

THE CAVALIER

for FEBRUARY



PRICE
10
CENTS

THE
FRANK A. MULLER
COMPANY
NEW YORK
&
LONDON

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THE CAVALIER

Vol. II.

FEBRUARY, 1909.

No. 1.

THE DUKE'S PAWN.

BY FRANCES OLIN.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE HAND OF A PRINCE.



It was a gala night in Madrid! A royal fête was in progress, excelling in its magnificence even those earlier ones given by Philip II to the beautiful Elizabeth of Valois, when he brought her, a bride, from France. Groups of young gallants, superbly mounted, with plumed hats and thin gauze masks, clattered through the narrow streets, singing and shouting. The main thoroughfares were gay with triumphal arches and banners, and the great houses were ablaze with light. High carnival reigned! At the palace, the magnificence of the entertainment was unparalleled. Wine flowed like water. Musicians, dressed like troubadours, sang and played their delicate instruments far into the night. A grand tournament of cavaliers, attended by a thousand pages, had been held in the great square near the palace until late in the afternoon; and now, at night, a masquerade ball was in progress, exceeding, in the ingenuity and beauty of its costumes, anything ever seen in Madrid.

It was in one of the most striking of these costumes—that of a knight in silver mail, with a curious device on the

helmet and shield—that Don Luis de Feria emerged from a side door of the palace shortly after midnight, and with a cursory glance about him, to see that he was not observed, turned hastily into one of the darkest of the side streets. He was deliberately choosing a round-about way to his goal, for he did not wish to be molested or recognized.

He had not a very good conscience in seeking Mercedes de Toledo on this particular evening, for he had promised her duenna, the Countess Emanuele, not to give the signal for three more evenings at least. Alas, for lovers' vows! He was busy conjuring up excuses for the breaking of his promise, when a sudden turn brought him into a public square filled with lights and people, and he realized that his preoccupation had thrust him into sudden publicity.

He had taken off his helmet and mask on the side street to enjoy better the coolness of the night, and his long fair hair, unusual in one of Spanish blood, and the marked cast of his delicate features, attracted the attention of more than one passer-by. Before he succeeded in slipping the mask in place, his arm was touched from behind.

Feria wheeled suddenly and confronted a tall, slender cavalier muffled in a long cloak and wearing a black gauze mask. In vain he endeavored to

penetrate the disguise. The stranger spoke rapidly in French. He lowered his voice and grasped the arm of the knight in silver mail.

"Come into a side street. I have something of importance for you!"

Too much astonished to refuse, Feria suffered himself to be led away, but he kept his hand on his sword. The stranger turned to him abruptly when they had walked a few steps and were in the shelter of a dark, deserted street. He spoke hurriedly and still in French:

"I came across the sea at the risk of my life to bring you this token and warning from her. Take her advice! Do not delay, or you will pay for it with your life!"

The stranger handed him as he spoke a small packet securely sealed.

"But who do you think I am?" asked Feria, stupefied.

"Florence de Montmorency! I knew you immediately when you removed your mask! Thank Heaven, I found you so soon!" The stranger spoke fervently.

Feria was about to reply when a sudden commotion arose in the street. A group of horsemen, separated from their fellows, clattered through with drawn swords. A little the worse for a day and night of merrymaking, they were on the lookout for an adventure, or a frolic, at least.

"Ho, fellows!" cried one, larger and more richly dressed than the others. "Here is a knight of the Golden Fleece in silver armor! A very pretty fellow, indeed! Let's have a look at him!"

Before Feria could anticipate their intention or defend himself, one of the young gallants had dismounted and torn the mask rudely from his face. Another held up a torch, while the rest gathered around in a circle.

"Sdeath! It's the Baron Montigny!" whispered one, and a silence fell on the little group.

The leader recovered himself and bowed with dignity: "We beg pardon, your lordship, we mistook you for one of ourselves!" and in a trice they were gone.

Feria turned for the stranger, but he had disappeared. The street was again deserted. In deep bewilderment, Feria turned into another street, where the lights from a gaily decorated palace gave

him his opportunity. With the point of his sword he opened the small packet and disclosed a very beautiful signet-ring—a woman's—with a coat of arms engraved upon it. Around the ring was a slip of thin paper with writing upon it. The writing, in French, in a woman's fine and delicate hand, Feria could not at the moment decipher, but he caught the superscription: "To Florence de Montmorency, Baron Montigny."

"What can be the meaning of this?" he muttered, and slipped the packet into a safe place.

All the Spanish world knew that the Baron Montigny had been sent from Flanders on a mission to the king, and that he was an honored guest at the Spanish Court. Feria, as it chanced, had not at this time met him, but he had heard much of the charm of his manners, his wit, and the elegance of his breeding.

"Have they taken me for Montigny, or am I chosen to convey some secret information to him?" he pondered. But, being very young, and fathoms deep in love, he soon forgot all but the object of his quest—Mercedes de Toledo—and his brain busied itself with conjectures of how he could enter the garden-gate if his signal were disregarded.

For a year Feria had conducted an intrigue, without molestation or apparent discovery, with one of the most beautiful women in Spain—Mercedes de Toledo—the ward of the Duke of Alva, and the orphan daughter of a kinsman of his. Seeing her first at mass, and afterward in a litter with the Countess Emanuele, her duenna, he had fallen hopelessly in love with the fairest girl he had ever looked upon.

Fortune favored him, and he had once saved the lives of the two ladies when they were caught in a mob, and done many small favors for the Countess Emanuele, who had been his mother's friend. At last the older woman, taking pity on his youthful passion, and for some reason being willing to brave the anger of the duke in case of discovery, permitted secret interviews in her apartments at stated times, and the youthful pair had been secretly betrothed for several months.

Don Luis de Feria, with his good

looks, manly bearing, and patrician birth—for his forebears were grandees of Spain—was not a mean match for Mercedes de Toledo, reputed one of the greatest heiresses of Castile; but he was poor, and his family were temporarily out of favor at court. His father was dead, and his brothers lived on their estates in Granada. Rumor had it that the old count had opposed the king in some Inquisition matters, and the two were estranged during the last years of the count's life.

Don Luis had become more or less a soldier of fortune, and could hardly hope to win the hand of the Duke of Alba's ward. Light-hearted and sanguine, however, he did not despair of gaining the great duke's regard.

As he approached the rear of the huge stone mansion where Mercedes de Toledo was living, under the care of the Countess Emanuele, he thought uneasily that it was hardly fair for him to be breaking the terms of his contract. Twice a week on certain evenings he was permitted to go to the garden-gate and give a signal, when the countess's maid would noiselessly slip the bolt and permit him to enter. The countess had adjured him most earnestly not to come at other times, for she was in sore dread of the Duke of Alba, and was obliged to guard against surprises.

This evening, however, Feria had left the duke at the palace, as he had had secret word that Mercedes—who was suffering from a slight indisposition—would not be at the ball. The doubtfulness of his gaining admission added zest to the adventure; but he did not risk giving the signal—three taps with the sword and a bar of a popular song softly whistled—as it would be useless, since he was not expected!

He looked in perplexity at the massive door in the high stone wall surrounding the garden. The wall was twenty feet high and impossible to scale. His hope lay in the door, but it was always kept securely bolted. He wondered idly whether, in his silk stockings, he could possibly get sufficient footing on the massive iron hinges to scale the door. To think of it was to try it! He was obliged to leave his shoes behind, but that was a trifle!

Supple, agile, and of light weight, he found the hinges sufficient for a foothold, and was able to pull himself up. The descent was more difficult, but he managed it; and in a few moments was standing, breathless, in the garden he knew so well. His long velvet cape, put on to conceal his armor, he had somehow managed to keep, but his mask had fallen into the street.

He glanced up at the windows of the Countess Emanuele's apartment, where he always saw his betrothed. They were brilliantly lighted! On the evenings of his visits the light in the windows was always dim, as the countess had warned him that brilliant light was a danger-signal, when he must on no account enter. But that, of course, was when he was expected! It could mean nothing on a night when they did not look for him! Besides, he had left the Duke of Alba at the king's palace.

He entered, and tried the door communicating with the rooms of the countess, and to his surprise found it ajar. There were no servants in sight! He noiselessly ascended the marble staircase until he reached the suite of the countess, when he hesitated for a moment. He was never announced, but always escorted by the maid directly to the countess's salon.

While he was hesitating, the door of the great salon opened suddenly and a fair young girl with disheveled hair, pale cheeks, and wild eyes bounded out and fairly fell into his arms as he stood blocking the way. She shrieked with terror, and Feria looked at her in consternation. It was the countess's maid!

"Anita! What is the meaning of this?" Feria spoke sharply. At first the girl could do nothing but weep and wring her hands. At last she pointed to the door.

"Her ladyship can do nothing—he forced his way in—he bribed the servants—save her if you can!"

Feria waited for nothing more. He pushed open the door of the great salon and entered. At first, blinded by the light, he could distinguish nothing. Then, on a divan at the end of the room, he saw a prostrate figure. He strode toward it, and beheld the Countess Emanuele either in a swoon or dead, he

could not tell which. At the same moment scream after scream came from one of the inner rooms of the apartment. He hurried on! Pushing through the two small rooms beyond the salon, he reached the boudoir of the countess. He knew the room well, for in it the happiest hours of his life had been passed. He turned the handle of the door softly, and with drawn sword entered the room.

Before him was the stooping figure of a man, who was evidently trying to unclasp the hands of a woman who knelt at his feet. Pale as death, her dark hair falling in a cloud over her shoulders, the roses she had worn scattered over the floor, Mercedes de Toledo looked up at her lover, but uttered no sound. Her eyes dilated, whether in terror or relief, Feria could not tell.

Pale with passion, Feria struck the unknown a blow that sent him reeling across the room, and then stood over him, sword in hand.

"Draw and defend yourself!"

The man looked up, gathered himself together, and sprang to his feet, facing Feria.

It was Don Carlos!

Feria's heart contracted and stood still. He had for his enemy the heir to the throne! The vindictive character of Carlos was well known, and his power undisputed. The most notorious libertine in Spain, many husbands and fathers had endured imprisonment, and worse, at his hands when they had attempted interference with his mad passions. The king rarely crossed his eldest son, and there was no hope from that quarter.

But Feria did not flinch. Wrath and love combined to make him reckless.

"Draw and defend yourself!"

Don Carlos needed no urging. Cowardice was not one of his vices. He picked up his fallen sword, and with hatred in his eyes took the defensive. The two were not badly matched. Feria was the taller and more agile, but Carlos was reputed the best swordsman in Europe. At first Feria contented himself with parrying, but as his foe's thrusts became more deadly, his eyes glittered and he pressed him closer.

The duel was fought in absolute silence, except for the labored breathing of the girl, who had retreated to the

farther corner of the room. But for the hatred in the eyes of the two men, it might have seemed a fencing-match!

The prince, apparently, had the advantage, for he had twice wounded his adversary slightly; but Feria was biding his time. He remembered a feint taught him by a Moorish fencing-master, and as Carlos made a final desperate onslaught he swerved, and with a sudden backward thrust struck the sword of the prince with such violence it fell clattering at the feet of the terror-stricken girl.

Feria bowed:

"Since you are disarmed, your highness, may we not consider the duel at an end?"

The prince, ugly at his best moments from the malignity of his expression, looked like a wolf brought to bay. He snarled rather than spoke:

"To what, pray, do I owe the honor of this intrusion?"

"Mercedes de Toledo is my affianced wife!"

"Ah!" Carlos drew a long breath—this information had not reached him, but then he was the sworn enemy of the Duke of Alva, and they met but seldom. He recovered his haughty bearing.

"I will take my departure!"

He picked up his sword, adjusted his cape of violet velvet bordered with ermine, and taking up his hat, with its long white and purple plumes, approached nearer the shrinking girl.

"Farewell for the present, *señorita*! May our next meeting prove a happier one!"

He raised the girl's hand to his lips; but Mercedes de Toledo, who in one short hour had suffered all the fluctuations of fear, despair, and hope, suddenly threw herself at his feet. Her voice was choked with sobs:

"Have mercy on us, your highness! We are betrothed, and we love each other!"

Carlos glanced grimly over his shoulder at Feria, who stood in his glittering suit of silver mail, his long fair hair in disorder and the blood flowing from a slight flesh wound in the cheek.

"You have a brave knight to wear your colors," he said with a sneer; "with such a sword at your command, you need have no fear!"

He gave a long, malignant look at Feria, opened the door without another word, and disappeared. The girl threw herself on the divan in a paroxysm of weeping.

"You are lost, beloved; you are lost!" she wailed.

Feria knelt beside her, stanching the blood flowing from his wound as best he might. That sight recalled her to herself! She brought water and napkins, and was so busy for some moments that she forgot the countess. But Feria suddenly remembered.

"The countess—is she dead?"

Together, they hastened to the salon. The Countess Emanuele, who was subject to severe heart attacks when overtired or overexcited, had complained of feeling indisposed early in the evening. Her young charge had enticed her into the large salon, where she had placed her on a divan covered with cushions, and had lighted all the candles, thinking to divert her.

"Now I am going to dance my new Moorish dance for you," she had said gaily, "and we will pretend we are at the ball!"

In a glittering dress of cloth of gold, with a wreath of roses on her beautiful hair and a long gauze scarf covered with spangles, which gave her the appearance of a butterfly in the evolutions of the dance, the girl was so entrancing that the countess, who loved her like her own child, momentarily forgot the pain in her admiration and delight in the girl's beauty. But a sudden faintness reminded her.

"Quick, Mercedes, the vial in the boudoir!"

The girl flew to the inner room, and at the same moment the door of the salon opened noiselessly. Don Carlos, in his long cape and with his hat pulled over his eyes, advanced into the room. The countess lay with closed eyes. Hearing the step, she spoke faintly:

"Is it you, Anita?"

Getting no reply, she opened her eyes and found bending over her the one man on earth she dreaded most—more even than the Duke of Alva! Because of the prince's evil reputation with women, she had kept her beautiful charge away from court, out of his sight, as she supposed.

But the fame of beauty travels far, and Don Carlos was determined to see with his own eyes this rare and hidden flower. He would have bidden her to court but for the enmity of the Duke of Alva.

The countess gave one long look into the cruel, ugly face.

"Anita, Anita," she moaned, and speedily lost consciousness.

All the servants in the great house had been bribed to keep away this evening—and it was only Anita—trembling, incorruptible Anita—who presently appeared and found her mistress in a deathlike swoon.

Carlos, in the meantime, had pressed through the inner rooms to the boudoir, where the girl, not finding the drops, was still searching distractedly. As she turned, a vision of loveliness met the eyes of the prince, such as even he had never seen.

Only eighteen, and of exquisite fairness, she had eyes and hair of midnight blackness, a rosebud mouth like a vivid line of scarlet in the warm pallor of her charming face, and a figure of exquisite proportions. In her rich and shimmering dress, with the glittering scarf thrown carelessly over one fair arm, and the red roses crowning the well-set head, she looked a veritable goddess.

Always inflammable, Carlos completely lost his head. Having come with the desire of an ordinary gallant adventure, he was fired with a sudden, uncontrollable passion. In an hour of hideous nightmare, the girl wept, pleaded, and finally struggled with the prince, who became more and more infuriated at not finding an easy prey. It was at last in utter exhaustion that the girl had knelt to him just as Feria opened the door.

The countess had come out of her swoon, and lay, propped by pillows, on the divan. Anita, with streaming eyes and trembling fingers, was working over her. Both women uttered a scream at sight of the young couple who came toward them pale and disheveled, Feria wearing a bandage across the face.

"Has the prince gone?"

The countess spoke at first in a whisper. She was ghastly pale. Mercedes knelt beside her.

"He has gone, dearest; and Luis fought with him!"

The countess moaned:

"Oh, poor, poor children, your love is doomed! You have the king now for an enemy!"

Feria knelt and kissed her hand. His courage was high, and he did not care, in that moment, if the king and entire court defied him.

"Listen, *madre!*"—the countess had permitted him to address her thus—"I will go at once to the Duke of Alva and press my suit. He hates Carlos, and may listen to me. He would do anything to thwart the prince, who humiliated him so bitterly in the Flanders matters! He may even let me marry Mercedes out of hand!" He laughed gaily and sprang to his feet. In his shining armor, he looked like a knight of the Crusade. Sweet it was to him that he had disarmed the prince!

But the Countess Emanuele knew the world—the Spanish world. To her Feria was between the devil and the deep sea.

Carlos was without scruple and of deadly vindictiveness, and no trust could be placed in the duke, who was the wildest, deepest, most astute intriguer in Europe. She sighed heavily. This boy was to her as her own son. In her youth Don Luis's father had been her lover; and although the match was broken for family reasons and she had married another, the early love was not forgotten, and this boy looked at her with his father's eyes.

"No, no!" she said in a moment. "Your only hope lies in waiting—and patience. I must see the duke, and place Mercedes in a convent, out of the reach of Carlos. You must leave Madrid to-morrow, and not come back until I send for you. Your very life depends on this!"

Feria's face clouded. He was twenty-one, trained in all the knightly accomplishments of the day, a good swordsman, eager, ambitious, and he had hoped for favor at court.

"I cannot go into hiding and kick up my heels all day!" he said.

The girl threw her arms around his neck. Her heart was filled with fear. The parting glance of the prince made her tremble. She knew what favor her lover would find in his eyes!

"Do as the *madre* says, dearest," she said entreatingly. "Go to Toledo—to a kinsman of mine who will treat you hospitably for my sake! Go to-morrow—to-morrow, without fail!"

Feria looked reluctantly at the two women. He knew the advice was good, but his own wish was to put his fortune to the touch. The duke was a great soldier, and he himself was eager for war. As with many other young Spaniards, the duke's brilliant military achievements inspired him with unbounded admiration. He would fain serve under such a general! His instinct told him, however, that it was best to let this affair with Carlos blow over—provided, of course, that Mercedes were safe.

"I obey," he said gallantly; "but do not make the exile long! Let me speak for myself with the duke!"

The two women clung to him, weeping. It was far into the night, and prudent that Feria should depart before the return of the servants, bribed by Carlos. Mercedes felt a terror she could not define.

"Go down to the side door, dearest, and Anita will let you out by the garden-gate!"

The lovers embraced, and embraced again.

"A parting token, sweet!" whispered Feria—he meant a rose or a tress of her beautiful hair, but the girl instantly detached from her neck a fine gold chain and slipped into his hands a miniature set in diamonds.

"My mother's picture! Keep it for a token, Luis, and send it to me if you are in danger!"

"I shall not be in danger, sweet!" He laughed gaily and bent over her, intoxicated by her beauty.

"Children," whispered the countess, "you must part! Luis must not be discovered here at daybreak!"

Feria turned to go, escorted by the faithful Anita. At the door he paused a moment, then rapidly returned.

"I am not in danger, but it is otherwise with you. Who can tell what the prince may venture? Take my signet-ring, and if you are in peril, send it to me by a trusty messenger. If I am at the ends of the earth, I will come to you!"

Feria kissed the hand of the countess and once more embraced the weeping girl. He then turned to Anita:

"Now we will hasten!"

In silence they descended the marble stairway. A faint gray light through the mullioned windows showed the coming of the dawn. But they met no one. The great mansion seemed deserted. Without speaking, Anita hastened through the garden, Feria beside her, until they reached the garden-gate. There she drew a key from her girdle and turned her streaming eyes on the young man's face.

"God in heaven guard you," she whispered, "and protect you from the vengeance of the prince!"

The key turned in the lock, the door swung open, and Feria stood before the wall that had seemed so impassable a few short hours before. There were his shoes, that had fallen when he had attempted to climb. He stooped to recover them, and as he did so three masked figures emerged from the shadow of the wall. They disarmed the stooping figure, bound and gagged him, and in silence lifted him into a litter and bore him away.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUKE'S SCHEME.

THE Duke of Alva was sitting in an inner room of his town-house in Madrid. The great duke had several palaces, but he never remained long absent from the court, unless engaged in foreign wars for the service of the king. He found it was better to keep a sharp eye on the movements of the king. Philip II, who delighted in plots and intrigues, both foreign and domestic, was never so happy as when he had hopelessly embroiled two aspirants to his favor. For years he had kept on tenter-hooks his greatest minister and his greatest general, and sometimes it was the Prince of Eboli who held the king's ear and enjoyed his confidence, and again it was Alva who was commissioned to execute the king's will.

At this time Alva's star was in the ascendent. Philip, who had long been meditating his dark designs against the

Flemish provinces, knew there was but one arm strong enough, one will invincible enough, to carry out his purposes! If he swam seas of blood, Alva would not shrink! There was no treachery, no deceit, to which he would not stoop! Trained by Philip, the duke was the worthy pupil of a royal master. Both could conceal the most hellish designs beneath a calm and courtly exterior.

As the duke perused the papers scattered over the beautiful old carved table before which he sat, a smile of supreme satisfaction played over his somber features. At last he was preferred to his great rival—he was even granted powers superior to the Duchess of Parma, regent of Flanders. He was to sail for the Low Countries as absolute dictator, to carry out Philip's will with a free hand! He rose and paced the room. Never had he been given such opportunity for distinction. And the bloody, treacherous undertaking was distinctly to his liking.

He was so deep in thought he did not mark a low tap on the door, and his son, Don Ferdinando, entered and came close to him before the duke was aware of his presence.

Don Ferdinando, the duke's natural son, was the favorite among his children. A brave soldier, and devoted to his father's interests, he was the confidant of all his schemes. Alva never undertook a foreign war without him, and he had entrusted to Ferdinando every detail of the Netherland plot. The son put his hand affectionately on his father's shoulder and looked earnestly in his face. To him alone the iron duke relaxed his haughty and somber bearing.

"Naught goes amiss to-day, father?"

"No, no!" said Alva hastily. "The king has still further trusted me, and I go to the Netherlands with royal powers!"

Don Ferdinando seated himself carelessly on a Moorish couch that had been pulled into the center of the room. His brows wrinkled reflectively.

"You need a man—an absolute tool—to do some of the dirty work! I can help you with the fighting and with the arrests; but to win the confidence of Egmont, Horn, and Orange, and lead them into the trap, you should have some

one who would inspire them with confidence and yet be devoted to our interests."

"You are right," said Alva gloomily; "but such a man does not exist! Not one of my captains but would desert if the bribe were high enough!"

"Such a man is the Baron Montigny," continued Don Ferdinando musingly. "I have noted him well! He has great charm of manner and absolute simplicity. He is not clever enough to betray a cause."

The duke regarded him with surprise.

"Florence de Montmorency? Impossible! He is a doomed man, and will never see Flanders again! You know the king's plan for him and Bergen? As soon as I get under way in the Netherlands, the two left here are to be done away with!"

"Yes! I know!" Don Ferdinando still seemed lost in thought. "A curious thing happened last evening! As I was riding with some friends through one of the dark side streets, we chanced upon a pretty, masked fellow, and endeavored to have some sport with him. We unmasked him, and it was the Baron Montigny!"

"Well?" said Alva impatiently.

"It was not the Baron Montigny! I went directly to the palace, and the Baron Montigny was there!"

The duke stared at his son in astonishment. "Who was the man, then?"

"Undoubtedly the baron's double! There is a young Spaniard in Madrid who is the exact image of Montigny, and continually taken for him. Bergen told me he could not tell the two apart."

"His name?"

"Don Luis de Feria!"

The duke's brow grew dark. "The young blade who has been paying secret attentions to Mercedes de Toledo?"

"The same man!"

"There is to be a day of reckoning with him," the duke said roughly, "when I return from the campaign in Flanders!"

"But, in the meantime," continued Don Ferdinando composedly, "why not use him?"

"How use him?"

"If he resembles Montigny so closely, why not have him personate Montigny

in Flanders? He has a most pleasing address. Why not use him as a bait to lure Egmont, Horn, and Orange?"

"How can I trust him so deeply?"

"Report has it that he is a simple youth, hot-headed and impetuous, and not overstocked with brains. Perhaps the Spanish cause—" He was interrupted by the majordomo bearing a card on a gold tray.

The duke glanced hastily at it.

"Countess Emanuele!" He looked suddenly at his son. "The duenna of Mercedes de Toledo! Is this a favorable augury for your plan?" He turned to the majordomo: "Where is the lady?"

"In the small salon, your grace."

"I will see her immediately!"

The Countess Emanuele, burdened with her tragic news, and crushed by the difficulties of her position, paced restlessly to and fro while waiting for the duke. She had no eyes for one of the most exquisite apartments in Spain. The hangings of the room were Moorish, as were also the beautiful divans and chairs. Paintings by the great Spanish artists of the day hung on the walls, and scattered through the room were articles of curiously wrought gold and silver of enormous value. But the Countess Emanuele had eyes for none of these things! She thought only of the despair of the beautiful girl she had left, and the doom hanging over the youth she loved as a son.

The duke entered so suddenly and noiselessly that she did not at once perceive him. She stood, the picture of despair, in the center of the apartment, her veil thrown back, her hands clasped, her eyes uplifted. The duke regarded her keenly. She had been exceedingly handsome in her youth, and still bore traces of beauty. She had been selected as a guardian of his ward, because the duke believed in her fidelity. He had made the fortune of Count Emanuele, and he believed the widow devoted to his interests. He kept spies always in her mansion, however, and through them he had learned of the frequent visits of Don Luis de Feria. Since then he had not trusted her.

The countess gave a little cry when the cold, measured tones of the duke fell on her ear:

"It is long since I have had the honor of a visit from you, Carlotta."

The unhappy woman fell on her knees before him. The Duke of Alva inspired all people with fear. His haughty bearing, his harsh features, his invincible will, made him dreaded of all, but this woman knew him to be as false as he was cruel, and she had little hope of their interview. She had come, however, resolved to confess all and throw herself on his mercy. She began without hesitation.

"I have come, your grace, to acknowledge a great error, prompted by the heart, which you know often leads women astray."

She had hit upon the only course which could have mollified the testy duke. She did not, of course, know that she was surrounded by spies, and consequently her confession would be a genuine one.

He graciously raised and seated her. "Tell me everything, Carlotta. Does what you have to say concern my ward?"

The countess choked. "Yes. Your grace, it has all to do with Mercedes. I have permitted her to have a lover who is known to me, and who wishes to marry her. He is of good birth, and of sterling worth."

"His name?"

"Don Luis de Feria."

The duke frowned heavily. "You know, madam, it was to guard against lovers that I put her in your charge. You have betrayed your trust, and I shall place Mercedes de Toledo in a convent until I find a husband worthy of her wealth and beauty."

The countess faltered. "They love each other, and Don Luis de Feria would serve you well."

"Do you realize, *madame*, that my ward can mate with a prince?"

"I know that one prince is seeking her," the countess said bitterly.

"What prince?" asked the duke hastily. He had heard nothing of this.

"Don Carlos."

The duke's face grew suddenly purple. Added to his hatred of Carlos was the fear of what this might mean—abduction, possibly death—and Mercedes de Toledo was to be a strong card in his winning game.

"Tell me everything," he said imperiously.

Rapidly, and without faltering, the countess narrated how she had always known the family of Don Luis de Feria, and how the young man had seen Mercedes first at church and afterward in the street, when he had extricated them from a dangerous mob.

"I could not do less than give him admission to the house after that," she pleaded.

The duke kept his keen eyes fixed upon her, but he said nothing.

"Then," continued the countess, "it was a case of love at first sight, and Feria continually begged that he might press his suit with you."

"But you knew well that would be hopeless." The duke spoke dryly.

The countess flushed crimson. "I hoped that when you found the heart of the girl was so deeply touched you might favor the suit."

"And so you ran the risk of lifelong unhappiness for your charge rather than nip this youthful passion in the bud."

"I hoped for clemency, your grace."

The duke laughed harshly. "Well, you ought to know how much compassion and sentiment play in my scheme of life, Carlotta." His tone changed. "Mercedes de Toledo is one of the greatest heiresses in Spain, and an important destiny awaits her. I have other and different designs for her. Feria must look elsewhere."

"Alas! Poor boy! Heaven alone can help him now." The tears sprang to the countess's eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"He has incurred the enmity of Don Carlos."

"How did it happen?"

Briefly the countess narrated the events of the night before. The duke listened, with growing anger.

"The scoundrel! The puppy! He bribed the servants and forced an entrance to the house, you say?"

"Yes, your grace."

"And this is the first time it has occurred?"

"Yes, your grace."

"You say Feria disarmed him, and he left the house. How do you know that harm afterward came to Feria?"

"Because when Mercedes and Feria parted they gave each other a token to be returned only in direst peril. This morning the token came from Feria with two words on a slip of paper—'Alcazar, Segovia.'"

The duke started. The situation was then serious. Feria had been spirited away to the great fortress-prison of Spain. The duke rose and began pacing the room, his hands behind him. A plan suddenly formed itself in his fertile brain. At least it would checkmate Carlos, and perhaps lead to important results. His whole aspect changed. His brow cleared, and he suddenly assumed that suavity of manner the countess most feared.

"I think I can help Feria, but Mercedes must be placed out of the reach of Carlos. You will both come to this house to-day, and I will put Mercedes in a convent."

The countess faintly murmured her thanks. She did not trust the duke, but if he saved the life of Feria it was much.

"I shall have an interview with the king to-day," continued the duke. "And I can make it extremely difficult for the prince to carry out his designs."

After the departure of the countess the duke remained some time lost in thought. "It is a hazard," he said to himself; "but I play for great stakes."

When he reached the palace he was told that the king and prince were closeted together, and could not be disturbed.

"I will wait in the large anteroom," he said haughtily, "until the king can give me audience."

All the attendants knew that the duke was the man most in Philip's good graces at that time, and it was without hesitation one of them approached the king's closet.

The duke did not have to wait long. Within a few moments the inner door was opened and Carlos, with a scowl on his face and in a towering passion, strode through the apartment. The duke saluted, but the prince did not deign to give him a glance. At once the duke was ushered into the presence of the king.

Philip, who was completely engrossed

at this time with his plan for the persecution of the Netherlands, had been having a stormy interview with his heir. Carlos, who was as vain as he was incapable, was desirous of being put in command of the forces sent to the Netherlands. Without experience, judgment, or tact, and a man of uncontrollable passions, the king knew his project was doomed if Carlos held the reins. In fact, Carlos could neither govern nor obey, and the king dared not let him leave Spain. This had provoked a storm of wrath from the prince.

The duke found the king seated at the farther end of the room, his eyes closed, and a look of utter weariness on his face. Already the father and son were becoming bitterly estranged, and this was the beginning of the tragedy which in the end was to cost the prince his life.

The duke perceived his advantage, and began at once.

"I have come, sire, to speak of some important matters preparatory to my starting for the Netherlands."

The king brightened visibly. That morose and fanatical nature had been only temporarily diverted by the pageants and spectacles which Elizabeth of Valois had inaugurated. His heart was in his bloody schemes for stamping out heresy.

"You understand the orders, Alva? You have *carte blanche*, with royal prerogatives, for the trials and executions."

"I understand, sire."

"And not one of the great nobles is to be spared—not one, you remember! You are to begin with the highest in the land."

"There will be some difficulty, sire, in luring the birds into the net. They must be baited. Already Orange has left the country, and Horn is practically inaccessible in his fortress."

The king frowned. He could not easily brook opposition. "Show your hand at once, then, and crush them."

"That is not wise, sire," said Alva smoothly. "You will lose much revenue if the great nobles turn their estates into money and go into Germany, as Orange has done."

This was a master-stroke. Philip loved money as well as burnings at the stake.

"What are we to do, then?" he asked sulkily.

"I would recommend, sire, that we proceed at first discreetly and lure our big game to Brussels, where we can easily seize and kill them."

"But how will you lure them? I have written Egmont, Horn, and Orange, assuring them of my undying love and of my trust in their fidelity."

Philip had indeed written those famous letters which ended in the destruction of all who believed in them.

"I think something is more necessary than letters, sire."

"What?" Philip spoke eagerly.

"We need a man of high birth, pleasing address, and fair speech, who will see the great lords personally and induce them to come to Brussels."

"Such a one as—"

"Baron Montigny, sire."

Philip's jaw dropped, and he stared at Alva in consternation. Baron Montigny had already been detained many months at the Court of Spain, and his fate and Pergen's were sealed. Only it was desirable not to touch them until the Spanish army had begun its work in the Netherlands.

"I don't understand," he faltered. "Montigny, of course, would be trusted, being a Flemish noble himself. And, fresh from the court of Spain, his assurances would naturally carry great weight. I presume he could even get Orange to cross the frontier."

The king snarled, his face was black: "I would not forego Montigny for the sake of Orange himself." The hapless nobleman had in some way incurred the deep enmity of the king.

"It is not the real Baron Montigny I wish to take with me," continued the duke blandly, "but his double, who is a faithful servant of your royal highness, and a trusty Catholic."

The king stared.

"I refer to Don Luis de Feria, whose strange and striking resemblance to Montigny has often been noted."

It had indeed been brought to the king's notice, and he had wondered at it. A light dawned on the monarch's mind.

"You wish to use this fellow as a cat's-paw—as a counterfeit Montigny."

"Exactly. As a pawn in this game of ours I am to play."

The king rubbed his hands softly to-

gether—a trick of his when pleased or agitated.

"This plan is worthy of you, Alva. No one else would have the wit to conceive it."

"There is only one obstacle," Alva continued dryly.

"What is it?"

"The man is at present imprisoned in the Alcazar at Segovia."

"For what crime is he imprisoned?" The king spoke with asperity.

"For the crime of loving a woman whom it has pleased the prince to fancy."

"What woman?"

"Mercedes de Toledo."

The king threw back his head and laughed loudly. He never interfered with the amours of the prince. Indeed, he preferred that his heir should occupy himself with love rather than with war.

The duke regarded the king with rising anger.

"Mercedes de Toledo is my ward," he said stiffly; "and I prefer her not to have the attentions of the prince. Her marriage is already contracted for, and I demand, your majesty, that I have a safe conduct for placing her in a convent during my absence from Spain, and that I have your guarantee she shall not be touched."

The king would have made an evasive reply, but he knew the man with whom he had to deal. Besides, he wished to propitiate him so far as he was able.

"I will see to it," he said shortly.

Alva looked at him directly. Each knew the duplicity of the other, but as there is sometimes honor among thieves, so these two dark plotters kept faith, as a rule, with each other.

"Very well, sire. If I get word that my ward has been molested I shall immediately return to Spain, at whatever cost."

The king understood. Alva, at any price, must be kept in the Netherlands. It would take months, perhaps years, for the bloody work to be finished, and only this man of steel and iron could accomplish it.

"Moreover," continued Alva steadily, "I must have a permit, with the royal seal, to remove Feria from the Alcazar, at Segovia. Since he has been placed

there by the order of the prince, it will require an order from yourself, sire, to set him free."

The king in silence, filled out a paper, and sealed it with the royal seal.

"Can't I have a look at this young fellow before you depart?" he asked, with more eagerness than he generally displayed.

"Certainly, sire."

"When do you go to Segovia?"

"To-night, your majesty."

"Perhaps it would be well for you not to go alone," the king continued reluctantly. He knew that Carlos would scruple at nothing should the plan be suspected.

"Don Ferdinando will accompany me, sire."

Later the father and son were closeted a brief time together. Alva explained the use he intended to make of Feria, following Don Ferdinando's plan in detail.

"He must bait Horn, Egmont, and Orange. That will be his part of the game."

"Of course the difficulties will be great," mused Don Ferdinando. "He has to personate a man he does not know, and Count Horn is Montigny's brother."

"He speaks French?" asked the duke.

"Yes, perfectly, and Dutch as well, I happen to know. His mother was the daughter of a great Flemish noble, and Count de Feria met her when he was in attendance upon Charles at the Flemish court. That accounts for the boy's blue eyes and fair hair. He is the image of his mother."

"We must make sure of his fidelity. But rumor has it that he is a simple-minded youth."

"Leave that part to me," said Alva grimly. "I usually understand when to apply the thumb-screw."

"But let me get him out of prison," Don Ferdinando urged anxiously. He had a dread of a possible meeting between the duke and the prince.

"Not at all," Alva returned coolly. "I shall take you with me to guard against surprises, but the proposition must come from me. He must be completely won over, or he will do nothing."

"How soon do we sail for the Netherlands?"

"The day after Don Luis de Feria has entered my service as the Baron Montigny."

CHAPTER III.

THE PAWN.

WHEN Don Luis de Feria felt himself seized and gagged by his unknown captors, before the garden-gate of the Toledo mansion, he gave himself up for lost. It was the hand of Carlos striking him, and a prince may do dark deeds without question. He was a brave man, and willing to die, but he thought wistfully of a soldier's death while they were blindfolding and binding him. It would be hard to die like a rat in a hole. Still, they might stab him; and, in the weary hours of their silent journey to the great prison, Feria expected, and even hoped, that a sword-thrust would end all.

This, however, did not suit the plan of Carlos. He preferred that his rival should languish in a distant prison, enduring alternations of hope and despair until the time should come for disposing of him altogether. From the Alcazar at Segovia no sound would reach the outside world, and Carlos promised himself one or two pretty interviews with the man who had so bitterly humiliated him.

In the meantime, it would be comparatively easy to abduct the girl for whom the prince suddenly felt the greatest passion of his life. He did not take Alva into his reckoning, for he knew the duke was absorbed heart and soul in the scheme for the Netherlands.

The Alcazar at Segovia was at that time the most noted political prison in the world. Noblemen and commoners alike were immured behind those forbidding walls, and the secrets of the dark prison-house were never revealed. Many a death-sentence, secretly and swiftly executed, remained for years a mystery. Death by strangulation was Philip's favorite method, since the marks of it showed but little on the body, and in certain cases a death could be announced to the world as coming from sudden illness—a convenient coincidence.

These things were known to Feria, and when at last, bruised and sore from

his fetters and the hurried journey, he arrived at his destination, he had no need to ask his silent captors the name of the huge fortress.

He was ushered immediately into an inner room, where there seemed some delay in the proceedings. Feria's hands were unbound, and he was left momentarily alone, with a strong guard posted at the door, in what seemed a kind of court-room for judging cases. It was lighted from above, and its scanty furniture consisted of a table and two chairs. In a moment, from a panel in the wall that opened as a door, appeared a youth with quill and papers, who seated himself before the table.

Feria had but an instant for reflection, and he thought of a dubious plan, yet since there was a chance in it, he took it. He stepped quickly to the table, and whispered low and hurriedly to the youth:

"I am a prisoner of the prince, but I have friends who will help me with the king. For the love of Heaven, take this token to Madrid; to the address I give you, and you will be well rewarded."

As he spoke Feria slipped the miniature Mercedes de Toledo had given him from the chain and pressed it into the youth's hand. He tore hastily a scrap of paper, wrote the address of the Toledo mansion and two words, "Alcazar, Segovia," which he handed the young man, and then took a valuable diamond from his finger.

"This is for you, for the danger you will incur—she will give you more if the message reaches her."

The key turned in the door, and Feria sprang back to the center of the room. The youth continued bending over the papers before him, and the guard marched silently into the room. The little episode had taken but a moment.

It had been one of Philip's fantasies to have a room in the rear end of the fortress fitted up as a death-chamber. The windows were boarded so that all light was excluded and the walls were draped in black. Candles were kept lighted night and day in this gloomy apartment, and the only method of keeping track of time was by means of the watch changed at night-time.

The jailers were not allowed to speak with the prisoners, and they were at once put to death if a prisoner escaped—a most effectual method of insuring their loyalty. But few indeed of the ill-fated men placed in this somber chamber ever tried to escape, for it was hopeless from the start.

Feria shuddered when he was escorted into this famous room. He knew well the stories that were rife about it, and he knew his own doom was sealed. He looked entreatingly at one of the two guards accompanying him.

"May I not have paper and quill to write my will?" he said in a stifled voice. "I have a few effects that I wish to leave to one who has done much for me."

The men did not speak, but one of them regarded Feria with a sardonic smile. The unfortunate man understood the look—confiscation of property awaited all who were brought to this place.

Feria could not have told the length of time he passed in his dreary solitude. Day and night had no meaning for him, since the light of the sun was excluded and the candles burned ever the same. At first he expected Carlos—or at least the men who were to execute the death-sentence—but as no one came, he sank into a kind of stupor, from which he extricated himself only to pace his narrow room for hours.

His only hope lay in the possible compassion of the youth who had taken the locket—but that was a shadowy hope—and what indeed could Mercedes de Toledo and the Countess Emanuele do if they received the token? It was not likely that the king would interfere. To the light-hearted youth—gay, careless, exuberant with love and hope—this change in his fortunes gave a kind of paralysis.

There was nothing to do but wait—no action on his part could save him—and at last it seemed to Feria that his very senses were deadened, and that he no longer tasted the food he ate, nor heard the creaking of the heavy door turning on its hinges, nor saw the faces of his jailers when they entered the room. Thus it was with no glance of recognition he looked dully into the face of a tall, powerfully built man, with rugged features, iron-gray hair and piercing eyes, who sud-

denly appeared in his room and looked down on him.

Alva regarded the young man with consternation. He was not prepared to see such ravages from a few days of solitary confinement—for in truth Feria had been in the fortress less than a week. His dress was disordered, his cheeks pale, his eyes dull and lifeless. He had the aspect of a man who hopes for nothing, expects nothing. Alva put his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"I am here by order of the king," he said in his deep voice, "and I wish to have a few words with you. Come with me."

As in a dream, Feria followed the tall figure through the corridors, past innumerable doors, until they came to a room locked with a massive key. Their single attendant turned the key and threw open the door. The two stepped into a great apartment, hung with tapestries; there was furniture of ebony and silver, and stained-glass windows that the king himself had ordered placed there—for this was the king's chamber on his visits to the fortress. The duke motioned the attendant to retire, and when they were left alone he pointed to a seat and produced a small vial.

"Drink from this, and you will feel better," he said kindly.

The stimulant and the sudden revival of hope restored Feria. He sat erect, and the light came back to his eye. Mercenary of temperament, impressionable and ardent, he rebounded as quickly as he had fallen.

"The Duke of Alva!" he murmured.

The other nodded: "I have known of you for some time, and when word came to me of your misfortune I took your case directly to the king."

Feria's heart beat high: "You knew of my imprisonment through Mercedes de Toledo!"

The duke frowned slightly. "Through the Countess Emanuele," he corrected.

The young man blushed. "Did she tell you—do you know—how I love her?" he stammered.

The expression on the duke's face was inscrutable.

"She confessed," he answered coldly, "that she had permitted my ward to have a lover without my knowledge or consent,

and because of that I had Mercedes de Toledo immediately removed to a convent for safe keeping."

"Did she tell you of the prince?" faltered Feria.

"She told me all," returned the duke stiffly, "and because I will not permit my ward to have lovers or to marry without my consent, I have placed her in an absolutely safe retreat."

Feria's face fell. "I had hoped," he began, "to press my suit with you, and to endeavor to win her hand."

"She is one of the greatest matches in Spain." The duke looked at him keenly.

"I do not care for her wealth!" Feria spoke hotly.

"Others do, if you do not," the duke retorted dryly, "and Mercedes de Toledo can marry whom she will."

"Can she marry the man she loves?"

The duke looked at him curiously: "She will only marry the man I consider fit to be her husband."

Feria sighed. His suit was then hopeless, but why had the great duke sought him out to save his life?

"Do you know about the expedition with which the king has entrusted me?" asked the duke abruptly.

Feria looked up suddenly: "All Spain knows that the king is going to crush heresy in the Netherlands, and that you are to be sent there as commander-in-chief."

The duke rose, drew himself to his full height, and put his hands behind him.

"I am going to take you into my confidence." His tone was almost winning. "I go to the Netherlands as more than commander-in-chief—I go as the king himself, with royal prerogatives to slay and to imprison. I shall not spare the highest in the land—heresy and insubordination are to be crushed out with an iron heel!"

The young man gazed at the striking figure and flashing eyes of the great general with awe. He knew that the troops adored him. Strict in discipline and a hard taskmaster, yet he always led them to victory, and he looked after their creature comforts. The Duke of Alva's army was always well fed and well clothed.

As Feria did not speak, the duke continued: "There are peculiar difficulties and dangers in this undertaking. It is

quartering a Spanish army on a foreign country, and much dissatisfaction has already been expressed. The great nobles are very powerful, and could raise a considerable army against us if they suspected our intentions. Our real mission to the Netherlands is to be kept a profound secret until they have fallen into the trap."

"What is the real mission?" Feria asked with dilating eyes.

"To slay, burn, confiscate, until we have put down heresy."

This idea was familiar to all Spaniards, who, under a fanatical king and in the shadow of the Inquisition, had become accustomed to deeds of horrible violence.

The young man did not flinch.

"In the name of God and the king," continued the duke.

"In the name of God and the king," repeated Feria, springing to his feet.

The duke studied the glowing face before him a moment. "I have need," he began slowly, "of a man of tact and finesse, who will help me, not with his sword, but with his brains. Before we slay, we must entrap. I need a man to lure my birds into the net."

Feria stared, uncomprehending.

"You seem to be that man," the duke pursued rapidly, "and the king agrees with me. That is why I am here to give you your freedom and to enlist you in my service."

The young man threw himself on his knees before the duke:

"Any service I can render, your grace, be it with sword or with brains, is yours to command!"

The duke raised him gravely: "This means unquestioning obedience—no questions asked, and a course followed to the letter."

"Yes, your grace!" Feria spoke submissively. What he had desired above all things was a commission in the duke's service.

"If you perform successfully the difficult task I shall put upon you," continued the duke, "I will reward you with the hand of Mercedes de Toledo."

Feria seized the hand of the great man and kissed it fervently. This was beyond his wildest hopes. At the bottom of his heart he had never expected the duke to listen to his suit.

Alva fixed him with his penetrating glance: "You can render me service only in one way. You must personate another man."

"What man?"

"Florence de Montmorency, Baron Montigny."

Feria started. The recollection of the quiet street, the encounter with the unknown man, the packet, the signet-ring, rushed over him. In his dire extremity it had been forgotten.

"You bear an extraordinary resemblance to the Baron Montigny," the duke said calmly, "and he is a friend of all the great nobles in Flanders. As Montigny, I wish you to bring Egmont, Horn, and Orange to Brussels."

"But they will immediately discover that I am an impostor," stammered the youth.

"Not if you possess sufficient wit to deceive them," the duke said dryly. "This is your task. I told you it was not an easy one."

Feria shrank back. He would undertake anything in his own person, but to deceive men in the guise of another was repugnant to him. The duke marked his hesitation.

"If the task seems too difficult," he sneered, "I will hand you back to the tender mercies of Carlos."

Feria flushed hotly. He was brave, and danger he knew not of. "It is not the difficulty, your grace"—it is the dishonor, he was about to say, but when did Philip think of dishonor! "I will attempt it," he answered briefly.

"And your reward will depend on your measure of success," the duke said pointedly.

There was a sound of angry voices in the corridor, some altercation at the door, and a man rushed headlong into the apartment.

It was Carlos!

He had judged it time to have his first interview with his prisoner. He was ready to apply the thumb-screw.

The three men stared at one another. The eyes of the prince seemed starting from his head. The duke recovered himself first:

"I am sorry, your highness, but this man has entered my service. I am the bearer of the royal seal."

The intense quiet of the prince deceived the other two.

"His majesty will explain to you the reasons for taking him to the Netherlands." The duke spoke blandly. He wished, if possible, to propitiate the prince.

Carlos regarded the duke with a look of concentrated hate: "So I have for the second time to thank you for thwarting my plans. The first time you take away my command, and the second time my prisoner."

Before either of the two men could anticipate his action, he sprang like a wild-cat upon the duke. With those hands of steel about his throat, the duke fumbled in vain for his weapon. It was not the first time Carlos had strangled a man to death. But quick as he was, Feria was quicker. With the point of his sword he forced the prince to relax his hold, and as the duke fell gasping onto a chair, he loudly summoned the guards. The chamber was filled in an instant.

Every eye was turned on the duke. It was well known in the fortress that the king hated and feared his first-born, and that the prince's authority was of precarious tenure. The duke, on the other hand, bore the royal seal, and it was an open secret that he was going with royal powers to the Netherlands.

The duke rose in a moment, pale and calm.

"Disarm that man," he said to the guards, "and place him in solitary confinement until you receive an order from the king."

The order was instantly obeyed.

Carlos attempted no resistance, but, handcuffed like a common criminal, was led from the room. Later, in a darker passage of his life he was to be immured by his father's own hand, and that time he was never again to behold the light of the sun.

The duke glanced at Feria as the others left the room.

"This makes it necessary to see the king again," he said abruptly, "and it is best that you should accompany me. I had hoped to sail to-morrow."

"Might I—for a short interview—see Mercedes de Toledo?" faltered the young man.

The duke started to give a peremptory

denial, and then for some occult reason changed his mind.

"My ward is in my own palace at present," he said shortly, "and I will permit you to speak with her as we are leaving—at the very last."

The king received them graciously. He seemed in nowise disconcerted at the imprisonment of the prince.

"I will keep him at Segovia until you are well under way," he said, with a shrug. "He might blow up some of the battle-ships if he were let out too soon."

He regarded Feria with close scrutiny. "Marvelous resemblance!" he said under his breath. "Montigny's own wife could not detect the difference—a little thinner, and the hair a shade darker, but our fierce skies might accomplish that. Remember, *señor*, very little about your early life in the Netherlands, and a great deal of the last two years in Spain."

The situation pleased the monarch extremely. That Montigny by proxy should entrap his own friends seemed to the king a delightful strategy of fate. The rôle would have suited him personally, and he half envied Feria his masquerade.

"I know nothing of Baron Montigny's past life," began the youth, flushing at the thought of the possible encounter with the young wife.

"Tut! tut!" The king spoke testily. "Have your interviews short and your words few. You are to be immediately recalled to Spain, remember, and have little time to parley. You are the messenger from me of specific promises."

Feria winced. These specious promises of Philip's that meant death!

"And now, go!" the king said to Alva. "We have procrastinated long enough. I shall await your despatches with the utmost impatience."

The interview between the lovers was short, but they were left alone. Mercedes de Toledo, weeping and agitated, clung to Feria. He thought her more beautiful in her pallor and distress than when crowned with roses and smiling, as he had often seen her.

The girl was inconsolable:

"I know it is a great deal for me to be placed out of Carlos's reach, and for you to have this commission under the duke, but, oh, Luis, the future seems so uncertain, and you will be so far away!"

Of a sudden the light-hearted, joyous nature of Feria asserted itself.

"All will go well, sweet!" he asserted confidently. "I am treated with special honor by the duke, and have an important mission to undertake for the king. Do you know what is to be my prize if I succeed?"

The girl looked up, smiling through her tears.

"The prize is to be yourself, sweet-heart."

But Mercedes de Toledo was not reassured. She knew the crafty duke too well:

"Do not put your trust in the Duke of Alva. Put it only in yourself. If you fail in what you undertake, he will throw you aside like an old glove."

"But if I succeed!" Feria said exultantly. He did not tell her about Montigny, for that would only add to her woman's fears. He stood before her in her shining armor, erect, strong, his head thrown back, the light of hope and courage in his eyes. His doubts had vanished.

In war, as in love, ruse and strategy were legitimate weapons. He was feeling

(To be continued.)

the strong reaction from those dark days in the fortress.

The girl looked at him with pride.

"You cannot fail, beloved!" she whispered. Then, as she laid her head on his heart and looked up at him, she murmured: "If I am in dire peril, will you come to me?"

He kissed her for reply.

She showed him the signet-ring she had hidden in her bosom:-

"If this ever comes to you, Luis, it will mean life or death to me."

He looked at her solemnly: "If it comes to me, I will go to you at the risk of my life."

They kissed, trembling, but he sought to infuse into her his own hopefulness:

"When I return I shall claim you before the world. Be brave, sweetheart, as a soldier's wife should be!"

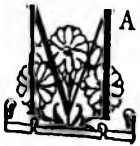
There was a slight sound of advancing footsteps. The Duke of Alva had entered the room. His somber face was inscrutable to them:

"Be prepared to leave for the convent instantly, Mercedes! Prince Carlos has escaped!"

A FORCED ISSUE.

BY ELLIOT BALESTIER.

A SHORT STORY.



MARGARET checked her mount at the top of a steep descent, and then waited patiently for the well-set-up young Englishman to overtake her.

"It's not your fault, Sir Lionel!" she cried, laughing joyously, as he brought his panting thoroughbred to a halt at her side. "Harry and Lois must be miles behind; nothing in the stable can beat Lady Betty at my weight."

"Nothing can beat you, Miss Holbrook," replied Clive-Gordon, looking with frank admiration at the bright,

flushed face framed in a mass of tumbled red-gold curls. "By Jove! you ride like one of those Western cow-girls."

"I should," she answered gaily; "more than half my life was spent at lonely Western posts, forty miles from anywhere. Besides, dad taught me, and he was the best rider in his class at West Point."

"The general had a worthy pupil, then," returned the Englishman gallantly. "Did he teach your sister, too?"

The girl glanced at her trim divided skirt, with the tips of her high-heeled

cavalry boots showing beneath, and mentally contrasted it with her sister's severely conventional habit.

"Lois!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my, no! She wasn't with us much. You see, she hated the West, and so dad sent her to the Misses Webb's school in New York, for a long time; then, after she finished, Aunt Susan took her abroad, where she married, and if her husband hadn't died so suddenly I suppose she would not be at home now.

"But isn't she stunning," she added with girlish enthusiasm, "just the type of '*grande dame*'; I feel like calling her 'my lady,' myself sometimes, and—" with a little chuckle, "she's ever so much more English than you are."

Sir Lionel laughed gently. "She is certainly a beautiful woman," he returned, flushing slightly. "I—I—knew her before she married my cousin, Lord Exminster's son." Something in his tone suggestive of embarrassment caused the girl to look at him sharply, but his face showed nothing.

"As to her being more English than I," he continued, "well, you know I was only a prospectless younger son until my poor brother died—and England is not overkind to younger sons—so I have spent most of my life anywhere else."

"Don't you love New England?" Margaret asked somewhat irrelevantly. "Just look at it," and the small, gray-gauntleted hand swept the far horizon with a comprehensive gesture. "Vermont in October! Is there anything like it!"

And, indeed, the view before them merited Margaret's enthusiasm. At their feet, far below, the Connecticut River, now deep and tranquil, now breaking into turbulent, foaming rapids, but always rushing swiftly southward, twisted through the valley, dividing, with its liquid width, Vermont and New Hampshire. Beyond, rising in myriad broken ranks, stretched the rugged hills of the Granite State, dotted here and there by lonely farmhouses or tiny villages, the white steeples of the churches standing out sharply against the dark background. A month later those hills would be as somber, cold, and gray as the granite in their hearts.

Now they were a tumult of color.

Maple and beech, oak and birch, flaunted all the brilliant shades of red and yellow, their gaudy apparel a sharp contrast to the staid and solemn garb of the pines, while the dull brown-and-yellow fields and pastures were splashed here and there by the young, vivid green of some field of winter rye. And beyond and above the farthest range, like a huge pyramid of white cloud, Monadnock, sixty miles away, reared his hoary head.

"It is certainly a charming picture," laughed Sir Lionel; but he was looking at the girl as she sat engrossed in the beauty of the view, drawing deep, full breaths of clear, invigorating air. "Here come the others to share it. You were hopelessly distanced," he added chaffingly, as they came up. "We have been waiting for you five minutes, at least."

"We are not all as fond of risking our necks on these rough country roads as Margaret," answered the elder sister, in a tone that brought a slight flush to the Englishman's face. "I'm afraid she is riding for a fall."

"Oh, I think not," retorted Sir Lionel somewhat shortly. "Miss Holbrook rides too well for that."

"Nevertheless, it is dangerous," answered Mrs. Weatherby, "and distinctly undignified. Margaret never seems to learn that she is not in her wild West here. Let us go home, I have an atrocious headache." •

II.

MRS. CURTIS WEATHERBY was, to all outward appearances, the exact antithesis of her sister. Tall, slight, but superbly proportioned, she was very fair, with a cold, imperious beauty that inspired while it repelled love.

She impressed one who looked beneath the *finesse* of perfect breeding as an unsatisfied woman—as a woman who had eaten of the fruit of life without tasting, and touched happiness without feeling it.

Her companion, Harry Dalton, was the average young New Yorker, well-built, well-groomed, firm-lipped and clear-eyed.

It had been generally believed that, some day, he would marry Margaret Holbrook; but, since the return of the elder sister, the maids and matrons of the

summer colony had been given considerable cause for doubt, and the arrival of the handsome young Englishman, some weeks afterward, had only served to increase their perplexity.

It was obvious, they said, that Sir Lionel, who, it was whispered, had been attentive to Mrs. Weatherby before her marriage, had followed her from London; and it was equally obvious that she was not a woman to throw herself away on a plain American, even a fairly wealthy one, when she had a baronet of Clive-Gordon's financial and social proportions at her feet.

Why was it, then, that she apparently preferred the society of Harry Dalton, while Sir Lionel devoted himself to Margaret?

Was it because of Lois's preference for Dalton that the Englishman sought Margaret, or was it because of Clive-Gordon's devotion to her sister, that Margaret accepted, or forced, the attentions of Harry?

Whatever the solution of the puzzle, the four principals were decidedly not *en rapport*, as they continued their ride. The pleasure was spoiled.

Mrs. Weatherby was in an ill-humor, a condition into which she had lately fallen with increasing frequency and which she took slight trouble to conceal; whether for this reason or another, they rode the few miles to the Holbrook place, on the outskirts of the village, in gloomy silence.

Margaret was late dressing for dinner that night. She usually was late; not that she spent an unwarranted time upon her toilet, but she was apt to put off the rather disagreeable duty until the last moment. She had dismissed her maid, and was putting the few finishing touches when the door opened and her sister entered.

"Do you know," she remarked critically, after scrutinizing Margaret for a moment in silence, "that you have remarkably good shoulders?"

Margaret turned and looked at her in surprise. Compliments were not usual from Lois; she was much more prone to criticize her younger sister.

"I think I will have to revise my first opinion of you, my dear," continued Mrs. Weatherby. "You have more worldly

wisdom than I credited you with, after all."

"Because I have good shoulders?" asked Margaret.

"Innocent! No—I was thinking of Sir Lionel."

"Sir Lionel!" repeated the girl, her eyes widening. "What has he to do with it?"

"Really, Margaret," said Mrs. Weatherby, elevating her eyebrows, "you are amusing. You must know that you have succeeded in making him fall desperately in love with you. But, let me warn you, Clive-Gordon is a charming man in many ways, but his reputation for inconstancy is really—well, in London there are some very piquant stories about town. Still, a position such as his covers a multitude of sins."

"Lois!" cried Margaret, "I haven't made him love me. You—you must not say such things. Sir Lionel is not in love with me, and I certainly am not with him. Besides, he is your guest."

Mrs. Weatherby laughed disagreeably. "My guest," she answered. Well—I suppose he *was*. Nevertheless, when he was plain Lionel Vernon, before his brother died, there were some odd stories about him, from America and elsewhere. But let us go down or we shall be late," and having said what she had come to say, Mrs. Weatherby departed, leaving a very perplexed girl behind.

If only Lois had never come home, she thought; she had been so happy before—and the idea of accusing her of making Sir Lionel love her! Perhaps she had flirted a little, but only because Lois had taken Harry away, and she wanted to show she did not care. But, *did* she care?

She had expected some day to marry Dalton, as a matter of course. They had been sweethearts from childhood, and everything was so cut and dried that she had really thought little about it. But, since the arrival of her sister, and the big, quiet, self-contained Englishman, the matter had presented itself in a different and more important aspect. She had to care for Sir Lionel; but now, after what Lois had said, after practically being called a vulgar title-hunter, she felt, illogically enough, that she hated him—and every one else.

With a little shake of impatience, not unmingled with self-contempt, she turned from her mirror and went down to dinner.

III.

GENERAL HOLBROOK'S dinners were long and elaborate affairs, even though his daughter's recent loss limited the guests to a few intimate friends. He was accustomed to say that he had "fed" for many years in camp and mess, and frequently in the saddle, and now that he had the opportunity, he wanted to "dine" as often and formally as possible.

He was earnestly absorbed in a particularly fine partridge, which he had shot himself, when Margaret's voice recalled him to the present.

"What is your opinion, papa?" she asked, leaning forward and speaking nearly the length of the table.

"I agree with you," answered the general promptly. "I don't know what it is, my dear, but I certainly agree with you."

"We were discussing the new play," Mrs. Weatherby replied laughing. "Mr. Dalton says he can conceive circumstances under which a white woman might properly marry an Indian."

"Don't agree with you, Harry," said the general decisively. He had all the prejudice of the old Indian fighter. "'Only good Indian's a dead one.' Don't believe in mixing races, anyway. Not even Anglo-Saxon and Latin, let alone the others."

"But, don't a lot of men in the West marry Indian girls?" asked his daughter.

"Squaw men!" snapped the general contemptuously. "Yes, there are some of them—mostly low-down, shiftless fellows—what they call in the South 'poor white trash.'"

"But, sometimes the better class do, too," she persisted. "I've heard of gentlemen even who married squaws."

"Well, yes," admitted the general, "there have been such cases. Never knew them to turn out well, though. Knew of one in the Territory five years ago, just before I was retired. She was a pretty little thing, too, and better educated than most of them. Half-breed—father was a French Canadian trader,

though he had disappeared long before, and she lived with her tribe. She used to come over to the post selling beadwork and such stuff. The man was an Englishman, I'm sorry to say, and it was generally understood, the son of a nobleman, down there ranching or something; anyway, he married her—Indian fashion. Apparently it went along all right for a few months, and then one day he sent her over to the post on an errand, and when she returned their shack was nailed up and he'd gone."

"Oh, dad, what a shame!" cried Margaret indignantly. "What did she do?"

"It isn't a pleasant story, but it is trite enough. She stayed around the shack a few days; mostly sitting on the step where she could see a long way up the trail, with the persistent patience only an Indian has. She wouldn't let us break in for her—said he'd be mad when he came back—nor take her to her tribe nor the post. They would have been glad to have her at the married quarters—the children all loved her—but she just sat there and waited, and grew thinner and weaker, until the women decided she must come anyway; so one day they rode over to get her—but they were too late. She was wrapped in her blanket on the step—dead. There was a bullet in her head, and a little silver-mounted revolver the man had given her was clasped tightly in her hand."

In the silence that followed, Lois leaned forward.

"Do you know who the man was," she asked, "his name?"

"No one knows much about any one out there," replied the general. "He called himself Vernon."

"Vernon!" the exclamation was wrung from Margaret. Had not Lois just told her Sir Lionel's name had been Vernon? Involuntarily she looked at him; his face was flushed, and the expression of chagrin—annoyance—whatever it was, startled Margaret more, even, than the mention of the name, but in the comment on the general's story her confusion escaped all but Lois.

"Let me see," said the latter, addressing Clive-Gordon, but covertly watching her sister, "I believe you were in the Indian Territory about that time, Sir Lionel?"

To any one familiar with the baronet's family name—which neither the general nor his guests were—the inference was plain enough, and Margaret paled with anger and disgust at her sister's vindictive question; and, though she knew Lois's eyes were upon her, she looked straight at Sir Lionel, smilingly awaiting his denial.

But he hesitated, palpably embarrassed, and Margaret felt her heart grow numb with a sudden fear, and she saw the flicker of a contemptuous smile curve Lois's lips.

Clive-Gordon saw it, too, for the indication died out of his eyes suddenly and his face hardened. For the fraction of a second his eyes met Margaret's and held them, then he turned to Mrs. Weatherby: "I have never been in Indian Territory," he said coldly.

Mrs. Weatherby raised her eyebrows. "Indeed!" she replied sweetly, "I understood you were there at that time."

Sir Lionel's face burned a dull red. "You were misinformed," he answered shortly.

Just then, Mrs. Holbrook, quite unaware that she had chosen a psychological moment, gave the signal and the ladies withdrew.

IV.

AFTER a moment in the drawing-room Margaret slipped away to the library, and ensconced herself in the deep seat of the baywindow. She wanted to be alone and think.

It was evident that Lois had known the story of the Indian girl, and had purposely inveigled her father into telling it for her—Margaret's—benefit. But, if it were true, how then could Lois receive such a man as a guest in her father's house? On the other hand, if it were not true, and Lois, believing Sir Lionel loved her sister, had done it to separate them—why, Lois must love him herself, and, if so—what of Harry? Had she simply been playing with him for her own amusement?

Her speculations were interrupted by the entrance of Sir Lionel and Harry. They did not see Margaret in the deep, curtained window, and before she could announce her presence Dalton began to speak.

"I asked you to come here," he said, "because I happen to know that your family name is Vernon."

Sir Lionel threw away the cigar he had been smoking and lighted another deliberately.

"Yes?" he questioned quietly.

"The conclusion is obvious," answered Dalton, struggling to control his temper.

"I fail to see either that the conclusion is obvious—or the obvious conclusion," drawled Sir Lionel.

"Were there two young Englishmen in the Indian Territory at the same time?" asked Dalton sarcastically.

"It is possible," replied Sir Lionel quietly, "though not probable. That is not the point. I have said that I was not there."

Dalton laughed rather nastily. "Mrs. Weatherby says you were."

"I have said that Mrs. Weatherby was misinformed," retorted Sir Lionel, flushing angrily. "What is all this to you, Dalton? I don't want to quarrel with the general's guest, but you go rather far. I am Mrs. Weatherby's cousin; on what ground do you take this matter on your shoulders?"

"It was my duty, I know, to go to the general first," returned Dalton, "but I am afraid of his temper. He would very likely shoot you. But if you were ten times Mrs. Weatherby's cousin," he added fiercely, "do you think I could stand by and see a man who has done what you have in the home of my friends? Do you think I could see a silly girl, whose head has been turned perhaps by the glitter of your position, marry such a man?"

Clive-Gordon looked at him a moment, his eyes narrowing, then he strode over to where Dalton stood. "We will leave girls, silly or otherwise, out of this," he said incisively; "neither do I care to discuss the matter further with you," and he turned to leave the room.

But Dalton was not easily frightened. "You can't bluff me!" he cried, losing his temper entirely. "You know that you acknowledged to Mrs. Weatherby that you were the man. She told me so."

Sir Lionel paused. "Mrs. Weatherby is—mistaken," he said with finality.

Dalton leaped forward with upraised arm. "You scoundrel!" he snarled,

"do you mean to say Mrs. Weatherby lies?"

Sir Lionel caught his wrist in a grip few could resist, while Margaret, rushing from her hiding-place, flung herself between them, and at the same moment General Holbrook and Mrs. Weatherby appeared in the door.

"What is this? What is this?" roared the general, "Clive-Gordon! Dalton! What does this brawling in my house mean?"

"It means, sir," replied Dalton, pale and trembling with rage, "that this man is the one you were telling us of at dinner. He is Vernon."

"Vernon!" repeated the general, "Sir Lionel—Vernon! Dalton, have you been drinking too much wine?"

"Mr. Dalton is right," interrupted Mrs. Weatherby coolly, though she was very pale. "Sir Lionel admitted it to me long ago. I only allowed him to come here because—because he was my husband's cousin, and because I believed he was trying to live down the past."

Margaret, who had not released her hold on Sir Lionel's arm, turned fiercely on his accusers. "I don't believe either of you!" she cried, bravely facing them. "I—I—you *don't* believe them, dad?" and she fled to him in sudden confusion.

"I think they are both mad!" growled the general. "Do you think I wouldn't know Dick Vernon, even after five years, and without his beard. He was three inches—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Sir Lionel hastily. "Will you grant me a moment alone, general? I have—"

"No, I will not!" the general snapped. "You have been placed in an atrociously false position in my house, and I won't allow it. Dick Vernon was fully three inches shorter than Clive-Gordon," he continued, despite the baronet's protests, "and his hair was almost red; also, he had a three-cornered scar over his right eye that no one could mistake. Does that satisfy—What's the matter now?"

Mrs. Weatherby had uttered a sudden exclamation and started forward.

"Dick Vernon!" she cried, "Vernon? That was his mother's name; I never thought; a three-cornered scar! Lionel, did you know this all the time?"

"Yes," he answered simply.

"Why did you not tell me?" she asked fiercely. "Why did you take the blame?"

"I thought you loved him, and—I loved you—then."

She came and stood close before him, looking deep into his eyes.

"Then?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

He met her gaze steadily—coldly. "Then," he answered sternly.

With a harsh laugh she turned away.

"Well, who was he?" asked the general, testily.

Mrs. Weatherby hesitated a moment, then she drew herself up haughtily.

"My husband," she said bitterly, and swept toward the door.

Margaret, quick sympathy conquering all resentment, intercepted her. "Oh, Lois!" she said gently, "I am so sorry."

But her sister drew away. "Spare me your pity," she answered contemptuously, "I always hated the creature. I trust your experience with the English nobility will be more successful; as successful as your skill at angling deserves."

"Lois!" thundered the general.

"Oh, I will say nothing more," she continued airily. "Come on, Harry, I'll play you fifty points at billiards for a dollar a point; it will be your last chance, for I am leaving for London to-morrow. Heaven knows how I've stood these backwoods so long."

But Dalton hesitated. "I—I—" he stammered. "If you will pardon me a moment, I owe Sir Lionel an apology."

Clive-Gordon extended his hand. "Consider it offered and accepted," he said heartily.

Dalton took his hand in embarrassed silence, and hastily followed Mrs. Weatherby from the room, and, after a glance at Margaret and Sir Lionel, the general also slipped quietly away.

As the door closed, Clive-Gordon strode to the girl's side and, without a word, took her in his arms and held her fast.

"Let me go!" she gasped, struggling fiercely but futilely in that strong embrace. "Sir Lionel—how dare you! Let me go!"

"Neither now nor ever, my Margaret," he whispered very gently.

But she continued to struggle. "Let me go," she panted. "Do you think, that after what she said to me, after—"

"Listen, dear," he said softly, "I love you. It is the real love this time. And I will be bold. I will say we love each other, for there is no doubt in the real love. Shall we let the foolish words of

a selfish, disappointed woman, blight the real love, dear?"

She had ceased to struggle now. "You say there is no doubt in the real love?" she asked, without looking up.

"None," he answered tenderly.

Slowly she raised her eyes to his. "I—I have no doubt," she said.

WHOM SHE LOVED BEST.

BY JANE BELFIELD.

A SHORT STORY.



T is easy to discover which man the woman loves best." The King of the Scarabee Islands shifted his gaze from the blue sea shining above the broad coral reef, and sneeringly regarded his latest favorite. "Bring out the prisoners. Four—you said?"

"Four were shipwrecked, O king—the woman, a child, and two men."

"And the child is hers, but she will not tell which man is her husband?"

"She will not tell."

The king yawned. Not much entertainment for a white man to be captured by these savages and forced to be their chief! Twice he had attempted to escape and twice been ignominiously retaken. According to their laws—their stupid, unchangeable laws—the third attempt meant death.

II.

He glanced down the long rows of bamboo-trees whence his half-naked negroes led forward the group of white prisoners.

A woman, young and beautiful, held fast the hand of a blue-eyed boy.

A tall, fair man followed between two stalwart blacks.

Then another guard and another man, slight of build, dark of countenance.

The king beckoned to the woman, saying:

"I'm sorry for all of you—but—do you know their law?"

The woman strained hopefully forward. "You are not—"

"One of them? No—but I am their prisoner as much as you are. Shipwrecked—saved because I practised a little easy magic to fool them! I'm still clothed in purple and fine linen, you see." The King of the Scarabee Islands spread out his skirt of woven grasses.

"Can you not save us?" she implored wildly.

The king shook his head. "Two of you. They do not kill women—unless by request. This is their ancient law. You may live, and the one you love best also may live. I will put you both on the first ship that passes this most detestable spot."

The woman knelt and clasped the boy. Over his head her eyes strained despairingly toward the two men who stood calmly regarding her.

For an instant the eyes of the taller left hers and lingered upon the boy's yellow curls.

III.

Two natives with knotted clubs stepped forward. The king rose. His gaze swept the multitude of dark faces.

He hesitated—no—his interference would but change those stolid countenances to instant fury.

"She chooses the boy," he said.

The blacks seized the tall, fair prisoner.

"No!" the woman shrieked. "No—not him! You have another law—the king's counselor told me—you dare not refuse a life for a life! I choose the child, but I claim the right to die in place of this man." She stretched out her hand toward the captive whose hair was golden as the boy's. "No! no! Do not listen to him. Guard the prisoner! You who are chief here—you dare not refuse. It is your law—your unchangeable law!"

The woman whispered in the boy's ear and thrust his hand into the hand of the tall, fair man who struggled vainly with his captors in desperate protest.

"Take them away! Take them away!"

the king commanded. "This man and the boy are free!"

IV.

THE woman smiled and turned her face toward the other prisoner—slight of build, dark of countenance.

The executioners bound them together.

"I die," she murmured low, "with you!"

At even, the King of the Scarabee Islands listened moodily to the swish of the bamboo-trees.

"Which man did the woman love best, O king?"

The King of the Scarabee Islands silently regarded his latest favorite in the glow of the moon.

AN AMERICAN KNIGHT ERRANT.

BY EDWARD BEDINGER MITCHELL.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER I.

AN ODD LEGACY.



PUSHED my empty cup of coffee to one side, laid down my cigarette, and drew the troublesome letter from my pocket. All the evening I had been puzzling over it, as I sat at the little café table, watching the life of the boulevards pass before me, and the solution of the problem was as far away as ever. For the fifth time I read:

RONALD LAMPTON, ESQ.,
No. 4 Rue Racine,
Paris.

SIR:

I write to inform you that, on July 1, my term of residence as a pupil at the convent will have expired.

Thanks to the generosity and care of your uncle, I have received an excellent education and it is now time that I should cease to be a burden to you. I plan to secure a position as governess and thus to

make for myself, if possible, a place in the world.

Believe me, Mr. Lampton, I am deeply grateful to you for your kindness in the past. Save yourself and the sisters in the convent. I know of no friend that I have in the world.

Yours very sincerely,

DORIS REVERE.

"Grateful for all my kindness!" I muttered; "why, I've never even seen the girl! All I've done is to pay the bills, and Heaven knows my uncle left me enough to take that little trouble."

I wished he had forgotten to leave me this other legacy. I could spend his money, but I did not know how to look after his ward.

How was I, a young man of twenty-seven, to take care of a girl of twenty I had never laid eyes on, and of whom I knew next to nothing?

Fifteen years before, my uncle, returning from the East, had brought with him a little girl. Who she was he never told me. He was always a reserved man—

the keeper, one fancied, of many persons' secrets—but in his will were these words:

To my only nephew, Ronald Lampton, I bequeath the rest of my possessions and the duty of guarding my ward, Doris Revere.

It had been no onerous task in the past. She was happy in the convent in which my uncle had placed her. As far as my experience went, she had always been there, and there seemed to be no good reason why she should not always stay there. But now—a governess! Something would have to be done, that was clear.

The vague gropings of my mind after the elusive something were suddenly disturbed by a rap on the head.

I turned to find myself looking into a pair of piercing black eyes.

"I beg your pardon," said their owner with cold politeness. "I was extremely clumsy with my stick. The waiter crowded me."

Though he spoke in excellent French, I knew at once that he was no Frenchman. Heavy black eyebrows, high cheek bones, an aquiline nose and a commanding jaw lent to his tall, spare form an air of distinction utterly lacking in the boulevardiers who surrounded us, and as he moved to the next table I observed him with interest. For the moment the perplexing case of Doris Revere was forgotten in my study of a type new to me.

There were others besides myself who found the stranger interesting. He had scarcely given his order to the waiter when two burly men squeezed past me and planted themselves at a near-by table. I have no pretensions to skill as an amateur detective, but I was too familiar with Paris to be deceived by the clothes of the newcomers. They were not of the class who frequent such a café, nor was it the glass of cognac they ordered which had brought them there.

Probably it was the unbroken silence in which they sipped the *liqueur* which drew my attention more than the occasional glance they threw at the stranger. But if their taciturnity was unusual, it was also monotonous, and I had resumed the consideration of the letter lying before me, when a sudden movement on the part of the two once more banished all thought of Doris Revere.

Every muscle of their bodies was rigid with attention, and one of them hitched his chair a little nearer the stranger's table. As he did so he stamped upon his companion's foot.

A vender of wax matches was approaching—an insignificant enough fellow, even more ragged than most of his calling. Apparently, the misery of the man aroused the compassion of the stranger, for not only did he buy enough matches to last the most inordinate smoker a week, but he condescended to question the man.

"Back of the Palais Royal, *monsieur*," came to my ears, and the pedler passed on his way.

A minute later, the stranger rose and sauntered off. The same instant the long silence at the other table came to an end.

"Back of the Palais Royal—you heard?" growled the shorter of the two.

"It's the old place. I know it. We can get him in the gateway," his companion answered.

"Not so loud, you fool!" snapped the other. "Do you want all Paris to hear?"

The second fellow glanced at me with an evil sneer. "Pah, American! Tourist! What does he know? But let's be out of this."

Even after all these years, I am ashamed to confess that for a moment I sat uncertain, watching them cross the boulevard and stride down the Avenue de l'Opéra. What did I have to do with the schemes of the Paris underworld? If I carried my tale to the police, they would laugh at me for a dreaming eavesdropper, and even if I could persuade them to act, "back of the Palais Royal" was vague information.

And if I did not call the police? Why should I risk my neck for an unknown who might be anything, and certainly was on odd terms with a most unprepossessing pedler. All that I had had from him was a rap on the head; and if I interfered now, I was in a fair way to be far worse treated by his enemies.

For a moment, I say, I hesitated—then the spirit of adventure thrilled in my veins suddenly. I jumped to my feet and hurried down the Avenue de l'Opéra.

Between an ordinary cane and a loaded

night-stick there is little difference in appearance; that is one reason why the latter is so useful a possession. The gendarme I passed on the corner did not bestow a glance on the plain black stick I swung in my right hand, but my fist tightened in satisfaction over its hidden steel rings when I caught sight of my two conspirators and slackened my pace to keep well behind them. My uncle had tested the strength of that stick more than once in the wild regions of the East, where he had made his fortune. Short of firearms, the men ahead could have nothing more formidable, and I doubted if they would use revolvers. In a crowded city shooting is a noisy, conspicuous business.

While we remained on the Avenue de l'Opéra the quarry was easy to keep in view. Once or twice I fancied one of them looked back; but, late as it was, too much of Paris was still abroad for a casual glance to have singled me out in the throng. And even if ill luck had betrayed me, the street was a favorite one for the despised tourist. The guiltiest conscience could find nothing suspicious in my walking on the Avenue de l'Opéra.

But when we turned to the left and the chase led through a labyrinth of side streets, it behooved me to move with caution. My footsteps echoed loudly on the deserted pavements: I was no longer shielded by a friendly throng of strangers. When I passed under the street lamps I stood out naked and alone from the surrounding blackness.

There was no help for it, and I fell back to a safe distance. To put the men on their guard would in the end be as disastrous as to lose sight of them altogether. Of this, indeed, there seemed every probability. Whether the dim shadows in the darkness in front of me were the creation of my imagination, or true reports from my straining eyes, I was never certain, and only the narrow circles of light, thrown from lamps at longer and longer intervals, assured me that I was still on the right trail.

The end came as I had feared. I watched them pass under one lamp; and then, from my place well in the rear, waited for them to reappear in the light of the next corner.

I waited in vain. The sound of the footsteps of the last of the belated walkers I had encountered died away in the distance, and the silence of the grave suddenly fell upon the narrow street.

I looked about me in anger and disgust. It was a decent enough neighborhood, but at that moment I should have preferred a teeming slum. No lights shone in the buildings about me, constructed like most Paris houses, around a small courtyard, entered by a long, arched passageway.

I glanced into the black depths of the one nearest me, and the words I had heard in the café rang in my ears:

"It's the old place. We can get him in the gateway."

In one of these traps the men were waiting—but which one? I could ascertain, I knew, by the simple process of poking my head into them all in succession. A smash with a bludgeon would tell me when I had come upon the right one. They would "get" me as well as the tall stranger of the café.

I was standing irresolute in the darkness, clutching my night-stick, when the distant rattle of a cab attracted my attention. Any sound was welcome, and I waited expectantly. If the god of good luck sent it through my street, I might at least be able to send the cabman for the police, while I remained on guard.

Nearer and nearer came the cab, until at last it turned the corner I had expected the men to pass, and rolled toward me. I had barely time to see that it held one passenger, when it drew up abruptly and a man alighted from it.

He must have had the fare in his hand, for with hardly a second's delay the cabbie wheeled about and was gone the way he had come, the clatter of hoofs and wheels drowning the sound of my running.

I had almost reached the newcomer—he stood with his back turned to me, apparently watching the cabman safely round the corner—when he turned and dashed into the abyss of an archway. Even in my hurry, I was amazed at the speed with which he darted into the cavernous entrance to the courtyard. That was no way for an orderly citizen to enter his own or any one's house.

A second later there came from out the darkness of the passage a crash as of two bodies falling heavily, a smothered oath and the sound of blows.

Grasping my loaded stick, I ran into the archway. A dim light, coming from the courtyard, revealed at the farther end of the passage a tangle of black forms, which I took to be men. For a brief instant I paused, uncertain which was friend and which foe; and in that moment a man shook himself free, rose to his feet, and staggered into the courtyard.

He did not get far. His assailants were on him again in a flash, and before I could so much as raise my stick he was down.

This time I did not hesitate. One blow stretched the nearer of the ruffians on the pavement of the court—the other was too quick for me.

Warned by his comrade's fall, he sprang to his feet and grappled with me, wrenching my stick from my hand. He was a powerful man, but for a time I held my own. Then he tore one arm free, and, finding his opportunity, dealt me a stunning blow on the mouth. As my grip relaxed, he broke clear away, fled into the passageway and vanished.

CHAPTER II.

A SUDDEN INVITATION.

"MONSIEUR, I am vastly indebted to you."

It was the stranger of the café who spoke, standing beside me in the little courtyard.

"You are not hurt, I trust?" His face was covered with blood from a cut in his forehead, but he spoke with the same quiet assurance—the same calm courtesy which had marked him in the café.

I pulled myself together, for the blow had been a hard one, and looked about me. The fellow I had struck lay where he had dropped, a short bludgeon close by his hand. Not far away was a black-jack. For any sign of interest in the proceedings that came from the building about us attempts at murder might have been part of the daily routine of its inhabitants.

"It was a tight squeeze," he went on. "If you had not come up, I think they would have killed me. As it is"—he shrugged his shoulders slightly—"as it is, you appear to have done for at least one of them."

"I hope the man's not dead," I cried. "I have no wish to kill a man."

"Nor to let others kill one," returned my unknown friend; "a taste for which, I assure you, I am deeply grateful. But what brings you here?" He frowned a trifle, and his black eyes narrowed as he looked at me sharply. "It is somewhat unusual to see travelers in this vicinity so late."

"As a matter of fact," I replied, "I am a student, not a tourist. But what brings me here is the fact that I chanced to be at the café earlier in the evening."

Very briefly I told him of the two men, of my suspicions, and of how they had been verified. He eyed me closely as I talked, and I fancied his brow cleared a little at the end.

"Ah!" he said when I had finished. "Well, I believe you."

"You believe me!" I cried hotly, astounded at the unexpected insult. "What—"

"Your pardon, *monsieur*; your pardon," he interrupted. "I have already said I was indebted to you. I have no intention of paying my debts with insults, but there are many things to think of. For instance, there is this—" He touched the man on the ground contemptuously with the toe of his shoe. "You see he is not dead. He has moved while we were talking. You need not have feared—he is not of the kind that dies easily."

"We must call the police," I said. "I will see if I can find a gendarme."

"Pardon, *monsieur*; why the police?" The tone was as suave and even as ever; but the eyes were stern, and beneath its mantle of blood I could see the set lines of the face.

"In the first place," I retorted, "the man is a ruffian, and ought to be locked up. In the next place, he may die if he does not receive proper treatment at once."

"My imagination can conceive of greater calamities," returned the stranger dryly, "but your humanity does you

credit. The man shall not die. Will you have the kindness to remain here a moment?"

He crossed the courtyard, with a big key opened one of the several doors that gave upon it, and disappeared into the silent house.

Hardly knowing why, I remained there by the side of the stricken man. My duty was obvious. I should have summoned the police, told my story, and washed my hands of the whole affair. The stranger I had rescued was nothing to me. Indeed, his obvious determination not to call the attention of the authorities to the affair was a circumstance too suspicious to be ignored. There was little reason for me to cultivate the acquaintance of an individual so reluctant to make that of the law.

As clearly as I do now, I perceived all this, standing in the quiet yard, awaiting I knew not what; but I did not stir. Curiosity is stronger than logic, and the stranger's manner had fascinated me. His record might be as black as his eyes, but I would learn more of it. That was a prospect more to my taste than detention by the police as a witness, and quite possibly as a suspicious character.

I had reached this point in my reflections, when the man at my feet rolled over with a groan and sat up, blinking his eyes uncertainly at me in the dim light of the oil lamp which lighted the court. The heavy jaw, low forehead, and small eyes were even more repulsive now than when I had first seen them in the café. Despite the comparative excellence of his clothes, ruffian was written all over the fellow.

He must have become accustomed to hard knocks in the course of an unsavory life, for now he appeared to be suffering from nothing more serious than bewilderment. I picked up my stick and leaned over him.

"Are you hurt?" I demanded.

"Hurt!" he muttered stupidly, rubbing his head over his head. "Somebody must have hit me. Where's Jean? Did we get him?"

"I hit you," said I, "and you didn't get him. We got you."

He looked at me in a dazed way and continued to rub his head. Plainly there was no fight left in him.

The door through which the stranger had vanished opened again, and he reappeared, followed by two men. I gazed on them in astonishment. One was the pedler of wax matches I had seen at the café, as ragged and disreputable as ever.

The other was a small, well-dressed individual who walked briskly, in contrast to the shuffling, weary gait of his companion. His features I could not distinguish, for a soft hat was pulled down on his eyes, and he held a handkerchief over the lower portion of his face.

I was not long left in doubt as to the object of the newcomers. While the pedler remained at a respectful distance, the small man advanced directly to the prisoner—for such in reality he was—and bent over him for a few moments. Then he straightened himself and turned to the stranger.

"There is nothing the matter," he said decisively. "I should suggest that you turn him out without further delay."

The stranger nodded. "See that he does not hang about here," he said to the pedler.

Assisted none too gently by the man of rags, the prisoner rose unsteadily to his feet and moved slowly off through the passageway to the street, his guard shuffling behind him. No one consulted me.

But by this time blank wonder had taken the place of thought in my bewildered brain. Had they chosen to deliver all the jails of Paris, I do not think I should have protested.

Nevertheless, one gleam of common sense remained to tell me that the sooner I was off the better. A chance neighbor at a café who was waylaid by ruffians and refused the aid of the police, a dilapidated vender of matches, and a masked unknown were undesirable society in the middle of the night.

Moreover, I was beginning to feel somewhat piqued. Though it had never before fallen to my lot to save a man's life and the etiquette of the situation was unfamiliar, it seemed to me that my services were not receiving the recognition one might reasonably expect.

The halting footsteps of the defeated ruffian and his strange companion were still audible when my mysterious friend

of the café turned to me as if he had divined my thoughts. Some one had found time to wash away the blood and to bandage roughly the wound on his forehead. His face was pale, but beneath the white linen his black eyes blazed as brightly as ever.

"*Monsieur*," he began, with a polite bow, "I have treated you somewhat cavalierly, and I now offer you my apologies. My name is Michael Kara. May I ask to whom I am indebted very probably for my life?"

"I am Ronald Lampton, an American, of New York," I answered: "Any one would have done the same under the circumstances."

"Possibly," remarked Kara, "though I have not always found it so. But you must be tired. Let me offer you something within."

He took a step toward the door, but the small man seized his arm.

"There is no time for such empty courtesies," he said, speaking very rapidly. "There were two of them. Where is the other? How long will it be before he is back with the whole pack at his heels? Do you fancy we are through with the business because chance has sent us this young gentleman?"

Kara stopped and faced the excited little man.

"You are right, Cleon," he said thoughtfully. "You are always right. This is no place for me. I will get the box and we will go—where I don't know. While I am gone, you might solve that problem for me as you have solved so many others."

He crossed the courtyard and disappeared once more within the door. The man he had called Cleon mopped his face with the handkerchief he still held before it, taking a few steps back and forth like one in sore perplexity.

"Pig of a wound!" I heard him mutter. "If it were not for that—"

The rest, if there was any more, was lost in his handkerchief as he turned his back on me. Up and down he marched, his head bent low in thought. Even in the dim light of the courtyard I noticed how large it was in proportion to his body, and that the hand which held the handkerchief was both finely formed and strong.

He was almost opposite me, when inspiration came.

"Sent by chance!" he cried in a low voice. "It may well be!"

He wheeled about and placed his face close to mine, looking me directly and eagerly in the eye.

"*Monsieur*, you have done us a great service to-night. Are you disposed to do us another?"

"If it is in my power," I answered somewhat coldly.

Kara's lean, broad form and dark, commanding face had fascinated me from the outset; but the nervous little man with the handkerchief-mask in front of me was a different proposition.

"You are not married?"

"No," I said more slowly than before.

What on earth did he want? I was willing enough to save a man's life, though I was rewarded with but hurried gratitude; but when it came to choosing a wife, I would please myself.

"And you have rooms of your own in the city?" my catechist continued, ignoring the tone of my reply.

"Yes."

"Then take Mr. Kara to them and keep him there a while."

In open-mouthed astonishment I gaped at the man. This was a pretty request to make of a total stranger. With something of an effort I gathered my wits and my dignity together and answered:

"I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, *monsieur*, and of Mr. Kara I know nothing but his name. You will pardon me if I add that the circumstances in which I find you do not insure unlimited confidence. Masks and mysteries are well enough to read of. I do not care for them in my own quarters. Will you be good enough to tell me why I should take Mr. Kara to my rooms?"

"That is impossible, I fear." Kara had joined us, a small paper parcel, looking singularly like a box of crackers from a corner grocery, under his arm. "However, Mr. Lampton need not take us entirely without recommendations. Show him our references, Cleon." He spoke with the suave calmness with which he had faced all the events of the night, but the sarcasm of the last words was too apparent to be missed.

"It is true—I spoke hastily," said his companion. "Though Mr. Lampton has never met me, he may have heard my name." He stuffed the handkerchief in his pocket and took off his hat. "I am Dr. Cleon Menon, of the Ecole de Médecine."

It was true. Before me I saw the finely chiseled features of the greatest surgeon France had known in many years. There was no possibility of mistaking that high, bulging forehead, long, straight nose and protruding jaw. Even the strong hands I had already noticed cried aloud the identity of their owner. Heard of him! Why, Dr. Cleon Menon was a sight cabmen pointed out to visitors like the Arc de Triomphe.

A moment they allowed me to recover from my astonishment. Then Kara took up the conversation.

"You see, *monsieur*, you are not in altogether disreputable society. It is a great favor that my friend asks of you in my behalf; but I assure you that, although it may cause you some inconvenience, the good it will do is too great to be lightly thrown aside. Dr. Menon's reputation will convince you that your spoons, at least, will be secure during my stay."

In utter bewilderment I gazed at the tall, broad figure before me, at the man who could apparently command the services of high and low alike; who one minute received important messages from a tatterdemalion of the streets, and the next summoned to his aid a scientist the whole city delighted to honor; who asked shelter from a stranger, and asked it as if he were conferring a favor.

After all, why should he not come? I was not likely to find a better use for my rooms than the sheltering of Michael Kara.

"Come," I said. "I live across the river, in the Rue Racine. I will take you there."

CHAPTER III.

A NEWSPAPER SENSATION.

VARIOUS legacies bequeathed me by my uncle, I believe, I have already mentioned—a comfortable fortune which, with the assistance of an Eastern

import business—now conducted by an able and honest manager—gave me far more money than I needed; the loaded stick with which I had gone to the rescue of Michael Kara, and the guardianship of Doris Revere. He had also left me something less tangible, namely, a deep-rooted aversion to the asking of questions.

"A man's business is his own," he was wont to declare. "Let him have it to himself."

Much of his time had been spent in the East, and, although the calm of the Orient had exerted little perceptible influence upon his own choleric temper, he had acquired to a marked degree the impenetrable reserve of the East. If he asked no impertinent questions himself, he suffered none to be asked of him. Indeed, his unorthodox opinions on the subject of curiosity were sometimes expressed with a vigor which was startling.

In the days that followed my meeting with Kara I needed all the training I had received from my uncle. Every hour of the day a question was in my mouth, and only with the greatest difficulty did I choke it down unasked. In consequence, I am still in doubt as to which one of the various ways of suppressing inquisitive idiots my guest would have selected, had I yielded to temptation; but, as I look back upon that time now, I am glad I did not learn.

Invariably courteous and gifted with a charm of manner which Nature bestows on few, there was that about my guest which forbade all intrusion. Of himself he volunteered no word whatsoever; and as I had the good taste and the good sense to respect his wishes, he remained enveloped in the same mystery in which I had first beheld him.

Within an hour of the time when I had ushered him into my rooms he had taken to his bed, and there he remained for several days. The wound he had received in the scuffle was more serious than he had at first supposed. Dr. Menon, who visited us once or twice, announced that a few days' rest would do him no harm.

"My friend is a strong man," the surgeon told me, "but even the strongest need rest. He has been somewhat fatigued lately."

I was not greatly surprised at the information; but, as Menon appeared to think that he had been quite communicative enough, I did not press the subject. Instead, I devoted myself to arrangements for my guest's comfort and to the enjoyment of my friend's society, for a friend I very soon came to consider him.

Never before had I met so entertaining a man. In every subject but Michael Kara he appeared to take a lively interest, and on the great majority he was far better informed than I. So universal, indeed, were his interests, so cosmopolitan his knowledge of men and manners that, search as I might, I could discover in his conversation no clue to his identity, or even to his nationality.

At last I gave my tortured mind some relief by determining that he must come from Hungary. That being a country I had never visited, men like Michael Kara might, for all I knew, be the natural product of its soil.

Only once did he allude to the scene which had brought me his acquaintance. It was at dusk, I remember, of the day when he left his bed for the first time, and we were awaiting the arrival of the *concierge* with the dinner I had ordered. Sauntering to the window, Kara glanced for a second into the shadows of the street beneath.

"The door of this house opens directly on the street, I am glad to see," he said, turning back. "I have little love for dark archways."

"If you have the same experience in all, I can hardly wonder," I answered. "I noticed you started to go through one of them rather fast."

"They are poor places for protracted meditation," he said with a little laugh. "It was fortunate I did not linger in the one in which you found me. I struck one of those fellows before he had time to hit me. He was almost as much surprised as I, I fancy, when I bowled him over."

What further information he might have vouchsafed I do not know; for he was interrupted by a knock on the door, and the *concierge* entered with our dinner. Close on her heels came, unannounced, a visitor whom at another time I might have been glad to see. At

the moment I regarded him with secret disfavor.

"Hallo, Ronald," he cried, advancing with outstretched hand. "I'm back, you see. Too blamed slow poking around musty picture galleries in Italy. Paris is the place for me."

I shook hands with him and introduced him to Kara, inwardly smiling at the contrast.

Tom Rawlins I had known all my life—or, rather, all his life—for he was some six years younger than I. He was a cheerful soul, as discreet as the four winds of heaven, endowed with an extraordinary capacity for blunders and an equal capacity for ignoring them. Fortunately, I was not the young man's guardian. Nevertheless, I was aware that in all probability his visit to Paris had been made possible only by his family's somewhat unfounded belief that I had attained to years of discretion.

"Won't you join us?" I said, indicating the frugal meal on the table. Nothing could be less to his taste, I knew, but something had to be done with the boy.

He glanced at the tray, his thoughts written plain on his face:

"Oh, thanks; but you dine with me at a restaurant—you and Mr. Kara. That's a bully place. What do you want to stay in this lonely hole for?"

"Mr. Lampton has been kind enough to entertain me," put in Kara. "As a temporary invalid, lonely holes suit me better than the splendors of the restaurants. But now that he has more interesting company, I cannot keep him secluded longer."

There was a gleam of amusement in the deep-set black eyes which did not altogether escape even the irresponsible Rawlins. He flushed a trifle, mentally floundered about, and finally blurted out:

"Oh, I see. That's a beast of a crash on the head you've got. You and Ronald must have been getting into trouble."

It suddenly occurred to me that this youth might be better employed enjoying himself on the boulevards than in speculating on the history of Michael Kara. The elders of the Rawlins family did not appreciate the existence of romance in modern life. Moreover, when they

disapproved of anything, the world became speedily aware of it. Much the same thought came to Kara.

"Pray don't let me spoil a pleasant evening with your friend," he said, ignoring Tom's solicitude. "Is it not growing late for dinner?"

Without further delay, I seized my hat and stick, and piloted Tom from the room and into a cab.

"Queer chap, that Kara," he remarked as we drove off. "Where did you pick him up, Ronald?"

"He's an old friend," I lied bravely. "And now tell me of your father and mother."

For the rest of that drive my interest in the doings of the Rawlins family was so intense that poor Tom was hard put to it to keep up with my questions.

Once we were established at our table, I had no further anxiety. The problem of ordering dinner, the choice of the wine—the boy did not know *Romanée Conti* from *vin ordinaire*; but he liked to think he did—the music, the glitter of the life about him, drove all thought of the somber Kara from his head. We had advanced with great satisfaction through the fish, and were watching the *maitre d'hôtel* in the manufacture of that most delectable of Parisian specialties, *canard Rouennais*, when I chanced to glance at the newspaper I had purchased.

My eye fell at once upon some headlines unusually large for a French journal:

DR. MENON ROBBED.

House of the Famous Surgeon Riffled by Burglars. Police Mystified.

My cry of surprise startled Rawlins.

Even the *maitre d'hôtel* paused in his operations and looked up at me.

"What's up now?" Tom asked.

"Dr. Menon's robbed," I replied without thinking, "and nothing of value was taken."

"Well, that's lucky for Menon, whoever he may be; but it is not half so important to me as this duck. Why doesn't the fellow go on with it?"

I dropped the newspaper and pulled myself together.

Of course, Tom Rawlins knew nothing and cared nothing about Dr. Menon, and he was the last person with whom I

cared to discuss the subject. Nevertheless, it was all very strange. Thinking that I would show the article to Kara in the morning, I stuffed the newspaper in my pocket.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PEDLER'S WARNING.

"SAY," said Rawlins again, "what's that man doing now? That duck will be ruined if he doesn't quit staring at you and attend to his business."

I glanced up to catch the eye of the *maitre d'hôtel* fixed on me. He turned at once to his task, while Rawlins, relieved of anxiety for the fate of his delicacy, plunged into a lengthy harangue on the stupidity of Italy. I did my best to appear interested; but it was hard work, and I gave an inward sigh of relief when the duck, in all its finished glory, was at length placed upon the table. For some minutes thereafter Tom had no leisure for what he was pleased to consider conversation.

He was still busy with his knife and fork, when the head waiter ushered to a near-by table a really beautiful woman.

With her light hair parted in the center and dressed low over her ears; with large, mild blue eyes and a graceful figure, magnificently gowned in blue, her loveliness was emphasized by the unattractive aspect of her escort. Save for an unusually fine physique, he bore all the marks of the Paris *roué*. The cut of his evening clothes was a little exaggerated, his black mustache a little too carefully curled; the lines of the thin-lipped, cruel mouth beneath it were those of a gambler's, and about the heavy eyes crow's-feet had thickly gathered.

We had no lack of opportunity to study the new arrivals. For a restaurant with a world-wide reputation, the service that night was deplorable. Having deposited our duck upon the table, both the *maitre d'hôtel* and his satellites lost all interest in us. Sarcasm, peremptory commands, and abuse were alike powerless to hasten their movements.

To add to my irritation, it was obvious that the attention we lacked was being bestowed upon our neighbors.

Whatever they ordered—and it was chiefly wine—was forthcoming at once.

Indeed, so assiduous was the head waiter that by the time we had at length dragged our coffee from the hands of a reluctant *garçon*, the man had advanced some distance on the road to intoxication. His sallow face now bore a slight flush, he gesticulated freely, and his voice occasionally rose so high that it attracted the attention of the few diners who remained in the room.

As the hour for the theaters came and passed, the restaurant grew more and more deserted, until in our vicinity there was no one left but ourselves and the two who had so successfully monopolized the attention of the waiters. The man ordered more champagne, and Rawlins, supremely happy with a *liqueur* and the excellent cigar I had given him, regaled me with an account of his past actions and future aspirations, which promised to last indefinitely.

He decided at length that he had talked enough of himself.

"And when are you coming home, Ronald?" he asked. "You've been abroad more than two years."

"Very soon," I answered. "I have a ward to look after, you know."

I took Doris's letter from the pocket in which I carried it in the hope that frequent contemplation might ultimately bring inspiration, and showed it to him. In some way yet to be determined I was resolved that Doris should be introduced to the world of New York that I knew, and the social influence of the Rawlins family was not to be despised.

"It's a rum go," remarked the young man as he handed it back. "Tell me some more about it."

But I had no chance. At that moment the quarrel which had been in progress at the adjacent table for some minutes reached an abrupt climax.

With a cry of anger that drew all eyes to her, the woman half rose from her chair and leaned across the table. The man eyed her evilly for a second.

"You think you will, eh?" he growled. "Well, I think you won't. Take that, curse you!"

Deliberately the brute raised his hand and slapped her heavily on the cheek, knocking her back into her chair, a large

splotch of crimson marking the spot where the blow had fallen.

The woman's scream of terror was still ringing through the room, when I was upon the man. Seizing him by the collar, I jerked him to his feet. He aimed a wild swing at me, but it merely grazed my head. Then my fist struck him full between the eyes, and he went down.

The place was in an uproar. From the few tables that were still occupied came a chorus of feminine screams; a horde of waiters buzzed aimlessly about; and over the figure of the coward I had punished, as he slunk slowly to his feet, I beheld the advancing form of the proprietor.

"What have we here?" he cried, confronting me angrily. "Do you think this a grog-shop, *monsieur*, that you can knock down gentlemen with impunity? I will call the police. I will have you arrested."

"You can do what you like and be hanged to you!" I retorted. "The fellow's a brute, and he got only half what he deserved. If he is the kind of customer you serve, you will not have decent people here long."

"The gentleman is right, *monsieur le propriétaire*." The head waiter pushed through the circle about me and faced his chief. "The gentleman is quite right. The other is a scoundrel, he is drunk, he is a pig. Be off with you!" he added fiercely.

Carried away by the excess of his emotions, he directed a kick at the shins of my late adversary. Though it fell short of its goal, that individual waited for no more. Picking up his hat and coat, he unceremoniously effaced himself from the scene.

With him vanished the storm. Some voluble explanations on the part of my unexpected ally, the head waiter, restored to the proprietor his habitual suavity. Apologizing to me, he sent the waiters about their business, and I turned to see what had become of the cause of the disturbance.

I found her seated in a chair. Rawlins was by her side, administering champagne and attempting to console her in execrable French.

Bad as it was, it seemed to serve its

purpose, for she greeted me with a smile instead of the hysterics I had feared.

"*Monsieur* is very gallant," she murmured. "I blame myself a thousand times. Such a frightful man! Why did I ever dine with him? Permit me to offer *monsieur* a glass of champagne, and then I will leave the wretched place. Ah, if it had not been for *monsieur*!"

The idea of knocking a man down and then drinking his wine did not appeal to me, and I moved aside the glass the head waiter, now become attention itself, placed before me.

I ordered him to bring us our bill. At the word the lady in blue clapped her hands together with a little cry of distress:

"Oh, the coward! Now, what shall I do? He has left me no money. I cannot pay, and I will be arrested."

"*Madame* will permit. It will be a pleasure." Rawlins thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out some gold.

Monsieur was too good. She could not consent to accept such kindness. As a loan, yes; but we must promise to drive with her to her apartment, where she would repay us at once.

Rawlins spluttered about in the endeavor, I took it, to declare that, while the money was a trifle, he could not think of permitting her to find her way home alone. In the course of time the checks were paid, the head waiter had bowed us into a cab, and we were driving up the Champs Elysées.

To Tom, I fancy, that drive was a delightful one. He was in Paris, the home of gaiety and romance; he had assisted in the rescue of a distressed damsel; and now he was being rewarded by the smiles and gratitude of a woman to whose beauty a far less susceptible person than Tom Rawlins could not have been blind.

But for me there were other things to think of than the blue eyes and fair face of my companion. While we were waiting on the sidewalk for the cab, I had been jostled by a pedler of wax matches—jostled so rudely that the head waiter had turned on the fellow and driven him off with loud objurgations.

And when, seated in the carriage. I thrust my hand into my pocket, I found there a box of matches. Under pretense of looking at my watch, I struck

one and examined the box. On the white cover was scrawled one word:

"*Danger!*"

CHAPTER V.

MME. LECOMPTE'S CIGARETTES.

WE drew up in front of a handsome apartment-house in a quiet side street not far from the Arc de Triomphe. Mme. Julie Lecompte, it appeared, was the name of the lady we had assisted, and she occupied half the second floor. An eminently correct maid opened the door for us, and we were ushered into a sitting-room which equaled in good taste the beauty of its tenant.

A small fire crackled on the hearth. The floor was covered with rugs, which I knew at a glance were genuine products of Samarcand and Bokhara, and the walls were lined with pictures of value. A pleasanter apartment, I believe, was not to be found in all Paris. Whatever danger the ubiquitous pedler had foreseen was hidden from my eyes.

"Claire will bring us coffee and liqueurs," said *madame*, throwing aside her wrap and sinking into a comfortable chair before the fire. "You must not think of leaving at once."

It was quite obvious that Rawlins entertained no such thought. Without further pressing, he established himself on the other side of the hearth, laboring zealously, if not fluently, with the problem of conversation. When she repaid him for his expenditure in her behalf in the café, he even murmured something inane about refusing to spend the gold which had brought him so delightful an evening.

Claire's arrival with a tray of coffee drew from the young man another burst of enthusiasm. It was Turkish coffee, was it not? Of all peoples, the Turks alone possessed the true secret of making coffee. And of all cordials, the apricot brandy, which he was then sipping, was the most delicious. There was about it the fragrance of a southern garden, an aroma, a bouquet—

Assisted by an occasional word from *madame*, he became positively eloquent. Then he observed that I was not touching anything, and came back to earth.

"What's the matter, Ronald?" he asked. "You're missing a lot. It's awfully good—a great deal better than what you and that Kara fellow were sitting down to when I dragged you out. You never told me who he is, by the way."

"You know, *madame*," he turned back to his hostess; "you know, I arrive in Paris and find my old friend here living with a most extraordinary person—a fellow who just stands and looks at you. He has a big cut on the side of his head, too; I think he and my friend must have been fighting the police. They need watching, I say."

"Tom, look out for the cup!" I sprang forward as if to save one of the fragile cups from the gesticulating arm of the young idiot.

Why must he undertake to trumpet my affairs over Paris? Would he never acquire the elements of intelligence?

Madame glanced at me quickly with a curious expression, which vanished as suddenly as it had come. My clumsy maneuver had not deceived her.

"*Monsieur* is quick," she remarked, indicating the rescued cup, though I doubt if it was of that she was thinking. "But it is true—you take nothing. Possibly you do not care for *café à la turque*?"

Turkish coffee was well enough, but a wild thought had entered my brain. Somewhere there was danger. What if it lay in that cup before me? The pedler had tried to warn me against some one. Could he have meant *Mme. Julie Lecompte*?

I glanced at the delicate face of my hostess, almost classic in its features. The idea was absurd, of course. Tom was the only one in danger from her, and vendors of matches do not concern themselves with the hearts of young Americans. Nevertheless—if Kara was not ashamed to run through dark passages, I need not hesitate to run from black coffee.

"If *madame* will permit," I remarked, taking out my case, "I will content myself with a cigarette."

"Certainly, *monsieur*," she said; "but, at least, do me the favor to try one of these." She walked over to a glass cabinet that stood in a corner of the room, unlocked the door, and drew forth a box

covered with Turkish characters and decorations. "They come to me direct from Constantinople. They are the kind the Sultan himself smokes. No such tobacco, I am told, ever reaches the shops of the West."

I took a cigarette from the box and lighted it. Somewhat larger than the ordinary, it possessed a fragrance new to me. For a minute I gave myself up to its enjoyment. Truly, the tobacco of the West was a poor thing. Hereafter—

I sat up with a gasp. Rawlins and the coffee-cups were executing a wild dance about the room. *Mme. Lecompte* had become a vast mountain of blue. In a vain effort to steady myself, I grasped the little table in front of me.

The cigarette dropped from my fingers, and I fell forward among the cups and glasses.

When I came to my senses, I found myself in a cab. Rawlins was by my side, and we were rattling over the *Pont de la Concorde* on our way to my rooms. My head was giddy, my legs like lumps of lead, and a strange, unformed fear possessed me.

Of how I came into the cab I could recall nothing. Floating vaguely in my mind was a vision of a sofa, on which I lay, of people running hither and thither, and of two great blue eyes looking down at me. The rest was all darkness.

With what self-control I could muster, I fixed my eyes on Rawlins. He, at least, seemed unharmed.

"What happened, Tom?" I asked. "How did we get here?"

"You fainted all of a sudden," he answered. "You gave us an awful scare, Ronald. I didn't know you ever went off like that. How do you feel now?"

Us! Fainted! My head was clearing rapidly in the night air. I remembered the quarrel at the *café*, the warning I had received, the fragrance of the cigarette with which *madame* had so thoughtfully provided me—the cigarette which came direct to her from Constantinople. Simpleton that I had been, to blunder into such a trap!

"Feel!" I said. "I feel like a green fool. Have you still got your money, Tom?"

"Of course I have," he cried indig-

nantly. "What did you suppose I did with it—threw it in the street? You think I'm still a child, Ronald. I'm pretty nearly able to take care of myself, I can tell you."

I cut him short by telling him to look and see. Then I proceeded to investigate my own pockets. There was my watch, and there my pocketbook. To my surprise, everything was safe except—what was it that was missing? Suddenly I turned to Rawlins.

"You remember that letter I showed you at dinner, Tom? Did you give it back to me?"

"Of course I did. What about it?"

"Well, it's gone—stolen." I said.

"Stolen!" he cried. "Who'd want to steal that thing?"

"That," I replied, "is exactly what I should like to know myself."

For the rest of the drive, we said little. Rawlins, enraged at my suspicions, obviously regarded me as an individual utterly devoid of chivalry. In his own

(To be continued.)

eyes he was the hero of a charming and romantic adventure; and he would not permit a tiresome skeptic like Ronald Lampton to turn him into an easy dupe.

As for me, I was content to let him think what he liked, so that he had no more opportunities for blundering. In the morning, when my head was somewhat clearer, I would endeavor to convince him that Mme. Julie Lecompte was an undesirable acquaintance, and that the affairs of Michael Kara did not require discussion with strangers. In the interval I would sleep.

Rawlins left me at my door and drove back to his hotel, still too piqued to trouble me with questions. Kara had retired, and without delay I followed his example.

After all, Rawlins might be right. Of what possible interest to any one but myself was the missing letter, and I knew it by heart? If that was what they were after, they might have had it for the asking.

ASUNTA'S HAND.

BY BERTHA BRADLEY.

A SHORT STORY.



He is the fattest of the year."

Chochone threw down the young buck he had been carrying across his shoulders and viewed it with pardonable pride.

Asunta looked with sparkling eyes from the sleek limp deer at her feet to the superb figure of the hunter before her. Her barbaric soul gave strength and beauty its meed of admiration.

"He is heavy," she answered, trying to move the carcass with her foot. "Where did you kill? How far have you carried him?"

"From Dos Corrales."

Asunta's look of surprise and admiration was entirely gratifying, and Chochone settled himself comfortably to improve

the favorable hour; for one did not often kill such a buck with bow and arrows—neither did one easily awake that sparkle in Asunta's dark eyes.

"See! The first arrow found his heart. No need of a second. There is not another brave this side of Guchapa's *rancheria* who could have brought him down so."

Asunta turned back to her work and bent smilingly over it.

"It is truth," she said. "The men of this *rancheria* have become eaters of grasshoppers and hunters of crabs."

Chochone searched her face distrustfully, but failed quite to understand what he saw there.

"For me it is a little thing to kill a deer or a bear. My hut shall always be

full of meat. The squaw of my house shall eat deer's eyes at each new moon."

Asunta shrugged her shoulders and gave undivided attention to her work, and Chochone gave his to her. He watched the long silky braids that hung down either side between arm and breast—none so long and heavy in all the *rancherías*; the lithe body to which the tunic of deer-skin had shaped itself, as a glove in time takes on the lines of the hand; the limbs, lean as a boy's, smooth and clear brown. Yes, surely there was no maiden in ten *rancherías* of such splendid and piquant beauty—and none so hard to please.

Chochone grunted angrily at the thought.

"Look you here, girl. It is three years that I speak soft to you and waste my words. Now I make an end. It is the last time. Will you be my squaw?"

Asunta lifted one eyebrow lazily.

"Chochone is a dull Indian. I am weary of his songs."

"I am the best man in the *ranchería*."

"So Zana thinks."

Chochone watched her furtively, but her face was a mask of innocence.

"You, you," he grunted, "whom do you think the best? You will marry Sachi?"

Asunta tittered at the suggestion, for Sachi was split-nosed and half a fool.

"Perhaps."

"Devil-squaw!" he said more wheedlingly. "Will you never marry?"

"Perhaps."

"Whom?"

"One whom I could love."

Chochone ground his teeth, and the big muscles of his arms and breast knotted themselves suddenly.

"Love! What is that to a squaw! Is not a good hut, many beads, and a strong husband enough?"

Her eyes glittered upon him a moment, but she did not deign to reply. So he harked back.

"Whom will you love?"

Asunta turned upon him then.

"One who is stronger than I, and wiser than I, and without fear."

"Me, me! That is I," he cried, striking his breast in triumph.

"Chochone is a big Indian and a very strong one, but more foolish than the coyote who howls at the moon."

Chochone rose up in fury.

"Foolish? I? Afraid, too?"

"Yes, of me."

She stood before him superbly, her brows drawn together, her lips curling in disdain. Chochone raised his bow to strike her, but her clear eyes never wavered nor did a muscle flinch; and, somehow, the blow did not fall.

"Plenty of time for beatings, by and by, when you are my squaw."

"Never."

"There are no men of your house. I will do as I please."

"Anaja is my grandmother."

"Anaja is an old fool, and humors all your madness. I care not for her."

"I will leave the *ranchería*."

"Where will you go?" He spoke sneeringly. "The chiefs of the other villages are my friends."

"I will go back to the *padres*, my old teachers, the priests."

"Back to the *padres*! You! Chains and stripes are the portion of the neophyte who deserts."

"Better the chain-gang than the hut of him I loathe!" There was no mistaking the sincerity of her feeling toward Chochone.

"Then I will kill you!"

"Kill me—now, now!"

Her own dagger was out in a flash, and her laugh of scorn stung him like a whip. She came close up to him and stepped jerkily from side to side, braving him. The girl's eyes seemed to defy him as he hesitated, irresolute. But his eyes were evil and cruel. He shrugged his shoulders.

"By and by," he said, and picked up the buck and took his way down the hillside to the huddle of little conical huts that made up the *ranchería* of Puerto San Luis Obispo.

Asunta watched him go with a certain relief. She was not unused to suitors, and stormy scenes were more or less the order at the times of her refusal of them. But, perhaps because Chochone was the ugliest-tempered or the most persistent, his wooing was always the stormiest.

"Ah, better the *padres* and much hard work and no freedom than Chochone. But—freedom!"

Her thoughts flew back to her days in the Santa Barbara mission. She shivered

as she remembered the last grim year there, when the postern-gate to the cemetery opened daily to some new victim of the sickness; when, sometimes, several were buried close together in the pit, like eggs in a nest. She remembered the blackest day of all, the day that swallowed both her parents, and the weeks of listless desolation that followed; and then the secret message one night that her grandmother, Anaja, stout old barbarian, had come to steal her away; the sickening fear as she crept past the drowsy *regidores*, the tumultuous, silent joy once outside the walls; the hasty shedding of the irksome Christian dress. And then long nights of flight, north and ever north; long days of hiding in some hot *arroyo* lest the scouts should find them; and at last a friendly *rancheria*, beyond the reach of southern priests, unmolested, too, by the priests of San Luis—and freedom, freedom, freedom!

No, she did not want to go back to the priests. And yet Padre Juan, the kindly old man! How she remembered his hand on her head and his gentle eyes looking down at her as she sat at her hemp-weaving in the *fabrica*!

Asunta started up from her dreaming and turned energetically to her work. She was putting the last touches upon a new costume made of rabbit-skins suppld in the hands till they were as soft as velvet. It was of simplest device—a tunic reaching to the knee, held in place by a strap over one shoulder and a girdle wrought with beads and shells. The bottom was deeply slashed and the top set thick with fluffy white rabbit-tails and jeweled at intervals with bits of rose abalone shell. The breast-piece was an albino-skin, head down, legs hanging free like tassels. She sang as she worked:

Chupu sends the fishes
Far across the channel.
All our boats are waiting,
All our nets are ready.
Chupu sends the fishes
From across the channel.

From the huts, lower down, one voice and another took up the shrill song, and the blue jays down in the *arroyo* answered with their clamor.

"Chupu catch you!" came a harsh voice behind Asunta, and she turned to

see old Anaja cuff a small brown imp that was roguishly tugging at her skirt.

That Anaja's temper was not at its mildest was evident. She flung down the fagots she was carrying and squatted beside the door of the hut.

"Chochone has been here?" she finally flung out.

Asunta opened her eyes wide and considered the question seriously a moment.

"Yes."

"He has killed the fattest buck of the year."

Asunta nodded.

"With one arrow."

"I know it."

"Why don't you marry him?"

"Why should I?"

"What better will you do?"

"Not marry at all."

"That is not possible. You are no fool."

"You have never urged me before; why now?"

"Sunta, I am an old woman, and have seen many things. And I know what is the truth: that the life of a woman if she have no children or husband—bah! It is the foam on the beach that the sand drinks up."

Asunta stood for a moment abashed, like a child, then tossed the matter lightly aside.

"Time for that by and by."

"At twelve many a girl gets her a brave and a home."

"And gives up her freedom."

"Freedom! Always you cry freedom. A woman is not born for freedom! How many are the suitors I have turned away for you?"

"But I love no one."

"Monstrous! Did I leave my own *rancheria* and bring you the long weary journey to foster a thing that was less than woman?"

"Anaja! I love you."

"Give me sons, then, to bury me. I am old and alone, and tired of the hate of Chochone. I'll stand between you no more. Hate you he will, or love you. There is no middle course. Choose."

"I have chosen." Asunta's head went up wilfully.

"Devil-squaw!"

Anaja's wrath but brought the mirth back to Asunta's face. She went over to

where the old woman crouched and petted her cheek wheedlingly.

"Devil-squaw, I would be if I were Chochone's. Think no more of him: Time enough to marry yet. Squaws of our race keep their beauty till they are old. You yourself have said it. What girl of the whole *rancheria* with back more straight than yours? And see your braids—as black and soft as a maiden's."

"Ugh!" grunted the old woman, half appeased. "Chochone is right. There is a madness in you."

II.

ANAJA was mumbling the last fragments of her supper when Asunta stepped out of the hut and stood for survey. She had put on the new costume for the festival of the fishes, and tacitly invited approval. The old woman looked up and scowled critically. The costume became the girl well. It was a soft blending of silvery gray and brown, heightened daringly by the white fur of the breast-piece and the opal fires of the abalone.

Anaja caught Asunta's hands and scrutinized them. The slender finger-tips were stained pink with the roots of white forget-me-nots. The soft round chin was stained, too.

"All very well," grumbled the old woman, wagging her head, "but if Chochone has his eyes to-night, beware!"

Asunta laughed and settled herself at the hut door.

"Bid caution to Zana. She has the more need."

The sun went down aflame into the great water beyond the end of the point, and the hush of twilight crept out of the deep *arroyo* and over the hill's breast. Near at hand came the piping voices of urchins playing in the chaparral; down among the huts sounded the laughter of girls, and off by the corral, men's voices as they fed the ponies; below all, the rush and throb of the surf on the beach. It was good—it was all good. Better the hate of Chochone than the toil of the *fabrica*. She would not go back to the *padres*. Perhaps, indeed, they would not want her now. For, it was certain, all was not well this year, with *padres*, or soldiers, or government. Chochone had said so. He knew some things, Chochone.

As darkness came on, a tongue of flame

shot up slenderly from the level spot below the village where they were building the sacred fire to Chupu, god of the channel. For a moment a figure stood out in silhouette against the blaze. She knew it by the height and bulk, and smiled disdainfully in the dark, shrugging her shoulders; then she fastened the thong of her dagger-sheath more securely, arose, and went down the hill.

The whole *rancheria* was already gathered around the fire when she took her place among the girls. The old folk and children squatted in a wide circle, within which the girls and young men stood in two lines facing each other, with the fire between. They began singing in unison, low and dragging, a single phrase over and over, with bodies heaving and swaying from side to side.

Soon, to a swifter chant, came soft-treading steps, forward and back, the fire-light shining dully on the bronze flesh of the men, touching out the beads and shell ornaments and the glint of flashing eyeballs. Then a new and wilder cadence rose, and the two lines met, mingled, and broke up in pairs, each pair dancing its own dance as it willed, yet all making one harmonious whole, twisting, gesturing, leaping, twining a shifting circlet round the great jewel of the fire.

Chochone had singled out Asunta in the pairing, but, lightly as a leaf on a mountain brook, she slipped from him, darting, pausing, turning, leading him to the extreme left, where Zana trod her measure unmated. Seizing the girl, Asunta whirled her straight into the arms of Chochone, while she herself shot off at a tangent, dancing with fresh abandon, playing the rover among couples. And steadily the chant grew shriller and wilder.

Coming to the extreme right, where a dense clump of chaparral broke the outer circle of seated onlookers, Asunta was aware of a presence in the thicket, and, poising an instant, alert, she divined the shadowy bulk of a man—by the outline of hat and sleeve a white man.

"*Señorita*," a tense whisper came through the wild chanting voices.

An instant she paused, and no more, then turned and danced on, completing her circle. But there was a new roguery in every movement, and in her face there

gleamed a look of elation and dangerous mischief. At the north pole of her orbit she stopped like a bird poised on steady wings, then dropped out of the dance, passed the outer circle, and was swallowed up by the darkness.

True to her Indian instinct, she started a false trail toward the corral, then turned, circled widely the group by the fire, and approached the chaparral thicket from the rear.

So stealthily she came that she had laid a hand upon his shoulder before the ambushed stranger was aware of her presence. She felt the muscles stiffen instantly, but he made no other sign save to turn his head slowly. When he saw who she was he would have seized her hand; but, motioning him to silence, she led the way back to safer ground.

They went by shrub and shadow, giving a wide berth to the huts, till they were far out on the point. Then she turned upon him full, the sparkle in her eye, the elation and eagerness in her pose reading clear for all the darkness.

"You wish our otter-skins—is it not so?" She was breathless with impatience, and the long unused Spanish words came tumbling and broken in her haste.

"*Muchas gracias!* No, *señorita*."

"Are you not a smuggler? Five years ago men came thus by night and gave us much money and cigarettes for our otter-skins."

"Cigarettes you shall have," the stranger answered with amusement, "but what should I do with otter-skins?"

Asunta hesitated an instant, then resumed, with suave diplomacy: "It is a pity the government is so cruel to smugglers. It is said they kill them in Santa Barbara like rats." Insinuatingly she added: "The *señor* is a trader?"

"No, not even that. Alas, if you are disappointed!"

"Are you from the *commandante*? Are you sent to spy on us?" Her tone had changed from eager curiosity to something hard and scornful, but there was no fear or shrinking in her voice.

"Believe me, I am not from the government." He laughed shortly.

"Then, why do you come in secrecy?"

"Because I am one against so many."

"Against? Would they wish to harm you?"

"They have no reason; but I have many for not being seen."

"Then, why do you come at all?"

With impatience she stamped her moc-casined foot. It was so hard to get at the kernel of truth in all this talk!

"To pass an idle hour; to be amused."

This trail led nowhere. She started afresh.

"Where do you come from?"

"Forgive me, it is not permitted to answer."

"Who are you?" she cried, baffled anew.

"Don José," he answered, sweeping a majestic bow.

She turned him imperiously where the light struck better on his face, and studied him carefully. Not a handsome face, but it pleased her well, from the scar on the chin to the beaked nose and keen, fierce eyes gleaming dangerously in their shadows.

In his turn he lifted her face to the light, and swore a soft rolling Spanish oath that it was fair. And he would have kissed it, but she was too quick for him, and slipped from his hands and was gone. She was not far, though, for she heard his "*Pardon, señorita; come back, and I will not vex you.*"

So she came back graciously, and they sat side by side on the ground.

"What is your name?"

"Asunta," she told him cheerfully.

"Spanish?" he asked with a scowl.

"No—Indian," she said with intense pride of race.

"Squaw or maiden?"

"What is that to you?"

"Something. Answer."

She caught the note of command, and answered quite meekly, "Maiden."

"Sixteen years, and you have not got a fat, lazy husband?"

She opened her hands with a comical gesture of deprecation.

"Eighteen years, and I have none."

He looked upon her curiously, and recalled the dance about the fire.

"What says the tall brave whom you left in the lurch to-night?"

Asunta laughed aloud, then smothered her indiscretion in her braids.

"Ah! How he was angry!"

"Do you not fear his anger?"

"*Señor*, let me tell you, I fear neither

man nor beast while I have my dagger in its sheath."

"But if that were gone?"

"Then have I hands and teeth."

She stood with her head high, and Don José swore again, strange oaths, the purport of which was lost upon Asunta—but not the fierce admiration in his eyes.

"I must go," she said abruptly.

"Yes, *señorita*. You will be missed."

The alacrity of his acquiescence took her by surprise, and she paused.

Don José took her hand and kissed it as she had seen the great folk do in Santa Barbara. And then he held both hands in his and looked down at her—a fierce, gaunt outline in the dusk. And a sense of mystery and loneliness about him struck her sharply.

"Will you come and see me again?"

"Yes," she answered rather faintly.

"And keep the secret of my coming?"

"Yes."

"And we will sit on the rocks at the point and smoke cigarettes."

She nodded.

"The fourth night hence, when all the *rancheria* is asleep, I will be here."

And then with an easy "*Buenas noches*," he let her go.

III.

NONE of Chochone's deer-meat was sent to Anaja, and she grumbled about it bitterly. To Asunta, excited as a child over her adventure, it mattered not if Chochone or the whole *rancheria* feasted. Would she not be talking soon with the stranger? But for Anaja, of course, it was hard, there being no romance to sweeten for her the flatness of acorn-cakes and grasshoppers. So Asunta took her bow and arrows and hunted squirrels for the old woman's suppers, and spent the days roaming the hills, bathing in a deep pool far up the *arroyo*, lying afterward in the warm sun, and drinking in sun, air, water, life, through every pore of her velvet skin.

When at last the appointed night came, and when Anaja finally slept, Asunta rose, instinct with haste and joy. And on the point Don José was waiting, impatient of her coming. He spread his cloak in a hollow of the rocks, and they sat where they could watch the back-trail, smoking cigarettes and talking of a thou-

sand things. He told her of adventures at sea and of bull-fights in Mexico. He showed her his star, the never-moving one in the north. And she in her turn sang him the song of *las tunas*:

Sweet is the fruit of the tunas,
Its leaf is drink in the drought.
But beware, if thou eat, of the thorns of the tunas;
Beware of the thorns of love.

If a tuna-thorn break in thy flesh,
Better thy knife cut it out,
Else will it pierce till it bite to the bone
And thou diest; so is it with love.

Don José watched her with kindling eyes.

"Shall one starve because the tuna has a thorn?"

He put his arm lightly about her. She shook it off roughly, and he flashed upon her a fierce, unwilling approval.

"Is it thus you treat your Indian lovers?"

She nodded curtly.

"How then shall love come if you box his ears when he draws near?"

She had risen to go, and he stood before her, holding her passive hand. She expected the hand-salute, and when he stooped suddenly and kissed her full on the lips she was stunned for an instant; but she was gone in the next, running wildly, forgetting caution till the huts shaped themselves near at hand. Then she stopped and found that she was weak and trembling, cold, and yet scorched with stinging heat, and dizzy with a strange new happiness.

Don José smiled and thanked the god of fortune that he had set a new tryst before he took his kiss. He thought she would keep it, and so she did, though she passed each of the intervening days in hot avowals never to see his face again.

When the last morning broke slow and dewy over the hills, Asunta awoke in a new spirit. She sat at the hut door watching the coming of the light, with a sort of gentle shyness. And when Anaja touched her shoulder, she blushed and turned away her face in confusion. She did not reason; she seemed for the time incapable of doing that. But she knew that the anger had burned itself out and could not be roused again.

When she came to the point that night, Don José laughed with easy confidence to see his eaglet tamed. Was she not *la paloma* now, the wood-dove?

Many trysts were set and kept; each seventh night was their trysting-night unless, for some inscrutable reason, Don José set another time. He was always before her on the point, and his coming and his going was always wrapped in mystery.

Chochone did not bother the girl. Once he came upon her at her basket-weaving, and stood over her a long moment.

"Plenty of time," he whispered, leering, and passed on.

The *rancheria* gossip was all of Chochone and Zana. As the squaws and girls squatted, grinding their endless acorn-meal on the big flat rock, they all retailed with glee the latest scandalous tattle. Asunta did not hear or heed, and Anaja grew day by day more taciturn, more querulous.

Then there came a trysting-night when Don José did not come. All night till an hour before the dawn Asunta sat on the rock at the point and watched his star, or tried to pierce the glimmering gray of the sea or the soft blackness of the hill that might be hiding him from her eager eyes.

And the next night she came and waited, not so long, with a heart grown sick and faint. The fog was all about her, and its eddyings, that dimly revealed a rock or a shrub, toyed with her heart as hope thrilled and swooned again. She could not take the air freely into her lungs. It choked her like smoke, and she gasped for relief.

Even the third night she came creepingly and sat with hands over her ears and eyes, that she might not listen or watch for his coming—that he might come swiftly and surprise her. And when he did not come, she knelt by the rock and tried to pray. But the Mother of God seemed far away in the mission, and the half-forgotten words were dumb on her lips.

Next night she came late, but it was with a tiger's springing step, head thrown high, and hand on her dagger-hilt. Ah, well for Don José that the moon showed him leaning weakly against the rocks, with forehead bandaged and dark streaks

and blots upon the cloth. For in the fury of her passion as she came through the sweet bushes and sage, Asunta's eyes had seen nothing but sheets of flame and belts of blackness. But the bloody bandage shone out in the moonlight, and she paused.

And she had been about to kill him! Her nerveless hands groped in front of her. She swayed, staggered, half fell, and, as he came to meet her, she was shaken by such hoarse and terrible sobbing as he had never heard before.

"My beloved, my beloved! I love you," she sobbed when the first agony was past.

And he said, "I know it," with unsmiling lips, for something, too, had gripped his heart that spoke more of pain than of joy. Besides, he was weak and racked with his wound.

She did not ask him how he had received the hurt, nor did he tell. She took his hot head in her lap and smoothed it with fingers as soft as a rose-leaf, and bent above him crooning, low and soft, the mother-song of the young squaw whose baby will be a chieftain, the song of the rain that comes cool to the parching earth, the song of the wind that swings the bird's nest.

And the strong man lay like a little child in her arms. A weakness stole over him and shook his heartstrings. And presently he reached up trembling hands to her face, and his faint voice whispered, "I love you."

Asunta's heart stopped for an instant before it leaped in great answering beats.

"Beloved, give yourself to me."

Then Asunta's heart lost beat a second time, and her hands passed tremblingly over his head.

"You mean you wish me to be your wife?"

There came no answer.

"You mean," she said more faintly, "that you wish to marry me?"

And again, after a silence: "You mean you do not wish to marry me?"

Don José groaned, and Asunta slipped from his relaxing arms and lay in a little huddle among the rocks. What was he saying?

"*Carissima*," he whispered sharply, "I did not know you set store by mar-

riage. It is love, not marriage, that brings joy."

She did not stir, and he groped yearningly for her face.

"*Carita mia*, I love you. Is not love enough? Lift your face to me."

Then she arose, wan like a dying thing, and stared past him with unseeing eyes.

"Don José asks of me dishonor?"

Her voice was dull and colorless.

"Beloved, I cannot marry you."

"You have already a wife?"

"No, by Heaven, I have not!"

"I am beneath you. I am but an Indian. Don José would be ashamed of me?"

"Never!" And it sounded like the truth.

"Then," her face grew haggard and pitiful—"then you do not love me?"

"Beloved!" he cried hoarsely.

She put him wearily aside.

"Listen," he urged. "Your *padres* would sooner see you dead than married to me. I am their enemy, and the enemy of their government. Once they laid a hand on me—it would be the *presidio* vaults and the hangman. And a native marriage—" He stopped a moment and drew her hands to his face. "I cannot do it! Look you, *carissima*, I've set my hand to do a great thing, something I'd give my life for. A crisis comes now—soon, for the Princesa—you saw her pass up the coast—is on my track. Mission San Luis Obispo is a bare eight miles away, and if a breath of it—No! I cannot do it, little one; there's too much at stake."

Don José, the passionate lover, seemed suddenly to merge into the hardy privateer, and Asunta felt the cold steel. She turned away, but he caught her in his arms vehemently.

"Asunta, stay! What will you do?"

Slowly the answer came.

"I will go back. My mother and my grandmother and all the squaws of our race lived honorably, not like the girls of the *rancheria*. So little or so much as I am, I shall not be touched save in honor."

She stood in the moonlight straight and still, her great eyes seeming to illumine all her face. Don José was abashed by the wild purity of the girl.

"Farewell," she said. Her face was working pitifully, beyond all power of

her Indian control. "May your God bless you and keep you safe."

She went from him slowly and painfully, without one backward look or sign. And he loved her enough to let her go.

IV.

ALL day long Asunta had crouched at the door of the hut, staring upon the baked earth at her feet, seeing wherever she turned her eyes only a gaunt, dark figure whose every line and attitude had grown so terribly dear. She had not touched food or water, and Anaja watched her sharply.

At last the old woman took her basket and went down to the beach to wait for the fishing-boat and get her share of the catch. A flock of gulls wheeled over the little bay, bent on the same errand and filling the air with creaking cries and the flap of many wings.

Before the boat had touched the beach, Anaja was aware that something unusual had happened. The grunts among the fishermen were evidently directed at her. Chochone was the first to spring ashore, and he came blustering toward her.

"Well, cavernous-mouthed one, what do you want?"

"Fish," Anaja answered sullenly. She was not unused to rough names. Old age seemed not a thing of respect among the Canaleños.

"Eat grasshoppers. They are good enough for a house of squaws."

"There is fish in plenty," said the old woman, casting an eye over the big bonitos and smaller fry lying in the boat.

"Not enough for us and you."

"What! You refuse me my share?"

"Not another fin for you and the devil-squaw!" And he cursed her roundly. Suddenly he stopped, and the men by the boat had new cause for grinning. Asunta herself stood beside Anaja.

Chochone could not meet her clear, shining eyes as she looked him up and down, not omitting the net of her making in his hand. No other squaw in the village could make such nets as she. The other men felt the bright scorn of her face, though she did not deign to give them a look, and busied themselves with the boat. Upon him alone shone the white flame, and he shriveled and turned clumsily aside.

Then she took Anaja and the empty basket, laughed a little, stinging laugh, and went back to the hut.

So it had come to this, that Chochone would try to starve her to his will. An unfortunate method of winning a maiden's love, and she despised him anew in her heart, alike for his stupidity and his cowardice. But it brought her face to face with the fact that she and Anaja now stood alone against the whole *rancheria*, for as Chochone willed, the others would acquiesce.

But if Anaja was cowed and whimpering, crouched in her blankets, Asunta was undaunted. She felt spurred on to action, ready to devise new ways of living independent of the *rancheria*, to pit her strength against Chochone's and her wits against them all; and she gloried in her power. The episode brought back color and vividness to her wan and languid body.

Twilight closed in drearily for both women as they sat in their blankets by their little fire. Darkness and sleep brought comfort to Anaja, but Asunta, tossing on her bed of grasses, found no relief. At last, when midnight came—his hour—she knelt and tried to pray. It was the second time she had prayed in all the years since she had put the mission behind her.

"*Ave Maria, ora pro nobis,*" the words came falteringly back to her tongue, but they were a healing to her bruised heart. A shadowy happiness fell over her, thinking that this was his God, to whom perhaps even now he, too, might be praying. She remembered her crucifix, and dug it up from the secret cranny where she had long ago hidden it from the hate of Anaja. Moldered and half forgotten, it became a thing of priceless worth, the only tie between herself and the world to which Don José belonged. In the long wakeful hours she hugged it to her heart.

Next morning Anaja spied it hanging about her neck, and snatched it with a scream of rage. Asunta paled, and the fingers that closed over Anaja's were like fingers of steel. Anaja did not try to take it again, but spent her rage impotently in curses. To her the little emblem was a symbol of all that she hated—the Spanish rule and interference, the setting up

of a law and a race against which the Indians were powerless, the taking of favored lands by the *padres*, and last, the turning from her of her own daughter to the hated people and their God. Asunta's act was like treason to her, and a poison festered in her heart.

V.

ASUNTA hunted that day to good purpose, bringing in a brace of fat rabbits and some brook-trout caught far up the *arroyo*. But nothing that she did brought a word or a look from Anaja, who sat idle all the day, thinking evil things and hardening her heart.

Asunta laughed her scornful laugh as she cooked the fish, thinking of Chochone's bonitos, but her face grew grave when she saw that no acorn-meal had been ground that day. Had Anaja deserted her? Was she to fight this out alone? So be it, then.

She had no fear; but that night she put her dagger loose in her bosom, and repeated her few words of prayer over and over, and was comforted. Little by little the teaching of the *padres* was coming back to her. He who was tortured on the cross was God himself and all-powerful. And He had died willingly so, to save the world, leaving heaven and descending into hell for the love of man. Ah, she remembered hell now—the painting in the mission church, the sea of flame, and the wicked people burning, forever burning. And she crossed herself—how easily the little sign came back to her!—and hoped devoutly that she might never by chance come there.

If Asunta realized to the full Anaja's change of heart, she gave no sign of it save that she did not let herself sleep at night. By day she sat fearlessly with the other women grinding the acorn-meal down on the flat rock, or she ranged the hills alone with her bow and arrows. And somewhere each day she found a safe nook for a snatch of sleep, for the strain was wearing on her.

But Anaja sat idle every day, and neither squaw nor man had a word out of her—save, once, Chochone.

In her world apart, Asunta was coming to live more and more in her memories of the mission. She knew that by the priests' standards she had done right, and

the knowledge brought her a sort of peace.

One night, as she lay on her blanket, pondering her crucifix in a ray of moonlight, her thoughts took an unforeseen trend. Don José's God had left His throne in heaven, had died and descended even into hell, for He so loved the world. Ah, there was love! But did she not love, too? Would she not—the thought burst full upon her—would she not enter bravely the lake of fire for him she loved? Were pride and honor more dear to her than he?

All night and all the next day the thought lived with her and lifted her into an ecstasy. But in the end it was not the lake of fire that held her back, but an innate sense of honor and the thought of Zana stealing by night to the hut of Chochone. This held her back for a time, and then shame, honor, and redemption were offered up on the altar of her love, and she bent the stubborn knee and put her head in the dust.

She went up the *arroyo* when the moon rose that night to be alone with her shame and her happiness, and lay stretched out on a great flat boulder in the dry-bed of the stream. Ah, but she loved him! He should know it now—that she loved him better than herself. Then of a sudden she counted over the days on her fingers—seven, *their* night! This was to have been their next tryst. She started up to go to him, but fell back, staggered by a thought of fear that came clutching at her heart. Would he come? Had she not sent him away forever?

She lay dazed and sick till a new sensation, a physical one, came over her—a feeling of danger such as comes to the wild things and those near to the wild. She looked swiftly around, and up at the dense bank of poison-oak above, and felt for her dagger. It was gone! Anaja had tricked her.

For a moment she felt as if turned to stone, then with a brave catch of song on her stiff lips, leaped lightly down the stream-bed. And the evil thing on the bank above her followed unseen, as a cougar follows its prey.

With the wit of a huntress, Asunta ran her race. At a place where the bank was bare and open and an enemy must show himself or wait till she had gone out of

sight, she doubled her speed and gained ground. But she could not keep the pace long among the scattered boulders. So, where an island of trees and brush cast dense shadows, and the bank, undermined by the winter torrent, offered a close lair, she hid and waited with her ears straining to catch the break of twig or rustle of leaf above the tumult of her heart.

Presently she heard the shadow-goer pass on down the stream-bed. Would he discover his mistake and come back? Was he not waiting now above her? She felt the crucifix in her hand, kissed it, and ran toward the chaparral—her one chance. And surely the God of Don José heard the dumb prayer, for she gained the bank and then the open hillside and the cover of the chaparral. But it was only a matter of time till her trick would be discovered, so she ran like a hare, close to the ground, following every advantage of shadow and bush and rock, till the huts were in sight and then behind her, and the point not far off. And none too soon, for she was stumbling blindly now, heart and eyes both failing her.

"Mother of God," she whispered, "let him be there!"

Don José saw her coming, and ran to meet her, and she fell at his feet. With fierce hunger he raised her face, saw how haggard it was, and kissed it passionately. And he found her hand to take the dagger from it that he thought he had seen gleaming as she came. But when he raised it to the moonlight, behold, it was a crucifix!

When Asunta's languid eyes opened, Don José's face was near her in the moonlight, staring down at something which he held—which she held, in her hand. And when she stirred, he kissed it and closed her hand over it.

He did not need to be told why she had come. The shyness and tenderness in her face told that. He did not know about the lake of fire at the mission, but he understood the utter self-renunciation, and he bowed his head upon his arms. Asunta's arms stole round him, and he groaned and put them away.

"Listen," he said harshly. "I am Valdez."

The name meant nothing to her.

"I am *el diablo*. Your priests would tell you so."

He laughed aloud when he saw her flinch. "Now, go back to the *rancheria* and forget me, or if you do not forget, remember only that Valdez sent you back unharmed."

The harshness did not deceive her. She looked at him steadfastly, and her words came slowly, as if she measured each one and fixed it unalterably upon her soul.

"I care not who you are. I love you."

What he might have answered she never knew. For his eyes wavered from her face and grew fixed on something beyond, and his hand closed over her arm like steel. And then she remembered what she had so utterly forgotten.

"Chochone!"

Before she could move, Valdez seized her and half dragged, half carried, her to the edge of the rock. Far below them the surf swirled. Just at their feet, between two spits of rock, was a tiny beach. Bracing himself, Valdez swung Asunta down to where her foot, groping, found a narrow hold till he could let himself down beside her. Again he lowered her, to a broader ledge; below that the wall was sheer, and no foothold was possible.

"Jump!" he commanded, and they took the leap together.

Mercifully they landed unhurt in the surf. And there, drawn up under the edge of the beetling cliff, was a light boat. Together they dragged it into the water, and Asunta sprang in. Valdez shoved it out, battling his way through the breakers till he could keep his footing no longer, then drew himself in, and fell upon the oars.

A great wave, bigger than its fellows, rolled resistlessly upon them and carried them back a boat-length. Asunta's eyes were on the point, looking for what must soon appear there, and measuring the strip of water so slowly widening between. Chochone was the best shot in ten *rancherias*. There was no paddle; no second pair of oars. She could only hold her hands and wait.

"Lie down!" Valdez whispered hoarsely. She obeyed; and presently began to take heart that they had not been discovered, when, with a sharp nasal song, an arrow dropped just ahead of the boat. A second hit truer, grazing her knee.

One more fierce stroke of the oars, and the next arrow fell astern.

Valdez rowed with great sweeping strokes, without change or pause. There seemed no attempt to follow them, and presently he dropped his oars.

"Asunta."

He knelt in the boat and held out his arms to her, and she crept into them like a wounded creature finding rest and safety at last.

"Asunta," he said, raising the crucifix between them, "God curse me if I am not true to you. This shall be our marriage rite."

He kissed the crucifix reverently, and she kissed it in her turn. The glimmering sea was all around them. The slow long swell of the Pacific lifted and dropped the little shallop with a soft swinging motion. The stars were faint in the frail white splendor of the moon, and the limitless horizon of the west swept its great circle around them. All the world was far away and forgotten.

After a time Valdez changed their course to the south, and presently the shadowy outline of a ship loomed close at hand. As they came alongside, Asunta saw that it was black from sail to rail and from stem to stern.

VI.

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND lies thirty miles out from the Santa Barbara coast. The landward side is high and bare, with few inlets, and those of the smallest. For the rest, its grassy hills and mesa land end abruptly in cliffs that drop sheer to the boiling surf, or, in places, to a meager rim of beach. A savage coast, and dangerous to navigate.

Midway in the island, in a little cove flanked by a great cave—still called the Cueva Valdez—the master of the black frigate established Asunta. He built a little hut, and made it gay with blankets and baskets, and here they lived long days and weeks in an enchanted solitude. They explored the little cañon that debouched upon their tiny beach; they hunted the hills over for the first ripe tunas, and laid up a store of them by the hut.

"Beloved," she said that day, "do you remember the song of the thorn?"

"Yes, little beloved."

"Ah," she whispered, "the thorn of

love! It is here in my breast. It is joy, but so sharp it is like an anguish."

The cliffs were riddled with strange caves, which they searched out. Some were great domed and pillared structures, more solemn than the mission church at Santa Barbara; some were small, and hung like wall-pockets, high up where one might climb only by finding ragged finger-hold and foothold in the rock. In one of these, exquisitely shaped as a shell, they used to lie at the hour of the siesta; or they would sit at its edge and watch the surf booming far below them. Sometimes they hunted crayfish or gathered mussels and abalones to broil over red coals and eat hot, as the Spaniards do.

Asunta was so happy that her heart and throat seemed bursting with dumb song. She saw Valdez's keen eyes and dark frown relax under her little ways of tenderness, and a new look slowly mold his face, till she almost cried out for the wonder of it. Sometimes she stole away to kneel before her crucifix, whispering tumultuously: "Ah, kind Heaven, he loves me—he loves me!"

One day he came upon her on the mesa dancing among the tall wild oats and slender poppies. He stopped, as if she were a spirit of the air whom he would not profane with a touch; but she discovered him, and finished her dance before him and round him, giving vent to her new-born happiness.

One shadow only lay athwart her sunshine—the shadow of the black ship in the lower harbor. In the long evenings, with his cheek against hers, Valdez would sometimes talk to her of the great cause; but, though she tried, she could not well understand it all. "Liberty"—that was freedom; but had he not his freedom? Why trouble about the *pueblos* and the *presidios*? How could a Spaniard be an enemy to Spain and also a friend to California?

A dread of the unknown knocked at her heart; womanlike, she feared to look in the face of the future. But when he saw the shadow in her eyes he would hold her very tenderly and laugh away her fears.

"Asunta! My little *señora* must be brave to share whatever future fate may send."

Ah, dangers she could share with him;

but afterward, if he went back to the world from which he had come—could she face *that*?

He would not let her brood, but would distract her attention with strange man-descriptions of the finery she should have, or tell her tales of old Spain or bits of history from Mexico. So she rested, sheltered in his love from all the world, feeling it strengthen and deepen as the days went by.

But the time came—Asunta had known it would come—when a look of eager keenness flashed up in Valdez's eye, and she saw the glint of steel again. She watched the new restlessness all one day, and understood it. At twilight, as he sat on a great rock gazing off across the channel, she went to him.

"The sea is calling you."

He looked up, surprised.

"The great cause needs you."

He did not reply.

"Or do the men in the ship grow impatient because a girl keeps their captain idle?"

He frowned quickly.

"Beloved," she said, "I know that no woman can fill the life of a man. Go, if you need or if you will. Go out to what calls you, and when it is met—come back to me."

Her voice broke in a little sob.

"Asunta," he said, trying to turn her thoughts, "are you sending me away from you? What have I done?"

She hushed him imperiously.

"I am no child that cannot bear the truth. I am Señora Valdez. Share with me your thoughts."

His eyes looked proudly upon her, and he met her on the footing that she asked.

"Something has gone amiss, I fear. No word comes from Hyppolite Bouchard. It is long past time. I need to go south, as far perhaps as San Diego, to see how things stand."

"Go, then," she said bravely, "and I will stay here."

"I am loath to leave you alone."

"I am not afraid."

So might speak the mates of princes, he thought. She saw the look, and was repaid.

So it was decided that he should go. He made what preparations he could devise for her safety and comfort.

"Harm cannot reach you here," he said again and again.

"Harm cannot touch me," she would answer.

The next night he left her, coming back after he had said good-by, and a second time coming back to look deep into her great eyes and hold her quivering body close in his arms. And a third time she saw him turn, as if resolved on some different plan. He retraced a few steps, then paused irresolute, and, in a moment, turned and took his way along the mesa to the lower harbor.

Asunta, alone at Cueva Valdez, lived the days bravely and the nights less bravely, and counted the hours till Valdez should return. She busied herself as best she could, and found solace in practising the songs he had taught her. Sometimes the solitude seemed intolerable, and she would huddle inside the hut, waiting, waiting to hear his boat ground on the pebbles of the beach, or his whistle call her from the mesa-path.

But the time somehow dragged itself along, and the afternoon of the third day came. She lay on the beach, close under the cliff to catch its narrow shade, where she could watch the seals. They were hunting in a solid pack like dogs or wolves, patrolling back and forth across the cove, driving the fish into shoal water, where they were easy prey. They had grown used to the motionless figure on the beach, and came in closer to the shore. Presently, as if by some magic, not a shiny black head showed in all the cove.

She wondered uneasily where they had gone. Suddenly her blood seemed to freeze in her veins, as when one passes a rattlesnake hidden in the brush. A pebble dropped on the sand beside her—not an unusual thing from such crumbling cliffs, but this was somehow different.

She looked up, and there, against the blue sky, peering over the cliff, were the evil eyes of Chochone. He had gone in an instant, leaving nothing to mark the spot but the broken stem of a poppy.

She reached for a ragged stone with one hand and for her dagger with the other, and stood close against the cliff waiting for his coming. She drew her breath sobbingly, trying to fill her aching lungs. An hour passed and the sun set, and Chochone still held off.

"He is waiting for the night," she thought, and braced herself anew. Twilight deepened into darkness, and her cramped muscles were trembling with the tension. But still he did not come. The tide rose and splashed her with flying spume. A great cave beyond thundered hollow with the dashing surf. Her ears, strained to catch other sounds above the roar, heard, or thought they heard, a stealthy tread come and go. Was it Chochone, or Chupu, the Evil Spirit, ranging the night for prey? But the brave heart kept the tender body up through the terrible vigil till midnight had passed.

In the meanwhile Valdez was running through the thick darkness, winged with a nameless fear. For, at the lower harbor, when he had landed, he had found a seal dying, shot through with an Indian arrow. Straight to the hut he sped, calling the girl's name hoarsely.

"Asunta! Asunta! It is I! Where are you?"

He burst into the silent hut, knelt, and passed his hand over the pile of blankets in the corner. There was no warm body beneath his groping hand. He struck a light—the blankets lay smooth and undisturbed. With starting eyes he stared about. In baskets were set out the wheat-cakes and fruit for the evening meal, untasted; on the floor lay a wilted flower.

The taper burned down to his fingers and went out. He did not feel the burn. He did not notice the darkness. He stooped again to the blankets and felt them over stealthily, as if to outwit fact. Then, straightening, he suddenly staggered to the door and rent the night with a cry as terrible as the wail of a lost soul.

"Asunta!"

Faint and frail, from out the booming surf by the cliffs, there rose and wavered an answering cry.

VII.

A SEARCH next day failed to discover Chochone, though they found where he had beached his boat at the lower harbor. He had gone, and Asunta knew, perhaps Valdez also, that if he had stayed his hand this time when his prey was helpless before him, it was that the blow might fall the heavier later. Valdez looked grave,

and doubled his vigilance, keeping Asunta ever in his sight. When he went to the harbor, six miles below the cove, she must go, too, though she was afraid of his cut-throat crew—hardy daredevils that feared neither God nor man, but only Valdez. She marveled to see him hold them in leash with a glance. No need of the bastinado. They feared him and they worshiped him as the boldest spirit and the coolest nerve and the wisest head of them all.

These were busy days at the harbor, for the men were overhauling the frigate generally, cleaning the bottom, calking the decks, and making everything shipshape.

Finally the day came for which they were all watching, when the sentinel on the lookout peak descried the *Princesa* creeping down the channel to Santa Barbara, leaving the north open to the privateer. The little beach hummed that night and all next day with redoubled activity, and the men were wild with joy to have their long exile ended, to be on the sea again, with the prospect of fighting and plundering perhaps, or at least of making some known port where they might find entertainment and fellows of their own kind.

Asunta at first had been swept along by the general rush and excitement, but as the day wore on a homesickness came over her, thinking of the little hut at Cueva Valdez which she should never sleep in more. She must go back to it. She must look one last time upon the spot that had held so much of happiness.

Valdez did not wholly understand the sentiment that impelled her, but he knew that it was the woman-way, and gave his unwilling consent. And, guessing the wish in her heart, he promised to come, too, later; and then, seeing the happiness spring up in her eyes, promised more—that they should eat their last supper there alone, far from the noisy crew.

So she sped in the warm afternoon along the mesa-way, to be beforehand with her preparations for the little love-feast. And Valdez turned back to the ship, busied with a thousand details till it lacked but an hour to sunset.

Suddenly there was a shout from the direction of the sentinel, and another, and another, and presently the man himself came running wildly. All understood, or

partly understood, the warning, and made for the ship. The anchor was up, and the rowers were tugging the frigate out from the lee of the land almost before the sentinel could tumble aboard with his news. Ten miles below them, hugging the island shore, the *Princesa* was stealing upon them.

And Asunta, where was she?

Outside the harbor, they sighted the *Princesa*, and behind her another ship, the *Activo*. With grim coolness Valdez steered the course, calculating angle and distance, speed and daylight, and watching the *Princesa* with a hawk's glance. The *Activo* he did not fear. He had run away from her once before that year, with all her treasure, too. But the *Princesa* was an unknown factor.

The breeze was light, and Valdez crowded on every inch of canvas he could raise; but in a short time he could see that the *Princesa* was overhauling them. They had not got away an instant too soon. If they could reach the upper end of the island before it grew too dark they could take the passage between the islands and make for the open sea. It was an even chance, but that was all. An hour passed, and Valdez verified his reckoning. It was better than an even chance. But there could be no stopping, no slackening speed even for a moment. They were approaching the upper harbor. Valdez's face grew sharp.

He gave over the helm to the steersman and called his crew about him. They came huddling, watching his inscrutable face for a clue to the outcome.

"Men!" His head was up in the old indomitable poise they loved, but none knew whether it meant confidence of victory or knowledge of defeat. "Men, the race is ours."

"*Viva Valdez!*" the hoarse voices shouted, and arms and ragged caps waved wildly.

He held up a hand, and they grew quiet to listen. "The race is yours—yours to win. And you will win it. Take the passage between the islands out to sea. Remember the sunken rock. To-morrow, at dawn, sail down the other shore of the island to a point just opposite this. I will be there. Ignace Portero, I appoint you to my post for the night. Lower the little boat."

If the bottom of the sea had sunk and engulfed the ship, the men would have shown no more surprise. They stood around, staring stupidly upon him as if what they heard was the stuff of a dream.

"The boat!" he shouted. "Lower the boat!"

Ignace Portero seized his arm.

"You are mad! What do you mean to do?"

Valdez shook him off.

"Obey your orders. I am captain. Lend a hand."

A great roar broke from the men as from ferocious beasts.

"Desert the ship?" They surged upon him.

"Back, you hounds of hell!"

They sank down, cowed by the flaming eyes and the restless hand at his pistol-belt. He looked toward shore. They were just opposite the little harbor, and he saw a fire burning on the beach. Then he fronted the men steadfastly, patiently.

"Men, I give you the chance to play a big game, to act independently, to play men's parts, not those of children and fools. I am not leaving you to an uncertain fate. The race is won. But the *game* is lost if the enemy gets the girl—waiting yonder on the beach. I need your help. Ignace Portero, will you stand by me?"

There was an instant's pause, then Portero came and stood shamefacedly beside Valdez.

"Men, I need *your* help. Shall we win—win the game? Or only save our skins? Who dares, with me?"

"I! I! *capitan!*" came thickly from the hoarse throats.

Valdez's face was all aflame. "You are my men. I know you true as steel. To-morrow at dawn you will meet me on the other shore. If anything unforeseen should happen, wait there a day and night. If I do not come by that time, sail for Hawaii, and know that Valdez has lost the game."

Next moment the little boat touched water, dropped back, and was flung loose, and Valdez set its bow to the shore.

VIII.

AN opalescent glory lay all across the channel; the mountains of Santa Barbara rose like mountains of a dream-country

in the sunset light. Asunta stood by her driftwood fire, watching the calm beauty of the scene framed by the black headlands of the cove. Suddenly into the quiet picture swam the black frigate, every inch of sail out for the freshening wind. In a moment—it seemed no more—it had traversed the narrow canvas of the picture and was gone. Asunta stood rooted, staring at the empty distance through the blur of reeling earth and sky.

Something dark moved again upon the opal sea. Valdez's little boat shot into the harbor.

"The Princesa!" he cried, as she ran into the surf to meet him. She understood the situation.

"You left the frigate for me?" Her face wore a glory as from some inner light.

"Do you think I could leave you?"

"What shall we do?"

"Eat, first," he answered, sweeping the food she had prepared into the scarf he took from his waist.

"Then?"

"We must cross the island to the ocean side to-night."

Her thought leaped to meet his.

"And the frigate will be there?"

"Yes, little wise one."

They climbed as they ate, to lose none of the precious daylight. From the high ground back of the beach they could see the race, the little frigate scudding by short tacks, the Princesa standing farther out and setting a longer course, and the Activo lumbering along behind.

In an illuminating flash it came to Asunta how it had all happened.

"Chochone!" she cried through clenched teeth as they stood a moment to breathe. "It is he! He has betrayed us!"

And it was so. He had spied and found, and gone with his information where it would be valued. Not so dull an Indian as Asunta had thought. Never is an Indian capable of such cunning and self-control and ceaseless effort as when he is pursuing his revenge. The commandant at Santa Barbara was still suffering personal and official hardship on account of the treasure Valdez had seized from the Activo. The Princesa came by chance to hand.

If the black frigate was not a smuggler,

it was Valdez—worth a raid in either case. As Valdez and Asunta stood watching, the Princessa came opposite them on an off-shore tack and passed on up the coast. But when the Activo came up abreast, she made a port tack and came inshore.

"Will she never put about?" muttered Valdez. "They are steering straight for the cove. She means to land."

He was not mistaken, and she was so near that they would have at most but an hour's start of the landing-party. Enough and to spare if soldiers, only, hunted them, but too little if Chochone should be among them.

They scrambled up the steep *arroyo* precipitately, only taking care not to be in view from the ship. Then when twilight drew on they climbed out upon a bare, narrow ridge running straight inland. They ran, where they could, and made excellent time till darkness closed murkily round them. The sea behind and the sky above were only less black than the earth beneath their feet. But that would be as bad for the pursuers as the pursued. At the crest of the long ridge they had been following, Valdez paused.

"They cannot be so mad as to give chase on such a night!"

"Chochone would."

"And find us?"

"Perhaps."

Valdez looked at her earnestly.

"Is he following, do you think?"

"I think so."

"Come," he said, taking her hand, "we must go on, then. The sea-wind is in our faces; we cannot go far wrong."

There seemed to be more crests beyond them, but whether far or near they could not judge; and below them yawned a black abyss.

Valdez led. Asunta would gladly have led, in his place, for she realized that while he was taking the easiest ways he was also taking the obvious ones—just those which a man tracking them would expect them to take. But she did not suggest a change of leadership.

They plunged down and found the black abyss only a rocky hollow rising almost at once toward the next crest. Here, in the darkness, Asunta stepped on a tuna-leaf, and the vicious thorns pierced her moccasin. She pulled it off, and, with sensitive fingers, felt for the

thorns in the sole of her foot. Some she found, and some were broken and embedded past finding. Valdez saw her stop, and turned back.

"What is it, *carita*?"

"Nothing—a pebble."

She whipped on the moccasin, and they hurried on. But every step drove the thorns deeper. She tried stepping on toe and heel or the side of her foot, and found that she was lagging behind. The pain of the tunas is not that of an ordinary thorn, but shivers through one's whole frame and pierces the very brain.

But Asunta went on unflinchingly, though her hand was on her throat as though to choke back a cry. And behind her she felt a shadowy presence tracking them on through the darkness.

When they stood on the crest of the last rock billow they could sense far below them a hollow land—open, perhaps flat. And beyond roared the majestic swell of the Pacific, beating upon the first bare rim of its eastern curb.

They rested a moment before plunging down, and Valdez took Asunta's hand. It was icy cold, and strange tremors passed spasmodically over her.

"Asunta," he cried, "are you ill?"

"No," she said, trying to pass him.

"Are you frightened?"

"No, never!"

"Wait!" he cried, as she moved to go on. "You must tell me. Is he near?"

"No, no. I think not."

"Then, what is it?" He held her almost roughly by the shoulders.

"Nothing, beloved—a little thorn in my foot."

"A tuna-thorn?"

She nodded.

With a quick exclamation, he forced her to sit down.

"How long have you walked on it?"

"I don't know—since the first descent."

He struck a light in the shelter of a rock and made a little blaze of some dry brush. And by the light of it he probed deeper and deeper into the swollen foot with his dagger, while Asunta lay clutching the rock lest she should move or scream. And not till the wounded foot was bandaged and padded with his scarf, not till his voice, shaken and husky, said, "My brave one!" did she let a tear escape.

They pushed on, but more slowly, for Asunta was weakened in spite of herself. When they reached the lowland Valdez carried her for long stretches; but an hour before the dawn, and a mile yet from the belt of sand-dunes, he stopped, well-nigh exhausted.

Valdez found a rocky hillock capped by stunted chaparral, and here he laid Asunta, where the grass grew thick behind the low shelter. He seated himself beside her, but her face kept turning uneasily toward the way whence they had come. Valdez understood.

"I will watch the back-trail; my pistol is ready."

He primed it, and felt the flint.

To please him, she closed her eyes and feigned sleep.

An hour passed. The first faint hint of dawn showed through the darkness. Valdez moved softly, then abruptly, and Asunta loosed her dagger and gathered her muscles ready, as if she had been waiting confidently for this moment. Yet, when she divined something moving in the near distance, horror froze her limbs. She remembered the fire on the crest. It must have served as a beacon.

The human bloodhound came on rapidly. He had not seen them yet, but his general direction was true. Valdez waited till he was quite near, then took delib-

erate aim, and fired. There was a flash—and no more. The charge had missed fire. Instantly Chochone raised his musket and fired where the flash had given him a mark. Asunta's face, near Valdez's shoulder, was splashed with blood.

Valdez staggered to his feet, and Asunta saw him fumble for his dagger with his left hand. His right arm dangled helplessly by his side. Next instant, with the shriek of a fiend, Chochone was upon him. But in that same instant Asunta sprang like a panther between them, and her dagger struck to the hilt into the thick neck of the Indian. She was felled to the ground by the great body as it plunged forward, dead.

Valdez dragged off the hideous weight, and they two stood up in the dawn.

"Men," said Valdez as his followers crowded round him, wondering, "we have won the game."

Ignace Portero touched his broken arm.

"That I got from the Indian who betrayed us. He lies yonder by the sand-dunes; and the hand that laid him there and saved your captain—is here."

He held up Asunta's hand.

"Men, this is Señora Valdez. If any man is my friend, let him honor her."

And the fierce fellows cried, "*Viva la señora! Viva Valdez!*"

NIGHT ON THE RIVER-FRONT.

ADOWN the river, drifting with the tide,
Deep-laden fore and aft, the barges glide.
Their squat sides glisten with each passing light,
Out to the silent reaches of the night.

Tall-masted vessels, safe in port at last,
Lie by the grimy wharves and, anchored fast,
Rock slowly with the waves till lulled to sleep—
Dreaming of foreign shores and terrors of the deep.

Closed are the crude dun buildings where lie stored
Treasures full worthy of a Midas hoard,
And where the shadows, brooding, wait for day,
The great drab rats seek silently for prey.

Echoes of curses and of ribald song
Rise from the taverns where the sailors throng;
But here lie silence and the river's might
Wrapped in the sable mantle of the night.

Grace Van Braam Gray.

LOVE AMONG THE CLIMBERS.

BY BARRY LITTLETON.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

A SHABBY man, seated on a park bench, sees Marian Farwell drive by, behind a span of smart horses. He watches for her regularly in the park.

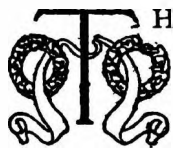
To-day she is to meet Richard Hadley, who having a very good social position and numerous debts, proposes to pay his bills by marrying Marian. His manner of addressing her is so offensive that she dismisses him.

He is picked up by Tommy Glenn. Hadley, in a fit of rage at his treatment by Marian, and knowing that Glenn's offer of marriage to her has also been declined, tells Glenn that Marian has described just how ridiculous Glenn appeared when proposing to her. Hadley inspires Glenn with the idea of taking revenge by having her marry a spurious nobleman. He mentions a restaurant musician who will aid them in their scheme, if sufficiently well paid. Glenn revolts at the plan, but does not wholly drive it out of his mind.

Meanwhile Marian's troubles run away, and in her rescue the shabby man reappears. He refuses to give his name. On her return home she is confronted by her mother, who is disappointed at the result of her interview with Hadley, and leaves Marian to confer about her troubles with Uncle Obie.

CHAPTER V.

A CONFIDENCE.



HERE was silence in the drawing-room for a minute or two after her departure. Then Marian rose and went back to her uncle's chair, dropped on her knees beside him, and put her arms around him.

"Oh—I'm glad you're here to-day," she said. "Take it altogether, I am pretty unhappy, Uncle Obadiah."

He was an old man of few words, and in the present crisis appeared to have none at all, but what he did seemed to be efficacious.

He reached out his hand rather shyly and clumsily stroked the girl's head.

After a moment she rose to her feet.

"There!" she said, frankly drying her eyes. "There's enough of that for one afternoon. Let's go into the library. You have your cob pipe in your pocket, I know. I felt it through your coat. You shall smoke in there, at any rate, and we'll have a good visit together."

Old Obadiah Williams was, perhaps, the sharpest thorn that Mrs. Farwell

found in the path which she had hoped would prove to be strewn with nothing but roses. The old man was an uncle of her husband's. So far as his appearance and manner went, he would have done very well on a farm, or in charge of a cross-roads store in the country. In such surroundings she would have found his angular figure and his homely ways quaint and attractive; but he made no concessions to New York whatever. He lived here, his business was here, but his way of life was, as nearly as possible, what his father's had been before him. And his father had lived and died in the town of Skaneateles.

Mrs. Farwell had always managed her husband. He had been an able man enough, and intelligent enough, but he lived in his office. The man who came home at night had really never been much more than a puppet, whose wires his wife operated with certainty and precision. He never crossed her wishes—never asked to be consulted regarding her plans. He had simply written the checks and left the rest to her. She would probably have succeeded better, by the way, had she called in his intelli-

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for January, 1909.

gence to aid her in the solution of problems which she regarded as exclusively her own.

No such course of action had ever suggested itself to her, and perhaps, in view of his sudden and unexpected death, just at the height of his prosperity, it was as well for her she did not. She never had relied upon him, and beyond her natural grief she never felt his loss; indeed, in one way his death was of service to her. As a widow in absolute possession of a stated number of millions she was probably a more interesting possibility socially considered than she ever could have been as the wife of Martin B. Farwell.

Marian, too, had always proved fairly tractable to her wishes. If she did not aid, actively and enthusiastically, in the carrying out of her mother's plans, at least she seldom did anything to thwart them.

But Uncle Obie was utterly refractory. He was always turning up at impossible moments and doing impossible things. Hardly a week passed when some unexpected, unconventional act of his did not humiliate his niece-in-law to the point of tears. Had Uncle Obadiah Williams been simply the conventional rustic poor relation, it would have been hard enough to deal with him. But the thing was rendered far more difficult by the fact that he was rich—horribly rich, rich enough to have bought out Martin B. Farwell two or three times over.

There was absolutely nothing to do but tolerate it, and this Mrs. Farwell somewhat rebelliously did. She regarded him as the chief stumbling-block to her complete ascendancy over her daughter.

Marian was very fond of him—fond of his homely ways and of his old-fashioned ideas. As long as this was so, her mother was likely to be conscious of something between them that would baffle her.

In the library to-day, once the old man's cob pipe was drawing well, Marian told him the whole story of her scene with Richard Hadley that afternoon—told him without hesitation, and, as nearly as she could, repeated literally the words each had said.

"There!" she exclaimed when she had finished. "Now, do you blame me for what I did, Uncle Obie? Do you think mother will be right to blame me?"

He took his pipe out of his mouth, blew out a smoke-ring or two, and then answered judicially:

"No, not for what you did—"

"For what I said?" she demanded quickly.

This time he was silent a little longer before he answered. And then it was with another question:

"Did you mean what you told him, when you said you wouldn't have minded a bargain if it had been honestly offered?"

She flushed a little, and now it was her turn to hesitate.

"Why—I think I did," she said at last. "I sha'n't ever fall in love with anybody—not the way people do in story-books and things. I'm not a sentimental person a bit, and I suppose I am ambitious. Is it so much worse for a woman to be ambitious than for a man? A man spends most of his life trying to get rich. It isn't the money that he wants; it's the power. He likes to know that his will can effect something. Well, hasn't a woman a right to want that knowledge, too? There is only one way in which she can get it."

She received no more decisive assent from him than an indulgent smile.

"Oh, if I make any bargain at all, it will be a good bargain, Uncle Obie. I don't know whether I shall ever marry or not, but if I do, I won't marry a cad nor an adventurer. I won't marry any one but a real man. But I think—I feel pretty sure, in fact—that I'd want, well, something more than that besides."

The old man said nothing in way of dissent. He smoked thoughtfully for a long time at his old cob pipe.

"I knew a girl once, years ago," he said at last, "who thought the same way you do. She told me so when I asked her to marry me."

Marian flushed suddenly, and looked at him with startled eyes.

"You mean," she asked, coming swiftly over to him, "you mean she gave that as a reason for refusing to marry you?"

He smiled over the bitter indignation that showed in her voice, and nodded by way of response.

Marian stood beside him for a moment in thoughtful silence. Then, in a voice little above a whisper, she asked:

"And did she make a bargain? And was she happy?"

"She made a bargain. I don't know whether she was happy or not—happier than I might have made her, perhaps."

The girl said nothing, but the thoughtful, troubled look deepened in her eyes.

It was the old man who broke the silence. "Promise me one thing, my dear," he said. "Don't commit yourself to a bargain until you have told me the terms of it."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN FOR THE PART.

TOMMY GLENN had come into the restaurant rather late. He was no more than half way through his big English mutton-chop, when the members of the little orchestra, which played from six to eight, and then came back at ten for a couple of hours more, laid down their instruments and made their preparations to leave.

Tommy called a waiter. "Go up and tell that black-haired chap who plays the violin that I want to speak to him before he leaves," he directed.

And when the waiter set off on his errand Tommy ceased plying knife and fork to watch him.

The tall man, with the intensely black hair, pale face and bright, almost luminous eyes, was in the act of wrapping his violin tenderly in a big silk handkerchief before placing it in its case. He looked up quickly, evidently a little surprised, when the waiter spoke to him. Then, following the direction of the man's gestures, he caught Tommy's eye. Tommy nodded at him affirmatively. The man answered with a dignified little bow of assent.

Tommy had been scrutinizing him pretty minutely from the moment he entered the restaurant. He was aware that he had seen the fellow before, though he never would have placed him, never would have thought of connecting him

in any way with Marian, had it not been for Richard Hadley's suggestion.

Glenn was not yet willing to admit to himself that he had come here to the restaurant with any idea of taking preliminary steps in the campaign at which Hadley had so skilfully hinted that afternoon. He had assured himself that, even if he should decide to attempt this means of revenging himself on Marian, it was hardly possible that the man he would find here at the restaurant would be a fit tool for the purpose. A loafer of the curbstones and of park benches could hardly be expected to be capable of turning into an even respectable imitation of a titled aristocrat.

But the longer Tommy watched him the better and more promising he seemed. He was in full evening-dress, of course—that most trying, most truth-telling costume a man can wear. No man who was not of the sort necessary for Glenn's purpose could put on a dress-suit without making the fact apparent.

Indeed, as Tommy Glenn sat there and watched him while he played, noticed the way he sat and, in the intervals when he was not playing, observed his poise, his grace, his complete self-possession, his first feeling was one of annoyance. Who was this poverty-stricken fiddler, that he should assume so lofty an air? Tommy was working himself into quite a fume about this, when it suddenly occurred to him how fortunate the fellow's manner was—supposing, that is, that Tommy Glenn really meant to carry out the plan at which Richard Hadley had hinted.

If the man could talk as well as he could wear evening-clothes and sit in a chair, he was made absolutely to order for the part designed for him—of low enough position to make Marian's humiliation complete when she learned the truth, but, at the same time, capable of imposing upon her.

When Tommy ordered the waiter to summon the violinist to his table he was still pretending to himself that he had no present idea of taking Hadley's suggestion seriously. But the fellow looked interesting, and there could be no harm in talking to him.

The young violinist locked his precious instrument in its leather case, laid it on

top of the piano, put on a shabby overcoat and, hat in hand, descended from the rostrum where he had been playing.

After that brief, dignified little bow of assent, he had not glanced once in Tommy's direction, apparently had not given him a thought either, and Tommy began to wonder whether he was not completely forgotten. But if the young man had forgotten, he recollected in time, for he turned abruptly out of the aisle that led toward the door and halted at Tommy's table.

"You wished to speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tommy. "Sit down—sit down. Make yourself comfortable."

It was Tommy himself who needed this last injunction rather than the stranger, every line of whose tall, slender body proclaimed him to be perfectly at ease. Tommy was redder than usual, and he squirmed a little in his chair. There was a disconcerting quality of authority about this young man's voice.

With a faint smile he accepted Tommy's invitation, and seated himself at the opposite side of the table.

"It can't be a very gay life sitting up there fiddling all the time," Tommy began tentatively, after a moment's silence.

"No," said the violinist simply; "not gay, at all events."

Tommy Glenn suddenly sat up a little straighter.

"I thought you were a foreigner," he said. "You look like one."

"I am," said the other. "I am from Hungary. Why not?"

"You don't talk like a dago," said Tommy.

The young man made no comment, but he looked at Tommy Glenn a little more keenly than he had looked before, drew a little closer to the table and clasped his hands before him on the cloth.

Tommy's brow was getting shiny, as it always did when he was excited, and he got out his handkerchief and rubbed it vigorously.

The man would do. There was absolutely no doubt about it. Dressed up for the part, he would be almost good enough to fool Tommy himself. Once convinced of that, he found it was the only thing he needed to make his plan

complete. He would do what Hadley had suggested, and would make Hadley help him do it. No doubt crossed his mind of the willingness of the young man who sat there opposite to take the part assigned him.

The hands which lay there, lightly clasped upon the cloth, were fine, distinguished, aristocratic, but Tommy, though he had sharp eyes, had not noticed them particularly. What had caught his glance was the fact that the seams of his coat-sleeves were shiny, that the linen cuffs were frayed.

"My name," said Tommy, after another moment of silence, "is Thomas J. Glenn. Perhaps you have heard of me."

The other man bowed. If there was a touch of irony in this display of deference, Tommy did not perceive it.

"And yours, I suppose," he continued, "since you came from Hungary, begins with a hard sneeze?"

"My name," said the other, "is Stephan Aranyi."

Tommy laughed.

"Well, that's more like a yawn," said he.

No annoyance over this vulgar man's impertinence was discernible in the violinist's face, but the eyes were at once thoughtful and very keen, and Tommy Glenn was getting the whole of their concentrated attention.

"You play the violin pretty well," said Tommy. "I don't know anything about music, but I know what's good when I hear it. I don't suppose there is anything much in it, though."

"In it?" questioned the other, as if he did not understand.

"In your job," Tommy amplified. "You don't make much at it, do you?"

"I am afraid I can't answer that," said the other. "Much and little are relative terms."

Tommy did not understand exactly what he meant, so he changed the subject.

"How do you like New York?" he asked. "It's a great city, isn't it?"

"A great city for those who have conquered it. A terrible city for those it conquers."

"Yes," Tommy assented modestly. "We have a pretty good time." He paused a moment; then shot at him a

question: "How would you like to conquer it yourself?"

The other man answered, not as if he were speaking to Tommy's limited intelligence, but more as if he were thinking aloud.

"I don't know," he said; "I don't know. When I came here I meant to conquer it, but now I cannot be sure that it is worth the cost."

"It wasn't so easy as it looked, eh?" Tommy interrupted. And at that the other man came to himself with a start.

He made no comment on the observation, however, and presently Tommy continued: "Well, we can't all succeed; but sometimes, when we can't succeed in one way, we can in another. The main thing is to take our chance when it comes."

He paused a moment, whirled a salt-cellar between his fingers, and then, with eyes averted, asked a question:

"If you should get your chance to-night—if I should offer it to you—would you take it?"

"My chance?" questioned the other.

"Yes, a chance to succeed. A chance to conquer, as you call it, this town; a chance to be one of the people that little old New York talks about."

He did not look up until he had finished speaking. When he did he found Stephan's brilliant, penetrating eyes looking through him in a disconcerting way.

"Why do you ask that question?" said the violinist in a low tone. "Are you merely idly curious to see what a man in my position would say if such a thing were dangled before him, or have you some serious intent behind it all?"

"I never was more serious in my life," said Tommy. "I tell you, if you want a chance you can have it. I'll give it to you. I'll give you good clothes instead of those you're wearing now; I'll give you money and put you up at a good hotel, and fix it so that you will have as good a time as any man in New York. I'd see that you got acquainted with some people that were worth knowing. I know that kind of people myself; and there's one of them—one of the prettiest girls I ever saw—who I think you'd find it worth while to cultivate. She's musical, and all that. She might take quite a fancy to you."

He had a feeling that he was stating his proposition rather successfully. The words were rolling off his tongue glibly enough anyhow.

"I'm not a cheap skate," he continued. "I'd do the job handsomely. Money isn't anything to me, and I don't care about expense. I guess if you know anything at all about me you know that. And all you have to do is to say the word."

"What word?" demanded the other. "What do I have to perform on my part to acquire the right to lie down in this bed of roses you talk of preparing for me?"

Still Tommy did not look at him. Had he done so, it is probable that he would have hesitated before going any farther. But his eyes were still on the salt-cellar, and his ears were not true enough to detect the ring of suppressed anger in Stephan's voice.

"Why, the beauty of it is," said Tommy, "you don't have to do anything at all. I'll do all the work myself. I'm going to make a nobleman of you—a count, or something like that. Your own last name will do. We won't have to make up a new one. And then I'll introduce you around to my friends. It's just by way of a sort of joke. People over here get so silly about anything that has a title tacked onto it—that—well, it struck me to be worth the price to see their faces when they found that they'd got let in."

"I suppose," said Stephan, "there is some one particular person with whom you wish this joke to be most effective. I gather from what you say that it is the young lady you spoke of a few moments back."

Tommy looked a little nonplused. The inference was one he was not quite prepared for. Yet he did not see his way to deny it.

"Oh, well, perhaps," he said, "you'll know in good time. There's no need of naming her now."

"No," said Stephan quietly. "As it happens, that is unnecessary. And what results are you calculating upon from this masquerade?" he asked, after a moment of silence.

"Why," said Tommy, "when we have carried it far enough—as far as I want

to carry it—I'll pay you a lump sum for your services, and you can go back to Hungary. When you're well out of the way the truth will come out. Nobody will be hurt, and I'll have had my fun. And I'm a man," he concluded solemnly, "I'm a man who's willing to pay for his fun."

"I fear I cannot accept your offer," said Stephan. "I've spent a very interesting half-hour with you, but I am afraid that will have to terminate our acquaintance. There happens to be an insuperable objection to your plan."

"Bosh!" said Tommy. "No objection is insuperable. Name it."

"I am afraid," said Stephan, "that the nature of the objection is such that, with my limited command of English, it would be quite impossible to make you understand. You will understand, however, that my refusal is final."

He rose and bowed as he spoke. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added something more: "I am not well acquainted in your country as yet, and your customs and ideas are somewhat strange to me. I've been interested to hear you define yourself as a man who pays for his fun. In my own country you would be characterized somewhat more simply. There is just one word that could be used there to describe a man who has made a suggestion such as you have made me to-night. If I am not mistaken the English translation of that one word is 'blackguard.' Good evening, sir."

Tommy Glenn thrust back his own chair and started to his feet. For an instant the two men confronted each other. Then Tommy's quick, momentary anger passed away. It was preposterous that a man dressed like that—a man shabby, thin, hunger-worn—should insult him.

He laughed.

"Have it your own way," he said, "but you really need a square meal and a decent suit of clothes. You'd better come down off your high horse and take it. I'll leave the offer open till to-morrow noon. Think it over."

Obadiah Williams had never got out of the habit of waking up at half past five in the morning, and the hours from

half past five till half past seven rested heavily on his hands. He could use them neither for work nor for play. Nobody else in the city was awake except milkmen, and even they had no leisure for Uncle Obie.

So he had formed the habit of using that period of time for his morning walk, whenever the weather made it possible for a man of his years to venture out. In these fine days of early summer he nearly always walked in the park, and as the morning after his talk with Marian was as fine a day as a man could hope for, it was quite in the natural course of things that he should have found himself strolling along one of its sunny paths.

But it was distinctly out of the ordinary that he should find any one here enjoying the park ahead of him. Perhaps enjoying is not the word, for the young man he saw sitting on a bench that commanded a view of the drive and part of the bridal-path did not look happy. He looked, rather, to be in the depth of profound melancholy. That man was Stephan Aranyi.

He looked up rather listlessly at hearing footsteps approaching his bench, but smiled when the quaint old figure of Obadiah Williams came in view. There was something about the old man's look that went well with the tang of the morning breeze and the fresh wholesomeness of everything at this time of day.

Uncle Obadiah smiled in immediate response and, without ceremony, seated himself beside Stephan on the bench.

"It ain't often," he said, as he clasped his hands over the knob of his stick, "it ain't often that I find any one hereabouts within two or three hours of sunup."

"I'll confess it's my first visit," said Stephan. "It occurred to me that this would be a pleasanter place to wait for the city to finish its rest than the bedroom in which I had not been able to get a night's sleep myself."

"Been worryin'?" asked Uncle Obie.

"Yes," said Stephan; "that's about it."

The old man's gaze traveled over him swiftly, but minutely. "Luck been goin' against you?" he asked.

"Oh, I can't call it luck," said Stephan. "It's all my own doing."

Now, old Obadiah Williams's question had really been a trap—a snare in which many of the scores of people who came to him for aid stumbled at the very beginning of their mission. Uncle Obie did not like to hear a man bewail his luck, and he used to say, in response to such a statement, that if a man was unlucky he was afraid he couldn't help him.

Of course, Stephan had no idea that any power to help or hinder his affairs rested in this quaint old man, least of all that he had any connection with the very vital center of them all. However, when he found the old man looking at him with undisguised approval, he was conscious of an overmastering impulse to talk to him; to tell him the thoughts that had kept him awake all night, and led him on, with every hour, into a deeper despondency. He was very much alone; he had no real friends, and now, as never before in his life, he craved the luxury of feeling that he was understood.

"I've only been in this country a few months," he said. "I'm a Hungarian—a perfect stranger here. I've just awakened to the fact that I came over on a fool's errand."

"Well," said Uncle Obie, "if it was a fool's errand, it is well you waked up."

"I am not sure of that," said Stephan, "for if the thing I've awakened to is the truth, I'd rather have gone on dreaming. I had always had the idea that this America of yours was the one place in the world where a man might go as far in any direction as his courage, his ability would take him. I thought that in America a man avoided the curse of a label. Do you see what I mean? In my country—in every other country that I know about—a man is branded at his birth with a label. It tells what he is, what he may do. No matter what his abilities are he carries that label to the grave."

"To some it gives rights and privileges for which they are not fit, and to others it denies rights and privileges of which they are deserving. The more clearly I understood the truth of that fact, the more I came to hate it, until I finally decided that I would come to America—to the only country in the

world, as I foolishly thought, where a man would be judged solely by what he was, and not by what he wore. That was the fool's errand I started on. And it came to an end yesterday."

The old man looked at him thoughtfully.

"Your label, for a label, must have been a pretty good one," he commented.

Stephan started a little, then smiled.

"You're the first person I've met in America who has discovered that fact," he said.

"You've been here only a few months, you say?" Uncle Obie asked.

Stephan nodded.

"How much of this country have you seen? How many of the eighty millions of us do you know? Have you been off the island of Manhattan yet? It seems to me you have begun to despair of the United States of America on rather short notice."

Stephan smiled rather ruefully.

"Your questions make me look rather young and rather foolish," he said. "Of course it's true that I had come to too hasty a conclusion; and it's also true, as I suppose you suspect, that my disappointment was more personal and less philosophical than I tried to make out. Do you mind if I tell you a little more?"

"Wait a bit," said the old man. He explored his pockets for a pipe and a pouch of tobacco. "I've a grandniece," he said, "who objects to my smoking before breakfast. She says it's bad for me, and if I keep it up long enough I'll probably die. And I suppose she's right about it. But before I die I'll have enjoyed a good many before-breakfast smokes. There's nothing like them."

When the pipe was drawing he turned once more to his young companion on the bench. "Now, go ahead," said he. "Let's hear the story."

"Well," said Stephan, with a downward gesture of his hands, "you see where a casual glance would classify me socially. I earn my living playing the violin in a restaurant. I can really play a great deal better than that, and some day I mean to make New York aware of the fact. In the meantime, I earn my bread as I can, without shame, like any other honest man. It hasn't been a very enjoyable existence, but there has been

one bright spot in it. I suppose you will laugh when I tell you it is a girl's face."

"No," said Uncle Obie. "Old men like me don't laugh at things like that."

"Well," said Stephan, "it's rather absurd, for all that. She's out of my world altogether—rich, spoiled, luxurious. In the ordinary circumstances of life she would never know that a man like me existed. For all that, I have had the sublime folly to fall in love with her. She is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen. I don't mean a cold, classical, perfect sort of beauty; but there is something about her eyes, and about that wonderful, sensitive, expressive mouth of hers that have all the possibilities of a man's dreams in them."

"I know I am talking like a romantic fool, but that's the way I feel about her. I have set here in the park just to see her go driving by; I have loitered near her house just to get a glimpse of her. My day, somehow, didn't seem complete without that glimpse. She has never seen me. Her eyes have rested on me, but only as an obstruction that she couldn't see through. That's all natural—all quite to be expected."

"Until yesterday I had nothing more to complain of than the apparent impossibility of ever reaching her at all—of ever becoming a human being to her. But yesterday fate gave me my great chance. I was able yesterday to do her a service—a great service, as things go—one that was by no means easy for me nor superfluous for her. For one instant of time yesterday the thing I might succeed in doing, or might fail to do, was the most important thing in the world to her. And when it was over I stood before her. I ought to have been a human being to her then, no matter what I wore, no matter how, in her eyes, I was labeled."

"But she did not look me in the face—not once. And for the service I had done her she offered to pay me. That was what brought my house down about my ears. That was what swept me, at a single breath, out of my fool's paradise and into chaos. I found out in that moment that when it came to the real things of life—things that lie beneath the surface—those beautiful eyes of hers could see no more than a doll's."

"I don't know if I have made you understand. You can't understand how I have been hoping, all these months, against reason for just such a chance as I had yesterday. I thought, like a fool, that that chance would be all that I needed."

"Do you see where the bitterness of it comes in? It isn't that the dream didn't come true; it isn't that I am no more to her this morning than I was yesterday morning. It is that I have found, after all, that there was nothing worth dreaming about."

There was silence for a moment or two. Then Uncle Obie asked an abrupt question:

"How old are you?"

Stephan looked at him surprised, but answered without hesitation.

"I am thirty," he said. "Why?"

"And how old do you think she is?"

"Twenty, perhaps," said Stephan. "Not more."

"How much," questioned the old man, relentless, "how much did you understand of life at twenty? How far beneath appearances could you see then?"

There was a long silence, Stephan leaning forward, his chin on one hand, gazing thoughtfully out over the stretches of the park, while his companion eyed him curiously.

"Yes," said the younger man at last, "I see you're right. I was wrong to say there was nothing to dream about. Some day or other—when she has been hurt—when the acid of life has eaten through the veneer that is over her soul—sometime or other a man will stand before her, and she will see him as he is. But—well, it will be another man. I've been a fool to hope, and I'm a fool to care. But calling oneself a fool doesn't help much, does it?"

"No," said the old man. "You've got your dreams, though, and dreams are what most of us have to get along with."

He rose stiffly from the bench and held out his hand. Stephan rose, too, and shook it warmly.

"Thank you," he said simply. "You don't know how much you've helped."

The old man nodded. Then, with a word of farewell, he walked slowly away.

Stephan dropped back on the bench

and watched his receding figure around the curve of the path. And neither of them dreamed how queer a trick Fate had played in permitting that interview between them.

Stephan got his breakfast at a lunch-counter, and then went home—to the only home that he could boast—that is, a single, shabby, dingy room in an upper East Side boarding-house.

The only work he had for which he received any pay was in the restaurant, and that did not begin until six o'clock in the evening. But there was another labor—a labor of love and hope and ambition—which occupied his days.

The deal-table in the room was littered with music manuscript. Bending over that table, or sitting before the battered, strident piano, which was the best his means could afford, he forgot the dinginess of his surroundings, the weariness of the drudgery by which he earned his board. Sometimes he could even forget Marian.

So occupied, he saw everything transfigured in the golden glow of the melodies which came welling up so spontaneously. But to-day this work seemed hopeless, too—dead and arid.

He seated himself at his rickety table and gazed blankly out of the one little window which the room possessed.

It was true what the old man had said; true that he had been wrong to judge her and to find her wanting; true that he still might have his dreams. And dreams, the old man had said, are what most of us have to content ourselves with.

He clenched his hands rebelliously. He did not want to dream without the possibility of making his dream come true. A dream like that—a dream that must stay always in the twilight land of Might-Have-Been—was nothing but torment, was like the mirage of water to a parched man lost on a desert.

Presently his eyes fell to the table, and he saw before him something that, but for his preoccupation, he would have noticed the moment he entered the room—a long, official-looking letter, with a foreign stamp, addressed to himself.

He tore open the envelope, opened the letter and read it. Before he finished his eyes were luminous and excited, his

brow was livid with the intense concentration of his thought.

He read the letter again. Then tossed it upon the table, and for the better part of an hour paced restlessly back and forth in the narrow limits of the little room.

His excitement mounted higher and higher as the time passed. At last he seated himself again at the table, rummaged about in a drawer for some stationery, and began to write. The note did not take him long. This is what it said:

I have reconsidered the proposal you made me last evening at the restaurant, and have decided to accept it. I will assume the character you wish me to take, will carry out your wishes in the matter.

STEPHAN ARANYI.

The note was addressed to Mr. Thomas J. Glenn.

CHAPTER VII.

HADLEY'S THREAT.

TOMMY GLENN, clad in an immaculate and irreproachable yachting costume, was leaning idly against the taffrail of his yacht and gazing somewhat discontentedly out across the moonlit shores of the little cove where the Diana had made her anchorage for the night.

Not far away from where he stood Richard Hadley was lounging in a comfortable deck-chair. He seemed quite at ease, entirely content with his surroundings and with the way the world was treating him. His head was turned a little to command a view of Tommy Glenn. In that position he remained perfectly motionless, except for the delicate hand that raised a cigar to his lips, and took it away again at regular intervals.

His host's manner was very, very different. Tommy squirmed about, kicked at the rail with impatient feet, betraying with every move he made a rising exasperation. Finally he flung the cigarette he was smoking as far as he could out over the water, watched the tiny glowing arc it described, and heard the little hiss with which the harbor received it.

"Confound him!" he said; "he smokes better cigarettes than I do."

"That's easily remedied, isn't it?" asked Hadley.

"No, it isn't. I don't know where he gets them, and there's nothing on them but his own infernal monogram."

"He'd tell you, no doubt, if you asked him," said Hadley. "He seems an obliging sort of nobleman."

"Well, I won't ask him," said Tommy, "and there's an end of it. He's cocky enough already. It's the same way in everything else," he continued fretfully. "My tailor makes him better clothes than he makes me. My valet simply bows down and worships him. Waiters in the restaurants pay twice as much attention to him as they do to me. I can't see why, for he doesn't tip so very heavy. He takes the whole thing as if it belonged to him. He's as polite and superior when he's alone with me as he is before other people. Oh, well, every dog has its day, but the 'count's' day has lasted about long enough."

He crossed the deck restlessly and gazed out over the water, shielding his eyes from the light that streamed from the companionway.

"He's been out with her in that canoe for an hour," he said. "Why don't they come back?"

Hadley smiled rather contemptuously.

"Really, my dear Glenn, you ought to realize that plain Americans like ourselves can hardly compete with a titled foreigner. If you had entertained any hopes of getting more than a stray glance now and then from the lady in question, you should have been more discreet than to have added the count to your party."

Hadley's words, which were spoken in his politest drawl, seemed to add the last straw to Tommy's exasperation. He whirled around in undisguised anger with a furious retort upon his lips; but, before he could utter it, the sudden appearance in the companionway of the portly, dignified figure of Mrs. Martin Farwell checked him.

As she came rather ponderously out on deck, both young men advanced to greet her.

"This is better than a novel in the cabin," she remarked. "But how does it happen that you two young gentlemen have the deck to yourselves? I was half

afraid to come out for fear of spoiling a *tête-à-tête*. Where is Marian? And where is the count?"

"Out there on the harbor somewhere, in a canoe," said Hadley. "The same answer does for both questions, just as the same canoe serves for both people. The others have taken to the launch, with the purpose, I believe, of seeing how far they can go up that little river before they run aground."

"And left you here all by yourselves?" protested the matron. "How very inconsiderate."

"We have nothing to complain of now that you have come out to keep us company," said Hadley. "We were finding each other rather dull."

Tommy had remained in the background during the colloquy, too angry with Hadley to take any part in it. Now, however, Mrs. Farwell seemed to become aware, for the first time, of his presence on deck, and to realize that, insignificant as he was, after all he was their host.

"I think Marian will certainly be back before long," she said. "There is no doubt about its being safe, is there?"

"Why," said Tommy, "the water is as smooth as a mill-pond, but I didn't see them start, and I don't know how good a man in a canoe the count is. These foreigners generally don't know much about water."

"Oh, but Count Aranyi is such an exception to that rule," she protested. "I think he is a very exceptional young man altogether." She turned to Hadley for confirmation as she spoke.

"Very, indeed," he assented, shooting an amused glance at Tommy Glenn over his shoulder. "A unique young man, I should say."

Ever since the beginning of the cruise, two weeks before, Mrs. Martin Farwell had been finding the days, the hours—every moment's time—pure gold. She had never been so completely happy in her life before. After vexatious years, things seemed to be coming right at last.

Tommy's invitation to her and Marian had surprised her a little at first, and Marian's willingness to accept it still more, for she knew that Tommy had asked her to marry him, and had been firmly, though kindly, rejected.

"But he's being awfully nice about it," Marian explained to her mother. "He says it was a mistake—that he won't bother me any more that way, but that he does want to be good friends. I sha'n't mind a bit going on his yacht, and I think it was awfully nice of him to ask us."

Tommy had said nothing of Hadley's being a member of the party. But that astute young gentleman had no intention of being left out, and by way of making it possible for him to go he had sought and obtained a private interview with Marian's mother. He had told her frankly that Marian had rejected him, but that he believed it to have been done under a misapprehension, which time would wear away. He had asked Mrs. Farwell's permission to join the party without notifying Marian to the effect in advance. He had given as a reason for this that Marian would undoubtedly refuse to go if she knew he was going, and that he wished very eagerly for a chance to set matters right with her.

It was with this newly awakened hope, as the sum of all possible good, that Mrs. Martin Farwell had set out on the cruise.

They had not been aboard an hour before the whole complexion of things changed. Richard Hadley became, at best, a slack second string to her bow. She had hardly been able to believe her ears when she heard Tommy presenting to her a man whom he had just addressed, with easy familiarity, as "count." When she saw that the man was young, handsome, charming, and supremely eligible for the one purpose dearest to her life, her happiness was complete.

And the cup simply overflowed when she saw him flush with eagerness as he turned from her to greet Marian; saw that her daughter had made an impression upon him which the trained nonchalance of the man of the world was unable to conceal. Marian's color had risen a little, too, and her eyes were very bright. Oh, it was a good world. There could be no doubt of that.

The days since then had been absolutely flawless. There was no thorn in the path; there was nothing to suggest a disquieting prophecy for the future.

The other members of the party on the yacht were comparative nobodies. There was no one, at any rate, of sufficient social importance to make Mrs. Farwell feel ill at ease. There were no other marriageable young women aboard attractive enough to deflect the count's glance for one moment from Marian. They had him all to themselves. They were safe from interruption. And to cap the climax, Marian seemed as much pleased at this circumstance as she was herself.

Her perceptions were not remarkably acute, but to-night, after she had stood a while longer talking to those two young men whom she had found monopolizing the deck, she became aware of something electrical in the atmosphere, across which her own person had interposed as a non-conductor.

They had something to talk about, these two, and were waiting—Hadley ironically polite, as was his wont, and Tommy Glenn undisguisedly sulky—until she should withdraw and make a resumption of their conversation possible.

"I left my novel in a very exciting place," she said presently; "and since my duties as a chaperon are not required on deck I think I'll go back and finish reading it."

There was a minute of silence after she had disappeared within the cabin. Then, with surprising truculence, Tommy turned upon his companion.

"See here, Hadley," he said, "I asked you to stay on the yacht to-night because I wanted to talk to you. Well, I'm going to talk straight, and you've got to talk straight yourself. You have carried this high and mighty bluff about not knowing what it was we were doing, and of having forgotten the very plan you suggested to me, far enough. You're in this as much as I am, and you've got to admit it. I can't keep this fellow in hand all by myself any longer. I don't know whether you can, but you've got to try. You've got a sort of way with you that I haven't. I'll admit that, if it's any satisfaction to you. With you backing him up the way you've been doing, I can't do anything with him at all."

The same calm, contemptuous smile with which he had looked after the re-

treating figure of Mrs. Martin Farwell was still on Hadley's lips. He lounged back into his deck-chair and relighted his cigar.

"Have you quite finished this remarkable address?" he asked. "You'd better get it all out of your system at once."

"No, I haven't finished," said Tommy hotly. "I've got just this much more to say. I'm asking nothing but what I've a right to expect from you, and if you don't come over to my side, and do what I am telling you to do, pretty quick—well, you will find yourself in hot water, that's all. I guess I can manage that."

"Oh, the hot water is there right enough," said Hadley easily; "but I am not the person who is in danger of falling into it."

"No?" questioned Tommy, with an attempt at sarcasm.

"Not at all," said Hadley. "I am absolutely in the dark as to what your insinuations may mean. I'm here on this yacht as your guest. You invited me here and introduced me to a man you called 'Count Stephan Aranyi.' That's absolutely all I know about it. When you talk about my having suggested a plan to you, you are talking nonsense. I remember your suggesting a plan to me, and my telling you that it was such a plan as no gentleman would stoop to execute." He paused a moment and laughed. "I sincerely hope that you took my advice."

(To be continued.)

Tommy was staring at him aghast. He was prepared for effrontery, but nothing on so magnificent a scale as this.

"Talk about nerve!" he ejaculated feebly.

And then, with a sudden access of anger, he got himself together.

"You know who he is, confound you! You know he's a restaurant fiddler. You yourself told me where to go to find him."

Hadley paid no more attention to his words than if they had been so much silence.

"Of course," he went on quietly, "if I see anything about this friend of yours, who calls himself a 'count,' that causes me any suspicion of his genuineness, I shall have him looked up myself. And if, unhappily, my suspicion should be verified—if I should discover that he was nothing but an impostor—then, of course, it would be my duty to expose him, not only to you, who are his host, but to any other of my friends whom I thought the fact might concern."

Tommy Glenn was standing over the chair where Hadley sat, his eyes literally glaring with rage.

"Curse you!" he cried hoarsely. "Do you mean that?"

"Absolutely and exactly," said Hadley. "You'd better make up your mind to it, and you'd better take the thing quietly, too. I don't care to be addressed in that manner."

THE ROSE YOU GAVE.

THE rose you gave has told me true
How strange a thing a rose may be;
Because it seemed so slight to you
And meant so much to me.

The rose is yellowed long ago,
And withered are its dainty wings;
Yet it has found a place, I know,
Among immortal things.


For be they lands of life or death
Wherein its fragrant spirit stays,
The shadow of its faded breath
Has colored all my days.

Ernest Jerome Hopkins.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S UNDERSTUDY.

BY FRANK CONWAY.

A SHORT STORY.

 HE had the gilt hair and scarlet cheeks of a new doll. She was as tiny and tidy as though she had been taken from a Christmas tree.

With swift, soundless steps she advanced from the door of the room to Jack's bedside and kissed him on the scalp.

"Pauline, baby," he said.

He spoke as spiritedly as would a man about to win the death payment on his insurance policy. He sounded like a soldier on a stretcher, in whom there is not left a single hurrah.

Typhoid fever had held him in the shade of his roof for seven weeks, and had so exhausted him of tar and pepper that his was the prosperous, vigor-kindled face of a Chinese conspirator being officially starved to death for his secrets. The pillows against which he had been propped up served to accentuate for Pauline this ill man's skinny, yellow ugliness.

She turned from him. As she looked through the window, out on the beautiful midwinter brilliance, he mumbled:

"What a day it is!"

"Yes, I guess it is."

She pulled off the coat of her gray tailored suit, and, sticking out a patent-leather boot, pushed a chair to his bedside. She was a creature fluent with short, quick moves. Even when she seated herself she didn't keep still long enough to be counted.

"It's Friday, Jackie, and I've had a Black Friday scare."

For a minute or so she played a mum part, with the air of marking time till her announcement had soaked well into his brain. Her little face was grave when she again spoke:

"Tell me, how's my future husband?" and she inclined toward him.

"You're concerned about me, Pauline?"

"You bet I am!"

"Why?"

With her white-gloved hand she fanned away a fly that had been flapping its wings in flights around Jack's tousled, tar-colored hair—half-caressing him in the act—and said:

"You know it has been advertised that I'm—an heiress."

"Yes, and it has been advertised that the people on Hoboken Heights are all taking milk baths, and that the moon is a cheesy emerald, but—"

"Don't deal out paleolithic jokes, Jackie," she pleaded.

She used to boast a command of five big words. A year's acquaintance with Jack and his friends had given her another—the one she just had taken a chance on.

Her big blue eyes were pensive for a while. Then she went on with her plea: "Please just be like a donkey, for a minute—be all ears, I mean." Briskly, then, she told him: "I saw my attorney a short time ago, and he mentioned what I must do to get the money uncle left me. Of course, you remember."

He did. Her grand-uncle, contractor, cart-tail political orator, and one-time county chairman; had reared five charming daughters. Each of them, perhaps confident that a husband could be had at any old time, had let slip her early chances to get married. Uncle had lived long enough to see the five foolish virgins die old maids.

To his sole surviving relative, his orphaned grand-niece, Pauline, he bequeathed his barrellfuls of money, Jack

understood, on the condition that she be married in church on or before the day she became twenty-one years old.

"This morning," Pauline resumed, "the postman served me this shock."

Her fingers had been active around the satin lining of her coat. With her announcement, she handed a letter to the man in the bed. He read it.

It made him wink. Therein her attorney-guardian informed her that he had been guilty of one of his characteristic oversights—that, on an accidental re-reading of her uncle's will, he had been disagreeably surprised to see that they all were one year short in their understanding of its most important clause.

"I didn't want to frighten off whatever flesh the fever has left you, Jackie," said his fiancée in a sort of suppressed wail, "but—well, you're entitled to oral notice, aren't you, that we may have to start with a dry exchequer, living on stewed prunes and love, Jackie? Uncle's estate will be whacked up among faithful family servants and a couple of colleges if I'm not married on or before to-morrow. To-morrow will be the twentieth anniversary of my birthday."

Jack didn't say a word, but his face was a whole page.

"Can't you go to church with me to-morrow?" she asked, and her eyes and outheld hands begged him to stretch himself and rise to the heroic. "Can't you get up any speed?"

"I'm afraid I can't, dear. This fever has taken all the teeth out of my sprocket. It's too bad, Pauline, but nothing can be done for me. The best physician in town might administer to me a hypodermic dose with a stuffed club, but he couldn't excite me out of my inertia." The poor patient grew green in the face with despond. With all the contraries of vivacity he drilled out another strong statement: "If I were in a tight race for the Presidency, I couldn't crawl to the polls and cast my vote for myself."

That was the limit. Pauline, when she heard it, went to pieces—her face in her hands, her shoulders rising and falling convulsively.

At the sound of her sobs he scratched his skull and shook himself. Then hoarsely, like a croupy elocutionist, he de-claimed:

"I always think of the right thing to do after the other party's gone. Leave me now, baby, and come back within, say, a hundred minutes."

II.

PAULINE had been gone but a tenth of that time when the door of the room was pressed open by somebody that evidently took his time as majestically as does the day dawning—and there crept in before Jack a young man quietly dressed, so high and thin that he could have hidden himself as easily as does a giraffe, and capped by wet, inky hair plastered down from a part far on one side of his peak. He looked like an undertaker.

Jack gave him as rattling a discharge of saluting-powder as a reasonable worthy could expect from a typhoid fever victim. "Ah, Poke, I'm glad to see your pleasant, cheery profile once again!"

When Poke finished the work of stringing his frame out in a deep chair between the fireplace and the foot of the bed, Jack passed to him the tidings that Pauline had brought.

"I've almost strained my head with thought—but I can think of only one thing for us to do," said her fiancé. "It has been done successfully—in the theater—and I'm going to unfold my plan to Pauline. I mean—a fake marriage, followed in due time, to be sure, by a divorce."

"You mean that in order to catch her uncle's hand-down Pauline must take unto herself a dummy husband?"

Poke rose to his six-foot altitude with that. Tall enough to take things from a top shelf without a ladder, and addicted to a drawl, he looked and sounded like one of those slow, self-sure, world-wise chaps that come from Indiana.

"Admitting, Jack, that the end sanctifies the means, the questions immediately arise: Who will marry her to oblige you? And who will tamely stay under the table till he's called out, and then tamely allow himself to be juggled aside in the divorce courts?"

Just then a girl in the white cap, cuffs, and apron of a trained nurse showed herself at the door.

"Mr. Wall is below."

She said it as something for which she was as sorry as she could be. It would

have been inferred by a stranger that Mr. Wall had been there before, that they couldn't receive him with an honest show of a municipality's "Welcome to Our City" spirit, and that the nurse knew this.

Said Jack grievingly: "Here is a headful of thoughts, I suppose. Well, we'll have to let him bring himself up," and the nurse withdrew.

Poke stuffed his hands into his gloves. "If he gets through that door before I leave by it, I'll jump through the window and fracture my face."

"For spite, Poke? Then you'll fail of the effect desired. They say his heart beats around forty. Of course, I've heard his giddy French elaborations and bold, bad views of things before," remarked Jack drearily, "but I'm too sick now to be upset by another dose of his windy irreverence."

Poke drifted to the door. There he explained: "I can't stay—and stand a session with Wall. He's living a thousand years before his time, and I haven't happened late enough for that period. So, so-long, Jack."

III.

PAULINE was a girl of catchy looks and winsome ways, and Jack foresaw that were she to become a make-believe bride it would be in the chances that her stage spouse might wish to be honored and disobeyed as her genuine husband.

A word from that actor, establishing collusion, would not only bar her from divorcing him on the ground of wilful and continued desertion, but would leave her liable to indictment for perjury in the filing of her complaint.

The job, therefore, demanded a man who enjoyed pleasing others, and who would as good as file a bond refraining himself from falling in love with the pretty Pauline.

Jack ever was loath to do anything naughty, but ready enough now that it had to be done. If there could have been suggested to him a right way to do this wrong, he would have paid a handsome counsel fee to hear about it. He felt that the fingers of the man stamping up the stairs to his room would untie no knots for him. Wall never had been medaled as a simplifier of problems.

He admitted himself to the room, and, walking to the bed, laid on Jack's shoulder a beautiful, well-kept hand. With the other he accepted the emaciated one that reached to him from the sheets.

"How d'ye do, Alfred?" said Jack, with an effort at such vocal racket and manual promptness as might somewhat express a genial welcome. Then he sized up, clothes and all—breathed in, so to speak—his visitor.

Mr. Wall was something flossy. A rose-pink personal cultivation—"class"—stuck out all over him. He was well proportioned, wasp-waisted, and wore a dark sack suit of faultless fit. A brazen red waistcoat called attention to his expanse of chest. His hair, close-cropped to the crown, there became a tangle of silken threads the color of old-gold. His cranium was a beautiful formation, his forehead nobly broad. The eye-hollows of his face—which was too crooked in contour, from the nose-bridge down, to pass as pretty—rather indicated a man susceptible to subtle sense impressions and "fat" on all sorts of refinements—a thinker tuned up pretty high—a youth that knew it all.

His flesh was as white as marble, and to Jack it felt as hard. Within a minute his presence filled the room with the fragrance of one fresh from his bath—a fragrance that yielded Jack sweet suggestion of his own babyhood days when his mother used to dust him with violet-scented powder and he used to grab the puff and try to eat it.

Wall declared to Jack—in a voice low and soft, though disciplined to a scrupulous distinctness of enunciation—that he did not know how to feel sorry for him.

"You see, I've never been sick a second in my life. If anything ever ails me, or if ever I become a fat man, I shall take prussic acid in my soup."

With that pleasant assurance, he seated himself at one of the great windows of the room and began to whistle.

Yes, indeed, life was a lark with Alfred Wall. He was, Jack knew, the son of a bonanza farmer putrid with money, and the darling boy of an opulent old aunt; and he looked care-free, and down for all the comforts and conveniences of life.

They were engaged on general topics, when Jack conceitedly struck up music on

the theme of his betrothal. Wall took his watch from his waistcoat-pocket and scanned it. Just as its chimes were ringing the quarter-hour he said, "Five minutes—I've been here that long, and I'm already in deep."

"On what?"

"On a pretty delicate subject."

"Why, Alfred, you've not even wet your feet on any subject yet."

Wall smiled. "Why did you yammer to me about your engagement to be married? Never mind. Maybe you don't know that the only thing for which I'm not popular with myself is my habit of laying siege, on that subject, to brains that are bomb-proof—to minds that stubbornly resist all attacks of reason. You do know what I think of matrimony."

Fate now stood at Wall's shoulder and prompted him, for good or evil, to blither himself into the greatest crisis of his life.

Without flurry or emphasis he went on: "And you, and all *your* kind, know that connubiality defiles your souls—such as you have."

"Well," Jack protested plaintively, "if that's so, I'm not the only one to be jumped on—and I don't want my spirit broken by you. Goodness only knows, it takes nerve to get married."

"And it takes chloroform to kill dogs."

Jack pressed his shoulders back against the pillows. "I don't ever care what anybody calls me as long as I'm called in time to eat," he said, "but I'm going to let that crack stir me to words. I'm out for an argument with you"—he flung it forth gallantly. "Understand, however, if you make it too warm, I'll holler for the nurse to come up and take my temperature—and you can take your leave."

"Go on." Wall dropped that as a gentle encouragement, not as an impatient command.

"Well, I propose that a man living singly is like a horse plugging along—alone—at one side of a team-pole."

"A horse? As tame as all that?" Wall resorted to his easy, almost stationary smile. "Why, if I married, I should murder. I should slide back to the savage in a flash. I should sink to the fiercest animalism in a second. I should rage through the world like one of Nietzsche's blond beasts."

"Or one of Barnum's trick-donkeys."

The Narcissus seated at the window, with his white, exquisite hands in his lap and his finger-ring dazzling in the sunlight, made it clear that he would no more attend to the punster's coarse scoffs.

"If that's the way you feel about it," said Jack, "simply don't get married. Suit yourself."

"Shoot myself?"

"I said *suit* yourself, Alfred. As for me, I obey the greatest law of life."

"Law your fussing old grandmother!"

Wall's carefully educated voice exclaimed, and over the varnished floor he began that back-and-forth, up-and-down exercise made famous or foolish by the Duke of York and his six thousand tin men. "If it were the greatest law, or any kind of a law, the prehistoric animals would not now be extinct. The fact is, you are one of the led, ignorant, mere beings that are smothered with obsessions as rusty as the age in which began the game of life. You can't get outside those obsessions long enough to see man's spiritual nature is something that has grown gradually within him since he first walked erect, and that matrimony, not only tolerating but encouraging and dignifying a comminglement of the sexes, levels him to the brute creation."

"You just love to tell the grand old story, don't you, Alfred?"

"No more than you hate to hear it," Wall counterbuffed. Without haste or spirit, he continued, as he reseated himself: "This geese story about it being man's high mission and all that, you accept, firstly, because it helps you along the line of least resistance."

He produced this so pertly, it irritated the typhoid-fever exhibit. So, too, did the mere sight of Wall, sitting there in his insulting good health—his classic physical beauty—his fragrant cleanliness—his well-groomed clothes—and his cold, cold gall.

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Jack.

"You swallow this geese story in the lump," Wall persisted, "secondly, because if you made wry faces and backed away from it, you'd bring on you paralyzing anathemas and flattening pronouncements of damnation."

"Say, Alfred," Jack abruptly inquired, "do you believe in anything?"

"In fate."

"Are you anything?"

"I, at least, am not one of your drinking, smoking, cheating, connubializing barbarians."

Jack regarded him dubiously. "Sometimes, young man, I think you're joshing me. Haven't there really been any lassies in your life?"

"No—which is something that I neither hide nor parade, neither apologize for nor pride myself on."

"Then," said Jack, pursuing his examination of the witness, "as a boy, you never played 'Post-office' or 'Pillows and Kisses'?"

"I have never been within any female's contaminating reach. Man levels himself—"

"Now, that's the second or the seventh time you've said the same thing!" interrupted Jack testily. "You're blowing echoes on your bugle."

"Is that so? Well, how would you like to hear the echoes of my footsteps on the stairs?" Wall put the question with all his finished French politeness, and lifted his derby from the window-sill.

Jack stayed him with an appealing gesture of five fingers. Why, here was just the man he was looking for! Where on earth could he rake up one to serve better in the move he meant to make? In the light of the answer he gave himself, every word Wall had spoken since he appeared in the room sparkled with pertinence.

Jack swiftly explained to the pagan his predicament and his great need—and then his chin touched his chest.

"But, you wouldn't do. You swing the breeze too well to be a man of action."

Wall, gazing absent-mindedly out of the window, remarked with his characteristic calm: "I've met many men of action, and every one of them was either insufferably gabby or sure to make an ass of himself every tenth time that he spoke. What were you about to ask of me?"

Jack came out with it. "Will you marry Pauline—that way—for me? Ah, but you won't, and I've no right to ask you. I never did anything for you."

"That settles it!" As he threw out the words, the pagan decidedly slapped his derby.

"I meant to show you how barren I am of respect for this matrimonial business," said Wall. "Now, I shall also show you that I'm on a higher grade than the elephant, who remembers favors, and pays for them, as well as he remembers the little boy that gave him the apple loaded with cayenne pepper, and pays for it with a swat from his trunk. I will marry her—that way. Somebody must be the bridegroom. You've made that clear. Very well. Don't budge. I shall act for you—and shall do as well."

Jack quivered with excitement. "Of course, there's no danger of her wanting to stay your wife and share in any property of yours, for she loves me dearly—"

"I dare say," Wall interrupted, "that a woman has the right to relinquish any rights she has. A signed paper, or some sort of a settlement— Oh, well, I shall see my father's attorney as a matter of course, and then I shall have my own way, as I always do."

Jack's eyes blazed with admiration. "Say! You, sir, *are* a courageous man!"

"I am not! I'm too intelligent not to recognize every one of the tigerish dangers that beset men, and I'm miserably afraid of life. However—who is this Pauline?"

"An American girl with Scotch tendencies."

"I don't know what that means, but my ignorance doesn't matter."

"Then," nervously cried Jack, "get your feet loose and gallop to her." The sick speaker looked at the clock on the mantel. "It's now ten moments after three—ten minutes, rather—and every second's a dollar's worth of time!"

IV.

ERE the room lost the scent of Wall, Pauline returned. Poke, with his undertaker's solemnity of mien and manner, paraded in on their conference just as Pauline was peeling off her jacket. For an hour, by telephone, they felt around for Wall.

The pagan himself called to them over the wire at the end of that period of inquiry. Everything had been doctored up,

he said. The prospect of his getting married pleased his people, although he hadn't asked them to get into any attitude whatever toward so trifling an affair. He was to motor out of town immediately, returning late that night. He would, without fail, present his compliments to Pauline, in church, at ten o'clock the next morning.

At his suggestion, Pauline and Poke went down to his father's attorney in the Merchants' Bank Building. There, calling in Pauline's guardian, they consummated the business of the marriage settlement. Pauline relinquished her every right in Wall's property for a cash consideration. This was juggled back to Wall by the personal check of Pauline's attorney-guardian, dated that very day.

Poke, in person and by telephone, drummed up the friends, critics, and poor relatives of the two families for attendance at the fake wedding. Clatter and display, of course, were the effects most intended by the performers. Poke played the prompter's part, and from the instant the curtain curled up on the fantastic comedy, the next morning, kept Jack informed—almost at intervals of a minute—of how he was steering the actors.

Had Jack's bed been one in which children all night long ate soda-biscuits and ginger-wafers, he couldn't have sat in it more restlessly.

The telephone had been placed on a table at his elbow. The first report that traveled from its receiver into his ear apprised him that Wall pounded his ear up to the time the ceremony had been scheduled to take place, then found that he had forty things to do, and then took his time doing them.

At twenty minutes to eleven, Pauline climbed into her chariot and was whirled off to the church. The reports, after that, danced along the wire with a rag-time multiplication of sounds—jumbling details about flower-girls, flower-pots, spinning-wheels, and what not—and then there came from Poke a graphic depiction of the bride.

"She's wearing a dress with a train, Jack, but she doesn't look any longer than a minute. And she's all in white, as though she's been through a thunderstorm accompanied by a fall of talcum powder."

This was the last message the nicked little instrument at his bedside gave to Jack.

V.

THE fat-bodied bronze clock on the mantel grunted twelve times—then once—then twice.

At three o'clock, "I wonder what in the dickens has happened," Jack muttered to himself.

The drab-dressed Poke burst into the room as though all the bloodhounds and scene-shifters of an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" company were after him, and slammed shut the door.

"It's all over," he panted, and sank into a chair.

"Well, it's about time," sighed Jack. "He was a burlesque as a bridegroom, I guess."

Poke wiped his face with his handkerchief, and pityingly murmured: "Oh, you poor Jack! So that's what you guess! Well, guess again."

Jack's eyes grew big with terror. "What's the matter, Poke? Ah, I see! You've declared the performance off, and you've been chased by the spectators for rain-checks. Am I right? Did he back out?"

"Yes—with Pauline."

"Cold feet on both sides, eh? And he told me not to budge! He said he'd do as well."

"Well, he did." It was without a blink that Poke, in a dramatic pause, then looked at Jack, to whom he seemed trying to transfer some of his own strength. "Now, Jack, receive the bump like a game sport, and smile." Poke's next words fell dead from his slothful tongue: "When the marine observer at Sandy Hook last sighted Mr. Wall, he was going away on *your* honeymoon!"

To realize what that meant took Jack ten minutes, and then his face broke out with the color of the whiskers of St. Nicholas.

"Oh, dear!" he moaned, with eyes full of a sort of dry agony and one fist tightened on the breast of his night-shirt. "And to think that my imagination has had me already married! Why, it's had me getting one of my grandsons out of a nasty scrape. Of course, I can't blame Wall."

"That's the big way to address me, if you like my brand of admiration."

"I mean, Pauline's pretty," Jack explained. "If I had asked him not to fall in love with her—well, I might as well have asked him to keep his feet off the floor of the church when he slow-stepped down the aisle."

A strange look suddenly came into his face, and Poke, alarmed, snapped his fingers and cried an inquiry.

"I remember, now," Jack excitedly answered, "that he said he'd revert if ever he mated—that he'd rage through the world like one of Nietzsche's blond beasts, or one of the sharp-shooters of Coxey's Army. He may chew me up. Don't you see, Poke? He may heel himself with a shooter—"

"And blow you to a square meal? Nonsense!" Poke crossed his long legs and filled his pockets with his hands. "Listen, Jack. When the ceremony was over, she kissed him. The Wall that we knew—the Wall of the grand beliefs—expired on the spot. When Pauline left him to put on her traveling dress—just before they started on their wedding flight—I thought he might suggest to me a dinosaur, with muzzle uplifted, mournfully calling for his mate through the somber silence of the Permian Period. Instead, he was merrier than a hundred twentieth-century hoboes convinced that the world is theirs. You must believe, Jack, that I did everything in my power to hold her for you. I might as well have tried to carry a pottery salesman's sample trunk under one arm and a dozen strong-winged pigeons under the other. She loved him from the moment she laid eyes on him."

The man in bed drowsily relaxed against his high pillows and closed his eyes. "I'm tired, Poke," he breathed. "Since yesterday, I've been hustled from one climax to another, and I'm tired."

On a sudden he opened his eyes. "He was tuned up too high to last long," he snapped out waspishly.

"I always knew that," Poke declared. "What stunned me was the thing he had the cheek to say just before they left. 'Poke,' he said, 'get married, else I shall think ill of you.' He said: 'A man that remains for long a bachelor is either a freak of nature or a scamp.'"

"Indeed!" Jack produced it as a jeer. "Well, when he fell off his cloud, he certainly hit the earth hard, didn't he? The full-blown faker!"

Poke frowned. "Don't call him that, Jack. He's something else. He's one of those fellows that can be anything he likes. He's a Jap. He's an actor. He could play the millionaire one minute, and the next minute act the butler. He loses himself on the stage. He's a crack rantér that chews up the scenery with never a single suspicion that it's all make-believe. We've got to acknowledge, at any rate, that he went all the way when he took your part in the cast of characters. He understudied you to perfection."

Jack looked sour. He looked sour enough to keep flies away.

"It's the luck," he muttered—"the ugly luck of the righteous—that sees another man owning the dear little baby I wanted exclusively for myself. Oh, I wish that some friend of mine would get the upper hand, and let me have a little good luck for a change."

Poke shuffled over to the bed, and his great, awkward hands reached out and took Jack by the shoulders. "I positively won't let you spat with fate, and furnish fun for the gods," he said. "Now, harden up like a gentleman."

"That I will!" cried Jack with a burst of electric enthusiasm. "Wall beat me on his merits, and when I meet him I'll take off my hat to him. In fact, before the day's over, I'll telegraph him that I hope he enjoys himself on my wedding tour. I'll request him to be happy for me."


"The very way to use the English language just now!" Poke commented; and then he reseeded himself, softly sighing like an audience tickled to death with the sunny ending of a sad play. "You're in good humor, I see—and I'm going to hammer you with congratulations. Of course, I won't take up Wall's old tune. But I *will* raise Lord Bacon's hostage-to-fortune holler—and I say you ought to feel like a man who has had a mortgage lifted off his house."

Jack shook his head. "I feel, rather, like an actor that must pound the pavements of the Rialto and sweep up another leading lady."

OUT OF BONDAGE.

BY ALBERT J. KLINCK.

A SHORT STORY.

 PEOPLE along the shore always called it Strood's Lane. To a stranger there was little out of the ordinary to be observed from the roadway proper. But, after mounting to the brow of the hill, one saw a cozy farmhouse nestled in a valley just beyond. Farm land stretched in all directions. And skirting the highest point—that midway between the house and the road—was Strood's potato patch, a wide, sloping stretch, which reached almost to the house itself, and was known for miles as very productive.

Every year this field suffered from trespassers. The potatoes taken were a small item to Judson Strood. At first he allowed the thing to go uninvestigated. But, with the advancing years, his views narrowed; and there became instilled in him an absorbing passion to hunt down the intruders.

"I can tell you, Chancel," he told his son, "I won't let it happen again this year. But I'll give fair warning. You can help me by telling the Foster girl my intentions. You know as well I that Bud Foster, her father, ain't above suspicion. I have nothing against the girl, Chancel. Her lot in life is hard enough. She would make you a good wife. And I think it would be a Christian act to take her away from such a father. I don't need to remind you of his reputation along the shore. Where does he get his living? Where does he, Chancel?"

Chancel Strood looked out over the potato patch.

"The law is on my side," the father went on. "I could shoot whoever stole my potatoes and no jury would ever con-

vict me. And this time I am going to—shoot!"

Chancel Strood said nothing. He knew his father well enough to understand that what he had just said he meant.

The son watched his father go along the edge of the potato patch and then disappear from view beyond a high hedge. His parent's warning still fresh in his mind, Chancel thought best not to defer taking it where he was most interested, and where he hoped it would do most good.

II.

HE struck out at a brisk pace. When he reached the lake road he turned, passed the closed summer cottages along the shore, and turned again up a lane similar to the one at his own home.

He saw Bud Foster leaving the house from a rear door. He called to him. Either his voice did not carry, or Bud was in no mood to listen, for he did not look back.

Instead, Norma Foster thrust her head from the door through which her father had passed.

"Oh, Chancel!" she said, a moment later stepping from the door-sill to the gravel path.

They seated themselves on a rustic bench under an old oak-tree. Chancel sighed. Norma Foster looked out over the lake in silence.

"I just saw your father going back through the fields," said Chancel.

Norma looked in the direction her father had taken.

"Yes," she said simply.

"I wanted to tell him something," young Strood went on.

"Oh, Chancel!" the girl broke out.

A silence followed. Then, in a voice of agitation, Chancel Strood said to her:

"Remember, Norma, I ain't ever said one word against your father to you. I'm not saying anything against him now. But father told me to tell—to warn. And I hurried here, Norma. I wanted everybody to know; but, somehow, I wanted your father to know first. My father is going to shoot this time!"

Chancel was afraid of saying too much—he wanted to convey his meaning, nothing more. From what he had told, a stranger might still be in the dark.

But Norma Foster knew. What Chancel Strood left unsaid was filled out by her own imagination. But Foster's practises were too well known to have missed being carried home to his daughter.

"Father wants me to marry you," Chancel next told her in quite a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

Norma sighed. This was but another way of telling his love for her.

"And you, Chancel?" she asked, to make sure that she was right.

"Ain't I told you enough times already?" he answered forcibly.

"Pshaw!" she said almost carelessly. "There's more ways than that out of it. I don't need to marry you to be free from it all. I can run away from here. And father's got a revolver. And there's the lake out there. The water's mighty deep in some places in old Cayuga."

Chancel Strood took her roughly by the arms.

"Norma!" he said. "You don't mean that—that—"

"Oh, I'm coming to it," she told him. "How much more do you think I can stand? Ain't I worked and worked and worked ever since mother died to make my father different? When she lay dying, she asked me to try to make him a better man. I promised. All these years I ain't had one minute's peace. Do you think it's easy to live as I've been living?"

The man beside her shook his head.

"No, you can bet it ain't," Norma went on. "And now it won't end till one or the other of us dies."

She moved uneasily on the bench.

"I'm always 'that Foster girl,'" she resumed; "always. People along the

shore, here, are down on me because—because— But you've been good to me, Chancel. And if I married you, your friends would have nothing more to do with you. They turn up their noses even now when they see us together. What would it be afterward? We couldn't go away from here. You will come into the farm when your father dies. Your interests are here. I wouldn't have you go away. I tell you, Chancel, it won't end till either father or myself dies."

"I can't hear you talk like that," he said hoarsely.

"I can't talk any other way to-day," she returned.

"You talked the same way yesterday," he reminded her.

"I know it," she acknowledged. "And I feel that I'm never going to talk any other way."

"You will, to-morrow," he tried to help her.

"Maybe there won't be a to-morrow," she said, working her hands nervously in her lap.

Chancel Strood rose and stood over her, his eyes staring, his hands clenched.

"Norma!" he cried out. "Norma! Norma! Whatever is to become of you?"

She said nothing. She rocked herself back and forth upon the bench.

"Leave me alone, Chancel," she said. "Good-by."

He remained looking reverently down at her.

"Good-by, Chancel," she repeated.

He began to move away from her.

"Chancel!" she called to him softly. "Chancel!"

He turned.

"Every time I say good-by to you now," she told him, "I feel that maybe—maybe—maybe—"

"Maybe what, Norma?" he asked.

"Maybe it will be for the—the last time," she ended.

"I can't hear you talk like that, Norma," he said chokingly. "I tell you, I can't. It most breaks my heart. Good-by."

III.

HE fled down the lane. Norma heard him sobbing. She looked after him with staring eyes. She was breathing heavily.

She thought and thought. She yearned for a single ray of sunshine. She went into the house.

Her father was back for the evening meal. Norma's eyes showed that she had been weeping. But by now Bud Foster knew enough not to question when he found his daughter in a sullen mood.

"I saw Chan Strood coming up the lane as I went out," he told Norma. "What did he want?"

"His father is going to shoot the first man he catches in his potato patch this year," she said forlornly.

Bud Foster smiled.

"And is that all the news young Strood brought?" he questioned further.

"He wants me to marry him," Norma returned.

"So he persists, does he?" Foster said pleasantly. "Well, why don't you?"

"Father!" Norma cried out. "How can you talk like that? You know I can't marry Chancel Strood."

"Don't be afraid of Edgar," Foster commented. "He'll never turn up again. Do you suppose he'd ever find us here? Besides, he could be bought off any time, even if he is your husband. You know as well as I do what he is."

Norma sighed.

"And another thing," her father went on, "he may be dead, for all we know. So you see what a great chance you're letting fly. Young Strood is a straight chap. His father is getting on in years; and the farm will pass to the son."

"Don't, father, please—not to-night," Norma pleaded.

She rose and walked away.

With the coming of the night, Bud Foster again slunk away. Rather than lie to his daughter, and then listen to her plaintive appeals, he had of late watched his chance, and had then crept off into the night.

To be alone was no new misery to Norma Foster. She had many times before sat in solitude and brooded. But to-night a new qualm beset her. The old house, with its dismal corners, its creaking boards, its gloomy memories, assailed her with a fear never before felt. Then, too, outside somewhere, a screech-owl was singing to the night.

Norma left the house and started down the lane. The moon was just

coming up over the lake. The road below lay in gloom, with here and there a fantastic patch of light where the rays struck through the interlacing branches of the trees along the shore.

Half-way down, Norma saw a shadow strike across one of these patches of light—then the crunch of feet upon the cinder path.

She stood still. A moment later she walked down toward the lake.

She crossed the dusty road, and went beyond the belt of trees. She stood in the cold moonlight, and looked out at the water.

Then, as if the earth itself had upheaved him, a man stood at her side. And a new terror struck to her heart when she heard his voice:

"It's you, Norma?"

IV.

SHE tried to speak his name. But the word choked in her throat.

"Shelter me for the night," he panted. "Come, Norma, quick!"

He took her almost roughly by the arm. She turned; and in a daze, went with him.

"You see," he began to explain, "it was over at Cayuga that I heard of Bud Foster. I had got that far by a freight."

"Is it still the same old story?" Norma now asked. "Are you no different than you were? Oh, Edgar!"

He made no reply. With now and then a hurried look back, he almost clung to his wife as she led the way up the lane.

"I had a little fright back there a ways," he told her. "I turned up a lane which I thought was yours—a man sprang out from behind a clump of bushes with a revolver in his hand and called me to halt. He caught me unguarded. I was afraid to reach for my gun. I asked if Bud Foster lived there. He said no—that it was Strood's place. And I hiked on. What's he guarding, Norma?"

"The potato patch," she returned.

"The potato patch?" he repeated. "And has your father got down to stealing potatoes?" He laughed.

"Don't!" Norma cried out. "How can you laugh when—when— Edgar, I wish you'd strike me dead on this very

spot!" she ended in a hoarse and frightened whisper.

"Never mind," he said. "I'm going to light out at the first opportunity. I've got to. The old man in the house?"

"No," she answered.

"Not doing time, I hope?"

A sigh that was half a sob came from Norma. Then they went on in silence.

The woman was shaking as with palsy when she entered her dismal home. She dropped into the nearest chair. With her head thrown against its back, her hands motionless in her lap, she remained a stolid figure in the glow of the lamp.

Her husband's presence was little more than a dream to her. She was indifferent to his words, to his movements. Everything was dead to her.

What finally roused her was a rush of feet upon the veranda. Her eyes roamed the room. Finding herself alone, she rose and ran wildly through the house, calling to her husband in a low, pulsating voice. In the kitchen she found him.

"They're here!" she panted. "Hide yourself! Quick!"

Already she heard footsteps at the very threshold. She satisfied her eyes with seeing her husband disappear up the stairway. Then she turned, and, with one shaking hand upon the table and the other clutching at her heart, she waited.

An instant later a loud cry escaped her. Not an officer of the law, but her own father, stood revealed to her in the door-frame.

"It means to go to-night," he began. "Now. I can't explain. We quarreled. I struck. The man fell. There was blood. Just pack up a few things. Let the rest go. We'll row across the lake to Cayuga, and then—"

He was out of the room again, and Norma tottered after him. She saw him take the front stairs, two at a time. She saw his revolver gleaming in his hand. She heard him strike a match in the upper hall. She saw its flickering light. She heard two voices—voices so harsh they seemed strange even to her—resound through the house.

She heard one shot—and another following so closely that it seemed but a prolongation of the first.

"Edgar," she shrieked, "it's father! Father, it's Edgar!"

She put an icy hand on the balustrade. She dragged herself up the stairs. She crawled along the dark corridor.

She touched a still trembling body. She ran her hands over the face.

"Father!" she whispered. "Father!"

She raised his head and pillowed it against her.

"Edgar!" she went on, still in that voice of horror. "Edgar!"

No sound came from the darkness.

"I'm—I'm afraid," she began to moan. "I'm—I'm afraid!"

She drew back. Unsteadily she rose. She groped her way down the stairs.

V.

SHE was half-way down the lane when she heard her name called, and a moment later found her cold hand clasped in one that was warm.

"Chancel!" she breathed.

"What's happened?" he asked. "I've been watching to tell your father not to go near the potato patch. I saw you go up the hill with a man, and into the house. And I saw your father hurry along a few moments ago. Just now I felt certain I'd heard a shot."

"I'm afraid, Chancel," she whispered.

She leaned against him.

"In a minute I'll speak," she panted.

"In—a—minute."

She breathed heavily.

"That man was my husband," she went on. "They met in the dark, upstairs. Father struck a match, or Edgar did. I heard it scratch. Each mistook the other for an officer of the law. They shot. Both are lying there in the dark. —But I can't go back, Chancel."

"Come with me, then, Norma," he said.

Chancel half carried her down the lane. Together, they plodded along the dusty road.

"Father!" Chancel Strood called, as they neared the potato patch. "Father! I've brought Norma. Take the lantern and hurry back to Foster's. Something's happened—up-stairs!"

When Judson Strood returned, he found that Norma had been put to bed by the old housekeeper.

"Both men are dead," he told his son.

THE SWORD OF TARROLOYS.*

BY BANNISTER MERWIN,

Author of "A Knight of To-Day," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

DENIS FOUCART is sent by King Louis XI to Touraine for the purpose of settling a quarrel between Guillaume de Mescun and his brother, Hugues de Cornay, who is being held prisoner by Guillaume pending the restoration of the forest of Jolin.

Accompanied by Jehan de Tarroloys, a young noble in whose family he had formerly been employed, Foucart proceeds to Jolin. He is received by Hugues's seneschal, Gilbert de Baisignan, and meets the young Comte de Rainemont, who evidently has on foot some plot of his own. On the way from Jolin to Mescun, Jehan rescues the Lady Clothilde, sister of the quarreling nobles, whom Rainemont is attempting to kidnap.

At the castle of Mescun Foucart discovers that Rainemont is supporting Hugues at the price of Lady Clothilde's hand. Foucart determines that if Clothilde were married to some one else the quarrel between the brothers might easily be ended. Rainemont advances against the castle, which at Foucart's advice has been prepared to resist a siege, and demands the release of Hugues and the surrender of Jehan de Tarroloys. Foucart counsels Guillaume to refuse both demands, and advises the prompt marriage of Jehan and Clothilde, who have fallen in love with each other. Guillaume accedes, but word comes that the priest, Father Ambrose, has been called away. At the moment Hugues appears at the door, a heavy mace in his hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASSAULT.

JEHAN was first to recognize the danger that arose from the liberty of the Seigneur Hugues. While the others of us stood dismayed, the youth leaped forward, barehanded. Hugues watched his approach and raised his heavy mace, but, on a second thought, he lowered the weapon and darted back through the arras and disappeared.

Jehan paused long enough to shout: "After him, men, but do him no hurt!" Then he, too, vanished, and we could hear his rapid steps as he ran through the corridor.

With Hugues at large, all treachery was possible. Quickly the assembly broke up, hurrying in little groups through the various ways of exit, and soon the Count Guillaume, the Lady Clothilde, and myself alone remained in the great hall, which now, in its emptiness, was to me a place of terror. I

could have wished to run with the others, while they made search, but my dignity enforced me to remain.

We learned afterward that the Seigneur Hugues, under the pretense of wishing a jug of water, had his guard unfasten and open the door of the prison chamber. That was the guard's last act, for Hugues, swinging a stool, sent him to the floor of the corridor with a cracked skull. Then, snatching a mace which some man-at-arms had left against the wall near by, he hurried to the great hall, and heard I know not how much of what was said therein.

The Lady Clothilde was leaning forward, breathless in alarm—though whether for her fleeing brother or for Jehan, I could not determine. Perhaps she most feared a meeting of the two, since one must be injured in the encounter. Or, it may be that the frenzy of the laugh that had so startled us told her of a menace which had not yet impressed the others, plain though it was to me, with the *seigneur's* story of mad hate still fresh in my ears.

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for December, 1908.

The Count Guillaume appeared in great uncertainty of mind. He did not fear the enemy without; I do not think that he feared the enemy within the walls; but I have no doubt that, in his dull way, he feared himself for that to which his brother might urge him. If he had not gone with the others, surely it was because he did not trust himself.

The steps of the pursuers had died away, and it was so still that Guillaume's stertorous breathing was audible. The lady never moved, but stood just so, with her lips parted and her eyes staring at the curtain through which her brother and her lover had passed. Thus we remained for some minutes.

Then, of a sudden, there was a sound of feet, and a man came running into the hall. I shrank back. The lady, turning swiftly; placed herself before the count and faced the newcomer.

It was a man-at-arms panting with haste.

"My lord count," he gasped, "the enemy is advancing. They threaten the gate!"

The count leaped to action. In one quick, roaring order he sent the man-at-arms to bring all the fighting men to their posts on the walls; in another he summoned his esquire, and was quickly helped into his armor.

Rainemont's advance was a surprise, for none of us had thought that, with his force, he would venture an attack. But once we were on the walls, we saw that, as he advanced, another force, stronger even than that with which he had appeared, was coming from the direction of the town. He had brought only a part of his small army directly with him to our walls; the others he had sent by a roundabout way, in order that they might come forward later, after Count Guillaume had disposed his forces with the conviction that no attempt would be made to force a breach.

The alarm from the walls brought quick response from the men who were pursuing the Seigneur Hugues, and a number of them rushed through the great hall on their way to their posts. Last came Jehan. The Lady Clothilde met him with a little cry.

"We have not found him," said Jehan. "I was close after him, but he

darted through several connected chambers and found some secret hiding-place."

She placed her hands on his shoulders.

"Oh, my lord," she said, "be watchful of yourself for all our sakes. My brother Hugues is frenzied. I saw his eyes when he appeared to us, and they were lighted by strange fires."

He drew her closer to him.

"Have no fear, lady," he whispered.

An esquire now entered with a splendid suit of Spanish mail which Guillaume had offered to Jehan. The dear youth put it on, and with it a gorget and a visored casque. The mail-set him off to great advantage. The great Achilles, who vanquished Hector of Troy, could not have borne himself more nobly. At his side he hung his father's sword.

The count had already gone from us. Jehan held the lady tight in his arms and kissed her forehead. She clung to him as though she could not bear to see him go, but he at last gently put her from him.

"Keep watch over her, Master Foucart," he said. "I am needed on the walls."

He clasped her again and kissed her, and was gone.

"Already I know," said the lady, with a tender and wistful look, "already I know the hard task of woman."

"Lady," I answered, "he will acquit himself well. No harm will come to him."

She nodded gravely.

The shouts of the approaching enemy and the clamor of our own men on the walls was now loud. We could distinguish from the others the cries of the armored knights, for their voices were muffled and hollow within their closed helmets. Louder than the general uproar came the frequent reports of the arquebuses, and twice we heard a cannon speak.

The lady moved toward a casement.

"I must see," she said.

"Not here," I implored her. "Let us find a safer place."

She did not heed me, and I seized her arm and held her back. "Lady," I said, "I promised Jehan to keep you in safety."

She smiled faintly, then led the way through the castle to a winding stair, which we ascended to the top of one of the corner towers. Here was an empty room, with a series of narrow embrasures. Had the castle been more fully manned, this room would have been a strong point of vantage for crossbow men or arquebusiers, since it commanded a view over the outer wall, but none of our fighting men were in the main building of the castle. That the enemy would send a bolt or a ball at this tower was unlikely, but there was the danger of a chance shot, and I admonished the lady to be careful not to expose herself to view.

We stood side by side and looked out. Crawling slowly toward the gate came Rainemont's men. They pushed before them heavy wooden shields, which gave them fair protection. Nevertheless, now and then a man fell, for the arquebusiers were firing as fast as they could load, and the bolts from the twanging crossbows were flying like hail.

The advance kept steadily on. We were so far to one side of the main gate that we could even look down to the edge of the moat across from it, though directly before us the wall cut off the moat from our view. The enemy were moving straight for the main gate. I saw a group of them, close behind the moving shields, bending under the weight of a construction of timber, with which, undoubtedly, they hoped to bridge the moat.

A shot from one of our cannon splintered one of the approaching shields. It was abandoned, and the men who had been behind it crowded in behind the others. On came the mass, right to the moat.

One armored knight, more active than those about him, rushed hither and thither, waving his commands. I heard the lady at my side draw her breath in sharply, but even without that sign I had known that the knight was Guy de Rainemont. Bolts rattled on his armor, men fell about him, some dead, some wounded and writhing; but his stout mail protected him.

The timber bridge was dropped at the edge of the moat, and the armored men made ready to slide it forward. I won-

dered where the Seneschal Baisignan was, but he could not be distinguished among the throng.

"Oh!" exclaimed the lady, "do you think that they will reach the gate?"

"They may reach it," I replied, "but they will not pass it."

"Oh!" she exclaimed again.

I followed the direction of her eyes and saw Jehan and the Count Guillaume standing on the battlements above the gate directing the movements of men who were dragging heavy stones and timbers to points from which they could be toppled over upon the assailants. Jehan was fully exposed to the enemy, upon whom he gazed from time to time, noting their movements.

I wondered why Rainemont was so slow to complete the work he had begun. Only his command was awaited to send the improvised bridge across the moat; but he stood idle, while one after another of his men fell. At the same time our own forces suffered some loss. Several men-at-arms lay dead on the wall. Rainemont, however, was at least safe from our cannon, the fire of which passed over his head.

Of a sudden came a shout from the eastern wall:

"Cornay! Cornay! The *seneschal*!"

With a word to Jehan, the Count Guillaume left his position and went bounding along the battlements to the place whence the new uproar sounded. Jehan, however, stood his ground, and so closely was the lady watching him that she did not seem to note her brother's disappearance. But she uttered one word—"the postern!"

With that clue, I understood. Hastening across the chamber to an eastern embrasure, I looked down over the plain and saw approaching the Seneschal Baisignan and his men. They, too, had shields, and a bridge. Their objective, of course, was the narrow postern-gate. Their diversion, if it should prove successful, might quickly become the serious main attack. A cry from the lady brought me back to her embrasure. The men on the walls were looking down into the courtyard, where a man was running.

It was the Seigneur Hugues, accoutered for battle. He rushed under the arch of the main gateway, and into

the porter's chamber. A moment later the windlass creaked and the great drawbridge swung down across the moat.

Rainemont's false bridge had been a blind. He had never intended to use it, but had brought it forward as an apparent explanation of his advance, while all the time he was awaiting the treacherous act by which Hugues, doubtless through the man Pierre, had promised to help him.

Jehan, with half a dozen men, came hurrying down from the wall. Before he could reach the courtyard Hugues ran back into the range of our vision and, shouting loudly, made his way unhindered into the castle.

At the same moment Rainemont's men attacked the chains of the drawbridge. Using stout spears as levers, they pried at the chains where they were stapled to the corners of the bridge. The chains came loose, and now the bridge could no longer be raised.

With three companions at his heels, Rainemont, whose courage I unwillingly admired, hastened across the bridge.

The portcullis—which was formed of heavy wooden bars—though bound at the joints with iron, was not proof against their battle-axes. They hacked away with rapid blows, and I doubt not that they would have effected an entrance had they been permitted a little more time, for the coping above them was a protection against the heavy stones and timbers which our men on the walls tried to hurl down upon them. The portcullis once broken, Rainemont's men would stream across the bridge and follow him into the courtyard, perhaps into the castle itself.

But Jehan was now in the courtyard, a dozen men with him. He could not reach the attacking party as long as the portcullis held, but with a quick order he sent forward several harquebusiers. They ran to the grating and thrust their weapons almost against the breasts of the men on the other side before they applied their slow-matches to the powder.

Rainemont saved himself by seizing with his hands the barrel of the weapon directed against him and twisting it from the hands of the man who was about to fire it. One of his companions on the

bridge dropped to his knees, while the ball sped harmlessly above his head. But the other two men of the attacking party fell dead at the discharge.

The lady and I saw this action obscurely, but I could not forbear chuckling to myself as I realized that Jehan, who had resented with so much youthful spirit my statement that mailed chivalry must give way before the bullet, was now himself using in defense the means which he had scorned. Truly the youth had grown older.

This strong resistance at the portcullis compelled Rainemont and his remaining companion to retire across the bridge. He issued a quick command, and his main force, which had held back like leashed hounds, awaiting the outcome of his venture, marched across the plain to their camp. There presently we saw them busy with the construction of a ram. They brought a heavy tree-trunk, and fastened to it at intervals what I supposed to be leather thongs, to serve as handles.

The path of their advance against us and their retreat was marked plainly by the bodies of the fallen, some of them dead, some still moving. One or two of them were crawling painfully back toward their camp.

Intent upon his plan for a renewed and better equipped attack, Rainemont overlooked the one means by which we might regain the advantage we had lost.

"See!" whispered the lady to me. "What are they about to do?" She pointed to the courtyard, where Jehan, the center of a half-score armored men, was giving rapid instructions.

I marveled to note how eagerly the grizzled veterans took the youth's orders. He was like a young king among them—no Louis, but a paladin of older days, when prowess and a keen scent for martial advantage made men royal. His words and gestures were swift and sure. But I knew that every act of his was now inspired by the knowledge that his lady's eyes were on him; and that she, too, knew this I was certain. Strength, courage, love, all radiated from her eyes.

Suddenly she turned to me.

"Oh, but he is brave!" she said; and, then, gravely: "I do not fear for him now."

I was conscious all this time that a hard struggle was in progress on the eastern wall, but I could not bring myself to turn from Jehan long enough to see how we fared on the other quarter. My youth was now leading his little body of fighters to the portcullis. Some of them carried great mallets, and handfuls of spikes. I guessed what was to happen.

The portcullis was raised quickly, and Jehan rushed across the bridge, the others close behind him. At his direction they gathered up the dangling chains which Rainemont's men had detached, and while some of them held the ends in place and thrust spikes between the links, others swung the mallets. The blows came fast. If the spikes could be made to hold, it would again be possible to raise the bridge.

Rainemont was quick to see what was taking place. He mounted a horse, the more quickly to reach the scene, and with a dozen followers came galloping across the plain. They were met by a flying swarm of bolts and bullets from the walls, and one of the horses went down before it had found its pace.

Jehan and two of his men took stations on the ground at the farther side of the moat, protecting the men who were still at work behind them. But we saw Jehan abandon his position of defense. Though the enemy was thundering toward him, he had bethought him of the temporary bridge which Rainemont had first dragged to the moat, and now he and the two men who were beside him bent themselves to this and pushed it slowly into the moat. When it floated in the water, they gave it an impetus which sent it to one side. Then, at a signal from Jehan, men on the walls toppled heavy stones upon it and crushed it.

Meantime, a shot from the wall had struck Rainemont's horse. It plunged forward on its knees and slowly rolled over on its side. The young count speedily disengaged himself and ran forward afoot, but one of his officers, whose horse was untouched, passed his commander and came charging down upon Jehan.

The work on the bridge had stopped, and our little party was retreating across the bridge—all except Jehan, who re-

mained alone at the farther end. His sword was drawn, his arm ready.

The lady beside me breathed an audible prayer: "Mary, help him!" But she broke off her repetition of the words with an exclamation of joy. The rider was unable to check the rush of his horse until it was upon the bridge itself. He swung his sword down at Jehan, who parried the blow and leaped aside. As the horse stumbled to a standstill on the bridge and the rider turned in his saddle, Jehan, for the moment out of reach of his opponent's sword, thrust the point of his own weapon against the horse's flank.

The animal plunged sidewise. Its hind feet went over the edge of the bridge, and though it pawed desperately with its fore feet to recover footing it slipped back into the moat. Horse and rider sank beneath the water. Their armor did not let them rise again to the surface.

Rainemont was now close, with many of his men behind him. He called in a muffled shout to Jehan. Doubtless he challenged him to remain and fight. But my youth, whose courage was not in question, did not permit himself to be stung into a bravado which might endanger the castle and his lady.

Back across the bridge he ran, and the heavy structure, its chains again holding, creaked upward even as he came, so that he slid down the ever-steeper incline to the gate.

And now the bridge was up and the portcullis was lowered. Men ran into the porter's room and returned with the arms of the windlass. The Seigneur Hugues would not be able to repeat his treachery.

Rainemont stood at the edge of the moat for a moment, stamping his feet in rage. He shouted a defiance at the walls. Answered with a shower of missiles, he turned and walked back to his men, moving slowly in his pride. "I understood how he must chafe at the discomfiture of his strategy by the youth whom he had despised.

The noise on the eastern wall was now at its loudest. I went to the other embrasure.

The *seneschal* had made some headway. He and his men had got their

bridge in position over the moat and were preparing to cross it. But as the *seneschal* himself advanced to lead the attack, a bolt found a weak joint in his armor. He sank to the ground, wounded, and was dragged back to safety. At the same moment a beam, dropped from the wall, struck the bridge, dislodged it and set it afloat in the moat.

The *seneschal's* men, disheartened by this double setback, and perhaps also by news of the failure of Rainemont's main attack, now withdrew. They were followed by taunting cries from the walls, but they continued their retreat in a semi-circle until they reached their main camp.

"Lady, the first victory is ours," I said.

There was no answer. I turned about. The lady had disappeared.

CHAPTER IX.

"CAIN!"

FOR the time the castle was safe. Rainemont and Baisignan would take counsel before attempting a new attack, if, indeed, they did not settle down to a siege, since they could not expect that the Seigneur Hugues would be permitted again to let down the draw-bridge.

I hurried down the winding turret stairs and to the courtyard. There stood the lady, unlacing Jehan's casque. She had gestured the willing squires aside that she might herself perform the loving task, and she was unmindful of the admiring glances of the men-at-arms, as they came, all sweat and grime, down from the walls.

And when at last Jehan lifted the casque from his head and stooped to kiss her brow, then a cheer went up from those about.

"Tarroloys!" they shouted. "The Lady Clothilde!"

She betrayed no embarrassment, but smiled upon them sweetly.

"There is wine for all," she cried. "You have fought well."

And so they trooped away to refresh themselves by drinking her health.

Then I heard Jehan speak.

"Lady," he said, "I must go to Raine-

mont's camp and liberate poor Father Ambrose."

He looked at her so tenderly that her eyes fell. No thought of the battle was in his mind, but only of the loveliness of her presence.

The Count Guillaume, who had himself been stationing the sentinels, now came down into the courtyard. He was flushed with his exertions, and looked like a great, tired bull, for he had been very active in the fight, and his strength was not so lasting as when he was younger. He paused to clap his heavy hand on Jehan's shoulder.

"Well, Tarroloys," he said, "you stood them off bravely. They told me of it."

I caught the count's arm.

"A few words with you," I whispered. He came with me to an angle of the wall, and there I laid before him what was in my mind.

"Sir count," I said, "you have won the victory to-day, and that despite your brother's treachery."

He scowled.

"Your brother must be found," I continued.

"Men are hunting now," he muttered. "I sent them after him when he ran across the courtyard."

"He must be found," I repeated. "While he is free, he endangers us all. He is not in his right mind, sir count. He has brooded so long on his fancied wrongs that his reason is now unhinged. He believes that he is persecuted."

"You may be right," said the count slowly. "Since he last goaded me and called me 'Cain,' I have wondered."

"Do not hold him responsible for all that he says," I urged. "When he is found, let me go to him for you and offer him his freedom and the retention of Jolin, if he will withdraw Baisignan and Rainemont from the siege. There is no shame in this action," I hastened to add, for his face was clouding. "You have shown yourself master to-day, and can afford to be generous."

"Bad advice, Master Foucart," he said. "If he is crazed, as we think he is, he will simply plan fresh mischief when we free him."

"If he is crazed, as we think," I replied, "we can soon make the fact plain

to your neighbors, who will then unite with you to put him under restraint."

"But if he is not crazed," persisted the count, "freedom and Jolin will not satisfy him."

"That," I said, "is an issue that is to be risked."

"Ah, well," he muttered, "you may be right. But, first, I must know what my sister thinks."

I called Jehan and the lady, and laid the case before them. The lady looked at me gratefully.

"You propose an excellent course, Master Foucart," she said. "To let Hugues go is to remove all present danger."

Count Guillaume sent an esquire to learn how the search was progressing. Presently the lad came back, accompanied by one of the men, who told us that the castle had been ransacked in vain. The Lady Clothilde's women had even hunted through her apartments.

"Is there no secret closet that he might know?" I asked as we stood undetermined, after the man had given us his account.

"Why, yes," said the lady. "Come, we will see."

So we went, the lady, Count Guillaume, Jehan, and I, back to the great hall.

"At that entrance he appeared," said the lady, pointing. "Show us, Jehan, which way he ran when you pursued."

Then Jehan led us through a passage and several connected chambers.

"I lost him after he had entered here," he told us.

The lady went over to the farther wall.

"Wait," I said, knowing her purpose. "Show us the spring, and leave the room. It is best that he should not see your brother and yourself."

She took Jehan's hand and placed it on a knob.

"Press here," she said; and, grasping her brother's arm, she led him from the room.

Count Guillaume suffered himself thus to be guided; for, with the realization of his brother's frenzy, he seemed to be dazed. I fancy that he blamed himself for his own infirmity of temper, which Hugues had played on.

When Jehan pressed the knob, and a

panel of the wall slid aside, I fully expected to see the Seigneur Hugues. But the cavity was empty.

"Come back," called Jehan to the others.

As the lady entered, she said: "This place was used by our father to conceal his treasure. There are other secret closets, but Hugues does not know of them. He must have hidden here, however, when you pursued him, Jehan."

"There remains one place," said I, "where doubtless they have not looked."

"Where would that be?" asked the count.

"The place he came from," I explained—"his prison-chamber. He may well have gone back there without suspicion."

Silently we made our way through the corridors. At the foot of the stairs which led up to the prison chamber stood Simon Crouay. I had not seen him since morning, but I knew that he had taken part in the fighting on the walls.

"Hold, master!" he said to me, with a quick glance at the lady and her brother. Then, in a low voice: "The Seigneur de Cornay is in the chamber above. I discovered that he was there some time ago, and have stood guard here in order that he might not go to a fresh hiding-place."

"Has he seen you?"

"No, master. I thought that he might come here, as the place least likely to be suspected, and I went softly to the door and saw him."

Leaving Count Guillaume and the lady at the foot of the stairs, Jehan, Simon Crouay, and I mounted, Simon leading. The door of the chamber stood ajar. Across the threshold lay the body of the guard whom Hugues had slain. His hair was matted with his own blood.

I peered into the room. The Seigneur Hugues sat in a chair which he had drawn close to the casement. His knees were crossed and he was gazing out over the plain toward Jolin. At his side lay the mace.

"Keep close," I whispered to Jehan and Simon Crouay, for I did not like the idea of going too near him unless some defense were back of me. Then I entered the room and said quickly: "*Seigneur!*"

He turned his head, but did not rise. "Ha!" he said. "Is it you, Master Fox? You and your friend? In this country we hunt foxes; we do not make house-dogs of them."

"I have my use, *seigneur*," I replied. He laughed.

"A slippery use, then."

Jehan and Simon Crouay had taken positions near the door. I advanced closer to the seated man.

"I bring good news to you, *seigneur*," I said. "You have chafed for your freedom. I have talked with your brother—"

"My dear brother Cain?" he sneered.

I did not heed, but continued: "I have talked with your brother, and he has agreed that you shall have your liberty."

"Finding that I have to-day proved a troublesome guest?"

I pointed to the door.

"It would be easy to secure you, if we wished."

"Easy," he replied, "but at some cost—your own life, at least, and the life of one of the others."

"You are to be set free," I repeated, "and permitted to go where you will."

"Under what condition?"

"Under condition that this siege be raised and that Rainemont march back to his own county."

"Is my dear brother fearful, then?"

"*Seigneur*," I said gravely, "can you think so after the fighting of to-day?"

"And Jolin?"

He was singularly calm. He might have expected my offer, for all the surprise he showed.

"You are to keep Jolin, if you so choose," I said.

"And my sister's hand?"

"Goes to Jehan, *Seigneur de Tarroloys*, as she herself desires."

"What, then, would I say to Rainemont, my friend, who has supported me with his forces?"

"The Count de Rainemont," I replied, "has made us no condition regarding your sister."

"Then she is to wed my brother's friend and my enemy?"

Jehan took a step forward.

"Not your enemy, *seigneur*," he exclaimed. "I ask no better, please be

assured, than that Clothilde's brother should be my friend."

Hugues did not answer him, but after a look turned again to me. His calm disappeared, and flames rose in his eyes.

"And how will my brother repay me for the wrongs of the last year?" he demanded. "How shall I check off the long list of my grievances? He has held me prisoner—me, his brother. He has flouted my wishes. All my life he has tried to force me to his will. He has struck me. He would like to kill me." Picking up the mace, he jumped to his feet. "By the saints!" he muttered, "I am tempted to brain you for bringing me his insolent message."

I thought my time had come, though I stood ready to spring back and trust to the others to subdue him. But his face relaxed, and he gave a contemptuous snort. I took the opportunity to retire a pace—as if I had no fear of him.

"And my dear brother," he suddenly jeered. "What new trick is he trying to play on me?"

"No trick at all, Hugues," came a voice from the doorway. Count Guillaume entered the room. "No trick at all, but an honest wish to end our quarrel."

The *seigneur's* muscles stiffened and his eyes gleamed, but the count, his hands empty, stepped surely forward. He still wore his mail-shirt, but his head was bare, with his hair all tousled by the removal of the casque. His features were composed to a courageous pity, a gentler expression than I had ever expected to see on his face.

"Well, Cain," sneered the *seigneur*, "have you come to kill me?"

"Does it look so?" said the count. "Let us end our troubles, Hugues. Keep Jolin. I will make it over to you as your fief in due form."

"Ha!" exclaimed Hugues. "Then the fox was not lying!"

"For all my faults to you I am sorry," continued Guillaume. "Hereafter you are my loved brother, as of old."

"As of old!" screamed Hugues. "As of old! Your loved varlet-brother as of old! Always to remember your hated magnanimity! Always to have to say, 'My dear brother has been kind to me!'"

Guillaume raised his hand in deprecation.

"Would you strike me again?" snarled Hugues.

The count, sighing, dropped his hand. "Brother," he said, "take time to calm yourself."

"To calm myself!"

Hugues glared into his brother's face. The pupils of his eyes grew smaller, smaller. His lips parted over his clenched teeth. I saw the danger and called to Jehan. The count too, seemed to awaken to the menace.

It was too late. Hugues swung the mace over his head. It crashed down. The Count Guillaume, his defenseless head broken, fell in a huddled heap on the floor.

I screamed, and Jehan and Simon Crouay rushed forward. Hugues eluded them with little, skipping jumps, like a playing schoolboy, and darted through the door and down the stairs. We heard him laughing as he went.

We were after him swiftly, Jehan leading. At the foot of the stairs the Lady Clothilde leaned back against the wall. Her hands were spread out flat against the plaster at either side. Her breast was rising and falling rapidly, and her eyes were filled with terror.

"What was it?" she whispered. "Hugues ran by me. What was it?"

"Lady," I faltered, "your brother—the Count Guillaume—tell her, Jehan."

There was no need to say more. The Lady Clothilde slipped down in a faint. Jehan caught her before she touched the floor.

I have heard it said that great fear will sometimes impel a man toward the very danger he dreads. The hare moves straight to the fangs of the waiting serpent. I have no doubt, indeed, that many a reputation for courage has been formed because a man, despite himself, rushed toward the enemy he most desired to avoid.

Only by such an unwilling impulse can I account for my own conduct. Leaving Jehan with the lady, I ran on in pursuit of Hugues. Simon Crouay ran with me, but the weight of his plate corselet retarded him and he fell behind.

Down into the courtyard I raced. There in the open a man-at-arms lay

writhing, while his companions stood frightened, staring toward the wall.

"Where?" I gasped.

The man started, and pointed to his wounded companion:

"The *seigneur* did it," he muttered.

"Which way did he go?"

"To the battlements."

I hurried to an inner stair that led up through the wall. Panting, I mounted the steep steps. When I reached the top, I saw the *Seigneur* Hugues standing but a few feet away. He was gesturing toward Rainemont's camp.

"*Seigneur!*" I called.

He did not seem to hear me, but continued to wave his arms.

"*Seigneur!*" I called again.

At this he swung toward me.

"Ha, Fox!" he exclaimed. "All is done. We go to Rainemont, you and I."

"*Seigneur*, calm yourself."

I know not why I addressed him with his brother's last words. But the effect was immediate.

"Calm yourself!" he screamed. With that, he rushed at me, raising his mace. I darted back, and he paused. A look of ghastly terror spread over his face.

"My brother!" he whispered. "Cain! I am Cain! I—" He dropped the mace.

"Do you see the mark on my brow?"

"There is no mark, *seigneur*," I said.

"Ha!" He laughed loud, then went to the parapet and stood with his arms extended. "Cain!" he shouted. "Cain! Cain!"

Men were running out from Rainemont's camp. It may be that the *Seigneur* Hugues saw them. With a shrill cry, he leaped forward into the air, and dropped in an instant below.

I hurried to the edge and looked down. The waters of the moat below were troubled, but while I stared the ripples died away and the surface resumed its dark and oily smoothness.

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH THE LINES.

I AM not one who entertains a morbid interest in tragic matters. The sum of life to me is a sum not of dangers met, but of dangers averted. To be al-

ways at the edge of trouble, but by nice skill keeping safely away from it, that is the true art of life. Otherwise, a man is either the sport of chance, or, if he stays too far from the edge, a placid and uneventful animal. From both those lots may the saints deliver me!

But now I found myself in the central swirl of a tragedy that was long to echo in Touraine—a tragedy so terrible that to-day, years after the event, the sweat stands out on my brow when I think about it. Guillaume de Mescun and his brother of Cornay were both dead through the madness of the one, and the Lady Clothilde thrust by this horror into the control of both estates, was face to face with responsibilities that might have made a man quail.

I did not fear for her. She was bred in a region where strong deeds were done, and bloodshed was not new to her. She had this to be thankful for, that the Seigneur Hugues had not realized what he was doing and that the Count Guillaume had, before the end, shown tenderness and mercy to his brother.

Also, Jehan was by her. When the first pain of her sorrow wore away, her love for him and his for her would be the stronger, since together they had seen the deeps of tragedy. There would be sadness in their hearts, but time would soften it for them, and make their lives the richer, because the more serious. All this I made clear to Jehan at the fitting moment, and he grasped my meaning where many older men would have looked blank.

How he had grown, that youth, since the time I first saw him at the tavern of Jules Simonet! One touch of experience, that and a woman's look, had given him the accolade of manhood. I remember that I had laughed when he offered to challenge the Seneschal Baisignan to combat. No laugh now for the sword of Tarroloys!

When the Seigneur Hugues had leaped to his death, I hastened down from the wall. In the courtyard was Simon Crouay. I told him what had happened, and together we went back into the castle.

News of the tragedy had already begun to spread. Men were hurrying to and fro; several stopped me with ques-

tions, but I waved them to Simon Crouay and walked on. I must find Jehan.

He was standing where I had left him with the lady, but he was alone. His eyes were stern and sad.

"Well?" he questioned. "The Seigneur Hugues?"

Briefly I told him. Then: "Where is the Lady Clothilde?" I asked.

"She has gone with her women. It is better that not even I should be with her for a time."

"Is she—is she bearing herself well?" I hesitated over the question.

"She is brave," he answered.

I meditated for a moment.

"You realize how we are now placed?" I then queried. "Rainemont no longer has an excuse for attack."

"Oh," he said wearily, "I cannot think of that now. But, Master Foucart, Master Foucart, do you not see that we might have prevented this?" He pointed up the winding stairs toward the room where the Count Guillaume still lay. "Why did I not hold him back when he entered?"

"Why did he come to the chamber at all?" I replied.

"Clothilde tried to detain him, but he was so certain that he could set matters right."

"And you and I also hoped for that result," I put in. "No, M. Jehan; it would have happened, sooner or later. We did what we could."

He sighed and moved away. I let him go; his battles were his own to fight.

Presently, the word was spread about that all were summoned to a council in the great hall. Quickly the vassals and men-at-arms gathered. They crowded the long chamber, for only the guards were left on the walls. And all were excited but grave.

The chair of state was empty. Jehan stood near it.

The low buzz of rumor was broken after a time by a slight commotion at the farther door. The curtains were pulled aside. Into the hall came the Lady Clothilde.

Her face was very white, and her eyes were somber, but she walked firmly toward the empty seat. Behind her came two tiring-women—one of them that same Mirelle whom Simon Crouay had

brought back to the castle on the first morning. The eyes of Mirelle were reddened by weeping.

Jehan stepped forward and gave the lady his hand. She took it firmly, not for support, it appeared, so much as for a sign of her reliance upon him, and he led her to the chair. For a moment she hesitated; then, her lips a thin red line, she seated herself. At her whispered word, Jehan remained by her side.

It seemed an hour that we waited, though it could have been but a dozen seconds. Her lips opened at last, and the words came—measured, even. There was no break in her strength.

"My brother Hugues, Seigneur de Cornay," she said, "in a fit of madness has slain my brother Guillaume, Count de Mescun, and has then himself found death in the moat. Our Lady of Mercy will pardon the frenzied sin of the one and speed the soul of the other. And, now, at this hour, I come before you as your liege lady."

One by one the vassals stepped forward and, kneeling before her, presented their swords and murmured the oath of fealty. Jehan would have done the same, but she stopped him, saying: "No, my lord, your place is at my side."

Some of the chief men she signaled to remain, but the others filed from the hall. A fair handful of us stayed for counsel.

The lady turned to me.

"Master Foucart," she said, "you know our case—sorrow within the walls, and an enemy without. What do you advise?"

I stepped forward.

"Gracious lady," I began, "the Count de Rainemont no longer has cause for quarrel. I propose that we send a messenger to acquaint him with what has happened and to demand that he withdraw his men. The Seneschal Gilbert de Baisignan, who is now your vassal, will surely support the demand."

"We have no heraldic officer," she said after a little thought, "and I doubt whether a plain messenger will be respected."

"Then, let us send Simon Crouay, my servant," I urged. "He is faithful to me, and to you, lady, but he came to me from the *seneschal's* ranks, and is

still regarded by them as of themselves. They will hear him."

"Call him." The lady directed the words to a man at the door, first looking at Jehan for his sign of agreement with my advice.

Simon Crouay soon appeared. We instructed him in his message, and when he had fully prepared himself the postern-gate was opened and a narrow bridge was thrust across the moat and he departed. First, however, I had a word with him.

"Do not come back," I whispered. "without seeing Baisignan. If Rainemont should not yield, make it plain to the *seneschal* that the Lady Clothilde is now his lady."

He nodded and was gone.

It was now close to sunset. The bloody day was symbolized by a great flood of crimson in the western sky. The red light slanted into the courtyard and tinged the castle walls whither I had watched, from the battlements, Simon's progress. Within, I knew, Jehan was still with the lady. The words they spoke to each other were doubtless few. But she leaned on him much more than her bearing in the council let it appear.

It was an hour before Simon Crouay returned. When he was seen retracing his way across the plain in the dark, I repaired to the room where the lady waited with Jehan. It was that same chamber in which but yesterday she had been busy with her tapestry. The unfinished brodering was still stretched upon its frame.

As I entered I heard the lady say: "My lord, we will drive sorrow from our hearts, but not the memory of sorrow. That must remain to teach us our responsibility."

He bent over her hand.

Simon Crouay was brought to us, and also came those of the leading vassals who had been in the council.

"Well," said the lady when Simon entered, "what is the Count de Rainemont's answer?"

"Lady," replied Simon, "I delivered your word to the count. He sat at first like one who has been stunned by a blow."

"Spare that!" said Jehan. "What did he say?"

"At first, nothing. Then he forced me to withdraw, under guard, while he talked with his captains."

"Yes," said I. "Go on, Simon. To the point."

"He told me that the fall of the Seigneur de Cornay had been seen from the camp," Simon hesitated. "And—and—lady, 'tis hard to say it."

"Proceed," she prompted calmly.

"He instructed me to tell you that those of his men who saw it are ready to swear that the Seigneur de Cornay was thrown from the wall by two armed men who held him."

"What?" exclaimed the lady.

"And, further," continued Simon Crouay, with the desperate haste of one who has an evil message and is eager to be rid of it—"and, furthermore, the Count de Rainemont asserts that, if the two lords are dead, it is because of foul play."

"Whom does he accuse?" demanded the lady.

"He names no names," stammered Simon. I know that he was hiding something. "Also, the Count de Rainemont says that he will not desist from the siege unless the castle is opened to him and his forces, to deal with as he sees fit. Also, he calls your attention to the fact that his demand for the person of the Seigneur de Tarroloys remains unmet."

"What does he wish of the Seigneur de Tarroloys?" asked the lady, her voice trembling a little.

"He declares," replied Simon, "that the Seigneur de Tarroloys grievously assaulted him in unknighly fashion."

"By the rood!" exclaimed the lady. "The Count de Rainemont is preposterous. Would he promise no truce? Would he not let the priest, Father Ambrose, come to us?"

"He agreed that no attack should be made before sunrise to-morrow. As to the priest, he said that he would send his own chaplain, Father Antoine."

The lady nodded her dismissal, and Simon drew back, audibly breathing his relief.

I led him to one side.

"Did you see the *seneschal*?" I asked.

"Only in the presence of the count. They held me under guard."

"How did the *seneschal* appear?"

"Much troubled by his master's death, and suffering somewhat from his wound. He was inclined to follow Rainemont's voice, partly, I think, because it promised him vengeance. He appeared to believe Rainemont's story."

"Now, tell me, Simon"—I pressed my hand on his shoulder—"whom did Rainemont accuse of foul play?"

Simon looked me in the eye.

"You will hardly believe it," he said, "but he accuses the Lady Clothilde and the Seigneur de Tarroloys."

I gasped.

"He argues," continued Simon, "that the lady thus has sought to make herself mistress of the two domains."

"He must have given up all hope of making her his wife," I muttered.

"And having given up hope, he is thirsty for revenge," said Simon, who had caught the low words I had not intended for him.

I pictured to my mind young Rainemont, in all his sneering pride. His rashness knew no retreat. If he could not have the lady, he would rob her of her promised husband and, perhaps, then try to crush her spirit and make her his slave. He would let us have a priest for our funerals, but no priest for the wedding. Father Antoine would perform no ceremony that Rainemont opposed.

The danger to us was that while we remained besieged in the castle, Rainemont would spread his lies broadcast until the whole country, already prepared to accept any story against Guillaume, believed the charge of foul play. With the case prejudged, Jehan and the lady would find it hard to clear themselves. I could imagine how eagerly the false news would be devoured.

Jehan and the lady were counseling with the others when I returned to them. It seemed that Jehan was for awaiting an attack on the morrow, and if it should not come, then making a sally by night. He pointed out that the horses could be taken out at the postern-gate, one at a time, with perhaps half our force. Riding in a wide détour, this body could get well to the other side of the enemy before charging. An attack from that quarter would not be expected.

Meantime, we who remained in the castle could let down the draw-bridge of the main entrance, and send forth a small supporting body to meet the expedition after it had ridden through the enemy's camp and done what damage it could. Our combined force would then come in over the draw-bridge, covered by a group of harquebusiers on the walls.

"A pretty plan," said I, "but what if the enemy should choose the time of your sally for a night attack on the castle? We cannot expect that they will come at us only by daylight."

"Very true," said Jehan. "But they can make no attack without some show of preparation. By watching them, we shall be sufficiently warned. Our own preparation is hidden by the walls."

His point was well taken. Moreover, I had small belief that even so headlong a fighter as Rainemont would attempt another direct assault. Rather, he would wait until his account of what had happened in the castle should be widely known. Then he might expect new partizans.

"I must yield to you in warcraft," I said to Jehan, secretly glad that he had planned so well, "but in policy I claim the precedence of some long practise. This is a situation for policy. Our number in the castle is not strong. Every attack is bound to weaken us, and in the end we should be defeated. Now, it is plain that the *seneschal*, who is really our lady's man, has been influenced by Rainemont's rash positiveness and his own honest ignorance of the facts. We must reach the *seneschal* privately and make the situation clear to him. Moreover, we must do it this very night."

"Very good," said the lady. "I do not like this notion of a sally." She looked at Jehan with gentle pride. "But who will go to the *seneschal*?"

"Lady, I will," said I.

Jehan laughed.

"Rainemont would make short work of you," he said.

"Rainemont will not touch me. Moreover, I will take Simon Crouay, who knows how their camp is placed. I have a plan that will get us safely to the *seneschal's* pavilion."

At some length I argued before they were willing to let me go, but I made

them see the virtues of my scheme, though I did not tell them in detail what I intended to do. I said farewell to them at last, and went to find Simon. Jehan would have organized an escort to protect us for part of the distance, but I would have none of it.

When I laid the plan before Simon, he was at first doubtful of success. Rainemont, he surmised, was determined to keep the *seneschal* from direct communication with us.

"But," I said, "you know in what direction the *seneschal's* forces lie."

"Why, yes," replied Simon.

"Well, he will have his own sentinels, will he not?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, first, send men from the postern-gate to bring in our disguises."

"What?"

"We will find them on the bodies of the men-at-arms whom the *seneschal* left behind when his assault failed."

"I understand," said Simon.

"Then, do you go, with two or three to help you, and find what we need."

Within a half-hour he was back. A varlet who accompanied him bore the accouterments of a man-at-arms.

"We are lucky," said Simon. "It happens that this fellow"—he pointed to the corselet as though it enclosed a human frame—"was a Swiss, by the name of Moller. He was small like yourself, though broader. He understood little French, except the commands of those above him. If you grunt when they ask you questions, it will suffice; Moller always grunted. Then, your own inability to speak our patois will not be manifest."

The varlet proceeded to help me into the armor—greaves, corselet, helmet, with leather for the other parts. I liked neither the feeling of it nor the weight of it.

"Is this Moller alive?" I asked.

"Are you not he?" Simon laughed; but I shuddered, and it was some time before I ceased to imagine that it was Moller himself and not merely his corselet, that enclosed my body in a grip of iron.

"Where is your own disguise?" I asked.

"I don't need one. You are Moller,

who was wounded and left on the field. I am Simon Crouay, returning to the *seneschal's* camp after giving Master Foucart the slip. I have found you, struggling to get to a place of safety, and have helped you into the lines."

"This is clever of you, Simon," I laughed. "Then if I should be apprehended, you would still be able to save yourself by saying that you *thought* I was Moller."

"And, therefore, I would be better placed to help you out of your difficulty," he replied evenly.

I liked Simon Crouay the better, because he had the skill to serve both himself and me by the same course.

"Well," I said, "come along, then. If this armor continues to grow heavier and heavier, as it seems, I shall not have to simulate the staggering weakness of a wounded man. By St. Julian! I did not dream that armor could be so uncomfortable."

"There is everything in being used to it," chuckled Simon. "At first it tires certain muscles that you have not hardened."

I made him lead me carefully across the narrow plank which had been thrust over the moat from the postern-gate, for a misstep would have sent me under ten feet of water with no chance of rising to the surface. Then we began our course over the plain.

The distance to the enemy's lines was, as I have said, not more than two bowshots, but it seemed to me like two leagues. My corselet was heavier on one side than on the other, thus tending to

make me sag out of the path. Inside the helmet, which Simon had induced me to close, it was not pleasant to breathe. But I staggered and stumbled along, my arm over Simon's shoulder.

At last the voice of a guard challenged us: "Who comes?"

"The *seneschal's* servant," replied Simon. He nudged me and whispered: "Grunt when I speak your name."

"By the voice it should be Simon Crouay," said the guard.

"I am he," replied Simon, "fresh escaped from the castle. On my way hither I have been able to rescue the Swiss, Moller, who was knocked on the head in the assault to-day."

"What, is Moller there?"

I grunted.

"He was only stunned," explained Simon, "and he has news which must be told to the *seneschal* alone."

"But I have orders that all newcomers and strangers shall be taken to the Count de Rainemont."

Simon laughed.

"Are Moller"—I grunted—"and myself strangers? Are we newcomers in the sense the count means?"

"Why, no. I suppose I may take you to the *seneschal's* pavilion."

"Who are you?" asked Simon. "I can't make you out in the darkness except as an armed man."

"I thought you knew my voice. I am Pierre."

"Surely, I might have known. Well, lead on."

Simon gave him a gentle push, and Pierre led us into the heart of the camp.

(To be concluded.)

YEARNING.

RAIN-SLASHED the night, and the wail of the wind
Comes over the hills for the day that is dead;
Sobs at my door, and will not be still—
Grieving for hours that are fled.

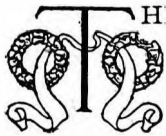
Grief-slashed my heart, and the wail of my soul
Comes over the years for the love that is fled;
Sobs at my door, and will not be still—
Yearning for you—who are dead.

Marie Beatrice Gannon.

THE CRIME AND THE CULPRIT.

BY HELEN NOË.

A SHORT STORY.



THE jewels of the Church of Santa Croce had been stolen. Like fire flaring over dead leaves, the news swept through Cervaro, arousing intense excitement. For a century they had lain in their big bronze chest within the crypt, beside the bones of its patron saint. No tourist was ever permitted to see them, and it was only by chance that the loss was discovered. There was no clue as to whether they had been taken singly or at one fell swoop.

"*Santiddio!* A hundred thousand lire at the turn of a hand," mused the innkeeper as he stroked his small mustache; "a dark night—a key that fitted—'how do you do, and I'll thank you for a loan!' to the saint—"

"Ah, Santa Maria! you think only of gold!" cried his pretty sister, holding a chain of corals to her dark hair and smiling at her reflection in a mirror; "think of the emeralds and rubies to make a queen envious, gone like the wink of an eye!" she sighed as she clasped the pink beads round her full white throat.

Tessa, the cobbler's wife, sitting among her noisy brood, looked wistfully into space: "A bushel of lire, no work—no denial! Enough for all, always! To be sure, for such a crime one might scorch hereafter—but what would be the suffering of one for the good of so many!"

Her dreams of cupidity were shattered by a glad shout, as Giulio de Lera stopped before the door. With a laugh he tossed a handful of confetti to the round-eyed *bambini*, who, after their burst of joy, awaited the gift with shy expectancy. Smiling at the mother's

happy face, he went on toward the church.

He was the only son of the *padrone*, who, ambitious to make of him a savant, had unfortunately overtaxed his brain. He had intervals of mad imagination, that merged into sanity with scarcely perceptible hiatus; but he was quite harmless always. The kindness of his disposition, that made him the adored of children, was reflected on his wavering brain.

Vespers had begun when he entered the church and, kneeling, he glanced with inquisitive recollection at Father Angelo, the village priest.

The *padre's* voice, rising and falling in the psalms, comforted his parishioners after the toil of the day; it was at the crooning of a mother who stills with meaningless syllables, and their responses were each a thanksgiving. But to Father Angelo himself the services were full of distractions; he was troubled—indeed, his mind had not been at ease since the first rumor of a tax to be levied by the crown on church treasure. The valuable possessions of Santa Croce were far beyond the circumstances of the parish, and even a small drain on its resources would mean distress to the poor. Yet the disappearance of the jewels had proved a greater calamity.

The archbishop had written in terms of cold censure, asserting that the theft could be but the effect of culpable negligence; and closed with a sentence of diplomatic courtesy, not too obscure to suggest his removal from the parish.

When Vespers were over, Giulio remained to speak to Father Angelo, but seeing another parishioner enter the sacristy, he forgot why he waited and left the church.

Ninna, the elderly woman who cared for the *padre's* house as if it were a shrine, took away the evening meal untasted.

"Madonna! it is always the good who suffer," she murmured, watching him go wearily through the garden. In the white moonlight his face was like that of the ivory crucifix in the sacristy.

There was a sound of a footfall on the walk and Giulio stood in the doorway; Ninna turned calmly, too familiar with his step to be startled. She had been his nurse, and during intervals of lucidity, when he shunned the curiosity of neighbors, he was devoted to her. Even while his mind was clouded he often went to her window in the night, and throwing a pebble to awaken her, would stand looking up until she drew her blind and spoke to him. This evening she greeted him with scant courtesy.

"A heavy heart has few words for visitors," she said shortly; "the *padre* is alone in the garden."

"A heavy heart—Maria—what about? The jewels?—bah—they gave no joy to saint or sinner, yet you all mourn for them alike!

"While they lay there in the crypt, nobody thought as much of them as of a setting of eggs; but now that they are gone—for the good of the *padre* knows whom—the whole town is screaming about them!"

"The *padre*! What has he to do with it—he knows nothing—he has not eaten a morsel since they discovered the theft."

"But I tell you the *padre* knows the thief very well—and so do I—Maria! 'twas easy—the mere lifting of a hand."

Ninna paled. "Do you know what you say, Giulio?"

"If I do not know, may I never speak again! I watched from the wall—the gold clasps glistened—have I not known the bronze-box since I was an acolyte?"

"And you did nothing—said nothing?"

"*Santiddio*, it was none of my affairs!"

"But where are they now—where were they taken?" Ninna listened, fascinated, incredulous, horrified.

"I cannot tell—for all I know they may be here somewhere. I saw them come here, through the garden gate—

the thief along with them!" he smiled sardonically.

Absurdity such as this broke the spell of revelation. Ninna shrugged her shoulders—the boy was mad!

Even to listen to his talk was infamous, and with a vague excuse, she filled an ewer with water, and went heavily up-stairs.

Giulio waited for a few minutes, seemingly amused at her ruse; then, with an impatient gesture, he left the house.

II.

NINNA could not dismiss Giulio's words as easily as she had him; again and again they returned to her as she made the *padre's* bedroom ready for the night. Often, when some pressing need had called aloud for funds, the jewels had evoked a surreptitious sigh; but there they were—the wealth of the good God! To even think of touching them was sacrilege.

That Father Angelo had aided the thief was inconceivable. Long after she went to bed, Ninna lay looking into the darkness, and her sleep, usually so placid, was restless.

Once she sat up to listen, thinking she had heard a footstep on the stairs; her breathing made little cracklings in the starched kerchief round her throat, but there was no other sound, and presently she went to sleep again.

Suddenly a pebble skipped past the open window and fell into the room with a sharp crack. In an instant Ninna was out of bed. Giulio was up to his old tricks, as she might have expected from his irrational talk!

He stood below her with his finger on his lips. "Hist—come down at once—I want you."

This was an entirely new departure in lunacy!

"Go home to bed!" she returned in a whisper, fearing to awaken the *padre*.

"Come to me at once—at once," he repeated with an exasperated gesture; "the jewels!"

Ninna's heart seemed to stop beating. Throwing a long cape around her, she slipped noiselessly down the stairs.

The moonlit garden was as light as day. Along the brick walk the tall clipped shrubs cast shadows in jet-black

silhouettes. The fragrance of many flowers filled the air.

Ninna noticed nothing but the man who awaited her.

"Well," she demanded, lifting a bare foot quickly from a sharp twig, "well—what is this! To get me out of bed when decent people sleep!"

Giulio ignored her asperity. "Come—I will show you the jewels." His voice was a mere breath. Taking her by the arm he led her rapidly down the path, with scarcely a sound of motion.

The garden was Father Angelo's one luxury. Its trees and hedges, its shaded walks bordered by flowering shrubs and velvet lawn, were his delight; and in the cool of the evening he loved to sit in the ancient pergola, listening to the night-ingales.

He was there now, kneeling on the brick floor. The white moonlight ran between the vines above his head, and fell in silver splashes all around him, but he remained in shadow. As Ninna halted, breathless, she thought he was at prayer, but suddenly a ray of moonlight caught fantastic colors. Leaning nearer she gasped—there on the bricks before him were the church jewels!

The *padre* was talking to himself, but her old ears failed to catch the words; lifting a chain of emeralds that shone as if alive, he seemed to drop it into the earth; and, then, to her amazement, she saw that the bronze-box was below the bricks.

He placed each glittering jewel carefully in the dark recess, their colors casting back the white rays of the moon. Then they heard the heavy lid drop down and the key turn.

A great trembling shook Ninna, her teeth chattered and, in the warm night, she felt chilled to the bone. Hurrying Giulio toward the house, she turned to him with an imperative whisper.

"Go—to-morrow you may say to me what you will. But, mind! one word to another soul, and all the maledictions of Satan be upon you!" Her face was ashen, and the flash of her eyes shot fear into his superstitious heart.

Ninna slept no more that night; the discovery was a shrieking horror in her mind. She did not try to solve the whys and wherefores of the crime—from these

she reverently stepped aside, the priest's motives were no concern of hers—but she determined to restore the bronze-box to the crypt, and free him from the sin of sacrilege.

III.

IN the morning the lines of trouble in his ascetic face, his kindly tones of sorrowful resignation, made the midnight scene seem a hideous fantasy; it was as if some evil spirit had worn his body.

After mass she expected Giulio, but the day waxed to noon and he did not come. Then a passing neighbor mentioned that his mind was again in disorder; he had gone down into a well in search of truth, and but for the timely arrival of a servant, might have been drowned. This ill-wind rid her of his criticism.

It was Whitsuntide, and in the evening the bishop was coming to the parish house to be present at the services the following day, when many children were to receive their first communion. During his visit the loss of the jewels was bound to be discussed, and Ninna felt that it would simplify the matter if they were replaced before his arrival; but it was out of the question for her to go near the pergola while the *padre* remained at home, and she knew of no way to secure his absence.

She went about her hospitable preparations mechanically, floundering among fears of failure; but circumstance came to her assistance. Immediately after his midday meal, Father Angelo was called to the bedside of a parishioner, where he would be detained until late. Ninna watched him down the street with thankfulness.

Taking with her a small lever, she went quickly to the pergola. To her initiated eyes the loosened bricks were plainly visible, and she lifted them with little difficulty; below, fitted snugly in the soil, was the bronze box.

It was of great weight, and she was an old woman, though constant work had kept her muscles supple. Again and again she tried to lift it from its recess, but the strain was too much for her strength. As she looked around helplessly, the blood rushed to her heart—a priest stood watching her over the hedge.

Ninna stared back at him in consternation.

It was the Jesuit, Father Ruffino, her pet aversion. Through his kindly offices, the theft of the jewels had been so reported to the archbishop as to cast doubt on the *padre's* prudence; and to him she could trace many of the *padre's* worries.

He was the last person on earth she would have chosen to find her in this equivocal position. There was no time to prepare explanations before he stood beside her, eying the chest.

"The thief!" His tone was venomous with aspersion.

Instantly she saw the episode as he did—more than this, she saw that she could not refute his accusation; her devotion to the *padre* forbade it. So she knelt silent while his scathing denunciations fell on her bowed head.

"Since you know so well how to conceal them, leave them where they are"; he said finally; "they will remain here until Father Angelo has seen their hiding-place."

With a half glance toward him to ascertain his meaning, she began replacing the bricks, fitting them neatly till all signs of their having been moved were obliterated; then she followed the priest to the house. At the door, struck with a desperate resolve, she hesitated.

"Father Ruffino!"

He turned a face of stern interrogation.

"I beg that you will not tell the *padre* until to-morrow—he is half ill from worry, and he will need his strength for the long services in the morning!" she looked up at him helplessly, trembling in agitation. "It is terrible that he should suffer because of me! The jewels are there—as safe as a church"—she winced at his sudden, scornful smile—"father, I beg of you!"

Time—time to think and plan was all she wanted; for she was counting on the help of the bishop—a life-long friend of the *padre*.

Father Ruffino wavered. Perhaps it was just as well to wait until after the services, when his revelation might be made with dramatic force; for it was no little mark of zeal that after ten minutes' presence he had discovered the jew-

els and the culprit! He could afford to grant her request.

"Very well; though your fears for Father Angelo are rather late!" he answered curtly, and passed on into the house.

Supper was served in the garden in honor of his excellency. Notwithstanding Ninna's agitation, it was a marvel of culinary skill, and the cobwebbed Burgundy jealously stored for such occasions was brought carefully in its wicker cradle.

The bishop was gracious and the *padre*, warmed by the ecclesiastical presence, forgot for a time the burdens of his heart. The three priests sat under the trees long after Ninna had removed the cloth; and as she went about her work their voices came to her in monotones.

She had decided to tell the bishop the whole story, for he knew Father Angelo's real worth and would see that it was not he himself who had done this monstrous thing—that the influence of long anxiety had preyed upon his mind and twisted it.

Since the jewels were still in the garden, no obvious harm had been done; and when they were returned to the church, nobody need be the wiser. In the meantime she piously looked to heaven for an opportunity to speak to his excellency. This came sooner than she expected; the *padre* went over to the sacristy on an errand, and Father Ruffino accompanied him. As they disappeared through the little gate, Ninna slipped into the garden.

For a moment the bishop was startled; in her haste Ninna's sentences were incoherent, and it was some seconds before he understood what it was all about. Then he listened with absorbed attention, frowning a little as he heard Father Ruffino's part in the story.

He asked many questions, his grave eyes looking into hers as if he could see her soul; and as he followed the narrative he remembered an episode of their college days, and formed a theory of his own. He suggested that it was not unlikely that for whatever reason the *padre* had buried the jewels, he would want to be certain of their safety, and if he went into the garden that night, his excellency desired her to call him. that he might

judge for himself. Then, at the sound of their returning footfalls, he dismissed her.

IV.

THE priests retired early, and Ninna, hearing them come up-stairs, drew a chair to the window and began her vigil. She had no intention of sleeping a wink, but habit was stronger than will, and she was a long way in dreams when a footstep in the garden called her. Father Angelo was going slowly down the walk.

Ninna knocked softly at the bishop's door, and in a moment he was in the hall, but, to her amazement, before following her down-stairs, he awakened Father Ruffino. They waited for him on the porch.

The Jesuit was dazed; but his excellency made few explanations. There was a stern line about his mouth—he was risking the reputation of his oldest friend, on the security of faith in him. Raising his hand in caution, he led the way.

As they came in sight of the pergola, the Jesuit started, with a quick glance at Ninna.

Father Angelo was lifting the loose bricks. They watched him wonderingly while he laid them aside, and, kneeling above the chest, raised the lid. The moon shone full upon the jewels in a galaxy of light.

"They are all here," he said distinctly, lifting one bauble after another and dropping it into the box in entrancing cadences of color. When he was assured of their safety he closed and locked the chest again and carefully replaced the bricks; it was astonishing how cleverly he did it.

Hidden by the hedge, they watched

him curiously. The whole scene seemed unreal.

As he rose and came toward them he passed so near that they could have touched him with their hands. His face was white as wax, and he moved uncertainly. Suddenly the watchers looked at each other in astonished comprehension.

Father Angelo was asleep! Tears ran unheeded down the bishop's face. In absolute silence they followed the *padre* to the house. Turning at the door the bishop beckoned Father Ruffino into his room—the moon was setting ere they went to bed, but Ninna fell asleep half way through her prayer of thankfulness.

The next morning the bishop asked to be shown the crypt that he might form his conclusions of the robbery.

It was now unlocked—when the bird is flown one does not close the cage—the *padre* threw back the heavy door with a heavier spirit; but as they entered the close vault he started in bewilderment—had the loss turned his brain?

The bronze box was in its accustomed place, and the jewels gleamed mockingly within it!

There were rejoicings throughout Cervaro—each parishioner congratulating himself as on a stroke of luck. "Maledictions on the thief!—but he was an honest fellow," they cried; "he knew where to draw the line!"

When, after a short interval, they repeated this opinion to Giulio, he laughed at them.

"The church does not tell its left hand what its right hand does," he said sententiously and stopped—remembering Ninna's admonition.

Nobody took the trouble to understand—for Giulio was known to have no wits!

LOVE'S STRATEGY.

Love stole into my heart,
All unannounced he came.
I knew it held a guest,
But gave him friendship's name.

Love dwelt within my heart
Upon this false pretense;
And when I was aware
I could not drive him thence.

F. E. Fenton.

AN INTERRUPTED JOURNEY.

BY ETTA A. SCOTT MORRIS.

A SHORT STORY.



JANE NEWTON, after hard thinking since early dawn, had formed a conclusion that would solve the perplexing problem which had been troubling her for months. She would leave Hiram to-day, and that would settle things.

"I've borne more'n any other two women livin' for nigh onto sixteen year, with never a word o' naggin'," she hotly soliloquized. "But it takes the last straw to break the camel's back, and Hiram laid that one on this mornin' when he called me a 'peppery old dame'—slamming the kitchen-door after him as he went out, and just for nothin' only 'cause I was a spankin' leetle Tom for upsettin' a can o' coal-oil on my clean floor after I worked my daylight's out o' me scrubbin' it till midnight last night. No, I ain't goin' to stand it another day."

Though somewhat relieved in mind after this outburst, she still leaned back in the hard wooden chair in a most dejected manner, while she looked for the twentieth time in the direction of the foot-hills around which she momentarily expected to sight the rickety old stage bound for Hamden, a town eighteen miles down the river.

Jane had indeed seen hard times. Sickness and innumerable losses, together with the bringing up of three healthy children to the ages of twelve, ten, and four years, had reduced her savings to but few dollars. Moreover, there seemed no brighter prospects ahead, for Hiram was happy, easy-going, and lazy. Her ambition for the children's future welfare seemed blighted. And now, to think that Hiram would call her such a name!

"Oh," she sighed, "it's more'n flesh and blood can stand."

Jerkily she pulled aside the calico curtains and peered up the road, but there was no living thing in sight save an old cow lazily grazing by the roadside.

"I won't wait any longer," she thought. "I'll jest go a piece down the road and let the old stage catch up with me. I can git in there jest as well as here. What if I should happen to run onto any folks I know?" she continued to meditate, a creepy, cold feeling running up and down her back. "It's not at all ways likely, for I hain't set foot off o' this here place in two year; but, somehow, I can't help havin' a nervous feelin'."

Going to a chest where the family's "best" wardrobe was kept, she took from within a limp bonnet, which had done her service for ten years. The wilted flowers and straight, worn-off vulture tips looked uglier to her than ever before. As she tied it on, trying to pick out the creased, frayed strings into semblance to a bow, she took stock of what attractiveness remained to the once handsome figure reflected in the small, cracked looking-glass. She saw little enough resemblance to the Jane Manny of sixteen years ago.

"What a change—and what a fright I be!" she said aloud, her voice sounding husky and unnatural. "Fifteen year o' worry and bein' a slave to Hiram has left its mark, all right."

She stooped by the window to take another look for the stage. Her thin features assumed a determined expression as she hurriedly drew about her shoulders her one cherished possession, an old Paisley shawl which had belonged to her mother.

"I'm sartainly disgusted with every-thing around this place," she thought as she smoothed out the wrinkles down the front of her threadbare, faded, black alpaca dress. "Only forty-five year old, and as wrinkled and haggard as old Aunt Lib Parsons, up on the hill, and she is sixty-five."

Hot anger shone in her eyes—anger toward Hiram, the sole cause of all her woes. It was Hiram who was to blame for her lost youth, who had brought her to poverty, who had heaped misery upon her all her married life. And not until this day had she found the backbone to assert her rights.

"I guess likely he'll think a thing or two to-night, when he comes home singin' them songs o' his'n as usual—as if there warn't nothin' to worry him—and finds me gone. Maybe he'll say 'red peppery' 'stead o' jest plain 'peppery' next time he calls me an 'old dame'—and maybe—"

But here the rancor in her heart changed to mother love. There were the children, her children; what would they say to find her gone? dear, sunny little Tom, who always hunted her up to give her a kiss of welcome, would mourn for her, she knew. But she mustn't let her heart fail her now her mind was made up.

"I'll come back and get them some day, but I must leave a word for them so they won't worry."

After considerable fumbling about in the pantry, she found a piece of wrapping-paper, on which she wrote:

dere mary be good to bessie and leetle tom til I com back to git you all yure lovin ma.

II.

SHE could give no explanation for her abrupt leaving, so she pinned the note as it was to the iron-holder on the table. Now she was ready. Dreamily she gazed about the room, and her eyes rested on little Tom's jacket and a pair of muddy boots, full of holes, which he had tucked under a chair before leaving for school that morning. Then she looked at the clock for the first time that afternoon—it was ten minutes to three.

"Why, how could I make such a blunder," she thought. "The stage ain't due for forty minutes yet, and here I am all

ready and have been a watchin' for it more'n a half-hour. Well, I won't wait here that long, anyhow. I need the fresh air, and in that time I can walk a right smart ways down the road."

She straightened herself, shrugged her shoulders, and paused with her hand on the latch.

"Jane Newton, you sartainly air a fool, and no mistake, to be so nervous. Here you was forgittin' to take some change for stage fare," she said aloud, dropping the dilapidated carpetbag which held her meager wardrobe while she counted from the tin-box under the bed sixty-five cents in small money.

Hastily pushing the box into place with her foot, she hurried from the house with a vague feeling that something had been left undone. On the steps, where she stopped to collect her scattered senses and at the same time to tie the change in the end of her bonnet-string, it dawned on her that she had left her bag.

"I guess I'm losin' my reason," she thought as she opened the door. "Hiram would say so. It's the sign o' bad luck to forget and have to go back."

She snatched the bag from the floor and again stepped forth. The fresh May breeze, laden with the sweet scent of pine and the intermingling perfume of the orchard, soothed her fevered cheeks as she wended her way down the uneven, clover-bordered path to the gate. Untying the rope, she was about to pass through when close on her heels she discovered "Limpy," the Plymouth Rock rooster, and behind him the stately "Biddy," his mate. Following near came the whole flock from the hen-yard, completely surrounding her as was their wont at feeding-time. Billy, the goat, hearing the commotion, ran from across the road to investigate, poking his nose about the carpetbag in anticipation of something to eat, while Old Mooley, the cow, playfully capered to the bars and put her head over to be petted. Rover, too, the faithful shepherd, must pay his respects, so he lazily crawled from under the shed, and, slinking up to her, affectionately licked her hand.

"Oh, do all of you go home—go back!" she cried angrily. "It 'pears to me as if you'd all be mighty glad to git away from this here place. I 'spose they

hate it as much as I do," she continued, a hard little laugh escaping her. "No wonder they make such a fuss, it's so long since I've gone away."

She carelessly wiped a trickle of moisture from her cheek as she took a last look at her pets and the little house.

Again she glanced back for the stage, then trudged on, while through her mind ran reminiscences of her early life as a trusted servant of Mrs. Wentworth.

"Dear old lady," she thought, "she must be just awful lonely—since the judge up and died so suddin like."

A smile brightened her careworn face. That was the very place where she would go—why had she not thought of it before? Mrs. Wentworth had always said that if she ever wanted a friend she must come to her. And, then, perhaps Jane could do something to comfort the old lady in her loneliness.

Faster and faster she walked, her feet keeping time with the busy thoughts which filled her mind. Her expression had grown less strained now that she had partly mapped out her course. She could earn her old-time wages, and soon she could have her children with her.

"Whew," she ejaculated suddenly, "it's awful hot! I'm about tuckered out, and my feet air jest about blistered. I didn't think it was so roasin'. There warent no need of my wearin' that thar shawl."

Unpinning the shawl and folding it carefully over her arm, she wearily proceeded on down the dusty road to Mill Creek. There, worn and thirsty, she seated herself on the ground near the bridge to rest.

This was the mile mark from home—or what was once her home—she would wait here in the shade until the stage came along, she thought, as her eyes wandered down the road.

"Thar's a team a comin' as sure as you're born, Jane Newton," she soliloquized. "Most likely it's Deacon Sivwright's hired man. I ain't often liable to be mistaken, even at a considerable distance."

Shading her eyes, she looked intently in the direction of the oncoming team.

"Besides," she continued, "it's 'bout his usual time to be gittin' home from town with the mail. I guess I'd better

cross on over the bridge and go down under to get a drink. I'm that thirsty I could die—besides, it's cooler there. Of course, I'd jest as soon that boy'd see me, but I'm sort o' upset to-day, and it's jest as well not to have to explain my business to everybody. Anyhow, he's awful medlin'."

III.

SHE had just descended the bank to the water, when she suddenly stopped, feeling an icy shudder creep up her spine. Hark! what was that she heard?

"As sure as I'm breathin', if that ain't Hiram a singing. It wasn't the deacon's hired man after all."

A feeling of actual seasickness made her faint and dizzy as she recognized the old, familiar song which Hiram had learned when he was a sailor. He was just starting another verse.

"The captain walked the quarter-deck and hailed the man aloft,"

sang Hiram. Louder she could hear it, as he drew nearer and nearer.

"Whar's that whale, my boy, how far is he off?"

"Oh, why can't I faint?" groaned Jane.

"The man at the masthead, he answered with a smile,"

came the clear, musical tones, "get up thar, Betsy Ann; step up, Billy," all in the same tone.

"Why won't the airth open right up and swallow me 'fore Hiram sees me!" gasped Jane.

"Two points off your lee bow, a distance of one mile,"

merrily sang Hiram.

Jane stood riveted to the spot, fairly paralyzed with fear as the wagon rattled onto the bridge; and then she heard the brakes grind, and Hiram's commanding "Whoa!" brought the horses to a standstill.

"Murder will out, sure," she murmured, keeping her back to the bridge, while the hot waves of mortification at the thought of facing Hiram swept over her. "I ain't going to bear up much longer," she thought, as she felt his look

piercing her very soul through the awful oppressiveness of the silence.

"Hallo thar, Jane, what in thunder air you doin' here—fishin'?"

Jane, who was trying to drink from a leaf, was suddenly stricken with a violent fit of choking, and pretended not to hear.

"I say, Jane," fairly yelled Hiram, "you come nigh chokin' to death, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't, neither," retorted Jane as she wheeled about to face him. "An' s'posen I did, it's nothin' to you, anyhow. I see you've lost another half a day," she changed the subject quickly, avoiding his look.

"Yes," he drawled unconcernedly, "we boys couldn't go on with the plowin', the stumps are so darned thick, so they got the pullers to workin' and give us fellers off for the rest o' the day. But," he adroitly added, "you don't need to fuss, for we git paid jest the same."

Jane, however, maintained the same frigid expression. What matter was it to her now whether he got pay or not, thought she.

"Say, Jane," called Hiram, a pleasant ring in his voice, "I've got a surprise for you." He held up a letter and shook it at her. "Come on up and git in, and we'll read it."

"Oh, you went to town, did you?" she rejoined icily. She was wondering who could possibly be writing her a letter. "Probably Aunt Malintha," she decided.

"Sure I went to town," answered Hiram. "Air you comin' up?"

"No!" said Jane decidedly, "I'm headed for Aunt Malintha's. I'm waitin' for the stage."

"All right," replied Hiram good-naturedly. "If you ain't curious to know who that thar letter's from, I'll go on up to the house and read it myself. These here women-folks make me tired."

"Pears to me as if she's got her back up at somethin'," he said under his breath as he let off the brakes, at the same time eying her keenly where she stood irresolute. What in the world made Hiram so unconcerned about her going away? And who could that letter be from? Jane was asking herself.

Then, curiosity getting the better of her, she edged a few steps nearer.

"Well, if you ain't comin', so long," shouted Hiram as he picked up the reins and woke Betsy and Billy with a tap of the whip.

"Wait," came faintly from Jane, and she scrambled up the bank and held out her hand. "Give me my letter," she said breathlessly.

"No, sir-ee, not on your life," replied Hiram, bringing Betsy and Billy to a sudden halt. "We read that thar letter together; now if you'll git in I'll drive round yonder near that clump o' trees, and we'll see what's in it. It's from a man—his name's in the corner," he added, dropping the reins and holding out his hand to help her climb over the wheel.

"No, I ain't goin' to git in," stubbornly asserted Jane. "I'll walk over yonder."

She thought she could better conceal the bag if she walked. A rumble in the distance attracted her attention.

"There's that pesky old stage," she murmured. "Why couldn't it 'a' come sooner? I jest can't go now. I must know who that thar letter is from—no tellin' what's in it." She choked back her chagrin at being intercepted by Hiram, and slowly walked in the direction he had taken, concealing the bag behind her.

IV.

SHE found him comfortably stretched on the ground under the clump of trees, carefully opening the letter on the end. She sat down on a stump facing him, letting the bag slide to the ground behind her.

"It's jest as well if he don't see it," she thought. "I'd have to explain why I had taken so many things, and, besides—"

"Here's your letter," broke in Hiram on her reverie. "I'm in a hurry to read it."

"Ugh!" grunted Jane, snatching it from his hand and eagerly scrutinizing the unfamiliar handwriting. "It seems as if you're more anxious 'bout what's in it than I be." She deliberately pulled the letter from the envelope, saying as her eyes caught the printed name of

"Wentworth" in the corner: "It's from Mrs. Judge Wentworth, whar I worked before I married *you*"—a stinging accent on the word—"I reckon."

With great difficulty she at last made out its contents. It ran:

HAMDEN, IND., May 2, 1898.

MRS. JANE NEWTON;

DEAR MADAM—You will be surprised and pained, no doubt, to learn of mother's death, which occurred on the 5th of April. Through the untiring services and tender care which you gave her during the period you were employed as maid in our home, you became greatly endeared to her, and we find in her will that you are remembered to the amount of five hundred dollars.

Please call at your earliest opportunity at my office.

Yours truly,

E. J. WENTWORTH, M.D.

The letter fluttered from Jane's nervous fingers to the ground, while a look of unutterable concern took the place of the expression of cold constraint which she was trying hard to maintain.

"Jumping Jehosephat!" ejaculated Hiram, rising abruptly and taking a turn on his heel. "Now wouldn't that crimp you! Five hundred dollars! Say, Jane, I always was sartin that the old lady wouldn't forgit you when she turned up her toes," he jabbered on irreverently. "Say!" he fairly shouted, "you ain't got palsy, have you? Why in thunder-ation don't you say somethin'?"

Giving her a hearty slap on the back, he danced about like a schoolboy, then leaped into the wagon, from which he threw a huge bundle.

"Open that thar parcel, and I guess you'll think something's doin', and it'll make you say somethin', too," he laughed. But Jane sat motionless.

"All right," rattled on Hiram, "if you ain't anxious to know what's in thar, you'll be dead sartin sorry you wasn't when I open it for you."

But still Jane sat like one in a trance, watching with a bewildered look the antics of Hiram as he untied the well-wrapped bundle and shook out something which she at once recognized as a dress—a dark-blue dress. Laying it across her lap, he untied a smaller package, out of which rolled a pair of gloves and a necktie of soft silk.

"How's that for high?" he said.

Not waiting for a reply from the now petrified Jane, he very gingerly opened a box which the bundle had contained, and as he looked into it, a smile stretched his mouth from ear to ear. With a wink at Jane he said: "If this don't make you say something, I shall know you are struck dumb."

"Oh," gasped Jane in delight, and reached out for the bonnet he was displaying first on one hand and then on the other.

"Let me put it on for you," he said. "You can't get it on straight without a glass."

Awkwardly he untied the ugly old one and setting the new one in its place—back side front—he clumsily, tenderly drew the ribbons about Jane's wrinkled chin and tied them much as he would fasten a heifer in the stall. Stepping back, he gazed with genuine satisfaction and with the utmost admiration.

"Janie, dear," he said good-naturedly, "I'd give a hundred dollars this minute if you had a looking-glass here, so you could see how handsome you be. Them red roses jest brighten up your eyes, and I'll be switched if you look a day over twenty year old."

A look of the old-time free-from-care softness flitted across Jane's features. This was indeed more than she could bear. Hiram must certainly love her after all. She felt a big lump come into her throat and, somehow, her eyes got awfully blurry.

"Whew!" she said, rising, "it's git-tin' awful hot again. I'm swettin' round the nose."

Vainly she searched for a handkerchief. Two scalding tears trickled down her cheeks to be caught in Hiram's bandanna as he put his big, strong arms about her and in as comforting words as he could find in his vocabulary told her that he "'sposed she naturally would feel all broke up about the old lady's keelin' over; but 'it's an ill wind, etc.'"

Finally, collecting herself, she interrupted: "It ain't her dying that makes me have this here choky feelin', Hi, it's—it's—"

"Well, never mind what it is, Janie, dear. I'm darned glad she didn't forgit you, and to git such good news on this here day, too. Don't you know,

Janie, this is our weddin'-day?" he said, drawing her head to his shoulder. "It is sixteen year ago to-day since we was married, so I thought as you had been a purty savin' woman all these year, gittin' on without much yourself, that I'd surprise you—but you don't seem to have nothin' to say."

"Hiram—" said Jane, then broke off. There was a long silence, interrupted only by the snoring of Betsy Ann, who was standing on three legs, very much asleep.

"Yes," answered Hiram, gently stroking her gray hair and accidentally knocking the new bonnet into the dust, "say something—go on."

"Hiram, it sort o' sticks in my crop—what you said this mornin'."

"What I said?" questioningly repeated Hiram.

"About my bein' a pep—peppery old—old dame," stammered Jane, feeling her face redden to the roots of her hair.

"Me call you such a name, Janie? Why, I never did."

Then he burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Well, if these women-folks don't make a man tired. Why, I recollect now, it was when you was spankin' leetle Tom, I saw that frisky Lady Dame mare kick the top rail clean off that gate, and as that made the third time she had done it this spring, I jest naturally called her a peppery—what was it, did you say?"

"Old dame," rejoined Jane, as she nervously felt for the missing bonnet.

AN OLD-FASHIONED VALENTINE.

UPON the lake we went to skate
When February breezes blew;
I said, "This is the day to mate
For birds, why not for me and you?"

Her curls were folding half her face,
When chirped a near-by chickadee,
"Just try your skates, and have a race—
On wings my lover came to me."

And so we took the slippery way,
More dangerous than the paths of air,
With reams of levity to say,
And not a word that Love could spare.

Some traces of the purple dawn
Still canopied the eastern hills;
I said, "Your cheeks those tints have drawn,
Your voice the music of the rills;

"Gay laughter to the fields below."
Whereat she seemed less cold and shy.
And then—why is it always so?—
A dismal rival sauntered by!

Which made me think, Love dares the snow,
And wins its way amidst alarms;
For, as we homeward turned to go,
She straightway fell into my arms.

What though the strap upon her skates
Had tripped her on that glassy ice?
It meant the same—and we were mates
Just from that chickadee's advice.

Joel Benton.

THE CLEVERNESS OF CARDILLAC.*

BY ROBERT BARR,

Author of "A Woman Intervenes," "Tekla," "Young Lord Stranleigh," Etc., Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

VICTOR DE CARDILLAC, of Gascony, comes to Paris, bearing a letter from Charles d'Albert de Luynes, favorite and master of the young King Louis XIII. Cardillac meets Tresor, confidential servant of De Luynes, who tells Cardillac the letter is a hoax. Tresor offers Cardillac a chance to meet De Luynes and prove his mettle. Cardillac goes to a rear gate of the palace, whence, as specified, a man, supposedly De Luynes, comes forth. Cardillac provokes him to a duel and is wounded. He discovers that his antagonist is not De Luynes, but the Duc de Montreuil, an opponent of De Luynes, though, for appearance' sake, his adherent.

The duke and Cardillac are suddenly surrounded by the guard. The duke reveals his identity to the sergeant of police, and pretends that Cardillac has been wounded by foot-pads. He invites both Cardillac and the sergeant to his house; and wheedles from the sergeant a *lettre de cachet* signed by the king. Then the duke proposes to furnish Cardillac with funds and all necessaries for six months, if Cardillac will undertake to recover his kidnapped daughter Thérèse, who is detained in a royal convent.

Cardillac gets into the convent by using the *lettre de cachet*, but the abbess divines his ruse. He is forced to flee to avoid arrest. In his flight he surprises a girl who has been eavesdropping. She tells him she is Marie Duchamps, waiting maid to Mlle. de Montreuil, and that *mademoiselle* wishes him to escort her to Blois to take service with the queen. They escape from the convent, and traversing the forest lose their way. While resting near the main road, they hear the password given to the patrol by two horsemen, and also overhear a romantic recital of Cardillac's escape, his character and enterprise.

CHAPTER XVI.

1. THE COURAGE OF A MAID SERVANT.

THE sound of hoof-beats lessened and lessened in either direction, until at last silence succeeded. Cardillac rose to his feet, stretched his arms above his head, and drew in a long breath.

"Well, of all outrageous liars!" he cried. "Did you listen to what was said, Marie?"

"I think I heard most of their conversation."

"I hope you didn't believe what you heard, then."

"Oh, no; I am not so credulous as you think."

"I am glad of that, for although you are but a humble serving-maid, I do not on such account undervalue your good opinion."

"Thanks for your condescension, M.

de Cardillac. It is very gracious of you, and you may be assured that this unbending is greatly appreciated by me."

"With your words there is no fault to find, Marie; yet you say them with an air that is somewhat difficult to define—an air that I do not exactly like."

"I am very sorry, *monsieur*; and if you would kindly give me some hint of what you complain, I shall endeavor to avoid my fault in the future."

"I do not say it rises to the dignity of a fault, Marie," replied the young man kindly; "yet there seemed to me a suspicion of scoffing in your tone, as if you did not mean exactly what you said."

"I fear, M. de Cardillac, that you have been listening so long to mendacity that you are now in a mood to doubt every one's good intentions."

"Well, so long as you know that these two men are liars, especially the long-winded one, it does not so much matter."

"Trust me, sir, I am sharper than you

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for October, 1908.

think. I at once detected the falsity of their statements. When they said you had come in the same carriage with the Duc de Montreuil, I knew that was an absurd saying; and when it was added that the Duc de Montreuil regarded you as a friend—why, the absurdity of such an allegation was evident even to a poor creature like myself."

"There, Marie, you are at it again. I hope, my good girl, you are not trying to be sarcastic. Sarcasm becomes a woman as ill as a badly fashioned gown. Yourself admitted that you believed me when I said the duke honored me with his friendship, and I think you said that his daughter accepted my proclamation as true. You have selected as untrue the two accurate affirmations these men made."

"When Pol said you had never met Mlle. de Montreuil, he was quite wrong, was he not?"

"No; that was a third veracious allegation that was made."

"If Pol and François are right in the instances I have cited, I shall save myself trouble by accepting everything else as true."

The girl rose wearily from the saddle and stood before him.

"No, no!" he cried. "Everything else they said was as false as—"

"Oh, do not let us discuss the matter any further! I am tired of the subject, and care not what they said. Do you propose to move on, *monsieur*?"

"Yes," said Cardillac, offended by her indifference, and annoyed at the turn she had given to the conversation, perversely disbelieving the points that told in his favor, while willing to accept offhand all that had been alleged against him.

"What are your plans, *monsieur*?"

"I shall disclose them when we reach the highroad."

"Oh, thank you, *monsieur*."

He got the horse upon its feet and strapped the saddle to its back. In spite of the fact that the moon was invisible from where they stood, the forest had become much less obscure; and he had little difficulty in leading the horse through the few yards of thicket that intervened between their resting-place and the main road. Here it was nearly as light as day, for the moon shone full

upon it, as it ran in a straight line from west to east.

"Now, *mademoiselle*, I propose—"

"Are you about to divulge your plans, *monsieur*?"

"Yes, Marie Duchamps. Are you not anxious to hear them?"

"Not in the least, *monsieur*; for they concern you alone, just as my plans concern nobody but myself."

"Your own plans? They take you to Blois, I suppose?"

"Of a surety, *monsieur*. I shall not thank you for your aid, because I think I was of some service to you in pointing out a method of escape from the convent; therefore, we bid one another good-by, neither in the other's debt."

"Do you mean that you are going alone to Blois?"

"How clever you are, *monsieur*! That indeed is my meaning."

"You do credit what those scoundrels said of me?"

"I fear, *monsieur*, that I was not listening. I think I was asleep most of the time they were talking."

"Not listening! Why, Marie, I'll warrant not a word escaped you. Your ears are as sharp as your tongue. Not listening? What were you doing when I nearly fell over you at the convent door?"

Marie drew herself up proudly, turning with quiet dignity toward him, the full moon shining now on her fair face; and not for the first time the young man, with a flutter of pleasure at the heart, realized how well favored she was.

"*Monsieur*," she said quietly, "as I am about to bid you good-by, and as I hope never to see you again, wishing you a safe return to all the allurements of Paris, I shall not prevent you referring to my listening at the door as often as you like. If we were to be comrades farther on our journey, I would say that your allusion was offensive to me. If there was any generosity in your nature, you would not again allude to the plight in which you caught me. You would know that a servant in my position must obey the commands of her mistress, and I have already told you that I listened at the door to obtain information that it might be vitally necessary Mlle. de Montreuil should know. She was kept a

prisoner in the convent, and I—if I may be so bold as to say so—was her only friend. I think, in the circumstances, *monsieur*, the listening was justified."

"Marie, I quite agree with you. Forgive me."

"I do so very willingly, *monsieur*; and now, good night and thank you."

"But you are not going alone?"

"Yes; I know the word. It is 'Montoire.' Everywhere the patrol will allow me to pass, and I shall be safe in Blois before daybreak."

"Oh, Marie, this is nonsense! I am in charge of you."

"Who put me in your charge, *monsieur*?"

"Why, Mlle. de Montreuil, so you said. It is my duty to see you safely within the walls of Blois."

"*Monsieur* is quite mistaken. *Mademoiselle*, it is true, wrote an order for your inspection; but when I returned to the stair, it was too dark for you to read it. Now, in this moonlight, you may decipher the words. I beg your perusal of the message, *monsieur*."

Cardillac took the paper she handed to him, and read:

MONSIEUR VICTOR DE CARDILLAC:

If you will convey my servant, Marie Duchamps, safely to any destination she requires of you, and if you will obey her in all things that she requests, I will communicate with my father, and see that he sends the money he promised you to any address you give Marie on leaving.

THERÈSE DE MONTREUIL.

Cardillac looked at the girl and looked at the letter, then looked back at the girl again, his brow wrinkled with perplexity.

"*Mon Dieu*, Marie, I cannot allow you to walk this road alone all night!"

"You must, *monsieur*; otherwise you shall not receive the money."

"*Morbleu!* Out upon the money! I was not thinking of the money, but of you. Still, I'm glad you mentioned the money."

"I thought it would influence you, *monsieur*."

"It does, Marie. It jumps me into jeopardy from this moment. I shall disobey Mlle. de Montreuil."

"*Monsieur!*" cried the girl in alarm, drawing back.

"Let *mademoiselle* keep her money to buy finery with, the next time she visits Paris. I swear she is not half so enchanting as her maid servant, in spite of the eulogy of François. Marie, you must mount this horse with me, and ride thence to Blois."

"Ah, and so give reality to the fancies of M. François?"

"I see you were not asleep, after all, Marie! Yes, we shall enact the drama by François, and I shall be delighted to kiss you over my shoulder as often as you are pleased to permit me, Marie. But we waste time. Come along."

"I shall not."

"Then I will pick you up in my arms, place you on the horse, and hold you there, if necessary."

"*Monsieur*, I bid you beware!" cried the girl warningly, stepping back as he approached.

Cardillac laughed joyously; and as he strode two steps nearer, she drew from her bosom an Italian stiletto, whose hilt gleamed with jewels, and whose sharp blade flashed in the moonlight.

"Another step at your peril, *monsieur!* *Mademoiselle* gave me the means to defend myself."

Cardillac stood still, but continued his laugh of quiet enjoyment. The upheld stiletto did not flash more dangerously than her own dark eyes. The red lips were compressed till all color had left them, and her face was white and set.

"You are an unfair highwayman, Marie. The robber of the road demands your money or your life; but you, lovely angel of danger, threaten both."

Marie did not reply, but held to her attitude of defense.

"Do you mean seriously to challenge to mortal combat the second best swordsman in France?"

"If you are he—yes."

"Well, for a maid servant, Marie, you do not lack courage."

"I cannot return the compliment, *monsieur*, for I should not call that gentleman courageous who threatened a woman."

"*Vrai Dieu*, Marie, I do not threaten you! I am but anxious for your safety. It is you who threaten me. And now, to show you how much I fear that toy, or you either, I bid you strike!"

He clasped his hands behind him and marched straight up to her, until their lips were not six inches apart.

"Strike, Marie, because if you do not, within ten minutes I shall gather you in my arms and place you on my horse. Now, *mademoiselle*, why do you hesitate? Why has all that high courage, which I admired a moment ago, left your face? Think how fitting your blow would be, and how poetical the justice that guided a woman's stiletto into my corrupt heart."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SWORD-WOUND IN THE ARM.

MARIE maintained her attitude for a few moments, then her arm lowered, and tears of vexation came into her eyes. There was a tremble in her voice when she said:

"You know I did not believe that."

"Then why do you object to my escort, and why do you think that steel will protect you?"

"*Monsieur*, if I tell you the truth, will you let me go my own way? I assure you I am not accustomed to being thwarted, and am headstrong after a fashion."

"I should have thought, on the contrary, that you were disciplined to obedience. Do you oppose *mademoiselle* as you have opposed me?"

"Ah, *mademoiselle*! That is another matter. I obey *mademoiselle* in everything."

"Of course. Then tell me your truthful reason for refusing my assistance."

"I refuse, for your sake, and not for my own. I shall be quite unmolested on the road to Blois, but you march there without disguise, in the garments so familiar to Beaugency. Your description has gone ahead of you. François has told each patrol for whom to look, and before long he will have informed the military at Blois of your age, appearance, manner, and bearing."

"You forget that François said he would help me to escape."

"Yes, if he met you alone; but you must remember he carries his instructions to Blois, and he also believes you will make for that town. The whole country

to the north of the Loire is on the alert already, watching for you. I can get through to Blois, but you will be captured; and, believing you to be a brave man and a gentleman, I cannot bear that you should be sacrificed on my account. There at last you have the truth, *monsieur*."

Cardillac caught her by the two shoulders. The girl first shrank from him, then, seeing he made no attempt to draw her to his arms, she stood quiescent.

"Marie," he cried, "if Thérèse de Montreuil is half so fine a lady as you—and much as I admire your beauty, I am not referring to that—she has reason to be proud of herself. However obscure and humble your origin, Marie, at heart you are a lady, and a beautiful, brave and charming lady at that."

Marie smiled, and a mischievous twinkle chased away the moisture from her eyes.

"I am gratified to receive so flattering an opinion from one whom I must regard as a connoisseur."

Victor's hands rested more heavily on Marie's shoulders than she thought was necessary, and she made a slight movement to release herself. As they stood together on the high road, his back was toward the moon, which shone full upon the lovely face of the girl. He seemed overpowered by this close view of her beauty, and she, feeling those heavy hands attempting to draw her still nearer, braced back, resisting their appeal. She spoke in a low voice.

"Please!" she said. "I rest secure in the courtesy and chivalry of De Cardillac."

The young man's left hand swung down to his side with a certain pendulum-like helplessness. His right he drew across his brow, as if in perplexity. The girl stood free, watching him intently.

"Where—where—" he murmured, with a new hesitancy in his speech, "where have I heard those words before?"

"Why," she said, "don't you remember? They were the words of the mythical nun to the mythical De Cardillac."

"What nun?"

"The nun of François's story. It

made an impression on my mind. Did it not on yours?"

"François? François? Ah, that was the horseman! But I did not harm the nun?"

"No, of course you did not. *Mon-sieur*, what is wrong with you? You speak strangely, as if you were talking in your sleep."

Cardillac laughed a little.

"I am asleep, or dizzy. I have had no sleep for weeks, I think. I don't know how long. I am rather tired."

Impulsively, she stepped forward. He swayed as though he would fall, and held himself erect by a visible effort, drawing his hand again and again across his brow as if to brush away bewilderment. She grasped him by the left arm, but he winced, and spoke irritably.

"Don't do that," he said.

"Turn round into the moonlight," she commanded. "I want to see your face."

He leaned back against his patient horse, throwing the right arm over the animal's neck. The girl gave a little cry of dismay as she saw the ghastly whiteness of his face, with the pale moonlight now upon it. She felt warm moisture on her hand, and looking at her finger-tips, saw them red with blood.

"You are wounded!" she cried.

"Oh, it is nothing—nothing at all," he answered impatiently, "but a sword-thrust through the arm. It would have been all right but for my coming carelessly down the rope from the convent. I was showing off, because you were there. I burst the bandages and reopened the wound."

"Who wounded you, and why?"

"It is of no importance, I tell you. The Duc de Montreuil ran his sword through my arm—that is all."

"The Duc de Montreuil?"

"Yes."

"But why, why, why?"

"Don't reiterate a silly word like that. Why do you ask so many questions? Curiosity is the bane of woman. Keep quiet, and let me gather my wits."

He was breathing hard, slipping slowly down along the horse's neck, hanging on his overreaching right arm; but while his plight brought deep sympathy to the girl's eyes, her lips again demanded:

"Why? Why did the Duc de Montreuil do that?"

"Because—because I attacked him. I tried to assassinate him."

The right arm loosed its hold, and Cardillac fell prone upon the ground. The horse started back in fright, and the girl gazed down upon his white face.

"*Saints et saintes?*" she cried, trembling. "In what a web of falsehood am I involved! Who is this man? My father's friend, or my father's murderer? My father's friend, as the horseman said, and as Cardillac contended, or his vile assassin, as he himself has admitted a moment since. Where is my father? A victim to this man's treachery, or safe at Loches? I shall go to Loches, instead of to Blois. But no, that is impossible. Loches is eighteen leagues away, and Blois but six. If anything has happened to my father, I shall learn that at Blois, and there my duty calls me to the queen."

She turned her face to the west and took a step in that direction, but paused again.

"Oh, what is the truth? What is the truth? He seemed honest and brave—yes, and kind. A lad like him cannot bear murder in his heart, and yet his own words—and that wound in his arm! My father's sword! Tried to assassinate him! Delirium has its madness as well as its truth.

"What am I to do? If I leave him here, it is death by exhaustion, or death by execution; and if he should be my father's friend after all, and my father safe in Loches—how am I to decide? My duty is to the queen; to plan her escape and aid her, yet I stand here hesitating. Why have I allowed this man to come between me and my duty—to bring this hesitation, which was impossible half a dozen hours ago? In any case, guilty or innocent, what is the death of one man to the fate of a dynasty? To Blois, of course; there is no second choice."

This time she took five steps resolutely toward Blois, faltered, and looked back. The horse had moved forward—had bent its head affectionately over its master, snorting with alarm at the warm scent of blood.

"That dumb brute is more merciful than I. Cardillac guided me safely

through the forest, bearing my petulance with patience. Thinking me servile, he called me a lady. Here, alone, and in his power, at my slightest command he retreated from me. One who was vile would not have done that, and all the while in pain and lessening strength, no word of complaint from his lips; a smile instead of a frown; and his last conscious words were used to persuade a woman to allow him, reckless of his own safety, to ward off danger from her, while she taunted him about money—a rich woman to a son of poverty, as he admitted himself to be. Merciful Heaven, what am I, to hold myself aloof from so great a soul as his! I cannot believe ill of him."

But when she returned once more, the former hesitation overcame her as she looked down upon the insensible man. After all, his own words were witnesses against him.

"'I tried to assassinate him,' he said. If he has injured my father, I cannot touch him—I cannot bear to so much as place my hands upon him; and if he be a murderer, then must he lie there and take whatever penalty comes. God of honesty, give me some inkling of the truth!"

She crossed her hands above her troubled breast and raised a suppliant face to the blue sky.

"Mary, Queen of Heaven," she prayed, "look down in pity on thine erring daughter. Resolve her doubt. Is this man fair or foul? Has he raised hand against my father? Is he fit for my father's daughter to touch? If he is innocent, bid me to aid him. Obliterate that natural pity if he be unworthy. *Mère de Dieu*, send me some sign, however trivial, and I will accept it. Mary, mother of God the merciful, hear me!"

For a moment she stood with face uplifted, as if expecting an answer from the skies, but the sound that reached her ears was entirely terrestrial. It was the measured tramp of the patrol, returning from the direction of Beaugency. A glance up the road showed him a silhouetted black figure against the white surface of the highway. He had evidently seen the horse and woman standing there, for his musketoon was not upon his shoulder, but held in readiness for attack or defense.

Instantly the girl was on her knees beside the wounded man. She drew the soaking sleeve from his arm, and saw with amazement that the wound was beautifully bound with the finest cambric, evidently the work of a surgeon who knew his business. The saturated bandage had been slightly displaced, but its very presence would contradict the story she had instantaneously resolved to tell.

This evidence must at once be done away with before the soldier arrived. She drew from her bosom the jeweled stiletto, and, running its thin blade between bandage and arm, she deftly cut it away, staining the virgin blade with blood. For a moment, before she threw the bandage into the bushes, she examined the fineness of the cloth, with sudden remembrance that only in one place—her father's house—had she seen cambric of this special make. Holding a section of it between herself and the moon, she saw dimly reflected thereon, woven in the fabric, the letter "M," and knew immediately that this binding had been done by her father's physician, and, therefore, by her father's orders. However Cardillac had come by his wound, it was her father who had succored him, as his daughter was now attempting to do.

"Mary, I adore thee and thank thee," she murmured as she flung the sodden lump into the thicket. Rapidly unfastening his shirt, and laying bare his breast, her small hands tremulously felt for the index of life. His heart was beating; feebly, slowly, but still beating.

"Poor lad! The nun lied for thee, and paid with her life. I shall do the same, if I pay with my soul."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DIALOGUE OF THE HIGHROAD.

"GOD'S wounds, *mademoiselle*, what have we here?"

The girl rose to her feet as if this interruption were unexpected; then she said, as if with an effort to control her emotion:

"*Madame*, not *mademoiselle*, *monsieur*."

"Well, whichever you please. Is this man dead?"

"No, *monsieur*, but grievously wounded."

"How came he wounded?"

"I struck him down, *monsieur*."

"You—you? A slip of a girl to strike down a man armed with a sword! I cannot believe that, *madame*."

"I took him unawares. He did not think I would do it. I struck him with my dagger through the arm."

"Had he been mistreating you?"

"He threatened to beat me."

"For what reason?"

"The reason that he is my husband."

"Oh, your husband! That puts a different face on the matter. If a husband meets cold steel merely for beating his wife, 'tis a strange pass the world has come to."

"True, *monsieur*; but I am ill-tempered, and would not have it so."

"This is a very serious matter, and by your own confession I must arrest you."

"But 'twas not maliciously done. It was in the height of a quarrel."

"No matter for that, *madame*. Is a man's life to be put in jeopardy for the mere threat of a beating, and because he marries a foolish woman? You are an obstreperous baggage, and, I doubt not, thoroughly deserved a beating."

She shifted her position till the grim old warrior could see her plainly. He paused in his denunciation.

"Nevertheless," he went on, "if I had a wife so comely to look upon as you, I'd think of kisses rather than blows. From whence do you come, *madame*?"

"From Blois."

"Do you live in Blois?"

"We lived in Tours, and are on our way through to Beaugency; thence to Orléans and Paris."

"Are you making a wedding-trip of it? You seem young enough to be married."

"'Tis our first journey together, *monsieur*."

"If you come from Blois, what is the word for the night?"

"Montoire, *monsieur*."

"Right. The road, then, is free to you. Is this the dagger with which you struck him?"

He lifted the stiletto from the road, and his covetous eyes glistened as they saw the jewels in its hilt.

"I must retain the weapon as evidence." And saying this, he proceeded illogically to destroy part of the evidence by rubbing the blade clean on his trousers.

"Oh, not as evidence, *monsieur*," she pleaded.

"Why not? 'Tis most material, being the instrument of your crime."

"True, but I have repented my crime; and though I willingly ask you to retain the stiletto, which comes from Italy, I hope it will not need to be used as evidence against me, because, in that case, it will be confiscated by the court, whereas if the dagger remains in your possession, it will keep you for many a year. That ruby alone, if taken out and sold to a jeweler, will bring you a hundred pistoles, at least."

The girl was as sharp as her stiletto, and by the time she had got this far with the monologue, she saw that a mistake was being made. The look of covetousness had departed from the eyes of the old soldier, and grave suspicion had taken its place. A lady in the position of Thérèse de Montreuil knew, as every one knew, that bribery was rampant throughout the empire. No one did anything for nothing; but the system of bribery, like everything else tending toward richness, was monopolized by the upper class. The peasantry neither looked for nor got any share in the distribution of *largesse*. If a noble wished any service from a peasant, he did not tip him, but commanded him, and the latter's recompense was more apt to be blows from a cudgel than coins from a purse.

The veteran with the musketoon lowered his brows and looked menacingly at the fair woman before him. If such an expensive donation was given, the giver must be concealing something of the utmost importance. His stolid mind worked with almost visible slowness, and the quick intuition of the girl saw whither it was tending. In another minute he would be asking himself: "How do I know this is not De Cardillac, of whom the whole world is in search?"

Now, Thérèse had become an excellent actress. Her gift of impersonation was so great that it formed one of the chief features which commended her to the

queen. There was never a dull moment in court when Thérèse de Montreuil was present, and her mimicry of those whom her majesty disliked was the cause of much amusement to the queen herself and the queen's entourage.

Thérèse became on the instant a wan, pathetic figure with tears streaming from her eyes.

"I can never bear," she said with halting voice, "to look upon that deadly instrument again. 'Twas given me as a present on my marriage, and look what it has done! They say it is ill-luck to receive without payment anything that is sharp or will cut, and now I must be rid of it at all costs. I should have given payment for it, but it was sent to me from Italy, and I could not in time recompense the sender. 'Twill bring disaster to you or your family if I give it to you; and while I wish to be rid of it myself, I dare not bring down curses on you with such a fatal gift," and here the drooping girl began to weep outright.

The sentry, whose seamed face turned pale, let the dagger, jewels and all fall from his hand ringing to the road, then he piously crossed himself.

"Well, I must rouse this man, and learn what he has to say for himself."

The soldier, whose calling demanded a certain skill in rough surgery, and the carrying of materials necessary for it, drew from his wallet a narrow strip of coarse cloth and a flask of brandy. He knelt by the side of Cardillac, examined the wound, and placed his hand on the forehead of the unconscious man. The girl, her own anxious self again, watched him intently, for the critical moment that she feared was approaching.

"To learn what he would say for himself" had been the patrol's words. The danger was what he might say against himself in those moments between the regaining of his wits and the resuming of his own control over them. She realized, with despair at her heart, that she could not explain his danger to Cardillac while this suspicious man was within earshot. Perhaps, when the soldier had bound up the wound, she might induce him to depart, and allow her to bring the stricken man back to a knowledge of his surroundings.

"If, good soldier, you will place a bandage on his arm and pass on your way to Blois, I will revive my husband."

"Why?" demanded the soldier, looking up at her, suspicion once more his dominant expression.

"Because, soldier, it is said that people walking in their sleep, or after a faint, when aroused should see no stranger near them."

"That may be true or not," said the patrol; "but I must be here to listen when he wakes."

"Then, soldier, tell me who you are, and for whom you stand," cried the girl craftily, in real as well as pretended dismay. "If you are for the queen mother, then are we lost; for my husband is a strong partizan of the king, and it is to Paris that we are going, for he intends to offer his sword to his majesty."

"Plague take it!" growled the old soldier. "Have you come all the way from Tours, *madame*, through Blois, where the queen is imprisoned, without learning that the north bank of the Loire is patrolled entirely by the king's men? If your husband, as you say, is a partizan of his majesty, he has nothing to fear. He is among friends, but I must hear from his own lips what he has to say, because I know from experience that women do not always tell the truth."

"Do you impugn my veracity, *mon-sieur*?" demanded Thérèse with indignation.

"I do not understand your language, *madame*. Plain talk is what I am accustomed to. There is something very strange about this case. The wound has stopped bleeding, and this man is not in a faint, but is asleep. He seems to me exhausted from much traveling, or lack of food, or both. 'Tis not within reason, *madame*, that a blow from your stiletto, ten minutes since, should have done what you say. This man has been bled white; the wound is not recent, *madame*."

"Recent? Of course it is not recent, nor did I make such allegation. The blow was struck hours ago, and here we have been quarreling ever since. Seemingly, he bled all the way, and so collapsed during our last dispute. Ten minutes ago he had his right arm over

his horse's neck, using language that was frightful to hear. Suddenly he became incoherent, then slipped down and down, and fell as you see him."

"That may all be, *madame*, but I wish to hear his version of it before I leave this spot."

"Why do you doubt what I tell you, soldier?"

"Will you answer me a question, *madame*?"

"A thousand of them."

"I think I see how this was done. When he realized you were about to strike, he held his arm across his face to protect it, and you struck him near the left shoulder."

This seemed such a reasonable explanation that Thérèse was about to answer yes, when suddenly she remembered that a sword-thrust would enter the front of the arm, whereas a stiletto stroke, delivered as the soldier had indicated, would enter the back of the arm, and could not take the same direction as would have been the case had the arm been outstretched or hanging by his side.

"No, soldier," she said, "you are wrong. My husband had threatened to take me in his arms and place me on the horse against my will. I warned him that if he attempted to carry out his menace, I would strike him. He rushed at me with arms outstretched, and I struck."

CHAPTER XIX.

A ROADSIDE COMEDY.

THE soldier grunted, but made no further comment. In a trice the wound was more effectually bandaged than she had expected. The amateur surgeon shook Cardillac roughly by grasping his right shoulder, and his prediction that the man was merely asleep proved correct. Cardillac blinked his eyes; then, with an effort, rose slowly to a sitting posture, muttering a malediction as the wounded arm gave him a twinge. The soldier was kneeling on his left side, with his left arm supporting the young man's head. Thérèse knelt quickly close to the right.

"Why, what a soft fool I am," said Cardillac, drawing his right hand across

his brow, the same action he had taken just before he fell. "Any schoolgirl might show more stamina."

"Oh, Victor, Victor!" exclaimed Marie. "Do not talk till you have more strength, I beseech you!"

"Talking won't hurt him," said the soldier. "What is your name, *monsieur*?"

"I told you," snapped the girl, "that his name is Victor Duchamps. Do you still doubt my word, soldier?"

"I wish you would not interrupt, *madame*. I have already heard your story, and I want to hear his. What is your name, *monsieur*?"

"Victor Duchamps," replied Cardillac, dazed, but obedient to her glance. He closed his eyes wearily and leaned back heavily on the soldier's arm.

"I thank you, sir," continued Cardillac. "You have bandaged that wound as well as the doctor in—"

The girl hesitated no longer, but flung her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Victor, Victor!" she cried. "I was afraid I had killed you!"

"My dear, you had nothing—"

She stopped his lips with a kiss.

"Why don't you let the man speak?" cried the indignant and now thoroughly distrustful soldier.

She turned on him with all the virulence of the virago she pretended to be.

"How dare you interrupt the affection of a wife who has recovered her husband from the grave!"

"Affection!" protested the bewildered soldier. "You talk of affection, who sent your dagger through your husband's arm, and stormed till the poor man fainted through loss of blood! Affection, say you! God protect me from such affection."

"Why," cried Cardillac, "you beast! She never—"

But he was silenced by the embrace of the girl, who drew his head to her shoulder and rapidly whispered in his ear:

"Gather your wits together, and listen. We are married. You are Victor Duchamps. We came from Tours, through Blois, and are going to Beaugency; thence to Paris. You are a king's man. You tried to beat me, and I struck you with my dagger. Do you

understand? Either keep quiet or follow what I have said."

This was spoken so rapidly that even if the soldier had heard it, he could not have understood; but no sound came to him. Apparently, she was fondling her husband in an ecstasy of joy at his recovery.

"Now, *madame*," said the soldier, standing up. "Will you rise and step aside, or shall I be forced to arrest you both?"

The girl rose, walked to the patient horse, and patted its neck.

"*Monsieur*, where are you from?"

"From Tours."

"Whither are you bound?"

"To-night, to Beaugency. After that, with a permit to Paris, there to take service with the king."

"Is this woman your wife?"

"Yes."

"What is her name?"

"Marie Duchamps."

"How came you by your wound?"

"I refuse to answer."

"Then, in that case, you must both return with me to Blois."

"Oh, Victor," cried the girl, "don't try to shield me! I have told him all about it."

"*Madame*, keep quiet. I have heard enough of your clack to-night."

"And I," said Cardillac, staggering to his feet, "have heard enough of yours. Curse you, sir, how dare you address my wife in such a manner; a lady born and bred, and you the scum of the earth? You think because I am weak I can be browbeaten by such as you. By St. Martin of Tours, I'll run you through like a spitted chicken if you dare address this lady but in words of the deepest respect!"

"Deepest respect!" muttered the soldier, endeavoring to edge toward his musketoon, which leaned against a tree. "Deepest respect, when she thrust a dagger through you!"

"Out upon that; 'tis none of your affair, you carrion of the crow-fields."

Cardillac, now all on the alert, stepped between the soldier and his chief weapon, his own sword gleaming in the moonlight.

"Oh, Victor, Victor!" warned the girl; but Victor understood better than

she the type of man with whom he had to deal. The very fact that he had now encountered such language convinced him more effectually than any cajoling would have done, that these people had the right to travel on this road.

"I mean no harm, *monsieur*. I merely asked, as is my duty, certain questions which you have answered quite to my satisfaction. And now, *monsieur*, if you will oblige me with the word for the night—I implore *madame* not to speak—I shall be satisfied. If you are a king's man, you carry the king's word. I ask you, sir, what it is?"

"The word is 'Montoire,' scullion."

"Right, *monsieur*—you are in the right; and hoping that I have bound the wound to your satisfaction, I bid you a very good night."

"Oh, that's all right, my good fellow! You have bound the wound as excellently as the doctor—"

"Yes, as excellently as any doctor," cried Thérèse, interrupting.

"That was what I was saying," corrected Cardillac. "You have done it as well as any surgeon could. And now, my good man, apologize to the lady and I will give you a surgeon's fee."

"*Madame*, I hope I have said nothing that offended you. You know my duty must be performed. I am one of the patrols of the road."

To this apology, such as it was, the lady made no reply. Cardillac, hesitating whether or not to entrust him with the musketoon, yet not wishing to deprive him of it, said:

"Are you satisfied with your inquiries, soldier?"

"Passably so," growled the man; "but I must take this dagger with me as evidence when I make my report."

He gingerly raised the dagger from the roadway.

"Grasp the dagger by the blade and hand it, hilt forward, to me."

With some hesitation the soldier did as he was commanded. If he had picked up the dagger as a weapon against the drawn sword, his own experience told him such dependence would be futile. Cardillac examined the stiletto with keen interest. On its hilt, mosaiced in jewels, was the crest of the House of Montreuil. That dagger would form a clue

that must not, under any circumstances, get out of his possession.

"I'll take charge of this," said Cardillac.

"But *madame* said she never wished to see it again."

"I dare say. I shall conceal it about my person that she may be saved the displeasure of looking at it."

"But I must make my report, *mon-sieur*, and this is evidence of the crime."

"There was no crime and no evidence. *Madame* was cozening you, seeing you are a fool. She never struck me with her dagger."

"Then how came the wound?"

"Oh, that's very simple. Tired of walking on foot, and also of horseback riding, I tried progression on my hands, neglecting to withdraw my sword when I stood on my head. The sword fell out and ran through my arm. Incorporate that in your report, and never be so ungallant in Touraine as to indict a lady."

The soldier growled.

"I cannot put a lie like that in my report."

"Then don't report at all, you monument of stupidity, for then you will save me from making a report when I reach Beaugency. Here are we, king's travelers on the king's highway, yet you dare to investigate as if you were one of his majesty's magistrates. The moment the word was given you, and the correct word, you should have passed on. What private brawls my wife and I may indulge in are none of your business, nor the business of any one like you. Are you going to report?"

"If you think it is not necessary—"

"You should have done one thing or the other, which was either to allow us to pass or to arrest us. If you do not arrest us, what is the use of your report? If you intend to arrest us, say so, and say it now; also tell me what reason you will give to your superiors for arresting a man who carries the password."

The perplexed soldier removed his cap and scratched his head.

"Well, *monsieur*, if you say nothing, I'll say nothing."

"As you please; it doesn't matter to me. But in that case here is your musketoon, and here are three gold pieces in payment of your bandaging."

The patrol accepted the gold pieces with some awkward expressions of gratitude, took his musketoon from Cardillac's hand, and, throwing it over his shoulder, marched stoutly away. For a few moments there was some anxiety between the two that he might, when at a safe distance, fire upon them, but the high moon beat down upon the soldier's back, and he never looked behind him.

"Well, thank Heaven, we are rid of that fellow!" said Cardillac.

"Yes," sighed the girl; "but my road to Blois is blocked!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE MIDNIGHT PICNIC IN THE WOOD.

CARDILLAC stood with his back against the horse, not yet too steady on his feet. He gazed down the road, watching the disappearing patrol. Thérèse remained in the middle of the road, her face, in shadow, turned toward the west, her head bowed, waiting for the man to speak, yet fearing what he would say, feeling that his first words after such an episode would be vital—definite, one way or another.

They would be a test of his quality as a gentleman; or, rather, of what the girl in her heart conceived a gentleman to be. Something different, she thought, from those she had hitherto met, yet she herself knew not what to say were she in his place. It would be deplorable if he treated it as a joke, and almost more deplorable if he regarded her action as binding her to anything.

Cardillac did not change his gaze from the west till the stalwart soldier had faded completely away, becoming indistinguishable in the slight haze, which seemed like thickened moonlight, far down the road. When at last the disappearance was complete, he, with a slight, joyful exclamation of relief to his brooding companion, looked at her for a moment, and noted a certain trace of dejection in her attitude. When he spoke, his voice took on all the cheeriness of a lad set free from some penalty.

"Well, Marie!" he cried, "I do like a question to be definitely settled."

The girl's heart seemed to leap into her throat, and her head bent lower, for

she knew her face was reddening. So this was the way he proposed to take it; and there arose in her breast a sensation of pity, not so much for herself as for him.

"And what question has been definitely settled, *monsieur*?" she asked, striving to keep control of her voice.

"Why, I should think you knew that, if any one did. You are quick to perceive any radical change in circumstances, Marie."

"I fear at times I am very slow, *monsieur*. Pray enlighten me regarding the question you speak of, and tell me plainly what is the nature of the settlement to which you refer?"

"Marie, you bewilder me with your changes of mood. You are pretending now to be very dull, although I know you are never dull. Sometimes I am disquieted by a suspicion that you are treating me lightly."

"Oh, impossible, *monsieur*!"

"There is one thing, Marie, that a Gascon will not stand, whether it comes from man or woman, and that is to be esteemed a sort of immature joke. If a man attempted that, he should be instantly compelled to draw his sword; but with a woman I am at a loss."

"You are quite mistaken, M. de Cardillac. I regard you as a very, very serious person, and thus I am chagrined that, instead of instructing one so much your inferior when she begs for information, you wander from the point. You were good enough to say that some question was definitely answered, and I wish to know what the question is."

"The question pertains to yourself and myself, Marie, and the answer, I thank your saint and mine, is entirely to my satisfaction."

Now the girl raised her head; and if a look could have frozen the jubilant youth, the smile he endeavored to make ingratiating would have become fixed.

"I do not understand you, *monsieur*," and he had never heard her speak with such distant unfriendliness, even when he had been coercing her in the convent. "In what manner has our relationship been changed?"

"My dear Marie, do you mean to persist in ignoring circumstances, one of which you yourself but just now pointed

out? 'The road to Blois,' you said, 'is blocked,' and that is absolutely true. I cannot go thither, neither can you; yet your very last words before I so foolishly fainted like a schoolgirl were to the effect that you would proceed alone to Blois, whereas I should take whatever direction pleased me. Now the road to Blois is closed to us.

"The road to Beaugency is impossible. The forest to the north is impassable. Thus east, west, and north are banished from our problem; only the south is left; and, dear girl, if you will allow me to call you so, you and I must travel to the south together."

Again the girl's head drooped.

"Yes, I understand, now that you point it out so clearly," she murmured.

"And look you, Marie, how providential this decision is which fate has made for us. You speak of my putting things clearly, but, if my mind had not been wandering, I should have convinced you long ago that this was really the only plan. As a lad, I lived at Mont-richard for months, and also at a farm in the environs of Blois, to the south of the river. All this country on the left bank of the Loire is known to me. I am familiar with the roads and the paths, and the woodcutters' huts and the huntsmen's lodges; and once we cross the river, I am, as it were, in my own land.

"Aside from this, there are no king's soldiers over there. The forest across the flood is not in the unkempt condition of this impenetrable thicket, because the woodmen are unmolested by wandering soldiery. They have never been looted of their scanty possessions, with no redress from those in command. Why, Marie, I could defy De Luynes and all his host over there, for, even at night, I can lead you through paths so intricate, and so embowered with foliage, that your eyes would sparkle at their beauty, rather than at your own danger. Danger? There isn't any, once we reach the farther banks. My mind was rather dazed, otherwise I had seen all these advantages before, and so persuaded you, Marie, instead of attempting to coerce you; for which, dear girl, I pray you forgive me.

"Then, a short league south of Blois,

on the road to St. Aignan, stands the stout farm of Gaspard Maloche, who used to be a tenant on our estate until, when I was a boy, he went north and settled in Touraine. His strong house is built round a courtyard, like a château or a monastery, and could stand a siege as well as any fortress in the land. Within its walls we will be welcome and safe; and you may reach Blois at your convenience from the fair south, instead of from the suspicious east.

"But a few short months ago I stopped with Maloche on my way to Paris. He has become more rich and prosperous than would ever have been the case had he remained in Gascony, for the court at Blois is his customer. His lands are fertile, and, being out of the beaten track, have never been overrun by the military."

The girl looked up at him with a rare smile on her enticing face. His own countenance was flushed by his enthusiastic declamation. In his fancy, he was already safe within the farm stronghold.

"You paint a very alluring picture, *monsieur*, and, in truth, I wish I were there at this moment."

"I shall lead you there in perfect safety within a very few hours. Are you afraid, Marie?"

"Not in the least; but, at the risk of shocking your fanciful nature, I must make the plebeian confession that I am hungry. Your attack on our convent was ill-timed, *monsieur*, for you came just a half-hour before dinner, and I have had nothing to eat since midday. So, when you spoke of the estimable Maloche becoming rich by feeding the court, my appetite, as well as my affection, turned toward the homestead that is doubtless well provided with good things to eat."

"Now, out upon me for a selfish, thoughtless beast! Why did you not tell me you were hungry, Marie?"

"Why did you not tell me you were wounded, *monsieur*?"

"Oh, a wound is nothing, and you could not have removed it if you had known."

"Well, hunger is nothing, and you could not have removed it had you known."

"There is just where you are mistaken, Marie. I shall gladly bestow upon you the supper of Mlle. de Montreuil."

The girl seemed startled.

"What do you mean by that, *monsieur*," she asked breathlessly.

"At the Hôtel Ecu de Bretagne, in Beaugency, I made an excellent repast, so satisfying that, until this moment, I forgot such a thing as hunger existed in the world. Well, I thought that, as I should be escorting *mademoiselle* all night through the forest, she might require a little refreshment, so I had the host of the Bretagne place in my saddle-bags two measures of wine; a cold, fat, roasted *poulet*; most excellent bread, and other appetizing provender. We shall picnic here by the roadside on the instant."

Cardillac turned to the saddle-bags; but she, approaching him, laid her hand lightly on his shoulder.

"No, not by the roadside, but on the other bank of the Loire. I am not so hungry as I pretended. I fear the return of that patrol with reinforcements. Let us plunge at once through the forest to the river, but first give me a sup of wine and take a flagon for yourself, for the pallor has returned."

"Indeed, your suggestion is both wise and practicable, Marie. I had not thought that any woman could be so sensible except my mother."

The girl laughed; and he, undoing the fastenings of the saddle-bag nearest him, brought out two leathern cups, and poured into each the rich red wine of Beaugency.

"I drink," she said, raising aloft the cup, "to the success of that brave and resourceful man, De Cardillac."

"And I," cried the youth, "pledge the health of the sweetest and most lovely princess in the world, courageous as a man and charming as a child."

"Your mother, *monsieur*?" she asked with an arch smile.

"Not this time, Marie, good woman as she is," and with that he drained the leathern goblet.

"And now for the river!" he cried.

"Wait one moment," suggested the girl. "You said I could not have helped your wound, and I said you could not assuage my hunger. We were both

wrong, it seems, for I am about to set up my surgery against your catering."

She took from her neck a silken scarf, and threw it over his. Tying a knot in it, she put his arm through the loop.

"There," she said, "we must be careful of that arm during the rest of the journey."

He mounted the horse, held out a hand to the girl, and she sprang up behind him.

"I shall hold on," she said, "by your sword-belt," and perhaps the quick blush that rose to her cheeks was caused by remembrance that the romancing François had placed her arm around the horseman's waist.

Thus the two bade farewell to the empty highroad and entered the dense forest which lay south of it. It proved to be in little better condition than that to the north; but on this occasion the moon, although unseen, which rode high in the heavens, caused the forest to be light enough for all practical purposes.

Being now sure of their direction, they speedily traversed the scant league that separated the highroad from the river.

The young man viewed the broad valley of the Loire with an exultation that he attributed to the inspiring quality of the wine he had consumed; but, nevertheless, this river produced in his heart certain sentimental emotions. It was the dividing-line between the north and the south; and, indeed, he regarded the Loire more as an entirely southern river than as the boundary between the two sections of France.

It was southern in its temper; quick to rise in wrath, with devastating consequences; quick to subside into quiescence again. In spring, a raging, resistless flood, spreading from bank to bank; but now, under the moonlight, it seemed a serious and placid stream, separated by long stretches of gravel, islands, and peninsulas, white and gleaming between glittering stretches of blue water.

"The Loire! The Loire!" he murmured affectionately as he set his horse to the task of fording it, an undertaking which the animal ventured upon with evident misgiving. It was the middle of summer, which meant a shallow river, so the crossing was easily made.

On the other side Cardillac halted his horse under the trees on a picturesque bluff, where they could see the Loire without danger of being themselves descried, for they were out of the moonlight under the trees; and here they took their first meal together.

Cardillac, before sitting down on the sward, broke one of his loaves into pieces and fed them to his horse, from whose head he had removed the bridle. Once again he removed the saddle from the animal's back, and was about to arrange it for the convenience of Marie, as he had done in the forest, when she laughingly protested that a picnic furnished with a chair was incongruous. So he spread his cloak as a carpet, and on this she ensconced herself, playing hostess with admirable vivacity.

He sprawled full length on the ground opposite her, and together they enjoyed the refectory provided by the innkeeper of Beaugency.

She, with her feet drawn up under her, leaning her elbow on the saddle, her fine eyes heavy with lack of sleep, murmured dreamily in what the young man thought was the most musical voice he had ever heard.

"It is now likely that we are quite safe from pursuit," he said, "and there is twice as much time as we need to reach Maloche's farm before he and his family are astir; so, all in all, a complicated situation has resolved itself into one of complete simplicity—and that's a comfort. I do dislike being hurried, and always prefer to face an enemy and get it over, rather than allow him to chase me. I detest a flight from my foes, no matter how many they are, for such a contingency causes one to put on a speed that is inconvenient. I like to stroll through the world indolently, as a gentleman should."

"Then you ought to become a monk, *monsieur*, and lead the placid life."

"Indeed, Marie, I have often envied the monastic orders, but within twenty-four hours I have realized that such an existence is not for me."

"What caused you to change your mind?"

"The meeting with you, Marie Duchamps."

(To be continued.)

A CARNIVAL COURTSHIP.

BY MARY NORTON.

A SHORT STORY.



MRS. WALSH and her daughter Adelaide were staying at the Hôtel des Anglais, Nice. A stupid place to the girl, as the only interesting person to her in the hotel was a German baron, whom she did not know. He was tall, of muscular build, with light hair and turned-up mustaches. Also had many interesting scars on his face.

The German baron and his mother, an old lady, dined every evening at the table next the Walshes, and, as he sat facing Adelaide, their eyes often met. In the palm-garden, too, where they sipped their coffee after dinner, the flirtation continued. Every night, however, the baroness's maid relieved him from duty by carrying her mistress off to her room. He never lingered, but always left the hotel, much to Adelaide's disappointment.

As Mrs. Walsh would go nowhere in the evenings, except occasionally to the opera, Adelaide's longing for excitement remained unappeased. She passed away the time by wearing her new Parisian gowns, and in wondering about the baron.

The day of the flower *fête* was warm and sparkling with sunshine. The Promenade des Anglais was enclosed by seats from which to view the parade or battle of flowers. Two long lines of carriages, fantastically decorated with flowers, passed up and down, bearing exquisitely dressed women and children. Crowds of peasants sold baskets of flowers, and every one joined in the frolic by pelting his neighbor with bouquets. The bands played, and the sea formed a shining background to the gay scene.

Many admiring glances were cast after Adelaide and her mother in their small victoria covered with mimosa. Mrs.

Walsh's mauve gown and Adelaide's parasol of the same color, which set off the girl's golden hair, combined to give the desired color effect.

"Yellow and purple. Aurora in her chariot at dawn," smiled Adelaide. "Here's the baron and his mother in that carriage coming toward us. As he passes I'll take him by storm—a violet storm."

She selected the largest bunch of violets in the basket, which she threw at him. They knocked his hat off.

"Adelaide," groaned Mrs. Walsh, "how could you?"

The girl, blushing deeply, looked back to see the baron alight from his carriage, secure his hat, and place some of the violets in the lapel of his coat.

Shortly after the flower *fête* Adelaide accepted an invitation from some English people—new arrivals, whom she had just met—to drive on a coach to Mentone, over the upper Corniche road. As she joined the party her hostess presented Baron Troun, and she found her baron bowing low before her.

"I am very glad to meet you," she said, extending her hand; "and to apologize for my awkwardness—the day of the battle of flowers."

"Ah, Mees Waltz, it was one big honor," replied the nobleman, kissing her hand.

"American girls are not accustomed to having their hands kissed in public," said the hostess, amused at Adelaide's embarrassment. "In America they shake hands—so," suiting the action to her words.

"Like dot? *Ach, Gott! Bourgeois!*"

While returning from Mentone they were overtaken by a drizzling rain and fog, on account of which most of them took the train at Monte Carlo for Nice,

thus leaving only a few to continue the drive.

Among those who preferred to drive in the rain were Adelaide and Baron Troun, cozily established upon the back seat of the coach, wrapped in rain-coats, and sheltered from storm as well as chaperons by a large umbrella. Adelaide was hatless, with wind-blown curls and rising color. She was getting on capitally with the baron. When she thanked him for the violets he had sent her every day since the battle of flowers episode, he vowed himself fathoms deep in love with her. Then, upon being laughed at, he changed the subject.

"You make anger with me this morning when I kiss your hand, Mees Waltz. The red in your face show it, so I make big apology wid you," said the baron.

"Yes?" questioned Adelaide wonderingly.

"I take back de kiss." He kissed the hand nearest him.

"But it was my glove you kissed this morning."

"Then I kiss that, too. Where is he?"

"Never," laughed Adelaide. "You have done your duty as it is. I am afraid you are a shocking flirt, Baron Troun."

"Fleert? Fleert? What is he?"

"A flirt? Why, a flirt is a person who insinuates he is in love with one when he is not."

Thereupon Baron Troun indignantly vowed his earnestness and sincerity as well as his love.

Baron Troun continued to propose to Adelaide twice a day on an average, until finally she became engaged to him, much to her mother's chagrin. Mrs. Walsh's sympathy was with Philip Chandler, the American man whom they had left in New York, and she hoped and prayed that her daughter might realize before it was too late how far superior Philip was to this sensational nobleman, whom they knew nothing about.

Adelaide was desperately in love with him, and Mrs. Walsh, being unable to control her wilful daughter, insisted upon a long engagement, and chaperoned the girl everywhere.

Their days were full—what with trips to La Turbie; luncheon at the Riviera Palace Hotel, above Monte Carlo; dinners at the Hôtel de Paris, in Monte

Carlo, and evenings spent over the roulette-tables. Or they motored to Cannes for golf, and to go yachting with some of the baron's friends, always with Mrs. Walsh in tow, who said she was never tired, but who sank each night into her bed a sad and exhausted little woman.

II.

THE night of the mask-ball at Nice, Adelaide and her mother, after an early dinner, sat in the palm-garden sipping their coffee, when Baron Troun came in, looking very distinguished in evening clothes. He was to dine at Monte Carlo with a great friend of his who had just arrived.

"It make me very sad to leave you," he said, sitting down by Adelaide. "I see you received the violets. Did you like the poem I sent with them. Could you understand it?"

"Not very well," laughed Adelaide; "but I made out a word here and there."

"Never you care. I will explain it with you to-morrow. Herr Gratz is mine greatest friend—was with me at Heidelberg, or I would not go from you to-night."

Adelaide flushed, and Mrs. Walsh sniffed contemptuously behind her book.

"Besides, the mask-ball is so common. Only tourists and the *bourgeois* ever go. I would not take my sister, even for the novelty of it, so could not take you, my dear."

"I really don't mind not going," smiled Adelaide, who was in reality disappointed and piqued at his leaving her.

Why did not he send for Herr Gratz to dine with them, and all go to the ball later, as an American man would have done?

"Well, I must be away," said the baron, looking at his watch. "Remember that every breath of the violets' perfume speaks of my love for you."

"I shall not see you when you return to-night?"

"No; it will be late, and you must have that rest. What you call it in your country?"

"Beauty sleep," smiled Adelaide.

"Yes, that is it—the beauty sleep." He bent and kissed her hand.

"That man," gasped Mrs. Walsh, dropping her book, "is not sincere, Ade-

laid. Too much gush and affectation. Imagine Philip Chandler making such a scene."

"Philip Chandler lacks expression—he is too self-conscious to ever forget himself for a minute. Our men are all for themselves and money-making. They have no time for romance. It's all money, money, money. I cannot tell how I hate it."

"Well, don't you think for one moment this German would have anything to do with you if your father had not worked hard for this money you scorn, and which has given you every advantage. I believe you were piqued because Philip did not come down to the boat to see you off; but what could you expect, child, when you had just refused his offer of marriage? He is not the sort of man to be played with. He has too much spirit."

"Adelaid Walsh," cried a handsome girl, rushing toward them, "I did not know you were here."

"Why, Anne," exclaimed Adelaid, "how good you look! Where is Walter?" She kissed the girl, who greeted Mrs. Walsh also warmly.

"Here he comes," said Anne.

Mrs. Walsh and Adelaid fairly smothered the young bride and groom with questions about their wedding and their friends at home. Finally Walter West suggested that Mrs. Walsh and Adelaid accompany them to the masked-ball, which they were very anxious to see. Mrs. Walsh, being very tired, refused, but Adelaid went.

Wearing masks, they sat in a box in the opera-house, watching the gay scene. The floor was crowded with dancing masqueraders, exquisitely clad in brightly-colored dominos of satin and chiffon. As the most exquisite domino would win a prize, the women made themselves conspicuous to the judges in the balcony by calling to them and posing in graceful attitudes.

One woman in a white plaited chiffon domino, covered with crystal jet, which sparkled as she moved and was set off by orchids, as well as her superb jewels of diamonds and pearls, won the first prize. Upon being cheered she removed her mask and kissed her hands to the crowd.

"Isn't she beautiful?" murmured Adelaid.

"The style of Cavalieri," yawned Walter.

"She looks exactly like the woman we saw at Trouville last summer, and were so interested in," said Anne, using her opera-glasses. "I believe it is the same woman. She had a very handsome German baron with her there. She is a *première danseuse*, I believe, or something of that sort, in Paris. The baron is madly in love with her, and follows her everywhere. He has spent all his money on her, wrecked his political career, and whenever his mother, who supports him, tries to marry him to some rich American girl, this woman always interferes, so this old German count, who knew him, told mother."

"She is beautiful enough to wreck more than one man," soliloquized Walter.

"Hear him, Adelaid," wailed Anne. "Let's go before he gets another look at her and is lost."

III.

As the crowd was becoming hilarious, and their vulgar pranks unbearable, Walter West took his wife and Adelaid out for supper. As it was early, they could select a good table from which to watch the masqueraders, who gradually filled the tables about them. They were a gay lot, noisily singing snatches of songs, smoking, and making merry.

The Neapolitan orchestra was unusually good, and the leader a violinist of some reputation. He strayed from table to table, playing by request; and when the notes of "En Sourdine" quivered forth in exquisite melody Adelaid turned to see who had asked for one of her favorite pieces.

The violinist was playing to the woman whose domino won the prize at the ball. She sat with a man whose back was turned, at a small table, a bit apart from the rest, and was lazily watching the smoke curl upward from her cigarette. She had discarded her domino, and wore an extremely low gown of the softest pearl-white satin, with crystal jet fringe, falling over her bust and shoulders. About her neck were strands of exquisite pearls, and a wonderful pearl and diamond brooch in her corsage, as well as

many bracelets of antique workmanship, all in the same jewels of pearls and diamonds, glistened upon her shapely arms.

"There's the Cavalieri woman, Anne," said Walter.

"Isn't she beautiful?" breathed Anne. "That gown is exquisite, and what jewels! Why, she would outrival the Czarina. Yes, she is the very same woman mother and I saw at Trouville, and I suppose those jewels are the baron's fortune. Wonder who the man is with her?"

"The baron may think it's only his fortune invested in those jewels, but I doubt if that's so," said Walter.

"They say he is horribly jealous, and has fought no less than twenty duels on her account," Anne remarked.

"How romantic," smiled Adelaide. "I should think such a knight errant as that would have a face like a patchwork quilt, judging from the Germans whom I have seen, who seem to get their share of scars in only a few duels."

"See, he is kissing her arm," whispered Anne. "It's the baron who was at Trouville. Look at him, Walter. You can see him, now he has turned."

Adelaide held her breath, for she recognized the man to be Baron Troun. Yes, it was Baron Troun.

Her head swam as she watched him bend admiringly toward the woman with him. Then everything seemed a blur.

Anne's voice sounded miles away as she asked: "Why, Adelaide, what's the matter?"

The next thing Adelaide knew she was

being driven swiftly home through the refreshing sea air.

IV.

MRS. WALSH proved Anne's story about Baron Troun to be true, and Adelaide broke her engagement with him, leaving Nice immediately.

A month later Mrs. Walsh and Adelaide were dining at the Hôtel Ritz, in Paris, where they were staying. Adelaide looked thin and pale, as she languidly watched the people about her.

"You are eating nothing, dear," sighed Mrs. Walsh, "and I was in hopes this *soufflé* would tempt you, it is so delicious."

"It's very good," said Adelaide indifferently.

The waiter brought Mrs. Walsh a card.

"Who is it?" asked Adelaide.

"I am not going to tell you. Wait and see," replied Mrs. Walsh nervously.

The waiter soon returned, followed by a tall, distinguished man, with smooth, square-cut jaws, and good-fitting evening clothes.

"Philip!" gasped Mrs. Walsh, the picture of guilt as she shook hands with the newcomer.

"Phil!" exclaimed Adelaide. "What a surprise!"

Her face flushed as he held both her hands a moment longer than necessary. "Why didn't you tell me, mother?"

"Because your mother is my private detective," said Philip quietly; "and detectives have to be discreet."

BY THE SUN-DIAL.

By the sun-dial, rose-entwined,
Consuelo wandered,
Blue her eyes as summer skies!
What to do? I pondered.

By the sun-dial, rose-entwined,
Consuelo waited,
Gold her hair beyond compare!
Still my breath was bated.

By the sun-dial, rose-entwined,
Consuelo tarried,
Sweet her smile as siren's guile—
That is why we married!

Harold Susman.

THE WOMAN THAT CALLED.

BY MATTHEW GOLDMAN.

A SHORT STORY.



AFTER climbing the three dark, dingy flights in the seething Cherry Hill tenement, the woman wavered a moment. Then she knocked timidly upon the cracked panel of a door.

"W—well! Of all the seven wonders of the world—Kittie Driscoll!"

"Yes, it's me, Frank," said the woman, softly closing the door behind her.

"Sit down, Kittie, and—make yourself right at home, won't you?" begged her rugged host, a bit flustered.

"I—er—I suppose you're kind of surprised to see me round here—ain't you?" remarked the caller, seating herself.

"Yes—kind of. You see, I ain't seen you—since—Maggie died."

"I wouldn't be here now, maybe," faltered the woman, "if—if it wasn't that I—"

"Don't hold back, Kittie," cut in the man encouragingly. "I—ain't got much myself, but if I—I can help you out, just say the word."

Kittie Driscoll's heart gave a banging thump. A choking feeling gripped her.

"I ain't needin' anything, Frank," she said in a firmer voice. "It's somethin' else I wanted to speak to you about. It's concernin' the trouble that's been on down to the shop, throwin' you and the rest of the boys out of work, for the last three months. It's been a mighty tough winter, and—I know it's hit you pretty hard, Frank."

"Some one's been kiddin' you," he said, forcing a smile. "I—I'm all hunky-dory, even if I ain't been workin' for some time. You see, I had a nice little piece of money banked away when the row came. But, anyway, it's mighty nice of you to drop in and pay an old

friend a social call when things ain't what they ought to be. That's the only time when you can find out who's your real friends."

"Yes, I know," said his caller, feeling his evasiveness, "but I came here to-day to square myself for a dirty turn I once done you."

"I ain't onto what you mean, Kittie," he said, his brow going into wrinkles. "Un—unless you mean the time we was keepin' company and you threw me over for Jack Keefe. Why, bless your heart, Kittie," he added, catching the visitor's nod, "I ain't thinkin' of that no more. Maybe, after all, everything was for the best."

"He's dead—died about a year ago. Drink."

"Poor Jack," said Frank compassionately. "Mighty nice chap, if he'd only left the booze alone."

"A good husband," sighed the widow reflectively. "None better. But the devil when he had the liquor in him."

"We've all got our faults," consoled her host, "so let bygones be bygones. You wasn't to blame for likin' Jack better. Anyway, I did the next best thing, didn't I? I married your best friend—my poor Maggie."

II.

THE woman cast a look into the next room where Maggie's anemic children lay in bed asleep.

Then she said impulsively, firmly: "When Jack died I got two hundred dollars from the insurance company. Frank, there's no use you tryin' to bluff me. We're old-time friends and can talk right out open and above board. It hurts me to say it, but I know how things stand with you, and that you're hard-up for

fair. So I've come to lend you the two hundred until things pick up. I don't need it; it ain't no use to me. I ain't got no one to look out for. And, besides, I'm earnin' a good livin' workin' at my old trade in the laundry, while you've got four mouths to feed."

She shoved a package of greenbacks quickly across the table. "You can pay it back when you're workin' again."

"Kit," choked the man, his eyes blinking, "I hardly know how to thank you. But I'm all right, I ain't needin' anything. I expect to go to work next Monday."

"Frank Porter," she returned, her voice ringing sweetly, "you and me was always good friends, back in the old days. So don't you say another word, but just you take this money and use it for yourself and the kids. It's needed, and needed bad. I'm a woman, and I know."

The man's eyes finally uplifted from the hole in the oilcloth.

"Kittie," he began, his voice husky, "you was always Maggie's best friend. My poor little kid," he gulped, blinking painfully, "she's better off now. Kittie, you know it ain't for myself I'm worryin' about—but of my two little girls. And—since you've been so kind as to want to help me out for a little while, I wouldn't be for imposin' on you, so—if you don't mind—I'll borrow about ten dollars. That'll be all I'll be needin' for the present. I've got a couple of dollars of my own left yet. It's the rent money that's botherin' me most; and, although I ain't paid him a cent for a long time, the landlord's treated me mighty decent."

"No, no, take it all, Frank; it ain't no good to me," she urged, rising quickly. "Good-by and good luck to you."

"You ain't goin' so soon, are you, Kittie?" cried the man, checking her at

the door. "Why—I—I ain't even had time to have a little talk with you. Stay a while, won't you?"

"Yeth, p'ease stay," unexpectedly chirped a tot of four years, who had, unseen, crawled out of her warm bed. "Stay—I likes you."

III.

"How've the children been?" faltered the woman through misty eyes, kissing a pair of tiny, pouting lips.

"Pretty good," returned the father brokenly. "There ain't no one to give them the right kind of attention, although my old mother does the best she can when she can be here. They're delicate, just like Maggie was. They need a mother's care badly. Some one—" He stopped abruptly. "Kittie," he went on again in a moment, "you and me and Maggie was always the best of friends, back in the old days. The kids here—Maggie's own flesh and blood—ain't got no one to give them the right kind of care. They need some one to be a mother to them."

The woman's eyes met those of the man in sudden inquiry. "You—you—you ain't askin'—?"

"Yes, Kittie." His voice rang manfully, though he brushed a mist from his eyes. "I ask you to promise to become my wife as soon as I go back to work again."

"But, Frank," cried the woman, her voice trembling with emotion, "you don't know anything about me. You haven't seen me in years. You—"

"I know I love you more than I ever did before," said the man, speaking heartfully. "Say you'll promise, Kittie; say you will."

"She said yeth to herself, papa!" cried out the child, jumping gleefully, her face radiant with joy.

WAITING.

THERE'S a song in my heart for the golden sun,
And the soft, warm winds and the summer sea;
There's a splendid trill for the growing things,
And an answering lilt comes back to me.

There's a song in my heart for the drifting rain,
For daisied meadows, for hill and tree;
But my royal song is for you, for you,
With a prayer that your heart will come back to me!

Lilla B. N. Weston.

THE WILD GEESE.*


BY STANLEY J. WEYMAN,

Author of "The Long Night," "A Gentleman of France," "Under the Red Robe," Etc.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEHIND THE YEWS. *

HE passages were still gray and chill when one of the bedchamber doors opened and a face peeped out. The face was Flavia's. Presently the girl stepped forward—paused, scared by a board that creaked under her naked foot—then went on again. She reached one of the doors, and scratched on it with her nail.

No one answered the summons, and she pushed the door open and went in. And, as she had feared, enlightened by Asgill's hint, she found James was awake and sitting up in his bed, his arms clasped about his knees. His eyes met hers; and in his eyes and in his form, huddled together as in sheer physical pain, she read beyond all doubt—fear. Why she had felt certain, courageous herself, that this was what she would find, she did not know. But there it was, as she had foreseen it through the long, restless, torturing hours.

James tried to utter the oath that, deceiving her, might rid him of her presence. But his nerves, shaken by his overnight drink, could not command his voice even for that. His eyes dropped in shame, he muttered "What the plague will you be wanting at this hour?" was no more than a querulous whisper.

"I couldn't sleep," she said, avoiding his eyes.

"I, no more," he muttered. "Curse him! Curse you, too! Why were you getting in his way? You've as good as murdered me with your tricks and your poses!"

"Heaven forbid!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, you have!" he answered, rocking himself to and fro in his excitement. "If it were any one else, I'm as ready to fight as another! But he's killed four men, and he'll kill me! Oh, if I'd not come up at that minute! If I'd not come up at that minute!"

The picture of what he would have escaped had he mounted the stairs a minute later was too much for him. Not a thought did he give to what might have happened to her had he come on the scene later; but, with all his cowardly soul laid bare, he rocked himself to and fro in a paroxysm of self-pity.

Yet he did not suffer more sorely under the lash of his own terrors than Flavia suffered—seeing him thus, the braggadocio stripped from him, and the poor cringing creature displayed. If she had thought too much of her descent—and the more in proportion as fortune had straightened the line, and only in this corner of a down-trodden land was its greatness even a memory—she was chastened for it now!

She could have wept tears of shame. And yet, so plain was the collapse of the man before her, that she did not think of reproach—even had she found heart to chide him, knowing that her words might send him to his death.

All her thought was, could she hide the blot? Could she, at any rate, so veil it that this insolent Englishman, this bully of the conquering race, might not perceive it? That were worth so much that her own life seemed a small price to pay for it.

But, alas! she could not purchase it with her life. Only in fairy tales can the woman pass for the man, and Doris

* This story began in THE SCRAP BOOK—Second Section—for August, 1908. Copyright by Stanley J. Weyman, 1908.

receive in her tender bosom the thrust intended for the sterner breast. Then how could they shun at least open disgrace—open dishonor? For it needed but a glance at her brother's pallid face to assure her that, brought to the field, he would prove unequal even to the task of cloaking his fears.

She sickened at the thought, and her eyes grew hard. Was this the man in whom she had believed? And when he turned on his side and hid his face in the pillow and groaned, she had small pity to spare for him. "Are you not well?" she asked.

"Can't you be seeing?" he answered fractionally, but for very shame he could not face her eyes. "Cannot you be seeing I'm not fit to get up? See how my hand shakes!"

"What is to be done, then?"

He cursed Payton thrice in a frenzy of rage. He beat the pillow with his fist.

"That does no good," she said.

"I believe you want to kill me!" he complained with childish passion. "I believe you want to see me dead! Why can't you be managing your own affairs, without—without—oh, Heaven!" And then in a dreadful voice, "I shall be dead to-night! And you care nothing!"

He hid unmanly tears on his pillow, while she looked at the wall, pale to the lips. Her worst misgivings had not pictured a thing as mean as this—a spirit so poor. And this was her brother, her idol, he to whom she had fondly looked to revive the glories of the race! Truly, she had been blind.

She had spoken to Luke Asgill the night before, and he would help her, she believed. But for that she would have turned—her thoughts did turn—to Colonel John. But he lay prostrate, and the O'Beirnes were out on the question; she could not tell them. Youth has no pity, makes no allowance; and a hundred times they had heard James brag and brawl. And Uncle Ulick was away.

There remained only Luke Asgill.

"If you are not well," she said in the same hard voice, "shall I be telling Mr. Asgill? He may contrive something."

The man, sweating in the bed, leaped at the hope as he would have leaped at any hope. Nor was he so bemused by fear as not to reflect that, whatever

Flavia asked, Asgill would be certain to do.

"Ah, tell him," he cried, raising himself on his elbow. "Do you be telling him! He can make him—wait maybe."

At that moment she came near to hating her brother. "I will send him to you," she said.

"No!" he cried anxiously. "No! Do you be telling him! Do you hear? I'm not so well to see him."

She shivered, seeing plainly the un-mixed selfishness of the course he urged. But she had not the heart to answer him. She went from the room, and going back to her own chamber, she dressed.

By this time the house was astir, the June sunshine was pouring with the songs of birds through the windows. She heard one of the O'Beirnes stumble downstairs. Next, Asgill opened his door and passed down.

In a twinkling she followed him, made a sign to him to go on, and led him into the open air. Nor when they were outside did she speak until she had put the courtyard between herself and the house.

For she would have hidden their shame from all if she could! Even to say what she had to say cost her in humiliation more than her brother had paid for aught in his selfish life. After a pause and with eyes averted, "My brother is ill," she faltered. "He cannot meet—that man—this morning. It is—as you feared. What can we do?"

In another case Luke Asgill would have blessed the chance that linked him with her and cast her on his help. He had guessed before she opened her mouth what she was going to say—nay, for hours he had lain sleepless on his bed, anticipating it. He had been certain of the issue—he knew James McMurrough; and being a man who loved Flavia, indeed, but loved life also, he had foreseen, with the cold sweat on his brow, what he would be driven to do.

He made no haste to answer, therefore; and his tone, when he did answer, was dull and lifeless. "Is it ill he is?" he asked. "It's a bad morning to be ill, and a meeting on hand."

She did not answer.

"Is he too bad to stand?" he continued. He made no attempt to hide his comprehension or his scorn.

"I don't say that," she faltered.

"Perhaps he told you," Asgill said, and there was nothing of the lover in his tone, "to speak to me?"

She nodded.

"It is I am to—put it off, I suppose?"

"If it be possible," she cried fervently. "Oh, if it be possible! Is it?"

He stood, thinking, with a gloomy face. He had known that it would come to this. From the first he had seen that there were two ways only of extricating The McMurrough. The one, by a mild explanation which would leave his honor in the mud; the other, by an explanation after a different fashion, with the word "liar" ready to answer the word "coward." But he who gave this last explanation must be willing to back the word with the deed, and stop caviling with the sword-point.

Now, Asgill knew the major's skill with the sword; and under other circumstances, the justice—cold, selfish, scheming—would have gone many a mile about before he entered upon a quarrel with him. None the less, love had drawn him to contemplate this very thing. For surely, if he did this, and lived, Flavia would smile on him.

Surely, if he saved her brother's honor, she would be won. It was a forlorn, it was a desperate, expedient. For no other advantage would Luke Asgill have faced the major's sword-point. But, whatever he was, he loved. And for the face and the form beside him, and for the quality of soul that shone from the girl's eyes, and made her what she was—and to him different from all other women—he had made up his mind to run the risk.

It went for something that he believed that Flavia, if he failed her, would go to Colonel Sullivan. If she did that, Asgill was sure that his own chance was at an end. This was his chance. It lay with him now, to-day, to dare or to retire, to win her favor at the risk of his life, or to yield her to another. In the chill morning hour he had discovered that he must risk all or lose all.

"I will make it possible," he said slowly, questioning in his mind whether he dared make terms with her. "I will make it possible," he repeated, with his eyes fixed on her face.

"If you could!" she cried, clasping her hands.

"I will!" he said, a sullen undertone in his voice. His eyes dwelt darkly on her. "If he raises an objection, I will fight him—myself!"

She shrank from him. "Ah, but I can't ask that!" she cried, trembling.

"It is that or nothing."

"That or—"

"There is no other way." He spoke with the same ungraciousness. Try as he would, and though the habit and the education of a life cried to him to make conditions, he could not; and he was enraged that he could not.

The more so as her wet eyes, her quick, mounting color told of her gratitude. In another moment she might have said a word fit to unlock his lips. He would have spoken, and she would have pledged herself. But Fate, in the person of old Darby, intervened.

Timely or untimely, the butler appeared in the distant doorway, cried "Hist!" and by a backward gesture warned them of some approaching peril.

"I fear—" she began.

"Yes, go!" Asgill replied, almost roughly. "He is coming, and he must not find us together."

The garden-gate had barely closed on her skirts before Payton issued from the courtyard. The Englishman paused an instant in the gateway, his sword under his arm and a handkerchief in his hand. Thence he looked up and down with an air of confidence that provoked Asgill beyond measure. The sun did not seem bright enough for him, nor the air scented to his liking. Finally, he approached the Irishman, who, affecting to be engaged with his own thoughts, had kept his distance.

"Is he ready?" he asked with a sneer.

With an effort Asgill controlled himself. "He is not," he said.

"At his prayers, is he? Well, he'll need them."

"He is not, to my knowledge," Asgill replied. "But he is ill."

Payton's face lightened with a joy not pleasant to see. "A coward!" he said coldly. "I am not surprised. Ill, is he? Aye, I know that illness. It's not the first time I've met it."

Asgill had no wish to precipitate a

quarrel. Only in the last resort had he determined to fling off the mask. But at that word "coward," though he knew it to be well deserved, his temper—sapped by the knowledge that love was forcing him into a position which reason repudiated—gave way, and he spoke his true thoughts.

"What a bully you are, Payton!" he said in his slowest tone. "Sure and you insult the man's sister—"

"What's that to you?"

"You insult the man's sister," Asgill persisted coolly; "and because he treats you like the miserable spalpeen you are, you'd kill him like a dog!"

Payton turned white. "And you, too," he said, "if you say another word! What in Heaven's name is amiss with you, man, this morning? Are you mad?"

"I'll not hear the word 'coward' used of the family—I'll soon be one of!" Asgill returned, speaking on the spur of the moment, and wondering at himself the moment he had made the statement. "That's what I'm meaning. Do you see? And if you are for repeating the word, more by token, it'll be all the breakfast you'll have, for I'll cram it down your ugly throat!"

Payton stared, divided between rage and astonishment. But the former quickly got the upper hand, and "Enough said!" he replied. "If you are willing to make it good, you'll be coming this way."

"Willingly," Asgill answered.

"I'll have one of my men for witness. I don't trust you, Mr. Asgill, and that's flat. Get you whom you please! In five minutes, in the garden?"

Asgill nodded. The Englishman looked once more at him, to make sure that he was sober; then he turned on his heel and went back through the courtyard. Asgill remained alone.

He had taken the step there was no retracing. He had cast the dice, and the next few minutes would decide whether it was for life or death.

The sunshine lost its warmth and grew pale, the hills lost their color and their beauty, as he reflected that he might never see the one or the other again, might never return by that lakeside road by which he had come; as he remembered that all his plans for his aggrandizement

—and they were many and clever—might end this day, this morning, this hour! It might well be, for the odds were great against him; that it was to this day that all his life had led up; that life by which men would by and by judge him, recalling this chicane and that extortion, thanking God that he was dead; or, perhaps, one here and there shrugging his shoulders in good-natured regret.

"Faith, Mr. Asgill," said a voice in his ear, "it's if you're ill, the major's asking? And, by the power, it's not very well you're looking this day!"

Asgill eyed the interrupter—it was Morty O'Beirne—with a sternness which his pallor made more striking. "I am coming," he said; "I am going to fight him."

"The deuce you are!" the young man answered. "Now, are you meaning? This morning that ever is?"

"Aye, now! Where is—"

He stopped on the word, and was silent. Instead, he looked across the courtyard in the direction of the house. If he might see her again. If he might speak to her. But, no. Yet, was it certain that she knew—that she would understand? And if she understood, would she know that he had gone to the meeting well-nigh without hope, aware how large—how very large—were the odds against him?

"But, faith, and it's no jest fighting him, if the least bit in life of what I've heard be true!" Morty said, a cloud on his face. He looked uncertainly from Asgill to the house and back. "Is it to be doing anything you want me?"

"I want you to come with me and see it out," Asgill said. He wheeled brusquely to the garden-gate; but when he was within a pace of it, he paused and turned his head. "Mr. O'Beirne," he said, "I'm going in by this gate, and it's not much to be expected I'll come out any way but feet first. Will you be telling her, if you please, that I knew that same?"

"I will," Morty answered, genuinely distressed. "But I'm asking, is there no other way?"

"There is none," Asgill said. And he opened the gate.

Payton was awaiting him on the path under the yew-trees, with two of his troopers on guard in the background.

He had removed his coat and vest, and stood a not ungraceful figure in the sunshine, bending his rapier and feeling its point with his thumb. He was doing this when his eyes surprised his opponent's entrance, and, without desisting from his employment, he smiled.

If the other's courage had begun to wane, that smile would have restored it. For it roused in him a stronger passion than fear—the passion of hatred. He saw in the man before him—the man with the cruel smile—a demon who, in pure malice, without reason and without cause, would take his life, would rob him of life and love and sunshine, and hurl him into the blackness of he knew not what. And he was seized with a rage at once fierce and deliberate.

This man who would kill him, and whom he saw before him smiling, he would kill! He thirsted to set his foot upon his throat and squeeze, and squeeze the life out of him! These were the thoughts that passed through his mind as he paused to throw off the encumbering coat. Then he advanced, drawing his weapon as he moved, and fixing his eyes on Payton, who for his part, reading the other's thoughts in his face—for more than once he had seen that look—put himself on his guard without a word.

Asgill had no more than the rudimentary knowledge of the sword, which was possessed in that day by all who wore it. He knew that, given time and the decent observances of the fencing-school, he would be a mere child in Payton's hands; that it would matter nothing whether the sun were on this side or that, or his sword the longer or the shorter by an inch.

The moment he was within reach, therefore, and his blade touched the other's, he rushed in, lunging fiercely at his opponent's breast and trusting to the vigor of his attack and the circular sweep of his point to protect himself. Not seldom has a man skilled in the subtleties of the art found himself confused and overcome by this mode of attack.

But Payton had fought too often on the green to be taken by surprise. He parried the first thrust, the second he evaded by stepping adroitly aside. By the same movement he put the sun in Asgill's eyes.

Again the latter rushed in, striving to get within his opponent's guard; and again Payton stepped aside and allowed the random thrust to pass harmlessly under his arm. Once more the same thing happened—Asgill rushed in, Payton parried or evaded, with the ease and coolness of long-tried skill.

By this time, Asgill, forced to keep his blade in motion, began to breathe quickly. The sweat stood on his brow, he struck more and more wildly, and with less and less strength or aim. He was aware—it could be read in the glare of his eyes—that he was being reduced to the defensive; and he knew that to be fatal.

An oath broke from his panting lips, and he rushed in again, even more recklessly, more at random, than before; his sole object now to kill the other, to stab him at close quarters, no matter what happened to himself.

Again Payton avoided the full force of the rush, but this time after a different fashion. He retreated a step. Then, with a flicker and a girding of steel on steel, Asgill's sword flew from his hand, and at the same instant—or so nearly at the same instant that the disarming and the thrust might have seemed to an untrained eye one motion—Payton turned his wrist, and his sword buried itself in Asgill's body.

The unfortunate man recoiled with a cry, staggered, and sank sideways to the ground.

"By the powers," cried O'Beirne, springing forward, "a foul stroke! By Heaven, a foul stroke! He was disarmed. I—"

"Have a care what you say!" Payton answered slowly, and in a terrible tone. "You'd do better to look to your friend—for he'll need it."

"It's you that struck him after he was disarmed!" Morty cried, almost weeping with rage. "Not a bit of a chance did you give him! You—"

"Silence, I say!" Payton answered in a fierce tone of authority. "I know my duty; and if you know yours, you'll look to him."

He turned aside with that, and thrust the point of his sword twice and thrice into the sod before he sheathed the weapon. Meanwhile, Morty had cast

himself down beside the fallen man, who, speechless, and with his head hanging, continued to support himself on his hand. A patch of blood, bright-colored, was growing slowly on his vest; and there was blood on his lips.

"Oh, whirra, whirra, what'll I do?" the Irishman exclaimed, helplessly wringing his hands. "What'll I do for him? He's murdered entirely!"

Payton, aided by one of the troopers, was putting on his coat and vest. He paused to bid the other help the gentleman. Then, with a cold look at the fallen man, for whom—though they had been friends, as friends go in the world—he seemed to have no feeling, except one of contempt, he walked away in the direction of the rear of the house.

By the time he reached the back door, the alarm was abroad, the maids were running to and fro and screaming, and on the threshold he encountered Flavia. Pale as the stricken man, she looked on Payton with an eye of horror, and, as he stood aside to let her pass, she drew her skirts away that they might not touch him.

He went on, with rage in his heart. "Very good, my lady," he muttered; "very good. But I've not done with you yet. I know a way to pull your pride down, and I'll go about it."

He might have spoken less confidently, had he, before he retired from the scene of the fight, cast one upward glance in the direction of the house; had he marked an opening high up in the wall of yew, and noticed through that opening a window, so placed that it alone of all the windows in the house commanded the scene of action. For then he would have discovered at that casement a face he knew, and a pair of stern eyes that had followed the course of the struggle throughout, noted each separate attack, and judged the issue—and the man.

And he might have taken warning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PITCHER AT THE WELL.

THE surgeon of that day was better skilled in letting blood than in stanching it. It was well for Luke Asgill, therefore, that none lived nearer

than Tralee. It was still more fortunate for him that there was one in the house to whom the treatment of such a wound as his was an every-day matter, and who was guided in his practise less by the rules of the faculty than by those of common sense.

Even under his care, Asgill's life hung for many hours in the balance. There was a time when his breath, in the old phrase, would not raise a feather. The servants were ready to raise the "keen," the cook sought the salt for the death-plate.

Colonel John, mindful of many a man found living on the field hours after he should, by all the rules, have died, did not despair; and little by little the colonel's skill and patience prevailed. The breathing grew stronger; and though the end must long remain uncertain, death, for the moment, was repelled.

Now, he who when others are distraught knows both what to do and how to do it, cannot fail to impress the imagination. Unsupported by Flavia, Colonel John might have done less; yet she who fetched and carried for him, and shrank from no sight of blood or wound, was also the one who succumbed the most completely to his ascendancy.

Flavia's feelings toward her cousin had been altering hour by hour; and this experience of his hastened her tacit surrender. For, having seen how high he could rise in adversity, she now saw also how naturally he took the lead of others, how completely he dominated the crowd.

While she no longer marveled at the skill with which he had thwarted plans which she could now appraise more nearly at their value, she found herself relying upon him to an extent which startled and almost frightened her.

Was it only that morning that she had trembled for her brother's life? Was it only that morning she had tasted the still more bitter draft of knowing him a craven, unworthy of his name and race? Was it only that morning that she had sent into peril the man who lay dying before her?

If that were so, why did she now feel so different? Why did she now feel inexplicably relieved, inconceivably at ease, almost happy? Why, with the man whom she had thrust into peril, lying

in extremis before her, did she find her mind straying to another?

To one whose hands touched hers in the work of tendance, who, low-toned, ordered her hither and thither and was obeyed?

She asked herself the question as she sat in the darkened room, watching. And in the twilight she blushed. Once at a crisis, Colonel John had taken her roughly by the wrist and forced her to hold the bandage so while he twisted it. She looked at the wrist now, and, fancying she could see the imprint of his fingers on it, she blushed more deeply.

Presently there came, as they sat listening to the fluttering breath, a low scratching at the door. At a sign from Colonel Sullivan, she stole to it and found Morty O'Beirne on the threshold. He beckoned to her; and closing the door, she followed him down-stairs to where, in the living-room, she found the other O'Beirne standing sheepishly beside the table.

"It's not knowing what to do, we are," Morty said.

He did not look at her, nor did his brother. Her heart sank. "What is it?" she asked.

"The fiend's in the man," Morty replied, tapping with his fingers on the table. "But—it's you will be telling her, Phelim."

"It's he that's not content," Phelim muttered, looking anywhere but at her. "The thief of the world!"

"Curse him!" cried his brother.

"Not content?" she echoed. "After what he's done?"

Then the downcast demeanor of the two told the story, and she gasped. "He's for—fighting my brother?" she whispered.

"He'll be content with no less," Morty answered with a groan. "Bad cess to him! And The McMurrrough—sure, he's no stomach for it. But whirra, whirra, on that the man says he'll be telling it in Tralee that he'd not meet him, and as far as Galway city he'll cut his comb for him! Aye, bedad, he says that."

She listened, despairing. The house was quiet, as houses in the country are of an afternoon. Her thoughts were no longer with the injured man, however; but in that other room, where her brother

lurked in shameless fear—fear that in a nameless man might have been pardoned; but in him, head of his race—last of his race—never! She came of heroes. To her the strain had descended, pure and untainted, and she would rather have seen him dead. The two men before her, she was sure that they would have taken up the glove, unwillingly and perforce, but they would have fought! While her brother, The McMurrrough—

But even while she thought of it, she saw through the open door the figure of a man saunter past the entrance to the courtyard, his sword under his arm. It was the Englishman! She felt the added sting. Her cheek, that had been pale, burned darkly.

"St. Patrick, fly away with the toad, and the ugly smile of him!" Morty said. "I'm thinking it's between the two of us, Phelim, my jewel! And he that's killed will help the other."

"Heaven forbid!" Flavia cried, pale with horror at the thought. "Not another!"

"But sure, and I'm not seeing how else we'll be rid of him handsomely," Phelim replied.

"No," she repeated firmly. "No, I forbid it!"

Again the man sauntered by the entrance, and again he cast the same insolent, smiling look at the house. They watched him pass, an ominous shadow in the sunshine, and Flavia shuddered.

"But what will you be doing then?" Morty asked, rubbing his chin in perplexity. "He's saying that if The McMurrrough'll not meet him by four o'clock, and it isn't much short of it, he'll be riding this day! And him once gone, he's a bitter tongue, and 'twill be foul shame on the house!"

Flavia drew in her breath sharply—she had made up her mind. "I know what I will do," she said. "I will tell him all." And she turned to go.

"It's not worth the shoe-leather," Morty cried, letting his scorn of James be seen.

But when she returned a minute later, she was followed, not by James McMurrrough, but by Colonel Sullivan. The colonel's face had lost the brown of health, but he trod firmly, and his eyes were clear and kind.

"I am willing to help, if I can," he said. "What is your trouble?"

"Tell him," Flavia said, averting her face.

They told him in almost the same words in which they had broken the news to her. "And the curse of Cromwell on me, but he's parading up and down now," Morty continued; "and cocking his eye at the sun-dial whenever he passes, as much as to say, 'Is it coming you are?' till the heart's fairly melted in me with the rage."

"And it's shame on us we let him be," cried Phelim.

Colonel John did not answer. He was silent even when, under the eyes of all, the ominous shadow passed before the entrance-gates—came and went. He was so long silent that Flavia turned to him and held out her hands. "What shall we do?" she cried—and in that cry she betrayed her new dependence on him.

"It is hard to say," Colonel John answered gravely. His face was very gloomy, and to hide it he turned from them and went to one of the windows.

They waited—Flavia with a growing sense of disappointment. She did not know what she had thought that he would do, but she had been confident that he could help; and it seemed that he could do no more than others.

He came back to them presently, his face sad. "I will deal with it," he said—and he sighed. "You can leave it to me. Do you," he continued, addressing Morty, "come with me, Mr. O'Beirne."

He was for turning away with that, but Flavia put herself between him and the door. She fixed her eyes on his face. "What are you going to do?" she asked in a low voice.

"I will tell you all—later," he replied gently.

"No, now!" she retorted, controlling herself with difficulty. "Now! You are not going—to fight him?"

"I am not going to fight," he answered slowly.

But her heart was not so easily deceived as the ear. "There is something under your words," she said. "What is it?"

"I am not going to fight," he replied, "but to punish. There is a limit." Even while he spoke she remembered in

what circumstances those words had been used. "He has blood of four on his head, and another lies at death's door. And he is not satisfied. Once I warned him. To-day the time for warning is past, the hour for judgment is come. God forgive me if I err, for vengeance is His, and it is terrible to be in His hands." He turned to Phelim. "My sword is broken," he said. "Fetch me the man's sword who lies up-stairs."

Phelim went, awe-stricken and marveling. Morty remained, marveling also. And Flavia—but, as she tried to speak, Payton's shadow came into sight at the entrance-gates and went slowly by, and she clapped her hand to her mouth that she might not scream. Colonel Sullivan saw the action, understood, and touched her softly on the shoulder. "Pray," he said, "pray!"

"For you?" she cried in a voice that, for those who had ears, betrayed her heart. "Ah, I will pray!"

"No, for him," he replied solemnly. "For him now. For me when I return."

She dropped on her knees before a chair, and, shuddering, hid her face in her hands. And immediately she knew that they were gone, and that she was alone in the room.

Then, whether she prayed most or listened most—or the very intensity of her listening was itself prayer—she never knew; but only that when, in the agony of her suspense, she raised her head from the chair to hear if there was news, the common sounds of afternoon life lashed her with a dreadful irony.

The whirl of a spinning-wheel, a girl's distant chatter, the cluck of a hen in the courtyard, the satisfied grunt of a roving pig—all bore home to her the bitter message that, whatever happened, and though night-fall found her lonely in a dishonored home, life would proceed as usual, the men and the women about her would eat and drink, and the smallest things would stand where they stood now.

What was that? Only the fall of a spit in the kitchen. Would they never come? Would she never know? That, surely, was something! They were returning! In a moment she would know. She rose to her feet and stared with stony eyes at the door. But when she had listened long—it was nothing. Nothing!

And then—ah, that surely was something! They were coming now! Yes, they were coming. In a moment she would know. She pressed her hands to her breast.

She might have known already, for had she gone to the door she would have seen who came. But she could not go.

And he, when he came in, did not look at her. He walked from the threshold to the hearth, and—strange coincidence—he set the unsheathed blade he carried in the self-same angle beside the fire-back, from which she had once taken a sword to attempt his life. And still he did not look at her, but stood with bowed head.

At last he turned. "God forgive us all," he said.

She broke into wild weeping. And what her lips, babbling incoherent thanksgiving, did not tell him, the clinging of her arms, as she hung on him, conveyed.

CHAPTER XXV.

PEACE.

UNCLE ULICK, with the mud of the road on his boots, and the curls still stiff in the wig which the town-barber at Mallow had dressed for him, rubbed his chin with his hand and owned himself puzzled. Had his absence run into months instead of weeks, the lapse of time had now sufficed to explain the change which he felt, but could not define, in his surroundings.

Certainly, old Darby looked a thought more trim, and the room a trifle better ordered than he had left them. But the change did not stop there—perhaps did not begin there. Full of news of the outer world as he was, he caught himself pausing in mid-career to question himself; and his eyes scanned his companions' faces for the answer his mind refused to give.

An insolent Englishman had come, and, after running Luke Asgill through the body, had paid the penalty—in fight so fair that the very troopers who had witnessed it could make no complaint nor raise trouble. So much Uncle Ulick had learned. But he had not known Payton, and, exciting as the episode sounded, it did not explain the difference

in the atmosphere of the house. Where he had left suspicion and a silent table, he found smiles and easiness and a cheerful sense of well-being.

Again he looked about him. "And where will James be?" he asked.

"He has left us," Flavia said, with her eyes on Colonel Sullivan.

"It's away to Galway city he is," Morty O'Beirne explained with a chuckle.

"The saints be between us and harm!" Uncle Ulick exclaimed in astonishment.

"And why's he there?"

"The story is long," said Colonel Sullivan.

"But I can tell it in a few words," Flavia continued with dignity. "And the sooner it is told the better. He has not behaved well, Uncle Ulick, and at his request, and with—the legal owner's consent—it's I have agreed to pay to him one-half of the value of the property."

"The deuce you have!" Uncle Ulick exclaimed, in greater astonishment. And, pushing back his seat and rubbing his huge thigh with his hand, he looked from one to another. "By the powers! If I may take the liberty of saying so, young lady, you've done a vast deal in a very little time—faith, in no time at all, at all!"

"It was done at his request," Flavia answered gravely.

Uncle Ulick continued to rub his thigh and to stare. These things were very surprising.

"And they're telling me," he said, "that Luke Asgill's in bed up-stairs?"

"He is."

"And recovering?"

"He is, glory be!"

"Nor that same's not the best news of him," Morty said with a grin. "Nor the last."

"True for you!" Phelim cried. "If it was the last word you spoke!"

"What are you meaning?" Uncle Ulick asked.

"He's turned," said Morty. "No less! Turned! He's what his father was before him, Mr. Sullivan—come back to the holy church, and not a morning but Father O'Hara's with him."

"Turned!" Uncle Ulick cried. "Luke Asgill, the justice? Boys, you're making

fun of me!" And, unable to believe what the O'Beirnes told him, he looked to Flavia for confirmation.

"It is true," she said.

"Bedad, it is!" Uncle Ulick replied. "Then I'll not be surprised in all my life again. More by token, there's only one thing left to pray for, my jewel, and that's certain. Cannot you do the same to the man that's beside you?"

Flavia glanced quickly at Colonel John, then, with a heightened color, she looked again at Uncle Ulick. "That's what I cannot do," she said.

But the blush, and the smile that accompanied it, and something perhaps in the way she hung toward her neighbor as she turned to him, told Uncle Ulick all. The big man smacked the table with his hand till the platters leaped from the board.

"Holy poker!" he cried, "is it that, you're meaning? And I felt it, and I didn't feel it, and you sitting there forinst me, and prating as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth! It is so, is it? But there, the red of your cheek is answer enough."

For Flavia was blushing more brightly than before, and Colonel John was smiling, and the two young men were laughing openly.

"You must get Flavia alone," Colonel John said, "and perhaps she'll tell you."

"Bedad, it's true, and I felt it in the air," Ulick Sullivan answered, smiling all over his face. "Ho, ho! Ho, ho! Indeed, you've not been idle while I've been away. But what does Father O'Hara say, eh?"

"The father—" Flavia began in a small voice.

"Aye, what does the father say?"

"He says," Flavia continued, looking down demurely, "that it's a rare stick that's no bend in it, and—and 'tis very little use looking for it on a dark night. Besides, Colonel John"—she glanced at her neighbor—"said he'd be master, you know, and what could I do?"

"Then it's the very wrong way he's gone about it!" Uncle Ulick cried, with a chuckle. "For there's no married man that I know that's master. It's you, my jewel, have put the comether on him, and I'll trust you to keep it there."

But into that we need not go. Our

task is done. Whether Flavia's high spirit and her husband's gravity traveled the road in unbroken amity, or with no more than the jars which the accidents of life occasion, it does not fall within this story to tell. Probably the two had their bickerings, which did not sever love; but one thing may be taken for granted—in that part of Kerry the king over the water, if his health was sometimes drunk of an evening; stirred up no second trouble. Nor, when the forty-five convulsed Scotland and shook England to its center, did one man at Morristown raise his hand or lose his life. For so much, at least, that wind-swept corner of Kerry, hard by the Atlantic tollers, had to thank Colonel Sullivan.

Nor for that only. In many unnamed ways his knowledge of the world blessed those about him. And, above all, his neighbors owned the influence of one, who, with a reputation gained at the sword's point, stood resolutely, at fairs and cock-fights—as on his own hearth—for peace. More than a century was to elapse before private war ceased to be the amusement of the Irish gentry. But in that part of Kerry, and during a score of years, the name and weight of Colonel Sullivan of Morristown availed to quiet many a brawl and avert many a meeting.

To follow the mean spirit beyond the point where their fortunes cease to be entwined with those of better men is a profitless task. James McMurrough, found wanting, where all favored him, was not likely to rise above his nature where the odds were equal and all men his rivals. What he did in Galway City, how long he tarried there, and whither he went afterward, in the vain search for a place where a man could swagger without courage and ruffle it without consequences, it matters not to inquire.

Luke Asgill, who could rise as much above The McMurrough as he could fall below him, was redeemed, one may believe, by the good that lurked in him. He lay many weeks on a sick-bed, and returned to every-day life another man. For, whereas he had succumbed a passionate lover of Flavia, he rose wholly cured of that passion. It had ebbed from him with his blood, or waned with his fever. And whereas he had before

sought both gain and power, restrained by as few scruples as the worst men of a bad age, he rose a pursuer of both, but within bounds. Close-fisted, at Father O'Hara's instance, he could open his hand. Hard, at the father's prayer, he would at times remit a cent or extend a bond. Ambitious, he gave up, for his soul's sake, the office which endowed him with power to oppress.

There were some who scoffed behind his back; but, in truth, as far as the

man's reformation went, it was real. The hours he had passed in the presence of death, the thoughts he had had while life was low in him, were not forgotten in his health. The strong nature, slow to take an impression, was stiff to retain it. A moody, silent man, going about his business with a face to match the sullen bogs of his native land, he lived to a great age and paid one tribute only to the woman he had loved and forgotten—he died a bachelor.

(The End.)

HIS MOTHER.

BY MARY EASTWOOD KNEVELS.

A SHORT STORY.



AND you say she is coming here to stay with Miss Gordon at the Wainright? Dear me, Reggie, to think I have never met the girl my son is to marry! May I ask if you have told her my profession? I believe the stage is viewed more leniently by the clergy than it used to be, but still it must be somewhat of a shock for a minister's daughter to marry the son of an actress. You say she does know it?" as her son nodded a little absently. "What does she think about it, Reggie?"

Reginald Alward, only son of Evelyn Alward—better known by her stage-name of Evelyn Grace—was a big young man, with a serious, rather heavy, face. Just now he was not only absent, but a little stern-looking as he fingered the ornaments on the mantel-shelf. His mother watched him, her full, upturned mouth ready for laughter.

"Out with it, Reggie!"

"Mother, I wish you wouldn't call me by that silly name. Reggie is so—so—stagy."

"Yes, it is, my boy; but you can thank your stars it isn't Algernon. Well, what is it, Reginald?"

"When you go to see Corona at the Wainright to-morrow, mother, I wish

you wouldn't wear a thing like that—that is, if you—"

"Hardly, my dear. An evening gown for an afternoon call on a minister's daughter—"

"Oh, you know what I mean! I want you to wear something gray and soft, and do your hair differently, and haven't you got a—a—bonnet? I don't know what Corona will think of you like this. You see, she's always lived in a country town, and she's not used to seeing people of your age dress—er—well, the way you do."

Reginald brought his troubled brows into a perplexed frown.

"Anyway," he went on, "I am making a good deal of money, and even when I marry there will be enough for both of us. Why shouldn't you leave it all and retire? At your age I should think you would rather do this. It must be hard to see one's glory wane. Better to go when it's at the full, as yours is now. I hate to hurt you, mother, but can't you see it this way, too?"

The pretty, bright room went suddenly dark before Mrs. Alward's eyes, and she blessed the delicate enameling that hid the sick wave of color suffusing her face. After a while the characteristic upturned mouth opened in a smile.

"Yes, yes; I think I see, Reggie. Tell me one thing, did you feel this way before you became engaged?"

Reginald answered her hastily:

"No, I don't know that I did. It was when I got to thinking what good times you and Corona and I might have in the country somewhere that it came how I should love to have you—well—as other men have their mothers."

It was so genuine that the submerged maternal stirred somewhere in poor Mrs. Alward's bruised sensibilities. Then the humor she never could keep down long reasserted itself.

"Is it possible you had visions of me as grandmama, Reggie?"

"Mother!"

"Forgive me, dear. And then you must remember that I loath the country quite as much as you love it, and the city you hate is the breath of life to me. I am afraid I should only pay you visits between—" "Engagements" hovered on her lips, but she let the sentence go unfinished.

"Unless," said her son hopefully, "you really do give it all up. Do think about that, mother!"

"Yes"—Mrs. Alward's soft white hands clenched themselves on the arm of her chair—"yes, I probably shall. Now, go and dress; you are late. Reggie, do you love your mother one thousandth as much as she loves you?"

"Oh, I have hurt you—I am so sorry, mother!"

She pushed him away with a quick, pettish gesture, and then drew him back to her and kissed him twice on his set young mouth.

II.

THE following afternoon, when Alward appeared at the Wainright, he was surprised to have Corona come down to the reception-room in answer to his card, dressed to go out.

Reginald thought he had never seen her as lovely. Her tall, straight figure had the grace of a young larch-tree, her plentiful tawny hair was gathered up beneath a fur-edged toque, and her eyes flashed with pleased anticipation.

"I had the loveliest note from your mother," she at once explained. "She can't come to call on me, but wants me to

waive ceremony and go to her. Of course, I don't mind a bit. Fancy Evelyn Grace apologizing for not coming to call! Oh, Reginald, to think I shall see her this very afternoon! You don't know—you can't—how I look forward to seeing her. I shall want to kiss her hand and drop on my knees, I know I shall, and just *look* at her!"

"Corona, how extravagant you are! You are going on like a regular *matinée*-girl. My mother is a public character in a way, of course, but—"

"Now, Reginald, it is you who are absurd. She is just your mother to you, I suppose, but to the world she is Evelyn Grace."

"My angel, that is nonsense. My mother isn't Bernhardt or Duse!"

In spite of the fact that this was only the second time he had seen Corona since their six months' separation, Reginald felt annoyed, and her sparkling face failed in its usual appeal to him.

Last night it had been the same. Coming to New York had meant to her seeing the far-famed Evelyn Grace, and the bill-boards announcing the new play in which her fiancé's mother was to star that winter had stirred her to such enthusiasm that Reginald scarcely knew what to say.

"Corona, do be sensible. I don't understand. Why, I hesitated to tell you who my mother was, for fear you would be distressed!"

"It did seem different at home," admitted Corona. "At first when you told me, it seemed—well—queer; but after you had gone I began reading everything I could find about her, and then since I've come on here, and seen the posters, and heard them all talking at the hotel about her—oh, I could hardly keep from telling them she was *your* mother, and I was going to marry you! Come, hurry; I can't wait a second longer."

She moved out of the room toward the elevator, and Reginald, his brows set in the frown his mother knew so well, followed her.

The door of Mrs. Alward's apartment was hung with rose-velvet portières. Reginald drew them aside for Corona, and led her in.

"Mother," he said a little formally, and then he paused.

The pretty room, all white and pink

and gold, was lighted by shaded lamps and the glow of a fire flaring warmly behind a brass fender. Before this fire sat an old lady in a soft gray house-frock, lace at her wrists and throat, and the most classic of old-lady caps, surmounted by a lavender bow on her beautiful white hair.

"Come in, Reggie," said the old lady, in whose voice was the suspicion of a tremble. Was it age or the slenderest suggestion of laughter?

"And this is Corona? Why, Reggie, you didn't tell me how pretty she was!"

Corona raised appalled eyes to Reginald behind the screening white lace of Mrs. Alward's cap, as she bent to kiss her.

Those accusing eyes seemed to say, "So, *this* is Evelyn Grace?"

The young man's face was a study, but it gave her no light whatsoever on the situation.

"I find," said Mrs. Alward, as the two women separated and Corona sank into a rose-tufted armchair, "that at my time of life a fire is not only a decoration, but a necessity. Reginald, will you put on another log?"

Thus gently reminded, Reginald did so, and then managed to find his voice.

"Corona has been so anxious to see you, mother, she could hardly wait to get here. She has heard a great deal of you."

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Alward, raising the daintiest of gold- and -glass vinaigrettes to her nose, "I suppose you refer to my late career?"

"What?" cried Corona. "You intend leaving the stage?"

"I have been advised"—Mrs. Alward allowed her bland blue eyes to rest for a second on Reginald's face—"that it is time to do so. Rheumatism, my dear, rheumatism and the stairs—one alone would be quite enough, but to bound upon the boards, as I once used to do, is out of the question. Reggie, will you kindly draw that curtain? Drafts, my child! That little white shawl behind you there—thank you!"

In placing the silky thing around Mrs. Alward's shoulders, Corona met Reginald's eyes once more, as he returned from arranging the curtain, and the scorn in hers made him flush a sullen red.

"Kerchoo!" sneezed Mrs. Alward. "Kerchoo! Dear me, where is my handkerchief?"

She opened her reticule—for reticule it was, a piece of stage property unearthed for the occasion—and sneezed a half-dozen times with great satisfaction; then she wiped her eyes, and, picking up her knitting, beamed benignly on Corona.

"Of course, you don't knit, my dear? No; young people never do. I used to feel that way myself when I was young, but now I find it very restful. Won't you put aside your wrap? We shall have some tea presently."

"I don't think we can wait this afternoon." Reginald answered for Corona, taking pity on the utterly confused face. "I want to take Corona on a special errand. Besides"—and he bent stern eyes on his mother—"it must be about time for your—er—nap."

"I had meant to forego it *this* afternoon," with a charming emphasis, and her eyes on Corona, for she dared not return her son's gaze.

Corona rose hastily, and stiffly allowed herself to be embraced by Mrs. Alward, who kissed her on each cheek and surveyed her approvingly.

To Corona, who felt the tears of vexation and disappointment close behind her eyes, the scrutiny was terribly trying.

She almost tore herself from Mrs. Alward's grasp, and with a choked word or two left the room.

III.

"Oh, Reginald!" In the safety of the cab, with curtains drawn, Corona gave way to violent sobs, and Reginald could not comfort her. Indeed, he did not know what to say, for his mother's conduct was a mystery to him. Apparently she had taken him at his word, but he knew her incorrigible habit of joking, and strongly suspected this to be merely an expression of it. However, Corona gave him little opportunity of explanation.

"Oh, I was so awkward, so foolish! Why didn't you prepare me? Of course, it isn't her fault, but it is yours," she kept sobbing.

"I couldn't," groaned Reginald. "Don't—don't feel so, Corona. I will explain it all to-morrow, every bit of it!"

And to himself he vowed that he certainly would, but first of all his mother should explain to him.

Then Corona turned wrathfully:

"Explain, indeed! It is a little late for that."

The carriage stopped at the Wainright, and Reginald helped her out. She stood on the steps and flamed at him:

"Don't dare come near me," she cried. "Don't dare come near me until I send for you!"

IV.

THE waiter helped Corona off with her coat, and she sat down with the menu before her, for the first time a little frightened at the extreme to which her indignation had carried her. After Reginald had gone it had been impossible to compose herself in the lonely hotel with her deaf old cousin.

She was hurt, vibrating with a sense of injury and deception, and the rolling carriages and puffing motors, the noise and lights of the street, had teased her into a wild plan by which she might defy Reginald and show her own independence.

She had left the choice of a dining-place to the clerk at the Wainright, and he had selected the Nestor in obedience to her stipulation that it must be gay and popular, and where she would see amusing people. She had arrived just late enough to find the room full. Her appearance, as she wound her way to the only vacant table, attracted some attention even in that place where oddities were no novelty. She was a striking figure just now, her gray eyes stormy with wrath, and her cheeks still flaming with a remembrance of the afternoon's episode.

At her left were two men, both frankly staring at her. When she raised her eyes from the menu she met theirs, and lowered hers again, blushing swiftly. Then, angry at herself for doing so, she frowned at them both so openly that the men, delighted with the attention, nudged each other and laughed.

A woman without an escort at the Nestor was fair game, and they deliberately proceeded to make her uncomfortable. Corona, utterly unused to this kind of thing, did not know how to behave. She

was wretchedly unhappy, every bit of bravado was oozing from her, and the loneliness of her position began to frighten her.

All about her people chattered and laughed, the gayest music was played, and good food and wine combined made the atmosphere of the place highly stimulating.

To be so apart from it all only increased her misery, and she laid down her knife and fork, her lips quivering. What would Reginald think of her? And at that very minute, in the distant Peoria meeting-house, they were probably including her in their kindly prayers!

From the shipwreck of this thought she was rescued by a friendly hand laid on her shoulder and a still friendlier voice that said soothingly:

"You look very uncomfortable and lonely. Will you let me sit down here with you until you finish your dinner?"

Corona bit her lips sharply for control.

"Oh, thank you," she answered gladly. "if you will! I have been so wretched."

Her lifted eyes, intense with gratitude, looked into those of a woman beautifully dressed in a heavy lace frock with orchids at her breast, and a white hat heaped with plumes. Beneath the hat there was blond hair, and, pleasantest of all, an upturned, smiling mouth.

"I don't want anything to eat," Corona explained. "I really couldn't swallow. I know I ought never to have come—it's been so dreadful—I think I was just going to—cry!"

On the swiftly lowered lashes the tears were clearly visible.

The other woman leaned forward quickly:

"Oh, please don't do that—it isn't so bad, is it? Try some of this nice salad, and then we'll have a dessert together. Those men who were annoying you are really not worth thinking about."

She said this in a perfectly distinct voice, and Corona looked at her admiringly. There was something familiar about the handsome statuesque features of her rescuer.

"I wish I could have spoken like that!" she said. "They didn't really do anything—they just made me uncomfortable—that and everything else together."

The other woman looked kindly at her flushed face. "I wish I could help you," she said warmly. "If you are alone in New York—"

Here Corona broke in. "Alone? Oh, no. I am with friends, and my—my—Mr. Alward—"

She stopped, confused, and was tactfully helped out of her difficulty:

"Of course, I know there are times when one wants to get off by oneself."

"It wasn't that," said Corona hastily. "I had been deceived, and I was very, very angry."

The other spoke with decision:

"Whoever deceived *you* must have been perfectly heartless."

"Oh, no," flashed Corona. "Reginald is never heartless! I don't know why he should have done it—that's just it—it's all mysterious and uncomfortable, and dreadfully disappointing."

"Have you asked him to explain?"

"He said he would to-morrow, but I did not wish to wait. I couldn't wait. If he had anything to say, he should have said it then!"

"It seems as if there must have been some one else concerned in it—some one he couldn't answer for, whom he had to see first, perhaps—"

This was put so delicately, with such an evident desire to say no more than she should, that Corona answered quickly:

"No, there is no one whom he could wish to see. There is only Reginald and his mother."

"Mothers," said the older woman, raising a spoonful of ice to her lips, "are always to be reckoned with."

"If she knew how I had felt about her!" Corona cried.

"How should she know?"

This was said so sharply that Corona opened her gray eyes full on her self-invited guest.

"Oh, she must have known how I looked forward to seeing her! But that isn't it, after all. It was the awful disappointment to find her so different from what I had imagined her, and I wasn't prepared, and I was so awkward—a schoolgirl would have had better manners. What can she think of me?"

"What should she think of herself?" breathed the other woman.

"I have told you more than I ought," said Corona, after a pause. "But you have been so kind and helped me so much. If she had only been like you! You are like the pictures of her—you really are! In the 'Candid Mrs. Waldron' she wears a hat trimmed in just that way."

Corona's frank gaze, a little puzzled now, traveled from the plumed hat to the upturned, humorous mouth. The other woman dropped sugar into her coffee.

"You are talking about Evelyn Grace?"

"Yes—Evelyn Grace, in private life Mrs. Alward. We girls in Peoria just raved about the pictures we saw of her in the illustrated papers—and then—to find her like *this!*"

"And Reginald—"

"Oh, he often talked to me about his mother—of how young she was, and so pretty and gay. Why shouldn't he have told me the truth?"

"Perhaps it was his mother who deceived you both. She is an actress!"

How should the girl know the pain beneath that level voice? Corona's eyes showed such an utter lack of comprehension that somehow their ingenuousness hurt, and the other woman hurried on.

"Did Reginald ever talk to you about his mother—as an actress?"

"No, no, scarcely ever. It was always as his mother, and you don't understand—"

"Yes, I do understand—better than any one in the world, I think, that all actors are just mummers."

She was not even regarding the girl's perplexed face. She was talking to the mother's heart that cried in her.

"Reginald is ashamed of his mother—now I know, now I see why."

But Corona hardly heard this broken speech. At this moment her eyes widened with excitement at the sudden appearance of Reginald in person.

"Mother," he said sternly, "I don't understand you! My dear Corona, what possessed you to come here alone? I have just been at the Wainwright."

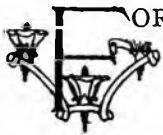
Mrs. Alward stretched her hands across the table and covered Corona's.

"Hush," she said to the comprehension breaking in the girl's face. "Reggie, dear, we've been talking about—living in the country!"

AN ENCHANTRESS OF THE SLUMS.

BY R. J. PEARSALL.

A SHORT STORY.



FORD'S LANDING had once been a village. Boats trafficking in Michigan lumber had stopped there, wagons laden with lumber had come from far inland, and boisterous lumbermen had spent their money easily at the two prosperous stores and the three more prosperous taverns. Times were good then! The chink of money vied with the rattle of logging chains. But now—

The lumber was all gone, years before. So was the dock. Weakened by neglect, it had been seized by ice-floes and crushed into splinters. The storekeepers and hotel men had drifted away one by one with the cessation of trade, taking their goods with them and leaving the empty shells of buildings to rot away unused.

All the people were gone—that is, all but a few. The Simpsons, the Manns, the Fraziers, Joe Bailey.

Bailey had turned one of the three rooms of his house into a sort of general store. Also, he worked at the carpenter trade for the farmers in the neighborhood. He was the only man in the landing who, if he had been asked, could have told how he made his living.

The rest fished sometimes in the summer, trapped in a desultory way in the winter, worked a few days at long intervals whenever they had to.

Thus, Ford's Landing had ceased to be either a landing or a village. It was merely a name; worse, it was a term of reproach. To live there implied disgrace.

Now, of all the shiftless families of Ford's Landing, the laziest and poorest was that headed by Jack Simpson. Simpson himself was tall, angular, and rawboned, with straight black hair, high

cheek-bones, and a noiseless, gliding walk. He was supposed to be part Indian. His wife was a nonentity, a little, thin, apathetic woman, so used to privation, even to real cold and hunger, that she never thought of complaining. Then there was the daughter, Lizzie, a girl of sixteen.

She was a true daughter of her parents and of her environment, and, consequently, was not beautiful. But that did not prevent her from being pretty. Her figure was well rounded; her lips were full and red; she had dark eyes that were fearless to the extent of boldness, and an almost loud voice.

Lizzie had been sent to "borry" some butter from Mrs. Maxfield. Considering the fact that the Simpsons kept no cow, and were never known to buy any butter, the word "borry" might easily have been construed into the harsher "beg." Lizzie went on her errand cheerfully.

The Maxfields owned a section of land lying just to the west of Ford's Landing, and, as compared with the Simpsons, were wealthy. Since she was able to walk, Lizzie had been used to these foraging expeditions. But in all these years she had never been required to return a borrowed article.

She had to pass the two-room shack in which the Manns lived.

II.

JACK MANN happened to be sitting in front of the house. When he saw her he scrambled up and came awkwardly out to meet her. He was about twenty; tall, ungainly, with a freckled but not unpleasant face.

"Mornin', Lizzie."

"Mornin'," she said, not unkindly.

"Where y' goin'."

"Up t' Maxfields."

He sauntered along beside her, wordless.

"Where *you* goin'?" There was untaught coquetry in her eye.

He blushed, and stammered guiltily: "Oh, just up the road." He tried to answer lightly, but signally failed.

"Oh!"

The awkward silence was full of embarrassed misery to the young man. He divided his attention impartially between his feet and the sky. It grew unbearable.

"Why don't y' say somethin'?" he blurted desperately.

"Say somethin'? Why, yer th' funniest feller. Why don't you? Y' act th' funniest, lately. What's th' matter? Cat got yer tongue?"

"Y' know what's th' matter. I told y' before. I—I like y' so, Lizzie."

"So do other people, I guess. An' they c'n talk."

"Oh, it's different! I—I love y'."

"Why, Jack Mann! But y' don't mean it."

"Mean it! Why, I love y' so I dream about y'. I'd do anything fer yer, Lizzie."

She looked at him curiously, as if measuring her power. "I don't believe it."

"I would. I can't help it. I'd—I'd go an' jump in th' lake this minute if y' told me t'."

"I wonder if y' would?"

"I would."

She broke into merry laughter.

"Oh, how funny y'd look! Funny! To go an' jump in th' lake."

She stood and laughed at him, standing there grave-eyed before her.

He tried to smile, but his lips trembled.

She turned to go. "Now, go back," she said. "Ye've come far enough."

He obeyed, and she went on, smiling at his obedience.

Mrs. Maxfield had a visitor, her brother, Joe Stanley, from the city. He was a young man, possibly twenty-one. He was sauntering about the yard when Lizzie entered the gate.

She looked at him, and of a sudden became conscious of her bare feet, her shabby dress, her unclean hands. His

eyes swept over her figure, and her own sank, abashed, to the ground. There was nothing of the bashful timidity of young Mann in his direct gaze.

In passing, she stole another hurried look at him. For the first time in her life, she repeated her worn petition with a feeling of shame. She wondered what this young man, whose name she did not know, would think of her errand.

Several times during the week Lizzie and he met. The young man had no idea that these meetings were laboriously calculated upon and managed by Lizzie Simpson.

After the first few times he, being a free-mannered youth, accosted her with a nod and a smile. But never anything more.

Lizzie cast about for reasons for his indifference. All of which was not good for her disposition.

"Lizzie," said her father sharply, one evening, "I don't see what has got into y' lately. Y'll have t' turn over a new leaf, I promise y'. Y' mope around all th' time. Yer impident t' yer ma. Y' even give *me* back talk. Y'll have t' quit it."

Lizzie preserved a sulky silence.

"What's th' matter with you, anyway?" Simpson persisted.

"Pa," said Lizzie, as if making a desperate resolve, "I want a new dress."

"New dress!" The idea was so astounding to Mr. Simpson that he gasped the words.

"Yes, a new dress." Lizzie gained courage. "I never have nothin' like nobody else. And I want somethin' sometimes like somebody else. I want a new dress."

"Well, is that all? Are y' sure that's all? Don't y' want a kerridge. Or an automobile? Now, I tell y' what. Yer gettin' too high-fangled notions. A new dress! What d'ye call that one y've got on? It wasn't three months ago yer mother cut it down from an old one of hers. Cut it down, bran'-new. And it ain't good enough fer you! Things hev come to a pretty pass when what's good enough fer her ain't good enough fer you."

Lizzie did not pursue the subject. It was no use.

But she had decided upon the one

thing that would give her the happiness she needed. The means did not matter.

III.

MEANWHILE, things were not pleasing Jack Mann. He wondered dully how he could have displeased Lizzie. Her capricious attitude toward him had been changed into one of actual dislike. It was hard to get to talk to her, even. One day, however, he got an opportunity of remonstrance.

"What makes y' use me so?" was his plea.

"Use y' how?" Lizzie was plainly anxious to get rid of him.

She saw Joe Stanley coming up the road.

"Like yer usin' me now. Y' act like y' want me t' go. An' I'd do anythin' fer yer. I would, y' know it."

Lizzie saw the approaching figure turn off from the road across the field, and her face fell. Then her eyes brightened again.

"Y' don't mean that, Jack?"

"I'll show y'. Anythin'. It don't matter what."

"D'ye really mean it? If I thought y' did—"

"Let me show y'."

"Mebbe I will, Jack, some day." She looked at him with the first tenderness in her eyes that he had ever seen there. "I b'lieve y' would," she went on, speaking almost to herself. "I've got t' go now, Jack. But I'll see y' again." She pressed his hand. "I'll see y' again, Jack. Good-by."

She left him trembling, bewildered, staring foolishly after her.

He talked to her again next day. He made love to her clumsily, and she let

him. But she would not believe in his sincerity. Over and over again he protested it. And at last she set him his task.

"Oh, I knew y' didn't mean it!" she cried, at the look in his eyes.

"Anythin' else; anythin'."

"I knew it. And I'm sorry." Under her eyes his young blood mounted feverishly. "Oh, all right, then." Her tone changed suddenly, and she turned away.

"Wait! Wait a minute! I will. Anythin'. I said I would, an' I will."

IV.

THAT was a memorable night in Ford's Landing. For the first time in twenty years, something happened important enough to warrant the mention of the place in metropolitan newspapers.

The window of Joe Bailey's store was forced, the store entered, and the till robbed.

There were several things about the robbery that marked it as a peculiar one. One was the fact that, although there were more than twenty-five dollars in the till, only five had been taken. Again, the thief had been at no pains to conceal his tracks, and had been easily identified by them. Finally, when accused of the crime, he broke down at once and confessed, refusing to say, however, what he had done with the five dollars, or why he had wanted that particular sum.

Jack Mann went to the penitentiary for two years.

Lizzie Simpson secured her coveted finery.

The day before she put it on, Joe Stanley, his vacation coming to an end, went back to his work in Detroit.

TO THE LADY YOLANDE.

I MARK the posy that you wear;
But will you never feel regret
That, while a rose was blooming there,
You culled the humble violet?

I mark the message Love has brought;
I hope you'll e'er be glad, my dear,
That, though the king your favor sought,
You smiled upon the cavalier.

H. Melbourne.

THE MUTUAL ACQUAINTANCE.

BY ANNA WYNNE AND GRACE TABOR.

A SHORT STORY.



MISS LAURIE sat in a huge armchair, gazing at the lighted gas-logs, while Mr. Houston stood before the tiny grate, gazing at Miss Laurie. And though he appreciated keenly the picture which her winsome beauty made against the dull-green background of the big chair, a shadow of vertical lines rested between his firm black brows. There had been a long silence since his last, swift, protesting speech; but now, at last, she spoke:

"Of course, Aunt Mary is old-fashioned—and it does seem absurd, Armstead, I know—but surely, dear, we are young enough to wait a little, to humor her in this. It would hurt her so if we didn't; it will please her so much if we do—and it can't do us any harm."

"Agh!" The frown deepened, and he made an impatient turn about the room. She lifted her head and watched him until he flung himself into the chair before her little desk, and, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, turned his dark eyes again gloomily full upon her.

"Sometimes I wonder, Beatrice, if you really care," he said sharply. "Sometimes I wonder."

"Armstead," she cried, "that's cruel of you!"

"Well, I do," he went on moodily. "You've a queer way of showing it—or else it's a queer love."

"Didn't you promise you would not urge, dear, if we could be engaged?" she pleaded. "That would be enough, you said, for now. We knew how Aunt Mary felt from the first—and she is all I have, Armstead. How can I go against her wishes so—even for you? It isn't as if

she said 'never'; she only says 'not now.' Oh, Armstead, don't you see how hard you make it—don't you see how it hurts me to have you insist—to have you blame me and find fault? Don't you *care* that it hurts me?" Her voice wavered.

He was on his feet in an instant, and swept her into his arms.

"How can I see anything but your beauty before me—how can I care for anything but you, my beloved?" he cried passionately. "There's nothing else in the whole wide world—and I can't help it if I do hurt you. I want you, sweet! Oh, how I want you, *now*—for my wife!"

He put his hand underneath her chin and tilted her head back until her lips were just below his own. Then—"Do you know, Beatrice," he said, "you've never *given* me one kiss, freely and of your own will?"

She murmured something, laughing, at which he smiled and nodded.

"Yes, I know," he acknowledged; "I've taken some—and I could do that now—but that's just what I don't want always to do. Won't you *give* it to me, Beatrice? *That's* what I want, sweetheart; the giving from you. You are keeping back all the time; that's what makes me wonder about your love. Love doesn't keep back—it *can't*! it gives, gives, *gives*!"

Her face became grave.

"That means a great deal, Armstead," she whispered rather solemnly. "A kiss like that means a great deal."

"I know, love," he answered tenderly, "I know. But—"

He stopped as her eyes were suddenly raised to his, stopped and waited, holding her closer; and then, with a smothered

exclamation at what he saw in their depths, he pressed his burning lips to hers, sweet and unresisting, and found for the first time that response which meant the seal of her complete surrender.

"You do love me—you do care!" he cried exultantly. "My darling—my own beautiful wife!"

She shrank from the word, half afraid of his ardor; but he would not let her go.

"You are my own," he insisted. "Surely, you will not deny me any longer, sweetheart. Say you will not. Why need we wait? There's no reason for delay—not the slightest. You shall go on studying as long as you will—here in New York, over in Paris—wherever you will, with whom you will. Everything will be just the same, only I shall be with you—I shall have you with me—we shall share it all—and that doubles anything that is good, you know."

She laughed helplessly, almost hysterically. Aunt Mary and her arguments and wishes were fading into shadowy unreality before this masterful eloquence.

He kissed her again.

"This is Friday," he said; "two days and a Sunday are long enough. We can be married Tuesday morning early, and catch the Amerika at noon; be in Brussels for the exhibit you've been so interested in, stay as long as you like, and then come back—or do what you like."

"But, Armstead—" she began.

He smothered the rest in his embrace.

"You shall not say it," he asserted. "You do not want to, and I do not want you to—therefore, why should you? And Aunt Mary will not mind it a bit, when she gets over there, having a good time."

"You mean—we shan't leave her behind?" she cried in incredulous delight.

"Why, of course we shall not," he answered; at which she kissed him again.

"Dear Armstead," she sighed, "how good you are! I never half knew."

"We'll dine to-night at that little place I was telling you of," he said, releasing her as he spoke, "because we may not have a chance again very soon. So I'll leave you now, dear, and catch Heather-ton at the bank. I'll call you up when I reach home—by six, surely—and send a cab for you, because I shall be busy with

a number of things which must be done—before—*Tuesday*. You won't mind driving down as far as the Square alone, will you? And with dinner so early, we can see as much of the opera as we care to."

II.

SHE sat down again in the green chair as the door closed after him and resumed her inspection of the gas-logs. How good he was, and kind; how fiercely he loved. Her heart glowed and melted at the thought of his warmth, of the strong clasp of his arms, of the touch of his lips—his arms that would always hold her close, his lips that would ever claim her own. Dear, foolish, notional Aunt Mary—she liked him in spite of her notions, and acknowledged it. Oh, yes, she was fair enough to do that, even while she continued to shake her head at the whole performance and frown a decided negative when the question of their marriage came up for discussion.

"But girls always *have* to take their husbands on faith, auntie," Miss Laurie had protested only that morning. "They can't know them until they've married them, and you say so yourself."

"Indeed they cannot, Beatrice," was the grave answer, "and more's the pity. But that is no reason for lowering the bars entirely and taking a total stranger on faith, and faith alone."

And this had led to an argument of the whole subject over again from beginning to end. Aunt Mary could never be brought to view with anything less than scandalized horror the manner in which the intimacy with Armstead Houston had grown. To be sure, this feeling faded under the charm of his personality; but it was always vividly restored when she reviewed the facts.

"It was a *scraped acquaintance*," she invariably reiterated at the end of all such confabs, "and even if he was very kind and courteous in helping you home after you fell, he ought never to have pressed a claim for anything further without being properly presented."

"But, auntie," was the invariable response, "who was there to do the presenting? We were absolute strangers here. Whom did we know? Whom do we know now, for that matter? Who

could introduce him? It wasn't alone his fault."

At which Aunt Mary still shook her head.

"He should have searched," she insisted firmly, "and waited until he had found a mutual acquaintance."

Well—they did things differently a generation ago; that's all. Or they do things differently now—it doesn't matter very much which way one puts it.

An irregular patter of feet advancing through the gloom of the hall roused Miss Laurie from her dreams. She turned her head and saw two curious little figures, who came slowly into the light, carrying between them a dress-maker's packing-box. They were as alike as two peas in a pod—two very wizened and shrivelly peas—though they were differently dressed. She watched them, puzzled.

"Oh," she said at last, with amused comprehension as the box was gravely presented, "it's the dress from Mme. Delano?"

They nodded silently, and as silently watched while she untied it.

"It looks very nice," she commented; "you may tell madam that I said so, please." And she turned to smile at them.

One responded with breathless promptness.

"I been here last summer!" she exclaimed. "I know you. You don't know me, 'cause I've grown since; that's why, ain't it? I'm Connie Maguire."

"Why, sure enough! And that must have been the reason I didn't remember you," answered Miss Laurie. "You're quite a big girl. I'm glad to see you again, Connie."

"That's Amy." The child pointed to her double.

"Is it?" said Miss Laurie. "How do you do, Amy?"

She put out her hand, and was shocked at the icy little paw which was laid in it. Poor, stiff, cold little fingers! Poor little half-clothed, frozen bodies! She huddled both of the children toward the fire.

"You must be twins," she said by way of conversation. "You look so much alike."

"We are," answered the spokeswoman,

"but we don't dress alike no more." She sighed at the thought of the departed days when they were suitably, similarly clad.

Miss Laurie grasped the situation.

"Well, of course you are growing up," she said. "Twins can't always be little and dress alike."

"No, I s'pose not," they answered.

"Now, you are really big enough to have tea with me this afternoon," she went on.

"Oh—may we?" they cried.

"Indeed, yes," she affirmed. "Off with your things. Here's a fairy-tale book to look at while you rest and wait."

"M-m! We're dead on to these," said Amy as they opened the covers.

"You are?" laughed Miss Laurie.

"Sure!" in unison.

"And didn't you *ever* believe in fairies," she asked, "when you were very, very little?"

"No, ma'am; we was never little enough fer that," said Connie, with mild scorn.

"And you've always lived in New York?"

"Sure—we was born here," said Amy loftily.

"An' we know heaps of people—gran' people, all madam's customers," explained Connie, "an' their maids an' their coachmen an' their cooks, too, some-times. I like cooks best of all."

Several pages were passed in silence. Then Amy scowled.

"Those gran' people are just like us, all the same," she said—and scowled harder at a perplexing train of thought.

"Of course they are, dear child," assented Miss Laurie.

"Things ain't always easy for 'em; they cry same's we do, an' I bet they don't have no more fun, neither."

"Oh, but they ain't *just* the same," ventured Connie deprecatingly.

"Just 'bout the same," insisted the scowling philosopher. "I seen a lady cry awful just a little while ago when I went alone one day to deliver. They cry fer funny reasons, that's all the diff'runce. She wasn't sick, ner nothin'; she was just standin' there with a pit'cher of her husband in her hand, an' she looked at it; an' then she cried awful, till her nose got all red. She said to the

ol' lady, 'Mother, I seen him myself this time. He was drivin' with a woman.'

"I was waitin', an' I got tired; an' I went to the door where I heard talkin', an' that's how I seen; an' I said, 'Here's your dress from Mme. Delano, if you please, ma'am'—an' the ol' lady put her arm around her an' took the pit'cher an' laid it down, an' then took her away. She said, 'You stay here,' an' I stayed—oh, a long time. I looked at the pit'cher, but there wasn't nothin' to cry about in it; just a man." Puzzled eyes were raised from the book to Miss Laurie's face.

"How old are you, dear?" Miss Laurie asked. The tragedy was made so vivid by the child's simple recital that she shivered—shivered at the sorrow and at the child's witnessing it.

"We're twelve, going on thirteen," answered her sister. "Miss Laurie, you look sad now. Did it make you feel bad to hear about the lady crying?"

"Why, yes, I believe it did," confessed Miss Laurie, half laughing as she rose. "But I'm going to see about the tea now; will you amuse yourselves?" They nodded. "There are some pictures you will like in that big book there," and she indicated a folio as she went out.

III.

THEY were absorbed in this when she came back, followed by Marie with the tray. Then they stood by to watch proceedings, though the room was too fascinating to be entirely neglected, now that their shyness was wearing off. They took turns in making short exploratory excursions, each coming back to report and comment upon her discoveries—until suddenly Amy came across something which surprised her so that she could not wait to cross the room and tell about it.

"Why," she cried, "it's him, it's him! You knew him all the time, an' that's why you looked sad, too." She wheeled around from the handsome photograph of Armstead Houston, with his prize bull-terrier at his knee, in its silver frame on Miss Laurie's desk. "Why didn't you say so?"

"Him?" Miss Laurie was puzzled. "Who, child? Who is 'him'? You mean—"

"Why, her husband that she cried about—only there wasn't no frame on the one she was holdin'."

"Her husband—that—she—cried about?" Miss Laurie's lips were white. "You mean that this gentleman"—she rose, and, taking the picture from the desk, put it into Amy's hands—"is the same one whose picture you saw the lady cry over?"

The child nodded.

"Are you *sure*, Amy? Look at it well and carefully before you say—*look at it well!*"

"Course I'm sure"—there was a hint of scornful resentment in the voice—"don't you s'pose I know? Didn't I look at it then, 'cause I wondered what there was to cry about? It's just the same pit'cher—they're just 'zactly 'like—gee, I bet that dog is dandy." She laid the photograph down on the table.

"Here's your tea, children," said Miss Laurie very quietly, "and the sandwiches and cakes. Help yourselves." And then she closed her eyes.

The memory of an exquisite early morning drive with him less than a month before came back to her; the carriage, with a pale, solitary lady in it, which had passed them; the smothered exclamation from Armstead that had led her to voice the thought which she believed lay in his mind as well as hers—"What a tragic figure! Poor, unhappy woman!"

He had laid his hand over hers with a sudden passionate gesture, and said: "Hush! Don't, dear! Let us see only the happy beauty of the morning; let us think only of each other."

She had smiled then at the boyish whim, but now—

"We have to go home now," said Connie, glancing at the clock as it chimed five. "But we're glad we come, ain't we, Amy?"

"You bet we are," assented Amy warmly.

"And so—am I," seconded Miss Laurie, a little catch in her voice. "And you can do something for me as you go," she added, sitting down at her desk. She wrote:

I have found a mutual acquaintance. You will understand. I thank God it is not too late.

B. L.

Folding it into the envelope, she addressed it firmly: "Mr. Armstead Houston, Carroll Arms, Madison Square, North," sealed it and gave it, with the amount for messenger's fee, into Amy's wiry little hand.

"We'll go right there with it ourselves," said Connie. "We got to go 'most there, anyway, 'cause we live in Twenty-Fift' Street."

"An' we'd *like* to take it," urged Amy.

So off they ran; and not until the elevator-door had clanged behind them did Miss Laurie return to her saddened thoughts and her library.

She walked wearily to the table and

raised the heavy silver frame from where the child had lain it. The dark, glowing, handsome face was blurred beneath her vision, but she caught her breath in a brave struggle.

"No," she whispered, "it's not too late; thank God, it's not too late—but—"

Somehow, it slipped from her fingers, and there was a sudden clatter of metal and splintering glass as it struck the tiles of the hearth. Afterward there was silence in the room—silence broken by bitter sobs; and quiet, save for the shaken figure, half kneeling, half lying, face down, against the dull green cushions of the big chair.

FAREWELL.

I AM not worthy? So let be!
Is there no memory, then, to stay
Sentence? Am I, then, less than he
Who kissed the luster of the sea
Your hair had caught, that summer day
You sailed with me?

Have you forgotten utterly
The iris-sunset west, the gleam
Of silver on the heedless sea,
The white ship—that must always be
A dream-ship on a sea adream
For you and me?

Have you forgotten all that we
Whispered beside the helm, and how
Out of the haze beyond the sea
Where the dusk gathered lingeringly,
Sudden there came a song—that now
Yearns upon me?

You have forgotten? So let be!
Summer will come another year,
With its blue sky and silver sea.
Then a new yachtsman friend, maybe,
Will kiss the sea-sheen from your hair
In ecstasy!

James McGregor.

WITHIN THE SHADOW.

BY KATE WHITING PATCH

A SHORT STORY.



“AND by and by you must go abroad and study. That will help ripen your mental powers and broaden your vision. Yes, you must go abroad and see more of the world.”

Eleanor Kent looked up from her nest of cushions. Her pale face flushed girlishly, and her tender gray eyes were bright with affection. “I expect great things of you, Harry,” and she reached out a white hand to the youth at her side.

He took the hand gently as something too precious and fragile for even the warm pressure of friendship, but his eyes fell beneath her glance and his dark face flushed.

“I can't go,” he said.

She looked up surprised. “Why not, boy?”

The young man still avoided her gaze. “I cannot leave you,” he said slowly.

A startled look dawned on Eleanor Kent's face and she gently drew her hand away.

“Why, boy,” she said lightly, “you will come back again.”

Then he raised his eyes and what she read in them brought the blood to her cheeks. She put out her hand again as though to arrest his speech, but he clasped it in both of his and sank to his knees beside her couch.

“I love you,” he said. “I have been afraid to tell you—but I love you and cannot leave you. It has been so perfect—our friendship—the most perfect thing in all the world. I could not speak because of my reverence. I dared not presume. How should you care for me? But when you talk of sending me away, I cannot bear it.”

“Hush,” whispered the woman, “you do not know what you are saying. Our friendship is perfect, and shall be always, but you are just a boy and this is not love. I am ten—fifteen years, perhaps—your senior, and made older still by ill-health.”

“What are years!” cried the boy impetuously. “We are companions, heart and soul. Are you not glad when I come? Would you not miss me if I went away? It is the most perfect love. Do you know what I always call you to myself? Lady of my Soul. All I ask of life is the privilege of being near you always; of caring for you, of worshiping you. Do not talk of sending me away. I cannot go—unless you go with me.”

As he looked up his eyes fell on the painting that hung above her couch, a bit of blue, sunny Venice. His face lighted with sudden inspiration. “We will go together to Italy,” he cried, “and you will grow well again. Browning took his wife to Italy and made her well—and you talk of years—he was younger than she, yet it was a perfect love.”

But Eleanor shook her head.

“He was a mature man when he made his choice, and you are just a boy,” she said, “a boy—twenty-four this June, while I—”

“Stop!” he interrupted, “you make me hate my youth. But you shall see. If you send me away I must go, but my love will not change.”

He bowed his head over the white hand and kissed it. At the touch of those eager lips, a message thrilled from the kissed hand to the heart of the woman. Was she so old after all?

Eleanor Kent turned her face away. “Go and leave me awhile,” she whispered. “I cannot talk any more. I

must think," and, rising quietly, the young man stole from the room.

As Eleanor lay back among her cushions, the slow tears crept from beneath her closed eyelids.

Why must she put it from her, this beautiful gift that had been laid at the door of her heart? Talk of her years as she might, she was a girl still, with all a girl's yearning for the tender things of life and the sweet mysteries of love. Because of her sheltered life they had passed her by. Now had come this youth, eager with enthusiasm and tenderly chivalrous. He had brought her light and warmth and joy; all the girl in her had responded to his bright companionship. She had shared with him her world of books and dreams and music, telling herself that he was just a boy, but feeling all the while his manly strength and his pleasant care of her.

And now it had come to this: he thought that he loved her, was asking her love in return. Should he have it? Ah, why not? Did years count? She felt so young. "I have not changed," she thought. "I feel as I did at twenty, and he is so mature; do we really grow old with our bodies?"

Restless with her questioning she arose and walked toward the long mirror. The figure she met there was slight and girlish enough in the loose rose-colored house-gown. The flush on her cheeks and the shy light in the gray eyes were all that a lover might have asked of a consenting maiden.

"Ah, it is beautiful to be loved," she whispered to herself. "Might she not take the gift?"

The door leading to an outer balcony stood open and she stepped out into the sweet June morning. Climbing roses draped the columns and balustrade, and on an elm near by a golden robin was pouring out his heart in melody. Roses and bird alike spoke to her trembling heart.

II.

ELEANOR stepped to the balustrade and looked down. On the lawn below a slight, dark youth was tossing a ball in the air, watching its skyward journey with eager eyes, running lightly here and there to catch the descending ball, then

tossing it even higher and higher, intent on his lonely game.

It was with a sense of shock that Eleanor Kent watched this eager, flying figure. The flush slowly faded from her cheeks and her thin fingers tightened on the railing.

"Ah, he is just a boy," her lips faltered pitifully. She had fancied him waiting, moody and restless for her summons, and here on the green below her he was working away the impatient moments with a game of ball.

Suddenly, the woman saw the years as they might be. This boy assuming a grave charge the meaning of which he scarcely knew; all the gay impulses fettered, his young blood curbed by unnatural self-restraint, his very youth turned gray before its time. Should she, accepting his chivalrous devotion, rob him of his youth, which, in itself, was a joyous delight to her? Ah, how could it be otherwise?

Slowly, perhaps, but very surely he would begin to realize that his eager young manhood yearned for a love more warm, more human, than she held in her power to give him. The enchanting light that now illumined her in his eyes would gradually grow dim, and he would find himself tied to an aging woman. She knew his faithful nature and how it would add to his suffering. He would stand by her loyally in the shadow, even while his eyes turned wistfully to the sunshine just outside.

"And yet," she faltered, looking down at her white hands, "it might be for such a little while. If only I could be sure of dying before the dream faded for him." Her heart pleaded, "why not, why not?" but she shook her head. "Better the pain now, his brief, boyish pain, and my deeper one of renunciation, than that horrible awakening by and by."

But at last he looked up and saw her standing there. Instantly the ball fell from his hands, and the dark eyes grew serious.

"May I come up?" he asked.

She nodded and watched with a faint smile as he climbed quickly up the rose-trellis.

"A *Romeo's* ladder," he said, "and *Juliet* waiting among the roses"; but she

sank back weakly in a chair, her face very white.

He came to her side and stood there quietly looking down.

"You will not send me away?" he asked again, his chin tremulous.

She raised her sad eyes. "I must, dear boy," she answered.

He sank beside her and bowed his head against her knee, and her hand fell lightly among the dark masses of his hair. "We must keep our perfect friendship," she said gently; "we must not spoil it by playing at love. I have heard that every man chooses some older woman for his first devotion, but she is not the woman he marries. Somewhere in the world a young girl is growing into sweet womanhood for you, and you will keep your love for her."

"Don't—" he interrupted her, "don't treat me like a child."

"You are a child to me," she told him, "and that makes you the more dear. Shall we not keep our perfect friendship?"

She felt his hot tears fall on the hand she held, and he did not know that her tears were dropping on his bowed head and that her poor face was so pale.

"You will let me come just the same?" he asked at last. "I have not spoiled it all by speaking?"

"You have spoiled nothing," she told him. "Cannot a perfect friendship bear this test?"

So they sat together in silence, for the golden robin had finished his song and flown away, and the joy had gone out of the morning.

At last the young man, also, went away.

As she passed the long mirror again on the way to her couch it was a pale, drooping woman that Eleanor Kent beheld there, not the girl of an hour before.

III.

"You hardly show a polite interest in my coming guest," Eleanor said, looking up with a smile from her letter.

"I am sorry that she is coming," returned the young man moodily. "I don't like girls, and she will take up your time and interrupt our reading."

"Helen is fond of poetry, also."

"But three cannot read together," he

protested. "Besides, you know very well that I do not want any one but you."

"And Helen sings very prettily."

"A young girl's music," he sneered petulantly.

"Don't, boy; there is nothing in this world so beautiful as a young girl. Wait and see."

Her own face flushed sweetly, and his eyes rested upon it eagerly.

"She cannot be so beautiful as you," he blurted out.

"Hush!" the color deepened as she raised a protesting hand. "Get the book and read to me. We will not talk any more."

"Forgive me—I forgot," he pleaded, "but don't you see, friendship is only perfect for just us two."

"Then it is a selfish thing and cannot be beautiful," she declared.

"Whatever it is, I want it just so," he returned, "and you know that it is beautiful."

Yet the day that Helen Maynard came he did not refuse to go in for tea, as he had threatened. It was late in the afternoon, and when he entered she was sitting by her aunt near the western window. They were talking together and did not hear his step, and he paused in the doorway with a strange feeling of wonder.

It almost seemed as though two Eleanors were sitting there—the same light hair, the same gray eyes, the same curve of brow and chin, the same sweet, eager face. Wherein lay the subtle difference? Was it a matter of years alone—the light of promise that glowed in the girl's eyes and in the rose of her cheek and in every line of her graceful young body—these things which in the woman had softened into the quiet charm of maturity? The afternoon sun fell about the girl so that she seemed to sit in a circle of light, but Eleanor's chair was a little withdrawn from the glory.

Both saw him at the same moment, and the girl arose as he drew near.

"This is my little niece," explained Eleanor, smiling, "and, Helen, here is your future playmate. Harold Dartmouth has promised to amuse you when I must stay quiet here. Now shake hands and be friends."

The young people laughingly obeyed, and the dreaded hour passed off most agreeably. Helen Maynard belonged to that best type of modern girl, she who, profiting by the greater independence and freedom of the present, yet preserves the sweeter womanly reserve of an older generation.

Her young aunt Eleanor had always been her idol, and this sweet devotion to the "Lady of his Soul" soon won over Eleanor's other devotee.

On the daily walks which they took together he found Helen a sympathetic listener to his rhapsodies, and was willing enough to listen when she in turn told sweet stories of earlier days when he had not known Eleanor Kent.

"Do you know," he said once, "how very like her you are?"

They were coming through a shadowy wood path, and as the girl looked up a shaft of sunlight fell across her face.

"Do you really think so?" she cried. "My mother says I am like her, but I hardly dare believe it. She must have been far more beautiful than I, when she was young."

Her words gave him a strange little shock.

"She is young now," he said quickly.

"Oh, yes," Helen agreed, "but I meant when she was a young girl. Do you know I can't bear it, sometimes, when I think of her frail health and all she has missed—all the young, lovely things. She would have been so beautiful in a home of her own with a splendid husband, and little children to love her. I can't make it seem right, somehow. Of course, she is happy with all her great interest in life and people, but—"

"She is still young," he reiterated chokingly. The day seemed suddenly warm and breathless for him, but the girl spoke calmly.

"Oh, yes," she agreed again, "but she is not young like you and me, with life all ahead of us."

She spread out her arms as though to welcome that life, and then suddenly a tender pathos drove the bright light from her eyes and her arms fell at her side. "Poor little aunty!" she sighed.

The young man quickened his pace. Somehow, this talk and his warm sense of

the girl's sweetness and beauty seemed a disloyalty to the Lady of his Soul, that patient woman waiting in the shadow of the vines for their return.

She greeted them with a question in her eyes that was soon lost in a smile of welcome. Helen went in to her room, and her companion sank on the step by the couch side. "It is good to see you alone," he said.

"Didn't you enjoy your walk?"

"Yes, it was beautiful in the woods, but we missed you. I wish I could carry you there for a day. Why can't I?"

"Perhaps, some day. Do you want to read to me a bit now?"

He took the book from her hand. "We don't read so much these days," he said, turning to the place.

She watched him questioningly. "You have been very kind to Helen," she ventured. "I feared the poor child might be lonely."

But he did not change color as he turned the pages of the book.

"She is very like you," he said simply.

That evening Helen sang for them, and, later, at her aunt's suggestion, they sang together and the two young voices harmonized well.

IV.

It was vacation time for the young man, so he was quite free to lend his aid in entertaining Eleanor Kent's guest. On rare days she joined them in some drive or picnic, but more often she stayed at home to rest while the young folks sought other amusement. There was tennis to enjoy, and a slim canoe on the winding river, or rambles through the fields or woods, and always it was Eleanor's word that sent them off, and Eleanor's smile that greeted their return.

Once when Harold opened the book in one of their now rare *tête-à-têtes*, he said quite naturally, "Would Miss Helen care to read with us?" and Eleanor did not remind him of his early aversion to three-cornered friendships.

So much she entered into the spirit of the happy days, so silent were her withdrawals, that neither man nor maid was quite aware that there were many hours when she was not with them.

Gradually the habits of the day had changed, that was all. Instead of long

hours in happy communion with the elder woman, the young man was, quite unconsciously, devoting his time to the younger one. He read with Helen, he sang with her, and all this, as he thought, in devotion to Eleanor's will. The light fell on the two young faces bent over book or music, or bright with gay talk, and all the while, just within the shadow, the woman lay among her cushions and wistfully looked on, waiting for the moment that she knew would come, yet so ready always with a response when they turned to her that neither guessed she was not with them in their circle of light.

The summer weeks slipped by, and at last it came—that moment of awakening.

The young man had come in ready for an evening on the river, and Helen was coming down the stair. Her white dress shone in the dim light of the hall, and there were wild roses in her hair.

His face lighted eagerly at sight of her. "Are you ready?" he asked.

"I mustn't go," she said, "I must stay with aunty. I've had a letter calling me home to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" The word was like a low cry, and he stood gazing into her flushed face. Their startled eyes held each other for a revealing moment; then the girl, with a little sob, turned away, hiding her hot face in her hands.

Quite blindly Harold turned and made his way to the room where Eleanor was waiting. He went straight to her couch and looked down helplessly.

"Helen is going home," he told her.

"And you are sorry, boy?"

He threw back his head. "I must go with her," he said. "I did not know."

Then his glance fell to her face, and the hot misery burned in his. "What have I done?" he said.

"Hush," she murmured soothingly. "You have done no wrong. You have just learned youth's sweet secret."

"I do not understand," he said. "I

do not know myself. I only know that I love you, that I shall always love you, reverence you, as Dante loved Beatrice in Heaven—but, Helen is my sweetheart." The words fell almost in a whisper.

"Have you told her so?"

His face flushed warmly. "How could I tell her until I had come to you! Oh, my lady, do you not understand?"

"Dear boy, it is all as it should be, all as I would have it. Go now and find Helen, and by and by you will bring her here to me."

As once before, he bent above her hand and raised it to his lips, and then he went away out of the shadowy room into the tender moonlight just outside, where Helen waited among the sweet things of the garden.

And Eleanor turned her white face against the cushion, and whispered softly, "Dear Lord, I thank thee for bending the yearnings of my heart to wisdom."

She would always have his tender reverence now. She would ever be for him his Soul Lady, his Beatrice, something set apart and held sweet and sacred. Yet her heart stirred as she thought of Helen waiting in the moonlight—Helen who was his sweetheart.

That night the girl and the woman looked out together along the shadowy street which the moonlight had transformed into a road to fairy-land. The man had said good night, and one kiss lay warm on the lips of the girl, and one upon the hand of the woman.

And as she watched him vanish down the shadowy street, the girl whispered to herself, "He loved her first because his heart was telling him of me—of me whom he had not seen."

But the woman said silently to her heart, "Dear child, I knew how it would be—he loves her because she is so like me."

THOUGHTS.

THOUGHTS are the flowers grown in every heart.

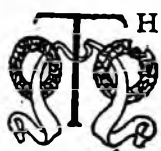
The kindly thoughts bloom ever sweet and fair;
With evil thoughts the black blight comes to kill—
With what thy garden heart is sown have care!

Wallace Arthur.

THE LADY OF THE LANTERN.

BY HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH.

A SHORT STORY.



THE Anita had been lying outside the bar, waiting for the tide, and now, at two in the morning, she was creeping up the river, with a pilot aboard. The night was very dark, and very still, except for the throb of the engines pulsing through the silence like the heart-beats of some primeval monster.

Suddenly, from a low cottage on the river-bank, a ray of light cut through the dark like an arrow. Then swinging, pendulum fashion, it drew luminous arcs against the night. The Anita acknowledged the courtesy with three discordant blasts of her whistle.

Since the Anita was new to the port, the pilot deigned an explanation.

"It's the Lady of the Lantern. That's what the river-men call her. Between dark and sunrise, no boat goes by without her swinging her lantern. And no boat would think of passing her without saluting, any more than if she was the President's yacht. How did it begin? Can't say. That was before my time."

Another man, the lookout in the bow, had thrilled at the sight of the swinging lantern. Old, vague memories stirred at his heart. His pulse quickened. The damp night wind blew in his face the fragrance of vanished springs. To his fancy, the bleak eastern sky was tinged with the tints of sunrise. For a moment the years fell away from him, and he was again a lad of twenty. Half dazed, he passed his hand before his eyes, trying to understand.

It was a home-coming to the lookout—a chance home-coming without joy or anticipation, as if a chip afloat upon a stream should be washed back into the very gully from which it had drifted.

He had seen the familiar lights at the mouth of the river with indifference; but the swinging lantern had evoked misty memories out of which, at last, a woman's face became visible. And the face was not that of his Scotch wife in Glasgow, the mother of his half-dozen sturdy sons.

The lookout, staring ahead of him into the night, was living again a scene enacted on the banks of this very river, twenty-five years before. He could see the figure of the girl who sat beside him with her face turned away. Her eyes were hidden, but the color on her cheeks made him hopeful, and the little hand he held tenderly in both of his trembled.

"Say yes, Molly. You don't know how much I love you. If you did, you'd try to like me a little."

In the averted eyes there were both anger and joy. The girl was glad that the avowal had come, angry that it had been so long delayed. The man did not know that many a night in the year past she had sobbed herself to sleep, wondering whether he would ever have eyes for the beauty which other men had praised. Now her question was answered, but she felt it was only right that he should have his share of uncertainty.

"Promise you'll marry me, Molly," the voice coaxed. "Only be my wife, and I'll make you love me. Say yes, won't you, dear?" The boy tried to put his lips to the crimson cheek, but she dodged in haste, and he drew back.

"You're in too much of a hurry," she told him coolly. "I've got to have time to think it over."

"Oh, don't take too much time, Molly," he pleaded. "The boat sails Tuesday morning."

"You'll be back in two weeks," she suggested, skilfully concealing her reluctance to wait two weeks for the sealing of her betrothal. She laughed exultantly at his exclamation of dismay. If only she had the necessary resolution, two weeks of waiting would do him no harm. But she herself had waited long enough.

"I'll tell you to-morrow, Nat," she said. "Come to-morrow, after dark—I won't be home till supper-time. But if it's no, you'll wish you'd waited longer."

"Give me one kiss, Molly, to keep up my heart on."

She pondered his request judiciously.

"Yes—you may kiss my cheek, if you like. There's no great harm in that." She leaned toward him, and felt the pressure of his lips. For a moment she was tempted to throw her arms about his neck and give him the answer that had been waiting for him through those months of deferred hope. But pride had its way, and her lover's first kiss was his last.

Late next afternoon a lad brought her a sheet of paper folded triangularly and addressed in pencil. She opened it with a sinking of the heart that foreboded no good, and when she had read it she dropped her head upon her arms and sobbed aloud. She had made her lover wait twenty-four hours for purposes of discipline. Now fate had turned the tables upon her, and she was still to be kept waiting. The letter ran:

DEAR MOLLY:

We sail to-night instead of in the morning, and I can't get away to get your answer. If it's "yes," swing a lantern at the door as we go by. If I don't see the light, I'll understand it's "no."

NAT.

II.

MOLLY's tear-stained eyes were not the first to read the note. The messenger who brought it had acquainted himself with its contents, and he detailed them later to an appreciative audience of one. Luke Warden joined grimly in the boy's laughter, but his eyes were not mirthful. After supper he strolled down the river-bank to a little cottage high above the water. Molly sat upon the steps, and not far away stood a lighted lantern.

"You're lighting up early, aren't you?" the man asked, taking his seat beside her. "The sun's hardly set. There's a good half-hour of daylight yet."

The girl did not reply at once. Then she said pertly: "I knew what I was about when I lighted that lantern."

"I guess you generally do. But when you're near, I don't know nothing but you." He watched her narrowly, and she met his look with indifference. She had shrunk from the gaze of the man she loved, but she looked with composure into the burning eyes of the man who loved her. Luke lit his pipe, and the acrid odor of tobacco mingled with the fragrance of the spring night. Occasionally between his puffs he spoke, and the girl answered at random, while the darkness deepened.

Presently through the stillness came a sound apart from the night-bird's call and the croaking of the frogs. Luke extinguished his pipe and put it in his pocket.

"I reckon it's the Susan," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "She sails to-night for Baltimore."

"So I've heard."

The girl's figure was tense, alert. She sat with her hands folded, her chin thrust forward, in the attitude of a listener. Presently she rose, and took a step toward the lighted lantern. Then Luke caught her wrist. The clasp of his fingers seemed gentle, but when she tried to draw away it held like a vise. She frowned upon him, unafraid.

"Let go my hand," she commanded.

"You sit down by me. That's no more than polite when I've taken the trouble to come and see you."

He drew her back to her place on the steps; and though she put all her vigorous young strength into resistance, she was as helpless as a child against him. Yet, as she found herself beside him, her wrist in his iron grip, she faced him furiously.

"You coward! You fool! You talk about liking me. Do you reckon this is going to make me like you? Let go my hand."

Luke Warden sat and smiled. The steamer was very near. Suddenly the girl's voice softened to entreaty.

"Please let me go, Luke. I always thought you were a good friend of mine, but this doesn't seem like it. You've asked me for a kiss lots of times, and I've always said no. But if you let go my hand, perhaps I'll kiss you good-by. Yes, I will, Luke, honest. I promise."

Luke laughed aloud. At the sound a sudden frenzy seemed to seize the girl. She flung herself forward and set her teeth in his thumb.

Luke uttered an exclamation of mingled pain and admiration.

"You little she-devil!" he cried. He forced back her head with his disengaged hand and kissed her on the lips red with his own blood.

Then for the first time the girl screamed shrilly, and a little old woman came shuffling to the door.

"Molly! I thought I heard you. Is anything wrong?"

"Take the lantern, granny," cried the girl. "Take up the lantern and swing it quick!"

The old woman stood bewildered. Before she could collect her dazed wits, Luke had kicked the lantern over. It rolled down the slope, extinguished and broken.

A strange choked sound pierced the stillness. Luke looked at the girl beside him, and in the dark her eyes were luminous, like a panther's. "Luke Warden," Molly whispered, "the Susan's back in two weeks. If Nat don't kill you then, he's not the man for me."

When the Susan came into port, Molly was at the docks. There was light in her eyes, flame on her cheeks, fire in her heart. She looked from one familiar face to another, but did not see the one she sought. Presently, as a man passed her with a word of greeting, she caught his sleeve.

"Where's Nat?"

The man ran his fingers through his hair.

"Where, indeed, the young fool? He's off for a trip round the Horn."

She stared at him with wide-open eyes, and though she did not speak the man saw that she was interested. He went on with his explanation, glad to make himself entertaining to so pretty a girl.

"There was a ship at Baltimore ready to start for Japan, and short two men

in her crew, and nothing would do for Nat but to go. 'There's nobody at home,' he says, 'that cares what becomes of me.' He wanted to see the world, I reckon. That's the way with young fellows."

"Yes, that's the way with them," Molly agreed. She turned and went away, outwardly a blooming young creature with life all before her, at heart an old woman at the end of things.

III.

EXISTENCE in the little cottage on the river-bank passed with seeming uneventfulness. No letters came bearing strange postmarks. No sailor returning from far-off parts heard the story of the broken lantern. Granny died, and Molly went on living in the old house alone, and people suddenly discovered that in some mysterious way her youth had vanished. For when hope dies, youth is not long behind it.

She fell into the way of spending much of her time nursing the sick of the neighborhood. She had the tactful tenderness of the born nurse; and when Luke Warden's sister came one night to ask Molly's help in caring for him, she was astonished to be curtly refused. She went away with her head high.

Two days later she returned, humble and pleading.

"Molly, Luke's awfully sick. The doctor thinks there's little hope for him. And Luke says he can't die in peace unless he sees you."

"I'll come," Molly answered. But her face showed no sign of softening. The two women walked in silence over the half mile between the two homes.

The sick man looked impassively into Molly's face. He was beyond emotion, if not out of the reach of conscience.

"Leave the room, Betty," he commanded his sister querulously. "I've got something to say to Molly."

When the two were alone, he drew his wasted hands from under the blanket. The same thought occurred to them both, that now, in a matching of strength, it was he who would be the helpless one. He pointed to a little white scar on the right thumb.

"Look, Molly. It's been there these years to remind me that I didn't treat

you fair once. I'd like you to forgive me before I die."

She stood beside the bed, more a symbol of Nemesis than of charity. She was not yet twenty-five, but the lines on her face seemed to have been chiseled by the suffering of the centuries.

"Luke Warden, there's no one ever called me unforgiving. And I'll forgive even you the day Nat's ship comes in." She went out of the room without a glance behind. That night Luke died.

Two days later there was no smoke rising from the chimney of Molly's cottage, and the neighbors who broke the lock and entered found her tossing in delirium. The mothers whose children she had nursed shared the care of her, and saved her life. But when the fever had passed her abundant hair was snow-white, and something new and strange looked out of her eyes. Stranger still were her first words every morning—"I think Nat's ship will be in to-night."

After her strength came back, the signaling with the lantern began. Through the daylight hours she nursed her sick neighbors as she had done before, but at night she was always at her post with the lantern lighted and ready. At first there was wonder, laughter, questioning. It came in time to be accepted, like the bar at the river's mouth, and every boat that passed saluted the little cottage.

And so the questioning and the wonder were all things of the past long before the Anita made her way up from the sea that moonless night in May.

His last night in port, Nat strolled along the river-bank in the direction of Molly's cottage. He had seen no familiar face during his stay. The town he had left a quarter of a century before had grown into a thriving city, with nothing about it to remind him that it had ever been his home. But the memory of a girl with averted head, the girl whose cheek he had kissed, did not leave

him. He had a feeling that if he followed this old path where they had walked together, he might find her, just as he had left her, with the blushes on her cheeks, dropping her lashes lest her eyes should lead a man too far.

The blasts of a steamer's whistle broke in on his musings, and he saw a lantern swinging over the steps of a little cottage. He remembered that it was this very sight as he came up the river which had awakened all those old memories. He felt an irresistible impulse to speak to the woman.

She turned, as he asked for water, and held up her lantern to see his face the better. At the same time he saw hers; seamed by a life of toil, tanned by exposure, and crowned with white hair. He thought her very old. As she brought him the tin cup, he drank thirstily, and praised the water.

"It's quite a bit of company for you, having the boats pass so near," he added.

"Yes, it is," the woman agreed. "Besides, I'm looking for a friend who's coming back some day."

"I'm glad he is," said the man cordially. "And it's a good thing for him that there's somebody to watch for him." His voice, with the intonations of one who knew a smattering of many tongues, fell strangely on her ear. "I've got a wife in Glasgow," he went on. "And she watches for me the same way, I'll be bound. Wish you good night, ma'am."

The loyalty of good women! That was the thought that thrilled him as he turned away. How they were watching, the world over, those faithful, unforgetting, unwearied souls. Suddenly he found that he had lost his desire to follow the path of yesterday, and find somewhere in its windings the girl with the restless color and the averted eyes. He set his face toward the docks, and his thoughts were on the woman who waited for him at home.

VISION.

FOR sight to pierce the future's misty veil,
To read life's mystic signs—for this men pray;
But better far the sight to see the good,
The beautiful that fills each common day.

Arthur Wallace Peach.

BENTLEY'S WAY.

BY JOHN ALWIN.

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

"URSA MAJOR."



RS. HAMELIN'S annual dance was in full swing. The great ballroom, with its decorations in cerise and gold, was crowded by men and women who knew that their presence at that time was the hall-mark of their social standing. The hostess had long since retired to her own apartments, where, after sipping a glass of milk, she was ready to prepare for the rest which her advanced years and the depleting cares of social leadership made doubly necessary to her. She was simply a gray old lady.

"Marie," she said suddenly to her maid, who was putting the famous tiara away in the secure wall-safe, "ask Miss Plimpton to come here."

Marie moved toward the door; and Mrs. Hamelin, arising with an apparent effort which she never betrayed in public, closed and locked the door of the safe, first assuring herself that the tiara and the necklace had actually been placed in their trays. This was a precaution which she never omitted when the jewels were put away.

Miss Plimpton entered.

"Go to the ballroom," said Mrs. Hamelin, "and get word to Mr. John Bentley that I wish to speak to him. You know him, of course?"

"By sight," said Miss Plimpton, whose duties as secretary to a social leader included acquaintance with a thousand names and faces.

"Few persons know him except by sight. He will be standing in some corner, with his hands behind him." The old lady smiled grimly. "He only comes

because he considers it his duty—out of respect for me."

After Miss Plimpton had gone, Mrs. Hamelin sat quite still and waited, alone. A cheerful fire danced in the open fireplace, but she drew her hands well into the sleeves of her negligee, as if to encompass them with a warmth which the friendly flames could not lend them. Her feet, in their fur-lined slippers, rested on the fender.

"I am growing old and cold," she whispered to herself—"old and cold."

But this somber reflection was interrupted. The door opened, and John Bentley entered. His big frame looked awkward in his evening clothes. His forehead was contracted in its habitual look of powerful concentration.

Mrs. Hamelin nodded gravely. "Sit down, John," she said. Then, as he drew a chair near her, she added: "I haven't had a talk with you since your mother died. Ten years ago, isn't it?"

He inclined his head.

"Ten years," she mused — "and she was my best friend. All that time I have been meaning to talk to you, but we have both been so busy—managing our two worlds. We are both captains, eh, John?"

He smiled his frowning smile.

"For forty years now, I have been dominating the comedy of manners; for ten, you have been dominating the drama of gain. In both leaderships the same qualities are required, don't you think? A knowledge of the right human metal and the ability to shape it. But I have played a part in your drama, too, John. Since Mr. Hamelin died, I have looked after all my stock holdings myself. Fifteen years of it, and no losses." She smiled at him with pleasant eyes.

He began to see what she was leading up to. Ignoring the gentle processes of her tact, he said:

"You think I stick too close to my own drama."

"Yes—considering your birth, your strength, and your money."

"Dear Mrs. Hamelin, it is purely a matter of my own choice."

She bent forward and laid her hand on his arm. "Certainly it is," she said earnestly. "But ask yourself—is it the right choice? There are only two things worth while in life, John. One is work, the other is love."

"And I think only of work." There was a note of impatience in his voice. "I do not entertain. I do not go out, except at your annual invitation—and then I stand silent in a corner. Oh, I know just how you feel about it. But I simply cannot cloak myself in social artifice. I cannot bear to see natural human roughnesses polished away. In this world of yours there is no unexpected. Within narrow limits, you know what every man and woman you meet will say and do."

She laughed frankly. "You have heard what they call you, John?"

"Yes; '*Ursa Major*'—'The Great Bear.'"

"In your case, it's something more than a phrase of the stock-market. Just think for a moment. You were born into one of our best families—thirty-eight years ago, wasn't it? You were well educated, you have always had money, but you refuse to fit into the position that belongs to you. When, on an occasion like this, you are dragged from your lair, you go about growling until people are afraid of you. As for women, you don't look at them—at least, not the kind I know."

"I don't look at any kind," he put in sharply.

"You poor boy!" She held out her hand. "Think about what I have said. You have been over the ground yourself, no doubt, many times; but, at my request, go over it again. And do not lay too much stress on the importance of human roughness. In a true leader, individuality is never destroyed by culture."

He took her hand. "In any event, I have had no intention to be ungracious

with you, Mrs. Hamelin. It is simply that I ought to have been born on the East Side—in a tenement."

"Well, John"—she spoke musingly—

"I'm an old woman. I have had my triumphs. People say that success has made me hard. Perhaps it has. But even if the triumphs I have won, and the position I have gained, seem futile to many persons, I have found it all quite worth while. The social life has to be lived, and it might as well be lived completely. Now run along back to the ballroom, and have a good time."

As he disappeared through the door, she leaned forward and spread her hands before the fire.

The cotillion was ending with an informal waltz when John Bentley re-entered the ballroom. He glanced over the brilliant scene, and his face almost showed his inward sneer. Mrs. Hamelin, his mother's friend, would condemn him to this! She would have him bow and scrape and keep from other people's toes—literally and figuratively—he who played with railroads as other men play at chess! No, so much position as seemed to him desirable was assured to him by birth. But this game, here under the flashing electroliers—this game which was played to languorous music—he would have none of it. It was artificial, exotic, unreal.

Two of the dancers stopped near a door that opened into the conservatory. With experienced grace, the man led the girl through the doorway, to a nook behind some potted palms. Two empty chairs were there, and as the girl sank into the nearest one and opened her fan, the man looked at her with an admiration so keen that she laughed openly.

"A little dangerous, isn't it, to sit alone here with an eligible girl?" he railed. "You are eligible, you know—even now."

"Three seasons? Is that long?" She turned the full splendor of her eyes on him.

"Not for every girl," he answered; "for you—yes."

"If I didn't know your subtle cynicism, Temple, I might suspect that you were going to be serious."

"I won't risk your displeasure by admitting any such intention."

"But what would you say if—"

For a moment he appraised her. The deep eyes, the regular features, the passionate but virgin line of the lips. Hers was such a well-trained beauty that he could discover no flaw in it; and Temple Jernegan was no amateur in such appreciation.

The gray threads in his hair, the fine wrinkles around his eyes, were by no means premature. He looked what he was—a stone that had rolled around in the social sea long enough to become quite smooth.

"Well, Janet," he said at last, "I might suggest that you are one of those fortunate girls whose virtues are so apparent that her opportunities come very quickly."

"And do not return?"

"I would never say that," he protested. "Still, a little more mystery, Janet—a little more. You are not as elusive as you might be."

"But I hate mystery," she said soberly.

"I'm afraid, Janet, that it is you who are becoming serious."

"Isn't that the usual result of our encounters?"

"Encounters?"

"Oh, Temple Jernegan!" she exclaimed. "You are so careful not to mean anything. You understand everything; you believe nothing. And I—I understand little, but I believe so many things I do not understand."

"It is just because you believe so much more than you understand that you can't afford to play the game as I play it—as Martia Rexford and Grace Delancy and Mrs. Vane play it. In your very first season, Janet, you rejected many men that most pretty girls would accept. It was scandalous."

"Oh, yes," she sighed; "I must marry, I suppose. All girls must marry."

"Marriage is the crown of a woman's charm, Janet. You need the right man."

"And, if I married, I should probably get the wrong one."

"With the advantage that you would thereafter be able to recognize the right one."

"And this right one—does he happen to be a friend of yours?"

"Oh, it is not I," he made comic haste to say. "I am too selfish to marry."

Janet laughed. "How cleverly you anticipate defeat," she said. "It is quite like you to retreat before the battle begins."

"To spare you the effort of victory."

"Well, the right man, then. Who is he?"

Jernegan studied her. "The right man," he said slowly, "is the man who cannot be victimized by either your beauty or your social training. We are hothouse plants, Janet. The man you need was not grown under glass."

"Doubtless."

She was piqued. Accustomed though she was to the subtle, cynical probe of Temple Jernegan's raillery, she was troubled by the knowledge that, to-night, he was telling the truth. For three brilliant seasons her training had held the rein on her emotions, of which, indeed, she was conscious only through occasional vivid flashes. She knew that she was capable of deep feeling, though no man had yet aroused it. Her good sense had kept her from marrying without love—she did not need to marry for money—so that her position was that of one who waits for something that cannot be foreseen.

"I don't know the man," Jernegan went on; "but if you ever do meet him, I shall be sorry for both of you."

"Sorry!"

"Why not?"

She gave up the effort to fathom the question, and she did not answer it. There was an angry light in her eyes that added fire to her beauty.

"Actually, Janet," he went on, "there are men you cannot fascinate."

"You enjoy the immunity of many scars," she said.

"I? No, indeed. I am a victim. But there is a man here to-night who has no scars. You could not hold him five minutes."

"Nonsense, Temple! If a woman exerts herself with a man of that type—"

"You might exert yourself all you could with him, it wouldn't budge him."

"Indeed!" Her foot was tapping the floor nervously.

"He is here to-night," he repeated.

Had she been less angry, she would have recognized that he was goading her from motive.

"Well," she said, looking past him into the green depths of the palms behind him, "who is this strange person?"

He leaned forward and moved his lips in a whisper. "John Bentley," he said.

"What? *Ursa Major*?"

"The great bear himself."

"I would never pretend to the power of fascinating a walking stock-certificate."

"You slander *Ursa Major* when you call him that, Janet. He is not made of parchment, and, despite his family, he was not grown under glass. The only trouble with John Bentley is that, when he finished college, he had to take charge at once of his father's affairs. The business fascinated him. Now he cares for nothing but the business—a good many thousand miles of railroad. At first he didn't have time for social life. Now—"

"Has he no clubs?"

"Yes; but he has not been seen in one of them for years."

Janet was again staring into the bank of palms. "I have never met Mr. Bentley," she said.

"But you have seen him."

"Occasionally. Every year at this dance. He is always frowning. I don't like to look at men who frown."

"Whoever talks with the bear must expect the bear to growl and to scowl."

"Bring him to me," said Janet coldly.

She did not detect the odd gleam in Jernegan's eyes. Indeed, she was now too much occupied with her own thoughts to notice the man beside her at all. Her pride had been wounded. She felt some shame that she was unable to resist the temptation to justify her pride; but all her repute was based upon it.

"Bring him to me," she repeated.

With a bow of mocking deference, Jernegan left her. The corners of his mouth, as he turned his back, took on a queer twist of satisfaction, which he carefully smoothed away with his hand while he was crossing the floor. He managed, however, to catch the eye of Mrs. Vane, who was the center of a group of four or five men, and she lifted her eyebrows and called out to him:

"On duty, Temple?"

A suggested meaning in his answering smile led her to move toward him.

Mrs. Vane was a rustling widow, who always appeared to walk with her elbows. It was her manner, too, seemingly to obviate all need of caution by uttering in a loud voice what purported to be sacred and intimate confidences. This loud frankness was in no small degree her protection. It also constituted a large part of her attractiveness.

"I have hardly had a glimpse of you to-night," she began. But her eyes were asking a question.

"My loss," he answered. Then: "I have been swimming in an interesting current."

She nodded her secret understanding of his words, and quickly turned to the men who had followed her.

"Fancy!" she exclaimed. "Temple says he has been swimming, when everybody knows that he does nothing but float."

This reference to his dilettanteism, and to his well-understood business of promoting stock companies, brought a laugh, and he moved on toward the silent, frowning figure that stood entrenched behind an empty gilt settee across the room.

John Bentley watched the approach of Jernegan. Many persons had spoken to him during the evening, but every one had abandoned the attack on his indifference, and he was now wondering whether it would not be decent for him to go. He had made his annual show of himself.

"This is nearly the last time," he muttered to himself.

Mrs. Hamelin, he could see, would not live many seasons longer. When she was gone there would be no further social claim upon his duty. And yet he found himself dwelling upon her words. She had distinguished him by a recognition which, perhaps, she had never accorded to another. She understood him far better than her careful sentences had indicated; and he, in turn, knew that she knew that he understood her. Kings and queens must recognize the processes of one another's minds.

After all it was strange, even to himself, that he had taken so little interest in the social side of life. He recognized that at first he had been purely preoccupied. Then, when he had more time, he

found that business sufficed for him. There was no pleasure like the solution of a problem of corporate organization. By tremendous bear operations he had, early in his career, quadrupled the miles of railroad which his father had left to him, buying in depreciated lines with a boldness that astonished the Street, and earned him his nickname. But for five years now his work had been altogether a work of development. Even at this moment his mind was busy, almost subconsciously, with a huge new project—the extension of the B. and R. short line to connect with his main trunk road.

He had met many men and women, but in every case, except when business interest necessitated something like a permanent relation, these acquaintances had been casual. True, he had often thought of marriage, but he had put the notion aside. There was time enough. If he never discovered a mate, what matter, since he was not interested in founding a dynasty?

He had even kept free from vulgar relations with the other sex. It was not that he had moral scruples; he was merely uninterested. Paint and feathers were not in the background of his game—the price of steel was much more important.

This man, Temple Jernegan, who was sauntering toward him, was not Jernegan a type of the society man in business? Or, would it be better to say, the business man in society? At least Bentley despised the type, with its continual veiling of truth by a pretense of intellectual modesty. The rule of conduct which governed Jernegan and his kind was, "When in doubt, be selfish." Bentley himself would say: "When in doubt, get rid of the doubt."

But Jernegan was speaking.

"I am a messenger, Mr. Bentley," he said, "from a pretty girl."

"Yes?" Bentley did not smile.

"She is determined to meet you," continued Jernegan, deprecatingly.

Why not? thought Bentley. The situation was not new to him, though it had occurred more and more infrequently of late years. He remembered Mrs. Hamelin's words: "You go around growling until people are afraid of you." Well, for once he would try to appear gracious.

"At your service—and hers—Mr. Jernegan," he said, so unexpectedly that Jernegan almost showed his surprise.

As they crossed the floor, and entered the conservatory, many eyes followed them. But Mrs. Vane did not appear to notice the phenomenon of John Bentley, the heavy freighter, in tow of a social steam-yacht. Indeed, she talked louder than ever. She almost appeared to be trying to distract attention.

Jernegan led the way to the nook in the conservatory, and spoke Bentley's name. Janet held out her hand.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Bentley?" she said, nodding her dismissal to Jernegan.

Bentley took the chair beside her. Vaguely he realized that he had seen this girl before. There were reasons why she could not be altogether forgotten. For one thing, her beauty lacked the classic coldness. Though she was gowned in the fashion, the jeweled silver dagger which she wore in her hair—something no other girl in the ballroom could have worn—lent a touch that suggested the barbaric.

"I think I know your brother, Miss Marsh," said Bentley.

"Billy? Oh, everybody knows Billy. He's a cheerful soul."

She studied him. He was a splendid machine, she thought—big-boned and strong; full of slumbering reserves of vitality. No wonder that in his singleness of purpose he had succeeded where men of powers—perhaps as great, but divided in their application—had failed.

"Tell me," he said abruptly, with a jerk of his head toward the door, "do you like that man?"

"Who? Temple Jernegan?" He was looking straight into her eyes. It never occurred to her not to tell the truth. "No," she finished, "I do not."

"Then, why do you bother yourself with him?"

"Why? Well, I suppose it is because he is Temple Jernegan. I have always known him. He can be agreeable, when he tries. And—don't you, in your business life, have anything to do with men you don't like?"

"Business is not based upon one's liking for men," he said tersely.

"Neither is social life."

He smiled, with an expression of faint contempt.

"Oh, I know," she exclaimed, with a sudden earnestness that surprised herself. "You are thinking, 'She is trying to say the smart thing, not the true one.'"

"Well?" The word was rude.

"Why are you so contemptuous?" she demanded, with sudden heat. "That is what I wanted to ask you. Why do you go frowning through life with a curl of the lip for everything that interests others. That silent contempt of yours maddens me."

She hardly knew what she was saying. The blood rushed to her cheeks. Temple Jernegan's calculated tormenting of her had left her sensitive to every sign of disapproval.

Bentley drew a quick breath. "It ought to madden you," he said roughly.

He looked at the firm curves of her heaving breast, noted the strength of her perfect chin, raised his eye to hers and, in spite of himself, he made a concession. "I am glad it does madden you," he added. "That proves that you are out of your place."

"Out of my place?"

"Yes, out of your place. If you were like these others, you wouldn't care what I think—any more than I care what they think. Mrs. Vane must know my opinion of her, but half an hour ago she came to me and asked for a tip on Reading." His laugh insulted the absent woman.

"I didn't suppose that any man would talk as you are talking," she exclaimed.

"You invited it. But, if it interests you to know, I will tell you that never before have I talked to any woman as I am talking to you."

"I can believe that," she answered. "You can imagine I feel much honored."

The instinct of her training was to rise and leave him. But, indeed, she had invited his brutality—had done so wittingly, under the spur of Jernegan's careful taunts. She had entered upon a struggle with a strong man—a rude man—and she must not let the weapon of rudeness defeat her.

"I think I must be beginning to like you," he said, staring at the curve of her throat. There was a new light in his eyes.

"Mr. Bentley," she exclaimed, "you simply cannot talk like this. We are not the only persons in the conservatory."

"They can't hear. What matter if they do? I have the right to like you."

"But not to force an odious fact on my attention."

He was now breathing more quickly. "So you find my liking odious?"

"I do."

"For some reason," he said slowly, "that makes me like you still more."

He laughed shortly. "You and I seem to be stripping our souls naked. Do you know why?"

She was too outraged to answer.

"It is because, without reference to good or bad, we mean something to each other. I feel more alive."

Janet leaned toward him. Her eyes blazed. "I don't understand how you dare," she whispered.

"I don't understand why I dare," he admitted. "You are beautiful, but it isn't merely your beauty. You try to repel me, but my feelings do not spring from the stimulus of an obstacle to be overcome."

She endeavored to analyze the situation coolly, but a sudden great fear of this man disturbed every attempt at thought. Was he, in truth, a bear incarnate? Had she aroused a wild beast? She wished that some one would come—Temple Jernegan—anybody. And yet she realized that the battle must be fought out.

What most troubled her was the consciousness that she could not fall back upon her feminine weakness for protection. He would welcome a show of weakness. He was acting on brute instinct. With her training, her knowledge of men, she understood doubtless better than he the sudden trend of his feelings. She saw, too, that he was an egoist—that he did not know what it meant to deny himself anything, that he really desired. If he had remained clean, it was only because his desires were naturally clean.

"You don't look like an American," he said suddenly.

She welcomed the apparent diversion of his thoughts. "My mother was an Italian," she explained—"the Countess Paraglia."

"Southern blood," he muttered. "That must be it." Then, louder: "American girls are ice. I have never thought of it before, but they are made up in too great part of calm, cold mind."

"Why have you never thought of it before?" she could not help asking.

"I have been preoccupied."

"And now?" She tried too late to stop the words.

"I know you," he said deliberately. "That explains it. I have been asleep. Only to-night I told Mrs. Hamelin that in this world of hers there was no unexpected. And then I came here and found it. I am awake now."

"I think you would do well to return to your hibernation."

"You think nothing of the sort," he cried. "I am a bear, if you like, but I am an awakened bear. No more winter for me."

Quietly she got to her feet. "I will leave you to rub your eyes," she said.

But he, too, had arisen, and barred her way.

"Listen to me," he whispered, and his frowning brows narrowed the more in the intensity of his emotion. "It may be mad—it certainly is strange—but you are going to be my mate. I want you, and I intend to have you. You can't help yourself. I will stop at nothing."

"Beast!" she exclaimed.

"If I am a beast, I am glad. You are going to belong to me. I will never let you alone until you yield."

There was no glow of love on his face, only a burning purpose.

She might have shrugged her shoulders and passed him, but his assured strength made him something worse than preposterous. A wave of fury, such as she had never felt, swept through her and transformed her. Thus might anger have surged in some far-back ancestor of her mother's.

How dared this man demand her? How dared he bully and insult? How dared he try to crush her with the crude force of his superior strength? All her training fell away from her.

"Oh!" she gasped and, with a quick intake of breath, snatched from her hair the jeweled dagger. Quick as a cat she struck.

He caught her descending arm, and held it.

"You tigress!" he exclaimed, laughing exultantly.

Suddenly he threw his free arm around her, and drew her close against him. His eyes gleamed into hers—saw the strength of her passion—nearer and nearer he thrust his face toward hers. There was no surrender in her look, only loathing and hatred, but he lowered his head and pressed his lips upon her bare shoulder. Then he released her.

"You are mine!" he laughed.

One long look of killing hate; then, her head high, she went through the door and crossed the ballroom.

Temple Jernegan approached her, with his mincing but not ungraceful step.

"Well, Janet," he began, "did you chain the bear?"

In the blaze of her eyes he lost his self-possession and backed away, staring after her as she passed without speaking. On into the hall she went, to the dressing-room. Thence she sent a call for her carriage.

And meantime Temple Jernegan returned to Mrs. Vane and whispered close to her ear.

"Did you notice she held that dagger of hers clutched tight in her hand?"

CHAPTER II.

SKIRMISHES.

THE offices of the Inter-Continental were situated in a building which dated from the earlier days of steel construction. They were remarkable for a dingy spaciousness which is seldom found in the more modern tenements of business. John Bentley's private office was the most spacious of them all—and perhaps the dingiest. He liked plenty of room about him when he was at work. Indeed, his habit of pacing up and down while he was dictating letters to his secretary doubtless did something toward keeping him in that prime of physical condition which other men maintain by active outdoor sports.

The confidential men who were closest to him had come to study his physical activity as the barometer of his concentration. The morning after Mrs. Hame-

lin's dance, Marcy, the fourth vice-president, came out of the chief's office, after a short conference, and remarked in an undertone to Callihan, the general-traffic man:

"Looks like a spell of weather. He's wearing out carpet."

"B. and R.?" inquired Callihan.

"Probably. He hasn't given the word yet, but you'd better have those figures handy."

Bentley, however, was not thinking of B. and R. He was hardly thinking at all. After a few hours abed, during which he whirled from dream to dream, he had awakened to a state of novel wonder at himself. Something had come into his life—a woman—the last visitation he would have expected. She had flashed upon him like a great light. He was conscious of only one fact—that he must have her. She must belong to him.

Dimly he realized that he had thoroughly aroused her anger. She hated him. But what did that matter? He would make her yield. When he was determined to have, he would have; and a woman's hatred should be no barrier. He did not consider consequences.

Thus, while he walked his office floor, hurrying through the details of necessary business, he was casting about for the most effective immediate way of reaching her. And it was significant of his business methods that, instead of attempting to reason the matter, he was simply opening his mind to intuitions.

On an impulse, he lifted his desk-telephone and told the office exchange to get Temple Jernegan on the wire. Presently the buzzer rang. He put the receiver to his ear.

"Mr. Jernegan?" he asked. "Can you come over to my office—at once?"

In the interval of waiting, he gave orders that Jernegan should be admitted as soon as he arrived.

Only a few minutes passed before the door opened.

"Morning, Mr. Jernegan," said Bentley with a curt nod. "Sit down."

Jernegan advanced smilingly. "Good morning," he said. "Sorry I had to let you in for that talk with Janet Marsh last evening, but when a pretty girl commands—" Nonchalantly he appeared to dismiss the subject.

"That is exactly what I want to talk to you about," said Bentley.

Jernegan showed no eagerness. "Oh, well," he said, "I didn't mean to let you in for it."

The fine creases in Jernegan's face were more apparent by daylight. He was fast approaching the time when he would be spoken of as "well-preserved." One could predict his course almost as certainly as the astronomer predicts the orbit of a planet—even down to that state of superannuated beauship that worries itself through old age in club-windows.

Bentley was still pacing about.

"Who is she?" he demanded. "Has she any intimates? Who are they? Does she care for any one man?"

"One question at a time," laughed Jernegan, drawing his gloves through his hands. "She is Janet Marsh, daughter of the late John G. Marsh. Her mother was the Countess Paraglia. Janet and her brother, Billy, have a few millions between them."

He paused, and took stock of Bentley's frowning attentiveness.

"This is her third season," he continued. "She is a recognized beauty—a full-blown American beauty."

"But her likings?"

"Two or three minor flirtations; no majors. To tell you the truth, Mr. Bentley, she is too frank to flirt well."

"Is she happy?"

"I think not." Jernegan was all candor. "Our life, here in New York, seems to be unsatisfying to her."

Bentley stopped in his pacing and stood beside Jernegan's chair. "Perhaps you wonder why I am asking you these things?"

"Why, no—not exactly. I fancy you've been a bit touched by her—that you're hard hit, in fact." He watched narrowly for the result of his words.

"Call it that, if you like," said Bentley. "All I know is that I want her. I am going to marry her."

The words were simple and direct. Jernegan did not question their genuineness. But he could hardly conceal his excitement over so quick an admission.

"Isn't this pretty sudden?" he faltered.

"Yes."

"Well—I will keep your confidence, Mr. Bentley."

"There's no secret in it. I don't care who knows."

"But Janet—"

"Oh, she hates me, I imagine. Nevertheless—"

Jernegan knit his brows. He was of no mind to see a swift falling-out between Bentley and Janet Marsh.

"Of course, you know your own mind best," he began; "but I should go a bit cautiously, if I were you. She's high-strung; she has a—well, a temper."

"Yes, I know it. She tried to kill me last night."

"What!"

"With that dagger she wore in her hair. I tell you, she was just like a tigress." Bentley smiled grimly at the remembrance.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Jernegan. He paled, and a network of red veins showed against the whitened background of his cheeks. He could only stare in amazement.

"Enough of that," continued Bentley. "I presume I made her pretty wild."

"You must have! Fancy it! There, in Mrs. Hamelin's house!"

"Oh, she won't hurt me. I like her spirit."

"But you have ruined your chances," gasped Jernegan.

Bentley brought his clenched right fist down upon the palm of his left hand.

"Understand me," he said. "This is not a question of chances. It has simply got to be. I will have her."

In the whirl of his own thoughts, Jernegan could not but realize that Bentley's face—as it was at that moment—would be a repulsive sight to any of the women he knew. It was strong, certainly, and filled with brute determination, but it was hard and unpleasing.

"I'm afraid," muttered Jernegan—"I'm afraid you will find that you can't manage a woman the way you manage the market."

Bentley laughed harshly. "Why not?" he demanded. "You will see. The main thing is not to let go. I will not give up. If she were already married to another man, I would not give up."

"But this little world of ours."

"It makes no difference what world she belongs to. I will be her world"—his nostrils dilated—"and she shall be mine. She will come to snap her fingers at her old life. Don't forget it, she will come with me."

"Of her own free will?"

"Of her own—" Bentley stopped short. The meaning of the question suddenly struck home. Was he to gain for himself a struggling, hating woman?—one who would loathe the sight of him, the touch of him? He put the suggestion out of his mind.

"Of her own free will—or not," he said. "That is as it may be."

Jernegan arose; the evidence of Bentley's determination was enough for him. He had not dreamed of a distraction so great. All he had dared to hope was that Janet would attract this man of iron and that he himself, by treating her carefully, might lead her unwittingly to unlock useful information—as to B. and R. Short Line, for example.

In such a contingency, he would have gone to her and urged her to buy or sell this or that stock. A careful hint would have sent her to Bentley for corroboration of the advice; and then, from her acceptance or her refusal of the suggestion, he could have inferred the position taken by *Ursa Major*.

That was the game he had planned to play. That was the game he had worked out with the pleasant connivance of Mrs. Vane. They had foreseen, both of them, that, if rightly thrown together, an unsatisfied girl, like Janet Marsh, and an unawakened man, like John Bentley, might mean much to each other. They had thought to light a flame. Now Jernegan discovered that they had exploded a magazine!

And what tremendous possibilities were opened to Jernegan! John Bentley was obsessed—the great John Bentley. Jernegan understood him well enough to see that he would give little attention to business until he had come to an understanding with Janet. What a chance for a raid!

"Well," said Jernegan, "I wish you luck. Count on me in any way. You see, I've known Janet since she was a little girl."

"So she says," remarked Bentley dryly.

While this conversation was going on, Janet Marsh was awakening from a troubled sleep. The exhaustion of her rage, when she left Mrs. Hamelin's, left her in a semistupor which, though it was hardly a normal slumber, passed well enough for such, since it carried her into oblivion.

But the sounds of the morning brought her a slow realization of calamity. Something terrible had happened. She could not think what it was, at first, but with each return of consciousness the horror grew greater, until at last she sat up in bed and stared with frightened eyes.

She had tried to kill a man! She had been swept into a furious passion which had made her, in all respects, elemental—like a peasant of her mother's country. Such a thing was undreamed of. She, Janet Marsh, stabbing with a dagger—cast for a part in comedy, and changing her rôle, like a flash, to tragic realism.

As for John Bentley, he was a brute. She almost wished that her blow had struck him. How had he dared?

"Beast!" she exclaimed.

And she scoured at her shoulder with the sleeve of her nightrobe.

But she was Janet Marsh, a woman of the world, with three years of experience in the game of hearts. After all, she had let that crude animal surprise her. Could she not have bested him earlier in the encounter? If she had kept her temper when he made his declaration, it would have been easy to put him in the wrong—perhaps, even, to force from him an apology. Now it was too late; she was the one who must apologize, if she was to regain her self-respect. Odious though he had been, his conduct had not justified a woman of her training to lose all self-control.

As she thought the situation out, she became calmer. She had aroused John Bentley. Considering his long restraint, his years of indifference to everything except business, it was not so surprising that he had flared into rude violence. Some allowance must be made for him.

At the same time, he must be forced to see that there was no place in her

world for conduct such as his. She would enjoy a final triumph over him. She would reduce him to his right position.

Calling her maid, she drank her coffee, then slipped into a dressing-gown and went to the telephone. She found John Bentley's office number, and called for it. She could hardly wait to make her apology, and put an end to the miserable affair.

In a few moments she heard his voice—terse, gruff:

"Hallo! Hallo!"

"Good morning, Mr. Bentley."

"That you, Janet?"

"It is Miss Marsh."

"Oh, well—"

She heard his short laugh.

"I—I—" she stammered—"I wish to apologize for my—for what I did last evening."

"Why?"

"Because it was something I should not have done."

"It was you yourself who did it," he replied. "I like you better for it."

"We will forget that. Now, you understand, I am sorry for what I did."

A pause. Then:

"If you are sorry, I'm ashamed of you."

"What!"

"I say, you have no business to be sorry. You did it. That's enough."

"It is not enough," she cried, frowning at the transmitter. "I apologize, do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand." Again the short laugh.

"As for your own conduct," she continued, "I do not expect an apology, for I don't think you realized what you were doing."

"I realized it perfectly."

She was trying to be very patient, but she was glad that he was not there before her. What power he seemed to have to enrage her!

"The incident is closed," she said. "Good-by."

Now, the truth about Janet Marsh is that she did not at once hang up the receiver. She realized afterward that, in not doing so, she had made a mistake; but, at the moment, she had a notion that he would demand a further answer, and

that she would do well to give him one. Yet, it was a mistake to parley.

"Hold on!" he said. "You aren't done with me."

She made no answer, though the receiver shook as her hand trembled.

"I'm coming up to see you," he said.

"I shall not be at home."

"When will you be at home?"

"I shall not be at home at all, to you. Please understand me. I do not wish to know you."

He laughed. "When a man and a woman come together as you and I came together, they can't be strangers after. You will hear from me, and you shall see me."

She dropped the receiver into its hook. Angrily she went to the window and stared across the avenue into the park.

Why had she parleyed with the man? By trying to be patient, by prolonging her talk, she had enabled him to force his hateful personality again into her mind. All the unexpressed dissatisfaction of her life rose up before her mental vision. Was this the kind of situation into which her experience had led her?

She rang for her maid.

"Get me into my habit," she said, "and tell Greene to saddle Starlight. I shan't want a groom."

"Are you going alone, Miss Marsh?"

"Yes."

She wanted to be alone—to think—and it seemed to her that the sharp air of the winter day might blow all the confusion from her mind.

She dressed rapidly and ran downstairs, impatient to be out of the house.

It was glorious in the park. Galloping along on Starlight—glad to be free from the chaperonage of even a groom—her fears swiftly vanished. Now, in the broad light of day, the shuddering memory of that dagger-stroke seemed but a bit of irresponsible melodrama.

And then, as she swept around a curve, she came face to face with him. He was cantering toward her on a huge black horse of unusual mettle. Without so much as lifting his hat in recognition, he swung around and galloped to her side.

"Well?" he said.

Her eyes were fixed ahead, and the color in her cheeks might have been due to the sting of the air.

"This is not accident," he continued. "When you left the telephone, I got hold of your brother and asked him where you were likely to be."

He chuckled with amusement, and Janet mentally set Billy down in her black book.

"It was necessary to see you," he said quietly. "There is much to be explained between you and me. First, why has this thing happened to us at all?"

She turned to him suddenly with a look that was colder than the day, then looked again straight along the road.

"It has happened, though," he said. "And I am the kind of man who refuses to believe that it could have happened to me in this way unless it happened to you also."

She laid her crop on Starlight's flank and forged a length ahead; but in a moment he was again at her side.

"Oh," she blazed, "I hate you!"

He looked at her frowningly. "I have owned a good many things that hated me," he said—"animals and men. This horse of mine, for instance—he would throw me if he could, but he can't."

No one was in sight. She glanced across at his galloping animal, and it seemed as though she had never seen a beast more powerful. Was the rider stronger still?

With a sudden motion she leaned over and brought her crop down on his horse. It was a sharp blow, and the animal bounded forward. But John Bentley's hand was on the rein, and, after a moment's struggle, the man was again the master. There was not an instant of uncertainty; he simply showed his quick strength, and the horse fell back to his gait.

"You see?" he said, as he came again to her side.

"What conceit you have!" she exclaimed.

"Conceit? Do you suppose I would bother to say these things to any one else? I simply care to show you that I am sure of myself. You are a woman—beautiful, almost spoiled. But there is something in your eyes, in your voice, that makes me want you. You think you hate me. Why, you don't even begin to know me!"

"When will you stop tormenting me?"

she cried. "I do not want to know you. I do not want even to see your face. You are more odious to me than you realize. You think that you can bully me. You rely on your position to save you from the punishment that is usually given to a man who annoys a woman, but I tell you that you are making me desperate. I have never been so insulted, so outraged."

"But I mean it," he said.

"That is the most shameful part of it. You mean it. Yes, I can see that you do. But that does not excuse it." She reined in her horse. "Now leave me!" she commanded.

"I won't," he said. His jaw was set, and his scowl was deeper than ever. "You shall not push me away. I mean to make you my wife—and soon."

She spurred her horse forward. Bentley kept determinedly at her flank, asserting his presence with his eyes whenever he caught her angry side-glance.

They had come to a stretch of the bridle-path that follows the west drive, near the tennis-courts. Carriages and motors were spinning by at their left. A nursemaid scurried across their path, dragging a stumbling child after her. A short distance ahead a mounted policeman was keeping his eye on the traffic.

Janet suddenly turned to Bentley. Her face was set and hard, covering with a mask of ice her inward rage.

"Once and for all," she said in a low voice, "will you let me alone?"

He met her eyes squarely. "I can't."

She rode straight into the carriage-road and up to the policeman.

"Officer," she said, pointing to Bentley, who was close behind her, "that man has insulted and annoyed me. I wish him arrested."

The policeman heard the words over his shoulder. He wheeled his horse and looked from the girl to the man, from the man to the girl. He saw the set scowl of Bentley, the cold rage of Janet.

"Do you know him?" he asked her.

"I do not." The words were as hard as steel.

"What has he done?"

"He has insisted on riding beside me and talking to me. His horse is faster than mine, and I can't get away from him."

The policeman hesitated to make the arrest, for the situation seemed to his shrewd eye very much like a quarrel. He turned to Bentley.

"Will you let this young lady alone?" he asked.

"I will not," said Bentley.

"What's that?"

"I say I will not."

"You heard her say she doesn't want you to bother her?"

"I heard."

"And you won't let her alone?"

"I will not."

The policeman grasped the bridle of the black. "You come along with me," he commanded Bentley—"and you, too, miss."

"Need I be dragged into this?" she asked.

"Somebody will have to make the complaint, miss."

Janet glanced at the crowd which was gathering around them. Carriages were stopping in the drive. She might be recognized.

"Haven't you heard enough to make the complaint for me?" she asked.

The policeman pondered. "Why, yes, I guess I have. I'll look after this fellow." His eye swept over the crowd, and he seemed to sense her possible embarrassment. "You needn't wait," he concluded.

Janet threw one glance at Bentley. What she saw in his face surprised her, for it was no less than silent admiration.

Suddenly he spoke. "You are not done with me," he said.

She turned her horse back into the bridle-path and cantered away.

CHAPTER III.—

THE DISAPPEARANCE.

MRS. VANE had been expecting some word from Temple Jerne-gan, and when he appeared early in the afternoon so as to minimize the chance of interruption by other callers, she did not keep him waiting, but rustled into her reception-room and gave him three fingers of her cool right hand.

"So glad!" she exclaimed. "Sit down and tell me everything."

"I don't know that I can do that," he replied. "There seems to be a good deal that I haven't found out. But"—he broke out abruptly—"how much cash can you get on short notice, Molly?"

"How much?" She stared at him with candid curiosity. "Why, you have charge of all my stock. There's the thousand of Steel Preferred, and the—"

"I know all that. Collateral to the amount of two hundred and nine thousand dollars. But bonds—you have something in bonds, haven't you?"

"Let me see." She began to calculate on her finger-tips.

"Not the divisions, but the total."

"One hundred and seventy thousand."

"City bonds?"

"Most of it. Some railroad."

"Averaging about four per cent?"

"Just about. It's all listed somewhere."

"Never mind that now. You are good for, say, about three hundred and seventy-five thousand. I can control eight hundred thousand of my own. Kistler & Co. would let me have two hundred thousand more. If necessary, I can draw Cortwright in, and Tyler." He fixed his eyes on the opposite wall.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" she cried.

He started out of his reverie. "We've got *Ursa Major*," he said slowly. "He's gone stark mad. He's blind and deaf. We thought last evening that we would play for a tip or two on Inter-Continental if we could get him interested in Janet Marsh. But she lifted him completely out of himself. It's the biggest chance—"

"You've been talking with him?" Mrs. Vane demanded excitedly, leaning far forward in her chair.

"Yes, I have—or, rather, he's been talking to me. He sent for me this morning—wanted to know her history, her occupations, the state of her heart. He acted like a lunatic."

"I never heard of such a thing!"

"We thought we could play a game such as we played with Tyler. But this—well, it's going to be a big killing. He won't do a thing about business till he's come to terms with Janet."

"I can't believe it."

"He gave me full permission to pub-

lish to the world that he is going to marry her."

"Then she—"

"Hates him like poison. Didn't you see the look she gave me when she passed through the ballroom last night? It will be a long time before she forgives me for getting her into the mess."

Jernegan had decided not to tell the story of the dagger.

"But what can he have said or done in those few minutes?" asked Mrs. Vane.

"Made forcible and violent love, I fancy. Acted like a Tatar chief who finds himself suddenly in the presence of a beautiful sultana."

Molly Vane threw back her head and laughed heartily.

"How disreputable of you, Temple! John Bentley isn't a savage."

"He's pretty close to it, Molly."

A thrill of excitement caused her to give a sudden little scream. "Oh, how splendid!" she exclaimed. "And how clever of you, Temple! I almost believe I shall marry you."

Jernegan smiled broadly. "Marriage between us would be like a business partnership, wouldn't it, Molly?"

"We should know how to play the game, at least." She looked at him speculatively, then wrinkled her face in a tantalizing *moue*.

He bowed deprecatingly. "I should dread the results of mating so much experience," he said.

Again she laughed her amusement.

"But this *Ursa Major* business," he continued. "You understand, do you not?"

"I understand that there is a good chance to take him unawares. As to your exact scheme—"

"Have I said anything to you about B. and R. Short Line?"

"No, I think not."

"Bentley plans to develop it—to connect it with the Inter-Continental. He's committed to the policy. Ordinarily no one would dream of fighting him in such a matter. But now—"

"Hasn't he control?"

"Probably. But the stock is now at twenty-seven. It went up from twenty-one when Bentley gave out an informal statement of his plans."

"And your plan?"

"Molly, if you will trust me—if you will take the same chances I intend to take myself—"

"Won't his subordinates look out for his interests?" she asked.

"That's just the point. His is a one-man rule. None of his lieutenants dares to make a new move without orders from him. There's the possibility that they might drag him to the helm in a crisis, but after hearing him talk this morning I am not much afraid of that."

She considered. Jernegan had handled her affairs well. She knew his limitations, but she had confidence in his shrewdness.

"All right, Temple," she said. "Count me in."

"There's a risk," he said cautiously.

"There's always a risk, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"Well—"

"I'll go ahead, then." He rose. "Good-by for now. I'd rather not lay down a definite plan, for what I do will depend a little on the course of events between now and to-morrow morning. But don't think I shall do anything rash. It will be wise to put out a feeler first. Quick action may be necessary, too. You'd better sign the necessary papers now."

"For what?"

"So that I can get at your collateral without loss of time."

She sighed. "It's everything I have, Temple—except this house. Little enough for a woman in my position."

"We'll double it."

"I suppose so."

For a few moments Mrs. Vane stood with compressed lips. Her caution was at war with her greed. But Temple Jernegan had already done so much with her small fortune, and she needed more money. The shifts to which she had resorted to meet the inevitable expenses of her manner of living, would have surprised many of her richer friends. Jernegan was the only person who knew the exact state of her finances.

In the end, however, she went over to the Empire writing-desk in the corner, and made out and signed the necessary transfers at Jernegan's dictation.

He folded them carefully and put them in his pocket.

"I'll keep in constant touch," he said. "You're a good sport, Molly."

She laid her hand on his shoulder and gave him a friendly push.

"Run along," she exclaimed. "You're getting sentimental."

After leaving Mrs. Vane, Jernegan went to the nearest telephone and held a brief conversation with the editor of a Wall Street financial paper, then he hailed a taxicab and gave Janet Marsh's street number.

He wished particularly to assure himself of Janet's resistance to the advances of *Ursa Major*. While he could not exactly see her in the rôle of animal-trainer, he recognized the possibility that, after her first flush of resentment, she might feel flattered by the size of her catch and set herself to the task of doing something with it. That situation must be prevented. A hint of the manner in which Bentley was talking of her; a careful reference to his coarse assurance that she could not resist him—Jernegan well knew the effect which such by-play would have on Janet's indignation.

But the maid who came to the door said that Miss Marsh was not at home.

"Ah!" said Jernegan. "You don't happen to know when I should be likely to find her, Kitty?"

He made it a habit always to know the names of the servants at the houses he visited, though he never called them by name when other persons were near.

"Why, no, Mr. Jernegan. You see, she has left town."

"Really?" He raised his eyebrows.

"Yes, sir; half an hour ago."

"Well," he laughed, "that's what I call sudden."

"It was sudden, sir."

"Nothing wrong, I trust?"

"We don't know, sir."

Jernegan winced at her way of putting the answer. "We" must mean the servants—and, unconsciously, by the tone, the maid was including him in her own class. But he smothered his disgust and continued:

"Where has she gone?"

"She didn't say. Mr. Marsh is to forward her mail."

Jernegan understood. Frightened by Bentley's rough aggressiveness, Janet had run away in a panic—had sought a

hiding-place, probably obscure, where she would feel safe from persecution.

"Thank you, Kitty," he said, and turned away.

At the foot of the steps he came face to face with Bentley.

"Well," he exclaimed, "you are surely losing no time."

Bentley scowled. In the determined lines of his nose and mouth was the cruel, relentless expression of the chase. Never had Jernegan seen a man who looked more like an animal on the track of its prey.

"I have no time to lose," said Bentley gruffly.

"You won't find her here," continued Jernegan.

"No? Not at home, I suppose." The words were a sneer at the accepted social convention. "But she'll have to see me."

"She has left town."

"How do you know that?" Bentley seized Jernegan's arm and held it with a grasp that hurt.

"The maid just told me."

"Bah! The maid! That's what servants are for."

"I am certain that she told the truth," said Jernegan.

"No, it can't be. Still," Bentley relaxed his hold and let his great arm drop to his side—"still, it may be."

"You have frightened her badly."

"Yes. She had me arrested this morning."

"Arrested!"

"In the park—for annoying her. It was the deuce of a pickle!"

"What on earth did you do?" Jernegan's astonishment was so extreme that he could hardly control it. Things were happening which were not dreamed of in his philosophy.

"Gave a false name—pleaded guilty—paid a fine—hushed up a newspaper man who recognized me."

"But what did you do to her? That was what I meant."

"Oh, I insisted on riding with her. Plucky move she made, wasn't it?"

"Plucky!"

"Yes, I rather liked it in her."

"But, my dear Bentley, do you realize what you've done?"

"Scared her." He chuckled harshly.

"She'll be worse scared before I'm through."

"But—"

"Oh, drop it, Jernegan. I recognize the notions of our class. If you want a woman you must flatter her. You must buy gifts for her. You must dangle along behind her and have heart-failure every time she looks around. You must keep up the pleasant fiction that it's all a matter of her choice. Is that what you would say?"

"There's a good deal in it."

"Not for me. If I can't win this woman in my way, I don't want her at all. Before I've finished; she'll be dead sure that I want her. Then, if she can't stand for me, she'll find a way to get rid of me."

"But you have shocked all her sensibilities."

"Of course I have. What of it?"

"And now she has hidden herself."

Bentley laughed. "Oh, don't you worry about that. I'll find her. A woman who looks as she does can't stay hidden long. Then, as you know, I have the machinery for finding people—my railroad detectives."

Jernegan stared. "I thought their business was to keep tramps off your lines."

"Their business is to do what I want them to do," said Bentley shortly. "In my experience, if a man wants anything, the best way to act is to go after it—and go after it hard."

"You talk like a—cave-man," exclaimed Jernegan. He almost said, "bear."

"Perhaps. But our ancestors—yours as well as mine, Jernegan—weren't altogether fools. We've brushed a few more coats of varnish over the original, and that's about all we have done. Our ancestors saw some things in human nature that people to-day can't see, because of the varnish. I haven't much varnish myself; and I can see Janet Marsh through the varnish. She'll do."

Jernegan pondered. His own notions of life were stimulated by this frank exposition of a savage philosophy that was alien to anything he had ever heard. What most amazed him was that John Bentley seemed to understand the finesse that he scorned. How a man of money

and good birth, understanding the subtler methods of human relationships, could set them aside and revert deliberately to customs that were those of two thousand years ago, was beyond Jernegan's comprehension. It was as though a person who possessed a well-trained appetite should turn his back on a dinner prepared by the best French *chef* and gobble a hunk of raw beef.

Perhaps Bentley was actually crazed. But, no, he was quite clear in all his statements. Examining the situation from every side, probing into every motive, Jernegan was forced to the conviction that Bentley was acting in accordance with a well-established personal theory of life. He was simply applying his business practise to the winning of a woman.

Social life, Jernegan realized, is based upon a recognition of necessary restraints. It implies the boundaries of long-defined conventions of unselfishness. One must seem to be unselfish, even if he is not. But business, you know—well, business is different.

"There comes Billy Marsh!" exclaimed Jernegan suddenly.

Billy was a tall, slow-moving, slow-speaking young man, who looked much bigger than he was. He was renowned for his good-nature and his apparent lack of sophistication. The Italian blood of his mother did not predominate in him.

He waved his hand languidly as he approached.

"Called home by phone," he explained to Jernegan. "Hate to come home so long before dinner; but Janet's flown the coop."

"Where has she gone?" demanded Bentley.

"Search me!"

"You don't know?"

"Why, yes. But I'm not to tell any one. She's quite fluttery about it."

"But it's important that I should see her."

"Drop a line in my care, then, and I'll forward it. Those are the orders. Makes me feel important." He grinned.

Bentley regarded him from under his bushy brows. "I want to know where your sister is. I must see her."

"Why?"

"That's my affair—and hers."

"She threatened to knock my head off—"

"Oh, come now, Billy," laughed Jernegan.

"Well, she made me promise especially not to divulge her secret whereabouts to Mr. John Bentley."

"Did she?" asked Bentley dryly.

"She did. Look here, Mr. Bentley, what have you been doing to Janet, anyway?"

"I intend to marry her," said Bentley.

Billy puckered his lips and breathed a low whistle.

"And I intend to marry her soon," continued Bentley decisively.

"What does Janet say to it? She didn't talk as though she figured on you as first choice."

"It makes no difference what she thinks," Bentley spoke with heat.

The easy smile disappeared from Billy's face. "I imagine you are wrong there, Mr. Bentley. What Janet says, goes."

"Not with me," said Bentley. "You might as well understand it, just as she does. I want her, and I will have her."

Billy stared long at the dogged, frowning man. Then, without a word, he turned on his heel and mounted the steps.

"Come," said Jernegan, crooking his arm through Bentley's elbow. "You've made a bad start with Billy."

"I'm not worrying about the impression I make."

"That's apparent, but come along. There's nothing more to be done just now."

"You're right," said Bentley suddenly, freeing his arm and walking away alone.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEARCH.

BENTLEY had barely entered his office the next morning when Marcy entered, a newspaper in his hand.

"Have you seen the *Morning Ticker*?" he asked.

"No," said Bentley shortly. "Why?"

"There's a paragraph here," began Marcy, but he stopped the verbal explanation and laid the paper on the desk,

pointing to a few sentences which had been marked with a blue pencil.

Bentley read hastily:

Late yesterday afternoon the report spread through the Street that the Inter-Continental was about to abandon its announced plan for the development of B. and R. Short Line. An effort was made to find President Bentley, but he was not in his office. His absence from his desk may have been significant, for it is several years since he has been missing when important projects were under way. Without the support of Inter-Continental, B. and R. has a dubious future.

Bentley tossed the paper aside. "Is Riley in the city?" he asked.

"Better than that, he's in the office."

"Send him to me. I'll take up this *Morning Ticker* matter with you another time."

"It reads to me as if it had a purpose," suggested Marcy.

"Probably."

"If you care to deny it—"

"Oh, let 'em yawp. Anybody with sense can see that we need B. and R. and intend to do something with it."

"Shall I quote you as saying that, Mr. Bentley?"

"No, I guess not. Come in a little later. I have nothing to say now. Get Riley, and, Marcy—don't let me be interrupted while he is here."

Marcy made his departure obediently, but his lips were compressed and his brow was troubled. He wondered what was wrong with *Ursa Major*. Never in his experience had he seen such an important matter dismissed so lightly.

For the spread of such a rumor, without denial, would surely mean a tumble in B. and R., and a tumble in B. and R.—in view of the delicate relationship between that road and Inter-Continental—would quite as surely affect the Inter-Continental. Inter-Continental was not at that moment as strong in the market as it might be—was not as well fortified against shock as usual—since great sums were tied up in new extensions. The credit of Inter-Continental had been strained to capitalize the future, and while John Bentley's name was in itself enough to carry the great system, if conditions remained unaltered, the slightest

slip in public confidence would threaten all the tremendous Bentley interests.

A pebble may start an avalanche. Marcy knew that B. and R. was the weakest Bentley holding. But surely John Bentley also knew. What was plain to the lieutenant, must be plain to the captain. Why, then, was John Bentley indifferent to this little paragraph in the *Morning Ticker*? Was he blind? Did he not see that, if the rumor went undenied, the country would infer that Inter-Continental had given up the B. and R. scheme, because it could not command the money to carry out the development as originally announced?

"There is something behind it," muttered Marcy to himself. "*Ursa Major* must have something up his sleeve."

This confidence in the infallibility of his chief was not so well sustained but that, when the reporters came to him for a statement, he could not altogether conceal his depression while he told that Mr. Bentley had nothing to say at the moment. His manner did much to strengthen the surmise that something was wrong with Inter-Continental.

And meantime, Bentley was closeted with Riley, the head of the detective service of his road.

"Now, Riley," he said, "you will drop everything else and prepare to spend the day right here. Work by telephone. And first make a list of every country resort within three hundred miles of New York—every one, that is, that is open at this time of the year."

Bentley had analyzed the situation carefully. With such a short time for preparation, Janet was not likely to have gone far. Florida and California were quite out of the question, and she had started too late to catch any of the European boats. Naturally, too, she would avoid all the fashionable centers. And she would keep away from the larger cities, where her presence might become known.

It was possible that she had claimed sanctuary with some friend in the country, but that would have been hard to arrange so quickly. Moreover, Bentley believed that Janet had too much pride to appeal to a friend to hide her. It was her strength against his, and she would fight him with her own wits.

Riley, his brick-colored face betraying

no emotion, got quickly to work. Calling up one railroad office after another, he got the names of the hotels that were reached by different lines. As fast as he wrote them down, Bentley took the sheets from him, and scanned them carefully, trying to determine what places would have been most likely to suggest themselves to Janet.

In the course of a half-hour Riley left the telephone.

"That's about all, I guess," he said, looking at Bentley with eyes that gave no sign of curiosity.

"Now, then," said Bentley, "we are working to locate a girl named Janet Marsh. She left town about three o'clock yesterday afternoon. At least, she went away from her house about that time, probably in her private carriage. Get in touch with a good detective agency. Tell them to put their best men at your disposal. Send one to each of the chief stations—here in the city and on the Jersey side—to learn whether by any chance Miss Marsh was recognized. These men can readily get her picture and show it. I expect their reports within two hours. Tell them to telephone to you here."

After five minutes of telephoning, Riley had carried out the instructions.

Meantime, Bentley had relisted the names of the hotels in groups of ten or twelve, placing together those which were likely to be reached over the same long-distance wires.

"Take these lists to the detective agency," he said, "and give one to each of as many men as there are lists. Tell each man to telephone to the hotels on his list, and find out whether Miss Marsh or any one answering to her description arrived late yesterday. They can describe her from her picture. Tell them to report by phone to this number."

Riley took the papers and moved toward the door.

"And, Riley," Bentley called after him, "tell the men outside not to disturb me in any circumstances. I wish to be absolutely alone until you return. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Walk right in when you come back. If anybody else opens that door, I'll wring his neck. Tell them that outside."

"Yes, sir."

Riley, when he had gone through the door, found Marcy, white of face and anxious of brow, awaiting some word from within.

"For Heaven's sake, Riley," said Marcy, "tell me what's the matter?"

"He's busy," explained Riley.

"But I must see him! B. and R. is down three points."

Riley shrugged his shoulders. "Mr. Bentley says he'll wring the neck of any man that opens that door before I get back."

"Is he mad?" groaned Marcy. "Give me some clue. What on earth is it?"

Riley hesitated. The evident distress of the fourth vice-president had its effect on him.

"If I was to give you any clue," he said, "it would be contained in the words, *cherchez la femme*. That's French."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Marcy as the detective hurried away. "A woman!"

Bentley, meantime, took up his telephone and spoke to the office exchange.

"Don't ring me for any call," he ordered, "unless it comes from one of the numbers I have called this morning. Or unless," he added, "it comes from Mr. Temple Jernegan—or William Marsh—got that?—or"—he paused to chuckle silently to himself—"Miss Janet Marsh."

So absorbed was he by his consuming passion that, as he paced the room during Riley's absence, his mind traveled in lightning journeys from place to place of the possible refuges with which he was acquainted. He pictured Janet terrified, Janet sullen and haughty, Janet in tears.

Business was altogether absent from his thoughts. The paragraph in the *Morning Ticker* had made no impression upon him; to the tide of his stocks, rising or falling, he was indifferent. One emotion dominated him—his great desire for Janet Marsh. To see her with his eyes; to touch her with his hand; to bully her, it might be; but, in any event, to force his personality upon her and to draw from her some return of interest, even though it were fierce hatred—these yearnings surged through him like fever.

She had struck against his consciousness with a heavy blow, and he had hurled himself at her with every ounce

of his impetuous energy—only to meet with repulses and eventually to find that she eluded him. But he would find her. By Heavens! He would find her! And she would receive the less mercy for her efforts to resist him!

Thus passion raged in him.

Riley did his errand and returned—to be interrupted again by the frantic Marcy, who laid a detaining hand on the detective's sleeve just as he was about to open the door of the private office.

"For Heaven's sake, do something with him!" exclaimed Marcy.

"I shouldn't care to try just now," replied Riley. "It's pretty serious with him."

"Has this woman caught him bad?"

"She hasn't caught him at all, far's I can see. He's doing his best to catch her."

Marcy groaned. "Our hands are tied," he said. "We can't make a move without word from him. B. and R.'s at twenty-one, and Inter-Continental has already sold down to one hundred and forty-one—a three-point drop, Riley! Think of that! Inter-Continental!"

Riley shook his head. "Sorry," he whispered, "but you know *Ursa Major*. I'd lose my job if I bothered him with the market—now."

"Slip in a casual sentence about the state of things. It may wake him up."

"Well—if he gives me an opening—" Riley went on into the office.

"Everything fixed?" asked Bentley, pausing in his nervous walk.

"Yes, sir. There's quite a bit of excitement in the Street, and—"

The telephone rang, and Bentley sprang for the receiver. It was the first report, covering a list of hotels in Westchester County. At none of them was there any woman resembling Janet Marsh.

"Scratch these names off the list," Bentley ordered Riley, and the detective went to the desk and ran his pencil through the names as Bentley called them.

Almost before this work was done, the telephone rang again, and a report came from the Grand Central Station. No clue there.

The reports from the twenty or thirty men at work now began to come in so

rapidly that the telephone was in use almost without interruption. But Riley at last found the interval to say:

"B. and R. was at twenty-one when I came in."

"Yes?" Bentley spoke abstractedly. He did not even look up from the railroad map he was studying in the thought of finding some resort which might have been omitted from his list.

"And Inter-Continental was down three points," continued Riley.

"Never mind that now. See if you can't do something to hurry the fellow who has the Berkshire list."

"Yes, sir." Riley went obediently to the telephone.

The day wore on without result. At last Bentley, his brow deeply corrugated, glanced at his watch. It was two o'clock.

"Hungry, Riley?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. But I ain't starving."

"Telephone the office manager—Parker—to send out for some sandwiches."

The order was given. When the sandwiches came, a few minutes later, they were brought into the office, not by a waiter or an office-boy, but by the desperate Marcy himself.

Bentley looked up. "What are you doing with those things, Marcy?" he asked, with the first smile that had appeared on his face that day.

"I simply had to see you, Mr. Bentley," Marcy replied, setting the tray on the desk. "B. and R. is at nineteen—at *nineteen!* Inter-Continental has dropped to one-thirty-nine."

"Don't bother me now!" exclaimed Bentley impatiently.

"But, Mr. Bentley—"

"Forget it—and clear out."

"It's very serious."

Bentley strode angrily toward the fourth vice-president. "When I say I'm busy, I mean it!" he exclaimed. "I will not be interrupted. If the bottom drops out of everything, I will not be interrupted. Now, leave!"

"May we act without you?" Marcy trembled as he made the request.

"No!" thundered Bentley.

Breathing hard, Marcy hurried from the room.

Three o'clock came, and four. Only one report was yet unmade, the delay in this case being due to the necessity of

telegraphing to certain remote hotels that had no telephone connection.

"I've given instruction everywhere," explained Riley suddenly, "that this affair must be kept dark."

"You needn't have taken the time to do that," said Bentley. "I'm not ashamed of it. Miss Marsh is the woman I intend to marry. She has run away to get out of my reach. I'm working to find her—that's all."

"Shall I give a story to the papers? They might trace her."

Bentley considered. "Not to-day," he said at last. "After all, there's plenty of time. If we have no luck, we will give out a story to-morrow."

Then came the report they were awaiting. It brought no news.

"Well," said Bentley, "that ends the first effort. Keep half a dozen men out on a general search overnight, and report to my apartment if you learn anything."

"One more matter, Mr. Bentley." Riley showed embarrassment. "I sent a careful man to the neighborhood of Miss Marsh's house to see if he could pick up a bit of news."

"Oh, you did?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well—why not?"

"He is to report at four-thirty."

"Then wait."

In time the man reported. He had learned, by questioning the servants of near-by houses, that Miss Marsh had gone away in her private motor-car about three o'clock in the afternoon of the preceding day. The car had not returned. He had traced it to the Hoboken Ferry and across the river, but it had not been entrained there. It looked as if she had continued over the Jersey roads.

Riley explained all this to Bentley, and added:

"She may be making no long stop anywhere, but touring from place to place."

"Hardly," said Bentley. "That would multiply the chances of being found. No, she has dodged the railroads, fearing that we might trace her. And she hasn't sent the chauffeur back, lest we find him. Lots of resources, that girl." He laughed. "Now you may go," he added. "Use every effort to

trace the car. Get its number, if you can, and a full description of it. I shall stay here—undisturbed, tell Marcy—until six. After that I shall go straight to my apartment."

The detective nodded, and left John Bentley to himself.

Down-stairs the newsboys were calling:

"Extra! Extra! All about the slump in Inter-Continental!"

CHAPTER V.

AT A COST.

INTER-CONTINENTAL closed that day at one hundred and thirty-eight and a quarter; B. and R. at eighteen and a half.

Temple Jernegan had had an exciting day; but he had preserved his manner of impudent amusement at the world in general, and only by the facts that his eyes were brighter than usual, and his step springier, could any one have suspected that he was much elated.

Three brokers had been kept occupied fulfilling his orders, and no one of them knew that he was not the only representative of Mr. Jernegan's interests.

Indeed, he had never before attempted any very large operation. His capital was not up to the million-mark. He had the reputation of being content to play a safe game for small profit. No one dreamed that during all his career he had been waiting for just such an opportunity as was now his—an opportunity which was determined not by the working of economic laws, but by his shrewd insight into human psychology.

He would never have dared to meddle with the Bentley interests unless he had felt quite sure of the effects of a tremendous, blinding passion upon John Bentley himself. The situation was almost too good to be true. But it was true, and Jernegan was not the man to neglect the certainty.

Making his way to Mrs. Vane's, half an hour after the closing of the market, he reviewed the day, and he felt satisfied; though, after all, he had made only a beginning.

"Why didn't you phone me, Temple?" Mrs. Vane demanded, leading the way hurriedly to the reception-room, after

opening the door to him herself. "I've been frantic. Three times I have tried to reach you by wire."

"Our rose-garden is blooming, Molly," he said. "I haven't had a moment to think—even of you—but I have come straight to report as soon as I could get away."

"Well, what has happened? What have you done?" In her agitation, she lifted a vase from the top of the desk beside her and placed it on the window-sill.

"I have been selling," he replied.

"B. and R.?"

"No, indeed! There isn't enough B. and R. stock loose in the market to risk any heavy dealing in it. I've been selling Inter-Continental."

"Oh!"

"Last night I drew one or two others into our game, so that we would have a pool of about two million dollars to work with. It's a tremendous thing, Molly."

"You are risking all that?"

"The more we risk, the better our chances. But to-day was only the beginning. I have sold thirty thousand shares, from one forty-four down to one forty and an eighth. The market closed at one thirty-eight and a quarter. There's a good profit for the day."

"Splendid!" she cried.

Her eyes shone. Her slender, supple figure swayed as she leaned forward in her chair.

"But to-morrow the real fun will begin," he went on. "Bentley has done nothing all day. He did not even deny a damaging rumor which I gave to the *Ticker*. His men are so tight under his thumb that they daren't move without his consent. It is all working out just as I expected."

"Oh, you are wonderful, Temple!" She reached out impulsively and gave his hand a little squeeze.

"I don't approve of being overconfident," he said cautiously. "You and I stand to lose a great deal."

"But what could happen now?"

"Bentley might come to. He is stunned, you see, by this new passion of his. All day, I fancy, he has been working to learn where Janet has gone. I wish he knew—I wish I knew."

"Gone?"

"True, I haven't seen you since I learned it." He told her quickly of his visit to Janet's house the afternoon before, and of his talk with Bentley, and of the scene between Bentley and Billy Marsh.

"Then, Billy knows where she is?"

"Yes, Billy knows."

"And why do you want to know?"

"I should like to inform Bentley. That would get him out of New York to-morrow. I should feel easier if he were out of town."

Mrs. Vane meditated. At last she said: "Billy's a nice boy."

"Yes."

"Leave it to me, Temple. Let this be my part in the work. I'll give you my word that John Bentley will leave town to-night—or, if there is no train to-night, by the earliest train in the morning."

She had a speculative, musing look; and Jernegan, at first, found her changed mood hard to understand. But when he succeeded in catching her eye, and saw the embarrassment with which she turned away from him, he began to comprehend.

"Don't put up too big a margin, Molly," he cautioned.

"I sha'n't risk any capital," she replied. "Trust me."

And thus it came about that Billy Marsh, dressing for dinner in a house that was made singularly empty by the absence of Janet, was called to the telephone to hear the velvety voice of Molly Vane.

"Oh, Billy," she said, "do take pity on me. My plans for the evening have gone to smash, and I shall be all alone unless you come over and amuse me. Do be a good boy and come."

Billy had an engagement, but the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with the fascinating Mrs. Vane would have outbalanced, in his inclination, a command to meet the King of England. He had trailed in her wake all the season, but always in company with too many others.

Now, he might have her to himself. Therefore, he promised with alacrity to come, and afterward floundered out of his previous engagement with the best skill he could.

She received him in her living-room, which had such a cozy, comfortable air that he felt immediately as though his

entrance to it placed him on a footing more intimate than he had dared to expect.

In her red gown, she made a striking figure. Her heavy black hair was waved down across her temples with a simplicity that surprised him; for in her public appearances Mrs. Vane was always stunning rather than simple. He felt that she was appearing to him as she did not appear to others, and his delight ruled out of his mind any possible doubt of the genuineness of her manner.

"This is good of you, Billy!" she exclaimed. "Make yourself comfortable. Smoke, if you feel like it. There are cigars there beside you."

He bestowed himself comfortably and lighted a Havana.

"It was jolly nice of you to ask me," he said contentedly.

She laughed. "I'm glad you had nothing on for the evening."

"But I did have," blurted Billy. "Bridge, at the Davison's."

"Billy!" There was humorous consternation in her voice. "How awful! Have I made you break up a bridge set?"

"You surely have," he replied calmly, gazing at her through the blue strata of the smoke. "Don't you care. They'll pick up somebody. There's always a man to be had."

"I wouldn't let you stay," she said, "if I shouldn't be so lonesome. Isn't it terrible to be alone, with nothing to do—no one to speak to? I simply can't bear it."

Billy nodded.

"I should have asked you to bring Janet, but I heard to-day that she was out of town."

Billy thanked his stars that this was so. "Yes," he said aloud, "she's cut it all for a while."

"How original!"

He looked at her admiringly. "You're particularly fetching in this get-up," he remarked.

"So?" She laughed. "Your frankness is more flattering than the subtlety of other men. Where did Janet go?" The question was matter of course.

"I can't tell."

"Why, how funny!"

"Fact, though. She's in hiding."

"Billy! What are you talking about? Janet in hiding?"

Billy would have been glad to dismiss the subject. But he knew the persistence of feminine curiosity, and, with a notion of satisfying her as quickly as possible, he explained:

"John Bentley's been making love to her. He won't take 'no,' and, of course, she won't say 'yes.' So she has hid herself where he can't find her."

Mrs. Vane exclaimed. "But," she said, "why should she be afraid of him?"

"Oh, he's a rough sort. Regular bully. You ought to have heard him talk to us yesterday. If he does it again—"

"He's a great catch."

"For any one that wants him."

Mrs. Vane stared dreamily into the grate-fire. "Do you know, Billy," she said softly, "I think many a woman would like to be wooed in John Bentley's way—would like to be taken against her will. We are primitive creatures, after all—we women. It is you men who have built up the fiction of chivalry."

"How so?" demanded Billy. "It's the man's job to treat the woman the way she likes to be treated."

She gave him a long look. "Yes," she said slowly; "but that does not always mean the way she thinks she would like to be treated. We don't always understand ourselves. We go by feelings, rather than by reason, and we don't always recognize our own desires. One thing is sure: if the man doesn't master the woman, the woman will master the man. There's no such thing as an equal partnership in love. And—and most women, secretly, would rather be mastered."

"Women usually are mastered," said Billy. "What you call the fiction of chivalry is the fiction of woman's freedom. She cannot be really free; but man gives her the chance to imagine herself free. He lets her spend his money and drag him around from place to place. But all the time she's like the child that pretends to drive a horse by taking hold of the loose end of the reins, while its father is actually in control."

Mrs. Vane was astounded. She had

never heard Billy Marsh talk like that before.

"But Janet—" she cried.

"Ah," said Billy, "the trouble is that John Bentley won't even give her the loose end of the reins. He would like her to cower in the bottom of the wagon and hang on tight."

"I'm not so sure of that." Mrs. Vane spoke carefully, as though picking her words. "He would master her to get her. After he had her, she might well master him. I fancy he would be quite doting—quite content with anything that would make her happy."

"Do you think that the religion of love can civilize a savage?"

"It may, at least, make him amenable to what you call the fiction of woman's freedom. But, oh, Billy, my boy, I don't believe that many women really want to be free."

He bent toward her. "Don't you?" he asked huskily. The change in his voice was the second surprise he had given her. She cast her eyes on the floor.

"I don't know," she said.

He went over to her chair and looked down into her face. "I have never heard you talk the way you are talking to-night, Molly Vane."

"Nor I you. You are a man this evening."

"Am I not always?"

"As I have known you, you have always been a boy."

"A boy!" he muttered. "Oh, I have tried to be what people seemed to like to have me. But, with you, it's—it's different. I—"

With a sudden motion he seized her hand. His eyes glowed strangely.

"Careful, Billy!" she whispered. "Do you want to make me run away—like Janet?"

"If you did, I'd find you!" he exclaimed.

Straight into his eyes she looked, and she said:

"Isn't that about the way John Bentley must have spoken to Janet?"

"It may be. If he did, he was right."

"Yet, you will not tell John Bentley where she is."

"She is my sister."

"Where is she, Billy?"

He tightened his grip on her hand.

"Why do you want to know?" he said.

"Where is she, Billy?"

"Fernbank."

"Fernbank? I never heard of it."

"Near Berryville, in the Berkshires."

Her eyes had not left his. He had answered under the compulsion of her look. But now his face came nearer—nearer. It was her eyes that were held now.

A delicious sweetness of expectation stole over her. In all her being she felt the joy of yielding. Then, suddenly, his arms were about her, his lips were on hers. She gave him back his kiss.

But a swift wave of revulsion swept through her, and she struggled from his embrace.

"No, Billy—no!" she cried. "It won't do. It is all wrong."

Even then she hardly realized how she had permitted herself to be carried away. She liked this boy, and the part she had set out to play with him had suddenly become real. It had meant as much to her as to him.

But the motive she had begun with—her hideous intention to tempt him, by all her attractions, to betray his sister's secret—and all for money—the self-respect that remained in her cried out against even the one moment of happiness. Never before had she gone so far. The horror of it was that she seemed to have destroyed something precious—her innate capacity to love, not this boy, whom she liked—who attracted her—but the right man, when he should come. Her eyes filled with tears of pity for herself and for Billy.

He had drawn away, startled by her changed tone.

"It won't do," she repeated more quietly.

"We can make each other happy," he said.

"No, Billy, we can't—we can't. You are an unspoiled boy, after all. I am a selfish, scheming, middle-aged flirt."

"I don't believe you," he returned stoutly.

"Oh, I am—I am. I—I hate myself."

"Nonsense!"

He moved toward her, as if to take her in his arms again, but she pushed his arm aside and rose to face him.

"You say that you have found me different this evening."

"I find you without the manner you use in society. All women have a society manner that they put on with their jewels. I like you as you are."

He took her hand, but she released it.

"Listen, Billy. You don't believe that I have done wrong to you?"

"I do not."

"I'll tell you something, Billy. I asked you here this evening to make you tell me where Janet has hidden herself. I—I drew you on."

"Well," he said calmly, "I told you."

"Oh, I wish you hadn't!" she cried—and for the moment she meant it. "I wish you hadn't! You have no idea why I wanted to find out."

"That is true."

"I wanted to tell John Bentley."

"John Bentley!"

"I want John Bentley out of New York to-morrow. There is a market deal. I—I am interested. It will be easier, if he is away."

Billy stood like a stone. His face turned gray.

"For money!" he whispered. "For money!"

"Yes, for money." She sobbed.

"But you did care!" His face brightened. "There was a moment when you did care! You kissed me after I had told you!"

Now she might have made her justification. What Billy said was true. But a glance showed her an impossible future, if they tried to meet it together. They would not be happy; dimly she realized that. The harder, selfish elements of her character would inevitably assert themselves. No; she would complete her shame—she would deny that moment of pure emotion.

"That kiss," she said, "was your payment, Billy."

The look on his face caused her to shrink back.

"Tell Bentley, if you wish," he said. "He can't fare worse than I have."

"And Janet?" she faltered.

The answer was cold and hard. "I fancy Janet can take care of herself."

Without another word, he turned and left the room. A moment later she heard the street door close behind him.

Then Molly Vane threw herself into a chair and cried as she had not cried for years. She had thrown away her self-respect, abandoning it in sheer penance for her earlier intentions. That there had been an element of sacrifice in her admission did not comfort her.

Behind her was a path strewn with wasted opportunities. Before her was a blank wall. Only Temple Jernegan seemed near to her now. His philosophy of life would not make an outcast of her. He and his kind, if they knew, might be amused, but they would not seriously criticize her. What was left in life for her was to be found in him. He could help her, not over the blank wall that loomed so high, but around it.

Billy Marsh was but a boy. His illusions were bound to disappear. If she had shattered one of them, her act had helped him that much farther toward his ultimate point of view.

A sudden notion made her laugh hysterically. Why speak of illusions as something to be shattered? Rather, they were like teeth, she thought—sound teeth, which, as a result of a rich social diet, become unsound and must be extracted and replaced by false ones.

She would repeat that fancy to Temple Jernegan some time.

And there was the deal in the Inter-Continental. If she was to live at all, she must have money. Practically everything she owned was now subject to the success of Temple's schemes. The deal must be successful; otherwise she would be impoverished. But, if John Bentley awoke to the situation—Ah!

With her lips compressed, she hurried to the telephone and called for John Bentley's number.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GODDESS AND THE MACHINE.

WHEN Janet rode home, after causing the arrest of John Bentley, her anger against the man was gradually replaced by a recurrence of her fear of him. The more strongly she opposed him, the greater seemed to be his admiration of her. Even her hatred pleased him. Nothing that she had done had checked his aggressiveness.

For all she knew, he was quite capable of seizing her forcibly and carrying her off. She shuddered at the thought.

"The man beast!" she exclaimed.

His open admiration of her methods of self-protection had the effect of a challenge to her to continue single-handed the struggle against him. And, indeed, her pride would not admit any need of assistance.

She knew that his arrest meant only a temporary detention. Soon he would be at her door, spying on her goings and comings, watching his chance to renew his detestable declarations. His power, his virtually unassailable position as a man of affairs, were so great that she could not hope to punish him as a lesser man could be punished. He had the reputation of brutal honesty in all his dealings—and brutal honesty is hard to oppose.

Her dread of new encounters could find only one way of relief. To go away—to hide herself for a time in some secluded place—thus she might be able to face the situation at her leisure, to determine her course coolly, free from the panic which his presence was so likely to arouse in her.

Now, Janet numbered among her acquaintances a young woman in moderate circumstances who spent her summers at a little hotel in the Berkshires—Fernbank, near the village of Berryville. This young woman had described Fernbank as a small, well-conducted inn, open the year round and frequented by persons who desired quiet surroundings and bracing air. The place, as Janet remembered the account of it, would be an ideal refuge for her.

As soon as she reached home she gave orders for a small trunk to be packed and the touring-car to be made ready for a long trip. MacPherson, the chauffeur, was told to prepare himself for an absence of several days. Janet knew that if she went by train she could be traced more easily, and if MacPherson returned to New York he might fall into the hands of some agent of Bentley's who knew how to wring a secret out of a Scot. As a matter of course, she expected Bentley to try to find her.

A brief telephone talk with Billy made the situation fairly plain to him;

and shortly before three o'clock Janet entered the motor-car and told MacPherson to go to the Hoboken Ferry. By taking a roundabout course she hoped to put Bentley off the scent.

Once in Jersey, she explained the journey to the taciturn MacPherson.

"We must reach Berryville, in the Berkshires, this evening," she said. "Don't hesitate to drive fast. Go north, then cross the Hudson to Poughkeepsie, and make for Great Barrington. You know the roads."

"Yes, Miss Marsh."

The car hummed along, and Janet drew her furs about her and settled back for the long ride. Her own thoughts proved fatiguing, and soon she gave up trying to think, and opened her mind lazily to such impressions as the passing scenery brought to her.

It was late when at last the car drew up before the steps of Fernbank, but there were still welcoming lights in the windows of the first floor. Belated motorists not infrequently made the inn a stopping-place.

She observed as she entered that Fernbank was an old country tavern, remodeled to suit modern taste. The main entrance gave into a wide hall, on the right of which was a "parlor." Through the doorway she caught a glimpse of several guests, men and women, reading or talking. At the left was the office—into which the servant directed her.

The office was a long, narrow room, with only the one entrance. A corner near the door was shut off by a counter for the convenience of the manager, a smiling woman, Mrs. Merriam by name, who conducted the house with the help of her sister, Miss Pettingill.

As Janet was later informed, the property had belonged to the Pettingill family for several generations. For a long time it had been occupied by tenants, but after the death of her husband Mrs. Merriam used her insurance money to refit the old place, and induced her sister to give up a position as stenographer in a New York office and come to assist in the management.

The one relic of Miss Pettingill's former profession was a typewriter, which reposed on the desk at the farther end of the office. Occasional visitors who

had not been able to leave their business at home when they came to the country were glad of the opportunity to dictate their correspondence—and Miss Pettin-gill was not loath to "keep her hand in" and add something to her own and her sister's scanty margin of profit.

As Janet's motor drew up at the entrance, Mrs. Merriam hurried to the office, and, bobbing under the counter, took her position. Her smile almost disappeared in her astonishment when she saw the beauty of the fur-clad figure who was ushered in from the hall.

"I shall want rooms for a few days," began Janet. "I am Miss Marsh. My friend, Miss Reese, told me of Fernbank."

"You are very welcome," said Mrs. Merriam. "This is a quiet place. There are few guests at this time of the year."

"That pleases me." Janet favored Mrs. Merriam with a dazzling smile. "The quieter the better. My chauffeur will want quarters. I intend to keep the car here."

"Certainly. He will be cared for. Will you let me show you the rooms that we have?"

As she followed Mrs. Merriam upstairs, Janet found herself relaxing in the comfortable atmosphere of cheerful quiet. One glance had shown how genuine and well intending was the hostess of this quaint refuge.

The furnishings of the room she inspected were unpretentious, but in good taste. At last she made her choice of a bedroom and a sitting-room.

"If you will send me a pot of tea and a poached egg—" she said. "I have had no dinner. And please see that MacPherson has something."

"No dinner!"

Janet smiled wearily. "I have come all the way from New York since three o'clock."

Mrs. Merriam's eyes opened wide.

"I have been disturbed and annoyed," Janet hastened to add. Then, as she read the question in Mrs. Merriam's eyes: "I must be quiet, by myself, for a few days—in a place where I shall not be found. There may be an effort to find me. Don't think I—oh, it sounds like a mystery!"

Mrs. Merriam, whose pride was the "tone" of Fernbank, was accustomed to deducing character swiftly.

"Now, it's all right, my dear Miss Marsh," she exclaimed. "You stay right here. No one will bother you."

"Berryville is the nearest railroad station, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"How far is it?"

"Five miles."

"And you have no telephone?"

"No telephone."

"I am glad," said Janet.

And Mrs. Merriam, who shrewdly suspected a love-affair, went to order a much more elaborate supper than had been called for.

Janet slept long and soundly. When she awoke, the sun was already two hours high, and she looked from her window upon a scene that could hardly have been more charming. Even here among the hills, the winter had been singularly open, and there was no snow. From the knoll upon which Fernbank was built, one looked off through a notch in the surrounding hills to a distant prospect of miniature mountains.

The nearer slopes, broken by the uneven fields of small farms, were clothed with pine and spruce. A hundred feet from the house a brook struggled downhill under its partial casing of ice. The outlook was thoroughly satisfying.

During the morning she kept to her room, but after luncheon she donned a short skirt and a sweater and a brown "tam," and strolled for a mile or more up the valley. The exercise seemed to drive away any remaining trace of doubt and uneasiness. Her eyes were luminous with the joy of the open, and she walked with a graceful, easy stride that knew no fatigue.

Surely she was safe here. Nor need she let her mind dwell upon the experiences that had driven her to this refuge. There would be time enough later to think.

Her fellow guests—they were only a handful—were more or less superannuated, and Janet felt free of any obligation to join in their life. Crocheting and endless games of solitaire were not to her taste.

Miss Pettingill, however, interested

her. The efficiency of Mrs. Merriam was openly accounted for by the evidence of experienced maturity, but Janet marveled to see the administrative genius of Miss Pettingill, a slim wisp of a girl in her twenties, undistinguished by any apparent charm. Despite her fragility, Miss Pettingill had a genius for getting things done. She was abrupt, observant, executive; yet by afternoon her time seemed to be her own, and unobtrusively she placed herself at Janet's disposal.

By this time Janet, who had returned from her walk, was glad to have some companionship, and when Miss Pettingill offered to take her to Sunset Rock she gladly accepted.

The path wound up through the woods back of Fernbank and brought them, in the course of ten minutes, to the edge of a sheer cliff—fifty feet high or more. The westerly view was entrancingly far-spread. Braced against the stiff wind, they gazed in silence over many miles of billowed hill-country to a far horizon.

And presently they were talking as women will when they meet casually in an out-of-the-way place and like each other—saying things more intimate than they would say to persons with whom their lives are more closely interwoven.

"I explained to your sister why I came here," said Janet, after a time. "Did she tell you?"

"Only that you wanted to be quiet."

"I am tempted to ask your advice," continued Janet impulsively. "What would you do if a man you had only just met—a rich, powerful man—suddenly made violent love to you in an offensive way—tried to bully you—forced himself on you in spite of every protest you could make?"

Miss Pettingill scrutinized Janet with her colorless eyes. "Do you like him?" she asked.

"I hate him," replied Janet slowly. "I have never hated any one as I hate him."

"Does he know that you hate him?"

"Yes. But that seems to make no difference with him. He persists more strongly than ever."

Miss Pettingill was silent.

"What would you do?" persisted Janet.

"If I hated him, I should find some

way of keeping him out of my sight. But"—she started out at the distant view—"do you know, I don't believe I could hate a man who acted that way."

"You would hate *him*," said Janet decisively.

"Perhaps. And it may be that I shouldn't feel as I do about it if I were the kind of girl that marries."

"Oh, my dear!"

"No; men don't marry girls like me—at least, not the right men, the men who would demand all we had to give them. But I like strong men, even if they are rough—even if they are wrong."

"But not if they are beastly."

"No-o-o. Not then."

"Well, this man is just a loathsome animal. When you are near him, you feel as though he might suddenly growl and pounce on you—like a savage dog."

"It sounds unpleasant," said Miss Pettingill. But her eyes still had a far-away look.

The following morning Janet breakfasted with the others, in the dining-room. She was dressed for walking. Her hair was drawn smoothly from her brows and fastened in a knotted braid behind. But before she set out, she learned that the early mail was due at Fernbank about eight-thirty. It reached Berryville at seven-thirty, and the Fernbank stage brought it over. She decided to wait for it.

Meanwhile, she wandered into the office. Miss Pettingill was behind the counter, making entries in a large book which Janet decided must be a ledger. She had time, however, to smile, and Janet took advantage of the chance for a moment of talk.

"Would you care for a spin in my car this afternoon?" she asked.

"I should love it!" Miss Pettingill's face lighted up.

"We'll call it settled, then. MacPherson will take us wherever you wish. He's had one day for doing nothing."

"I can be ready at two. Is that early enough?"

"Oh, yes."

A distant rumble of wheels caught Janet's ear. She glanced from the window and saw a four-seated wagon winding up the road.

"Is that the stage?" she asked.

Miss Pettingill looked. "Yes. The mail is the event of the morning. We never know what it may bring. For that matter, guests often come by the early train and trust to us to accommodate them. We can generally manage."

Janet watched the heavy wagon approach. There was only one passenger—a man. While she peered, the wagon was shut off from her view by the trees and shrubs that dotted the lawn.

Then the driver's whip cracked like a pistol-shot, and the team swung into view at a spirited trot. Around the turn by the corner of the building the wagon came, and stopped short at the foot of the steps. The passenger already had one foot over the wheel.

With a frightened exclamation, Janet sprang back from the window. She knew that heavy figure, that frowning face, with its alert eyes, which already were traveling from window to window. She knew the nervous activity of his movements.

Frantic, she rushed to the desk.

"Quick!" she exclaimed. "There's a man coming—for me—the man I spoke of. Tell him I've gone on to Boston in the car. Tell him anything. Don't let him find me."

Miss Pettingill had no time to recover from her amazement before Janet rushed to the door. To dart through the hall into the dining-room, and so to the kitchen, was the only way of escape she could think of. But, just as she was about to set foot in the hall, one of the guests threw the front door wide open. If she advanced Bentley could not fail to see her, for by now he must be mounting the steps.

She ran back into the office. There was not time to dodge into the enclosure where Miss Pettingill stood and crouch under the counter. The windows were closed, and she could not escape by them. The desk upon which the typewriter rested had no back, and she could not conceal herself behind it. But even now she heard his voice in the hall.

Another moment and he would loom in the doorway. She could picture the odious air of triumph on his face, the insulting effrontery with which he would call her by name.

She was trapped. But, at least, she

might delay the recognition. Hurrying across the room, she threw herself into the chair before the typewriter and bent over a letter which lay on the desk. Her back was to the hall door.

Then she heard his voice.

"I want to see Miss Marsh," he said. "Miss Janet Marsh."

Oh, if that wisp of a woman behind the counter would play the game as it should be played!

"Miss Marsh?" The voice of Miss Pettingill carried just the right shade of regret. "Why, she was here yesterday."

"Has she gone?" Bentley spoke sharply, anxiously.

Would Miss Pettingill tell the lie which to Janet seemed so fully justified?

"Has she gone?" repeated Bentley.

There was a sound of rustling leaves. "Her name is not on the register," said Miss Pettingill.

"Come, now," exclaimed Bentley harshly. "I must see her."

"Oh, I remember now." Miss Pettingill seemed to have settled a doubt in her mind. "She told me to say, if any one called for her, that she had gone on to Boston in her car."

"Ha! To Boston, eh? Which means that she probably went in just the opposite direction. Do you happen to know what way she actually did go?"

"No," replied Miss Pettingill, "I do not. You might inquire at Berryville. She would have gone there first."

A long moment of silence followed. Evidently he was searching his brain for the best plan. To Janet it seemed as though his eyes must be on her, and she bent lower over the letter. For the life of her she could not have read a word of it at that moment.

Then Bentley said:

"How far is it to the nearest telegraph station?"

"Berryville is the nearest."

"And you have no phone?"

"No."

"Can you get a message to the Berryville station for me?"

"Why, yes. We might send one of our men on a bicycle."

"That's well enough."

"You are not going back yourself?"

"No. I'll stay here. She can't have gone far."

"Then you will wish a room, sir?"

"I'll see. Later, perhaps."

There was another moment of silence, and this time Janet felt sure that he was looking at her. To account for her presence at the desk she picked up a piece of blank paper and placed it in position in the typewriter, as if she were about to use the machine. If he was watching she must seem to be busy. He had never seen her in a sweater and a short skirt, or with her hair dressed in this wind-defying fashion, or with her shoulders bent like the shoulders of one who stooped habitually over work. Perhaps he would not recognize her. There was a chance. And if Miss Pettingill could get him to look at one of the rooms up-stairs, she might get word to MacPherson and escape in the motor.

But suddenly she heard him move. His steps came toward her—nearer, nearer. He stopped beside her. She could hear his quick breathing.

"Take down this telegram," he said.

She almost sobbed aloud in her relief. He had not recognized her.

But how could she, who had never used a typewriter, how could she carry out the deception? Would not her failure to write the message betray her? At least she could gain time, and by postponing the moment of detection, the way might be opened to some new, unforeseen avenue of escape. So she bent her head lower, in apparent acquiescence, and placed her hands over the keys.

"Thomas Riley, Racine Building, New York," he dictated.

She struck the keys at random, and made the machine click out a queer assortment of letters for what seemed to her the requisite length of time. Had he been watching her he could not have failed to notice that she did not run the carriage back when she reached the end of the line.

"Bird flown—but, I think—not far," he went on, and again she pounded away at that unintelligible keyboard.

"Come to Fernbank — Berryville — Mass.—with six men—immediately."

He waited for her to finish, then said:

"Now sign it—John Bentley."

She gave the keys a few final despairing blows.

"Now give it to me," he said.

The hard moment had come. She must show him that wretched jumble of letters.

"Quick!" he said sharply.

Desperately she jerked the paper from the machine and held it out to him. As he took it she leaned forward over the desk and buried her face in her arms, and her shoulders heaved with her dry sobs. But Bentley was crumpling the paper in his hand.

"What nonsense is this?" he demanded angrily. "Don't you understand your business?"

The voice of Miss Pettingill broke in upon him.

"The stenographer is not feeling quite herself to-day," she said. "If you will come to the counter and write the message I will look after it."

But Bentley, for the first time, had fixed his eyes on the girl at the desk. Surely no other woman had that most lively line of the neck or such exquisite ears. And the hand was her hand.

He laughed softly.

"Well, Janet," he said.

CHAPTER VII.

FACE TO FACE.

BENTLEY'S tone was so full of his assurance of Janet's helplessness that her pride was stung to the full reassertion of her strength. She felt suddenly calm. That the calmness was the calmness of despair she did not fully know at the moment. Something terrible was about to happen—that much she did realize; but the realization seemed to steady her.

She sat up straight, then slowly rose to her feet and looked at him. The unpleasant smile on his face, the dogged self-will of his chin, the eager desire in his eyes—all added to her revulsion, but she held herself in firm control.

"Since you have found me," she said, "I am not altogether sorry."

"Nor am I."

She ignored the interjection. "We should have had to meet sooner or later. There was bound to be some final understanding between us. You have been very dense—"

"Not so dense as you think, perhaps,"

he returned, filling his eyes with her beauty. "Come, where can we talk?"

"If you will follow—" she began, and at his answering laugh she went to the door, giving Miss Pettingill a reassuring look in passing.

What that young woman may have thought of the situation did not appear in her face. She had done what she could.

In the hall Janet coolly pinned on her "tam" and drew on her gloves. Then, opening the door, she led the way around the house and up the path to Sunset Rock. She did not know what she was going to say, what she was going to do.

He strode along behind her. Was he so sure of her weakness that he was content to bide his time? Or did he realize that she was at the end of her resources, and that, therefore, she must have her say before he took action? Janet asked herself these questions.

She knew that he could, at any moment, reach forward and draw her into his arms, yet she did not fear. Even if he did that, it would mean but one more insult to her, and he had already offended her so greatly that one thing more did not seem to matter.

Coming to the rock, she turned and looked at him for the first time since they had left Fernbank.

"Stay where you are," she commanded.

He halted, balancing himself lightly.

"Now," she said, "there is no need for us to go over the old ground. It is all horrible to me."

"I don't know about that," he said. "It may be unpleasant for you. I can't help that part of it. But I must make you understand."

"Oh, I understand you." She laughed contemptuously. "It is you who are blind. You do not see that it is entirely possible that there should be something you want that you cannot have. You think that it is only necessary to take what you want, or to buy it. You reason in terms of the stock-market. Just as your money would get for you any property there, so you believe that the capital of your physical strength and your determination will triumph over the disgust and loathing that I have for you."

"I am accustomed to having what I want," he returned. "If I seem sure, it is because I am sure. You can't fight me forever. You will end by yielding."

"Do you think so?" She was surprised at her own calmness. "You have much to learn."

"You show fine spirit, Janet," he chuckled.

"Oh!" she cried; her eyes flashing, "haven't you a single decent feeling?"

"I don't know. I want you—that is all I do know."

"And I hate you." She said it not angrily, but with a note of wonder that he could not see how definitely her feeling should bear on his demands.

"I suppose you do," he replied. "You have said so often enough. But whether you hate me or not, I shall have you."

"No," she said firmly, "you will not. That is the one thing that will never be. You can insult me. You can bully me. You can make me so wretched that I don't even wish to live. But you cannot make me marry you."

"You have never yet been satisfied, Janet."

"That is true," she admitted. How had he read her discontent? "I have never been satisfied. It does not look as though I ever should be. I have found what sweetness I could in the life I have been brought up to lead, but there has been very little of it. What little there was has sprung from the fact that the men and women I have known have shown me some respect."

"But you have never lived?"

"No, I have never lived."

"With your beauty, and your capacity to love and hate, you have never lived. You have been waiting."

"Well?"

"I am making you live," he exclaimed. "I am making you hate. I will make you like me, and like me as you have never dreamed of liking."

"You?"

"Yes, I." His eyes were aflame, and he took a step toward her, his arms outstretched.

"Keep back!" she cried.

He studied her determined face, set like a tragic mask, and he stopped.

"Now, listen to me," she said imperiously. "Let me tell you how you

have been made a fool of. That night at Mrs. Hamelin's—it seems a year ago—"

"It was Monday. To-day is Thursday."

"Temple Jernegan taunted me. He said that I could not keep your attention five minutes. I knew I could. I was proud enough, silly enough, to be led into meeting you."

"And you have found it a dangerous game—eh, Janet?"

"An unhappy game."

"Do you think I have found it happy?" he asked.

"I am not interested in that."

"Yet you say yourself that you began it. You played with fire, Janet."

She was silent.

"Since I saw you that night I have thought of nothing but you," he continued. "I have let business slide. They are attacking me in the market, I fancy, but I won't even let my men bother me about it until I have settled this matter with you."

"Because you are secure in the knowledge that no one can hurt you badly in the market."

"Not at all. My interests are huge, but it is often the case with large interests that there comes a time when the capital is too widely extended for safety. If that were not the case, development would be slow work. That is the present condition of my interests. Last week I would have given every bit of my mind to the market. Now I don't care what happens. Everything can go to smash, if it wants to."

How strange the insanity of passion that had seized this man! Janet looked at him with wonder. Then a suspicion flashed into her mind.

"How did you happen to learn that I was here?" she asked.

He laughed.

"Tell me," she repeated. "It is important."

He shook his head.

"You didn't learn by your own wit, I fancy?"

"No. But I should have found you in time."

"And you think I might make it uncomfortable for the person who told you?"

"You might." He grinned.

"Well, I sh'a'nt. I am glad that you came, since we are coming to a real understanding. I wish to know for another reason."

He hesitated.

"Tell me," she insisted.

"Well," he said shortly, "I suppose you have the right to know anything I know. It was Mrs. Vane."

"Mrs. Vane! She wormed it out of Billy." Janet spoke half to herself. "She and Temple—don't you see?" she cried. "You great blind animal, don't you see? It has all been a plot to take you away from the market. Temple Jernegan planned it. Mrs. Vane is his ally. Don't you see?"

"It may be," he replied indifferently. "I don't care."

"You ought to care," she said.

"But I don't. Let 'em get me, if they want to."

For that moment she almost admired him. She had a glimpse of his greater qualities. But his next words brought back her loathing.

"Do you understand now how absolutely I intend to have you?" he demanded. "Do you still think that you can escape from me? You belong to me. There's nothing else in the world. I will follow you everywhere. I will catch you and crush you in my arms. You are mine!"

His eyes blazed with passion, and his nostrils were dilated.

"Don't touch me!" she said sharply, backing away from him.

"I will." He took a step forward.

"No."

"I will."

He was very near. The picture he made filled her with disgust. His hands were knotted and bony, and the fingers were working convulsively. The lower half of his face was darkened by a day-old beard. Above his eyebrows was the smutch of a cinder.

These details she had been too much absorbed to notice until now, and as they struck on her consciousness she shuddered. His hand must not be laid on her. She would die first. And if she must face a future of continued battle against his will, she preferred to die. What money could give her, she

had enjoyed, but that had been little enough. There was nothing ahead for her but the persecutions of this beast and the old wearying round of artificial gaieties that she had found so empty, so dreary.

She sprang to the edge of the cliff, and glanced swiftly down at the rocks fifty feet below. Then her eyes traveled for an instant over the extended landscape to the westward. It was a beautiful world, but its beauties were denied her.

He was still advancing—slowly, sure of possession.

"If you come another step," she cried, "I'll jump."

The smile left his face. "Do you hate me as much as that?"

"I hate you as much as that."

For a long time he searched her eyes, but they did not waver in their intense loathing, nor did the firm line of her lips lose its determination.

"By Heaven!" he muttered, "I believe you do mean it."

"Yes," she said, "I mean it. I don't care to live, if you continue to be near me."

Quietly he turned away and walked several steps, while she remained poised at the edge of the cliff. For a time he stared at the growth on the mountain-side, then, squaring his shoulders, he took out his watch.

"Nine o'clock," he said. "There's a train south at nine forty-five from Berryville."

He mused. "I can hardly make it," he then said.

"You may take my car." She made the offer quickly. "Leave it at the station, and my man MacPherson will get it later."

He nodded. "Thanks. Well, good-by."

"Good-by," she replied.

"I'm going back to the Street," he continued, "for a time."

He gave her one searching look, wavered for a moment, as though reconsidering his decision to go, then plunged into the woods, along the path to Fernbank.

Janet had won. But she felt no glow of triumph. Though the place where he had stood was now empty, she still

seemed to see him standing there; and, with a great wonder and surprise, she realized that she no longer hated him.

CHAPTER VIII.

TERMS.

BENTLEY had made his train. With a seat all to himself in the smoker, he lighted a cigar, and resolutely pushed Janet out of his mind. He would think about her later; but now he had work to do, and he settled down to acquaint himself with the situation he was going home to face.

It was surprising how quickly he was able to concentrate his faculties. Janet had been merely a new and absorbing interest to him. He had wanted her. Two weeks ago he had wanted B. and R.; and while he had got B. and R., and had not got Janet—the first time in years he had failed to carry out a plan of his—he would consider that later.

It was characteristic, moreover, that he had not once inquired into the state of his feeling for Janet. His wont had always been to get what seemed to him desirable to get, without going deeply into reasons—at least, no more deeply than was necessary to assure himself that the thing he desired was not worthless. He acted on the theory that anything that was not without value could be made more valuable. Thus, he would often acquire a property and afterward set himself to discover how he could best use it—how he could weave it into the mesh of his other holdings so as to strengthen the fabric.

Janet was valuable. She had beauty—she had admirable strength of will. For some reason, which he did not attempt to fathom, he wanted her, though he had never before wanted any woman. Why he wanted her was a matter that did not greatly interest him. And when he became convinced that he could not have her, he simply turned his attention to other interests.

He bought several New York papers from the boy who came through the train, and read them swiftly for their stories of the market. There was enough to inform him that some one was raiding Inter-Continental. Doubtless it was Jer-

negan, as Janet had suggested. No large man of affairs would be likely to take part in the movement—at its beginning, at least—for their interests in every case were closely bound up with his; and his downfall, or even his loss, would inevitably mean embarrassment for them. But Jernegan, though he had never done anything in a large way, was the one man in the Street who could recognize the opportunity—who knew that John Bentley had any other interest besides his railroads and the market.

Bentley studied the time-table. He found that he was due to arrive in New York at two-fifty. That meant that the battle on the exchange would be over before he could reach his office.

And anything might happen in the next few hours. That dread specter, Fear, might extend its bony fingers over the temple of the Golden Calf. Men might go mad at the hint that John Bentley was in difficulties, and they would throw their holdings into the tottering market in a frantic effort to save something. And then down would crash some patiently reared structure of financial genius—and another—and another—no one could know how many.

Meantime, his own men were powerless. He had ordered them not to, he remembered. What was it that had kept his mind from the situation? Oh, yes, it was Janet. To be sure, it was Janet. But that had passed, and he must turn all his energies to Inter-Continental.

He decided not to go through to New York, but to stop at New Haven, where he could be at a telephone, and at the same time have access to frequent trains.

At Great Barrington he went into the station and sent a telegram to Marcy:

Support Inter-Continental at your own discretion till you hear from me. Wire me Brookfield Junction, train three hundred and six.

Marcy knew the Bentley methods, and could be relied on at least to stave off disaster for the time.

For a few moments Bentley meditated a plan of arranging for a special train to be ready at Brookfield Junction to take him through to New York in a record run. By that means he might reach his

office an hour before the market closed. The effect of an announcement that he was hurrying back to save the market would be electric. But he had the wisdom to see that he could do more effective work over the telephone than he could by the stage effect of a record-breaking ride.

Marcy's answering telegram was brought to him at Brookfield Junction by the agitated conductor—agitated by the discovery of the identity of this passenger. Bentley tore open the yellow envelope and read:

Opening one thirty-eight. Now one thirty-six one-fourth. Will hold it there. Glad for word from you.

MARCY.

"One thirty-six and one-fourth!" Nearly eight points off since Tuesday! But the fall could be stopped—must be stopped before his credit was seriously impaired. He sent another telegram from Botsford, using the office code this time, and saying:

Learn who began selling. Buy all his brokers offer, but do it quietly. Will phone, New Haven, twelve-thirty.

Then he settled back to wait, for his plan had nearly matured.

When the train pulled up at New Haven, Bentley ran through the station, jumped into a cab, and was driven quickly to the telephone exchange. There he arranged for the uninterrupted use of a New York wire, and two minutes later he heard Marcy's voice.

"Hallo—hallo!" said Bentley. "Are you holding it?"

"Almost. It's now at one thirty-six."

"Who's the man? Jernegan?"

"Yes." Marcy's old confidence in his chief's insight was increased a thousand-fold. How could Bentley have suspected the apparently negligible Jernegan?

"What have you got from his brokers?"

"Twenty thousand odd shares. Most of it is presumably his; though the same brokers, of course, may be working for others."

"Keep on buying from him, but not fast enough to raise the market."

"All right."

"And, Marcy?"

"Yes."

"Get word this afternoon to all our heavy stockholders you can reach that Inter-Continental will be back at its old figure Saturday morning. Tell 'em it's from me."

"Yes."

"But don't let it get around generally that I'm in the field."

"All right."

"Where's B. and R.?"

"Fifteen and a fraction, I think."

"Give it out that the rumor that we were going to drop the B. and R. project was a mistake. Say that the mistake was due to a misinterpretation of the fact that, while we do not intend to carry out our original plan for B. and R., we are including it in a larger plan which involves its extension to a Southern lumber country."

"Yes, sir."

"We'll do it, too, Marcy. I have been figuring it out this morning."

"The statement will have a strong effect, Mr. Bentley—coming from you."

"Say that I am away from the city, and that the new B. and R. scheme was prepared for announcement before I left."

"Ye-es, sir."

"And above all, don't let Jernegan, or any one who is selling, imagine that I am in touch with you. Make it appear that you are giving as much support to the market as you dare without my authority."

"Will you keep the wire open, Mr. Bentley?"

"Yes, until the market closes. I'll leave here on the Boston Express, and shall be in New York at five thirty-six. I won't go to my apartment, for I don't want it known that I have returned. How would this be? Meet me at six at your house. Your wife won't mind if you put me up, will she?"

"No, indeed."

"Then that will be the best plan."

Until three o'clock Bentley had the receiver at his ear for the greater part of the time. Through Marcy, he kept the market where he wanted it—now up a fraction, now down a fraction. If the Jernegan brokers, thinking that Inter-Continental was too strongly supported

to be forced lower, began to buy for their client, Bentley promptly gave so large a buying order that the stock would threaten to rise rapidly, and the Jernegan man would again begin selling.

It was a nice operation, requiring the greatest precision in judgment and in action, and Bentley had never done such work in a more masterly way. By three o'clock he had bought from the Jernegan brokers seventy-one thousand shares of Inter-Continental—a fair afternoon's work.

Then Bentley, chuckling to himself, caught his New York train, and, on arriving at the Grand Central Station, went at once, unrecognized, to Marcy's house and spent some hours discussing plans for the next day. He slept soundly.

The following morning he remained at Marcy's house, and, using the telephone, repeated the tactics of the afternoon before. At noon he had bought from the Jernegan brokers, including the purchases made at New Haven, one hundred and sixty-one thousand shares.

His lieutenants, meantime, had scraped together collateral in large amounts. He was not surprised to find how much credit he could command; for, although the interests to whom he went for money knew that Inter-Continental was pretty widely extended, they had an almost unflinching confidence in his ability to pull through. Their belief in him was based on his ten-year record of dogged perseverance and success.

While he ate hastily the luncheon which Mrs. Marcy sent to the library, he made his final analysis of the situation. Jernegan was caught. An investigation of Jernegan's possible resources had convinced Bentley that he could not command more than two and a half millions of dollars. Estimating what the man must have sold to others, it was plain that he had come close to the end of his collateral. Perhaps there were two hundred thousand dollars left, and that sum would, undoubtedly be used at the afternoon session in an attempt to hold the price down while buying.

The time had come to make the final thrust. After luncheon Bentley went straight to his office and threw into the market buying orders so large that Inter-Continental went up like a shot.

By half past two it was at one hundred and forty-five. It closed at one hundred and fifty, and Bentley could have sent it higher but that, for reasons of his own, he did not wish entirely to wipe out Jernegan's margins. Moreover, there would be no difficulty in holding Inter-Continental close to one hundred and fifty for some time to come.

At three-thirty Bentley sent for Jernegan. When he arrived, a few minutes later, and was shown into the private office, he seemed to have aged twenty years. His hands were clammy, his hair looked matted, and the circles under his eyes gave evidence of the terrible strain under which he had been laboring. The network of fine veins on his cheeks had turned from red to purple.

Bentley grinned at him unfeelingly. "Hallo, *Ursa Minor*," he said.

A ghost of a smile was Jernegan's only answer. He sank into a chair and began turning his hat in his hands.

"You are pretty near down and out, aren't you?" continued Bentley.

"I am in bad." Jernegan's voice was husky. "I am in bad," he repeated, clearing his throat.

"Made a mistake, didn't you? Thought you were going to get me."

There was no answer.

"Inter-Continental is going to stay at one hundred and fifty for some time—till after settling day, Jernegan."

The wretched man in the chair never ceased turning his hat in his hands. He looked dully at Bentley, who was standing before him.

"I owe you something, Jernegan. You have been my very good friend. Suppose you give me a statement that will show just where you stand."

Jernegan leaped suddenly to his feet and his eyes lighted with rage. "Why do you torture me?" he cried. "You beast! Here's the statement. Take it."

He drew a paper from his pocket and threw it to the floor.

"Keep cool!" said Bentley. "I don't want to have to hurt you." He stooped as he spoke, and picked up the paper. Swiftly his eyes ran through it. "Yes," he said, "this is close to what I estimated. Who was in this with you?"

"Oh, several others."

"Mrs. Vane?"

"That's nothing to you."

"Mrs. Vane?"

"Yes—Mrs. Vane!" screamed Jernegan.

"And how many others?"

"Can't you let me alone?"

"How many others?"

"Three."

"How much do you personally stand to lose, Jernegan?"

"All I have." Jernegan turned half away. There was no fight left in him.

"And Mrs. Vane?"

"All—all she has."

"And the others?"

"More than they can afford."

"I owe you something, Jernegan. You introduced me to Janet Marsh."

There was no answer.

"And I owe Mrs. Vane something," continued Bentley. "Mrs. Vane told me where to find Janet Marsh."

"Leave her out of it," said Jernegan.

"No, we will leave nothing out. You were quite sure what I would do when I met Janet Marsh, weren't you?"

"I was."

"You have never known me well, Jernegan."

"No."

"And yet you were quite sure what I would do?"

"Yes."

"And you have known her well for years."

"Yes."

Bentley laughed. "You were right about me, Jernegan—me whom you have never known very well; but you were wrong about her—though you have known her for so many years. She is the one who beat you."

"What are you going to do?" asked Jernegan feebly.

Bentley paced over to a window and looked down into the narrow rift of the street. Far below, swarmed the little black dots of humanity—infinite parasites on the body of earth. As he watched them he felt what he had never felt before—the futility of all their effort.

"What miserable microbes we are!" he muttered. "We fuss and fume and crowd and struggle, but old earth has only to wrinkle her skin, and we vanish. Is it worth while?"

New sentiments, these, for John Bentley.

He thought of the battle that he had just fought and won, and he realized that he had won by lying—he, John Bentley, who was known for rugged honesty. Even Marcy had answered with a dubious drawl of the affirmative when the order had been given to announce the new B. and R. plan as though it had been long arranged. What would Janet Marsh have thought? But why should he trouble himself now with what Janet Marsh might think?

He turned back to Jernegan. "You and I have been making excursions into each other's worlds," he said. "We have been meddling with things we don't understand; and we have both learned our lessons. Now, I am going to let you out. I don't know why, but I am going to do it." He scribbled hasty instructions on a sheet of paper. "Give this to Marcy," he continued. "He will make a settlement by which you will stand just where you stood before this fight began. Pay up Mrs. Vane and the others, and hereafter let me alone."

Jernegan heaved a great sigh, as Bentley waved him away.

An hour later, Jernegan, much more himself, rang the bell of Mrs. Vane's house. She received him with a wearily questioning smile which seemed to indicate that no blow could hurt her. She had followed the progress of the market, of course, and she must know that during so rapid a rise Jernegan would have been unable to buy all he needed.

But he had planned just how to meet her—how to demand credit for something that he had not done—how to retain her confidence.

"Bentley reappeared in the market to-day," he said, "with too many millions back of him. But we have got out of it without loss. I couldn't take profits; there wasn't time. But everything is arranged so that we stand just where we stood at the beginning."

He watched her face. It showed neither regret nor gladness.

"So you see," he said lightly, "we have lost nothing."

She looked at him steadily. He smiled, but the smile brought no answering light to her face.

"You have lost nothing," she said slowly, "because you had nothing to lose. But I—" she choked; then ended hurriedly—"I have lost much."

And Jernegan, with all his shrewdness, did not understand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIRACLE.

THAT evening Bentley discovered that his mind was singularly disturbed. He seemed to miss something. Every little while he came with a start out of vague reveries which fled from him so quickly that he could not tell what they were about. He tried to dismiss them as the elusive fancies of fatigue, but again and again they returned.

When at last he got to sleep, he found himself launched into distressing dreams of failure and collapse. Once in the night he awoke, and, arising, opened his window wider that he might have all the fresh air the frosty winds would give him; but the dreams continued, and in the morning he felt dull and dispirited. Plainly, something was wrong.

It was Saturday. He went to the office and worried through a vast amount of business, but his heart was not in it. And he kept asking himself: "What shall I do to-morrow?"

After a second bad night and a listless morning, he decided suddenly to call on Mrs. Hamelin. He put on his coat, but at once took it off again, and stood frowning into the cheval-glass.

"What an undecided fool I am!" he growled.

He stretched out his long arms, and, bending the elbows, flexed his biceps into huge knots. He filled his lungs.

"There's nothing the matter with me," he exclaimed. "I know there's nothing the matter with me."

Finally he got into his coat for the second time, and went to Mrs. Hamelin's.

"Well, John," she said, "I have been hearing much about you for the last few days."

"Oh, that raid on Inter-Continental? It kept me busy for a time."

She studied him gravely. "No, it was not the raid on Inter-Continental. It was

your astonishing pursuit of Janet Marsh. You know, such things will get around."

"I made no attempt to hide it," he replied calmly. "I was not ashamed of it. But I have put it out of my mind."

"Indeed?" She smiled in a manner he could not fathom.

"Yes. I had to give it up."

"What? John Bentley had to give anything up?"

He narrowed his brows uneasily under her curious scrutiny.

"When one has to give something up, the best thing to do is to put it out of one's mind."

"You are quite capable of putting anything out of your mind, John. I understand that."

"It's been a necessary part of my work," he returned. "One cannot attend to the thing at hand if his brain is charged with something else."

But there was an absent look upon his face. His imagination again saw a girl standing on Sunset Rock, her face full of high scorn of him. Again he seemed to hear her say: "I hate you as much as that!"

Mrs. Hamelin's eyes watched him with keen kindness. "I shouldn't like to see you make a bad mistake, John," she said at last. "I have always believed that there was greatness in you—yes, and fineness, too. What people call your roughness is really impatience. There is only one thing that can teach a man to be patient."

She paused, conscious that he was giving to her words an importance greater than she had expected him to give them.

"Do you remember what I said to you last Monday evening? There are only two things worth while in life—work and love?"

He nodded.

"You can put work out of your mind, John. You can even put love out of your mind. But you can never, never put love out of your heart."

"Love?" He stared at her fiercely. "Love?"

"Oh, John Bentley," she laughed, "you aren't a great bear at all. You are just an overgrown cub that needs to be taught how to behave."

After sitting for a moment in silence, he rose to leave her, with his brain whirl-

ing. It was an abrupt departure, but Mrs. Hamelin understood, and she did not show any surprise when he held out his hand in farewell.

As he walked rapidly through the streets—for he did not at once return to his apartment—he gradually came face to face with the truth. He had wanted Janet Marsh. He had wanted her so much that he would have sacrificed everything else to get her. But why had he wanted her?

Was it because she was beautiful? Other women were beautiful. Was it because he had been piqued by her resentment of his manner? It had never occurred to him to be disturbed by the opinions of men and women who disagreed with his point of view.

What, then? He had wanted her so badly. He still wanted her—wanted her with an aching, yearning, straining heart that seemed to struggle to escape from the confining walls of his chest—wanted her with the desperate hope of a future that would be arid without her—wanted her with the realization that only she could fill the emptiness of his successful life.

But why?

He stopped short in his tracks, and laughed aloud. The brownstone houses on each side of the street frowned down upon him superciliously, but he did not see them. Wheels rumbled, motor-cars honked on the neighboring avenue; but he did not hear them.

"I want her," he exclaimed, "because—because she is Janet Marsh!"

The wonder of it struck him afresh, and he laughed again—joyously, like a boy. Fragments of the old, forgotten songs of youth sang themselves in his ear; and the very pavement of the street, touched by the slanting splendor of the winter sun, was like a rosy carpet.

"Of course I frightened her," he said. "Of course she hates me. How could she know?"

Returning to his apartment, he faced the situation in its more immediate aspects. Naturally, he must go to her again. He must explain to her—remove every reason she had for hating him—and do it all so gently that she would feel no more fear of him.

He took the late train for the Berk-

shires. Again he rode the five miles from Berryville in the Fernback stage. And when he burst eagerly through the open door of the inn, hoping to see her before him, again she was not there.

He hurried into the office. Miss Pettingill looked up at him from behind the counter, and her mouth settled itself down firmly at the corners. Though Janet had not told her all that had happened, Miss Pettingill had drawn her own inferences from the girl's shaken voice, from her trembling hand—for Janet's strength had not stayed with her long after her triumph.

"Where is Miss Marsh?" demanded Bentley breathlessly.

"You cannot see her, Mr. Bentley."

"She is here?"

"She is not here."

He stared at her disbelievingly. "But I must find her," he said with an earnest frown.

"I cannot help you, Mr. Bentley," she answered quietly.

As he looked at her, her features gradually seemed to grow familiar to him. He had seen her before—in some other place. And she had called him by name.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I am Miss Pettingill—Mrs. Merriam's niece."

The name told him nothing. "Where have I met you?" he asked.

A faint smile fluttered across her face as she answered:

"In your own office, Mr. Bentley. I used to work for you."

"Ah!" He did not pause to consider the strangeness of this coincidence. "Then you know me. And you can help me."

She shook her head.

"You must!"

"No," she said. "Miss Marsh does not wish to see you. She is beginning to be happy in the belief that you will not come to trouble her. You have frightened her and hurt her, and—" she broke off.

"But," he cried, "I have come to make all that right. Things are not the same. Don't you see? Can't you understand?"

This was not the John Bentley in whose office she had spent three years.

This was not the John Bentley who had appeared at Fernbank a few short days before. She looked at him doubtfully.

At last she smiled. "You are telling the truth," she said. "Well, Miss Marsh is in the one place you would probably first go to look for her."

"Sunset Rock?"

She nodded, but already he had disappeared. Up the path he hurried. The low branches of the trees whipped his face.

"I must be gentle," Bentley was saying to himself. "I must be gentle."

But when he saw her on the rock where he had last left her, his yearning mastered him. He rushed forward.

She turned.

"Oh!" she cried, putting up her arms as though to protect herself.

He did not stop.

She cast a wavering glance over the cliff to the rocks below, then turned back to him. Had he forgotten what she had said she would do?

Sobbing, she took a step toward the edge.

"Janet!" he cried.

The new note in his voice made her hesitate.

"Janet!"

She looked around. He was only a few feet away, and he did not mean to stop. Now she must jump.

But again his voice held her.

"Janet!"

And then his arms went round her and drew her close to his strong breast.

Silently she struggled, trying to writhe out of his grasp. His hand was on her forehead, pressing it back. Her face was close to his. She shut her eyes.

"Look!" he commanded.

She opened her eyes. His own were close to hers.

Strange currents flashed between them—blinding, thrilling currents. Unspoken questions were answered rapidly without words.

"What does it mean?" she exclaimed.

"Everything is different!"

"Love!" he whispered.

She looked for a moment longer into his eyes; then, with a little cry, she hid her face on his shoulder. He leaned his cheek against her dark hair.

(The End.)