

MUNSEY

September

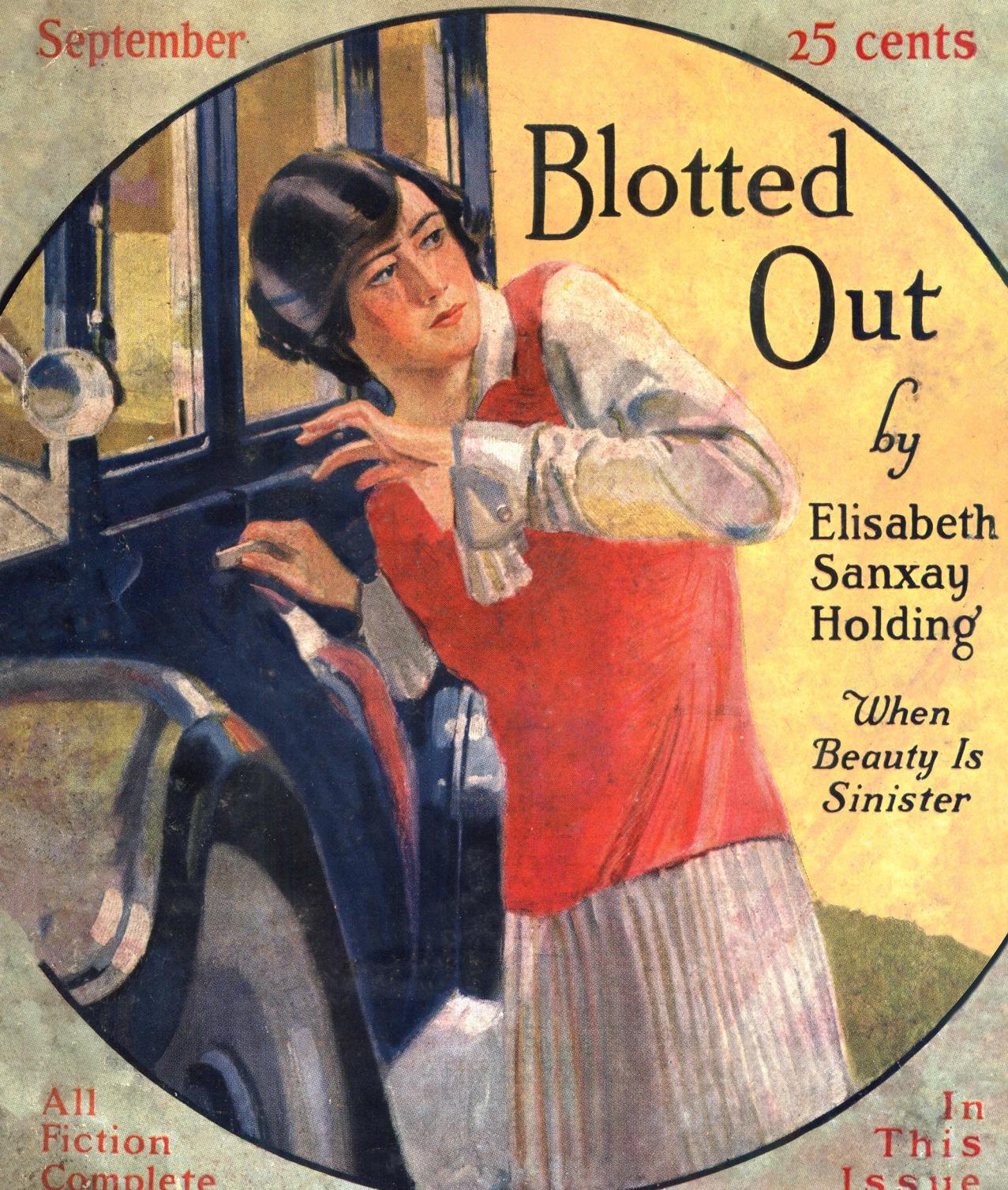
25 cents

Blotted Out

by

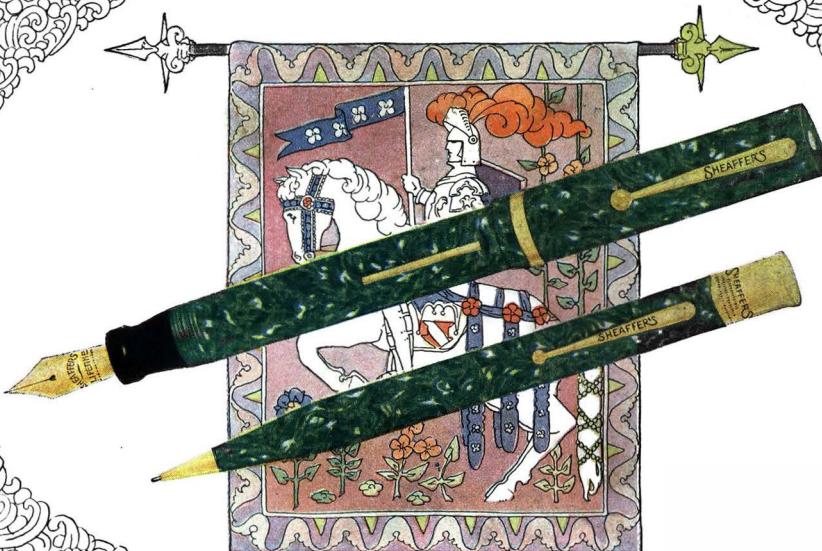
Elisabeth
Sanxay
Holding

*When
Beauty Is
Sinister*



All
Fiction
Complete

In
This
Issue



Identify the aristocrat
of pens by this
white dot

It is the banner pen of a banner year

Success, inspirited, large-measured success has come to the green pen with the white dot. Record millions of them are now traveling in American pockets. They are in evidence everywhere—for the very good reason that they have set new standards in pendum. For the first time a *device* has been *absolutely guaranteed* for a lifetime. No cost for repairs. That's faith. And this ever-dependable Sheaffer Lifetime* is made of handsome and practically indestructible Radite, which also has been a looming factor in this banner-year success.

"Lifetime" pen in Green or black, \$8.75. Ladies', \$7.50—pencil, \$4.25

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PENS • PENCILS • SKRIP

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*Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

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School

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In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE.

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

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THE OCTOBER MUNSEY (on sale Saturday, September 18) will contain a notable novelette picturing to-day's swift set—"Gamblers All," by Charles K. Harris, world-famous author of "After the Ball." Another feature will be Scammon Lockwood's "World Without End," a fascinating excursion into the realm of fancy. A dozen short stories will complete a fine offering.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and

LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE.,
16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W. C. 2

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
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WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
Single copies, 25 cents. By the year, \$3.00 in United States, its dependencies, Canada, Mexico and Cuba; \$4.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered.

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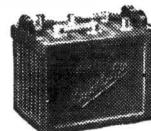
Whether you are buying a battery for your car or for your radio set, it is no longer necessary to take a chance with an unknown make. Prest-O-Lite Automobile Batteries can be bought from \$15.50 up—and Radio Batteries from \$4.75 up.



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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



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Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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RINGS
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Extra Prizes

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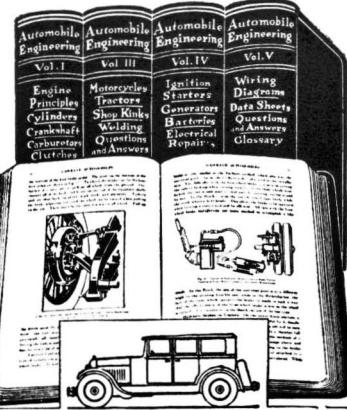
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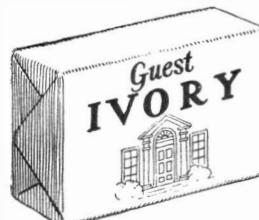
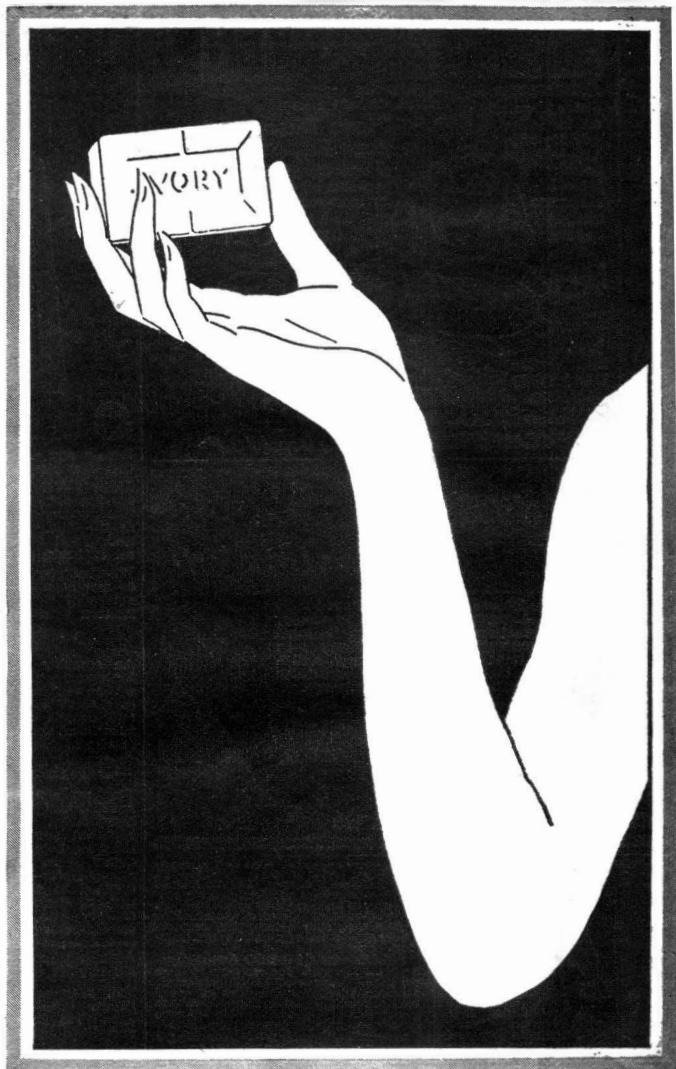
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MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1926

Vol. LXXXVIII

NUMBER 4

Blotted Out

IN THIS STORY A TIGRESS MASQUERADES AS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN—IN OTHER WORDS, AMY ROSS WAS PREDATORY AND CRUEL

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

AMES ROSS was well content, that morning. He stood on the deck, one elbow on the rail, enjoying the wind and the cold rain that blew in his face, enjoying still more his feeling of complete isolation and freedom.

None of the other passengers shared his liking for this bleak November weather, and he had the windward side of the deck to himself. He was alone there; he was alone in the world—and he meant to remain alone.

Through the window of the saloon he could, if he liked, see the severe, eagle-nosed profile of Mrs. Barron, who was sitting in there, more majestic than ever in her shore-going outfit. She was a formidable lady, stern, resolute, and experienced; she had marked him down as soon as he had come on board at San Juan.

Yet he had escaped from her; he had got the better of her, and so skillfully that even to this moment she was not sure whether he had deliberately avoided her, or whether

it was chance. Yes, even now, if the weather had permitted, she would have come out after him with her card.

But, if the weather had permitted that, Ross would not have been where he was. The day before, she had captured him for an instant in the dining saloon, and she had said that before they landed she would give him her card.

He had thanked her very civilly, but he had made up his mind that she should do nothing of the sort. Because, if she did, she would expect a card from him in return; she would want to know where he was going, and he meant that she should never know, and never be able to find him. Even she was not likely to go so far as to rush across the rain-swept deck with that card of hers.

He could also see, if he liked, the little blond head of Phyllis Barron, who was sitting beside her mother, her hat in her lap. He knew very well that Phyllis had taken no part at all in pursuing him, yet, in a

way, she was far more dangerous than Mrs. Barron.

Before he had realized the danger, he had spent a good deal of time with Phyllis—too much time. It was only a five days' run up from Porto Rico; he had never seen her before he came on board, and he intended never to see her again; yet he felt that it might take him considerably more than five days to forget her.

This made him uncomfortable. Every glimpse of that quiet, thoughtful little face, so very pretty, so touching in its brave young dignity and candor, gave him a sort of qualm, as if she had spoken a friendly word to him, and he had not answered. Indeed, so much did the sight of Phyllis Barron disquiet him that he turned away altogether.

And now, through the downpour, he saw the regal form of the Statue of Liberty. It pleased him, and somehow consoled him for those qualms. It was a symbol of what his life was going to be, a life of completest liberty. He had left nobody behind him, there was nobody waiting for him anywhere in the world; he cared for nobody—no, not he; and nobody cared for him. That was just what he liked.

He was young, he was in vigorous health, he had sufficient money, and no one on earth had any sort of claim upon him. He could go where he pleased, and do what he pleased. He was free. And here he was, coming back to what was, after all, his native city, and not one soul there knew his face.

He smiled to himself at the thought, his dour, tight-lipped smile. Coming home, eh? And nobody to greet him but the Statue of Liberty. He was glad it was so. He didn't want to be greeted; he wanted to be let alone. And, in that case, he had better go now, before they came alongside the pier, and Mrs. Barron appeared.

He went below to his cabin, intending to stop there until all other passengers had disembarked. The steward had taken up his bags, and the little room had a forlorn and untidy look; not an agreeable place in which to sit. But it was safe.

Ross hung up his wet overcoat and cap, and sat down with a magazine, to read. But he could not read a word. The engines had stopped; they had arrived; he was in New York. In New York. Try as he would to stifle his emotions, a great impatience and restlessness filled him.

There were, in this city, thousands of men to whom Manila and Mayaguez would seem names of almost incredible romance; men to whom New York meant little but an apartment, the subway, the office, and the anxious and monotonous routine of earning a living. But to Ross, New York had all the allurement of the exotic, and those other ports had meant only exile and discontent. He thought uncharitable thoughts about Mrs. Barron, because she kept him imprisoned here when he so longed to set foot on shore.

There was a knock at the door.

"Well?" Ross demanded.

"Note for you, sir," answered the steward.

Ross grinned to himself at what he considered a new instance of Mrs. Barron's enterprise. For a moment he thought he would refuse to take the note, so that he might truthfully say he had never got it; then he reflected that Mrs. Barron was never going to have a chance to question him about it, and he unlocked the door.

"We've docked, sir," the steward said.

"I know it," Ross agreed briefly.

He took the note, tipped the steward, and locked the door after him. Extraordinary, the way this lady had pursued him, all the way across! He was not handsome, not entertaining, not even very amiable; she knew nothing about him.

Indeed, as far as her knowledge went, he might be any sort of dangerous and undesirable character. Yet she had persistently—and obviously—done her best to capture him for her daughter.

He glanced at himself in the mirror. A lean and hardy young man, very dark, with the features characteristic of his family, a thin, keen nose, rather long upper lip, a saturnine and faintly mocking expression. They were a disagreeable family, bitterly obstinate, ambitious, energetic, and grimly unsociable.

And he was like that, too; like his father and his grandfather and his uncles. Without being in the least humble, he still could not understand what Mrs. Barron had seen in him to make her consider him a suitable son-in-law.

With Phyllis Barron it was different. He had sometimes imagined that her innocent and candid eyes had discerned in him qualities he had long ago tried to destroy. It was possible that she had found him a little likable.

But *she* wouldn't pursue him. He was certain that she had not written this note, or wanted her mother to write it. When he had realized his danger, and had begun to spend his time talking to the doctor, instead of sitting beside her on deck, she had never tried to recall him. Whenever he did come, she always had that serious, friendly little smile for him; but she had tried to make it very plain that, where she was concerned, he was quite free to come or to go, to remember or to forget.

Well, he meant to forget. His life was just beginning, and he did not intend to entangle himself in any way. He sighed, not knowing that he did so, and then, out of sheer idle curiosity, just to see how Mrs. Barron worked, he opened the note.

"Dear Cousin James—" it began.

But, as far as he knew, he hadn't a cousin in the world. With a puzzled frown, he picked up the envelope; it was plainly addressed, in a clear, small hand, to "Mr. James Ross. On board the S. S. Farragut."

"Must be a mistake, though," he muttered. "I'll just see." And he went on reading:

You have never seen me, and I know you have heard all sorts of cruel and false things about me. But I *beg* you to forget all that now. I am in such terrible trouble, and I don't know where to turn. I *beg* you to come here as soon as you get this. Ask for Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper. Say you have come from Cren's Agency, about the job as chauffeur. She will tell you everything. You *can't* refuse just to come and let me tell you about this terrible thing.

Your desperately unhappy cousin,

AMY ROSS SOLWAY.
"Day's End," Wygatt Road, near Stamford.

He sat, staring in amazement at this letter.

"It's a mistake!" he said, aloud.

But, all the same, it filled him with a curious uneasiness. Of course, it was meant for some one else — and he wanted that other fellow to get it at once; he wanted to be rid of it in a hurry.

He had nothing to do with any one's Cousin Amy and her "terrible trouble." He rang the bell for the steward, waited, rang again, more vigorously, again waited, but no one came.

Then, putting the note back in its envelope, he flung open the door and strode out into the passage, shouting "Steward!" in a pretty forcible voice. No one answered him. He went down the corridor, turned a corner, and almost ran into Mrs. Barron.

"Mr. Ross!" said she, in a tone of stern triumph. "So here you are! Phyllis, dear, give Mr. Ross one of our cards—with the address."

Then he caught sight of Phyllis, standing behind her mother. In her little close fitting hat, her coat with a fur collar, she looked taller, older, graver, quite different from that bright-haired, slender little thing in a deck chair. And, somehow, she was so dear to him, so lovely, so gentle, so utterly trustworthy.

"I'll never forget her!" he thought, in despair.

Then she spoke, in a tone he had not heard before.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I haven't any cards with me."

"Phyllis!" cried her mother. "I particularly asked you—"

"I'm sorry," Phyllis declared again. "We'll really have to hurry, mother. Good-by, Mr. Ross!"

Her steady blue eyes met his for an instant, but, for all the regret and pain he felt, his stubborn spirit refused to show one trace. Evidently she knew he had tried to run away, and she didn't want to see him again. Very well!

"Good-by, Miss Barron!" he said.

She turned away, and he, too, would have walked off, but the dauntless Mrs. Barron was not to be thwarted.

"Then I'll tell you the address!" said she. "Hotel Bernderly—West Seventy-Seventh Street. Don't forget!"

"I shan't," Ross replied. "Thank you! Good-by!"

He went back along the corridor, forgetting all about the note, even forgetting where he was going, until the sight of a white jacket in the distance recalled him.

"Steward!" he shouted.

The man came toward him, anxious and very hurried.

"Look here!" said Ross. "This note—it's not meant for me."

"Beg your pardon, sir, but a boy brought it aboard and told me to give it to you."

"I tell you it's not meant for me!" said Ross. "Take it back!"

"But it's addressed to you, sir. Mr. James Ross. There's no other Mr. Ross on board. The boy said it was urgent."

"Take it back!" Ross repeated.

"I shouldn't like to do that, sir," said the steward, firmly. "I said I'd deliver it

to Mr. Ross. If you're not—satisfied, sir, the purser might—"

"Oh, all right!" Ross interrupted, with a frown. "I haven't time to bother now. I'll keep it. But it's a mistake. And somebody is going to regret it."

II

A CASUAL acquaintance in San Juan had recommended the Hotel Miston to Ross. "Nice, quiet little place," he had said; "and you can get a really good cup of coffee there."

So, when the United States customs officers had done with Ross, he secured a taxi, and told the chauffeur to drive him to this Hotel Miston. Not that he was in the least anxious for quiet, or had any desire for a cup of coffee; simply, he was in a hurry to get somewhere, anywhere, so that he could begin to live.

In spite of the rain, he lowered the window of the cab, and sat looking out at the astounding speed and vigor of the life about him. This was what he had longed for, this was what he had wanted; for years and years he had said to himself that when he was free, he would come here and make a fortune.

Well, he was free, and he was in New York, and he had already the foundation of a nice little fortune. For eight years he had worked in the office of a commission agent in Manila, and every day of those eight years he had told himself that he wouldn't stand it any longer. But he had stood it.

His grandfather had been a cynical old tyrant; he had thwarted the boy in every ambition that he had. When James said he wanted to be a civil engineer, as his father had been, old Ross told him he hadn't brains enough for that. James had not agreed with him, but as he had no money to send himself home to college, he had been obliged to put up with what old Ross called "a sound practical education."

At eighteen his education was declared finished, and he went to work. He hated his work, he hated everything about his life, and from his meager salary he had saved every cent he could, so that he would get away.

Long ago he had saved enough to pay his passage to New York—but he had not gone. His grandfather was old and ill, and, because of his bitter tongue, quite without friends; he certainly gave no sign that he

enjoyed his grandson's company, and James showed no affection for him; their domestic life was anything but agreeable.

Sick at heart, James saw his youth slipping by, wasted, his abilities all unused; he told himself that he had done his duty, and more than his duty to his grandfather. Yet he could not leave him.

Then, six months ago, the old man had died, leaving everything he had to "my grandson, James Ross, in appreciation of his loyalty," the only sign of appreciation he had ever made. It was a surprisingly large estate; there was some property in Porto Rico, where James had spent his childhood with his parents, but the greater part consisted of very sound bonds and mortgages in the hands of a New York lawyer, Mr. Teagle.

Mr. Teagle had written to James, and James had written to Mr. Teagle several times in the last few months, but James had not told him when he expected to arrive in New York. He had gone to Porto Rico in a little cargo steamer, by the way of Panama; he had wound up his business there, and now he wanted to walk in on Mr. Teagle in the most casual fashion. He hated any sort of fuss; he didn't want to be met at the steamer, he didn't want to be advised and assisted. He wanted to be let alone.

The taxi stopped before the Hotel Miston, a dingy little place not far from Washington Square. Ross got out, paid the driver, and followed the porter into the lobby. He engaged a room and bath, and turned toward the elevator.

"Will you register, sir?" asked the clerk. Ross hesitated for a moment; then he wrote "J. Ross, New York." After all, this was his home; he had been born here, and he intended to live here.

He went upstairs to his room, and, locking the door, sat down near the window. The floor still seemed to heave under his feet, like the deck of a ship. He visualized the deck of the Farragut, and Phyllis in a deck chair, looking at him with her dear, friendly little smile.

He frowned at the unwelcome thought. That was finished; that belonged in the past. There was a new life before him, and the sooner he began it, the better.

He reached in his pocket for Mr. Teagle's last letter—and brought out that note to "Cousin James." At the sight of it, he frowned more heavily; he tossed it across the room in the direction of the desk, but it

fluttered down to the floor. Let it lie there. He found Mr. Teagle's letter, and took up the telephone receiver. Presently:

"Mr. Teagle's office!" came a brisk feminine voice.

"I'd like to see Mr. Teagle this morning, if possible."

"Sorry, but Mr. Teagle won't be in today. Will you leave a message?"

"No," said Ross. "No, thanks." And hung up the receiver.

He sat for a time looking out of the window at the street, far below him. The rain fell steadily; it was a dismal day. He could not begin his new life to-day, after all. Very well; what should he do, then? Anything he wanted, of course. Nobody could have been freer.

He lit a cigarette, and leaned back in the chair. Freedom—that was what he had wanted, and that was what he had got. And yet—

He turned his head, to look for an ash tray, and his glance fell upon that confounded note on the floor. In the back of his mind he had known, all the time, that he would have to do something about it.

He disliked it, and disapproved of it; a silly, hysterical sort of note, he thought, but, nevertheless, it was an appeal for help, and it was from a woman. Somebody ought to answer it.

He began idly to speculate about the "terribly unhappy" Amy Ross Solway. Perhaps she was young—not much more than a girl—like Phyllis.

"Not much!" he said to himself. "She wouldn't write a note like that. She's not that sort. No matter what sort of trouble menaced—"

It occurred to him that if Phyllis Barron were in any sort of trouble, she would never turn to James Ross for help. He had shown her too plainly that he was not disposed to trouble himself about other people and their affairs.

His family never did. They minded their own business, they let other people alone, and other people soon learned to let them alone. Very satisfactory! Lucky for this Amy Ross Solway that she didn't know what sort of fellow had got that note of hers.

Still, something had to be done about it. At first he thought he would mail it back to her, with a note of his own, explaining that he was not her Cousin James, but another James Ross, who had got it by

mistake. But, no; that plan meant too much delay, when she was no doubt waiting impatiently for a gallant cousin.

Then he thought he would try to get her on the telephone, but that idea did not suit him, either. It was always awkward, trying to explain anything on the telephone—and, besides, she seemed anxious for secrecy. He might explain to the wrong person, and do a great deal of harm.

He began to think very seriously about that note now. And, for some unaccountable reason, his thoughts of the unknown woman were confused with thoughts of Phyllis Barron. It seemed to him that if Phyllis could know how much attention he was giving to this problem which was not his business, she would realize that he was not entirely callous. If she thought he was, she misjudged him.

Perhaps he was not what you might call impulsively sympathetic, but he was not lacking in all decent feeling. He was not going to ignore this appeal.

"I'll go out there!" he decided. "I'll see this Amy Ross Solway, and explain. And, if her trouble's anything real, I'll—" He hesitated. "Well, I'll give her the best advice I can," he thought.

No, James Ross was not what you might call impulsively sympathetic. But, considering how vehemently he hated to be mixed up in other people's affairs, it was creditable of him even to think of giving advice, creditable of him to go at all.

He arose, put on his overcoat, caught up his hat, and went downstairs. Nobody took any notice of him. He walked out of the Hotel Miston—and he never came back.

III

It did not please the young man to ask questions in this, his native city. He had spent time enough in studying a map of New York, and he knew his way about pretty well. But there were, naturally, things he did not know; for instance, he went to the Pennsylvania Station, and learned that his train for Stamford left from the Grand Central.

It was after one o'clock, then, so he went into a restaurant and had lunch before going farther—his first meal in the United States. He had never enjoyed anything more. To walk through these streets, among the hurrying and indifferent crowds, to be one of them, to feel himself at home

here, filled him with something like elation. It was *his* city.

A little after three, he boarded the train. And, in spite of his caution and his native reticence, he would, at that moment, have relished a talk with one of his fellow countrymen in the smoking car. He was not disposed to start a conversation without encouragement, though, and nobody took any notice of him; nobody had, since his landing. A clever criminal, escaping from justice, could not have been much more successful in leaving no traces.

When he got out at Stamford, the rain had ceased, but the sky was menacing and overcast. He stood for a moment on the platform, again reluctant to ask questions, but there was no help for it this time.

He stopped a grocer's boy, and asked him where Wygatt Road was. The boy told him. "But it's a long way," he added.

Ross didn't care how long it was. This was the first suburban town he had seen, and it charmed him. Such a prosperous, orderly, lively town! He thought that he might like to live here.

Dusk was closing in early this dismal day; it was almost dark before he reached the hill he had to climb. The street lights came on, and through the windows of houses he could see shaded lamps and the shadows of people, comfortable rooms, bright little glimpses of domestic life. Past him, along the road, went an endless stream of motor cars, with a rush and a glare of light; he scarcely realized that he was in the country until he came to the top of the hill, and saw before him a signpost marked "Wygatt Road."

He turned down here, and was at once in another world. It was dark, and very, very quiet; no motors passed him, no lights shone out; he walked on, quite alone, under tall old trees, to which clung a few leaves, trembling in every gust of wind. Overhead, ragged black clouds flew across the darkening sky; the night was coming fast.

And now he began to think about his extraordinary errand, now he began to think that he had been a fool to come. But it did not occur to him to turn back. He never did that. He was sorry he had begun a foolish thing, but, now that he had begun, he would carry on. If it took him all night, if it took him a week, he would find "Day's End," and do what he had set out to do.

There was no one to ask questions of here; no human being, no house in sight.

On one side of him was a belt of woodland, on the other an iron fence which appeared to run on interminably. Well, he also would go on interminably, and if "Day's End" was on Wygatt Road, he would certainly come to it in the course of time.

He did. There was a break in the fence at last, made by a gateway between stone pillars, and here he saw, by the light of a match, "Day's End," in gilt letters. He opened the gate and went in; a long driveway stretched before him, tree lined; he went up it briskly.

He saw nothing, and heard nothing, but he had a vague impression that the grounds through which he passed were somber and forbidding, and he expected to see a house in keeping with this notion, an old, sinister house, suitable for people in "terrible trouble."

It was not like that, though. A turn in the driveway brought him in sight of a long façade of lighted windows, and a large, substantial, matter-of-fact house—which made him feel more of a fool than ever. Yet, still he went on, mounted the steps of a brick terrace, and rang the doorbell.

The door was opened promptly by a pale and disagreeable young housemaid.

"I want to see Mrs. Jones, the house-keeper," said Ross.

"You ought to go to the back door!" she remarked sharply. "You ought to know that much!"

Ross did not like this, but it was not his habit to let his temper override discretion.

"All right!" he said, and was turning away, ready to go to the back door, ready to go anywhere, so that he accomplished his mission, when the housemaid relented.

"As long as you're here, you can come in," she said. "This way!"

He followed her across a wide hall, with a polished floor and a fine old stairway rising from it, to a door at the farther end.

"It's the room right in front of you when you get to the top," she explained.

She opened the door; he went in, she closed the door behind him, and he found himself in what seemed a pitch-black cupboard. But, as he moved forward, his foot struck against a step, and he began cautiously to mount a narrow, boxed-in staircase, until his outstretched hand touched a door.

He pushed it open, and found himself in a well lighted corridor, and, facing him, a white painted door. And behind that door

he heard some one sobbing, in a low, wailing voice.

He stopped, rather at a loss. Then, because he would not go back, he went forward, and knocked.

"Who is it?" cried a voice.

"I came to see Mrs. Jones," Ross replied casually.

There was a moment's silence; then the door was opened by the loveliest creature he had ever seen in his life. He had only a glimpse of her, of an exquisite face, very white, with dark and delicate brows and great black eyes, a face childlike in its soft, pure contours, but terribly unchildlike in its expression of terror and despair.

"Wait!" she said. "Go in and wait!"

She brushed past him, with a flutter of her filmy gray dress and a breath of some faint fragrance, and vanished down the back stairs.

Ross went in as he was instructed, and stood facing the door, waiting with a certain uneasiness for some one to come. But nobody did come, and at last he turned and looked about him.

It was a cozy room, with a cheerful red carpet on the floor, and plenty of solid, old-fashioned walnut furniture about; it was well warmed by a steam radiator, and well lighted by an alabaster electrolier in the ceiling; a clock ticked smartly on the mantelpiece, and on the sofa lay a big yellow cat, pretending to be asleep, with one gleaming eye half open.

It was such a thoroughly commonplace and comfortable room that the young man felt reassured. He decided to ignore the wailing voice he had heard, and the pallid, lovely creature who had opened the door. For all he knew, such things might be quite usual in this household, and, anyhow, it was none of his business. He had come to see Mrs. Jones, and to explain an error.

He watched the smart little clock for five minutes, and then began to grow restless. He had walked a good deal this day; he was tired; his shoes were wet; he wanted to be done with this business and to get away. Another five minutes—

It seemed to him that this was the quietest room he had ever known. Even the tick of the clock was muffled, like a tiny pulse. It was altogether too quiet. He didn't like it at all.

He frowned uneasily, and turned toward the only other living thing there, the cat. He laid his hand on its head, and in a sort

of drowsy ecstasy the cat stretched out to a surprising length, opening and curling up its paws. Its claws caught in the linen cover and pulled it up a little, and Ross saw something under the sofa.

He doubted the very evidence of his senses. He could not believe that he saw a hand stretched out on the red carpet. He stared and stared at it, incredulous.

Then he stooped and lifted up the cover and looked under the sofa. There lay a man, face downward.

He was very still. It seemed to Ross that it was this man's stillness which he had felt in the room; it was the quiet of death.

IV

Ross stood looking down at the very quiet figure in a sort of daze. He did not find this horrible, or shocking; it was simply impossible. Here, in this tranquil, cozy room— No, it was impossible!

Going down on one knee, he reached out and touched the nape of the man's neck. But he did it mechanically; he had known, from the first glance, that the man was dead. No living thing could lie so still. Quite cold—

The sound of a slow footstep in the corridor startled him. He sprang to his feet, pulled down the linen cover, and was standing idly in the center of the room when a woman entered, a stout, elderly woman with calm brown eyes behind spectacles.

"Well?" said she.

"I came to see Mrs. Jones," said Ross. "I had a note—"

He spoke in a tone as matter-of-fact as her own, for to save his life he could think of no rational manner in which to tell her what he had seen. Such a preposterous thing to tell a sensible, elderly woman! The very thought of it dismayed him. Of all things in the world, he hated the theatrical. He could not be, and he would not be, dramatic. He wished to be casual.

But, in this case, it would not be easy. The thing he had found was, in its very nature, dramatic, and was even now defying him to be casual and sensible. He would have to tell her, point-blank, and she probably would shriek or faint, or both.

"Yes," she said. "I'm Mrs. Jones. A note?"

Her voice trailed away, and she stood regarding him in thoughtful silence. Ross was quite willing to be silent a little longer,

while he tried to find a reassuring form for his statement; he looked back at her, his lean face quite impassive, his mind working furiously.

"Yes?" said Mrs. Jones. "Miss Solway did think, for a time, that she might need some one to—advise her. But everything's quite all right now." She paused a moment. "She'll be sorry to hear you've made the journey for nothing. She'll appreciate your kindness, I'm sure. But everything's quite all right now."

"Oh, is it?" murmured Ross.

He found difficulty in suppressing a grim smile. Everything was all right now, was it, and he could run away home? He did not agree with Mrs. Jones.

"Yes," she replied. "It was very kind of you to come, but—"

"Wait!" cried Ross, for she had turned away toward the sofa.

Without so much as turning her head, she went on a few steps, took the knitted scarf from her shoulders, and threw it over the end of the sofa. And he saw then that just the tip of the man's fingers had been visible, and that the trailing end of the scarf covered them now. She *knew!*

"Well?" she asked, looking inquiringly at him through her spectacles. No; it was impossible; the whole thing was utterly impossible!

This sedate, respectable, gray-haired woman, this housekeeper who looked as if she would not overlook the smallest trace of dust in a corner, certainly, surely would not leave a dead man under her sofa.

She was stroking the cat, and the animal had assumed an expression of idiotic delight, pink tongue protruding a little, eyes half open. Would even a cat be so monstrously indifferent if—if what he thought he had seen under the sofa were really there?

"Would you like me to telephone for a taxi to take you to the station?" asked Mrs. Jones, very civilly.

"Ha!" thought Ross. "You want to get rid of me, don't you?"

And that aroused all his stiff-necked obstinacy. He would *not* go away now, after all his trouble, without any sort of explanation of the situation.

"There's a good train—" Mrs. Jones began, with calm persistence, but Ross interrupted.

"No, thanks," he said. "I'd like to see Miss Solway first."

His own words surprised him a little. After all, why on earth should he want to see this Miss Solway? A few hours ago he had been greatly annoyed at the thought of having to do so; he would have been only too glad never to see or to hear of her again.

"It's because I don't like being made such a fool of," he thought.

For the first time since she had entered the room, Mrs. Jones's calm was disturbed. She came nearer to him, and looked into his face with obvious anxiety, speaking very low, and far more respectfully.

"It would be much better not to!" she said. "Much better, sir, if you'll just go away—"

"I want to see Miss Solway," Ross repeated. "There's been a mistake, and I want to explain."

"I know that, sir!" she whispered. "Of course, as soon as I saw you, I knew you weren't Mr. Ross. But—"

"Look here!" said Ross, bluntly. "What's it all about, anyhow?"

"There was a little difficulty, sir," said Mrs. Jones, still in a whisper. "But it's all over now."

All over now? A new thought came to Ross. Had the man under the sofa been Miss Solway's "terrible trouble," and had Cousin James been sent for to help—in doing what had already been done?

He had, at this moment, a most clear and definite warning from his brain. "*Clear out!*" it said. "*Get out of this, now. Don't wait; don't ask questions; just go!*" All through his body this warning signal ran, making his scalp prickle and his heart beat fast. "*It is bad for you here. Go! Now!*"

And his stubborn and indomitable spirit answered: "*I won't!*"

"I want to see Miss Solway," he said, aloud.

Mrs. Jones looked at him for a moment, and apparently the expression on his face filled her with despair.

"Oh, dear!" she said, with a tremulous sigh. "I knew; I told her it was a mistake to send. Oh, dear!"

Ross stood there and waited.

"If you'll go away," she said, "Miss Solway will write to you."

Ross still stood there and waited.

"Very well, sir!" she said, with another sigh. "If you must, you must. This way, please!"

He followed her out of the room, and he noticed that she did not even glance back. She couldn't know. It was impossible that any one who was aware of what lay under the sofa could simply walk out of the room like that, closing the door upon it.

They went down the corridor, which was evidently a wing of the house, and turned the corner into a wider hall. Mrs. Jones knocked upon a door.

"Miss Amy, my pet!" she called, softly. The door opened a little.

"The gentleman," said Mrs. Jones. "He will see you!"

"All right!" answered a voice he recognized; the door opened wider, and there was the girl he had seen before. Her body, in that soft gray dress, seemed almost incredibly fragile; her face, colorless, framed in misty black hair, with great, restless black eyes and delicate little features, was strange and lovely as a dream.

Too strange, thought Ross. For the first time he realized the significance of her presence in the housekeeper's room. He remembered the wailing voice, her air of haste and terror as she had brushed past him. She had been in there, alone. What did she know? What had she seen?

"I had a note from you—" he began.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Jones. "If you please, sir! It's a mistake, Miss Amy, my pet. This isn't Mr. Ross. It's quite a stranger."

Obviously she was warning her pet to be careful what she said, and Ross decided that he, too, would be careful. He would have his own little mystery.

"Quite a stranger!" he repeated.

"But—how did you get my note?" asked the girl.

"It was given to me," he answered.

He saw Mrs. Jones and the girl exchange a glance.

"If I hold my tongue and wait," he thought, "they'll surely have to tell me something."

"But I don't—" the girl began, when, to Ross's amazement, Mrs. Jones gave him a vigorous push forward.

"You're the new chauffeur!" she whispered, fiercely.

Then he heard footsteps in the hall. He stood well inside the room, now; a large room, furnished with quiet elegance. It was what people called a boudoir, he thought, as his quick eye took in the details; a dressing table with rose shaded elec-

tric lights and gleaming silver and glass; a little desk with rose and ivory fittings; a silver vase of white chrysanthemums on the table.

"I'm afraid we can't take you," said Mrs. Jones, in an altogether new sort of voice, brisk, and a little loud. "I'm sorry."

Ross was very well aware that some one else had come to the door and was standing behind him. He was also aware of a sort of triumph in Mrs. Jones's manner. She thought she was going to get rid of him. But she wasn't.

"If it's a question of wages," he said, "I'll take a little less."

He saw how greatly this disconcerted her.

"No," she said. "No, I'm afraid not."

"What's the matter? What's the matter? What's the matter?" demanded an impatient voice behind him. He turned, and saw a stout, middle-aged man of domineering aspect standing there and frowning heavily.

"The young man's come to apply for the chauffeur's position, sir," Mrs. Jones explained. "But I'm afraid—"

"Well, what's the matter with him?" cried the domineering man. "Can he drive a car? Has he got references, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Ross replied.

"Let's see your references!"

"I left them at the agency," said Ross, as if inspired.

"Agency sent you, eh? Well, they know their business, don't they? Can you take a car to pieces and put it together again? Have you brains enough to keep your gasoline tank filled, and to remember that when you're going round a corner some other fellow may be doing the same thing?"

"Yes, sir," said Ross.

The domineering man stared hard, and Ross met his regard steadily.

"He'll do," said the man. "I like him. Looks you straight in the face. Level headed. Well set up. Good nerves. Doesn't drink. We'll give him a chance. Eddy!"

He went out into the hall.

"Eddy!" he shouted. "I want Eddy!" Mrs. Jones came close to Ross.

"Go away!" she whispered. "You must go away!"

The domineering man had come back into the room.

"Now, then, what's your name?" he demanded brusquely.

"Moss," said Ross.

"Moss, eh? Very well! Ah, here's Eddy! Eddy, take this young man over to the garage. See that he's properly looked after. He's our new chauffeur."

V

THE door closed behind them, and Ross round himself in the hall, alone with this Eddy. They stared at each other for a moment; then, in spite of himself, a grudging smile dawned upon Ross's lean and dour face. Eddy grinned from ear to ear.

"Come on, shover!" he said. "I'll show you your stall!"

A sheik, Eddy was: very slender, with black hair well oiled and combed back from his brow, and wearing clothes of the latest and jauntiest mode. But he lacked the lilylike languor of the true sheik; his rather handsome face was alert and cheerful; and although he moved with the somewhat supercilious grace of one who had been frequently called a just wonderful dancer, there was a certain wiry vigor about him.

Ross followed him down the hall and around the corner, into the corridor where Mrs. Jones's room was. Ross saw that the door was a little ajar, and he dropped behind, because he wanted to look into that room, but Eddy, in passing, pulled it shut.

Did he know, too? Certainly he did not look like the sort of youth who went about closing doors unbidden, simply from a sense of order and decorum. And that grin—did it signify a shrewd understanding of a discreditable situation?

It was at this instant that Ross began to realize what he had done. Only dimly, though; for he thought that in a few moments he would be gone, and the whole affair finished, as far as he was concerned. He felt only a vague disquiet, and a great impatience to get away. He went after Eddy down the back stairs and through a dark passage on the floor below, at the end of which he saw a brightly lit kitchen where a stout cook bent over the stove, and that same disagreeable housemaid was mixing something in a bowl at the table.

Then Eddy opened a door, and a wild gust of wind and rain sprang at them.

"Step right along, shover!" said Eddy. "Here! This way!" And he took Ross by the arm.

It was black as the pit out there; the wind came whistling through the pines,

driving before it great sheets of rain that was half sleet. It was a world of black, bitter cold and confusion, and Ross thought of nothing at all except getting under shelter again.

It was only a few yards; then Eddy stopped, let go of Ross's arm, and slid back a door. This door opened upon blackness, too, but Ross was glad enough to get inside. Eddy closed the door, turned on a switch, and he saw that they were in a garage.

It was a very ordinary garage, neat and bare, with a cement floor, and two cars standing, side by side; yet, to Ross it had a sinister aspect. He was very weary, wet and chilled to the bone, and this place looked to him like a prison, a stone dungeon. Storm or no storm, he wanted to get out, away from this place and these people.

"Look here—" he began, but Eddy's cheerful voice called out: "This way!" and he saw him standing at the foot of a narrow staircase in one corner.

The one thing which made Ross go up those stairs was his violent distaste for the dramatic. He felt that it would be absurd to dash out into the rain. Instinct warned him, but once again he defied that warning, and up he went.

He was surprised and pleased by what he found up there: the jolliest, coziest little room, green rug on the floor, big armchairs of imitation red leather, reading lamp. It was not a room of much æsthetic charm, perhaps, but comfortable, cheerful and homelike, and warm.

The rain was drumming loud on the roof and dashing against the windows, and Ross sighed as he looked at the big chairs. But he was beginning to think now.

"Take off your coat and make yourself at home," said Eddy.

"No," Ross objected. "I can't stay tonight. Didn't bring my things along."

"Oh, didn't you?" said Eddy. "Why not?"

"Because I didn't come prepared to stay."

"What did you come for?" asked Eddy.

Now, this might be mere idle curiosity, and Ross decided to accept it as that.

"No," he said, slowly. "I'll go back to the city and get my things."

"It's raining too hard," Eddy declared. "It wouldn't be healthy for you to go out just now, shover."

This was a little too much for Ross to ignore.

"Just the same," he insisted, "I'm going now."

"Nope!" said Eddy.

Ross moved forward, and Eddy moved, too, so that he blocked the doorway. He was grinning, but there was an odd light in his eyes.

"Now, lookit here!" he said. "You just make yourself comfortable for the night, see?"

Ross looked at him thoughtfully. He believed that it would not be difficult to throw this slender youth down the stairs, and to walk out of the garage, but he disliked the idea.

"I don't want to make any trouble, Eddy," he explained, almost mildly. "But I'm going."

"Nope!" said Eddy.

Ross took a step forward. Eddy reached in his hip pocket and pulled out a revolver.

"Nope!" he said again.

"What!" cried Ross, astounded. "Do you mean—"

"Tell you what I mean," said Eddy. "I mean to say that I know who you are, and what you come for, and you're going to sit pretty till to-morrow morning. That's what I mean."

He spoke quite without malice; indeed, his tone was good-humored. But he was in earnest, he and his gun; there was no doubt about it.

It was not Ross's disposition to enter into futile arguments. He took off his over-coat, sat down, calmly took out a cigarette and lit it.

"I see!" he remarked. "But I'd like to know who I am, and what I came for. I'd like to hear your point of view."

"Maybe you wouldn't," said Eddy. "Anyway, that can wait. Got to see about feeding you now."

He locked the door behind him and dropped the key into his pocket. Then he opened another door leading out of the sitting room, disclosing a small kitchen.

"Last shover we had, he was a married man," he explained. "Him and his wife fixed the place up like it is. I been living here myself, lately. Let's see—I got pork and beans, cawfee, cake—good cake—cook over at the house made it. How does that strike you?"

"Good enough!" answered Ross, a little absently.

Eddy was moving about in the kitchen, whistling between his teeth; from time to time he addressed a cheerful remark to his captive, but got no answer. Presently he brought in a meal, of a sort, and set it out on a table.

"Here you are!" he announced.

Ross drew up his chair, and fell to, with a pretty sharp appetite.

"Look here!" he said, abruptly. "Who was that man—the one who—hired me?"

"Him? The Prince of Wales!" Eddy replied. "Thought you'd recognized him."

This was Ross's last attempt at questioning. Indeed, he was quite willing to be silent now, for his deplorably postponed thinking was now well under way. His brain was busy with the events of this day—this immeasurably long day. Was it only this morning that he had got the note? Only this morning that he had said good-by to Phyllis Barron?

"She'd be a bit surprised if she knew where I'd gone!" he thought.

And then, with a sort of shock, it occurred to him that nobody—absolutely nobody on earth knew where he had gone, or cared. These people here did not know even his name. He had come here, had walked into this situation, and if he never came out again, who would be troubled?

Mr. Teagle had not expected him at any definite time, and would wait for weeks and weeks before feeling the least anxiety about his unknown client. The people at the Hotel Miston would scarcely notice for some time the absence of Mr. Ross of New York, especially as his luggage remained there to compensate them for any loss. Nobody would be injured, or unhappy, or one jot the worse, if he never saw daylight again.

This was one aspect of a completely free life which he had not considered. He was of no interest or importance to any one. He began to consider it now.

Eddy had cleared away their meal, and had been turning over the pages of a magazine. Now he began to yawn, and presently, getting up, opened another door, to display a tidy little bedroom.

"Whenever you're ready to go by-by, shover," he suggested.

"Thanks, I'm all right where I am," Ross asserted.

"Suit yourself," said Eddy.

He set a chair against the locked door, pulled up another chair to put his feet on, and made himself as comfortable as he

could. But Ross made no such effort. His family had never cared about being comfortable. No; there he sat, too intent upon his thoughts to sleep.

The realization of his own utter loneliness in this "world had set him to thinking about the man under the sofa. There might be some one waiting, in tears, in terrible anxiety for that man. Probably there was. There were very, very few human beings who had nobody to care.

He had made up his mind to go to the police with his story the next morning. And he saw very clearly the disagreeable position into which his perverse obstinacy had brought him. He had discovered a man who was certainly dead, and possibly murdered, and he had said not a word about it to any one.

He had refused to go away when he had a chance, and now, here he was, held prisoner while, if there had been foul play, the persons responsible would have ample time to make what arrangements they pleased. He could very well imagine how his tale would sound to the police.

"Good Lord!" he said to himself. "What a fool I've been!"

VI

It seemed to Ross that the great noise of the wind outside was mingled now with the throb of engines and the rushing of water. He thought he felt the lift and roll of the ship beneath him; he thought he was lying in his berth again, on his way across the dark waste of waters, toward New York. He wondered what New York would be like.

Phyllis Barron was knocking at his door, telling him to hurry, hurry and come on deck. This did not surprise him; he was only immensely relieved and glad.

"I knew you'd come!" he wanted to say, but he could not speak. He tried to get up and dress and go out to her, but he could not move. He made a desperate struggle to call to her.

"Wait! Wait!" he tried to say. "I'm asleep. But I'll wake in a minute. Please don't go away!"

Then, with a supreme effort, he did wake. He opened his eyes. There was Eddy, stretched out on his two chairs, sound asleep. And there was a muffled knocking at the door, and a little wailing voice:

"Eddy! Eddy! Oh, *can't* you hear me? Eddy!"

For a moment Ross thought it was an echo from his dream, but, as the drowsiness cleared from his head, he knew it was real. He got up and touched the sleeping youth on the shoulder.

"There's some one calling you!" he said.

Eddy opened his eyes with an alert expression and glared at Ross.

"What?" he demanded, sternly. "No monkey tricks, now!"

As a matter of fact, he was still more than half asleep, and Ross had to repeat his statement twice before it was understood. Then he sprang up, pushed aside the chairs, and unlocked the door.

It was Miss Solway. She came in, like a wraith; she was wrapped in a fur coat, but she looked cold, pale, affrighted; her black eyes wide, her misty dark hair in disorder; a fit figure for a dream.

"Eddy!" she said. "Go away!"

"Lookit here, Miss Amy," Eddy protested, anxiously. "Wait till morning."

"But it *is* morning!" she cried. "Go away, Eddy! Quick! I want to speak to— Go away, do! I only have a minute to spare."

"Morning!" thought Ross. He looked at his watch, which showed a few minutes past six; then at the window. It was as black as ever outside.

"Lookit here, Miss Amy," Eddy began again. "If I was you, I'd—"

"Get out, fool!" she cried. "Idiot! This instant!"

Her fierce and sudden anger astounded Ross. Her eyes had narrowed, her nostrils dilated, her short upper lip was drawn up in a sort of snarl. Yet this rage was in no way repellent; it was like the fury of some beautiful little animal. He could perfectly understand Eddy's answering in a tone of resigned indulgence.

"All right, Miss Amy. Have it your own way."

It seemed to Ross that that was the only possible way for any man to regard this preposterous and lovely creature, not critically, but simply with indulgence.

Taking up his cap and overcoat, Eddy departed, whistling as he went down the stairs. Miss Solway waited, scowling, until he had gone; then she turned to Ross.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

He was greatly taken aback. He had not yet had time to collect his thoughts; nothing much remained in his mind except the decision of the night before that this

morning he was going to the police with an account of what he had seen. And, stronger and clearer than anything else, was his desire and resolve to get away from here.

"Oh, tell me!" she entreated.

Ross reflected well before answering. Eddy suspected him of something—Heaven knew what. Perhaps this girl did, too. He imagined that they were both a little afraid of him. And, if he held his tongue, and didn't let them know how casual and unpremeditated all his actions had been, he might keep them in wholesome doubt about him, and so get away.

"My name's Moss," he replied, as if surprised. "I came to get a job."

"No!" she said. "You got my note. But how could you? Who *can* you be? Nanna said—but I don't believe it! I knew—as soon as I saw you—I felt sure you'd come to help me. Oh, tell me! My cousin James sent you, didn't he?"

"James Ross?" asked Ross, slowly.

"Yes!" she answered, eagerly. "My cousin James. He did! I know it! Mother always told me to go to him if I needed help. Of course, I know he must be old now. I was afraid—so terribly afraid that he'd left the ship, or that I'd forgotten the name of it. But I was right, after all. I thought mother had said he was purser on the *Farragut*."

"What!" cried Ross.

He began to understand now. Years and years ago—the dimmest memory—he had had a cousin James who was purser on one of the Porto Rico boats. He could vaguely remember his coming to their house in Mayaguez; a gloomy man with a black beard; son of his father's elder brother William. It must have been on the old *Farragut*, scrapped nearly twenty years ago.

And that cousin James had vanished, too, long ago. William Ross had had three children, and outlived them all. Ross could remember his grandfather telling him that.

"All gone," the old man had said; "both my sons and their sons. No doubt the Almighty has some reason for sparing *you*; but it's beyond me."

"*Your* Cousin James?" said Ross, staring at her—because that had been *his* Cousin James.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" she answered, impatiently. "I told you. Now tell me how—"

But Ross wanted to understand.

"What was your father's name?" he demanded.

"Luis Delmano," she replied. "But what does that matter? I only have a minute—"

"Then why do you call yourself Sol-way if your name is—"

"Oh!" she cried. "Now I see! You didn't know the name of my mother's second husband! Nobody had told you that! Of course! I should have thought of that. Mother told me how horrible her brothers were. When she married daddy, they were so furious. They said they'd never see her or speak to her or mention her name again—and I suppose they didn't. Nasty, heartless beasts! Their only sister!"

Although Ross had never before heard of any sister of his father's, the story seemed to him probable. His grandfather, his father, and his uncle were so exactly the sort of people to possess a sister whose name was never mentioned; grim, savage, old-fashioned, excommunicating sort of people. Yes; it was probable; but it was startling. Because, if this girl's mother had been his father's sister, then he was her Cousin James, after all.

He did not want to be. His dark face grew a little pale, and he turned away, looking down at the floor, considering this new and unwelcome idea.

"Now you understand!" she said. "And you did come to help me, didn't you?"

This time his silence was deliberate, and not due to any confusion in his thoughts. The blood in his veins spoke clearly to him. What those other Rosses had condemned, he, too, condemned. He was like them. This girl was altogether strange, exotic, and dangerous, and he wanted to get away from her.

It was his gift, however, to show no sign of whatever he might be thinking; his face was expressionless, and she read what she chose there. She came nearer to him, and laid her hand on his arm.

"You will help me?" she said, softly.

He looked down at her gravely. He knew that she was willfully attempting to charm him—and how he did scorn anything of that sort! And yet— He looked at her as some long forgotten Ross of Salem might have looked at a bonny young witch. The creature was dangerous, and yet— Bonny she was, and a young man is a young man. "I don't see," he began, doubtfully,

when suddenly she cried: "Look!" and pointed to the window. He turned, startled, but he saw nothing there.

"It's getting light!" she cried.

That was true enough. The sky was not black now, but all gray, pallid, swept clean of clouds. The rain had ceased, but the mighty wind still blew, and the tops of the trees bowed and bent before it, like inky marionettes before a pale curtain. There was no sign yet of the sun, but you could feel that the dawn was coming.

"What of it?" asked Ross, briefly.

"It's the last day!" she answered.

What a thing to say! The last day. It filled him with a vague sense of dread, and it made him angry.

"That's not—" he began, but she did not heed him.

"Listen!" she said. "You must help me! I don't know what to do. I'm—I'm desperate! I've—" She stopped, looking up into his wooden face; then, seizing him by the shoulder, she tried to shake him.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, look at me like a human being!" she cried.

He stared at her, dumfounded.

"Stop it!" she commanded. "You've got to listen to me!"

He had never in his life been so amazed. She had flown at him, and shaken him! It was unbelievable. It was pathetic. She was such a little thing; so fierce, and so helpless.

"All right!" he said, mildly. "I'm listening. What's it all about?"

His tone, his faint smile, did not please her.

"Oh, you think it's nothing!" she said. "You think I'm just a silly girl, making an awful fuss about some childish trouble. *Don't* you? Well, you're wrong. Listen to me!"

She stopped, and drew back a little, looking him straight in the face with those strange black eyes of hers.

"I've done a terrible thing," she said, in a low, steady voice. "A wicked, terrible thing. If I get what I deserve, I'm ruined and lost."

She turned away from him, and walked over to the window. Ross turned, too, and followed her. She was gazing before her at the gray sky; the curve of her cheek, her half parted lips, her wide brow, were altogether innocent and lovely, but the look on her pale face was not so. It was somber, bitter, and tragic.

"The sun is coming up," she said, almost inaudibly. "Will you help me?"

"Yes," Ross answered.

VII

Ross stood by the window, watching the sun come up—the first sunrise he had witnessed in his native land. From the east the light welled up and spread, slow and inexorable, across the sky, like the Master's glance traveling over the chill world; and in his soul Ross dreaded that light. It would mean discovery. That very quiet figure in the housekeeper's room would have his revenge.

"I'm in it now," Ross muttered. "Up to the neck."

And why? Was it pity for that girl? Was it a stirring of sentiment because she was his kinswoman, his cousin? He did not think so. He might have pitied her, and still gone away. He might have recognized their kinship simply by keeping silent about what he had seen. No; it was something more than that; something he could not quite understand.

It was the claim of life upon a strong spirit. You are hardy and valiant, life said; your shoulders are fitted to bear burdens, and bear them you shall. Here before you is a cruel burden, and you cannot turn aside. All the strong ones shall be chosen to suffer for the weak. You are chosen, and you shall suffer.

Well, he did.

"I've done a wicked, terrible thing. If I get what I deserve, I'm ruined and lost."

That was what she had said to him, and he interpreted it readily enough. It was hideous to think of, but not difficult to believe. She was, he thought, capable of any imaginable thing, good or evil. She would not weigh, or calculate, or even understand; she would only *want*. She would want to possess something, or she would want to destroy something which irked her.

"And after all," he thought, "it's not a hard thing to do. Even a little, weak thing like her can—"

His mind balked at the fatal word, but, with a frown, he deliberately uttered it to himself.

"Can kill," he said. "I've got to face this squarely. Other women have done things like that. A few drops of something in a glass, perhaps."

An uncontrollable shudder ran through him.

"No!" he thought. "I needn't think—that. I'll wait till she's told me. The whole thing may be—some accident—something else."

But he remembered that she had been there alone in the housekeeper's room, and that he had heard her crying in there. He remembered her words—"a wicked, terrible thing." And he remembered, above everything else, her face, with that look upon it.

"Damn it!" he cried. "I won't think at all—until I know something definite. I'll just carry on."

He could, and did, refuse to think of his immediate problem, but his mind would not remain idle. It presented him with a very vivid picture of Phyllis Barron. And now, for the first time, he welcomed that gentle image. She was so immeasurably remote now, so far away, in an entirely different world; a friendly, honest world, where she was living her daily life, while he stood here, watching the sun rise upon a dreaded and unpredictable day.

"Well, shover!" said Eddy's cheerful voice behind him. "The big boss 'll want the car for the eight forty."

"All right!" Ross agreed, promptly. "I want a bath and a shave first. And maybe you'll lend me a collar and a pair of socks."

"I'll do that for you!" said Eddy. "And say! You could try Wheeler's uniform that he left behind. He was the shover before you. He left in a hurry. Got kicked out. Most of our shovers do."

"Why?"

"Well, I'll tell you," Eddy explained, sitting down on the edge of the bed, and watching Ross shave with cold water, a very dull razor, and the minute fragment of a shaving stick. "Most of our shovers get tempted and fall—hard. Miss Amy 'll ask 'em to take her some place where the boss don't want her to go, and not to mention it at home. And they do. And then, the next time she gets mad at the boss, she tells him the whole tale, just to worry him. And the shover goes. See?"

"I see!" said Ross.

"She was talking to me just now," Eddy went on. "I guess I was mistaken about you. She says you're going to stay. Well!" He grinned. "I wish you luck!"

"Thanks!" said Ross.

He understood that Eddy was warning him against the devices of Miss Amy, but it was a little too late.

He took a bath in water colder than any he had yet encountered; then he tried on the uniform left behind by the unfortunate Wheeler. It was a bit tight across the shoulders, and the style was by no means in accordance with his austere taste, but he could wear it.

"And I shan't keep up this silly farce much longer," he thought.

"We might as well go over to the house for breakfast," said Eddy. "Ready?"

Ross did not relish the glimpse he had of his reflection in the mirror. That snug-fitting jacket with a belt in the back, those breeches, those puttees—he did not like them. Worst of all, Eddy's collar would not meet round his neck, and he had fastened it with a safety pin. As he took up the peaked cap and followed the cheerful youth, he felt, not like an accomplice in a tragedy, but like a very complete fool—and that did not please him.

They crossed the lawn to the house, went in at the back door, and entered the kitchen. There he sat down to breakfast with the cook, the housemaid, the laundress, and Eddy. The kitchen was warm and clean, and neat as a new pin; very agreeable in the morning sunshine. The breakfast was good, and he was very hungry, and ate with a healthy appetite. But, except for a civil good morning, he did not say one word.

For he was listening. He was waiting, in an unpleasant state of tension, for something which would shatter this comfortable serenity. It must come. It was not possible that the figure under the sofa should remain undiscovered, that life should progress as if nothing at all had happened. Amy had said this was the "last day."

Nothing interrupted the breakfast, though; and, when he had finished, he went back to the garage, to look over the sedan he was to drive. It was a good car, and in perfect condition; nothing for him to do there. He lit a cigarette, and stood talking to Eddy for a time.

Eddy's theme was Mr. Solway, Miss Amy's long-suffering stepfather.

"He's the best man Gawd ever made," said Eddy, seriously. "My father was coachman to him for eighteen years, and when he passed out, Mr. Solway, he kept me here. He seen that I got a good education and all. I wanted this here shover's job, but he said nothing doing. He said I'd ought to get a job with a future. I'm

down in the telephone comp'ny now—repair man. He lets me live here for nothing—just for doing a few odd jobs. He's a prince!" He stamped out his cigarette with his heel. "And he has a hell of a life!" he added.

"How?" asked Ross, thirsting for any sort of information about this household.

"Her," said Eddy. "Remember, I'm not saying nothing against Miss Amy. I've known her all my life. But, I've done things for that girl I wouldn't have done for my own mother." He paused. "I done things for her I wish to Gawd I hadn't done," he said, and fell silent.

Ross was silent, too. He remembered how Eddy had closed the door of the house-keeper's room. He remembered how very anxious Eddy had been to keep him shut up in the garage all night. And he remembered that Eddy carried a revolver.

Why should he imagine that Amy Solway would do for herself any unpleasing task, when apparently she found it so easy to make others do things for her? This boy admitted he had done things for her which he wished "to Gawd" he hadn't.

"You better start," said Eddy, and Ross got into the sedan and drove up to the house. He was undeniably nervous. He expected to see—he didn't know what; a pale face looking at him from one of the windows, a handkerchief waved to him, a note slipped into his hand, some signal. But there was nothing.

Mr. Solway came bursting out of the front door, ran down the steps, said "Good morning! Good morning!" to his new chauffeur, popped into the sedan, and immediately began to read the newspaper. At the station he bounced out, said "Four fifty," and walked off.

Ross stopped in the town and bought himself some collars. Even this delay worried him; he might be badly needed at the house. But, in spite of his haste to get back, he was mighty careful in his driving, because he had no sort of license. He returned to the garage and put up the car—and waited.

Four hours did he wait. Eddy was nowhere about; no doubt he was repairing telephones. Nobody came near the garage. Ross sketchily overhauled both cars, swept out the place, and waited, not patiently, either.

He had agreed to help that girl, and he was prepared to do so, but he was not going

to be a chauffeur much longer. It was, he thought, a singularly dull life. What is more, he had his own affairs to look after; he wanted to get back to New York, and to see Mr. Teagle.

At one o'clock the telephone in the garage rang, and the disagreeable housemaid informed him that lunch was ready. Very well, he was ready for lunch; he went over to the house and again sat down in the kitchen, and ate again in silence. He had nothing to say, and the three women said nothing to him.

He was not a talkative young man; he and his grandfather had often passed entire days with scarcely a word between them, and he took this silence as a matter of course, quite innocent of the fact that it was hostile. The new chauffeur was not liked in the kitchen.

Then he went back to the garage, and waited, and waited, and waited, with grim resentment. A little after four o'clock he was preparing to take the sedan out again, when Amy appeared in the doorway, in her fur coat and a little scarlet hat.

"Oh, good!" she cried. "You're all ready! I want you to take me—"

"No!" said Ross. "Mr. Solway said four fifty, and I'm going to meet his train."

"But he meant the four fifty from New York!" said she. "You'll have plenty of time." She came nearer to him. "Please, please be quick!" she said. "It's my last chance!"

VIII

"To the left, and straight ahead!" said Amy, as they drove out of the gates.

So, to the left he turned, and drove straight ahead. And he looked straight ahead, too, although he knew very well that she was looking at him. This girl took entirely too much for granted. It was one thing to help her, but to obey her orders blindly was quite another, and it did not suit him. Here he was, dressed up in a chauffeur's uniform somewhat too small for him, and behaving, no doubt, as those other chauffeurs had behaved—like a fool.

He heard her stir restlessly, with little flutterings and jinglings of her silly feminine finery. She sighed deeply.

"I don't believe you've told me your right name," she said, plaintively.

"James Ross," he announced.

"James Ross!" she cried. "Oh, but you said— But he's *old!*"

"Another James Ross," he remarked, coldly. But in his heart he was rather pleased with the sensation his words caused.

"Another one? Then—are you my cousin? Are you?"

"I believe so," Ross replied.

She was silent for a moment; then she observed, thoughtfully:

"I guess I'll call you Jimmy."

"I'd rather you didn't," said Ross. "I don't like it."

"I do!" said she. "I think Jimmy's a darling name." Suddenly she flung one arm about his neck. "And I think you're a darling!" she added, with a sob.

"Look out!" Ross cried, sharply. "You mustn't do that when I'm driving." He cast a glance along the straight, empty road, and then turned to her. Her dark eyes were soft and shining with tears, but she was trying to smile.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad you've come!"

"All right!" said the Spartan young man. "Then suppose you tell me what's wrong?"

"I can't, Jimmy," she answered. Her hand rested on his shoulder, but her head was turned away. "I can't—just now. Only, oh, Jimmy! Sometimes I wish I were dead! Dead and buried with my darling mother—"

He could think of nothing adequate to say to that, and, once more giving a careful glance at the road, he patted her hand.

"I'm sorry," he declared gravely.

"I know it's not fair—not to tell you," she said. "But—can't you just help me, Jimmy, and—and not care?"

A curious emotion filled him; a great compassion and a great dread.

"Why not?" he thought. "I don't want to hear. I don't want to know. Better let well enough alone."

But he knew it was not better, and not possible. Not all the pity in the world should make him a blind and ignorant tool. He was in honor bound to ask his question.

"Just this," he said. "That man—in the housekeeper's room?"

"Why, what man?" she asked. "I don't know what you mean."

His heart sank. Disappointment, and a sort of disgust for this childish lie filled him; he did not want to look at her again. He drove on, down a road which seemed to him endless, like a road in a dream.

The sun was going down quietly, without

pomp and glory, only slipping out of sight and drawing with it all the light and color in the world. They passed houses, they passed other cars, and it seemed to him that he and this girl passed through the everyday life about them like ghosts, set apart from their fellows, under a chill shadow.

"Jimmy!" she said, abruptly. "How can you be so horrid! Why don't you talk? Why can't you be like—like a real cousin?"

"Perhaps I haven't had enough practice," Ross replied.

She did not like this.

"All right, then! *Don't* help me! Just go away and leave me to suffer all alone!" she cried. "You're a heartless—beast! Go away!"

"Just as you please," said Ross. "Can you drive the car?"

She began to cry, but he paid no attention to this.

"Jimmy," she resumed, at last, "my Gayle's coming to-night."

"Your Gayle?" he repeated. "What's that?"

"He's the man I love," she said, simply.

And she was honest now, wholly in earnest; the childish artfulness had gone, and she spoke quietly

"He's coming to-night," she went on. "And if anything—goes wrong, he'll go away, and never come back. And something's very likely to go wrong, Jimmy."

"You'll have to remember that I don't know what you're talking about," said Ross.

She did not resent his blunt manner now.

"In the house where we're going," she explained, "there's some one Gayle must not see—no matter what happens. I'll talk to—this person first; I'll try to persuade him. But if I can't— That's what I want you to do for me. I want you to be sure to see that—this person doesn't leave that house to-night."

"And how am I to do that?"

She was silent for a moment.

"I don't care," she said then. "It doesn't matter how it's done."

"It does matter—to me."

"Listen to me!" she said, with a sort of sternness. "This man—in the cottage—he's blackmailing me. Because of something I did—something I'm sorry for—terribly, terribly sorry—"

"What will he take to keep quiet?"

"Nothing. All he wants is to hurt and ruin me."

"That's not blackmail," said Ross. "If he can't be bribed—"

"Oh, what does it matter what you call it? He's coming to-night, to tell—this thing—and Gayle will go away!"

"Look here!" said Ross. "Let him tell. If this Gayle of yours cares for you, he'll stand by you. If he doesn't, you're well rid of him. No; just wait a minute! Don't you see? You can't lie to a man you're—fond of. You—"

"I'm not going to lie. I'll just say nothing. The thing is over, Jimmy; over and done with. Mustn't I even have a chance? Jimmy, I'm young! I'm sorry—God knows I'm sorry for what I did—but it's done. Nothing can undo it. Won't you—*won't* you let me have just a chance?"

"But look here! Even if the man didn't come to-night, he'd come some other time. You don't expect me to—"

He stopped short, appalled by the words he had not spoken. He looked at her, and in the gathering dusk he saw upon her white face that terrible, still look again.

"No!" he cried.

"Jimmy!" she said. "Just keep him from coming to-night. Then to-morrow I'll tell you the whole thing. And perhaps you'll think of something to do. But—just to-night—keep him from coming!"

Ross made no answer.

"Down here, Jimmy—to the left," she said, presently, and he turned the car down a solitary lane, narrow, scored with ruts of half frozen mud. It had grown so dark now that he turned on the headlights.

"There!" she said. "That's the house. Let me out!"

He stopped the car.

"Look here!" he began, but she had sprung out, and was hurrying across a field of stubble. He could not let her go alone. He followed her, sick at heart, filled again with that sense of utter solitude, of being cut off from all his fellows, in a desolate and unreal world. His soul revolted against this monstrous adventure, and yet he could not abandon her.

She went before him, light, surprisingly sure-footed upon those high heels of hers. For some reason of her own, she had chosen to approach the house from the side, instead of following the curve of the lane. She came to a fence, and climbed it like a cat, and Ross climbed after her.

They were in a forlorn garden, where the withered grass stood high, and before them was the sorriest little cottage, battered and discolored by wind and rain, all the shutters closed, not a light, not a curtain, not a sign of life about it.

"Look here!" Ross began again. "I've got to know—"

She ran up the steps to the porch, where a broken rocking-chair began to rock as she brushed it in passing. She opened the door and entered; it was dark in there, but she ran up the stairs as if she knew them well; before he was halfway up, he heard her hurrying footsteps on the floor above, heard doors open and shut.

Then a light sprang out in the upper hall, and she stood there, looking down at him. By the unshaded gas jet he could see her face clearly, and it shocked him; such anguish there, such terror.

"Gone!" she gasped. "Gone!"

IX

To Ross, with his rigid self-control, it seemed impossible that a human creature could safely endure such violent emotion as hers. She was so fragile; she looked ill, horribly ill, ghastly; he thought she would faint, would fall senseless at his feet. He sprang up the stairs to be with her.

"Amy!" he cried.

Her dark brows met in a somber frown; she shook her head, waving her forefinger in front of her face; an odd, foreign little gesture.

"No!" she said. "Keep quiet! Don't speak to me. Let me think."

"Think!" said Ross to himself. "I don't believe you're capable of it, my girl. But certainly you're even less capable of listening to any one. Very well; go ahead with your thinking, then; and I'll wait for the next development."

He lit a cigarette, and leaned against the wall, smoking, not sorry for an interval of peace.

"Look at the time!" Amy commanded sharply. "You'll be late getting to the station, unless you hurry. Why didn't you remind me?"

"Inexcusable of me," said Ross. "I hope I shan't lose my job."

She apparently did not choose to notice this flippancy.

"Come!" she ordered, and went past him, down the stairs, and out of that sorry little cottage. She ran all the way to the

car, and two or three times she said "Hurry!" to Ross, who kept easily at her side with his usual stride.

"Now!" she said. "Drive as fast as you possibly can!"

"Sorry," said Ross, "but my only license is one I had in Manila—and even that's expired. I can't afford to take chances."

She shrugged her shoulders, with an unpleasant little laugh. She was in a very evil temper; the light was on inside of the car, and now and then he glanced at her, saw her sitting there, her black eyes staring straight before her, her mouth set in a mutinous and scornful line.

She was in torment; he felt sure of that, but he felt equally sure that she would not hesitate to inflict torment upon others. She was cruel, reckless, blind, and deaf in her folly. He wondered why it was that he pitied her so.

Then he, too, shrugged his shoulders; mentally, that is, for he was incapable of so theoretic a gesture in the flesh. He himself was in an odd humor, a sort of resigned indifference. He had, for the moment, lost interest in the whole affair. It was too fantastic, too confusing; he didn't care very much what happened, just now.

"Let me out here!" she said. "There's not time for you to take me up to the house. I'll walk. Now hurry!"

He stopped the car at the corner of Wygatt Road; she got out, and he went on, alone. And he was surprised by the difference which her going made. It was as if a monstrous oppression were lifted from his spirit, and he could once more draw a free breath, and once more see the open sky. One clear star was out. No; it was not a mad world; there was awful and majestic order in the universe, inexorable law.

And she was truly pitiable, hurrying home beneath that one star; a poor, helpless futile young thing, defying the whole world for her own desire. She wanted him to help her! He would not help her in her desperate folly, but he would not leave her now. Not now.

These admirable ideas were entirely put out of his head by a new dilemma. He arrived at the station; he heard the train coming in, and he could find no advantageous place for his car. All the good places were taken. He had to stop where he was certain Mr. Solway would never find him, until, as the train came in, a taxi was seized

by an alert woman, and Ross got his car into that vacant place.

Mr. Solway was not in the vanguard of the commuters; he came leisurely and with dignity, talking with another man. Ross stood beside the open door of the car; with a nod Mr. Solway got in, and the other man, too. They paid no attention whatever to Ross; they settled themselves, and went on talking, as if he were a ghost.

"They closed at five and an eighth," said the other man. "I can't help thinking that—"

"Now, see here!" Mr. Solway interrupted. "You hold on to them, my boy. I told you it was a good thing."

"It would be," said the other. "A very good thing, sir, if I could unload at five and an eighth—or even a bit less—when I bought at three and three-fourths."

"Now, see here!" said Mr. Solway. "I'll tell you something—which you needn't mention anywhere. I'm *buying* at five and an eighth—up to six and a half. Buying, mind you, my boy!"

This was almost more than Ross could bear. This was just the sort of talk he had thirsted for; this was what he had come to New York for; to buy stocks at three and three-fourths and sell at six and one-half, or more. There he sat, with his peaked cap pulled down over his lean, impassive face, listening with a sort of rage. If he could only ask Mr. Solway questions, only tell him that he had a few thousands of his own all ready and waiting for a little venture like this.

"And you'll need all you can get, my boy," Mr. Solway went on, "if you're going to marry Amy."

Then this was Gayle? Ross turned his head for one hasty glance—and then, encountering the astonished frown of Mr. Solway, realized what an improper thing he had done. Chauffeurs must not look.

He had had this look, though, and had gained a pretty accurate impression of the stranger. A tall young fellow, fair haired and gray eyed; he was stalwart and broad shouldered, and altogether manly, but there was in his face something singularly gentle and engaging.

"And that's the fellow!" thought Ross. "That's the fellow who's going to be fooled and lied to."

He liked him. And he liked the vigorous and blustering Mr. Solway, and he liked this rational, masculine conversation. It

reassured him. He reflected that, after all, he was not alone in this miserable affair, not hopelessly cornered with the preposterous girl. No; Solway was her stepfather, and the other man was her "Gayle." They were in it, too. They were his natural allies.

"She's got to tell them, that's all," he said to himself. "They'll both stand by her. I'll make her tell them. I can't handle this infernal mystery alone. I'm too much in the dark."

He drove in at the gates, up the driveway, and stopped the car before the house with a smartness that pleased him. Mr. Solway bounced out.

"Here, now!" he said. "You—Moss—Moss, that's it. Moss, just lend a hand with this bag. That's right; up the stairs—first door on the left. That's it! That's it! There you are, Gayle, my boy!"

He turned to Ross.

"Moss," he said. "Everything going along all right? That's it! That's it! You let me know if there's anything wrong."

Ross was hard put to it to suppress a smile. He imagined how it would be if he should say:

"Well, sir, there *was* one little thing—a dead man under the housekeeper's sofa. But, perhaps I shouldn't mention it."

He looked for a moment into the bluff, scowling, kindly face of the man Eddy had called "a prince."

"Thank you, sir," he said, and turned away, down the hall toward the back stairs. And, as he came round the corner into the corridor, where the housekeeper's room was, his quick ear caught some words of such remarkable personal interest to him that he stood still.

"Another James Ross!" Mrs. Jones was saying. "That's a likely story, I must say! Amy, that man's a fraud and a spy!"

"No, Nanna darling, he's not!" answered Amy, with sweet obstinacy.

"I tell you he is, child. He's got to go."

"No, dear," said Amy. "He's going to help me."

"Amy!" cried Mrs. Jones. "Can't you trust me? I tell you it's all right. He won't come to-night. I promise you he won't!"

"Oh, you mean well!" Amy remarked. "But you've made plenty of mistakes before this."

"Amy, I promise you—"

"No," said Amy. "You told me before that I needn't worry, that you'd 'settled everything.' And what happened? No; I'm afraid you're getting old, Nanna—old and stupid. I'm going to manage for myself now. And Jimmy's going to help me."

"Child!" Mrs. Jones protested. "That man will ferret out—"

"I don't care if he does," said Amy. "He won't tell, anyhow. Now don't bother me any more, Nanna. I've simply got to go."

Ross stepped quickly backward along the hall for a few yards; then he went forward again, with a somewhat heavier tread. And just round the corner of the corridor, he came face to face with Amy.

Her beauty almost took his breath away. She wore a dress of white and silver, and round her slender throat a short string of pearls. And against all this gleaming white the pallor of her skin was rich and warm, with a tint almost golden; and her misty hair was like a cloud about her face, and her black eyes so soft, so limpid.

"Jimmy!" she whispered. "Do I look nice?"

"Er—yes; very nice," Ross answered stiffly.

She came close to him, put her hand on his shoulder.

"Please, Jimmy!" she said, earnestly. "I do so awfully want to be happy—just for a little while!"

Ross had a moment of weakness. She was so young, so lovely; it seemed important, even necessary, that she should be happy. But he valiantly resisted the spell.

"Who doesn't?" he inquired.

"Jimmy, dear!" she said. "I'm coming to the garage after dinner—to ask you something—to beg you to do something. Will you do it, my *dear* little Jimmy?"

"I'll have to hear what it is first," said Ross.

But she seemed satisfied.

X

Ross went up to the room over the garage, and sat down there. He was hungry and tired, and in no pleasant humor.

"It's entirely too damned much!" he said to himself. "I'm—comparatively speaking—a rich man. There's money waiting for me. There's a nice, comfortable room in a hotel waiting for me; and decent clothes. I could have gone to a play tonight. There was one I wanted to see.

And here I am—in a garage—dressed up like a monkey. No, it's too much! I'm going back to the city to-morrow. I'm going to see Teagle, and settle my affairs. If Amy wants me to help her, I suppose I shall. But I won't stay here, and I won't be a chauffeur."

The more he thought of all this, the more exasperated he became. And it was nearly nine o'clock before he was summoned to dinner, which did not tend to placate him. In spite of his hunger, he took his time in going over to the house. He had no objection to being late, and he would have no objection to hearing some one complain about it. Indeed, he wished that some one would complain. Just one word.

Looking for trouble, Ross was, when he entered the house. He pushed open the swing door of the kitchen.

What marvelous aromas were there! What a festive air! That grave woman, the cook, was wreathed in smiles, for had she not this night accomplished a dinner which even Mrs. Jones had praised?

And the disagreeable housemaid was in softened mood, too, for she had waited upon romance. She had already described, more than once, the splendor of Miss Amy's costume, and the way "him and her" had looked at each other.

The laundress was elated, because she was fond of romance, and still more because she was a greedy young creature, and scented an especially good dinner. And they all welcomed Ross with cordiality.

"It's too bad you had to be waiting the long time it was!" said the cook. "You've a right to be famished entirely, Mr. Moss!"

Much mollified, the young man admitted that he *was* hungry.

"You'd oughter of come over for a cuper tea this afternoon," said the housemaid. "And a piecer cake."

"You'd oughter of tolle him, Gracie," the laundress added. "Poor feller! He don't know the ways here, yet!"

"Sit down, the lot of ye!" said the cook.

They did, and that unparalleled dinner began. It must be borne in mind that Ross was wholly unaccustomed to this sort of thing, to home cooking at its best, to the maternal kindness of women toward a hungry man. He liked it.

He was in no hurry to go back to the solitude of the garage, and his own thoughts. Being invited to smoke, he lit a cigarette and made himself very comfort-

able, while the cook washed the dishes, and Gracie and the laundress dried them. He was still taciturn, because he couldn't be anything else; but he answered questions.

He admitted that he had traveled a bit, and when the laundress, who was disposed to be arch, asked to be told about them queer places, he gave a few facts about the exports and imports of Manila. Anyhow, they all listened to him, and said, "Didjer ever!" and it was altogether the pleasantest hour he had yet spent in his native land.

And then—the swing door banged open, and there stood Amy, with a fur coat over her shimmering dress, and an ominous look in her black eyes.

"Moss!" she said. "What are you doing here? Get up and come with me at once! I want to speak to you!"

Without a word, he arose and followed her into the passage.

"I told you I was coming to the garage!" she pointed out, in a low, furious voice. "Why didn't you wait there?"

"Look here!" said Ross. "I don't like this sort of thing."

Before his tone her wrath vanished at once.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy!" she said. "I didn't mean to be horrid. Only, it was so hard for me to slip away—and I went all the way out to the garage in the cold and the dark, and you weren't there—and I'm so terribly worried. Oh, you will hurry, won't you?"

"Hurry? Well, what do you want me to do?"

"It may be too late, even now. Any instant he may come. He'll ring the bell, and Gracie will open the door. I *can't* tell her not to. He'll come in. Oh, Jimmy, you won't let that happen, will you? Oh, do, please hurry!"

"But just what—"

"Go out and hide some place where you can watch the front door. And if you see him coming—stop him! A thin, dark man, with a mustache. Oh, hurry, Jimmy! All evening long I've been waiting and waiting—in torment—for the sound of the bell. Go, Jimmy dear!"

"How long do you expect me to wait for him?"

"Oh, not so awfully long, dear. Just—" She paused. "Just till Eddy comes home. I'm sure he won't be late. Now hurry!"

"I don't want to do this," said Ross. "I can't stop—"

"Oh, shut up!" she cried; and then tried to atone by patting his cheek. "Jimmy, I'm desperate! Just help me this once! To-morrow I'll explain it all, and you'll see. Only go now!"

"I'll have to get my overcoat from the garage," he explained.

"All right, dear!" she said, gently, and turned away. And as he went toward the back door, he heard her sob.

All the way to the garage that sob echoed in his ears. Her tears had not affected him; they were too facile, too convenient. But that half stifled sob in the dark— He went quickly, taking the key from his pocket as he went; he, too, was in a hurry, now, to spare her this thing she dreaded.

He unlocked the door, turned on the switch, ran up the stairs, through the sitting room, and into the bedroom, where his coat hung.

He stopped short in the doorway. For, sitting on the bed was a tiny girl, seriously engaged in tying a ribbon about the waist of a white flannel rabbit. She looked up at the young man, but apparently was not interested, and went on with her job.

"Who are *you*?" demanded Ross.

"Lil-lee," said she.

"Yes, but I mean—how did you get here?"

"I comded in a balloon," she assured him.

Ross was completely ignorant about young children, but he realized that they were not to be held strictly accountable for their statements. And this child was such a very small one; such a funny little doll. She had a great mane of fair hair hanging about her shoulders, and, on one temple, a wilted bit of pink ribbon; she had serene blue eyes, a plump and serious face, by no means clean.

She wore a white dress, still less clean, a coral necklace, white—or grayish white—socks all down about her ankles, and the most dreadful little white shoes. He observed all this, because it was his way to observe, and because he was so amazed that he could do nothing but stare at her.

"But who brought you?" he asked.

"Minoo," she replied.

"Who's Minoo?"

The child held up the rabbit.

"Oh, Lord!" cried Ross. "Won't you please try to be—sensible? I don't know—Are you all alone here?"

"I fink I are."

"The door was locked," he said, aloud. "I can't see— But what shall I do with you?"

"Gimme my dindin," said she.

Ross wished to treat so small and manifestly incompetent a creature with all possible courtesy, but he was handicapped by his inexperience.

"Look here, Lily!" he said, earnestly. "I'm in the deuce of a hurry just now. If you'll wait here, I'll come back as soon as I can."

"I will be a good baby!" said she. "But I want my dindin!"

He could have torn his hair. He could not fail Amy now. And he could not leave a good baby alone and hungry, for he did not know how long.

"Shall I take it to the house?" he thought. "The cook would feed it. But— perhaps it's another of these damned mysteries. I haven't time to think it out now. I'd better keep it here until I've thought a bit. See here, Lily, what do you eat?"

"Dindin," Lily answered.

"Yes, I know. But—I've got bread. Will that do?"

"I like bread and thugar!" she agreed.

He hurried into the kitchen, cut four good, sturdy slices of bread, covered them well with butter and sugar, and brought them back on a plate. Then, with a vague memory of a puppy he had once had, he thought of water, and brought a glassful.

"Now I've got to go, Lily," he explained. "But I'll come back as soon as I can. You just wait, see?"

"I will!" she said, pleasantly, and held out her arms.

He hesitated for a moment, half frightened; then he caught up the funny little doll and kissed its cheek.

It was not a doll. It was warm and alive, and solider than it looked. It clung to him, and kissed him back again.

XI

"You won't feel the cold the first winter in the States."

That was what people in Manila and Porto Rico had told Ross. He thought of those people now. You didn't feel it, did you? Yes, you did!

He had found "some place where he could hide and watch the front door"; a plantation of firs halfway between the house and the gates. He had been there more than an hour, prowling up and down

behind the screen of branches; he had at first tried to smoke, but darkness and cold annihilated any sort of zest in the tobacco. He had attempted the army setting-up exercises, considerably hampered by his overcoat; but nothing produced in him either bodily warmth or a patient serenity of mind.

He was worried about that child. Not once did he say to himself that it was none of his business; he admitted willingly that a creature of that size had a claim upon all full-grown persons; he admitted that, whoever it was, and wherever it came from, it was entitled to his protection.

"She's too little to be left there alone," he thought. "Much too little. They always have nurses—or some one. She might fall down the stairs—or turn on the gas stove. I've been gone more than an hour. Good Lord! This is too much! What the devil's the matter with that fellow, anyhow?"

He was disgusted with this thin dark man with a mustache, who was so outrageously late in coming. Very likely the funny little doll was sitting up there, crying. The raw cold pierced to the marrow of his bones.

And this, he reflected, was his second night in his native land. The first had been spent imprisoned in the garage, at the point of a revolver, but it had been a thousand times better than this. He had been warm and comfortable—and he had been innocent, a victim. Now he was taking an active part in a thoroughly discreditable affair.

He was committed to wait for a thin dark man with a mustache, and to prevent his entering the house. And how was he to do this? Walk up to him and begin to expostulate? Try to bribe him?

The thought of bribery aroused in the young man an anger which almost made him warm. No Ross would ever pay blackmail. Indeed, no Ross of his branch was fond of parting with money for any purpose at all. They were very prompt in paying their just bills and debts, but they took care that these should be moderate.

"No!" thought Ross. "If I was fool enough to give this fellow money, he'd only come back for more, later on. I'm not going to start that. No! But how am I going to stop him? Knock him out? That's all very well, but suppose he knocked me out? Or he may carry a gun. Of course, I

suppose I could come up behind him and crack him over the head with a rock. That's what my Cousin Amy would appreciate. But somehow it doesn't appeal to me. After all, what have I got against this fellow? What do I know about him? Only what she's told me. And she's not what you'd call overparticular with her words."

His thoughts were off, then, upon the track of that problem which obsessed him. What had happened to the man under the sofa? He couldn't still be there. But who had taken him away, and where was he now? He looked toward the house, so solid and dignified, with its façade of lighted windows. He remembered his cozy dinner in the kitchen; he thought of the orderly life going on there.

It was impossible! Yet it was true. He had seen that dead man with his own eyes. He had touched him.

Who else knew? Surely Amy; but it was obvious that she had some one to help her in all emergencies. Mrs. Jones? Ross believed that Mrs. Jones had been well aware of the man's presence in her room. Eddy? Eddy's behavior had been highly suspicious.

He refused to go on with this profitless and exasperating train of thought. He was sick of the whole thing. Amy had said that she would "explain everything" to him the next day. Not for a moment did he believe that she would do anything of the sort, but he did hope that at least she would tell him a little. And, anyhow, whatever she told him, whatever happened or did not happen, he was going away—back to normal, honest, decent life.

"I said I'd help her, and, by Heaven, I am!" he thought. "After to-night we're quits. I'll hold my tongue about all this; but—I'm going!"

He whacked his stiff arms across his chest.

"Hotel Benderly, West Seventy-Seventh Street," he said to himself. "I'm going there to-morrow."

For he no longer saw Phyllis Barron as a danger. He was considerably less infatuated with liberty after these two days. It occurred to him, now, that to be entirely free meant to be entirely alone, and that to be without a friend was not good.

He wanted some one to trust, and he trusted Phyllis. No matter that he had known her only five days; he had seen that,

she was honest; that she was steadfast, and loveliest virtue of all, she was self-controlled. He knew that from her one need never dread tears, fury, despairs, selfishness and cajoleries.

Out there, in the cold and dark of his unhappy vigil, he thought of Phyllis, and longed for her smile.

"She'd never in her life get a fellow into a mess like this!" he thought. "But Amy—"

His distrust for his Cousin Amy was without limits. There was nothing, he thought, that she might not do. She was perfectly capable of forgetting all about him, and then, in the morning, if he were found frozen to death at his post, she would pretend to wonder what on earth the new chauffeur had been doing out there.

"After eleven," he thought. "And Eddy hasn't come yet. Very likely she knew he wouldn't come. Perhaps he's never coming back. All right! I'll wait till twelve, and then I'm going to take a look at that little kid. I've got to. It's too little."

So he walked up and down, up and down, over the rough, frozen patch of ground behind the fir trees; his coat collar turned up, his soft hat pulled low over his eyes, his face grim and dour; a sinister figure he would have been to meet on a lonely road.

Up and down—and then something happened. At first he could not grasp what it was, only that in some way his world had changed. He stopped short, every nerve alert. Then he realized that it was a sudden increase in the darkness, and, turning toward the house, he saw the lights there going out, one by one.

"By George!" he thought. "They're all going to bed! And I suppose I can stay here all night, eh? While they're warm and snug, the faithful Cousin James will be on guard. All right! I said I'd do it. But I'm going to get a glass of milk for that baby."

He set off as fast as his numb feet and stiff legs would carry him, toward the back door. He would tell the cook that he was hungry, and she would give him what he wanted. A kind, sensible woman, that cook.

He pushed open the back door and went in; it was dark in the passage, but warm, and the entrancing perfumes of the great dinner still lingered there. He went on, toward the kitchen, but before he got there,

the swing door opened, and Mrs. Jones appeared. She stopped, and he thought that she whispered: "It's I!"

He was a little disconcerted, because he knew that Mrs. Jones was not fond of him, and he was extremely suspicious of her. But she looked so sedate, almost venerable, standing there in the lighted doorway, in her best black dress, with her gray hair, her spectacles. He took off his hat, and spoke to her civilly.

"I came to ask for a glass of milk," he said.

Then she repeated what she had said before, and it was not "It's I," but the word "Spy!" uttered with a suppressed scorn that startled him.

"Spy!" she said. "I know you!"

He looked at her in stern amazement.

"Leave this house!" she said. "You can deceive a poor innocent young girl, but you can't deceive me. You and your glass of milk! I know you! And I tell you straight to your face that you're not coming one step farther. I'm going to stay here all night, and I'm going to see to it that neither you nor anybody else comes to worry and torment that poor girl. Go!"

"All right!" said Ross, briefly, and, turning on his heel, went out of the house.

"If she's going to take over the job of watchdog, she's welcome to it," he thought. "I guess she'd be pretty good at that sort of thing. But—spy!"

His face grew hot.

"I don't feel inclined to swallow that," he said to himself, deliberately. "Some day we'll have a reckoning, Mrs. Jones!"

XII

THE funny little doll lay asleep, very neat and straight, just in the center of the bed, the covers drawn up like a shawl, one cheek pressed against the pillow, its fair mane streaming out behind, as if it were advancing doggedly against a high wind. There was no creature in the world more helpless, yet it was not alert, not timid, as defenseless little animals are; it slept in utter confidence and security.

And that confidence seemed to Ross almost terrible. The tiny creature, breathing so tranquilly, took for granted all possible kindness and protection from him. It had asked him for food; it had offered a kiss.

He stood looking down at it with considerable anxiety, yet with the hint of a smile on his lips.

"Made yourself at home, didn't you?" he thought.

As he looked, the child gave an impatient flounce, and threw one arm over her head. Ross drew nearer, frowning a little; bent over to examine that arm, that ruffled sleeve.

"I don't believe—" he muttered, and very carefully pulled out the covers from the foot of the bed. His suspicions were confirmed; she was fully dressed, even to her shoes.

"Must be darned uncomfortable!" he thought. He hesitated a moment, half afraid to touch her; but at last he cautiously unbuttoned one slipper. She did not stir. He drew off the slipper, then the other one; then the socks, and tucked in the covers again.

"Poor little devil!" he said to himself. "Poor little devil! I wonder—"

A great yawn interrupted him.

"I'll think about this in the morning," he thought; "but I'm going to get some sleep now—before anything else happens."

For, coming from the cold of his vigil into this warmth was making him intolerably drowsy. He took off his collar and sat down to remove those objectionable puttees.

As this unprincipled intruder had so coolly taken possession of the bed, he would have to sleep on the couch in the sitting room, but that didn't trouble him. He felt that he could sleep anywhere, and that nothing—absolutely nothing—could keep him awake ten minutes longer.

A sound from below startled him. Some one was unlocking the door.

In his blind fatigue, he was ready to ignore even that. He didn't care who came; he wanted to go to sleep.

But he remembered the tiny creature in the bed, the creature who expected his protection, and that roused him. Closing the bedroom door, he went to the head of the stairs, and, in a voice husky with sleep, but distinctly threatening, called out:

"Who's that?"

"Me," answered Eddy's voice.

Even before he saw the boy, Ross was aware that there was something amiss with Eddy to-night. His voice was different; he climbed the stairs so slowly. He came into the sitting room, and flung down the bag he was carrying.

"I'm all in!" he said.

He looked it. His face was haggard and

white; his glossy hair was no longer combed back, but flopped untidily over his forehead. There was nothing jaunty about Eddy now. He was weary, grimy, and dispirited.

"Been doing overtime," he explained. "Lot of wires down in that storm last night."

"Look here!" said Ross. "There's a child here—a baby. I don't know whose it is, or how it got here. But it's asleep in there. Better not disturb it."

"Wha-at!" cried Eddy. He looked amazed, he spoke in a tone of amazement, but there was something—

"By Heaven!" thought Ross. "You've got the other key to the garage, my lad! And the child didn't come through a locked door."

"A kid!" Eddy repeated.

"Queer, isn't it?" Ross inquired, sarcastically. "If not peculiar!"

Eddy glanced at him, and then sat down and lit a cigarette.

"I'll say it's queer!" he observed.

"Especially as I'd left the door locked when I went out."

Again Eddy glanced at him.

"Did you—what did they say—over at the house?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing much!"

He observed, with satisfaction, that this answer alarmed Eddy.

"Well, lissen here," he said. "Who did you tell? Old Jones?"

"I don't remember," Ross declared.

"But—" Eddy began, and stopped.

"I'm going to turn in now," said Ross. "Afraid you'll have to put up with the chair again to-night."

He crossed the room to the couch and lay down there. He was only partly undressed, and he put his shoes beside him, and his overcoat across his feet, because, in this nightmare existence, he had to be prepared for every impossible emergency.

"But I'll get some sleep anyhow!" he thought, defiantly.

He stretched out, with a sigh of relief, and closed his eyes, when an almost inaudible sound, like the faintest echo of his own sigh, made him glance up again. He saw that Eddy had buried his face in his hands, and sat there, his slight shoulders hunched, his young head bent, in an attitude of misery and dejection.

And Ross was sorry for him. All through his confused and heavy dreams

that night ran a little thread of pity, of regret and pain, which he could not understand. Only, he felt that in this adventure there was more than the tragedy of death.

When he opened his eyes again, the room was filled with a strange, pale light, unfamiliar to him. Dawn? It was more like twilight. He raised himself on one elbow and looked out of the window, and, for the first time in his life, he saw the snow.

Thick and fast the flakes went spinning by, tapping lightly against the glass, and, out beyond, he saw that all the world was white. White and unimaginably still. He had seen plenty of pictures of snow-covered landscapes, but he had never known the *feel* of a snowstorm, the odd tingle in the air, the sense of hushed expectancy.

He was amazed and delighted with it. Old and forgotten fancies of his childhood stirred in him now; queer little memories of glittering Christmas cards, of fairy tales. He remembered a story his mother had read to him, so very long ago, about a Snow Queen.

And it was good for him to remember these things, after so many ungracious years, just as it was good to see the snow, after so long a time of tropic sun and rain. He knew that it was good, and for a little time he was content, watching the snow fall.

But his destiny was not inclined to allow him many peaceful moments just then. Before he had even begun to think of his complicated anxieties, a sound from the next room brought the whole burden upon him like an avalanche. It was the child's voice.

He jumped up from the couch, and then he noticed that Eddy had gone. He frowned, not knowing whether this was a disaster or a thing of no importance, and, without stopping to put on his shoes, went across to the bedroom door and turned the knob. He had come so quietly that no one had heard him, and he was able to observe a curious scene.

Eddy was on his knees, his head bowed before the little girl, who sat on the bed, lifting strands of his glossy hair and pulling them out to their fullest extent, with a grave and thoughtful air.

"Lookit here!" whispered Eddy. "I wish you'd quit that, baby!"

"You dot funny, flippety-floppety hair," said she.

"Well, anyway, hold your foot still, won't you?" he entreated.

Ross saw, then, that Eddy was trying to put the child's socks on, and getting no intelligent coöperation from her.

"What are you doing that for?" he asked.

Eddy sprang to his feet like a cat. He looked at Ross, and Ross looked at him, and the little girl lay back on the bed and began jouncing up and down.

"Well," Eddy replied, slowly, "if you really want to know, it was me brought her here, and now I'm goin' to take her away again; that's all."

Once more Ross was conscious of a disarming pity for the boy. He thought he had never seen a human creature who looked so unhappy.

"Look here, Eddy!" he remarked. "Who is she, anyhow?"

"Her?" said Eddy. "Why what does it matter?"

Ross was silent for a moment.

"I—I'm interested in the little girl," he said, half ashamed of this weakness. "I'd like to know where she's going."

"Gawd knows," said Eddy, briefly.

"What do you mean?"

"She can't stay here," said Eddy. "That's one sure thing."

Again he looked at Ross, with a strange intensity, as if he were trying desperately to read that quite unreadable face.

"If you're really interested in the kid—" he began.

"I am," said Ross.

Eddy sat down on the bed.

"I don't believe you told them, over at the house," he continued. "'Cause, if they knew, they'd of—"

"No, I didn't," said Ross.

"Then nobody knows she's here—but me and you?"

"That's all."

"Well," said Eddy.

Again Ross had a distinct warning of danger, and again he defied it, standing there stubbornly resistant to all the ill winds that might blow.

"This kid," Eddy pointed out—"she hasn't got anybody in the world."

As if by common consent, they both turned to look at the child. She was holding the rabbit aloft, and trying to touch it with one little bare foot; she was quite happy; with superb unconcern she left her fate in the hands of these two young men.

"I'd explain it to you, if I could," Eddy went on; "but I can't, just now. Later on, maybe. Only, she can't stay here. I got to take her away before anybody sees her." He paused. "I know somewhere I could leave her to-day, and bring her back here to-night, all right, only after that—"

A dim and monstrous suspicion stirred in Ross, but he would not examine it. He did not want to understand.

"After that," he said, "I'll look after her."

XIII

THEY had breakfast together, Ross and Eddy and the child. And the rabbit was there, too, propped up against the coffee-pot; he was fed with spoonfuls of water, and he got pretty wet in the process.

It was an amazing meal. It seemed to Ross sometimes that he was still asleep, and this a dream—the little kitchen filled with that strange, pale light, the snow falling steadily outside, and the child beside him.

"Why did I say I'd look after her?" he thought, with a sort of wonder. "What's the matter with me, anyhow?"

He didn't know, and could not understand. He was hopelessly involved, now, in this sorry muddle, and he saw, very clearly, that every step had been taken deliberately, of his own free will. He could have got out, long ago, but—here he was. And he was committed now to an undertaking almost too fantastic, too preposterous to contemplate.

Yet he did not regret it. Just as, in a shipwreck, he would have given his life for a tiny creature like this, so was he obliged now to offer it his protection. Eddy said she had nobody in the world. Very well, then; he had to stop, to turn aside from his own affairs, and lend a hand to this forlorn little fellow traveler. He had to do it.

"More!" said the child, briskly.

"More what?" asked Ross.

"More—evvysing!" she cried, bouncing up and down perilously upon the telephone directories he had piled on her chair. "More evvysing!"

"Give her some cawfee," suggested Eddy.

"No," said Ross. "Too young. They only have milk—things like that."

And, with these words, the fantasy became real. He had actually assumed the responsibility, now. He was taking care of

the child. He looked down at her, frowning a little, and she looked up into his face with cheerful expectancy. She knew very well! He was the one appointed to serve her, and she knew it. He was to supply her with "more evvysing."

"Look here, Eddy!" he said. "There must be some one who'll turn up later to— to take care of the child. There's bound to be *some one*."

Eddy glanced up as if he were about to speak, but his face grew scarlet, and he turned away.

"Well," he said, after a time, "I dunno. It's kind of hard to say. Only, I thought you—I thought you'd be a good one to—take her."

Ross was surprised and curiously touched by this, and somewhat embarrassed. A good one, was he, for this charge? He looked at the child again.

"Her face is dirty," he observed, sternly. "She ought to be washed. Any warm water in that kettle, Eddy?"

"Yep. But I got to hurry, before the rest of 'em get up. Go on and eat, kid!" He turned to Ross. "Tell you what I thought. I know a place where I can take her and keep her till you come and get her after dark. It's a cottage where there's nobody living just now. You go up the Post Road about eight miles, till you come to a church that's being built on the left side of the road. Then you turn—"

"Yes," said Ross. "I—" He stopped, and Eddy sat staring blankly at him.

"What?" he cried. "D'you know?"

"Go on!" said Ross. "Go on! Tell me how to get there."

"What made you say 'yes,' like that?"

"I meant I was listening to you. Go on, man!" And because of his distaste for this lie, Ross spoke with a brusque impatience which impressed Eddy.

"All right!" he said. "But listen here! I—well—you're a funny sort of guy. I never seen any one so close-mouthed in my life. I can't make out yet who you are, or what you come here for. But—" He sighed, and stroked his glossy hair. "I got to trust you, that's all. Last night I thought I'd go crazy, trying to think what I could do about the kid. I couldn't—I'll tell you where this place is, and I hope to Gawd you'll keep still about it. 'Cause, if we get any one else monkeying around there—well—there'll be trouble, that's all. Big trouble."

"Go on!" said Ross.

So Eddy did go on, giving him careful directions for reaching the cottage Ross had visited the day before with Amy.

"And for Pete's sake, come as early as you can," he ended. "Come before it gets dark, will you? I—" He arose. "Come on, baby!"

She jumped down from her chair, with a piece of bread and butter in one hand, and the rabbit in the other; she was quite ready to go anywhere, with any one. Ross washed her sticky hands and tried to wash her face, but this annoyed her so much that he was not successful. Eddy brought out her coat and bonnet from a cupboard; put on his own very modish overcoat, and a cap, picked up the child, and off they went.

From an upper window, Ross watched them go across the great white waste that was so strange and yet somehow so familiar to him. Eddy stumbled now and then, over some hidden unevenness in the ground, but the child in his arms sat up straight and triumphant, her head, in the knitted hood, turning briskly from side to side. Then they were lost to sight in the falling snow and the gray morning light, and Ross turned back to the empty rooms.

It was only half past seven; he had nearly an hour before Mr. Solway expected him, and he thought he would use that time for investigating the engine of the limousine. Both cars were in deplorably good condition; there was little he could justifiably do to them, and he was, moreover, a mechanic of more enterprise than experience. But he was devoted to engines, and pretty well up in the theory of the internal combustion type.

He put on a suit of overalls he found in the garage; he started the engine and opened the hood; he was so pleased with that fine roar, that powerful vibration which was like the beat of a great, faithful heart, that he began to whistle. A superb motor; he would enjoy driving that car.

"She's a beauty, all right!" said a voice, so very close to his ear that he jumped.

Standing at his elbow was a burly fellow of thirty-five or so, with a bulldog jaw; his voice and his smile were friendly, but his blue eyes, Ross thought, were not.

"Yes, sir!" he went on. "You've got a mighty fine car there."

Ross said nothing. He did not care to continue his amateur explorations under those cold blue eyes. He shut off the en-

gine, closed the hood, and turned toward the stranger with a challenging glance.

But the stranger was not at all abashed.

"Have a smoke," he asked, proffering a packet of cigarettes.

"No, thanks!" said Ross, and stood there, facing the other, and obviously waiting for an explanation.

"Dirty weather!" said the stranger.

"All right!" said Ross sullenly. "What about it?"

His tone was very nearly savage, for, to tell the truth, his position was having a bad effect upon his temper. Having so much to conceal, so many unwelcome secrets intrusted to him, he had begun to suspect every one. He didn't like this fellow.

"Well, I'll tell you," said the stranger, in an easy and confidential manner. "I came up this way, looking for a man. And I thought I'd drop in here and see if you could give me any information." He stopped to light a cigarette, and his blue eyes were fixed upon Ross. "Fellow by the name of Ives," he said. "Ever hear of him, eh?"

"No!" said Ross.

"Ives," said the other, slowly. "Martin Ives. Fellow about your age. About your build. Dark complexioned—like you."

"D'you think I'm your Martin Ives?" demanded Ross, angrily.

"I wish you were," said the stranger, and his tone was so grave that Ross had a sudden feeling of profound uneasiness.

"Well, I'm not," he said, "and I never heard of him. I'm new here—just came two days ago."

"Two days, eh?" said the stranger. "That was Wednesday, eh?"

"I shouldn't have told him that," thought Ross, dismayed. "But, good Lord, I can't remember to lie all the time! And, anyhow, what difference can it make —when I came here?"

But he could see, from the stranger's face, that it had made a difference.

"You came here on Wednesday," he continued. "I wonder, now, did you happen to see any one—"

"No!" shouted Ross. "I didn't see any one. I didn't see anything. I never heard of your Ives. Go and ask some one else. I'm busy!"

"I don't want to bother you," said the stranger, grown very mild. "I can see you're busy. But it's a pretty serious thing. You see, Ives came to Stamford on

Tuesday. I've traced him that far. And after that—he's disappeared."

"Well, do you think I've got him hidden here?"

"My name's Donnelly," the stranger went on. "And I've come out here to find Ives."

"All right! I wish you luck!"

"I don't know," said Donnelly, thoughtfully. "Maybe it won't be so lucky—for some people."

He was not looking at Ross now; his cold blue eyes were staring straight before him.

"But I think I'll find him, all the same," he declared, gently.

"Ives was the man under the sofa," thought Ross.

XIV

Ross could not understand why that notion came as a shock to him. Naturally, the man under the sofa had a name; every one had. Yet, directly he thought of that figure as "Martin Ives," instead of "the man," the whole affair grew ten times more tragic and horrible—and ten times more dangerous.

"A man" might disappear, but not Martin Ives. Martin Ives was real; he had friends; he must have lived somewhere. He would be sought for—and found.

"This Donnelly—" thought Ross. "He's got this far already. And he'll keep on."

In his mind he envisaged the inexorable progress of the search. Step by step, hour by hour. If this man went away, another would come. The awful march of retribution had begun. Nothing could stop it.

"Murder will out."

His anger, his impatience, had quite vanished now. He could not resent Donnelly's presence, because he was inevitable. He seemed to Ross the very personification of destiny, not to be eluded, not to be mollified. He looked at him and, as he had expected, found the cold blue eyes regarding him.

"Do you think you can help me?" asked Donnelly.

"I don't see how," said Ross. "I don't know the fellow you're looking for. I'll have to get along, now. Got to drive down to the station."

"Well," said Donnelly, blandly, "I can wait."

"Not here!" said Ross, with energy. "They wouldn't like—"

"Oh, no, not here!" said the other. "See you later. So long!" And off he went.

Ross watched his burly figure tramping along the driveway until he was out of sight; then he made haste to get himself ready, took out the car, locked the garage, and drove up to the house.

It was much too early. There he sat, shut up in the snug little sedan, with the snow falling outside, as if he were some unfortunate victim of an enchantment, shut up in a glass cage. And he began to think, now, of what lay immediately before him.

"I'll have to make some sort of excuse to Mr. Solway for going away," he thought. "A lie, of course. I wish to Heaven I didn't have to lie to *him*. Then I'll get the child, and clear out. I'll find some sort of home for her. Phyllis Barron will help me."

The idea dazzled him, the magnificent simplicity of it, the unspeakable relief of just picking up the child and walking off. No explanations, no more lies. He contemplated it in detail. How he would walk into the Hotel Miston, into his comfortable room, and unpack his bags. How he would take the child to Phyllis Barron, and tell her that here was a poor little kid who had nobody in the world. She would know what to do; she would help him; the nightmare would end.

As for Amy—

"I'll have it out with her to-day!" he thought. "I'm not called upon to give up my entire life for that girl. I've done enough, and more than enough."

The door opened, and out came Mr. Solway. Ross jumped out and opened the door of the car.

"Ha!" said Mr. Solway. "Very sensible—very sensible! You came early, so that you'd have time to drive carefully. Very important—weather like this. Very sensible! But wait a bit! Mr. Dexter's coming along." Standing out in the snow, he shouted: "Gayle! Come, now! Come!" to the unresponsive house; then he got into the car.

"I'd like to speak to you for a minute, sir," said Ross.

Mr. Solway observed how white and strained the young man's face was, and he spoke to him very kindly.

"Well?" he said. "What is it, Moss?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to leave to-morrow, sir."

"Leave, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I—it's—family troubles, sir."

"Married man?" asked Mr. Solway, in a low voice.

"No, sir," said Ross. The honest sympathy in the other man's tone made him sick with shame. "It's a—a younger sister of mine."

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Solway, "I'm sorry, very sorry. You're the sort of young fellow I like. Family troubles—Too bad! I'm sorry. Come back here any time you like."

"Thank you, sir," said Ross.

"Nonsense! Nonsense! You're the type of young— Ha, Gayle! Step in! Step in. Start her up, Moss!"

Ross did so. He had never been more unhappy in his life than he was now, with his lie successfully accomplished.

"This finishes it!" he thought, as he drove back from the station. "I'm going to see Amy, and have it out with her. I'll tell her about this Donnelly. I'll warn her—"

And then go off and leave her to face the consequences alone?

"But, hang it all, she's not alone!" he cried to himself. "She's got Solway, and she's got her Gayle. Why doesn't she go to him? He's the natural one to share her troubles."

Unfortunately, however, he could not help understanding a little why Amy did not want to tell Gayle. He had had another good look at Gayle when he got out of the car at the station, and he was obliged to admit that there was something very uncompromising in that handsome face. Nobody, he thought, would want to tell Gayle Dexter a guilty secret.

"I suppose she doesn't particularly mind my knowing anything," he reflected, "because, as far as she's concerned, I don't count."

This idea pleased him as much as it would please any other young fellow of twenty-six. And, combined with his many anxieties, and his hatred and impatience toward his present position, it produced in him a very unchivalrous mood. He brought the car into the garage, and sat down on its step, with his watch in his hand. He gave Amy thirty minutes in which to send him a message.

Of course she didn't send any. Then he went to the telephone which connected with the house. Gracie's voice answered him.

"I want to speak to Miss Solway!" he said.

"I'll see," said Gracie.

He waited and waited, feeling pretty sure that Amy would not come; that she would, indeed, never speak to him or think of him unless she wanted him to do something for her. But presently, to his surprise, he heard her voice, so very gentle and sweet that he could scarcely recognize it.

"Moss?" she said, as if in wonder.

"Yes," he said. "Look here! I'd like to—"

"I don't think I'll want the car all day," said she. "Not in this weather."

"Look here!" he began, again. "I want to speak to you. Now."

"I shan't need you at all to-day, Moss," said she, graciously, and he heard the receiver go up on the hook.

He stood for a moment, looking at the telephone. His dark face had grown quite pale, and there was upon it a peculiar and unpleasant smile.

But he was, in his way, a just man, and not disposed to let his temper master him. He looked at the telephone, and he thought his thoughts for a few moments; then he resolutely put this exasperation out of his mind, and proceeded with his business.

He decided to go and get the child without any further delay. There was no reason for delay, and, to tell the truth, he was vaguely uneasy with her away. He could easily keep her hidden in the garage until the morning, and then get away early. And he wanted her here.

He took off the hated uniform, dressed himself in his customary neat and sober fashion, put his papers and what money he had into his pockets, and set off toward the station, where he knew he could get a taxi.

The beauty which had so enchanted him early in the morning was perishing fast, now. The fields still showed an unbroken expanse of white, but the trees were bare again. The flakes melted as they fell; the roads were a morass of slush, and all the tingle had gone out of the air. It was a desolate, depressing day, now, with a leaden sky. The slush came over the tops of his shoes, his hat brim dripped, his spirits sank, in this melancholy world.

But at least he was alone, and able to go his own way, in his own good time, and that was a relief. He stopped in the town, and bought himself a pipe and a tin of tobacco. He stopped whenever he felt like

it, to look at things; and, passing a fruit stand, went in and bought two apples for the little girl.

"Good for children," he thought, with curious satisfaction.

He reached the station, and saw three or four vacant taxis standing there; he selected one and went up to it, and was just about to give his directions when a hand fell on his shoulder.

"Well!" said a voice—the most unwelcome one he could have heard.

It was Donnelly, grinning broadly.

"Well!" said Ross, in a noncommittal tone.

His brain was working fast. He couldn't go to the cottage now. He must somehow get rid of this fellow, and he must invent a plausible reason for being here.

"I walked down to get a few things," he said, "but I guess I won't try walking back. The roads are too bad."

"You're right!" said Donnelly, heartily.

"Wygatt Road!" Ross told the taxi driver, and got into the cab.

"Hold on a minute!" said Donnelly. "I'm going that way, too. I'll share the cab with you."

"Look here!" cried Ross.

"Well?" said Donnelly. "I'm looking."

The unhappy young man did not know what to say. He felt that it would be extremely imprudent to antagonize the man.

"All right," he said, at last, and Donnelly got in beside him.

The cab set off, splashing through the melted snow—going back again to that infernal garage. Suppose Donnelly hung about all day?

"Where do you want to get out?" he demanded.

"To tell you the truth," said Donnelly, "I was waiting for you."

"Waiting! But—"

"I sort of thought you might be coming to the station some time to-day," said the other, tranquilly, "and I waited. Wanted a little talk with you."

"What about?"

"Well, it's this. I told you I was looking for a man called Ives."

"And I told you I didn't—"

"Now, hold on a minute! You told me you'd never heard of him. All right. Now, I told you I knew Ives came out to Stamford on Tuesday. That was about all I did know—this morning. But I've found out a little more since then."

"What's that got to do with me?" asked Ross, with a surly air and a sinking heart.

"That's just what I don't know. On Wednesday you came to Mr. Solway's house. You didn't bring anything with you, and you haven't sent for any bag or trunk, or anything like that. Now, hold on! Just wait a minute! You said you'd come from Cren's Agency, I'm told. But Cren's Agency told me on the telephone that—Now, hold on! Don't lose your temper! You can clear this up easy enough. Just show me your license. Haven't got it with you, I suppose?"

"No!" said Ross.

"All right. You've left it in the garage. Very well. That's where you're going now, isn't it? Unless—" He paused. "Unless you'd like to come along with me."

"Come—where?" asked Ross.

"Why, there's a little cottage off the Post Road," said Donnelly. "I'd like to pay a little visit there this morning, and it came into my head that maybe you'd like to come along with me, eh?"

XV

Ross was, by nature, incapable of despair; but he felt something akin to it now. He was so hopelessly in the dark; he did not know what to guard against, what was most dangerous. He remembered Eddy's warning, not to let any one come "monkeying around" that cottage; but he did not know the reason for that warning. Nor could he think of any way to prevent Donnelly's going there.

Should he lock the fellow up in the garage until he had warned Eddy? No; that was a plan lacking in subtlety. Certainly it would confirm whatever suspicions Donnelly might have; it might do a great deal more harm than good.

Should he tell Amy, on the chance that she might suggest something? No. The chance of her suggesting anything helpful was very small, and the chance that she would do something reckless and disastrous very great. Better keep Amy out of it.

Then what could he do? The idea came into his head that he might keep Donnelly quiet for a time by boldly asserting that he himself was Ives. But perhaps Donnelly knew that he wasn't.

"By Heaven, why shouldn't I tell him the truth?" he thought, in a sort of rage. "Why not tell him I'm James Ross? There's nothing against me. I've done

nothing criminal. I don't even know what's happened here. I'll just tell him."

And then Donnelly would ask him why he had come, and why he was here masquerading as a chauffeur. How could he explain? For it never occurred to him as a possibility that he could ignore Donnelly's questions.

There was an air of unmistakable authority about the man. Ross had not asked him who he was, and he had no wish in the world to find out, either; simply, he knew that Donnelly was justified in his very inconvenient curiosity, that he had a right to know, and that he probably would know, before long.

"Perhaps I can manage to get away from him," thought Ross.

That was the thing! Somehow he must sidetrack Donnelly; get him off upon a false scent, while he himself hastened to Eddy. Such a simple and easy thing to do, wasn't it?

"Well!" said Donnelly. "Do we go back, and have a look at that license of yours—or do we go and pay a little visit to that cottage, eh?"

"I'm going back," said Ross, curtly.

"Of course," Donnelly went on, in a mild and reasonable tone, "I know, and *you* know, that you're not going to show me any license. What you want is a little time to make up your mind. You're saying to yourself: 'I don't know this fellow. I don't know what he's up to. I don't see any reason why I should trust him with any of my private affairs.' You're right. Why should you? You've talked to certain other people, and you've heard good reasons why you ought to keep quiet—about one or two little things. That's sensible enough. Why, naturally," he went on, growing almost indignant in defense of Ross, "naturally an intelligent young man like you isn't going to tell all he knows to a stranger. Why should you?"

Ross found it difficult to reply to this.

"No," said Donnelly. "Naturally not. What you say to me is: 'Put your cards on the table, Donnelly. Let's hear who you are, and what you know, and what you're after. Then we can talk.' That's what you say. All right. Now, I'll tell you. I'll be frank. I'll admit that when I saw you this morning, I thought you were Ives. You see, I'm frank—not pretending to know it all. I made a mistake. You're not Ives."

"Thanks!" said Ross.

"When Ives came out here on Tuesday," Donnelly proceeded, "he took a taxi. I'll tell you frankly that I just found that out this morning by a lucky fluke. No credit to me. He went out to this cottage, and there he met somebody."

"Oh, that was me, I suppose" said Ross.

"No," said Donnelly. "It was a woman."

"Oh, Lord!" thought Ross. "This is—I can't stand much more of this."

"Now, I'm not going to pretend I know who that woman was," Donnelly went on. "I don't. I haven't found that out—yet. Not yet."

"But you will," thought Ross.

He felt sure of that. He believed that there was no hope now for the guilty ones, and he felt that he was one of the guilty ones. He did not know what had happened at "Day's End," but the burden of that guilt lay upon his heart. This man was the agent of destiny, inexorable, in no way to be eluded. He had come to find out, and find out he surely would.

Ross was a young man of remarkable hardihood, though; no one had ever yet been able to bully him, or to intimidate or fluster him. He had precious little hope of success, but he meant to do what he could. If he could only gain a little time, perhaps he might think of a plan, and, in the meanwhile, he would say nothing and admit nothing.

"Now, before we talk," said Donnelly, "you want to know who I am, and how I came to be mixed up in this business. As soon as you saw me, you said to yourself: 'Police!'"

Ross winced at the word.

"That was natural. But you made a mistake. I'll tell you frankly that I was a police detective once, but I've left the force. I'm a private citizen, now, same as you are. Got a little business of my own—what you might call a private investigator. Collecting information—jobs like that. Nothing to do with criminal cases."

He was silent for a moment.

"Nothing to do with criminal cases," he repeated. "I don't like 'em. Now, this—"

Again he fell silent.

"We'll hope this isn't one," he said. "I'll tell you about it. My sister, she's a widow, and she keeps a rooming house, down on West Twelfth Street. Well, yes—

terday she came to me with a story that sort of interested me. She told me that about a month ago a young fellow took a room in her house. Quiet young fellow, didn't give any trouble, but she'd taken a good deal of notice of him, in what you might call a sort of motherly way."

"Yes, I know," Ross nodded.

"A good-looking young fellow, very polite and nice in his ways—and she thought from the start that he was pretty badly worried about something. She'd hear him walking up and down at night—and she said there was a look on his face— You know how women are."

"Yes," Ross agreed.

"So, when he didn't show up for a couple of nights, she came to me. I told her to go to the police, but she had some sort of notion that he wouldn't like that—and I dare say she didn't like it herself. Bad for business—a thing like that in the newspapers, you know. So, just to please her, I got his door unlocked, and had a look at his room."

"You found—"

"Well, the first thing I saw there was a pile of money on the table—about seventy-five dollars in bills, under a paper weight, and a half finished letter. No name—just began right off—'I won't wait any longer.' But here's the letter. You can see for yourself."

Unbuttoning his overcoat, he took a folded piece of paper from his breast pocket and handed it to Ross. It read:

I won't wait any longer. I am coming out to Stamford to-morrow, and if you refuse to see me this time, it will be the end. You've been putting me off with one lie after the other for all this time, and now it's finished. I don't know how you can be so damned cruel. Don't you even want to see your own child? As for your husband—I have no more illusions about that. You're sick of me. All you want is to get rid of me, and you don't care how, either. Well, I don't care. I'd be better off with a bullet through the head. It's only the baby—

Here there were several words scratched out, and it began again:

Darling, my own girl, perhaps I'm wrong. I hope to God I am. Perhaps you are really doing your best, and thinking of what's best for the child. Only, it's been so long. I want you back so. I've got a little money saved. I can keep you both. I can work. I can make you happy, even if we are a bit poor. Darling, just let me see you and—

That was the end. Ross touched his tongue to his dry lips, and folded up the

letter again. He dared not look at Donnelly, but he knew Donnelly was looking at him.

"Ives wrote that letter," said Donnelly. "The way I figure it out is this. He began to write, and then he decided that, instead of sending a letter, he'd go. He must have been in a pretty bad state to leave all that money behind. But, of course, he meant to come back. Well, he didn't. Aha! Here we are!"

The taxi stopped before the gates of "Day's End," and Donnelly, getting out, told the driver to wait for him. Then he set off with Ross, not along the drive, but across the lawn, behind the fir trees.

"I won't bother you by telling you how I know he came to Stamford on Tuesday," he proceeded. "It's my business to find out things like that. He came, and he took a taxi out to this cottage I've mentioned, and a woman met him there. He sent the taxi away—and that's the last I've heard of him."

The snow was wholly turned to rain, now; it blew against Ross's face, cold and bitter; the trees stood dripping and shivering under the gray sky. He was wet, chilled to the bone, filled with a terrible foreboding.

"That cottage belongs to an old lady in the neighborhood," said Donnelly. "But she doesn't know anything about this. She said the place had been vacant two years, and she didn't expect to rent it till she'd made some repairs. She said anybody could get into it easily enough if they should want to. Well!"

They stood before the garage, now, and Ross took the key from his pocket.

"So you see," said Donnelly, "that's how it is. I've traced him that far. I know that there's some woman in Stamford who has a good reason for wanting to get rid of him. And now—" He looked steadily at Ross. "And now I've about finished."

"Finished?" said Ross. "You—you mean—"

But Donnelly did not answer.

XVI

Ross went upstairs to the sitting room over the garage. It did not occur to him to extend an invitation to his companion; he knew well enough that he would hear those deliberate footsteps mounting after him; he knew that Donnelly would follow.

He took off his hat and overcoat and flung himself into a chair, and Donnelly did the same, in a more leisurely fashion. Certainly he was not a very troublesome shadow; he did not speak or disturb Ross in any way. He just waited.

And Ross sat there, his legs stretched out before him, hands in his pockets, his head sunk, lost in a reverie of wonder, pity, and great dread.

"Her child?" he thought. "Amy's child? Ives was her husband, and that baby is her child?"

He recalled with singular vividness the phrases of that pitiful, unreasonable letter. "Just let me see you." "It's been so long!" "You're sick of me. All you want is to get rid of me." He could imagine Ives, that fellow who was about his age, about his build — alone in his furnished room, writing that letter. "How can you be so damned cruel?" And "darling."

"In a pretty bad state," Donnelly had said. And he had come, with all his hope and his fear and his pain, to "Day's End," and —

"But if—if that was Ives I saw in Mrs. Jones's room," thought Ross, "then who was it Amy wanted me to watch for last night?"

This idea gave him immeasurable relief. That man had not been Ives. Ives hadn't come yet. The whole tragedy was an invention of his own.

"No reason to take it for granted that that letter was meant for Amy," he thought. "Plenty of other women in Stamford. No; I've simply been making a fool of myself, imagining."

But there was one thing he had not imagined. There was, among all these doubts and surmises, one immutable fact, the man under the sofa. He could, if he pleased, explain away everything else, but not that.

It seemed to him incredible that he had, in the beginning, accepted that fact so coolly. He had thought it was "none of his business." And now it was the chief business of his life. It was as if that silent figure had cried out to him for justice; as if he had come here only in order to see that man, and to avenge him.

"No!" he protested, in his soul. "I've got nothing to do with justice and—vengeance. The thing's done. It can never be undone. I don't want to see—any one punished for it. That's not my business. I'm nobody's judge, thank God!"

"Well?" said Donnelly, gently. Ross looked up, met his glance squarely. "I can't help you," he said. Donnelly arose.

"I'm sorry for that," he said. "Mighty sorry. I've been very frank with you. Showed you the letter—laid my cards on the table. Because I had a notion that you'd heard one side of the case, and that if you heard the other you might change your mind. You might think that Ives hadn't had a fair deal."

"I can't help that," muttered Ross.

"No," said Donnelly, "of course you can't. And I can't help it now, either." He sighed. "Well," he said, "I'll be off now. Good-bye!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Ross, sitting up straight.

"Why, I'm going to that cottage I mentioned," said Donnelly. "And if I don't find Ives there, or something that'll help me to find him—then I'll have to turn the case over to the police."

Ross got up and began to put on his damp overcoat.

"I'll go with you," he said.

Whether this was the best thing for him to do, he could not tell. But he could see no way of preventing Donnelly from going, and he would not let him go alone. He meant to be there, with Eddy and the little girl.

Donnelly had already gone to the head of the stairs, and Ross followed him, impatient to be gone. But the other's burly form blocked the way. He was listening. Some one was opening the door of the garage.

Ross made an attempt to get by, but Donnelly laid a hand on his arm.

"Wait!" he whispered.

Light, quick footsteps sounded on the cement floor below, and then a voice, so clear, so sweet:

"Jim-my!"

"Miss Solway!" he cried. "Jimmy's not here. Only me—Moss—and a friend of mine!"

This was his warning to her, and he hoped with all his heart that she would understand, and would go. Donnelly had begun to descend the stairs. If she would only go, before that man saw her!

But she had not gone. When he reached the foot of the stairs, and looked over Donnelly's shoulder, he saw her there. She was wearing her fur coat, with the collar

turned up, and a black velvet tam; the cold air had brought a beautiful color into her cheeks; her hair was clinging in little damp curls to her forehead; he had never seen her so lovely, so radiant. And for all that he knew against her, and all that he suspected, he saw in her now a pitiful and terrible innocence.

"She doesn't know!" he thought. "She doesn't realize—she *can't* realize—ever—what she's done. She doesn't even know when she hurts any one."

And there was Donnelly, standing before her, hat in hand, his eyes modestly downcast; a most inoffensive figure. She was not interested in him; she thought he didn't matter; she was looking past him at Ross, with that cajoling, childish smile of hers.

"Oh, Moss!" she said. "Will you bring the sedan round to the house? Please? I want to go out."

"I'm sorry, Miss Solway," he said, and it seemed to him that any one could hear the significance in his voice. "Mr. Solway told me not to take you out—in this weather."

"Oh!" she said, and sighed. "All right," with gentle resignation; "I'll just have to wait, then."

"I'm sorry, Miss Solway," said Ross again.

Didn't she see how that fellow was watching her? It was torment to Ross. There was not a shadow on her bright face; she stood there, gay, careless, perfectly indifferent to the silent Donnelly.

"All right!" she said, and turned away, then, to open the door. But it was heavy for her small fingers, and Donnelly hastened forward.

"Excuse me, miss!" he said, and pushed back the door for her.

"Oh, thanks!" she said, smiling into his face, and off she went, running through the rain across the sodden lawn. Ross looked after her; so little, so young.

"And that's Miss Solway!" said Donnelly, speculatively.

Ross glanced at him, and his heart gave a great leap. For, on the other's face, was an unmistakable look of perplexity.

"Yes," he said, "that's Miss Solway."

"She's pretty young, isn't she?" Donnelly pursued, still following with his eyes the hurrying little figure.

"I suppose so," said Ross, casually. It was difficult for him to conceal his delight. Donnelly was evidently at a loss; he

couldn't believe ill of that girl with her careless smile. He thought she was too young, too light-hearted. The very fact of her ignoring Ross's warning had done this for her. If she had understood, if across her smiling face had come that look Ross had seen, that look of terror and dismay, Donnelly would not have thought her too young.

"He's not sure now!" thought Ross. "He's not sure. She has a chance now. If I can only think of something."

He could not think of anything useful now, but he felt sure that he would, later on. There was a chance now. Donnelly was only human; he, like other men, could be deluded.

They left the garage and walked back to the waiting taxi.

"What about a little lunch first?" suggested Donnelly.

"All right!" said Ross.

So they stopped at a restaurant in the town, and sent away the cab. They sat down facing each other across a small table. Ross was hungry, and Donnelly, too, ate with hearty appetite, but he did not talk. He was thoughtful, and, Ross believed, somewhat downcast.

"Getting up a new theory," said the young man to himself. "Perhaps I can help him."

The vague outline of a plan was assembling in his mind, but he could not quite discern it yet. It seemed to him plain that Donnelly had nothing but suspicions; that he had no definite facts as to any connection between Ives and Amy Solway. He had thought she was the woman to whom that letter was addressed; but since he had seen her, he doubted. Very well; he must be kept in doubt.

When they had finished lunch, they went round the corner to a garage, and took another taxi. Ross settled himself back comfortably, and filled and lighted his new pipe; a good time to break it in, he thought. Donnelly brought out a big cigar, which he kept in the corner of his mouth while he talked a little upon the subject of tobacco. The cab grew thick with smoke, and Ross opened the window beside him. The rain blew in, but he did not mind that.

They came to the cottage along the lane which took them directly to its front gate. There it stood, forlorn and shabby, the shutters closed, the neglected garden a dripping tangle. They went up the steps; Don-

nelly knocked, but there was no answer. He pushed open the door, and they went in. He called out: "Is there anybody here?"

But Ross knew then that the house was empty. The very air proclaimed it.

"My luck's in!" he thought, elated.

XVII

"NICE, cheerful little place!" observed Donnelly, looking about him.

Ross said nothing. He had not even dared hope for such a stroke of luck as that Eddy and the little girl should be gone, yet the silence in this dim, damp, little house troubled him. Where and why had they gone?

"We'll just take a look around," said Donnelly.

He opened a door beside him, revealing a dark and empty room. He flashed an electric torch across it; nothing there but the bare floor and the four walls. He closed the door and went along the passage, and opened the door of the next room. The shutter was broken here, and one of the window panes, and the rain was blowing in, making a pool on the floor that gleamed darkly when the flash light touched it.

That door, too, he closed, with a sort of polite caution, as if he didn't want to disturb any one. Then he looked into the room at the end of the passage. This was evidently the kitchen, for there was a sink there, and a built-in dresser. He turned on the taps; no water.

"Now we'll just take a look upstairs," he said, in a subdued tone.

He mounted the stairs with remarkable lightness for so heavy a man; but Ross took no such precaution. Indeed, he wanted to make a noise. He did not like the silence in this house.

Donnelly opened the door facing the stairs. One shutter had been thrown back, and the room was filled with the gray light of the rainy afternoon. And, lying on the floor, Ross saw a white flannel rabbit.

It lay there, quite alone, its one pink glass eye staring up at the ceiling, and round its middle was a bedraggled bit of blue ribbon which Ross remembered very well.

"Now, what's this?" said Donnelly.

He picked up the rabbit, frowning a little; he turned it this way and that, he fingered its sash. And, to Ross, there was something grotesque and almost horrible in

the sight of the burly fellow with a cigar in one corner of his mouth, and an intent frown on his red face, holding that rabbit.

"It's a clew, isn't it?" he inquired, with mock respect.

Donnelly glanced at him quickly. Then he put the rabbit into the pocket of his overcoat, from which its long ears protruded ludicrously.

"Come on!" he said.

The next door was locked, and here Donnelly displayed his professional talents. Before Ross could quite see what he was at, he had taken something from his pocket; he bent forward, and almost at once the lock clicked, and he opened the door.

It seemed to Ross that nothing could have been more eloquent of crime, of shameful secrecy and misery, than that room. There was a wretched little make-shift bed against one wall, made up of burlap bags and a ragged portière; there was a box on which stood a lantern, an empty corned beef tin, and a crushed and sodden packet of cigarettes. There was nothing else.

With a leaden heart, he looked at Donnelly, and saw him very grave.

"Come on!" he said, again.

And they went on, into every corner of that house that was so empty and yet so filled with questions. They found nothing more. Some one had been here, and some one had gone; that was all.

Donnelly led the way back to the room where that some one had been.

"Now we'll see if we can find some more clews here," he said. "Like the fellows in the story books."

He took up the packet of cigarettes and went over to the window with it. But, instead of examining the object in his hand, his glance was arrested by something outside, and he stood staring straight before him so long that Ross came up beside him, to see for himself.

From this upper window there was an unexpectedly wide vista of empty fields, still white with snow, and houses tiny in the distance, and a belt of woodland, dark against the gray sky; all deserted and desolate in the steady fall of sleet. What else?

Directly before the house was the road, where the taxi waited, the driver inside. Across the road the land ran downhill in a steep slope, washed bare of any trace of snow, and at its foot was a pond, a somber

little sheet of water, shivering under the downpour. But there was nobody in sight, nothing stirred. What else? What was Donnelly looking at?

"I think—" said Donnelly. "I guess I'll just go out and mooch around a little before it gets dark. Just to get the lay of the land. You don't want to come—in this weather. You just wait here. I won't keep you long."

Ross did want to go with him, everywhere, and to see everything that he saw, but he judged it unwise to say so. He stood where he was, listening to the other's footsteps quietly descending; he heard the front door close softly, and a moment later he saw Donnelly come out into the road and cross it, with a wave of his hand toward the taxi driver, and begin to descend the steep slope toward the pond.

"What's he going there for?" thought Ross. "What does he think—"

Before he had finished the question, the answer sprang up in his mind. Donnelly had not found Ives in the cottage, so he was going to look for him down there. Suppose he found him?

"No!" thought Ross. "It's—impossible. I—I'm losing my nerve."

To tell the truth, he was badly shaken. He was ready to credit Donnelly with superhuman powers, to believe that he could see things invisible to other persons, that he could, simply by looking out of the window, trace the whole course of a crime.

"I've got to do something," he thought. "Now is my chance. I can give him the slip now."

But he was a good seven or eight miles from "Day's End." Well, why couldn't he hurry down, jump into the taxi, and order the driver to set off at once? Long before Donnelly could find any way of escape from this desolate region, he could get back to the house and warn Amy. And, in doing so, he would certainly antagonize Donnelly, and confirm any suspicions he might already have.

"No," he thought. "He's not sure about Amy now. And I don't believe he's got anything against me. I can't afford to run away. He hasn't found anything yet that definitely connects Amy with the—the case."

But when he did?

Donnelly had reached the bottom of the slope now, and was sauntering along the edge of the pond, hands in his pockets. He

had in nowise the air of a sleuth hot upon a scent, but to Ross his leisurely progress suggested an alarming confidence. He knew—what didn't he know? And Ross, the guilty one, knew nothing at all. In angry desperation, he turned away from the window.

"All right!" he said, aloud. "I'll have a look for clews myself!"

And, without the slightest difficulty, he found all the clews he wanted.

The makeshift bed was the only place in the room where anything could be hidden; he lifted up the portière that lay over the bags, and there he found a shabby pocket-book in which were the papers of the missing Martin Ives.

Everything was there—everything one could want. There was a savings bank book, there were two or three letters, and there was a little snapshot of Amy, on the back of which was written: "To Marty—so that he won't forget."

Ross looked at that photograph for a long time. He was not expert enough to recognize that the costume was somewhat outmoded, but he did know that this picture had been taken some time ago, because Amy was so different. It showed her standing on a beach, with the wind blowing her hair and her skirts, her head a little thrown back, and on her face the jolliest smile—a regular schoolgirl grin.

It hurt him, the sight of that laughing, dimpled, little ghost from the past. He remembered her as he had seen her to-day, still smiling, still lovely, but so changed. She was reckless now, haunted now, even in her most careless moments.

He opened the top letter; it bore the date of last Monday, but no address. It read:

DEAR MR. IVES:

Amy has asked me to reply to your letter of a month ago. I scarcely need to tell you how greatly it distressed her. If you should come to the house publicly now, everything she has tried to do would be ruined. She had hoped that you would wait patiently, but as you refuse to do so, she has consented to see you.

She wants to see Lily as well, and, although there is a great deal of risk in this, if you will follow my directions, I think we can manage. Telephone to the nurse with whom the child is boarding to bring her to the station at Greenwich by the train leaving New York at 7.20 A.M. on Tuesday and Eddy will meet her there. You can take an early afternoon train to Stamford. Take a taxi there and go up the Post Road to Bonnifer Lane, a little past the Raven Inn. There is a new church being built on the corner. Turn down here, and stop at the first house, about half a mile from the main road. You will find the little

girl there, and I shall be there, waiting for you, between three and five, and we can make arrangements for you to see Amy.

Remember, Mr. Ives, that Amy trusts you to do *nothing* until you have seen her.

Respectfully yours,

AMANDA JONES.

Ross folded up the letter. Yes; nobody could ask for a much better clew. He took out another letter, but before opening it, he glanced out of the window. And he saw Donnelly coming back.

He put the wallet into his pocket, and went to the head of the stairs. A great lassitude had come upon him; he felt physically exhausted. His doubt—and his hope—were ended now.

Donnelly came in quietly, and advanced to the foot of the stairs. It was not possible to read his face by that dim light, but his voice was very grave.

"Come on!" he said.

"Find anything?" asked Ross.

Donnelly was silent for a moment.

"I've finished," he said, at last.

"What—" began Ross.

"I've finished," Donnelly repeated, almost gently. "It's up to the police now. We'll have that pond dragged."

Ross, too, was silent for a moment.

"All right!" he said. "I'll just get my hat."

He turned back into the room; Donnelly waited for him below. In a few minutes Ross joined him, and they got into the cab.

XVIII

MR. SOLWAY descended from the train and walked briskly toward his car. The new chauffeur was standing there, stiff as a poker.

"Well, Moss!" he said. "Everything all right, eh?"

"Yes, thank you, sir," said Ross.

"That's it!" said Mr. Solway, with his vague kindness. He got into the car, and Ross started off through the sleet and the dark. Mr. Solway made two or three observations about the weather, but his chauffeur answered "Yes, sir," "That's so, sir," rather absent-mindedly. He was, to tell the truth, very much preoccupied with his own thoughts. He was wondering how a pond was dragged, and how long such a thing might take.

He had seen no one, spoken to no one, since he had left Donnelly at the police station and gone back to the garage alone. So he had had plenty of time to think.

He stopped the car before the house, Mr. Solway got out, and Ross drove on to the garage. There would be a little more time for thinking before he was summoned to dinner. He went upstairs and sat down, stretched out in a chair, staring before him. He was still wearing the peaked cap which had belonged to Wheeler; perhaps it was not a becoming cap, for his face looked grim and harsh beneath it.

He was not impatient, now, as that James Ross had been who had landed in New York three days ago. Indeed, he seemed almost inhumanly patient, as if he were willing to sit there forever. And that was how he felt. He had done his utmost; now he could only wait.

The sleet was rattling against the windows, and a great wind blew. It must be a wild night, out in the fields, where a lonely little pond lay. A bad night to be in that little cottage. A bad night, anywhere in the world, for a child who had nobody.

From his pocket he brought out a snapshot, and looked at it for a long time; then he tore it into fragments and let them flutter to the floor. He closed his eyes, then, but he was not asleep; the knuckles of his hand grasping the arm of the chair were white.

No; he wasn't asleep. When the telephone rang in the garage, he got up at once and went downstairs to answer it.

"Dinner's ready!" said Gracie's voice.

"Eddy come in yet?"

"Not yet," answered Ross. "But—wait a minute!"

For he thought he heard some one at the door. He was standing with the receiver in his hand when the door slid open and Eddy came in.

"He's just—" he began, turning back to the telephone, when Eddy sprang forward and caught his arm, and whispered: "Shut up! Sh-h-h!"

"Just about due," said Ross to Gracie. Then he hung up the receiver and faced Eddy.

"Don't tell 'em I'm here!" said Eddy. "I—I don't want—I c-can't stand any—jabbering. I—Oh, Gawd!"

At the end of his tether, Eddy was. His lips twitched, his face was distorted with his valiant effort after self-control. And it occurred to Ross that, for all his shrewdness and his worldly air, Eddy was not very old or very wise.

"What's up, old man?" he asked.

"Tell me. You'd better get your dinner now."

"Nope!" said Eddy. "I—can't eat. I—I don't want to talk."

Ross waited for some time.

"Lissen here," said Eddy, at last. "You—you seemed to like—that kid. You—you'll look after her, won't you?"

"Yes," Ross answered.

He would have been surprised, and a little incredulous, if any one had called him tactful, yet few people could have handled Eddy better. He knew what the boy wanted; knew that he needed just this cool and steady tone, this incurious patience.

"Go and get her," Eddy pleaded. "She's down at the barber's—near the movie the-ayter. Go and get her."

"All right. I'll have my dinner first, though. Want me to bring you something?"

"Nope!" said Eddy. "Lissen! I guess the cops are after me already."

"You mean they've—found him?"

"Yep," said Eddy. "They've found him. How did you know?"

Ross did not answer the question.

"Can't you get away?" he asked.

"Not going to try," said Eddy. "I—I'm too d-darn tired. I—I *don't care!*" There was a hysterical rise in his voice, but he mastered it. "Let 'em come!"

"What have they got against you?"

"They've found him—in the pond—where I put him."

"Who's going to know that?"

"Oh, they'll know, all right!" said Eddy. "They got ways of finding out things. They'll know, and they'll think it was me that— All right! Let 'em!"

"Then you're not going to tell?"

Eddy looked at him.

"D'you think it—wasn't me?"

"Yes," Ross replied. "I think it wasn't you, Eddy."

There was a long silence between them.

"What d'you think I'd ought to do?" asked Eddy, almost in a whisper.

"Suppose we talk it over," said Ross.

"Yes—but—I dunno who you are."

"Well, let's say I'm Ives."

Eddy sprang back as if he had been struck.

"*Ives!*"

"Look here!" said Ross. "I'm going to tell you what I did."

And, very bluntly, he told. Eddy listened to him in silence; it was a strange enough thing, but he showed no surprise.

"D'you think it 'll work?" he asked, when Ross had finished.

"I hope so. Anyhow, there's a chance. Now, you better tell me the whole thing. There's a lot that I don't know—and I might make a bad mistake."

The telephone rang again. It was Gracie, annoyed by this delay.

"I'll come as soon as I can," said Ross, severely. "But I'm working on the car, and I can't leave off for a few minutes."

He turned again to Eddy.

"Go ahead!" he said.

Eddy sat down on the step of the sedan, and Ross leaned back against the wall, his arms folded, his saturnine face shadowed by the peaked cap.

"Tuesday I went and got her—the kid, y' know, and took her to the cottage."

"Did you know about her before?"

"Sure I did! I knew when they got married — her and Ives — four years ago. She told me herself. You know the way she tells you things—crying an' all."

Ross did know.

"Well, I used to see Ives hanging around. He was a nice seller—but he didn't have a cent. He was an actor. She was too young, anyway—eighteen—same age as me. I told her I'd tell Mr. Solway, and then she told me they'd got married. I felt pretty bad—on Mr. Solway's account. But she—well, you know how she acts. Her mother'd left her some money she's going to get when she's twenty-five, if she don't get married without her stepfather's consent. Mrs. Solway had the right idea. She knew Amy, all right. Only, it didn't work. Amy wanted to get married and have the money, too. That's how she is. So she told me she was going to tell Mr. Solway when she was twenty-five. I know I'd ought to have told him then, but—I didn't."

Ross understood that.

"Mr. Solway went over to Europe that summer, and she and Mrs. Jones went somewhere out West, and Lily was born out there. And Ives, he took the kid, and she came back here. She used to see Ives pretty often for awhile—go into the city and meet him. Then she began talking about what a risk it was. That was because she'd met this Gayle Dexter. That made me sick! I said I'd tell Mr. Solway, but she said her and Ives was going to get divorced, an' nobody'd ever know, and that I'd ruin her life and all. And I gave in—

like a fool. Only, you see, I—I've known Amy all my life."

"I see!" said Ross.

"Well, it seems Ives was beginning to get suspicious, when she didn't see him no more. He kept writing; I used to get the letters for her—general delivery—an' she kept stalling—and at last he said he was coming here to see her. Well, her and Mrs. Jones must have told him to come along. And Tuesday I met the kid and took her to that cottage. My idea, that was. I told Mrs. Jones about the place. I wish to Gawd I hadn't." He was silent for a moment. "Only, I thought it might—I was glad to do it, 'cause I thought maybe if Amy seen Ives and the kid, she'd—kinder change her mind. He come that afternoon, and seen Mrs. Jones. Well, I went there after work, and he told me Amy was coming to see him next morning. He was real pleased. He was—he was a—nice feller—"

Eddy's mouth twitched again. "I wish—I'd known. Anyway, she wouldn't go to see him. Jones tried to make her—said she'd got to have a talk with him—but Amy, she took on something fierce. Said she'd never see him again. Well, I guess he must of waited and waited, and in the afternoon he come here to the garage. I tried to argue with him and all, but it wouldn't work. He started off for the house, and I telephoned over to Jones. An' he went—he went out of that door—"

Eddy turned and stared at the door with an odd blank look. It was as if he saw something—which was not there.

"This very door," he muttered. "My Gawd!"

"Yes," said Ross, quietly. "He went to the house. And then?"

Eddy turned back with a shudder.

"I didn't never think," he said. "Wheeler'd left, then, so I drove the big car down to the station to meet Mr. Solway, and when I brung him home, you was there. Old Lady Jones tried to tip me off. I saw her trying to tell me something behind your back. I couldn't make out what it was, but I knew there was something queer. I thought you was a detective Ives'd sent to see what was going on, 'cause he'd been saying he'd do that. I didn't know, then— But next day Jones told me that—that Ives had—died. Said he'd fell down dead from a heart attack. And she said we'd got to get rid of him on the Q. T., for Amy's sake. I—I thought I couldn't—

but I did. Fella I know lent me his Ford. I said I wanted to take a girl out. And, while you were out there on the lawn, I—I got him—out of Jones's room."

"Do you mean he'd been there all that time?"

"I guess so. She told me she been sitting up all night, trying to—to see if she could—do anything for him. But he—Anyway, Jones told me what to do, and I did it. I—you don't know what it was like—going all that way—alone—with him. And I had to put stones in his pockets." He looked at Ross with a sort of wonder.

"I can't believe it now!" he cried. "It don't seem true! I don't know *why*—only Jones told me that if I didn't, there'd be a inquest an' all. And she said everyone'd think that Amy— It would all come out, she said, and Amy and Mr. Solway'd be in the newspapers and all. And she said he was dead, anyway. The pond couldn't hurt *him*. I—"

He came closer to Ross, and laid a hand on his sleeve. "Lissen here!" he said. "D'you think that's true—that he—just died?"

"There's no use thinking about that—now," said Ross.

XIX

Ross could feel sorry enough for Eddy, for his ghastly trip to the pond, for all the dread and misery that lay upon his soul. He was sorry for Ives, although his sufferings were at an end. He pitied Mr. Solway, in his ignorance of all this. He was sorry, in his own way, for Amy. But, above all creatures in this world, he pitied that little child.

Eddy told him about her. When Ives had gone to "Day's End," he had left the child with the obliging barber in town, and she had been there all that night and the next day, until Mrs. Jones had sent Eddy after her.

"She said it would start people talking, if the kid stayed there, and she told me to take her back to the cottage and leave her till she made some plans. But I couldn't do that. The way I felt last night, I didn't care. I'd rather have seen the whole thing go to smash than leave the kid alone there all night. That's why I brung her here. And this morning—I couldn't stay there—in that house. It kind of gave me the creeps. So I took her back to the barber's." He paused.

"Jones don't care about the kid," he added. "She don't care about anything on earth but Amy. Lissen here! I know she's old and all, but I think—maybe she—I just wonder if the old girl had the nerve?"

Ross had had that thought, too. But it seemed to him that, no matter who had actually done this thing, even if it were an accident—which he did not believe—the guilt still lay upon the woman who had betrayed and abandoned the man and the child. Amy was guilty, and no one else.

He straightened up, with a sigh.

"Come along!" he said. "We'll get our dinner. No! Don't be a fool, my lad. It's what you need."

Eddy was considerably relieved by his confession. He went upstairs, washed, changed his coat, and brushed his glossy hair, and when he set off toward the house, there was a trace of his old swagger about him. Only a trace, though, for he walked beneath a shadow.

As for Ross, there was precious little change to be discerned in his dour face and impassive bearing. And it was his very good fortune to be so constituted that he did not show what he felt, for he was to receive an unexpected shock.

"Sit down!" said Gracie, sharply. "I put somethin' aside for you. Now hurry up! It puts me back with the dishes an' all."

"An' them extry people," said the cook, who was also a little out of temper. "There'll not be enough butter for breakfast, the way they did be eatin', an' me without a word of warnin' at all."

"It's that Mr. Teagle," said Gracie. "Them small men is always heavy eaters."

"Teagle? Who's he?" asked Eddy.

"Haven't you heard?" cried Gracie, almost unable to believe that she was to have the bliss of imparting this amazing news. "Why, there was a body found in a lake somewhere."

"Oh, I heard about that, down at the comp'ny!" said Eddy, scornfully.

"But lissen, Eddy! It turns out it was a cousin o' Miss Amy's! It seems they found some papers an' letters an' all near where they found him, an' he turns out to be her cousin! This Mr. Teagle, he's a lawyer. They sent for him, an' he come out here to look at the poor feller, and then he come to the house, 'cause Miss Amy's goin' to get all his money. She took on somethin' terrible! Mr. Solway, he tele-

phoned to Mr. Dexter, and he come out, too. I guess it was kinder to comfort her."

"What would she be needin' all the comfortin' for?" demanded the cook. "She'd never set eyes on the cousin at all, and her to be gettin' all that money."

"She's kinder sensitive," said Gracie.

"Sensitive, is it!" said the cook, with significance.

Ross went on eating his dinner. He did not appear to be interested. When he had finished, he bade them all a civil good night, and got up and went out.

"He's a cold-blooded fish," said Gracie.

Yet, something seemed to keep him warm—something kept him steadfast and untroubled as he walked, head down, against the storm of wind and sleet, along the lonely roads to the town. He found the barber shop to which Eddy had directed him, and when he entered, the lively little Italian barber did not think his face forbidding.

"I've come for the little girl," said Ross.

"Oh, she's all right!" cried the barber. "She's O. K. She eat a soom nica dinner—verrie O. K. She sooma kid."

He was a happy little man, pleased with his thriving business, with his family, with his own easy fluency in the use of the American tongue. He took Ross through the brilliantly lighted white tiled shop—a sanitary barber, he was—into a back room, where were his wife and his own small children.

And among them was the little fair-haired Lily, content and quite at home as she seemed always to be. You might have thought that she knew she had nobody, and no place of her own in this world, and that she had philosophically made up her mind to be happy wherever fate might place her.

She was sitting on the floor, much in the way of the barber's wife, who pursued her household duties among the four little children in the room with the deft unconcern of a highly skilled dancer among eggshells. The woman could speak no English, but she smiled at Ross with placid amiability. She could not understand why three different men should have brought this child here at different times; but, after all, she didn't particularly care. A passing incident, this was, in her busy life.

As for the barber himself, he had his own ideas. He saw something suspicious in the affair; a kidnaping, perhaps; but he preferred to know nothing. It was his tradition to be wary of troubling the police.

He took the money Ross gave him, and he smiled. Nobody had told him anything. He knew nothing.

The barber's wife got the little girl ready, and Ross picked her up in his arms. She turned her head, to look back at the children, and her little woolen cap brushed across his eyes; he had to stop in the doorway of the shop, to shift her on to one arm, so that he could see. And then, what he did see was Donnelly.

"Well! Well!" said Donnelly, in a tone of hearty welcome.

"Well!" said Ross. "I'm in a hurry to get back, now. To-morrow—"

"Of course you are!" said Donnelly. "I'm not going to keep you a minute. I've got something here I'd like the little girl to identify."

Ross's arm tightened about the child.

"No!" he protested. "No! She's got nothing to do with—this."

"Pshaw!" said Donnelly, with a laugh. "It's only this." And from his pocket he brought out the rabbit.

"Oh, *my* wabbit!" cried the little girl, with a sort of solemn ecstasy.

"Hi! Taxi!" called Donnelly, suddenly, and a cab going by slowed down, turned, skidding a little on the wet street, and drew up to the curb. Without delay, Ross put the child inside, and got in after her, but Donnelly remained standing on the curb, holding open the door. Light streamed from the shop windows, but his back was turned toward it; his face was in darkness; he stood like a statue in the downpour.

"There's some funny things about this case—" he observed.

Ross said nothing.

"Mighty funny!" Donnelly pursued. "And, by the way—" He leaned into the cab. "I've seen a good deal of you to-day, but I don't believe you've told me your name."

It seemed to Ross for a moment that he could not speak. But, at last, with a great effort, he said:

"Ives."

"Ah!" said Donnelly.

Ross waited and waited.

"If you'd like to see—my bank book and papers," he finally suggested.

"No," said Donnelly, soothingly. "No, never mind. And this James Ross. You never heard of him, I suppose?"

"No."

"He landed in New York on Wednesday, went to a hotel in the city, left his bags, and came right out to Stamford—and fell in a pond. Now, that's a queer stunt, isn't it?"

Ross put his arm round the child's tiny shoulders and drew her close to him.

"Very!" he agreed.

"I thought so myself. Queer! I found the man's pocketbook in that cottage—in that very room where you waited for me. What d'you think of that? There was a letter from a lawyer in New York—name of Teagle. I telephoned to him, and he came out. He could identify the man's handwriting and so on. But he'd never seen him. Said he didn't think there was any one in this country who had. He has a theory, though. Like to hear it—or are you in a hurry?"

"No! Go ahead!"

"Well, Teagle's theory is that this Mr. James Ross knew he had a cousin out this way. Miss Solway, you know. It seems her mother made a match the family didn't approve of, and they dropped her, years ago. Now, Teagle thinks this Mr. James Ross wanted to see for himself what this cousin was like, and that he came out to that cottage to stay while he sort of mooched around, getting information about her. Family feeling, see? Only—he met with an accident."

"That sounds plausible," said Ross.

"You're right! Now, of course, there'll be a coroner's inquest to-morrow. *But*—" He paused. "I happened to be around when the doctor made his examination. And he says—the man was dead before he fell in the pond."

"Oh, God!" cried Ross, in his torment. "Don't go on!"

"Hold on a minute! Hold on! Of course that startles you, eh? You think it's a case of murder, eh? Well, I'll tell you now that the verdict 'll be—death from natural causes. No marks of violence. And Mr. James Ross had a very bad heart. I dare say he didn't know it. He died of heart failure, and then he rolled down that slope. I saw that for myself—saw bushes broken, and so on, where something had rolled or been dragged down there."

"Then?"

"Then," said Donnelly, "as far as I'm concerned, there's no case. And I'll say good-by to you. Maybe you wouldn't mind shaking hands, Mr.—Ives?"

Their hands met in a firm clasp.

"On Miss Solway's account," said Donnelly, "I'm mighty glad you're Mr. Ives. *Good-by!*"

XX

Ross was going away, at last. He was going as he had come, with no luggage, with no ceremony. Only, he was going to take with him a small child, and he left behind him his name, his money, and a good many illusions—and a friend. Eddy was not likely to forget him.

"You're—you're a white man!" he said, in a very unsteady voice. "You're—a prince."

"No," Ross objected. "I'm a fool. The biggest damned fool that ever lived."

"Have it your own way!" said Eddy. "I can think different if I like. I—" He paused a moment. "It makes me *sick*, you goin' away like this. It—it—"

Ross laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Drop it!" he said. "Now, then! It's about time for us to be off." He turned toward the bedroom. "I'll wake her up, while you start the car. I'll take one of the blankets to wrap her in."

It was a little early for the train he wanted to catch, but he was in a hurry to be gone. He might have known, though, that it was his fate never to leave this place when or how he wished.

He might have known that there was one inevitable thing still to be faced. He heard the throb of the sturdy little engine downstairs; he thought, he hoped, that the last moment had come, and, instead, he was called upon to endure a moment almost beyond endurance.

For Amy came. The sound of the engine prevented his hearing her entrance; he had just gone into the bedroom when he heard her footsteps on the stairs. In a wild storm of tears, desperate, white as a ghost, she ran in to him.

"Jimmy!" she gasped. "Oh, Jimmy! Jimmy!"

He did not speak. What had he to say to her now?

She was panting for breath, and her sobs were horrible, as if they choked her. He wanted to close the bedroom door, but she had seized him by the shoulder.

"I didn't know!" she cried. "Not—till to-night. Oh, Jimmy, I didn't know he was dead! He came to see me—and he died. Oh, Jimmy! Just when Nanna told

him—that I didn't want to see him ever again. It killed him, Jimmy. *I* killed him!"

"Oh, do keep quiet!" said Ross, in a sort of despair.

"I can't! I can't! I can't! If I'd only seen him—just once more! Nanna begged me to—but I wouldn't. And when Nanna told him, he—died! How can I bear that? Oh, Jimmy! I didn't think he'd care so much! Just as I care for Gayle. Jimmy, listen to me! I'll tell Gayle. I'll go to him now. I can't let you do this for me, Jimmy!"

For a moment his heart beat with a great hope.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"I never meant it to be like this. Never! Never! I thought Martin would let me go—let me get a divorce. And if he hadn't, I'd have given up Gayle. I'll give him up now, if you tell me to. Even if I die, too!"

The hope was faint now.

"You think he'd give you up, if he knew?" he asked.

"Think? I know! He'd loathe me!"

"And you'd be willing to marry him with—"

"You don't understand!" she interrupted, violently. "You never could. You're too good. And I'm not good—in your way. I was just a child when I met Martin. I'm not a child now. Gayle's my whole life to me. I love him so that—"

"For God's sake, stop!" cried Ross. "It's—infamous! Have you *forgotten*?"

All the light and passion fled from her face at his tone. She looked up at him in terrified inquiry. Ross stood aside from the doorway, so that she could see the child lying asleep on the bed. She went in very softly, and stood looking down at the little creature.

"You see," she whispered, "I've given up—my soul—for Gayle."

He took her by the arm and led her out of the room, closing the door behind them.

"Very well!" he said. "On her account, it's better like this. I'll take her. And you'll have to forget her. Do you understand? There's to be no repentance, and so on. Make up your mind now."

"No," she said, faintly. "I can't. I won't! I'll just do what you tell me. You've got to decide."

"What!" he cried, appalled. "You'd try to make me?"

The child gave a little chuckle in her

sleep. He thought what the child's life would be, with Amy, if Amy were denied her Gayle. He thought of Ives. He had taken Ives's name, and with it the burden that Ives could no longer carry.

"All right!" he said. "It's finished. I only hope to Heaven that Mr. Solway can end his days without knowing. As for Dexter—he'll have to take his chance—like the rest of us. Good-by, Amy!"

She caught one of his hands in both of hers, and pressed it against her wet cheek.

"Can you ever, ever forgive me, Jimmy?" she asked, with a sob.

"I dare say!" said Ross, grimly.

XXI

"LEFT hand, please!"

Obediently, Mrs. Barron took her left hand out of the bowl of warm water, and laid it on the towel, carefully, as if it might melt. And the manicurist bent over it with her nice air of earnest attention.

All this was agreeable to Mrs. Barron. She was rather proud of her hands; she was altogether comfortable and tranquil; she had a pleasant, restful day before her.

In the afternoon she and her daughter were going to look at fur coats, which was really better than the actual buying; and, in the evening, they were all going to a play. The sun was shining, too, and the formal sitting room of her hotel suite was cheerful and warm, and filled with the perfume of the roses that stood all about.

"It's good to be home again," she remarked. "At my time of life traveling is not—" The telephone bell rang. "Answer that, my dear. It's dangerous to touch a telephone with damp hands—Oh! A gentleman to see Miss Barron? What a strange time to call—ten o'clock in the morning! Ask his name, my dear. He was on the Farragut with us? But how very strange! Why doesn't he give his name? But ask him to come up."

She dried her hands and arose, majestic even in her frivolous negligee.

"Very strange!" she murmured.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she said.

The door opened—and it was Mr. Ross! She took a step forward, with a welcoming smile; then she stopped short.

"Mr. Ross!" she cried. "But—Mr. Ross!"

He did not fail to notice the change in her tone, the vanishing of her smile. It did

not surprise him. He stood in the doorway, hat in one hand, the little girl clinging to the other, and he felt that, to her piercing glance, he was a sorry enough figure. He felt shabby, as if he had been long battered by wind and rain; he felt that somehow the emptiness of his pockets was obvious to any one.

"I'm sorry," he said stiffly. "I'm afraid I've disturbed you. I thought perhaps I could see Miss Barron, just for a moment."

"Come in!" said Mrs. Barron, and, turning to the manicurist, "Later, my dear!" she said.

Ross came in, and the manicurist, gathering her things together on her tray, made haste to escape. She went out, closing the door behind her.

"Mr. Ross!" said Mrs. Barron, in the same tone of stern wonder.

"I'm sorry," he said, again. "I'm afraid I've dis—"

"But, my dear boy, what has hap-pened?" she cried.

He was absolutely astounded by her voice, by the kindly anxiety in her face.

"I just thought—" he began.

"Sit down!" said she. "Here! On the sofa. You do look so tired!"

"I—I am," he admitted.

"And such a dear little girl!" said Mrs. Barron. "Such a dear little mite."

She had sat down on the sofa beside the child, and was stroking her fair mane, while her eyes were fixed upon Ross with genuine solicitude. She looked so kind, so honest, so sensible—he marveled that he had ever thought her formidable.

"You wanted to see Phyllis?" she went on. "She's out, just now; but you must wait."

"By George!" cried Ross.

For he had an inspiration. With all his stubborn soul he had been dreading to meet Phyllis in his present condition. He was penniless, and, what was worse, he could not rid himself of an unreasonable conviction of guilt. And now that he found Mrs. Barron so kind—

"Mrs. Barron!" he said. "It's really you I ought to speak to. It's about this child. She's a—sort of cousin of mine, and she's"—he paused a moment—"alone."

Mrs. Barron was looking down at the child, very thoughtfully.

"I don't know any one in this country," he went on, "so I thought if you'd advise me. I want to find a home for her. A—

a real home, you know, with people who'll—be fond of her. Just for a few months; later on I'll take her myself. But, just now—" His dark face flushed.

"I'm a bit hard up just now," he said; "but I'll find a job right away, and I'll be able to pay for her board and so on."

Mrs. Barron continued to look thoughtful, and it occurred to him that his request must seem odd to her—very odd. The flush on his face deepened.

"I'm sorry," he said, coldly; "but there are a good many things I can't explain—"

"Yes, you can!" Mrs. Barron declared, in her old manner. "And that's just what you're going to do. As soon as I set eyes on you, on board that ship, I knew what you were. And I am *never* deceived about character. Never, Mr. Ross! I knew at once that you were to be trusted. I said to Phyllis: 'That young man has force of character!' I knew it. Now you've gone and got yourself into trouble of some sort, and you've come to me—very properly—and you're going to tell me the whole thing."

"I can't!" Ross protested.

"Oh, yes, you can! Here you come and tell me you haven't a penny, and don't know a soul in this country, and here's this poor little child who's been foisted upon you—Don't look surprised! I know it very well! She's been foisted upon you by selfish, heartless, unscrupulous people, and you can't deny it! Now, tell me what's happened."

He did. And what is more, he was glad to tell her.

There were a good many details that he left out, and he mentioned no names at all, but the main facts of his amazing story he gave to her. Especially was he emphatic in pointing out that he had now no name and no money, and he thought that would be enough for her.

But when he carefully pointed this out, she said:

"Nonsense! You've got your own name, and you can go right on using it. As

for money, you're never going to let that horrible, wicked woman rob you like that—"

"Look here, Mrs. Barron!" said Ross. "I am. I give you my word, I'll never re-open that case again. It's finished. I'm going to make a fresh start in the world and forget all about it."

"I shan't argue with you now," said Mrs. Barron, firmly. "You're too tired. And if you want a position—for awhile—Mr. Barron will find you one. The little girl will stay here with us, of course. Now, take off your coat and make yourself comfortable until lunch time."

"No!" said Ross. "No! I—don't you see for yourself? I don't want to see—anybody."

"Mr. Ross!" said Mrs. Barron. "I'm not young any longer. I've lived a good many years in the world, and I've learned a few things. And one of them is—that character is the one thing that counts. Not money, Mr. Ross; not intellect, or appearance, or manners; but character. What you've done is very, very foolish, but—" She leaned across the child, and laid her hand on his shoulder. "But it was very splendid, my dear boy."

Ross grew redder than ever.

"Just the same, I'd rather go," he muttered, obstinately.

"Here's Phyllis now!" cried Mrs. Barron, in triumph.

So he had to get up and face her—the girl he had run away from when he had had so much to offer her. He had to face her, empty-handed, now; heartsick and weary after his bitter adventure.

And she seemed to him so wonderful, with that dear friendly smile.

"Mr. Ross!" she said.

She held out her hand, and he had to take it. He had to look at her—and then he could not stop. They forgot, for a moment; they stood there, hands clasped, looking at each other.

"Didn't I *know* he'd come!" cried Mrs. Barron.

THE END

STARS

THE stars are lilies of the night,
But lo, the ruthless day
With a single flash of its sword of light
Sweeps all the flowers away!

Clinton Scollard

This Tough Old World

FATE, WISHING TO BE CRUELER THAN THE GRAVE, CHOSE A
WEAKLING FOR ITS VICTIM

By William Dudley Pelley

THE door of my newspaper office opened abruptly. Then it slammed closed. It slammed closed with an impact which rattled the glass. I looked out in annoyance from a cluttered inner room, and saw my partner, Samuel P. Hod. Sam's arm was loaded with our paper's quota of evening mail.

Now, my partner is not given to slamming doors carelessly. Either he had fumbled the latch of that specific door and the draft of a November night had seized it, or some unusual occurrence had so perturbed the man that doors in general must behave for themselves. Dumping the mail on the proofreader's desk, he next beheld me, and exclaimed:

"George Wareham's in town!"

I frowned. My partner had a constitutional weakness for coming in off our Vermont main street and precipitating columns of news sensations with just such terse announcements.

"George who?" I faltered.

"Wareham. Wareham! Great Scott, have you forgotten?"

"Forgotten what?"

"That Cass Block lawyer who vanished into thin air one night, some twenty years ago—"

"You mean you've seen him?"

"Yep. Coming out of Len Brickhart's law office—or, at least, the Hawks Block, where Len now has his office. Didn't know him at first—Wareham—"

"Why not?"

"He's an old, old man."

"He can't be a day over forty-five. Wait a minute! He was twenty-six when he gave the town that three months' sensation. That was nineteen four. Twenty-six and twenty-two are forty-eight. By Jove, he is! He's forty-eight."

"Well, he looks sixty-five. His hair's nearly white, his face is yellow and seamed with wrinkles. He's fifty pounds lighter than when I last saw him, and his eyes! They look as dead as—"

"But didn't you stop him—question him?"

"Didn't have time. He knew me, because, as we jostled each other, he nodded, and called me by name. But, before I could 'place' him, he'd trundled off down the walk and turned the bank corner, carrying his hat in his hand. I wonder what's brought him back."

"Sam, I've always felt that Len and his wife, Amy, knew more about that 'disappearance' than either would care to admit in print."

"Well, Len's a lawyer, and entitled to professional secrets."

"S'pose Wareham's back to see Amy Brickhart's sister, Frank Higley's widow? He was engaged to her, remember, that winter he vanished."

"Maybe. It's a tough old world, and queer things happen. Then again, he might have come back here to see Len about the estate of old Moses Cuttle. Though Wareham was only a nephew, he was next of kin."

We discussed the strange case of the erstwhile vanished lawyer. We pulled down back volumes of our paper, *The Telegraph*, and refreshed our memories from printed detail.

"Guess I'll walk around to Brickhart's," I suggested. "We can't let George leave town again without some sort of explanation. Len may know where he's staying, or what's brought him back here, twenty-two years later."

"Good idea," said Sam. "And on my way home I'll look in at Martha Higley's.

Between the two places, we should get a front page story for our little old sheet."

We did, but we didn't print it all.

II

BACK in the days of the Full Dinner Pail, Foxy Grandpa, pyrography, shoe lace watch fobs, and "How'd You Like to Be the Ice Man?" it started, in the little side parlor of a smug cottage home over in West Elm Street. A young woman and a lad in his twenties faced each other on a January night, with the embittering realization that a forked path lay before them.

It was one of those stuffy, overfurnished parlors, in bygone days called a sitting room, with a carpet fastened to the floor with tacks, a cottage organ, lambrequins, souvenir seashells, and a dust catching cozy corner supposed to be frightfully romantic.

The boy had a sheen of red in his hair, but his callow features were colorless, and his eyes showed the throb of heartbreak. He thought his grimly set lips revealed strength of character, whereas they were somewhat petulant. He wore the painfully square shoulders and peg top trousers of the period; he had broken finger nails and unshined shoes.

The girl was frail, dark eyed, and inclined to be waspish, although, perhaps, the prevailing situation accounted pardonably for this last. Her deep chestnut hair was dressed in a pompadour; two slightly protruding upper teeth closed down on a bloodless lower lip. Crumpled leg o' mutton sleeves hung listlessly from shapely shoulders. She stood against the cottage organ, fingers gripping it, head thrown back, face moist with tears of pique.

"You mean that, Martha?" the lad asked finally.

"Yes, I mean it. If you don't believe it, wait and see."

"You can't love me very much, or you wouldn't show yourself so—sordid."

"Sordid!" She nearly shrieked the word. "Well, I like that!"

"You're practically telling me you'll marry Frank Higley because his father's died and left him some money. If that isn't sordid, *what* is?"

"There you go again—money, money, money. I tell you it isn't money. But I want a husband who can get ahead. I want to get married while I'm young and have plenty of chances, not wait till I'm old and faded and wrinkled—*like Amy!*"

"Your sister may be an old maid, but she's not faded or wrinkled, or without a man to love her—"

"Well, she will be soon enough if she lets Len Brickhart drift along and drift along—on the 'general understanding' he'll marry her sometime. She's flabby. Her life is going. Her other chances are going, if they haven't gone already. But I won't be cheated so—"

"Len may be ten years older than I, but we're in the same boat. He can't afford to keep up a house on his present practice any more than I. To hear you girls talk, anybody'd think a feller could be graduated from law school in June and be retained as counsel for all the railroads in Vermont by the following September."

"That's not so at all. You've been *four years* at it now, and you've tried only two cases in court. Besides, what were they? Silly little accident cases—and you had to lose them both. You can hardly pay your office rent from collecting bad bills, and you call it 'building up a practice.' It isn't as if you couldn't go in with your uncle at his store—"

"Selling cigarettes, cigars, and pipe tobacco, me! Getting wizened and sallow and narrow, like Uncle Moses. Making some money at it, perhaps—as home town money goes—but being the same at sixty that I was at twenty."

"Anybody'd think going in with your uncle was some sort of sacrifice."

"It would be a sacrifice, when I'd hoped some day to be a great big lawyer—"

"And to keep me from becoming an old maid before I have a home of my own—that's not worth such a sacrifice?"

"Martha, dear—"

"Is it, or isn't it?"

"Just because Frank Higley's had ten thousand dollars left him—"

"I asked you a question, and I want an answer."

"What difference does it make what I do, so long as I'm successful and we have a home?"

"It doesn't. It's the time you're taking that's breaking my heart. Marriage is a girl's one chance to better herself, pull herself up, and the one who throws it away is a fool. I'm not sordid. I'm sensible. I'm asking you to be sensible, too. I want you to think of my happiness a little bit, and you won't. Frank Higley's liked me just as long as you have. So I'm telling you,"

Georgie Wareham, either you make up your mind what you're going to do about financing our marriage by Saturday night, or I'm going to tell Frank Higley I'll marry him, Sunday afternoon!"

III

WAREHAM got from the house, his inward hurt bleeding like a wound. A thousand fellows and girls had undoubtedly faced such crises, but that made this specific crisis no less tragic.

For nine years, ever since high school, he and the younger Cummings girl had "kept company" together, and the town had accepted that they would ultimately marry. Two things Martha prided herself upon: her domesticity and her "terrible temper."

The first was commendable, though largely a fetish. The second—well, Wareham, more than any other person in the valley, knew how harmless it was—come and gone like a bolt of lightning. For nine years he had loved her, passionately at first, then complacently, methodically, something to be accepted as part of his career, defending her against the caustic criticism of contemporaries and relatives.

But Martha's altered attitude was something altogether different from a passing burst of temperament. Frank Higley had always dogged Martha. What more natural thing than with the Higley property being turned into cash—according to the will—for presentation shortly to the carriage painter's only son, the Cummings girl should take thought for her future.

Another angle, making misery for young Wareham, was that his judicial mind admitted the justice of Martha's impatience from her standpoint as a woman. She was getting on toward thirty. Spinsterhood, according to the times, carried a far greater onus than it would in another generation. It was pardonable that she wanted a home, a competent husband, a family of youngsters about her.

All these bitter, bitter recognitions young Wareham turned over in his mind as he walked the homely town's streets that night, a fateful crossroad looming ahead in his life, indeed.

At twenty minutes past eleven o'clock he lifted the latch of the tobacconist's shop on Cross Street, one block from Main.

"Old Man Cuttle," as town and valley knew him, was a shrewd, withered little

man, his flesh as "cured" as the shagleaf he sold, his neck so wrinkled that it gave his head the aspect of having been twisted a couple of times around on his shoulders. In a stuffy, odorous shop, he had rolled out cigars through two generations.

A bachelor by reason of some tragedy of youth, he lived in a room at the back of this shop, and passed his spare time at the hobby of whittling. Boats for the youngsters of families poor in purse, who could not acquire those toy yachts displayed each spring in the Main Street windows, were his specialty. The small, painted warrior, with uplifted tomahawk, that advertised his wares at the portals of his "Smokery," was his masterpiece. That he must "be worth money" was a community concession; his trade was established, and his expenses trivial.

"Hello, Georgie!" the old man called, pulling aside the silkateen curtain that draped off his back room, glancing out and espying the nephew. "Just gonna close up. Come in and sit a piece. Ain't seen you for three, four days, Georgie. How's the law business, anyhow, *and what ails your face?*"

"My face, Uncle Moses? Is it dirty or something?"

"Might as well be dirty—Lord knows it looks black enough. Bet you been visitin' that flighty girl o' Cummings's, an' she's been layin' down some law of her own."

"That's just what I came in to talk with you about, Uncle Moses. I've been up there to-night, I admit. You see, Marty wants—an—understanding."

"Understandin' over what?"

Well enough the uncle knew, but a gruff affection was maintained between these two, the only surviving representatives of their family in town, and he sought an argument which might save the lad from the pain of his folly.

"I've got to dig up the cash to get married on, Uncle Moses, and keep on digging it up all my days, or Sunday afternoon the woman I love is going to promise to marry some one else."

"That Higley feller?"

"Yes."

"No such good luck!"

The wizened little uncle sat on a backless wooden chair, elbows on his knees, vest unbuttoned, razor keen carving blade in one hand, a half shapen block of wood swinging idly in the other. He wore his

famous skullcap, shoved down upon one temple. Despite the nephew's misery, as George sat down opposite, he wondered for the thousandth time how a human countenance could hold so many seams and furrows and yet be recognizable.

"Oh, I know you don't like Martha, Uncle Moses. But it's me that's marrying her. It's me that's willing to live with her. And to suddenly find that perhaps I won't—it makes me realize how much I think of her, and I feel all torn open inside."

"Ho!" mused the tobacconist. "Haw! Hum! Not to put too fine a point upon it, Georgie boy, I feel more like extendin' ye my sincerest congratulations. Any girl who'll throw down a feller she's been goin' with nine years—just because some one else is comin' into a little money—is well worth shet of."

"Don't, Uncle Moses! Please don't! I'm the one to blame, if nine years later I'm still as far away from being able to marry her as ever. Haven't you—didn't you—once love a woman, Uncle Moses? Can't you remember how *you* felt?"

It changed the old man, that. The shrewdness went from his eyes. He stopped chewing his tobacco, and his lack-luster glance dropped down to his knife.

"The cases warn't the same, Georgie," he declared at length. "In the first place, the girl was different from your Marty. She'd 'a' waited for *me* till hell froze over—no matter how many other fellers' fathers died and left money. In fact, Georgie, she was doin' just that—waitin' for me—when death up and—took her."

"All the same, can't you remember how *you* felt? I guess there's things worse'n death, Uncle Moses."

"Yes, and one of 'em is findin' yourself hitched for life to a female who's married you for a home—or because she's afeerd she'll die an old maid."

The youth leaned forward and buried his face in the hands with the broken finger nails. "It's funny you can't see that the hurt inside me—over letting Frank Higley get the girl I love—isn't one bit different than the hurt was to you when your sweetheart d-d-died."

"Y' mean to tell me, Georgie, that all that's standin' in the way o' you and Marty Cummings's gettin' married is the money to swing it? Don't it make no difference to the woman what you turn out in life? Ain't she got no thought for your career?"

"She's sort of losing heart, I guess, Uncle Moses—that my career amounts to anything—in the law, anyhow."

"Is she willin' to marry you on nothin', and work in an office or store for wages, to help support the both o' ye till your practice gets big enough so's she can knock off?"

"I wouldn't want my wife to work, after she married me, Uncle Moses."

"Well, I can tell you right here that the female who thinks marriage is the end o' work for her ain't worth marryin' in the first place—because she's a fool. I asked you a question, and I want an answer."

"N-n-no, Uncle Moses, I don't think Marty would—"

"Her sister's willin' to do it for Len Brickhart. Len told me so himself."

"There's a lot of difference between Martha and Amy. But that's no reason why I love Martha any less. Uncle Moses, *won't you help me?*"

"Won't I help you, how?"

"Have you got ten thousand dollars?"

The tobacconist was jolted perceptibly. "S'posin' I have, or s'posin' I ain't?"

"Wouldn't you—loan it to me—on a note—to grubstake me—"

"Great Caesar's ghost! Does it take ten thousand dollars to acquire that money-grabbin' little—"

"Don't call her that, Uncle Moses. You know how you'd feel if I started in calling your dead sweetheart unkind names. I don't want ten thousand to spend. I just want to know I've got it, the same as Frank Higley would have it. I probably wouldn't use a tenth of it, getting married and setting up housekeeping. The balance could stay on deposit and draw interest, just as it does now. And you could have that interest regular as—"

"Georgie, Georgie—do you think your woman'd stand for any such darn fool arrangement as that?"

"She didn't mind me borrowing money to pay my tuition through law school."

"Yes, and seems to me you ain't met that loan, have you?"

"No, but if I could only get this marriage business off my mind, and behind me, so I could concentrate on my practice—"

"Poppycock! You'd only be makin' a bad financial matter worse. In the first place, 'tain't good business to go deeper in debt, when you're in debt already. In the second place, you'd find if that Cummings

girl knew you had ten thousand dollars, she'd want to live in a ten thousand dollar way. They'd be expenses you don't dream of. You'd never be able to pay a cent of it back—"

"Then you won't consider it? Under any circumstances?"

"Not while I'm in my senses. Borrow ten thousand dollars to get married on! Who ever heard o' such a crazy piece o' business?"

"I only mentioned so much because that's the sum Frank Higley's getting from his—"

"Well, it'd be a darned good thing for both Higley and the Cummings girl, and you as well, if old Amos hadn't died and left his boy that cash to go to hell on. Yes, sir; best thing as could happen to young Higley 'd be to have a burglar break into Len Brickhart's office this very night and vamose with that legacy—"

"Len Brickhart's office! Len hasn't got the Higley legacy in his office. What makes you say that?"

"Oh, I dunno's he's got it right this minute, but I understand he's turnin' them two Higley houses into cash this week—as the will provides—and so I say, it 'd be a darned good thing if it was stolen, or he dropped it on the sidewalk, or the Higley houses burned down between now and Sunday, so they wouldn't fetch nothin'. All the Cummings girl 'll do is help him go through it—"

Wareham sprang up angrily. "She won't, if I can help it!" His bitterness now included his only local relative—whom he had come to see at last in the desperation of youth.

"Georgie, siddown and look at this thing sensibly."

"I don't want to sit down. And why haven't you looked at the loss of the woman you loved, *sensibly*, instead of staying a bachelor and grieving about it for twenty-eight years—as you told me one time you'd done?"

"She was different—"

"Love is love. Hurt is hurt. Disappointment's disappointment. And while I'm right here to-night, at the parting of the ways, well, I'm telling you, Uncle Moses, I won't go through the rest of life eating out my heart—"

"Bah! You won't eat out your heart. A dozen years from to-day—when you see the mess that Cummings girl's got Higley

into—you'll laugh in your sleeve at your one time good luck—"

"Will I, though? We'll see."

The tobacconist was not prepared for the abrupt way Wareham whirled, fell down the two steps into the shop, strode across it, and banged the door. The old man scowled stupidly to find the nephew so dramatically departed.

Then he sighed. He gave three or four strokes with the knife on the little pine block he had in his hand. As many splinters and shavings curled up, dropped off his lap to his feet. In another moment, both blade and carving had followed suit. Down on the floor they fell, while the old man covered the wrinkled features with his stubby little hands—very much the same position the nephew had affected a few moments before.

The fierce heat in the little sheet iron stove died down. The Welsbach gas burners over his show cases and in his windows burned uncommonly late. Those windows coated over with a fuzz of hoarfrost. Now and then the crunch of a belated boot heel sounded out along the walks, where pedestrians passed homeward beneath arc lamps swinging in a freezing gale.

Chief Hogan saw the lights burning around one o'clock, and came in to ascertain if something grim had happened.

"What's th' matter, Moses?" the officer demanded, standing at the foot of the two steps and looking up into the workshop and living room.

"Nothin', Mike. Nothin', nothin'. Jus' been sittin' here a thinkin' of other days, that's all—and why it is that young folks wanna marry at the most dangerous time in their lives—when they don't know nothin'."

IV

WHERE George Wareham spent that night, no one seems to know. It does not appear that he recalls, himself. He could not have spent it tramping those naked, icy Vermont town streets; the temperature went down frightfully low in early morning, that winter, and, despite his perturbation, the fellow would have frozen.

If he went over to the Cass Block and spent the intervening hours of darkness in his office, certainly he lighted no light. And yet, half a dozen people saw him in Farrell's Lunch Room around seven thirty. Scores of persons testified later that they

had seen him about the village that ensuing Saturday forenoon. When a man vanishes out of a small town law office between supper and bedtime, leaving hat and overcoat thrown down upon his desk, and the days and weeks and months pile up without the slightest clew to a solution, individual memories are apt to be exceedingly retentive anent his last movements.

About half past eleven that morning, in particular, Len Brickhart accosted him in the People's National Bank. The two lawyers, besides being engaged to sisters, and expecting ultimately to become a variety of brothers-in-law, had offices as aforesaid on the same floor of the old Cass Block. The whole town wondered why they had not essayed a partnership. Perhaps both were sensitive about the lack of success that had attended their vocations up to that time, although Len—with a ten year start—was handling much more business than Wareham. The fact remains that they hadn't.

And yet they often visited by the hour in each other's offices, and consulted on prospective decisions. Wareham, not being sufficiently affluent to afford a safe of his own, had even used space for important documents or funds in Len Brickhart's strong box.

"Hello, George," the older attorney greeted. He accepted the bulky manila envelope which the cashier thrust beneath the bank wicket, and thrust it carefully down inside the inner pocket of his coat. "What the devil ails you, Georgie? Not sick, are you? Seems to me you look—rumpled."

"Oh, I'm all right, Len. Just a little off my feed, that's all. Lookit, Len, tell me something. Are you settling the Higley estate this week?"

"After a fashion, I am. Anyhow, it's been up to me to turn the property into cash. I suppose old Amos feared those houses might depreciate, and his boy get cheated—"

"You're getting *cash* for them—currency—bank notes?"

"That's what Amos specified. I'm not advertising it all over town—to attract whatever rascals might be hanging around—but I've just cashed Joe Hoadley's check today for—"

"To turn over to Frank?"

"If he comes up from Springfield tonight. If not, he'll come to-morrow."

"Won't you—be taking—a lot of risk—locking that money—so much—in your safe—in case he's delayed—"

"Oh, nobody knows about it," Len laughed carelessly. "My safe has ten thousand dollars in it so darned seldom, that I'm not worried about burglars tackling it this one specific night."

V

JUST before the supper hour that Saturday night, Wareham went out West Elm Street and tried to see Martha. What he wanted to say to her is immaterial. Perhaps he merely wanted to talk with her about a delay in the Higley decision until he had worked out a plan for a junior partnership with some more successful attorney.

Perhaps he merely wished to enjoy her company—such as it might have been—in those last few hours before their engagement might be terminated. Anyhow, he did not find her. Mrs. Cummings declared the younger daughter was "down street" with a friend. But George caught sight of her familiar hat and cloak on the Cummings's hall rack, and his militant inferiority complex led him to assume that both mother and daughter were thus suggesting to him how unwelcome he must ever be thenceforth.

It infuriated and sickened him. He could not eat his supper. He did not go back to his boarding house; he encircled the town, and came back by way of South Maple Street. A man named Billings saw him descend Maple Street hill toward the business section around seven thirty. Wareham's head was sunken forward moodily. He continually kicked particles of ice and frozen snow ahead of him, as though his thoughts were elsewhere. Billings was the last man to see him before his disappearance.

Around a quarter to eight the grief crazed fellow got into the lower corridor of the Cass Block, mounted the rubber matted stairs, produced his keys, and admitted himself to his office. This time he switched on the electric lights. He slipped from his overcoat and threw it on his desk, where Chief Hogan found it, with his hat, around ten o'clock the ensuing Monday morning.

For a time he sat before his desk, his feet raised on it, dwelling darkly on what would transpire before another twenty-four hours had passed. Young Higley had lately opened up a carriage painting and repair

shop down in Springfield, and in case he was delayed getting out of the latter city that day on account of business, could not reach Paris, Vermont, to spend Sunday, visit Martha, and collect his inheritance, before six o'clock Sunday morning.

Just when the suggestion for his desperate stratagem came to him, Wareham has not been explicit. Perhaps it came from what his Uncle Moses recommended aenent the Higley inheritance. Perhaps it occurred to him wherever he had spent the previous night. It might have been suggested by sight of Len Brickhart in the bank that noontime. Or perchance it dawned on him while sitting there brooding that Saturday evening in his swivel chair, with the lickpenny Mardi Gras of winter Main Street coming up from below. At any rate, *it came*.

It was simple.

If some tragic thing happened to the Higley inheritance that very night, Frank would learn about it at once when Len went to get it for him in the coming forenoon—or, at least, Monday morning. If Frank Higley discovered he stood a show of never receiving that legacy, Martha would think twice about marrying him. At any rate, their engagement would be delayed. If their engagement were delayed, he, Wareham, might stumble onto some legal good luck, or later command the finances to rivet the woman's life to his, after all.

Subsequent events testified positively that not once did young Wareham consider appropriating that legacy to his own purposes. That would be theft, and he had no stomach for theft. Besides, he was lawyer enough to realize that no felon ever escapes the ultimate penalty of the law; good luck might delay it, but even if no apprehension resulted immediately, the strain of the worry could never be worth the price.

To get into Len Brickhart's suite, however, open his safe, remove the currency—if it were there—and *hide it right there in Brickhart's office indefinitely*, was not exactly dishonesty, or even chicanery, half so much as it appeared desperate tactics of love and war.

Both technically and morally, of course, Higley had every right in the world to the funds his father had left him for his infant business. But, then, reasoned Wareham, so did he, George, have every technical and moral right to Martha's heart. Wasn't

Frank Higley stealing that? How, then, could Higley arraign him for "misplacing" the legacy so that it did not wreck the Wareham-Cummings love match?

For four solid hours George Wareham remained there in his office arguing with himself, figuring out how he would subsequently deport himself.

Eleven o'clock tolled over in the illuminated clock on the courthouse tower. That meant old Ezra Hassock, the colored janitor, would have coaled down his basement fires for the night and gone home to bed, locking the street door of the Cass Block behind him.

Wareham gave himself an extra half hour. Then, leaving his own office door ajar, he stole out.

VI

LEN BRICKHART'S door was diagonally down the hall some twenty to thirty feet, near the head of the stairs. Wareham reached it. In his hands he had the upper half of a steel buggy spring, which had reposed in his office some twenty months after being Exhibit A in one of the accident cases Martha had twitted him for losing.

Faint light came up the rubber matted stairs from the arc lights down in the wintry street. Glass doors and transoms passed along more light, which entered locked offices surrounding. His own door, left open, gave its quota. The "thief" had enough light to worm one sharp end of the spring into the Brickhart casing and get a leverage on the knob.

No ordinary door in a thousand years could withstand the terrific pressure which resulted when Wareham pushed his weight forward against spring, knob, and lock. Len's door burst inward, with the knob a flattened wreck and a splinter torn out of the jamb.

Stepping quickly inside the familiar room, wondering if his heart thumps could be heard all over the business section, Wareham closed it behind him. He laid the spring across the seat of a chair, and applied himself at once to the safe.

This part of the conspiracy was simplest of all. He knew the safe's combination by heart. All he needed was illumination to spin it. He lighted several matches.

The safe came open! Then the plundering started.

Purposely ledgers, drawers, summonses, bales of documents bound with string—all

came out on the floor and were strewn around recklessly. The cash drawer being locked with a key on Len's private ring, the wagon spring was requisitioned a second time to smash it dramatically. The whole front of the drawer stove in. Wareham's trembling fingers thrust into the ragged aperture.

He drew out the bulky manila envelope.

One glance, even in the half light, was sufficient to disclose the tremendous currency it held. Money it was, spendable money, and yet George Wareham carried it like poison.

Between the safe and the left hand wall were shelves containing Brickhart's law books. Legislative enactments reaching back for two generations were stored on these shelves—tomes never looked into, never disturbed even for dusting. Wareham dragged across a chair. Standing upon its arms, he could just reach over in behind the topmost row of these volumes. Scarcely an inch of space opened between them and the wall. Down into this slot Wareham dropped the packet, knowing well that it might repose there undisturbed for years.

The dastardly stuff disposed of, all that now remained was making certain Len's office was left in such a state of disorder that the authorities could never suspect the cash drawer of the safe had been the first item of assault. But, before he ransacked Brickhart's roll-top desk, he carefully wiped the safe front with his handkerchief, in fear of the newfangled finger-print idea. Then he turned that office "upside down."

Documents, letters, law books were swept off the desk and strewn about the floor. Chairs were overturned. Even the hat pole laid prostrate.

The fellow was about to pick up the wagon spring and retreat—to hasten into his own office and hysterically telephone both Len and the police, as if he had just discovered the sabotage, when his body went rigid, his stomach somersaulted, his vitals turned to slag.

"Why, Len!" cried a surprised feminine voice behind him, "I thought you told me you were going home and doctor your cold!"

The next moment Amy Cummings's hand had found the familiar light switch. Packets of documents in both hands, the miserable "felon" turned slowly to look into the horror-stricken eyes of Len Brick-

hart's fiancée. She stood in her street wraps, and took in the destruction with her muff at her mouth. As through eons of time and space, Wareham heard her exclaim:

"I thought I saw some one up here in the dark!"

Plop! Both hands gripping desecrated papers relaxed. Letters and packets went down on the floor.

"George Wareham! You! What are you doing?" Then the woman's stunned gaze came to rest on the safe. "Georgie Wareham—*Georgie!*"

"Get out of my way!"

"Georgie—wait!"

But he did not wait. Amy Cummings was screaming for him to "come back" as he took the rear stairs three or four at a time. He got down to the alley, hatless and coatless. He fled eastward up the alley in bitter midnight wind.

VII

TO-DAY, twenty-two years later, he solemnly affirmed he had no more choice in the matter of staying or bolting than as though he had read the whole thing in a book.

With a great panorama flash, as the stupefied spinster gaped there before him, he saw the awful result. That wagon spring would incriminate him as nothing else could. Len knew that spring. They had often joked about it.

Useless to try to make Amy believe outsiders had effected that breaking and entry, when, in addition, she had seen him standing with sheafs of papers in his hands. And she was Martha's sister. Whether he restored the money from its hiding place behind the books, made no difference. He had been caught in the compromise. In one swift fluke, his future was in wreckage. Small wonder he bolted.

And he did bolt—blindly, instinctively.

He kept to the alley, dodging crates and ash cans, till it ended with the fence behind the Baptist Church. He climbed this fence, ears tingling, teeth chattering, hands numbed with zero cold. He got over into School Street.

The walks were deserted. Not a sleigh was in sight. But, to make certain that retiring persons did not espy and remark upon him from darkened chamber windows—fleeing hatless and coatless through the streets in the dead of winter night—he sped diagonally across School Street, through

the school yard, over another fence into a cinder dump that brought him out along the northern boundary of Caleb Gridley's tannery.

At exactly midnight—tortured by the penetrating cold—he had worked his way as far as Depot Street and the aisles of cars in the freight yards. When old Rufus Whiting went out to lower the gates across East Main Street for the hurtling flyer that marked the end of Whiting's workday as a watchman at the crossing, Wareham slipped into his shanty and stole one of his lamb-skin coats. The watchman also had several caps hanging on a peg. The fugitive took one of these. Neither coat nor cap was missed for days.

He spent the rest of that night in a freight car, sobbing at times like a broken-hearted boy. The freight pulled out for White River Junction and Boston at five thirty. A terrible day ensued in that blackened, banging prison. Shortly after night-fall, Wareham dropped from it in Concord, New Hampshire. He found a crowded eating room, where no one paid him any attention beyond serving him wholesome food and resuscitating coffee. He counted his money.

He had twenty-eight dollars and some loose silver change. He used some of this change to buy all the Boston papers which had arrived in Concord just before sunset.

Not an item did he find of any theft in Paris, Vermont.

But that meant nothing. Perhaps it had missed the afternoon editions—

Then it dawned on him that the day was Sunday. Those papers had been printed—most of them containing current news—the evening before, or at least the very early morning.

He edged into a Concord church for evening services that night, removing rough coat and cap before entering the vestibule. The church was warm, and would be so for days. Watching his chance, he slipped up to the gallery and down between some pews. The services ended, lights were extinguished, the janitor departed. Wareham spent that second night in the slumber of nervous exhaustion, stretched out on the cushions of a gallery pew.

In mid afternoon hunger and thirst drove him out. He found a basement door which was locked from within. He gained an eating place and bought more papers. Still no signs of any misdemeanor in Paris.

Numb of heart, jumpy of nerves, he dared to buy a ticket for Manchester late that night, and rode down in the front seat of the smoking coach. Alighting there, he got a railroad ticket for Portsmouth and Portland.

Wednesday night he crossed the Canada line. At St. John, New Brunswick, he hired a room, getting his worst scare at the catechism he received because of the Yankee money he proffered. He stayed in the place three weeks, supporting himself by getting a job washing dishes in a cheap eating house.

He seemed to be living, moving, fleeing from place to place in a dream. Every mile he covered, every day he stayed away, only made his return the more impossible.

Thoughts of Paris, his practice, his aspirations, the uncle who loved him despite the old fellow's eccentricities, all the plans he had made, the prestige he had enjoyed—were as ashes in his heart. As for Martha—

But he pulled himself together. After all, he was only twenty-six. Fifty or sixty years of earthly existence still remained to him, and he had to face them somehow. He was lawyer enough to recognize that in twenty-two years his "crime" would be outlawed. Then he might return to Paris. *Return!*

He had his moments of make-believe at writing to Len, Martha, Amy, his uncle—confessing everything—even writing Frank Higley and disclosing where the legacy was hidden. Yet some queer psychological twist kept him from giving Higley so much satisfaction.

Subconsciously a great hate began to grow within him for Higley. The fellow, his miserable legacy, had started all the furor in the first place. Let him get along without his money. Let him sweat. At least, without it, he was being denied the same thing that Wareham was being denied—matrimony with the woman they loved in common.

So George Wareham's long trek began. Heitically, tortuously, heartbrokenly he went at first. But, as the days grew into weeks, the weeks into months, and—yes, verily—the months into years, gradually what he chose to consider his "past" assumed the proportions of a nightmare which was old. It pleased him to think he had not lived superficially; that he had drunk deeply of the dregs of life; that he was sodden and gray with the world.

He left St. John in the middle of February, 1904. He found a job as a cutlery salesman throughout Eastern Canada, but gave it up in April, fearing he might encounter some one who would recognize him. In Toronto he got a better position—as timekeeper on a lumber job far up in Northern Ontario.

That following Christmas he worked through to Victoria. He was a thousand miles out on the Pacific, headed for China, to buy pig bristles for a firm of brush and paint manufacturers in San Francisco, when the realization dawned on him like a sort of cold douche:

Some day, in the nature of things, Len Brickhart was going either to move or renovate his office. Then the ten-thousand-dollar packet would topple into reëxistence. What would they say about George Wareham then—he whom they had castigated for months and years as a thief and a scoundrel?

It gave him a peculiar self-satisfaction—the grim hoax which the whole affair would become in that day. Without knowing it, the man had long since commenced to pity himself—as the helpless victim of a dastardly compromise.

But he landed in the Orient, and the Far East swallowed him.

VIII

LONG, long ago, when we were children, most of us learned the well-known verse:

Oh, what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practice to deceive!

The sentiment of that couplet came to haunt George Wareham until he bore it as a sort of shibboleth. Self-pity continued to gnaw him like a cancer. He had his hours when homesickness for the mountains and scenes of his boyhood almost worked his self-destruction. He saw new faces, and made other friendships. But always, always, the canker was there—he had fled from his old home town beneath an onus.

Once, in Seoul, Korea, he did sit down and write a long letter to his uncle. He implored the old man to write him secretly about Len, about Martha, about Higley—and if the two latter had married. But when it came to disclosing that the “stolen” legacy was up in Len’s office behind his law books—he found he could not bring himself to do it. He mailed the first part of the letter at last, however, giving

Moses Cuttle a shipping agency’s offices in Singapore as address for an answer.

He never knew what fate that letter met. At least, no response ever came to hand.

Under such conditions, twenty-two years may assume the aspects of a lifetime. Many a man has forgotten his mother and his God—in twenty-two years. Others have been born, risen to meteoric renown, or been smeared from the so-called human universe.

In 1910, the year he was thirty-two years old, George Wareham came back to America. He settled for a time in San Francisco. He met a woman there—head of a department in a great San Francisco store. Ten days before he was to have married her, he thought he saw a person in a hotel foyer who bore an uncanny and perturbing resemblance to Amy Cummings.

Subsequent revealments have proved that it was Amy Cummings—or, rather, Amy Brickhart. She and Len “did” California the year before the European war, as a sort of belated honeymoon. But George was psychologically shattered by the strange embroilment which he imagined had “wrecked” his life.

Certain it was that the meeting—although Amy was unaware of it—called all the past before George Wareham anew. He had a bad quarter hour debating whether to investigate, and if it were Amy, make himself known. But now the absurd cancer had made him a coward. It did more than that. It caused his forthcoming marriage to the California lady to appear revolting.

He fled San Francisco without any explanation to her.

He drifted east to Denver, to Chicago. Then he went back to Los Angeles. The war came and ended. The influenza epidemic numbered him among its victims. It found him devitalized physically, dispirited mentally, and yet he pulled through.

Lines had come in his face. His hair grayed. He had never been overly successful financially, and this, too, preyed upon him. He went back to the Orient for his old California firm in 1921. He was severely burned in the Tokyo earthquake.

Then, one day, it came to him as a shock that his twenty-two years as a “fugitive” were over. He was forty-eight years old—and had lived a beggarly, stifled life. And yet he could go back; assuming, of course, that he wanted to go back.

Whimsy seized him. He decided to risk a return.

He came back to Paris, Vermont.

IX

HE arrived in town on the shuttle train up from the Junction, this afternoon about six o'clock. Tears fused his eyes—tired, burned out eyes—all the way up the Green River Valley, so that he could scarcely recognize the familiar outlines of the hoary old mountains. Once or twice he thought he saw persons whom he once knew and who once knew him; he wasn't sure, and accosted no one.

When he got into Paris, he appeared confused. The station itself was different; the railroad erected a new one in 1912. Out on East Main Street, where he had stolen the lambskin coat from old man Whiting, the gateman, had been reared a modern, concrete underpass.

He got down into town on a blowy November night. Not a soul recognized him; it was natural they wouldn't. As Sam had said, he was an old, old man—forty-eight, yet appearing sixty-five—not with years, nor the enormity of his "crime," but with what proportions he had allowed that dereliction to assume within his own brain.

He got his first terrible shock when he found the whole front of the Cass Block altered—he could scarcely credit it to be the same building. A dentist had his offices where Wareham had abandoned coat and hat for flight. Len Brickhart's name, too, was missing from the windows in the other corner.

He turned into Cross Street. His Uncle Moses Cuttle's "Smokery" had ceased to be a smokery—or anything else. The low line of monitor buildings was entirely wiped out. A yard was presented, with a gray picket fence about it, and the great cylindrical tanks of an oil company in the rear of a barricade of gasoline pumps to serve automobiles.

He turned into a drug store. Every face was strange. He found the telephone book in the booth, and fingered out Len Brickhart's new business address—the Hawks Block. George had never known any Hawks Block. And yet he found it.

For a moment Len Brickhart, closing up his day's work to get home to Amy and dinner, blinked stupidly at the fellow who stood beyond the railing in his outer room.

"You're who?" cried the lawyer, aghast,

dropping the dozen stamped letters he held.

Len was fifty pounds stouter now; his hair was iron gray. His practice netted him thirty thousand a year in a grubby little town of ten thousand inhabitants. Then:

"Come in, George," he gasped weakly. And when the door was closed behind the threadbare, shriveled prodigal, he added: "You've been away a long time, George."

"Yes," lisped Wareham, "just twenty-two years."

Brickhart was a bit too dazed to credit the materialization. He sat down limply in a heavy leather swivel.

"Len," whispered the other hoarsely, "where's my Uncle Moses?" He asked that first, before anything else was said.

"Dead," responded Len. "He died in nineteen five."

"What? One year after I left this place?" The prodigal seemed to wilt. But the second question had to come at once, also: "And Martha—what about her—and Higley?"

"Frank got his inheritance, and she married him, some three months after you left us. They were married nineteen years, and their girls are both in high school. Frank died some three years back."

"He—got—his—inheritance?"

"Sure, why not?"

"You mean, you found that money—behind your books?"

"What money? What books? What on earth are you talking about, George?"

X

LEN was late for his dinner to-night—quite late. As set forth in the opening of this chronicle, my partner met George Wareham emerging from his office somewhere around half past seven. And for a full quarter hour before he left, Wareham sat in one of Len's massive leather chairs, forearms upon the edge of the desk, forehead down on his wrists.

"And for twenty-two years you've thought I stole that money?" Wareham had cackled hoarsely. "Higley's money."

"But you didn't steal Higley's money, I tell you. I paid it to him, and he married Martha Cummings and lived with her for nineteen years."

"How could you do that when I propped it up behind the law books on the top shelf of your office in the Cass Block? Didn't you find it when you moved over here?"

"I didn't move over here, so to speak. The Cass Block was totally destroyed by fire in nineteen hundred and nine. I was burned out—lost everything—law books—furniture—what top shelf are you talking about?"

"That ten thousand dollars I took out of your safe, I never stole it. I didn't take it with me when I fled. I hid it so Higley couldn't get it, on a top shelf in your office."

"You poor, poor son of a gun! Have

you been running around the world for twenty-two years a sort of fugitive for *that*? Why, George, that ten thousand dollars you took from my safe was a sum your Uncle Moses had me negotiate on his property, *to give you outright*, so you could marry the Cummings girl. We thought—Amy and I—that as you'd grabbed nothing but your own property, we might as well slick up the wreck you made of my office, and forget it!"

Two Birds In a Gilded Cage

HENRY LOU MAY HAVE BEEN A RECKLESS GIRL, BUT—WELL,
THE DARKEST HOUR IS JUST BEFORE THE DAWN

By Viola Brothers Shore

HENRY LOU held in her hand the unopened telegram that she had taken from the table in the lower hall. A little stab of anticipation went through her, in some way associated with the image of Penn Fletcher; although it was not obvious why she should think of Penn Fletcher in connection with a telegram, when he had never sent her one in the fifteen years she had known him—nor any other communication whatever in the last thirteen months and eleven days.

She more than suspected that the telegram was from Mrs. Vann, announcing that the lady was leaving the sanatorium, or changing her instructions about the living room slip covers. At the thought of Mrs. Vann, Henry Lou wrinkled what still was an impudent nose, although the last two years had ironed most of the mischief out of her face. Her failure to open the telegram was as much due to a distaste for any communication from her employer as to her reluctance to dispel the pleasing image of a tall young man, with one écrù-colored lock wandering characteristically in the direction of a thin and crooked, but thoroughly amiable nose, which seemed to materialize out of the yellow envelope.

As she stepped into the boxlike little automatic lift, the head of Mr. Speck—just

like a rolling stone, except for a gray fringe above his celluloid collar—peered suspiciously over the steps leading to his superintendent's apartment in the basement. Mr. Speck was nearsighted, a German, a bachelor, and a misanthrope, and his full name was Klaus Specknudel—which, of course, was too much. At first Henry Lou's credulity had rebelled utterly at Mr. Speck.

"He's not real," she used to say. "I'm just making him up."

In time, however, one learns not to rebel at anything.

Mr. Speck had but one interest in life—one love, one attachment, one vulnerable spot—the little automatic lift, installed in what had been a dumb-waiter shaft in the old days when No. 3 was a palatial private residence in the East Fifties. It was so small that three people could not enter it without achieving an instantaneous intimacy. If two had been forced to spend the night in it—a calamity not at all impossible, since, like all pampered darlings, the lift had a willful, undependable nature—they would have had to remain rigidly upright, unless well enough acquainted to lean against each other.

The superintendent always referred to it as "Der El," and you could fairly hear the capital letters. He guarded it jealously,

suspecting the motives of every one who entered it. When, late at night, it was needed most, as it invariably was, and refused to budge, as it invariably did, Mr. Speck, the sworn and swearing enemy of all tenants and their guests, would direct his maledictions against the occupant.

The only person in the house with whom Mr. Speck was on friendly terms, if one might so call the mere absence of hostilities, was Miss Bascom — *Miss*, mind you, not *Mrs.* — Mrs. Vann's cook, who, through a deep and abiding distrust of Der El, walked her two hundred pounds up and down the four flights of stairs to the Vann apartment. Henry Lou figured that the friendliness between Mr. Speck and Miss Bascom was an instinctive alliance between the two meanest tempers in the world. There was Mrs. Vann's, of course, but hers was more neurotic than mean.

The unopened telegram in her mouth, Henry Lou let herself in with her key. It was Thursday, and there was a certain relief in knowing that Miss Bascom would be out. She was unusually disagreeable, these days, because she had to cook for Henry Lou. Certainly, Henry Lou would have preferred to eat out, in the absence of Mrs. Vann; but that took either money or friends. Money, Henry Lou had not, and her pride had not let her communicate with any of her friends since the illness which had reduced her to taking this position as companion to a semi-invalid. She did not want them to know how utterly she had been defeated — how she had had to give up her dreams and take anything that would keep her from getting farther into debt, in order to send every week to Mannisville the amount that simply had to go home to keep ma and pa from suspecting that she had failed.

Henry Lou took off her small round felt hat, which had been one of Mrs. Vann's sartorial mistakes, but which suited the younger woman's slender, boyish lines, and her face — which should have been full of freckles, but was not. She ran the brush over her smooth tan hair, cut in straight Dutch style. Since her illness much of the gold glint had gone out of it, but it still made a pleasing contrast with the fine line of black brow and lash framing her brown eyes.

As she closed the door of her room, she frowned at herself in the mirror, for it seemed to her that she was beginning to

look more than her twenty-six years. It was an attractive room — too attractive for a companion, but there was no other place where Mrs. Vann could have put her. On her way out to the roof garden, Henry Lou picked up a magazine, and, settling herself in a wicker chair, within the last rays of the setting sun, she opened her unwanted telegram.

The roof garden, built on top of a rear extension, was gay with striped awnings and cretonnes, and rows of flower boxes, in which she had planted marigolds, and zinnias, and all the things of which she had been tired, back home in the days when her heart had been full of restless dreams of the city. The flower boxes were the only part of her life at Mrs. Vann's that seemed really to belong to Henry Lou and not to some hateful nightmare. Every time she saw them they brought a warm glow to her eyes.

Now, however, she looked past them, unseeingly, at the jagged line of city roofs against the fading sky, and the telegram dropped from her fingers to the fiber rug, as she strove to realize what she had read. Ma and pa were coming to visit her!

She roused herself, and tried to think. How could she have them here, where she was not much better than a servant? How let them understand the truth, after the letters she had been writing?

She must stop them; but how? The telegram had lain in the hall all afternoon. They were on the train — would be here at any moment. Why hadn't it ever occurred to her that they might do just that? Well, it hadn't. Even now it seemed incredible. Ma and pa in New York — ma and pa, who hadn't left Mannisville in thirty years!

What would she do with them? What could she do but face the music and tell them the truth? And so it had all been in vain — the worry, the privation, the weeks and years of mental anguish to keep them from knowing!

There are people who simply never plan ahead, whom the problem in hand absorbs to the exclusion of everything else, who must solve that before contemplating the next. Henry Lou was that sort of person. That was how she had been able to live from week to week, concerned only with the moment, untroubled by a possible day of reckoning, and convinced, somehow, that if it arrived, she would be able to handle it in turn.

In Mannisville, when she had longed to get to New York, nothing had concerned her except getting there. What she would do, or what the result would be, had not troubled her. Finally, persuaded by her conviction, her parents had given her all that pa had been able to save out of a lifetime of selling and tuning pianos. In return, she had promised to send them what they needed every week, until pa found something that he could do in spite of his growing deafness.

Henry Lou had kept her promise. At first her remittances came out of pa's savings, but, to keep them from worrying, she wrote that she was already launched on her career. As she went from underpaid job to underpaid job, encroaching more and more on the savings, her letters had never failed to reassure them—partly through pride, of course, but partly through unwillingness to have their lives troubled by her temporary ups and downs; for these were only temporary, she was sure. Henry Lou Patton could not fail!

As things went from bad to worse, and she was afraid lest some of her despair might creep between the lines, she had made her letters increasingly glowing; and, for awhile, it had seemed as if they would become realities—the dreams that she poured into her letters home. That was when she and Phyllis Drury, a rich but not very clever girl, had opened the Drury Print Shop. Henry Lou had even increased the amount she sent home, so confident was she that her new venture was going to work out brilliantly.

But it had not. The last of the savings were swallowed up; but she managed not to cut down the allowance she sent to ma and pa. For one entire week she lived on spaghetti and tea cooked over the gas flame; and the next week she was in a hospital.

Breakdown, they said, from weakness and worry and overwork. Phyllis Drury lent her the money she needed, and when she came out of the hospital, she took the first position that offered. She only meant to stay with Mrs. Vann until she regained her driving power; but, somehow, she had never regained it.

And now this had overtaken her. Always she had put off the question of coming home with the plea of being busy. She would come next spring, or the following Christmas, or during the summer; but when she heard that she was to take Mrs.

Vann to the sanatorium at Clear Springs, she figured that on her way back she could make the slight detour to Mannisville at small cost. The whole thing had seemed quite providential, and she had written that she was coming home.

And then Mrs. Vann had changed her plans, and had motored up to Clear Springs with friends. Henry Lou had not the heart to go deeper into debt for the trip, even if she could have borrowed the money; and so her parents had decided to come and visit her.

Well, one thing at a time. Her first concern must be to make them welcome and comfortable after the long trip. She set about getting the tea things. It always helped her to have something to do. She found jam and cheese and crackers. After they had eaten and rested, she would tell them.

II

HENRY LOU had gone to bed without telling them. She had lacked the sort of ruthless courage it would have required to shatter with a blow all their pride and joy in seeing her.

Of course, they had taken for granted that the apartment was hers; and Henry Lou, without quite knowing how it had come about, had installed them in Mrs. Vann's bedroom. It could not hurt to let them sleep there one night. After all, they were not young, and a shock when they were tired and overwrought might have serious consequences. Some time before Miss Bascom arrived in the morning she would manage to tell ma.

What made it particularly difficult was the fact that both ma and pa had grown so deaf. Henry Lou was shocked beyond measure, although they seemed unconcerned and almost unaware of it. Pa's deafness had been growing for years, but ma's had come on her recently. Otherwise, she was exactly the same, from her crinkly white hair, showing pink along the part, down the whole buxom pink and white width of her—even to her way of apologizing for pa.

"Pa's a little hard of hearing," she would explain, winking one of her jolly brown eyes with an impish expression not unlike Henry Lou's.

Pa had not changed, either, except that his thinning gray hair strained harder to bridge the widening gap at the back; but he

still looked inquiringly over the top of his spectacles, and carried his head aslant from having listened so long to pianos.

When anything was said, he would tap his ear significantly in the direction of ma.

"Don't let on you've noticed," the gesture seemed to say, "but ma's hearing isn't what it used to be."

Then he would repeat what he thought Henry Lou had said, for the benefit of ma, and ma would reply to what she thought he had said. Altogether, it made confidences a little difficult.

"Henry Lou says she had the grippie," pa relayed to ma, with that little conspiring wink at his daughter, who had asked whether they had had a pleasant trip.

"No," replied ma placidly, enjoying to overflowing Mrs. Vann's most overstuffed chair. "We brought a trunk. It 'll be up to-morrow."

Henry Lou could not sleep, she was so busy framing her interview with ma. As a consequence she failed to wake up, and the visitors were already in the dining room when she made her appearance. She knew immediately, from the quality of the silence in which Miss Bascom served breakfast, that something had happened. Miss Bascom had degrees of silence—normal, brooding, and wounded; and after that the deluge.

It broke immediately after ma, in the raised voice of those who live with deafness, remarked:

"I was just telling your cook she oughtn't to leave the rhubarb uncovered. It takes the taste of everything."

"Ma's been layin' down the law to your hired woman, Mrs. Bascom," added pa.

Bang! Something came down with violence, and Henry Lou hastened into the kitchen. She thought it best to have noticed nothing.

"My mother and father came down unexpectedly to visit me," she began pleasantly, straightening the cuff of her one blue tailored dress. "Did you meet them?"

There was an ominous silence, and then Miss Bascom replied, her mouth so tightly screwed up that it was a wonder any sound came out at all:

"I did. Please tell your father I'm *Miss* Bascom, and *not* Mrs. I told it to him four times."

"He doesn't hear very well," explained Henry Lou placatingly. "They got in late last night, and I had nowhere to put them.

I hope Mrs. Vann won't mind my having let them use her room for one night."

"She said"—Miss Bascom indicated the dining room—"they were going to be here a week."

"No, no!" Henry Lou protested hastily. "I'll take them to a hotel to-day. I hope they haven't put you out."

Her hope was ill-founded.

"I've been with Mrs. Vann five years, and this is the first time I had to have anybody poking their nose in my ice box and telling me what to do!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Bascom. My mother didn't mean to intrude; but you know how old people are. They want to be helpful—"

"Well, I don't need any help. If you don't want me to quit, you keep that old woman out of my kitchen!"

Henry Lou promised that she would try; but it is not easy to make a mother, even one with perfect hearing, understand that she must not go into your kitchen. Later in the morning she would explain everything to ma; but first she had to run over to Phyllis Drury, who had written that she wanted to see her at once. Henry Lou could not disregard a summons from Phyllis Drury, who might have some business proposition to make to her.

Phyllis had no such proposition. On the contrary, she was pressed for money, and wanted Henry Lou to repay part of what she owed her. The debt had been running a long time, and Phyllis felt that her good nature was being trespassed upon. Henry Lou simply could not plead for quarter. It was not her way. She promised to do what she could within the week.

Coming back from Phyllis Drury's, it seemed to Henry Lou that her cup of misery was indeed full; but cups of misery sometimes betray a surprising elasticity.

During her absence, pa had discovered Der El, and the untold amusement to be derived from pushing a button and being wafted magically aloft in a gilded chariot. Not in years had pa found anything that so intrigued his fancy. No magic carpet ever thrilled its discoverer more. No seven-league boots brought their possessor more unadulterated joy. Up he went, and then, to test once more its miraculous properties, down. Then up again—

Meanwhile from Mr. Speck emanated ominous rumblings, of which, fortunately, pa was unaware.

Henry Lou ran right into a purpling Mr.

Speck just as pa, with a complete and child-like satisfaction in regard to life, emerged from the lift. She presented him to the heaving Mr. Speck. "This is my father, Mr. Patton. Pa, this is Mr. Specknudel."

"What did you say was the name?" pa firmly demanded, tilting his head incredulously, and screwing up his face behind his spectacles.

"Mr. Specknudel," said Henry Lou, the hysterical tendency that the name always induced in her intensified by the need for shouting it. Pa's expression deepened, and Henry Lou repeated hastily: "Specknudel! Mr. Specknudel!"

A smile twitched at the corners of pa's mouth as he shook his head hopelessly. Henry Lou raised her voice desperately.

"*Specknudel!*" she yelled.

Pa made no further attempt to conceal his weakness, but laughed outright.

"You'll have to excuse me," he protested feebly, "but it sounds just like 'Specknudel' to me."

Henry Lou was glad pa could not understand what Mr. Speck was saying as she bundled him into Der El, and up they shot. "Shot," however, is an exaggeration. "Oozed" would be nearer to suggesting Der El's rate of progress, if any.

Finally emerging, they encountered Miss Bascom, her black hat sitting angrily astride the oily knot of her thin hair, and a determined expression upon her unnecessarily prominent features.

Pa did not exactly help matters.

"Going out for a bit, Mrs. Bascom?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Miss Bascom!" she bellowed. "I'm going out—for *good!*!"

Henry Lou blanched.

"Miss Bascom, you don't mean it? You're not—"

Miss Bascom turned on her.

"I told you to keep that old woman out of my kitchen."

"Oh, but, Miss Bascom, give me a chance! You can't go like this. What will Mrs. Vann say?"

"That's for you to find out. You wait till she hears this was *your* apartment, and that I was supposed to take my orders from your mother! I'd write to her this very day, only she's not to get any letters. You just wait till she gets back! You just wait!"

Ma had been crying in the bedroom. She hadn't meant to make trouble for

Henry Lou. She had only suggested very gently to the cook that she ought to appreciate what a nice, easy place she had, and not be so wasteful with the butter.

Henry Lou took her in her arms and held her close; and by the wave of yearning that swept over her, she realized how long she had been hungering for just this. Dear, dear ma, whom she loved, and who loved her so! They were both crying a little, because they were so glad of each other.

How foolish to have been afraid of telling ma anything at all! She was going to tell her now. Ma would understand, and would make Henry Lou come back with her to Mannisville. Henry Lou was very tired—too tired to go on any longer, facing Miss Bascoms, Mrs. Vanns and Phyllis Drurys. She wanted nothing so much as to run away from them all—back home!

Already she felt stronger, as if she had cast off her load. She reassured ma with little pats on her plump shoulder. She had done the right thing. Miss Bascom had always been cross. They would get somebody else.

"You won't need anybody else," ma said, drying her eyes resolutely, "as long as I'm here. I guess I can cook as well as anybody you can hire in New York!"

And, as if she meant to lose no time in proving it, ma headed determinedly toward the kitchen, where she began at once to make herself at home with a zest and pride which made it doubly hard for Henry Lou to begin telling her that it was not her kitchen at all.

Still, she did try.

"I've got something to say to you, ma," she began with difficulty.

"They're in the ice box," replied ma, bustling about happily.

Henry Lou swallowed and raised her voice.

"I want to have a real talk with you, ma," she shouted.

"Land sakes, child," replied ma, "so do I! I haven't told you half the news. Did I write you about Lola's baby falling out of the high chair? Like I said to pa, some people don't deserve children, the care they give them!"

Nothing ma liked better than having a talk. There was so much she had to tell; and when nothing else occurred to her, she would make conversation out of the thing she was doing.

"Now these celery tops 'll make soup to-

morrow;" or, " Better light my stove or it won't be hot."

Henry Lou would have to wait until she had all ma's attention. It would be difficult enough even when she was not clattering about between the stove and ice box, or searching earnestly for the colander or some other hidden utensil.

III

WHEN at last luncheon was ready, pa was nowhere to be found. Hearing Mr. Speck's voice in the hall below, Henry Lou went to the door.

" What's he saying?" inquired pa, stepping out of the lift with such a beatific and contented expression that Henry Lou had not the heart to tell him.

At luncheon, however, she ventured:

" Whenever anybody uses the lift, Mr. Speck gets cross and grumbles."

" Yes," agreed pa, " you always did. Every time Penn Fletcher comes to the house, he says: ' Ma Patton, got any of those jumbles Henry Lou used to be so crazy about?' And ma gives him a plateful to take home."

Henry Lou's heart turned a somersault before settling into a swift canter.

" Land sakes!" grumbled ma, who had her own ideas about what was being said. " Can't you eat one meal without that stuff? You'll burn the lining of your stomach away with all that ketchup. Just like that summer boarder over to—"

Henry Lou was not attending. Penn remembered the cookies she liked, and had asked for some to take home with him—perhaps because they reminded him—

" Did you see much of Penn during the past year?" she asked, when ma returned with the ketchup.

" Henry Lou wants to know what you been doing the last year," ma translated for pa. " He don't hear very well," she explained, turning to Henry Lou.

" Can't say for certain," replied pa, scratching his head thoughtfully; " but I believe it was chipmunks."

Henry Lou repeated her question about Penn, this time loud enough for both to hear. Of course they had seen a lot of Penn. He came over every Tuesday—the day Henry Lou's letter was due from New York—to read it.

Henry Lou put down a forkful of food untasted. Had they shown Penn Fletcher her letters?

Of course they had. He had been very much interested in her success.

" Well," he had said, " it's plain Mannsville has nothing to offer *her*!"

Henry Lou had a sudden flash of vision. It was not because he no longer cared that Penn had stopped writing to her, but because he thought, from her letters, that she no longer cared. He had his pride, too!

But that changed everything. A rush of feeling flooded her, as something which had stood sentinel over her thoughts vanished. She could admit to herself, now, that she was very fond of Penn—fonder of him than before she left home. The last few years had made her more capable of appreciating how good he was, how kind and dependable, how real.

Henry Lou had always been inclined to patronize Penn Fletcher, because he had no ambition. He never hoped to get away from Mannsville. He loved that part of the country, and his dream was to fix up the old Fletcher place and live in it.

Penn was wonderfully clever with his hands. He could make almost anything out of anything. He had ideas, too. Henry Lou had tried to make him see that he was too good for Mannsville—that he ought to plan a bigger destiny than restoring an old Colonial house. After all, a house was not a life work, but only something to be moved into and fixed up, and then moved out of again when you grew tired of it.

Henry Lou would have married Penn if he had been willing to come to New York with her and gamble on their fortunes. Not that she considered it a gamble. Penn could take a piece of board and a pot of paint, and turn out a screen or a corner cupboard that would make you gasp. Out of a cigar box and some green and gold paint, using spaghetti and lentils as moldings, he had once made the best looking clock case Henry Lou had ever seen. There was no market for that sort of thing in Mannsville. New York was the place.

Now she realized that she had been very young and impatient, and that Penn, as a matter of fact, had probably been right. He had known best where he belonged.

Well, now that she knew and understood, she could write to him without compromising her pride. While ma talked on, she began composing the letter in her mind. Her spirits had mounted inexplicably. She forgot the other tasks ahead of her—telling ma, raising the money for Phyllis Drury,

and facing Mrs. Vann—in the absorption of this one. An impatience seized her to begin.

As they rose from the table she asked, close to ma's ear:

"I suppose Penn is still at the Fletcher place?"

To her surprise, ma regarded her blankly and shook her head.

"The Fletcher place? Didn't Penn write you?"

Henry Lou had to admit that she had heard nothing from Penn in a year, to say nothing of the additional month and twelve days.

"Well, I declare!"

Ma had to sit right down at the table and pour herself another cup of coffee while she told Henry Lou about Penn Fletcher.

It seems that after Henry Lou left, he began "restoring" the old Fletcher place—although restoring was not what the folks in Mannisville called it. They thought he had gone clear out of his head, ripping out plaster ceilings till he got to the beams underneath, tearing expensive lincrusta off the walls, replacing the windows with little old style ones that opened out like doors, throwing away a good coal range and digging out the old oven that had been plastered into the kitchen wall, and even removing the tar roof and knocking down the extensions that his grandfather had built on the kitchen and porch.

To the furnishings he did even more dreadful violence, selling the green velours parlor suit that had come all the way from Grand Rapids, throwing out the brass beds, the oak dining table and sideboard, and putting in all sorts of old chairs and tables and curly maple beds and horsehair sofas that he dug out of people's attics and barns, and that you wouldn't give house room to. He told Simp Ellery he was getting the house ready for his bride; but, of course, that was only one of Penn's jokes, because everybody knew he had never courted a girl.

At this point in the story Henry Lou rose and walked nervously to the window; but in a moment she came back to hear more.

Ma kept on obligingly. About a year ago everybody had noticed a change in Penn. He got so he couldn't seem to bear having people around him; and suddenly they heard he had sold the Fletcher place for a tremendous price to a New York art-

ist. When Simp Ellery asked about his bride, Penn said:

"Guess I made a mistake. It wasn't the sort of place she'd have liked, after all."

Soon after that he bought the Hatch place cheap for cash, and blessed if he didn't go and do the same thing with that, and sold it, too, for an unheard of profit, to the artist's friend. Now he was at work on the Penn place, which he'd bought from his cousins; but nobody thought he was crazy any more. He had a car, and he was considered the most successful young man in Mannisville.

"I think you'd like the way he's fixin' the Penn place, Henry Lou—all white paint and green shutters and window boxes with marigolds. You always was partial to marigolds, Henry Lou. I wish you could take a look at it. Maybe you'd buy it."

"I couldn't buy a henhouse," said Henry Lou, bitterly.

Something had happened to her mood, and it was no longer high. If Penn was really so successful—the most successful young man in Mannisville—she could not be the one to write to him, when she was such a failure. All her troubles seemed suddenly to have closed in on her again.

"What?" Ma had asked the question twice.

"I said I couldn't buy a henhouse," shouted Henry Lou, and left the room, for she could not bear any more.

Ma turned to pa.

"Did you hear Henry Lou say she'd like to buy Penn's house?"

"No," answered pa, "but I can let you have a lead pencil."

However, ma paid no attention to what she thought he said. She was busy with thoughts of her own.

So was Henry Lou. Ma had shown her letters! She had wanted every one in Mannisville to know the way her daughter was getting ahead—particularly those who had never understood or appreciated Henry Lou, and had prophesied all sorts of terrible things when the Pattons intrusted all their money to an inexperienced girl in a big city.

Why had Henry Lou imagined that it would be possible to go back home to Mannisville and face those people? To admit—and to make ma and pa admit—that she had failed, and not only failed, but bluffed, lied, deceived ma and pa? No, she couldn't face what it would mean to go back. Some-

how, she would have to fight the thing to a finish in New York.

IV

THE first thing Henry Lou knew about ma's letter to Penn was when ma showed her Penn's reply, which said that he had been wanting to visit New York for some time, and that he would come and interview Henry Lou in person about buying his house. Then, if the folks cared to make the trip by machine, he would drive them back to Mannisville.

Henry Lou did not know whether the turmoil inside her was due more to pleasurable anticipation or to acute distress at the thought that Penn was coming. Certainly she would be happy to see him; but Penn was not like the old folks. He might easily see through the sham she was living. At the thought of that, something in her nearly died; and yet—

She went around in a sort of breathless daze. A hundred times, at least, she figured the earliest moment at which Penn Fletcher could possibly arrive, provided he had started at once and met with no set-backs on the way.

The earliest she could expect him, she told herself, was Wednesday morning; but that did not keep her from spending most of Tuesday at the window and jumping every time a bell rang. By evening her nerves were worn quite thin with the pressure of inward excitement—the strain of sleepless nights and the tension of trying to converse casually with ma and to keep Mr. Speck away from pa.

She had given up trying to keep pa away from the lift. In the morning, before she was up, he would creep out in his slippers feet, ostensibly to take in the rolls; but if no one was looking, he would steal a little ride in Der El. He made twenty excuses to run out during the day—excuses which but too thinly veiled his real object.

Moreover, not content merely to ride from the first floor to the fifth, he would push all the buttons, and stop at each intermediate floor on the way. The irate Mr. Speck would stand below, exhausting his vocabulary in two languages, while pa would answer placidly questions which the superintendent was far from asking. Thanks to Der El, pa was having the time of his life in New York.

So was ma. She had kept house and cooked for thirty years, but it is doubtful

whether she would have enjoyed any other form of vacation so much as keeping house for Henry Lou, and cooking the things that her daughter had always liked.

Henry Lou did the marketing. She had to charge all the food. It meant a bigger and bigger score to settle when Mrs. Vann returned; but somehow, some time, she would manage to pay it all back.

Penn arrived late on Tuesday night. He had lost little time on the trip, even for eating and sleeping, and he was too tired to stay long—only long enough for Henry Lou to realize she was in love with him.

She lay awake all night thinking of him. She thought of the way he looked when he smiled the slow, grave smile that showed his fine teeth and the vertical dimples which, somehow, seemed to belong in his lean, tanned cheeks; of the pleasing drawl with which his kindly voice appeared to hesitate over the thing he was saying; of the way his eyes, beneath that one incorrigible strand, looked back and locked around yours, in spite of his shyness, when you asked him a question. They were dependable eyes, gentle and understanding. They were eyes to which one might tell anything—yes, anything, Henry Lou decided before she finally fell asleep.

Why did things always seem so easy at night, and so impossible the next day? When she saw Penn, everything was choked up again inside her. The words which had flowed so readily into her mind the night before would not come to her lips.

Even while she was explaining, with the air of a woman who is the victim of too many worldly cares, why she was in no position to consider buying a house at present, something in her was crying out that she wanted him to know the truth, that she was sick with the need of telling him, that she needed him. Not that she wished to shirk responsibility, or to stop working, but only to have some one who would lend her a little of his strength to go on with.

As she talked, she could feel a wall growing up between them. The more she wanted to draw him toward her, the more she found herself pushing him away.

V

THE old people were to leave with Penn on Thursday afternoon. He did not care to stay in New York, after all. In a sense, Henry Lou was glad. She could not have borne the strain any longer. She felt that

at any moment her nerves might crack. She had to have some sleep.

At the same time, she dared not contemplate the emptiness of their leaving. When they were gone, she would have nothing ahead of her but the doubtful prospect of Mrs. Vann's return; but she did not think of that. She only thought that, once they were gone, she would be able to sleep. She looked forward to sleep as a parched man craves water. She could not begin to think of facing Mrs. Vann until she had had some rest.

At noon on Thursday a wire came from Mrs. Vann, which read:

Arriving Thursday afternoon—have dinner for four.

Well, Henry Lou told herself, if Mrs. Vann arrived that afternoon and found no dinner for four and no Miss Bascom, she, Henry Lou, would probably be taking her much needed sleep on a park bench.

However, one thing at a time. She mustn't begin thinking those ridiculous things about her nerves. She hadn't any nerves. She had a couple of difficult tasks ahead, and she must save her strength to face them. The first thing was to get the old folks off, delicately, so that they would not suspect she was trying to be rid of them.

Meanwhile, she absently opened the letter that she had picked up with the wire. It was from Phyllis Drury. Phyllis was pained and disappointed beyond measure at not having heard from Henry Lou. If she did not hear within a day or two, she would have to write to Henry Lou's people.

Henry Lou began to laugh, and then stopped suddenly. There was something about her own laugh that frightened her. In a sort of daze she walked down the hall, to confront the angry face of Mr. Speck at work upon the lift.

He growled on seeing her.

"H-m-m-mph! Vunce more again iss Der El out of order. Dot's your fader's doings. You vait! I make trouble for you!"

Henry Lou blinked at him.

"You—make trouble for me?" There was something terribly funny about that. She controlled herself with difficulty. "Save yourself the bother, Mr. Speck," she said, starting wearily up the four long flights of stairs. "That job's already been done by an expert!"

She tried to realize what was happening.

The old folks and Penn were going back to Mannsville. They were all she had, all that mattered to her in the world, and it might be years before she saw them again; and she was hurrying them away. It made the ache greater to realize that all that stood between her and going with them—with ma and pa and Penn—was something inside herself, a profitless thing, a joyless thing called pride.

She was nearly up the fourth flight when she remembered ma's purse, which was being mended; and she trudged down for it again.

When she came back, she met Penn getting out of his car. At the sight of that car, which was going to carry out of her life everything that mattered, leaving her to face a dreary waste peopled only with goblins and monsters and demons with whom she was too tired to cope, a panic seized her. She had a mad hope that the faintness she felt would carry her completely beyond consciousness of what was going on, that something would happen outside her volition to break the tension.

But nothing happened. She stepped into the lift with Penn, expecting to step off at the fifth floor, with the merciless order of things unchanged.

However, she was reckoning without her host.

Only a second before, the exasperated Mr. Speck had caught pa taking his farewell trip in Der El. He stopped at each floor going down, and again going up. It was a sort of farewell gesture to each landing, while Mr. Speck swore great Teuton oaths, which did not even pierce the consciousness of pa, lost to all but the ineffable joy of feeling this most exhilarating and subtle of playthings respond to his will.

At last Mr. Speck, on the verge of apoplexy, cried:

"Vait! I fix you!"

He disappeared into the cellar; and the next moment, hearing Der El start again, he turned off the current, so that the lift remained suspended between the second and third floors.

Still purple, Mr. Speck emerged to enjoy his triumph over what he supposed was his enemy trapped.

"I learn you, you old faker!" he cried, brandishing his fist aloft. "Making believe you got all der time business riding oop en down! Your whole family is fakirs. Your dochter is a faker, making believe she

owns der apartment ven der lady is avay. Miss Bascom she tells me, und der market tells me how she's sharging oop all der time bills. Vait! Ven Mrs. Vann comes back, your dochter finds herself out on der shtreet. I only hope she gets arrested yet, too. Dot's vhere she belongs—such a crook!"

For the first moment Henry Lou stood transfixed, unable to open her mouth. Her impulse was to run, to shut out the sound of the irate superintendent's voice, to hide away from Penn; but they were wedged so closely that she could not move her face half a foot away from his eyes—those blue, unflickering eyes that were looking at her speechlessly. Then, suddenly—

"Here you!" he cried to Mr. Speck. "Be still down there, or I'll—"

But a madness was on Henry Lou—a fury. Everything inside her seemed to have gone berserk.

"No!" she panted. "Let him talk. It's true—every word. I am everything he says. I'm glad you know now. I wanted you to know—"

It had been pent up in her so long, and she had wanted so much to tell it, that, now the gates were down, a torrent of words swept out of her. Everything escaped as fast as she could say it—even the fact that she loved him and wanted to go home.

Penn, amazed, incredulous, let her go on until he understood what it was all about. Then he stopped her. He did it very effectually against his coat lapel.

Feeling herself in his arms, the last ounce

of her reserve gave way, and she began to sob. He applied the magic words that men have always used in similar crises.

"There, there!" he soothed, patting her shoulder.

When that did not work, he took hold of her chin and tilted back her head; for it had suddenly occurred to him—although it was a contingency he had been considering for fifteen years—that this would be the time to kiss her.

Just then the lift moved slowly and majestically upward, Mr. Speck having turned on the juice.

Penn assumed that Henry Lou was coming home at once, but she felt that she should wait for Mrs. Vann.

"Then I'll wait with you," said Penn, in the hall outside the door, "after we've fixed the tradespeople."

Henry Lou felt strong again—capable of handling everything.

"No, no, Penn dear! That's not necessary. I'm not a bit afraid now. I can manage alone."

"I'll never let you manage another thing alone as long as you live," announced Penn, as if he meant it; and Henry Lou experienced the greatest thrill of happiness she had ever known in her twenty-six independent, self-willed years.

"Henry Lou is coming with us," Penn said to ma, who had come to open the door.

Although she did not hear the words, for once ma knew just what was being said. She held out her arms for Henry Lou.

I SENT MY LADY ROSES

I SENT my lady roses fair,
They drooped as pale as moonlight,
I sent them for her innocence,
And prayed to God with penitence,
For she was pure as moonlight.

I sent my lady roses fair,
They flamed with passion's crimson,
She wore these flowers at her breast—
The flowers that breathed my love's behest—
The roses that flamed crimson!

I sent my lady roses fair,
But they were roses yellow,
For I was jealous as a clown!

* * * *

She lay where I had struck her down—
All quiet in her silken gown—
Red-stained the roses yellow!

Glenn Visscher

A Triple Assist

IN BASEBALL, AS IN THE GAME OF LIFE, YOU MAY AID
YOURSELF WHEN YOU HELP OTHERS

By Richard Wilmer Rowan

HE had found a second purpose in coming there two minutes after his arrival at the Florida hotel, for the girl at the magazine and cigar stand was about the prettiest he had ever seen. A modern knight-errant, he had only the armor of youthful assurance, and now a motto: Baseball and the Beauty.

Some time before dinner he would meet a great leader of big league champions; until then he might compose himself by talking to the very attractive girl. He need only buy, and continue buying, tobacco or reading matter.

So successful was he in recalling the names of obscure publications that it took her all of twenty minutes to find him a magazine. Thereupon he began to search for his favorite cigar.

"Perhaps you have got Panatela Tarantulas?" he suggested, after cheerfully failing to find any one of a dozen other uncommon brands.

She seemed wavering, now, between vexation and mirth, and he added, hastily: "I'm afraid you've got that one— You can't blame me for wanting to talk to you. I'm J. Roger Riggs, a stranger—"

"Being a stranger will never grow into a habit, like your smoking," she said.

"Did I trouble you much?" he queried hopefully.

"Well, I'm not used to the tobacco heart. This is a lobby, not a camp site. Besides, I'm only pinch-hitting here," she added, smiling, "while the regular day girl is sick. I'm not used to these cigar brands."

"Hereafter I'll hate cigars," he promised warmly. "You said you're pinch-hitting. You're a baseball fan?"

She nodded.

"McFarlan is here with the Titans for spring training," he pursued eagerly.

"When do they get back from afternoon practice?"

"The main parade 'll soon set in. But McFarlan isn't signing any actors."

"How'd you know I ever was an actor?" he demanded.

"After you've seen one actor—"

J. Roger Riggs grinned his approval.

"I've got to make a big impression today," he explained. "I've only played a little vaudeville—tank time. Baseball is my real job. Of course, when I'm a big leaguer, Sid Miller will want to book me on the big time between seasons."

"You know Sid Miller, the booking agent?"

"Got a letter from him to McFarlan—"

"You mean he's recommending you to McFarlan?"

"He's shouting it to McFarlan," said J. Roger. "Sid's a great fan—knows McFarlan well. And he knows me well, too."

She sold cigarettes to a youth who enviously studied the Riggs presumption.

"So Sid Miller's scouting for the Titans, and discovered you?" she jeered, returning. "Sid's a swell picker, I'll say. He got me to go out with a second company of the 'Girl in the Moon.' I was to understudy the kid sister part—you know, the flapper—*Isabel*, that made Blanche Sawyer in New York.

"Well, Agnes Lukens—her health was my ball and chain in the chorus—played eleven weeks without even coughing. Then she got a touch of flu in Atlanta. I stepped right into the part—with only eleven weeks' notice. They said I made good. But you know what the road has been? We closed nine days later in Savannah."

"That was terrible luck," he sympathized. "The road is simply dying by inches—"

"By mileage, you mean. It costs more to move a show now than to build a storehouse around it. My brother lives down here all year round," she continued. "He's an assistant manager in this premium palace, and has often asked me to come down for a visit. So, when we closed suddenly, I waived on the guaranteed return to Broadway and Forty-Second, took a ticket with climate attached, and left the show business flat. The Titans began to gather here a week after I did."

"Can you blame 'em?" he interrupted gallantly. "McFarlan always has a lucky club." And he added, "That's why he's getting me."

"Your flattery spills so fast, you have to spread some of it on yourself," she said. "I don't know why I've been telling you all this, anyway."

"You didn't need to," J. Roger assured her blandly. "The moment I saw you I thought—as soon as I could think—now, there's a girl who belongs on the stage or in pictures. She's working here only to save the job of some friend who's sick and 'll need the money. Was I right? I admit it—And your face was very familiar. Surely, I've seen you in something—your name on a program. Wait—I'll remember your name in a second. Don't tell me—"

But she did tell him, "Stella Willis," and joined in acknowledging his strategy.

By twos and threes, athletic young men began to arrive—Titans, regulars and recruits, tired and hungry after their work-out. Stella identified several of the more conspicuous recruits.

"That big blond is Jenkins, an outfielder," she told him. "A semipro McFarlan's looking over—an awful bashful kid—hates to ask a lady for cigarettes. I'm afraid he's tagged for a life in the bushes—There's Simonds, catcher and All-American fashion plate. He's so fresh he's raw. I told him I'd look for his picture in the butchers' trade papers.

"And there's the great McFarlan himself!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Riggs, go to it, and good luck!"

Without any visible embarrassment, the young man hastened to meet the leader of the far-famed Titans.

"This is Mr. McFarlan, of course," said he, offering his hand very cordially.

"What can I do for you?" the manager returned, with undisguised caution.

"It's what we can do for each other,"

J. Roger Riggs corrected engagingly. "You see—I'm a ball player—"

"Oh," said McFarlan. "And you want to do me a favor?"

"I want to work for you; yes. I've come down here to let you give me a try out. I'll pay the surtax at this high-toned tavern till you're satisfied and sign me up. Also, I've a letter to you from Sid Miller, in New York; but my playing in practice will speak louder 'n letters."

"Sid Miller, the theatrical man?"

"The same old Sid. He knows me well."

"What position did you play on Miller's team?" the manager questioned dryly.

"Sid said you'd be like that—never up-stage—fond of a joke—"

"So he sent you to me."

"I asked for that one," Riggs chuckled. "Well, no offense. Of course, I did a monologue for Sid Miller. But he knows I can play ball if I say I can."

"And you say you can play—what position?"

"I used to pitch. Once fanned the side for the last six innings of the first, and the next four innings of the second game of a double-header. But my batting made the boys cry for me to play in every game. So I began covering first base or left field—"

"Why not both?"

"Until they found out what a catcher I was. Since Hopkins has a bad ankle, and Donovan's getting ancient, I think you'd better call me a catcher."

"If that's all I call you, you're a wonder."

"A wonder! Now you're broadcasting," the young man proclaimed. "Your scouts are cripples, or they'd have found me two years ago. Do I eat with the bunch tonight?"

"Might help some," said McFarlan. "I'll look you over to-morrow A.M. Don't blow in your roll celebrating. This hotel is run to train highwaymen, and you've car fare home to save."

"Thanks, but I'm burglar proof," J. Roger assured him. "The sister of the assistant manager of this reverse mint is my good friend. As for car fare, if I don't ride home with you, I'll build my own private railroad."

He left the Titans' leader gayly, proceeded to register, accepting a front room and bath without asking the price, and gave his baggage checks to a bell boy. Then he returned to the cigar stand.

Stella's greeting was satirical. "Has McFarlan grabbed another pennant? Or will he trade you to Keith's league? He could use that animal act where the little elephant hits a home run."

"Lady Nicotine, he jumped at me," the former monologist expanded. "Never even asked to see Sid Miller's letter."

She waited upon an elderly customer, with a merry smile which captivated that gentleman.

"Of course, I insisted on paying my own way till he's seen me perform to-morrow," Riggs continued. "Sid wouldn't want to recommend a piker."

"If Sid Miller can make a baseball star out of you," said Stella, "get him to do the same for me in musical comedy."

"I will. It's a bet," he promised earnestly. "When I was an infielder I used to say, never mind about the put-outs, let me make the assists."

II

WHEN the newcomer joined the Titans at dinner, McFarlan merely mentioned his name by way of introduction. But J. Roger Riggs hastened to include a large squad of ball players in that ever spreading circle of those who knew him well.

"Big and little leaguers, my compliments," said he, seating himself between Jenkins, the husky outfield recruit, and Dennison, third baseman. "Waiter, a large meal on several plates. Serve crisp ten-dollar bills with the soup."

He ordered extensively, and ate and talked with equal relish. In his neighbor, Sam Jenkins, he found the diffidence which guarantees a good listener. J. Roger could talk loud enough to benefit all, but would rather talk at an individual than deliberately make a speech.

"You're an outfielder, eh?" he began.

The blond giant nodded and blushed with embarrassment.

"Play any in the East?"

Another bashful nod.

"What team?"

"Jessup's—"

"Not Jessup's Bulldogs!" exclaimed J. Roger, as one entering a promised land. "You weren't with Jessup's junkmen on June 3, two years ago. Last game I pitched, and I'd remember anybody with 'em that day; I had nothing to do but look at their faces."

"Held 'em to two little scratchy hits—

the kind a lap dog might use to scratch his fleas with. We beat 'em thirteen nothing. I had a field day—got only four hits, only four—a single I stretched to a double, two triples, and a homer that gravity stretched across two States. That ball sure went back to the factory. I cleaned the bases. Oldest inhabitants 'll tell about it some day."

The Titans consumed this bulletin, and their new comrade went on: "To think you played with Jessup's. Did that bunch ever win? Who gave 'em dates? We only took 'em on to cover a cancellation. You must have worked with better combinations, or you wouldn't be here."

Sam Jenkins continued to respond with nods and mild exclamations.

"Now, the most bases I ever stole," came another bland advertisement, "was eleven. I felt frisky and ran wild—against a real catcher, too. He'll make a Class A outfit this season, sure."

"All catchers have off days. I'll never forget the one bad game I caught—July 9, last—four clean steals they rolled up against me. But nobody said much about it; my throwing hand was in a plaster cast."

With the dessert his discourse shifted to hostile ground.

"First-class food," said he; "everything—even pie—the way I like it. And, brothers, speaking of sweets, let me exclaim that by day there's a bit of confection behind yon cigar stand who—well, as I've been raving, everything the way I like it."

Perhaps the Titans remaining misinterpreted the extent of the Riggs's compliment. As J. Roger signed his check with a flourish, and started to rise, repeating, "Every little thing the way I like it," there came a general, sullen scraping of chairs, and the veteran catcher, Donovan, as voluntary spokesman, said quietly, "Wait a moment, young fellow, and listen to us."

"Why, sure—what next for an evening?" returned the amiable Riggs.

"Simply this, son. We don't know you yet—don't know what sort of ball player you are, or what sort of man you are. We don't know how long you may last. Maybe some don't care. But you are with us for awhile, and if you've come with any hope of making good down here, don't try breaking in with a club that's sorry you're alive."

J. Roger Riggs looked about him as if the victim of some strange initiation.

"I'm a catcher, and of course, if it's your old legs and your job that worries you—" he began.

"You know what was meant," snapped Parkins, the star shortstop. "It might be no major operation to remove your brain—but if you can think, shut up—and think."

"Great Heavens, are you men sore about my speaking of Stella Willis at the cigar stand? Why, she's an old friend. Her brother's assistant manager here. She's only substituting to help a sick girl hold on to her job—just like generous little Stella," he added.

"She's an actress, you know—and I've reflected footlights some myself. I heard she had come on down here when the 'Girl in the Moon' company closed in Savannah. I wanted to see her—who doesn't like to see Stella? But, in particular, I wanted to tell her Sid Miller would feature her in a vaudeville act he's going to put on for me next fall, after the World's Series, of course—if we get in it."

He had walked over to Donovan and offered his hand in genial forgiveness. The veteran catcher, grinning, shook it heartily. Other Titans available were included in the ceremony. But most of the younger and unmarried athletes had lingered only to hear the close of his defense, and then retired gloomily, to envy him who was concluding, "To think you men were calling me for insulting Stella Willis! Wonderful girl! Going to be a star some day—Why, she knows me well."

This episode seemed to dissociate J. Roger Riggs from the more ordinary recruits before he ever had put on a uniform. He contrived to be included in a billiard game with Donovan and Parkins, cue experts. Later, he invited himself to join a veteran group at cards. And, at both billiards and poker, he vindicated his pretensions with impressive skill.

Having luckily recovered his expenses for one day, J. Roger slept soundly amid elegance his evening's pastimes permitted him to afford. He rose early, breakfasted with due regard for the approaching athletic trial, and started for the local ball park by way of the hotel's magazine and cigar stand.

Stella Willis had arrived for the day's work, a picture of youthful charm. She greeted him with whimsical good humor:

"Too bad about McFarlan quitting, but the papers say a child has been born to

take his place—Jiggs, or Spriggs, or Higgs, some name like that; so the old fellow'll never be missed."

"McFarlan won't have to quit with such a chance to strengthen his team as is offered him this day," said J. Roger, delightedly lingering.

"Too much nerve to be nervous, I suppose," she taunted.

"Well, I needed a tonic, but was afraid the regular day girl's dislocated health had snapped back into place, and I'd be cheated of seeing you."

"A real pretty speech!" Stella commended. "You never spoke a prettier—not even about yourself. As it is, I'm sentenced here at least two days more. Her cold would be an understudy's joy—Good luck, and don't be lavish with the fireworks."

"Thanks. I know McFarlan hates grandstanding," said he. "I'll simply let him guess I'm great."

"Bright idea! Nothing like having a cunning brain to lurk beneath the laurel." And she waved to him as he went forth.

III

At the park, his persuasiveness gained him early admission and an extra Titan uniform. It would be an hour before McFarlan and the regular contingent appeared; yet this interval he filled resourcefully, limbering up, and entertaining sundry lounging natives with gymnastic feats and tricks of juggling.

When the Titans' leader came, at last, he was welcomed by his newest recruit to the field where his authority was absolute.

"Glad to see you, sir," said Riggs, with sincere respect. "I've been waiting for this morning all my life. What shall I show you first?"

"You carry a sample case?"

"No; but it's like this," the youth confided. "I know you can develop me into the best catcher in the league. But you can't if I'm not with your club. I've figured my best chance to land with you permanently will be as a handy man—the utility king, pinch-hitting, and running."

"Some of your veterans are covered wagons on the bases. You'll need me, sure. You see, I'm a ten second man. Last August four umpires got cross-eyed watching me whiz from first to third on infield outs."

"You've run the hundred in ten flat? When?"

"Constantly."

"Is that fact? Why didn't you say so yesterday, or did I miss hearing it?"

"It was all in Sid Miller's letter," said Riggs. "I thought of mentioning it, but I hate to brag."

"I missed that, too, I guess," the great manager chuckled. "But I must read Miller's letter some time. He's been a great picker in his line. Perhaps he's changing his line."

J. Roger had thoughtfully brought his own shoes, and whenever given an excuse to run, the new spikes twinkled, and the Titans saw a genuine sprinter. His alertness dominated a group of youngsters taken aside by McFarlan himself, to be drilled in sliding to bases. During his turns at batting practice, he also showed promise, hitting well from either side of the plate. And all the mounting self-confidence he would have liked to shout, he saved as energy for his next effort.

There came a moment when McFarlan, with his regular infield on the diamond, Andrews in the box, and Larry Donovan behind the bat, sent Riggs to the plate and ordered him to bunt. The newcomer would have asked no more had he owned stock in the club. He chopped irresolute rollers at first and third. With tantalizing taps he challenged fielders counted among the fastest in their league. Told "to run 'em out," with McFarlan umpiring, he played tag with their throws, and gained two close decisions out of three.

It has often since been said he won his Titan contract then and there. McFarlan probably makes no such hasty decisions about talent. But Riggs was invited to train thereafter at the club's expense, a potential Titan, and was further rewarded, being assigned to catch for the second team during three innings of the afternoon game.

If confessing defeat in throwing to bases with his hand in a cast, the nimble J. Roger allowed no liberties during his trial behind the bat. Even the fleet Parkins he threw out by a yard, and this while receiving the delivery of Lange, as wild a youth as ever came out of the Texas League.

"This guy can't use a mere catcher," said Riggs, leaping for another high one. "He needs a clairvoyant on a springboard." And Lange's erratic twirling, with every batter instructed to hit, resulted in a profusion of foul balls, betraying Riggs into revealing his one theatrical weakness.

He did not, with a foul lifted high above his head, plunge instantly toward the spot of its conjectured return to earth. Heavier, slower backstops must do so, and wait for the wabbling, dropping ball to come within reach. The Riggs manner for high fouls required, first, discarding of his mask with a splendid gesture, then a pause, an instant of relaxation, as though he misunderstood his duty or the object of the game; whereupon, having focused a partisan panic, he would flash under the descending ball almost at a bound, his speed of foot seeming to amend the law of gravitation.

"Our young man in the wire mask 'll have to trade that Winged-Mercury stuff for a plain motor cycle," said McFarlan to Parkins; "but how the fans could learn to love him for it!"

"Perhaps he only means to show you, Mac, that there's a pair of catcher's legs in camp to help out Larry's," the shortstop said, adding: "Also, it would appear, an arm, and a willing worker."

"I thought of that," replied McFarlan.

IV

ANY among the youngsters of the squad who had not envied J. Roger Riggs his athletic sensation that day, lost their indifference when, upon returning to the hotel, he left them to receive from pretty Stella Willis an exclusive and welcoming smile.

"I suppose I must pretend to buy something," said he. "Have you the Canal Zone edition of *Tropical Topics*?"

"Stick to cigarettes," she advised. "Try some Turkish Atrocities— Are you due to celebrate?"

"To-night, fair lady, I become a Titan. McFarlan will close the big deal right after the demi-tasse."

"That's fine," she approved sincerely. "I'll bet you need grand opera to describe how you feel about it?"

"Words and music couldn't touch it," he said with unaccustomed earnestness. "Of course, I told you I'd make him weep on my shoulder and yell for a contract. I knew I would. But now I have, I don't know how I knew—"

"That sounds maudlin," said Stella. "I guess you really persuade yourself so hard, it persuades others. I've known theater reputations to come over that route."

"Your stage success is coming that way, Miss Willis," he declared. "I'm not forgetting my promise about Sid Miller."

"Try to forget it," she said with mock severity.

Later he signed a Titan contract, assuring himself a year's professional employment, though McFarlan darkly hinted he might be released under option to some minor league club for purposes of seasoning.

"I only ask to be kept if you find you can't spare me," the newest Titan explained calmly.

He had enjoyed another excellent dinner, and at the request of the club's business manager, who now paid his bills, he shifted his quarters in the hotel, doubling up with Sam Jenkins, the big blond outfielder, whose roommate, the sartorial Simonds, had that day been released to Birmingham.

"We'll pal together first-rate," Riggs assured McCurdy, the business manager, who had not considered the combination either permanent or important.

Jenkins also took this view, saying: "You'll have to be quicker 'n even you are, Riggs, to get me for a pal, at the rate I'm slipping out o' here. It's back to the bushes for me, soon, just like Simonds went."

"He had luck at that."

"How do you make that out, Riggs?"

"I was already looking for that dressy egg," said a dramatic J. Roger. "He got fresh, some way, with Stella Willis. She says she told him he was so raw his picture would be in a butchers' journal. I'd made sausage of him if he stayed, just to give her promise an encore."

Before retiring, the new catcher sent a night letter, collect, to Sid Miller, in little old Manhattan:

Signed contract to-night. McFarlan offers you vote of thanks. Salary not much, but your loan is well secured by my world's series share. Dust off that big time; the bidding for me will be brisk next fall. Have not forgotten your real business. Will have sensation for you when casting summer shows.

J. R. Riccs, Titan.

Jenkins seemed asleep when he reentered the bedroom, so he began considerably to undress without a light. The outfielder promptly declared, however, that any artificial brightening of his situation would be welcomed.

"I'm no ball hawk," he mourned from his pillow. "I can hit. But I'm too slow for big-league outfielding."

"You looked to me to-day more like a pitcher."

"Did I, honest? I was a pitcher, Riggs

—and I had a heap of stuff, too," Jenkins related; "but they wanted me in every game, for my hitting—same as you said last night happened to you."

In new silk pyjamas, J. Roger acknowledged a slight similarity of past, saying: "But I was too fast for a pitcher, too, you see. And I wouldn't stay an outfielder, for I hate standing around. Now, I'm a catcher—and you're a pitcher!" he exclaimed in sudden inspiration. "You're strong, easy to handle, good nerves, ought to have speed. You and I might—"

"Do you think we could become a battery, Riggs?"

"That's it. Just what I need to clinch McFarlan about me. And I'll be fixing it for you, too, Jenkins, old bullwhip. It's a bet."

"Do you think you can get me a chance in the box?"

"If you'll do what I tell you, throw 'em where I ask for 'em, why, we'll bathe together in the public eye many a time before next October. Persuade yourself hard enough, and it persuades others. Theater reputations come over that route." He switched off the lights, concluding: "First, there's Stella, now you—scorer, give Riggs, J. R., catcher, a double assist."

Before going on to practice next morning, he confided to Stella Willis this overnight expansion of his promotion plans.

"McFarlan, I can see, is crazy about me for my speed and the rest; yet, just the same, I'd be a loose end with the club. Mac's got a bunch of veteran pitchers who'll try to treat me like a worm with a mitt. I want a boxman I can call my own—somebody just like this big Jenkins, who, with my hand to guide him—"

"Enough!" Stella jeered. "No more than six bouquets right after breakfast, or you'll be fined for breaking training."

"There's one flower I'd pick," he said boldly.

"One alone, in a garden of weeds," she recited, surveying her array of cigars. "Go on, now, about Jenkins."

"It's simply this: I want a battery mate, and so I'm going to put him over with this club—just as I'll put you over with Sid Miller."

"I suppose you want me for a vaudeville mate—that is, partner?" Her confusion enchanted him.

"Don't tempt me, siren!" he exclaimed. "It's an exciting thing to see a real blush

in this cosmetic climate of ours. And I've been warned once about getting gay at this parking place."

"If I changed my hair we might be billed as the Titan and the Titian, eh?" she pursued in ready evasion.

Stricken serious, J. Roger Riggs frowned.

"The truth is, Stella," said he, "that on the stage I'll never get halfway to the top, where you'll be."

Long after he had gone she contemplated the amazing proportions of his compliment with its touch of real humility.

V

DURING that day's practice McFarlan continued to note the merits of the self-reliant Riggs, who, without diminishing his own effort, anxiously inspected the possibilities of Jenkins, his roommate. Sam, he found, had not exaggerated in complaining of his inequalities as an outfielder. A heavy hitter, with a strong arm, his running was also heavy, and his desire to stop and rest equally strong. Said the swift J. Roger: "In a mile race, Sam, your handicap would be at least a mile."

"I know, Riggs. I'm hopeless."

"You know you're a pitcher."

And given opportunity, Jenkins did behave like a pitcher, delighting Riggs with an assortment of curves, control, and speed.

"You've got what I ask for; you've got everything you need—not forgetting that big item, a heady young catcher. Two more days, Sam, and I'll show you to McFarlan," promised the promoter of talents. "You're going to be great. I'll even introduce you to Stella."

This bonus he bestowed before dinner, but Jenkins, being without courage or grace, bolted as soon as a customer engaged her attention.

"Timid and treacherous," Riggs apologized; "but you'll forgive him when you see him in the box. A wide world of stuff! Help me encourage him, please, whenever you can."

"I'll need help to catch him, first," she lamented. "Perhaps some day I'll stand near third and encourage him to steal home. He's about as bashful as you aren't."

Evening rumors that McFarlan intended releasing several more rookies, including Jenkins, gave that victim's roommate a wakeful half hour, and with it the resolve to parade a new Titan pitcher next morning, whatever the circumstances. He rose

early, in dread of a rainy day. But it was clear, and he woke Jenkins, to announce a good omen.

"You're an awful good sort, Riggsy," said the massive Sam, starting to dress without elation; "but why worry over me? You're safe; you'll be a star in a year or two. I'm just a born busher—"

"I'll be a star in two months," the other corrected. "And I've said you'll be another. Just keep away from McFarlan this morning. I'm going to eat breakfast with him—and spread you on his cereal. I'll make him like it."

J. Roger breakfasted as he planned, contriving to sit beside the Titans' leader, and to persuade him that one clumsy outfielder, already assigned to the South Atlantic League, was really a pitcher deserving early consideration.

At the park, Jenkins warmed up, and was ready to be displayed. True to his promise, the manager came over to see what Riggs had discovered in the right arm of a recruit whose feet were notably indifferent. He saw, he lingered to see more, he became visibly impressed.

"Go and get a rubdown, Jenkins," he ordered. "Report again this afternoon. I'll tell McCurdy you're not leaving tonight." And then, to the triumphant young catcher: "Why did they ever call him an outfielder?"

"Semipro bone, four feet thick. Probably the manager had an uncle or a grandfather who wanted to pitch; so Sam was planted in the outer garden. Also, they wanted his hitting in every game. Same thing was tried on me, you know. Sam's as good a pitcher as I ever was—and more rugged. He ought to be worth a bundle of games to us this summer—with me catching him."

McFarlan laughed aloud.

"Riggs," said he, "I'm glad Sid Miller sent you."

"I've already wired him that."

"Some time I must read his letter. As for Jenkins, we'll see if he can pitch to big league batting."

Sam Jenkins could. He did, that same afternoon. He pitched to nine Titans during three innings of a practice game, fanning two, and letting none reach first base. Also, he had two hits, one a triple. Riggs also hit for three bases, but stretched it to a home run in one of the most dazzling dashes local fandom ever saw.

The Titans' training exercises drew considerable crowds, and Stella Willis became a regular patron when relieved of her duty at the hotel. Aggressive, swift, an artist of the unexpected, J. Roger Riggs was soon an acclaimed favorite in the small grand stand. Certainly he was Stella's favorite. Yet, at his urgent request, she also smiled upon the diffident Jenkins, whose mastery in the box, continuing, postponed indefinitely the once imminent release.

"He's got great speed and control, an easy delivery, and that's all he needs," said Riggs. "I do the rest."

Presently the Titans began the trip that would end at their home grounds with the opening of the championship season. Playing exhibition games almost daily, they moved northward, being conditioned for a pennant race, as is the custom, with liberal applications of Pullman sleeper. Riggs had frequent letters from Stella Willis, merry little messages he treasured boyishly, yet freely shared with Sam Jenkins. The bashful pitcher would not admit how he cherished Stella's humorous encouragements; but the shrewd J. Roger Riggs quickly detected this source of pitching enthusiasm, and began saving her letters until a day when Sam was due to be tested again by McFarlan, and needed every inspiration.

The Titans opened the season at home. Among the throng that came to cheer their starting was Stella, just returned from the Southern vacation, and looking her best, in a box presented by J. Roger, big leaguer at last, beyond dispute. Sid Miller, a swarthy little man of influence, occupied a field box with guests notable on the stage or screen; and during the preliminary practicing the Titans' youngest catcher saluted him with appropriate gratitude.

"For every hit I make, Sid," he promised, "you'll be allowed four free ice cream cones."

At a critical moment in the eighth inning, Dennison doubled, but pulled up lame, and McFarlan sent Riggs in to run for him. Arthur Parkins took two strikes and a ball, and then scratched a hit over second. Running on a wave of partisan tumult, Riggs scored the tying run with dash and audacity, and a perfect slide, endearing him straightway with thousands of fans.

The Titans won in the tenth, and were happily headed pennantward. Only Sam Jenkins, who had spent his afternoon in

the dugout, returned in a deep personal gloom to the clubhouse.

"Why the prolonged face?" Riggs demanded. "You didn't expect McFarlan to use us to-day, did you?"

"Sure not."

"Then be gay for your size. You didn't even speak to Stella. She was with her father and some folks. I sent her the box."

"Oh, was that man with her her father?" Jenkins flushed sheepishly.

"Sure! Who else—with my tickets? He has some sort of political job, and can get off to games. But Stella says he always works hard around election."

Benjamin T. Willis and daughter occupied the same box a week later, again the guests of J. Roger Riggs, who succeeded in forcing Jenkins to greet the bewitching Stella, and meet her parent, a fervid fan.

McFarlan sent Linley to pitch against the Busters, who approved his choice with three runs in the second. With two on base, Linley departed, unmourned; but the stands were surprised to see Larry Donovan also preparing to leave the game. A new battery! Jenkins and Riggs, summoned from the bull pen, were installed to check the Buster attack.

It was characteristic of the Titans' leader that he recognized Sam Jenkins's tactical dependence upon Riggs, and did not transfer him to the veteran care of Donovan. Confirming this judgment, J. Roger caught a heady game, and Sam responded with equal effectiveness. Scoring no more, the Busters saw their lead overcome by the Titan counterattack, to which both pitcher and catcher contributed, the latter with a triple and a clean steal of home. Stella Willis had attended another victory.

The club went briefly on the road, whereupon Sam's form in the box suffered an alarming reverse. Called on again for relief, he replaced Dunning unevenly for two innings in the Busters' home park, repeatedly saved from mishap by the crafty Riggs, only to lose all control at last and be hammered to the showers.

But he recovered, and performed expertly when given his next chance to pitch at home. For his fourth appearance he was permitted to start a game, opposing Jim Cannon's heavy-hitting Warriors; and through nine innings he held them with the slight blandishment of three bases on balls and two hits. Stella, of course, had happily witnessed both of these telling per-

formances. Like many another, she believed the influence of his catcher alone made Jenkins conquer.

VI

THE enterprises of J. Roger Riggs could no longer be lightly regarded. He must make a baseball star of himself; and he had assumed the burden of Sam Jenkins, misplaced in the outfield, attaching Sam's skill to his own, that they might find a road to fame together. He had, moreover, volunteered to help adorn the youth and charm of Stella Willis with the laurel of theatrical celebrity.

His own intentions regarding Stella he had never pondered, beyond that promise and its fulfillment. He must help her arrive on Broadway, because he had said he would. That he now thought of her as his girl, did not amaze him. He had not hesitated to let Stella know he was fond of her, and she had never seemed to object.

But here was his special care, his private partner, the silent Sam Jenkins, too evidently attached to the same fascinating young actress! And Sam couldn't pitch well unless Stella sat in the box that the catcher had been providing!

Riggs had already begun the campaign which was to convey Stella to musical comedy fame, but with slight encouragement from Sid Miller, who recalled in detail the awful depression of the past theatrical year.

Believing any liability may have a future if disguised as an asset, J. Roger now returned to the Miller offices as in public emergency. Would the booking agent care to do much toward helping the Titans to another pennant?

"I helped 'em to you," chuckled Sid Miller; "but my conscience is clear."

"That's why I felt sure you'd do another big thing for McFarlan," replied Riggs. "You see, I discovered Sam Jenkins. When he's right, Sam's the all wool fabric. If he continues to pitch his best this summer, we've only got to get the flagpole repainted. And he will win steady, Sid, if you get a part in some summer show for Stella Willis, that clever girl I told you about. Sam's crazy about her—"

"I thought you were her lunatic?"

"Stella's my pet find, and a wonder," admitted Riggs; "but I don't have to be delirious, like Sam, to play my best. If you could just book Stella again—"

"You know I don't bother with chorus girls," said Miller. "You told me before how she said I'd booked her in a 'Girl in the Moon' company. I had an interest in that show, and took charge of the road production. That's that."

"If Jenkins keeps worrying about Stella's being only an understudy in the chorus, he'll never win again."

"I like your spirit, Riggsy, but baseball could ruin my business. Of course, I was glad to help you—"

"Don't think I've forgotten that loan," the young catcher assured him, continuing: "You see, Sid, I'll have a foot fast, too, if Sam loses his cunning. With Dennison lame, McFarlan needs another infielder. The Busters and Warriors will talk trade, but they want a pitcher."

"Now, if this town and worrying about Stella don't agree with Sam, Mac'll trade him. And what club would take Sam without me to handle him? You know what I'm going to be worth to the Titans as I develop. If you don't want me traded to work for Jim Cannon or those Busters, then help me buck up Sam Jenkins, which means, find a part for Stella."

"There's many a business would pay you even better than baseball," said Miller, capitulating.

"Vaudeville after a World's Series," the great opportunist reminded him. "As for Stella, it's rumored you're helping Rod Beale out of the two a day and into a big summer production. Let her sing one song somewhere in Beale's show—just one song—and the public'll do the rest of the asking for Stella."

"Can she sing?"

"Great! Can we find her the song? That's the real problem."

Thus it was agreed, J. Roger Riggs employing the next rainy afternoon's leisure to renew his acquaintance with one "Ivories" Engle, a young man addicted to pink shirts, gold-tipped cigarettes, and piano keys.

"You must be about ready to tie a can on this 'mammy' and 'blues' bunk," the catcher began, "and I'm bringing you your fire escape. I've discovered a girl with the looks and personality, and a real sense of humor—everything. Sid Miller is crazy to bring her out in Rod Beale's new revue. You write her a song. Put a really jazz idea into your lyric to go with the zippiest tune in your tank."

He consulted an envelope. "Something queer, but comic, like this:

"Why place such a face
On a beauty called Grace?
Or repose such a nose
On a cutie named Rose?"

"Get me? Give us your best, and we'll all put over a knock-out. Is it a bet?"

Engle made a few notes, nodded absent-ly, and sat down before his battered piano. Riggs presently left him there, composing dreamily. Agonizing discords followed Stella's sponsor to the elevator.

But the song writer had wrestled with many a borrowed idea. In this case he was inspired to deliver, within three days, a strangely fourth dimensional hysteria of rhythm and rime, of pleasing cadence and comic versification, which delighted Riggs, and impressed Sid Miller. Stella heard it, and liked it. Learning it quickly, she rehearsed with an appreciative Engle and a catcher bursting with vivid prophecy. Finally, she sang the song for Miller, Rod Beale, and others interested in the forth-coming revue.

"Engle, I'll put that across for you myself," Beale proposed. "It's really good, but it needs me."

"Somehow, I seem to remember it being ordered for Miss Willis," the song writer drawled.

"It belongs to Miss Willis," Riggs put in grimly.

Sid Miller confirmed Stella's claim.

He had come prepared with a contract for her to sign. J. Roger declared the terms satisfactory, and Stella signed. Within a week she had begun rehearsing.

Her temporary withdrawal from after-noon duty as the inspiration of Sam Jenkins's shut-out pitching might have taxed even the Riggs resources, had not the slow and bulky Sam disabled himself, stopping a wide, fast ball with his right elbow while at bat in morning practice. An X-ray examination showed no serious damage, yet, Doc Milliken, the Titans' trainer, prudently insisted that the big pitcher rest a salary wing so painfully swollen.

To Riggs, an equally lamentable accident was the scheduled demand that he be on the road with the club when the new Beale revue — and Stella — opened on Broadway. Before leaving town he arranged to receive three copies of every pa-per reviewing her début. He negotiated recklessly with a florist. And, when the

great night came, in a Western city, he signed and sent telegraphic best wishes, not only from himself and Sam, but also from McFarlan and every other Titan with whom Stella was acquainted.

A late wire from Sid Miller excited him.

The press notices arrived, as ordered, by special delivery. The newcomer, Stella Willis, and her song, "Flapperplexities," in stage parlance, had "stopped the show."

J. Roger read the reviews to Sam again and again; also Miller's jubilant message, and a joyous night letter that had followed from Stella herself. All these he interpret-ed with such infectious rejoicing that, when called upon, Sam pitched in masterly style for six innings, and then for an entire game, allowing six hits and two runs in all.

The Titans arriving home, Riggs hastened alone to enjoy Stella's stage success. He tamely paid an exorbitant price for a seat three rows better than standing room, accounting his change from ten dollars the final proof that Stella belonged to a hit. And, toward the end of the first act, he sat enraptured when the prettiest girl, in the prettiest costume he had ever seen, sang to him, and to him only, again and again, that song which was making "Ivories" En-gle a pink silk plutocrat.

VII

In first place, and leading the Titans by two games, the redoubtable Warriors came to play a series with McFarlan's young men. Said the Titan leader to J. Roger Riggs, "I'm going to use your man Friday against Parsons. The old war horse is going great guns — Andrews or Dunning couldn't beat him, but they're good for a game from any other of Jim Cannon's hurlers. So, I'll save 'em. If Jenkins gives his best, he has an outside chance to beat Parsons, and that'd be one heartbreaker for Cannon. Can you deliver?"

"Leave it to me," the catcher assured him, and added, in seeming irrelevance: "Got two nickels for a dime?"

Then he telephoned Stella, to make sure she would attend the morrow's important encounter.

Smart and charming, and much observed, she came rather early, proudly escorted to a box near the Titan dugout by her father, whose welcome to Riggs was all that any young man could desire of a parent.

"I read this morning, Roger," said Wil-lis, the politically favored, "that your

boss 'll try to fix up a trade to get Sterling from the Warriors while they're here. McFarlan always builds for the present, eh? And with Dennison lame, who do you think he'd let go to Jim Cannon?"

"If Sam gets another fading spell, it 'll be us, I guess, sir. No club 'd take Sam without me, of course—"

"Oh!"

Stella's exclamation, and a curious flicker of light in her eyes, told Riggs more than he dared consider at such a moment.

"Please encourage Sam all you can," he said to her, earnestly. "It's seldom I can march the timid mammoth over here, but he feeds on your cheer. If he does well today, phone him or write him a note, will you? I haven't led him to your show yet. He's honorary hick from high buckwheat, has inherited notions about girls in socks. And now a special smile to me for luck!"

Stella smiled her luckiest, obediently. But the smile had gone when she mistily watched her champion prepare for battle.

She saw him catching his first big game. Twice she saw him beat out infield hits, and once he stole second. She breathlessly watched him dash within inches of a concrete wall, bagging a foul for the final out in the sixth when a Warrior run threatened on third base. And she discovered how every move of the Titan pitcher was ordered for victory by a young strategist whom she loved.

It was a rare duel between youth and age. In his eleventh season, Parsons held the Titans at bay with four hits and no runs in nine innings. Massive and calm, Jenkins matched this veteran skill, and surpassed it; the Warriors had one hit, Dolan's lucky triple in the sixth, with two out, beginning of an attack which Riggs's dauntless capture of Parsons's foul abruptly checked.

The score board had paraded a vacuum until, in the opening half of the tenth, as if to magnify his value in McFarlan's trading estimates, Sterling drove a double to the left field fence, advanced to third on an infield out, and came home on Dolan's long sacrifice fly, with a run that looked enormous.

Yet, J. Roger Riggs slightly trimmed its halo by hitting the first ball pitched to him, and taking two bases, and sprinting to third when the same Sterling juggled Wade's fine throw in from deep right field.

McFarlan possessed no pinch hitter more

likely to present him with the tying run than Sam Jenkins. Prancing off third, Riggs was imploring his pitcher to "show 'em what almost made you an outfielder!" McFarlan hoped Riggs's demand would dominate Sam as usual. But the big pitcher glanced toward Stella Willis before hitting—and the resulting smash might have gone for a homer could all the running have been attended to by Riggs.

The fleet catcher had only to trot to the plate in triumph, however, while Sam rested upon second after a desperate effort and a slide made as though he were delivering the winter's coal. Mike Conners's hot liner Parsons knocked down for an out at first, having no chance for a play at third, to which Jenkins had miraculously hurled himself.

Quite undisturbed, the Warrior's pitcher struck out the next batter. Two out, and the tie, one-one, seeming certain to persist! Dennison, now at the plate, and gamely playing with an injured knee, would need a clean hit to limp to base safely. Nor could Sam be expected to bring home the winning run unless Dennison punctured the Warrior defense.

And, if the tie continued, how much longer could an inexperienced recruit sustain this killing pace in the box?

All Titans and their followers were worrying about Sam Jenkins's endurance as his older rival poised himself confidently to achieve a third out. From the steps of the dugout, Riggs waved his cap strangely, and shouted a vague encouragement to his pitcher on third.

Suddenly, Parsons stood transfixed. His team mates portrayed convulsive alarm. Jenkins had started to steal home!

His pace, if not swift, was reckless. He was getting there. But to many Titans this progress was a slow-motion picture of an elephant at full gallop.

Parsons roused, made a hasty toss to Dolan, but, overeager, the Warrior catcher used his mitt only to deflect the high throw to a point near Stella's box. And Sam, winded and weakening, was agreeably surprised to find he could stagger five yards more and win his own game.

In the clubhouse, a few minutes later, Riggs was unpleasantly surprised by his manager.

"You brought Jenkins home!" he charged, pale with anger.

"I sure fixed it, Mac. Knew his bulk 'd

buffalo 'em. And wasn't Sam the lavish landslide?"

Said McFarlan: "It 'll cost you a hundred, Riggs. You're fined and suspended. You need to learn who runs this team. One game in June never won a pennant. Team-work wins—and that means discipline."

The crestfallen catcher dressed hurriedly, and in silence. Avoiding Sam, he went boldly to the business offices, where he knew McFarlan probably lingered.

"Well?" snapped that disciplinarian.

"I can afford to spend the hundred," said Riggs, "and I can stand my being suspended, if you can. But I hate being misjudged for handing you a tough game. Out on the bench I couldn't explain in a hurry. But Sam never pitches his best without Stella Willis watching him."

"If that tie had lasted, Stella soon 'd have had to leave for her evening performance. And then our Sam 'd have left his own performance to enlist in aviation. Why, with her walking out on him, say, in the eleventh, he'd have gone up so high, you'd had to keep the park open all night waiting for him to come down. I knew I had to beat Parsons quick."

"You say Stella Willis? But I thought you and her—"

"Well, Sam likes her, too, and needs encouraging."

"Do you mean to say," McFarlan exclaimed, "you'll even give up your girl to make Jenkins a star pitcher?"

"Not so far as that. But Stella's a great little fan, a wonderful help to Sam; so, till he gets set—"

The manager confessed his bewilderment, but agreed he must reconsider the fine and suspension next day.

VIII

J. ROGER hurried to the hotel room he shared with Jenkins, and assured that worried friend he had persuaded a calmer McFarlan to apologize handsomely.

"Stella just phoned me—us; was leaving for her theater, she said," the pitcher explained uneasily. "I didn't tell her you'd had a row with the boss. I guess I've got to tell you, though; I worry a heap about you and her."

"Who and her?"

"You and Stella," said Sam. "Riggsy, you've been the best little pal I've ever had. You've made me, and I'd just do anything for you. 'Course I'm not smart about as-

sisting folks the way you are—but if only I could fix it for you and her to be—"

"But you care for her yourself."

"I like her a lot, of course." Sam was tactful. "She's pretty, a peach, and good fun. But mostly, I guess, I'm fond of her on your account. You're just her kind; I never will be. You two are just suited to each other. And you love her; I've guessed that for some time, Riggsy. She would love you, too, I'm sure."

"I want to see you happy—that's why I had to speak out this way. I figure I could sort o' repay some of what you've been doing for me. I'm so dang sure, you see, that Stella does mean your happiness. For one reason, you're always trying to have me meet her and get to know her. You'd only be that anxious to have a pal like the girl you love, see?"

"You pitch better with Stella watching."

"Watching us, sure. I feel I got to do my best before her, Riggsy. I know you're proud of having found me, and like to show me off to her. That's natural. Besides, when I'm going good, you look better yourself. Somehow, when she's at the game, everything seems more comfortable—"

"See! You do care about her, Sam!"

"More comfortable for your sake. I'd hate to have anything come between you two," he pursued, crimson; "and, though it's low down o' me to tell it, you ought to know, Riggsy—Stella flirts."

"Yes, even with a dub like me; she even did just awhile ago—over the phone, honest. And now, with her becoming such a stage hit—well, I went to see her act last night; you thought I was up here, snoring. You've seen how she has to dress. If she'll even flirt with me—"

And he concluded, urgently: "Get serious about this, Riggsy; if you ask her in time, and both get really engaged, I'm certain you'll never regret it. Somehow, I had to spill this. It's tough talking, but I'd do anything for such a pal as you."

J. Roger Riggs, humbled, and confessing it, replied after a moment: "What a door-knob a real big-headed guy can get to be! And you—good old Samuel J.—walking in my sleep! If really you'll do anything for me, Sam, go borrow a big meat ax and start manicuring my skull."

The new promoter beamed upon him.

"But you can see Stella soon, to-night, right after the show. Mr. Miller will know of some handy jeweler."

J. Roger promptly phoned the theatrical man, and disclosed his sudden want.

"A fine engagement ring, Sid—no, to-night! Sure, for Stella. No, from me—Sam isn't to be traded. He's the quick Cupid, and thinks he'll pitch better if signed up to be my best man. Yes, he's a base runner, too. You saw him bring home that game to-day in a wheelbarrow. Sure I started him. Oh, McFarlan understood.

"He's talking about handing me a hundred to-morrow. Now, about Stella's ring? Max who? He's honest, and open evenings, both? Oh, sure, I'll be careful—but, as a judge of diamonds, I'm not even the ground keeper's dog. Thanks, again, Sid. Same to you—I suppose this boy, Max, will wait for a balance till I get my World's Series share—if I tell him you know me well?"

A Trifling Opening

THERE WAS NO SMALL EXCITEMENT IN TICKFALL WHEN MIKE MULE DEMONSTRATED HIS UNSUSPECTED ABILITIES AS A NAPOLEON OF FINANCE

By E. K. Means

TO Mike Mule, Tickfall was no longer a pleasant place to live. Wherever he rambled in the little village, certain persistent persons asked him for money, and he owed money to all who asked. He did not know what they wanted with it, or what they would do with it if they got it, for he had not paid anybody any money yet.

He had exhausted his credit, and had come to the end of his resources. He had been chased out of town by his creditors, but he had just come back to Tickfall from Shongaloon on a log train.

"I'm gwine set down in de shade of dis deppo and rest my foots an' wuck my mind an' think," he said to himself.

He searched the pockets of his clothes, brought forth all his available assets, and surveyed them with disgust—two quarters, two dimes, five copper pennies, a package containing two cigarettes, a gnawed plug of chewing tobacco, a handful of cigar stubs. He separated the tobacco from the other contents of his pockets, and murmured:

"Dat man over dar at dat eatin' stand sells peanuts, pop cawn, chawin' gum, choc'lates, hot dog, hot cat, sandwidges, an' pie; but I ain't gwine to do much high eatin' in Tickfall. Dis here chawin' terbacker is my only nourishment."

He raised his eyes and gazed with listless interest down the sun-sashed street. One old goose wandered disconsolately about, moving from one watermelon rind to another, scooping up the moisture of the succulent vegetable with a shovel motion of the bill and an audible sound of suction. A vagrant gust of wind swept up a handful of sand and dust, which whirled in cylindrical form, gathering volume and more dust until a tiny cyclone was in action in the middle of the street. The goose raised her head, gazed at the moving column, and, with a flutter of wings and a loud squall, hurled herself into the midst of it.

"Dat ole goose ain't got no mo' sense dan dis ole nigger," Mike announced to himself. "Dat's me! I'm always jumpin' in de middle of a stir up, bustin' up a baby cycloon storm."

He lowered his eyes again to the contemplation of his meager financial resources. Six bits! Three white men had contributed this sum of money merely because Mike had asked them for a piece of loose change. He expected just a little bit of the needful, and had received it. Then his mind turned to a consideration of his one remaining recourse.

"Ain't nothin' lef' but de widder," he remarked.

The widow was an antique relic who owned a house and a little land beside a lake about ten miles from town. She was the only woman Mike knew who could furnish him food and shelter and give him the comforts to which he had become accustomed by living on credit and dodging his creditors, spending borrowed money.

The widow was a mean old thing, Mike thought. He must accustom his body to hard knocks, and train his ears to the sound of harsh and uncomplimentary words. Had not the widow hounded and nagged her last husband into the grave after living with him for forty years?

"Ef things gits too bad, I'll shore marry de widder," Mike sighed; "but dey ain't got dat bad yit, bless Gawd!"

Mike looked up, and saw a man whose apparel proclaimed that he was a negro preacher. He stooped, and walked feebly. A long-tailed coat swathed his emaciated form like a bath robe, and a battered silk hat adorned his gray head.

"Dar, now!" Mike grumbled. "Dat ole Wyatt Sebree is jes' now come to town on de train. He's after dat ole widder, too; an' he's got de inside track. When he preached de fun'ral of her fust husband, he gib dat ole bat a good recommend to de Lawd, an' a fine send-off to de land whar nigger angels lives at."

While he was following the colored clergyman with baleful eyes, a portly white man came around the corner of the depot, puffing like a log train pulling a grade, and seated himself in the shade beside Mike.

"I'm too durn fat to walk around much on a hot day. Ain't that so?"

"Yes, suh, white folks," Mike replied. "You shore is moisturous wid sweat."

"You colored people always look cool," the white man remarked. "Don't you ever get bothered? Don't you ever have any troubles?"

"Yes, suh; but when we sets down an' begins to think about our troubles, we draps off asleep," Mike grinned. "I got plenty troubles, but dey don't make me hot, an' dey cain't keep me awake. I needs my sleep, an' I always gits it."

Then Mike began to unburden his heart in the ears of the stranger. It was a sad story that he told, and he told it well. None of it was true, but almost anybody who did not know Mike would have believed it. It stirred the sympathy of the fat white man.

"Some of us fellers are planning to buy a little house somewhere in the woods—a kind of clubhouse, where we can meet and fish and rest and not be disturbed," he said. "You might get the job of taking care of the house, when we get it."

"Whar is dat house?" Mike asked.

"We ain't found one yet," the white man told him.

"Dat suits me, boss," Mike told him. "I'll be hangin' aroun' here most of de time, an' I'll make myse'f easy to find. Eve'ybody, white an' black, calls me Mike Mule. I'd shore like to git some kind of job like dat."

The white man sat fanning himself with his hat until he felt more comfortable, and then he waddled away, leaving Mike in silent contemplation of the scenery.

II

A WAGON came down the street, drawn by two thin horses. Gaudy ribbons hung from the arched canvas cover of the vehicle, and swarthy female faces, with a background of long hair intertwined with cheap beads and glass ornaments, proclaimed that this was an outfit of gypsies. The wagon stopped beside the depot, a man dismounted and entered the freight office, and three women gazed at Mike Mule. One of them saw the coins lying upon the ground at his feet.

Climbing out of the wagon, she made a sound, half whistle and half voice, and induced a parakeet to climb from its perch upon her finger. Then she picked up a box filled with papers folded in an orderly row, cast a suspicious glance about her, and came to where Mike Mule sat.

"Bucko tell your fortune—two bits," she said.

"Naw!" Mike covered his money with his foot. "Had my forchune told wunst. It didn't git me nothin'—lost my two bits."

"But Bucko, the bird, he cannot miss," the woman said. "You try Bucko—two bits."

"Git up in town whar de white folks is at," Mike suggested. "Dey falls easy for forchunes, because de white folks has all de good luck."

"Against the law. The sheriff told us to git out," the woman said.

"Ef it's ag'in' de law, I'll take a chance," Mike said, uncovering his money by removing his foot. "I knows a lot of nice things to do whut de law don't allow."

He handed the gypsy woman twenty-five cents, and she whistled to the bird. Bucko climbed awkwardly from her finger, walked clumsily across the box of folded papers, and pulled one up with his beak. The woman handed the paper to Mike, and climbed back into the wagon. The driver came from the freight depot, and the outfit rode away, leaving Mike to decipher the document that he had acquired in violation of the law.

Opening the page, he saw a crude drawing of a human hand, with heavy marks indicating the joints of the fingers and the lines in the palm and at the wrist.

"Gypsy hand," Mike murmured. "Dey got it drawed correck, too—wide open, an' wavin' in yo' face. 'Gimme, gimme, gimme!' dat hand say. Eve'y time a nigger sees it, it costs him money."

Then his slow mind pondered the written contents of the page, which ran thus:

You are inclined to be overhappy or oversad, as may happen. Opportunity has failed to favor you, because you did not see it clearly. Soon a trifling opening will come to you. Consult your friends freely. Follow good advice. Wealth and happiness will fall in your lap. You are too shy and modest. Be brave and hopeful.

It did not take Mike long to decide that he could not comprehend the hidden meaning of this document. He folded it carefully, placed it in his pocket, and rose to his feet.

"I'm gwine to de Henscratch an' git some advices on dis paper."

III

THE Big Four of Tickfall sat listlessly beside a table in the soft drink emporium, smoking and grumbling about the dullness of the times. These men had devised an easy method of entertainment for themselves. Meeting every day, they assembled from their common knowledge all the scandal and gossip of the village, considered all the enterprises and ambitions of their colored friends, and then selected some matter of common interest and devoted the day to its promotion. A man coming to them for advice might find four men interested enough to help him in putting that advice into operation for one day at least.

When Mike Mule entered, bearing some kind of document, the four men brightened up and welcomed him in joyful anticipation of something new.

"I needs advices, niggers," Mike said,

as he sat down at the table with them. "I arrived down from Shongaloon dis mawnin', and I hadn't sat very long to rest up when a gypsy wagon come by, and a woman charged me two bits to hab a funny little green duck kind of bird pick me out a forchune. It's all writ out on dis here piece of paper. I ain't got no profound mind, an' I don't seem to ketch on to whut I'm expected to do."

"I don't like nothin' wrote on paper," Skeeter Butts snapped. "A feller sold me somepin once, an' got me to sign my name on a dotted line. Lawd! I come mighty nigh gittin' in jail about dat name."

"Dis ain't got no name on it, but it's ag'in' de law, an' I'm got to speak it kinder easy," Mike said.

The four men bent their heads above the page and laboriously read the contents. They had such difficulty in spelling out some of the words and mastering the meaning of each sentence, that they could not grasp the purport of the whole communication when they had finished, because they forgot what had gone before.

"We ain't wuckin' dis right, boys," Skeeter Butts announced. "I moves we read it out one line at a time, an' git dat advice in our heads befo' we moves on."

"'Line upon line an' precep' upon precep', here a little an' dar a little,'" Vinegar Atts, the preacher, quoted.

"Stop talkin' to yo'se'f, revun," Pap Curtain objected. "Dis here nigger has fotch us dat dar writin' on a page dat he says he got from a little green duck kind of bird. Dat las' part sounds good to me—but we better git de drift of de words befo' somepin happens to us."

"All right! Shut up an' listen!" Skeeter Butts snapped, as he picked up the paper and read: "'You are inclined to be overhappy or oversad, as may happen.' Whut do dat mean?"

"Whut's gwine happen?" Mike Mule asked, showing the whites of his eyes.

"De writin' says 'as may happen,'" Skeeter told him, consulting the paper.

"Whut do a 'as' look like?" Mike Mule wanted to know.

"It's kinder like a mule," Pap Curtain explained. "You is seed 'em many a time an' called 'em donkeys."

"Aw, you is talkin' about a jackass," Skeeter Butts said. "Dis writin' don't say a jackass may happen."

"Pap Curtain is done happened," Vine-

gar grinned; "an' our friend Mike is a Mule. Us is hoping dat dem two is all dat ever will happen."

"It's spelt diff'unt," Skeeter declared.

"It sounds de same," Pap asserted.

"Mebbe us better pass on," Figger Bush suggested. "Nothin' ain't happened yit. Give us another shove, Skeeter!"

"Opportunity has failed to favor you, because you did not see it clearly," Skeeter read, and laid the sheet down while he lighted another cigarette.

"Whut am dis here opportunity?" Mike Mule inquired. "How kin a feller see anything clear when he don't know whar to look?"

"Whut do a opportunity look like?" Figger Bush asked. "I ain't never seed one."

"It knocks once at eve'y man's do," declared Vinegar Atts. "I read dat in a book."

"Tain't never knocked aroun' my house, onless I warn't home," Pap Curtain said. "Mebbe my wife heard de knock—"

"Opportunity ain't no pusson, like a insurance collector," Vinegar informed them. "Opportunity is a thing, like—like love."

"Dar now!" Skeeter Butts exclaimed, a great enlightenment shining in his eyes. "How come you ain't said dem words befo'? I onderstan's it all, now. Dis here is a love paper!"

"Dat shore does esplain a heap," Pap Curtain agreed. "Love makes us over-happy an' oversad, as may happen, like a pore nigger most inginerally feels. Love tries to favor us, an' we don't see it dat way clearly; an' den love up an' reaches fer a skillet or a brick, an' does somepin' dat makes us oversad."

"Dat's right," Vinegar applauded. "Now we is movin' fine! Whut else do she say?"

"Soon a triflin' openin' will come to you. Consult yo' friends freely. Follow good advice. Wealth an' happiness will fall into yo' lap," Skeeter read, and stopped.

Vinegar Atts sprang to his feet, pointed his finger at Mike Mule's head, and demanded solemnly:

"Nigger, does you know whut a openin' is when you sees it?"

"Suttinly! I kin see a gap in de fence an' a break in de wall an' a hole in de seat of a nigger's pants. I knows a openin' when I sees it."

"Watch it!" Vinegar bawled. "Watch it keerful! Consult yo' friends freely!"

"Whar at is dat openin' I muss watch?" Mike asked.

"A openin' will come—soon," Vinegar assured him. "Dis here writin' says 'soon.'"

"It cain't be too soon fer me, onless it's a openin' in a jail house," Mike grinned. "I come down to be at de church festerbul. You reckon dis paper is alludin' to dat?"

"Suttinly," Vinegar bawled. "All de cullud sawsieti of Tickfall is comin' to dat meetin' at de Shoofly Church to-night, an' wealth an' happiness will drap in yo' lap."

"Dat's fine, brudders," Mike said gratefully. "I shore feels better; but I aims to hang aroun' you-alls at dat festerbul."

"Dat's de correck notion," Skeeter said. "Cornslt yo' friends freely, an' foller good advice."

IV

On his way to the Shoofly Church, that night, Mike Mule chanced to meet the only white clergyman in the village. Remembering the injunction to consult his friends freely, and follow good advice, he paused and inquired:

"Elder, I got a writin' to-day dat said dat a slight openin' would soon come to me. Whut do dat signify?"

"An opening?" Dr. Sentelle inquired. "Well, it may mean several things; but generally it indicates that you will have a chance to make some money. It may mean a business opening, where you will get a good job, or something of that kind."

"Yes, suh; I shore thanks you, suh," Mike said earnestly. "I done seen de light through dat openin' right now."

Mike went on to the church, and handed out the only two silver quarters he possessed for admission to the festivities. He glanced over the assembly with the eyes of a predatory wild beast. He was a master of the artful touch, and this gay assembly was in the nature of a business opening for him.

Standing with his broad back against the wall was Hitch Diamond, a giant pugilist, known as the Tickfall Tiger. With a furtive glance of the eye and a jerk of the head, Mike indicated to Hitch that he desired to see him outside. Hitch pushed his way through the throng and met his friend at the corner of the church.

"Dis is secret wuck, Hitchie," Mike

whispered, as he produced the paper which contained the prediction of his future.

"My Gawd!" Hitch exclaimed, staring at the crude drawing of the lines of a human palm, with the thumb and fingers spread wide. "Black hand!"

"Yes, suh, somepin like dat," Mike agreed.

"Whar you git it?" Hitch asked.

"A wagon full of gypsies rambled through town dis mawnin'," Mike began.

"I seed 'em," Hitch interrupted. "De sheriff made 'em move on."

"Well, suh, dey met up wid me at de deppo. I reckon dey **wus** mad because de sheriff chased 'em, an' dey gimme dis black hand paper. It says dat wealth will fall in my lap ef I takes de advices of my friends. You want to git in on dis?"

"Shore do!" Hitch declared, positively.

"I'm lettin' a few friends in at ten dollars per each," Mike said. "You kin talk to Vinegar an' Pap an' Skeeter an' Figger about it. Dem Big Four advices me."

"Here's de money," Hitch said, as he extended a bill. "I cain't read nothin', but ef de Big Four favors it, I'm in."

"Dat's fine," Mike applauded, turning the gypsy document over to the back, where the sheet was blank. "I writes yo' name on de back of dis paper so I kin remember yo' donate."

Returning to the church, Mike saw Mustard Prophet standing beside a punch bowl. He moved up to him, eyed the concoction in the bowl with a grimace of revulsion and disgust, and gave Mustard's coat tail a jerk.

"Hello, Mike!" Mustard greeted him. "Less drink a punch!"

"Don't speak dat awful word in dis Mule's year, Mustard," Mike pleaded. "Dar ain't no slop in dis woeful world of sorrer like dat stuff called punch. Ef I had a water moccasin whut had bit all my fambly, I'd be too kind-hearted to drownd him in a bowl of swill like dat."

"It do taste like some kind of slimy varmint got drowned in it," Mustard murmured meditatively. "Wonder how come dey calls it punch!"

"Dunno. A punch is a—punch. Whenever I takes a dram of dat swill, I feels plumb outraged, like I done been knocked in de shawt ribs, slammed in de slats, an' kicked behime. I shore craves to punch de stuffin' outen de fool dat mixed it," Mike answered in vicious tones. "It ain't fitten

fer nothin' but sheep dip, an' yet it is de favoryte drink in high sawsiety, whar a sheep is unkowed."

"Atter you buys yo' admit ticket, dis am all dey offers you fer yo' money," Mustard sighed. "Some female sings a song about 'I'm a little peach bloom, hangin' on a tree—ef you wants a flower, come an' pick me; an' den some half growed up gal, who wus picked too soon, comes an' axes you, 'Is you been served punch?' I's tried frequent to make a camuel outen myse'f an' drink enough to feel like I's got my money's wuth, but it cain't be did."

"Ef you wants yo' money's wuth of somepin, look at dis here paper," Mike invited him.

Mustard glanced down at the document that Mike was waving under his nose, and followed his friend to the light of a dusty electric globe.

"Dis paper is wuth good money to us niggers," Mike declared. "It's a paper whut tells of a openin' in bizness whut will fotch wealth an' happiness, an' drap 'em down in yo' lap."

"How come you don't read dat paper to de female ladies whut is present?" Mustard asked. "Dey is got laps. Men folks ain't got nothin' but legs."

"I ain't got aroun' to de lady folks yit," Mike said easily; "but I will. I ain't aimin' to negleck nobody. Any pusson who craves to gimme ten dollars on dis paper will hab his name wrote on de back of it, an' he won't hear no objections from me because he wears pants or high skirts."

"Do it cost ten dollars?" Mustard asked.

"It do."

"It comes mighty high," Mustard complained, "especial when I don't know whut dis here writin' signify. I cain't make no sense outen it."

"I didn't git no sense in it, neither," Mike said; "but dem Big Four niggers—dey sot deir minds on it an' told me whut de paper meant. Vinegar Atts knowed better dan anybody. De Revun Vinegar Atts is a scholard."

"All right," Mustard finally agreed, "I'll buy ten dollars' wuth of whutever dis is. When do dis here wealth an' happiness drap on us?"

"Whenever you consult yo' best friends an' foller good advice," Mike replied, consulting the paper and quoting from it.

To use the parlance of the negro, Mike "picked the crowd." He plucked all the

birds of their golden plumage, both geese and ganders. At last he turned to the Big Four of Tickfall, and took from each of them the sum of five dollars, by the simple process of showing them his "list," and indicating how much money he had collected from the other patrons of the sociable.

Just before the party adjourned, the Rev. Wyatt Sebree came in with a colored lady. This was the widow whom Mike had determined to marry if the worst came to the worst; but the worst was nowhere near that unfortunate ultimatum now, for Mike had acquired more money than he had ever had at one time in his life.

When Wyatt Sebree and the widow, Juice Spice, sat down at a table, to be served with ice cream and cake, Mike came up and greeted them cordially.

"Me an' de revun came over on de same train dis mawnin'," Mike said; "only but de revun rid in de caboose, an' paid his way like a gen'leman, an' I jes' natchelly hates to gib my money to a railroad. De train is got to come anyhow, an' I prefers to let it catch me free."

"Did you come to town to dis church party?" Juice Spice asked.

"Naw, not fer dat puppus only. I had a notion, befo' I lef' town, dat I would ax you to marry me," Mike said.

"I done got my ax in fust," Wyatt Sebree objected. "Soon as I hopped off de train I oozed along to Juicy's house. I didn't let no ground grow under my foots."

"I reckon I'm too late," Mike sighed, in good imitation of a man who had lost an incalculable treasure. "An' yit I's got a straight word dat wealth an' happiness is fixin' to fall in my lap."

"Niggers don't never hab no luck like dat, Mike," Wyatt Sebree told him. "Now dis ole widder an' me, we is about de same age, an' we bofe is got a notion to git married an' set aroun' fer de rest of our days, watchin' each yuther to see who starves to death fust."

"You ain't got much to look forward to," Mike grinned.

"De widder is got a little land an' a crop, an' I'm got a little land an' a crop, an' de widder won't marry me unless she kin sell out," Wyatt continued.

"How much?" Mike Mule asked promptly.

"Two hundred dollars will buy all I's got, an' I moves out immediate," Juice Spice answered.

"You two cullud pussons meet me to-morrer at de cotehouse," Mike Mule said. "I buys prompt, an' I pays cash. I needs a house an' a little land. Lawd, I'll shore hab plenty big bizness to-morrer!"

V

WHILE Mike Mule was buying a house and farm, and transacting other business, the Big Four were in the midst of what Mike would describe as a "cycaloon storm."

The first black thunder cloud that appeared upon their horizon was Hitch Diamond. He rumbled threateningly, and disturbed their morning calm. He came in as if propelled by a violent wind, and continued to blow:

"I needs info'mation. Las' night I drapped ten dollars in de hand of a nigger named Mike Mule, an' dat Mule is done racked away. I must hab been crazy in my head to donate dat money to de bigges' crook nigger ever wus in Tickfall; but I gave de money on yo'-all's recommend, an' I holds you 'sponsible."

"Naw!" Skeeter Butts wailed. "Us ain't know nothin'. We drapped a few change ourself."

Before the discussion got started, another cloud appeared in the person of Mustard Prophet.

"I wus skeered I wus too late, an' you fellers had tuck my money an' scooted away. I shore wus unthinkful when I bestowed my good dollars on Mike Mule, jes' because dat animile showed me a writin' on paper an' brayed a few hee-haws about de black hand; but you niggers led me into it, an' now I craves you to show me de way out. How do I git my money back?"

"Out of which? Back from who?" Vinegar demanded with a snort. "Ain't you ole enough to know how to spend yo' own money?"

Mustard looked at them with a long stare of surprise. Then he wailed:

"Oh, Lawdy! You niggers is done loss yo' money, too—I kin see it plain. You niggers looks like picked geeses."

Then cyclonic forces began to assemble from various points of the compass. Men and women came in from all the negro settlements of Tickfall, and gathered around the table where the Big Four sat in anguished meditation. They explained at length, and, profanely, that they had not read the paper, could not read it or compre-

hend its purport, but Mike Mule had told them that the Big Four had interpreted it, and that he was acting on their advices. Consequently, they had bought ten dollars' worth.

Skeeter Butts almost became a chattering imbecile under their talk.

"Naw, not at all," he muttered. "Positively not. 'Tain't so. Naw, no, nit!"

The affair was progressing rapidly from the stage of argument to a state of action, when Mike Mule entered the Henscratch and dissipated the tempest.

He sat down at the table with an air of great self-satisfaction, and told everybody just how he had raised the money, and just how he had spent it all.

"My Lawd!" Vinegar bawled. "How is we ever gwine to git back de dollars we loant you? I ain't no deesire to own no property dat use to belong to a widder woman. Dat land is ten miles from town, on a lake whar de bullfrogs bellers like sick cows, an' de woods is so dark dat de hoot owls fly aroun' in de daytime, an' de muskeeters whine like a saw cuttin' through a knot in a log, an' de wild cats squall at you from de tree limbs, an' dat lake is so deep dat nobody ain't never touched bottom!"

"Us went in powerful deep when we gib dis dang Mule our money," Pap Curtain asserted.

"We loant it to him!" Vinegar whooped.

"Did you lend me de loant of dat money?" Mike asked quietly.

"Suttinly!"

"I'm powerful shore you didn't," Mike said slowly. "I never axed nobody to lend me a cent. 'Twouldn't do no good. My credick is all busted up in dis town."

"Dat's right," Skeeter snickered. "Dis nigger crook is shore wucked a buzzo on us. I heard him talkin' to all dat crowd, an' dey wus so tuck up wid havin' a good time dat dey handed out deir money an' didn't ax no questions."

"Me, I figgered dat I would ax 'terrogations to-day when I seed Mike Mule," Pap Curtain snarled.

"All right!" Mike grinned. "I'm here. Go on wid de questions."

"At de fust offstartin', I axes you dis—whut is you gwine do next?" Pap inquired.

Mike reached into his pocket, brought forth his paper, spread it out on the table, scrutinized it carefully, and read aloud:

"Consult yo' friends freely. Foller good advice always."

"Huh!" Vinegar grunted, while the rest of the crowd stood like dumb cattle.

"I'm ready now to foller good advices," Mike said solemnly.

And, for the first time in their history, the Big Four of Tickfall had no advice to offer. They sat, stupidly staring, in astounded silence.

Mike Mule produced a fat cigar with a broad, showy band. He lighted the cigar, placed the band upon his little finger, and sat admiring the ornament.

"I wish I had my money back!" Vinegar Att's snapped, as he glared at Mike.

Mike placed his beringed hand in his pocket, brought forth a five-dollar bill, laid it upon the table, and scratched Vinegar's name off the list on the back of the document of prognostications. Vinegar pounced upon the money as a hungry bird pounces on a worm.

"Got any mo' of dem bills?" Pap Curtain snarled. "I'd shore expe'unce joy to git my money back!"

Mike promptly produced another bill and handed it to him. Then, answering the longing expressed in the faces of Skeeter and Figger, he handed them their money, too. The others came up to the table like children being served with cake, each holding out a hand. Mike paid each man and woman what each had contributed, and scratched each name off of the list.

"I don't understand about dis," Skeeter snapped. "It 'pears to me like you tuck all dis trouble to colleck dis money jes' fer de fun of handin' it back."

"Wealth an' happiness is done fell in my lap," Mike explained. "A white man I met down at de deppo is done bought dat cabin from me, an' aims to fix it up fer a clubhouse. He done hired me fer money to take keer of it fer him, an' I gits all de crap I raises on de land."

"Huh!" Vinegar grunted.

"I made one hundred dollars on de trade, an' I hoofed it aroun' dis town an' paid off all I owed. I ain't real shore dat happiness is drapped in my lap, but I shore feels good," Mike concluded.

Skeeter reached for the paper, the back of which had been defaced by every name being scratched. He turned it over and read:

You are too shy and modest.

"Shy an' modest!" Skeeter repeated with a snort. "My good gawsh!"

The Blue Envelope

THE WHITE LIES THAT THIS HERO TOLD DARKENED HIS
EXISTENCE UNTIL THE HEROINE SMILINGLY
INVOKED THE LIGHT OF TRUTH

By Richard Howells Watkins

THERE is a limit to insults. And when that limit is reached, reprisals are bound to ensue.

Consequently, when Mr. Francis Verrold laid a fleshy hand upon the shoulder of Reg Arthwright's dinner jacket, and grinningly introduced him to a strikingly good-looking girl as "our little British cousin," Reg abruptly left the dance to get on as best it might.

Steps must be taken. Out in the velvety, depressing blackness of the moonless August night, on the velvety, unpleasing softness of the country club lawn, he brooded darkly on measures which had nothing of velvet about them.

"Fathead! The simpering sap!" he seethed.

It was not Verrold's words that gave offense, for Reg was no smaller than six-footers usually are; he had no apologies to make for an English mother and an Oxford education; and further, he considered himself distinctly fortunate in that no cousinship existed between himself and Verrold.

No; the words had no power to sting; it was the man behind them who annoyed Reg. He did not like Verrold's puffy face, or his musty politics, or his brilliant neckties, or his heavy humor, or his unfailing faithfulness to the brokerage business, or anything else he knew or could imagine about the man.

As far as Reg knew, Francis Verrold had never fired a hospital or murdered a bishop in his life; in fact, he was, as far as could be discerned, an ordinary type of chap. Nevertheless, Reg detested him, and gloried in it; he believed it was lack of opportunity, not virtue, that prevented Verrold from committing worse crimes than burning eleemosynary institutions or popping

off an ecclesiastic. And Reg had, on more than one occasion, detected distinct symptoms that Verrold harbored sentiments equally inimical.

The intense concentration Verrold bestowed on his business grated on Reg, who was beginning to feel it as a reflection on his own joyous lack of industry. And Reg Arthwright was not idle; he was positive of that; he was just cautious. He had gone about selecting a life work by a process of elimination which had already narrowed the field of endeavor in a most drastic manner, although he had only been considering the matter for a scant two years. No; he felt entirely justified in disliking Francis Verrold.

"The rotter! The beastly cad! The bounding boob!" Reg Arthwright muttered in his bilingual way. "For tuppence ha'penny I'd knock his block off!"

But blocks are rarely dislodged at country club dances, so Reg perforce turned his attention to subtler forms of retaliation. His dark thoughts were broken in upon abruptly when, in his heedless progress across the lawn, he blundered indelicately around a lilac bush and well-nigh into a tender moment in the lives of two perfect strangers.

He backed out expeditiously, without apology, as a gentleman should, and was laying this annoying incident with the others of the evening as proof that he was a son of misfortune, when suddenly the sight he had seen aroused thoughts that swelled instantly into a full-blown scheme of revenge. Verrold certainly had seemed very far gone on the girl to whom he had been so ridiculously introduced — Miss Woodsley—and furthermore, it was no passion of a summer evening, for he had seen them together several times before.

Reg spun around on his heel and headed back toward the lights and the music.

"Mentality is mine!" he mused approvingly, as he tested the set of his tie with expert fingers. "But will she care for the intellectual type—if she likes Verrold?"

II

"AND so, as soon as I find you, you prepare to place an ocean between us," Reg Arthwright accused, an hour and forty-three minutes later. "That isn't like you a bit, Marcia."

"Really?" inquired Marcia Woodsley, looking away from him into the blackness that was still velvety, but no longer depressing. "How much you can tell me about myself, though you have known me such a short time!"

"Time!" exclaimed Reg, scornfully. "Leave time to clock manufacturers, railroads, and—and fatheads who pursue you with unwelcome attentions. What have we to do with time—we two?" His voice throbbed, and he looked quickly over his shoulder. Yes, that was Verrold standing on the steps, peering this way and that. He turned to the girl with renewed ardor. "Haven't we known each other always—in spirit? Haven't our souls been akin for ages, though our slow minds are just realizing it?"

"I'm afraid my mind is a trifle slower than yours," murmured the girl. "And, after all, we can continue to know each other in spirit, even if my mere person is sailing on the Americ next Saturday."

"Uh—yes," agreed Reg, caught off guard for the instant by yielding to the temptation for another gloating glance at the agitated Verrold. "But that isn't enough," he added, energetically, as he felt the girl's eyes upon him. "After all, we are human beings; we must see each other, be close to each other, to—er—really get a kick, ah—inspiration, mutual admir—divine harmony, and so forth."

The girl did not seem to notice the disjunction of his thought, or else attributed it to fervor. "Then I may assume that I will see you on the Americ, Saturday, as we sail for your native shores?" she asked softly.

That was a bit of a facer, and Reg seized upon the obvious opportunity to stall for time.

"My native shores are on this side, if you don't mind," he corrected firmly.

"I'm so sorry," she murmured, and was silent, but not warmly silent. Reg felt he was losing hard won ground.

Francis Verrold was coming down the steps. His catlike eyes had spotted them, and he was heading toward them at a considerable acceleration of pace. In a moment Reg's chance would be gone, and this rather pleasing girl would be wrested from him.

After all, she was deuced attractive, he thought, and, moreover, there was no reason why he should not take the Americ. He had nothing much on. What a neat little bombshell he would hurl by dispatching a radio, dated S. S. Americ, instructing Verrold to buy or sell a hundred shares of something at the market!

"Is that a dare?" he demanded, soberly enough, and turned intent eyes on the girl's face.

"Yes, Reg," she whispered, and there was a delightful little catch in her voice. It was too dark to see her face.

"I'll be there!" he said, and the words reached the rapidly approaching ears of Francis Verrold. He bowed low, and, he hoped, gracefully, and stepped lightly away over the velvety grass as his rival, with a mumble about his dance, took possession of the girl.

III

WITH a thunder of steam from her whistle, the eighteen-thousand-ton, triple-screw steamer Americ challenged the small fry in the river to try to stop her. Then she backed cautiously away from her pier. None of the ferries, tugs, lighters, and such everyday craft having seen fit to accept her bass challenge, she turned slowly in the river, and her propellers took up the beat that would not cease until she reached, in eight or ten days, the shores of France—except, of course, to get rid of the pilot off Ambrose Light.

On the promenade deck, Reg Arthwright, with Machiavellian forethought, kept well away from the rail until the faces on the pier blurred into mere white dots. The second day out would be plenty of time to let Verrold know the devastating fact that he was on the Americ.

"Farewell, Frankie; your little British cousin is leaving you flat and soon to be thoroughly flabbergasted," he told himself complacently.

There was no doubt that the news would

be of distinct interest to the stolid stock-broker. Reg was more certain of that than ever, now. From a sheltered position at the stern end of the shelter deck, he had seen Verrold escort Marcia Woodsley on board, and his hand—his fat, repulsive hand—had been tucked tightly and tenderly under the slender arm of the girl, and his fat face had been turned toward hers. It was a revolting scene, to any one at all aesthetic, like Reg. But it had demonstrated, beyond the breath of a doubt, that Verrold was pipped on the girl.

The pier having faded from view, Reg strolled around the deck to make his dazzling appearance before Marcia. She would learn that he was a man of his word.

He caught her just as she was skipping over the high sill of the door to go inside.

"Here I am, Marcia," he called cheerily. She turned quickly, and viewed him with startled eyes.

"Oh—oh—oh!" she exclaimed, and collapsed into somebody's steamer chair. Her shoulders rose and fell, but her head was tucked so low that Reg was unable to fathom the nature of the emotion that demanded such startling expression.

"I say—" he exclaimed, hovering anxiously. "Just—just what is it all about, Marcia?"

A tiny squeak rose to his agitated ears. "You—you came!" she stammered, and the shoulders shook more disquietingly than ever.

The girl was plainly in a mood of intense excitement. He sat down on the foot rest.

"There! There!" he said, uncertainly. "Of course I came."

She raised her head and confronted him with streaming eyes. Her mouth worked pitifully, and a throb of sympathy swelled and contracted Reg Arthwright's mobile heart. She dropped her head again without coherent speech.

"Tell me what it is, little girl," Reg murmured, in his most soothing tone. His technique of supplying comfort to afflicted but pretty girls was deucedly impaired by this location on the broad, light, and by no means deserted deck.

Marcia raised her left hand to him, as if that explained something her voice could not. It was a pretty hand, with some rings on it, and Reg made to seize it eagerly, but it was swiftly withdrawn from his grasp.

"W-wait until h-h-h-he sees you!" gasped the girl.

"Who sees me?" demanded Reg. A strange, inward unrest surged through him; a thin blade of apprehension cut his breast. Was this girl laughing or crying—hysterical or mirthful?

"Francis!" the girl sobbed. "He's just hunting up the deck steward to get chairs. Oh, don't you understand? We're married! You—you've come on our honeymoon. Oh—oh—oh!"

IV

THE hot, brilliant sunlight darkened suddenly around Reg Arthwright, and he felt the earth spinning dizzily on its eccentric orbit, and humming in his ears as it spun.

Through the hum, faintly, came the shaky voice of Marcia Woodsley—no, Marcia Verrold. "We—we've been engaged for six months—secretly—so nobody could know—and to-day we were married at the Municipal Building. Not one of our friends know—Francis hates a fuss—and we had the booking in my name. And you—you c-came!"

Although the world continued to spin vertiginously, Reg Arthwright climbed to his feet. He could not continue to sit on the same chair with this girl. Her laughter, still uncontrolled, cut his shrinking ears like hot needles and pins.

"I—I haven't told him about your pr-promise, yet—but when I do—oh—oh—oh—oh!"

Reg had good stuff in him. At Crecy, and at Blenheim, and at Waterloo, his mother's ancestors had taken knocks nearly as hard as this, and given them back again. And his father's people had done good work at Bunker Hill and Gettysburg. He must not let this get about; for the honor of his race, he must not. Let Verrold know this—to tell it in the clubs, blazon it forth to all his friends that he, Reginald Tarrenton Arthwright, had come on his wedding trip with him. No! Not if he could stop it by any means in his power, the fouler the better.

"But, my dear Marcia," he heard himself saying, and his voice seemed both indulgently amused and incredulous, "you do not really believe that I—I'm sailing on the Americ because of a few light words to you at that dance?" He essayed a laugh; succeeded in it, and tried another, louder. "Come, now; you don't mean that?"

The girl looked up quickly. Suspicion gleamed in her tear-filled eyes. But there was a shade of disappointment in them, too.

Reg, his whole form braced for the ordeal, met those eyes, and smiled in a superior sort of way.

"What are you sailing on the Americ for, then?" the girl asked tensely. Her voice was no longer shaky; but it was dry and strained from her excess of emotion.

Here was a moment that required quick thinking.

"I might reply, of course, to get on the other side, but I won't," said he, lightly. His eyes wandered hungrily about the deck, seeking inspiration. They alighted with subconscious approval upon the figure of a slight, blond girl in a light blue dress, who was almost skipping along the deck in the enthusiastic spirits of sailing time. "I—I will tell you," he continued, almost without a break, lowering his voice. "After all, I am the first to learn your delightful, but not altogether unexpected, secret; you shall hear mine. Do you see that girl?"

"Of course I see her," replied Marcia, instantly, and not altogether favorably. Marcia was inclined to be a brunette.

"You must confide this to no one—not even to your husband," he warned. "I—I am—she bowled me over completely—I'm wildly in love, and have been for some time. But she doesn't know it—no, doesn't even suspect it. And when I found she was sailing on the Americ—some days before I met you at the dance—I decided I must go, too—I'm afraid I haven't been myself—wasn't myself that night when I heard you were going on this boat—I've been so knocked about by her."

"What is her name?" inquired Marcia, and her voice was now quite controlled, and even cool. "Is she a New York girl—are her people—"

To Reg's intense relief the girl in blue paused before the row of steamer chairs, found her own name on a tab, and sank into a seat not a dozen feet from them.

"S-h-h!" cautioned Reg. "I—I don't even know her name. I'm half bally—foaming at the mouth and kicking my legs. Can't find any one who knows her—any one who can introduce me. Trailed her to the booking office, and heard her mention the Americ, but didn't have nerve enough to ask the clerk who she was."

Frank disbelief showed in Marcia Verrold's eyes, and with it a threatened return of her metriment.

"Look here," said Reg, desperately, "if

I was trying to tell a howler about why I picked the Americ, don't you think I could devise something more plausible than that?"

Marcia considered this judicially, and reluctantly awarded him the verdict. "Well, yes," she said slowly. "I think you're rather good at lying."

"Thank you," said Reg, bowing politely. Inwardly, thankfulness flooded him, but he wished to give no sign that her belief or disbelief was important. "You will keep my secret, then—even from your husband? You know"—he lowered his voice confidentially—"I'm going to be impertinent, and suggest, also, that you do not tell your husband about your little joke—thinking that I came on your honeymoon trip unknowingly. As I suppose you know by this time, he's the most jealous chap in the world, and he's intensely in love with you. It might disturb him."

Marcia surveyed the problem thoughtfully. "I suppose I shouldn't worry him in any way," she agreed. Then she added, with sudden decision: "But, Reg, I'll not only not tell about the romance with the girl in blue, I'll help you. A married woman can do wonders in helping an affair like that along."

Reg bent over and grasped her hand—the one without the rings on it—and shook it warmly. His mind was mulling over, somewhat uncertainly, Marcia's offer of assistance and the tone of voice she had used.

"Thanks," he murmured gratefully. "I knew you were a good sort the minute I saw you."

He straightened, nodded, and smiled in a conspiratorial manner, and walked steadily, although with great care, away—right down the deck. If a walk can portray anything, Reg's walk portrayed not a blithering ass who had blundered inexcusably into another man's wedding trip, but a romantic lover bent upon pursuing his unconscious love to the ends of the earth, if she happened to be going there.

When he had rounded the corner he collapsed suddenly against the rail, and, with a shaking hand, produced a handkerchief to sop the fount of water that had suddenly developed on the surface of his aching forehead.

"What a gruesome sense of humor she has—positively indecent!" he mumbled, drawing in deep breaths of river air. "Did I put that over, or does she know I'm

spoofing her? Will she get vindictive, and try to mess me up with that other girl, or—"

V

HE ceased to cogitate and, approaching the corner he had rounded, peered back up the deck, most distrustfully, in what he realized was a totally futile effort to plumb Marcia's mind by watching her movements. She had gone. Footsteps sounded behind him. He turned.

There, not five feet from him, was the flushed, plump, animated countenance of Francis Verrold. And, as their eyes met, Verrold's face took on a sheepish—or, as Reg preferred to think, a piggish—cast, and he blushed to the color of a tomato that has lived three weeks too long.

"Why, Reg, are you sailing on this boat?" Verrold demanded, and pushed a somewhat fleshy right hand toward him. "What on earth are you peeking around that corner for? Looking for my wife? Ha! Ha! My wife!"

It was quite obvious that Francis Verrold was in a whirl—a very deuce of a whirl; and of the opinion that every one in the world, including Reg Arthwright, was his friend. Stranger phenomena than this have been witnessed on wedding days.

Reg Arthwright desperately assumed a hearty, waggish air.

"You sly dog!" he chided, and seized the extended hand and squeezed it until Verrold winced and his own forearm ached horribly. "Congratulations—just ran into Mrs. Verrold and heard the news. Well, well, well!"

Verrold beamed complacently. His broad face was not built for beaming, Reg decided instantly. It overdid the thing. Standing there before the still dazed Reg, he even rocked on his heels with his hands in his pockets, and looked as clever as if he had just performed a miracle offhand. But his slow mind swung back to his question again.

"What were you peeking round that corner for?" he inquired.

Reg examined this two-hundred-pound monument of self-satisfaction with longing. Here he was, a hunted, suspected creature, who might, if he didn't look alive, become the butt of his friends—of the whole world—for the rest of his life, and here Verrold was, looking at him in that pitying, superior way that bridegrooms reserve for

their unmarried acquaintances. Oh, if he could only torpedo this mass of egotism! But at least he must demonstrate that he, Reg Arthwright, was in no need of pity—he was quite satisfied with his bachelor bliss.

He gulped, and plunged farther down the path of prevarication.

"Well, to tell the truth, Frank, old thing, I'm fleeing—not for my life, but for my liberty. Met a girl a few weeks ago—pretty little thing—intelligent, too—and, somehow or other, can't admire her taste—ha!—she—ah—became quite attached to me. Not my fault—pleasant to her, even a bit gallant, the first meeting—but after that—well, she likes me, for everywhere I go she turns up. Nice girl—lots of metal—fine family—but—well—matrimony's not for me. No, no. Leave that to sober old birdies, like you."

"And she's pursued you on board!" exclaimed Verrold, without too much sympathy. No man, even though married an hour, cares to hear that another is so attractive that beautiful girls follow him around.

"Well, yes; she has," Reg admitted modestly.

"Let me see," said the bridegroom, and unexpectedly thrust his face around the corner. Now, it happened that among the few passengers on this, the New Jersey side of the boat, there remained only one girl. Verrold's intense gaze fixed upon her. "The girl in blue!" he muttered.

Instantly, thunderously, it became apparent to Reg that he had erred; that he had committed a colossal blunder. Without exposing himself, he pulled Verrold back promptly.

"No, no!" he denied vigorously. It was not part of his strategy to place upon any girl, and particularly the pretty little blue girl, the stigma of man chaser. Silly of him to have thought of that story as an explanation of his spying.

Verrold laughed knowingly, and maddeningly, and poked a confidential finger toward Reg's indignantly withdrawing side. "Ah, you gallant philanderer! Wouldn't put a lady in wrong under any circumstances, Sir Walter Raleigh. Eh?"

"You're wrong," insisted Reg desperately. "She isn't there at all."

"No, of course not," Verrold said, and winked a facetiously wicked eye. It was a brown eye, and Verrold never knew how close it was to changing its hue at that mo-

ment. But Reg controlled his hardening fist and a tendency to froth at the mouth.

"A sacred secret, Frank," he said, his eyes boring with intensity at the smirking bridegroom. "Sworn on your wife's wedding ring, and so on. You must tell no one —no one at all — whatsoever. It would mean bad luck—and on your wedding day!"

Verrold blinked a bit at Reg's deadly seriousness, but his inquiring eyes could find no humor in the other man's grim countenance. Bad luck is not to be sniffed at in either matrimony or Wall Street, and Reg's voice had somehow conveyed the idea to Verrold's giddy brain that he dispensed luck on wedding days as another man dispenses drinks.

"I'll help you duck her, Reg," he assured the strategist solemnly. "I'll keep mum and save you from her clutching claws."

"It's a go," said Reg helplessly. Pretending to take this super-ass into his confidence seemed the only way to save the little blue girl's character from wreckage on the rocks of slander.

Verrold screwed up his eye again, and swung around the corner. As he paced up the deck, Reg stepped out of concealment and gazed after him with annihilation wistfully glowing in his eyes. That was the man who had got him into this mess—that! What right had a he-thing like that to refer to the innocent little blue girl's slender hands as clutching claws?

"Fatuous fathead!" he growled. His wrathful eyes did not leave Verrold until the plump bridegroom had disappeared through the companionway. Then they wandered, with a softening expression, toward the girl in the steamer chair. Her own large, wondering eyes were upon him —had been upon him, apparently, for some time.

Reg Arthwright turned back, walked athwart ship, and strolled disconsolately sternward as far as he could. Leaning over the rail, he watched with yearning eyes the skyscrapers of New York shrink into utter nothingness.

To think that he could slander so vilely a girl like that! What if she heard of it! And what if she heard of that other grisly thing—the reason why he was here on this boat. He groaned whole-heartedly.

"What a putrid voyage this is going to be!" he remarked to the white, hissing

wake of the Americ. And the foaming water did not rise up and impugn his gift of prophecy.

VI

"CONFIDENTIALLY," Reg admitted, some two days later, in the conspiratorial murmur that had, most hatefully, become his usual tone, "I must say that you have fathomed much — displayed a remarkable deductive sense; but you must not go on, and you must not ask me to explain. Let's just forget it all, Jean, and enjoy ourselves, please."

He was speaking, or whispering, rather, to the little blue girl, and his head was close to her head, and his elbow touched her elbow, as they stood at the side of the promenade deck.

A glorious sun bathed them; the salt air, with just a hint of bite, filled their lungs with freshness, and beneath them tiny bits of brown seaweed, the sign of the Grand Banks, brought out the blue of the water and the white of the foam.

Nevertheless, Reg Arthwright was not happy. The way of the transgressor is hard, but the way of the hardened transgressor is very much softer than that of the amateur in perfidy.

Not even when he watched the beautiful mysterious play of the sun in her halo of hair, the straightness and whiteness of her little nose, with its entrancing and undeniable lone freckle just above the right nostril, or let himself sink, fathom after fathom, into the vast depths of her sea blue eyes—not even when he did these things, was he happy.

Before the girl could reply to his plea, a heavy hand fell on Reg's shoulder.

"What is it?" he demanded irritably, turning to behold the broad, smiling, yet somehow significant face of Verrold.

"Pardon me for interrupting, old chap, but I just saw your steward taking a radio message to your room."

"Thanks," said Reg, with inward fury. He turned back to the rail.

But Verrold lingered at his elbow—the elbow that had been touching Jean Crosbie's elbow so companionably.

"Thought it might be something important," he said, amiably. "I'm going below, myself. Coming?"

"I'll get it later," Reg growled over his shoulder. "Much obliged."

"All right," Verrold responded. He

hesitated, and Reg, although his head was turned one hundred and eighty degrees from him, felt that he was still there.

"Much obliged," said he, again, with finality, and as decisively as a man could speak.

"See you later, then," Verrold replied with unshaken friendliness, and passed on.

"There! You see! I know!" said the girl, with triumph.

"Don't talk in that enigmatic way—please, Jean," he begged, humbly. "It reminds me of a girl who—ugh! What is it you know?"

The girl's blue eyes dwelt upon his firmly.

"I know that you are on the track of that horrible, oily man, and he is horrible, and oily, even if his wife is sweet and did introduce you to me," she said emphatically, earnestly.

Reg warmed to this discerning little girl who could sense a man's character so surely, even though she was on the wobbly side about what constitutes sweetness in woman. But his swiftly increasing regard for her did not erase the half frown on his forehead as she pursued her topic.

"I saw him, that first day, peering around a corner to see if you were on board, and then he ducked back in a most peculiar way. A minute or so later he came around and walked down the deck, past my chair, and I saw you come out from behind the same corner, and you stared at him in such a stern, purposeful manner. You must have been behind him all the time, and you needn't deny it."

"Well," said Reg, haltingly. "Well, of course—as I said, you have a remarkably keen mind, but you mustn't think—think too much of these little things, Jean."

But Jean Crosbie merely pursed up her lips in a most alluring gesture of contemplation, and pursued her own individual train of reasoning.

"And since then he's been so attentive to you—almost like a servant, and you've been rude to him, as if you resented his attempts to ingratiate himself. Just while I've been with you during these two days, he's told you about five radio messages, asked you to make a fourth at bridge in the smokeroom three or four times, told you you really should go below and put on a heavier coat twice, and—oh, I can't think of all the things he's either done or tried to do for you."

Reg listened to this list of Verrold's services with grimly set teeth, but he did not speak. He had come to believe that on that bewitched ship he could not speak without enmeshing himself more and more in his own snares. And this at the very moment in his life when he most desired to be open, sincere, and winning!

"You—you have the goods on him!" she charged. "That's what detectives call it, isn't it?"

"Detectives?" repeated Reg, faintly. His brain was numb; weary of circumvolutions of deceit. It is quite simple to be mendacious ashore and escape, but on this tiny ship it was impossible to get away from the victims of a double-dealing tongue.

"Yes, detectives," said the girl, without wincing. "Of course, you may be a diplomatic agent or a secret service man, or something of that sort, instead of a regular detective, for when our town place was robbed the detectives who came weren't like you a bit. But it's detective work, anyhow, isn't it?"

Reg arose and shook himself, mentally. In the last forty-eight hours it had become more and more essential to his happiness—to his life, even—that not a breath of a suspicion that he had come along on another man's honeymoon should leak out. The very possibility that this sweet girl should ever even suspect his shameful secret curdled his brain.

The other consequences—the hurt to his honor, the pain of his family, the ribaldry of his friends—faded into pale lavender insignificance compared to what Jean Crosbie would think of him—how her tender eyes would survey him. He perspired internally. Obviously, he must lie on and on and on.

He raked his brain for a good, smashing crime of which Verrold looked capable. Should he make him a poisoner, a black-mailer, a kidnapaper, or—

"You must tell me *all* about it," whispered the girl, and moved a bit closer to him, confidentially.

VII

BUT, instead of exhilarating him, nerving him to a magnificent effort in duplicity, the words sobered him. *All* about it! That was a bit of a poser, for a man whose deceitfulness was suffering from overwork. And then again, if he told Jean that this

fellow had poisoned a mothers' meeting; blackmailed an aged spinster; or stolen the only triplets a poor family ever hoped to have, she would want to know why he was merely shadowing so openly, and not arresting him.

"I cannot tell," he said, mournfully. "I cannot." It was the bare truth, and the telling of truth to Jean was a real relief.

She drew a deep breath and shuddered delightfully. He saw that the mystery of the thing was more pleasing to her than plain facts. That suited him, too. But the next moment she turned to him an alarmed, faintly reproving countenance.

"But he is fawning on you—tempting you," she said. "You mustn't let him—"

"Put anything over on me?" he suggested. His face grew savage as he thought of the number of times Verrold had interfered with his *tête-à-têtes*. "Don't worry," he said with convincing determination. "I can't be had—not by him."

"He isn't trying to—to—bribe you?" she asked fearfully, hesitating over the word.

"Not all the money in the world would make me ease up on him," he assured her. His voice was fervent, compelling. "Or on his wife, either," he added, and now his tone was positively vindictive.

"Why, I thought *she* was rather nice," the girl said, in a tone of surprise.

"You don't know her as I do," he replied, and was silent, brooding.

Her hand on his coat sleeve aroused him.

"I will help you," she murmured. "What must you do on this voyage? Just watch him?"

That hardly sounded adequate to Reg, somehow.

"I must get the evidence—the blue envelope," he muttered hoarsely, and then felt like kicking himself.

Confound it all; here he was, lying concretely again! Why could he not prevaricate in the abstract? Even before he spoke, he knew that that nonexistent blue envelope would get him into more trouble.

"The blue envelope!" she repeated, contentedly. "But if that's the evidence against him, won't he destroy it?"

"He cannot," he replied, miserably. "If he burns that, the game is up; if he doesn't—" He paused. "Well, the blackguard runs the risk of my getting hold of it; that's all."

"I should say that was enough," said

the girl, and her eyes surveyed him admiringly. Then her tone became businesslike. "But you must let me help you get it. Have you searched his trunk—and hers?"

Reg Arthwright started violently—almost indignantly. "Searched—" He recovered in time. "Not yet," he answered. "This has been a game of wits, so far."

"Well, leave the trunks to me," she said, briskly. "You accept one of his invitations to make a fourth at bridge, when both he and his wife are in the game, and I'll—"

Reg gasped, and stared wide eyed at this innocent looking young creature who spoke so purposefully. Her deep blue eyes were shining with zeal and coöperation.

"I say, you mustn't do anything like that," he remonstrated. Visions of his little Jean in the ship's brig, or whatever it was they confined ship thieves in, arose in horrible plainness before his eyes. "This is a delicate matter—exceedingly delicate. You must promise to take no steps whatever." But he saw her mouth erase its little curves, and become straight; and her lips tightened. "Until I give the word," he added quickly.

"All right," she said. "I'll agree to that, unless I see that you're trying to keep me out of it. Then—" She did not complete the sentence. It was not necessary.

"Good-by!" she said suddenly, and flitted away from him, leaving a large, aching vacuum by his side. He straightened up, gazed disconsolately after her, and finally strolled aimlessly forward. His brain ached. He descended to the next deck, and continued to wander. He had acquired a habit of mooning about alone which had been quite foreign to his nature before Marcia came into his life. His dislike of Verrold was paling before his feeling toward the woman who had got him into this mess.

Reg found himself up in the bows, gazing over the lee rail, and watching the stem of the ship send a slim spray of water in a graceful curve upward and backward. The sides of the ship, following close behind the cutwater, broke the blue depths into shallow, hissing foam. It was white on the surface and light green below. This foam was repelled as the ship lunged forward in waves that leaped optimistically over their unbroken fellows to port and starboard. A rainbow, delicate, fading and strengthening, kept pace with the bows.

What a place to bring a girl—Jean—and

talk to her about things not even remotely connected with intrigue, while the endless, fascinating beauties of the water banished time from her mind. And here he had well-nigh exhausted his quota of companionship with Jean that day blithering about a hypothetical blue envelope.

VIII

"HELLO, Reg! Mind if I join you?"

Reg Arthwright looked up. It was Marcia, smiling prettily. He moaned, but the murmur of the water made it a private moan, and unheard.

"People are beginning to suspect that we are honeymooners, so I've turned Francis into the smoke room and come up here to be flirted with," she said cheerfully. "It's quite the most public place in the ship, as far as being seen is concerned."

"That's always an advantage, of course," he agreed. "And is Francis a victim or conspirator in this plot?"

"Well, I hope, a victim," she said, after a thoughtful pause. She came and stood, back to the rail, and regarded him attentively. "Do you know, I believe you were right in saying that Francis is really a bit jealous."

Reg Arthwright stirred uneasily. The statement would have given him joy two days before, but now he regarded it suspiciously, as an omen of still more devious complications.

"It is always a pleasure to be considered right," he alleged, without conviction.

"I think he is quite jealous of you, although he shows it in the most peculiar way." She puckered her brow to review the situation, and Reg Arthwright eyed her warily. He was sure now that he was right. More trouble was ahead.

"He isn't in the least angry with me, or anything like that, but do you notice how he pretends to be having a mild affair with that little Crosbie girl? He is always leaving me and dashing up when you and she are having a good time, and interrupting in the most obvious sort of way. And I've seen him waylay her when she seems lonely and is strolling about looking for you."

"Yes?" said Reg Arthwright. It seemed a safe sort of thing to say. With great difficulty he concealed the delight that her last few words had given him. Jean looking for him!

"Well, of course his attention to her is all done to impress me," Marcia went on.

"You know, he thinks I'm a bit too friendly with you, and is trying indirectly and gently to impress that fact upon me by pretending an interest in that girl. It's very ancient strategy, of course, but Francis probably doesn't know that."

Reg Arthwright could have undeceived her as to Verrold's motives, but he never gave that line of action a thought. Deeply engraven in his consciousness was the fact that this beautiful young woman with the ghastly sense of humor, who had lured him into joining her own honeymoon trip, was a person against whom to be on his guard. If a girl took pleasure in the number of scalps of hapless victims like himself, acquired before marriage, how much greater a trophy would be the skull covering of a young man so hopelessly bowled over that he followed her under such circumstances as the present?

Undoubtedly she was still angling for the truth. Give her the least opportunity of claiming that scalp, and she would let all the world know about it for her own glorification. What mattered it to her that the young man in question was fighting for his hair, and his honor, and his unattached heart, that he might lay all these things at the feet of a little girl whose blue eyes were certainly transplanted bits of Heaven's own sky? No, he must be wary—very, very wary. He maintained a cautious silence.

"But, of course, I'm not going to let the silly old thing succeed in his artfulness," Marcia Verrold confided briskly. "What I'm going to do is counter by being more taken with you than ever." She looked up, brightly, expectantly, and then, as Reg continued speechless, she added, with a tinge of pettiness in her voice:

"I must congratulate you upon the strong way in which you manage to restrain your enthusiasm."

"No, no!" he said hastily. "I—I wasn't thinking of myself and—ah—the delight that would accrue to me from your course—but of you—and your happiness." His brow became furrowed with thoughtful wrinkles, his voice resonant with conviction, and his manner oracular. "Any little misunderstanding now, in this early period of the married state, is serious, not because of its present friction, rift in the lute, and that sort of thing, but because of its future consequences. Doubt now may become danger and difficulty later and—"

Marcia stopped his accelerating oratori-

cal efforts with a trill of laughter. "You really should call yourself Helen Heartthrob, and write for a newspaper," she assured him. "But you cannot prevent me from admiring you in public if I want to, and I do—for my own reasons."

"Look here, it would really be much better for you to keep your husband in close tow, so he can't break in on me and Miss Crosbie," Reg assured her eagerly. "It's—it's the thing to do on a wedding trip, you know."

"Poppycock!" sharply retorted the bride. "You've been reading the Victorian spinster novelists. The only way to keep a man's heart is to hang it on the tenter-hooks."

"I warn you," Reg replied with magnificent solemnity. "A man in love isn't a thinking creature; he's an emotional automaton—he acts in response to his feelings, not to the promptings of his brains. Have you forgotten that he must have heard me say to you, 'I'll be there!' that night on the lawn? Do you doubt that he is beginning to wonder what that meant, now that he has had time to speculate on why I took this boat without telling any of my friends? Suppose he gets the idea that you are encouraging me to chase you around—as indeed you did?"

"I'll chance it!" she said, daringly. "If he really wants to trot around with that little Crosbie girl, I'll let him. Sorry to interfere with your own mad pursuit of her, of course, but it must be done."

Reg surveyed this heartless creature with cold eyes. She smiled back at him most winningly.

"If that is the attitude you intend to take," he said, severely, as he removed his cap most formally, "you will pardon me if I withdraw."

He replaced his cap and stalked aft. Two steps—three steps, he made, and then, most unexpectedly, a small hand inserted itself affectionately under his arm. The soft voice of Marcia murmured into his ear, "I'll withdraw with you, then."

He glanced around indignantly at this clinging creature who tripped along so close to him, but the full force of his moral wrath remained in suspension. For the corner of his eye, as he had turned his head, had recorded a dismaying, almost paralyzing vision on the promenade deck above them.

He looked again, to make sure that his eyes had not gone back on him, like every-

thing else. Upon the exact center of his retina was impaled the burning, slightly bulbous stare of Francis Verrold. Beside the agitated husband who leaned so recklessly over the rail to regard him, and the bride adhering so devotedly to him, was Jean Crosbie.

"You've done it now," Reg muttered, bitterly, and with deep conviction.

"I hope so," Marcia answered with quick acerbity. "He's with that—that girl you've been chasing so frantically, again."

IX

IN the sanctity of his bolted cabin, one night about the time that the Americ passed over the depths known as the mid-Atlantic, Reg sat in the single chair provided by the company, with a suit case on his lap, busily writing:

1. Marcia V. thinks I am pursuing Jean.
2. Francis Verrold thinks Jean is pursuing me.
3. Jean thinks I am pursuing Francis Verrold.

He regarded without any pleasure this statement of his situation.

So he picked up his pen again, and went on writing:

1. If I tell Marcia the truth she'll blazon forth my imbecility in going on her honeymoon.
2. If I tell Verrold the truth he'll bleat to Marcia, and Marcia will blazon, as above, and also tell Jean I said she was pursuing me.
3. If I tell Jean the truth she'll put me down as a particularly poisonous ass.

With mounting despair he gazed upon this effort at unscrambling the omelet, and moaned aloud. And, as he moaned, a loud and vigorous *rat-a-tat-tat* sounded upon his locked door.

He leaped nimbly to his feet, shoved his problem into the suit case, and slid the bolt. The opening door revealed the glowering countenance of Francis Verrold.

"I'll come in," said Verrold decisively, and did so. The cabin appeared to shrink as his big form entered, and he stood, not two feet from his surprised host.

"Look here, Arthwright," he said abruptly. "It's time for you and me to have a talk, and we'll have it, as soon as you shut that door."

Reg shut it, and drew the bolt. Verrold plunged into his subject without delay.

"The mere fact that a girl is sufficiently light-headed to follow you on board this ship is no reason why you should discourage her by associating freely, and much too fre-

quently, with another man's wife," the bridegroom blurted out, scowling at his host under somber and threatening brows.

With some difficulty the frantic Reg restrained himself from advising the worried benedict to take his wife to Tophet with him, and to cease from blackening the fair name of a sweet and gentle lady.

"It isn't my fault if Marcia finds pleasure in my society," he retorted vehemently, and instantly realized that he had said something worse than the remark he had set aside from gentlemanly compunction.

"What!" rumbled Francis Verrold. "Why, you—you—do you mean to infer—" He raised his fist, but let it drop helplessly, for there was no strength in it. He gasped for breath, turned and staggered to the door. His fingers fumbled at the bolt, and he lifted his feet over the sill.

Turning, he stood for a moment in the doorway, his mouth opening and shutting in a manner that to Reg's fascinated eyes seemed quite fishlike. "Take warning!" he muttered thickly. "Take warning!" He turned around and walked slowly, almost feebly, up the passage.

Reg closed the door. He felt almost as stunned — as weak — as Verrold. For the second time on that voyage he, who had thought himself a gentleman, had traduced the name of a lady, for Marcia Verrold, despite her obvious defects, was a lady. Further, he had planted seeds of doubt in the mind of a bridegroom, for he felt sure that the spontaneous nature of his remark would breed conviction of its truth in Verrold's mind, once he subdued his emotion.

"There's something wrong with me—something quite wrong," Reg cogitated. "I'm becoming a blackguard—a blighter—a slanderer of women — right before my own eyes."

From this frightful picture he fled out of his cabin, as soon as Verrold's slow footfalls had died away, to the public rooms, in search of relief, and Jean.

He found one, but not the other. On the windy side of the promenade deck he came face to face with the girl he sought, as she stepped briskly along on one of her usual solitary walks.

"Hello!" he greeted her hopefully. "I've been looking for you everywhere, Jean. Why, what's the matter?"

His tone had changed as he beheld her pretty face surveying him with eyes at once reproachful and angry.

She glanced behind her, to make sure no one was near, then looked into his face squarely again. Her voice, cold as the water that whispered and hissed along the side of the boat, reached him faintly:

"I am not spying on you, Mr. Arthwright, but I could not help seeing the man you are supposed to be watching enter your cabin. And I could not help hearing you bolt the cabin door, either."

"But, Jean—" he protested. She shook her head.

"Do you deny you were inside?" she inquired.

He was silent, formulating a reply that would not harm his meshwork of duplicity, and yet would free him from this latest strand that wrapped itself, like the tentacle of an octopus, around him.

"You cannot," she accused. "You are toying with temptation."

"May I not—" He stopped himself, this time.

"Have you told me the whole truth, Reg Arthwright?" she demanded. He stirred uneasily.

"You haven't!" she whispered, and he thought there was disappointment, even dismay, in her voice. He raised his hand appealingly, but she shook her head with resolution.

"When you have taken your first step toward getting the blue envelope, you may speak to me again," she said, and resumed her walk with a serenity that seemed quite convincing to him. He watched her round a corner, walking with firm, implacable step.

He plunged below. "I've had enough," he told himself. "A girl who believes I'm a double crosser, isn't worth thinking about."

But an instant later he answered that thought. "Keep right on talking, you scoundalmonger," he mused. "You know jolly well you'd be pipped on her if she thought you were a mangy pickpocket."

He went to bed quite convinced that nothing but an extremely catastrophic marine disaster would give him an opportunity to right himself in her eyes. And very likely, he thought, if the *Americ* was wrecked, she would discover him hiding under a pile of women and children in the first boat to be launched.

It was not that he doubted his own courage, for he had had to display a bit once or twice; but, as he bounced around in his

berth that night, he felt quite sure that some coil of his own maze of duplicity would make a coward of him in her eyes, as it had already made him a sleuth who was also a crook.

X

THERE was nothing in the next two or three days to modify this dark opinion of his fortune. He spent ninety-five per cent of his time in the smoke room, whither Marcia could not pursue him, in devising explanations, and five per cent in making swift raids upon Jean Crosbie, to try out the explanations.

But she was indomitably severe and unchanging in her response to his words, whether they were glib with guile or halting with something that approached sincerity, although not truth. Nothing but the production of the blue envelope that did not exist would restore him to a position of trust and esteem with her, together, of course, with a complete explanation of the various crimes committed by the fiendish Francis Verrold.

And he hesitated to pursue the obvious course of deception and dig up a blue envelope somewhere. Though everything was black, indeed, some stubborn instinct told him that things conceivably might be even worse. If he could stick out the voyage and get Jean Crosbie far enough away from the Verrolds, then he could devise some lie sufficiently potent to restore him to her confidence.

He derived a faint, almost impalpable satisfaction from the fact that he had at least been able to defeat Marcia in her wrong-headed efforts to use him as an instrument for her silly revenge on Verrold. Perhaps Marcia would fall back on her husband, he thought, now that he himself could no longer be flirted with so obviously.

Dismally he peered out of one of the port windows of the smoke room on an afternoon when a blanket of fog shrouded the sea, and set the passengers talking of the nearness of England. There was no use meditating a dash out upon Jean as she came around the corner, for she was accompanied by another girl—a wide-smiling, dark, detestable creature, whose existence proved conclusively to Reg's disconsolate mind that the universe was the product of chaos, and not an ordered creation at all.

Finally the two girls ceased to swing by his prison window, but he continued moodi-

ly to peer out at the gray fog and grayer sea. Ten minutes passed thus.

Through the heavy glass he caught the sound of quick steps approaching, and he waited without hope. The next instant he was staring through the heavy glass, full into the agitated countenance of Jean Crosbie. She beckoned to him imperatively, and the next instant had vanished sternward from his view.

Reg Arthwright blinked. Then he bolted for the door. Vision or not, when Jean Crosbie beckoned, he came. In the narrow thwartship passage at the end of the deck he found her. She was clad in a long gray raincoat, and the mist had put tiny sparklets in the wisps of hair that escaped from under her hat.

"What's—" he began; but she seized his hand and whisked him around the corner and forward on the other side of the boat to the gymnasium door. At her command he opened it, and they put their heads in together. It was empty, as usual.

"Look!" she said breathlessly, and drew forth from the raincoat a big blue envelope, bulky with contents.

Reg looked—looked long without speaking. She had committed larceny! Why had he not said green envelope, pink envelope, mauve envelope? Why should such an accursed coincidence as this superimpose itself on his already overpowering burden? The girl became impatient at this peculiar delay.

"Don't you want it?" she asked. "It's the blue envelope."

"So it is," said Reg slowly, and took it. The thing weighed enough to contain passports, letters of credit, travelers' checks—all the necessary valuables a traveler must carry.

"I couldn't h-have you fail in your duty, s-so I've taken the law into my own hands," she confessed, in a rather small voice. "I checked some valuables of my own at the purser's office, and made the purser talk a little about the queer things people gave him to put in the safe. Just on the chance, I asked him if any one had given him a blue envelope, and he said they hadn't."

She paused, to receive some word of commendation from him, but he did not speak. "So I trailed Mr. and Mrs. Verrold. I saw them go into the lounge, and those two old ladies who prowl about looking for bridge players seized on them. I waited until they were actually playing, and then

skipped down to their cabin. It's a big one on the port side, about amidships, on the deck below this."

Reg nodded like a mechanical doll.

"I had a lot of good luck. The door wasn't locked, and I slipped in without any one seeing me. I'm sure of that. And then I hunted and hunted and hunted. I'm afraid I made rather a mess."

"Yes?" muttered Reg, unhappily.

"But finally I found it." She smiled proudly. "It was in one of the wardrobes, between the bottom of the lower drawer and the deck. Wasn't that a good place for a—a—whatever he is—to hide the incriminating evidence?"

"It is a very good place," Reg admitted dizzily.

"The only thing is," she said, frowning a little, "I'm sure a stateroom steward caught a glimpse of me just after I'd come out of the cabin."

"He did!" he muttered. He looked hastily down at the fat, red sealed envelope to conceal his panic-stricken face. "You—you don't know what this means to me, Jean."

"But I hope to," she said, a bit pink under his praise.

"I—I'll have to tell you—something," he agreed. Rather hastily he looked at his watch. "But not now," he added. "I'll be busy for some time now—you understand how it is?"

"Yes, of course," said the girl.

"I'll thank you later," he assured her, and dashed for the door.

"Ten minutes to six!" he muttered, as he sprinted for the stairs. He stuffed the infernal blue envelope into his inner coat pocket as he ran. "Any moment now that game will be breaking up."

His frantic gallop took him to the Verrold's stateroom door before the need for caution caught up with him, and impressed itself on his addled mind. He paused in the short corridor, with his hand on the doorknob, and listened, but he could hear no signs of pursuit. Next instant he plunged into the cabin.

It was empty. He whizzed across the disordered room, fell on his knee, jerked out the lower drawer of one of the wardrobes, and deposited his blue liability in the recess beneath. Then he sat on the floor, breathing heavily, but quite pleased with himself. Their room must be set to rights, then all would be—not well—but better.

The sounds of staccato heel taps, somewhere near, roused him to the fact that peril was not past for himself, if he had succeeded in averting it as far as Jean personally was concerned.

"I've got to get out of here with speed," he decided, listening for the noise to die away.

XI

THE next instant he was scrambling swiftly to his feet. The footsteps had not died away; they had become louder. He glanced madly about for a hiding place; and while he hesitated, the door opened. His glassy eyes rested upon Marcia Verrold's face.

The girl's expression wavered between surprise and fear.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, tensely.

"L-looking for Verrold," he muttered unconvincingly. "Have you seen him anywhere about?"

She glanced around the room, slowly taking in the rifled drawers, the mattresses and blankets askew in the berths, and the clothes scattered on the floor beside yawning wardrobe doors. "You seem to be making a thorough job of it," she remarked coldly. "Do you think he might be under the carpet?"

He approached her.

"Marcia, I've got to get out of here," he said earnestly. "I'll explain later, but don't you see that if Verrold should come now—his jealousy would put you—"

The words froze in his throat. Again, from outside, came the sound of steps—heavier, thudding footfalls, this time. And again the door opened, and the worst that Reg feared had happened.

Verrold's momentum carried him into the room and a step or two from the door, before he saw and realized what he saw. He made a strangled noise in his throat, and turned from Reg Arthwright to his wife.

"What—how—" he blazed at her, and made a motion toward the intruder.

Reg drew a long, deep breath. His mind leaped over the situation. It had to be. Better ruin for him, since he deserved it, than ruin for her and misery for that chump Verrold. There was a limit of infamy beyond which he would not go. He smiled, cynically, and felt vaguely for his cigarette case.

"Right-o!" he said, with easy wicked-

ness. "You've nabbed me—both of you. I congratulate you. But I've taken nothing—not a cent. And you'd have a jolly bad time of it trying to convict me!"

This statement, instead of relieving Verrold's emotion, appeared to augment it. His mouth sagged open. Reg, stealing a quick glance at Marcia under lowered eyelids, found that she, too, was obviously taken aback.

And while there was silence, the door that had twice opened to Reg's confusion, opened again, and Jean Crosbie stood surveying the tableau with her lovely blue eyes.

"Oh!" she faltered. "So this is the man whom I believed in—trusted—" Her voice broke.

But Reg was not looking at Jean, which was a strange thing, indeed. His own keen eyes, still veiled by his lowered lids, were on Verrold's countenance, studying it intently, line by line, dissecting the queer expression that had something besides wild rage in it as Verrold looked at his wife. What was that hidden something—was it—could it be a plea for instructions? Was it conspiracy?

Reg Arthwright laughed again—and now there was tolerant amusement in his voice. The tone of it drew Verrold's eyes toward him, and although the man's face remained stubbornly a fairly convincing mask of astonished anger, the eyes were nervous—apprehensive, almost.

"You—you—you—a thief!" exclaimed Marcia quickly. "Good Heaven! And we—" Her voice quavered and died.

"Excellently well done, Marcia!" Reg applauded. "Your acting is perfect, even in an emergency such as my unexpected assumption of the rôle of gentleman thief. But I think I may say, without the loss of too much modesty, that my own acting of the difficult part of the dupe wasn't bad. Remember, I had three people to fool, and you each had only one."

He paused to regard them with a smile he struggled hard to make genuine and happy.

"Verrold wasn't at all bad as the heavy husband, although he's no actor. Jean, in the part of the credulous eager girl, was handicapped by the fact that it was too close to her own character to give her scope for acting."

He turned his back upon the silent trio to walk over to the wardrobe and unearth the blue envelope. His hand quivered as

he touched it, but he was determined to play out his hunch.

"This is past its usefulness, I believe," he said urbanely, and with a sudden exertion tore the accursed thing in half, and again and again. Yet, with all his outward confidence, he breathed more freely when no roar of protest came from Verrold. He had destroyed no valuables, then. He dropped the shreds into the wastebasket, and caught a glimpse of blank white paper beneath the blue envelope.

"You knew all along!" Marcia exclaimed. She strove to conceal her chagrin, but her smile was wider than it was happy.

Reg flirted a knowing hand. "Far be it from me to interfere with a bit of a spoof on a dull voyage," he said. "Besides, you know, I'm not sure I wasn't getting more entertainment out of it than you three."

"You were." Jean spoke suddenly, as if she were easing her mind of a burden. "When Marcia and I discovered on the first day that we belonged to the same sorority, though at different colleges, I thought this plan of hers was a splendid way of taking down a young man who had boasted that I was following him around."

"Ah—er—I told Marcia what you had told me about the girl in blue, old man," Verrold broke in uneasily.

Reg nodded cordially. "You would," he said, quite affably. His attention was so keenly riveted on Jean that the girl, catching his eye, looked down and brought her explanation to an abrupt halt.

"But—as it went on—it seemed rather mean, so I—I'm glad it's over."

"I am, too," he agreed. "It seemed quite a lark at first to give Marcia and Verrold, here, diametrically opposed reasons for my presence on the *America*, but lately I've had nothing but a headache from it—the complications, acting, and so forth."

"Why did you sail on the *America*, then?" demanded Marcia, and Reg's serenity almost cracked as he perceived the icy glitter just visible in her narrowed eyes.

His pause was barely perceptible. "Rather a stodgy reason, I'm afraid," he said apologetically. "I'm going over to face the pater, and tell him definitely that I decline to spend the summer trotting around the Continent with him. He must give me a post in the Newark works, or I'll pop off and get one on my own. I must be firm with the man—firm."

"You must let us know when you've suc-

ceeded in landing a job," said Marcia, cordially; but the optical frigidity was still there, beneath the long dark lashes. "Otherwise," she added meaningfully, "I'll be tempted to attribute your trip to—another reason."

"I'll write," Reg assured her hastily. He sternly suppressed a groan as he thought of Newark. "Well, I must duck out now. Coming, Jean?"

His head was turned from Verrold's, and there was frank, humble appeal in his eyes. Jean decided she was ready to go. Reg smiled cheerily at the composed Marcia and the glum Verrold, and opened the door. He left with colors flying, and they knew it.

Outside the cabin, Reg tucked Jean's hand gently under his arm and led her swiftly and without words up to the boat deck. In a little space between two life-boats he halted abruptly and turned to her.

"Look here," he said. "I want to admit that I hadn't the least idea that all this was a game until you entered that stateroom half a moment ago."

"Yes?" said Jean, encouragingly. "I rather suspected that, and I think you did splendidly, Reg."

He went pink, and then, as thoughts thrust themselves on him, almost green. Desperately he gritted his teeth and went on with his story:

"And I came on board to rush Marcia, and meanly annoy Verrold because I don't like his face, his—well, never mind that. And I found myself on their honeymoon, and—and that started things."

Jean nodded gravely. "There were reasons why I thought something like that was the true state of affairs," she murmured.

"In fact," he burst out, violently, "I must confess that every word I've spoken on his boat has been an infernal lie."

"Really?" she asked. "Then you have deceived me, Reg, for I believed implicitly what you said about the position you had in mind in Newark."

"That's true," he said, with desperate calm. "After all, if a man is going to settle down, he—he has to go in for that sort of thing. But what I want to do, Jean, is to start fresh from this longitude on, because I've a lot of things to say to you."

"All right, Reg," she agreed demurely. "I'll believe you, provided you don't start too—too fresh."

BALLADE OF AUTUMN

FOR some the autumn is indeed the fall—
As leaf by leaf by leaf, summer's rich cloak
Flutters to earth—and so full time to haul
Down, and resignedly, one's colors; choke
Back sighs that warmth must end, and meet the stroke
Winter prepares, never remembering
That, as there's fire still purring where there's smoke,
Autumn can be as ardent as young Spring.

Unfortunate are such. The Indian shawl
Of woodlands, moccasins of field, provoke
Flashes of praise, perhaps, but zest how small
Measured by theirs whose eye and mind's eye yoke
This land from Kennebec to Roanoke,
And far beyond, with life gay as the wing
Of a flamingo on a dead live-oak.
Autumn can be as ardent as young Spring!

As ardent—yes? But seldom, if at all,
Moving as spring is. Charming fun to poke
At one who lives on dreams when facts appall.
Surely, a sweet, kind rainbow-tinted joke
To brighten what goes gray, to make burned coke
Believe itself a crock of gold, something
Desirable, rare, fit to glow, not croak,
"Autumn can be as ardent as young Spring."

ENVOI

Princess who found me sleeping and who woke
Me to a dream too fine, made me seem king,
Were you not, spring-crowned, dreaming when you spoke?
Autumn can be as ardent as young Spring?

Richard Butler Glaenzer

Cinderella in Autumn

THIS LITTLE OLD LADY WAS UNDISMAYED BY THE MANNERS
OF OUR PRESENT GENERATION

By Elizabeth Burgess Hughes

"I HAVEN'T time to bother with every little detail of the house," complained Lillia. "Ask Mother Gesley. She has time to burn, and nothing in the world to do. I'm off."

"You usually are. Whither away this time?" her husband inquired.

"Luncheon and bridge—at Madeline Thomas's house. 'By.'

"Seems to me you gad a lot."

"Gad! Where'd this family be, socially, I wonder, if I didn't go about? I've got to put us on the map if we're to be on it at all. You and your family 'd never do it. Look at Mother Gesley, a regular Georgia—what do they call it?—Georgia 'cracker.' She's never helped you in a social way—or any other."

"Well, I reckon she couldn't—much. She was always so poor."

"And so—so unambitious for you! All she wants is to stay at home and potter about. No wonder," exasperatedly, "you're so stupid at times! I've got to hurry—"

"I guess you aren't overly fond of mother."

"What an idea! I like her all right enough, but she's no asset to us socially—you must know that. Right here, while I'm straining every nerve to get in with the Montgomery crowd, she says 'ain't,' and asks personal questions and dresses queer. If only she was like Betty Montgomery's mother!"

"Why, the Montgomeys are simply wallowing in money. That white-haired dame who looks like a duchess or something never had to do a lick of hard work since the day she was born. Mother brought up her children without any help, and she never had a servant in her life."

"S-s-sh! Don't talk so loud—the new maid 'll hear you. Well, look how she

brought you two boys up! Neither of you with any idea of how to act in society."

"Oh, come now, honey—don't I do pretty well?"

"You had to pick it up. You don't owe any manners to *her*. She does the most awful things—reads letters over one's shoulder, and reaches across the table for things."

"I guess you notice things more'n most."

Lillia tucked her hair prettily under her hat. "My friends notice, too. But you will have her here."

"She has nowhere else to go, dear."

"And you without a cent to spare! The fight I have on my hands just to keep up appearances!"

"I'm sorry."

"That doesn't help much."

Mrs. Gesley, Jr., walked out, slamming the door smartly behind her.

II

DAVID stood looking after her with rather a helpless expression—a big, foolish, blundering man hopelessly in love with his wife—looking at the door that had closed between Lillia and him.

"She gone?" anxiously inquired a small piping voice. A little old lady in a starched gray print frock, with a ruffled white apron tied about her waist, peered round the open door of her room.

David jerked his thoughts back.

"Yes—to a bridge party. She thought you might sort of oversee that new maid about dinner—I mean, just tell her where things are."

"I'm afraid of her."

"Afraid of her—a servant?"

"Well, she's so proper 'n' everything. She calls me 'moddom.' If I try to talk pleasant and confidential to her, she raises

her eyebrows and sort of looks through me. Makes me nervous."

"You mustn't get confidential with the servants, mother. Give them their orders, and let it rest at that."

"I reckon you're right," she admitted reluctantly. "But I always was sort of sociable."

She thought him a miracle of perfection, this big, slow, awkward man, who obviously didn't want to hurt her feelings, yet felt that he must see his wife's side of the question, too.

"Don't you get fussed, mother; just keep a level head. Lillia's got the social bug, and neither of us quite fit into her new sphere, but we'll just do the best we can, and try not to feel neglected."

"Sure, lamb." She patted his arm. "She's a snippy little brat, but she means well, I guess."

"Why, you mustn't speak of her like that! It isn't respectful, exactly, to call your offspring's wife all that."

"She don't aggravate me half as much as she thinks she does," observed Grandma Gesley, chuckling. "I shut my ears to her—I learned to do that a long time ago. Tim Brash taught me to."

"Tim Brash! In one way or another, he seems to have impressed you quite a bit."

"He did. He was a fine fellow. I liked him. I was just on the point of encouraging him, when your pa came along. Now, your pa, he used to have gloomy fits; but Tim never did. Cheerful as a thrush. Good, sound common sense, too."

"What became of him?"

"He went off up North somewhere. Sort of lost track of him. But I ain't never forgot the calm way Timmy took everything. 'We ain't got but one life,' he used to say, 'so why not make the best of it?' He never did get down-hearted. I remember one time—"

"Well, you just keep his philosophy in mind. Don't worry about anything. A stiff upper lip's what you need."

"And a stiff backbone and some of Tim's good horse sense, too, in *this* house. I better see about your dinner, honey."

David confided: "I'd like roast pork or—or something. Lillia's cooks seem partial to these eternal French messes—creamed this or that, and *à la* so and so; they don't appear to have much substance. Liver and onions, now—"

"I'll cook 'em for you, son."

"No, you can't do that. The new maid—"

"Well, that's so. She'd raise Cain, like as not. I'm going to tell her what you want, anyway."

She went into the kitchen. The trim maid in uniform was opening a tin can of something or other.

"Mr. Gesley thinks he might relish liver," began grandma. "Fried liver with onions."

"I beg your pardon?" Two sharply defined brows went up into crescents.

"I said liver and onions—and no back talk out of you either, miss."

The brows ascended a trifle higher. Grandma Gesley held her ground.

"I reckon you heard me?"

"Yes, madam. Does Mrs. Gesley wish—"

"I don't give a whoop whether she does or not. My son craves some real victuals. He don't like this here *à la* stuff."

"No? But Mrs. Gesley is satisfied, isn't she?"

"I guess she is. If a thing looks stylish, it don't matter to her whether it's going to stick to your ribs or not."

The maid did not answer. Grandma, having primed herself for a fight, felt somewhat disappointed.

"He might relish roast pork."

"Yes, madam. But Mrs. Gesley thought creamed shrimps—"

"Creamed fiddlesticks! That's what my boy's tired of, creamed this and that. Party doodads! I reckon his wife likes 'em, but he wants something he can put his teeth into."

"Yes, madam."

There wasn't much one could say to that snippy brat, a graduate of some cooking school or other, like as not—a nice, trim white girl. The cooks people used to have were black, lazy, and good-natured. The world do move.

The one other servant, a housemaid, was making up Grandma Gesley's bed. It was a perfect job, so far as the human eye could see, but the minute she left the room the old lady jerked it apart and made it up again. It was not so much implied criticism as a stand for independence. She'd always made up her own bed, and made it up to suit her. Why let a stranger do it?

The house was quiet. Thank goodness for that. Half the time there were droves of chattering women playing cards in the

living room. "Bridge," they called it. In her day she'd have soundly thrashed any child of hers caught with a pack of playing cards in his possession. But with the years had come a certain measure of tolerance; nowadays, she reckoned, there wasn't any real harm in it, only it did seem to be an awful waste of time. Smoking cigarettes, too—and them pretending to be ladies! This had puzzled Grandma Gesley considerably, until she decided that as long as it was fashionable it must be decent, anyway, and she tried out one of Lillia's cigarettes.

Her son later found her lying helplessly across the bed—she who thought it shiftless to lie down in the daytime—too sick to lift a finger, and of a pale green color.

Her respect for her daughter-in-law arose, temporarily at any rate. There were, apparently, a few things that young married lady could do that *she* couldn't!

III

LILLIA returned home at six. There were creamed shrimps for dinner.

Grandma could not eat them. She could only sit and stare in gloomy reflection at her man child. She yearned to rush out to market and buy for him what he wanted, and cook it with her own hands, as she had done for so many years before either of them had ever heard of Lillia.

"She didn't pay one mite of attention to me," she thought resentfully of the cook. "Poor Dave!"

She made up her mind to speak to Lillia. She'd do it if it killed her.

"Davy—he thought he might relish pork roast for supper," she began.

"He'd relish it, probably—but he could not digest it. He should be careful of his diet. He isn't splitting rails for a living, you know. He's sitting at a desk in an office all day."

"He'll starve to death," prophesied Davy's mother morbidly.

"Oh, no, he won't! And it isn't supper, mother; it's *dinner*."

"Fiddlesticks!" muttered Grandma Gesley to herself. What matter what they called it, if her child was slowly starving?

She reveled in mental misery all day, sitting alone in her room. Davy's brother, now—if only he could take her. But they were positively poverty-stricken, he and Agnes. A small house, six children, and "table boarders." Also, the children ran wild and were impudent.

"Those young ones make me sick," the grandmother brooded pessimistically. She loved them, but they teased her within an inch of her life and liked to play practical jokes on her—such as offering to tie her shoe laces, and binding her neatly to the leg of the chair; hiding her spectacles; constantly shrieking in her ears.

Alas, she was so dependent! She hadn't any money of her own. Bitter was the bread of charity when it came from her son's wife.

Lillia was having a card party on Friday, and Grandma Gesley kept to her room. Lillia didn't want her fine friends to see what ordinary folks David came from. Of course she didn't say that, but her husband's mother understood perfectly. More than once she had been tempted to walk right out among 'em and shame Lillia! It would serve her right, the little whipper-snapper! But she didn't quite dare.

She craned her neck out of the window, and watched the postman—a nice, boyish fellow—come whistling up the path with the mail.

At dinner that evening the grandmother's eyes snapped and sparkled. She was brightly impervious to Lillia's curious glances at her. She impertinently sent her coffee cup back for more—she hated Lillia's demitasse cups brought in last thing—and snickered when the maid caught her heel in the rug and nearly fell.

"What's the matter with you to-night, Betsy Gesley?" demanded David, looking at her with a half grin. An echo from childhood, that—he used to call her Betsy when she romped and played with him like a wild Indian, and brought down on her the acidulous comment of a strait-laced neighborhood.

"Guess who I've had a letter from?" suggested Grandma Gesley gayly.

"Well, let me see. Somebody from down home?"

"Strictly speaking, and in a manner, yes. I've got a letter from Tim Brash!"

"Not really?"

"Yes. He's living in New York now, and he's been trying to get my address for ages."

"Who's he?" asked Lillia languidly.

"An old beau of mother's," explained David.

Grandma colored hotly.

"Nothing of the sort, Dave Gesley! Ain't you ashamed of yourself? Me and

Tim," turning importantly to her daughter-in-law, "are old friends. We were friends as children, and I always liked Tim. David's pa liked him, too. Tim's a mighty fine fellow."

Lillia laughed. Not a nice laugh, at all; rather one of amused ridicule. The little old lady felt her face burn.

"How comical! I suppose he's a widower, and that we'll be treated to the spectacle of an autumnal courtship."

"He's not a widower that I know of. He married Lessy Riggs, and she weighed a hundred and ninety-six and could push a bull off a cliff, she was that strong. So, unless her health failed mightily, Lessy's still with him."

"Oh!" drawled Lillia. "Well, you must not be vamping him away from his wife."

Grandma was indignantly silent. Why was Lillia always poking fun at her—or being openly rude?

"I wish I could cuss," she thought. "I will—I'll do it to myself: Damn! Damn!"

"Mother, you look positively wicked with your face screwed up like that," commented her son. "Come, smile for papa."

She always unbent for him. She adored him, and anything he did within reason was bound to be all right. She lost her vindictive look, and got up, shaking out her crisp percale skirt and settling her waistband.

"I guess I'll go answer Timmy's letter," she announced coldly.

She heard Lillia giggle as she went upstairs—and David's voice, a little sharp, as if in reproof.

She sighed. But the sigh was swiftly followed by concern. Her cheap dime store writing paper wouldn't do for Tim. What should she do? That lovely gray and cream stationery Lillia used, now—she'd love to have some of it, but she'd die before she'd ask Lillia for a favor. However, she guessed it wouldn't hurt to help herself to a sheet or two.

She walked across the hall into Lillia's dainty bedroom. There on the open desk was a splash of gray and lavender and cream. Her fingers were on it before sudden revulsion took hold of her.

"Stealing—*me!* That's what living in this house has brought me to. I'm ashamed of myself."

She turned to go, and confronted Lillia.

"Can't you ever *knock?*" inquired the latter wearily. "How many times have I

suggested to you that running in and out of people's rooms like this is bad form? You know I don't want to hurt your feelings, Mother Gesley, but there are times when I feel that I *must* speak. I'm only telling you for your own good. I don't expect any thanks for it."

"You won't git any," returned Grandma Gesley ungratefully, and marched back to her own room. She had to use the cheap ruled paper, after all.

She got an immediate reply. And that day she went out and bought a bright pink box of "correspondence cards" at the corner drug store, with the dollar she was saving for a bottle of patent tonic. She didn't need the tonic right now, anyway, she decided. It was tonic enough just to hear from her old friend Tim!

IV

A FEW weeks later David, coming in around 5:30 P.M., heard a giggling and guffawing from his living room that surprised him.

"Who's in there?" he asked of Lillia, who had just come down with her hat on.

"Your mother," said Lillia, "is entertaining a gentleman."

"Hot dog!" commented Mr. Gesley.

"My dear, if you could just see him! Suppose some of our friends should drop in? He's perfectly *dreadful*. You can hear him laugh six blocks. And your mother's been giggling like that, off and on, for an hour. Really, I don't know—"

"It must be Tim Brash!"

"Well, for goodness' sake, suggest that it's about time for him to leave. He's—impossible!"

David walked over to the living room door.

His mother, in her one good dress of black silk whose lace collar was fastened with a brooch containing "your pa's" picture, hair smoothed down carefully, and face powder showing recklessly in her eyebrows, sat on the davenport beside a round, hale, hearty old gentleman with white hair, cheeks as red as June apples, and twinkling blue eyes that overflowed with fun and good humor. He was in the act of slapping his thigh, with a mighty roar of laughter, the sort of movement that made Lillia wince.

"Oh, here's David! Come in, son! This is Timmy Brash—remember my speaking of him? Ain't it fine that he's come to see me?"

The naïve delight of his parent in Mr. Brash's society was slightly shocking to David. It seemed to him just a trifle—well, unladylike.

"I haven't had such a good time since Heck was a small pup," giggled Grandma Gesley. "Timmy here's been telling me all about the folks down home, and lots of funny stories and—"

"Lord, yes," boomed Mr. Brash. "Lots of amusing things happen down our way. There was Conny Green, for instance. You remember Conny, don't you, Betsy? We used to go to school with her. Well, Conny made up her mind to get married or bust. She always did want to git married worse'n any girl I ever saw, but fate somehow was always ag'in' her. She used to 'low she didn't mind not getting a man so awful much, but she hated like anything to have *Miss Conny Green* on her tombstone! Well, there wasn't no available timber down there in Eastlake, Georgia, so finally Conny ups and advertises for a husband. Yes, sir—one of these matrimonial papers. She describes herself with a little leeway, so to speak, regarding the facts in the case. By the great horn spoon, if she didn't catch a fellow right off the bat! He sends her a pretty nice photo—says he's tall and distinguished-looking, with plenty of money. So he comes to Eastlake, and they give each other the once-over."

Mr. Brash's hearty laugh reverberated through the house.

"Both of 'em was terrible disappointed, I hear; but the wedding come off, anyway, and they start off on their honeymoon. Bill Harkins was chauffing, and he was about half drunk, so he runs 'em into a tree and smashes things up a bit. Nobody hurt, but the bridegroom was knocked sort of unconscious, and when they picked him up his wig had fell off, and his upper teeth was jarred out, and his wooden leg had come unhinged. 'Land sakes,' says Conny—and stands there looking at him. But she recovered right off. 'Oh, well, what's the use worrying?' says she. 'I got *Mrs.* tacked to my name, anyway!'"

Grandma and Mr. Brash went into mild hysteria, the old lady rocking back and forth with tears of mirth in her eyes.

"Tell him about Angie Copy's daughter," she prodded.

Mr. Brash was obliging. "Well, you know Angie was as poor as Job's turkey, and about as ignorant. But she raised Kitty to

be a lady. Kitty was one of these smart Aleck young ones—I never could abide her. Angie, she washes and scrubs and gets money enough to send Kitty off to school. Well, about that time I left Eastlake, and it was eight years or more before I went back for a visit. One day I dropped in on Angie. She was still over the washtub. 'Angie,' says I, 'can I have a drink of that good spring water you got here?' And Angie says: 'Sure! Hey, Diploma, bring the gentleman a glass of water.' A gangling kid of about six or seven comes out with the water. 'Diploma?' says I. 'Land, that's a funny name for a child. How come?' Angie explains: 'Well, you see, it was this way. Kitty she stayed off at school two years, and my money give out. I kept writing her to come home, and she'd write back: "*I can't come, ma, till I git my diploma.*" That,' says Angie, pointing to the gangling youngster—"that's what she fetched home."

More unregenerate giggles and guffaws!

David was grateful that Lillia had gone out. How horrified she'd have been! He couldn't help smiling at the cheerful, noisy old gentleman, on whose every word Grandma Gesley hung, but he wished they were anywhere but in his living room.

"Can Tim stay for supper, son?" his mother inquired eagerly.

David colored apprehensively. He stammered: "Mother dear, you know I'd like it, but—but Lillia's having a dinner party to-night. Sixteen people. She—"

Grandma's face fell.

"Now, don't you worry a mite, Betsy," consoled Mr. Brash cordially. "I 'low as how you and me's going to have a big evening. I'm going to take you down to the Mayflower and blow us to a swell feed. You get your hat while I call a taxi."

"But, mother—" David hurriedly started to interrupt.

The Mayflower was the most exclusive hotel in town. The dinner check would be ten or fifteen dollars. And the taxi—Poor old man; spending every cent he had, maybe, on this visit to his old friend Betsy, and she, David's own mother, ready to encourage him in it!

"My, that 'll be nice, Tim," fluttered Grandma Gesley. "I won't be a minute."

"But, mother—" David tried again. He halted her in the hall, whispered. "That old fool—spending more than he can afford. You—"

"Well, Timmy ain't no rich man, I reckon, but I expect he can pay for one meal at the Mayflower. I'm going, anyway."

David groaned inwardly. Wouldn't they be dreadful, those two, in the cool, æsthetic blue dining room of the Mayflower, giggling and guffawing over the Brash fund of humor? Suppose Betsy was recognized as Lillia's mother-in-law?

Grandma went off in high spirits, with Mr. Brash slapping David on the back and telling him how fortunate he was to have a mother like Betsy. "Always was fond of her. We went to school together."

V

SOMEBODY did recognize them. Mrs. Adolphus Montgomery had been dining at an adjoining table with a party of friends—a Lady Something or Other from England, and an ambassador. It developed they had been so highly entertained by the antics of the unique couple—"That pretty little Mrs. Gesley's mother-in-law, my dear—such a *quaint* person—and a delightful old gentleman who was just *too* amusing! Really, they seemed to be having the *time of their lives*, don't you know?")—that the comedy which they afterward attended fell quite flat by comparison.

Lillia was humiliated. She said so, in no uncertain terms. And the next time Mr. Brash called, she instructed the maid to say that Mrs. Gesley, Sr., was out. The same procedure followed at the telephone.

Grandma drooped. "I wonder if Tim's sick?" she said.

"Why, no," returned her man child innocently. "I met him down town to-day, and he inquired anxiously about you. Said you were always out when he called."

"Me out?" echoed grandma. She shot a swift glance at Lillia, who reddened. "Oh, I see."

She *did* go out that afternoon. She went straight to Mr. Brash's hotel and asked for him.

The clerk said he thought Mr. Brash had gone out for a walk.

"All right; I'll wait," said Grandma Gesley calmly.

When he put in appearance she explained grimly:

"I got one of these stylish daughters-in-law, Timmy. I reckon you and me'll have to sit in the park."

Lillia complained, a few days later, that Grandma Gesley and "that funny old

man" had been seen at a matinée together, and driving in the park afterward.

"He's *dreadful*—he laughs so loud and talks so much—makes himself conspicuous. Besides, where's his wife? You may be sixty-six, Mother Gesley, but there are the conventions. He is a married man—"

"No, he ain't. He's a widower. Lessy fell down the cellar steps and cracked her skull. Poor girl, she was a good creature. I thought a lot of her. Tim's been a widower now for four years."

"Oh—a widower." Lillia began to laugh—that shrill, mocking, amused laugh of hers. "Has he proposed yet?"

"No. But he's going to, if I have my way."

"Mother Gesley!" more shrilly and incredulous. "Listen to that, will you, Davy? Quite shameless. Really, I don't know—"

"I was always fond of Timmy," Grandma Gesley defended herself stoutly. "I loved your pa better, Dave, 'cause he was so good-looking 'n' stylish 'n' everything, but I never lost my feeling for Tim. And I reckon I'm about fed up on style—I've realized that I'm a plain woman, and I like plain people. Tim suits me."

"Did you *ever*?" gasped Lillia.

The next afternoon, the little old lady went out alone. She had been nervous and excitable all morning, and wore a secretive, determined air that would have roused Lillia's curiosity had that young matron been there to see. But Lillia was at the golf course, and no one particularly noticed Grandma Gesley when she stepped forth briskly around three o'clock.

It was nearing the dinner hour when a gorgeous sedan of soft, dull purple, with lavender cushions and silver flower holders full of violets, drew up before the door. A nimble little figure in neat black silk hopped out, followed by Mr. Brash, in all the splendor of a new suit and a bright necktie.

"Is Davy home?" was Grandma Gesley's first question.

He was. He came out holding a magazine with two fingers marking his page.

"I was just wondering where you were, Betsy Gesley." He spoke cheerfully, but glanced a little disapprovingly at her companion.

"I ain't Betsy Gesley any more, son. I'm Mrs. Tim Brash," said the grandmother pertly. "Tim and me were mar-

ried just now. We're leaving for Florida on our honeymoon."

"For the love of Mike!" gasped David.

"No—for the love of Tim," his mother corrected. "And we've got all the money we want—oceans of it."

Lillia had come to the living room door, and was listening.

"Oceans is right," boomed Mr. Brash, with his big, hearty laugh. "I got in on the ground floor in that Florida business. I lived there when I was a young fellow, and I bought up a thousand acres or so down by the Keys for just a song. Not long ago I sold just half of 'em for five hundred thousand, and—"

"Five hundred thousand!" repeated Lillia softly.

David could only stare with his mouth open, while the new Mrs. Brash straightened her spouse's tie and brushed an imaginary fleck from his shoulder.

"We've come back to tell you about the wedding, but we're leaving right off, me and Tim. We've already got our reservations and everything. We're going to honeymoon in Palm Beach."

Lillia recovered herself.

"Oh, mother dear, how perfectly won-

derful! I'm so glad for you. You deserve all the happiness in the world, dear."

She advanced with outstretched arms.

Grandma kissed her warmly on the cheek. But when it came to saying good-by to David, that was another matter. His mother clung to him and cried a little.

"Betsy Brash, you little devil!" he chuckled, and his own eyes were wet.

"Come to see us! Come to see us!" roared Mr. Brash. "We're going to build us a fine house on one of them islands down there."

"Oh, we will—we will," promised Lillia earnestly.

The chauffeur, who looked as if he was enjoying the afternoon, opened the door of the purple sedan.

"Good Heaven, look at that car!" murmured Dave. "Gosh knows what it cost. Well, what do you know about that?"

He turned to look at Lillia. She nodded her head up and down, opening and shutting her mouth without a sound. She seemed to be temporarily out of any more words.

Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Brash waved at them through the window, happily, as the big purple car rolled away.

G R O P I N G

I WONDER if our earth has lungs
And forms air with its sighs,
The air that reaches just so far,
Then dissipates and dies.

I wonder if our earth has hands
And marks unbounded space,
And hangs and moves each planet in
Its own appointed place.

I wonder if our earth has milk
To nurse a growing thing,
Or if it has a voice to teach
The little birds to sing.

I wonder if our earth has mind
And thinks, and counts the hours—
I wonder, but I do not know,
If earth can have such powers.

I know earth only as a spot
In which to dream a bit
Entranced to watch the rhythm and
Sheer loveliness of it.

Francis Livingston Montgomery

Silver Boy

THE STORY OF A WILD FOX THAT SAT IN CHAINS BY THE HEARTH OF A LONELY MAN

By Vance Hoyt

ASILVER gray form, that moved with phantom swiftness, came to a sudden halt in an open space atop the ridge. Frozen into a pose of stealth and beauty, this old dog fox stood surveying the valley below.

The black sheen that ran from the nape of his neck to the tip of his plumy, floating brush, framed the graceful curve of his back against the golden hue of a California gloaming.

Beneath him, pointing out in beautiful relief the curves and crooks of his strong, slender legs, streamed the lambent rays of the sun.

The white and russet of his neck and legs, merging with the creamy yellow of his breast, completed a living picture of animal beauty to thrill the soul of a nature lover. And the man watching the fox possessed the heart of a true naturalist.

"What beauty and grace!" Alden breathed to himself, reveling in the picture before him. And then the great desire came to him.

"I must have you, fox—all to myself," he mused. "By right of discovery you are mine.

"And I will have you, one of these fine days, too, Silver Boy!" he added, aloud, addressing the fox by the name he had given him the first time they had met.

Although Sir Reynard's hearing is keener than that of most of the wild folk, the sound of the man's voice did not carry to him. It was pitched too low for that, or the fox was too far away. But his marvelous eyes had caught the movement, as Alden quickly stepped behind a clump of buckthorn. The vigilance of Silver Boy's stance, and his erect, rabbitlike ears, revealed this.

His dark brown pools of sight bore into

the brush, and through it to the man form beyond, and never, for an instant, did they shift. They were riveted upon the two objects he held in his hands. One of these was a camera, the other a gun.

Alden might have brought in the old dog fox right then and there, provided, of course, that he could be quick enough on the trigger. But that was not the way he wanted this king of all foxes. The nature loving soul of the man cringed at the very thought of slaughtering the splendid animal.

Alden wanted Silver Boy—wanted him mighty bad—perhaps more than he had ever wanted any one of the wild folk in all his ten years of animal study and nature painting. But not in the manner of the killer. No! Alive and unharmed—that was the only way in which he would take him.

The man had never possessed a dog. A canine is something of a nuisance to one who wishes to study the wild folk unobserved in their natural haunts. But Silver Boy would make an unusual companion, cautious and quiet; a pet he could care for and feed, and talk to—for the man lived alone, and was sometimes lonely.

Still, it takes two to make a bargain—and negotiations are slow between the wild and the tame. But Alden and Silver Boy were not strangers. They had crossed trails often in the last year, each stopping to observe the other at a respectable distance—the man admiring the four-legged beauty before him, and the fox, always keenly wary, striving to fathom the motives and intentions of the biped. But unquestionably Silver Boy possessed a will of his own, and he now did the thing he had always done from the first time they met.

The old dog fox suddenly sat back upon his haunches and barked, once, with care-

ful deliberateness—beginning far down in his throat as a mere growl, and rolling up and out into a rasping yip. Wild and raucous, the sound soared across the little valley, and died. Then he grinned.

Sitting there, silhouetted against the setting sun—a furry bunch of gray, interspersed with russet, white, and black—Silver Boy laughed down at the man. With his little red mouth open, glistening needle-like teeth showing, and tongue extended—dripping as if he had just run afar—he grinned and grinned, as only those of his breed can grin.

“Golly!” exclaimed Alden to himself. “I guess that’s what you’d call the fox laugh. Giving me the ha-ha, are you? Well, remember, ‘He who laughs last, laughs best.’ I’m on your trail, Silver Boy. But just now we’ll content ourselves with a picture.”

However, before Alden could complete the operation of his camera, the fox had vanished as though into space, and the telescopic lens registered only scenery. Silver Boy was too old in caution and craftiness to risk the movement of a man’s arm when that human held something metallic in his hand.

More resolute than ever, Alden vowed to himself that he would possess this cunning dog fox. He returned to his cabin that evening in Old Topanga, considering his plans for the capture. But he would bide his time.

II

SILVER BOY was across the ridge, a distance of three miles, as the trail runs, from where he had once met the man. The hunting urge was strong upon him.

There were Mrs. Silver and the little Silvers to be fed, aside from himself. The litter was too young to be left alone. “Safety first” is an old rule in the animal kingdom.

He had taken the man path, for it was perfectly safe at night, and he could travel considerably faster over it than through the dense undergrowth. He was careful of his fluffy brush, and avoided the thickets wherever possible.

It was just after a rain, and there was the annoying wood tick to be considered. Even at the moment one was burrowing in his furry breast, and he halted in his stride to nip it from the coat with a click of his incisors.

Then, with a flip of his rabbitlike ears, and after a few hurried tests of the air—ever on the alert for game or danger—he glided down the trail into Cold Creek Cañon, with the speed and silence of a hawk’s shadow passing across the earth.

Crouching low, he scooted along, never rising at leg’s length; his brush floating straight out behind, a gray and black streamer. Down, down, he sped, into the deep cañon, leaping small gullies and bounding over rocky prominences—sure-footed, lithe and swift.

Suddenly he came to a halt, poised upon a boulder, and scanned the expanse of the cañon floor. He sniffed the air keenly, suspiciously, alertly, thrusting his nose upward, swaying it from side to side, tilting his head so far back that the russet of his breast was plain to be seen.

Then he caught it—over to the right. He passed, a gray streak, up the side gully.

His objective was a mile away, so marvelous was his sense of smell. And in a few moments he was there, crouched low behind a tuft of button sage—silent, imperceptible, his coat blending perfectly with the gray of the salvia plant.

For a long moment he stood—his hips sagging, a front paw lifted, his body curved around the bush—with only one eye and a pricked ear showing. There he waited, poised—his keen little eye centered upon the object before him—his nose tingling to the delicious scent.

The object before him was a box, partly concealed in a thicket of glistening bay. It was innocent enough in its appearance, but the fox did not approach nearer. Distrust and caution prompted him to remain where he was.

Then, suddenly, Silver Boy flattened himself. He simply vanished into the dead, grassy coat of the earth. Something had made a faint rustling sound near by.

A pair of foxy eyes—gleaming flames—devoured the clump of laurel and lilac bushes a short distance away. A towhee bird fluttered and twittered saucily. Slender and sinewy muscles relaxed, and the fox panted for an instant to relieve the thumping of his heart.

Again he came to a standing position and looked about cautiously. Satisfied that, if need be, his retreat was an open field, he once more centered his attention upon the box. He had seen many such objects in the farmyards he had visited.

And always they had something to do with chickens—and there was now an unmistakable scent tantalizing his sensitive nostrils. Still, he was wary. He knew perfectly what was within the box—a nice, fat old hen!

But here was a food proposition different from any he had ever chanced upon. Some inward sense, or intuition, prompted him to greater caution than he would have displayed at a chicken house in a barnyard.

Several times he was minded to ignore this situation entirely and go on about his business. But the delicious odor of the nice, fat hen always stayed the impulse.

However, there would be no harm in investigating. The hen might come out of her own free will—old hens were known to be very stupid at times. Then a rush, and she would be his. What a feast for the family!

Silver Boy did not reason this thing out in so many thoughts. In that respect he was different from the man he had left over the ridge. He just knew, or didn't; sprang into action, or refrained, on instant impulses. Besides, how was he to know this was a trap?

III

To associate the man with this box was the furthest thing possible from any fox knowledge he might possess. Although he could not see the hen from where he stood, he knew she was concealed within the box—an object in which most chickens made their homes—and his only purpose in life at that moment was to seek an opening and get at her.

How did the hen come to be there, why she was there, and such allied, human questions, of course, held no place in his intuitions. He had long since forgotten the man. Silver Boy was just a hungry fox, and, like most wild folk, his memory was short.

Thus he set about to solve the problem before him in his own cunning way. And, if the man could have witnessed the scene that was enacted, he would have feasted on it to his heart's content.

Extremely wary and suspicious, the fox moved around so that he could see into the open end of the box. There she was—the nice, fat hen—nested with her head curled back beneath one of her wings. But Silver Boy did not draw nearer. Instead, he sat upon his haunches, tongue lolling, grinning

to himself, and studied the situation most wisely.

There was no hurry. The hen could not get away. Although he could see through the box, both ends being open, a mesh wire partition was plainly discernible between him and his prey. And it was this obstacle that brought a resentful growl into his throat and a snarl upon his lips. He had tested wire before with his teeth. This situation was not so good.

The alarming cluck of the hen was instant, but the sound was music to his ears. He paid no attention to her scoldings. His sole interest was centered upon the wire, and the tempting piece of meat that hung from a string suspended in front of the partition.

He batted his crafty eyes. There was strong suspicion of danger here. But nothing happened as he waited. Nothing moved within or about the box, save the occupant that was now fluttering and cackling in fright.

The deep shades of night had settled among the trees about, and it suddenly became very dark. This was as it should be for a kill. Silver Boy was at once emboldened.

He picked his way around to the rear of the box. Again he sat upon his haunches and observed the foolish, fat hen—his mouth watering.

Presently he arose to his feet, yawned in a bored manner, and moved nearer to the trap. Within a few feet of it he came to a halt, poised in the middle of a stride, and cast about him suspicious glances. After a pause, satisfied that there was no one present—save himself and the panicky old hen—he once more sat down and waited for what might happen. But nothing occurred to arouse his mistrust, and he was again reassured.

Suddenly, he was on his feet, and, sniffing, set about in his usual manner of approaching food. With all four legs slightly sprawled, he emitted a low growl, and thrust his nose forward, withdrawing it instantly. Several times he repeated this maneuver, and with each thrust there was always the growl.

Between these movements, he would throw his head back and revolve it around, stretching his neck far up, and then permitting it to drop until his chin rested upon the ground, swing it first to one side and the other, then the thrust. And each time

he repeated the maneuver, he moved a step nearer.

If the hen had been out in the open, his stratagem would have been different. A silent, quick rush, and she would be his. But here was prey that could not escape him. And foxes are like cats—they tease and torment their live food before devouring it.

Finally, certain that the bridge was worth crossing, he abruptly moved up to the box and sniffed at it carefully. Every muscle was taut for a quick leap to safety, if anything should arouse his mistrust. But nothing happened.

Relaxing his vigilance, he lightly tested the wire mesh across the end of the box with the claws of his right paw. He had climbed over and gnawed through this stuff before, and he brought his teeth to play upon it.

For a moment he clawed and bit at the mesh, his teeth snapping like nippers; but the wire was too strong for them. He suddenly abandoned the attack and sat back, grinding his teeth and growling to himself, his lips and gums trickling blood.

The hen went into a panic, and the fox into a rage. With a yip of fury, the old dog sprang at the end of the box and began to dig a tunnel beneath it. Then, as quickly, he gave this up.

Panting and sniffing—there was no grin on his face now—he whipped around the side to the opening of the box. But he did not enter.

For awhile he stood, statue-like, peering into the trap. The urge was strong to rush in and set his teeth upon the partition mesh that formed the compartment wherein the hen was kept. But he could not arouse himself sufficiently for the task.

However, Silver Boy was never lacking in persistence, and raiding chicken coops was the best thing he did. Besides, although he should fail at the hen, he was reasonably sure of securing that delicious piece of meat, whose odor tantalized him beyond reasoning. Still, he did not enter without stealth.

Slowly and gingerly he felt his way into the box, lightly touching the floor with his noiseless pads. Twice he sprang back into the open, glancing about, quivering with tension, snarling and panting, his little red tongue dripping.

Presently he made another attempt. This time he moved into the trap deliberately,

thrusting his pointed muzzle forward at the frightened hen, growling and snarling constantly, as if to ward off some unseen rival he feared might rush forward and rob him of this delicacy.

At the wire partition he paused, sniffed, and felt of it with his claws. Nothing happened. Then he set his teeth to the mesh, and tore at it in quick rage. But the wire did not give.

Thwarted, his lips and gums stinging with pain, he moved back from the partition, his eyes flashing green fire in his savage anger. For a few moments he stood observing the piece of fresh meat dangling at his nose's tip, drinking in its delicious scent.

The old hen was cackling, quite loudly now, and the sound of her distress might any moment bring danger to him.

Most delicately he caressed the meat with his warm red tongue. Nothing happened. The scent of blood and its luscious taste set his taut little body quaking as though from an electric shock.

Glancing back to assure himself that his avenue of escape was open, he whirled, and, with a savage snarl, snapped at the piece of meat and wrenched it loose.

IV

THE next morning, when Alden awoke, he found that the glories of spring were upon the earth. The fresh morning air was filled with the melodious notes of wild canaries. Blue birds sallied across the glen down by the spring, and a hawk circled far above in the heavens. It was one of those late April mornings that Alden loved so well, and "his heart was rife with the joy of life."

Hurriedly he finished his bacon and took to the trail. He headed for the summit of the ridge, passing through the dew bespangled brush of buckthorn, holly, laurel, and bay; drinking in the thousand moist odors that greeted him as he strode along with a sack flung over a shoulder and a camera under an arm.

Cold Creek Cañon was his objective, and in a short time he was at the crest of the ridge. For a moment he stood motionless, carefully scanning the cañon below, in hopes of obtaining a rare picture of deer or lynx, or other furtive beast, before it sprang from sight.

Once he had caught a mountain lioness at her kill from this very spot on the ridge,

for Cold Creek Cañon is the feeding and hunting ground of Topanga. But this morning he was not rewarded with such a treat, and he plunged down into the dense undergrowth of the cañon floor.

Alden was not a hunter, but a student and painter of animal life, and many foxes had he caught in his box trap for the purpose of study. He had learned much of the habits and peculiarities of these little gray marauders. But always there had been the disappointment that he had missed his goal—the capture of the dog fox he admired so greatly.

However, as he came up to the trap this morning, he knew that he had finally succeeded—Silver Boy had met his Waterloo. His knowledge of these animals told him this ere he could look into the box.

There was no scratching at the fallen door, or tearing at the wire mesh, as usual. Silver Boy would be too proud and cunning for this. Instead, a deadly stillness marked the scene, and a peculiar acrid odor floated out to him. Silver Boy was seeking his freedom with elusive weapons.

Alden smiled to himself as he peered through the mesh into the box. The hen was unharmed in her compartment, but she had her feathers up.

He drove her to one side, and it was several seconds before his eyes adjusted themselves to the darkness of the inclosure. Then he saw the crafty fellow crouched low upon the floor, glaring out at him, his eyes immobile emeralds. For a space, the two stared at each other. But the fox never batted an eye.

"Why don't you grin, Silver Boy?" said the man, thrilled with the joy of his catch. "This is not so nice, eh? I told you I'd get you. And you remember what I said, 'He who laughs last, laughs best.' Listen to this, Silver Boy." And his full, clear merriment echoed across the cañon.

Silver Boy might have rightly shown his disgust at the silly "bark" of a human being. But whatever his feelings were on the subject, he did not express them. Nor did he do any of the things his trapped kin were wont to do on the approach of man, such as growling, barking, and snapping. He just kept on staring, and with that stare he was drinking in a world of knowledge pertaining to this biped who had taken him prisoner.

"Well, Silver Boy, you're a sedate old fellow!" said Alden presently, feeling a lit-

tle shame for his actions. "Blamed if you aren't a king. But we're going to be great friends, you and I. Come on, now. We'll have to put you into this sack. Pretty soft for you from now on, old pal."

Alden hastened back to the cabin, filled with the pride of his catch. He placed his majesty in the large pen he had constructed for him. Then he set about his daily routine, without paying any further attention to his captive.

Each day Silver Boy was given fresh water, and fed morning and evening. But Alden never spoke to him, nor did he evince the slightest interest in his prisoner. Two weeks of this passed, then he set about to accomplish the impossible—taming a full-grown wild fox.

Alden knew what he was about. His indifference toward his captive had overcome the greatest handicap—fear. The next step was to win the dog fox's confidence. This would be harder to accomplish, and take a considerable longer time to do. But he did not rush matters.

At first he merely entered the pen, working about, apparently oblivious of the animal's presence. Not once did he glance in the direction of the fox, who immediately shrank back in his corner—snarling and growling. Only a few moments he remained inside; then he stepped out and went about his duties, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened—completely ignoring the uneasy animal's resentment of his intrusion.

Immediately the growling ceased, and Silver Boy relaxed, licking his chops as though he had undergone a nervous strain, and panting, but always observing the man as long as he remained in sight.

For two weeks Alden repeated this program. Never more than twice did he enter the pen in one day. And always there was the growl as he came near, then the relaxation when he stepped outside, the licking of chops and panting.

On several occasions the fox suddenly darted away as Alden drew too near. And once he barked with a warning rasp. But the growl grew less malignant as the days passed.

So Alden worked with his pet, cautious with every move he made, never forcing the issue, but evincing the greatest of patience. Time was no object. It was imperative that he must win Silver Boy's confidence before they could advance further in es-

tablishing a lasting friendship between them.

Then, for a week or so, Alden refrained from entering the pen. Instead, he remained outside, carefully moving up to where Silver Boy lay near the wire. For hours he would sit there, quietly talking to his captive, cajoling, tempting him with choice bits of food.

Very wary at first, the old fox would ignore the lure of the food—twitching his little black pointed snoot at the delicious odors. Then, gradually, he became emboldened—his confidence in this man greater, his fear less—and suddenly, one day, he partook of the offering. The food was luscious, and his keeper did not attempt to molest him. Thereafter, this became a daily occurrence, Silver Boy taking both his morning and evening repasts in this manner.

Again Alden entered the pen. This time he sat a few feet away from the fox and coaxed him to come to get his meals from a plate he held in his hand. Within a week, Silver Boy was taking his food solely in this manner.

But always he growled as he would snatch a bit and bolt it down. Then into his corner he would dart, and no amount of coaxing could tempt the distrustful old fellow forth. So far so good.

V

BUT the big test was yet to come—taking Silver Boy into the man's arms without inviting the vengeance of needle sharp teeth.

Foxes are nervous, and, for that reason, snappy. One rash move will invariably throw them into a panic of scrambles and snaps. No one knew their peculiarities better than Alden. Thus he set about in a manner entirely foreign to his usual procedure. Past experience had taught him many things.

Generally, with the aid of a broom, he would hold the fox's head against the side of the pen, and, with one hand, pick it up by the back of the neck. Nothing will subdue a wild animal so quickly as this. But the neck hold is not in the least conducive to friendship.

However, with Silver Boy, Alden could take no such chances. His technique must be of a milder nature. He began by gently resting his hand upon the fox's head, ruffling him between the ears, and stroking his

heavy, coarse fur. This invariably brought a series of growls and quivering lips, revealing long and glistening fangs.

But, to Alden's surprise, Silver Boy never attempted to snap him, although his demeanor was anything but reassuring. Then, one day, he deliberately reached over and caught his pet about the shoulders and took him up into his arms.

What a change! Silver Boy cowered as if he were a whipped dog. There were no snarls, or growls, or unsheathed fangs. Instead, he licked his lips as if they were dry, and a trembling seized him as from a great fright.

The master's heart went out to his pet.

"Poor fellow," said Alden, stroking and cuddling the little furry body closer to him. "I wouldn't hurt you for the world, Silver Boy. Don't tremble. We're going to be good friends—pals! Poor boy!"

Then he placed the fox on the ground, not holding him in his arms long, for fear of subjecting him to too great a nervous tension for the first time. And Alden discovered how really clever was the animal he was dealing with—more so than any other fox he had ever attempted to tame. Silver Boy did not jump up and run from him to a far corner, but, to his surprise, remained lying inert in the position he had placed him.

The man was instantly alert and to work. He turned his pet over on his back, and Silver Boy did not even blink an eye. He remained limp and quiet, all four paws extended in the air, as though he were a statue fallen over on its back.

"Playing 'possum, are you?" Alden said, greatly interested, mauling the old fox about playfully, laughing at the ludicrous positions he would slump into. "That's what you're doing. Clever boy."

He stepped back a few paces, as though going to leave the pen. Instantly, Silver Boy was on his feet and into his favorite corner, where he crouched and growled, his eyes flaming green.

"Foxy old fellow," Alden remarked. "I thought you'd bear watching." Then, as he laughed aloud, Sir Reynard barked his resentment at the indignity to which he had just been subjected. But Alden knew that he had, nevertheless, won the animal's confidence.

To substantiate this, he deliberately walked over and took his pet up into his arms. At the mere touch of his hand, Sil-

ber Boy flattened his ears and wagged his tail. That was sufficient—he had accepted a master. Not once had he attempted to bite the man.

Alden immediately left the pen. He knew now that he could accomplish that which he had set out to do. Time was the only factor to be considered.

In captivity Silver Boy fattened. He did very little exercising in his pen, and became more finicky every day about his food, preferring cheese, eggs to suck, and cookies, to mere meat. But, one day, a delicacy crawled into his pen in the form of a long and slender black snake.

The serpent must have been oblivious of the fox's presence, or he would not have been so indiscreet. A black snake usually is capable of caring for himself, being swift and powerful; but before this one could squirm into the watch-spring attitude of the species in attack, Silver Boy came out of his corner, like the swoop of a hawk, and caught the reptile by the neck.

With body free, and anchored by the head, the serpent attempted to squeeze and whip the fox into pulp. For the moment, a pandemonium of whip snaps and wriggles followed. Then the body of the snake went writhing through the air.

Alden, who had been attracted by the dust of the conflict, did not realize just what had happened. Then he gasped in astonishment. Silver Boy stood grinning at him with the head of the snake in his mouth. He had severed it from the neck, so vicious is a fox at its kill.

Silver Boy dropped the head to the ground and, growling softly to himself, walked over and picked up the squirming body of the snake daintily in his teeth.

Into his favorite corner he stalked. Snarling the while, he curled down and pinned his prey to the earth with his claws. Thus he settled himself for a joyous feast.

"Good work, Silver Boy!" praised the master. "That's the fellow who's been after our chickens. You're a pal after my own heart."

VI

By now the summer was passed, and Silver Boy had been in captivity five months. During this time he had been taught to walk at the end of a leash, bark for his food, sleep in the cabin at nights on his pillow near the fireplace, and perform other doggy feats of domesticity.

But always there appeared to Alden in the eyes of his pet the hint of a crushed spirit. The old fox seemingly held but little interest in life, save to eat and sleep and lounge in his favorite corner.

Only once did he show any concern in his environment, and that was when the black snake crawled into his pen. But only for that moment was the resurgence of the wild upon him. Then he settled back into the ennui of captivity, and the master was forced to take his pet out on a leash each day for exercise.

This Alden did not like. He wanted Silver Boy to be contented with his new home, to accept him as his master and friend. But, although he had seemingly done this, he realized that the wild heart of the fox could never be conquered, no more than the city's streets could tame his own human heart. And he knew this only too well for the good of his conscience.

He loved Silver Boy as any man might become attached to his dog, and it hurt him to think of giving the animal up. But he knew that without freedom there is no happy life for a fox. And there was Mrs. Silver, from whom he had taken him, and the little Silvers! Certainly there had been a litter in April. At the thought, he was tempted to give Silver Boy his freedom, but could never steel himself to the point of parting.

The problem was suddenly solved for him in a most extraordinary manner.

Alden had spent most of two nights and a day over the range, striving to get a flash picture of a lynx at the entrance of her den. But she had detected something unusual, and was too cunning to approach. The unsuccessful attempt in securing a picture, and principally lack of sleep, left Alden in an irritable mood as he returned to his cabin the next day.

And, to make matters worse, during his absence, a wood rat had entered the place and played havoc with his supplies. He was unable to locate its place of entrance, and stormed to himself, as a man will when tired and hungry and sleepy.

That night he went to bed early, only smoking a pipeful before retiring. But, before he did so, he brought Silver Boy into the cabin and placed him, as usual, upon his pillow by the stone fireplace.

He left open the door leading into the next room, or lean-to, where he slept. For possibly an hour or more Alden lay awake,

listening to the fox moving about the place, sniffing or jumping up into the screened windows, where he would lay for long minutes, gazing out into the black night.

Then would come the soft padding—*pat-pat, pat-pat!* The pacing back and forth along the sill was like that of caged beasts in circuses. Now and then there was a faint scratch at the heavy screen, and, once, a bark.

Something was moving in the thicket of wild cherry near by. Maybe it was Mrs. Silver, whom Alden had robbed of her lord and master. Out there was Silver Boy's mate for life, waiting—waiting—in vain. Or maybe it was one of the whelps. There had been cubs in the preceding April; they would be nearly full grown by now.

Half dozing, the conscience of the man smote him severely. It was a shame! The poor dog fox wanted his freedom so badly, and had all along displayed wonderful patience. Not once had he snapped at his master, or shown the least sign of vengeance because of the freedom he had lost. Even a man wouldn't suffer so patiently.

There was no doubt about it—Alden's sympathy was getting the better of him. Well, in the morning he would see. He was too fagged out to decide definitely now. And, amid the soft crackling of embers in the open hearth, he fell asleep.

It was early fall, and the nights were quite chilly. But when Alden awakened he was in a bath of perspiration. He knew that he had not slept long, for the late moon had not yet risen over the peak back of the cabin. The starry heavens cast a faint light into the room through the open window.

Why he had awakened he did not know. And for several seconds he lay listening to the ticking of his watch, hanging on the wall across the room. Probably an owl had hooted near the cabin, or a coyote yapped up the cañon. Then he was suddenly alert.

Something strange was lying on the covers of his bed. He could distinctly feel the pressure of its weight. It probably was Silver Boy—he may have curled down there for the night. But he had never done this before; always he slept on his pillow by the fireside, or on a window sill.

No, it could not be he. It was not quite heavy enough for him.

But, what was it? Surely there was nothing else in the cabin—alive! But this

was certainly alive! Unmistakably there was a constant shifting of the weight—a sort of rippling or quiver—the play of the muscles of some gliding creature.

It was slowly moving up from his feet toward the head of the bed. He could distinctly feel its progress.

Then the movement suddenly stopped, and a fearful sound came to his ears, sending involuntary chills along his spine. For the tenth of a second, so quickly was it done, he felt the weight leap from the covers and settle back as from the recoil of a spring.

Again and again he was conscious of the thrust. And continuously, now, the most horrible of all sounds buzzed in his ears. A rattlesnake was coiled on his bed, not two feet from his head, striking out boldly into the darkness! For the first time in his life the terror of death gripped at the soul of the man.

He did not dare to move, although the impulse to flee was almost irresistible. He wished to leap up and away from this flaying death that menaced him in the cloaking darkness.

But he knew the slightest move would prove fatal. Only by remaining absolutely quiet was there the ghost of a chance for him to escape the fangs of the rattler.

Twice the snake struck within a few inches of his face. So close was the path of the thrust he could see that its fangs glistened in the starlight streaming through the window, and its black, beady eyes flashed for an instant. But Alden knew that he was not the target.

He realized, suddenly, the full import of the situation. The rattler had crawled into the room for the night, as cold is repellent to it.

It had probably entered by the hole the wood rat had gnawed, crawling upon the low bed to get under the warm covers. However, in the cabin, the snake found a greater danger than the weather. Silver Boy had come to the rescue of his master.

Alden knew the dog fox was trying to make his kill in a systematic manner. The animal seemed to realize the vast difference between the fangs of a rattler and the coils of a poisonless black snake.

From what Alden could make out in the darkness, Silver Boy was harassing the snake into uncoiling so as to permit a fatal rush. That queer thing, instinct, told the fox that this particular reptile cannot

strike, save from a coil. Furthermore, past experience had something to do with his tactics. But it was a harrowing ordeal for the man who scarcely dared to breathe for fear of attracting the rattler's ire to himself.

The end came quickly. Suddenly the striking and buzzing ceased, and Alden felt the snake uncoil, and its weight glide across the bed toward the wall.

This was what he prayed for! The rattler was striving to escape where it had come up from beneath the bed.

He remembered now. He had not looked under the low bed in his search for the wood rat's entrance into the cabin. The snake had now revealed it to him.

But the diamond-back never reached the hole in the pine boards. A small gray body hurled itself through the air, and came to a stand upon the bed in a fury of snarls and snaps.

Unable to control himself longer, Alden sprang to the floor and quickly lit the lantern. His teeth were chattering, and the light in his hands quaking. The sight that met his eyes brought the grace of gratitude to his heart.

Silver Boy stood grinning at him, with the writhing snake held in his teeth, precisely where the neck begins. He was a picture of viciousness and cunning.

In his master's mind there was no question but that the old fox had saved his life. Whether he had awakened or not, he might have moved in his sleep and been bitten by the rattlesnake.

Stepping to the door of the cabin, he flung it open.

"There is your freedom, Silver Boy; I give it back to you," he said to the fox.

Silver Boy darted out through the door with the snake.

"And don't forget, old pal, you're always welcome," Alden called back after him. "Food will be ready for you every night down by the spring."

Silver Boy gave one rasping yip, and looked back. Then his eyes, shining in the light of the lantern, suddenly vanished—and he was gone.

But the next night, just at dusk, a pleasing sight greeted Alden as he glanced toward the spring. There stood Silver Boy in all his wild beauty and grace, laughing up at him with a tidbit in his teeth—a piece of cheese his former master had placed for him.

With him was a female—his mate. She, too, was taking her food daintily. And, hidden in the brush near by—not so bold and less daintily—three large whelps were snarling and snapping at one another, bolting down in greedy gulps the food their parents brought over to them.

The picture more than repaid Alden for the close companionship of his pet. His conscience was clear now.

Each night the gray foxes came, and the man would talk to them, moving quite near, his nature soul feasting upon their beauty. And always, after they were fed, the old dog fox would sit upon his haunches and bark—the sound beginning far down in his throat as a mere growl, and rolling up and out into a rasping yip. Then he would grin and grin, bark once as of yore—and be gone.

THE STORY'S ENDING

THE wood has lost its dryad
That made its boughs her home,
The stream has lost its naiad,
With shoulders white as foam,
And the leaves go all a-crying
That the happy summer's dying,
And the brook glides o'er the stone
All alone.

The world has grown September
With leaves that drift and drip,
It sighs one word "Remember!"
With sad finger on its lip;
For the happy summer's going,
The flowers have done a-blowning,
And the story, lovely friend,
Is at an end.

Richard Le Gallienne

I Just Couldn't Stand It

FOR WHAT PURPOSE DID GOD SEND WOMEN INTO THE
WORLD?—ON THIS INTERESTING AND VERY IMPOR-
TANT QUESTION SOME LIGHT IS THROWN
BY THE FOLLOWING STORY

By Mella Russell McCallum

YOU know how it sometimes is when you wake up—there's a gloom pressing down on you, and you can't think what causes it. That was the way with me this morning. I just couldn't stand it, even before I remembered what it was I couldn't stand. Then it come to me—it was life.

I laid there watching the curtains flap, and hating them, for they were dirty. I'd washed them only last week, but you know what Hoboken is. We wouldn't live here if it wasn't so handy to pop's business in lower Manhattan—and, well, there's another reason, of course, for where else could you get five rooms with steam heat for sixty-five a month?

I looked over at pop's empty place in the bed, and that ought to have made me feel ashamed, for my husband is in wholesale nuts, and gets up at five o'clock, while I generally lay till seven, for we decided long ago there was no sense in the two of us crawling out at that ungodly hour. However, I was feeling too sorry for myself to pity poor pop or anybody else—not even young Hecker, the fellow pop had told me about.

It seemed Hecker's wife had just had her third baby, and wasn't getting along any too well, and he was worried to death about her mind being affected, the way it is sometimes. Hecker being in business next door to pop, naturally all the wholesale nut men took an interest in the case; but I just couldn't seem to bother my head with anybody else's troubles, except, of course, I felt sorry about the little wife and all.

Lord, I was blue! It wasn't any one thing—it was everything. I looked around

at the golden oak bedroom furniture we got twenty years ago, and I hated it. There was a picture of Elaine on the wall, with her diploma, and all I could think of was how I had sweated over that voile of hers, and now she was married and gone to her own home, and what was the use of anything, anyhow?

The closet door was open, and pop's pyjamas had fell down, the way they do when a man hangs anything up, and the sight of them—oh, I don't know, I just couldn't stand it. I thought how I used to wish for the day to come when I would have plenty of time. Now it was here, and there was nothing to it, for time without the money to dress it up with is more or less of a nuisance. For all I know, it may be a nuisance if you do have money. I can't say as to that.

Well, I got up and combed my hair. It's bobbed, and only a little gray, with a natural wave the girls would give their ears for. I looked at myself in the glass to see if I looked as bad as I felt, and I didn't, even in my nightgown.

"Ellie Wilson," said I, addressing myself, "it's a darn shame!"

But I didn't know for the life of me what was a darn shame, for pop hadn't lost anything to speak of on the ponies lately, and Elaine and her husband were doing nicely in their new bungalow just outside of Pittsburgh. I picked up pop's comb and took the gray hair out of it and laid it in the drawer, and thought maybe I'd feel better after I had my coffee; so I put on my kimono without getting dressed.

The dumb-waiter buzzed just then, the way it always does at that hour, and I knew it was the ice. Going down the hall,

I saw the torn place in the wall paper that we've been after the landlord to fix for so long, and he doesn't.

I took off the ice and put it in the ice box, and looked the food over, mechanical. It all looked perfectly familiar to me—a piece of butter, half a pint of Grade B, some cold oatmeal, and a chop. I could have screamed. The kitchen, too—pop's toast crumbs, and the cretonne holders his sister makes me, and the Woolworth mats over the worn places in the linoleum; and then, as if I wasn't gloomy enough, out comes a roach and strolls along the drain board. You've got to fight those pests, Hoboken or Park Avenue; but honestly it was the first I'd seen for months.

I had my coffee, and then I went back and put on a house dress. Well, I thought, I might as well start in house cleaning, and begin with the bric-a-brac; but the sight of the parlor took away the false hope the coffee had give me. It's a nice parlor with overstuffed furniture—although I never could see why they call it that, for it's stuffed just the way they intended it—and a refined rug—small pattern, you know—and the brass ship book ends Elaine had give us, and the pongee curtains, practical as well as genteel, and the pictures of Athens on the walls.

I like it all, when you pin me right down to it—well, all excepting the Athens pictures, for I don't care much for them. I was glad when Elaine took down the family portraits, but instead of Athens I would have preferred some nice cows or sheep; but you know what schoolgirls are.

Well, I began to take down things—the iron candlesticks, and the silver picture frame, and the ash tray with the Washington Monument. I thought how I'd made a nice suds, but all the time my joints were operating as if they had rust in them, and I was thinking:

"I can't stand it—I can't stand it!"

Before I realized it, I was putting everything back again. I couldn't clean bric-a-brac to-day—that was sure; so I made the bed, and did some passes with the dust mop, and washed the dishes, and sprinkled around extra insect powder. The dumb-waiter buzzed again, and I put on the garbage. It buzzed again, and I took off the pail, and rinsed it and put in a clean paper, and peered around the sink for more roaches, but I didn't find any. Then I said to myself:

"The thing for you to do, Ellie Wilson, is to get out of this flat!"

And I did. I put on my new henna crape, the one I got me for the card club. I couldn't leave the house fast enough. The downstairs hall smelled just the way it always does—clean enough, but kind of cabbagy—and I hated that, too.

I didn't know where I'd go. I didn't want to call on any of the card club ladies, for they'd wonder at me all dressed up and out at nine o'clock. I didn't want to see any of them, anyway. I didn't feel like shopping. I wanted to talk to somebody I hadn't seen in a long time, and so naturally I thought of Belle and Clara, my old schoolmates that live one in the Bronx and the other in Brooklyn.

If I made tracks, I could see them both. It was the most interesting idea I'd had strike me for months, for the three of us used to be a regular trio in the old days, and we'd always kept track of each other; and now we were all in the same boat, with our children grown up and out of the way. Clara's boy was married, and Belle's two boys were away at college on the money Belle's father left for the purpose, he being a great believer in higher education, although Belle herself married two years out of grammar school, the same as Clara and I.

I went to Brooklyn, to Clara's, first. I didn't call her up, for I thought I'd rather run the chance of missing her than have her doll up for me and make a big fuss—send out for pastry and all that. I wanted to catch the girls just as they were or not at all, for, you see, I was anxious to get a line on how they felt inside, and whether they were having any trouble standing life.

II

CLARA came to the door, and I saw I had caught her all right. She's a good-looking girl, Clara, with coal-black eyes and hair, and lots of snap. Just now she had a bright green smock thing with daubs of paint on it, and there was a black smudge on her face.

"Well, Ellie Wilson, if you aren't a sight for sore eyes!" she said to me, and right away I was glad I had come.

The place smelled painty. She's having it decorated, I thought, and touching up a few shelves and things her own self. I followed her to the bedroom—and then my eyes opened for sure. That bedroom was all

done in orange and green—everything. The floor and furniture were green, and the walls, the bedcover, the dresser scarf, and the curtains were orange—absolutely the brightest green and the brightest orange you can imagine.

"Lay your things on the bed," Clara said. "I can't touch them—I'm all paint. I want to show you the apartment."

"My goodness, you've got all new things, haven't you?" I remarked.

"No—just the same old things, painted," she explained. "The only new things are covers and drapes. Isn't it wonderful what a little paint will do?"

Well, it was wonderful, all right! She had painted right over her brass bedstead and her oak furniture, cane seats and all.

"Does George occupy the same room with you?" I asked her, referring to her husband.

"He certainly does. Wait till I show you what I just made for him." Her eyes snapped. She flipped open a door, and there hung a green dressing-gown with orange collar and cuffs. "What do you think of it, Ellie?"

"I don't know yet," I said; "but while you're about it, why don't you do away with a bed altogether and get you a nice big parrot's cage?"

You see, I had her husband in my mind's eye. George is a little man with a kind of a beak, and how funny he would look in that green gown!

"Oh, go on, you!" she said, laughing.

She took me out to the living room, which wasn't so bad, being in cream and blue. There it was her same furniture painted over, too, and—would you believe it?—she had even painted the rug blue. The only reading matter in sight was a magazine with a blue cover and a last year's date, and some books with cream and blue bindings—"The History of Mormonism," volumes one and two. That gave me a kind of a start, for Clara and George had never been Mormons to my knowledge; and then I realized she had bought them for the color scheme.

The only thing in the room that hadn't been done over was the piano. She was going to do that, too, but George was stubborn about painting a piano, she said, and so far she hadn't been able to coax him into it.

Then we went to the dining room, and that rose up and hit me one between the

eyes. It was black and white, with spots of orange. It had white walls with a few black and white pictures, black baseboards and floor, black furniture—I recognized her old curly sideboard—black and white striped curtains, a big bowl of artificial oranges, some orange-colored artificial flowers, and orange candles and curtain pulls. It was some room, but kind of attractive at that, I had to admit.

"I haven't done the kitchen yet," Clara said. "I'm working on some jars, and I want to finish up the one I've started before I get lunch."

So I went out to the kitchen with her, and there was the table covered with marmalade and mayonnaise jars that she was painting black with different colored stripes, to match the different rooms. I sat down on a stool and watched her, and I must say she was handy at it.

"Those up there are dry"—she pointed to a shelf—"and I'll give you one to take home."

"Thanks," I said, and asked her what about the kitchen.

"I'm going to do the kitchen in yellow, white, and black," she said. "Yellow bands on the stove, yellow chairs with black bands, yellow plant in a black pot, white walls, black base, black and white check floor, yellow and black check curtains. It will be hard to do the floor—probably take me a month."

"And then, when it's done, I suppose you can only eat yellow, white, and black foods," I remarked. "Let's see—that gives you butter, eggs and cheese, bananas and white bread, and—oh, yes, celery and potatoes; but no red meat, nothing but yellow fried chicken. You can have licorice for dessert."

"Oh, go on, you!" Clara laughed. "Don't you like my apartment?"

"Sure, I think it's fine"—for I really did, in a way—"only I'd like to know what got you started doing it."

Clara slapped a green streak around the middle of a jar and looked at me kind of thoughtful.

"I don't know as you'll understand, Ellie," she said. "You're one of the calm, contented ones; but after Herbert was married I got so depressed I—well, I just couldn't stand it. I thought I'd die, honestly, everything was so dull. Then one day I read an article about how you could do your surroundings over entirely different,

and that started me. It's been a perfect godsend to me, Ellie, doing it."

"How does George like it?" I asked her.

"Oh, you know how conservative men are; but he doesn't say much, except he drew the line at the piano. To tell you the truth, Ellie, he never notices his surroundings much, anyway. He just eats and reads the paper and goes to sleep in his chair, until I haul him off to bed."

I wondered if she had made him pyjamas in parrot shades, but I didn't ask. Clara went on talking about him.

"One night a week he goes to his poker club, and one night we have our card club, and further than that George won't do anything. I wanted him to take up some line of culture with me, and sometimes go to a serious play, but he says he's too tired. When he goes to a show, he wants vaudeville, and he can get that right here in Brooklyn."

I had to smile, for that was pop all over, the way she described her husband. Pop likes vaudeville, too.

"But I don't fuss at him any more," Clara went on; "not since I took this up. When I get all done, I'm going to help a friend do her apartment, and by that time it'll be time to do mine over again." She laughed. "I'll probably get new ideas and want a change."

"I see," I said. "So you've been sort of solving a problem, as you might say?"

"Just that," said Clara. Then she sighed. "You're lucky, not to have any problems to settle."

Oh, yes, thought I, awful lucky!

"Well, Clara," I told her, "your bird scheme puts me in mind of a show I saw a long time ago—Maude Adams in 'Chanticleer.' Do you remember? If you run out of ideas, you ought to be able to do something with that—a kind of a rooster room, you know."

I had to duck, or she would have slapped me with her paintbrush. When she began to put away the stuff and make room to get lunch, I said to myself, what am I poking fun at Clara for? She's happier than I am, I thought. I really envied her; only I couldn't help but think of her George and his beak in that green dressing gown.

"Let's go out for lunch," I said, suddenly; for all at once I was tired of the smell of paint and all. "Let's go to some nice place where we can have a good visit all by ourselves."

"We're all by ourselves here," she said.

"No, we aren't," I said. "I think your color scheme is grand, but it gets in the way of conversation. Come on—it'll do you good."

I think she liked the notion of going out herself.

"All right," she said.

She made me pick out a jar to take home, and I took one with a cream-colored stripe, and she went to get dressed. When we got out on the street she was more like the Clara I always knew, stepping along springy in her gray suit and little snappy gray hat. I was glad she hadn't carried her color schemes into her street clothes.

Well, we had a real nice lunch at a tea room, and talked about old days, and how we wouldn't wait so long between visits next time—we always say that and never do it—and how we would meet for lunch at a chop suey in New York and take in a matinée soon.

Before I left her to go on to Belle's, she said:

"Now, Ellie, if you should ever decide to do your rooms over, let me know."

"I will," I promised her. "Tomatoes and mayonnaise sprinkled with black pepper would make a nice scheme, wouldn't they?"

"Oh, go on, you!" she said, and we parted, she home to her paint pots and me to the Bronx subway.

III

WELL, when I got to Belle's, I was thankful to find everything just the way it used to be. The floors were kind of dusty, and the pictures not quite straight, for Belle never was so much of a housekeeper; but, my goodness, I was glad to see her, and she me, the same as Clara had been.

And then, after I'd laid off my things and taken a good look at Belle herself, I began to blink. She was always a pretty girl, but to-day, why, honestly, to-day she was beautiful! She looked ten years younger than me, and maybe fifteen years younger. Her hair was cut snappier than mine or Clara's, and still yellow, and there wasn't a wrinkle in her face that I could see. She had on a straight blue crape that put my henna in the shade, and flesh-colored stockings, and the cutest little satin shoes with buckles.

I wasn't really envious. I was just happy to look at her.

"Now here is a woman who can solve a problem without painting the piano and making her husband into a parrot," I thought. "My, you look sweet, Belle," I told her.

Even her finger nails were just perfect. I gave a glance at myself, and saw that I was common and middle-aged beside her.

"What have you done to yourself?" I went on.

"Nothing," she said. "I hope you'll excuse the looks of the apartment."

"I shan't look at anything but you. You're a picture," I declared.

Well, we talked, then, about our husbands, and she said hers was well, and the hardware business going fair, and the boys doing nicely at college, and she asked about pop, and about Clara, and everything—you know the way you talk.

You see, Belle had married a man considerably older than herself, and you'd have thought she would be the one of us three to grow old first; but it had turned out just the other way around.

"So poor old Clara has found herself at last," she said, after I told her about Clara's apartment. "I tell you, Ellie, you're fortunate to be able to take things as they come. Clara and I never could. We were always restless souls, always seeking—"

She broke off.

"I suppose I'm too dumb to be restless," I said.

"Not that, Ellie dear"—her eyes had a queer far-away look—"just different, that is all."

I wondered what was eating her, but didn't have to ask, for she told me.

"Now, my husband is like Clara's George, the dearest, kindest man in the world, but absolutely set. His work is his only activity."

"Supporting a family is quite some activity," I said, for, I don't know, I didn't like the way she talked.

"Oh, yes, but a man shouldn't neglect the finer things of life—never! It isn't fair to his wife or to himself."

"You never used to talk that way when your boys were little," I said.

And then I saw I had really started something big.

"No, I didn't—and do you know why? Because the mother in a poor family never has time to develop herself. She is a slave—nothing else."

I thought, then, how pretty Belle had

looked when she was a young mother with two baby boys, but I didn't have a chance to tell her so, she was talking so hard.

"A slave to the race," she went on. "Because this happens to be a civilized country, that makes her all the more of a slave. The care of the child devolves upon the woman, in homes like yours and mine. The father's responsibility is mainly financial. So, naturally, when the child grows up, it doesn't make much difference to him; but the woman—the woman, suddenly bereft of her chains! Ah, Ellie, it's lucky that some are content, like you, to adapt and adjust yourselves to an empty nest! Poor Clara and me!"

I wanted to ask her where she got all that dope, as pop would say, and I would have, too, only the doorbell rang. Belle got up quick.

"I'm expecting a guest for tea," she said.

"I got to be thinking about Hoboken," I said. "I'll just say how d'ye do and slip out."

"Oh, no!" said Belle. "You must stay and have tea with Ted and me."

Well, who is Ted, I wondered? I wasn't kept in suspense long, for back she came with a tall young man carrying a bag that looked like delicatessen, and must have been, for he handed it to Belle and said, murmuring like:

"I brought some cakes."

"Oh, how sweet of you!" replied Belle. "Ellie, let me present Mr. Barnes—my old friend, Mrs. Wilson."

Off she went to the kitchen, and left me alone with him. He was a nice-looking boy with slick light hair and a high forehead, and neat enough, but a bit frayed as to collar and cuffs. Right away I was drawn to him, for I like young folks.

"Are you a friend of Mrs. Andrews's boys?" I asked him.

"I have not that pleasure," he said, and he kind of murmured to me, too. It was his way of talking, I guess. "I am a friend of Mrs. Andrews. She is a marvelous woman, is she not?"

"A peach," I seconceded him. "I ought to know, for we've been friends more than thirty years. We graduated from grammar school together."

He looked at me queer, as if I must have been a backward scholar or something.

"She is a wonderful help to me in my work," he went on.

I thought that was queer, for Belle had

never been one to help her husband in the hardware business, although I never blame a woman for that. A man likes to run his own business.

"I am a composer," Mr. Barnes said, like announcing something, and lifted his head up and looked at me straight with his nice boy's eyes.

"Oh!" I said. "I never knew Belle was musical."

"She isn't in the sense you mean, Mrs. Wilson," he said, leaning toward me solemn; "but in the larger sense—her whole being flows in large rhythms, cosmic rhythms. One feels it just to be in the room with her. One vibrates to it."

I knew I ought to say something, but what? He was too polite to pin me down in my ignorance, and he slid over on the piano bench and said:

"I'm doing a movement in A major. I'll play the first part of it, and perhaps you'll see what I mean."

Well, he played real pretty, although there wasn't a great deal of tune to it; but for the life of me I didn't see what it had to do with Belle.

"That's very nice," I said, and wished Belle would come back, for I guess nobody likes to be showed up a fool. Still, it's better to admit it right out, if you are one, so I told him. "I don't just get you, Mr. Barnes, but if Belle really helps you compose your music, why, I think it's just fine!"

He smiled, and we kind of warmed up to each other, and I was glad I had said that. Then Belle came in with the tea—came in sort of tripping, as much as you can when you carry tea.

"I've forgotten how many lumps you take, Ellie," Belle said. "This greedy boy here takes four. Imagine!"

Mr. Barnes smiled at her, and she smiled back.

"If I'm not mistaken, there's a greedy girl in this room, too," he said. "You know you always eat more cakes than I do, Belle."

Well, it was then, for the first time, that I began to feel funny, as if I might find out something I didn't want to. It hadn't come to me before. In fact, I thought it was grand to be an inspiration to a real composer, and I had been taking off my hat to Belle, so lovely and young-looking and all—until he called her a "greedy girl." I don't know—it kind of made me sick.

I didn't enjoy my cup of tea much. It was like I had had poor eyesight and put on glasses, and everything looked different. Belle's face bothered me now, for I saw it wasn't really young. How could it be, with her my age? And her eyes—they would light up sudden, and then die down like a dead coal, if you know what I mean. I wished her husband would walk in; but they never do except in shows.

As quick as I could I got away. They both went to the door with me, and Mr. Barnes took my hand and held it, and said he wanted me to attend his recital.

"When is it?" I asked him.

"Oh, that I cannot say," he sighed. "It is so hard to get a hearing!"

"If Teddy composed jazz, he could be famous," put in Belle; "but when you're doing something really fine, it's heart-breaking to succeed."

"Yes, I guess it is," I agreed, but I didn't mean Mr. Barnes's music.

IV

WELL, I went back to Hoboken, and I didn't notice the distance, or the subway mob, or the squeak of the tube train, for thinking of Clara and Belle; but mostly Belle, for, after all, you can't hurt yourself serious with a can of paint. Paint'll wear off in time, while Belle—I was sorry for her and ashamed for her, and I wanted to spank her, too.

Hoboken looked good to me that night, somehow. I took the Washington Street car home, and the inside of our flat building smelled nice—you know, all the different families making fresh coffee for their dinner, and some having chops and some steak.

I hurried out to the kitchen and put on four potatoes to boil in their jackets, and then I changed my dress. Pop was going to bring the meat.

Then I did a funny thing for coming home late and pretty tired. I started in and whisked up a batch of drop biscuits—you know, they go grand with thin gravy. I don't know why I did it. Maybe it was what they call self-expression, for it made me feel good, and yet all the time I was thinking:

"But biscuits don't settle the question—biscuits don't settle the question!"

And then it came to me that you can't really settle questions, anyway, and the best thing is to put them out of mind and

not try to do too much about it. You've got to have empty hands and an empty mind to grow problems. A woman that's taking care of a flat and a baby don't have time for them.

Well, if this had been a story or a theater play, I guess it would have ended like this—pop would have looked at me sharp after dinner and said:

"Aren't you kind of run down, Ellie? How about a little trip to Atlantic City or somewhere?"

Nothing like that happened. He came in as usual and plunked the steak down on the kitchen table, and said:

"Hello, old lady, have a good time? Don't cook her too much."

When I asked him if he liked the biscuits, he said:

"I'm eating them, ain't I?"—that same old answer that a woman never likes.

While I washed the dishes, pop read the paper. I fussed around the kitchen quite some time, scouring the knives and the faucets, and wondering why I wasn't so blue as I had been, for I had certainly lost a lot of my discontent between Brooklyn and Hoboken *via* the Bronx—and I wasn't going to advertise for it, either!

I remembered that painted jar Clara had give me, and I went and undid it. It was kind of a pretty thing, at that. I was going to set it up somewhere, and then I thought, no, it makes me think of George's dressing gown, and the first thing I knew I was giving it a sharp tap on the edge of the sink.

"Smashing up the china?" pop called out.

He always wakes up after his dinner's settled, and now he strolled out to where I was.

"Just a marmalade jar," I said, and put the pieces in the garbage pail.

Then pop leaned against the door and talked about what had happened in his line of business during the day. He went on to say that things had gone from bad to worse with young Hecker. The new baby was all right, but the wife had to be taken away to an asylum for awhile.

"It's darn tough luck on a young fellow just starting in business," pop said. "Not a charity case, you know, for he's able to keep a hired girl to look after the other two kids; but you know what a hired girl is. He says the kids ain't getting what they ought to have to eat—spinach and such stuff—and their clothes ain't looked after right. Hunter's wife went up there to-day"—Hunter is pop's partner—"to kind of look after things what she could, but gosh, Hunter's wife has little kids of her own to look after."

Right then it was as if something clicked in me—I don't know.

"I wonder if I couldn't help out?" I said.

"You, Ellie?" Pop was staring at me. "I thought you were all tired out from getting our own girl married and off. Hunter spoke of you, but I told him I didn't believe you could."

"Well, I can," I said. "I don't know anything I'd rather do." Just then something Belle said came to my mind. "You know, pop, when a woman is suddenly bereft of her chains—"

I couldn't go on. I had to laugh. Pop laughed, too.

"That's a good line you started," he said. "Where'd you get it?"

I didn't tell him.

NOSTALGIA

I HAVE bartered the lowland pastures
Where the peaceful cattle graze
For a roaring hell of girders
And streets in an endless maze.

I have sold the sea mist's perfume
And the forest's scented breath
For the dust of a thousand gutters
Laden with living death.

And God, how my soul within me
Cries out in agony
For a glimpse of the fields and mountains
And the far-off, murmuring sea.

Paul Chadwick

Across the River

THIS STRONG MAN FOUND A RESISTING SPIRIT THAT HIS
FISTS COULD NOT BATTER DOWN

By William Merriam Rouse

BILL WYMAN had a grouch. To himself he acknowledged it, standing by the kitchen window with his broad back to the room, and his scowl directed downward upon the roaring waters of the Dunder River. Like the river, he was working himself into a smashing, vicious rage, and, like the river, he struck the eye of the beholder with an impression of terrific power compactly held in a comparatively small space.

The shoulders of Wyman ran in two sloping lines from casing to casing of the window, and between them his neck rose from the flaring collar of a blue and green checked flannel shirt. His shirts were always open at the throat; there was none for sale in the general store that would button around his neck.

Small ears, set close to his head, heard every sound of movement from his wife as she went about her housework. Minutes ago she had stopped singing. Amy knew, always, when her husband's grouch was coming on. Her step was light and careful, and she had not spoken since he crossed the kitchen five minutes before, cursing the frothing river because the ice had gone out unexpectedly during the night, and carried away a small pile of lumber that he had just drawn and piled too close to the bank.

Upon the turgid brown stretch, seething and spotted with yellow foam, he saw boards which other men had lost; good saw logs, a chicken coop, a wagon box. He was sure that some of his two-by-fours were lodged against the tiny island just below his house; jammed among the cakes of dirty ice there.

They might well be gone by another morning. The Dunder was rising, and the few square yards of the island which remained above water were slowly growing

fewer. The patch of alders and the lonely little elm had less visible surface to stand upon than had been there at breakfast time.

For such a small river, the Dunder had great power; every spring it threatened the stone pier under the bridge below the falls. The men of Dunder Falls village sometimes worked hard to save it when an ice jam formed there.

Bill's brows were knotted above blue eyes made so dark by wrath that they appeared black. He turned suddenly, light as a cat in spite of his riverman's heavy boots. Amy Wyman stopped in a careful progress across the room, and looked at him with apprehension.

Her gray eyes would have been filled with warmth if she had not been half frightened; he knew that. She had soft brown hair, with the sheen of silk, parted and brought low upon a wide, white forehead. It was a face where peace belonged.

The swift, fierce glance of her husband took her all in: face of startled serenity, strong and graceful limbs, white skin. He was savagely proud of her.

"I'll make that damn river pay me, one way or another!" he flung at her, through half shut teeth. "I'll catch logs to pay for that lumber! And, if I can't get enough from shore with a pike pole, I'll go out in the boat!"

"Don't do that, Bill!" she exclaimed. "It's dangerous! Never mind a few boards!"

"A few boards!" he roared. "A thousand feet of good hemlock!"

"Now, Bill!" she pleaded. "Don't get yourself all excited! I know it's too bad, but don't take it so hard!"

"You'd take it hard if you had to earn the money to buy more!" He paced the floor with the tread of a panther.

"You earn good money, Bill!"

"It goes! All of it! To the devil!"

"Bill!" She came up to him as he stood glaring, and put her hands—long, well-shaped—upon his shoulders. Tears were in her eyes, brimming to the lashes. "I've got ten dollars! I'll give you that to help!"

"I don't want your money!" he growled. Suddenly he flung his mighty arms around her, and pressed her to him so that she cried out in pain; he let her go as suddenly, and she staggered, gasping, but with a light breaking in her eyes.

"I'll lick the river!" he declared. "Ned Bradford promised to bring back my pike pole to-day. If he don't, I'll break his neck!"

"Don't roar so, Bill!" she exclaimed, nervously. "Ned's coming now; he's almost at the door. I just happened to look out and see him."

"I'd just as soon tell him!" said Wyman. He walked to the door and flung it open. "Hello! Come in! Where's my pike pole, Bradford?"

A tall man, taller than Wyman, entered the room with laughter upon his lips and in his brown eyes. Except by comparison with Bill, he would have been called strong; a careless, laughing, curly haired fellow, with the freedom of the woods and river in his movements.

"Hello, Amy!" His eyes went to hers, and met them, with frank admiration. "Hello, Bill!"

Wyman recognized, with no thought of jealousy, the marked liking which his wife and Bradford had for each other; he regarded it with a mental shrug when it did not annoy him, as to-day. Bradford was inclined to let things go with a laugh in a case where Bill Wyman would crash through to victory at no matter what cost to himself, or others.

"What about my pike pole that you borrowed last fall, before the river froze?" he demanded.

"Oh, sure!" The smile still lingered upon the face of the caller. "I'll go home and get it, and bring it right up to you, Bill. Don't look so glum!"

"He's lost some lumber," said Amy, in a low voice. "The river took it off in the night!"

"Looks as though it might take the bridge this time, too!" Bradford told them. "They're a gang working now to keep the ice and stuff from jamming and putting any

more weight against the pier than it 'll have to bear, anyway. They want a new shift to-night. Looks as though you and me'd have to turn out, Bill!"

"I'll go," promised Wyman. He had never yet hesitated to face danger for the common good; fire and flood found him in the most dangerous place, and doing the work of three ordinary men. He caught a look of admiration from Amy.

"I'll be there, too," said Bradford, and Wyman grinned at him. He knew—Bill did—that Ned Bradford wanted a little of that incense of praise from Amy. It was nothing to Wyman that she gave it; she belonged to him, and if it did Ned Bradford any good to show off in front of her, he did not care.

"I'll have an early supper and go for all night," said Wyman, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "That 'll give me all day to drag back forty dollars out of that cussed river! And I'll do it!"

"Maybe I better go get that pike pole, then," said Bradford, turning toward the door. "I'll be right back with it, if I don't get into a poker game or something!"

"You could go get it, Bill," suggested Amy.

He turned upon her a darkening gaze.

"Yes, and lose some more time!"

Bradford went out with a casual wave of his hand. Wyman was furious that the delinquent borrower had not taken the matter of the pike pole more seriously.

"Don't get yourself all worked up, Bill!" His wife was pale, and he knew that she realized what a volcano of rage was pressing within him.

"If he don't bring that pike pole, I'll smash him!" said Wyman, in a low voice.

"No!" Amy had grown white to the lips, and there was something more than fear in her eyes. The knowledge that she was angry made Wyman all the more determined to take vengeance if Bradford trifled with him.

"I'll give him until afternoon," said Bill. "If he don't come by the time I've finished my dinner, I'll go after the pike pole myself!"

"I'll go for you, Bill!"

"You'll stay here!" Wyman put on his hat. "That grinning fool has got me mad! I've had bad luck enough without wasting the whole day besides!"

He went out, cooling a little as he struck the raw air of March. Up the river a little

way, and mostly on the other side, lay the village. Wyman could see people on the bridge, and hear, above the roar of the river at his feet, the crashing thunder of the falls. It eased him a little to stand in the presence of this turbulence; it would make him feel still better when he was fighting against the cause of it.

Always these fits of anger shook him, and afterward he was more or less ashamed of them, unless the cause of grievance continued. Now, as he dragged his heavy, flat-bottomed boat out from its winter resting place in the old woodshed, he would have calmed down but for the fact that his pike pole still remained missing. He had had a feeling that Ned Bradford was going to let himself be diverted from the errand.

So, as Wyman tested his two pairs of ash oars and pulled the boat down close to the water's edge, he grew more angry. He saw a fine pine log go plunging downstream, well inshore. He could have got that one. Then came a six inch sawn timber, which would have made one of the sills for the new woodshed. Bradford was costing him something to-day. Bill worked furiously at a log that had lodged in the bushes. To use the boat he needed another man, with that pike pole.

Wyman lost count of time, and when he finally felt the hunger that meant noon, he looked at his watch. One o'clock! Dinner time had come and passed, and no doubt Amy had hesitated to call him in his present mood. That was all right, but had she done it because she was afraid of what he might do to Bradford? To save him, rather than to let her husband work himself to calmness?

Bill drove his ax into the log which he had dragged out by main strength. The helve quivered and hummed from the force of his blow. He was wet, dirty, tired, and losing in his battle to make the river pay him.

He stared broodingly toward the bend where Ned Bradford lived, farther on down the river. Slowly he began to walk in that direction, padding his heavy boots down softly, and bending a little forward.

II

BILL WYMAN flung his pike pole down upon the ground and opened the door of his kitchen half an hour after he had left the back yard. Amy was standing by the table from which they ate; he saw that his

dinner was there, and had been for some time, neglected. Probably she had at last gone out to call him, and found him gone. From her face, he knew that she guessed where.

"What's that over your eye, Bill?" she exclaimed, breathing fast. "Blood?"

"I guess so." He put his hand up, then he went to the sink and washed hands and face. All the while he was flapping the towel about his head and neck, Amy stood in one place, with her level gray gaze upon him.

"You—" It was hard for her to speak, apparently. "You — had trouble with Ned?"

"I got my pike pole," replied Bill, calmly, "and I smashed him!"

"Oh—you—you *coward!*"

"What's that?" barked Wyman, staring at her.

"You can't stand up to anything! A little trouble, and you have to hurt somebody or something! That's the way you take it out! Cruel! To everybody! To me! Some day you're going to drive me away from you, Bill! This is just about the last straw!"

"Wha-at!" Speech died in the throat of Bill Wyman. He would have been no more surprised if some half grown boy of the village had tried to thrash him. Amy and he had had their small quarrels, and he had his tantrums, and frightened her, but there had never before come from her lips any such talk as this.

"I'm tired!" she went on, pale, with trembling lips, and a look in her eyes that made her seem like a stranger to him. "I'm discouraged! I can't stand it! You take and take from me, and you never give anything but hurts!"

"Never give you anything?" he repeated, still dazed. "Why, yes, I do!"

"Not a thing you can't spare! When did you ever give up the satisfaction of a mad fit for me? Did you give up half an hour's time to get your pike pole? No! Ned's careless sometimes! What of it? You're as savage as a bull! I wish I knew how much you've hurt him!"

"What did you say about driving you away," demanded Wyman, lowering his head a little. Out of this swift and utterly bewildering attack, his mind picked the thrusts that hurt most. "Leave me? You can't get away from me! I'd follow you—anywhere—and break your neck!"

She shivered and drew back, and he knew she realized that he meant it literally. He had never struck her, but now he wanted to take her white and beautiful throat in his mighty fingers. Leave him? He would rather die than lose her. If she ever tried anything like that he would take her by the neck and shake her until she was as limp as a rag doll!

"Yes!" she whispered, staring at him with eyes which seemed to have dissolved all veils of reticence. "You would do that if—you could!"

"I could!" he boomed. The kitchen fairly shook with sound. "I'd walk through that river to get you!"

Her eyes curtained themselves quickly; he no longer saw into the depths of her being. She gestured toward the table, and went swiftly out of the room; in a moment the sound of her feet upon the stairs came to him. He sat down at the table, from habit, and mechanically ate a few mouthfuls before he found that he did not want food.

Wyman got up and went out of doors, to balance the pike pole in his hands and stare at the swirling brown water. He had never seen Amy like this before; the feeling it gave him was more closely akin to physical illness than anything he had ever known before. She would be all right to-night, or to-morrow, of course.

But it was strange to have her talk to him like that. Talk of leaving him! He walked down to the river and jabbed viciously at a plank; speared it and drew it ashore.

Never gave her anything! That was a nice stick of hemlock! *Thud!* The hook at the end of the pike pole caught it, and he stood knee-deep in icy water to lift out a weight that no other man in the village could have handled alone. He gave her money, clothes, all he could afford. He was a good husband to her.

What did she care about Bradford? Soft-hearted! Ned would look like himself again in a week or so, and the fight would be forgotten inside of a year. There had been a terrifying look in her eyes as she stood there by the kitchen table. It made him cold now to think of it.

Through the afternoon Wyman collected a goodly pile of salvage; to a certain extent his loss was recouped, although not in kind, and he began to feel better. He went into the house early for supper, secretly con-

scious of an uneasy desire to see Amy again.

A good meal was waiting for him on the table. She was upstairs; he could hear her moving around. Well, he would go up to the village and put in the night with the boys at the bridge. To-morrow would be another day—a new day.

It was growing dark by the time Wyman finished supper. He went up to the bridge and stopped there in the cold, misty evening. Bill was not in a willing mood to bear company to humanity this night, but a man had to help when people needed him.

He looked down over the railing, partly to get an idea of how the men were working before he joined them. They had hung lanterns on the sides of the pier; a half dozen men stood on the rocks and broke up jams when they started to form.

Wyman turned and looked back toward his own house, with instinctive longing. It was outlined against the sky, a dark mass. A lantern appeared at the back door. Amy going to the woodshed, he told himself. But the lights in the house went out. There must be two persons, then; one with the lantern, and one inside, putting out the lamps. Probably a neighbor had come in, and Amy was going visiting somewhere for the evening.

No, something unusual was happening. The lantern moved down toward the river, and stopped there. What could Amy be doing on the river bank at this time of night? And who was with her?

This was not merely extraordinary; it indicated that something was inexplicably wrong. So strong was the feeling that Wyman involuntarily started to go home, stopped, called himself a fool, and stood irresolutely watching that light at the edge of the river.

When it appeared suddenly and swiftly to move out upon the surface of the Dunder, Wyman hesitated no longer; he began to walk with long strides. He broke into a run. It did not seem possible that any one had gone out there on the river this night, and yet there was no other explanation of the way the light had acted. He reached the dark house in a matter of five minutes, and dashed toward the water.

Buildings and turns of the road had prevented him from watching the light as he ran; now he saw it again, and it was stationary in the middle of the Dunder, somewhat below where he stood. Was the oars-

man trying to row upstream and just holding his own? If he could not do better than that against the current, he might as well tell himself good-by. There were rock filled rapids below, and not even Wyman's stout boat would hold together in them when the water was like this.

It was his boat, undoubtedly, for it was gone. Perhaps it had grounded on what remained of the little island below the house. Even now he could not believe that Amy was out there; she had lent the boat to some fool whose head Wyman resolved to punch if the river spared him. He moved down the river in the hope that he would be able to see, in the lantern light, something of what had happened.

A form came plunging out of the darkness, clutching at him with a cry that sounded above the steady roar of the water. Amy? How did she get here? Bill steadied her by the elbows; literally held her up until her gasping lungs quieted; until she could give utterance to words which meant something.

"The boat!" she panted in his ear. "It's grounded on a bar—right here—the current swung me in—he's out there on the island—water to his knees, Bill! Holding to that elm tree! Hurry, Bill!"

"Say!" Wyman shook her in his bewilderment. "What 're you doing on the river? Who's out there?"

"Ned Bradford! The boat struck, and he hung the lantern on a branch and got out to push off—the current was too strong for him—he pushed, and she got away! Quick, Bill, or the current 'll pull him down! He can't last long!"

Wyman was still bewildered, but he was moving before she finished making him understand. He went down the river bank, every inch of which he knew. He saw a dark mass, swinging uneasily a few feet out. With no hesitation, he jumped and landed in the ooze of a newly formed bar. Oars? Yes, one pair swinging in the locks and the others in the bottom of the boat. He pushed off instantly, and was carried twenty feet before he could get set to begin the battle with the river.

The stout ash bent as he settled back against the oars; the boat fairly leaped up against the pulling water. Bill Wyman would show the Dunder River what he could do! He did not think of himself as risking his life for a man to whom he had given a beating that day. He would have

gone to help anybody, and, in a sense, he would be getting even with the river for the trick it had played on him during the night.

An oar snapped, and Wyman lost yards before he could get one of the spares into the oarlock. He had most of the work to do over again. He looked over his shoulder and saw that the light was not far away; it would be necessary to go beyond the elm and come down against it. Even the great strength of Bill Wyman began to feel this drain. His mouth hung open and his breath whistled; he could hear it inside his head. A rod of pain lay across his shoulders.

When the blunt end of the boat at last bumped against the tree, Wyman's head was sunk between his shoulders, and it seemed that he had not enough strength left from the needs of his battle to raise it. Under his brows, he saw Bradford fall into the boat, with the lantern, to sit huddled, exhausted, with hands dragging on the bottom boards. The water had driven him up the tree.

That trip ashore was easy, compared with the long fight upstream. A summoning of the will, a burst of effort to keep the boat working inshore; then they were jerked from their seats as the craft grounded on the bar that had saved Amy. Wyman was out first. He was not going to lose a good boat to that river, even if his legs would hardly carry him. He helped Bradford out and pulled the boat far up on the bank with desperate tugs, of which he would have been ashamed an hour before.

Bill staggered as he went toward the house with the others. They went dumbly, all their strength put into the effort of walking. Amy and Bradford had the lantern, and she was helping him. Well, he needed help! Five or ten minutes more and he would have gone down the river on his last boat ride.

The three of them stumbled into the kitchen. It was Amy who lighted a lamp; the men sank to chairs, and sat staring at each other while slowly strength came back to them. Bill looked at Bradford's face, and saw the marks he had left there; they had grown black and blue and purple by now.

Everything ought to be all right, now, Wyman thought, and then slowly he became conscious that there was something in the room besides the presence of the

drama they had just lived. Bradford was looking at him in a queer way, and so was Amy.

Amy's hands went up to her white throat; long, slender hands that were so good to touch. It was as though that gesture were a key which unlocked the door of knowledge for Bill Wyman. He remembered the threat he had made; he would follow her and break her neck if ever she tried to get away from him. That was in the back of her mind now as she sat there looking at him.

She had been going to leave him—the railroad station was on the other side of the river, and he had been up there at the bridge—the southbound sleeper! *She had been running away with Ned Bradford!*

For a moment the shock of this knowledge blurred the eyes of Wyman; the faces of the others swam in a mist. There had been nothing of this going on before to-day; he was sure of that, knowing her. Yet, now he understood that Ned had always been in love with her. It was as plain as the nose on a man's face, now that he saw it!

Bill stood up, with his legs once more as strong as pillars of granite under him. He could see Ned and Amy clearly, now; and she was paper white, with her hands still at her throat. Bradford sat slumped down in his chair, hands in coat pockets, with his somber eyes staring fixedly from his battered face at Wyman. The smile and the sparkle had gone out of him to-night.

"So you two had started to run away together?" croaked Bill, at last. "You were fixing to leave me, Amy?"

"Yes, Bill!" Amy whispered, but she was defying him, nevertheless. "It's my fault. I knew Ned—cared about me, but he never said so. I—I sent for him to-day, and told him I wanted to go! I'm through!"

"And she's going to go, damn you!" shouted Bradford. With the words he leaped from his chair, and Bill caught a glimpse of a black automatic.

Crash! There came a scream from Amy. Wyman felt a streak of smarting pain. The next instant he had wrenched the pistol out of Bradford's hand and flung it through a window. Glass tinkled upon the floor in a sudden stillness, and there was a taste of smoke in the air.

Bill stood away from Bradford, backing a step or two toward the middle of the room. The inside of his arm was seared, as

was his side, with a welt like fire. He did not care for that. He looked at Bradford, who had gripped the back of his chair, ready to swing it.

Bill knew that he could kill both of them before they could get out of the room. He knew that they knew it; it was written in the tense form of Ned Bradford, in the paper whiteness of Amy.

Bill Wyman was conscious only of a weight upon his heart; a sadness like thick fog pressed in against him, and from it there was no escape. Whether he killed Amy, or whether, by a miracle, she evaded his hands, he had lost her. Now he understood this.

It wiped him clean of wrath. He hated himself for the fear of him which was now stamped upon her face. Hurt! He had hurt her worse than all the bullets in that pistol could have hurt him.

Bill wanted to make her happy, and he saw a way to do it; the hardest way in the world for him. But he knew that if he could take that way he would forever afterward be a different man; glad, able, somehow, to pull through the dark years without her. His fists clenched. He could feel his neck swell, while the blood pounded in his head. Three times he tried before he could speak.

"You said I never give you anything!" he panted hoarsely. "It's all right—you and Bradford. Get a divorce, Amy. I won't bother you! Now—are you happy, Amy?"

Ned Bradford relaxed with a sigh that drifted through the room. The slim hands of Amy fell away from her throat. Her head bowed; then swiftly it was flung up again, and she cried out, pointing at his hand.

"Bill! You're wounded!"

Wyman raised his big paw and laughed with a dry sound. The hand was half red, and dripping.

"They can't kill me with a gun!" he said, but he did feel a little queer, and he groped as he turned to find a chair.

"Only a scratch!" he added scornfully.

He heard the tap of hurrying feet behind him. He jerked back his head defiantly, and turned.

"I'm not afraid—" he began.

"Oh, Bill!" Amy's arms were around him, and his wounded hand was snatched to her breast. "My poor boy! You need me now. I love you!"

An Interpreter for Monsieur

IN THIS STORY CELESTE, LOYAL HANDMAIDEN, OFFICIATES AS THE GODDESS FROM THE MACHINE

By Reita Lambert

I HAVE served humanity in many capacities during my life, whether for good or ill, *le bon Dieu* knows best. But, though I am supposed to possess some linguistic skill I have never been called upon to serve as interpreter save once. Not that I was called upon, even then, for that express purpose. No, it came about most unexpectedly, and in this wise:

On a certain morning last winter, my good *bonne*, Yvonne, brought me up a *pneumatique*. A *pneumatique*, as you know, if you know your Paris, is the little blue note that can travel from the summits of Montmartre to Neuilly within the hour. It is a means of communication resorted to only in emergencies, and I ripped this one open with a quickening curiosity which became amazement when I saw the signature of my friend, Mme. Darcy. Amazement, I say, for one does not look for Mme. Darcy's signature on anything save especially embossed stationery.

There were only a few lines, begging me to come to her at once, and, as I shouted for Yvonne to bring me my hat and coat, I wondered what could have happened in that circumspect *ménage* to warrant this hasty summons. We are friends of long standing, *madame* and I, though she is a member of an old and noble French family, and I an insignificant busybody. Two-thirds of her aristocratic ancestors gave their heads as the price of their hauteur during the Revolution, and she is their true descendant.

It was Mme. Darcy who, disliking the word "detective," as indeed I do myself, labeled me "criminal psychologist," though I know something less of psychology than *madame* does of criminals. As for me, I have the same regard for her as one has for curiosities. She still lives her life as

though this were the nineteenth century, and rules her household by approved nineteenth century methods.

When the Darcy family is not at its villa in St. Cloud, it occupies an apartment on the Boulevard St. Germain, in one of those ancient buildings fashioned after the manner of a museum, and with rooms almost as vast and chilly. The comparison was in my mind when I rang her bell that morning. The maid who admitted me shut me into an unheated *salon* as though I were something that would not keep in a warm room, and I was shivering when she came to release me some ten minutes later.

My friend was waiting for me in her *boudoir*, before a delft blue fireplace, with not more than a franc's worth of coals burning in the grate. It was an immense room—which a lady's *boudoir* should never be, with a good deal of gilt and brocade about, but it was the proper setting for the regal height and noble features of Mme. Darcy. I could see, when she came forward to greet me, that she was disturbed, though she only said, after kissing me on both cheeks, "Well, my good Charlotte, and are you still pursuing your eccentric adventures?"

"Perhaps," I said, thinking of the note she sent me, "they are still pursuing me."

She sighed, and led me to the fire. "It was good of you to come so promptly. I never thought I should have need of you in any other capacity save that of friend."

"It is as a friend that I serve my friends," I told her, though I was surprised at her evident distress. "Come! You are in trouble. Do not tell me that M. Darcy—at his age! No? Your pretty daughter, then. It cannot be that she—"

"Monsieur and Ernestine are as usual," she told me a little stiffly, and then she

leaned forward and laid her hand on mine. "My dear friend, there has been a theft in my house—a common theft—and think of it—coming at this time!"

I sighed. Of all criminals, the thief interests me least. Still, I tried to show the concern she expected of me.

"That is bad, but why any worse at this time than another?"

"How can you ask," she reproached me, "when it is, as one might say, the very eve of my daughter's marriage!"

"What! Ernestine is to be married? And soon, too?" True, I knew the child had been betrothed almost since childhood, but I had never expected the marriage to be consummated. The arranged marriage is falling more and more into disfavor among us, what with the young people's determination to select their own lifemates.

"You did not know then," she was saying, "that the wedding is to take place within a week at St. Thomas d'Aquin?"

"Which is correct enough, so far as the church is concerned," I said. St. Thomas d'Aquin is noted for its fashionable weddings. "But Ernestine? She is happy, then—she is reconciled to the match?"

"Why not!" she challenged me. "She is, as you know, marrying the younger son of M. and Mme. Henri Dufreyn."

By itself I should not have considered this sufficient cause for a young girl's happiness. Young Henri Dufreyn, it is true, was as much as one could expect of a last leaf on a last branch of an ancient family tree, a little thin as to body and blood, I fancied, but as an alliance of families, I suppose it would be considered a good match. I remembered this pretty little Ernestine Darcy as a gentle and dutiful child. I had the chilly feeling one gets when it would seem as though romance had been bartered like something in a pot. But, after all, it was none of my affair, and so I came back to the theft.

"What," I asked her, "has been stolen? When did you discover the theft?"

"Not two hours ago—and by the merest chance. How long they have been gone I can only guess."

"But what—"

"I was about to tell you—the things were Ernestine's wedding gifts from her father and myself."

"Ernestine's wedding gifts!"

"I knew you would feel for her. You

may imagine how heartbroken she would be. She adored the things."

"Then she knew of their existence," I broke in.

"We permitted her to select them."

"And what were they?"

As she described them to me, I could scarcely believe my ears: an antique silver tea service, a ditto toilet set, some bits of old jewelry, valuable only to the collector of such trifles.

"Wait," I cut in. "You mean the thief took these things! And without your knowing it! Why, he must have left the apartment loaded like a donkey's back. A bulky tea set by itself is—"

"One moment, my friend! You go too fast. It was no common thief, as you may suppose, and no 'he,' as you imply. The thief is a member of my own household, of this I am convinced—and still in my employ. That is why I sent for you instead of for the police. Besides, to have the police in at this time—well, you may imagine the excitement under which my poor child already labors. Besides, the publicity!" She lifted her hands in horror. "And how could I know that they would recover the things? And that is really all I demand. And we shall recover them, I know, if we go about the matter quietly, so that this girl—this Celeste will not suspect."

"The girl, Celeste? And who is she?"

"Our *femme de chambre*, and Ernestine's personal maid as well."

"And why do you suspect her?"

"She is the only one in my household who could have had access to the wardrobe where the things have been kept—the only one who knew they were there—the only one who knew the value of the gifts. She is, in a manner, Ernestine's confidante, and has always made a great show of her devotion to my child. She could leave the house laden like a donkey, as you say, and no one would think ill of it since she has been with us for three years."

"She," I said, "would not seem like a guilty person to me, unless you have been harboring a thief for three years. In all this time have you missed nothing else?"

"Nothing," she admitted, grudgingly, I thought. "Our valuables are kept in the safe in our room, of course."

"Then these things were not in the safe."

"There was no room," she said. "Besides, we had no suspicion that they would not be safe in the wardrobe where they were locked. We have had nothing stolen from us before."

"And nothing else has been stolen now—only Ernestine's wedding gifts?"

"Nothing."

"You say this girl—this Celeste, had access to the wardrobe?"

Ernestine kept the key in a small drawer of her bureau. Celeste, of course, knew this.

"It is incredible," I said, after I had thought a moment, "that she should carry off a trunkful of tarnished antiques, and still have the boldness to stay on here."

"I have thought of that," Mme. Darcy told me. "But she had no idea that the loss would be discovered. The things have been packed away in the wardrobe since the last purchase was made nearly a month ago."

"And how did you happen to discover the loss, now?"

"By the merest chance. I had a dispute with a friend yesterday as to the pattern of a carved silver bracelet. It is said to have belonged to Du Barry, and my friend was skeptical. I determined to prove its authenticity. It was when I went for the bracelet that I discovered the things were gone."

"How do you know," I asked her, "that Ernestine has not moved the things herself?"

"Because I have looked for them everywhere. Besides, why should she want to move them? No, it is this Celeste. Of that I am sure. Of late I have noticed a change in her—how can I explain it? She has seemed, well, sly, and rather sullen in her manner to me. I had already decided to discharge her after Ernestine's wedding."

The more she talked, the more was I forced to share her conviction. It seemed ridiculous that the girl should stay on in the house she had plundered. But since nothing else had been stolen, and since Celeste had heard these things of Ernestine's discussed, and knew their value, the evidence pointed to the sly *femme de chambre*. Certainly it was an "inside job," as you say, and not the work of an ordinary thief. Antiques are not easily marketable, and they are easily traced. *Voila!* Her temerity in lingering on in the house could

be accounted for if she were planning to add to her collection, which must be the case.

"You have searched her room," I asked *madame*.

She said that she had—with no result, of course.

"To keep the thing from Ernestine—and her father, also, if possible—you know *monsieur's* hasty temper—"

"And to recover the gifts," I added.

"But, yes," she said. "You shall do this for me, my good Charlotte—if not for me, then for my poor baby." She took my two hands in her long, white ones. "I have found the thief for you; it should not be difficult for you to find my little one's gifts."

"I am not so sure of that," I said, and spoke the truth. "However, attend to what I say! Let no one know that you have discovered your loss. Go on as though nothing has happened. And tell me now all you know of this girl, when she is off duty, where her family lives—if she has one—and whether or not she has a sweetheart."

II

We were still talking a half hour later when Ernestine came in from the *couturier's*, where she had been to have the final fitting of her traveling gown. The girl, Celeste, was with her, and carried the long box in which the precious garment was wrapped. I looked at her closely; a healthy, decent appearing girl, she was, with nothing extraordinary about her, unless it be her dark, bold eyes, quick and flashing as a bird's.

As for little Ernestine, I was charmed to see how pretty she had grown. A *petite*, gay creature, with eyes like October grapes, and cheeks as red as the close red hat she wore pulled down over her dark curls. I thought of young Henri Dufreyn, and wondered how she could look so happy. Before I left, I spoke to her in English, a language which her mother scorns. However, like most of our young people, Ernestine speaks English fluently, as I found when I congratulated her upon her approaching marriage.

"Come, I want you to tell me that you are going to be happy."

I had her hands in mine—like a plump baby's hands, they were—and I felt them tense suddenly.

"But, of course I am going to be happy, *madame*," she laughed. "Indeed, I mean to be happy. Is it not my right?"

"Most certainly," I agreed. "And it is easy to be happy—when one loves!"

"I know that, *madame*; indeed, I know that!" she cried, and broke away from my grasp.

Well, I went back to my own small *pavillon* not a little disgusted with my own sagacity. Ernestine was not being forced into a marriage that would break her heart, and yet it was difficult to reconcile myself to the thought of that marriage—as it would be for you if you could but see this Henri Dufreyn. I was bored, too, at the prospect of tracing those treasures by which *madame* set such store, and not a little puzzled by the lack of mystery in their disappearance.

My first move was to call in a friend of mine, who knows as much about antique metal and stones as though he created them himself. It would not take him more than twenty-four hours to learn if the silver tea set and the Du Barry bracelet had been placed in the market. This done, I could only wait for the day when the girl, Celeste, would have her afternoon and evening free from her duties at Mme. Darcy's. In the meantime, *madame* was to notify me if any further losses were discovered. I had no word from her, however, and on Celeste's afternoon off, as you would call it, I set my faithful Yvonne to follow her.

She was back before dinner, looking as though I should be glad to see her. Yvonne, as I have told you, is my maid, and very proud when I set her a task of this sort.

"Well, you have not been to Boulogne and back," I said; for Boulogne, I had learned, was where the girl's family lived.

"No, *madame*, but I have seen and followed this girl you told me of. I was opposite the servants' entrance when she came out at three as surely as a chicken comes out of its shell."

"Or, a fox out of its hole," I helped her. "And she did not come out empty-handed, then?"

"She carried nothing, *madame*."

"What! Are you sure? She carried nothing under her coat?"

"You would not say so if you could see that coat. She is *chic*, this Celeste, and like the skin of a horse that coat fitted her."

My virtuous Yvonne, who is fashioned not unlike a peddler's sack, tossed her head.

"And she did not go to Boulogne," I said. I was disappointed. I had expected her to walk off laden like a good Santa Claus, which is natural when you consider how she had mingled downright crudity with her daring.

"She went to the cinema, *madame*. I followed her—down the Rue Bonaparte, and from there to the Rue Visconti. It was there that she met the man."

"A man! Come, you have not walked backwards, then. Did she meet this man by appointment, did it seem?"

"It was by appointment, assuredly," Yvonne said. "They spoke together for a moment, and it seemed to me they exchanged not more than three words."

"And those three?"

"I could not hear, though I went as close as I dared."

"Well, and then?"

"They walked together to the door of the cinema theater—"

"And went in, I suppose."

"It is true the girl went in—after buying her own ticket."

"What? She left her man?"

"Pardon, *madame*! He left her."

"She had given him nothing?"

"A smile, *madame*."

"She would," I grumbled. "And after that, what did you do?"

"I followed the man, *madame*!"

You see, I have trained her well, my Yvonne.

"It was this way," she explained. "I knew the girl would not leave before the cinema had completed itself, having paid two francs for her ticket. And so I left her there and followed the young man—though he did not know it—until I saw the last of him through the glass door of the Hotel Voltaire, which is on the Quai Voltaire, as *madame* knows. After that I returned to the cinema, and waited for the girl to come out again."

"And you saw her again?"

"But yes, *madame*, and followed her back to the apartment house of Mme. Darcy. I saw her go back into the servants' entrance."

There, it was not so simple as I had supposed. The girl had not added to her collection that afternoon—unless you consider the man. This I did, for want of something better. I had at first concluded

that he was this girl, Celeste's, sweetheart. But his actions had not been those of a young man in love. There is, as you know, no place more conducive to hand holdings and love passages than the dark inside of a cinema theater. Yet this gallant had permitted his lady to pay for her own ticket, and then left her to a lonely contemplation of the picture and returned to his hotel.

Or was it his hotel? If it were, then, as a fellow conspirator of the girl's, he fitted with no better success into the picture. A thief who would ally himself with a *femme de chambre* would not be likely to choose the Hotel Voltaire as his headquarters. The Voltaire is no meeting place for thieves, but a decent house with good traditions and a respectable clientele. I know this as well as I know M. Gouraud, who is the manager of the place, as his father was before him.

After thinking for a moment over what Yvonne had told me, I asked her to describe the young man for me, and then I went to my telephone and called the Voltaire. M. Gouraud's voice lost its cordial tone when I put my questions. An inquiry from one who has spent her life on the trail of vice, instead of virtue, was, in itself, a reflection on his establishment. He gave me the information I wanted in the voice of one whose children's honor has been questioned.

Doubtless I referred to M. Richard Stanley, the young American who had been many weeks a guest at his establishment. An estimable young man who paid his bills without demur, and preferred the refinement and good taste of the Voltaire to the more ornate hotels, though he could afford the best—he was but now enjoying the hotel's famous *table d'hôte*.

There was more, but I had learned what I wanted to know. The young man who had met Mme. Darcy's *femme de chambre* by appointment that afternoon, was an American gentleman—and rich. Provided that I attached any importance to that brief meeting, there was mystery here. And yet, when I had looked at it for some moments, that mystery lifted. Americans, as we all know, are indefatigable treasure hunters. Who would be a more ready purchaser for the things Yvonne had stolen than a rich young American?

Though this was neat deduction, it was only conjectural. Still, I found myself

hoping that if the young man was the possessor of Ernestine's wedding gifts, he had come by them in all innocence. That they were in his possession, or that he was in some manner connected with this theft, was well-nigh certain. Why should a handsome young American cultivate a servant unless he wanted something of her! And since this M. Stanley did not want love, there must be other attractions in that quarter.

Having come this far along the avenue these thoughts had made for me, I recalled that meeting of the two that afternoon. They had met briefly, and doubtless for a definite purpose. What purpose could they have, except to arrange for another rendezvous? And why had Celeste gone back to her place of employment when this was the one evening in the week when she was free to do as she liked. I did not like the look of that, and I said so to Yvonne.

"Come, put a morsel of bread in your pocket, and trot back to the Hotel Voltaire. This young man who permits his lady to buy for herself the cinema ticket is but now at dinner. M. Gouraud has just told me so. It will be interesting to know what he will do with himself later. There are some benches on the quay opposite the hotel from which you can see plainly when, or if, the American leaves the place. You comprehend me?"

"*Oui, madame.* Most perfectly!" gloated the eager creature, and waddled forth.

It was close upon midnight when she returned. The small mustache which graces the good soul's upper lip quite bristled with excitement. And with cause. Her vigilance outside the hotel had been rewarded when she had waited not more than five minutes, by the sight of this M. Stanley striding forth and making off down the quay at a pretty pace.

Yvonne had galloped along behind him through a maze of dim and devious streets until she found herself on the Boulevard St. Germain, which is the street upon which my friend Mme. Darcy lives. She had not recovered from the surprise of this when she saw the young man disappear through the door of the servants' entrance of the very apartment house occupied by my friend.

This entrance, as you know, leads up a separate stairway to the servants' quarters at the top of the house. Thus, our young man had gone direct to Celeste's room—

which, in itself, was a breach of the proprieties, since the maids are forbidden to entertain in their rooms.

Having seen him go in, Yvonne determined to wait and see him come out, which he did an hour or so later. He seemed to carry nothing that looked suspicious, but Yvonne followed him a block or so down the street until she saw him hail a cab and direct the driver to the Hotel Voltaire. When she had seen him drive off, she turned and went back, since she had to retrace her steps in order to come home.

It was by the merest chance that she happened to look across the street when she was repassing the apartment house of my friend Mme. Darcy. But she did look across, and in time to see the girl, Celeste, scurry out of the servants' entrance and break into a run. When Yvonne saw this, she also commenced to run, but, fortunately, the chase lasted not more than a block. The girl was evidently in search of a cab, for she hailed the first one that passed, and directed him to drive to the Hotel Voltaire.

"And, *madame*," panted Yvonne, "she carried a box—long and flat; it was like a small coffin!"

III

So there, you see, we had this rich, young American; this collector of *objets d'art*, bartering with a servant for her stolen treasures. More, he permitted her to risk her neck by delivering the things he was too much of a coward to carry off himself! A nice young man! A valorous gentleman indeed!

It was not yet nine on the following morning when I presented myself at the Hotel Voltaire and asked for M. Gouraud. *Monsieur* was in his private office, drinking *café au lait* out of a cup the size of a hat, and I could see that I was in disfavor by the hostile look in his little blue eyes when he greeted me. He told me that M. Stanley had already breakfasted and left—which I already knew—and then I told him my story. He listened to me, incredulous and profane.

"But you are mistaken! Have I not told you so from the very first? Do you think my house a rendezvous for thieves? And, of all men, this M. Stanley is a gentleman—above reproach. Who should know better than I!"

"Only Yvonne and myself," I said gently, "who have found him out."

"I tell you—"

"Let us not quarrel, *monsieur*. There is the possibility that he may have bought the things in good faith. The point is that he has the things, that they are here somewhere in your hotel, since you tell me that he left empty-handed this morning. If that is so, then they are here; for Yvonne heard the girl direct the driver of the taxi to your hotel."

"Here! The loot of thieves! Come!" and he got up. "I myself will admit you to his room—a breach of honor, in itself, but there is no alternative."

I followed him, smiling behind his cushioned back. The room into which he led me overlooked the quay, and the Seine, and the long rows of melancholy trees that march beside the river. It was a large room, with a bath opening off it, and there was a large wardrobe trunk in one corner, and there were brushes and toilet accessories on the bureau; but there was no sign anywhere—though we searched every corner—of Ernestine's missing wedding gifts.

I was standing there, puzzling over it, and wondering how I could carry my search farther without making my host too angry, when I found my eyes holding to a photograph that stood upon the mantelpiece. It was the photograph of a girl, a delightful young creature with a smile upon her mouth and in her eyes. And there was an inscription on the margin in English.

I quite forgot where I was, staring up at that pretty face which I knew so well, until M. Gouraud touched me on the shoulder.

"A charming picture, that," he was saying, and chuckled. "These young Americans have excellent taste." He caught my eye, and grinned his triumph at me. "You see, *madame*—I was right, no? The only object in my young guest's room that has proved of interest to you is that photograph!"

"Yes," I said meekly, "that is true," and I followed him without a word downstairs, and back of the desk into his private office.

"Is it not true that we all make mistakes?" he said to me, while I sat gazing stupidly, dazedly, about the place. As I have said, we were in his private office behind the desk where the mail is sorted and the keys hung. Like all such places, it was cluttered with stray umbrellas and canes, forgotten by hurried guests, hastily wrapped bundles labeled "to be called

for," bits of luggage shipped ahead or left behind by travelers.

I was still listening to my host, though my thoughts were on that photograph upstairs in the room of the American, when I realized that my eyes were resting upon a box, long and flat—like a little coffin, perhaps. I got out of my chair, and went over to it. Printed upon the top was the name of a fashionable *couturier*, the same, in fact, who had designed the gown in which Ernestine Darcy was to travel on her honeymoon. It was piled atop some crudely tied bundles, and it took me but a moment to ascertain that here were the missing wedding gifts.

"*Madame!* If you please!" protested M. Gouraud, horrified. "Those are but some things left here for a guest expected from Amiens. You must not—"

"Never fear, I have finished," I assured him, and took myself out of the hotel.

You may think that I went straight to Mme. Darcy, since I had found her daughter's missing treasures. But I have always said that one never finds the solution to one mystery without uncovering the seeds of another. It is true my first impulse was to restore the things, forget that I had found more than these, and leave the rest to fate. But this fate is an unreliable lady, and scandalously overworked. There are times when she needs help, and this seemed to me such an occasion.

Instead of going to Mme. Darcy, I walked down the quay while suicidal taxi and omnibus horns battered me on all sides. I was thinking of pretty Ernestine, and of her inflexible mother, and of Henri Dufreyn, and of the young American. I recalled the girl's defiant words, that it was her right to be happy. I remembered that I had agreed with her. I still agreed with her, and so I went back to my *pavillon* and called an acquaintance of mine who is in the office of the American consul, on the telephone. I told him the name of the American, and I said:

"I want to know all that you know—and a little more, perhaps, of this young man."

When he had called me back to tell me what he had learned, I wrote a note to Mme. Darcy, and asked her if she would be at home that evening, and alone. I dispatched Yvonne with this, and she was back inside the hour.

"Mme. Darcy will be alone after eight,"

she told me. "*Monsieur* is attending a banquet, and *mademoiselle* is spending the evening with her aunt on the Rue Vaugirard, where she will be until ten."

"I doubt," I said, "if she will stay that long. However, that is for you to ascertain. The number of this aunt's house on the Rue Vaugirard is twenty-four. There is a convent across the street whose entrance will provide a shelter for you. You will be there not much later than eight thirty, and you will see Mlle. Ernestine when she comes out, and you will follow her. I shall be at Mme. Darcy's, and you will come to me there. I shall be waiting for you."

"But if I follow the girl, *madame?*"

"She will not lead you so far, I believe, that you will not be able to report to me at Mme. Darcy's."

With Yvonne properly instructed, I called M. Gouraud, of the Voltaire, and spoke to him for a moment. Then I sat down to my dinner, and, after that, to wait. It was about a quarter before nine when M. Gouraud telephoned me to tell me that the American had just left the hotel.

"He has not checked out?"

"No, *madame*. He took nothing with him, save his hat and coat."

"Good!" I said, and went for my wraps.

Mme. Darcy was pacing the *salon* when I arrived.

"I thought you would never come," she said.

"There was no necessity for me to come sooner," I told her, and I confess that when I looked at her distressed face, guilt pricked me.

"Tell me! You have found the things!"

"That is so."

"And Celeste! I was right, then!"

"You were right in believing that it was she who carried off the things."

"*Parbleu!* I knew it!" She made trembling fists of her white hands. "And she is here—the thief. She went up to her room not half an hour ago. And the tea set, the other things, where are they? Come, I am eager to hear the story!"

"As to where they are," I said, looking at the fire, "that, I have been thinking, is more Ernestine's affair than yours or mine."

She stared at me, vastly puzzled, as I could see.

"Ernestine's affair," she echoed.

"She has not had many, I know," I said

slowly. "I mean, there are few matters concerning Ernestine that you have not arranged and supervised. I do not suppose it has occurred to you that your daughter is an individual capable of her own thoughts, her own preferences. These wedding gifts, for example. You permitted Ernestine to have a voice in their selection, although they were really your choice."

"Ernestine liked—"

"The gifts, however, once purchased, were hers, were they not? She understood that they were hers!"

"But certainly!"

"Then," I said gently, "there has been no theft."

She looked at me first in a daze, and then in mounting anger.

"My good friend, you are talking in conundrums."

"Every conundrum has its answer," I told her, "and so shall this one, soon."

"Mme. Le Brun's maid," announced the voice of my friend's *bonne* from the doorway. "She asks to have a word with *madame*."

I excused myself, and went out into the hall, where I found Yvonne panting a little. She told me nothing for which I was unprepared, and when it was told I sent her home and went back to Mme. Darcy. She had had time to think over what I had said, and to grow very angry.

"Really, my good Charlotte, your penchant for mystery is exasperating. You come here to tell me that you have discovered the stolen gifts, and then you talk nonsense for five minutes. You must know that this affair has frayed my nerves, and with the wedding three days off—"

"The wedding," I repeated. "Well, come, then. I want you to show me the way to this girl, Celeste's, room."

"But how can you—"

"If you will do that you will find the answer to all of your questions," I told her.

She swept past me like an automaton. We went through the kitchen, which gives on the outer staircase that leads to the top floor and the maids' rooms. There was only a yellow moon to see us as we let ourselves into a long, gusty corridor. A double row of doors opened on this narrow hall, and when we were opposite the fourth, she paused, and gestured to show me that here was the room; and I pressed hastily past her and turned the knob.

The room was the regulation affair, no larger than it need be, with a narrow bed against the wall, and a small bureau with a pitcher and bowl opposite. There was a muddy-colored rug on the floor, a roped trunk in one corner. A single electric light bulb dangled from the ceiling, drenching everything in a white glare; and in a chair, with her face to the wall, sat the maid, Celeste, reading a novel with a yellow paper cover.

Behind her, seated side by side on the gray-blanketed bed, were Ernestine and a young man who was certainly not the scion of the noble Dufreyn family. He was far too handsome and big. When I opened the door their heads had been close together, and they had been talking—in English, you understand. It was Celeste's tight, choked little scream that brought them to their feet as though there had been but one pair between them. I trembled for the safety of the American's head, which just grazed the low ceiling, and I saw Ernestine make a frantic clutch for his hand, which swallowed hers in a gulp.

"M-mother!"

Mme. Darcy moved her head as one does sometimes to shake off fancies. It seemed a full moment before she jerked out: "Ernestine! What—what are you doing here?"

And now the place was full of voices, Ernestine's babbling broken sentences in French, the American's deep basso boom-ing explanations in English.

"Oh, mother! I haven't done anything wrong—really! Celeste is here to chaperon us—she's been here every time—you mustn't blame Dick! He wanted me to take him to you—but I kept putting it off. I wouldn't let him see you."

"Wait a minute, Ernestine. I was just pleading with her, *madame*," he was addressing Mme. Darcy, "to let me go down and talk to you. I was sure that you would understand when you knew I was serious."

Neither of them seemed to realize that the crazed mother understood his words no more than she did his presence there in the servant's room. She stood there, her eyes shifting wildly from one to the other, her white fingers pawing at her throat.

"I can't marry Henri, mother! I've tried to tell you—I can't marry him."

And now she found words.

"You can't marry Henri! What do

you mean by that? Who is this man? What is he doing here—what are *you* doing here—how dare he! Let go of his hand!"

"Mme. Darcy, if you will just let me explain—" he began, but she turned on him like a tigress.

"What is he saying? What is he doing here?"

"Come!" I broke in, for I could hold my tongue no longer. "What he is doing here is obvious, my friend. He is paying court to your daughter, and here for want of a better place. You will see that they are the very picture of propriety with Celeste to chaperon them."

I waved my hand toward the terror-stricken girl in the corner, but *madame's* eyes were fixed upon the young man.

"Paying court! Paying court!" she shrieked. "The *canaille!* And my daughter permits—when I thought she was with her aunt!"

"And so she was, for a short time, *madame*," I told her. "She came back early, and through the servants' entrance, to meet her lover here, since it was the only place they had. And I would not call names, if I were you. Though he is an American, the young man is a gentleman of excellent birth, as I happen to know."

"A gentleman!" she roared. "Here! In a servant's room!"

"Love is resourceful, my friend."

"Love!"

"It is true, I love him, mother. That is why I cannot marry Henri." For the space of a moment, the confession lit the girl's courage like a torch. "It isn't Dick's fault. I wouldn't let him come to see you—I was afraid. I wanted him to elope with me, and he wouldn't!"

"That, also, is true, my good friend," I put in. "That is why I told you this evening that there had been no theft, since it was Ernestine who sent the things away in preparation for her elopement. I suppose she felt that having no dowry to take him—"

"They were my gifts! My own!" the girl cried.

"Exactly," I said. "And so was the gown which you sent to the hotel last night. And so was the photograph you gave your lover!"

Right here the American, who had been babbling at first one and then another of us, broke in loudly.

"For Heaven's sake! Ernestine, dear, what is it? Is your mother terribly angry? Doesn't she speak any English?" He turned to me desperately. "Do you understand me? Won't you tell Mme. Darcy that I love her daughter, and want to marry her?"

I felt *madame's* hand clawing my arm.

"What is it he is saying? Have you told him—"

"He says he loves your daughter, my friend, and wants to marry her."

I have already said that she is a tall woman, and regal. I had never seen her angry. I hope never to see her angry again. Her arms went up as though they would tear off the roof.

"Tell him to get out of here! If he ever returns, I shall have him horse-whipped out of Paris! Ernestine, leave the room! Go downstairs—do you hear? Go!"

The two young things had shrunk back as if hell's own furnace had opened its door upon them. The girl's poor little torch of bravado went out in the flood of her mother's wrath. She tried to tug her hand loose from her lover's grasp.

"Let me go, Dick! Let me go! You must!"

But though he was white and nonplussed by that outburst, he had not understood Mme. Darcy's words, and he held her closer.

"No, wait, dearest girl! What does she say? She can't understand, surely. Why in blazes didn't I learn the darned language?"

"She is interested to know," I said in English, "if it is the custom in your country to conduct your courtships in the servants' quarters?"

"No," he snapped. "But you may tell her that girls in my country aren't scared stiff of their parents." Then, more gently: "Can't you make her understand that I'm in dead earnest? We've committed no crime, unless loving each other is a crime."

"Well, is he going?" demanded Mme. Darcy. "Ernestine, if I speak to you again—"

IV

HER voice was not a pleasant thing to hear. Ernestine made another frantic lunge to free herself, but the boy threw his arm about her shoulders and drew her to his side.

"Don't worry, darling," he soothed her, "we'll bring her around all right."

Which proved how little he knew.

"Well!" It was Mme. Darcy again, and, having already launched my career as interpreter, I could not turn back.

"Your ultimatum fails to move the young man," I told her. "He has the audacity to repeat that he loves your daughter, and intends to marry her."

"*Mon Dieu!*" she shouted. "Then tell him that my daughter is already betrothed, and if he does not release her this instant, I shall arouse every man in this house and have him thrown into the street."

Ernestine understood this, even if her young man did not. She let out a little squeal, and fell to sobbing violently.

"Come," I said in English, "where is your fine courage, child? And you, M. Stanley—"

But he had forgotten the rest of us. He had Ernestine in his arms, and was cuddling her like a mother.

"Why, darling! Ernestine—little girl! Don't cry like that. My dear precious—"

I was conscious that Mme. Darcy had taken a step toward them, but I spoke to her sharply.

"That will not do, my friend. Violence on your part will only make matters worse."

"But look! Look—he dares!"

"These Americans are intrepid, *madame*. You see how little your threats affect him. That is because he knows that he has the right and the law on his side—as he has just pointed out. He has no intention of leaving until you have given your full consent to his marriage with Ernestine."

"Consent! I will—I will—"

"Dearest, I tell you it will be all right. Don't cry like that. It breaks my heart. Don't you know I love you—love you—"

"And he is quite right," I interpreted this. "As he says, your daughter is of age, and may choose her own mate. If she elects to elope with him—"

"Elope! If she were to do such a thing—"

"It would be unfortunate," I sighed, still holding to her arm. "Still, he seems adamant."

"Sweetheart, don't! You'll make yourself sick. Oh, my dear—"

"They can," I told Mme. Darcy, "be married without your consent, though they

would prefer to have your blessing—as he says."

"*Sacré Dieu!* They would defy me!"

"It is the modern trend, my friend. Young people these days appear to think they have the right to select their own husbands. The world has changed—as perhaps you have heard me say."

Ernestine's sobs were growing more violent, and her lover's chants more impassioned. If he was aware that we were there, he gave no sign.

"M. Stanley," I said in English, "just what have you to offer Ernestine? Are you prepared to court her formally—like a gentleman?"

"Darling, tell me what I can do to make things easier. Shall I go, my love? I'll do anything you say."

"You'd better not try it," I warned him, and turned back to *madame*. "You see, my friend, he is a bold one, this American. He has your daughter's confession that she loves him, and oddly enough that is considered paramount by young people these days. If you take my advice, you will reconcile yourself and permit him to see your daughter in her *salon* as a suitor should." I dragged her toward the door, and lowered my voice. "Come, we do not want a scandal, and the affair might be worse. He is not a bad catch—as I have learned. He is a gentleman, and one with much more money than ever the Dufreyn strong box contained."

"And you can suggest such a thing! On the eve of the marriage! What—what of Henri Dufreyn?"

I turned to young Stanley, and roared at him in his own language—"You man, have you no more control over your future wife than to let her go on like that?"

"Darling girl! Do you hear that? She's come around! Oh, I love you; I love you—"

"He says," I translated for *madame*, who was panting against the door, "that this is the twentieth century, and that the custom of disposing of one's daughters as though they were marketable hens is entirely obsolete."

And this, I have told myself since, is most certainly what he would have said if he had known that such a person as Henri Dufreyn existed. It happened that he did not, since Ernestine had not told him of her approaching marriage. Instead, she had bent all her poor little energies and inge-

nuity toward planning an elopement—which never took place.

They were married decently in church some weeks later, and with *madame's* consent. You see, it is a strange fact, but true, that once arrogance meets its match, respect is invariably born of the encounter. Mme. Darcy is woman enough and French enough to respect a resolute man, and I

feel sure he would have been as resolute as I had made him appear if he had known more of our French ways.

As for Henri, he soon consoled himself—as I knew he would do—knowing the young man better than Mme. Darcy had done.

Ernestine has nothing but unqualified praise for my skill as interpreter, but I fear she is prejudiced in my favor.

The Ivory Totem

A HEATHEN FETISH CASTS A DEATH HOROSCOPE FOR THIS WHITE GIRL, BUT LADY LUCK INTERVENES

By Herman Howard Matteson

SOMETHING had gone wrong. Standing erect in his dory in the sheltered bay, Pely Griffin surveyed a scene of desolation. The Indian village was silent, save for a dog that howled but did not bark. On the hill above the village were new grave boxes, a dozen or more.

To the left stood a cabin where white folk lived—Old Lan Haddow and his daughter Nika. Ordinarily, in the early spring, Nika had flower boxes putting forth green promise. Laughter and gay song usually emanated from that cabin. Now it was quiet. Even the smoke seemed to hang dejectedly over the roof.

Young Pely, just returning from a five months' trapping expedition among the Hole in the Wall islands of farther Puget Sound, beached his dory, and looked down at the pitiful bundle of pelts that he was fetching home. The winter had been too mild. The skins were thin and mangy. The gorgeous presents that he had hoped to buy for Nika—a terribly red carpet, curtains, a box thing that grabbed tunes out of the air—would have to wait.

Hauling up the dory, Pely walked toward the cabin. Nika sat at the table, her head buried in her arms.

He spoke her name. She uttered a nervous scream, ran to him, and flung her arms about his thick neck, sobbing hysterically. He patted her shoulder awkwardly, utter-

ing a foolish phrase of comfort: "Quiet there, Nika, you dassn't take on so. There, there."

"Everything has fetched away complete," she sobbed, "deck step to the trucks. Everything is stové, beam-ended, gone by the board, derelict on the mud."

"They hain't never a storm, Nika," he comforted, "that don't blow itself to a ca'm. Now, from the beginning, read me out the log."

"I'm afraid," she shuddered. "The Indians. I don't go to my duck pens that I don't feel a seal spear slithering into my back. I don't lay down of a night that I don't feel a cold blade laid to my throat."

"Poolie!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "Afraid—of Indians!"

She pointed through the open door toward the new grave boxes.

"Cougar Cat, the medicine man, says I filled them grave boxes, fourteen of 'em. Every Indian on the island thinks I killed 'em, filled them graves when I took the sacred ivory totem and give it to my dad."

Pely glanced toward the door that led into the adjoining workroom where Old Lan Haddow carved the scrimshaws, the sailor trinkets that he sold to tourists.

"He's gone, too, my dad," she sobbed. "I been alone for weeks. Dad's dead. They say he got to drinking in a sailor boarding house in Seattle, fell downstairs,

killed hisself. I know better. He was murdered. When the Seamen's Aid fetched dad home here to bury, I seen the mark on the back of his head. Cougar Cat had follerred my dad, account of him carrying away the ivory totem. The old stone battle club that hangs in Cougar's lodge is carved like a thunderbird. That was the mark that was on the back of poor dad's head. Cougar Cat killed him, account of the ivory totem that I took from the lodge to give to dad."

Pely Griffin sat cracking the joints of his thick fingers. A score of times Pely had seen the ivory totem standing on a shelf in the medicine lodge. Carved from a walrus tusk, it stood ten inches high and bore the tribal insignia of the thunderbird, the raven, the wolf, and the hideous face of the black spirit called Deaub.

Once a year, to conjure good luck for the fishing fleet, and to fend away disease and disaster, the medicine man built a fire in the lodge, said his incantations, and carried the totem in solemn procession to the water front. Once the ivory totem had been snow white. Throughout the ages the ceremonial smoke of the yearly invocation had stained the totem to a golden brown.

Pely, who knew the fanatical reverence and worship bestowed upon the totem, wondered at Nika's foolhardiness in removing the holy relic. Still, in a way, he could understand. Lan Haddow had wanted it, and she had always venerated and loved her worthless father beyond all understanding.

"Dad said he just wanted to borrow the totem for a pattern," she began to explain. "Tourist folks and collectors buy such *iktas*, pay big money. Dad did try to make a pattern of the totem. In his shop there—I hain't been into it since he was brought home—I found part of a walrus tusk, chips of ivory, that showed he had anyway started to copy the totem, like he promised me. Dad got tired easy. I think he figgered it was all foolishness, so much hocus-pocus over just a totem."

"So say I," Pely affirmed.

"Without saying a word to me, dad done up a lot of scrimshaws, Indian baskets and such, and went to Seattle," Nika continued. "Smallpox broke out among the Indians. Cougar Cat, going to say a spell before the ivory totem, missed it. He come to me. I got scared, told how I took it for a pattern for dad. Cougar Cat follerred dad to Seattle, and killed him. I know he did.

Fourteen Indian folks died. Cougar Cat and a lot of 'em come one night to torture me. They sung and danced on the beach. They come to the cabin here, yelled and threatened. I stood 'em off all night with dad's six-shooter. By morning they'd sung and danced theirselves out, was more cooler. But I'm afraid. Something is going to happen."

"Why didn't you bundle up and *klatawa* on out?" asked Pely, using the Indian term for flight.

"Never! Thirty years ago my dad bought this land from Chimacum. Here I was born, here my mother died. It's mine. If I got to die, it's going to be in my shoes, the old gun all smoky in my hand."

Pely arose from his chair. "I hain't terrified none of Cougar Cat," he said, grinning. "I aim to go have a growl with him. If he pesters you again, I and him mingle in a terrible fight between man and beast."

An hour later Pely, his face grave, returned to the cabin. "It's tougher than I thought," he admitted reluctantly. "Them Indians is *pelton* (insane); they hain't a doubt of it, with so many dying. Old Cougar Cat, he says unless the ivory totem is brung back, why, you just got to wing out for good! He kind of let on like he meant it. Somehow or other, we just got to restore back that totem. Have you any idea who your dad sold it to?"

Nika knitted her brows, opened the door into the workshop, and returned with a battered memorandum book in her grasp. "The Seamen's Aid, they brung all dad's things home with him. This book was among 'em." She turned the soiled, crinkled pages of the book.

"Here," she said, pointing. "Here's baskets he sold, a ship in a bottle, one ivory totem, to J. A. Spanner, Capitol Hill, Seattle, for two hundred dollars."

Pely squinted over the entry. "It's cheaper to buy back that totem, Nika. Your land, this beach, the cabin, is worth ten times two hundred dollars."

"In the baking powder can there," she rejoined, pointing to a shelf, "I got six dollars and forty cents."

"I got two hundred," he said, "or will have when I sell them furs." He winced at recollection of the sorry pelts he had. "I'll go buy back that totem. It's cheaper."

Pely Griffin repaired to the Indian village for a further word with Cougar Cat.

"He gives us till the Tyee salmon run," reported Pely to Nika. "That's lots of time, three months from now, on the new of the moon. You just go on over to Satura-na Island, camp down with Mrs. Briscoe till I come back with the totem. You see, while Cougar Cat he agrees, he hain't too sure of them that's sung the death song over them new grave boxes."

Stubbornly she shook her head. "Here I stay," was her answer.

"I guess likely it will be all right," he agreed with some misgivings. "I won't be gone near no three months. I guess it will be all right. Keep in of nights, and your fist on the old siege gun. I'll hurry."

With the battered memorandum book in his pocket, the sorry bale of pelts in the dory, Pely hoisted sail and started for Seattle, two hundred miles away.

II

A CURIO dealer, to whom Pely was referred by the fur buyer who grudgingly paid two hundred and eight dollars for the bundle of pelts, provided the young trapper with the street address of J. A. Spanner, and told him what car to take.

Shortly Pely arrived at the house, an impressive mansion. A man wearing a sort of uniform with gold braid on the sleeves let Pely in, and motioned him to a stiff seat in the hall. Pely got a look through an open door into an immense room, with a very large fireplace, the shelves along the walls covered with idols of stone and metal, baskets, shells, and corals.

He was finally shown into the big room. Spanner, a middle-aged man, at once asked the young fellow what he had to sell.

"Nothing. I come to buy—a ivory totem pole. You bought it offen Old Lan Haddow awhile back. It's terrible important. You see, I and Nika, Old Lan's girl, we been *tillicums* for years—and we just got to have it back."

Pely was hauling from an abysmal side pocket of his tarpaulin pants a red tobacco sack in which chinked and bulged two hundred and eight dollars.

"I never sell any curio that I have bought," said Spanner coldly. "Especially I would not think of selling the ivory totem. It is a marvelous bit of carving. It is not for sale at any price."

The gold braided lackey had the stunned and bewildered Pely by the arm, urged him to the door, and closed it after him.

Pely walked up the street and back again. He turned into the alley and stood looking up at the roof of the Spanner mansion, especially at the wide, thick chimney of the immense fireplace.

Pely, his head bent in thought, walked on out of the alleyway, down street after street, to the business section. He sought the familiar water front, went into a Japanese restaurant frequented by seafaring men, and ordered ham and eggs and a pannikin of coffee. The Japanese waiter came and got his forty cents. Still Pely sat at table, his head clasped in his hands. The lights snapped on. Night had come.

Pely left the restaurant and sought the wharf under which he had left his dory. An hour later he stood in the alley in the rear of the Spanner mansion. Twenty seconds thereafter he crouched beneath a window that flanked the immense fireplace. He grasped the coping, drew himself up at the window, and peered in.

Save for a splay finger of light entering through a partly opened door, the room was in darkness. From his hip pocket Pely drew a flaying steel, an instrument used in removing skins from the carcasses of animals. He insinuated the end of the steel beneath the window and pried.

Easily, noiselessly the window slid up, for it had not been as yet locked for the night. Pely flung a leg across the sill, listened, then crawled in.

Sidling along the wall, out of the path of the wedge of light that shone through the door, he began to run his blunt fingers over the trinkets that rested upon the shelves. Everything but the relic he sought seemed to be there—jade boxes, idols, bits of coral, odd-shaped shells.

Some one coughed and moved his feet in the room adjoining. Pely plastered himself up against the shelving and held his breath. Then on he went, feeling, touching, striving in the darkness to find the ivory totem.

At last! This was it, with the thunderbird at the top, the raven, the gargoyle-faced Deaub.

Grasping the treasure in one hand, Pely drew from a pocket a tobacco sack. He lifted his hand. In the exact spot from which he had removed the totem he proposed to leave the sack containing two hundred and eight dollars.

In his agitation, his triumph of finding the totem, he must have moved a step.

His blundering hand, grasping the sack, instead of locating the vacant place where the totem had stood, struck against a crystal candelabrum, that toppled and fell with a crash.

Some one stood in the open doorway, and raised a shout. Pely, bewildered, made a leap in the wrong direction, away from the window that he had left open.

A door from the hall was flung open. There were more shouts and calls. The lights snapped on. But there was no one in the room, save the servants that had run in.

Mr. Spanner came. "There is some one in the house," explained the gold-braided fellow, pointing to the open window.

All about the room the servants ran, peering behind curtains, under chairs and tables. Spanner, standing in the middle of the room, gave an animal-like scream, ran to the shelf, and pointed to the place where the ivory totem had stood. He snatched down something that he found upon the shelf, a red tobacco sack.

The gold-braided servant ran into the hall and turned in a police alarm, while the other servants hunted futilely all over the room.

Baffled, concluding that the marauder must have got away, the servants drew about their master, who was cursing earnestly to himself, swearing that he would not have taken five thousand dollars for the ivory totem.

Suddenly the gold-braided man flounced down upon his knees and thrust head and shoulders into the fireplace. A chunk of soot had just fallen from the chimney upon the feebly glowing coals.

"Outside!" he shouted, backing out of the fireplace. "We can catch him yet. He just crawled out of the chimney."

He himself leaped through the open window, while the other servants and Spanner dashed from the front door into the yard. As swift as had been pursuit, Pely Griffin had been swifter still. By bracing hands, knees, and elbows in the corner of the chimney, he had worked his way to the top. A tile roof sloped to a lower story, and down this tile roof he slid recklessly, swung into a thick wistaria vine that clambered up over a trellis, jumped a hedge, and went racing down a dark alley.

Hard after followed the gold-braided fellow, lifting a vociferous shout of "Thief! Thief! Stop, thief!"

Pely leaped a second hedge, tore through a rose garden, crossed a street, zigzagged over a lawn, leaped a back fence, ran down a sloping concrete way that led from a garage, slipped, fell, and gave his head a knock that made it ring like a bell.

When he regained his wits, the gold-braided man, bawling out to fetch a rope, or the police, was sitting astride his chest. A policeman came, produced handcuffs, and snapped them upon Pely's thick wrists. Spanner wheezed up, and demanded his ivory totem.

Where was the ivory totem? Certainly not in the possession of the thief.

"He had a confederate," conjectured Spanner, when the prisoner refused to answer any questions.

"He might have chucked it into an ash barrel or garbage can," offered the gold-braided fellow.

The patrol wagon took Pely away, and during the remainder of the night the Spanner servants sought futilely for the totem, pawing into flower boxes and garbage cans along the route pursued by the curio thief.

III

ARRAIGNED in court, Pely Griffin admitted taking the ivory totem, but he insisted that he had paid for the relic. Spanner, as prosecuting witness, admitted that a tobacco sack had been found upon the shelf containing two hundred and eight dollars.

Pely somewhat weakened his case by refusing to give details as to why he had wanted the ivory totem, and what he had done with it. The court, looking into the honest, homely face of the prisoner, and weighing the fact that he had left two hundred and eight dollars to pay for the abstracted article, concluded that this was both a burglary and no burglary.

"My boy," said the court, "you do not look like a crook. Still, you have gravely transgressed the law. I sentence you to three months' hard labor in the stockade. The city is no place for you. If you are ever caught in any questionable business in Seattle again, it will go hard with you. I direct the police to see to it that this boy is put upon a steamer when his time is up, and shipped back to his islands."

Pely went to the stockade. Every instant he was repeating to himself: "When the third new moon hangs in the sky. I just dassn't be too late. No!"

At the end of a week he made a senseless

dash for liberty. A bullet through the calf of his leg sent him sprawling. A week after he came out of the hospital, he made another break, and got three squares from the stockade before the prowler car overhauled him, and a bunch of deputies swarmed over him.

This time he was returned to the county jail and cast into a steel cell, which he ranged like a caged wild thing, shouting, promising, begging, cursing. He must get out, he must, before the third new moon hung in the sky.

"Goofy!" exclaimed the jailer, tapping himself with his finger upon the head. "A nut!"

The night of the day upon which his sentence expired Pely was taken to the wharf in a police car and loaded upon a steamer that was sailing for Vancouver Island. The officers stood upon the pier until the ship drew in its plank and backed away. They waved to Pely, who was standing at the rail, a derisive farewell, and got into their machine.

IV

SOME time after the second new moon had floated in the sky, grown, waned, and faded to nothingness, an Indian girl, Delate, with whom Nika had played as a child, came secretly by night to the cabin. Delate scratched upon the window pane, and began to whisper earnestly when the white girl had opened the sash.

"*Nika klatawa alta*," whispered Delate, clutching Nika nervously by the arm. "*Siwash mamook itlokum chako memaloos Nika.*"

Translated, this meant Nika must run away at once. The Indians had drawn lots to decide which should make her die.

Several times Nika started to pack up her few belongings and flee, but as many times she forbore. One instant her fears stamped her courage, the next she determined to stay it out. Her pertinacity of purpose held her, although she knew the shadow of death hovered near.

The night passed, and the day, and night again. The thin, new moon, the third since Pely Griffin had deserted her, hung in the fir tops. During the night of the *chahko* moon she heard sounds of preparation in the Indian village.

At daybreak would begin the fishing. The first capture of a Tyee salmon would be the signal for fate to be visited upon

her. She prayed so earnestly that the fish might not come for a day, three days, a week. She arose from her knees, put the little cabin in order, and oiled and loaded the big, old six-shooter.

Before sunup the bay before her house was dotted with canoes. Back and forth they plied in silence, the clamshell fishing gear trailing astern.

A shout went up. An Indian drew in a fish.

It was a cod. A derisive laugh went up from the other fishermen, to be succeeded instantly by an ominous calm.

The next strike might be a Tyee. Then the blow would fall.

Oh, Nika wanted to live, live. Whimpering, she ran into her father's workshop, and began flinging things out of the chest of drawers and rummaging through the work table. There was a chance in a million that he had not carried away the totem, but only a copy that he had made, she tried to assure herself in her frenzied state.

Something beneath the work bench, in the shadows near the wall, caught her eye. She crawled beneath the bench, gathered it up, and fetched it to the light.

Her eyes started, her breathing quickened. In her fingers she held clasped a fragment of old brown ivory, that had shape and design and the wing from the thunderbird that clung atop the sacred totem.

Understanding flooded her consciousness. Now she knew why her father had fled. Some accident had occurred to the sacred totem. He had dropped it and broken it to fragments. To break the holy image was as bad as to steal it outright.

She ran to the fireplace in the end of the room and began prodding in the deep, neglected ashes. One after the other, she brought to light the shattered bits of the ivory totem.

They were of no avail. To display the broken idol would be to invite the penalty, and to justify it. She flung the broken relic back into the ashes and covered it.

A second shout echoed from the bay. An Indian had caught a fish. Nika looked from the window.

The Indian was holding his catch at arm's length. It was a great Tyee salmon.

Instantly a wailing chant began to sound from the natives on shore. The canoes moved in and were beached. With the brave holding the salmon in his grasp, the

procession moved toward the medicine lodge. Presently not an Indian was in sight, nor was there a sound save the drone of the incantation being uttered in the lodge.

Nika closed the door and lowered the curtains. Around and around the cabin she ranged, the six-shooter in her hand. Cautiously, from the edge of the curtain, she would peek forth, go on to the next window, look and listen.

The cabin was in a clearing, and nowhere did the forest approach nearer than fifty yards. Before the house was a stretch of beach, a hundred yards to the edge of the water. The Indians, to storm her cabin, would have to cross the open. Her fingers tensed about the butt of the old gun as she constantly circled the room.

A movement in the brush on the hillside caught her eye. The branch of a bush moved slightly. A humming sound came to her ears, then a gentle thud upon the cedar shake roof. A crackle followed, with the pungent smell of burning cedar.

They were burning her out. An Indian had shot an arrow, the head wrapped about with smoldering moss. Louder grew the sputter of spreading fire. The red showed between the edges of the rude shingles.

They would expect her to run for the open, the beach way, she reasoned swiftly. She would fool them. She would make straight for the place on the hill whence the fiery arrow had been launched. One Indian at least would pay the penalty.

With a yank she tore away a curtain and flung open the sash. The wind, unfortunately offshore, was carrying the billows of smoke and flame toward the water. Anyhow, she would be across that clearing in a few seconds, into the wood. She might escape; one chance in a thousand.

She had started to climb across the sill, when a prodigious shouting sounded from the beach side of the cabin, the thud and clump of heavy running feet. She sprang to the front of the cabin. A dory had drawn up on the sands. Pely Griffin was tearing up the sanded slope, calling and waving his long arms.

Nika tore open the door, leaped into the midst of the smoke screen, ran to him, and fell into his arms in a dead faint.

When consciousness returned to her, she found herself lying upon the sands, her head resting on Pely's knee. Indians, no longer hostile, but smiling and friendly, stood all about. Cougar Cat stood near. In

his hands was clasped the aged, seal brown, ivory totem.

"We all turn out, we cut new logs, build a house finer than before," Cougar Cat was saying to her. "The totem has come back to abide in the medicine lodge. We are very happy."

He held up the totem, and a murmur that was at once a thanksgiving and a prayer came from the lips of the multitude.

V

PELY GRIFFIN, with some little vain-glory, had just recounted to Nika the circumstances of his burglarious entrance into the Spanner mansion, his escape, capture, and the three interminable months in the stockade and jail.

"When the ship pulled out from the dock, me aboard," continued Pely, "them constables give me the *hiyu hee-hee*. They figured I couldn't set foot on dirt till I got to Vancouver Island. When the ship come about, I swarmed the tiller chains, dropped into the water. It was good and dark, and I was back under the dock in no time. I found my dory. I took a rope. I went back to Capitol Hill. I climbed the flower bush, up the slope of roof, and I took and made fast my rope around the chimney, and I let myself down."

"And the totem, Pely!" Nika demanded. "Where was it?"

"Sure, there was the totem. When I crawled the chimney, getting away, I just couldn't make it and pack the totem, too. Six feet above the fire where the brick ended was a little stone shelf four inches wide. I set the totem onto that shelf, aiming to come back in the night and get it.

"I let myself down. I grabbed the totem. I shinned back, cast off my rope, slid down the flower bush, got back to my dory, h'isted the dory rag, and here I be."

Nika smiled. This must be a secret between them forever. Her father had made a perfect copy of the old totem, out of shining new white ivory. Standing for three months in the smoke of the Spanner fireplace, the new totem had taken on the lustrous seal brown color that it had required many years to confer upon the genuine.

Cougar Cat, without the slightest misgiving, had accepted the counterfeit as the original. With pomp and ceremony the sacred totem was restored to its place in the medicine lodge, and there to this day it rests.

The Sidewalk

A BIT OF FLOTSAM FROM THE GREAT WAR FINALLY FINDS ANCHORAGE IN A FRIENDLY HAVEN

By Stanley Jones

A GRAY city," murmured the tall, spare man, gazing out into an October mist which strove to smother the street lights. "No wonder the etchers love it, eh, Hubert? London is your true child of black and white."

"Aye, Sir John," nodded the other, like a vigorous cock robin unearthing a choice conversational worm. "But you've not done so badly with the colors. By gad, sir, if I could squeeze but one of my accursed marines into the Tate, the National or the Metropolitan, as you do your portraits, I'd—"

"And what does it all amount to, after all?" interrupted the other, gravely raising a long hand in protest. "They're done, now—and not half so well done as the others about them." His deep-set eyes smoldered at the recollection of some rare canvas. "Ah, Hubert," he said, almost with reverence, "those chaps could paint."

"And so can you," insisted the stout little man. "If you would," he added, sulkily, half under his breath. But Sir John Carter, R. A., had turned to shroud himself in his habitual aloofness. It was an aloofness which shut him off from contact with the world as effectually as a score of miles.

Hubert Cleeve regarded him as he stared abstractedly out of the leaded casement, the faint hearth crackle and a soothing tick of ivory balls blending pleasantly in the high, paneled alcove. "Hopkins is right," thought the little man, turning away toward the main room of the club; "he looks the proud old eagle who has fed on bitterness and sorrow, every inch of him."

Other men entered and stood rubbing their hands before the warm friendliness of the fire. The free flow of masculine

talk was broken only by occasional bursts of laughter, or that most cheery sound—glasses elbowing good-naturedly on a tray. Into this congenial pool there suddenly flopped an excited man, youngish, blond, animated. Scarcely waiting for the old doorman to relieve him of a damp hat and rainproof, he tumbled out the news.

"This is straight," he exclaimed; "never heard anything like it in my life!" They crowded round him, expectant. "Do you know what Sir John has done?"

"No," they chorused. "What has he done?"

"Sh-h!" hissed Cleeve, with a warning jerk of his bald head toward the curtained bow window in the adjoining room. The youngish man lowered his voice, although he choked with the restraint of it. "Well, he has refused a commission to paint the Duke of—" Here the narrator paused in triumph, then whispered a single potent word, "and his entire family! What do you think of that?"

They thought various things after a stunned instant. Academicians raised their eyebrows, shook their heads, and bent eagerly forward for more details. "Few men," sighed one, "would care to flout opportunity, when she appeared leading one's future by the hand."

"Sir John's future," objected another, swiftly, "is already secure. He is our century's justification to those that will follow. His mark is made."

There was general assent to this, although the discussion buzzed hotly, and the bearer of the tidings dropped into a deep chair, apparently exhausted by the sheer weight of them. He looked up, fascinated, only when a sudden hush settled upon the room.

Sir John Carter stalked silently out.

His brooding air of abstraction gave no hint that he had overheard. Not until he had carefully buttoned up the long, black overcoat, and swathed his throat in a white silk muffler, did he speak. Then, "Good night, gentlemen," the merest slant of a bow, and deliberate footfalls echoing faintly from steps without.

"What a man," breathed the blond youth, enviously. "But, say," he appealed aloud, "I'm the newest member here. Won't some of you chaps take pity and tell me why Sir John hasn't laid brush on canvas since the war?"

There was an awkward silence. Some squinted with sudden interest into their glasses. Others clasped hands behind backs and scrutinized the mellow old portraits gazing down from the shadows of the wainscoting. A few had heard scraps of the story, more or less garbled, as they became when dealing with a man eccentric and gifted. But none had heard it all, save possibly Hubert Cleeve. Now, as he felt all eyes settling on him, he decided, after some thought, to give them the straight of it.

II

"I'LL tell you," he began hesitantly, staring hard at the thick rug at his feet. "At least, what I know to be the truth. And I need not mention the fact that we are all friends of Sir John, in so far as he will allow us to be—and should respect this confidence accordingly." Here the speaker paused for a grave, impersonal survey of the newest and youngest member, until that worthy flushed and squirmed uneasily. Cleeve then resumed his narrative without hesitancy.

"I first met Sir John in Paris in—well, a long, long time ago, anyway. I was pretty harum-scarum then; just out of Cambridge, and with plenty of pocket money to chuck about under the guise of obtaining an art education. But he was frightfully serious, and poor as a church mouse. Perhaps the sheer novelty of any one's being so hard up, and yet so fiercely determined, first drew me to him. At any rate, it did not take long for the ability of the black-browed, silent youth to force itself on the notice of one or two worth while men. After that he could give up the part time job in the bakery, and hook his long thumb through a palette for twenty hours out of twenty-four.

"Ah, he could paint, even then—fine, smashing things that made our finicking attempts look like the pastimes of ladies! Then, to my amazement, he told me one evening, on a bench in the Tuileries, that he was going to be married next day. Perhaps three commissions, just received, precipitated the step. I extended the usual, and then inquired who the bride might be."

Cleeve, here, took a smiling, reminiscent pull at his cigar, and drew a deep breath as he narrowed his blue eyes down the vista of other days.

"I was prepared for anything," he resumed; "but when John Carter said, almost defiantly, 'Claire Roule,' my heart gave a painful squeeze or two. For she was the loveliest thing—as essentially a woman as he was a man, and quality, too. I was quite mad about her—we all were—and she was one of the few women who really came down to the Quartier to work. She might have proved another Lebrun, she had the gift and the brains.

"However, we beaus swallowed our chagrin, and made the little wedding a topping event. Before the last cork had struck the ceiling we all agreed John deserved her—if any man did—for we felt, even then, that he would do very great things indeed.

"Well, to clip a long story, I went rocketing about for some years after that, and rather lost touch with John Carter, save through chance notices of his work in the prints. Our correspondence gasped and died. Not until fifteen years later did our paths cross again, in a sun-soaked Spanish hamlet on the Bay of Biscay. He had aged, although his spare figure was still the familiar ramrod, and his dress as faultless as ever. With him was a handsome lad, as fair as John was dark. One had only to meet him to recognize the charm and the gayety—yet with a touch of steel in it—that one finds only in the best blood of France.

"John seemed glad to see me once more, although I sensed that he had withdrawn his thoughts into an inner chamber even more secluded than formerly. Possibly the sight of me recalled days of rapture now transformed to the throbbing pain of memories. For he told me, as he watched the lad rioting through the breakers, that Claire had been lost to him through the birth of their son. His face was as marble, although the harsh voice trembled slightly,

as a strong branch does in a wind, and he kept his eyes turned from mine, out to sea."

III

HUBERT CLEEVE paused for a minute, while the tall clock in the shadows seemed to soften its nine chimes out of respect to his narrative. When the final stroke had been absorbed by the silence, he blew his round little nose loudly, and continued.

"That night, after young Dick turned in, we talked till the stars paled overhead. It is always easier so. John—I did not know he was Sir John then—told me something of his work, and how little his astonishing commercial success meant to him. He painted, as always, with every nerve and fiber of his being drawn to a point on his canvas. But now he painted, he said, 'to keep his mind free from his heart.'

"Next morning he showed me, rather shyly, some small but exquisite seascapes, and a few sketches rich in that blazing sense of heat which Spain can give. I expressed amazement that he should be so versatile, for he was born for portraiture. Then he told me, trying to make it offhand, that his lad had done them, and bade fair to make a name for himself, one day. 'He's his mother all over again, Hubert,' he murmured. 'I even believe, at times, he has her gift with the brush. It is my one desire to have him develop it and bring it to bear, but he is a lad of impulse, impatient of restraint.'

"I left the following day, for I had some commissions to execute among the consular set at Barcelona. My last glimpse of John Carter, for what was destined to be a gap of three years, saw him angled intently over his son's small easel, far out on a yellow sandspit. I waved once more, but he was already engrossed in the canvas.

"Three short years," sighed Cleeve, "yet they saw the world run red. Art was chucked aside, or conscripted for the relief of humanity. I managed to wangle a staff job which winked at my rheumatism, and one evening bethought myself of Sir John. I recalled hearing that he had become practically a recluse, so I pulled the doorbell outside the great, silent mansion on Kensington with no great hopes. But old Giles admitted me, and soon the tall, spare figure of Sir John drifted down the staircase and greeted me hospitably. Before the hall fire, I saw new lines etched in his

face. They were lines of care and worry, yet they seemed to have drawn his features together, somehow, into a harder cast, instead of softening them.

"We talked of the war, of course, and I finally risked a roundabout question on Dick. He was too young for battle, of course, eighteen at most. Still, he had the spark. Sir John fell silent for so long that I doubted he had heard me, gazing into the coals with those fierce, unwinking eyes. Then, bit by bit, he told me, with long, bitter pauses; the inward tempest escaping only through the sudden hot clasps of his hands as they rested in his lap.

"Ambition is a gift divine, gentlemen, yet it must make some concession to the weakness of nature. In telling you these things, I must only ask you to judge Sir John in the light of what, to him, was not only his own chief excuse for living, but a quixotic sense of duty to the memory of his wife.

"He told me, there in the firelight, how his son had come to make up his entire world, supplanting even his own work. Ah, the plans he had made for his training; he had been assured the help of the greatest painters alive. Then came the first stunning blow. Dick returned from a shooting holiday in Lincoln to ask his father's consent to his marriage. She was some American girl he had known for a year or two, and not wealthy—there are some such, it seems!

"Sir John was aghast, and, despite his best efforts, was overcome by a terrible rage at this threatened rupture of his plans. In vain the lad held his own temper, pointing out his father's precedent in the same step, and asserting his willingness to make his own way in the world. It ended by the lad's withdrawing from the room, white lipped, but promising not a thing. This was enough, Heaven knows, but more was to come.

"War broke out, with all its frightful mockery of romance and glamour. Dick's friends, those older than he, left schools and blazers for red Mons and the khaki. Sir John noted a growing seriousness in his son, but promptly and fiercely squashed each wistful inquiry as to his being needed 'out there.' War talk was taboo in the big house, at least where Master Richard might overhear.

"'You must learn to paint,' his father told him sternly; 'the king has no need of

babes in arms as yet.' But, after eight fearful months, it began to look as though we should need everything we could get. And all the time, while he strove to infuse life and spirit into the canvas before him, the lad's mind and heart were across the Channel, where the guns could be heard muttering when the wind was right.

"One morning Dick came up to Sir John and asked him, casually enough, if he didn't want to paint his portrait. 'You ought to have one of me, sir,' explained the boy, 'for that space halfway up the staircase. And you haven't done me for a long time, you know.' His father thought it a bit strange, but acquiesced gladly—it would be a welcome relief from the generals and admirals he had been slaving over. The evening after it was finished, and hung before admiring throngs at the R. A., Giles tiptoed in to announce a soldier calling on Sir John.

IV

"**T**HERE was something in the old servant's air, Sir John told me—a touching mixture of tears and smiles—that stirred his worst fears, and sent him downstairs with a cold chill about his heart. And there, very tall and straight beneath the great chandelier, stood his son, in the khaki and Sam Browne of a subaltern. They eyed each other a long moment without speaking. Then Dick thrust out his hand impulsively, and tried, very quietly, to tell his father why he felt he had to go. He concluded by saying that he had married that afternoon, and that his wife was working with the wounded out at Richmond.

"'I'll get you out of that uniform,' Sir John admitted he had snarled. 'You're not of age. I forbid you to go.' But his last hope crumbled to dust before his bitter eyes when the lad shook his head, almost with pity.

"'No,' he said, slowly, 'you cannot. I'm in under another name, sir. I'm sorry, and—good-by.'

"For a moment he held out his hand, then slowly let it fall to his side as Sir John ignored it, breathing hard. At the door he turned for a final, lingering glance. His father had not moved, save to rest one hand on the back of a chair at his side. He seemed like a man paralyzed. His voice was a mere threatening croak as he gasped:

"'Very good. We part here, then. I'll trouble you not to come crawling back to

me for support, Richard.' The boy regarded him seriously with his wide blue eyes, as if he were trying to grasp something he did not understand. Then he bowed slightly, murmured 'Very well, sir,' and was swallowed up by the blackness which enveloped the city.

"No one can know the emotions which seized the lonely man in the weeks and months that followed. He withdrew the portrait of his son from the gallery almost at once, and kept to himself. He has not painted another picture to this day. He rarely leaves the house, save to come to this one club.

"That was five years ago," concluded Hubert Cleeve, "and each day sees Sir John draw himself more closely into his shell, and away from contact with the world that would honor him."

A silence of indefinite length followed. A silence so profound that the settling of a log in the grate seemed to echo and re-echo through the room. Then some one inquired softly:

"And the son, Cleeve? Was he—"

"No one can say. I do know that Sir John made every effort to trace him, after time and loneliness had worked their way. But, not knowing even his enlisted name or regiment, it would naturally prove futile. He has never heard."

V

ON this same misty evening, the tall figure of Sir John Carter might have been perceived moving slowly along the Strand. His hands clasped behind, head slightly bowed, he walked neither as one who strolls to enjoy the damp night air, nor as one with any particular destination in view. In fact, had we been close enough, we would have observed his eyes to be fixed on the gray pavement just before him. Only when he crossed an intersecting street did he raise them, to peer up and down before leaving the curb. Ever and anon he would square his thin shoulders with a sudden jerk, raise his head, and breathe deeply, as though recalling a doctor's injunction.

Arriving at Kingsway, he appeared to hesitate a moment, as though undecided whether to retrace his steps. The striking of ten deliberate counts from the quarter which veiled "Big Ben," led him to continue his course up Kingsway. The street was virtually deserted, save for an occasional harried clerk scuttering home, a

sauntering guardsman with his girl, and the beseeching eyes of the sidewalk artists, flotsam from the tide of Mars.

These last were a familiar sight to the London which is abroad after sunset. Sometimes whole in body, but more often minus an arm or a leg, they would silently appear, slap the dust from the pavement with their worn caps, and chalk on it their three or four scenes.

Thus one would see them, sitting, often sound asleep, beside their violent red and yellow sunsets, hideous black cats on orange hearths, or unrecognizable portraits labeled "Lord Nelson," "Lord Haig," and "Jack Hobbs, World's Greatest Cricketer." Some crude lettering beside the waiting cap would state that the artist was a war veteran with wife and children to support, and that other work, of any sort, would be a blessing.

Sir John frequently took passing note of these works, perhaps because the more enterprising had come to employ the center of the sidewalk for a canvas, or perhaps because his eye could seldom resist anything drawn and colored.

To-night, however, his preoccupation barred them as he passed Holborn and found himself in the even deeper quiet of Russell Square, with its inclosed centerpiece of velvet turf and softly whispering elms. Sir John was swinging along one side, past dark stone houses whose windows blinked when the arc light struck them, when he noted a figure huddled against the wall across the street.

He paused a second, then made his way thence. His footsteps bit hollowly into the gritty paving, but the figure did not stir. It was a girl, sleeping, her rather small head resting against the wall. The smooth white column of her throat arose from a worn old coat of that indiscriminate shade which simply comes, and which cannot be bought. Sir John bent over her, and even in the uncertain light he could perceive that she was handsome, with a sweet dignity that rendered her present humble position a certain distinction.

"Some soldier's widow," he mused, and shook his head. The harshness of his face appeared, for an instant, to undergo a subtle softening as his gaze embraced the shadows beneath the long sweep of the lashes, the droop of the lips, and the scuffed toe of one little shoe peeping out from the dark skirt.

What was she doing out here? He looked about for some evidence of appeal to the charitable passer-by, but so dim was the light that he did not at once note the chalk pictures a few paces distant. When he did see them, however, Sir John hunched quickly forward, looked twice, then drew out his pince-nez.

"Extraordinary," he whispered, straightening up at length. "Talent there—unmistakable. And clods walking on it! Shameful!"

Sir John stalked back to the sleeper again, and seemed of half a mind to waken her. His hand strayed toward his pocket as he noted the small cardboard box beside the first sketch. The box was empty. For a few instants he hesitated, then paused, struck by an idea which, to judge by his expression, tempted him strongly.

He peered hesitantly up and down the length of the short street, one hand nervously fussing at the trim white wedge of his Vandyke. The street was deserted. With one final scrutiny of the girl, Sir John cautiously picked up the tin box of chalk beside her, selected a fairly well-lighted spot, and crouched over it, smiling faintly.

VI

OLD Giles had become well used to the uncertain hours kept by his master. But, on this particular morning, "'Pon my word," he complained to Richardson, the parlor maid, "I admits 'im as the Bow-bells struck four, and had scarcely touched my 'ead to the pillow 'ere he was bathed, and out again by seven! Jolly, he was, too—almost like he had a joke on some one."

"Aye," nodded the interested Richardson. "Paper boy seen 'im, an' arks me if Sir John 'd taken to prayin', 'is knees were that dusty."

As Sir John's taxicab veered toward Russell Square, a certain corner of that sedate green rectangle began to exhibit the signs of an ant hill newly poked with a stick. It was an orderly crowd, as English crowds generally are, although there was no doubt of their interest.

Forcing himself to a sober saunter, Sir John's mouth twitched slightly as the black helmets of two bobbies met his gaze in the front rank on the sidewalk. His pulse quickened with exaltation—he recalled, for a flashing moment, the first picture he had hung in the Luxembourg.

"What is the attraction, madam?" he inquired of a stout, red-faced matron who had just pushed her way out. She raised plump paws and let them flop against ample sides.

"A pitcher," she replied, "of two young sodjers, one of 'em a carryin' of the other. Big as life they be, sir, an' 'uman as us a standin' 'ere. 'Ow that girl do it, I don't see. I was arf afear'd to raise me eyes lest they walk of, wiv 'is 'ead a bandaged, an' the mud on 'em, an all. It do touch one 'ere, sir, that it do."

She pressed a hand to the general region of her heart, rolled forth a lugubrious lower lip, and nodded slowly. Sir John gradually knifed his gaunt figure to the front rank. Yes, it was good, he acknowledged, taking the unusual working conditions—to say the least—into consideration.

It was good because it lived, and it lived because it had dwelt for so long a space in his mind—now, gripping him in the blackness of night until he clenched his fists and ground his face into the damp pillow; yet, again, surging over him at some fresh sight or sound that brought back early days, and a lad with eager blue eyes. Sir John glanced at the blur of faces about him.

Two paces distant, a woman in black caught her lip between her teeth and moved suddenly off. A stout man, with strangely glistening eyes, added half a crown to the already heaping cardboard box before the girl, almost with an air of reverence. Yes, it was good. And the girl—

She was sitting there as if in a dream, raising her dark eyes only to murmur "Thank you!" when a coin was added. Her fingers worried at the hinged cover of the chalk box as if seeking relief for the agitation which she struggled to repress. Sir John followed her gaze as it wavered, momentarily, along to her own handiwork. He observed three well-dressed men, obviously cultured, to be discussing it earnestly. As he looked, one of them indicated some detail with his stick, and his companions nodded approvingly.

"A bit too fine for the ordinary eye," his comment floated to Sir John. "Leaves something for the imagination to fill in—real promise."

They entered a softly purring motor, and drove off. Sir John, wrapped in meditation, leaned against the wall, his hat brim tilted well forward. He had a cultivated

dislike to being recognized in public, intensified by his connection with the scene at hand. Shortly before noon, the crowds had so swelled that traffic was seriously impeded, and the bobbies reluctantly decided to carry out regulations and erase the attractions from the sidewalk.

Sir John lingered until the crowd had dispersed, leaving the girl, who at length arose and slid the coins into a much worn beaded bag. Two young men, endowed with the rich assurance of reportorial work, talked at her, pads in hand, as she moved wearily down the street. But she merely shook her head to all their questions, eyes straight ahead, so that they became discouraged and abandoned her after two fruitless squares. She was standing near the curb, probably awaiting a bus, when Sir John stopped before her, hat in hand.

"I beg your pardon," he began, "and I am not after news. But would you be so kind as to tell me—"

He broke off in consternation at her expression. For the incipient curiosity in her eyes had been promptly erased by an acute misery, tinged with indignation. He observed, with dismay, that hot tears clouded her eyes, and that her brave attempt to steady the tremor in her voice was not wholly successful.

VII

"WHY did you do it?" she wailed, in a small voice. "Why?" Sir John, thoroughly ill at ease, raised one hand, but she rushed on, accusingly: "Oh, yes, you did! I awoke this morning just as you were leaving, and I—I was frightened, before I saw it. I thought you had come to—to pick my pocket," she concluded, and tried to smile. Sir John started slightly at this confidence, and drew himself up very straight.

"I assure you, young woman, that my motives were untouched with any thought of self. If you will hear me out, I am sure that you will agree. I shan't detain you long."

He bowed, and indicated a near-by bench with a gesture that lacked nothing of courtliness. The girl hesitated, then made her way to it, talking over her shoulder the while; although, it seemed, as much to herself as to the tall figure behind her.

"Now, wherever I go, they'll expect something like that, you see, and where will it come from?" she demanded. "They

even took pictures of it for the newspapers. I shall be known as an impostor." She slumped down, rather in a heap, then as suddenly thrust out an impulsive hand to touch his arm.

"Please," she begged, "please do not misunderstand me. It was such a splendid piece of work—even I could see that. And such a shame to destroy it! But when one is desperately hard up, well—it drives one to think of little else save how to get money. And now—"

Her voice trailed off into a disheartened silence, which Sir John finally broke, not without a trace of embarrassment.

"I am a lonely old man," he said, looking absently down at a yellow leaf which stirred fitfully at his feet. "Seldom, of late years, have I concerned myself with another's trouble. Yet some obscure, compelling impulse moved me, when I saw talent such as yours thrown away on a dirty sidewalk."

"But you don't understand," the girl interrupted quickly. "It was—" She stopped short.

Sir John continued, gently: "My first thought went no farther than to draw a crowd, and some money, for you, with perhaps the one thoroughly unselfish picture that I have to my credit. But, as I worked there, alone with my thoughts, it came to me that here was an opportunity, possibly fashioned by Providence, for me to do something worthy for one who was once very dear to me."

Emotion mastered his throat for a moment, while the girl, visibly concerned, kept her wide, dark eyes fixed sympathetically on his face. At length the yellow leaf scratched faintly on the asphalt as it moved off, and Sir John looked up into his companion's face.

"If you were a man," he said, with a touch of sadness, almost, "I should probably not be moved to make you this offer. Men, especially young men, are headstrong, impulsive. But you do not so impress me, and anyway, it does not matter; your gift makes it unimportant."

He drew a long breath that was half sigh.

"And what is it," murmured the girl, lips parted curiously, "that you offer me?" A faint flicker of cynicism struggled in her eyes, and a corner of the firm mouth drew down ever so slightly. Bitterness and disappointment were no strangers here.

"I should hold it an honor," said Sir John, looking into her face with an earnestness that banished all doubt, "if you would become my pupil for the next two or three years. You have much already, although perhaps I, and some others I know, could round out and develop to full flower that which has grown so astonishingly by its own efforts." He paused, following her eyes, which considered the frayed border of her skirt.

"I shall bear all expenses, and see to it that you shall want for nothing. There are so few things—so pitifully few—that money can buy in this world," he concluded, gravely, with a sad little gesture. "I hope you will indulge an old man."

The girl seemed about to speak, then checked herself with some insistent thought. She stared off, down a bleak street, with a strange mixture of vagueness and fierce concentration, while the worn coat fluttered and fell from the tumult within her breast. The man regarded her anxiously.

"But I have a child," she said at length, her voice was scarcely audible; "a little boy. I can't leave him—and I'm in rags myself."

"No matter," assured Sir John, eagerly. "Perhaps you would even bring him to the studio, sometimes? As for the other—"

He slid one hand inside the long black coat and drew forth a capacious wallet. "There," he murmured, "please accept it. You can get whatever you need for the moment."

Her eyes widened at the denomination of the bank note rustling in her fingers. She smoothed it on her knee, and looked at it as one regards a miracle which is apt to vanish any second. A long moment followed, while she struggled with some inner self, then she said, almost defiantly: "Very well. Why shouldn't I? It's for us—both." Roughly she folded up the bank note and crammed it into her bag, rather as if she feared that it might be withdrawn again.

But when she arose, extending her hand, a sudden constraint seized her, so that she looked away from Sir John's smile, after one glance from beneath the dark, thick lashes. They conversed as they walked out to the curb again, until the thunder of an approaching bus silenced them.

"To-morrow, then, at five," called the tall man happily. "I shall call for you, 18 Carmichael Lane, and complete our plans."

He raised his hat, the bus trundled off. He thought, for an instant, that she was going to shout something back at him, but instead she raised her handkerchief, with a quick movement, up to her mouth, and merely smiled. So he stood, with the chill wind stirring his white hair ever so faintly, and a light lingering in his eyes until the bus lumbered out of sight.

VIII

At four thirty, next afternoon, a genial sun winked proudly at his reflection in the glossy black and polished brass of the limousine at Sir John's door. A tall figure, erect as a gun barrel, stepped briskly forth.

"Good afternoon, Morey," nodded Sir John. The pink-faced automaton in blue blinked once and touched his visor.

"Eighteen Carmichael Lane," directed Sir John, further, and entered the car.

The automaton blinked twice. "Carmichael Lane, sir?"

"Quite, Morey, quite," assured Sir John crisply. "Carmichael Lane."

"Very good, sir," acquiesced the automaton, although rather weakly, and sprang behind the wheel.

Swiftly the long car hummed on its way, at first through wide streets lined with stately horse-chestnuts. Then into thoroughfares ever more narrow and mean and twisting, with ash cans in evidence, and white-faced children. All at once the car slowed to a noiseless stop, and stood, purring gently.

"Number 18, sir," said Morey. He opened the door, and it was evident from the upward tilt of his snub nose that neither the number nor the street itself found any great favor in his eyes.

Disregarding the curious stares from dingy windows, Sir John descended and pushed open the gate to Number 18. It wabbled crazily on insecure hinges. Then, so quickly that he did not notice her, the girl stepped over the worn threshold and confronted him.

Sir John was vaguely aware that she was dressed as on the day before, even to the close fitting black felt hat which managed a certain air of chic, despite a scuffed spot or two. He was completely taken off his feet by her first sentence.

"Please," she begged, and laid her hand on his arm for a brief instant, "don't come in, for I don't live here, and I can't accept your generous offer."

"But—but you said," stammered Sir John, "yesterday—"

"Yes, I know," she rushed on, with a sort of desperation. "I—I have an explanation, and a—a sincere apology to make to you." She glanced about her, then: "May I tell you in the car? All these ears listening about us—I hate them," with a tiny shudder.

Round-eyed, Morey spun them out of the district with distinct relief. For a minute the girl collected herself, then faced the still figure beside her.

"I shall tell you everything, sir," she said, and moistened her lips. "But, first, you must take this back." The bank note was returned to Sir John's nerveless hand, which closed over it mechanically.

"When I left you yesterday I frankly expected never to see you again. And I intended to keep your money, too. We never know what we will do, you see, until we have our backs to the wall. Then, even honesty is apt to run second to the first law of nature."

Sir John still sat as if stunned, and after an instant the girl went on in her low, dry voice, eyes fixed resolutely on his own.

"I have deceived you as nobody so kind as you ever deserved. I did not draw a line of those pictures, and was only sitting there because he who drew them was too ill to come out himself."

Sir John gasped slightly, and she leaned forward as if to get it over with as soon as possible.

"Then—but I never dreamed things would come on as they did. Your money was the only really big thing—it meant food and medicine and comfort. I hurried home with it, stifling my conscience with thoughts of the good it would do. But my husband can see through my finest schemes—and he would cut off his right hand before he would do a mean or a dishonest thing. He is so much better than I, you see," she concluded proudly, yet with the ghost of a smile.

"Well?" inquired Sir John, and cleared his throat harshly.

"I tried to make him believe I had found it. But he laughed at first, and then grew terribly stern, for he can be that way, despite his tenderness. And finally—I told him everything, even to my giving you the wrong address, so that you could not find me again."

"H-m," murmured Sir John. He nar-

rowed his gaze at the last dull embers of another day smoldering behind the western chimney pots.

"And—well, here I am, and I guess that's all," concluded the girl. A little sigh escaped from her lips, and her shoulders drooped as though some inner brace had suddenly given way. The car spun along in a deep silence for some time. Only the swish of passing motors and the occasional cries of children romping in Hyde Park drifted in through the windows.

IX

"THIS husband of yours," remarked Sir John at length. "I should like to make his acquaintance, at any rate. Could I drop in—just for a moment, when we leave you?"

The girl shook her head regretfully. "I am sorry, but he distinctly said you should not do so, much as he would like to meet you, and to thank you, sir. He is fearfully proud, and so afraid that you would, well—"

"Think he was hinting around for himself, eh?"

The girl nodded quickly.

"Well," said Sir John, with abrupt decision, "it is getting along, so if you will—this time—give me your address, we shall take you home."

This she did, and in no time Morey's snub nose was elevated once more as the car halted before Number 81 Carmichael Lane. Sir John assisted the girl to alight, and followed her to a door whose lack of paint was obscured by a merciful dusk. She turned, and held out her hand, but he shook his head, smiling.

"Not until I have at least congratulated him on his wife," he said firmly. "I feel that I am entitled to that much consideration, and I intend to block your doorway until I get it."

After some subdued argument she yielded, and led the way back through a dark hallway faintly reminiscent of boiled cabbage. Their footsteps, light as they were,

aroused a child upstairs, who set up a lusty shouting for "Mommy."

"He is in there," whispered the girl, pointing to a lighted room at the end of the hallway. "You may go in, while I fly upstairs to the rescue."

Sir John cautiously parted draperies, once a brave green, and blinked in the sudden glare. His eyes had only time to skim the scored furniture, the white iron bedstead, and the worn tan carpet, when a movement beside the table drew him thence.

A man, a young man despite the thin-nish droop of his shoulders, was sitting with his back to the door. Now, he hitched his chair around with a deft movement, and the visitor noted with a start that the left sleeve flapped empty from the shoulder. His face, as the light fell full upon it, was a young face, prematurely etched with the acid of worry and suffering. But his voice, when he called out, was vibrant with gladness. "That you, dearest? My, you've been gone a long—"

He stopped short as his startled blue eyes fell upon the tall figure, hat in hand. Sir John, too, had opened his mouth to say something, he never knew what. For a dazed instant they stared deep into each other's very hearts. There ticked off a long moment that seemed eternity, until the older man faltered forward with trembling hands and streaming eyes.

"Lad, Dicky-lad," he choked, and his voice was little more than a whisper. "Is it in your heart to forgive me, lad? Ever?"

The young man's eyes filled suddenly, too, and so did his throat, so that he could do no more than encircle his father's shoulders with his right arm as Sir John sank to his knees and pressed the empty sleeve to his face in a passion of tenderness. But it was one of those times when words of mouth are more than ever futile things, or so it seemed to the girl as she silently appeared in the doorway, and as silently retraced her steps upstairs, smiling through tears of happiness.

AT THE END OF SUMMER

COLOR like music—breezes that caress—
Alas, that flawless beauty such as this
Must swiftly fade! But autumn's loveliness
Dies not—it blooms again 'neath summer's kiss.

Lena Whittaker Blakeney

Apple Man

JENNY WAS LETTER-PERFECT ON THE DANCE FLOOR, BUT
HERE WAS A DILEMMA FOR ANY PAID HOSTESS

By T. T. Flynn

IT was nine thirty at the Monarch Dancing Club. The orchestra blared loudly. Weaving couples on the great waxed dance floor wheeled and turned rhythmically.

The girls were young and pretty, and boasted little badges with "Hostess" engraved on the face. Some of the men were young. Far more of them were middle-aged. The least desirable ones seemed to be dancing with the youngest and prettiest girls.

It was so with Jenny Wright. Jenny was twenty, small, slim, dark haired and blue eyed. On her face was an expression of sophistication stopping just short of hardness.

Perhaps much of it was due to men like her present partner. Ginkkens was his name, and he was from some little town up-State or out in the Middle West; he was vague about this.

"In to look the Big Town over for a few days," he wheezingly confided to Jenny.

Ginkkens was short, pudgy, and carried an obtruding paunch, which he balanced by leaning slightly to the rear. For an hour he had been rushing Jenny. And for an hour she had been smiling mechanically at him.

Twice he had renewed the strip of tickets which he clutched in a moist hand. Jenny, collecting two tickets at the beginning of each dance, had quite a snug little bundle, each redeemable for cash at the end of the evening.

Ginkkens kept time to the music with his fleshy shoulders.

"Some class to this, eh, girly?" he panted, enthusiastically.

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m," Jenny answered.

"I could keep this up all night," Ginkkens said, rapturously.

Jenny dipped with him, and winced as one of his ample feet brushed one of her tired ones.

"I believe you could," she remarked viciously.

"That's me, sister," Ginkkens assured her between wheezes. He looked down at Jenny, tucked inside his arm, and announced brightly: "You've made a hit with me, little lady."

"I'll never forget it," Jenny admitted grimly.

"Yes, siree, some hit! The minute I saw you I says to myself, 'Ginkkens, my boy, there's the little lady that's queen of them all.' And," he panted gallantly, "I ain't seen any one yet that's made me change my mind."

"Apple sauce," retorted Jenny wearily. "You men all hand out the same line."

Ginkkens patted her shoulder with a pudgy hand, and tightened his clasp around her a trifle.

"It's the truth," he insisted. "You look like the queen of hearts to me."

Jenny wrenched the shoulder he had patted and said angrily:

"Lay off the pawing! Your tickets get you one dance straight, with no *Romeo* act tagged on!"

II

WITH a final rising clash of music, the dance came to an end. Jenny stopped, much like a run down toy, dropped her arms, and mechanically applauded with small slaps of her thin hands.

Ginkkens likewise patted his moist, pudgy palms together. But his attention was centered on Jenny. On his ample face was an expression of fatuous concern. "Not mad at me, are you, little lady?" he queried.

"Mad at you?" Jenny looked at him with cold impersonality. "You'll know when I get mad at you," she declared acidly. "That was just a little advance warning. No pawing!"

"Now, now, no offense meant," Ginkkens said hastily.

A preliminary note blared from a saxophone, and the orchestra again broke into loud music. The couples on the crowded floor closed together and swung away. Ginkkens started his fat shoulders swinging with the music, and held out his arms in invitation.

Jenny shrugged. "Let's sit this one out," she suggested.

"Sure." Ginkkens smiled agreement. But on a sudden thought the smile fled. "It'll cost me two tickets, won't it?" he asked.

"Certainly! You don't think Glassman's running a charity bazaar, do you?" Jenny asked indignantly.

Ginkkens hesitated and pursed his lips. Jenny, waiting hopefully, saw, frowning at them from the edge of the dance floor, the immaculately groomed figure of Berney Glassman, owner of the Monarch. A couple not dancing meant two tickets slipping forever out of reach, unless it was a paid sit-out. Glassman had been known to discharge a girl for the loss of two tickets.

Jenny was on the point of sliding away into another dance when Ginkkens made up his mind. "All right," he said generously. "I'll do it, little lady. If it was any one else I wouldn't. But you got me wound around your little finger."

Jenny said hurriedly: "Two tickets, please."

Ginkkens tore them off the end of the strip which he clutched in one fat hand. The frown passed from the face of Glassman, and he turned away.

Jenny expertly threaded a way across the dance floor to an exit. Outside the guard rope were chairs. She sank into one with a sigh of relief. "I'll tell the world this is the asbestos pancake," she said aloud. "Another five minutes and I'd have passed out on my feet."

Ginkkens dropped into the seat beside her, patted her arm, and said: "You're too nice for this sort of thing, little girl. You ought to get something easier. It wouldn't be hard."

Jenny carefully lifted the arm he had

touched, crossed it before her, away from him. Turning, she looked at him levelly. "What do you mean?" she asked coldly.

Ginkkens smiled nervously, started to speak, and then floundered. "I — ah — well, it oughtn't to be hard to find something," he said vaguely. He swallowed, moistened his thick lips, and turned red.

III

THE dance was a short one. When it ended, Jenny stood up abruptly. "You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Ginkkens," she said. "There's a party I got to see." Ignoring his protest, she made her way to the dressing room. There she found her chum, Maybelle, standing before a mirror renewing a ravaged complexion. Maybelle saw her approaching in the mirror and spoke without turning:

"Who's the butter and egg man, deary?"

Jenny sank into a chair and waved a hand in surrender.

"It's terrible, honey! The fat fool has been slobbering sappy remarks for the last hour. I could skin him alive and laugh at every howl."

Maybelle bent closer and deftly touched up her lips.

"Why'n't you give him his walking papers?" she asked between dabs.

"Why'n't I slap Glassman's face? It'd be the same thing in the end. Glassman's had his eye on me all evening. If I handed the boob what was coming to him, he'd sulk. Glassman would see it—even if Fatty didn't tell. You know where little Jenny would get off? The bum's rush with a one-way ticket! And my board bill due, and next week a payment on last year's fur coat. No, little Jenny's got to take it and like it."

Maybelle straightened up and moved back, critically eying the effect in the mirror. "It's tough," she agreed. "But cheer up, honey, the evening don't last forever."

Jenny lifted her left arm, looked at the cheap wrist watch strapped around her thin wrist, and said wearily: "Nine fifteen. I'll pass out if I have to trot around with that pork barrel the rest of the evening."

"Maybe you'll get a better one when you go out," Maybelle suggested. "One like that boy I had awhile ago. He was a swell dancer. Light as a feather on his feet. And a snappy talker, too. Works in a shirt shop down on the avenue."

"Maybe I won't, too," Jenny replied.

She stood up, walked to the curtained door, peered through a moment, and then stormed back. "Just like I thought!" she said furiously. "The fat slob is out there waiting for me. He looks like a sick cow."

Maybelle shook her head in sympathy.

"It's just the breaks, honey," she said consolingly. "But if it worries you so much, I'll go out and vamp that heavy sheik. If I can get him away for one round you'll have a chance to get located."

Jenny brightened. "I could kiss you for that, honey. If you get him away, I'll never forget it."

"Watch me." Maybelle gave her hair a final caressing pat, and stepped through the doorway.

Jenny slipped up, pushed one of the curtains aside a trifle, and peered out. She saw Maybelle stop before Ginkkens, say something, and motion toward the dance floor.

Ginkkens shook his head.

Maybelle stepped a trifle closer and again spoke.

Ginkkens shook his head stubbornly and peered past her at the door of the dressing room.

Maybelle shrugged, but remained in front of him. Jenny, seeing that there was no hope in that direction, slipped through the curtains and walked rapidly in the other direction. Ginkkens stepped around Maybelle and waddled after her.

IV

THE Monarch hall was well filled. Most of the men had dancing partners. Jenny, gazing desperately about, found one male apparently unattached.

Leaning against the rear wall of the hall, hands in his coat pockets, was a tall young man—alone. She descended upon him with a swift little rush, and asked:

"Mister, don't you want to dance?"

The tall young man hastily straightened, removed his hands from his pockets, swallowed, and said nothing.

Jenny spoke vehemently. "I said don't you want to dance? Say something, quick!"

A quick flush stained the young man's face. "I don't dance," he replied in embarrassment.

Jenny half stamped her foot. "Well, do something! Here, grab my arm and walk down the hall with me! I got to have some help, and you're it!"

He put forth his right arm, awkwardly.

Jenny seized it, and tucked it under her left arm. "Come on!" she said sharply. "Show some speed! I ain't going to bite you!"

He obeyed, silently. Ginkkens, standing indecisively a score of paces away, watched them depart with chagrin visible in every curve of his short, pudgy body.

Jenny forgot her aching feet in the joy of her escape. She took several steps in time with the music. "I'll tell the world that was a close one!" she exclaimed. "Another minute and he'd have caught me sure."

The tall young man considered the remark for several steps. Finally he asked gravely: "Is it a game?"

Jenny sniffed. "Call it a game if you want to. How would you like to have a fat sheik shadowing you all over the hall?"

He considered her reply in silence for a few moments. "You mean that fat man has been following you around and annoying you?"

Again his voice was serious. Jenny was nonplussed. She knew the kidders, the fatuous, the vain, the boastful—and others. Somehow he was different. For want of anything better, she answered his question.

"Following and annoying ain't the word. The fat hick has been after me all evening. He's a big pain."

"Do you want him whipped?"

Jenny stopped abruptly, lifted her arm free, and faced him. She had his number. He was stringing her along for amusement. Hotly she said: "Tie it out! I've been kidded by experts. Your line's in the limburger class!"

His face reddened once more. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't go to rile you up. I just spoke out like it was my sister."

Jenny looked at him clearly for the first time. Tall, broad shouldered, perhaps twenty-eight or nine, not handsome, neither was he bad looking. His skin was darker than that of the men who usually appeared in the Monarch. His blue suit lacked the snappy cut of the city tailors, yet it suited the outdoor atmosphere which clung to him. Altogether, he was likable. But his remark—

"Sister?" she inquired, uncertainly. "Sister?"

"Yes, sister."

"What's the idea?" Jenny asked faintly, her aplomb completely upset.

"It's the custom where I come from," he explained, and a faint smile softened the corners of his mouth.

Jenny looked at him doubtfully. "Would you really give that guy a punch if I asked you to? No kidding!"

"No kidding. Cross my heart, and hope to die." He looked down at her, and a real, full smile crinkled his tanned features.

Jenny experienced a sudden, overwhelming desire to return the smile with one equally as warm and friendly. But a last, lingering doubt drove her to say: "Well—do it."

V

THE smile left his face. Little lines of muscle appeared on his cheeks as his jaws set. He nodded, and, without speaking, wheeled and started through the crowd, back the way they had come. He was headed for Ginkkens—and Ginkkens was headed for a thrashing. There was no doubt about that.

Jenny's chief emotion was astonishment. To the last moment she had not really believed he would do it. But he had spoken the truth. And then, with a rush, came realization of the consequences which would ensue for them both. She caught her breath and darted after him.

Before he had rounded the end of the dance floor, she caught up with him, seized his arm, and ordered: "Wait a minute! I was just kidding!"

He stopped, reluctantly, it appeared to her, and turned to face her. "It's not a kidding matter," he stated severely.

"Pooh!" replied Jenny. But even to herself the reply sounded a trifle inadequate. She fell back upon other tactics. "This sister stuff may be all right out in the sticks!" she scolded. "But it won't get you a thing here in little old New York—nothing but the hoosegow! You'd feel like a fish by the time the cops had you salted away."

At that moment a warning note sounded from the orchestra, and the tide of jazz crashed forth. The crowd about them shifted to the dance floor. Jenny caught sight of Glassman strolling toward them. It reminded her that no tickets were coming into her possession. If Glassman realized it, trouble would surely follow. She dropped her hand from the young man's arm, shrugged, and said:

"I got to be getting back to work. Gas-

sing with you ain't collecting any tickets for the Monarch."

He interposed quickly: "Don't go. Can't I buy some tickets—or something like that? I don't know just how it's done."

"I'll tell the world you can," Jenny replied. "Glassman's got 'em in big rolls to sell—and just dying to do it. You can buy a strip and sit 'em out. That is, if you don't really dance."

He shook his head. "Never had time to learn. Where do I get the tickets?"

Jenny led him to the ticket booth, and then to a far corner of the hall. There, in a nook formed by a wall of the check room and two pillars, were several vacant chairs. Behind them were open windows.

She sank into a chair, held her arms up to the cool night breeze which blew into the stuffy interior, and said: "Gee, that air feels good!"

He sat down beside her and breathed deeply of it.

"Yes," he agreed. "Pretty good. But it's not like the breezes we get up in the Blue Ridge Mountains."

"What's your name?" Jenny asked, curiously. "And what do you do in the mountains? Hunt and fish?"

He smiled at that. "My name is Dennis Lee. I raise apples for a living."

"Apples?"

"Yes. A couple of thousand barrels every year. I ship them to England. This year's crop is on the ocean now."

Jenny half closed her eyes.

"I used to climb in an apple tree," she said dreamily. "We lived in a little hick town, and had an apple tree and a pear tree and a cherry tree and a plum tree in the back yard. Pop kept a garden, too. I can just remember it. Gee, it seems like another world!"

Dennis Lee nodded.

"It is. The city's harsh and cold—and I always think it's going to be cruel. The country is warm and alive and kind."

He half turned and looked out of the window at a small patch of sky which was visible.

"There," he said, pointing to it. "That little patch looks out of reach. But on top of the Blue Ridge the sky is near. It's a great sweep from horizon to horizon—and every star in it is almost like a friend. I—I wouldn't trade one star from my sky for all of your city."

"Don't worry, I wouldn't be nut enough to want to make the change," said Jenny, loyally. "But," she added, "you do make the old homestead sound pretty nice. Tell me some more."

VI

"It is nice," said Dennis Lee, intensely. And he told her more. Jenny, wafted from the Monarch and all that went with it, wandered in spirit with him along the smoky heights of the Blue Ridge.

She saw the mountainsides clothed with summer green and dotted with riotous flowers. She stood on the brow of lofty hills and looked for many miles across the country below, where the fields and farmhouses were spread like a checkerboard of the gods.

With him she strolled through spaced rows of spreading apple trees, when each branch was a living arm of color and perfume, and the air was filled with the soft hum of the bees.

She saw the trees drooping with fruit, and gangs of pickers stripping them and packing the fruit into barrels. She saw the fields harvested, the corn shocked, the gleaming pumpkins lying between the rows. She felt the tang of the autumn air, and witnessed the stocking of the larders for the leisurely winter months to come.

It was all new, strange, and appealing. Jenny hung on every word, her small thin face set in lines of unconscious wistfulness, the sophistication of her features softened.

Finally Dennis Lee said:

"Thank goodness, I'm through with my business in the city. I'm going to take the first train in the morning."

They sat in silence for a full minute. Jenny broke it by saying: "To-morrow?"

"Yes."

She took a deep breath. "Give my regards to the punkins — and the mountains. Some day, maybe, I'll drop in and look 'em over."

Dennis Lee half turned and inspected her gravely. "You ought to get some fat on you," he said suddenly. "I—I'll bet you don't eat enough."

Jenny turned up her nose and tried to wither him with a look.

"I like your nerve," she remarked coldly. But in spite of herself there was nothing withering about the look, and her voice contained more of warmth and softness than it did of chill.

"It's the truth," he insisted. "Y-you look like the first good wind would blow you away."

"Listen to the man!" she cried sarcastically. "Old Doc Criticism looking 'em over. Forget it. I got an arm like a Turk wrestler. Look!" She clenched her fist and crooked her right arm. Her elfish pugnacity drew a laugh from him.

"I've got a little bantam hen back home that struts up to a big rooster and looks just like that," he told her with a chuckle.

"Classing me with his animals, now," mourned Jenny. But inside she felt all warm and delicious. Something was there that the wildest strains of the Monarch orchestra had never stirred. It was incredibly nice to be scolded for not eating enough.

And being classed with his little bantam hen was, well, like a feather bed of happiness—a soft descent into contentment. She felt a bond of sorts between her and the little hen. She wished that she might see her.

Dennis Lee drew out his watch.

"Gosh!" he said in surprise. "I've been sitting here talking your head off. I guess you think I'm a bore."

"I think—well, never mind what I think," Jenny replied. "But you don't see me passing out on you, do you?"

He smiled. "I wouldn't blame you if you did." And then: "I saw a soda fountain at the other end of the hall. Could you eat some ice cream?"

"Try me," invited Jenny.

He stood up, and she made a move to follow him. He motioned her back, and said: "I'll bring it here. You stay and keep cur seats. Some one might come along and steal them."

VII

JENNY was content. She sank back and watched him stride away. What shoulders he had. And he was not at all clumsy; rather free moving, suggesting finely made machinery. As he turned the corner of the check room the contour of his face attracted her. Jenny was thinking about it, her eyes closed, when a wheezing voice said: "Hello, little lady. I been looking all over for you."

She opened her eyes and met Ginkkens's oily smile.

"Beat it," she remarked briefly.

"Now, lissen," argued Ginkkens plain-

tively. "You ain't treating me right, little girl. I had the tickets, and you went off and left me flat. I ain't kicking about that. But you ain't doing nothing now, and I want to dance."

"I told you to beat it!" snapped Jenny. "I'm sitting this dance out with another gentleman. Shift into reverse and make yourself scarce. I'm sick of the sight of you. You may be a sheik back home, but you're nothing but a fat pest to me. Beat it while you got your health!"

Ginkkens purpled. "Say!" he said hoarsely. "You're a fine hostess! What you here for if it ain't to make yourself agreeable? What d'you suppose I bought these tickets for?" He shook a strip of them at her.

"It's nothing to me," said Jenny coldly. "Go on—make yourself scarce!"

Ginkkens glared at her. Then he turned and waddled away, muttering to himself. Within a minute Glassman came striding around the corner of the check room, Ginkkens following.

Jenny eyed Glassman with a slight sinking feeling. It was not, however, as great a panic as would have been the case earlier in the evening. After Dennis Lee, Glassman somehow seemed a trifle puny.

Glassman halted before her. "I been watching you all evening," he said wrathfully. "You been acting funny. Now, here comes a gentleman with a complaint that you left him flat awhile ago—and refused to dance with him just now. You can't treat 'em like that in the Monarch and get by with it. You're fired! Turn your tickets in and get out!"

Ginkkens, standing behind Glassman, looked at her and smirked.

Jenny jumped to her feet and faced Glassman.

"Is that so!" she cried. "Well, I ain't fired—get me! I quit when that comic bothered me! Go chase yourself—and I'll leave when I get good and ready."

"You little devil!" snarled Glassman. "Get out quick or I'll throw you out!" He reached for her wrist.

And then a hand, big and tanned and muscular, fastened on his shoulder, jerked him around, and threw him back into the chair Jenny had just quitted.

VIII

It was Dennis Lee, carrying two dishes of ice cream on a small tray, and looking

grim, if not positively ferocious, as he glared down at Glassman.

In spite of her disturbed state, Jenny thrilled. He looked big and handsome and formidable—just like a modern knight, in her judgment.

Glassman evidently didn't see anything knight-like about him, for he struggled to his feet, rubbing his side where it had connected with the chair back, and choked: "Who asked you to butt in? I've a good mind to call a cop and have you run in!"

"What's the matter?" asked Dennis Lee, and he spoke to Jenny and not to Glassman or Ginkkens.

"He came fooling around," Jenny replied, pointing to Ginkkens. "And when I gave him his papers, he ran to Glassman. Glassman came here and fired me and was going to throw me out. The big ham!"

"Throw you out, eh?" Dennis Lee remarked quietly. He set the small tray down on the chair he had been sitting in. Then he straightened up and looked at Glassman and Ginkkens, who had both moved together, as if they were facing a common danger.

"No," said Dennis Lee, softly, "there isn't going to be any throwing out. At least, not for you, Jenny Wright."

"She's got to get out!" said Glassman thickly. "Both of you, get out at once!"

"Ah," said Dennis Lee, still more softly. "Now, then," he said, and a musical slur crept into his voice, "down where I come from they don't talk to ladies that way. No, suh. We are going. But you will remember us.

"You," with a nod to Ginkkens, "for not knowing you shouldn't bother a lady.

"You," with a nod to Glassman, "for not knowing how to talk to a lady."

Suddenly he arose ever so slightly upon his toes, and took two swift sliding steps. His great strong hands clenched, flashed out, and sank into the ample middle sections of the men before him, the right into Ginkkens, the left into Glassman.

Ginkkens and Glassman bent over as if they were worked by strings. Each emitted a loud and violent "Oof!" Each clasped both hands to his middle, staggered over to the chairs, and collapsed. Ginkkens sank accurately into the middle of the little tray—and the two dishes of ice cream.

Jenny looked at them wide eyed. Then she turned to Dennis Lee, her eyes shining.

"I'll tell the world you can wallop!" she exclaimed. "They won't forget that for a long time."

"I hope they don't," said Dennis Lee modestly.

They were in a quiet nook, invisible to most of the dancers on the floor. But Jenny, looking around with swift caution, saw one or two couples looking curiously in their direction. Also, the two men on the chairs were moaning, and showing signs of returning to a noisier state. She clutched Dennis Lee's arm.

"You got to beat it!" she said hurriedly. "The cops 'll be here in a couple of minutes."

He hesitated. "I don't like to run."

She shook his arm in a sudden frenzy of alarm. "Don't be an idiot! You'll get hauled up in court — maybe get a short stretch. And they might put your picture in the papers. That 'd be fine reading for the people who know you back on the mountain, wouldn't it?"

He still hesitated, and she pulled at the arm again.

"Come on!" she urged anxiously. "Follow me. Those two birds 'll come back to life and give the alarm before you can get out the front door. But there's another way. I'll show it to you. Come on!"

"My hat," he objected.

Jenny stamped her foot. "Forget it! What's a hat to the hoosegow?"

He said nothing further, and followed her. Swiftly she led him, around the check room to the other side of the hall, through a door into a narrow, dimly lit passageway, then down a flight of steep steps.

Jenny descended two at a time. Dennis Lee followed close behind her. One flight followed, another flight, one more short, dim passage, a door, and suddenly they were standing in a pitch dark alley.

Jenny hastened down the alley, turned into an intersecting one, went half a block, and finally stopped just short of a lighted street.

"There," she said, panting, but relieved. "You can walk down this street, get a car, and reach your hotel all right. And you better get out of town. Those bimbos might get the cops after you."

He was scarcely breathing deeply. "I don't know how to thank you," he said awkwardly.

"Never mind the thanks. I was glad to do it. Those two wallops squared us. And you better be on your way, or all this running might turn out to be a flop."

IX

SHE found his hand in the darkness and pressed it in farewell.

"Don't forget to remember me to the mountains," she said, a trifle huskily. Her throat felt tight, and she had a well-grounded suspicion that a good cry was not far in the offing.

Dennis Lee returned her clasp. "I will," he said. "Good-by." He released her hand and turned away. His step was not hurried.

"G-g-good-by," gulped Jenny. She suddenly felt very small and weak, and alone—horribly, terribly alone. In spite of herself the tears came. They were meant to be silent ones, and the catch in her voice was small.

But Dennis Lee heard it, or something that neither of them saw nor heard called across the darkness to him. He faced about and returned to her with a rush.

"Jenny Wright!" he said huskily. "You're not going to send me home alone, are you?"

"N-no," Jenny gulped again. "I wasn't sending you. You was j-just going of your own a-accord."

"Never!" he explained, his voice clearer. "Not alone." He took her in his arms and told her more — much more. Jenny listened, and cried her tears out against the front of his coat. And when he turned her tear-wet face up and kissed her, she clung to him as if fearful that he would slip away at the last moment.

Later, when they were ready to step forth from the shadows and face the lighted street, he remembered. "You haven't said you're going to marry me, Jenny. It means going up in the Blue Ridge, where everything is different from here. It means a mighty big sacrifice for you, I know."

Jenny found his hand again and pressed it, but this time the pressure was possessive.

"You talk s-so silly," she quavered. "I'm c-crazy about the mountains and the apples. I'm g-going to get good and fat—like a punkin. And if you don't l-love me then, I'll—I'll—"

"Darling!" said Dennis Lee — and he stopped her threatening speech with the most satisfactory means available.

Mudge Lane

MARY MADE THE LAST DAYS OF SIMON AS GOLDEN AS THE RAYS OF THE SETTING SUN

By Leslie Gordon Barnard

NOBODY but Mrs. Gorsby would have thought of it!

The old ladies were all agreed as to that. They stood about the little, cobblestoned courtyard, leaning upon sticks, supported by the residue of fading life, and agreed upon it, with a clacking of tongues and a shaking of whitened heads. They agreed that it was quite, quite ridiculous! They agreed that it was utterly brazen!

Eating into every aged mind was a secret, terrible jealousy that the thrilling idea had not been born first in it! Considering it, old hearts found their measured and declining beat growing faster, pulsing a little with the far, faint thrill of life.

"She hadn't ought to!" said Mrs. Wumble. "The nerve of it!" objected Martha Hawkes. "The ducking stool!" shrilled old Granny Snodges, whose second childhood appropriated the things of the first, so that all history—of which, as a child, she had been fond—became a part of herself. "That's the thing for the likes of her! The horse pond! That's what we'd have done to her in *my* day!"

"Hush!" warned old Mary Grimble. "She's coming!"

Mrs. Gorsby, indeed, was descending her crooked staircase leading to the courtyard. This staircase had known the comings and goings of charity feet for, some said, centuries, now.

It doubtless could detect the gradual transition from the first comparative sprightliness to the final shufflings of extreme age, and judge how long before there would be another sale of pitiful trifles, a temporary vacancy, and then the incoming of such other household goods as an old woman in penury may bring into the space of a single room up a crooked staircase.

For her age, Mrs. Gorsby was still incredibly sprightly—almost irritatingly so. She had been here only three weeks. She

scrubbed her steps in a way impossible to a less active body. Her diamond-paned windows shone spotlessly, becoming a constant reproach to others.

Some as well as she had bits of china within, and flower boxes without, their windows; but there was that in the ordering of Mrs. Gorsby's china that offended, and her geraniums in the window boxes were fresh and blatant upstarts.

All this might have been overlooked had Mrs. Gorsby only shown a modesty natural and fitting in a newcomer, and at least some consciousness of the half suspicious, half resentful appraisement to which she was subjected—which she did not!

"Airs she gives herself, do you look now!" grumbled one of the watchers.

Mrs. Gorsby held her head high.

In her hands she carried a bowl, covered with napery irreproachably white.

The intaking of breaths at sight of this was almost a hiss. The blue and white bowl glinted in the sunshine. A little gust of wind danced curiously toward her, caught at the covering napkin, lifted it—revealing for a moment a tempting corner of Spanish cream—and dropped it again. Mrs. Gorsby pursued her dignified way.

The groups of watchers were now sufficiently dispersed to appear casual, to remove undue suspicion concerning their chatterings, lest it be mistaken for envy. As she passed under the archway toward the porter's lodge, there was a general movement together again, and into the sunshine that filled one corner still.

Old women like sunshine. They follow it about as if in its golden fire lies the secret of continuing existence.

And old women like to watch. From the sunlit patch of courtyard they could follow her progress with their eyes. There—they hissed again with quick inhalations of jealousy.

She stopped, knocked, entered the lodge where old Simon, the porter and janitor, lived. Old Simon's daughter, who kept house for him, was away, and Simon had chosen this unpropitious moment to fall ill.

No one seemed to think of it—that he would need sustenance and care. Old Simon? He would fend for himself!

Mrs. Gorsby had thought of it.

There—she was in now, the quaint oaken door closing behind her.

"She hadn't ought to!" declared Mrs. Wurmble.

"The nerve of it!" agreed Martha Hawkes.

"The ducking stool! The horse pond!" shrilled old Granny Snodges.

They stood in the moted sunlight. The wind caught at them gently; the motes were whisked away by it. They were motes themselves, dried atoms of dust, ready to be blown away.

They stood in the moted sunlight, peering at the door of scandal. Their breaths came and went hissingly.

Unthinkable, this conduct!

Old Simon!

Why did they leave it to *her* to think of it?

II

Who was old Simon?

Another atom of dust, ready to be blown away. He was hardy, of course. The chattering women in the courtyard could have told Mrs. Gorsby that. He made out well enough, he did, for a man.

How old? Seventy-seven? Old Simon insisted on eighty, but Naddy Mudge, his daughter, was quick to take down this pride of years. Perhaps if he were all of eighty, she would awaken to the incongruity of his making out so well with his pails and his broom, and his handy jobs around the place.

She even might relieve him of more of the labor, then, instead of herself gadding about so much. Aye, and an acid tongue she had, and small use for age in man or woman—being not too strongly in the shadows yet herself.

But Simon, he was hardy enough. The women could have told Mrs. Gorsby that. Simon could fend for himself right enough, without her meddling.

The moted sunlight was mellower still in here, falling through ancient mullioned windows.

"That you, Naddy? What's that? No, I'm not hungry!"

"It's not Naddy. It's just—me!"

Her own fingers touched the hand on the rough coverlet, a hand outstretched and yet almost overtaken by the clumsy night-shirt sleeve of Naddy's careless making.

He twitched oddly; his words came with a puzzled but urgent appeal:

"Naddy, you must tell Charlton about her. Old Charlton's a good sort, he'll get her in. I'd go myself, if I didn't feel—so poorly. Fetch a paper, Naddy, and write it down—there's a good girl—and Charlton 'll put her case before the governors. G-o-r-s-b-y — Mary Gorsby — that's it! That's it, sir; you've got it right. I'll be much obliged to you, sir; much obliged—an old friend—when I was a boy—"

She took his hand then.

"Simon, that's all past. I'm *here!* Don't you know me? It's Mary. Mr. Charlton did get me in. You went to see him—in the rain—when you shouldn't, Simon! Now you're ill, but I'm here to help you get well again."

"Mary!" He lingered over the name.

He sat up in bed suddenly, and she propped a pillow behind him. Her face was transfigured with an amazing radiance. She was young again. And Simon—aye, Simon sat up there with the sunlight shifted to the lower part of his face.

Simon's face was grizzled and not over-clean, for Naddy had been neglectful, and Mrs. Gorsby too timid to offer such intimate ministrations; his teeth were mostly missing, and yellowed where they were not. But Simon's eyes were young.

He was an atom of dust, old and unlovely, and the wind, with its slightest puff, might blow him away and be done with it, but he would not be tabernacled thus by age and decrepitude: already his spirit wandered in Elysian fields.

Mrs. Gorsby sat beside him now, seeing not his aged and unlovely body, but his eyes—blue eyes that had laughed with her down the lanes of Stocklow-cum-Chardy.

So she, too, was young with him again.

III

It was a crooked lane, rather than a street. There were cottages on either side, each with its bit of garden. These spaces are small, if one were really to see them now, but quite vast tracts then, and inclosed by brick walls, moss-grown with a

moldy, comfortable green. At one end of this lane is the Meadows, where there is the brook—then a vast, vast playground. At the other end is the traffic of High Street.

High Street, Stocklow-cum-Chardy!

Mudge Lane, Stocklow-cum-Chardy!

Behind the Mudge cottage itself, in those days, where Granny Mudge sits, presiding like a genial and protecting old witch over the games of the children, and imagining she can still smell the roses, there is the sound of hammering—a musical sound; and of saws eating into wood, more musical still; and of planes upon wood, most musical of all.

Evening! Well, they are working late in the carpenter shop to-night—the Mudges, father and son—old Mudge still able to do his day's work, and better.

"Come, Mary, let's go and see. Race you around!"

Stout legs a flying—rough stockings, bare knees and grimy, and marked with honorable scars, scarcely ahead of Mary's brown limbs and short wisp of skirt. Now she is ahead of him, little witch, round the bend of the path, into the yard, laughing her victory! He does not mind. It is Mary.

The wide, double door of the shop is open. The smell of fresh sawdust is a perfume of which one never tires. They sit on some boards, watching. A tremulous light hangs about them, filling the little yard with a quivering beauty. The sound of hammers rings more clearly, as if all things were strangely clarified at this hour, and so, too, one's heartbeats throb and pulsate oddly.

"Gettin' late, father!"

"Aye, we'll finish her by lantern, if need be!"

Simon is proud of these men, and their muscled arms—grandad and father both, men of might and skill.

"What's the queer box for, Simon?"

"Huh!" Simon swells a little with pride that he should know. "It's a coffin—for old man Snibbs!"

"A—a w-what?"

"Coffin!"

"What's that?"

"To put old man Snibbs in, silly!"

She had heard, of course, that Snibbs's blinds were down, and on his door was something black, and when you went by—if you were a child—you ran. If you weren't, you stood, and looked, and whis-

pered to whoever you were with, and nodded wisely.

"Let's play hide an' seek, Simon!" You ran in that.

"Who'll play hide an' seek?" Volunteers a plenty. Mudge Lane rings with their merry shouts; the quivering evening stillness catches up the sound, joins them to the twitterings of birds, and offers them up, an evening sacrifice of praise. Dusk falls more closely. The hammering ceases on the queer box for old man Snibbs.

But the play goes on.

"Tisn't fair Mary should always hide with Simon. "Tisn't fair!" A mutinous group gathers. Mary draws near. "Yah! Yah! What were you doing with Simon in that old empty tool box? O-h, M-a-a-r-y!"

She blushes; she does not quite know why. Is it not right that she, liking Simon so well, should crouch with him happily, their hearts beating half with joy of the game, half with a comradeship that makes them clasp hands, while the merry hue and cry is about them?

"Twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five—"

"Hurry, Mary, we must hide again!"

They are watching her—jealous little minxes; her head goes high, she takes Simon's hand boldly, and runs. They hide together again, and are happy.

"Simon! Simon!"

Yes, they heard that call before, but did not heed it. It comes again.

"S-i-m-o-n!"

When the voice gets long like that a fellow has to go—if he wants his supper, that is. Mrs. Mudge, junior, has acid ways. The children don't like her very well. Against her and her ways they make common cause. "Oh, Simon, *must* you go?" No, the children don't care for young Mrs. Mudge.

Young Mrs. Mudge is like the Brewster dog. When it starts barking, all the dogs in the village join in. When young Mrs. Mudge calls Simon, it is a signal to all parents that their offspring should soon be in. Simon drags himself away. But he whispers: "See you to-morrow, Mary!"

The game goes on without him. "Going to play, Mary? Aw, don't go in! *You're* not called just yet!" They like her now, want her—Simon having gone.

Of course she will play, and happily enough, too, in the fast fading light. A gleam shines in the Mudge cottage where Simon has gone. She can hear his voice

comfortably still, echoing within her: "See you to-morrow, Mary!"

Ah, but the game must end for all. For her as well. "M-a-a-r-y!" That is her call. She goes homeward in the gathering darkness.

Teacups in the light of lamps, and the last rays of sunset falling upon dishes of blue and white. Her father's grave voice reading the evening Scripture before they may eat.

They are hammering again in the shop back of the Mudge cottage; hammering at that queer box. Perhaps Mary's father hears it, too, for he seems to stop and listen. He opens the Bible.

"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

Mary is sleepy with her play, her mind refuses the rest of the reading, but that smooth, grave sentence that she cannot understand, brings singular comfort and peace.

Supper now. Dishes of blue and white. After that, sleep. Childhood dreams. And then?

"See you to-morrow, Mary!"

IV

THE slanting sunlight had shifted. It no longer touched the coverlet, nor the grizzled beard and not overclean face of old Simon. It played for a moment on a corner of the ceiling where the ancient timbering glowed under its touch, then vanished altogether.

"I'm cold, Naddy!"

Ah, he was back from the lane and the workshop at Stocklow-cum-Chardy. And Mary had gone from his mind, not from the room. She drew a heavier blanket over him, tucking it about the arms with their coarse, clumsy sleeves. That did it! Tucking it about—as his mother used to do—his mother, the young Mrs. Mudge, of Mudge Lane.

"Hide an' seek, ma! Such a game, but I'm tired now! I'll play again, to-morrow, shan't I, ma?"

She would fetch him hot broth presently, from her own little stove, would Mary. Meanwhile, perhaps she was the least bit jealous of the junior Mrs. Mudge, now forgotten in Mudge Lane, which has become the back alley of a factory district.

She put her hand on his.

"Simon—it's *Mary*!"

But he was counting now: "Forty-five,

fifty, fifty-five—" Now he was no longer "it," but ran with her to hide. "Here, Mary, the old tool box!" His hand tightened on hers. Then he started as if hearing a call. "Must go, Mary!" "S-i-m-o-n!"

When the voice gets long like that, a fellow has to go.

"See you to-morrow, Mary!" he whispered.

She hurried out, did Mary, then, afraid of her emotion, her old breast throbbing with a far, faint life.

It was chill in the courtyard now. The sunlight had gone, and with it the old women. Fires in small grates invite old women to huddle near. Heat! Fire! Sunlight by day, and stored sunlight, in coal, by night!

Mary Gorsby fancied even firesides were neglected for her; she imagined faces at every window. Perhaps she was right. Her head went high. She smiled, thinking of Mudge Lane. "What were you doing with Simon? O-h, M-a-a-r-y!" Jealous minxes! Her head was held high.

The broth now—strong, but not too strong—lovingly brewed. It almost spilled, her fingers trembled so. Happiness? Aye, it is for Simon.

The years have carried them apart, the current of circumstances given them other mates for the while, but now—Mudge Lane is a back alley of a factory district. Mudge Lane, as such, is gone even in name.

But Mudge Lane lives here again—in Mary—in Simon. Childhood is renewed. Childhood is not dead. It lives in a second childhood!

Another bowl of blue and white; Mudge Lane knew that bowl, and the secret of its broth.

She went tremblingly down the stairs. One or two old women, braving again the chill of evening, watched her openly, whispering. She passed on under the archway. Simon would like this broth; they knew the delicious secret of it in Mudge Lane.

She had to set it down on the low step, to open the door of the porter's lodge. What was the matter? It would not open. She fumbled anxiously; in the end it opened with a jerk.

"Well, what do *you* want?"

It was Naddy, back. Mrs. Gorsby tried to explain.

"No, no! Go away. I can tend to him well enough myself!"

Her heart failing, Mrs. Gorsby murmured timidly: "At least, you'll give him the broth, miss?"

Couldn't youth understand that it meant everything—everything to age—this broth in its blue and white bowl from Mudge Lane? Aye, but perhaps youth was remembering he was eighty after all, and was seeing the incongruity of his making out so well with his pails and broom and handy jobs about the place—while youth went gadding. Self-reproach, like enough, and bitterness with it, turning itself against age that did thoughtful duty where neglectful youth failed.

"Get away, now, I tell you. You had no business coming here. I've a notion to report you to the governors!"

The door slammed.

Stains of brown on the gray cobblestones. Blue and white pieces of crazed earthenware. A stooping old woman tremblingly collecting them, as if they alone now mattered.

How had the news spread? Perhaps the raised voice and shrill tones of Naddy did it. Women, hurrying out, shawled against the evening chill, gathered around her.

"Never you mind, deary. She's a hussy, she is!" "She hadn't ought to do it!" "The ducking stool! That's the thing for her. In *my* day—"

It is Naddy they rage against now, making common cause. An acid tongue and a quick way, had Naddy. Like the young Mrs. Mudge, whom the children did not care for in the lane.

They make common cause against her. "You come with us, deary!" Simon had been taken from her now. They no longer whispered against her. They chatted quite companionably.

Aye, Simon had been taken; but *that* they did not know yet. A last long call had come: "S-i-m-o-n!" When the voice gets long like that, a fellow has to go.

If this were Mudge Lane, and the shop behind the cottage still open for the labor of carpenters by lantern light, to-night there would be the ringing of hammers, clarified by the evening silence.

"What's that queer box for, Simon?"

"To put old man Snibbs in, silly!"

Hammering like that, if this were Mudge Lane. And if you were a child, passing the door yonder, you ran. If you weren't, you stood, and looked, and whispered to whoever you were with, and nodded wisely.

Days, as men count them, do not matter now. One scorns the petty measuring out of hours and minutes. Life is a day, and evening draws near. Simon has been called, and answered.

There is a gleam yonder where he is gone. One catches it, now and again—in strange places—at odd times. A flower—blue sky and sailing clouds above the courtyard—warm, ancient walls caught in the evening light—sunset—

Sunset, as now. A tremulous light is in the courtyard. Late sunlight slants into the tiny room where Mrs. Gorsby entertains. She is one of them now, for Simon is gone. "Play with us, Mary, you're not called yet!"

Of course, of course she will! Proud of the spotless room, the bits of furniture—some of them from Mudge Lane, too. Proud of the china, and earthenware, blue and white—crazed a bit—never mind that! A late gleam rests on it goldenly. The teacups shine in the light of lamps, and the last rays of the sunset are on dishes of blue and white.

The women are chattering, but she does not heed their prattle. They nod over their words, regarding her curiously. "You know about her—and Simon? Well, well, she takes it lightly!" And then: "What a noise that new janitor makes!"

The new janitor is hammering open a packing case of incoming goods. For Mary, they are hammering again in the shop back of the Mudge cottage, hammering at that queer box. Mary's father seems to hear it, too. He opens the Book to read:

"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

Her face is radiant. She pours tea. The dishes are of blue and white, out of a far childhood. Oh, she can afford to wait, can Mary! Occasionally she chatters a bit herself. Evening is pleasant, and the light tremulous: throbbing, quivering with ecstatic promise. Afterward will come sleep! And then—

"See you to-morrow, Mary!"

She smiles upon them all. She pours more tea into white and blue cups, offers more buttered toast on plates of blue and white. Evening is pleasant.

The quivering, ecstatic light throbs about eight old women, sipping tea from crazed teacups of Mudge Lane. Such little things bring joy in childhood.

The Not Impossible He

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—NEPTUNE PLAYS A PRACTICAL JOKE
ON A GIRL WHO MAKES HER SUITORS RUN
THE GANTLET OF THE GALE

By George F. Worts

“**M**Y darling daughter,” Captain Jethro Furness is believed to have remarked with some sternness to his darling daughter on the occasion of her nineteenth birthday, “the time has come when you must begin looking about you for the man with whom you are going to sail life’s stormy seas. Haul up your anchor, shake out your jib, take a reef in your mains’l, and—get busy!”

“With a yo-ho-ho?” the lovely creature is alleged to have insinuated with characteristic impudence.

It is more than likely that the two squirrels which served the old gentleman for eyebrows, leaped up and then returned to their places, bristling, as he glared at her. His furry brows had terrified more than one able seaman, but their antics had never terrified Dorothy. She knew that her ferocious father was nothing but a dear old fraud. He had been barking like this all his life, and had yet to bite any one.

“Stop joking with me!” the old sea dog barked. “This business of marriage has got to be taken seriously!”

“I have been taking it seriously, darling,” Dorothy replied, “since I was fifteen. It is, I think, a very serious problem. I’d just love to have your advice.” And she gazed at him with innocent large eyes.

“All the women of our family, as far back as the records go,” he reminded her, “were married before they were twenty—your mother, both your grandmothers, all four of your great-grandmothers. Your time, Dorothy, has come.”

“It has such a fatal sound, dad—‘Your time, Dorothy, has come!’ And it’s so hard to make a choice—there are so many, many, many nice men to choose from.”

“For instance?” he growled.

“Well,” she said glibly, “there are Boris Slagton, and Johnny Vance, and Bert Clew, and Georgie Nichols, and Jord Cartwright, and Sam MacAvoy, and Billy Wheeler, and Spike Bowman, and Fatty Anderson, and Lorran Wainwerring, and Bud Davis, and Sandy Blancher, and—and—Well, the others aren’t *quite* so important.”

Captain Furness gazed at his daughter with the expression of a man upon whom it is dawning that something has been going on for a long while without his connivance, his consent, or his consciousness.

“They don’t *all* love you!” he gasped.

“They say they do.”

“Which—which of them do you—do you—”

“Pop, I love ‘em all!”

“It isn’t possible!”

She hung her head as she whispered: “But it’s so.”

“This is certainly serious,” he blustered. “What have I got in my family—a polygamist? When I was courting your mother, there were just three men who really mattered. She didn’t fritter away her time on a baker’s dozen—there was nothing indecisive about your mother. When the real eliminating began, and the smoke cleared, there was just Bill Garfus and Sam Stoeckel and me.”

“And no one can say that mother didn’t do her picking cleverly and wisely,” his daughter stanchly agreed. “Look at Bill Garfus and Sam Stoeckel to-day! Just a pair of old wharf rats. While you—Well, the race of real men is dying out. I’m afraid it has died out.”

“Oh, there are a few real men left in the world, m’ dear,” he modestly protested. “Maybe there’s one, or even more, among that number you just reeled off; but how

can you tell if you don't put them to the test? If you love one as much as another, as you claim, why not pipe all hands on deck—and try your mother's way to make sure?"

"Mother's way was a good way," reflected Dorothy Furness, "and I'd just adore making it mine, except — well, don't you think it's a wee bit old fashioned?"

"Not at all, not at all," stoutly denied the captain. "The sea is still the sea, and men are still men the wide world over. Just bring the two together—"

"But I honestly don't believe, pop, that a girl picks a man to-day for the same qualities she looked for when mother was a girl."

"Doesn't she want manliness any more?" the retired sea dog barked.

"Yes, dear, she wants manliness as much as ever, but she likes other qualities, too. The world isn't as serious as it used to be, and a girl prefers a man who can be humorous as well as hardy. Most of the married people I know appear to grow bored after a few years of it, and the ones who aren't are the ones who laugh together. It works beautifully as long as they laugh at the same jokes. If they don't, of course they ought to be divorced without a moment's hesitation."

"Dorothy!" he gasped. "Is this the way the younger generation looks at the sacred institution of marriage?"

"I am pretty sure," evaded the beautiful creature, "that if I could be invited to fifteen or twenty week-end house parties, and one of the men I love was at each, I would know in the end which one I could be happiest with. Of course, a lovely little roadster would help, too. What I haven't learned about men in automobiles!"

There was no responsive sparkle in Captain Furness's pale blue eyes, and his daughter's heart sank. She had so been hoping that this birthday conversation would sooner or later work around to that adorable gray roadster in the Dulcier show-rooms. She had been hinting about it for weeks; and she feared now that all her hints had been dropped in vain.

"The qualities a young girl may like in a suitor," stated the captain, pontifically, "are entirely different from the ones she wants to look for in the man she's going to spend her life with, m' dear. The worst suitor, as the saying goes, often makes the best husband. I still stand by the test of

the sea, and not the test of the week-end house party. Many a manly heart beats beneath the satin lapel of a dinner jacket, I'll grant; but what chance has a real man to show his stuff when only drinking cocktails and dancing the Charleston, count?"

"Aren't you forgetting," she reproved him, "that I have a pair of very bright eyes?"

"No, m' dear, I'm not. You're like your mother, who missed nothing that went on before her, and put two and two together as neatly as anybody I know. I only maintain you're still a little young to know your own heart, and that you should abide by the answer of the sea. Boil down your list of eligibles to two or three, and give them each a ride out to sea when a gale o' wind is blowing. Study them when your little ship is lying well over and taking plenty of green aboard. Watch them when the lee rail is under, and every square inch of sail cracked on, and in the end the sea will give you the proper answer, just as it did to your mother, your two grandmothers, and your four great-grandmothers. Each of them was a clever, beautiful girl. Each of them took a man according to the verdict of the sea, and was happy all her life."

"But, dad, I haven't a little ship. You wouldn't want me to carry out the test of the sea on board that leaky old catboat of mine, would you? One puff—and I wouldn't be anybody's bride but Father Neptune's!"

Captain Furness grasped his daughter by the nearer elbow, and piloted her to the great plate glass window in the Furness living room that overlooked the crowded harbor. He flung out a gnarled, scarred brown hand, and pointed with a forefinger that had been amputated at the first joint in his salad days by a meat cleaver in the hands of an ill-tempered cook.

"Yonder is your little ship!"

His daughter stared down into the jack-straw tangle of spars, of yachts and fishing boats, of sailing ships from all the ports in the world.

"Which one?" she breathed.

"Guess!"

"Barkentine, schooner, ketch, yawl, or sloop?"

"Sloop!" he roared.

"The black one?"

"Aye, m' dear, the black sloop! A birthday present for the sweetest daughter on land or sea!"

She flung both arms about his neck and kissed him rapturously, then ran to get the binoculars.

"A solid mahogany cabin!" she cried.

"Yes, m' dear."

"Hollow spars!"

"Yes, m' dear."

"A keel—and not a bothersome old centerboard makeshift!"

"Draws six foot, six, m' dear."

"What's her name, dad?"

"The Dorothy and X."

She raised her slender dark brows. "X?"

He smiled down at her triumphantly. "The great unknown, m' dear—the man who'll survive the test o' the sea—the fittest of the fit!"

II

In the cabin of the Dorothy and X, its owner sat gnawing at the end of a pencil.

The delicate redolence of new manila rope and fresh varnish hung in the air. Sunlight reflected from rippling water played upon the white enameled ceiling. Tide ripples gurgled along the glossy black hull, and a sweet breeze from the sea blew through the opened portholes.

Dorothy's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes sparkled with animation. She wore a middy blouse, a white skirt to match, and white silk stockings rolled down and revealing dimpled pink knees. Perched jauntily on her dark curls was a white cap with gold letters across the front spelling, incongruously, "Bar Steward." This had been the gift to her of a young man who, on a ship home bound from Europe, had acquired it from its owner, knowing how delighted Dorothy always was to receive quaint and distinctive souvenirs from far-away places.

There was a pad on the table, and on this pad was a list of names written in Dorothy's free, affectionate scrawl. Of this list of names, all but four had been scratched out. As we come upon her, she is about to remove the pencil from her teeth and strike out one of the remaining four. The beating of the wings of fate must be almost audible. By what caprice will the luckless fourth be doomed?

"He chews gum when he dances," murmured the goddess.

The pencil descends—and oblivion and heartbreak eternal is the lot of poor Bertram Clew.

The remaining candidates she arranged upon a fresh sheet of paper, humming soft-

ly, the creases no longer clouding her lovely forehead. There was no more deciding for her to do—the final answer would come from the depths of the sea. She was sure she could be reasonably happy with either of the three.

Dorothy prided herself as being too wise to believe that eternal rapturous happiness is available in any man alive. But the three she had segregated upon paper interested her in one way or another. The names she had set down were these three:

Boris Slagton.

Jordan Ames Cartwright.

Lorran Wainwerring.

Any one with half a knowledge of human nature would realize that she had arranged them in the order of her preference. That is to say, if the three men were stood up side by side, and a vote was taken by any group of marriageable girls, the majority of votes cast would have favored Mr. Slagton, with Mr. Cartwright a runner up, and Mr. Wainwerring a heavy handicapper.

With no other evidence to go by, save appearances, that is the way the vote would have fallen. But if the girls were permitted to associate with the three candidates for a week or so, and the vote was taken then, its outcome might be different. *Might, I say.*

Each of the three candidates—each of the trio who would go down to the sea and be tested by the acid of hissing spray, shrieking wind, and a bounding deck—appealed to Dorothy in a different way. Boris Slagton attracted her because he was big and strong and masterful. He had muscles like iron, a barrel of a chest, the head of a viking, a voice that sometimes reminded her of thunder.

He was well over six feet tall, but you did not notice his height, because he was so well proportioned. He fought well, danced well, talked well—if a little too aggressively—and made love after the manner of the earlier cavemen. Boris Slagton, it would be reasonably safe to say, was all man.

And if it is safe to say that Boris Slagton was all man, it is quite as prudent to assert that Jordan Ames Cartwright was all gentleman. Jord Cartwright was a finished product of this civilized, luxurious age. He was tall, slender, handsome, graceful, without being in the least effeminate—and scrupulously, immaculately, meticulously neat.

His coats fitted him as a coat of enamel fits an automobile.

In looking at him, you were convinced that you were gazing at the glass of fashion, the mirror of form. Yet he was not by any means a fop or a dandy. It was simply that Jord was civilized. The civilized man is properly dressed. Jord was properly dressed. The tailor who made his clothing, the shirt maker who made his shirts, the hatter who designed his hats, the tie maker who made his ties, the spat maker who made his spats, the pyjama manufacturer who manufactured his pyjamas—all these were the most fashionable in the land.

In comparing the two men, you might say that if one partook of the nature of a broadsword, the other resembled a rapier. There was fine steel in both of them. Perhaps in Jord Cartwright there was not so much steel, but it was of a finer grade. It was the result of four generations of New England culture. Boris Slagton was a recent casting from the great American melting pot. Where one would thud and hammer and smash and barge his way, the other would employ skill and diplomacy.

Jord Cartwright was infallibly courteous and considerate. He was never known to forget his manners. No girl ever produced a cigarette that Jord Cartwright was not ready to light; no girl approached a door that Jord Cartwright was not there to hold open.

"The three qualities that a girl wants most in the man she is going to marry," mused the slim, lovely girl who owned the Dorothy and X, "are considerateness, ambition, and neatness. I read that somewhere, so it must be true. I wonder just how the sea is going to bring those qualities out. Boris is certainly ambitious, but he is neither considerate nor neat. If he would only shave and change his shirts a little oftener! Jordan is considerate, and terribly neat, but is he ambitious? As for Lorran Wainwerring, he is neither neat, ambitious, nor considerate. I wonder why I put his name down on this list! Why did I?"

Well, why did she? Was it because he had no chance at all? Was it a whim—caprice? Not at all. Lorran Wainwerring was down on that list because he baffled her.

Mr. Wainwerring was the most indifferent man she had ever known. He did not appear to care at all for girls; in fact, he

had said that he would as lief have nothing to do with them; they were either pursuing you or egging you on to pursue them. And they distracted your mind from the bigger impulses of life.

Inasmuch as every girl alive likes to think that she can—if she wants to—distract a man's mind from the bigger impulses of life, it naturally followed that every girl in Swimpocket had tried to affix Lorran Wainwerring's scalp to her belt ever since that irritating young man had come to the village. It was not because he was particularly attractive or a marvelous dancer, but because his aloofness and his almost contemptuous indifference were more than their pride could stand.

He simply tolerated them, and no girl can tolerate being simply tolerated. Their pride told them to tell him to go to the devil, but the incorrigible Eve in them wouldn't give him up until they had tried every last trick in their bag.

"Gracious!" said Dorothy suddenly. "I've put his name on the list of the three eligibles, and he has never even intimated that he cares for me! What put the idea into my head that he would want to marry me, even if he did survive the test of the sea?"

Whether Lorran Wainwerring loved her—whether he actually wanted her if he should win her—was a detail that must be settled at once. It would be easy to settle. She would simply ask him!

III

DOROTHY FURNESS climbed into the dinghy, started the egg-beater fastened to the stern, and putt-putted to shore. The landing place most convenient to the somewhat remodeled barn in which Wainwerring lived and had his being was the new concrete pier of the Slagton Lumber Company. A beautiful old five-masted schooner was made fast alongside the dock, and men were busily stowing lumber aboard her.

She saw Boris Slagton as she climbed a little ladder to the dock. He wore no coat. His shirt sleeves were rolled up, and his collar was tucked in, and his thick thatch of molasses colored hair stirred in the breeze. There was a nip in that breeze, but Boris Slagton could have bared his chest to a blizzard and not suffered any.

He was talking to the schooner's master, and his voice came booming down the dock as Dorothy approached.

"Out of here by two this afternoon," boomed the voice of the viking. "Those are my orders. There's a sou'easter blowing up, and I don't want this cargo delayed, understand?"

"Yes, sir," the young captain of the schooner acquiesced, "I'll have her out of here by two sharp."

Men always addressed Boris Slagton in that tone. They respected and perhaps envied in him that quality of supervirility that was lacking in themselves. He was not only a man's man—he was a master of men. And how handsome he was!

A great grin bared his healthy red lips from his large, strong white teeth as he beheld the slim, lovely presence of Dorothy Furness. You could never imagine Boris Slagton lacking self-confidence. He always knew exactly what he wanted—and he always got it.

Dorothy shivered a little as he approached her. He was so masterful, so strong, so ruthless. He could have snapped her in two between his great hairy hands, as if she were a jackstraw. What a man Boris was!

With his deep, booming laugh, he caught her waist with his two hands and lifted her up, squealing, to a pile of lumber as easily as if she weighed nothing at all. This maneuver placed his nose on a level with hers. She saw at once that Boris needed a razor's attentions.

"You haven't shaved since yesterday," she rebuked him.

"Bother the shave!" he boomed at her, his blue eyes twinkling and sparkling with delight at seeing her. "What's this I hear about your dad giving you a fine little yacht for your birthday—to give the men you love the test of the sea?" But without waiting for her reply, he boomed on: "I've a notion to give you nineteen fine big kisses, and as many great hugs!"

"No man has ever kissed me yet," argued Dorothy, "and no man shall—until his engagement ring is on my finger and the date of the wedding is set."

"It's a big waste of time, if you ask my opinion of the whole procedure," declared the owner of the Slagton Lumber Yard. "I come from a long line of whaling men. I can whip any man in this town with my bare fists. I can reef down the mains'l of your sloop in an eighty mile gale with one hand lashed behind me. I'll make the sea stand on its ear, if you say the word. Why,

run off this test, Dorothy, when I am sure to win?"

"You certainly are sure of yourself," Dorothy agreed.

"Why not? I know my strength, and am not ashamed of it. I'll pit my brawn against any man you name. When does this test of the sea take place—when a gale blows up?"

"Yes, Boris—three gales—a gale to a man."

"And who are my deadly rivals, Dorothy, dear?"

"Well, there's Jord Cartwright—"

"That dude?"

"And Lorran Wainwerring—"

"That shrimp? What mortal chance have those pipsqueaks against a real man like me?"

"That remains to be seen, Boris. It all depends on the sea."

"Dorothy, I say: put all three of us in your sloop together and let the best man win!"

"No, Boris, that is not the way the test of the sea is carried out by the women of my family. One man goes at a time."

"Blast my eyes, girl, it's a sheer waste of time. It hurts me to think you'd put men like Cartwright and that shrimp Wainwerring into a contest with a man like me."

"Lorran Wainwerring is not a shrimp, Boris. He is almost as tall as you are."

"I could rip out his herring backbone with my naked fingers!"

"But you won't, Boris. There must be no quarrels over me. The sea is to decide."

His craglike brows darkened under a thunderhead of wrinkles. The primitive man in Boris longed to come to grips with these two natural enemies of his. He would have taken each of them by the throat and smacked their heads together until they became so much pulp.

"But what can the sea decide for you that you do not already know?"

Dorothy shook her curly dark head.

"I, too, am mystified, Boris, but I can remember my mother telling me that the test of the sea does bring out some hidden quality that you had not dreamed existed. It is some mysterious and wonderful thing, she told me. My grandmothers told me the same thing. And they smiled wise old smiles. I cannot imagine what it can be, but they were shrewd women, as well as beautiful, and what was good enough for them is good enough for me. I will abide

by the test of the sea, as each of them did in her time."

But Boris stubbornly stuck to his theme.

"It is entirely a matter of strength and courage. What more proof can the sea give you than you already have, girl? You saw me dive into the sea from the dory, last summer, and grapple with that sword-fish with my bare hands when he broke off the hook. You saw me dive into the ice and pull out that drowning fisherman last winter. You saw me thrash those three bullies who were teasing old man Barlow. You saw me stop that team of runaway trotters at the State fair. As for these two weaklings you've matched me against—"

"They are not weaklings, Boris, and well you know it!"

"Fiddle-de-daw! If I can't whip the both of them with one hand lashed behind my back—"

"You are as stubborn as a mule," Dorothy sighed. "Isn't there anything worth while in the world but brute strength?"

"Manliness—courage!" he said, with shining eyes.

Dorothy sprang lightly down from the pile of sweet pine and looked up into his dark, handsome face, with a wondering grin. She knew that Boris was restraining himself with an effort, positively heroic, from seizing her in his arms and burning her mouth, her face, her neck with his hot kisses, and carrying her away in his iron arms—the caveman in him was so close to the surface—and she was vain of the appeal in her that aroused him so, and proud of the power in her that kept him subdued. What a magnificent lover Boris would be!

He engulfed her small hand in his huge brown paw, and his eyes licked along her face and her slim body like whips.

"My turn is first," he stated. "There's a sou'easter on the way, as you heard me telling the captain of this schooner. According to the way the glass in my office is acting, and the way those wind clouds are piling up yonder, it should strike Swimpocket between two and three. Call for me here at two thirty. We'll leave your dinghy at your mooring buoy. We carry no lifeboats! I'll show you tricks of handling a light sloop in heavy weather you never dreamed of, my girl—without reefing a stitch of canvas! Two thirty. Don't be late, my girl!"

"But you're not first on the list, Boris," Dorothy protested. "I'm going to take

you in alphabetical order—Cartwright, Slagton, Wainwerring. Your turn is second. It's Jord who's to be given the test this afternoon, and I'll have to run along and tell him so."

Boris had compressed his lips and narrowed his eyes. Any frustration of his purposes always angered the young man. But he managed a rueful smile as Dorothy asked him:

"You do love me, don't you, Boris?"

"I love you from the pink tips of your silly little toes to the top of your foolish little head," he replied recklessly. "You know what life will be like as my wife, don't you? You'll be protected and sheltered and cherished. You won't know what a worry is. You're going to be my wife, and you're going to be treasured like the precious jewel you are!"

"Always, Boris?"

"Forever and aye!" he boomed.

IV

DOROTHY FURNESS betook herself from the Slagton Lumber Yard and down Plymouth Lane to Narragansett Boulevard. She intended to go to Lorran Wainwerring's barn and get that delicate interview over with before seeing Jordan Ames Cartwright.

As she walked along in the bright spring sunlight, absently admiring the misty green bloom on the trees, she murmured, tentatively: "Mrs. Boris Slagton, Mrs. Jordan Ames Cartwright, Mrs. Lorran Wainwerring. I wonder—"

"Slagton, Cartwright, Wainwerring," she repeated. "I'm afraid Lorran stands no chance, and— Oh, no, I'm going to play fair."

Her meditations were interrupted by the muffled muttering of a lacquered gray monster that had drawn up beside her. Jordan Ames Cartwright disembarked from his imported roadster with his cap in his hand, a good-looking smile illuminating his tanned, aristocratic face, excitement, only slightly suppressed, sparkling in his wide set blue eyes.

His accent was Harvard; his bow, Continental. There was a grace in his every gesture that bespoke long familiarity with drawing-rooms. You knew that Jordan Ames Cartwright, scion of one of the oldest and most exclusive New England families, would be at his ease in the most difficult of social situations.

"Dorothy!" he exclaimed. "What luck!"

I've been scouring the town for you. Is this rumor true?"

The most beautiful girl in Swimpocket looked at him for several seconds before she answered his question. There was something about this young man that would appeal to any woman of any age. He was slim, supple, and beautifully built. There was a fineness about him that would not have escaped the most casual observation.

He was, truly, a gentleman. And he was a man; but not after the standards of Boris Slagton. His physique was that of the polo player, the tennis player. Always cheerful, always tactful, always obliging, Jord Cartwright was a fine young man whom no one disliked.

Dorothy liked his hands. They were brown and slender and fine—the hands, in short, of a gentleman. And she liked the way he wore his clothes. Just now he was wearing light gray flannels and a sapphire batik tie. He always looked well; always carried himself with distinction.

"What rumor?" Dorothy countered, pretending she did not know.

"The whole town's talking," he said. "It's got around that your father gave you that black sloop in the harbor for your birthday present, and that you're going to take it out in a series of gales with a different man aboard each trip to see which one you really love. Is it true, Dorothy?"

"It is," affirmed the girl.

"Is—is my name on that list?"

"Why should it be?" Dorothy came back mischievously.

"Because," he proclaimed, "I love you more than life."

"Alphabetically," Dorothy reassured him, "you are the very first man on the list."

"I will do my utmost," he declared, with a little bow, "to maintain that position permanently. Who are the others?"

"Boris Slagton."

"Ah?"

"And Lorran Wainwerring."

"I see. May the best man win!"

Wasn't that just like Jordan Cartwright? He might have said "That bully?" when Dorothy mentioned Boris Slagton; he might have said, "That Bohemian scum?" when Dorothy mentioned Lorran Wainwerring. Only by the slight narrowing of his eyes could you have guessed that he may have been a trifle displeased with the competitors with whom he had been placed.

"Just what, Dorothy, is the test of the sea going to prove? Or is it a secret?"

"It is a mystery," was Dorothy's answer. "I do not even know myself."

The stiffening breeze was blowing through Jordan's curly blond hair. There was something, it seemed to Dorothy, of triumph in his face already. She knew him to be a fighter, and the squarest of sportsmen. His very next words were a confirmation of the latter.

"It hardly seems fair to match my skill against Mr. Slagton and Mr. Wainwerring," he said. "But, of course, I am willing to let them be as heavily handicapped as the gods will allow. Slagton is not a yachtsman. He is at home in heavy fishing boats, but light yachts are not in his class. Wainwerring, I have never seen in a sailboat of any description. The odds are all in my favor, and I certainly am not the one to object. I've been in love with you, Dorothy, ever since we exchanged valentines in the sixth grade. I think you are the most beautiful girl in the world. I—I adore you, Dorothy."

His voice had become a little husky. Involuntarily, Dorothy swayed slightly toward him. And she knew that nothing but his inborn fineness prevented him from taking her in his arms in the broad sunny daylight of Narragansett Boulevard. She pictured herself as his bride, the envied of all of the girls in Swimpocket—bearing the fine old name of Cartwright.

"Mrs. Jordan Ames Cartwright is presiding at a tea—"

"Mrs. Jordan Ames Cartwright is giving a dinner to-night in the west dining room of the old family mansion—"

"Mrs. Jordan Ames Cartwright, on her return from Palm Beach, declared—"

His clean-cut, strong, boyish face was pink with his deep emotion.

"I've always loved you," he was saying. "There's never been any one else; there never can be any one else. The test of the sea, my dear, is stuff and nonsense. We were made for each other. Dorothy, I love you so! I want you so!"

She looked at him dreamily. His voice was rich and musical; and there was real depth, she knew, to his feelings. And he did make love so beautifully! Never had she been so near the point of weakening in the presence of any man as she was at this delicious moment. His voice seemed to surround her like some warm, silky cov-

ering. She could feel the steely strength in his arms. But—ah, no. She had promised to go through with the test of the sea; she must not, would not, weaken.

"When do these experiments begin?" he wanted to know.

"With the very first gale."

"One's blowing up now," he said with eagerness. "Do we make the test this afternoon?"

"Just before the gale breaks, Jordan!"

"I'll have time to go home and change, of course. How long will we be out?"

"I'll decide that, Jordan."

"Well, I'll bring sufficient stuff along in the way of clothes. Supposing I have my man row me out?"

Dorothy nodded her acquiescence.

"Be aboard at two thirty, Jord. You—you're sure you love me, and will want me in case you win?"

"I adore you!"

"Will you love me always, Jordan? Do you really think we'd be congenial? I mean, did you really mean it when you said that we were meant for each other?"

He heaved a deep sigh of longing.

"You've heard the Chinese proverb, Dorothy: 'How deep the joy when things that are meant for each other meet and are joined!' It seems to me to cover everything, dear. How deep the joy!"

"But will you love me forever?"

"Forever and ever!"

V

THE spell of Jordan Cartwright's refreshing personality was still upon her when Dorothy Furness turned into the path which led from the sidewalk to the disheveled old red barn in which Lorran Wainwerring was spending the summer. She had never been to the barn before, and she felt a little nervous now as she approached it. The huge, many paned window set into the north wall was like a great ogreish eye glaring at her, darkling at her insolence.

It was, indeed, a presumptuous impulse that brought her here. What right had she to assume that Wainwerring loved her? He had never given her grounds for such an assumption by word or gesture. Therein, perhaps, lay his whole attraction.

She paused at the door and examined with some interest the brass knocker that was affixed to the board in the center. It was the head of a pig, with a heavy brass ring pendent from the nose. This ring

could be lifted and let fall upon a brass disk. Dorothy lifted it and let it fall.

She heard, then, a torrent of rich profanity within, and she knew that the tenant of the barn was at home. Evidently he had not heard her knock. Again she lifted the pig's nose ring and let it fall with a little clank.

A voice percolated to her through many cracks: "For God's sake, come in!"

Flushing at that, and with a timorous bearing, Dorothy pushed open the door and entered, perhaps, the untidiest place she had ever seen. An unmade bed with the clothing dragged out upon the floor stood in one corner. In another corner, beside a sink, stood a table laden with dirty dishes. Cigarette stubs were everywhere.

Under the north light stood an easel, and before the easel stood Lorran Wainwerring. His cheeks were flushed. His curly chestnut hair stood out in all directions. He was, to say the least, a picturesque young man, and, if you could overlook the unmade bed and the staggering piles of unwashed dishes and the cigarette stubs, very attractive. He wore a fresh white smock over baggy trousers.

At the moment of Dorothy's timorous entrance, he had a paintbrush gripped between his teeth, as pirates in the dear old days used to grip knives when they came scrambling aboard helpless merchant vessels. His whole attitude was one of unmitigated ferocity.

He was glaring at the canvas on the easel, and assaulting it from time to time with a brush in his right hand. If the light had only been dim you could easily imagine that he was having a duel with some imaginary opponent.

Dorothy came in and crept across the room until she could see in its entirety the object of his keen dislike. The canvas sustained in pleasant bright colors the portrait of a pretty girl about to sip tea from a cup.

"How lovely!" Dorothy murmured.

Wainwerring looked at her, presumably for the first time; and the fierce look did not depart from his blazing eyes.

"It's rotten!" he declared. "I can't get it. I've been slaving on this thing for a week. This is my third start. It misses fire every time. Look at that elbow!"

"W-what's the matter with it?" she quaked.

"It's wrong," he snarled. "I'll get it. You stand right there."

To her mystification, he strode angrily across the room. He returned, dragging a small round teakwood table. Magazines, a box of matches, several half empty packages of cigarettes, spilled to the floor as he dragged it to where Dorothy was standing. Then he fetched a chair.

"Sit down!" he snapped.

Meekly, Dorothy obeyed.

He strode across the room, and this time returned with a teacup. The cup was not clean, but he did not seem to mind.

"Hold this!" he ordered.

Dorothy accepted the cup, and mechanically raised it in the gesture of the girl on the canvas. The attitude did not seem to please him. He adjusted her arm and returned to the canvas, staring at her as if he disliked her a little more than anything on earth.

He stopped staring, and began to stab at the canvas. Subtly, the elbow of the girl on the canvas changed. Then, with another brush, he did some mysterious things to her face. The girl on the canvas had almost been Dorothy before. When he had finished, the girl was unquestionably Dorothy Furness.

He stepped back, and the frown left his face. The color left it, too. He looked pale and rather haggard.

"Gee," he said, "I'm tired. It was nice of you, Dorothy, to drop in this way and help me. You're a peach."

"Is it finished?" said Dorothy.

"Will be as soon as I've done a little fixing on that background. Do you like it?"

"It looks like me," said Dorothy.

He considered her critically, and grinned wanly.

"It does, doesn't it?" She wriggled. He certainly wasn't very observing.

"I don't see how you can stand it here," she burst out.

"What's the matter with it?"

"I never saw such a mess!"

He looked about the studio as if he were seeing it, too, for the first time.

"I guess I've sort of let things slide while I've been trying to jam this through. It's a pretty important job. It's the first of a series of canvases the Five O'Clock Tea Company wants me to do. I've never done much advertising work before, and I'm terribly anxious to make good. I want to make a barrel of money."

"What for?" said Dorothy.

"I want to go to Florence and study. Have you ever been in Florence, Dorothy?"

"Never," said Dorothy. She was gazing at a small table beyond the easel. It supported an empty coffee cup and a saucer. The saucer was filled with soggy cigarette stubs.

"What did you have for breakfast?" she demanded.

He had returned to his contemplation of the canvas. "Huh? Breakfast?"

"A cup of coffee and five cigarettes?" she inquired. He looked at her vaguely, and did not answer. It was as if he had not heard.

"No wonder you look so pale! You ought to take better care of yourself, Lorrain. It's a perfect crime to live the way you do. I never dreamed you lived like this. Have you an ice box?"

"Huh? Ice box? Sure. It's outside the back door."

She left him to his pondering and paid the ice box a visit. It was in just the condition she had expected to find it. But an exploration brought to light a carton of sliced bacon, another carton of eggs, some butter, and a half pint bottle of fresh cream.

The artist was a thousand miles away when she reentered the studio, again gripping a brush savagely in his teeth as he jabbed with another.

Suppressing her rising irritation, Dorothy busied herself at a kerosene stove in the last stages of disrepair. While his breakfast, or luncheon, was developing on the dispirited burners, Dorothy attacked the stacks of dirty dishes.

When the eggs, bacon, and coffee were done, she arranged them neatly on a tray and carried this over to him. He regarded the tribute vaguely, dreamily.

"Eat that before it gets cold," she bluntly ordered.

"In just a minute, Dorothy."

"Now!" she snapped.

He reluctantly laid aside his brushes and sat down at the little table. For a few seconds she watched him. He ate ravenously.

She returned to the dishes. When they were washed and dried, she seized a broom and went about the room like a miniature cyclone. She changed the linen on the bed, gathered up hundreds of cigarette stubs, and emptied a dozen overflowing ash trays.

When some semblance of order had been restored, she confronted him again.

"You ought to be ashamed to live like this."

He smiled. It was a charming, a maddening smile. She wanted to take him by the shoulders and shake him, but she melted when he spoke.

"Dorothy, you're a darling to tidy things up for me. I hate living in a mess like this, but things do pile up so. I get things cleaned up, and I firmly resolve it 'll never happen again; then I get started working, and days pass, and the first thing I know the place looks like a pigpen again. That's the trouble with a single track mind."

"You smoke too many cigarettes," she scolded.

"I know it, Dorothy. I guess I'm not a very well disciplined person."

"You're temperamental."

"For God's sake, don't call me that! When a man's an artist, every bit of orneriness in him is called temperament. I just get all het up over something—and everything else slides, that's all. Let's sit down and talk. I'm all wound up. I love to talk to you—you're a perfect listener; you never peep."

"I can't wait, Lorran. I have an important appointment at two thirty."

"With a man?"

"And a gale."

"That sounds interesting, but why the gale?"

"You don't seem to have heard the rumor, or had you heard that my father gave little me a beautiful sloop for a birthday present?"

"Nope. How old are you?"

"Guess."

"Twenty-four."

"You're hopeless. I'm just nineteen."

He grinned affably. "If you were a little younger, or I was a little older, I would give you several resounding spanks. I'll gladly give you nineteen resounding kisses, though."

"The first kiss a man gives me is going to come as a follow up to a three carat solitaire ring," said Dorothy, stoutly.

"You don't mean to tell me you've never been kissed!"

"Never," said Dorothy.

He sighed. "You don't know what you've missed. Would you like to begin now? I'm afraid I haven't a three carat solitaire ring in stock this morning, but I'll do my best with the follow up."

"But you don't love me. I wouldn't

dream of letting a man kiss me who didn't love me."

"But I do love you. Of course I love you!"

She regarded him skeptically. "You've never said so."

"Why elucidate the obvious, Dorothy? Everybody loves you. Nature's grandeur are taken for granted."

"I won't be taken for granted. Throw that cigarette away. You're lighting one from the end of another."

He crushed the cigarette in an ash tray.

"Tell me more about this rumor."

"I really don't think it will interest you," she said, coolly. "I've reached the age when the women of my family have always decided on the man they are going to marry. And the women of my family have always tested their suitors by watching how they behave on a small sailing boat, usually a sloop, in a gale. It's called the test of the sea."

"What can the sea bring out that you don't already know about a man?"

"That's the mystery, Lorran; but it always does bring out something."

"You'll be pretty busy, won't you, testing all the men who love you? Are you sure there're enough gales to go round?"

"I only need three gales. I've boiled my list of eligibles down to three men."

"And you've come to get my opinion of the traditional triumvirate. Wise girl! I'll give you the low down on every man in Swimpocket."

"One," she said, "is Boris Slagton."

"Ah, yes, the Bull of the Pampas. Slagton has sailed in lumber hookers and fishing smacks all of his life. The sea will dash itself to pieces against him, thereby proving that he would make an ideal husband. Aside from being a bully, a tyrant, and a conceited ass of the first water, he will make a perfect little pal for some lucky girl. Who else?"

"Jordan Ames Cartwright."

"The Prince of Wales himself, in person. Cartwright is internationally famous as a racing yachtsman. He will handle your sloop in a sixty mile gale as easily as a two hundred pound German nurse girl handles a perambulator, thereby proving that he will make an ideal husband. He will personally design all of his wife's frocks, hats, and shoes. She will learn to broaden her A's, and elevate either eyebrow at the slightest provocation."

"I think you're mean, Lorran."

"I admit it, my dear. I have the soul of a flea. Who is the third candidate?"

The loveliest girl in Swimpocket looked at him.

"You," she said.

"Dorothy, you're joking."

"Are you surprised?"

"My dear child, I'm delighted. I never dared to dream that I was an eligible. But it isn't fair. Boris Slagton and Jordan Cartwright haven't a chance!"

"Are you so sure of your seamanship?"

"Dearest, I'm sure that I'm the only man in the world for you. What has seamanship got to do with that?"

"I never saw such perfect confidence in any man," said Dorothy. "Every one of you thinks he is a perfect marvel. How can you all win?"

"You might found a colony of husbands, and be the queen," the artist suggested.

"That's what my father called me—a polygamist. You think the test of the sea is perfectly fair, do you, Lorran?"

"Nope. I said it was very unfair—to Boris and Jordan."

"I'm beginning to suspect, Lorran, that you are Sir Thomas Lipton in disguise."

"You're getting warm, darling. To break through my customary reserve, and to be perfectly honest—I am the Flying Dutchman."

"I didn't know you knew anything about boats, Lorran."

"Oakum," said Lorran, "is my favorite breakfast food."

"You don't mean hokum, do you?"

"The odor of bilge water affects me, my dear, the way catnip affects a cat. You don't know what an attraction there is between me and the sea."

Dorothy shook her head. "I'm afraid you're taking a very serious matter flippanly. I don't think you love me at all. I think you're just being polite."

Lorran Wainwerring clapped his hands upon her shoulders and drew her toward him until their faces were only a few inches apart. The light was going, blotted by the unnatural night of the coming gale. Dark clouds were skimming across the sky, and a loose board in the side of the barn was banging away in the rising wind.

Dorothy looked up at the artist hopefully, but suspiciously. She believed he was acting. He was doing the sort of thing that movie heroes did.

"Does life only consist of wanting something—and reaching out your hand to take it?" he demanded hoarsely. "Can I have the moon just because I may want it? What chance has a poor, unknown artist alongside the corn fed hero of Swimpocket and the best dressed man in New England? They are asking you to share their fortunes. All I can ask you to share is my misfortunes! A husk of bread, a rind of cheese—"

"Stop pretending to be romantic," she chided him. "I think you're selfish. All artists are like that. They think only of themselves."

"I never made a more unselfish gesture in my life!"

"That's the trouble—it's nothing but a gesture. You don't love me!"

"Dorothy, I'm crazy about you."

"Will you love me forever?"

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "I will, provided you don't fall in love with some other man, or I don't fall in love with some other woman, or if we don't fall out of love with each other because we grow tired of each other, or provided—"

"I hate you!" Dorothy burst out. Boris Slagton had vowed that he would love her forever and aye. Jordan Cartwright had sworn that he would love her forever and ever.

"Does that mean, Dorothy, that I'm eliminated from the contest?"

She stared at him in the dying light. The wind was beginning to whistle through innumerable cracks.

"You're third on the list!" she cried. "We'll see what the test of the sea proves!"

Tears of fury blurred her eyes as she ran to the door and let herself out. How she hated Lorran Wainwerring and the way he scoffed at love eternal!

Halfway down the path she halted. There was something she had forgotten. What had she forgotten? Ah, yes—she had forgotten to clean the ice box! She ran on with a little laugh—a wild little laugh. As far as she was concerned, Wainwerring's ice box might remain in its present deplorable state forever—forever and ever and aye!

VI

THE air was filled with a brown glow. When Dorothy Furness reached the water front an angry wind from the southeast was spanking the harbor into curling brown waves with hissing white crests. It was go-

ing to be a blow! Storm warnings—dabs of scarlet and black—were snapping in the wind at the coast guard station.

Her dinghy was bobbing about at the foot of the ladder at Slagton's wharf. As she climbed down and cast off, she saw a slender figure on the deck of the Dorothy and X. Before she had reached the mooring, the mainsail was up and double reefed. Evidently, Jordan was taking no chances.

There seemed to be something fatalistic in the very air. There was vice in the long waves that rolled in from the Atlantic, a sullen restlessness, and the fog bell tolling at the mouth of the harbor seemed to have acquired a dire and ominous note. It was as if the sea were marshaling its forces, somberly preparing for the test that would decide the most important question that can arise in the course of a girl's life.

Jordan was ready with the boat hook when the dinghy came alongside. He lifted Dorothy lightly aboard, then made fast the dinghy's painter to a cleat astern. He did not seem to be in the least agitated; if he was burdened by thoughts of the ordeal through which he was about to pass, he managed to conceal them nicely from his expression. His face contained naught but confidence.

"I've been cleaning things up a bit," he explained, misconstruing the look she was giving his dungarees. "I brought other clothes along. They're down in the cabin."

The loveliest girl in Swimpocket regarded him more thoughtfully, then she glanced about the sloop.

"You'd better make an inspection, captain," he said, smilingly, "before we get under way."

He went below, and while he was gone Dorothy took a little tour of inspection. Jordan's habit of neatness had been asserting itself in many directions in the hour or two he had been aboard. He had scrubbed down the decks, tarred the lower parts of the standing rigging, and had sandpapered one fluke of the heavy anchor which he had broken out, and to which he had bent the thousand foot anchor hawser.

He came above again while she was admiring the work he had done on the anchor. In his hand was a bottle of cleaning fluid: With this and a rag he busied himself cleaning a spot of dark oil which stained the after leech of the mainsail.

At first Dorothy was inclined to smile; then she realized that Jordan's habit of

neatness was a quality deserving of warm encouragement. Would Boris have gone to these pains? Or Lorran?

Jordan went below again, and when he reappeared he was dressed in freshly starched and ironed white duck. He wore a new white yachting cap embellished with yellow gold.

"I'd like to have finished sanding down that anchor," said Jordan, "but I suppose you're in a hurry to get under way. I like to have things shipshape, you know."

"You've taken two reefs in both sails," said Dorothy.

"I thought it best to be prudent. It's going to be a blow. The wind's shifting to sou'sou'east. Do you want to take her out, or shall I?"

"You're going to do everything," was Dorothy's answer. "I'm simply an official observer."

He nodded briskly, and went forward to the chock, where the mooring cable was made fast. He cast off the mooring cable and came running aft. He hauled in the jib sheet with one hand and the mainsheet with the other, manipulating the tiller deftly with one leg. Both sails filled as if at his command.

The Dorothy and X lay over on her course for the harbor entrance, and Dorothy, seating herself beside him in the cockpit, watched and admired.

He had taken the black sloop from her mooring with cool, nice judgment. Jordan certainly did know how to handle a small boat, but for the time being, at least, or so it seemed to the girl, he had crowded all thought of her out of his mind.

The wind sang through the rigging; black storm clouds sped across the sullen sky above them. Dorothy would never have dreamed of taking a boat, one even as well built as this one, into such a storm as was brewing over the sea. She was thrilled, and a little frightened.

They skimmed through the harbor entrance and passed the tolling bell, with the boom all but skimming the wave crests. Still they were under the lee of the inner and the outer reefs on which the backbones of so many stanch ships had been broken.

"Where to?" he inquired.

"Into the howling black heart of it!" Dorothy cried. Her cheeks were a deep rose; her eyes sparkled with the joy of the impending combat; her lips were parted in a little eager smile.

"The storm center," Jordan pointed out, "may be halfway to the Azores. You want to be back by midnight, don't you?"

"I don't care when we come back!" was Dorothy's reckless rejoinder. "Let's sail between the inner and outer reefs, Jord!"

"No," he denied her, "the backlash of those combers might put us on hard and fast. I'll sail to the lee of them."

"Aren't you simply thrilled, Jord?"

"That wind's hauling around still more to the south," he replied judicially.

"Doesn't she sail wonderfully?"

"I think she'd point into the wind a little better if you put a half ton more lead on the keel."

Dorothy subsided and watched him. It was a liberal education in small boat handling to watch Jordan.

And suddenly they were away from the lee of the two notorious reefs, and ahead of them lay the gray, furious Atlantic. The high wind had already lashed the water into toppling waves, and at first sight of these Dorothy's heart leaped with terror.

The first comber struck the bows head on. Its crest foamed down on the deck and ran hissing through the scuppers, but the black sloop had risen to it birdlike, shivering only a little under the impact.

"Isn't she a beauty?" Dorothy cried. "She'll ride out any weather, just as dad said."

"For heavy weather of this kind," Jordan answered, ducking his head as a clump of spray shot hissingly aft, "I really prefer the Friendship type of sloop. And I really think that this stern has a little too much overhang."

"I don't," said Dorothy, stoutly.

"Of course, opinions differ," he calmly conceded.

"I wonder," the troubled girl mused, "when the sea will give me a sign."

"You can gauge the wind direction fairly accurately by watching the clouds," he stated.

Dorothy sighed, and drew her slicker more closely about her. Was there no romance in Jordan Ames Cartwright? No adventuresomeness?

"Ready about," said Jordan. "The starboard tack won't be quite so rough."

"Let's jibe," Dorothy suggested.

"Do you want to snap the stick out of her?" he cried.

"All right," she snapped. "Tack!"

He brought the black sloop into the wind

so beautifully, and put her over on the starboard tack with so little pounding, that Dorothy's admiration of him returned in a kind of wave. And she realized that Jordan's traits of prudence, his caution, were traits to be praised and encouraged. In a husband they would be the most admirable of traits.

"Jordan," she said, above the hard pressure of the wind, "do you really love me?"

"I adore you," he replied. "I think you ought to put a boom and a traveler on that jib. She would come about better."

"Jordan," she persisted, "do you honestly love me?"

"What am I here for?" he said simply.

"To undergo the test of the sea."

"And I am undergoing it to the best of my ability, such as it is," was his modest reply. "I am trying to prove to you that I am worthy of you, and I only hope that you will stand by the answer that the sea gives you this afternoon, because I do not believe in long engagements. Do you?"

"No," said Dorothy, thoughtfully. "The shorter the nicer. Where would you take me on a honeymoon—if you took me on a honeymoon, Jordan?"

His eyes glowed at that. "Ah, I have it all planned, Dorothy. First we will go to Paris for gowns, hats, and such like; then we will go to the Riviera. You'll love Continental society when you learn the ropes. The so-called aristocracy of America can't compare—"

"What ropes?" Dorothy interrupted.

His eyes grew a little cloudy at that. "You realize, of course, that at formal social functions, such as state dinners we might attend—"

"You mean, you think I won't know which fork to use, Jordan?"

"It goes deeper than that, Dorothy. You see—and you mustn't whisper this to a soul—I'm thinking seriously of entering the diplomatic service. And my wife—"

"Will have to be a perfect lady, which you don't think I am," the sparkling-eyed girl finished for him.

"I do think you're a trifle hoydenish," he admitted, and made haste to add: "but, of course, look at the environment you've grown up in! You've never really had a chance."

"It must be wonderful to love some one so much that you want to improve them," said Dorothy. "I suppose I'd be that way, too, if I really loved some one."

"But you do love me, Dorothy. You must!"

"But I don't want to change you at all. I think you're perfect just as you are. You're good-looking, and awfully smart, and you dress wonderfully, and you have the most marvelous manners."

"You have to be all that—for the diplomatic service," the young man informed her. "And you'll be surprised how easy it will be for you to—to make good, too. You're just a little too hard boiled, Dorothy, that's all that's the matter with you. But I am absolutely certain that I could train you to become the kind of girl that I could positively admire."

Dorothy was looking at him intently. "I'm afraid it would be a dreadfully hard, long job, Jord."

"Well, I'm willing to undertake it, because I love you so, and because you're so quick at learning things. I'll wager that inside of a year you'll be treating your French maid with as much contempt as if you'd had one all your life."

"Am I going to have a French maid?"

"Indeed you are!"

"And we are going to lead a very social existence?"

"That's my greatest ambition," he said.

"M-m-m-m-m," said Dorothy. "What does your mother say about me? Does she think I'm smart enough to learn how to be a lady?"

"Dorothy, you can depend on me to bring her around."

"What does your sister say? Does she think I could ever learn to be a lady?"

"Well, you know Prudence. She's the most snobbish girl in the world. Of course I do admire snobbishness in a woman. Why not be aware of your superiority if you are superior?"

"Why not?" Dorothy agreed. "What does your Aunt Priscilla say about me? Don't be afraid of hurting my feelings, Jordan. You know I *am* anxious to become a lady."

Jordan Cartwright found some difficulty in meeting her clear blue eye.

"Don't worry your little head about Aunt Pris. I can handle her when every one else fails. She swears she will not attend the wedding, but I think I can wheedle her into coming. I want our wedding to be the most exclusive and the most fashionable that this hick town has ever seen. Oh, by the way, Dorothy, you were plan-

ning, of course, to have your father attend our wedding, I suppose."

Dorothy's look of curiosity had deepened. "Would you rather he didn't come to our wedding?"

Jordan hesitated before replying. "It might raise a pretty delicate issue if he insisted on coming. Mother and Prue and Aunt Pris are so darned peculiar in some ways. They don't realize what a fine old fellow your father is as—as I do."

"What do they think's the matter with him?"

"Oh, they—they think he's a sort of roughneck."

Dorothy's deep blue eyes were now glittering. "That's all he is, Jord—just a roughneck."

The young man's face lighted with eagerness and relief.

"Well, thank Heaven that's settled!"

"What's settled, Jord?"

"Why, that your dad won't come to our wedding!"

"I'm glad we settled it all so quickly," said Dorothy. "It's nice to settle these things without hurting people's feelings, isn't it, Jord? It makes everything so much simpler. Can you think of anybody else you'd rather not have come to our wedding?"

"Let me think," said Jordan. "Oh, there's quite a list."

"I wouldn't have anybody but the very nicest people, Jordan. And the name you can start off your black list with, Jordan, is mine."

He stared at her. "Dorothy! What do you mean? You're joking! I do love your sense of humor, Dorothy."

"I mean," said Dorothy, "that I am not coming to our wedding. You can come to it if you want to—you and Prue and your mother and Aunt Pris, and I do hope you all have the loveliest time!"

"Dorothy," he burst out, "you can't mean that—"

"You just said you loved my sense of humor, Jord. So do I. I simply adore my sense of humor. You've heard the old proverb, haven't you—he who laughs—lasts? It was the French maid that did it, Jordan. I don't feel superior enough to have contempt for anybody. I'm just a plain, ordinary, middle-class girl. I don't want to become a lady. And I don't think you're ever going to enter the diplomatic service. I don't think you're ever going to

enter any kind of service. You're too satisfied with yourself just as you are, Jord. You find yourself a girl who is as satisfied with herself as you are, and you'll be terribly, terribly happy. Look, Jord!"

The clouds had rolled back, and through a widening cleft the fine spring sun beat down on the licking wave crests. The gale was over; already the blast of the wind was abating.

Dorothy stood up in the cockpit, her eyes sparkling with laughter, her face shining with salt spray. The wind fluttered her hair about her head.

The defeated young man looked up at her with blank despair. But Dorothy paid him no heed. She was smiling out over the tossing blue sea, her lips parted in the smile of a mystic.

"Hard alee, Jord!" she sang out. "We're going back to the harbor. The test of the sea is over."

Mechanically, he pushed the helm over. "You aren't telling me that the sea gave you an answer!" he moaned.

"Didn't you hear the sea talking to me between the shouts of the gale, Jordan?"

"No, Dorothy, no!"

"That's just what it was saying to me—
'No, Dorothy, no!'"

And thus ended the first of the three tests of the sea that were destined to become famous in Swimpocket history.

VII

CAPTAIN JETHRO FURNESS was stretched out in a Singapore chair before a blazing log fire in the Furness living room when his beautiful daughter, rosy of cheek and breathless from the thrill of the first test of the sea, came bounding in. He laid aside Captain Joshua Slocum's "Cruising Alone Around the World," an adventureful classic which he was reading for perhaps the eightieth time, and gazed brightly at Dorothy over the tops of his square, steel-rimmed spectacles.

"What was the answer of the sea, my girl?"

"The sea," Dorothy answered, "certainly does eliminate 'em. If it brings out the true nature of Boris and Lorran as it did poor Jordan's, I will have to add about twenty more names to my list of eligibles. The Dorothy and X handles beautifully, dad, and Jordan thinks you are a rough-neck, but that I might in time learn to be a lady."

"It's a wise old sea," said the old sea dog, "and one of the contenders has been calling you up with woe in his voice all afternoon. The lad sounds as if he'd lost his last friend. It's young Wainwerring."

Dorothy stared at her father with large, glowing eyes, and she became aware that the heart in her bosom was hammering away like mad. Lorran Wainwerring was so concerned that he'd been trying to reach her all afternoon! Mist appeared in her eyes. She had supposed Lorran was almost indifferent to her. It simply proved that behind his cynical, unresponsive, selfish exterior lay a human, sympathetic heart. Dear Lorran!

The telephone bell rang vigorously as she was starting upstairs to change to dry clothing, and she fairly flew across the room to answer it. A rich, melodious barytone voice thrilled her to the core of her being and to the tips of her toes.

"Lorran! Oh, Lorran!"

"Dorothy, for God's sake, where did you hide my pipe?" his anguished accents came over the humming wire to her.

"Your pipe?" she gasped. "Have you been calling up here all afternoon to find out where I put your pipe?"

"Yes, Dorothy."

"I put it on that little shelf behind the old clock. I was going to throw it out. It smelled—horribly."

"God bless you for not throwing it out. I've had that pipe for nine years. Oh! There was another thing I wanted to ask you, Dorothy."

"Yes, Lorran?" she breathed.

"I want you to tell me how you boiled those eggs for me this noon. I've been boiling eggs all my life, and I never could make them come out so—so loose and—just right."

"It's very simple," said Dorothy. "You put the eggs in a pan of cold water, and when the water starts to boil, you take them out. Was that all you wanted to ask me? I made the first test of the sea this afternoon! Jordan was perfectly wonderful, Lorran. He handled the sloop beautifully."

"Do you mean the sea sat up and said yes when she saw him?"

"A girl would be safe in a boat anywhere in the world with him."

Dorothy heard him chuckle. "The question is, does a girl want to be safe in a boat anywhere in the world? In other words, are you going to marry him?"

"Would you care?"

"I wouldn't eat or sleep for a month—that's how much I'd care!"

"Why?" Dorothy breathed.

"Because I hate to see a free, gay young thing like you bound down by the cords of marriage. It would cramp your style horribly. Think of being the wife of a milk fed clotheshorse!"

"You're jealous," said Dorothy. "You love me so much that you're jealous of every man I look at!"

"I wish you'd teach me how to fry bacon the way you fried it this noon. It was just right."

"Heavens! You do appreciate me!"

"I positively adore you!"

"Yet you aren't a wee bit jealous?"

"Dorothy, jealousy is a sign of nothing but fear. A man is jealous because he is afraid the girl he loves is going to love somebody else. An All Seeing Creator designed you and me expressly for each other. It has been written in the stars for the last four million years. When my turn comes to be tested by the sea, I am going to be surprised if the sea doesn't toss a bottle aboard containing the message, 'God bless you, my children,' and signed, 'Your Hot Seaweed Mamma.' When are you coming over here and pose for me again? You have something that makes you a marvelous model."

"It isn't proper for me to go calling on you," said Dorothy, "and, besides, your untidiness drives me mad. And, furthermore, I am going to remain very cloistered until the tests of the sea are finished. I don't want my judgment swayed by earthly things."

"When am I to go down to the sea in your ship, Dorothy?"

"The third gale is yours, Lorran. Boris is next. In case you should win me, Lorran, will you love me forever and ever?"

"Well," said the artist, "I will, provided that—"

Dorothy hung up the receiver. Was Lorran's attraction nothing more than his elusiveness?

Hardly had she replaced the receiver than the telephone bell again rang. This time the deep, harsh basso profundo of Boris Slagton came booming along the wire. He was laughing. It was strange—that deep, bull-like sound banging into her ear.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ug!"

"Boris?"

"Ha! Ha! Yes, Dorothy."

"What are you laughing about? I think you're very rude."

"And proud I am of it, my girl! Ho! Ho! I'd rather be rude and crude than a dude! How does that rhyme?"

"Boris, you're fried."

"Huh?"

"You're skished, Boris; you're three sheets in the wind."

"Nope. Haven't had a drop. I'm just laughing at the expression I saw on Jordie Cartwright's face when he passed my office window. He looked as if he'd just found a dead cat in his overcoat pocket. Did the test of the sea put that sick look on his face?"

"I refuse to commit myself."

"You don't have to commit yourself, my dear. Any man who would take a girl out to sea and reef down all sails to the last point in the summer breeze that was blowing this afternoon—"

"He handled that sloop perfectly, Boris. You're just jealous."

"Of course I'm jealous. I'm jealous of every man who looks at you sidewise. I'm jealous of every man you've ever danced with."

"But jealousy, Boris, is a sign of nothing but fear. It means you're afraid you haven't the power to hold my affections."

"It means nothing of the sort!" the young giant exclaimed. "It means I love you! It means I want you, and won't let any one else have you! Jealous? Ha! Ha! Me, jealous of a man who's so chicken-hearted he won't steer between a pair of harmless little reefs on a bright summer day?"

"Aren't you afraid of those reefs—in a gale?"

"I'm not scared of anything, in calm or gale, and well you ought to know it."

"Not even of me?"

"Why should I be scared of a tender-hearted little wisp of a thing like you? I called up to verify the look on Jordie's face. I still have a chance to be standing beside you when the organist pipes up Lohengrin's well-known march, haven't I?"

"You certainly have, Boris."

"I'm wishing for a gale that will blow the feathers off a duck's back. No summer zephyrs, but a full nor'easter with the bark on. Be in readiness."

"I'll be ready. Do—do you love me, Boris?"

"With all my heart!" he boomed.

"And you'll love me—forever?"

"Aye—forever!"

With a contented smile, Dorothy Furness put down the phone and met the steady blue gaze of her father. He was holding in one hand an envelope that was yellow with age. Dorothy, moving toward him, eyed it curiously. She saw that her name was written upon it in faded ink, and the writing was that of her mother—dead now these ten years. And, under her name was written:

Not to be opened till after your last test of the sea.

Puzzled, Dorothy looked from the envelope to her father's grave smile.

"I'd give a small fortune to know what is written on the piece of Canton silk that this envelope contains," said the old sea dog. "No man's eyes have ever looked upon it. It was written by your great-grandmother, Caroline Hope, and left for your grandmother, Mary Jarvis, who handed it on, in due course, to your dear mother. It is a check up on the answer of the sea—and it tells the winning man."

"But, pop, it must have been written long, long ago."

"So it was, my dear."

"How can it tell the winning man?"

"The heart of a sailor's wife is a treasure chest that no man can thoroughly explore," he answered. "Maybe sailors' wives have looked at the sea so long that they have learned to read its secrets. Maybe it is some kind of clairvoyance. All I know is that the man the sea chooses for you will be told off in Chinese ink on the little strip of Canton silk in this envelope. It has yet to fail. But you must promise me not to open the envelope until you are convinced that the man the sea picks for you is the man of your heart."

"I promise," Dorothy whispered. And, as she took the envelope from him, she was conscious of a sensation of awe, very similar to that which she experienced in church. This was, indeed, a sacred moment to her. In her hand was a message to her from a woman who had lived long, long ago! The seriousness, the profundity of life became very real to Dorothy Furness at that sacred moment.

The jangling of the telephone aroused her, and she picked up the receiver with a vague "Hello?"

"Say, Dorothy, old thing," came a rich, melodious barytone, "I want to know if you take those eggs out as *soon* as the water starts to boil, or do you—"

"Yes, Lorran," she said patiently; "just as soon as it starts to boil."

VIII

EVER since Dorothy Furness was old enough to remember anything, she had gone to sleep with the light on Torture Point flashing at measured intervals upon the west wall of her bedroom. That beaconing white ray which swung like a friendly arm over the land and sea had always comforted her. It was a warning to sailors at sea to beware of the dangerous shoals—the inner and outer reefs—which jutted out from Torture Point. To-night the flashes were dim. For seconds at a time they were absent, obliterated by the driving rain.

Rain was drumming softly on the roof when Dorothy retired to her room. It was descending with slashing violence when her eyes finally closed, and the fingers of the rising nor'easter were plucking strongly at the windowpanes.

She was awakened by a shrill, metallic clangor hours later, and the flashes of hard, white light on the west wall were now clear. The rain had stopped, and a gale of wind was blowing. The panes rattled; the house shook. Dorothy was glad that she was in a snug, tight house on solid land, and she snuggled down in her warm bed.

Again the house rang with that shrill, metallic clangor.

Dorothy sat up and looked at the little clock on her bedside table. It was half past three. Who could be ringing the doorbell at this hour?

Again it rang—and again. Some insensitive soul was placing a finger on the button and holding it there.

Wondering, Dorothy slipped into a dressing gown, descended to the ground floor, and opened the front door. A gust of chill wind flattened her garments against her.

A tall, broad shouldered man was standing there in a yellow slicker, his head bared, his molasses colored hair blowing about in the wind.

"Boris!" she gulped.

"It's the nor'easter," he boomed, "and here I am, as I said I would be. Jump into your warm clothes, girl."

"But, Boris, this is certainly no time to go to sea. It's dark—pitch-dark."

"It's blacker than the inside of a crow," the young giant robustly agreed. "And it's the kind of night I love. The breeze is freshening every minute. It'll be blowing a full gale by the time we cross the bar. And we'll have the tide against us. It's going to call for seamanship to get that sloop out of here to-night. Come, Dorothy! We'll be missing the cream of it if we stand here palavering much longer. Get into your clothes."

"But, Boris—"

"Get into your clothes!"

The light on Torture Point cast its traveling white beam on Boris, and for the moment it lingered he was revealed to her cameo clear, his profile seeming to be outlined in bright silver. His brow was dark with a frown of impatience, his eyes glittered, his great jaw was thrust out. He was grinning up at her. Was there contempt in that grin?

"Are you afraid of the night?" he asked.

"It's a wild night, Boris. Wait! I'll dress, and join you in a jiffy."

When she returned to him, a few minutes later, the velocity of the wind had perceptibly increased. A slender ghostly moon hurrying through dark clouds sent down its eerie light upon a scene of wildness and turmoil. Trees were being whipped about in the rising wind. Old leaves, small sticks, and dust flew in disorderly clouds before it. Shutters were banging, and, far away, the booming of the surf on the beach at Torture Point could at intervals be heard.

Dorothy clung to Boris Slagton's iron-like arm. At times the wind almost swept her off her feet, but Boris was like a rock against which the gale thrust itself in vain. He was happy. She had never seen him so happy. Where another man might have been cowed by the assaults of the wind, by the picture of wildness and confusion in the harbor, he was thrilled with a savage joy. He was in his element.

He helped her—all but carried her—down the steep bank to the water's edge, to the little wharf where her dinghy was made fast. The wharf groaned uneasily in the wash from the laboring sea. Waves glittered for a moment, and broke in a small thunder along the beach. Spray, snatched from a wave crest, was flung, stinging, in their faces.

"It's going to be a gale!" Boris announced in a triumphant voice. "We'll see what the test of the sea brings out.

Stop trembling, my dear. You'll come to no harm with me handy. And, remember, my dear, in all of the gales of life I will be handy to protect you. This night I am going to prove what I've been saying. Do you think I'm nothing but a braggart?"

"Oh, no, Boris, I think you're wonderful. Stay close to me, Boris. I don't think we ought to go to sea on a night like this. The waves will be like mountains!"

"Bother the waves—my faith'll move them! Put your trust in me, Dorothy. This is my night, my gale, and it's going to prove to you that you're my woman!"

"Boris," she quavered, "you do love me?"

They had reached the end of the dock. His answer was to clasp her for a moment—a brief, intoxicating moment—in his strong arms. That moment was sublime. What he had said was true. She felt a sense of great security in his arms. He was afraid of nothing—gales, men, or life itself. A feeling of deep contentment stole over her. At that moment Boris could have kissed her, and she would have returned his kisses with meekness and joy and surrender. She felt that she had come at last into a safe harbor.

He released her and lifted her lightly down into the dinghy. She seated herself amidships, and he started the egg-beater. They nosed out from the shelter of the little wharf and made toward the dark blur in the wind mist where the Dorothy and X lay at her mooring.

"You're sure it's perfectly all right?" Dorothy quavered.

His booming laugh reassured her. "I could take your little ship out of here with my eyes blindfolded. I know these waters as an egg knows the inside of its shell. Here we are, girl!"

The slender spar of the black sloop loomed above them. Boris helped her aboard, and made the painter of the dinghy fast to the ring on the buoy.

"Boris! Aren't we taking the dinghy?"

His voice, from before the mast, came booming back to her.

"No lifeboats!"

He ran up the mainsail, cast off, and was hoisting the jib before she could speak. Then her voice was shrill with terror.

"You aren't going to sail without reefs!"

"Bother the reefs! All the men of my family have been famous as sail carriers. I give ground to no wind that blows! There

isn't wind enough here to capsize a toy sailboat."

"It's a full gale!" she squeaked.

She could hardly see him in the misty darkness. He was perched on the coaming, holding the jib sheet and the mainsheet in one hand, the tiller in the other. The black sloop was flying through the waves toward the harbor mouth, her standing rigging protesting at the unwonted strain.

"Aye!" was his joyous answer. "A full gale—and a stout little ship, even though she be a yacht."

"But you're carrying too much sail!" she croaked.

"I'd carry a tops'l, if you owned one! They told my grandfather he was bending on too much canvas when he took the clipper Golden Girl around the Horn, back in fifty-two. He lost his mizzenmast before he was through, but he got her around! And my grandfather had no redder blood in him than I have!"

The black sloop tilted over under the freshening blast; water spilled over the coaming into the cockpit, and Boris roared.

Dorothy huddled down, sitting as close to him as she could. She had never known so fearless a man. She was trembling in every limb, frightened as she had never been. The wind screamed in the rigging, and it seemed to her that the top of the mast was barely skimming the wave crests. In the dim light of the racing moon, the wake of the sloop was a boiling arrow.

She could vaguely see the fishermen's shanties on the point dart past as they raced out of the inlet. A wave lifted the sloop, and she came down on the next one with a crash.

"You'll shake her to pieces!" Dorothy cried.

In a booming voice, Boris sang "Blow the Man Down," and suddenly Dorothy stiffened with terror.

"Where are you heading?" she cried.

"For the reefs!"

"But you can't find the way through there in this darkness!"

"Watch me!" he boomed.

"Boris, it isn't bravery to go between those reefs on a night like this. It's folly. It's suicide. If you have any feelings at all for me, go around them."

Without answering, Boris held to his course. And, in terror, Dorothy tried to take the tiller from him, but his arm was like a rod of iron.

"We'll lose the boat and our lives!" she sobbed.

"I'm showing you that I'm master of this gale," was his retort. "Those rocks have no terrors for me. Look yonder!"

Dorothy lifted her head and looked. Her sight was blurred, and the light was dim, but the agony of the sea as it hurled itself upon those age old rocks was horribly plain. The tide was racing in before the blast of the wind. And where the reefs lay was a whirling, tossing madness of water.

"Boris, please, if you love me—"

"I'm proving my love for you!"

"Turn back!"

"I'll not turn back; we're in the passage now!"

She closed her eyes as the sloop lurched in the first of the murderous whirlpools. A wave broke aboard, and for a few seconds the Dorothy and X seemed on the point of foundering. The cockpit was awash. But presently she arose and staggered on, and Dorothy looked again. Waves, mountain high, were toppling toward them. Reaching the outer reef, they tripped and sprawled with thunderous roars.

The black sloop spun and plunged, and Dorothy huddled closer to this man who feared neither wind nor waves nor treacherous rocks. It was foolhardiness, but it was bravery. It was terrifying, but it proved that Boris Slagton was all that he claimed to be.

Was this the answer that the shouting wind was giving to her question? In the confusion of her reeling thoughts, love had no place. This was a stark affair, as elemental and as primitive as the power that drew the first man to the first woman—his strength protecting her against the assaults of the primitive life about them. Was this, then, the answer?

The black sloop was rising and falling more violently.

"We're clear of the reefs!" Boris roared.

Dorothy looked astern at the boiling sea. It seemed impossible that they could have come through that narrow passage without striking. Spray hammered against the taut canvas like shot fired from a gun, and the sound of the wind became a scream.

"I'm going to jibe," he announced.

"Boris, don't jibe!" she pleaded. "We'll capsize; we'll lose the mast!"

But he only laughed at her. He hauled in the mainsheet, hand over hand, bringing the stern of the craft more and more into

the wind. And suddenly the mainsail filled on the other side. The boom flew over with a crack. There was a violent explosion—and the mainsail went floating down the wind, ripped from its fastenings. The jib went next.

The Dorothy and X was stripped of her sails!

And Boris only laughed.

"I'll sail her back with the bare pole!"

"Not through the reefs again!"

"Aye—through the reefs again!"

Dorothy huddled down and buried her face in her hands. She could not endure that agony a second time. In a daze, she felt the twisting and bounding of the black sloop as they ran before the gale. Then she must have fainted, for next thing she knew the Dorothy and X was riding in calm water. She heard footsteps on the deck, and, lifting her aching body, saw that Boris was making fast the mooring cable to the chock, forward.

Presently he came aft to her and sat down, throwing his arm along the coaming at her back.

He was smiling. "It was a pleasant little sail," his deep voice boomed, and he grinned triumphantly. "Has the mystery of the X been solved, my dear? Did the sea give you the answer you were listening for?"

Dorothy took a deep breath and stopped shaking. She managed a rueful little smile.

"Aren't you afraid of anything, Boris?"

He shook his molasses curls, and chuckled gleefully.

"I'll order that ring to-morrow if you'll pay for it now with a kiss, Dorothy."

"Let me catch my breath," she pleaded.

He leaned toward her. She observed that he had not shaved.

"I've given some thought to our honeymoon, my dear, and I'm ready to tell you the plan."

"So have I," said Dorothy. "First, I want to go to Paris, and have some frocks and hats and—"

"Blast my eyes, Dorothy, we'll have no room for frocks and hats. Let me tell you my plans for our honeymoon. My affairs here are in shipshape order; I can leave for a year. You and I are going to sail around the world in a twenty-foot sloop."

"Boris!"

"Aye! I knew you'd like that! I'll have the stoutest little sloop built that money can buy; we'll have her made by

the men of Friendship. And, if I can sell my interests here, we'll spend the rest of our lives fighting gales and the wilderness. When we tire of the sea, we'll live the life of pioneers in the Canadian wilderness."

"But, Boris—"

"You may find it hard going at first, my dear, but you'll soon toughen. It's the only fault I have to find with you, Dorothy, girl."

"I thought you thought I was perfect."

He laughed mellowly. "I think you're sweet; I never claimed you were perfect. You're too soft. You're too much of a lady. But who can blame you, playing around as you've done with such men as Jordan Cartwright? But I'll soon iron those kinks out of you, never fear! I'll make a woman of you before I'm through! You'll soon get these ideas of fripperies and dancing out of your little head. My woman must be a woman—not a silly society butterfly."

"I thought you said you—you would treat me like a precious jewel."

"And so I will, my dear; but we must have a definite understanding to begin with. I hate civilization and all that it stands for. The world has turned too soft. My woman must be, as a woman, what I am as a man!"

"And you think I'm too soft! Isn't that funny? Jordan, on the other hand, thought I was too hard."

"That pipsqueak!"

"Boris, do you want me to be like that tall, black-eyed Portuguese girl you go fishing with?"

"Aye—in a way!"

"Broad shouldered and big muscled and deep voiced—"

"Aye, she's all woman, that girl!"

"Then why don't you marry her instead of me?"

"Because we fight all the time. No woman of mine will ever answer back when I give her orders!"

"Hark!" said Dorothy. "Did you hear the sea speaking to me just then?"

Boris frowned darkly. "I heard nothing but the wind and the surf on Torture Point. You're imagining things, my girl."

"But I heard it plainly."

"Hah! You're dreaming, child! What did the sea say? But first give me the kiss that is going to buy that ring!"

"Listen, Boris, and you will hear the voice of the sea."

"No, Dorothy, no!"

"That's just what it is saying, Boris—
'No, Dorothy, no!'"

For a moment Boris Slagton was silent, as only a strong, masterful man can be silent.

"You're jesting!" he roared.

"The only thing wrong with you, Boris, is that you were born six million years too late. You ought to be wearing a saber-toothed tiger's skin, and carrying a stone hatchet. My advice to you is to marry the Portuguese girl, and take her into the wilderness with you. Then you can each take a pile of rocks and have a duel—to decide who's going to be boss."

"You're not jilting me!" the viking boomed. "You're my woman!"

"The sea said no, Boris. Now that the excitement's over, I'm terribly sleepy. Won't you put me ashore? I want to go back to bed. If I don't get eight hours' sleep, I'm a wreck all the next day."

"The truth is," boomed Boris Slagton, "you're too soft for a man like me."

"Yes, Boris. A three-minute egg and a twenty-minute one would simply not get along at all."

And thus ended the second of the three tests of the sea that were destined to become famous in Swimpocket history.

IX

NOTHING happened for days and days. To be sure, the king of a celebrated kingdom was assassinated; a famous boom began in Wall Street; the germ of a plague was isolated by a scientist; a world-shaking novel came off the press; a marriage was arranged in New York that meant the union of two mighty railroad systems; but, taking it by and large, as far as the life of Dorothy Furness was concerned, nothing worth recording took place.

Jordan Ames Cartwright departed for Paris with his Aunt Priscilla; Boris Slagton began to keep company, openly and defiantly, with a black-eyed Portuguese girl. The tongue of gossip in Swimpocket clacked and clacked, but Dorothy Furness, who might have told all, maintained an impenetrable silence. She stayed at home, and would see no one.

Hour after hour she sat on the Furness home's wide veranda, rocking back and forth, trying to sew, to knit, to read a book, but thinking only of that yellowed envelope with the faded ink which seemed to burn against the flesh of her breast. What did

that letter say? Time after time she drew it out, tempted to open it, wondering what secret it might reveal; but she had given her promise. She must wait until the tests of the sea had been completed.

She saw nothing of the man who was third and last on her list of eligibles, and she was sure that the sea would eliminate him as it had the others. She feared the day when the next gale would descend upon Swimpocket; she was sure that the sea would bring out some hidden, obnoxious trait in Lorran Wainwerring, as it had in the others.

Her father, offering no advice, simply watching her with his wise old eyes when he was at home, was spending most of his time superintending the rerigging of the Dorothy and X. He had had her hauled out, and was having her recalked. Boris Slagton had strained the pretty black sloop; it was rumored that he had put her aground during that mad ride through the reefs. And every one knew that he would not have cared if he had wrecked the boat.

There was a question in Dorothy's heart which she could not bring herself to face, let alone to answer. What would she do if the metal in Lorran rang as spuriously as had the metal in Jordan and Boris? She would become the laughingstock of Swimpocket, that was certain.

She would not talk to Lorran when he called her on the telephone, and she slowly built up in her mind an image of him that fell only an inch or two short of perfection. He would take the helm of the Dorothy and X, and, combining the best features of Jordan's and Boris's seamanship, would pilot her out of the harbor and over the bar into the very teeth of the gale. He would be neither too prudent nor too reckless, and when the time came for them to talk, he would be gentle but firm, considerate but manly. And as her inner eye feasted upon this picture of Lorran idealized, her old buoyancy by degrees returned.

Once, when her father answered the phone, she overheard him saying:

"The sloop will be overboard in another day or two, Lorran. It looks like settled weather, but you never can tell about this time of the year. Be ready."

"What did he say?" Dorothy asked the captain when he had hung up.

"He said he was working on a set of advertising drawings, and couldn't you come down to his studio and pose for him for

just an hour or so. And you heard me tell him you weren't seeing anybody. He says to let him know when the gale breaks, and he'll try to arrange to be there. Are you sure the lad loves you, girl?"

"No," snapped the lovely creature. "That's the maddening part of it."

"Is the boy a good sailor?"

"Oh, yes, he knows all about sailboats."

And she returned to her dream. Lorran at the helm. Lorran smiling as the lee rail went under, and green water foamed along the deck. Lorran telling her he would love her forever—with no ifs or ands or provideds attached. He must make good. To save her from ridicule in the eyes of all Swimpocket, he must make good!

The days passed into weeks; late spring became early summer. Tulips and dandelions came and went. Midsummer came—and the sky remained blue and untroubled, the sea smooth, and kissed only by the merriest and gentlest of breezes. August came, hot, sullen, smoldering.

And still no gales! Dorothy, eschewing all contact with her fellow beings, grew thin and wan and peaked. Rings appeared under her eyes, and she wondered if they were the only rings that men would ever give her. Day after day she sat in the rocker on the veranda, waiting for the gale that would never come, dreaming her dreams.

The other young men she had gone with had long since ceased telephoning to her, but, day after day, Lorran Wainwerring telephoned faithfully, asking her—*via* her father—to come and pose for him, asking her for this or that recipe, or asking where she had hidden this or that article on the historic day when she had gone to his barn and given it a housecleaning.

And, one morning, she was awakened by a sound that she thought had departed from the world forever. It was the sound of a rising wind! It was rattling the windowpanes, and the maple trees in the front yard were waving. With hopeful eyes she gazed out toward the open sea. The harbor was dark with the ruffling of the wind; and in the sea there was a speck here and there of white.

She hastened downstairs to the barometer. She had set it, as usual, the night before, and she gazed at the black and gold needles now with fascination. Overnight, the barometer had fallen almost an inch into the field of "storms."

She flew to the telephone, and a few seconds later a sleepy, but rich and melodious baritone voice was dazedly answering her.

"Lorran! Lorran!" she cried. "The gale is coming at last! The barometer's been dropping ever since last night, and the wind is freshening every minute. And—and it's from the nor'west! Can you come over right away?"

"Gee, Dorothy," the artist answered, "I have to get dressed, first, and boil myself a couple of eggs, and I promised to have a drawing in New York by noon sharp. Can't you postpone it, Dorothy, until some other day this week?"

"Gales and girls wait for no man!" she cried. "This is the first blow we've had since spring. If you aren't interested in undergoing the test of the sea, kindly tell me so, Lorran. I don't really think we are suited to each other, anyhow, and—"

"Dorothy," he pleaded, "how many times must I tell you that a judicious Creator took especial pains to design us for each other? Great guns, child, think how much we have in common! We like our eggs boiled the same way, and our bacon fried the same way—"

"Are you coming over here as soon as you've dressed, and boiled and eaten your eggs, or aren't you?"

There was a moment's hesitation.

"If you'd come over and pose for me a half hour while I finish this drawing—"

"Are you coming, or aren't you?"

"I'll be over in half an hour," he promised reluctantly.

She replaced the receiver with a look of grim self-satisfaction. A blast of wind shook the house. She hastened to the living room window. Here and there in the harbor was now a dancing spot of white.

The telephone rang while she was staring at Torture Point. It was Lorran.

"Don't you think we'd save time, Dorothy," the young man boldly asked, "if I came over and had breakfast with you? I—I seem to be all out of eggs, darn it, and one of the neighbor's dogs got into my ice box last night and ate up every scrap of bacon. I certainly do muddle things."

"Come right over, Lorran. The cook is making some waffles. I'm going to send the gardener out and get the sloop ready. How many reefs do you want?"

"Dorothy," he replied, "I'd prefer to leave such trifling details to you. I'll be right over. Good-by!"

The lovely owner of the Dorothy and X turned from the telephone with glowing eyes. She liked the tone of indifference with which he had dismissed the matter of reefing; and she liked the way he deferred to her. If Lorran Wainwerring did not victoriously survive the test of the sea, what would she do?

"I want to be perfectly fair," mused the girl, "but I am willing to stretch a point to let the sea say yes. I'll soon be twenty, and I must marry and settle down before I'm an old maid. Even if Lorran says I am too soft or too hard or too anything, I positively won't mind. I'll let him make me just the kind of woman he wants. Oh, the sea must say yes to-day!"

X

THEY stood on the foredeck of the black sloop. The mainsail was up, and Lorran Wainwerring was freeing the mooring cable from the chock. Dorothy observed that he was composed; that his hands were steady; that his eyes were serene.

Since breakfast the sky had become overcast. Black storm banners were flung from horizon to horizon, and now and then, on a gust of wind, spray hissed past them and stung their faces.

"It's going to be a blow!" Dorothy predicted. "Are you sure one reef will be enough?"

"If it suits you," Lorran said amiably, "it suits me."

"Shall I take her out? Or do you know this channel well enough?"

"You'd better take her out," he agreed.

"Cast off!" Dorothy sang out, and she ran aft, hoisted the jib, made the jib sheet fast, and took the tiller and mainsheet.

Lorran came aft, stuffing tobacco into his pipe. He settled down beside Dorothy as the sloop, her sails filling, lay over and shot toward the inlet.

The wind increased to a steady, hard blast as they reached the harbor entrance. Dorothy waved to the lookout on the tower at the life-saving station, and the entire crew waved back. To a man, they were lined up before the boat sheds to watch this test of the sea. And, as the sloop rounded Inner Torture Point, Dorothy saw that the beach was black with spectators.

Swimpocket had been waiting for this moment for weeks. The black sloop had become a symbol of the lost romance of the old sailing ship era; there clung to her the

glamour of a finer, more reckless day. Her purpose was known to every one, now.

A cheer went up as the sloop hove into sight.

"They're cheering because you've only taken one reef," said Dorothy. "They know that it means that you aren't afraid. Oh, Lorran, I'm so excited! Everybody's going to watch how you handle the boat. Are you nervous?"

"Not at all," he said quietly. "You and the sea, not they, are the judges."

The wind howled in the rigging, and spray rattled like hail on the taut canvas. The tip of the boom sluiced through a wave top, and Dorothy eased off, bringing the wind more nearly abaft. The sloop began to rise and fall sharply in the wash of the waves breaking over the treacherous reefs.

She could plainly see the passage through the reefs now. Did Lorran dare sail through there?

"Shall we sail between the reefs?"

"Why not?" was his languid reply.

"Do—do you want to take her now?"

"Do you mind if I finish this pipe?"

She smiled at him happily. He was not afraid of the reefs! Her heart sang. How sweet he was—and how brave! Oh, the sea must say yes to-day! It had always been Lorran; could never be any one but Lorran!

"Isn't it thrilling?"

"Great!"

Dorothy eased off a little more on the helm, until the black sloop was running almost with the wind, her graceful bowsprit pointing squarely at the passage. She calculated that the sloop could make the run nicely without jibing.

"You can take her any time, now," said the girl. "It takes good seamanship to sail a boat through those whirlpools, and I'm not a good enough sailor."

Lorran didn't answer. He had put his pipe away, and was leaning back with his eyes closed.

"Lorran! Are you asleep?"

"No," said Lorran, "I'm perfectly wide awake."

He staggered to his feet, and all but fell across the cockpit to the lee rail, along which foam was gurgling. And she saw that he was terribly pale.

"Lorran! Are you ill?"

"Deathly ill!" he moaned.

It had been coming upon him ever since the black sloop had pushed her nose into

the first of those uneasy waves. Even as she stared at him, his complexion brightened to a peculiar green. Then he cast all politeness aside and became heartily seasick.

Dorothy watched him with a sinking heart. Lorran—seasick!

"Lorran!" she said sternly. "You must take the helm, seasick or not. I cannot take this boat through these whirlpools, and we cannot turn back now. If we make the slightest leeway, we'll be on those rocks. There isn't room to come about. The channel here is hardly forty feet wide."

Lorran straightened up bravely. He was ghostly pale, but his teeth were clenched with resolve.

"I'll take her," he jerked out. "Let me take her!"

Dorothy realized what depths of bravery were being called up, and, with shining eyes, she gave the tiller and the mainsheet to Lorran.

Neither observed—and Dorothy, at least, should have done so—that the gale had abruptly faltered. She should have been watching the wind, but she was not. It shifted in the twinkling of an eye.

Too late, she saw the boom begin to swing.

"Hard alee!" she cried. "Haul in your mainsheet!"

Lorran stared at her mutely. "What?" he groaned.

There was no time to discuss the matter. Dorothy pushed the tiller down and seized the mainsheet.

"Lower the peak!" she screamed.

"The—what?"

"The peak! Drop the peak! Throw off the peak halyard!"

"Where is it?"

"That cleat! That one! Throw it off and let go the jib sheet!"

"Where," he implored, "in God's name, is the jib sheet?"

Before she could instruct him further, a crash occurred which could be likened only to a volley of musketry. The sails and the mast seemed to be wiped away by an invisible hand. The mast split off at the base, and, in a wildly flapping tangle, the sails flew into the sea.

The Dorothy and X was lifted by a wave. Black rocks, green with sea growth, gleamed to leeward as a wave broke on the deck. And when the black sloop came down, she crashed upon the rocks.

But to the dazed owner of the sloop, this

thundering impact, which she knew meant that the backbone of her birthday present was broken, was far less important than the hideous discovery that Lorran Wainwerring knew absolutely nothing about sailboats.

With blazing eyes and clenched fists she turned on him.

"You let me take out this boat," she panted, "among these reefs! You never even hinted you've never sailed a boat!"

"It's true," he groaned. "But I've seen it done. And it looked so easy!"

The sloop was lifted by a giant wave, and again came crashing down on the black fangs.

"We're wrecked!"

"I thought I could bluff it through."

"We'll have to swim for it. This boat's going down. She's stove in. We'll have to swim these whirlpools!"

"But I can't swim a stroke."

There was loathing in the gaze she leveled at him.

"Yet you dared bring me out in this gale!"

"What else was there to do?" he cried.

"What would you have said if I'd refused? You'd have given some other fellow the chance. What have you proved, anyhow? Tell me what you've proved! Did I ever claim to be a sea wolf? Test me out on shore. That's where I belong."

Dorothy gripped him by either elbow. They swayed and clutched each other as the black sloop lurched under another collision with the greedy black rocks.

"Lorran," she panted, "I think we're going to drown. I can't swim very well, either, but I'll try to save you. Before we drown, Lorran, I want to know where you'd planned to have us spend our honeymoon. Tell me! This boat is going to pieces at any moment! If we had lived, where would we have spent our honeymoon?"

"In my barn," said the artist.

The sloop struck the rocks and rebounded with a shuddering crash.

"Wouldn't we go abroad, Lorran?"

"Well, when we'd saved enough money, I thought we'd go abroad and study art."

"But I don't know the first thing about art."

"Oh, you're bright. You'd learn."

"I'm not smart enough."

A breaking comber crashed down on the deck, and Dorothy clung to the artist.

"If we weren't going to be drowned," he said, "I'd teach you to draw and paint."

The sloop shuddered as it struck the black rocks again.

"Do you mean, Lorran, that you want me to study art—that you aren't satisfied with me as I am?"

"I didn't say I wasn't satisfied with you as you are."

"Don't you want to improve me or change me in any way?"

She clung to him as water swirled and gurgled about their knees.

"Why should I want to change you?" he countered. "You're all right."

"Do you think I'm a lady?"

"Sure, I do. Aren't you?"

"Do—do you think I'm a hoyden?"

"Never occurred to me."

"Do—do you think I'm too—too soft?"

"Nope. I think you're very nice."

"Just right, Lorran?"

"Yep. Just right."

"Perfect, Lorran?"

"Sure."

"And you'll love me forever?"

"Now, listen—" Lorran began, and suddenly these two storm tossed bits of humanity out on that raging sea clutched each other. The sentence was never finished.

The sloop disappeared under their very feet. They had been standing in water to their knees. Swiftly it arose to their waists, then to their chins.

Where the black sloop had been was now only flotsam.

Lorran was unconscious in Dorothy's arms. A section of the broken mast had struck him on the right temple as the sloop went down.

Treading water, Dorothy supported him. She would have to swim those whirlpools and tow him to safety.

A shout came down the wind to her. A white speck danced on the waves not far away. A boat from the life-saving station was coming.

But the brave young swimmer did not hear those shouts of encouragement as the crew pulled toward her. All she heard was the voice of the sea.

"Yes! Yes!" said the sea.

And thus ended the third of the three tests of the sea that were destined to become famous in Swimpocket history.

XI

It was that evening in Lorran Wainwerring's somewhat remodeled barn. Rain drummed softly on the roof. It was one of

those chilly August nights, but within the barn was warmth and cheer. A fire crackled in the fireplace, and candles cast a mellow light upon the scene.

Wainwerring lay on his bed, groaning faintly. There was a neat white bandage about his head.

Dorothy, humming happily, was tidying the room. She had collected countless cigarette stubs, swept the room, dusted it, and rearranged the furniture. Now she was mopping the floor. She wore a blue and red checked gingham apron. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were sparkling with happy excitement. On the antique kerosene stove, supper for two was fragrantly simmering.

As she mopped, she stopped now and then to admire a new gleaming golden band on the second finger from the left on her left hand.

Having finished mopping the floor, she went outside, and, unmindful of the rain, gave the ice box a thorough cleaning. That obligation had been resting heavily on her shoulders for months.

And, when she returned, Lorran's eyes were open, and he was staring vaguely about the room.

"Haul in that jibsheets!" he muttered. "Take a reef in that peak halyard!"

She flew over to him and knelt down, with her fingers gently stroking his thick curly walnut hair.

"Take the tiller!" he moaned. "Take it. I don't want it!"

"Lorran!" she breathed. "You must be dreaming, darling. We're here—safe and snug in our little barn. We aren't at sea. Don't you remember?"

The artist passed a shaking hand over his eyes. He looked at her dazedly.

"I've just had a wild dream," he told her. "I dreamed we were shipwrecked, and then I dreamed that we were married."

"It's all true, dear. We were shipwrecked. We were married. And now we're all alone in your dear old barn."

He struggled to sit up.

"Married!" he gasped. "Am I really married?"

"Yes, dear," she soothed him. "See? Here's my wedding ring. I paid for it myself. Don't you remember?"

"Everything is so hazy," he muttered.

"Yes, honey. You were struck on the head by a section of the broken mast, but it's nothing serious. You'll be all right in

a day or two. The doctor said you would. You have a good thick skull, and it wasn't fractured."

"And I'm actually married to you!" he gasped.

"Yes, darling, we were married shortly after the life-saving crew rescued us. And you're going to paint and draw and study and become a great artist, and I'm going to take care of you. I'll wait on you and— and don't you want to give mamma a kiss?"

She lowered her lips to his, and she heard him sigh.

"We'll be terribly happy, won't we, Lorran? Pop's wedding present is a trip abroad. We'll stop in Paris, then we'll go on down to Florence and—"

"Darling!" murmured the dazed artist.

"And—and you'll love me forever and ever and aye, won't you, sweetest?"

"Well—" he began. But she sealed his rebellious lips with a warm kiss.

"Now, sleep, dear," she said, rising. "I'll awaken you when supper's ready. We're going to have soft-boiled eggs and bacon. Our wedding supper!"

She left him and went to the stove. Suddenly she bethought herself of the envelope that lay, still moist from its immersion in the sea, against her bosom. She had placed it there when she had changed to dry clothing, just before the wedding. She had had no time to read it.

Dorothy went to the fireplace, removed

the envelope, seated herself on a milking stool, and, leaning forward, read the message in Chinese ink on the strip of Canton silk in the light of the crackling logs.

The yellowed fragment of silk was signed Caroline Furness, and it read:

What every wise, true girl knows: It is the man of whom she is least sure and can serve most that she will love best.

With the fragment of ancient silk dangling in her fingers, Dorothy Furness stared into the leaping flames.

A rueful smile played upon her lips.

"How perfectly absurd!" mused Dorothy. "That sentiment may have applied to love and marriage back in those dear old days, but a modern girl knows that the man she can love best is the one who makes life most interesting for her."

"Dorothy!"

The girl jumped up. "Yes, darling?"

"Is supper almost ready? I'm hungry."

"Yes, sweetheart. Mamma'll bring it right over."

With a contemptuous little gesture, she tossed the fragment of silk, with its ridiculous sentiment, into the flames. It would never do for her husband to come upon that silly message.

And, if she and Lorran ever had daughters—well, their daughters would have sense enough to pick their husbands without dragging the poor creatures into the teeth of gales.

THE END

MY FATHER WAS A SAILOR

My father sailed a schooner, a proud, gaunt schooner,
Around the Horn to Rio, and up the mucky Clyde.
He knew the winds and weathers, the sulky winds and weathers,
He knew the sweet and oily winds the gray gulls ride.

My father was a sailor, a hard, brown sailor,
The singing sea had mothered him against her salty breast.
She suckled him on silence, on bitter, briny silence,
She gave him toys of aching 'toil, or cradled him to rest.

But I was born a landsman, a gray, pale landsman,
I dwell on earthy acres, I tramp a noisy street.
And yet the blood that's in me, the salty blood that's in me
Still pulses through the veins of me with ocean's beat.

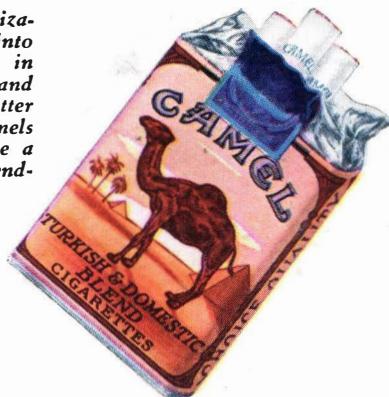
By day I hush the echoes, the faint, far echoes,
But I can only hearken to echoes in the night
When fleets of phantom schooners, of gaunt and beating schooners
Sail restless 'round my salty veins with signal lamps alight.

Karl W. Detzer

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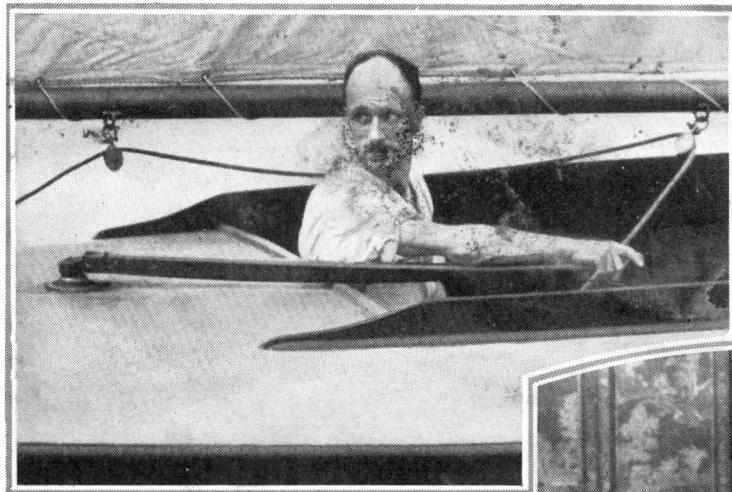


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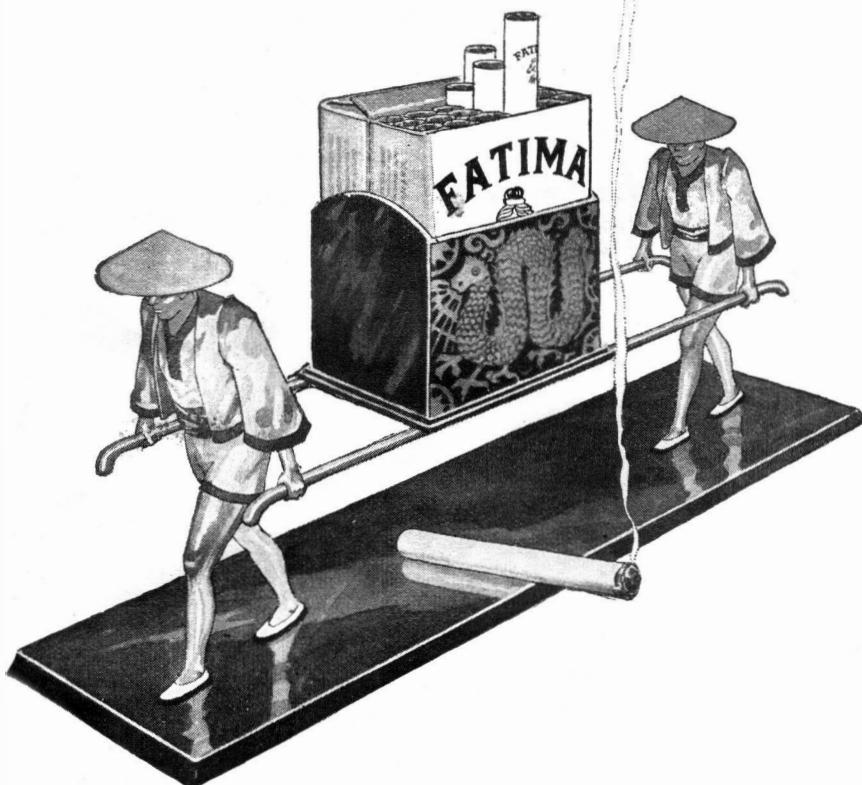
MRS. E. MURPHY, New Haven, Conn.



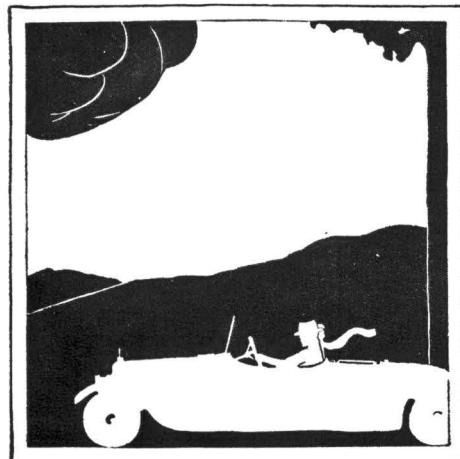
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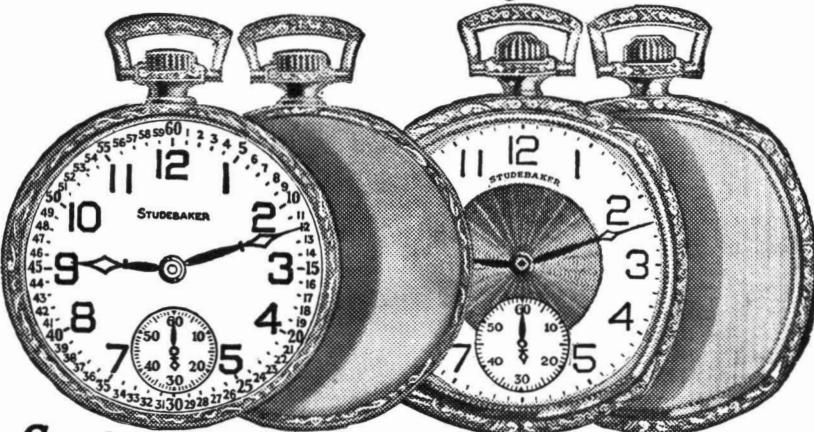
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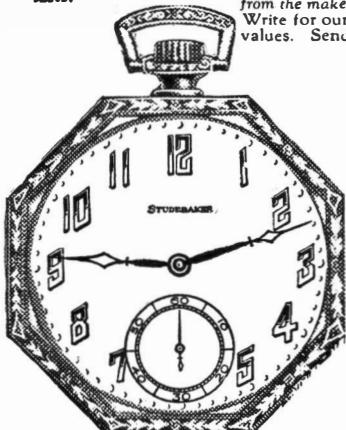
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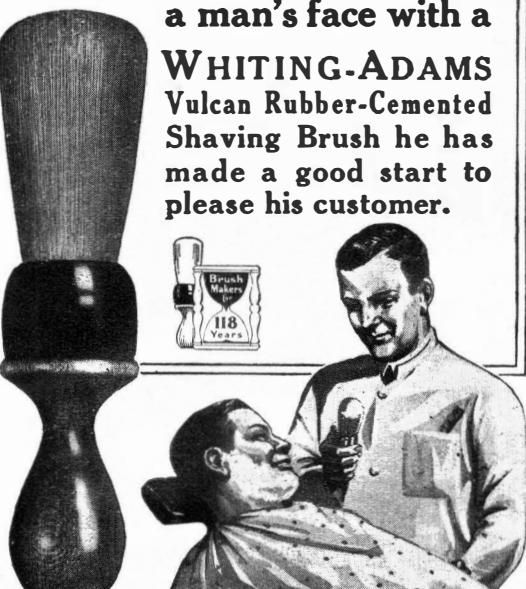
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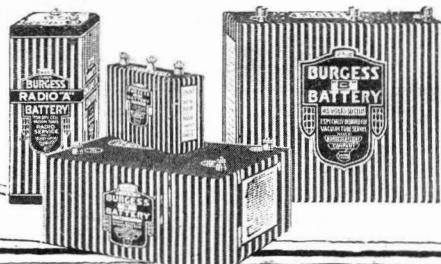
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