzzed from the quick transition.

The limousine pushed along slowly through the five-o'clock crush on Fifth Avenue.

Finally the man sitting opposite her spoke.

"Feeling all right now?" he asked.

She opened her eyes with a jerk and looked at him.

He was in dinner clothes and wore a gardenia in his buttonhole. Every item of his attire seemed faultlessly correct. Even his features were molded into an expression far removed

from that of the ordinarily prosperous man. Wealth had given them refinement, trim, close, self-controlled lines.

And that cushioned, silk-lined, exclusive place, perfumed by a cluster of roses in their exquisite holder, fairly reeked of wealth.

The girl found it hard to speak.

She simply nodded her head in response to his question.

"It was a close call," he said, frowning a little. "You must be more careful to stick to the crossings during the rush-hours. What made you attempt the street in such a way?"

"I don't know," she faltered, remembering the sudden sea of machines closing in about her, the jolt of falling against the limousine as she tried to jump to a place of safety, its abrupt halt, the hand thrusting open the door and pulling her up out of harm's way.

She gave a little shuddering sigh as she realized what she had escaped.

Her eyes rested gratefully on the man.

He was miles above her. She thought, with a thrill of respect, that he had the clean-cut face of a bishop.

"Don't try it again," he advised with a faint smile.

"I'd been walking along, looking

into the store windows," she ventured in explanation. "I think I was confused."

He scanned her with a show of interest, his glance arrested by her soft, dreamy eyes, which were gravely regarding him.

"Oh, well," he replied, turning away and gazing absently out the window into the jam of vehicles and the brilliant glitter of the street, "I was glad to be of service."

She was beginning to recover her balance. Slowly, as if through a mist, her mind went back to the point where her life had been cut in two by this new, odd incident. It was time for her to get out, to step back into her commonplace world, and continue on her way down-town.

She wondered just what words she could use to thank him, and then ask him to leave her at the next cross-walk. She glanced down tentatively. How queer her hands looked folded in her lap. It came to her with a start that they were empty.

"I've lost my drawings!" she exclaimed, half rising to her feet.

Then, as the thought came to her that they were doubtless already ruined beyond repair beneath the wheels and hoofs of traffic, she sank back on the seat, trying to strangle the choke that came up into her throat.

"What are they?" the man asked, turning quickly.

"My sketches," she answered, ashamed of her shaking voice.

"Then you are an artist?" he asked, his eyes closely studying her pretty, tremulous, anxious face.

Her cheeks colored slightly.

"I'd like to be one," she answered, a wistful quality in her voice.

He continued to observe her with unsatisfied curiosity.

"Perhaps you're studying somewhere?" he hazarded.

"No," she returned in prompt denial.

She sat with downcast eyes, her lips compressed.

"I do drawings for an advertising firm," she threw out at length in a manner of utter defeat.

Her secret was out now, the one that ground her young soul and made each day seem more hopeless than the day before. She had had all the hopes and ambitions of a healthy, strong, finely keyed girl. And they had fallen into rubbish at her feet.

"I will succeed—I won't be a failure; I'll stick to it till I'm old before I'll give up!" she had cried to herself again and again. But defeats closed in thick and fast.

The money was gone before she had had half the training that she required. No one wanted her pictures. She had walked from one place to another for weeks to get some kind of work as an artist. A small commission had occasionally been given her. She had been perilously near to being hungry when she had succeeded in getting work from the advertising firm. Just how long that would last she could not tell.

The whole, big, crushing load fell on her again as she sat in the luxurious limousine, and made her unwilling admission to the man on the opposite seat. In this rich atmosphere of subdued color and perfect appointment her failure seemed all the more sordid and ugly. She wished that she could hide herself from his eyes.

"Then it was your work that you lost?" he was saying delicately.

"I was taking it down to the office," she admitted, smothering her pride.

"I see," he replied thoughtfully.

"I suppose it's hopeless to go back and look for it," she said with a little quiver of her lips.

"I'm afraid so," he agreed, his voice expressing sympathy.

"Then I may as well go home," she said, trying to make the best of her loss. "I'll get out at the next crossing, and, I th—"

"Don't thank me," he interposed hastily. "I am the one who is responsible for your loss."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, raising her eyes in dissent.

"You dropped your drawings when you fell against my machine," he insisted quietly. "That makes me responsible. And since that is the case—"

She started up, her eyes widely opened now in refusal of anything more he might say.

The limousine slowed down to await the signal at the crossing.

"—since that is the case," the man continued, smiling slightly and motioning her back gently, "I have a right to hear the whole story."

She sank back against the softly cushioned seat with a sigh of assent. When crushed youth has a chance to vindicate itself—ah, the temptation! A few bare, halting particulars were all that came at first.

But the man understood and was sympathetic. He led her on so skillfully that she did not recognize the subtlety of his questions. He suppressed himself so completely that it did not occur to her that she was confiding in a complete stranger. The little bonds of convention she had been taught to observe were completely forgotten. In fact, they were swept away.

Little by little she parted with fragments of her story till her reserve was melted, and she poured forth the whole flood of her struggles and disappointments into his attentive ears.

When she came to a pause he sat silent and moved.

"How hard the old world is," he said at length, "to tender young hearts like yours! But you'll pull through—never fear. There's a little justice, after all. Be patient—wait a while."

A faint light of hope dawned in her eyes.

"Do you think if I work—and wait—it will come?" she asked. "There are so many who have to give up. The girl who has been living with me has gone home discouraged. Her health has given out, too. She did beautiful work. But I'm afraid she'll never do

anything more. They wrote that her mother was ill, and she jumped at the chance to go back. She says that she had rather get down on her hands and knees and scrub for a living than struggle with anything so hopeless."

Her lips quivered.

"But I won't give up!" she added stubbornly—"I won't!"

"That's right," he said encouragingly. "You are young, strong, and full of fine ambition. You can't help but succeed."

Her face clouded a little. It was so easy for him to make predictions. He knew nothing about the cost of success.

"I'd like to see some of your work," he continued, his eyes contracting a little before her open gaze. "Would you show me some of it?"

"Willingly," she replied, her face brightening. "But I'm afraid you'd be disappointed in what I've done. I've only had two years of instruction—"

He was taking a leather case from his pocket and slowly extracting a card. He held it out to her. She took it and read the name:

MR. ALEXANDER LAMONT

It sounded finely unusual to her. She lifted her eyes and smiled confidently.

"I am Muriel Lee," she confessed with a frank little blush.

"A charming name!" he responded, bowing. "It seems to fit you very well."

"And now I must see some of your work. Could you bring a few sketches down to Giannelli's art-rooms? I'm in there often. In fact, I've got to go there to-morrow morning to look at a picture I'm thinking of buying. Art happens to be my hobby, you see. I've given a helping hand to a number of young artists."

"Oh!" she exclaimed; "oh!" failing to find a more adequate expression.

She looked out the limousine window into the darkening street. The short November day had come to a close. The electric lights were beginning to scintillate brilliantly. She caught a glimpse of a great, shimmering, antique Goravan rug hanging in a show-window; of a picture of a cardinal, his red robes glowing under an artificial light; of a solid bank of spotted, extravagant orchids; of a row of silk-draped windows, through which gleamed the soft lights from shaded candles on snowy little tables where people were dining with epicurean daintiness; at a big, dark, unoccupied mansion frowning at her for half a block.

The mystery, the transforming lights, the illusive illuminated colorings, lured her artist's senses. She sighed out of a full heart.

It was all wonderful seen from the limousine window as they glided smoothly along. Her luxurious environment gave it an enchanting and refined perspective.

They had nearly reached the park.

"I could take the Subway at Columbus Circle," she said, as though she were sipping a last sup of nectar and must plunge back to common realities; "I live up-town."

As she stepped out of the machine at the Subway station the man reached over, and, pulling the roses out from their exquisite holder, handed them to her.

She ran down the steps for her train, her nose buried in their sweetness.

## II.

WHEN Muriel got home that night she lit the gas, and then sank down into a chair without taking off her things.

She stared about the small apartment with bewildered eyes. There was a queer blur in her mind. Everything looked unreal to her. She gazed at

the drawings and water-colors she had pinned on the walls as though she had never seen them before. They looked faulty and miserable to her. She felt suddenly capable of doing wonderful things.

It did not seem as if reality could have dealt out such a swift, dazzling change.

"It's not a dream," she kept assuring herself. "It's true—perfectly true. I've got a friend—a real friend. How glad I am that I worked and waited!"

She thought almost reverently of Mr. Alexander Lamont as she worked over the gas-stove in the tiny kitchen, preparing her supper. He hovered above her homely surroundings nearly like a saint encircled by a golden halo. His refined, almost severe, features were stamped upon her memory. She ate her frugal meal absently, her eyes feasting upon the roses which she had placed in a glass on the table, remembering all the beautiful pictures she had hoped to paint.

Before she went to bed she looked out the window for a long time at a star shining above the roofs. A patch of blue with the star shining in it was all she could see. It was like the patch of brightness that had come into her dull life. The star seemed to grow larger and brighter.

She went to sleep, thanking God for creating Mr. Alexander Lamont.

The next morning, precisely at the hour he had stated, Muriel walked along the velvet-carpeted passage into Giannelli's art-rooms. She carried a small bundle of her best sketches, and tried to feel calm and confident. Surely this benign luck would not desert her now. But she showed plainly, at least to Mr. Lamont's discerning eyes, her nervousness and apprehension.

He was a long time in looking over her work. He made a careful study of each picture.

"I'm a very conscientious man in my judgments," he said with a gravely responsible air. "Not for the world would I knowingly encourage false

hopes in any young artist. If for no other reason, I should not want to suffer the reproaches that might be heaped upon me. I want to do good, create happiness."

They had the room quite to themselves.

An attendant stood outside the door as if to ward off any one who presumed to enter.

"There is the picture I am thinking of buying," Mr. Lamont said with a benevolent glance at the girl's shrinking figure.

He pointed to a great canvas in a magnificent frame placed in a favorable light where it displayed to full advantage its marvels of technique and conception, and Muriel devoured each detail with appreciative eyes.

"It's wonderful!" she breathed softly.

She turned with a gesture of despair toward her own imperfect sketch which Mr. Lamont had just stood up for inspection.

"Don't look at any more of them," she faltered, her voice trembling with humiliation.

"I'm going to buy this one," Mr. Lamont stated with the air of a man who is used to having what he wants.

There was nothing sophisticated about the girl; nevertheless her lips curled in a bitter little sneer.

"I suppose you will hang it beside that one over there," she said, nodding her head toward the big canvas in its costly frame.

"I'm not going to give you much," he continued, smiling tolerantly; "but will fifty dollars do?"

"It isn't worth ten," she gasped with a frightened quiver of her eyelashes.

"If I consider it worth fifty," he retorted somewhat coolly, "there's nothing for you to do except take up my offer. I assure you that it isn't exorbitant."

How kind his eyes were as they dwelt upon her troubled face. All of the coolness went out of them. His

hair was just tinged with gray. It gave him a paternal look. He was a very distinguished-looking, elderly man, Muriel concluded, as she struggled to coerce herself into accepting his point of view.

"And you must go on and do some more studying," he said in positive tones. "You have talent. I should like to see you go ahead and succeed."

"Could I?" she asked doubtfully.

"Are you afraid of work?" he asked sternly.

"No, no, no!" she cried with a rush of conviction, of belief in herself, of great gratitude toward him. "I'm willing to work to the end of my days."

She dropped down into a convenient chair, hid her face against its back, and sobbed.

He came over and put his hand on her shoulder in a fatherly, protecting manner.

"There, there, little girl," he said soothingly, "don't take things so hard. I'm only just in my decisions, that's all. Now, pick up your drawings and run home and use those clever little hands of yours to the best of your ability. Some day I'll show one or two of your water-colors to Mr. Giannelli. He might be able to give you a little help.

"And let me know how your work progresses," he called after her pleasantly, as she dried her eyes, took up her drawings, and started from the room.

"You can always reach me through the Giannelli Company," he added as she glanced around to bid him good morning.

This was the beginning of many happy days for Muriel. When the precious fifty dollars arrived she hoarded it like a miser, spending it for nothing except tuition at the art school and for needed supplies. She resumed her lessons, working morning, afternoon, and evening; for she still continued to fill orders for the advertising concern. And rather than

give up the little apartment, whose expense she had shared with the other girl, she nearly starved herself to death in order to have money for the rent.

One week when she had earned a small triumph from an unusually good drawing from life, receiving a favorable prediction from her instructor, she took the thumb-tacks out of the drawing and sent it to her kind patron with a little note of explanation.

Shortly after came a brief letter from the Giannelli Company, in which they consented to examine some of her work.

As she left the art rooms, flushed and excited from the sale of a couple of her sketches, she met Mr. Lamont.

"And how is the young artist progressing?" he inquired pleasantly.

The eyes she lifted to his glowed with hopefulness.

"I've sold to Giannelli," she said in an impressive whisper.

Mr. Lamont suppressed a slight smile that threatened to relax the straight line of his mouth.

"Good!" he responded. "They're excellent judges. But I should hardly have known you. Are you not getting rather thin and overworked?"

"Oh, no!" she declared smilingly. "I'm feeling very well and happy."

He shook his head reprovingly.

"This won't do," he chided as he walked with her along the street. "You mustn't let devotion to art run away with your common sense. If I approved of young girls dining at restaurants I should take you in some one of these places and make you eat a good dinner."

He watched her face furtively as he spoke.

They were passing a café, in and out of which stepped stylishly dressed women, whence issued the music of stringed instruments.

She glanced toward the entrance.

"Would it be wrong?" she asked seriously. "I know how people talk about such things — and yet — Not

that I could go," she added, with a quick, inward photograph of her plainly dressed, if not shabby, figure.

"It is always best to avoid the appearance of evil," he replied sententiously. "But there is one thing I am going to do. I am going to send you a hamper of nice little things to eat."

"Oh, you mustn't!" she objected. "You're too good."

"I have a great deal more money than I know how to spend," he answered sadly. "I hope you won't deny me the satisfaction of using a little of it on you. The good things of this world are very unequally divided. You deserve a great many more things than you have. I read somewhere the other day that men of wealth should be rich in imagination as well as in money, should give to individuals instead of institutions, go out into the highways and the byways, finding men and women worthy of a happy, easy life. Such a man, it affirmed, would coin happiness for himself and others. It seemed to me that there was a very great deal of sense in this."

She nodded, wondering how she could have been so narrow and so stubborn as to think of rejecting the help which this man had offered her.

They turned the corner into Fifth Avenue.

A flower-vender on the curb held out a bunch of fresh-cut violets. Mr. Lamont stopped and bought them.

"I know that you love violets," he said, offering the fragrant token to the girl. She held out her hand, blushing brightly.

A smart equipage rolled by, a dignified woman leaning out and bowing smilingly.

Muriel watched Mr. Lamont as he returned the greeting with cold ceremony. She thought that he must be a very well-known man.

As she pinned the violets on her coat she could feel her heart beat with pleased wonder over his interest in

her. It did not seem as if she could possibly deserve it.

When, a couple of blocks farther on, he paused and said he must say good-by as he was going into his club, she gave him her hand with grave confidence. He pressed it gently. She parted with him as she would with an old and valued friend.

Small wonder that the acquaintance between them should grow apace, that ere long he should have persuaded her of her worthiness to accept better things than fate had doled out to her.

And if circumstance had elected him to be the donor—

Small luxuries found their way into the apartment. Once or twice a provident check for the month's rent was sent to the landlord. And the philanthropist was so tactful, put so little stress upon himself, that after a time a certain dissociation took place in her mind between the man and the kindnesses he showered upon her. She got to regard them almost as her due. Her nature, tuned to all that was beautiful in both art and life, craved them with more and more insistence.

One day he met her at the Metropolitan Museum to show her a loan exhibition of old Flemish portraits. Afterward he took her back to her small apartment in his car.

She lived on one of the cheaper up-town streets, and she saw him look about observingly as they approached her door. The sidewalk was crowded with noisy children, whirring up and down on roller-skates, quarreling with each other, playing vociferously.

As she stepped from the machine she slipped on a banana-skin and nearly fell. There were lumps of ashes and bits of waste scattered by the curb. An empty lot was littered with papers and cans and other cast-off stuff. Two women were shrilly exchanging gossip across a courtyard. From open windows came the clash of phonographs and piano-players. In the air was an odor of varied cookery.

Mr. Lamont made no comments, but

the next time that Muriel met him he brought up the subject.

It was a cold, stormy, cheerless day. A fine sleet was falling as she hurried along with her package of drawings for the advertising firm. The holidays were on, which meant nothing to her, and she had had a lonesome week up in her little apartment. Moreover, she had slept badly for several nights. A persistent vocalist had sung till the wee small hours, undismayed by the unfavorable comment of the neighborhood.

They met on Thirty - Third Street, quite by accident, as he came out from the doorway of a big hotel and was crossing the sidewalk to his limousine.

He raised his hat politely to her, and then paused.

"You're just the one I want to have a little talk with, Miss Lee," he said.

He waved a dissenting hand to his chauffeur, who had jumped to open the door of the machine, and led Muriel away down the street to a small tea-room.

"Come in here and have something hot to drink. You look half frozen."

Then, as they sat together at a cozy table and she sipped a cup of hot, comforting tea, he scrutinized her white, delicate face thoughtfully.

"An artist should have a congenial environment," he said. "It is a thought I have had in my mind for some time in regard to you. You ought to have a quiet, pleasant studio marked by your own personality—a place where you could work contentedly, absorbed in your dreams and inspirations. There is no person in the whole world with such finely sensitive nerves as one possessing an artistic temperament. How can he work in a jangling discord with all his delicate nerves unstrung? And you are an artist, a real artist who should be carefully sheltered so that all your beautiful thoughts may find expression. I have been thinking about the matter lately, but no solution occurred to me till yesterday."

He paused an instant, his eyes lingering on her downcast eyelids, the sweetly reasonable curves of her lips. Then he went on, with a carefully guarded air of disinterested kindness:

"I happened to think of a studio building I own on one of the old, quiet, dignified streets. I telephoned to the agent and found that there is a small studio apartment vacant that it seems to me would be very suitable for you. It is completely furnished, quite ready for occupancy, and I am going to ask you to go and look at it."

She hesitated for just a breath, then lifted her eyes frankly.

"I should like to see it," she said, "but—"

"The rental would be my gift to your talent," he stated firmly. "It would be, of course, beyond your own income—I know just how proud and sensitive you are; but can't you remember that these things give *me* happiness—"

"I'll go," she answered.

The gratified expression of a benevolently inclined man, whose wishes have been respected, spread over his face.

"Then I will expect you to go around there to-morrow morning," he said, mentioning the street and number. "The hall-boy will give you the key. Make it about eleven and I will try to drop in and see how you like it."

"I think that you are the kindest and most thoughtful man who ever lived," she replied fervently. "And I know that I can't help but like it—"

She hesitated, looking down, with undecided eyes, into her half-drained cup of tea.

"If you like it you must stay," he said conclusively.

### III.

MURIEL had another sleepless night.

It was not the singing, nor the phonographs, nor the piano-players that kept her awake. It was her own restless thoughts. One moment she was dazzled to the fever-point and lay

with flushed cheeks building up a great mushroom structure of a dream castle; the next, she was curled up shivering-ly, thinking about the morrow.

Should she go down to the studio building and ask the hall-boy for the key for what she knew to be a dainty, luxurious apartment, which would cater to her most fastidious tastes? Was it right to accept this gift of possession?

On the other hand, was it right to reject it and wound Mr. Alexander Lamont's feelings?

It was a very hard matter to decide. She was still in a state of indecision when morning came. But the remembrance of her promise swung the scales in favor of going. Above all, she would not back down from her word.

Shortly after breakfast she commenced packing up her personal belongings. If she went at all she felt that it would be to stay. She sat down and cried a little before she closed the door on her cheap, common little dwelling-place, and walked out to the subway.

Half an hour later she took the key from the hall-boy and went up with a quickly beating heart to the studio apartment.

She gave a tremulous cry of pleasure as she entered.

Clinging to the doorknob, she looked around.

A long, high room with a great window at the end, the lower panes of leaded glass laid in beautiful mosaics through which the cold November light streamed softly. Dull brown walls, left bare for her own pictures. A quaint old fireplace in which a log burned lazily. A silky Persian rug on the floor. Exquisitely simple furnishings, every line counting for beauty.

But what held her attention longest was the easel, studiously placed for the best light and where she could work with the greatest ease.

With a hushed step she walked across the floor and sat down in front of it. She sat there for a long time,

looking at the empty canvas on the easel.

Finally she arose and stepped about, examining everything.

A door, curtained with an old tapestry, led into the bedroom, a dainty nest of white and rose-color. Next to it was a bathroom, all pure and white. A daintily equipped kitchenette completed the suite. She fingered the thin blue china lightly.

She reentered the bedroom and gazed at herself in a long mirror. There was a tall wardrobe and she opened the door, childishly curious. Then she started back. On the hooks hung pretty clothes, the kind she had always wanted to wear.

She stood and stared at them, an eager color mounting into her cheeks.

It still lacked ten or fifteen minutes of being eleven o'clock.

Yielding to a tempting impulse, she took down one of the lovely gowns and deftly slipped it on. She turned to the mirror again and regarded herself long and thoughtfully. A clock in the studio chimed the hour.

She wandered about aimlessly, waiting for Mr. Lamont to come.

She thought that she would like to have him see how nice she looked in the pretty gown.

A little shamefacedly she went back to the mirror and viewed herself again. Yes, it was very becoming.

The quarter, then the half hour were chimed melodiously.

She dropped down into a low seat by the fireplace, wondering if she had better stay.

Why did not Mr. Lamont come?

Perhaps he refrained from connecting himself with this beautiful place which he had asked her to occupy. Perhaps he hesitated delicately from breaking in upon her first impressions. Perhaps he did not mean to come at all.

She sat thinking reverently of his unselfish kindness.

The sharp, imperative ringing of the telephone bell broke harshly into her quiet thoughts.

She ran to the small side-table where the instrument stood and picked up the receiver.

"Yes," she answered to the unfamiliar voice sounding in her ear, "I am Miss Muriel Lee."

"Yes—yes—yes—" she answered consecutively to the questions which were asked her.

Then she dropped the receiver and stood staring at the softly blended mosaics with unseeing eyes.

His lawyer! Why did Mr. Lamont's lawyer wish to see her? Why would he be there in a few minutes? What had happened? Where was Mr. Lamont?

A strange, guilty feeling came over her.

*Who* was Mr. Lamont?

Was there something wrong in it all? Did he have a family—a wife? Had they discovered his kindness to her? Had they risen in arms against her? Would she be asked to leave the apartment? Would she be obliged to relinquish this rare friendship?

*Wait!* Did anything hide under this rare friendship?

She had trembled, grown paler over each fresh question.

Now a great flaring crimson color rushed into her cheeks.

She stumbled across the thick, silky Persian rug, and paused taut and breathless before the door when she heard the elevator stop at her landing and there came a delicate touch at her bell.

Finally she opened the door.

The lawyer, a keen-eyed, well-groomed man, stepped in.

He was very grave in his manner, but he gave her a slow glance of admiration as she drew herself up to learn the object of his visit.

"Miss Lee," he said, after some hesitation and after he had disposed of the usual conventional formalities, "I have handled Mr. Alexander Lamont's affairs for a great many years. I am familiar with every transaction of his life which involved any amount of

money. I had a talk of some length with him yesterday afternoon."

Muriel drew a breath of relief. Perhaps this was only another example of Mr. Lamont's kindness. Perhaps he had instructed the lawyer to give her a lease of the studio. Perhaps he has settled a little sum upon her for its maintenance in his odd, generous manner of endeavoring to make life easy and happy for worthy people. But, oh, could she take advantage of it?

An expression on the lawyer's face gave her a stab of distrust.

She stared at him with round eyes. Her eyelids fell suddenly. A queer pang went through her breast.

It occurred suddenly and poignantly to Muriel that she was a *woman*.

Why had Mr. Lamont given her this lovely studio?

The question groped through her brain like icy fingers.

"I am very sorry," the lawyer continued, "to be the bearer of unpleasant tidings, but I knew of Mr. Lamont's appointment with you here this morning, partly from matters he discussed with me yesterday, and partly from memoranda in his note-book. I considered it advisable for you to know why he had failed to keep his appointment."

"Why?" she asked sharply.

"At five o'clock this morning—Mr. Lamont died.

She gave a gasp of consternation.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Oh!—how terrible!"

She turned away and stood looking into the smoldering fire, her head bent over.

When at length she faced the lawyer again, she still stood with her head bent. She seemed unable to lift it.

"He was so kind," she said chokingly—"so good. He lived to make other people happy."

An inscrutable look flitted across the lawyer's countenance. His eyes roved speculatively about the finely appointed room. He observed the girl with covert interest.

"I quite understand your feelings, Miss Lee," he said wisely. "It is a great shock to lose an old friend like Mr. Lamont. It must, indeed, be a blow to you. It is to all of us. You need time to recover, to resign yourself to the altered circumstances. I hope you will make yourself as comfortable as you can here—let things continue as they were—"

"But I've never lived in the apartment," she interposed in a distressed voice. "I had just come in this morning to look around. I don't think I meant to stay."

"I am quite sure," the lawyer returned, "that Mr. Lamont intended you should stay."

"I—wanted to stay," she confessed.

"Then I hope you will decide to do so," he replied in satisfied tones, "and carry out Mr. Lamont's wishes. He had a great interest in your future. It would gratify him if he could know that you are trying to respect his last wishes."

The tears started to her eyes over this last allusion. It all seemed so right. What was it that she seemed to glimpse lurking under the surface?

Muriel lifted her eyes to the lawyer's face in a long, earnest, questioning look.

"And don't hesitate to call upon me," he went on reassuringly, "for any little service I can perform, any little luxuries you may need, any little assistance. In a day or two, after I have adjusted the affairs of his widow, I should like to call again and talk matters over."

Did Mr. Lamont's widow know? Muriel asked herself. She felt another stab of distrust, sinking deeper than the first. Her eyes filled with doubt. She shrank back instinctively.

What ulterior meaning was hiding from her? What demon lurked under the surface smugly playing, making sport of her ignorance?

"I can see that you are very much upset," the lawyer was saying sympathetically. "It would be unkind for

me to trouble you any longer to-day. Try and recover yourself—just make up your mind that you will do your level best."

"I'll try to," she promised.

She shook hands with him as he started to leave the apartment.

"Remember that I am at your command," he said.

"You're very kind," she faltered in reply.

He gave her hand a warm, sympathetic pressure.

"You are young and lovely," he said in a low voice. "The whole world is at your command."

When he had gone the girl sank into the nearest chair as though her strength had suddenly collapsed. She sat staring at the floor.

The clock chimed in silver tones the passing of another hour.

She lifted her head and looked about the room at each exquisite detail, arose and let her feet sink into the silky rug, examined its odd design, noticed its subdued, unusual coloring, made the tour of the apartment, appreciating each comfort, each artistic touch.

She paused again before the mirror in the rose and white boudoir and gazed at herself in the subtilely deli-

cate gown. A deep look of prescience was born in her eyes. A sob tore up through her throat.

She had probed beneath the surface. She had seen that smug, lurking demon. He was playing with her own immortal soul.

With hysterical haste she pulled off the dress as though it burned her skin. She hung it hurriedly back on its hook in the wardrobe. With frantic fingers she donned her own plain suit, her cheap little hat. She caught up the key and ran out of the apartment. She tossed the key to the hall-boy and walked wildly out to the street.

Her cheap, common little dwelling-place up-town seemed to hold out warm, comforting arms to Muriel. It was almost human in its sympathy. She stretched out her own arms to all that it contained, all that it meant. Her eyes grew very clear and bright.

That night when she was ready for bed she looked up at the patch of blue sky. The star was shining even more brightly.

It looked like a great star of hope.

A tear splashed down her cheek.

She wondered why God had guarded her so tenderly.

## 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**

# SKIPPER KEELSON'S COWBOY

A SHORT STORY

BY D. A. WASSON

**W**HEN Pawnee Pete's Peerless Performing Pioneers of the Prairie Primeval most ingloriously petered out one fine day in the little seaport town of Rivermouth, the alliterative aggregation of artists appertaining thereto gravitated into the great army of the unemployed.

That is to say, most of them did.

For a time Tom Spurr, champion bareback rider, aimlessly watched a United States marshal as he affixed his ominous labels of indebtedness to the various items of the plethora of priceless paraphernalia.

Then he sadly collected his possessions, a proceeding simplified by the fact that they were already on his back, and started off in quest of fresh fields and pastures new.

As he slouched dejectedly away a familiar and delectable odor mingled with the cool fresh south wind, and Spurr was on the instant galvanized into action.

He headed assiduously into the eye of the wind, and like a pointer went after the prize at the foot of his rainbow. The chase led him to the waterfront, and ultimately to the Herald of the Morning.

Now, to the romantically inclined, the above name suggests nothing less than a superb clipper-ship bowling along under all her snowy canvas with a spicy Elysium of Oriental incense hovering in her lee.

Truth, however, compels the statement that the Herald of the Morning

was an ancient and rust-streaked Down-East coasting schooner, laden with guano and lying in a Rivermouth dock redolent of sewerage. The latter-day exigencies of the American merchant marine are not conducive to romance.

When the cook went to the rail to empty a pan of dish-water overside he discovered the Westerner teetering on the cap-log of the wharf and gazing curiously down at the old coaster's weather-beaten decks. Such was the surprise of the autocrat of the mess-table that he dumped his burden in the newly swabbed waterways.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed. "Who let you out, neighbor?"

"Why, hello, Onions, that you?" said Spurr good-naturedly.

Captain Ephraim Keelson heard the voices and poked his ruddy little face leisurely out of the companionway.

"What in thunder have ye dug up now, cookie?" he asked indulgently.

Then his glance followed the steward's pointed finger and he lost his indifference.

"Turn out, mate, quick!" he belowered below waggishly. "Here's the wild man of Borneo hisself, stepped right out of a cirkis poster! Or meb-be it's a real live bronco buster!"

"Busted, pardner, busted," corrected the cowboy, pulling his pockets wrong side out and bearing with smiling composure the open-mouthed scrutiny of the Cape Cod mate, the Nova Scotian cook, and the Swede seaman comprising the crew.

In truth, in his unheard-of garb of wide sombrero, flowing kerchief, bow-legged, greasy, buckskin chaps, and a few other essentials, the newcomer was well calculated to inspire wonder among the Herald's people, to whom New York was "West," and Chicago remote as China.

"I was jest nacherly lookin' for a chew of terbacker and a job, pardner," explained he of the strange attire, "but I didn't reckon on this kind. Still, I'm willin' to be coaxed."

"Got to ship another man, anyway, cap'n," put in the mate.

"Sufferin' thole-pins! What would ye do aboard here?" gasped the skipper at this suggestion. "This ain't no farm, nor a cattle steamer, nor yet a set-fired loonatic asylum."

"Oh, I could make myself useful feedin' the donkey-boiler and the hawse-pipe, if worse come to worst," said the cow-puncher mischievously.

The captain snorted and the crew chuckled.

"I'm quite a sailor lad if I have to be, too," went on Spurr encouragingly, and none would have guessed him hungry since the day before. He hitched his trousers and executed an embryo fisher's hornpipe on the wharf. "Dash my timbers! Swab my scuppers! Shiver my toplights! A life on the ocean wave for mine!" he added theatrically as final proof of his sea-going status.

The captain conferred with the mate.

"What'll we do, Sam, ship this nut or go short-handed? There ain't another man to be had here for love nor money."

"Might's well sign him on," said the mate recklessly. "He looks to be rugged as a live oak, and we'll git a vordveel show hove in besides."

"What d'ye call yourself, anyway, Borneo?" asked the captain, undecided.

"Bareback rider, and more truth than poetry to the bareback part of it, too," said Spurr mournfully, fingering a hole in his last shirt.

"Don't ye know the likes of you is liable to git into trouble monkeyin' around all this wet water?" demanded the captain anxiously.

"I reckoned I sniffed the stock-yards down thisaway," explained Spurr meekly, "and so I hits the trail for the steers. But looks like all the steers down in these parts is yonder."

He pointed with a wink at the crew toward the bare oaken wheel, scoured bare as a hound's tooth by a thousand storms.

"Climb down here, ye pore misguided critter," groaned the skipper, "and we'll see what we kin do for ye. We got to have another man, even if he don't know a reef-point from a deck-load of lumber. We'll give ye a good practical lesson in sailorizin' the first send-off. Give us a hand with these hatches!"

"Hatches what?" asked the other with alacrity, as he swung into the rigging and dropped on deck like a load of brick in a triangle of grinning seamen. "Got a little chicken ranch some place? Reckon I struck the right outfit after all, then. Where's the coral?"

"What's he ravin' about?" said the captain, scratching his head in a puzzled manner. "I ain't sure now but it's my dooty to have him took care of."

"Great snakes! It's holler, ain't it?" went on the cowboy, as he looked into the yawning main hatch and down on to the reeking pile of guano bags which had lured him. "I'll be shot if 'tain't a regular cyclone cellar!"

"Holler! Well, I should holler!" said the skipper feebly.

But the new man lifted his corner of the main hatch with such ease that the scoffers decided that an ounce of discretion was worth a pound of valor, and concluded thenceforth to scoff in private.

"Of course ye kin stand trick at the wheel," said Captain Ephraim, struck by a sudden thought.

"Surest thing you know," replied Spurr eagerly. "Stand there till the

crack of doom, soon's I learn how to steer."

"Here, mate," called the captain in a muffled voice, "I'll turn him over to you, bein' as you took him on, as ye might say. Continue his course of instruction, ye know." Then he slipped triumphantly below.

The outraged mate muttered savagely after his receding superior, cast his eye about helplessly, and then tactfully began on the subject which he thought most congenial to his pupil.

"Well—" he said, "of course you know, young feller, that this little freight of gwaner ain't nothin' like a full cargo for this vessel."

"Sure!" said Spurr knowingly. "I could see that the minute I got here."

Much gratified, the mate went on.

"Yes, she's a great carrier, the old Herald is. Only last fall we went over the Shoals—over Nantucket Shoals, mind ye, and in the fall of the year—with a hunnerd and sixty-seven thousand foot of spruce scantlin' aboard—"

"Looky here, pardner," interrupted Spurr, "I'm tryin' my best to digest this here sailorizin' business, but I want to know how in the name of Davy Crockett you're goin' to stick a hundred and sixty thousand foot of scan'lous anything, I don't care a hoo-rah what it is, into a little boat that can't be more'n a hundred foot long the best you can make it."

The mate went to the companion-way and relinquished his charge to the skipper with much profane emphasis.

Captain Ephraim came on deck, deprecating the mate's failure with a lordly air. "I'm afeerd you wasn't never born to be a leader of men," he mourned. "It's practical lessons what does the business. Jest jawin' at 'em won't do no good in a week of Sundays."

He led his pupil aft and picked out the halyards by which a patched maintopsail was to mastheaded. Handing them to Spurr, he said:

"Maintops'l halyards! Tail on! Pull!"

The new man heartily hoisted away.

"Belay!" shouted Captain Ephraim at length. Spurr looked blank and again bore down on his halyards. "Belay! Make fast!" bellowed his mentor again. "Oh, sufferin' tholepins! Tie this string on that stick!"

"I'm sorry, pardner," said Spurr humbly. "Prob'ly I'd do better takin' care of them chickens, if you'll show me to 'em," with a wink at the cook.

This party prudently slunk forward to enjoy a laugh behind the forecabin.

"Now snicker, confound ye," said the captain indignantly to the mate. "Jest the same, that lesson learned him what 'belay' means, jest as I calc'lated it should. Rome wasn't built in a day, and 'twouldn't have been built yet if you'd been in charge, you grin-nin' pun'kin-head," he ended in righteous wrath.

The Herald of the Morning was expected to go to sea before dark, but a surprise was in store for her people. The dying south wind wafted a silent eager fogbank over the breakwater with its last salty breath. The captain swallowed his disappointment at losing a night run, and decided to solace himself by an evening ashore with the mate.

An envious crew watched their departure and wished that it were the end instead of the beginning of the trip. But an inventory showed that the combined finances of the forecabin would not even meet the most conservative needs of one lone last-nighter.

Spurr, resolved to make no more mistakes, had early turned in in the captain's bunk in the after house. The rest of the crew nursed their grouches until they realized the futility of it, and then succumbed to slumber also.

Freed of the sun's restraint the fog after dark became omnivorous. The city lights beyond the wharf-end, at first rebellious, were subdued utterly; cabin windows on neighboring craft glowed but faintly. Blackness was complete; silence would have been so but for the occasional sleepy cadence

of a harbor fog-bell and the musical tinkle of the ebb through the piling of the wharf.

Hours passed thus. Then into the dead somnolence of the dark came the hoarse discord of a drowning man's bubbling cries. To the befuddled sleepers as they stumbled on deck the outcry seemed to come from all points at once.

The cowboy, rubbing his eyes by the wheel, first heard a frantic splashing between vessel and wharf, and then the tide bore a floundering object out by her stern and seaward. The timid sparkle of phosphorescence troubling the hurrying black water receded inch by inch as the unhappy being fought the ebb.

The leaderless crew dropped the yawl boat from the davits by the run. As might have been expected, she landed bottom up in the water. Then they ran about the deck like decapitated chickens, yelling loudly for help.

Spurr took no part in such—to him—irrelevant proceedings. He whipped out a long knife, slashed the main sheet, deftly knotted one end, coiled it with lightning precision and leaped on the taffrail, sweeping his line overhead in great swishing circles. It was far heavier than any lariat he had ever wielded, but his big right arm took no heed of its clumsiness.

For an instant he balanced on the rail, then sent the cumbrous coil hurtling far out toward the faint luminous circles in the gloom below. Over the shoulders of the man struggling in the water it settled fairly.

"Haul in!" came a small cry.

As the crew now tailed on to the line they were reenforced by a crowd of bleary, beery loafers who had been routed by the uproar from their sodden pleasures on the water-front street.

Among them the mate had happened to mingle as he ran down the dock, but the captain was nowhere in the crowd. No, the captain was none other than the soggy reveler whom the men now gaffed aboard!

A few minutes rolling over a cask relieved him of the water—to speak conservatively—which he had absorbed. Then Spurr bore him, streaming clothes and all, down to the cabin.

"Never do it again—goin' to sign pledge!" gasped the penitent skipper.

"I ain't pertickler whether you sign the pledge or not, pardner," grinned the cowboy, "but I been waitin' till you come back to tell ye that I reckon I'll quit this job for somethin' that's more suited to my talents. That's when they always quit in the story-books, ye know—when they've made good."

"Made good? Who said you'd made good?" snarled the thankless skipper, fast recovering his wits and breath, and realizing that his presence was at the moment not exactly the commanding one that might have been expected in such an emergency.

"Made good? Why, throwin' one of them ropes is your business, ain't it? Why, that wasn't nothin' for you to do!"

"Naw!" chorused the crew jealously. "We could done it if we was cowboys!"

"Try him in the mornin'," advised the mate aside to Spurr. "He'll be feelin' better then."

"Now pile out of here, the whole bunch of ye," ordered the captain irritably, "and be ready to go to sea early in the mornin'. Can't a man take a little dip by hisself without raisin' all this hullabaloo?"

A crisp northwester had cleared the fog, and the smoky morning haze of Rivermouth's industry was trailing to sea behind it when Spurr next came on deck to find the crew casting the stops off the dingy sails. They hadn't even thought it worth while to call him, he thought a little grimly. But it was of small consequence.

Spurr realized when he had had enough; he had been used to making good, and to fail was not pleasant. The Herald was plainly getting ready to leave port, and as Spurr had no in-

tention of going with her he decided that it was time to be making his adieu.

"I reckon I ain't goin' to be much use aboard here, pard—cap'n," he began, walking up to the skipper, who showed no trace of his night's experience, "so I'll jest beat it while my shoes is good if ye can spare my services. Pleased to have met ye, and if ye ever happen to come out to Circle Bar, Wyoming, and want anything in the way of a job—"

"You won't do nothin' of the kind, Borneo," said Captain Ephraim firmly. "You've signed articles and you'll stay. I have seen better sailormen than what ye be, but as I told ye, we're short-handed, and half a loaf is better than no bread. You'll do well enough to pump and heave up anchor and sweat up sails—"

"Do you reckon you can keep me here if I take it into my head to light out, pardner?" asked Spurr deliberately.

"Mebbe not," said the skipper nastily, "but I calc'late there's a police force up here somewheres, and they know what to do with seamen that refuses duty. Hey, mate?"

"Oh, all right, then," drawled Spurr. "I ain't enough sailor yet to conduct a mutiny like it ought to be handled. I'll stick around."

"That's where your head's level," said the captain grimly. "We ain't lookin' for trouble aboard here, my boy, and jest to show ye I don't bear ye no gredge for this or for last night I'm goin' to send ye up the main riggin' a piece to stick up a flag for a tug. Got to have help to git out ag'in' the tide, ye know."

The cowboy eyed the offshore ratlines dubiously, then tucked the frayed bit of bunting under his arm and went gingerly aloft.

Ten minutes later Captain Ephraim squinted up at the result of his protégé's work. "Wuss and wuss!" he grunted disgustedly. "You been and set that flag union down, and by the great horn-spoon you're the feller

that'll trot right up there agin and put her right side up!"

"Well, it won't be no worse than it was the first time, I reckon," said Spurr cheerfully, and wondering a little at the skipper's ominous tone. "I got the hang of them ornery stairs a little this time."

The mate took the captain by the arm and led him aside. Followed a low-voiced discussion in which the mate was evidently an unsuccessful remonstrant. At length the latter walked off, shaking his head and studiously avoiding looking in Spurr's direction.

"Wonder what deviltry they're hatchin' up for me now," thought the cowboy.

"Well, why don't ye git busy and git up there?" sneered Captain Ephraim. "Got cold feet?"

"There ain't no cold feet in my vocaberlary, pardner," said Spurr briskly, and climbed into the rigging again.

The cook came aft from the galley, wiping his hands on his apron; the seaman swarmed in from the bowsprit, where he was loosing the jibs; the mate and captain ostentatiously busied themselves in reeving off a new main sheet, but at the same time not a movement of the cowboy escaped them. A sudden funereal hush hung over the vessel's sunny decks.

"I may not be much of a sailor, but I'm a first-class goat," thought Spurr as he mounted step by step and noted the breathless audience below.

The cowboy reached the reversed ensign, unfastened it from the rigging, and was about to secure it in its proper position when a rotten ratline parted under his heavy tread.

He clutched frantically for another, missed it, straddled a third for an instant, then catapulted head downward, caromed against the sheerpoles and cartwheeled deep into the turbid water of the harbor. The flag wound like a shroud about his shooting body.

The crew ran as one man to the rail

and stared in fascination at the foamy undulations where their late shipmate had disappeared.

"I told ye so," reproved the mate. "I told ye ye hadn't orter done it," while the cook and seaman too bent their reproachful glances on their chastened lord and master.

"How did I know?" faltered poor Captain Ephraim, all his bluster gone, and started with bowed head for the cabin.

"He was a game one," sighed the mate, and this seemed a requiem.

But at this juncture the cow-puncher, puffing lustily after his deep dive, popped into view two fathoms from the vessel's side. The mate ran for a pike-pole; the cook and man rained a fusillade of battered fenders, oars and other impromptu life-preservers at the head of the splashing cowboy, some of which narrowly escaped braining him.

Spurr grabbed a bobbing water-cask and unwound the clinging bunting from his face.

"Shoot, if you must, this old gray head, but spare your country's flag"—he panted.

"Fresh as ever!" muttered the skipper, and then an inspiration came to him, perhaps born of a foggy recollection.

He took the end of the main peak halyards from the coil on the pin-rail and cast it squarely into the new man's arms. Then all hands bundled him over the side.

"Young feller," said Captain Ephraim soberly, "I shall be pleased to shake ye by the hand, if you're agreeable."

"Me, too, Mister Crockett," echoed

the mate. "You certainly made good for keeps that time."

"Spunky ain't no name for it," said the cook sententiously.

"Ya, ya, she bane gude sport," corroborated Ole.

"What in the name of the Great Manitou ails the bunch of ye?" demanded the bewildered Spurr, holding both hands to his aching head while the pool about his feet encircled his hearers. "All I've done is made another bull, ain't it? What's eatin' ye? Let me in on it, will ye? What's the joke?"

"Well, ye see, old man," explained the mate with a chummy hand on Spurr's shoulder and an accusing gaze on the humbled skipper. "settin' that flag union down by mistake that way was the worst kind of a hoodoo, and by all calc'lation you was bound to git a nasty tumble out of it at the very least. There ain't a man aboard of this hooker would have went aloft a second time like you done, and there ain't nothin' aboard the old Herald that's too good for ye from now on. Jest say the word."

"Great Snakes!" said Spurr under his breath. "There's more to this business of makin' good than appears on the surface!"

Then he turned to Captain Ephraim. "That right, pard—cap'n?" he asked.

The skipper squirmed and started to reply, but Spurr cut him short. "That's very good of ye, I'm sure, pardner," he said hastily. "There is one little favor I'd like to ask of ye, and that's a fact. I'd like to have ye go down in your cyclone cellar there and make me out a discharge jest as soon as the Lord will let ye."



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# HIS CHOSEN FIELD

A SHORT STORY

BY JOHN BARTON OXFORD

**W**ITH his hat-brim pulled down, his overcoat collar turned up, and his head lowered to the icy blasts which rattled the bare branches above his head, Andrew McClochen poked down the dreary little suburban street, pausing now and then in the glare of an infrequent street-lamp to note the numbers on the doors of the little cottages, each with its tiny bit of straw-covered lawn.

"Fifty-eight," grunted Andrew, counting from the last lamp-post, "sixty, sixty-two, sixty-four! This'll be it!"

He started up the slate walk to the front door, but, as the front of the house was dark and he caught the glimmer of light from windows to the rear, he made his way thither, stumbled up a small, wooden stoop, and rapped thunderously on what was very evidently the kitchen door.

Footsteps creaked across the bare floor within; the door was opened and a wiry little man of fifty shaded his eyes with his hand as he peered at the muffled figure on the stoop.

"Good evenin' to ye, Con Corri-gan," Andrew greeted him. "Ye'll na be knowin' me, to-judge by the perplexity of ye. Ye've surely na forgotten Andy McClochen."

"Andy McClochen!" the man in the door repeated in surprise. Then he shot out a hospitable hand, which the man on the stoop pump-handled cordially. "'Tis manny and manny the day since I've laid eyes on yer.

Come in out av the cold. A dirty night, ain't ut? L'ave me take that coat av yours and sit here close to the fire. Ye're still runnin' the engines down to the loom works?"

Andrew, chafing his blue hands above the red-hot little kitchen stove, nodded.

"Still there. 'Tis all the job I'm good for," he laughed.

"'Tis fine to see yer again," Corri-gan declared, bringing out a rocking-chair from the room beyond for his guest. "Ye'll have a wee nip? No? Or a pull at a pipe? No again? My, my, but the good b'y ye've grown to be, Andy."

Andrew McClochen grinned and settled himself in the rocker close to the fire.

"Ye'll think it strange, no doobt, Con," said he, "for me to come look-in' ye up after all these years on a night like this. The fact is I want yer help. I want ye to do somethin' for me, Con."

"Well, now, annythin' in the power av me, Andy, I'll do and gladly," said Corri-gan warmly.

"Ye still foller the ring, Con?" Andrew asked.

"Oh, I'm in pretty close touch wit' the game," said Corri-gan. "Av course, at my age, I don't do no active work, but I handle a few likely b'ys now and then, train 'em for their goes, yer know, and the like."

"Good!" said Andrew McClochen with much conviction. "Good!" he repeated. "I thought I'd make no mistake in comin' to ye, Con. Now

this job I want done I'm willin' to pay liberal for. There's a man I want licked."

Corrigan showed no very great surprise. Indeed, his expression was that of a man who had heard a like request more than once before.

"I guess maybe it could be did, Andy," he chuckled.

"I want him licked good. I don't want it no ordinary lickin'. I want it the kind of a lickin' that'll take the starch clean out of him and—"

"Ye bloodthirsty divil, Andy!" Con laughed. "What has this felly ever done to you to deserve such a beatin'-up? Tell me about ut. Who is he?"

"That boy of mine—Jamie," McClochen explained. Corrigan whistled under his breath, and leaned questioningly forward in his chair.

"It's like this," McClochen went on. "I've always told him he could make his own choice when it come time for him to start out in the world for himself. I've told him no matter what he chose to do I'd never stand in his way; I'd help him all I could.

"He's seventeen now, just out of the high school last June. He's been workin' at this and dabblin' with that ever since then, with his mind not on anything he does and all the time actin' as if he was tryin' to tell me somethin' that wouldn't come out. Well, last night he told me what it was he had on his mind. He's been doin' a lot of boxin' off and on for a couple of years. They say he's clever at it. Last night, as I'm sayin', he has it out with me. He tells me his mind is made up to go into the ring and make good.

"And he throws it up to me that I've always told him, no matter what he chose to do, I'd never stand in his way, but help him all I could. He acts, when he tells me all this, like he didn't really think I'd stand by what I'd said. But I never makes a complaint, Con. All I does is ask him if he's sure that that's what he wants to

do, and the way his eyes shone when he told me his heart was set on it was answer enough for me. I told him, if that was the case, I'd nothing to say. I even told him I'd have a word with you some time, and that maybe I could get you to take him in hand and start him right. He'd heard of you and was fair delighted with the prospect.

"So I want ye to take him in hand, Con. I'll foot the bills. I want ye to train him and get a fight for him at one of the clubs round here. And in that very first fight I want him licked—not just an ordinary lickin', but a lickin' so bad he'll want to quit the ring of his own accord for good and all."

Con Corrigan sat wrinkling and unwrinkling his heavy brows.

"Ye see how I'm placed," McClochen urged. "I never thought of his wantin' to do anything like this when I preached to him about a man choosin' his own field of work."

"Yer think this is the best way?" Corrigan asked doubtfully.

McClochen nodded vigorously.

Corrigan thought deeply for a time.

"There's a felly round town here named Hughey Goode," he said at length. "He's a hard one, all right. He's fast and he's clever. As yet he ain't got much of a rep, so he takes a mill, when he can get one, down to the Crescent Club. He'd give Jamie an awful drubbin'—"

"Could ye fix it?" asked McClochen eagerly.

"Oh, I guess I could fix ut," said Corrigan. "He's got the awfullest kick in his right mitt I ever see in a young felly."

"Then he's the one for the job," McClochen declared.

"He's a fire-eater, all right; he goes in to finish his man as soon as he can. He'd be likely to beat up Jamie pretty bad," Corrigan suggested.

"That's what we're after," McClochen reminded him, with a stubborn setting of his jaws.

They settled on the price Corrigan

should have for his services in the matter, and McClochen took his departure, chuckling mightily to himself as he made his way down that wind-swept street to his car.

"Let a lad pick his own work or quit it by his own choice. That's the way to do it," he told himself as he turned into the bleak suburban square.

Jamie McClochen, a sturdy, well-developed young fellow, was overjoyed when he learned from his father that he was to go into training with no less a celebrity than Con Corrigan.

"I was afraid you'd squeal on all your promises, dad," said he, "when you knew what I really wanted to do. You're one father in a thousand. I know you haven't much use for the ring, and that makes what you've done all the finer, to my mind. You watch me make good! I'll make you proud of me—see'f I don't!"

"Go ahead, lad. Every man to a callin' of his own choosin'," said McClochen with a grin the meaning of which Jamie entirely mistook.

Thereafter, each evening, McClochen was forced to listen to Jamie's glowing accounts of his day's work with Con Corrigan.

"The cleverest old rooster at the game you ever imagined," said Jamie. "Why, dad, I didn't know the first thing about it till he took me on. I've learned more in the time I've been with him than I have from all the rest of them put together. And say, he thinks he can get me a chance next month at the Crescent Club. He says it will be a tryout for me. He's going to put me on with a man I should have no trouble with. I told him not to make it too easy, and he said I'd got to win this first real go of mine."

"Who's the feller you go on with?" asked McClochen innocently.

"A feller named Hughey Goode. I've heard of him, though I never saw him in action. He's been on a number of times at the Crescent Club. Con says I'll have no trouble with

him, or if I do I'd better give up the game right here and now."

McClochen turned away to hide his smile. Crafty Con Corrigan! He surely was doing his work well!

"And I'll win that bout, or quit," Jamie boasted mildly. "Con says a win over Hughey Goode will help a lot in the way of laying a foundation for a little reputation. Gee, dad, you sure were a brick to put me in touch with Con. I've got to make good now, especially after what you've done for me!"

Again McClochen turned away his head. But he was not smiling this time.

"Ah, weel," McClochen said aloud to himself after the enthusiastic Jamie had gone out, "he's young. He'll soon get over the bitter disappointment of it. And 'tis best he should think he's doin' it by his own choice, too."

But, since Jamie was the apple of his eye, his face was still troubled as he, too, started off for bed.

McClochen had no intention at all of seeing that affair at the Crescent Club. But on the evening of the scheduled mill between his son and Hughey Goode, McClochen was strangely uneasy. Early in the evening Jamie, full of hope and gay banter, had started off with Con Corrigan; and as they left the flat Con had managed to whisper in McClochen's ear:

"Hughey's been tellin' all his friends what he'll do to this young McClochen upstart to-night. And he will, too. I guess Jamie'll be glad enough to change his life job after to-night. They tell me Hughey is in great trim."

McClochen found the evening paper uninteresting. Somehow his mind would stray to the Crescent Club. At times he felt almost a criminal; but it was all for Jamie's ultimate good. He solaced himself over and over with that thought—or tried to.

Jamie's bout, so Con had told him,

would come off a little after nine. By half past eight McClochen was pacing the floor restlessly; by quarter of nine he was having a mighty struggle with himself; by ten minutes of nine he was tearing madly down-town in the unaccustomed luxury of a taxicab; by nine he was buying a ticket for a seat well up toward the roof at the Crescent Club's barnlike building.

McClochen had never been a ring fan. He entered the arena and stumbled to his seat just as deafening roars greeted the finish of a particularly fast bout, in which, even now, the referee was counting out one of the men, who lay face down on the mat.

The air was blue with smoke and foul from lack of proper ventilation. The tiers of faces that McClochen saw as he stumbled into the wake of a nimble usher to his own seat, seemed hard and coarse and brutal through that billowing smoke. And Jamie had wanted to follow a game like this! He was glad he had come. He felt much more at peace with himself and the course he had taken with Jamie.

The ring beneath the flaring, heavy-shaded lights was cleared. The victor skipped nimbly over the ropes; the vanquished, supported by two seconds, wobbled out drooping. The bottles and pails and towels and chairs were whisked from the ringside, and others took their places.

McClochen sat down beside a very stout gentleman, whose vest was open, and the tattered cigar in whose mouth told plainly of recent exciting moments.

Then came a ripple of applause; a few feeble cheers. Into the ring came six figures, two of them in long bathrobes, which were instantly stripped from their shoulders while gloves were duly inspected by the seconds. A man crawled through the ropes and stood puff-cheeked in the ring as he bellowed his announcement:

"The next bout, gen'l'mun, 'll be ten rounds between Hughey Goode, in this corner, and James McClochen, in

this corner. This is Mr. McClochen's first appearance at this club! The management has asked me to request the spectators to kindly refrain from further smoking this evening!"

McClochen was bending far forward. In one corner of the ring, his flesh glowing smooth and pink in the light which beat down upon him, his muscles rippling and swelling beneath that satiny skin, was Jamie, smiling confidently at the opposite corner, where the seconds were lacing the gloves on to a squat, dark man, with heavy, black brows and a receding forehead.

"Who's this McClochen, cull?" asked the fat man beside Andrew, shifting his tattered cigar as he spoke. "Ever hear of him before?"

"New man, likely," said Andrew shortly. "They say this is his first appearance here."

"There won't be nuthin' to this," said the fat man. "Hughey Goode won't do a thing to him. That other guy's too pretty to fight. Look at the nice little even part in his hair. I know them kind. They ain't no fighters. Toe-artists, them fellers is. That's all. Gimme a guy like Hughey that looks his job."

Andrew bristled. He was about to make reply when the gong struck. The two in the ring advanced and clasped their gloved right hands. Then they squared off. Hughey Goode feinted with his left, and whipped over a wicked right. Jamie danced daintily out of danger.

"See? What'd I tell yer?" the fat man beside McClochen grunted. "He oughter be at dancin' school, not in the ring. Ah!"

For Hughey had sent through another blow which Jamie did not duck quite quickly enough. It rocked back his head. The crowd howled its delight.

"Dat a boy, Hughey! Drop him quick! Don't play with him!" came the yells.

"This is just plain murder, runnin'

a bout like this," grunted the fat man. "I hope Hughey puts him out quick. Darn bouts like this!"

Hughey Goode made one of his celebrated rushes; his fists worked like flails; but his nimble opponent was wary now. He moved out of danger with wonderful speed.

"Aw, stand up and fight!" howled the crowd to Jamie.

The gong struck. McClochen became aware, as the tension lessened with the temporary cessation of hostilities, that he had been leaning far forward in his seat and that he was biting his under lip.

The second round began. Hughey Goode rushed straight at his opponent, evidently bent on his immediate annihilation; but Hughey Goode got the surprise of his life in the shape of two stunning blows in the face that stayed that rush and put him momentarily on the defense.

Then came one of those bursts of slugging that brought the crowd to its feet, yelling like wild Indians. Blows were given and taken in a furious whirlwind, and then Jamie staggered back and went down; but he was up in a minute and blocking the blows Hughey rained at him.

"Say, that's a game little guy, all right," the fat man yelled in McClochen's ear. "Clinch him, there! Hold on to him!"

He jumped onto his seat. Quite unconscious what he was doing, so did McClochen.

"Clinch him!" McClochen was yelling at the top of his voice, just as Jamie managed to get his arms over Hughey Goode's shoulders and clung there desperately, recovering his wind while the referee rushed up to part them.

"Won't fight, eh? Oughter be in a dancin'-class, hey?" McClochen questioned his neighbor between the rounds. "Whatter ye think of him now?"

"I eat my former words about him, pardner," conceded the fat man.

If the second round had been fast, the third was a cyclone. The fighting began when, at the tap of the gong, both men rushed furiously at each other. Everybody was up on the seats now, and everybody was yelling. It was the sort of fighting that stirs the blood and brings whoops from the most conservative throats.

And so it was for four more fast and furious rounds. The men went to their corners panting, drooping, all but hitting the mat from sheer exhaustion. They came back each time with that same mad rush to renew the fierce battle in the middle of the ring.

Andrew McClochen put his arms round the fat man; he shouted inarticulate things in his ear; he danced, he roared, he bellowed with the rest of the excited crowd at the top of his voice. He accepted a cigar the fat man offered him, quite unmindful of what he was doing, and he stuck it in his mouth—he, Andrew McClochen, who never smoked.

Then came that awful round, the eighth, when Hughey Goode sent his man twice to the mat.

"Gee, too bad! Too bad!" growled the fat man. "All over now! He'll never get up after that punch!"

In the hush that followed the referee began to count. At "seven" Jamie rolled on his side; at "eight" he lifted one shoulder; at "nine" he got up somehow, and in sheer desperation managed to clinch and hang on until the gong struck.

Whereat the crowd, who seemed to be with him almost to a man, vented mighty whoops, and Andrew McClochen, in a burst of exuberance, banged his fat neighbor's hat far down over his eyes.

But his joy at that moment was as nothing to what it was in that tenth round, when Jamie, suddenly shot his left to the stomach and his right to Hughey Goode's jaw.

"He's got him!" bawled the fat man above the uproar. "He's got him—yee-ow-wow!"

At the ten of the referee's count, which spelled defeat for Hughey Goode, McClochen seized the portly gentleman with the open vest, hugged him like a long-lost brother, and then sped down the steps in the aisle to the ringside.

The first Con Corrigan knew of McClochen's presence at the arena was when, just as he was tossing Jamie's bathrobe to him, he received a stunning whack between the shoulders.

"What do ye know about it, Con?" inquired a voice cracking in its excitement.

Con Corrigan, turning and beholding McClochen there beside him, looked worried.

"Gee, Andy," he muttered, "I

hadn't anny idea he'd do ut like that, honest—"

"Neither had I!" McClochen replied. "Nor yet what it meant to me to have him do it."

Before the astounded Corrigan's eyes, he dove through the ropes and proceeded before the cheering crowd to embrace his son.

"I had to make good for you, dad," Jamie roared into his ear to make himself heard above the din. "It was fierce, but I knew I would because I had to!"

McClochen patted him on the shoulder.

"Let a man pick his work and he'll make good at it. I always held to that," his dad declared shamelessly.

## TO THE EGOTIST

By Strickland Gillilan

YOU wouldn't be wrong, because you are You!  
 Whatever you think or say is true.  
 Of course you have missed, in times long past,  
 But you've figured it out just right, at last.  
 Whoever dissents from your own belief—  
 Lord pity the chap—he's a cause for grief!  
 Till you have discerned it, there's nothing new—  
 You couldn't be wrong while you are You.

Just think of the wretches in all the earth  
 Whose parents mistakenly hailed their birth!  
 But yet they were born with a fallible streak—  
 Oh, where is the eye would fail to leak  
 At thought of the sorrow we all should feel  
 O'er cases that thus to Yourself appeal!  
 But what is the rest of the world to do—  
 You can't be mistaken so long as you're You!

But hold a bit—you with the big, swelled head;  
 There's a thing or two else that might be said:  
 For every one of these fools called "they"  
 Is I to himself, in his pitiable way.  
 Also he is You, to a few proud friends—  
 Thus on, in a series that never ends.  
 Now, Smarty, d'ye think it can still be true  
 You cannot be wrong because you are You?

# THE CRIMSON LADDER

A SHORT STORY

BY JENNIE HARRIS OLIVER

I.



“OME, thar,” invited a heavy voice.

John Sutton, pushing open the door which scraped on the warped boards, entered, so bewildered by his tramp through the storm that for a moment he stood dazedly in the glow of firelight, the water dripping from him. Again the heavy voice spoke:

“Set,” it said, by which Sutton knew he was to occupy the bench shoved forward by a heavily shod foot.

In a warm hollow of silence, broken only by the dripping of the eaves and the snapping of pine-cones, the way-farer thankfully held his chilled hands to the fireplace.

At one side, so close to the flames that the odor of crisping hair mingled with that of coffee steaming up from a tin bucket before her, a bent, sallow woman sliced bacon into a skillet, and raked out embers for the roasting of an ash-cake.

Her low “Howdy?” was murmured disinterestedly, but a thin little boy of ten, with tousled curls and a shrewd face, routed from his corner by the heat of the freshly raked embers, was unmistakably excited.

He planted himself before the visitor, legs wide apart, red mouth working dimpling hollows in his cheeks; his pointed hazel eyes roving from the top of Sutton’s brown locks to the tips of his soaked patent leathers.

Finally the host, who had seemed lost in a pipe dream, tamped his tobac-

co with a thick forefinger and asked briefly:

“Travelin’ fur about hyar?”

Sutton looked at him oddly.

“Not very,” he replied, studying the old face for some hidden thing. Then, as if disappointed, he turned his attention to his surroundings, centering his scrutiny in the very last thing one would look for in the cabin of a common mountaineer—a piano.

The old man, whose keen eyes had learned the value of half-lifted lids, approved of the visitor’s tardy interest. He, too, looked at the instrument.

“Agent left hit hyar more’n a year ago,” he told Sutton with something like a smile. “Was totin’ hit over from Lone Pine and the waggin broke down.” He chuckled. “Reckon hit’s mine now—mine and Mag’s.”

He turned to the girl who sat back in the shadow of the loft ladder, her face drooped against the wall.

“Come, gyarl, make hit talk fer urse.”

The girl stirred uneasily. “I’d ruther not, dad”—the primitive words were music—“not tuh-night.”

“A’ right,” said her father vexedly; “I’ll jest write fer that agent tuh come and fetch hit away. Tain’t no good ef yo’re goin’ tuh ac’ thisaway.”

The girl slipped out of the shadow and passed before the stranger. She was tall and straight. Girlishly slim, and, even in clumsy shoes, she trod lightly. Her profile was toward Sutton as she seated herself on the broad polished bench—a dark cameo against the fire-glow.

Embarrassed, her long, tapering hands hesitated on the keyboard, then the awkward moment passed. Her dark eyes lifted and she seemed to look straight through the rough wall into the dwindling storm—questioning the blackness beyond. Before she had struck a note Sutton knew he was not going to listen to a primitive rendering of "Turkey in the Straw," or "The Devil's Dream"; but he was entirely unprepared for what he did hear.

Woven by the low-murmuring tremolo of two bass notes, there grew in the room a black web of melody—the muttering growling effect of thunder; and ripping through it in one darting scale after another, higher and higher, there flashed through it the forked dazzle one sees when alone in the sodden night.

Then rain fell in sharp staccato; wind roared in the tree-tops, and all died away in a plaintive aria—softer, finer, until it rested upon two notes, upon one note, upon a sigh—silence.

By the uncultured soul of this mountain girl, nature had entered the room. It was as if she had painted a storm masterpiece against the crude canvas of a wagon-sheet, or drawn a pipe-organ halleluiahs chorus from the great Eolian harp of the wooded hills.

The old man nodded and grinned; but Sutton was breathing fast.

"By George," he said, "I don't know just what that said to you, but I was back on the slippery mountain-side; wild things howling too close to be comfortable; broken limbs crashing around me. You must have a wonderful teacher here on these heights."

The old man laughed gruffly.

"Hit's born in Mag, I reckon. She don't do nuthin' evenin's but set thar and make that thing talk. She hain't never made hit storm afore."

"Set up and eat," said the girl's mother, pushing a big cat from a chair and scraping it forward for the stranger.

Sutton obeyed with alacrity, for he was hungry, but all through the meal

his thoughts were filled with the unusual music he had listened to. He was crazy about music, and extremely proud of the talent he had discovered in this out-of-way place; for was not the girl—but that could wait.

"I don't suppose you'd ever guess who I am," he said, when he was again seated with the family at the fireplace. "Of course, that is not strange, as we never saw each other before, but I was sure some feature, something in my build or voice, would remind you of father."

He turned squarely upon the old man as if to impart a pleasant secret: "I am your nephew, John Sutton."

"My—whut!" The old man got out of his chair and unfolded to his great height. "My whut? Air yur—a Sutton?"

The visitor was startled by the sudden hostility in his supposed relative's face. "Yes," he said wonderingly; "aren't you?"

"Not by a blamed sight. I'm Elnathan Black!"

When Black had thus proclaimed himself, he had spoken a volume. Sutton, too, arose.

"Well, I'll be darned. I must have got on the wrong side of the cañon. Dad warned me about it, and even gave me a map, but the storm came on so sudden, and it got so dark—"

"Hit can't be helped," said Elnathan coldly, "but yo're the fust Sutton as ever stood in this cabin. I guess yuh've heerd consid'able about hit, and to-morrer yuh kin go and look fer yoreself at some long heaps o' dirt 'twasn't thar when the world was made. I don't need tuh remin' yuh that them was Blacks and Suttons as didn't keep tuh their own side. Ef yo're ready we'll go down tuh the Pass. A trail leads from thar tuh yore Uncle Hiram's door. Hit was wore thar afore yore grandpap. Jonathan Sutton, shot down Ephraim Black in the co't-room, when a suit went ag'in' him. 'Tain't never growed over, cause hit's rock—plumb rock."

As Sutton passed out into the night, his eyes crossed the prying gaze of the small boy, and focused upon the dark eyes of the girl, Maggie—eyes that spoke of baffled ambition and passionate romance, and all the young blood of him leaped in compassion.

## II.

"BEN CASOWAY'S comin', Mag," piped the small boy, who answered to the name of Buster. "He's ridin' Devil agin!"

Maggie came and stood in the doorway with her brother. The clatter of hoofs that had attracted the boy's attention ceased, and a huge young mountaineer flung himself down and began leading his horse toward a rickety stable at the rear. A moment later he stamped into the cabin, greeting the girl familiarly:

"Howdy, Mag? Who's that yore pap's totin' off down the trail?"

Buster opened his mouth to gossip, met his sister's eyes, and paused, his lips apart.

"A man lost in the storm," replied the girl simply. "How's yore mammy?"

Casoway flung himself onto a bench and leaned back against the wall, his long legs stretched to the fire, hands hooked in his belt, wide hat shoved back on his thick black hair.

"She's peart," he answered absently, his mind still on the stranger. "What kind of a man was he—younger old?"

Buster could no longer hold his tongue.

"Lordy, Ben, yuh dought tuh seen him!" he piped, licking his red lips with a pointed tongue, as if the memory were delicious. "His pants was peenched, thisaway"—he illustrated on Casoway's—"and his ha'r behint want no longer'n a cat's. He had a dimunt ring, and shoes—shoes yuh c'd see yore face in. And whin Mag made the pieanner thunder fer him, he jest set thisaway!"

Buster reared himself on a chair, planted his spread fingers on his knees, and bugged his eyes impressively.

"He war shore some foxy!"

Casoway scowled.

"Git yore dress tuh-day, Mag?"

He turned to the girl, who was frowning whitely upon her brother. "I see yuh go down tuh Boxwood."

Maggie nodded, glad of a change of subject.

"Well, git hit, and les have a look," he ordered in a voice prophetic of the girl's future.

Under the proddings of that tone one could see her going down the years, shedding radiance as she went—bent, apathetic, servile.

She opened a rough cedar chest under one of the windows, and drew forth something that glowed like the heart of old wine. It was silk of the hue of ripe sumacs. She shook out the folds and, struck by a sudden delightful whim, began winding her slim form in them until she blazed up a tall rare flame, her dark head lifting in unconscious beauty from the gorgeous glow.

"Be keerful," cautioned Casoway, "yo're switchin' hit in the ashes. How much be they, twenty yards?"

"Uhuh," the girl answered—too absently to please Casoway.

"Yo're a queer um, Mag," he laughed gratingly. "Hyar yuh've spent yore hull life savin' fer one perty dress—yore weddin' one, too, and then switch hit around as ef hit war caliker."

"I hain't never said 'twas a weddin' dress," Maggie told him bravely.

"Co's yuh hain't," soothed Casoway, amused by the flash of temper, which, in the natural course of events, meant so little. "Co's not—'twas me that said hit."

Again his mind reverted to the stranger, and he drew Buster between his knees, asking him question after question about John Sutton.

Buster, nothing loath, gave a vivid impersonation of the city man—even to the toss of the head used to remove an obstinate lock of hair from his fore-

head. His monkey-quick eyes had caught everything, and Casoway's scowl grew blacker as he listened.

Across the hearth sat Maggie, one long hand cupping her chin, the other clutched in a fold of the crimson fabric trailing across her lap—lost in dreams. Near by was her mother, dozing fitfully over her short, black pipe, her prematurely bent shoulders, and the lines of her faded face, a hundred years old, at least.

Only twenty years lay between a girl's springtime and the colorless autumn of the mother. It is the fate of those who dwell in the mountain silences.

### III.

JOHN SUTTON's trip to the Ozarks concerned an unexpected vacation and a desire to see the primitive surroundings from which his father, Douglas Sutton, had sprung.

But he was mightily interested in his uncle's story of the feud. He reveled in a description of Elnathan's Maggie—an uncommon character, even in her childhood.

He could see her—a slim, bareheaded wanderer in the passes, with the mettlesome toss of a pony, and big dark eyes that questioned. He drew his cousin Sally into a eulogy of the wonderful wedding "gown" which had been reported on by the mountain doctor.

"Hit's got raised flowers," cried Sally, her blue eyes shining, "and hit's full a yard wide. Ever since she was five year old she's raised turkeys and picked nuts and berries, and saved ever cent. Old Dr. Spicers gyarl, Susie, was thar when the bank was broke—hit was a earthin bank, shaped like a peeg, and they was twenty-five dollars and seventeen cents. I'd shore like tuh be tuh that weddin'!"

From what Sutton heard of Ben Casoway, and from the hostility of the glances that stabbed him when the two met at the stock-yard in Boxwood, the future husband of his mountain girl

was a young ruffian. Her marriage to him would be like the chaining of an eagle to an elephant.

He could see the poor eagle—after it had silently strained at its fetters—settle back with dim eyes and the dust on its plumage. More and more his heart bled for her, and his chivalrous mind dwelt with her in her isolation and thwarted dreams.

Lying back among the drifts of autumn leaves, the healing of the pines in his nostrils, he reveled in a transplanting of her; thrilled at thought of her dark beauty in modish garments; her slim feet buttoned snugly in fine velvet; her wonderful hands busy with books, pictures, and music.

One evening as he loitered idly along the edge of the cañon, he looked across the gulf and saw her standing there, unconscious of his presence. Her coarse, sleeveless apron, sagging with some burden, was gathered in one hand, the other shaded her eyes toward his uncle's cabin on the slope.

Scarcely breathing, he stood waiting for her eyes to come around to his—waiting to surprise their expression, but there was no self-revelment in her face when at last their gaze met, only relief and anxiety.

Many times she had come to this narrow gulf, waiting for this very moment, and now the thoughts which concerned his safety, groped helplessly for expression.

After all, such thoughts were but vague—born of Casoway's dark hints and threats. Casoway was always threatening some one since the horse, Devil, had been singled out from the drove stolen under cover of darkness from the stock-yard at Boxwood, across Bald Ridge to the company who were going far north.

Maggie said none of the things she had meant to. She had been loyal to the feud too long to speak readily against a friend of the Blacks. She replied to Sutton's inquiry that she was gathering turkey eggs. She had fifteen—each one more speckled than the

rest—in her apron. She showed him one, and he laughed appreciatively.

"Turkeys are more brightly tinted here than in the markets at home," he told her. "Everything of nature's is."

He picked up a scarlet maple leaf and held it silently on his palm, waiting for her to speak.

"That may be of turkeys and leaves," she said wistfully, "but what are they?"

Sutton had said the right thing. As he went on, drawing her to him across the gulf, her red, repressed lips began to turn the key of the silent years. She was not ignorant, and as she spoke freely, it was more and more in the language of the few books her mother had brought from the 'Hio. The old mountain doctor had brought her music journals, too, so her rendition was not quite the miracle it had seemed.

It was a strange place for a courtship. Long ago Sutton had heard, and with amusement, that farther down, in the region of the sangdiggers, many another couple had become acquainted on opposite sides of the chasm, never even touching hands until required to by the "jestice" in his office among the foothills.

For a time the situation had its charm, but it was not in a Sutton to abide by the fixed laws of enemies. Old Hiram kept to his side because he had helped to make the unwritten law; and because, although greatly feared when aroused, he was a big-hearted man who had no real pleasure in bloodshed. His young nephew had never seen a posse of grim men ride out to "git" an enemy.

Many times Sutton talked with his mountain girl across the gulf, each time becoming more firm in his resolve to go to her around the Pass—that frozen wrinkle at the giant lip-corners, where none but the mountain doctor and a circuit rider might cross in safety.

Standing on the slope, he often watched her flash down the trail leading to a spring, and one lonesome after-

noon he did a very foolhardy thing. He went straight down to the Pass and crossed over.

Maggie, straightening with the dripping bucket, looked across the dimpled water and saw him close to her, but so constantly had he been in her thoughts that there was no start of surprise. No word at first, only the blending of swift smile from gray eyes to dark ones.

Sutton reached for her hand, and, drawing her around to him, kissed her upon the lips.

"That," he said, "is what I came for. If they shoot me now—it was worth it."

In that supreme moment, when he stood by the mountain spring, the low sun glinting on his bare head as he tossed the troublesome lock from his eyes, Sutton meant what he said. The kiss, for which he had risked his life, had not disappointed him. Although given warmly and clingingly, he judged rightly that it was her first intimate caress. He knew that she had never kissed Casoway.

And Maggie—after the first stifling gladness at seeing him so close; after the thrilling joy of the kiss—blanched with the daring of it. "Please go away," she begged him earnestly, her dark eyes sweeping the slope. "Yuh air a Sutton, and this very minute a gun may be leveled on yuh. Mountain people do not change—they go deeper and deeper. They's no tellin' what may be said about yuh—that yuh're revener—anythin' tuh carry out the grudge."

"Of course, it's Casoway," said Sutton. "I've noticed his dark looks. He probably understands that I'm going to take you away from him—unless, of course, you want to marry him. Do you?"

Maggie turned on him the reproach of her dark, shining, miserable eyes.

"Of course I don't," she said simply; "but I didn't know as women ever wanted to marry who they could."

"Do you think you can tell by this

evening whether you want to marry me?" asked Sutton gently, touched by her innocent betrayal. "Will you tell me across the cañon to-night?"

"Ef yuh'll only go," Maggie told him whitely, "I'll tell yuh—anythin'!"

Snatching the bucket she almost ran up the trail. Between the towering tree-tops she had seen a horseman ride over Bald Ridge, swaying against the sky-line, and every step she listened for the whine of a bullet, but only the rustle of the bushes responded to the small, hurrying feet of Buster, who had been spying at the spring, and was breaking his neck to meet Casoway and tell him what had clutched him coldly by the heart.

"The city feller, Ben—that Sutton! He's been across the Pass. He's been tuh the spring and kissed Mag, and he's goin' tuh take her away with him!"

#### IV.

"He hain't only a Sutton, he's a sneak, and we'll git him. We'll git him tuh-night!"

Casoway held in his horse before Elnathan's door, and poured out his jealous rage.

"Come sneakin' oveh hyar pertendin' he's lost. Hangs around the stock-yard tuh Boxwood—I seen him thar. Seen him out in the woods, lookin' across at the smoke from the lower still. Now he sneaks across the Pass, and makes up tuh Mag. They hain't no time tuh lose."

Elnathan's keen eyes switched from the speaker to the horse he rode—the silky black coat; the slim legs and the nervous, beautiful head of the thoroughbred—Devil. Then he glanced down the slope toward the lower still and broke out wrathfully:

"Blame my skin, he's a revener, 'n I never ketched on. Co's he is. I reckon some one over tuh Boxwood blabbed."

The old man choked on his wrath a moment, then it broke out anew: "Blarst 'im, and thar he sot a eatin'

tuh my table! Blarst 'im, I wush I'd shot 'im down then!"

Casoway backed around.

"N'mind," he said, "I'm going over Bald Ridge fer Ellery Black's boys and the Beanses. Old Hi's a reg'lar devil when he's aroused. I'll send a posse tuh block up Hi's roads out townward, tuh. Yuh goin' down tuh the Pass?"

"Yes," answered Elnathan shortly. He stepped into the cabin and filled his belt with ammunition, taking his rifle from over the door. As he strode out and swung down the trail, trotting in the bushes at his side went Buster. Not for worlds would he miss seeing them "git" the man that was going to steal his beloved Mag!

Maggie was late at the cañon, and for some time Sutton stood there alone, looking down the sheer wall from which the opposite side fell away, like the roll of a mighty giant's lip. Once on the cañon floor, one could, hard pressed, climb the opposite side. It showed many a jagged hand and foothold.

Now, as many times before, when his heart had leaped the chasm, as if out of his desire, Maggie stood on the opposite side—a slim shape among the shadows. He could see her ghastly face and the intense darkness of her excited eyes. From her lifted arm came a swish, and something thudded at his feet.

"Tie that tuh a tree," she called to him softly, "and swing down. I heered them plannin' tuh take yuh tuh-night, but they'll never think of the cañon. Yuh cain't git out ary other way—all the trails on that side is gyarded. Keep back clost tuh the wall, and soon's hit's light go east. They's a way out of the cañon, close tuh Lebanon. Good-by."

In a flash she had blended with the other shadows on the slope, and Sutton bent to the object that lay against his feet. Shaking it from the stone used to weight it, he sensed the thrill of silk, the fragrance of cedar and the dull red

glow of sumacs. It was the wonder "gownd" of which his cousin Sally had told him, and she had sacrificed it for his life.

Sixty feet of stout, crimson rope!

## V.

THE cabin was lighted by the flare of burning pine cones, and in the glow Maggie sat at the piano, her fingers dreaming among the chords.

As Sutton entered the doorway, and crossed to her, she still played on, though her face went whiter.

"Oh," she said, "what made yuh do hit? I never dreamed o' yore cross-in'. They're shore tuh stop hyar from over Bald Ridge—they're shore tuh!"

And as she warned him came the ring of hoofs—six Blacks, three Beans and Ben Casoway were filing toward the cabin.

"Go into the loft," said the girl calmly, her hands still busy with the smooth melody; "and ef they start up the ladder, thay's a winder in the no'th end. Go quick!"

But the posse paused only a moment. As the sparkling avalanche of sound swept out to them, they spurred on toward the Pass. A glowing hearth fire and music—what could be more disarming? Danger for the time had passed them by.

After ten minutes of uneventful waiting, Maggie went to the door and peered out into the silent starlight. Then she felt Sutton's arms drawing her around to him, and met the triumphant smile of his eyes.

"There's a road back of the cabin," he told her quietly, "that leads to the railroad crossing. It is the one your father takes to Boxwood, only he dé-tours by the old saw-mill. I know all about it. A freight goes by that crossing. We can flag it and be married when we get into Little Rock. If you have made up your mind that you want to marry me—come now. If not, I can wait."

Silently the girl took a long-hooded

cloak from behind the door and wrapped herself in it. The hood was one of those round, gathered bags, an adjunct of the primitive waterproof. but out of its ugliness her face glowed like a red rose as she aroused her mother from her pipe dream and strangled her in an unwonted, parting caress.

"If they don't get us," said Sutton, "you're going to be my mother, too. So there!" And he kissed her warmly upon her withered cheek.

After she was alone in the cabin the woman took her hand from the cheek Sutton had pressed with his lips and looked at it curiously, as if it might have blossomed into something beautiful. The night was very still, and she sat there a long time, trembling—straining her ears for the distant echo of a gun.

Elnathan and Buster and the thwarted Casoway found her there in the gray of the morning, and as she read their dark faces she turned her head away. If that could have been possible one would have said she was smiling.

Buster was inconsolable. After he had devoured the story of Maggie's flight with the "city feller"; and even months after, when the mountain doctor brought to the cabin a musical journal, and he had seen the picture of his beloved Mag—"the beautiful young wife of John Sutton"—he went away to howl out his rage by himself.

By chance his path led to the cañon's edge—the trysting-place of John and Maggie—and there he found the crimson ladder, now badly tattered, but switching in the wind like a big laugh of triumph.

"Well, by hokey!" he said, sitting down and gloating over the dizzy spectacle; "by hokey, city fellers is some foxy! 'N when I go with maw tuh visit 'em I'm goin' tuh stay and be a city feller, too. I'm shore goin' tuh have some pants like his'n!"



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



SOLDIER fleeing from the battle of Appomattox was halted by the voice of an officer.

"Private Smith, why are you running?"

"Because," replied the soldier, "I cannot fly."

As far back as the Civil War people began to discover the necessity for stepping along in a hurry, and I am in the same position this week. The printers are screaming for copy, the presses are groaning for 192 pages of next week's issue, and the newsdealers are barking all over the country for more CAVALIERS. If there is any place in the United States where they are not demanding this magazine, I do not know where it is. Can you blame them, when they get such a marvelous assortment of the kind of stories we print?

Get the issue for March 22 and read

## THE WILD WOMAN

BY FRED JACKSON

Gipsy born, at the age of twelve she was adopted by a family that brought her up in an atmosphere of culture and ease. Of suitors she had many. In fact, she suffered from a surfeit of masculine homage. But all the untamable passion of her wild heritage went out to a man who did not love her!

I have never been loved by a gipsy and I do not know what I would do under the circumstances. Mr. Fred Jackson has solved this complicated situation with his usual audacity and

gotten away with it in a very attractive manner. If I had his genius for getting out from under the grand stand when it is getting ready to collapse, I would dare anything.

I have a surprise for you this week: A new author, a new story, a new note in literature. Viewed from any angle,

## THE LATE SENATOR SMITH

BY MOLLIE MARTIN

is quite as adroit a piece of story-telling as I have read for some months. It is splendidly written; it is virile in tone, rich in plot and romance, and strikes a note of pathos so pure and deep that the reader is imbued with a feeling of genuine sympathy. If a tear creeps from your eye and falls on the printed page, you need not be ashamed.

Any one who could have written "THE LATE SENATOR SMITH" wears a bell-shaped heart from which great emotions can be rung in harmonious accord.

Mollie Martin, I expect big things of you.

Frank Condon, not many weeks ago, strolled through Madison Square Park and picked up a story which he calls "CASTING BREAD UPON WATERS."

Now, *Waters* happened to be a tramp, and, by a most unusual run of circumstances, the bread was cast back again.

Any ordinary human being would have heaved this biscuit on its return trip in a quiet way, but Frank Condon has laid out an entirely new route along the grand avenue of laughter, the highway of adventure, and the vale of tears.

Read "YELLOW MOON," by King Kelley. It is a corking short story.

*Yellow Moon* was an Indian maiden who fell in love with a plated chieftain who cut his hair, wore white man's clothes and store shoes. *Yellow Moon* loved him with all the passion of her aboriginal heart, the which her dusky lover received with more or less indifference. He had spurts in which he acted like a real Lothario, and then again he had lapses. A rival stepped in, a real, smoky, tepee-stained red man who did not pretend to be anything else.

Follows here a tragedy in one of the best short stories Mr. King Kelley has put forth.

There is an old adage that listeners hear no good of themselves.

Read "DOUBTING THOMAS," by Sophy Florence Gould and Purnell Pratt, and you will find it proven. In this case the listener was a married man who had sworn that he would never doubt his wife no matter what the circumstances; but when he heard a man in a club make a slighting remark about her, doubt was born in his bosom. To

complicate the situation, everything his wife did served to confirm his doubts.

All ye who are heavily laden with suspicion had better read this story. It is charmingly told.

There are other short stories in the same issue, one of the best-balanced numbers thus far printed.

The fiction in *THE CAVALIER* is attracting the attention of book publishers all over the United States.

Those who liked "THE DEVIL'S ADMIRAL," by Frederick Ferdinand Moore, will be glad to know that it has been brought out in a handsomely illustrated volume by Doubleday, Page & Co., and is now on sale at all book-stores.

Mr. Charles Neville Buck's now famous Southern serial, entitled "THE STRENGTH OF SAMSON," will be issued next week from the press of W. J. Watt & Co. under the title of "THE CALL OF THE CUMBERLANDS." The illustrations are in color.

Both of these books are destined to have a large sale, if the number of approving letters received by *THE CAVALIER* is any indication.

Both writers belong to the new school of American authors who believe in the importance of action and the necessity for incident.

You must read *THE CAVALIER* to get live literature.

## FROM MY EDITORIAL ADVISERS

The best way to judge a magazine is to study the correspondence received from its readers. I claim that no magazine published in the English language has so many intelligent, discriminating readers as this magazine.

I am selecting this week from a large batch of correspondence a number of letters all more or less varied—letters that display a sense of humor, a depth of understanding, and a quality of selection in literature that gives them individuality.

The first is from our friend John D. Swain, who holds forth on the subject of the horror story, an echo of Irvin Cobb's "FISHHEAD."

There is enough in this letter to give any student in literature a new lead on some good reading.

I beg to quote:

MY DEAR DAVIS:

It seems to me that real horror is not found, like Mahomet's paradise, in "the shadow of the crossing of swords."

The best horror stories of the world, as admitted, I think, universally by critics and discriminating readers, have not to do with blood, guts, or moans of pain, nor yet with "dull, sickening thuds." The most poignant effect of horror is psychological and needs no *corpus delicti*. Cobb's story is admirable

enough; I am not thinking of criticizing it; but any one with a fair digestion could read it in an empty house at midnight by the light of a candle and then roll over and go peacefully to sleep. This is not true of your genuine horror story.

I do not need to recall to your mind the big horror stories that have been written to illustrate what I mean. Take Scott's "The Tapestry Chamber"; or Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw"; or that story of Ambrose Bierce whose name I have forgotten, where the newspaperman on a wager watches for the night by a corpse in an abandoned house; or his other story of the man and the snake, the latter proving to be merely a stuffed hassock, with two shoe-buttons for eyes; or Stevenson's "Markheim"; or two or three of Maupassant's Normandy stories; or Poe's "Cask of Amontillado," or "The Masque of the Red Death"; or Jacobs's "The Monkey's Paw"; or Wells's "The Door in the Wall"; or the "Two Ghost Stories" by Dickens; or a chapter or two from Andreief's "The Seven Who Were Hanged"—there is no need to enlarge upon this list to show what I mean. Here is not a drop of blood, not the cracking of a sinew, not a solitary shriek; and yet he would need be a singularly well-balanced man who could read any of these stories alone at night and not feel the atavistic hairs rise along his spine and run off where his tail used to be in the old forest days!

In fact, along that line it is pretty hard to beat some of the French stories; such as Zola's "Attack on the Mill," and portions of Hugo's "Waterloo"; here is blood, not in drops, but in cascades; horses burst like enormous gooseberries; shattered men dragging themselves along on the ground in order to die a few feet nearer the bastions; a riot of dead babies, broken household effects, burning barns, death grapples, and death rattles; yet not, to my understanding, horror stories at all.

I should like to know your opinion of that little story by Mark Twain, where the small boy who has run away from school creeps into his father's medical office and goes to bed on the big haircloth sofa, not daring to go home; and how, awakening in the night, he sees the bright moonlight strike upon a human hand, everything else being in shadow; and how he watches the moonlight creep inch by inch up that still hand and wrist and onto the breast, where there is a deep gash covered with dried blood; and finally onto the white face; about which time the boy vacates the place, taking the window-sash along; the story turning upon the fact that a murder had been committed that day on the levee, and the body brought to the doctor's office and left for a post-mortem the following day; all told with just enough of Twain's irony and sting to form a strong contrast to the feelings of the small boy. It is pretty hard to read that without becoming, for the time, the small boy yourself!

And to take one other example: Jacobs's "The Monkey's Paw," a story of the supernatural, without one line to strain your credulity or cause you to say, "that never

could happen"; all told as smoothly and plausibly as a census report, and simply depicting the effect of superstitious horror on the minds of two childless old people living alone in the country. Now *that* is art, and it is horror.

And that sort of thing is being done even to-day; *vide* Catharine Gerould's "Vain Oblations," in a recent *Century*, or Edith Wharton's "Ethan Frome"; studies in horror, but horror largely mental. "Is this a dagger that I see before me?" No—it is a crucified soul; the writhings of a tortured mind, infinitely more ghastly than the squirmings of a tortured body, whether in the grip of the Spanish Inquisition or the big fish of the deserted lake.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN D. SWAIN.

Worcester, Mass.

It makes little difference whether John D. Swain writes a letter or a story; both are always worth reading—the former always full of priceless information, the latter full of brilliant effort.

## PICKS GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

As I was a reader of *THE CAVALIER* for over a year before I subscribed, and a very enthusiastic one since the weekly innovation, I firmly believe that I am qualified to become a wearer of the Badge of Intellectual Advancement.

In regard to the staff of authors: They are all so superior that it is "hard pickin's" to select the best. To my mind, George Allan England has it a shade better than the rest. If you lose him from the staff and he goes to another magazine, it will mean increased expenditures for me, because I will have to buy both magazines.

I think further comment unnecessary.

Second in line of superiority is the writer of the *Heart to Heart Talks*. The rest are all pressing so hard for third place that it would be unfair to make a selection.

Having no suggestions for an impossible betterment of the "Greatest Treasure-Trove of Literary Gems" since the time man conceived the idea of placing his thoughts on paper, I will close, with best regards for you and "ours."

L. DALLAS PARK.

Oro Blanco, Arizona.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Several of our force, having read the story "Darkness and Dawn" and its sequel, "Beyond the Great Oblivion," with a great deal of interest, are of the opinion that Mr. George Allan England has left himself an opening for a final story that will show how the world was reinhabited by the transfer to the surface of the people found in the depths of the great chasm. We would also like to know what was found beyond the great vortex and have more

information concerning the life conditions on the new planet which was split from Mother Earth.

Kindly ask Mr. England to give us the rounding out of this truly wonderful creation of his brain.

NORMAN H. EVANS, *Secretary*.  
Progress Talc Company,  
Philadelphia, Pa.

*Note:* The sequel to "BEYOND THE GREAT OBLIVION," under the title of "THE AFTERGLOW," will shortly be completed and will appear in THE CAVALIER early this spring.

## RECALLS PLEASANT MEMORIES

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have been reading all the issues of your magazine, and I want to express my appreciation for the standard you have set and are keeping up.

There is one writer, Oney Fred Sweet, whose short stories I find appearing very often in THE CAVALIER. These I enjoy very much. He writes about the Middle West and its people. The types he portrays are the healthy American kind; not the overdrawn Down-East Yankee of past memory nor the melodramatic far Western Cowboy, but the blending of the two—the kind of people that really exist.

To him I am much indebted for recalling many pleasant memories, for I, too, once lived in that section about which he writes.

L. TUDO.

1154 Eddy Street,  
San Francisco, Cal.

Readers of THE CAVALIER will recall a letter signed by "Bobby the Knocker," containing some very unkind words about the editor of the magazine. Since then "Bobby" has seen the light. His heart has softened and his voice is gentle, and this is what he sings:

DEAR OLD SCOUT:

Believe me, I have thrown away my hammer and am now boosting.

I want to congratulate you on the many good stories in your magazine since I last knocked. I really don't want you to be killed now, but live.

I saw an advertisement of the first volume of *The Scrap Book*. I saved it, for I never missed a number when it was published. I kept it because it contained "The Companions of Jehu," by Alex. Dumas. Although I have

in my library thirty volumes of Dumas, "The Companions of Jehu" is not included. To my mind, it is one of his best works. Therefore the first volume of *The Scrap Book* is worth more to me for this work alone than all the other good things in it.

Like our old mutual friend Charles Dana, late editor of the New York *Sun*, I can read "The Three Guardsmen" series of six books every winter and still enjoy them.

I am saving THE CAVALIER now, for there are so many good stories I will read them over again next winter.

Here's hoping you will continue to live, and not die, as I wished in my last letter.

"BOBBY THE KNOCKER."

Cincinnati, Ohio.

## CANNOT FIND A HALL

The following suggestion is interesting indeed, but there is not a building in New York big enough to house the readers of THE CAVALIER. Better wait until this summer, and we will try to arrange this blowout in Central Park. What do the other CAVALIER readers think about it?

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have been a reader of your CAVALIER for a long time and read with much interest the Heart to Heart Talks.

How about having your New York members and readers get together and form a CAVALIER Social Club? I am sure it can be started with at least fifty "Loyal New York Cavaliers." Weekly or monthly discussions of the current CAVALIER's contents would indeed be interesting, and I am sure you would give us a little space once or twice a month. If we make a success of it, clubs in other cities will follow suit.

I hope to see this in print, and trust that my suggestion will be passed upon by other readers.

W. J. H.

## ALL ABOUT REAL MONEY

I attach my personal check for four dollars. Please put me down as a member of the LEGION and send me a button. I shall consider it an honor to wear it. Also, if you will send me a few additional LEGION memberships, I will place them.

I was the first one to call for THE CAVALIER in my home city. It was through me that a few were stocked here. It is the only book for me.

Lock Box 357,  
Quincy, Illinois.

JULIUS F. SIEN.



**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.**



# SOUL SALVE

A SHORT STORY

BY MARTINA GARDNER OWEN



**M**ECHANICALLY Sanna cleared the luncheon-table and washed and dried the dishes.

With hands that moved skilfully though undirected by conscious thought she prepared the roast and the vegetables and the desert for dinner. While eyes feverishly sought the clock, her tired feet treaded the pedals of the sewing-machine while her slender fingers guided the yards of flying, fluttering ruffles. Then the feet hurried her up-stairs.

She was nearing the last lap of the day's routine. There was no love light in her eyes as she laid out her husband's clean linen. It was all a part of the treadmill of existence.

A clock chimed into the lassitude of the late summer afternoon. Sanna roused herself to the fact that there were fifteen precious minutes at her disposal. The hammock lured. A new magazine enticed. Weary limbs begged for rest. The piano plead for the touch of stiffened fingers. Her soul stirred, wakened, and implored for a revel in the sunshine.

Sanna stilled the clamoring voices.

"I'll satiate as many of you as I can," she declared whimsically, as a twinkle appeared in the fine gray eyes.

Selecting the newest magazine, she settled herself luxuriously among the cushions of a wicker divan, drawn where she could drink in the delights of meadow and sky and blue water beyond. A vague sense of gratification soothed her. For a moment she wondered idly as to its source, then

turned a page listlessly as she told herself:

"It's because Hugh has purchased those vacant lots and so made sure that no ugly brick and mortar will cut off my view."

Then she glimpsed the figure of a little, old man, threading his way up the deserted suburban street. The worn satchel, the bent shoulders, the speculative glance with which he appraised the walks and porches all proclaimed the vender of street wares.

Mrs. Crosby watched him curiously and breathed a sigh of relief. He had passed Grandma Morrison's little white cottage. He had not halted at the ill-kept lawn of the Simmonses. He had hurried past the staring new splendor of the Greystones. Unheeding the smugly contented front of Miss Marion's, he had come to tap at Sanna's door.

Usually this competent housewife made quick work of the genus pedler. Some irresistible impulse softened her voice as she said:

"Yes. What do you wish?"

"To sell you some salve, madam," was the courteous reply. "Have you five minutes at your disposal? If so—" His suggestive glance leaped from the white, dusty street to the coolly inviting interior.

Most emphatically Sanna had no moments at her disposal. Moreover, she never used patent medicines. Rarely, indeed, did she resort to any drugs. A seeker for pills and nostrums in Sanna's cupboard would have met the same reward as did the dog

of nursery lore in his quest for a bone in Mother Hubbard's domain.

The family doctor was wont to remark that he was never summoned to the Crosby's except for the purpose of inscribing his name on birth certificates. Also that the rearers of such exasperatingly healthy families were undermining the medical profession. Nevertheless, Sanna unlatched the screen door, stood aside for the street vender to enter, and pulled forward her most comfortable chair.

The next instant she broke another of her inflexible rules. Hitherto no stranger had been left unwatched in close proximity to curios and silverware. Now Sanna hurried kitchenward, prepared a cooling drink, and proffered it to the stranger in one of her delicate crystal glasses.

"Thank you, madam," the stranger replied in well-bred, richly modulated tones. "I was sure that my instincts had not led me astray when they urged me to choose your home from a village full of houses. In the days to come I believe that you will be glad to remember that you were the first to purchase a box of this salve. It is its initial appearance on the market," he added simply.

Sanna stared uncomprehendingly.

"Will it cure—er—" she paused.

A smile trembled about his fine, old mouth.

"Most everything, madam," he replied. "It will cure an aggravated form of callus. A callus—correct me if I am not right—is formed by long friction and it reduces the sensibilities of that part of the physical self upon which it appears. It may utterly destroy such sensibilities. This salve"—he touched the shabby old satchel—"removes calluses. It restores to the affected part the fine sensibilities which it possessed before friction—and time—had done their blunting work. There is this difference." He paused for a moment, then continued:

"You asked for a salve to remove a physical callus."

The vender again stopped speaking. His hands fumbled for a moment with the fastenings. Then he groped in the interior of the satchel and drew forth a tiny box which he displayed to Sanna's wondering eyes.

"This," he concluded impressively, "is soul salve and it removes soul cal-luses."

For a moment Sanna looked at the box in bewilderment. The material was one strange to her. It seemed to be blended from crystal and ivory and alabaster. It was both strong and fragile. It was delicately carved. The sun made it gleam with opalescent hues.

"I don't quite understand," Sanna gasped.

"Permit me."

The vender opened the box. Sanna noted his slim, pointed fingers, his veined, wrinkled hands. Then a perfume of mingled dew-wet violets and attar of roses gratified her nostrils.

She submitted passively while the old man touched the tip of his finger to the rose-colored salve. He leaned forward. There was nothing repulsive about the face so close to hers. She found herself wishing that her grandfather was living and that he was just such a man as this.

"Close your eyes," the low voice suggested. Sanna obeyed. She felt a cool touch on each eyelid.

"What do you see?" came the demand. The eyes fluttered open.

"The wall-paper!" Sanna exclaimed in a tone of disgust. "I had forgotten that it was so utterly hideous," she shuddered. "When we moved here I told Hugh that I should have it changed if I had to do it myself. But there were so many other things to do. I haven't given it a thought in months."

"In other words," her visitor explained, as he shut the rose-hued ointment from view, "the part of your soul, your intellect, your senses—call it what you will—which was touched by the sight of that paper, has become

callused by constant contact therewith. This ointment"—he paused to give the words their full weight—"has removed the callus."

"But how?" Sanna demanded, as her eyes sought a safe refuge from the ugly paper and found it in the kind old face.

"How does the rose perfect a pink petal from the brown earth?" he demanded. "I do not know. I only know that I have spent years in my laboratory and that at last I have succeeded in so blending the elements that I have a soul salve which will remove soul calluses. By some mysterious, unexplainable process, it finds its way through sinew and bone to the intangible ego within. The tiny bit which I applied to your eyelids removed the callus which had been formed by constant contact with an unsightly object. Another application will remove other calluses. Applied to the forehead, the temples, the base of the brain, the region over the heart, it will remove others."

"And the price?" Sanna heard herself inquiring.

"The price?" One of the rare smiles illumined the lined features. "Some day, when the world knows its merits, the price will be a thousand dollars per box. To-day, to you"—his eye caught the frost-rimmed pitcher—"the price is another glass of that delicious lemonade. And I will return in a month to inquire if you need more."

A moment later Sanna was clutching the tiny box and watching the old vender disappear around a corner.

Then she aroused to action. Casting a shuddering glance at the leering, grimacing walls, she dumped the contents of her house purse on the table and feverishly counted the bills and coins.

"To think I contemplated spending that for lace curtains," she told herself contemptuously, as she hurried to the phone.

Yes, they could send up samples of

paper at once. In cream and ivory? Certainly. A paper-hanger could be secured for the morrow? Assuredly. It was a slack time.

"Fancy papering in August!" she laughed hysterically. "But I don't intend to give that particular callus time to reform itself."

Her gaze caught the box of soul salve and she looked at it with a speculative stare.

"Wonder what would happen if I should anoint myself with it from crown to toe?" she ruminated. I don't quite dare venture that far, but"—she smiled softly—"I'll try a bit on my forehead."

With fingers that lingered caressingly over the task, Sanna opened the carved box, touched the exquisite, rose-colored salve, and applied a precious bit to her smooth forehead.

For a long moment she bent delightedly over the box while the fragrance of June-kissed roses and of dew-wet violets seemed to permeate every fiber of her being. A step sounded on the porch. Sanna quickly replaced the cover, concealed her treasure in her handkerchief, and turned to the door.

A hesitating, drooping, dejected little figure met her glance. Edna's crisp, white dress, which had been adjusted at noon with so many warning admonitions, hung in limp and smut-tied folds. Her hair, which had been so carefully curled, was roughened and tangled. The rose-leaf complexion was overlaid with grime and streaked with tears.

Sanna's feet attempted to thrust her forward. Sanna's hand essayed to clutch the child's shoulder. Sanna's lips formed for a torrent of hasty words. Sanna's figure quivered before the realization that this heedless afternoon of play would cost the mother weary hours in a heated kitchen.

Ordinarily hand and foot and lip would have had full permission to do its will. Now Sanna thrust aside the details of soiled garment and wind-

tossed hair. She saw only her baby—her little daughter.

She noted the pathos and the fear and the pleading which looked out of the blue eyes. She caught the fleeting, cowed, shrinking expression of trust in mother's goodness and justice which tried to find place among other emotions.

"Tell mother all about it," crooned Sanna.

The soul salve had done its work. The callus had been removed. The little girl was caught close in mother's arms and her head was pillowed on mother's breast.

"I did try so hard, mother," the wee girlie sobbed, "and I did keep it clean all through the party, and I didn't forget a single thing you told me. But on the way home there was a beautiful, big butterfly, and we chased it, and I caught my foot and fell in the dust. Then Rob Ellis teased me and called me a cry-baby and pulled my hair. And sister Julia was coming along with one of the high-school boys, and I thought she would fix my ribbon, but she was just mad at me. She said I was a dirty little rag'muffin, and to run along home."

The sobs ceased as the little arms crept up and closed about mother's neck.

"I was most 'fraid you'd be cross, too," she sighed contentedly, "but you understand, and I'm so sorry 'cause I don't like to make you work so hard. Can't I help you now?" Midget exclaimed, slipping to the floor. "I'll work drestful fast, and do everything you tell me."

"Course you can help, girlie," mother reassured. "The others will be here soon and you may lay the table. We'll just skip up to the bathroom and get a nice, clean little girl into a nice, clean little dress, and then we'll hurry as fast as we can."

A new vision met Sanna's gaze as she came down the broad stairs. It had on high-heeled pumps and silk stockings. Its head was much curled

and pompadoured. Some near jewelry adorned the frilled and fluffy gown. Edna's little fingers clutched her mother's comforting hand as the vision harangued.

"So you've cleaned her up! Of all the disgraceful, dirty little tykes! Just when I was walking with Algernon, too. I do wish that you could impress the child with a sense of the fitness of things."

Sanna was staring. A new callus had been removed. It had left a supersensitive, smarting bit of soul.

"Is dinner nearly ready?" Julia finished languidly. "I hope you've something decent to eat. Playing tennis gives one such an appetite. I'll run up and put on my frilled pink muslin. Algernon says his sisters always dress for dinner, and—"

"You'll put on your blue gingham," Sanna interrupted decisively. "And you'll be down here in exactly five minutes and you will prepare the salad for dinner."

For a moment Julia stared. Then she gasped, and her dawning womanhood and her latent good sense asserted themselves.

"Good motherkins," she declared, hugging Sanna affectionately. "I've always been crazy to do housework, but you declared it was too much bother to teach me. I suppose I was a nuisance, and that it was easier to do it yourself than to have me messing around. I'll be just as careful," she declared, skipping toward the stairway.

At the door of the dining-room Sanna had another shock. It was hot and heavy and stuffy. Then she saw something that she had never seen before—a cool expanse of green lawn shaded by big elms and just right for an out-of-doors dining-room.

"How would you like to have dinner out of doors, Midget?"

"Oh, goody, goody!" Edna exclaimed, clapping her plump little hands and dancing in glee. "I'll carry out every single dish myself, and I'll hold 'em tight so they can't drop."

"We can't carry out this table," Sanna ruminated, surveying the massive bulk of oak. "But"—she led the way to the pine one in the kitchen and tentatively tried her strength on one end—"perhaps we can manage this when Julia comes down."

"Manage what, mother?" demanded a tall youth, swinging into the kitchen and dropping a baseball-bat with a resounding whack.

"To carry this table out under the trees for dinner, son," said Sanna.

"Bully for you! I can do it alone," he declared, lifting it lightly in his lithe young arms. "There you are. Anything else? Hercules is at your service."

"Could you clean Guy up a bit?" she asked hesitatingly, indicating a dirty-faced, chubby-legged, apple-cheeked specimen of adorable childhood that had sidled near and was viewing the proceedings in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Come on, kid," called Rodney in prompt affirmative. "The bath-tub for ours. We'll be as slick as two candy kids in a jiffy. Hello, sis! What's up?" as a very demure and domestic Julia tripped past him. "Cut out the high-society act, have you, and gone in for the dutiful-daughter drama?" He eyed her in frank approval. "Keep it up and I'll cease my frantic efforts to locate a soul-mate and take you to the college prom next month instead. Now, then, youngster—up we go for our splash-splash act!"

Under the skilful management of the three feminine members of the household the table blossomed as if by magic. The tired father, returning from a wearisome day in the city office, straightened his drooping shoulders and hurried toward the enticing glimpse of white linen and sky-blue asters.

Throughout that merry dinner eyes rested upon Sanna—happy eyes, wondering eyes, approving eyes, appreciative eyes. She was apt to be tired and nervous and overwrought.

To-night she seemed to be bubbling over with vivacity, to comprehend one's very thoughts before they were uttered. She was a mother that any one could be proud of, Rodney decided, as he studied the sensitive, high-bred face, the tender lips, and the graceful, matronly figure. Not many of the chaps had a mother like that. She was always a pretty good fellow, but to-night—to-night she was perfect!

After dinner Sanna told sleepy-time stories to Guy and Edna, while the older brother and sister made a frolic of the dishes. Father luxuriated meanwhile on the broad piazza among heaped-up cushions which had hitherto been too delicate for use.

He marveled at the fact that the discerning eye and ready hand of one woman could work such a speedy transformation in a household!

That night as Sanna brushed out her hair and massaged her face with cold cream she surreptitiously dabbed her fingers in the rose-colored salve.

"The forehead, the temples, the base of the brain, the region over the heart," she quoted, suiting the action to the word. "I'll have a new, uncallused soul in the morning, and what a wonderful day it will be! Perhaps I can induce Hugh and the children to try it, and the neighbors—and their children."

She lay awake a long time ruminating on the vast vista of possibilities which the suggestion had opened. The moonlight flooded the room and revealed her husband's sleeping face. A new sense of love, of appreciation, of tenderness, surged through her thoughts. She raised herself on one elbow and studied the strong, kindly face with a new clearness of vision. A whiff of violets and roses came to her nostrils, and with them a remembrance of other days. She was walking with her lover at spring-time. Now they were standing before the altar.

"I, Sanna, take thee, Hugh."

The wandering breeze seemed to be murmuring the words. How the other girls had envied her. How she had thrilled to the fact that this strong, young Adonis, with his fine character and keen intellect, had chosen her—her, for his very own.

She had glorified in his powers, his capabilities. And he had made good! She half sobbed the acknowledgment. He had won an honored place among men. He had been kind and true through all the years. But—she bitterly faced facts—she had come to take him for granted.

She had ceased to appreciate the man's sterling qualities, had allowed dust-cloths and curtains and rugs and the thousand and one other minutiae of housekeeping details to smother love. She had come to look at him with the same unseeing eyes with which she regarded the pictures on the wall. She had allowed him to pour out the wealth of his strong manhood, his love and devotion, and had made no return.

It was not that she had done him wrong!

Only that she had left so many of the possible depths of wifehood unsounded. She had accepted the money for which he had strained nerve and brain, quite as a matter of course. She had forgotten the promises which the girl of other years had made: the promises to be a comrade and playmate and a source of inspiration for the days. She was coming to be a mere housekeeper and governess.

The Sanna of seven hours before would have wasted futile hours in regrets. This new Sanna looked eagerly to the morrow.

An irresistible impulse led her to touch Hugh's relaxed hand.

"Awake, sweetheart?" he questioned sleepily. Then, as she pressed the hand to her lips, he drew her close in his arms.

"What is it, little mother?" he demanded tenderly. "You've had a hard day. Tell me all about it."

And she did tell him. She poured forth a flood of protestations of love, mingled with self-recriminations and pledges, for the future. She confused it all with disjointed and incoherent descriptions of the old vender and of his soul salve. She babbled of the possibilities lurking within the tiny carved box.

Hugh slipped into a dressing-gown, enveloped his wife in a white shawl, deposited her in a chair, and switched on the light. Then he sat down opposite her and said firmly:

"Now, Sanna, begin at the beginning and tell me everything that has happened."

His calm strength soothed her. She gave a clear, concise recital of facts.

"Let me see the box," Hugh suggested quietly.

She produced it in silence.

"I've half a mind to try it myself," he declared after a critical inspection. "But I won't. Not to-night at least."

He mused with half-shut eyes for a time, then began to pace the floor excitedly.

"Do you realize what this means, Sanna?" he demanded, pausing before her. "It will revolutionize the world. It will put a fortune in some one's pocket—and it shall be in ours—in ours, and in those of its inventor," he decided. His shrewd business self had gained the ascendancy. "Evidently that dreaming, old philosopher knows nothing of finance. When he returns I'll arrange to advertise and to market his product. We'll be rich, Sanna—rich, do you understand?"

He began his restless pacing again.

"But," he added, checking his progress, "we must so arrange that this product shall not be put in the hands of the wicked and of the unscrupulous. It might be a power for evil as well as for good." It was the husband and father and solid citizen speaking now.

"How can it revolutionize the world?" Sanna demanded timidly.

He explained to her gently as to a little child.

"In the hands of prison chaplains," he declared, "it can be used to send the man from the iron cage to the fresh beginning of a new life. Given to an artist it will enable him to discover defects in his canvas and to present a masterpiece to the world. It will enable all men to see beauty in the commonplace. By Jove!"—he laughed and slapped his thigh—"do you remember the fun that we had last year on our trip, seeking out the ugly spots in otherwise beautiful towns? There was the glaring sign-board next to the ivy-grown cottage in Meadowcroft; the pile of tin cans by the river at Sunnypoint. Remember?"

Sanna nodded.

"We'll sell this salve to the village fathers," he resumed. "They will discover the eyesores in their towns, clean 'em up, and give us a more beautiful America. That is just one possibility. There are hundreds of others. I'll think 'em up, tabulate 'em, and be ready for business when your vender of soul salve next invades our peaceful

domains. And now"—he decided briskly—"it's time you were in dream-land. Put this away safely," holding out the box of blended crystal and ivory and alabaster.

Sanna made an attempt to rise. An irresistible power seemed to be dragging her back.

She gave a final mighty struggle—and awoke among the cushions of the wicker divan, drawn where she could drink in the delights of meadow and sky and blue water beyond!

A step sounded on the porch. A hesitating, drooping, dejected little figure met her glance. Edna's crisp, white dress that had been adjusted at noon with so many warning admonitions hung in limp and smuttied folds. Her hair, which had been so carefully curled, was roughened and tangled. The rose-leaf complexion was overlaid with grime and streaked with tears.

But the mother just opened her arms and gathered the little one close to her breast!

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## THE WORLD'S MIRROR

By Betty A. Beall

FACES that the gods adorn.

Faces of the old and drear;

Faces clothed in chilling scorn,

And faces filled with sunny cheer.

Faces of the genius born,

Faces with the childish tear;

Faces patient, sad, and worn,

And faces shunned by all with fear.

Faces marred and passion torn,

Faces of the loved and dear;


Faces bowed in grief to mourn,

In, passing show—reflected here.

# FROM THE SILENCE

A SHORT STORY

BY HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH

T'S queer when one thinks of it, what a habit people have of dying just when they're needed most!

You know what I mean, mothers of tiny babies that every one else thinks a nuisance, and fathers just about the time that their boys begin to borrow cigarettes from their chums and need their dad most, to say nothing of business men who, with another six months could have carried their deals through and left their widows something beside their half-worn clothing and a mortgage on the place!

And old Mr. Counselman, though he broke pretty nearly all rules, especially those which have to do with the use of a knife and fork, was no exception when it came to this.

Old Mr. Counselman — the "Old Man" everybody called him — was what is commonly known as a character in distinction from the people who are like everybody else. He was big and strong and dominating, cruel or generous, as the whim took him, and he stood in awe of nothing on earth or beyond it.

He had a mouth like a trap, except that it pulled up humorously at one corner; and his hard, gray eyes could soften at times into almost human kindness, though few of his acquaintances, and especially the men who did business with him, would have believed it. But they had never seen him with Pauline.

Ernie Counselman — no one ever called *him* a character, and for good reason — was what was known as a

howling swell. The newer slang, meaning the same thing, somehow expresses less. Ernie was as vacant, as flavorless, and as conventional as if he had reckoned a hundred ears among his forebears.

His life was spent in a pathetic endeavor to live up to the traditions of the smart set, to which his wife belonged by right of birth.

It was plain that the Old Man was of the opinion that he had begotten a fool, and he disliked his daughter-in-law as openly as he despised his son. Old Mr. Counselman was refreshingly devoid of tact. But the human side of him came out where Pauline was concerned.

Because I was a nurse Pauline was my first patient in the Counselman household.

It was nothing but a sore throat and a little fever, such an attack as your mother or mine would have dosed with a tablespoonful of castor-oil, followed by a palpitating, translucent wedge of jelly, and we would have been as good as new by the next morning.

But as Pauline was the Counselman heiress it was necessary that she have a day nurse and a night nurse, and that Dr. Schroeder, the throat specialist, be called into consultation with the family physician, Dr. McDaniels. And, of course, there were flowers enough for a funeral, and baskets of fruit that would have supplied a hospital, and telegrams and telephone-calls and a million other things as useless. I'm sorry for the kids whose people call in a stomach specialist when a mustard-

plaster is all that is necessary, and a trained nurse if they happen to sneeze.

Perhaps it was just because I was sorry that Pauline took such a fancy to me. She was thirteen then, and a shy, gentle child, pathetically ready to return affection for kindness. As I sized her up she had rather more than her father's brains, and considerably more than her mother's heart.

Pauline was not pretty then. She was at the age when a girl's legs are too long for her body, and her feet are too large for her legs. She was wearing something to straighten her teeth, and altogether she might have been the daughter of a tradesman in a small town as well as the heiress to nobody knows how many millions.

As Pauline was not really sick, I made it my business to entertain her. She knew a good deal about London and Paris, but she had never jumped from the big beam in the loft of a barn down into the fragrant hay.

I racked my brain for the half-forgotten pranks of my youth, when I found out what a fascinating novelty a real childhood was to her. She was laughing over one of my stories one afternoon when her grandfather walked in.

"H-m!" said the Old Man, and looked from her to me. I will venture to say he had never heard Pauline laugh before in that fashion. "Ought she to be excited like this when she's sick?" he said, with a scowl that hid his eyes.

"In the first place she isn't excited," I replied. "And in the second place, she isn't sick." For I saw at a glance that old Mr. Counselman was the sort to like a direct answer as blunt as his own questions. He was just an everyday man, for all that he could buy a new yacht as somebody else would get a five-cent cigar.

"H-m!" he said, and when he looked at me again I saw his eyes. Then he asked me about Pauline's temperature, and her pulse, and what the specialist had said; and while he talked

he was stroking Pauline's thin, white wrist with a big, hairy hand that looked strong enough to take life by the throat and choke it till it had emptied its pockets of everything worth taking.

Pauline's father cared for nothing but social success, and her mother's god was herself; and she was the most consistent worshiper I have ever known. But the poor little rich child was not altogether forlorn, for the Old Man loved her.

After that I saw a good deal of the Counselman family. Pauline always wanted me when anything ailed her, and I nursed her through one real illness, beside any number of colds in the head and little attacks of indigestion. And I nursed Mrs. Ernie through the grippe, and they called me in when the Old Man had sciatica and Miss Jessop gave up the case.

Nobody could blame Miss Jessop, for he had bitten her clinical thermometer in two, beside calling her names which Miss Jessop said were sufficient grounds to bring suit for defamation of character. But he and I got on very well, and when he swore I pretended it was at the sciatica instead of at me. And after he was better we talked about Pauline. The Old Man was shrewd enough to see that my liking for the girl had nothing to do with her being an heiress.

By the time she was eighteen, with her grandfather's assistance, Pauline had developed something in the line of an individuality. She actually knew what she wanted, though if it had not been for the iron will back of her it is to be doubted whether she would ever have done as she pleased.

Her entering college was a case in point. Neither Ernie nor his wife would listen to the idea. If she went to college, what about her *début*? The girls in her set would all be married, while she was still poring over lexicons. But the Old Man's will was law in that household, and what Pauline wanted was old Mr. Counselman's will. And Pauline was just finishing her

sophomore year when her grandfather died.

For nearly two years I lost track of her, except as the newspapers told what she wore at the horse-show, or at the D'Arcy Clements's ball. And then one day Dr. Graves, the specialist with the big sanatorium on Long Island, called me up, and seemed mighty glad to find I was just off a case.

"They want you at the Ernest Counselman's," said the doctor. "It's the girl; result of overstudy, Mrs. Counselman thinks."

I grunted and the doctor laughed, and we understood each other. It's always the study before a girl's *début* which is responsible when she breaks down, not late hours and indigestible food and the continual excitement and all the rest.

But the minute I saw Pauline I knew it was something more than late hours that ailed her. It was a broken heart. She had grown into something of a beauty since the days when her teeth needed straightening. But her good looks served her as little as her wealth.

She made one think of the man in the fairy story whose diamonds and rubies turned to pebbles in his hands. White, listless, with a strange, forced little smile that was any amount sadder than weeping, she held out her hand in greeting. And as I took it I thought of the stern Old Man, whose heart would have been wrung at the sight of her now, and there was a lump in my throat.

"I'm glad it's you instead of a stranger," Pauline said as simply as a child. "But there really isn't anything wrong with me, you know, except that I'm tired, and I can't sleep. A nurse can't help me, not even you, dear Miss Potts."

I haven't mentioned it before, not being proud of it, but that is my name—Julia Potts.

Of course, I could not help her till I had gained her confidence. That took something less than forty-eight hours. As I sat beside her bed that sleepless

second night, the story all came out, as I knew it must.

She had become interested in philanthropic questions during her two years in college, and when she came home she had attempted to put some of her theories into practise.

And in her experimenting she had run across a young enthusiast brimful of zeal for humanity, and with a little more knowledge to guide him than she possessed. After the sort of men she was used to, the Ernie Counselman variety, the kind to whom the proper width of the trouser-leg is a vastly more important question than the problem of the unemployed, it was no wonder that John Owens seemed to her a god.

As far as I could judge from what was without question a prejudiced account, the young fellow had behaved very well. The two had met frequently, Pauline's growing interest in philanthropy awakening the disapproval of both her parents. Together the two had tackled the problems of tubercular fathers and backward children, and girls with nameless babies in their arms.

There may be something about coming into close contact with life in the raw which belittles the artificial distinctions on which Pauline had been brought up to lay such stress. And, anyway, among them all they had never succeeded in spoiling the simple humanness of her.

I suppose what happened was bound to happen, sooner or later; but it did happen sooner, thanks to a drunken father of one of Pauline's protégés. He walked into the room where she was sitting beside the child's bed, and, not being in a state to differentiate between a young woman in a two-hundred-dollar tailored suit and the bedraggled females of his own class, he had launched at once into the insults and abuse which are the tribute of men of his type to the sex. And when Pauline, white and shrinking, stood up to go, he lurched toward her with an

oath, uttering threats that are unprintable.

It was not such a coincidence as it seems that Owens walked in at that moment. He had formed a habit of turning up wherever he was likely to find Pauline, and these little chance encounters had been taking place with the regularity of clockwork several times a week for six months.

When he saw the girl's terrified face and the menacing figure advancing upon her, he forgot, I'm glad to say, that he was a philanthropist, and felt those good, wholesome, murderous instincts which seem to persist in all of us, under the crust.

In an instant the dangerous brute was a loathsome heap in the corner, and Pauline was sobbing in Owens's arms, with her head resting against his shoulder, as comfortably as if it had found its inevitable resting-place.

Love's young dream lasted in their case a matter of twenty-four hours. The next day Pauline stayed in her room, poor child, and prayed, and her lover faced the music. I would have given something pretty to have seen Ernie Counselman when John Owens asked him for his daughter's hand.

But I should not have liked to be present at the interview when Ernie and his wife explained to their daughter the disgrace she had brought upon the family name, and forbade her ever to think of John Owens again. That exhibition of inane cruelty would have been an ordeal through which I could not willingly pass. Even a woman who nurses in the so-called best families needs to grasp some illusions.

Of course, it was not enough for them to have broken her heart. It was necessary that they should marry her off as soon as possible, and, as ill luck would have it, an eligible suitor had already presented himself.

He was a little older than Ernie, with one divorce and any number of scandals to his credit, and Pauline felt for him the attraction that a thrush might feel for an insinuating striped snake.

"Why do you marry him, then?" I asked bluntly when she reached this point in her story. "You'll be twenty-one in a few months, mistress of your fortune and yourself."

She looked at me as blankly as if I had been talking in a foreign tongue, and I thought of the Old Man and sighed. He had stood back of her through her girlhood, lending the strength of his will to her irresolution. He had fought her battles for her, when what she needed was to learn to fight.

Now they were going to sacrifice her, as truly as if she had been Iphigenia, and she could go no further in rebellion than nervous prostration. "I should think he couldn't rest in his grave," I said to myself, using the fashion of speech which has persisted for all that countless generations of the dead have been quiet under wrong like this, or worse.

The phrase was in my mind when the maid brought up the mail, and that, accounted, as I thought, for the trick my eyes played me as I took the letters.

I had seen old Mr. Counselman's handwriting some half-dozen times. It was a peculiar chirography, as rugged and distinctive as the man himself, fairly bristing against the surface of the paper; and as I glanced at the top letter on the tray, the thing slipped from my hand, and the letters strewed the carpet like leaves in a November gale.

For if it were not for the fact that old Mr. Counselman had been dead two years I should have said that he had just written his granddaughter.

I picked the letters up, apologizing for my awkwardness. I stole a second look at the envelope with the sprawling address in the blackest of black ink, and I felt that curious pricking in my scalp which I thought I had outgrown long before I took my diploma. Pauline, leaning languidly back in the easy chair, looked at me as I came toward her, and a little breeze of emotion stirred the listlessness of her face.

"Are you ill, Miss Potts?" she exclaimed.

"No, indeed; I'm perfectly well."

"I never saw you so pale. You're as white as if you'd seen a ghost," said Pauline. Strange how figures of speech stick in this materialistic age!

She put out her hand for the letters, a hungry look in her eyes. She had written Owens that he must not write her again, and I think she was living in hopes of an answer.

What I remember next is the dreadful stillness in the room, so that the hammering of my heart seemed offensively loud. And then Pauline caught her breath with a little gasping sound that rent the hush like a shriek.

There was no color in the face lifted to mine, yet by some strange contradiction the eyes seemed to have come alive. Blazing in the oval of her dead, white face, they gave me an odd, illogical certainty of immortality.

I came to myself a little when she put the preposterous thought into words. One can be any number of kinds of fool while it's only a matter of feeling. To say it is another matter.

"Miss Potts—I—it's a letter from—grandfather."

"My dear!" I remarked, and at once I was my superior self again—I even felt my color coming back. "Some similarity in handwriting," I began airily.

She held the letter toward me, and I noticed that her hand was not shaking. My glib explanation broke off just where it was. To speak of resemblances seemed as absurd, with the address before me, as if the Old Man himself stood there in full view, the strong ugliness of his face softened by the humorous quirk to his mouth and the light of his eyes as he looked at Pauline.

As she opened the envelope I knew my throat was dry. With an absurd sense of relief I saw the enclosure was typewritten. Common sense triumphantly reasserted itself. Superstition and the typewriter seem as far apart

as the poles. "It is singular," I began, "how these resemblances—"

Again I tripped over the word, and again my scalp was pricking as I watched her face. She read to the sprawling signature at the end of the page, and then stood up, facing me.

"It's from grandfather," she said with perfect steadiness. "He knows about my trouble, and he's told me what to do, just as he always did."

Then just for a moment fear showed beneath her pale tranquillity, like an ugly face peering from behind a curtain.

"Unless I'm going insane," she said falteringly. "Read it. Tell me if I'm insane!"

I took the letter and read it aloud.

I've often heard people speak of being uncertain whether they were awake or in a dream, but this was the first time I ever longed for the tinkle of the telephone-bell to wake me. It was all so monstrous, the elegance of that big room, and Pauline, listening with her colorless face and big, burning eyes, and the typewritten letter from a man two years dead:

DEAR PAULINE:

It's time this sort of thing was ending. Why the devil do you let other people run your life for you? Daughterly obedience is all very well while you're in pinafores, and after that it's rot.

There are two things necessary to make a man successful or a woman happy. The first is to know what you want, and the next is to get what you want. Now I'm taking it for granted you know your own mind about this thing. If you're not sure, sit down and settle it on the spot. If you are sure, then do what you want, if you stir up hell. But bless you, it won't last.

You're a good little girl, Pauline. You've got brains enough to have been of use to you if you'd been a man. And you've got heart enough to be a good deal of trouble to you, as long as you're a woman. And all you want in addition is a little of your old granddad's backbone.

J. COUNSELMAN.

It was the Old Man's letter!

If the address and signature, too, had been typewritten, there would have been no mistaking its source. He had

been dead two years, and the postmark was Chicago and the date two days earlier. The stationery was that of the eighteen-hour flier, which old Mr. Counselman always took when he made his business trips West, and from which he had written Pauline many a letter, though never before in a more crucial moment in her life. When I looked at the girl's face I realized that, though her grandfather had died just when she needed him most, he had somehow retrieved that blunder.

She moved toward the door.

"I must find John at once," she said, and then hesitated. "Or perhaps I'd better see papa first." And that was all there was to it. The strength of that stubborn old will that had bowed men like wheat in a hail-storm was pulsing through her.

While it was only a question of breaking her heart, and making her life torture long-drawn out, she had been listless and submissive. But now the Old Man stood back of her, and she was afraid of nothing.

As it turned out, the wedding was a month after Pauline reached her majority. At first she had planned it for her birthday, but conceded that point when she realized that her father and mother were prepared to make the best—in public, at least—of something they could never forgive. The wedding was the sort that occupies several columns in the Sunday papers.

It is an open question whether or not Ernie Counselman was a more pathetic figure than the son-in-law, summoned from his model tenements and day nurseries and what-not, to act one of the principal rôles in a fashionable wedding. But as far as that is concerned, all men look out of place at weddings. If only the bride and her attendants were allowed to appear, the effect would be greatly enhanced.

That was the last I saw of Pauline Counselman, though of Mrs. John Owens I have seen a great deal. For Mrs. Owens is one of the unreasonable mothers, and she always feels so much

safer about the children if I am along. It was as we were starting for California one winter that I made the acquaintance of Miss Rosina Wells, the stenographer on the eighteen-hour flier.

She had taken several letters from Mr. Owens, and was dying to question me about him. Wasn't he the young man who married the awfully rich Counselman girl? Miss Rosina Wells was a pleasant enough person, and I have never looked on curiosity as one of the vices, and I told her what she wanted to know.

"I was acquainted with her grandfather," said Miss Wells by way of returning the compliment. "Awfully nice old man, though he would swear if things didn't suit him. Once I took a letter from him to this very Mrs. Owens."

I knew all at once that what she was going to say would be worth hearing, just as you know sometimes that the unopened telegram is a death-message, instead of news that the company you expected at six o'clock isn't coming till next week, or that the ring at the telephone is your dearest friend whom you thought a thousand miles away. I listened with more than my ears.

"It was a funny letter," Miss Wells rattled on, "to write a young lady. At least most gentlemen don't talk about the devil and such subjects in their letters to girls. He explained to me afterward that he talked straight because he felt worked up. She wanted to go to college, didn't she, and her folks were in a hurry to get her into society?"

"Yes, yes!" I cried. "And he told her not to let other people run her life for her, and that daughterly obedience was rot after a girl got out of pinafores."

Miss Wells opened her eyes so widely that circles of white showed around the blue.

"Why, how did you know?" she gasped. I never had a chance to tell her, for a jewelry salesman came up

then, who wanted to get off letters to twenty or more customers, and I suppose Miss Rosina Wells is wondering yet.

I was not as surprised as I might have been, for that day when I had read to Pauline Counselman the letter that was to save her from making shipwreck of her life, her grandfather's letter, I had found myself looking at the date in the corner. The month and day of the month corresponded with the postmark. The year was a little blurred, but as I looked at it closely I thought I could make out '02 instead of '06. The letter had been written four years earlier, to urge her not to be browbeaten into giving up her ambition for a college course.

Where it had been in the mean time I cannot say. Four years is a trifle long even for a Pullman porter to carry

a letter in his pocket. I have heard of letters stuck in mail-boxes and sent on their way at last, a score of years after they were written. But, whatever the explanation of the delay, there is no question that the letter had come just when it was needed most.

At the door of the Owens compartment I stood for a moment looking in. Owens had the baby in his arms, and the little boy stood leaning against his arm with the air of cheerful confidence characterizing children whose fathers have time for them.

And Pauline, watching the trio with lips parted and eyes luminous, looked incarnate motherhood. One forgot that she was the heiress of the Counselman millions, and saw only a happy woman. And as I looked I suddenly felt a profound conviction that the Old Man knew.

## P R O T E S T

By Gladys Hall

THE birds are wooing and mating,  
With a wild thing's joyous right—  
The winds are caressing the waters,  
Wanton and subtle and light;  
And I, of all things created,  
Stand—lonely—'neath moon and sun,  
I, of all things of passion,  
Because of this thing you've done.

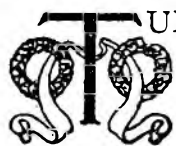
The flowers give of their fragrance,  
They clamber and blossom and sate—  
Each forest creature answers  
The call of its forest mate.  
And I, accursed and forsaken,  
Stand forth like a stricken tree,  
I—of God's highest creation—  
For this thing you have done to me.

Adamant, I, to all pleading—  
Cold when I should be fain,  
Night where there should be sunshine,  
Where Joy should rule—but Pain.  
Lonely beyond conception,  
Dead in a living guise,  
When, for my truth you gave me,  
Lies—all lies—all lies.

# TURNER "UP!"

A SHORT STORY

BY HENRY EDWARD WARNER



TURNER had decided to quit the game. It was a rotten one, anyhow. He had been a crooked jockey ever since Gentleman Armstrong had baited him, that day of the forty to one shot at Saratoga.

A crook feels like a crook, thinks and lives like a crook—and Turner was no exception. But his bravado was off now. Minnie McFadden had done it—Minnie of the blue eyes and red lips, and the voice like a bird, who sang "Buttercup" at the Jockey Social's presentation of "Pinafore."

As he walked the path to the clubhouse at the new track, kicking gravel before him, he remembered the way she smiled at him when he gave her the flowers.

A pitiful offering to a queen, he thought, but she said they were beautiful, and when she took one from the bunch and put it in his lapel and leaned over to pull it down against his coat, her hair brushed his cheek, and before he knew what he was doing he had her in his arms.

There is one supreme moment in a man's life—until the next one arrives. That was Turner's supreme moment number one. Number two was when she told him that, much as she admired a fine horse and a good rider, she could not marry a jockey.

"I can quit," he had said, proudly, "and sell real estate. I've got plenty of money."

"When you have quit," she said, "why, then—"

And so arrived Turner's supreme moment number three, for to-day was his last day as a jockey. He was to be up on Firebrand. Armstrong was waiting for him at the club. Turner knew what for. Gentleman Armstrong was a crook, too—the father of crooks.

And Turner bit his lip as he thought of what Gentleman Armstrong was going to say to him.

Not that Turner had any scruples—that is, not that he would have had any ordinarily, but now it was different. In his inner consciousness he knew that Minnie McFadden's code was straight. He was making ready to wipe off the slate, but he wanted to quit clean.

He wanted that last race to be on the level. He knew every horse, every jockey in it. Only Pathfinder could beat Firebrand; but Murphy was up on Pathfinder and didn't know the horse. Why not run it on the level?

"Armstrong's so darned crooked he'd make the trail of a gartersnake look like a straight line," Turner muttered. "He wouldn't win straight if he could!" There was a tone of bitterness in it.

Practically, one honest win at the finish of a career like Turner's wouldn't make him a whit cleaner; but sentimentally, Turner just wanted that one white feather to take to his girl. It meant something to him—as much as a clean collar means to a man who has had to turn his cuffs.

He was thinking it over along that line when, just at the steps of the clubhouse, he ran into Armstrong.

"Where in thunder have you been?" demanded the Gentleman. "I've been waiting half an hour for you!"

"I'm here," said Turner laconically.

The Gentleman pushed him by the elbow up the steps and into a little off room, then touched a button and told the waiter to stay a decent distance away and keep others out of range until further orders—which, accompanied by a bank note, cleared the field.

They sat down, the Gentleman and the Jockey, at opposite sides of the table.

Armstrong leaned on his elbows, his hands to his cheeks.

"Turner," he said, "you don't show in the sixth race to-day; get me?"

"Don't show!" Turner laughed roughly. "Say, Mr. Armstrong, do you mean Turner up on Firebrand doesn't show?"

"I mean you're fourth by a neck, Turner. Pathfinder first under the wire if you have to foul Maid-o'-Mist; the Maid comes second, and field for third—Firebrand fourth, or in the bunch, I don't care where."

Turner whistled—a long, incredulous whistle.

"Do you know Morgan?"

"Yes. What's he doing?" Turner replied and inquired in a breath.

"He takes Murphy's place on Pathfinder."

"What's the matter with Murphy?"

"Sick—hospital—doctor's certificate; got it all fixed."

Turner had been fiddling with the menu card; he had torn points off and was now ripping a hole in the center. Gentleman Armstrong noticed it.

"What's the matter with your liver?" he demanded. "What's up?"

Turner threw down the pieces of cardboard angrily, and with his fist struck the table.

"I'll tell you what's up!" he exclaimed. "Firebrand's lost two races this season; Turner hasn't ridden a horse in the field. What're you going to do with Firebrand and Turner?"

"Cool down, kid," and Armstrong

actually smiled happily. "Isn't Firebrand my hoss? Put him in a dray if I want to, can't I? What's it to you? Didn't you pull your resignation on me yesterday like a quitter, with Havre de Grace and Laurel coming on? What's your reputation if you're going to quit the game, anyhow? Get wise, Turner; get wise! I stand to pull over fifty thousand dollars two ways, on Pathfinder winning and Firebrand losing, and it's five thousand each way for you besides anything you can get over the books. And, anyhow, take it from me, Turner, we're near the end of sport. Get yours while the going is good."

The Gentleman leaned back with a grin. Turner swallowed hard.

"You know why I want to win this race, Mr. Armstrong," he said finally.

The Gentleman stood, shook himself as if to go.

"I know, Turner," he said, coolly smoothing down his coat collar. "Maybe you're right, but business is business. Chase your skirt to-morrow, but to-day"—he opened the door and let Turner out first—"to-day you ride regular, like I tell you, or—"

The waiter came up. He didn't finish; he had no need to finish. Turner understood. Among crooks there are secrets that require only to be hinted. At the bottom of the steps they separated.

The Gentleman swung away carelessly, fingering the watch-chain that was draped on a fat front. Turner hesitated, seemed about to call him back, then turned on his heel and went toward the paddock.

There were yet five hours until the races. In the stables, boys trained to their business, rubbed down horses, trotted them around, patted them, or sat about talking, whittling, whistling. Turner went in among them, stopped at Firebrand's stall and patted his favorite's arched neck, rubbed his nose, spoke to him, and fed him a wisp of hay.

He had something heavy on his mind. A mere nod or a short-cut hello was all the greeting he exchanged with any one. Jockeys at any time are not a loquacious crowd.

Turner was musing along this line. He had to be a crook. The Gentleman had his number. He had his orders. He had raced crooked, he must quit crooked. He wondered if Minnie McFadden would understand how hard it was, and how he really wanted to be straight just this once, so that he could smile into her blue eyes when he told her how he had quit. He had all that money down-town and a little edge in the real-estate crowd.

It would be fairly easy sailing for him after he got a start, and he had a picture in his mind of a home, and kids maybe, and all that goes with the best sort of life. They would have a little garden in the back yard; sure, he had always wanted a garden. Somehow or other he felt like a public benefactor every time he thought of making something useful grow from the ground.

He had to be crooked—why? So that the Gentleman could cash in a fifty-thousand-dollar winning. The Gentleman knew, and the public knew, that Firebrand couldn't do worse than second, and ought to win, on the card of the sixth race. They would call it a frame-up or a fluke—most likely a frame-up. If they called it a frame-up, Minnie would see it in the newspapers.

Supposing he won ten thousand and lost Minnie! You see, Turner was serious about this affair, and he knew that Minnie was straight as a string.

And then he thought.

"If I'm going to be crooked, why not be crooked for myself—and Minnie?"

'A double-cross is a nasty thing to deal, in any event; but what was the Gentleman doing to *him*?

"I get Burney and hand him my roll; he bets on Firebrand; Firebrand wins. Everybody knows Turner is up; Minnie knows it."

But Turner wanted to be straight. And would it be straight to double-cross the Gentleman? What about that honor among thieves—the code of crooks? Rot! And yet Turner hesitated, and if he hadn't bumped into Burney at the next corner of the grand stand—

They went to the nearest café.

"Burney, I've got some business for you."

"A sure thing?" Burney grinned. Turner nodded.

"Better than a sure thing—a cinch and a customer," he said. "How'd you like to take down a commission on a cold \$18,000, track odds?"

"Who's got it?" Burney was interested.

"A friend of mine," said Turner. To the waiter: "Two bottles of beer here." To Burney: "A swell with a bank-roll as big as an elephant. He wants to bet on Firebrand."

"Place?"

"No; to win!" and Turner gritted his teeth. "He may be a damned fool, Burney, but that's his funeral. He won't handle it himself, and I can't trust any one but you; you're square."

Burney blinked and stared at his friend. He asked who was the swell, and Turner shook his head.

"I give you the money for him in an hour, if you take it on; you pay me—that's all. Are you on?"

"Would a duck hunt a puddle? Keep the change, waiter; you remind me of an old friend. Don't mention it. Kid, where is the rhino?"

"You meet me here in an hour, and go dumb, Burney!"

Burney went dumb. And an hour later Turner slipped him currency in exchange for a receipt, and went his way.

The Gentleman, meanwhile, was back in the club counting his problematical winnings at all conceivable odds, even money, every way it might go. He had quietly invested a liberal amount of loose change with blind commissioners, to be bet at the right

time. He was more than satisfied. And when he thought of Turner he grinned.

"Square little guy!" he mused.

And the square little guy was at that moment being rubbed down in the bath-house, and had completely reconciled his conscience to the rawest double-cross in all his personal knowledge of nefarious work. He knew Pathfinder's weakness; and Morgan's substitution for Murphy made it easier, for he knew where Morgan was last night; and where Morgan was last night was no place for a winning jockey the evening before a big race.

Morgan had spent the morning with a hot towel and ammonia.

When Gentleman Armstrong put through the bill creating the Racing Commission that permitted him to open the Gentlemen's Agricultural and Breeding Association for the Development of Farming Interests and the Improvement of Live Stock, he winked the other eye. He was always winking the other eye.

The good people in the community also winked the other eye, for like the Gentleman, they were in on the main chance. If Deacon Smith hauled a hundred bettors at twenty-five cents a head to the track in his limousine, which came out of a land deal, certainly the encouragement of agricultural development and horse breeding couldn't be nefarious.

Nearly all the good people had filled their houses with boarders from New York, Philadelphia, and other centers of agricultural development. These worthy agriculturists wore checkered vests through checkered careers, and their general notion was that potatoes were grown hashed brown, and lima-beans ready shelled.

Even the leading church choir's benefit advertised in all the town windows was a musical comedy at the opera-house, rehearsed and dated to catch the overdrip of easy money. And so the Gentleman was on good terms

with himself and with the world as he nodded to the deacon and swung through the big gate, heading for the club-house.

What though an irate Governor, tricked into signing the bill for the betterment of agriculture, had sent his attorney-general to stop proceedings on the ground of fraud. A legitimate race-track, licensed by a *de facto*, self-perpetuating board of good citizens who owned race-track stock—a board named in the act—why, it was to say pooh-pooh to the Governor!

And so the grand stand was packed, the paddock filled with fat sports and pallid youth who knowingly looked over the runners and their jockeys, and talked wisely of past performances and fillies and black colts and geldings, and Heaven knows what sort of conjectures based upon what sort of information!

There were tipsters with their hats on sidewise and reeking cigars sticking from their mouth-corners. There were broken-down sports who begged the favor of a commission; callow kidlings, too, who had broken away from their counters for the day in the hope of making a killing.

Into this bunch came Burney—quiet, worming his way here and there. And he nodded to Gentleman Armstrong.

"How's Firebrand to-day, Gentleman?"

"Fit as a fiddle; Turner's up; sure win," said the Gentleman with a smile, and passed on.

Several and sundry men came to Burney and took what he slipped to them, and moved silently away. In the betting-ring twenty-six bookmakers were in their pens. The slates went up, one by one. There was a rush for the pens, an exchange of money right and left for tickets left and right. A bell clanged in the center of the ring.

Hurrying feet carried their owners to the grand stand and points of vantage. Clockers with their glasses caught the line-up. Blockmen cleared,

away their old slates and sheet men hurriedly cast up figures, to see what they stood to win or lose. Scouts lingering behind the bettors for an exchange of views commented on the cinch, for the bookies were billed to knock 'em down in the first race.

"They're off!" The cry was picked up from end to end of the stand. Down the track the horses came, jockeys standing in their stirrups and whipping their mounts over the neck and withers.

And while the race went on—the same old struggle, the same old mob, the same screaming women and yelling men—men keyed up to foolishness and let down to despair; men cursing and men actually praying under their breath, who had staked on a hunch or a tip—while the horses went around under glasses and whips cut the air, Turner was wrestling with his soul. For be it known, jockey or gentleman, saint or sinner, all men in love have souls. And Turner had found and was wrestling with his own.

It happened to have been entrusted for the moment to the keeping of the girl with the blue dress that matched her eyes, who leaned against the paddock gate; and he kept thinking hard—as hard as he had ever thought on any other homestretch: "I want to quit clean! I want to quit clean! I want to—dammit, I want to!" But what he said aloud was:

"Honest, Minnie, I was never so nutty in my life! Firebrand'll run away from them to-day!"

"Oh, Jock, I hope so!" she exclaimed. "I'd just like to see you win once more!"

"I'll win, all right!" Turner gritted his teeth a little. "Don't you fret, sweetheart; I'll win. Where—where's it?"

She looked about her—timorously, quickly. Then she unfastened from her neck a bit of ribbon and gave it to him. He kissed it furtively.

In the very act of saluting his colors he caught a glimpse over her

shoulder of a fat man who twirled his cane, grinned, and walked away with a slight toss of his head in the direction of the stables.

"It's the Gentleman—I'll have to go now; I'll see you—after the race," and Turner followed the fat man, looking backward, regretfully at the girl with the blue eyes who was picking her way through the crowd to entrance G.

No. 6 rode past the judges with a bit of ribbon pinned to his right arm. He wore the smile of easy confidence. Morgan was mounted, No. 4, on Pathfinder—a prancing, dancing beast with a proud neck. Maid-o'-the-Mist got the rail, Turner up next on Firebrand, then Pathfinder and the bunch—Miller, John Quincy, Zenetra, Sleeping Car, Leapaway, and Sir Lacey—Sir Lacey, the inevitable long shot that all the pale boys with two dollars hoped some day to bring down at least fifty to one.

In the betting-ring Pathfinder and Firebrand had been breaking even as favorites. When the books opened there was a run on Firebrand to win. Before a dozen bets were down a counter-run began on Maid-o'-the-Mist at three to one, and a whisper went around that there was something doing. One of Gentleman Armstrong's commissioners had been unwontedly active down the line.

The odds went up against Firebrand and down on the Maid. Pathfinder picking up a lot of money on past performance and among the wise ones. There are always wise ones. Suddenly, from two quarters at once, there came a flying line of bettors on Firebrand and Pathfinder. They met in the center of the semicircle like two great waves—met, clashed, broke, and splashed all over the place. Everybody had money on one of the two horses.

"What th' hell's doin'?" demanded Big Phil, sheet-writer for the Murray Club. "Better go slow."

Murray saw the crowd coming. He

hesitated just a moment; and then, picking up the eraser, with a single circular motion wiped his slate clean.

"Murray's quit!" a blockman across the way shouted. In an instant slates disappeared right and left.

"No more bets, gentlemen!" The late comers growled. "Nothing doing!" And then the great bell rang!

At one end of the line of pens Gentleman Armstrong keenly eyed a small, wiry man who was hurrying toward the grand stand, glass in hand. He reached out and touched him with his cane.

"Hello, Burney! What're your boys up to—eh?"

Burney grinned. And then he passed on without replying. Gentleman Armstrong grunted, scratched his head, walked across to the green in front of the grand stand, and put his glasses on the horses jockeying a bit at the post.

There was that quiet, with a little rustling and settling, that comes just before the start of a big event. Then the crowd in the grand stand arose in a mass and the cry "They're off!" rang over the field.

Firebrand got away clean. The Maid, hugging the rail, was running half a head back; Pathfinder had started the fraction of a second late. Morgan was already laying his whip hard over the withers of his mount.

As they passed the judges, Gentleman Armstrong saw that Pathfinder was coming up under the whip, and that Turner was maneuvering to crowd the Maid at the first turn.

And Turner up was thinking of his instructions.

"Foul the Maid, put Pathfinder first under, and go back to the field," he said. "Come on, Blazes! Come on!"

They were at the turn. The Gentleman saw Turner pull away and give the Maid a clean rail. He grinned.

"He's too sharp to put it over here; he'll do it on the second turn," the Gentleman muttered, and then started

and ran a few clumsy steps down the green. "Why, damn him, he's using the whip! What in thunder— Oh, I see!"

For it was apparent to the Gentleman's mind that it would take the whip to keep Firebrand in a position to cut off the Maid and let Pathfinder through; and the field was close to front, the last horse's nose almost brushing the tip of Leapaway's bobbed tail.

But at the second turn Turner still made way for the Maid, and in doing it crowded Pathfinder into a long swing around, and himself, on the straightaway, brought down his whip with a tremendous sweep, and Firebrand shot forward as if from a cannon, caught up, and passed the Maid by a head.

The crowd in the grand stand yelled itself crazy. Men waved racing cards, women danced up and down, a bedlam of excitement broke loose. From end to end of that long mass of people yells went up for Firebrand, for Pathfinder, for the Maid, and a derisive scream of mirth went along the line as Sir Lacey, the longshot, ran down like a mechanical toy, and quit at the half.

The turn was just ahead. And as it came close Turner up on Firebrand must have seen, in his mind's vision, the little girl in blue who ran down from the grand stand, out onto the green, up to the big fat man with the glasses, and standing by his side began to scream at the top of her voice:

"Come on, dearie! Come on, dearie! Oh, dearie, dearie—"

"Get a telephone!" growled the Gentleman, scowling at her. "You think your dearie can hear you out there, Cinderella?" And he resumed his work with the glass.

At any rate, Turner was thinking—thinking hard.

A crooked jockey who wanted to finish straight for the girl with the blue eyes, he glanced from the tail of his eye at the ribbon pinned to his sleeve. He was figuring out a problem.

First, he was honest—dead honest—in his desire to finish clean. And he said in his heart:

"If I play the Gentleman's game and lose, I'm crooked; if I double-cross the Gentleman and win, I'm crooked two ways. If I ride crooked for the Gentleman, I win \$10,000; if I ride crooked for myself, I win all Burney got down for me, and it's dirty money.

"Come on, Blazes! Win or lose, I ride this race straight! Come on, Blazes!"

Firebrand always was a square horse. He caught the idea. He gave one big leap, carried himself forward on the wings of an impulse, pushed well ahead of the Maid at the turn and, responsive to the frantic yells of a rider who stood in his stirrups and howled the name of the girl in blue, began a desperate fight for the rail.

Morgan saw that something unusual had happened. Rounding the turn a scant third, he began to wear his whip over Pathfinder's neck; but the Maid was game and steady, and held her place.

Then suddenly, just before the last turn, Firebrand blocked the Maid in a too short cut for the rail, and quick as a flash Morgan threw Pathfinder slightly out, and, to the astonishment of every one who saw, the horse that had been third forged ahead.

That was a memorable finish. Down the homestretch they raced, Pathfinder nosing the lead, Firebrand pounding furiously behind him and Turner, laying on the whip, screaming into his mount's ear:

"Win, Blazes, win! She's up there watching us; you've just got to win!"

They were even with the rear end of the grand stand; they had passed it; a shout went up. Turner's sight went dim; a mass of color swept before him, and he felt some one lifting him.

There's a little room where they mend broken heads and hearts, and a jockey's friends—his very close

friends, that is—can come there when anything has happened. And so it happened that the girl with the blue eyes was rubbing Turner's hands when he came out of his trance.

"What—where—what was it?" he asked, dazedly, and then saw her pale, frightened face. "Why, Minnie! What's—"

"Be quiet, Jock," said the doctor. "You've just had a little spill, that's all."

"I lost, eh?"

The girl in blue touched his face gently.

"Don't worry, dearie," she said. "Pathfinder won, and Firebrand stumbled and threw you when you came in second, and the Maid kicked you—but you're all right. There's nothing broken. I'm here."

Turner looked up and smiled, a pale, sick smile.

"Kid," he said, "you know that real-estate business I was going into? Well, it's all up. I had my last cent on Firebrand! Don't cut up, kid—I thought it was a good one. Something happened—anyhow, I'm broke, kid. It's me to keep on riding for a stake, and—"

Minnie McFadden laughed—a big Irish laugh. She motioned to a little man who stood behind the bed.

"Burney," she said, "tell him what you did."

Burney, the commissioner, had a grin on his face that would have engulfed a watermelon.

"Well, you see, Turner," he said, "I did Tom Morgan a good trick once and he tipped me off to something nice to-day, that I thought you wasn't hep to, and so—well, I took a chance and disobeyed your instructions."

"You did what?" Turner raised himself on his elbow.

"Why—er—I— Now don't get sore, Turner. I know I oughtn't to've done it, but I bet your friend's roll on Pathfinder!"

And he winked a lazy, drawling wink and turned away.