An Unwilling Accomplice Complete in This Issue

THE ARGOSY

FOR JANUARY

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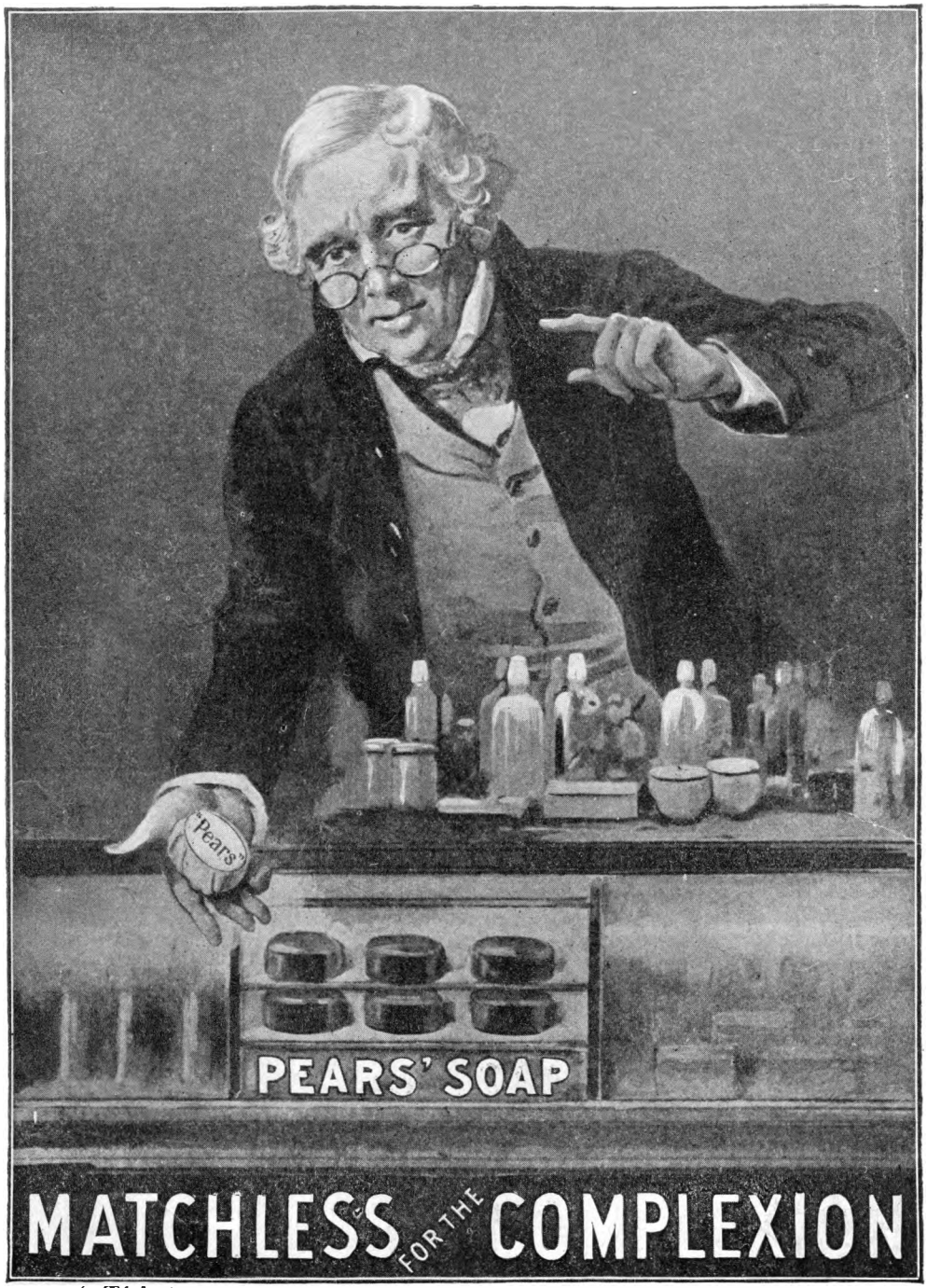

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CREAM
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THE ARGOSY.

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AN UNWILLING ACCOMPLICE.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

On the trail of a delinquent bridegroom in a pursuit which gave rise to certain extraordinary happenings in New York, London, and at sea.

(*Complete in This Issue.*)

CHAPTER I.

A PECULIAR SITUATION.

UNDER ordinary circumstances it is supposed by everybody to be a great honor and a compliment of no mean magnitude to be asked to serve as best man at a swell wedding. One of the swellest rich young men about town in New York was Querles. Querles was about twenty-five, and had an income about what anybody wished to place it at, for nobody knew.

He certainly did live in good style at the Elmost, went in good society, and was generous enough to introduce me to some of his friends.

These friends seemed to be very numerous, and I cannot take time or space to speak of them all.

But there was Gladys Vernon.

Gladys was a young girl about twenty years of age, and very good-looking. At least, she seemed so to me.

Her father was a banker, and her mother a woman of society.

I spent a few pleasant evenings at the Vernons', and fell in love with Gladys.

I had just about worked up courage enough to ask her to be my wife, when, one nice day in April, Querles walked into my room.

"Hello, Gorris, old man, how be you?"

"Oh," I replied, "I am about the same as usual. You look well."

"Well?" He sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"Anything wrong?" I asked.

I had known Querles but a few years, and understood his moods and tenses only as a fellow club member.

I saw that he was somewhat excited.

"Say, Gorris," he said, "I want you to do me a favor."

"It seems queer that you should want it without asking it," I replied.

"Well—this is something out of the usual course. I don't want to borrow money, I don't want to ask you to go my bail, but I want something worse. I want you to be my best man."

"What!" I exclaimed in surprise. "You going to be married! I thought you were a confirmed bachelor."

"Oh, well, sometimes things turn out differently. Now the case is just this. Gladys Vernon is dead in love with me, and—well, what's the use going into details? Mrs. Vernon has urged on the matter on account of my prestige in society, and my—er—wealth. I am to be married the fifth of June. June's a fine month to be married in. And I want you to be best man."

"All right," I said gloomily. "If you insist."

He glared at me.

"Insist! I wouldn't have to insist if I asked Jack Commens or Billy Lighter. You talk about insisting!"

"Well, it will be a tough job for me. I——"

"You what?"

"Was thinking of taking a trip around the world. I thought of making the tour last twice around. You

see, I could go to England, then to France and Spain, and then across that new Trans-Siberian Railway, back to San Francisco, and then southward, and do South America, and start from Rio de Janeiro for Africa, cross that, and go to Australia, and then——"

"Great ghost of Captain Cook!" he yelled. "Is there anything left of such sanity as you had? You! Why, you can't sail down to the fishing banks without getting sea-sick."

"I don't care," I said more gloomily. "I wouldn't care if I had any old thing. I wouldn't care even if I died."

He swung around from me, put his feet upon the window-sill, and puffed on his little coffin-nail.

"Neither would I," he said.

"Much obliged for that expression of friendship," I returned.

"Oh, I mean me."

"And just going to be married?"

"Look here, Gorris," he said, swinging around again, "I am not sure—I don't know—what the devil is this married business, anyway?"

"I don't know. I never tried it." I gulped down a sort of lump in my throat as I thought how impossible it was for me to try it when he was to marry the girl I loved.

"Well, I never tried it. I think my father and mother were happy. But any man could be happy with my mother."

"Well—don't you think you can be happy with Gladys?"

"Dammit! That isn't the point. I don't know whether I can make her happy. I'll have my clubs and the theaters just the same, don't you know, and she will have to stay home and mind the —the children—er—don't you see? There are a lot of things to be taken into consideration when you make this jump."

"But you should have thought of all that before you asked her to marry you."

"But nobody could be in her company many times without asking her. By Jove, I wouldn't be afraid to bet you wanted to ask her yourself."

"Never thought of it," I said in a brazen lie.

"It's a new game," he went on. "It isn't like poker or pinochle at a dollar a corner. It's for life or death, you know. No—I don't mean that. It is for life. Until death does us part, as the preacher says. You know I am rather—er—happy-go-lucky, as it were. Some people say I'm an ass. But Gladys is pretty, and will be rich. See the point?"

"What difference does that make to you?" I asked.

"Oh, well, never mind all this tarradiddle. Will you confess—I mean consent?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "I'll have to, I suppose."

"Good. Now, you see, we are to be married in church. It is to be one of the swellest affairs of the year. You'll be the boss of everything. I want everything right up to the handle."

"But doesn't the bride's father furnish the wedding?" I asked.

"Sure!"

"No wonder you want it swell. But if I am to manage the thing, I ought to see him and have a talk about it."

"Yes. Go on."

Querles was fidgety and did not remain long, and when he had left I fell into a gloomy reflection.

I had pictured Gladys Vernon as my wife. I could support her, and though two years younger, was as much in society as Querles. I did not fly so high, but that was not through stinginess. My income was ten thousand dollars a year, and his must have been twenty.

That evening I called at the Vernon mansion on Madison Avenue. I asked for Miss Vernon. She was not at home. I could hear her talking, and Querles answering.

I felt like taking the bit in my teeth and bolting. But I thought better of that, and went in, asking for Mr. Vernon.

Mr. Vernon was, in my opinion, a gentleman of sterling worth. He was a successful man, having risen from almost nothing to the presidency of a bank.

He was a stern man in business, but allowed his wife and daughter full sway in all matters pertaining to the home.

He was in his library, and sent word he would be glad to see me. I found

him seated at his desk, reading some papers.

"Good-evening, Mr. Gorris," he said. "Haven't seen you lately. Haven't been sick, have you?"

"No, sir," I replied. "I am never sick. I have been out of town on a little matter of business. And in a way—yes, in a large way—I have come to talk business to-night."

"Got money to invest?"

"Not just at present. But Mr. Querles has asked me to be best man at his marriage to your daughter, and to take charge of the details of preparation. I thought I ought to see you about it before I started in."

"That was thoughtful," he said.

He got up, and began walking the floor.

"Have a cigar, Gorris," he said. "I feel like smoking, and I have some good ones here."

I took a cigar.

"This confounded wedding," he went on, "will have me crazy if somebody doesn't take the work off my shoulders. The bank is in a little difficulty—trifling, you understand, but a difficulty, nevertheless. Now, Gorris, man to man, how much is Querles worth?"

"I don't know, Mr. Vernon; I never asked, and he never told me."

"He spends a good deal of money, I understand."

"Yes; that is true enough."

"My wife thinks he is the only man for Gladys. Gladys, I must say, does not seem to be over-enthusiastic about it. But if they have decided that way, it will have to go. Now I will tell you what we had better do: I will send for my wife."

Mrs. Vernon appeared, cold and somewhat haughty, evidently dressed for going out.

"Did you send for me, George?" she asked. "Good-evening, Mr. Gorris."

"I sent for you, my dear, because Querles has asked Gorris to act as his—er—what do you call it?—best man. Gorris wants to talk to you about the arrangements."

"That is very proper. Now, Mr. Gorris, we want everything done in the very finest style. Not too—er—too newly rich, as you will understand. We want everything in good taste, refined, and yet elegant. We want the church decorated with roses, and we want the Rev. Mr. Barton to officiate.

"There will be ushers and flower-girls and maids of honor, and all that. Those details I can manage. I leave the management of carriages and church to you. Of course, there will be a reception at home after the ceremony, and I wish you, with your excellent management, would assist me. We shall have Sherry to serve the supper."

"I will do my best," I answered. "I suppose, of course, you will take care of the invitations."

"Yes. And there will be a rehearsal. As you know, if you have spoken with Edward, the ceremony will be at three o'clock on the fifth."

"I did not know, but I will remember," I answered.

"You must excuse me now. I must attend the meeting of the Society for the Extirpation of Poverty, and my carriage is ready."

She bowed to her husband as well as myself, and went out.

Mr. Vernon had returned to his papers. Knowing that I was not wanted any longer, I bade him good-evening and departed.

On my way out I heard Querles laugh.

There was no laugh in me as I wended my way homeward. Life did not seem as rosy as before. The brightest star was going from my firmament.

CHAPTER II.

"FIND THAT MAN."

NOTWITHSTANDING my own disappointment, and steeling my heart against the wound that comes from the loss of one you love, I set about the work of getting everything in readiness for Querles' wedding.

I had never had much to do with a fashionable wedding, and was amazed to learn that there were so many things to do. The papers were full of the coming society event. It was on the tip of every tongue in the smart set.

Mr. Vernon alone seemed calm.

"Gorris," he said to me, "get this

thing off my hands without any trouble, and I will give you a diamond. Oh, you don't go in for jewelry. Well, I will give you a thousand dollars."

"I don't need that, either, Mr. Vernon," I told him. "Money is useful, but I have enough. There will, however, be no trouble. Everything is arranged."

And everything *was* arranged. The church was engaged, and the Rev. Mr. Barton became interested in the affair just as soon as he knew of it.

I bought all the roses in New York. The best florists were to decorate the church.

Gladys herself seemed less inclined to laugh as the days went by. There was something that did not seem like happiness about her.

She was gay enough, as any girl would be with a brilliant wedding before her. There was nothing objectionable known about Querles, and in high life love is not an essential factor in marriage.

Invitations were sent abroad, and to all the families of Mrs. Vernon's set.

I confess that I felt a slight fear of something going wrong. I talked it over with Gladys.

"I can't see what you could do more," she said, and there was a heavy playfulness in her tones. "I certainly will be married, and everybody will be satisfied."

In my heart I said: "Everybody but you."

We had a rehearsal, and Querles did himself proud. He went through the ceremony all right, or so much of it as was necessary, and after it was all over he took the entire crowd of accessories before the fact to the theater.

The fifth of June proved to be an ideal day. It was none too warm, and yet the sun was bright and clear. I went to the church early to see that everything was as it should be. There was no fault to be found. The decorators had done their work in most excellent fashion.

The ushers were on hand early. So was the organist, who played the Wedding March from "Lohengrin," with the ushers and myself as audience.

The carriages began to arrive. The most exclusive people in town, and many rich people from other towns, came in and took their seats. Ten minutes before three the carriage of Mr. Vernon drew up, and as the representative of Querles, who had not arrived, I met Mr. and Mrs. Vernon and Gladys, and conducted them to the study, which had been reserved for the purpose.

The church was filling up. The heavy perfume of the flowers mingled with the perfume used by the women.

"Is the bridegroom here?" asked the Rev. Mr. Barton.

He was not.

Three o'clock came, and Querles had not arrived. Mr. Vernon began to grow uneasy.

"Strange Querles should be late," he said. "He was always punctual enough when he was invited to dinner."

"George!" said Mrs. Vernon in a remonstrating tone.

"It is ten minutes past three now."

"Oh, well, nobody is ever on time."

"I have to be, I notice," was the banker's reply.

Quarter-past three came, and an usher came to me to whisper.

"Where the deuce is Querles?"

"Oh, he hasn't come yet. You can't expect him so soon," I said, but all the same I knew that if it was myself who was going to marry Gladys Vernon I would be on time.

It was evident that the great crowd in the church was getting restless. I was getting restless myself.

Mr. Vernon was decidedly uneasy, and Mrs. Vernon so agitated she had nothing to say.

Gladys was calm, but very pale.

Half-past three came, and no Querles.

"Where the devil is he?" blurted Mr. Vernon. "Say, Gorris, take my carriage and go to the Elmost and see what the deuce is the matter, will you?"

I stepped into the carriage, and was driven to the Elmost.

I asked for Querles.

"I think," said the clerk, "that Mr. Querles went out. I know he intended leaving the hotel. I will send up an inquiry."

A bell-boy was despatched, and returned with the information that there

was no reply to his summons at the door of Mr. Querles' apartments.

"Wait—why, his keys are here," said the clerk. "He is out somewhere. Did he order a carriage?"

"I'll ask," said the bell-boy.

I waited.

The boy soon returned with information that Querles had ordered a carriage for half-past ten that morning, had left the hotel in it, and had left the carriage at his tailor's for about five minutes, and was then driven back to the hotel. What he did after that nobody knew.

"What about his baggage?" I asked. "It was to be sent to the White Star pier."

"Oh, that was sent," said the clerk. "He was to take the Majestic."

"Yes. I arranged for that, and he has his cabin engaged."

"Sails to-morrow morning," said the clerk. "Hasn't he arrived for his wedding?"

"No, and everybody is getting frantic."

"That's queer. I can't tell you anything about it. I was not here this morning."

"Has he paid all his bills?"

"Yes; he did that yesterday."

I returned to the church and reported. Mr. Vernon walked up and down. Mrs. Vernon was in a fury. It was then about four o'clock.

"By the high heaven!" muttered Mr. Vernon, "if that man has played my girl false, I'll kill him! I will, so help me God! Here are hundreds of the first people of New York waiting for this wedding. Is it to be or not to be? My daughter and wife will be laughing-stocks."

"It is simply disgraceful!" said Mrs. Vernon. "What shall we do?"

"We can't do anything," replied her husband. "Even if we knew where he was, we could not drag him here against his will. All I could do would be to kill him."

There were murmurs and the noise of restless people in the church. Gladys was by this time so white that it almost seemed as if she was chalk. She said nothing, but her lips were tremulous.

Gorris," said Mr. Vernon, restraining his vehemence, "find that man. Go everywhere, spare no expense, but find that man! I don't propose to have my daughter and wife disgraced like this."

I did not know what to do or where to go. If the fellow was alive, it was reasonable to suppose he would show up.

I thought of a possible illness, but Querles was animal-like in his robust health. I thought of an attack, but Querles wasn't the sort of man to be carried off.

I went to the nearest drug store and telephoned to police headquarters.

There was no record of any accident there.

I spent an hour going from club to club. Nobody had seen Querles that day.

Finally I returned to the church.

The guests were departing, some of them laughing. I went to the pastor's study.

Mrs. Vernon was in hysterics; Mr. Vernon like a mad bull; Gladys lying, half fainting, on a sofa.

The bridesmaids were weeping in sympathy, and the minister was trying to calm everybody.

"Gorris," said Mr. Vernon, striving to be calm, "you've got to find that man! You have been his friend, and if he has played us a trick I will kill him!"

I looked at Gladys. My heart was filled with rage at Querles, but at the same time there was a sneaking joy that she was not his wife.

"Do you hear what I say?" demanded Mr. Vernon. "I want you to find Querles. We are going home."

They were the last to leave the church. I went with them to their carriage.

Then I stood on the curb and thought hard and long.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

I STOOD on the curb before the church, as I said, saying things about Querles. But what good did it do me, and what harm did it do Querles?

Yet there was that feeling in my mind that I could almost kill him for what he had done.

And, contrary to that, the feeling that I was glad. I still had a chance.

Mr. Vernon had commanded me to find Querles.

There was not the slightest reason in the world why I should find Querles if he did not wish to be found. But Mr. Vernon wanted Querles, and Mrs. Vernon wanted Querles.

The thing that bothered me was the question, "Does Gladys want Querles?"

I went to my club for dinner, and at seven sat in a cozy corner, smoking a cigar and trying to think the matter out. It was not an easy problem to solve.

The fact that I was in love with Gladys was a factor against any intense desire to find Querles.

After I had spent an hour thinking absolutely nothing of any value, I called a cab and was driven to Mr. Vernon's.

The butler opened the door, and he wore his usual smooth expression. I asked for Mr. Vernon.

The butler took my card, and soon returned. Mr. Vernon would see me.

I have read in some book—I think it was the Bible—about Daniel in the lions' den. But Daniel never faced so fierce a lion as I did when I entered Mr. Vernon's library.

"Have you found him?" he roared. "Have you found that miserable fellow who has marred the whole life of my daughter?"

"No," I said. "I have not begun to look for him."

"What! A friend of mine! A friend of our family! And you have not begun to look? Where is the scoundrel? I believe you know."

"I don't know, Mr. Vernon," I said, "and furthermore it is not certain that Querles is a scoundrel. I am quite willing to agree that if he has deserted Miss Vernon at the last moment he is a scoundrel, provided he did it intentionally. But there are other possibilities. He may have met with an accident; he may have been taken suddenly ill. There are a dozen ways that he may have been prevented from coming."

"Find them! Find those ways!" he said, and he grew red in the face. "My wife is prostrated. My daughter is afraid to show her face before her associates. I want Querles."

"But Mr. Vernon——"

"Don't talk to me until you find Querles."

"But can't I see Mrs. Vernon or Miss Vernon?"

"No! Mrs. Vernon, as I told you, is prostrated. Gladys—— Oh, you might see her. I'll ask."

The result of his asking was that in a short time I was in the drawing-room with the girl I loved.

I do not suppose that many who read this have been in the same position that I was. I was in love with Gladys, and yet commanded by her father to find the man who was to have married her.

Gladys was very pale. I felt sorry that I had brought her down-stairs.

"Miss Vernon," I said, "I have called to see your father, and he insists that I begin a search for Querles. Before I do that I must ask you two questions."

"Why, Mr. Gorris," she replied, "you may ask me all the questions you wish. This is a terrible disgrace. I feel hurt to my very soul. My mother, of course, feels worse than I because she had set her heart upon Mr. Querles as my husband. But he has made me a small, pitiable object. I want you to find him."

"Well," I said, "I will do my best."

I did not remain long. I knew that Gladys needed rest, and I did not want to see Mr. Vernon again. I returned to the club and held a good two hours' communion with myself.

After that, having calmed myself enough almost to forget Querles, I played a game of pinochle, and then went home.

The next morning I began my search. The first thing was to go to the Elmost.

The same clerk I had seen before was behind the desk, and smiled as he saw me coming toward him.

"He has not been here since you were," he said. "I saw in this morning's paper that he had disappeared."

I had not read a paper that morning. I rushed to the cigar-counter, where the papers were sold, and bought one. It was certainly a startling account:

One of the most mysterious desertions at the altar that has ever occurred took place last night when Mr. Edward Querles disappeared at the time of his

intended marriage to Miss Gladys Vernon, daughter of the well-known banker of this city.

Very little is known of the details, except that Miss Vernon was at the church with her parents, and the church was crowded with friends, all of whom move in the best society. Mr. Arthur Gorris, the best man, after a wait of an hour, went to the Elmost, where Querles lived, and failed to find him.

Mr. Gorris is said to be intimate with Querles, and many believe that he may know something of the circumstances. He has not been seen by any of our interviewers.

Mr. Vernon avers that he will shoot Querles on sight, and Mrs. Vernon is prostrated over the disgrace. Miss Vernon cannot be seen at all, and is thought by her friends to be in seclusion at her home or at a sanitarium, under treatment for nervous prostration.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked the clerk.

"Oh, it is about as nearly right as they get anything," I answered. "Then you have heard nothing from him?"

"No; absolutely nothing."

There was nothing to start from. I could go to the police, but they had already been asked, and if they knew where Querles was they would notify Mr. Vernon.

I began to hate Querles. And the more I hated Querles the more I loved Gladys Vernon.

I called a cab and went to the Kinsmore Club. I knew Querles spent a good deal of his time there. But they knew nothing about him except that the steward had been requested to send his mail to the general post-office.

This was strange, as an order on the post-office would send the mail where he wanted it. But it showed that whatever the fellow had done had been done with clear thought.

I went to the post-office. I asked for some one who could give me the required information. A tall and elderly man came to the window.

"What is the information you wish?" he asked.

"I want to know where you are sending mail for Querles. You probably read the papers this morning, and know the man I mean. He has evaporated somehow, and I must find him."

"Well, it is against the rules of the department to tell the address used by any person," was the reply. "This is an unusual case, and I have read it with interest. I do not know whether any forwarding order has been received or not."

He turned to a clerk.

"Have we received any order for forwarding mail to Mr. Querles—the one who disappeared yesterday in so mysterious a manner?"

"No, sir," was the reply.

"Then his mail is held here," I said. "At the Kinsmore Club they told me he left orders to send it to the post-office."

"Perhaps he wants it held on general delivery," suggested the official. "I will see."

An inquiry brought out the information that there was no order from Querles, nor any mail for him.

The official then stepped to the telephone, and, after a short talk with the station of the district where the Kinsmore Club was located, returned with the additional information that nothing was known of Querles, and that he received no mail of importance.

I was baffled again and went back home.

The business of hunting Querles was growing tiresome. It was like a nightmare.

I had some little business matters of my own to attend to, and spent the rest of the day in looking after them. That evening I called again at Mr. Vernon's.

"Have you found Querles?" was his greeting, and not a pleasant one.

"No, sir," I answered; "I have tried to trace him, but——"

"Oh, don't come here with excuses! I tell you, you must find Querles!"

I felt like telling him that it was my kindly disposition and not my duty that impelled me to obey him, but I did not, because of Gladys.

I left in a sort of whirl. I could not see Mrs. Vernon nor Gladys. And if I loved Gladys I must find the man who was to have been her husband.

It was a mess. I went to the club and reflected upon the strange things that happen in every-day life.

And of all the things I could think of, the disappearance of Querles was the strangest.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MUCH-WANTED QUERLES.

NEVER in my life had I thought it could be so difficult to find a person as well known as Querles.

After a sleepless night I went to police headquarters. Nothing was known.

"You see," said the officer in charge, "the police have no authority over weddings except to preserve order. It cannot be said that Querles has really committed a crime. As a matter of fact, a crime may have been committed against him. Now, if you will enter all the details, I will send out a general alarm."

I gave all the details.

"Now I advise you to advertise," he added.

I said I would, but I did not. What was the use of advertising?

In the first place, if Querles did not wish to let us know where he was, the advertising would be of no use whatever. In the second place, if somebody else had him in bondage, that person would not answer any advertisement.

I took a trip to the office of the White Star line.

A clerk met me.

"Is the name of Mr. Querles, the man who is missing so mysteriously, on your sailing books?" I asked.

"I will look. What ship, sir?"

"The Majestic."

He went to a desk and looked at a large book.

"I find here," he said, "that Mr. Edward Querles booked for stateroom A, and the entry reads 'and wife.'"

"But he isn't married!" I gasped. "He intended to be."

"That's all right, then. Many people do that. Just before their wedding they book for a trip, and if it is to be a honeymoon they put in the wife. You see, they have to do that to get passage."

"Is there any way by which you could tell whether Querles sailed on the Majestic?"

"Why, not just now. Of course, everybody who books and pays for passage is supposed to sail unless there is some notice sent to the contrary. We have had no notice from Mr. Querles."

"And would anybody at the pier know?" I asked.

"Not unless Mr. Querles made himself known by conversing with some one. I will telephone if you wish."

"I wish you would."

He stepped into the telephone booth, and I heard him talking. He soon returned to where I was standing, shaking his head.

"He could not have sailed," he said. "His trunks are on the pier, and nobody came to claim them or to label them for the steamer."

"But were they not sent already labeled for the Majestic?" I asked.

"Apparently not. They are still at the pier, and the Majestic sailed this morning."

Although I had resolved to do no advertising, the thing was advertised enough. The papers were full of articles on the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Querles on the day he was to have married Gladys Vernon.

I picked up a paper I had not hitherto read, and under a great, black caption, which almost told the entire story, I learned that I was in full charge of the search for Querles. It was an interview with Mr. Vernon, and he made these announcements:

"I will shoot the fellow on sight. He has disgraced my family."

"Querles was a man I never had much confidence in. He was not my choice as a son-in-law, but we've got to find him now."

"Mr. Arthur Gorris has full charge of the search. If you wish to know what he has done, see him. You will find him, I suppose, at the Kinsmore Club."

There was nothing very enlightening about this. I spent a few hours telephoning. I telephoned to everybody I knew who also knew Querles. Nobody had seen him, and everybody I telephoned to had been at the church.

I went to the Kinsmore Club for dinner.

"There are three gentlemen waiting to see you, sir," said the steward.

"Where?"

"In the office, sir, at the east window."

I saw a number of men in the office, which was a large corridor, but in the east window, a cozy little nook by itself, I saw three men. One was young, the others elderly.

"Are you the gentlemen waiting for Mr. Gorris?" I asked.

"Yes!" all three responded at once, jumping up from their chairs.

The young man spoke first.

"I represent the United Press," he said. "I understand from Mr. Vernon, the banker, whose daughter was jilted at the altar, that you have full charge of the search for Querles, the man who jilted her. Have you discovered anything yet?"

"Not a thing."

"What are you doing in the way of investigating?"

"Everything I can think of."

"And yet you can find no trace of him?"

"None."

"I wanted to see you about him," said one of the others. "Your name is Gorris. Mine is Albertson. Mr. Querles came to me about a month ago. I had known his father, and thought well of the young man. He wanted to borrow some money, and I loaned him five hundred dollars."

"Borrow!" I exclaimed. "Querles wanted to borrow money? Why, he is rich!"

Mr. Albertson laughed and shook his head.

"If he is," he said, "it is the first time I knew it. His father was a poor man. Querles himself—I mean the young man—never did any work. He was not in business, so I don't see where his wealth comes in."

"But he spent money like water!" I said.

The other man broke in.

"It was other people's money," he said. "That man has been raising money every way he knew how. I am out a thousand on him. He gave me his note, and it isn't worth the paper it is written on."

"Great Moses!" I exclaimed. "Does everybody want Querles?"

"Everybody who knows him, I guess," said Mr. Albertson.

"I can tell you nothing about him. I know he left suddenly, or was killed, kidnaped, eaten up by wild animals in the street, wafted to heaven by a zephyr, or something else. I have been charged with knowing where he went, but I don't. He has put me to great trouble."

"What is your interest in finding him?" asked the United Press representative.

"None—absolutely none, except that Mr. Vernon is a friend and wants me to hunt Querles. That is all."

"It's a queer case," said the man who had not given his name. "I hope you will find him. I want my thousand."

"I want my five hundred," said Albertson.

They left, and I went to dinner.

Late that afternoon I called at Mr. Vernon's. He had not come home from the bank.

This time I saw Mrs. Vernon.

"This matter is simply killing me," she said. "I can't stand it. If it continues, it will send us all to a sanitarium."

"But why should you be so intent on finding Querles?" I asked her. "If he left the city rather than marry Miss Vernon, she is better off than had he married her."

"That is all very well; but there is a doubt. He may have been killed; he may be ill somewhere, unable to communicate with us. Oh, find him!"

"How is Miss Vernon to-day?" I inquired.

"Oh, she is getting over it. She doesn't die easily."

"I am glad of that," I said.

As I was going out Mr. Vernon came in.

"Hello, Gorris!" he said. "Wait. I want to see you."

I wanted to see him.

I went into the library with him.

"Have you found Querles?" he asked.

"No, sir. I have done my best. I can't learn whether he sailed on the Majestic; the police know nothing about him; and now a general alarm has been sent out. I have telephoned to every-

body I know, and to some I don't know. I have seen men to whom he owes money. It seems he is not rich. He is —well, from what two men told me today, Querles is a fraud."

"Did you have to wait till now to find that out?" asked the banker grimly.

"None of us thought so until the fifth."

"We learned it then. Now, I'll tell you something, Gorris, that I did not tell you before. Querles came to me one day and asked me to cash a draft for three thousand dollars. It was signed by a name I did not know. Querles endorsed it. I gave him the money, and now the draft is returned as no good."

"I see how he lived so high," I said.

"Live high! I should say! But I'll get even."

I gave the banker a moment to cool down.

"Now, Mr. Vernon," I went on, "the unfortunate termination of what would have been a brilliant wedding has upset your wife and daughter. I never believed that Miss Vernon cared much for Querles. I wish to ask you now if I may be permitted to pay her attentions with the view of asking her after a time to be my wife?"

Mr. Vernon banged on the desk with his fist.

"Confound it, yes!" he said. "But you can't say boo to that girl till you find Querles. Find Querles, bring him here, and—— Well, we can talk that over afterward.

"You have only one thing to do now—find Querles."

CHAPTER V.

"THE CHASE IS ON!"

THE Kinsmore Club became the headquarters of everybody who wanted to find Querles. I was so busy answering questions I had scarcely any time to attend to the thing myself.

The morning after I had held my memorable and important interview with Mr. Vernon I sat in my chosen corner at the club, thinking the matter over. It was the worst mix-up I had ever known.

Here I was, asking for Gladys Vernon's hand, and eligible only on condition that I found the man to whom she was engaged.

Of course, if it proved that Querles had simply left the city and jilted her, the engagement would be off.

That in itself was some satisfaction, and I hoped that Querles had done that very thing.

"Mr. Gorris, a gentleman to see you," said one of the boys employed by the club, and I turned to find a stranger approaching me.

"My name is Sanders," he said, and he did not speak very pleasantly. "You are apparently the majordomo of this confounded Querles affair. Now, I want to know where Querles is."

"I wish I knew," I answered with a sigh.

"I believe you do know."

"I know absolutely nothing about Mr. Querles," I said with some asperity. "I am learning more about his affairs than I ever knew before. What does he owe you?"

"Owe me! Why, the brute owes me ten thousand dollars! He came to me one day with a big mining scheme. He was always a nice talker, and I listened. I guess I'm a good listener, for I bought some shares. They cost me ten thousand. I bought the whole business, I guess. None of it was any good. There is no such company, and no such mine."

"I am sorry for you," I told him, "but I can't help you unless I find Querles. I have a reason of my own for wishing to find the gentleman."

"I know. It's that Vernon affair. But let me tell you, he won't marry Gladys Vernon if I get my hands on him. He'll be a dead one."

"Lady to see you, sir," said the boy.

I groaned.

"Air you the gent what is lookin' fur Mr. Querles?" asked a stout and not over-tidy woman as she pounced on me.

"I am that same gent," I answered wearily. "How much does he owe you?"

"It's twenty dollars by now. Bad cess to him, I say! I'm a poor wurrkin' woman, an' can't afford to lose that money."

"How did Querles come to owe you twenty dollars?" I asked.

"Sure, fur washin' his dirty clothes. It's me business to do it, an' he niver had a cint, an'—oh! me child is sick, an'——"

I don't know how long she would have talked had I not stopped her.

"Yours is a harder case than the others," I said.

I took some bills from my pocket. After all, Querles was a friend of mine, and the woman needed the money. At the same time I cursed Querles.

"I'll pay you the twenty," I said.

"God bless ye, sir. A poor woman gives ye her blessin'."

She took the money and vanished.

"Now I am convinced," said the man who had been speaking, "that you know where Querles is hiding. You would never pay that woman twenty dollars unless there was a reason for it."

"There was a reason for it; she needed the money."

"Well, I need my ten thousand dollars as much as she needed her twenty. I want you to pay it."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," I answered. "If you go into a wildcat speculation, it is nothing to me. That woman was poor. I gave her that money because I felt sorry for her."

"Don't you feel sorry for me?"

"Not in the same way."

"Gentleman to see you," said the boy.

I turned again. It was Mr. Vernon.

"See here, Gorris," he blurted out. "That Querles was worse than I thought he was. Do you know what he has done now? Well, he has forged my name for five thousand. Here's a draft on the New York National Bank for that amount. I never signed it. His name is on the back."

I began to feel sick.

"He's a scoundrel!" said the other man.

"Did you lose by him?" asked Mr. Vernon.

"Yes. My name is Sanders. I'm from Omaha. I don't understand your get-rich people down here. But that Querles got ten thousand out of me. And this man just paid a woman twenty dollars for Querles. I say he knows where Querles is, and I want my ten thousand."

"Gorris, do you honestly know anything about Querles?" asked Mr. Vernon.

"Absolutely nothing, sir," I answered. "I am as much in the dark as you."

"Lady to see you, sir," said the boy.

A woman about thirty entered. She paid no attention to Mr. Vernon or Mr. Sanders.

"Are you the man who has charge of Mr. Querles?"

"No," I said in reply to her question. "I am not in charge of Mr. Querles. I wish I was just now. He has evidently got himself into so many difficulties that he found it necessary to retire. How much does he owe you?"

She banged the floor with the point of her shoe.

"Owe me! Owe me! What does that man Querles owe me? A living! A living! Do you know who I am, young man? I am his wife!"

"Impossible!" ejaculated Mr. Vernon.

"Impossible, is it? I'll let you know if it is impossible! Who are you, anyway?"

"Nobody," said Mr. Vernon.

He looked it.

"Madam, be calm," said Sanders. "This gentleman will get so tangled up that he will not only be ignorant of the location of Querles, but he won't know where he is himself. Be calm."

"Calm! Am I not calm? I say I'm Mrs. Querles, and I want to know where that wretch is. He was never any good. He took a thousand dollars I had saved to——"

"Lady to see you, sir," said the boy.

A pretty girl joined the group.

"Are you Mr. Gorris?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, as the others stepped back to give her a chance at me.

"Where is Edward Querles?"

"I don't know. Mr. Querles is in some mysterious manner eliminated from the curriculum of our present institutions, and I am looking for him."

"Oh, find him! Find him! He promised to marry me, and I am distracted!"

"Marry you!" cried Mr. Vernon.

"Yes. Oh, where is poor Edward?"

"It will indeed be 'poor Edward,' if

I get him in my clutches," said Mr. Vernon.

"Me, too," said Sanders.

"Same here," said the woman who claimed to be his wife.

"Oh, I want my Edward!" said the girl, beginning to weep.

"I want him myself," I struck in. "I think I'll go daffy if I don't find him."

"Gorris, you've got to find him," said Mr. Vernon. "You have nothing else to do; nothing else to think of; nothing else to live for."

"Yes, I have," I said, with a significant look at him.

"Well, you can't have her till you find that rascal Querles."

"I'll find him," I said grimly.

"I don't care if the search takes you around the world twenty times. I'll pay the expenses. But you've got to find Querles."

"I'll find him," I said again.

One after another they left. I got down to something like calm thinking, when the steward brought me some mail. One letter was from my bank.

It is with regret that we inform you that you have overdrawn your account one hundred dollars. Our purpose in sending you word is merely to give you the information. You are at liberty to draw as much as you please.

It was signed by the vice-president.

I rushed for my check-book. According to that I had ten thousand dollars, all but a hundred, in the bank.

Nine thousand nine hundred gone!

I hurried to the bank. They showed me a draft for ten thousand, signed by my name, but which I had never signed. Yet the signature was almost identical with my own. The endorsement was Edward Querles.

"You see, the draft being made to bearer, we could not tell," said the cashier. "Have you found Querles yet?"

"No," I said, "but now I'll find him. Nobody needs him but me. I'll—oh, I'll find him—that's enough!"

The question was how.

It is easy to plan. It is easy to try. The thing is to succeed.

I telegraphed to American consuls. I wrote letters. I did everything under the sun I could think of, but I did not find Querles.

A week passed, and I was almost beside myself. Not a day went by but somebody wanted to see Querles.

Querles owed more people money than any other man I ever knew. He owed for everything. He had forged names.

He had borrowed large amounts. He had sold fake bonds and shares. So it went.

I was in despair. I was so enraged at the loss of my own money that I wanted to wring the neck of the lamented Querles.

Then I received a letter. It was from the White Star Company:

MR. ARTHUR GORRIS, Kinsmore Club:

DEAR SIR,—You applied at this office the day after the Majestic sailed to inquire whether Mr. Querles was a passenger on her. I have cabled Liverpool, where the Majestic touched last night, and find that the stateroom engaged by Mr. Querles was actually occupied by a man who gave the name of Bearles, but had the ticket of Mr. Querles. He left the steamer at Liverpool.

I trust you may now be successful, as undoubtedly Bearles is no other than Querles.

"Liverpool!" I groaned. "Liverpool for me! The chase is on!"

CHAPTER VI.

A CLUE AND A SNAG.

I MADE quick preparations for a trip abroad. I first went to the steamship office and booked my passage on a ship that was to sail in two days.

I was still beset by people to whom Querles owed money.

I went to see Mr. Vernon. He acted strangely. I thought he was too greatly agitated. It seemed to be I who should be agitated.

"Have you found Querles?" he asked as I entered his room.

"No, but I think I know where he is," I replied. "I have received word from the White Star Company that somebody giving the name of Bearles used his ticket on the Majestic. Now, Bearles is

not far from Querles, and I believe the fellow to be the one we want."

"Undoubtedly you are right," he said with some excitement. "Sailed, eh? What have you done?"

"I have engaged passage on the Croissic, and will sail to-morrow."

"Good! I think you are doing well. Undoubtedly the man who gave the name of Bearles *is* Querles. Nab him wherever you see him. Cable to me at once, and I will take care of any legal business that may be necessary. How much does he owe now?"

"Oh, a small matter of about fifty thousand dollars," I said.

"What a rascal! And we thought he was as good as his word. Now, you get that fellow, Gorris. You get him."

"I'll get him all right. Now, I have a good deal to do, and would be pleased to see Mrs. Vernon and Gladys before I leave. I may not have time to come again."

"Certainly," he said.

Mrs. Vernon met me in the drawing-room. She was plainly dressed, and there was a weary look about her eyes.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Gorris. Have you found Mr. Querles?"

"I have not, Mrs. Vernon," I said with a shudder. "But I have received word that a man calling himself Bearles went to Liverpool on the same ticket that Querles bought. Now, it is reasonable to suppose that this was Querles. Therefore I am going to Liverpool to find him, and just wanted to say good-by."

"I am so glad that you have taken an interest in the case. It has nearly killed me. The notoriety and the shame of it! I cannot understand how he could do such a thing!"

"Nobody can. But he was always queer. Is Miss Vernon well?"

"That she is," said a pleasant voice, as Gladys herself came into the room. "I'm all right. But that—oh! What shall I call him? Have you found Querles?"

"Not yet," I managed to get out, "but I am going after him to-morrow. I think he is in Europe."

"Leave him there."

"Well, there are several persons who want him. I want him myself. He stole money from your father and from me and from a lot of other people."

That evening I was besieged.

Men and women who had bought stock in various bogus companies came to me with their tales of wo. It was awful.

They asked me all sorts of questions, and doubted most of my answers.

The Croissic could not sail too soon for me. I added up the amounts the victims of Querles gave me as the money he owed them, and found it to be over eighty thousand dollars.

Fortunately there were no more wives.

The following morning I was on board the Croissic early. It was a good steamer and all of the accommodations were as nearly perfect as they could be. I had crossed the Atlantic before, and had much fear of sea-sickness, but the weather was made to order, and the sea calm.

The trip over was the same as any other, and they have been described so often that I shall not waste time on it. Suffice to say there was the same card-party in the smoking-room, the same concert for the benefit of a sailors' home, and the same everything.

We arrived at Liverpool about ten o'clock one fine morning. I had benefited by the voyage, and felt in the best of health and the best of spirits. I had not the slightest doubt that I would locate Querles in a short time.

I went to the Hotel Prince of Wales and engaged rooms before beginning my search. When I registered I looked over the book.

"Is there such a man as Mr. Bearles here?" I asked.

"No, sir. I never heard the name."

"Have you had anybody here named Querles, from the Majestic?"

"Never heard that name either."

Evidently I was not going to find Querles at the Hotel Prince of Wales.

I had my lunch at the hotel and then started out.

I had never been through the streets of Liverpool, except to land from a steamer and go on to London.

There were plenty of hiding-places, and plenty of means by which Querles could get away from me.

I went to the King's Own, a hotel about the same as the Prince of Wales, and inquired there for Querles and Bearles. No such person could be there, for every person was known.

I wandered from one hotel to another, and went into all the cafés. I saw all sorts of people and many men who looked something like Querles.

But I did not see Querles.

Returning to the Prince of Wales that evening, tired from my long search, I sat down to think what to do next. One of those brilliant inspirations that make men great came to me. I rushed to the cable office and sent a message to the White Star Company.

Has anything been done with the trunks of Querles?

I received this reply:

Trunks of Querles called for by American Express. Destination not known at this office.

Here was another tangle. The first thing to do now was to cable the American Express Company. I did so, asking what had been done with the trunks.

I received the following reply:

This company took trunks marked Querles from White Star pier. Shipped same on Croissic for Liverpool.

Now it was easy. If the trunks had come on the same steamer that I had, it would not be difficult to follow them to their destination.

In the morning I went to the docks. The Croissic was still there.

"Is there," I asked the officer in charge, "anything here for Mr. Edward Querles?"

"I'll see."

He went inside a little office, and I saw through a window that he was looking over a list.

"Yes," he said. "We received on the Croissic two trunks marked Edward Querles. They have not been called for, and we have received no orders for forwarding. If you have any instructions to leave I will see that they are followed."

"Well," I said, "my name is Gorris. I am stopping at the Hotel Prince of Wales. This Querles is a rascal, and I am after him. Can we hold the trunks as a means to catch him?"

"Only on order of the police."

"Then I must see a magistrate?"

"Yes."

Disgusted, I returned to the hotel again to learn where I could find a magistrate.

CHAPTER VII.

A CLUE TO QUERLES.

About noon that day I managed to get an audience with Justice Holcomb. He received me graciously, but with a calm reserve that was not entirely reassuring.

However, I did not care for that. I was so intent on my search that I would have gone to him had he been a cake of ice.

I stated the case clearly and concisely. I gave the justice the details I knew.

Justice Holcomb listened with interest.

"This man," he said when I had finished, "is a very picturesque individual. He ought to make his mark in the world. If this world is too small for him, perhaps he will do so in the next."

"I hope this world is not so large but what I can find him," I remarked.

"Now," went on the justice, "in this matter of the luggage, it seems clear to me that I would be justified in giving you a stop-order only upon communication with New York. I don't doubt your story—not in the slightest degree. But if this Querles and Bearles happen not to be the same man, an order to prevent the use of the trunks might cause trouble."

"But the trunks are marked with the name of Querles, and not Bearles," I said.

"That being the case, I will give you the order."

Armed with this, I hurried back to the pier. I found the same official I had seen before. He grinned as I held out the order from the magistrate.

"Is it all right?" I asked.

"It is all right, sir," he answered,

"only it is too late. The trunks have been forwarded."

"So soon!" I exclaimed. "Where were they sent?"

"That I can't tell you. A gentleman came here and identified the trunks and labeled them. A van took them. I was busy at the time, and I could not pay the matter much attention."

"Did you say anything about me?"

"Yes, I think I did. I think I told him a man had been here to hold the trunks."

"Where is the express company that took them?"

"I don't know where the office is. It is a private concern. But there is an employee of the same company standing there near the end of the pier. You can ask him."

I found him to be a young man of good manners. I told him what I wanted, and showed him the order from the magistrate.

"I am very sorry, sir, but I cannot help you," he answered. "Those trunks are now out of Liverpool. We sent them to London."

"To what address?"

"None, only London. The gentleman was in a hurry, and we rushed for the early afternoon mail. It might better be called a noon mail, because it leaves here just a little after noon."

"Where would they be found in London? At the station?"

"That depends on the time you take to get there. If you leave Liverpool at once you may find them. I don't recall just what was on the labels."

"Was the name Querles? Or perhaps Bearles?"

"I don't know. Something like that."

I had no time to lose, and, cursing Querles more than ever, I rushed back to the hotel. It did not take me long to get my small amount of luggage ready, and, calling a cab, I hurried to the station.

I found when I reached there that I had a half-hour to wait. I utilized this by getting lunch. Then, with a magazine, I boarded a train and was off for London.

Arriving there, I could not find any other trace of the trunks than the information that a cabman had come with the owner, whose name was Burles or Curles, and taken them away.

I was up against it again.

I sat down in a café and thought it over.

Would it be best to go to Scotland Yard and have the police take up the search? I did not like the idea of making the matter too public. Had it not been for my consideration of Mrs. Vernon and Gladys, the police of every city in the world would be after him.

I left Scotland Yard as a last resort. After all, Bearles might not be Querles. Yet, had such been the case, he would not, probably, have the trunks.

My next thought was to cable to Mr. Vernon. I had not sent him any address, and there was no way he could communicate with me. He might have something to say.

I went to a telegraph office and sent the following:

MR. GEORGE VERNON, New York:
Man named Bearles has trunks of Querles. Have lost track of him in London. I am at King's Hotel.

That afternoon I received the following:

Querles is undoubtedly the man you call Bearles. He has robbed the City Bank of twenty thousand. A reward of two thousand is offered for his arrest. Do all you can. VERNON.

Would it never cease? Was there no end to the man's rascalities? It appeared not.

I finally did go to Scotland Yard.

After a lucid explanation, the officer in charge said he would learn what he could and let me know the result.

"At what time to-night," he asked, "could a man from Scotland Yard see you?"

"Any time. If you say he is coming, I will remain at King's until he does come."

"Very well. With that understanding I will detail the best men on the case. I hope I shall have success enough to gratify you."

I returned to King's, and went to my room. As I wrote my name in the register the clerk looked at the signature.

"There is a letter for you, sir," he said.

He handed it to me.

It bore no date, and read as follows:

GORRIS:

You are following me with no prospect of success. I have run my course, and that is all there is to it. No one will ever take me back to New York alive. If you value your life let me alone.

There was no signature, but I knew it was the handwriting of Querles.

So here, added to other things, was a threat. I knew Querles could be desperate when he chose; but there was no danger in London. And Scotland Yard was on the scent.

I would soon have Querles.

That evening about nine I sat in my room. A card was brought to me. It bore a name with which I was not familiar.

"Show him up," I said.

A short, stout, rather florid man entered.

"I am from Scotland Yard," he said abruptly. "You are Mr. Gorris, who wants to find Querles. I think I have located him, but I am not sure. He is, however, where we can have a good look at him, and you can assure me. The rest is easy."

"I'll go at once," I said.

He had a cab waiting, and we entered it. We were driven to a street that seemed dirty and unlike what Querles would choose, but I reflected that the fellow must be at the end of his rope and could not be too particular. It was a narrow street, one I had never seen before, and from it I could set the lights on the Thames.

The cab stopped at a small restaurant. On the ground floor there was a laundry, in the door of which a Chinaman sat on a stool. The stairs leading to the restaurant above were narrow and unclean.

We climbed the stairs and entered a little eating-room.

Four men sat at a table. The remains of a meal were before them. They glanced at me, and then resumed their occupation, which was smoking.

"The man I mean eats here about midnight," said the police officer. "He comes in and goes out without saying anything except to give his order."

"We will have a bite ourselves," I replied, and sat down at a table. He took the chair opposite me.

I saw him glance over my shoulder, and turned. A smashing blow on my temple half stunned me, and before I could recover my reasoning powers, or realize what really was taking place, I was beset by three men, while one stood guard at the door.

My own strength was not equal to the combined forces against me, and after a struggle of several minutes I was compelled to yield.

I shouted for help, but no help came. I was picked up, replaced in the chair, and securely fastened.

Then the man I had supposed to come from Scotland Yard sat down, facing me again, and held a bull-dog revolver in his right hand.

I could see things coming my way that I did not want.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GENTLEMANLY HOLD-UP.

"You see," said the supposed police official, "there may be some explanations necessary. You are better known than you supposed you were."

"I should remark," I replied "that a short explanation might not only be useful, but appropriate. What does this outrage mean?"

"This," said the evident leader of the gang, "is not what we call in polite language an outrage. It is not our present intention to injure you. It is more our intention to win your high regard and brotherly affection."

"You have taken a strange way about it," I retorted.

"Ways must always be subordinate to conditions. Now, had I told you that we wanted you to come here and take a drink you would not have come."

"Your invitation need not have been so violent," I answered.

"Possibly not. But we did not know how intractable you might be. We must always move cautiously."

"Well, you are moving cautiously

enough about that explanation. I am waiting for it."

"You shall have it. You perhaps may have been misled by the peculiar reception we gave you into thinking that we are a rough lot. Now, such is not the case. As a matter of fact, we are the best fellows in the world. This place is the headquarters of our society. The society is world-wide. By that I do not mean that we have a large membership, but that we spread out thinly. We are very exclusive. We don't ask everybody to join us.

"You have been watched from the time Mr. Querles, one of our honored members, asked you to be his groomsman. Querles isn't a bad fellow. He is only a fool. But he is one of our distinguished members. He has been the most successful."

"He seems to be successful in fraud," I said.

"Now, please be cautious. We do not like that word. The Order of Level Humanity seeks only to protect the poor from the machinations of the rich. As you know, the good things of this world are not evenly distributed. There are some who have so much wealth they don't know what to do with it; others starve. Some live in palaces; others have no homes at all.

"The Order of Level Humanity knows no creed or race distinction. We devote ourselves to the noble purpose of getting all we can from those who have the most. Now, had you remained in New York, you would not be listening to my pleasant chatter, but since you saw fit to follow our brother Querles with the intention of returning him to those who would perhaps do him harm, we have gobbled you up, so to speak.

"Now, Mr. Querles behaved very properly in deserting that girl in New York. We like him better as a single man. He is worth more to the society."

"Yes, but there is a woman in New York who claims he is her husband," I replied.

"That is possible—anything is possible. We never could understand how Querles got so far gone as to want to marry her. But even that, it seems, is possible."

"But where is Querles now?" I asked.

"That is the very question I expected you to ask. I told you that Querles was here. He is not very far away. But Querles being here, and Querles being taken back to New York, are two different propositions.

"Now, if you will kindly give me your distinguished attention, I will go farther. We have an offer to make. As you see, we are fellows who live by our wits.

"Every rich man is our friend as long as we can work him as a gold mine. You are, as Querles has told us, considered wealthy."

"But Querles has already robbed me," I said.

"Very true. But Querles is not in a position to do what you can do for us. Querles used his money himself. You would not need it. Our first proposition is that you join us. Take our oath, and then, through your acquaintance with rich men, throw one hundred thousand pounds into our treasury."

"Well," I said quietly.

"The other is that if you refuse you are to be—well, something will happen. You see, we must protect ourselves."

"Do you mean that unless I join your order you will kill me?"

"We do not like that word kill," said the rascal. "We call it having something happen. It sounds better. For instance, take your own case. It would sound very brusk to cable home that you had been killed. How much better it would be to say that something had happened to you and you died! What do you think of our proposition?"

"Nothing. I think you are a lot of fakirs. Querles may have done this for a joke. Such an order as you mention would be destroyed before it could operate."

"Perhaps," he said; "everything is possible. Now, to begin again, we are good fellows, but we are poor. We are so poor that if we were honest we would starve to death. The only people who can afford to be honest are those who have inherited money from those who got it dishonestly. Now, will you join us?"

"No; certainly not."

"You had better think over it."

"Give him till to-morrow morning to think over it," said another of the gang. "He'll be all right then."

"That is a good idea," answered the leader. "I will. Mr. Gorris, don't try to escape. It means sure death."

One after another filed out. The door was locked and I was alone.

I did not know whether I was really in danger or not.

But I do know that I was most infernally mad.

CHAPTER IX.

FACE TO FACE.

SITTING in a chair to which you are fastened with a cord, in the upper room of a building supposed to be a restaurant, knowing that your life has been threatened more than once, is no fun.

I did not strain at the cords at first, after the gang left me. I sat still to study out what the probabilities were.

There seemed every reason to consider the matter a joke. I had lived a life of comparative, or I might even say superlative, ease. So far as I knew, I had no enemy.

Having an income sufficient for my needs, having no relatives to annoy me, and having no responsibilities beyond my powers, I took life easily.

But this episode was something to enrage anybody.

Here I was a prisoner—actually a prisoner—with the promise of death if I tried to escape.

What the prospects were if I remained there quietly I could not tell.

No information had been given me except that I would be killed if I tried to escape. I must sign the papers that bound me to the Order of Level Humanity.

In the abstract, this belief in the level of humanity is well and good, but it does not appeal very strongly to our sense of justice when it touches ourselves or our homes.

The first thing that came to my mind as I sat there thinking was that Querles was either a greater rascal than I had thought him or else he was the greatest practical joker on earth.

I reflected upon the appearance of the men who had captured me. They were all well dressed; they were young, and apparently of good families. I could not bring myself to believe them the villains they pretended to be.

"Querles," I said to myself, "has learned that I am following him, and has put up a trick on me. Now we'll see who wins."

It was by that time nearly midnight. I was tired and hungry and thirsty. I began squirming in my chair, and felt the cords loosen.

With a quick wrench of my wrists, such as I doubt my ability to give again, I wriggled loose.

Free from the cords, I began an inspection of the place.

One small, mean lamp was burning. By this light I saw that there was but the one door to the room.

There were two windows, and, turning down the lamp, I saw that I was not very far above the ground.

I peered from the windows, and could see nobody.

"Joke for joke," I said, and I chuckled as I thought how Querles would feel when he learned that I had defeated him.

From one window there was a leader I thought I could reach. By this means I could slide down to the ground.

I knew London pretty well. I had been there a few times before, but never in that quarter. There was, however, not much danger of getting lost.

The main thing was to reach the ground. I tried the door, but that was locked. The leader was my only hope.

I crawled from the window and grasped the leader. To my utter delight, it was strongly built and seemed able to bear my weight.

Hand under hand I let myself down. It was, after all, a great joke. But I would have the laugh. I would show them how to reach the level of humanity.

The work of getting down the leader was no easy task, and as I drew near the ground I began to feel a great weariness in my muscles.

About four feet from the bottom I let go and dropped.

I was a little sloppy on my legs as I reached the ground, and stumbled.

There was a rush of somebody toward me, and something struck me on the head.

I heard a laugh.

I fell. There was no joke to this matter, after all. I could feel the warm blood oozing down my cheek.

I scrambled to my feet, and in the darkness reached out to grapple my assailant.

I caught him fairly, and he went down. There was a shout as he fell, but I leaped over his prostrate body.

I heard answers to his shouts, and knew my best skill and efforts were needed in order to escape.

I found that I was in the rear of the building. There was just a small yard enclosure, and from this a narrow alley led toward a stable some distance in the rear. I took that simply by chance.

A hundred feet from the enclosure I ran into the stable. It was evidently the headquarters of a large transportation company, for many trucks and wagons were there.

I saw no one at first. I heard the sound of my pursuers. They made so much noise that again I thought it must be a joke. But there had been no joke about that blow I had received when I dropped from the leader.

I turned in and out among the various vehicles, and found my way to a stairs leading to the loft. I went up this as if I was made of air. I could see nothing in the Cimmerian darkness. I felt around. There was hay on the floor, and the odor of the stable was everywhere.

I shut the door leading from the stairway landing, and crouched in the hay. I heard the shouts of my pursuers.

I felt then that there was something more about the matter than had been explained.

This was no joke.

I was helpless against them, and waited with fear and trembling for them to come up and discover me.

They did not do so. I could tell when they were farther from the stable, and when they returned. They were incessantly calling to one another, and such things as were spoken concerning me were far from complimentary.

"We'll keep a good lookout to-night," I heard one say. "This fellow can't escape us like the other."

I knew they would do it. I burrowed in the hay and stretched myself for a rest. I felt that it would not be safe to leave the stable with them around.

My experiences of the day had been exhausting, and nature being too strong for me, I soon fell asleep.

I was awakened toward morning by hearing somebody breathing. I sat up and listened.

It certainly startled me. Somebody was inside the hay-loft.

I strained my ears, but all I heard was the heavy breathing on my right side of somebody evidently asleep.

I felt a queer sensation.

I sat up the rest of the night, listening to this startling sound. I knew nothing of the manner in which the English truckmen housed their employees. This might be a driver or a driver's helper.

Toward morning the sun came in through the chinks and the little window that was used to ventilate the place.

I was sitting in my corner, listening. In another corner I saw the hay move.

There was a rolling motion, and then the hay was thrown down, and a rising figure presented itself.

It was Querles.

CHAPTER X.

BACK TO BONDAGE.

It was so strange a meeting that I gasped. If the look on my face was anything like the expression with which Querles regarded me, we were both ornaments.

"Did they get you?" asked Querles.

"That seems to be a superfluous question," I replied. "I certainly would not be sleeping in a stable loft unless there was a reason for it."

"They got me. Now, look here, Gorris, we've got to have an understanding."

"I should say we had," I replied. "The understanding is that you and I return to New York, where you will proceed with due truthfulness to explain your actions."

"That is not the main question now," said Querles. "I am perfectly willing to go back. I know I am wanted. But there are circumstances right here that need our attention now. Aside from that, we need each other. What did that gang say to you?"

"That you were a prominent member of the Order of Level Humanity, and that I must sign as a member or take the consequences."

"That is about what they told me," answered Querles. "But in my case they had no one else to quote."

"Are you a member?"

"No. I wouldn't be hiding here if I was. I was with them long enough to learn that that gang is the most desperate company of robbers, cutthroats, and everything else in the world. All this tommyrot about leveling humanity amounts to nothing. They are simply out for the money. They would cut your throat for thirty cents."

My own mind was in a whirl. Here I was, in a most ridiculous position, hiding in a hay-loft with the man I had crossed the ocean to find.

I realized that there was some danger to be apprehended from the society, but that was not weighing on my mind so much as the question how to manage Querles. He had a manner that seemed to indicate he had done nothing wrong.

"Querles," I said, "there is more in this thing than I know. You were always supposed to be a rich man. Miss Vernon thought so, and so did Mrs. Vernon. You robbed Vernon, you robbed me, you owe everybody in New York, and you jilted Miss Vernon at the altar."

"All true," he said, with the utmost calmness. "But it was necessary."

"What was necessary?"

"Everything. But we can talk that over after we get to a more comfortable place," he said. "Now listen. When I came to London, of course the entire world that reads newspapers knew that I had fled. It was printed that I was rich, eccentric, easy with money, and so on. This Order for the Level of Humanity was organized, I believe, for no other purpose than to rob me. I escaped from them by knocking down a guard they left, and would have got away if I had hit him harder. But he called for help, and then I had to hide. I don't believe there is any such order. Just a crowd of broken-down sports who thought they could get money out of me."

"They wanted me to furnish a hundred thousand pounds as a member," I said.

"That is what they wanted me to do. Let's see how to get out of this place. I wonder who is on guard. I am hungry."

I went to the window. I could see no one. I went to the door, and so did Querles.

We opened it just to a crack. He bent down, and I, leaning over his shoulder, peered through the opening.

"I don't see any one," he said.

"Nor I either," I added.

He leaped up suddenly, and butted me in the stomach. For a moment I was almost unconscious. I fell back against some hay, and before I could rise to my feet again he had fled down the stairs.

I was not to be robbed of my prisoner, and after I got my breath I followed.

That is, when I say I followed, I mean that I went down the stairs three steps at a time, but I did not see Querles.

But getting down the stairs was not getting out of the place.

In front was the main building, covering the width of the lot with the exception of the driveway to the stable, and the gate was an iron one about eight feet high, and topped with spear points. On one side was a brick building and on the other a high brick wall.

There was but one explanation of the disappearance of Querles, and that was that he had gone inside the building through the laundry.

I carefully brushed the hay-seed from my clothes, and tried the back door of the building. It was locked.

I went back to the stable, and looked in at the horses. The majority of them were gone. Three remained. There was no one there, so I entered and searched the place. There was no Querles.

It now became certain that Querles had gone through the rear door of the laundry and locked it against me.

I looked for a ladder to scale the wall. There was none. I went like a frantic

man from one part of the enclosure to another, but could see no way out.

I looked longingly at the leader by means of which I could perhaps reach the room I had escaped from, but I felt that there was danger there as well as where I was.

I knew the lower part of the building was used as a laundry. A laundryman or a laundress could have no reason for delaying me, so I knocked at the door.

I waited for a moment and it was opened.

"Come in," said a voice, and the same gang I had met the night before seized me.

"You are welcome," said the chief spokesman. "Nothing pleases us more. Your friend came in and locked the door, and thought he was escaping. But we know this place too well to fear that. How is hay as a bed?"

I fought to the limit of my strength, but they were too many for me. I was hustled to the stairs and up to the very room from which I had escaped the night before. Querles was there, a man armed with a revolver watching him.

"Querles," I said, "you must have told the truth for once."

"Shut up!" he said. "I tried to get away. I am a fool. You are a bigger one. You've got to get us out of this scrape."

The five men composing the Order for the Level of Humanity gathered round me.

The leader spoke.

"Now, my friend Gorris," he said, "let us reach an amicable understanding. My name, if you wish to speak it, is Ali-Baba. I am the president of this society. Everything connected with this affair is known by us.

"This man Querles is a crook. We thought he had money, but he has failed so far to make good. We know that he deserted a girl in New York the day he was to be married. We know that her father wants him—wants him bad. He is a banker with plenty of money. Now, you were sent after him, and we have kept informed of your movements. He is trying to escape from justice. You are trying to get him back to justice. You are rich and know rich people. We must have a hundred thousand pounds."

It seemed to me that I was listening to a farce. But there was Querles, with a white, scared face, and anything that could scare Querles was worth thinking about.

"I can't furnish half a million dollars," I said. "I have no such amount, and no one to ask for it."

"Ask Vernon, the banker."

"I will not."

"Then, let me tell you, we make our living this way, but never had such a chance as this. You are too well known, and have too much influence to injure us, to be allowed to escape. You've got to give up the money, raise the money, get the money, steal the money, or in some way furnish us with that money. Otherwise you will never leave this place alive."

"For God's sake, do it!" said Querles.

With all their laughter and easy manner of speaking, I could see that these men were desperate characters.

"I would give you the money if I had it," I said. "But I have not."

"Do as Ali-Baba says," put in Querles. "Send word to Vernon. He wants me bad enough."

"Get the paper, pen, and ink!" commanded the fellow who called himself Ali-Baba.

It was hard to do, but what else was there?

"Write what I dictate," said the leader.

This was the letter that finally went to Mr. Vernon.

DEAR MR. VERNON:

I have found Querles, and he is willing to return and make full reparation for what he has done. He is also willing, so he says, to take any punishment that may be due him.

But, unfortunately, he and I are in the power of a small band of conspirators who know all the circumstances, and insist upon receiving one hundred thousand pounds before they release us.

I am not writing this as a request or as a favor. You told me to find Querles, and I have found him. If you want him, it is the purpose of these men to make you pay the money. If you want Querles, send money to the general post-office. If you don't want him, don't send the money. I will take my chances.

"You are a cheeky individual," said the leader, or president, or whatever he might be. "Sign your name."

I obeyed his command, and he placed the letter in an envelope.

"Now," said Ali-Baba, "you have proven yourself to be a brave man, and a gentleman. You spent the night in the hay-loft, but hay is not, as a rule, a good breakfast food for human beings. You shall have all you wish. I don't mean hay, but anything. What will you have?"

"All I want is a bit of steak, some potatoes, and some bread and coffee," I said.

Querles wanted more, and after taking down the order one of the band left the room.

"Now," said Ali-Baba, "I will post this letter. You are prisoners until it is answered."

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE TURN OF EVENTS.

QUERLES and I glared at each other like two wolves. I had not the slightest idea that Mr. Vernon would forward a half million simply to get Querles or release me. I wrote the letter under duress, and began the next minute to plan escape.

The man who called himself Ali-Baba was far and away the shrewdest member of the gang. It was easy to imagine that he had organized this modern order of robbers.

It was still impossible for me to determine to my own satisfaction whether Querles was the victim of the gang, or, as Ali-Baba said, a member.

There were now, after the departure of Ali-Baba to post the letter, three men guarding us. Neither Querles nor myself was bound, but the knowledge that the men watching us were armed made us cautious.

All thought of the desertion of Gladys Vernon, all thought of the wife, the other jilted girl, and all thought of the money acquired by fraud, became in my mind subservient to the idea of escape. I really did not care whether I took Querles or not.

I knew how I had escaped from that room before, but now there were men to watch me. But the first time I was bound and left supposedly helpless. This time I was free.

Ali-Baba was out posting the letter. The other man who had left the room was after our breakfast.

The three men who remained guarded us without once relinquishing their care.

I did not know whether the laundry down-stairs was filled with other members of the gang or not. I only knew that the matter of importance was to escape.

The three guards spoke to one another on some subject that interested them. I bowed my head and pretended to be thinking. In reality I was studying.

The little round table at which I sat was light, but strong. The guards were all at the left. A fit of desperation overcame me, and I seized the table by its legs and swung it around me.

It hit one of the guards in the head, and knocked him down. I struck another. He fell.

I laid about me with the table until, after several attempts to reach me, the three members of the Order of Level Humanity were level themselves on the floor.

"Come!" I said to Querles.

We rushed from the room and down the stairs. If there was anybody on guard on the first floor, we did not know it.

Querles seemed to cling to me as a friend. Yet I knew that at the first opportunity he would attack me.

Once in the street, we were practically safe, for on the corner above there was a policeman.

"Now," said Querles, "what do you propose to do?"

"I propose first," I said, "to cable Mr. Vernon to ignore my letter. That is, not to send any money. Then we will take passage on the earliest steamer and return to New York."

"Gorris," said Querles, "let us have a talk about this. Now, I'll speak low, for we are in the street, but you are a fool."

"I am willing to admit that on general terms," I replied. "The thing is the present application."

"That," said the man I held as my prisoner, "is a small matter to quibble

over. I have learned something since I came to London. I admire Ali-Baba and his gang. They live well. They drink champagne. They smoke good cigars. On their earnings? No, sir. I tried to do the same thing, but did not have the system they have.

"Now, you have written to Mr. Vernon for what would amount to about half a million dollars. This would not be sent to them, but to you at the post-office. Good! Now, we can get at it.

"I have taken some money, ten thousand of which is yours. I had to do it, Gorris. I must live. Vernon has plenty of money. Now then, Gorris, why not let Vernon send that money, and let us divide it between us? I need money, and you want your ten thousand dollars. Very well. Let him send the money, and we will go somewhere—to some other country—and live like princes."

"I don't need money," was my reply. "I followed you not only for the ten thousand dollars, but because it seemed to be my duty to find you. I do not desire to become a party to any such scheme as you propose. I shall cable Mr. Vernon not to send the money."

"Well," he said with an air of irritation, "do as you please."

We walked toward the Atlantic Cable Company's office. I had in my mind just what I wanted to say by wire. I sat at a small desk to write it, and Querles strolled out by the door.

I wrote as follows to Mr. Vernon:

Don't send money—am free! Querles and I return next steamer.

GORRIS.

Querles strolled back into the office.

"Got it ready?" he asked. "Hurry up. Mr. Vernon and Gladys are outside."

I sprang to my feet.

"You've saved money," he said. "Mr. Vernon and Gladys are outside in a cab. I spoke to them. They are willing to pardon me if I make good the losses my —er—friends have sustained. I've been foolish, Gorris, I admit. But—there, that is Vernon calling. He wants you."

I turned toward the door. There was a carriage at the curb, and I could just see the face of a man, but not to distinguish his features.

"You won't need to cable," added Querles. "And now we can settle our little affair in London."

It was a strange turn for a man to take. Knowing the fellow to be what he was, I did not trust him.

"Mr. Vernon is not there," I said. "That is some one else. I will not walk into a trap."

"That isn't a trap!" said Querles. "That's a four-wheeler. And I'll swear by all that's good and great that Vernon is in it. Come on and see."

I stepped to the curb, and as I reached the cab the door was opened.

"That is not——" I began, but I got no further.

Querles caught me under the arms and swung me forward. The man in the hansom grabbed my shoulders and lifted me. In the twinkling of an eye I was being carried away.

I struggled to the utmost of my strength.

Here was a pretty condition of affairs. I struck the occupant of the cab, but as I did so, and he returned the blow, he also slammed a handkerchief against my face.

It stifled me. There was a strange and peculiar odor. I thought I recognized it as chloroform, but could not be sure. My mind was in a whirl. I became dizzy. Dreams came to me, and then—oblivion.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF A STRANGE REVENGE.

I REMEMBER that I first felt a sensation as though my heart had stopped beating. Then my returning consciousness brought the nausea that usually follows the administration of chloroform.

As I slowly came around to my senses I saw that I was in a strange room. It was not only strange to me, but it was strange in appearance.

I was lying on a small bed, and the room was practically unfurnished with the exception of the bed and a quaint old chair. In that chair sat Querles.

"You were long enough coming round," he said. "I've sat here for hours. Gorris, you are the most obstinate and the most objectionable friend

I ever had. I had it in my mind to kill you."

Was I in the power of a madman?

What was the secret of his actions? Could it be mere degeneracy?

"Where are we?" I mumbled.

I felt ill.

"Oh, you don't need to know now. I have waited to have a good talk with you. A heart-to-heart talk, they call it, don't they? You see, Gorris, you have upset my plans. You had no business to follow me."

"I think I had," was my answer. "When a man robs me of ten thousand dollars it seems my business to find him. Are you just a rascal or are you crazy?"

"Well, we won't discuss that. The thing is to plan our course when we get the money from Mr. Vernon. Dear man, how I love him!"

"There is some mystery in this that is beyond me," I said with as much emphasis as I could muster. "You always seemed a decent enough fellow. Of course, I knew nothing of your financial affairs. You are a thief, and a rogue generally. But why under the sun of heaven did you jilt Gladys Vernon at the altar?"

He sat looking moodily out of a small window that opened toward water. I judged it to be the Thames, but was not sure.

"Revenge," he said.

There was so peculiar a note in his tone that I stared.

"Revenge!" I echoed. "On whom?"

"Oh, everybody concerned. Gorris, when I first made your acquaintance at the club I picked you out for a nice, good little boy, perfectly innocent of wrong, quite willing to be friends with anybody who moved in the same social atmosphere, and all that.

"My subsequent observations proved to my own satisfaction that I was right. But let me tell you, Gorris, there's a whole lot in this world you've got to learn yet. Learn? I should say so!

"I will explain my position. Listen, for it is interesting, but not long.

"My mother was Eliza Thorpe. She lived in a small village not a million miles from New York. She was one of these meek, sweet, trusting country girls. Now, I'm not saying that all country girls are meek and sweet, but you know that a country girl who is young, confiding, innocent of all knowledge of sin in this world is the best creature God ever put on earth.

"All right, we've got that part of my pedigree down. In this village Mr. George Vernon, a young bank clerk, spent his summers—that is, whatever vacation he had. He boarded with my mother's aunt, and at her boarding-house met my mother, Eliza Thorpe.

"Vernon was a slick article, a smooth talker, and always was well dressed. At that time he was twenty-five and Eliza Thorpe was seventeen.

"At first, on my mother's part there was admiration, for Vernon was a good-looking chap. After the love came confidence concealed. But Vernon paid her so much attention, taking her to picnics, country fairs, and this and that, that she soon grew to like him, and then the confidences were mutual.

"To make a long story short, Gorris, Vernon sought the love of Eliza Thorpe for all he was worth. He walked with her at the riverside every evening. The trusting heart went out to him; the believing ears listened to his words of love.

"Vernon asked Eliza Thorpe to become his wife, and she consented.

"You must remember, Gorris, that it was not like a man asking a girl to marry him if he is rich. He was a clerk. He had talked nicely to her, and she said she loved him. I believe she did.

"The day was set for their wedding, and the village people gathered. Mr. Thorpe, the father of Eliza, was delighted. He was a man of small means, and though he took good care of his family, he could leave them little.

"Eliza was his favorite. That she was to marry a New York bank clerk, with all his opportunities before him, filled the old gentleman with delight. She would be well provided for. Vernon was a young man who filled everybody with confidence in him.

"The day came, Gorris, and Eliza Thorpe stood in a church and waited.

"Vernon did not put in an appearance. It was learned that he had left town. Eliza Thorpe was prostrated, for she loved Vernon.

"She was taken ill and lay several days at the door of death. Her parents took her on a little journey and hoped that the change might do her a lot of good. Well, in a way it did; but it never healed the wounded heart.

"Alexander Querles came to that town. He was a man of whom everybody said that he was bright and energetic. He was poor; but he met Eliza Thorpe and loved her.

"Leaping from the love of a man who had jilted her and made her the laughing-stock of the village to the arms of a man everybody liked, she married my father. I was their only child.

"When I was about sixteen years of age I heard the story. Vernon had married a rich girl.

"Boosted by her wealth, his own fortunes began to rise at once. I looked him up. I studied him. He was fond of his daughter. I made her acquaintance. I registered a vow that I would serve that daughter as he had served my mother.

"I was poor. There was no method of breaking the reserve of the family unless I had money.

"I began borrowing. I began cheating. I did everything to get money enough to float on the silvery clouds of wealth in order to attract their attention.

"I did so. From the first Mrs. Vernon liked me, because I had the money. Money? I rolled in it.

"I avenged my mother. That ends that part of it. Now comes along a fellow I knew—being yourself—and pursues me. I do not belong to the Society for the Leveling of Humanity, or anything like it.

"That society had the same use for me they had for you. I was really in more danger than you, because they knew my reputation. When a man is down, keep him down.

"They knew that I had run away. I was legitimate prey. But they did not know how desperate I had become. All the money I had raised I had spent to win the regard of that girl's mother. You know I did so. You know the rest."

"But," I said, "what about the other wife?"

"I told you once I had none. Oh, maybe a common-law affair; but that has nothing to do with you. The point I am getting at—well, there are two of them, and they are as follows:

"I swore to injure Vernon. I have done so to some extent, but not enough to satisfy me. Gladys never loved me. It was the money I was supposed to have.

"I swore I would get his money. I did get some of it, but now you have assisted me, and I will bring the scoundrel to his knees.

"Before God, I will! My mother shall be avenged!

"You can't leave this room until that money comes. When it does come you shall have your share.

"Until that time you are a prisoner."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MATTER OF A REGISTERED LETTER.

WHILE Querles was talking I was slowly gathering strength. I lay and listened and at the same time gazed at him.

Here was a man between whom and myself a friendship of at least two years had existed—a man I would have stood by through thick and thin as an honorable fellow.

He spoke in a smooth, easy way, as if the monstrous wrongs he had done were nothing extraordinary.

I wondered what next would develop in his character.

What puzzled me more than anything else was the fact that hitherto no one had breathed a word of reproach against him. His mania for forging signatures seemed to have just developed.

"Querles," I said, "I can understand your desire to avenge the slight that Mr. Vernon put upon your mother, but I don't understand why you should rob me of ten thousand dollars. We have been friends since we met, eaten at the club together and gone to the theater together, as well as to various houses. It is inexplicable."

"Not at all. Having set upon a career that needed money, and having no capacity to make it, money must be had in the only way I could get it. I knew

you had a fortune and would not suffer."

"But you want Vernon's money, you say. Yet you took only half as much from Vernon as you did from me."

"I hadn't got through with Vernon. When I left the hotel on the fifth of the month I anticipated no such fuss as you kicked up. You can make more trouble than anybody I ever knew. You always seemed to be such an easy-going chap I did not expect this of you. But I am glad you did raise the row now, because through the Order of Level Humanity we will get a good half-million of Vernon's money."

"But what good will that do? We've got to go back, and then it will be taken from us."

"Oh, I'll take care of that."

It was a new Querles to me. I could not understand him. He had always been suave, and an easy talker. But where he had hidden his masterful talent for crime I could not understand.

"Where am I?" I asked. "I was pushed into that cab and chloroformed. Now, why did you do that?"

"Oh, well, you see, you developed a stubbornness that was not in accord with my wishes. You insisted on sending that insane cablegram to Vernon to prevent him from forwarding the money. Having gone so far, I had no idea of going back.

"I have not the slightest objection to telling you where you are. This is a private sanitarium. I am supposed to be your private physician. Of course, when the money comes you will be free. But everybody here has it well understood that you need constant care, and all the arguments you might use would not get them to release you. I fixed all that."

It was certainly a strange condition of affairs. I pondered over it as well as I could with a sick stomach and aching head, but finally gave it up.

Querles did not leave me. He sat in my room by day and slept with me at night. He was as calmly master of the situation as any man could be. I wondered if there was a way to defeat his purpose, but could not just then manage to find it.

It was simply necessary for me to wait, and then when the time did come, act as the situation permitted.

Querles made a fairly generous master. I was well fed. No person actually entered the room. An attendant would come to the door with a tray, and Querles, who had a key, would unlock it. We ate together.

The attendant who had charge of the room did not speak to me, and would not answer me if I spoke to him.

In this way we waited long enough for my letter to reach Mr. Vernon and for his reply to reach the London general delivery.

This would require about two weeks.

"I don't like this, Querles," I said one day. "If you are determined to rob Mr. Vernon of such an amount, why did you not do it alone? You might have gone to the post-office and used my name."

"I know—I know all that. But you would have stopped the money. Don't you see, Gorris, after the plan was laid by our friends, it struck me as being a good idea to borrow.

"I don't know how Vernon will send the money. He may send it in a way that will require identification. That would make you an absolute necessity. Oh, I've thought it all out."

"But suppose Mr. Vernon does not send the money? Then what will you do?"

"Think up some other scheme that will get it out of him."

I gave up argument as a useless task, and waited.

No person was guarded more closely than I. I longed for freedom. Some may wonder why I did not attack Querles and get the key and let myself out.

I did think of that, but Querles was armed with a revolver and I was not armed at all.

More than that, if he had given the information he claimed he had, and I could see no reason to doubt it, I would not free myself, but would be captured about the building, and perhaps get into worse trouble.

It was best to wait.

The two weeks passed.

"I think, Gorris," Querles remarked one day, "that you have sufficiently re-

covered to take a drive. I am glad, as your physician ought to be, to see you so much improved. I will order a cab."

He rang for the attendant.

"My patient is feeling better to-day," he said with a smile. "I shall take him out for a drive. Please order me a hansom."

"All right, sir," came the answer.

It was useless to lose temper and berate Querles. He was perfectly calm, and immune from the shafts of anger I might have hurled at him. We walked to the door, and Querles touched me on the arm.

"Gorris, let me tell you a story. It may interest you. Two desperate men were in a cab one day—one a prisoner of the other. He tried to escape and was shot."

"That so?" I answered. "Too bad."

A man I supposed to be the head of the institution came to the door, and he and Querles had a pleasant chat, but he did not come near me.

Outside there was a hansom waiting. We entered it.

"General post-office," said Querles.

"Don't you think it would be wiser to go first to King's Hotel and see if there is anything there?"

"No; I think we can take our time about that. We will go to the post-office."

When we arrived there Querles took me by the arm. Now I could have called a policeman, but the first thing Querles would have done would be to prove that I was an inmate of an institution.

Having found our way to the general delivery department, I asked for any mail there might be for Arthur Gorris. I scarcely hoped, and certainly did not expect, an answer from Mr. Vernon.

It therefore surprised me when the clerk handed me a letter.

"Ah!" said Querles. "Things are coming our way. It is from Vernon."

My hands trembled as I tore open the envelope. Querles stood over me with a tigerish look.

The letter ran as follows:

My dear Gorris:

I do not in the slightest degree understand how you have placed yourself, or permitted yourself to be placed in such an uncomfortable position. A half million seems to be an excessive ransom. Knowing, however, that you are a man of means, I apprehend that you are ready to repay the amount, regarding it as a loan.

There is a doubt in my mind, however, having ascertained from your bank that your balance is overdrawn.

It therefore seems to me that I should be careful, and I have taken such precautions as I considered best.

Inquire at the registered letter department for a letter which will settle matters, I think, to our mutual satisfaction.

Mr. Vernon's signature was attached to the letter. Querles read it over.

"There is nothing wrong with that," he said. "Let us go and get the registered letter."

We went to the proper department, and I made inquiries for a registered letter for Arthur Gorris.

There were questions to be answered, and I tried to explain in some plausible manner why I had it sent there instead of to my address.

This was not an easy task, but after showing my letter the clerk smiled and said he would look.

Querles and I were not the only ones at the window; others stood waiting.

When the clerk returned he said:

"Mr. Gorris, there is no letter for you here. There was one yesterday, but it was taken and signed for by yourself."

"Impossible!" I said. "I have not been here."

"I will show you the book," he answered.

He walked away again and soon returned with a book.

Upon the page devoted to the day previous my own name appeared.

It was attached as a receipt for a registered letter.

I stood like a statue of putty, looking at Querles; and he stared back at me.

Somebody else had gathered in Mr. Vernon's money.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HOPELESS CASE.

I TURNED away with a sickening dread of some new impending disaster.

Gladys Vernon was farther away now

than ever. The expression on the face of Querles was defying in its fixed placidity.

"This is a deuce of a mess!" I cried. "We are in a hole now for sure."

"Yes, it looks that way," he said. "I'll see a policeman."

He left me, and I stood like a dolt, waiting for him to return. As Querles went swiftly out of sight two men stepped toward me.

One of them, a short, stoutly built fellow, placed his hand on my shoulder.

"You did not receive the letter you looked for, Mr. Gorris." He spoke pleasantly.

"No," I answered. "There is some mistake about it. I——"

"But your name is Arthur Gorris?"

"Yes, that is my name."

"Then my duty is to tell you that you are under arrest."

"Under arrest!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he said. "We are from Scotland Yard. Don't make a fuss. It will go easier with you."

"But on what charge am I arrested?" I asked.

"Oh, you'll hear all about that. Come along."

I was so bewildered that I could not think of a reply that would help me. I could do nothing but submit and permit them to conduct me from the post-office. Once behind closed doors in a police station I had time to think.

What, I asked myself, could this mean? I had been, I knew, the cause of Mr. Vernon sending a letter supposed to contain money, and a large amount of money. But I had not received it. I spent a most uncomfortable hour. Then a keeper came to me.

"Do you want to see anybody?" was his greeting.

"Yes, I should say I do," I answered. "I want to see the consul general of the United States."

"All right. You pay the expenses. I'll send a messenger."

I took a ten-dollar-bill from my pocket, American money, not yet having had it changed, and the keeper took it.

"I'll see," he said.

He left me, and it was late in the day when the door opened again. This time a young man entered and the door was closed.

The visitor carried a note-book and a fountain-pen.

"I am from the consulate," he said. "I may say I also represent the embassy. My name is Esmay. Yours is Gorris?"

"Yes," I answered.

"This," he said, "seems to be rather a complicated and serious matter. The charge being made in New York, we can do nothing for you except see that you get fair play."

"But I am not getting fair play," I protested. "I did send for money, but it was at the pistol point. I did not want the money. I am rich enough. If I had received the money I would have returned it to Mr. Vernon."

"Vernon! Yes, that is the name. He sent on word to arrest you when you asked for the registered letter. The message came yesterday."

"But you did not arrest the man who got the letter," I cried. "I was looking for a man named Querles for Mr. Vernon. He insisted on having Querles. I asked for assistance at Scotland Yard. A man I never saw before came to me and said that he was from Scotland Yard. He said he knew where Querles was, and for me to accompany him and identify Querles."

"I see. And then what happened?"

"I was taken into a sort of restaurant. There were four men there, and it was evident they had been eating. I was introduced. The man who brought me was one of the gang, and not from Scotland Yard.

"I was ordered to send a letter to Mr. Vernon and demand a hundred thousand pounds for ransom. I did so, and have Mr. Vernon's reply."

"Well, you received the money. What did you do with it?"

"I did not get the money. Some one else, who must have kept close watch, got the registered letter."

"I am afraid that won't go, but I'll see what I can do. So far as Querles is concerned, we have nothing to do with him except that he must receive fair treatment. There is no complaint against Querles."

This was a staggerer. Mr. Esmay wrote down some notes in his book and left me. Then I was fed, and after that passed a most miserable night. The next day the young man returned.

"I can do nothing," he said. "Mr. Vernon insists on having you sent back. You must remain here until a New York detective comes for you."

"What about Querles?"

"There is no charge against him, for it could not be proven that he had anything to do with the matter."

"Why—he had more than I! It was to catch Querles I——"

"Yes; you said that before. But I can't change things now. Somebody will be after you in about a week."

A week of imprisonment staring me in the face!

When he had gone I sat down to think. It was almost impossible to think straight, and as for any plans, they were out of the question. Still, thoughts like these ran in my head.

Was or was not Querles one of the gang? If not, how did they know anything about me or Mr. Vernon? Had he pretended to be in hiding from them just to be able to govern my movements?

Had his pretended flight been simply part of a well-laid plan? It seemed so. And now he had gone free, and I was to be taken back to New York as a criminal!

But who had the money?

Except for the confinement and the anxiety concerning the money, my life in prison was not uncomfortable. I was well fed, and my room was clean and neat.

I had been there about seven days, or perhaps eight, when I was informed that a detective had come for me.

"All right," I said.

The detective appeared.

"Are you Arthur Gorris?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. "And I want to say that this is a shame and an outrage. I am as innocent of crime as a baby. I did not write to Mr. Vernon with the intention of getting his money. I explained the circumstances fully in my letter, and have one from him that indicates his faith in me."

"Yes, I know," he answered. "But it was a strange thing, you know. I have talked with Scotland Yard, and they say your story is absurd."

"I say it is the truth!" I exclaimed angrily. "If I was free to act, and had the time, I think I could prove it. But what can I do if I am taken off to New York? That won't bring back Vernon's money."

"No, but it will give him some satisfaction to see you. We start back tomorrow."

We chatted a while, and then he left.

The next day he called for me again.

"Come," he said; "it is time to go."

"Is there no hope?" I asked.

"None here. I must obey orders. There may be hope in New York."

With a sigh, I got ready to go. There was nothing else to do.

CHAPTER XV.

A GLOWING OUTLOOK.

BERTRAM, the detective, it appeared, had engaged passage for himself and me on the Majestic. It was with no joyful feelings that I accompanied him on board.

Still there was within me a hope that, upon arriving in New York, I might be able to explain matters satisfactorily to Mr. Vernon.

Our trip over was uneventful. Bertram was not unpleasantly officious, and I doubt if anybody save him and myself knew that I was a prisoner. Detectives are more considerate than their usual reputations would lead one to suppose.

It might be said by some that this was not a courtesy on his part, because there was no way by which I could escape unless I jumped overboard. I was in no mood to do that, but I considered his actions as being courteous. Many would have delighted in showing their authority.

It was not a pleasant voyage to me. I had been placed in so false a light, with all the appearances against me, that I almost despaired of ever redeeming myself in the eyes of Mr. Vernon. And unless I did that, I knew there was no reason to hope that I might win Gladys.

We left the steamer with the mob of

passengers, and Bertram called a cab. I was taken at once to police headquarters. Here Inspector Manly and the commissioner had me taken to the inspector's room.

"Gorris," said the commissioner, a mild sort of man, "this is a strange thing in police work. I don't think I ever knew a similar case."

"I know I never did," I responded.

"There is something so disturbing in the mystery of the manner in which you obtained the money."

"There is something more disturbing in the mystery of the manner in which I did not obtain the money," I said with some asperity.

"But you did get the money."

"No, I did not. The police of London would not believe my story."

"Well, to be perfectly frank with you, I don't believe the police of New York will, either."

"But," I said, "I was a prisoner, held by Querles. Querles was the real criminal in the case. He compelled me to permit Mr. Vernon to send the money."

"That is a good story as far as it goes. If you had told that at first it might have been believed, but that yarn about the gang of highbinders that held you up, and the story that the very man you accuse now was not one of them, don't seem to fit well together. You see, we have not been idle. I have been at work, but it is not my duty to tell you what I have done.

"Now, I can commit you to Ludlow Street Jail, or you may wait here in the inspector's room while I send for Mr. Vernon. You may also send for a lawyer if you wish."

"I don't care to see Mr. Vernon until I see a lawyer first," I said. "Get me Mr. Otter. His office is in the big building at the corner of Wall Street and Broadway. Jim Otter. He is the only one I want to see. Will you send for him?"

"You may telephone for him if you wish," answered the commissioner.

I quickly availed myself of the privilege.

Otter was in his office, and, after talking over the wire to his pretty stenographer, I got Jim himself.

"Jim," I said, "I am under arrest. Gorris—Arthur Gorris. I am at police headquarters. Come up at once, will you?"

"Yes," came the answer; "at once."

I spent a most impatient hour. I knew that Otter was a busy man, and "at once" with him might mean any time within two or three hours.

Jim Otter deserves some description.

He was of angular build, his spare shoulders square, his face about as homely as a face could be, but intelligence shone from his eyes.

He had never, so far as my knowledge went, been dressed stylishly. He wore anything that suited his fancy. His trousers bagged at the knees, and he never had them pressed. His coats were shiny as a rule, and I had known him to argue a case before a supreme court judge with no neck-scarf on. He won the case, too.

When at last Otter came in, he ambled easily to a chair. He reached out his hand to me, and I took it. There was inspiration in his presence.

"Now," he said, "begin at the beginning and tell me the whole story. I apprehend it is something connected with that Vernon business. What you had to do with it I don't know, but it is commonly understood that you had a good deal."

"Well, I had nothing to do with the Querles business, Jim. I could not help it if he skipped out."

"I know. You were not brought back under arrest because he skipped out. Go ahead and tell your story."

I told him the entire business, with a strict adherence to truth and details. It took me some little time to describe the manner in which I was taken to the restaurant over the laundry, and the episode of finding Querles in the stable loft took another half-hour.

Jim listened attentively, and when I had finished he rose from his chair without a comment.

"What can you do?" I asked.

"Oh," he said, "I'll see Vernon first. You'll have to go to jail, but that won't kill you. You'll come before a magistrate, and I will get bail for you."

"But look here," I said, "when you see Mr. Vernon, ask him why he had me arrested, and not Querles."

"Oh, we'll take care of that. There

are two or three things connected with the case that I want to study."

He left me, and Bertram laughed.

"That's a good one," he said, "whether it is true or not. The funny part of it is that you can't prove a thing you said."

"Yes, I can," I answered.

"What can you prove?"

"That I was arrested."

I was next taken by Bertram to Ludlow Street Jail. My pedigree was entered in the big book, and as soon as the preliminary work was done I was conducted to a cell.

The cell was neat enough and clean enough. There was a comfortable bed, a chair, and two windows to let in light.

I slept that night but little. There was a fear in my mind that Mr. Vernon would not retract his charge and that I was sure to be sent to prison.

I was feeling blue and exhausted the next morning when Otter came.

He looked fresh and natty in a new suit, and I felt the reverse, notwithstanding the fact that my clothes probably cost more than his.

"Well?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"It is a sort of a bad case, Gorris," he said. "Vernon will not give up. It is not the money. I told him that you were willing to repay him, and asked him how much money he sent. It is not the money Vernon is sore about. It is the fact that a man he trusted as he did you should take the course you did. There are many things that have so incensed Vernon against you that he declines almost to talk about the matter at all.

"He insists that you were an accomplice of Querles and knew that he was going away."

"Very well," I said despondently. "How much money did he send?"

"He says there was at least fifty thousand dollars in the letter. That was as near as I could come to the truth."

"But," I said, "Mr. Vernon has known me for many years. He knows that I can repay that fifty thousand. He also knows that I did not need the money."

"Oh, I know," said Otter. "But Vernon is a queer man. You asked for half a million. He sent fifty thousand. You and Querles were supposed to be enemies, yet you were together when you were arrested."

"But I can explain all that."

"You have already done so. It's a queer case. Your explanation is not accepted at all by Mr. Vernon. Now, if there is anything more you can say to help me on the case, you must let me know it."

"There is nothing," I said, "except that if Mr. Vernon sent fifty thousand dollars to me, I will pay it back."

"I told him so, but he will not listen. It is not the loss of the money. He says you have told a preposterous lie. His sole object is to punish you."

"Then let it go to trial," I said. "I am tired of it all. I am tired of Vernon, and the only one in the lot I do care for does not care for me."

"Now you are getting at something I know nothing of. Will you kindly explain?"

"Yes," I said. "I love Gladys Vernon."

"The deuce you do! Have you spoken to her about it?"

"No."

"Well, that is about the most sensible thing I've heard yet. You've got yourself in an awful mess."

"But Vernon sent me."

"I know that. He said so. I'll see what I can do."

His manner was brusk, and he bade me a curt adieu as he left.

I had sent for the man I thought the best lawyer in New York, and he had left me with that encouragement.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRESH HORROR.

On the following day I had the usual breakfast given to those who are held on a charge but not convicted. I asked permission to read a paper, and one was brought me.

I had just about finished that when the keeper announced that Mr. Vernon and Otter were there to see me.

At first a feeling of wrath toward Mr.

Vernon welled up within me, but it was followed by a question whether, after all, the banker was not perhaps justified in suspecting me.

I had not determined how to meet him when he and my lawyer entered the cell.

Otter merely nodded.

"Gorris," began Mr. Vernon, "I have had a long talk with your lawyer. He tells me that you claim to be innocent of all intent to do wrong."

"I not only claim to be innocent of intent to do wrong, but I claim that I have done nothing wrong," I answered. "Has Mr. Otter told you the story?"

"He has told me the story you told him. Now, Arthur, you know I trusted you. There was not a man in all creation I would trust sooner than I would you. But it appears to me that you have abused my confidence shamefully."

"Mr. Vernon," I answered, "I should not have been arrested. Every word that I ever told you was the absolute truth. You have told Mr. Otter you sent fifty thousand dollars in that letter."

"Yes, and I was a fool to do it. I took your signature to your bank, and they said it was genuine. I believed that if you sent such a letter you were sincere, truthful, my friend. I could not at that moment send the full amount you demanded. I sent fifty thousand dollars."

"And you believe me capable of stealing it!"

"You and Querles were together. You and Querles asked for the letter."

"Yes, and Querles was my master. Can't you understand? I sent to you for the money because I was compelled to do so. A man does not stop to reason when he sees a revolver pointed at his head, and the man behind the revolver tells him to obey orders. That was my situation at the time I wrote for money."

"But the police of London say there is no such gang. I have been in communication with them constantly. I did not wish to do you an injustice, but you were a close friend of Querles, and what could I think save that you and he had concocted the scheme to rob me."

"Still, you sent fifty thousand dollars, you say."

"Yes, but I believed in you then implicitly. It was only when you and Querles were together asking for the letter that you showed your hand."

"I haven't shown it yet. I don't know what you intend to do with me, but when I have my freedom I'll get Querles and have the satisfaction of breaking him up in small pieces. Remember, Mr. Vernon, that you sent me after Querles. It was not my intention to follow him."

"There is something in that, sir," said Otter.

It was evident that Mr. Vernon was greatly agitated. He walked up and down the cell, and his face was seamed with deep lines.

"Mr. Otter," he said, "I do not wish to seem unjust. I do not wish to be unduly harsh. But I must be sure. My wife is still in a terrible condition of nervous prostration, and my daughter is even worse. Now, when this new shock comes, we are all broken up. It is terrible.

"It may sound like a slight affair to say merely that a man did not appear at the altar to be married. It may sound like a fairy tale to say that a man who is recognized in the financial world sent fifty thousand dollars to London to free a man who was already free. But such has been the case, and I don't know what to do.

"I sent word to have Gorris arrested, thinking to land him in prison. I was so worked up over the whole business I did not know what I was doing. Now, I think I will take my wife and daughter and go to Europe. I can't stand the strain much longer."

While Mr. Vernon was speaking, Otter was fumbling with his watch-chain. He did not seem to be much interested in what the banker was saying, but I knew that he was taking in every word.

"This brings to me a thought that perhaps could be acted upon or improved upon," he said when Mr. Vernon finished.

"Well," said the banker, "let us hear the thought so we can plan an improvement."

"It is simply this," said Otter. "You say you think of going to Europe. Now, you have acknowledged that you thought a great deal of Gorris. You did not doubt his honesty until you learned that

he had been with Querles when he asked for the registered letter. Gorris states that he never received the letter. and that Querles had overcome him with a revolver at the time he escaped and wished to cable you not to send the money.

"There is at least a reasonable doubt about Gorris' guilt. Give him a chance and save a law-suit. He is willing to make good the fifty thousand dollars, and is in love—never mind that—he is ready now to hand you a certified check for fifty thousand dollars, the amount you sent to ransom him from the gang. Now, why not compromise the thing a little? Why not—let me see——

"You are going to Europe. Your wife and daughter are not in good health, and of course you will take along sufficient help. But you will be alone, practically. Why not take Gorris along, accept his fifty thousand dollars, and let him get at this gang if he can, and find Querles also.

"The thing is clear enough to me. I have no doubt that Querles was working with that gang. The mere fact that he was in the hay-loft of the stable matters nothing. Gorris escaped by climbing down a leader. He found the stable and went in to hide, and fell asleep. When he awoke there was Querles.

"There is nothing to show that Querles was there when Gorris entered. It may have been a preconcerted affair, and Querles went to the stable to wait for Gorris to discover him. He then had Gorris in his power because he was armed. It seems to me there is a chance there for Querles to be proven one of the gang. The fact that the business took place in London does not affect the question. There are hands across the sea.

"The fact that the police of London say there is no such gang amounts to nothing. The police of New York will tell you that there are no thieves in New York, and every night some house is robbed.

"I suggest that we release Gorris, and permit him to accompany you to London, which place you will undoubtedly visit, and with your eyes upon him, and if you wish, the eyes of the police, let him do his best to find this gang who have your money. What do you think of that, Mr. Vernon?"

The banker sat on the edge of my cot a moment, thinking.

His keen, heavy-browed eyes were fixed on me.

"Gorris," he said suddenly, "do you solemnly swear that you are not guilty of any attempt to defraud me?"

"I swear it upon my hopes of salvation."

"And will you swear that you were really in the hands of a gang who compelled you at the point of a pistol to send for that money?"

"Yes, sir, with the same oath."

"Then, Otter, I think I will adopt your suggestion. But, Gorris, look here. Play me false once and I will shoot you like a dog. I don't want your money. The loss of the money is nothing to me. I want to know that you are honest, because I liked you. Otter, fix up the matter, will you?"

"Yes," said Otter. "It will not be a hard thing to do. All you've got to do is either to withdraw the charge or go get somebody to go bail for Gorris."

"I'll withdraw the charge," said the banker. "Let us get off as soon as possible."

"I seem to be spending my life on the ocean just now," I remarked with a laugh.

My heart had suddenly become light. I was free from the law, and was to take a trip once more across the Atlantic, and this time in the company of Gladys Vernon.

Life looked rosy to me.

Otter managed to have the charge withdrawn upon Mr. Vernon's affidavit, and I accompanied him home.

Mr. Vernon was not a man to melt suddenly. What he had consented to do was merely from a sense of justice. He did not show me any special friendship. We talked a while in his library, and then I went to my own rooms.

The evening papers were full of the affair. They called the whole thing a fizzle. They said that Mr. Vernon had good cause to hold me, but that there must be some hidden reason why he was afraid to do so.

This sentiment was repeated in the papers the following morning. I was

still, in the opinion of the public, a rogue.

I had not seen Gladys. I did not ask to see her. It was enough to know that we were to be on the ship together, and that the charge against me had been withdrawn.

I drew sufficient money from the bank by depositing some bonds, and with that got myself in decent shape to start. I left all the preliminaries to Mr. Vernon. I was glad to do so. I felt that he was treating me fairly, and that all I could do before I got to London was to permit him to have his own way.

The days passed slowly, wearily. I wanted to see Gladys.

At last I received word from Mr. Vernon that he wanted to see me at once. I went to his house.

"We start day after to-morrow," he said after the first greetings. "You can't see Mrs. Vernon or Gladys now. But you will see them on the ship. We sail on the Ulria. Now, I have made arrangements that may seem queer. There are reasons why Gladys should have her mother with her at night. Neither is well, and they must have a maid. I have engaged two staterooms. One a large double one for them. The other for you and me."

"That suits me very well, sir," I answered.

I knew he wanted to have me constantly under his eye.

I met the party at the pier, and we greeted each other with rather a distant coldness. Gladys was pale, and Mrs. Vernon so wrapped up one could scarcely see her face. It was apparent that she was very feeble.

Our staterooms were comfortable, and as Mr. Vernon and I had agreed I soon became part of their circle, but there was always that restraint that seemed to indicate suspicion.

I met Gladys on deck, and we had frequent conversations, but Mrs. Vernon was always present, and I did not speak of personal matters.

The third morning after passing Sandy Hook I awoke at an early hour. It was daylight, and through the deadlight came a ray of morning sun.

I had, on the previous mornings, found Mr. Vernon awake. This morning he lay silent. I spoke to him, but he did not reply. I knew he was an early riser, and so I shook him.

He was dead.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THERE IS HIS MURDERER!"

I WAS almost stunned by this new disaster. I stood on the floor of the stateroom, unable even to begin to dress, looking at the white face of the man who had supposed I had plotted to rob him.

There flashed over me an instinctive fear that I was in worse trouble than before. The horror of it overcame me.

Gradually recovering enough of my mental strength to dress myself, I managed to get on trousers and shoes. In this incomplete costume I rushed to the purser's cabin.

Mr. Simmons, the purser, had seemed to me a pleasant and congenial man. We had had several chats together, and it was to him I now turned for aid.

I found him at his little desk. He looked up, nodded, and then stared.

"You look ill, Mr. Gorris," he said. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"Wrong!" I echoed. "I should say so. May I have a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"Certainly," he answered, swinging around.

I dropped into a chair.

"Mr. Simmons," I said, trying to keep down my emotions, "I must tell you that Mr. Vernon, the banker who occupied my stateroom with me, is dead."

He leaped from his chair.

"Vernon dead!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," I answered. "I tried to rouse him, because I knew he was an early riser and never felt so well in the morning if he slept longer than was his wont. I found he was dead. I don't know what to do."

"Come with me," he said.

We left the purser's office and went to my stateroom. Mr. Simmons entered first, and I followed, shuddering. There was a pall of fear hanging over me.

The purser turned to me with a peculiar expression on his face.

"It appears that you were mistaken, Mr. Gorris."

I stumbled into the stateroom and looked at the bed. It was empty.

A flood of fresh horror swept over me.

"I swear that Mr. Vernon was dead when I left this room," I gasped. "I swear it! I swear it!"

The sea-tanned face of the purser wrinkled in perplexity.

"Come with me," he said abruptly.

He hurried me through companionways until we reached the captain's room.

The captain had not yet risen, having been on the bridge till long past midnight. Mr. Simmons pounded on his door.

"What is it?" demanded the captain as he opened the door in his pajamas.

"There is something wrong, sir," answered the purser. "Begin to dress, and I will tell you what I know, and Mr. Gorris will tell you the rest."

"Proceed," said the captain calmly.

"The matter is this, captain," I said. "Mr. Vernon, a New York banker, was my room-mate in stateroom B. Now, there were strange circumstances connected with our being together, and I shall tell you the truth. Mr. Vernon was possessed of the idea that I had defrauded him out of fifty thousand dollars. I had not, and as we had been friends, he gave me the opportunity to vindicate myself, which was possible only by finding the men really responsible.

"He was intending to take this trip, and at my solicitation, instead of leaving me in jail in New York, he permitted me to accompany him. I was in London when the fraud was committed.

"This morning I awoke and found Mr. Vernon dead. There was no evidence of murder that I could see. No blood or wound of any kind. I went to Mr. Simmons, and we returned to the stateroom together. The body of Mr. Vernon is gone."

The captain had his trousers in his hands, but let them drop as he stared at me and then at the purser.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"He's gone, anyway," said Simmons.

"Have you been on deck?"

"No, sir. I took Mr. Gorris' word that Mr. Vernon was dead."

"Oh, but we must search the ship. I doubt if Mr. Gorris was right. A man might appear to him to be dead, and in his excited frame of mind he might not discover the error. I suppose while Mr. Gorris was in your room, Mr. Vernon woke up and has gone somewhere else. We will see."

He finished dressing, and, the purser and I following, went to the deck.

There were a few early risers among the passengers loitering there to enjoy the sunrise. Mr. Vernon was not among them.

The ship's first officer was on the bridge. The captain darted up the ladder, and the purser and I followed, although I knew it was against the rules for a passenger to ascend to the bridge.

"Mr. Cooms," said the captain, "I am trying to find Mr. Vernon, who occupied room B. Has he been on deck this morning?"

"He has not, sir, so far as I am aware. I saw Mr. Vernon last evening in the smoking-room with Mr. Gorris, but not since then."

"Strange," muttered the captain. "He may, after all, be in stateroom A, where his wife and daughter are. We must see to that."

Down we went again, and hurried to stateroom A. The captain pounded on the door.

"Is that you, George?" came the voice of Mrs. Vernon.

"No, it is the captain—Captain Thorne," was the reply.

"Well, is anything the matter? We are not dressed."

"Better put something on. I wish to speak to you."

I heard Gladys talking. I did not catch all the words, but it was something about accident. She feared that the ship had met with some disaster.

We did not have to wait long. The door opened, and Mrs. Vernon admitted us.

"Mrs. Vernon," said the captain, "have you seen your husband this morning?"

"No, I have not been awake. Have you seen your father, Gladys?"

"Not since last evening."

"This is strange," said Captain Thorne. "I am sorry to be compelled to tell you, Mrs. Vernon, but your husband is missing."

"Missing? Oh, he must be somewhere on the steamer."

"I had that same idea. But I cannot find him on deck. I have not been through the ship, but that was because I did not wish to cause any sensation without cause. Now, if you have not seen him, I will search."

"Mr. Gorris, do you know anything about it?" asked Gladys.

"Only this, Miss Vernon: When I awoke this morning there was something apparently the matter with your father. I—I tried to rouse him. I found—I believed—that he was dead."

"Oh, my God!" screamed Mrs. Vernon. "Not that!"

"He came to me first," said Simmons. "But we could not find Mr. Vernon upon returning to the stateroom."

"Ah," gasped Mrs. Vernon, "that relieves me so much. Then Mr. Gorris was mistaken. Mr. Vernon must be somewhere on board."

"That's what I think," said the captain. "Has there been any tendency, Mrs. Vernon, toward a slight mental disturbance in your husband? Have you noticed any symptoms?"

"None. My husband is a clear-headed man."

"Come, Simmons," said the captain. "Let us make a good search."

We left the ladies to complete their toilets, and went to the smoking-room. There were a few men there, but not Mr. Vernon. From the smoking-room we went to the saloon. The stewards were getting the table ready for breakfast. No one else was there. The chief steward came in to superintend.

"Harker," said the captain, "have you seen Mr. Vernon, the gentleman who sat on my right?"

"Not this morning, sir."

"Are you sure he is not in the galley?"

"I just left there, sir."

"Well, have two of your men make a complete search. Store-rooms, galley, everything. Leave no place unsearched. Mr. Vernon is strangely missing."

We went next to the engineer's department. The usual quota of men were at work. The captain asked the same questions. Nobody had seen Mr. Vernon.

"Let me see that stateroom," said the captain. Back we went to stateroom B. It was still vacant. Mr. Vernon's clothing was in the same place where I had seen him carefully de osit it the night before when we retired.

"Was that port-hole open when you got up?" asked the captain, turning to me.

"No, sir, I don't think so."

"It is closed, but then that doesn't amount to anything. It is easily opened and closed again. This is strange, Simmons. There is no use rousing the passengers. But come to my room again, and let us talk the matter over."

As we left stateroom B, from stateroom A Gladys and her mother met us. Mrs. Vernon was very much excited.

"Have you found him?" she asked.

"I am sorry to say we have not, Mrs. Vernon," answered the captain.

"Oh, my God, he has been murdered!"

A strange look came over her face, as if a new and horrible thought had taken possession of her. She looked at me.

"And there," she said, pointing her finger at me, "is his murderer! Now I see it all!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"TWO AND TWO TOGETHER."

THE captain looked from one to the other in a bewildered manner.

"Be careful, madam," he said. "That is a serious charge to make, especially on board ship. Many accidents——"

"It was no accident!" cried Mrs. Vernon. "That man robbed my husband of fifty thousand dollars. He has now killed him!"

"Come to my room!"

Mrs. Vernon and Gladys were much excited when we reached the captain's cabin, and Gladys was weeping. Captain Thorne was calm, but stern, and the purser distinctly disturbed.

As for myself, I felt as though the sea was opening to swallow me.

"Before we go any further into the discussion of the strange disappearance of Mr. Vernon," began the captain, "let me get reports from those who have been searching."

He rang a bell, and his servant came to him.

"Ask Mr. Harker to come to me," he said to the cabin-boy.

In a short time the head steward appeared.

"Mr. Harker," said the captain, "have you had a search made for Mr. Vernon?"

"I have, sir. I have searched every stateroom that was not occupied, and I have asked at the door of those that were. Nobody, so far as I can find, has seen Mr. Vernon."

"Did you examine all the storerooms?"

"Every room on the ship, sir. I went to the steerage myself. He is not there. What time was it, sir, when he disappeared?"

"Only about half an hour ago."

"Had he dressed this morning?"

"No," I said. "He was dead."

The steward looked incredulous.

"That is all, Harker," said the captain. "If you learn anything let me know."

"Yes, sir."

"Now," went on the captain, "in order to know what to do, I must ask you for a full account of what you call a robbery. You stated, Mrs. Vernon, a short time ago that Mr. Gorris robbed your husband. I wish you would give me the particulars."

"Let that man tell his story," answered Mrs. Vernon. "I am not familiar with it."

Her eyes were brilliant with excitement, and a hectic flush was on her cheeks.

"Go on, Gorris!"

It took some time to go over the story. I left out no details, but gave everything as it occurred.

"What do you think, Mr. Simmons?" asked the captain when I had finished my recital.

"It is the strangest story I ever heard," was the purser's reply. "I never heard of any such gang in London. If it was a gang of rough and brutal fellows along the water-front, I might say it was possible, but these fellows, according to Gorris, were evidently educated men. And they certainly must have had tremendous opportunities for following the movements of the persons they wanted. Now, either London has a great mystery to solve in a new form of crime, with the shrewdest of men to hunt down, or Gorris has a wonderful imagination."

"I know," said the captain rather impatiently. "Let London settle that. The question we want answered is what has happened to Mr. Vernon."

"As to that, sir," said the purser, "there are but two possible conjectures. One is that Mr. Vernon was not dead when Gorris saw him this morning, but suffering from some peculiar mental disturbance, and, while Gorris was in my room, Mr. Vernon crawled out of the port-hole."

"And what's the other."

"That Mrs. Vernon is right, and Gorris killed the banker."

"Was your stateroom door locked last night?" asked the captain suddenly of me.

"No, sir. It has not been locked at night since we came on board. Mr. Vernon spoke of that. He said he never locked a door on shipboard, because he always liked to have it free for exit in case of fire or accident."

"Very few people lock their doors on board," interposed the purser.

"That leaves the way open to another conjecture, Simmons," said the captain. "There may be an enemy of Mr. Vernon's on board who entered his room and killed him."

"Then it would be necessary for him to go back the second time to dispose of the body," answered the purser. "I am not inclined to that theory, sir."

"Then which one do you favor?"

"Well, if Gorris had not stated that he saw the man dead, I would favor the theory that Mr. Vernon committed suicide. But as he does make the statement that he left the banker in his room dead when he came to see me, the suicide theory explodes."

"Then you think that Gorris killed him?"

"It looks that way to me, sir."

"I swear, sir, that I did not," I said. "I thought as much of Mr. Vernon as I could of a father. More than that, I—but that has nothing to do with it. I did not kill Mr. Vernon."

"Let us put two and two together and see if they make four," said the purser. "From London, Gorris writes for money to ransom him from a gang of captors —as he says. A certain amount of money is sent, because being known as a wealthy young man the banker trusted him. The fellow who deserted Miss Vernon at the altar was with him when he called at the post-office.

"The fact that he did not receive the letter that day was no proof that he had not received it previously. Let that be as it may. He possibly did not receive it at all. But to Mr. Vernon it was the same as if he had, and unless there could be some proof established to the contrary, on complaint of Mr. Vernon some punishment would be meted out to Gorris.

"Gorris, knowing that Mr. Vernon had withdrawn his charges, and believing that it would be impossible to prove a murder committed in a stateroom at sea when the victim cannot be found, may have taken that means of escaping from the consequences of the former crime."

"That is what I said!" said Mrs. Vernon. "I believe Gorris killed my husband."

Gladys was in tears. She made no comment on the remark her mother had made.

"Miss Vernon," I pleaded, "do you share this awful opinion held by your mother?"

She sobbed louder.

"Don't ask me! I can't think!" she said.

"We can do nothing now, anyway," said the captain. "I will quietly make an investigation. Gorris, under the circumstances, you must consider yourself under arrest. When we get to London I shall place the matter in the hands of the police."

"So help me God, I am innocent!" I cried.

"Well, as to that I am not competent to judge. We may know more in a few days. I shall not limit your freedom on board, but shall let the police and the company do whatever they think is best under the circumstances."

I walked from the room like a man gone mad. I managed to reach the deck. I wanted no breakfast. The horror of my position grew greater every moment. Even the sea air seemed stifling.

CHAPTER XIX.

STATEROOM NO. 133.

FROM that morning I became the most vindictive amateur detective this world ever saw. In my own heart I knew that the crime, if a crime had been committed, had been committed by some one connected with the gang in whose hands I had been in London.

Then the suggestion came to me that it was possible that a woman had done it. I was a sound sleeper, and while I was asleep, the door of the stateroom being unlocked, a woman might have entered and killed him.

Had he been found in bed when the purser and I went back to the stateroom, then the theory of death from natural causes would be tenable. This, however, in view of Mr. Vernon's disappearance, was not to be thought of.

But why should a woman wish to murder Mr. Vernon, and, had there been a woman who did, how had she happened to be on the same ship?

It was maddening. I walked the deck as the passengers came up from breakfast. There was a tall, finely dressed woman who looked as if she might be an actress. She was very handsome.

I furtively watched her and asked the purser who she was. He gave me her name, but that did not help me, for I had never heard it before.

I followed her about the deck, getting close enough to her to listen to her conversation with others. Her voice was low and sweet. There was nothing in anything she said to indicate that she was to be suspected of such an atrocious crime as murder.

Then there was a clerical-looking man who seemed always on the move, and I learned from the purser that he was a missionary, sent abroad by the Methodist Episcopal Church of New York.

He seemed to be on friendly terms with the woman, and that fact ended my investigations in that quarter. But the woman theory stuck to me.

I waited long enough for Mrs. Ver-

non and Gladys to finish their breakfast, and then went to their stateroom.

Gladys opened the door in response to my knock, and her eyes were red with weeping. By this time, of course, the news of the banker's disappearance had spread through the ship, and everybody was excited.

Gladys started back when she saw me.

"Mama, it is Mr. Gorris!" she cried.

"I will not see him," came the answer.

"Miss Vernon," I said, "I am an innocent man, and am trying to fathom this terrible mystery. I have no word of complaint against Mrs. Vernon because she suspects me, but in order to work out the solution I must know one or two things that I have come to ask."

"Let him in," came sharply from Mrs. Vernon.

Gladys stepped aside, and I entered the stateroom.

"Mrs. Vernon," I began, "I must ask you a few questions. I swear to you that I am innocent of your husband's death, and also of robbing him. I am determined to get to the bottom of the matter. It has occurred to me that possibly there was a woman in the case. Now——"

"How dare you suggest such a thing! My husband was the noblest man on earth."

"I always thought so myself, Mrs. Vernon. But we must find a motive for the crime. I think——"

"You are the only one who had a motive!"

"I had every motive to wish him to live. See where his death puts me. Undoubtedly, upon the statement of the captain, when we reach Liverpool I shall be clapped into jail without a chance to prove anything. Possibly my life will be forfeited. I certainly had no reason to murder Mr. Vernon."

"Go on and ask your questions," said the lady.

"Had your husband, at any time, that is, within your knowledge, any connection with a woman outside the family?"

"No. He was distinctly a home man. He seldom left the house during an evening, and never unless it was on business. He cared little for society.

"My husband was stern and unyielding in his Christian faith. There could be no such motive as jealousy."

"Had he ever spoken about a business enemy?"

"Rivals, of course. But not the kind who would take his life."

"Is there any past incident in your husband's life that could in any way assist in unraveling the mystery?"

"No."

I saw that it was a useless task to get information from Mrs. Vernon, and I left the stateroom.

I was not, however, discouraged. My detective work had scarcely begun. Somewhere on that ship there was a murderer, and I was determined to find him. I dropped the woman theory and began on the men.

I went to the smoking-room, and, after lighting a cigar, sat down. A heavy game of cards had been in progress, and four men were at a table at the time. I narrowly surveyed their faces.

One I recognized as a gambler of New York. He was a man whose name was well known, and who had the reputation of being generous and a kind and loving family man. I rubbed him off my list of suspects.

The three others I did not know, but they were all good-looking, manly men. They appeared to be prosperous, and not the kind who would commit a murder.

"What's this I hear about a man being missing?" asked the gambler. "I understand that a passenger has disappeared from one of the lettered staterooms."

"Yes, some time during the night," answered one of the players. "It was Vernon, the banker."

"The deuce you say! Why, Vernon was all right financially, was he not?"

"So far as I know. But you can't tell. It seems he had some controversy over money with a fellow named Gorris. Remember that? It was just after Vernon's daughter was jilted at the altar."

"I recall that incident. That fellow Querles must be either a scoundrel or a lunatic."

"I should say so."

All that day I studied the faces of all my fellow-passengers. Mrs. Vernon and

Gladys remained in their room and did not hear the constant run of comments upon Mr. Vernon's death and disappearance.

"It's easy for a man to sneak off and die," said a young man near me at the table, "but to die and then sneak off—that's improbable."

The death of Mr. Vernon was not a proven death. Many on board doubted that he had died. He may have leaped overboard, or he may have been on deck smoking and lost his balance over the rail. But the story that he had been found dead in bed, and had then disappeared, was scouted by everybody.

I could see that the captain was far from being impressed favorably with me. His cold, steely glance seemed never to leave me. He did not speak to me, nor did his manner betray the fact that I was practically a prisoner.

I was not in any way under restraint, and was therefore free to continue my investigations.

I asked the purser to transfer me to the second cabin. He did so. I watched everybody there. I could find no person who was nervous while looking at me, nor one whom I could reasonably suspect.

I was next transferred to the steerage, and spent an entire day there.

In this way—an apparently useless way—I spent the time until we were within half a day's sail of the Mersey.

I was growing desperate. Having been once arrested by the English police, this second accusation was bound to put me beyond the pale of any friendship or leniency.

I wandered among the passengers and grew frantic in the search.

I was in the smoking-room one day when a gentleman came in and sat down to smoke. He wore a beard parted on the chin, and a long but not very heavy mustache.

There was nothing familiar to me in his features, save that the eyes had something about them that struck me forcibly as having been seen by me before.

"And, by Jove!" I said. "He walks like Querles!"

He appeared to be about forty-five or fifty years of age, and a man of dignity and means.

I asked the purser who he was.

"That," was the reply, "is Mr. Gilrick. He occupies stateroom 133."

"Have you known him before?"

"No, I never saw him until this trip."

Mr. Gilrick had little to do with any other passenger. He smoked and read. Now and then he would glance up casually and look around him.

When he had finished his cigar he rose and sauntered out. As he went I noticed a peculiarity in his gait. It was a step that I had noticed in the gait of Querles: a peculiar turn of the heel in walking.

Could it be possible? Was this Querles in disguise!

I made a mental note of the number of his stateroom—133. I knew he would go there before landing, and I kept my eye on him. There was the usual excitement on board as we drew nearer land.

I went to room 133, and found it unlocked. I entered and found a hiding-place in the berth. I remained there almost without breathing.

As I expected, the man came in. He closed the door and locked it. It was none too light, and he did not glance toward the bed. He sat down near his dresser and smiled. Then he whistled. It was a tune I knew. I had heard Querles whistle it before.

He began to comb his beard, and suddenly it came off attached to the comb.

The man was Querles.

CHAPTER XX.

STILL IN THE TOILS.

I CAN scarcely think of the proper word to express the emotion I felt at that moment. I was glad it was Querles, for now I had something tangible to work on in order to free my own good name from the stain the mystery had put upon it.

My mind was in a whirl to try to think just what would be best to do.

Would it, I asked myself, be the best plan to denounce him there and then? Or would it be better to wait and report the fact of his presence to the captain and hold a conference with Mrs. Vernon?

The great fear was that Querles would see me. If he did I feared that in some

way he would defeat my purpose. He had proven himself to be so skilful a rogue that almost anything might be expected now.

There was no possibility of getting out of the room without being seen until he left himself. And then came the fear that when he did go he would lock the door.

He readjusted the beard, and then rose from his chair. In walking about the little stateroom he caught sight of me. He stood like a man transfixed.

"Damn you!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing in my room?"

"Discovering the murderer of Mr. Vernon!" I replied.

I sprang from the bed and made a drive for the door. He was nearer to it and backed up against it.

I hurled myself on him, and he struck me in the face. I got back at him in good fashion, and then the fight was on in earnest.

We surged about the small space, banging away at each other, neither saying a word, but both panting.

I had always been a good wrestler, and was pretty fair with the gloves. But Querles was a more powerful man than I, and equally agile.

At one time I would seem to be getting the best of it, and at another time he would. It was nip and tuck until, with a snarl like that of an angry wolf, he sprang at me, and before I could break away he had me by the throat.

"It was a mistake, you fool," he said, "to let you live! But you had never jilted my mother. I wish I had killed you then, and I am going to do it now!"

I was gasping for breath. His iron grasp was on my throat, and I was rapidly growing powerless.

The room began to go around. Everything in it swam before my eyes. It was my last moment, if Querles had his will.

With a mighty wrench I broke away, and made another drive for the door. But he sprang upon me from behind, and I fell to the floor.

I made an attempt then to call for assistance, but Querles had his grip on my throat again and I could not utter a sound.

The man fought like a fiend. Had he gone mad? I asked myself. I had known him in New York and had never noticed anything wrong with him. But then, while he was working out the revenge he had sworn to take on Mr. Vernon, he was, outwardly at least, on his good behavior.

I succumbed, although I was not unconscious. Querles chuckled with a hideous glee as he tore the cover from the berth and wrapped it around my head. I could scarcely breathe.

"Now," he said as I lay prostrate and he sat on my chest, "let me tell you something. Cease following me. I told you I would have revenge on Vernon. I have had it now. I gave him two doses before, and now it is ended. I'll kill you if you don't let me alone."

I tried to answer, but only made a mumbling noise in the bed-cover.

Taking me by the throat again he dragged me to the outward end of the room and threw me to the floor. Then with a derisive laugh he snatched his traveling-case and dashed outside the door.

I heard it slam, and rushed to get out before he locked it. But he was too quick for me. The bolt was shot, and I was locked in.

This fact did not at the time disturb me much, but it made me wild with anger. I had no idea that he could leave the ship before I was released.

I unwound the cover and shouted. But with all the racket I made no one seemed to hear. Everybody was on deck watching the landing. From the porthole I could see the city of Liverpool. We were ascending the Mersey.

It did not take long for the big ship to be warped into her dock, and I heard the loud scuffling of many feet above, the hoarse bawling of the hands who were getting out the baggage, and the shouts of officers. But no one heard me.

I judged that people were disembarking. There were loud greetings, but from my position I could not see the landing.

The noises on deck diminished. Then I heard men talking. I shouted. I banged on the door. It was opened.

"Huh! Thought you could outwit us, eh!" said the captain. "It was the worst thing you could have done."

"I did not try to outwit you!" I said

with some vehemence. "Listen to reason. I have no key!"

"Well," said the steward, who was with the captain, "it could easily be thrown out of the port."

"You come along!" said the captain.

"Captain," I said, "as God is my judge I did not lock myself in this cabin. I knew that every steward carries keys to the rooms. But when I was accused of the murder I——"

"Never mind. We are in Liverpool now. Tell what you like to the police."

I received a look of unutterable hatred from Mrs. Vernon as I was taken to the deck; and Gladys did not look at me at all.

The steward received his instructions from the captain. I was taken to police headquarters, and was soon being questioned by the commissioner.

He listened with a show of interest, but did not seem to credit my story.

"I swear it was Querles!" I said. "He must be mad or something very like it. He was in disguise."

"What sort of disguise?"

"Beard and wig."

"Well, if he is, I'll find him. Meantime, you'll stay in jail. It seems that you two are mixed up together pretty well. I'll put you both where you belong if I can prove anything."

"Now, commissioner," I said, "I am a fairly rich man. I had absolutely no reason to rob Mr. Vernon or to kill him. Why, I want to marry his daughter."

"Did he ever refuse you permission? Ever have any words with him?"

"No! I had almost convinced him that I was innocent of the robbery. He must have been convinced that there was a probability of my being so because I was his room-mate on board. A man does not go in a stateroom with a thief."

"No, that seems as though he was convinced of your innocence and was willing to give you a chance to prove it. Now, I'll tell you what I will do. You say you are fairly rich. You can afford to pay the expenses of a first-class detective. I admit that there may be something in what you say, and I am willing to let you spend your own money to prove it."

"I am willing to do that. I don't care what it costs," I rejoined.

"Then I'll send for Cook. He's the best in the business. He'll be here tomorrow."

That wound me up with the commissioner, and I was conducted to a cell. I was not in a happy frame of mind, but hope was ahead.

CHAPTER XXI.

"LEAVE IT TO COOK."

"GORRIS," said the commissioner the following afternoon, "this is Sergeant Cook. I have partly explained the case to him, and he is interested in it. I leave you in his hands."

The man who entered my cell was not one to win sudden admiration. He was about five feet three inches high, probably fifty years of age, and his thin little face was marred and scarred and full of wrinkles, but his eyes were bright and sharp, and his mouth straight and firm.

"So you are the man that has turned two cities upside down," he began. "It was not a nice thing to do, but possibly there are mitigating circumstances. I said possibly. Yes, there is a possibility. But do not depend too much on that. The commissioner has told me something of your case. Never mind. I want you to start at the beginning and tell me everything."

"Great Scott!" I groaned. "I have told that so many times it is like a nightmare to me. And from one telling to the next the incidents grow so that now it is a three-volume novel."

"All right," he said. "I'll just light a cigar. I am a great smoker. Now while I sit here with my eyes shut you tell your story."

There was nothing else to do, and I started in. By that time the story had got so long and so tragic that it took me some while. During the whole time my detective sat with his eyes closed and with about as much expression on his face as could be found on that of a bat.

He leaned back against the wall of the cell and appeared to be either bored or entirely oblivious of what I was saying. When I had finished he slowly opened his eyes.

"Your name is Gorris, eh?" he said.

"Yes. Arthur Gorris."

"Well," he drawled, "Mr. Arthur Gorris, you have given me a most fascinating case to ferret out, or you are the biggest liar I ever knew. And I have known some. Let us commune.

"We will go 'way back to the time that you were requested to act as best man at the wedding of Querles and Miss Vernon. At that time you and Querles were friends."

"Yes."

"How intimate were you with Querles?"

"I cannot say that I was really intimate. He and I were members of the Kinsmore Club. We also called on the same people. Included among others was the family of Mr. Vernon."

"There seems to me to be a direct line of reasoning that may bear some fruit. I am working, you understand, on the theory that you have told the truth."

"I have told nothing else, sir."

"Of course, you are not now so much interested in the recovery of the money sent by Vernon as you are in the capture of Querles. Now, let me think. Don't speak a word."

"All right," I answered.

"I said do not speak a word. You annoy me excessively. If there is anything intelligent to be said on this subject, permit me to say that it appears to me that I am the one to say it. The first thing for us to determine—and by the word us I mean myself, not you—is whether there is any connection between the gang you first struck and Querles. The fact that he was in the stable loft when you awoke does not prove that he was there when you went in. I knew of just such a gang in London, and I ran them down. The queer part of it was they were not Englishmen—that is not all.

"The head of the machine was an Englishman — the youngest son of a dead-broke earl. They conducted their affairs much the same as your gang, only they were more original. They would take the new candidate for initiation into a finely appointed room, and, dressed in white robes and masks, they would put him through the usual grotesque ceremony of initiation. They would place before him a paper which they said was the written constitution, and bid the candidate sign.

"Of course the signature was forthcoming, and the paper invariably proved to be a demand on some wealthy relative for a certain amount. The gang lived this way for three years before they were caught. I trapped them in my own way.

"This Ali-Baba seems to fit the leader of that gang. His name was Lord Lester Payne. I fancy he is the same one.

"As in that case we found Americans, Frenchmen, and Austrians, so, if this gang of which you speak is really in existence, Querles may also be a member.

"The murder of Vernon was the act of a man who is of morbid temperament. If it was you, you hide it well. If it was Querles, it proves that he had been a member of the gang. In order to begin right, I shall be compelled to have you with me. That I can do upon request, but I must have your solemn oath that you will not try to escape."

"I don't want to escape!" I exclaimed. "I want to prove the truth of what I am saying. Mrs. Vernon has denounced me as the murderer of her husband. I am not. Querles was on that ship in disguise, and during our fight in his stateroom admitted that he had killed Mr. Vernon."

"As he pulled the bed-cover from its place in order to prevent your calling for help, it is probable that he used the same means to kill Vernon. He undoubtedly smothered him."

"But how can we ever discover how the man disappeared after he was killed?" I asked. "I know he was dead when I went for the purser. When the purser and I returned he was gone."

"That is not a difficult problem. If Querles was on board, he was on board for a purpose. As he was in disguise, we assume at once that he had the money, or his share of it, and instead of remaining in London or going elsewhere, he had still further plans for revenge. Men do go insane on the subject of revenge, as you doubtless know. I have known of cases where murder was committed for the most insignificant reasons.

"Well, assuming that Querles was there to kill Vernon, we first look for a motive. You have given me that. Being a crafty fellow, he goes in disguise. He does nothing for three days except watch the man he wishes to kill. He remains near enough to overhear the conversation Vernon has with you, with his wife, with everybody.

"I assume that Vernon was not a man who would suspect. He might be shadowed by somebody on board almost continually and not detect it. Very good.

"Querles learns that the door of your stateroom is not locked at night. This in itself is an invitation. He entered the stateroom perhaps with the idea of murdering both of you. Perhaps you stirred, and he fled. You, discovering the fact that Mr. Vernon was dead, rushed to the purser. You would not have noticed whether any one saw you or was apparently watching you. You were excited. While you were gone, Querles returned and shoved the body of Vernon through the port-hole."

"Why did he not do that at first?"

"You are rather stupid, I think. As I said before, when he had finished off Mr. Vernon you may have moved and frightened him. It makes more noise to ram a man through a port-hole than it does to smother him.

"Here is another thing. Querles having been, as the evidence shows, a thief and a rascal, may have known that Mr. Vernon would have money. Now, what we want to know is whether Mr. Vernon had money, and whether it was found."

"I heard nothing about money," I said. "I was accused of murdering him, and after that I was not in the company of his wife and daughter. I would not know of money. The charge of murder was so much greater than that of robbery that they might think the latter not worth mentioning."

"Very true. And the first thing to do is to learn whether money was missed. It will serve as an additional motive. Motive is everything. Get that and you've got your man. Now, it seems to me the first thing to do is to see Mrs. Vernon."

"Will you do that?"

"We will both do it. I will attend to that. You will be paroled in my custody."

His face was as wooden as ever. He abruptly rose and left the cell. The keeper grinned.

"Know who that is?" he asked.

"All I know is that he is a detective named Cook."

"Guess he is. That's Foxy Cook. He is the greatest criminal detective in England. He'll get the facts, if it's possible for any one to get them. Leave the whole thing to him."

With this he locked the door.

There were now decided hopes.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MILLIONAIRE TO ORDER.

"Foxy" Cook proved to be as good as his word, and demonstrated the fact that he had weight in the department of police.

In an hour I was speeding toward London in his company. He had already learned that Mrs. Vernon and Gladys had made the proper connection with the train and had gone on before us.

"I have done some thinking about this matter, Gorris," he said, "and I believe that you have told the truth. The thing is to establish that fact. The main question with me now is whether Querles was a member of that gang or not. Are you sure you could not identify the restaurant?"

"I probably could if I saw it, but I have not the slightest idea where it is, and London is a very large place, as you know."

"Tolerably, tolerably," said Sergeant Cook.

Upon reaching London we went to King's, where I had lodged on my previous visit.

"There's another thing I want to work out," said the detective as we sat at dinner. "I cannot exactly place this insane asylum where you were held by Querles. You see, in all well-regulated establishments of that kind an examination by a commission is demanded and the certification that a man is insane signed by three reputable physi-

cians. Now, did you see anybody in that place who seemed to be insane?"

"I saw nobody except the man who brought our meals."

"Querles ate in the same room with you constantly?"

"Yes."

"Then it was not an asylum for the insane. That would not be permitted. The entire business looks like a great hoax, yet the death and disappearance of Mr. Vernon prove it is a series of crimes. We will learn where Mrs. Vernon is and call on her."

"How will you learn that?"

"I will know in an hour."

I could not get very much out of Cook, but he was not curt and rough. He was abrupt. What he said was little, but it went to the heart of things.

After dinner I accompanied him in a cab to Scotland Yard. There he began telephoning. Hotel after hotel was called up. At last he learned that Mrs. Vernon and Gladys were at the Albemarle.

To the Albemarle we went. Mr. Cook wrote an explanation on his card, which was sent to Mrs. Vernon. She returned word that she would see us.

We found the banker's widow a physical wreck. She had already become so weak before the trip to Europe had been planned that this tragedy bursting upon her as it did had unnerved her. Gladys was not in the room.

"Madam, pardon me for this intrusion," said Sergeant Cook. "I have been engaged to solve the mysteries that have reached their culmination in the robbery of your husband and his murder. Mr. Gorris, whom you suspect, has told a pretty straight story, and I am inclined to believe him. There are many seemingly impossible things in it that appear possible after careful study. I have gone all over the matter with him, and there is just one thing I cannot establish.

"That is the motive for the murder. Mr. Vernon has not accused Querles, nor had him arrested, as he did Gorris. Therefore, having had such revenge for the slight upon his mother he claims was inflicted years ago by Mr. Vernon, there seems to be no reason for the murder unless it was robbery.

"Taking up the theory of robbery, we have this fact to think about. If it was robbery, it would not be necessary to murder Mr. Vernon, for as his door was open the robbery of his purse could be accomplished just the same. And, having murdered one man, why did the murderer not send Gorris with him?"

"Because Gorris was awake, and was the one who committed the murder. As a matter of fact," said Mrs. Vernon, "my husband had, when we started, a large amount of money to pay our expenses. He carried it in a flat package, and I believe slept with it fastened inside his night-clothes."

"Ah! That would furnish a motive. Do you know how much money he had with him?"

"No, but I do know that he had been contemplating a long stay in Europe, with several journeys. He must have had a large amount with him."

Cook nodded.

"I think, Mrs. Vernon, that this is all that I wish to ask now. If anything comes up that causes me to need fresh information I will give myself the pleasure of calling upon you again."

"Do so at your will," said Mrs. Vernon.

We left Mrs. Vernon and returned to King's.

"Now, see here," said Cook, as he sat in his room smoking, "we have got to work a peculiar game in this matter. In fact, we have got to get ourselves captured by that gang."

"Captured again!" I cried. "I don't want to go through that experience another time."

"It may not be necessary to be actually captured. But we want all the proof we can get, and the way to go at it is from the beginning of things. The fact that Querles was disguised and on the same steamer with you leads to the suspicion that he was working with the gang. I propose a plan."

He did not state what the plan was, but pulled a pencil and note-book from his pocket and wrote for about five minutes slowly, stopping frequently to review the few words he had written.

"How is this for a news item?" he asked when he had finished. "I should have been a newspaper correspondent."

He then proceeded to read:

"'The celebrated millionaire, Mr. James Wisdom, arrived yesterday from New York, and is stopping at King's Hotel. Mr. Wisdom is thinking of investing a large amount of American cash in English securities, and came prepared to do so.'"

"What do you intend to do with that?" I asked.

Cook looked at it for some time. Then, with that wooden face of his as inscrutable as ever, he replied:

"Tear it up. It is no good."

He threw the fragments away and sat down again without further comments. I could see that he was perplexed.

"What was wrong with that?" I asked.

"There was nothing right. You must bear in mind that London produces the sharpest and shrewdest criminals in the world. If it does not produce them, it harbors them. A gang that has its members in New York, Paris, London, everywhere, and can tell when a man leaves New York, is not going to be fooled like that. What we want is an actual millionaire. I don't wish to delay, and I don't wish to make mistakes."

"What would you suggest then? I know of no millionaire who would lend himself to the scheme."

"We must create one. That is easy. You must have friends who can help you out. Now, who is there who would be willing to come over here and act the part if you paid his expenses?"

"Jim Otter. He is a lawyer. I know he would come."

"Good. Now, you write him the circumstances under which he is to come. Is he rich?"

"No. He is far from rich."

"He must inherit a fortune. Wait."

Cook got out his pencil and note-book again and began writing.

"Now, listen," he said.

"'Mr. James Otter, a young lawyer of New York, has been the recipient of a vast fortune, left by his uncle, John Otter, who was a large land-owner in Australia. Young Mr. Otter had been a poor man all his life up to the present moment.

"'Years ago a brother of Mr. Otter was stolen, or was lured away from home, or ran away. Now that Mr. Otter has inherited this fortune he intends to prosecute a search for his brother. He formerly lived with his parents on Pabby Lane, and will sail in a short time for London, from which headquarters he will continue the search.

"'Mr. Otter is not strong, and wishes to find his brother in order to have the fortune remain in the name.'

"Now," said Cook, when he finished, "that will get them if anything will. You do the writing."

It did not take me long, for I began to see through the game Mr. Cook was working.

"Now," he said, "there are two more things to do. Have this printed, and then procure disguises for you and me."

We left the hotel on our rather peculiar mission.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN DISGUISE.

I KNEW that Jim Otter was far from well-to-do. He was rising in his profession, but it took all he could make to pay expenses and carry the appearances a professional man needs. So, when I sent the letter I sent an order for enough money to bring him over. I knew by that time I would have interest due from a trust company in which half my fortune was invested.

Sergeant Cook proved to be an adept in disguises. Querles was clumsy compared to him.

When we left the costumer's he was a little old farmer, and I was a bearded man of apparently middle age, dressed as a man of means, without education or refinement, who was interested in sporting life.

We returned to the hotel.

The following day we took a drive through various streets near the river, but I could not settle upon any one of the restaurants we saw as the one in which I had had my adventure.

"There is nothing to do but wait for Otter," said Cook. "Then we'll bag the lot."

It was a long and weary wait. We called at the Albemarle to ask after

Mrs. Vernon's health and learned that she had gone to Nice. I afterward ascertained that she had driven to Scotland Yard to inquire if it was safe to leave me with Cook, enjoying comparative freedom.

She had been informed that I was as secure in his hands as in jail.

I had not the slightest idea of what Cook intended to do, and he evidently had not the slightest idea of enlightening me until he felt like it.

But Otter did arrive at last. He actually looked the millionaire he was supposed to be.

"What in the world is this scheme of yours?" he asked.

"It was not my scheme," I answered after I had made myself known to him and introduced Cook. "It is Sergeant Cook's scheme, and I know nothing about it."

"Come, let us settle our plans," said Cook.

We went to our rooms, and Cook was careful to close the door.

"My name for the time is Donaldson," he said. "Yours, Gorris, is Weatherspoon. I have had the books of the hotel altered so that Gorris has gone away, supposedly.

"You, Mr. Otter, have just come into a great fortune. You are a Londoner, and your uncle in Australia has recently died, and you inherit his fortune. It happens, however, that you are now here to hunt up a lost brother, and have placed the matter in the hands of Scotland Yard.

"There is no doubt that your movements are noted every foot of your way, if there is any such gang as Gorris says met him. Now, the first thing you do, go to Scotland Yard. I will give you a note."

Cook wrote a brief letter to some one in authority, and ordered a hansom.

He soon returned.

"I suspect I am followed," he said as he entered the room. "There was a man in the hotel corridor as I came in, who saw me as I went out again. He stepped to the street and called a hansom. I noted the horse, and after I left the police headquarters I saw the same hansom."

Cook chuckled.

"I knew it! I knew it!" he said. "I've got 'em now."

"What next?" asked Otter.

"You will be called upon to accompany an officer somewhere to identify your brother. That was the game worked on Gorris. We must make a show of money, and we must all be armed. We will accompany you, and I'll do the rest.

"You are buying horses. When they come you pay me, as a country squire, for ten good horses. I'll furnish the money."

Cook left us and returned in about three hours.

"I think I have spotted your man," he said. "I am beginning to think through Gorris we are unearthing one of the most stupendous blackmailing schemes ever tried. Anybody been here?"

"Not yet."

It was to come, however. That evening about eight o'clock a page employed at the hotel announced that a gentleman wished to see Mr. Otter, of New York.

Cook handed Otter a roll of bills. It was "police money," and worthless for any other purpose than that for which it was intended.

"Show the man here," said Otter.

Jim Otter was perfectly calm, standing before Cook and myself, with his hands in his pockets, his coat shoved back, displaying a heavy gold chain and locket.

The door opened and the man came in.

I started. It was the same individual who had come after me.

I had difficulty in suppressing a shout.

"Which of you is Mr. Otter?" he asked briskly.

"I am," replied Jim.

"I am from Scotland Yard. You are in search of a lost brother. I have been detailed on the case. I believe, Mr. Otter, that I have located your brother, although he now bears the name Smith. I began my investigations when you first wrote from New York, and commenced my inquiries at your mother's old place of residence."

I had to smother a laugh. The

shrewdest are not as shrewd as they think. Otter's mother was alive in New York, and had never lived in England.

"I found," said the supposed detective, "that your brother was about six years of age when he was taken away by a band of gipsies. I traced him through the country. He had been compelled to learn some dangerous tricks, to perform at the country fairs where the band stopped.

"He escaped and came to London. For some reason he did not return to New York. I could not determine whether he had gone away from home against his will or not. But there is a young boy working in a restaurant on Thames Street whom I think you will find to be your brother. As I say, he goes by the name of Smith."

Otter began to show agitation.

"I trust you are right," he said. "I will go. But I must close with Mr. Donaldson. I have just purchased ten horses from him. I will pay you, Mr. Donaldson, and send my man to your farm for the horses."

"All right, sir," said Cook.

Otter pulled the money from his pocket and counted out a number of bills.

The eyes of the rascal posing as a detective opened.

Cook thanked Otter and placed the money in his pocket.

"Perhaps your friends would like to accompany you," said the detective from Scotland Yard.

"I should be pleased to have them. Mr. Donaldson saw my brother frequently when he was at home, and I believe that he will be of great assistance to me."

"I will have a cab."

We followed him and got into the cab. Again I was surprised at the easy bearing, the evident education of the man. He would appear anywhere as a gentleman.

"Thames Street," he said to the driver.

Cook settled back comfortably; Otter was as easy as though he was going to the theater.

I was inwardly excited. Was it possible, after all, I asked myself, that my troubles would now be over, and I be able to look Gladys Vernon in the face?

It seemed incredible.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TURNING THE TABLES.

I could not tell during the drive whether we were taking the same course we had taken on my first trip or not. I had been in Thames Street, and did not believe the restaurant was there.

After turning many times, and having a drive of almost an hour, during which we probably doubled on our own tracks to throw Otter off if he should make any subsequent attempt to find the place, we came to a standstill before the very same building. The laundry was there, and from the windows above a dim light shone.

"If this should prove to be my brother," said Otter, with a warmth that only Otter could assume under such circumstances, "I shall reward you."

"I never thought of that," rejoined the impostor. "I am paid for what I do."

I imagined I could hear Cook saying that he would be well paid that night.

We mounted to the room above. The same four I had met sat at the table.

There were dishes as though they had just eaten a meal. Everything was the same as when I had first been there.

"Sit down," said our guide. "Smith, as he calls himself, will soon be in."

I heard the click of the lock.

The man who called himself Ali-Baba rose from his chair, calmly lighted his cigar, and reached into his pocket, from which he took a revolver.

"A present, boys. A cousin of mine who fought in the Boer war used this to kill seven Boers with. He gave it to me. It is a fine piece of workmanship."

He turned it one way and another, and all looked at it. I began to feel weak in the knees. Cook and Otter were as cool as men could be.

"It seems a decent weapon," said another. "I think, though, I have its superior. I have one here that was given to me by the Duke of Podlam. It was made especially for him, and has his monogram on the hold. See?"

He took a revolver from his pocket and displayed it to all.

I began to get fidgety. Why didn't Cook do something? It was evident that this was part of the usual work done by the gang.

But Cook sat through it without a smile or without a word. He was interested in the revolvers.

"I can go you one better," said a third. "I have one sent to my father by the late Ameer of Afghanistan. It is of peculiar type, but I assure you at a hundred paces it does fearful execution."

He pulled from his pocket a long-barreled affair that looked hideously wicked.

"Now," said Ali-Baba, as all three revolvers were aimed at us, each at a head, "I must inform you that we are a society for the leveling of the human race. Some are too rich, some too poor. We seek to take from those who are rich and even matters up. We expected only one guest to-night, but we have three instead. Don't move, any one of you, or these revolvers will end your days."

"That's nice," said Cook quietly.

"Charming situation," said Otter.

I could not speak. Why, for heaven's sake, when we all had revolvers, had not Cook shown some fight.

"What we want," said Ali-Baba, "is money. Now, Mr. Otter has just inherited a lot of money. He would not miss a few thousands. You see, a rich man can stand the loss because his income keeps on and replaces what he gives up. I propose now, my brothers, that we initiate Mr. Otter into our great society."

"Agreed!" cried one.

"We all agree," said another.

"How much does it cost?" inquired Otter.

"Well, in your case I think about a hundred thousand dollars will do. You see, we have to grade the amount according to what we think a man is worth. But some men are mean. We demanded a hundred thousand pounds from one man. It was to ransom a fool who came here to find one of our members.

"We are serene and immune. The police do not interfere, no punishment can reach us. Now, then, our country friend here doesn't look as though he had great wealth, but——"

"He's got the cash in his pocket for ten horses," said the one who had come for us and guided us to the place."

"In that case, we will initiate him for the cash he has in his pocket."

"How many members have you?" asked Cook.

"I am not certain, but enough to frame laws and juggle with what certain unenlightened people call justice. Proceed to hand over that cash."

Cook looked at his watch.

"I am perfectly willing," he said, "for the purpose of saving my life. I did not expect any such trick as this, and cannot afford to lose this money. But in the face of three revolvers I must submit."

He handed over the police money, as desired.

"Now, Mr. Otter," said Ali-Baba.

"Before you go any further," interposed Cook, "permit me to give you a little information."

"Proceed at your pleasure," said Ali-Baba, still with his pistol ready for action.

"When our dear, kind friend from Scotland Yard brought us here, we were watched and followed. It may interest you to know that at this present moment there are one hundred officers from Scotland Yard in and around this building. You may shoot if you like, but every one of you would go to the gibbet."

"Who the Hades are you?" shouted Ali-Baba.

"If it would interest you to know, I may tell you that I am Sergeant Cook, of Scotland Yard."

"Damn!" said Ali-Baba.

"I gave you that money," continued Cook with an amazing calmness, "before two witnesses. That will prove our case against you in any event. But one of you committed murder on board the Ulria, and unless you give up the one who did it the charge of murder on the high seas will be brought against each one.

"You are cornered fair and square. I've got you bottled. One shot from

your revolver would bring twenty-five men with better weapons than yours into this room. You locked the door. Ten of the men have axes. Now, gentlemen, you can take your choice. Go with me peaceably and take such sentence as the law gives, or kill us and be hanged inside of six months."

I never saw a more astonished lot.

Their faces were ashen and distorted with fear. One by one they replaced their revolvers.

"You are wise," said Cook. "Now, I have two carriages waiting below. It will be necessary to handcuff you. This is a simple matter of precaution and does not injure your chances. But I want the man named Querles."

They looked at each other with expressions of terror.

The fourth man of the group at the table, who had not uttered a word, leaned back in his chair. His eyes glittered.

"Unless you show me Querles," said Cook, "every one of you will go before the highest tribunal in England charged with the murder of George Vernon, of New York."

"We do not know him," said Ali-Baba. "We never saw a man by the name of Querles."

"You lie!" I said. "And there he is!"

With one hand I pointed to the frightened man who had not spoken, and who had leaned back in his chair; with the other hand I tore away my disguising beard.

"My God! Gorris!" came a cry from him.

Cook was as ironlike as ever.

"You see," he remarked, "that there is no use of making a fight. Even if you shot us all, you would not be able to escape, and then the charge of murder would be made against you all. As it is, the little pleasantry just now going on will result in some kind of a charge of extortion, except for our friend Querles.

"Permit me to explain. It is necessary for the protection of the traveling public to make it clear that a rich man is safe. I am sure you will not object to these handcuffs."

As he put his hands in his pockets and then withdrew them each held a revolver. Otter and I, being armed in a similar manner, quickly drew ours.

"Now, Otter, cover those two. I will cover Querles and any of the others who make a fuss. Now, Gorris, you get those nice little bracelets out of my pockets. Put them on."

I laid my revolver on the table and reached into Cook's pocket. I drew from there handcuffs enough to shackle the entire crowd.

"I will take Querles myself," said Cook. "He is the only one now charged with murder. The others will be attended to by my men down-stairs."

It was a complete victory. Not a man made a move to draw a revolver after Cook had spoken.

The little iron detective of the best police in England was as cool as his former habit as he fastened handcuffs on each one.

"Now," he said to Otter and me, "I think we can go. You, Gorris, take Ali-Baba; I will take charge of Querles; and you, Otter, take this fellow here."

The calm voice of Cook was the commanding atmosphere in the place. He coolly asked Ali-Baba for the key to the door. His voice was calm, his manner easy, but he held a revolver in his hand.

Ali-Baba responded by handing over the key.

It was a beaten, dejected crowd that we conducted to the waiting carriages. We were soon at the office of the Commissioner of Police.

Cook seemed to be *persona grata* with the commissioner. The head of the largest police force in the world looked us over.

Cook removed his disguise.

The commissioner did not even blink.

"What is it, sergeant?" he asked.

"I've got Querles and Gorris and the gang. The gang, as you know, is what Gorris reported when he was arrested before. There are stories you must hear to decide upon, and this man I have in charge is Querles, and I charge him with murder and robbery."

"First name?" asked the commissioner.

"Edward."

"Querles, you are charged with robbery, and the murder of Mr. Vernon.

What have you to say for yourself? Remember that anything you may say may be used against you at your trial."

Cook coolly took the beard and wig from Querles.

"Now we are ready," he said.

"I am not," said Querles, with the emphasis on the "I." "I wish to prepare a statement."

"That," said the commissioner, "is regular and is allowed. It seems practical and fair."

"After I have delivered this statement," said Querles, "you may do with me as you wish. I will tell the truth."

"Very well," answered the commissioner. "I hold you till your statement is ready. Sergeant Cook, I congratulate you. You have always done good work. Now let us see what can be done with the other prisoners. The case has no precedent in England."

"The magistrate in Liverpool," said Cook, "gave over Gorris into my custody. I would be pleased if this could be continued. In my humble opinion we have unearthed a bed of crime that will need extirpating. Gorris has helped me more and better than any one else. I need him."

"Sergeant," said the commissioner, "you shall have your way. I will leave Gorris in your custody and send the others to jail to await trial. This, of course, hinges on the statement that your prisoner Querles may make."

"Querles will tell the truth," said Cook.

I hoped he would.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STATEMENT OF QUERLES.

SERGEANT COOK seemed to have all the power he needed to do whatever he wished. He was certainly a strong man at headquarters.

He, with Otter and myself, sat in our room at King's, talking over the entire case.

"Suppose," suggested Otter, "we confront Querles with Mrs. Vernon. Do you think it would open his lips?"

"Probably," said Cook. "But whether to our advantage or not—that is the point."

"I think it would be," replied Otter. "It seems to me that most of the confessions in criminal cases have taken place in the presence of some one closely interested in the affair. I remember one case——"

"Now," said Cook, interrupting, "let us go on. Memories of those not woven in this particular case cannot bear on the matter. It seems to me that Mrs. Vernon, if she is physically able, should hear what Querles has to say. I am not sure that the confession of Querles will be as satisfactory as we think.

"But it may be more so. Querles, my good friends, is a unique and interesting type of the modern criminal. I suggest that I see Mrs. Vernon alone and learn what she wishes in the matter."

"That seems all right," said Otter. "I don't know Mrs. Vernon at all, and if you can get anything out of her that will do us any good, so much the better."

Cook subsided into his customary silence. Not a word could we get out of him. Suddenly he left his chair and bolted for the door.

"Where now?" yelled Otter.

"To see Mrs. Vernon."

There was no use remonstrating with him. Mrs. Vernon, so far as we knew, was in Nice. This fact did not seem to bother Cook. He returned in about two hours, radiant.

"Mrs. Vernon will be at the Albemarle again to-morrow," he said. "Now we will get something out of all this mess of mystery."

Otter and Cook and I talked the matter over, but beyond the realm of conjecture we could not go. Each had a theory and not one of us had absolute proof. We hoped that Querles would confess.

In the office of the Commissioner of Police the meeting took place two days later. Mrs. Vernon and Gladys were there, Otter and I were there, and Cook was there. Querles, now in his own proper person, cowered in a corner guarded by two policemen.

"This," said the commissioner, "becomes a magisterial case after the deposition of the accused. If Querles wishes

to make a statement, it is now in order. I wish, however, to say that his deposition may be used as evidence against him at his trial."

"No, it will not," said Querles, and he laughed.

"You are bold about it," observed Cook.

"I can afford to be."

"I may remark," went on the commissioner, Lord Hasponal, "we have not gathered here to listen to personal insults between prisoner and detective. It seems to me that under the extraordinary circumstances that have marked the course of this case, the person to speak first is Sergeant Cook."

Querles laughed again, but his laugh was a peculiar one.

"It is not necessary," he said; "I can tell my story. After that you may do anything you like."

"Proceed," said his lordship.

"Mrs. Vernon," Querles began, "I have had no reason to do you a personal injury, but there was a spirit of revenge in my heart toward your husband that I could not control."

He then repeated the same story he had told me about Mr. Vernon jilting his own mother at the altar and his determination to do the same to the daughter of Mr. Vernon.

"Now," he said in continuation, "let me get to my own career. I was a poor boy. There was, at the time I took up my life of crime, no apparent hope for me.

"I began small. I met a woman with a little money and married her. I borrowed money wherever I could, but the small amounts I was enabled to borrow did not gratify my needs and wants.

"I met Gorris and others at the clubs. I had absolutely no conscience in dealing with them as I did. I was dead broke. I posed for a time as a model man. This won the regard of Mr. Vernon and Mr. Gorris.

"I had plenty of friends, and I worked them all. I lived well and posed as a rich man. As a matter of fact, I had not a dollar to my name, and owed thousands.

"The matter of revenge was an incident in my life, and an incident only. I have lived on what I could obtain from others ever since I have been able to think. Reason—oh, yes, I reason. But it has been the reasoning that makes me the master of the purses of my friends, and also makes me the slave of the law.

"I have been the American agent of the Order of Level Humanity for years. Through them I gained, and through me they gained also. It was the greatest scheme that was ever concocted to get money."

"Now," interposed the commissioner, "what about the terrible affair on board the Uria?"

Querles laughed.

"I knew," he said, "that Gorris was after me hot-foot. When I left him in London I watched his movements. I knew he would be sent back to New York. I simply bided my time, and took the same steamer in disguise. In New York I kept watch, and saw that Otter was in the case.

"When Vernon withdrew the charges against Gorris I saw that things were going wrong with me. Then they sailed for Europe, and I sailed on the same ship. Here was a man sleeping in a stateroom with one he had accused of robbery. There was at that time no proof of innocence or guilt.

"It was my opportunity. I knew that Mr. Vernon always carried a large amount of money with him. I went to the stateroom with no intention of killing him.

"Gorris was sound asleep, but Mr. Vernon woke up. I drew the coverlet down tightly over his mouth and nose and smothered him. I took the money from his pajamas. I can't say how much it was. I've used some. I have been a crook all my life, but I won't be one much longer.

"When Gorris came to London first I was in the room when he was introduced. We kept an eye on him, and when he crept out of the window and made his way to the stable loft, I went, too.

"I waited till he awoke in the morning, and pretended to be his friend, having escaped from the same gang. Then, of course, wishing to get the money demanded of Mr. Vernon, I paid a cabman to help kidnap him, and I took him to the house that Ali-Baba lives in. Ali-

Baba is nothing more than an assumed name. His right name is Jack Averlie. The others Cook can learn for himself.

"You wondered what caused the disappearance of Mr. Vernon after Gorris discovered that he was dead. I can explain that also. I kept a close watch. When Gorris went to the purser's office I went in—and—I—crowded Mr. Vernon's—body—through the — port-hole, and—when I saw Gorris in—my room I——"

The man's head drooped upon his chest.

Cook was calm and cold. I was excited, of course. The commissioner was calm, but stern and interested.

"Has he anything further to say?" asked the commissioner.

"I don't think so," answered Cook.

He had stepped over to Querles.

"I am sure he has not," added Cook. "The man is dead."

Mrs. Vernon gasped. Gladys turned to me, but there was a pallor that seemed to indicate that she was ill.

"Gladys!" I cried. "Do you believe me now? Make me a happy man by saying that you believe me innocent."

"I do," she said in a trembling voice, and then Mrs. Vernon fainted.

Cook took charge of the case after that. The confession of Querles was written down in full and an autopsy was held.

It was found that all the time he was talking he had been suffering the inward symptoms of poisoning. He had taken a deadly drug, preferring death by his own hand to execution.

His suicide was the real factor in changing Mrs. Vernon's mind toward me. She received me graciously.

The case suddenly became the most celebrated in England and America. Every one of the members of the gang was sent to prison. Cook placed the confession of Querles before the magistrates, and there were witnesses enough to prove his statements.

The day following the confession Mrs. Vernon sent for me.

"Mr. Gorris," she said, "I ask your pardon. I beg it. I want you to forgive me, and I do wish that we shall be friends again."

"I echo my mother's request," added Gladys.

"I am proud," I said, "that I have vindicated myself in your eyes. Let us be friends."

"We are," said Gladys.

Mrs. Vernon had rented a villa at Nice, and we went there. The days passed happily. Gladys and I are to be married some day, but Mrs. Vernon is still ill. We must wait.

THE END.

ALMOST AS ARRANGED.

BY PORTER EMERSON BROWNE.

How Chance stepped in, when Obstinacy was rampant, and took a hand in the game.

IT all began when Uncle Tim—my guardian, you know—called me into his den one day shortly after I had finished college, and told me that he had arranged a most satisfactory alliance for me.

Now, what do you think of that for an apparently *compos mentis* American uncle to tell an able-bodied nephew in the twentieth century?

But in extenuation of the old gentleman let me remark that, in his early days, he had the misfortune to wear a *table d'hôte* uniform and do chores for his elders at Eton and Oxford—which is a palliation, but not an excuse.

When Uncle Tim informed me of the arrangements that he had so considerately made for my future, I endeavored to appear pleased and thanked him for his well-meant but altogether ridiculous efforts on my behalf, telling him that I had decided to attend to those small details of life for myself.

I further added that it looked to me as though every man should be his own matrimonial agent, just as he should eat his own food and wear his own clothes.

Uncle Tim bit about twice too much from the end of his cigar, and told me that I was a deuced ungrateful puppy. Then he asked me if he were to gather that I refused to concur in the altogether harmonious and proper marriage that he had arranged for me, and I told him that he was to gather that, at least.

"By the way, who's the lady?" I asked.

"Hortense Langham, the daughter of a very old and dear chum of mine at Oxford," replied Uncle Tim, viciously scratching a match on the edge of the table.

"American?" I queried.

"Yes," snapped Uncle Tim.

"Well, what does she say?" I asked.

"Eh—she——" sputtered Uncle Tim.

"Says just what I do," I stated positively. "If she doesn't, I'll never marry her."

"And if she does?" asked Uncle Tim hopefully.

"Why, then, of course I can't. How can I?"

He thought it over for a moment—for two or three moments—and then he said just "Damn!" and no more.

Then he began to bluster. He's a big, fine-looking old gentleman, you know, and usually when he starts to paw and rear and champ his bit, he gets what he wants, and gets it quickly—from those, that is, who don't know him. I do.

"What do you mean," he thundered in his deep bass, "by setting up your infantile judgment against mine? Don't you think I know enough to choose you a wife?"

Uncle Tim's a bachelor, so I replied calmly:

"Past performances count, uncle."

"I'll have you understand that I am your guardian until you are twenty-five—for six months more!"

"So a misguided Providence has decreed," I answered.

"Your humor is about as great as your common sense," said Uncle Tim savagely.

"Thank you," I replied modestly, taking good care to regard this as a compliment.

Uncle Tim sniffed.

"Then you won't do it?" he demanded fiercely.

"On one condition," I said.

"Well?"

"That you let me buy your cigars and clothes and tell you what time to go to bed as long as you live," I returned. "That's fair. I know a whole lot more about cigars and clothes and bedtime than you do about wives."

"Don't you want to spend my money, too?" he asked sarcastically.

"I wouldn't be so unjust," I returned. "That's a thing in which *you* have had the more experience. I'll leave that to you."

"You are very funny, aren't you?" queried Uncle Tim sarcastically.

"It runs in the family," I rejoined modestly.

Doubtless it was very rude of me to converse thus, but I was beginning to get a little warm myself. It was all so ridiculous, this talk of an *alliance*. Just as though I were the Crown Prince of Siam or the great and only scion of a decaying nobility. It made me weary.

It evidently made Uncle Tim so, too, for he quite lost the little patience that he usually carries with him.

"I've had enough of this," he shouted. "Will you or will you not?"

"Not," I answered. "When my marrying time comes, I'll perhaps put a personal in the *Herald* or go to a matrimonial agency, where you can look over an assortment of wives before buying. But I will have some sort of a run for my money."

"Leave my house!" he thundered in a voice that made the lampshades rattle. "You'll never get a cent of my money. I'll leave it to the Soldiers' Home."

"Doubtless a much more worthy charity," I approved.

"You'll get your own money—all of it—when you are twenty-five," he continued in megaphone tones, "and you can go to the devil with it."

Now, I didn't want to row it with the old gentleman, who has the biggest heart in the world if his self-esteem and sense of dignity didn't cover it up and tuck the edges in. So I tried to mollify him.

"Now, look here, uncle," I said, "I——"

"Don't 'look here' me!"

Bang went his fist on the table, and the little bronze Venus did a high-jump that was really creditable for one of her years.

"All right," I replied.

I arose.

"When you want me," I said, "you know where to find me."

And I turned to leave.

"You come around on your next birthday, and not before, you ungrateful puppy!" vociferated Uncle Tim, and the Venus made another hop. "And you won't be detained unduly."

"Very well, uncle," I said. "Good-night."

Parkins helped me on with my coat.

"When will you be back, Mr. Julian?" he asked.

"To-morrow some time, Parkins," I answered.

I had "left the house" on divers previous occasions, and so I was able to prognosticate rather accurately future events.

I had left once because I would not give up football; once because I wouldn't part my hair in the middle; once because I wouldn't go to Oxford; once because I bought a power-boat; once because I wanted to play polo; once because I didn't want to play polo, and several other times for things that have slipped my mind.

On the first occasion my absence had been of a week's duration, on the second five days, and they had been consistently growing less. So I figured this to last about twenty-four hours at the outside.

I crossed over into the park, for it was still early afternoon. The green lawns were covered with pretty children wearing little white dresses that stuck out all around like lampshades above their fat, bare legs, and they were getting gloriously dirty and having the time of their lives while their nurses held soulful converse with big, blue-coated policemen with white gloves and countenances glowing with self-satisfaction.

After helping the children disorganize with salted peanuts the digestions of several sociable squirrels, I continued in my walk across the park.

I reached Central Park West, and, turning to the south, passed the Circle and went on down Seventh Avenue. When I reached Forty-Second Street I chanced to see a clock. The hands were at a quarter to three, so I saw that I would have to ride if I wished to reach my bank in time; for my down-town journeying had been with the partial object of cashing a check to sustain me through my period of ostracism.

I swung on a car and sat down beside a girl.

And such a girl!

I have seen all those things that Botticelli and Rembrandt and Gibson and Peter Paul Somebody and Christy have done, and it was quite evident to me that they had never seen her or they would have done better—much better.

If you should take all the best things in all the galleries that anemic-looking Cook's tourists are herded through so many times a year, and composite them, and multiply them by eighty-four, the result would be a rank and puerile imitation of the girl who sat beside me on this Broadway car. And in that company and on that car she looked about as incongruous as a calla lily at Coney Island.

I am sure that I should have been extremely rude if at just this time the conductor had not made his appearance on the running-board, and, thrusting a large and dirty paw under my chin, demanded his tribute.

I felt in my change pocket. There was nothing there. Then I sought my pocketbook. I had left it at home. Every pocket was empty. I hadn't so much as a match-box.

"Git busy," requested the conductor impatiently.

I got busy, but it was futile. I hadn't a cent.

"Come, come! Git a move on you," demanded the representative of the company.

"I'm very sorry," I explained politely, "but I've left my money at home."

"Too t'in," declared the conductor. "Gimme de coin er fall off. See?"

The rest of the passengers in my immediate vicinity were waking up and taking notice.

"Looks like a crook," commented a

large man with an irregularly spotted vest.

"I think he's a pickpocket," said a sharp-faced old woman with spectacles. "Look at the di'mon' in his ring. I wonder if it's reel?"

I got very red in the face, and then I grew much redder as I realized that She sat beside me, listening to it all. What did she think? How did she regard me? As a fanlight-worker or a murderer? The others seemed to have usurped almost every other branch of criminology.

Angry and somewhat excited, I turned upon the conductor.

"I've got four thousand shares in your beastly road," I announced, "and——"

"W'y don't yez cash 'em in an' git some nickels, den?" asked the conductor pertinently. "Come, pay up er fall off. Dem fairy tales don't make no hit wit' me. See?"

And then the girl—the Angel—beside me (and this is fact, not fiction, that I am relating) turned her great, dark eyes on me, and said:

"Why, Tom, *I* have change." And she handed the conductor a dime.

"Gee!" said the large man with the spotted vest. "His wife settles. He must be a dook."

The girl blushed a glorious red and looked away. And as for me, the whole affair, culminating in such a surprise, was so bewildering that I sat there dumbly, a victim of disseminated intellect.

At length I came to and then I began to wonder what the proper course of procedure might be—whether it would be her wish to persist in her angelic deception for the benefit of the rest of the passengers or to forget the break in the conventionalities that her impulsive kindness had led her to make.

It was quite clear that she had done what she had done solely from goodness of heart and an unwillingness to see a fellow-being placed in an embarrassing position and (I feared) in quite an impersonal way, and so, under the circumstances, I felt that I would be a brute to take any advantage whatsoever of her charitable deed.

And yet, if we should separate without a word, the other passengers might misconstrue, and so, when she signaled the conductor to stop, I, too, arose, and, alighting from the car, assisted her to descend.

And then it was that Providence, in the shape of a large, ornately clad man, who was considerably more illuminated than the laws of either good breeding or the city allow, came to my aid. For with maudlin, East Side gallantry he attempted to throw his arm about her.

But he didn't succeed, for I landed on the point of his jaw, and down he went, hard. And it wasn't a minute before we were the center of a large, inquisitive audience that was constantly growing larger and more curious.

Luckily, there was a cab drawn up at the curb close by, and I hailed the driver.

"To the park," I directed. Then to the girl, who was standing beside me, frightened and helpless, I said:

"Get in, please."

She saw that I was right, and, without waiting to question, entered the cab. I closed the flaps.

"Tell him where you wish to go," I said. "I am very grateful. Good-by, and thank you."

"And you?" she queried.

"Oh, I'll stay here and talk things over with the police," I replied lightly.

With a quick, impulsive gesture, she flung open the flaps.

"Come," she said simply.

She turned upon me her dark, glowing eyes and—well, the police went without explanations, unless they got them from the red-necktied Providence who was now snoring lustily on a Belgian block.

It was in a rubber-tired triumphal chariot that I rolled up the avenue, for was not she beside me? I couldn't think of a thing to say. I could only gloat.

At length she glanced up at me shyly from beneath long lashes.

"I don't know what you'll think of me," she said, hesitatingly.

I tried to tell her, but I became too incoherent. Still, as she blushed and didn't seem angry, I judged that my remarks were somewhat intelligible and not entirely obnoxious.

"I am Clare Langham," she said at length.

I jumped.

"You have a sister?" I ejaculated absurdly.

"Yes, three," she said. "Do you know them?"

"I know of a Miss Hortense Langham. Is she your sister?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Oh," I said.

"Why 'oh,'" she asked.

"Because she was—er—requested to marry—some one I know," I replied with hesitation.

"But she won't," returned the girl at my side positively. "She told me so."

"I don't blame her a bit," I announced. "If she's like you, no man could possibly be worthy of her."

She blushed.

"Oh, but it isn't that," she said. "The man's quite possible. Really he is."

"Thank you," I rejoined feelingly.

She looked at me, perplexed.

"I beg your pardon?" she said inquiringly.

I couldn't think of any explanation for my apparently ridiculous remark, so I asked hurriedly:

"Then why won't she marry him?"

"Why," she explained seriously, "one can't love a man whom one does not know."

"And so," I said, "your sister is old-fashioned enough to believe in love. And do you?"

"Why, yes, of course," she answered simply and wonderingly. "Don't you?"

Her eyes were raised to mine, and in their dark, glowing depths I saw many, many things that I had never before known that eyes held; and I kept finding more wonderful, beautiful things until at last her long lashes fell and the red blood delicately colored the tender whiteness of her cheek.

Then I answered her question.

"Yes," I said; and I meant it as I had never meant anything before.

My hand fell on hers, which trembled for a moment and then lay still; and, do you know, it felt as though it had always been there, and yet hadn't—and this means nothing save to those who know.

And then the driver stuck his ugly face in though the trap.

"Where d'yer wanter go?" he queried.

"Don't be so deuced inquisitive," I shouted. "Drive anywhere, and when you get there drive somewhere else, and don't bother me."

And I really believe that that was what he did, for it was quite dusk when we at length drove up to the Langhams' place; and she wondered what made the sun set at half-past four that night when it hadn't gone down until a quarter past seven on the night before—for really it couldn't have been more than half an hour since we had entered the park.

I avowed that twenty minutes was the utmost limit—and believed it, too.

I drove back to Uncle Tim's, and Parkins paid the cabbie. I found Uncle Tim sitting over his cordial and cigar when I entered the dining-room.

"Time goes quickly," he observed ironically.

"It does," I replied feelingly, thinking of the park.

"I thought I told you not to come back until your birthday," he went on acidly.

"You did," I replied, "but I couldn't wait as long as that to tell you that your judgment is almost good. You struck the right house, anyway."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Lend me a nickel," I requested.

"What?" he cried.

"Well, then, advance it to me out of my legacy."

He tendered me the desired coin wonderingly.

"Keep it," I said. "And now I want you to go up to Mr. Langham's and tell him that I want to marry his daughter—the one to whom I owe this nickel."

My uncle stared at me in amazement.

"Are you crazy?" he asked in anxious bewilderment.

"Almost," I replied. "I've ordered the brougham around. It's at the door now. And I'll have a maniacal attack that will make a Kansas cyclone look like a spring zephyr if you don't get up

to the Langhams' place in about a minute. I want to go up there myself, you know, as soon as you bring me back the right answer."

Then my uncle's cordial jumped up in the air and descended wrong end up, and he said that he'd stand no more tomfoolishness, and that he'd have an explanation or know the reason why, damme if he wouldn't.

So I heaved a chastened sigh and told him in as few words as possible all that had occurred.

And before I had finished the good old gentleman, muttering that he'd be jiggered, had his silk hat over one ear and his coat on his arm and was off to the Langhams'.

I tramped up and down like a spotted hyena in a cage for at least a year. And then I heard the brougham stop in front of the house.

Pushing poor old Parkins into a chair, I ran to the door.

"Well?" I cried eagerly as I flung it open.

And it *was* well. For She stood before me. Behind her were Uncle Tim and old Mr. Langham, both of whom stood there chuckling and poking each other in the ribs.

Trembling, shy, with happiness in her eyes and upon her lips, she came toward me. And I—well, just then Uncle Tim gave old Mr. Langham an extra forcible jolt and murmured in a stage whisper:

"I knew the youngsters would come around to our way of thinking!"

And old Mr. Langham chuckled absurdly: "Of course."

THE RAVENS OF THE RHINE.

BY F. K. SCRIBNER.

A war-time story of France in the year of the Prussian invasion, and of the tight corner an American non-combatant elected to occupy.

CHAPTER I.

BARRED OUT.

A WATERY moon fulfilled the promise of a blustering night. The semi-gloom gave place to darkness. A few great drops of rain splashed on the dusty highway; but the storm promised to be more of wind than water.

Bosworth saw the glimmer of a light some distance down the highroad. His pace quickened, and, pushing forward against the gale, he presently discovered the source of the yellow gleam: the steady rays of a lamp in the window of a squat, two-storied stone building.

It did not require a careful examination to tell him that the place upon which he had come so opportunely was an inn; one of the many hundred which dot the landscape of Northern France.

The lower story was dark; it was well toward midnight and the innkeeper had evidently closed his door for the night. Yet the presence of the light proved that some one was astir, and Bosworth hit the stout oaken door a resounding rap with his heavy cane.

Only the echo of the blow and the howling of the wind answered his effort; a second and a third time he beat loudly upon the door.

Bosworth understood something of the disposition of the rural French innkeeper. After the third blow he stepped back and waited.

A few moments elapsed, a shadow passed before the single flickering light, and the noise of a window being opened cautiously sounded above his head. Looking upward, Bosworth called impatiently:

"Hi, monsieur, open the door!"

A head was thrust cautiously from the half-open window. A moment's silence, then:

"God forbid I should turn any one away on such a night, but monsieur can see; the bolts are drawn."

"That is evident, but you can open them. You are not afraid?"

Bosworth spoke impatiently.

The head in the window remained motionless; then the innkeeper answered.

"That is it, for the wise man guards himself in such times as these. Mon-

sieur speaks French excellently, but that is nothing; it is possible that behind monsieur certain ones are sitting motionless in the saddle. Even now I fancy I hear the flutter of the little pennons, and beneath each pennon is the cap of a Uhlan."

Bosworth made a gesture of impatience.

"So that is it," said he dryly. "Well, there are no Uhlans here. I am alone. I am an American, and what I want most is a roof and a place to sleep until morning. Do you understand?"

"It is possible, but monsieur may be lying," answered the Frenchman calmly. "In any case, I will not open the door."

Bosworth swore softly. It began to look as though he must walk all night or pass the time till daylight under a cowshed..

The desire to hurl his heavy walking-stick at the head above almost overmastered him, but he said with forced calmness:

"Then it is possible that monsieur takes me for a Uhlan. Well, in the first place, I have no horse, being unable to procure one; in the second, I am an American, *en route* for Paris from across the frontier. Thirdly, I have walked for some hours, and not a Uhlan has appeared this side of the Rhine. Why is it that monsieur suspects there are Uhlans in the neighborhood?"

The head in the window nodded violently.

"Perhaps it is that monsieur takes me for a fool; thrice this day have certain ones stopped before the door, and each bore the same tale. 'The Uhlans have crossed the Rhine; look to yourself, friend Pierre, answer not a rude summons at the door.' Such things being so, none shall be admitted here after nightfall, for I understand perhaps better than monsieur thinks. These Uhlans are wolves; as wolves they lurk under cover of the bushes, their eyes gleaming fiercely in the darkness. Against stout stone walls they are powerless, but, once inside, they would destroy what I possess and murder me into the bargain."

"You certainly are a fool," said Bosworth sharply. "For were the Uhlans here do you fancy a door would stop them? I tell you I have traveled for some hours; all I ask is a bed until morning; it is worth ten francs."

There was a minute of silence, then the innkeeper replied.

"Ten francs! Mother of God, but I would open for half that were it not as it is. But now a hundred francs would not be sufficient; monsieur must seek shelter elsewhere."

"So it seems," answered Bosworth dryly. "But where; in the fields?"

The innkeeper hesitated.

"There is yet the château, if monsieur would care to try," said he.

"Oh, the château! But perhaps they fear also the Uhlans," answered Bosworth dryly.

"God, the Germans, or the devil, the marquis fears nothing," replied the innkeeper soberly.

"And where is this château?"

"Straight on up the highway; in a quarter of an hour monsieur may come upon it."

Bosworth shrugged his shoulders.

"Probably this château is in total darkness, and I shall have only my trouble for my pains," thought he "but anything is better than a night in the open fields."

Then, raising his voice:

"And who may this marquis be who fears not God, the devil, or the dreaded Uhlans?"

"Who but the Marquis de Luynes of the tenth generation of his house; it is evident monsieur is indeed a stranger, that he should ask such a question here."

"Have I not told you?" cried the American impatiently. "To the devil with your châteaus and marquises. Come down and open the door."

"*Ventre St. Gris!* Not though it was the emperor himself. Here I am safe; God knows what may be behind you in the darkness," responded the innkeeper fervently.

"You are a fool," retorted Bosworth angrily. "The rumor that a few German lances have crossed the Rhine is sufficient to throw you into a panic. What will you do, *mon ami*, when the black and white pennons really flutter before your door? Again I say you are a fool, monsieur."

The Frenchman crossed himself a

number of times. It was plain that the very mention of the dreaded Uhlans—the ravens of the German army—filled his breast with alarm unutterable. The American understood perfectly the door would not be opened that night.

"You tell me to apply at the château of the Marquis de Luynes; your marquises are not fond of receiving strangers at this hour of the night. Why not better say plainly: 'There is a cow-shed behind the inn; go thither until daybreak'?"

"It is as monsieur wills, but the château is but a little way off," answered the innkeeper shortly, and with that he slammed shut the window.

Bosworth stood silent for a few minutes in the darkness. Then the humor of the situation struck him and he began to laugh.

Because the war precluded the possibility of obtaining a horse he had followed the highway on foot since the noon before, when the train upon which he had taken passage had been seized for the transportation of provisions to the army.

It was his purpose to push on to Paris, from which he might watch the development of events. A cut across country some twelve leagues would bring him to another railroad line, upon which he hoped to take passage to the capital.

Now, however, night had overtaken him, he was footsore and weary, and a fool of a superstitious Frenchman denied him admittance to a public inn.

Should it be the cow-shed or the château? With some misgivings as to the success of further efforts, he decided on the latter; he remembered that the innkeeper had said the Marquis de Luynes had no fear of God, the devil, nor the Germans.

The quarter of an hour's walk stretched into a tramp of twice that length, but at last Bosworth saw the glimmer of several lights ahead of him. It was plainly the château, standing in a park, beside the entrance of which burned an ancient iron lantern.

To follow the road which led from this lantern to the black structure beyond required scarcely three minutes.

Bosworth found himself standing before the door of the château. What was better, the interior of the house was lighted; it was evident the Marquis de Luynes was not an early retirer, for it was somewhat past midnight.

Mounting the terraced steps, Bosworth hesitated, then, rendered bold by thought of the cow-shed or a night spent under the lowering sky, plied the massive knocker. The echo of the blow had scarcely died away when the door opened. A tall, white-headed, old man confronted the midnight intruder.

Bosworth guessed that it was the marquis himself, the more readily because the old Frenchman held a book in his hand. It was evident De Luynes was a burner of midnight oil.

The old nobleman peered at the American keenly, but manifested no surprise. He was alone and apparently unarmed; there was war in the land, rumors that even then the Germans were in the neighborhood; the worst element of France, taking advantage of the confusion incident upon hostilities, was giving itself free rein, but no shadow of alarm was visible on the highbred face, only the faintest sign of curiosity.

Bosworth broke the momentary silence.

"A thousand pardons, monsieur, but—I was directed here; even at such an hour."

"And to whom am I indebted that monsieur has so honored me?"

The voice of the marquis was calm, calm with a studied coldness.

"Perhaps a mile from here there is an inn; through fear of the Germans admittance was denied me, but I was told——" began Bosworth, at a loss exactly what to say in the presence of this austere old Frenchman.

He had counted on meeting a servant, if indeed he gained admittance to the château at all.

"So it is that monsieur was directed here by those who feared to open the door of the inn. It is scarcely possible that monsieur understands—the place at which he has applied."

Something besides coldness had crept into the even voice.

Bosworth almost wished he had chosen the cow-shed, but there was no turning back now.

"I have already begged monsieur's

pardon. But I have walked since noon, the night is stormy, and—I am a gentleman, *monsieur le marquis*," said he desperately.

The owner of the château made a little gesture.

"So I have observed, else—— And might I inquire who monsieur may be?"

"I am an American—John Bosworth—and——"

The marquis' interruption was in the nature of a surprise.

"Might I inquire the name of monsieur's father?" asked he sharply.

"I was named for him, but——" began Bosworth.

The marquis was peering into his face.

"It is indeed like the picture which hangs in my son's room." The old Frenchman seemed to be talking to himself. Then, suddenly:

"The father of monsieur was the general—the General Bosworth—who commanded the third division in—in what is styled the Wilderness. Am I mistaken, monsieur?"

"My father did command the third division under Grant." The astonishment he felt was written plainly on the American's face.

"*Mille diables!* And you have been permitted to stand upon the threshold of my house these many minutes—you, the son of my son's old commander. *Mon Dieu,* can I forgive myself this thing, monsieur?"

The coldness had vanished from the face of the Marquis de Luynes. Bosworth, too astonished to speak, felt himself almost dragged into the spacious hall of the château.

"It was given to my son the honor, with others of his countrymen, to serve as aide-de-camp under your renowned father, monsieur; it was indeed a great kindness he did him when he received in the shoulder the fragment of a shell. Surely it is the hand of God which has directed you here, child of my child's old commander."

The face of the marquis was flushed with excitement.

Bosworth remembered that several young Frenchmen had served under his father during the war between the States; now he thanked his lucky stars that one was a De Luynes. His reception at the château was like to be otherwise than he had expected.

CHAPTER II.

FIRING AT CLOSE RANGE.

THE marquis drew his guest along the hall into a well-lighted room, which was evidently the library of the ancient structure. The old Frenchman pointed to a vacant space above the fireplace.

"It was there hung the sword my son wore in America; it is now with him in the army of the Seine. And the general, your father—he is well, monsieur?"

"I left him so eighteen months ago," Bosworth replied.

"Then you have been absent from America for so long a time, and—and, monsieur, why is it that you are walking through France to-night? Surely it is an accident, something——"

"Only that your government decided to seize the train on which I was journeying to Paris, as it has seized all the horses in the province. Being dumped down in that fashion, nothing remained but to walk," answered Bosworth dryly.

The marquis almost pushed him into a great easy-chair.

"And I have kept you standing; what would Jean say should he know?"

"Your son is in the army of the Seine?" asked Bosworth.

"Of the Fortieth Chasseurs; he went a captain at the first call to arms."

Then, after a brief pause:

"You have seen the armies of France, monsieur?"

"Only a few divisions; I crossed the border but yesterday," answered Bosworth.

"From Germany?"

The young man nodded. "I have been in Germany for a year. At the university, where I was completing a course in surgery."

The marquis had opened a cupboard in one corner of the room; he put the bottle of wine and a plate of cakes gently upon the table at Bosworth's elbow. Filling a glass to the brim he passed it to his guest.

Bosworth sipped the wine slowly;

some of the fatigue which was creeping over him vanished under the stimulant of the liquor. The marquis refilled the glass before he spoke.

"Then you have seen something, perhaps much, of the Prussians; I have heard that they are trained like a machine. What think you of that, monsieur?"

"There are no better soldiers in the world: this war will not be for a day, monsieur, and—the Germans are terribly in earnest," replied Bosworth gravely.

A shadow crossed the old Frenchman's face.

"There are some who believe otherwise, but others think as you do, monsieur; the war will not end with one battle, and—I have heard to-day that the Germans have crossed the Rhine."

Bosworth did not reply; his sympathies lay with the country in which he had dwelt for the past twelve months; as the guest of a Frenchman courtesy demanded he should hide his sentiments.

The marquis spoke again—gravely.

"Uhlans have been reported not far away. Could you tell me what may be behind the Uhlans, monsieur?"

Bosworth set down the wine-glass.

"The soldiers from across the Rhine, companies, battalions, regiments, divisions; the Uhlans are the forerunners of the Prussian armies, monsieur," he answered.

De Luynes made a quick gesture; one would have thought he was warding off a blow. Then he asked suddenly:

"And this war, monsieur—as an American, a neutral, what is your opinion?"

"Do you desire me to answer plainly?"

The marquis was looking him full in the face.

"Yes," said he almost sharply.

"I think," replied Bosworth soberly, "that the war can bring only misfortune upon France; I would not have said it had you not pressed me for an opinion. I have watched these Germans for more than a year: as I have told you, they are terribly in earnest. Then there is Von Moltke: he has already fought the war out, years ago—with his head. Now he is using his hands."

He had thought his words might bring a protest from his host, but to his surprise the marquis bowed his head, ever so slightly. An expression of pain flitted across his face.

"It is as monsieur says, and we—France—are we too prepared, like these men across the Rhine? I am an old man, monsieur. I have seen fighting on the plains of Africa. There is no more loyal Frenchman than the head of the house of De Luynes, but, as you have told me, France can gain no good from this war. I have known it for a long time, Monsieur Bosworth, though my son and daughter already see Berlin under the tricolor."

He walked once across the room, then stopped directly before Bosworth's chair.

"There are no French troops within thirty miles of us, and—and you have seen of what use are the peasants. Do not think I am afraid—that were not possible; but to-morrow, the next day, these Uhlans may be here, these wolves of the German border. And I have a daughter, monsieur."

For the moment Bosworth was at a loss what to reply: the change in his host's manner had been so abrupt—this old man who had no fear of God, the devil, or the Germans. But he must say something.

"I think," he answered soberly, "that *monsieur le marquis* does not understand the Germans; they do not war on noncombatants and women; so long as your house is not turned into a fortress not a stone will be touched by a Prussian soldier."

What the marquis might have replied was interrupted in an unexpected manner. A noise outside the window drew his attention and that of the American to the opening. Bosworth caught a glimpse of several dark faces, dimly revealed by the light which came from the lamp on the table.

Before he could arise from his chair, before the old Frenchman could take a step toward the window, half a dozen forms pushed their way through the casement, and behind crowded others.

Bosworth saw that the newcomers were French; evidently some were soldiers, for they were attired in the red, baggy trousers and short blue jackets of

infantrymen. Others were garbed in an assorted costume; one wore the steel helmet of a chasseur.

The marquis had drawn himself up stiffly, one hand rested heavily on the edge of the table. He comprehended the identity of his visitors, though the American did not.

"What do you mean? What is your business here, messieurs?" he asked sharply.

The expression of his face was not pleasant to look upon.

He of the helmet advanced toward the middle of the room.

"And is it Monsieur le Marquis de Luynes who puts that question to loyal French soldiers? *Dame!* We have not been asleep, though certain ones might have thought so. We have come for the German spy, Monsieur de Luynes."

His eyes turned with a triumphant leer straight upon Bosworth. The marquis' face went white with anger.

"And did you think to find a *German* here? You may go as you have come—by the window," said he coldly.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. Bosworth, who felt himself the center of all eyes, opened his mouth to speak. He, too, understood the situation: the men before him were not regular soldiers of France, but a band of *Franc-tireurs*—irregular troops banded together, whose object was to rob and assassinate in the name of France.

He had heard something of these land pirates while at the University of Heidelberg; had heard that should the Germans enter France these *Franc-tireurs* would be shot down without mercy. He opened his mouth to speak, but before a word could pass his lips the marquis checked him sharply.

"Leave these *canaille* to me, monsieur; they have seen fit to insult me twice this night: first, by entering the château like a band of cutthroats; and secondly, by accusing me, who fought for France before they were born, of entertaining a German spy. I have dealt with such as these before—in Paris and elsewhere; it is they, and such as they, who disgrace the empire."

He spoke coldly and with extreme contempt stamped on every word; then suddenly his manner changed.

"Begone!" cried he in a terrible voice. "How dare you, how dare you come here, tainting the atmosphere with your evil presence and insulting a noble of France?"

Some of those behind the man in the chasseur's helmet began to cower and hal turned toward the window, but the leader only answered the old marquis' outburst by a sneering laugh.

"And so you think to frighten us because you are a nobleman and have dined in Paris with the emperor. *Bien!* And there is something else: It was your son, the grand captain of chasseurs, who ordered me ten stripes upon the bare back and drove me from the regiment. That was two weeks ago, *monsieur le marquis*, but I have not forgotten. Now, *I* am here and your son is off somewhere with the Prussians."

"Ah!" said De Luynes shortly. "Ah! And so it is that which brought you here. Well?"

The leader of the *Franc-tireurs* had worked himself into a passion: his teeth began to glisten under his shaggy mustache.

"*Sacré bleu!* And he asks that!" he shouted. "I will tell you, *monsieur le marquis*. To harbor a spy, a Prussian spy, is to be a traitor to France—*à bas le traiteur!* It is you who would betray the empire to the Germans."

The marquis was trembling and his eyes blazed with passion. Bosworth started forward.

"Look here," said he shortly, "you have twice called me a German spy; it is not necessary to say you lie, and that you know you lie. I suppose it was that cowardly innkeeper who told you I was here. You come at night to browbeat an old man and——"

He checked himself suddenly; he was going to say "and a helpless girl," but a quick look from the marquis stopped him in time.

He turned fiercely upon the leader of the *Franc-tireurs*.

"You are a coward. Step out here and——"

"*Mille tonnerre!*" shouted the Frenchman.

He snatched a knife from his belt and struck fiercely at the American. Bosworth dodged easily; he was unarmed,

and shot a quick glance about the room for some weapon with which to defend himself.

The next instant the heavy wine bottle crashed full in the passionate face of the *Franc-tireur;* the man uttered a groan, reeled back against his followers, and clapped both hands to his battered countenance. Tiny streams of blood trickled through his fingers.

Bosworth understood why the rabble was there: to be avenged upon the marquis for the act of his son, the captain of chasseurs, and probably to loot the château. His hasty action had brought matters to a crisis a few minutes earlier.

His fighting instinct was aroused, and he did not take reckoning of the odds against him.

The sudden and unexpected mishap to their leader seemed to paralyze the other *Franc-tireurs;* they stood still and did nothing. Bosworth called to the marquis.

"The door is behind you, monsieur, perhaps——"

The cold voice of the old nobleman broke in.

"You should not have mixed yourself in this, monsieur. *Mon Dieu,* you should have left him for me to kill. Now—now we will fight it out together—if the *canaille* know how to fight."

Suddenly a shot rang out from somewhere in the crowd near the window. Probably it was fired at the American, but Bosworth stood unharmed; the marquis was not so fortunate.

Receiving the ball full in the chest, he swayed backward toward the wall, clutched at the draperies, then sank without word or groan to the floor.

It seemed to Bosworth that scarcely a second elasped between the shot and a second report; the echo of the first had not ceased ringing in his ears when the thunder of the other sounded behind him.

He saw one of the *Franc-tireurs* pitch forward, saw the leader snatch his hand from his wounded face and stare past him toward the inner door of the library. He turned sharply, thinking to see one of the marquis' servants who had come to the defense of his master; but what he saw struck him dumb with astonishment and admiration.

Just inside the threshold of the door opening into the hall a young girl was standing; though fully dressed it was evident she had but lately arisen from slumber. Her face was pale, but her eyes looked fearlessly across the space which separated her from the rabble near the window. One hand clutched the hem of her loose robe, the other, half raised, held a short-barreled revolver.

The blood stained face of the leader of the *Franc-tireurs* was distorted by a horrible smile.

"Ah!" cried he hoarsely. "So it is the mademoiselle who has saved us the trouble of searching for her. *Ciel,* but the little one has teeth! *Monsieur le marquis* taught her something before he died."

At the final words the girl started and her gaze shifted hastily about the room. It was evident she had seen only the *Franc-tireurs,* and did not know the marquis had fallen.

Now, for the first time, she saw the old man, lying motionless near the wall. Her lips parted; she took a step forward, and, letting the revolver fall from her fingers, she threw herself upon her knees beside her father.

"*Père! Mon père!*" she cried pitifully.

The *Franc-tireurs* were pressing nearer; the leader was already within a few feet of Bosworth. The latter knew he must do something, and do it quickly.

With a rapid movement he sprang backward, stooped down, and caught up the revolver which lay just within the doorway. Then he turned and faced the *Franc-tireurs.*

CHAPTER III.

THE RAVENS OF THE RHINE.

THE man in the chasseur helmet halted in his tracks—perhaps he remembered the wine bottle. His followers crowded behind him, peering over his shoulder. A determined man armed with a revolver frequently dampens enthusiasm, and the stockily built American certainly looked determined.

Bosworth knew he was in a tight place: perhaps the most ticklish of his life, and he had seen something of

danger. He braced his back against the door casement and kept his eyes fixed on the leader of the *Franc-tireurs;* he noted with a feeling of satisfaction that one of the fellow's eyes was closed, and his nose apparently broken, but he understood perfectly that these very wounds meant his certain death did the man get him in his power.

Had it not been for the dead, or wounded, old Frenchman stretched upon the floor and the girl who knelt by his side, he would have bolted through the door and taken his chances of escaping from the château in the darkness; but under the circumstances he did not contemplate escape for a moment. To leave the young French girl to the mercies of those ruffians was not to be thought of.

The men behind the leader began to murmur; somewhere in the crowd a *chassepot* rattled. The man in the chasseur helmet turned his head sharply.

"*Mille diables!* I command that no one fire; to fall by the bullet is too easy for such a one, for—a Prussian spy," he cried fiercely.

Bosworth wondered at his own coolness; his heart was thumping like a trip-hammer against his ribs, but of nervousness, or fear, he felt nothing. His only dread was for the girl, who, with one hand upon her father's breast, was gazing up at him with blanched face.

Still keeping his eyes upon the *Franc-tireurs* he said quietly:

"Do you speak English, mademoiselle?"

The girl nodded.

"Then listen. I doubt if any of these fellows can understand what I say. Get up and slip behind me through the door. Leave the château; there must be some one in the neighborhood to whom you can go for aid. It will be worse than death for you to stay here, there are four bullets in this revolver, but those fellows number three times four. It can only be a question of a few minutes."

He imagined she would do as he asked, but she did not move. Instead she answered.

"It is for monsieur to do that—to escape from this wretched room, for why should monsieur sacrifice himself for us? Do you think I would leave my father here?"

"Very well," said Bosworth quietly; he saw that argument would be useless.

Then he addressed the *Franc-tireurs.*

"What are you waiting for? You are a dozen to two. Are you afraid of one Prussian spy?"

It seemed as though the fever of madness was coursing through his veins; he knew he was going to die sooner or later. He wanted them to rush forward in order that he might fire.

The leader turned to those directly behind him.

"Go, two of you, around the veranda and take him in the rear; we will show this Prussian dog how easily the thing can be done," he ordered.

Then to Bosworth:

"You are good at throwing wine bottles, monsieur; let us see how good you may be when it comes to dying—the death which is meted out to spies. As for that little, white-faced aristocrat, she who has killed one of the sons of France, do you think you can defend her with a noose around your neck? *Bien!* We shall see."

He wiped the blood from his lips and laughed hoarsely; and then a terrible thing happened.

The figure of the old marquis, which had lain motionless upon the floor, quivered suddenly, the wounded man arose, staggered to his feet, and faced his would-be murderers. His lean, drawn face was gray with the pallor of approaching death; upon the white bosom of his shirt a ghastly, ever-widening crimson blotch was visible; but when he spoke it was in a voice which could be heard in every corner of the large room.

"Begone, *canaille,* and leave this house in peace. It is I who command you before——"

He swayed unsteadily and would have fallen had not his daughter supported him in her arms. He seemed to forget the presence of the spellbound *Franc-tireurs,* some of whom were crossing themselves repeatedly.

"Listen, my Heloise," said he in a clear voice. "To-night's work is the work of those who call themselves Frenchmen. Within the year such will be France herself—it is the time of '93 come again. Already the columns of

the Germans are across the Rhine; it is to them you must turn, for France has betrayed her honor. Remember, it was France that killed your father."

It was plain to Bosworth that the old nobleman was mad—he who had served France through two generations; but the girl answered dully.

"It is France—France that has slain you, *mon père;* do you think I shall forget?"

The old man was leaning heavily against her shoulder. Suddenly he straightened, and with that last summoning of strength which sometimes comes to the dying, raised himself to his full height.

"I hear it—listen—the thunder of the charging squadron. It is the chasseurs, come to put this *canaille* to the saber, or, perhaps—perhaps it is the Prussians from across the Rhine."

He staggered, lurched forward, and fell at full length at the very feet of the *Franc-tireur* leader, and, even as he fell, Bosworth was conscious of a sound which rose above the crash of the body to the floor—the impatient movement of horses' feet, the ring of steel against steel, which came in through the open window.

Those of the *Franc-tireurs* nearest the veranda turned hastily, peered into the night, then began to press forward upon those between them and the center of the room, this pressure urging those in front forward toward the American.

Not comprehending the meaning of this movement, Bosworth raised the revolver.

"Back!" he shouted, and fired rapidly four times into the frenzied group before him.

Oaths, cries, and a terrible uproar arose from the *Franc-tireurs.* Those in front were being pushed forward by the frenzy of those behind; crowded toward the stern-faced man who was shooting into their ranks as fast as his finger could press the trigger.

The revolver empty, Bosworth gave himself up as lost. Hurling the weapon straight into the face of the nearest Frenchman, he sprang to one side, caught the girl in his arms, and, dragging her into the nearest corner, pushed her behind him.

But the *Franc-tireurs* did not turn in that direction. Straight across the room, over the body of the marquis and those of their fallen companions, they pushed and surged in a mad endeavor to gain the door which led into the hall.

A tumult of cries filled the room; men fought, pulled at each other's hair, bit, tore with their nails; and, above all this tumult, Bosworth could distinguish the words:

"It is the Prussians—save yourself!"

Suddenly, from out of the darkness behind this frenzied mob, the faces of men appeared in the opening of the window. These faces were bronzed and bearded, surmounted by little, queer-shaped, shining caps, which glistened in the lamplight.

Below the faces appeared broad shoulders, and uniforms edged with yellow.

These men sprang through the window casement into the room; first one, then a second, and after this one others. The first carried lances, below the steel tips of which fluttered little pennons of black and white.

Before these lances, and the men who bore them, the *Franc-tireurs* fled as would sheep before a pack of hungry wolves.

Bosworth, shielding the marquis' daughter with his body, looked upon these things as through a mist; the scowling faces of the *Franc-tireurs* no longer appeared between him and the window. The space which they had occupied was indeed filled with men, but men from across the Rhine—the Uhlans.

He heard the gruff command, uttered in German, to halt. Then, as the last of the *Franc-tireurs* crowded frantically through the doorway, a flash, followed by a second, a third, a fourth, and fifth spurted from the revolvers in the Prussians' hands.

Two of the Frenchmen fell, and through the smoke which filled the room a dozen Uhlans rushed for the door leading into the hall; others turned toward the corner.

An officer peered through the drifting smoke, his revolver half raised.

"You surrender?" said he gruffly.

Bosworth pulled himself together, and took a step forward.

"It is not necessary, Herr Captain; I am not a Frenchman," said he.

The German lowered the revolver.

"Are you an inmate of this place? What have you there?" he demanded.

"I am John Bosworth, an American, and this is Mademoiselle de Luynes."

The German's gaze shifted to the girl, then to the bodies upon the floor.

"Ah!" said he. "But the firing?"

"It was the *Franc-tireurs*. They attacked the house and shot the Marquis de Luynes; in five minutes more, had you not come, they would have hanged me to one of those trees out yonder, because I took the marquis' part and—they accused me of being a German spy."

The Uhlan thrust the revolver into his belt.

"But if you are an American what are you doing here, and *why* did they accuse you of being a German spy?" asked he sharply.

Bosworth related briefly what had occurred; the Uhlan shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems these Frenchman are engaged in fighting one another. I see no reason to doubt your word, Herr Bosworth, but I must detain you as a prisoner," he said.

"I won't object to that, for my first day in France is not filled with pleasant recollections," replied Bosworth dryly. Then: "And mademoiselle?"

"Is free to go where she pleases after daybreak," answered the Uhlan.

A shot, followed by an irregular volley, came ringing through the night. A grim smile touched Bosworth's lips.

"I hope you'll get the leader of the *Franc-tireurs*, and, if you do, you'll give me the chance to say a few words to him," he muttered.

Then, remembering suddenly the young French girl, and fearing he had neglected her too long, he turned.

He had expected to see Mademoiselle de Luynes shrinking back in terror in the presence of the dreaded Uhlans, but he was treated to a surprise. It is true the girl's face was ashen in color and her lips trembled, but her eyes looked fearlessly upon the Prussian invaders.

He had intended to explain gently, to comfort her as best he could, but, in the face of her attitude, he only asked:

"Mademoiselle understands German, does she not?"

"Yes," answered the girl; "enough to follow what the officer has said. Tell me, monsieur, tell me why they should make you a prisoner?"

"Oh," answered Bosworth lightly, "that comes under the rules of war, I suppose, and they will let me go presently. As for yourself, there is nothing to be feared from the Germans. But may I inquire what are you going to do? By to-morrow or the next day the Prussians will be gone, and we have seen what your own countrymen may do. Will you go to Paris, or is there some one here upon whom you can depend?"

The girl's lips quivered.

"First, monsieur, I will bury my father; afterward I do not know what may follow."

"But surely there are servants—some one upon whom you can rely until your brother shall return?"

"Those that remain are old, for the men have gone into the army, and my father kept but few servants, monsieur."

The voice of the Uhlan officer broke in upon them.

"Pardon," said he, "but I should advise that the *Fräulein* retire; you can see this is no place for a woman."

Bosworth threw a hasty glance around the room. The apartment, in truth, resembled a shambles: the carpet, the walls, the furniture were spattered with blood.

"Mademoiselle," said he gently, "may I be permitted to take you to your room?"

"Under escort of one of my men," broke in the Uhlan.

Bosworth bit his lip; he had forgotten he was a prisoner, subject to the will of his captors.

"You need not fear I will try to run away. In the first place, I have had plenty of excitement for one night; in the second, I am getting terribly sleepy," said he dryly.

"I do not think any one will run away to-night," returned the Prussian harshly.

Mademoiselle de Luynes crossed the room and knelt by her father's side; for a moment she remained motionless, then arose and approached the German officer.

"I thank you for coming here to-night; would that it had been sooner. It is all as Monsieur Bosworth has told you, but he has not told you that he might have escaped when it seemed as though to remain would mean his own death. He is a brave man, monsieur."

The Prussian appeared surprised. She, a French girl, had thanked him for leading a horde of Uhlans into her father's house. It is probable he had been accustomed to being addressed in a different manner by those Frenchwomen he had chanced to meet at close quarters. He muttered something under his breath.

"The *Fräulein* may retire; everything will be attended to," said he aloud, and his eyes turned for an instant upon the body of the marquis.

The girl walked to the door.

"I will not trouble you, monsieur," said she, holding out her hand to Bosworth. "Good-night, *mon ami.*"

The Uhlan gave a low command to one of his men. The girl disappeared through the doorway—the soldier followed her.

A dark flush sprang to Bosworth's temples; an angry sentence arose to his lips, but remembering where he was, he checked the impulse to give it utterance. Instead, he asked:

"Well, and what are you going to do with me, Herr Captain?"

He thrust his hand into the pocket of his coat, produced his pipe, and pressed down the half-burned tobacco into the bowl.

"If you don't mind, I'll smoke a bit; I think my nerves need quieting," he added.

Some of the Uhlans smiled; the stern lines on the face of the officer relaxed a little. Bosworth began to hunt for a match; before he could find one there was a sudden movement at the window.

Several Uhlans were pushing through the opening, driving before them a trio of the *Franc-tireurs;* one of the latter was dripping wet, the faces of all three were white with terror. An officer with tilted helmet and mud-bespattered boots pushed past the prisoners.

"I have to report the capture of these men; four were killed on the lawn outside, and one or two, I think, escaped in the darkness," said he, standing erect before the Uhlan captain.

Having made his report he stared stolidly around the room and at Bosworth, who had neglected to light the match he held between his fingers. He was returning the young German officer's stare with interest. An expression of astonishment crossed the face of the latter.

"*Gott in Himmel!* It is Herr Bosworth," he burst out suddenly.

"I fancy so, Von Werner, but I've been several things to-night; not the least of which is a German spy, and now a prisoner," was Bosworth's answer.

The voice of the Uhlan captain broke in:

"Do you know this man, Lieutenant von Werner?"

"It is Herr Bosworth; we were at the university together until I joined the regiment a month ago."

He answered with military precision, but it was plain he was burning with curiosity to learn how and why Bosworth was there in a French château filled with dead men and seized by his own soldiers.

As for Bosworth, he felt relieved; he might, indeed, be a prisoner, but the prisoner of a man with whom he had been on terms of intimacy for the good part of a year. He began to enjoy the situation.

The Uhlan captain looked fixedly at the captive *Franc-tireurs,* then turned suddenly to Bosworth.

"How many of these men entered the château? Can you tell that?" demanded he abruptly.

"A dozen, perhaps fifteen, but I counted a dozen," Bosworth replied.

"Four were killed in here, four others outside, and these three make eleven. You have permitted one or more to escape, Lieutenant von Werner," said the captain sharply.

"There is a river at the foot of the lawn; several of the enemy jumped into the water; we pulled this one out and fired at the others, but the night is very dark, Herr Captain," replied the lieutenant stolidly.

The Uhlan turned to the prisoners.

"You are not French soldiers, yet you have borne arms and attacked the

dwelling of one of your own countrymen. It is possible you may have heard of the general order issued to the German troops regarding those not regular soldiers of France found bearing arms. Well, have you anything to say?" He put the question coldly.

"We are soldiers of the empire," replied one of the prisoners sullenly.

"Do soldiers of the empire attack the houses of French noblemen and murder defenseless old men and women?" demanded the Prussian harshly.

"We know nothing of that; we were ordered to come here, and we obeyed orders," replied the *Franc-tireur*.

"By whom?"

"Le Bête—Captain Le Bête—who else, seeing he is our commander?"

"Herr Bosworth," asked the Uhlan, turning to Bosworth, "was the leader of these men a French officer?"

"A French cutthroat—I heard the marquis so style him. It appears that he was a French chasseur, a soldier in the company commanded by the marquis' son; he was dismissed in disgrace for some knavery or other," answered Bosworth quietly.

"What have you to say to that?" demanded the Uhlan gruffly.

"What does *he* know about it? He fired upon us; that started the trouble, and—the marquis was drunk," replied the *Franc-tireur*.

An expression of disgust crossed the Uhlan's face.

"These men are not only murderers, but cowards." Then to the lieutenant: "See that they are carefully guarded until daybreak; at sunrise they shall be shot."

The prisoners looked sullenly upon the floor; there was nothing they could say in their defense, and, surrounded by Uhlans, escape was hopeless. When they had been led away the Prussian captain turned to Bosworth.

"The fact that you are known to Lieutenant von Werner alters the situation, but I am obliged to detain you for a short time; our orders are strict in that particular. You have but to give me your word, Herr Bosworth, that you will not leave the château grounds and you are at liberty to do as you please," said he.

"I should like," said Bosworth, "to borrow a lantern. I want to see if one of those dead *Franc-tireurs* out there is this Le Bête, or whether he has escaped. The answer to that question may be of some moment to Mademoiselle de Luynes."

At that moment Von Werner entered the room.

"Herr Bosworth desires to examine the men who were shot outside. I have paroled him, but if he cares to have you accompany him, do so," said the captain.

Bosworth desired nothing more. He wished to relate to Von Werner what had occurred at the château. The latter procured a lantern, and together the young men stepped out upon the veranda and into the garden which surrounded the building.

At the expiration of a quarter of an hour they returned. The Uhlans were removing the last of the dead men from the library. The captain, seated near the window, was puffing gravely at his pipe. Bosworth set down the lantern.

"The man Le Bête has escaped," said he shortly.

CHAPTER IV.

THREATENING FORCES.

Bosworth sat suddenly bolt upright and pulled together his scattered senses.

Daylight was just beginning to creep through the window of the room which he had occupied for the few hours subsequent to his leaving the Prussians on the lower floor of the château; he had slept heavily, and the crash of the volley under the window awakened him with startling suddenness.

In the first moment of returning consciousness he imagined that a combat of some sort was being waged in the park outside. Then he remembered—the French prisoners, and what was to occur at sunrise.

He had little cause to waste any sympathy on the *Franc-tireurs*, but he waited some moments before swinging himself out of bed and going to the window. It was one thing to shoot men down in fair fight, but another to wit-

ness the death struggles of the poor wretches who had been lined up against the garden wall.

When he drew the shade and looked out, he saw that it was all over. Two of the Uhlans were shoveling dirt into a grim hole several hundred feet from the château; the excavation contained the riddled bodies of the men who had been captured the night before.

Bosworth dressed slowly, and opened the door. He had taken scarcely a dozen steps in the passage when he heard the rustle of skirts behind him, and, turning, confronted Mademoiselle de Luynes.

It was plain the girl had not slept, but her face showed no signs of weakness or the strain which she had so lately undergone. For the first time, Bosworth noted the delicacy of her features and the expression in the dark blue eyes.

The wish flashed through his mind that Le Bête had been among those who had a few minutes before stood with their backs to the wall.

"Monsieur," said she suddenly, "they are using firearms—in the park?"

"It is nothing that need trouble you, mademoiselle, believe me," Bosworth answered.

"It was the Prussians?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Bosworth briefly, "only the Prussians firing in the park."

For a moment she remained silent. Then:

"Do not think that I am afraid to know the truth, or that I will forget what I owe to these men from beyond the Rhine. Yesterday the thought that they had shot down in cold blood some of my countrymen would have filled me with loathing and hatred, but now—now I have no country, monsieur."

Bosworth made a little movement, then checked himself.

"You must not say that, mademoiselle; you are unnerved by what you have passed through. Remember that those who came here last night were not the soldiers of France, that France would disown them. France is the same to-day as yesterday, believe me," said he kindly.

A cold look came into the blue eyes.

"You were in the library. You saw them shoot down an old man who has served France for sixty years. You heard what he said to me—before he died," she answered.

"But if you will think——" he began.

"Do you then imagine I have not thought—while others slept—do you know what I thought a few minutes ago, when I saw from the window those wretches stood against a wall and the flash of the Prussian guns which killed them?"

"And you saw *that?*" faltered Bosworth.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the girl dispassionately, "and I saw that one wore the uniform of a soldier of the line—the uniform of France, monsieur."

Bosworth felt himself at a loss. The argument was carrying him into deep water.

And why should he care whether or not this girl remained loyal to the empire—he, whose sympathies were with the Germans? He changed the subject abruptly.

"And what do you intend doing, mademoiselle? You will not remain here?" he asked.

"To-morrow I shall leave the château; my brother is in Sedan," she replied.

"And you will go to Sedan?"

"To see him, yes; after that I do not know."

There came the clatter of a steel scabbard at the further end of the passage. The tall form of Lieutenant von Werner advanced a few paces, then stopped abruptly, and the little shining cap was lifted from his head.

"Ah, pardon me, but I had come to inform Herr Bosworth that breakfast is ready," said he politely.

"And mademoiselle?" asked Bosworth.

"Something will be sent to her in her apartment if she so chooses," answered the Uhlan.

He looked at Bosworth, then at the girl's pretty face. He remembered the Bosworth of Heidelberg, and he added abruptly:

"It may be possible that breakfast for two might be served——"

"Mademoiselle will breakfast in her room; I will accompany you down-stairs," said Bosworth sharply.

He could have kicked the big, good-natured German for his suspicion—the suspicion that he was flirting, at such a time and under such circumstances.

Von Werner bowed.

"It is pot-luck, my friend, for the larder seems to be strangely empty," said he with a little shrug.

Mademoiselle de Luynes was regarding the two attentively: the big, bluff, blond-bearded Uhlan, and the quiet-appearing American.

Had Bosworth chanced to look at her that moment he might have noted a peculiar expression in her eyes, but he was answering Von Werner's remark about the empty larder. When he turned to the girl the peculiar expression was gone.

"It will please mademoiselle to have something sent up to her?" he asked.

"Only a cup of coffee, monsieur, and —if you will look in the cellar, in the little store-room there, something will doubtless be discovered which is lacking in the larder."

She was gone, and Bosworth turned to Von Werner.

"See here," said he, but there was no trace of sharpness in his voice, "this is not Heidelberg, but a far different proposition. Don't make the mistake a second time or—I'll punch your head."

The Prussian gave another little shrug. It was plain he did not possess a profound faith in his friend's protestations, and he had seen plainly enough that Mademoiselle de Luynes was remarkably pretty.

Bosworth noticed the shrug, his face flushed, then he began to laugh.

"You old fool, I know why you feel safe; for a civilian to strike a German officer, under the present conditions, means standing with one's back against a wall; but wait until this little scrap is over."

Down-stairs the Uhlan captain bad finished his coffee and was puffing great clouds of tobacco smoke through the open window, from which Bosworth could see a couple of soldiers presiding over a steaming kettle hanging from three crossed poles on the lawn.

Von Werner beckoned, one of the soldiers filled two cups from the kettle and placed them on the table beside a half consumed loaf of bread. The captain removed the stem of the pipe from between his teeth, deliberately dumped the smoldering ashes upon the carpeted floor, and asked abruptly:

"What is it that Herr Bosworth intends to do?"

"What do you suppose but drink this steaming concoction and nibble at the crust you have been kind enough to leave?" was upon Bosworth's tongue, but he substituted:

"That depends upon yourself. Being a prisoner——"

The Uhlan indicated Von Werner by a stiff nod.

"That has been discussed, and he vouches for you. We leave here in half an hour; then you may do as you please," said he.

"Were it not for one thing, I should like to ride with you," ventured Bosworth boldly.

It struck him that it would be something to accompany these cavalrymen in their dash over French territory, even better than going on to Paris and waiting for something to turn up.

The Uhlan captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Much as we might desire your company, Herr Bosworth, that would be hardly regular. Yet you say 'but for one thing'; might I inquire——"

"I suppose I should stay here and see the marquis buried, especially as Mademoiselle de Luynes appears to be practically alone," Bosworth answered.

The captain nodded.

"That is as you please," he began, then turned suddenly and stared out of the window.

A Uhlan was crossing the lawn, from the direction of the gate, on a brisk run; in another moment he stood panting in the opening, and saluted.

"It is reported by outpost number three, Herr Captain, that a body of men are approaching this place," was his unexpected announcement.

The captain's pipe disappeared as though by magic. At that instant the report of a shot rolled across the park.

The captain gave a rapid order to

Von Werner and dashed through the window opening. From various quarters of the garden Uhlans could be seen hurrying toward the château.

Von Werner swallowed his coffee at a gulp and kicked the table out of his way.

"It is either a crowd of countrymen who imagine they have us in a trap, or some French soldiers have happened this way; in either case you will have a little excitement," said he coolly.

He followed the captain through the window, and Bosworth could see him issuing orders to the Uhlans. Several horsemen, with fluttering black-and-white pennons, appeared from around the corner of the building. The notes of a bugle rang out across the park.

From the window Bosworth watched the animated scene before him. More mounted men appeared upon the lawn, until the slender poles of the pennoned lances seemed to form a small grove about Von Werner and the captain.

Including these, he counted thirty Uhlans, and there were probably others at the gate of the park.

Presently Von Werner separated from the group, gave a few hurried orders, and walked rapidly back to the château. The Uhlans dashed across the park, straight up to the stone wall which separated it from the country without. By standing in the stirrups the riders could just see over the wall.

Von Werner stopped before the window.

"There are a hundred or so of those fellows out there." He motioned toward the gate. "On the further side of the château are others, and the countrymen are pouring in by threes and dozens. We are going to have a pretty time of it, my friend."

"But surely," ventured Bosworth, "thirty trained soldiers can put to rout five times their number of country yokels."

"If it was only that, but there are fifty or so regulars out there; it would seem that they have happened in this neighborhood just in time to find us here. We are forty-one; outside are two hundred Frenchmen led by a regular officer. You can see that something is going to happen."

"You will hold the château?" suggested Bosworth.

"Of course; but in another hour the two hundred will be increased to three—in two hours to five. These Frenchmen are swarming in like bees."

Half a dozen Uhlans approached the window. One, a sergeant, saluted.

"It is ordered that we occupy the house, and fire down upon the enemy," said he briefly.

"Very well," answered Von Werner. And to Bosworth:

"Of course, you will take no part in this, but if you care to join me at one of the upper windows, you can get a good view of what is going on. Some of our men will hold the gate and the wall; I, with these half-dozen, will attack the enemy from the windows."

He stepped through the window and, followed by the half-dozen Uhlans, made for the stairs leading to the second story of the château. Bosworth trailed on behind. As his friend had said, something was likely to happen.

The park of the château was shaped something like a triangle, with the house nearest to the apex. An L or wing approached within fifty yards of the wall, on the north.

Any one stationed at an upper window in this L could look over and along the wall to the main gate of the park, a distance of some two hundred yards. It was also possible to command a good extent of the wall on that side and to fire down upon any person attempting to scale it and enter the grounds.

It was into a large room in this L that Von Werner led his Uhlans; two windows overlooked the north, and at each window three of the Prussians took their stand.

Von Werner pulled up a table in the rear of one of these trios. Having mounted upon it, he produced a small field-glass, coolly adjusted the focus, and took a good look at what was visible from the window.

Bosworth was hovering behind the other Uhlans, peering over their shoulders; Von Werner turned and called to him.

"Come up here alongside me; you can get a good look at some of those fellows," said he.

Bosworth climbed upon the table, which groaned under the double burden imposed upon it. Von Werner handed him the glass.

Looking down, the American could see an open space of ground before the gate; beyond this space, and sheltered by some trees, was a group of fifty or more Frenchmen, the majority of whom were plainly *bona-fide* soldiers of the empire, for they wore the baggy red trousers and blue jackets, carried chassepots, and were commanded by an officer whose cap was heavily braided with bands of gold.

"Those are our principal assailants; the rest are scattered all along the wall —but at a *safe* distance," remarked Von Werner dryly.

"What are they going to do?" asked Bosworth, lowering the glass.

"If you asked me what *we* were going to do, I could tell you, but those Frenchmen—— We must wait and see," answered his companion.

Bosworth looked at the Uhlans standing just beneath him. Each was armed with a short-barreled, ugly-looking cavalry rifle, the hammers of which were at full cock. The little shining caps had been laid aside, and the men waited bareheaded for the order to be up and doing.

Five minutes passed, then suddenly there was a commotion among the Frenchmen. The group parted, and out from it eight soldiers, bearing a long, heavy log, rushed toward the gate.

"Fire!" ordered Von Werner sharply.

From the windows burst six jets of flame, and the thunder of the report shook the pictures on the wall. At the same instant a series of reports came from behind the gate; three of the men carrying the battering-ram loosened their hold and pitched headlong. The log rolled upon the ground; the remaining five Frenchmen turned and dashed back to their companions.

"I don't know whether it was our bullets or those from behind the gate, but it stopped that game," quoth Von Werner gruffly.

"Yes, and it did something besides," muttered Bosworth in an undertone.

The Frenchmen were looking toward the château, up at the two windows from which the Uhlans had fired. The officer was pointing with his sword.

A dozen of the French soldiers detached themselves from the others and ran in the direction of the L. Having gone two hundred yards, they were directly opposite the windows but some distance from the wall. They halted, crouched down, and waited.

"Ah!" remarked Von Werner. "Now it is coming. You had best get down from the table, my friend."

Bosworth knew just what would happen. If any of the Uhlans attempted to fire from the window, the Frenchmen would send a volley at the openings.

The table was in direct range, but Bosworth did not follow Von Werner's suggestion. The latter had no intention of leaving the top of the table, and Bosworth was willing to take the chances with him.

The Uhlans were crouching at the windows, the barrels of their guns resting across the sill; it was evident they would have liked to take a shot at the Frenchmen in front of them, but Von Werner did not give the command. It came a moment later, when, for the second time, a second group of the enemy, armed with another battering-ram, dashed toward the gate.

The crash of the six reports was ringing in Bosworth's ears when a dozen spurts of flame burst from the ground where the twelve French soldiers were crouching.

The next instant a swarm of angry bees seemed to be buzzing about his head; the zip, zip of the speeding bullets made him duck involuntarily.

Pieces of plaster fell from the wall behind him, a picture crashed to the floor, but neither he, Von Werner nor the Uhlans were injured.

Looking through the smoke, he could see that the second attack upon the gate had failed. Von Werner's voice came out of the pungent cloud.

"Let those fellows down there have a taste of their own medicine."

Two of the Uhlans raised their weapons and fired at the Frenchmen opposite the window; the example was followed by their four companions. One of the soldiers fell, and a second sank

back upon his elbow, but the others returned the fire. The bullets began to hum through the room again.

"You had better get down; no need to get a bullet through the head out of mere curiosity," said Von Werner shortly.

Bosworth was about to make an appropriate reply when two things happened. He felt a sharp sting over his right ear, then everything seemed to give way beneath him, and with Von Werner he went crashing to the floor.

The table had refused longer to perform the office of a grand-stand.

The Prussian was the first to free himself from the tangle.

"*Gott verdammt!*" he growled. Then, looking down at Bosworth:

"You are hit—do you feel anything?"

Bosworth was rubbing his head, which had come in violent contact with the floor.

"I feel as though I had been hit by a ton of brick, but——"

He looked at his fingers, which felt sticky; they were covered with blood.

Von Werner bent down and pulled him upon his feet.

"Ah!" he said in a relieved tone. "It has only cut the skin."

"It was a bullet, then, which knocked me off the table?" Bosworth asked.

The Prussian smiled.

"No," said he, "it is only that the table is French and refused to assist us."

Two of the Uhlans had turned to see what had happened to their officer, but the others were firing rapidly down upon the French soldiers.

Von Werner went to the window. He saw that the dozen of the enemy who had at first approached the L were reinforced.

A crowd numbering forty or more were directly opposite him, but most of the new-comers were peasants.

Bosworth wiped the blood from his face and joined the others at the window; the fire on both sides had slackened and he stood for several moments looking upon the crowd below.

Suddenly a cry came from the gathering of Frenchmen:

"*A bas l'espion! A bas le Prussien!*"

It was the cry he had heard the night before, and the tongue which uttered it was the same. Among the Frenchmen looking up at the window was the *Franc-tireur* Le Bête.

A peculiar sensation crept along Bosworth's spine. He suddenly saw a startling possibility before him. What if the French overcame the Uhlans and obtained possession of the château? It would probably mean that he, Bosworth, would not long remain a prisoner. Even did they spare the Prussians, *he* could hope for no leniency. He would be taken out and hanged, because they would believe him to be a German spy.

That Mademoiselle de Luynes might intercede in his behalf must count for little—a woman's word did not go far on such occasions. Le Bête would have his say, the French officer would believe him, and afterward, when he learned the truth, he could not unhang the man he had executed.

In a few words Bosworth explained the situation to Von Werner, and pointed out Le Bête. The Uhlan looked grave.

"It is certainly something which is unpleasant," said he. Then, in a decided tone: "But they are not going to take us, my friend; not to-day, anyway."

Bosworth was thinking that he would gain no great advantage even if the hanging was postponed until the morrow. A look of determination came into his face.

"See here, Von Werner," said he shortly, "get me a gun. I didn't intend to take any part in this mix-up, but now I'm going to help keep those fellows off."

A volley from without checked the Uhlan's reply. One of the men at the other window sank in a heap below the sill; a few drops of blood trickled from a small round hole above his right eye.

"*Gott in Himmel*—fire!" shouted Von Werner.

The five remaining Uhlans began cracking away again.

Suddenly the doorway of the room was darkened by a blond-bearded giant, who crossed the floor and saluted Von Werner.

"I have to report to you, Herr Lieutenant, that the Herr Captain Hahn has been killed by the enemy," said he briefly.

"*Gott verdammt!* Are there others besides?"

"Two dead and one wounded in the shoulder," answered the Uhlan.

Von Werner sprang to the window, raised the field-glass, and remained gazing through it for several moments.

Then he turned abruptly.

"It was the captain's purpose to hold this place, but I think otherwise. We are surrounded by these Frenchmen, whose number is increasing every hour; by to-night the neighborhood will be swarming with them."

This to Bosworth.

The latter nodded. He had been wondering what the Prussians expected to gain by holding the château, unless, indeed, they might hope for reinforcements.

"These fellows are on foot, and we fight best from the saddle. Besides, we were not ordered to seize and hold a building. We can be kept here until our ammunition is exhausted, or they can sit quietly around the place and allow us to starve. I have a fancy for neither," continued Von Werner.

"Then you will make a dash for it?" asked Bosworth.

"That is what I propose to do. Some of us may be killed, perhaps many, but we will not be slaughtered like rats in a trap. And," he added dryly, "these countrymen do not fancy our style of fighting in the open. It will be only the regulars with whom we will have seriously to deal."

(To be continued.)

The Harmless Lot on a Rampage.

BY JOHN P. GUCKES

What the rousing of the lunatics did for the one among them who sighed for the sea.

"OH, for one look at the cool, green sea! Oh, for one roar of the breakers on the beach! Oh, for one whiff—just one—of the briny breeze! Then I'd be a man again. I'd be sensible. I'd be Captain Thomas Hackett instead of a crazy Life-Preserver."

Thus murmured the old, gray-headed man to himself, and thus had he murmured day after day during the long years they had kept him there at the State Hospital for the Insane.

"And why do they keep me here?" he asked himself at times. "Why? I'd like to know. I never did anything to anybody. I'm not crazy like the rest. I've only got an idea in my head that I'm a life-preserver—that's all; and it don't hurt anybody. Oh, if I could only see the sea again, that idea, I feel certain, would be gone! I'd be a man again. I'd be Captain Tom Hackett."

He was sitting now with eleven other inmates, some as old as himself, some older, all engaged in playful conversation.

They were considered quite a harmless lot, those twelve old gentlemen. On clear afternoons they were allowed to sun themselves and indulge in their favorite delusions upon the porch of building No. 9, entirely out of sight and hearing of the guards.

They were simply old, worn-out men, without home or friends, just insane enough to be in the asylum instead of the poorhouse.

"I'm President McKinley, let me tell you," said one, "and this is the city of Washington. I'm the boss here, ain't I, Admiral Dewey?"

"That's right," replied the Admiral, shaking his head vigorously.

"And I'm a warship," put in a big, gruff old fellow. "Say, I wouldn't do a thing to the Spaniards, would I?"

"Boom! Boom!" shouted the Cannon.

"Quit that," commanded the Washington Monument, "or I'll fall on you. Don't fire on your friends. There's no Spaniards around here."

The Washington Monument's threat

bad the usual effect of quieting the Cannon.

"You're all crazy!" shouted Captain Hackett, the Life-Preserver. "This ain't Washington. This is the insane asylum, but you're all too gone in the head to know it."

"Say, Life-Preserver, I believe you're a Spaniard!" shrieked the Torpedo-Boat.

"Well, whatever I am, I've got good common sense!" retorted the Life-Preserver. "That's more than the rest of you've got. I'm better than all of you. What good's a cannon, I'd like to know? What good's a torpedo-boat or a Washington Monument? I'm the only useful article here. I'm a life-preserver, but I'm out of my natural element."

"And pray, sir," inquired President McKinley gravely, "what is your natural element?"

This question was always a signal for Captain Hackett to make a speech.

"Gentlemen," said he, arising, "water is my natural element. The sea! That's it. I'm a life-preserver, and I'm proud of it. In other words, I used to be Captain Tom Hackett, of the schooner Three Boys, until I lost my ship off the Jersey coast. Then I was for some time a life-saver at Atlantic City. The rest I only half remember, but now I'm made of cork and I'm only a life-preserver.

"I couldn't tell you how many lives I saved in those days. I don't remember. 'Tain't so long ago, either—not more'n ten years, I guess. Why did I quit?

"Well, one day I went out after a land-lubber that got into deep water. I got tangled up in the iron pier, butted my head against one of the piles, and was knocked senseless. Somehow I got to shore, or, I guess, the other life-savers got me there. Anyway, I got there. But when I come to, my head wasn't right. I had got an idea into it that I was made of cork, and I guess I am.

"After that I was a life-preserver—I know that. Then I got here one day; I don't know how. I guess they put me here, thinking I was crazy. But I ain't. The rest of you are, but I ain't. I've got sense enough to know this ain't Washington. I'm a life-preserver, and I'm out of my natural element, and that's the sea."

Captain Hackett sat down and looked about for the nods of approval which usually followed his little speech.

"Guess the Life-Preserver ain't a Spaniard, after all," remarked the Monitor.

"I believe he's a spy!" shrieked the Torpedo-Boat.

"Ha! ha! The enemy's fleet is coming down upon us!" shouted the Admiral, interrupting the conversation by jumping to his feet suddenly. He was staring across the asylum's broad lawn at a man approaching the place where they sat.

"Sit down and be sensible, mate," said the Life-Preserver. "That's a visitor. Don't make a fool of yourself."

"Ha! ha! I will cable the President for instructions!" exclaimed Admiral Dewey, not heeding the Life-Preserver's advice.

A corpulent gentleman, middle-aged and well dressed, toiled laboriously up the gravel walk, perspiring freely in the hot sun, and pausing now and then to catch his breath and wipe his forehead with a white silk handkerchief.

The old men upon the porch of building No. 9 watched him in silence as he drew near. When the stranger reached the porch, he paused for a moment, and his eyes went from one to another of the twelve men sitting there.

Then he walked up the steps, went over to the old man who called himself President McKinley, and grasped his hand.

"Sam, my dear fellow," he said, shaking the old man's hand heartily, "I'm glad to see you. You're looking well, and you haven't changed much in a dozen years. I was afraid I wouldn't recognize you when they told me over at the office that I might find you here without assistance."

For answer, President McKinley stared at the visitor without a sign of recognition, and said, "I suppose you are a foreign minister, come to see me upon business of state. Or, let's see. It might be that you're Mark Hanna. I forget."

"Poor Sam's clear gone!" muttered the visitor under his breath. "Don't you remember me, Sam? I'm George Titus! George Titus, your old partner. Don't you remember the little grocery store we used to run together on Seventh Street?"

And then to bring Sam to his senses, the visitor indiscreetly put his hands upon the old fellow's shoulders and shook him, exclaiming: "Sam, Sam! You must remember me!"

To see President McKinley thus rudely jostled was more than Admiral Dewey could stand.

"To arms! To arms!" he cried. "He's a Spaniard! He's a traitor! A spy!"

"No!" shouted the Monument. "He's an Anarchist. He's got a bomb! He's going to blow me up and kill the President. I'll fall on him!"

Bewildered and alarmed, the visitor backed off. The Life-Preserver walked over to him, touched his arm, and whispered:

"Say, you'd better go. I never saw the men act like this before. I'm all right, but the rest are crazy, and you'd better take my advice."

"But they told me at the office that none of the men over here were violent," remonstrated the gentleman.

"Well, maybe they ain't. But you'd better——"

Captain Hackett's sentence was not finished.

The Cannon, with a "Boom! Boom!" had shot straight out of his chair and bumped into the stomach of the visitor, throwing him to the ground.

"Fire upon the enemy, men!" cried Admiral Dewey.

The Warship, the Torpedo-Boat, and the Monitor jumped up from their chairs and rushed at the stout man.

"I'll fall on him," shouted the Washington Monument, and, suiting the action to the word, he dashed down the steps and fell over the struggling body of the visitor.

In the twinkling of an eye, eleven harmless old men had been changed into raving lunatics.

They had labored so long under the delusions that they were admirals and warships and other things on the lookout for an enemy, that now, with that imaginary enemy in sight in the person of the visitor, the pent-up fury of years burst out.

Fortunately, they had nothing which might have been used as a weapon, or the visitor would undoubtedly have been killed upon the spot. As it was, they kicked him, punched him, and scratched him with their nails.

The Washington Monument had got the corpulent gentleman by the throat and was choking him. The unfortunate man was already purple in the face when the Life-Preserver suddenly jumped into the mêlée.

"I'm a life-preserver," he cried, "and I've got to save that man's life! Away, you lunatics!"

Right and left his fists shot out, felling the men about him. He grasped the Monument by the legs, threw him over, and forced him to relax his grasp upon the visitor's throat.

Then, fighting the men off with one hand, and helping the stranger to his feet with the other, he cried:

"Run for your life, mister, and tell the guards to come, quick."

The stout man ran off as one possessed, and was well on his way toward the administration building before the madmen realized it.

Their fury increased by the escape of their intended victim, the old men who had not been felled by the fists of Captain Hackett now turned upon him.

They all rushed at him from in front, with the exception of the Torpedo-Boat. He came behind and landed a blow upon the back of the captain's head.

That blow brought the Life-Preserver to his senses instead of knocking him out.

His head reeled with pain; stars flashed before his eyes; and then the life-preserver idea was gone forever.

He was no longer made of cork. He was a living, breathing, fighting man again; he was Captain Tom Hackett, of the Three Boys, in the midst of a mutinous crew.

Right and left, forward and back, his fists shot out. Oh, how he longed for a belaying pin! Down went the Monument! Another well-directed blow, and President McKinley tottered and fell.

Captain Hackett planted each hit true, fighting coolly, his mind now perfectly clear. The others fought like madmen, most of their blows going wild. With all their numbers, they were scarcely a match for the plucky little captain.

But the great odds began to tell. At the end of three minutes' fighting Captain Hackett had been thrown upon his back, the Cannon was at his throat, Admiral Dewey was pommeling him upon the breast.

Suddenly the Admiral ceased operations and jumped to his feet.

"Spanish reinforcements coming!" he shouted. "Retreat! Retreat!"

Half a dozen guards, followed by the stout visitor, came tearing down upon the group. The old men fled in every direction.

Five of the guards pursued them. The sixth and Mr. Titus, the visitor, helped the captain to his feet.

"You've saved my life, whoever you are," said Titus, grasping the captain's hand warmly. "Man, you're bleeding all over. Hadn't we better hurry him to the doctor, guard?"

The guard produced a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, and with a movement to put them on the captain, replied:

"Yes; but this man's like the others, and we'll have to get him into bracelets."

"No, you won't!" shouted the stranger. "That man's as sensible as you or I. He didn't touch me. He defended me against the others at the risk of his own life, and I'll not see him put in irons."

"The stranger's right, guard," said the captain coolly. "I'm as sensible as you or he. I've got the nuttiness plumb knocked out of me."

"I'll test him," whispered the guard to Titus. Then, addressing the captain, he asked: "Aren't you a life-preserver? Come, now, tell the truth."

"No, sir," replied the captain with energy, "I'm not. I thought I was up to a few minutes ago, but when I got into the scrap with that mutinous crew one of 'em gave me a whack on the head that brought me back to my senses. You needn't smile; it's true. Yesterday I was made of cork, or thought I was, and maybe I was as crazy as the rest; but to-day I'm Captain Thomas Hackett. of the schooner Three Boys."

"Captain Hackett! Thomas Hackett!" exclaimed the corpulent gentleman in astonishment. "Do you mean to say that you're the Captain Hackett who used to belong to the life-saving crew at Atlantic City?"

"Aye, aye, sir! The very same, sir!"

"Well, if that don't beat the——"

George Titus was too astounded to complete the sentence. "You Cap Hackett! You! Yes, you are. I see it now. Well, I never expected to find the bravest man on the coast in this place. You've saved my life for the second time to-day. Do you remember the first time, eleven years ago, when you pulled me half-drowned out of the water at Atlantic City?"

"I think maybe I do, sir," replied Hackett. "I believe I remember you now. My memory's coming back, but I can't think of your name."

"Well, it's Titus—George Titus. And I want to tell you, Cap, that George Titus has been looking high and low over this earth for you ever since you saved his life that first time. I couldn't get track of you anywhere. I've always had it in my mind to do something handsome for you, and I'm going to do it now!"

"You're not going to take me away from here—from this crazy place, are you?" demanded the captain doubtfully, his eyes growing bright with sudden hope.

"Yes, that's what I'm going to do. And more, too. I'm going to find you a decent home for the rest of your days."

Captain Hackett fell upon his knees; tears filled the eyes that had so suddenly grown bright.

"You'll take me away—to the sea?" he pleaded.

"Anywhere."

"The sea," sobbed the old man. "Take me there. I'll see the water again, I'll feel it, I'll smell it, I'll roll in it. Take me to the sea. I don't need a home. I only want the sea."

JIM DEXTER—CATTLEMAN.*

BY WILLIAM WALLACE COOK.

Author of "Rogers of Butte," "The Gold Gleaners," etc.

A story of the plains in which chivalry and trust are pitted against trickery and deceit.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JIM DEXTER and his ward, Roy Burnham, are the owners of Clearwater Ranch. While Roy is away in the mountains, a bunch of their cattle is rustled by Kalispel, a rival ranch-owner. Dexter presents a bill.

On his way to talk the matter over with Kalispel at Siwash City, Dexter rescues a girl from the attack of a dangerous steer. Her name is Orah Lee, and he finds that she is on her way to his ranch, expecting to find Roy there.

Dexter accompanies her to Siwash City to wait until Burnham returns, and as he does not find Kalispel, goes up to the latter's ranch, where, at the point of a pistol, he collects his money.

He returns to find Roy at the ranch, but has hardly greeted him when the sheriff appears with a warrant for Burnham's arrest. Kalispel's son has been killed, and the money for the pay-roll, which he had with him, stolen. Kalispel suspects Roy, as he and his son had lately quarreled. The sheriff searches the house and finds one of Kalispel's paybags with money in it.

CHAPTER VII.

FOILING A MOB.

THIS was a propitious moment for McKibben. He did not go to his deputy, but ran to the chamber door, threw it open, and stepped across the threshold.

Dexter recovered sufficiently to whirl about and dart after him. The window of the room was open and Roy Burnham was gone.

"Confound it, Dexter!" shouted McKibben in a fury. "While you kept me in that other room the boy got away. But he can't have gone far, and we'll have him yet. Get the horses, Perry!" he roared, racing back to his deputy. "Our man has skipped out and we've got to overhaul him."

"Just a minute, Mac," spoke up Dexter from the bedroom door. "This farce has gone far enough. Let me see that warrant of yours."

Perry had hurried after the horses, and the sheriff had a moment or two to spare while the animals were being brought to the door. Taking the document in question from his pocket, he handed it to the cattleman.

Dexter unfolded it and looked it over. Then he deliberately tore it into fragments.

"What's that for?" demanded McKibben.

"Kalispel swore out his warrant against the wrong man, Mac," answered Dexter. "I'm the one you are after."

"You!" gasped McKibben, drawing back incredulously.

"Yes," was the cool reply. "Nate Kalispel made an attack on me last night, in the trail, and I had to kill him in self-defense. I don't want to make you any trouble, and here are my guns. Put on the irons if you want to."

Jim Dexter stretched out his hands, wrists together.

In some men there is a blind, unreasoning faith which will suffer itself to be flouted by contradictory facts, trampled on by damning and indisputable evidence, defied by testimony in no wise to be impeached, and yet will hold as unwaveringly to its object as the compass to its pole.

Such was Jim Dexter's faith in Roy Burnham.

To another man the finding of Kalispel's pay-roll money in the violin-case would have been the last link in the circumstantial chain that convicted Roy of

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murder. And a most reprehensible bit of evidence it was, this hiding of the price of blood where it could not but involve Dexter, a man who had been to Roy almost as a second father. But Dexter would not believe.

In his life Joe Burnham had stood for everything that was honest and noble, and Roy could not come of his blood and be the scoundrel that others would have him.

The buckskin bag containing the six hundred dollars which Dexter had plucked from the cunning hands of Ol Kalispel, the day before, had been left in the bedroom at the time Dexter had gone into the outer room and closed the door. That bag had vanished through the open window with Roy.

This was as it should be. In his flight from injustice Roy would need money, and whatever Dexter had the boy was welcome to.

By taking the burden of the crime upon his own shoulders, Dexter at one stroke cut short all pursuit of Roy, cleared his name of stain, and set him fair in the face of the world—and of Orah Lee.

If Kalispel's devilish cunning had woven a web from which there was no escape, Dexter would take the consequences. If a way out could be found, then Dexter would free himself.

In any event, Roy would be safe. Orah Lee would have no cause to blush for him. Their young lives could be happily united, and the joy of it would be reward enough for the generous Dexter.

All in good time the presence of the money in the violin-case would be explained, and until that time Dexter scorned the thought that Roy had had a hand in placing it there.

Circumstances had conspired to lend color to Dexter's avowal of guilt. The attack made on him by young Kalispel at the O. D. K. ranch, young Kalispel's bitter words as he quitted the scene to carry out his father's orders as to the pay-roll money, Dexter's tarrying at the deserted cabin while the crime was being committed—all this was corroborative detail that could not be gainsaid.

So much for Dexter's motives. Mistaken though they were, certainly the cattleman never confronted an issue more cheerfully than he did the present one.

"Good heavens, Jim!" cried McKibben. "Do you know what such a confession means for you?"

"I believe so, Mac," replied Dexter. "I have held a pretty high place in the opinion of the community, and no doubt my reputation is going to suffer. As I told you, however, what I did was in self-defense."

"But you didn't take the money in self-defense. That's the worst part of it. What did you take the money at all for? Everybody knows you're well off in this world's goods, and why in Sam Hill you'd kill a man in self-defense and then rob him is a notch or two beyond me."

That was the weak point in Jim Dexter's confession. He saw it, and discreetly held his peace.

"Then, too," muttered the sheriff, rubbing his forehead in perplexity, "what did young Burnham run away for? I can't understand that."

"It isn't necessary for you to understand it, Mac," said Dexter. "Are you going to put on the irons?"

"No," grunted McKibben. "I'm not afraid that you'll run away."

A sound of galloping came from outside at that juncture, growing rapidly in volume until it ceased suddenly in the camp. A yell went up from Perry, and Dexter and McKibben ran to the door.

A lathered and dusty horse stood within a dozen yards of the house, head drooping, mouth covered with foam and nostrils distended with a wearing fight for breath.

Near the fagged horse stood the two mounts belonging to McKibben and Perry, and in front of them was the deputy, supporting the fainting form of a woman.

Cowboys were running toward the scene from every direction.

"What's the matter, Perry?" called McKibben as he and Dexter left the house and hurried toward him.

"This woman rode into camp jest now with her horse on the keen jump," replied Perry. "When the horse stopped

I saw her reel in her saddle, and ran up barely in time to catch her."

"Give her to me," said Dexter, and took the limp form from the deputy and bore it tenderly into the house.

"Water," he said laconically to Haverstraw, who had followed him in, as he laid the form on the couch.

It was Orah Lee. Her fair hair was tumbled about her shoulders and her face was deathly white.

As he knelt beside her, supporting her head on his arm, Dexter's heart swelled in his breast and a choking sensation came into his throat. A feeling he could not define all but mastered him.

Why had she ridden at break-neck speed to reach the camp? There was peril of some sort afoot, he felt sure, and Orah had tried herself beyond endurance to bring the warning.

Haverstraw came with the water, and the girl was quickly revived. Opening her eyes with a gasp, she stared blankly up into Dexter's face.

"What is it, Orah?" he asked softly.

His voice brought her to herself.

"Roy!" she murmured wildly. "They are coming for him!"

"Who?"

"Oh, I don't know," she sighed weakly. "There are a lot of them, Mr. Dexter. Mrs. Hutton told me—she said Kalispel was one. They say Roy has committed some terrible crime, and they are coming here to get him. It isn't true! It can't be true!" Her voice died away in a moan of anguish.

"Of course it isn't true, Orah," Dexter said reassuringly. "You rode out here to tell Roy these men are coming, did you?"

"Yes. Is Roy here? Has he come back? Mrs. Hutton said the men were coming here, and so I got the horse and galloped on ahead of them. Save Roy, Mr. Dexter!" She clasped one of his hands passionately with both her own. "You will save him," she added; "you must save him!"

"Roy is safe, Orah. There has been a mistake, you understand? Roy has committed no crime, and he is not at the ranch. But you are a brave girl to do what you have done; it is something neither Roy nor I will ever forget. You are worn out and you must lie here and rest. This afternoon my foreman will take you back to town."

Dexter got up from beside her, waved all the men out of the room, and then went out himself and closed the door.

"A word with you, Haverstraw," said Dexter, and walked apart with the foreman. "I did some shooting last night in self-defense," he continued, "and that makes it necessary for me to accompany the sheriff. I don't know how long I shall be away from the ranch, but you will take entire charge while I am gone. Have you seen anything of Roy?"

"Not a sign, Jim, since he reached camp this morning and turned in. But one of the horses is missing."

"All right. Now another thing. That young lady in the house is to be well cared for, and I want you to have your wife come down and look after her.

"This afternoon you are to put a team to the buckboard and drive her to Mrs. Hutton's, in Siwash. Also, see that her horse is cared for and returned to town. That's all, except that I want you to have one of the boys get a mount ready for me as soon as possible."

"All right, Jim." Haverstraw hastened off, his brain teeming with vague surmises and suspicions.

Meantime, McKibben had been talking with Perry, and both officers came over for a few words with Dexter as soon as the foreman had left.

"If what the girl says is true, Jim," remarked the sheriff, "Kalispel is heading this way with a lynching party."

"I have no doubt that Ol Kalispel will try to take the law into his own hands," replied Dexter.

"Then it won't do for us to take you to Siwash."

"Why not?"

"Because we'd be likely to meet Kalispel and his men."

"I should be safe enough," returned Dexter. "They're after Roy, and won't learn their mistake until I am safe in the Siwash jail. I don't want that outfit to come here. If it does"—and a worried look crossed Dexter's face—"there'll be fighting, for my boys are hot against Kalispel and his men."

McKibben was thoughtful for a moment. At last he said:

"It won't be best to take you to Siwash, Jim. The jail there is only a makeshift affair, and when Ol Kal learns the truth he'll certainly try to do something desperate, and I'm not going to run any chances. You go to Lamark, and we'll give the Siwash trail a wide berth on the trip."

"Very well," answered Dexter, "I'll go with you to Lamark, Mac, but you can send Perry to Siwash. If he meets Kalispel and his crowd, he can tell them the truth, and that Roy is not here. That will probably turn Kalispel back."

"That's a good plan, Jim." McKibben turned to his deputy. "You understand what you are to do, Perry?"

"No chance for a mistake, Mac," replied Perry. "But I'm darned if I take any stock in this yarn of Jim's. The idee of *him* makin' off with that pay-roll money! It don't sound reasonable to me."

"We've got his word for it, and there is nothing else for me to do but to land him in the Lamark lock-up. We aren't at the end of this trail yet, and I think there'll be some surprises when we reach it. Take to the saddle now, Perry, and see how fast you can ride. Jim and I wil' do the same."

Davis had brought up Dexter's horse, and when McKibben had finished his talk with Perry, all three men mounted, the deputy riding in one direction and the sheriff and the cattleman in another.

They left the camp in an uproar of excitement. It was several hours before the J. D. cowboys learned the true inwardness of the situation.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SEA OF DECEIT.

LAMARK was a much larger town than Siwash City, and the building wherein it housed offenders against the law was more pretentious and more secure than the similar institution in the other place.

And here the Honorable Jim Dexter found himself in the early evening, after six tedious and wearing hours in the saddle.

A half-forgotten quotation took form in his mind as he sat in the cell, and bit by bit he pieced the stanza together:

> Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage;
> Minds innocent and quiet take
> That for a hermitage;
> If I have freedom in my love,
> And in my soul am free,
> Angels alone that soar above
> Enjoy such liberty.

He would have given much if he could have had his violin. Although far from being a master of the instrument, he had a knack with the bow that occasionally pleased his listeners and always himself.

Owing to circumstances which will presently appear, Dexter's imprisonment was of short duration. He passed but one night in jail, and it passed sleeplessly for him, mainly because he had so much to think of.

Where had Roy gone? was the mental question he tried hardest to answer. Had he concerned himself with the question *why* had Roy gone, perhaps he would have come to see the folly of his present sacrifice. But he reared a barrier of love between his reason and the assaults of doubt.

Dexter hated a lie with all his soul, yet he had not hesitated an instant to embark upon this sea of deceit and push toward the gloomy shores which he imagined lay ready to claim him.

He stood ready to face anything this side of perjury.

If the coroner swore him, he would preserve silence; if not under oath, he would go into a series of imaginary details that could be nothing less than damning.

Jim was thirty-seven; Roy not yet twenty-one. The cattleman felt, however, that the best of life lay buried in his past. Six years before something had gone from him into the misty confines of the might-have-been, and of that something he remembered only a pair of faithless blue eyes.

Since that red-letter epoch he had tried to forget. And Roy, coming to him in that period of his great depression, had helped him—if not to forget, at least to bow to the inevitable.

While pacing the confines of the steel

room, out of the dead level of wearisome cogitation one supreme thought arose like a beacon, so bright it blinded him.

Orah had eyes like those others he had known six centuries before. Yet while they were like, they were unlike. Orah's were of the constant blue of heaven: those others, as inconstant as the sea.

In the light that suddenly broke over him Dexter understood the subtle attraction that drew him to Orah as by a spell. Her appeal to his heart arose ghostlike out of that grave of his dead hopes.

Somehow the night dragged through, and with the coming of day the turnkey came also with a bountiful breakfast.

After the meal there were visitors—influential men of the town who called to declare their faith, to learn if there was anything they could do, and to express a hope that, even if Dexter had shot young Kalispel, the plea of self-defense would give him the liberty he deserved.

Two lawyers insisted that they should be retained in Dexter's behalf.

To these friends the cattleman would say nothing except, substantially, that having made his own bed he would lie in it as a man should. As for the lawyers, he expressed his appreciation of their good will, but firmly declined their services.

About ten in the morning Judge Givins arrived, planted himself hesitatingly in the corridor, and peered anxiously through the bars, angling mutely for some sign of the prisoner's feelings toward him. Dexter turned his back and studied the rear wall of the cell.

"You can't shake me, Jim," said the judge obstinately, mopping the damp from his forehead with a red bandanna handkerchief.

Something in the words struck at the humorous side of Jim's nature. He faced about with a forgiving smile, and the judge took heart.

"Good-morning, judge," said Jim.

The judge returned the greeting.

"Came down from Siwash just to say that you can't fool me," he expanded. "You never killed anybody in your life, in self-defense or otherwise, and you know it."

"Do I?" returned Jim. "What's the sentiment in Siwash?"

"I reflect the sentiment of Siwash City in what I have just said," returned Givins with dignity. "Kalispel is as near a crazy man as you could find anywhere outside of an asylum. He swears he'll kill you before you can ever be brought to trial."

"I have softened a little toward Kalispel," said Jim, after a moment. "Even a bear will fight for its cub."

"What did you do this for, Jim?" demanded the judge.

"Nate Kalispel would have killed me if I had not been too quick for him. I guess that is reason enough, judge."

"That wasn't the point I was trying to cover," growled the judge. "What did you *say* you killed him for?"

"I have just told you."

"Quibble if you want to," the judge spluttered irritably, "but if you think your friends are going to let you throw yourself away, out of a sentiment as mistaken as it is unworthy of you, you're several points out of your reckoning."

"My friends will please me best by allowing me to manage my own affairs," said Jim sharply.

"I think a judge and a jury will have something to say about your affairs if you push this Nate Kalispel business through to a finish," retorted Givins.

"That is what I intend to do."

"Look at me, Jim!" Dexter fixed his eyes unflinchingly on those of the judge. "Now, on your honor, did you really shoot Nate Kalispel."

"Yes," was the steady answer.

"Did you fire once or twice?"

"It isn't necessary for me to fire more than once at a plain target."

The judge looked impressed.

"They don't think it safe to take you to Siwash City, Jim, so the coroner is coming here to get your statement," said he.

Thereupon he turned and went off down the corridor. He seemed in an especially amiable frame of mind, and Dexter distinctly heard a chuckle wafted back behind him.

A resplendent and highly groomed gentleman was next to call. His outward person bore the stamp of the

green-cloth fraternity, and the rakish tilt of his high hat and the jaunty swagger with which he carried himself proved that he certainly had the courage of his convictions—whatever they might be.

"How are you, Jim?" asked this gentleman from the passage.

Dexter stared coldly and made no response.

The blackleg shrugged his shoulders.

"You overwhelm me with the warmth of your welcome," smiled the gambler easily. "You know me, anyhow."

"I know that you are Three-Card Jenkins," said Jim, "and that your specialty is a cold deck. That's enough to wipe you off my visiting list. Good-by, Mr. Jenkins."

Jim turned away abruptly, but Jenkins was not to be shaken off.

"I will leave you cheerfully, Mr. Dexter," said he, "as soon as you condescend to transact a little business with me."

"Business!" cried Jim. "What business can I have with you?"

"I have three or four I. O. U.'s which you might think it best to take up, and so head off legal proceedings," came blandly from Mr. Jenkins.

"I never gave you a due-bill in my life."

"The Honorable Jim Dexter has a bank account which would preclude that necessity. I don't believe, however, that you will let this paper go to protest."

"Let me see the due-bills," said the puzzled cattleman.

"Here is one"—and Jenkins pushed it through the bars.

For value received I promise to pay Archibald Jenkins five hundred dollars on demand. ROY BURNHAM.

The words swam before Dexter's eyes.

"It's an infernal forgery!" he raged, crushing the slip in his hand and hurling it at the mocking face on the other side of the bars.

"We will find out about that in due course," returned Jenkins calmly, fishing for the crumpled due-bill with his cane. "What are you going to do about it, Mr. Dexter?" he inquired, recovering the bit of paper.

"Get out!" stormed Jim. "I don't want another word out of you."

"There will be an unpleasant exposure when this comes to trial," went on Jenkins. "Of course, Mr. Dexter, I have no claim on you for my money, but as Burnham's good name appears to be the object of your solicitude, I thought I would call and give you an opportunity to redeem it. My duty is done, and I will now take my departure." He started off.

"Come back here!" shouted Dexter, rattling the cell door savagely.

Not only did the gambler come back, but the turnkey, thinking the noise a summons, likewise showed himself.

"What do you want, Jim?" asked the official.

"Bring me a pen and ink, Jasper," said Jim. The turnkey left for the writing materials. "How many of those I. O. U.'s did you say you had, Jenkins?" Jim asked.

"Four."

"What is the total amount?"

"Twelve hundred dollars."

"Bundle them in here."

Jenkins pushed the four slips through the bars. Dexter did not even look at them, but struck a match and burned them before the blackleg's eyes.

"Don't worry," said Jim, noting the expression of alarm that crossed Jenkins' face; "you'll get your money."

When the pen and ink arrived the cattleman sat down at a table in his cell and wrote out a check.

"There," said he, pushing the check through the bars, "is the price of your miserable plotting. Those papers were forgeries, but I have no time to bother with you on account of them. But look here, Mr. Three-Card Jenkins, if you ever spring another of those forgeries on me, I'll cowhide you within an inch of your life. Take yourself off—the air in here is none too good, anyway."

Jenkins left, and Jim paced his cell with bowed head. This was a dastardly blow at Roy, and the injustice of it wore on his spirit. Roy had all the money he wanted to spend, and it was not neces-

sary for him to have recourse to promises to pay.

An hour after Jenkins left, the cattleman was conducted to the jail office and there met the coroner and the men he had chosen to assist him in fixing the blame for Nate Kalispel's taking off.

McKibben was with the party, and so was the city marshal of Lamark.

Dexter was not put under oath, but was questioned at length regarding his actions Monday afternoon and Monday night. The coroner and every man on the jury were friends of the prisoner's; it would have been difficult, in fact, to pick up a set of men anywhere in that part of the country who would not have been inclined to give Jim Dexter the benefit of any reasonable doubt.

Dexter rehearsed the events of his afternoon at the O. D. K. ranch, placing particular stress on the wanton attack made by young Kalispel, and on the words the young man had used on leaving the scene.

"After riding away from the O. D. K. ranch, where did you go?" asked the coroner.

"I turned off the trail and went south into the hills," replied Jim.

"Did you go directly back to your ranch?"

"No; I stopped at a deserted cabin."

"And stayed there all night?"

"A few hours only. Thinking Kalispel and his men had left the trail clear, I took another start for Siwash City and met young Kalispel on the road."

"Where?"

"About two miles north of the Bad-Ax."

"What happened?"

"It was a bright night, and we recognized each other at once. He shot at me, and I drew and fired in return. He fell, and his horse galloped on."

Dexter's voice was steady, but his face paled under the searching eyes that were bent upon him.

"Why did you take the pay-roll money?"

"I refuse to answer that question," said Dexter after a nervous pause.

"It is immaterial," said the coroner. "Did you have a struggle with Nate Kalispel?"

"No."

"You did not lay hands on him at all?"

Dexter closed his eyes. The ordeal was trying him more than he had thought possible.

"No," he answered slowly.

"Jim," said the coroner, stepping over to the cattleman and laying a kindly hand on his shoulder, "you have acquitted yourself."

Dexter sprang erect, as though by a galvanic shock.

"What do you mean?" he demanded harshly. "How can I acquit myself when I acknowledge the crime?"

"I mean that your generous attempt to shield Burnham at your own expense has proved a failure. Young Kalispel had two revolvers with him, but there was not an empty shell in either of them. So he could not have fired at you as you say he did."

Dexter wavered for a moment, then smiled grimly.

"You are bound to take the theory of self-defense out of my hands," he answered. "He did not fire, but—but I wanted it to appear so."

"No," continued the coroner, "young Kalispel did not fire, and you did not fire either. Nate was not killed by a bullet, but by a blow on the head given by some sharp instrument whose exact nature is unknown."

Dexter sank back in his chair and covered his face with his hands. He had failed—miserably failed. His bungling attempt to save Roy had only resulted in forging the fetters more firmly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COWARD'S PART.

JIM DEXTER reproached himself for not having questioned McKibben for further particulars of the crime. Now, when it was too late, he remembered the sheriff had said that the ground showed evidence of a struggle. As to the rest of it, Dexter had jumped to the conclusion that a bullet had been the vehicle of the deed, and had not thought it necessary to verify the conviction.

In the work of the coroner Dexter believed he could see the shrewd hand of Judge Givins.

The judge had cunningly fostered the impression, in his brief conversation from the corridor, that a bullet had really proved young Kalispel's death; then, undoubtedly, he had counseled with the coroner, and Dexter had been trapped into clearing himself.

A confused babel of sound smote on Dexter's ears. The others in the room were talking among themselves, but he had little interest in what they said.

It was only when he heard the creak of an opening door that he started up in passionate vehemence to stay the coroner and his jury before they could leave.

"Gentlemen," he said brokenly, "permit me a few words before you go."

They turned back, touched by the haggard face that met their eyes. Dexter's devotion to one so unworthy of it was something they could not comprehend; but it was in their power to feel for him in his hour of intense sorrow and disappointment.

"Gentlemen," Dexter proceeded, making a desperate effort to regain his composure, "if you hold Roy Burnham to answer for this crime, you will be guilty before God of a counter-crime greater than the one that has already been committed. I tell you I *know!*"

He stretched upward a shaking hand to emphasize his words.

"Roy is as innocent of Nate Kalispel's blood as any man here in this room. It isn't in the boy to do such a thing. I have known him longer than you have. For six years the threads of our lives have been interwoven, and he has the high principles and the nobility of character that caused his father to stand head and shoulders above other men.

"I tried to shield Roy, not because he is guilty, but because I wished to keep his name unstained and to preserve him from the devilish wiles of Ol Kalispel. Kalispel's fight is with me, and when he attempts to strike at me over Roy's shoulders, as he is doing now, it is my right and my duty to intervene. Remember, you have only circumstantial evidence—the most untrustworthy of all evidence—to influence you. In the opposite scale I want you to lay my intimate knowledge of Roy Burnham. Consider my faith and—and——"

Dexter broke off abruptly, turned away, dropped into a chair by a table, and lowered his face in his arms. One by one the coroner and his jury filed out, followed by the two officers, and the door was softly closed on the grief-stricken man they left behind.

If the expression of their faces could be taken as an indication, they considered their duty paramount to the hearty good-will they cherished for Dexter. Because he took an unreasonable position and held to it was no excuse whatever for their doing likewise.

No one appeared to lead Dexter back to his cell, and he fought long with his sorrow.

He became aware suddenly that a gentle arm had encircled his neck and that a soft cheek was pressed against his own.

"Jim!" whispered a sad voice. "Dear Jim!"

He looked up, startled, and met a pair of brimming blue eyes.

"Orah!" he exclaimed, leaning back in his chair. Catching her hand, he stayed the arm she would have withdrawn. "Why have you come here, little one?"

"I wanted to see you, Jim," she answered, "and I wanted to thank you for what you tried to do for Roy."

"You need not thank me. I am responsible for Roy's unhappy situation and should bear the brunt of it."

"I came here to ask you not to do so," went on Orah, showing a mastery of herself under the circumstances which was a revelation to him. "I knew you could not be guilty when your confession was told about the streets of Siwash City last night. I made up my mind then to come here and plead with you, and I have just found that your own confession has freed you. I am so glad, Jim!" she added softly.

He removed her hand from his shoulder and pushed it from him.

"Is it possible," he asked "that *you* think Roy is guilty?"

He regretted the words the next instant. A stricken cry fluttered from her lips, and she pressed one hand to her heart.

"No, no," she murmured; "you wrong me, Jim. Roy could not have done that awful thing."

"You believe in him, then?" he asked, eying her keenly.

"I do, in spite of the coroner's verdict."

"They have reached a verdict?"

She bowed her head.

"And it is——"

"That Roy is guilty."

Dexter had already touched the lowest depths of his grief. This final blow left him unshaken.

"Do you know where Roy is, Orah?" he asked calmly.

"No."

"You have not seen him at all?"

"I have not seen him."

Had Dexter been in Roy's place, he would have dared heaven and earth to get to the girl of his heart and declare his innocence, even though such a declaration had been unnecessary.

"Tell me, Orah," said Dexter, "why would you have had me refuse to shield Roy from his enemies?"

"I would have had you shield him in another way," she answered.

"Another way?" he echoed.

"Yes. I would have had you keep your liberty and dedicate yourself to the task of proving Roy's innocence so clearly that all the world would be convinced."

Such a view of the matter surprised him.

It even gave him a doubt of his own policy of self-sacrifice.

"You do not understand," he said gently, and went on to explain how he and Roy had been in the rear room when the sheriff entered the house at the ranch, and how his confession had afforded Roy the opportunity to make his escape.

"Being innocent," said the girl passionately, "why should he want to run away? I do not like having one I love retreat under fire."

He studied her face, more and more amazed at the Spartan fiber baring itself through her gentleness. Had any other indulged in these criticisms of Roy—the judge, for instance—he would have retaliated harshly, or turned away. Now he was listening to one whose love, albeit of another sort, equaled his own, and he had perforce to hear and consider.

"Possibly," suggested Dexter, "Roy was thinking of you."

"He was not thinking of me!" she cried. "Am I so weak a creature that he must spare me a blow at his honor? And he has not spared me. I could face any injustice with him, and help him beat it down. Now he has left you and me to do this without his aid. It looks like the coward's part, Jim."

He started back from her, and she stretched out her hand to the table and laid it on his.

"You think I cannot talk this way and love him," she said, "but I talk so because I love him so much I am jealous of his good name—I would not have it slandered. Yet I could despise him if I knew he had acted the poltroon!"

Her lips compressed, her eyes flashed, and the color mounted to her cheeks.

Strong man that he was, Jim Dexter felt a sudden weakness before the girl. He feared her—feared what she might do to his faith in Roy if her own faith were ever shaken.

"Roy is young," he palliated, "and somewhat given to impulse. Love is like charity, little one, and ought to cover a multitude of faults."

"Love *is* charity," she answered, "but it is false charity to condone a fault, and true charity to reprove it."

Dexter heaved a deep breath. The girl's character was like a diamond, giving off a new color at every angle from which he beheld it.

"We must face the issue unflinchingly, Jim," she went on, "and it will be infinitely better for Roy if you do not let your affection for him blur the perspective."

"I never allow anything to sway me in my estimate of a friend," answered Jim, with refreshing candor.

"Have you asked yourself how that bag of money belonging to Kalispel got into your violin-case?" she asked.

"That's a mystery," returned Jim. "I half suspect it got there through the schemes of Ol Kalispel."

"You are mistaken, Jim. Old Kalispel feels the loss of his son too keenly. He may recognize you or Roy as an in-

strument in the young man's taking off, but he would not have the heart to play with circumstantial evidence in that manner, at such a time."

"I guess you're right, Orah, but that only deepens the mystery instead of helping to clear it."

The city marshal and McKibben returned to the jail at that moment.

"Burnham has been held for the murder, Jim," said McKibben; "so that lets you out. You are free to leave here whenever you wish."

"Have you found out anything about Roy, Mac?" Dexter inquired.

"Nothing. Legal machinery will be put in operation at once, and it will be only a question of time until he is found. Old Kal will offer a big reward, and that will stimulate the search."

"Give the boy half a chance," said Dexter, "and he will come back of his own accord and save you the trouble of bringing him."

McKibben smiled his incredulity, and Jim took Orah's arm and they left the jail.

"Our work is before us, Jim," said Orah when they had reached the street. "We must prove Roy's innocence."

"I'll wire Omaha and get a detective," answered Dexter.

"No," said the girl, "let us do it ourselves. It will be a labor of love, and we cannot help but succeed."

"I thought before that you were a girl in ten thousand," said Jim, "but now——" He stopped short and regarded her with frank admiration.

"And now?" she asked, with a vivid blush.

"Now," he continued, "I think you're one girl in ten million. You fill me with confidence and courage. We'll tackle this work together, Orah, and we'll win out, too. Come, we must lose no time in getting back to Siwash City."

CHAPTER X.

FACING THE FACTS.

DEXTER arranged to have his horse sent back to Siwash City and he and Orah returned by train. As fellow-travelers they had the judge, McKibben, and the coroner and his jury.

Had Dexter encountered the judge previous to meeting Orah, there would have been hard words and a further breach in their friendship.

The cattleman was confident that the judge, more than any one else, was to be credited with the verdict returned by the coroner's jury. Since talking with Orah, Dexter's views in the matter of the judge's culpability had undergone a change.

Givins offered his puffy hand and seated himself at Dexter's side. Orah occupied the seat in front and McKibben the one behind.

"You would have immolated yourself on the altar of friendship, Jim, and for a person who is most unworthy of the sacrifice," remarked the judge sonorously, harping away on the same old string. "I am happy to think that I was able to assist in frustrating the attempt."

Dexter gave the judge a look that commanded silence, but a movement of Orah's head indicated that she had caught the words.

"If you can't be quiet about Roy on my account," whispered Dexter angrily, "then consider the feelings of the young lady in front."

"Who is she?" returned the judge, *sotto voce*.

"The future Mrs. Burnham," said Dexter.

The judge stared at Orah and shook his head sadly. McKibben leaned across the back of the seat and began talking over Dexter's shoulder.

"While you were a prisoner, Jim," said he, "money couldn't have hired me to take chances in removing you to Siwash City. That's why the coroner's jury had to go to Lamark."

"I'm not a prisoner now, Mac," answered Dexter, "and that makes all the difference in the world."

"I'll lay something handsome it won't make much difference with Kalispel."

"So will I," concurred the judge.

"The verdict of the jury has been wired ahead," went on McKibben, "and the whole of Siwash knows just where the Honorable Jim stands, but the verdict isn't going to make any great change in the opinions of the Kalispel contingent."

"Meaning, I suppose," said Dexter, "that I shall have to keep a weather-eye out for myself."

"You are liable to see storm signals if old Kal ever heads your way," returned McKibben. "Here are your guns, Jim. Keep them where they will be handy."

The sheriff handed over the navy sixes, and Orah looked back with a frightened face as Dexter stowed the weapons away in his pockets. He smiled at her reassuringly, and she turned her thoughtful eyes from the window.

"Don't scare the girl, Mac," breathed Dexter in the sheriff's car.

"You're the one I want to scare," muttered McKibben.

"Well, you can't do that," struck in the judge. "When Jim gets the bit in his teeth, he'll go his own way in spite of fate. Hello, here's Siwash. My, what does all that yelling mean?"

They discovered the cause of the yelling when they disembarked. The whole town had assembled at the station in honor of Jim Dexter.

The place had been plunged in gloom the day before when Perry had ridden in and told of Dexter's confession. Perry's news was colored and emphasized by the fierce denunciations of the large party of sympathizers which Kalispel had led in the direction of Clearwater Ranch. This party had trooped back to town on learning that Burnham had made good his escape and that Dexter was then well on the road to Lamark.

Dexter was the most popular man in that part of the State. Not only had he represented his district in the Legislature with honor to himself and satisfaction to his constituents, but more than one paper was systematically "booming" him for the United States Senate.

Such political distinction tickled the pride of the citizens of Siwash City. Apart from Dexter's personal worth, it was a matter of congratulation to the town to be heralded forth as his native place.

News of the coroner's verdict spread like wildfire. People gathered in knots and jubilantly discussed it, losing sight of the fact that Dexter had brought his incarceration upon himself, and thinking of him only as an innocent man rescued from the clutches of the law.

The Honorable Jim was cheered to the echo, felicitations then centering about the coroner, the coroner's jury, and the judge. The train pulled out and away, leaving the judge in the midst of a neatly turned speech, having principally to do with "our noble friend who would play Pythias to an unworthy Damon."

Classical allusions were lost upon that plebeian crowd, but the judge wallowed on in his rhetoric while the embarrassed Jim shook hands with his friends and thought sadly of Roy. For the cattleman it was not an occasion for rejoicing.

Before the judge had finished his speech, and before Jim could escape from the platform, a wild-eyed, distraught man hurled himself into the gathering, clutching two revolvers and shaking them above his head.

"Let me at Dexter!" yelled the man. "If he did not kill my boy he was in the plot to have him put out of the way! Let me at him, curse you! Clear out of the way."

Strong hands were laid upon Ol Kalispel, and he was disarmed and dragged off, a piteous sight. He was a man with a "record," a man who had killed others and cheated the scaffold, yet the intensity of his grief had crazed him, and such grief always commands respect.

As soon as he could get out of the throng, Dexter joined Orah beyond the station building. Her face was drawn with sorrow; with the lapse of every hour she seemed to realize more and more how the blight of circumstances was striking at the heart of her love. But she was still brave.

"Let us go to the undertaker's, Jim," she said.

"I will go there, Orah," Jim answered, "but not you."

"Yes," she persisted, and in such a tone that he gave her his arm and they went forthwith.

There was nothing gruesome in the sight of the young man who lay calm and still in the back room at the undertaker's. Nate Kalispel had been a perfect man physically, and his death struggle had left no mark upon his face.

Parting his dark hair, the undertaker

showed them the wound—a clean, straight fracture six inches in length.

"It's a mystery what sort of an instrument made that," said he. "It couldn't have been a gun-stock, or a branding iron, or a club, or a stone. I suppose it will all come out some day."

"You may be sure of that," said Orah. Then, to the cattleman, as she laid a trembling hand on his arm: "Let us go, Jim."

A faintness had shaken her, but she quickly revived in the cool air of the street.

"Could we go to the place where the —the accident occurred this afternoon?" she asked.

"Not till to-morrow morning," he replied. "Do you think it will be necessary for you to go there, Orah?"

"I must," she said.

After leaving her at Mrs. Hutton's he made his way to the tavern, passing two of the O. D. K. cowboys, who gave him a surly look as he went on. A surprise was in store for him at the tavern office, for no less a personage than Shorty Burke was there, awaiting his coming.

Burke was somewhat demoralized in appearance. His right eye was swollen and blackened, there was a ragged bruise on his left cheek, and one sleeve of his flannel shirt was torn from wrist to shoulder.

But Shorty Burke was aglow in spite of his dilapidation, and swooped down on his employer's hand with eager warmth.

"Davis was in town this mornin', Jim," he jubilated, "and sailed into the ranch with the news that came by telegraft. It was sure good the way you got out of it."

"What's the matter with you, Burke?" asked Jim.

The cowboy wagged his head humorously and passed one hand over his injured eye and bruised cheek.

"Met up with one of the O. D. K. outfit, ridin' into town," said he. "He passed a remark that didn't set well, an' so we clinched."

"What was the remark?"

"Ain't a-goin' to tell ye, Jim. It reflected on your standin' in the community, and before I got done with the Kalispel puncher, you can bet he was sorry he chirped. I don't look anythin' extry, but, say, you ought to see *him!*"—and Burke gloated under his breath.

"What brings you to Siwash, Burke?" queried Dexter.

"Haverstraw wanted me to come and tell ye about Old Blazes."

"What about Old Blazes?"

"He was seen in the Whiplash Hills. Haverstraw reckons he'll round up the cattle in them hills to-morrow and chase the big maverick out. He didn't know but you'd like to be around and see us do the trick."

"I'll be there," said Dexter. "Don't forget what I said, Burke: Five hundred to the man who settles for Old Blazes."

"Every puncher at the ranch has got his eye on that bunch of money," said Burke with a wink. "I'm layin' plenty hard to corral it myself."

After a few minutes' chat the cowboy took his departure. Dexter ate his supper, smoked and gossiped with the judge for an hour or two, and then went off to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

BEFORE sunrise Jim Dexter was in front of Mrs. Hutton's boarding-house, astride the bronco, sent from Lamark and leading a mount with a side-saddle. The early start was designed to bring him to the Whiplash Hills in time to take part in the work Haverstraw had planned for that day.

The hills lay between the Bad-Ax and the Clearwater, far to the south and west of Dexter's ranch and close to the limits of his range—not more than an hour's ride from the spot on the Bad-Ax trail where Nate Kalispel had lost his life.

Despite the early hour, Orah was in readiness and waiting. Barely had Dexter come to a stop in front of the house when she issued from it and ran down the steps and out of the gate.

Her face was wan and there was a languid look in her blue eyes. Evidently the night had brought her little rest. Dexter sprang from the saddle to assist her to mount.

"Do you still feel that you must go, Orah?" he asked.

"Yes, Jim," she answered him simply.

He told her of the work to be done in the Whiplash Hills, and her eyes brightened.

"It will not be possible for me to ride back to Siwash with you to-day," he finished, "so you had better stay at my ranch to-night. As soon as we reach the hills I will send you to headquarters with one of the men."

"I have a deep interest in Old Blazes," she answered with a slight smile. "Why may I not stay in the hills and see him meet his fate, then ride to the ranch with you?"

He saw how eager she was to carry out the plan and had not the heart to deny her. She could be posted in a safe place, and the excitement of the drive might give her some relief from the sadness that had lately come into her life.

"Very well," he said, turning to look at the cinches of the side-saddle. "It will be well, I think, to tell Mrs. Hutton you will not be back until to-morrow."

She flew back to the house with the message and was quickly at his side again. He swung her lightly to the horse's back, leaped to his own saddle, and they galloped away.

For some time they rode in silence, both busy with their thoughts.

"There is no word from Roy?" she asked at last.

"No."

"One of Mrs. Hutton's boarders was saying last night that Ol Kalispel had hired a detective to hunt for Roy, and had offered him ten thousand dollars if he succeeded in his search."

"That is like Kalispel," was his only comment.

"I hope," she went on tremulously, "that Roy will return of his own free will before the detective has a chance to find him."

"I hope so, too, Orah."

"But no matter whether Roy returns of his own accord or is brought back," she said with spirit, "we must clear his name before he gets here."

"We will do everything possible," he answered. "If we succeed in clearing his name he will not be brought back—there will be nothing to keep him from coming of his own accord."

She flashed a glance at him.

"Then you really think he is afraid to come back?"

"I do not know what to think, but that seems the clearest explanation."

"Why should he be afraid, if he is innocent?"

"He knows how cunning Ol Kalispel can be, and he may think, as I did, that this is a plot of Kalispel's to entrap him."

They conversed little after this, but told off the miles at a rapid pace, and were at the scene of the "accident," as Orah had referred to it, before they were fairly aware.

A broken paint can beside the trail caught Dexter's eye, and he drew to a quick halt. Orah also stopped a few paces ahead, and they backed their horses to the trail-side and gazed in silence at the broken ground.

There was a scant growth of timber on both sides of the trail at that point, and if Nate Kalispel had had an unscrupulous enemy, it was such a place as might have been chosen for an ambush.

Three days had passed since the tragedy, and the ordinary travel along the trail had done much to obliterate traces of the struggle; but to the right of the road, where the ground had not been interfered with, the earth was deeply indented.

The spilled paint had soaked into the ground for the most part, and where stray stones had caught splashes of it the settling dust had turned it to a sickly dun color.

"There is little to be learned here, Orah," said Dexter.

"There are hoofmarks there," she observed a moment later, pointing with her quirt.

"A steer has crossed the road," returned Dexter. "That is nothing to wonder at in a cattle country."

"I suppose not," she sighed. "As you say, Jim, there is little to be learned and we might as well continue our journey."

As they were about to start, Dexter's quick ear caught a sound of approaching hoofs. With a significant look at

the girl, he caught the bridle of her horse and plunged deeper into the chaparral.

When screened from the trail, he faced around and peered out to see who the traveler might be. Presently an exclamation escaped him.

"Remain here, Orah," he said in a low tone; "I'll be back in a little while."

She nodded and he pushed back toward the road again.

A cowboy was passing, his horse at a walk. One of the rider's legs was hooked about the pommel of his saddle. He was a young fellow, scarcely more than a boy, and was humming a low song and rolling a cigarette.

"Wilcox!" called Dexter.

The cowboy jumped and the half-rolled cigarette dropped from his hands. He looked around in consternation.

"Jupiter, Jim!" he exclaimed. "You came within one of giving me the scare of my life that time. This here's a mighty ticklish place, and you can't get me within gunshot of it after dark. But, say"—Wilcox wheeled his horse and rode to Jim's side. "You must know it ain't very safe for you around here. It wouldn't be safe for me, either, if some of the boys caught me talking with you."

"I came here to look over the ground, Wilcox."

"There ain't much to be found out by lookin' at the ground. Maybe you won't believe it, Jim, but I was thinkin' of you as I rode along rollin' that paper pipe. Your outfit is going to have a sort of round-up over in the Whiplash Hills to-day, ain't they?"

"They've cornered Old Blazes, and we're going to do our best to put him out of the way."

Wilcox rose in his stirrups and took a careful look up and down the trail. As he settled back in his saddle he said:

"Take my advice, Jim, and have a good strong party at the hills. I'm tellin' you for your own good."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you can expect a pretty large bunch of trouble. The old man knows your plans—I believe he even knows that you're going to be with the party—and he's pullin' the wires for mischief. Gee, man"—and Wilcox hunched himself up and gave a long whistle. "The trouble we've had on this range won't compare with what's to come, the way I figger it."

"Does Kalispel still think that I killed Nate?"

"I don't know as he thinks that. He has an idea, though, that it was a put-up job between you and young Burnham. He's crazy mad, Jim, that's what he is. A killin' mood, I call it."

Dexter did not seem greatly disturbed.

"Can you tell me what he is thinking of doing?" he asked.

"I've told you all I know, Jim, and you can bet your shaps, taps, and latigoes it would be all day with me if old Kal ever found it out. But I'm sort o' rung in on this deal, havin' toted the hide of one of them rustled steers over to you. I can't forget what you done for me that time I needed help, Jim, and I can tell you that I'd do a heap more for you than I have already—don't forget that."

"I won't forget anything," said Jim. "If you'd come over to the Clearwater I'd give you a better lay than you're getting here."

"It ain't to be thought of, though I'm obliged to you. My brother's got a hold at the O. D. K. and wants me with him. If you——" Wilcox broke off suddenly. "Listen!" he muttered, bending his head.

Galloping was heard in the north, distant and indistinct but approaching swiftly.

"That's our cue to separate, Jim," said Wilcox hurriedly. "It won't do for you to be seen here, nor for me to be seen palaverin' with you. You hike, and I'll do the same. So-long."

"*Adios*," returned Dexter, backing his horse into the thicket as Wilcox went on up the trail, humming to himself and rolling another cigarette.

"Who was that, Jim?" questioned Orah.

He raised a hand, warning her to silence, and peered through the brush toward the trail. The girl allowed her eyes to follow his.

The galloping was now loud in their ears, and the horsemen were in sight.

There were five riders in all, four cowboys riding two abreast and the fifth in the lead.

The leader was Ol Kalispel, reins on pommel, arms folded across his breast and head bowed gloomily. Swung between the cowboys, by means of their riatas, was a long, pine box that bobbed and pitched gruesomely as the horses galloped.

Abruptly, when almost in front of the two concealed in the thicket, Ol Kalispel caught at the bridle-reins and turned his horse about.

(To be continued.)

A Small Professional Dinner-Party.

BY EDWARD P. CAMPBELL.

One woman's attempt to solve a riddle connected with the stage, and the unexpected answer she found to it.

"THERE is a certain glamour and fascination about the women of the stage against which the society girl, with all her charm and beauty, is powerless to compete," oracularly observed Gertie Allen to her friend Helen Brown.

The two girls were having a little confidential chat during that hair-brushing period just prior to bed-time, which is the feminine equivalent for the late-at-night cigar for the other sex.

"But how do you know that the reason the men all left us so early this evening was because they were going to that theatrical supper?" probed Helen. "Fred told me that he had an important business engagement with a man at the club."

One of Gertie's long, flaxen braids was between her teeth at the moment, and she could not well answer; but she looked unutterable things with her eyes.

"Yes," she scoffed, when at last she was free to speak, "and Charlie Hastings likewise announced that he had to catch a train to Philadelphia. Curious how all of them had such good excuses. I guess they failed to recollect that I have a brother. Why, Jack told me this very afternoon that he was going, and said that none of the 'push' would think of missing it. He claims, too, that Fred Saxby is awfully smitten with this Lora Tremont."

Helen glanced up as though about to speak; then pressed her lips together, and quickly averted her eyes. She strove to appear composed as she twisted up a little bunch of combings to toss in the fire; but Gertie's shrewd glance perceived that her fingers were trembling, and that the color receded from her cheek, to come back in a rosy flood.

"Is this Miss Tremont so beautiful, then?" she asked after a moment's pause, the careless unconcern of her tone a trifle over-done. "I have never seen her, you know."

"Beautiful?" Gertie gave a contemptuous toss of her head. "Why, my dear, she's no more to be compared to you in looks than—than one of those pink tea-gowns in the windows of the Sixth Avenue second-hand shops to a Paquin model"—hitting on a happy metaphor. "She's flashy, and she's made up, and she's thirty-five if she's a day. But, it's just as I tell you: she has the glitter of the footlights about her, and all these men go circling after her like a lot of silly moths around a flame."

"She must have some graces of conversation then, or some charm of manner," argued Helen. "That would account for her popularity, even though she does lack beauty; and whatever is said, she must possess magnetism, or she would never have succeeded so wonderfully in her profession."

"Stuff!" demurred the other tartly. "They tell me that she never opens her mouth except to put her foot in it; that she can give no answer when anything is said to her except to grin and simper; and that when crossed in the slightest way she becomes a veritable virago. And

as for her histrionic triumphs, I have it on the most reliable authority that her manager has to train her for every part like a parrot. Every tone she uses, every gesture she makes, every pose she assumes has to be drilled and rehearsed into her over and over again.

"No, Helen, don't dream that if she were not a popular actress—made so by judicious booming—Fred Saxby or any other man would ever give her a second look. It is simply because they think they are doing something 'Bohemian,' associating with genius, as it were, that they seek her out."

Helen had no answer to make to this assertion; and shortly afterward the two girls retired.

But, although her companion almost immediately dropped off to sleep, Miss Brown lay awake a long time turning over and over in her mind the explanation propounded by her friend for the recent defection of the man whom she had come to regard as in a sense her own particular cavalier.

Fred Saxby had been her champion and her knight almost since the time of their schooldays. No actual engagement existed between them; yet there had been almost a tacit understanding that some day they were to be married.

She could not disguise from herself, however, that of late there had seemed a perceptible falling off in his allegiance. He did not come to the house so often, and when he did come, he appeared moody, preoccupied, and distraught.

Moreover, from various sources it had reached her ears that he was paying ardent court at the shrine of the reigning theatrical success, Miss Lora Tremont, leading lady of the Bromwell & Brueton stock company.

At first Helen had simply laughed at such reports; but to-night, when after a very brief and ceremonious call he had left with an extremely flimsy excuse, his actions had seemed to confirm the story which Gertie Allen had brought her that Miss Tremont was entertaining that evening with an after-theater supper party, and that Saxby was to be the guest of honor.

It must be so, then, that he was vastly taken with this queen of sock and buskin; but, such being the case, Helen could not credit her friend's diagnosis of the character of the attraction.

True, she herself, from one cause or another, had never seen Miss Tremont either on or off the stage; but it did not seem to her possible that Fred Saxby's fastidious fancy could have been ensnared by a woman so utterly lacking in all attributes of charm.

There must be some subtle witchery about this actress, she concluded, which had evaded the vision of her chum, but which Saxby had been able to see, and to which he had surrendered. And with the jealousy aroused which lurks at the bottom of every woman's soul, she resolved to study the other woman, and whatever the potent force of her attractiveness might be, to adapt it to her own personality.

Thus would she win her errant swain back to his fealty.

Full of this project, she lost no time in putting it into effect.

The next day happened to be a matinée at the Arbor Theater, where Miss Tremont was playing in "Love's Comedy," and after her lunch Helen duly repaired thither, having first rid herself of the company of Miss Allen on the specious excuse that she had a headache, and wanted to walk it off on a solitary stroll.

She was able to secure a seat only very far back; but later she had occasion to regard this as an extremely fortunate mischance, for just before the curtain rang up, Fred Saxby sauntered in and took a chair in one of the forward proscenium boxes.

From her position in the shadow of the balcony, she could see him, and with her glasses note every expression which crossed his face, while at the same time herself remaining reasonably secure from recognition at his hands.

She fervently thanked her lucky stars for this, as she noted that during the first part of the act Saxby's attention was directed far more to the audience than to the play. It was evidently an old story with him, for he deliberately turned his shoulder upon the opening scenes and amused himself by idly scanning the faces of the spectators.

With the appearance of Miss Tremont, however, a change came into his bored

and inattentive attitude. He straightened up and clapped madly at her entrance, he bent an unbroken and interested gaze upon her, and Helen could see that he was watching narrowly every movement that she made, listening as though entranced to every inflection of her rather unmusical voice.

What could be the secret of it?

The girl, carefully studying both him and the actress, shook her head in a sort of uncomprehending perplexity; for as Miss Tremont proceeded with her part, the listener found herself forced more and more to agree with Gertie Allen, and to acknowledge that the latter had rather understated than exaggerated this star's defects.

The woman was old; all the grease-paint and powder in the world could not cover up those lines which Time had etched along her throat and about the corners of her mouth. She had irregular features, a big mouth, and an awkward, ungainly figure. Her carriage was slovenly, and her elocution faulty and unrefined.

There was a certain power to her acting, of course; but unprejudiced as Helen strove to be, she could not convince herself that this was from any spark of the "divine fire." Indeed, it seemed to her not as work in any degree sincere or voluntary, but rather, as her friend had claimed, the mere showing of a puppet going unwittingly through its paces.

As for any quality of personal magnetism which might have atoned for all these other shortcomings, the girl could not discover a trace; Miss Tremont was to her as dull, flat, and uninspiring as ditchwater.

What then could be the influence which had drawn Fred Saxby into the train of her admirers? Miss Brown, with an expressive lifting of her brows, gave up the conundrum.

Her respect and esteem for him instantly fell many degrees, and unable to remain and endure the spectacle of seeing him applauding such a performance, she arose at the close of the act and hurriedly left the house.

Almost in a daze at the conflict of emotions which had been aroused within her, she started off impetuously, heeding little what direction she was taking; but when she had proceeded about half way down a block she suddenly realized that she was headed for the East Side, and paused to consider her movements.

While she stood there uncertainly debating whether a brisk stroll up Madison Avenue or a drive through the Park would best serve to soothe her perturbed spirit, her attention was caught by the quaint comments of a group of children gathered about the gaudy posters which portrayed the "death-defying" feats of the circus at that very moment going on within the walls at her side.

Memory insensibly took Miss Brown back to the time when she herself had gloated over circus bills, and she inclined her ear to the childish observations with a sort of sympathetic interest.

"Aw, dey don't reely have nuttin' like dat, does dey?" incredulously questioned one little girl, pointing a chubby forefinger at the representation of a black-mustached Apollo smilingly evoluting a bicycle down a swift incline and leaping a chasm which if drawn to scale must have measured a thousand feet.

"Sure dey does," another rebuked her shocking want of faith. "Wasn't me brudder Jimmy dere de odder night, an' didn't he say dey done it jest like it was in de pitshurs?"

"Are you a goin' to git to go, Annie?" asked a third yearningly, turning to still another of the party. "Maw says as how I was to de cirkis last year, an' dat ought to do me. She guesses dey ain't much new in it, nohow."

Miss Brown hesitated a moment; then impulsively snapped open her watch and glanced at the time. It was still early. With a quick decision, characteristic of her, she stepped up to the little group.

"How would you tots like to go to the circus with me this afternoon?" she asked with a winning smile. "I think I can manage it, if none of you have to go home, and if you would really care to go?"

Care to go? Ask a famished man if he would care for manna direct from heaven!

They made no answer in words; they were stricken dumb with an incredulous joy. But she read her answer in their glistening eyes.

"Come along, then," she said, and led the way around to the front entrance.

The circus was an old story to Miss Brown. She had been to it twice already during its present engagement; so after seeing her rapturous charges duly installed in the box, and providing them with light refreshment in the way of candy and peanuts, she gave little heed to the performance, but drifted off into a fresh consideration of the problem which filled her thoughts: what secret enchantment did this Lora Tremont possess which had enabled her to woo away a suitor so loyal and devoted as Fred Saxby had always proven himself?

Yet puzzle over it as she would, she could arrive at no better solution than that which Gertie Allen had offered her the night before: that no matter how ugly or untalented a woman might be, the mere fact of her being on the stage rendered her attractive and fascinating to the men of her acquaintance.

Just as she had about reached this conclusion, her ear was suddenly assailed by the name of the very woman of whom she had been thinking.

"Look at dat lady out dere on de horse," shrilled out the little girl Helen had previously heard accosted as "Annie." "Don't she look like Lory Tremont?"

"Naw, I don't t'ink so," disclaimed another vehemently. "Dat lady looks real jolly, an' ole Tremont is always as cross as two sticks w'en she ain't out in front. You oughter seen her try to hit me w'en I got in her way in de wings dis afternoon."

Helen could not restrain her curiosity.

"Do you girls know Miss Tremont?" she asked, leaning forward.

"Does we know her?"—in a tumultuous chorus. "We oughter know her, nasty ole t'ing. She's always a scoldin' us or jawin' at us w'en she's out o' temper."

"We's de beggar childern in de fust act of 'Love's Comedy,' you know, ma'am," put in the oldest girl by way of explanation.

"Ah, so I have been entertaining actresses, eh?" smiled Helen. Then, a sudden inspiration striking her: "I wonder if you would all like to come to my house to dinner to-morrow night? I will have it early, so that you can get through and be at the theater on time; and if you say so, I will go around home with each of you after the circus is out and obtain your mothers' consent."

The children, she found, all lived within a radius of three or four blocks, so she had no difficulty in carrying out the program she had outlined, and at the same time arriving home in time to dress for dinner.

Before she even removed her hat, however, she sat down and indited brief notes to six men of her acquaintance, including Saxby, inviting them to a "professional" dinner party the following evening to meet, as she stated, six ladies of the stage.

"Where on earth did Helen Brown come to know six actresses?" questioned Charlie Hastings in surprise, when he met Fred Saxby at lunch the next day. "I didn't know she had even one of the profession on her visiting list."

"Neither did I," replied the other; "but know them she must, for there's no mistaking the invitation. You are going, I suppose?"

"Well, rather. In fact, I fancy that we'll all be on hand; don't you?"

Sure enough, promptly at the appointed hour the six, immaculately got up, put in their appearance. No one being on hand to greet them, however, except their hostess and Miss Allen, and their rather pertinacious inquiries being unsatisfactorily answered, they began to look dubiously at one another and to suspect a hoax.

But at length there came a peal at the bell, and a flutter of skirts in the hall, and with hope revived each man turned expectantly toward the door.

And then sounded a concerted gasp of consternation, followed by a roar of laughter.

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed Charlie Hastings as soon as he could recover his voice. "If it ain't the six kids that play the beggar children in 'Love's Comedy.' They're actresses, all right; the joke is fairly on us, boys."

Nevertheless, it is but fair to the victims of the conspiracy to say that they rallied nobly from their confusion, and even outdid the young ladies in enter-

taining and amusing the guests of the afternoon.

They played circus horse to the irreclaimable damage of their trouser knees, enacted with realistic growls and caperings every animal in the menagerie, took the rôle of freaks, and generally comported themselves in a manner which would have caused any commissioner of lunacy to commit them to Bloomingdale without delay.

But it was reserved for Fred Saxby to propose the crowning effect of the evening. After the games had all been played, and the "goodies" devoured, and the mothers of the tots had arrived to take charge of their respective offsprings, he suggested that six automobile hansoms should be summoned, and the actresses and their mothers escorted to the theater in proper style.

"I know how it should be done, you know," he said boldly, winking significantly across the room to Charlie Hastings. "I have had some experience lately with a popular star."

Helen could not but consider this in bad taste, and when he murmured to her a moment later that he would return as soon as he had safely bestowed the child under his care at the theater, she was on the point of telling him that he need not trouble himself.

She grudgingly consented, however, when he added that he wanted to see her alone, as he had something very important to tell her. No woman with ordinary curiosity could have been expected to deny a request like that.

Then they started off, and never probably did such a unique procession wend its way down Fifth Avenue. Charlie Hastings had snatched up a banjo as he left the house, and Ned Kramer provided himself with a mandolin, and to the rollicking strains of these two instruments the automobiles paraded down the wide thoroughfare in imposing file.

But arrived at the theater, and relieved of his charge, Saxby turned to his chauffeur with a thrill of impatience in his voice.

"Back to Mr. Brown's again," he ordered, "and it will be worth your while to get me there in a hurry."

"Is there any need to tell you my secret, Helen?" he asked when he found her in the drawing-room all topsy-turvy from the games of the children. "I had been striving to screw up my courage for weeks to seek my fate at your hands; but it was not until to-night when I saw your heavenly kindness to those poor waifs that I could make up my mind to speak. I told myself that such a tender heart might even be merciful to me.

"I think I have always loved you, dear," he went on. "Never for one moment has my affection wavered, or——"

"Never?" she interrupted, her glance, which had been drooping under his ardent gaze, suddenly becoming hard and cold. "What about Miss Lora Tremont?"

"Lora Tremont?" he echoed bewilderedly. "I never had any interest in her except as a business proposition. Bromwell, her manager, has been trying to get me to back a starring venture he has in view for her next year; but I frankly confess I have been unable to discern her wonderful talents, and from what your little friend Annie told me to-night, I don't believe I care to bank on a woman of her uncertain temper. But for heaven's sake, Helen, you don't mean to tell me that you have been imagining——"

But Miss Brown's answer to his unfinished question was sobbed out in her lover's arms.

SHE MIGHT BE.

SHE might be queen or princess
With that regal poise of head,
Or she might be just the mistress
Of three millions cold instead,
Or she might be—but she isn't;
Expectations I must crush
When I say she's just my model
And she's posing for my brush.

R. D. McKay.

NO WAY OUT.*

BY BERTRAM LEBHAR.

A loan shark's threat, his victim's burst of temper, and the tragedy that supervened.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

ARTHUR LADD has obtained Robert Adrian's consent to an engagement between himself and Adrian's daughter, Rosa, on condition that he gives up all his sporting vices. On the way home, he receives a "sure-thing" tip on the races, and, unable to resist, plays it and loses all he has. He has promised Rosa a certain ring, and not wishing to disappoint her, purchases it on instalments. For a few weeks all goes well, but he falls behind in his payments and the jewel dealer threatens to expose him. Ladd has a private interview with this man Meyer, a quarrel follows, and Ladd leaves the office.

A moment later, a clerk enters the room to find the jeweler dead, stabbed with Ladd's sword-cane. Ladd cannot be found. Perriam, a rejected suitor of Rosa's and a newspaper reporter, is put on the case. He goes to interview Adrian and there finds that Ladd has gone out with Rosa, and that a servant heard them mention going to the bank.

CHAPTER V.

PERRIAM'S BEAT.

IT was all very well for Robert Adrian to say that the eloping pair must be caught at once; but how was it to be done?

The excited father, forced to realize his helplessness, asked this question anxiously of the reporter.

"I was just trying to think," said Perriam quietly. "It is almost certain that they have left town. Ladd would not dare stay here with this murder charge hanging over his head. The police are looking for him. Our greatest hope at present lies in them. Ordinarily I haven't much confidence in the ability of the force to catch a fugitive; but if this young scoundrel has your daughter with him, it ought to make their work so much simpler. A couple is easier to identify than a single person."

"Then let us notify police headquarters at once," proposed Adrian. "I leave it to you, Perriam. You know the ropes."

"But are we sure your daughter has really eloped with this scamp? After all, it is only a theory on your part, Mr. Adrian."

"A theory! Why else should she have gone to the bank with him and drawn out her money? She has taken it to pay their expenses. A child could guess that."

"It certainly sounds plausible. But are we sure that they actually did go to the bank? Let us ascertain that positively first of all. It may give us a clue."

"How can we find that out until tomorrow? The bank is closed now."

"If you were in the newspaper business, Mr. Adrian, you would realize that a little thing like that would be no obstacle. Do you care to come with me?"

"Come where?" asked Adrian.

"To the bank."

"But I just told you that the bank is closed."

"There will be a night-watchman there."

"What can he tell us?" exclaimed Adrian impatiently. "He probably came on duty after banking hours. He will know nothing."

"Oh, yes. He'll probably know the address of one of the bank officials, and this bank official will be able to tell us the address of the paying-teller, and when we interview the paying-teller in his home, he will surely remember whether or not your daughter drew out her account this afternoon."

"Well, that's not a bad idea," said the merchant admiringly. "You reporters are certainly ingenious, to say the least. Why, I never even thought of the watchman. Come, let's go to the bank at once."

They drove in a cab to the Park Sav-

This story began in the December issue of THE ARGOSY, which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.

ings Bank, where Rosa had her private account.

Perriam had guessed aright. There was a watchman outside the building.

In answer to questions, this man said that he had not come on until after the bank closed, so he had not had a chance to notice any lady or gentleman who might have come there. He did not know where the paying-teller lived, but his name was John Sheldon and he thought the address was in the directory.

They went to a near-by drug store and consulted this volume. John Sheldon, bank clerk, lived at 60 West One Hundred and Twelfth Street, according to this showing, so they jumped in the cab and drove thither at once.

Mr. Sheldon proved to be a man with a good memory for details.

"Yes, gentlemen, Miss Adrian did visit the bank to-day," said he. "It was around six o'clock. Monday is our late closing night, you know. She was accompanied by a tall young man, who appeared very nervous. She filled out a blank check at the desk and came over to my window to cash it."

"Did you notice her face?" asked Perriam. "Did she seem at all excited?"

"Yes; she was quite pale, and her eyes were red, as if she had been crying. She and the young man conversed in low tones. I remember noting at the time that they seemed to be in some trouble. He seemed to be pleading with her."

"Did you catch anything of what they said?" asked Perriam.

"I heard her ask him if seven hundred would cover everything, and he nodded his head affirmatively."

"How much money did your daughter have in the bank, Mr. Adrian?" asked Perriam.

"Over one thousand dollars, I believe."

"And did she take it all out?" the reporter inquired of the paying-teller.

"No; she did not close her account. She merely drew the seven hundred."

"That's funny," said Perriam. "I wonder why she left that balance of three hundred?"

"You can never explain a woman's actions where money is concerned," grunted Rosa's father. "That's a trivial point, anyway. There's no doubt at all now that they have gone away together. Mr. Sheldon here tells us that she distinctly asked him whether seven hundred would 'cover everything.' What else could she have meant by 'everything' but the expenses of their trip? Come on, Perriam; let's hurry to police headquarters. We may be able to catch them yet."

They entered the cab again, and were driven down-town to Mulberry Street.

In the detective bureau Perriam found Detective Sergeant Connaughton.

"Hello, sergeant," he said, "have you caught Ladd yet?"

"Not yet," replied Connaughton gruffly. "We'll get him, though. Don't you worry about that."

"Have you got a line on him?"

"Well, I can't say anything for publication," replied the detective guardedly.

"Well, I'll give you some information," went on Perriam.

"Give *me* some information, eh! What is it?"

"It's this: Don't look for Ladd alone. There's a lady with him."

"A lady with him! The deuce you say! Who is she?"

"Let me introduce you to Mr. Adrian. His daughter was betrothed to Ladd. Ladd called for her to-day after he committed the murder, and they went out together. There is every indication that when Ladd fled he took her with him. Look for a young man accompanied by a young lady, and you will stand a much better chance of getting Ladd."

"That's a good clue. They're probably married by this time," said Connaughton excitedly. "Do you think she'll stick to him?"

"The foolish girl is infatuated with the fellow," growled Adrian. "She'll probably stay with him through thick and thin."

"Then it will be much easier for us to nab him," said the detective with satisfaction. "We'll work the stations and the ferries on this new clue. There's no doubt they've taken a train or a boat

for somewhere. Don't you worry, Mr. Adrian."

"Don't worry!" growled the silk merchant. "That's fine advice, sir. Wouldn't you worry if your daughter was married to a murderer?"

"Well, she'll get her separation when once we catch him," said the detective grimly. "For he'll go to the chair as sure as fate. I've never had a stronger case in all my experience in the detective bureau."

"Good!" said Adrian. "The villain deserves it."

"Good," echoed Perriam quietly.

"What next?" asked Rosa's father of the reporter, when they had left police headquarters.

"I can't think of anything else. You go home to sleep, Mr. Adrian. I must go to the office to write my story."

"What story?" asked the old man, in sudden alarm.

"The story of the murder. They'll be tearing their hair out down there, wondering what has become of me."

"See here," said Mr. Adrian anxiously; "you are not going to print anything about my daughter, are you?"

"I'm afraid I must, Mr. Adrian. Remember, I told you that I came to see you strictly on business. I must tell the story of the elopement, you know. It's too important a part of the story not to print."

"And yet you claim to love my daughter!" exclaimed Adrian angrily.

"I do. But duty is duty. Besides, Mr. Adrian, just consider for a moment. Now that we have tipped off police headquarters, all the other papers will have it. What difference will it make if the *Star* prints it also."

"And you pretend to love my daughter, sir!" repeated Adrian, with even more anger in his tone.

"The story shall in no way reflect on your daughter—I'll promise you that. The fact that she has run off with Ladd must come out. It's impossible to suppress it. I'll simply publish the truth. That can do her no harm."

"Do you think I want the world to know that I allowed my girl to become betrothed to a murderer?" growled Adrian.

"The world must know, sooner or later, that your daughter is married to a murderer," said Perriam bitterly.

"Good God! That's true!" exclaimed Rosa's father, with anguish in his voice. "Well, if you must print the story, Perriam, all I ask is that you deal as gently with her as possible."

"I'll promise you that, sir," answered Perriam readily, whereupon the two men shook hands and parted.

When Perriam entered the editorial rooms of the *Star*, the night city editor greeted him angrily.

"Where in blazes have you been, Perriam?" he growled. "I understand the office hasn't heard from you since you went out early this afternoon on that murder story. We haven't got a line on that story except the A. P. (Associated Press) flimsy. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I've been working on the story. I haven't wasted a minute since I left the office."

"Then you should have reported progress over the telephone," said the night city editor testily. "How do you expect us to guess where you're at? Get busy now and rush out that story. We are waiting for it."

Perriam sat down at a typewriter. He worked industriously for three-quarters of an hour, then gathered the typewritten sheets together and took them over to the city editor's desk.

"Here's the story," he said. "I've played up the elopement end pretty strong, as you'll see. The rest of the bunch don't know anything about it, so it will be a beat. That's the part of the story that has kept me out working so late. I thought it was worth while spending the time on."

The night city editor glanced over the typewritten sheets. "Worth while!" he exclaimed. "I should say so! This is good work, Perriam. Are you sure the other fellows didn't get any wind of this?"

"I'm pretty sure. I've been with Adrian, the father, all night. I don't think the police will give it out. It will be to their interest, of course, to keep the thing dark until Ladd is caught. Oh, I guess it's a beat, all right."

And as he walked over to his own

desk he muttered: "'Deal gently with her,' said her father. Did she deal gently with me? She deserves to suffer as she has made me suffer. This newspaper publicity will break her proud spirit, and, when Ladd is caught and put out of the way, she perhaps will be only too glad to turn to me. All is fair in love and war."

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

MEANWHILE, what of Arthur Ladd? Mr. Adrian's maid had told the truth in saying that Miss Rosa Adrian had left the house with him, and this is how it came about.

After bursting out of the office of Jacob Meyer, Arthur rushed down the four flights of stone stairs and gained the street, giving no heed to the cries of the jeweler's gray-haired clerk.

"The game's all up now," was his first thought. "I've lost Rosa for sure, and it doesn't much matter what becomes of me, I suppose. What shall I do and where shall I go?"

And then the thought came to him like a flash: "If she has got to hear about it, it would be better, far better, that she should hear it from my own lips. I won't spare myself. I will tell her everything and then bid her good-by forever, and leave this luckless town."

With this intention he boarded an up-town car.

Rosa was delighted to see him.

"It seems an age since we were last together, and yet it was only last night," she whispered.

It was not until he failed to answer her in the way in which he always rewarded such affectionate greetings that she noticed the haggard look upon his face.

"Why, Arthur," she cried with sudden alarm, "what is wrong? You look as pale as a ghost! Something terrible has happened. I know it."

"Little girl," said Arthur gently, taking a seat by her side, "I have come here to make confession. Something terrible *has* happened."

"Oh, what is it? What is it?" she gasped. "Don't spare me, Arthur; I can bear it, whatever it is. Tell me the worst at once."

"I have been cruelly deceiving you, Rosa," groaned Arthur.

"Deceiving me? How?"

"I have acted the part of a liar and a scoundrel. I am not fit to brush your shoes for you."

"Oh, Arthur, please don't talk so foolishly and look so tragic. Tell me what has happened. What have you been doing?"

"I promised you and your father that I would not play the races. I *have* played the races."

"Oh, Arthur! How could you?"

"I'm a conscienceless cad—a weak fool!" he groaned. "But that isn't the worst, Rosa."

"Not the worst! Arthur dear, what else have you been doing?"

"I promised your father that I would live within my means. I've been getting into debt. I owe my landlady three weeks' board at the present time. She threatened to put me out this morning. I owe my tailor and several others. I've pawned my watch. Oh, I'm an unprincipled ass!"

"Oh, Arthur! After all your promises, too."

"That's right; reproach me!" groaned Arthur. "I want you to think as badly of me as you can. It will make the parting easier for us both."

"The parting? What parting, Arthur?" asked the girl in alarm.

"After to-night we must not see each other again. This must be our last meeting, Rosa. I have not told you the worst yet. That ring you wear—the ring of which you are so proud—the engagement ring I gave you—— Forgive me, Rosa—it wasn't mine to give."

"Not yours to give! Arthur!" screamed the girl, starting to her feet in alarm. "You don't mean to tell me you s-stole it?"

Without waiting for an answer, she burst into tears.

"Yes," said Arthur, "I guess that's none too harsh a word to use, Rosa. I didn't break into a store and take it by force, but I did something nearly as bad. I bought it on the instalment plan, and I've only paid off the first three instal-

ments so far. I'm three payments behind already."

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur, Arthur!" cried the girl. "How could you deceive me so cruelly?"

"I was a coward!" groaned the other. "A miserable coward! I did not have the money, and I didn't have courage enough to tell you so. So I went to this jeweler on Nassau Street and bought this ring. I thought I should be able to pay off the instalments easily, week by week, without you or your father or anybody else being the wiser; but my extravagant habits got the best of me. To-day I had a letter from the jeweler, threatening trouble. I went down to see him, and he threatened to tell your father and to tear the ring from your finger unless I paid him all that was owing on the ring this very day."

"Good heavens, Arthur, and what did you do?"

"I lost my temper, and gave the blackmailing scamp a lesson he won't forget for many days, I guess."

"You used violence, Arthur?"

"I certainly did. He deserved it."

"Oh, Arthur! How could you? And now he will write to father, and he will break off the match. How foolish you have been. Do you think I would have cared if you had asked me to go without a ring for a while? What kind of girl do you think me? You might have trusted me to that extent. But I must send the ring back this very night. We must not keep it another day if it isn't paid for."

"My poor Rosa!" groaned Arthur. "What a brute I am to put you to all this humiliation."

"Stop!" cried the girl suddenly. "I have an idea. We won't return the ring at all. We'll pay for it—every cent in full."

"Pay for it!" gasped Arthur. "I tell you I haven't any money, Rosa."

"No; but I have—in the bank. I have a private account of a thousand dollars."

"Your money!" said Arthur. "I couldn't take your money, Rosa."

"Don't be foolish, boy. You're not taking my money. I'm spending it to buy this ring with. Isn't that better than sending the ring back and having to explain to my father and friends the reason why?"

"But we are going to break the engagement right now. You will have to give me back my ring, anyway, won't you, so what's the use of your paying for it?"

"We are not going to break the engagement at all, sir! Not unless you have grown tired of me and very much desire it. You have been a very wicked boy, Arthur, but you don't think I am going to give you up so easily, do you? We must try all over again. We will go to the bank right now and get the money for the ring. If you want to make atonement for what you have done you will do me one great favor."

"What is it, Rosa?"

"You will let me loan you the money to settle your board bill and pay to get your watch from the horrid pawnshop. No, don't make that wry face, Arthur. You simply have got to take the money. It's only a loan, mind. Surely you would as soon have me for a creditor as a horrid money-grabbing pawnbroker."

"Oh, I can't, Rosa; you dear, kind little girl. I really can't take any money from you"—and Arthur shook his head determinedly.

"You can, sir and you will. You shall pay it back to me week by week, if you like, and we won't go out anywhere until the debt is paid. You have been spending too much money entertaining me—if only I had known the true state of affairs! Come, we will go to the bank immediately. We have just time to get there before it closes. How glad I am that dad always believed in my having my own private little bank account."

They went to the bank together, Arthur remaining silent most of the way, and feeling thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"How much shall I draw?" asked Rosa, as they entered the building. "Will seven hundred cover everything?"

"Yes," groaned Arthur. "Oh, Rosa, please don't do it! You make me feel so horribly cheap——"

"That's a punishment for plunging

into debt," said Rosa severely, and without further argument filled out a check for seven hundred dollars, signed it, and went to the paying-teller's window.

"Here's the money," she said to Arthur joyously. "Now we will go across the street and buy a money order and send it to the jeweler's. Come along."

"What a little business woman you are!" exclaimed Arthur admiringly. "You go about things so quickly, you quite take my breath away."

"I guess I inherit it from dad," said the girl seriously. "Come on. Here is the post-office. How much do you owe the jeweler on the ring?"

"Four hundred and seventy dollars," answered Arthur. "But, Rosa, you really must not."

But she was already filling out a postal money order blank, and before he could get any further had tripped to the cashier's window and exchanged four hundred and seventy dollars of the money she had drawn from the bank for a postal money order addressed to Jacob Meyer, jeweler.

"Send this right away, with a note saying it is payment in full for the ring. That's right. Now we will go to your boarding-house, and you shall settle with the landlady. How much? Twenty-five dollars? All right; here is the money. And here is the fifty dollars to get your watch out of pawn."

She handed him the money with a laugh.

"Oh, you splendid little girl," cried Arthur; "you are the truest sweetheart that ever was made, I think. But, really, I cannot take this money, Rosa. I shall never be able to look anybody in the eyes again if I do. You make me feel like a whipped cur. Honestly, you do. I will let you pay for the ring, if you wish, for that will save you also from humiliation, but don't ask me to take the other money."

"I don't ask you; I command you, sir!" was his answer. "I know it must go against the grain for you to let me pay your debts; but remember, this is your punishment for heaping them up. Next time you will be careful. Come, take the money."

And with a sigh Arthur took the proffered bills. There was no use arguing with this girl when she had made up her mind.

"Now, let us go to your boarding-house," she commanded. "I am going with you to see you pay the landlady with my own eyes."

"Don't you trust me?" asked Arthur huskily.

"Yes, I guess I trust you," said the girl slowly, "but I shall not be able to sleep until I know that you are out of debt, so if you don't mind I'll come along and have the satisfaction of seeing the money paid."

But they did not get to Mrs. Jarvis' select boarding-house. For, three blocks from that place they met that estimable lady herself. She was hurrying along, and gave a little shriek when she saw Arthur.

"Good heavens, Mr. Ladd!" she cried. "Where are you going? Not to the house—surely!"

"And why not?" said Arthur. "Mrs. Jarvis, let me introduce my fiancée, Miss Adrian."

"Glad to meet you, Miss Adrian," said the boarding-house lady, making a mental note of the fact that the girl before her was no other than the original of the picture in Mr. Perriam's room. "If you are this young man's fiancée and have any love for him in your heart, please persuade him not to go to the house."

"And why not?" asked Rosa in surprise.

"Why not? And can you ask such a question when the police have been waiting at my door these four hours past ready to arrest him as soon as he shows up."

"Arrest him!" screamed Rosa. "Arrest him for what? Speak, for heaven's sake!"

"Arrest him for what he did to the poor jeweler on Nassau Street, of course. Hasn't he told you anything about it?"

"Oh, what did you do to him? What did you do to him?" cried the girl, turning to Arthur. "You told me you used violence, but I didn't know it was as bad as that!"

"I gave him a good thrashing," said Arthur sullenly. "I taught him a lesson he won't forget for days to come."

"What are you saying, boy, what are you saying?" cried Mrs. Jarvis in undisguised horror. "'Won't forget it for many days to come.' I should say he won't. God help us all! Don't you know the poor gentleman is dead?"

"Dead!" shuddered Rosa.

"Dead!" gasped Arthur, going white to the lips.

"Yes, dead! Do you think you can stab a man clean through the heart with the blade of a sword cane and he still live? Oh, Mr. Ladd, Mr. Ladd, I'm surprised at you; I really am."

"Stabbed through the heart!" shrieked Rosa. "Oh, Arthur, you did not tell me——"

"It isn't true!" cried Arthur huskily. "I did not stab him. I only whipped him. It's a wicked lie."

"It's God's gospel truth," said Mrs. Jarvis solemnly. "The poor gentleman was stone dead when the doctor got there, with the blade of your sword cane still sticking into his heart. The police are looking for you to arrest you for wilful murder. Oh, laddie, laddie! They'll send you to the chair. You must fly at once."

"Fly! I shall not fly! I did not kill him. I only gave him a good caning, and he deserved it."

"A good caning. Is it a good caning you call it to drive the blade of your cane through the poor gentleman's heart?" said Mrs. Jarvis angrily.

"I did not use the blade, I tell you," protested Arthur. "I did not stab him. Rosa, you believe what I say, do you not?"

"Pshaw!" said Mrs. Jarvis contemptuously. "She may believe you, but do you think any jury of sane men will believe you, my boy? You may be telling the truth, and I hope to heaven you are, for I always liked you; but do you think you will stand any chance in court, when you admit yourself that you were alone with the dead gentleman in his office and used your cane on him? Who else could have killed him? You will be declared guilty, sir, as sure as fate. My advice to you is to run away immediately."

"Yes, Arthur," sobbed Rosa, "she is right. I'll try to believe you are innocent of this man's death, if you say so; but the case is black against you, and I tremble to think of what will happen if you are caught. You must fly, Arthur; you must fly at once."

"No," said Arthur doggedly, "I must stay and face this ridiculous charge."

"There isn't one person in a thousand who would believe you are innocent," insisted Mrs. Jarvis. "How do you expect to fare before a jury?"

"You must fly, Arthur. This is no time for foolish heroics. If they arrest you, it will kill me. If you love me, you will go at once."

"Rosa," said Arthur, "you are advising me against my own interests. I will stay here and fight them——"

"Oh, no, no," sobbed the girl. "For the love you bear me, fly at once. I could not bear to see you in prison. If you run away, I will do my best to clear your name, and for my sake my father will help me. Then perhaps afterwards, when all is well, you can return home. Oh, please listen to reason, and go."

"Rosa," groaned the wretched young man, "I believe you think me guilty of this awful crime."

"No, no," sobbed the girl. "I believe you are innocent when you tell me so, but nobody else will believe it. The case is strong against you. They may sentence you to die, as they have sentenced other innocent men before. Oh, please—please listen to me, and go."

Arthur Ladd looked tenderly at the pleading girl.

"Very well," he said huskily, "for your sake, Rosa, I will go."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHASE BEGINS.

When Perriam reached the *Star* office next day, the telephone boy hailed him.

"Hey, Mr. Perriam," he said, "a gentleman's been trying to get you on the 'phone here for the past hour."

"Who is he?" asked the reporter carelessly.

"He said his name was Adrian, and he left word that you should come around to his office on Walker Street immediately, as he had something of importance to tell you."

"He has, eh? Much obliged, boy. I'll attend to it."

"Perriam," said the city editor, "that was fine work you did on that Meyer murder story yesterday. We beat the town. You'd better stay on the story, I guess. There may be important developments to-day. See Mr. Adrian again and find out if he's got any word from his daughter."

"I'm going up to his office now," replied Perriam. "I've just got a telephone message from him to come and see him."

"Good! Perhaps you'll land another beat. Cover the story thoroughly, and spare no expense. You can take your own time and report at the office whenever you like. I want you to catch Ladd if you can. It would be a good thing for the *Star*."

"All right, boss," answered the reporter, and wended his way to Walker Street.

He found Mr. Adrian in his private office, much excited.

"I haven't slept a wink all night, Perriam," he said. "I came down to business to-day, thinking that I could do no good by staying away and that work would keep me from worrying. But I can't put my mind on my work."

"You must take it easy, Mr. Adrian. Rest assured that your daughter will be found O. K. Haven't you any word from her? I thought for sure that she would communicate with you in some way."

"Yes. I received a telegram this morning. That is why I sent for you. It is from Rosa. It should have reached me last night, but the boy could not make anybody hear up at the house, it seems, so I didn't get it until this morning. Read it yourself, and see what you think of it."

He handed a typewritten telegram to the reporter, who read:

MR. ROBERT ADRIAN:

DEAR DAD: Don't worry at my absence. Arthur is innocent. You must believe in him, and help him. Love.

ROSA.

"Humph!" remarked Perriam, when he had read this brief message over twice.

"Does that telegram furnish any clue?" asked Adrian anxiously.

"Clue! I should say so! You will notice this message was sent from the telegraph office at the Grand Central Station. She must have written it just before they got on the train. That ought to help us materially. I must visit the telegraph office at once, and see if I can learn anything there."

"Why, what do you expect they can tell you?" asked the merchant helplessly.

"Somebody in the office may have overheard them say where they were going."

"Perriam," said the old man earnestly, "bring back my daughter and have that villain punished as he deserves, and I will give you a thousand dollars."

"I don't want money," answered Perriam eagerly, "but you can offer me another reward, Mr. Adrian, if you wish."

"What is it?"

"Your daughter."

"But haven't I told you that I have no objection to your marrying her if she will have you? It was she herself who refused you."

"Force her to marry me."

"I don't believe in a father forcing his girl against her wishes in such an important thing as matrimony."

"You have tried the other way. You have allowed your daughter to make her own selection, and you see what it has led to," said Perriam bitterly.

"It is true," groaned the miserable father. "Oh, what a fool I was ever to have permitted that rogue to come into my house."

"It is not too late to make amends. If she is already married to this fellow, the marriage can be annulled under the circumstances."

"It shall be. I won't have my unfortunate girl linked to a murderer. You must find them and bring them back immediately, Perriam."

"And if I do, you will force her to marry me?" asked the reporter eagerly.

"Force! How can I force her? I have never in my life been harsh to Rosa."

"This is a case where harshness is necessary. Your duty as a father de-

mands it. She has made a fool of herself, and now she should be made to obey."

His tone was so fierce that Adrian looked at him, amazed.

"I'm afraid you'd make a pretty brutal sort of a husband, Perriam," he remarked quietly.

"Brutal! I'm not brutal. But I'm sore to think what a fool Rosa has made of herself over that fellow. Promise me your daughter's hand, Mr. Adrian, and I will work night and day to find her."

"Why not leave it to her—when she comes back?" said the old man.

"Leave it to her! No, that will not do. She doesn't like me, Mr. Adrian. I candidly admit it. I may have my faults, but I claim to be a thousand times better man than that scoundrel she has fallen in love with. Mr. Adrian, I promise you I will make her a good and faithful husband. She is too young and inexperienced to choose for herself or to know her real friends. Promise me that you will use your influence."

"All right, Perriam, I'll promise," said Adrian. "Here's my hand on it. Bring her back safe to me, and she shall marry you, even if it's against her will. Now go and find her—find her and that ruffian. I sha'n't get a wink of sleep until she comes back to me and that scoundrel is placed behind bars."

With a jubilant smile upon his face, Perriam went down-town to find Connaughton, the detective sergeant.

"Hello, Perriam!" was the policeman's greeting. "I've got something here to interest you."

"What is it?" asked the reporter eagerly.

"What do you think of this?"—and he handed the reporter an envelope containing a money order and a penciled note.

"From Ladd to Meyer!" gasped Perriam in surprise. "When did this arrive?"

"This morning. It was in the dead man's letter box when I reached his office to-day. I took the liberty of opening it, thinking it might be a clue of some sort. You observe that the note says the enclosed money order is payment in full for the ring, and asks for a receipt. Now, what does it all mean, do you think? Why should this fellow send four hundred and seventy dollars to a man he knew to be dead?"

"That's easily explained," said Perriam quickly. "It's nothing but a clever bluff. This chap Ladd is a crafty fellow, from what I know of him. He hit upon this scheme, I guess, as a good piece of evidence for the defense in case he's caught and brought to trial."

"A good piece of evidence? What do you mean?"

"Why, think how strong it would go with the jury if his lawyer could prove by this means that Ladd was in utter ignorance of his alleged victim's death hours after it occurred."

"That's plausible, Perriam. But why did he waste four hundred and seventy dollars on such a bluff as that? He could have written the dead man a letter of some sort without enclosing any money, and it would have worked just as well."

"No, it wouldn't. A mere letter would look like a bluff, while the enclosing of a money order for such a big sum would be more likely to convince the jury of the genuineness of the argument. Oh, he's a clever one, is this fellow Ladd. Don't you think my theory is right, Connaughton?"

"Probably it is. The only other theory that I can advance is that while Ladd knew he had injured Meyer, he did not know he had actually killed him, and thought that perhaps the sending of the money might induce the jeweler to drop prosecution for the assault."

"That's scarcely likely. When a man drives his sword cane through another man's heart, he doesn't expect to find that man at his desk the next day, writing out receipts for money orders, does he?" asked Perriam scornfully.

"No. I reckon you are right," admitted the detective. "Well, what do you know? Anything?"

"Yes. I've got a piece of important information for you. Here's a telegram from the girl who ran off with Ladd. It's addressed to her father. Take a look at it and see what you can learn from it."

The detective glanced at the message.

"That's a good clue. Come on," he said. "Let's hurry up there."

"To the Grand Central Station?" inquired Perriam.

"Exactly. Where else do you suppose? Maybe the operator there can tell us something. We had a man stationed at the depot yesterday, watching for Ladd, but I reckon they must have given him the slip. Come on; we'll take a cab."

The operator at the Grand Central telegraph office was able to furnish them with some slight information.

"That telegram," said he, "was sent by a darned pretty girl. A brunette. She was a peach, too, I can tell you."

"Did she write it herself?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir. She wrote it right at the desk here, and she was crying while she wrote it."

"And who was with her?" asked Perriam eagerly.

"A young man and a middle-aged lady."

"A middle-aged woman!" exclaimed the policeman and the reporter in a breath, looking at each other in surprise.

"Yes. A stout woman with a red face. She appeared to be very nervous, and so did the young man, for that matter. The whole three of them acted so strangely that I couldn't help remembering them."

"I suppose you don't know the train they took," remarked the policeman hopelessly.

"Yes, I do. If you want to know real bad, you're in rare luck, for I wouldn't have known it myself only for an accident. The girl, who was crying, as I've said, left her lace handkerchief on the counter. I noticed it immediately she stepped out of the office, and called to her to come back, but she apparently did not hear. I sent one of the kids after her, and he caught her just as they were about to step aboard the train at platform six."

"What time was this?" asked Perriam excitedly.

"At seven-thirty."

"The seven-thirty train on track six. This is the best clue yet!" cried Perriam to the detective. "I don't know who the middle-aged woman can be, but we'll get them now, Connaughton, if we have to follow them to the end of the earth!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE SURPRISE ON TOP OF ANOTHER.

PERRIAM and the detective went to the station master's office in the Grand Central Depot, and there learned that the seven-thirty train from track six ran to Clayton.

"That means they've beaten it to Canada," growled Connaughton. "I guessed as much. They've gone across the river, and they've got a day's start. Now, how do you propose to get them?"

"I'm going out there after them," replied the reporter quietly. "My office has given me permission to use all the time and money I need to find Ladd. I'm going to find him, too—him and the girl he's run off with. I'll get off the train at every stopping-place and make inquiries about them. Wherever they are, I'll get them, Connaughton, I'll promise you that."

"By Jove, you're the most enterprising newspaper man I've ever met!" said the detective admiringly. "You throw yourself so heartily into this case that one would think your interest was personal, instead of purely professional."

Perriam did not return any answer to this remark.

"We'll notify the chiefs of police at Clayton and on the other side of the river," continued the detective. "We'll have the fugitives looked for. You'll get plenty of assistance from the police."

"Good!" said Perriam. "The next train for Clayton doesn't leave for two hours yet, I understand. That'll give me time to get to my boarding-house and pack a few things."

"Say, Perriam," struck in the detective, "have you got any idea as to the identity of this woman who accompanied them—the stout woman with the red face?"

"I have a slight suspicion," answered the reporter. "The description answers that of our landlady, Mrs. Jarvis. I know that she feels very friendly towards Ladd, and is sorry for his plight. I might confess, however, that I can't see what her object would be in going with them, or what theirs could be in taking her."

"Perhaps they took her in the capacity of chaperon," suggested the detective dryly.

"Maybe. At any rate, we will soon find out if my suspicion is correct. Mrs. Jarvis ought to be up at the boarding-house if she hasn't gone away with them."

And the very first person Perriam encountered when he let himself into the house with his latch-key was Mrs. Jarvis.

The reporter had so completely made up his mind by that time that the stout, red-faced woman of the Grand Central Depot was no other than his landlady that he started with surprise when he saw her.

"Why, Mr. Perriam," said the good woman, "how you did jump! Did I startle you?"

"A little, Mrs. Jarvis. I guess I'm getting nervous."

"Lordy me! You getting nervous, Mr. Perriam? I'll not believe it. Often I've remarked to the other gentlemen in this house that I don't believe Mr. Perriam, who writes for the papers, knows what nerves are. By the way, Mr. Perriam," she continued, lowering her voice, "have you heard anything new about the murder? Have they caught poor Mr. Ladd yet?"

"No, Mrs. Jarvis," Perriam replied, "there's nothing new regarding the murder. Ladd is still uncaptured."

"Thank heaven!" said Mrs. Jarvis solemnly.

Perriam shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"It is only proper that a criminal should be dealt with according to law," he said coldly. "Your sentiments and your misplaced sympathy do not do you credit, Mrs. Jarvis."

"I know it, sir, but I can't help it. I always liked young Mr. Ladd so much. He was such a nice fellow. Somehow or other I can't get myself to believe that he really did it. I think he's innocent, Mr. Perriam—I do, indeed. Or if he ain't innocent, he must have been sorely tried and tempted to have done a thing like that."

Perriam impatiently shrugged his shoulders again and went up-stairs to his room.

He came down an hour later, dress-suit case in hand, and Mrs. Jarvis met him on the stairs.

"Going away, Mr. Perriam?" she inquired.

"Yes; I'm going out of town, and may be gone a few days," answered the reporter. "Hold any mail until I get back, please."

"He's going after poor Arthur Ladd," said the woman, as she watched his tall form retreating down the street. "He didn't tell me so, but I know it. You can't fool a woman's intuition. He is interesting himself mightily in the capture of that poor young man, and since I've met that sweet-faced girl I know why. To think that I never guessed before that poor Arthur's sweetheart and the girl Perriam sighs for and has a picture of in his room were one and the same! That's why he looks so mad when I tell him that I hope Arthur won't be caught by the police. I reckon nothing would please him more than to see that poor boy go to the chair for that crime.

"Oh, he's a cold, clammy sort of man, is Perriam! Sometimes it fairly makes me shudder to think of him. I don't blame Arthur's sweet-faced girl for not taking to him. He's a human icicle—that's what he is. Well, anyway, I do hope that Arthur will give him the slip."

Perriam reached the Grand Central Station for the second time that day, and bought a ticket for Clayton.

He stood in the waiting-room, dress-suit case in hand, mentally trying, while waiting for his train, to solve the mystery of the stout, red-faced woman who had accompanied Ladd and Rosa, according to the man in the telegraph office.

"Now, who could it be?" mused Perriam. "I can't think of anybody except Mrs. Jarvis, and it positively couldn't have been she. Well, probably

it was some friend of Rosa's, or maybe a servant.

"What on earth they wanted to take a third party along for, when it only increases their chances of capture, I cannot imagine. They are a fine pair of young fools, and no mistake."

He began to pace impatiently up and down the floor of the waiting-room.

"I suppose this is more or less a wild-goose chase I'm embarking on," he mused. "The devil knows where they may have got to by this time. I suppose the chances are one in a thousand that I shall find them. It's worse than looking for a needle in a hay-stack. And yet I'm going to catch them sooner or later. I'm determined upon that. I've faced tougher situations than this in my time and won out, and why should my luck go back on me now, I should like to know?"

Even as he asked himself this question, he saw something which startled him so that he staggered backwards and the dress-suit case fell from his hand. Magnificent as was his habitual self-control, it was not proof against this surprise.

For, coming from the direction of the trains and wending his way through the crowds in the waiting-room, a tall young man was advancing toward where he stood.

There could be no mistake about it at all. For a second Perriam was inclined to believe that his eyes had played him a trick, but as every step brought the other man nearer, all doubts vanished.

The tall young man was Arthur Ladd, fugitive from justice, wanted by the police on a charge of wilful murder, and yet walking almost unconcernedly through the crowded waiting-room of a railroad station in the heart of New York.

Perriam did not stop to ask himself what this could mean.

Without even stopping to pick up his fallen dress-suit case, he stepped forward and confronted this unlooked-for apparition.

"Arthur Ladd," he said quietly, half believing that the other man would disown the name.

"Hello, Perriam!" exclaimed the other heartily. "I am glad to see you"—and he held out his hand, but it remained outstretched in the air, for Perriam pretended not to see it.

"So you believe in that ridiculous charge, too, eh?" said Ladd, flushing at the open slight. "You think I murdered that wretched jeweler, eh? Well, you can think what you like, my boy, but I'm innocent, and some day I shall be able to prove it."

He turned haughtily on his heel and was about to depart, but the reporter laid a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"Not so fast, young man," he said in a calm, cold voice. "If you wanted to run away, you should never have come back here. You must have been crazy to have returned when you had got safely off. However, now that you are here, you're going to stay. I give you a choice of either accompanying me quietly down to police headquarters or of being turned over to the first uniformed policeman we find outside."

"Oh, I don't object to accompanying you," said Ladd, with a bitter laugh. "I came back to town to give myself up. I'm not going to run away from the charge. I was foolish enough to allow myself to be persuaded into leaving town yesterday, but I saw the folly of my course as soon as I stepped off the train, and I took the very next one back, determined to give myself up. I'm ready to stand trial on this ridiculous murder charge. I'll go down to headquarters with you right now. Come along."

Perriam looked at his prisoner searchingly. He appeared to be sincere.

"If you attempt any funny business, I want to warn you that I'm armed and intend to shoot," he said quietly, patting his hip-pocket.

Ladd shrugged his shoulders by way of answer. Perriam called a cab, and they drove down-town to Mulberry Street.

During all that ride neither man said a word. Perriam would have liked to ask Ladd what had become of Rosa, but somehow or other he shrank from mentioning the girl to his successful rival in love.

When the cab reached police headquarters, Perriam was the first to alight, but Ladd jumped out briskly after him, smiling grimly at the other's evident suspicion that he intended to run away at the first opportunity.

As luck would have it, Detective Sergeant Connaughton chanced to be standing on the stoop, smoking a big, black cigar, and a look of surprise came over his face when he saw Perriam and his companion alight from the cab.

"Hello, there!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were on your way to Canada by this time."

He cast a careless glance at Ladd.

"I'm not going to Canada, Connaughton," replied the reporter quietly. "I've changed my mind."

"Ah! I had an idea you would. The thing isn't so easy as it looks, is it? So you have decided to leave such work to the police, eh?"

There was a shade of sarcasm in the detective's tone.

"Not at all," said the reporter quietly. "I'm afraid there's very little left for the police to do. I've found Arthur Ladd."

"The deuce you say! Where is he?" Even as he asked the question the detective's eyes were sizing up Perriam's companion from head to foot, and he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"You don't mean——" he added, pointing to Arthur.

"Yes," answered Ladd coolly, "I'm the man you want, officer. I'm Arthur Ladd. I came back to give myself up."

"Good for you, young man! It was the best course, for we would have got you in the end, anyway. You're my prisoner, Mr. Ladd. I'll trouble you to step this way, please."

He took Arthur by the coat-sleeve, and, followed by Perriam, entered the building and marched his prisoner to the office of the chief of the detective bureau.

"Inspector," said Connaughton to a keen-eyed, gray-haired man sitting at a roll-top desk, "I've got an important prisoner here."

"Who is it?" asked the chief gruffly.

"Arthur Ladd, wanted on the charge of murder—the Nassau Street murder."

"Of which I am not guilty," remarked Arthur boldly.

"Then why did you run away, young man?" asked the inspector, fixing his sharp, blue eyes on Arthur as though he would read him like a book.

"It was foolish of me, I will admit. In my first surprise at hearing the jeweler was murdered, and that I was charged with the crime, I allowed myself to be persuaded to leave the city."

"Who persuaded you?"

"A friend."

"What is this friend's name?" asked the inspector sharply.

"I cannot tell you that. It would get her—I mean him—into trouble, I suppose. Let me say, however, in my own defense, that as soon as I got off the train I realized at once the folly of taking such a step when I was entirely innocent of any crime. I jumped on the next returning train and came right back to give myself up. That's why I'm here now."

"See here, young man," said the inspector, looking straight into Arthur's eyes, "why don't you own up to this crime and have done with it? We'll make it as easy for you as possible, if you make it easy for us. That I'll promise you. There's no doubt whatever that you killed Meyer. Nobody but a fool would deny it under the circumstances, and I am certain you don't look like a fool."

"I swear to you that I am innocent, inspector."

"You deny that you were in his office that day, I suppose."

"On the contrary, I admit that."

"You had no quarrel with him; he was alive and well when you left him, I suppose," said the chief sarcastically.

"He was certainly alive. I admit, however, that I did have a quarrel with him, and that I struck him with my cane."

"Oh, you do admit that!" exclaimed the inspector in unfeigned surprise. "Young man, let me warn you that every word you say now will be used as evidence against you. You admit that you attacked this jeweler with your sword cane, eh?"

"Yes. He threatened to blackmail me, and I lost my temper and seized him

by the throat. He struggled, and I proceeded to give him a good beating."

"With your cane?"

"Yes, sir."

"There was nobody else in the room at the time?" asked the inspector.

"No, we were absolutely alone, and the door was closed. You see, I'm not trying to spare myself. I'm telling the whole truth."

"And how did the struggle end?" asked the inspector.

"I gave him such a sound beating that he dropped, groaning, to the floor, and then I thought it was about time I went."

"You admit that it was with your sword cane that you attacked him?"

"I do. But not with the blade of it."

"Was this the cane you used?"

The inspector went to a closet and took therefrom the bamboo stick which had been found driven through the dead jeweler's body.

Arthur examined it carefully.

"Yes," he said; "that's the cane I used—to *beat* him with."

"You did not open the cane and send the blade through his heart?"

"I swear I did not."

"And yet you say there was nobody else in the room at the time?"

"Absolutely nobody."

"You saw the clerk in the outer office as you ran out?"

"I did."

"Did you make any remark to him?"

"I think I told him to go inside and attend to his employer; that I rather fancied he needed attention. Of course I forget the exact words I used."

"When you told the clerk that, Arthur Ladd," shouted the chief, "do you mean to tell me that you did not know that the jeweler was lying on the floor of the private office you had just left, stabbed through the heart with the blade of your sword cane?"

"I swear to you, inspector, that I did not know it. I realize the facts are all against me; but I swear that I am innocent of that man's death."

"Ladd," said the inspector, "you are the biggest liar I ever met, and I've met some pretty good ones in my experience in the police business. You ask us to believe an impossibility. Your own sense should tell you the folly of adhering to your ridiculous story. Your own admission will send you to the chair. You haven't got a chance."

A uniformed policeman entered and handed the chief a visiting-card.

"Adrian! Adrian!" said the chief, glancing at the card. "Doesn't Mr. Robert Adrian figure in some way in this case?"

"Yes; he's the father of the girl," answered Connaughton.

"Then show him in," ordered the chief, and a second later Rosa's father entered the room.

As soon as he saw Arthur, standing with white face and clenched teeth by the side of Detective Sergeant Connaughton, a look of mingled surprise, satisfaction, and anger came into the old man's face.

"So you've got him!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Adrian," said Arthur pleadingly, "believe me, I am innocent."

Before anybody could prevent him, the old man had rushed at the prisoner and seized him by the throat.

"You scoundrel!" he cried. "What have you done with my daughter? Speak, or I will kill you."

"If you want him to speak," suggested the chief of the detective bureau quietly, "I would suggest, Mr. Adrian, that you lessen your hold on his throat. A man can't perform a physical impossibility. Ah, that's better. Now, young man, perhaps you'll tell us what has become of the young lady."

"Why do you ask me that question?" cried Arthur in great alarm. "Has anything happened to Rosa, Mr. Adrian? For God's sake, tell me at once."

"Anything happened to her!" cried Adrian bitterly. "All that has happened to her is that she has been insane enough to run away with a scoundrel, and a murderer to boot. What have you done with her, you villain?"

"Mr. Adrian," cried Arthur earnestly, "if you believe that Rosa went off with me yesterday, you are mistaken. I swear that I haven't seen her since yesterday evening."

"More lies!" muttered Perriam contemptuously.

"Where was it you last saw her?" asked the inspector.

Arthur appeared to hesitate.

"I won't answer that question," he said. "There's no need to get her mixed up in this affair at all. I swear she did not accompany me on the train."

"You lie," exclaimed Perriam hotly. "You were seen boarding the train for Clayton at the Grand Central Depot last night. You were accompanied by Miss Adrian and a stout, red-faced, middle-aged woman. There are witnesses who will swear it."

"What a magnificent liar you are, Ladd!" declared the inspector. "Take him to a cell, Connaughton. It's a waste of time to try to get the truth out of him."

(To be continued.)

WHEN THE TELEPHONE FAILED.

BY HELEN TOMPKINS.

About the confederate within and the conspirators without.

THE rain had fallen incessantly for hours. It had been a very dreary day and I had been alone since the early morning. Even if the weather had been good I could not have gone out.

"Stay closely at home, Katherine," my father had said, "and look out for strangers. I hate to leave you alone on your birthday, but no one knows that the money is in my hands, or of course I would not allow you to take the risk. But telephone me at once if you need me."

I must have inherited some of my father's peculiarities, for I was not in the least afraid even when I looked at the neat little bags which I knew were filled with gold and silver.

Twenty thousand dollars! And only three weeks before an old man had been brutally assaulted and left for dead for the sake of the few bits of silver in his purse. I shivered a little when I thought of it, although I felt no fear.

But the day had been a long one, and I was not sorry to see it close.

I had had but little to do, and the dreary scene outside—the wind-scourged branches of the trees and the steady downpour of the rain were not an inspiriting sight. For the first time the thought came to me that under certain circumstances it was exceedingly probable that Rosston might prove, as a place of residence, to be rather dull.

I had been away from home attending school for several years. My mother was dead, and my father had been left alone while my education was being completed.

Twice he had been elected sheriff and tax-collector of Sevier County, and he was now nearing the second year of his second term of office. When I had gone to him fresh from school it had been a source of great pleasure to me to witness his joy at having me with him.

It tended, however, I am afraid, to give me rather an exaggerated idea of my own importance. He had a very pleasant home, and I liked his friends. Everybody was very kind to me.

I looked again at the driving rain and wondered if the morrow would be fair. It was turning dusk, although the hour was still early, and the rain was increasing if possible. The house was rather an isolated one, and I was glad that my father would be coming home almost immediately. There seemed to be a thrill of impending disaster in the air.

I locked the doors securely, and lighted the lamp in the sitting-room. It had grown quite dark by this time, as I found when I went to draw the curtains.

There was only the swish of the rain against the blurred panes, and a black smother of water-soaked darkness.

Sounds — suspicious sounds — began to multiply themselves. I fancied that I caught the faint echo of a footfall in the dark hall outside, and then the vague groping of unaccustomed figures for the door.

I felt very glad that the telephone had

been placed in the sitting-room so as to be near father's desk. How horrible it would be if I were to get frightened and be obliged to leave the safety of the lighted room to summon help!

Ten minutes passed. Five more now and my father should be at home. The sharp ringing of the telephone bell made me start, so intently was I listening for the familiar footfall.

"Hello! Is that you, Katherine?"

How pleasantly the wholesome, masculine voice sounded in the room. The gloom and rain were forgotten.

"Yes. I have not started home yet, however. No. Osborne has been here——"

The words tailed off into a meaningless jumble, and then into a most provoking silence.

"Yes, I am still here. What in the world is wrong with the telephone, Katherine?"

"Oh!" as I attempted to explain. "Well, that is all right. You can hear me now, of course?

"All right then. I am leaving the office now, Katherine, but I will have to see Jadwin before I come home. So I will go around by his place. Is everything all right—house locked up and everything? Very well. You are not afraid, are you, Katherine?"

"No," I said faintly in a tone which I sincerely hope the recording angel failed to catch.

As I hung up the receiver I heard a low knock at the hall door.

"Who is that?" I called out in a trembling, scared voice which I strove in vain to make steady.

"It's only me—Jim Carroll, you know—Miss Watson."

The voice was quite unknown to me, but that stood for very little. Most voices in Rosston were unknown to me.

"Your pa told me to bring a box down to the house before I quit work. If you will open the door——"

My momentary hesitation was gone. It was hardly likely that burglars would come to the front door and call for admittance in a loud voice.

However, I thought of the money in my care, and was wise enough to flatten my nose against the window before the door was opened.

Two men were standing outside on the veranda. One of them held a lighted lantern, and the other was shaking raindrops from his clothing like a good-natured dog.

Beyond them the flare of the lantern fell upon the outlines of a vehicle of some kind, and a horse rattled his harness impatiently. The rain still fell.

I opened the door.

"What is in the box?" I asked. "And where did father say that it was to be placed?"

My mind was quite at ease now, although both of the men were unknown to me.

"Books, I think," said the man with the lantern; "and the box was to be left in the settin'-room."

They were drawing the box from the wagon now and the horse was rattling his harness more disgustedly than ever. Their burden was large and heavy, for the two men swayed a little under the weight of it.

I drew back to allow them to precede me, but I did not take my eyes from them a single moment. They placed the box down carefully near the desk, and then the younger one—the man who had carried the lantern—leaned familiarly upon the desk and looked at me in a way that I did not half like.

"Your pa ain't come yet, I know," he said coarsely. "Are you sure you ain't afeard to stay here all by yourself—especially in tax-collecting time?" he added with a wink.

"I am not alone," I said coldly, although my heart beat slow with dread.

"Jack is with me. Jack!" I called, and again I prayed devoutly that the recording angel might not hear me.

"Jack?" said the man suspiciously. "Jack?"

"A gentleman from—Little Rock," I explained a trifle hurriedly. "My—cousin, you know. He is not very well, and he is inclined to be fractious when he is annoyed. He may be asleep, but the least sound——"

The younger man—the one who had leaned upon the desk—had been drinking. I detected the odor of liquor on his breath. But the elder man had backed out into the hall, and the other now followed him.

I held my breath until I heard the clash of the gate latch and the rattle of clanking harness again.

"Gid-dap!" said an unsteady voice, and the sound of wheels died away.

I locked and double-locked the hall door and hurried back to the sitting-room. The faint odor of stale tobacco —the stronger smell of liquor—was all that there was left to remind me of my unpleasant visitors, but I felt ill-at-ease still.

Could anything have happened to my father? It was not like him to leave me so long alone even under ordinary circumstances, and now——

I seated myself and tried to read, but the printed characters were meaningless to me. I was nervous and restless.

I threw the book aside and went back to the window, but could hear no sound of footsteps. Only the sob of the wind and the heavy downpour of the rain broke the silence.

I went back to the desk and stood for a moment beside it. As I did so the stale scent of mingled tobacco and whisky again smote upon my nostrils.

The room was tightly closed, and the clothing of the men must have been thoroughly impregnated. I leaned forward impulsively, and then fell back, sick with terror.

The odor was coming from the box!

So great was my panic that I wonder I did not faint in that one moment when the floor seemed to melt under my feet and the upright pine box multiplied itself into a dozen.

Why had I been such a fool? The scheme was an old one. I had read and shivered over instances of the kind when I was little more than a baby.

The introduction of a thief into the house by his confederates——

I ran to the telephone and rang the bell wildly.

"Central—yes. Give me one hundred and fifty-five. Yes, Mr. Jadwin. Yes. Quick!"

I waited a moment. I could hear the beating of my heart in the stillness.

"Oh, Mr. Jadwin, is father there? I am afraid——"

There was a meaningless rattle of the receiver—an ominous break, and then:

"I cannot hear a *word* you say!" said an exasperated voice. "What in the world do you want? Some braid? I am no shop-keeper——"

I clung desperately to the receiver.

"*Don't* cut me off!" I cried frantically. "*Afraid*, I said. Not *braid*—*afraid!*"

There was another ominous rattle of the receiver.

"If there is something you wish to say to me," said the exasperated voice again, "and you are not merely *drunk*, come up and see me in the morning, and don't stand there gasping like an idiot!"

I made one more effort.

"It is Katherine Watson," I gasped. "Is my father there? I want my father!"

Jadwin was now, judging from the half-inarticulate noises he was making, almost apoplectic with fury.

"It is my belief that you *are* drunk, sir!" he roared. "Bother, indeed! You may well say *bother!*"

There was another ominous crackling of the wires. In utter desperation I called again and again.

No use. Something had gone wrong, and the telephone was about to fail me in my hour of bitterest need.

I tried to ring the bell again, but there was no sound.

I looked over my shoulder at the box again, and a sudden thought came to me.

"Jack!" I called. "*Jack!*"

I crossed to the door leading from the sitting-room into a bedroom beyond, and laid my hand upon the latch.

If I could only control my terrified voice—could only make that man in the box believe that I was not alone——

"Jack!" I called again, and then the very imminence of my danger served to steady me suddenly.

My voice righted itself with a little gasp.

"Jack!" I called again. "Oh, you need not answer—I only wanted to tell you that father would be home *at once!* You must have heard the telephone. I —I—think I hear his footsteps now."

I had forgotten the displeasure of the recording angel and all future dangers now. My only idea was to keep that man in the box quiet until help could come to me—somehow——

I sank into a chair simply because my quaking knees would no longer support me.

How long before the man's confederates would come? Five minutes—ten——

For the first time the thought of firearms occurred to me. That my father had pistols I knew—locked away in his desk. But the wealth of all the Indies would not have tempted me to open that desk where I knew the money was at that precise moment.

In one corner of the room was an ancient musket. It was loaded, I knew—I had heard my father say so one day—and that the lock was jammed in some way so that he could neither fire the musket nor extract the load. But my confidence in my guardian angel was not all lost. Something seemed to tell me that I could fire that musket if he could not.

I took it up gingerly, laid it across my lap, trained it as nearly as possible on the window by which I fancied that my enemies would attempt an entrance—and waited.

Time dragged. I thought of Edward Ridgely (to whom my father had a particular aversion on account of sundry glances in my direction) and my tears flowed afresh.

Edward was young—impressionable—and a little inclined to be sentimental. The thought of my danger——

A sudden sound outside chilled the blood in my veins, and the heavy musket lying across my knees shook like a leaf in the wind. The rain had ceased, and only the scraping of the water-weighted branches against the roof broke the stillness. Then the noise came again.

There was no mistaking it this time. It was the faint sound of a footfall upon the gravel under the window. A little later I heard another footfall, and then a queer little metallic snap.

Were they trying to force the sash open without waiting for their confederate inside?

I was almost within reach of the window. I laid the end of the musket against the pane, but it shook so that the glass rattled. Then:

"Are you ready?" asked a man's low voice.

"In just one minute. There, the confounded thing has gone wrong again!"

Again I heard the little metallic snap.

"Do you suppose that she is asleep?"

"It makes mighty little difference so far as I can see whether she is *now* or not. She *won't* be for more than five minutes."

"Both together!" said the other voice—a lower one—hastily. "Wait until I give the word. *Now!*"

I don't know whether I had meant to fire just then or not. I had known all the time however that I *could* fire that old musket if I wanted to do so, and I did.

There was a sound as if the world was coming to an end, and the whole house shook as if from an earthquake's shock. Broken glass fell all about me, and I went over backwards and saw more stars than are usually visible even under the most favorable conditions.

But there was another sound in my ears that stunned me worse than the explosion of that old musket. That was the "pank-pink" of a guitar and the tinkle of a mandolin mingled with the sounds of Edward Ridgely's voice singing "Come where my love lies dre-a-aming!" and then the song had ended suddenly in a terrified howl that seemed to split the atmosphere.

"Katherine Anabelle Watson, what on earth is the matter? Are you hurt?"

I scrambled hastily to my feet, and, facing my father, flung myself into his arms like a catapult.

"I was afraid——" I sobbed.

"Why, I fancied that you would have a good time unpacking and arranging my books for me," he said hastily. "But I am sure that I heard some one cry out. Were you really frightened, Katherine? Did you——"

He stepped through the window and looked anxiously about him.

On the ground was a guitar with the strings snapped, and the fragments of a shattered mandolin. A little further on the fence was broken down. And a minute later we heard (the night-air carries far) the thud, thud, of running feet.

Then my father looked again at my scared face—at the wreck of the window—at the fragments of the smoking mus-

ket—and next at the powder-stains on my white dress. Then he sat down weakly and laughed until he almost had convulsions.

The next day he came home to dinner early.

"Edward Ridgely went out West to-day," he said and looked at me suspiciously. "He and his brother. He made up his mind to go—rather suddenly."

"I hope that he will succeed out there," I said, smiling vaguely, and then helped myself to more chicken.

A birthday serenade in spite of the weather! But I was never in all my life sentimental.

THE OUTCAST.*

BY W. BERT FOSTER.

The lure of false hopes that paved the way to tragedy, hedged with doubt, and girdled by remorse.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

RAMON BURRESS returns to his native village possessed of nothing save his medical degree and some debts, which his uncle has given him to understand he will settle. He finds Leslie Searles, his boyhood sweetheart, betrothed to his chum, Seymour Lloyd, and his uncle refuses to settle his bills save by a legacy.

His uncle's taunts, his disappointment and the demands of his creditors half madden Burress, and when, while out hunting, he comes upon his uncle in the woods, he impulsively shoots in his direction.

As his uncle falls dead, Lloyd rushes from the underbrush, crying out that Ramon is a murderer. In his haste he falls and stuns himself. Burress returns to his own home, and later on Lloyd is brought in, discovered by Orrin Paddock, the old herb man. The young doctor does his best to revive him, knowing the while that with his friend's returning consciousness his own doom will fall, but when Lloyd awakens, it is with a mind as blank as a new-born child's.

To Burress, sure that retribution will overtake him eventually, this is added torture rather than a relief.

Meantime Orrin Paddock has found Lloyd's gun, and Burress has now to bear his insinuations that Lloyd shot the old man. He feels that another crime burdens his conscience.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AWAKENING OF A SOUL.

BURRESS did not return directly to the office. There were several minor cases which the old doctor had left to his attention and refused to consider again now that he had returned.

The young physician shook off the herbalist at the door of the first of these patients, and when he had completed this brief round of calls, struck out alone from the village, desirous only of being freed of all human companionship.

The excitement through which he had so recently passed had sapped both his self-possession and his mental vitality. Before returning to take up the duties awaiting him, he felt that he must quell those chaotic thoughts now mastering his mind.

First and most troublesome of all were the reflections anent the character of the wound in the dead man's skull. And that it was peculiar there could be no question.

A ball as large as that thrown by his rifle—the weapon he had buried in the mire—might make a wound no larger than a pea in the fleshy part of the body, but in this case it had drilled its path through the thin tissue of the scalp and the bone directly beneath it.

There are exceptions to every rule, and a pellet of lead driven by the force of fulminating powder is a most uncertain thing. Nevertheless, his experience and observation pointed to the fact that his rifle ball should have made a larger and much more ragged wound.

If the rifle found by the old herbalist was produced, his townspeople, knowing that the gun belonged to the injured

* *This story began in the November issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of* 20 *cents.*

man, would readily believe Lloyd had accidentally killed Solon Burress. And to a person of more gross temperament than Burress, there would have been a serious temptation in this thought. With the accusation of murder hanging over him, a man may be excused for seizing any chance to shift the burden of suspicion from his own shoulders to those of one who would never, in all likelihood, be punished for the deed.

But to Ramon Burress the possibility of another's reputation suffering under the imputation of guilt for his crime seemed more awful than the crime itself.

Whichever way he turned, the possibility of further wrongdoing, or of increased personal hazard, faced him.

Tailing to these reflections was no little speculation upon how and when Seymour Lloyd had discharged his rifle the morning of the murder, and why he had not ejected the empty cartridge immediately, as would have been the almost involuntary act of any practised hunter.

In the case of a man as methodical as he knew his old friend to be, this neglect was the more surprising. When had that cartridge been exploded? What had happened to prevent Lloyd from ejecting the empty shell?

As he walked on, he went over carefully and logically the story Orrin Paddock had related. The herb-gatherer had heard the explosion of the gun that killed Solon Burress. It had been a phenomenally heavy explosion (so he said), as though it were the report of two rifles fired simultaneously.

Was Lloyd's the second rifle discharged? The thought set Burress to shaking again, and his brow grew moist. The evil suggestion stung him like a physical hurt, and he wrung his hands and groaned aloud. He knew it could not be true.

He knew Seymour Lloyd as he knew no other living man. Had Lloyd discharged his gun across or in the direction of the wood-road, and seen the old man fall, he would never have accused the physician of the crime. No, no! Never for a moment could Ramon Burress believe such a wild and improbable fantasy.

Yet he now saw that to those who did not know the circumstances of the shooting the evidence pointed as clearly to Lloyd as to himself! Indeed, if Orrin Paddock's tale was circulated, Lloyd was the sole person likely to be accused of the murder.

His rifle had been found on the spot, and it contained an exploded cartridge shell; while the rifle which Burress had discharged was sunk too deeply in the swamp (so he believed) ever to come to the light of day again.

While Lloyd remained in his present mental condition the herb-gatherer might be held in check; when Lloyd recovered (if recovery were possible) Orrin's conscience or his curiosity would likely force him to reveal the evidence which he had suppressed at the inquest.

And then what? No gratitude to Burress for his medical attention could withhold Lloyd from telling the truth. To shield Burress from being apprehended as the murderer, the injured man would have to assume the guilt himself, and that was too melodramatic —too farcical, indeed—to expect!

And his friend's testimony might not be needed to connect him with his uncle's death. There was old Betty's observation when he arrived home the morning of the murder with the mud of the swamp on his clothing. She knew where he had been. A direct course from the scene of the tragedy would lead one through the morass.

Lloyd probably told his partner, Nathan Landgrave, that he expected to go hunting with Burress; and very likely Lloyd had inquired for him at Munhall's before setting out alone in the Big Woods. Betty might learn that Burress' own rifle was missing, and his preparations for leaving town directly after the shooting would be another count against him.

How could he return, take up the duties he knew awaited him, fulfil his promise to Leslie Searle, and await calmly the dénouement which, if not imminent, was nevertheless sure? Some day, if not from Lloyd's lips, the accusation would smite him. He had not forgotten Cartaret's suspicious visage.

So buried was he in these distracting thoughts, torn between his promise to remain at his post and the certainty he

felt of being, sooner or later, apprehended for the murder, that he came quite unexpectedly, after his blind walk from the village, to the very spot where he had stood at daybreak the day before —upon the ridge above the wood-road, adown which the hoop-backed figure of old Solon had hobbled into the red light of the sunrise.

Below where he stood, in the mud of the roadway, were the prints of many feet—the feet of the curious who had come to view the scene of the shooting. The patch of crimson which had grown so swiftly under his stunned gaze was now erased.

Here at his hand was the clump of bushes from which Lloyd had sprung when Solon fell. Yonder was the broken place in the brink of the declivity where his friend had made his misstep, and down the bank the bushes were crushed and broken by the passage of Lloyd's body as it fell.

Again he rehearsed in his mind the fatality and all that led to it. The remembrance of the hours of mental suffering which he had undergone before his awful temptation made him writhe again. In those sleepless hours preceding the tragedy he had suffered with the damned.

And yet, sorely as Solon Burress had tried him, no thought of vengeance had entered his mind until the dreadful suggestion which had instigated the act for which he now suffered. The temptation and his fall had been accomplished in a moment.

Weakened by the strain through which he had passed, his will had been unable to resist. Murder had never been premeditated in any particular; the execution of the deed had followed its suggestion instantly.

For the moment only—that single instant of action—he was a murderer at heart. But God knew the crime was not in his mind before, and the keenest remorse had been his portion since.

He had not even properly aimed the rifle at his unhappy relative. Fate had sped the bullet which killed Solon Burress.

He fell upon his knees now and covered his face with his shaking hands. He prayed, the burning tears trickling through his fingers while his body shook with the sobs he could not suppress.

At length the paroxysm passed. He rose quietly, glanced about for the last time at the place of the murder, and turned back toward the village. Both his countenance and his soul were calm when he arrived again at the office. The riot in his heart and mind had been stilled.

Finally and for all time he was settled in his course of action. Both duty and love pointed the way, and a way to repentance for his crime as well.

The funeral of Solon Burress, miser and money-lender, who had met so sudden and miserable an end that it seemed to the minds of the simple Barrowsvale folk a judgment for his usury and hard-heartedness, was held the following day.

Medbury, the coroner, had been satisfied with the verdict of his jury—"death by the bullet of a rifle in the hands of a person unknown"—and the local constabulary was warranted to do little or nothing toward discovering the careless hunter whose shot was supposed to have killed the old man.

The good parson of Barrowsvale's First Church was possibly the only person perturbed by Solon's death, saving Burress himself. The parson was a kindly old clergyman to whom a funeral service was only an added opportunity to prepare his people for that happy hereafter promised to the elect.

But even his charity could not canonize Solon Burress. For the first time in all his long experience he seemed unable to find a characteristic of the deceased, or an act of his life, from which to draw a comforting lesson.

When the first frozen sod had fallen on the coffin Burress would have hurried back to his professional duties, but Higby, his uncle's legal adviser, detained him.

It was the lawyer's desire to have the reading of the will over at once, and he gravely informed the physician that *he* must be present at the formality.

The miserly, unloved old man, who had hoarded his money to no good purpose in life, had left it, in dying, to found an institution which should cause

his name to be remembered gratefully by many people.

His entire fortune, aside from certain small amounts named in a codicil, was to be devoted to the building and endowment of a county hospital.

By this act the testator had made it improbable that his nephew would try to break the will; he would have the weight of public opinion as well as all the legal resources of the county authorities against him.

Burress listened with dulled comprehension to the reading; it did not interest him in the least. Even the item in the codicil instructing Higby, as the dead man's administrator, to pay the debts incurred by the doctor during his college course fell upon his unappreciative ears as though it all referred to some stranger.

Aside from the funeral and the minor calls of his profession, he had devoted the twenty-four hours which elapsed since his appearance at the postponed coroner's inquest to attendance on Seymour Lloyd. The latter had no immediate family, and all his kin lived at a distance. He was as much alone in the world as Burress himself.

Nathan Landgrave, his partner in the Blue Front Grocery, was the only person aside from the doctor and Leslie who felt any peculiar interest in his condition. Nathan was a plodding, calculating man, for whom Lloyd had worked so many years that Nathan had agreed to a partnership and a division of the profits of the business rather than suffer the loss of his assistance.

Being scrupulously honest, Burress knew that the storekeeper would look out for Lloyd's pecuniary interests; but the senior partner in the grocery firm could not be depended upon for anything else. Indeed, everybody seemed uncannily willing to step aside and allow the entire burden of Lloyd's treatment and nursing to fall upon the doctor's shoulders.

The strange malady which had stricken Lloyd fairly frightened those neighbors who saw him. Leslie, despite the opposition raised by her parents, who were bound by the usual chains of propriety, was the only person who was really anxious to assist Burress, and Lloyd had awakened to his present existence with an unaccountable objection to a feminine nurse.

To see the young man, who soon looked much like his usual self, lying, unable to speak, as helpless in most things as a puling infant, recognizing none of those who came to see him—these strange conditions struck the visitors as utterly inexplicable. Its effect on Nathan Landgrave will serve as a sample of the general attitude of the community.

"I swow I can't sense it's him!" ejaculated the storekeeper, pushing both his old fur cap and his spectacles back from his bald forehead, while he stared down into the face of the afflicted man.

"It don't look like Lloyd, 'ceptin' that it's his *face*. Never seen that expression in it before—blank's an idjit, Dr. Burress! Poor See! Poor See! An' him as cheerful and chipper as a grig t'other mornin' when he started out ter find you.

"By the way, doc, ye didn't happen ter meet up with him at all that mornin', did ye?"

"No," replied Burress, with averted face.

Nathan turned from the sick man and whispered the next question, his wrinkled countenance revealin' much worriment of mind:

"Did he have his gun with him, doc? I can't find it nowher's erbout th' place, an' I've hunted high an' low. Warn't you 'n' him goin' gunnin'?"

It had come—the first query pointing the way to the end. Burress had felt that suspicion would raise its head, and that deeper inquiry would be made into the murder whether Lloyd recovered or not.

His expectation was only being fulfilled sooner than he had thought. But his mind was prepared for it. On his knees at the spot where he had fired the fatal shot, Ramon Burress had sworn to prove equal to whatever trial fate prepared for him. He turned now and looked Nathan calmly in the eye.

"Why, no," he said; "we made no particular arrangement for going hunting. I gave up hope of See's coming up and went for a tramp before he got here. We did not meet."

But although he lied so calmly, the storekeeper's question had pointed a way of danger, and a danger that was imminent. Suppose inquiries should be made about his own rifle!

Several people would know that weapon well enough to swear to it in any court of law. Some occasion might arise which would call for the production of the gun—and he had buried it in the swamp!

How short-sighted he was to destroy the gun in that way! Had he merely hidden it under a log or in a brush clump, he could have smuggled it home afterward.

This idea worked upon Burress' mind for forty-eight hours. Then he found a reason for visiting the city, and boldly took his gun-case along.

It was a stiff leather case, and he loaded it with stones so that it was the weight of an ordinary gun. To a chance inquirer he proposed saying that he was taking the weapon with him for repairs.

On arriving at his destination—the very town where, by this time, Lawyer Higby's checks had paid all his old accounts—Burress went to a hotel, engaged a room, and behind the locked door dumped out the contents of the case. Then he went to a gunsmith's and bought the duplicate of the rifle he had hidden in the swamp.

He as well as Lloyd had scratched his name on the butt of his rifle years before, and now he marked this new gun in the same way. Sandpaper and a file to rub down the parts corresponding to those worn on the old gun, and oil to blacken the butt and give it an old appearance, finished his work.

He went back to Barrowsvale carrying with him a weapon which he was not afraid to show as the gun he had so often used in the Big Woods during his vacations. One danger, he believed, was sidetracked.

The old doctor remained to assist him with Lloyd for a fortnight, and Oglethorpe displayed his interest in the case by coming to Barrowsvale twice for consultation. Yet Burress was forced to wage practically a single-handed fight for his friend's health and sanity.

Day and night, excepting during the hours which were spent by Lloyd in sleep, Burress was by his side. Slowly at first the patient learned some simple things, much as one of the bigger and more intelligent apes would have learned them.

For instance, he was soon able to hold a cup and could drink from it; he ate with a fork and spoon, although unless he was watched he fell back upon his fingers as a child might, the digits being easier to manage than the table instruments.

The mind which had been perfectly blank upon his awakening advanced in primary branches of education quite rapidly, when once Burress had gained its attention. Lloyd was no longer afraid of new faces, and he began to repeat a few words, although at first speech was very difficult.

In the beginning he learned the names of the objects about him, and those which he first began to use, following this by learning the names of the individuals whom he saw most frequently. Hearing Burress called "doctor" incessantly, he picked up the word and addressed Burress by it, showing thereby the possession already of some reasoning powers.

It was after Dr. Munhall had gone away again and left his protégé without medical advice or assistance that the patient learned most rapidly. He was as docile as a well-behaved child, and never sought to oppose Burress.

So active was his mind that every minute of the time the doctor could spend with him was occupied in Lloyd's learning something new. And his memory retained everything which he understood.

He soon learned to call the moving shadows which had so disturbed him at first "people."

"What am I?" he asked Burress one day.

"You are 'people,' too," he was told.

At once he wished to know why he did not get up and move about, and be dressed in clothing like other folks.

Before this time he had never expressed a desire to move from his bed, for Burress had been more anxious to advance his mental activities than his physical.

He was taught to walk as a child is taught, but he learned everything much more rapidly than the most forward child.

Although he had awakened to this new and strange existence with a mind perfectly blank, the matured powers of his mental self were all there, and when once set in motion they absorbed knowledge with marvelous quickness.

The bruises and cuts upon his head being healed, Lloyd was once more possessed of his usual strength. In an hour he walked about the room very well, and aside from some little awkwardness, acted quite like an ordinary person.

However, one very queer point Burress noted. His patient's gait was quite different from what Lloyd's once had been. He did nothing involuntarily, or in the way he used to do it before his injury. There was plainly a complete separation of the man's dual natures—a barrier between the old Seymour Lloyd and this new man who bore his name and wore his physical appearance.

Burress possessed the enthusiasm of the born investigator. Almost hourly he found some surprising phase of the case which had not been revealed to him before.

Yet underlying all his interest, the basis of his desire to cultivate Lloyd's struggling intelligence was his hope of finding the key to that other personality which the accident had shut away from both the patient himself and from his friends.

To educate the new Seymour Lloyd and to mold his existence into the semblance of his previous life was one thing; to merge this existence with that other was the greater problem. Somehow and by some means, safely and surely, Lloyd must be led back to a knowledge of what his life had been before he awoke on the couch in Munhall's old-fashioned parlor.

In bringing this desired object about, Burress would risk his own safety; for with the return of memory to the patient would not the strongest and most vivid remembrance of all be that of the murder of Solon Burress?

Yet the physician persevered. The pain and mortification Leslie suffered through Lloyd's plainly expressed dislike for her urged the doctor to his task.

He had promised Leslie to do his utmost to bring Lloyd back to his right mind and place him in her arms again. With that end in view he sought upon every possible occasion to turn the patient's thoughts to the girl he had once loved so devotedly.

But Lloyd's strange distaste for female society, which had been so marked upon his first being aroused, continued unabated. Once Burress asked him if he did not prefer to observe a nice-looking woman rather than a nice-looking man.

The answer, considering the physician's object, was, to say the least, discouraging.

"I don't like women people. I don't like their clothes. The clothes make a noise when they move; they don't look like you, doctor, and me, Seymour Lloyd. Or like Orrin Paddock. Or like Nathan. Sometimes their voices sound nice; but they can't lift me when I am in bed, like you, doctor."

Yet the emotion of affection had been aroused in the man. His devotion to the doctor was dog-like, and he plainly showed his enjoyment of Orrin Paddock's society.

He was rapidly developing strong likes and dislikes. And, it could not be denied, Leslie Searle came under the category of people of whom Lloyd, in his present state, disapproved.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MARVEL.

LESLIE SEARLE had more than once defied public opinion by some act of independence. Her devotion to Lloyd in his present state set gossip's tongue awag, and her parents would have forbidden her attendance upon him had they dared so assert themselves. Having had her own way all her life, Leslie was not now minded to brook interference.

She declared her intention of fitting herself for the profession of a trained nurse, and as soon as the new hospital was built proposed applying for a position therein. Meanwhile, she was be-

ginning in an humble way under Dr. Burress' instruction.

That her interest in nursing was not altogether connected with Lloyd was proven by the fact that she attended several of Burress' patients during that winter—patients who did not feel Lloyd's unconquerable distaste for a female nurse.

Her intercourse with Burress was that of a sister with a brother. She trusted him utterly, and on his side every selfish consideration was eliminated. The physician's attempt to cure Lloyd was, first of all, for Leslie's sake.

All his spare time was given up to the study of similar cases. He fitted himself as well as possible for this special work which he had undertaken, and if he made minor mistakes they were the mistakes of an honest man groping for light on a subject which filled all his thought.

Burress' practise increased rapidly. The advertising which Lloyd's case gave him helped this to no inconsiderable extent. The young physician's finances improved.

He furnished several articles to medical journals, dealing with his observations of Lloyd. All this prominence would make the final crash of his life, when it came, the harder to bear; but Burress went on his chosen way calmly and as though the thought of exposure never entered his mind.

Much that he tried to do for Lloyd was at first beyond the patient's appreciation; many simple things he could not understand. Remembering nothing excepting that which had occurred since his strange awakening, it was very difficult for Lloyd to comprehend the meaning of "memory" or the fact that he had already lived an existence which he had forgotten.

But one day he mislaid the book out of which Burress was teaching him to read. He could not remember where he had put it for some little time. His mentor grasped that opportunity and Lloyd comprehended at last what memory was.

From that hour he became anxious as Burress himself—or as Leslie—to recover what he had lost.

Burress believed it unwise to relate to the patient much of his old life. It was enough that Lloyd should realize that there was something to attain in the recovery of his memory.

If his present mind was filled with tales of his previous existence, they would be confounded with what he might, in the future, remember of his own volition.

To this end, Burress forbade anybody answering the questions which Lloyd put in curiosity. The formula was "Ask the doctor," and to Burress the patient turned for all information.

Before the winter was half over, Burress' practise had increased so that he could afford a horse and carriage. Lloyd learned to drive, and was the physician's companion more than ever.

They slept in the same room, and often, when Burress came in late from some case and found his friend peacefully slumbering upon his couch, he watched him with his own mind given up to strange speculations. While the body of Seymour Lloyd was at rest, where did his fancy stray?

Those mental activities while we are asleep, which we call dreams, endure continually, whether we afterwards remember the dreams or not.

Lloyd's remembrances of his present existence were so limited—his present life had been so short—that food for his dreams must be meager indeed. Yet his movements in his sleep, his sighs, his smiles, showed that his mind was active in weaving scene after scene in the imaginary world into which he had sunk.

So frequently did he think of this, and so strong was the hold it gained upon his mind, that Burress finally put it to a test which, until he was proven wrong or right, he would not trust to any other soul. He selected a night when Lloyd's mind seemed particularly active, and after giving the patient a mild sleeping draft, warranted to put him into a sound slumber at once, he ordered a pot of strong tea for himself and sat down beside the sleeping man to watch.

The shaded night-lamp revealed the outline only of Lloyd's face, yet every change of expression which moved his countenance was noted by the doctor's

keen eyes. Hour after hour passed, challenged by the resonant tones of the clock in the hall.

Midnight came and went. The small hours dragged their slow lengths by, and then arrived that time, just before the dawn, when tired humanity sleeps its soundest.

Lloyd, who had lain very quietly until now, turned over and muttered a phrase. Instantly the doctor's half-deadened senses were alert. He rose and leaned over the sleeping man.

A little flush had come into Lloyd's cheek, his lips were parted, he breathed deeply, and his eyelids twitched as though he were in a state between waking and sleeping. Changing his position in the bed had partially aroused him.

Burress shifted the shade of the lamp that the added illumination might reveal the face more plainly. He saw Lloyd's lips moving and caught a whispered word.

Much as he had hoped for some sign of the restoration of Lloyd's primary personality, this single word set the doctor to shaking with nervous dread. Since his awakening in his new character Lloyd had refused to show the slightest interest in Leslie Searle. He never addressed her by her name nor referred to her separately from other women whom he saw.

But this word he had uttered in his sleep was "Leslie." Burress was convinced that the dream which disturbed Lloyd's repose at that moment referred to the girl and dealt with a time previous to the accident which had so changed the patient's personality.

Lloyd did not speak again, but after a moment fell into deeper slumber. The physician discovered nothing more that night, but he wrote at once to Oglethorpe.

The scientist agreed with the assumption which Burress maintained. Disconnected pictures, scenes in his former existence, arose in the patient's dreams, and Oglethorpe encouraged his pupil to increased efforts centered on restoring Lloyd to his former state of mind.

Burress' first article regarding the case in the medical journal brought him a score of letters from both laymen and professional investigators. Several hints and suggestions contained in these letters he gratefully accepted; others he was afraid to follow.

Some suggested the use of what is commonly called "hypnotism" to throw Lloyd (for a shorter or longer period) into his primary personality. But the young physician, inclined to be a conservative investigator by instinct, was afraid to use a power which he did not understand, and which so few scientists agreed upon.

But he continued his observations of Lloyd's natural slumbers and, early one evening, when his friend had fallen asleep on the office lounge and the February rain dashed angrily against the windows, he was encouraged to make a deeper incursion into the mysteries of Lloyd's dream-life.

The patient was restless, turning from side to side on the hard couch, and muttering in his sleep. With some people, and under certain conditions, it is very easy to bridge the gulf between the realities of existence and their dreams.

Lloyd's lips formed words which, now and then, became audible. Burress had left his desk and sat closely beside his friend, watching and listening to his almost ceaseless babblings. Now and then he caught a broken phrase plainly:

"How it rains! How it rains!" was repeated over and over again, while the sharp gusts of the storm rattled the windows. It was easy enough to understand what had suggested the fancy which now enthralled his mind.

Then followed words which startled Burress. They referred to the danger of somebody getting wet—and that somebody the restless sleeper referred to as "she."

"Put my coat round her, Rame," muttered Lloyd, still in his dream.

"Will that keep her dry, See?" the doctor asked distinctly, yet speaking in a low voice.

Strange as it may seem, the question did not arouse the sleeper, but seemed to fit into his dream perfectly.

"Of course it will!" he exclaimed, with apparent exasperation. "Until we get to the corner, anyway."

"What corner?" asked the doctor.

"Why, old Ladd's. Then the rain will be in our faces again. Wish we had a boot. That would—keep—her—dry——"

His voice trailed off, his lips ceased muttering, and suddenly his eyelids flew apart. He stared up at the serious face of Burress with surprise and bewilderment.

"What—what is the matter, doctor?" he stammered.

"Nothing. You've been talking in your sleep," replied Burress, and went back to his desk.

But he had a clue to what Lloyd had been dreaming; it had happened years ago when they were half-grown youngsters and Leslie was quite a little girl.

There was a picnic, to which they had driven in an old "shay" drawn by a horse almost as antediluvian as the vehicle itself. Coming back, a summer shower had developed, saturating the trio. Leslie had managed to keep dry in the depths of the chaise until they turned into the Barrowsvale road at Ladd's Corner. Lloyd had been dreaming of the incidents of that afternoon.

This was an evening to be remembered, and for more than the dream. Lloyd was finally aroused from his somnolent state when Burress was disturbed by a late and urgent call.

Lloyd ran out to harness the horse, and insisted upon driving the doctor as usual. Returning, the wind got under the cover of the light buggy and wrenched it back, twisting the framework so that it could not be pulled forward again to shield them from the rain.

Lloyd's dream seemed to have foredoomed this experience. Both young men returned in a saturated condition. Burress took ordinary precautions for his own, and extraordinary precautions for his friend's health; but the day following the latter showed evil results of the drenching.

Before the week was out the obstinate cold, which resisted the application of all simple remedies, resulted in a fever. Lloyd was forced to remain in bed, and his temperature advanced in spite of every effort.

Heretofore the physician had kept him perfectly well, for he doubly feared the effect of any illness in his patient's present mental state.

It was a busy season for the doctor; his hands were full outside of the house, and Lloyd's obstinate illness worried him every minute he was away from his side. Leslie had come over at once, and she and Betty did all they could to lighten the physician's burden; but the presence of the women disturbed the sick man greatly.

Returning after his series of calls one day, Burress found Lloyd's pulse very rapid and there were other signs of increasing fever. Nothing he could do seemed to retard the rising mental stimulation.

Never since he had been under Burress' care had Lloyd been so voluble. The doctor strove to quiet him; but he would not be calmed. His state was verging upon that of delirium.

Evening came and Betty brought in the lamp. Leslie whispered to the physician from the doorway:

"I am not going home yet, Ramon. Perhaps you may need me by and by."

The troubled physician nodded without looking around, and then heard the door closed upon old Betty's departure. The man on the bed, who had been twisting and turning restlessly, suddenly lay still.

His face was turned toward the doctor, who sat in the chair by the bedside. The lamplight was shaded from the patient's face, but Burress saw his eyes glitter in the dusk. There was a change of some kind, and the physician half rose to scrutinize him more closely.

Hoarsely, stammeringly, a voice suddenly penetrated the silence of the room—a voice not at all like the tones which had marked Lloyd's recent utterance.

"Ramon? Who is Ramon? Ramon Burress!"

The doctor fell back into his chair, clutching its arms and biting his lips to stifle the cry which rose to them. Not only had Lloyd's voice changed, but since learning to express himself verbally in his present state he had never called the doctor "Ramon."

"Where am I? My God, where am I?" rasped the voice. "What has happened?"

The figure on the bed started suddenly into action. It sat up, and the wild eyes and strained countenance appeared

within the glow of the lamp. The man's face was convulsed with horror and his arm rose slowly, his forefinger transfixing Burress, who crouched in the armchair.

The raucous voice rose to a shriek, and the Seymour Lloyd who had sprung from the bushes at the moment when Solon Burress was shot down, again faced the trembling and guilty physician.

"You have killed him! You murderer!" Lloyd repeated, and the cry penetrated to the hall.

The door opened instantly, and before Burress could rise from his seat, Leslie had run into the room.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" she gasped.

"Murderer! Murderer!" repeated Lloyd, his eyes blazing, his hand still outstretched.

"Oh, Ramon, what does it mean? Is he delirious? How awful he looks!" murmured the girl, clinging to the physician as though for protection.

But Burress made no reply. His mind was active enough, but his lips refused to utter a sound. The awful situation smote him speechless.

Wonderful as had been Lloyd's first awakening after his injury, this was far more astounding. Mentally stimulated by the fever in his veins, the patient had suddenly recovered his previous personality; he had gone back to his first existence and had taken up the thread of his remembrance at the point where it had snapped on the morning of the murder.

Seymour Lloyd in his right mind had suddenly and horribly appeared again. Where an ordinary fever patient would have relapsed into a delirious state, he had regained his sanity.

"You have killed him! I saw you!" cried Lloyd again. "My God!" He suddenly relaxed his muscles and fell back exhausted upon the pillows.

"Oh, Ramon, Ramon! This is worse than he was before," Leslie whispered. "He is mad—utterly mad!"

But Burress knew better. He knew that, for those few moments at least, Lloyd had been sane.

He was senseless now; the strain had been too much for his fever-racked body, however, the barrier between the two personalities had been overthrown.

Recovered from the horror into which Lloyd's words had thrown him, he set instantly to work to resuscitate the patient. As it had been on the day when he first brought Lloyd to consciousness after the accident, Burress' mind was now in a maze of uncertainty.

Into which identity would the man emerge? Would he rouse again to accuse the doctor of murder? Or would he return to that second personality which knew Burress only as his best friend?

The swoon was an obstinate one, and it was some time before the first symptoms of returning consciousness were visible. Much as Burress feared the outcome, he dared not order Leslie from the room.

Finally the eyelids fluttered again, and Lloyd's lips moved. His eyes opened slowly, resting first upon the face of the girl who bent above him. He turned away from her impatiently, and saw Burress.

"Oh, doctor! doctor!" he murmured. "I have had a bad dream. May I drink?"

"Thank God! he is himself again," cried Leslie, bursting into tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REVELATION.

Lloyd dropped to sleep almost at once, his body completely exhausted by the struggle of his dual natures. Burress' own condition was little better.

He left Leslie to watch by the bedside and entered the office. Once out of her sight he prepared a draft with shaking hands, and swallowed it before dropping weakly upon the couch.

The danger had been so imminent—the truth regarding the death of Solon Burress had come so near the surface—that the physician felt the hangman's noose tighten about his neck. And that Leslie Searle had been in the room to hear Lloyd's frenzied accusation made it all the more horrible! He was shaken as he had not been since the murder.

He had read of cases in which the stimulation of bodily illness had acted upon the mind with the result noted. These had been cases of partial, or total,

insanity; the lost memory had returned to patients who, in their normal health, were classed as imbeciles.

However it had come about, the fact was established beyond peradventure that the gulf between Lloyd's primary and his present personality could be spanned.

Since November, when his patient's mind seemed established in its present groove, the physician's apprehensions had been lulled to sleep. At times he had feared the curious inquiries of outsiders; but he had not expected a sudden exposure such as this incident had promised.

Working and studying daily to the end that he might cure his friend of his loss of memory, Burress had hoped gradually to merge his present mind with that of the old Seymour Lloyd. This strange paroxysm suggested the possibility of instantaneously throwing the patient back into his original personality.

Burress secretly intended escaping from his present environment when Lloyd seemed upon the highroad to recovery; he could do this without breaking his promise to Leslie. Faithfully as he had taken up the treatment of his old friend, there was back in his mind the expectation that opportunity would be given him to flee from the consequences of his crime before Lloyd's story of the murder would be made public.

But this sudden alternation from one identity to the other threatened him with instant ruin if his friend should become firmly established in his old mind again. The change was like to be sudden and unexpected; chance might not favor him a second time.

Had any other medical man been present when Lloyd made his accusation, or was Leslie herself at all suspicious, Burress would have been put to it for an explanation of his old friend's harsh words.

Fortunately no elucidation was needed; Leslie was convinced that Lloyd had been delirious. She did not suspect that for those few moments he was his own sane self. She had caught a glimpse of her lover as he used to be, and had not known it!

"What Orrin says is true—it must be true, Ramon," she said earnestly. "Seymour saw your uncle shot; there can be no doubt of it after this.

"If he was himself again he might even be able to point out the murderer. I have never believed that the shot was fired and that the guilty person went away without being aware of the awful result of his act.

"This explains it—don't you think so? Poor Seymour must have been within sight when the shot was fired. He not only saw your uncle killed, but he knows the man who killed him. In his delirium the scene came back to him. Don't you think that is reasonable?"

"It may be so," Burress answered gravely. "We probably shall never know the truth of the matter until Lloyd is once more firmly established in his original identity."

"Tell me, Ramon, does what has happened this evening give you any stronger hope for his recovery?" The girl clasped her hands over the doctor's arm and looked up at him with eyes whose glance he dared not meet.

"I cannot answer that question, Leslie," he murmured.

"How will he be when he awakes? Will he be delirious again? Is it possible that he may come back to us—in his own self—this very night?"

Burress, whose fingers were lightly resting upon Lloyd's wrist, shook his head slowly, and finally he turned to her with a sad smile.

"No, no, Leslie; not now. Perhaps the drugs I gave him stimulated his system too highly at first; but they have now gained control of the fever. He will awake just as he was before the paroxysm. We must be patient."

She began to sob, hiding her face against his shoulder. His arm stole around her waist, drawing her to him, and he patted her hand as he might have soothed a child.

"Dear Ramon! my more than brother! What should I do without you in this hard trial? I know you will do your best for him—your very best. But it is so hard to wait!"

The crisis of Lloyd's illness was past. He awoke in the morning without fever and in a few days had completely thrown off the effects of the cold. He had no

remembrance of the alternation of personality which he had undergone.

But the incident was the subject of Burress' continued thought. He had immediately written Professor Oglethorpe an account of the affair, neglecting, of course, to repeat the exact words which Lloyd uttered when, for those few seconds, he was again his old self.

The professor had no advice to offer. Whether he believed there was a method of changing Lloyd from one personality into another, he would not state. At least, there was no known precedent upon which to base such a theory of treatment.

Aside from the fanciful drug compounded by Stevenson's hero in "Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," Burress had come across little in his reading to encourage him in this phase of his investigations. Methods of physiological stimulation had been, of course, employed time out of mind; but what would be the effect of powerful drugs upon such a hair-hung mentality as that of Seymour Lloyd's?

A drug of sufficient power which, without acting as a poison, stimulates the higher cerebral centers, was in Burress' mind; for instance, *cannabis indica.* But suppose the result should be the utter unhinging of the patient's brain?

The violent alternation of the two personalities, if brought about by such means, might do untold harm. He was getting along very promisingly in his present state of mind, was learning daily more of the principles of life, and would even, in time, be able to take up his work again where he had dropped it; to hurry the merging of his present personality into his primary state might result disastrously.

Burress did not try to hide from himself that he shrank from the possibility of Lloyd's suddenly recovering his memory. The few moments when his friend was himself had shown him his peril very clearly.

Yet having once recovered from his abject state of fear, he went on as calmly as before in the path of duty. He would not allow these personal feelings to influence his judgment.

The rapid advance Lloyd made in all branches of study he took up was an additional reason for Burress' hesitation. Had his friend remained helpless, or imbecile, he would have been spurred quickly to grasp a desperate chance of transforming him into his primary personality.

But this new Seymour Lloyd quickly displayed powers of mind which were almost marvelous, did not one stop to think that those powers were already matured when put to the assimilation of knowledge.

Before the winter's end Lloyd read fluently, wrote a good hand (but entirely different in its characteristics from the writing of the original Seymour Lloyd), and had advanced in his mathematical studies sufficiently to take up business again.

Nathan clamored for him to come back to the Blue Front Grocery. The storekeeper saw no reason, now that his partner seemed in perfect health and was once more an able-bodied man, why he should not take up his work. Nathan's honesty and fairness had kept Lloyd in comfort, and had reimbursed the doctor for his care and attention; the old man now thought Lloyd should do something to earn his share of the profits of the grocery business.

Oddly enough, Lloyd was but slightly interested in the project. Burress had explained to him his connection with Nathan Landgrave, and all about his partnership in the store. But the other's attention was not at all excited.

He seemed desirous of remaining in Burress' company; or, when that was impossible, he attached himself to old Orrin Paddock. Now that the spring was at hand, the herbalist began his usual wanderings about the lanes and woods, searching for early plants possessing medicinal properties, and marking for future reference the beds of newly springing herbs which, later in the season, he might utilize in his business.

Coming home from a siege at the bedside of a patient one day, Burress found that Lloyd had gone out with Orrin into the woods. The doctor feared the curious old man more than he cared to acknowledge even to himself. Often Orrin's countenance, and his shrewd glances, warned him that the herb-

gatherer's thoughts were secretly set upon the mystery of Solon Burress' murder.

Orrin had smothered a portion of his testimony at the coroner's inquest; but he had not forgotten a single suspicious circumstance connected with the crime.

Burress was therefore not a little anxious until Lloyd returned. The herbalist might be tempted, by his curiosity and love of prying into affairs other than his own, to try some foolish experiment upon the afflicted man.

And this was exactly what he had done, but Burress only learned of it through Leslie, to whom the old man confessed. He had taken Lloyd into the Big Woods and presented to him suddenly the scene of the murder.

He had brought him out upon the ridge above the wood-road at the exact spot from which Lloyd saw the fatal shot fired and Solon Burress fall dead. But to Orrin's disappointment nothing came of it. Lloyd had shown no recognition of the place whatsoever.

After this, Burress made it a point to keep the herb-gatherer and his patient apart unless he himself could be present at their interviews. He took pains to warn Orrin, likewise, that he must not refer to Lloyd's past life, or tell him of incidents which had happened during the young man's primary existence.

But Lloyd developed a liking for wandering about the woods and fields, and took an interest in the more simple forms of natural science, which was entirely foreign to his previous character. Orrin's half-vagabond life appealed to him, and for the first time since his recovery from his fall he showed vexation at the doctor's restraint.

Burress could take nobody into his confidence, not even Leslie. To say that he was suspicious of Orrin Paddock might raise doubts of himself in the girl's mind.

Indeed, Leslie quite approved of Lloyd's open-air life. She was anxious to do anything within her power to help him; or to attach his interest, if possible, to herself. She helped Nathan with the books of the Blue Front Grocery that the old man might not grumble over the fact that his partner left him to do all the work.

And how did this impress Lloyd?

"She's very nice to help Nathan, doctor," he observed to Lloyd, and that careless comment was actually all he had to say about the matter.

The fact remained, and no exertion upon Burress' part could change it, that Seymour Lloyd in his present state of mind had no interest whatsoever in the woman whom he had once loved so dearly.

The patient had not been informed (and that because of Leslie's own pleading) that he had once asked her to be his wife. She hoped that in time his heart would turn naturally toward her, even if he retained his second identity. But this present character was utterly different from the original personality of the man; in tastes, habits, disposition, and social likes and dislikes they were so dissimilar that they might have resided in different bodies.

The methodical, high-minded, rather puritanical individual whom Burress had known all his life seemed utterly buried in oblivion. This new personality of his afflicted friend was by no means the moral equal of the old.

It was as though the worse side of the man's nature had gained ascendancy over his higher and nobler qualities. The Mr. Hyde in Lloyd's spiritual make-up had come to the surface and utterly ignored the claims of his earlier and better character.

It was within Burress' power to forbid Orrin Paddock the house, and to separate Lloyd forcibly from the old man. But the effect of this upon the patient was in doubt; and Burress was only too sure that such a course would set Orrin's suspicious curiosity on fire.

Therefore, it only remained for the doctor (as previously stated) to often set aside his own work, or his own desires, and join Lloyd and the herbalist in their trips about the country. Lloyd's affection for the doctor, aroused during the first few weeks of his affliction, had not waned. He was delighted to have Burress make one in these outings.

Thus far no suggestion regarding hunting, or a rifle, had been made by the herbalist. Leslie and Nathan Landgrave held the opinion that the man who shot Solon Burress had removed Lloyd's

gun from the scene of the murder—providing Lloyd had carried his gun into the woods that morning. The weapon had certainly not come to light, and this explanation of its disappearance seemed the most reasonable.

Orrin had interested Lloyd in fishing, and the trout had now begun to rise to a fly. One morning the doctor cut his office hours short, and accompanied the herbalist and Lloyd to the trout stream, which wound for a part of its length through the confines of the swamp.

He had obstinately kept away from the place in the woods where his uncle had been shot; but as they followed along the banks of the stream, on this morning, in pursuit of its finny denizens, the physician was startled suddenly to find himself within sight of that hummock where he had first halted in his mad flight after the murder.

He would have hurried on, eager to lose sight of the spot; but Orrin proposed resting, producing a lunch which he had brought in his basket, and Lloyd agreed to the halt.

As for Burress, he dreaded to remain, and yet he dared not leave them. His condition of mind at the moment was not governed by his usual calm judgment.

What could possibly happen here to disturb the secret which he had kept locked in his bosom so long? What was there here to discover?

The agony of spirit which he had suffered at the foot of the tree against which the old herbalist leaned had left its mark only on his soul—not upon the scene itself. His fear was childish; he tried to convince himself of this.

But he could not eat, and remained lost in gloomy reflections while Orrin and Lloyd talked. Finally the latter rose and went nearer to the stretch of soft and dangerous morass at the foot of the little island.

Something sticking out of the black mud—half on the solid ground and half in the mire—had attracted his attention.

"What is this?" he asked, as he always did when he came upon a new object. "It is iron, I guess. It is round. It is a hollow thing—a tube, eh? See, doctor!"

Burress' attention had wandered. His chin was sunk on his breast. He did not look up, or answer; but Orrin rose quickly and came to Lloyd's side.

"What ye got, See?" he asked curiously.

The next instant he uttered a startled exclamation and seized the object, drawing it, with some difficulty, completely from the quagmire.

"It's a gun—a rifle!" gasped Orrin, scarcely above a whisper, staring at the weapon with bulging eyes.

"What's a rifle?" asked Lloyd. Orrin did not reply, and the other turned to Burress. "Doctor, you tell me what this is?" cried the afflicted man.

Burress was at last aroused, and rose slowly to his feet. His gaze wandered idly to the thing in Orrin Paddock's hands. As though a bullet from the gun itself had stricken him, he fell back for support against the bole of the tree.

Neither of his companions noticed his emotion. Orrin still regarded the rifle with a puzzled frown; Lloyd drew nearer to examine the mystery.

Instantly Burress saw that this was the rifle he had hidden the morning of the murder—the weapon which he had thrust into the mire of the swamp. The heaving of the frozen mud in the early spring had vomited forth the gun again; the very earth refused to hide the evidence of his crime!

He believed Orrin Paddock was already suspicious. The herbalist held in his hands now the evidence to convict him of the murder. Would he be sharp enough to see this fact?

(To be continued.)

WELCOME.

So glad the word of greeting,
So sweet the kiss and smile,
That parting, for such meeting,
Were almost made worth while. *George Alison.*

A Dog and a Gasoline Engine.

BY FREDERICK WALWORTH BROWN.

A boating experience with disorganized machinery at the prow and a mischievous bull-terrier at the helm.

BURCHARD was living an almost hermetically sealed existence, so he was not really sorry when Blinks turned up and firmly attached himself to the young man's person.

You see, when Burchard left college there had been a girl, and for perhaps a year everything was lovely. Then something went wrong, and Burchard retired to the seclusion of his ancestral place, got into his lead coffin, so to speak, and pulled down the lid.

That was Burchard all over. There was a moody streak in him, and a certain pig-headedness, combined with an introspective, self-questioning habit of thought.

Where a more impulsive spirit would have rushed in and overwhelmed that girl's affections, Burchard solemnly abolished himself and in the privacy of his hermitage nursed his fancied wrongs.

He used to go down to the pine-clad bluff overlooking the upper river, and here, in the solitudes of nature, commune with bitterness in the abstract. No doubt Burchard was an ass, but a man can't help being what his inherited predispositions make him, and Burchard's cast of mind was in the direction of asininity.

This was in the fall.

Blinks turned up early in the following June. Whence did not appear. Burchard roused from gloomy reverie under the pines to find Blinks patiently regarding him from a distance of some ten feet, his head cocked slightly to the left.

There was nothing prepossessing about Blinks' form or features. One had to know him to appreciate his charms. Burchard coldly inventoried his points:

"Bull-terrier head, wire-haired Scotch coat, English setter eyes, and—come here, boy—yes, the tail of a hound. Well, you are a jim-dandy."

Blinks came forward, whirling the hound's tail in furious gyrations and winking his brown eyes in an excess of exuberant joy at being noticed. Burchard found his name engraved on his collar, deemed it appropriate, and promptly adopted him.

There began a companionship which lasted the better part of a week.

Blinks proved an excellent tonic for Burchard's blue devils. He had a wire-haired terrier's perfervid energy, plus the unreasoning tenacity of a bull-dog, and his frantic efforts to uproot an age-old pine were not conducive to melancholia in the mind of the spectator.

Burchard used to lie on the brown needles and watch him digging like a steam shovel till the coveted root lay bare, whereupon he seized it and settled valiantly to the unequal task of dragging it bodily from Mother Earth and the parent tree. His tail whirled like the spokes of a wheel, he growled, and Burchard found the heart to laugh.

Wearied to exhaustion, Blinks would desist and come grinning to lie by Burchard's side and pant, till, energy having once more accumulated, he sprang again to essay the impossible.

Perhaps this stubborn perseverance, this perennial access of determination, acted upon Burchard somewhat as the unwearied efforts of the spider reanimated the Bruce. At any rate, he left off reading Schopenhauer, Nordau, and the other pessimists, and applied himself to Blinks, who was essentially an optimist of purest ray serene.

They roamed the June woods together, though Burchard was forced to put a chain on the dog to trammel his barbaric desires in the direction of young rabbits and baby quail. But their main diversion was taken on the river in Burchard's launch.

This was a little eighteen-footer, with a two-horse-power gasoline engine, and the name of Puffing Billy.

Blinks had a frantic spasm when he discovered it lying off Burchard's pier. It seemed to arouse recollections in his canine mind, which as a rule was too full of present emotions for memory to find a foothold.

His first exuberance over, he seated himself on the end of the pier, and, lifting his snub nose in air, relieved his overburdened soul in the melancholy howling of a hound.

Burchard, who was near-sighted, feared at first that some one beyond his own ken of vision might be drowning, but no cry for help reached his ears, and he finally discovered that the dog was howling at the launch.

For the fun of the thing, to see what Blinks would do, he rowed out to the launch, intending to bring her in to the pier. But Blinks insisted upon going with him, and when they reached the Puffing Billy, the dog scrambled at once to the after-deck of the boat and seated himself with an air of tremendous importance.

Burchard climbed in then, cast the Puffing Billy loose from her moorings, and started the engine, half-expecting Blinks to jump overboard with the first exhaust.

On the contrary, Blinks yapped with pure delight as the boat gathered way, and down-river they went, with Burchard manipulating the wheel and Blinks walking the quarter-deck like an admiral of the fleet.

Thereafter they cruised over the river at least once a day, and that is how Burchard lost him.

They had gone down-river below the bridge one morning, and Blinks was as usual playing captain, when Burchard discerned, largely and indefinitely in his near-sighted way, another launch coming up-stream toward him. He sheered off to the right, and as they ran abreast noticed casually that the passing boat contained a girl and a man.

That was all so far as Burchard was concerned, but Blinks apparently saw more. With a crazy little yap of delight he sprang headlong into the water and struck out for the other boat.

Burchard heard him go and instantly turned off his bow switch, thereby stopping his engine. The Puffing Billy ceased to puff, and, losing her forward momentum, began to drift up-river with the tide.

"Why, it's Blinks!" came a girl's voice. "Come on, Blinks. Good old doggy. Stop the boat, Eddie. How do you suppose—— Oh, it's——"

At the first word Burchard had stiffened, at the second he went limp, at the fifth he moved aft to start the engine once more, moved moreover with a dignified indifference, never glancing toward the other craft.

He gave the fly-wheel four fierce revolutions before he discovered that the bow switch was still off. So he heard the girl's startled exclamation when presumably her eye lighted upon himself; then the exhaust of the engine cut off all other sounds, and he went churning down-river reviling his despicable fortune, which was, to say the best of it, a perfectly asinine thing to do.

"'Eddie,'" he soliloquized. "Always Eddie Rolson. Fat little toad! Oh, well, who cares?"

He went as far as the lower bridge, and, turning then, came back up-river and took the shallow north channel past the island in order to avoid if possible another encounter. In this he was successful, though he snarled his propeller in the salad grass and had to stop the engine, get out on the after-deck, and clear it with his hands.

This did not improve his frame of mind, and he reached his own pier in prime condition for a further study of the pessimists, a business which he entered upon no later than that same afternoon.

Really it's hard to make a hero out of Burchard, he was such an ass, but for Mollie Pearson's sake I've got to try. He was alone with his pines and his pessimists for four days, soaking himself with bitterness like a green pickle in its brine.

Then came the call to action, and Burchard almost rose to the occasion.

The call came in the painful voice of Blinks, howling in unmistakable distress somewhere off Burchard's point on the river. Burchard couldn't see him, being blind beyond thirty yards even with his glasses, but after listening for some time he made up his mind that

the dog was in need of succor, and put off to the rescue in the Puffing Billy, steering by the houndish howls of Blinks.

Ultimately he made out, largely and indefinitely, a white launch motionless on the face of the waters, and with no living creature in sight save Blinks the melodious, sitting with nose uplifted on the after-deck.

"Gone adrift," said Burchard to himself, and, shutting off his engine, he let the boat's momentum carry him up to the other launch.

Blinks promptly boarded the Puffing Billy, and at the slight jar as the boats came together, a girl uprose from the cock-pit of the strange craft and turned a flushed face upon Burchard.

The flush may have been due to bending low above a hot gasoline engine. I don't pretend to know, but it seems strange that she should not have heard the Puffing Billy's noisy approach. Burchard took a long, deep breath.

"Good afternoon, Miss Pearson," he said solemnly. "Got a breakdown?"

There was an appealing look in the girl's eyes. It may have been owing to the disorganized machinery and it may not. Anyway, Burchard was too near-sighted mentally as well as physically to notice it.

"The dynamo seems to be flooded," she said. "I think I can fix it, though."

Burchard calmly tied the boats together, climbed into the Chinkopin, rolled up his sleeves, and tackled the problem.

Mollie sat down and watched him, saying nothing. It was a time to say nothing, for the most even-tempered man is not at his best while greasing himself to the elbows over a cranky gasoline motor.

Now, a gasoline engine is a strange and wonderful machine. A man may know one from tank to exhaust-pipe; he may know, from actual examination with hand and eye, that everything is absolutely as it should be, yet he may find himself quite unable to make that machine go round.

He may grease himself to his ears; if he is alone he may swear till he chokes; and after he has given it up and yelled for help, if he gives his starting gear one last desperate jerk, the chances are the engine will start off evenly and sweetly and take him within a quarter of a mile from home before it quits again.

Something like this happened to Burchard. He first examined the dynamo, and found it quite dry and in perfect order.

"Nothing wrong there," he growled.

The dynamo ran with a belt to the engine fly-wheel, and for starting it was necessary to make connection by a switch with a set of dry cells. He next examined these, tested them, got an excellent spark, and, turning the connection switch, gave the fly-wheel a vicious whirl.

She coughed twice and stopped. Apparently the spark was all right. The trouble lay deeper.

He examined the gasoline-feed and found the fluid ran perfectly. He went forward and poked a stick into the tank. It was more than half full.

"Have you any oil?" he asked.

Mollie went to the bow locker and fetched thence a can of automobile oil, which she proffered in silence. Burchard accepted it without words and proceeded to fill the feed cup and oil the crank and shaft bearings.

Meanwhile Blinks, tiring of inaction, had returned to the forward deck of the Chinkopin and busied himself worrying the end of the painter by which the two boats were fastened together.

Burchard set down the oil-can and gave the fly-wheel another vicious turn. Again she coughed twice and stopped. He repeated the operation perhaps twenty times with the same result.

He went over the machinery once more with the utmost care, and tried her again. Same result. Then he examined the mechanism a third time and tried her again. Same result.

Whereupon he rose, holding his greasy hands away from his once immaculate trousers.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I don't seem to find what's wrong. I'll have to tow you."

"Oh, isn't it provoking?" cried Mollie. "I promised to pick up Eddie Rolson at the upper bridge. And it's a shame to inconvenience you."

"It's not the slightest inconvenience, Miss Pearson," said Burchard stiffly.

"I'm delighted to be able to help. I'm only sorry I am not able to make the engine run."

His studious courtesy seemed to pique her to judge by the look she gave him, and she made no reply. He turned to the Puffing Billy, and even as he turned, Blinks, with a last vicious pull, succeeded in untying the knot in the painter.

Some freak of the current caught the Puffing Billy and swung her off. Blinks was so delighted that he dropped the rope to bark deliriously, and a yard of water opened between the boats.

Burchard made a desperate lunge, missed, and hung precariously over the rail of the Chinkopin till Mollie seized one waving leg and restored his equilibrium. Meantime the Puffing Billy sidled coquettishly away.

"Got an oar?" cried Burchard.

"No," said Mollie.

Burchard looked across at the departing launch. He had been taking solace of his pipe these last few months, and his heart and lungs were not in the best shape.

"I might swim for it," he said doubtfully.

"Indeed you won't," cried Mollie.

Burchard looked at her straight through his glasses, and she repented of her sudden vehemence. Once more Burchard turned his eyes toward the Puffing Billy and then threw back his head and laughed.

"Mollie," he cried before he thought, "this is certainly the limit. There goes my boat with an engine in good working order and an oar in the cockpit, and here are we with an engine out of whack and nothing even to push her with."

His tone was companionable and no longer formal. Mollie noted the difference.

"It's tragic," she said, but her eyes belied her voice.

In fact it was really a pity that Burchard's hearing was so much more acute than his vision. Desperately he tried the engine once more, but with no greater success than had attended his former efforts.

"I think we're going aground on the Island bar," said Mollie presently, and Burchard rose to take a look.

"Can't be helped," he said. "If my boat grounds there, too, I can wade to her," and he returned to the machinery.

Five minutes later the Chinkopin took ground gently, well out toward the end of the bar.

This is a long sand-spit formed by the current as it swings round the south side of the island. Between the stranded boat and the island proper lay a hundred feet of shallow water, while on the other side the main channel, forty yards wide and forty feet deep, separated them from the southern shore.

Hard aground and helpless, they watched the Puffing Billy swing, broadside to the current, through the channel and bob away down river. So with their last hope extinguished they faced the embarrassment of each other's society till such time as succor should appear.

This might very well be hours, for in early June the season is not fairly open, and boats on the upper river are few and far between.

Burchard continued to monkey with the engine, and presently Mollie burst out laughing. Burchard turned to her.

"I was thinking of Eddie Rolson walking home from the upper bridge," she explained. "It'll be good for what ails him, but he won't think so. I can't say I admire fat men."

Burchard dropped the wrench into the greasy bilge water under the engine and turned to stare at her for an instant. As near as he could tell, however, she was looking past him in the direction of the upper bridge, where at any moment the fat Mr. Rolson might be expected to appear.

He rescued the wrench in silence and continued his efforts on the engine.

"If Eddie will only see us and recognize us," cried Mollie gleefully, "he'll be perfectly wild."

Burchard paused again and appeared to consider this remark in all its bearings. Then he returned in silence to the engine.

During the next twenty minutes he ascertained beyond the shadow of a doubt that there was nothing whatever the matter with the machine. And still she would not run. Ultimately he gave over his tinkering and stood up, oil dripping from his fingers.

"There's a cake of soap in that left-hand locker," said Mollie. "I wouldn't

bother with the old thing any longer. Somebody'll rescue us."

Burchard found the soap, and in the course of ten or fifteen minutes had removed the grease. Then he sat down in front of the girl.

He seemed to have something on his mind. Solidly and uncompromisingly he faced her, as he should have done months before.

"Mol—er—Miss Pearson——" he began.

"Oh, call me Mollie, Tom," said the girl. "We've just got to be friends after this."

"There's just one thing I want more than being friends, Mollie."

"Isn't that Eddie on the bridge?" she cried, rising quickly. "It is. He's waving his hat."

Frantically she waved in return. The fat Mr. Rolson evidently mistook her salutation for a signal of distress. With a parting flutter of his hat he waddled off the bridge and disappeared in the woods.

In the course of an hour he might be expected to make the circuit over the sandy road and arrive on the river with a boat. Mollie sat down again, chuckling with glee.

"Poor Eddie," she said. "It's warm in those woods, too."

"Mollie," said Burchard in his solemn, solid way, "do you care a great deal about Rolson?"

"Me!" cried the girl. "Care about Eddie Rolson! Heavens, no."

"I thought you did," he said. "Take me back, will you, Mollie?"

Mollie looked at him with a queer, little smile.

"Was that the reason you——"

"Yes," said Burchard. "I thought you didn't care any more."

"Oh, Tommy," she cried, "you *are* a silly boy."

"Will you take me back, Mollie?"

She considered this proposition for a moment, smiling to herself.

"I don't think I ever willingly let you go," she said.

An hour later they were disturbed by the sound of a furiously rowed boat, and discovered Mr. Rolson pulling hurriedly and crabbily up the river toward the island. Mr. Rolson's opportunities for playing the hero in a thrilling rescue had not been so frequent as to blunt his delighted appreciation of his own importance under the circumstances.

He would have been glad had the vacant shores been lined with applauding spectators. As it was, he anticipated great pleasure in recounting to admiring audiences the narrative of his gallant exploit.

It had been a long and arduous walk to the boat-house, and a hard and blistering pull up to the island, but he considered that Mollie would value these labors at their proper worth, and reward him accordingly.

"Well," said Burchard, "here comes our rescuer."

"Yes," said Mollie, quite as though she did not particularly yearn to be rescued.

"I'm going to take one last try at that engine," said Burchard.

"Oh, I *wish* it would go," cried Mollie with a wicked smile in the direction of the perspiring Mr. Rolson.

Burchard glanced at the switches, turned on the gasoline, gave the air-cock a twist, and, seizing the starting bar, gave the fly-wheel a half turn.

Sweetly and evenly, as though she had never dreamed of being balky, the engine caught and started. Blinks at the first exhaust roused from a nap in the cockpit, and scrambled to his place on the after-deck.

Burchard reversed the engine, and the Chinkopin backed gracefully off the bar. Mr. Rolson ceased rowing, and viewed the proceedings with a good deal of injured surprise.

Well out in deep water, Burchard started the engine ahead, and with Mollie at the wheel the Chinkopin churned down upon the would-be rescuer.

"Want a tow?" cried Mollie as they sailed past.

"N—no," answered Mr. Rolson. "No, thanks."

He said more, but the exhaust of the engine mercifully swallowed it.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Mollie joyfully.

"I think," said Burchard slowly, "the whole business was a Simon Pure godsend. What do you think?"

But Mollie only smiled.

BLOCK TOWER SEVEN.*

BY JARED L. FULLER.

A railroad story of a signalman's thrilling experiences in ferreting out the mystery of his predecessor's murder.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A WRECK occurs on the A. & C. R. R., from which Dr. Lester, Captain Payne Howard and his daughter Belle are rescued by Dan Crompton, an employee of the road. Captain Howard is in litigation with the railway company at this time.

It is discovered that Raddigan, the signalman in Tower Seven at Coldspring, is murdered, and that the signals were changed to cause the wreck. There is no clue to the murderer.

Crompton is promoted to Raddigan's position, and takes up his quarters with Mrs. Corrigan and her idiot son, Billy, sister and nephew of the murdered Raddigan. It is not long before he receives a warning of personal danger, and while returning home at midnight is attacked by a couple of men who get aboard a slow freight. He starts in pursuit of them and enters the car where they are hiding. They gag and bind him and make their escape. At the top of a steep slope the train breaks in two. Crompton's car, with several others, rolls backward. At the end of the slope there is a sharp turn, and the car in which Crompton is confined, jumping the track, rolls into a ravine. He escapes serious injury and is discovered by Belle Howard, who braves a forest fire to free him.

During an illness of several days Crompton obtains information which leads him to think that this last series of accidents was due to Ike and Jase Howard and that Silly Billy knows more of the doings at Tower Seven than is generally supposed.

Crompton is still confined to his room when his substitute, Markell, brings him a key to the new lock on the tower door. As a test, Crompton gives Billy a chance to steal the key. Billy takes it, and when he leaves the house, Crompton follows him, convinced that some valuable information is going to come his way.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNCERTAINTY.

CROMPTON pulled on his coat, seized a hat, and went down the stairs on tiptoe, so as not to arouse the widow. He was really very weak in his legs, but he was determined to go on to the tower; and the farther he walked the more confidence he gained in his ability to keep up.

Nobody passed him whom he recognized, and when he reached the railroad not a soul was in sight. In the distance the green lamps upon the tail of a train, rounding the curve beyond the tower, were the only sign of activity he saw.

Markell's light in the upper room glowed brightly as Dan approached. The latter was undecided whether to knock and call Markell down, or to see if Silly Billy really had unlocked the tower door and stolen within.

Could it be possible that the boy had taken the key for an entirely different purpose from that of which Dan thought? It might be that the foolish youth was under the influence of those who wished to injure the A. & C. road —those who had caused old Raddigan's death.

He approached the tower hesitatingly, arriving in its shadow without apparently arousing the attention of the signalman above, and still undecided as to his further course. The door was closed and he heard no sound from within but the occasional rattle of the telegraph sounder.

At last Crompton stretched forth his hand and touched the knob. He turned it softly, and then placed his knee against the lower panel.

The door sprang open without noise. It had been unlocked.

There was not the slightest sound from above, although Dan saw the radiance of the lamp flung down the stairway. By this glow he was enabled to descry objects in the lower room.

He saw the skeleton arms of the signal and switch levers, extending from the floor above to the box on the ground. And before this box stopped a figure which, when Dan stepped within, sprang up with a cry of alarm.

Crompton, by no means sure of the identity of the individual, ducked quickly to dodge any weapon—or bullet, if the party were armed with a pistol—and ran in, believing that to close with him would be the wiser plan.

But the other did not wait for his attack. With the agility of a cat, he slipped beneath Dan's arm.

The signalman could not even clutch the fellow's coat, but fell on his knees with his hands outstretched before him, while the stranger ran out.

Dan found himself groveling on the ground, his fingers clutching the loosened dirt where the other had been digging. Whether it had really been Silly Billy, or somebody else, he had no means of knowing.

The light in the place had suddenly increased, and a step fell on the stair. It was Markell, aroused by the scuffle.

Dan heard the click, click of a pistol hammer, and he turned his head quickly that the light might fall upon his face. He did not fancy having the white-head take a pot shot at him.

"Cæsar!" exclaimed Markell, though scarcely above his breath. "You gave me a start, Crompton. Is it you?"

"Yes."

"Who else was there? I heard 'em run."

"I don't know who it was," growled Dan, still without rising, his hands in the loose soil. "I missed that key you gave me to-day——"

"Silly Billy!" ejaculated Markell.

"Well, he took it, all right! But I don't know that it was he in here. I didn't see his face."

"And you followed him? You'd oughtn't to be out of your bed at this hour, Dannie!"

"Bother! I had to come over, didn't I?"

"Well?"

Markell came down the stairs now and brought the light over to him.

"I found the door unlocked here. He must have come in easy," said Dan.

"What was he doing there?"

"Digging, and—by Jove!"

He uttered this exclamation while still his hands were groping about in the shallow hole near the corner.

"What is it?" rejoined Markell. Then, as he saw that Dan was enlarging and deepening the hole with such energy, he added:

"Don't tell me! I know, by thunder!"

"What do you know?" grunted Dan, still at work.

"Cæsar! What a fool I've been! Of course, he'd know," murmured Markell.

"Who'd know?"

"Silly Billy."

"Ah-ha!" exclaimed Dan, and drew something from the hole.

"It's a forty-four caliber pistol—Smith & Wesson make — hammerless," Markell cried. "Am I right?"

Dan scrambled to his feet, and by the light of the lamp Markell carried, examined the rusted weapon he had found.

"You're right, old man!" he said, in wonder. "How do you know?"

"It's the gun that killed Raddigan," the other affirmed confidently.

Dan had been examining the bone handle of the weapon very attentively.

"If that's so, he was killed with his own gun, Markell! Here's 'J. R.' scratched on the grip. What d'ye say to that?"

Markell handed Dan the lamp, put up his own weapon, and took the rusted pistol which the other had dug up. He threw it open and removed the cylinder. One cartridge had been fired.

"That was the ball that finished poor Raddigan," the white-head said slowly. "How does it look to you, Dannie?"

"God knows! I—I don't want to think of it!" gasped Crompton.

But Markell kept on, as though arguing out the circumstances in his own mind.

"If this ball killed Raddigan—a shot from his own revolver— then the murderer did not come into the tower that night with the determination to kill the old man.

"D'ye see? He wasn't prepared. At least, he wasn't armed with a gun. But he got hold of Raddigan's, put it to the old man's head, and finished him!

"Then he came down here, buried the gun and—escaped!"

Recognizing the incompleteness of this last, he let it go and continued on the line of identification.

"Now, who was this? What do you think? Who knew of the pistol being buried here?"

"Don't! For God's sake, Markell, think what you're saying!" gasped Dan, clutching at his arm and almost dropping the lamp. "The poor boy!"

Markell took the lamp for safety.

"Come up-stairs and let's talk it over, old man," he said, leading the way.

As they closed the door, Markell's sharp eye caught the glimmer of something bright upon the floor. It was a key—*the* key.

Dan picked it up and locked the door; then he followed Markell up the stairway.

"I'm glad, whoever it was, that he didn't carry it off with him," the latter said, referring to the key.

Crompton was satisfied to sit down after he reached the upper room of the tower. The exertions of the evening had tried his strength.

But the matter under discussion was warranted to make him forget his bodily weakness. God knows, his mind was active enough!

"You can't mean," he stammered, looking at Markell almost appealingly, "that you believe Billy had anything to do with his uncle's death?"

"What can we believe?" demanded the white-head, looking like a preternaturally grave cherub, perching on the telegraph table, and swinging his chubby legs.

"By heaven! I never thought of it before. That note you got in your dinner-pail made me a bit curious. But this——"

"See here," exclaimed Crompton suddenly. "How do you figure the thing out logically? Mr. Pebble declared that the old man was killed by somebody who had a grudge against the railroad more particularly than against Raddigan."

"That's what he said," sniffed Markell.

"Doesn't it stand to reason that it's so? See how that signal was shifted on the semaphore, tolling the Fly-by-Night into collision with the freight. Remember?"

"Humph!"

"And how could poor Billy have anything against the railroad? And think of his killing his own uncle!"

"Who says he did?" snapped Markell, puckering his brows still more. "What I say is, he knows the party who did shoot Raddigan. That I'll stick to!"

"His poor mother!" groaned Dan. "Markell, we must keep this thing close until we're sure."

"I reckon I sha'n't blurt it around very promiscuously," grunted the white-head. "We'll have to tell Pebble."

"I—don't see it."

"Then you must take the responsibility upon your shoulders. You're boss here," Markell declared, with a smile which Dan did not observe.

"Leave it to me," said Dan, with a sigh. "I'll write Mr. Pebble fully. But God knows I don't wish to see Mrs. Corrigan in deeper trouble, nor do I believe Billy is a bad boy."

"He's mixed up with those Howards, all right," declared Markell.

"You believe they are the guilty ones?"

"Well, what do you believe yourself?"

And Crompton couldn't answer this. He did not know what to think. After going home and getting to bed again, he lay for the rest of the night wide awake, trying to figure the matter out to a logical conclusion and to decide what his own course should be.

When it came to writing the facts, as he saw them, to Alonzo Pebble, he couldn't do it. He tried half a dozen times, and each time tore the letter up.

This was early in the morning. It was mid-forenoon before he learned from Mrs. Corrigan that Billy had disappeared.

"Shure, Oi don't know at all at all phat's become av him! He's not been in his bed this night, Mr. Crompton. Was iver a poor widder woman so troubled in this wor-r-ld?" and she wrung her hands despairingly.

Dan could do, or say, little to comfort her, and dared not tell her what he suspected regarding the reason for Billy's absenting himself. The boy was quite evidently afraid to come home.

"It's no use!" exclaimed Dan, after canvassing the situation with the aid of several pipes. "I've got to see Alonzo. I can talk to him when I couldn't write. By thunder! I wouldn't want to put down in black and white some of the things I'll have to say. Poor Billy!"

The doctor came and seemed surprised to find his patient doing so well. Dan believed the excitement of the previous evening had served to "shake him up" and do him good. But he said nothing about having been out of the house to Lester; nor did he mention his further intentions for that afternoon.

Nevertheless, as soon as he had eaten his dinner, he astonished Mrs. Corrigan by telling her that he was going out and might not be back again that night.

"If I can get transportation to Arkane, I shall run over there and come back in the morning," Dan declared.

He really felt much stronger when he went out into the air. It was a fine day and he determined to walk to the Coldspring station.

The rules of the Tri-State System forbade conductors to pass an employee of the road (as well as non-employees, of course) on any train without a written permit. There was not time for Dan to appeal to headquarters for transportation; but the station-master at Coldspring, really the acting superintendent of the branch in the absence of Mr. Pebble, could issue such a paper.

The signalman took the shorter way to the station, which lay along the tracks. On his way he kept a bright lookout for Silly Billy, and even asked several of the workmen he passed if they had seen the boy; but to no purpose. Billy had not been on the line that day.

Just before reaching the yards, he found a long freight side-tracked, waiting for the passing of a passenger train soon due from Coldspring. The other tracks being full, this train of "empties," which had wandered in from the west, had been backed over across the westbound track.

A chorus of snores from the hack as the signalman passed assured him that the crew, exhausted after their long run, were taking advantage of even this brief halt to obtain some of the sleep due them. A car inspector named Francis, whom Dan had frequently seen, was just beginning his examination of the long train.

"Sounds like a ten-cent lodging house, inside there," Francis remarked, with a jerk of his thumb toward the caboose.

"A long trip?" Dan asked.

"They left here day before yesterday morning, and I reckon nary one of 'em struck a decent bed while they were away. This doubling up on freight runs is making some of the boys pretty sore —an' I don't blame 'em."

While he spoke Francis was going from car to car, scrutinizing with a keen eye the wheels, brake-beams, bolsters, and rods.

He kept up a running fire of comment as they went down the line, stopping now and then to measure a flat place on a wheel (if it is more than two and a half inches across, the car is shunted off until a new pair of wheels can be put under it) or to examine more closely the fastenings of a door.

So quick was the inspector's eye and so thorough his scrutiny that Dan scarcely broke step to wait for him down the entire length of the train. When they reached the locomotive, where the engineer and fireman were likewise nodding on their respective benches, the whistle of the coming passenger train for which the freight waited rang in their ears.

"Here she comes!" exclaimed Francis, stepping over in front of the pilot. "I'll hustle up the other side, and then these poor chaps can go on into the yard and perhaps get a lay-off.

"Look at Merriweather there!"

The man to whom he referred was the forward brakeman, who sat on the embankment by the switch, his head sagging between his knees, sound asleep.

"He's worn out!" observed Dan commiseratingly. "I'll stick to the signal tower, I reckon. No braking for me, thank you!"

Francis turned away and Dan kept on

toward Coldspring. As he approached the sleeping Merriweather, he observed that the brakeman had shut the siding switch, so as to give the passenger train a clear track, and had doubtless sat down here to wait for its passage so as to open the switch again for his own train.

The passenger train approached swiftly, its whistle shrilly announcing its coming when but a few rods away. The sound awoke the brakeman with a start.

Dan saw him jerk up his head, stare wildly about, and finally stagger to his feet as he saw the forefront of the passenger engine rushing along the track towards him. Dan had stepped aside for the train to pass, and the expression of Merriweather's face surprised him.

In a flash the brakeman's countenance became as colorless as chalk, his jaws fell apart, and although the lingering echo of the locomotive whistle drowned other sounds, Dan knew that a wild yell had been emitted from the man's throat.

Merriweather dashed forward toward the switch which had been left unlocked. The passenger engine was almost upon the frog, yet the brakeman seized the lever to throw the rails over!

"My God, the man is mad!" cried the signalman, and forgetting all else but the immediate peril, he bounded toward the spot.

That switch was properly closed; but Dan knew what had happened. Aroused so suddenly by the whistle of the coming train from his slumber of exhaustion, Merriweather had become confused.

A freight engineer, after thirty odd hours' continual strain, has been known to forget how to stop or start his locomotive. Merriweather staggered up, believing that he had not properly turned the switch before falling asleep beside the tracks!

In a moment more the fatal mistake would have been made, and the passenger train, turned into the side track, would have collided with the freight.

But before the lever was dragged over, and before the forward trucks of the onrushing locomotive caught the switch rails, Dan had flung himself upon the stooping brakeman.

The latter was borne to the ground by the weight of the signalman's body, the lever slipped back into place, and the train sped by in safety, while the two men grappled for a moment in the shallow ditch.

Francis, who had seen the incident, came running back and dragged them to their feet. Merriweather, his eyes bloodshot and staring, all a-shake like a palsied man, gazed in wonder after the train disappearing safely along the westbound track.

"Did—did I do it, after all?" he gasped.

"You most certainly did!" observed the car inspector. "But if it hadn't been for Mr. Crompton here, you'd have sent that train to kingdom come."

"I thought—I dreamed I hadn't thrown it," stammered Merriweather, wetting his lips, still a picture of horror.

"Well!" grunted Francis, staring at him. "You'd better get a night's rest—even if you're docked for it—before you go much farther, young man. That was a narrow squeak."

Dan was so greatly moved himself that he was obliged to sit down for a few minutes to recover his strength. A catastrophe had been avoided by so narrow a margin that the thought of it, in his weakened state, made him positively giddy.

Merriweather, indeed, recovered first. He wrung Dan's hand warmly.

"Another moment, sir, and I'd have had something on my mind that would have given me nightmare for the rest of my life," he said, and shuddered.

"And—how about the directors?" suggested the signalman, wiping his brow.

"Hell!" exclaimed Merriweather in disgust. "Did you ever hear of a director who cared about anything but dividends?"

This was rather a sweeping statement; but Dan was not in a mood to challenge it. The determination of the managers of the road to move freight as cheaply as possible was at the bottom of the business, and usually is at the foundation of a railroad wreck.

Francis finished the inspection of the

train and signaled the driver to go on, the track into the Coldspring yard now being clear. Dan rode on the locomotive step down to the roundhouse, and from thence walked on to the station.

He went up-stairs to the offices and was able to see the station-master without much difficulty. But to obtain a pass over the road to Arkane was another matter.

"You are at present laid off, I believe, Mr. Crompton?" queried the station-master.

"Not exactly, sir. I was laid off as punishment for holding up the freight the other evening——"

"I know, sir. I was forced to recommend that myself," said the station-master, who was a small man clothed with a brief authority, and usually acted as other small men do under like circumstances.

Dan had no complaint to make of that; at least, not to this person. But he said:

"My lay-off was concluded day before yesterday. I got a week's vacation because of illness. You can see I am not very well even now."

"Humph!" said the other doubtfully. "Well?"

"I wish to go to Arkane to see Mr. Pebble."

"What for, sir? Has the superintendent sent for you?"

"No, sir."

"Well?"

"It is a private matter," stammered Dan, not at all willing to explain his business to the station agent.

"I can give you no transportation on private business."

"It is on railroad business, but of a private nature," explained Dan.

The station-master flushed. He considered that no employee should have business with Pebble of which he was not informed.

"I cannot undertake to issue transportation under such circumstances, Mr. Crompton," he declared severely. "You must ask headquarters."

"I wish to go at once, sir," Dan said mildly.

"Then pay your way, sir, pay your way!" snapped the man, and turned his back upon him.

And that was the end of it.

Dan went down-stairs gloomily. With his illness, and lay-off, and all, he had no money to spare. Yet he did feel as though he must speak face to face with Alonzo Pebble about Silly Billy and the mystery of Block Tower Seven.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE CAB OF THE CAMEL-BACK.

CROMPTON was feeling pretty blue as he walked up and down the train shed, knowing that the express to Arkane was already being made up, when he saw Francis, the car inspector, coming along in conversation with the Coldspring train-starter—an official in whom Dan had some interest, as he often took orders from him.

"Here!" cried Francis, stopping his companion, "I want you to know Mr. Crompton, Felix. Mr. Bennett, Crompton. Crompton's at Block Tower Seven—when he isn't playing the under dog in a railroad smash-up."

The train-starter shook hands.

"This is the gentleman you were just speaking of—who played Providence up there at the switch?" he asked the inspector.

"That's the fellow," said Francis. "What's put you down, Crompton? You look as though you'd just been ordered to get your time made up."*

Dan told him no; that he had only been in to ask for transportation to Arkane.

"And was refused, eh?" asked Mr. Bennett quickly.

"Yes. I wanted to go over on this train," and he nodded at the waiting cars, down to which the great camel-back locomotive that drew them as far as Massail was being backed.

"Why, perhaps, I can fix that up for you," said the train-starter.

"Of course you can, Felix," declared the inspector, and with a nod to Crompton, went on about his business.

"I'll speak to John Lowther. He'll take you," the train-starter said. "Hurry up, Mr. Crompton. I've only a minute to spare."

But he did it very nicely, introducing

* The railroad man's expression for a discharge.

Dan to the driver of the big engine, and the latter welcomed the signalman into his side of the cab.

"And he'll pass you on to the chap who takes the train from the Junction —won't you, John?" Bennett said.

"Sure," declared the driver. Then to Dan he added: "Just you sit tight and say nothing till we pull out of the station. They'll think you have a permit."

The camel-back was a huge machine, with the driver's and stoker's cabs hanging like saddle-bags (or a palanquin) midway of the boiler. There was a railed runway from the rear of each cab to the rear of the boiler, but from their seats the engineer and fireman could not see each other.

This fact is the one (or the principal) objection to the camel-backed locomotive. Her crew should really consist of three men, for if anything happens in either of the cabs, the man on the other side of the high boiler has no means of knowing it.

Dan had never ridden on a first-class passenger engine before, although he had studied the mechanism of the huge machines at the company's shops at Arkane, and had once held the throttle (under the watchful eye of an old driver) on a freight hauler, for a short distance. And his memorable ride on the Afternoon Flier to the Fallon River bridge was still fresh in his mind.

This branch of the service, as he had told Belle Howard, was that which attracted him the most. He would have willingly served the hard apprenticeship of stoking for the sake of being one day the master of a machine like that attached to this train.

John Lowther had already looked over his engine, and the stoker was oiling certain joints and bearings which the driver believed needed special attention. He knew the good and bad points of his engine as a good horseman knows his steed.

Coming back into the cab, Lowther tried his steam gages and various little brass arrangements with which the side of the boiler was studded. Now and then he took a squint through the open side window at the broad face of the station clock, the electric inspired hands of which jerked toward the moment for the train's departure.

The stoker sprang aboard, and his shovel rang on the steel plate before the furnace door. The last belated passengers scurried for the cars.

"All aboard!" echoed from the forward brakeman to the flagman on the tail of the long train.

The conductor snapped his watch, glanced forward at Lowther, nodded, and raised his hand.

Instantly, as though by that motion the conductor had started the train himself, the cars began to move. They glided the first few feet without a jar, and without an appreciable change in the panting of the engine.

Lowther still looked back along the line, evidently waiting for the couplings between each coach to become taut, and the entire train to be in motion. The conductor and flagman swung themselves aboard.

Then the old camel-back coughed once and the great drivers spun faster. Yet, so shrewdly did the engineer govern his machine that there seemed little jar even here in the cab itself.

Starting a passenger train, Crompton saw, was an altogether different proceeding from getting a freight under way.

By the time the tail of the express was out from under the station-hood they were moving at the rate of twenty miles an hour, yet the speed was gathered so shrewdly that the coaches had not begun to rock on their springs, and the passengers had no suspicion of the rate at which the train was already traveling.

Once clear of the station, Lowther had drawn in his head and was now looking sharply forward through the glass of the front window of the cab, watching the signals and the network of tracks in the yard through which the train was running.

The fireman had skipped up into his own cab, for Dan heard the continual jangle of the bell, warning the yardmen and the pony engines out of the way.

Twenty miles an hour was a stiff pace for yard work, but the Minie Ball Express was a privileged train. It left Coldspring at the same moment that

the Fly-by-Night started from Arkane, and its schedule was figured quite as closely.

They were out of the yard in a very few moments, and soon flying past Block Tower Seven. Dan scarcely knew whether Markell recognized him as he leaned from the back of the cab and waved his hand at the windows of the signal tower, so swiftly did the train round the curve.

Lowther seldom spoke. His gaze alternated between the rails ahead and the gages and cocks beside him.

If his steam decreased in the smallest degree, he pulled a wire that rang a gong in the fireman's cab, for at once Dan would hear the stoker shoveling the fuel into the hungry maw of the great engine.

It was still quite light when they got into the first of the foothills, and began to climb upwards through the burned tract which Dan had reason to remember so vividly. He caught a glimpse of the river between the gaunt and blackened trees, and shuddered to think how near to death he and Belle Howard had been so short a time before.

At the curve, where the box-car had jumped the track, he hung out of the window, trying to see into the depths of the gully. But it was growing dark down there, and he could distinguish nothing but the blackened tops of the pines.

A little further up the grade was the crossing beside the tool-shed. As they neared it the fireman blew a sharp blast of warning, and peering ahead over the engineer's shoulder Dan saw a wagon, drawn by a pair of mules, cross just in front of the pilot.

As they passed, the man driving the mules turned an angry countenance upon the train and shook his fist at the two faces he saw at the cab window.

Dan knew the fellow at once. It was Jase Howard. But the signalman gave him but a single glance.

It was the other person in the wagon who held Dan Crompton's attention. He was of a slight figure, and was sitting on some bags of grain in the back of the wagon. Without seeing his face, Dan knew it to be Billy Corrigan.

Billy had not been at home, nor had he been seen about his familiar haunts on the railroad line that day. Here was the explanation.

"Whether it was Billy whom I frightened out of the tower last night or not, this proves that the poor boy is mixed up with these people," thought Dan, with sorrow.

"The white-head must be right. Billy knows much more about his uncle's murder than he should—and about the murderer, too."

They arrived at the summit of the grade without losing a minute on the schedule, and passed Gridiron at a speed that sucked up the gravel behind the tail coach like a tunnel-shaped cyclone.

On the west side of the pass was a broad tableland which lent itself to speed making, and Lowther did not lose the trick.

With one eye seemingly ever scanning the rails ahead (now revealed by the light of the headlamp or an occasional switchlight), and the other on his gages, the engine driver coaxed his huge machine to still higher speed.

Suddenly Dan, sitting behind him, and where he could observe every motion of Lowther, saw the old engineer pull the gong in the fireman's cab, informing that individual that the steam was running down. At the moment the whistle of the camel-back shrieked a staccato greeting to a train coming from the west, and which ran past them with appalling din.

When the train had gone, Dan saw Lowther turn restlessly in his seat and strike the fireman's gong again. The signalman glanced at the steam gage; the power was still decreasing.

He leaned back and strove to make out the rear platform of the engine. When the firebox door was opened, he could see the glow of the fire shining upon the front of the tender.

But this did not follow, nor did he hear the clang of the stoker's shovel in the gangway.

He glanced back at Lowther. The old engineer was becoming exasperated. He jerked at the signal wire again, and by the movement of his lips Dan knew that Lowther was heartily berating his mate's inattention. The speed of the

camel-back was being perceptibly reduced. They were losing time on one of the best running pieces of track on the entire branch.

A minute lost in the running of the Minie Ball meant a great deal. That and the Fly-by-Night were Pebble's pet trains.

If they didn't keep up to their schedules, the engineers heard from the dour Scot with exceeding promptness.

Lowther turned to his visitor and put his lips close to Dan's ears.

"Run 'round there and see if that blamed fool has gone to sleep, will you?" he shouted above the roar of the pounding wheels.

And then he added something which Crompton took for a general and particular cursing of all engines the structure of which made it impossible for engineer and fireman to see each other.

Dan crept out on the runway. It seemed a risky thing (to him), this creeping back along the boiler; yet he knew the fireman did it on his side every few minutes.

But where was the fireman now? He leaped down into the gangway and stepped across to the other side of the huge boiler.

From that point he could see forward into the stoker's cab, and the sight which met his gaze brought a horrified cry to Dan Crompton's lips.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TAKING CHANCES.

THE dim light revealed to Crompton the fireman hanging with half his body through the side window—indeed, it seemed he was slipping still farther as the train raced on—and with his head swinging against the outside of the cab as though his neck were broken.

Chilled as he was by this sight, the signalman lost no time in springing forward along the left runway to the man's rescue. In half a minute he had seized the poor fellow by the tail of his coat and dragged him in upon the narrow, cushioned seat.

The body was quite inert, the head and shoulders covered with blood, the skull was terribly crashed by impact with some adamantine object. It was not hard to guess what had happened.

The train which had so recently passed the Minie Ball on the east-bound track was a mail train. Most mail cars are supplied with mechanical contrivances which pick the mail bags from stationary arms at stations where the train may not stop.

One of these swinging mail-bag arms on the inner side of a mail-car had become loosened or its catch was broken. As the trains passed, the arm swung out at right angles with the car. The fireman of the camel-back, leaning from his cab to look up the track as the mail train swooped down upon him, did not see the swinging arm, and it had dealt him a vicious blow.

With his head beaten in, the blood flowing sluggishly from the wound, and the horrible pallor of his countenance, the fireman was a terrifying object. It seemed to Dan that he surely must be dead.

But he could not stop to make closer examination. The train was losing speed every instant, and now the insistent gong rang in his ears.

John Lowther was growing anxious regarding his passenger as well as his mate.

Dan saw that he could do nothing for the fireman, and he sprang out of the cab again.

Realizing that the Minie Ball was rapidly losing time, he did not run back to tell Lowther at once. In the gangway was the fireman's shovel, and he seized this and flung open the door of the firebox.

Not until he had heaped the fire with fuel and shut the door again did he take the time to inform Lowther of what had occurred.

When he came into the engineer's cab something in the expression of his face warned the engineer that an accident had occurred.

"For God's sake, what's got into him?" Dan saw that the old man asked, although he could not hear him.

The signalman bent down and screamed in Lowther's ear:

"He's hurt—bad—unconscious."

"My God!" gasped the engineer.

"What'll we do for him?"

"Did you put on that coal?" asked Lowther.

Dan nodded, but he was breathing so heavily that he had to sit down. It was plain to the engineer that his guest was exhausted with his effort.

"I—I've been sick," Dan explained weakly.

Lowther nodded grimly.

"I know," he said. "I heard about it. But Little, over yonder."

"Hit by the train that passed. He may be dead. It's awful!"

Dan covered his eyes for a moment with his hands and trembled. For the first time in his life he thought he should keel over in a "ladylike" faint.

"Brace up, there!" yelled Lowther. "D'you know anything about an engine?"

Dan nodded and looked at him more confidently.

"I couldn't undertake to fire for you," he said, "but I believe I can handle the lever. I've done it on a freight, and I learned a good deal in the shops."

"Theory isn't worth a tinker's damn in running this camel-back," declared Lowther, with his lips close to Dan's ear. "But we'll hafter make the best we can of it. Lemme by, and I'll go and see what I can do for Little—poor chap! Catch hold here!"

They passed each other. Dan slid into the old man's seat, and his hand closed on the lever firmly.

"That's the way!" said Lowther. "You see the brake lever there? Don't git rattled, for God's sake! Keep your eye on the track. See! the steam's coming up again."

He glanced at the clock fastened to the cabside and drew out his own watch.

"Thunder! We've lost four minutes and a half. There's Pabloe"—as they rushed by a group of houses which were lost in the darkness again in half a minute. "We've got to make that up—and most of it before the other upgrade. Keep your eyes open, Mr. Crompton."

He ran back, and Dan heard the firebox door banging as the old engineer stopped for a squint at the furnace.

Dan felt the throb of the machinery under his hand, and he woke up. He forgot how Little's head had looked when he dragged him into the cab window; his own eyes grew keener in their glance, and his lips lost their tremor.

The thought that he controlled this great monster of steel thrilled him mightily. He took long breaths, and the red came back into his cheek.

He felt himself in his element. This was the place he was cut out for—the right side of a big locomotive, pounding away at rising fifty miles an hour, and with a chance to make up four minutes odd on his own hook!

"Drat that inspector, anyway!" he muttered, thinking of the man whose report had kept him from this very branch of the service. "I don't believe he knew what he was about. There's nothing the matter with my eyes."

And he shut out of his thought the troubling remembrance of the occasions when they seemed to have played him such sorry tricks in the identification of colors.

The revolving wheels seemed to take on a different—a more exultant—tone. He watched the steam-gage and the clock. To his delight, the speed was increasing, and he coaxed the camel-back on and on, as he had seen John Lowther do.

The latter was back in a minute, looking over his shoulder, and trying the various cocks. Dan glanced up at him for an instant.

"How is he?" he asked.

"He ain't dead yet. God, that was a terrible blow he got!"

"The mail bag arm," decided Dan, looking up the track again.

"Yep. Damn 'em! They're always loose—or something. I knew a fellow killed—— Ah!"

He ran back, and Dan heard the firebox door bang and the sound of shoveling. They passed a station with the bell jangling warningly. Then Lowther was back to watch his manipulation of the machine.

"You're doin' well, Mr. Crompton," he shouted in Dan's ear. "You'd oughter hold down a throttle of your own."

"Reported against by the inspector," grunted Dan, without looking around.

"Little's got it good," said Lowther, after a minute. "I'd pull her down, but there's no hospital this side of Massail, and there'd be the devil to pay. Thunder! You've made up a minute and a half. There's Rodger's Corner."

Dan knew it, and exulted. They passed this station just at the foot of the last rise. The climb from here to the summit of the range was a stiff bit of work.

The time-card called for thirty miles an hour on this grade, and the camelback had a good start. Lowther seemed confident that Dan knew what he was about.

He remained in the gangway for most of the ascent, and the steam rose well in the cylinders.

Could they bring the Minie Ball into the Junction on time? That was the query that made Dan's heart beat more vigorously.

Suppose he, merely a theoretical engineer, could do this—and suppose Alonzo Pebble heard of it!

Some day Dan was determined to apply again for the job he desired. This run would tell for him when that hour came round.

Only three minutes or so late at the foot of the grade, and the old engine steaming famously up the rise! The long, well-balanced descent to Fallon River promised to help him make up the lost time.

And yet, remembering his ride on the Afternoon Flier down that same descent, Dan was worried. Suppose the bridge draw should be open again!

If a steamboat was going through, the train might be held long enough to be reported late at Massail. He found he was growing nervous over this thought, and it took some effort to hold himself down to steady work.

The summit of the rise was reached at last, and the Minie Ball, gaining speed with every revolution of the wheels, shot through the pass in the range. Before him lay the gently falling ground to the distant river.

The steam was comparatively high, and Lowther was a good stoker. For the first time Dan "let her out" to the last notch.

In half a minute the old engineer came running along the bridge at his back. He said nothing, but watched Dan closely.

The engine began to sway with a rhythmical motion which exhilarated the amateur driver. He was delighted with the feeling of power which possessed him.

"By George, you're doin' well!" Lowther shouted encouragingly in his ear, and ran back to the gangway.

Silvered by the glare of the headlight, the rails gleamed before them, stretching away and away into the gloom of the valley.

When the firebox door was opened, a glare shot up from the smokestack into the lowering clouds.

Far, far below, the lights along the river and those at the bridge began to glimmer like low-hung stars. Dan strained his eyes up and down the darkly outlined stream to catch a glimpse of any possible steamboat approaching the railroad bridge.

Lowther came over to him again.

The old man's face was working pitifully.

"I—I'm afraid poor Little will die on my hands," he stammered, and Dan, turning in his seat, read these words on his lips rather than heard them.

"He's in a terrible way. His breathing is shaking him to pieces," shouted the engineer.

"Shall we stop at the river? Is there a doctor there?"

"God knows! It's not much of a place. There's a good hospital and good doctors at the Junction."

"And that's but five miles farther," Dan observed, turning to his work.

"But if we're held up by a boat down here ——"

"Gad!" exclaimed the signalman. "There's one coming!"

He had caught sight of a moving light upon the upper reach of the river. It was surely a boat approaching the bridge.

This woke Lowther up.

"We've got to get there first; it's our right of way!" he shouted.

"Think we can do it?"

"We've got to. Mebbe Little's life depends upon it. Let her go, Crompton!"

He disappeared, and in a few seconds the whistle began to shriek for a clear way at the bridge.

It all lay with the temper of the bridge-tender.

Down toward the black river thundered the heavy train. His former run on this grade did not trouble Dan now. He was too much interested in the present one.

He knew that the old camel-back was making phenomenal time. At a rough estimate, they were traveling seventy miles an hour, and on the A. & C. branch that was something to remember.

Out of the darkness ahead, shooting up the hill toward them in the glare of their own headlight, was the semaphore bearing the signal arm which called for "brakes." They were still some distance from the bridge, however, and Dan was in a mood to take chances.

No red signal had yet appeared at the top of the pole, closing the bridge to train traffic, but the lights of the steamboat were drawing closer, and Dan feared every second to see the warning lantern rise.

Again and again the shrill shriek of the engine whistle deafened him. They plunged down into the valley with no diminution of speed.

Suddenly the forward wheels struck the first switch in the yard before the bridge entrance. Dan bounded into the air from the force of the contact, and for a breath he believed the engine had jumped the track.

Nevertheless, he did not apply the brakes, as an amateur might have been expected to do, nor did he reverse the engine.

To do these things would have sent the train sliding on locked wheels, ruining their flanges and necessitating sending the old camel-back to the repair-shop to have her tires planed down.

He reduced speed slowly, although every rod he expected the train to leave the rails, and he was shaken about in the cab like a loose pea in a dice-box.

It probably did not have so serious an effect upon the passengers behind; yet they must have suffered considerable of a shake-up.

With a shriek and a roar, the train plunged upon the bridge, traveling still at a speed much above that considered safe. The structure trembled under the tramp of the wheels.

They shot across it and tore on into the night beyond. Before the last car had whipped off the bridge Dan was "letting her out" again.

Lowther came over to his side once more. He was still pale, but he looked at the signalman admiringly.

"By George, you're a wonder!" he yelled. "I thought you'd have us in the ditch back there, but you've made up those four and a half minutes."

Dan nodded, his eyes still to the front. He was proud of his achievement, but there were still four miles to run into Massail.

The lights of the town soon sparkled on the plain before him. It was with keen satisfaction that he brought the train into the yard.

For an amateur—merely a theoretical engineer—his run had been phenomenal, and he knew it. Dan believed that the story of the incident would put him 'way up in Pebble's estimation.

He pulled over his lever carefully, gave her the air with shrewdness, and finally brought the panting engine to a stop under the shed just as the hand of the big clock pointed to the minute scheduled for the train's arrival.

Lowther himself could have brought her in no better than that.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE BAGGAGE CAR.

THE first man Lowther saw hustled away to telephone for an ambulance, and in two minutes there was a crowd of railroad employees around to hear about the accident. Dan felt quite done up himself, and climbed down quickly so as not to be observed in the cab by any high official.

Little was lifted out and laid upon a temporary stretcher, and a wiper ran the camel-back out of the station. Another engine took the Minie Ball on from Massail to Arkane, and there was a twelve-minute wait.

Lowther stuck by his mate. He was

going to the hospital with the injured man, he said. But he did not forget to introduce Dan to some of the other men on the train.

Hendricks, the express messenger, said he'd make a place for the block signalman.

"I'll stow you away somewhere, all right," he assured Dan, as the ambulance surgeon and his assistant brought in the hospital stretcher and the police cleared the crowd away from the street exit.

Lowther stepped back for a moment to whisper in Dan's ear:

"Don't say much about this business, Mr. Crompton. The conductor and I will fix up the report."

"What do you mean?" asked the surprised Dan.

"Why, if it gets known that you brought in the train, I'm up on the carpet—and so is Felix Bennett, probably. For letting you ride in the cab without a permit, you know."

"All—all right," grunted Dan.

But he saw his hope of the run's redounding to his credit melting away like dew before a particularly hot sun. He was out of it.

But of course, as he was under obligations to Lowther and Bennett, he could not do or say anything to get them into trouble. He had the satisfaction of knowing he had done a good thing—"all in the day's work," as it might be—and it would have to end right there.

Hendricks had heard enough of the story to know of Dan's part, however, and he mentioned it to the conductor when that individual came in after their start from Massail.

"He's a white man, and I reckon we can stand for him during the run, eh?" laughed the express company's employee.

The conductor agreed, and Dan found himself much more comfortably situated in the baggage car than he had been in the cab of the camel-back. This branch of the service was not altogether lacking in interest for him, either.

Hendricks acted as baggage-master as well as express agent. One end of the car was fenced off as an office and had a big safe in it sealed with the express company's seals.

There were not many trunks in the car, but considerable space was taken up with express matter. The train which followed the Minie Ball carried most of the surplus baggage.

The car immediately ahead was a United States mail car. The one behind was a Pullman smoker. The conductor, therefore, when he had made his first round after leaving Massail, made his headquarters in the baggage car.

The fact that Dan had taken Lowther's place and brought the Minie Ball into Massail Junction made a very favorable impression upon all the employees who heard of the feat, and he received considerable attention.

Every man in the crew of the Minie Ball felt some responsibility regarding the run. They watched the mile posts and stations, and timed the train only a degree less anxiously than the train despatcher or Alonzo Pebble himself.

The accident to the fireman of the camel-back might have caused an expensive delay had not Dan been on hand to help the engineer. Now, thanks to the signalman, the train had been pulled out of the Junction exactly on the minute.

The distance from the Junction to Arkane was the lesser half of the journey, but it was the more difficult, as the grades were sharper and the windings of the road more erratic. As Hendricks, the express agent, said, there were places where the men in the cab could pretty nearly shake hands with the rear brakeman, the curves were so sharp.

"Lucky you didn't have your experience on this part of the run," he said. "You'd have had us off the track for fair. When we came down that grade at Fallon River I thought we were bound to leave the rails. I knew John had a good bit to make up, but that was a reckless run."

"There was a steamboat coming. I didn't propose to let 'em tie us up," Dan grunted.

The conductor laughed. "You're the fellow who had that adventure with the Afternoon Flier on that grade, aren't you? When you were dropped into the river as the engine jumped the bridge, I mean?"

Dan admitted the corn.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Hendricks, "you come near being burned up then, and I hear you've just been through a forest fire the other side of the range. That so?"

"And weren't you in the wreck of the Fly-by-Night near Coldspring?" pursued the conductor.

Dan held up his hands.

"Don't! Don't!" he begged. "I plead guilty of being the worst kind of a Jonah."

"Jonah! Huh!" grunted Hendricks. "You're more of a salamander. Fire don't seem to have any more effect on you than it does on an asbestos jacket."

A commercial man, who had followed the conductor in from the smoker, and who evidently possessed an abundant strain of curiosity, drew the facts regarding the run over from Coldspring from Hendricks and the conductor. He seemed at once to gain an enormous admiration for Dan Crompton.

Finding that none of the railroad men would sample the contents of his private flask, he presented his cigar-case and then withdrew.

"Never can tell when one of those fellows is an inspector," growled Hendricks when the drummer was gone.

"Not on this road," the conductor declared. "Old Alonzo doesn't do business that way."

"It's a funny railroad that doesn't have detectives," said the express messenger, who had not long been running on the A. & C. branch.

"They've got detectives, but not spies," the conductor declared.

Dan was about to light up, but Hendricks reached over quickly and snuffed out his match.

"Don't do that here, sonny," he said. "It's against the rules."

The conductor laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Hendricks has a doubt about that fellow yet."

"No," returned the express messenger, "it isn't that. But one never knows what's in these bundles"—and he nodded at the express matter piled on the floor of the car. "Better go back into the smoker, Mr. Crompton."

Dan took his advice.

As he entered the car in question, he was startled by the first face he saw—that of a man facing him near the forward door. Lying comfortably back in his seat, smoking a big corncob pipe, was Captain Payne Howard himself!

The old man saw him, and his wrinkled face flushed darkly. He sat up straight, and looked Dan steadily in the eye as the latter came along the aisle.

It was a sudden idea that took possession of Dan's mind. At first glance he had no intention of speaking to the old man unless he spoke first.

He remembered how the latter had passed him with scarcely a word upon the street after his trouble with Jase and Ike at John Stabel's hotel. Dan was not a man to force himself upon another, even when circumstances seemed to put that other under obligations to him.

The most prejudiced person would have said that Crompton had some claim upon the captain and his daughter. The night in the fire-swept forest was not a time to be easily forgotten.

But the scowl on Captain Payne's brow deepened and his hard old eyes expressed nothing but dislike as Dan approached. Somehow this look cut Dan deeply, and he halted directly before the old man.

"Good-evening, sir," he said, returning the captain's gaze with steadiness.

"Evenin'!"

"You evidently do not feel friendly towards me, Captain Howard," the younger man said in a low voice. "Will you tell me why?"

"Jeffers pelters!" snarled the other wrathfully. "Hev I gotter speak ter ev'ry yaller purp that wags his tail at me on the street?"

The utter brutality and unreasonableness of the remark called nothing but a smile to Dan's countenance. He would not have opened the conversation had he not been able to stand anything the old fellow might say, knowing his temper as he did.

"I seem to be off your good books entirely, captain," was his comment. "But I hope you will allow me to ask after the health of your daughter, won't you?"

The old man half rose in his seat, and Dan expected to see him froth at the mouth with rage.

"Yeou imperdent raskil!" he yelled in a tone which disturbed everybody in the car and drew the attention of all the passengers. "I'll hev ye know that the Howards stick tergether—th' good's well as th' bad!

"Don't ye dare speak ter my daughter—nor don't you speak to me! Yeou railroad people air all cut off th' same piece o' goods. I wish all yer old trains would run off th' track an' go ter pot—that I do!"

"You'd be rather badly off if this one should, eh?" laughed Dan, and went on to a vacant seat in the rear.

As he lit his cigar, the man behind him leaned over his shoulder.

"Guess the old captain's pretty hot under the collar," this individual said, chuckling. "The papers say he hasn't a leg to stand on in his suit against the railroad company—and he's carried the case to the highest court, too. He's got to appear again to-morrow, and he's like a bear with a sore head. I reckon he's made his daughter's life miserable in the car behind before he came in here."

This was said curiously, and Dan felt that he was expected to respond; but he failed to satisfy the other's inquisitiveness.

"I never just understood what the trouble was between the captain and the company," the signalman observed as a means of turning the conversation to a less personal channel.

"Why, Captain Payne owned a big farm there on the outskirts of Coldspring, before the place began to be built up much. When the branch was laid out they condemned a part of this farm. That wouldn't have troubled the old man much, for he got his price—and more—for the land.

"But they run a bill through afterward to widen the roadbed, just there at the block tower numbered seven, and it took in an old burial ground. Fact is, the signal tower is built right where folks was buried."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Dan, with aroused curiosity.

"Yep. And that made the old captain sore. His father was buried there and his wife. He had to move the bodies, and he's stiff-necked and ugly about it. He considers it a desecration of their graves."

"But he seems to hate everybody working for the railroad, as well as the corporation itself."

"That's right. If Captain Payne has a grudge against a man, he hates everybody and everything connected with him, down to the last hair on the tail of that man's dog. He's a good hater."

But Dan knew that there was something besides his being employed by the A. & C. road that made Captain Payne hate him.

The old fellow certainly sided with his disreputable relatives in the quarrel which had risen between them and Dan.

"And he's stepped in between me and Miss Howard, too," thought Dan gloomily. "I don't believe she would have been so heartless if it were not for her father's influence."

Captain Payne's verbal attack upon him caused so much comment that Dan went back into the baggage car as soon as he had finished his cigar. The train was just slowing down for Bryanton, the only stop between Massail Junction and the terminus of the branch.

Hendricks had looked over his books and was sorting out the express matter and several pieces of baggage billed to this station. The conductor had gone back into one of the other cars.

When the train stopped and Hendricks opened the door, Dan made himself of use in handling the various packages. These were quickly out upon the platform, and then the truck piled with goods for Arkane was run up beside the wide door.

"Hurry up, there—shove 'em in!" cried Hendricks to the Bryanton agent.

The train stopped but four minutes, and there was not a moment to spare. He seized the book handed up to him and began to check off the packages as they were lifted in.

"The John E. Abbott Co.—marked glass; yes, I got that. Handle that carefully, Mr. Crompton. Like enough it isn't glass at all, but then, again, it might be.

"What's that—Dickerson & Smitch? Oh! Schmidt! Well, why don't you

write it so? Who are they? That the bundle?"

Dan shoved along the one in question with his foot. The man outside picked up a package which he handed in gingerly enough.

"Take care o' that, Hendricks. It's marked 'fireworks,'" he said.

"All right." The messenger put it at one side, away from the other goods. "What's that?"

"That" was a box nearly three feet square, which was the last on the truck. The Bryanton man looked it over.

"Hanged if I know!" he ejaculated. "May be cotton batting—patent medicine—rattlesnakes. It don't say"—and he poised the box before tossing it into the far corner of the car.

"Be careful there. It may be breakable," said Hendricks. "What's the address?"

"Sloan & Co. If it's glass, it's not on us if it—smashes!"

He heaved the box as he spoke, like a man putting a heavy shot. It sailed through the air and—then something happened.

(To be continued.)

THE MOMENT OF MOMENTS.

BY ALBERT JULIAN HENDLEY.

The wonderful invention that delivered a lover out of a dilemma via the telephone.

THE card bore this inscription:

H. WESTFIELD SMYTHE.
Inventor.

To be disturbed at your office is provoking enough, but when poor, unrecognized geniuses track you to your apartments to pester you with diagrams of a world-revolutionizing invention, you are justified in imparting a different tint to the atmosphere.

Satisfying myself with a preliminary soliloquy, I turned like an angry bull to the unoffending Carroll.

"Tell Mr. H. Westfield Smythe, Carroll, that I'm a lawyer—a lawyer. There is a patent attorney in the Crandall Building, down-town."

With the relaxation not unlike that immediately following the dismissal of a book-agent, I again settled comfortably in my Morris chair, and, with my meerschaum, resumed musing.

That I was in love I would not refute. The fact had been calmly accepted for the last two months. My conscience, however, forced me to admit that I was a coward.

A man thirty-three years of age who knows when he is in love (he is capable to decide at that age) and who has not the nerve to ask a woman to marry him is a coward.

I loved Marian Miller, and had reason to believe that she had a more than casual interest in me. But I had not the nerve to ask her to become my wife.

I had been engaged, when interrupted, in the rather suitable task of composing a suitable declaration which I intended to submit upon the occasion of my visit the following night.

The next evening, as I sat rehearsing mentally my proposal, and planning how I should lead to the vital question, my thoughts were diverted from a contemplation of the sublime by the disgustingly earthly ring at my apartment door.

The next moment I was gazing at a neat card, introducing

H. WESTFIELD SMYTHE.
Inventor.

"Did you inform H. Westfield Smythe, Carroll, that inventions held no interest, pecuniary or otherwise, for me, and that Howard & Wilkins, first floor, Crandall Building, would gladly advise him?"

"I did, sir. He insists that it is you he wishes to see, sir."

"Carroll, tell this individual I refuse to see him. That is final, tell him —final."

I was thoroughly angered by the at-

tentions of this persistent sharper, and when I departed for my fiancée-elect's home I was in no Dan Cupid mood.

Consequently, either on account of my ill-humor, or, perhaps, my bashfulness, I could recognize neither the proper opening for my avowal nor any evidences of the necessary susceptibility on my lady's part.

The following night I was ensconced in one of those blissful reveries given only to the lover when Carroll thrust the now familiar card before my eyes.

I resolved upon immediate action.

"Tell H. Westfield Smythe, inventor, to enter, Carroll. I will be prepared to meet him."

Snatching an andiron from the grate, I awaited my prey.

An affable, well-built gentleman, fashionably attired, appeared, and after disposing of gloves and cane he adjusted his eye-glasses and I was submitted to a critical inspection.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Warren Walker, of Walker & Brown, attorneys at law?"

Surprised and dumfounded, I could only stammer:

"I am Mr. Walker, sir. You will please pardon my informality, Mr.—er—Smythe; but the fact is I thought you were one of those confounded—er—inventors sulking after me for legal counsel about some—er—impossible invention."

"Your impressions are partly correct, sir. I am an inventor, and many think my invention an impossibility. I am confident, however, that I have finally met a sane person who will assist me.

"My purpose in calling, sir, is to interest you in a project which, if properly and comprehensibly considered, will revolutionize the human race and net fame and fortune to its promoters. Before I begin my disclosure I wish to inquire if you are—pardon the apparent irrelevancy of the question—I wish to inquire, sir, if you are—er—in love?"

The abruptness of the interrogation staggered me. An inventor, soliciting my aid in propagating an invention capable of revolutionizing the human race, asking if I was in love!

Was I dealing with a fakir or a lunatic?

"What bearing, Mr. Smythe, has that on the success or failure of your invention?"

"May I have your reply, my dear sir? Believe me, your confidence is not misplaced. I only wished to ascertain that fact before proceeding."

Partly convinced by this reply, I answered:

"Curiously enough, Mr. Smythe, I had decided to ask a certain young lady to marry me last evening, but whether owing to bashfulness or—er—other causes, I did not declare myself."

"Thank you. I now consider the conditions favorable under such circumstances."

The situation was far from pleasant. So inconsistent were his utterances that one moment I assured myself that I was dealing with an intelligent caller, while the next I doubted his sanity.

"Mr. Smythe," I inquired, "will you kindly enlighten me as to the nature of the invention for which you prophesy so prosperous a future?"

"It is needless," he answered, looking critically at me—"it is needless to impress upon you that our conversation is to be considered essentially confidential?"

"Pray assure yourself on that point," I said.

Reaching into an inner pocket, my visitor extracted what appeared to be an ordinary scarlet jewelry case. Touching a spring, he revealed to my expectant gaze a minute instrument embedded in silk.

Removing it from the case, he submitted it to my inspection. It was simply constructed. In a circular disk of dull gold about an inch in diameter a coil of glass tubing lay like a tiny spring. Separating the glass from the gold was another dull metal of a silvery luster which apparently was aluminum.

The tubing was hardly more than an eighth of an inch in thickness and was pierced within by an opening as thin as a hair. The center of the coil was a bulb approximately a quarter of an inch in diameter. This was filled with a thick, red liquid.

In answer to my puzzled look, my visitor explained:

"This instrument, which I have

called the P. M. Gage, might have easily been named a psychometer. It has the heretofore adjudged impossible function of measuring the ideas of the mind. On the same principle that we know the mind by direct intuition in consciousness, so can this instrument graduate the mental emotions of a person toward whom your thoughts are directed. The moment this red fluid reaches this mark on the tubing"—and he designated a faint scratch across the outer coil of glass—"you may know that the time is at hand when the mind of your subject is susceptible to a force which, when exerted on the opposite mind, will produce a sensation of like intensity, resulting in a mental harmony, as it were, of the two parties affected.

"In other words, sir"—his voice rang out strangely in the stillness of the night—"this instrument is in fact a psychological moment gage."

So earnest and convincing was his explanation, so assured was he of his claims, that the faint shadow of doubt which first crossed my mind fled as he uttered the concluding words.

"What!" I cried, astounded beyond reason. "Do you claim that this instrument will reveal to its owner what is known as the psychological moment—that is, the knowledge of the instant best suited for any occasion?"

"You have the correct idea, sir. The P. M. Gage will identify the heretofore unrecognizable psychological moment."

"It will?" I repeated mechanically, as one who, doubting, desires to be convinced.

"It not only will, but has."

I was pacing the floor, attempting vainly to comprehend the magnitude of the thing.

His last words transfixed me. I looked at him incredulously.

"Yes, sir," he continued. "You will probably recollect that I called twice before obtaining this interview?"

"This is the third time," I replied.

"And you will, if you will please, recall that on each occasion your mind was engrossed on one subject."

I understood. Yes, on each occasion my mind was wrapped in one theme—Marian—when to propose. But why had the instrument designated such a time as best suited for him to call?

The answer was simplicity itself. A bashful man, head over heels in love, anxious to know the secret of an unreadable soul, would undoubtedly be the very person who would lend any assistance conceivable to learn such precious news.

With this gage I could hope to propose at the moment my sweetheart would be in the most favorable mood to accept me.

I collected my wits. I would demand further proof. Again, as if he read my mind, he began:

"You wish conclusive evidence?"

He thought for a moment.

"Are you expecting any particular event to happen to-night?" he asked.

"No. Only a 'phone message from Marian—that is, from a particular acquaintance—some time this evening."

"Excellent!" he cried. "It is now eleven. The young lady will probably telephone soon. Come to the 'phone."

I crossed to my desk and seated myself near the telephone. He placed the P. M. Gage before me.

"Watch for the psychological moment," he whispered.

We remained quiet. My mind reverted to Marian.

She had attended the theater with one of my numerous rivals and had promised to call me on her return that night.

I waited—five, ten, fifteen minutes, watching the coil of glass. Suddenly the red liquid in the bulb began to palpitate. It rose, turn by turn, until at the instant it reached the mark on the glass I removed the receiver, and shouted:

"Hello!"

And in the voice I knew so well, the voice I loved, came softly back:

"Hello! Is that you, Warren?"

"Yes, Marian," I gasped.

Ye gods! I had removed the receiver at the moment Central had connected us. The Central office had not yet had time to ring me. With difficulty I suppressed my excitement.

"I did not enjoy myself at all this evening," she was saying. "Wilson Taylor was an awful bore. Warren, I really wished you had been with us."

Joy surged through my veins.

"I'm flattered," I replied, apparently unperturbed.

"Warren, I have been thinking of you all evening. What was the matter last night? You were unusually sullen and ill at ease for some reason. Are you troubled over anything? I do hope you are in a better humor to-night?"

"I am, Marian. I was worried over something."

I looked at the coil of glass before me. The liquid palpitated strangely. "I intended telling you something very important last night," I continued.

"Tell me instantly, Warren, before you forget it."

I gave one frantic glance at the P. M. Gage. The red liquid had reached the mark. With desperation, I almost shouted:

"I wished to tell you that I—to ask you, Marian—to—to—marry me—dear. Will you?"

I cursed myself for my idiotic stammering. I shook like a man with the ague. My head swam, and I grew weak at the knees. Into the black depths of the transmitter I stared as if trying to read my answer there.

Now! Now was the test. Would she never speak? I could almost hear her heart beating over the 'phone. A moment more, and then:

"Ye-es, dear. But, Warren, what a strange time to ask! We will talk it over to-morrow. Good-night, dear."

"Good-night."

I heard her replace the receiver nervously. It was wonderful, incredulous. I was oblivious to everything but Marian and the marvelous piece of metal before me.

I was hypnotized by the magic fluid in the coils. Again it palpitated wildly. Up, up to the mark again!

I turned suddenly to find my visitor, wild-eyed and murderous, rushing savagely toward me. In an instant he had me by the throat. We fought, rolled and cursed on the carpet. Chair, table, and lamp crashed to the floor.

With one wild, random, vicious swing of my arm, I knocked my assailant senseless.

Carroll rushed in upon us.

"Call the police, Carroll. My caller has suddenly gone daft."

In a few minutes the police arrived.

"Ah, as I expected. Are you badly injured, sir? This man is a lunatic. He is considered harmless, however, and allowed his freedom."

I collapsed on a divan. The victim of a wild imagination!

"Mr. Smythe was once a famous inventor. He lost his mind in an attempt to solve the impossible problem of the non-refillable bottle, and this is his latest fad. Come with me," he said to the poor creature as he slowly regained consciousness. "There is a gentleman at your home who wishes to talk about putting your gage on the market."

"All right," he answered weakly, and they led him out.

"Carroll, a glass of brandy quickly."

I drank deeply. I suddenly remembered the gage. It lay in fragments on the disordered rugs.

I picked up the gold case. The coils had been smashed, but, great luck, the bulb with a few drops of its strange fluid remained.

I hastily drew on my coat while Carroll brought my hat. Seizing the bulb, I rushed out into the night.

Recalling the location of a neighboring chemist, I was overjoyed to find him there engaged in testing.

"Analyze this, please," I said, placing the bulb in his hands.

The chemist glanced at the piece of glass, and then turned to me.

"Analyze what?" he muttered.

I gazed at the glass bulb.

It was empty.

RELATIONSHIP.

"No, no," she cried; "'twill never do—
I'll be your sister, Harry,"
Said I: "Just make it cousins, Sue,
For cousins sometimes marry."

Frank Roe Batchelder.

A MONTH IN MASQUERADE.*

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN.

The cue from Fate that was handed out to a man down on his luck, why he felt compelled to act on it, and the risk he ran in the process.

CHAPTER XVI.

DUNCAN MAKES A RESOLVE.

THERE was something rather warm in the region of Duncan's forehead and about his head.

The sensation annoyed him extremely, and after a time he decided to open his eyes; and with something of an effort he accomplished the feat.

Over him, as he lay in bed, a youngish man, rather obviously of the medical profession, was leaning. He gave a little grunt of satisfaction as Duncan's startled glance confronted him.

"Lie still!"

The command was sharp, and Duncan obeyed and stared at his companion.

Plainly, he had been injured in the smash-up of the cab and the automobile. Where was he now? The place looked rather too homelike for a hospital, and the bed lacked the severity of the institution.

His body ached and his head ached and throbbed; his limbs felt stiff and painful. The ex-architect sighed, as details returned to his clearing brain. This time, he feared, Chambers had accomplished his end.

"Am I—going to die?" he asked.

"Hardly that." The physician smiled brightly and reassuringly.

"Am I badly injured, then?"

"That I cannot say positively to-night, my dear sir. As a matter of fact, I believe you have had a marvelous escape. There are no broken bones, and no particular indication of trouble anywhere else. You appear simply to have had your senses knocked out in the accident."

"And I may get up?"

"In a day or two, perhaps. Not now. You have sustained a tremendous shock to-night, and we won't take chances."

Duncan moved his head—and groaned.

"Tell me about it, doctor."

"Not to-night."

"But I want to know!" Duncan cried irritably. "What became of that cursed automobile? Where am I now? Was my driver killed?"

His voice rose sharply, and the physician hurriedly seated himself beside the bed.

"I don't want you to worry about it, my dear man. Your driver wasn't killed, although he has gone to the hospital to wait for several bones to mend. As for the machine, it managed to get clear before the crowd collected, and nobody seems to be able to furnish a very definite description of it, beyond the fact that it was big and black and operated by a man well muffled in furs. At all events, he made away at top speed and there is no particular clue to him as yet."

"And now I am——"

"At the house of a patient of mine—a Mrs. Havers."

"A Mrs. Havers!" gasped Duncan.

He managed to twist his head and look about. He had seen the room but once or twice before, yet he knew it now. It was the unused bedroom on the lower floor of Louise's home!

"Her daughter ran out of the house at the sound of the crash, and when it was seen that you were apparently badly injured, she hurried you in here—even before the police arrived—and sent for me. A splendid girl, sir!"

"Yes," Duncan agreed thickly.

"Not one in a thousand would have

This story began in the October issue of THE ARGOSY. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.

acted so promptly. Quiet and immediate attention were what you needed, and before the crowd had caught its breath, she had ordered two of the men to carry you in, and I was on the way."

Many thoughts were running through Duncan's brain. Had she disclosed his identity during the excitement? Had the police been able to search his pockets and find the "Henry Alvin" cards and a dozen or so letters and papers bearing the name?

"For the sake of the International" was becoming almost an instinct with Duncan, and he saw in a flash what the news might mean.

"My—clothes?" he said haltingly.

"Don't worry about them," laughed the doctor. "I've hung them in that closet, and nothing has been touched. The police, I understand, wish to search them for some means of identification, unless, of course, you were obliging enough to come around as you have. Now you'll be able to give them a statement yourself in the morning."

"Yes." Duncan breathed a great sigh of relief. Apparently his incognito was still safe.

"By the way," the physician said with a little smile, "you don't mind telling me your name?"

"Do you mind remaining in ignorance?"

"Not at all, if you will feel any easier, but——"

"I shall feel decidely easier if I remain unknown," sighed Duncan. "Thank you."

Somewhere above, a clock struck the hour of eleven. He had been a long time in oblivion. He was very tired and rather comfortable now. He stared at the ceiling and wondered what would come next.

"I'm going to give you a couple of tablets now," the medical man was saying, "and I'll leave three or four more in case you are not asleep within the hour."

"And—doctor!"

"Well?"

"Do you mind leaving orders that I must not be disturbed to-morrow—by the authorities or the reporters or any one else?" said the injured man. "I want to rest."

"Since there seems to be no particular necessity for disturbing you, I had contemplated just that. You don't know the machine which ran you down, or the owner?"

"No!" Duncan lied flatly, and wondered why he did it.

"Then I think we shall leave you in perfect quiet until day after to-morrow, at least. Afterward, if all is well, you may get up and take matters into your own hands."

He gathered his bottles and his bandages, and after a last examination of the patient, which appeared satisfactory, he said good-night and walked softly out of the room.

Duncan closed his eyes to ease his aching head and drowsed for a time. He was roused by the faintest rustle of garments across the room, and he realized that the light was going down.

He looked up sharply, and a little cry of joy escaped him.

"Louise!"

"Well?"

Duncan held out a pleading hand.

"Come here—please!"

The girl took a chair across the room.

"I prefer to remain here, John." She faced him placidly. "Don't talk too much, please. The doctor says that you will be up in a day or two if you don't excite yourself."

Duncan smiled despairingly. That clear mind had accepted the diagnosis and was free even from any anxiety which a doubt as to the seriousness of his injury might have aroused and converted into a little friendliness.

"If you could understand, Louise, you would forgive me!"

"It is not necessary, for I have nothing to forgive—and I believe that I understand perfectly, John. We will not discuss that, please."

"But, my dear child——"

"Good-night."

She had risen and was about to lower the light again.

"Don't go!" Duncan cried. "If you will not hear me, at least tell me about the accident."

"That was what brought me here, John. There are one or two things which you may be glad to know. I think that you are perfectly safe."

"In what way?"

"No one, I believe, has an inkling of your identity—the true one or the other! I was standing at the window when the crash came, and I saw it quite clearly. When the side broke from the cab and you were thrown on the walk, I almost recognized you, for your hat had fallen off, and I ran out as quickly as I could."

"And did you care particularly, Louise?" the man asked sadly.

"When I made sure that it was you, it flashed over me what it might mean, perhaps. I had you carried in here and sent for the doctor—and since then you have been under lock and key. I didn't know just what to do, but I managed to keep out the police and the newspapermen, John."

"Good!"

"Everything seems to have worked for you, too," the girl continued thoughtfully. "Rheumatism has kept mother up-stairs for several days, and she will be there for several more. She cannot see you, therefore, and I told her only that a man had been hurt and that I had him brought in here."

"And you did all that for my sake!"

"Not at all," Louise replied, with some crispness. "I did it because it seemed to be implied by the promise I once made to keep your secret, John. I wish sincerely that it had never been given. Even beyond what I have told you, the maid is a new one and cannot recognize you. I believe that you are safe enough, unless you wish to tell—whatever your name may be to-night."

"Louise, I don't know how to thank you."

"By getting well, John!" slipped from the girl. An instant later she blushed hotly, and Duncan's heart beat fast.

"Child, you do care!" he cried. "You——"

"I am going now. Is there anything you wish? There is fresh water on the stand, and the doctor told me to leave the tablets beside you here, if you did not sleep."

"There is nothing I wish but——"

"Good-night!"

The words struck Duncan's own too incisively to permit the ending of his sentence. Louise lowered the light to a tiny flame and immediately left the room.

The doctor's sedative was effective enough. Not many minutes later, Duncan felt himself sinking into a delicious doze, and he knew that he was on the road to slumber. But the train of thought which the medicine had drugged to a standstill was waiting only for morning light to continue to its end.

The little clock in the sunshine across the room informed Duncan that his nap had extended past ten o'clock.

He shook himself and was rejoiced to feel that his abused body was returning to the normal. His head ached somewhat and one side was stiff and bruised, but even without expert knowledge, he felt that he had not been badly hurt.

Presently the physician's head appeared in the doorway and the medical man walked in.

"Pretty comfortable?"

"I'm doing nicely, thank you."

"All things considered, I should say that you were. No particular pain anywhere?"

"No."

"You'll do! To-morrow night you may get up and leave, my friend. Miss Havers, the young lady who saved you from an ambulance, tells me that she'll look after you."

"Yes."

"And see that you thank her fittingly. She's one of the best—the very best and sweetest girl that ever lived!"

The young physician smiled almost sentimentally, and Duncan scowled blackly at his departing back. Could that idiot tell him anything about Louise and her good qualities, and had he any business enlarging on them with that sickly smirk?

But Duncan smoothed his brow as the maid entered with his breakfast, and settled to a hearty meal.

Afterward he disposed himself comfortably and fixed his attention upon a particularly amiable appearing plaster Cupid on the cornice. Duncan was settling down to a long, long analysis of himself and his troubles, in the heavenly quiet of that back bedroom, with only an occasional distant voice or the laugh

of a child in one of the rear yards to disturb him.

He was himself, and living, as most of the human kind must do, for himself. Just what had he done, and what had been his reward?

First of all, he had shouldered the burden of the International, which was not his burden. Next, he had managed to wreck Louise's happiness and his own. He had succeeded in deluding Beatrice Morrison into an engagement which he had no intention of continuing and the breaking of which would cause both sorrow and shame for her.

Passing on to more recent events, he had laid himself open to a dynamiting which had almost been successful. He had almost sacrificed Beatrice's young life to the general wretched scheme. He had been run down by Chambers and missed death again by the narrowest possible margin. What would come next?

And what on earth was he doing it all for? For the sake of the International and the sake of this invisible Henry Alvin, who did not care enough or who had not brains enough to appreciate all the trouble he was making and all that he was losing by remaining absent? Or was the fellow dead?

However that might be or whatever his present whereabouts mattered little enough now. There is a limit to every obligation, and inasmuch as no obligation had even existed in his case, Duncan felt that he had done his full duty by Henry Alvin.

Half way through the afternoon, a sound of voices came from the corridor. Duncan recognized the tones of Morley, and settled back and closed his eyes.

The secretary entered ahead of the protesting maid, and before the door had fairly latched again he was on his knees beside the bed.

"Alvin! Alvin! My God!"

"Eh?" Duncan opened his eyes sleepily.

"You were the man, then!"

"What man?"

"The one whom the black automobile hit last night! I suspected dimly that you might have been, when I read the little notice in the papers this morning and you did not appear. And then, Barrington's men lost track of you, too! How—why—did you shake them off?"

"I wanted a little walk, Morley."

"But think, man! Think what you were risking—and what has happened now!"

"Chambers made kindling wood of the poor old cab, fast enough!"

"It was Chambers?" gasped Morley.

"Yes."

"Alvin, how badly are you hurt?"

"I don't know." Duncan smiled. "I believe that I am not going to die, although if I'm excited, it may turn into something or other with a long name."

"You mean——"

"I mean that, according to the doctor, if I am shaken up to-day, the infernal old International may never see me again. Morley, I am sleepy and I need the rest!" said the injured man, rather pointedly.

Morley rose to his feet, frowning in perplexity.

"Are you all right here, Henry? Sha'n't I see whether you can be removed to your own rooms? Hadn't I better send your man or, better still, a trained nurse?"

"I'm very comfortable just as I am," Duncan yawned ostentatiously. "I don't want any one. All I need is rest and quiet."

The secretary scratched his head.

"I'll go, then, Henry, although—gad! I believe that I should stay here myself and take care of you! I'll run in again to-night."

"Don't. I'm going to be asleep."

"In the morning, then?"

Duncan rolled over to his side with a sleepy grunt.

"Umum—all right."

Morley laid a hand on his forehead; Duncan did not stir. The secretary arranged the covers and patted his shoulder—and left on tiptoe.

When he had departed, Duncan chuckled and stretched out to continue his meditations.

Dinner-time came, and when the maid appeared Duncan asked for Louise. Miss Havers, it appeared, would not see the injured man unless he grew worse. The maid was rather apologetic in delivering the message, but Miss Havers' orders had been quite emphatic.

Duncan sighed and returned once more to his thoughts.

Just past eight he reached the end of his problem. He had the answer!

Were he to continue the rôle of Henry Alvin, his life must remain in danger from the moment he left the house; the life of Beatrice Morrison must remain in danger as well; Louise Havers must continue to believe him the poorest kind of cad.

These things were present and certain; Morley's world-panic and the smashing of the International were of the future, and would have to take care of themselves.

Duncan sat up suddenly. Be the result what it might, he had come to the end of his masquerade! If all creation flew into bits, he would return to the character of John Duncan—and at once!

Within a very few seconds his plan of action became quite clear.

He would go at once to Beatrice and confess the truth. In the morning he would call together the heads of the International and tell his little story. He would give them all the proof they wished of his identity—and walk out of the office free!

Henry Alvin, the world could be informed, had left unexpectedly for Europe once more!

And the sooner the thing was settled, the better. Duncan listened; then rose and dressed quickly. He found his hat, somewhat battered, and slipped into his overcoat. He extinguished the light and peered into the corridor.

No one was about; the soft tones of a piano somewhere above told him that Louise was not likely to encounter him.

He hurried down the corridor and slipped noiselessly out into the street!

A quick trip to the Exmoor, and he found that the butler had been located and was under surveillance. He left again and was whirled away to the Morrison home.

Luckily, the place was deserted. The man disappeared for a moment and came back wearing a curious smile. Miss Morrison was in the library and would see him there.

Duncan braced himself for the interview and entered. He foresaw only too clearly the fond greeting that was awaiting him, and he thanked heaven that this would be the last time it could occur.

Yet he was disappointed! Beatrice stood across the apartment and made no move to meet him. Duncan caught her expression and stopped in astonishment. The girl's eyes snapped as they rested on him and her lips were compressed in a scornful smile.

"Beatrice——" Duncan began.

"You wretched, contemptible impostor!" Miss Morrison said slowly.

CHAPTER XVII.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE REAL ALVIN.

For the moment Duncan was too utterly startled to speak.

He had come to declare his true identity, but here was the girl confronting him with the fact before he had made it known.

"I—I——" he stammered.

"Please don't attempt to deny it," continued his inquisitor.

"I am denying nothing. I——"

"What is your name—your true name?"

"Duncan!" cried the man, with sudden joy at the sound. "It is John Duncan, and——"

The girl nodded and threw back her head with a hard little laugh, which grated upon Duncan's nerves.

"And so, Mr. Duncan, because of a remarkable resemblance, you planned it all out—and took the place of Henry Alvin for your own ends!"

"I took it, yes! But not because——"

"Oh, there have been times—many times—when I have wondered at the change in you!" Beatrice hurried on, a little incoherently. "There have been little things that were so different from the Henry Alvin I knew, but—how could I ever have suspected the truth! It is three years and more since he went away, and——" she broke off into another line, and her voice rose. "And you asked me to marry you! Afterward, I suppose I should have learned the truth and——"

"Miss Morrison!" Duncan cried.

"You cur!"

The words came in a deep voice, from the doorway. Duncan started back and stared in the direction.

Before the sound had died away, the curtains were torn apart, and a man was rushing at him, panting and furious.

His hair was black and his beard as well. His expression was almost Duncan's own, yet the man was a little older and more careworn, and his skin was hard and brown as wind and weather could make it.

Yet even in the instant of his leap across the room, Duncan knew the truth: Henry Alvin had returned!

His impersonator was allowed little time for thought. Unmindful of the place or of Beatrice's presence, the real Alvin was coming down upon him like a madman. Duncan raised his hands instinctively, but they were dashed aside.

Iron fingers clutched his throat and he stumbled backward. The two men crashed to the floor, and Alvin shook the prostrate one and choked and snarled at him.

Beatrice's scream seemed to bring him to his senses. His grip did not relax, but his fury seemed to pass.

"Why don't I kill you?" he gasped. "Why don't I choke your wretched life out, here and now?"

"Henry! Henry dear!"

Alvin laughed bitterly.

"Don't be frightened, Bee. I'm not going to do it, much as he deserves it." He regained his feet. "I'm done with scraps, and there's a law that will deal with the hound!"

Duncan, too, rose slowly, half dazed from the suddenness of the shock. He looked Alvin over for an instant, and he felt no particular anger against him for the attack; there were few men, he reflected, who would not have done the same—or worse.

They were wonderfully alike, with the difference that Alvin had aged somewhat since his disappearance, to judge from the photograph, and that he bore the marks of a hard outdoor life.

And now he was back, and Duncan would place the burden where it belonged and leave!

"Alvin," he said slowly, "if you knew the circumstances, you'd realize that you are rather unkind to choke me after what I've suffered for you!"

"For me!"

"When you have heard the story——"

"It's not necessary to repeat it. I understand altogether too well now. In some manner you discovered that we looked alike and that I was out of the way. What you were, I don't know; but you saw the chance to enter an easy berth—and you had the incredible assurance to risk it!"

"It was not altogether my doing. I——"

"Of course not! You were dragged into it!" sneered Alvin. "But you stayed where you were, nevertheless. You took my place in the International—and over there in England I laughed at that when I had recovered from the first shock of reading that I had reappeared. What you were doing there I didn't care particularly, and it was something of a joke to think that you had fooled the crowd. But when I read of your engagement—ah!" His fists clenched again and his face went purple. "Damn you! I'd have killed you if I'd had you!"

He bit his mustache savagely, and Duncan waited for his anger to pass.

"But you brought me back!" Alvin laughed. "You brought me back post haste, although I was almost ready to come!" He glared at Duncan. "How dared you do it? Ah, well—I'm here now, and you'll pay well for your fun. Come along!"

"Where?"

"To find an officer. You're going up, my friend. I'd rather thrash you to a jelly, but——"

"Henry!"

"I beg your pardon, Beatrice. Come!"

Duncan did not move. Alvin waited a moment—and in waiting took to staring at his double. His astonishment at the audacity returned and he muttered again:

"How dared you risk it! Why, at most when my uncle returns from France——"

"Your uncle will not return from France."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because he is not there."

Alvin looked curiously at him.

"He is in France, I believe."

"He is dead!"

"What!" The man's eyes opened in horror. "You're mistaken! He——"

"He died in an ambulance, while on his way to the hospital."

"When?" gasped Alvin.

"About four months ago."

"How——"

"How do I know it? I was at his side!" said Duncan. "He was searching for you. A band of thugs attacked him and fractured his skull."

Alvin dropped into a chair.

"Searching for me—and they killed him! Poor old Uncle Jim. I——"

He covered his face, and for a moment his broad shoulders shook. Beatrice sat silent, horrified at the news. Duncan waited until the other looked up.

"Man, how was it kept secret?"

"That I will explain if you allow me —and several more things, Alvin. I'll tell you why I took your place, and what you owe to me. I'll tell you what I've borne in worry and unhappiness!"

The sincerity of his tone seemed to have softened Alvin. He looked curiously at Duncan.

"You got nothing more than you deserved."

"That you shall judge. I couldn't have had much more to endure, barring actual death!"

"Eh?"

"I've been dynamited for you, Alvin!"

"Eh?"

"I have been smashed by an automobile, too. Miss Morrison here received a dose of poison two days ago on my account—and a few more little things of the sort have happened since I took your place. I've been harassed almost into an asylum because I allowed myself to be pushed into your place. I've saved the International Iron Company from disintegration, I understand, and I have saved your own immense fortune as well. I have spent the most unhappy month a man could know and live through, and I have shattered the happiness of the best girl on earth—for your sake, my friend, and——"

Alvin's face blackened again, as he glanced toward Beatrice.

"I was not referring to Miss Morrison," said Duncan dryly. "Before stepping into your shoes, I hoped to marry—another lady. The much advertised Morrison-Alvin engagement was for the sake of the International. The self-contempt which it has caused me has been the hardest thing of all to bear!"

There was silence in the room for a little space.

Both Beatrice and Alvin were gazing thoughtfully at Duncan, and both seemed more kindly disposed toward him. The man rose suddenly and walked across to the architect.

"You said that your name was Duncan?"

"Yes."

"Then, Duncan, queer as it may seem, here's my hand. I believe that you're a decent sort!"

"Thank you."

"And now tell us the whole story."

Duncan drew up his chair.

"And afterward," he said, half aloud, "I'll hand you the job of being yourself —and it will be the happiest night of my life!"

He began at the very start.

He recounted the adventure of the fight and the night ride in the ambulance. He told about the picture and the seven thousand dollars, and the mission which poor Fraim had been unable to communicate.

Passing on, he told about Morley's recognition of himself and of his entry into International affairs; of the trouble with Chambers and of his own personal trouble as well.

Beatrice interrupted.

"Mr. Duncan," she said softly, "did that poor girl love you?"

"Well"—Duncan blushed—"I hope so."

"And still you could ask me to marry you, even though you had no intention of doing such a thing?"

"Morley informed me that it was the only way to save the company and avert a panic—and there seemed nowhere else for me to turn. I had taken up the burden, and I couldn't shift it just then, you see."

"And this Miss Havers. You tried to explain to her?"

"She wouldn't listen."

Beatrice dimpled suddenly.

"I suppose not. Please go on."

Duncan continued to the end, omitting nothing. Alvin listened, with a comment or a question only occasionally.

"You've been through a lot, Duncan!" he observed at the end.

"But now, thank heaven, it's over with, and you'll shoulder your own troubles, Alvin."

"And you have saved me a great deal—all that uncle left, although I've never laid much store by money."

"You're more than welcome to the care and responsibility of it." Duncan shuddered a little.

Beatrice had a question or two to ask. Curiously, they seemed to deal mainly with Louise Havers.

She rose finally and left the room.

Alvin leaned back in his chair.

"I suppose you're wondering what sort of idiot I must have been?"

"There have been times when I wished that you had behaved differently in the past," Duncan confessed somewhat dryly.

"I was a wild young one, and it didn't wear off as I grew up. Poor Uncle Jim wanted to work me into the International as a boy, and have me ready to take his place when he wished to retire. It wasn't exactly what I hoped for. I wanted excitement and freedom—and I managed to find them in one way or another."

Duncan nodded.

"We had a good many disagreements, and each one seemed a little worse than the last. We quarreled about this and that and the other thing, but he never gave up hope of me, poor old man! He settled gambling debts for me and did more than most fathers would have done, and I repaid it by causing his death!"

"Not quite that."

"As exactly as if I had dealt him the fatal blow!" Alvin said bitterly. "Well, the last row came three years ago. I must have been insane, for it's the truth. I did steal the money from Broadfield. He'll get it back now, and as much more as he'll take, but there's no eradicating the fact that, if only once, I dropped to actual theft.

"After I realized it, and what a downright disgrace I was to Uncle Jim and to Beatrice and every one else who tried to keep me straight, I left to do the job myself and either turn into a man or disappear for good and all.

"I went to England, and from there to South Africa, and—I did well enough in the way of money. But best of all, I learned to be a man. Why the devil couldn't I have done it five years ago!"

He sighed and shook his head.

"Well, I'd made my pile and found out how to behave, and I started home to bring the glad news to Beatrice and uncle and take whatever place in the company he wished me to fill.

"In London—I was obliged to remain in England several weeks to dispose of some land I'd acquired down there—I read that I had returned to act in my uncle's place in the International. It was a staggerer, I can tell you, and for a little while I couldn't determine whether it was merely some press work of Morley's or whether some one was really impersonating me. At all events, I resolved to turn up suddenly in the flesh and give them a bit of a start.

"Then came the cabled news of my engagement to Beatrice! I had meant to sail to-day, but I caught the first boat and rushed here. The papers said that the marriage would occur at an early date, and all the way over I've been praying not to land and find that it was too late.

"But it's all right now! I got here this afternoon, and I have been with Beatrice ever since. To-morrow morning we'll go to the International offices and give old Morley and Barrington and the rest such a surprise as they've never suspected could exist!"

"And I'll go back to my architecture in peace!" added Duncan, with a long, delicious yawn.

"You were poor, weren't you?"

"As poor as a church mouse, and I'm thoroughly satisfied to be again."

"Then you're destined to be dissatisfied!" said Alvin flatly. "For I can assure you that you never will be while I have a dollar left!"

There was a rustle, and Beatrice stepped in, cloaked for the street.

"Mr. Duncan," she said, "what was Miss Havers' address?"

Duncan told her, and added:

"Why?"

"Because my motor has come around, and I'm going to see her! There are some things a woman can do rather better than a man, and this is one of them!"

Duncan stared frankly.

"And when I have seen her," Miss Morrison said as she disappeared, "I'm going to bring her back here with me!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF THE PLAY.

THE morning sunshine sparkled on the polished top of Duncan's big, flat desk at the International offices. Duncan himself sat calmly sorting over some documents.

Steps came rapidly down the corridor, and the door opened unceremoniously. Morley hurried in.

"Ah, so you're here!"

"It seems so."

"By George, you look better this morning!"

"I feel somewhat better, thank you!" said Duncan, and his smile had a ray of happy relief which Morley had never seen before.

"What time did you get down?"

"Oh, half an hour ago."

"Aha, I thought that confounded boy at the door was crazy! He swore that you landed here even before the clerks this morning, went straight to your office, and hadn't been out since. Then he corrected himself and said that you must have been out, for you came in again a little while ago."

"Yes?" Duncan smiled slightly.

"It's time Jennings put some one else at that door, anyway. Well, how's the injured man?"

"Chambers didn't kill me that time!"

"Thank the Lord! I called at the Exmoor last night, but you were away. The man said you'd returned, though, and it was a mighty relief! Then I called you up on the 'phone after midnight, but you were not back yet!"

"No, I—I was out until early this morning."

"Morrison's?"

"Yes."

"How is Beatrice?"

"She seems to be all right again."

"Phew! That's lucky. It was a narrow escape for her, poor girl!"

"Too narrow altogether."

"If we could only afford the row, what an end we could make of Chambers! However, the thing isn't likely to happen again. I talked it over with Barrington, and one of the detectives has the post of butler in the Morrison household now!"

Duncan smiled mysteriously.

"Perhaps we can make an end of Chambers without any particular row."

"Eh? How?"

"Oh, I have several ideas."

"What are they?"

Duncan glanced at his watch.

"Oh, Morley, would you mind finding Barrington and Downs and asking them to come here for a little while?"

"Eh? No. I'll send for them."

"Go yourself."

Morley seemed rather astonished, but he rose slowly.

"Is it anything particular, Alvin?"

"Only something rather puzzling. You come back with them, Morley."

The secretary of the International left the room, and his step retreated down the hall.

Not many minutes later he returned, and with him the two men for whom Duncan had asked.

The trio entered and found chairs, and Morley was the first to speak.

"Hello, Alvin!"

"What is it?"

"What the deuce have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing."

"But what has happened to you in the last five minutes?"

Morley frowned and stared hard.

"Why, what seems to have happened?" The man at the desk smiled broadly.

"Well, hang it, there's nothing wrong with my eyes, is there? How were you dressed five minutes ago?"

"Just as I am now, Morley."

"I'll—I'll swear that you were not! You had on a gray suit then, and now you're dressed in brown!"

"And he has gathered a fine crop of tan since he's been away!" Barrington contributed.

"That's right, too!" gasped Morley. "What on earth has struck you, Alvin? You're brown as a berry—and you were perfectly white when I left this office just now!"

"And he's three or four years older than he was day before yesterday," Downs put in.

The man at the desk smiled again.

"Gentlemen, you must be mistaken!"

"I'm not!" Morley was rubbing his forehead in an apparent effort to clear his vision. "Alvin, you've changed in a dozen particulars since I went out of here!"

"I'm quite sure that I haven't."

"And I am equally sure that you have! You look like another person altogether!"

The three men were on their feet now and staring in perplexity at the man behind the desk.

After a moment or two Barrington walked quickly over and peered closely at him.

"Gentlemen!" he cried excitedly.

"What is it?" Morley, too, ran forward.

"There is a scar here over that eye, and I'll guarantee that it isn't six months' old!"

"Why, Alvin has no scar!"

"Lock that door!" Barrington hurried on. "Don't let him out! There's something very queer here!"

Downs was at his side now. Barrington turned to him and Morley.

"This man is not Henry Alvin!" he said breathlessly.

The man at the desk rose, smiling still.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I assure you that I *am* Henry Alvin!"

"You're not!" Morley cried. "It's—it's altogether past understanding, but I see it now, too, Barrington! It is not Alvin!"

"I am the only Henry Alvin!"

For a few moments the trio stared silently at him. Then all three cried aloud in speechless amazement.

For from one of the little offices of the suite, Duncan stepped quietly forward!

He walked straight to Alvin's side and stood there, smiling at the astounded trio.

"Mr. Morley, and the rest of you," he said softly. "You are all mistaken. Once upon a time I told you that my name was not Alvin but Duncan. You wouldn't believe me then. Now, perhaps Mr. Alvin himself may be able to convince you!"

Morley sat down heavily, and his jaw dropped. Downs clutched the desk and fairly glared at the double apparition before him—the man in gray and the man in brown. Barrington seemed petrified.

The secretary finally broke the silence.

"Gad! I—I—I believe it's the truth! One of them"—he moistened his lips—"one of them is Alvin, and it's the one in brown!"

"But the other—he looks——" Downs muttered uncertainly.

"He looks exactly as Alvin did when we last saw him, gentlemen!" said Barrington suddenly.

"That's it! That's it!"

"But now——"

"Now I am back and ready for business," said Alvin. "And"—a smile flashed across his lips—"but for Mr. Duncan, I should not be here now! Thank him, if you're glad to see me!"

A long hour of excited talk had passed.

Duncan rose from his chair and looked at the time.

"I spoke about getting rid of Chambers, Morley."

"What? Did you?" The secretary smiled in some bewilderment still.

"Perhaps I can accomplish it without further delay. Mr. Alvin will stay here with you. There is no need of Chambers knowing the true state of affairs." He turned to Alvin. "You don't mind my signing your name for a million or so just once more, do you?"

Alvin burst into laughter.

"No, I'll trust you, Duncan."

"Good."

He stepped into another office, and presently he emerged with a pair of rather frightened looking men.

"Mr. Brown, who sent me the infernal machine," he said with mock ceremony. "Also, Mr. Parker, the amateur poisoner. They are here by—well, by my invitation and on the understanding that under certain circumstances they may remain out of jail. We are going to call on Mr. Chambers together!"

He bowed and led the way out.

Barrington, Downs, and Morley, nearly agape again, stared after him, and the secretary muttered:

"Well, I don't know what he's up to, Alvin, but this astral body of yours, or whatever it is, seems like a pretty resourceful chap himself! The way he took hold here!"

"He's too good a man to lose," said Alvin gravely. "He's going to stay with this company, gentlemen!"

"Well, I was going to suggest that myself," Barrington agreed.

They knew, within a half-hour, precisely what Duncan was "up to."

The unmasked masquerader walked lightly into the office, holding a bundle of papers, which he dropped to the desk carelessly.

"Well?" Morley asked eagerly.

"There is a boat sailing from one of the big stores on the Brooklyn waterfront at five o'clock for Australia," said Duncan.

"What of it?"

"Mr. Chambers feels that a long trip may benefit him. He's going to take that boat—and perhaps he'll settle out there, if he likes the country!"

"What?"

"And since there is a strong possibility of his never returning to America, he thought best to close his connection with the International on the spot. I offered him an even million dollars for his holdings, and while they're worth a little more, he very quickly saw his way to accepting!"

"You mean to say that we're rid of him?" shouted Morley.

"I think so, and without any row. The world may rest easy so far as concerns the internal peace of the company!"

"Duncan, you're a wonder! By thunder, you're a wonder!"

Three hands grasped his own and shook it enthusiastically.

"But how did you manage to make him cave in so quickly?"

"Well, I took his two accomplices and I called in Mr. Gray, of our law department. Then I gave Chambers the option of selling out and quitting or of going to jail on the spot. There wasn't much argument with Brown and Parker sitting there, you know. Gray just made out the necessary papers, and I made out the check—and Chambers left."

"And you bought him out for——"

"Not at all. Alvin did, as you'll see by the papers here."

Duncan dropped into a chair and fairly grinned in his happiness at the rest.

"And now my job is done!" he cried joyfully.

Smooth-shaven again and togged in cap and long coat, Duncan leaned on the rail of the steamer and smoked thoughtfully as the last sign of land faded away astern.

At his side, Mrs. John Duncan watched the water. Presently she looked up and spoke.

"Wasn't she perfectly sweet?"

"She? Who?"

"Beatrice, of course!"

"Oh, yes. Nice girl. But——"

"The papers said that it was the prettiest double wedding that ever took place in New York!" said Louise, rather irrelevantly.

"It was a very pleasant little affair!" Duncan laughed. "Good Lord, if the general public knew the inside history of that double wedding!"

"It is rather lucky that they don't."

Duncan dropped his cigar, and watched it bob for a moment, as it was swept rapidly astern.

"It was downright lucky from one end to the other! I'm alive, which is one piece of sheer luck. I seem to be worth ten thousand a year to the International, even without the beard, which is better still. And I've got you, which is best of all!"

His bride smiled softly at him and came a little closer; and the elderly passenger reclining in the deck-chair behind them grunted and returned to his book.

"Think of it!" Duncan murmured. "Six months ago I was living almost on air! Now we're married and I'm at the head of all the International's building affairs, not to mention what they seem to expect of me in the executive end! Here we are, sailing for Europe for a year's jaunt among the iron people and a chance for me to study all the points of the different works. And when we come

back, I'm to buckle down to the job of building the biggest iron and steel plant the world has ever known!"

"We are very fortunate indeed, dear."

"We're all of that, Louise, although there have been times when it seemed as if happiness was not for us. Well, I had my month in masquerade, as a result of taking my cue from Fate. But——"

He broke off and shook his head.

"But hereafter I hope that Fate will keep her cues for some one else!"

THE END.

AN UNABUSED MONOPOLIST.

BY WILLIAM H. HAMBY.

Why one man loved to lend money to those who had no credit, and what he made out of the business.

"THAT is the richest man in Carthage," said my friend.

I looked with an indifferent glance at the man pointed out. I have found the richest man almost as numerous as the oldest inhabitant, and not more interesting.

"Very peculiar," remarked my friend as if to arouse my curiosity. But my interest was too languid to prompt a question.

"Has an absolute monopoly in his line," continued the friend.

"Yes," I said idly; "they all have."

"Follows a business never heard of before," continued the friend.

"What?" I asked, my interest at last aroused.

"Lending money to people who never pay their debts," replied my friend.

This was interesting indeed, and I began to ask questions.

"No," said my friend, "he is not bothered by too many applicants, for it is known that he never lends a cent to a man who asks him.

"He actually hunts for the right, or rather the wrong, kind. He never lends to a man whose credit is good for a dollar's worth of flour or a roast of meat. He never lends to a man who owes less than five hundred dollars. He never takes any security, he only charges six per cent, and has not sued a man for twenty years."

That certainly was a man worth knowing. Here was something new under the sun. When urged for more information my friend suggested I had better talk with him myself.

After a very cordial greeting we took chairs in the library facing each other, the richest man in Carthage and I.

"Your friend was speaking of you yesterday," he said with a frank smile. "And I am glad you came."

A light of almost boyish interest and enthusiasm in his eye gave me a very pleasant sensation.

"It is about this strange business of yours," I rejoined. "I wanted to know about it."

"All right," he said, "ask what you will."

There was neither egotism nor reticence in his tone.

"It is really true that you lend money to people who have no credit?"

"Yes," he said.

"Without any security?"

"Only their notes."

"Do they ever pay it?"

"Certainly," and he laughed heartily.

"How do you manage to collect?"

"Just wait for them to come around and settle," he replied in a matter-of-fact way.

"They don't apply to you for the money?" I asked.

"No, not if they get any. I always apply to them."

"How do you manage it?"

"Well, I begin with the commercial reports. When I find a man's credit bad I begin to get interested. I make further inquiries, and if I find his credit hopeless, I visit his town. If the banks, the merchants, and the town in general tell me he is not good for any debt, I then consider him eligible for a loan."

"And you get your money?" I asked in astonishment.

"In twenty years I have lost less than two per cent. Pretty good average, isn't it?"

"Splendid," I said, "but why in thunder don't you explain? Don't you see I am completely befuddled?"

He laughed lightly. Then his face changed to kindly seriousness.

"Perhaps if I tell you of my first loan you will understand.

"I inherited thirty thousand when a youngster of twenty-six, and to celebrate my thankfulness decided to use one thousand of it in helping some poor devil who was down on his luck.

"Well, sir, you know I hunted over a month before I found my man. I was anxious to get the biggest possible dividends of happiness out of that thousand. I walked the streets at night, I visited the tenements, the hospitals, even the jails. I found plenty of fellows down on their luck; plenty of fellows who would have fallen on my neck and wept with gratitude for the thousand, but they did not fill the bill. Came nearly giving it to Jenkins, but discovered he gambled. I knew it would last him about three nights, and then he would be down on the same old luck.

"I felt moved to help Drake, but Drake loved the flowing bowl, and I could see thirty tipplers around the bar hilariously helping Drake break that thousand. So I passed Drake.

"I found my man by accident, and it was in a justice court. A young fellow about my own age was being sued for a suit of clothes. He made no defense. Acknowledged the bill, and took advantage of the creditor's law.

"There were some good lines in that fellow's face in spite of his hang-dog look and hopeless eyes.

"I made some inquiries and found the fellow owed nearly everybody, and none of them could get a cent out of him. He never was known to pay a debt, they all declared.

"That evening I went out to his house—a little two-room shack near the edge of town. When I knocked, there was a hesitancy inside which betokened long and painful acquaintance with the wiles of bill collectors.

"At last the door opened a few inches and a woman's face, thin, pale and stained with tears, appeared in the opening.

"'May I come in?' I said. 'I have some important news for Mr. Harter.' I knew he was there, for I heard his voice.

"The door was opened reluctantly and I entered a bare little room—rag-carpet, broken heating stove, and a smoking lamp on a rickety table.

"The man sat by the stove with his chin in his hands.

"I tried conversation, but the fellow was sullen and defiant. The wife sat by the table trying to sew, but from her nervousness, I knew she still suspected me of being a bill collector in disguise.

"I could see she was well bred, but poverty and worry had lined her once pretty face.

"'Mr. Harter,' I began, 'I have a little money I want to put out at interest, and I thought maybe you would use some of it.'

"'Oh, the shack's already mortgaged for all it is worth,' he said bitterly.

"'But I don't want any mortgage,' I replied; 'your note will be sufficient.'

"'Good Lord, man,' he exclaimed, sitting up straight, 'are you crazy?'

"'No, I think not,' I smiled.

"'Do you know whom you are talking to?'

"'Certainly,' I answered.

"'Why, great heavens, man, my credit is not good for a pound of coffee.'

"'It is with me,' I said.

"'I owe everybody within fifty miles who would trust me for anything. I owe for flour and meat, and clothes and medicine, and the Lord only knows what all.'

"'That is all right,' I told him. 'Take your pencil and figure how much you owe.'

"The wife took the pencil and paper, her hands trembling now from wonder and excitement. Harter named the items over.

"There was a long list. It took an hour to remember all of them, and they totaled seven hundred and sixty-three dollars.

"'Now,' said I, 'suppose I lend you enough money to pay all these debts and

a little to start on, and then arrange payments so you can pay them out of your work—whatever you do.'"

The richest man in Carthage turned away and wiped his eyes.

"I can't help it," he said, smiling apologetically. "I never recall the look of hope which passed between that man and wife without having to use my handkerchief.

"'Good Lord!' said Harter, getting up and pacing the floor, 'you are not fooling, are you, man?'

"I convinced them I was in earnest. He walked the floor for some minutes, swallowing hard.

"'I got into debt while out of work four years ago,' he explained, 'and then when I got work they attached my wages and I lost my job. Ever since then, as fast as I get a job my debts ruin my reputation and make me lose it. We have been hounded by debt until we were nearly ready to quit.

"'But now——' He got no further, but came over and gripped my hand and cried as one does when the danger is past.

"Well, sir, I lent him the thousand dollars. He was to have his life insured in my favor, and pay me ten dollars a month with six per cent.

"You can imagine how quickly public sentiment changed in his favor when he went around and paid all his debts. In less than a week he had a good job, and he never missed a payment on those notes.

"He is president of the First National Bank now.

"So that is the way I started. I reinvested that thousand in another poor fellow, and that did so much good I added more to the capital, and in a little while I quit everything else.

"But my money has doubled up faster than I can find openings for it. I'm just starting my son in the business"—with a proud fatherly smile.

"He is certainly going to be a great success at it. Why, he found ten last week that I had overlooked."

THE MAN AND THE BOMB.

BY LEE BERTRAND.

An adventure in an English railway carriage which is not the same old thing after all.

THE elevated train, packed to the doors with its load of human freight, went rattling on its way to Harlem. The unfortunates, who by virtue of the little red tickets deposited in the chopper's box were entitled to the classification of passengers, but who, by compressed packing and general treatment from uniformed employees of the company came better under the classification of "cattle," hung desperately to straps, grinning cheerfully and accepting the conditions as one of the unavoidable evils of metropolitan travel.

Not so, however, two men of the stockbroker class standing well forward in the first car.

"Say, this overcrowding is getting to be a perfect disgrace to this city," remarked one. "Something ought to be done to stop it. I have been thinking that the European system of railways is very much better than ours, any way. The little compartments in European trains are never overcrowded, and if one travels when the rush hours are over he has the comfort of enjoying absolute privacy in a compartment all to himself."

To the speaker's surprise, the other man suddenly became very excited at these words, clenched his fist, and exclaimed hoarsely:

"Not at all, sir; not at all. When you say that the English system of railway cars, or carriages as we call them over there, is to be compared with the American style of car, you utter a falsehood, sir, a base falsehood."

After a minute he recovered his composure with some effort and apologized for the outburst.

"I must beg pardon for displaying such apparently unseemly violence," he said, "but every time I hear an English railway car even mentioned I feel as if I should go crazy. To hear you, sir,

praise the system was more than my flesh and blood could stand.

"You see this gray hair upon my unfortunate head? Perhaps you take me for an old man. I am not; I have not yet reached my fortieth year. This gray hair and these lines of care on my face are both due to that confounded system of railroad cars you have just been extolling.

"Can you wonder then if I am so vehement and bitter in my expressions of opinion? Perhaps, if you have time, you will step off at the next station and do me the honor of accompanying me to a near-by hotel, where we can secure a cozy corner, and I will tell you my harrowing story."

Consumed with curiosity to learn the history of this extraordinary man, the person addressed signified his willingness, and the two were soon seated comfortably at a little table bearing some refreshment. The man with the story forthwith unburdened himself as follows:

"As you know, I am an Englishman, born and bred in the old country. Ten years ago I was engaged to marry the prettiest girl and one of the wealthiest in all England. On the very day of our wedding occurred the horrible event I am going to narrate.

"My fiancée lived in Auburn, a little town in the southern part of England, and in the little church there we were to be made one. I was a stockbroker by profession, and as luck would have it there came a small sized panic on the very day preceding that which I had selected to corner the matrimonial market.

"It was a case of staying on in London or losing every cent I possessed. The wedding ceremony was not to take place until noon, and after close calculation I discovered that it would be possible, by catching the fast trains, to transact my business and be back in Auburn in good time.

"Well, I was able to arrange my affairs all right, and I reached the railway station just in time to catch the express.

"As I bounded into a second-class carriage I found that the only occupant of the compartment beside myself was a rough-looking man with gray hair and a long, shaggy beard. I did not pay much attention to him at first, but busied myself with my newspaper in the seat opposite.

"After we had been traveling about twenty minutes my attention was attracted to my fellow-passenger by a subdued chuckle which evidently came from him. Curious as to what could be amusing him so greatly, I glanced in his direction and saw that he was turning round and round in his hands a little square package with an outer wrapping of brown paper.

"Every now and again the curious old man would put one side of the package to his ear, and he chuckled all the more as he evidently listened to some sound emanating from its interior. He was a wild-looking object, this old fellow, I discovered when I investigated him closely.

"His long, gray hair, like his beard, was shaggy and unkempt. His black eyes were piercing, with an almost unearthly brightness; his clothing was loose and ill-fitting. He noticed that I was watching him, and smiled across at me with a smile so devoid of humor that it struck a cold chill within me.

"'Listen,' he said in a harsh, rasping voice. 'Do you hear it?'

"'Hear what?' asked I.

"'Hear the clicking of the clockwork inside? It is timed to go off very soon, very soon. Then there will be a whirring of wheels and a sudden explosion, and this train will be blown into fragments.'

"I gazed at him in alarm. 'You must be joking,' I said.

"'Joking! There is very little of a joke about this pretty package, I fancy. Chock full of dynamite it is. There is enough power here to convert St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey into ruins. You won't think that I'm joking a little while from now. At least,' he corrected himself with a cruel chuckle that sent another chill through me, 'you won't be thinking at all, then, I take it.'

"'But why do you seek to do this thing?' I said. 'What have I done to you, old man? So far as I know, I have never met you before.'

"'It isn't you I have any grievance

against. It is against this railroad company. I am only acting under orders, and the grand council has ordered me to blow up this train. It is unfortunate for you, young man, that you happened to choose it. Still, we are all in the hands of the fates, and must accept our destinies as they are handed out to us.'

"'And does that horrible thing there really contain dynamite?' I gasped.

"'Dynamite and about as ingenious a clockwork contrivance as man ever devised,' chuckled the wild-looking wretch. 'Hear it ticking?'

"He placed the package to my ear, and I could plainly hear the 'tick, tick, tick' which came from the interior.

"'But you yourself will be blown up also,' I cried suddenly, and the suggestion gave me a ray of hope, for I thought that after all the fellow must be joking when he spoke of the contents of this infernal package and was at the same time himself in as tight a position as was I.

"His next act, as unexpected as it was horrifying, caused my worst fears to return.

"'I'll be blown up myself, too, will I?' he croaked with another of his horrible chuckles. 'Don't you believe that, young man. I know a trick worth two of that.'

"In an instant, before I could prevent him, or even divine what he was going to do, he had rushed to the door, flung it wide open, and jumped into space.

"We were flying through green country at a speed of fifty miles an hour, and I closed my eyes as I saw his body dashed to the ground.

"I gave vent to a cry of horror, but my voice was drowned in the roar of the train and the puffing of the engine.

"Then I remembered the check string which runs through every English railway carriage, and which when pulled stops the train and summons the guard.

"I seized the cord and tugged at it frantically. There was no response. The string was out of order. I was alone in the car with that terrible package, which was liable to explode at any minute and blow me into kingdom come.

"I gazed at the thing in terror. It was ticking now twice as loudly as before. Something evidently was happening inside.

"I shuddered to think what that increased ticking might portend. There was not a doubt that the thing was a genuine infernal machine, for had not that wretch who placed it there given his own life by springing from the train, because he preferred taking that slim chance to the certain death of being blown up when the explosion came?

"For a second I thought of imitating him, and seeking safety by jumping. I glanced out of the window. The train was running along at a terrific rate of speed, and I did not possess courage enough to take that awful leap. No, no! I would stay where I was and face the worst.

"And then the thought occurred to me, why not reverse the situation and throw the infernal package out of the window?

"There was a certainty of its exploding as soon as it reached the ground, but perhaps, considering the high rate of speed at which we were traveling, we should be able to escape the full force of the shock.

"On the other hand, however, the unfortunate wretch who had placed this package there had not said at what time the thing was to go off. There might be quite some while yet before the machinery set off the explosive, and in that case it would be an easy matter to get out at the next station and hand the package over to the authorities. The only argument against this was that our train was a through train—one that didn't stop at any station before Auburn.

"I would have to wait until we reached there before I could get rid of that package, which meant trusting myself to the mercy of that confounded thing for a good hour and more. If only that cursed check string had been in order! I tried it again, but there was no response.

"Again I yelled lustily out of the window, and again the roar of the train rendered my cries in vain.

"Oh, I tell you, that English system of railway compartment cars is a fine

institution! I would have given every cent I possessed in the world at that time to have been in an American car instead.

"Apprehensively I glanced across at the infernal machine on the seat opposite. It was making the most ghastly, blood-curdling noises now, and the top of the package was beginning to heave, like an animal breathing.

"A wild panic seized me.

"'It is going to explode!' I gasped. 'Now—this very minute! Help! Help! For God's sake, some one, help!'

"With tongue that clave to the roof of my mouth and body trembling with horror, I seized the package in both hands and bore it swiftly to the window. The cursed working of the clockwork inside made it quiver and pulsate in my hands like a thing of life. The noise that was coming from it was now almost deafening. There was a loud whirring, jarring, crashing medley of wheels that congealed the blood in my veins. There was no doubt in my mind that the thing was going off in a second, and after all, self-preservation was the first law of nature, for me as well as the rest of the universe.

"Only a man who has held a high explosive in his hands with a possibility of its going off at any minute and a horrible uncertainty as to the precise minute can appreciate the panic that comes over one on such an occasion. Get that thing out of the window I must, at all costs, and yet I trembled to change the uncertainty of its going off immediately for the certainty of its exploding as soon as it reached the ground.

"It would not need a time-set clockwork machine to explode that dynamite if I hurled it out of the window; the force of its collision as it struck the ground would be sufficient. I glanced out of the open window, and my heart sank. We were passing through a small town.

"There were buildings all around us, huddled closely together. Most of them were dwelling houses and stores, but there were some bigger buildings of imposing size.

"The streets were full of people and vehicles. We were passing over a sort of arch under which ran a busy thoroughfare, evidently the main one of the town.

"All this I noticed in one glance, and as luck would have it, it was just at this precise moment that I made up my mind the thing was going to explode right away.

"We had passed many lone, desolate stretches of country where the thing could have exploded without doing harm, but I had missed these opportunities, and now my ill-fortune demanded that I must throw the devilish machine just where it would create the most havoc.

"I raised the package above my head—the whirring of its infernal machinery as I did so is in my ears now—and with a wild cry I hurled it as far from the train as my strength would permit. There was a low, rumbling roar, a thick cloud of dust and smoke that got into my throat and eyes and almost choked me, darkness all around, and then I fell back on the floor of the car, unconscious.

"It must have been a good ten minutes before my senses returned to me, and I arose, white and trembling. The explosion evidently had not stopped the train, for we were going at full speed, and I was still alone in the compartment.

"Thank God that we were apparently unharmed, but what of the city at which I had hurled this instrument of desolation? How many innocent unfortunates had I killed by my effort to save myself?

"The horror of my deed came to me in all its ghastliness. With it came the disturbing thought that a jury of my peers, despite my provocation, might hold me guilty of murder for what I had done.

"I might tell my story, but the answer would probably be that it was my duty to hold on to that package and risk the chance of its exploding. How did I know that the machinery would have worked? There might have been a chance of the infernal thing failing to explode. The blame of its explosion was on me for changing a possibility for a certainty by hurling it from the car.

"Filled with these dismal recollections, my attention was attracted by the fact that the train was slowing down.

We had come to a halt outside a switchman's box. Suddenly I heard the switchman yell to some one on the train, evidently the guard, 'There has been a terrible explosion—many killed.' Before he could say more, the train suddenly started again, and was going once more at express speed. But I had heard enough.

"My worst fears were confirmed. I think that it must have been at this point that my hair turned gray. I was a murderer. Hanging probably awaited me as a result of my cowardly work.

"A murderer! And on my wedding-day, too! What should I do? Should I give myself up? These were the questions that I asked myself. And then came the temptation to protect myself at all costs.

"Nobody knew as yet who had thrown that bomb. It would take some time before it was discovered that the explosive had been hurled from the train. By the time the deed was traced to me I might be safely out of the country.

"I couldn't marry Janice now, anyway. It would be cruel to link her life with that of a murderer, with the gallows hanging over his head. Before we reached Auburn my mind was fully made up.

"In my pocket I had two tickets for passage on the American liner New York, which was to sail that very afternoon for America. It was to have been our honeymoon trip, for Janice had relatives in this country.

"Here was my great opportunity. I would convert the wedding trip into a flight from justice. I would use one of the tickets and fly to the United States, where I could remain in hiding till the danger of discovery was past. The train was bound for Southampton. When we reached Auburn, instead of alighting I kept my seat, and took out of my pocket the difference to pay the guard when he came for my ticket. At Southampton I hurried aboard the New York.

"Her steam was already up. She was to sail within an hour. As I reached the ship I fancied I heard the word explosion mentioned by some men on the dock, but I dared not interrogate them for fear of exciting suspicion. Just as the gangplank was being drawn up, two newsboys came running down to the dock, evidently with the intention of selling their papers aboard ship. They looked in dismay at the disappearing plank. Then, perhaps hoping to attract some customers to the rail, they put their little hands to their mouths and yelled lustily, 'Extra! Extra! Terrible explosion! Eighty killed! Many buildings in ruins! Extra! Extra! Terrible dynamite explosion!'

"Horrors! The news of my awful act was on the streets already, and the results were indeed as bad as my worst apprehension had pictured them.

"Eighty killed by my mad, selfish effort to save my own miserable carcass! I might have died a hero by allowing the infernal machine to explode in the protecting shelter of the car and saving these eighty innocent souls by sacrificing my own worthless life.

"Frantically I leaned over the rail and threw a shilling to the newsboys.

"'See if you can throw me up a paper,' I yelled, determined to see that hideous story at all costs.

"Both youngsters rolled one of their papers into a ball and each endeavored to throw the improvised missile up to me, but their hurling capacity was not equal to their good intentions, and the newspapers fell limply into the water.

"At the same instant the ship began to move, and the stretch of water between the vessel and the shore widened perceptibly. The newsboys stood there, grinning and waving their hands to me, with never a thought in their innocent little heads that the newspapers which they bore contained a story which stamped me as a murderer.

"All through that week's voyage I shunned my fellow-passengers. I could feel the brand of Cain upon my brow, and sensitively I shrank from my fellows. Eighty innocent souls were upon my conscience.

"The third day out I overheard two passengers talking about the one subject upon which my entire thoughts were concentrated.

"'It was a terrific explosion,' said one. 'Eighty people blown up suddenly, building torn to atoms. A terrible affair!'

"'And have they caught the man who threw the bomb?' asked the other.

"'No; but the police are looking for him with untiring energy. It was probably an Anarchist, and the police believe he will have by this time fled to some foreign country, and they are causing all ports to be watched. At first it was thought that the wretch himself had died in the explosion with the rest, but afterwards a few clock wheels, found in the ruins, caused the authorities to believe that the bomb was a time machine, set to explode at a definite hour. Rest assured they will get the fellow in the end and it will go hard with him.'

"I groaned aloud in my anguish. When the liner entered quarantine here a new terror seized me. A revenue cutter hailed us, and three men in blue uniforms climbed aboard our ship. At first I thought they were American policemen come to seize me, and it was with intense relief that I realized they were only custom officers making their usual official investigation. When we reached the pier and I had left the ship I gazed tremblingly around, fearing that every minute a restraining hand would be laid upon my shoulders; but I was to go free, unsuspected, evidently, as yet.

"I had shaved off my mustache and close-cropped my hair in an effort to secure a partial disguise.

"Well, sir, for two weeks I kept in hiding, and they were the most miserable two weeks I had ever spent in my life.

"And then I was seized with a desire to see an English newspaper and learn something about my crime. Was I as yet suspected? What had been said about my disappearance?

"I visited the Astor Library and eagerly looked over the file of the London *Times*. The latest paper on the file was of course a week old, and after carefully conning it I could find no reference to the explosion.

"I turned to the previous week, and my eye was immediately attracted to the heading of the second column on the front page of Saturday's issue.

"If I had been looking at an American newspaper, even with my short acquaintance with American methods, I should have expected to find a head strewn across the page in type several inches high, but such sensationalism was not to be expected of the *Times*.

"Nevertheless, small as was the type, it could not have filled me with greater horror if it had been the size of the page upon which it was printed.

"'Bomb Kills Many,' read the top line, followed by a sub-heading in smaller type, reading 'Eighty Killed—Many Buildings Destroyed by a Dynamite Bomb Placed in a Busy Town by an Anarchist.'

"Under this appalling heading was a full column telling of the havoc wrought and the efforts of the police to find the villain who had done the deed.

"Every word in that article sank like iron into my soul. It was not until I had read through the horrible details four times that my eyes suddenly caught the date line, which, as you know, precedes all out-of-town despatches.

"'Prague, Austria, September 15th,' the article was headed, and in a sudden burst of hope there came to me a realization of the fact that this was not my explosion at all.

"It was the account of an affair in an Austrian town. Perhaps, too, it was of this explosion that the passengers on the New York had been talking—perhaps, even, this was the explosion referred to by the newsboys on the Southampton pier, and even by the switchman whose voice I had heard yell out something about an explosion to some one on that cursed Auburn express.

"For a few minutes everything went dark before my eyes, and my soul was filled with wild joy. Perhaps I was not, after all, the wholesale murderer I had pictured myself.

"Half unconsciously I turned to another page of the *Times*. Suddenly my eye was attracted by another heading.

"'Strange Death of a Crank.'

"The article went on to tell how, the preceding day, a wild-eyed man had committed suicide by throwing himself headfirst from the Southampton express, while the train was going at full speed.

"The article mentioned the fact that

the dead man was Jerry Bunions, a local character who had for some time caused considerable trouble to the railroad companies.

"He was demented and invariably entertained the delusion that he was a desperate Anarchist with a mission to blow up fast expresses. It was a fad of his to wrap up an alarm clock and some bricks in a paper package and leave them in empty railroad cars, evidently with the pretense that the package was an infernal machine.

"On the same page with this interesting story was another article headed 'Strange Disappearance of a Bridegroom. Auburn Fashionable Wedding Party Dismissed by Flight of the Groom. Bride Marries Best Man.'

"And there I read an account of how I came direct from London and reached Auburn at 11.46, in time for the wedding, and had been seen by the railway guard at the station (to whom I was known) to remain in my seat and pay the difference in fare to Southampton.

"Telegraph inquiry to Southampton by the surprised bridal party had revealed the startling fact that I was fleeing to the United States alone, without leaving even a word of farewell to my cruelly deserted bride-to-be. The story ended with the comforting announcement of the fact that the bride had listened to the persuasion of her parents and consented to marry the best man, who had always been her ardent admirer and an unsuccessful candidate for her hand.

"'He is ten times as good as that scamp who has so deliberately deserted you,' the *Times* reported the irate father to have said.

"Well, that is my sad story, and under the circumstances, sir, I don't think that you can wonder to hear me inveigh so bitterly against those cursed English cars. It could never have happened on an American train."

"But, say," asked the other man suddenly, "I understood you to say that after you had thrown that package out of the train window there was a cloud of choking dust and a loud roar and darkness. How do you account for that result if the package merely contained bricks and an alarm clock?"

"Well, I have never been back to England to ascertain definitely," replied the other, smiling, "but I am inclined to believe that just after I threw that package the train must have entered one of those dark, frightful tunnels one encounters so frequently on English railroads. Darting into that tunnel would of course account for the roar, the dust cloud and the darkness. To one in my nervous condition such a combination would naturally appeal to the imagination in its worst aspect."

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

BY CHARLES CAREY.

The trying experience of a philanthropist, which taught him the necessity of going through a certain process before scattering his largess abroad.

UNCLE EDWARD, fresh as the morning in his spotless blue serge and immaculate linen, sat by the open window and read the Sunday paper with an air of virtuous content. Ralph fussed about the room, finding troubles at almost every stage of his dressing operations.

A collar button had led him a fruitless chase under half the furniture in the apartment; his shoe-lace had snapped off short at the third hole, and a reckless swipe of his razor had marked his cheek with a jagged, red scratch.

The "perversity of inanimate things," some philosopher has said, is largely due to the state of our own feelings, and it must be confessed that Ralph was not in a mood to meet these annoyances with any especial equanimity of spirit.

A dull headache over one eye reminded him that chop-suey and shark-fin soup rest not easy upon an unaccustomed stomach, and that the inhalation

of stale fumes of opium is not conducive to healthy repose.

Uncle Edward, as an incident of his nephew's visit to New York, had proposed the evening before a trip through Chinatown, and they had accordingly explored that unique section of the city, top, side, and bottom.

Not only had they inspected the joss house, theater, and the resorts familiar to the ordinary visitor of the "Seeing New York" type, but also, by reason of the older man's influence with "the powers that be," they had gained access to some of those secret retreats far below the street level—gambling dives and "hop joint," reached only by an intricate system of hidden trap-doors and winding passages.

In one of these places they had run into a rather unpleasant episode; for a man considerably the worse for "dope," recognizing Uncle Edward, had accosted him for a loan, and, when refused, indulged in a flood of threatening abuse.

The guide in charge of their party had quickly hurried them away, but, after regaining the street, Uncle Edward, against all dissuasion, had insisted on going back.

"Why," he sputtered indignantly to Ralph, "did you hear what that fellow said? I took him into my employ when he was down and had not a friend in the world, and gave him every chance to reform; yet now, when I decline to cater to his miserable vices, he dares to threaten me—had the impudence to assert that unless I gave up he would tell something which would ruin me in my business!

"H'm!" he snorted, his face flushed and quivering, "I shall soon show him that I am not the caliber to submit lightly to such blackmailing demands!"

Uncle Edward was one of the most charitable and long-suffering men alive; but, like most other people, he had his limits.

When he once more rejoined the party he was a bit disheveled in appearance; but he was singularly silent as to his experience, merely remarking, with grim significance, that he did not anticipate the man would cause further trouble.

It was growing late by this time, so they did not linger much longer in the section, but after a final supper at one of the restaurants, returned to civilization and the apartment hotel in the upper "Forties" where the older gentleman maintained his bachelor quarters.

Ralph, as has been said, was feeling a bit seedy and the worse for wear as a result of the expedition, but Uncle Edward, with the imperturbability of the seasoned New Yorker, showed not a trace of ill-effects.

He had already been up for over two hours, had had his cold bath, and had even taken a leisurely morning stroll, the pleasure of which had been enhanced for him by an opportunity to bestow a little benefaction upon the news-woman at the corner whose baby was ill and who was apprehensively conscious of the imminent approach of rent day.

If anything could have increased Ralph's irritability, it was the unflurried complacency with which his uncle bore himself as he sat there placidly scanning the columns of the *Sun*. He felt almost like snatching the paper away and hurling it in his respected relative's face.

Instead, however, he vented his spleen upon a collar which he had just taken out of his box preparatory to putting on. There was a tiny black spot upon it, overlooked by the laundry, and it was also slightly frayed along the edges where it joined at the neck; so with a quick, nervous jerk, Ralph tore it in two, and tossed the fragments into the waste basket.

Uncle Edward, attracted by the sound of the rending, glanced up from his paper.

"Why did you do that, Ralph?" he asked with mild disapproval. "You might not have cared to wear the collar yourself, but there is many a poor fellow who would have been glad of the opportunity. I make it a practise myself," he went on, "to send all such discarded clothing to one of the mission houses down-town, and I understand it is gratefully received, for the unfortunates who gather there have learned that nothing so favorably impresses a

prospective employer as the effect of spruceness and tidiness in personal appearance.

"That very collar which you have just heedlessly destroyed," he added pointedly, "might have been the stepping-stone to give some worthy chap a new start in life."

But Ralph was in no humor for reproof. He turned toward his uncle with an impatient retort upon his lips—one which he would later have been sorry for.

Before it could be uttered, however, they were interrupted by a thundering knock upon the door, and when Uncle Edward opened to the summons the hotel manager, accompanied by a stout man with keen eyes and an air of authority, entered the room.

"Mr. Stuart," began the manager with evident embarrassment, "this is a —a gentleman from police headquarters. He wishes to ask you a few questions."

Uncle Edward started slightly at the intimation of his caller's official character, but immediately recovered himself.

"Certainly," he assented, waving his visitors to seats. "I cannot conceive what value any information in my possession could have for the police; but, be that as it may, I am ready to give any assistance in my power. What is it you wish to know, Mr.——"

"Burke," supplied the detective shortly, "of Inspector Hengelmuller's staff."

Then, making no move to accept the proffered chair:

"What I want to find out, Mr. Stuart, is whether you have any knowledge of or acquaintance with George Bradford, formerly a bookkeeper, but for some months past a 'dope fiend,' hanging out around the opium joints?"

"Why, yes; of course I have," instantly admitted Uncle Edward. "In fact, the man was in my office until about six months ago, when I had to discharge him on account of his habits."

"Have you seen him lately?"

Uncle Edward hesitated. It struck him that the purpose of this inquiry must be to establish Bradford's blackmailing proclivities, and his benevolent soul shrank from adding the weight of his testimony.

The officer repeated his question a little more sternly.

"Yes," finally confessed Mr. Stuart, but with manifest unwillingness, "I ran across him quite unexpectedly in a place down in Chinatown last evening."

"Did you have any conversation with him?"

Again Uncle Edward seemed inclined to balk, but the detective broke in with an impatient frown.

"Oh, you might as well make a clean breast of it, Mr. Stuart. We know all the facts, anyway, from 'Pidge' Dorlan, who was piloting you around; but the inspector thought it best to get your account, too."

"Well, then," avowed Uncle Edward with some asperity, "I did see the man and I did have some conversation with him. He was half crazed with the drug he had been taking, and when I refused a demand for money he assailed me with foolish threats.

"I do not believe he meant them, however. In fact, I think he scarcely knew what he was saying, for when I returned to call him down on account of his remarks he expressed the greatest contrition, and told me I was the best friend he had ever had."

Burke passed no comment on this statement beyond a slight lifting of the eyebrows.

"Did you have any struggle with the man?" he asked bruskly.

"Oh, yes"—with a smile—"if you could call it such. The fellow was literally beside himself, I tell you, and, when I first came back, made as if to attack me, but in his weakened physical condition, I had no difficulty in handling him.

"Then, when he had calmed down somewhat, I talked to him, and brought him around to see the folly of his course. I suppose I made a mistake" —shamefacedly—"but before I left I gave the poor devil the loan he was seeking.

"Not that it was on account of his demands, however, you understand," he added hurriedly, as though fearing this admission might be misconstrued. "If you have got Bradford locked up on a

charge of blackmail, I am afraid I can be of no assistance to you. What I gave him was freely and entirely of my own volition."

"We have not got Bradford locked up," returned the detective dryly, "but I don't think I'm mistaken in saying we will have some one else under bolt and bar."

Then, a subtle change coming into his tone:

"Edward Stuart, I arrest you for the wilful murder of George Bradford, and"—adding the now superfluous caution—"warn you that anything you may say hereafter can be used against you."

Uncle Edward started back in consternation.

"Arrest me?" he gasped. "And for the murder of George Bradford?"

The detective nodded.

"He was found in Wong Kee's place just after you left him last night, stabbed to the heart, and with your collar, all smeared in blood, clutched in his hand, while beside him on the ground lay your handkerchief, both evidently wrested from you in the struggle."

"My collar and my handkerchief?" ejaculated the prisoner bewilderedly. "Why, there must be some hideous mistake, here. I had both my collar and my handkerchief when I returned home last night."

He turned eagerly to his nephew for confirmation.

A horrible uncertainty shot through Ralph. It had started in to drizzle the night before while they were waiting for his uncle to return from the second visit to Wong Kee's, and all the party had buttoned their rain-coats tightly up about their throats. He could not definitely say whether Uncle Edward had worn a collar after the encounter with Bradford or not.

Happily, however, he was spared from answering for the time being, for Burke was in no mood to submit to a delay, and broke in impatiently upon the colloquy.

"Here, here!" he said roughly. "I'm no court, to go into all this stuff. If you're innocent, you'll have a chance to prove it later on. What you'd better do now is to say as little as possible and come quietly along with me. I suppose you'll be wanting a cab, so if the landlord here will have one called for us, we'll be moving on."

The next day the papers, of course, were full of the tragedy. It had been some time since New York had enjoyed a sensational murder case, and the prominence of the man charged with this crime made it of exceptional interest.

His eminent philanthropic services and his hitherto blameless life were fully descanted upon, yet in the columns printed about him and about the case there was very little doubt expressed as to his guilt or ultimate conviction.

The chain of evidence which the police had forged seemed too strong to admit of any question.

In the first place, there was an adequate motive—Bradford's assertion that he possessed knowledge which if divulged would ruin the other's business. Then there was the encounter and the struggle between them which Mr. Stuart himself admitted, and the damning testimony of the bloody collar and handkerchief which had given the police their first clue, and which, by means of the laundry marks, had led to the swift location of their owner.

Lastly, there was the remark of the prisoner on rejoining his companions after that second visit to Wong Kee's, and which now assumed a sinister significance: "I do not anticipate the man will cause us any further trouble."

Overwhelmed by the terrible accusation brought against him and this seemingly irrefutable array of proof, Uncle Edward, for the first few days of his sojourn in the Tombs, sank into a dreary state of apathetic hopelessness, but gradually the optimistic assurances of his nephew, and his own hopeful temperament, succeeded in restoring him to a more natural tone, and he began in some measure to take thought of his ordinary interests in life.

Ralph had intended to close his visit the Monday after the trip to Chinatown and return to his home in the country, but of course, under the circumstances, remained over, and spent as much of

each day as was permissible under the rules in the cell with his uncle. On the ninth day of Mr. Stuart's incarceration Ralph brought down with him a great bundle of clean linen which had just come home from the wash, and the prisoner found employment for himself in running over this and sorting it out.

"Here, Ralph," he said, wrapping up a bundle of worn collars and cuffs, "take this over to the mission house when you go, will you? I must not forget my little charities because I happen to be in the shadow of affliction myself."

Accordingly, when the young man took his departure he carried the parcel under his arm and made a détour of several blocks from his route in order to give it prompt delivery.

The superintendent of the mission received it gratefully.

"These will come in mighty handy," he said, opening up the bundle "'Pigtail Charley' was in to-day, asking if I had anything from Mr. Stuart on hand. The most of the stuff we get, you see," he explained, "is too small for him, and so he is always delighted with the supply Mr. Stuart sends us. He seems actually to know when it's coming, too. Until he came around to-day, I hadn't seen anything of him for nearly two weeks."

Ralph was a country boy, and naturally interested in this novel phase of the seamy side of city life.

"'Pigtail Charley'?" he commented curiously. "Why do they call him that?"

"Oh, because he is always associating with the 'Chinks.' He has smoked so much 'hop' that he is pretty nearly naturalized, I guess. He is one of the regulars down at Wong Kee's, they tell me."

"A 'dope fiend'?" cried Ralph excitedly. "And he wears my uncle's collars, you say?"

"Why, yes. In fact, if he can't get one of Mr. Stuart's he refuses to wear any at all. That is what struck me as funny to-day. He had on a soiled new one, which he said he had bought; but I can't believe that, for every cent he gets he spends upon opium. If he wasted any money upon a collar he must have been more than ordinarily flush, I can tell you that."

"And where can I find this chap?" interrupted Ralph breathlessly. "Will he be back here again?"

"Yes; he told me to be sure and expect him this evening, as he was broke and would be around for a night's lodging. He helps us sometimes with the bath tubs, you know, and——"

But the superintendent was talking to the empty air, for Ralph was already hustling up the street in search of a telephone which would connect him with police headquarters.

Moreover, so convincing were his remarks over the wire, and so plausible the theory he presented, that Sergeant Burke came down to the mission house himself and waited there with Ralph until Pigtail Charley put in his advertised appearance.

Surprised and disconcerted by so unexpectedly finding himself in the clutches of the law, and weakening under pressure of the "third degree," the feeble-minded derelict ultimately made a full confession.

"W'y, it wuz dis way, s'arge, y'see," he whined, blear-eyed and trembling. "I didn't have a cent, an' I'd been to Wong Kee to coax him to give me a 'pill,' an' he wouldn't do it, an' I wuz nigh crazed wit' de cravin'. An' den I seen dis guy wit' de white galways slip a whole saw-buck to Bradford out in de passageway, an' I made up me mind to have it. But, 'fore God, s'arge, I never intended fer to croak 'im, an' I wouldn't if he hadn't put up a better scrap 'n I t'ought wuz in him. He grabbed me by de collar an' he kep' chokin' me till I wuz most in. Den I seen it wuz him or me, an' I pulled me knife an' let him have it. As he fell back de collar gave way an' went wit' 'im, an' I wuz too scared to stop an' git it. I jest grabbed de tenner an' lit out."

Mr. Stuart was of course released at once, and everybody—authorities, newspapers, and the public—endeavored to make reparation to him for the harrowing experience through which he had passed, although no one could well argue that it was other than very largely his own fault.

His nephew had no desire to rub it in

on him, yet he could not resist the temptation to point out the superior advantage of his method of disposing of discarded linen.

"No, my boy," affirmed Uncle Edward, "I cannot agree that it is right to destroy such articles; but," he added thoughtfully, "I will grant that it may be wise to cut off the laundry mark before giving them away."

THE PROTEST OF CHAMBERS.

BY FRANK EDWARDS.

The tale of a robbery which repeats itself and leads to the trapping of one who is very far from being the thief.

"AND so," concluded Chambers, winding up his narrative, "after I had returned from the village bank this morning with the money for the pay-roll, and opened the safe to stow it away, I found that our two hundred dollars of loose cash had departed! I left the factory at once and came down here to report the facts to you in person, Mr. Janeway. That's about all."

His employer, the head of the firm, leaned back in his chair and gazed down upon William Street in meditative fashion.

"Um—clean gone, eh?"

"Clean gone—cash-box and all. I don't know that I haven't been expecting something of the sort for a long time, although I haven't mentioned it. Mr. Janeway, I want to file a protest against that aged, key-locked safe we have, out at the works. It's about as insecure a contraption as——"

"Oh, pshaw! Why, Chambers, that safe has been doing duty for thirty years—long before I grew up and entered this office as office-boy. It's never been broken into before."

"Well, let us hope it won't be again," said Chambers crisply.

"There's no use in dropping five or six hundred dollars for a new one, so far as I see. I—um—I suppose you haven't any clue to who took the money?"

"Not the slightest. Jenkins, the bookkeeper, and the young bill-clerk both left before me last night. Higgins, the night-watchman, has been on duty for twenty years. It wouldn't be in him to steal."

"No, I don't believe it would," Janeway admitted.

Then he turned to the other with a somewhat acid smile.

"Well, the firm's out two hundred! That's the long and the short of it."

The smile irritated Chambers.

"It is not!" he replied emphatically. "I've been superintending your works for nearly nine years now, Mr. Janeway, and nothing of this kind has happened before. I don't propose to have it happen again, if I have to buy a bulldog and chain him to the handle of that prehistoric iron box; but this time, sir, I intend to deposit two hundred dollars out of my pocket to the firm's credit, so that you will *not* be out!"

"Oh—nonsense, Chambers." Janeway looked rather annoyed than otherwise.

"No, sir, no nonsense about it!" the superintendent replied with some warmth. "While I have charge of your factory, I shall shoulder the responsibilities. This episode has occurred during my supervision, and I shall make good. If I find the thief and get back the money—so much the better. If not, well and good."

"You needn't strain such a point," his employer laughed. "I won't allow that. But I must say it's infernally mysterious. There was no one in the office after Jenkins left last night?"

"One or two of the men came to look for him, just after quitting time, I understand. They were there only for a moment or two."

"Well, couldn't one of them——"

"No, sir, I don't see how he could, very well. Personally, I think that the office was entered during the night, doubtless while Higgins was up-stairs.

by some one who has a duplicate key to the safe."

"Um—maybe." Janeway scratched his head. "Well, we won't worry about it, Chambers, and don't grow morbid over that key-locking safe."

The interview ended soon, and Chambers hurried across New York to the Jersey City ferry and the train that would carry him back to Broadtown and his post as superintendent of Janeway's acid works.

To say that the previous night's robbery annoyed him is putting the thing far too mildly. He was an overworked, over-conscientious individual, and the robbery positively harried him.

Arrived at Broadtown, he turned resolutely to the solitary little bank, procured two hundred dollars from his own account, and transferred it to that of the Janeway Chemical Company. Then he made his way along dusty roads to the works itself.

When he entered the office only Robert, the youthful bill-clerk, was visible. His face was white and his mouth hung open, but Chambers was too much occupied with his own thoughts to observe the phenomena.

"Well, Robert? Have you or Jenkins made any discoveries about the theft?"

"N—n—no, sir," the lad stammered.

"Have you tried?" Chambers demanded irritably.

"Why—you see, Mr. Chambers——"

"Well, look at that!" snapped the superintendent angrily. "That safe door is standing wide open! How long has it been so? Eh?"

"Why — since — since — since the——"

"And a dozen times every day neither you nor Jenkins is in the office, and any one on earth might walk in and go through the safe! Confound it! I suppose it's some such idiotic trick that cost us two hundred dollars last night!"

"But——Mr. Chambers!" the clerk stammered miserably. "It isn't—only the—the two hundred——"

"Well, what is it, then?" rasped the superintendent.

The door banged open suddenly and Jenkins rushed in from the factory.

"Thank God you're back, sir!" he gasped breathlessly.

"Eh?"

"There's been another robbery, sir!"

"Another one!" yelled Chambers.

"Yes, sir. The pay-roll's gone, too!"

Chambers sat down with some suddenness.

"The——pay-roll!"

"Yes, sir, every cent of it!"

"Where was it?"

"All in the bag, sir, just as you brought it from the bank."

"And it's gone—gone?" Chambers repeated incredulously. "Man, there was twenty-five hundred dollars in that bag!"

"I know it, Mr. Chambers!" groaned Jenkins.

For a few seconds there was dead silence in the factory office.

Chambers was the first to collect himself, and when he could patch together intelligible thoughts once more he asked:

"When was it stolen, Jenkins?"

"Not half an hour ago, sir."

"Was it in the safe?"

"Yes, sir, and the door locked tight."

"Sure of that, are you?"

"Absolutely, sir. The key was in my pocket. Robert, here, had just gone to lunch and I was alone in the office. I had to go out and see the foreman of the repair work—at least I wanted to catch him before he'd finished eating and gone back to the scaffold. Well, sir, I locked that safe door as carefully as a man could lock it, and went out to find Martin. When I came back, five minutes later, the door stood wide open and the canvas bag was gone!"

"And who was in here while you were away?"

"Well, if I could tell you that, sir, I could tell you who stole the money!" the bookkeeper retorted sourly.

"True," groaned the superintendent.

He was thoroughly disgusted. Two hundred dollars had been bad enough, in all conscience, but two thousand and over—and carried off in the very middle of a working day!

He glowered at the floor for a time, while Jenkins and the clerk watched sympathetically and somewhat fearfully.

"It's a great mystery, sir," the former hazarded at last, when the stillness was growing oppressive.

"It's no mystery at all!" said Chambers curtly. "Some one has a key to that antique relic, and he's opening it whenever it pleases him best. That's a new key you're carrying, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where's the old one?"

"Broke in two, sir—it's in the drawer. I had this new one made last week; I sent down to the locksmith —Bland, you know, sir—and had him make it."

"That was a careless piece of business, on the very face of it. Do you know this locksmith?"

"Only by sight, sir."

"Then why the dickens didn't you ask for my key when yours smashed?"

"Well, sir——" Jenkins grew confused and apologetic. "I didn't want to trouble you, and it only took a little time to have this one filed out. The man was back with it in an hour."

"And in that hour, how do you know that your locksmith didn't make a dozen new keys for his own use? Probably he knew the man you sent, and he must have known what this type of key was used for. That seems to weed out the last of the mystery, doesn't it? Either your key-maker or some one connected with him has free access to the safe! I'm very much inclined to believe, Jenkins, that you're indirectly responsible for both these robberies!"

"Why, Mr. Chambers!" stuttered the man. "I've been keeping books here this seventeen years now, and never a cent astray, one way or the other! People that know me can tell you, sir——"

"Oh, I'm not accusing you of taking the money!" the superintendent cried impatiently, as he arose and strode toward the door, "but you have been guilty of a most senseless piece of carelessness. That key should have been sent to New York for duplication."

Chambers, ordinarily calm and phlegmatic, fairly stamped his way up-stairs to his private office and threw himself into a chair.

For a while he stared at the desk and pondered angrily. The two hundred dollar theft he had intended to take no action upon until some definite clues were in hand, but a matter of twenty-five hundred clearly demanded police attention.

There seemed but one solution of the case. Either the locksmith or a confederate was able to explain the present location of the firm's funds.

At any rate, he would risk having the man arrested before he could leave town.

He unhooked the telephone and called up the establishment which passed in Broadtown for a police station. There he gave directions to have the locksmith watched until he could make his way to the village and swear out a warrant.

Next he went through the ordeal of getting a long-distance connection, and spoke to Janeway, sitting in his New York office. That person was momentarily dumfounded at the new loss; but when the first shock had passed, he prepared for action and communicated his intention of reaching the factory by the first outgoing train.

Chambers was about to leave the office when the telephone bell rang once more.

It was the police station this time. They had sent to Bland's place and found it closed. They had visited his home and learned from his wife that the locksmith had left for the city on the one o'clock train.

He expected to be back by four, but —the police were skeptical.

So was Chambers, decidedly skeptical. The time of the man's leaving jibed perfectly with the time of the robbery; it would have taken him about half an hour to reach the depot with his plunder—and evidently he had reached it and made good his escape.

The whole situation was maddening enough, but the superintendent realized that there was no particular use in railing at it. Perforce, he fell in with the police suggestion that the depot be watched, to take the locksmith should he by any chance return, or arrest his wife if she attempted to leave.

Now, a matter of two or three hours must elapse before Janeway could arrive, and during that time Chambers' hands were tied.

He tried hard to sit still and smoke and ponder the case, but he found himself fuming impatiently; and at last he

gave over the effort of remaining there quietly and slipped on his overalls for a tour of the factory.

The firm had prospered that winter, and Janeway had ordered a multitude of spring repairs. Over in the acid shop they were building a new set of chambers; the steam-piping, too, was having a thorough renovation and the reserve water-supply was being put into shape for the season.

This latter they were forced to use in hot weather, when the Broadtown reservoir refused to keep pace with their manufacturing, and it consisted simply of a huge twenty-thousand-gallon tank on the roof of the main building, from which pipes ran to various parts of the factory, and into which the town water drizzled steadily.

On the day of the robbery a gang of men had been set to cleaning and overhauling the pipes. Particularly, the big supply pipe from the bottom of the tank had been giving more or less trouble when last used, and Chambers had directed that the lower lengths be replaced without delay.

He made his way to the spot where the work should have been going on, and when he reached it he received another unpleasant surprise.

The crowd of men were idle. Their foreman was smoking his pipe as he gathered together some tools; one man reclined at length, unaware of the superintendent's approach; two or three more had doffed their overalls and were gazing questioningly about. And the hour was half-past one!

"Well, what's this?" Chambers demanded in exasperation. "A strike?"

"What, sir?" said the foreman, straightening up.

"I say, why the devil aren't you working on that pipe, Martin? You've got all the connections uncoupled, and the thing's hanging there and——"

"No more work to-day, Mr. Chambers—not on this job."

"Why not?"

"Lost a die."

"Eh?"

"Why, the die that we were using to cut screw-threads on them four-inch pipes is gone! There ain't another one that size in town, sir. I've sent a man to New York, but he can't be back before night now."

"So you've got to stop work on those pipes for the day? And instead of fixing up the roof tank to-morrow, you'll have to put it over till day after to-morrow?"

"Well, yes, sir, it looks that way," said Martin with a deprecatory grin.

"Well, who in thunder lost that die?" shouted the superintendent, looking over the group with angry eyes. "It seems to me that there ought to be sense enough in the crowd of you to keep track of a piece of steel bigger than a man's two fists!"

There was no reply.

"Who had it last?"

"Well, you see, sir," temporized Martin.

"Look here, my man, you may tell me who lost that thing or you need not. In the latter case it will be charged against your wages. D'ye understand that?"

"Yes, sir." Martin opened his eyes. Such wrath was not common with Chambers. "I guess—I—oh, Jim Cooley had it, sir."

"Cooley, eh? Cooley!"

"Well?" said a gruff voice.

A towering hulk of Irish-American muscle shuffled from his seat on a box and approached the group—Cooley, brutal and surly of mien, but a perfect Hercules when heavy work was to be done. Not a man in the place had ever dared try conclusions with him.

"Did you lose that die, Cooley?"

"What die?"

"The four-inch."

"Well, I had it. Maybe it's gone. I dunno."

"Martin says that you were the last man to use it."

"That's right," the foreman put in. "You were cutting threads on those short lengths, Jim."

"Yeah?" Cooley yawned.

"And the die hasn't been seen since you had it—consequently work on the tank is held up for another day!" Chambers hurried on, enraged. "Why haven't you wits enough to replace such a thing when you're through with it? Where is it?"

"How the devil do I know where yer die is?" Cooley demanded insolently.

"What's that?"

"Go to Hades and look for it!"

"See here, Cooley," the superintendent cried. "I'll have no more talk of that sort around here. It seems to me that you've managed to be in hot water of one sort or another for the past year, and it's time to put a stop to it. You'll get out of here Saturday night. You're discharged."

Cooley laughed in a manner that made Chambers yearn to lose his dignity as superintendent for five minutes, and simultaneously add the seventy pounds of brawn by which Cooley exceeded him.

That being palpably impossible, he turned and walked away from the hushed group of men.

When his anger had cooled somewhat, he found himself still thinking of that water-supply job.

Probably none of the numbskulls had as yet looked over the tank on the roof; he might as well inspect it himself. Moreover, there was a breeze and solitude up there, and Chambers felt that he would enjoy a place where one might swear freely for a few moments.

He went to the upper story and climbed to the lower roof; then ascended another ladder to the high roof of the main building and stood beside the huge tank.

It certainly had dried out badly—there were chinks and cracks innumerable, little holes which apparently counted for nothing, but which would allow thousands of gallons of water to drip away before the rotten old wood swelled again.

Like the safe, the tank was suffering from old age, Chambers was thinking, when his ear caught the crunch of a shoe on the pebbled roof behind him.

He faced about. There stood Cooley! He had paused some twenty feet away and was regarding the superintendent with a sneeringly speculative air.

"Well, Cooley?"

"Well?" There was a vicious glitter in the fellow's eye. "Think you're pretty clever, eh?"

"What's that?"

"You think you're a foxy lot, don't ye, hey?"

"Look here, if you refer to my discharging you——"

"If I refer! Ho, ho, ho! Maybe I do an' maybe I don't! You know an' I know! Hey? I guess we know all right! Hey?"

"What under the sun——" Chambers began wonderingly.

"Now, look right here, sonny." Cooley stepped forward. "I'll just put you wise to one little thing. When you're up against Jim Cooley, you're up against a hard lot!"

"I know that," the superintendent said contemptuously. "Go down and get to work. Who told you to come up here?"

"Well, I dunno's as any one told me, if it comes to that. Anyway, we won't jaw no more about it. We'll talk about this thing of goin' down. You'll go first!"

"What!"

"You'll go first!" the workman hissed at him. "And it won't be down no ladder, either. You're a wise little man—oh, you're a fox all right, but ye made a bad break when ye went up against Jim Cooley! See? D'ye see the edge o' that roof? Sixty foot drop, ain't it, an' a rock pile at the bottom! Hey? Well, that's where you go, right now!"

Chambers was fairly thunderstruck. He had discharged men before—such characters as this—and seen lively times at their going; but—was it possible that this brute contemplated actual murder in revenge?

There was little time for the shaping of theories. Cooley was advancing on him rapidly, and should he once get a grip on the superintendent's person, there would be nothing whatever to prevent the carrying out of his design. Simple pluck would count for nothing in the struggle.

Chambers glanced around quickly. The tank was behind him, and a little ladder ran up to the brim, some ten or twelve feet above the roof.

He grabbed for the rungs, and Cooley's hands barely missed him! In a twinkling he was at the top, and had seated himself on the tank's edge.

"Cooley!" he cried. "Put one foot on that ladder and I'll blow your brains out!"

The man leaped back, and Chambers' hand groped for the revolver in his coat pocket.

And then, too late, he remembered

that, the day being warm, he had left coat, revolver and all in the office below!

Cooley perceived his sudden start, and perhaps divined its cause, for he ran at the ladder once more.

"I mean it, Cooley!" the superintendent shouted desperately.

"All right. Show up yer gun!"

The man was ascending like a gigantic monkey. One of his great hands reached for Chambers' leg.

For one instant the superintendent faced the hard grin on the brute's countenance and realized that the fellow meant murder.

He shifted quickly to get beyond reach, hitched farther along the edge, and then he felt himself toppling, clutched frantically at the air for a moment—and fell backward into the empty tank!

It was a long drop, and Chambers lay still and silent on the old flooring, his arms and legs sprawled awkwardly. Very vaguely he was conscious that Cooley's face had appeared above the edge, and that he was trying to clamber into the vat.

Then, from far, far away, came a voice that sounded like Jenkins'.

"What are you doing there, Cooley?"

"Lookin' at the tank."

"What for?"

"Why, the old tub's gotter be filled with water an' swelled. I'll shut off the valve underneath and turn on the water, an' she can fill overnight."

Chambers tried his hardest to cry aloud, for terror was gripping his heart, but no sound would come.

"Well, never mind that now," Jenkins' voice continued. "They want you downstairs to help on the trucks."

"That water oughter be turned on."

"Not now. You can turn it on before you go to-night. That'll do just as well."

"All right, boss," said Cooley's surly bass.

Chambers' eyes were wide open now and he was striving hard to find voice; but Cooley leered at him, drew down the heavy cover that hinged in half and descended, and Chambers found himself in darkness—still dumb.

The shock of his fall had been terrific. He seemed paralyzed, unable to move or speak, able only to stare helplessly at the chinks of light which filtered through the cracks in the heavy cover far above him.

Centuries seemed to elapse before he "came round"; but after a time he found that legs and arms answered his call once more, although they were racked with pain.

With difficulty he sat erect and tried to look about the dark hole. He wondered what the time might be and lit a match.

Quarter past four! He struck another match to make certain, and having confirmed the fact, he glanced around as the splinter flickered away.

Then Chambers caught his breath and crawled across the tank, and one listening at the side might have caught the sound of a man's voice mumbling curiously.

A few minutes later the superintendent was on his feet, thinking hard.

He was trapped. There seemed no doubt about that.

At five the whistle would blow. Then, or even before, Cooley might be expected to turn on the water and the tank to fill. After that, help would be gone.

Chambers might shout until he was hoarse. Not a soul could hear him, even a dozen yards away, for the tank was thick and the cover massive.

And when the water rose? The superintendent shuddered at the prospect. He might—he could—keep afloat until the tank had filled and that was all. Raising the cover required a strong man's effort, standing firmly on the ladder. To hope that he might lift it while paddling in the water was extremely absurd.

Cooley had trapped him securely, and the chances were that before morning he would have drowned like a rat!

Chambers tramped the floor of his narrow quarters for a time; then, overcome with the horror of his plight, sank rather limply to the boards.

His hand struck something sharply. He groped for it, and found that it was the end of the big outlet pipe.

He straightened up quickly. The other end of that pipe was wide open! Hanging in the air, it was fairly in the

center of the factory. If he could call down—but no, that was not feasible, he concluded, as he gazed down the six-inch opening at the faint circlet of gray-light at the other end.

Somehow or other he must attract attention—but how? His keys! He drew them from his pocket and dropped them down the long, straight pipe. Then his knife followed; then a pair of pinchers from his overalls; then the two-foot rule he carried.

Chambers waited breathlessly for footsteps on the roof. Surely some one must have noticed the falling articles and investigated their sources.

But the minutes passed and no sound came. From far, far away, a factory whistle blew the hour of five.

The superintendent went through his pockets again. There must be something else that he could drop—yes, there was! His monkey-wrench remained to him.

He poised it over the opening and released his hold, and the tool clattered noisily down the iron chute. Very dimly, he saw it land on the flooring and bounce, and he leaned back with a long sigh.

Another five minutes dragged by and Chambers found himself growing cold. If the things had not been noticed—if Cooley should come now to turn on the water!

Almost inaudibly, a crunching step sounded from the roof. Chambers strained every faculty. Yes, it was indeed the tread of a man; he had reached the ladder now and was ascending.

One more—two more seconds—and Chambers would know his fate; for if the evil face of Cooley appeared, his chances were nil.

He glared excitedly at the cover. It was moving slightly; it rose an inch or two and fell back again; it moved once and very slowly was raised and thrown back, and Jenkins' startled eyes peered into the depths.

"Mr.—Chambers!" he ejaculated.

"I'm the man!" the superintendent cried joyfully. "Are you well braced on the ladder?"

"Why, yes, sir. But how—why—whatever has happened that you're here and——"

"Never mind that now. You lean over and—catch!" shouted Chambers.

* * * *

There was a little group in the factory office—Janeway and a policeman and Bland, the unhappy locksmith—when Chambers entered with Jenkins behind him.

The head of the firm arose.

"Well, Chambers?" he said sharply. "They told me that you were lost, too. Where have you been?"

"In the tank on the roof, my dear sir," smiled the superintendent. "One of our amiable workmen locked me in. Later, I think, he intended to return, knock me on the head, walk off with a few things I found up above and then drown me!"

"But what under the sun have you been——"

"What have I been doing up there? Oh, several things. Mainly I've been learning interesting facts."

"Well, sir, we've been waiting over an hour for you. This locksmith is the man you want, is he not?"

"He was—he's not now," laughed Chambers. "Mr. Bland, I beg your pardon. Mr. Janeway, I spoke of learning various things of interest during my confinement. In the first place, here's one detail I gathered!"

He took from Jenkins a tin cash-box and placed it on the desk.

"The two hundred that took wings last night!" he announced.

"God bless my soul!" cried the proprietor.

"In the second place, I learned—this!" Jenkins handed over a heavy canvas bag, and Chambers dropped it beside the box. "Which happens to be the twenty-five hundred dollars that disappeared this noon!"

There was a hush of amazement.

"Did you—find those in the tank?" Janeway managed to articulate.

"I found them in the tank!" echoed Chambers. "They had been put there for safe-keeping by the gentleman who took the money. Jenkins, whom did you send to Mr. Bland?"

"It was Cooley, sir, if I remember right."

"Indeed?" The superintendent

smiled and turned to the locksmith. "Now, Mr. Bland, a man visited you from this factory about a week ago to have a new key made, did he not?"

"A man came, but he wanted three keys, mister. I made 'em for him and he paid his money, and I want to say right here that this is the most damnably outrageous business that——"

"You can say that later," said the superintendent calmly. "He was a large man, was he not?"

"He was a hulk of a brute, mister, but if it's him that got me into this he might be three times the size, and I'd smash his——"

"Er—Mr. Jenkins," said Chambers. "Just go out very quietly and ask Mr. Cooley to step in here."

The bookkeeper departed and they waited in silence until footsteps approached the door once more.

"If you've got a gun, you'd better get it ready, officer," whispered Chambers.

The door opened, but Cooley did not appear. Instead, Martin, the foreman, entered a coat over his arm.

"Cooley's gone, sir," he said. "Left on a dead run—dropped his coat and everything. Why, I guess it was just about the time you come down-stairs, sir."

"Yes, I guess it may have been," responded Chambers dryly. "Policeman, will you kindly telephone your people to watch the station and the trains? So that's Cooley's coat, is it, Martin?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let's have a look at it."

He took the garment, inverted it and shook it briskly.

Some loose change, a rule, a pipe, a bag of tobacco and other odds and ends dropped to the floor; and in the midst of them all lay two shining new keys of brass!

Chambers smiled at the head of the firm.

"I suppose that the mystery is quite solved now, Mr. Janeway?"

"I suppose it is, Chambers," said that person.

Then, as the officer was ringing off in the adjoining apartment, Janeway turned his gaze to the landscape and remarked with an attempt at nonchalant dignity:

"There—er—there may be something in that—er—protest of yours Chambers—the one you made this morning, you know. I—um—I believe that I'll order a new safe with a burglar-proof combination to-morrow morning!"

A VALENTINE.

I'LL build a house of lollypops
Just suited, sweetheart, to your taste;
The windows shall be lemon drops,
The doors shall be of jujube paste—
Heigh-ho, if you'll be mine!

With peppermints I'll pave the walks;
A little garden, too, I'll sow
With seeds that send up sugared stalks
On which the candied violets grow—
Heigh-ho, my Valentine!

Some seats of sassafras I'll make,
Because I know you think it's nice;
The cushions shall be jelly cake
Laced all around with lemon ice—
Heigh-ho, if you'll be mine!

We'll have a party every day,
And feast on cream and honeydew;
And, though you're only six, we'll play
That I am just as young as you—
Heigh-ho, my Valentine!

AN EXCHANGE OF HANDICAPS.

BY STEPHEN BRANDISH.

The Kestor million-volt treatment and its triumphant progress to a halt.

OFF in the far corner of the grill-room the three tables in the alcove were filled, as were those in the rest of the great room. Little scraps of conversation detached themselves from the general babel of voices. The huge, puffy man at the left-hand table, for one, made himself heard in discontented snatches:

"*Ja! Gott*, it is infamous! All der time—der whole time bigger und bigger."

And at the right-hand table a forlorn thin man in evening dress raised his tones almost excitedly:

"I tell you, it's no use! I might as well give it up. The Eternity's medical examiner turned me down to-day—and he's the eighth in five weeks."

Then the clatter arose again—laughter and talk and the rattle of dishes, and here and there the faint pop of a cork.

In such a gathering and in such a place sudden pauses have the most curious way of occurring. At one instant a hundred men may be talking fast; the next, and as if by prearrangement, all is still.

People look about in astonishment; after a second or so some one laughs and the laugh is echoed across the room; another second and some one else takes up the conversation, and the babel is on again.

So it chanced in this case. The chatter had swelled almost to a roar, then, without warning, every man seemed to finish his sentence at the same second.

As if at the wave of the magician's wand, the place was absolutely quiet, and out of the stillness two voices came loudly and distinctly from the alcove:

"*Ja*, it is so! If I get but ten pounds fatter, I got no longer the stage presence! I vill actually haf to stop singing, dot der pooblic does not laugh at me!"

And the other:

"Yes, sir, the Eternity's examiner told me that until I can put on at least thirty pounds more flesh I won't be able to get insurance in any company in America."

Fully twenty of the diners turned and laughed outright at the queer coincidence. The speakers themselves faced about and stared at each other in wonder. The little man laughed too.

"We seem to be in the same sort of trouble—with a slight difference," he observed.

The big German chuckled hoarsely:

"*Ja*, you are right—vid a difference!"

Out in the room the talk found itself once more, the clatter returned and the rattle of plates. The German sighed and nodded as he turned back to his party; the thin man looked after him for a moment and sighed as well. He was distinctly envious of that massive back and those ham-like hands. As his eyes dragged themselves away from the tantalizing sight a tall man rose from the center table of the alcove, where he had been lingering over a solitary meal. He hesitated a trifle and glanced from one man to the other, then the hesitation departed, and with a decided little nod he touched the German lightly upon the shoulder.

"If you would step over to my table for a moment, sir?"

"Vot?"

"I think that there is a possibility—a faint one, perhaps—of my being able to help you. In the matter of that unnecessary flesh, you know."

The German stared hard for a brief instant. The man appeared to be quite sane. He rose, with a word to his friends, and took a chair at the center table.

The tall man approached the other of the sufferers.

"I beg your pardon, but if you would

like to confer with me—and our large friend here—in regard to your lack of weight, there is a chance of helping you both."

"You—you don't mean that?"

"I do, indeed."

The thin man glanced at the German, who shrugged his shoulders and shook his head; then he, too, rose and followed the mysterious person who had been dining alone.

The latter seemed a little embarrassed for a moment as he returned to his own place.

"You — er—understand, gentlemen, that I'm not advertising any one's patent medicine or featuring any one's obesity treatment," he said with a slight laugh. "But you two announced your troubles so curiously that I couldn't resist asking your acquaintance in this slightly informal fashion."

Both men nodded.

"Now, if you wouldn't mind giving me a little fuller idea of your precise plight, I should be able to talk more intelligently."

"Well—for my part, it's very easily told," said the thin man despondently. "My name is Burnley. I'm president of the Unicorn Bank. I've been trying for Heaven only knows how long to take out a fifty-thousand-dollar insurance policy on my life. It's a flat impossibility. I am healthy and sound and strong, but — I'm every bit of forty pounds under weight. For my height, the average is about one hundred and forty pounds. I weigh just ninety-nine!"

"*Gott!* You have luck!"

"Well, you may think so," the other retorted sourly, "but I don't. Why, I have been to certainly a dozen doctors—specialists and quacks and ordinary physicians. I've tried systems of diet and systems of exercise. I've eaten things that would drive any ordinary man to suicide; I've taken concoctions of drugs that must have been devised by the devil himself. They have done me as much good as the same amount of fresh water."

The mysterious man inclined his head sagely.

"Then I've spent hours under massage treatment and I've been mauled into a pulp by people who wanted to rub in different kinds of grease and flesh foods. I tried an idiot's sleep treatment, by which I spent the best part of every day on my back and allowed business to go straight to thunder — which it did.

"I've had sun-baths and mud-baths and oil-baths. Not one thing has done me the slightest good. When I began to experiment, over a year ago, I weighed just one hundred and one pounds. To-day it has gone down to ninety-nine. That's all."

He sighed again.

The tall man turned to the colossus.

"Well, sir, how about you?"

"Me? It is just der udder way! My name is Burgstadt; I am der leading baritone at der Metropolitan for der Wagnerian season. Vell, for that one must have a sort of figure; one must be large und strong, but not an elephant! *Ach, Gott!*"

He puffed wearily to a standstill and found a cigarette, which looked comically small in the center of the round face.

"Also, I get every day fatter—dot is all! All der time more and more of der confounded fatness! It is execrable! Dey laugh among themselves, some of der singers, even now. Der manager, he spoke to me a month ago. He asked that I should see a doctor; that I should have one of the American boxing instructors; that I should walk fifteen miles every day—anything, so that I became smaller.

"Vell, I had seen some doctors. They did nothing. They starved me; they said I should drink no beer; they made me valk und run—me, to run! They sent me to Turkish baths und I boiled through a thousand deaths. They found me a teacher of der boxing, und he punched me until I grew sore und sick! Me, too, they gave der massage. For vot? Nodding! Absolutely nodding!"

"Aha?" The tall man nodded again. "You are anxious to become thinner?"

"Anxious! *Ja*, I am anxious!" The red face grew redder. "Anxious!

It is my bread und butter, as you say! If I don't get smaller, I shall get off from der operatic stage!"

"And you, sir? You are quite as anxious to take on more weight?"

"I'll pay a hundred dollars a pound for it, and buy fifty pounds!" said the thin one solemnly.

"You don't mean that?"

"I was never more earnest in my life."

For a period of minutes the tall man stared thoughtfully at the big rafters overhead. Then he spoke slowly:

"Well, gentlemen, my name happens to be Dixon. I have—er—a friend, a Dr. Kestor. Perhaps you have heard of him?"

They had not.

"He's rather an odd mortal, but a very acute scientist in his way. He strikes off on rather unconventional lines now and then—he has in this obesity matter, I believe. Kestor has devised some sort of reciprocating treatment for the simultaneous cure of fleshiness and leanness. Why don't you go together and see him? It may do some good and it may not. It can't do any harm."

"You mean that he has a really successful treatment for a man like me?" asked Burnley incredulously.

"At least, it is one in which he has the utmost confidence. I believe that he has given some satisfactory demonstrations to the profession."

"Und also it vill make such a one as me *thin?*" Burgstadt inquired tensely as he leaned his bulk across the table.

"Yes."

The baritone and the bank president faced each other; a gleam of hope had appeared in each pair of eyes.

"Well, Herr Burgstadt?"

"Vell, Mr. Burnley?"

"Shall we see him?"

"In der morning," said the singer decidedly.

"Good! I'll give you Kestor's address." The benefactor produced one of his own cards and scribbled on the back.

"His hours, I think, are from nine to eleven in the morning."

Shortly he departed.

Burgstadt and Burnley remained at the table, wondering, unbelieving, but hopeful.

They talked for a little while and fixed a meeting place for the morning. They drank together—Burnley of the imported porter which should have added pounds to his weight, and the baritone of a mineral water guaranteed to dispose of superfluous flesh. Then they parted, almost affectionately.

At nine sharp the two men waited in Dr. Kestor's slightly gloomy anteroom.

Presently the door from an inner office opened, and Dr. Kestor stalked in. He was big and broad, brusk and businesslike to a degree.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Mr. Dixon sent you, I believe? Yes? Well, it is not difficult to diagnose your respective cases."

He sat down and looked keenly from one to the other.

"One of you, I see, weighs perhaps two hundred and eighty. The other, I should say, one hundred. One of you wishes to gain flesh, the other to lose it. That's about three hundred and eighty in the aggregate, isn't it? Suppose we arrange matters so that each of you tips the scales at one hundred and ninety. Would that be mutually satisfactory?"

"Satisfactory!" gasped Burnley. "Why, I never dreamed that such a thing could be possible."

"Und for me! *Himmel!* At one hundred and ninety I am an Apollo!"

"But, seriously, doctor," said the bank president, "you don't mean to say that it can be done?"

"I have accomplished more in the same line."

"And do I understand that you—that you undertake to transfer the excess of weight from Herr Burgstadt to myself?"

"Exactly, if you wish to submit to the treatment."

"It isn't—er—painful?"

"Not in the slightest—only a little bit startling at first."

"Oxcuse me, but would you mind outlining der treatment?" the baritone asked anxiously.

"Certainly not. You will each be

given a place upon a table in my operating room. You will each be given a mild sleeping dose, for it is necessary that both subjects be absolutely passive. Thereafter I shall pass a current of one million volts of electricity through both of you."

"One—million—volts!"

"Und den we are both dead, und der fat doesn't matter! What?" cried Burgstadt.

"There is no danger whatever," Kestor replied imperturbably. "By my system of current transformation and multiplication it would be perfectly possible to send a current of ten million volts through your bodies without any ill effect. The electricity, as I have modified it, merely carries minute particles of fat from one body and deposits them within the other. It is electroplating in another form, if you wish to call it that."

"My dear man!" exclaimed the bank president. "Is that a fact?"

"A proven one, Mr. Burnley."

"And how long will it take for the entire treatment?"

"That is at our discretion. On the average, I prefer to make the treatment in one hour periods. In that time about ten pounds of flesh may be transferred safely. Longer is not dangerous—only a little tiresome for the subjects."

"I see. If we come here, say, eight or nine times, and each time Herr Burgstadt transfers to me ten pounds of his weight, in a week or two we shall both be normal men?"

"You have the idea precisely," said the doctor, arising with an air of finality. "Do you wish to make an appointment?"

"Well—Herr Burgstadt?"

"To be beautiful, vun must suffer!" quoted the baritone sadly. "I don't like much der idea, Mr. Burnley, but if it is necessary I come with you."

"Eleven o'clock to-morrow morning then?" Kestor's pencil poised over a little note-book. "Good! The charge will be one hundred dollars for each treatment, payable at the end. Good morning, gentlemen."

Now, the notion of one million volts of electricity perambulating irresponsibly through one's anatomy is less than reassuring.

If Burnley boggled many matters at the bank that day there is small wonder. If Herr Burgstadt stumbled through his part that evening with hitherto unknown clumsiness it is not at all remarkable.

But they went through their respective duties, and passed the long night, during which each man slept little and thought much; and at the appointed hour a white-uniformed attendant, phlegmatic and cold, ushered them into the inner sanctum of Dr. Kestor.

The doctor, rubber-gloved and preoccupied, merely nodded. He was working over a remarkable contrivance at one end of the long table. It was a machine of many wires and more coils, of platinum and German silver and copper switches, of porcelain insulators and green silk connections.

The two patients contemplated it rather cheerlessly. They were roused from their reflections by the white-clad man, who bore the sleeping dose in two little glasses and proffered it silently.

"Now, gentlemen! This dose is likely to work rapidly when it begins. This way please, Mr. Burnley."

The bank president followed the beckoning hand and stepped to the platform of a scale. Kestor quickly adjusted the weights.

"Ninety-nine and a fraction," he announced. "Now you, sir."

The apparatus creaked under Burgstadt. More weights were added, and the rider was sent to the far end of the beam.

"Two hundred and eighty, almost exactly. You're pretty solid, Mr. Burgstadt!"

"I know it."

"And now, if you'll both step to the table," Kestor continued briskly. "Yes, right here, please. You on this side, Mr. Burnley. You here."

Burnley stretched himself upon the padded surface. Burgstadt lumbered to a place beside him. The uncanny attendant glided forward with what appeared to be handcuffs and metal belts, and under Kestor's direction the men

were buckled and belted together in the maze of electrical connection. From the queer machine a gentle buzzing rose. Kestor manipulated switches; a haze of green light appeared in one or two places.

Burnley felt vaguely that he should have been decidedly nervous, yet he was pleasantly conscious of the entire absence of anything like uneasiness. The green light and the buzzing—the whole environment indeed—were a trifle gruesome and unusual, but he felt no particular fear. He yawned deliciously and looked at the massive figure at his side.

Burgstadt's eyes were closed and the baritone snored gently and regularly. The bank president gave up the effort to keep awake; his own lids dropped, and he slept.

His next sensation was a cold shock. Somebody seemed to be dashing water over his face. He sat up suddenly, free from the connecting bands. Burgstadt was beside him, drowsy and stupid as he allowed the attendant to bathe his forehead.

It was a matter of a very few minutes, however, when consciousness returned in full.

Burnley stretched and wondered what was wrong. He seemed bigger everywhere; his vest had grown so tight that breathing was uncomfortable. He looked hard at the baritone; the reverse of the process seemed to have happened there!

"I think we'll weigh you now. This way, Mr. Burnley."

The bank president walked eagerly to the scales.

"There! Can you see that, sir? Just bend a trifle, and read your weight."

"What!" Burnley fairly shouted in his amazement. "One hundred and ten pounds! Why—it's impossible!"

"Hardly that, sir," said Kestor, with his cold, complacent smile. "Merely unusual. Mr. Burgstadt, please."

The baritone hurried to the platform. The weights were readjusted.

"There you are, sir! Two hundred and sixty-nine pounds. I think that that is correct."

"Hi! What?" Burgstadt stooped incredulously. "*Himmel!* It is der fact! Der eleven pounds have gone to you, Herr Burnley. We are saved!"

Weird as it was, there could be no disputing the condition of affairs. The change had been effected. The fat man had become thinner; the thin man had increased his bulk by the substantial item of eleven pounds! And it had been done within an hour.

"Saturday morning at the same time, then, gentlemen," the doctor's even voice remarked. "Good-day!"

The white person opened a door before them. Both men walked mechanically from the place, thunderstruck, jubilant, but half-inclined to believe the whole affair a dream.

After all their individual striving, Burgstadt and Burnley, with the help of Kestor and of each other, were on the high road to attaining what each held most desirable.

A new era had opened for them. Burnley put greater energy into his work; the papers spoke admiringly of the increased power and sweetness of the famed Burgstadt voice, which had latterly grown heavy and husky.

On Saturday they met on the doorstep, fifteen minutes ahead of time, and talked merrily as they waited. When they left, their aggregate weight was the same, but Burnley scaled one hundred and twenty and the baritone two hundred and sixty pounds.

They were on hand again Tuesday—and again upon the following Thursday. The result each day was similar. Ten pounds changed hands — or bodies. There was no pain; no trouble. Simply a space of peaceful oblivion, and then unbounded joy.

After the first and second treatments they compared notes and found that a purchase of at least two suits apiece was threatened each week. They conferred long and seriously and then devised a scheme.

By the use of money and persuasion, a fashionable tailor was prevailed upon to construct two suits upon an entirely unique plan: the seams were left with a yard or so of goods to spare, neatly folded and basted into place. It was annoying and it took valuable time, this

thing of adjourning to the tailor shop after each treatment and having one's clothes readjusted to the new conditions. It created unending gossip among the workers, but at least it was better than acquiring a useless wardrobe of misfits. And neither Burnley nor the baritone was in a mood to growl.

Burnley passed to one hundred and thirty; Burgstadt to two hundred and fifty. Burnley tipped the scales at one hundred and forty; Burgstadt at two hundred and forty. Burnley awoke joyously to a weight of one fifty; the baritone chortled aloud in his ten-thousand-dollar voice, for the figures showed but two hundred and thirty pounds.

Thus it went week after week. The two men were nearly of a size at last.

Burnley had reached one hundred and seventy, and was ready to stop, but Burgstadt still possessed two hundred and ten pounds, and on the score of gratitude due from the bank president he pleaded for at least one more exchange and Burnley was in no position to refuse.

They met at Kestor's for the last time, each man with a check for his share of the heaven-sent treatment.

The doctor looked ill and tired that day. They joked with him, and he sighed.

"I—I am not myself, exactly," he said with less than the usual brevity. "I'm more or less discouraged, gentlemen. This whole contrivance of mine is wearing out, and I cannot duplicate it exactly for some reason. I have been working upon another instrument for months, but I can't seem to reproduce the thing properly—indeed, I can hardly reproduce it at all, I fear."

"The engine isn't wearing out, is it?" laughed Burnley.

"It may break down forever at almost any minute," said Kestor sadly. "I can't guarantee the old success today, gentlemen. It may not work at all."

"Possibly we had better postpone the treatment," suggested Burnley.

"Postpone it! What?" Burgstadt put in energetically. "Ven I hope to sail next week! *Ach*, Mr. Burnley!"

"Oh, I—I think we can manage it," said Kestor, stepping toward the unique affair. "John is away to-day, and I shall have to attend to you alone, but you are so familiar with the process that we can manage."

He shuffled slowly across the operating-room and prepared the sleeping potions.

The patients took their places and were connected. The electrical engine buzzed faintly, stopped, buzzed on again.

Then the draft grew effective, and bank president and singer dropped to sleep for their last exchange of weight.

Burnley, in a vague way, perceived a beam of sunlight on the opposite wall. That was odd, for their appointment had been particularly early that morning, and no sun was due on that wall until late in the afternoon.

He was heavy and lethargic for a moment. He shook himself together and wondered what had become of John and the grateful cold water that always revived them.

He realized, too, that both he and Burgstadt were still shackled, although the engine was utterly still. Then, as he sat up, a horrified groan escaped him. He tore at his bonds and loosed them.

He prodded Burgstadt and the German moved and grunted. Burnley shrieked aloud!

For his ample raiment hung about him in great loose folds. His expansive vest was as a blanket draped upon a pole. The shoulders of his coat were well down toward his elbows, and his hands flapped wildly within the wide sleeves!

Whatever had occurred, every ounce of his acquired weight was gone.

"Burgstadt! Burgstadt!" he shouted frantically, as he dragged the usual covering from the singer. "Burgstadt! Oh, great heavens!"

Burnley reeled back against the wall.

The baritone sat up, not with his usual alacrity, but laboriously and with many puffs.

He glanced down at his straining garments and a frenzied stream of words rose to his lips.

"*Himmel!* Herr Burnley! *Gottes-*

willen! What has happened? I am—fat!"

"Fat! You're fatter than you ever were before! You're simply tremendous!"

The baritone rolled from the table and stood panting as he jerked himself free from the connecting bands.

Burnley approached him almost sobbing.

"Herr Burgstadt, you are a sight. You——"

"I! But you! You are a skeleton! You are thin like never in der past!"

"I know it, but——" He pointed a trembling finger at the engine. "Look! Do you see what has happened? The thing has been running all day and burned itself out! It's half-melted to bits!"

Burgstadt stared stupidly and struggled for breath.

"And look!" the bank president went on. "Do you see what else the idiot has done beside leaving us here? You've always had the copper bands—they were on me to-day. I remember it now, and I thought it strange at the time. And the nickel ones have been mine; you had them!"

Burgstadt drew his eyes from the mysterious wreck.

"Mr. Burnley," he said solemnly, "dot feller was drinking before we came. I know it. Vot has he done now? He has sent der current in der udder direction, und left us all day sleeping while my miserable fatness came back to me!"

"And now the machine is broken, and there is no chance of having him undo his work."

"Und I weigh every ounce of three hundred pounds, und der vay I get fatter it vill be four hundred within der year!"

"And as for me——" Burnley's voice broke completely as he sought to draw his garments more closely about him.

Burgstadt puffed hard for a little.

"Mr. Burnley," he said finally, "vere is dot man?"

They found the doctor in a drunken slumber upon a couch.

They shook him and he grunted indistinct words about "dead beat out—drink if I want to—that or go crazy, I tell you! Machine? What machine? Broken, hey? I don't care! I'm done with it, for good and all! Let me alone!"

Burnley is still president of the Unicorn Bank, where he labors sadly on, uninsured and uninsurable. Burgstadt—ah, unhappy Burgstadt! He disappeared that day, and he left no trace behind. He has never been heard from since.

But there are days down on the Bowery when, within a certain wretched little dime museum, "Johann Schmidt, the German Wonder of Corpulency, the Massive Man from the Black Forest," startles a rare, appreciative ear by executing snatches of Wagner in a really remarkable fashion. And afterward he is wont to sink his great beard upon his chest and stare with distant, apathetic eyes upon the gaping rabble at his feet.

RHYMES TO A MINIATURE.

DEAR maiden, to this imagery that art hath caught
Full faithfully of that fair face I know so well,
I yield a homage that no mortal tongue may tell
The measure of. Upon my speech there rests the spell
That memory hath placed, fond recollection wrought.

The treasured ribbons fade; time, desecrating, works
Such wanton waste, the painted figure wears away;
But in my heart of hearts thy scepter hath its sway,
There sits enthroned thine image where is no decay,
And in the stillness there thy merry laughter lurks.

John Carleton Sherman.

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UTICA, N. Y.—
138 Genesee St.
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KANSAS CITY, MO.—
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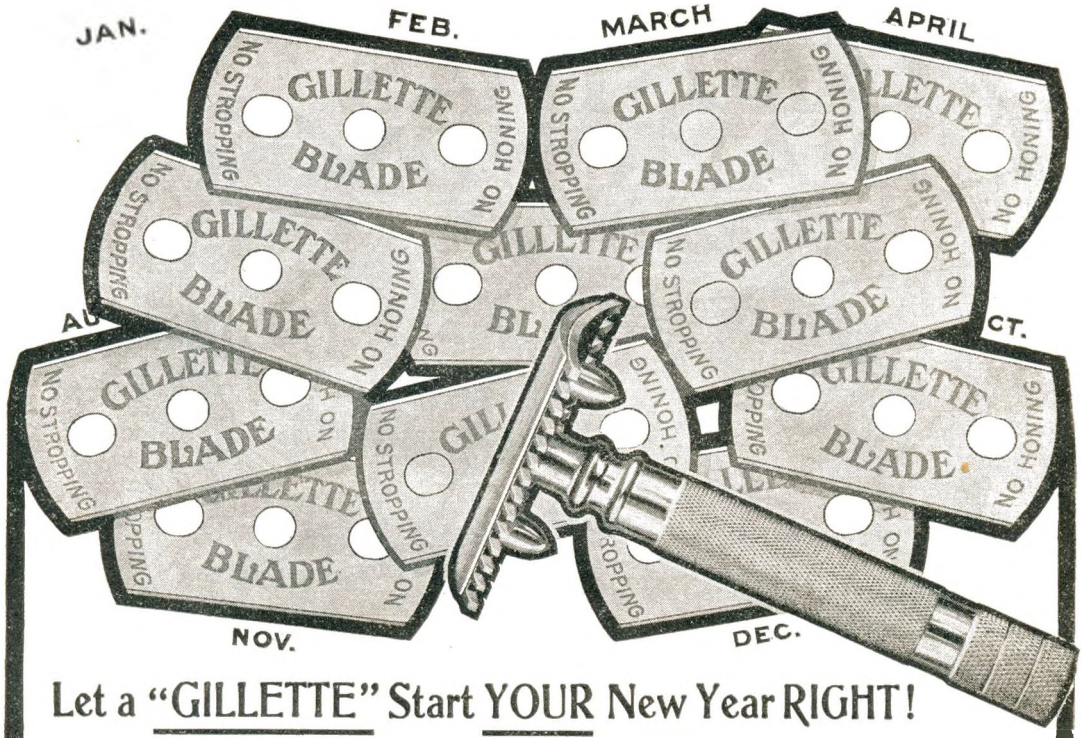

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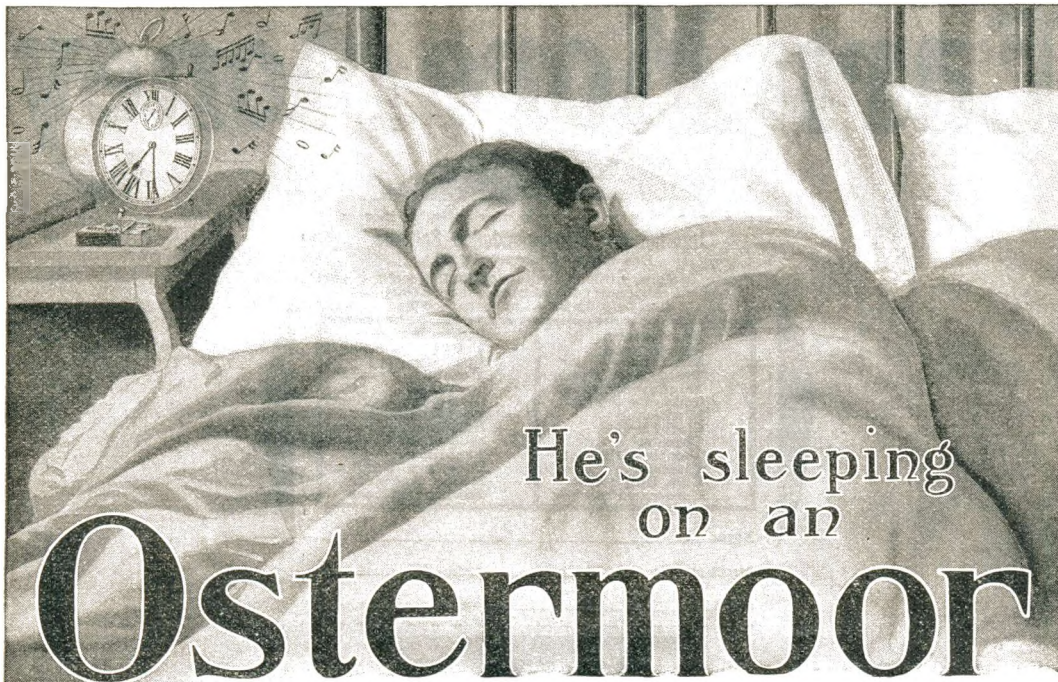

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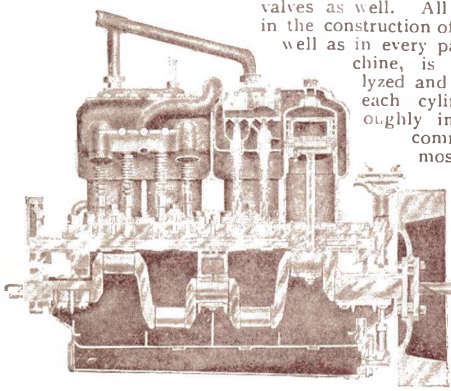
Points Distinctive of OLDSMOBILE, Model S, in a Comprehensive Form for Busy Readers

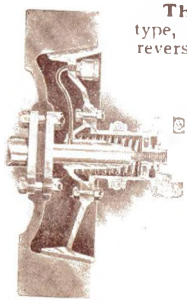
Without going into minute details of construction of Model S (which we will gladly send you upon application), we will mention some of its features which stand out prominently, giving this machine its *marked individuality*.

The Motor is of the four-cylinder, vertical, water-cooled type, developing 24 to 26 H. P. The cylinders are cast in pairs and are water-jacketed in such a manner that not only the cylinders themselves are cooled, but the valves as well. All material used in the construction of the motor, as well as in every part of the machine, is carefully analyzed and tested, and each cylinder is thoroughly inspected. In common with the most up-to-date cars the motor may nearly always be started from the seat, thus doing away with the necessity of cranking. This is a very attractive feature.



SHOWING CROSS SECTION OF THE OLDSMOBILE FOUR-CYLINDER MOTOR

The Crank Shaft is of special carbon steel and runs in long bearings. An oil crank pump in crank case chamber forces oil to all main bearings.



CROSS SECTION OF CLUTCH

The Transmission is of the sliding gear type, having three speeds forward and one reverse.

The Clutch is of the "dish pan," or cone, type fitted with leather surface, and a simple spring device which allows the load to increase gradually, thus doing away with any jerking in starting.

The Control is by single lever within easy reach of right hand. The whole transmission is enclosed in an oil-tight case and runs in oil bath.

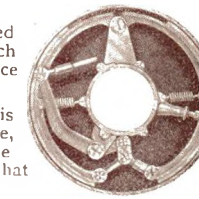
The Springs are of the flexible, half elliptic type, giving exceedingly easy riding qualities.

The Axles are fitted with Timken Roller Bearings throughout, and are made sufficiently heavy to withstand hard usage. *The rear axle is fitted with bevel gear drive, eliminating chain trouble.*

The Ignition consists of four unit coils operated by dry cells, storage battery or magneto. The commutator is very accurate in its action and is instantly accessible—*accessibility of parts being a feature of this car.* The spark plugs are easily examined and connections quickly and positively made.

The Wheels are 32 inch, equipped with 3½-inch pneumatic tires. Four-inch tires for unusual or extraordinary service can be had on special order.

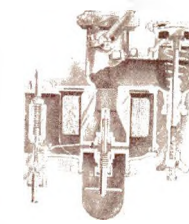
The Brakes. Each rear wheel is fitted with an emergency toggle joint brake, which is absolutely positive in action, the large friction surface insuring a brake that brakes.



CROSS SECTION SHOWING TOGGLE JOINT AND POSITIVE ACTION OF HUB BRAKE

The Steering Gear is of the "worm and nut" type, controlled by 16-inch wheel placed in very comfortable position. Spark and throttle control levers are located just below the wheel on right-hand side of the post. In addition to the regular throttle an accelerator pedal is provided, whereby speed may be momently increased.

The Carburetor is of the most efficient and best type. Particular attention has been given to this most important part of an automobile power equipment. Our carburetor has several distinctive features; for instance, the gasoline nozzle instead of being placed in a mixing chamber by itself runs up through the center of the float chamber. An auxiliary air inlet is also provided, which insures the maintenance of a perfect mixture. The result is a large decrease in fuel consumption and increased power.



CROSS SECTION OF CARBURETOR

The Water Circulation is by gear pump driven from crank shaft. Water is forced around water-jacket and out into the radiator mounted in front of car. Sufficient cooling surface has been provided, so that the temperature of the water is always kept well below the boiling point.

We want to tell you still more about this car. If you are interested, cut the Catalog Coupon below and mail to us. We want to tell you why this is a safe, delightful car for the woman driver; why it appeals to the man who discriminates.

OLDS MOTOR WORKS
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Kindly send me information regarding cars checked. I am interested.

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Model L ...

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Address.....
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For One Dollar

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Hundreds of thousands of boys this Christmas will experience that exquisite thrill of joy which nothing but his first watch ever brings to a lad.

A *real* watch—that ticking, pulsating thing of life inspires punctuality and brings the first touch of manhood. Of course it should be an **Ingersoll** Watch—truly our National Christmas Present. The **Ingersoll** is the perfect boy's watch, because it stands hard knocks; but it is principally a *Man's Watch*, because it is made to answer a man's requirements. It is a guaranteed accurate timekeeper.

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How I Grew Tall

A Story Which Will Interest All Who Are Short.

The Height of Either Sex Can Be Increased from Two to Five Inches—These Marvelous Results Can Be Accomplished at Home.

THE FREE BOOK TELLS YOU ALL ABOUT IT

MR. K. LEO MINGES.

Inventors, scientists and physicians have for years been trying to find some method whereby the height of an individual could be increased, and up to the last few years have met with failure. It remained for a comparatively young man, Mr. K. Leo Minges, by name, to discover what so many others had failed to do.

Mr. Minges resides in Rochester, N. Y., and has devoted the best part of his life in studying and experimenting on the Cartilage, and his great efforts have at last been crowned with success. A large company, composed of Rochester's leading citizens, has been formed for the purpose of placing Mr. Minges's discovery and inventions before the public, so that now it is possible for any lady or gentleman who is short to increase her or his height from two to five inches. These results are absolutely guaranteed.

Mr. Minges has successfully used his method on himself, and has grown from a short, stunted boy to a handsome, robust man of six feet one inch in height. Thousands of people living in all parts of the world are using his method with equally as startling results. Let us send you the absolute proof of the above statements. We have just issued a beautifully illustrated book, entitled "How to Grow Tall," which contains information that will surprise you. Ten thousand of these remarkable books will be given away absolutely free of charge in order to introduce them. If you fail to receive a copy, you will always regret it. This great book tells how Mr. Minges made his wonderful discovery. It tells how you can increase your height and build up the entire system. It contains the pictures and statements of many who have used this method. After you receive this book you will thank us the longest day you live for having placed within your reach this great opportunity.

Remember, a postal card will bring it to your very door, all charges prepaid. All correspondence strictly confidential, and sent in plain envelopes. If you wish a free copy of this book and the proof of our claims, write to-day. Address The Cartilage Co., 93D, Unity Blg., Rochester, N. Y.

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If you have rheumatism we want you to try the famous Magic Foot Drafts at our expense. They're curing all ages and conditions—after doctors and baths have failed, without a spoonful of medicine.

They cured Gus L. Brock, Douglas, Ga., of sciatic rheumatism in six days.

Cured Mrs. J. R. Waite, Woodland, Ia., after her hands and toes were drawn almost double, and after being five months unable to walk.

Magic Foot Draft cured me entirely. It is a wonderful thing. Rev. J. Holz, Chicago.

Cured G. H. Searle, Ill., Cent. R. R. Agent at Tucker, Ill., of sciatic rheumatism after he thought himself incurable.

Used Drafts two years ago. No return of rheumatism. Ed. Ball, Leadville, Colo.

Words cannot express the good they have done me. E. Gay, Dublin, Ga. (Cured after suffering five years.)

May God bless you for the wonderful cure. Mrs. Sam Durham, Reidsville, N. C.

We have letters from the above and thousands of others that Magic Foot Drafts have cured. We believe they'll cure you. Send us your name, and we'll send you the Drafts by return mail, prepaid. Try them, then if you are satisfied, send us the price, One Dollar. If not simply say so, and they cost you nothing whatever. We have been sending these Drafts "pay when satisfied" for many months now, and you can see for yourself that we couldn't keep this up if the Drafts didn't cure. The fact is they do cure, no matter how many doctors have failed, because they apply a new scientific principle (fully explained and illustrated in our booklet), and that's why we are glad to send them on approval. Will you try them? Just send your address to Magic Foot Draft Co., 155 Oliver Building, Jackson, Mich. Send no money; write today.

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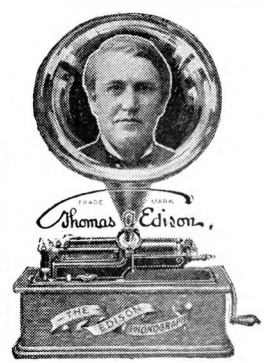

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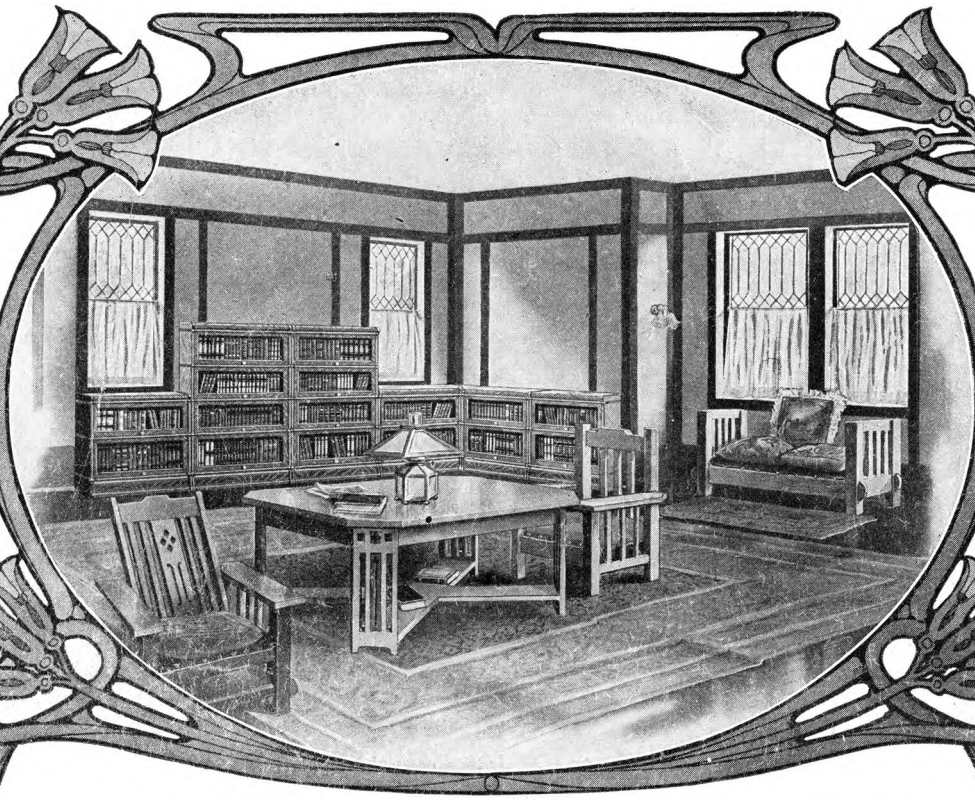

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