


SATURDAY

THE

MARCH 8

CAVALIER

ISSUED WEEKLY

An illustration of a man in a tuxedo with a red bow tie, looking upwards with his hands raised in a gesture of surprise or helplessness. He is surrounded by a chaotic shower of falling money, including various banknotes and coins. The background is a light, textured surface with more money falling around him.

The Purchase

by E. J. Rath

Author of
"Two Women or One?"

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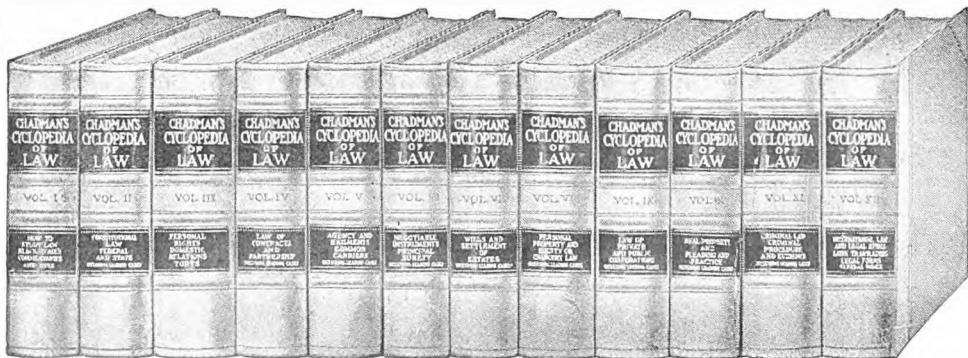
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THE CAVALIER

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THE CAVALIER

MARCH 8, 1913

Vol. XXVI

No. 2

THE PURCHASE

A SERIAL IN IV PARTS—PART I

BY E. J. RATH

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

CHAPTER I.

Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars.



At first the letter amazed Harris; then it amused him, because he had a sharp sense of the absurd. His laugh rang out in the lonely office. Nearly always it was lonely. About the only person who ever entered it was Harris, for a client was a rare luxury, to say nothing of being a curiosity. He fingered the texture of the paper as if to test its reality, and even held it against the light for further proof that it was a tangible thing. Then he reread it twice, the second time aloud. Unmistakably it said:

MR. WINSTON HARRIS,
1422 Bonanza Building, City.

DEAR SIR:

We have bought for your order this day, per instructions, 1,500 shares Federal Copper common, at 78, and will hold same on 20 per cent margin until further orders.

Very truly,
WHITERIDGE, HUNTER & Co.

Harris laughed again. Then he leaned across the desk, picked up a pencil, and began to calculate.

"Fifteen hundred shares! At seventy-eight. Why, that's one hundred and seventeen thousand dollars' worth of stock! What a crazy mistake! And the margin—twenty. That's just a little matter of thirty thousand dollars. Ow! Conservative house, that! Only this time they seem to have made a bad break."

He reached for the telephone-book and turned to the "W's," where he found Whiteridge, Hunter & Co. listed, hailing from the Street.

"It's a real firm, all right," murmured Harris. "The funny part of it is that I don't know them, and I'll bet a cigar they don't know me. Gee! I wonder if I've got a rich namesake?"

Again he sought the telephone-book, and then the city directory. There was no record of any Winston Harris save himself.

"The right building and the right

room," he said, speaking his thoughts; "but the wrong Harris. They may have had some sort of a letter for me; probably an advertisement, and the stenographer has mixed things up. Yet why didn't the man who signed the letter catch the error? Me—a plunger! With a bank-balance under two thousand dollars, and maybe one thousand dollars' worth of outstanding bills, if I have luck collecting."

He chuckled at the fancy. Putting up a margin of thirty thousand dollars was a rare joke. It did not arouse the slightest feeling of longing or jealousy, for Harris troubled himself little about money or the lack of it. He glanced at his desk-clock.

"Too late to phone about it now. I'll wait till to-morrow. Then, if I have time, I'll run down there and explain the mistake."

It was nearly time to start for the train, and Harris slammed down the lid of his desk and put on his coat. He even gave the knob of the little safe a whirl.

It was his custom to smile sardonically when he did that, and this evening his grin was wider than usual. The safe was his because of a debt, not because he bought it. He had nothing to put in it. But the letter he had just received served to accentuate the emptiness of it to the point where it became ridiculous.

The cares of being an architect did not rest very heavily upon Harris. By the bulk of his shoulders and arms he should have been earning a living with his muscles. Yet it pleased him enormously whenever he paused long enough to consider that for six years he had actually supported himself with his drawing-pencil.

True, he had few customers, and the buildings that most of them wanted were the kind that Harris detested. He loved to draw and plan things that were impossible—economically, at least. It pleased him to design beautiful structures that no man wanted. He sighed when the necessity of money

compelled him to cater to what man desired, not to what he ought to have.

Harris strolled toward the railroad station, musing over his letter. It was evident that the stock-brokers had some communication for him; it might even be an invitation to compete for a building. Yet he could not understand how such a serious mistake could have slipped through the hands of the man who signed the letter. Well, he would find out about it in the morning.

But Harris was not at his office the next morning, nor for three days. Municipal cares in the rising little city of Thomas, thirty minutes from the metropolis, piled suddenly upon him, and the letter went completely out of his head. When he did reappear at his town office he found a small heap of letters which had been pushed through the slot in the door, lying there as mute testimony to neglected architectural opportunities. He scooped them up, threw his hat on the table, and sat down to examine his mail. One of the envelopes had a familiar appearance.

"Ah, my friends Whiteridge, Hunter again!" he observed. "Here's where I get the explanation. I suppose I should have written."

He slid a finger under the flap of the envelope and ripped it open. As he removed the letter a small yellow slip, folded once across, fell out upon the desk. Harris spread it out.

A check for \$24,400!

He caught his breath sharply and stared at the yellow slip. His name was written upon it plainly—Winston Harris. Over and over he turned the thing, blinking as if there was something about it that dazzled him. At last he turned to the letter:

DEAR SIR:

We have this day sold, per your order, 1,500 shares Federal Copper common, at 94½, and herewith enclose check for amount due you, less commission and interest. Kindly acknowledge receipt, and oblige,

Very truly,
WHITERIDGE, HUNTER & Co.

For five minutes Harris sat stupefied. Then, seizing his hat, he rushed out of the office, leaving the remainder of his mail unopened on the desk.

"It's going too far," he muttered, as he rang feverishly for the elevator. "It's too much for the nerves of a poor man. I'm not anxious to be caught with somebody else's money, even if they do hand it to me without the asking."

Twenty minutes later he turned in at the entrance to one of the big stone monoliths of the Street, and entered an office on the ground floor.

"Manager in?" asked Harris.

"Yes, he's in," said a clerk. "What is it you want to see him about? Anything I can do?"

"I want to see your manager; it's important."

"He's very busy," suggested the clerk. "If you'll—"

"Is he too busy to see a man who is trying to get rid of twenty-five thousand dollars," demanded Harris, "particularly when it's your money?"

The clerk eyed his caller with sudden interest and some anxiety; then he led him toward a rear office, keeping a furtive though keen eye upon him.

"Mr. Wilson," said the clerk, as he opened a door.

Harris seized a chair as he entered the office, drew it up to the manager's desk, and sat down without ceremony. Then he slapped down before the eyes of the mildly astonished broker the letter and the check.

"What about this?" asked Harris.

The manager read the letter, examined the check, and by that time the visitor had produced his card.

"Well, what about it, Mr. Harris?" inquired the manager. "Isn't the amount right?"

"Right! Man, it's a mistake. That check's not meant for me. I never bought a cent's worth of stock in my life."

The manager glanced at the card again.

"You're Mr. Winston Harris, are you not?"

"Oh, that part's right enough!"

"Of 1422 Bonanza Building?"

"Yes; but—"

"Anybody else of your name who has offices in the Bonanza?"

"No; nor in the city, for that matter, as far as I can discover."

"Then I fail to see where there is any mistake, Mr. Harris."

"But I tell you I bought no stock."

"We certainly had your order," said the manager composedly. "And you've made a pretty good turn, too. You caught the market psychologically."

"I never bought or sold a share of stock through your firm or any other firm," said Harris, slowly and distinctly. "Do you get that? I haven't got any money to buy stock with. I never did have any."

"Nevertheless, we had your order," repeated the manager, "to sell as well as to buy. The margin was deposited with us, and the transaction has been closed."

"My order? I never gave an order."

"But your agent did," and Mr. Wilson showed signs of becoming bored.

"I have no agent!" declared Harris, in exasperation. "This check doesn't belong to me, and I won't take it. And if you take my advice, you'll hustle around and find out who's making costly mistakes in your office."

"Mr. Harris, we don't make mistakes in this office," replied the manager, eying him calmly. "And why are you so averse to a good profit?"

"Because it's not my profit; that's why. It may be somebody's, but it certainly doesn't belong to me. Who is this agent you talk about?"

"That is something which I cannot discuss."

Harris stared in amazement at the man behind the desk.

"You mean to say," he began slowly, "that you decline—"

"Listen, Mr. Harris," said the manager. "Mr. Whiteridge gave me directions to have this order executed. He further told me to make no explanations concerning it, even if any were demanded. As a matter of fact, I know so little about the transaction that I am not in a position to explain, even were I permitted."

"All right; I'll see Mr. Whiteridge."

"He sailed for Europe two days ago."

"Mr. Hunter, then."

"He has been only a name here for several years," smiled the manager.

"He's dead."

"Then who the devil can tell me something about this business?" demanded Harris.

For answer, Mr. Wilson picked up the letter and check and handed them to Harris, who shook his head.

"I won't touch it; I'm afraid of it. Somebody'll be after me for grand larceny. I warn you, you've made a mistake."

"I'm quite sure you'll find the check good in the Palmer Trust Company, Mr. Harris. Why complain?"

"I wouldn't, if it were true. I'd turn handsprings. But don't you see how impossible it is? I repudiate it—disown it; the whole business. You're handing twenty-five thousand dollars to the wrong man."

"We'll take that risk, Mr. Harris."

Harris eyed the manager in silence for a few seconds, then slipped the yellow check out of the folds of the letter and held it up. Taking it between the thumbs and forefingers of each hand, he said:

"Watch it!"

The manager put forth a calm, restraining hand.

"Think twice," he said. "Don't be foolish. Don't make trouble for our bookkeepers and cashiers. If there's a mistake, time will rectify it."

His bland, friendly smile stayed the purpose of the bewildered architect. Harris paused irresolutely, then folded the check again and put it in his pocket.

"Mr. Wilson," he said. "I'm going to let you persist in your error, since you insist; but I'm also going to protect you against it. I hereby formally notify your firm that you have paid twenty-four thousand four hundred dollars to the wrong man. I have made formal tender of the check, and you refuse it. Now I shall deposit this check with the Palmer Trust Company, upon which it is drawn. I shall open an account there in my own name, and I will ask you to send a clerk with me for identification. That account will remain untouched until Mr. Whiteridge returns from abroad, and then I'll get an explanation—or know why. Meantime, you know where the money is."

The manager smiled and nodded his head in satisfaction. He touched a push-button, and when a clerk entered the office he said:

"Take Mr. Harris over to the Palmer Trust, where he wishes to be identified."

Ten minutes later Harris walked forth from the doors of the Palmer Trust, the possessor of a pass-book which certified that he had an account worth nearly twenty-five thousand dollars, and also the possessor of thoughts as baffling as they were uneasy.

Slowly he made his way afoot through the crowded streets. Every shoulder that jostled him furnished a thrill. He had a sensation of being followed, even though he knew it to be a false one.

Had somebody quietly taken him by the arm and whispered that he was "wanted," Harris would have submitted with hardly a question.

For the first time in his life he had money—and it did not belong to him!

CHAPTER II.

Fifteen Thousand More.

HARRIS pushed away from him a pile of official papers with an impatient thrust. His mind would not

concentrate upon the affairs of the city of Thomas. Every document seemed to bear, in blurred, dancing characters of red, the figures \$24,400.

The thing was haunting him, both-ering him, stealing his attention from matters that demanded it, and throwing him into aimless, preoccupied moods when every duty of the hour bade him be alert, keen, and watchful. Time that rightfully belonged to the taxpayers, not to him, had been wasted in idle efforts to find a namesake—somebody to whom he could shift a burden so strangely put upon him.

But there was no namesake within the ken or the search of the mayor of Thomas. As a Winston Harris, his isolation was splendid and complete. Even the metropolis, where, as architect, he kept an office big enough to hold his drawing-table, a desk, and the ironical safe, offered no man whose name matched his—at least, none whom he could find.

The foolishness of the mistake of the people in the Street, had it ended there, would have furnished Harris a tale for the entertainment of his friends; but the sheer folly that topped it, that of stubbornly and blindly refusing to acknowledge the mistake, or even explain the making of it, supplied an element of mystery, uneasiness, and even foreboding that locked his lips and made the secret a prisoner to him alone.

And the thing kept thrusting itself before him. He could feel in his pocket the bank-book that told a truth, but concealed a lie. Folded between its stiff and unmarked pages—unmarked save for the single entry which seemed to do nothing but mock at his comparative poverty—lay the two letters that offered a further taunt. Again and again Harris read those letters; times by the dozen he reassured his eyes with the falsehood in the book. The practise was becoming almost mechanical. He could feel stealing upon him an unrest, an obsession that made his mind

and resolution unfit for the things which he had sworn faithfully to do.

For Harris, at the age of thirty, was a man weighted with responsibilities which, had he realized them in advance, he would have no more undertaken than he would have deliberately condemned himself to life-long toil in an abhorrent occupation.

It had been fun to fight the old gang; it had been exhilarating to lead the charge against a foe that stood for the sordidness of things as they were; it had been a sweet triumph to tear victory from the clutches of a boss who had never known defeat. But that was only the beginning of the battle, as the young mayor of Thomas soon came to learn.

The gang had called it a college boys' fight, and the boys had accepted the challenge. They had pushed the fray swiftly, even ferociously; they had gone abroad telling truths in a way that had the novelty and vigor of youth. And the people of Thomas had voted to give the boys a chance.

They had even given them a majority of the city council, though it was but a slender one. It was here that Harris could feel the powerful hand of Harvey Johnson, holding back through the skilful manipulation of a tricky minority the things that needed to be done, if the pledge of the "college boys" was to be redeemed.

True, Harris had made a clean sweep of the executive departments; he had a friend wherever the power of his appointment ran. Yet the political wisdom of the gang, and all the experience that came with years of power, immunity, and greed, were still struggling to compass the doom of an administration hardly begun.

Certainly it was no time for Harris to be haunted with a phantom that refused to be explained, yet persisted without a single unrelenting hour. Free of the mayoralty, he might conceivably have amused himself with the problem. Beset as he was, however, with swiftly changing conditions,

hidden attacks, and problems that called for courage as well as constructiveness, he had no time for an affair that preyed cunningly upon his very inability to cope with it.

For a grinding, discouraging week he fettered himself to his desk in the City Hall; then in sheer weariness gave himself a day for his professional affairs in the metropolis. The usual pile of letters lay on the office floor, for he had no clerk or stenographer, and needed none. One by one he read them with feeble interest, until—Well, this is what it said:

WINSTON HARRIS, ESQ.,
Bonanza Building, City.

DEAR SIR:

We sold for your order this day 2,500 shares Union Central, preferred, at 122 $\frac{3}{4}$, holding it per your order to cover at 117.

Very truly,

WAGENHEIM & FOSTER.

"Good God!" shouted Harris.

Automatically he had risen from his chair, glaring at the sheet of paper which bore the message. For a moment he felt oppressed, even dazed. Then he ran out of the office, slamming the door with a pull that threatened to shatter the glass which bore his name—the name that seemed to be a magnet for a world of insane finance.

A breathless architect found himself elbowing a crowd of excited men, some of them panting, as he himself was, in the customers' room of Wagenheim & Foster. The market was a swiftly flying shuttle; even a novice could have sensed that. Something in a foreign land—a war, a revolution, or the death of a monarch—was playing upon the frayed nerves of the Street. And the Street cried:

"Sell! Sell!"

A massive structure of prices was crumbling under the sledges of a crew of wreckers, tottering, swaying ominously, falling block by block.

"Your manager! Who's in charge?" cried Harris, shoving and half hurdling himself toward a railing at the

far end of the room. Here there were men who seemed to be measurably sane amid all the outcry. Harris seized the nearest, a beardless youth, and waved in front of his astonished eyes a letter.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

The youth took it, held it off to read, and then nodded.

"Just a minute, Mr. Harris," he said; "I think you're all right on that."

He disappeared into a rear room, but returned in half a minute with a cheerful smile and nod.

"You were covered at 116 $\frac{1}{2}$ not five minutes ago. The market is so active that the order could not be executed at 117. But I guess you won't complain about that."

He was turning away, when Harris detained him with a grip of desperation.

"See here," he said. "You're not through with me. There's an explanation coming, and I want it."

"An explanation? What is there to explain? Why, man, you win! There isn't a man out there in that crowd who wouldn't step into your shoes if he could."

And the youth pointed to the breathless scores who struggled around the fluttering ticker and the blackboard, which told the story of a decay of fortunes.

"There's everything to explain," said Harris, never loosening his grip. "I never ordered you to sell any stock for me. I never ordered you to cover. I never put up a cent. I don't know you, and you don't know me."

"Really?" The young man was smiling. "Wait a minute."

Reluctantly Harris allowed him to disappear again, and nervously he watched the door that led to the rear room until the youth of high finance once more came into his view.

"No mistake about the order, Mr. Harris. It was placed in the hands of our junior member, and, if I do say it,

pretty neatly executed, considering the way things are going this morning. He's on the floor now—busy. A check will be forwarded to you to-night. It will be somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen thousand dollars."

"But—"

Harris raised his hand in a baffled gesture, and the young man, free from the clutch that kept him from urgent things, slid away with an apologetic smile.

"You'll have to excuse me now," he said. "You can see how busy we are."

Harris turned hopelessly and stared at the crowd. Nobody paid the slightest attention to him as he stood irresolute, the crumpled letter in his hand. For several minutes he watched the way of the Street in one of its tantrums. It was doing things—shouting, winning, losing, but always doing things. It was explaining nothing.

With a shrug of his shoulders he walked slowly out into the open air, where he halted again, hat in hand, and wiping his moist forehead. A mad crowd caromed him right and left, though he scarcely was aware of it. At last, sluggishly, as if but half awake, he walked away from the place where men were too busy to explain.

Fifteen thousand dollars! Whence? From whom? Why? His brain refused to fashion an answer. All it seemed to grasp was an echo, which said over and over again: "Fifteen thousand! Fifteen thousand!"

What Harris did the remainder of that day he could recall but faintly. He ate lunch somewhere—he remembered that; and dinner, too. He even went to a theater, where there was something with music in it; but the music always seemed to be droning forth a monotonous refrain of the phrase that whirled in his brain—fifteen thousand dollars!

He did not even return to the little city of Thomas that night, but dreamed through the sleeping hours in a hotel. Gradually, out of the chaos

of his thoughts, one had shaped itself into definite form: He must go back to the Street and choke from it the secret which he had a right to know.

His mind was approximating a state of calm when he visited his office early in the morning. He found what he fully expected—a letter and a check. Their very tangibility seemed to steady him. It had not been a wild dream, after all. Deliberately he folded the check, slipped it back into the envelope, and, as a matter of self-discipline, opened the rest of his mail, and even wrote one or two letters. Then he went down-town.

But Harris found, despite his own return to an outward composure, there had been no change in the demeanor of the people of the Street. His affairs were no longer a matter of concern to them; they failed to see that he had aught of which he could complain; the page of the ledger that told his brief story had been turned.

The junior partner gave him a word or two, then dashed away for the Exchange. The transaction was "regular," he said; the firm had deducted its customary commission. If there was any error in the calculation, would Mr. Harris please make a statement of it in writing? It would be attended to.

"But the order—who gave it?" There was something almost pleading in the tone of Harris.

"Your agent," said the junior member as he ran out of the office.

His agent! Harris had heard the same phrase a week before only a block down the street. There was something sinister in the mystery of it. Had he a self-constituted guardian of his fortunes? Was he but a mere pawn, pushed here and there by an unseen finger? Who owned the finger? What was his purpose?

His agent! Harris could have laughed at the term. Fitter, it seemed to him, would it be to say "his master." A vague sense of awe had seized upon him. No longer was he his own pilot. He had the helpless sensation

of a captive, being led whither he knew not and with no one to offer a word that would make things clear.

He was the plaything of a hidden purpose, an unknowable force. Its whim for the day was to shower fortune upon him. When would the whim change, and when would that which had been given be snatched away, and even more?

Harris was worried. The check was like a weight in his pocket, insistently reminding him of its presence. No longer could he find consolation in the thought that somewhere there had been a mistake, for two mistakes of the kind which had overtaken him do not happen. Neither do two houses, engaged in the unsentimental business of the Street, make the same mistake with the same man.

No; somewhere there was a purpose, somewhere a plan. And somewhere, he could not escape the dread sensation, was a force that guided him in the way it chose to have him go.

For half the day he carried the check. Then he took it to the Palmer Trust Company. A teller received it, glanced casually at it, and added something over fifteen thousand dollars to the figures in Harris's pass-book.

Had he thrown the check back in the face of the young man who presented it, the latter would not have been startled out of the forced calm which he had assumed. Had a button been pressed, and an officer called, Harris would have taken the proceeding as something to be expected.

Forty thousand dollars! It must be true, for the book said so.

"I think I'd better go back and be mayor for a while," said Harris, half aloud.

CHAPTER III.

He Sees a Doctor.

THE rain of money—money written on checks—continued to drench the young mayor of Thomas. He

knew not where to turn for shelter; he had no warning of the days when the storm would break in a fresh fury. It was always money. He never lost.

Allen & Hartley, bankers and brokers of Broad Street, may have intended to produce a shock when they sent him a check for \$32,468.78. If so, they failed of their purpose. Harris was deadened to shocks. His mind refused to react.

Dully, doggedly, mechanically, it received each new message, as if the details of the tidings were fully known and wholly anticipated. Allen & Hartley told him, briefly and courteously, that his account—they said it had been running for nearly a month—had been closed out in accordance with his order. The check represented the result.

Harris unfolded the slip with no trace of excitement. His mind was scarcely fixed upon the amount which it represented; rather, it was groping for a clue to the giver, to the motive that dictated the gift, to the end at which both gift and motive were aimed.

The young architect in the Bonanza Building no longer had an impulse to hurry down to the Street on an errand of futile inquiry, for he felt vaguely yet certainly the futility before he had even tested it. He felt himself becoming a fatalist. The power was still guiding him; even worse, relentlessly impressing upon his mind that it was useless to resist.

Harris sat for many minutes, stubbornly thinking and idly twisting the check that stood for over thirty-two thousand dollars.

"It's no use," he muttered. "I won't go down there. They wouldn't tell me anything—except something about an agent. No; I'll sit tight. I'll try to keep sane. It'll come out—sooner or later; it's bound to. And when they come for the money at last, I'll have it—every cent."

He added the check to his account, and he fancied as the teller received it that his eyebrows were raised in polite

inquiry. Yet there was no comment. Why should there be? Other men gambled in the Street; many of them won.

Once more in the same week the thing showed its power again. It was \$19,500 this time. Harris hardly noted the names of the brokers or the stock in which they said he dealt. All he knew was that the check was honored at the Palmer Trust Company, as all the others had been, added to his account in the little brown-covered book, and piled as a new burden upon his shoulders.

There was no exhilaration in the paper ownership of more than ninety-thousand dollars; rather, there was abstraction, depression. There were long days of listlessness and waiting—waiting for something that never came.

Not until he realized that the thing was affecting his sleep did the mayor of Thomas experience anything like real fright. Then, as all physical troubles strike at those who have never known an ill, Harris was gripped with the idea that there was something fundamentally wrong. A constitution bestowed by nature had resisted the attacks of official cares; a muscular system developed in the shell and on the gridiron had carried him through months of grinding labor; a mind disciplined to combat and inured to discouragement had gone calmly forward through a labyrinth of intricate business and treacherous politics.

All these things had in no manner broken the strength of the young mayor, who led his "college boys" always onward with a cheer. But when a man becomes ridden with an obsession, when something sits just out of sight in the back of his brain and whispers, when it breaks his sleep, derails his thoughts, haunts his leisure—then even the stoutest may become a coward for sheer lack of ability to cope with the unseen.

The municipal cares of the city of Thomas should have been all sufficient for anybody. They had even served

to keep the old mayor busy, and he had little more to do than ask for his orders, and watch them executed through a city council which worked the will of the boss with the precision of an adding machine.

The new government had problems; the old had none; for it left to Harvey Johnson such things as problems, and Johnson knew how to solve them. There was building up to be done in Thomas, as well as the tearing down of rotten structures. It was a young man's job, and Harris rejoiced in it—rejoiced until the other thing came to sit upon his shoulder.

Had the mystery shown itself openly in his municipal office, the mayor might have broken under the strain. But it seemed to show a devilish consideration. The money-letters knew him only as Winston Harris, architect. They always went to the little office in the Bonanza Building. Never did he find one upon the great mahogany desk which the old gang had purchased for his predecessor, and which represented the price of a hundred school-desks which the city of Thomas needed far more than it needed luxury in the city hall.

Whatever it all meant, it was a thing apart—physically. The mental burden he carried always; yet he came to know that, so long as he remained in the city of which he was the official head, he would be free from the visible reminders of the power that he could not see. But there were days when curiosity and apprehension mastered him; when he was drawn relentlessly to the office in the big city, where the clients were few, the earnings a grim jest—but the gamble of the mails an intoxicating dread.

He was sitting there one afternoon, trying to goad his mind through the mazes of a blue-print, when there came a caller who seemed to bring into the office an atmosphere that foretold his errand.

"I am Mr. Sageman," he said.

Harris nodded. It was the power

again, this time embodied in a living thing.

"I represent the realty firm of Brown & McKesson."

Again Harris nodded.

"We closed out the Blythewood property at the figure you named."

Harris regarded the visitor placidly, crushing an impulse to take him by the throat and search his pockets; for the futility and foolishness of that came to him on the heels of a fleeting desire.

"Yes?" he said in an even voice.

"And I feel quite free to say," added Mr. Sageman, "that none of us had an idea the property would reach that figure so soon."

Harris smiled faintly. He wondered what the figure was.

"Nevertheless, Blythewood has had an astonishing development of late," added the visitor glibly. "The information about the railroad was good."

The mayor of Thomas nodded mechanically.

"Even better than our own," continued Mr. Sageman.

Would the man never produce the money? For Harris knew that the money flood was loosed again.

"It is really remarkable," said Mr. Sageman smoothly. "that a man should hold a piece of land, merely on contract, you know, for sixty days, and then turn over a matter of forty-five thousand dollars, without ever having had the title."

So it was forty-five thousand this time!

"Those things sometimes happen, you know," remarked Harris lightly, although his brain was aflame. The sum did not interest him; he cared little about it. Had it been forty-five million he would probably have shrugged his shoulders. The thing that gripped his attention was the sixty days. For two months, then, it had been at work—long before it had led his footsteps to the Street. There was an element of shock in that that a mere sum of dollars could not produce.

"Your agent closed out the contract," added Mr. Sageman, as he drew a long leather wallet from his pocket. "He directed us to make the check payable to you. Here it is."

Harris took the slip and tossed it on the desk, without a glance at the writing it bore.

"I'm probably correct in supposing you'd like a receipt," he said, with forced lightness. "Particularly as the amount is fairly large."

He wrote it, listening apathetically to words of congratulation from his visitor. Then he bowed Mr. Sageman out of the office and sat down at the desk again, only to become a prey to a long hour of moody reflection. Something had been learned, anyhow.

It had been going on for a full month before he was aware of it. The stock deals of the Street were manifestly a matter of no sudden impulse; on the contrary, more likely a result of the slower process of gain in real estate. The power had become impatient; evidently there was reason for haste in the affair.

He rose, paced the length of the office a few times, then returned to the desk and picked up the check. Something seemed to blur his eyes, yet he could feel the thing distinctly between his fingers. Was it real? Was all that had gone before a dream? It could not be a dream, and yet—

"I'm going to see Walt," he said suddenly. "He'll know."

Dr. Heatherton held out his hand in glad surprise, when Harris pushed his way unannounced into the office.

"Jingo, but I'm glad to see you!" he said. "Thought you never would come around again. I've been telling some of my friends that I was class-mate to a real mayor; but I think they're beginning to doubt it, because I've never been able to produce you. Don't you ever get a day off?"

"Once in a while," said Harris, with a smile. "But it's a busy job."

Dr. Heatherton appraised the mayor with a pleasant glance of scrutiny.

"You're all right," he said. "You're working hard, but that won't hurt you. All you've got to do is to stop worrying."

"How did you know I was worrying?" demanded Harris, startled.

"It's my business to know it," laughed the doctor. "Sometimes I don't know how I do know it. I just feel it. So the old boss and the lovely gang are worrying you, are they?"

Harris shook his head.

"They don't worry me for a minute," he said. "They hammer me a lot, but they don't worry me."

"Good," said Dr. Heatherton. "We'll rule them out. It's a good thing for a man to have his worries dissociated from his trade—if he has to have them at all. Now, what is it?"

Harris hesitated for an instant, wondering how much to tell. As yet he had confided the business of the money to nobody. Then, as if in recollection of something, he drew from his pocket the check that had been dropped on his desk an hour before and held it forward. The doctor took it, examined it casually, and looked up.

"Well, what about it?" he asked.

"I want to know if it's real."

"You'd better go to a bank cashier," laughed the doctor. "It may be the real thing and it may be a fake. I'm no judge of checks."

"Then it is a check—you can read it," said Harris, with a sigh. "I was almost afraid—"

"It's a check for forty-five thousand dollars," said the doctor crisply. "But it may be a bum one, of course. Anyhow, it's a check."

They studied each other for a few seconds in silence, Harris moving restlessly. Then he leaned forward, laid his hand on the knee of the other man, and said:

"Doc, I want your professional opinion on the subject of my mental condition."

The young specialist laughed again.

"Been having any hallucinations?" he asked.

"That's what I want to find out."

"Well, if you thought this was an hallucination you've got another guess. Win. This is real paper, with real printing and writing on it. And, if I were you, I'd consult a bank."

"I'm serious," said Harris. "I'm worried. Something has been happening to me for the last three or four weeks—at least, I think it has. I want to be examined. I want to know whether I'm crazy. If you tell me that I am I won't be surprised."

"I'll disappoint you by telling you that you're not," said the doctor. "But inasmuch as you've got something on your mind, let's have it."

Harris began with the first check and told the story methodically and carefully. He punctuated it with letters as exhibits; he diagrammed it with the aid of his bank-book. He went into the last detail faithfully.

"Well, that's some yarn," said the doctor, as he finished. "In fact, it's an extraordinary yarn. The strange part of it is that it's true."

"You're sure?" Harris's voice was eager.

"Why, certainly. I'd be sure even if you didn't have the exhibits."

"It's not a delusion?"

"Not even an illusion," smiled Dr. Heatherton. "And you might have an illusion and still be sane. For instance: Suppose there was no check there at all, no letters, no bank-book; yet you thought you possessed them all; were quite sure of it. That would be a delusion, something absolutely without a basis in fact."

"But suppose that you had this check—as you have—yet thought it was for one hundred thousand dollars instead of forty-five thousand dollars, or thought it was a ten-thousand-dollar bill, or even a five-cent piece. We would call that an illusion—something that had a basis in fact, but was distorted either in the eye or the brain. Even if you had that you would not necessarily be insane, or even approaching mental unbalance."

"But there is no illusion present. Everything is real. You have an absolutely accurate knowledge and appreciation of the facts. The only thing the matter with you is, you're worrying about them."

"Do you blame me?" demanded Harris.

"Of course I blame you. You've got no business to let this thing worry you. What's there to worry about? Somebody's giving you money. Let 'em go ahead, if they want to. Just be happy that nobody's taking money away from you."

"That's all very well," interrupted Harris, "but nevertheless—"

"Oh, I understand, of course. You're curious. Who wouldn't be? Keep on being curious, if you like; that won't hurt you. But quit the worry part. Make up your mind that you ought to be well satisfied with the situation. It'll be explained some day."

"You think so?"

"Surely; all things are. Win."

"Well," said Harris, after a pause, "you certainly have relieved my mind. I was really doubtful as to whether all these things were checks or pink menageries. But now they're real it becomes easier to get rid of them. I did tell a couple of brokers that I was going to hold them for a claimant, but I've changed my mind—my sane mind, as you please to call it. Now I'm going to give the stuff to charity."

Dr. Heatherton raised a hand in protest.

"As a physician I have given you all the advice I'm supposed to give. But as a friend and a business man I'm going to give you a little more. Hang on to that money for a while."

"Why?"

"Hang on until you find out who holds the other end of the string."

"You think there is a string?"

"Who knows?" said the doctor, with a shrug. "You can't tell. If they call on you to produce, be ready. That's my advice. Win, don't you

worry about delusions, illusions, or hallucinations. That money is so real that the safest place for it is in a bank."

CHAPTER IV.

Harris Gets Good Advice.

THE mayor of Thomas apparently had been dozing in his office-chair. As a matter of fact, he was wide awake—thinking. When he swung his feet off the mahogany desk and reached for the telephone it was a signal that he had decided to act. Harris liked to do things at once, after his mind was made up. This characteristic was one of his elements of strength, even though it went hand in hand with what others thought was an element of weakness, his frequent failure to consult others before he acted.

"Hello! That, you, Billy?"

The mayor was talking to the office of the *Star*.

"Can you come over here for a little while? I've got a story for you."

A pause, during which he listened, and then he added:

"I want to make a statement for the public, and you can have it exclusively, if you like. I know that I ought not to do that, but you understand why. What? Yes; bring Phil, if you like."

Hanging up the receiver, Harris perched his feet on the desk once more and waited for Billy McAllister, managing editor of the *Star*. McAllister was one of the "college boys." The *Star* had staked its future on the fight against the old ring. It had been the first to bring Harris into the field. It had worked for his nomination. It had set the city of Thomas by the ears in clamoring for his election. The things it had printed earned formidable foes, but they had driven Harvey Johnson and his army of privilege from their fortress. The *Star* stood by the mayor and McAllister guided the *Star*.

Big, blond, and slow in movement, his figure was in keen contrast to that of a small, swarthy, alert youth who

entered the office of the mayor in company with him.

Phil Sharkey was thirty, yet he was a youth in every appearance and movement. He had the guileless blue eye of a child. Also he had the cynical wisdom of a man who had spent years moving among fellow men who made their living out of the city treasury and were post-graduates in the art of keeping out of jail. Phil Sharkey had helped the *Star* elect the mayor. Some of the staff declared that it was really the other way around; that the *Star* had merely afforded Sharkey a medium for telling a story which none knew so well as he, and for telling it in a way that would make a man stop on the street, buy a paper, and stand on the curbstone to read.

"Good morning, Mr. Mayor," said McAllister, with a wave of his hand.

"Hello, you two!" answered Harris. "Find chairs."

"And what's the news now?" asked McAllister. "I warn you in advance that it's got to be good, because I dropped things in the middle of an editorial that is going to loosen the hide of somebody in this town, if it doesn't entirely remove it. And if the news isn't good, I may substitute your name for the one I've already written."

Harris smiled, passed a box of cigarettes, and handed to McAllister an envelope. The managing editor of the *Star* glanced at the address, then removed the contents and studied them. Sharkey leaned forward in his chair and studied them simultaneously.

"So you've been playing the market, I see," observed McAllister. "And you've won. Well, it's a pretty good story when anybody wins at that game. And this is the check representing your winnings—wow! That's some check, Win. Twelve thousand eight hundred! And you a reformer! This sure is a story, Phil. It'll be a peach if the anti-graft mayor of our fair city will tell us where he got it. Well, unbelt, my son, and disclose the tale of your infamy."

"So you think that's a story, do you?" said Harris.

Sharkey nodded, and he knew a story when he saw it.

"What would you say if I told you that was the fifth check of the kind I have received in four weeks?" asked the mayor, eying his visitors.

Sharkey knocked the ashes from his cigarette, rose, walked to the door, and locked it by way of answer.

"Well, I'd say you were a first-class gambler and a person utterly unfit to reform our downtrodden town," observed McAllister judicially.

"And, furthermore, what would you say if I told you that, in addition, I had received a check for a forty-five-thousand-dollar profit in real estate?"

Sharkey rose once more, sauntered to the window, closed it, and slipped the catch. McAllister laughed, and nodded his head in the direction of the reporter.

"Phil's comment leaves nothing for me to add," he said. "But as we are not discussing fiction this afternoon, let us return to something that the *Star* can print."

"Fiction, you think?" said Harris. "Take a look at that."

He tossed over a little brown bank-book. McAllister and Sharkey inspected its pages in silence and then looked up inquiringly.

"Now, I'll tell you what it's all about, although I cannot tell you what it means," said Harris. "If I leave anything out, ask questions as I go along."

For the second time the young mayor of Thomas went chronologically through the facts that had been twisting themselves into fantastic dreams whenever he slept. His previous recital to his friend, the doctor, had helped to arrange the story in his mind, and he told it swiftly. Once or twice Sharkey put in a question, professionally, but the mayor told the story well. McAllister listened without comment, without expression.

"First, I decided to keep this money

where it could be called for," said Harris, as he finished the narrative. "Then I had an idea I'd give it to charity. Now I've come back to the original scheme, but with a compromise proviso. I shall make a public statement of the whole business. I shall make it known that the money is lying untouched, banked in my name. I shall wait a reasonable time for some claimant to come forward and prove property—also motive. If no such person comes forward I shall apportion the money among charities in this city as may be directed by a committee of citizens."

"Fine and philanthropic," said McAllister, nodding.

Sharkey lighted another cigarette and looked at the ceiling.

"So you're at liberty to make a complete announcement in the *Star* tomorrow," added Harris.

"Great story, isn't it, Phil?" observed McAllister.

"A bird," commented Sharkey, who was making a chain of smoke-rings.

"It'll make the town sit up," mused McAllister, half to himself.

"And yet you used to say I had no news sense," smiled Harris. "Am I vindicated?"

"Vindicated? Surest thing you know, Win. Your news sense is a life endowment from now on. But your horse sense, or your common sense, or whatever kind of sense you ever did have, seems to have been completely frittered away."

And McAllister drummed with his fingers upon the arm of his chair, while the mayor looked at him in astonishment.

"And I greatly regret that the *Star* will not be able to print the story," added the managing editor.

Sharkey nodded nonchalantly, in complete accord.

"And why not?" There was surprise and even resentment in Harris's voice.

"We strive to avoid libel," said McAllister. "We don't always succeed,

but we strive. Even Phil here strives, although he has a harder time than the rest of us."

"Libel? Where's the libel?" demanded Harris. "I don't accuse anybody of anything."

"The libel is against the mayor of Thomas," answered McAllister.

Harris looked at the big blond man in bewilderment.

"Listen, Win," continued McAllister, leaning forward. "The *Star* is your friend. It made the fight for you. It has supported you in office. It wants to keep on supporting you. So do I. So does Phil. So do all of us. We want to see you succeed, and, incidentally, to see our own judgment vindicated. Therefore, why in the world should the *Star* publish a story that will brand you from one end of the town to the other as a grafter, particularly when you're not a grafter?"

"A grafter!" Harris almost shouted the words.

"Uh, huh—a grafter," said McAllister. "You don't suppose anybody is going to believe this story you've just told us, do you? Did it occur to you that most of our skeptical citizens will come to the conclusion that the new mayor got his bit, after all?"

"But, good Lord, I can prove it!" said Harris. "I've got the documents. You've seen them. You can photograph them, if you want to."

"It doesn't go," said McAllister, shaking his head. "I believe it. Even Phil believes it, and that's going some. But you can't make the public believe it."

Harris made a gesture of impatience and disgust. He was about to speak when McAllister remarked quietly:

"Has it occurred to you that the old gang is a pretty clever old gang? That it has more ways than one of bagging a nice, young reform mayor and putting him on ice?"

Harris stared.

"Have you forgotten what Harve Johnson said the day after election? Don't you recall a casual remark to the

effect that he would 'get' you? And has it slipped your mind that Harve is a very wise old person, who knows a lot of pretty little tricks that you don't?"

"You mean—"

"I mean just that," said McAllister, with a nod. "I don't know, of course. But I think. It's the only thing to think. And so long as I think it I wouldn't print that story—no, not even if I knew the *Times* had a page of it."

"But why should they go after me that way?" asked Harris, dazed at the suggestion.

"That, my son, is something that I do not know. I haven't had time to figure it out. It's worth study. Harve Johnson is always worth study, anyhow."

"But why all these elaborate transactions? I thought cold cash was the usual medium in that sort of a game."

"Again, I don't know," said McAllister slowly. "I can only surmise. For instance, cold cash leaves no trail. But here is a series of transactions—a record. Money paid to you in checks, and you accepted them."

"But it proves nothing," declared Harris, impatiently. "Even if some people should really believe I had played the market, there's nothing criminal in that."

"No; that's true—if you can show where you got the money to gamble with. But how about the little deal in real estate?"

"Well, how about it?" demanded Harris.

McAllister gave the young mayor a sympathetic glance.

"The trouble with you, Win," he said, "is that you've had your mind so much concentrated on the money that somebody is flooding you with that you haven't taken time to think of a few of the side issues. I don't blame you, because almost any man in your place would be in the air, just as you are. Now, just take a minute off and think."

"You made forty-five thousand in

real estate. The real estate was located in Blythewood. The investment was made two months ago by some person in your behalf. A month and a half ago the Thomas Traction Company got its franchise extended. The council voted it; you signed it. That franchise enables the company to tap the Blythewood district with its line. A good thing for the company; a fine thing for Blythewood. Real estate booms—and the mayor makes forty-five thousand!"

Harris sank back into his chair and looked from McAllister to Sharkey, a baffled expression on his face.

"Now, that wouldn't make very nice reading, would it?" added McAllister.

"But, Heavens, Mac! You don't believe—"

"Of course I don't believe. I've told you that. But how are you going to keep other people from believing?"

"And you mean to say that Johnson, to get me, would go as far as that?" The mayor's tone was anxious and incredulous.

"How far would he go, Phil?" asked McAllister quietly.

"Well, he'd go some further than I want to go when I die," said Sharkey. "And if he needed any ready cash to get there he'd rob a few widows on the way, or burn down an orphan asylum and collect the insurance. Harve is a persistent cuss and he'll travel quite a bit to get what he wants."

"But suppose it is true? Suppose Johnson is after me? Isn't the surest way to block it publicity?"

"You've waited too long, Win," said McAllister. "You've allowed six separate transactions to pile up without saying a word to anybody. People will think that you liked the stuff for a while, until you began to get nervous over it. They'll want to know why you didn't spring the thing in the first place."

Harris rose from his chair and walked to and fro beside the big mahogany desk, his hands clenched behind his back.

"Well, what am I to do?" he demanded, finally.

"Wait," said McAllister.

Sharkey nodded.

"Wait until we know something more about this business. Wait until you get some sort of a clue. Give Phil a chance. He's a pretty good sleuth. Let's have time to figure the thing. But for the Lord's sake, don't breathe a word now. Why, I wouldn't print that story in the *Star* if you gave me the City Hall."

Harris had strayed to the window, where he stood looking out upon the busy street. A tall, thick-set figure passed briskly along with the crowd. As the mayor's eyes followed the man he glanced up, nodded familiarly, and then raised his hat with a gesture that hinted mockery. The mayor wheeled around and strode back to his desk.

"Damn him!" he said.

"Who was that?" asked McAllister, as he lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Johnson. He just went by."

CHAPTER V.

The Purloined Cylinder.

McALLISTER and Sharkey regarded the mayor with amusement as he squared himself in his office chair and began drumming aggressively with his fingers on the blotting pad.

"Johnson gets your goat too easily, Win," said McAllister.

"It's his damnable smirking and bowing!" said the mayor, explosively. "He knows I hate him and he hates me, and he knows I'd have sent him to jail if I could. Yet he always goes through that exhibition of hypocritical politeness."

"For the purpose of getting the mayor in a temper," added McAllister.

"And every time you show it Johnson is tickled to death. It's his crude form of amusement. Don't take Johnson so personally, Win. It isn't Johnson you're after so much; it's what he represents. Laugh at him once in a while."

"Oh, I know it's foolish," said Harris, impatiently. "But I'm not used to smiling at my enemies and joking with them."

"Then learn, son," observed McAllister. "Give him a brotherly grip some day, shoot a joke at him, and you'll have Johnson guessing. Let the old boy do a little puzzling on his own account. What's the use of you doing all of it?"

Harris stared moodily at the desk for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"I suppose you're right," he said. "But it's not easy—for me. Now about this other business. You say to wait and investigate. I suppose that means hiring a detective."

"No."

It was Sharkey who spoke and he snapped out the word.

"No detectives—private or public," he added, with a glance at McAllister, who nodded. "Most of 'em have too many wires out. Most of 'em know Johnson."

"Let Phil have a chance at this first, Win," put in McAllister. "Even if he doesn't land anything you'll have the satisfaction of knowing to a certainty that he's working for you, and not Johnson. Let things rest as they are for a while; take your mind off this business and put it on something official—the water main extensions, for instance. If anything new turns up, of course, why let me know, or Phil. Is that agreed?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Harris, resignedly. "But it doesn't seem like taking the bull by the horns."

"Maybe we'll get him by the tail," observed Sharkey over his shoulder, as he and McAllister left the mayor's office.

Two days after that Harris sent for his friends of the *Star*. Something new had happened—another check. It was for less than eight thousand dollars this time, yet a valid check for all that, and another evidence that the unseen force was at work, relentlessly

piling wealth into the pockets of the graftless mayor of Thomas. And a week after that came another to the architect's office in the big city for an amount almost identical.

"There's a possibility I've just thought of," Harris told McAllister. "Suppose one of these checks should come to this office instead of the other place. And suppose my secretary, who opens all the mail for me, should run across it. What would he think?"

"Can't you trust your secretary?"

"Oh, certainly, I trust him. But you know a thing like that causes talk. Even if he shouldn't talk, I don't want him even to think that I'm either gambling in the market or taking graft in an indirect form. Do you suppose I ought to open my own mail?"

"No; you'll just have to take the chance," said McAllister. "If you told Warner not to open your mail any more he'd think it was queer and he'd get the idea that you suspected him of something. That would be unjust to him. I don't think you need worry about any of that stuff coming here, anyhow. Whoever sends it has been pretty consistent up to date. The only thing to do is to risk the chance. Don't say anything which would give anybody a hint that you're anxious about something, no matter whether he's a friend or an enemy."

Days of tension did not improve the amiability of the young mayor of Thomas. It was well enough to be advised not to worry, but to think of something else, and to be told not to act, but wait; yet a normal and healthy young man, jealous of his reputation for integrity and given to aggressiveness rather than passivity, is, when placed under such restrictions, apt to behave after the fashion of a newly caged beast whose freedom is of recent memory.

Harris could not dismiss from his mind the new fear that things which he was not in a position to explain would begin to happen at the mayor's office. Warner, he knew, was loyal.

But he felt that he could not explain his circumstances to Warner, for his secretary was a person without imagination, and it took much of that very quality to understand and believe the case of his chief.

There was no relative of whom Harris could make a confidant, for the mayor was singularly alone in the world. He was the only child of his parents, both of whom rested in a little churchyard in a Western town. Since he was fourteen he had been his own master and his own support. He possessed an education because he had worked for it. Friends he had by the score; in fact, that was the main reason why he was now the mayor of Thomas. Yet there were times when Harris felt his loneliness with a keenness known only to those without kin.

It was this yearning for a confidant beside his two friends of the *Star* that led Harris to set about making a written record of the unexplained events which were crowding in upon him. He did this methodically and carefully at his city office. He told in minute detail the circumstances surrounding each check which had been received, writing and rewriting in order to make the narrative clear.

He even supplied some observations concerning his emotions during the progress of the rain of money. The sheets on which he wrote were filed away carefully in envelopes, sealed and marked, and placed in one of the compartments of his office safe. The safe no longer assumed the aspect of a joke to Harris. He now regarded it almost as the custodian of his honor.

Certainly it had become the repository of a secret which would have furnished the city of Thomas not merely with a sensation, but with an extraordinary chapter of municipal history.

It was two weeks after his first conference with McAllister and Sharkey that that pair appeared in his office one afternoon without a summons.

"Tell him about it, Phil," said McAllister.

"There isn't a lot to tell," said Sharkey. "I'm not really next to it. But it's a fact that something seems to be doing."

"Concerning me?" asked Harris.

Sharkey nodded.

"Who are in it?"

"Who would be in it? It's Johnson and his crowd. Whatever is cooking evidently amounts to something—in their opinion, at least. If they mouthed about it I wouldn't take much stock in it. But they're tight on the subject. Now, I know some of the crowd pretty well, and they'll tell me as much as they'll tell anybody who isn't one of them. I was a kid with Flanagan. He represents the Fifth in the council, you know.

"But Flanagan won't loosen up. He's tipped me a wink and has advised me not to get beaten on a story, but that's as far as I could get with him. Same way, practically, with Browne and Schroeder. I haven't made any real headway with any of them, except I know there's something in the wind. I can't see it, but I can feel it. They're cocky."

This was a long speech for Sharkey, who preferred writing to talking. He paused and watched the mayor as the latter, eyes half closed, scowled at the wall opposite him.

"Well?" asked Harris.

"You haven't made any breaks, have you?" asked Sharkey, slowly.

"How do you mean—breaks?"

"Well, I mean committed any irregularities, simply because you weren't familiar with routine?" Haven't given them any chance like that?"

Harris shook his head after a moment of thought.

"I feel sure I haven't," he said. "I haven't taken a step involving the legality of anything without advice. I've moved slow there."

"Haven't appointed anybody without knowing his record, have you?" suggested McAllister.

"I'll take a chance on the record of

any man I've appointed to a job," said Harris emphatically. "You know them all as well as I do, Billy."

McAllister nodded an admission of the fact.

"What I want to know is," said Harris, "has all this talk got anything to do with the checks?"

"No, not directly," answered Sharkey. "I don't know that it has, even indirectly. Yet I couldn't swear that it has no relation to what you mean. Some of them are buzzing about graft. Ordinarily that wouldn't mean anything, because the gang on the outside always hollers graft about the gang inside the fence. But in this particular case—well, you can see that it may mean something."

Harris sat silently for a minute and then said:

"We don't seem to be getting anywhere, do we?"

"Not unless this will help any," said Sharkey, and he placed upon the desk an object which he had drawn from his pocket. It was a dark-brown cylinder finely scored on its outer side with hairlike lines.

McAllister leaned forward with an interest as sudden as that of the mayor himself.

"Where did you get that?" he asked. "You didn't show it to me."

"I got that less than an hour ago," said Sharkey. "You know what it is, don't you?"

"A phonograph cylinder, of course," said Harris; and Sharkey nodded.

"All those little lines around it," he added, "represent the recent conversation of a certain gentleman."

"Who?" demanded McAllister.

"Mr. District Attorney Meade."

Harris and McAllister exchanged glances as Sharkey named a common enemy.

"How in the world did you get it?" asked the mayor, examining the cylinder curiously, yet handling it gingerly.

"Stole it, perhaps." Sharkey smiled and lighted a cigarette.

McAllister raised his eyebrows and looked quizzically at his reporter. "Explain," he said.

"Well, I dropped in to see Meade," said Sharkey—"to see what was new in the Hampden case and when he proposed to go to trial with it. Meade may be owned by Harve Johnson, but give him credit for keeping his office work up in good shape, so long as it doesn't touch politics. He was dictating into one of those machines as I walked into the room. He always uses one for letters and briefs and stuff like that.

"I caught him in the middle of a sentence, and when he saw who it was he stopped short. I thought he stopped too short. Ordinarily a man would look up, finish his sentence, and then say 'Howdy.' He didn't seem to be pleased that I interrupted him.

"We talked about the Hampden case some, and by and by the girl who transcribes his dictation poked her head in the door and asked him if he could step out a minute to see a party. So Meade went out and left me there, staring at the cylinder in the phonograph.

"I don't know what gave me the hunch, but I suddenly decided that I wanted that cylinder. There was a little rack standing alongside the machine with some other cylinders in it, some of 'em used and some fresh. It didn't take ten seconds. I slipped the one out of the machine and put a fresh one in. When Meade came back I asked him a few more questions and then left. That's how I came by that."

And Sharkey nodded toward the wax cylinder on the mayor's desk.

"You're a burglar," observed McAllister. "But the point is, what does the cylinder say?"

"That's what I want to find out," said Sharkey. "Got a machine?"

The mayor rang a bell, and the boy who answered was instructed to bring in Miss Murray's phonograph. When the instrument had been placed on Harris's desk and the electric connection

made, Sharkey slipped the cylinder into position and adjusted the needle.

"Who takes first listen?" he asked.

"You go ahead," said Harris. "I don't believe it's anything, after all."

Sharkey slipped the headpiece into place and turned the switch. The wax cylinder began to revolve. For half a minute he remained silent, his eyes fixed on the machine in front of him, his whole attitude one of close attention. Then he turned off the current and remarked:

"That was nothing but an ordinary letter to Phillips, the lawyer."

He switched on the current again and let the machine run for a couple of minutes.

"Two more letters—no consequence," he said, without stopping the cylinder.

A moment's pause and then:

"This is a memorandum of instructions to Assistant District Attorney Black in the Carpenter case."

Harris made a gesture of impatience, while McAllister sat stolidly, watching Sharkey. Presently that young man raised his hand, switched off the current and said:

"'Memorandum in traction franchise matter.'"

Harris leaned forward and made a motion as if to seize the headpiece.

"Let Sharkey repeat it," said McAllister. "Run it slow, Phil, and repeat it."

The cylinder began to turn slowly.

"'Points to be considered.' This is Meade talking, you understand. 'Points to be considered.' He repeated himself. 'First point. Was there a public demand for the extension of the traction system into Blythewood?'"

Harris and McAllister were sitting as rigidly as statues. Sharkey's voice droned on:

"'Second point. Was the consideration to the city named in the franchise an equitable one? Could a larger consideration have been obtained?"

"Third point. Was there any legal defect in the manner of the passage of the franchise by the city council? Any defect in the completion of the franchise and its final signature? Was the matter properly and legally advertised, etc.?"

"Fourth point. Are circumstances sufficient to warrant investigation? If so, should such investigation be initiated in this office, or by a taxpayer?"

Sharkey stopped the machine and looked up with a grin.

"The woods are full of that sort of taxpayers," he said.

"Go on," ordered Harris. The cylinder whirled again.

"Fifth point. Did Harris, before or after signing such fran—"

Sharkey's voice ceased and he bent over the cylinder, which still revolved smoothly. The needle had passed beyond the fine scorings on the wax surface.

"That's the finish," he said ruefully, pointing to the cylinder.

Harris uttered an exclamation, and McAllister, verifying the fact that the contents of the cylinder had been exhausted, said:

"Phil, go back and steal the next cylinder. And next time don't interrupt a man in the middle of a sentence."

"Hang the luck!" cried Harris, looking at the phonograph in despair. "Just think of having the thing end there!"

"Well, we've made some progress," said Sharkey, complacently. "I'll admit I was a boob to butt in at that particular instant, but how could I know? Still, it's something to know that you're likely to be investigated."

"The franchise is as straight and regular as a string," said Harris, pounding the table with an open palm. "The votes that passed it in the council were straight. I know every one of them. They can't pick a hole in the transaction or even cast a shadow on it."

McAllister and Sharkey nodded in unison.

"But did you get the last words?" said the latter, pointing to the cylinder. "'Did Harris, before or after signing such fran—' That's what interests me."

"Well, what did I do, before or after?" demanded the mayor.

"It isn't what you did," said Sharkey. "You didn't do anything, so far as I know. Anyhow, you didn't do anything wrong. But it's what Meade may think you did, or may try to prove you did, or even suggest that you did."

"That's the point," said McAllister.

"It's what Harve Johnson would like to have people think you did," added Sharkey.

Harris was silent and serious.

"Well, we know they're after you, anyhow," said McAllister, after a pause. "We know their line. Of course, it may peter out, but we know what they're likely to try first."

"Do you suppose," said Harris slowly, "that Meade, when he dictated that last sentence, knew anything about those—checks?"

Sharkey shrugged his shoulders. It was McAllister who said finally:

"That, of course, is purely a matter for surmise. We can only put two and two together, and then we sometimes get a wrong result. Phil, you've got to get more than this. You've got to work like the devil now."

"Uh, huh," said Sharkey. Then, turning to Harris: "Will you keep that cylinder?"

"I wouldn't have it found in the mayor's office for a million!" exclaimed Harris.

"I'll keep it," said McAllister, slipping it into his pocket.

CHAPTER VI.

A Letter and a Caller.

HARRIS awoke one morning, startled with a new possibility involving his unsought riches. Whether

he had been dreaming about it or whether the idea had come to him at the instant of waking he could not tell. It seemed as if he had been thinking about it always.

Suppose he began to lose!

He sat huddled in bed, staring at the brass footboard, enthralled by a fresh prospect of disaster. All the unearned money had come to him as the fruits of gambling—gambling on margin in the Street, gambling in real estate that had been boomed by a traction-franchise. And he had always won. Fortune had thus far traveled a straight and pleasant road.

Yet Harris knew that even the captains of the Street did not always win. They won oftener than they lost, usually; but not invariably did they back the winning card. Why should he always win?

Obviously, the answer was that he would not. The day must come when he—or the hidden power that acted for him—must lose. Would he be called upon to pay? How long would the losses run; how great would they be? Why, his profits, steadily accumulating on the books of the Palmer Trust, might be swept away almost in a single transaction!

Why—Harris almost choked at the thought—he might even lose more than he had made! Would he still be called upon to pay? Could they hold him responsible? Why not? He had accepted his gains, recently almost as a matter of course, not questioning the source nor attempting to deny his right to the money. In a way, he had tacitly established a status for himself among those brokers of the Street who mailed him checks as the reward of successful gambling.

Why, then, should they not attempt to collect from him if his accounts began to show a deficit? The logic of the situation, as Harris viewed it, pointed inevitably one way. He shivered at the thought. What could he do when the money was gone? A beggarly three thousand dollars of his

own probably would not pay the loss on a single transaction. Not one of his earnings had been as small as that.

It was this new glance down a vista of despair that sent Harris hurrying to the city, once more to seek an answer from the men who bartered in stocks. Once more he experienced a hopeless, exasperating day. They would tell him nothing. They even smiled at him, and there was thinly veiled skepticism in the mirth.

Gradually it was dawning upon the young mayor of Thomas that these people of the Street believed him to be playing a part; that they looked upon him as a customer who, for some reason known only to himself, sought to adopt an attitude of ignorance, reluctance, and even protest against transactions conducted through agents who had full authority to carry forward his plans. Nobody told him that, but he began to feel it.

"Why, if you lose, you lose," was the sum of the answers he got. "But you haven't lost yet. Yes, of course; all of them lose some time or other. Pay their losses? Certainly—if they are responsible. We only deal with responsible people. You are responsible. We know who you are."

Harris, raging at his impotence, went back to the little city where he could at least be the pilot of his own course, even though he were but an unconsidered and helpless factor in the big town. People nodded pleasantly to the mayor as he stepped off the train at Thomas. He responded to the greetings almost savagely. He felt like crying aloud in the street the story of the plot which had been woven around him, so mysteriously.

McAllister and Sharkey had warned him to keep quiet, to tell no one; but Harris chafed at the restriction. He wanted to tell everybody. He wanted the people who had made him the mayor of their city to know that a power was at work trying to compass his downfall.

"I'm going to tell Jim Wayne, any-

how," said Harris. "I don't care what McAllister says. Maybe Jim can help."

Jim Wayne was three years the senior of the young mayor of Thomas and, since Harris had become the chief magistrate of the city, had been occupying the office of commissioner of public works. Wayne had money and political ambition. He was clean, straightforward, resourceful, and a fighter. Harris often had wondered how it came that he had been chosen for the chief place, rather than a man who had more real genius for politics than himself.

Yes; he would tell Wayne. And as he turned into the offices of the public works commissioner he wondered why he had not made a confidant of Jim before.

Clerks nodded to the mayor as he passed through the outer room and then redoubled their efforts to appear zealous in the service of the city, for they knew that Harris, always disposed to be just and even considerate, was demanding that every public employee should earn his pay to the full and had a quick eye in searching out the laggards. He walked into Wayne's room without knocking, closed the door after him abruptly, and then noted that the chair at the big desk was empty.

The noise of a typewriter running at a merry speed drew his eyes in the direction of an alcove window at the other end of the room. Harris paused a moment to study the back of a young woman, whose hands were flying over the lettered keys and whose eyes were bent upon a note-book propped up at the side of the machine. She did not turn her head, although she must have heard his entrance, for he had slammed the door rather loudly.

The young woman appeared to be exceedingly busy—remarkably faithful to the municipal welfare, Harris thought, for a typewriter girl. Her white shirtwaist struck him as being

unusually neat. As she lifted the carriage on the machine he observed that she wore paper cuffs to avoid soiling of the sleeves.

Particularly he noticed a great coil of chestnut hair, with the inevitable lead-pencil thrust through it from right to left. And then he frowned.

Jim Wayne had promised him to save money; to let go of every useless employee in his department. They had gone over the list together, marking sheep for the slaughter. Jim said he could get along without the girl typewriter who had obtained her job under the old order of things; that he proposed to get a secretary who could take care of his correspondence unaided.

Jim got the secretary; yet here was the officeholder whose job he had volunteered to abolish. Presented with an object-lesson of extravagance, the mayor's private perplexities fell from his shoulders as if by magic; for Harris, elected on a platform of retrenchment, had become almost a crank in the matter of economies. And here was a waste of city money in the office of the very man who had promised to cooperate in the crusade.

Of course, she was very busy. Harris admitted that, although he did it grudgingly. But Jim had told him he did not need her; in fact, had dismissed her. What right had he to reengage her, or perhaps hire another one, without even saying a word of it to the mayor? Harris sighed. It was desperately hard to save money for the taxpayers, even in little things.

"Where is Mr. Wayne?" he asked abruptly.

"He went out half an hour ago. He will be back in an hour more."

It was a pleasant if rather decisive voice that answered the mayor's question, albeit the girl spoke rather to the window in front of her than to him, for she did not turn her head and scarcely appeared to pause in her work.

"This is the mayor talking." Har-

ris somehow felt as distant as if he were conversing by telephone. She made a slight motion, as if to turn, then apparently changed her mind and bent over her machine again.

"Oh, yes," she answered smoothly, and the fingers again flew over the keys.

"I wished to see the commissioner about a very important matter," said Harris, a shade of annoyance in his tone. He was not a stickler for good form, and he required nobody to make a display of fawning courtesy to the mayor; yet he was unaccustomed to being treated with indifference in the city departments over which he held sway.

Of course, it was an obvious display of industry, intended to impress the mayor with the importance of the young woman as a cog in the municipal machinery; Harris could see that at a glance. It was merely another way of making a favorable impression. Probably she had seen him coming up the street and was aware of the fact from the first that it was the mayor who had entered the room.

"I am sorry the commissioner is not in," she answered, still intent upon her work.

"Do you know where I can find him?"

"No, sir." The keys were rattling again.

"Doesn't he leave word where he is going?"

"Yes, sir; with the chief clerk."

Harris half wheeled in the direction of the door. He felt his face flushing, but the girl never turned her head to see whether the mayor was pleased or otherwise with her display of industry.

"I'll dictate a letter to him, if you please," he said, changing his mind suddenly and approaching the window.

"Certainly."

The girl withdrew the pencil from the coil of chestnut hair, turned to a blank page in her note-book and waited.

Harris paused, in unobserved embarrassment. He suddenly realized that what he really wanted to say to Jim Wayne he could not put upon paper. He had no intention of taking a girl into his confidence, even in the guise of a mere instrument for the recording of his words.

He walked five steps across the office and five steps back again and was conscious that he had counted each footfall. The girl waited. Harris halted and looked fixedly at the back of her head.

"Dear Jim," he said, abruptly.

The ready pencil moved slightly over the blank page.

"Change that," ordered the mayor. "This is an official communication. Make it 'My dear Commissioner.'"

The pencil moved again and then paused for a further incentive.

"My dear Commissioner: You are fully aware, of course, how imperative it is for the present administration to practise economy, even in the least things. Only in this way can we justify our promises to the taxpayers of the city. You will undoubtedly recall how we discussed this matter of economy and how it was agreed that all unnecessary employees in the departments over which we had control should be dismissed."

Harris paused, cleared his throat softly and wondered if she was aware of the trend of his remarks. He did not mean to be brutal about the thing, yet she would have to know sooner or later; and if she could glean the significance of the situation from his words she would, at least in some measure, be prepared. He went on:

"Paragraph. 'I wish you would send me a statement of all employees in your department, their names, the work they do, the hours per day they are engaged, together with your opinion as to whether the services of any can be dispensed with. Also, will you kindly let me know whether any persons dismissed during the first month of your administration have been re-

instated, or whether other persons have been engaged to fill the positions vacated by them."

Apparently his words were recorded, for the pencil had been moving busily. Harris watched almost timidly for some sign of agitation, for if the girl possessed acumen she must understand now. There was no sign. The pencil was poised in a steady hand, waiting for more.

"Hum. 'I wish to add—' No: strike that out, please. Paragraph. 'It is my opinion that there is still room for further economies without in any manner lessening the efficiency of the municipal departments, and I shall greatly appreciate your cooperation in this matter. Very truly yours.'"

The indifference of the young woman in the window-alcove emboldened the mayor, even hardened his heart.

"I suppose you understand the purport of that letter," he remarked.

He saw her head nod, but she did not turn to look at him. This was annoying, yet it did not become the mayor to invade the alcove merely for the purpose of glimpsing the face of a girl who did not choose even to look in his direction.

"I am asking Mr. Wayne to do away with certain employees whom I understood had been dismissed," volunteered Harris. "I will be perfectly frank in saying that you are one of them. Mr. Wayne informed me that his secretary, Mr. Van Deinse, would be fully able to care for his correspondence without assistance. It will probably be necessary for Mr. Wayne to dismiss you."

Harris paused uncomfortably, although he was sustained by a feeling that he was doing his duty to the taxpayers. The girl relieved his tension by an understanding nod and a brief "Certainly, Mr. Mayor."

"Please understand," added Harris hastily, as he chewed on an unlighted cigar, "that there is nothing personal in this—not in any way. I do not wish to be harsh. And if there is anything

I can do to assist you in obtaining a position elsewhere with a private concern I shall be very glad."

"Thank you, sir." She was very cool about it.

"I will speak personally to Mr. Wayne about it," said the mayor. "Between us I have not the least doubt that we can obtain a new and equally satisfactory place for you. But really, you know, it was understood between the commissioner and myself that this place was to be abolished."

"I understand perfectly," said the voice evenly. "Will you wait for the letter to be transcribed?"

"No, I think not. You can just sign my name to it and leave it on Mr. Wayne's desk. I'll talk to him about the matter later."

Having performed an unpleasant duty in behalf of the taxpayers, Harris had no desire to linger in the presence of a young woman who had just received gloomy tidings. He took a last look as the coil of shining chestnut hair, to which the pencil had been restored, mentally approved the neat shirt-waist, and then turned and left the room with an abrupt "Good afternoon."

If she answered he did not hear it.

"Nasty job, that," muttered Harris as he walked in the direction of the mayor's office. "But Jim promised me, and what's more, I've got to be consistent in all departments. I've been grinding some of 'em hard, and I can't afford to show Jim favors. Anyway, I'll see to it that the girl gets a job."

It was an hour later when Harris looked up from his desk and saw that it was Wayne who had entered the room.

"Hello, Jim!" he said. "Sit down. I just dictated a nasty letter in your office. Sorry I had to do it, but—you know."

"I got it," said Wayne, helping himself to a cigarette. "That's all right. I did promise to do away with the stenographer. You caught me with the goods. I'll fire her."

"Of course, if you really need her,"

said Harris apologetically, "why I guess—"

Wayne waved his hand carelessly.

"I'll get along all right, Win. Don't you worry about that letter. It's in the waste-basket now, anyhow. But I'll see to it. On the level, I admire you for being consistent."

"We'll find her a place, you know," said Harris, relieved.

"Oh, I've already attended to that," said Wayne. "She's got a place to go to right away."

Harris looked surprised and slightly disappointed. In fact, he felt a trifle foolish. He wanted to do something for the girl, but now there was no opportunity.

"Oh, well," he said indifferently, "that disposes of the matter, then. By the way, Jim, I've got something really serious on my mind. That's the reason I called at your office. I want to talk it over with you."

Wayne looked at his watch.

"It's five-forty," he said. "Come out to the house to dinner. You haven't been near us in a long time. You haven't seen Constance since she got back from Europe. We can sit down and have a talk after dinner, and you can unburden whatever you've got on your chest. Is that a go?"

"You're on," said the mayor. "Wait till I sign a few letters."

"Go to it, then," said the commissioner of public works. "I'll wait. I've got my car outside."

CHAPTER VII.

The Mayor's Discomfiture.

PETER WAYNE — "Old Man"

Wayne they called him downtown—was admitted to be the possessor of the finest house in the city of Thomas. It was located amid several acres of oaks and maples out in the Blythewood addition, and Wayne, retired from business because he had enough money to suit him, and because he still enjoyed other things in life be-

sides the making of it, spent his time almost exclusively there, with his son and daughter.

There had been years when Peter Wayne was a power both in business and politics. Now he was merely identified as a "capitalist." Even his own son could not draw him into the last municipal fight, which had resulted in the overthrow, even though it might be but temporary, of Harvey Johnson.

"Let the young fellows go it," said Wayne. "I'm through. If they win, more power to them. But they've got to win without me."

He did not even finance the campaign. For the sake of political memories he made a contribution to the fund, but it was so modest that even the opponents of reform could not raise the cry that Old Man Wayne had knocked the head off a barrel for the purpose of corrupting the electorate. He was not particularly pleased when son Jim became commissioner of public works.

"The boy ought to be in a steady business," said Peter Wayne. "When he gets to be fifty it will be time enough to have a fling at politics and office-holding, if he likes."

It was on the broad porch of the Wayne house that Harris found himself after a brisk ride in the sporty runabout in which his chief commissioner acted as his own chauffeur. A girl swung herself out of a hammock in a vine-shaded corner and came toward him with a boyishly outstretched hand.

"Win, I'm glad to see you," she said.

Harris took the hand and held it while he gazed at her, trying to bridge the gap over the missing years. For it had been a full three years since he had seen Constance Wayne. Nearly all of that time she had spent abroad, studying art. It seemed to Harris that she had grown, not older exactly, but somehow less purely girlish. Constance always did have a frank, direct way; but now there seemed to be an air of self-reliance which was new to

him. Her blue eyes smiled at him as he studied her face, still clinging awkwardly to the firm, sun-tanned hand.

"Jim only told me this afternoon that you were back," he said. "When did you arrive?"

Constance looked at her brother accusingly.

"Did you only tell him to-day?"

"I've dropped a remark about it off and on for the last three or four months," said Wayne with a laugh. "But he never seemed to hear. Whenever Win appears to be absent-minded you can rest assured that he is going to the mat with a municipal problem."

"Oh, now, that's unfair," said the mayor flushing, dropping the hand hastily. "Honest, did you ever tell me, Jim, before to-day?"

Wayne nodded and Harris looked his misery. The girl threw back her head and laughed.

"Come," she said. "I'm not a bit offended. It's great, I think, for this town to have a mayor who really keeps his mind on city business and has no time, even for girls. Don't look so unhappy, Win. There's nothing to forgive. Jim tells me you're making a fine mayor—saving money for the taxpayers and reforming lots of things."

Something in that phrase, "saving money for the taxpayers," struck a sharp note in Harris's memory. Something in the tone of her voice sounded familiar. She turned for an instant to call a servant, and Harris was queerly impressed with the fact that somewhere else he had seen a girl who reminded him of Constance Wayne. His eyes wandered to a great coil of chestnut hair at the back of her head. And—yes, it was true—there was a lead-pencil thrust from right to left through the coil!

Harris wanted to turn and run, but, instead, he only exclaimed weakly:

"Constance!"

She turned and eyed him with an amused smile.

"I wondered if you'd recognize the lead-pencil," she said gaily.

"Oh, Lord!" said the mayor. "What an ass I was! How in the world could I ever have failed to know you? Why didn't you tell me back there in the office? Jim, you're a scoundrel. You let me go right ahead and make a fool of myself."

Jim Wayne was sitting in a porch-chair which momentarily threatened to fall to pieces under the stress of uncontrollable laughter. The mayor blushed helplessly and wore an aspect of wo.

"Oh, it was delicious!" laughed Constance. "Really, Win, it was great fun. Every minute I expected you would recognize me. Then, when I saw that you were on your official dignity, and were so sternly impersonal about it, I was resolved to keep it up. Oo-o-oh, but you were so incorruptibly loyal to the taxpayers!"

"Constance! Please!" cried Harris, raising a protesting hand. "I didn't know. I apologize—humbly."

"Apologize! Indeed, you shall not. Why, it was fine, Win—just fine! You were so earnest about it. I could see that you meant every word of it. I love to see a man stick to his principles, even when there's a girl in the way. Oh, I thought you were great! And you can't imagine how funny I felt—being discharged."

"She wouldn't let me tell you," said Wayne, grinning. "She had the letter all written out and lying on the desk when I got back. I told her it was outrageous to play a trick like that on the mayor, but she couldn't see it that way at all. She told me you have a perfectly lovely way of firing folks, Win."

Harris smiled sheepishly, and looked from the girl to her brother.

"If you'd only told me, Jim, that you needed—"

"Tell nothing," said Wayne. "I don't need a stenographer all the time. But there are some days when the work piles up, and then Connie comes down and helps. She studied shorthand a long while ago, to help dad with his

letters home. She was just crazy to come down and mix in politics."

Constance nodded at the mayor. Then she suddenly became serious and held out her hand again.

"It was a mean trick, Win," she said. "I'm sorry."

"I must have talked like a prig," said Harris.

"No; you talked like a man who is attending to his job. It was good to hear. Jim's proud of you."

"And you?" Harris was taking comfort from the frank blue eyes.

"I? Why, I'm proud, too," she answered directly. "I met the mayor in an unguarded moment, and now I know what he is really like. I'm sorry that Jim and I laughed at you, but I'm not sorry that I was a sort of eaves-dropper."

"Neither am I," said Harris, and they shook hands gravely.

"Now, Jim," said Constance, "you can do whatever you like for the next half-hour. Win and I have three solid years to talk about between now and dinner."

It was Constance who did most of the talking, for Harris soon discovered that she possessed a pretty accurate history of his career, since the day he had bidden her good-by, three years before, when she sailed to continue her study of art abroad.

"Do you remember that day?" she said, laughing. "I was so serious over my ambitions. I was to be a great artist, and you a great architect."

"Remember!" exclaimed Harris. "Why, I remember you in pigtails."

"I have a distinct recollection of the pigtail days myself," she said, musing. "I presume I was very much of a nuisance to you and Jim then; but you were such a superior person that at times it maddened me. I used to think you were dreadfully serious—and old. I did not feel comfortable in the presence of serious people then, but I guess I've changed some. Still, I don't think you are so serious now as you were then—except when you're mayor."

Her eyes were laughing at him again, and Harris protested.

"Please forget this afternoon," he said. "I have to be serious, you know, in my official capacity—and awfully impersonal."

"Why did you drop architecture, Win?" she asked suddenly.

"I haven't dropped it exactly. But, of course, I don't get much time for it now. It's just a side line I dabble in occasionally."

"That's wrong," said Constance, seriously. "I like to see a man stick to his profession. You'll go back to it, I suppose?"

"Oh, I intend to—some day," he answered. "I haven't abandoned it. But, you know—there was a great chance here in Thomas, and the boys just dragged me into it."

"Oh, I know the whole story—every word of it. Jim wrote me regularly. His letters were awfully exciting. Why, I even got to drawing political cartoons in my little Paris studio. I got all the papers, too—the *Times* was perfectly horrid. I often wondered why you and Jim didn't go and shoot the editor. And then, when election day came near, I could hardly stay in Paris. I wanted to take a steamer and come straight home.

"The only thing that kept me there, I think, was Jim's promise to send me a cable just as soon as the result was known. I sat up until four o'clock in the morning to get that cablegram, and after that I was so excited that I couldn't go to bed at all."

"I hadn't the least idea that you were so interested in municipal affairs," said Harris, surprised.

"I wasn't, until Jim and you and some of the other boys got into politics. Then, of course, I couldn't help being interested. I used to think politics was dry, but now I find it rather exciting. That's why I made Jim let me go down to the office and help him, whenever he needed help."

And from that point until the maid announced dinner Constance Wayne

plunged into a discussion of the municipal affairs of the city of Thomas, asking questions, making comments and criticisms, and even offering suggestions in a way that astonished the mayor. Harris began to get some understanding of the change in the girl that had at first puzzled him.

Always in the past he had looked upon her as a charming tomboy whose father had settled a small fortune upon her, and who would see to it, when the time arrived, that she made a proper marriage to some man of her own social world who had the means to maintain the luxuries to which she was accustomed.

The ambitions of Peter Wayne centered in his two children. Harris and Jim Wayne had been college mates, and the young architect had always been a welcome guest in the Blythewood household. The Waynes had a way of treating him that made him forget the monetary gulf which opened between them. Constance had her girlish enthusiasms and friendships, and had plunged into both art and society with equal ardor. Then came the time when art triumphed for a time and she went abroad. Harris had seen her depart with a faint sense of amusement. It seemed like a childish attempt to run away from her future. For he knew very well what would happen to Constance. When Peter Wayne got ready, and when Constance herself was tired of painting sketches in Paris, she would marry a rich young man, and settle down to the career for which she was destined. That was the thing which inevitably happened to young women of the Constance type.

It was a matter that Harris considered in a purely detached way. He liked Constance, and hoped that her husband would be a good fellow, with the requisite fortune.

But, now that Constance was arriving at the period when these things would naturally come to pass, Harris began to wonder if events were going to turn out just as Peter Wayne had

planned them. Constance was getting serious. She was not merely developing, but had already acquired an interest in things which it had never occurred to Harris would be of the least concern to her. He wondered how Old Man Wayne liked it. In fact, he asked.

"Father? Why, father doesn't mind particularly," she answered. "Of course, he doesn't like to have me go down to Jim's office, yet he doesn't object to my being interested in politics. But the only way to be interested in anything is to get right into it yourself; so that's why I try to help Jim sometimes. It makes me feel as if I was part of the administration, you know; as if I actually had some civic responsibility."

"Would you like to go on the city pay-roll?" asked Harris, with a smile.

"I would—in a minute! I think it would be fine to earn money. Only Jim says it wouldn't do. He says the administration won't stand for nepotism. He says the major is very, very strict on that point."

Her eyes were laughing again as she led the way in to dinner.

It took Harris more than an hour to tell Jim Wayne the story of the flood of money. The two sat in silence in a far corner of the porch for several minutes after the mayor had finished the story, Wayne's eyes fixed upon the alternately glowing and fading contents of his pipe. Now and then he carefully tamped the tobacco with his finger.

"I wish you'd told me of this before, Win," he said, at length.

"I should have, I know," said Harris. "It wasn't that I meant to be secretive, particularly with my friends. But I was warned to keep quiet, and it seemed like good advice."

"The reason I said that," continued Wayne, "is that I have known there was something doing on the part of Johnson and his crowd in connection with the Blythewood franchise for the past several weeks. Now you confirm it. I didn't think they were going to

try to drag you into the thing personally. I thought they were really going after me."

"You?"

"Yes; through father, you know."

"What's he been doing?"

"Nothing, as a matter of fact. It's what Johnson thinks he has been doing. You know as well as I do the way the traction company has been held up for years, principally because father had a big block of stock in it, and because the gang thought they could make him pay well for a franchise extension. But father wouldn't give up a cent.

"Then came the reform fight. My dad is a pretty shrewd judge of things in politics, and he figured out what was going to happen to Johnson. And he knew that if it did happen, the old game of shoving a gun at the head of the railroad would cease, and that the franchise would go through, as it ought to. He also knew that if the franchise was voted while he was a stockholder in the company, that it would open the way for the nastiest kind of an attack on the new administration."

Wayne paused for a moment to re-light his pipe.

"So the old man sold out every share he had," he added.

"Honest, Jim?" exclaimed Harris.

"I never heard of it."

"No, nor anybody else—yet. Harve Johnson doesn't know. It was a private sale. Win, it was the old man's way of helping us. You know how he wouldn't finance the campaign; said it was our fight, and all that sort of thing. Well, he chose the other way of doing things. He wanted to clear the road for us. And, what's more, Win, he sold that stock at a sacrifice. He lost money on it. He just did it for the 'cause.'"

"Where is he?" demanded Harris, rising. "I want to shake hands with him, Jim. That was the finest thing I ever heard of!"

"Don't say anything to him about it, Win. He wouldn't like it. He's peculiar that way. He made his own

campaign contribution in his own way, and he doesn't want any of us to thank him. He doesn't want Johnson to know it—yet.

"When I heard that the gang was cooking something in connection with the franchise, I figured, of course, that they were going to show how the old man, as the largest stockholder, had pulled it off through his son and his son's associates in the administration. You know how the stock went up when the franchise was passed. We were going to let them get well into the scheme, and then leave them out on a limb, by showing how father hasn't owned a cent's worth of stock in the road for months. That's what I thought they were after. It seemed obvious.

"But this business of yours, Win, makes it look differently. They seem to be after you direct."

"You think they know about that real-estate deal?"

"Know about it?" echoed Wayne.

"I think they pulled it off!"

Harris caught his breath sharply.

"Have you had a search of the real-estate transfers made?" continued Wayne.

"No, I haven't. I've been afraid even to turn around, Jim."

"Well, of course, the transfers may not show it. Your name probably wouldn't appear in the records, anyhow. They wouldn't tip their hand like that until they were ready. There may have been no actual transfer, or it may not have been filed with the registrar. It may have been merely a speculation through a contract. But your name was on that check, Win, and you took the check—and wrote a receipt for it—and deposited it in your bank!"

"Oh, I was a fool, Jim!" groaned the mayor. "I ought to have destroyed every check, or kept them—one or the other. But after I deposited the first one I seemed to be in for it. I guess I lost my senses entirely. But who wouldn't? What would you do, Jim,

if somebody began sending you money and you couldn't for the life of you find out where it came from?"

"I don't know," answered Wayne slowly. "The whole business is crazy—utterly impossible. Yet it's true."

"Isn't there any way I can get rid of it—the money?"

"How?" asked Wayne. "What would you do with it? Lord, man, if this business does come out, and they find you've spent it, that will make things worse than ever! Hang onto it now, whatever you do. Keep it where you can produce every cent. Meantime, get busy! We're still groping. Leave the real-estate deal to me. I can make some inquiries without starting suspicion."

"Prod McAllister and Sharkey—

keep 'em moving. Watch that you don't make a false move. Win. Examine everything with a microscope. Be suspicious. We may be able to check-mate 'em yet. But we've simply got to find out just what they're up to. Keep your nerve, and, above all, don't let them get an idea you are worried. That might precipitate things. What we need now is time."

Harris arose wearily and stretched out his hand.

"Thanks, Jim," he said. "We're up against it, I guess—and it's my fault. If anything does break, I won't dodge the blame, and I won't try to split it with anybody else. It belongs to me. And—I wish you'd thank your father for that fine thing he did. Good night."

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.

SINGING IN THE RAIN

By Glenn Ward Dresbach

I QUITE forgot the sky was gray,
And scorned an old dream's pain—
I heard another on the way
Go singing in the rain.

Perhaps he sang to ease an ache
No eyes could ever see;
And yet it seemed for some one's sake
The song had made him free.

I do not know his cause for song;
But he had mastered Care;
I know the day was not so long
When he had passed me there.

So do not tell me skies are gray
And hearts are slaves to pain.
Say, one who passed me on the way—
Was singing in the rain!

MISS "X"*

A LONDON MYSTERY

A SERIAL IN VI PARTS—PART II

BY WATKIN BEAL

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

DAPHNE BLATCHINGTON is a beautiful young girl of twenty-five in London society, engaged to be married to Lord Lauriston, M. P., a wealthy politician and society man—a coming cabinet minister. Daphne is a great success socially, and Lauriston is very proud of her. But the girl is unhappy because of a cloud which hangs over her life. Some years previously she had married a man who turned out a scoundrel, and from whom she fled. Later she heard of him as being killed in an American railway accident. 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. On returning from a reception with Lauriston, Daphne finds a letter awaiting her from John Pennistone, her solicitor. In it he tells her he has received a letter from Victor Scruit, the man she had married and believed to have been killed. It is a terrible blow to Daphne. She is to marry Lauriston in six weeks time. She is heavily in debt, having obtained credit on the strength of her engagement. 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 finally consents to go. She arrives at the house at three o'clock the next afternoon. Mrs. Maberly, the landlady, opens the door to her and indicates the room where she will find "Mr. Ward." Daphne has come heavily veiled, and gives no name. An hour passes, then Mrs. Maberly prepares "Mr. Ward's" tea and takes it up-stairs.

She finds "Mr. Ward" lying on the landing dead. There is no sign of the lady visitor. Evidence points to "Ward" having been murdered.

Daphne goes to see Pennistone late that afternoon, and tells him that on going up to her husband's room she found him lying dead, and then left the house without telling any one, because she feared being suspected of killing him.

Pennistone listens to her story, and then tells her frankly that he does not believe it, and refuses to act for her.

Daphne reads in the paper that a search is being made for her. She has left a brooch in Scruit's house, and she fears that the clue will lead to her being caught.

CHAPTER IX.

At Scotland Yard.

WHEN Lady Farjeohn determined to arrange a small luncheon to which to invite Daphne, she had an ulterior object in view besides her obvious one of wishing to meet Daphne as her future sister-in-

law. She wished to revenge herself on her brother for presuming to become engaged without her approval, by inviting a certain Mrs. Lanksbury, whom a few months before every one had expected would become Lady Lauriston. From this it will be inferred that Lady Farjeohn was an unpleasant person, which was exactly the case.

Smart she had been dubbed, fashion-

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

able, rich, immensely rich, good looking and clever she may have been, but unpleasant she certainly was.

It was scarcely likely, therefore, that she would submit to "this girl, whoever she is," as she described Daphne, capturing her brother without making some effort to be objectionable when she found it impossible to prevent the marriage. She was most indignant over it, in fact.

"Just like Laurence," she said to her husband as they drove to the Savoy preparatory to the luncheon—"just like him to go and throw away his best chances in life by marryin' a girl whom no one knows, and who knows no one. I expect."

Sir John Farjeohn grunted: he never troubled to talk, least of all to his wife. He was shrewd, however, and, after a slight pause, he volunteered a remark.

"And I suppose you think you will make him see reason by inviting Madeline Lanksbury to meet this Miss Blatchington."

"I think I shall give his conscience a twinge," returned Lady Farjeohn viciously.

Sir John smiled quietly to himself. The little catlike instincts of women amused him.

"What are you smilin' for?" asked his wife, dropping her "g's" as she always did.

Sir John did not reply, but his little eyes still twinkled.

"I can't see anythin' funny in what I've done or what Laurence's goin' to do," added Lady Farjeohn.

"No, nor do I," said Sir John, suppressing his humor.

When they reached the Savoy the motor ahead of their car put down Madeline Lanksbury. As Lady Farjeohn saw the car it annoyed her especially to remember how rich Madeline was, and that Daphne was supposed to be penniless.

They all reached the foyer together. Lady Farjeohn murmuring:

"Of course, Laurence's late, and I'm

literally dyin' for lunch: aren't you Madeline?"

"Oh, is your brother coming?" said the latter, remembering with a pang that Lord Lauriston was now engaged. Madeline Lanksbury had not merely wanted to marry Lord Lauriston for his title, she had been in love with him, and was still.

"Yes, he and the girl he's engaged to," said Lady Farjeohn with studied carelessness. "D'you know her, Madeline?"

The color rose faintly to Mrs. Lanksbury's cheeks. She was a woman of violent temper, and she felt positive that Lady Farjeohn was trying to be spiteful to her.

"No, I shall be so pleased to see her," she said, controlling her face, if not her feelings. She was furious immediately at being trapped like this. Hot-tempered, and always ready to take affront, her passionate nature made her life almost a martyrdom, when from the circumstances that her first husband, whom she had hated, had died and left her a fortune, she should have been happier than most people.

She was still young, barely thirty, and very good looking; imposing looking, with golden hair, would have accurately described her.

"I haven't seen her either," said Lady Farjeohn, alluding to Daphne. "I've been abroad, you know. I was horrified when I heard Laurence was engaged. We all thought he would have married—some one we all know."

The last words were almost too much for Madeline Lanksbury. She knew too well that no one could be insulting to a person's face so coolly as Lady Farjeohn.

At that moment, however, Daphne and Lord Lauriston arrived.

"I am so delighted to see you," Lady Farjeohn said gushingly to Daphne, meanwhile staring at her from tip to toe. "I've been simply dying to meet you."

Daphne murmured a few nervous

words and they went into lunch almost immediately.

When they were having coffee and liqueurs, Lady Farjeohn—who seemed to show more interest in the liqueur than the coffee and smoked with the air of an expert—managed to get a private word or two with her brother.

"My dear Laurence," she whispered, "why on earth do you want to fall at the feet of such a dowdy doll?"

"Don't you think she is charming?" he said.

"Charming, but ordinary, shockingly ordinary, Laurence."

"I am sorry you don't like her," said Lord Lauriston coldly. So great was his love and admiration for Daphne that he even made a feeble attempt to be disagreeable to his sister for her sake.

"Oh, never mind what I think, Laurence. Only don't expect me to entertain her. You'll probably find her people are sausage merchants or somethin' ghastly. But never mind. Marry for love, Laurence. It's just the sort of second-rate thing I knew you would do."

Lauriston was very annoyed; he even trembled with anger, but he was too well-bred to be disagreeably rude to his sister before any one else; besides, it was impossible there, and, as it was, he was afraid Daphne might have overheard part of their conversation. Lady Farjeohn had purposely not spoken too softly.

He took up a paper which he happened to find lying on the lounge and began reading out of it, mainly to put a stop to any more objectionable conversation from his sister.

"Hello!" he said. "Another murder mystery. By George, and quite a romance, too. Have you seen it, Mildred?"

"I never read those things," said Lady Farjeohn. "I haven't time. And that reminds me, I have heaps of places to go to this afternoon."

This was a plain and quite intentionally rude hint to her guests to go.

But Daphne had heard what Lauriston had said, and in a second all her fear and anxiety, which had been somewhat dissipated by the excitement of meeting Lady Farjeohn, returned. She grew perceptibly pale.

"But this is quite an up-to-date murder," pursued Lord Lauriston. "There's a mysterious lady in it, who has dropped a pearl worth thousands of pounds; she appears to have seen the murdered man last. The police want her badly." He laughed, actually laughed. Daphne was horror-stricken. "The police want her badly."

Daphne felt cold, and shaken, and ill, and was glad the party had been broken up.

"Good-by, Miss Blatchington," said Lady Farjeohn when they had reached the entrance-hall of the hotel and were waiting for their motors to be called. "It's been so rippin' to have really made your acquaintance. You must come to us for a week-end. I'll fix one up, but I'm fearfully full just now." She bade good-by to Mrs. Lanksbury, nodded to her brother, got into her car, and was borne off luxuriously. Mrs. Lanksbury also went, so furious that she could hardly be polite, and Daphne and Lauriston were left.

"I'm going home now, Laurence," she said. "Just put me into a cab." She spoke wearily.

"I'll take you," he answered. "Daphne, you don't look well." He glanced at her with affectionate concern.

"Oh, yes, quite. Only fagged."

"Well, I'll come, too," he said, "and you can drop me at the house."

He loved to remind people that he was an M. P.

"Very well," she murmured.

They drove along, Daphne having now a little time to revert to her anxieties. She would have liked to ask him where he had had her brooch made, but she did not dare to in case he should notice that she was not wearing it, and his suspicions should be aroused.

After a time her thoughts took another turn.

"Laurence," she said, "who is head of the police?"

"Head of the police," he echoed. "What do you mean?"

"Who is the official above the detective department? Who directs the detectives in these sensational cases? Surely there's some one at the head of everything. In that case you were reading about at the Savoy, for instance?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered. "The chief commissioner of the police, I suppose. It's Arthur Ainley now. I know him slightly. At least he's the head of everything. I suppose the big detectives are more or less under him."

"I see," she murmured, making a note of the name.

Lord Lauriston alighted at Westminster, and told the driver to go on towards Knightsbridge. Slowly, very slowly, a plan was formulating in Daphne's mind.

"If," she reflected, "I could see some one who would realize how serious it would be for Laurence's name to be connected with any one in this case, perhaps I could persuade them to hush up this matter of my pearl—if I told my whole story." This was briefly the trend of her thoughts.

The more she thought over this the more feasible it seemed to her. Surely, if she went to see this Sir Arthur Ainley and told him of her engagement to Lord Lauriston, he would realize how vital it was that the case should be hushed up, so that Lord Lauriston should not be involved in the scandal, as he assuredly would be if her identity was discovered. At any rate, she could try. If her story was disbelieved—disbelieved as it had been by Mr. Pennistone—well, that would only be the end. Every one would know then. People could say and do their worst; at any rate, this horrible torturing anxiety and fear and shame would be over.

The cab reached Sloane Street. She thought and thought, then suddenly summoned up all her strength.

"Wait!" she cried to the driver; "drive me to New Scotland Yard first."

And the cab turned round.

The drive back to New Scotland Yard seemed incredibly short to Daphne, dreading as she was what she was going to do at the end of it. She was forced to do this thing by a much greater fear—the fear that, if she did not go at once to some highly placed official and disclose her story to him, the police would discover her identity and arrest her for her husband's murder.

Nevertheless, when the cab reached its destination, she alighted with apparent composure and entered the office where inquiries had to be made.

An official came forward, and one or two other men present turned to look at her rather curiously. They were evidently struck with her appearance.

"I want to see Sir Arthur Ainley," she said simply.

"You have an appointment, madam?" said the official.

"No."

"He sees no one without. What is it you want to see him about?"

Daphne replied in a low voice that it was a private matter.

"I can take any message; if you will state shortly to me what it is you want, perhaps I could do something for you, not otherwise."

"What I have to say I wish to say to Sir Arthur Ainley in person," said Daphne. "Really I must see him."

"If you can tell me what it is you want—what matter even it is—I might be able to do something," he repeated, not too politely.

Daphne began to despair. "It is about the Holloway crime," she said.

To her surprise, these words acted like magic. "What about it?" asked the official. "A theory of your own or a statement you wish to make?"

"It is a statement I wish to make," answered Daphne in a low tone.

After a slight consultation the one she had spoken to disappeared.

One of the other men gave her a chair, and she sat down with a rustling movement. She noticed some dust on the edge of a desk and the particular shape of the windows. A clock ticked. The minutes seemed to drag. Then all of a sudden the official reappeared.

"Sir Arthur Ainley would like to know your name," he said.

"I cannot give it," replied Daphne.

"I don't think he will see you without."

"I will give it to him. Tell him," she added with inspiration, "that it is probably well known to him."

The official departed again, and after an interval came back abruptly.

"Sir Arthur Ainley will see you," he said.

Daphne followed him, feeling every moment that her strength would fail her; then a door was thrown open, and she found herself in a large, light room. So light and bare in its atmosphere of pitiless utility was it that it suggested that here, at any rate, no absurd sentiment would be permitted to bias its owner's better judgment.

Sir Arthur Ainley, a keen gray man, half soldier, half official, rose courteously and gave her, she thought, a look that had something of shrewd surprise in it. Probably he had expected a different sort of woman to Daphne.

"Please sit down," he said.

Daphne seated herself. "You are Sir Arthur Ainley?" she said.

"Yes. I do not know your name."

Daphne gave it, and her address, but it was evident to her that Sir Arthur did not recognize it in any way; instead, he went on:

"Will you please tell me as shortly as possible what you have come about?" Daphne was not reassured. "As a matter of fact, I seldom, if ever, see any one without an appointment," he added. "I have not the least doubt that one of my assistants

could have done all you wish, but since you insisted—" He broke off, there was a slight note of contempt apparent in his words, as well as a rather impolite brusqueness.

"I have come in reference to what is known as the Holloway crime," said Daphne.

"Yes, yes, I have been told that."

Daphne tried to gather strength. "A pearl ornament has been found," she said. "I think it is mine."

"Yours!" cried Sir Arthur. "Yours, did you say?" He stared at her more closely.

"Yes," answered Daphne, wondering how it was that she was able to speak evenly. "I saw in the papers that a description of it is going to be circulated in order to discover the ownership. I came to you to-day to ask you to stop that description being given, because it is imperative that my identity should not be discovered, and I am afraid that certain persons will certainly be able to recognize the pearl as mine."

Sir Arthur leaned forward. He was very excited, and by this time he had divined from Daphne's dress and manner that she was obviously a woman of the kind that is described as "fashionable."

"You mean that you are the woman who went to the house?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that you are the person whom the entire detective force is moving heaven and earth to find?"

"Yes," answered Daphne. "That is why I have come to you and deliberately disclosed my identity. So that you, who hold a very high position, may realize how imperative it is for me, and, above all, for certain other very well-known persons, that my story should be hushed up."

Sir Arthur realized that here he was in the face of very exceptional circumstances.

"Were you an inmate of the house where the murder was committed?" he asked.

"No."

"Then what connection had you—with this case?"

Daphne took a deep breath.

"Ward was my husband."

Sir Arthur Ainley started, not for the first time since he had been speaking to Daphne. "Your husband! But"—he glanced at his writing-pad—"I thought you gave me your name as Miss Blatchington. That is a false name, then?"

"It was my maiden name," said Daphne. "I believed my husband to be dead. Three days ago I got a communication from him through my solicitor, asking me to go and see him—on the day, in fact, that he was murdered."

"And did you go?"

"Yes."

Sir Arthur suddenly rose and put out his finger to press an electric bell.

"Excuse me. I should like one of my colleagues to be here also."

Daphne sprang up. "No," she cried. "No! My story is for your ears alone. It is not to be made public." Her agitation amazed Sir Arthur. He noticed she was panting.

"That is absurd," he said. "Don't you realize the gravity of what you have told me? If you wanted it kept secret you should not have come to me."

"I came to you precisely because I did want it kept secret," cried Daphne. "I came to you, Sir Arthur, because I imagined you to be a man of such high position that I could safely tell you what I have to tell you, and then let you see if, in the interests of certain well-known persons, my identity ought not at all costs to be kept secret, which it will not, if the authorities here persist in discovering the ownership of my pearl."

Sir Arthur sank again into his chair. "I don't understand what you mean," he said. "I don't recognize your name. Who are you connected with whom you think it will be so dangerous for to be dragged into this case?"

"I am the Miss Blatchington who is going to marry Lord Lauriston," said Daphne. "I believed myself to be free. I am free now because my husband, though he reappeared so strangely, is now dead. I am well known to Lord Lauriston's family and friends. In other words, to a great many people to whom this scandal would be terrible. It must never get into the papers that Lord Lauriston is or was engaged—to the woman who was connected with this notorious crime."

Sir Arthur had been growing more and more amazed as she spoke.

"Lord Lauriston!" he cried. "You are the Miss Blatchington, then, whose portraits I now remember to have seen in the papers?"

"Yes."

"You told me you visited your husband—" he began. Then he broke off abruptly and framed his question differently. "You, of course, are the woman whom the police have surmised visited your husband just before his death. How long before was it?"

"He was dead when I got there."

"Dead when you got there! How? I cannot understand."

"I found him lying there dead. I—" Daphne broke off. "Will you let me tell you the whole story?" she asked.

"Yes, let me have it clear in my mind," he said, and Daphne related to him substantially what she had told Mr. Pennistone.

Sir Arthur listened intently. He was more familiar with the annals of crime than was Mr. Pennistone, yet this recitation of Daphne's amazed him beyond anything he had ever heard before. When she had finished he got up and, without commenting on what she had said, walked to the window and stood half turned away from her, apparently in deep thought; but now and again he looked round at her searchingly—looked at her with just the same curious expression that Mr. Pennistone had observed her.

He was greatly agitated and a little bit touched by her story. He was a much younger man than Mr. Pennistone, a much more virile man, a man much more susceptible to a woman's influence, consequently much more tender toward a woman. Yet his look was hard. It suggested disbelief, suspicion.

At last he said: "Are you telling me the absolute truth, Miss Blatchington, or are you withholding anything whatsoever from me?"

"I have told you nothing but what is the truth," replied Daphne in a low voice.

Sir Arthur remained silent, thinking—thinking hard. He tugged at his mustache, he fidgeted. Never, never before had he heard of such a curious case, much less been asked to do such an extraordinary thing.

"Do you realize the intense gravity of what you ask me to do," he said, "or the intense responsibility that I should be incurring in deciding—to agree to what you ask?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" cried Daphne. "But I am in such a terrible position that I—I came to the conclusion that the only thing I could do was to come to you or to some person in high authority and lay my whole story bare, sordid and wretched as it is." Then she went on, as Sir Arthur did not speak: "Don't you see? the police are circulating a description of this pearl. It is bound to be recognized. As you yourself know, it is of extraordinary size. It was mounted in a peculiar brooch which Lord Lauriston himself gave me. No doubt he had it specially made in London; the jeweler who made it up will identify it. I shall be discovered, ruined. My whole story will be public property. My engagement will be broken off. Lord Lauriston and his family will be dragged into the scandal. The whole affair will cause the most tremendous sensation. The papers will seize upon it greedily. They are full of it already. Oh, can't you realize?"

"Yes, I can realize very well," said Sir Arthur. "What you do not realize is that you are asking me to do an impossible thing."

"Such things have been done before," cried Daphne. She mentioned a famous *cause célèbre*. "Were not many important facts suppressed there?" she cried.

Sir Arthur betrayed by his face that he was familiar with what had actually happened in that case.

"That was different," he said.

"Every case is different," cried Daphne. Again Sir Arthur did not speak, and suddenly she leaned toward him.

"If you are thinking," she cried with sudden passion, "that I am the one person that can throw any light on my husband's death, you are mistaken. I cannot, and no good cause will be served by impaling me on a blade of publicity. Many people, you among others, Sir Arthur, would, I dare say, be brutal enough to suspect me of my husband's murder. But I know that I am innocent, and I know that suspicious as the evidence against me is—circumstantial and incriminating as it is—it is not strong enough to convict me."

Sir Arthur was taken aback at her vehemence, and touched. To him there was something terribly dramatic in this scene. It had come upon him so unexpectedly. Then almost as suddenly as his commiseration for Daphne had arisen, so an insidious suspicion grew up in his mind. He looked at her to see if he thought she seemed sincere—to see if she looked bad.

"Never, never before, have I been asked to do such a thing," said Sir Arthur at last to her. "I could not do it," he added, as if suddenly convinced on a point upon which he had hitherto been doubtful. "And yet—" He broke off as if the knotty point had again recurred to him. He got up and strode about the room.

"The whole case is so extraordinary," he murmured. "I say frankly

to you that I cannot conceive how you went to that house and had the moral courage to come away knowing that any man, much more your husband, was lying there the victim of foul play. I cannot conceive how you bore the shock. In fact, the whole case is beyond me. I have never even heard of such a one before." Then something occurred to him. "I will communicate with one of our departments and see what is being done."

He took up a telephone and rang up some one; Daphne could not judge whom, but he carried on a long conversation from which she was able to gather a good deal of what the inner working of the police investigation was like. It was a peculiar situation—she, the fugitive from the hand of the law, sitting there and listening to the plans for her own discovery.

Sir Arthur turned to her. "Yes, the police are going to advertise a description of the pearl to-morrow, so there is still time to stop it. The inquest will be held on Tuesday of next week—though, of course, it may be adjourned. If, then, I am going to do anything in the nature of what you ask, it will have to be done quickly."

"Then you think you will?" She could not repress her eagerness, and he noticed it, and argued that it was a bad sign. "Perhaps, after all," he reflected, "this woman is duping me unmercifully."

"I don't know what I shall do," he said. "I think the decision will hardly rest with me. I shall probably consult with the home secretary upon the matter."

A new terror was raised for Daphne. "But you won't reveal my name to him!" cried Daphne.

"Certainly I shall. You may rest assured that he, no more than I, will take advantage of your confession."

"But I know him; he is a friend of Lord Lauriston—a great friend."

"He will not reveal to his greatest friends, not even to his wife, his official secrets, unless he is a fool," said

Sir Arthur dryly. "Yes," he added, "I shall see Ashwell, the home secretary, and—well, if he thinks, as I confess I do, that considering the position of Lord Lauriston's family, it would be advisable to stifle this case as much as possible—well, we shall do our best. On the other hand," he added, "he may tell me it is my duty to utilize this confession of yours in my official capacity—in other words, to have you detained as the person for whom my subordinates are searching."

Daphne rose, gasping. "You would not do that?" she cried.

"Why not?" asked Sir Arthur. His eyes met hers without a trace of pity in them.

Suddenly her fear gave way to anger. "Of course, you will do as you think your duty bids you," she cried. "But," she added sarcastically, "I do not think you will. On the contrary, you will do what I ask you, not for my sake, but for the sake of saving the people whose names ought to be above such a scandal as this. You will do it even at the expense of justice. That is what I relied on."

She walked toward the door. Sir Arthur was surprised, and for the moment angry, but her contemptuous outburst had served to make him realize what he had hardly realized before—that here he was dealing with a woman, a girl of spirit, and obviously from her dress and manner brought up in the most fastidious of surroundings, and yet embroiled in this sordid affair.

He held open the door for Daphne. "Well I will think over your case," he said, "and until I have come to a decision I will see that your name is protected. I cannot do more. I will write to you."

CHAPTER X.

In the Nick of Time.

ABOUT an hour after Daphne's interview with Sir Arthur Ainley, that official left New Scotland Yard

and walked quietly across to the adjacent houses of parliament.

Sir Arthur, very unobtrusive in his manner, passed quite unrecognized through a knot of loungers at the corner of the Embankment and reached one of the imposing Gothic gateways of St. Stephen's, having, as it happened, rubbed elbows with a police sergeant *en route*.

A whispered conversation with another blue-coated representative of the law, however, and a great deal of respect when his name was given, caused him to be immediately taken to a small room to await the home secretary, the Right Hon. George Ashwell, whom he had come to see with reference to Daphne's case.

In a little while the minister came in, and the two men, whose official duties brought them from time to time into contact with one another, shook hands.

"I am sorry to bother you," said Sir Arthur, getting briskly to business; "but I have a most peculiar—point—to decide, one which I feel is rather beyond my authority."

"And you want to throw the responsibility on me," laughed the home secretary.

"Exactly," replied Sir Arthur. "You have heard, of course, of the case which we are investigating just now, commonly called the Holloway crime."

"Yes, yes," murmured Ashwell, "but as regards it, you know that I am more ignorant than the man in the street; he has time to read the papers. I don't."

"I can quite believe that," laughed Sir Arthur. "Well, the fact is, it promised from the beginning to be something of a *cause célèbre*. Now it has taken a most curious turn. I must tell you that we are searching for a mysterious woman who was known to have visited the murdered man just before the murder was committed apparently, but of whose identity we haven't the least trace except that a pearl, sup-

posed to have belonged to her, has been found—"

"I know!" cried the home secretary, his face lighting up humorously. "My boy told me all about it at breakfast. He wants to be a detective. I'll apprentice him to you, Ainley."

Sir Arthur had to smile at the home secretary's levity, then he became grave. "Well, you know this woman's connection with the case," he went on.

"Call her the woman in the case," interrupted the home secretary frivolously.

Again Sir Arthur had to smile. "Well," he said. "As it happens she is a lady quite well known to you, I expect. She came to see me to-day—privately, you understand—to make a clean breast of her story to me. She turns out to be the girl whom Lord Lauriston is engaged to."

"Lauriston, Lauriston, do you say?" cried the home secretary.

"Yes, Lauriston, your coming man," said Sir Arthur.

Lord Lauriston, as a member of parliament, was one of the chief supporters of the party to which the home secretary belonged.

"Good Heavens! But, why, how? Of course, I know her. Miss Blatchington. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes, that was her name," replied Ainley. "A charming girl."

"Of course I know her," repeated the home secretary. "Everybody does."

"Well, she is the woman—in this case," observed Sir Arthur. "Miss Blatchington was really this man Ward's wife."

"His wife! Wife?" queried the home secretary.

"His wife," repeated Sir Arthur quietly. He always spoke quietly.

"Good Lord, what next are you going to tell me? Why was she his wife, and how was she going to marry Lauriston?"

"She believed him to be dead," said Sir Arthur. "He was one of these blackguards who contrive to hide their

identity when things get too hot for them. It appears he was in some big train smash in the States, and was supposed to have been killed. As a matter of fact, he wasn't, though it suited his purpose very well then to let his friends—and creditors—think that he was. That was about eight years ago, I think. Last week he suddenly turned up here and wrote to his wife, Miss Blatchington, and demanded an interview." Here Sir Arthur continued a bare outline of the story of Scruit's, or Ward's, death, and Daphne's visit to Klito Road, as related by her.

The home secretary listened intently. He was a most keen man, with a wonderful aptitude for assimilating a few facts and seeing at once the salient points of a case.

"Amazing," he said. "There is no end to the strange things of this world."

"No, there isn't," replied Sir Arthur.

"Doesn't speak very well for Lauriston's choice, either," remarked the home secretary. "I've heard people say Miss Blatchington dropped from the skies, but I don't think any one suspected a melodrama of this sort. Lauriston doesn't know, of course."

"No; I think that's what she's frightened of," said Sir Arthur. "Almost as much as the danger she runs of being arrested."

"Arrested?" queried the home secretary.

"Don't you see, she was seen to enter this house, go up to the man's rooms, but she wasn't seen to leave. About half an hour later he was found murdered. As far as circumstantial evidence goes, it's almost conclusive."

"So it is," replied the home secretary. "Good Lord, I'd missed that point!"

He looked curiously at Sir Arthur. "I wonder—if she is guilty," he added slowly.

"I don't think that is so much what I have to consider," said Sir Arthur.

"In any case, if I stifle the affair, stop the police investigating the ownership of this pearl, I shall be more or less standing in the way of justice. It will be what the man in the street calls one law for the rich and one for the poor. However, it wouldn't make a vast difference to the public at large if I do stop the true course of justice, but it will make a vast difference to Lauriston and his family, and his father in particular—considering his position—if this story comes out. By George! what a harvest for the papers it would be. Lauriston engaged to the woman in the Holloway crime!"

"Anything would be better than it all coming out," said the home secretary. Also, besides Lauriston and his family, there is the government to be considered. Nothing is more damaging to a government, not the greatest political blunders, than a really discreditable scandal. The electorate is so moral at heart."

"It's a beastly responsibility, either way," remarked Sir Arthur. "Yet, on the whole, as one of Lauriston's class, and you as his friend, I think we ought to hush it up."

The home secretary stared out of the window, and as if by a cynical working of fate, as his eyes rested on the darkened courtyard beneath, a large motor-car, brightly lit up inside, turned away from the members' entrance and slowly passed in front of the window.

"By George!" cried the home secretary, "that's strange. There is Lauriston and Miss Blatchington, I believe!"

Sir Arthur sprang up and stood by the home secretary's side.

"Yes, that is she," he said. "How extraordinary!"

The car passed across the courtyard, and Daphne, sitting beside her lover, was quite visible to the two men. Something in her attitude suggested anxiety.

She looked very sweet and womanly, and a little bit pathetic.

The car disappeared from view, and Sir Arthur turned back into the room.

"I think," said the home secretary, "that if I were you, Ainley, I would do as I said. Let the matter slide, and stop your men. I'll take the responsibility with you."

And Sir Arthur knew that this was the home secretary's decision, though the words were so carelessly spoken.

Daphne was saved—for the time.

CHAPTER XI.

Blackmail.

ON Saturday morning the countless persons all over England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, who opened their papers and looked straight to the column headed "Holloway Crime," expecting to see some sensational development, were disappointed. On the contrary, they saw something which surprised them considerably and baffled their intelligences completely.

In every paper that appeared in the United Kingdom on that morning there was a short identical paragraph which had, in fact, been dictated by the authorities at New Scotland Yard. It ran simply:

The supposed find of a pearl, thought to belong to the mysterious woman for whom the police are searching, turns out to be of no moment. It is true that a pearl was found; it was, however, an imitation one, a cheap ornament belonging to a friend of Mrs. Maberly, the landlady, who had visited her on the day previous to the crime. The police are therefore deprived of their one and only clue to the identity of the woman.

A few lines in all, so short and convincing a statement that none could doubt the veracity of it.

The magic of officialdom had worked, the great had exerted their influence, and the British public had been effectively duped by its masters, and there were only three persons out of its population of forty or fifty odd millions who knew the truth.

Sir Arthur Ainley, sitting over his

breakfast-table, felt certain that he had done the right thing; the home secretary, who had nearly forgotten the matter, was startled when his little boy drew his attention to the paragraph; Daphne, the person most concerned, felt an immense relief.

So great was her relief that she could only look blankly into vacancy until her aunt recalled her to her remembrance of her surroundings.

"How strange you have been in your manner lately, Daphne," she said. "I am sure you are not well. I think we had better go away for a time."

"Oh, no, I couldn't possibly!" cried Daphne. "I mean, I shouldn't like to."

Mrs. Maddox was silent—wisely—and Daphne took up her letters. She experienced a slight thrill, a feeling of guilty nervousness, when she saw one in a strange handwriting, which she surmised was from Sir Arthur Ainley.

DEAR MISS BLATCHINGTON:

I saw the friend whom I told you I should consult as to what you asked me to do. He agrees with me that, in the interests of everybody, it should be done, and I have therefore given the necessary instructions; as you will see from the morning's papers, the matter is at an end. Your jewel will, however, be retained. This is essential. Of course, I cannot guarantee that at some future time the matter may not crop up again from some reason or other, but I shall do my best for you. For my sake, as well as yours, destroy this letter, and be careful that no hint of our interview is given by you to any one. I remain,

Yours truly,

That was all. Daphne folded the sheet of note-paper carefully and thrust it into her dress. There was something in Sir Arthur's cold, careful, official note that struck a chill to her heart. This man had her secret, this man and another man, both men of honor, it was true; but yet she feared.

She shivered and glanced round the cozy room, and at her aunt, the little timid woman who would have been so horrified had she divined a tithe of what Daphne was concealing from her.

Daphne picked up a paper and read

it with morbid horror; she hated the sight of papers now. This one had three columns on the case. Lines and lines of theories and surmises. Detailed descriptions of the house in Klito Road, the arrangement of the rooms, what people thought in the neighborhood; also an interview with Mrs. Maberly, where she gave once again—it had already appeared in half a dozen papers—an account of how she had let the mysterious woman in.

Daphne put the paper aside with loathing. "They will find me yet," she spoke to herself mentally. She felt so alone, so frail to battle against this horrible thing that had come so suddenly into her life. She could take her anxieties to not one single person. Mr. Pennistone had disbelieved her, deserted her, as if she were already a convicted criminal. Sir Arthur Ainley had had suspicions, she could see that, and was cold and pitiless to her as a stranger and some one he believed to be of bad reputation.

She reviewed her friends and wondered—was there one of them who would trust her and help her, even if she dared to reveal her story? Yes, there was one—only one. Lancelot Welde. She thought of him with almost tearful dismay. He would soon go out of her life forever, and something caught in her throat and taught her of the tragedy of existence. And then, as if in extra torment to her, her aunt spoke.

"By the way, Daphne," she said primly. "Now that you are engaged to Lord Lauriston, you really ought not to receive that Mr. Welde alone. When I was out the other afternoon I hear he called, and that just as he was going Lord Lauriston came. I'm sure he will not like it; in fact, he mentioned the fact to me quite pointedly."

"Mr. Welde is a very old friend," said Daphne in a low voice, flushing also to think that Lord Lauriston had dared to object to her behavior, particularly where Lancelot Welde was concerned.

"He may be," said her aunt. "But just because you are an orphan you are not at liberty to act hostess in that unconventional way. Besides, I do not think he is a very desirable acquaintance."

Daphne's anger fired up instantaneously. Not her anger so much as her loyal love for Welde. She burst out uncontrollably:

"I shall have him here when I like. It does not concern Laurence. I wish that he had a tithe of Mr. Welde's charm and humor. Please don't say anything against him again."

She fled out of the room in tears.

At that same moment Mr. George Maberly was also reading the morning's paper as he journeyed to his work. He was, in fact, very absorbed in his paper.

"It's a deuced strange thing," he ruminated as he read and reread the short paragraph about the pearl. "I wasn't born yesterday, but I'm dashed if I can see what object the police had in saying this. Belonged to a friend of Mrs. Maberly's, indeed! I'm her husband, and I know that it didn't. Now, what's their game? Want to hush up something about this lady they're supposed to be looking for, I suppose. Well, I dare say I'll be able to see about that."

Then, with great care, he took from his pocket his letter-case, and extracted therefrom a visiting-card, at which he looked long and thoughtfully.

It bore the inscription, "Miss Daphne Blatchington," and in the lower corner, "Hill Street, S.W." He had found it in the hall of his house in Klito Road on the morning after the murder.

"Wonder what she'd give me to keep my mouth shut?" he reflected.

CHAPTER XII.

By a Person Unknown.

IT was a dull, raw morning, the morning of the day fixed for the inquest upon the body of Victor Scruit; but

George Maberly sat at breakfast eating heartily while his wife waited upon him. Dismal climatic conditions did not affect him any more than did the gruesome event which was to take place within a few hours, and in which he and his wife were to participate.

Outside the hall where the inquest was to be held a group of morbid sight-seers had assembled at quite an early hour, and by half past ten this crowd had grown to large proportions, and the street was congested with a rough and seething mass of people.

A brougham had driven up, bringing some of the treasury officials. After that others arrived — counsel, solicitors, witnesses, the Maberlys among others, and the doctor who had been called in on the finding of the body.

The hall was filled with a subdued murmur, which died down as the coroner took his place. The usual formalities were proceeded with, the jury were sworn; they viewed the body. It seemed going to be a very ordinary inquest, when suddenly the coroner announced that he had some special remarks to make.

"There are three outstanding features in this case," he said. "In the first place, although I think you will have very little difficulty in coming to the conclusion that the dead man was the victim of foul play, yet we have practically no evidence of how he met his death; in the second place, the weapon with which the wound was inflicted is missing; and, in the third place — and this is most important — evidence will be called before you to prove that a certain woman entered the house and went up to the dead man's rooms shortly before, or shortly after, or, at the actual moment of his death, at present we cannot say when. We can, in fact, say nothing more than that she was seen to go up, but not to leave. Her identity has not been discovered, nor has any clue to it been forthcoming. In these proceedings before you this woman, whoever she is, will be alluded to as Miss X."

A slight murmur of interest ran round the hall and died down as Mrs. Maberly, the first witness, was called.

Her examination was begun with mere formalities.

"On Thursday last did you see the dead man?" she was asked.

She assented.

"At what time?"

"He came down to me just afore I was goin' to give my little girl her dinner. I was in the kitchen, you will understand, sir. He came in and said, 'Mrs. Maberly,' he said, 'I have a lady coming to see me at three o'clock.'"

"You are sure he said three o'clock?" interrupted the coroner.

"'At three o'clock this afternoon,' he said," repeated Mrs. Maberly. "'I want you to let her in for me, and particularly not to keep her waiting.'"

"And you agreed?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did a lady come?"

"Yes, but not till nearly half past three."

"And you let her in?"

"Yes, I let her in, and told her to go up to the second floor."

"You didn't go with her?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't generally open the door for my lodgers," answered Mrs. Maberly.

"I only did it this time by special request of Mr. Ward. I shouldn't have dreamed of showing her up-stairs. He didn't ask me to."

"Do you mean me to infer anything from that?"

"What, sir?"

"You mean you think he would have resented your accompanying the lady up-stairs?"

"No, I don't think that. I didn't see no need."

"Yes. And she went up alone?"

"Yes, an' I went down-stairs to the kitchen, where I had been sitting with my sister and my little girl."

"Yes." The coroner finished off the sentence which he was writing.

"Now, before we go any further,

can you describe this lady whom you let into the house?"

"Well, not very well, sir, for she was that wrapped up in one of these motor veils that it was next to impossible for me to see her face. But she was tall, and fairish, and slim, and quite the lady, but I couldn't describe her features—except that she seemed pale."

"Any distinctive dress?" asked the coroner.

"It was all black, sir, and quite plain," answered Mrs. Maberly.

"Now, when you had gone down-stairs," said the coroner, "what did you do?"

"Well, I began sewing again," said Mrs. Maberly. "Then my little girl upset the kettle, and we—me and my sister Rose, who was there—had such a to-do clearing it up. Then, after that, I put it on again to make some tea for Mr. Ward. I always took him up a cup, but you will understand, sir, I was just a bit doubtful about taking it up to him that afternoon, seeing as he had the lady with him, and mightn't want to be disturbed. Me and my sister argued about it—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the coroner. "But you did take it up?"

"Yes."

"Now, before you go on," he said, "tell me, had you seen this Miss X., the lady you had let in—had you seen her go?"

"No sir."

"Well, when you had made the tea, you took it up, I suppose?"

Mrs. Maberly drew in a deep breath and steadied herself.

"I put the teapot on the tray," she said, "and a cup—two cups, one for the lady—and some bread and butter I'd cut; then I picked up the tray, but first of all I must tell you, sir, that we had no light in the kitchen or outside on the stairs, it being not quite dark, and me wanting to be economical. Well, I went up-stairs, up the first flight to the hall, then up the next flight. As I turned to go up to the second floor I

saw some one lying in front of me across the little first landing. I was very startled, but I thought it was Mr. Ward taken ill. Well, I went on up two or three steps, then I saw something dreadful had happened.

"Well, sir, I was that terrified I dropped the whole tea-tray—yes, sir, I did"—Mrs. Maberly became quite familiar in her excitement—"and it fell right down the stairs, and so did I, nearly. Then I recovered a little and rushed down, calling out to my sister. She heard the crash, of course, and came running out, and I shrieked out to her to get some matches. I hadn't any. She got them, and then we, both of us, and my little girl, who clung to our skirts, terrified, poor mite, went up-stairs again. We lit the gas on the first landing, and we only had to look once, sir, to see that it really was Mr. Ward, and that he was dead."

Mrs. Maberly paused for breath at this climax.

"Yes," said the coroner, finishing writing.

"That was all, sir. I just went up two steps and took one good look to make sure, and then me and Rose rushed into the street. We couldn't stay alone there."

A dramatic hush fell while the coroner again finished writing all she had said; then, after taking her through what had happened when she called in the police, he went on:

"Now tell me, you said it was half past three when this Miss X. came. Now, what time was it that you discovered the body?"

"It must have been about twenty minutes, or quite half an hour, later," replied Mrs. Maberly. "I know it was a quarter to four when the child upset the kettle, because, as I was wiping it up, I happened to catch my eye on the clock."

"And you can give me no idea what time this Miss X. left the house?"

"No, sir."

This practically finished Mrs. Maberly's evidence.

The more formal witnesses were now taken—first the doctor who examined the body, to prove that he considered that the wound was not self-inflicted, and that it had been made with a sharp knife. Stress was laid on the point that the knife or other instrument had never been found.

"And how long do you consider the man had been dead?" asked the coroner.

"About three-quarters of an hour when I first saw him," replied the doctor.

"What time was that?" asked the coroner.

"Exactly ten minutes past four."

"You consider, then, that the man must have met his death just about the time that this Miss X. entered the house?"

This question caused some little sensation in the hall.

"I cannot speak to that," replied the doctor. "I repeat that I consider that he had been dead about three-quarters of an hour."

"But then he would not die directly after the wound had been inflicted," observed the coroner.

"Almost directly," said the doctor, "from a wound of that description."

After him various police officers, who had come in response to the first officer's whistle, were called, and again the fact that no weapon had been found was made much of. Rose was also called, but she could only corroborate Mrs. Maberly's evidence, and so her own was unimportant. Lastly, George Maberly was asked a few questions as to his movements on the day of the murder. When all this had been done and the coroner was about to make his final remarks to the jury, a man suddenly rose in the back of the hall, a poor and rather small man.

"Please, sir, I should like to ask a question," he shouted roughly, apparently from nervousness.

"I cannot allow you to ask a question without you show good grounds for doing so," said the coroner.

Indignant police officers hurried the man forward. Police officers are always indignantly amazed if anything happens which they do not quite understand or expect.

"I was on the same ship with the deceased coming from South America," said the man. "I knew him, though I couldn't say as we were friends."

"What is your name?" asked the coroner.

"Richard Hall, sir."

"And your address and occupation?"

The man gave a mean address, adding: "I'm a traveler when I can get any work, sir; just now I can't."

"Well, what is the question you wanted to ask?" went on the coroner, a trifle impatiently.

"It's this, sir. Does this court consider the identity of the deceased proved beyond doubt?"

"Certainly," said the coroner.

"In that case, then, sir, I should like to say that I saw the man whom I knew as L. Ward alive and walking along Blackfriars Bridge at half past eight yesterday morning."

When these extraordinary words had made themselves clear to his mind, and the intense excitement in the court had subsided, the coroner asked the man Hall to repeat his statement. He did so.

"But, come, how can it have been he?" cried the coroner. "What reason can you give me for supposing that it was?"

"I am fair certain," said the man.

"Did you speak to him?"

"No, sir; he was on the other side of the road, and walking the opposite way to what I was."

"And it didn't occur to you to try and make sure?"

"No, sir, seeing as I knew nothing about this here affair then. It was only when I saw the papers—"

"Quiet, quiet!" cried the coroner, realizing that he had asked a silly question and slurring it over. "Now, tell

me, had you any positive means of identifying him?"

"No, sir; I can't say as I 'ad, save he tried to avoid me, and seeing that we'd been very chummy, as you might say, on board ship—"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted the coroner. "But that is not what I am asking for, you know. Can't you give me any special proof of why you thought this man whom you saw was L. Ward? Had he a scarf, for instance, that you had seen Ward wear? Had he any mark upon his face, any bodily peculiarity, any piece of jewelry, any distinctive walk or movement? Anything?"

"No, sir; nothing," replied Hall rather aggrievedly at seeing himself discredited.

"Then how can you come here and waste the time of this court with such tales?" cried the coroner testily. "It is absurd. No, I cannot admit your statement. People must not be encouraged to come to courts of law and make irresponsible statements of this description."

"All the same, sir, I'm sure it was he—"

"Silence!" said the coroner. "You have no real reason at all for thinking that the man you saw was the deceased."

"Except that I knew his face right enough," muttered Hall suddenly. "Nor likely to forget it, neither."

"You thought you did," snapped the coroner. "Stand down now."

Two constables hustled him back, and he subsided into the crowd at the lower end of the hall, with the result that the interruption in the proceedings was at an end. Not so the incident, however, which had made a strong impression upon every one, and, as the man disappeared back to his place among the general public, all eyes followed him.

The coroner did not allow the matter to delay the inquest, however, and immediately proceeded with his summing up of the evidence; though, as a

matter of fact, there was very little for him to deal with. After he had finished, the jury deliberated only a very short time. Their verdict was what it could only be: "Murder by a person unknown."

CHAPTER XIII.

Maberly Calls.

DAPHNE was in the drawing-room of the little house in Hill Street. The half light of the January afternoon filled it uncertainly; outside was the dreary landscape of opposite houses; the fire had burned low, and she had no energy to replenish it. She shivered.

It was the day of the inquest on Victor Scrut.

She crouched in a low chair, with her chin poked forward and resting on the palm of one hand. The coldness of apprehension and suspense was in her heart.

She could scarcely endure this day of slow torture. She wondered how she had borne it so far. She felt she must cry out aloud or rush, sobbing, to some friend and unburden her cares and terrors. She moved her foot slightly and her dress rustled; the slightest bodily movement made an eery sound in the hushed room and startled her nerves, strung now almost to breaking-point.

"Unless some one comes I shall go mad," she burst out in a hysterical whisper, and at that instant the door opened and the maid announced:

"Lord Lauriston, 'miss."

Daphne started, and recovered herself quickly.

"Am I not a nuisance?" he cried. "Am I not an importunate lover? Bursting in upon you when you least expect me, and least want me."

"Yes, you are," she retorted; and then, as he seemed genuinely alarmed lest he had annoyed her, she hastened to add: "No, you have come at the very right moment, Laurence. I was

just praying for some one to come; naturally, you above everybody. Isn't it an appalling day?"

"I don't think about the days now," he cried, "except to count them up to our wedding-day, Daphne. It has just occurred to me, why shouldn't we be married sooner?"

"Sooner—"

"In a fortnight's time?"

"A fortnight, Laurence?"

"Why not? A fortnight seems to me an age."

"My dear foolish Laurie, you know it's impossible."

"All right, Daphne," he answered gently, though he was a trifle hurt at her uncompromising refusal to listen to him. "I suppose I must wait, but you must not expect me to be patient."

"You certainly show every sign of impatience already," she laughed, and walked over to the window. Her words sounded a trifle callous, as in truth they were; for, apart from not reciprocating Lauriston's love, her mind was terribly occupied with other thoughts at that moment; above all, she wished that she could see an afternoon's paper, for she felt sure that it would contain a report of the inquest.

She wondered how long he would keep her before she could go out and buy one. She was afraid to send one of the servants.

She stood by the window, and once again, as she looked out into the quiet street, as she had on that night of her husband's murder, she fancied that a man, standing under the opposite lamp-post, was looking up at the house. She turned away, shivering, and tried to smile to Lauriston. As she turned, however, the door opened, and another visitor was announced.

It was Lancelot Welde.

He came in easily and shook hands with each of them. His *sang-froid* usually carried him through most trying situations quite unperturbed; nor did his pleasantly smiling face betray in the least how it hurt him to see another man occupying the position and

exercising the rights which he so much coveted.

Tea had now been brought in, and Daphne began to dispense it.

"I am feeling particularly merry," remarked Welde, as the conversation flagged slightly. "I have been to an inquest."

"An inquest!" cried Daphne with involuntary horror.

"Really?" said Lauriston frigidly.

"Yes, but not an ordinary one," went on Welde in the light manner which he affected and which irritated some people intensely. "A very interesting one. The inquest, in fact, in that Holloway crime. You know the one I mean. It is quite exceptional."

His words stabbed Daphne's faculties. She paused in the act of pouring out a cup of tea, and sat with all her vitality arrested. She dared not move; she was afraid she would cry out.

"Oh, really?" said Lord Lauriston, his interest now slightly aroused. "Yes, it is an exceptional crime, though I cannot plead guilty to having read the sensational newspaper reports. But one thing I can tell you, if you are studying the case from a criminological point of view. I heard, as a piece of club gossip, that the identity of the mysterious woman in the case is very well known to some people in authority, and that she is by no means personally unknown to many people of—oh!—our own class."

"No?" cried Welde, immensely keen. "That is very curious."

Still Daphne sat motionless, though Lord Lauriston's words, coming so suddenly after Lancelot Welde's, had terrified her. Then one of her confessors had been giving away her story. A piece of scandal too good to be kept locked up, she supposed. She wondered instantaneously whether it was the home secretary or Sir Arthur Ainley. Whichever it was, however, the outcome of it could have only one result for her.

She was horrified, too, that Welde

and Lord Lauriston should both, by a strange mischance, be interested in the case. The deception and secrecy of it all made her sick.

"And you were present at this inquest?" remarked Lord Lauriston, now apparently more amiably disposed toward Welde because he thought he might extract some interesting conversational items from him. "Really, that was very curious. Was it dramatic? Were the proceedings signalized by any stirring incidents? I have never been at an inquest myself."

"On the contrary, it was rather dull," replied Welde. "Except that from the medical evidence, it seems practically certain that the time of this man's death coincided almost exactly, so far as can be judged, of course, with the time at which this mysterious woman was seen to enter the house."

Daphne drew in her breath sharply like a person who has experienced sudden physical pain. It was the only sign she made of the tumult of horror into which she had been thrown by this startling disclosure of Welde's interest in the case of her husband's murder.

"That was proved, was it?" said Lord Lauriston in commenting upon Welde's last remark.

"Well, practically," answered he. "So far as anything can be proved in the case. But, really, it is so extraordinarily baffling. It seems amazing that they cannot find any trace of this woman. They were said, as you remember, I dare say, to have found a pearl, or some piece of jewelry, belonging to her. But that has been contradicted."

"Contradicted in a rather curious manner," observed Lauriston.

"Yes," said Welde, "in a manner which would bear out what you said, that the woman is some one whom the authorities are endeavoring to shield."

"Precisely," agreed Lauriston.

They went on drinking tea and chatting on various subjects. Lauriston seemed in a particularly unbending

mood, and Welde was always lively—even now, when he was in the presence of the man who was going to marry Daphne.

While they were talking it suddenly occurred to her that she had not heard what was the actual result of the inquest. In her terror and horror, when she had found that Welde had been present at it, and he and Lauriston had been discussing it so crudely, she had been almost too upset to consider the main point—the verdict.

"By the way," she said, trying to speak as naturally as she could, "what was the actual verdict in that case? I suppose they think it really was murder?"

"In the Holloway case?" replied Welde. "Of course, murder. The medical evidence proves that. The verdict was 'Murder—by some person unknown,'" he added carelessly.

Daphne shivered. Once again she seemed to feel that terrible, upturned, staring face of her husband, to smell the stuffy atmosphere of that awful house, to see those murky, squalid roads through which she had fled afterward. It all came back to her so vividly now, and she seemed to hear Welde and Lauriston speaking, as it were, far away.

She wondered whether she was turning a little bit faint, if it was all real, if Lauriston, whom she knew so well and was going to marry, if Lancelot Welde, who was so familiar to her, were really talking about this terrible tragedy in which she felt that she was the principal actress. She could hardly believe that she could conceal it at all, that she could be so skilful in duplicity.

"Yes, of course," Welde was saying in his hypercritical way. "Yes, of course, the whole crux of the case is the identity of this mysterious woman. They have not found her, and they say they have not the slightest trace of her, so it is hardly likely that they will find her, and if the authorities are trying to shield her identity, well, it is very un-

likely that they will make any effort to find her."

"Quite," said Lauriston. "What was the man, by the way?"

"No one knows."

"No one seems to know anything, in fact," remarked Lauriston. "Extraordinary!"

"Some one in London must know something," said Welde with conviction, "and, ah, that reminds me, there was one rather dramatic incident in the case. A man got up and swore he had seen the dead man alive this morning."

"Alive?" cried Lauriston.

Daphne started, and suddenly there occurred to her the man like her dead husband whom she had seen standing on the opposite side of the street that evening. A chill struck her. There was something horrible about this—unexplainable, ghastly.

"It was a friend of his who thought he had seen him," continued Welde. "At least a man who had come from the States on the same boat. Probably a man who had forgotten his face really. At any rate, the coroner didn't think his evidence worth admitting. But it was queer all the same."

"People always come forward and say those sort of things," said Lauriston. "Sooner or later some morbidly minded person will confess to the crime. The sensational reports of these cases are very pernicious. They work in a peculiar manner on the imaginations of weak-minded people."

"I know," answered Welde. "It is curious."

At this point Lauriston rose. Daphne scarcely seemed to notice him. She was sitting pale and erect and vacant. That peculiar trance-like stare, to which she was so subject, was upon her. Her expression was blank, and she was almost unconscious of the two men.

Welde rose, too, thinking he could not very well stay after Lauriston had left, much as he would have liked to.

"Perhaps you are coming my way," said the latter courteously.

But Welde made an excuse, and a few minutes afterward, when they had left the house together, they went in opposite directions.

Meanwhile Daphne felt stunned. She stood resting her forehead against the mantelpiece staring down into the red coals and trying to realize what it all meant.

Two things, however, stood out clearly in her mind; one was that she, as the mysterious woman, was definitely and publicly suspected of her husband's murder; the other was that either the home secretary or Sir Arthur Ainley had betrayed her. How much farther would they go, whichever of them it was? she asked herself, and then, while she was thus apprehensively conjecturing, the maid came in.

"Please, miss," she said, "there's a gentleman—leastways a man—downstairs wants to speak to you. Mr. George Maberly he calls himself."

"Mr. George Maberly," Daphne had repeated when the maid had come into the room. "Maberly, I don't know any one of that name."

"That is the name, miss," said the maid. "He won't say what he wants."

"What sort of a man?" asked Daphne.

"Oh, quite a rough man," said the prim parlor maid in a tone that would have hurt Mr. George Maberly's self-respect very much.

"Well, I'll come down and see what it is he wants," said Daphne. She half suspected that it might be a man sent from some shop about an overdue account, and she therefore did not want to inquire too particularly from her maid what his business might be.

She ran down-stairs and into the little room at the back of the dining-room, which they called the library. George Maberly was standing with his hat in his hand; Daphne thought he had rather a sheepish expression.

"Good afternoon," she said, "what is it?"

"Miss Blatchington?" he queried with something like pompousness.

"Yes, I am Miss Blatchington," answered Daphne, expecting to have a writ or county court summons thrust at her. "What is it you want? I am in rather a hurry."

George Maberly fumbled in his pocket-book and then held out a visiting card. "Is that your card by any chance?" he asked.

Daphne was quite surprised. She took the slip of white board and gazed at it intently. "Yes, it is my card," she said. "But why and how did you come to have it?"

George Maberly hesitated a little. This was the awkward part of the business. "I found it"—he paused—"at No. 5 Klito Road, Holloway," he said, and looked with his little eyes to see what effect his words would have on Daphne.

She started, she could not repress the start, nor the involuntary exclamation: "At Klito Road," and in a second a tumult of questions rushed through her brain. What did the man mean? Who was he? What had she best say? What attitude had she best take up?

"I am afraid I do not understand," she said, mastering her nervousness with a tremendous effort.

"'Aven't you heard of Klito Road before?" he asked.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

George Maberly looked straight at her.

"Come, I'm not taking any of that, Miss Blatchington," he said with horrid familiarity and decided suggestion of insolence. "This is your visiting card, isn't it? And I found it at No. 5 Klito Road, where the murder was committed, you know. I'm the landlord."

"The landlord," echoed Daphne in such a tone that she betrayed herself. She recovered immediately, however. "But still I don't see why you have come to me, or, if you found that card there, how it got there," she said.

"P'raps you mayn't see," said

George Maberly. "but I do." He paused to observe what effect his words would have on her, and as she merely maintained a tremulous silence he went on: "Look here, it ain't no good beating about the bush. This is your card, and it's not the only thing of yours that's been found in that house. There was a pearl as well, wasn't there, though the police did try to 'ush it up!"

"I don't know what you are talking about," cried Daphne in a stifled voice, putting her hand up to her throat with a clutching movement.

George Maberly took a step toward her and forced his little sharp face quite close to hers. "Don't you know what I mean?" he said. "Then I'll tell you. You're the woman the police are looking for, and will find jolly soon, if I don't mistake."

"How dare you say such things!" cried Daphne, but nevertheless her face had blanched.

"Don't I dare?" cried Maberly, seeing his advantage and becoming correspondingly bumptious. "Don't I dare? I shall dare something else soon. Take what I know to the police. It's my duty to."

Daphne was now thoroughly frightened and unnerved. "Oh, you would not do that," she shuddered, suddenly abandoning the pretense which she had been trying to keep up.

"Wouldn't I?" he cried, again stepping forward as she had stepped back, and again forcing his little face up to hers. "Wouldn't I? I would, jolly quick, now that I know I'm right. So you admit, now, that you're the woman — beg pardon, the lady — they're looking for."

"I admit nothing," said Daphne in a deep voice that she tried ineffectually to still. "I have nothing at all to do with what you're talking about."

"Haven't you?" said Maberly. "Well, I wasn't born yesterday. Come," he went on, as she still shrank back from him in horrified silence. "Come, don't let's shilly-shally about.

It won't do no good. I'm a lawyer, I am, and I know all about your sort. Smart society, you calls yourself, I suppose. Generally the worst. My, aren't your class rips generally, and no mistake! I know you, knows you by the dozen. We acts for one or two, but I think you could give them points."

"Go, go out of my room, out of the house," cried Daphne, now in a fury at the man's vile impudence. "How dare you come here and say such things! Go at once, or I'll have the police in."

"Would you, now?" cried Maberly. "The police, indeed. Take my advice and keep clear of the police. They want you more than they'll ever want me."

Daphne gasped. "Go, go, you— you horror."

"Not till we've come to a little friendly arrangement that'll be better for me and for you," cried Maberly, with something like a grin of satisfaction. "No fear, you won't get rid of me like that. I know a thing or two too much for that. Them as lives in glass houses mustn't throw stones."

"I won't listen to you," she cried. But again she shrank back until she was standing against a cabinet, and again he stepped forward in his insinuating way and put up his face close to hers.

"Won't you?" he cried. "We'll see about that. Look here, I've got your name and address. I know something more, too. I know you're the lady the police are after." As Daphne made an exclamation. "Ah, it's no good you takin' on like that. I know, and that's all I want. I've only got to go to the nearest police station and say, 'The woman connected with the 'Olloway crime lives at No. so-and-so 'Ill Street, Knightsbridge,' and you'd soon be brought to book, lady or no lady, see if you wouldn't. Now, what'll you give me to hold my tongue? That's what I mean." He stopped and peered calmly at Daphne

once more to see the exact effect of his words.

"I won't give you anything," she said at last in a low voice. She was terrified and horror-stricken now that she began to see the drift of the man's meaning.

Every moment she wondered whether some of the servants might not hear, or, worse still, her aunt come into the room. How she had come to drop the card she could not imagine, but she had a faint recollection of having got a visiting card out to send up to her husband and then finding what a poor, rough sort of house it was she had put it away, or thought she had done so, into her bag.

"Won't you give me anything?" cried Maberly. "Come, think about it, Miss Blatchington. Much simpler, you know. A check now, or, better still, notes for fifty pounds would settle me nicely. I'm a bit hard up, and it would be real charity into the bargain."

"I will do nothing of the kind," cried Daphne, faltering nevertheless, and wondering whether she had not better give the man a check right away.

"Come, don't shilly-shally about," cried Maberly. "I mean what I say. Either I go to the police or I don't."

"And if I do give you money," cried Daphne in her misery, "what guarantee shall I have that you will keep silence?"

"A bargain's a bargain," said Maberly, standing firm, as it were, both mentally and physically. "Fifty pounds, and my mouth's shut tight."

A slight silence fell. "Very well," said Daphne. "I haven't my check book here; you must wait a minute." In her nervous terror she was almost apologetic.

"Oh, I can wait," cried George Maberly, trying to suppress the eagerness in his voice now that he saw she had given way.

Daphne went out of the room, but quickly returned with her check-book.

"What initial?" she said in a low, laconic tone.

"George," said George Maberly. "No high-sounding names for me."

She wrote the check and held it out to him. In this action she was just a trifle supercilious and contemptuous, though she knew she was beaten.

George Maberly took the check, glanced at it, and thought she was a fine girl. He flattered himself that he had a nice eye for feminine beauty—for the ladies, as he termed it—and he was not averse to indulging himself in this respect. He stood for a moment awkwardly fingering the check.

"That is all, I think," said Daphne, who had now recovered her composure somewhat.

"Yes, that's all, right enough," answered George Maberly. He might truthfully have added "for the present," for a blackmailer never relinquishes his hold on his victim. He did not say this, however, though he thought it. Instead, he added: "And mind, a bargain's a bargain, Miss Blatchington. I hold my tongue and you hold yours. No going to the police and blabbin' about me comin' here; not that I think you're likely to," he ended, with a smack of satisfaction.

Daphne stood quite inert, very white, and rather contemptuous. She felt that she could have struck the little man.

"Please go," she said in a low voice full of loathing, and which trembled a little.

"Yes. I'll go right enough now," cried Maberly. "Good afternoon."

Daphne did not reply, but she went with him to the hall door instead of ringing for the maid to go and open it for him.

His final exit was of a somewhat slinking description; but, as he walked briskly to the tube, he was thinking what a good piece of business he had done—"and done one of them aristocrats in the eye as well," he congratulated himself.

Meanwhile Daphne had rushed back

into the little library and threw herself face downward at her desk, and sobbed out of sheer terror.

CHAPTER XIV.

When Murder Outs.

FROM the porch of a large house in Queen's Gate a pink and white striped awning stretched down to the edge of the pavement. A flood of light streamed out from the open doors, at which a continuous stream of carriages and motors with flashing lamps put down gorgeously-dressed women and uniformed and opera-hatted men who barely disappeared into the house before others arrived. Now and again the loungers, who congregated by the railings, got a glimpse of footmen in knee breeches or women with bare shoulders and flashing diamonds.

Inside people thronged up the marble balustraded staircase to the upper floor, where Lady Murchiston, Lord Lauriston's mother, stood and received her guests with perpetual hand-shakings and smiles.

At the head of the stairs there was a wide square gallery, with a strip of *couleur-de-rose* carpet down its center, and bare spaces of marble flooring at the sides. Chairs and palms and settees were placed along the wall, and here people, who were not bent on crowding into the drawing-rooms beyond, or forcing their way downstairs, past the stream of incoming guests, to supper, sat and chatted in comparative peace and quiet.

In a secluded corner of this gallery, where an excellent view was obtained of the people as they appeared up the stairs, a woman sat alone, a woman in a costly dress of gold brocade, which set off wonderfully her golden hair. She was a very handsome woman, with broad white shoulders and an imperious manner. Her only ornament was a diamond and emerald necklace, which would have tried the beauty of most people to wear.

This was Mrs. Lanksbury.

Ever since the luncheon party at the Savoy she had been nourishing in her peculiar-working mind an unjust hatred against Daphne and a bitter enmity to Lauriston. And yet she loved him still. She did not attempt to disguise that from herself. Pride, self-respect, her fortune, she would have thrown them all to the winds to recover his love. And she could not.

No one knew the agony that was in her mind, the hatred, the bitterness, the intense misery. Her nerves were on edge. When people laughed near her, she turned sharply and fancied they were laughing at her. When they looked in her direction and smiled at something she fancied they smiled derisively at her. She would much rather have been in the solitude of her own home, yet she could not stay away from this house, where she knew that she would be certain of seeing Daphne and Lauriston together.

In the last few weeks she had made a point of going to every place where she thought she would meet them. She had feasted her eyes with misery and jealousy as she saw them smile and chat or whisper to one another.

To-night she had had to wait long, and now, as the hands of the clock moved round toward midnight, she began to feel very tired—very weary.

Suddenly she raised herself a little, her fingers gripped slowly in her lap, and her gaze became fixed.

Up the stairs came Daphne and Mrs. Maddox, with Lauriston in their wake.

Daphne looked very tall and slight. She had on the palest blue, which set off her fair hair and brilliant coloring admirably. Mrs. Lanksbury noted with bitter resignation how fresh and young she looked, how well she carried herself, with what a delicate poise her small head was set at the end of her long neck. She was certainly a very good-looking girl.

She watched her shake hands with Lady Murchiston, smile and murmur something. She thought now she

looked tired, in spite of the freshness of her youthful appearance, and she noticed that directly she ceased speaking, an expression of anxiety settled in her eyes and around her mouth. Then Mrs. Lanksbury's glance followed Lauriston. Yes, he was just as handsome as ever. For a minute all the group stood chatting and laughing; then, with a nod and a remark, Daphne left Mrs. Maddox and put her arm through Lord Lauriston's, and they moved away toward some people on the other side of the gallery.

Suddenly two men near to Mrs. Lanksbury, who had also noticed Daphne, began to talk about her. Mrs. Lanksbury was not a dishonest or mean woman, but something prompted her to listen to what they said, which, from the low tone in which they were speaking, she imagined was meant to be of a private nature.

As she listened she suddenly became aware that they knew something about Daphne, something not generally known and derogatory to her.

She looked to see who they were. One she recognized as the home secretary, the other one whom she did not know was Sir Arthur Ainley.

"Yes," said the home secretary, "she is a very good-looking girl, and charming, too, but I should like to know her true history."

"That is what we should like to know about so many people," remarked Sir Arthur dryly.

"I would give a year's official income, Ainley," he said impressively, "to know whether she did, or did not, commit that murder."

The room became dizzy for Mrs. Lanksbury. Then it was—murder. She was so amazed she could hardly believe that she had heard rightly.

"It is beyond all reason to think for a moment that she could be guilty," said Sir Arthur.

"Guilty!" Mrs. Lanksbury echoed the word in her mind, horrified, and yet with a feeling of pleasure growing up in it. Then Daphne was not the simple

girl that she seemed; there was a stain in her life which she was concealing from Lord Lauriston, from everybody except apparently from the home secretary and this other man, Sir Arthur, whom Mrs. Lanksbury did not know. And that stain was the vilest of crimes—murder. But the home secretary was speaking again, and she strained her ears to catch every syllable.

"Is it beyond reason?" he said, with unpleasant insinuation. "A woman in love will do almost anything to secure the desired man to her. Remember, she could not marry Lauriston if she had a husband in the background."

"Nor could she marry him with any peace if she had done what you suggest," cried Sir Arthur, championing Daphne. "No, Ashwell, it's impossible to believe or think of."

The home secretary was a rather brutal man.

"What will you have on it, that in six months' time Miss Biatchington will have been tried for"—he paused—"murder?"

"You are absurd," said Sir Arthur.

The home secretary laughed.

He did not believe in Daphne, or in her story, but he could not absolutely think that Daphne had murdered her husband. Yet, to him, all the circumstances appeared so suspicious.

"My dear Ainley," he said, "human nature is capable of any enormity, and just because we here are veneered over with a varnish of manners and money, it doesn't follow in the least that we are any better, nor any worse, as some people like to think, than the rest. Hello, I must be off!"

Just as he moved away Daphne happened to turn her head, and saw Sir Arthur and him regarding her. She did not flinch; not a flicker of her eyelids betrayed the shudder that passed momentarily over her as she saw these two men, who alone in the midst of that huge, brilliant concourse of people knew the secret of her life, talking together. One of those men, perhaps

both, had almost betrayed her—at any rate, talked lightly about her story. She hated them both.

Meanwhile, the home secretary had passed close to Mrs. Lanksbury, and she no longer felt any doubt of the reality of what she had heard. She looked at Daphne standing, tall and serene and slightly smiling, in the middle of the room, and a light, not only of hatred, but of triumphant malice, lit up her eyes.

"Some day," she said to herself passionately, "the reckoning will be even."

She rose also and went across the room to reach the stairs and her carriage. She scarcely knew what she was doing. To such a pitch had she worked herself up with hysterical passion that it was beginning to tell upon her; and now this discovery, startling beyond anything that she could have dreamed of or imagined, almost destroyed the equilibrium of her always unequally balanced mind.

Mrs. Lanksbury had not noticed the Holloway case. She was not an avid reader of papers, much less of cheap sensationalism, and it never crossed her thoughts to associate what the home secretary had said about Daphne with any particular crime. She only knew vaguely that he had hinted at murder and a husband alive—or murdered.

About one o'clock Daphne and Mrs. Maddox reached the entrance-hall and were endeavoring to get to Lord Lauriston's car, which was to drive them home. The hall was packed with people still coming in, and with people forcing their way out. Daphne in the struggle inadvertently pushed roughly against a lady next to her. She apologized, and the lady turned, first, smilingly, to accept the apology; then, when she saw who it was, her face darkened, and she drew back with a contemptuous movement to let Daphne pass.

The movement was so pointed that Daphne flushed, and one or two people near stared.

The woman was Mrs. Lanksbury. She went home, hating Daphne more bitterly than ever.

CHAPTER XV.

An Arrest.

BY the middle of February Daphne's thoughts had become almost entirely concentrated on her approaching marriage, though scarcely with any joy or eagerness.

At the bottom of her heart she began, day by day, to dread and revolt more and more from the idea of this marriage to a man whom she frankly did not love, although she appreciated the wealth of his love for her. Day by day, too, the image of Lancelot Welde forced itself more and more insistently upon her mind.

It began to torment her. She could not help thinking about him, and, most horrible of all, she was continually comparing Lord Lauriston with him.

Yet she must carry this marriage through, and the inevitable preparations for it, long interviews with modistes and milliners, and endless purchases, reminded her how awkward a meager bank-balance is, and how nerve-racking a mode of life it is to live on credit, however callous one may be of the rights of tradesmen and shopkeepers.

Public interest in the Holloway crime had ceased. The glaring headlines and the highly colored paragraphs in the papers had been discontinued. People were beginning to forget, and, if the police were still working with quiet patience to discover the author of the crime and the identity of the mysterious woman, their efforts were certainly fruitless as well as unnoticed.

"They will never find out now," Daphne repeated to herself a dozen times a day, and she went about her duties and pleasures with the light-hearted satisfaction of a person who has escaped a great trouble. One aft-

ernoon she came in from shopping at about five. She had been out with her aunt, ordering numerous dresses of a delightful description, which could not fail to please her girlish mind, and she felt quite light-hearted.

Mrs. Maddox sat down rather wearily, and Daphne was busying herself with making tea at the little table bright with silver and delicate china, when the door opened and Lancelot Welde was announced.

A look of annoyance settled on Mrs. Maddox's face, and Daphne paled perceptibly; and then, as perceptibly, brightened without being aware of it. The very entry of this man into the room, though she knew that he was lost to her, was a joy to her, an exquisite pleasure.

Welde came forward with his easy smile.

He sat down, and Mrs. Maddox offered him tea rather ungraciously. He had had tea, however, and chatted on.

After a time Mrs. Maddox went upstairs to rest, and Daphne and Welde were left alone to a solitude *à deux*, which they both prized so highly that when they found themselves in possession of it the conversation flagged for a moment or so.

"I came for a particular reason to-day," said Welde at last. "I couldn't resist coming to you, because in the past it is to you that I have always brought my troubles, and you have been so patient. Well, to-day I have come to bring you a piece of good news. At last I've got a client."

Welde was, or had been, a briefless barrister.

"Lance, then you're going to get on," cried Daphne.

"With one client," laughed Welde in his whimsical way. "Well, I shall hardly become a millionaire—yet."

Daphne had risen in her excitement, and, without thinking what she did, placed her hands on his shoulders.

"Oh, Lance, I am so pleased!" she half laughed and half cried; "but why did you come and tell me this now?"

"Now?" he echoed, not comprehending her.

Suddenly she burst out crying.

"Now that it is too late," she sobbed, and he saw that she meant that, had he but succeeded in life, but made this one step in his career a little earlier, she might have become his wife.

"Daphne, for God's sake don't talk of that!" Lancelot Welde burst out.

"Ah, but I must, I must!" she cried. "How can I help it? Why did you come and tell me this? Oh, I cannot bear it! The only thing that reconciled me to doing—what I am going to do, was that—oh, Lance, how can I say it? It is so wicked of me to say it, now that I am bound to him—so disloyal, so deceitful!"

"Don't say it," said Welde quietly, and with just that subtle touch of humor with which he was so well able to redeem the situation from being absolutely tragic.

"Oh, Lance, how can you laugh about it?"

"My dear Daphne, I'm deadly serious," he said. "We mustn't say it. We mustn't put into words what we feel; it's when people do that that they make such fools of themselves, and make inevitable the things that might have been avoided, if they had only had the golden gift of silence."

"But, Lance, even if I didn't speak, we know—we know that we love one another—each other only."

He actually put his arms round her.

"Daphne, don't be foolish. We are good pals—that—is all." He ended off the sentence with difficulty, and something like a sob broke his voice.

She drew herself away sharply.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "Don't—I can't bear it. There are limits to endurance. I cannot bear that. I cannot bear to see you here, Lance; to listen to your dear voice. It tears at my heart!"

"Daphne!" he cried.

But he could not silence her.

"Yes, tears at my heart!" she re-

peated. "What is the good of denying it with foolish, useless lies? Every day, every hour, I think of you. I try not to, and your image comes back to torment me and worry me, and repeat to me the deceit of my life. It comes between me and him. And the sound of your voice and the touch of your hand. I hear and feel and see them all, and there is no escape from the torment!"

She sank down exhausted and flung herself sideways over the broad back of the chair, her head resting hopelessly on her arms. She was sobbing.

He took a step forward. He was trembling in every limb from a terrible desire that had seized upon him to take her in his arms, to kiss her as she huddled there, to drag her shaking form to his and look into her face and tell her that he, too, could not resist the inevitable.

But he restrained himself and stood shakingly watching her. In a minute or so the temptation had passed off, and he was able to look upon the incident in the same light of reason. He saw how terrible such a scene was for her; he was amazed, almost frightened, by this sudden, overpowering revelation of her love for him. Man-like, he doubted that the intensity of her love for him equaled his for her.

But now, having contrived by a big effort to regain his own composure, he saw that he had best wait a minute or two until her passion had spent itself.

After a time her sobs subsided, and she looked up slightly.

"Go away," she murmured. "Oh, Lance, for Heaven's sake, go away! Never, never come again, whatever it may cost us!"

"Surely, I may come as a friend, Daphne?"

"You can't; you could only come as a stranger or lover, Lance. It can't be as either—now!" She made a hopeless gesture. She had stood up, and she threw her arms apart and looked at him appealingly.

"Very well," he said, after a pause.

"It's the only thing we can do, Lance," she added whisperingly.

"I know," he said. "You are right. But mayn't I come to you as I should go to a pal? You understand, and you are so sympathetic! It's half the battle to take one's troubles and pleasures to some one. I only came to-day to tell you that I had got this work. I wish to Heaven I hadn't got it!"

"No, no; don't say that!" she cried. "Of course it is a good thing—a splendid thing, Lance, even if it is small, and I am glad—oh, so glad!"

"I know."

She looked brighter now, and was more herself, though there was still a suspicious shine about her eyes.

"What is it, by the way?" she asked. "What sort of a case?"

"The case! Oh, I was going to tell you; it's a brief to defend the woman the police have arrested for that Holloway murder."

He spoke the words quite ordinarily, and for a moment Daphne did not grasp their meaning. Then it flashed across her.

"The Holloway case!" she echoed.

"Yes, you remember. Lord Lauriston and I were discussing it here one afternoon. There has been no end of a fuss about it, and there were no clues of any description. There was a mysterious woman in the case—"

"Yes, yes; I recollect," said Daphne.

She sat rigid and spoke softly, but her brain was in a turmoil.

"And they have arrested some one now?" she added, and waited breathlessly for his answer.

"Yes, some unfortunate woman," said Welde, "and I shall have to defend her. It's all in to-day's papers, or, at any rate, this afternoon's edition, that I've got in my coat. I'll get it."

He ran out of the room, flushed with enthusiasm, and thinking she would be only too eager to see the particulars of anything that concerned him so personally.

When he came back into the room

Daphne was sitting rigidly with the palms of her hands pressed against the cushions of her chair.

He flushed with enthusiasm, and for the minute he had forgotten the violence and pathos of the scene which had just passed between them.

"Here it is," he said, flourishing an edition of an evening paper. "The papers, even, are quite excited about it; not that I think there is much in it myself."

Daphne took the paper and began to read. The paragraph was short, and merely stated that the police had apprehended a woman named Olive Mason on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of L. Ward on January 13 last. "The woman was seen in company with the murdered man on the evening preceding his death," the paper went on to state, "and it is, at any rate, thought that she may be able to throw some light on the crime."

Daphne withdrew her eyes from the paper.

"But do you mean to say that they are going to try this woman for the murder? How can they?"

"She is the only woman, the only person, for the matter of that, who is known to have had any association with the murdered man," said Welde. "And, you see, it is certain that some woman went to that house just about the time that he met his death."

"That is not denied?" she queried, anxious to test what view was taken of the case.

"Certainly, it is not," he cried. "The landlady let the woman in, and then there was that pearl that the police found—"

"I thought," said Daphne slowly, "that that was said to have belonged to some one the police or the authorities were shielding."

"That is the story," said Welde. "It may or may not be true."

Daphne walked about. Welde was so excited over the part that he was to take in the affair that he did not notice her pallor and agitation.

"Who was this woman?" she asked herself again and again, "and what right had she, Daphne, to allow her to be arrested on suspicions that an honest confession from herself would certainly refute?" Her brain felt muddled. She could not think clearly about it; she could scarcely credit this sudden return of the shadow that menaced her.

"You see," added Welde in his careless way, "it will be hard luck on this woman if the authorities are shielding some one else who is guilty."

"But they would never let the trial go on?" cried Daphne, horrified at the blunt way in which he stated exactly what she had been thinking.

"It is difficult to say what will happen," he said. "A suspected person has to be sent for trial, of course—that is, go before a grand jury, who have to make what is called a true bill. Well, she may never get further than that; in fact, it is most likely she will probably be able to prove an alibi."

"And supposing she cannot?"

"That would be more or less evidence against her."

"And she might be convicted?" Daphne's tone was breathless.

"She might."

"Oh, but it is too terrible to think of!" cried she. "Fancy the horror of being arrested if one is innocent. Surely, surely she will never be even tried on such flimsy evidence. It would be too unjust, too brutal."

"I shall do my best for her," said Welde. "You forget that she has the inestimable advantage of being defended by me."

Daphne did not say anything in answer to this, but his tone of half seriousness, almost levity, was horrible to her. Welde noticed that she looked angry and upset.

"I am afraid I have disgusted you," he said.

"I don't like you when you are quite so callous," answered Daphne.

"I am not callous," he answered. "I'm only a little bit light-headed at the prospect of really walking into court with a beautiful new brief tied up with pink tape in my hand."

"I congratulate you on being able to laugh over a case of life and death," she cried.

The light died out of Welde's face. He looked hurt.

"I am sorry," he said. "I did not mean to be brutal. It is so fatal to take the serious things of life seriously."

"Quite," she cried. "That is why you have always taken them unseriously, and so you haven't succeeded, never will succeed. Because you haven't the energy to do anything more than laugh at failure."

She turned away to hide her face. She had not meant to lash him so cruelly. Welde winced. "I hardly deserved that, Daphne," he said.

"Is it any good discussing what you deserve when it can make no difference to either of us?" she cried with a sob.

He was speechless. Her attack was so bitter and yet so piteous. He understood exactly what she meant: that if he had succeeded in life he might have married her.

"I am sorry, Daphne," he said.

She did not speak, and he shifted uneasily. Then there was a long silence, and at the end of it Welde rose.

"Good-by, then, Daphne," he murmured. She was standing, turned away from him.

"Good-by." Their tones were cold in the extreme, and still she did not turn.

Again Welde shifted, then, after some hesitation, he went noiselessly out of the room.

"You will never succeed in life," she had told him, and no words had ever cut so deeply into his feelings. He was a failure—a failure at his profession, a failure at everything, and he had lost the woman he loved, which is the worst failure a man can suffer.

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.

DISCOMFITING DIANA*

A SERIAL IN III PARTS—PART III

BY ROTHVIN WALLACE

Author of "The Peril," "The Elopers," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

Diana Displeased.



DIANA lay quiescent, looking up into the hard face of Pepita. She saw no mercy there, and realized the uselessness of struggling against the inevitable. She was as impotent as a child in the hands of this servitor who had been delegated to be her jailer.

"I—I'll behave," said Diana, rising on one elbow.

Pepita stepped back, and allowed her prisoner to sit up.

"The *señorita* must make no more of the noise," she said quietly.

"I'll not," promised Diana. "But I should like you to ask Doña Isabel if she will come to me at once."

"If I go, the *señorita* will make no more of the noise?"

"I promise not to open my mouth until you return."

Pepita accepted the pledge and left the room, again locking the door after her exit. Half an hour dragged by wearily, during which time Diana occupied herself with her morbid thoughts. And as she gazed sadly from the window, across the fertile valley of the Seine, her heart was pierced with still another sorrow. She began to form speculations as to Jack Sherbrook's apparently intimate conversation in the garden with Doña Isabel, and to wonder if he were alined with her in the mysterious en-

terprise that had resulted in her own incarceration.

Surely, though, Jack had had no hand in depriving her of her liberty—for had he not warned her against Doña Isabel? But it was all very inscrutable and impossible to understand. The characters in this strange game seemed to fly about with the bewildering rapidity of the numbers on a wheel of fortune. There was no way of knowing—even guessing—what was going to happen next.

A sound at the door caused Diana to turn sharply. Doña Isabel entered, followed by Pepita, carrying the clothing which Diana had worn on her arrival at the castle.

"*Bon jour, ma chère,*" said Doña Isabel airily. She seemed utterly devoid of the shame that Diana had expected to see. "You asked to see me?" she added.

"Not because I wished for the pleasure of your company, you may be sure," returned Diana heatedly. "I merely demand to know why you have detained me here."

"Demand!" is not a becoming word, my dear. You are in no position to make demands." Doña Isabel shrugged. "However, you are clever. I give you credit for that."

"Thank you," said Diana ironically. "It had just occurred to me that I was insufferably stupid—to allow myself to be caught in this manner; and especially after I had been warned."

* This story began in *The Cavalier* for February 22.

"Warned? By whom?"

"I prefer not to say."

"Oh, no difference. But you are here, whether clever or stupid, and you may console yourself with the thought that the best of us err—sometimes. It seems as if even I made a mistake in your case. I thought you must have it concealed somewhere about your clothing. Consequently I had dressmakers rip the linings and seams of every garment; I had cobblers remove the soles and heels of your shoes—but to no purpose. Therefore I contend that you are clever."

Diana's expression must have betrayed her amazement. Why had Doña Isabel had her clothing ripped up? To find the queen's hand? Preposterous! She could not have concealed such a bulky object in the heel of her shoe. What, then, did Doña Isabel seek? The latter apparently misinterpreted Diana's concern.

"Oh," she said, "you need have no fear about your clothing. I have had it restored to its original state, and it's as good as ever."

"I wasn't thinking about my clothing," returned Diana. "I was wondering what you were after."

"That's good," laughed Doña Isabel; "and said with convincing naïveté—that is, it might convince any one but me. I know the game too well to be deceived."

"What game?" Diana's eyes were wide with amazement. She was wondering if Doña Isabel had gone suddenly insane.

"Oh, come, now," said the *señora* testily; "quit those baby tricks. They don't go with me." Diana made no reply, and Doña Isabel continued. "I suppose it is useless to ask you where you have hidden it. I will say merely that, until it is placed in my hands, you shall remain a prisoner in this house. Think it over."

Diana started to ask what it was that she was supposed to have hidden, but before she could frame the words,

Doña Isabel had flounced from the room, and Pepita, having turned the lock, was removing the great key from the door.

"Do you know what she means?" asked Diana of the stern-visaged servitor.

Pepita shrugged and made a negative sign.

"Is Mr. Sherbrook—the gentleman whom I saw in the garden—still in the castle?" was Diana's next question.

"He has gone to Paris," said Pepita shortly.

Still the mystery was growing more complex. Jack had come and gone, apparently without seeking to find her. Diana argued that he must know she was somewhere in the house. And then Doña Isabel suspected her of concealing a mysterious—something. Was it a rare gem, a valuable secret of some kind? What, indeed, could be of such vast importance, and so small that she might hide it in the sole of her shoe or the lining of her clothes?

Diana dismissed the problem for the time being, and decided that she would costume herself in her own clothing. Then, if an opportunity to escape should present itself, she would be ready to fly at a moment's notice. She had a vague fear that Pepita might oppose this determination; but, to her delighted surprise, Pepita not only offered no protest, but even assisted her in dressing.

Scarcely had Diana perfected her toilet when there came a gentle knock on the door. Pepita asked who was there.

"Don Joaquin," came the answer.

Pepita opened the door, and Doña Isabel's brother bowed his way across the threshold.

"May I hope that Señorita Darling will have the goodness to receive me?" he asked.

"You may come in," said Diana coldly. "I suppose you are here to see if you can find out what I have done with—it?"

"Pardon; I do not understand."
Don Joaquin smiled quizzically.

"Did not your sister send you here to question me?"

"No, *señorita*."

"But you know that she is seeking something which she believed I possess?"

"I—I suspected as much."

"And you are helping her, of course," insisted Diana. "Oh, you are a fine specimen of chivalrous manhood, aren't you? I suppose it's the polite custom of you Spanish grandees to imprison women—even to torture them, to attain your ends."

"Stop, *señorita*, I beg of you," interposed Don Joaquin. His face had blanched under the lash of Diana's scorn, and he looked hurt. "I want you to believe me when I say that I have nothing to do with my sister's intrigues. I had no part in your detention, nor did I venture to intrude on you for the purpose of asking questions."

"Why, then, did you come?"

Don Joaquin's face went as red as it had been white a moment before.

"To offer you a book, *señorita*; to amuse you, if I may; to talk with you, if you wish it, and make your confinement less onerous."

Diana's heart swelled at this touch of human sympathy. But could she trust Don Joaquin? she asked herself. His manner was sincere, but was he wearing a mask to hide an ulterior purpose? Even so, she argued, he could do her no harm; and then, he might be speaking the truth, and she could make a friend of him. Perhaps she could learn something by talking with him; and maybe he could be persuaded to aid her in escaping. The wild thought brought a hope that made Diana sweetly responsive to the friendly mood of her visitor.

"Is that an offer of friendship?" she smiled.

"It is, *señorita*."

"Then I accept it—and offer mine in return."

Diana stepped forward and extended her slender hand. Don Joaquin seized it eagerly, and, bending low, pressed his lips to her fingers. He held her hand perhaps a little longer than was necessary, but she did not resent it. His touch was not so repulsive as that of Marchese Rosseto.

"I trust that we shall be good friends," he murmured.

Don Joaquin was at no loss for words, and met a situation that might have been awkward with not the slightest trace of embarrassment. Diana was impatient to lead the conversation to the subject that was uppermost in her mind, but she gave polite attention to her caller's discussion of other topics.

He described his ancestral home in Spain, and read several verses from one of the books that he had brought her; he recounted the legends that clung to the castle, and told her that once an unhappy queen of France had been imprisoned in the very room where she was being detained. That afforded Diana the opportunity for which she had been waiting.

"How long was the queen kept here?" she asked.

"For a long time—months."

"How did she escape?"

"A faithful courier gained access to her room, lowered her on a rope from yonder window, and led her to a boat that was waiting for them in the Seine. They went to Spain incognito, and died there in obscurity."

"What a tragic romance," sighed Diana. "I wonder how long I shall be held here?"

"I do not know; that is my sister's business."

"Do you know why I am being treated in this manner?"

"I suspect two reasons. First, I understand that you are in Europe on a secret mission for your government. You have something which my sister wants—or which she wants to prevent you from delivering to the person for whom it was intended."

"And the second reason?"

"You have been receiving much attention from a countryman of yours—a Mr. Sherbrook?"

"Why, yes, I have," admitted Diana. "But what has that to do with it?"

"Ah, you do not know my sister. She will allow nothing to interfere with the attainment of her ends. Can you not guess the rest?"

"Is it that—that she loves Mr. Sherbrook herself?"

"Exactly. She has known him for years, and now that she has met him again she does not intend that a dangerous rival shall spoil her opportunity."

Diana was dumfounded at the revelation. So, in addition to her other tribulations, this new fear came to rend her heart. And while she was a helpless prisoner Doña Isabel was practising her evil wiles on the man she loved. Perhaps she would win him! The thought drove Diana to the verge of madness. She concealed her emotions only by great effort.

"Does—does he love her?" she asked weakly.

"I think he is quite fond of her. He has been here several times in the last two days."

Seemingly unconscious of the aching wound that his words had caused Don Joaquin arose and sauntered to the window. He stood silently for several minutes, looking down and across to that flowing graveyard of dark mysteries—the Seine. Then he sent Pepita from the room to get cigarettes.

"Why not?" he mused finally, aloud.

"Why not what, Don Joaquin?" asked Diana. Her senses were keyed to catch every word, every expression, every action.

"Did I think aloud?" He laughed softly. "I was merely appraising the queen's hazards when she stepped from this window at the end of a rope. I was wondering, too, why the present

queen in captivity could not do the same."

"I?" gasped Diana. "Oh, I have no brave cavalier." She tried to speak lightly, though the hope of escape had set her heart to thumping madly. Inwardly she was anything but calm.

"Yes, you have!" he cried suddenly, fiercely. "I—I, Don Joaquin Camaño, will be your protector. Come—come here. Let me show you."

Don Joaquin turned toward her with eyes that were afire with latent passion, and Diana shrank from him in intuitive dread.

"Come," he sibilated, reaching forth and seizing her by the hand.

His fingers seemed like bands of hot iron. Diana, trembling with fear, allowed herself to be led to the window.

"Look!" cried Don Joaquin. "Do you see yonder yacht, lying at anchor? Well, that is mine, and in it you shall ride to freedom, to happiness—to my beloved Spain. You are too young, too beautiful to concern yourself with these sordid intrigues of state. You should have love and music and flowers and blue skies—eternally. Come, my dear—to Spain!"

"Are you—are you making me a proposal of marriage?" ventured Diana.

"Marriage!" He seemed startled and surprised. "Have I not offered you enough?"

"You dog!" grated Diana.

Her fear vanished suddenly before an onrushing wave of contempt and anger. Don Joaquin looked at her blankly, as if in disbelief. Then into his eyes crept that baleful light that had frightened her before. She took a backward step, stumbled against a chair, and, the next moment, found herself swept into the encircling arms of Don Joaquin.

"Well, then, even marriage," he panted. "I must have you, anyway—I must."

His hot breath scorched her, while his lips burned her with their kisses.

And all the while she was fighting—scratching, pushing, kicking, with all the might of her impotent fury. And then the door opened, Pepita entered, and he released her.

"Leave me, Don Joaquin," she said firmly. "I'd like to kill you if I could."

He stood stupidly looking at her. Then, without a word, he turned and slunk abjectly from the room. Diana threw herself on the bed, and gave way to tears of anguish.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Diana Dispirited.

ONCE again hope seemed dead to Diana Darling. Pepita respected her grief and moved quietly into the adjoining room, leaving her to weep unrestrained over her cumulative sorrows. By and by, however, Diana's active mind began to analyze the recent events enacted in the kaleidoscopic nightmare that she was living; but not for long was she permitted to dwell on the past. The inexorable pendulum of fate swung back and plunged her still deeper into the swirling eddies that harassed her forward course. A sudden knock on the door heralded the entrance of Doña Isabel.

"My dear, I have relented," she said gaily. "You shall have your liberty to-morrow."

The words struck Diana like a knife-thrust, and made her both glad and sad. She could imagine only one reason for Doña Isabel's unexpected burst of generosity. It meant, of course, that, at last, she had won Jack Sherbrook; and her happy mood seemed to be a further evidence of victory.

"That is very good of you," answered Diana with a trace of irony.

Diana's thoughts then reverted to the queen's hand, which she had left at her hotel in Paris. She suspected that it had been purloined during her absence.

"I suppose," she added, "that you

have found the object for which you were looking?"

"No," replied Doña Isabel frankly, "I have not. Your question, though, convinces me that you still have it."

Diana made no answer. She was thinking that Jack Sherbrook was of infinitely greater importance than anything else in the world—not only to herself, but to Doña Isabel as well. After all, the great plot, whatever it was, had resolved itself into a woman's battle—for the love of a man.

"Of course," added Doña Isabel, "there is one condition attached to my change of attitude toward you."

"What is that?"

"I shall want you to dine with me to-night."

"What an odd condition," said Diana. "Why do you wish that?"

"I might say for the pleasure of your charming company."

"But you could not expect me to believe you, after all that has happened."

"Yes, even after all that has happened. Frankly, Miss Darling, I like you immensely. Were it not that we are playing at cross purposes, we might be the best of friends."

"Why are we playing at cross purposes?" questioned Diana.

"Ah, my dear, you know that as well as I. But we are digressing. I came to ask you to dine with me to-night, and, if you will be gracious enough to accept, to offer you your release to-morrow."

"Why is my release contingent on my acceptance of your invitation?"

"Because I want to be sure of your accepting the invitation."

"And again why?" persisted Diana.

"You are exasperating," sighed Doña Isabel. "However, I revert to my first statement—because I crave the pleasure of your company. You are bright, attractive, and amusing, and I am to have several distinguished guests who must be entertained."

"And do you think that, in my present state of anxiety, I could be expected to be entertaining?"

"I expect it. Your very mission to Europe, if nothing else, would convince me that you have self-control, and the versatility to adapt yourself readily to circumstances."

"What do you know of my mission to Europe?" demanded Diana.

"More, perhaps, than you think. But again we are digressing. Will you accept your liberty on my conditions?"

"I have no other choice. But you have forgotten that I have no suitable dinner gown here."

"I shall provide for that," returned Doña Isabel. "You may wear one of mine, and my maid will drape it to fit you."

"All right," agreed Diana with an air of resignation.

Doña Isabel took a step toward the door. Suddenly a wild idea flashed into Diana's mind. She would not wait until to-morrow; she would escape to-night, and fly back to Paris. Given the freedom of the castle, she might slip out unobserved, or, failing that, she could acquaint some of the dinner guests with her predicament, and demand her instant release. Doña Isabel had paused before reaching the door, and, with almost uncanny certitude, seemed to read Diana's thoughts.

"Of course, Miss Darling," she said, "you will not be so foolish as to attempt any break for liberty to-night. Please remember that my guests are my very good friends."

"I doubt, though, if they would countenance my detention here," retorted Diana warmly. It stung her to have her half-formed plan so quickly and unerringly divined.

"Don't mistake yourself," replied Doña Isabel calmly. "They are men who are used to taking desperate chances; the detention of a recalcitrant person who is interfering in vast issues is of ordinary occurrence with them. They probably would censure me for being so lenient toward you. So, Miss Darling, be warned. Any such move on your part would result only in long confinement for you."

Doña Isabel swung on her heel and left the room unceremoniously, while Diana returned to the contemplation of her moody thoughts. That there was a covert design in Doña Isabel's determination to have her at dinner she was confident, but how she could subserve the interests of this scheming woman by her mere presence at the table was another unanswerable problem.

Diana still was pondering the situation when a maid arrived with the promised evening gown and a note. The latter was written on crested stationery, and, to Diana's surprise, came from Don Joaquin. He had written as follows:

DEAR MISS DARLING:

I come to you on my knees, with the entreaty that you will find it in your heart to forgive my rudeness to you this afternoon. I am desolate with regret that I should so far have forgotten myself.

DON JOAQUIN CAMAÑO.

In her present circumstances, and with the probability of having to meet Don Joaquin at dinner, Diana thought it better to grant her pardon. She sent Pepita for paper and ink, and wrote the Spaniard that she had condoned his insult. Then she allowed the maid to adjust Doña Isabel's gown to her figure.

When Doña Isabel came for her at eight o'clock, Diana was ready to descend. She felt that she was looking particularly well, although a trifle pale. This, however, Doña Isabel told her, was intensely becoming. In fact, Doña Isabel seemed highly pleased with her appearance, and paid her several delicate compliments.

It gave her a feeling of relief to leave the chamber in which she had been imprisoned, and, as she descended the broad staircase, Diana regained much of her quondam vivacity. She received somewhat of a shock, however, on entering the drawing-room, for there, to her annoyance, she found Marchese Rosseto, also Viscount Ozaki, Don Joaquin, and two other foreigners whom she did not know.

They were introduced to her as Baron von Schleswig and Count Nabateff. The former, a rotund little German, who alternately shot his cuffs and toyed with a waxed mustache, disgusted Diana at once. The Russian was taller and better looking; but he, too, failed to make a favorable impression. Altogether, Diana was anything but pleased with the company of which she was forced to be a member.

They chatted about banalities until a swarthy butler announced dinner, and then, without any prearranged order, the ill-assorted party of five men and two women filed into the dining-room. Marchese Rosseto offered his arm to Diana, and at table she found herself placed between the Italian and the fussy little German.

The dinner was all that could be desired, and, until the wine began to exert its sprightly effects, the guests ate in comparative silence. The men seemed to Diana to be pondering some weighty problem, and their taciturnity was broken only by the demands of polite intercourse.

Dofia Isabel, while exerting herself to appear animated, betrayed a marked degree of reserve until she had taken her third glass of champagne. Then, by subtle methods, she directed the conversation toward Diana.

"And, oh," she cried suddenly, "Miss Darling has the most gruesomely charming little superstition. You don't mind if I tell, do you, Miss Darling? But, of course you don't my dear. All of us have our fads and foibles. Now, Count Nabateff's chief delight when he is at home is a pet cobra. Think of it! And he sits on the floor and plays a funny-looking flute to it by the hour."

"But you were discussing the more interesting person of Miss Darling," interrupted the count, flushing.

"So I was," continued Dofia Isabel. "Well, I was going to say that Miss Darling's talisman is—you couldn't guess in a thousand years! It's the petrified hand of a Polynesian queen,

severed by a jealous king because she was unfaithful to him. She carries it with her at all times as a fetish against misfortune."

"That is interesting," beamed Count Nabateff.

Diana felt her face flame, as all eyes were turned upon her. Why, she wondered, had Dofia Isabel brought up this subject? Had these men known of the queen's hand before she referred to it, and were they concerned in the plot to steal it from her? Diana suspected that a new development in the strange case was about to be unfolded.

"I should like to see this odd talisman, Miss Darling." The speaker was Baron von Schleswig.

"I haven't it—here," murmured Diana.

"Not here!" exclaimed Dofia Isabel. "Why, I thought you kept it by you always. You haven't lost it, I hope."

"That I cannot say," returned Diana. "At least, I have mislaid it."

Her clumsy ruse seemed to be effective, as, beyond expressions of regret, nothing more was said about the queen's hand.

It was Baron von Schleswig who, having become mellowed by the wine that he had drunk, broke another interval of silence.

"Six great nations represented here to-night," he observed irrelevantly and without preamble. "Here we have Spain, Russia, Italy, Japan, America—and my own Germany. Oh, if we but had the other two, and could form one great alliance, instead of—"

"Baron!" Dofia Isabel spoke sharply and her small fist crashed on the table. "You are forgetting yourself."

"The other two?" queried Diana, to whom he seemed to have addressed his remark. "I don't understand."

"No?" Dofia Isabel smiled cynically.

"Indeed, I do not."

"Oh, come now, Miss Darling, tell us about it," purred Viscount Ozaki.

Diana was startled, as every head was bent in her direction.

"It's just among friends, you know," insinuated Marchese Rosseto.

"I do not know what you are talking about," persisted Diana.

"Is it possible that you do not know of your country's contemplated secret offensive and defensive alliance with Great Britain and France?" demanded the viscount.

"I have no knowledge of any such alliance," replied Diana; "and if I had, I am sure that it would not interest me, nor can I see how it could concern any of you."

"*Gott!*" exclaimed the baron, mopping his bald head. "She cannot see how it could concern us, when—"

"Be quiet," admonished the Russian, whereupon the baron, puffing his cheeks pompously, subsided.

Again a pall of gloom seemed to settle over the table. The men appeared to be perturbed, and Diana wondered what further mystery was brewing. Was she believed to be a party to an international intrigue that involved a secret treaty among nations? The very idea was absurd, yet these people seemed to think that she was concerned with such a plan. And now it was plainly evident that she had been coerced into attending this dinner because it was thought that she possessed information that the others wanted, and not as Doña Isabel had said, merely to entertain the guests. Well, they had learned nothing from her, while she had received the grateful information that they had not discovered the whereabouts of the queen's hand.

"Foiled—by a girl," mused Viscount Ozaki, with a grave shake of the head.

"Well, let them go ahead," shouted Baron von Schleswig. "Our five nations have perfected their alliance, and—"

"Shut up, you fool!" interposed Doña Isabel harshly.

The baron shot his cuffs, twisted his waxed mustache, glared around the

table, drank a glass of wine at a gulp, and said no more. The others cast apprehensive glances at each other, then turned their eyes on Diana. She was calm under the scrutiny, yet she realized that, perhaps, she had heard an important piece of diplomatic information that had not been intended for her ears. While she was wondering what would happen to her now, the butler went to Doña Isabel's side and said something in a low tone.

"Sherbrook!" she started. "Tell him I am not at home. But wait, Miss Darling, may I ask you to return to your room?" Diana was pale and trembling. The name of Sherbrook had come like an electrical shock, and several of the men had arisen. All were watching Doña Isabel.

"Miss Darling," she repeated. "I demand that you go to your room."

"Thanks," said Diana coolly. "I prefer to remain where I am."

She was in a tremor of fear, but the proximity of Jack Sherbrook gave her strength and courage. Now was her opportunity, she reasoned, and she intended to take advantage of it.

"Go to your room at once," commanded Doña Isabel.

"No," declared Diana firmly. "I am going to see Mr. Sherbrook."

Doña Isabel's face betrayed the anger that surged within her. The men looked startled at the unexpected dénouement.

"Pietro," called Doña Isabel, suddenly. "Take Miss Darling to her room."

Diana, in a paroxysm of fear, saw the huge servant coming toward her. She attempted to run to the door leading into the broad hallway, but the arm of Marchese Rosseto, no longer a suit-or breathing honeyed words; detained her. She was cornered—helpless. And then she found her voice.

"Jack!" she screamed. "Help!"

The next instant the hand of the German baron closed over her mouth and she was lifted, struggling, in the strong arms of Pietro.

"Lock her up in the tower-room," said Doña Isabel, coldly; "and see that the little fool behaves."

CHAPTER XIX.

Diana Deserted.

AGAIN back in her prison, with the giant Pietro in the adjoining room to suppress any outcry, Diana realized the hopeless futility of further resistance. Therefore, she remained silently submissive, and allowed the taciturn Pepita to get her ready for bed. The blessed balm of sleep, however, refused her its sweet solace, and for many hours she lay quietly in the darkness, her mind racked by hopeless thoughts.

Diana wondered if, after what had happened at the dinner-table, Doña Isabel would fulfil the promise to release her. She doubted it. Then she began to form disturbing conjectures to account for Jack Sherbrook's unexpected visit at the castle. Had he come to investigate her own disappearance or to pay court to Doña Isabel? If for the former purpose, he evidently had failed, else she should have heard from him ere this.

Consequently, her predicament was worse than ever. There was only one fact that cheered her in her misery: Doña Isabel had not found the queen's hand.

The night dragged miserably. Diana managed to gain an occasional, sporadic cat-nap, but each time she dozed she would awake with a start and, with straining eyes, try to penetrate the circumambient gloom and lay bare its latent terrors. Finally, toward morning, Pietro crossed the room and went out. Pepita locked the door after him, then returned to the adjoining chamber to maintain the vigil.

Another wearisome hour limped slowly down the void of time. Somewhere in the castle the gong of a great clock droned dismally the hour of four. Diana now was wide awake, with

senses alert to every sound. A portentous stillness pervaded the house. Presently a door slammed and, a moment later, Diana heard a murmur of voices. Ten minutes passed and footsteps approached her room.

The person was walking cautiously. Then there came a gentle rap on her door. Pepita answered, after tiptoeing across the room. Whispers were exchanged in Spanish. Pepita left the room and locked the door from the outside.

Left alone in her dark prison, Diana trembled with the fear of a nameless horror. Something was going to happen, she was sure—something that boded ill for her.

"Jack—Jack!" she cried aloud. "Oh, why don't you come?"

And then came a babel of uncertain noises filtered upward from the bowels of the great castle. Doors were slammed, an occasional cry rang out, the sound of running feet through stone corridors echoed dismally: What could be the trouble? Was the house on fire? The terrifying thought brought Diana out of bed with a jump. She groped her way to the door and tried vainly to drag it open. Then she turned helplessly to the narrow window.

The first gray pencilings of dawn were streaking the murky horizon. Day was coming and its faint herald filled Diana's heart with hope and gladness. The potential terrors that lurk in night's fearsome shadows soon would be dispelled.

Diana found her clothing and dressed hastily in the dark, so that she would be prepared for any emergency. While she was so engaged the noise below ceased. Once again the castle was as silent as a forgotten tomb.

Diana returned to the window. Patches of rose and orange now flecked the eastern sky, and the soft light of early morn disclosed nature in the first dewy blush of her matinal awakening. The girl's sad eyes swept the gardens of the castle, the terrace

of the Seine beyond and rested, with quickening interest, on the white yacht of which Don Joaquin had claimed ownership.

She was surprised to see smoke pouring from the little craft, and to note other self-evident preparations for an immediate cruise. She saw several men hurrying about the deck, while others appeared to be weighing anchors, fore and aft. Then, to her further amazement, a yawl shot out from the terrace, made fast to the yacht, and a dozen persons clambered up the accommodation-ladder that had been dropped over the side of the larger craft.

Another small boat followed the first, and it was light enough now for Diana to see that it was laden with trunks and luggage.

As Diana watched the proceedings her interest was augmented by wonderment. What could it mean? Ah!

The solution came to her in a flash. Señora Doña Isabel and her friends were running away! But from what? Why should they beat such a precipitous retreat in the early morning? That their departure was hastily planned, and as quickly executed, was evident. Maybe, too, Jack was with them. Diana scarcely could believe that he would desert her wilfully, yet so many strange things had happened that nothing seemed impossible. And deserted she had been, indubitably—left locked hard and fast in a room at the top of the old castle.

Diana, with fascinated eyes, continued to watch the maneuvers on board the yacht until it became a mere speck in the distance and disappeared around a bend in the river, headed seaward. Then, for the first time, she began to realize the seriousness of her position.

When she saw the household departing her thought had been that it would mean liberty for her; but now a graver peril than mere imprisonment beset her. True, she had no stern jailer to restrict her movements, but the bolted door still stood between her and free-

dom. It was impossible to descend from the window without the aid of masculine arms and a strong rope. The house was as quiet as a graveyard, and apparently as deserted. Why, she might starve before help should reach her. The thought of food made her hungry, and she would have welcomed even the sight of old Pepita with a breakfast tray.

The leaden hours crept on and Diana's terror grew apace. She stood constantly by the window now, with startled eyes ever on the alert for some passer-by to whom she could call for assistance. Several times she had shouted until her voice died in a hoarse whisper; but each time the object of her frenzied appeal had been too far away and had not heard her cries.

Yes, she realized she had been left to her doom—to starve like a rat in a trap. Even Jack had deserted her.

Wearily in mind and body, Diana sank on the bed, a forlorn, tear-racked, hopeless little bundle of shattered nerves. What was that? Her sensitive ears had caught a sound below and she was on her feet in an instant, listening. Yes, there were men downstairs. She could hear the distant murmur of their voices. Could it be that Doña Isabel's friends had returned? Hardly. It seemed equally improbable that these newcomers would befriend her. However, she must find out. She tried to call to them, but gave it up in despair. Her voice was little better than a husky whisper. But there was another way by which she might attract their attention. She seized a heavy chair and, with every atom of her strength, dashed it against the door.

Three times she did this. Then, exhausted, she crouched on the floor and waited.

Presently Diana was rewarded with the welcome sound of footsteps. They were coming up-stairs, and as they drew nearer Diana could hear them asking each other in French the loca-

tion of the noise they had heard. Diana raised herself and pounded, and in a moment they were at her door.

"Locked!" she heard one say.

"Who is within?" called another.

Diana put her lips to the keyhole and whispered in French:

"An American girl—a prisoner."

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the first speaker. "We are in luck. It is she. You have no key inside?"

"No," Diana answered. "If I had, you should not have found me here."

"True," said the man. "You must wait, then, until we can get help to break down the door."

Diana heard their footsteps receding. It seemed an incredibly long time before they returned, although they were gone only a few minutes. They had gained reinforcements, however, and after the spokesman had warned her to stand back a heavy object came crashing against the massive door. The stout wood withstood the assault well, but presently it fell shattered and splintered.

"The *gendarmes!*" cried Diana, as with a great wave of relief, she beheld the rescue party.

The men, at least a dozen of them, wearing the attractive uniforms of the French soldier police, crowded into the room. The officer in command stepped forward.

"You are Miss Diana Darling, of New York?" he asked.

"Yes," admitted Diana. "How did you know?"

"I merely suspected, but I am delighted. Why, for two days and nights the police of Paris have been scouring every nook of their city and its environs in an effort to find you. Our orders were from the government and were imperative."

"From the government?" repeated Diana, with wide-open eyes. "I didn't know I was so important. I don't understand it at all."

"Nor do I," said the *gendarme*. "Have you been here ever since your disappearance?"

"Yes."

"A prisoner?"

"A prisoner."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I came here for luncheon and evidently was drugged by my hostess, Doña Isabel de Albornoz."

"Doña Isabel de Albornoz," mused the *gendarme*. "I came here to get her, with instructions to take her before the prefect of police. Do you know where she has gone?"

"She and several of her friends left early this morning in a yacht. Their departure seemed to be hurried."

"Escaped in a yacht, eh? Well, she may have been warned."

Diana started. Of course, Doña Isabel had been warned.

Had Jack Sherbrook conveyed that warning? She was impelled to speak of Jack to the *gendarme*, but the fear of incriminating him in some way with the police constrained her. Instead she asked:

"May I inquire why you are looking for Doña Isabel?"

"An affair of state," answered the *gendarme* evasively.

"Did you expect to find me here?" was Diana's next question.

"I knew that you had been here."

"Who gave the information?" she asked.

"A countryman of yours, I believe—a man who has much influence with the government. I do not know his name. But we have work to do, Miss Darling. Will you inform the prefect of police that you are safe; or shall I have one of my men escort you to him?"

"Thank you; I can go alone," said Diana. "If you wish to communicate with me, I shall be at the Ritz—until to-morrow, at least."

After thanking the *gendarmes* for their service, Diana left the castle. It was her intention to walk into the quaint old town of St. Germain, and there take a motor cab to Paris. But had she the money? The doubt gave

her another fright. She had not opened her handbag since she had entered the castle, and in the mean time she might have been robbed. A glance, however, gave her the grateful assurance that she still had four thousand francs with her.

First, she made her way to the Pavillon Henri Quatre, on the Terrace, where she enjoyed a hearty and expensive breakfast at two o'clock in the afternoon. Then she ordered a taxicab and sped toward Paris.

An hour later Diana was set down before the Ritz. It was a welcome sight, indeed, and she went to the desk for her key with a lighter heart than she had carried since the day she had left the hotel to ride with Doña Isabel.

"Your key, *mademoiselle*," exclaimed the clerk, looking at her queerly.

"Yes," said Diana sharply. "I am a guest of your house. Don't you remember me?"

"*Oui*, I remember; but I did not know that Mlle. Darling was a guest any longer. Her maid left yesterday."

"My maid left yesterday!" gasped Diana. "Why, that is impossible. I—"

"Pardon me, but it is true," interrupted the clerk. "She said that *mademoiselle* had gone to London, where she must join her at once."

"But my trunks are here, are they not?"

"*Mademoiselle's* maid paid the bill and took everything with her. I, myself, sent the trunks to the St. Lazare station yesterday afternoon in time to catch the three-o'clock train for Dieppe."

Diana could say no more. She had been deserted by Jack and by her faithless maid; and she had lost the queen's hand. Now she was utterly alone in Paris. Her only assets were the tailored suit that she was wearing and less than four thousand francs in money. She was grateful even for

these, but, as she sank wearily into a chair at the Ritz, her blue eyes were glistening with unshed tears.

CHAPTER XX.

Diana Desolate.

DIANA was in a sad plight. She felt that, as she had made such a miserable failure of her mission, the only thing left for her to do was to return home at once, while she still had sufficient money for the trip. In New York she had left the bulk of the ten thousand dollars given to her by Sartelle, and that would maintain her comfortably until she could make permanent arrangements for her future.

She had about decided to follow this course, when it occurred to her that in so doing she would not be playing fair. Sartelle had trusted her to carry out a certain plan. She had not done it. Therefore, if she should bolt and go back home, it would be her duty to find Sartelle and return his money. In honor she could do nothing else.

Diana fought the matter out with herself, and in the end, as she had done on other occasions when her burdens seemed too great to bear, decided to remain loyal to her duty. She would do what she could to regain the queen's hand and fulfil the requirements of her mission. First, though, she would see if she could reach Jack by telephone. She felt intuitively that, if he knew of her trouble, he would not aline himself on the side of Doña Isabel—at least, her feminine vanity assured her that he would not.

Diana consulted a telephone directory and called the Hôtel du Rhin, where Jack had told her he was staying. It was close by the Ritz, in the Place Vendôme, and she hoped to have him with her in a few minutes.

"Mr. Sherbrook is not here," replied a voice in answer to her inquiry.

"Do you mean that he is no longer a guest at your house?" palpitated Diana.

"Oh, no!" said the man. "His luggage remains here, and he has not given up his rooms; but he has not been in since early yesterday afternoon."

"Do you know where he is? Did he leave no word?"

"I'll see."

The clerk was gone for several minutes, but to return with only a negative answer. No one in the hotel knew of the whereabouts of M. Sherbrook.

Diana thanked the clerk, and retired to the ladies' reception-room at the Ritz. Suspicion again routed confidence, and she began to believe that, after all, Jack had deserted her and had accompanied Doña Isabel and her friends on the yacht. What, then, was she to do? Oh, yes, there was one recourse left to her. She had forgotten momentarily that the *gendarme* who had released her from the castle at St. Germain had told her to report to the prefect of police.

Perhaps if she were to see him she might enlist his further aid in her behalf.

A taxicab took her quickly to the prefecture, and, to Diana's surprise and satisfaction, the prefect not only received her at once, but accorded her all the deference that he could have bestowed upon a personage. He appeared to be disproportionately pleased that no actual harm had befallen her, and pressed her to relate every minute detail of her experience.

She was at a loss to understand his unexpected cordiality. However, she told him as briefly as possible of her detention at St. Germain.

"Do you know exactly why you were held there?" he asked at the conclusion of her recital.

"I think—" Diana hesitated. "No, I really do not know."

"Pardon me," bowed the prefect. "I understand your position and the necessity for your reticence."

"What do you mean?"

The prefect shrugged and smiled at her inscrutably.

"I am most happy because of your deliverance," he said evasively.

"But I am still in great trouble," sighed Diana.

"Perhaps I can help you."

"I think you can. Was it Mr. Jack Sherbrook who reported my disappearance to you?"

"M. Sherbrook—and the minister of foreign affairs of France."

"The minister of foreign affairs!" gasped Diana.

Now she could understand why the police were so deferential. But why should a member of the ministry of France bother with her affairs unless, as Doña Isabel and her brother had intimated, she actually was engaged in the weaving of an international intrigue?

"Well," continued Diana, with all the *sang-froid* she could command, "Mr. Sherbrook now has disappeared."

"What!" cried the prefect. "Disappeared, you say? When?"

"He has not been at his hotel since yesterday afternoon. I saw him—or heard him, rather—last night. He came to St. Germain to see Doña Isabel."

Then, urged to do so by the prefect, Diana told all she knew of Jack's visit to the castle, and of her suspicion that he might have gone away on Don Joaquin's yacht.

"Not likely," said the prefect, shaking his head. "This, indeed, is serious."

The police chief was visibly perturbed. He called one of his lieutenants and gave rapid directions for an immediate search for the missing man.

"And then," said Diana, "my maid also has disappeared. She left the Ritz yesterday with all of my belongings, after saying that she was going to London to meet me. I had given her no such instructions."

"Perhaps some one else did," suggested the prefect.

"But who?"

"I know not," he shrugged. "However, I shall notify the London police to detain her if she goes to that city. In the mean time, where are you going?"

"To Berlin—I think."

"To Berlin?" The prefect looked his surprise. "Why—but pardon, *mademoiselle*."

"On important business," volunteered Diana. "I shall be at the Hotel Bismarck. If, for any reason, you should desire to communicate with me, you may reach me there."

The prefect made a note of the address, and, after expressing profuse thanks to the officer, Diana departed. There was nothing more she could do in Paris, so she decided to go to Berlin at once. Indeed, in pursuance of her instructions from John Sartelle, she should have been in the German capital three days ago.

Diana went directly to a shop in the Rue de Rivoli, where she purchased a bag, toilet articles, and several necessary pieces of clothing. Then she hastened to the *Gare du Nord*, where, after an hour's impatient waiting, she got a train for Berlin.

Again, as on the night when she had left London, Diana felt that she was running away from trouble—temporarily, at least. Of course, she could not even guess what complications might arise in Berlin—what calamities might befall her. But surely she could not fare worse than she had in Paris.

She was worried about the loss of the queen's hand; she was troubled more, however, about the disappearance of Jack Sherbrook. Jack had become a part of her very life, whereas the withered relic of Polynesian barbarity was a thing apart. And then, the latter might be regained.

She might meet Sartelle or one of his agents in Berlin, and he probably could find a way to rectify the loss. In any event, she had done her best. But with Jack it was different. Even at that moment he might be in grave peril.

Diana slept little, and rose from her berth in the early morning, unfreshed. She was in Berlin at last. A carriage, procured at the station, conveyed her to the Hotel Bismarck, on the banks of the Spree. It was a small hostelry, as Sartelle had written, but its appointments were exquisite. As Diana scratched her name on the register she wondered if she should venture to take a suite, or if, in her depleted financial condition, it would not be more advisable to content herself with one room and bath. She decided on the latter.

"Ah! Miss Darling," mused the clerk, as he read her signature. Then, bending over the desk, he asked confidentially: "May I ask the size of Miss Darling's shoe?"

"No. 4," she answered promptly. The suddenness of the familiar question startled her, however.

"That is right," said the clerk, with phlegmatic gravity. "I have a letter for you."

Diana selected a cheerful room, overlooking the river. There she she opened her letter and read:

MY DEAR MISS DARLING: It seems scarcely necessary to tell you to deliver the enclosed message to the person whose name appears thereon at noon on the day that you receive this. Act as you have done in the past. JOHN SARTELLE.

Diana shrank from a repetition of the monotonously repellent formula, but, since it was her duty to follow instructions, she was confident that a visit to Herr Johann Wasserbrun, whose name was inscribed on the letter that she was to deliver, would result in filling her shrunken coffers.

As she had wondered in London and Paris, Diana now wondered if John Sartelle was in Berlin, and if he would reveal himself to her. Her letter bore a local postmark of a date four days previously. Consequently she was very late in fulfilling her obligations, and many things might have happened in the mean time to discourage the plans of her employer. The morning still

was young, and Diana decided to sleep for a few hours. Then at noon she would call on Herr Wasserbrun.

Diana found her meeting with the German banker little different from interviews with the financiers in New York, London, and Paris.

"Of what size is your shoe?" was Herr Wasserbrun's question.

His watery blue eyes, peering over thick, gold-rimmed spectacles, inspected her critically as she answered:

"No. 4."

"*Das ist recht,*" he nodded. "And now, Miss Darling, please sign your signature—here."

Herr Wasserbrun's thick index-finger drew an imaginary line on a blank visiting card, which he extracted from a desk drawer, and Diana wrote her name on the designated spot. Herr Wasserbrun again nodded his approval and delved into his desk. Then, without leaving the room, as his predecessors invariably had done, he handed a bulky envelope to Diana.

"Open when you are back in your hotel," he said.

Past experience told Diana that her business with Herr Wasserbrun was at an end. She hurried back to her hotel, and there, in the lobby, once more came face to face with the Englishman that had dogged her footsteps for two weeks.

The sudden contact caused her to start and halt momentarily. He, in turn, took a step toward her, seemed on the point of addressing her, then paused irresolutely. In that instant of indecision, Diana wheeled about and almost ran to her room.

CHAPTER XXI.

Diana Dubitates.

THE reappearance of the Englishman in Berlin gave Diana's nerves an additional shock, and caused her to suspect that some new unfathomable deviltry was afoot. As she looked back on her accidental meeting

with him in the lobby of the Bismarck, she felt sure that he was about to speak to her. But what had he intended to say? Perhaps it would have been better had she remained to hear him. He might have shed some light on the mystery that was growing more tangled each day—each moment. However, she had not taken advantage of her opportunity.

Diana tore open the envelope that she had received from Herr Wasserbrun, and, as she had expected, a bundle of money fell into her lap. She counted it, and found that her generous employer had provided her with four thousand marks. This money, with the remnant of that which she had received in Paris, gave her an equivalent of about seventeen hundred dollars in ready cash. She felt much better on that score.

Diana also expected to find the usual note. She was surprised, therefore, when it was somewhat different from those that she had received in New York, London, and Paris. It was written in the same style, however, and read as follows:

The enclosed four thousand marks, you will understand, are to be used in defraying the expenses of travel. On the fourth day of your arrival in Berlin, at two o'clock in the afternoon, go into the ladies' reception-room at the Bismarck and play, on the piano, the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin." Deliver the queen's hand to the person who shall ask the size of your shoe and accept your future directions from him.

"From him!" repeated Diana with emphasis. "It will be a man then. And there are no instructions beyond Berlin. That makes it evident that this strange case will end here—or at least my part in it. But does it? I am told to accept my future instructions from him. Who is he? The Englishman? Does he know that I have—or have not—the queen's hand?"

All of Diana's reasoning brought her no nearer to the solution of the problem, except for the uncertain sat-

isfaction of believing that a man finally was to lay claim to the queen's hand.

Diana glanced at her watch with a start. It was nearly two o'clock, and, had she arrived in Berlin according to schedule, this would have been the day on which to play the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin."

Should she do it at once, or count four days from the actual time of her arrival? Diana was in a quandary. What, though, could be the use of her playing? She had not the queen's hand to deliver, even though a claimant for it should appear. However, if this man were to approach her, she could explain her predicament and enlist his help. That, she thought, was the best idea that had entered her mind, and she decided to make the venture.

A middle-aged German was sitting alone in the ladies' reception-room when Diana entered, and she wondered, as she walked slowly toward the piano, if he were the man with whom she should have to deal. He gave her scant attention, though, as, with a courage born of desperation, she struck the keys.

There was none of her erstwhile timidity in her manner, and the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin" pealed forth with a stentorian ring.

Diana turned from the instrument defiantly, expecting to see the German at her elbow.

Instead, he was gazing placidly out of a window. She stood by the piano for several minutes waiting. Nothing happened. Then she strolled casually from the room, leaving the only person who seemed to have heard, and ignored, her performance still staring imperturbably into the street. Not even the Englishman was in view as she sallied forth into the lobby of the hotel.

Diana felt angry with herself—resentful toward all the persons who had an interest, directly or indirectly, with the hateful queen's hand. As she was

approaching the lift, on the way to her room, a boy approached her with a telegram. She opened it hastily and read:

Stay in Berlin until I arrive. JACK.

Diana's heart leaped with gladness. Jack was safe, and was coming to her! The despatch bore a Paris date-line, and Jack evidently had obtained her address from the prefect of police in the French capital. After all, he had not deserted her wilfully. The knowledge was of vastly greater import to her than any information about the queen's hand could have been.

Of course, she wanted to know about that, too; but Jack was of primal importance. And she felt that Jack, if she should make a confidant of him, could solve the mystery of the queen's hand. Anyway, she intended to tell him all about it, despite the restrictions imposed upon her by John Sartelle. He—Sartelle—had not seemed to care what happened to her, and there was no reason, she argued with feminine logic, why she should respect his secrets any longer.

There was nothing for Diana to do now but to wait, and this she did with the greatest impatience. She denied herself the pleasure of motoring and visiting the places of interest in the city, because she did not want to be absent when Jack should arrive. She was almost afraid that, were she not in at the time, something might take him away from her again before she could see him.

So she told the hotel clerk to notify her of his arrival immediately, at any hour of the day or night. Then she went to her room, and tried, with poor success, to find diversion in reading.

The weary hours of the afternoon lapsed dismally into the dusk of evening. At seven o'clock, Diana dressed herself and went down to dinner. Again she met the Englishman in the lobby, but this time they passed without sign of recognition. An hour later she returned to her room.

A carnival on the Spree was in progress, and the gaily caparisoned boats, with their laughing occupants, gliding past her window under the soft glow of the shore illumination, entertained her for a time.

Still in a chaos of doubt and suspense, Diana went to bed at midnight. At seven o'clock in the morning she was awakened by the ringing of her telephone bell.

"Jack!" she cried, as she leaped nimbly from the bed. "Yes?" she palpitated into the receiver.

"Miss Darling?" inquired a strange masculine voice with a thick German accent.

"Yes, yes," she answered impatiently.

"A young woman has just arrived here who says she is your maid. She insists on seeing you at once."

"My maid!" ejaculated Diana. "Why—what is her name? And who are you?"

"This is the clerk of the hotel speaking." There was a pause, then he continued: "The young woman says that her name is Marie Coulevain, and that she has just come from London. I am sorry to have disturbed you, but—"

"Send her to me at once!" interrupted Diana, as soon as she was able to recover from her surprise sufficiently to speak.

As Diana slipped on a negligee, she wondered if, in a fairy tale, stranger things could happen than the actual occurrences in her daily life.

CHAPTER XXII.

Diana Disillusioned.

MARIE'S entrance to the presence of her mistress by no means savored of the contrite return of a wayward servant.

"Thank God you are safe, Miss Darling!" she cried.

The girl's large brown eyes filled with tears, and she seized Diana impulsively with both hands. While she

had been waiting for Marie to come upstairs, Diana half framed a severe rebuke for the girl; but the manner of her maid's greeting left her perplexed and all but speechless. Indeed, Marie had assumed an air almost of equality, rather than her quondam demeanor of a servitor.

"Where have you been, and why did you desert me?" demanded Diana, with as much severity as she could summon.

"In London; but I did not desert you, Miss Darling. Why did you tell me to go to London?"

Diana noticed that, in her excitement, Marie had dropped her French accent and mannerisms. These, then, had been a pose.

"I told you to go to London?"

"You did."

"Marie!" Diana looked her disbelief. "How and when did I tell you to go to London?"

"On the day following your disappearance in Paris. You telephoned to me at the Ritz, and said that you must leave at once for London, on important business. You told me that you would send me some money at once, and that I was to settle the hotel bill and return to the Carleton as soon as possible. I implored you not to go, but you were firm. In less than two hours, a special messenger arrived at the hotel, said he had come from you, and gave me one thousand francs. There was nothing else to do but to obey instructions."

The girl paused, and Diana weighed her story. She seemed to have told the truth, in so far as she believed that her mistress had given the directions.

"Marie," said Diana at length, "did it not occur to you that some one might have deceived you—might have imitated my voice over the telephone?"

"I have thought of that since, but, at the time, I was completely deceived, especially when the money came so promptly. Who would give a thousand francs merely to have me leave Paris? And what could be the purpose of such a person?"

"Describe this special messenger who brought you the money," commanded Diana irrelevantly.

"A large, powerful-looking man, about forty years old, with black hair, eyes and mustache, and a red scar on his right cheek. It seemed to me that he might be a Spaniard or an Italian."

"Pietro," murmured Diana; "I thought so."

"You know him, Miss Darling?"

"He is a servant of the brother of Doña Isabel de Alborno. And now I'll tell you, Marie, why you were sent to London. Doña Isabel held me a prisoner for two days at her brother's castle at St. Germain; and Doña Isabel it was undoubtedly who telephoned to you. She wanted to make it appear that I had returned to London, so that my friends would not look for me in Paris."

"Imprisoned you?" repeated Marie, aghast. "What was her object?"

"To extract some secret from me that she thought I possessed. Even now I do not know exactly what she was after."

"But how did you escape?"

"Doña Isabel and her friends fled evidently, because of their fear of the police, and the *gendarmes* came later and liberated me."

"And I—I allowed all that!" sighed Marie.

"You allowed it? How could you have prevented it?"

"I should have prevented it, Miss Darling. I told you in London that I was your protector. I reproach myself bitterly because I have proved such a poor one."

A long silence ensued, during which Diana gathered her wits for the inquisition she was now determined to inflict on Marie. She knew that the girl was withholding much that would enlighten her as to the stirring incidents of the last two weeks, and it was her firm resolve to wring a confession from the lips of her maid.

"There are several questions that I want to ask you, Marie," she began.

"Please wait a little while—until tomorrow, at least," pleaded the girl.

"No," said Diana firmly. "I am in great trouble, and I insist upon knowing all that you can tell me. In the first place, why did you make me believe that you were French?"

"To—to make my character appear more effective."

"Then you are not a maid by profession?"

"I suppose I may as well tell you the truth. I am a private detective."

"A detective!" gasped Diana. "Why were you watching me?"

"I was not watching you, Miss Darling, in the sense that you imply. I told you the truth in London. I was engaged by John Sartelle, at a high salary, to act as your maid merely to protect you from harm. My instructions ended there."

"How could you have protected me?" grilled Diana. "You do not appear to be any stronger physically nor more self-reliant than I am."

"You overlook the fact that my experience has given me a wide acquaintance with both police and criminals, and their methods. This is not my first international case, Miss Darling," she added, with a touch of pride.

"Then your name is not Marie Coulevain?"

"No; Mary Blake—Mrs. Thornton Blake."

"Tell me, now," pursued Diana, "how you knew where to find me in Berlin, and why you left London if you thought I was there?"

"I had definite information yesterday, by wire, that you were at the Hotel Bismarck here."

Diana raised her eyebrows. Surely she was the center of a more carefully planned system of espionage than she had suspected.

"From whom did you receive this information?" she demanded.

"From my—my husband," blushed Marie. "He—he happened to be in Berlin and saw you."

"Strange how he knew where you

were, since you have been dodging about Europe in such a sprightly fashion," observed Diana. She was a little suspicious of the last reply.

"I suppose you know that the Englishman with whom you discussed the pleasant weather—and other things—is in Berlin and at this very hotel?" was her next thrust.

"Is he?"

"Don't you know he is?"

"Y—yes," admitted Marie weakly.

"Who is he?"

"Th—Thornton Blake."

"Your husband!" gasped Diana.

Marie flushed and nodded her pretty head.

"No wonder, then, that your husband *happened* to be in Berlin. He's a detective, too, I suppose?"

"Yes, Miss Darling."

"And watching me, also."

"But only for your protection," hastened Marie. "Now you see why I should have guarded you better from misfortune."

"I should prefer to see your husband," said Diana dryly. "If you don't mind being a maid for a little while longer, you might help me to dress. Then we will have breakfast with Mr. Thornton Blake—that is, if he will consent to grace our table with his presence."

Marie was quite willing to perform her part of the arrangement, and seemed happy at the prospect of breakfasting with her husband. When Diana was dressed, they went in search of that indefatigable individual, and found him, as usual, lolling in an easy chair in the lobby. He sprang to his feet in startled surprise when he saw who was approaching, but acknowledged the introduction to Diana with graceful composure. Diana was pleased to note that his manners were perfect. She extended her hand in greeting, and he bent over it with true Chesterfieldian courtliness.

"Well, Mr. Thornton Blake," said Diana, "you have caused me many an anxious moment; but it is a relief

to know that I may count such a persistent person as a friend. I should hate to have you on my trail if you were not."

"You may be sure of my friendliness," he answered, in a pleasant voice. "If I have annoyed you, I hope that you will forgive me, on the ground that I was merely doing my duty." He paused and looked at his wife inquiringly, as if to ask her what she had told.

"You are forgiven," laughed Diana.

"I—I peached, Thornton," explained Marie. "Poor Miss Darling was so distressed after her terrible experience in Paris that I just had to tell her who we were, and that we were her friends."

"You did quite right," said Blake, "and I think Mr. Sartelle will agree with me." Then, turning to Diana: "You were held in that castle at St. Germain?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I saw you enter; and, when you did not return to your hotel suspected that you had been detained against your will."

"Do you know why I was imprisoned?"

"I do not, Miss Darling."

"Do let us have breakfast," interposed Marie. "But we must go to some café away from the hotel. Miss Darling would lose caste if she were to be seen at table with her maid."

Diana was grateful for the suggestion. She had had a similar thought herself, but disliked to voice it, in fear of wounding the girl's pride.

"All right," she agreed. "Where shall we go?"

Blake suggested a place, and thither they went at once.

"Now, Mr. Blake, may I cross-examine you?" asked Diana, when they were comfortably seated.

"I shall not mind."

"I warn you that Miss Darling is a severe inquisitor," laughed Marie.

"Of course, you don't *have* to answer," said Diana.

"I promise to be a willing witness," he smiled.

"Well, then, what did you do after you saw me enter the castle at St. Germain?"

"Returned to the Hotel Ritz and told Mrs. Blake where you had gone."

"Then what happened?"

"Presently Mrs. Blake received a telephone call, ostensibly from you, telling her that you were about to leave for London and instructing her to follow. We were a little suspicious of the directions, and, while we were discussing the matter, Mr. Jack Sherbrook called to take you to luncheon."

"Did not Doña Isabel telephone to him and invite him to St. Germain for luncheon?"

"I think not. Had she done so, he would have gone. On the other hand, when I told him where you were, he telephoned to Doña Isabel. She admitted that you had been there, but said that you had left suddenly, intending to go to London. Naturally, we were much worried about you. We decided that Mrs. Blake should return to London, while Mr. Sherbrook should remain in Paris to pursue the search for you. I came at once to Berlin, on the chance that you might be here."

"What made you think that I might go to Berlin?"

"I knew that Berlin was to be your next objective point."

"You did?"

"Before sailing from New York, Mr. Sartelle gave me your exact itinerary, even to the names of the hotels at which you were to stay."

"What else did he tell you?"

"Nothing, except that I was to keep you under constant surveillance, and to see that no harm should befall you. He told me, however, that I need not conceal the fact from you that you were being watched. I believe he wanted you to be a little mystified."

"Why, I wonder?"

"I don't know. Had it not been that he wanted me to make myself

conspicuous, I could have trailed you around Europe without your knowing it."

"Do you know the purpose of my trip to Europe?"

"Truthfully, Miss Darling, I have not the faintest idea."

"Where shall I go next?"

"I have no instructions beyond Berlin."

"Then our business ends here?"

"Probably. I am to remain here for further directions."

"From Sartelle?"

"From him or one of his agents."

Diana puckered her brow in perplexity. She had about run the gamut of interrogation, and had learned only that which mystified her the more. Of a truth, Sartelle was a strange man. He had made a puzzle of which he alone seemed to hold the key.

"Oh, yes," resumed Diana suddenly; "I want to know if it was you who left that note for me in London, warning me against Doña Isabel."

"It was I," admitted Blake.

"What reason had you for warning me?"

"I thought her an unfit companion for you."

"Why?"

"Well, chiefly because she is notorious as a schemer in matters of state and her presence usually means trouble. You know now that my estimate was correct."

"And you assure me that you don't know why she had designs on me, and that you are ignorant of the mission that brought me to Europe?"

"I pledge you my word that I do not," said Blake fervently. "Perhaps, if you would tell me—"

"No, no," interrupted Diana. "I cannot, Mr. Blake—not now, at any rate."

The thought of her mission brought Diana's mind back to the unknown duties that lay before her. She wondered if the queen's hand still were undisturbed in the hiding place where she had left it.

"Did you bring my trunks to Berlin?" she asked of Marie.

"Yes, Miss Darling."

"Then let us return to the hotel," said Diana. "I shall welcome a change of clothing."

This time she had no terror of the Englishman, who walked proudly by her side.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Diana Delivered.

DIANA'S first act on arriving again at the hotel was to inquire for Jack Sherbrook, but, to her intense disappointment, there was not even a message from him. She then directed that a sitting-room be added to her bedroom and bath, and ordered her trunks sent up. A hasty examination of the trunk in which she had left the queen's hand assured her that it had not been disturbed. She took it from its teakwood case, regarded it distrustfully, as a thing that had given her so much heartache and misery, and set it on her dresser.

Diana sat down in a chair by one of the windows, and, with fascinated eyes glued to the gruesome object that had caused her to be sent on this mad, mysterious mission, reviewed the anguish that she had suffered because of it, and attempted to divine the uncertain future. And as she gazed, the long, sinuous, shrunken fingers of the hideous thing seemed to twist and writhe in the red fire that emanated from the huge garnet, blazing like a satellite on the middle finger.

Diana shuddered with intuitive dread, and, for relief, turned her eyes toward the shimmering surface of the rippling Spree.

Her thoughts flew back to her foolish rejection of Jack Sherbrook's offer of marriage, then lingered on the amazing advertisement that she had read that afternoon in her New York home. She recalled her first interview with John Sartelle, and the surprise

she had felt when he gave her the ten thousand dollars to impersonate herself. Then she had stolen the queen's hand from herself, and had embarked on this crazy tour of Europe, during which she had been required to play the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin" at every stopping place.

She tried vainly to comprehend the relative positions of Doña Isabel and Jack Sherbrook in this strange game, and asked herself what danger threatened her that required the constant surveillance of two detectives to protect her. Why, too, was a mole required on her left cheek, and why was the size of her foot so urgently demanded wherever she went?

Diana came no nearer to the solution of the riddle than she had on other occasions of self-inquisition. Only one point had been cleared—one disturbing element removed. It eased her mind to know that the Englishman and her maid could be counted as friends, and that she did not have to guess any more as to their identity and intentions.

In all other matters, however, she was as much at sea as ever—more so, in fact.

In the end, Diana was inclined to take a philosophical view of her situation. Many times she had wished that she was back in New York, and that she never had seen John Sartelle. In the light of calmer reason, though, she realized that this bewildering commission that she had accepted really was a godsend, at the time of her greatest need. John Sartelle, within an hour, had lifted her from abject, disheartening poverty to ease and independence. She was visiting the principal cities of Europe in the most luxurious fashion and, when her duties were ended, she still would have a cash balance of nearly ten thousand dollars.

Then, perhaps, Jack again would ask her to be his wife; and the next time, she assured herself, she would not decline his offer. If the tender god of

love should weave such a fitting conclusion to her dream, Jack, she was sure, would help her to unravel the mystery of why Diana Darling had been called upon to impersonate — Diana Darling.

But why, she wondered, did not Jack come to her, as he had promised? Had some new complication again heaped trouble upon him? She was worn out with the anxiety of waiting.

Diana again ventured to look at the baneful curio that reposed on her dresser. The ray of sunshine that had inflamed the crude garnet had passed, and the stone merely blinked at her, like the dull red eye of a couchant dragon. It sent a chill of fear creeping down her spine, and, arising hastily, she replaced it in its case. How she wished that the person for whom it was intended would come and claim it.

But how could he, if she should continue to sit in her room, and fail to perform her part of the obligation?

Diana suddenly became obsessed with the one idea—to get rid of the queen's hand. By every indication, the claimant should appear in Berlin. But suppose he had come, and gone, while she was being detained in Paris? Her efforts to attract this person on the day before had proved fruitless; but surely he would not run away entirely, when there appeared to be so much at stake. In any event, she would try again—this very day. At two o'clock she would go into the ladies' reception-room and play the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin." Now that she again had the hand in her possession, she should have no explanation to offer.

At noon, Diana summoned Marie and suggested that she and her husband go off on a sight-seeing trip.

"But we cannot leave you, Miss Darling," protested Marie. "It is our duty to remain near you."

"I promise not to go outside of the hotel, for any purpose," said Diana. "You will agree that I cannot be in much danger while I am here."

"One never can tell," observed Marie.

However, she consulted her husband, and returned to say that he would take the risk, if Miss Darling insisted on it.

"I do insist on it," said Diana. "Both of you have been very faithful, and are entitled to some pleasure."

Diana was relieved to feel that she should be free from espionage for the afternoon. She went down-stairs presently, inquired for mail, again without result, then had luncheon.

As the hour of two o'clock approached, Diana began to feel a strong intuition that something was going to happen, and a subtle sixth sense seemed to tell her to be prepared for a surprise. Consequently her nerves were tingling apprehensively as she approached the reception-room. She half expected to find some one waiting there for her, and she felt a shade of disappointment when she discovered that no one else was present.

She steadied herself for a moment, walked rapidly to the piano, and, abandoning her customary prelude, played the first eight bars of the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin." A pause followed—a silence, tense with the potentialities of the impending cataclysm. Then came a voice:

"May I ask what size of shoe you are wearing?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

Diana Discomfited.

"MAY I ask what size of shoe you are wearing?"

Had a thunderbolt crashed on the stillness of the room, the effect could have been no more terrifying to Diana. She had expected—even had hoped—for just that question; but when it came, she still was unprepared. She stood as though petrified, her heart beating furiously, breathing in staccato gasps. She closed her eyes and attempted to gather strength to turn and

face her interrogator—to frame words with which to address him; but the faintness of fear had seized her, and she found herself struggling vainly to overcome an attack of complete aphasia.

Diana's first coherent thought was that she had forgotten the queen's hand—had left it on the dresser in her room. She would have given worlds to have it then—to hurl it at this man and cry: "There! Take the hideous thing!" She wanted to run—anywhere, to get away from this hateful presence.

"Diana dear, what is the matter?"

The voice, now soft, whispered into her ear. She felt the man's warm breath fan her cheek. Presently a hand was laid gently on her shoulder, and a tender arm encircled her. She turned her head ever so slightly and looked into the love-lit eyes of—

"Jack! You!"

The words fell from her lips in a weak little gurgle.

"You treat me as if I were a grizzly bear, come to devour you. Weren't you expecting me? Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Y-yes, but—"

"Well, then, what is the matter?"

"Where is—is he?"

"He! Who? I've seen no one."

"Why, you must have seen him. He was here only a minute ago. Or could I have been dreaming? Oh, I have been through so much lately that perhaps my mind is giving way. I don't know. I thought I heard him speak just before you came in."

"Poor little girl," he sympathized; "you *have* had trouble. Come, dear, tell me about it. I want to know what you have been doing since that last night I saw you in Paris."

"I have seen you since then," she said, as they became seated.

"You have? Where?"

"Walking in the garden at St. Germain with Doña Isabel. I tried to call to you from the room in which she had imprisoned me, but you did not

seem to hear. Then her brother came and told me that you and she might be married, and—"

"There is only one little woman that I care to marry," he interrupted, "and her name is not Isabel. But go on, dear; tell me the whole story."

She did so, omitting nothing that had occurred in the castle at St. Germain. In conclusion, she observed:

"My mind has been perplexed to understand your relationship with Doña Isabel, and to know what she thought I had that could possibly benefit her."

"I can enlighten you," he said.

"And you will?" she cried. "Oh, Jack!"

"And I will," he smiled. "In the first place, let me say that you have done me an inestimable service."

"How?" She looked at him with wide eyes.

"By learning definitely that a secret treaty had been consummated by Germany, Japan, Russia, Italy, and Spain. Somebody must have drunk too much wine at that dinner to let the cat out of the bag as he did."

"The German did it boastingly. But why should that interest you?"

"Because one of my duties in Europe was to learn if such a convention had been negotiated. The American Department of State suspected such a plan, but we were not sure."

"I don't understand this at all," said Diana, in bewilderment.

"Then I shall make it clearer to you. First, dear, I will admit that I have been playing at underground diplomacy—a secret agent for our government, you know. It always has afforded me pleasant pastime—until the intrigues with which I was concerned involved you. Primarily, I came to Europe with certain secret documents relating to the tripartite treaty of England, France, and the United States, about which you heard at Doña Isabel's.

"Well, Doña Isabel, who knew of my government affiliations, saw you

and me talking in the parlor of the Plaza in New York. She is suspicious of everything, and probably had you followed. When she found that you were going abroad she naturally assumed that you were a new secret agent, and had taken over the duties that had been assigned to me. But I am so sorry, dear—so sorry. If you even can forgive me—”

“The information that I gained at St. Germain helped you, didn’t it?” she interrupted.

“It might have taken months for me to discover what you learned in an hour.”

“Then I am glad it happened. So you see, you do not need to be forgiven.”

“Dear little girl,” he murmured.

“Then you were going to tell me how you happened to be with Doña Isabel that day in the garden,” she reminded.

“Oh, yes. Well, briefly, when I learned that you had gone to her place, I suspected that you might be in danger, and followed at once. She invited me to stroll in the garden, which, of course, I did. I questioned her closely about you, and she told me the straightest story I ever heard: said you had been there to luncheon, and had left to return to London.

“I discredited her explanation of your sudden disappearance, and solicited the aid of the minister of foreign affairs in finding you. He went with me to the prefect of police, and a widespread search was instituted immediately. Then, on the night of your dinner at St. Germain, I returned there in the hope of drawing some clue from Doña Isabel.

“I accused her bluntly of having you imprisoned in the house, with the result that her friends and servants overpowered me and threw me into the old dungeon under the castle. They fled in the early morning, because, I suppose, they realized that things were getting too warm for them.

“Then the *gendarmes* came. They

found you and released you, but it was some time later before they discovered me and my company of rats. When I finally reached Paris I learned that you had left for Berlin. I would have followed immediately had not business detained me. Now, dear, you understand all.”

“No, not all,” sighed Diana. “I now understand all of the hitherto mystifying elements of the imbroglio that was not on my particular program; but aside from all that, I still am in grave trouble.”

Diana turned a sorrowful little face toward her companion, and, to her indignant astonishment, he smiled—actually smiled.

“Shall I also explain away all of the—the other trouble?” he asked.

“I’d give anything if you could. But you can’t, Jack. You don’t understand.” She looked at him quizzically. His expression puzzled her.

“We’ll see what I know,” he laughed. “You remember that you would not let me into any of your secrets in New York, and that you were equally reticent when I saw you in Paris. Well, I—but let me start at the beginning.

“In the first place, you refused to marry a very well-to-do young man, who loved you devotedly, and decided to earn your own living. Then you answered an advertisement in a newspaper that called for a young woman with a peculiar admixture of qualifications. You saw John Sartelle, and he told you that you were to impersonate yourself, steal the petrified hand of a Polynesian queen from yourself, and, for ten thousand dollars and traveling expenses, take this curio on a jaunt about Europe. Am I right, so far?”

“You are right,” gasped Diana. “But how—”

“No questions, please, until I have finished. You were to wear a mole on your left cheek, discard mourning for fashionable colors, sign a visiting card whenever you got money, and, wherever you went, play the first eight bars

of the 'Bridal Chorus' from 'Lohengrin.' If a person should approach you and ask the size of your shoe, after such a performance, you were to let him have the queen's hand. Am I still correct?"

"Still correct," agreed Diana amazedly.

"Then, to conclude, an agent went ahead of you to arrange for your supply of funds, and two private detectives—man and wife—were with you, to protect you from mishaps. It seems as if they failed in one instance, however, and allowed your project to cross mine. Had not Doña Isabel injected herself into your affairs, everything would have been plain sailing. That was a real adventure."

"It seems to me that it is all a real adventure," said Diana. "Will you tell me, now, why I was sent to Europe on this mission, and how you happen to know so much about it?"

"One question at a time, please, and those two last of all."

"May I ask, then, why I have had to impersonate myself?"

"You have not been impersonating yourself."

"I don't understand. I thought—"

"John Sartelle knew all the time that you were the real, the only Diana Darling."

"Why, then, did he say that he wanted a woman to impersonate Diana Darling?" asked Diana incredulously.

"To mystify you, my dear."

"To mystify me? Well, he succeeded. But why should he require me to have a mole on my left cheek?"

"To bewilder you further, and to help identify you when you should call for money in foreign cities."

"Why did every one ask the size of my foot?"

"That served the same purpose—helped to identify you, and added to your perplexities."

"Then I had to sign ever so many visiting cards."

"They completed your identification. You signed several in New

York, and one of those was left with each banker on whom you called. Each asked you to sign another card in his presence, and then compared the signatures."

"Why did I have to steal the queen's hand from myself and bring it to Europe? And oh, why was it necessary for me to play the first eight bars of the 'Bridal Chorus' from 'Lohengrin' so often?"

"Other artistic touches to a plot intended to bewilder you, my dear."

"A plot intended to bewilder me!" gasped Diana. "Oh, Jack, I don't see it yet. I—"

"Then," he interrupted remorselessly, "you were required to cast aside your mourning because it was desired that your mind should be free from all morbid thoughts. You insisted on earning your living. Well, you got a position that paid you liberally, and one that was intended to make you think less of your recent troubles. I hope it did, dear; and I—I hope, too, that the trials you have passed through have made you think kindly of one who would like to share all of your burdens in the future. Don't you understand—now?"

Diana sat for a moment in puzzled silence. Then, suddenly, a great light began to dawn on her. "A plot intended to bewilder me," she repeated in her mind. Why, could it be possible that Jack—but no; there was some mistake.

"May I ask you the last two questions—those that you refused to answer first?" she murmured.

"I'll answer them—now," he answered softly.

"Tell me, then, why I was sent to Europe on this mission, and how you happen to know so much about it?"

"You were sent to Europe at my direction, and, therefore, I knew all about it from the beginning."

Diana was speechless for a full minute. She bit her lip and turned her eyes away. She saw—or thought she saw—it all, but she wanted a complete

confession to come from Jack's own lips.

"But why?" she insisted gently.

"Can't you guess?" He looked at her tenderly and pressed her small, cold fingers in a warm clasp. Her eyes drooped. "Because," he whispered—"because I love you, dear. You wanted to work, and, having the means I possess, I couldn't allow you to engage in any sordid occupation at home.

"I wanted to distract your mind, in the hope that you would alter your foolish standard of ethics; and because I had to come to Europe on the business that I have described to you, I wanted you here, too, so that I might see you occasionally. I conceived the romantic plot that you carried out so faithfully, and had my agents arrange the details. I—I thought that the legend of the queen's hand and the constant repetition of the 'Bridal Chorus' might cause you to wish to be somebody's wife."

"Jack."

"Yes, dear."

"Suppose"—Diana's voice had grown weak and tearful—"suppose I had not answered your advertisement?"

"Then I'd have thought of something else."

"And Jack?"

"Yes."

"Did you—when you came into the room—did you ask me what size shoe I wore?"

"Yes."

"You were very impertinent."

"Can you forgive me, dear?"

"For—for everything." A becoming tinge of carmine crept into Diana's face, and she turned her large, lustrous, love-lit eyes on her companion. "And, Jack," she whispered confusedly, "I have—have thought—often—since that day—that I should like—like to be—somebody's wife."

"Mine? Oh, Diana, dearest, will you? I—"

"Wait."

She sprang suddenly from his side and faced him, with alternate smiles and blushes.

"But, dearest—"

"I must think."

"No."

"Really, Jack. I must—for five minutes." She glanced at him archly, turned and fled, while he tried vainly to catch her. "Wait—for five minutes," she flung over her shoulder at the door.

The intervening five minutes were the longest that Jack Sherbrook ever had endured, tortured as he was by the fear that Diana was playing a counter trick on him. Well, perhaps he deserved it, but—Oh, there she was, more radiantly beautiful than ever; and as she came and stood before him he noticed that she carried a small teak-wood box.

"Jack dear," she murmured, "when you entered this room you asked a question that required me to give you something. I didn't have it with me then. But here it is—the queen's hand. I give it to you with the same sentiment that it conveyed to its barbaric possessors of old—love, loyalty, and submission."

"Diana—darling Diana!" he cried.

"No," she corrected, smiling;

"Diana Darling."

"*Darling* Diana Darling," he murmured fondly.

"Oh, Jack, I *do* love you!" she cried impulsively, with a sudden excess of feeling.

He crushed her in his arms, and their lips met.

"Shall we be married at once, dearest?" he asked.

"If you like."

"To-day?"

"I am willing."

"Then we'll go honeymooning on the Riviera."

"And be as happy as—as Tom and Mabel?"

"Happier—lots," he said fervently.

(The end.)

ONE WONDERFUL NIGHT*

A SERIAL IN V PARTS—PART IV

BY LOUIS TRACY

Author of "The Wings of the Morning," "Mirabel's Island," "The Final War,"
"The Red Year," "The Stowaway," "A Son of the Immortals," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

JOHN DELANCY CURTIS, a young American engineer, just back in New York after a long absence in the Far East, sees two assassins murder a young man who had been stopping in the same hostelry. In the mêlée Curtis, in his attempt to succor the victim, loses his own overcoat and has thrust upon him that of the victim, the assassins betimes escaping in an automobile. Shortly afterward Curtis discovers in the pocket of the strange overcoat a marriage certificate, made out in the names of Jean de Courtois, of France, and Hermione Beauregard Grandison, of England. Filled with sympathy for the unknown bride, Curtis obeys that impulse and goes to her address. There he discovers that the lady is exceedingly beautiful, young, and aristocratic; daughter of the Earl of Valletort. She tells Curtis how her father had attempted to coerce her into marrying Count Ladislas Vassilan, a villainous Hungarian of noble lineage, and how, as a means of escape, she had arranged a platonic wedding with her French music-master, the recent victim of the assassins. Curtis offers to take the dead man's place, and Lady Hermione becomes Mrs. John D. Curtis, under promise that Curtis is to demand none of the privileges the law allows.

In the mean time the police have begun work on the murder mystery at the Central Hotel. Curtis is implicated by the fact that his overcoat is discovered at the murdered man's side. Then the earl and the count arrive at the Central to further accuse him of being a dangerous adventurer. On the other hand, at the same instant arrive Curtis's friend Devar, and his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Horace P. Curtis, who stoutly assert the alleged assassin's character. Detective Steingall suspects Count Vassilan to be mixed up some way in the murder, and with Curtis traces him to a Hungarian restaurant. Curtis, later, with his friend Devar, while motoring home sees an automobile, the driver of which he recognizes as Anatole, the driver of the "murder car." They give chase.

CHAPTER XI.

One O'Clock.



DEVAR had the nimble wits of a fox, and the blood which raced in his veins was volatile as quicksilver. The same glance which showed him the gray automobile stealing softly across the network of car-lines of one of the city's main thoroughfares revealed a roundsman crossing the square.

"Friend Anatole may be heeled," he said. "Let's get help."

Leaning out, he shouted to Arthur, whose other name was Brodie:

"Pull in alongside the cop. I want to speak to him."

The policeman turned a questioning eye on the car, thinking some idiot meant to run him down. Devar had the door open in a second.

"Have you heard of the murder in Twenty-Seventh Street, outside the Central Hotel?" he said, almost bewildering the man by his eager directness.

"Of course I have," came the answer quickly enough.

* This story began in *The Cavalier* for February 15.

"Well, the car mixed up in it is right ahead. There it is, making for Fifth Avenue. Jump in! We'll explain as we go."

The roundsman needed no second invitation. Obviously, unless some brainless young fool was trying to be humorous, there was no time to spare for words. He sprang inside, and Devar cried to the surprised chauffeur:

"Follow that gray auto. Don't kill anybody, but hit up the speed until we are close behind it, and then I'll tell you what next to do."

Little recking what this order really meant, for its true inwardness was hidden at the moment from the ken of those far better versed than he in the tangle of events, Brodie changed gear and touched the accelerator, and the machine whirled past Admiral Farragut's statue at a pace which would have caused even doughty "Old Salamander" to blink with astonishment.

While four pairs of eyes were watching the fast-moving vehicle in front, Curtis gave the policeman a brief résumé of the night's doings since he and Devar had gone with Steingall to the police headquarters. There was no need to say much about the actual crime, because the man had full details, with descriptions of the man-slayers, in his note-book.

He was a shrewd person, too. His name was McCulloch; his father had emigrated from Belfast, and a man of such ancestry seldom takes anything for granted.

"I suppose you are not quite certain, Mr. Curtis, that the chauffeur driving that car ahead is the 'Anatole' concerned in the death of Mr. Hunter?" he asked.

But Curtis was of a cautious temperament, too.

"No," he said, "that is more than I dare state, even if I had an opportunity to look at him closely. As it is, I merely received what I may term 'an impression' of him. That, to-

gether with the marked similarity of the car to the one I saw outside the hotel, seems to offer reasonable ground for inquiry, at any rate."

"Did you notice the number of this car?"

"No, not exactly. I believe it differs from that which I undoubtedly did see and put on record."

"Of course, the plate must have been changed or he would never venture in this locality again. If you are right, sir, the fellow must possess a mighty cool nerve, because he is just passing Twenty-Seventh Street, within a few yards of the hotel."

Somehow, the fact had escaped Curtis's remembrance; excellent though his topographical sense might be, he was still sufficient of a stranger in New York not to appreciate the bearings of particular localities with the prompt discrimination necessarily displayed by the policeman.

During the succeeding few seconds none of the occupants of the limousine spoke. Devar was kneeling on one of the front seats, and the roundsman, who had removed his uniform hat to avoid attracting notice when a lamp shone directly into the interior, quietly took stock of the men who had so unceremoniously called him off his tour of inspection.

Evidently he satisfied himself that he was not being dragged into a wild-goose chase. Their tense manner could hardly have been assumed; they were in desperate and deadly earnest; so he thanked the stars which had brought him into active connection with an important crime, and gave his mind strictly to the business in hand. Several knotty points demanded careful if speedy decision. The chased automobile might prove to be an innocent vehicle, driven by a chauffeur above suspicion; and if its owner appeared in the guise of some highly influential person, he, the roundsman, might be called to sharp account for exceeding his duty in making an arrest, or, if he stopped short of that

extreme course, in conducting an offensive inquiry.

Brodie took his instructions literally, and the distance between the two cars was diminishing sensibly. It seemed, too, as though the driver of the gray car slackened pace after passing Twenty-Seventh Street, although Fifth Avenue was fairly clear of traffic, which, such as it was, consisted mainly of motors going up-town—that is to say, in the same direction as pursued and pursuer.

At Thirty-Fourth Street came a check. A cross-town street-car caused the gray automobile to swerve rapidly in order to avoid a collision, and Brodie, a methodical person of law-abiding instincts, lost nearly fifty yards in allowing the street-car to pass.

"Whoever he may be, he is not going to make any unnecessary stops," commented the roundsman, fully alive to the significance of the incident, since ninety-nine drivers out of a hundred would have applied the brake and allowed the heavy public conveyance to get out of the way.

"Unless the Hungarian assassins of New York are bang up to date in the benzin part of their stock-in-trade, our car will make good in the next two blocks," said Devar over his shoulder.

And, indeed, it almost appeared that Brodie had heard what was said. He bent forward slightly, touched a few taps with skilled fingers, squared his shoulders, and set about the race with the air of a man who thought it had lasted long enough.

Nearing Forty-Second Street he had reduced the gap to little more than twice the length of the car, and the three men saw the number-plate clearly. Not only did the number differ, but it was of another series.

"That's a New Jersey car," announced the policeman.

"It may be a New Jersey number," Curtis corrected him, "but I still retain my belief that we are following the right man and the right car."

Just then no less than four cross-

town electric cars loomed into sight and completely blocked the avenue at its intersection with Forty-Second Street. The gray automobile had to pull up very quickly, and Brodie was compelled to execute a neat half-turn to clear the rear wheels. In the result, both cars halted side by side, but Curtis found himself just short of a position whence he could obtain a second look at the suspected man.

The policeman had bent low in his seat, lest his uniform should be seen; but he, like his companions, gave a sharp glance into the interior of the other car. It was empty.

He was seated on the near side, however, and he noticed that the lower panel behind the door had been cleaned since the remainder of the paint-work was touched, and the step bore signs of a recent washing.

Devar lowered one of the front sashes a couple of inches.

"Don't look round, Arthur," he said in a low tone, "and don't take any notice of the chauffeur, but creep forward a foot or two, and then let him go ahead again."

Brodie sat like a sphinx, and apparently did nothing, yet the car moved. Sacrificing himself, Roundsman McCulloch fell back into his corner, and left the window clear for Curtis.

"Well?" he inquired, and, surfeited though he might be with New York sensations, the others were conscious of just a hint of excitement in his voice.

"That is Anatole, I am nearly sure," said Curtis.

"Why not jump out and grab him now?" suggested Devar.

"Do you gentlemen mind following him for a time?" asked the policeman.

"No; I'm game for anything. And you, Curtis?"

"Oh, I feel ready to start the night all over again!"

The street-cars went on, and the gray automobile darted through the first possible opening.

"You see, it is this way," explained

the official. "I am prepared to arrest the man on Mr. Curtis's evidence, because I couldn't have better testimony than that of the chief witness. But I've been chewing on this thing for the past few minutes, and it strikes me that we gain nothing by acting in a hurry. You may be sure that this fellow, even if he is the person we want, will deny it, and a day or two may be lost in proving his identity, or collecting facts which would support the theory that he was the chauffeur connected with the crime.

"Now, if we let him go on, we shall certainly have a better hold over him. We'll find out his destination—perhaps secure a very useful address, or, with real luck, discover that he is keeping a fixture with some other individual."

"In a word, we must watch and pray," said Devar.

"Well, we can wait and see, anyhow," said the practical-minded McCulloch.

His counsel sounded good, and the others agreed with him, thereby letting themselves and the patient Brodie in for some remarkable developments in a pursuit which began by a simple coincidence, and was destined to end in a manner which none of them dreamed of.

Devar opened the window again.

"Arthur," he said, "did you happen to notice whether or not that fellow is carrying a reflector?"

"Yes, sir. He has one. I saw him looking into it when I drew alongside."

"Ah, that puts a different complexion on the affair, as the young man said when he kissed his best girl and tasted Somebody's Beauty Powder. Don't press, Arthur. Just keep him in sight till I consult the law."

As the outcome of a hurried discussion, Brodie received a fresh mandate. During the straightaway run he was not to approach the gray car nearer than sixty yards or thereabouts—in effect, remaining within the same block if possible, but, if the gray car stopped

in front of any dwelling, he was to slacken speed and pass it, taking the middle of the road, and holding himself in instant readiness to halt or turn as directed.

"By the way, how are you fixed for petrol?" added Devar.

"I filled the tanks, sir, before leaving the garage. We're good for the trip to Albany and back."

Brodie's tone was quite cheerful. He, too, had been reviewing the situation, and the presence of a uniformed policeman had dispelled the last shred of suspicion that some stupid joke had been worked off outside the police headquarters when a fearsome-looking tough was introduced to him as the chief of the New York detective bureau.

Devar was about to congratulate the roundsman on the prospect of an all-night journey if Brodie's chance phrase were fated to come true, when he glanced at Curtis, and elected to remain silent. They were passing the Plaza Hotel, and his friend was peering up at its square white bulk. Obviously, he was striving to locate Hermione's room. Most probably he failed, for it is no easy matter to pick out the windows of any particular set of rooms in a huge building while rushing along at twenty-five or more miles an hour.

Further, it was now past one o'clock in the morning, and most respectable people were in bed, so the solemn mass of the hotel was enlivened by very few rectangles of light.

But Curtis fancied, as did Devar also, that the illuminated blinds of three windows on the second floor might possibly be those of Suite F, and each wondered, if the surmise were correct, why her ladyship was remaining up so late.

Devar resolved to say nothing; but Curtis felt that he must talk, if only for the sake of hearing his own voice. Usually a man of taciturn habit, the outcome of long vigils among an alien and often hostile race in a semicivi-

lized land, he had gone through so much during the five and a half hours which had unfolded their marvels since he quitted the dining-room of the Central Hotel, that he ached for human sympathy, even in a trivial matter of this sort.

"I thought I saw a light in my wife's rooms," he said.

"As you mention it, so did I," agreed Devar.

"I hope she is not awaiting my return?"

"Perhaps she is anxious about you?"

"But why?"

"Women are given that way. She knows you went out with Steingall, and he is a dangerous character."

"Is Mrs. Curtis staying in the Plaza?" asked the puzzled McCulloch.

"Yes."

"But I thought you occupied a room at the Central Hotel in Twenty-Seventh Street?"

"I did; but I got married at half past eight, and we went to the Plaza."

"Married at half past eight — just after the murder!" The policeman's words formed a crescendo of sheer surprise. For some indefinable reason this curious conjunction of a crime and a wedding went beyond his comprehension.

"Yes, it happened so. It might have been avoided; yet, looking back now over the whole of the circumstances, it would appear that I have followed a beaten track inevitable as death."

Of course, the roundsman could not grasp the somber thought underlying Curtis's words, but a species of indeterminate suspicion prompted his next question.

"You came from the Plaza with Mr. Steingall, I believe, sir?"

"Yes. We were having supper there with Mr. Devar and my uncle and aunt, when Mr. Clancy rang him up on the telephone, and he invited us to accompany him to the police headquarters. The rest you know."

Certainly, the explanation sounded quite satisfactory. The attitude of these two young men and their chauffeur was perfectly correct, and the policeman's views had been strengthened materially by the telltale tokens he had noted on the gray car, which, however, he had not thought fit to mention. If Steingall had attended the supper in the Plaza he must have convinced himself that there was nothing unusual, or, at any rate, doubtful, about the queer fact that a man who was mixed up in a remarkable murder should have gone straight from the scene of the tragedy and got married.

Just to dispel a little of the mist that befogged his brain, he waited a while and then said:

"Which side of the car was opposite the doorway when those two men attacked Mr. Hunter?"

"The left. The car had entered the street from Broadway."

"Why do you ask?" inquired Devar, instantly alive to the queerness of this alteration of topics.

"My mind went back to the job we have in hand," said the roundsman readily. "I was wondering just what sort of glimpse Mr. Curtis obtained of the chauffeur. Of course, I see now that he was looking at the man exactly under similar conditions when we made that stop at Forty-Second Street."

Thus, unknown to either of the parties to the alliance, a minor crisis was averted, because it may safely be conceded that the hard-headed policeman would have refused then and there to accept any sort of statement from such a lunatic as John Delancy Curtis if he were given a full, true, and particular account of the night's proceedings while being whirled up Fifth Avenue in a fast-moving automobile.

Romance, if it is to be accepted without question, requires the setting of a comfortable armchair or tree-shaded nook in a summer garden. There, forgetting and forgotten by the world, man or maid may indeed be carried far

on the Magic Carpet of Tangu; but when served out by two strangers to a prosaic policeman seated in a humming car, and bound heaven knew whither long after midnight, it is apt to savor of the moon and witchcraft.

Away up the straight vista of Fifth Avenue sped the two cars. On the left lay the black solitude of Central Park, on the right the varied architecture of New York's millionaire dwellings.

Devar and the policeman talked cheerfully enough, but Curtis was wrapped in his own musings till the rear lamp of the gray car suddenly curved to the left and vanished.

"He has turned into the parkway at One Hundred and Tenth Street," said McCulloch; and Curtis awoke with a start to a sense of his surroundings.

"I suppose he's making for St. Nicholas Avenue," went on the roundsman.

"Why?" demanded Curtis, whose recollections of map study would have reminded him, in other conditions, that the avenue named by McCulloch is one of the few which slant across the city's rectangles.

"Well, sir, it's only a guess, but St. Nicholas Avenue is a short cut to Washington Heights, and cars often follow that route. Yes, there he goes!"

For an instant they caught a fleeting glimpse of Lenox Avenue, which runs parallel with Fifth, and then they were bowling along St. Nicholas Avenue. After a half-mile or less, they crossed Eighth Avenue at an acute angle, but the gray car kept steadily on, and soon was skirting St. Nicholas Park.

Thenceforth another mile and a half counted as little until the flying automobile gained the Harlem River Speedway. Here the pace improved. There was practically no traffic to interfere with progress now, and Brodie had to maintain an equable rate of forty miles an hour in order to keep within sight of his quarry.

At last, by way of Nagle and Amsterdam Avenues, they regained Broadway itself, at the point where its many

sinuosities end at the bridges over the Harlem River and Spuyten Duyvil Creek.

By this time McCulloch was undeniably anxious. Many a mile separated him from the busy activities of Madison Square and its surroundings, and the main roads of the State of New York were opening up their possibilities. Still, he was of Scotch-Irish stock, and even the most ardent Nationalist would be slow to maintain that the men from beyond the Boyne are what is popularly and tersely described as "quitters."

"I'd be better pleased if I had any sort of notion where that joker was heading for," he said, with a grim smile. "I didn't count on taking a joy-ride at this hour of the morning."

That was his sole concession to outraged official decorum. He accepted a cigar, and forthwith resigned himself to the exigencies of the chase, which lay not with him but with the dark and devious purposes of the sinister Anatole. The end, however, was nearer than any of them was now inclined to imagine. A rapid run along the main road through Yonkers brought them to Hastings and the bank of the Hudson River. The comparatively level grades of New York were replaced by hilly ground, and if they would avoid courting observation beyond any doubt of error it was essential that the gray car should be allowed greater latitude. In fact, it was almost demonstrable that an alert criminal like the man they were pursuing—if he really were the ally of Hunter's slayers—could hardly have failed to realize much earlier that he was being followed.

Moreover, being an expert motorist, he would know that the car in the rear could not only hold him in the race, but close up with him whenever its occupants were so minded. He would not be lulled into false security by the present widening of the gap, because that was an obvious maneuver due to altered circumstances. In a word, there was now no hope or prospect of run-

ning him to earth at a rendezvous; but giving him credit for the possession and use of a criminal's brains, it became urgent to overtake him and compel a halt by deliberately blocking the way.

They debated the point fully, and Devar was about to tell Brodie to act, when the gray car disappeared.

Not wishing to interfere at a critical moment, Devar drew back from the window. Brodie spurred down a hill and along a short level lined with suburban villas; he slowed to take a sharp corner, and the car ran along a winding lane which could lead nowhere but to the water's edge. It was pitch-dark, and a mist from the Hudson filled the valley. Common sense urged a careful pace, because it had never been possible to stop and adjust the powerful headlights, while the luminous haze of an occasional street lamp served only to reveal the narrowness of the road and the presence of shacks and warehouses.

The descent was fairly steep, so Brodie shut off the engine, and the big car crept on with a stealthy and noiseless rapidity which seemed to betoken an actual sense of danger.

Suddenly they heard a loud splash, accompanied by a muffled explosion, and McCulloch relieved his feelings by a few words, the use of which is expressly forbidden by the police manual. But their purport was ridiculously clear; the gray car had plunged into the Hudson, and who could tell whether or not Anatole had gone with it. Curtis was the first to adopt a definite line of reasoning; he assumed command now with the confidence of one accustomed to be in tight places and to depend on his own wits for extrication.

"Go forward slowly until the buildings stop, Brodie," he said, for the two front windows were lowered, and the three men were crowded at them. "That fellow knew exactly where he was going. When you pull up, light the acetylene lamps, and we will take the other pair and search the wharf

from which that car was shot into the stream."

Within a few yards the brakes went on with a jerk, and a tall crane loomed up vaguely in front. All four men sprang to the ground, and while the chauffeur busied himself with the big lamps Curtis and Devar disconnected the smaller ones.

They found themselves standing on a wooden quay, evidently used for the transshipment of building materials, and a quick scrutiny showed that the lane supplied the only practicable means of egress. Some gaunt sheds blocked one end of the wharf and piles of dressed stone cumbered the other. The tiny wavelets of the river murmured and gurgled amid the heavy piles which shored up the landing-place, and Devar's sharp eyes soon detected a corner of the limousine round which a ripple had formed.

In all probability the heated cylinders had burst when the water rushed in, and the explosion had tilted the chassis, else the river, necessarily deep by the side of the quay, would have concealed the wreckage completely.

From out of the mist came a white glare. Brodie had set the lamps going, and now the square section of the submerged car became distinctly visible. A little to one side a barge was moored, and the policeman, who had produced a serviceable looking revolver, determined to search it.

A plank spanned the foot or so of interstice between the quay and the rough deck, and, in the flurry of the moment, the three men crossed without warning the chauffeur as to their movements. The squat craft had an open well amidships, but there were two covered-in ends, and McCulloch, taking one of the lamps, peered down into the nearest hatchway.

"If any one is below there, speak," he said, "or I give you warning that I shall shoot at sight."

There was no answer; he knelt down, lowered the lamp, and peered inside.

"Empty!" he announced. "Now for the other one."

He repeated the same tactics, but the cavity revealed no lurking form within. Naturally, his companions were absorbed in McCulloch's actions, because they knew that any instant a blinding sheet of flame might leap out of the darkness and a bullet send him prostrate and writhing. Of the three, Curtis was most inured to an environment that was unusual and weird, and he it was who first noticed that the barge was altering its position with regard to the white disks of light which the lamps of the automobile formed in the mist, and a splash caused by the falling plank confirmed his frenzied doubt.

One glance showed what had happened. Already they were ten or twelve feet from the quay, which stood fully two feet above the deck of the barge. Even while the fantastic notion flashed through his mind, a shoreward jump barely achievable by a first-rate athlete became a sheer impossibility.

"Good Lord!" he cried, almost laughing with vexation. "The barge has been cast off from her moorings!"

Devar and McCulloch greeted the discovery with appropriate remarks, but the situation called for deeds rather than words. The cumbrous craft was swinging gaily out into the stream, displaying a light-hearted energy and ease of motion which would certainly not have been forthcoming had it been the object of her unwilling crew to get her under way.

The whereabouts of Brodie and the automobile were still vaguely discernible by two fast converging luminous circles now some twenty yards distant, and the fact was painfully borne in on them that in another few seconds this landmark would be swallowed in a sea of mist and swirling waters.

Curtis, accustomed to the vagaries of Chinese junks in the swift currents of the Yang-tse-Kiang, adopted the only measures which promised any degree of success. He ran to the helm,

which had been lashed on the starboard side to keep it from fouling any submerged piles near the bank. Casting it loose, he put it hard aport, and shouted to the policeman and Devar to bring a couple of boards from the floor of the well, and use them to sheer in the hulk to the bank.

The night was pitch-dark, the mist fell on them like an impenetrable veil, and the wooded heights which dominated both banks of the river prevented any ray of light from coming to their assistance. Still, they had two lamps, which at least enabled them to see each other, and Curtis could judge with reasonable accuracy of the direction they were taking by the set of the stream. They seemed to have been toiling a weary time before the helmsman fancied he could see something looming out of the void.

He believed that, however slowly, they were surely forging inshore again, and was about to ask Devar to abandon his valiant efforts to convert a long plank into a paddle and go forward in order to keep a lookout, when the barge crashed heavily into the stern of a ship of some sort, and simultaneously bumped into a wharf. The noise was terrific, coming so unexpectedly out of the silence, and their argosy careened dangerously under some obstruction forward.

No orders were needed now. They scrambled ashore, abandoning one of the lamps in their desperate hurry, and the policeman instantly extinguished the light of the other by pressing the glass closely to his breast when a rumble of curses heralded the coming on deck of two men who had been aroused from sleep on board the vessel by the thunderous onset of the colliding barge.

CHAPTER XII.

2:30 A.M.

FEW men or women of sympathetic nature, and gifted with ordinary powers of observation, can go through

life without learning, at some time or other in the course of their careers, that circumstances wholly beyond human control can display on occasion a fiendish faculty of converting patent honesty into apparent dishonesty—and that which is true of motive holds equally good in the case of conduct.

The three men standing breathless and unmoved on some unknown wharf on the left bank of the Hudson might fairly be described as superlatively honest persons, nor had they done any act which could be construed as wrongful by the most captious critic; yet McCulloch's concealment of the lamp suggested something thievish and illicit, and, though he alone could give a valid reason for exercising extreme discretion, because he realized, better than the others, what a choice morsel this adventure would supply to the press if ever it became known, both Curtis and Devar listened like himself with bated breath to the oaths and ejaculations which came from the after part of the moored vessel.

"Howly war!" cried one of the startled crew. "See what's butted into us—the divvle's own battherin'-ram av a scow, an' wid an ilegant lanthern shtuck on her mangy hide, if ye plaze."

A ship's lamp bobbed up and down in the gloom, and another voice said gruffly:

"Mighty good job we had those fenders out, or she would have knocked a hole in us. She seems to be wedged in good and hard under our mooring rope; but shin over, Pat, an' make her fast. Somebody owns the brute, an' there'll be damages to pay for this, an' p'r'aps salvage as well."

The Irishman dropped down into the barge. The silent trio on the quay heard him walking to the lamp, and saw its dull orb of radiance lifted from the deck.

"Begob, but this is a bit of a fairy tale," came the comment. "Here is none o' yer tin-cint Standard Ile prapositions, but a rale dandy uv a lamp, fit for a lady's cabin on Vandherbilt's

yacht. An', for the luv o' Hiven, look at the make uv it, wid a handle where the bottom ought to be, an' all polished up like the pewther in Casey's saloon."

"Oh, get a move on, Pat, an' tie her up," said the other voice. "It's the Lord knows what o'clock, an' we've a long day before us to-morrow."

The lamp moved astern, and the Irishman investigated matters further.

"There's bin black wur-rk here, George," he shouted. "The moorin' rope nivver bruk. It was cut."

A sharp hiss of breath between McCulloch's teeth betrayed the stress of his emotions. To think that he, a smart roundsman of the Broadway squad, should have been bested so thoroughly by a miserable alien chauffeur! The man had merely slipped over the edge of the quay, and clung like a limpet to the rough balks of timber which faced it; when his pursuers were safely disposed of on board the barge, one cut of a sharp knife had sent them adrift by the stern, while the forward rope, released of any strain, had probably uncoiled itself from a stanchion with the diabolical ingenuity which inanimate objects can display at unlooked-for moments.

"Fling a coil uv line here," continued the speaker. "This fag ind is no good, at all at all."

The thud of a falling rope, and various grunts and comments from the Irishman, showed that the barge was being secured. Still the three waited. The primary display of secrecy, the instinct to remain unseen, had passed, but there was nothing to be gained by entering into a long and difficult explanation with the ship's hands, while it would be a simple matter to recoup the owner of the barge for any charge which might be levied on him for injury to the vessel, provided the liability rested with him and not with others.

Swearing and grumbling, Pat stumbled along the quay, carrying the lamp. He passed within a few feet of the motionless group, and soon they

heard him and his mate descending the companionway to their bunks.

"Now for a light," said the policeman; "and let's get out of this!"

Taking heed not to turn the lamp toward the ship, lest their movements should be overheard and a head pop up out of the hatch, he led the way quietly to the rear of the wharf. A rough road climbed the hill to the left, and, as this direction offered the only probable means of regaining the car, they took it.

After a long climb they reached a better road, which ultimately brought them into a main thoroughfare. Then Curtis bethought him of looking at his watch, and was astonished to find that the hour was half past two o'clock.

"By Jove!" he cried. "We must have consumed fully half an hour over that trip. I wonder whether your man has waited, Devar; or would he give us up as lost, and go home?"

"What! Arthur return alone, and tell my aunt that the last he saw of me I was adrift on the Hudson River in a barge with a policeman and a swashbuckler from Peking? Not much!"

"I hope you are right, sir," said McCulloch. "Even when we reach New York I must trouble you two gentlemen to come to the station-house and report the whole affair, as I was due there an hour ago, and the entire precinct will have been scoured for news of me by this time."

Devar laughed loudly.

"I don't want to alarm you, McCulloch—not that you are of the neurotic habit, judging by the way you took a chance of having a hole bored through you while searching that blessed barge—but if you believe you can frame a cut-and-dried program during the time you have retained John D. Curtis's services as guide, philosopher, and friend, you are hugging a delusion. I started out from a happy home last evening, intending to pick up a friendless stranger and show him the orthodox sights of New York.

"Gee whiz! Look at me now! I missed John D. by a few minutes, but found myself gaping with the crowd at the scene of a murder in which he had figured heavily. Since then I have helped to break open hotel doors, discovered a villain tied and gagged by other villains, stood on my head in Morris Siegelman's joint, started a riot in East Broadway, helped a detective to commit a larceny, checked a British lord, and scoffed at a Hungarian prince, to say nothing of the present racket. So don't you go making plans for the night yet a while. McCulloch, because John D. will keep you busy without any call for you exercising your brain cells in that respect."

The roundsman did not try to grasp the inner significance of this rigmale. He was unfeignedly glad to have escaped from an awkward predicament.

"Anyhow," he said briefly, "if it comes to the worst I can ring up my captain from the nearest station-house, and at least he will know where I am."

"Don't be too sure of that, either. Suppose you had phoned your captain before you went on board the barge, would he be any the wiser now? Just to prove the exceeding wisdom of my remarks, do you know where you are at the present moment? Because I don't."

The policeman stopped short, and gazed ahead with a new anxiety. The mist was thinner here, and pin-points of light from a row of lamps showed in a straight line for a considerable distance. For an instant there was an embarrassed pause, because all three failed to remember covering any similar stretch of level road after descending the hill and turning into the lane leading to the Hudson.

"Did you notice a few minutes since that a low wall bounded the road on both sides?" said Curtis, breaking a somewhat strained silence.

Yes, each had seen it.

"Well, I am inclined to believe," he

went on, "that that wall formed part of an accommodation bridge, under which the car passed in the dark without our being aware of it. Indeed, I feel confident that if we turn back along this main road, we shall meet our lane on the right, and about three hundred yards from this very point."

They agreed to make the experiment, and Devar grinned broadly when the lane presented itself exactly as Curtis had predicted.

"What did I tell you?" he cackled to the roundsman. "John D. is a Chinese necromancer. I'm getting used to his tricks, and you will catch the habit in another hour or two. By four o'clock you won't be the least bit surprised if you find yourself flying across the New Jersey flats in an aeroplane, or having a cup of hot coffee on board the pilot steamer off Sandy Hook."

"I'll risk either of those unlikely things, sir, if we find your car where we left it."

They stepped out briskly. When all was said and done, none of the three wished to be stranded in some unknown byway of Westchester County at that ungodly hour, and their relief was great when the stark outline of the crane became visible in an otherwise impenetrable wall of darkness.

"By Jove! The car is here all right," crowed Devar joyously.

In the next few strides the automobile came in sight, the blaze of its headlights casting a cheerful glow over the wharf. Brodie was standing where the barge had been moored, and gazing blankly at the river; he turned when he heard their footsteps and ran quickly to the car.

"It's O. K., Arthur," cried Devar, realizing that the chauffeur might be dreading an attack from the rear; "little Willie has returned, and won't go boating again in a derelict barge at two o'clock in the morning if he can help it."

"Oh, it's you, sir!" came the answer in a tone of vast relief. "My, but I'm glad to see you! I didn't know,

what to do. I thought you were safe enough, because I heard your voices as you drifted away, and I fancied you might make the shore again lower down, but it seemed to be a hopeless job to go in search of you, so, after things had calmed down a bit, I decided to stop right here."

After the first gasp of excitement there had crept into the placid Brodie's voice a note of quiet jubilation which hinted at developments.

"Did anything happen after we sailed away?" asked Devar.

"Did you see any one?" demanded the policeman.

"Things were quiet as the grave for quite a time after you gentlemen disappeared," said Brodie, speaking with the unctuous slowness of a man who has been vouchsafed the opportunity of his life and has grabbed it with both hands.

"Something *did* occur, then?" put in Devar impatiently.

"Nothing to speak of, sir—at first," came the irritating answer. "I watched you go on board the barge, and I noticed her edging out into the river, and it was easy enough to know that none of you had cast her off, because what you said showed that you were even more surprised than I was. So, sez I to meself, 'Arthur, me boy, barges don't untie themselves from wharfs in that casual sort of way, and at just the right minute, too, for any one who wanted to dispose of a cop,' begging your pardon, Mr. Policeman, but that was the line of argument I had with meself."

"Try the accelerator, Arthur," groaned Devar.

"If ever I meet with a bit of an accident, sir, I always pull up and plan the wheel-marks; I carry a tape for the purpose, and it saves a lot of hard swearing in court afterward." Brodie spoke seriously, and Devar vowed that he would interrupt no more, since he merely succeeded in stimulating the man's torpid wits.

Even now the chauffeur waited to

allow his philosophy to sink into minds which might prove unreceptive. Finding that there was no likelihood of debate, he went on:

"It struck me, too, that a feller who didn't hesitate about shoving a good car into a river must be a rank tough, the kind of character who would jump at the chance of plugging me with a bullet or two, for that matter, and hiking off with the car, without anybody being the wiser, so I nipped out from behind the wheel, and, taking care to keep away from the light, crept in behind that pile of rock there," and he nodded to the mass of dressed stone which filled one end of the wharf.

He waited, as though to make sure that they appreciated his generalship. Devar's teeth grated, and McCulloch stirred uneasily, but no one spoke.

"You'll notice that it is only a few feet away," he said, measuring the distance with a thoughtful eye, "but, to make sure of reaching anybody who might try to monkey with the car, I groped around until I had found two half bricks. Then I waited. By that time, which was really less than it takes me to tell you about it, there wasn't a sound to be heard but the lapping of the river. The last thing I heard you say, Mr. Howard, was—"

"I used language which no self-respecting chauffeur could possibly repeat," broke in Devar despairingly.

"That's as may be, sir. Circumstances alter cases, as you will see before I've done. Well, I listened to the river, which resembled nothing in all the world so much as the sobbing of a child, but no one stirred for such a time that I began to feel stiff, and I was thinking that I might be acting like a fool for my pains when a head popped up over the edge of the wharf."

Obviously, this sentence demanded a dramatic pause, and Brodie knew his business. Perhaps he expected cries of horror from his audience, but none was forthcoming, so, with a sigh, he continued:

"That cured the stiffness, gentlemen, I can assure you. I balanced one of the half bricks in my left hand—I'm a left-handed man in many things—and watched the head, while it was easy to see that the head watched the car. 'Now,' sez I to meself, 'that's the whelp who mistreated a car which had served him well, and he's reckoning in his own mind that my car would suit his needs just as well as the one he has lost.'

"I do believe I read that man's mind correctly. He might have said out loud: 'That party of sports were mutts. They're all aboard the Hudson River liner, chauffeur and all.' I beg your pardon, gentlemen, if I have put it awkwardly, but I am sort of feeling my way toward the feller's sentiments—groping in the dark, as you might say."

Notwithstanding his effort at self-restraint, Devar felt that he must speak or explode.

"Go right ahead, Arthur," he said. "Explain the position thoroughly. The fog is lifting, and we have heaps of time before sunrise."

"The whole affair is a mighty queer business, sir," said Brodie seriously. "The roundsman here will tell you how careful one has to be in such matters. I have had a law case or two in my time, and them lawyers turn you inside out if you begin romancing. For instance, what I've just told you isn't evidence. The man said nothing; neither did I. We played a fine game of cat and mouse, only it happened that I was the cat. . . . Well, it is getting late, so I'll get on with the story."

"The head didn't budge for quite a while, but at last it made a move, and soon the identical chauffeur who hit up the pace from Twenty-Third Street climbed onto the wharf and dodged in behind the crane. He had something in his right hand, too, that I didn't like the look of, so I gripped my chunk of brick mighty hard. This time he didn't wait so long, but crept

forward like a stage murderer, peeping this way and that, but making for the car.

"Once he looked straight at where I was crouching, and I was scared stiff, because a brick ain't any fair match—for one of them new-fangled pistols at six yards or so; but I guess he was a bit nervy himself, and he didn't make out anything unusual in my direction. Then he dodged right round the car to the back, and returned on the side nearest to me. I suppose he reckoned all was safe by that time, so he took hold of the crank and began to start the engine. 'Now or never!' says I to meself, so up I gets, and my knee joints cracked like—well, they cracked so loud that only the turning of the crank stopped him from hearing them.

"With that, I let drive with the half brick, and caught him square in the small of the back. Down he went with a yell, and me on top of him. I had the second half brick ready to batter his skull in if he showed fight, but the first one had laid him out sufficient for my purpose, which was to get hold of this."

Brodie's hand dived into a pocket and he produced a particularly vicious-looking automatic pistol.

Then McCulloch said imperatively: "You've got him. Where is he?"

Brodie was really an artist. Some men would have smirked with triumph, but he merely jerked a thumb casually toward the automobile.

"In there!" he said.

The policeman ran to a door and wrenched it open. He turned the rays of the lamp which he still held in his hand on to a figure, lying kneeling on the floor in an extraordinary attitude. From a white face a pair of gleaming eyes met his in a glance of hate and fear, but no words came from the thin lips set in a line, and a moment's scrutiny showed that the captive was bound hand and foot. Indeed, hands and feet were fastened together with a stout cord, which had

been passed around the man's neck subsequently, so that he was in some danger of suffocation if he endeavored to wriggle loose, or even straighten his back, which was bent over his heels.

"He's all right," said Brodie, who had strolled leisurely after the others. "I told him I was taking no chances, and was compelled to make him uncomfortable, but that he wouldn't choke if he kept quiet. Of course, he has had a rather trying wait, but I couldn't help that, could I?"

"We give you best," growled McCulloch. "Did you stiffen him with the half brick, then, that you were able to hunt around for a rope?"

"That helped some, but I also remarked that, if he moved, this toy of his would surely go off by accident, and he seemed to think it might hurt."

McCulloch held the lamp close to the livid, twisted face.

"Is this Anatole?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes," said Curtis, with instant appreciation of his adroitness.

They were rewarded by the scowl which convulsed the masklike face, and terror set its unmistakable seal there. A harsh metallic voice came from the huddled-up form.

"Cut this d—d rope, and let me stand on my feet!"

"There's no special hurry," said the policeman coolly. "We won't object to making things more pleasant for you if you promise to take us straight to your Hungarian friends."

Again that wave of dread which betokens the quailing heart of the detected felon swept over the man's features, but he only swore again, and protested that they had no right to torture him.

McCulloch saw that he had to deal with a hardened criminal, from whom no conscience-stricken confession would be forthcoming. He gave the lamp to Curtis, stooped, and lifted the prisoner out on to the ground. Untying the rope, except at the man's ankles, he brought the listless hands in front,

and placed a pair of handcuffs on the wrists.

"Now," he said, "if you have any sense left, you'll keep quiet and enjoy the ride back to New York."

"Why am I arrested? I have a right to know?" The words were yelped at him rather than spoken.

"All in good time. Anatole. You'll have everything explained to you fair and square."

"That is not my name. That's a Frenchman's name."

"It fitted you all right in 'Twenty-Seventh Street a few hours ago."

"I was not there. I can prove it."

"Of course you can. You'd be a poor sort of crook if you couldn't. But what's this?" the roundsman had found some letters and a pocketbook in an inner pocket of the chauffeur's closely buttoned jacket—"M. Anatole Labergerie, care of Morris Siegelman, saloon-keeper, East Broadway, N. Y.," he said. "You know some one named Anatole, anyhow, so we are warm, as the kids say," he went on sarcastically.

"I say nothing. I admit nothing. I demand the presence of a lawyer," was the defiant reply.

"You'll see a heap of lawyers before the State of New York has no further use for you. Now, I'll take you to a nice, quiet hotel for the night. In with you. Mind the step. Let me give you a friendly hand. No, that seat, if you please, close up in the corner. I'll go next. Mr. Curtis, you don't object to being squeezed a little, I'm sure, though the three of us will crowd the back seat, and if the gentleman who says nothing and admits nothing will only change his mind, and tell us exactly how he has spent a rather exciting evening, the story will help pass the journey quite pleasantly."

But Anatole Labergerie, whose accent was that of a Frenchman with a very complete knowledge of English, had evidently determined on a policy of silence, and no word crossed his lips during the greater part of the long run to the police station-house in Thirtieth

Street, in which precinct, the 'Twenty-third, the murder had occurred, and to which McCulloch was attached.

His presence in the car acted as an effectual damper on conversation in so far as Curtis and Devar were concerned. If their suspicions were justified, he was a principal in an atrocious crime, and mere propinquity with such a wretch induced a feeling of loathing comparable only with that shrinking from physical contact to which mankind yields when confronted with leprosy in its final forbidding form.

But McCulloch was jubilant. He regarded his prisoner with the almost friendly interest taken in his quarry by the slayer of wild beasts to whose rifle has fallen some peculiarly rare and dangerous "specimen." He enlivened the road with anecdotes of famous criminals, and each story invariably concluded with a feigning reference to the "chair" or a "lifer."

Once or twice he gave details of the breaking up of some notorious gang owing to information extracted from one of its minor members, who, in consequence, either escaped punishment or received a light sentence; but the captive remained mute and apparently indifferent, whereupon Curtis, who had been revolving in his mind certain elements in a singularly complex mystery, broke fresh ground by saying:

"The strangest feature of this affair is probably unknown to you, Mr. McCulloch. To all intents and purposes, the men who killed the journalist were acting in concert with a Frenchman named Jean de Courtois, and their common object was to prevent a marriage arranged for last night. Yet this same De Courtois was found gagged and bound in his room at the Central Hotel shortly before midnight. Some one had maltreated him badly, and the wonder is he was not killed outright."

Now, the roundsman, wedged close against the prisoner, felt the man give an almost unconscious and quite involuntary start when De Courtois was

mentioned, and there could be no question that he was straining his ears to catch each syllable Curtis uttered.

Nudging the latter, McCulloch said:

"So it was a near thing that two weddings were not interfered with last night, sir?"

"No, not two—only one. I married the lady."

"You did!"

The policeman's undoubted bewilderment was convincingly genuine, but, despite his surprise, he was alert to catch the slightest move or sign of emotion on the part of the captive.

"Yes," said Curtis. "I married her before half past eight."

"Then you must have possessed some knowledge of the parties mixed up in this business?"

"No, not in the sense you have in mind. I cannot supply full particulars now, but you will learn them in due course. The point I wish to emphasize is this—poor Mr. Hunter's death was absolutely needless. I imagine he only came into connection with the intrigue by exercising the journalistic instinct to obtain exclusive details of a sensational news item which involved several distinguished people. The miserable tools employed by men who wished to gain their own ends were not even true to each other, and they undoubtedly attacked Hunter by error."

"Did they mean to kill you, then?"

"Oh, no. They had never heard of me. I dropped from the skies, or the nearest thing to it, since I was on the Atlantic at this hour yesterday."

McCulloch was aware that the Frenchman had been profoundly disturbed by Curtis's statements, and kept the ball rolling. That name, De Courtois, seemed to supply the clue to the man's agitation, so he harped on it.

"Has Mr. Steingall seen De Courtois?" he asked.

"Yes. Mr. Devar and I accompanied him to De Courtois's room, and set the rascal free."

"That settles it," said the roundsman emphatically. "If the man with

the camera eye has looked De Courtois over it is all up with the whole bunch. Are you listening, Anatole? This should be real lively hearing for you."

"M. de Courtois is a friend of mine," came the sullen response.

"Oh, is he? Then you do know something about events in Twenty-Seventh Street, eh?"

"I tell you nothing, but why should I deny that I know M. de Courtois?"

"Or that you are a Frenchman," put in Curtis quietly. "One of the few words in the French language which no foreigner can ever pronounce is that word '*monsieur*,' especially when it is followed by a '*de*.' I speak French well enough to realize my limitations."

"Now, Anatole, cough it up," said McCulloch jocularly. "You've no more chance of winning through than a chunk of ice in hell's flames."

"Let me alone; I'm tired," said the other, relapsing into a stony inattention which did not end even when Brodie brought the car to a stand outside the police station-house in West Thirtieth Street.

The advent of the roundsman with a prisoner and escort created some commotion among his colleagues. The police captain was the same official who had harbored suspicion against Curtis not so many hours ago, and his opinion was not entirely changed, only modified.

He glanced darkly at Curtis and Devar, but was manifestly cheered by sight of McCulloch with a chauffeur in custody.

"Hello!" he cried. "And where in Hades have you been?"

"A long way from home, Mr. Evans," said the roundsman. "But it was worth while. This is Anatole, whose other name is Labergerie, the man wanted for the murder in Twenty-Seventh Street."

"The deuce it is! Where did you get him?"

"Away up beyond Yonkers."

"Hold on a minute."

He swung round quickly to a telephone and called up headquarters.

"Hello, there!" he said, when an answer came. "Mr. Steingall or Mr. Clancy in? Both? Well, put me through. That you, Mr. Steingall? I'm Evans, Twenty-Third Precinct. Sergeant McCulloch has just arrived with a prisoner—the chauffeur, Anatole; and Mr. Curtis is here, too. Anatole Labergerie is the full name."

Some conversation followed. The others could hear the peculiar rasping sound of a voice otherwise undistinguishable, but it was evident that the police captain was greatly puzzled. At last he beckoned to Curtis.

"You're wanted," he said laconically.

Curtis went to the instrument, and Steingall's rather amused tone was soon explicable.

"There's a screw loose somewhere," he said. "Anatole Labergerie is a respectable garage-keeper. I know him well. Half an hour ago I called him out of bed, chiefly on account of his front name, and he told me that Mr. Hunter hired a car from him last evening, but never showed up at the appointed place and time, and the chauffeur brought the car back to the garage to wait further orders."

"I have no wish to traduce Anatole Labergerie," said Curtis, "but I am quite sure that the man under arrest is the driver of the car in which the Hungarians made off. He has admitted, too, that Jean de Courtois is his friend."

A low whistle revealed Steingall's revised view of the situation.

"Don't go away," he said. "Clancy and I will be with you in less than a quarter of an hour."

Curtis hung up the receiver and announced the new development. The Frenchman did not betray any cognizance of it. He had collapsed into a chair, and looked the degenerate that he was.

But Devar slapped McCulloch's broad shoulders.

"Didn't I tell you?" he cried. "There's a whole lot of night ahead of us yet. Gee whiz! I'll write a book before I'm through with this!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Lady Hermione "Acts for the Best."

A DEJECTED and disheveled super-clerk was called on to face a new crisis soon after he had apparently got rid of most of the persons concerned in the pandemonium which had raged for hours around that refuge of middle-class decorum and respectability, the Central Hotel in Twenty-Seventh Street.

As he was wont to explain in later days of blessed peacefulness:

"The queerest part of the whole business was that I never had the slightest notion as to what was going to happen next. Everything occurred like a flash of lightning, and imitated lightning by never striking twice in the same place."

It was not to be expected that a man of the Earl of Valletort's social standing and experience would allow himself to be brow-beaten by a police official and an uncertain miscellany of people like Devar and the members of the Curtis family. When the cool night air had tempered his indignation, and he was removed from the electrical atmosphere created by his son-in-law's positive disdain and Steingall's negative indifference, he began to survey the situation.

Though not wholly a stranger in New York, he was far from being versed in the technicalities of legal and police methods, so he bethought him of securing skilled advice. The hour was late, but the fact merely presented a difficulty which was not insuperable to a person of even average intelligence. He turned into an imposing-looking hotel on Broadway, produced his card, and asked for the manager.

An affable Swiss hurried forward,

thinking that his house was about to earn new laurels; if somewhat surprised by the earl's explanation that he was in need of a lawyer of repute, and had applied to the proprietor of an important hotel as one most likely to further the quest, he responded with prompt civility.

"There are several lawyers guests in the hotel at this moment, my lord," he said. "Each is a notable man in one branch of practise or another. May I ask if you want advice in a matter of real estate, or some commercial claim, or a criminal charge?"

"The latter, in a sense," said the earl. "A relative of mine has contracted a marriage under conditions which are illegal, or, at any rate, most irregular."

The Swiss stroked his chin.

"Mr. Otto Schmidt has just concluded a remarkable nullity of marriage suit," he pondered.

"Just the man for my purpose. Is he in?"

Within five minutes the earl was closeted with Mr. Otto Schmidt in the latter's private sitting-room. The lawyer was a short man, who bore a remarkable physical resemblance to an egg. Head, rotund body, and immensely fat legs tapering to very small feet, formed a complete oval, while his ivory-tinted skin, and a curious crease running round forehead and ears beneath a scalp wholly devoid of hair, suggested that the egg had been boiled, and the top cut off and replaced.

But he showed presently that the ovum was sound in quality. He listened in absolute silence until his lordship had told his story. All things considered, the recital was essentially true.

There were suppressions of fact, such as the lack of any mention of collusion between the distraught father and Count Ladislav Vassilan on the one hand and Jean de Courtois on the other, and there were wholly unwarrantable imputations against Curtis's

character and attributes, but, on the whole, Mr. Schmidt was able, in his own phrase, "to size up the position" with fair accuracy.

Like every other man of common sense who became acquainted with the night's doings in a connected narrative, he began by expressing his astonishment.

"I have had some, singular cases to handle during a long and varied professional career," he said, and eyelids almost devoid of lashes dropped for an instant over a pair of dark and curiously piercing eyes, "but I have never heard of anything quite like this. You say the name of the detective who gave you the account of the murder, and of the connection of this John Delancy Curtis with it, is Steingall?"

"Yes."

Again the eyelids fell, and, as Mr. Schmidt's face was also devoid of eyebrows, and was colorless in its pallor, and as his lips met in a thin seam above a chin which merged in folds of soft flesh where his neck ought to be, his features at such a moment assumed the disagreeable aspect of a death mask, though this impression vanished when those brilliant eyes peered forth from their bulbous sockets.

"But I know Steingall," he said. "He is at the head of the New York detective bureau, a man of the highest reputation, and one who commands confidence in the courts, not to speak of his department."

"He struck me as an able man, but I am quite sure he has failed to appreciate the share this fellow, Curtis, has borne in the affair," said the earl testily.

"It seems to me that your daughter, Lady Hermione, could not possibly have been what is commonly described as 'in love' with De Courtois? Stupid as the comment may appear, I must search for a motive."

"My good sir, the notion is preposterous. I—I have reason to believe that she intended this marriage to serve as a shield, or cloak, for her own pur-

poses, which were, I regret to say, largely inspired by a stubborn resolve not to marry a man who is suitable as a husband in every way—by birth, social position, and distinguished prospects."

"Her own purposes. What does that mean exactly?"

"It means that she was contracting a marriage as a matter of form. Don't you see that this consideration, and this alone, made it possible for an impertinent outsider like Curtis to offer his services as De Courtois's substitute, while my misguided daughter was equally prepared to accept them?"

"Ah!"

The eyelids shut tightly once more, and the earl, feeling rather irritated and disturbed by this unpleasing habit, shifted his chair noisily. He found, however, that Mr. Schmidt merely kept the shutters down for a rather longer period than before, and, as the lawyer impressed him with a sense of power and ability, he resolved to put up with a peculiarity which was certainly disconcerting.

"May I ask if your daughter is what is popularly known as a pretty girl, my lord?" demanded Schmidt.

"Yes. She is remarkably good-looking, but—"

"Motive, my lord—motive. I was wondering why Curtis should behave like a thundering idiot. Now, apart from your natural dislike to the man, how would you describe him?"

"He looks a gentleman, and, under ordinary conditions, I would regard him as a social equal," admitted the earl.

"So, unfortunate as the circumstances may be, he is a more desirable *parti* than the French music-master?"

Then the noble lord flared into heat.

"Dash it all!" he cried. "You are almost as bad as that detective person. I am not bothering my brains as to Curtis's desirableness or otherwise, or comparing him with a worm like De Courtois. I want this marriage annulled. I want him arrested. I want

the aid of the law to extricate my daughter from the consequences of her own folly. Surely, such a marriage cannot be legal!"

Schmidt weighed the point from behind the veil, and an unemotional reply soothed his fiery client.

"The idea is, perhaps, untenable—almost repulsive," he said—"but the law on the matter is governed by so many differing decisions that I cannot express a reasoned opinion offhand. You see, the question of consideration intervenes. And—and—where is the lady now?"

"I don't know."

"You left Curtis at the Central Hotel?"

"Yes."

"In company with Steingall and two elderly Curtises, and young Devar?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you demand your daughter's present address?"

"I—I was so stunned by what I regarded as official sanction of an outrage that I came away in a fury."

Mr. Otto Schmidt rose, or, rather, raised his oblong shape from a slight incline on a chair to a horizontal position.

"Let us go to the hotel," he said.

"And there must be no more fury. Leave the inquiry in my hands, my lord, and it will be strange if I do not succeed in elucidating points which are now baffling us—in fact, I may say, inducing mental disturbance."

Thus it came to pass that Krantz, the reception-clerk at the Central Hotel, had just seen the doctor sent to dose De Courtois with bromid, leaving the building when the earl and Mr. Schmidt entered.

As it happened, the lawyer was known to him, Schmidt having had legal charge of the corporation which reconstructed the hotel, so it was impossible for an employee to be reticent with him about the matters which were discussed forthwith.

"Mr. Steingall gone?" inquired Schmidt affably.

"Yes, sir. He left here nearly half an hour ago," said the clerk, outwardly self-possessed, but wondering inwardly what new bomb would be exploded in his weary brain.

"This murder and its attendant circumstances constitute a very extraordinary affair," said the lawyer.

"Yes, sir."

Krantz was not deceived. He had answered some such remark a hundred times that evening, but he would surely be put on the rack in a moment by some fantastic disclosure which none save a lunatic would dream of.

"Now, about this Mr. John Delancy Curtis," purred Schmidt—"has it been ascertained beyond all doubt that he arrived in New York from Europe this evening?"

"I think so, sir," was the jaded answer. "The police are satisfied on that point, I believe, and he himself gave his last address as Peking."

"Peking!"

"Yes, sir."

Everybody was invariably astonished when they heard of Peking. Had Curtis described his recent residence as "the moon" it would have been regarded as only a degree more recondite.

"Then," said Schmidt, closing his eyes, "assuming he is the stranger he represents himself as being, he could have no personal connection with the murder of M. Jean de Courtois?"

There! Another comet had fallen in Twenty-Seventh Street. Krantz winced, as if the lawyer had struck him.

"Mr. de Courtois!" he gasped. "Who says he was murdered? He is—not very well, it is true, but for all that I can tell, he is sound asleep in bed at this minute."

"Sound asleep!" roared the earl, who had been most positive in his opinion that Curtis must have brought about the Frenchman's death for his own fell purpose.

Otto Schmidt laid a restraining hand on his lordship's shoulder.

"Steady now," he murmured. "Remember my instructions. The inquiry is committed to me for the time."

"But, confound it, man—"

"Yes, this is startling—this changes the whole aspect of the case. But you see the value of calm and judicious method."

The egg-shaped man was certainly entitled to take credit for the disclosure, and seldom failed to do so in many subsequent expositions to admiring friends of a singular case, but he never realized how thoroughly self-deluded the earl had been by the original blunder.

"But, sir," protested the clerk, "it was never supposed that Mr. de Courtois had been killed. No one knew who the poor gentleman was at first, because Mr. Curtis's overcoat and his had been accidentally exchanged in the flurry and excitement after the crime was committed. The police found the initials H. R. H. on his clothing, and that fact led to his being recognized as Mr. Henry R. Hunter, a well-known New York journalist. Had I seen him myself I would have settled that point in a moment, because he often came here to visit Mr. de Courtois."

"Indeed! That is very interesting, most decidedly interesting."

"Are you quite certain that what you are saying is correct? Mr. Hunter, the murdered man, was acquainted with M. de Courtois?"

The question came from the Earl of Valletort, whose angry bewilderment had suddenly given place to a gravity of demeanor that was significant of the serious complications involved in the clerk's statement.

Poor Krantz could have bitten his tongue for its too free wagging. He was thoroughly tired, and had intended to go to his room at the earliest moment and repair damages by a long night's rest. Now, to all appearance, he had unwittingly reopened the whole wretched imbroglio. But there was no

help for it. Having put his hand to the plow he was obliged to turn the furrow.

"Yes, my lord, positive," he said between his teeth.

"Ah!" Schmidt was beginning to think that the amazing marriage promised to develop into a *cause célèbre*. "In that event, it becomes essential—indeed, I may say imperative—that his lordship and I should interview M. de Courtois without delay."

"Sorry, sir," said the clerk, desperately availing himself of the detective's instructions, "but Mr. Steingall left orders that no one should be permitted to visit Mr. de Courtois to-night."

"Left orders? Is the man in this hotel?"

"Oh, yes, I was aware of that all the time," put in the earl. "He lived here; don't you see, that accounts for the mistake I made in assuming that—"

"Forgive me." The lawyer's monitory hand rose again, and he turned to the clerk. "You can hardly expect me, Mr. Krantz, to regard Mr. Steingall's 'orders' as in any way controlling my actions. Kindly show his lordship and me to M. de Courtois's room at once."

There was nothing for it but to obey. Krantz understood exactly how he would be jumped on and pulverized in the morning by irate stockholders in the hotel if any action of his should be adversely reported on by the great Otto Schmidt.

But the visit to De Courtois fizzled out unexpectedly. The Frenchman, still attired in evening dress, for that is the conventional wedding-attire of his race, was lying on the bed sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion supplemented by bromid. The two negro attendants, who were hoping for some more exciting experience, were squatted on the floor playing craps, and the strenuous efforts of Lord Valletort to arouse the slumberer were quite useless. But—and that was a vital thing—he had seen De Courtois, and

knew beyond doubt that he was alive and seemingly in good health, or, at any rate, physically uninjured.

"The man has been drugged," said the lawyer, watching the earl's unavailing attempt to awaken the Frenchman. "Is, by any chance, Mr. Curtis's room situated near this one?"

"It is just overhead," said the clerk.

"Dear me!"

Schmidt looked up at the ceiling as though his eyes might discern a trap-door. "Is Mr. Curtis there now?"

"No, sir."

"Where is he?"

"He went out with a Mr. Devar."

"Oh! Do you know where he went to?"

Krantz was tempted to prevaricate, but Schmidt was a power in the Central Hotel.

"I believe, sir, he is at the Plaza."

"A large hotel, near Central Park, is it not?" demanded the earl eagerly.

"My lord, pardon me." The lawyer was no believer in letting all the world into your secrets, and the clerk's manner showed that he was far from well posted in certain elements of the affair.

Valletort was for rushing forthwith off in a taxi to the Plaza; but Schmidt vetoed the notion. He shared the earl's conviction that Hermione would be discovered there, but, before meeting her, he wanted to obtain a great many particulars the lack of which in his client's earlier story his legal acumen had already scented.

So he drew the impatient nobleman into a quiet corner of the restaurant, and extracted from his unwilling lips certain details as to Count Vassilan and the marriage project which had not been forthcoming before.

Krantz seized the opportunity to call up Steingall on the telephone and told him something, not all, of what had occurred. He did not say that the earl and Schmidt had actually seen De Courtois, and suppressed any mention of his disclosure with reference to Cur-

tis's whereabouts, not that he wished to mislead the detective wilfully, but he felt that he had been indiscreet, and there was no need to proclaim the fact. Moreover, he had never heard Hermione's name mentioned, or he was gallant enough to have risked any trouble next day if a lady would be saved distress thereby.

Schmidt's lawyerlike caution was destined to have far-reaching effects on the night's history. It provided one of the minor rills of a torrent which was gaining irresistible momentum, and would submerge many people before its uncontrolled madness was exhausted. Had he yielded to the earl, and hurried to the Plaza at once, he would have met Curtis and Steingall there, and those two men might have diverted the bursting current of events into a new channel. But, naturally enough, he wanted to understand precisely where he stood. In a word, the egg was excellent in its constituents, but lacked the exuberant freshness of the newly laid article.

Hence, while the earl nearly choked with indignation at sight of that entry in the visitor's book at the Plaza—"Mr. and Lady Hermione Curtis, Peking"—mistress and maid were once more discussing the astounding things which had taken place since the moment when John Delancy Curtis rang the bell at Flat Ten in No. 1000 Fifty-Ninth Street.

"If only I knew how to act for the best!" wailed Hermione half tearfully. "I am afraid, Marcelle, I have been too egotistical—too much concerned about myself, I mean—and far too regardless of others. I have allowed Mr. Curtis to place himself in a dreadful position—"

"I'm sure, miladi, he doesn't think so," interrupted Marcelle breathlessly.

"That is the worst feature of it, to my thinking. He is making all the sacrifice."

"What! To get a wife like you, miladi!"

"I am *not* his wife."

"Well, you are not married like folk who go away for a honeymoon and find rice in their clothes every day for a week, but Mr. Curtis says, miladi, that you are his wife right enough in the eyes of the law, and I'm sure he admires you immensely already, so there's no telling—"

"Marcelle, do you imagine for one single instant that I would really marry any man who took me as a favor, who conferred an obligation on me, who came to my assistance in a moment of despair?"

"No, miladi, not if he thought those things. But I have a sort of notion that Mr. Curtis would hurt any other man who suggested any of them, and it is easy to see by the very way he looks at you—"

"Oh, have pity, and don't harp on that string! I can be nothing to him. You mistake his kindness for something which is so utterly impossible that it almost drives me to hysteria to hear it even spoken of."

Marcelle knew better. In some recess of her own acute mind she felt that Lady Hermione's heightened color and shining eyes were due to just that wild and irresponsible conceit which they were debating. Indeed, Hermione could not leave the topic alone. She forbade it, rejected it, stormed at its folly, yet came back to it like a child held spellbound by some terrifying yet fascinating object.

The maid was racking her brain for some feminine argument which should convince an impulsive mistress that Curtis might reasonably regard his matrimonial entanglement as by no means so incapable of a satisfactory outcome as his "wife" deemed it, when a knock at the door of the sitting-room alarmed both.

And, indeed, the ever-present dread which haunted them was justified, because a page announced: "The Earl of Valletort and Mr. Otto Schmidt," and before the petrified Marcelle could utter a word of protest the two men were in the room.

Marcelle said afterward that no incident of those tumultuous hours surprised her more than the way in which Lady Hermione received her unbidden and unwelcome visitors. The instant before their arrival she was an irresponsible and doubting and vacillating girl, torn by emotion and swayed hither and thither by gusts of perplexity which ranged from half-formed hope to blank despair; but now she came from her bedroom without a second's hesitancy and faced her father and the lawyer with a proud serenity which obviously disconcerted them and quite dumfounded Marcelle.

"Ah, at last!" said the earl, trying to speak complacently, but failing rather badly, because his attitude and words were decidedly melodramatic.

"And too late!" said his daughter, letting her fine eyes dwell on Schmidt with the contemplative scrutiny she might bestow on an exhibit in a natural-history museum.

"Pardon me, your ladyship; not too late, but just in time, I fancy."

Otto Schmidt met her gaze without flinching, and he was a man who undoubtedly commanded attention when he spoke. His tone was deferential but decisive. His black eyes were taking in this charming and intelligent woman in full measure. Her rare beauty, her unstudied pose, her slender elegance, the quiet harmonies of her costume—each and all made their appeal. He even waited for her reply, compelling it by some subtle transference of the knowledge that he would not endeavor to browbeat or misunderstand her.

"I have heard your name, but may I ask why you are here?" she said composedly.

It pleased him to find that he had not erred by underrating her intelligence.

"A very proper question, Lady Hermione," he said. "I am a lawyer, and your father has consulted me with reference to the marriage you have contracted to-night."

"Since, as you say, the marriage has most certainly been contracted, the statement hardly explains your presence."

He smiled, and Lord Valletort, who had not seen Otto Schmidt smile once during the past hour, discovered that he had not begun to appraise his new ally's qualities at their due worth.

"It is a legal habit to state events in their order," he replied suavely. "But these are matters which we ought to discuss privately."

"No, Marcelle, do not go," said Hermione, hiding her fear under an assumption of icy indifference and checking the maid's movement in response to the lawyer's hint. "Marcelle Leroux is fully in my confidence," she explained, "and you can say nothing which she may not listen to."

"I am obliged to your ladyship, but I had to mention her presence," said Schmidt. "Well, I am sorry to be the bearer of unpleasant news, but you were inveigled into a marriage ceremony with John Delancy Curtis by gross and fraudulent misrepresentation. He told you, I assume, that M. Jean de Courtois was dead. That is not true. M. de Courtois is alive and in his room at the Central Hotel in Twenty-Seventh Street at this moment. He was detained there at the hour you awaited him—kept there forcibly by means which must be investigated; but the really important fact now is that he lives."

"Need I tell you what that statement implies? Need I emphasize the lie with which this man Curtis attained his object? Your father, the earl, and I myself, saw Jean de Courtois a few minutes since. Probably, and not without reason, you doubt my word. If that is so, will you kindly use the telephone yourself, ring up the Central Hotel, and ask if M. de Courtois is there? You will hardly imagine that the hotel staff would enter into a conspiracy with us to deceive you. Again, you might send for the manager here."

He knows me, and will assure you that I am not a person who would lend himself to subterfuge or falsehood."

"But some man was killed, was he not?"

Hermione's lips had whitened, but her courage was superb, though her poor heart was like to burst with its frenzied throbbing, for she was certain this self-possessed man was speaking truly, and, if he were, her hero with the head of gold had revealed feet of clay.

"Yes, unhappily, a journalist named Hunter."

Schmidt was an artist. He knew when to use few words.

"But Mr. Curtis himself may have been deceived."

"Mr. Curtis was among those who pretended to liberate De Courtois from his bonds. Your unfortunate friend was brutally tied and gagged in his room in the hotel, and is now recovering from the effects of the maltreatment he received."

"Mr. Curtis couldn't have known of this when he was here, little more than half an hour ago."

"He knew it two hours ago. Not only he, but Mr. Steingall knew it. Did neither of them tell you?"

In utter despair, broken-hearted now, not by reason of her own plight, but rather because of a shattered faith, Hermione appealed to the earl.

"Father, is this true?"

"Absolutely true, every syllable. I really think you ought to confirm Mr. Schmidt's statement by inquiry at the Central Hotel."

"And publish my unhappy story more widely! Will you kindly leave me now? I must think, and act."

"One word, your ladyship, and I have done," said the lawyer, speaking with a slow seriousness that could not fail to be convincing. "The mischief is not irreparable—at present. But you must not remain here. You are registered in the books of the hotel as the wife of John Delancy Curtis, and, if I may say it with respect, your own sense

of what is right and proper will forbid the notion that you can abide in the hotel until to-morrow.

"I pledge my reputation that it will immensely facilitate the legal steps necessary to secure the annulment of the marriage if you dis sever yourself from your so-called husband at the earliest moment after you have discovered his tort."

Hermione was not the type of woman who faints in an emergency, though gladly now would she have found in unconsciousness a respite from the bitter pain that was rending her innermost fiber.

"I think—I understand," she said brokenly. "Will you please go?"

"But will you not come with me, Hermione?" said her father. "I give you my word of honor there will be no recriminations."

"I must be alone—to-night," she cried, flaring into a passionate vehemence. "Marcelle and I will return to my apartment. You know where it is. Come there in the morning, at any hour you choose, but go now, this very instant, or I shall refuse to leave the hotel, no matter what the consequences may be."

Her voice rose almost to a scream, and Schmidt, a profound student of human nature, realized that any extra pressure would be fatal. He had succeeded. This girl would keep her promise, of that he was well assured, but if her high-strung temperament was subjected to undue force she would put her back against the wall and defy law and convention alike.

"Come," he said to the earl, and, with a courteous bow to Hermione, he literally pulled her father from the room.

Hermione did not weep. She was done with tears, sick with vain regret, yet braced to unfaltering purpose. The instant the door was closed she picked up the telephone, and the wretched Krantz was soon in evidence to verify the lawyer's words.

Marcelle was crying as though she

had lost a lover or some dear relative; when Hermione bade her prepare for their departure, she gave no heed, but wailed her sorrow aloud.

"I d-don't believe them, miladi," she sobbed. "Mr. Curtis—will wring the lawyer-man's neck—to-morrow. I know he will. Did Mr. Curtis kill that poor Mr. Hunter? If not, why should he tie that Frenchman? And wouldn't he t-tie twenty Frenchmen if he w-wanted to m-marry you!"

Hermione stooped and fondled the girl's shoulders, for Marcelle had collapsed to her knees on the hearth-rug while her mistress was using the telephone.

"You have been my very good friend, Marcelle," she said, and the misery in her voice subjugated the

maid's louder grief. "Don't fail me now, there's a dear! I want to write a letter, and there can be no question whatever that you and I must get away before Mr. Curtis returns. Don't fret, or lose faith in Providence. A great man once wrote: 'God's in heaven, and all's well with the world.' You and I must try to believe that, and place utmost trust in its promise. There, now! Hurry, and I shall join you in a few minutes. We shall send for our baggage in the morning, and so avoid attracting attention in the hotel to-night."

Brave as she was, when left alone in the room she pressed her hands to her face in sheer abandonment of agony. But the storm passed, and she sat down to write.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

A FOREST FREE LANCE

A NOVELETTE

BY ALBERT M. TREYNOR

CHAPTER I.

Up to the Girl.



WHEN the cashier of the Woodsman's National Bank in St. Louis refused Gerald Peyton a promised loan of two hundred thousand dollars, the old lumberman realized that he had been forced into a fight for his financial life.

The cashier smiled pleasantly but firmly. "Sorry, Mr. Peyton, but we can't oblige you to-day. The president said we'd require another twenty-four hours to investigate your collateral."

Peyton's face grew white.

"But, man," he expostulated, "President Markham absolutely guaranteed to have the currency for me to-day. Don't you understand that this loan means my very existence in the lumber business?"

"I've an option on seventy-five thousand acres of yellow pine at Hattiesburg, Mississippi, that expires day after to-morrow morning at six o'clock. I've got to catch to-night's train with the money or I can't reach Hattiesburg in time to close the deal."

The cashier shook his head. "You'll have to see Mr. Markham, but I'm afraid it'll do no good. He seemed

very positive when he gave his orders about this."

Peyton turned away from the cashier's desk with a tightening of the jaw. His blue eyes glittered behind his nose-glasses, and he swung toward the door of the president's office in angry determination.

As he rounded the corner of the grated enclosure he almost collided with a lean, grayish man in a short overcoat who was just emerging from Markham's private room.

With narrowing eyelids, Peyton placed himself directly in the path of the other man, while a light of grim understanding shot across his face.

"Good morning, Burton Grimes," he drawled bitterly. "I thought you were in Chicago."

Grimes chuckled with dry appreciation. "Hello, Peyton. How's your option on the Hattiesburg land coming?"

Peyton shook his forefinger into the lean, leering face.

"I might have guessed you'd try to do me out of that land," he accused fiercely. "I made a loan with this bank a week ago. To-day, when I come for my money, they put me off with a fool's excuse. I suspected you were mixed in this some way, and your being here now clinches my suspicions."

Grimes's smile broadened.

"You always were a smart guesser, Peyton," he laughed; "so, if that's the way you feel about it, you may as well go on thinking what you like. Your option runs out Wednesday morning, doesn't it?"

"You know very well when it runs out," exploded Peyton. "Some of your scouts learned I was in St. Louis to swing this deal. They wired you, and you came down from Chicago and framed it with this bank to hold back the money on me. I've always known how unscrupulous your firm is, but I never believed you'd try anything as flagrant as this."

"Those seventy-five thousand acres

adjoin our Hattiesburg land," remarked Grimes casually. "There's no use denying I'd like to get hold of it."

"You mean the trust would like to grab it," declared Peyton. "You people have been trying to break me for a good many years because I preferred to stay independent."

"Have it your own way, Peyton. I don't care what you think as long as I get the land."

"But I've already bought it," protested Peyton. "I've committed myself irretrievably with my contractors for a mill and logging road. There remains only the money transaction to close my option."

"Which is the most important part of any deal, according to my mind," retorted Grimes. "If you don't have the currency at Hattiesburg Wednesday morning, it strikes me that I'll buy the property."

Peyton leaned forward, his eyes fixed intently on the other's sneering face. His small figure quivered with emotion.

"I've bought this property, and I mean to have it," he declared. "If you want to start anything with me, you'll find you've struck a man who doesn't lie down, and who can play the game through to a finish. I know you stand in with Markham, and have fixed it so I can't get my money until to-morrow. All right, then. We'll let it go at that. But money or no money, I'm going to win. That's all."

Grimes laughed mockingly. "It's true that I'm a very good friend of Markham's. I'll present you to him, if you wish."

Choking with outraged feeling, Peyton turned away. "Good day, sir!" he flashed over his shoulder, and hurried from the bank.

But on the street the sudden relaxation of his features belied his bold challenge to the rival lumberman. His mouth sagged anxiously and his eyes took on an expression of doubt and worry.

Peyton had been an independent

lumberman with holdings in northern Michigan. When he had finally cut through his timber he was forced to follow the lead of the wealthy lumber corporations, and move his field of operations to the pine forests of the South. He made ready for the change with the enthusiasm of a boy.

From James Kernan, a big land speculator at Hattiesburg, he had obtained an option on a large stretch of pine land near the enormous holdings of Grimes & Gottschalk, the recognized lumber barons of the country.

He sank every cent he could raise in getting ready for his mill and logging road. The actual cash for the purchase of the land the Woodsman's bank had promised him. The eleventh hour refusal of the bank to meet that promise had placed him in a financial hole from which there was apparently no escape.

Failure to obtain the Hattiesburg land at that late moment meant his bankruptcy.

The lumber business in the South was complicated by nature's niggardliness in the matter of rivers. A few shallow, turbid streams meandered through the hard-pine woods, but it was impossible to float log-rafts over them to distant sawmills.

The transplanted lumbermen had adapted themselves to altered conditions by constructing little logging railways from their mills to camps in the wilderness where sawyers had begun to fell the virgin forest.

Peyton had contracted for such a road, and had begun the erection of a mill near the Hattiesburg tract, never dreaming of any attempt to block his purchase of timber for cutting.

Peyton had been accompanied to Hattiesburg by Glendora, his motherless daughter. She was nineteen years old, strikingly pretty, and her father's constant companion and adviser.

Upon his arrival in the Southern town Peyton had built a bungalow and installed the girl as housekeeper. In his absence she was his only repre-

sentative in Hattiesburg. He had not yet organized his business staff.

As Peyton walked despairingly from the Woodsman's bank his thoughts turned sadly upon the girl. It was because of her that he looked with horror into the face of financial failure.

He spent all of the afternoon wandering from bank to bank in the hope that he might raise the money through some unexpected source.

In every case he was unsuccessful. None of the St. Louis banks would honor his note without several days to investigate his security. He knew he could get the currency from the Woodsman's bank on the following afternoon; but, as Grimes had intended, that would be too late.

When he finally returned to the Planters' Hotel he realized that he was beaten, as far as the St. Louis end of the game could be played. There remained one more hope—a slender straw of possibility.

"Glendora can do it, if any one can," he muttered to himself. "If she can persuade Kernan to grant a few hours' extension on the option—well, I could make it then. It's worth trying, anyhow."

He went to the telegraph desk in the lobby and scribbled a message to his daughter. As he listened to the operator clicking off the despatch, he felt that all his faith and courage was scampering over the wire to hearten the girl in the South.

"And that's all I can do," he murmured. "The rest's up to Glendora."

CHAPTER II.

"We'll Go Broke."

IN the Hattiesburg offices of Grimes & Gottschalk two men faced each other, tense and livid.

"You can survey your line in your own crooked way, but you'll get some one else to do it for you!" exploded the younger of the two with indignant finality.

He arose from his chair and glared contemptuously at his companion. Then he slowly reached for his hat. "Is that all you want to know, Gordon?"

Henry Gordon, the general manager of the Grimes & Gottschalk mills, crossed the room in a flaming passion and shook his finger in the other's face. His short, black hair bristled as though his emotions had electrified the roots, and his eyes blazed.

"Yes, that's all!" he shouted. "And you can get out of here quick, Chivington! You're fired!"

"Fired!" Chivington laughed outright. "Why, I decided to quit your burglarizing firm the minute I learned you were trying to slant that survey off through Potter's homestead. Fired! If you use that word to me again I'll drop you out your own window."

From his six-foot height he stared savagely down at Gordon. Then he quietly turned and left the room.

Caldwell Chivington, for two years employed by Grimes & Gottschalk as an engineering expert, faced the future with more satisfaction than might be expected in a man who had just lost a three-thousand-dollar job and saw no prospect for another one.

It pleased him to think that he had at last spoken his mind after a too-lengthy association with a firm whose business methods antagonized his every instinct of squareness.

He breathed more freely as he slammed the door of the main offices behind him for the last time and passed down the platform, where long strings of lumber cars were being loaded from the mill.

He was untroubled by any misgivings. He felt utterly competent to wrest a living from the world under any conditions. With a half-unconscious movement he pinched the swelling biceps of his right arm, and rejoiced in the knowledge that he was so splendidly fit.

Then he started whistling pleasantly to himself, without caring that the

snarling and shrieking saws in the mill entirely drowned the cheerful note.

At the employees' gate he paused to light a cigarette, and sauntered down Hattiesburg's unpaved streets toward the railway station.

As he turned into one of the side streets he collided with a young woman who was hurrying around the corner from the opposite direction. She stopped, and he removed his hat with a hasty word of apology.

Chivington recognized the girl as Glendora Peyton, a newcomer in town. He had never met her; but in a place as small as Hattiesburg it is impossible not to know the names and something about the affairs of every white resident, especially when the resident is a pretty girl.

"I'm so sorry I bumped you," apologized the young woman, regarding him with a half-mischievous glance of her blue eyes. "I wasn't looking where I was going, and that's no way to be running around the streets."

She shook her brown head in self-reproof. "Aren't you Mr. Chivington, of Grimes & Gottschalk?"

"I'm Mr. Chivington," he admitted; "but not of Grimes & Gottschalk. I've quit, or, rather, I've been fired." He laughed.

"Oh, that's too bad!" she cried. "I was going to ask you a great favor. I wanted a pass to go to your Fifteen Mile Camp on the four o'clock workmen's train."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Chivington. "That's a funny place to want to go. If I were still with the company it would be easy, but— Is it very important that you should go?"

She studied his face nervously for an instant.

"Why—why were you fi-fired?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Because I refused to certify a survey made to include the Potter homestead in the company's holdings," said he. "Don't know whether you know Potter or not. He and his wife and little girl live in a cabin near Fifteen

Mile Camp. They've made a little clearing, and manage to live on a truck garden and a few razorback hogs.

"Well, Potter really has a homesteader's title to the timber around his cabin, but the company wants it. The county surveyor's been bribed, and he's willing to run a false line. But I couldn't see why the Potters should be ousted. So I—well, I'm no longer with the company."

"Then you'd have no reason to tell Mr. Gordon why I want to go to the woods?"

"Not the slightest reason," he answered.

"I'll tell you, then, what I've got to do," she said tremulously. "Only I don't know how to go about it."

She reached into the bosom of her shirt-waist and produced a telegram.

"I got this yesterday from my father," she explained. "Unless I can find James Kernan, and induce him to extend our option, we'll lose the seventy-five thousand acres out there in the woods. Then we'll both go broke—father and I."

Chivington examined the crumpled yellow paper.

"Where is Kernan?" he inquired.

"That's the whole trouble," she lamented. "He was in New Orleans yesterday, and to-day he's gone to Fifteen Mile Camp with Grimes's woods boss, George Deems. And, don't you see, I've got to find him before six o'clock to-morrow morning."

For a moment Chivington stood gazing reflectively at the girl. Two years had taught him to know Deems and Deems's methods. He realized that if the woods boss had come all the way to town, and induced Kernan to accompany him back to the woods, he had some crafty, underlying motive.

Deems was Grimes's handy man, who, as boss of the woods and the absolute czar of some mixed thousand negro and white lumbermen, was always ready to carry off any high-handed game for the company.

Deems, undoubtedly, had been in-

structed to keep Kernan out of the way until the Peyton option lapsed. And the woods boss was the type of man who would stop at nothing to gain his point.

"I'll tell you, Miss Peyton," Chivington finally began, "it'll be next to impossible for you to find your man if you start out alone in the woods to look for him. You don't know what you're running into."

"But I've got to—I've got to reach him," she pleaded anxiously.

Chivington straightened his shoulders, and his gray eyes glinted.

"Come with me, then," he said; "I'll get you to the woods. We've got fifteen minutes to catch that train."

With the girl at his side Chivington hurried through the town, passed the Grimes & Gottschalk mill-pond where a long line of flat-cars were discharging their splashing loads of logs into the water, and finally, after crossing a network of tracks, reached the side of a waiting logging train. It consisted of two cabooses, a flat-car, and a snubby, coughing locomotive.

Helping the girl over a great heap of sawdust beside the track, Chivington gently boosted her to the rear platform of the forward caboose. He followed her aboard.

The conductor came out scowling.

"No passengers goes this trip," he growled. "Them's the orders from Deems."

"Oh, come now, Jerry," remonstrated Chivington, "you surely have room for this young lady."

"Lots of room, but she don't ride!" shouted the conductor. He leaned out from the platform and signaled the engineer. "All right, let her go!" he called. Then he again faced Glendora. "Come on, now," he exclaimed roughly. "get off of here!"

The engine jerked ahead with a whirring of drive-wheels. The light train gathered headway quickly, and Glendora, her face white but her eyes flashing defiantly, held her position on the platform.

"Didn't I tell you to get off?" yelled the conductor. "Now I've got to stop to put you off. If you was a man I'd do it without stoppin'."

He started to run through the caboose, but Chivington reached out and seized him by the collar. He pulled the struggling man back to the platform and forced him down to the lower step.

"Well, I guess we'll ride," he declared. "And we'll do it without your company. So-long, Jerry!"

The conductor soared off the step, propelled by a hearty shove from Chivington, struck a sawdust pile and rolled over and over. When he picked himself up he had been left far behind, and the engineer failed to hear his frantic shouts above the rumble of the train.

Chivington chuckled and turned to the girl.

"I'm glad I was fired!" he cried. "I've been aching to do that for two years. But it wouldn't have been right while I was on the pay-roll."

He drew her into the caboose and they made themselves comfortable on a bench by a window, watching the town fade into the distance.

"I wonder why they don't want us to ride?" asked Glendora uneasily, as they passed into the first stretch of forest.

"They've heard, somehow, of your reason for wanting to go," answered Chivington. "They'll try to check-mate you at every turn now."

His features hardened in an expression of grimness which the girl could not read.

"Deems will be next," he observed. "He'll try to balk us in the woods. I'm not on the pay-roll, and I'll meet him more than half-way, let him go as far as he likes."

CHAPTER III.

The Fight in the Woods.

WHEN the train brought up in its yarding at Fifteen Mile Camp, Chivington and Glendora started along

the track toward Deems's office, half a mile farther up the line.

They were halted by Tom Masters, the camp superintendent, who came running from his shack near the machine shed.

"Here, you!" he shouted. "Deems said there were no passengers to come out this run. Oh, it's you Chivington. Where's Jerry?"

Chivington smiled at the mention of the conductor's name.

"Oh, he didn't come all the way with us, Masters," he explained lightly. "I think he stopped to pick Magnolia-blossoms by the track. Or maybe he had something else in mind—he didn't say. But he seemed in an awful hurry to get off the train."

"Darned funny what happened to him," muttered the superintendent suspiciously. He hailed the engineer, who was standing in the back of the cab sluicing his face in a bucket of water.

"Didn't you bring Jerry along?" he shouted.

The engineer poked a dripping head out the window. "Ain't he along?" he demanded in astonishment. "He gave the go-ahead signal at Hattiesburg all right. I thought he was in the caboose."

The superintendent shook his head in a puzzled manner. Then he glanced doubtfully at Glendora. Chivington broke in before he could speak again.

"Do you know Kernan, Masters?" he asked.

"Sure I know him," replied Masters. "I saw him with Deems a few minutes ago. I—"

He paused and turned to a youth who came sprinting down the track from the superintendent's shack. The newcomer drew him aside, and the pair whispered together for a minute.

Then Masters came back and confronted Chivington loweringly.

"Just got a telephone message from Deems," he snapped. "Jerry telegraphed how he happened to be left behind. Picking Magnolia-blossoms, hey? Deems'll fix you for that. You

been fired, too, ain't you? They wired that in from town. Well, I'll tell you now, young feller, you can't put over any funny business on us out here."

"When you see me putting over any funny business, Masters, you stop me," invited Chivington. "Now tell me where Deems is."

The camp superintendent stared back shrewdly.

"Deems is up at the company's store in the north valley," he asserted.

"That isn't true, Masters," declared Chivington; "there's only one telephone in camp besides the one in your shack. The second one is at Deems's office, so he couldn't very well have telephoned you just now from the company's store. I'll take a chance of finding him at his office."

Without waiting for further words with the discomfited superintendent, Chivington and Glendora started again to walk up the track.

"We'll have to hurry," Chivington urged the girl. "Masters will phone Deems we are coming, and they'll manage to get Kernan away before we see him under some pretext."

He looked over his shoulder. "There, what did I tell you?" he exclaimed. "Masters is running for his telephone. I'll sprint ahead; it'll only take me about ten minutes to reach Deems's office, and maybe I'll be in time."

He started forward at a brisk trot, but the girl kept at his side without effort.

"Don't worry about me," she laughed; "I went in for athletics at school, and I can keep up this pace for a few minutes."

Chivington watched her picking her way over the uneven ties, and smiled approvingly.

"We'll work this thing out together," he exulted. "Why, I don't know of anything I couldn't do if you were always along to encourage me."

They were passing through the temporary yards where the company's rolling stock was kept in the woods.

There was a low shed of rough planks where three Shay engines were quartered nights. Just beyond was a glowing forge and a roughly constructed machine-shop, while a dripping water-tank and a clanking steam-pump completed the forest equipment of the logging railway system.

A gang of negroes was engaged in cutting and splitting logs and piling up the pine blocks for engine fuel. The blacks glanced up in astonishment at the sight of a man and girl running through the clearing, but made no move to interfere.

Chivington and Glendora paid no attention to the workmen. They crossed a little trestle at the edge of the clearing, and followed a sharp turn of the track down a narrow lane cut through the dense timber.

On the right they caught a glimpse of the negro camp as they hurried along. This consisted of a score of wheelless box cars set about promiscuously on log foundations in a cleared valley.

A little later they passed a similar camp for white workmen, and finally they stumbled from the track and through a patch of pine stumps to the left where Deems had built his little unpainted bungalow.

The woods boss, a thick-set man with a heavy, reddish face, was seated on the front stoop with a litter of blue-prints and penciled memoranda scattered about. He dropped his papers with a sharp exclamation when he saw the man and girl, and stood up, facing them.

"Well, what do you want?" he snarled.

"I want to see Kernan," answered Chivington. Both he and the girl were panting from their long run.

"Kernan!" he sneered. "You don't stand much chance of seeing Kernan to-night."

"Is Kernan in your office?" demanded Chivington, advancing a step.

"Think I'd let you see him if he was?" His lips twisted into an ex-

pression of coarse sarcasm. "So you've hooked up with the Peytons, eh? Didn't take you long to turn against the company after they kicked you off the pay-roll. Well, you'll see what good it'll do you."

"I asked a question," flashed Chivington. "I want an answer quick!"

"Even if you found Kernan," parleyed Deems, "you'd get nothing by it. I know what you want out of him. Well, I fixed him this afternoon. He promised that seventy-five thousand acres to Grimes when the Peyton option runs out to-morrow at 6 A.M."

Chivington laughed comfortably. "For a bluff that's pretty feeble," he declared. "If Kernan had made you any promises you wouldn't be so anxious to keep us from seeing him."

"You'll get out of this camp right now!" shouted Deems.

"Oh, I guess not!" said Chivington easily. "Not till I've seen my man."

He started toward the house, and Deems flung himself down the steps to meet him. They came together with a thud and grappled.

As Chivington felt his opponent's muscular arm circle his neck he called to the girl, standing unflinchingly by:

"Go into the house and see if Kernan's there. I'll take care of Deems."

Without waiting to see her answering nod he twisted from the grasp of the woods boss and caught him around the shoulders. Deems was noted through many miles of forest country as a man of great fighting prowess. But he had never before tackled the active, broad-shouldered Chivington, and he was unprepared for the muscular agility of his antagonist.

The pair struggled silently for a moment, and Chivington finally succeeded in forcing his grip downward until he had pinioned the other man's arms to his side. Then he jammed his knee behind Deems and slowly drove him to the ground. In another second he held the woodsman, helpless and panting, in his embrace.

Chivington retained his advantage until he saw Glendora come out of the bungalow with a look of disappointment in her face.

"He's not there?" inquired Chivington, releasing Deems and springing to his feet.

She shook her head. "The house is empty."

Deems staggered from the ground, his face distorted with rage.

"I'll fix you for this!" he threatened, mopping his face; "I'll fix you—you hear?"

Chivington paid no attention. He was looking at Glendora anxiously.

A woman came around the corner of the bungalow. She wore a faded blue Mother Hubbard dress, and her pinched, weather-beaten face was half concealed in a drooping sunbonnet.

"Here's your wash, Mr. Deems," she said, dropping a large bundle on the front stoop.

Chivington looked at her. "Why, how do you do, Mrs. Potter?" he greeted. "Where's your husband?" he inquired.

"Oh, it's Mr. Chivington!" the woman smiled. "Well, Mr. Potter he driv over to Five Mile Junction this evenin' with a man that wanted to ketch a train to Hattiesburg from Twenty Mile Camp."

A gleam of enlightenment flashed into Chivington's eyes. "Do you know who he was, Mrs. Potter?" he questioned eagerly. "Was it Mr. Kernan?"

"Yes, that's the one," she answered. "He said Deems told him there wasn't any other train back from this camp to-night."

Chivington turned to Deems. "So that's how you got rid of Kernan! You lied to him. There is another train to-night back from here. It leaves in half an hour if you're running by the old schedule."

"What'd you want to see Mr. Potter for, Mr. Chivington?" the thin washerwoman inquired, her hungry eyes searching his face.

"I want to tell him this company's trying to best him out of his homestead," Chivington blurted, "and I wanted to post him how to protect himself."

"Great Lord!" gasped Mrs. Potter. "You don't tell me, Mr. Chivington—"

He beckoned to Glendora. "Come," he said, "we mustn't wait here if we want that train. It'll be easy to catch Kernan at Hattiesburg now."

A loud, sneering laugh from Deems followed them as they started to move away.

"You try to get that train," he threatened, "and I'll set every nigger in camp on you! I'll order them to throw you off into the swamp, both you and the girl! And they'd do it without a question!"

Chivington halted in perplexity. "I hadn't thought of that, Deems," he admitted. "You're just the sort of a dog who'd do a trick like that. I've a notion to—"

He didn't finish. Glendora had touched him on the arm, and his eyes softened as he faced her.

"It's only fifteen miles to Hattiesburg," she said. "I'm by no means an invalid. There will be plenty of time, and it promises to be a pleasant night."

"Yes," urged Chivington.

"We'll walk!" she declared.

CHAPTER IV.

Prisoners.

CHIVINGTON regarded the girl with an admiration he could not conceal.

"Capital!" he cried. "You certainly have pluck! Why, we can't help winning! It will take us five hours or more over the railroad ties, but we'll make it in time!"

Glendora matched his glance of frank admiration with a steady look of confidence, and Mrs. Potter smiled softly to herself at the wordless message she read in their eyes.

But Mrs. Potter decided to become more than a spectator at a pretty tableau. She was a practical woman, and she had always liked Chivington.

"It's brave of you to walk, miss; but I've got a better plan," she said to Glendora. "Potter'll be back in an hour at the outside, and I'll make him drive you over to Hattiesburg."

She shot a dark look at Deems, who was standing sullenly by the steps. "Mr. Deems, you can find another woman to do your washin'. I wouldn't touch your shirts agin for five dollars apiece," said she.

Glendora clasped the woman's work-worn fingers with a sudden impulse of gratitude.

"You are so good," she breathed. "I'll never, never forget!"

Chivington and Glendora turned their backs on Deems, and followed Mrs. Potter along a little path that twisted among the stumps and finally led them into the sweet-scented woods. A short walk through the silent forest brought them to the clearing where Potter had built his cabin.

Mrs. Potter conducted them through a little patch of sweet corn to the house, while a drove of razor-back hogs scampered into the woods at their approach.

"I'll bring out some chairs," said the woman. "Mr. Potter ought to be back pretty soon now."

"Where's your little girl?" inquired Chivington.

"She drove over to the junction with Mr. Kernan and her pap."

"Did Kernan mention anything about selling his property here?"

"He said he'd come out to look over some land with Mr. Deems. He intended to stay all night, but got a telephone-call from the Grimes offices in Hattiesburg and decided to hurry back."

Chivington frowned thoughtfully. "We'll have to get to town in a rush," he mused. "I wish Potter would get here."

They waited in front of the cabin,

chatting idly with Mrs. Potter. Nearly half an hour passed, and Chivington finally arose impatiently and sauntered across the corn patch to the opening of a rough, narrow wagon-trail which slanted off into the woods. He stood listening for a moment in hope of catching the sound of Potter's wagon-wheels.

Suddenly he heard a woman scream. He wheeled and gazed fearfully back in the direction of the cabin. With a furious exclamation he broke his way through the corn-stalks. When he emerged into the open he saw Miss Peyton struggling in the grasp of several negroes, while Mrs. Potter was beating them frantically with her fists.

"Help! Oh, hurry!" cried Glendora.

Chivington was quickly at her side. He seized a chair and beat two of the negroes to the ground. The chair shattered over the head of the third, but the man dropped. With a growl Chivington seized a fourth man by the throat and flung him against the cabin wall.

Glendora broke away from the other two negroes and fled into the cabin. Chivington and Mrs. Potter followed, slamming the door and barring it after them.

Outside there rose a hoarse-voiced clamor.

"Get a log! Smash in the door!" some one shouted.

Chivington ran to the window and peered out.

"It's Deems!" he cried. "He intends to hold us!"

There was a brief silence while the two women waited gaspingly together in the corner. Chivington picked up a long piece of firewood and stationed himself in front of them.

Something struck the door with a force which jarred the cabin, and one of the hinges broke away from the frame. A second and third blow followed, and the heavy, wooden bar split from end to end.

"Once more, now!" came a tri-

umphant yell from without. "Heave-oh!"

Again the heavy log was swung forward, and the door was torn from the frame and fell into the cabin.

Chivington sprang forward to meet the rush of negroes, but before he could use his club he was arrested by a warning scream from behind. He whirled just as two men smashed the rear window and leaped into the room.

Chivington fought desperately, but his club was wrenched from his grasp and he was driven across the room. There the men rushed him and pinioned him against the wall. Further resistance was out of the question. Chivington straightened in the grasp of the three negroes who had him by the arms, and ceased struggling. No attempt had been made to lay hands on the two women.

Deems entered the cabin. He looked at Chivington and laughed boisterously.

"I guess maybe you won't go back to town to-night," he chuckled.

Chivington confronted him hotly.

"You'll hear from this later, Deems!" he blazed. "This is a pretty high-handed proceeding for a civilized State."

"Don't trouble yourself about that," said Deems. "It happened on the company's land; you're trespassers."

"It happened on Potter's homestead," corrected Chivington. "And I'll make it my business to see that Potter's ownership is legally established!"

"All right," retorted Deems. "But at present you're going to do as I say. Bring him along, boys, and don't let the girl get away. Let Potter's woman stay here if she wants to."

The negroes jerked Chivington across the room, while a couple of others started for Glendora.

"Hold on, Deems!" expostulated Chivington. "There's no use being rough with Miss Peyton. Let her walk alone, and I'll promise to go peacefully."

Deems motioned to the girl, and she stepped fearlessly to the doorway.

"Give me your word you won't try to run," he demanded.

"Yes," she agreed. "I'll remain with Mr. Chivington."

He nodded his head. "All right, boys!" he called. "Let 'em both come with me, but you follow along close behind."

The party left the cabin, and Mrs. Potter came to the door with anxious eyes.

"When Potter starts to yelling about his door," Deems called back, "you can tell him for me that it doesn't pay to monkey with the G. and G. Company."

The woods boss guided his prisoners by a short cut through the forest to the railroad track.

"We're going down to Masters's shack," he informed them. "If you behave you won't get hurt."

Glendora walked at Chivington's side, and felt unaccountably comforted by his nearness. Once he gently pressed her fingers and smiled down at her reassuringly.

"Don't worry," he whispered. "We've loads of time yet. Somehow, I'm confident that we'll get the best of this crowd."

"I believe you'll find a way," she answered. He thrilled beneath the glance she gave him.

Masters, the superintendent, came to meet them as they entered the yards of the G. and G. Railway.

"Got 'em, did you, Deems?" he said with a grin. "What'll we do with 'em?"

"Keep 'em here all night," returned the woods boss. "I don't care where they go after six in the morning. How'll your shack do for a jail?"

"All right. There's a strong lock on the door, and we can put out a couple of niggers for guards."

"Great!" exclaimed the woods boss. "Only—" He hesitated. "Say, there's a telephone in there. I don't want to give 'em a chance to telephone

a certain party in town. Your shack won't do. What's the matter with the roundhouse?"

"That's better," agreed Masters. "The doors are heavy, and there's no windows."

"Come along, then," commanded Deems.

He conducted Chivington and Glendora down one of the branching tracks that led to the engine-shed. Their protests were unheeded, and a single glance at the escort of powerful negroes showed them the hopelessness of resistance.

Together, the man and girl entered the shed, and Deems slammed the ponderous doors behind them. The heavy padlock clicked, and the woods boss walked away, whistling.

CHAPTER V.

The Stolen Engine.

WHEN his eyes had adjusted themselves to the semidarkness of the engine-shed, Chivington began looking cautiously about him.

As Masters had said, there were no windows in the place. The solid walls of two-inch pine killed all hope of breaking through, and the heavy swinging doors were uncompromisingly secure.

Glendora groped her way to Chivington's side, and placed her hand on his arm as if to gather courage from the touch.

"I can't see," she complained, "and I can hardly breath. What makes it so smoky in here?"

"The engines," he answered. "They've backed their three Shays inside for the night. One of the engineers must have been in too great a hurry to draw his fires. Whew! The gas is stifling. I wonder if I can't stop it?"

He climbed over the pilot of the second engine and mounted to the running-board near the smoke-stack.

"Hello!" he called. "They've got

some holes in the roof. Never noticed them before. Sort of flues for the engines. This is the one that's spouting; the others look dead."

The girl heard him drop to the ground and cross between the tracks to a second engine.

"I'm going to climb on top of the boiler," he said. "Maybe I could squeeze through one of those vents in the roof."

There was silence for a few minutes, and then Chivington scrambled from the engine and rejoined the girl.

"It's no use," he declared, breathing heavily; "the holes are too small. It looks as though they had us locked in here for keeps."

For the first time Glendora's courage failed her. She began sobbing despairingly. With an entirely involuntary movement Chivington slid his arm about her shoulders, and for a second she pressed her face against his breast.

Then she released herself, catching his hand appealingly.

"Think, think, think!" she commanded. "We've got to get out of here! We simply must!"

"We'll try!" gasped Chivington wildly. "I'd try to dig my way through hot steel for you!"

He flung himself against the door, but it failed to give the fraction of an inch.

"If we only had an ax," he groaned, "we'd chop—"

He broke off the sentence sharply. "Well," he exclaimed, "how devilish simple!" He laughed excitedly.

"What is it? Oh, tell me what you've thought of?" she cried.

"Just a second," he promised. "It may not work, but—you never can tell till you try."

While the girl stood by in wonder he climbed into the cab of one of the Shay engines. After rummaging a few seconds in the tool box he jumped again to the ground with a big wrench in his hand. Kneeling beside the wheels he began taking the bolts from one of the knuckle joints.

"Ever watch a Shay engine running, Miss Peyton?" he inquired while he worked swiftly at the heavy burrs. "They drive with a revolving motion instead of the straight drive of the ordinary locomotive. Something like the screw propeller of a boat, you know."

The bolts slipped through the steel jacket and the casing dropped to the ground with a thud.

"There!" he said with satisfaction, "this engine's shed its knuckle-joint, Miss Peyton. The only way it could run now would be to tow on behind something. If that part should happen to disappear it would take them all night to find another and bolt it back into place. This engine is helpless for the next twenty hours, that's certain."

He picked up the piece and carried it to the tender of the midmost engine.

"Now for the other!" he panted.

Miss Peyton followed him back across the tracks in puzzled silence.

He set to work on the second engine, humming under his breath.

"These Shays are great for woods travel," he informed her after a minute. "They hang to the track where a horizontal driven locomotive would go skipping into the ditch like a rabbit. You could almost climb a tree with one, but you mustn't expect to make time."

The second fitting came off, and he also lugged it to the engine, which still remained hot. Then he jumped into the cab.

"Plenty of water," he observed, "tender full of wood." He opened the door of the fire-box and a red glow lighted his face.

"Mighty careless of the engineer not to draw his fire, Miss Peyton. There's even a few pounds of steam. Can't say for certain, but it strikes me this old pot's worth stoking."

He opened the flues and began throwing great pine chunks into the flame. Soaked with turpentine, they burst into flame.

"Mr. Chivington!" cried Glendora

with dawning comprehension. "What are you going to do? You surely don't intend—"

He interrupted her with a feverish laugh.

"We're going to ride to Hattiesburg," he said, "or blow up this engine and their old shed with it! Look at her steam!"

Choking clouds of smoke poured from the stack of the locomotive. Most of it drew out through the vent overhead, but enough remained behind to almost suffocate the pair in the shed.

Gasping for breath, his eyes smarting, Chivington fed the roaring fire furiously. The little indicator in the steam-gage circled around with perceptible jerks.

"Lie down, Miss Peyton," he called. "You'll find the air better nearer the ground."

For the next few minutes they fought for breath, holding out against their tortured lungs for the great stake that was not yet lost.

At last Chivington reached for the throttle and gave the handle a tentative jerk. Steam rushed through the valves, and the engine quivered.

"She'll do!" he shouted. "Now, Miss Peyton!"

She sprang to her feet and he helped her into the cab. He took the throttle and gazed ahead through the smoke. There was a clear fifteen feet between the pilot and the great, wooden doors.

"All right, look out!"

The engine answered to the steam slowly, nosed ahead sturdily, and bucked into the door with a hissing grunt.

For an instant it seemed that the door might hold. But the Shay has the one great virtue of going ahead where a bigger engine stalls.

With a shudder that nearly shook the two from their feet, the engine drove its pilot through the wooden barrier, and then the doors burst open like a pod, and flung back on their hinges against the sides of the shed.

Chivington opened the throttle wide,

while warning shouts rang through the clearing and men came running from all sides.

The Shay responded like a good piece of machinery, and jumped into its pace with a pleasant whirring of driving gear. Five, ten, fifteen miles an hour—the speed increased.

A score of negroes had reached the track ahead, but they scattered out of the way as the engine plunged past. One man caught at the step of the cab and started to swing aboard, but Chivington abandoned the throttle and kicked the black fingers loose. The negro dropped off at the side.

"Ever run an engine?" Chivington called to Glendora. "You'll have to begin now. Just hold the throttle open. If anything happens, just push it shut."

He showed her the proper lever, and she climbed into the engineer's seat.

Three hundred yards ahead the track connected with the main branch of the logging line. There was a switch there for shunting cars onto a siding.

As Chivington stared ahead he saw a man dash out of Masters's shack and run for the switch. He recognized Deems.

"Keep her wide open," he instructed the girl; "keep her open no matter what happens! Don't pay any attention to me!"

He grabbed a stick of wood from the tender and climbed through the cab to the running-board. Clinging desperately to the rocking engine, he swung out around the smoke-stack and dropped to the pilot.

With his left hand he grasped the head-bar and craned forward. The engine was running nearly twenty miles an hour, but Deems, in his lumbering run, had almost gained the switch.

For seconds the race was of doubtful outcome. Deems threw himself upon the switch and started to throw the lever. As he clutched the handle Chivington drew back his arm and, with all his force, hurled the stick of wood.

The missile struck the woods boss between the shoulders. He pitched to

the ground as the engine rattled past the switch stand and on down the line.

Chivington scrambled back into the cab and opened the whistle in a long, triumphant blast. Then he turned exultantly to the girl.

"Now for the open track to Hattiesburg!" he shouted.

CHAPTER VI.

Danger in the Dark.

AS the engine danced and jolted over the rough track, Glendora continued to hold the throttle, while Chivington lurched back and forth between the cab and tender, feeding the hungry furnace with chunks of wood.

Presently he stopped to look at the water gauge, and smiled with satisfaction.

"We're good for nearly fifty miles," he shouted above the rattle and clanking of the working gear. "This engine must have taken water and wood for an early trip to-morrow. That's a piece of luck."

The girl threw him a flushed and grateful smile.

"It was more than luck that led me to you!" she cried. "That was Providence!"

He shook his head deprecatingly.

"We're not out of the woods, yet," he reminded her. "Still, we have several things in our favor."

He pointed to the knuckle-joints which had been stripped from the other two engines.

"Even if we have a breakdown on the road they couldn't overtake us. We've crippled their engines until morning, and we'll be in Hattiesburg long before then."

Miss Peyton nodded, and then concentrated her attention on the track ahead. The line was only a branch which turned off northward from the main G. and G. logging road. This ran straight westward from Hattiesburg to an older camp twenty miles in the forest.

The two lines met in a clearing known as Five Mile Junction. There was a repair-shed there for the company's track-gang, and a few shacks for negro workmen.

From the junction, along the side of the branch line, ran a narrow, stumpy wagon road. Night had begun to fall, but it was still possible to distinguish objects on either side of the track as the engine ran through the long forest cut.

They rounded a sharp curve, and Miss Peyton, who had been staring ahead through the engineer's window, called suddenly to Chivington. He gave a quick glance down the line, and jammed the throttle shut. Then he applied the brakes, and the engine skidded past a man who was standing in a wagon beside the track, wildly waving his arms.

"That must be Potter," said Chivington. "He's got the only wagon around here."

The engine came to a standstill, and Chivington leaned from the cab and looked back. The man jumped to the ground and ran toward them.

"Hello, Potter!" Chivington called, when he could distinguish the man's features. "What's the trouble?"

The homesteader reached the engine breathless, and climbed into the cab.

"They're going to ditch you at the junction!" he cried. "I was there when they got a wire from Deems!"

Chivington gave a gasp of contrition.

"I forgot all about their having a despatcher at the junction!" he exclaimed. "Of course they would telegraph ahead! I ought to be kicked!"

"What's wrong, Mr. Chivington?" asked Potter.

"We're trying to get hold of Kernan, and Deems is doing his best to prevent us. That's all. Did Kernan get his train?"

"Yes; he left about an hour ago for Hattiesburg. I suppose he's there by now."

"Then there's nothing to do but run on through somehow," declared Chivington. "How do they intend to ditch us?"

"They've thrown the derailing switch. The worst of it is that several men are waiting around to guard it. You remember that switch is around a sharp curve just before you hit the main line? You don't see it, even in the daytime, until you're on it."

"Oh, couldn't you drive us to town?" pleaded Glendora. "There'd be time even yet."

"I'm afraid it couldn't be done," answered the homesteader regretfully. "The road goes right through the junction, and they'd stop us, sure."

Chivington lighted a cigarette and became thoughtfully silent. Glendora started to speak to him, but checked herself. For a minute the low panting of the engine broke the hush of the night.

"Will you sell me your wagon, Potter?"

The homesteader started at the abruptness of Chivington's question.

"Of course," he answered in a second. "I'd be glad to do anything for you."

"Do you think you could make your way through the woods and throw that switch, if I could draw those fellows away a few minutes?"

"Bessie could do that better than me," suggested Potter. "She can travel through the woods like a cat." He whistled softly, and a cautious answer came from up the road.

"Bessie's my daughter," explained the homesteader.

Presently footsteps sounded beside the track, and a girl drew herself into the cab.

"These are friends of mine, Bessie," said the homesteader. "They want you to do something for them. You remember Mr. Chivington—"

"Listen, Bessie," interrupted Chivington. "I want you to go quietly through the woods until you're opposite the switch at the junction. There

are several men on watch there. Wait until you see them leave, and then run out and throw the switch. Do you know how a switch turns?"

"Why, yes," she assured him. "The men have let me throw switches up at camp."

"Then do this for me, and I'll not forget it. But remember that our safety, maybe even our lives, as well as a big land deal, depends on your carrying out my instructions. When the men leave, throw the switch and run away. But be sure to throw the switch! You promise?"

"Why, yes; I'll do that," she replied.

"But the girl might get hurt," protested Glendora.

"There's no danger for her," said Chivington. "But we'll have to take our chances. I don't know whether I ought to let you stay on the engine, Miss Peyton."

"Where you stay, I stay," she answered softly. "Where would I be now if it hadn't been for you?"

"We'll see this through together, then," he returned. Then he turned to the homesteader. "Potter, you drive your wagon down the road to about three hundred yards this side of the curve. We'll go along slowly with you."

"I don't know what you're up to," said Potter, "but I'm with you clear through." He and Bessie jumped from the engine and disappeared in the darkness. In a few moments he called from the road: "All right, we're ready to go ahead!"

Chivington took the throttle and started the engine. For a mile and a half they proceeded down the line at a creeping pace. Potter, in the wagon, kept along at their right.

When they had almost reached the bend that led into the junction, Chivington stopped the engine and called in a whisper to Potter:

"Drive across the track about a hundred yards ahead of us. Unhitch the horse and leave your wagon standing. Then send the girl on ahead. You'll

have to ride home on horseback, because there won't be any wagon left at all."

They waited in silence while Potter carried out the instructions.

"Bessie's started," he said, as he returned on foot to the engine. "When she's thrown the switch she'll sneak back to where we've tied the horses and ride home. I'm going to stay with you."

Chivington grasped his hand in the darkness. "Thanks, Potter," he said. "We'll have to give Bessie at least half an hour."

He stoked the fire and examined his watch by the glow from the furnace door. Then he resumed his seat by the throttle, while Miss Peyton found a place on the other side of the cab. Potter stationed himself in the tender. The three sat without speaking, counting the minutes.

Finally, after a wait that fretted their nerves almost beyond endurance, Chivington touched the throttle.

"After we hit the wagon, scream," he instructed Miss Peyton. "It'll add to the general effect."

He tested the steam. "We're off!" he cried.

The engine gathered headway and lurched into its pace. Chivington reached out and pulled the whistle. The penetrating blast echoed through the forest as the engine clattered down the track.

Then, with a crash that could be heard a mile, they struck the wagon. Broken fragments showered about them. The engine staggered, and, for an instant, Chivington feared they had left the rails. But the next second he felt the wheels running smoothly over the steel. He shut off the steam, and the engine slid almost noiselessly for the next hundred yards.

As they rounded the curve Chivington, staring ahead in the darkness, emitted a triumphant chuckle, and again opened the throttle wide.

Down the track, running toward them, he could see several men. Some

of them were swinging lanterns as they hurried forward.

"We've drawn them!" he exulted. "They're all coming to see what happened! God help us now if Bessie failed to throw the switch!"

The men flung themselves from the track as the engine bore down upon them at high speed, but the occupants of the cab gave them scarcely a glance.

Chivington, with his hand on the throttle, was leaning strainingly from the cab window. Glendora had left her seat and was crouching by his side. His left hand strayed to hers, and with tightly clutched fingers they waited for the switch.

During the next five seconds it seemed to the man and girl that their hearts had suspended action.

But in the terrible period of suspense they were conscious also of a wonderful gladness that they were so near each other, and that whatever happened now they must meet their fate together.

The careening engine roared through the darkness and, with a sharp tilt to the right, took the curve. There was a sudden, lurching movement as the wheels clattered over intersecting rails.

Then, in the straining fraction of an instant, as they nerved themselves for the finish, the rocking locomotive swept onto the main line.

CHAPTER VII.

Blindly Into the Night.

"GOD bless Bessie!" breathed Chivington thankfully, as he let the engine race down the track toward Hattiesburg.

"Father will see that she never, never regrets this night," murmured Glendora in a shaking voice. "She couldn't have had more than half a minute to turn the switch. Oh, I pray she got away safely!"

"Don't you worry about Bessie, miss," Potter comforted her. "She can take care of herself."

With Potter acting as volunteer fireman and Chivington at the throttle, the engine was sweeping ahead swiftly, and Hattiesburg was only ten miles away.

They had covered more than a mile of the distance when Chivington suddenly shut off the steam and set the brakes.

"What's the matter?" asked Glendora anxiously.

"The telegraph wires," he explained briefly. "We'll be much safer if we prevent their sending any more messages."

The engine came to a standstill on the lonely road, and Chivington, snatching an ax from the tender, jumped to the ground.

"I'll be only a minute," he called, making his way across the track.

He groped through a patch of underbrush and finally came to the rough pine pole which carried the telegraph-wires. Quickly working his way to the top, he clung to the swaying support with his legs and began hacking at the wires.

"We're all right now," he called cheerily as he rejoined Glendora and Potter a little later. "I've cut both the telephone and telegraph wires. No chance of their sending any word to Hattiesburg. I guess we've got Deems helpless at last."

"We've got to be awfully careful, though," Potter reminded him. "For the last few nights they've been running a train of empties out to Twenty-Mile Camp. They haven't any regular schedule, and she's liable to come through any minute."

"Lord!" ejaculated Chivington. "They'll not be able to stop here now that I've cut the wires, and a head-on collision would be a nice finish for our little jaunt! There's a siding near here, isn't there, Potter?"

"About two miles ahead."

"We'll have to run for it then," declared Chivington.

He opened the throttle and for five minutes the engine fairly danced over

the rails. At his orders Glendora and Potter stationed themselves in the rear of the cab, ready to jump at an instant's notice.

Chivington crouched forward in his seat with one hand on the brakes, glaring nervously ahead and with every sense alert. When they finally reached the siding his forehead was damp and cold, and his fingers trembled as he shut off the steam.

"There's nothing quite as hair-raising as running wild on a schedule of chance!" he muttered, as they clattered over the switch, leaving the way clear for the Twenty-Mile logging-train. "Please the powers now, we won't have to wait long!"

"I'm beginning to feel we'll never see Hattiesburg!" lamented Glendora. "What a night this has been!"

The train of flat cars was much later than they had expected. They might have run to Hattiesburg twice had they dared take the chance before the headlight of the oncoming locomotive finally gleamed out of the darkness.

Chivington's engine was without a light, save the glow from the firebox, and that, from the main line, could not be seen. The extra rumbled past the siding without a stop.

When they once more resumed their trip to Hattiesburg, Chivington's watch showed it was nearly midnight.

They finished the rest of the journey without interruption, and left the engine standing on a siding at the outskirts of town.

"Miss Peyton and I are going to hunt Kernan," Chivington told Potter. "Do you mind waiting with the engine until we come back?"

"Of course not," answered Potter. "Good luck to you!"

"Good-by, Mr. Potter; we'll be back soon," called Glendora as she took Chivington's arm.

They left the yards and hurried through the silent streets.

"If we fail now," whispered the girl, "it will be only because fate is against us: But, whether we fail or

not, I want to tell you that you are the bravest and truest man I have ever known."

Chivington did not trust himself to reply, and they walked on in a silence that was charged with words unspoken.

When they turned into Kernan's front lawn they saw that the big house was dark.

"I feared he'd be in bed," muttered Chivington. "You've got to have his answer before six o'clock, so I'll wake him up. It's your only chance."

He then rang. After a brief wait he rang again. This time there was a response.

They saw a light flare in the hall, and a man in a bath-robe opened the front door.

"Good evening, Mr. Kernan," greeted Chivington. "I'm awfully sorry we had to disturb you at this hour."

The man blinked sleepily and yawned. "Oh, it's you, Chivington!" he said in a tone of annoyance. "Well, what do— Come in, and talk fast. I want to get back to bed."

He led them to a front room and turned up the light. Then he looked at Glendora with momentary interest.

"You're Miss Peyton, aren't you?" he inquired. "I remember seeing you with your father."

"Yes, I'm Miss Peyton," she answered. "And— oh, Mr. Kernan, we've had a time finding you!"

"Well, you've got me now," he grinned. "What is it?"

"It's about father's option," she began breathlessly. "Father was delayed in St. Louis, and won't be able to reach here until the eight o'clock train this morning. He'll bring the money with him then."

"But the option expires at six o'clock. Your father'll be here too late."

"That's just it," she pursued anxiously. "That's why we've spent so many hours trying to find you. I wanted to ask you to extend the option. You must extend it."

Kernan laughed. "Really, I don't see how I can do that. I want to sell that land at once, and if your father isn't here to buy it I'll have to let it go to the first cash purchaser."

"But it will be only a few hours," pleaded the girl. "You don't know how much it means to us—to father! He's staked everything on getting this land."

Kernan shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said; "but it is equally important to me that I sell the timber at once. I've got to use the cash to-day."

"Father will be here to-day with the cash," expostulated Glendora. "Oh, you must wait for him!"

"I can't afford to take chances on your father not getting here," persisted Kernan.

The girl gave an exclamation of bitter disappointment. Chivington flashed a glance at her sorrowful face and stepped forward.

"Have you made a deal with the G. and G. people?" he asked bluntly.

Kernan faced him smilingly. "I heard you had left the old firm," he said. "I must say you were quick to hook up with another cause. Well, I can't say I blame you." He looked slyly at Glendora. Then he grew serious again.

"I haven't made any deal with G. and G. Both Deems and Gordon tried to get me to bind myself, but I didn't see any reason for doing so. But I have made up my mind to let Grimes have the property the minute the Peyton option expires."

"But you just said," protested Chivington, "that you'd make over the land to the first man who paid you the cash."

"I still hold by that," retorted Kernan. "I merely spoke of Grimes because I happen to know that he'll be on hand with the cash at six o'clock. I'll sell to the first cash customer who presents himself."

"Will you put that in writing?" asked Chivington.

"Surely," answered Kernan. "I hope this will suit."

He opened a desk and scribbled a few words on a piece of paper. He signed the slip and handed it to Chivington.

"I hope that'll satisfy you," he laughed grimly.

Chivington carefully tucked the paper in his pocket and picked up his hat.

"I guess we can do nothing more here, Miss Peyton," he said, and with troubled eyes the girl prepared to follow.

Kernan called after them as they were leaving the room.

"I might as well tell you frankly that your case is hopeless. Grimes reached town last night with two hundred thousand dollars in cash with him. He's down in the yards in his private car now, waiting for the Peyton option to run out. He'll be at my office promptly at six o'clock."

CHAPTER VIII.

The Kidnaped Coach.

THE strain of the night had begun to tell on the girl. As they reached the sidewalk in front of Kernan's home she began to cry.

Chivington placed his hand on her arm.

"Don't," he whispered tenderly; "please don't. We haven't been beaten yet."

"But what else is there to be done?" she cried piteously. "We've found Mr. Kernan, and failed utterly. Don't think I care for myself," she rushed on quickly. "It's only because of father. He's worked so hard to establish himself in his business, and it will break his heart to lose now—and all through a trick of an unscrupulous man."

"We haven't been beaten yet," reiterated Chivington gently. "We've gone through too much to quit now."

She checked her sobs with an effort

and seized his hand with a girlish impulse.

"I'd be unworthy your friendship and your help," she declared, "if I broke down now. Please forgive me."

"Forgive!" he exclaimed feelingly. "Why, don't you understand I think you the most courageous woman in the world? If we still carry this thing through it will be solely because yours is the sort of fighting spirit that makes things come right in spite of obstacles."

"Don't talk that way to me," she pleaded. "It makes me ashamed."

They turned into a dark side street that skirted the rear of the G. and G. mills, crossed behind the log pond, and finally came out upon the railway tracks. A quarter of a mile's walk brought them to the siding where Potter was keeping vigil in the stolen locomotive.

"Hello, Potter," greeted Chivington in an undertone. "Anybody disturbed you?"

"Nary a soul," answered the homesteader. "I've been sitting in the cab, taking things comfortable. Haven't heard a sound since you left."

"Are you still with us, Potter?"

"To the last drop, Mr. Chivington," he answered.

"Then we're likely to have to try your nerve again before the night's out. Things are beginning to look desperate, indeed."

The girl and the two men perched themselves in the cab of the engine, and for ten minutes conversed in excited whispers. Finally, with a hand-shake all around, Chivington and Glendora dropped to the track and hurried away in the darkness.

With extreme caution they made their way nearly a mile through the company's railway yards. They spoke but occasionally, and only in whispers, keeping a sharp lookout for night watchmen, who were supposed to keep the mill property patrolled.

They passed behind a long string of logging cars, treading on their tip-toes. A man with a lantern came along

whistling, and they dodged under one of the cars, huddling close together until he had disappeared into the mill yard.

At last they reached the end of the flat-cars, and Chivington held the girl so she could peek out across the tracks. Almost directly opposite them a large passenger coach loomed in the darkness.

"Grimes's private car," breathed Chivington. "He's sleeping in there with his two hundred thousand dollars. There'll be a guard."

They stooped in their tracks, scarcely daring to breathe, and tried to see through the darkness. All lights in the coach had been extinguished, and not a sound came from within.

As they watched they noticed a tiny glow of fire on the observation platform of the coach.

Chivington gripped Glendora's arm warningly. "That's the guard," he whispered. "He's smoking a cigar."

They waited a few minutes, but the guard remained motionless. Chivington found a heavy piece of bark beside the track and flung it recklessly into the darkness. The billet struck in a clump of bushes on the opposite side of the car.

The watchers saw the glowing cigar-end move quickly to the side of the platform, and then disappear.

"He's gone to investigate," exclaimed Chivington in an undertone. "Here's our chance! Wait for me here, and don't make a sound!"

With the stealth of an Indian he tiptoed his way to the side of the private coach, and crawled beneath the forward platform. He acted so swiftly that Glendora, in her concealment, scarcely realized he had left her side.

They could hear the watchman beating around in the bushes on the other side of the tracks. Presently he came back and walked around the coach, pausing occasionally as though to listen. He made the circuit twice, and then resumed his seat on the observation platform.

Chivington could have touched the man's leg as he passed the second time, but he held his position beneath the coach, crouched and motionless.

Ten minutes went by, and the silence remained unbroken. Fifteen minutes elapsed, and Chivington began to grow anxious. The three o'clock whistle at the mill blew, and he took advantage of the prolonged shriek to shift his position and relieve his cramped muscles.

Ahead in the darkness there came the faint sound of a puffing engine. Glaring down the track Chivington saw the red glow of the fire-box, and then he heard the clanking of revolving gear. With every nerve and muscle keyed for action he waited.

The engine was approaching, almost at a foot-pace, the steam chasing lazily back and forth through the valves. He watched it with a thumping pulse.

Suddenly he heard footsteps beside him, and the guard advanced down the track.

"Here! Where you going with that engine?" Chivington heard him call.

"Look out there! You'll get run down!" came back Potter's voice from the cab.

"You can't get through here!" shouted the guard. "You'll bump Mr. Grimes's car!"

"Then bump and be damned to you!" yelled Potter, and he drove the pilot of the engine against the private coach.

Before the bumpers touched, Chivington had leaped from his place of concealment. He seized the engine coupling and rammed it home, dropping the iron pin in place with his other hand.

"All right, Potter!" he cried. "Take her away!"

Potter threw on his reverse lever, and the sturdy little engine began backing with little coughs and jerks and a mad spinning of wheels, trundling the heavy coach slowly forward.

With a furious yell the guard sprang to the step of the cab and started for Potter. He got no farther.

As soon as he made the coupling, Chivington sprinted up the track. He seized the man by the foot and tore his grip from the hand-rail.

The guard turned fiercely upon his assailant, but Chivington smothered him in a muscular hug and dragged him into the ditch. The pair wrestled desperately on their feet for an instant, and then fell together, with the guard underneath.

With a snarl the man reached to his pocket, but Chivington twisted the half-drawn revolver from his fingers and flung it into the ditch.

"Go on, Potter!" shouted Chivington. "Take her out of here!"

Under Potter's coaxing hand the engine was jumping into its speed with quick little spurts.

Chivington released his grasp on the guard as the private coach rumbled past him. He jumped to his feet and darted into the shelter of the bushes.

The outraged prisoner scrambled back to the track and paused in momentary indecision. Then he turned and ran in vain pursuit of the kidnaped coach.

As the man dashed down the track, Chivington came out from the bushes and called softly to Glendora. She reached his side, fluttering with excitement.

"Have we made it?" she cried.

"A clean getaway!" rejoiced Chivington. "Potter opened the switches before he came down! He's got an open track to the forest, and he's going fast! They'll never catch him now!"

"But can't Grimes and the porter climb into the engine and overpower him?"

"Not while he's backing. They'd have to come over the pilot and down the running-board, and Potter'd account for a dozen men if they tried to rush him that way."

As he spoke a light suddenly flared in the observation window of the rapidly receding coach.

"See!" he exclaimed delightedly. "Grimes is awake, and they're running

too fast for him to jump! He'll have to stay with Potter! And Potter promised to lose him twenty miles in his own woods—Grimes and his two hundred thousand dollars!"

CHAPTER IX.

The Winning Pair.

HENRY GORDON, general manager of the Grimes & Gottschalk mills, had breakfasted early. Immaculately groomed, well fed, and with a smile of deep satisfaction on his sallow face, he arrived at the Hattiesburg office of James Kernan before the majority of the townspeople had left their beds. Kernan had reached his desk a few minutes before.

The two men shook hands and lighted cigars. Gordon glanced at the clock and chuckled.

"President Grimes will be here in five minutes," he observed comfortably. "He'll have the money with him."

Kernan opened the drawer of his desk and placed a packet of papers in his pocket.

"The Peyton option will expire in five minutes," he stated solemnly. "I'm ready to make over the deeds to Grimes any time after that."

He gazed reflectively out the window. "I hate to turn Peyton down, for this thing's going to break him. But as I told his daughter last night, I want to sell to-day, and I can't chance his not showing up."

"It'll be a pleasure to smash Peyton!" declared Gordon vindictively. "Some of these little independent fellows are getting altogether too fresh. Peyton's the worst of the lot."

Kernan puffed at his cigar and said nothing.

The clock finally struck six, and Gordon walked to the window and looked into the street. In a minute he came back and sat down. At quarter past six he went to the window again. Then he began pacing the floor rest-

lessly. Six-thirty came, and he went to the door. He remained there several minutes.

"I say, Kernan, what do you suppose is keeping Mr. Grimes?" he asked nervously when he returned to the desk.

"Can't say," answered Kernan, who was rummaging quietly through his papers. He glanced up and grinned. "Peyton's apt to be along pretty soon."

"Curse Peyton!" exploded Gordon. He glanced again at the clock. "Grimes ought to be getting here."

Shortly before eight o'clock the office door was flung open and a hatless, excited man rushed into the room.

"Have you seen President Grimes?" he shouted.

"My God! Where is he?" cried Gordon.

"I don't know!" returned the other. "His private car's disappeared from the yards. It's gone!"

"Gone where?" yelled the superintendent.

"Don't know. The man who was guarding it is over at the mill with a black eye. He says it was stolen by a runaway engine with a lunatic for an engineer!"

Gordon dashed frantically for Kernan's telephone. As he grabbed the receiver the door opened again, and he glanced up with nervous expectancy. The telephone crashed to the floor, and a flush of consternation and rage swept across his face.

Smiling and radiant, Chivington and Glendora walked into the office. Just behind them followed a little, gray-haired man, whose deep-set, blue eyes twinkled merrily behind his nose-glasses. Both he and Chivington carried heavy valises.

"Mr. Peyton!" exclaimed Kernan, jumping from his chair and offering his hand. "You were almost too late!"

"But not quite—eh, Kernan?" the old lumberman chuckled. "Here's the money, the full two hundred thousand. And Mr. Chivington has given me

your signed promise to sell to the first comer. I'll take over the deeds now, if it's all satisfactory."

"That suits me down to the ground," declared Kernan, as he returned to the desk and started to run through his papers. "Frankly, Mr. Peyton, I preferred it should be you. But I didn't dare wait. I've another deal on to-day."

Gordon came forward. His face was distorted with fury, and his entire body shook with emotion. He glared threateningly at Chivington.

"I've a sneaking notion you've been meddling in this," he shouted. "Do you know what happened to President Grimes?"

Chivington laughed with reminiscent relish, but Peyton interrupted before he could answer.

"Gordon," drawled the old man, "I owe you an apology as well as my heartfelt thanks. I've always thought, and would have told you so if you'd asked me, that you have never done a good deed in your life. I take it back unreservedly."

"Yesterday, I'm told, you fired Mr. Chivington. That was a very decent and magnanimous action on your part. I thank you for it."

He took off his glasses and shook them pleasantly at Gordon.

"By releasing Mr. Chivington," he pursued, "you dropped into my hands one of the most capable men in the entire lumber industry. When I get a grip on a good thing I don't let go."

"I've just made Mr. Chivington the general superintendent of all my interests in Hattiesburg. And I can promise you that those interests will be well worth trusting to a big-salaried manager."

He abruptly turned his back upon Gordon and beamed upon Kernan.

"That young man was at your home with my daughter last night," he said. "Perhaps you're now beginning to guess a little of what I owe him."

He reached for Glendora's fingers, pressed them affectionately, and drew

her nearer. Then he placed his other hand on Chivington's broad shoulder.

"The best pair any man ever drew to," he chuckled.

Glendora blushed confusedly, but she allowed her eyes for an instant to meet Chivington's; and in that glance was a mutual intelligence which did not escape the old man.

He must have been pleased with the mute message he intercepted, for he chuckled again.

"The best pair I know of," he repeated softly; and this time he gave a new and deeply significant accent to the word "pair."

Kernan smiled gently and gave his hand to Chivington.

"I want to be the first to congratulate you on your new job," he said slowly. Then he looked meaningly at the flushing Glendora. "And I guess I won't go far wrong if I let my congratulations go double—eh, Chivington?"

But Gordon was not in a mood to appreciate light interludes of tenderness.

"I asked you a question, Chivington," he snarled, thrusting his way in

front of the little group. "I want to know what happened to President Grimes!"

Chivington eyed his ex-boss coolly.

"Do you remember Potter?" he inquired with bland good humor—"Potter, whose homestead you wanted to steal?"

"What's Potter got to do with Mr. Grimes?" shouted the enraged Gordon.

"Really, Mr. Gordon, you mustn't excite yourself," advised Chivington solemnly. "The last I saw of your president he was hitting out for the woods as fast as he could travel. He didn't want to go, but somehow he just couldn't help it."

Mr. Peyton laughed outright, and even Kernan began to grin.

"I last saw President Grimes at three o'clock this morning," pursued Chivington gravely. "He was riding in his own private car, over his own logging road, behind his own engine, into his own forest, at a rate of about twenty-five miles an hour."

"And Mr. Potter, the new woods boss for Peyton & Company, was the engineer."

(The end.)

LOVE'S ROAD

By James Owen Tryon

NOW I would take my scrip and staff
And follow where you go,
Dance to the music of your laugh,
Your mirths or sorrows know.


I care not where the road may lead
Or what the toll may be,
For some day you will surely need
This pilgrim heart of me.

And there and then, while skies are fair,
What path more straight or true
Than that by which your loads I bear
And cheer the heart of you?

M E L I N D Y

A SHORT STORY

BY EDWIN CARLILE LITSEY

HINYHEAD JO had gone "hog wild," and it was all because of a woman.

That section of the Kentucky Cumberland Mountains known locally as Turkey-foot, on account of its peculiar configuration, did not possess the type of female loveliness which sweeps a man like a sirocco blast. They were pale, shapeless creatures in the main, old and broken in their 'teens, the result of manual labor beyond their strength.

So when Rad Gunny moved up from some unknown dwelling place in the Georgia wilderness, for reasons which he did not think necessary to make public, and brought with him his young wife, the scattered community gasped.

She was indeed a vivid wild rose of the South, and she had learned some trick of dress, some art of fluffing and curling her glistening black hair, which enhanced her physical charms many fold.

Shinyhead Jo encountered Rad and his woman on the trail one afternoon in April, as they were covering the last lap of their journey to their new home. They were perched on the seat of a two-horse wagon drawn by a pair of bony, cat-hammed mules. The wagon-bed was filled with household truck.

Rad had been up the month before prospecting, and Jo knew that they were coming. He had stepped aside to give the wagon the right of way on the narrow road while his gaze found the woman.

He stopped and grounded his rifle, staring in direct, open amazement and admiration at the red-lipped, mischievous-eyed, saucy face under the slanting poke bonnet. Rad pulled up his tired team.

"How fur mought it be to Deep Crick, stranger?" he asked, tilting his old slouch-hat with his thumb and drawing his palm across his forehead. He was a big, strongly built man.

Shinyhead Jo did not answer.

The vision of the New Jerusalem which the aged eyes of St. John beheld on Patmos was no more of a revelation to him than was this flaunting, flaming specimen of womanhood to Jo. He had looked upon mothers, grannies, sisters, aunts, and the like all his life; he had never seen a woman before.

He felt that something was crawling inside him; something that both tickled and bit!

Rad waited a few moments, while the mules sagged on their feet, heads drooping. The eyes of the girl had narrowed, and a thin line of white showed between her scarlet, smiling lips. She was looking straight at the man on the roadside.

"How fur to Deep Crick?" repeated Rad, raising his voice sharply.

Shinyhead Jo moved his eyes alone and regarded the speaker stonily.

"Huh? Oh! Ten mile, I 'low; some mought say twelve."

"Make it by night, yo' s'pose?"

"Dunno. Yo' critters 'pear 'bout wo' out. They's a moon, though; a young 'n'."

"Better be gitt'n' 'long then, I reck'n."

Rad squirmed into a new position and picked up his blacksnake whip. The girl at his side put a detaining hand upon his arm.

"Straight ahead, ain't it, mister?" she asked sweetly, bending toward the tall, loose-jointed form standing by the off mule's head. "They ain't no turnoffs whur we c'd git los'?"

Jo felt his face heating under his sandy whiskers.

"They's a fawk 'bout two mile on," he said. "Turn to th' lef'."

The thought of their driving away did not find a welcome, and he essayed to hold them a few moments.

"How long yo' ben a coming?" he asked, walking slowly forward with the question. At the front wheel he stopped, and lifted his booted foot to the mud-encrusted hub. The girl was on this side of the wagon.

"Two weeks to-day."

It was Rad who answered, and Jo's upturned glance showed him that the girl was looking straight ahead now with prim, composed features. He slid his foot from the hub and took a chew of tobacco.

"Fur ja'nt, wuzn't it?" he ventured, in a tone not near so interested. "Glad yo' 'bout lit, I reckon?"

"You bet," returned Rad, in a manner which indicated the last question was more than superfluous.

"This yo' woman, o' co'se?" said Jo, the easy ethics of the mountains presenting no bar to personalities of this description.

"Uh-huh; Melindy. Jes' ben married three mont's. Skeercely got 'quainted yit, yo' mought say."

Gunny grinned at his fair partner and playfully nudged her uncorseted side with his elbow.

"Likely look'n' gal, by shucks!" was Jo's genuine compliment.

Melindy said not a word and kept her eyes set on some point ahead.

Rad spoke again.

"Know uv any chanct fur a feller

to make a livin' 'bout here? I'm a fust rate han' at some things."

With this most innocent, ordinary declaration, he stared hard into the eyes under the vizor of Shinyhead Jo's old corduroy cap.

The man on the ground was no fool. He knew what was what in the community parlance, and he sensed the newcomer's meaning as plainly as if it had not been couched in veiled words. Another thought quickly followed, and it was the second thought which shaped his lips to a pleased grin.

"They's bar'ls o' work," he answered; "'n' 'tain't extry hard. Th' p'int is to know whur to go to git it. Tell yo' whut I'll do. I'm knowed all over Tukky-foot 'n' I know whut's goin' on. I'll give yo' a day 'r two to get set up, then I'll drap 'roun' 'n' talk business to yo'."

"S a go," agreed Rad, again squaring himself. "Yo' know whur? Up Rabbit Lope Holler a jump 'r two."

"Ben thur a thousan' times!" laughed Jo, stepping back into the wayside weeds as a sharp call to the mules set the chain traces to jangling.

He looked up again as the loaded wagon creaked in response. He caught a little nod; a glimpse of shining eyes, then Rad Gunny and his woman rolled down the trail and presently were out of sight around a turn.

Jo took off his cap and gave a prodigious "*Where!*"

"I didn't know they made sich!" he soliloquized softly, and stood there staring down at the gray-white clay before him for many minutes.

He was a young man, tall and awkward. Scarcely more than twenty seasons of frost had passed over his head, but they had bitten it clean of all hair on top. It was a legend on Turkey-foot that all the Simco men had slick heads before they were twenty-one. He did nothing, and lived with his parents as a sort of pet. There were fourteen others, all younger.

He had never been out of the wil-

derness of his nativity, and the female of his species had been a sort of machine to chop stove-wood, tote water from the spring, cook his grub, and minister to his comfort generally. But the scales had fallen from his eyes in that hour.

That something which had leaped into life inside him when he first beheld Melindy grew momentarily, and already threatened his peace. His chest was tight and felt funny, and his eyes were hot.

When he at length moved on it was with bent head, and a brain which had begun to scheme.

Shortly after noon two days later found him striding along the bank of Deep Creek, a narrow, swift stream, where it debouched from Rabbit Lope Hollow. He had timed his call at this hour for a purpose; there was a chance that the man of the house might be away. The food of recollection upon which he had feasted since that encounter on the highway had put something in Jo's blood which nagged at his peace.

As he came in sight of the log cabin which was his goal, pale-blue smoke was ascending in a wavering column from the stick-and-mud chimney. This was not a good sign. It indicated cooking.

Jo squinted at the sun, observed that it was at least an hour past dinner time, and went doggedly on. Presently he heard a woman's voice singing, and his heart leaped. He stopped a few feet from the open door.

"Hello!" he called.

A moment later Melindy appeared, still caroling a rollicking tune. Her sleeves were rolled up, and she was drying a cheap, yellow earthenware bowl with a coarse towel.

"Why, it's Mr. —!" she exclaimed, with a quick effort at demureness, which added to her charm.

Shinyhead felt as though his ribs were collapsing.

"I'm Jo Simco, Miz Gunny. I 'lowed—"

He stopped, tongue-tied.

Melindy could best be described as petite. Add to that a pretty, unintelligent face, piquancy of manner, and spirit naturally ebullient, and no one need wonder at Jo's plight.

The girl smiled dazzlingly, her white, plump hands moving swiftly over the bowl.

"Walk right in, Mr. Simco. Yo'll fin' things a bit mussed, but yo're welcome." She continued talking as Jo made his entrance, a fixed grin on his sandy-whiskered face. "I take it mos' neighborly o' you to come so fur so soon. Rad 'n' me 've jes' had our snack 'n' he's gone fur a bucket o' water. Can't I fix you a bite, Mr. Simco?"

"I've et," replied Jo, standing with his head almost touching the ceiling, and watching the girl's every movement with hungry eyes.

"Then take a cheer 'n' res' yo' hat," urged Melindy, whisking the shining bowl into a box which served for a cupboard and picking up a chipped plate. This she soused in the dishpan and presently brought forth dripping.

Jo accepted the invitation to sit, but as his hand went up mechanically to his cap, he stopped, and remained covered. Women were curious things.

He wanted to begin his treacherous campaign, but he had forgotten how. For the past two nights he had lain in the loft at home making his plans. He had his method of procedure all outlined; the very words he would say to her when first he found her alone. And behold!

Minutes were racing by, and Rad might arrive any moment, and the plotter's mind was a muddle. He could only look, and breathe hard, and twist his bare toes helplessly in their rough brogan shoes. And directly the head of the house entered.

Mrs. Gunny presented the caller by name. Rad shook hands with him heartily, hitched at his sagging trousers' band, and at once suggested that they step outside for a chat. So

to the bare space in front of the cabin they went, each dragging a low, bark-bottomed chair behind him.

It was all business, this talk. While not exactly kindred spirits, they moved in the same strata of existence. Jo knew of one or two openings where a man of Rad's confessed skill and daring would come in handy, and in return for this service, to be rendered at once, Gunny grew confidential. He whispered to Jo why Georgia had grown undesirable for him, and Jo listened, his long legs stretched out in front of him, his eyes squinted, his head nodding slowly.

A great admiration was born in him for the adventurer's craft and courage, but overshadowing it was a deceit as old as that which prompted King David to put Uriah in the forefront of the battle. And all the time they sat there, whether he talked or listened, Jo was conscious of an undercurrent of song stealing out of the cabin-door.

So it was, when he had bidden Rad and his wife good-by with a promise to come again as soon as he had got "things fixed," he fared him away to the home of Dad Slaymush, a sobriquet gained because of that individual's ability as a trencherman with this homely article of diet.

Dad was the most reckless of all the lawless men who made contraband whisky in that vicinity, and though his still had been destroyed time and again, he had never been captured. But it was the best chance Jo knew for the furtherance of his plot, and as a result of his visit Rad Gunny was accepted as a partner the next afternoon.

It was in the days immediately following this arrangement that Shiny-head Jo went "hog wild."

Such poise as nature had provided him became totally unbalanced, and he retained only his cunning, a trait which grew prodigiously during this distressful period. He went to the Gunny home often. Usually Rad was there, for his work was done mostly at night,

and Jo could scrape up no legitimate excuse for an evening call.

It was this tormenting, baffling condition which so quickly ravaged his peace, making him an object of remark in the neighborhood and a source of much concern for his family. He became moody and cross; ate little, drank much, and roamed the mountains day and night. Prodded by the scourge of that something inside him which would never let him rest, he at last got to frequenting by night the vicinity of the cabin up Rabbit Lope Hollow.

There was a certain secret place on the side of one of the spurs, where he came time and again to keep watch over the lonely habitation. There he would stay for hours and wrestle with himself.

He would review each time he had been with Melindy; would recall every act and word and smile, and strive to interpret them to suit his disordered fancy. And eventually his mind always went back to that first meeting, when she had looked straight at him with lowered lashes, and smiled at him with lips as red as holly berries.

"What in hell did she mean by that?" he wanted to know!

The moon came later now, and had grown fuller. There must have been some baneful essence lurking in its mellow radiance, for upon the night of an especially trying day during which Jo had swallowed much white whisky and trudged many miles, his senses deserted him entirely.

When the light, which he had been watching with doglike intentness, went out of the tiny window he left his covert, and, trailing his rifle, crept toward the cabin like a hunter stalking skittish game.

His movements were stealthy, although he knew that Rad was three good miles away. Moon-mania, or liquor, or innate deviltry, or all three, caused him to thump with his knuckles upon the weather-grayed planks of Rad Gunny's door.

There came no answer, and in the

silence which followed his rap, a sane glimmer struggled into Shinyhead Jo's drugged intellect. He knocked again.

"Hello! Who's thur?"

The hail helped to steady the prowler further. The sweet, clear voice beyond the door did not seem at all frightened.

"Miz Gunny," he said, speaking a little thickly: "I'm Jo. 'S Rad here?"

He heard a movement within as the girl got out of bed, and the light pattering of her feet across the floor. He turned to the window, and saw her face framed there for an instant as she peered out; a fresh, childlike face in which two big eyes were set, and beneath it the shadowy white of her nightgown. She dodged back when she saw him looking, and an instant later her voice came again.

"It didn't soun' lak you, Mr. Simco. Rad's 'way. Anything I c'n tell 'im, ur will yo' drap 'roun' to-morrer?"

The calm naturalness of her voice sent a shiver of despair over the man standing with one foot on the low step. It likewise sobered him, and cleared his brain of the miasmic vapor begotten by his solitary brooding.

"Yes'm," he replied directly. "I's pass'n-by 'n' I 'lowed I'd stop 'n' tell 'im I'd he'p 'im in gittin' th' cawn down to th' stillhus ef he wanted me to."

"Oh! I know he'd sho' be glad o' that, 'n' I'll tell 'im fus' thing in th' mawn'n'. You-uns ben mighty good to we-uns, 'n' me 'n' Rad pays 'tention to sich things. Sorry I can't ast yo' to set down a spell."

"Air yo' sleepy, M'lindy?" queried Jo, in a honeyed voice.

"Well, not to say sleepy, I s'pose. I usually go to bed to git rid o' th' lonesome."

"Then whut's to hinder us frum havin' a li'l' chat?" pursued Jo. "I skeercely ever ketch any res' tel after th' turn o' night. I c'n set right here on th' do'step 'n' you c'n set in thur."

"All right!" agreed Melindy, laughing. "That'll be fun, won't it?"

"It sho' will!" confirmed Jo, leaning his gun against the log wall and wedging himself as close to the door as possible.

The faint swish of soft garments came to his keen ears, and he set his teeth and clamped a hand over each knee. He waited a few minutes, but she did not speak. Evidently he was expected to begin the conversation.

"I've ben a wonder'n', M'lindy, how come it yo' married Rad?"

This was rather a startling beginning, but the simple-hearted creature within the room must have seen in it only cause for mirth. This time her laughter came in a staccato gust, and it sounded so close to his ear that Jo jumped, and turned to stare.

The wooden barrier still intervened, but he knew that she was sitting on the floor not two feet from him. All his torso seemed to turn into a sensitive jelly at the thought.

"Whut makes any gel marry a man, Mr. Simco?" retorted Melindy, her tones shaking with glee. "Maybe 'cause she loves 'im; maybe 'cause she wants a home o' her own—oh, they's lots o' reasons!"

"Rad's a good feller," pursued Jo; "he's whut yo' might call a hoss fur doin' things. Co'se he's kin' 'n' good—couldn't he'p hisseff 'ith sich a gel's you allus 'roun'."

The reply to this artful speech was not instantaneous.

"They ain't nobody gunta live together 'ithout some tiffs," Melindy presently gave as her opinion, and the plotter without caught the note of dejection.

He smiled in secret pleasure, for this index to the domestic life of the Gunny's, however slight and perhaps in part imagined, would serve him.

"Oh! Co'se they ain't! I know that!" he agreed. "Not 'cause I've ever kep' house 'ith a woman, but I've seed it time 'n' agin. Thur's pap 'n' ma; they furse some'n' tur'ble, 'n' allus did ever since I's a li'l' kid. Still I can't see no kin' o' sinse in it. Ef I

ever tuk a woman, 'n' she's allus kin' 'n' good 'n' sweet 'n' smil'n' 'n' sing'n'—that woman c'd tromp on me 'n' I'd jes' lick her shoes!"

There came no reply to this sentiment. But directly—

"Purty night, Mr. Simco, ain't it?"

"Plum' fine, M'lindy—'n' since we're to be clost neighbors 'n' good friends, 'pears to me yo' oughter call me Jo, same 's Rad. I feel kind o'—kind o' lak I'm not welcome w'en yo' mister me."

A gentle laugh sounded behind the door.

"Yo're th' beat'n's' man I ever seen! . . . I'm a git'n' sleepy—Jo."

"God A'mighty!" breathed Shinyhead, to the surrounding hills.

The sibilant exclamation was drawn from him by Melindy's last speech. It was spoken during the expulsion of a yawn, and ended with his given name. There was something in the manner of her saying it which flashed her before his vision as plainly as though she sat in the sunlight before him—and the sight was both torture and bliss. He felt the surface muscles twitching on his arms and legs.

"Better crawl in, then," he sent back. "They tell me folks git purty that sleep mos' 'fo' fus' rooster-crow'n'." He got up. "'S that a fac'. M'lindy?"

"Ever' gel knows that—yo' goose! Now, I'm gone. Good night!"

The last word came faintly.

"Good-by!" called Jo, in eager response. "Don't furgit to tell Rad!"

During the week which followed Jo was alternately on the heights and in the depths. He couldn't "make out" Melindy. Sometimes she would look at him and smile devilishly; sometimes she seemed scarcely to know he was present.

He essayed another nocturnal tête-à-tête, to be told that she "'spected they'd better not do that no mo'." Then, as he was moving away, crestfallen, she called after him through the keyhole to

be sure and come again soon in the daytime.

The raid for which he hoped had not come off. What had happened to the government, he wondered, that they were letting 'Turkey-foot folks alone? Maybe the revenue officers needed a little stirring up. Maybe a word in the right place—Shinyhead Jo, recklessly treading the rocky top of a high range, whither that spike-footed thing in his chest had driven him, halted and whirled till he faced Jackson, the county-seat.

Wasn't court in session, and wasn't they trying Goatchin George for murder? Wasn't Juliver, the terror of all evil-doers in that section, present as a witness? Did Juliver ever come after a man and go back without him? It was a twenty-mile hike to Jackson, but Jo made it in five hours.

The night on which he was betrayed, Rad was slow in telling his young wife good-by as he started to work. An unconfirmed rumor had come to him the day before that trouble was ahead for some of the gang. Nothing definite was declared, but the news was afloat. He took both his belt-guns that evening and finally departed, whistling his customary tune.

Near midnight the fist of Shinyhead Jo descended upon Rad Gunny's door. He heard the start with which the occupant of the room awakened before her half-startled query came, thick with sleep:

"Whut's th' matter?"

"Git up 'n' light th' lamp 'n' dress? Quick! Hell's to pay!"

Almost instantly the small window glowed to the match within, a shadow moved distortedly athwart it, the light flared up and steadied, and the door was opened.

Jo but partly masked the baseborn joy which leaped to his features when he saw Melindy. She had not taken time to dress, but had thrown a dark underskirt around her. Her black, unbraided, curling hair was short; it hung about her cheeks and on her shoulders.

She was plainly scared, for her lips were ajar, her eyes wide and her forehead drawn.

"Whur's Rad?" she cried piteously. "They ain't—they ain't—"

Jo brushed past her, drew the door from her nerveless hand and shut it, and sat down before he answered.

"It looks might'y thataway."

The girl checked a sob and leaned against the wall, putting one hand over her heart.

The intruder regarded her with impatience. He was keyed up with mean liquor for this night's adventure.

"They ain't no use hav'n' a swivet 'bout it," he declared; "jes' set down 'n' take it easy, 'n' I'll tell yo' whut I know."

Melindy moved silently across to the big fireplace and crouched on a three-legged stool.

"It's thisaway," resumed Jo, uneasiness beginning to show in his face at the way Melindy was taking the news. "I heard this mawn'n' that this damn feller Jul'ver's some're's on Tukky-foot, 'n' to-night I got so worrit 'n' anxi's that I went down to th' still 'bout half a' hour 'go. Ol' dad didn't show to-night — got rheumatiz — 'n' that lef' Rad by hisseff. I reck'n some'n' happened all right. Th' still's busted 'n' broke, th' bar'ls all caved in, 'n' no Rad nowhurs."

He stopped and stared about the room, wet his lips, and finally centered his gaze on the humped-over little form with its face in its hands. She was sobbing.

The sight was an irritant to his tense emotions.

"Whut 'n' thunder yo' cry'n' fur?" he demanded crossly. He got up, went to her, and put one hand on her shoulder.

"They's jes' 's good men clost to han' 's Rad Gunny ever wuz!" he said, in a low voice.

Melindy jumped up as though a whip had struck her and ran across the small room. Turning, she faced her startled wooer with wrathful countenance.

"Whut yo' mean, Jo Simco—'n' whut yo' com'n' here 'ith this lie fur? Yo' wait tel Rad comes in th' mawn'n' 'n' yo'll see!"

The man's cunning deserted him under the sting of her words.

"He ain't a com'n' in th' mawn'n', fur I saw 'im han'cuffed straddle uv a hoss 'n' headed fur Jacks'n. 'N' yo'd jes' 's well make up yo' min' to live 'ith me, 'cause I'm agunta have yo'!"

"Yo'—dawg!" hissed Melindy between her teeth, her face chalky with fear and rage. "Don't yo' tech me, ur I'll—"

The tread of approaching feet stilled her tongue.

Before either could speak the door was opened very gently and two men entered—Rad and Juliver. The former wore handcuffs, and trailing from them was a fine steel chain whose other end was gripped by the officer. Just within the door they stood, side by side.

Shinyhead Jo's face went pasty gray, and he fumbled nervously at his empty belt as he saw the savage fury which gathered in Rad's eyes. He had left his rifle outside.

Juliver's keen mind must have appraised the situation correctly, for one of his strong hands went to his prisoner's shoulder as he spoke, calmly and steadily.

"Go slow, Gunny. It seems well that I yielded to your wish to tell your wife good-by. There's been some low-down work here, and we'll see it made straight."

Rad had half raised his manacled hands as though to attempt a rush, but he put them down when his captor spoke, and glared silent hate at the man who had tried to ruin him. Not once had his eyes sought Melindy.

"Whut you a doin' here this time o' night?" he muttered, between clenched teeth.

The question brought a vile thought to the cornered man, and, more vindictive in his defeat than cautious, he determined to use it. Giving a short laugh, he answered:

"'Tain't th' fus' time! Ast her!"

Melindy had stood silent, a distressed and shaking spectator, but as Jo Simco uttered this slander her face glowed with shame, and she took a step forward.

She began talking, in quick and broken sentences, for tears were flowing fast now, and her throat choked more than once. She told, crudely, but fervently, all the truth, now speaking to Rad and now to Juliver, whom she called mister.

At the conclusion of her stormy recital she was all but hysterical, and clung trembling to her husband with one arm around his neck. And because his hands were helpless, he bent his head until his cheek rested upon her hair. Though his head was bent, his burning eyes still glared at the coward, while now and then a spasm of shackled strength shook his big frame.

Juliver was a man before he was an officer, and there had been a wedding back in mid-State a few months before, where he had been one of the principals. His young wife had clung to him in just this fashion before he started on his present raid, begging

him to be careful for her, and for that other who was coming. Perhaps Juliver sensed an analogy.

Now his face was very serious and his mind was very busy. He had a reputation of never coming back defeated, and this prize was safe in his clutches.

Directly he slid his hand in his pocket and brought forth a tiny key, which he quickly fitted to the steel circlets on his captive's wrists.

"I told you I'd see this thing made straight, Rad Gunny," he said. "My duty is to take you back with me, but to-night I say—to hell with duty! Promise me one thing first—you won't kill him?"

Rad's big head came up, and he quaked with the knowledge of a joy he could barely believe.

"I sw'ar I won't kill 'im—quite!"

A twist of finger and thumb and Gunny was free.

"Then go to him!" said the officer.

Juliver stepped quickly without and closed the door. His big bay was patiently waiting, and a moment later the officer was speeding toward Jackson, his heart singing exultantly within him.

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EDITOR, THE CAVALIER, Flatiron Building, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York

CUPID ALWAYS CASHES

A SHORT STORY

BY FRANK CONDON



LIKE a good many other peculiar things, this started in that lovely queen city of the inland seas, Chicago, Ill.

On the very last day of the old year, Mr. Rennold Porter arrived from the West in the town of wind and wurst and made the unqualified statement to the Pullman colored servitor that it certainly was tough luck to have to spend New Year's eve away from home and especially in Chicago, Ill.

Mr. Porter lived in New York. He was young, rich, and unmarried. On New Year's eve at home it was the custom of Mr. Porter and his friends to cut up to a considerable extent.

The African chieftain agreed with Mr. Porter, helped him off the train and handed him his bag. Later on, the New Yorker wandered disconsolately into his favorite hotel, made a few gloomy remarks to the clerk and sat down to a lonesome New Year's eve dinner.

At nine o'clock in the evening Mr. Porter was sitting in his bedroom reading selections from the leather-backed Bible supplied by the hotel and wondering whether he had better turn in for the night or saunter into the streets in an effort to discover whether Chicago celebrated New Year's eve.

His telephone rang. He answered it and his relief was great. Three or four Chicago comrades had accidentally discovered his name on the hotel register and had concluded he would be lonesome on that important eve. Would he like to run about town a bit

during the night and look at the colored lanterns? Mr. Rennold Porter sent a shout of acquiescent joy through the telephone, picked up his hat and joined the merrymakers.

On the stroke of midnight young Mr. Porter sat in a congenial gathering. At his right hand was a tall, dark, mysterious girl, who regarded him ever and anon with approving eyes. To Mr. Porter, three of those in the festive party were known; the others were strangers. Fat men were buying champagne and proposing toasts in loud voices. Every one was wishing every one else a Happy New Year. It was very gay.

Mr. Porter was happy in the thought that he shared the jollity, instead of the murky solitude of his room. The mysterious girl beside him, with the strange, weird eyes, leaned nearer. He turned and studied her closely. She was clad in a tight-fitting suit of black velvet. Her lips were red and full. She was a girl of the stage.

"You," she said, tapping his arm gently, "are one who is to be blessed with great good luck during this year which is now beginning. I am a seeress. The future is an open book to me. I see you achieving great and lasting happiness. I see a slim girl, whose cheeks are very white and whose eyes are blue.

"You are standing near her. You look at her with jealous eyes. But you need have no fear. This is your year of constant good luck and this talisman, which I place in your hand,

will be the token of that fair fortune you are about to enjoy. Take it, sir, and possess it always."

The tall girl opened Mr. Porter's fingers and slipped a round coin into his hand. She laughed gaily. He examined the coin and found it of a yellow metal. On one side were the words: "I Love You." On the reverse side was a design of two hearts, pierced by an arrow. Mr. Porter grinned. It was New Year's eve.

"All right, Princess," he said, smiling into the strange, dark eyes beside him. "Everything goes to-night. This may be some new form of joshing that I don't understand, but I'll try anything once. Thanks for the good fortune I am about to receive. Would Royalty be offended if I poured a few more drops of the yellow liquid into her glass?"

And so they sat and laughed. Rennold dropped the coin into the pocket of his vest and turned his attention to other subjects. A most enjoyable, decorous and friendly time was had. The party disbanded at three o'clock in the morning.

At nine o'clock the following day, the New York express started for the metropolis at full speed and occupying a contented seat in a rear coach was Mr. Rennold Porter.

One of the characteristics that marks the average New Yorker is his utter disbelief in tokens, talismans, superstitions, and prophecies. Rennold Porter, fingering the odd-looking coin, in the privacy of his New York office, wondered about the identity of the girl in the black velvet suit and pondered over the whim that had caused her to point out his future good luck.

"It is now April," he said, looking out over the park, wherein the growing things were taking on the season's green. "All the good luck I've had so far was on the day that intoxicated chauffeur missed me. But that was mere New Year's eve nonsense."

He dropped the coin back into his pocket and sat down to his desk, upon which reposed a pile of unopened mail. On the top of the heap was a communication from his friends, the Grantland Mitchells.

"I saw you on Broadway last week," wrote the head of the Mitchell household, "and you looked pale and drawn. You are keeping your nose too hard against the grindstone. Let up on the chase after the golden bucks. You have enough already for any sensible young man. - Take a rest. Come down and spend a day, a week, a month, or a year at Sonoma Hall and we will treat you with tenderness and bring back the flush of health to your manly cheek. And telegraph when you start, so we can send the machine to meet you."

Porter laughed and looked out again at the new leaves in the park. Grantland Mitchell's home up the Hudson never bored one and Grantland himself—well, there was only one such friend in the world.

It required all of forty seconds for Mr. Porter to glance over his affairs of the immediate future and decide that he could spare himself away from New York for a day or two. His telegram to the Mitchells read:

I shall arrive on that alleged train that is supposed to reach your, in a way of speaking, station at noon Saturday.

His message, when he had finished it, fell off the desk and as Porter stooped to the floor the yellow coin slipped from his vest pocket and rolled across the room. When he retrieved it he noticed that the I-Love-You face was up.

On Saturday, at eleven in the morning, the Royal Westchester express rolled away from the Harlem River station and attacked the perilous trip north with its accustomed *sang-froid*. The Royal Westchester consisted of a locomotive in the last stages of metallic phthisis and two day coaches which had lost their illusions and youth.

Rennold Porter's coach was half filled with persons of the male sex who delve in New York offices, live in a frame house anywhere between Harlem and Peekskill and imagine they are farmers. There was also one other.

Swift, blinding knowledge of the presence of that one other rushed upon the intellect of Mr. Porter and left him holding a magazine upside down and staring over the top of it for the first ten miles north—and ten miles on the Royal Westchester express is quite a long time.

She occupied a seat near the front of the coach and faced the rear, by reason of a small man, in the seat before her, who was transporting three large packages from a department store.

Porter surrendered himself at once to the reflection that this specimen of feminine perfection should immediately be pensioned, subsidized, and otherwise rewarded by the national government on the ground that she was doing American civilization a tremendous favor by merely existing and walking about in public while American civilization looked at her.

He placed his now useless magazine on the seat beside him and tried to guess what color her eyes were. He fixed her age at twenty-two. He tried to remember all the feminine noses he had ever seen and concluded that this particular nose made all the other noses look like rough work.

She was dressed in gray and wore a small gray hat, shaped like a hollowed-out watermelon, on the top of which a black feather waved pertly. There was a faint flush in her cheeks and a defiant, independent, haughty glance in her eyes that reminded you of the scene where Cleopatra comes from behind the throne and tells the worthless Casabianca to go a long ways off.

Porter leaned back in his seat and half closed his eyes, hoping the angelic vision would look his way. Once she

did. Then she turned her eyes away and never again gave a glance. All the way north to Crab Tree Station the young man spent the time thinking that if a beauty contest were to be held and if he were the judge and if this young creature passed by first, then there would be nothing more to it; the other contestants might as well go home.

If he were sole judge the contest would end there and then and he would place the laurel wreath upon her white brow and murmur soft nothings into her shell-like ear, she naturally possessing a shell-like ear, although that useful organ was hidden from Mr. Porter by the watermelon hat.

Then came another hard question into Porter's mind. What was the use of getting off at Crab Tree Station? The instant he stepped from the train the vision would disappear, never to return. Why not sit still and just look at her?

There are certain formalities about getting off at Crab Tree Station, anyhow. That institution consists of a tool-house and a semaphore, with a platform four feet wide and ten feet long. There are no houses near it. The road runs from it, five miles up the mountain to Sonoma Hall, and Grantland Mitchell had to pay the railroad to build the station.

Furthermore, while the Royal Westchester express is not uppish and will do favors for its friends, it is needful to tip the porter, talk to the conductor and send a note to the engineer, if one wants to get out at Crab Tree Station.

With a sigh of deepest melancholy, Porter decided that as Grantland would certainly send the car for him, it would be impossible to remain in his seat and travel beyond Crab Tree, even for the excessive pleasure of staring at the gray lady. He summoned the conductor and told him that the train must stop at the tool-house. Then he gave himself up to sad thoughts, but roused himself with a start a moment

later. The lady in the front seat had also touched the conductor's arm as he passed and now she was speaking to him.

"Is it possible," Porter whispered, feeling a storm of ecstasy coming over him. "Is it possible that this heavenly person is also going to get off at Crab Tree! Why else would she speak to the conductor?"

Horrid doubt succeeded buoyant hope in the young man's mind during the next few miles. At length the express began to slow down and the conductor shouted "Crab Tree Station." Porter made no move, but watched the girl and immediately after the conductor's warning she reached down for a small traveling bag and arose to her feet.

Porter overcame his desire to cheer and gathered up his own impedimenta. The train stopped. The young lady was assisted to the deserted platform by the conductor, who made room for the descending Porter, waved his hand at the engineer and boarded the slowly moving train.

No waiting Grantland Mitchell motor car assailed the Porter gaze. He was vaguely pleased. Like a good general, preparing for an attack upon the doughty enemy, he was lining out a campaign against this haughty damsel, who had moved to the very extreme opposite end of the platform and was looking about her in perplexity. It was, of course obvious, Porter decided, that she, too, was on her way to Sonoma Hall. They were to be friends in the near future.

Therefore, why wait for the formal introduction certain to come, when the present situation justified action. Mr. Porter assumed what he believed to be his best air and walked across the small platform with a respectful stride. He removed his hat and spake.

"It is apparent, miss," he began, "that you and I are fellow-travelers in the same distress. I'm on my way to Sonoma Hall and I presume you

also are. Grantland has evidently neglected us by not sending the machine, as he promised, or he is late or—or something. If I can do anything to help pass the time agreeably till he comes, command me. I am Rennold Porter."

Then the air of aloofness and hauteur melted as if by magic and the young lady turned a most charming smile upon her companion.

"Yes," she said, in one of those tones a young man never forgets, "I, too, expected to find the car waiting here. I had a telegram this morning from Mrs. Mitchell. Undoubtedly something unforeseen has happened. I am Miss King."

There you are. It was as simple as that. In three minutes Rennold Porter had contrived a temporary throne, made of boxes he found in the tool-shed. Miss King seated herself. They spoke to each other politely, just as two people must who have recently met and they found out, in no time at all, that they had many mutual friends.

Miss King talked with somewhat greater freedom than Mr. Porter, because that young man fumbled a good many sentences on account of some nervous disorder he had never previously noticed about himself. He found himself looking directly into those eyes, about whose color he had speculated. They were blue eyes. Oh, very blue eyes.

But he was having a perfectly beautiful time, in spite of his astounding shyness, or whatever it was. He wished the Mitchell motor car would remain broken for several hours, if it had broken down.

It was just as the radiator of the rescuing motor car appeared over a hill in the distance that Rennold remarked, apropos of nothing and to the great mystification of his smiling companion:

"There is one thing that troubles me in connection with something in the past."

"What is it?" Miss King inquired.

"Your eyes are blue, without any doubt in the world. But your complexion is *not* pallid. It is almost the opposite of pallid. I wonder if it is possible that that Chicago prophet was slightly mixed up on her colors?"

Not knowing the answer to this cryptic remark, Miss King arose and they prepared to be rescued. Grantland Mitchell was not in the car, but the chauffeur explained.

"You are Miss King and Mr. Porter, are you not? Mr. Mitchell says to tell you that he couldn't come himself and hopes you'll forgive him. I had some engine trouble coming over and that made me late."

Porter opened the door of the car and prepared to assist his fair acquaintance. She paused at the step and the young man stooped to gather up their traveling bags.

As he did so a yellow coin slipped from his pocket, rolled across the platform, safely over cracks and stopped beside the small and well-shod foot of the lady. Porter blushed. Miss King picked up the coin and looked at it.

"That's funny," he said, putting her into the machine. "That's my old friend, Mr. Talisman. I received that under somewhat peculiar circumstances and—and—well, I'll tell you all about it later on."

Miss King examined the yellow disk with interest. She noticed the I-Love-You inscription and the two hearts stabbed with the arrow.

"It's very interesting," she murmured. "Have you had it long?"

"I received it during the first moment of the present year," he replied, "and there's quite a story goes with it. I'll tell you about it."

The ride in the motor to Sonoma Hall was very pleasant indeed.

There was one thing about the Grantland Mitchells that made people love them. They always forced their guests at Sonoma Hall to be comfortable, happy and to enjoy life, whether the guests felt like it or not. A small crowd greeted the two new arrivals

and introduced them to each other with mock solemnity.

The three days that followed were blissful beyond description to Rennold Porter. It was true that other guests were at Sonoma Hall, but for him Miss King obscured the horizon. The first part of her name was Allie. Allie King had a delightful sound, when repeated seven or eight hundred times, as Mr. Porter discovered.

They walked abroad together, ignoring the smiles of the more discerning. They found nooks on the Mitchell estate that were of tremendous interest. They noticed that spring was coming on rapidly and that the flowers were coming out. Porter found himself rhapsodizing over Nature's excellent work in a way that would have caused him the most intense surprise a few days previous.

And about one thing there was not the faintest doubt. He was in love with Allie. The first night at Sonoma Hall brought him no sleep whatever. He sat up, smoked numerous cigarettes and thought of blue eyes, brown hair, watermelon hats, and all that sort of thing. At the end of the visit, when he looked into Miss King's eyes, the lady blushed slightly, so that you can form some vague idea of her feelings toward him.

And to skip over a good many things that happened later on, it may as well be announced here, as it was in New York that time, Mr. Rennold Porter became engaged to Miss Allie—no, Miss Alice King. Her folks sent out the engraved statement of facts. Everybody smiled and said, "fine."

The afternoon Rennold took the small hand in his own and tremblingly spoke the fateful question, and after Allie had nodded her head without saying anything, he took from his pocket the visible sign of good fortune and handed it to her.

"You remember what I told you about this coin," he said. "It's good luck. I'm not superstitious, but any

one can see that the prophecy that went with this coin has been fulfilled. I was told—well, I was told everything that has come to pass and you were the dear girl named in the prophecy. I want you to wear this coin. It will just about fit in your locket. Place it there and always keep it and it will bring everlasting good luck to both of us."

Allie did so. They were very happy. They discussed plans for the wedding. Allie's parents approved of Rennold Porter because he was a fine young man and a successful one. Not a cloud appeared upon their horizon. They were the most devoted of lovers.

There is one thing about true lovers which absolutely defies explanation. If the young man, deeply in love as he is, gathers the father and mother and brothers and sisters of his *fiancée* and ties them all together with chains in their own parlor and pours kerosene over the group and burns the family to a small cinder—that is undoubtedly a cause for a quarrel between the lovers.

Also, if the lady says to her lover, "Did you say it is four o'clock, dear?" and he answered, "Yes, I did," omitting the word "sweetheart," that also is undoubtedly cause for a lover's quarrel. It shows the girl that the man no longer loves her and never did and has been deceiving her horribly. So they quarrel. That is, he goes away and tries to murder his own house cat.

Allie and Rennold quarreled. Something happened and sharp words followed. It appeared to Rennold that Allie could not possibly care a farthing for him, and if she did care for him that very fact would preclude the harsh words she had spoken. To Allie the situation had a somewhat different aspect.

"And I tell you plainly," he said to her, standing in the entrance of her home, "I'm not big enough fool to come back to you on my knees. If you want me to come back, you will

have to send for me. I shall *not* come back unless you *do* send!"

You can't put a thing more plainly than that. Allie lifted her head just the faintest trifle higher and said nothing. Rennold walked out. The end had come. All was over.

Then followed that fearful period that comes to genuine lovers who are separated and can no longer look into each other's eyes or hear each other's voices. Within twenty-four hours Rennold Porter was the most miserable human being in the western hemisphere.

In three days he began to look gaunt and he decided that as life was not worth the living he would remain away from the office. He hoped bitterly that some financial swirl would come along and ruin him while he was absent. He had thoughts of leaping from Brooklyn Bridge, leaving a mournful note pinned to the railing for the police to find. He swore that whoever invented women played a scurvy trick upon humanity.

But, broken as he was in spirit, useless to himself and the rest of the world, a man marked by melancholy for its own, he still retained, thank Heaven, his pride. He had said to her: "I shall not come until you send for me." He had meant it. The stars might fall from the blue vault above, but Rennold Porter would never return until Allie capitulated.

And it is no violation of anybody's confidence at this point to state that, so far as Miss Allie King was concerned, not only could the stars fall, but all the other planets, suns, constellations, worlds, universes, globes, cosmos, satellites and so forth, including Cassiopeia's chair, could also fall and fall hard before she would send word to Rennold Porter asking him to come back to her.

Thus matters stood on an evening two weeks after the calamity. In his up-town apartment Porter sprawled in an armchair, a picture of vast and eternal gloom. His Jap valet had just

descended to lower places to bring up the evening mail, and as he opened the outer door Rennold roused himself. He had never quite overcome the feeling that each mail might—*might*—bring word.

Kokomo appeared. His right arm supported a great pile of letters, circulars, and other mail, and as he approached the table at which his master sat he reached up and jerked the chain connecting with the electric lights.

As he did so his loaded arm moved slightly and something bright, yellow, and round slid from the pile of letters and rolled across the floor. Mr. Porter leaped to his feet and with a yell of delight chased the fleeing coin. He picked it up avidly, hungrily, like a man dying of thirst in the desert and about to sip his first few drops of water.

"I Love You," he said aloud, reading the greeting on the coin. He turned it over and kissed the two hearts pierced with the arrow.

Then he turned to the heap of letters the Jap had deposited upon the table and searched feverishly for the familiar handwriting. After a second bewildered search it dawned upon him that the letter was not there.

Three times he went through his mail—a bill from his tailor; an art society's announcement; a letter from the Mitchells; folders from the butcher, the grocer, and the laundry; theatrical announcements; picture post-cards from friends in Europe; three newspapers and a magazine—but no letter from Allie.

"Fool," he shouted into his servant's ear. "You have lost the only letter I wanted. Go back over the stairs and see if you can find it, and if you come back here without it—*instant death!*"

Kokomo descended again, convinced that his employer had been drinking. He returned soon, shaking his head. There was no letter to be found.

But the coin! What further mes-

sage need a man have? He was a fool for wasting even a moment after receiving it. Without further delay he leaped into his garments, dashed down the stairs, and hailed a passing taxicab.

In ten minutes he was ascending the familiar stairway. A tall, lean woman servant opened the door in answer to his ring and regarded him with a baleful eye. She knew him. She knew that he had made trouble.

"Is Miss King at home?" Rennold inquired shakily.

"She is," said the dragon.

"Is she-alone?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"She is in the library."

Porter pushed through the doorway and dropped his hat as he passed through the long hall. Then he slackened his pace and framed an opening sentence. He would be kind to the little girl.

At the entrance to the King library Rennold pushed back the curtain and stopped. Allie was sitting at a desk, with her elbows resting upon its top and her palms supporting her chin. Before her was the photograph of Rennold he had given her, surrounded by its heavy silver frame.

While he looked the arms dropped to the table-top and the brown head bent forward. Allie sobbed.

With his opening sentence hopelessly wrecked by this scene, Porter leaped forward, stumbling over a chair, and in another instant he was on his knees with his arms about her shoulders. She tried to rise, but he held her fast.

She turned a tear-stained, white face to him and then placed her arms around his neck.

"I am glad," she whispered, kissing him. "I thought I would die."

For the next few minutes we will draw a veil.

When we look again, Rennold was standing before Allie. Both of them were smiling. Happiness had returned.

"And here," Rennold was saying tenderly—"here is the dear coin you sent to me, sweetheart. I came to you the very instant I received it."

He held in his open palm the yellow disk.

"Dear one," Allie answered, staring as if fascinated at the coin, "I want you—I love you—and you must never leave me; but I did not send you the coin."

She opened the clasp of the gold locket hanging at her throat and took out a coin.

"This, beloved," she said, "is our coin. I know nothing of the one you hold in your hand."

But he stayed, anyway.

In the mailing-room of the Red-and-Gold Theater on Broadway, just north of Fortieth Street, the head press agent was speaking to the foreman.

"How's things?"

"Coin' right along," answered the foreman, wiping his brow. "We've sent out thirty thousand since the show started here."

"You're getting the names from the telephone directory?"

"Sure thing. That's the way we worked it in Chicago, and you know the show went big there."

"I don't know," replied the press agent. "Sometimes it seems to me these coins don't do any good at all. Maybe they do, though. You can't tell."

"No; they may do a lot of good, however, one way or another," argued the foreman.

"And now," continued the press agent sadly, "they're thinking of changing the name of the show."

"They'll go a long way before they find a better name than 'I Love You,'" insisted the foreman, as he slipped another yellow metal coin into an advertising circular and sealed it.

THE CALL OF HOME

A SHORT STORY

BY MARY RIDER MECHTOLD



HE was so engrossed with his book, "The Garden Primer," that he didn't even look up to see if any acquaintances chanced to be entering the parlor car.

In fact, he swung his chair to face backward and prayed that he would not be interrupted during the two hours' ride to Brookdale. He wanted to get away from city people as much as from the city itself. He was weary of artificiality.

It was a glorious September day, with the first bit of crispness, and it

called for freshness, for brightness, for real things, and for the fall preparation for next season's gardens.

Arthur Corey studied the book a friendly editor of such publications had sent him, with more assiduity than he ever did his most important editorial.

In his days of manuscript reading he had acquired the habit of catching the gist of a story in a few rapid glances, now he plugged with the zeal of a schoolboy trying to escape being kept after hours.

After the porter had repeated twice,

"You are in the wrong seat, sir," Corey felt vaguely that something was expected of him. With his eyes still riveted on a chapter headed, "Hot Beds and Cold Frames," he stirred a bit, and started to speak, when he heard a low-pitched, wonderfully modulated woman's voice, saying:

"Porter, I don't mind in the least occupying the next chair."

Corey heard a faint rustle of soft garments and he imagined an odor of spring flowers, as the woman swept by him and seated herself in the chair just beyond his.

It was the last one at the end of the car; it had to face forward, and as he had swung his to face backward he looked up into the most luminous hazel eyes he had ever seen. Then greatly perturbed he sprang to his feet.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I'm very absent-minded—have I taken your chair?"

The woman looked at the big, well-groomed figure, the square-cut jaw, the high intellectual forehead, the shrewd blue eyes, the touch of gray over the temples, and smiled.

"I am quite comfortable here," she said; then turning to the porter added: "Serve my tea as soon as possible; I have a slight headache."

"Yes, ma'am," responded the porter, moving away.

"Don't forget my order," called Corey.

"No, sir," the black man grinned. "I 'member you said you had no lunch, sir."

The editor again offered to exchange seats with the charming woman opposite, but she pronounced herself quite satisfied. So there was nothing for him to do but swing his chair to front and resume his reading, as the train moved out of the station.

Only now he couldn't comprehend a word on the page; the low voice that suggested chimes rang in his ears. And the wonderful eyes continued to smile at him—he had never noticed such lashes before, and he had been a keen

observer of women. Then the soft fluff of chestnut hair, that peaked out beneath the close-fitting black turban with its daring bow of gold satin!

Such teeth, and such a wonderful complexion! Made up slightly, he had to admit that, but—well, with the black charmeuse dress and coat, truly Parisian in their complicated simplicity—the cosmetics seemed a necessary adjunct. She was certainly American, yet suggested the cosmopolitan, and might be twenty-five or thirty-five.

In short, to Arthur Corey she seemed a finished product of civilization, and he thought, annoyed, quite out of touch with his simple fall-gardening schemes.

It took his usually alert mind quite ten minutes to reach this decision, and at the juncture the porter brought his tea.

"Will you hurry my order, porter?" Corey heard the voice from behind say.

"As soon as I can, ma'am, but you was about the last passenger to get on, ma'am."

At once Corey swung about.

"Now, won't you exchange chairs?" he asked deferentially. "George seems to have served me first, and you have a headache."

"But you had no lunch," the woman graciously reminded him.

"Then let's compromise by having the table placed between us?" he suggested. "If you'll have a cup of my tea and part of my muffin, I'll gladly accept return hospitality when your order arrives."

"I'll gratefully take the cup of tea," she answered.

And soon they were chatting over the tea-table like very old friends—and he was surprised at her more than superficial understanding of things discussed.

They touched on art, music, drama, suffrage, and the latest religious fads. She brought out a point in criticizing his last book that no critic had called attention to—for he had introduced

himself, though she had remained silent as to her identity.

"You've lived mostly abroad?" he inquired.

"I am playing a flying visit to this country for the first time in twelve years," she said. "I came on business, but now something seems to call to me. I suddenly find that I am weary of supercultivation—wearied of, yes, let me confess it, conversation such as we've been having. After all, where does it all lead to? I've such a longing for something real that I'm going now to the old place where I lived summers during my childhood. I have never sold it."

"How strange," murmured the well-known author; "just such feelings got me into this trouble."

For explanation he gave her "The Garden Primer." She smiled at him sympathetically.

"Want to garden yourself?" she asked.

"Yes," he confided. "I've a town apartment run by Japs, and I've a big place on Long Island where I entertain a lot, but I hadn't a home, so I just built this."

He handed her the picture of a bungalow, with pergola porches and great trees mothering it. It stood on a knoll and there was a glimpse of the sea in the distance.

"Charming!" said the woman. "Great possibilities."

"That's the thing in a nutshell," he interrupted. "How am I going to develop the possibilities, without spoiling everything?"

"Surely there are specialists who could advise you?"

"That's what I want to get away from. I don't care for a show place, it's a home I'm after." Then he ended abruptly, "But I don't want to bore you."

"You're not," she said quickly. "Tell me all about it."

"It's just a small place as you see, only one guest chamber—it's a retreat for my approaching old age. I've a

middle-aged couple to run it—John does the 'chores' and Eliza the housework. I don't keep any conveyance there, except an old horse and a run-down phaeton for carting packages—I walk the mile from the station. I try to run down every Friday and stay over Monday, and occasionally carry along a congenial friend, and we do a bit of fishing. This is the first season."

"How refreshing it all sounds," sighed the woman.

Her eyes closed for a minute. And she thought how impossible such a conversation would be with a foreigner, where sex entered into everything. She felt herself blushing.

"Refreshing?" repeated Corey. "Not always. I struggled bravely with the designing and furnishings, but took some fool clerk's advice, and find myself landed with white ruffled curtains at all of my windows. What kind ought I to have? I know the effect I want—something soft and creamy."

Helplessly he handed her a bunch of samples; she looked them over.

"None of these will do. When I get back to town I'll send you something," offered the woman.

"That would be bully. I know your taste would be perfect; here's the measurements of the windows. You see I carry everything about with me," he laughed. "Buy what you like, charge it to me, and have it shipped here."

"Without seeing the house?" she asked amazed.

"Couldn't you stop over trains?" he inquired boyishly.

"Oh, no," she said hastily, "I'm going much farther."

"Maybe you'll be within motoring distance?" he ventured.

"I couldn't say that I wouldn't be," she conceded.

"Then bring some aunt or cousin with you and drop in for lunch to-morrow!" he begged.

"I have no chaperon with me—not even a maid," she said pointedly.

"Well, anyway you wouldn't need

one," he returned, with charming frankness; "only promise you'll drop in on me. Besides the house, I'd like to ask you about the garden. It seems there are some bulbs and seeds that have to be planted now if I'm to have a variety of flowers next summer. Curse the luck, here's my getting-off place!"

"I wish I could come and see your home spot," the woman said wistfully.

"Why not?" he asked, brightening. "May I look for you to-morrow?"

The woman dropped her eyes, hesitated, then looked up at him mischievously. "Friday week, perhaps, I'll come for luncheon—don't plan to meet me. I'll just drop in on you."

Corey only had time to grasp her outstretched hand, seize his grip, and swing off the platform. There, dazed, he stood on the Brookdale siding and looked after the express train. A cinder in his eye recalled him to realities. Grumbling he handed his grip to John, asked about Eliza, and started for his cross-country walk.

But his mind was not on his homestead—it was traveling with the piquant little woman, whose name he didn't know but whose beauty and cleverness were evident, and whose willingness to ignore the conventions now rather startled him.

Was she married? The thought staggered him. She had kept on her gloves and he had not thought of a wedding-ring.

During the following week in town the episode of the train was uppermost in Arthur Corey's mind. Finally on Thursday, at lunch, he confided in Allan Whitlock, the friendly architect who built the bungalow.

"Gad, Arthur," Whitlock explained, "you're getting too old for these romantic experiences—next thing you'll be figuring in the police court."

"I know women," said Corey impatiently, "all kinds, in and out—but this one is different. She's no adventuress—yet—"

"Yet?" Allan giped.

"If she has a husband, and is inclined to be a bit reckless, I want to protect her against her own impulses."

"You mean you want me for a chaperon?" blurted out Whitlock.

"Exactly," Corey answered; "so phone for your bag and we'll take the four-fifty to Brookdale."

The next morning Allan Whitlock lounged on the pergola, and with keen amusement watched his august host spade up the rose garden.

"She won't come, boy," he'd occasionally call out encouragingly, "but if she does, am I supposed to go for a long walk—or excuse myself by pleading a bad headache?"

"Don't be an ass," Corey ejaculated.

"Well, when is the goddess expected? It's nearly noon now; you'd better be sprucing up—"

Just then a big, gray touring car came speeding down the road and stopped before the rustic gateway.

A slim, girlish figure, all in soft, brown, silky garments, with a soft, brown veil fluttering about her, stood on the car step.

"I knew this was the place the moment I saw it," a musical voice called out joyously.

Corey dropped his spade and Whitlock sprang to his feet—they both stared like green country boys.

"Am I not welcome?" the woman asked roguishly.

"Welcome?" exclaimed Corey; "the word is inadequate."

The two men hastened to open the gate, and Whitlock took the grip and suit-case the chauffeur handed him. He looked at the baggage wonderingly as Corey started up the path with his guest—and the automobile departed.

Whitlock coughed twice before his existence was remembered.

"Whitlock," Corey said, turning, "I want you to meet Miss—a—Miss—"

"Mrs. Alwyn," prompted the woman smiling. Corey winced at the Mrs.

"Mr. Whitlock," he said, "is the sympathetic well-wisher who built my bungalow—so I have him down occasionally for a week end. I thought that you might explain to his comprehending ear just what my place needs to make a happy home of it."

"As for that," teased Whitlock, "you don't need to consult an architect."

Corey shot him a warning glance.

The woman, with her keen sense of humor, laughed softly, and at once established a feeling of hearty good fellowship. Then she broke into exclamations of delight over the quaintness of the house, the fruit-trees in the front yard, the view from the pergola—nothing escaped her.

When Eliza appeared at the front door wiping her hands on her kitchen apron and plainly betraying a motherly interest in her employer's guest, Mrs. Alwyn impulsively held out her hand and shook that of the older woman's as graciously as if she had been the marquise or a chatelaine.

"Are you staying long?" asked Eliza, as she took the baggage from Whitlock.

"Oh," laughed Mrs. Alwyn, addressing Corey, "I did not want to detain my friend's motor, so I thought when it was train time you'd send me and my belongings to the station in your famous carryall."

"Please don't let's discuss your departure yet," begged Corey; "the day is too beautiful."

"Isn't it heavenly? Abroad we never have such weather," said Mrs. Alwyn.

"Would you like a cup of coffee, after your ride?" asked Eliza.

"Thank you, I would."

"So would I," said Corey; "eh, Whitlock?"

Whitlock was about to assent when Eliza settled the question.

"You boys don't need any—you had a late breakfast. I thought I'd never get you up." Then she proceeded to the kitchen.

"Oh, this has the makings of a real home, all right," laughed Whitlock.

"It's enchanting," said Mrs. Alwyn. "Where may I go to tidy?"

"In my room," said the host, opening a door at the far end of the living-room. "Whitlock has the guest chamber in a turmoil."

"Well, Mr. Cynic?" inquired Corey when they were alone.

"She's charming," pronounced Whitlock, "but she might be anything—an American duchess—a famous comedienne—or a clever woman of the world."

"At least the doubt makes it interesting," said Corey.

Mrs. Alwyn soon rejoined them. She had taken her hat off; the soft, wavy, chestnut hair was caught in a loose knot at the back of her head, her throat was bare, and about her neck was a broad, ivory-lace collar. Corey noted her ear—it was like a wonderful sea shell.

When Eliza entered with the coffee Mrs. Alwyn held out both hands to take the tray, and both men saw that she wore no jewels, not even a wedding-ring.

"It's all lovely," said Mrs. Alwyn, looking about the living-room, "but the curtains."

The room was huge—in one corner stood the dining-room table, and from the open French windows a view of the sea was obtainable. A great fireplace was at the opposite end of the room, and easy chairs and divans of weathered oak were plentiful.

On the library table were an assortment of magazines. A broad stairway led to the rooms above that opened on a gallery. The furniture matched the woodwork and the raftered ceiling.

"The curtains are an eye-sore," said Corey, as his eye followed hers about—and stopped on the obnoxious articles.

"Let's take them down at once," suggested the lady.

"Oh, I protest—" began Whitlock.

"I've brought with me some new ones. If they don't quite fit the fixtures I can shorten them from the top—we'll get them hung while I'm here to superintend them."

"Come on, Allan," said Corey, making a dive at the ruffled affairs; "we've had our orders."

The curtains were soon in a heap in one corner.

"Now fold them up," directed Mrs. Alwyn.

They looked at her askance as she left the room, and clumsily began to do so. She came back with an armful of fine, creamy, scrim draperies, beautifully hand hemstitched.

"If the architect will assist me," said Mrs. Alwyn, "we'll do a little measuring. I wouldn't trust an editor with anything requiring exactness."

That accomplished, they wandered out under the maples.

"I'll sew outdoors," she said, "while you finish your spading, Mr. Corey."

"I think I'll let John do the rest," said Corey.

"No, please—then we can plan about the rose-bushes. Mr. Whitlock, you may keep needles threaded for me, and pull out the bastings."

"But I don't want to work," argued Whitlock, stretching himself lazily.

So they bantered till Eliza called from the doorway that dinner was ready.

A bunch of bachelor's-buttons nodded a welcome from the table.

"Look at the delicious things to eat," cried Mrs. Alwyn, "and everything on at once—it just makes me hungry."

During the afternoon they sat under the trees. While Corey read aloud from his almost completed novel, Mrs. Alwyn sewed on the curtains, and Whitlock amused himself doing sketches of her. Curiously, he didn't feel in the least *de trop*, and nothing was farther from his thoughts than to steal off, as he had planned to.

When the curtains were ready there

was great excitement, in which John and Eliza participated. The hanging of them over, Corey and Whitlock sought out easy chairs in the living-room and sank back exhausted.

"Gad, what a change!" exclaimed Corey, looking about approvingly.

"What is the time?" asked Mrs. Alwyn suddenly.

"You must stay for supper," they all cried out together.

"I really ought not—"

"And I've made apple dumplings especially for you," said Eliza disappointedly.

"Take the express at nine," begged Corey.

"I could do that," conceded Mrs. Alwyn.

Then they all laughed as if some terrible catastrophe had been averted and went for a walk. They returned with arms full of wild flowers.

"While you gentlemen dress for supper, I'll arrange the flowers," said Mrs. Alwyn.

"I'll adjoin to Whitlock's bath," said Corey, "and place my room at your disposal."

"Well, run along, both of you," she ordered.

When they started down the stairs a half-hour later they halted astounded. The whole room below was transformed. Not only were there flowers, wonderfully arranged, but the furniture had been moved about, the baby-grand piano opened and music scattered over it. A fire burned on the hearth, and John's mongrel puppy frisked about and greeted them.

Corey didn't say a word—he just put his hand on Whitlock's arm and pressed it.

"A woman's touch," sighed Whitlock, and whistled softly.

And then she came in—still in her brown dress, but looking fresh and immaculate.

After supper they sat about the fire and smoked their cigarettes, and unsolicited Mrs. Alwyn went to the piano and played for a while—then sang to

them. Her voice was not big, but well trained—a mezzo of unusual texture.

She sang from the various operas, and the folk songs of Germany, France, and Italy in the native languages. In the midst of a lullaby the clock struck nine—then all sprang to their feet, and Eliza came in breathless.

"I got that sleepy listening to the singing," she said, "I forgot to tell John about the hitching."

"You can't catch that train now," exclaimed Whitlock; "so please, Mrs. Alwyn, go on singing."

"Why don't you stay all night?" inquired Eliza; "you can have Mr. Corey's room—I put clean sheets on the bed just this morning. He can sleep in the other bed in Mr. Whitlock's room."

Eliza didn't notice that Mrs. Alwyn remained silent; she just concluded the subject settled, and with a cheery good night went to tell John he needn't hitch up after all.

"It really wouldn't do—my staying," said Mrs. Alwyn.

"I don't see why?" cried Whitlock.

"Do stay," urged Corey, in a low tone, as he crossed to her. "You know we haven't done the garden yet."

"Yes, and I couldn't come again—I sail Monday."

"Then you don't go now," he said, in a determined way. "I—well—please sing again that German folk-song."

Mrs. Alwyn slowly lifted her eyes to her host's—hesitated for a moment, then without a word went back to the piano.

At eleven-thirty she took the lighted candle Corey handed her.

"In the country, you know, it's early to bed and early to rise," he said; "tomorrow we've a busy day before us."

"Good night and pleasant dreams, for both of you," said Mrs. Alwyn, as she left them.

The men put out the lights and stumbled upward. They had been in their respective beds for some time when Corey called out:

"Who is she, I wonder?"

"I wonder," echoed Whitlock, sleepily.

While at breakfast the next morning a message came that necessitated Whitlock's immediate return to the city.

He barely had time to make the next train, and as he snatched up his hat and rushed to the door he called back: "I won't say good-by, for I shall expect to see you when I come back to-night, Mrs. Alwyn. So-long, Arthur."

Mrs. Alwyn and Corey followed him out on the pergola and waved to him, till he disappeared beneath the brow of the hill—running and shouting.

For a while there was a silence, then Mrs. Alwyn sighed.

"Mr. Whitlock's departure has given me a queer feeling—I feel as if we'd lost something."

"I have all the sensations of the first child leaving the home-place," admitted Corey. "You may have my shoulder to weep on."

"Get your Garden Primer," Mrs. Alwyn retorted with mock severity.

So they spent the morning planting and planning, and when Eliza announced dinner, they were amazed that the time had flown so quickly. The only thing that marred their appetites was the discovery that they had planted the wrong seeds—the spring flowers instead of the hardies.

"John can put in the right seeds Monday," said Corey, and the momentary gloom vanished.

After dinner they read the morning papers, chatted—Mrs. Alwyn sang and played for a while—Corey wrote some business letters—and then they wandered about the yard and planned more improvements. Mrs. Alwyn discovered that the pears on a heavily loaded tree were just right for canning, and she wasn't content until Eliza had promised to "put them up," so that Mr. Corey might have home fruit during the winter.

Before you knew it, it was supper-time.

"Where is Mr. Whitlock?" Mrs. Alwyn inquired.

"A disappointment," said Corey; "I just got word that our favorite child can't come home to-night."

"Oh!" Mrs. Alwyn's knife and fork dropped—she rose and looked about embarrassed. "I—I must have been crazy to stay here as I have! But it was so like real living that I couldn't tear myself away from it. Mr. Corey, will you ask John to take me to the station? I must catch the first train to town."

"Certainly, Mrs. Alwyn; I'll tell him, if you feel that you must go," Corey answered regretfully. "But won't you finish your supper—take a later train? I'll go in town with you."

"No, no! That wouldn't do at all," she said frightened. "Please tell John about the horse."

"Very well," Corey answered gravely.

He did not see her again until she came out on the porch heavily veiled. Eliza had already carried out the grip and suit-case and said good-by to her.

Silently they walked down the path to the gate—the moon was just coming up over the ocean. The faint breeze tossed the tree-tops about like plumed knights bowing adieus to their ladies.

When they reached the phaeton, Mrs. Alwyn hastily extended her gloved hand—there was a suspicious catch in her voice as she said:

"Thank you so much, Mr. Corey, for your charming hospitality. I'll never forget this."

"But I'll see you again," said Corey meaningly; "I'll be in town to-morrow. Where will I find you and who shall I ask for?"

"My address is uncertain," she answered equivocally. "Please, I beg of you—you see, we could never be friends, and I sail Monday."

"Drive on, John," said Mrs. Alwyn, as she got into the phaeton.

"But surely—" exclaimed Corey stunned, "surely—" He followed the moving conveyance and caught hold of her hand; she withdrew it with a show of annoyance.

"I'm sorry," said Corey, stepping back. "Good-by and thank you for coming."

Uncertainly he stood in the middle of the road until the phaeton was a hundred yards away, then he turned toward his bungalow and his self-mastery forsook him.

The place looked deserted, the moon threw ghostly shadows across the pathway, an owl shrieked in the distance.

"What a lonesome dump!" exclaimed Corey.

The thought of going into the living-room, and seeing the curtains that she had hung at his windows, and the flowers she had arranged so artistically—and of not seeing her—was unbearable. Corey suddenly realized that the home spirit he had yearned for was not in the house, but in the departing buggy.

He wheeled about to see the shambling old horse crawling down the hillside, and a hand fluttering out from the side of the phaeton, as if the owner were bidding an unwelcome farewell to something it longed for.

Corey felt a lump in his throat—he gulped hard for a moment, then the blue eyes that had looked dreamy regained their resolute expression. With one bound he jumped the pasture fence, and took the short cut toward the station.

In the hollow, at the foot of the hill, where the woods threw its shadow across the winding roadway, he intercepted the occupants of the phaeton.

"John," said Corey quietly, "you can go back. I'll drive Mrs. Alwyn to the station."

"Mr. Corey! You frighten me!" cried Mrs. Alwyn, half rising. Her veil was thrown back and she was quite as pale as the man whose eyes now sought hers entreatingly.

John didn't seem in the least sur-

prised; he pulled the old horse up and leisurely arranged to turn over the lines to the owner.

"If the nag gets to loafin' on you," the make-shift coachman advised, "just rattle the whip; it may do some good, and again it mayn't."

Mrs. Alwyn said good-by to John, then remained silent as Corey took up the reins and sat down beside her.

They were alone with the night sounds, shut in by the pitch black of the pine woods, when Mrs. Alwyn asked tensely: "Why did you come?"

"For you," Corey answered.

Before she could draw back he put his arms about her and drew her to him.

"I love you," he said, "and the mere thought of losing you upset me completely. Will you marry me?"

"I can't!" she cried.

"Is there a husband?" he asked grimly. His hand tightened on her arm until she winced.

"No, my husband is dead," she answered in a low tone.

"Then you'll marry me!" he announced decisively.

"But you don't know who I am," she said, shrinking from him.

"I don't care," Corey answered. "Do you love me?"

"I'm the Hon. Mrs. Alwyn Marvin!" she cried hysterically.

"You—you—" His arm dropped from about her. "I've heard of you," he said huskily.

"I never meant harm," began Mrs. Marvin. "I was married when I was seventeen to a man old enough—"

"I don't want to know anything," interrupted Corey.

"I tried to forget," she went on un-

heeding, "and I took my fling in society. I'm pronounced heartless and reckless—"

"This doesn't interest me," Corey broke in again. "Do you love me?"

"Yes," she answered, with a low sob.

"Then that's all there is to it," he stated. "What you've done, doesn't matter. I've seen deep into your heart, and I could never give you up now. We've heard the home call together!"

Reverently he bent and kissed her, and he held her close as they emerged from the dark out into the moonlight. From a turn in the road they could see the little bungalow.

"It's just an empty, empty shell without you," he said. "It takes two to make a home—and more, it's whispered!"

She pressed her cheek against his arm, and neither spoke until Corey drew up in front of a farm house.

"But," exclaimed Mrs. Marvin, "this isn't the railway station!"

"No," Corey admitted, with eyes twinkling, "but it's the first stop on the road to Homeville—the justice of the peace lives here, dear."

John waited and waited around the stable for Corey to come back, so that he might unhitch and end his day's labor. He looked at the moonlit landscape, at the sea in the distance, scratched his head, rubbed his chin, and wondered why it took the old nag so much longer than usual to make the trip.

At last he saw the ramshackle phaeton stop at the gate, and then he saw a man and a woman, holding each other's hand, go slowly up the path, and cross the threshold together.



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CURING SPRING FEVER

A SHORT STORY

BY FRANK X. FINNEGAN:

SAY, do you know what's buzzing around in the back of my head?" demanded Birdie McMullen as she lolled on her desk and looked dreamily across the office at Miss Bennings, the second assistant typist. "I need a vacation. I'm all in. Every time I look down at the keys on this mill of mine they make faces at me—I think they're giving me the laugh."

"You couldn't get away at this time of the year, could you?" asked Miss Bennings with polite interest.

She had been in the office only a fortnight and was not quite sure whether she ought to admit Miss McMullen to her set.

"I suppose the vacation season begins along about June—it does in most offices," she added.

"Well, just you watch me beat it if I decide to go," Birdie said warmly; "and if he tries to pull any time clock on me I'll bid him a fond fare-ye-well and die away in the distance. I've been sitting here listening to 'Yours at hand' so long that I'm getting noodly, and if I waited until next summer I'd be biting chunks out of the calendar before the first soda fountain had its grand opening."

Miss Bennings looked at her rather timorously.

"How oddly you talk!" she observed with a feeble smile.

"If you think my chatter is odd you'll be having a squad in here to measure me for a padded cell if I stick around much longer," Miss McMullen retorted. "It always gets me when

spring comes back in the trees and you can sort of smell it in the air—I want to tear for some place else. I don't care much what it is so long as its different. The more I talk about it, the stronger it gets—I'm going to hand the boss a little eye-opener as soon as he blows back from his eighty-five cent luncheon."

"Well, I wish you luck," Miss Bennings said, attacking her work with vigor; "but from the way he acted this morning I don't think he's in quite the mood to do any favors for anybody."

"Favors!" Birdie retorted scornfully. "Say, you haven't got things straightened out in your head at all. Why, the big favor is for me to stand for all I do from this party when there are thirty-seven better jobs that I know of simply waiting for me. If he's got that favor thing rattling around in his block, the sooner he loses it the better for all of us. If he tries to flag this vacation idea I'm liable to do something positively unique."

"Like what?" asked Miss Bennings with rising interest.

"Like doing a Brodie right through that window without stopping to open it," Birdie said calmly and with her most engaging smile. "Belasco hasn't anything on me when it comes to the big curtains."

Miss Bennings was eminently correct in her estimate of the mental state of Mr. Jagers, the general manager, who was running the establishment during the absence of the president in Europe. Responsibility sat heavily upon the Jagers brow and had its re-

lection in the Jaggers attitude toward the world at large and the employees in particular.

Indeed, it was his growing peevishness and irritation that had worked on Miss Birdie McMullen's nerves until she was prepared to demand a vacation and to walk out of the office if it were refused.

He met her request for a fortnight's leave with a bark of amazement.

"What!" he exclaimed—"a vacation? At the busiest season of the year? You must be crazy!"

"Not yet," said Birdie, "but speeding rapidly on the way. That's why I want to escape for a little while. Every time I look up at that Rosa Bonheur picture on the calendar I can see those horses kicking those heavy-weight jockeys all over the lot and I want to get out before any of them are killed."

"Nervous, eh?" Jaggers snapped. "Well, that's common enough around here. I'll let you know to-morrow. But I don't think there's a chance in the world," he added gloomily.

That afternoon the cares of state weighed so heavily upon the brain-pan of Mr. Jaggers, after he had received five telegrams at half-hour intervals, that he suddenly keeled over on his desk and gasped feebly for a doctor.

The physician whom Miss McMullen summoned immediately pronounced the attack acute indigestion, and twenty minutes after the general manager collapsed he was being carefully wheeled home in an ambulance, and the Atlas Paper Box Company was without a guiding hand.

Birdie watched the departing ambulance from the window and turned to Miss Bennings with a slow smile.

"This is a scream, isn't it?" she said. "Half a dozen men on the road fighting for orders, couple of hundred slaveys here making boxes, and nobody bossing the job. I suppose it's up to me, as usual."

"Up to you!" the assistant typist echoed. "Why, the idea!"

"That's the idea, girly," Miss McMullen replied, "and I'll make a little five-to-one bet right now that's the way it works out. When Mr. Throgmorton did this quick jump over to London and put this Jaggers party in the lookout chair, it never occurred to him that something would happen to Jaggers. Not your friend Throg. As long as he had ordered it this way, it was a cinch with him that it would go through all right.

"He didn't even take the trouble to let anybody know just where he was going or when he would be back—and there isn't one of those deck-hands out there in the factory that wouldn't rattle around in the main screw's job here like a loose window-blind. I guess little Birdie is elected to man the life-boat."

"What are you going to do?" Miss Bennings asked in an awed tone.

"First I'm going to take a flash at these telegrams that gave Jaggers the knockout," she said, "and see what's stirring. And second, I'm going to hand it out to anybody around this shack that seems to be curious, that Jaggers told me to deal just before the doc dragged him away. Somebody's got to put coal on the fire here, and I'm a grand little stoker if I have to do it."

She picked up the telegrams from a wire basket on the general manager's desk and looked them over carefully.

"It's that Granacorn job," she said; "just as I thought. I've been writing letters and telegrams about it for a week. New breakfast food company in Ohio—they're framing up to send out about a million or two little sample bunches of their fodder all over the country, and every box factory in the business has been battling for the contract. Witherspoon is down there after it and he seems to be getting cold feet."

Miss Bennings had laid aside her work long before and was listening to Birdie with interest.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Looks like somebody on the inside

of the Granacorn offices took a peek at the bids before they were opened and wised him up that the Phoenix people have it on him about half a cent," Miss McMullen explained, swinging easily in Mr. Jaggers's revolving chair and shuffling the telegrams. "They're not supposed to be opened until noon tomorrow, but Witherspoon is yelping like an Uncle Tom bloodhound about the price Mallory offered for the Phoenix Company.

"Listen to this:

Unquestionable information Mallory has bid dollar a hundred. Can secure our original bid and substitute one meeting price if authorized. Wire immediately.

"No wonder Jaggers had a grouch," she went on; "he thought he had that contract hooked, strung and hung over the side of the boat, and he was going to pull it on the boss when he got back and tell him to beat it back to Europe for another six months.

"Jaggers hasn't answered one of these wires, and Witherspoon is probably frothing at the mouth all over the Western Union office in Columbus. It's me for the big telegram to get him back on earth."

She drew a bunch of telegraph blanks from the rack on the desk, dipped a pen and poised it over them for an instant. Miss Bennings's heart began to beat in double time with excitement. Nothing quite so unusual had ever occurred in her calm career of shorthand and touch typewriting.

"Oh, wait a minute, Birdie!" she begged. "Aren't you afraid you'll get into trouble?"

Miss McMullen began to scribble rapidly.

"I wouldn't feel just right if I didn't have a bunch of trouble every so often," she said; "I just eat it up. Listen to this:

L. WITHERSPOON, Columbus, Ohio.

Must have Granacorn contract without fail. Use your best judgment about bid, but get that contract. JAGGERS.

"I guess that'll show Louie what we think about it out here," she added,

pulling the call-box for a messenger boy, "and if our outfit can't deliver the boxes at the price he makes, we'll have plenty of time to renege before he lets go of that five-thousand-dollar deposit. I'm not going to see the firm lose out because Jaggers got a stomach-ache at the wrong minute."

"I do hope it will be all right," Miss Bennings suggested feebly.

"So do I," Birdie admitted, "but if nobody took a chance in this town all the poker games would have to close up and the detectives would starve to death. Here it goes," she added, as the messenger boy dived into the office and took the telegram she held out to him, "and if I get the fresh air for putting this one over you'll have a chance to grab my job."

Two hours later, when the wheels in the big Atlas factory had ceased whirring and the employees were pouring out of the place, a telegram came from Witherspoon. Miss McMullen, lingering a few minutes beyond her usual time in the hope that it would arrive, opened it nonchalantly although it was addressed to Jaggers.

It fairly breathed the excitement under which the worried representative of the firm had been laboring all day, and she smiled in anticipation of the row she felt certain she had precipitated in the Atlas plant as she read:

Fixed Granacorn president's secretary with a hundred to show me bids. Phoenix bid was dollar a hundred. I took out our dollar four bid and substituted one for ninety-eight cents. Afraid we'll lose money, but your orders were positive. Looks like our contract to a certainty. Wire instructions Globe Hotel.

WITHERSPOON.

Birdie tossed the message across the desk to Miss Bennings and turned to the little mirror to pin on her hat.

"Well, I've started something," she said; "but whether the firm goes broke or makes me a partner depends on which shell the little pea is under. But, believe me, I'll sleep like a top, and that's more than Jaggers or Witherspoon will do, I'll bet."

At a quarter to eight the next morning the trolley car in which Miss McMullen was speeding to business came to an unexpected stop in the middle of a block some three miles from the office. Impatient glances showed the car ahead halted at the end of a blockade, and energetic youths who volunteered to investigate after the first few moments of restiveness reported in shrill tones that a fire a few blocks away had caused the trouble.

"Gee! It's a big one, too," announced an errand boy who had questioned the lounging motormen. "The tracks is all covered with hose and no cars can get past. You might as well beat it the rest of the way down."

"What's on fire, son?" asked a curious man from behind his newspaper.

"The Phoenix box factory," the lad shouted, swinging off the car. "and she's all gone up, too. One fellow says the roof is fell in and the walls is comin' down. I'm goin' up and see it."

Miss Birdie McMullen, from a state of indignant irritation over the delay which would make her late in arrival at the office, was suddenly galvanized into action. If the Phoenix Company's factory was destroyed it would be impossible for it to carry out the Granacorn contract at any figure, she realized in the first instant after the surprise of the boy's announcement had passed. And if she had not interfered with the bid Witherspoon had submitted in the first place—

She jumped up and hurried to the street. Her dominant thought was to reach the office as soon as possible—to do something—anything—to retrieve the error she had made before it was too late.

If that ninety-eight-cent bid was opened in Columbus by the president of the Granacorn Company she knew her employers would have a difficult task increasing it to a figure at which they could afford to make a million boxes—and before her stretched a

long line of stalled trolley cars, with smoking, whistling fire engines at the end of the vista.

It was not a neighborhood in which a cab was likely to be found, and the nearest parallel car-line was more than a half-mile distant. She turned in that direction and had taken a few quick steps when an automobile swung around the corner and the chauffeur, alone in the big car, regarded her with an approving glance and a smile of admiration.

Ordinarily Miss McMullen would have retaliated with a frozen stare, but on the instant it flashed upon her that the opportunity to get to the office in a hurry was being thrust upon her and she smiled brightly in response. The flirtatious chauffeur needed no further encouragement and he stopped the car within its length.

"Hello, bright eyes!" he said cheerfully; "want a little ride?"

"Sure I do," Birdie responded, stepping toward the machine. "My own car is laid up to-day and I've got to beat it down to my bank and open up for the mill-hands."

He jumped down briskly to help her into the seat beside him.

"I see your car is on the blink," he said with a grin, nodding toward the long line of trolleys. "Which is yours—that last one?"

Miss McMullen held her own in the rapid-fire conversation that ensued as the big car bowled toward the plant of the Atlas Company, but all the while her mind was busy with the problem that the fire had thrust upon her, and when the obliging chauffeur set her down at the door, frankly disappointed by her curt dismissal, she had evolved her plan of action.

Before she drew out her hat-pins she put in a long-distance telephone call for Witherspoon at his hotel in Columbus and then she told Miss Bennings what had happened.

"It begins to look like a busy day for me," she said. "I'm not so sure that I'm a wiz in this financial game,

after all. Here I get everything framed up to grab the Phoenix people's chance for that contract by putting our own firm on the rocks, and then their blamed old shack burns up and my rough work wasn't necessary."

The telephone bell jingled.

"There's Witherspoon now," she said, making a jump for it, "and I've got to deal him some facts that will jolt ten years off his life."

But Miss Bennings, watching her face anxiously as she answered the call, saw a sudden change of expression that startled her.

"Who?" asked Birdie sharply, and then she listened intently. After a moment she regained control of her voice.

"No, there's nothing particularly new," she said. "Mr. Jagers was taken ill yesterday and had to go home. He's be all right, I guess. About ten? All right, Mr. Throgmorton."

Miss Bennings sat up straight as she heard the name and Birdie dropped the receiver into place.

"It is the boss," she said. "Just blew into town this morning and taking breakfast at a hotel down-town. Says he wanted to surprise us so he didn't tell anybody he was back from Europe. Well, he got his wish, all right; I'm surprised."

"Aren't you going to tell him about—about the Granacorn contract?" Miss Bennings asked.

"Not if I can beat him to it!" Birdie said firmly. "Do you think I want to tip myself off after making a fumble like that?" He'd probably make me work overtime the rest of my life to pay for what they'll lose on the deal. And he's going to be here at ten o'clock to take a flash at these telegrams and things. I don't mind saying that for a fine spring morning, it's getting just a trifle too warm."

"Oh, why doesn't Mr. Witherspoon call up?" exclaimed Miss Bennings plaintively.

"They're probably paging him down the main street of Columbus and haven't struck the right saloon yet,"

Birdie suggested; "it's an even-money bet that he calls up just as old man Throgmorton is settling into his chair and calling for the letter book."

For half an hour longer the two girls worked on under a nervous tension that made them jump when a door slammed in the factory beyond the office. Shouting newsboys came by with extras detailing the story of the fire, and together they devoured the wildly exaggerated narrative.

Foremen came in to inquire for Jagers, the absent one, and the minutes dragged on until at last the telephone bell rang and Witherspoon excitedly asked what was wanted.

"Mr. Jagers wanted to talk to you," said Birdie, "but he had to leave the plant on a business trip and he told me to give you the message. Say, did you folks in Columbus hear about the Phoenix box factory burning up? Well, it's all off with our pals over there—nothing doing but settling the insurance. Yep—total loss. You see what that means, don't you? They couldn't carry out that dollar a hundred contract if they got it, so we don't need to underbid them. Yes—that's the idea. Jagers wants you to bribe your pall down there again before those bids are opened, swipe that ninety-eight-cent bid of ours, and stick the other one back in the bunch. Well, it's simply got to be done, he says. We'll have to close down if we make those boxes for ninety-eight cents, and with the Phoenix people out of business we don't need to do it. That's all—wire us how you finish. Good-by."

She hung up and fell back in the chair limply.

"You've heard about that one-armed paperhanger with the hives who thought he was a bit busy," she said. "Why, he's asleep under a tree compared to little Birdie this morning. All we need now to make it a purple holiday is to have our box makers go out on a strike and blame it on me some way."

Promptly at ten o'clock Mr. J. Atwood Throgmorton walked into the office and beamed upon his stenographers.

"Good morning—glad to see you again," he said. "Everything looks quite familiar—very familiar, indeed. Sorry to hear about Mr. Jagers being ill. Nothing serious, I hope, Miss McMullen?"

"Acute indigestion the doctor called it," she said. "I'm 'fraid he was worrying too much over the business."

"Ah, I suppose—I suppose so," said the president, "but things will soon be straightened out now that I am back. Nothing very important on hand, I believe you said?"

"Oh, one or two matters to be closed up," Miss McMullen replied, trying to keep her voice quite level and natural, "but I believe they are going through all right."

The telegrams from Witherspoon were in her desk. She could only hope desperately that his next message would be reassuring as she tapped away at routine correspondence left over from the day before.

Miss Bennings gave up the attempt to conceal her agitation and fled the scene under the subterfuge of visiting

a dentist to have a painful tooth attended to, and for two hours, while Mr. Throgmorton discussed the Phoenix factory fire and browsed over the correspondence that had been accumulated in his absence, she sat waiting for what the future and the telegraph wires might bring forth.

Then came the long-awaited message from Witherspoon. Mr. Throgmorton opened it leisurely and Miss McMullen, covertly watching his face, felt a load lifted from her heart as he smiled genially.

"Well, well, here's good news," he said. "Witherspoon wires that everything is all right and we get the Granacorn contract at a dollar four per hundred. Jagers wrote me something about that a month or more ago. Do you know whether the competition was very keen, Miss McMullen?"

Birdie fitted an envelope into her machine and looked up innocently.

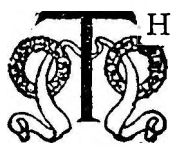
"I haven't paid much attention to it, Mr. Throgmorton," she said, "but I think Mr. Jagers felt pretty certain he would land it at that price."

"U-m-m!" mused the president, looking at the telegram, "I think he could have got a dollar ten just as easily."

A YOUNG BLOOD

A SHORT STORY

BY RUBY M. AYRES



THE Young Blood, as Bill called him, lived in chambers overlooking the cab-stand where Bill spent most of his days.

Bill was a relic of old London; he said he could remember the time when stage coaches rattled over London

Bridge, and link-boys lighted pedestrians to their homes.

Bill only said these things when business looked up a bit, and he was able to get a few extra pints; and as nobody knew how old Bill really was, and nobody particularly cared, nobody was in a position to contradict his statement.

Bill was very interested in the Young Blood; but then—Bill was interested in the whole world, from his own broken-kneed cab-horse which stood dejectedly on the rank for the greater part of the day and night, to the prime minister himself, whom Bill had once seen leaving the house.

"'Tis a wonderful place—the world," old Bill would say, puffing smoke from his nose-warmer. "An' it grows more wonderful every day."

He said that once to the Young Blood, who had stopped to stroke the nose of the broken-kneed horse, and bestow sixpence upon its owner; the Young Blood was very generous with sixpences; he flung them about as freely as if he had no unpaid tailors' bills and notes from money lenders in his desk.

"Wonderful place do you call it!" he echoed, staring down at Bill through his eye-glass. "Rotten place, I call it! damned awful place in fact—"

Then without waiting for the homily, which would surely have come, he hailed a taxi, and was whirled away west.

The Young Blood spent most of his time down west; he belonged to a couple of smart clubs, and he was invited to swell houses because he was young and unattached and good-looking; furthermore, he knew how to make himself agreeable.

As Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy often said:

"One can always ask young Farnham to make up; he's quite a nice boy."

The Young Blood was going to "make up" now for a dear friend of the said Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy; he was perfectly well aware that he had received his invitation at the last moment; but he was philosophic and he agreed with the old adage that beggars cannot be choosers!

Old Bill stood looking after the vanishing taxi that whirled the Young Blood away down the frosty road, and scratched his stubbly chin.

"D'ye 'ear that, Snuffy?" he demanded of the broken-kneed horse.

"Did ye 'ear the Young Blood say as the world were a demmed h'orful place—eh, my gal?"

Snuffy tossed her head to coax the few remaining oats in her nose-bag out of odd corners. Could she have spoken, she would probably have heartily agreed with the Young Blood; privately she thought very little of a world obviously made for racing taxicabs, and snorting motor-buses—a world that no longer had room or use for an old cab-horse with rheumatism in every joint.

Bill tightened a girth laconically.

"There's many a Young Blood in 'is fur-lined coat wots a sight worse off nor you or me, Snuffy, an' don't you forget it," he said severely. "There ain't a man in England as can say I owes 'im a penny piece, thank Gawd!"

He looked down the road where the taxi had disappeared from sight.

"And that's more than t' Young Blood can say, I'll be bound," he added meaningly.

The Young Blood had a decided taste for taxicabs; those on the rank outside his chambers reaped a small harvest from him, for he hated walking, and he hated dirtying his boots.

The Young Blood had been brought up from his cradle with golden expectations dangling before his eyes; it had never been considered necessary to teach him to do anything more useful than how to dance and shoot and play cricket and make love, all of which he did exceedingly well! He had had a thoroughly good time at Eton and Cambridge and he had been half round the world.

He had left the other half to such time when those golden expectations should be realized; but alas! for when the Young Blood was barely seven and twenty, those golden expectations were willed away to a cousin, and the other half of the world seemed suddenly to recede to an alarming distance.

The Young Blood was thirty now!

For three years he had scraped along on credit and promises and loans and

the security that lies in the chance of a wealthy marriage; but people were beginning to get skeptical, and only that morning a big gentleman with a diamond pin had politely hinted quite respectfully, but none the less firmly, that unless Mr. Farnham could manage to get hold of some money—

The Young Blood said he understood perfectly, which was why he had told Bill that he thought the world was a "damned awful place"; he was still thinking so as he was whirled away west to the house of Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy's dearest friend; still thinking so when he gave his hat and coat to a statuesque footman; still thinking so when presently he cast anchor on a hideously uncomfortable chair beside a—no, she was not hideous!

The Young Blood always liked fair play; and now, as he stole a sidelong glance at the woman beside him, he admitted generously that she was nothing worse than terribly plain!

Her hair was sandy and unbecomingly dressed; she had an indifferent skin and white eyelashes and a wide unlovely mouth.

But she had money! Ye gods, the amount of money which some misguided fool had bequeathed to her!

The Young Blood looked at her again. She had flushed in dull, red patches when he sat down beside her; her light-lashed eyes glanced at him now and again coquettishly, for the Young Blood was a handsome man—his looks being his sole asset.

"Poor old girl!" thought the Young Blood. He turned slowly in the hideously uncomfortable chair and smiled; the Young Blood had a beautiful smile!

After all, he was thinking, a man need see so little of a woman once he was married to her; surely it could not matter so very much if she had white lashes and a wide mouth?

But that is just what does matter to men like the Young Blood; only he did not realize it, as he began to talk softly in his slow, caressing voice.

The Young Blood walked home.

The night was still young, and the air was crisp with frost.

The clear sky was brilliant with stars; they twinkled like amused eyes as the Young Blood walked slowly along the Strand and up toward Piccadilly.

He hated the thought of bed, and he did not want to turn in at either of the expensive clubs, for clubs meant spending money which he could not afford, and bed meant being visited by a whole army of unpleasant thoughts.

So the Young Blood walked the Strand toward Piccadilly.

There were not many people about; what was "early" to the Young Blood was late to the ordinary man in the street; now and then an overdressed woman glanced boldly at him; a bare-foot newsboy ran along the gutter shouting a late edition.

"'Orrible murder! 'Orrible murder!"

The Young Blood did not want a late edition, and he was not interested in the 'orrible murder, but he gave the boy tuppence and walked on.

He was thinking about the woman whose hand he had pressed as he bade her good night in the crowded rooms of the house where Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy's dearest friend lived; at least—it would be more correct to say that he was thinking of her money, and what he could do with it!

The Young Blood had never seriously cared for a woman in all his life! His own mother had been a society butterfly, heartless and pleasure-loving; and the Young Blood had never troubled to discover that all women were not the same.

Honestly speaking, he had no wish to marry; but there were other things for which he had no wish either—the chief of them being bankruptcy!

He had known plenty of fellows who had gone through the Bankruptcy Court and emerged smiling on the other side, but somehow he did not think that he could manage to do so; therefore he had pressed the hand of

the white-lashed woman as he bade her good night.

"Poor old girl!" thought the Young Blood again compassionately; he thought it must be dreadful to be a woman—and ugly!

He was crossing Piccadilly Circus now, past the deserted island where flower women sit all day; he hesitated for a moment, uncertain which way to go.

There were only two paths in London to the Young Blood at that time of night; one which led home to bed, and another which led to the two swagger clubs, and he did not want to go either way; he wanted to find another road which led away somewhere fresh.

"I beg your pardon!"

A timid voice spoke at his elbow; a timid hand was laid lightly on his arm. The Young Blood glanced down. He was used to being addressed by voices of all sorts, at all hours of day or night.

"I am afraid—" he began, then stopped, his eye-glass falling from his eye.

In the whole course of his life he had never seen a face like the one raised to his through the clear, frosty night.

She was not very tall; her head did not reach to his shoulder; but her eyes were gray as a tree-shadowed lake on a chill spring afternoon, her mouth sweet and tremulous, and her hair a beautiful dead-leaf brown.

"I beg your pardon," she said again nervously.

The Young Blood stared—he felt all at once very old and superior—quite fatherly, in fact.

"Don't you know—" he said severely. "Don't you know that you have no right to speak to me at this time of night—or, indeed, at *any* time of night?" The gray eyes looked puzzled.

"But there is nobody else to speak to," she said.

The Young Blood looked round at

the deserted circus. It was quite true; there was not even a constable in sight. He picked up his monocle and screwed it fiercely into his eye.

"Little girls like you ought to be at home and in bed," he said virtuously. She half smiled.

"I know—but I have got to get to Kensington first—can you please tell me the way? That is all I want to know."

"Kensington!" the Young Blood echoed the word doubtfully—he was not at all sure that he believed her. "I should take a taxi," he said at length.

The smile faded—the gray eyes looked distressed.

"But I haven't any money."

The Young Blood drew himself up severely.

"No money!" he echoed. "Where do you come from? What are you going to Kensington for?"

She answered him readily.

"I came up from Devonshire this morning. A friend was going to meet me. I waited at Charing Cross for three hours, but he never came, and they told me when I asked that there were no more trains home that night. I would have gone back if there had been. So the only thing I can do is to go on to Kensington. I suppose I must walk, as I haven't any money—if you will tell me the way."

"You can't walk—don't be silly," said the Young Blood. He looked at her frowningly. "I live in Kensington myself—if you will let me drive you down—"

"But I don't know who you are," she objected.

"Well, that's soon remedied—my name is Robertson, and I'm the penniless younger son of a younger son; otherwise I'm a fairly respectable member of society. What part of Kensington do you want?"

She mentioned the name of the road—the Young Blood beamed.

"I know a man living there—a man named Sargent—"

The girl uttered a little cry.

"That is my friend's name," she said. "Ronald Sargent—we are going to be married."

"W-h-a-t!"

The Young Blood brought out the word with stupefied incredulity. "*What!*" he said again sharply.

The girl flushed—she bit her lip.

"I ought not to have told you—he said I must keep it a secret—but you seemed to disbelieve me."

"Disbelieve you!" the Young Blood laughed shortly. "I should rather say so; why—" he broke off, meeting her eyes. "I beg your pardon," he added abruptly. "I'm afraid I'm an awful ass. If you'll allow me to drive you down—we can find a taxi a little farther along."

She walked obediently by his side. From time to time she looked at him with a half puzzled expression in her eyes. The Young Blood hailed a taxi creeping up the street—he held the door for the girl to enter.

"Kensington," he said absently. He got in beside her.

"So you're going to marry Ronald Sargent?" he said.

"Yes"—she looked at him distrustfully. "Why are you so surprised?"

"Am I? Not really! It's just my way. Fancy you knowing Ronald! I suppose—" A sudden idea flashed through his mind. "Of course—you met him down in Devonshire?"

"Yes—did he tell you?"

"Yes."

He answered curtly; remembering the way in which Ronald had spoken of a girl he had stumbled across in a far away village among daffodil fields. He sat silent for a moment, leaning forward, staring before him.

"I say," he said suddenly. "It's a bit late to go and look Ronald up to-night, you know—supposing—I know quite a nice place where you can go and sleep—and then—I'll take you down myself in the morning. What do you say? Are you sure he's expecting you—*quite* sure?"

"I sent a telegram, and told him I

was coming, and what time to meet me."

The Young Blood drew in his breath sharply; he looked down at her and quickly away again.

"I dare say he's been detained," he said evenly. "I think it will be much the best if you do as I suggest, and go to my rooms—I mean, go to the old lady I spoke of! She's one of the best—she'll take care of you—and in the morning I'll—I'll see to everything for you. Will you do that?"

"But—but I don't know you," she said again; her voice was tremulous.

The Young Blood dropped his monocle.

"Look here," he said boyishly. "If you think I'm a scoundrel say so and have done with. I don't mind."

The gray eyes searched his face nervously—then a half smile crossed her face.

"Of course I don't think so," she said.

"Good." The Young Blood let down the window with a gesture of relief, and called to the driver the name of the road where Bill and Snuffy stood on the cab rank for most of the day and night.

When the cab stopped he got out and closed the door. "If you don't mind waiting a minute I'll just go in and tell the old lady." He ran up the steps of the house, and opened the door with his latch-key. He seemed a long while gone to the girl who sat there in the silent night, when at last he came back his young face looked grave. "It's all right," he said; he led the way up the steps to the door. An old woman stood there in a drab dressing gown. She looked as if she had been hastily roused from sleep. "This is the lady, Mrs. King," said the Young Blood. He held his hand to the girl.

"Good night, sleep well. I'll come round early in the morning and see to everything for you."

He held her little fingers for a moment, then turned away and went down the steps again into the street.

He paid the waiting taxi and walked slowly up the pavement. Old Bill sat on the door of his cab, smoking a short clay pipe. He bade the Young Blood a respectful good night.

The Young Blood stopped.

"Bill," he said solemnly. "Men are all scoundrels."

Old Bill spat with great precision into the gutter.

"No, sir," he said slowly. "Only some on 'em." He rose stiffly to his feet. "You—you wasn't wanting a keb, sir, by any chance?"

The Young Blood laughed.

"I want a bed, Bill," he said.

"A bed, sir?"

"Yes, Bill, an angel's taken possession of mine."

Old Bill scratched his head.

"Aye," he said ruefully. "I thought I'd seen one of them once, but I was mistaken, sir. She weren't an angel, she were t'other thing. I 'ope you'll be more fortunate, sir."

"I hope I shall, Bill," said the Young Blood. "Tell you what, you can drive me round to Mr. Sargent's if you like. You know the house?"

"Yes, sir."

The Young Blood scrambled into the old cab; it was stuffy, and smelled of straw. He let both windows down, and leaned out of one, looking up at the house they were leaving. As he looked, a light flashed in one of the upper windows. For a moment he caught the silhouette of a girl's head, the outline of a delicate cheek.

The Young Blood leaned back with a little tingling in his veins. He thought of the white-lashed woman whose hand he had pressed when he bade her good night, and then he thought of the gray, puzzled eyes that had been raised to his through the silent night.

"Old Bill's wrong," he told himself ashamedly. "All men are scoundrels."

There was chaos in Ronald Sargent's room when the Young Blood pushed wide the door and entered.

Sargent, in his shirt-sleeves, stood by the mantel-shelf rolling a cigarette; a perspiring valet knelt on the floor, packing trunks and portmanteaus; the Young Blood looked from one to the other silently.

"Hello!" said Sargent. He was a good-looking man, with very white teeth and very dark eyes.

The Young Blood shut the door and leaned his back against it.

"I want to speak to you," he said.

"You want to—" Sargent stopped rolling his cigarette; he frowned a little. "Get out, Lines," he said briefly.

The perspiring valet rose to his feet and disappeared through a door at the end of the room.

Sargent indicated a chair.

"Sit down," he said. The Young Blood did not move.

"Ronald," he said uncompromisingly, "you're a scoundrel!"

The other man stared; finally he laughed.

"Thank you—what's the matter now? You're a nice chap to come and blackguard a man the night before his wedding-day—"

"That's why," said the Young Blood grimly.

The cigarette fell from Sargent's fingers—his face paled.

"An hour ago," said the Young Blood, "there was a girl from some forgotten spot in Devonshire, wandering about Piccadilly without a penny in her pocket, looking for you."

He looked at his friend unflinchingly; for the first time in his life he realized that Sargent had shifty eyes.

"She spoke to me," he went on slowly, "to ask me the way to Kensington. She said she had waited three hours at Charing Cross for you; that she had sent you a telegram; that you were going to marry her."

Sargent moistened his white lips; he tried to speak, but no words would come.

"She let out your name quite by accident," the Young Blood went on mercilessly. "You've got me to thank

that she isn't here now—at this moment. I persuaded her to wait till the morning to come to you. I left her with the old girl round at my rooms. What are you going to do?"

The elder man had recovered himself a little—he laughed forcedly.

"What a *contretemps*! Little fool! I never thought she was serious. I certainly gave her a kiss or two—and wrote. I admit that, but when her wire came this morning I looked upon it as a—a sort of joke. I replied at once, telling her not to come; she can't have got it. Heavens, Robertson, what kind of idiot do you take me for?"

"You said you were going to marry her."

Sargent laughed savagely.

"I told you I made love to her; you'd have done the same in my place. It was just a flirtation."

The Young Blood swallowed hard. He had called Sargent a scoundrel, but he had not believed him such a scoundrel as this!

He walked over to the mantel-shelf, cleared now of all the photographs and odds and ends so familiar to him, and stared down into the fire. He wondered what Sargent would do if he obeyed the impulse in his heart, and crashed a fist in the handsome, careless face; for a moment he could not trust himself to speak.

"Don't be an ass, old chap!" said the other man suddenly; his voice sounded uncomfortable. "If it's money she wants—" He stopped, the words died in his throat as the Young Blood swung round, facing him with fury in his eyes.

There was a poignant silence; then the Young Blood picked up the hat and coat he had flung down on a chair, and made for the door.

Sargent followed him.

"What are you going to do—what will you tell her?"

"That she is well rid of a black-guard like you," said the Young Blood; the door slammed behind him.

But it was obviously impossible to tell her any such thing.

When the Young Blood went round to his rooms in the morning, having shaved and changed, and breakfasted at one of the smart clubs—she was watching for him from the window—she was half-way down the stairs when he opened the door with his latch-key.

"I thought you were never coming," she said eagerly.

He looked at her, and away again.

"It's awfully early—for me!" he explained.

He followed her up-stairs to his sitting-room; he looked round anxiously; he wondered what she thought of the many feminine photographs on his shelf.

She sat down on the arm of a chair and looked at him silently.

"I did not know I was turning you out last night," she said suddenly. "It was very good of you. I shall tell Ronald how kind you were to me."

The Young Blood bit his lip.

"Ah!" he said lightly. "You won't be able to do that just yet. I can soon tell you why he didn't turn up at Charing Cross last night. He isn't in London, so of course he never got your wire."

"Not—in—London?"

"No. Don't look so frightened! It's all right. We all clear off abroad sometimes, you know; and he'll be back soon. I went round to his chambers."

She had paled; her eyes were once more furtive and scared.

"But—but what am I to do?"

"Stay here," said the Young Blood, unhesitatingly. "Sargent's my—friend—" He gulped over the word, knowing full well that last night had dealt the death-blow to any friendship that had ever existed.

"I'll look after you for him—if you'll allow me to—if you'll trust me. I've got plenty of money." She smiled.

"Last night you told me you were penniless," she reminded him.

"There are various degrees of the penniless state," the Young Blood ex-

plained grandly. "I've enough for the wants of a little girl like you, anyway. And, now—tell me—why did you run away from home?"

She flushed scarlet; tears started in her eyes.

"Please don't call it 'home'! I have no home; I lived with an aunt who treated me as if I were a servant. I never knew what it was to be happy till—Ronald came."

The Young Blood turned away.

"You love—Ronald—very much, of course?" he said.

"He has been so good to me."

The Young Blood kicked furiously at the fire, sending a shower of sparks up the chimney; there was antagonism in every line of his smartly coated figure.

Suddenly he wheeled round.

"Well, I must be going," he said laconically. "I hope you will be able to amuse yourself; there are heaps of books; try those in the case—not the ones on the shelf."

She started to her feet with a little dismayed cry.

"You are not going to leave me here, alone?"

He dropped his monocle agitatedly.

"I'm awfully sorry. I've got an appointment. I've promised to go to a wedding."

She clasped her hands.

"A wedding? Oh, can't I come, too? I need not sit with you; but I should so love to see a London wedding. Please let me come."

"Certainly not," said the Young Blood. He wondered what she would say if he told her whose wedding it was. He told himself that he hated Sargent—that he hoped he would never see him again.

He took an agitated stride toward the door. He felt afraid that she would guess the thing he had not the courage to tell her.

"I'll come back and have tea with you—if I may," he said clumsily. "We'll go out and have tea somewhere together."

She made him no answer. He looked back over his shoulder.

The girl sat listlessly staring out of the window. He had a horrible presentiment that as soon as he closed the door behind him she would cry. He stood irresolute; then he went back, tossed hat and coat to the sofa, and crossed to her side.

"Confound the wedding!" he said. "I'll take you for a walk."

It was the following morning, when he went to see her, that he noticed the dark circles beneath her eyes. She was very pale, too, and there was a suspicion of tears in her eyes.

The Young Blood eyed her accusingly.

"You're not well. Haven't you slept? Doesn't the old girl make you comfortable?"

She smiled faintly.

"She's very kind—and I slept quite well, but"—she broke off—"I don't want to stay here."

The Young Blood polished his monocle furiously on his coat-sleeve. "You don't like me!" he accused her.

"Oh, yes, I do!"

"You don't like these rooms. I know they're a bit queer for a woman, but—"

"I think they are lovely," she said.

The Young Blood beamed.

"Then why do you want to go back to the horrid aunt?" he demanded.

"I don't; only—"

"You haven't given us a fair trial," he said cheerily. "You've got the hump. Put on your hat and come out. I'll introduce you to Bill and Snuffy; they'll cheer you up."

She obeyed him silently. She stood beside the fire, pulling on her gloves. Suddenly she asked him a question.

"Who is the lady in evening dress?" She indicated a photo in a silver frame on the shelf.

The Young Blood flushed scarlet.

"It's a Miss Dumaire," he said.

"At least she was, but she was married yesterday."

"At the wedding you were going to?"

"Yes."

"What is her name now?" The gray eyes were raised to his face steadily. The Young Blood was tongue-tied; then—

"Smith," he said desperately.

She finished buttoning her gloves gravely.

"I don't like that name," she said.

"I think Sargent is much nicer."

There was a poignant silence; she took up her muff—quite a cheap little muff it was, of no particular fur. "I am quite ready," she said.

It was a week later that the Young Blood encountered Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy in the park.

It was a bright, sunny morning, with just a pleasant touch of frost in the air.

Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy called to him from an expensively appointed car drawn up by the railings.

"Bobbie—Bobbie. I've been looking for you everywhere."

He approached reluctantly; she made room for him beside her on the white, upholstered seat.

"Come in—nonsense—" as he would have refused. "I want you most particularly."

He sat down with a look of resignation.

"I've heard a nasty little tale about you," she said seriously. "Of course I don't believe it, but, Bobbie—have you got a girl staying in your rooms?"

The Young Blood returned her gaze calmly.

"Yes, please," he said.

Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy screamed.

"And you dare to admit it! Bobbie, are you raving mad?"

"No," said the Young Blood. He sat up with a sudden show of attention. "Who told you?" he asked.

Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy hesitated.

"Well," she said at length. "I suppose there's no harm in telling you—it was Ronald Sargent."

"Ah!" the word came from between the Young Blood's teeth; "I thought he was in Paris honeymooning," he said presently.

"My dear boy, they came back after three days—Grace said she was bored to death—quite a marriage of convenience it was, you know. Sargent was ambitious, and her father is an influential man, and she wanted Sargent's money—that's the case in a nutshell!"

The Young Blood made no comment; he thought of the whitelashed woman and shivered. Only that morning he had received a letter from her asking why he had not been to see her as he had promised; how could he, in the face of the determination he had made to ask her to be his wife, condemn Sargent?

The woman beside him suddenly slipped a coaxing hand through his arm.

"Tell me who she is, Bobby—this girl—tell me who she is!"

"I will," said the Young Blood grimly, and he did.

Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy was not so surprised as one might have expected; she had heard similar stories before—she called the Young Blood a fool, then she relented and said he was a dear thing.

"And she doesn't know that Sargent's married, Bobby?"

"No."

"She'll have to know, of course?"

The Young Blood made no answer.

"Bobby, are you in love with her?"

The Young Blood flushed crimson; such a thought had never entered his head—he laughed mirthlessly.

"I can't afford such luxuries," he said. "When I marry I shall be like Sargent—fed-up after three days' honeymoon," and he thought again of the white-lashed woman.

"You won't tell any one, of course, will you?" he said as he made his adieu; and Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy said "Of course not," but she drove straight from the park to the house of

the white-lashed woman, and repeated the conversation with additions.

The white-lashed woman listened with a spot of color on either cheek.

"And you say this girl is at his rooms—at Kensington?" she asked.

"Yes."

The white-lashed woman looked at her colorless reflection in a mirror opposite.

"She is pretty, of course?"

"My dear, I suppose so. I accused Bobbie of being in love with her, and he said he couldn't afford such luxuries."

The white-lashed woman made no comment. After Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy had left her she sat for a long time, staring at her reflection; she loved the Young Blood; just then she loved him better than she loved the wealth which she knew was all of hers that he coveted.

She was still sitting motionless when the Young Blood was announced. His manner was very gentle, but there was a fighting expression in his eyes; he held her hand for a moment longer than was strictly necessary, but when he looked into her eyes he thought of the sweet gray ones that had been raised to his through the darkness that night little more than a week ago.

He said he was sorry he had stayed away so long; he said he had been very busy.

"I know," said the white-lashed woman. "Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy has just been—she told me."

The Young Blood was conscious of an overwhelming sense of relief; he sat down with a feeling of giddiness.

"I'm very glad," he said.

The woman watched him; there was something very boyish about the Young Blood; a sudden fierce pain gripped her—it was hard, hard that an unkind fate had given her a plain face and white eyelashes; she felt all at once the same wounded pang which she had experienced years before as a child when she had been snubbed for her younger and prettier sister.

With a sudden gesture of abandon she covered her face with her hands. The Young Blood was beside her in an instant; he could never bear to see a woman cry—he gently tried to draw her hands from her face.

"I'm so ugly," she said, resisting him with a sob; "I'm so ugly."

The words sounded infinitely pathetic; they brought an uncomfortable lump to the susceptible throat of the Young Blood; and then—well then, he did the very thing he had decided he never would do as he climbed the stairs to her beautiful drawing-room—he asked her to marry him.

Fate is a cruel jade; when the Young Blood got back to the smart club where he had been staying for the past week, there was a letter waiting for him from his cousin's lawyer to say that the cousin had died suddenly and left him all the money which the Young Blood had thought to inherit years before.

"Bill," said the Young Blood that evening drearily as he paused on his way to his rooms to pat Snuffy's lean head and bestow sixpence on Snuffy's master, "Bill, it's a d— rotten world!"

The girl with the gray eyes sprang up from her chair eagerly when the Young Blood was announced, letting a book fall to the floor. The Young Blood stooped to pick it up for her; the little action did away with the formality of shaking hands.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"One of your books; I found it on the shelf."

He laid it down on the table with careful precision.

"I want to tell you something, too," she said.

He swung round.

"Ladies first," he said, with an attempt at levity. "What is it?"

She stood looking down into the fire.

"I'm going home—back to Devonshire."

He stared at the back of her head with its coils of leaf-brown hair.

"Why?" he asked blankly.

"Because—" She swung round, facing him. "Oh, what is the use of explanations? It's just that I can't stay here any longer. I'm going back—there's a train in the morning."

"I see," said the Young Blood.

He felt as if some one had hit him hard between the eyes, and yet he knew that it was quite the best thing that could happen. How would he ever grow satisfied with the white-lashed eyes, so long as he had the beauty of this girl's face before him!

She whitened a little.

"You agree, then; you think it is the best thing?"

"I shall be sorry," said the Young Blood lamely. "And besides, there is Ronald Sargent. What about Ronald Sargent?"

"Yes," she said quietly. "What about Ronald Sargent?"

Something in her voice made his heart thump. With a swift gesture she held something to him.

"I found *that* the day after I came here—the day you were going to Mr. Smith's wedding; it was lying between the pages of a book."

The Young Blood took it with an unsteady hand; it was the elaborately engraved card inviting him to Sargent's wedding.

He let it fall to the ground.

"I ought to have told you," he stammered. "I hope you believe that I meant to have told you, but I didn't want to hurt you."

She laughed.

"It didn't hurt me at all—at least, perhaps just my pride—a little! Oh, what a fool I've been—what a little fool."

The Young Blood caught her hand.

"You don't love him, then?"

"No. I thought I did—just at first; but now—"

"Now?" he echoed breathlessly. Lovely color dyed her cheeks, her eyes fell.

The Young Blood dropped her hand; he turned away with a stifled groan. There was a little tragic silence; then he spoke jerkily:

"I have not told you my news yet." He paused; he drew a long breath. "I—I am going to be married."

He took the plunge desperately, and came up shivering as if from icy waters.

He dared not look at her; she did not look at him.

Presently a small, uncertain voice broke the silence.

"I hope you will be very happy. If you are half as kind to her as you have been to me I know she will be!"

They were almost side by side in the papers the next day—the announcement of the Young Blood's engagement to one of the richest women in London and—the brief notice of his cousin's death!

Mrs. d'Arcy d'Alroy read both as she sipped her chocolate in bed; then she threw the paper from her.

"I have always said that Bobby was a fool," she declared irritably. "Why on earth couldn't he have waited?"

The white-lashed woman read the announcements too; she shivered as she realized all that lay behind them.

Later she ordered one of her cars, and drove down to Kensington. She had a sudden craving to see this girl whom Bobby had befriended—to see for herself if she were pretty; to find out if Bobby loved her. The old housekeeper admitted her reluctantly; the young lady was leaving that morning, she said; Mr. Robertson was waiting to take her to Paddington.

The white-lashed woman drew her breath sharply.

"Mr. Robertson is—here?" she asked.

"Yes, madam, he has just come. He has been living at his club for the past week. I will tell him you—"

"No—I will just go up."

When she opened the door of the

Young Blood's sitting-room the Young Blood was standing by the mantel-shelf. He did not hear her enter; he was staring into the fire; his head leaned dejectedly on his hand.

"Bobby," said the white-lashed woman painfully.

He turned, startled; he forced a smile as he came forward.

"You! Is anything the matter?"

"No, but I—" She broke off as the girl came into the room.

She was dressed for traveling; she wore the same unfashionable clothes and cheap furs with which she had come to London; but she was—oh, so beautiful in spite of a badly cut coat and ugly hat!

There was a little silence; then the Young Blood mechanically introduced the two women.

"Miss Lee is going back to Devonshire this morning," he said.

"Mr. Robertson has told me about you," said the girl. "I am sure you will be very happy. I hope so."

The Young Blood turned abruptly away, but not before the elder woman had seen the expression of his eyes. It hurt—how it hurt!

A few moments of forced conversation followed; then she turned to him.

"I must go, Bobby—if you will see me to the car."

She held her hand to the girl; her white-lashed eyes swept the soft beauty of her face piteously; then she walked from the room.

The Young Blood stood at the door of the luxurious car; he wrapped the rug about her assiduously.

"I shall see you this evening," he said; his voice was forced.

She did not answer for a moment, then:

"It was in the papers, Bobby—you saw it?—our engagement, and—your cousin's death."

"I saw it."

She looked at him for a second; she was white to the lips; her breath fluttered in her throat.

"It's really absurd, the mistakes these papers make," she said shakily. "It's annoying, too, don't you think? I really shall complain when I write to contradict it."

He echoed her words blankly.

"Contradict what?"

She forced herself to smile.

"Our engagement, of course. Silly boy, why—oh, don't, *don't* look so glad!" She wrenched her hand-free of him. "Go away—go away—tell him to drive on."

The big car glided noiselessly away, leaving the Young Blood staring after it with a dazed, white face.

Old Bill, crawling up the road, drew Snuffy to a rocking standstill. He looked down from his perch on the box with an anxious eye.

"Was you wanting a cab, sir?"

The Young Blood shook his head.

"No—at least—" Wild excitement flared in his eyes. "Wait a moment. Do you know where Somerset House is? The place where you can get marriage licenses and things like that? Good. Well, just wait half a trick."

He dashed into the house and upstairs two at a time; he paused on the landing a moment to get his breath; he walked soberly into the room. The girl stood where he had left her; her eyes turned to the door as he entered.

"I shall miss my train if we don't go now."

The Young Blood shut the door behind him.

"You're not going," he said.

It seemed a long time to old Bill before the Young Blood came out again. When at last he did he looked like a schoolboy who has got an unexpected half holiday; and the girl at his side—old Bill chuckled as he saw the color in her cheeks, the light in her eyes.

"It's a grand old place—the world," he soliloquized as he gathered up the reins and flung Snuffy a word of encouragement.

"Aye, but it's a grand old place."



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



NE evening in Berlin the German Emperor, while attending a vaudeville performance, sent word behind the scenes that unless somebody pulled a new joke before midnight he would have the place raided, or words to that effect. An English comedian rose to the occasion with the following:

"I used to know a man who had a habit of jumping at conclusions. His name was August. One day he jumped at a conclusion, and that was the last of August."

"Why?" asked the leader of the orchestra. "Because," answered the British joker, "the next day was the 1st of September."

The German Emperor got up and left the house, climbed into the imperial automobile, and tore for the winter palace in search of medical advice. Can you blame him?

There are several ways, however, of making a fool of yourself, all of them more or less entertaining. By way of comparison I want to call your attention to

THE FIGHTING FOOL

BY DANE COOLIDGE

The difference between this fighting fool and the theatrical fool was that the former hadn't the slightest idea that he was off his base, in consequence of which he went through life mistaking a scrap for a kind of pastime. Anybody who wanted anything in the line of a Donnybrook from him could get it. He

would rather walk into a room full of enemies and shoot up the place than swing in a hammock under a Balm of Gilead tree, drinking lemonade and eating macaroons. Quiet and respectability palled upon him. He couldn't see any reason why anybody should want to live a placid existence. He loathed the drone of the bumblebee and the souging of wind through the meadows or the mooing of cows in the distance. The crack of a six-pistol, the scuffle of feet, the dull resounding echo of a milk-stool coming in contact with a gentleman's occipital protuberance was music to his ears. A night of perfect rest hurt his feelings, and when he went out among his fellow men and didn't get a chance to bite somebody he considered the day a failure.

With these few introductory paragraphs I ask you to begin the opening chapters of the new Dane Coolidge novel which begins in the next number of this magazine.

There is another splendid feature in the next issue in the form of a complete novelette. It is entitled

THE OFFICIAL INTRODUCER

BY MARY RIDER MECHTOLD

There is the bugbear of "the other woman" in every woman's life, married or unmarried, in love or out of love. If she is married, "the other woman" is a fantom in the background of her dearest

domestic joys; if she is unmarried, she blames "the other woman" for usurping her chance of happiness with a man; if she is in love, "the other woman" is a torture which blisters her heart; if she is unloved, "the other woman" is a vixen who stands between her and her golden chance.

So there you have it. Believe it or not, ladies, every man knows that it is true. But is this universal fear of "the other woman" always justified? Is man ever constant and honorable enough to be trusted in a suffragette parade a block behind his wife?

Is a man always as bad as the world believes him to be when "the other woman" is involved? It is hard to believe he is not, especially when "the other woman" is one with hair like a wrought sunbeam and eyes that make you feel like you could even carry her closed parasol down the avenue on Sunday afternoon.

That is the question to be settled in your own mind after you read this strong story. Is a man as bad as he looks to the world when the scandal of "the other woman" clouds his life?

You will remember Mary Rider Mech-told as the author of that double-ended story "THE WOMAN WHO PAID." You thought a lot of her on account of that story. You will not think any less of her when you read "THE OFFICIAL INTRODUCER."

It is quite impossible for us to escape our environment. This fact is proved most conclusively in Maria Chipman Topping's story, "A HILL MAN."

The central figure was born in the mountains and among the moonshiners. He fell into bad lines because he got in the secret service business, and when he came back to spy upon his own people a very properly offended former compatriot of his cut loose and plugged him, and his former sweetheart took the same attitude toward him as a wildcat takes toward a field-mouse. Everybody in the mountains handed it out to him in a harsh, relentless manner. But there are compensations always, and "A HILL MAN" balanced them up on the scales of equity.

"THE DEVIL'S DOLL," by Mary Germaine, is made pretty clear in the title. The young woman who plays the leading rôle in this story is one of a hundred thousand.

I suppose you are aware that the devil is a man who fishes out of season. He uses the most attractive bait, knows the best waters, and has no objection to poaching.

Mary Germaine is one of the most popular contributors to *THE CAVALIER*, doubtless due to the fact that she writes about life as she finds it, knows how to tell a story, and appeals always to the mass because of her directness of style and the human qualities of her characters.

In "THE DEVIL'S DOLL," she paints a rather unusual picture of a condition that has supplied, I regret to say, a great many models.

Read this, girls, and do not let the devil lure you from the deep waters of the sheltering pool.

How would you like to read about a cow-puncher who went to sea? It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? It will seem even more so if you will read "SKIPPER KEELSON'S COWBOY," by D. A. Wasson.

The main object of this story is to spread a little laughter, and if it doesn't do that for you, it certainly won't hurt your feelings.

There is a story by John Barton Oxford in the issue of the 15th entitled "HIS CHOSEN FIELD." It is about a kindly old gent who wanted to cure his son of a passionate yearning to shine in the prize-ring. And so, therefore, he hired an ambidextrous pug to go up against his offspring and polish him off for fair.

The only way to enjoy a prize-fight is to be present from the tap of the gong. The whole story is told in *THE CAVALIER*. Get right up close to the ring, Mr. Man, rest your chin upon the platform, and watch them go to it.

"THE CRIMSON LADDER," by Jennie Harris Oliver: The whole action of this story takes place on the heroine's wedding-day. She was to be married, and the silk for the wedding-dress, a beautiful fabric of deep sumac coloring, was already bought. Then the new man appeared on the scene, after which things began to happen! Her people thought the stranger was a spy, and pre-

pared to deal with him as they had always dealt with his kind. Right here the red silk for the wedding-dress played its part in saving the marked man, and the little hands of the bride-to-be were the ones which provided him with the avenue to safety and a woman's heart.

There isn't a dull line in it. It is a honey-cooler of a honeymoon story!

OUR REGULAR CORRESPONDENTS

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have been trying to add my little "chip to the fire" for some time past, but something or other always interfered. Every one else has had their little say until there is hardly anything left to say. So I will just say that I agree with what everybody else has said except the kickers, as I think I realize, in a small degree, what an editor has to put up with in trying to cater to the world and trying to please every one.

I will say that the four serials running at the present time, especially "Beyond the Great Oblivion" and "Greater Love Hath No Man," have me going some, and I can hardly wait for the next issue to get at them.

I wish THE CAVALIER success, and if you do as well in the future as you have in the past, you can always count on one good friend from Nashville, Tennessee.

"NUFF SED."

"JUST BECAUSE HE'S IRISH"

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Living in a little Lake Erie town, surrounded by water, is very romantic, but no reason why I cannot get a look-in and express my opinion in the "Heart to Heart Talks."

I take five or six short-story magazines, but THE CAVALIER for mine. If I don't get it regularly, there is something doing. I am Irish—and you know what they can do.

I am not going to give any particular writer a shower of roses or anything of the sort. But if you continue to give the public unexpected pleasure in good stories such as you have been handing us in the past, there will be no kick coming from me—or the public, either.

H. R. LADD.

U. S. Fish Commission,
Put-in-Bay,
Lake Erie, Ohio.

"BEST SELLERS" IN THE CAVALIER

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have been a victim of the CAVALIER charms for a year, and yet I am the most willing

victim. I have read the "Heart to Heart Talks," and think it useless to repeat the praises of others, because it seems that everybody's doing it.

I gladly take my hat off and bow low to the great love master, Mr. Fred Jackson. He surely is a brick.

Really, Mr. Editor, you have given THE CAVALIER readers the best. For example, the other day I was surprised to see one of our largest book stores advertising "The Ivory Snuff Box" and "Through the Portal of Dreams" in book form, both of which I read in your magazine. I think CAVALIER readers did appreciate the opportunity of being able to get the two stories for almost nothing, compared with the price they now will have to pay for a bound book.

"Ice-Bound Hearts" will surely boost THE CAVALIER, for I sure did part with my goat when I finished that story.

If you will send me one or two of your CAVALIER LEGION buttons I will be very much obliged.

JOHN B. CHILLO.

1412 W. Jackson Boulevard,
Chicago, Illinois.

A SEQUEL ON THE WAY

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have just finished the sixth and final instalment of "Beyond the Great Oblivion," and to say that I am disappointed would be stating it but mildly.

Has the author no bowels of compassion that he must leave a newly married couple to spend their honeymoon on the cheerless brink of a gash in the ground five hundred miles deep? Not even a single cheerful idiot provided to shower them with rice and confetti! Oh, what t' 'ell, Bill—what t' 'ell!

Such an ignoble ending to six weeks of strenuous adventuring and hairbreadth escapades is absolutely intolerable!

Turn England loose again and stay not the clatter of his typewriter until he has bestowed upon his hero and heroine their well-deserved reward for toil and privation.

Let us know if the people of the abyss were eventually uplifted—mentally, spiritually, and

actually. Grant us a glimpse of the civilization that arose from this reversion to chaos and primeval night.

Afford us, I implore thee, an opportunity to stand at the graves of Allan the athletic and Beatrice the beautiful and bow our heads in reverence to the memory of this newer, nobler Adam and Eve of a regenerated race.

Hopefully,

FRED E. IRISH.

Woodfords, Maine.

Mr. Irish need have no alarm, because "THE AFTER-GLOW" is now under the talented hand of Mr. England, and will begin as a serial as soon as it is ready for the printer. It will round out this great trilogy on the nobler race.

FROM THE DEAR OLD PHILIPPINES

If the Constitution follows the flag, why shouldn't THE CAVALIER follow it also?

Out in the Philippines we appear to have some friends among the soldiers, as the following letter will prove.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Having been a subscriber of THE CAVALIER for nearly a year through E. C. McCullough & Co., Manila, and a reader of it for much longer, I desire to say a few words in regard to the best magazine published.

There is no magazine published to-day which can beat THE CAVALIER for an all-fiction magazine. It is perfect. Some people think it could be improved by better covers, more short stories, less short stories, no short stories, more serials, less serials, and no serials. But in my opinion it is O. K. as it is now.

Could you favor myself, and possibly a few others, by giving us a serial or a novelette with the plot laid in the Philippines?

Trusting that THE CAVALIER will continue as good as it has been in the past,

SERGT. L. E. FAIR.

Post. Hospital,
Camp John Hay,
Benguet, P. I.

THE THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

Honest Injun, your magazine is putting our firm on the bum. It is impossible to get a nickel's worth of work out of our employees since we first laid "lamps" on the magazine. (That doesn't mean that they're backward about coming forward for the "filthy lucre," oh, no!)

My wife wouldn't be worth a brass farthing if I neglected to bring in "our" magazine Monday morning. Honestly, I believe they'd chase me out for it. Without exaggeration, eight people eat the print off the pages of my one magazine. The first thing you know we'll all be walking the way to "Help Wanted" signs, meaning the boss doesn't sympathize with our thirst for knowledge, etc.

Now please get on Mr. Jackson's trail and give us some more "smushy" tales. Also, give us more like "The Red Dawn," "The Golden Gate," etc. But, anyway, serve us some more "à la Jackson."

A. N. D.

Dorchester, Mass.

"I GETCHA, STEVE"

I have been reading THE CAVALIER only a few months, so have, in all probability, missed some good stories. But I shall see to it that I don't take any more chances of that kind.

Find enclosed forty cents in stamps, for which send me the four numbers of your magazine in which "Darkness and Dawn" was published early last year.

D. C. JONES.

109 Endicott Arcade,
St. Paul, Minn.

THE CAVALIER is the only magazine on the market. The stories are written true to life.

OTTO A. SCHACHT.

Powell, Wyoming.

We wish to tell you that we appreciate your magazine very much. You have some exceptionally good writers, but there is one on your staff who deserves far more credit than the rest. It is George Allan England. We have finished "Beyond the Great Oblivion" and are anxiously waiting for a third of this series. As long as you can give us this type of story you can count on us as subscribers for THE CAVALIER.

MR. AND MRS. J. WALTER BRIGGS.

Tell Fred Jackson to come across with some more fiction.

I am sending you one of my photos with my button on it. I certainly am proud of it.

I have no fault to find with any of your stories.

Please have your and Fred Jackson's picture in the next issue. I am crazy to know how you look.

General Delivery,
Jacksonville, Florida.

MAUDE MORTON.



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.



JEWELRY FROM A GENTLEMAN

A SHORT STORY

BY J. N. COLE, JR.

BECAUSE "Skeeter" Lafferty was a "rat," speaking in terms of the Forest School, and because he had legs like macaroni, and a snub nose spotted with freckles, none of the older members of the track squad took particular account of the fact that Skeeter warmed up with scrupulous care and deposited himself in a blanket to await the time trials for the 440-yard dash.

He did not resent being thus ignored. He was too much elated over the dazzling prospect of running at the Federal Track Meet, to be held in Washington the following Saturday, provided he won in the trial heats.

In addition, Skeeter knew that he was being observed by a certain person whose fur toque and muff—he hadn't dared go near enough to hear her voice and see her smile—was visible among a little group of enthusiasts which had collected at the turn to watch the races.

The fact that she was there changed all things for Skeeter. Life was intensified and recolored until it became almost unbearable.

If he should win! If he only *could*! Skeeter's chest swelled at the thought of the coveted letter awarded for athletic attainments. It was an awe-inspiring "F," covering eight inches of sweater-front.

Skeeter's imagination began to race ahead. After the meet he would drop in at the Gaiety; he would stroll up the avenue, where many would eye him approvingly as the victor in the 440; if nothing else was stirring he

might flirt a bit. He wasn't sure about the flirtation. That might be disloyal to her.

The starter's gun flashed as he raised it high above his shoulders.

"All candidates for the 440," he called, "get to your marks!"

Figures huddled on the benches suddenly came to life; sweaters and blankets were thrown off, and six lithe racers, half naked in running-trunks and jerseys, placed themselves at the line, lifting their legs like hackneys in a show-ring.

"Get set!"

The runners crouched with muscles tense and quivering.

Bang!

There was a grating of spiked shoes on the cinder-track; the six, as one man, sprang forward, and, before the smoke from the gun had vanished, were fighting each other on the first turn, a hundred yards away.

A piping cheer and the clapping of gloved hands sounded from the group who clustered at the turn.

Captain Hughes, a powerful, muscular fellow, with red hair and a strawberry complexion, secured the inside lane and began to pull out from the bunch in quick, greedy strides.

Lafferty, with teeth set, dug out after him. Soon they were racing abreast, like a well-schooled pair of coach-horses.

The rest were strung along the course. At the end of the first round it was easily seen that the race lay between Hughes and Skeeter.

The girl of the fur toque and the

muff held her breath. With Skeeter and Hughes pitted against each other she almost wished there had been no race at all.

As the pistol spoke again, announcing the beginning of the last lap, Hughes quickened his pace; so did Lafferty.

There came an instant, as always does when two well-matched runners are speeding side by side, when both knew what the outcome of the race would be. With Skeeter this consciousness arrived as they were within a few paces of the last turn. Skeeter felt that he would win. He was fresh still. It was his race!

And then, as he gripped himself for a supreme effort to gain the inside track as they were taking the turn, a sharp punch from Hughes's elbow sent him wobbling to the outside. He barely missed tripping himself.

It was but an instant's delay. But it cost him the inside, and—

"Fifty-four!" sang the timer as Hughes crossed the finish.

"Fifty-five, Lafferty!"

Skeeter had whizzed past only a second later.

"Some class!" called a bystander.

"For a 'rat'!" taunted another.

Skeeter's Christian name was Fitzhugh Carter Lafferty. No one knew, who had detected his resemblance to a mosquito, though the discovery had been made on the day of his arrival at the Forest School. But mosquito was too classic and mouth-filling to be popular with the "student body," and was promptly reduced to Skeeter, while rare, intimate friends in rare, intimate moments were privileged to say Skeets.

But Fitzhugh Carter Lafferty, for all this, had failed to beat Hughes. So Hughes would represent the school at Washington! And she had gone without even saying that she was sorry!

Life to Skeeter suddenly became a loathsome thing; the magic "F" faded from his sweater; the lights on the avenue went out; he had a sinking sensation in his middle, and his

Adam's-apple swelled till it almost choked him.

He covered himself in a blanket and started for the showers.

"One moment, Lafferty!" called the coach. "I didn't know you were out for the 440. You ran a corking good race for a new man, but you finished with too much left. The 440 takes all any man has in him, and to win you've got to finish dead. I'd rather see you drop on the first lap than come in strong. You could go another now and not feel it, and Hughes is still blowing hard."

Skeeter winced. He wasn't at all in the mood for post-mortems. Clearly the coach hadn't seen Hughes foul him on the turn. A part of him was burning to tell everything; to heap upon Hughes the full volume of his scorn and indignation. Yet the better part of Skeeter triumphed, even at such a time of stress. And he was silent.

Maybe she had seen! That helped some. It was the sole shred of consolation upon which he could build new hopes.

The coach laid a hand on his shoulder.

"That will do. Stick to it, Skeeter. You'll put a kink in somebody's high gear yet."

"What if Hughes wins the point-trophy and gives her the medal?" inquired Skeeter bluntly, hardly conscious of speaking aloud his inmost thoughts.

The coach smiled. "Who is her?" he asked.

Skeeter grew pink, even to his neck and ears.

"Hu-Hughes," he stammered. "He's—he's my rival."

The coach was still at sea, but proved himself a human being by saying after a pause:

"Hughes will hardly win; he's—"

"Too much like a hunk of cheese," assisted Skeeter.

"And what you want to do," advised the coach, "is to stick around

and keep him off. If he attempts to unload his medal on her, tell him that the lady's parents do not approve of her accepting jewelry from gentlemen."

Skeeter's eyes were dancing.

"If Hughes comes butting around us I'll punch his face. But we've got to have that point-trophy, just the same. Bruton has the fifty-yard hurdles in a walk, our relay will make 'em sick. Joyner has the pole-vault tied up in a bag. If Hughes only wins!"

"Anyway, we'll be there to see that he does," concluded the coach, a trifle less humanely than before.

Skeeter throughout the remaining days of the week was unable to shake off a nagging, insistent sense of disappointment. Could he have beaten Hughes in the trial heat if he had known what the coach had told him before the race? Could he have beaten if Hughes had played fair? Skeeter knew that he could. To a youth of seventeen all things are possible.

Perhaps Skeeter's disappointment would have been less had he known, as the coach knew, that Hughes would not last long as a runner, because he refused to train properly. His winnings were made at the cost of heavy drafts on a youthful energy, which he was rapidly using up. Hughes had a big, powerful frame, but no will-power. He was easily led, easily influenced, and quick to take an unfair advantage.

Nor did Skeeter realize the benefits of his own self-denials and sacrifices for the sake of athletics. He could not detect the pliant muscle and sinew which had begun to knit about his hardening bones.

When Saturday came Skeeter's tousled head was one of the thousands that rose in an undulating mass on every side of the vast amphitheater surrounding the track.

There was so much to see that it made Skeeter's eyes hurt. It was worse than trying to watch a three-ringed circus.

Leather-lunged, brass-throated youths swarmed along the course, shouting and yelling; scores of scantily clad runners scurried about with numbers pinned to their backs, and Skeeter's trained eye inspected dozens and dozens of pretty girls.

Excitement and confusion were in the atmosphere. The sonorous voice of the megaphoned clerk echoed and vibrated through the hall; occasionally the starter's pistol spoke above the din of the cheering.

Then came the hush, the patter of running shoes on the resined floor, and the breathless instant at the finish. In only a twinkling, it seemed to Skeeter, a race was won or lost.

He unconsciously ran each of them. At the sound of the gun his muscles grew taut, and his fingers gripped the seat. During the intervals between the events his eye scanned tier after tier of seats. He found her at last. She was sitting in a box, surrounded by a swarm of Forest School cohorts, armed with banners and megaphones; and Hughes, immersed in an imposing orange sweater, was leaning toward her in a most engaging manner.

Skeeter grew pale with envy as he realized that he had been beaten again. Then he muttered:

"Hughes looks like a hunk of Schweitzer!"

Bruton won the fifty-yard hurdles with ease. The Forest School, however, had lost the pole-vault and the eight-eighty-yard run. The relay would add five points. But the 300 was shaky, and, as Skeeter had predicted, the winning of the 440-yard dash would determine the school to which the point-trophy would belong. Would Hughes win?

Involuntarily Skeeter glanced across toward her box. Where was she? Her chair was empty! Where was Hughes?

"First call for the scholastic 440."

The clerk was calling Hughes's race.

A moment later he shouted again:

"Hughes, Forest School, No. 60!"

There was no reply, and the clerk repeated the call.

Again Hughes failed to respond.

Skeeter, in a panic, slipped from his seat and hurried to the dressing-room.

"Where is Hughes?" he asked breathlessly. "They have called his race, and he hasn't shown up yet."

"We've looked everywhere for him," spoke up several of Hughes's friends. "He must have gone out with that female."

"He did," announced another. "I heard her tell him she had a headache, and asked him if he wouldn't go out with her to a drug-store."

Several boys ran out to fetch Hughes. The coach said something under his breath which made the dressing-room grow quite still. He turned to Skeeter.

"If Hughes doesn't show up in time you might as well try to take his place for this race. Hustle into a suit and answer to No. 60 at the last call. It's a chance in a thousand!"

The coach peered anxiously through the crowd.

"I am not surprised," he muttered. "A boy who hasn't got will-power enough to stop smoking and get himself into good shape for a big meet hasn't got enough to keep a girl from making a fool out of him—"

"Last call for the 440!" came a deep summons from the clerk of the course.

"Go ahead, Lafferty!"

Skeeter let out a yip of joy.

"Here, take this quietly!" scolded the coach. "You've got the stuff in you, but to-day you are up against men way out of your class. If you win you've got to get the pole on the first lap, and keep it!"

Skeeter nodded gravely and trotted off, thinking in a dazed way:

"The point-trophy—the Forest School—the medal—for her—get the pole on the first lap—keep it!"

He took his place at the start, white to the lips.

The starter raised his gun.

"Get to your marks!"

"Get set!" He gave an agonizing pause. *Bang!*

There was a flash of white, stinging muscle amid a whirl of legs and arms.

It was Skeeter!

Never before had the coaches seen such a pace set for a scholastic 440. They smiled. They had often seen inexperienced runners set a killing pace on the first go round, and—die on the second. On the second lap the cheer leaders were staring mutely over their megaphones. Not a voice broke the silence.

Three times around. Skeeter was not dead. He was running like a frightened jack-rabbit. The words:

"Get the pole—keep it!" sang through his brain. Around they went, plunging, elbowing, fighting.

The pistol rang out. It was the last lap!

Three runners turned for the finish. Skeeter was wheezing. His legs seemed to crumple; his lungs stiffened. The floor waved under him and seemed to rise to meet his feet. A pain throbbed in his side. He felt a man's hot breath on his neck. Then the man began to pull ahead!

But something deep in Skeeter, which had trained him when all hope seemed idle, refused to die now. His will sent life to the macaroni legs and breath to his lungs.

He lunged forward—the tape twanged across his breast!

Later, when Skeeter opened his eyes, the Forest School cohorts were dancing wildly as they pumped cheers of victory from their leather lungs, and the coach at his side was saying:

"Good work, old macaroni! You've just about put one over on the hunk of cheese!"

"Did we win?" asked Skeeter weakly.

"Sure—sure you did!" The coach patted the boy on the shoulder. "And what do you think?" he added in a confidential tone. "She got that fel-

low Hughes out of here on purpose. Can you beat it? Says she didn't dream you'd get to run, but she was determined Hughes shouldn't. Why didn't you tell me he fouled you in the trials?"

Skeeter struggled to his feet.

"Where—where is she?" he asked eagerly.

"She's over there, waiting to see you."

Skeeter broke away through the crowd.

"Say," called the coach, smiling. "I guess if she'd do a thing like that for you, she wouldn't mind accepting a little jewelry from a gentleman, in spite of the old folks."

AT THE STROKE OF TWELVE

A SHORT STORY

BY ELLIOT BALESTIER

STANTON BLAKE'S first conscious emotion, as his senses slowly returned, was a profound and somewhat impersonal amazement that he was still alive.

His second was an equally profound but somewhat more personal curiosity as to where he might be, together with a deep sense of physical discomfort; a general soreness, concentrated especially in the left side of his head, and a sensation at his stomach reminiscent of his first deep-sea voyage.

For a few moments he lay quite still, gripping the smooth stones on which he lay, and resting his aching head against their grateful coolness, while he collected his scattered thoughts.

The events of the evening up to the moment of losing consciousness were perfectly clear; impatient to try out a new motor he had that day installed, and tempted by the brilliancy of the three-quarter moon and the absolute stillness of the air, he had left his hangar on the Hudson, just below Yonkers, in his big hydroplane shortly before eleven o'clock, for a night fly.

He had followed the river to the Statue of Liberty, circled it, and

started to return over the city—rising to an altitude which he calculated would avoid the treacherous cross-currents, eddies, and whirlpools that, even on the apparently stillest days, abound in the neighborhood of the great man-made cañons of lower New York—when he struck a "hole" in the air, and before he realized what had happened was coasting down the side of this invisible precipice, like a toboggan down a slide, heading straight for the huge tower of the Acton Building.

The next few seconds were busy ones. He remembered the towering needlelike structure leaping toward him, a single lighted window near the top standing open invitingly; and he remembered that even as he shut off his power and struggled furiously with his planes, he had wondered what the late-working occupants of the office would think if he happened to crash into it from the sky.

Then, at the last moment, he had gained partial control of the careening plane, had flashed by the window like a wheeling bird, and then—oblivion.

Cautiously he raised his head and looked around, and his eyes grew wide with wonder.

"Well, I'll—be—eternally *blowed!*" he said slowly. "How in the name of Isaac Newton I ever got here—" He stopped, words being inadequate to express his astonishment, and examined his surroundings more carefully.

He lay upon a ledge scarcely three feet wide; on one side rose the wall of a building, rising five or six stories above him; on the other was a sheer drop of close to two hundred and fifty feet. He was in the shadow, the moon being on the other side of the building, but he knew where he was well enough; why not, since his own office lay just below him; the ledge upon which he lay surrounded the thirty-eighth story of the Acton Building tower.

"Shades of Icarus!" he muttered. "I must have catapulted out of my seat for fair; but I'm hanged if I see; and *where* is my plane?"

He paused, his brow wrinkled in thought, and rather more puzzled than he had ever been in his short but energetic life.

He remembered that just before he became unconscious he had felt certain of clearing the corner of the tower; besides, he had felt no crash, and certainly he had not fainted. He snorted contemptuously at the thought; and yet he *had* lost consciousness, and *before* the machine struck the tower! But why?

Mechanically he raised his hand to head, which throbbed unaccountably; then, with an exclamation, he snatched off the heavy cap he wore and examined it closely. A deep furrow, in which he could have laid a lead-pencil, was cut in the thick leather the whole length of the left side, and certainly nothing but a bullet could have made it—a very small bullet, to be sure, but with tremendous force behind it.

Blake whistled softly.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he asked, gazing off over the silent city. "Shot, by jinks—but why?—and how?—and wherefrom? And *where* is my machine?"

But it was easier to propound the questions than answer them, especially the first two. As to where the shot had come from, the open and lighted window seemed the most plausible place; a bullet from it might have "creased" the left side of his head very handily.

Then, being unguided or jerked out of its course by his unconscious hand, the machine might have swerved toward the tower, careened, or perhaps turned turtle, dropping him on the ledge, and then glided off, to fall on some near-by roof, or possibly even into the river, a few short blocks away.

To Blake, however, at the moment, the most important thing seemed to be to locate the man who had fired on him; so, pulling on the mutilated cap again, he rose cautiously to his knees, and looked back and forth along the line of windows, but they were all dark; and for a moment he was non-plused.

Then suddenly it occurred to him that he had approached the tower from the east, while he was now on the north face of it; obviously, in some amazing way, either by his unconscious hand or the vagary of the wind, he had volplaned around the corner.

His mind made up, the air-man lost no time. On hands and knees he crawled swiftly but noiselessly along the narrow ledge; and as he peered around the corner a grunt of satisfaction escaped him.

A window, the fifth from where he knelt, was brightly lighted, and in a moment more he was beside it.

No sound came from the room; so, after a moment's hesitation, he peeped cautiously around the frame. It was a handsomely furnished office, apparently the private sanctum of a lawyer, for the wall space was entirely covered with rich mahogany cases full of big calf-bound, legal-looking books.

A massive table-desk, also of mahogany, stood near the window, and seated at it, quietly engaged in winding a rather ornate clock—on the top of

which a bronze cowboy, repeater in hand, bestrode a galloping bronco—sat a stout, middle-aged gentleman, florid and preeminently respectable—the last person in the world one would suspect of firing on a harmless aviator.

The desk was placed at right angles to the window, so the man's back was partly toward Blake; and since it seemed evident that, wherever the shot came from, it was not from there, Stanton hesitated to make his presence known.

To do so would involve a long and possibly not wholly satisfactory explanation, to begin with; besides which, he was not just sure of what the consequences of his sudden appearance would be. It would be decidedly startling, undoubtedly; and might, in the case of a stout, full-blooded man like the one at the desk, have serious, possibly fatal, results.

Moreover, it was possible that some one of the windows on that floor would be unlocked; in which case, he could slip into the building and down to his own office, where he would be quite safe until morning, when he could walk out without question.

As rapidly as was consistent with silence, he made his way back to the corner; for it occurred to him that if, as was possible, he failed to find any window unlocked, he would be forced to make his presence known to the occupant of the lighted room, and his position would be distinctly uncomfortable if, during his absence, that gentleman should lock *his* window and go home. The ledge, while reasonably safe, was not a wholly desirable place to spend the night, even for one accustomed to dizzy heights.

But as he reached the corner a sound behind him caught his ear, and, turning, he saw that the light in the office had been extinguished. It was a case for a quick decision now; in another second or so the window would be closed, and probably fastened. Either he must speak at once, or trust to luck to find an unfastened catch.

It was the possibility of a night on the ledge against the probability of a night in jail, and, on the whole, he preferred the ledge.

He was about to continue his search when a sudden thought stopped him. "Now, I wonder why he didn't close the window before he put out the light," he muttered. "He can't be going to— Holy Helicopters!"

In his amazement he almost betrayed himself; for, instead of the window being closed, there had emerged from it the head and shoulders of the man Blake had seen at the desk, followed with much puffing and evident trepidation by the bulky body.

Then, after a moment's pause, the man cautiously rose to his knees and closed the window; then, crouching low, and pressing his body as close to the wall and as far from the edge as possible, he crawled away from Blake, and disappeared into the third window beyond the one he had left.

A moment later the wondering watcher heard the sash drawn down, the click of the catch as it was snapped into place, and then a shaft of light shot across the ledge.

Blake was decidedly puzzled. Also he was curious and a little suspicious, and was sorely tempted to take a look at the gentleman again; but, on the other hand, his own position was rather anomalous, and, anyway, it was none of his business; so, since the way had been so providentially left open to him, he decided on the whole to take advantage of it.

It was the work of a moment to open the window, slip inside, and close it behind him; also, after a brief hesitation, he locked it.

"That'll puzzle my friend if he tries to come back," he thought with a grin, as he flashed his electric pocket-light about the dark room in search of a door. There was only one visible, and that led obviously into an adjoining office; the one into the hall and any others there might be were concealed by the bookcases.

The second room was, judging from the furnishings, the reception-room, and beyond it were other offices, the doors of which stood open. Evidently the firm was a prosperous one; but just at present, though the luxury of the suite pleased him, Blake was more interested in getting to his own tiny office down-stairs without stumbling over a watchman, a feat which proved not so difficult as he expected.

Nevertheless, he breathed a sigh of relief as his own door—bearing the simple legend “Stanton Blake, Consulting Electrical Engineer”—closed behind him.

He was very tired, sore and stiff from his fall, and his head ached violently; also he was worried about his hydroplane, on which he had spent much more than he could conveniently afford. But before wrapping himself in the old ulster he kept at the office for climatic emergencies and seeking much-needed rest upon the old couch that disfigured his small private office, he wrote down the name upon the door of the office into which the midnight worker had disappeared, which, since he had to pass it to reach the stairs, he had taken the trouble to note.

The names of the tenants of the other suite he was not likely to forget. There was an ex-Governor, an ex-United States Senator, and two ex-judges in the famous legal firm of Hardy, Galbraith, Wood & Colton, and one of the judges happened to be, as well, the uncle and guardian of a certain girl—the certain girl, in fact; and though Blake had never met him, his acquaintance even with the girl being confined, so far, to half a dozen meetings at other people's houses, he knew him by sight, and had well-defined hopes of knowing him personally, not to say intimately, in a very short time—the shorter the better.

“And I believe that little Jimmy Scott—if my fat friend *was* Mr. Scott—will serve as an excellent introduction to my respectable uncle-to-be, Judge Galbraith,” he thought, as he

stretched his weary limbs upon the couch; and so, with pleasing thoughts of the judge's gratitude, and the various forms of expression it might take, he fell asleep.

When Blake awoke the sun was streaming into the room, and he sprang up with an exclamation of annoyance at having overslept, for he had intended to have recovered his runaway machine long before it was time for him to see Judge Galbraith, and here it was nearly half past nine.

Now that he was awake at last, however, he determined to waste no more time; but first he must find out the fate of his lost hydroplane, and with that intent called up police headquarters.

Much to his amazement, nothing had been heard of it there; nor could they explain how a “wild” Bleriot model monoplane, weighing nearly a thousand pounds with its fifty horsepower engine and auxiliary gas-tank, and with a wing spread of over forty feet—could drop down in the heart of New York without causing comment; and they ended by suggesting that the police department was not playing press-agent for birdmen, amateur or professional.

Puzzled, disgusted, and angry, Blake hurried to the office of the *Evening Diary*, and poured the whole story into the ears of his old friend Billy Talimage, the city editor.

Billy listened, at first with amazement, then with interest, and finally with something as nearly approaching excitement as he ever allowed himself to display.

“Look here, Stan!” he said. “Forget the machine. It will turn up somewhere. There are plenty of corners over there on the West Side where it might have dropped. Low roofs between iron-shuttered warehouses, where it might lay for a month unseen; or it might have fallen into the river—let it go. It would make a corking good story if any one would believe it; but it isn't one, two, six with the other.

There's something doing there. Do you know this man Scott?"

"No. I don't even know that it *was* Scott," replied Blake bitterly; "and I don't care. I want my machine—if—"

"Drop it," snapped Talmage, "and listen to me! It *might* not have been Scott; it *might* have been an employee of Galbraith or his firm, looking for something in Scott's room. Didn't think of that, eh?" he added, grinning, as Blake started. "Well, even eminently respectable people do strange things sometimes, old man; but, as it happens, it *was* Scott. Your description fits him to a T."

"Well, what of it?" returned Blake sullenly. "I'll tell the judge about it, of course; but I want to find my plane first. I can't afford to lose it, even for the chance of getting in solid with the judge—much as I want to."

"Hang the machine!" exclaimed Talmage irritably. "I'll send a couple of the boys scouting for it, to ease your mind. Now, attend! This fellow Scott is a crook, the smoothest-mannered bad man east of the Pacific Ocean. He ought to have been hung the day he was born, but he's so blamed slick they can't even disbar him. His father was a crook, too—a jeweler and watchmaker. Jim worked at the trade, too, until he turned lawyer. The old man's in State prison now."

"We keep our eyes on men like that; and in this case I have a little personal score against him, so I've followed him up pretty closely. He only moved to his present offices two weeks ago. Do you know anything about the judge's family?"

"I—eh—I know his niece," replied Blake.

"Quite so," said Billy dryly. "Hence the desire to get solid, I suppose. But I mean his immediate family—his father and mother and half-brother? Well," he continued, as Blake shook his head, "he was a posthumous child; his mother married again two years after he was born, and he was brought up by his stepfather, Johnson

Clarke. When the old man died he divided his property—several millions it was—equally between the judge and his own son, Johnson Clarke, Jr.; but he left the latter his outright, and the judge's share in trust, to return to Johnson or his heirs provided the judge died childless—which, as he hasn't married yet, he is apt to do."

"Well, Johnson junior died, after getting rid of a good deal of his share, leaving a son, Johnson third, who has finished it up, and, I hear, has bled his half-uncle for all he could besides. See?"

"I see a lot of uninteresting biography," replied Blake impatiently. "Go on."

"It's necessary," continued Talmage.

"Now, two months ago, Johnson Clarke third, met and got quite chummy with Jim Scott. Two weeks ago Scott moved to offices as near as he could get to Judge Galbraith's. Last night you saw Scott in Judge Galbraith's office. Item—a bullet flies. Did it occur to you, by the way, that said bullet might have been going *in* instead of coming out of the office when you so nearly ended its career and your own?"

"By George, it might have been!" exclaimed Blake. "But—Why, then, some one was shooting at Scott!"

"Or a target set up by Scott. To get the range, you know."

"But where is the target?" demanded Blake. "Scott had nothing in his hands when he came out of the window. Besides, where did the shot—"

"Piffle!" interrupted Billy curtly. "A half-inch piece of steel, say two feet long and a foot wide, is not easily seen at night and from a distance; he might have put it on the ledge before you turned, and pushed it along before him to his window. As to where the bullet came from, the new Lamb Building is in a direct line with the Acton, three blocks north; both towers rise high above the surrounding buildings, and are not over seven hundred yards

apart. Not far for a high-powered, accurate rifle, which, besides, is probably clamped in an immovable frame."

Blake sprang to his feet.

"Good Heavens, Billy, I believe you've got it!" he cried. "We must warn him at once! Good Lord, the man may be murdered any minute! For Heaven's sake, hurry!"

"Hold on! Hold on!" replied Talmage, quietly reaching for the telephone. "This is a bit quicker than a taxi, son."

"But he won't listen; he—"

"Yes, he will. I know him very well in my official capacity. He'll have his desk moved if I say so, and I'll tell him you are coming to explain. Go to it now! Beat it! I'll put a couple of good men on the Lamb Building end, and send some one to keep tabs on Scott, too. Hustle, now!"

Ten minutes later, hot and out of breath, Blake left the elevator at the floor above his own in the Acton Building, and hurried toward the office of the great law firm; but as he came abreast of Scott's door he stopped suddenly, arrested by a voice that floated over the open transom. A voice raised to that peculiar unmistakable pitch that one uses in speaking at the telephone.

"Doubt," it said jovially. "My dear boy, there is not the slightest doubt. Success is ours. I saw the distinguished jurist not three minutes ago, and planted the damning evidence of his guilt safely under the desk, in the shadow of the scrap-basket. What? Of course I will see that he is in position at the proper moment—by wire.

"You can hear the clock of old Trinity chime the mystic hour of noon, can't you? Well, before the last stroke has died away you can write yourself a millionaire, my son—and prepare to write me that check in six figures. Ring off, now. There are only ten minutes more."

The voice ceased, and his brow wrinkled in a perplexed frown. Blake hastened on to Judge Galbraith's office.

The judge received him at once, and Blake saw with a sigh of relief that the desk had been moved so that no part of the lawyer's body was visible from the window.

"I see you got Talmage's message," he began hurriedly.

The judge smiled tolerantly.

"Oh, yes," he replied lightly. "These newspaper fellows are curious creatures, I find; always discovering mare's nests in the most unlikely places. But we have to humor them, you know, otherwise Heaven knows what they would say of us. But I believe, in this case, it was a midnight aviator who captured the—eh—moonshine."

"This is neither a mare's nest nor moonshine, I'm afraid," replied Blake bluntly, and immediately plunged into his story.

As he told it, the smile faded from Galbraith's lips, and when, at the end, he exhibited the bullet-scarred cap, the old judge's face was stern and set, but all he said was: "I see," nodding gravely and tapping the arm of his chair with a pencil.

"One question," said Blake. "Was Scott here a few moments ago?"

"Yes," replied Galbraith quietly.

"And had your desk been moved at the time?"

"A moment before he came."

"Then why—" began Blake, and paused, puzzled. If Scott knew of the change of position, how could he have telephoned as he did, unless for some reason of his own he was deceiving his hearer—Johnson Clarke third he must have been—or—he started, his face growing suddenly pale—unless the position of the desk was not necessary to his plot—unless Billy Talmage was mistaken in his hypothesis, and the shot was not to come from the window.

Anxiously he glanced about the room. Save for the window and the single door, from floor to ceiling the walls were lined with books.

His eyes fell upon the ornate clock,

with its bronze rough-riding cowboy, and he started nervously as he saw the hands pointed to one minute of twelve.

The last stroke of twelve, Scott had said. But how? From where was the blow to fall? His nerves were on edge, and the sudden tinkle of the telephone bell brought him to his feet with a gasp. But the judge leaned forward and calmly lifted the receiver.

"Hello!" he called quite coolly. "Oh, is it you, Mr. Scott?"

"Yes—" He paused, listening, and at that moment the clock began to chime sweetly: "One!" "Two!" "Three!" Blake gripped the arm of his chair and thought as he had never thought before. Scott's words returned to him, "I will see that he is in position at the proper moment—by wire."

"Four!" "Five!" "Six!" chimed the clock.

"I've planted the damning evidence of his guilt safely under the desk in the shadow of the scrap-basket."

In a second Blake was on his knees looking, and the glint of blued steel caught his eye.

"Seven!" "Eight!" "Nine!"

Blake was on his feet again.

"Ten!"

The telephone crashed to the floor as his arms closed around the lawyer's neck, and dragged him, chair and all, away from the desk.

"Eleven!" "Twelve!" — *Crack! Crash!*

Dazed and bewildered but unhurt, the two, rescued and rescuer, looked up from amid the wreck of the chair.

From the muzzle of the bronze cowboy's little repeater a tiny wreath of almost invisible vapor rose slowly and almost immediately disappeared, and directly back of where the desk chair had stood the glass of a bookcase lay shattered, while in the back of one of the calf-bound volumes a small round hole told where the tiny steel bullet meant for Judge Galbraith's head had gone.

For a moment the two sat looking at each other in silence. Then as the office force, pale and frightened, crowded in, they rose and the judge extended his hand to Blake.

"I owe this gentleman my life; James Scott has attempted to kill me," he said quietly, stooping and picking up the little revolver that lay under the desk. "I see! One chamber has been fired, the object evidently being to give the impression of suicide. Carter—to his chief clerk—" send for the police at once, and two or three of you watch that man Scott's door until they come. If he attempts to leave—"

"He's gone!" cried the office boy, his voice shrill with excitement. "I seen him peek in here just after the gun went off, an' then he beat it for the elevator, but one of them *Diary* fellers was right behind him, so he won't get farther than the next cop."

"But where in Heaven's name," demanded Blake, "did you get that infernally ingenious clock?"

The judge shook his head slowly, a puzzled look upon his face. "It was a gift from my stepfather. I've had it for years," he said. "Ever since I've had this office it has stood there upon that desk. I—don't understand it. There were two of them originally—duplicates—one was given to my half-brother—"

"Ah!" cried Blake, "I see! The duplicate went of course to your nephew at his father's death. Scott, who began life as a watchmaker, rigged up this infernal machine in it, and substituted it for your own clock. He was regulating and testing it last night when I flew by, and it was the test shot that nearly got me."

"Very luckily for me," supplemented the judge. "And now, gentlemen, that the excitement is over, you will kindly return to your work. Mr. Blake, I trust you will lunch with me now, and dine with me this evening. I—eh—believe," he added, with a quizzical smile, "you have met my niece. She has spoken of you—well,

more than once. She will be glad of the opportunity to thank—"

"Beg pardon, sir," interrupted Carter, hurrying in, "the *Diary* young man has just telephoned that he's had Scott arrested on a disorderly conduct charge, and he wants to know will you come and make a more serious one before he can squirm out of it."

"Say I will come at once," replied the judge grimly. "I shall be sorry if my nephew is involved, but it can't be helped."

"Also, he says," added Carter, "that Mr. Blake's aeroplane has been picked up in the lower bay by a Consolidated Railroad tug, and doesn't seem to be much injured."

Blake uttered a cry of joy, and the judge laughed.

"Tell the railroad people to tow the machine to Mr. Blake's hangar at—Yonkers, is it not?—and send the bill to me. And now, my boy, I will proceed to fulfil, first my duty at the police station, and then your pleasure at the luncheon table."

"And later—at the dinner table?" asked Blake, half laughing, half serious, as they made their way to the elevator, "what shall I fulfil there?"

For a moment the judge looked at Blake with his gravely quizzical smile.

"Perhaps your destiny," he replied oracularly—"who knows?"

REMEMBERED YESTERDAYS

By Mazie V. Caruthers

WEDDED to one who only knows

My presence means his bliss,

Yet daily, at his side to dream

Of a forbidden kiss—

When the first fragrance of the spring

Sets my starved heart a hungering—

To live with him, whom bell, book, priest,

Till death has joined to me,

While memory guards the vision clear

Of one I may not see—

To rule my life, that thought may be

Its only infidelity—

To picture hours when once I roamed

Through rapture's roadway far,

Wraiths of remembered yesterdays

Which haunt the days that are—

To know the joys that life might give,

And then—just be content to live!

AN INVESTMENT IN LOVE

A SHORT STORY

BY EUGENE A. VOGT



GLENWISH JOHNSON sat in the private office of the Acme-Johnson Grocery Company, of which commanding establishment he was president, and, practically, sole owner.

Curtis, the confidential young man of Johnson's own business rearing, was with him as usual at this hour—four o'clock—to receive his superior's final instructions for the day.

"Well," concluded Mr. Johnson, in that icy tone the meaning of which none knew better than Curtis, "that's settled. If that Marden note is not paid to-morrow you go ahead and foreclose the mortgage. This presuming on old friendship and that sort of rot will not go! I've renewed it once and I'm tired of it."

Curtis smiled and nodded as he shut down the top of his chief's desk. The latter had turned to go, but stopped suddenly.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I almost forgot. My little girl is twenty-one to-day." The diplomatic Curtis merely smiled his congratulations. "Hand me my private check book, Curt," ordered Johnson. "I'll take it home with me."

Emil, the porter of Charles Thran's leaf-tobacco establishment on Water Street, New York, was the first member of that firm's force to gasp as Edna, Glenwish Johnson's daughter, alighted from her electric car and briskly entered his part of the house.

He smiled on him so ingratiatingly

that he braced himself against a surely impending suffragette appeal.

"I should like to see Miss Grace Marden," she said sweetly.

The porter gave a sigh of relief.

"Right in there, lady," he said, pointing toward the inner office.

Miss Johnson thanked him sufficiently with her blue eyes and tripped into the first office of the establishment. Frank, the bookkeeper, was gasper number two.

"I should like to see Miss Grace Marden, your stenographer," announced the bewildering intrusion.

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank, doubly relieved, for he, not having seen the electric car at the curb, had mentally classified the stylishly gowned young woman as a book agent. "Oh, you want to see Miss Marden? She is in there."

The bookkeeper solemnly waved his hand toward the half open door of the private office.

"With Mr. Thran?"

"Yes, ma'am, with Mr. Thran," warned Frank.

But the young lady did not seem a bit awed by the formidability of the personage with whom Miss Marden was engaged. She walked fearlessly up to the half open door of the private office and looked in.

"Hello, Edna," came Thran's voice, so cheery and cordial, that the assembled porter and bookkeeper looked at each other, dumfounded. "What on earth brings you way down to Water Street?"

Edna looked smilingly at the bewildered young stenographer.

"I came down to see Grace on business, Mr. Thran. You don't mind letting me speak to her in private for a few minutes?"

"Latest styles, I suppose," laughed the tobacco dealer.

"Oh, no, Mr. Thran," replied the intruder indignantly. "It is really very important."

"Is it, now?" asked Thran, raising his eyebrows in mock surprise. "Well, I suppose that means that the imperious Miss Edna Johnson wants the use of my private office."

"That's exactly what it means, Mr. Thran," agreed the young woman with a winsome smile. "You are such a dear to anticipate it."

Thran patted the girl's cheek with the familiarity of a very old friend, and ceremoniously bowed himself out of his own office, softly closing the door behind him. The bookkeeper and porter disbanded suddenly and each plunged into his work with new assiduity. Their employer looked about him sheepishly, dazed by the unheard of predicament into which he had permitted a pair of appealing blue eyes to force him.

Presently, however, the door of the private office opened and Edna stood at the threshold, her face rather pale and her pose unsteady.

"Please, come in, Mr. Thran," she pleaded tremulously.

Mr. Thran reentered his sanctum only to find that his troubles had just begun. His young stenographer was huddled in her chair, disturbingly near the verge of tears.

"I can't do a thing with her, Mr. Thran," began Edna fiercely. "I do wish you would make her do it; I can't."

"What is it, Edna?" he inquired, with real concern.

"Please, Edna," wailed the crushed figure in the chair.

"I will tell him," persisted the other girl. "I am sure he will agree with me when he knows. Won't you, Mr. Thran?"

"I should prefer to know what it is all about before I commit myself," was Thran's cautious response.

"There you are!" exclaimed Miss Johnson, looking threateningly at the shuddering stenographer. Then she turned and proceeded to enlighten him. "The whole thing in a nutshell is this. Mr. Marden, this foolish girl's father, owes papa five thousand dollars, and if it isn't paid before three o'clock to-day, papa says he will foreclose the mortgage or something, and Grace and Uncle 'Bully' John Marden will be homeless. Now, I was twenty-one yesterday—"

"Twenty-one!" interposed her listener, as much to give the young woman an opportunity to regain some of the usual calmness of her voice as from congratulatory motives. "I congratulate—"

"Don't!" interdicted the young woman ungraciously. "I just wish I had never seen the hateful day."

"Why, twenty-one isn't so old, Edna—" His attempt to inject a little saving humor into the situation proved a failure.

"Please, don't be frivolous," reproved Edna. "The matter is too serious for that. Papa gave me a check for five thousand dollars as a birthday gift and I was so happy about it, knowing that it would just cover the amount Uncle John owes papa, and now Grace—Grace—she won't take it. Please make her take it, Mr. Thran."

"Please, Mr. Thran," now came appealingly from the other girl—"please do not try to make me do this thing. God knows, I appreciate Edna's motives, and I love her all the more for her kindly intentions. But I cannot take this money from her. My poor father called on Uncle Glen, and he refused to renew the note. Don't you understand, Edna dear? Please, Mr. Thran," she said again, with gentle firmness, "do not try to force me to take it; I have been so very happy here."

The tobacco dealer laid a reassuring

hand on his young stenographer's shaking shoulder, but his sympathetic eyes remained fixed on the other younger woman.

"Edna," he said very tenderly, "you are a very kind, dear girl, and I am proud to know you. But you do not understand, my dear. I am truly very sorry for both of you."

Charles Thran was mistaken, and his counsel was wrong. Johnson had given his daughter this five-thousand-dollar check in the hope that she would do exactly what she drove to Thran's office to accomplish.

He would cheerfully have paid the five thousand himself, but was afraid of that man Curtis. After twelve years of patient work to make a real business man out of his young confidential man, Johnson did not dare to make so idiotic and sentimental a proposition.

So he had carefully planned it all, had presented Edna with the check and an admonition to invest it as she saw fit, and then dexterously apprised her of Marden's indebtedness to him and the inevitable consequences of a failure to meet the payment of the note the next day.

He noted with pleasure that Edna made no attempt to sway him from the course he had mapped out in the event of Marden's default, and went to sleep chuckling over the clever way he had thwarted that young Shylock who managed his office and who was a young man after Johnson's own heart.

And now his old friend Thran made the whole splendidly engineered scheme come to naught. Of course, Johnson had no idea of the proceedings in Thran's private office that morning while he was transacting the routine business of the Acme-Johnson Grocery Company with Curtis, facing that imperturbable young man with his usual brisk but cordial manner.

Johnson only heard of the miscarriage of his plan at about two o'clock

that afternoon. Returning to his private office from luncheon at that hour, he found his daughter on the verge of tears. In her hand fluttered the check her dotting father had given her the night before.

"Take it back, papa," she said pleadingly. "*Please* take it, I can't use it. I am sorry I ever saw it."

"For Heaven's sake!" gasped Johnson, realizing that his poor friend Marden's last chance was gone.

"I didn't sleep a wink all last night," continued the tremulous young woman. "I didn't want to interfere with your business, papa; I *do* hope you will believe that."

"I do believe it, dearie," affirmed Johnson, taking the distressed girl in his arms. "Calm yourself, my girl, and tell me everything."

"You are very good to me," she said contritely. "But I did it, anyway. It seemed as if some higher power kept on urging me, and when I got up this morning I had finally decided to disregard your wishes and to obey the other. And now I am punished." She paused to suppress a sob. "Oh, papa, Grace won't take the check, won't let *me* help her—me, her best friend."

"Woo-oon't—take—it," repeated Johnson inanelly, holding her very close to his breast and staring over her shoulder at the door behind which he knew his Nemesis—the Frankenstein he had reared—was calmly contemplating the necessary legal steps to make his unfortunate old friend Bully John Marden homeless.

Didn't it mean anything to that soulless young cub out there that Bully John Marden and "Weeziefaced" Glen Johnson had been chums together for the last forty-five years; had wriggled their naked bodies in the same old swimming-hole; had been licked with the same hickory by the same irate schoolmaster; had danced with and made longing eyes at the same girls; had—Good Lord! Didn't these forty-five years of the same dreams and hopes—didn't they mean

anything to that dollar-thinking mind of John Henry Curtis?

He turned to his daughter, smiling grimly. The girl placed the piece of paper she had been holding in his hands.

He looked at it stupidly for a moment, but his mind was too well disciplined to remain long in an inert state. He gave his daughter a reassuring squeeze and then said with infectious confidence:

"Come along with me, dearie. You do not have to ask Grace Marden or any one else to pay that note. All you need do is to go over to the bank and pay it. But—as my check is not certified, and besides you have never been inside of a real commercial bank—I'll go with you if you will let me."

Edna rewarded her father with a grateful hug and kiss, and they traversed the outer offices. Glen Johnson, accompanied by his daughter, walked authoritatively up to the note teller's window of one of New York's largest banking institutions.

"How do you do, Mr. Johnson?" greeted the man behind the bars respectfully.

"All right," responded the other cordially. "You have a note here for collection, five thousand, John Marden, maker, to my order. This lady wishes to pay it. Want me to certify it?"

The note teller scrutinized the check Mr. Johnson had pushed toward him and smiled rather broadly, considering that he knew the man addressing him was the first vice-president of this very institution.

"Oh," remarked Smith, still smiling amusedly, "the check is all right, of course, but I can't take it. The note has been paid, Mr. Johnson."

"Paid?"

"Most unusual thing about this collection," resumed the teller. "It seems everybody wants to pay it. You are the third party to attempt to do so. It wasn't more than ten minutes ago that Miss Grace Marden came in to

pay it. She presented a certified check signed by Charles Thran—"

"Oh, Mr. Thran!" interposed Edna gleefully. "So he paid it himself. Isn't that noble of him?"

"Mr. Thran's intentions were good," proceeded the teller. "But he was too late by, at least, half an hour. But, of course," and here the teller risked a sly wink at Edna's father, "you know who really paid it, Mr. Johnson."

"I! I!" exploded the latter. "Do you think I came over here with my daughter to make a fool of myself?"

"I—I—really, I beg your pardon," stammered Smith. "But, naturally, I thought you knew when your own Mr. Curtis paid the note."

Johnson stared at the young man behind the bars. Then he stared at his dazed daughter and from her, back at the apologetic teller.

"You said Curtis, didn't you?" he asked, to assure himself that he had heard correctly.

"Yes, sir," replied Smith firmly. "I said Curtis, and I thought you knew, Mr. Johnson."

"It's all right, Mr. Smith," muttered Johnson, stroking his brow. "Come, Edna, let us go."

Johnson was still nervously clutching his daughter's hand as they passed through the outer offices of the Acme-Johnson Grocery Company.

Just before he ushered the girl into the private office he ordered the office boy to send in Mr. Curtis at once. The culprit entered with his usual placid air.

"Hear anything about the Marden note?" asked Johnson leadingly.

"Yes, sir," replied Curtis dryly. "The note has been paid."

"Oh, it has, has it?" asked the chief sarcastically. "How do you know that, since you haven't been to the bank to-day?"

The smile on the confidential young man's face was serene.

"I've been at the bank, Mr. Johnson," he said calmly. "I went there

for the purpose of paying the Marden note."

"And you *paid* it?"

"I paid it."

"*You* paid it," repeated Johnson, riled by the other's nonchalance. "We know you paid it, but why? *You*—in Heaven's name! why did *you* pay it? There is something behind all this and I want to know it."

"There is a great deal behind it, Mr. Johnson," admitted Curtis cheerfully. "My life's happiness is behind it. Grace Marden has promised to become my wife."

The delighted, but accusing, voice of the only lady present was the first to break the silence which followed the momentous announcement.

"Oh, the deceitful dear," she gasped. "And she never whispered as much as an intimation to me."

"And you thought you would do a very wise thing by paying her father's note?" demanded Johnson.

"I thought so," replied the young man, with just the slightest note of doubt in his voice.

The elder man turned abruptly to his desk.

"I am sure," soothed his daughter, "that you are to be congratulated, Mr. Curtis. And your paying the note a very noble act."

"Thank you," replied Curtis sheepishly, as he took the dainty hand she had extended. But his troubled eyes were fixed on the apparently busy man at the desk, his employer, who seemed to have dismissed the incident with provoking indifference.

Ungallantly and ungratefully, he wished the radiant young woman showering him with appreciation would suffer him to get away or—better yet—would depart herself and leave him to have it out with her imperious, heartless father alone.

But, suddenly, Johnson rose to his feet. The young assistant's worried expression gave way to a triumphant grin at sight of the changed countenance of his chief, for the good, old

fighting gleam shone in those eyes once more. Johnson handed the young man a check he had written.

"Now, listen here, Curt," he said sharply. Curtis knew the tone and hearkened attentively. "This is an order, and if it isn't carried out to the letter, I'll fire you." Johnson's gray eyes softened as he continued: "Curt, you have put your good self in a fix. Bully John's daughter is too proud to stand for what you have just done; don't I know the girl? Now, boy, you go over to the bank and stop that fool deal you just made. Now, *you* listen to me!" as Curtis made a gesture of protest. "Listen to sense, will you? Even if you are in love. You go over to the bank and do as I say. Then, you come back here with that abominable note. And then, it's *my* move. I'll write Marden a letter, agreeing to extend that infernal note of his another four months; I'll tell him—er—anything—changed my mind—or something; well, never mind what I tell him; that's none of your business; nor"—turning to his daughter who had laughed audibly—"any of yours either, madam. That saves the girl's pride and relieves the old man's anxiety. Now, listen to me! you two—two—well, never mind!" for Edna had laughed irreverently again. "I want you to know this much: I pay the five thousand dollars—do you get that? I—Glenwish Johnson—and no other living man, or woman either. Now, Curt, scoot!"

Curtis having "scooted," father and daughter faced each other with a new and better understanding.

"I am so proud of you," she murmured. Glen Johnson caught the tears in her voice, even before he saw them on her cheeks.

"You mustn't cry about it, girlie," he said tenderly.

But she *did* cry about it, while her happy father held her very close to his breast, for he knew that every tear she shed was a token of her new love and reverence for himself.